

WAS DROUART LA VACHE,
AUTHOR OF THE *LIVRE D'AMOUR* (1290),
« LE ROI DE SOISSONS »?

This article builds on Gabriele Giannini's superb demonstration of a « centre de production » in the former diocese of Soissons responsible for vernacular manuscripts in the final third of the thirteenth century¹. G. Giannini shows that three manuscripts, Paris, BnF, fr. 24431, Paris, Arsenal, 3114, and Paris, Arsenal, 3122, were once part of the same codex before it was split up in the eighteenth century. Arsenal 3122 contains the sole surviving copy of the so-called *Livre d'amour*, a verse adaptation of Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore* dated to 1290 and authored by Drouart la Vache. In what follows, I will put forward a hypothesis identifying this elusive poet that connects him to civic life in Soissons. Most scholarly discussions of the *Livre* have been limited to interpretative endeavors, focusing on the manner in which Drouart responds to his source text's ideological challenges. Interest has thus fallen either on *De Amore* and what Drouart's reading implies about its reception, or on the broader dynamics of vernacular adaptation. My intention, however, is to consider how the *Livre* might relate to the urban literary community in Soissons, where I suggest Drouart lived and worked. This hypothesis relies on references to a « Drouart le roi de Soissons » found in a cartulary dated to the turn of the fourteenth century. The title of *roi* was conferred on the winner of a poetic competition known as, and/or organized by a literary society known as, a *pu*y. Although no other evidence of a Soissons *pu*y survives, I explore what shape this might have taken and therefore reassess the possible intended readership of the *Livre*.

A further aim of this article is to discuss the relationship between manuscript transmission, modes of urban lay-clerical sociability, and the institution of the *pu*y. In the late thirteenth century, the towns of northern France were dynamic spaces of social transformation, religious practice, and cultural production. Arras is perhaps the most famous and well-documented case, and the number of literary works ascribable to this locale

1. Gabriele Giannini, « L'Arsenal 3114 et la production de manuscrits en langue vernaculaire dans l'ancien diocèse de Soissons (1260-1300 environ) », in *Les Centres de production des manuscrits vernaculaires au Moyen Âge*, ed. Gabriele Giannini and Francis Gingras, Paris, 2015, p. 89-138.

Romania, t. 142, 2024, p. 365 à 382.

reflects a creative hub where texts and performances were fully imbricated into the social and political life of the town². People and texts travelled frequently within mercantile and devotional networks that spanned the places populating *fabliaux* and miracle stories, such as Abbeville, Amiens, Calais, Cambrai, Compiègne, Douai, Mons, St. Omer, and Tournai³. Much of the poetic corpus of Old French arises from this area in the thirteenth century and survives in manuscripts from the second half of that century. The famous *recueil* – “miscellany” or “multi-text manuscript” – Paris, BnF, fr. 837, for instance, collects an extraordinary amount of material that affords a glimpse of – without being able to fully capture – the lively culture of public performance in Arras around 1278⁴. When put to writing, however, much of this performance culture fossilizes and its connection to urban life becomes harder to retrieve. As Olivier Collet has noted in his discussion of Paris, BnF, fr. 25566 and the modern scholarly preoccupation with Arras, there often exists a *décalage*, both temporal and cultural, between the manuscript and the performances it ostensibly “records⁵”. Such *recueils* are simultaneously literary artefacts in their own right and tools for the reconstruction of social practices upon which this kind of literature depends.

One upshot of this situation, as O. Collet points out, is that better-known locales tend to draw indeterminate evidence into their orbit. The more we localize manuscripts and texts to Arras, the more plausible or alluring it becomes as a site of localization. Its fame, both medieval and modern, precedes it. Yet, there are relatively few thirteenth-century vernacular texts and manuscripts that can be definitively ascribed to a time and a place. An interesting example to consider are the so-called *Fatrasies d'Arras*, a type of nonsense poem defined by its meter (11 verses divided into two tercets of 5 syllables and a quintet of 7 syllables) and rhyme scheme (*aab aab babab*). Intertextual references in the *Fatrasies d'Arras* suggest a date of

2. Carol Symes, *A Common Stage: Theater and Public Life in Medieval Arras*, Ithaca, 2007. On medieval literature and towns, see Ursula Peters, *Literatur in der Stadt: Studien zu den sozialen Voraussetzungen und kulturellen Organisationsformen städtischer Literatur im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert*, Tübingen, 1983.

3. See Francis Gingras, «D'autres genres de vilain: Jean Bodel, le roman et la ville», in *Synergies*, t. 2 (2007), p. 97-114.

4. 1278 is the year of Pierre de la Broce's execution, which is thematized in some of BnF, fr. 837's texts. On the manuscript, see Sylvie Lefèvre, «Le recueil et l'œuvre unique. Mobilité et figement», in *Mouvances et Jointures. Du manuscrit au texte médiéval*, ed. Milena Mikhailova, Orléans, 2005, p. 203-228; Olivier Collet, «“Encore pert il bien aus tés quels li pos fu” (*Le Jeu d'Adam*, v. 11): le manuscrit BnF, fr. 837 et le laboratoire poétique du XIII^e siècle», in *Mouvances, op. cit.*, Orléans, 2005, p. 173-201.

5. Olivier Collet, «Le Recueil BnF, fr. 25566 ou le trompe-l'œil de la vie littéraire arrageoise au XIII^e siècle», in *Les Centres, op. cit.*, Paris, 2015, p. 59-87, p. 70: «L'heure de gloire est passée et le recueil [fr. 25566] se présente déjà comme une sorte de monument d'un renom littéraire en train de s'éteindre.»

creation in the second half of the thirteenth century⁶. Questions remain about their method of composition and their enigmatic obsession with the number eleven (the *Fatrasies d'Arras* count 55 poems, and the *Fatrasies* attributed to Philippe de Rémi père count 117). The *Fatrasies d'Arras* survive only in Arsenal 3114 (f. 7v-11r), a manuscript that has been localized convincingly by G. Giannini to the former diocese of Soissons⁸. The ambiguous epithet « d'Arras » is recorded in the explicit but not the incipit. Were these *Fatrasies* “composed” in Arras and then copied in or near Soissons? If so, what was this vector of transmission? Did they follow the same path as Jean Bodel's *Congés d'Arras* (c. 1202), found in the same manuscript (f. 1r-3r)? Or were the *Fatrasies* simply associated with the poetic practices and experimental forms of this prestigious literary milieu?

These questions underline a well-known epistemological problem inherent to the manuscript evidence, namely the *décalage* between composition and copying, and between oral and written forms of literature. This article takes a new hypothesis concerning Drouart la Vache's *Livre d'amour* and G. Giannini's work on the origins of its material witness in order to restate the case that the *puy* was a pertinent context for practices of both literary composition and *mise en recueil* in the late thirteenth century.

The *Livre d'amour* was completed – according to the text itself – on 8 November 1290 by a poet who names himself « Drouart la Vache » in an acrostic riddle⁹. The *Livre*, written in 7,640 lines of rhyming octosyllabic couplets, has informed our understanding of the later reception of Andreas's text¹⁰. Critics have not always been kind. In his 1926 edition, Robert Bossuat concludes that Drouart, albeit a competent versifier,

6. *Rêveries, fatrasies, fatras 'entés'. Poèmes 'nonsensiques' des XIII^e et XIV^e siècles*, ed. Patrice Uhl, Louvain-Paris-Walpole, 2012, p. 13-14. For a dating to the end of the thirteenth or start of the fourteenth century, see *Poésies du non-sens, XIII^e-XIV^e-XVI^e siècles*. I. *Fatrasies (Fatrasies de Beaumanoir, Fatrasies d'Arras)*, ed. Martijn Rus, Orléans, 2005, p. 108-110.

7. Paris, BnF, fr. 1588, f. 109v-110v. Were they poetic games, where one poet would provide the rhymes and others would create the links between them? On this question, see Paul Zumthor, « Fatrasie, fatrassiers », in *Langue, texte, énigme*, Paris, 1975, p. 68-88, p. 80, and *id.*, « Fatrasie et coq-à-l'âne (De Beaumanoir à Clément Marot) », in *Fin du Moyen Âge et Renaissance. Mélanges de philologie française offerts à Robert Guiette*, Anvers, 1961, p. 5-18. M. Rus, *Poésies, op. cit.*, suggests that it was a collective undertaking with five authors responsible for a set of eleven strophes each.

8. G. Giannini, « L'Arsenal 3114 », art. cit. Cf. P. Uhl, *Rêveries, op. cit.*, p. 369: « La provenance [du manuscrit] est très vraisemblablement arrageoise »; Keith Busby, *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript*, 2 vol., Turnhout, 2002, t. 2, p. 704: « Despite its evident Artesian contents and possible origins, this short manuscript is linked very firmly to the Paris-Reims axis and western Champagne. »

9. *Li Livres d'Amours de Drouart la Vache*, ed. Robert Bossuat, Paris, 1926. Subsequent references are given in parentheses.

10. See Alfred Karnein, « La Réception du *De Amore* d'André le Chapelain au XIII^e siècle », in *Romania*, t. 102 (1981), p. 324-351, p. 501-542.