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Valérie Fasseur and Cécile Rochelois, eds., *Ponctuer l'œuvre médiévale. Des signes au sens*. Genève: Droz, 2016. 718 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. 48.99 CHF (pb). ISBN 978-2-600-01910-1.

Review by Maria Teresa Rachetta, Università degli Studi di Napoli, Federico II.

The thirty-five essays in this collection derive from the papers given at a conference in Pau in April 2014. They offer a collective assessment of contemporary approaches to practices of punctuation in medieval manuscripts by an interdisciplinary cohort of scholars (historians, philologists, and linguists).

In nineteenth- and twentieth-century editions of medieval French texts, which form the basis of modern knowledge of Old and Middle French, punctuation is editorial. These editions also normally lack any assessment of the punctuation system of the manuscript sources. Medieval punctuation has long been the appanage of palaeographers, and quite an esoteric subject. The growing interest in the original punctuation and in its meaning is one of the consequences of the digital turn in medieval studies. On the one hand, reproductions of the manuscript sources are widely accessible and a vast public of scholars and students are now able to experience directly (at least partially) the materiality of medieval writing. On the other hand, the digital infrastructure makes it possible to compile editions and corpora where the medieval punctuation may be interpreted through encoding and make it available to readers as an alternative to the modern one. In this framework, one could be easily inclined to compile descriptions and taxonomies. The main merits of the Pau conference and of this collection lie in the critical engagement of the contributions which, rather than adopt a descriptive approach, focus on interpretation of the artefacts.

Interpretation here is crucial, since punctuation resides in the domain of the written encoding of texts, a domain in which medieval practices differ significantly from modern ones. Firstly, there was no shared standard: each scribe seems to follow his own, idiosyncratic practices. Secondly, the presence of punctuation was not perceived as an integral, mandatory feature. One scribe may or may not use punctuation marks in different transcriptions or in different sections of the same transcription. Thirdly, the meaning of a punctuation mark was not univocal. On the contrary, the same mark was used for different purposes by the same scribe and in the same transcription. Furthermore, these purposes are often unclear. Contemporary scholarship approaches punctuation from two interrelated perspectives: a hermeneutic approach, i.e. the understanding of its development, meaning and significance in a broader consideration of medieval linguistic culture; and an editorial approach, i.e. the effort of translating the information conveyed by the

presence (or the absence) of medieval punctuation in our modern, post-print encoding where punctuation is standardised and tends to be univocal (even when the practices of different national and linguistic traditions differ). Valérie Fasseur and Cécile Rochelois take into account both these dimensions of the problem and put together indepth contributions using a wide typology of sources and critical outputs (including traditional editions, digital editions, palaeographic analyses, linguistic descriptions, and genealogical reconstructions of manuscript traditions).

Part one, *Donner à voir et à entendre le sens*, focuses on graphic and aural forms of punctuation and analyses Latin and French sources with particular attention paid to musical manuscripts and an interesting excursus on epigraphic punctuation. Part two and part three concentrate on vernacular sources: *Copistes et éditeurs à l'oeuvre* contains analyses derived from philological and linguistical works in progress; and *Ordre et désordre, rupture et continuité* includes critical approaches to a number of editorial case studies. Most of the essays focus on French examples, but Occitan, Italian, and English are also represented. A synthesis of contemporary approaches to medieval punctuation is neither easy nor was it the objective of this collection.<sup>[1]</sup> However, the collected studies have a potential impact on our knowledge of medieval French, as well as on future editorial practices.

From the hermeneutic angle, the essays confirm medieval punctuation's idiosyncratic dimension and assess it historically. In this perspective, Nicolas Mazziotta's essay on the non-identical punctuation in two 1268 charters containing the same text and copied by the same scribe is revealing. In the same vein, Olivier Collet's study of the vast *recueil* Paris, BnF, fr. 1553 shows how different scribal practices coexist in the same manuscript book. In thirteenth-century luxury manuscripts, which constitute the bulk of the available documentation, the rarity of punctuation may be explained by their intended destination: they are library books, designed to preserve rather than circulate the texts. On the basis of a large corpus of *fabliaux* manuscripts spanning from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, Francis Gingras illustrates the use of punctuation practices established in the fourteenth century, in small manuscripts of humble appearance. Danièle James-Raoul examines the abundant punctuation of the manuscript Nottingham, WLC/LM/6, which was recently dated to the first third of the thirteenth century and serves here as a specimen of earlier practices. Yan Greub uses the vast manuscript tradition of the *Ovide Moralisé* to show how relevant information concerning the structure of the text, conveyed by decorated capitals, can get lost in transmission. By studying the manuscripts of Laurent de Premierfait's adaptation of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Simone Ventura demonstrates how changes in the graphic marks of the internal divisions of the text reflect the interpretation and re-coding of the work for a new public. In some cases, a coherent and effective system of syntactical punctuation in a vernacular manuscript tradition is identified: for example, the luxury manuscript of the *Corpus iuris civilis*' translation studied by H elene Bui and in the copy of the *Secret des Secrets* analysed by Christine Silvi. More commonly, however, the study of punctuation reveals the inherent ambiguity of medieval vernacular transcriptions from the syntactical point of view: further case studies are provided in the second section by Arnaud Sibille and Laetitia Tabard. In this framework, the closing remarks by Isabelle Chlol and Isabelle Ser ca are refreshing. The authors thematise the hermeneutical richness of non-standard punctuation from a wide comparative perspective. As for the editorial angle, this collection offers interesting insights on editorial challenges: notably in Jasmina Foher-Jansenn's essay, where the contrast between paratactical syntax and modern practices of punctuation is deeply problematized in the case of the verse *Sept Sages de Rome*, and in V ronique Dominguez's discussion of interrogations in the

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*Jeu d'Adam*. Reviews of past editorial practice are undertaken by Blandine Longhi, Vanessa Obry, Jean-Marie Fritz, and Christopher Lucken.

It is interesting that the digital perspective, which emerged in the contribution of Nicolas Mazziotta and Cinzia Pignatelli, is absent from the reviews. This is not the reviewer's fault, but is a consequence of the separation between the practices and the intellectual agenda of digital and pre-digital scholars. Digital scholars are today engaged in constructing effective methods of textual encoding, in building large corpora and in designing effective digital visualisations. In other words, they are engaging in constructing digital humanities. The challenges of interpretations are still mostly the appanage of pre-digital scholarship, which engages in rendering the specificities of the medieval text prior to the culture of the printed book. This is because, from an anthropological point of view, the reader represents a function of the book. Pre-digital scholars set the standards for critical editions based on the assumption that they are destined for a wide public of educated readers and that the editor's task lies in making it as easy as possible for this public to understand fully and enjoy medieval texts. In 1865, Paul Meyer claimed: '[u]n jour viendra, sans doute, où toute personne instruite saura lire dans l'original la chanson de Roland ou au moins les mémoires de Joinville'. [2] We may now say that he was a poor prophet; but still, critical editors are educated to make an old text comprehensible for non-specialist readers, and to consider interpretation an inescapable task. This does not mean that digital and pre-digital scholarship do not communicate. On the contrary, contemporary scholars are normally educated in both fields, and this book is just one example of how the digital turn has made the pre-digital approach aware of new problems and new challenges and encouraged its progression. The lack of alignment between digital and pre-digital scholarship only means that the migration is still in progress.

At the moment, we do not know if this migration will be a complete one and will result in the oblivion of the book. More importantly, we do not know if it will be successfully migrated and what will be lost. In this respect, the essay by Max Engamarre is telling. Engamarre recalls a lawsuit filed by Droz in order to protect the copyright of a number of its editions, which had been included in the database *Classiques Garnier Numérique*. In 2014, a Parisian judge ruled against Droz, stating that the critical edition is a mechanic operation to reproduce an earlier text and does not involve any personal intellectual contribution (and, in doing this, the judge also did not recognize the critical value of editorial punctuation). Droz appealed this sentence, hoping to have a more favourable outcome. But here is what happened in Paris: a court overruled the legal status of the pre-digital editors, and created the conditions that define the standard of digital corpora whereby the edited text is nobody's, is unprotected from deformation and deterioration, and is separated from its original critical apparatus and commentary. While we are enjoying the critical richness of the current transitional period, we should also reflect on how the loss of intellectual habits and the deterioration of scholarly achievement are not the inescapable consequences of infrastructural changes, but the product of human decisions.

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## NOTES

[1] The *Orientation bibliographique* closing the volume is not an analytical bibliography. It contains references to the primary sources analysed in the essays and to secondary sources which sometimes, though not irrelevant, are just marginally concerned by punctuation. A bibliographical *mise-au-point* of the studies of manuscript punctuation after 1988 is still much-needed, being the earlier period covered by Patrizia Rafti, 'L'interpunzione nel libro manoscritto: mezzo secolo di studi', *Scrittura e civiltà* 12 (1988): 239-298.

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[2] Paul Meyer, *Le Roman de Flamenca*, Paris--Béziers, Franck--Delpech (1865), p. xliv.

Maria Teresa Rachetta  
Universita degli Studi di Napoli, Federico II  
Mariateresa.rachetta@unina.it

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