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Lisa Fagin Davis, *La Chronique Anonyme Universelle: Reading and Writing History in Fifteenth-Century France*. London and Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers (Brepols), 2014. vi + 439 pp. + CD-ROM. Tables, diagrams, notes, bibliography, plates, and indices. €175.00 (cl.) ISBN 978-1-905375-55-4

Review by Chris Jones, University of Canterbury

The anonymous universal chronicle of this volume's title is a French compilation that recounts "the history of the world from a particular and particularly French point of view" (p. 94). Beginning with Creation, and structured in the form of a genealogical roll, the history divides, from the birth of Christ, into four parts that recount the histories of popes, Roman Emperors and the kings of France and Britain. The editor, Lisa Fagin Davis, argues that the original version was produced between 1409 and 1415 in the circle of Marie of Bourbon (d. 1434), duchess of Auvergne. While Davis recognizes that neither the duchess nor her father, Jean, duke of Berry, appear on the roll, she puts a well-argued and plausible case for Marie as the original patron. In the mid-fifteenth century, the chronicle was extended via two recensions, both of which focused on the reigns of Charles VI and Charles VII, with the latest manuscripts ending with the succession of Louis XI in 1461.

Davis has produced a handsome critical edition based on a deep and convincing analysis of a complex manuscript tradition. The edition is accompanied by an in-depth scholarly introduction, a detailed catalogue of all the extant manuscripts, a useful parallel English translation, an example of a full illumination cycle and a CD-ROM. Overall, this volume is an impressive achievement and a testament to considerable scholarship. While future research may nuance our understanding of the chronicle's origins and composition, the critical edition will remain, without doubt, the starting point for all future work on this text.

Davis has produced this edition at exactly the right moment. The last decade has seen a rebirth of interest in chronicle rolls following a tendency of scholars, inherited from their Renaissance humanist predecessors, to look somewhat disdainfully on these highly inaccurate and unwieldy, if often beautifully illuminated, products of the later medieval centuries.<sup>[1]</sup> And it is an interest that appears set to continue with, for example, the commencement in 2015 of a project at the University of Heidelberg that focuses on the link between the content and material format of rolls.<sup>[2]</sup> Ultimately, this interest can be traced back to the broader shift represented by historians such as Bernard Guenée, who reminded us of the value of chronicles more generally as windows onto the medieval world.<sup>[3]</sup> As Olivier de Laborderie and Maree Shirota have demonstrated recently, there is much to be learned from a closer examination of rolls produced in an English context.<sup>[4]</sup> Davis's work certainly opens important new doors on French rolls. It does so by building on solid foundations, particularly the work undertaken by Marigold Norbye into *A tous nobles*, a popular abridgment with its roots in the *Grandes Chroniques de France* tradition.<sup>[5]</sup> The decision by the compiler of this particular history to employ *A tous nobles* betrays his, as Davis puts it, "Francophilic agenda" (p. 19). Indeed, she floats the intriguing possibility that he may even be *A tous nobles's* original author.

One of the most welcome features of Davis's critical edition is that it does not fall into the nineteenth-century model of an attempt to reconstruct a definitive "authorial" text. Davis certainly identifies the earliest version of the chronicle, St Petersburg, National Library of Russia, MS Fr F.v.I.9 and MS Fr F.v.IV.14. These unillustrated, relatively plain manuscripts are the only extant version that makes sense of internal references to a division between two rolls. For her base text, however, Davis has chosen, instead, one of the most "authoritative" copies (p. 49), a manuscript written half a century later: Manchester, John Rylands Library, Ms. Fr. 99. Her reasoning is carefully and convincingly explained in the part of the commentary labelled "The textual transmission of the *Chronique*" (pp. 47-67). Davis identifies the John Rylands version as a bridge, of sorts, between the earliest version of the text represented in the St Petersburg manuscripts and the two recensions into which the chronicle branched. The resulting stemma is summed up on page 65 and represented diagrammatically on page 66. As Davis herself recognizes, "the stemma remains somewhat provisional ... an incontrovertable [sic] stemma is impossible to construct. There is simply too much information missing" (pp. 49, 65); nevertheless, this painstaking analysis puts the proposed reconstruction on as firm a footing as there is ever likely to be unless new manuscripts come to light.

The critical edition is based on the collation of sixteen of the twenty-eight extant manuscripts. The choice of manuscripts was based primarily, as Davis notes, on expediency. By integrating, in square brackets, readings taken from the St Petersburg rolls, interpolations which on multiple occasions help make sense of the text, the reader is able to follow not only the original 1409-1415 version but both the later recensions and the three sub-families that Davis identifies within them. My main comment regarding the edition concerns the layout. It is always going to be extremely challenging to represent a manuscript roll that was intended to be read vertically from top to bottom in a modern codex format. Davis has sought to assist the reading process by retaining the text's original columns. This is a sensible decision as it helps preserve some of the "feel" of the original manuscripts. At the same time, there are two problematic consequences. First, incidents in individual columns often stretch over several pages. Readers can find, therefore, that they need to turn back multiple pages as many as five times to follow the parallel columns. Second, while the typesetting program copes admirably with four columns, its elasticity was clearly tested by five: there is, for example, jarringly exaggerated spacing between words when the column containing the history of Britain splits in two and parallels its history of Richard I, John and Henry III with events in the Holy Land (for example, pp. 274-283; see also pp. 196-205).

A good translation is to some extent an additional layer of commentary on the text, and this is a welcome one. It will also make the chronicle more accessible to a wide-ranging audience, particularly graduate students. As is to be expected of a reviewer, I had a few minor quibbles: personally, given the context in both cases, I would probably have chosen "paradise" over "heaven" (p. 155, col. A, line 27) and "kingdom" over "realm" (p. 293, col. B, line 18). But my one substantial criticism, which also extends to the critical edition, is the decision to keep the apparatus to a minimum. Notes are largely restricted to variant readings and to identifying individuals mentioned in the chronicle. There is an admirable air of King James's approach to producing the 1611 English translation of the Bible here: faced with the competing claims of Catholic and Puritan translations, James recognized commentary can be more trouble than it is worth and opted to avoid it altogether. Yet, the bare bones approach can be accompanied by its own problems. If the reader knows, for example, that Louis IX obtained the Crown of Thorns before departing for his first crusade there is no difficulty. For those, however, who find themselves less sure-footed in the 1240s, it might have been useful to note that the chronicle's account is garbled to say the least. The same can be said of its distorted version of Becket's murder and its assertion that Charles I of Anjou was crowned emperor.

The issues connected with layout also intrude upon the translation. To some extent it is probably inevitable when dealing with such a complex text that, on occasion, parts of the translation will appear on a different page to the edition (for example pp. 184-187, col. D). On at least one occasion, however, I got the distinct impression, judging by the insertion of an unexplained series of breaks, that a somewhat

hapless typesetter had simply stopped trying to make sense of it all (see columns C and D across pp. 238-243; see also p. 278f). There is also one instance in which the label intended to indicate an illumination appears in the translation but not in the edition (pp. 266-267) and another where the label is misplaced (p. 341).

Davis's prefatory commentary adds particular depth to this volume. The section "Sources and origin of the *Chronique*" (pp. 25-46) combined with the "Conclusions" (pp. 94-96) is especially notable. Davis sets herself an ambitious goal: "to identify the collection or collections that housed the source manuscripts in the early fifteenth century in hopes of identifying the point of origin and original audience" (p. 25). She builds a strong case that links the earliest known version of the roll to the library of the duke of Bourbon via a specific manuscript of a *Bible Historiale*. Davis is not able to produce a "smoking gun" but offers a complex yet ultimately convincing justification. Along the way she highlights the perennial problem with any chronicle roll: we remain very uncertain how they were actually used. My one significant query in the commentary concerns the undocumented assertion that Bernard Gui composed a French translation of Martin of Troppau's chronicle of popes and emperors (p. 31). Gui certainly employed Martin's chronicle when composing his own Latin histories; [6] I stand to be corrected, but I have not found any reference to his work as a translator of Martin. Davis's discussion of the illustrative cycle is, however, entirely convincing: building on her stemma, it establishes that while there are variations of style, there is one basic cycle. The most interesting aspect of Davis's argument here is her suggestion that although the earliest known rolls were unilluminated, the cycle itself is latent in the St Petersburg manuscripts. It was drawn out fifty years later from "suggestions left, consciously or not" in the earliest version; it then remained notably consistent (pp. 68-69). An example of a full illumination cycle is supplied from Davis's manuscript *W*.

Manuscript *W* also forms the basis for the digital facsimile on the CD-ROM that accompanies this book. Davis explains that "though it is a second-recension manuscript, and therefore gives a slightly variant text from the critical edition, manuscript *W* has been used for the digital facsimile because it is the most complete fully-illustrated copy" (p. 150). One might add, less tactfully, that as *W* is now in private hands this is also the only way scholars are likely to be able to access it. By providing nineteen high definition digital photographs of the roll in sections, a full transcript and an English translation, Davis has provided scholars with the components of a very useful additional resource. The concept for linking these is inspirational: Davis has set out to enable the viewer to not only zoom in and out of the photographs but to link highlighted blocks of text on the roll to the transcript and translation. She has also sought to make each name on the roll not only locatable and searchable, but also to provide a database of information regarding every entry. This is supplemented by a searchable version of the roll's genealogical connections presented in diagrammatic form. [7]

It is then a great shame that this potentially wonderful resource has extremely poor functionality (the manuscript viewer is not even provisioned with "auto execute"; the user has to dig around in the CD-ROM menu to find it). It is accompanied by PDF documentation for which the label "inadequate" would be generous. More importantly, the choice of CD-ROM itself – and not DVD as the publisher claims on the dust jacket – means this resource has an extremely limited shelf life. And the claim that the software has been developed to work with "most Windows systems today" does not, apparently, include those at the British Library, whose computers could not open the viewer in July 2016. Put simply, the value of a good piece of scholarship has been much reduced by a poor publishing decision: this resource should, without doubt, have been web-mounted. Marvel Comics is just one company to solve the conundrum of multi-platform DRM (Digital Rights Management). It would be nice to see scholarly publishers pack up their equivalent of the four-color process and consider moving into the current century.

This is a magnificent volume, a clunky bit of 1990s technology and the odd typo notwithstanding (p. 40: "Comparison" not 'Comparisan"; p. 185, col. B, line 9: "King" not "Kimg"; p. 275, col. E, line 9 should read "This"; p. 347, line 31 should read "did *not* want to belong"; p. 376: the first Norbye entry should

read “histoires” not “histories”). Lisa Fagin Davis is to be congratulated. She has brought to light a wonderful new resource that will be of tremendous interest to scholars of late medieval France, to those interested in chronicles in general and to those keen to explore the potential of chronicle rolls in particular. It also raises important questions for those interested in the digital humanities.

## NOTES

[1] For this renewed interest see, for example, the essays in Raluca Radulescu and Edward Kennedy, eds., *Broken Lines: Genealogical Literature in Medieval Britain and France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008); and, most recently, Jaclyn Rajsic, “The English Prose *Brut* Chronicle on a Roll: Cambridge Corpus Christi College, MS 546 and its History,” in Jaclyn Rajsic, Erik Kooper and Dominique Hoche, eds., *The Prose Brut and Other Late Medieval Chronicles: Books have their Histories: Essays in Honour of Lister M. Matheson* (York: York Medieval Press, 2016), pp. 105-124.

[2] The project, under the direction of Professor Jörg Peltzer, will run until 2019: Sub-Project B10, *Material-Texts-Cultures* Collaborative Research Centre 933 of the German Research Foundation, “Rolls for the King. The Format of Rolls in Royal Administration and Historiography in the Late Middle Ages in Western Europe”, [www.materiale-textkulturen.org/subproject.php?tp=B10&up=](http://www.materiale-textkulturen.org/subproject.php?tp=B10&up=) (last accessed 11 November 2016).

[3] Bernard Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1980).

[4] Olivier de la Laborderie, *Histoire, mémoire et pouvoir: Les généalogies en rouleau des rois d'Angleterre (1250-1422)* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013); Maree Shirota, “Royal Depositions and the ‘Canterbury Roll’,” *Parergon* 32.2 (2015):39-61.

[5] Marigold Norbye, “‘A tous nobles qui aiment beaux faits et bonnes histoires’: The Multiple Transformations of a Fifteenth-Century French Genealogical Chronicle,” *The Medieval Chronicle* 5 (2008):175-196. Davis notes Norbye edited both the edition and the translation presented in this volume (p. 150).

[6] Anne-Marie Lamarrigue, *Bernard Gui (1261-1331): Un historien et sa méthode* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), pp. 101-102.

[7] It is such a good model that I have decided to adopt a similar approach in a project that aims to publish a new edition and translation of another fifteenth-century roll, Christchurch, University of Canterbury, MS 1. For this roll: Chris Jones, Maree Shirota, M. Johnson, D. Shaw-Brown and E. Welch, *Canterbury Roll: Digital Facsimile with Commentary* (University of Canterbury, 2013), [www.canterbury.ac.nz/canterburyroll](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/canterburyroll) (last accessed 11 November 2016).

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