

## **New fragments of Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la cité des dames*.<sup>1</sup>**

Fragments of a manuscript of Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la cité des dames* have come to light in the bindings of four books donated to the Bodleian Library in 1603.<sup>2</sup> The fragments consist of eight slight strips of manuscript on vellum, used as endleaf guards, with much of their text concealed beneath paper pastedowns.<sup>3</sup> But enough is visible to suggest that these are remnants of an unknown or lost fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Cité*. The text that is preserved comes from Book III, vii–ix, on saints Lucy, Justine and other virgins, and Theodosia, with readings that vary from the text published by Earl Jeffrey Richards.<sup>4</sup> The fragments offer a new witness to the text, and a new angle on the dissemination of the *Cité*.

## **Host volumes**

The distinctive bindings that preserve these fragments—limp vellum, with prominent cover extensions over all edges of the text-block, four sets of green ties, and gilt and gauffered text-block edges—were made in continental Europe around 1553.<sup>5</sup> This provides the approximate latest date by which the Pizan manuscript became scrap. The place where these bindings were produced is important for the history of the fragments, but currently remains uncertain. Some features suggest an origin in France, or Italy, although they are not characteristic of either, and no similar examples with gilt and gauffered edges have been located thus far. Germany, Switzerland, and the Low Countries also remain possibilities. The books contain multiple items printed in Venice between 1543 and 1553, and form part of a donation of some 50 such volumes by Michael Dormer of Ascot manor, Oxfordshire, in 1603.<sup>6</sup> Most seem to have been purchased on the continent in the 1550s by Michael's father Ambrose Dormer (c.1523–1566), who bequeathed them to him.<sup>7</sup>

## **Description of the manuscript**

Four of the fragments are cut from a single leaf, horizontally, in strips of around 36-40 mm high, with parts of two or three lines of text visible (and parts of another five or six lines covered over by pastedowns); they are placed vertically in each book, matching its height. The remaining four fragments are cut vertically, in strips of approximately 23-28 mm wide, most likely from the sides of the same leaf; but with only 1-4 letters of 12-17 lines of text visible, this has yet to be confirmed. The manuscript appears to have been laid out with text in one column; roughly one third of surviving *Cité* manuscripts have text in one column, with page widths of 140-215 mm (those in two columns are 188-307 mm wide).<sup>8</sup> None of the Bodleian fragments preserves a whole line of text, but calculations based on what remains suggest a minimum page width of 204-226 mm: lines would appear to have been 150-160 mm in length, and what remains of the left margin is between 28-32 mm, and the right 26-34 mm. This places the fragments among the larger of the surviving manuscripts with text in a single column. If we similarly calculate the page width required for text in two columns, allowing for an estimate of 26-34 mm (that is, the range of what currently survives of the margins) between the two columns, the width of the original page would have been at least between 380-420 mm, which would place the manuscript far outside the range of the largest surviving examples, confirming that it was most likely in a single column.<sup>9</sup> The lower margin is at least 60 mm, and lines are 5 mm apart, with no visible ruling, and no ruling of margins. Red and blue paragraph marks are used at the start of some—but not all—sentences. There is also a trace of an illuminated initial in blue and gold, of which just the lower part remains; this perhaps marks the start of chapter ix ('ite' below the initial could be from 'la benoite Theodosine' in the opening line), or perhaps marks the start of a sub-section of chapter viii, introducing Eulalie, 'la benoite vierge'. The text is punctuated, and the script *lettre bâtarde*, dating perhaps to the second third of the fifteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Minims are approximately 3 mm high, 'd' has a distinctive split ascender (with no connecting hair-line stroke visible under

magnification), and terminal ‘s’ is a figure-of-eight. There is a note in the margin on fragment 2b, perhaps in a sixteenth-century hand, or earlier; it is not dissimilar to some of the preparation notes for rubrics in other *Cité* manuscripts.<sup>11</sup> Further research on the date of this marginal note will be crucial to understanding when the manuscript was cut up for binder’s waste: if the hand is sixteenth-century, it shows the manuscript being used and annotated very close to the time when it became waste.

### ***Cité* manuscripts**

We can rule out the possibility of the fragments coming from any of the surviving *Cité* manuscripts, even though some of these are missing leaves. The twenty-seven that survive have been described and studied extensively, and many are available in digital format.<sup>12</sup> The Bodleian fragments have been compared with descriptions, and with digitised versions where available. All of those that lack leaves can be ruled out as a match for these fragments: some are on paper rather than vellum; some lack paragraph marks; some have ruled margins or lines; and none of the hands matches that of the fragments, with its distinctive ‘d’. This rules out the scribes *P*, *R*, and *X*, responsible for the ‘original’ eight manuscripts of the text produced under Christine’s own supervision between 1405–1414 (with *X* being her own hand).<sup>13</sup> The hand of the fragments is also different from all of the examples of scribal hands of Christine’s works illustrated more widely in Ouy, Reno, and Villela-Petit’s *Album*. It is hoped that it can be matched elsewhere in the future, perhaps to manuscripts of other works by Christine.

Maureen Curnow, who gave a full description of twenty-six of the *Cité* manuscripts in her unpublished thesis of 1975, also described five lost manuscripts known from early inventories.<sup>14</sup> Number 5 on her list is the only one that could be a match for the Bodleian fragments: from an inventory of the Library of the House of Savoy at Chambéry in 1498, it is

described as ‘vng aultre moyen liure en parchemin en prose escript à la main en françois ... historié et illuminé d’or et d’azur’.<sup>15</sup> The features mentioned in the Chambery description—on vellum, illuminated in blue and gold—do fit the Bodleian fragments, but would also describe many surviving *Cité* manuscripts. It is not known when or via whom this book entered the Chambery library, though Gianni Mombello suggests the family’s interest in Christine’s works were occasioned by French princesses such as Yolande of France (born 1434) who married into the family (a ‘Livre de Crestine’ is listed as hers in an inventory of 1479), and Bonne, who owned a ‘romance’ by Christine.<sup>16</sup> Mombello lists books that are known to have left the Savoy collection in the first decades of the sixteenth century; while the *Cité* is not among these, it is relevant that books left the collection in this period. More pertinently, he suggests that political upheaval lay behind the dispersal of the library, and the destruction of some of its books.<sup>17</sup> This could explain how a lavish manuscript of a major work such as the *Cité* was removed from its collection, and became more valuable as binder’s waste than as a book.<sup>18</sup> But it remains uncertain for now whether the Bodleian fragments are survivals of this lost manuscript, or the remnants of a new and unknown example.

## **Text**

Andrea Valentini’s recent investigation into the manuscript transmission of the *Cité* provides an overview of scholarship on the two versions (V1 and V2) of Christine’s text.<sup>19</sup> Richards used V2—to which the eight manuscripts overseen directly by Christine belong—for his published text. The Bodleian fragments include readings that vary from Richards (V2), and appear to be closer to the earlier version of the text (V1) published by Hope Johnston from British Library, Royal MS 19 A XIX.<sup>20</sup> This manuscript at the British Library dates to the second quarter of the fifteenth century, and was used by Brian Anslay for his English translation published in 1521.<sup>21</sup> Although a late manuscript, it is part of a small group that

derives, via an unknown (Valentini suggests defective) archetype, from what is thought to have been the first version of the text.<sup>22</sup> The Bodleian fragments appear to belong to this group of *V1* manuscripts. This table shows where the fragments vary from Richards's text, and sets them alongside Johnston:

| <b>Bodleian fragments</b>                                | <b>Richards</b>                                          | <b>Johnston</b>                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 1a: [en nom de?] moy                                     | En mon nom (p. 452)                                      | En nom de moy (p. 438)                                 |
| 1b: dieu                                                 | Jhesu (p. 454)                                           | Dieu (p. 442)                                          |
| 3b: [... ...]e chauffe et ne reuest ne [eschau]ffe [...] | veult estre eschauffé et ne eschauffe ne revest (p. 456) | voulst estre chauffé, et ne revest ne chauffe (p. 444) |
| 3b: travaille                                            | traveille (p. 456)                                       | travaille (p. 444)                                     |
| 4b: menacha                                              | menaça (p. 456)                                          | menaça (p. 446)                                        |

Johnston's text accounts for all the variants visible in the Bodleian fragments, with the exception of 'menacha' for 'menaça', which perhaps suggests a Picard origin.<sup>23</sup> There is further work to be done here on how these fragments might fit into the family of manuscripts that transmit *V1* of the text.

## Transcription

A transcription has not been attempted for the parts of the fragments covered by pastedowns.<sup>24</sup> Expansions are in italic, and square brackets are used for conjectured readings of letters only partly visible; references to Richards's text follow each fragment.

The fragments have been re-arranged into their textual order, each numbered in accordance with its place on the leaf before it was cut up, with 'a' and 'b' indicating the recto and verso of that original leaf. This is followed by the shelfmark of the book in which it is found, and the position in the book, that is, a stub after the upper or before the lower endpapers, and recto or verso in relation to its current binding arrangement.

## Fragments

**Fragment 1a (8° S 39 Art., lower cover, verso)**

moy je suis ou millieu deulx. Et adonc fut ouye vne voix qu[i ...]

[...]

(*Cité*, III, vii; Richards, p. 452)

**Fragment 2a (8° I 6 Art., upper cover, verso)**

de samour; et ne la laissoit en paix [blue paragraph mark] mais pour ce que par pr[ieres ...]

[...] cuida aidier de l'ennemy mais Riens n[‘y ...]

(*Cité*, III, viii; Richards, p. 452)

**Fragment 3a (8° I 6 Art., lower cover, verso)**

[...]

moult de signes monstra dieu en elle par quoy plusieurs fu[... ...]

[red paragraph mark ...]

(*Cité*, III, viii; Richards, p. 454)

**Fragment 4a (8° S 39 Art., upper cover, verso):**

mainttes gens furent conuertis. [Blue paragraph mark.] Ceste ot plusieurs grans [...]

[...]

(*Cité*, III, viii; Richards, p. 454)

**Fragment 1b (8° S 39 Art., lower cover, recto)**

[...] pour le nom de dieu. Elle fut moult noble de lignee *et tres belle*

[... ...]lles et

(*Cité*, III, viii; Richards, p. 454)

**Fragment 2b (8° I 6 Art., upper cover, recto)**

[...] qui despecya le tourment [et tourmenta les tourmenteurs]

[... ..]e joyeux s'en yssy toute saine. [Red paragraph mark.] Le faulx preuost fist embraser

(*Cité*, III, viii; Richards, p. 454)

**Fragment 3b (8° I 6 Art., lower cover, recto)**

[... ..]e chauffe et ne reuest ne [eschau]ffe [...]

[...] travaille les aultres, mal pour celui qui

[...]

(*Cité*, III, ix; Richards, p. 456)

**Fragment 4b (8° S 39 Art., upper cover, recto)**

[...]eille [blue paragraph mark] Et le tyrant la menacha de corrompre sa virginite

(*Cité*, III, ix; Richards, p. 456)

**Fragments cut vertically**

The remaining four fragments, cut vertically, include only a few letters from each line; although their textual order has not been ascertained, for the sake of reference they are here numbered sequentially. They appear to have been cut from the lower portion of the original folio, retaining some of the wide lower margin.

**Fragment [5]a (8° D 5 Art., upper cover, recto)**

12 lines of text, with 1–4 letters per line; lower margin of at least 70 mm.

**Fragment [5]b (8° D 5 Art., upper cover, verso)**

13 lines of text, with the first letter of each line visible; lower margin of at least 70 mm.

**Fragment [6]a (8° D 5 Art., lower cover, recto)**

13 lines of text, with 1–3 letters visible per line; blue and red paragraph marks; lower margin of at least 70 mm.

**Fragment [6]b (8° D 5 Art., lower cover, verso)**

12 lines of text, with 3–4 letters visible per line; lower margin of at least 74 mm.

**Fragment [7]a (8° A 19 Art., upper cover, recto)**

3 lines of text, blank space (covering perhaps 3 lines), 12 lines of text, with 2–3 letters visible per line; lower margin of at least 60 mm.

**Fragment [7]b (8° A 19 Art., upper cover, verso)**

Lower part of initial in blue and gold, 16 lines of text, with 1–3 letters visible per line; lower margin of at least 66 mm.

**Fragment [8]a (8° A 19 Art., lower cover, recto)**

17 lines of text, with 2–4 letters visible per line, and part of a red paragraph mark; lower margin of at least 67 mm.

**Fragment [8]b (8° A 19 Art., lower cover, verso)**

17 lines of text, with 2–3 letters visible per line; lower margin of at least 62 mm.

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<sup>1</sup> With sincere thanks to my generous (anonymous) reader, to Bruce Barker-Benfield, and to Sylvia Huot and Nigel Palmer.

<sup>2</sup> Shelfmarks: 8° I 6 Art.; 8° S 39 Art.; 8° D 5 Art.; 8° A 19 Art.

<sup>3</sup> The endleaf guards wrap around the paper endleaves, leaving a small stub visible in the gutter facing the title-page, with the rest concealed beneath the pastedown. These important early bindings would be compromised by the removal of the fragments, so they remain in place. It is hoped that non-invasive techniques, such as multi-spectral imaging, might in the future allow the covered parts of text to be read.

<sup>4</sup> Richards's text appears alongside a parallel translation by Patrizia Caraffi, in Patrizia Caraffi and Earl Jeffrey Richards, *La città delle dame* (Rome, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> For an account of the dating, and a full description of the books and bindings, see Francesca Galligan, 'The Origins of Michael Dormer's Donation', *Bodleian Library Record*, 31 (2018), pp. 47–75.

<sup>6</sup> Contents of the four volumes containing the fragments: 1) 8° I 6 Art. - Girolamo Muzio, *Il duello*, and *Le risposte* (both Venice, 1553); 2) 8° S 39 Art. - Gabriele Simeoni, *Comentarii* (Venice, 1548), and Dictys, *Della Guerra Troiana* (Venice, 1543); 3) 8° D 5 Art. - Euripides, *Ifigenia*, trans. L. Dolce (Venice, 1551), Seneca, *Thyeste*, trans. L. Dolce (Venice, 1547), Euripides, *La Hecuba*, trans. L. Dolce (Venice 1549), Giovanni Battista Giraldi, *Orbecche* (Venice, 1551), Giovanni Giorgio Trissino, *La Sophonisba* (Venice, 1553), Bernardo Dovizi, *Calandra* (Venice, 1553), Pietro Aretino, *L'Horatia* (Venice, 1549); and 4) 8° A 19 Art. - Aristophanes, *Le comedie*, trans. B. & P. Rositini, (Venice, 1545). For a list of the whole donation, see the Bodleian Benefactors' Register, *Munificentissimis atque optimis cuiusuis*

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*ordinis, dignitatis, sexus, qui bibliothecam hanc libris, aut pecuniis numeratis ad libros coemendos, alioque quouis genere ampliarunt, Thomas Bodleius eques auratus, honorarium hoc volumen, in quod huiuscemodi donationes, simulque nomina donantium singillatim referuntur, pietatis, memoriæ, virtutisque causa dedit, dedicavit* (London, 1604), pp. 73–74, and Galligan, ‘The Origins,’ Table 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ambrose Dormer’s will: National Archives, PROB 11/48/547.

<sup>8</sup> Measurements from Maureen Curnow, *The ‘Livre de la cité des dames’ of Christine de Pisan: a Critical Edition* (unpub. Ph.D. diss, Vanderbilt University, 1975, retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global,

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/302738209?accountid=13042>), and Gilbert Ouy,

Christine Reno & Inès Villela-Petit, *Album Christine de Pizan* (Turnhout, c.2012), pp. 517–564.

<sup>9</sup> The line length has been determined from Fragment 1b, where approximately 28 characters (including spaces) are missing between the first and second lines, giving a length of approximately 150 mm, and from Fragment 2b, which suggests a line length of approximately 160 mm using the same calculation.

<sup>10</sup> My thanks to Marc Smith and Bruce Barker-Benfield for consultation on the date.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Ouy, Reno and Villela-Petit, *Album*, p. 562. The note appears to begin “Item”; my thanks to Bruce Barker-Benfield for this reading.

<sup>12</sup> Angus J. Kennedy, *Christine de Pisan: a Bibliographical Guide* (London, 1984), pp. 93–94, and *Christine de Pisan: a Bibliographical Guide. Supplement [1]* (London, 1994), p. 93. For detailed descriptions, see Ouy, Reno, and Villela-Petit, *Album*, pp. 517–564, and Curnow, ‘*Livre*’ pp. 346–570.

<sup>13</sup> See Ouy, Reno, and Villela-Petit, *Album*, pp. 517–525.

<sup>14</sup> Curnow, *The ‘Livre’*, pp. 547–567.

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<sup>15</sup> Curnow, *The 'Livre'*, p. 565. The other four lost manuscripts Curnow lists can be ruled out as follows: Number 1 went missing only in the eighteenth century; 2 and 3 are on paper; 4 is probably now Paris, BnF.fr. 609.

<sup>16</sup> Gianni Mombello, 'Christine de Pizan and the House of Savoy', trans. and ed. Nadia Margolis, *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, ed. Earl Jeffrey Richards, Joan Williamson, Nadia Margolis, Christine Reno (Athens and London, 1992), pp. 191–192.

<sup>17</sup> Mombello, 'Christine', p. 193: 'The majority of the manuscripts in the Savoy collection perished during the political and military vicissitudes of the sixteenth century and especially, we believe, as a result of the long occupation by French militia of the duchy's territories beyond the Alps'.

<sup>18</sup> We might also consider whether its content—a Catholic female author writing about women, including saints—had any bearing on its destruction.

<sup>19</sup> Andrea Valentini, 'La tradition manuscrite du Livre de la cité des dames de Christine de Pizan: sur la genèse et l'évolution d'un texte majeur du XVe siècle', *Romania*, 137 (2019), pp. 394–445; see also Earl Jeffrey Richards, 'Editing the Livre de la cité des dames: New Insights, Problems and Challenges', *Au champ des escriptures*, ed. Eric Hicks (Paris, 2000), pp. 789–816.

<sup>20</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes*, trans. Brian Anslay, ed. Hope Johnston (Tempe, 2014), pp. lii–liv.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=7439&CollID=16&NStart=190119> [accessed 13/7/2021]

<sup>22</sup> Valentini, 'Tradition', p. 438: 'trois copies, différemment corrigées, d'un même archetype incorrect'.

<sup>23</sup> I owe this suggestion to my anonymous reader. See, for example, Alcius Ledieu, *Dictionnaire Picard* (Paris, 1922), p. 124.

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<sup>24</sup> See note 3 above, on the potential for future analysis with multi-spectral imaging.