

Claire Le Ninan. *Le sage roi et la clergesse: L'écriture du politique dans l'oeuvre de Christine de Pizan*.

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When Christine de Pizan was first rediscovered as an author, in the nineteenth century, she was primarily seen as a writer who addressed the crisis faced by French political society in the early fifteenth century. By contrast, the renewed attention that Christine's work received in the late twentieth century tended to be accompanied by a focus on those texts in which she offered a defense of women against the misogyny that characterized so much medieval culture. More recently, however, there has been a revival of interest in Christine as a political theorist and as a writer who was seeking to engage with contemporary events. For some writers, Christine's political theory was original in offering a more inclusive and egalitarian view of society than the hierarchical outlook that was typical of so much medieval political thought.

By contrast, Angus Kennedy has argued that Christine's originality is often to be found not in the content of her political theory, but rather in the artistic form and rhetorical means she adopted in order to present afresh to her readers ideas with which they were already very familiar. It is this latter approach that is developed in detail in Claire Le Ninan's *Le sage roi et la clergesse*, which is the twelfth volume to be published in Champion's excellent Études Christiniennes series. The book mainly focuses on four of Christine's works: *Le livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V* (1404), *Le livre de l'advison Cristine* (1405), *Le livre de paix* (1412–13), and *Le ditié de Jehanne d'Arc* (1430). For Le Ninan, Christine's overall political outlook was very similar to that of John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome, her two main sources. Where Christine was more original was in relating the general principles set out in their work to the political events of her own day and in finding new artistic and rhetorical means to persuade her audience of the validity of her ideas. It is the latter aspect of Christine's work that is Le Ninan's chief focus as she offers a number of readings of the ways in which Christine sought to create an authority for herself as an author. In the *Advison*, for instance, she legitimates her discourse by invoking her own personal experience and her status as a widow, a traditional figure of the defenseless subject whom the prince should defend, in order to reproach those in power. In her thematic biography of Charles V, she invokes the authority of Philip, Duke of Burgundy, the dead king's brother, who had commissioned the work, to help guarantee its seriousness and value. In the *Livre de paix*, Christine adopts the pose of a tutor to the French dauphin, putting herself in the tradition of Aristotle and Seneca as the adviser to the prince.

Finally, in her celebration of Joan of Arc, Christine takes on the posture of the prophet warning of the divine retribution that will result unless her contemporaries amend their ways. Le Ninan shows how Christine adapted quotations taken from her sources, particularly Brunetto Latini's *Li livres dou tresor*, in order to transform the raw materials borrowed from others into something new. Shifting from analyses

of the overall structure of Christine's work to close readings of the language that the author uses in particular passages, Le Ninan's study provides a series of novel interpretations of the four texts that are her main focus of interest while also relating these to Christine's other works, particularly the *Livre du corps de policie*. Her analysis is fully grounded in the preexisting secondary literature but also arrives at an original line of argument of its own.

Inevitably, some readers will disagree with particular readings that she offers and claims that she makes. For instance, is the scarcity of surviving manuscripts of her political works (as opposed to the much-greater number of copies of her works in defense of women) really to be explained by their willingness to criticize the wrongdoings of the powerful (380), given that her biography of Charles V, which presents the king as a model ruler, also only survives in half a dozen manuscripts? Nonetheless, this is a study that has much to offer anyone interested in Christine's art and thought, and opens up new perspectives even for those who are very familiar with her work.

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