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Anne D. Hedeman, *Translating the Past. Laurent de Premierfait and Boccaccio's De casibus*. Los Angeles: Published by the J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008. xv+280 pp. Appendices, notes, references, indexes. 36€ (cl). ISBN 978-0-89236-935-5

Review by Daisy Delogu, University of Chicago.

Anne D. Hedeman's insightful and beautifully-produced new book, *Translating the Past. Laurent de Premierfait and Boccaccio's De casibus*, builds upon the important work Professor Hedeman has already done in the field of manuscript studies. Hedeman has long focused on the ways in which images generate meaning, as well as the dynamic interaction of text and image, particularly in the area of secular, vernacular manuscripts. Her work, like that of scholars such as Sandra Hindman and Claire Richter Sherman, has sought to reconstruct for a modern public the complex and integrated medieval reading experience, which was one conditioned by the interplay of text, rubrics, page layout, marginalia, and miniatures.

In her new book Professor Hedeman interrogates the related concepts and the medieval practices of textual translation on the one hand, and on the other what Hedeman, following Claire Richter Sherman, calls visual translation. This key concept supposes that images can be used to "smooth cultural and chronological gaps, to enrich the texts that they accompany, and occasionally to introduce ideas or associations that are not in the text" (p. xii). Hedeman's point of entry into this important question is provided by Laurent de Premierfait's linguistic translation of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium* into French c. 1400, and his retranslation and amplification of the same text, c. 1409-10, this time accompanied by a virtual explosion of visual content.

In her introduction Professor Hedeman discusses the ways in which noble readers acquired, organized, and read the manuscripts that they possessed. She emphasizes, quite rightly, that reading was part of a larger process of discussion, observation, comparison, and reflection on the part of a manuscript's public, and that images played a vital role in this active and engaged reading process by highlighting certain textual passages, encouraging a non-sequential reading, and helping readers to perceive the relevance of a historical text to their lived reality.

The first two chapters, "The Popularity of Translation in the Late Fourteenth and Early Fifteenth Century" and "Laurent de Premierfait and Artistic Commissions before 1410," are both relatively short, and lay the historical and conceptual groundwork for the dense analyses of chapters three and four. In these opening chapters Professor Hedeman presents her protagonists: the early fifteenth-century humanist, writer, and administrator, Laurent de Premierfait, and Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*, twice translated by Laurent de Premierfait as the *Des cas des nobles hommes et femmes*. Boccaccio's work was structured as a series of first-person speeches addressed to the author in which the speakers discussed their reversals of Fortune. Laurent's first and quite literal translation of the *Des cas*, containing just one image, was not a success. In the years that followed Laurent translated two classical texts, Cicero's *De senectute* (c. 1405) and Livy's *Ab urbe condita* (c. 1409). It was in these works, Hedeman argues, that Laurent began to experiment with the ways in which images might be used to gloss his classical source through amplification, clarification, or explanation of the text. In these translations

visual imagery “extends textual meanings or introduces original information” (p. 34). Hedeman compares the images in the one surviving manuscript of Laurent’s *Ab urbe* to the visual cycles analysed by Inge Zacher of manuscripts of Bersuire’s fourteenth-century translation of Livy.

Hedeman finds that the visual content Laurent’s manuscript is original in important ways. He selected images to emphasize Roman history, institutions, and virtues, used rubrics to call attention to important speeches, and tightened the bonds between text, images, and rubrics. The execution of these translations, with their progressively more complex visual programs overseen, Hedeman argues, by Laurent de Premierfait himself, constitute an important stage in Laurent’s increasingly sophisticated deployment of images as an aid not just to linguistic, but also to cultural translation. Laurent’s c. 1409–10 retranslation of the *Des cas* was significantly different from his first effort from a textual standpoint, not least because it was far longer (Hedeman’s Appendix 6 provides an example of the amplification of Boccaccio’s text effected by Laurent in his second translation). Like Nicole Oresme’s translations of Aristotle carried out during the reign of Charles V, Laurent’s retranslation was also a commentary on and adaptation of his source intended to aid in comprehension and to guide the reception of Boccaccio’s text. Laurent added two prologues to his retranslation which commented on the purposes and methods of translation, and which highlighted the significance of his own role in the transmission of Boccaccio’s text. This retranslation was a great success, as evidenced by the over fifty illuminated manuscripts of this version that survive.

In chapter three, “Retranslating Boccaccio’s *De casibus*. The Formation of a Core Visual Cycle for the Princes of the Blood,” Hedeman analyses closely the two manuscripts of the *Des Cas* produced, she argues, not sequentially but in tandem, for the dukes of Berry and Burgundy respectively. Unlike their sparsely illustrated predecessor, these manuscripts contained 147 and 153 images. Hedeman affirms that Laurent oversaw the visual program, and that he continued to revise both text and images as the manuscripts were being produced. Hedeman emphasizes the near-simultaneity of these manuscripts, as well as the very close iconography of their miniatures, and she refers to them as a unit—the ducal manuscripts. However, she does not call attention to the fact that the Duke of Berry and his nephew, Duke John of Burgundy, found themselves, in 1409–10, on opposite sides of a profound political divide. The Duke of Burgundy’s 1407 assassination of Louis d’Orléans, the king’s younger brother and another nephew of the Duke of Berry, drove France to civil war, and placed Berry and Burgundy into opposing political camps. While Hedeman does discuss the commission of the Duke of Berry’s manuscript, she does not comment upon the circumstances that led to the production of a near-identical manuscript for the Duke of Burgundy. These circumstances are perhaps unknown, but I believe it would have been useful to recognize the singularity of this situation, and to proffer an explanation concerning what about this manuscript made it relevant for each of these political enemies.

Hedeman shows through careful analysis that the miniatures in these manuscripts functioned as a partner or aid in the process of textual amplification effected by Laurent in his retranslation. The images often illustrate parts of the text that Laurent had expanded, thereby drawing attention to his interpolations. Moreover, the images do not simply accompany expanded parts of the text, they are themselves amplified. Hedeman defines visual amplification as the process by which “pairs of miniatures illustrating a single story stretch out, spilling over from the chapter containing the story to illustrate a subsequent chapter” (p. 85). This important technique extends the viewer/reader’s experience of a given episode. Hedeman then examines four examples of such visual amplification, all of which “draw special attention to examples of governmental change in times of stress, usually in response to the overweening ambition of tyrants” (p. 86). Hedeman notes that Laurent adds to the text associated with one of these examples a reference to tyranny, but she might have discussed in greater detail the contemporary relevance of this insertion for the manuscripts’ publics. Hedeman is absolutely right to claim that the textual examples and the images contained in the *Des cas* were relevant to contemporary audiences, but she treats this audience as though it were uniform in its understanding and application of such examples. Would the references to tyranny signify in the same manner for the Duke of Burgundy,

who steadfastly refused to admit to wrongdoing in the assassination of Louis d'Orléans by affirming that he had rid the king and the kingdom of a tyrant, as they would to the Duke of Berry, who pursued justice against his nephew? Hedeman notes that certain visual amplifications are unique to the manuscript of the Duke of Burgundy, notably those related to the fall of the ruling family of Troy. Such differences might have been deployed in an analysis of the different publics for whom Laurent's text and images were useful.

In the final part of the chapter Hedeman makes a compelling case for how the large image related to the fall of Jerusalem, which introduces book seven of the *Des cas*, functioned as a second, internal frontispiece. The French were commonly understood to be God's new chosen people, and the large and striking representation of the fall of Jerusalem and the sale of the Jews into slavery provided a warning to the French, whose moral failings put them at risk of undergoing a similar fate. This image, unprecedented Hedeman says in its prominence, provides an optic for interpreting the entire *Des cas* as a text that attempts the moral reform of its powerful public, and that shows the applicability of historical exempla to late medieval audiences.

In her final chapter, "Receiving Laurent's *Des cas*. Distribution and Reformation of the Core Visual Cycle for Parisian Audiences," Hedeman focuses on the reception and transformation of Laurent's visual cycle in four manuscripts of the *Des cas* produced shortly after the ducal manuscripts, but not under the supervision of Laurent. She observes that these and other later manuscripts tend to re-emphasize the importance of Boccaccio as the author figure. In addition, they often seek to regularize the visual cycle by placing images before the prologue and at the start of each of Boccaccio's nine books, unlike the ducal manuscripts, in which images were concentrated in the first three books of the *Des cas*. Finally, Laurent's first and longest prologue is often omitted from later manuscripts, while a presentation scene is added. Unlike previous scholars, who traced a linear chronology of manuscript production, Hedeman proposes instead a first stage (the ducal manuscripts) and a second stage made soon thereafter, but not under Laurent's direction, in which the "Parisian *libraires*, artists, and the practices of the book trade played a more direct role than did the author of the translation" (p. 137). The similarities between the visual cycles of these second stage manuscripts may be attributed to the existence of the artist instructions produced by Laurent which circulated shortly after the completion of the ducal manuscripts, and also to a "shared visual vocabulary that included both generic figure studies and specific compositions" (p. 145).

Hedeman pays particular attention to the manuscripts produced for Gontier Col (BnF Ms fr 131) and Girard Blanchet (Getty Ms 63), both royal administrators loyal to the so-called Armagnacs (i.e., those allied with the Duke of Berry) and to King Charles VII. Hedeman discusses Col's manuscript as one that illustrates the owner's humanist interests. Col is particularly interested in questions of authorship, and his is the only manuscript to visually acknowledge the role of Laurent in the transmission of Boccaccio's text. Hedeman discusses Blanchet's manuscript, Getty Ms 63, illuminated by the Boucicaut Master, within the context of late medieval Parisian book production practices. The so-called Boucicaut Master was not one person, or a master and apprentice/s, but a small group of artists who worked very closely together and who produced images that were at once consistent and unique. Hedeman affirms that "[d]espite this collaborative production, which sought to present a uniform appearance, many images stand out for their iconographic inventiveness and the quality of their execution" (p. 171). Two kinds of images are particularly important when considering Getty Ms 63: those unique to this manuscript, and those that "elaborate on visual tradition with expanded iconography or that the *libraire* chose to have painted at a larger scale" (p. 182), and these image types constitute the foundation of Hedeman's study. Though close visual analysis, Hedeman shows that these image types emphasize Laurent and Boccaccio's authorship, provide examples of good government, and invite the public to use the *Des cas* to understand the contemporary French historical and political context, notably the French civil war. This last point is made with particular force by the image of the fall of Jerusalem, which stood out for its size, and because it was by a different artist. As in the ducal manuscripts, the presence of a

large image at the start of Boccaccio's book seven allowed this image to serve as an internal frontispiece, one that oriented the reading not only of the book that followed it, but of the text as a whole.

Hedeman affirms that the Boucicaut images lent themselves to active reading and contemplation, and also served to bridge past and present. This final point is reiterated in Hedeman's conclusions to the volume, which emphasize the "present of past things" (p. 207). Laurent's textual amplifications, as well as the visual amplifications and modifications effected under his direction and later by Parisian *libraires*, show the continued relevance of Biblical and classical history for the French. Images about the past, Hedeman concludes "*always* also address the present and create expectations about the future" (p. 211).

Hedeman's book includes eight appendices that show the subject and placement of miniatures in the ducal manuscripts, in Bersuire's translation and Laurent's retranslation of Livy, and in other manuscripts of the *Des cas*; gift exchanges between Martin Gouge and the duke of Berry; manuscripts given to and commissioned by the duke of Berry; an example of Laurent's extensive annotations and additions in his retranslation of the *Des cas*; visual amplifications unique to the ducal manuscripts; and guide letters for artists contained in Getty Ms 63.

While Professor Hedeman's study is limited to a restricted number of instantiations of a single text, the arguments that these sources allow her to make about the role of images in negotiating meaning, the significance of images in reading processes, and the "presentness of the past" are astute and widely applicable. Her book provides thoughtful-provoking and useful reading for literary scholars, historians, and art historians of late medieval Europe, especially France. Hedeman's prose is lucid and she furnishes the necessary background for non-art historians, such that her important arguments are accessible to a wide public. Finally, the book's one hundred beautiful color reproductions and fifty two black and white ones further contribute to the pleasure of the text.

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