The Literary Geographies of Christine de Pizan

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Christine de Pizan's wide grasp of history and geography is apparent when one reads her oeuvre. Generally, scholars focus on her devotion to France or to Italy—for example, in her line to Minerva in *Les fais d'armes et de chevallerie* (*The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*): "Je suis comme toy, femme ytalienne" ("I am like you an Italian woman")—but these geographic references are usually thought of as markers of identity. Scholars have sometimes argued, through close reading, for the importance of geography to an understanding of her sources in specific works. In *Le livre du chemin de lonc estude* (*The Book of the Path of Long Study*) Christine demonstrates a knowledge of contemporary travel narratives; among others, those of Jean Mandeville and Guillebert de Lannoy are inspiration for her imaginary voyage (Willard, "Source"). The importance of geography across her whole body of work has not, however, been a scholarly preoccupation. Perhaps the reason we have ignored the complexity of her knowledge and use of geography is that the setting of some of her best-known writing is not always a chronotope (Bakhtin) based on real places but rather imaginative, allegorical space such as in *Le livre de la cité des dames* (*The Book of the City of Ladies*). Other premodern French authors have benefited from being studied from the perspective of geography: for example, ReNom, a project developed by the Bibliothèques Virtuelles Humanistes, has studied the places and people in works of Pierre de Ronsard and François Rabelais. A larger corpus of medieval French literature has been examined from a distant perspective by Visualizing Medieval Places, a project developed by myself and others (vmp.djwrisley.com/). Given the diversity of genres and sources in Christine's corpus, it would be valuable to study the geographies she includes to gain an understanding of the world she knew and evoked in her writing. This essay suggests that researchers, teachers, and students do so by using digital mapping environments.

Mapping the Geographies of a Literary Corpus

Literary geography emerged at the intersection of two interdisciplinary trends, the spatial turn in literary studies and the cultural turn in human geography (Alexander 3–4). The former focuses on the importance of location, landscape, and other spatial notions in imaginative narrative. The latter opens up the creative space of narrative as inspiration for rethinking the descriptive, even scientific, world of human geography. The study of literary geography does not require the use of maps, yet an increasing body of research in the spatial humanities argues for bringing maps back, as a heuristic abstraction, in the

humanities in general and in literary studies in particular. In the early twentieth century, maps constituted a fundamental part of the genre of the literary atlas (Ferré; Bartholomew). The limitations of such printed maps of literary phenomena were many, and in particular their print-bound, static nature opened them up to criticism that they were nationalistic and reduced elements of literature to touristic voyeurism. Maps are not, however, "a one-time thing," nor are they limited to representing the national space of a language; maps are both flexible research objects and platforms that help us portray graphical representations in an interactive and iterative way (Presner et al. 15). A literary geography is an open-ended inquiry into place in a literary corpus, free to be manipulated and remixed with other literary data.

The approach taken in this essay is that of humanities geographic information systems (GIS): it uses dynamic, Web-based environments to create map visualizations of the places mentioned in Christine's writing. The map of these places (www.djwrisley.com/maps/cdep/) does not attempt to think through medieval spatial conceptions, nor does it engage with medieval mapmaking practices (although these would be excellent follow-up projects that might reuse this article's companion dataset). It is worth acknowledging from the outset the gap, and the potential anachronism, created by pushing a distant past into the digital present.

Whereas traditional GIS projects in urban planning or social history might rely on precise spatial data and computational analysis, the mapping techniques suggested here are adjusted for the kind of representation we want to make— coarsely granular, oriented to visual exploration, and tolerant of spatial uncertainty (Wrisley, "Spatial Humanities" 107). The data are multivariate; that is, they contain different kinds of places (medieval and ancient, real and imaginary) as well as different scales (cities, regions, countries, and continents). Gathering the place-names found in Christine's works and creating faceted visualizations (more than one thousand places in a dozen or so works) attempts to draw critical attention to patterns in the geographic data and to allow us to study the use of historical places across her oeuvre.

Making literary geographies opens up new frames of analysis and suggests new readings of Christine based on place. The plural "geographies" in the title of this essay is intentional, asserting that place is not an unchanging object for her. She wrote in many genres and about many topics, and her geographies are, as such, diverse. Just as she uses many different toponymic strata, mapped literature is not to meant to relegate geography to a static technology but rather to open it up to new forms of reflection, using locational aspects of literature and frameworks of dynamic visualization. Maps are not simply flat mirrors of the world but tell multiple "deep" narratives about lived and historical space (Bodenhamer 13). Furthermore, visualizations created in digital environments are useful as companions to traditional prose arguments made about texts.

If mapping is a complex process of "picturing, narrating, symbolizing, contesting, re-picturing, re-narrating, re-symbolizing, erasing and re-inscribing a

set of relations" (Presner et al. 15), the map objects we create must be thought of as "a conversation and not a statement; they are inherently unstable, continually unfolding and changing in response to new data, new perspectives, and new insights" (Bodenhamer et al. 3–4). We might think of mapping locational elements of Christine's writings as an open-ended inquiry, therefore, to be combined with other forms of curation and analysis.

The starting point of our inquiry is a human-curated dataset, a tabularly arranged collection of place-names in Christine's writings, which has been geotagged (associated with geographic coordinates). Geotagging involves certain challenges and assumptions. Coordinates were collected from *GeoNames*, a geographic database, and from *Wikipedia*. A first version of the dataset has been published concurrently with this essay, in the Zenodo research data repository (zenodo.org/record/35350), and readers are invited to reuse it.[1] An accompanying interactive map was created for the purpose of exploring Christine's geographies, but creative, active use of the data is recommended over planned, interactive use of a map. I encourage instructors teaching Christine and medieval literature to have students learn to make a map with the dataset and to reuse the dataset to explore geography and other notions of space in Christine. Digital humanities, after all, values learning through doing, as well as sharing and remixing data.

Christine de Pizan and the (Textual) Digital Humanities

There are other digital resources for exploring Christine (some of which are mentioned in Mark Aussems's essay in this volume). *Christine de Pizan: The Making of the Queen's Manuscript*, a digital project at the University of Edinburgh based on the British Library's Harley 4431 manuscript, is a rich resource for learning firsthand about scribal culture in Christine's day. The project facilitates discovery of the materiality of a medieval presentation manuscript, analysis of text and image in a manuscript context, and even learning how a markup language such as TEI-XML can be used to describe and transcribe a complex textual object. Any of these aspects of scribal culture could be examined in the classroom, even where students are not reading Christine in the original French. The *Christine de Pizan Digital Scriptorium* provides a comprehensive handlist of manuscripts containing Christine's work, access to manuscript images, and a database of proper names. The *Christine de Pizan Database*, an excellent entry point into Christine's language, is a set of lists and concordances of Harley 4431.

An open, digitized manuscript is a strong starting point for digital analysis of Christine's work. However, we are far from having her entire corpus in open, digital format, because Harley 4431 is missing key texts, texts that are some of the most geospecific. Students and researchers can find some of Christine's works digitized from older editions (those in the public domain) in open

repositories such as *Internet Archive* and *Project Gutenberg.* Because her cor-
pus was rediscovered and edited more fully after the 1920s (the current cutoff
for copyrighted material to enter the public domain), it is not fully available for
free, open, digital analysis. To address this gap, scholars could encourage their
graduate students to create open-access digital editions of Christine's works as
thesis topics and their undergraduates to contribute more basic plain-text ver-
sions of editions in the public domain at the Open Medieval French Initiative
(github.com/OpenMedFr).

Christine de Pizan and the Spatial Humanities

Place-name indexes, like proper-name indexes, are one of the important para-
textual elements of traditional critical editions. Such indexes have facilitated the
study of place in traditional literary criticism. How a literary text manipulates
geographic space has piqued the interest of scholars across time. For example,
the absence and presence of the city of Paris in medieval French literature has
been shown to be both a locus and a topos (Planche). Furthermore, topography
and monuments of medieval Paris served as a backdrop for localizing the chan-
sons de geste (Olschki). With electronic texts and basic concordancing software,
we are able to look for patterns in texts without relying on predigital technology
such as the index. Take, for example, a search for "Auvergne" in *Le livre des
fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V* (*The Book of the Deeds and Good
Conduct of the Wise King Charles V*), which reveals a table of occurrences from
chapter 14 about Charles's brother, Louis, the duke of Bourbon. Such software
is designed to allow for different kinds of reading, as readers can move from the
keyword in context (KWIC) view to the larger text with just one click.

A digital map can function as another kind of index of place. But the map
of the places mentioned in Christine's work also allows for spatial recognition
of patterns. Whereas a digital text search returns a set of occurrences of "Au-
vergne" in a table, on a map, place-names from the *Fais et bonnes meurs*—
Aquitaine, Poitou, Picardy, Champagne—appear as clusters. A map does not
explain the appearance of clusters of nearby places, but their proximity to one
another suggests that a closer analysis and interpretation could be valuable.
Clusters of places mentioned in the *Fais et bonnes meurs* covers major areas
of Charles V's realm at a time when the English were claiming vast areas of
France. Geographic mentions in Christine's work thus form part of her political
argument as well.

Patterns beyond Continental France

Christine's geographic scope is large because the oeuvre includes many genres,
such as personal and universal history. In fact, there is no better way to imagine
a global Christine than to consider her through her various literary geographies.

The *Fais et bonnes meurs*, her text with the largest geographic imprint, popu-
lates Aquitaine, northern France, and the Charente area with multiple points.
Other areas well represented in her corpus are the western Maghreb, central
France, Italy, biblical Palestine, the Aegean coast of Asia Minor, the Pelopon-
nese, Attica, and Boeotia. Since absence speaks just as loudly as presence on a
map, we might compare Christine's geographies with a much larger set of me-
dieval French literary geographies (djwrisley.com/maps/VMP). The absences in
Christine's geography appear to be Spain, Britain, Scandinavia, the Holy Ro-
man Empire, central Europe, central Asia, eastern Asia, India, the Balkans, the
Caucauses, and Greece (Epirus, the Cyclades, and Crete). Christine mentions
these places, but the number of such references is much smaller than the norm
in medieval French literature. These geographic presences and absences gener-
ate many questions. Why does Christine turn a blind eye to the Crusader states?
Why are the Punic Wars so interesting to her, while the rise of the Ottomans
seems to have no spatial imprint on her work?

There are some problems with representing places on such a simple map.
First, some places cannot be reduced to a single point (Africa, for example)
but require vectors or even polygons. Other places are unknown—for example,
Lake Allefabter, from *La cité des dames*, or even the mythical Magog or the
mysterious Gouffre Perilleux. These unknown places cannot be represented
on a contemporary map interface, but they should be taken into account when
thinking about the aggregate of Christine's places. A list of Christine's unmap-
pable places thus contains both abstractions and large-scale toponyms. Addi-
tionally, there are seemingly real places that are difficult to map—places that
are unknown or cannot be disambiguated, because either they come from un-
identified geography (often ancient or biblical) or their names are simply too
generic and could correspond to many possible real places.

If we explore the places found in Christine's oeuvre, by manipulating the
larger dataset in a Web-based mapping environment, some of her toponymic
strata—Roman, Greek, biblical, French, and Italian—come into sharp focus.
Geography, it seems, is quite closely linked to the argument of each work. For
this reason, mapping different works together helps us compare the geographic
focus and scope of each. If we compare the place-names found in two works,
La cité des dames and *Le livre de la mutacion de Fortune* (*The Book of the
Mutability of Fortune*), for example, the sweep of historical space is distinct,
though the works share a common perspective of universal history. The *Muta-
cion* extends to India, Persia, and the British Isles and, compared with *La cité
des dames*, which is more focused on France, has much denser coverage of the
Hellenic world, Palestine, and Asia Minor. *L'epistre Othea* (*Othea's Letter to
Hector*), however, highlights a simpler Mediterranean geography (Italy, Greece,
the eastern Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, and Persia). The *Othea* is a mytho-
logical compendium that gave contemporary readers perhaps the most compact
version of ancient mythology available at the time, an observation seemingly
confirmed by its concise geography of antiquity.

Students might consider a map of two works in which Christine expounds her views on the moral conduct of princes and governments, *Fais et bonnes meurs* and *Le livre de paix* (*The Book of Peace*). Although the *Livre de paix* has fewer geographic mentions, the two texts display similar clusters in a kind of geographic echo. After all, in *Paix* Christine is appealing to warring factions to make peace according to a model provided by Charles V. Students could be asked if this is borne out by similar spatial morphologies.

Finally, looking at the corpus of all of Christine's writings while zeroing in on the eastern Mediterranean reveals a clear split: *Le livre du corps de policie* (*The Book of the Body Politic*) clusters in Attica, the Peloponnese, and the Italian peninsula, while *La mutacion de Fortune* clusters along the Aegean coast, in Asia Minor, and Palestine. These two works seem to cleave the Greco-Roman Mediterranean in two.

Putting Christine on the Map: Affordances and Limitations

The visual corpus analysis of Christine (djwrisley.com/maps/cdep) stems from a dataset that was built manually of the place-names found in Christine's writings (zenodo.org/record/35350). Advanced digital humanities projects build datasets by automatic extraction of names, which is an imperfect process. The orthographic variance of medieval language troubles accuracy further. The companion dataset for this essay was assembled with some semiautomatic extraction but began with the proper-name indexes of editions of Christine's works; the places mentioned were meticulously matched (that is, geotagged) with information contained in gazetteers. This method of building the database of place-names is admittedly not without its flaws. Place-names and personal names are often indistinguishable: "Bourgogne," whether used alone or in the name "duc de Bourgogne," appears as a glyph on the map of Burgundy. What is more, different editors apply different criteria in preparing indexes. The Middle French edition of *La mutacion de Fortune* edited by Suzanne Solente gives the following entry in its index of place-names: "[Bénévent] (Italie méridionale). *Pyrrhus y fut vaincu par les Romains* (275 av. J.-C.) 19312–19314" (4: 116). Yet the word *Benevento* never occurs in the text; Solente deduced this location from narrative cues. Something similar occurs in Maureen Churney Curnow's dissertation, an edition of *La cité des dames*. This phenomemon is less a shortcoming of an edition, however, and more an illustration of Christine's use of setting, which may be evoked through mythographic intertextuality rather than mentioned by name.

These caveats call for cautious interpretation of map visualizations and indeed of data extracted from literary sources. The real place-names mentioned in a work of literature have a multidimensional quality, and when they appear out of context or extracted in a tabular dataset, they lose that multidimensionality. Places evoked in literature can point to patronage, locality, source citation, and even political or social history (Wrisley, "Locating"). It is in visualizing the

aggregate of data, noticing patterns, and then returning to the text that we are able to analyze more fully the importance of place. Distant views of literary phenomena eventually lead us back to close reading, but initially they step away from the linear (or semilinear) reading of traditional criticism.

Putting Christine on the digital map responds to many instructors' shared pedagogical values: for one, it inspires students to engage critically with significant cultural texts using innovative forms of technology. Engagement through extraction of data and abstraction might best be seen as a form of critical "deformance" (McGann and Samuels), in which students break apart texts in order to revisualize them along conceptual and technological lines. Such critical thinking is concept-based, iterative, hypothesis-driven, and bold. Close readings allow us to be as precise as we want to be—discussing material or political context, comparing a text with others in the same genre, engaging with theoretical perspectives. Distant readings take one aspect of the text and abstract it, collecting many examples across a large corpus. Such a practice may sacrifice detail for distance and some degree of accuracy for scale. Close and distant readings produce different kinds of conclusions.

Changing Notions of Student Work and Class Time

The methodology presented here of visualizing the companion dataset uses low-entry, interactive techniques common in the digital humanities, such as mapping; these can foster student-centered, exploratory learning in the literature classroom. Putting the means of creating abstract visualizations in the hands of instructors and learners leads to new ways of thinking about and seeing literature. Such exploration, using maps and layered toponymy from different periods of human history, has the salutary effect of reinforcing student knowledge of history and geography while affording the opportunity for hands-on work.

These pedagogical practices are inspired by larger-scale research in the digital humanities, but they do not require elaborate or expensive investments in technology. (The distant reading of place suggested here requires only simple spreadsheets and either free downloadable software or Web-based platforms.) They provide a chance for students to incorporate visual forms of argumentation into their course work. Not least, they encourage students to gain digital skills and literacies through the study of humanistic material, skills and literacies that, in tandem with close reading, are transferable to other contexts.

My strategy for finding time for such student-centered experimentation with digital tools in the literature classroom is to set up a portion of the class meeting time as a literary lab session, perhaps every second week. In lab sessions, students explore and play with texts, and the instructor and perhaps some more advanced students help them learn the tools. I encourage students to compose visual essays, in which they embed the exported visuals (screenshots or live, embedded maps in their blogs) of their map deformance into academic prose. Like citation

from primary texts, such visuals enhance and drive forward the argument at hand. These new visual rhetorics are challenging and exciting yet demand new rubrics through which we can assess their use by students as evidence.

Although a literary dataset can always be improved by additions and corrections and attributions of place can be refined, we can begin to expand our experiments with the data, reusing and building on them. Some day the geographic dataset on Christine de Pizan might be combined with the linguistic data created by, for example, *The Making of the Queen's Manuscript.* Students could build a similar dataset for purposes of comparison with contemporary authors (Guillaume de Machaut, Eustache Deschamps, Jean Froissart, Jean Gerson, or writers from the Burgundian court) or with subsequent translations of Christine's works, such as that by the sixteenth-century author Brian Anslay, published by Henry Pepwell: the first approach would allow different authorial geographies to be compared; the second would show how rewriting and translation change such geographies. More advanced students could take the data gathered from critical editions to study the question of how (or if) geographies shift with manuscript variance. Using the model of the University of Virginia course On Haj with Ibn Jubayr: Reconstructing the Twelfth-Century Mediterranean, in which students remix the contents of the famous medieval Arabic travel narrative with historical materials in a multimodal environment, students could take the data of one or more of the Christine works provided in my dataset to do an in-depth visual and textual (or sonic, textural, emotional?) exploration of a subset of her literary places. Students could create digital literary exhibits on Holy Land places Christine mentions, the monuments of Paris she cites, her Mediterranean mythological sites, or even digital storytelling of the imaginary voyage in *Le chemin de lonc estude.* Given the preponderance of castles and strongholds in the dataset (all tagged as "landmark"), a larger project could map Christine's oeuvre against key places in the Hundred Years War.

Map visualizations are aesthetic and critical provocations for discussing literature; they place productive pressure on standard academic prose interpretations of literary work, generating new avenues of engagement and iterative discovery of texts along nonlinear trajectories, with a strong visual element. They also encourage both comparison and historicism, inviting creative weaving of text and interpretation in a larger frame of geographic reference.

NOTE

[1] The dataset carries a Creative Commons CC0 license that places it "as completely as possible in the public domain, so that others may freely build upon, enhance and reuse the works for any purposes without restriction under copyright or database law" ("About CC0"). It is easily downloadable and can be visualized in one of the numerous Web-based mapping environments available to the general public.

Approaches to Teaching the Works of Christine de Pizan

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