

## **‘Visualising Virtue: The Use of Images in Christine de Pizan’s Didactic Works’**

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I was extremely grateful for the Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature’s contribution towards funding a three-week research trip in continental Europe in July 2015. During this trip, I examined a total of thirty-nine manuscripts in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in Brussels, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and the Musée Condé in Chantilly – manuscripts that it was vital for me to see in order to complete my thesis, which takes as its topic the use of illuminations in Christine de Pizan’s didactic works. Many of the manuscripts that make up my corpus are available online (notably through Gallica), which had enabled me to make preliminary comparisons between different versions of the same text, but the remaining, unseen, manuscripts included ten author manuscripts and one well-known compilation manuscript that it was vital for me to see in order to more confidently present my conclusions.

Over 100 manuscripts of Christine’s works survive to this day, fifty-four of which were prepared under her direct supervision. As part of my thesis, I have investigated how the layout and illuminations of some of her texts were altered as they were copied by subsequent scribes, and as later artists adapted the iconographic programme for their needs. By examining the remaining author-manuscripts, I was able to confirm that the Master of the City of Ladies was the first miniaturist to represent Christine in a consistent manner, in the long blue gown with trailing sleeves and white headdress that we are now accustomed to seeing Christine in – and which we often mistakenly assume to be the only way in which she was represented during her lifetime. I also saw altered representations of Christine, that were carried out after her death, in which she is depicted as a nun, a noblewoman, or where the female authorship of a work has been entirely erased, and the author is presented (and depicted) as a man!

Viewing this number of works, I was also able to confirm one of my preliminary findings, that women are more often represented than men in the manuscripts prepared under Christine’s supervision. However, I found that my conjecture that works addressed to women were less luxuriously decorated and illuminated than those addressed to men to be erroneous. Viewing these manuscripts up-close also made me question assumptions about the gender of the audience of some of these works – which I am now able to address more fully than I had anticipated in the latter half of the final chapter of my thesis.

I had saved carrying out this trip until the end of the third year of my DPhil, as I finished the final chapter, and began the final writing up stage. I therefore came prepared with a list of questions to answer when viewing each manuscript, and which enabled me to work through my materials relatively quickly and efficiently. This was somewhat a risky tactic, as I was very much afraid that I might come across something that would fundamentally change my thesis – which could be difficult to work in so late in the game! Fortunately, the gamble paid off, and I came away with examples that could illuminate my discussions, and additional data for each manuscript. I also noticed a pattern

within the illuminations in one manuscript in Brussels, on which I intend to carry out a stand-alone study based on the information gathered on this visit. As well as a thoroughly-researched thesis, I can therefore also thank SSMLL for helping me find materials for a future article! My thanks also go out to the librarians in Brussels, Paris, and Chantilly who assisted me during my stays – in particular, to Michiel Verweij of the KBR, who was of invaluable assistance in preparing for the trip.