

Songe du Viel Pelerin. Philippe de Mézières.

Ed. Joël Blanchard. Textes Littéraires Français 633. 2 vols. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2015. clxiv + 1,744 pp. \$110.40.

In January 2015 Joël Blanchard gave readers of the *Songe du Viel Pelerin* a wonderful present with his new edition. This long-awaited edition is absolutely crucial for scholars of Philippe's seminal text. Blanchard's translation of the *Songe* (2008) and his numerous articles have already proven his knowledge of the subject. He now brings a solid working base to researchers who desperately needed something trustworthy after the somewhat unreliable edition of G. W. Coopland in 1969. There are many aspects of the new edition that will now make research easier. First of all, the practical structure of the edition is significant. The division into two volumes corresponds to the base manuscript, A (Arsenal, MS 2682: books 1 and 2; and Arsenal, MS 2683: book 3). The page numbering is continuous from prologue to epilogue, going from the first volume to the second. Readers of the *Songe* remember that Coopland had interrupted the text by several introductions to books 1, 2, and 3. The new edition makes the referencing system much more efficient.

The most important aspect, of course, is the content. The edition begins with a brilliant and substantial introduction, presenting the nine manuscripts of the *Songe du Viel Pelerin*. Blanchard's edition is based on the Arsenal manuscript, which contains autograph notes: additions and corrections between the lines or in the margins. Those elements tend to prove that the manuscript stayed at the Convent of the Celestines, never given to Charles VI or Bureau de La Rivière. It was more a work tool than a royal present, despite the very beautiful illumination of the winged deer, representing Charles VI. Other manuscripts are also described and considered. Blanchard establishes an

interesting picture of actual evidence on this point, which had not been completely presented before. Using the reliable manuscript, this critical edition corrects at the same time errors found in manuscript B (BnF, fr. 22542) and those introduced by Cooplund himself. The result is a clearer and more comprehensible text. The variants of the nine manuscripts appear at the end of the second volume.

The editor briefly synthesizes Philippe de Mézières's biography and underlines the importance of three men: Pierre Thomas, Bureau de La Rivière, and Nicole Oresme. The first had a spiritual influence on Philippe in Cyprus. He was an avid supporter of the Crusade, and Philippe remained devoted to his old friend throughout his life, even though Pierre Thomas is mentioned only once in the *Songe du Viel Pelerin*. The second was chamberlain of Charles V, belonging to the group of counselors named the Marmousets (from Jules Michelet, in the nineteenth century). He is the dedicatee of a previous book by Philippe de Mézières, *Le Pelerinage du Povre Pelerin* (which has unfortunately disappeared). Philippe's political theory was very close to the Marmousets' principles, as reflected in the *Songe du Viel Pelerin*. There is no need for introductions with the last of these three: the very famous translator of Aristotle and writer of several books that inspired Philippe, particularly when he wrote about currencies and astrology.

Philippe de Mézières took advantage of his twenty-five years of retreat at the Convent of the Celestines to write his major books, among which feature the *Songe du Viel Pelerin*, the *Epistre au roi Richart*, and the *Epistre lamentable et consolatoire*. In all three, the author employs allegory. This process enables a veiled critique of society without directly implicating the author. This is obvious in the *Songe du Viel Pelerin*, where criticism is the business of allegorical figures such as Reine Verité or her *chambrières*. The structure of the *Songe* is complex, arising from one central allegory, the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30). Secondary allegories insert themselves and interlock: the vessel, the tablets of law, the trolley, and the most important and longest one, the chessboard. The result might be occasionally difficult to read. An image sometimes has several meanings, and the same signification can be explained through different images. This is the reason why Philippe de Mézières wants to help his reader, by offering a “table des figures.” It had never been done before in medieval literature. This index is accessible between the prologue and the first chapter of the first book. It is directly followed by a “table des rubriques” (table of contents), which had not been transcribed in Cooplund's edition. Both tables reveal an attitude focused on the reader, as the author says himself in the prologue. He wishes his book to be leafed through, as a real tool, and implicitly speaks in favor of solitary, partial, and even silent reading.

Not only is the introduction an excellent overview of Philippe de Mézières's life and work, but it also reveals a lot of new detailed information and research. The sections on literary sources are especially successful. The main sources of the *Songe du Viel Pelerin* are *Le Roman de la Rose* (key allegorical dream), Guillaume de Digulleville and his pilgrimages (written a few years before the *Songe du Viel Pelerin*), Gilles de Rome and Jean de Salisbury (mirrors for princes), and Jacques de Cessoles, who also wrote an allegory based on a chessboard (translated in French in 1372 by Jean de Vignay).

Philippe de Mézières is also remarkable for his endless intellectual curiosity. Never having gone to university (he learned Latin with the canons of Amiens), the counselor of kings was a self-taught man, always reading books that were at his disposal in the magnificent library of Charles VI.

However, Philippe de Mézières distances himself from his predecessors. His *Songe* is more militant in religion and politics, even if his political opinions are very close to those of the Marmousets. Mentioned in the prologue of the *Songe*, his *Chevalerie de l'Ordre de la Passion* is a concrete realization of the theoretical project presented in the *Songe*. Several of his friends had promised their engagement, but the defeat of Nicopolis (1396) unfortunately ended this movement. However, it is very representative of the utopian vision that guided Philippe de Mézières throughout his life: his hope of a return to the Golden Age. The true and deep purpose of his writing goes further than good government. He hopes for general peace, reform of the state and church, and the conquest of Jerusalem. It is difficult to know how Mézières's contemporaries reacted to this huge undertaking, but the difficult historical context certainly did not help, not to mention the utopian dimension that he brought to his reflections.

At the end of the second volume, readers and researchers will find a solid critical apparatus. As mentioned above, variants are listed after the epilogue of the *Songe*. They are followed by notes, which clarify the text page by page, giving historical and literary glosses and proposing precious bibliographical trails. A very useful index closes the volume; unfortunately, it contains some incorrect page numbers (the same problem occurs in the introduction). I occasionally had to read a number of pages to find the item listed. It is the only defect I can identify in this beautiful edition.

I would like to conclude by referring to an extraordinary discovery made by Joël Blanchard. In the introduction, Blanchard reveals that the opening of the *Songe du Viel Pelerin* is a rewriting of the *Pelerinage du Pauvre Pelerin*, an earlier text composed in verse, and he proves it beyond doubt through his analysis of a wide range of examples. This discovery and the edition more generally open new and exciting possibilities for scholars of this most fascinating of medieval authors.

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