By now well known to modernists and medievalists alike as a pioneering medieval woman poet, moralist, and polemicist, Christine de Pizan (1364/65–c. 1430) has found greatest modern renown for her Livre de la Cité des dames (Book of the City of Ladies, 1404–5). But equally extraordinary is her biography of her adoptive country’s esteemed monarch, Charles V (1338–80), the Livre des Fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V (Book of the Deeds and Good Practices of King Charles V the Wise) of 1404.¹ A rare official biography of a king authored by a woman, it was Christine’s first of many prose treatises out of a total oeuvre of some forty-three titles in verse, prose, or prosimetrum. As Christine tells us in her opening chapter, the late king’s brother, Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy, commissioned Christine specifically because of her rousing homage to the king as ideal ruler in her verse narrative Livre du Chemin de lonc estude (Book of the Path of Long Study, 1402–3) and her proven talent for writing a special kind of moralized history, albeit in verse, as exemplified in her 24,000-verse Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune (Book of Fortune’s Transformation), which she had given Philip as étrennes, or official New Year’s gift (1403). Because the duke would die before Charles V’s completion late in 1404, Christine would present a deluxe copy to his son and successor, John the Fearless, soon thereafter (see fig. 6.1).²

As with most of her writings, Christine experimented both subtly and daringly in Charles V, apparently undaunted by its aura of official mandate from the most powerful man in France. This essay attempts to show how
Fig. 6.1. Opening page of the earliest presentation ms. of Christine’s *Charles V*: Paris, BnF fr. 10153, fol. 2r. Its particular scribal hands, with their text framed by *fantaisie*-frilled yet sharply defined justification and initials, exemplify the style of Christine’s atelier. (© Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.)
her approach to royal biography rendered it something more than a distinctive “mirror for the prince.” By transforming chronicle materials, principally the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, a vast chronicle history encompassing the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, manuals such as Giles of Rome’s *De regimine principum* (*The Governance of Princes*), and other learned sources, such as her personal connections at court, Christine wove together a quasi-biography in which Charles’s life story functions as sole exemplum of ideal kingship, with the equally original combined purpose of teaching as well as praising. Her approach differed from earlier princely mirrors—including her own *Epistre Othea*—in that it offered practical and ethical advice by creating multiple exempla drawn from myth and history to illustrate proper conduct and decision-making. She thus more than memorialized the king; she rendered her book, and her persona, what Pierre Nora might have labeled a lieu de mémoire (“realm of memory”) by inscribing her individual memory incarnating him within official French history, France’s “national memory,” in Lori Walters’s words.

THE EXEMPLARY BIOGRAPHY AS SACRED OBJECT: MEMORY AND REVERENCE

Christine objectified and exalted Charles’s virtues—those making him a great king, principally his noble heart, chivalry, and wisdom—by showcasing them while encasing them within a special rhetorical and didactic structure and imagery to imprint them in the reader’s memory. Her prose thus functions much in the way that visually remarkable reliquaries preserve body parts of saints in order to encourage contemplation and emulation of the holy lives of these martyrs. Ernst Kantorowicz’s classic exploration of the concept of the king’s two bodies—one personal-mortal, the other incarnating the kingdom itself—shows this image as calculatedly derived from the corpus naturale-corpus mysticum designating the body of Christ and its relationship to the Church. Christine’s literary effigy of Charles as ideal sovereign is likewise mystically tinged with key Christ-like traits, which enhance the king’s sacrosanct allure as divine corpus mysticum projected onto earth as body politic. Moreover, as Caroline Bynum has observed in her more general discussions of the intersections of gender and the human body, Christine first fragments her subject in body and deed so as to redeem him,
and in turn legitimize and consolidate all of French royalty and kingship, so severely menaced at this time by English succession claims. Despite its outwardly pedagogical trappings, Charles V is no easy read. Its densely woven, heteroclite prose and content, at first disparate and obscure, then systematically revelatory, parallel later medieval reliquaries’ hidden-display strategies to discourage the idly curious and reward worthy readers for their diligent, careful reading. This Christine accomplishes through a sort of thematic layering, resembling the structure of a reliquary as first protective and then edifying object. In explaining each of Charles’s three principal virtues and numerous related “sub-virtues,” she reconstructs and preserves her ideal king through a series of discursive “coffers,” one inside the other. These fall into three basic categories of rhetorical concretization and encasement: (1) her self-legitimation as historiographer chosen by a supreme earthly being (Philip) and, she hopes, God; (2) laudatory enumeration of the king’s deeds, character, and virtue, crystallized by citing precedents, metaphor, and repetition; (3) humanistic merging of secular-pagan with Christian religious exaltation to guarantee his sanctity on earth as a model for other princes, and his eternity in heaven. Each “encasement” is in a sense “annealed” to the other by interrelated gloss or validation, in recurrent cycles, to preserve and display Charles’s virtues as ideal ruler, and Christine’s aptitude as his historian.

The notion of text-as-holy-object was already present in the minds of early hagiographers, whose transmission narratives often describe their texts as relics. As for Christine’s conscious patterning of her work as such, modern commentators have noted Charles V’s hagiographic and panegyric characteristics. These may reflect much more than her political allegiance to and fond memories of the king, for Christine’s hagiographic propensities were already surfacing in at least one other text. Chronologically speaking, she must have been working simultaneously on Cité des Dames, appearing a year after Charles V. Part III of Cité centers on the legends of female Christian martyrs, most fully St. Christine (not surprisingly), and unstintingly relates details of physical violence in their ordeals and God’s punishment of their persecutors, as if to convey the sublime joy of bodily suffering for the Lord. Her style of sanctifying through objectification also would have benefited from her apprenticeship as a virtuoso poet of fin’amors, a lyric mode sharing its thematics and imagery with mystical visionary writing, so that the courtly poetic veneration of objects belonging to one’s beloved as
a means of connection is replaced by no less intense protocols for uniting oneself with God and vice versa.\footnote{13}

Just as texts could function as holy objects, holy objects could function as texts. As demonstrated in Cynthia Hahn’s work on medieval reliquaries, which often relies on literary terminology in defining the reliquaries’ purpose, these objects prepare and teach the reader-viewer how to absorb their precious contents, along lines very similar to how Christine manipulates the reader of her \textit{Charles V}.\footnote{14} Christine’s most pertinent metaphor introduces her biography as an “envelop en or, en esmail ou drap de soie” (“envelope of gold, enamel or silk cloth”) enclosing a “pierre precieuse, digne et fine et de grant chierté” (“highly precious, worthy and fine gemstone,” \textit{Charles V, I.3}). Christine, the astrologer’s daughter, knew her way around lapidaries, as evidenced in other works.\footnote{15} Hahn and earlier scholars have found that gems and gold customarily decorating reliquaries became reliquaries in themselves, and then even synonymous with the relics. The gems’ beauty emphasized the relics’ precious, divinely luminous yet durable qualities, transcending their initial ugliness as old clothing remnants, bones, hairs, and even dried blood. The holy object’s power of \textit{reverentia} increased as the gemstone evolved from useful décor or container into a trope for the relic, and eventually into the entire saint.\footnote{16}

Christine may likewise be effecting a separation-then-slippage between object boundaries in \textit{Charles V} for the same reason, causing her book to self-transform from useful princely manual to unique personal portrait—exclusively verbal, since, oddly enough, no manuscript of \textit{Charles V} contains miniatures bearing the king’s likeness or an author portrait, despite their presence in earlier royal biographies and Christine’s excellent atelier for illuminating her other works—and finally to talisman embodying Charles as royal institution and saving spirit of France.\footnote{17} In III.49, again using metallic imagery from another angle, she affirms her work’s value for princely education through its durability and dissemination. Citing Ovid, she declares that she has “made a work that neither fire nor iron can destroy,”\footnote{18} since through multiple copies and widespread scattering “into the wind” books like hers record “beautiful, exemplary legends” for the benefit of future princes that they may govern equally well. This rhetorical trope mimics early Christian commentators, who viewed the scattering of relics as dissemination without diminution.\footnote{19} Subjacently, Christine is proving once again, as she did in the \textit{Mutacion}, that women can write history on a par with or better than men—
hence Duke Philip’s order—and now hagiography, another traditionally masculine genre even for lives of female saints. In this light, Charles V is also a new kind of woman’s object.

EDUCATING THE PERFECT PRINCE IN IMPERFECT CIRCUMSTANCES

Because Christine dedicates Charles V exclusively to its patron rather than to its intended reader/pupil, scholars like Suzanne Solente have wondered why and for whose benefit Philip the Bold commissioned this work, aside from the impulse to revere his late brother. They conclude most logically that it envisioned Philip’s grandnephew and Charles V’s grandson, the Dauphin Louis de France, Duke of Guyenne, then aged seven, who was about to become Philip’s grandson as well by marrying the latter’s granddaughter, Marguerite (daughter of Philip’s son, John the Fearless): a doubled bond promising Burgundy still greater influence over the monarchy.²⁰

Louis was not alone in needing a sound chivalric education.²¹ Fifteenth-century French nobility overall exhibited an alarming deficiency in this regard, requiring mass (re-)education, in Christine and other moralists’ opinions, as a remedy to a widely perceived aristocratic decay. France’s political integrity was simultaneously threatened from without by belligerent English claims to its throne since 1337, as the Hundred Years War staggered on, and potential civil war from within between Orleanists/Armagnacs and the Burgundians. These seeds of upheaval began to emerge after Charles V’s death in 1380. His reform-minded son Charles VI had wrested power from his warring ducal uncles (Anjou, Berry, Burgundy) only to yield it back to them upon going mad in 1392. Duke Philip managed to restore order as regent but knew it would die with him, so that part of his program to guarantee France’s lasting solidarity, beyond his reign, included reminding its ruling class of its responsibilities through education. Hence his appointment of Christine, a learned, loyal subject and proven author of didactic texts favoring his régime, as a sort of royal historiographer, despite her gender.

The Dauphin Louis’s education was therefore all the more crucial in guaranteeing the savior-king France sorely needed. Unlike Louis IX, canonized by the Church even before his confessor Joinville’s encomiastic Histoire de Saint Louis, Charles V had not been canonized, nor had he written his own manual for his successor.²² Christine may accordingly have
noticed that her princely mirror-cum-personal portrait required an additional sanctifying component, the above-noted third encasement, to ensure that her Valois king would match his Capetian precursor in popular affection and political loyalty. But she first needed to excite the emulative instincts of the Dauphin Louis, who precociously enjoyed finery, would commission illuminated religious texts, and might thus be attracted to her introduction of Charles V as a “precious stone” enveloped in “gold, enamel or silk,” just as the artisans of jewel-studded reliquaries hoped to rekindle piety within their wealthy patrons.

While innovatively structuring her entire manual around Charles as single real-life exemplum, laced with comparisons to ancient heroes and anecdotes from contemporaries or personal memory, Christine does adhere to the princely mirror tradition, as Daisy Delogu observes, by dividing her book into three parts. Yet she personalizes this convention by labeling each part according to her own ideal of kingly virtues: nobility, chivalry, and wisdom. These virtues she extolled in earlier poetic works, whether in certain courtly ballades or more obvious narrative precursors like Chemin de lonc estude, another type of princely mirror, in verse, dedicated to Charles’s brothers and his son, Charles VI.

THE BIRTH OF AN HISTORIAN

Christine’s framing of Charles V’s physical and spiritual bodies begins in part I with an explicitly labeled prologue that is followed by two more prefacing its main topic, Charles’s “noblece de courage” (“nobility of heart”). Here Christine retains the motif of orality—lips instead of hand/pen—for its spiritual effectiveness, while elsewhere stressing Charles V’s authority as a written text. The prologue (I.1) commences as a devotional prayer—“Sire Dieux, euvre mes levres, enlumine[s] ma pensée, et mon entendement esclaires à celle fin que m’ignorance n’encombre pas mes sens à expliquer les choses conceues en ma memoire” (“Lord God, open [her] lips, illuminate my thinking, that ignorance not encumber my ability to explain the things conceived within my memory”)—as one would normally praise God in a Book of Hours, a more conventional example of a book as sacred object. This prayer, recalling Psalm 51:15, asks that God “open [her] lips” and illuminate her intelligence to enable her to praise Charles to the utmost, just as she would praise God himself. This image of bodily opening, even birthing,
also intricately underscores the reliquary aspect by a kind of oxymoron, as if Christine must open her mind and expressivity in order to extoll, encompass, and finally seal Charles’s virtues, his mystical body, within this text.

When she does begin her biography (I.1–2), it is not with Charles’s birth but with her own rebirth from poet to royal historiographer of this “nouvelle compilacion”—now in the prose style (stille prosal) following her classical-antique models: another legitimizing layer. Toward the end of the book (III. 63–68), she further elaborates on her choice of prose over poetry (here narrative fiction as well as lyric) because, according to the ancients, prose is more truthful by reason of its directness, devoid of poetry’s reliance on allegories and other hermetic figures. Rather like Hahn’s reliquarists, she instructs the reader in how she wishes to be read.27 Even when using abstractions like virtue and the body politic, she appears to ask us to read literally, to guarantee our grasp of her “truth.”

Here, then, is the essence of her first encasement, her book’s own story of itself.28 As in any good creation myth, light and dark, greatness and smallness compete as she, an avowedly fragile woman of feeble learning (“faiblesse de savoir”), emerges from the “tenebres d’ignorance” (“shadows of ignorance”) to the “cler entendement” (“light of understanding”) granted her by God to make her worthy of this “pleasant mission.”29 This light of understanding will translate into Charles’s own radiance as exemplary king. The metaphor of encased, enhanced light brings to mind Hahn’s assessment, summarizing Paulinus of Nola’s twofold approach to the making of reliquaries: “by encasing them in order to create ‘enhanced light’ and to appreciate their origin in Christ; and ‘renewing’ older reliquaries and structures out of honor to their contents and their ultimate maker,” which triggers a “dynamic which seeks to recharge the power of the relic for its audience.”30 Christine’s numerous references to her own role, together with her descriptions of the king, reflect a similar purpose and cause us to interpret Charles V’s sanctifying monumentality even beyond the impressive assessments by Walters and Delogu, among others.31

When she recreates her actual meeting with Philip, which takes place before various other nobles with full pomp and ceremony, as he issued her his “commandement” to compose Charles V, and her humble acceptance (I.2), it is as if Christine-biographer had to be created and, in a sense, “crowned” before Charles V could be properly commemorated as ideal king. On a more practical level, I.3 then explains her use of sources, both learned and from reliable personal knowledge and memory. Her book’s Trinitarian structure
works both organizationally and symbolically—adding to later associations of Charles with Christ—to fashion a “veritable narration” of the king’s good qualities. Again, she prepares us for how to read Charles’s life, as she does continuously throughout, as part of her reliquary-like encasement.  

Toward this end, she skillfully uses various ploys. One we might call the “seulette” (“lonely little woman”) persona—a favorite since her genuinely self-consoling lyric days—now used to blindside potential (male) misogynistic detractors of her historiographical abilities by using their stereotype of women’s inherent weakness and inferior intelligence against them, as in I.36, to reinforce Christine’s status as chosen historian, first by Duke Philip and then by God. We later find her more aggressively defending herself in part II, chapter 18, against some foreseeable redargus (“counterattacks”) on her motives and competence by unnamed, presumably male, rivals accusing her of using flattery with the royal family and “presumption” in attempting to write history and discuss such masculine topics as chivalry and history, all of which she deftly parries. In II.21, whose rubric purports to discuss how authors should write about chivalry, she continues the self-defense begun in chapter 18 by refuting accusations of merely parroting her sources. It is here that she introduces such striking metaphors as “le ventre de la memoire” (“the stomach of [collective] memory”) and the more trenchant ones of architecture, masonry, and embroidery to illustrate her philosophy of composition as compilation arranged toward a specific intellectual purpose. She does not need to create her own material, but rather should be judged on how competently she assembles these raw materials (II.21).  

This defense’s distinction between craftsman (maker) and artist (autonomous creator) leads to Christine’s most confident and subtle ploy, in which she modestly seems to pose as mere maker or “compiler” of her matiere (“material”), Charles’s life, while actually functioning as autonomous author of this book, and thus of Charles’s posterity. At the same time, she also promotes Charles as autonomous architect of the new chivalry and body politic of his kingdom. Her dual apotheosis of herself and Charles as architects (II.21) arises significantly at the organizational, though not structural, midpoint of the entire book. Her architectural metaphor, especially when she describes her incorporation of older sources for illustrating Charles’s virtues, reinforces the association with reliquaries when we consider that many reliquaries were fashioned as little house-like shrines of gold and jewels, often “remodeled” so as to protect and revere their sacred core more perfectly.  

Christine utilizes a final discernible tactic when inserting herself as real
participant in Charles's life, as one of his many grateful subjects, for example at the end when she repeats how she considered it a privilege to commemo-rate Charles’s virtues, since she and her family had been “nourished from his bread” (III.72). More generally, as her Advision (Vision) more openly attests, Charles’s reign coincided with the happiest period in her life.  

The King Fragmented, then Reconstructed, in Body and Deed

As mentioned earlier, Christine organized her book around Charles’s three principal virtues, or general categories of virtue: nobility of heart, chivalry, and wisdom. Each of these parts/categories is divided into at least thirty-six chapters (as in part I) focusing on a particular related “sub-virtue,” with part III containing the most, fifty-two, to emphasize sagece as Charles’s most salient trait. Two other qualities appear to pervade all of these: his prudence (esp. III.5–7) and love of order.

Charles’s qualities are not only isolated by name and chapter divisions—usually highlighted all the more by scribal rubrication—but also by the mechanics of each part and even of individual chapters. After being so designated, the virtue is then illustrated by an anecdote from Christine’s recollections and/or a chronicle source and/or by a comparable anecdote to a classical-antique or biblical analogue, such as Alexander, Xerxes, or Caesar, sometimes adding opinions from classical or early Christian thinkers, or by introducing a symbol, such as the chain representing chivalry’s harmony and order (II.4), as if to seal by precedent or impressive object this virtue’s meaning within the reader’s memory. Less frequent but equally telling comparisons to medieval kings are limited to Charlemagne and Saint Louis, France’s holiest rulers. In both classical-antique and Christian linkages with Charles, Christine is reassembling these culturally disparate, diachronic personages in conjunction with Charles’s actual blood relatives (esp. II.11–17) to reconstruct the continuity of the Valois line from ancient roots, per Bynum’s paradigm redeeming it, as the rightful ruling lineage for France. Also conforming to Bynum’s paradigm will be Christine’s reunification of all the parts, chapters, and virtues introduced at the beginning of the book by repeating key phrases, motifs, and terms at the end to produce a new, redeeming whole vision of Charles.

As an example of her technique, Christine begins part I’s elucidation
of Charles’s first virtue by citing Aristotle and Ecclesiasticus 41:15, defining nobility of heart as “three motivations ending in one”: aspiring toward lofty matters, loving virtue, and using wisdom and foresight in all affairs. She then shows that Charles’s nobility of heart was also guaranteed by his Valois lineage, traceable, following the Grandes Chroniques, to the noble Trojans (I.5). She compares Charles’s birth and infancy with those of Moses and Christ (I.6), portending what I have labeled above as her third encasement—but not his adolescence. For this phase of his life she departs markedly from her usual laudatio by describing his “jeunesce” instead as problematic (I.7). She blames Charles’s youthful excesses on inadequate discipline from his governors and tutors and inserts an excursus on the need for especially careful discipline in princely education (I.8), an example of her self-affirmation as worthy royal preceptor inextricably intertwined with Charles’s life. Then, in the next chapter, as though transformed by Christine’s words, the young Charles is shown, on his coronation (1364) at age twenty-seven, following the “rule of virtue,” which Christine further glosses by references to Aristotle’s Ethics as assimilated in Henri de Gauchi’s translation of Giles of Rome’s De regimine principum. She has thus transformed one of Charles’s rare flaws into a virtue, just as we witnessed her doing with herself as author. But this depiction of him as an ideal conglomeration of attributes and exploits, despite his supposedly wild youth, whets our desire to read more about him as a flesh-and-blood person.

Such a portrait appears in I.17, depicting his “physiognomy” (fizonomie, phinozomie) and “body” (corpulance). She begins straightforwardly enough, seeming to rely on her personal memories of him by describing his well-formed body, although she mainly focuses on his head, noting such traits heralding his intelligence and charisma as a high forehead, well-set, arresting brown eyes, and so forth. She downplays his thinness and pallor—signs of weakness—by ascribing these to the accident of youthful illness and not inherent defect. Her verbal description of his face and body is faithful to the many visual portraits of him.

But when she describes his “phinozomie” (as opposed to his face), his bearing and movements entail more idealizing, arbitrary adjectives—“sage, attrempé et rassise à toute heure” (“always wise, temperate and calm”)—while his voice carries a “pleasing” tone and his “beautiful” discursive style is well-ordered and moderate, in keeping with the rest of him. Through such idealizing, this chapter ends up offering more of a moral portrait than a real physical likeness. Here we must consider, as does Stephen Perkin-
son, the fourteenth-century belief in physiognomic analysis for reading the depths of human character, in assessing her portrait of Charles in relation to her source, a long-evolving mirror for princes titled the *Secret des secrèz* (*Secret of Secrets*, 10C–16C), based on a fictitious letter of advice to Alexander from his mentor Aristotle. Those passages depicting everyday details of Charles’s life, such as his home life with the queen (I.18, 20), minutely described excursions on horseback (I.18), finances (I.19), and child-rearing (I.21), function mainly to illustrate the aforementioned virtues, as well as his keen sense of order.

Christine privileges the moral over the physical, conventional, personal portrait because, as head of the body politic, Charles’s identifiable traits are his virtues and his body parts—for our purposes, his relics—reflecting those virtues. She similarly fragments, then reassembles and magnifies, Charles by the same isolating-encapsulating through glossing-monumentalizing process in the other two parts, as she demonstrates his innovatively practical approach to chivalry (part II) and cultivation of wisdom in diplomacy and governing (part III). Since the *Grandes chroniques*, which Charles supervised anyway, has already recorded his military campaigns and related events quite comprehensively, she was free to pursue her own more metonymic or metaphoric paradigm of exemplary “teaching moments” highlighting the king’s reign.

One type of example, her definition of chivalry in II.4, is strikingly germane to reliquaries, when she, paraphrasing the Roman historian Vegetius, sets forth the ideal knight’s duty to protect all social classes, from princes to clergy to *menu peuple*, by committing “something as precious as his life, his blood, his arms and his assets, for it was agreed that in recompense for spilled blood one would bring honor and respect to knights everywhere [and that, to repay their sacrifice] it was fitting that . . . fine jewelry and beautiful metalwork set off in gold and precious stones were owed them.” Another example uses the body-politic metaphor in praising Bertrand Du Guesclin as Charles’s right hand in providing France’s sole victorious phase in the Hundred Years War for that century (II.6–10, 19–20, 22–26). Du Guesclin thus contributes toward making Charles himself a “vrai chevalereux” (“perfect knight,” II.39), even though Charles’s (and Christine’s) new chivalry was mainly based on enlightened peacemaking rather than war. Another kind of example, in part III, involves zooming in and lingering for fifteen chapters on one event: the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV’s visit as the supreme moment for all of the French monarch’s virtues, from lavish hospital-
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Delogu’s analysis here aptly captures Christine’s characterization of Charles as architect or artist (III.11) to defend his absolutism subtly and efficiently on multiple levels. His innate sense of order, form and structure cause him to control his barons and expel the marauding Grandes Compagnies of mercenaries. This predilection also motivates his calculated patronage of the University of Paris, and commission of learned translations, arts and crafts. Most literally in her own scheme, Christine cites his direction of vital public works projects for improving the kingdom’s infrastructure.\(^43\)

Not all of his policies were easily defensible, notably his handling of the Great Schism, which Christine manages to spin favorably (III. 51–62).\(^44\) This she manages in part by inserting a chapter on a foiled plot to poison him, perhaps to win sympathy for him without inciting trouble by naming the plot’s instigator, Charles the Bad (III.52).\(^45\) Just as Christine prudently rewrote Charles’s fragile body, she also strengthened his body politic.

Sanctifying the King

Having already observed traces of this third encasement in her opening and closing prayers, her likening of Charles’s birth and infancy to those of Moses and Christ (I.6) and similar comparisons, we now arrive at Christine’s highest accolade for her king and completion of her reliquary: his quasi-canonization. To the classical-antique paragons typically found in other mirrors, Christine links Charles’s sincere Christian piety as an equally essential trait, in keeping with the new humanistic values of her milieu.

She further crystallizes her message (III.69) by repeating Charles’s three virtues (nobility, chivalry, wisdom), assuming the humbler tone of her preface, again contrasting her own limited capacities with the “boundless stream” of her topic’s magnitude. Her rhetoric then becomes more grandiose in exalting the king’s *bonnes meurs* for all eternity, encapsulating them as a sort of talisman for all mortals to fend off future villainy, and to guarantee his soul’s receiving eternal glory in heaven. Beyond didactic strategy, Christine is setting the eschatological stage for Charles’s final act, his “bonne mort” (exemplary death), presaged by that of the valiant Du Guesclin shortly before (III.70). Christine relates the king’s last moments via his own highly eloquent speeches, reproduced in direct discourse from an anonymous Latin eyewitness source,\(^46\) on the faults and glories of his reign, then records him
confessing his sins, amidst his château at Beauté’s splendor, and the solemnity of his last rites, as he dies in the arms of Bureau de la Rivière, his chamberlain and confidant, while his subjects weep (III.71).

In perfect symmetry, the book does not end with Charles’s death, any more than it began with his birth. This Christine underscores inadvertently by reporting his death date incorrectly, following her Latin source. Rather, as noted above, the concluding chapter (III.72) consists in Christine’s final self-validation as author of this reliquary and book by offering her prayer, sealed by the appropriate words _Amen_, also recalling resemblance to a breviary, and _Explicit_ to close her secular book. Her final prayer, to the Holy Trinity, commends Charles’s soul and those of his brothers (including Duke Philip) and ancestors into Paradise—another means of gloriously giving closure to the initial chapters on Philip’s “planting the seed” of this book, and on Charles’s pedigree and birth.

But more tangible than our three theoretical encasements and related evidence in representing Charles V as reliquary is the lack of any description of the king’s tombs, in contrast, for example, to Christine’s careful reportage of the fate of the heart, entrails, and body of his predeceased queen, Jeanne de Bourbon (III.50). This despite the historical fact that Charles’s body was interred next to Jeanne’s at St. Denis, his heart was buried at Rouen, his entrails at Maubuisson Abbey.

In the end Christine’s book promulgates a salvific message: to show that Charles’s moral excellence is no fortunate fluke, but was instead portended by his ancient counterparts and ancestry, and thus remains a promise not only of survival but also of redemption and future greatness for France after the Hundred Years War, as God’s chosen kingdom. The reader’s success at understanding and implementing the lessons of Charles’s life, which we might equate with a pilgrimage, completes the book’s function as reliquary.

Notes

1. My heartfelt thanks to Nancy Bradbury and Jenny Adams for their suggestions in reading and editing earlier drafts of this essay. All citations from this text, henceforth Charles V, are from the edition by Suzanne Solente, _Le Livre des Fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V_, 2 vols., Société de l’Histoire de France, 437, 444 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1936–40). See also the modern French translation by Eric Hicks and Thérèse Moreau, _Le Livre des Faits et Bonnes Mœurs du roy Charles_
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2. Now Paris, BnF fr. 10153 (fig. 6.1 depicts fol. 2r), for which, along with another manuscript, Christine was paid 100 écus. For this ms.’s full description and importance in Christine’s total scriptorial œuvre, see Gilbert Ouy, Christine Reno, and Inès Villela-Petit, Album Christine de Pizan, Texte, Codex & Contexte, 14 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 489–95. The three other contemporary, serial copies were probably given to Charles VI, Louis of Orléans, and Louis de Bourbon, the king’s brother-in-law. Another copy, now lost, she presented to Philip’s brother, John, duke of Berry, recorded as étrennes (“New Year’s gift”) in 1405. See Gilbert Ouy and Christine Reno, “Manuscrits copiés en série: les quatre témoins contemporains du Livre des faits et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V e d’icelluy nom,” Cahiers de Recherches Médievales 16 (2008): 239–52 at 240. For the sociopolitical value of these étrennes, see Brigitte Buettner, “Past Presents: New Year’s Gifts at the Valois Courts, ca. 1400,” Art Bulletin 83 (2001): 598–625 and Stephen Perkinson, The Likeness of the King: A Prehistory of Portraiture in Late Medieval France (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 238–47.


5. L’Epistre que Othea la deesse envoya a Hector de Troye (The Epistle that the Goddess Othea Sent to Hector of Troy, 1400–1). Its innovation lay instead in its multimedia interpolation in epistolary form of one hundred glossed and allegorized mythological stories as exempla to educate the nobility, including her son Jean, future royal notary.


11. As “panegyric”: see, e.g., Hicks and Moreau, trans., *Livre des Faits*, 16; Tracy Adams, *Christine de Pizan and the Fight for France* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2014), 107. As “hagiography”: e.g., Delogu, *Theorizing*, 182–83; also 154, 244n7.

12. In 1410, her *Lamentacion sur les maux de la France* (*Lamentation on France’s Ills*), *Epistre de la Prison de Vie humaine* (*Epistle on the Prison of Human Life, 1416–18*), and *Heures de contemplacion sur la Passion de Nostre Seigneur* (*Hours of Contemplation on Our Lord’s Passion, 1420–29*) all evoke extreme bodily suffering in a variety of contexts.

13. See, e.g., Marguerite Porete’s expressed desire, using courtly love motifs, for union with God through meditative self-annihilation in her *Mirouer des simples ames* (1306). For Christine’s use of reverential, secretive objects in her love poetry, see, e.g., her *Jeux a vendre*, most pertinently no. 70, involving an *escribet* (“coffer”) enclosing her name in its anagram and that of her beloved.


15. For extended precious stone metaphors see her *Mutacion de Fortune* (vv. 524–769) and *Advision Cristine* (III.27.72–81). A quick search of the Christine de Pizan Database (http://www.christine.llc.ed.ac.uk/conc2_p.htm) under just the words *pierre(s)* (= gemstone or rock) and *pierrerie* (gemstones) alone (one could go on to search individual stones by name) provides a more complete list for most of Christine’s works, while showing *Mutacion* and *Charles V* to contain their greatest frequency.

16. *Reverentia*, connoting the relic-viewer’s desired response, as used by Hahn, crediting Peter Brown, “What Do Reliquaries,” esp. 284, 301. For the precious mate-


21. Louis de Guyenne (1397–1415), then only seven, because of his father Charles VI's madness, was already being scrutinized as future king. Despite efforts by notable mentors, Louis, though gifted, supposedly became fat and dissolute, eliciting Christine's continued admonitions. See Angus J. Kennedy, “The Education of a Good Prince: Repetition and Variation in Christine de Pizan's Livre du Corps de Policie and Livre de Paix,” in “Contez me tout”: mélanges de langue et littérature médiévales offerts à Herman Braet, ed. Catherine Bel, Pascale Dumont, and Frank Willaert (Louvain: Peeters, 2006), 507–25.

22. Louis IX (d. 1270, canonized 1297) composed his Enseignements (Teachings) for his son the future Philippe le Bel. For Joinville's life of Louis IX as milestone in the vernacular royal-biography tradition leading to Charles V, see Delogu, Theorizing, 22–57.


24. Delogu, Theorizing, 156.

25. Tracy Adams, Christine de Pizan and the Fight, 107, sees Charles V as a re-
sponse to the *Chemin*, which contains a debate among four allegorical figures, three of them Charles’s virtues.

26. Walters, “Christine as Translator,” 33, relates the “lips” of praise more specifically to the thematics of the Hours of the Virgin, thus making Christine a “second Mary.”

27. Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and Their Posterity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 40, on the *Epistre Othea*: unlike her contemporaries, even when Christine speaks through allegories and fables, she is unambiguous about how she expects to be read.


29. In *Cité des Dames*, I.7, Christine again tells the story of her book, as she rises from the darkness of her despair at predominantly male misogyny to the light of wisdom offered her by the Three Virtues sent by God to enable her to compose this work.


31. As attested by this study’s numerous references to them, Walters and Delogu have done major pioneering analyses of Christine’s historiographical technique in *Charles V*, while noting the significance of the hagiographical and/or religious component of the king’s persona as ideal sovereign (Delogu) and Christine’s authority to memorialize it, with her own mystical body, particularly her “tongue,” as “living relic” (Walters, “Christine as Translator,” 36). Equally important, more secular in textual approach, is Claire Le Ninan, *Le Sage Roi et la clergesse: l’écriture politique dans l’œuvre de Christine de Pizan*, Études christiniennes, 12 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013).

32. Given the nature of this princely mirror/exemplary life, Christine’s goals and Charles’s are often so closely intertwined that we cannot always separate them. This section will therefore limit itself to key phases in her self-representation as “reliquizer” of Charles’s life.

33. She would magnify the masonry metaphor to reconstruct women’s history in *Cité des Dames* (1404–5).

34. For more on the architect/ure metaphor, see Delogu, *Theorizing*, 163–74.


38. For more on contemporary criticism of the youthful Charles, see Adams, *Christine de Pizan and the Fight for France*, 108–9.

39. Christine previously inveighed against the inadequate education of princes and its consequences in her *Mutacion de Fortune*, III.ix, vv. 5761–5862, and later in the *Corps de Policie* and *Livre de Paix*.

40. Although, as Solente affirms (*Livre des Fais*, 1:49n1), her prose description closely resembles the visual portraits found in contemporary manuscripts and sculpture, these latter, especially Jean Bondol’s, were more naturalistic. See Sherman, *The Portraits of Charles V of France* (1338–1380), and Perkinson, *Likeness*, 138–39, 149–52, 208–14, 247–53, etc.


44. See Richardz, “Prudence and Wisdom,” 114–16. Simply put, Charles’s active support of the French pope proved a menace and hindered resolution of this crisis, as Christine has him vaguely suspect on his deathbed (III. 70).


50. Christine would rejoice in France’s divine election through victory in her last work, *Le Ditié de Jehanne d’Arc* (*Song of Joan of Arc*, 1429, e.g., stanzas 39–41, 45–47, 51–58, 61), as would Joan herself in her trial testimony, e.g., March 1, 1431.

Works Cited


