

Mary-Jo Arn. *The Poet's Notebook: The Personal Manuscript of Charles d'Orléans* (Paris BnF MS fr. 25458).

Texts and Transitions 3. Turnhout: Brepols, 2008. xxii + 200 pp. index. append. illus. tbls. bibl. €64. ISBN: 978-2-503-52070-4.

Charles d'Orléans's notebook is one of the world's more intriguing medieval manuscripts, but also one of the more puzzling. As brought back to France by the poet in the 1440s, it seems to have been conceived as an elegant, but quite conventional, presentation manuscript for the lyrics Charles had written largely while he was a prisoner in England, with the ballades as a coherent narrative; this *fonds primitif* was copied and decorated in England. When, however, the loose quires containing these sequences arrived in the ducal court at Blois, they were greatly extended to contain not only Charles's own compositions over the remainder of his life (often copied in his own hand), but also the *rondeaux* and ballades of some forty of his courtiers, friends, and visitors to his court, copied in various hands, autograph or scribal. Serious work on the manuscript — the hands, the identities of the poets, the ordering and dating of the lyrics, the complicated and puzzling *mise en page* — has been dominated by the monumental work of Pierre Champion in the early decades of the twentieth century, to the extent that his edition (1923–27) remains the standard, that his study of the manuscript, written in 1907, remains the only full-scale one, and that later scholars have been daunted by the major reevaluation that would be needed to rethink Champion's characteristically imperious conclusions. Until now: Mary-Jo Arn has spent years reexamining the manuscript from every angle, and, with this excellent book, has undertaken “to see and display as clearly as possible a succession of layers of scribal work in the manuscript and behind that a series of phases of the poet's work” (10).

What most characterizes this book is Arn's acute, meticulous, and minute observation of manuscript details that turn out to be astonishingly informative, and her rigorous argument. It has been only too easy for critics to misunderstand or misrepresent the succession of events in the production of this manuscript; Champion's hypotheses have been long-lived, and often misleading. Arn brings to bear every tool in the codicologist's chest: not just the obvious, hands, quire structures, *mise en page*, decoration, but also such things as ruling patterns, pricking, lyric numberings, marginalia, emendations, quality of vellum. Her focus is the history of the manuscript itself, and the order of composition: she stresses, rightly, that the temptation actually to date lyrics or runs of lyrics is one to be generally resisted. She starts with a careful description of the manuscript itself (summarized valuably in a series of synoptic tables at the end of the book). There then follow four chapters corresponding to the four “stints” of copying discernible in the manuscript, and that transform it from its elegant beginnings into the busy, untidy pages containing the courtiers' contributions, and finally into the last four scrappily presented, miscellaneous quires copied in the final decade or so leading to the duke's death. In the course of these surveys, Arn offers judicious and prudent discussions of some of the more notorious problems posed by the manuscript: the

reasons for the curious *mise en page* whereby *chansons* were copied only into the bottom half of some pages; the order in which the poems were composed and copied, and especially those copied later, onto the blank half-pages; the question of generic uncertainties as between *chanson* and *rondeau* — discussions, laudably, not necessarily solutions, since it is one of the great strengths of this book that Arn declines to follow so many critics in speculating beyond the evidence. What is admirable, here, is both the clarity of Arn's arguments, and the way (with occasional sardonic touches) that she makes this highly technical study not just clear, but also enjoyable; she is helped in this by the CD-ROM attached that collates the manuscript with the major scholarly editions, and sets out such things as quire structure and numberings, hands, and so on.

In her sixth and final chapter, Arn teases out the implications of this study. Above all, she makes a plea for a Charles who is far more technically flexible, and far more rooted in the social organization of his court, than is easily perceived from existing editions. Here, Arn suggests the questions that her book may enable us to answer with far more certitude than previously: questions to do with technical and personal poetic development, questions to do with how collection and anthologization were perceived in Charles's circles, and more broadly in the poetic community of the fifteenth century. What becomes especially obvious is how far her highly important work should inform any new edition; we look forward with enthusiasm to the new edition of the manuscript promised by Arn and John Fox.

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