

Joël Blanchard, ed. *1511–2011, Philippe de Commines: Droit, écriture: deux piliers de la souveraineté*.

Cahiers d'Humanisme et Renaissance 100. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2012. 376 pp. \$51.60. ISBN: 978-2-600-0154321.

This volume brings together the work of scholars who gathered in 2011 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the death of the diplomat and historian Philippe de Commines, a highly important figure whose work forms many bridges: between the *chroniqueurs* and sixteenth-century European historians, but perhaps most importantly (for this reviewer, anyway) between the genre of the memoir and that of the essay.

A common problem with the publication of conference proceedings is a lack of unity, but not in this case, for while the topic centered around a single author may have helped, there is nonetheless a remarkable coherence in approach and perspective. Many of the reviews seem to have a similar objective, namely, to define what makes Commines, well, Commines and to situate him with respect to the past, present, and future. One famous difference is his practice of a less idealizing form of historical writing: thus, in a famous phrase of the prologue to his *Mémoires*, Commines observes of princes that “ils sont hommes comme nous. A Dieu seul appartient la perfection” (Joël Blanchard, ed. Philippe de Commines [2006], 1). By less “idealizing” is meant less hagiographic, *miroir-des-princes*-type writing, and more observation grounded in the contemporaneous practices of diplomacy and personal experience. Many of the studies brought together in the first two sections devoted to “L'Écriture Comminienne” and “Pragmatique Politique” continue Jean Dufournet's groundbreaking 1966 *thèse* on *La Destruction des mythes dans les “mémoires” de Ph. de Commines* by seeking to measure the historian's “contribution” through an evaluation

of the differences between Commynes's known sources and Commynes's actual writing: thus Jean Dumolyn writes on Flemish influences (since Commynes was of Flemish origin), Joël Blanchard on diplomatic notes, Frédéric Martin on the practice of law, Franck Collard on accounts of poisoning, to some extent even Jean-Louis Fournel, who covers violence, and finally Cédric Michon on "Commynes et le Conseil." These studies occupy approximately one half of the book.

The third section, entitled "Commynes l'Européen: Regards Croisés," pays homage to the work of Joël Blanchard himself, author of *Commynes l'Européen: l'invention du politique* (1996). These broaden the scope somewhat of the contributions in the "Pragmatique Politique" section: Gille Lucuppre remarks on the displacement of England by the Hapsburg Empire after the Hundred Year's War; Jean-Philippe Genet evaluates whether Commynes really knew England well but concludes that what matters is the uses he makes of it; Marc Boone analyzes the influence of both Commynes's Flemish urban origins and his diplomatic experience of Italian urban areas; Stéphane Péquignot observes Commynes's unusual sensitivity to changes in Spain (234), and Patrick Gilli focuses on Italian documents revealing how important a diplomat Commynes was.

For this reviewer, the most engaging essays, i.e., those richest in implications for the relationship between representations of authorial self and literary genre, came at the beginning and end of the volume. In her study of court documents from the trial of the Count of Saint-Pol in section 1, Irit Kleiman reflects on how Saint-Pol's duplicitous writing — and its analysis by Commynes — gives rise to a space of interiority (27). In her "Les *Mémoires* de Commynes: précurseur et modèle d'un genre," constituting the first article in section 4 ("La Lecture des *Mémoires*: Passeurs et Héritiers"), Nadine Kuperty-Tsur identifies Commynes's writing as an "espace de substitution" that allows Commynes after his disgrace to continue his political analysis and underscores its novelty in being a first-person narration (274). Philippe Desan's magisterial article "Des *Mémoires* de Commynes aux *Essais* de Montaigne: Réflexion sur les Genres" continues Kuperty-Tsur's contribution and demonstrates persuasively how the frustrated political aspirations of both Commynes and Montaigne gave rise to the development of new literary genres. Building on the idea of the de-idealized prince, Desan shows that this occurs through a double leveling: the leveling of the king, the memoirist, and the essayist on the one hand, and of politics and the literary on the other, is accompanied by the realization at a certain point that the memoirist and essayist are sufficient all by themselves (286). Nevertheless, Montaigne's essays represent a considerable evolution with respect to Commynes's *Mémoires* because, as Desan concludes so pithily, "si l'essai universalize le moi en niant l'histoire de l'autre, il propose une nouvelle histoire plus vraie qui amoindrit l'expérience de l'autre au profit de l'expérience du moi" (300).

It is, perhaps, these considerations of Commynes's place in the evolution of autobiographical genres that enable us best to understand his specific contributions as a writer.

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