

The Date of the Queen's MS

(London, British Library, Harley MS 4431)¹

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The most important surviving manuscript of the works of Christine de Pizan is the collection of thirty texts commissioned by Queen Isabeau of France, which is now in the British Library. To ensure a volume fit for the Queen, Christine employed her most trusted scribes, principally X, and engaged artists of the highest quality. Harley MS 4431 contains no less than 132 miniatures, the great majority of them painted by the Master of the *Cité des Dames*. The secondary decoration – initials, paragraph marks and rubrics – is also lavish. And so the Queen's manuscript takes its place, deservedly, among the treasures of the British Library.

When was the manuscript commissioned by Queen Isabeau? Those scholars who have asked the question have come up with essentially two answers. Maurice Roy, when he published the first volume of his edition of Christine's poetical works in 1886, indicated how important are the *Encore aultres balades* for establishing the date of the Queen's MS.² (The only known copy of that collection is in Harley MS 4431.) These nine poems, five ballades and four rondeaux, end with three lyrics in praise of the

Duc de Bourbon, jeune, sage et qui passe
Selon l'age mains vaillans en tous fais... (9:3-4)

Jean de Bourbon succeeded his father as Duke of Bourbon on 19 August 1410; he was then aged 28. Just over five years later, on 25 October 1415, the young Duke was captured at the Battle of Agincourt. For Maurice Roy these two significant events in the life of Jean de Bourbon showed that the Queen's MS was completed between August 1410 and October 1415. Paul Meyer, in the note he contributed to the third volume of Roy's edition, took the same view.³ Likewise Sandra Hindman in her article on the Queen's MS, which appeared in 1983, and Barbara Altmann, whose edition of Christine's love-debate poems published in 1998 is based on the Queen's MS.⁴

Other scholars, for example Félix Lecoy, Angus Kennedy and myself, have opted for the more precise dates of 1410 or of 1410-11, considering that Christine's references to Jean de Bourbon were intended to celebrate his succession to the dukedom. In 1961, Félix Lecoy wrote that

1 This article is based on a paper given at the Fifth International Christine de Pizan Colloquium, Salzburg, July 2003. I am grateful to Professor Roman Reisinger for allowing me to publish it here in advance of the appearance of the Acta of the Colloquium. See also James Laidlaw, 'Christine de Pizan, le duc de Bourbon et le manuscrit de la reine (Londres, British Library, Harley MS 4431)', *La Chevalerie du Moyen Age à nos jours: mélanges offerts à Michel Stanescu*, ed. Mihaela Voicu & Victor-Dinu Vlădulescu (Bucureşti: Editura Universităţii, 2003), 332-44.

2 Maurice Roy (ed.), *Œuvres poétiques de Christine de Pisan*, Société des anciens textes français, 3 vols (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1886, 1891, 1896), I, xxxvii and 271-79.

3 *Œuvres poétiques*, III, xxi-xxiv.

4 Sandra Hindman, 'The Composition of the Manuscript of Christine de Pizan's Collected Works in the British Library: a Reassessment', *The British Library Journal*, 9 (1983), 93-123 (99). Barbara K. Altmann (ed.), *The Love Debate Poems of Christine de Pizan: 'Le Livre du Débat de deux amans'; 'Le Livre des trois jugemens'; 'Le Dit de Poissy'* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998), 43.

les trois dernières [sc. *Encore aultres balades*] sont adressées au jeune duc de Bourbon, qui venait (?) de succéder à son père (août 1410). Le manuscrit de la Reine est donc postérieur à cette date.⁵

When I discussed the question in 1987, I pointed to the unusual structure of Quire 6 which contains the *Encore aultres balades* and argued that the collection must have been inserted at the very last minute, just before the finished volume was presented to Queen Isabeau late in 1410 or early in 1411.⁶ Three years later Angus Kennedy opted for the year 1410 in his analysis of the textual tradition of Christine's *Epistre a la reine*. His article highlights another intriguing feature of Harley MS 4431, the lay-out of Quire 34, where the *Epistre a Eustace Mourel* (Eustache Deschamps), which begins on fol. 255d, is preceded by three columns (fols 255a-c) from which writing has been erased. Enough traces remain to show that these columns originally contained the concluding paragraphs of the *Epistre a la reine* which Christine, alarmed by the threat of civil war, had sent to Queen Isabeau in October 1405, urging her to act as peacemaker between the rival factions. The folio which contained the opening paragraphs of the *Epistre* has been excised.⁷

In returning to the question, I will look at some sources of information which have been neglected or overlooked. First of all Queen Isabeau's financial accounts which, alas, have proved to be uninformative. The accounts which survive for the years 1410 to 1415 are incomplete, and they are of no help in dating the Queen's MS.⁸ By contrast, Christine's works which date from this period, the *Lamentacion sur les maux de la France*,⁹ the *Livre de la Paix*,¹⁰ and the *Encore aultres balades*, are much more revealing, since they present Christine's reactions to the different phases of the civil war between the Armagnacs and the Burgundians. Of particular importance is the very specific reference, in the last of the *Encore aultres balades*, to a 'hault voyage' (9:6) undertaken by Jean de Bourbon. Lastly, there is the codicological evidence to be found in Harley MS 4431: the unusual structure of Quire 6, and also of Quire 34 which begins with the three blank or would-be blank columns just mentioned. When all these factors are taken into account, they show that the Queen's MS was completed, not in 1410 or 1411, but very early in 1414.

First, 'un peu d'histoire', as the *Guide Michelin* puts it. From the autumn of 1409 until August 1413 Paris was under the control of Jean sans Peur, Duke of Burgundy. Ranged against him were the Orleanists, determined to avenge the death of Louis, Duke of Orleans, who had been murdered in November 1407 on the orders of Jean sans Peur. The League of Gien, concluded on 15 April 1410 on the initiative of the Duke of Berry, created an anti-Burgundian alliance whose members included Charles

5 Félix Lecoy, 'Note sur quelques ballades de Christine de Pisan', in *Fin de moyen âge et renaissance: Mélanges de philologie française offerts à Robert Guiette* (Antwerp: 1961), 107-14 (108).

6 J.C. Laidlaw, 'Christine de Pizan - A Publisher's Progress', *Modern Language Review*, 82 (1987), 35-75 (62-64).

7 Angus J. Kennedy, 'Editing Christine de Pizan's *Epistre à la reine*', *The Editor and the Text*, edited by Philip E. Bennett and Graham A. Runnalls (Edinburgh University Press in conjunction with Modern Humanities Research Association, 1990), 70-82 (78-79).

8 Paris, Archives nationales, KK 47-48.

9 Angus J. Kennedy, 'La Lamentacion sur les maux de la France de Christine de Pisan', in *Mélanges de langue et littérature françaises du moyen âge et de la renaissance offerts à Charles Foulon*, 2 vols (Rennes: Institut de français, Université de Haute-Bretagne, 1980), I, 177-85.

10 Charity Cannon Willard (ed.), *The 'Livre de la Paix' of Christine de Pisan* (The Hague: Mouton, 1958). In Brussels, KBR 10366, the base manuscript used by Willard and the only extant presentation copy, the work is in fact entitled *Livre de Paix*; see her edition, pp. 57-58 and 181.

d'Orléans, Jean de Clermont, shortly to become Duke of Bourbon, and Bernard, Count of Armagnac. Later that same month the alliance was cemented by the marriage of Charles d'Orléans to Bonne d'Armagnac, daughter of Bernard and granddaughter of Jean de Berry.

Christine de Pizan spent the years 1410 to 1415 in Paris. On 23 August 1410, increasingly alarmed by the developing civil war, she wrote the *Lamentacion sur les maux de la France*, an open letter to the Duke of Berry, the leader of the coalition, urging him not to take up arms against his nephews of Burgundy. Instead he should act as peacemaker, and thus play a much more appropriate role for one of his seniority among the princes of the fleurs-de-lis:

Helaz! quelle douleur à veoir le plus noble oncle qui aujourd'ui vive, comme de trois roys, de six ducs et de tant de contes, en assemblée mortele contre sa propre chair, et les nepveux qui tant doivent de reverence à si noble oncle, si comme à pere, contre lui en bataille! (pp. 182-83)

Just over two months later, on 2 November 1410, a truce was arranged between the warring factions. But the Peace of Bicêtre, as it was called, afforded only a breathing-space, and it was not long before hostilities were resumed. That pattern was to be repeated over the next three years, as in turn the Peaces of Auxerre, then Pontoise were solemnly sworn, only to be broken shortly afterwards. Christine greeted the Peace of Auxerre, concluded on 22 August 1412, with relief and great joy. For her it was also a source of inspiration: ten days later she took up her pen and began work on the *Livre de la Paix*. Alas, her hopes and those of her contemporaries were short-lived: three months later, on 30 November, she abandoned Part 1 of her treatise, 'pour cause de paix deffaillie' (p. 57).

A further nine months elapsed before Christine resumed work. Part 2 of the *Livre de la Paix* was begun on 3 September 1413, and the finished book was presented to Jean de Berry on 1 January 1414.¹¹ We can presume that the Dauphin, to whom the work is dedicated, received his copy at much the same time. Christine had worked at astonishing speed: Parts 2 and 3, which make up three quarters of the treatise, were written in just under four months.¹² And we must remember that time was needed to plan, copy and decorate at least two presentation copies.

Let us go back to the summer of 1413 and examine the events which prompted Christine to resume work on the *Livre de la Paix*. The Peace of Pontoise was concluded on 26 July. Four weeks later, Jean sans Peur, whose hold on Paris had become increasingly precarious, fled the capital and sought refuge in Burgundy. His departure was quickly followed by the triumphant return, on 31 August, of the Armagnac princes, led by Charles d'Orléans and Jean de Bourbon. In the opening

¹¹ 'Item, ung autre livre qui est intitulé: le *Livre de la paix*, escript en françois, de lettre de court; et au commencement du second fueillet après la première ystoire a escript: *et loisibles*; couvert de cuir vermeil emprant, à deux fermoirs de latton, de cinq gros boillons de mesmes sur chascune aiz; lequel livre damoiselle Cristine de Pizan donna à mondit Seigneur ausdictes estrainnes mil quatre cens et treize [sc. 1414 (n.s.)]' (Jules Guiffrey (ed.), *Inventaires de Jean duc de Berry (1401-16)*, 2 vols (Paris: Leroux 1894-1896), I, p. 332, n° 1239). Brussels, KBR 10366, the only extant presentation copy and the base manuscript used by Willard, cannot be identified with the Duke of Berry's MS: the words 'et loisibles' are copied towards the top of fol. 4a, but not as the opening words of the column.

¹² In Willard's edition the *Livre de la Paix* is 125 pages long (pp. 57-181). Part 1 (pp. 57-87) makes up a quarter of the work.

sentences of Part 2 of the *Livre de la Paix* Christine celebrates their return with a series of almost lyrical variations on the themes of joy and peace:

[Je] reprens ma plume à cestui iij.^e jour du mois de septembre, de nouvel entréz à Paris à joye et paix noz seigneurs du sang royal longuement absentéz, pour lequel joyeux venement et veue d'iceulx recommence mon chant de la joyeuse paix en cestui an mil iij cent et lxiiij. disant ainsi: O! quel chose est aujourd'hui au monde plus delictable que paix?¹³

Christine's relief is palpable; it as if she has emerged from a long, dark tunnel. During the previous four years of Burgundian control, it would have been unthinkable for Christine to compose poems in praise of Jean de Bourbon, one of the most prominent leaders of the Armagnac party. The conclusion is clear: the Queen's MS must have been completed after the return of the Armagnacs to Paris, and not in 1410 or 1411. Peace had been restored, the civil war was at an end, or so it seemed. There was thus no longer any need for Christine to repeat the pleas she had addressed to Queen Isabeau in 1405. One can therefore understand why Christine decided to remove the copy of the *Epistre a la reine* which formed part of the Queen's collection, as it was originally planned.

Let us now come back to the *Encore aultres balades* and consider Ballade 9, the last of the three poems which celebrate Jean de Bourbon's virtues and achievements. Curiously, Ballade 9 is separated from Rondeau 8, the immediately preceding poem, by two folios (fols 50bis, 50ter), which are ruled but are otherwise completely blank; there is no way of telling whether this was deliberate or was the result of an oversight. In Ballade 9 Christine welcomes the Duke on his return from a 'hault voyage' (line 6), during which he has covered himself with glory. Jean de Bourbon's valiant deeds have been inspired by his great love for his lady and, just as importantly, by her continuing love for him which had been expressed in Poem 8, a *rondeau quatrain*. Although the Duke has been far away (lines 25-26), his lady's love has been unfailing, strengthened by the news of his valiant deeds and her awareness of the heavy responsibilities he has had to bear. Their separation will end in a joyous reunion.

The lady awaiting the Duke's return is Marie, daughter of Jean de Berry, whose virtues had been celebrated by Christine on at least two previous occasions. The collection of *Autres balades* included in the *Livre de Cristine* of 1402 contains a New Year poem in honour of Marie.¹⁴ A second flattering portrait of Marie de Berry, Countess of Clermont, as she then was, forms part of the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, completed in 1405 or 1406.

La contesse de Clermont, fille du susdit Jehan, duc de Berry de sa premiere femme, et mariee au conte Jehan de Clermont, filz du duc de Bourbon, attendant la duchie, n'est elle toute tele qui a estre appartient a toute haulte princece de grant amour a son seigneur et bien moriginee en toutes choses, belle, sage et bonne? Et a tout dire, a son bel maintien et port honorable appertenent ses vertus.¹⁵

13 *Livre de la Paix*, 90-91; the italics have been added.

14 *Oeuvres poétiques*, I, 229-30.

15 Patrizia Caraffi & Earl Jeffrey Richards, *Christine de Pizan: La Città delle Dame*, Biblioteca Medievale 2, (Milano, Trento: Luni Editrice, 1998), 422, 424. See also S. Solente (ed.), *Christine de Pisan: le Livre des faits et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*, Société de l'histoire de France, 2 vols, (Paris: Champion, 1936-40), I, 143-44 and 159-60.

And, in the ninth of the *Encore aultres balades*, as has just been seen, Christine directs the spotlight first on Jean de Bourbon, before moving it to Marie de Berry and then allowing it to play on both of them.¹⁶

When did Jean de Bourbon undertake his ‘hault voyage’? In a note to Poem 9 Maurice Roy characterises the Duke as a ‘prince d’un courage éprouvé, comme le témoigne sa glorieuse campagne de 1413 contre des compagnies de brigands’.¹⁷ Roy’s source was almost certainly the *Nouvelle biographie universelle* which gives a longer and more colourful account of Jean de Bourbon’s expedition, linking the campaign against the brigands or mercenaries with the capture of the town of Soubise, near La Rochelle, from the English.

Of the chroniclers of this period only two, Le Fèvre de Saint-Rémy and the Religieux de Saint-Denis, make any reference to the problems created by the mercenaries and to the capture of Soubise or rather its recapture, for the town had been seized by the English in 1412. Le Fèvre describes the expedient used to rid the Ile-de-France of the mercenaries: they were enlisted on a month’s contract which committed them to undertake the siege of Soubise under the command of the Duke of Bourbon and the Count of La Marche. The town was duly captured, at which point the mercenaries were dismissed, and the two commanders returned to Paris to a hero’s welcome. In that way, the mercenary problem had effectively been exported from the Ile de France to Guienne:

Or est ainsi que les gens de guerre que le roy avoit mandé pour la résistence des Anglois, faisoient innumérables maulx autour de Paris. Sy fut avisé que on les payeroit pour ung mois, et seroient menez, par le duc de Bourbon et le conte de la Marche, ou pays de Guyenne, pour asséger la ville de Soubize séant sur la mer, à trois lieues près de la Rochelle, que lors les Anglois occupoient. Et, ainsi que il fut ordonné, il fut fait; et furent iceulx payez pour ung mois... Et de fait fu la ville prinse d’assault, non obstant que ilz estoient de v à vj^c Anglois dedans; mais ne se doubtioient de l’assault ne de la venue des François... Après ceste conquête, les deux gentilz princes de France donnèrent congé à tous leurs gens de guerre; et les deux princes dessusdis retournèrent à Paris, où ilz furent grandement festoyez.¹⁸

Le Fèvre’s narrative, written when he is in his late sixties, dates from some time after 1462, long after the events which he recounts; he relies partly on memory, partly on written sources, not all of which have survived. By contrast the chronicle of Michel Pintoin, the Religieux de Saint-Denis, was written close to the events it narrates and is altogether more trustworthy. For the period we are concerned with, Pintoin had access to some official documents, but also relied very often on eyewitnesses, as is the case with his account of the expedition against Soubise. He makes only a passing reference

16 It must also be remembered that the Duke’s MS (Paris, BnF, f.fr. 835, 606, 836, 605 and 607), the collection of Christine’s works acquired by the Duke of Berry in 1408 or 1409, became part of the library of the Dukes of Bourbon after Berry’s death in 1416, and that Christine addressed the *Epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, completed on 20 January 1418, to ‘Marie, duchesse de Bourbon et d’Auvergne’, following her husband’s capture at Agincourt. See Angus J. Kennedy (ed.), *Christine de Pizan’s ‘Epistre de la prison de vie humaine’*, (Glasgow University French Department, 1984).

17 *Oeuvres poétiques*, I, p. 308.

18 François Morand (ed.), *Chronique de Jean le Févre* (sic), Société de l’histoire de France, 2 vols (Paris: Renouard, 1886-88), I, 72-74. Le Fèvre is mistaken when he states that the expedition took place in 1412. The sources quoted by J.H. Wylie (*The Reign of Henry the Fifth*, 3 vols (Cambridge: UP, 1914-29) I, 136-38) show that the year is 1413.

to the Count of La Marche;¹⁹ for Pintoin the leader of the expedition is the illustrious Duke of Bourbon:

J'ai déjà dit ci-dessus que l'illustre duc de Bourbon avait été chargé par le roi de conduire une armée en Aquitaine, pour reconquérir sur les Anglais plusieurs places dont ils s'étaient emparés l'année précédente... cette expédition, au dire des barons du pays, fit beaucoup d'honneur au duc... Ayant appris que les gens de guerre en garnison dans la ville maritime de Soubise étaient allés à Bordeaux pour toucher l'argent de leur solde, et qu'ils n'avaient laissé, pour la garde de la place, qu'un petit nombre des leurs... il résolut d'essayer ses forces contre Soubise. (5:223)²⁰

The siege began on 21 November 1413 and ended two days later after an epic struggle:

Je ne rapporterai pas tous les incidents de ce siège (*sic*), ni toutes les prouesses par lesquelles chacun s'y fit remarquer... Je me contenterai de dire que j'ai appris de plusieurs de ceux qui prirent part à cette action, qu'ils n'avaient jamais assisté à une si rude et si chaude affaire, et que, les assiégés perdant enfin tout espoir, ceux que commandait le duc, et qui avaient commencé l'assaut, furent aussi les premiers qui entrèrent dans la ville et crièrent au pillage. (5:227)

Jean de Bourbon lost no time in sending the news of his success to Paris. But, whereas Le Fèvre has the Duke bring the news in person, Pintoin tells a different story:

Il [*sc.* Jean de Bourbon] chargea ensuite deux illustres chevaliers d'aller annoncer ce succès au roi. A cette nouvelle, les habitants de Paris et les membres du clergé célébrèrent une procession solennelle et générale, et firent une station à l'église de Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois. Pendant la messe, un célèbre professeur de théologie, maître Benoît Gentien, religieux de l'abbaye de Saint-Denys, prononça un éloquent discours, dans lequel il vanta beaucoup la paix du royaume, la valeur du duc, et la fidélité avec laquelle il avait accompli ses promesses. (5:229)

Pintoin does not say exactly when this celebratory mass took place, but it must have been at the very end of November or early in December 1413. At any rate it must have taken place before 1 January 1414 when Christine presented the *Livre de la Paix* to the Duke of Berry. In that way she too 'vanta beaucoup la paix du royaume', to repeat Pintoin's words.

While these events were taking place in Soubise and in Paris, Jean sans Peur launched a campaign to regain control of the capital. First of all a war of words directed against the Dauphin and Queen Isabeau. Their efforts to dissuade Jean sans Peur had no effect and it soon became clear that he was ready to march on Paris. It was at that point that the Dauphin decided to recall Jean de Bourbon and his army:

Mais voyant qu'il [*sc.* le duc de Bourgogne] persistait dans son dessein, il [*sc.* le dauphin] rappela d'Aquitaine le duc de Bourbon et ses gens de guerre, et le jour de la Saint-Vincent [le 26 janvier], qui était l'anniversaire de sa naissance, il donna un grand festin, en témoignage de son amitié particulière, à ceux qu'il avait avec lui à Paris. (5:231)

¹⁹ Louis-François Bellaguet (ed.), *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys, contenant le règne de Charles VI, de 1380 à 1422*, Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France, 6 vols (Paris: Crapelet, 1839-52), 5 (1844), p. 225. The quotations are from Bellaguet's translation of the Latin original.

²⁰ No earlier reference to the expedition has been found in the *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys*.

The exact date of Jean de Bourbon's return to Paris is not given, but it is implied that he was there in time to attend the grand dinner given by the Dauphin.

In the spring of 1414 Charles VI set out from Paris, leading his army on a campaign against Jean sans Peur. The royal troops attacked the towns occupied by the Burgundians and captured them one by one – Compiègne, Soissons, Laon, Bapaume. By the end of July they had reached Arras and proceeded to besiege the town. As the siege progressed, negotiations began between the two sides, and they resulted in a draft peace agreement, signed on 4 September. Throughout this campaign Jean de Bourbon played a prominent role: at Bapaume and at the siege of Arras, he was given joint command of the vanguard together with the Count of Armagnac.²¹ But he was never in sole command, as he had been at the siege of Soubise the previous November.

Thus when Christine de Pizan writes of the 'hault voyage' of Jean de Bourbon which had taken him far from Paris, she is referring to the expedition against Soubise. As Michel Pintoin tells us, the news of the French success reached Paris before the Duke's return, to be greeted by general joy. But that joy was short-lived, as Jean sans Peur massed his troops and threatened to march on Paris. We can understand therefore why Christine welcomed Jean de Bourbon's return with such enthusiasm, why she hastened to insert the last three of the *Encore aultres balades* into the collection which she was preparing for presentation to Queen Isabeau, and why she deleted the copy of the *Epistre a la reine*. The finished volume must have been presented to Queen Isabeau in January 1414, perhaps on New Year's Day, when gifts were traditionally presented. In the closing months of 1413 Christine's scriptorium must have been at full stretch, completing the Queen's MS and preparing copies of the *Livre de la Paix* for the Dauphin and the Duke of Berry.²²

21 *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys*, 5, p.237.

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