

Christine de Pizan and French Humanism: Elements for a Historical Contextualization¹

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Abstract: This paper seeks to provide sufficient elements to locate the philosopher and poet Christine de Pizan in the intellectual context of early 15th-century French humanism. This objective responds to a difficulty that accompanies studies of the philosophical activity of the medieval period in a secular environment. As a woman, Pizan is necessarily secular and her literary production took place outside the limits normally outlined as an object of study by historians of medieval philosophy, that is, a typical scholastic production.

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Although Christine de Pizan certainly represents a thinker of extraordinary kind with regard to her *femme de lettres* status in the medioevo and to the topicality of her ideas, this should not lead us to present her as a figure isolated from her doctrinal context. We will try to show that Pizan belongs to the intellectual and cultural domain that blossomed in Charles VI's court, where she lived and debated with the main figures of the rising French humanist thinking. For this purpose, our exposition will be organized in three axes: (i) a concise characterization of humanism and its Parisian expression; (ii) an evaluation of the translation program, developed by Charles V, of central works of the Latin medieval thinking to the vernacular language; (III) we will try to identify in Pizan's works typical traces of humanistic influence, as well as to determine concrete contact points between her intellectual production and that of the first Parisian humanists.

Understanding Christine de Pizan's position in the comprehension of the philosophical activity that marks the passage of the 14th to the 15th century means observing the intellectual production derived from the laic sphere and distancing the historian's attention from the productions destined to the clerical midst. Let us remind that, in this context, the term *laicus* is limited to those who did not finish the studies in the schools of arts or of theology. It is important to notice that, despite the many references in the medieval period to laics as *illiterati*, in Pizan's humanist context it is not a matter of associating this adjective to the ignorance of the Latin language and to the absence of culture anymore². In this moment, there is a common understanding that one does not need to be a clergyman in order to be cultivated, even if the latter still represents a prestigious intellectual elite³.

The First Humanists and Charles VI's Court

Gilbert Ouy's⁴ initial studies enabled us to understand the particularities of the French humanist movement, as well as to determine that its beginning took place in the last decades of the 14th century, during Charles VI's regency. This movement receives Petrarch's ideas and reacts to them, it is specially interested in moral philosophy, accompanied by certain aesthetic attention, as well as it reveals the birth of a national consciousness. Like in the Italian humanism, we notice the appreciation for ancient authors who did not appear among the recurrent *auctoritates* of the scholastics: to the detriment of Aristotle's almost complete hegemony, authors like Plato, Cicero, and Seneca are read due to a concern about associating philosophy (understood as the subject's transformation) with rhetoric (Cicero oratory, despised in the scholastic midst)⁵. The appeal to Augustine's authority is also very present, but in this case, it constitutes more properly an element of continuity with the medieval scholastic thinking.

It seems a consensus among medievalists that Jean Gerson (1363-1429), along with Jean Montreuil (1354-1418), are the first intellectuals to clearly express such "*révolution dans les esprits*". Both occupy important positions relative to Charles VI's court: Gerson is a chancellor at the University of Paris; Montreuil is the king's secretary. In their writings, both present the characteristic elements of humanism mentioned above. If we take as paradigm Gerson's case, we can stress his sermon of 1389, written against the Dominican Juan de Monzón. It is a treatise whose prologue constitutes, according to G. Ouy, a true manifest of the Parisian rising humanism⁶: in a Latin style that imitates Petrarch's eloquence, he states that Paris (not Rome) is the true cultural bastion of the world and exalts the prestige of the University of Paris,

² On the depreciation of the term *laicus* and its association with *illiteratus*, see CONGAR, 1983.

³ In Petrarch's work, the word *illiteratus* will be completely reevaluated ("*virtus illiterata*") in his criticism of the academic knowledge (PETRARCA, 2000, p. 78). See IMBACH and KÖNIG-PRALONG, 2013, p. 184.

⁴ OUY, 1967; 1980; 1973; 1997.

⁵ For a broader study of the characteristics of humanism cf. EBBERSMEYER, 2017.

⁶ OUY, 1973, p. 26.



understood as superior to the others⁷. Despite the fact that an important trace of humanism fed by Petrarch is the criticism of the Scholasticism⁸ and its monopoly of the theoretical knowledge, Gerson (graduated in theology⁹) understands the prestige of the University of Paris as consequence of the nationalist aspect of its humanism¹⁰, fed by the rivalry with the British (Hundred Years War) and by the reaction to Petrarch's own patriotism (registered in the infamous declaration "*oratores et poetae extra Italiam non quaerantur*"¹¹).

The reception of Petrarch in French territory can be partially evaluated from the considerable presence in French libraries of manuscripts of his works, produced in the 14th and 15th centuries¹². Add to it his trip to Paris through Jean le Bon's invitation in 1361, as well as the translation of the *De remediis* to French by Jean Daudin in 1378 at the request of Charles V¹³. In addition, the Collège de Navarre had at least a copy of the *Bucolicum carmen*¹⁴ in 1380, and we know that in the same period the texts *Secretum*, *De vita solitaria*, *De otio religiosorum*, and *Psalmi penitentiales* were at the library of Saint-Denis Abbey and constituted the reading program of the monks¹⁵. Nonetheless, the direct influence of Italian humanists on Parisian texts is more relevant. In this regard, one should note that Gerson explicitly mentions Petrarch in a sermon addressed to the court in 1389, quoting the *De remediis*: "[...] *ne tu n'en plus estre certain se tu n'as este malheureux et infortunez par aucun temps, car en adversité voit on l'amy. Pour ce dit Pétrarque : felix se nescit amari*"¹⁶. Jean Montreuil corresponds with Coluccio Salutati¹⁷, another central name of the Italian branch.

In this context, it is not possible to comprehend the flourishing of the *foyers culturels* outside the universities without mentioning the relevance of the chancelleries and secretariats linked with the king. Especially in the 14th century, we see the development of a royal bureaucracy that recruited employees (secretaries, chancellors) graduated at the University of Paris, among whom many belonged originally to a

⁷ "La France, qui, de tout temps s'est illustrée par ses vaillants guerriers et ses sages penseurs, a souffert jusqu'ici d'une grave pénurie d'historiens sérieux et de poètes de génie. Encore que, grâce à Dieu, elle soit déjà grande et glorieuse, si ses écrivains avaient déployé la même activité que ceux de l'Antiquité, elle brillerait aux yeux de nos contemporains, et surtout des générations futures, d'un plus vif éclat et serait, en quelque sorte, plus immortelle. [...] L'université de Paris, de toutes la plus ancienne, a toujours été supérieure aux autres par sa réputation et son prestige. Certains croient trouver son origine à Rome, d'autres à Athènes, d'autres encore en Égypte [...]. Quoi qu'il en soit, une chose est sûre, c'est que toutes les autres universités sont venues après elle, ou plutôt qu'elles en découlent ainsi que d'une source vive qui, se divisant en quatre facultés comme en autant de fleuves, irrigue toute la surface de la terre de l'onde bienfaisante du savoir" (GERSON, 1995 p. 108-9).

⁸ We will develop this topic further on.

⁹ Gerson, unlike Montreuil, was a theologian. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to disqualify him as humanist, as MATUSEVICH (2001, p. 49-50) understands: "L'accord s'établit entre Gerson et Montreuil, contre les historiens qui n'ont que trop déclamé sur l'opposition entre théologiens et humanistes, même quand ils semblent dire la même chose. Cet accord n'est pas à situer sur l'axe de la pensée antique, mais plus exactement sur l'axe de la pensée chrétienne la plus consciente d'elle-même. Ni Gerson ni Jean de Montreuil n'éprouvaient le moindre doute à ce sujet. Disposant les textes offerts à leur studieuse curiosité selon la hiérarchie qui est naturelle en climat chrétien, ils s'accordaient aussi bien sur l'intérêt et le mérite des auteurs païens que sur le primat inconditionné de la théologie. Ainsi Jean de Montreuil trouva en Gerson son idéal théologique et rhétorique sans jamais chercher aucune autonomie de pensée. Cet idéal est bien un idéal d'humaniste avec culte de l'éloquence et de la perfection oratoire".

¹⁰ The superiority of Paris also figures in his poem *Josephina*: "C'est toi d'abord que viennent féconder ses eaux, O Paris sans pareille, ô mère des études, Plus grande que l'Égypte et plus grande qu'Athènes, Car plus noble et plus pure est ta philosophie, Où nulle erreur ne mêle sa senteur malsaine" (GERSON, 1995 p. 111).

¹¹ "It is useless to seek for good lecturers and poets outside Italy" (PETRARCA, 2004, p. 114).

¹² For a complete list and description of Petrarch's Latin manuscripts preserved in the libraries of France, see PELLEGRIN, 1976.

¹³ MONFRIN, 1963, p. 174.

¹⁴ The famous robbery of the Bibliothèque de Navarre in 1418, as well as the absence of an inventory, prevent us from knowing whether its students had access to other works of Petrarch.

¹⁵ OUY, 1997, p. 415-34.

¹⁶ Jean Gerson, *Pour le mercredi des Cendres*, quoted by MATUSEVICH, 2001 p. 52.

¹⁷ BILLANOVICH and OUY, 1966.

new social sphere, whose appearance is due to the end of the feudal period: the *clercs laïcisés*. These receive the tonsure and develop their study without achieving the theologians' graduation, then they become laic (they get married) and pursue administrative careers. High cultural level and intellectual curiosity are qualities of these workers of the court¹⁸. The greater names of the beginning of the French humanism were all members of an important chancellery: we have already mentioned Jean Gerson's case, who succeeds Pierre d'Ailly as chancellor at the University of Paris; besides Jean de Montreuil, Gontier Col, Jacques de Nouvion, and Jean Lebègue were also members of the pontifical chancellery of Avignon. In this context, the Collège de Navarre (founded in 1304 by Jeanne de Navarre, Phillippe ele Bel's wife) is seen as a sort of birthplace of humanism. Its students were many times admitted without financial compensation, many of them from the countryside, and they received there education in grammar, logics, and theology. Pierre d'Ailly, Nicolas de Clamanges, Jean Gerson, and Nicole Oresme taught in this institution. Although it has received many protagonists of humanism, it is not clear whether the education received at the Collège Navarre had a decisive relation in their intellectual orientation: the elaboration of humanistic texts by these intellectuals does not coincide with their formation period, but are works of maturity, precisely when they had already taken chancellery positions¹⁹. Indeed, the concentration of humanists in royal chancelleries, whose diplomatic activities involved trips to Rome, enables us to explain the Italian influence and the reception of Petrarch's works²⁰.

An aspect of Charles VI's court is the creation of literary circles, of which the *Cour amoureuse de Charles VI*, founded in 1400 in Paris to “*honorer et servir toutes dames et damoiselles*” and to “*passer partie du temps plus gracieusement*”, stands out²¹. The *cour amoureuse* originates from the resumption of the themes of the courtly love and of the *chevaleresque* spirit; their statutes include the defense and honor of women – Marechal Boucicault, along with other twelve knights, founded the Order of the *Dame blanche à l'Escu vert*, seeking to exclusively protect women with their weapons. The *cour* had a list of hundreds of members and their respective coats of arms (*armoires*); its meetings included a precise ceremonial and a prize destined to the best poet. Among names such as Antoine de La Salle, there were chancellors and secretaries of the king: Jean de Montreuil, Gontier Col, Guillome Maigret, and Jean Castel (Pizan's son) are counted in the list of members, besides the secretaries Jean Sans Peur, Baude des Bordes, and Jean Talance, and two big patrons of the arts and literature, the Duke of Orléans and the Duke of Berry²².

In these *foyers culturels* there is an atmosphere of renovation and intellectual maturity; they are open to new influences and exchanges with Italy and its most prestigious authors. This atmosphere prospers in a laic context linked to the royal administration, mostly constituted under Charles VI. The wars (Hundred Years, *armagnacs* against *bourgignons*) will damage this cultural fervor, already restricted to Paris, and it will only reappear at the end of the 15th century²³.

Charles V's Translation Program

The national consciousness that follows the French humanism is related to the valorization of the vulgar language as vehicle of knowledge. At the same time, it values and develops the classic Latin and

¹⁸ OUY, 1973, p. 37.

¹⁹ Cf. ROCCATI, 1995.

²⁰ BAUTIER, 1990 and PONS 1990.

²¹ See BOZZOLO and LOYAU, 1982-2018.

²² BAUTIER, 1990, p. 33.

²³ Symbolically marked by the establishment of Guillaume Fichet and Robert Gaguin's press at Sorbonne, in 1472. Cf. PONS, 1990, p. 149.

encourages the production in vernacular languages²⁴. The expansion of the French language domain was to a large extent promoted by Charles V and his translation program, whose dimension and relevance can be evaluated through the indispensable works of Léopold Deslile and Serge Lusignan²⁵. The translation program concerned the medieval *auctoritates*, more precisely, the works that served as base for university education: just as the Bible, works from the Fathers of the Church, philosophers, and theologians. The most important translators concerning our discussion are Nicole Oresme²⁶ (translator of part of the Aristotelian corpus: *Ethiques*, 1370; *Politiques*, 1372-1374; *Yconomiques*, 1374; *Du ciel et du monde*, 1374) and Raoul de Presles (translator of Augustine's *Cité de Dieu*, 1371-1375).

A distinctive aspect of these translations consists in the fact that, since they were ordered by the king, they represent an interest external to the clerical context: they are the laics demanding access to Latin texts²⁷. "The act of translating... manifests the will of appropriating, in French, cultural goods whose acquisition depended, until then, on the learning of the clerical language... [Latin] was asserted through its right of exclusivity in the manifestation of knowledge" (LUSIGNAN, 1987, p. 140). Such characteristic is essential to the understanding of this cultural movement and the constitution of the *Librarie du Louvre*²⁸: the first European library whose conception is close to the conception of a public library²⁹.

The proem of Nicole Oresme's translations offers us the opportunity to understand the difficulties and importance attributed to the program sponsored by the king. Although Charles V certainly knew Latin, Oresme acknowledges that the Aristotelian text is of difficult comprehension, so that even an trained reader could benefit from a translation³⁰. In fact, making these texts accessible to the laic public involved a work

²⁴This is precisely Dante's comprehension. According to Ruedi Imbach (IMBACH e KÖNIG-PRALONG, 2013, p.161), Dante turns the language into a philosophical object: his very interesting Latin treatise *De vulgari eloquentia* is exclusively dedicated to the issue of the formation and multiplication of different languages from a rational point of view (not as a post-Babel punishment). The issue of the philosophical activity in vulgar language is themed in the *Convivio*: Dante aims at "unlearned" addressees, that is, those who could not finish a graduation. Although he acknowledges the scientific superiority of Latin, Dante sees a barrier to the instruction of the laic public in that language and understands that the philosophy should not be restricted to a small aristocratic elite.

²⁵DELISLE, 1907; LUSIGNAN, 1987; see also MONFRIN, 1963.

²⁶Charles V, regarding the ordering of Nicole Oresme's translations in a document of May 21, 1372: "Nous faisons traduire à nostre bien amé le doyen de Rouen, maistre Nicolle Oresme, deux livres, lesquels nous sont très nécessaires, et pour cause, c'est assavoir Politiques et Yconomiques; et pour ce que nous savons que le dit maistre Nicolle a à ce faire grant peine et grant diligence, et que il convient que pour ce il delaisse toutes ses autres oeuvres et besoignes quelconques, ...". *Apud*: DELISLE, 1879, p. 259.

²⁷It is worth listing other important translations that were not directly ordered by Charles V, but were produced in the context of the royal court: Laurent de Premierfait translates to Charles V's close ones: Cicero's *De amicitia*, Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum et mulierum illustrium* and *Decameron*; Nicolas de Gonesse translates Petrarch's *De remediis*. Previous to Charles V's translation program, the following translations are worth mentioning: Henri Gauchy translates Gilles de Rome's *De regimine principum* to Phillippe le Bel (1268-1314), to the same king, Jean de Meun (author of the *Romain de la Rose*) translates Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae*, Végèce's *De re militari*, the Letters of Abelard and Héloïse. According to LUSIGNAN (1987 p. 135), it is a complex movement, initiated in the 13th century, that "reveals the narrow connection between the translation into French of the *autoritates* and the royal power; a cultural politics that timidly begins under Philippe III is intensified under Phillippe le Bel and Jean le Bon, and reaches its peak under Charles V; it will continue under Phillip le Bon".

²⁸The royal library had 836 volumes, it was the most important western medieval collection, after the Pope's library in Avignon (1300 volumes in 1375) and the library of the Sorbonne in Paris (1720 volumes in 1338). Besides the disciplines of the seven liberal arts – *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, astronomy) – that organized the volumes in the shelves, there were also theology, law and medicine, and astrology, a discipline absent in the universities. Cf. POTIN, 2007.

²⁹LUSIGNAN, 1987, p.135: "il faut attendre Charles V pour voir se réaliser l'idée d'une bibliothèque royale qui soit presque une bibliothèque d'État". Until then, the manuscripts possessed by the kings were seen as personal objects, not as belongings of an institution. Indeed, there are no actual medieval catalogues of these libraries. The catalogues are deduced from inventories of properties (which included, besides the books, other valuable objects) and borrowing registries, in the case of university libraries.

³⁰ORESME, 1940, p. 99: "Mais pour ce que les livres morales de Aristote furent faiz en grec, et nous les avons en latin moult fort a entendre, le Roi a voulu, pour le bien commun, faire les traduire en françois, afin que il et ses conseillers et autres les puissent mieulx entendre, mesmement Ethiques et Politiques".

of mediation: besides dealing with the difficulties in the transposition of a language to another (like the restriction of the French vocabulary and the Latin stylistic concision), the translator was responsible for making the content understandable to the non-specialist reader. Indeed, many of these translations are accompanied with remarks derived from the practice of academic commentaries.

Despite the fact that he acknowledges the privileged status of Latin as *langue savante*, Oresme hopes that the global project of translations can improve the vernacular language and make it more apt to express the scientific knowledge. These punctual difficulties are seen as a consequence of the current state of the vernacular language, which can be improved. This is an important legacy of the *translating* effort: the practice of the language makes it more refined. Thus, Oresme is aware that his translation practice is a contribution to the French language.

Besides justifying the king's request based on the value of the work to the monarch's political and moral formation³¹, in this text there is a reflection on the cultural contribution of the ordered task. Oresme sees his task as a historical sequence of the transmission of knowledge from the Greek to the Latin world – which, in its turn, was possible thanks to the translations from Greek to Latin. Now, Latin understood today as erudite language has already known the state of language ignorant of science. Oresme spoke clearly about the legitimacy of the activity of translation:

³¹seems to me that we should bless and praise the King in heaven who provided his people with an earthly king of great wisdom, who – among other graces provided by Him – inspired him which such a noble will that he dedicates his attention and understanding to very important sciences [...]. Certainly, translating such books to French and explaining the arts and sciences also in French is a very beneficial work because it is a noble language and common to people of great intelligence and prudence. As Cicero says in his book *Academics*³², difficult matters and matters of great authority are pleasant and gratifying to people in the language of their country. The same is said in many other books against the opinions of some people, that is, that it was good to translate the sciences from Greek to Latin and explain and expose them in Latin. Now, in that moment the Greek language meant to the Romans, in relation to Latin, the same as, to us, Latin represents to day in relation to French. In that time students knew Greek in Rome and in other places, and the sciences were usually explained in Greek, whereas in this country the common and mother language was Latin. Therefore, I can conclude that the consideration and purpose of our good king Charles V, who orders the translation of good and excellent books to French, must be praised.³³

Thus, the analysis of Nicole Oresme's preface to the translation of Aristotle's *Ethics* enables us to notice that the translation movement was understood by Oresme as a step of the *translatio studii* (LUSIGNAN, 1987, p. 147). Although the motivation fundamentally aims the practice of governing (not an uninterested

³¹ Nicole Oresme, in his preface to Ptolemy's *Quadripartiti*, justifies Charles V's initiative and others that tried to have access to books in vernacular language: "sont plusieurs gens de langue françoise qui sont de grant entendement et de excellent enging et qui n'entendent pas souffisamment latin, et pour ce les vaillans roys de France ont fait aucuns livres translater en françois, et principalement la divine escripture et certaines hystoires plaines de bons exemples et dignes de mémoire, desquelz roys est issu Charles, hoir de France, a present gouverneur du royaume, qui nulle vertu ne veut trespasser ne laisser, en laquelle il ne ensuive ou surmonte ces bons prédécesseurs, et après ce que il a eu en son langage l'Escripiture divine, il veut aussi avoir des livres en françois de la plus noble science de cet siècle... ». apud: MONFRIN, 1963, p. 173.

³² CICERO, 2010, p. 73-4.

³³ ORESME, 1940, p. 98-101: "Si me semble que nous devons benier et loer le Roy du ciel qui a son pueple pourveu de tel roy terrien plain de si grant sagesse, et qui avecques les autres graces que il lui a données, il li a inspirée si noble volonté que il met sa cure et son entente a si bonnes sciences [...]. Et pour certain, translater telz livres en françois et baillier en françois les arts et les sciences est un labeur moult profitable, car c'est un langage noble et commun a genz de grant engin et de bonne prudence. Et comme dit Tullies en son livre de Académiques, les choses pesantes et de grant auctorité sont délectables et bien agreables as genz ou langage de leur país ; et pour ce dit-il ou livre dessus dit et en plusieurs autres contre l'opinion d'aucuns, que c'estoit bien de translater les sciences de grec en latin et de les baillier et traiter en latin. Or est il ainsi que pour le temps de lors, grec estoit en regart de latin, quant as Romains, si comme est maintenant latin en resgart de françois quant a nous. Et estoient pour le temps les estudiants introduiz en grec et a Romme et aillieurs, et les sciences communement baillies en grec ; et en ce pays, le langage commun et maternel c'estoit latin. Doncques puis-je bien encore conclure que la considération et le propos de nostre bon roi Charles V est a recommander qui fait les bons livres et excellents translater en François".



aesthetic concern), the translations propel the laicization movement in philosophy. In this regard, Charles V's requests accomplished by Oresme are innovative and belong to the rising humanist spirit, of which Christine de Pizan is heiress.

Humanistic Criticism of Scholasticism

Despite its peculiarities, the Italian and French humanistic movements belong to the same episode of the European intellectual history, whose expression includes what we above called "the birth of national consciousness", which places the respective capitals – Rome and Paris – in the center of the *translatio studii*. In addition, we can mention as their characteristics the search for a moral and edifying direction of the philosophical knowledge. Such conception is subjected to the criticism of what we now call *clerical monopoly of knowledge*. In order for us to conclude the opposition sketched here, it is important to define how we understand Scholasticism, especially its discourse, practiced in this context. Without taking it as a homogeneous block, we can mention some minimum elements of identity: its place par excellence is the University and its registry and transmission are in Latin: its manifests mainly through the argumentative dynamics of the *disputatio*; the model adopted is essentially the Aristotelian one, which includes the primacy of metaphysics in the hierarchy of knowledge – understood as supreme science insofar as it guides the philosopher to the contemplation of the first causes. The scholastic tradition is still engaged with the comprehension of happiness as contemplative life, also directed here to the noblest object of knowledge.

Petrarch's persistent criticism of the scholastics notably defies the comprehension of what the philosopher is supposed to be insofar as they seek wisdom through a new moral discipline. In the *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* we find what can be understood as his first formulation: Petrarch defends himself from the accusation of ignorance by four friends by means of an attack to the Aristotelians, accused of taking Aristotle as a god (PETRARCH, 2000, p. 78). According to Petrarch, Aristotle would have been mistaken with regard to several truths, such as the eternity of the world and the path to achieve true happiness, that is, through the immortality of the soul. This observation becomes a criticism of the professional philosophers, who would have denied the revelation by opposing Christ to Aristotle.

^{And} what to say of the others who no longer dream about the infinity of the worlds and spaces, but about the eternity of our world? Besides Plato and the Platonics, almost all philosophers share this opinion [...] they oppose to the truth and religion, secretly in the chants that ridicule Christ, and they worship Aristotle, whom they do not comprehend. And because I do not wish to unite with them, they criticize me and attribute ignorance to what belongs to faith.³⁴

^{There} is something that I say promptly – and that is maybe audacious, but true – Aristotle indeed saw happiness just like the owl can see the sun, that is, he did not see anything except the light and the rays, without seeing it in itself. The one who did not edify happiness on a true ground or on solid base, but who build an ambitious building on an unstable ground, in an enemy and far country, this one did not understand anything. Rather, if he understood something, he forgot that without which we cannot reach happiness, that is, the faith in immortality.³⁵

³⁴ PETRARCH, 2000, p. 135: "Quid de aliis dicam, qui non mundorum innumerabilitatem infinitatemque locorum, ut hi proximi, sed mundi huius eternitatem astruunt? In quam sententiam, preter Platonem ac platonicos, philosophi fere omnes [...] oppugnant veritatem et pietatem, clanculum in angulis irridentes Cristum, atque Aristotilem, quem non intelligunt, adorantes, meque ideo, quod cum eis genua non incurvo, accusant, quod est fidei ignorantie tribuentes".

³⁵ PETRARCH, 2000, p. 99: "Cum mihi tamen – audacter forsitan hoc dixerim, sed, ni fallor, vere – ut solem noctua, sic ille felicitatem, hoc est lucem eius ac radios, sed non ipsam vidisse videatur; nempe qui illam nonsuis in finibus nec solidis in rebus edificium velut excelsum procul in hosticum tremulaque in sede fundeverit, illa vero non intellexerit, sive intellecta neglexerit, sine quibus prorsus esse felicitas non potest, fidem scilicet atque immortalitatem."



It is worth mentioning that Petrarch's criticism is not entirely new: one can find the same thought, in a content not less controversial, formulated by the very scholastic tradition³⁶. For example, let us remember Pedro Olivi's case when he reprehends Aristotelian authors for having subjected their intellects to Aristotle as to their god³⁷; or Albert the Great's observation: "*we say that the one who believes that Aristotle was a god must believe that he was never mistaken; but we believe that he was a man, then he undoubtedly may have made a mistake just like us*"³⁸. In fact, the thesis on the insufficiency of reason in comparison with faith is a commonplace among the scholastic theologians. Due to the fact that the relation between theologians, masters, and the Aristotelian authority is much more complex than the opposition *academics x humanistics*, the originality of Petrarch's attack relies mainly on his laic origin and his conscious distancing from the scholastics³⁹.

As a reaction to clerical knowledge, Petrarch intends to build his own conception of the philosophy of literary expression, as well as a reflection on the ethical premises of this new philosophical practice. For Petrarch, this renewal is possible once he resumes Seneca, Cicero, and Augustine's Christian thinking. As we shall see, Pizan's case (similar to Gerson's case) associates the shift of the theoretical monopoly to the secular context of the court with the acknowledgement of the importance of the University of Paris. We will also see that Pizan's criticism of the philosophers' authority has a significant role in her criticism of the thesis on the imperfectability of the feminine form, especially disseminated in the Aristotelian midst. For this purpose, we first have to locate Pizan in the intellectual context explained above.

Pizan and Charles V's Translation Program

We know that Pizan was received in Charles V's court when she was still a child when his father, Tommaso de Pizzano, is made the king's astrologer in 1368⁴⁰. Pizan is a great admirer of Charles V, whom she calls "the wise" in her *Livre des faits et bonnes moeurs du sage Roy Charles V*, a biography ordered by the Duke of Burgundy in 1404. In it, the monarch is described as a philosopher⁴¹, insofar as he seeks for the comprehension of elevated matters in theology and metaphysics. His erudition motivates, according to Pizan, his famous translation program:

^{And} let us remember king Charles V's wisdom, the great love he had for study and science, demonstrated by the beautiful collection of remarkable books and by the library in which he kept the most remarkable volumes, which were compiled by the greatest authors, be it the Holy Scripture, theology and philosophy authors, or authors of other sciences, all of them well written and richly ornated by the best copyists [...]. Although he knew Latin and

³⁶ Cf. Olivier Boulnois' preface in PETRARCH, 2000. R. Imbach draws attention to the same fact; nonetheless, Boulnois and Imbach disagree on the philosophical worth of Petrarch's contribution. Cf. IMBACH and KÖNIG-PRALONG, 2013, p. 181, n.3; p. 189, n. 2. Contra: Boulnois, in PETRARCH, 2000, p. 36. In the same regard, see DE LIBERA, 1997. Evaluating the philosophical dimension of Petrarch's writings exceed the purpose of this article. We only emphasize our preference for R. Imbach's reading.

³⁷ OLIVI, 1922, p. 461: "*captivantes intellectus suos sibi tanquam deo eorum*".

³⁸ ALBERTO, 2003, p. 57: "*qui credit Aristotelem fuisse deum, ille debet credere quod nunquam erravit. Si autem credit ipsum esse hominem, tunc procul dubio errare potuit sicut et nos*".

³⁹ For an excellent study on how the scholastics understood their own intellectual activity, as well as for an excellent account of the criticisms internal to this midst, see KÖNIG-PRALONG, 2001.

⁴⁰ For an account of Tommaso de Pizzano's intellectual path, see WILLARD, 1984, p. 17-21.

⁴¹ PIZAN, 1936-1940, p. 12-13: "*Et que nostre roy Charles fust vray philosophe, c'est assavoir, ameur de sapience, meismes imbuez en ycelle, appert par ce que il fu vray inquisiteur des hautes choses premieraines, c'est assavoir de haulte theologie, qui est le terme de sapience, qui n'est aultre chose que cognoistre Dieu est ses hautes vertus celestes, par naturele science. En ce le demoustra nostre bon roy, car il vult en ycelle par sages maistres estre instruit et apris, et, pour ce que peut-estre n'avoit le latin, pour la force des termes soubtilz, si en usage comme la langue françoise, fist de theologie translater plusieurs livres de saint Augustin et aultres docteurs par sages theologiens, si comme sera cy après declairié, ou chapitre de ses translacions; et de theologie solvente vouloit ouir, entendoit les poins de la science, en sçavoit parler, sentoit par raison et estude ce que theologie demoustre, laquelle chose est vraye sapience*".

did not need any help to understand it, it was with great providence and due to the love he had for his successors that he, for future purposes, wanted to provide them with the teachings and sciences introductory to all virtues; it is the reason why he ordered from great masters, versed in all arts and sciences, to translate from Latin to French the most important books, such as the Bible, in three modes, that is, the text itself, then the text with remarks, and then in an allegorized manner; also the great book of Saint Augustine, *The City of God*⁴²; also the *Book of Heaven and Earth*⁴³; Augustine's *De Soliloquio*⁴⁴, Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*⁴⁵, to which he ordered the addition of other volumes; Vegetious's *Epitome of Military Science*⁴⁶; the eighteen books of the *Properties of Things*⁴⁷, the work of Valerius Maximus⁴⁸; the *Policraticus*⁴⁹; Titus Livius⁵⁰ and many others. He kept the masters permanently in charge [of the translations], for which they were very well paid.⁵¹

In Pizan's praise to the king's erudition we find the very idea of *translatio studii* present in Oresme. In the same spirit of the first French humanists, Pizan sees France as heir of the knowledge of the ancients in the prestige and history of the creation of the University of Paris⁵². The process of translation is described as an intrinsic step of the transmission of theoretical knowledge. Her narrative of Charles V's relation with the University of Paris is clear with respect to it:

Charles V's love for science and study was shown through his daughter, the University of Paris, to which he fully ensured privileges and concessions, and he granted [the university other privileges] which he did not allow to be interrupted. He had great respect for the clerical congregation and for study. He frequently requested the rector's, the masters', and the great clerics' presence to listen to the doctrine of their sciences, he benefited from their advices regarding spirituality, honored them by voluntarily and peacefully providing for them. With regard to the University of Paris and the great love the king had for it, I would like to tell how it was established in Paris

⁴² Translated, like the Bible, by Raoul de Presles in 1371-1375. For the footnotes related to the translators, cf. DESLILE, p. 80 ff., as well as the corresponding footnotes of the publisher.

⁴³ It is Aristotle's *De caelo*, translated by Nicole Oresme in 1377.

⁴⁴ Translator unknown. Indeed, the volume is listed in the inventory of the mentioned library.

⁴⁵ Translated by Nicole Oresme in 1372-1374.

⁴⁶ Unknown translator. Charles V possibly obtained this copy through Jean de Meun and did not order the translation.

⁴⁷ Bartholomeus Anglicus' work, translated by Jean Corbechon in 1372.

⁴⁸ The first four books were translated by Simon de Hesdin in 1375; the rest of them were translated by Nicolas de Gonesse only in 1401, at the request of the Duke of Berry.

⁴⁹ By Jean de Salisbury, translated by Denis Foulecaht in 1372.

⁵⁰ Pizan is mistaken regarding this point: the mentioned translation is in the library, but it was ordered by Jean II and translated by Pierre Bersuire.

⁵¹ PIZAN, 1936-1940, p. 43-4: "Ne dirons nous encore de la sagece du roy Charles, la grant amour qu'il avoit à l'estude et à science; et qu'il soit ainsi bien le demoustrait par la belle assemblée des notables livres et belle librairie, qu'il avoit de tous les plus notables volumes, qui par souverains auteurs aient esté compilés, soit de la Sainte Escripiture, de theologie, de philosophie et de toutes sciences moult bien escrips et richement [aournés] et tout temps les meilleurs escripvains [...]. mais non obstant que bien entendist le latin et que ja ne fust besoing que on lui exposast, de si grant providence fu, pour la grant amour qu'il avoit à ses successeurs, que, au temps à venir, les vould pourveoir d'enseignemens et sciences introduisables à toutes vertus; dont, pour celle cause fist par solempnelz maistres, souffisans en toutes les sciences et ars, translater de latin en françois tous les plus notables livres, si comme la Bible en .iii. manieres, c'est assavoir: le texte, et puis le texte et les gloses ensemble, et puis d'une autre maniere alegorisée; item, le grant livre de saint Augustin, *De la Cité de Dieu*; item, le *Livre du Ciel et du Monde*; item, le livre de saint Augustin *De soliloquio*; item, des livres de Aristote, *Ethiques* et *Politiques*, et mettre nouveaux exemples; item, Vegece, *De chevalerie*; item, les XIX livres des *Proprietés des choses*; item, Valerius Maximus; item, *Policratique*; item, Titu Livius, et tres grant foison d'aultres, comme sanz cesser y eust maistres, qui grans gages en recevoient, de ce embesoignés".

⁵² The same theme will be resumed in the *Chemin de longue estude* (PIZAN, 2000, p. 436-8): "[...] et pour l'amour qu'ot a science sans demour [Charles Maine] l'université fist de Romme venir a Paris, et grant somme de privileges leur donna, et ainsi clergie amena a Paris et le noble estude des clers par sa sollicitude". For a discussion of the use of nationalist estereotypes in Pizan's politically engaged texts, cf. RICHARDS, 1992, p. 75-94.

[...]: [Alcuin of York], noticing the great love [Charlemagne]⁵³ had for science, at the request of him, transferred his studies from Rome to Paris, just as they had been previously transferred from Greece to Rome.⁵⁴

Pizan, whose friendship with Giles Malet (*inventorier* and *gardien de la librairie du Louvre*) is known⁵⁵, could have access to the royal library and its translated volumes. It is known that Pizan understood Latin (as the recurrent use of Tomas Hubernicus' *Manipulos Florum* and Thomas Aquinas' *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, among other examples, attests), but she often made use of French translations, as the ones made by Oresme, Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and Augustine's *The City of God*⁵⁶.

Pizan, Reader of the Ancients and Italians

Pizan was born in a peculiar intellectual context: as mentioned above, she is the daughter of a graduated man and she spent her childhood at Charles V's cultured court. Her husband, Etienne du Castel, also completed his studies⁵⁷; in 1380, the year of her marriage, he became secretary of the king, which brings Pizan closer to the midst of the chancelleries and its cultural activities. This biographical information put Pizan in a place that greatly favors her access to books. In fact, a quick view on her most known works shows us that Pizan read the most important names of the rising humanism. We can state, for example, her admiration for Dante, described as "*Dant de Florence, le vaillant Poete*" (PIZAN, 1959, vol. 2, p. 15). In a passage of the *Chemin de long estude*, Pizan narrates the encounter of the poet with Virgil in hell: "Dante of Florence recalls in his book – which he writes in the most beautiful style – how he entered the forest and was taken by fear" (PIZAN, 2000, p. 154)⁵⁸. In her last letter to Gontier Col, Pizan takes Dante as a model of eloquence in the Italian language⁵⁹. In the *Cité des Dames*, Petrarch is mentioned in two moments: Pizan explicitly quotes him (PIZAN, 1982, p. 111) when she presumably invokes the *De remediis*⁶⁰ to deplore the case of the children who yearn for their parents' wealth. In the same work, she revisits Griselda's tale (taken as an example of virtue), making use of the version provided by Petrarch in his *De oboedientia ac*

⁵³ One should remember that the University of Paris was not built in Charlemagne's time (742-814), but in the second half of the 12th century.

⁵⁴ PIZAN, 1936-1940, pp. 46-7: "A ce propos que le roy Charles amast science et l'estude, bien le moustroit à sa très amée fille l'Université des clers de Paris, à laquelle gardoit entierement les privileges et les franchises, et plus encore lui en donnoit et ne suffrist que ilz leur fussent enfrains. La congregation des clers et de l'estude avoit en grant reverence; le recteur, les maistres et les clers solempnez, dont y a maint, mandoit souvent pour la dottrine de leur Science, usoit de leurs conseilz de ce qui apertenoit à l'esperituaulté, moult les honnoroit et portoit em toutes choses, tenoit benivolens et en paix; et ceste matiere de l'Université de Paris, et la grant amour que le roy y avoit, m'ingere à dire comment ele vint à Paris [...]. [Alcun] pour la grant amour qu'il vid que [Charlemaignes] avoit à la Science, et par priere, qu'il lui en fist, tant pourchaça par son sens que il amena et fist translater les estudes des sciences de Romme à Paris, tout ainsi comme jadis vindrent de Grece à Romme".

⁵⁵ WILLARD, 1984, p. 42. Regarding Malet, Pizan writes: "Le roy Charles avoit un sien varlet de chambre lequel, pour cause que lui en savoit plusieurs vertus, moult amoit; celluy, par especial sur tous autres, souverainement bien lisoit et bien ponctoit [faisait bien ressortir les points du discours] et entendens home estoit (...); car encore est vif, chevalier, maistre d'ostel, sage et honorez, comme il fust par ledit roy moult enrichis" (PIZAN, 1936-1940, p. 43). G. Malet's inventory made in 1373 can be consulted in MALET, 1836.

⁵⁶ On Pizan's Latin and French sources, see DULAC and RENO, 1995; FORHAN 2000.

⁵⁷ WILLARD, 1984, p.34.

⁵⁸ "Dant de Florence recorde en son livre qu'il composa ou il moult beau stile posa quant en la silve fu entrez ou tout de paour ert outrez".

⁵⁹ "If you really want to hear the best descriptions of paradise and hell, presented in the most subtle terms of high theology, more efficiently and poetically, read Dante's book, in which he will explain to you what is something written in the Florentine language in its highest degree of perfection." (*Mais se mieulx vulex ouyr descripre paradis et enfer, et par plus soubtilz termes et plus haullement parlé de theologie, plus proufi tablement, plus poetiquement et de plus grantefficace, lis le livre que on appelle le Dant, ou le te fais exposer pour ce que il est en lengue flourentine souverainement dicté*). Cf. MCWEBB, 2013, p. 176.

⁶⁰ Cf. PETRARCA, 2002, vol. 1, p. 758 ff.

fide uxoriam mythologia, from 1373⁶¹. Undoubtedly, the group of notable women from Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* (translated to French in 1401) is one of Pizan's most important sources, whose *exempla* are systematically resumed in the *Cité des Dames*⁶². Finally, it is worth noting that Pizan resorts many times to Cicero and Seneca in the *Le chemin de longue estude*, seeking to determine the prince's wisdom⁶³. Thus, we must acknowledge Pizan's interest for the works of the ancients and her humanistic fellow countrymen, despite the fact that she had accessed them many times indirectly.

Christine de Pizan and the Querelle de la Rose

The most important contact point between Pizan and the other authors of the rising French humanism is undoubtedly the *Querelle de la Rose*⁶⁴. With Christine de Pizan, Jean de Montreuil, and Gontier Col as its main representatives, the debate takes place in an exchange of letters involving the criticism of Jean de Meun's widespread *Romance of the Rose*. The first version of the romance has 4 thousand verses, it was written in 1236 by Guillaume de Lorris and employs allegories related to the aesthetics of the courtly love. Jean de Meun's sequence (17 thousand more verses) is a romantic satire in which prevails the depreciative perspective over women, presented there as deceptive and disloyal. The dispute formally begins in 1401 when Pizan writes the first direct answer to Jean de Montreuil, denouncing the intellectuals who praise Meun's version and defend the content of his verses. Pizan understands that every author should take the moral responsibility for their works and that the defamatory depiction of women would have a corrosive effect on their readers, in addition to the mistaken comprehension of love. Gontier Col enters the debate in September of 1401, strongly criticizes Pizan and starts a new exchange of letters that will last until October of 1402. Pizan decides to make the dispute public by copying the letter and sending them to Queen Isabeau of Bavaria and to the *provost* of Paris, Guillaume de Tignoville, in February of 1402. On May 17th, 1402, Jean Gerson writes a treatise against the *Romance of the Rose*, taking Pizan's side. In his letter *Talia de me*, addressed to Gontier Col, the humanist clearly refers to Pizan⁶⁵:

And because in his attack to my short work you placed me beside that remarkable woman, I ask you whether this virile woman to whom you address [...] demonstrated the mistake contained in the proverb "it is better to deceive than to be deceived", did she not refute you?⁶⁶

The *querelle* is considered the first public debate in defense of the feminine sex, a subject that will be widely explored in the humanistic midst⁶⁷. This "moralizing" discourse adopted by Pizan advances elements that will be resumed in the argument developed in the *Cité des Dames* (1405) in defense of the female sex.

⁶¹ Check Earl Jeffrey Richards' footnote in PIZAN 1982, p. 265. This account was translated to French by Philippe de Mézières in his *Livre de la vertu du sacrement du mariage* (1384-89).

⁶² WILLARD, 1984, p. 135.

⁶³ PIZAN, 2000. Verses that mention Cicero: vv. 5149, 5297, 5813, 5994; verses that mention Seneca: vv. 4589, 4649, 4663, 4817, 4831, 5097, 5170, 5347, 5367, 5633, 5662, 5694, 5703, 5967, 6023, 6041.

⁶⁴ Cf. MCWEBB, 2013.

⁶⁵ Besides the correspondence, there are indirect signs of Gerson's influence over Pizan, broadly discussed in the specialized bibliography: Earl Jeffrey Richards (RICHARDS, 2000, pp. 199-200) argues that both Pizan and Gerson make use of the *Lamentationes de Matheolus* in a moment that this text was not very known, which can indicate that Gerson was Pizan's source. In the first pages of the *City of Ladies*, Pizan says that someone had lent her that book along with other ones: "entre mains me vint d'aventure un livre estrange, non mie de mes volumes, qui avec autres livres m'avoit este baillié si comme em garde" (PIZAN, 1997a, p. 40). For other textual approximations between Gerson and Pizan that could indicate an intellectual exchange, see WILLARD, 1984, p. 19-23; SEMPLE, 1998, p. 118.

⁶⁶ Jean Gerson, *Talia de me*, in MCWEBB, 2013, p. 353: "Et quia me, in opusculi mei impugnacione, cum insigni femina miscuisti, quero si virilis illa femina cui tuus sermo dirigitur [...] arguit erroneum hoc pro proverbio positum: «Melius est decipere quam decipi», nonquid non recte redarguit?"

⁶⁷ Cf. EBBERSMEYER, 2017, p. 201 ff.

The debate also represents a change in her career: Pizan abandons the poems and dedicates to the prose, influenced by the mirrors of the education of princes and treatises of political nature.

Pizan and Charles VI' Cour Amoureuse

It is possible to find in Pizan's work many references to preeminent members of Charles VI's *cour amoureuse*⁶⁸. Among them is Eustache Deschamps, famous poet and Pizan's admirer, with whom she exchanged letters in 1404⁶⁹. Jean de Torsay is celebrated in a Pizan's *ballade*⁷⁰; Jean le Meingre (Boucicaut), notorious knight close to Charles VI, is praised by his courage and loyalty to the king in the *Débat des deux amants*⁷¹, in the same way as Jean de Châteaumorand⁷². Charles Savoisy is also quoted by Pizan in the *Débat des deux amants*⁷³; Pizan dedicates the *livre des Trois Jugements* to Jean de Werchin⁷⁴. Guillaume de Tignoville, *prevost* of Paris, will be the recipient of the epistolary collection of the *Roman de la Rose*, as mentioned above. Pizan's son, Jean de Castel, was also part of the *cour amoureuse*, as well as Jean Montreuil and Gontier Col, whose epistolary exchange with Pizan was clarified above. It is also worth mentioning the relevance of the patrons of arts related to the royal court, such as the Duke of Berry: among his *protégés* are Gontier Col and Christine de Pizan⁷⁵.

Thus, it does not seem exaggerated to conclude that Pizan was an important figure in Charles VI's *cour*, as the frequent interactions and literary exchanges with members of this confraternity show. Certainly, it does not enable us to say that she belonged to the *cour*, once her name is not in the list of members – which did not include women (we could not identify female names in its list of 952 members).

Pizan and the Criticism of the Clerical Monopoly of Knowledge

In Pizan's works of prose we face a complex argumentative structure alien to the commonly academic productions (commentaries, summas, disputed questions etc.). In this regard, her practices do not emulate the *disputatio* such as it was practiced in the scholastic context, but express the combination of rhetoric and a concern for convincing through reason, making use, at the same time, of literary expedients (as the *exempla*⁷⁶) and logical expedients (like demonstrations through *reductio ad absurdum*). In the *Cité des Dames* Pizan's arguments aim the rehabilitation of the female nature in the face of the comprehension according to which the woman is an inferior being. In this point, we find an important aspect of Pizan's thinking, that is, her criticism of the clerical monopoly of knowledge. We can present her according to two aspects: the refutation of the misogynist purposes disseminated in the erudite midst and the defense of the laicization of the theoretical knowledge. Now, this criticism is only enabled once the philosophers' authorities is challenged through the awareness of the intrinsic fallibility of their discourses. Pizan intends to show that the reasoning of learned men, although supposedly universal, can be biased.

⁶⁸ See BOZZOLO and LOYAU, 1982-2018.

⁶⁹ Cf. *A Letter to Eustache Morel* in (PIZAN 1997b, p. 111-112). On the correspondence, see LACASSAGNE, 2002; RIBÉMONT, 2002, p. 103-108.

⁷⁰ PIZAN, 1886-1896, vol. I, p. 221.

⁷¹ PIZAN, 1886-1896, vol. II, p. 96.

⁷² PIZAN, 1886-1896, vol. II, p. 98.

⁷³ PIZAN, 1886-1896, vol. II, p. 99.

⁷⁴ PIZAN, 1886-1896, vol. II, p. 111-57.

⁷⁵ WILLARD, 1984, p. 45.

⁷⁶ For more information on the medieval use of the *exemplum* in argumentative context, see BRÉMOND; LE GOFF; SCHMITT, 1982. Check also PAUPERT, 2016.

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You should note that the greatest philosophers who already existed, from whom you argue against your own sex, could not distinguish between the false and the true, but they repeatedly contradicted themselves. Just as you have seen in the *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle resumes and refutes your opinions and also speaks about Plato and other philosophers. And you should note that even Saint Augustine and other doctors of the Church made the same with some of Aristotle's passages, even though he is called the prince of the philosophers and had been supreme in his natural and moral philosophy. It seems that you take all the philosophers' words as objects of faith, and that they cannot make a mistake.⁷⁷

Regarding the tradition of the mirrors of princes, Pizan establishes a true knowledge encyclopedia for the laics, in which the theoretical sciences (including metaphysics) are included among the monarch's expected knowledge. In her *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*, in the chapter "Proof that King Charles was a true philosopher and on what philosophy is", Pizan defends the wisdom of the ideal king as including the knowledge of the first causes:

[Charles V] frequently wanted to listen about theology, to understand specific points of this science, to know how to talk about it, and he understood through reason and study what theology demonstrates, which is the true wisdom [sapience]; in this regard we mention what Aristotle says in his *Metaphysics*⁷⁸: it is called theology or divine science insofar as it considers the separate essences or substances, or even divine things; it is called Metaphysics, that is, "beyond nature", from the Greek *metha*, which means "beyond", and *physis*, which means "nature", insofar as it considers being [*ens*] and the things that follow from it. It is called first philosophy insofar as it considers the first causes of things. Therefore, it is called wisdom, and this is its proper name since it is a very general science and it enables its owner to know all things.⁷⁹

As C. König-Pralong (IMBACH; KÖNIG-PRALONG, 2013, p. 199-200) points out, such configuration of knowledge represents an important transformation, especially if we consider that the most reputed mirror of princes of his time – Egidio of Rome's *Livre du gouvernement des princes* – adopts a condescending stand regarding the manifestly laics, reducing their wisdom to practical knowledge aimed at social utility. In this context, we can say that Pizan clearly denounces the clerical monopoly of the theoretical knowledge, claiming metaphysics as a legit knowledge legit of the non-clerical.

Conclusion

The last quarter of the 14th century suffers a transformation in the mood of a certain Parisian intellectual elite: under Petrarch's undeniable influence, a humanism born in the context of royal chancelleries, marked by a renewed interest for classical antiquity and a new critical spirit, encompasses the whole 15th century. The expression of humanism that reverberates in Pizan's work includes, in the one hand, the acknowledgement

⁷⁷ PIZAN, 1997a, p. 48: "Regardes se les tres plus grans philosophes qui ayente esté que tu argues contre ton mesmes sexe en ont point determine faulx et au contraire du vray et se ilz reppnent l'un l'autre et reprennent, si comme tu mesmes l'as veu ou livre de la *Methaphisique*, la ou Aristote redargue et reprent leurs oppinions et recite semblablement de Platon et d'autres. Et nottes derechef se saint Augustin et autres docteurs de l'Eglise ont point repris mesmement Aristote en aucines pars, tout soit dit le prince des philosophes et en qui philosophie naturelle et morale fu souverainement. Et il semble que tu cuides que toutes parole des philosophes soient article de foy et que ils ne puissent errer."

⁷⁸ As the publisher S. Solente well puts it (PIZAN, 1936-1940, t. II, p. 15, n.2), Pizan resorts here to the Proem of Thomas Aquinas' *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*. "Secundum igitur tria praedicta, ex quibus perfectio huius scientiae attenditur, sortitur tria nomina. Dicitur enim scientia divina sive theologia, in quantum praedictas substantias considerat. Metaphysica, in quantum considerat ens et ea quae consequuntur ipsum. Haec enim transphusica inveniuntur in via resolutionis, sicut magis communia post minus communia. Dicitur autem prima philosophia, in quantum primas rerum causas considerat" (AQUINO, 1950, p. 1-2).

⁷⁹ PIZAN, 1936-1940, t. II, p. 13-14: "[...] de theologie solvente vouloit ouir, entendoit les poins de la science, en sçavoit parler, sentoit par raison et estude ce que theologie demoustré, laquelle chose est vraye sapience et, à ce propos dirons ce que Aristotele en sa *Methaphisique* et autre part desclaire sus ceste matière. Elle est dicte theologie ou science divine en tant que elle considere les essences ou substances separées ou les divines choses. Elle <est> ditte Methaphisique, c'est à dire oultre nature, de *metha* en grec, qui vault autant à dire comme oultre, et *physis*, qui vault dire nature, en tant que elle considere ens et les choses, qui ensuivent à lui. Elle est dicte premiere philosophie en tant que elle considere les premieres causes des choses. Autressi elle est ditte sapience, et son proper nom en tant que elle est tres generale et fait son possesseur cognoistre toutes choses".



of the preeminence of the University of Paris as the home of knowledge, but also values the shift of the French cultural life to the court, carried out by the translation program. Its most important feature is the shift of the re-signified philosophical discourse to the laic sphere.

Undoubtedly, Pizan's belonging to the humanistic context does not mean a complete identification: her texts were not written in Cicero's Latin and her thought has clear aspects of continuity with the scholastic tradition (such as the relevance of Aristotelianism in her political thought and the presence of metaphysics in the hierarchy of knowledge). Nonetheless, it does not mean an emulation of the Italian antecedents. Taken individually, the contact points between Pizan and the French humanistic movement identified in this article are not sufficient conditions to place Pizan in the center of the humanistic movement, but taken collectively, they enable us to see that Pizan is not an isolated author and that her writings reflect the same intellectual context of Jean Gerson, Jean Montreuil, and Gontier Col.

Through arguments that resort to a variety of rhetorical tools ultimately directed to the moral edification of her readers, Pizan finds a way to legitimize her philosophical discourse. Her motivations for engaging in the debates of her time come from a transforming and emancipatory view of what means to be a philosopher.

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