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Brown, Cynthia J. The Queen's Library: Image-Making at the Court of Anne of Brittany, 1477–1514

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Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

Brown, Cynthia J.

The Queen's Library: Image-Making at the Court of Anne of Brittany, 1477–1514.

Material Texts. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. Pp. xii, 402 + 48 b/w ill. ISBN 978-0-8122-4282-9 (hardcover) \$79.95.

Anne of Brittany was an important patron in the final years of illuminated manuscript book production in France. As Duchess of Brittany, Anne married not one but two French kings (Charles VIII and Louis XII), marriages that aimed to enfold Brittany within the French state. Anne was astoundingly wealthy and heir to lands of strategic and symbolic importance; her marriages thus functioned as important political staging grounds. Charles VIII, for instance, had her earlier proxy marriage to Maximilian I of Austria, designed to protect Brittany from French encroachment, annulled. Anne's ambiguous though by no means tenuous position at court furnishes the background to Cynthia J. Brown's exploration of the manuscript and printed books commissioned by Anne, dedicated to her, or associated in some way with her circle. While acknowledging that many of the books in Anne's possession served devotional or moral purposes, as was true for other noble women at the time, Brown focuses on a smaller group of more secular books in order to study the dynamics of female power at court. In doing so, she "aims to assess female modes of empowerment through an examination of how the demands of a patriarchal and aristocratic society influenced the creation and reception of literary and artistic images in those works" (10).

Brown examines the miniatures and accompanying text in Anne's books for what they reveal about the representation of female power and the negotiation of court life. The first chapter explores books associated with Anne's two entries into Paris as Queen of France in 1492 and 1504. Noting that entry festivals and festival books often appear at moments of political change and crisis (Anne's second entry occurred several years after her actual marriage with Louis XII), Brown explores the use of queenship in such entries as a political

tool, arguing that Anne and other female entry subjects “were essentially agents of propaganda who abided by established performative codes as they dutifully played out their roles” (61). Brown’s second chapter moves into an arena where Anne exercised considerably more agency: the system of artistic patronage at court. Examining the textual and pictorial reconstruction of women in allegorical works, Brown concludes that although Anne of Brittany may well have held the purse strings of patronage, the male makers of Anne’s books—authors, miniaturists, publishers—nonetheless obliquely reinforced dominant models of restricted female power even when praising their patron or seeking preferment. The author here makes a rare misstep in failing to incorporate recent work on female patronage of the arts—abundant enough for Italian courts of the same period—into her discussion. Anne of Brittany introduced humanist elements into her intellectual circle, and her strategy in doing so may well have followed contours similar to those employed by her Italian counterparts.

The third chapter takes measure of the humanist debate over the intellectual and moral virtues of women which surfaced, evidently with some resonance, at Anne’s court. That the *querelle des femmes* was indeed a hot topic is demonstrated by Antoine Vérard’s 1493 printed edition of a French translation of Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus claris*. A vellum copy prepared for Charles VIII and another for Henry VII of England deliberately excise the praise heaped upon Anne in the translator’s dedication issued with more broadly circulating paper copies. Brown’s investigation of other installments in the debate at court show how verbal and visual images could be used to both glorify and contest ideas about women and, perhaps more predictably, were manipulated to secure advancement. The last two chapters are devoted to the theme of death and mourning. Chapter 4 examines the literary theme of female lamentation, exploring the ways in which contemporary female figures were inserted into the visual repertoire of mourning in miniatures found in copies of French translations of Ovid’s *Heroides* and other works. Through these sources Brown draws out the tensions inherent in the role of the noble widow of means, alternating between motifs of newly-acquired independence and of vulnerability. The last chapter examines works associated with Anne’s death and funeral—which lasted some 40 days—in 1512. We return here to themes explored in the first chapter. Brown shows how the now well and truly passive queen, whose passing posed no real threat to the stability of the monarchy, could be manipulated

to affirm the dynamics of power that had shaped Anne's life as wife, mother, duchess, and queen.

Brown's book is admirable in its expert and nuanced examination of the interplay of text and image in books identified as stemming from the circle of Anne of Brittany. The vast majority of books considered are illuminated manuscripts; the author itemizes 53 manuscripts and 11 printed books in a useful appendix. Brown explores but does not overplay the different strategies and opportunities afforded by manuscript and print technologies in this transitional period of book production. The author offers the occasional passing remark on Anne's collecting habits and acknowledges that *luxé* book collections of this period functioned to broadcast the taste, wealth, and power of their owners. Missing is any direct discussion of the external life of Anne's books: Where and how did she acquire them? Where were they kept? How did they circulate? Who cared for them? Consideration of such questions, invited by the book's title, would throw additional light on the author's investigation of the role of books as instruments of power. Yet this is a minor criticism. Brown has produced a superbly illustrated, richly documented, and deftly argued study. Authorship, book production, and patronage appear here not simply as the material residue of Anne of Brittany's life, but as essential tools in her efforts to manage her image as a female ruler and negotiate the intricacies of marriage alliances, dynastic power, and court life.

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Clément, Michèle (éd.).

Étienne Dolet 1509–2009.

Cahiers d'Humanisme et Renaissance 98. Genève: Droz, 2012. 518 p. ISBN 978-2-600-01542-4 (broché) 96\$

Si de son vivant Étienne Dolet (1509–1546) éveillait les passions, on peut affirmer, sans l'ombre d'un doute, que c'est encore le cas aujourd'hui, du moins si l'on en juge par le contenu de ce livre qui vient de paraître et qui rassemble les actes du colloque tenu à Lyon en 2009, en souvenir du cinq-centième anniversaire de sa naissance. Intitulé *Étienne Dolet 1509–2009* et édité par Michèle