

Anne de France: Lessons for my Daughter. Translated from the French with Introduction, Notes, and Interpretative Essay by Sharon L. Jansen. (Library of Medieval Women) D.S. Brewer, 2004. pp.106.

When Anne de France, better known as Anne de Beaujeu, suffered a mysterious illness in 1497, she began writing a book for her daughter Suzanne, *Lessons for my Daughter* (in Sharon L. Jansen's English translation). This was something of a kingly tradition: Saint Louis had written lessons for his son and his daughter, and Anne's own father, Louis XII had written lessons for his son.

Anne de Beaujeu was a remarkable woman. The least foolish of women, as her father described her, became more or less the regent of the French kingdom from 1483 to 1491 until her younger brother Charles VII came of age and took over governance of the country. However, she remained politically active until 1515. Sharon Jansen has brought out an English edition of a work that has not elicited praise from recent critics. Their complaint is that the lessons offered by

the mighty princess, mostly on domestic issues, serve to diminish women's talents.

The work is divided into 33 short chapters. Anne instructs her daughter to be a good Christian, to think of life after death, to be chaste, to keep her mind busy, not to play too much, not to lie, not to flatter, not to gossip, to surround herself with wise people, to be pleasant to everyone, to be clean, to dress soberly but according to her rank, not to behave like a foolish woman, to know how to be reserved in her speech, to be humble and not vain, to respect old people, to help the poor and the sick, to be a good hostess, to be true to her friends, not to be envious, not to mock anyone, to please her husband, not to be familiar with her servants, not to reveal secrets, not to get angry too quickly, to be cautious with male suitors, to be an honorable woman her entire life. Good

advice all, but not very original. Here and there the reader comes upon rich cultural nuggets: Anne evokes sumptuary laws in telling her daughter not to suffer servants to be dressed better than she is. She recommends that she gets rid of bad servants quickly and be mindful of a rebellion if she is not fair to them. She also tells Suzanne that if she has a child who wants to embrace a religious order, to make sure that it is a good order, because so many are not. She also warns her not to dress too young when she is past forty, because no matter the elegance of her attire, she will not erase the wrinkles of her face. Chapter 27 is the most interesting: if Suzanne happens to lose her husband, she should mourn soberly, and she should know that she, and nobody else, is the master of her land and possessions, and that she should not give power over them to anyone.

Anne de Beaujeu owned a copy of Christine de Pizan's *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, and some critics have suggested that she drew heavily from it.

Jansen correctly discounts this influence in footnotes that clearly reveal Anne's work to be independent of Christine's. I wish she had done yet more to secure this independence.

The translation is followed by an interpretative essay in which Jansen compares Anne de Beaujeu's *Lessons* with Machiavelli's *Prince*. It is an interesting idea, though regrettably she attempts to support her thesis by drawing on what Anne's contemporaries wrote about her, as opposed to drawing directly from the *Lessons*.

Jansen based her translation on an edition done by A. M. Chazaud in the late 19th century and three 16th century printings. Unfortunately, the original and unique manuscript has disappeared. Chazaud's text is very difficult to read, as Jansen notes, principally due to erratic spelling and frequent grammatical problems. I find Jansen's translation to be very good, true to Chazaud's French. Nevertheless, there are a few errors: for example, *viande* means "food," not "meat" as

in modern French; *maîtrise* is not "mistress," but "mastery"; *monstrees du doy* means that people "pointed their fingers at shameful women," etc.

There are also a number of typographical errors in the introduction, notes and essay: Castile, Charlotte de Savoy, Pisan, la vielle, humanism (in French), Fontainebleu, and some words have been omitted here and there. Yet in spite of these minor flaws, this is an excellent translation of a text where a curious reader will find revealing and helpful comments.

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"Women walk by varying and diverse paths, but whatever the paths they wander, whatever the by-ways they take, there is one result, one finishing-post for all their routes, one head and point of agreement of all their ways...mischief."

□ Walter Map,
The Letter of Valerius to Ruffinus, Against Marriage