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USING AN EXAMPLE: DENIS SAUVAGE, PHILIPPE DE COMMYNES AND
THE 'VIEIL EXEMPLAIRE'

Catherine Emerson

Abstract

Philippe de Comynnes was part of a community of writers in the fifteenth century who referred to their work as *Mémoires*, but readers did not recognize this as a generic marker and first editions of his work were published as *Chroniques*. This article examines the editing strategies of Denis Sauvage, the first editor to use the title *Mémoires*, and his references to an unidentified manuscript. For Sauvage and his publisher, Galliot Du Pré, the manuscript has intellectual and financial value, justifying the granting of a new royal privilege for exclusive publication. However, in many cases, the base text remains the text as originally published, with references to the manuscript serving to draw attention to the skill of the editor's craft. Similar approaches can be identified in modern editions of medieval histories.

With remarkably few exceptions the descent of any given text through the printed editions is in a single line and each editor is found to base his work on that of his (usually though not invariably) immediate predecessor. For each author the base text, the *lectio recepta* — the text *tout court* — is the printed text; this is now the uniquely stable point of reference.¹

Edward Kenney makes this observation about sixteenth-century editions of classical texts, but it is also true of editions of medieval texts produced in the same period. It is true even when those editions look like modern critical editions, referring to manuscript sources. Recognition of this fact is crucial if we are to understand the way that the canonical texts of late medieval historiography have been transmitted. Moreover, although modern scholars may find fault with the attitudes adopted by editors in the first century of printing, we

¹ Kenney (1974: 18-19).

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should recognize that today's approaches present many parallels with those of earlier editors. The way that we read works of medieval historiography has been shaped by early readers of those texts, in some cases crucially so, since it is those readers, working as editors, who have fixed the structure of the text, for instance its division into paragraphs, chapters and books and who have in many cases established the base text to be edited.

The example of Denis Sauvage's treatment of Philippe de Commines is particularly instructive in this regard, demonstrating both the extent of editorial intervention and its constraints. On the one hand, Sauvage could be said to have created Commines's text in its modern form, overturning previous conventions that named it as a Chronicle, in favour of its modern designation of *Mémoires*. On the other hand, however, his edition remains strongly influenced by the earlier print tradition that he seems to reject. Sauvage's intervention is significant because it reminds us that the Medieval Chronicle is not just the chronicle as written in the Middle Ages, it is also what the chronicle becomes in subsequent years.

From a modern perspective, the fact that Philippe de Commines's writing might be considered as *mémoires* could be seen as self-evident: the author, who chronicles the French court in the late fifteenth century, was a member of the inner circle of that court, and of other courts during his lifetime. An intimate servant of the last Valois duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, he intervened with his master in favour of Louis XI and later left the service of Charles to enter that of Louis, where he became a leading diplomat and counsellor. Having served in diplomatic service in Italy during a turbulent period politically, he returned to the court where he was witness to the French king's declining years. Following this, he was associated with the *Guerre folle*, against the regency of Anne de Beaujeu, for which he was imprisoned, for periods on display in an iron cage. He later returned to the diplomatic service of Charles VIII and to the Italian diplomatic arena, amidst lengthy legal battles to try to retain the lands that Louis XI had disinherited him of on his deathbed.² The fact that Commines writes about the events that he himself experienced qualifies him as a memorialist to a modern readership. However, fifteenth-century readers did not recognize *mémoires* as a recognized historical genre. An emerging community

² For a recent retelling of Commines's career, see Kleiman (2013).

of writers were beginning to use the term. Commynes was one of the very first to use the term, alongside Olivier de La Marche, Jean Lefèvre de Saint-Rémy and Jean de Roye,³ but they used it in a way that differs markedly from our horizon of expectation.⁴ Now we might assume that the generic label refers to the increased prominence of personal recollection in a history and indeed this is a trend that can be identified in the later Middle Ages. Jean Froissart, for example, places a great deal of stress on eyewitness testimony in composing his *Chroniques*. Nevertheless, he considered his work as a *Chronique* and this is how it has been presented to subsequent generations of readers in printed editions. The first generation of memorialists had a slightly different understanding of the generic term. For them, *mémoires* were *memoranda*, notes which could serve in the composition of an official history. *Mémoires* were distinguished from *chroniques* by the fact that they were a private initiative, rather than a history commissioned by a patron. 'Il n'est permis à personne composer chronique s'il n'y a esté ordonné et député' (No one is allowed to compose a chronicle unless he has been ordered and commissioned to do so), writes Alain Bouchard,⁵ drawing attention to the fact that he was writing to order. *Mémoires*, by contrast, were intended to feed into a larger historiographical project, or at least this is how their authors presented them, as raw material for a later chronicler. By modern standards, these authors talk surprisingly little about their own involvement in the events which they describe, because for them, personal memory was not the defining characteristic of the genre. Commynes, for example, gives very little information about why he decided to pass from the service of Charles to that of Louis, leaving a space for speculation which has continued ever since. Early *mémoires* are discreet in their use of the generic terminology and differ little if at all in their treatment of their subject matter from chronicles of the period. As a result, it is not surprising that, because of the novelty of the terminology, publishers were reluctant to acknowledge an unfamiliar generic term. Early editions of Commynes's work were published not as *mémoires* but as, for example, *Chronique & histoire*, *Croniques du roi Charles huictiesme*, *Res gestis Lodovic ...*, that is, as the life of a

³ Emerson (2004: 33-40).

⁴ Jauss (1970).

⁵ Bouchard (1986: I, 7).

monarch or the chronicle of his reign.⁶ When Denis Sauvage, a translator into French from Latin and Italian, and editor of historical works, decided that his 1552 edition would use the generic label that Commynes himself had applied, it was a departure from previous readings that had classified the work in line with established medieval historiographical genres.

There is no doubt that Sauvage's editorial choice has been influential. Pierre Nora, the French historian of memory, cites Commynes as the founder of the genre of the political *mémoire*, which was inordinately popular in France in the nineteenth century, to the extent that it was considered a distinctly French national form of writing.⁷ This is partly due to the success of Commynes as an author: Joël Blanchard, Commynes's most recent editor, lists twenty-two editions between the first in 1524 and the end of the seventeenth century and there were multiple translations into Latin, German, Italian and Spanish in the same period.⁸ However, none of the editions and translations which had been published before Sauvage's were given the title of *mémoires*. Following Sauvage's edition, this title becomes common and had become the standard title for the work by 1600.

In this context, Sauvage's edition makes a number of claims – explicitly and implicitly – to authority, to justify the changes that he has made, and the fact that he is editing a text which has already been published at least five times and has been translated into Italian and Latin. Indeed, even more explanation is needed in this context, since Sauvage was working for a bookseller, Galliot du Pré, who had been responsible for the first edition in 1524.⁹ Both editor and publisher, therefore, had to justify their re-engagement with Commynes's text. The way that Du Pré in particular did this can be seen in the terms in which he obtained his royal privilege. This document, printed at the start of Sauvage's 1552 edition, gives the bookseller the exclusive right to print, publish and distribute Commynes's *Mémoires* for a period of six years. This is longer than the three-year term which was granted to Du Pré for his first edition of the same work. The

⁶ For a selected list of titles of editions prior to 1552, as listed in the Universal Short Title Catalogue, see the bibliography of primary sources accompanying this article.

⁷ Nora (1986: 355): 'un genre qui remonte à Commynes'.

⁸ Blanchard (2007: I, xxxviii–lii).

⁹ Commynes (1524a).

regranting of the privilege to the same bookseller for the same text, for a longer period, is justified with reference to Du Pré's financial outlay, spent on obtaining a manuscript copy, based on the original by Philippe de Commines himself, and on the paper and editorial work inherent in preparing the manuscript for publication.¹⁰ The editorial work – the contribution of Denis Sauvage – is broken down into two categories. Firstly, there is the correction of the text and secondly there is the division of the text into books and chapters. On this basis, the bookseller is able to get a fresh privilege, because he has produced a new reading of the book, from new sources. Accordingly, the visual presentation of the edition stresses its modernity and innovation: rather than the gothic blackletter of Du Pré's earlier edition, the 1552 edition was produced in a humanist typeface. The margins of the pages were filled with Sauvage's editorial notes, where those of the first edition had been bare. All in all, the edition is designed to give the impression of an erudite Renaissance appreciation of a medieval chronicle, so much so that one commentator has referred to Sauvage as the creator of the 'first critical edition' of Commines.¹¹

It is important not to forget this financial context of Sauvage's edition when considering the way that he approaches the task of editing Commines's *Mémoires*. It was in Sauvage's interest – as well as that of his printer – to make this new edition look as modern and as distinct as possible. Throughout his editorial notes, until the last two books, which his manuscript does not contain, Sauvage draws his readers' attention to variant readings contained in the manuscript, which he calls the *vieil exemplaire*, or 'old example'. He does this in part because he believes that it is closest to the author's original, saying that there is a handwritten note on the first page to this effect. There is an intellectual advantage in his eyes in returning to the

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¹⁰ Commines (1552), Privilege : ... il a, à grands frais, recouvert une Copie, escripte sur l'original de feu messire Philippe de Commines, ..., lesquelles Histoires, ledict du Pré auroit fait corriger & et divider par livres & et chapitres, ce qu'il feroit volontiers imprimer, mais il doute qu'après les frais, qu'il conviendra faire, tant pour le papier, que pour la correction & et l'impression desdictes Histoires, autres Libraires les voulsissent faire imprimer sus ses Copies & et corrections, & par ce moyen le frustrer de ses labeurs & et impenses'. In this quotation and the following ones ²² abbreviations have been expanded and spellings modified to clarify the distinction between *u* and *v*. Where necessary, the distinction between *i* and *j* will also be clarified.

¹¹ Dufournet (2001: 161) : 'la première édition critique'.

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author's text, or as close to it as possible: in his dedication to Henri II, he criticizes other printed editions for having corrupted the author's original words and says that Commynes has been better served by his translators than he has been by his native editors.¹² A manuscript source that is closer to Commynes, then, allows Sauvage potentially to correct erroneous readings. The value attached to this manuscript is not purely intellectual. It is true that it supplies additional clues to authorial intent. However, it also adds monetary value to the edition because its use justifies the issuing of a fresh privilege to the bookseller and therefore contributes to the commercial viability and potential success of the edition. Mentions of the manuscript, therefore, are not simply editorial interventions guaranteeing the purity of the text, they also rhetorical devices to draw attention to the editor's work and the value of his product.

We also need to be careful when we consider the antiquity of Sauvage's manuscript. Although he says that his source manuscript contained a note indicating that it was copied from Commynes's original, no surviving manuscript bears such an indication. And no surviving manuscript contains all the variants that Sauvage signals in his edition, with the result that most commentators have regarded Sauvage's 'old example' as a lost witness to the text.¹³ The authority that Sauvage, and his bookseller Galliot du Pré, attach to this manuscript is somewhat illusory, because it is clearly not the first manuscript used to prepare the text. The first edition – Galliot's first edition – must have come from a manuscript source. The fact that the two men place such a premium on the contribution of the manuscript suggests that their new text is probably not based on the same manuscript and the implication must be therefore that the new source is somehow superior. However, in the absence of any other evidence, we do not need to accept that the 'old example' is any more authoritative than any other text of Commynes's *Mémoires*. What is important is that Sauvage seems to suggest that it is (although he is not consistent on this point) and exploits this elusive lost manuscript as a corrective to other print readings.

¹² Sauvage describes the text as 'tant corrompu qu'il estoit, au grand deshonneur de nous autres envers les estrangers : qui depuis quelque temps, l'ont mieux eu en Latin & ~~et~~ vulgaire Italien, qu'en son propre naturel.' [[Ref. to source ?](#)] (Commynes, 1552: 'Au Treschrestien Roy Henry, Second de ce nom').

¹³ Blanchard (2007: I, liv-lv).

Sauvage's engagement with Commynes's text did not end with his production of the 1552 edition. He subsequently produced another edition for Jan de Tournes in his adopted town of Lyon, seven years later.¹⁴ This was, the title announced, a 'second revised edition', very similar in many respects, but without the emphasis on the use of the manuscript source on the title page. Although there are minor revisions, especially in the marginal notes, extremely few of them concern manuscript readings. In one case in the 1559 edition, Sauvage comments that where his text has Jean Tiercelin, Seigneur de la Brosse, his manuscript reads Jean Tiercelin, Seigneur de Brosse.¹⁵ Again, he notes that the text he is editing has Desmeriez and while the 'old example' reads 'De Meries'.¹⁶ Neither note is present in the 1552 edition, but, aside from these two observations, his account of the content of the manuscript is identical in his two editions, so much so that it seems likely that he did not consult the manuscript afresh in the preparation of his new edition. Indeed, how could he have gone back to the manuscript if he was now in Lyon, while the costly manuscript remained in Paris with Galliot Du Pré?

Where the 1559 edition does differ substantially from that of 1552, however, is in the way that Sauvage reflects on the meaning of the manuscript text, and on its relevance to the text as a whole. This edition has many more instances of marginal notes where the editor's comments have been added to a simple record of a variant, arguing that one reading is preferable or not to others presented. Sometimes these comments represent mature reflections on options already presented in the earlier edition. For instance, in the 1552 edition a marginal note comments on the text 'Le Prince de Galles (dont j'ay parlé) à l'heure de ceste bataille estoit ja descendu en Angleterre: ~~& et~~ estoient jonctz avec luy les Ducz de *Clocestre ~~& et~~ de Sombresset, ~~& et~~ plusieurs de sa lignee' (The Prince of Wales, whom I have mentioned, had already entered England at the time of this battle, and had joined the dukes of *Gloucester and Somerset and others of his family).¹⁷ Sauvage usually signals his annotations with a preceding asterisk, so the text commented on here is 'Clocestre', and the note reads '*Le vieil Exē. a encor en ce lieu d'Excestre: ~~et~~, à la verité

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¹⁴ Commynes, 1559. For further information on Sauvage's career, see Bratu (2010).

¹⁵ Commynes, 1559: 89.

¹⁶ Commynes, 1559: 109.

¹⁷ Commynes: 1552: fol. Fxlviij recto.

j'aymeroye mieulx lire par tout cy deuant d'Excestre ('The Old Exem. has again in this place 'of Exeter', and, if truth be told, I would rather read 'of Exeter', throughout up to this point'). The same note appears in the 1559 edition, with the words '*ou de Cestre*' added.¹⁸ Here Sauvage is acknowledging that the text – and this is Kenney's *lectio recepta*, the base text inherited from the most recent printed edition – presents one reading, but the manuscript presents another, which he tends to prefer. In 1559 he returns to this judgement and suggests a third possibility, which is similar to both readings and which is also plausible, although only if considered an alternative orthography for *Excestre*, as the Earl of *Chester* in the late fourteenth century was not a separate individual but an alternative title of the Prince of Wales. Alongside this sort of revisitation of the editor's decisions, the 1559 edition also contains a considerable number of spontaneous corrections, where Sauvage identifies passages which he considers erroneous or difficult, and where he suggests a resolution of the problem in a marginal note. Where this occurs, Sauvage does not draw attention to the fact that he has revisited his initial editorial decisions. His second edition does not indicate to readers the way in which it differs from the first. However, when the two editions are read against each other, it seems that the editor approaches his second edition with a greater familiarity with the text, allowing him to feel more confident in his modifications.

When the two editions are compared, however, a surprising feature ~~that~~ emerges: it seems that Sauvage is not especially particular when it comes to issues of orthography, despite his interventions to correct obscure proper names and to note the absence or presence of a noble particle in a name. For instance, in the text cited above, *jonctz* and *ducz* appear with final *z* in the 1552 edition and final *s* in 1559. We might be tempted to attribute this to a change in the way that Sauvage sees or chooses to render scribal features in his medieval text, but the pattern is repeated in other instances where no confusion is possible. *Anglois* might be written with an *i* in one edition and a *y* in the other, even when they are referring to the same reading in the manuscript. *Doubter*, to doubt or to fear, appears with or without a *b*. The overall conclusion can only be that Sauvage, who was passionately interested in questions of orthography and punctuation, as befitted a Renaissance editor and partisan of French language

¹⁸ Commynes, 1559: 72.

Commented [E2]: I have reversed italics and roman here. And shouldn't you indicate that the italics were added by you? The same for the next quotation. CE No, because the italics are not added by me, they are the editor's own typography. His notes are in italics and he emphasises the words he wishes to emphasise with straight Roman type. I've reversed again, but you can change back if you'd rather.

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reform, was not especially concerned by orthographical variation where it did not make a material difference to the meaning of a word. In his preface to readers, which appears at the beginning of both editions, Sauvage declares that he has left the medieval language more or less as it is until he has formulated his response on the matter to his colleague and friend Jacques Pelletier. He further says that he did not want to signal in marginal notes the points where medieval spelling or grammar differ from the norms of sixteenth-century France, nor to change the text too much, but that this was a difficult balancing act since he did not want his text to be too archaizing, but neither did he want the antiquity of the text to be disrespected. He suggests that he has kept editorial intervention to a minimum, changing as little as possible, and explaining only that which will be obscure to modern readers. However, his actual practice differs quite considerably from what he says he is doing, because he treats proper nouns differently from other words. Proper nouns are subjected to much more rigorous standards of orthographical consistency than other words are, and Sauvage does not tell his reader that this is his approach. Thus, a note on page 70 of the 1559 edition draws attention to variant spellings of a toponym: 'Grauelines *par tout Exemplaire vieil. les [Les ?] autres Grauelignes et Grauelignes*'. In this case, the place in question is not in doubt (although sometimes variant spellings can suggest actual differences in places), but the marginal notes suggest that the proper spelling of it is very important to the editor. It is therefore surprising to learn that he can render a manuscript reading with an *i* as if it had a *y* and not seem to appreciate that there is a difference.

It should be observed that Sauvage's text at this point does not follow his manuscript reading, but instead spells *Gravelines* with a *g*. This is contrary to what we might predict, given Sauvage and Du Pré's emphasis on the importance of the manuscript, but it is what Kenney's analysis would lead us to expect. It is important to recognize that even though the elusive old example is of monetary worth to Du Pré and his editor, and of scientific value to Sauvage as a potential source of alternative readings, it is not Sauvage's base text. Denis Sauvage is not doing what a modern editor would do and editing a chosen manuscript. Nor is he producing a corrected text based on the common readings of all the available manuscripts, nor even of all the available printed editions. Instead, his *lectio recepta* is the 1524 Galliot Du Pré edition, with all the modifications that that editor brought to Commynes's text. As Sauvage, himself says, subsequent

Commented [N3]: No. I think Sauvage or the printer has got into the habit of putting a point after *vieil* even though it isn't the end of the note here. The *les* is lower case.

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printed editions of the work until his own made very few alterations to the 1524 text: ‘ils ont pris les uns sur les autres, avec peu, ou nul, égard de s’entre-corriger’ (Advertissement aux lecteurs: ‘They borrowed one from the other with little or no concern to correct each other’). The 1524 edition had, however, not contained the final two books of the work, which had been published separately in 1529 by Enguilbert de Marnef, and this is Sauvage’s base edition for this portion of the text. One of the criticisms that Sauvage makes of these printed editions is that they can be counted as a single edition really, because they are all copied one from the other without any effort at critical reflection or correction. He does not, however, consider the implications for his own methodology. An idiosyncratic reading from 1524 is given the weight of authority by virtue of its appearing in all the print witnesses that he consults. Rarely in such instances does he restore the manuscript reading. One occasion where he does occurs on page 17 of the 1559 edition, when he notes that the text accuses the Duke of Lancaster of having murdered the sons of Edward IV, whereas ‘*le vieil à la main dit Clocestre: comme veut aussi Pol. Vergile et tous bons Historiographes*’ (‘the old handwritten copy says *Clocestre*: as is also Polydore Vergil’s reading and that of all good historians’). The decision, as Sauvage points out, reflects historical plausibility – indeed, there was no Duke of Lancaster at the time – but it appears to have been made on the basis of extra-textual evidence. Because Sauvage has referred to only one manuscript, he appears unaware of the fact that his emendation has restored a reading that is universal in the manuscript tradition. Although he claims that his manuscript has a greater weight than any other source, because it is supposedly closer to Commynes, he does not usually prefer manuscript readings in his text, especially when they are contradicted by all the printed editions that he uses. In such cases he tends to choose to bow to the weight of the print tradition.

The vocabulary that Sauvage uses to talk about his sources goes some of the way to explaining why this should have occurred. Printed versions of the *Mémoires*, like the manuscript, are *exemplaires*, examples. They bear witness to the text at a particular time, and, although Sauvage realizes that they are interrelated and influence each other, he seems to see his role as being to correct the established – that is to say the printed – text with reference to the old example that he has identified. Again, because he has examined only one manuscript, he has only a very little idea of the extent to which it is unique. He

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notes that there are reader's marks on the manuscript, and speculates that a 'prereader' may have prepared the text for publication, describing the manuscript as 'estant d'avantage preveu, pour le mettre sur la presse, (ainsi qu'il m'appert par les marques de certaines histoires ou figures, &—et par plusieurs autres raisons) par uñ prelecteur de mesme, sans aucune punctuation, sinon quelquefois devant les grandes lettres, que les Imprimeurs nomment Capitales & Versales' (Advertissement aux lecteurs: 'being further intended to go to press (as it seems to me from the marks of certain inscriptions and symbols, and for many other reasons) by a prereader of the same copy, without any punctuation except occasionally in front of the big letters which printers call capitals and initials'). He comments that these marks have not helped him in the slightest, that the prereader has crossed out passages which were illegible or incomprehensible to him, but which a reader with more experience of French history (Sauvage implies, like himself) might have been able to understand. He therefore signals carefully in his marginal notes where his manuscript presented erasures, and this has been very valuable to subsequent scholars, who have recognized this manuscript as being at an intermediary stage between the majority manuscript tradition and a manuscript currently owned by the Musée Dobrée in Nantes (ms 18, hereafter **D**) where the passages crossed out in Sauvage's source do not appear.¹⁹ Commynes's most recent editor, Joël Blanchard, argues that these omissions and other interpolations shared by both manuscript **D** and Sauvage's source are most often prompted by a lack of clarity in the passage, or a lack of understanding on the part of the editor.²⁰ Blanchard chooses instead to edit a manuscript that he calls **P**. Formerly the property of Anne de Poulignac, it is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Nouvelles acquisitions 20960. It is the only manuscript to contain all eight books of the *Mémoires*, and also the one which, according to Blanchard, preserves the greatest number of authorial anacolutha.²¹ Indeed, Blanchard argues that this manuscript is the one that makes the least compromise with the difficulties presented by Commynes's sentence structures.²² Blanchard views the unpredictable syntax of the text as originating with its author. If the text was, as he supposes, non-standard from the outset, it

¹⁹ Durville (1904).

²⁰ Blanchard (2007: I, lxii-lxvii).

²¹ Blanchard (2007: I, lvi-lvii).

²² Blanchard (2007: I, lxxvii).

explains why a number of manuscripts, including Sauvage's old example, have had difficulty with it. It is therefore less surprising that different scribes have wrestled with the problem of producing a version of Commynes's text that their readers can understand, and that in some cases the solution has been to dispense with a passage altogether. Inevitably this means that at some points where Sauvage identifies variants, the manuscript tradition is very confused, because the original text was hard to understand. A passage that illustrates this complexity occurs on page 34 of Sauvage's 1559 edition, when Commynes is explaining that it is important for a prince to have lots of different people in his council:

Et pource est bien necessaire à un Prince d'avoir plusieurs gens à son conseil, car les plus sages errent aucunesfois, & ~~et~~ tressouvent, ou pour estre passionés aux matieres dequoy l'on parle, ou par amour, ou par haine, ou pour vouloir dire l'opposite d'un autre, & ~~et~~ aucunesfois *par l'indisposition des personnes. car on ne doit point tenir pour conseil ce, qui se fait apres disner.

(And for this reason it is very necessary for a Prince to have many people in his council, because the wisest can sometimes – and frequently – make mistakes, either because they are passionate about the subject under discussion, or out of affection, or hatred, or because they want to say the opposite to someone else, and sometimes because of some people's indisposition, because you should not consider as advice that which occurs after dinner.)

Here, Sauvage follows the print tradition, along with manuscripts **B**, **P** and **C**, in describing why a wise prince will not necessarily listen to partisan counsel, or, according to the indisposition of his counsellors, advice that is given after dinner. However, Sauvage's manuscript, along with manuscript **D** which is from the same family, and manuscript **A**, which is not, attributes post-prandial inability to give advice to the *disposition* of the counsellors, rather than their *indisposition*. The two readings seem irreconcilable, but both are justifiable in context and Sauvage gives both, one in the body of his text and one in his margin. Again, where Commynes is reporting a scene (p. 99) where Louis de Créville has been impersonating the duke of Burgundy, heaping insults on the King of England and cursing St George, the scribes are confused as to what Charles has actually said. Manuscripts **P**, **C** and **D**, together with Sauvage's manuscript, say that he called the king 'Blay borgne' [**Borgne ?**], son of an archer, **A** reports it as 'Vray Borgne' (a real squinter), **B** and the print tradition opt for 'Blanc Borgne'. [**What does Borgne mean?**] **None**

Commented [N4]: Orthography used in the texts is lower case, and of course this is an issue if we are wondering whether it is someone's name or a word. Borgne means someone who has only one eye or who squints. MS A seems to recognize this, but other MSS have rendered the insult in such a way that it doesn't make much sense. Blay borgne is gobblede gook. Blanc Borgne means white squinter, or White Borgne where Borgne might be a personal name.

'Borgne' could mean one-eyed or squinting, or it could be a family name, but none of these readings really makes sense, and it reads as a garbled version of an English term. One might be tempted to correct it as 'baseborn' and the accompanying reference to the addressee being the son of an archer strengthens this supposition, referring to the lowly birth of the addressee, but the first attestation of this in the Oxford English Dictionary is from 1553, which is much later than Commynes's work.

At such points, the editor is obliged to make a decision, even though the text is unclear, but Sauvage does not entirely come down on one side or the other, allowing himself the luxury of presenting two readings, one in the text and the other in the margin. Does this technique have any effect other than to draw attention to the fact that the text is hard to understand? This, of course, emphasizes his role as editor, stressing the skill required in identifying and evaluating the different alternatives but it raises the question of what attitude Sauvage expects of his reader. One interpretation might be that the editor intends his 'example' to be regarded as exemplary, encouraging his readers to correct the *lectio recepta* with reference to the manuscript. This seems, however, not to be his intention, as he only occasionally says that he prefers the manuscript reading. The logical conclusion would be that where he does not say this, he does not prefer the manuscript text. Sauvage does not explicitly state this, however, and he makes surreptitious interventions in the text which further problematize his relationship with his manuscript. Although he does draw attention to some variant readings, including sometimes seemingly trivial variations, he makes other changes without drawing attention to them. These generally take place on the level of grammatical modifications to bring the text into line with current conventions of written French or to clear up ambiguities which arise from the telegraphic nature of Commynes's writing. It is true that, in his preface to the reader, he has said that he would do this but Sauvage does not signal the extent to which he has intervened. Nor does he draw attention to all of the instances where he has departed from the 1524 text and followed what one must presume to be the 'old example'. We can presume this because there are numerous instances where Sauvage and manuscript **D** are the only surviving witnesses to a particular reading, suggesting that Sauvage probably got his reading from the lost manuscript which presents many similarities with **D**. The changes he makes to the earlier printed text take two forms: Sauvage

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innovates on his own initiative, in order to make the text clearer, and he also follows his manuscript source without telling his reader that this is what he has done. When he innovates, he is following in the tradition of the editor of the earliest edition, who has also intervened to bring Commynes's writing into line with the grammatical expectations of the sixteenth century. Sauvage accepts most of these earlier modifications without comment, failing to draw attention to the fact that his manuscript source differs at the point where this occurred, even though it is likely that it did, because all surviving manuscript witnesses do. Joël Blanchard argues that, in doing this, Sauvage continues the modernizing and clarifying tendencies that can be identified in some of the manuscripts, and most particularly **D**, the closest to his own 'old example'.²³

Modernization of the historical text, then, is not a Renaissance innovation that appears with the age of print, but rather is a tendency that begins almost as soon as the author has dictated his text and continues into the print tradition. Where Sauvage's approach differs from his predecessors is not so much in the modifications that he makes but rather in the degree of reflection that he shares with his readership in making them. Even then, the fact that he comments on some but not all of the changes that he has made means that the degree of his intervention is not immediately apparent.

It is clear that Sauvage only draws attention to a manuscript variant when it suits him to do so and that he is implicated in his final text much more than he acknowledges. The presentation of a variant is neither a signal that he accepts a reading, nor that he rejects it, but a display of his own erudition and a sign of the indeterminacy of Commynes's text. Sometimes, Sauvage appears to exploit this indeterminacy to allow him to tell a slightly nuanced narrative, as when Commynes is reporting on his early intimacy with Charles the Bold. On page 25 of the 1559 edition, Commynes describes the frustration of the duke, then count of Charrolais, at witnessing his advisors meeting in his presence without calling upon him to contribute to the discussion. Or rather, this is what the text says in manuscript **B** and **P**.²⁴ The 1524 edition has a variant reading, which seems more plausible but is not attested by any surviving manuscript,

²³ Blanchard (2007: I, liv-lv).

²⁴ The text of **P** along with all the textual variations is presented in Sauvage (2007: I, 71, and II, 760).

which has the count complaining that his counsellors should at least meet in his presence and should call on him, and it is this text which Sauvage reproduces: ~~&~~ et il luy sembloit bien que la plus grande chose, ~~&~~ et toute, c'estoit que de parler en sa presence, ~~&~~ et que, sans l'appeler, ne se devoit point faire' ('And it seemed to him that the most important thing of all was to speak in his presence and that, without calling on him, it should not take place').²⁵ However, his manuscript, along with manuscripts **A**, **C** and **D**, suggests a different reading, which alleges an even greater degree of impudence on the part of the counsellors. Here, Charles suggests that they have been meeting in his bedchamber without inviting him to their meetings: ~~&~~ et parler en sa chambre, sans l'y appeler, ne se devoit point faire' ('and talking in his bedchamber, without calling on him, should not take place'), and this reading appears in the margin of Sauvage's edition. Since both 'presence' and 'chambre' occur close by in the passage, it is easy to see why either might have been inserted in error at this point – and very hard to determine which, if either, is correct. Charles was clearly frustrated by the lack of discussion with his advisors, but were they really meeting in his bedroom without him? Later in the text, on page 44 of Sauvage's 1559 edition, we find a passage where the Duke's bedchamber is again a disputed territory, although this time Commynes is talking about his own personal access. Sauvage's main text tells us that Commynes was allowed to sleep in the Duke's room, if he wished: 'Pour lors estoye encores avec ledict Duc, ~~&~~ et le servoye de Chambellan, ~~&~~ et couchoye en sa chambre, quand je vouloye. car telle estoit l'usance de ceste maison' ('At that time I was still with the afore-mentioned duke and I served him as chamberlain and I used to sleep in his chamber when I wanted, for this was the custom of the household'). A marginal note ~~&~~ et presents the alternative reading *entroye* ('I used to enter'), which Sauvage has found in his manuscript example. It is also present in manuscript **C**, whereas the reading found in the 1524 edition is also present in manuscript **D** (usually, but not in this case, identical to Sauvage's), while manuscripts **A** and **B** present a further variant, *cognoissoye* ('I used to know'), which Joël Blanchard suggests may be a misreading.²⁶ Sauvage decides here to preserve the 1524 reading of *couchoye* in the text, even though his manuscript suggests the less

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²⁵ [Ref. to source?Commynes, 1559: 25.](#)

²⁶ Blanchard (2007: I, 125; II, 777; II, 1018).

intimate *entroye*. In both cases the level of intimacy between the prince and his servants is at stake, and in both Sauvage opts for the reading of the printed source, while his manuscript suggests greater intimacy in one case and lesser in another. The number of variants at these points presented by the different versions suggests that these are passages that have caused some discomfort to scribes and editors, perhaps because of a feeling that it is important to give a precise picture of the nature of relationships with Charles's court. Sauvage does not have a consistent ideological approach to them: he does not aim to maximize or minimize the impression of intimacy in the account, but he does in each case use the reading inherited from the earlier printed text, demonstrating a methodological bias rather than an ideological one. At the same time, by presenting the two versions he has seen side by side on the page, he draws attention to the fact that the question of access to the Duke's bedchamber is subject to uncertainty.

Denis Sauvage complains that Commynes's text has been badly served by its editors, comparing it to a broken body: 'tous les Chirurgiens du monde, s'ils avoyent entrepris la cure d'un corps autant cruellement navré que ce livre estoit miserablement corrompu, n'en pourroyent venir à chef, sans y laisser cicatrices à tousjours apparentes' (Advertissement aux lecteurs: 'all the surgeons in the world, if they had undertaken to treat a body that had been as badly wounded as this book had been desperately corrupted, they could not be able to complete their task without leaving indelible scars'). Joël Blanchard remarks wryly that Sauvage has contributed to the wounds that have been inflicted on the body of Commynes's text: 'Les choix éditoriaux de *D* et de *Sauvage* ... contribuent eux-aussi à approfondir les cicatrices laissées sur ce corps « navré ».'²⁷ Blanchard does not share the same tendency towards clarification and grammatical rectification — at least not in the body of the text, though his extensive notes draw attention to passages where he feels that the text is unclear or inaccurate. Nevertheless, his editorial voice is very similar to Sauvage's. Blanchard's edition is presented in two volumes, one of which contains the text of the *Mémoires*, based on his source **P** and the second contains extensive paratextual material, including a full account of all manuscript variants, and those of early printed

²⁷ Blanchard (2007: I, lxxv): 'The editorial choices of *D* and *Sauvage* also themselves contribute to deepening the scars on the "wounded" body.'

editions: of the first edition and of Sauvage. Like Sauvage, then, this most recent editor treats early printed editions as witnesses to the text amongst others. Like Sauvage too, he appears to give a complete account of the complexities of the text, so that his edition is not merely the history of Commynes's career, but, in the margins, the history of the text itself and the way that it has developed since Commynes completed it. Here the *lectio recepta*, the base text for the edition, is that of the manuscript, rather than of the printed editions, but multiple versions of the text are still presented. The reader can, if he or she wishes, prefer an alternative reading to that found in **P**. It is the approach that was pioneered by the first critical edition, which for all its deficiencies has set an example for how to approach editing Commynes. A similar approach can be found in the online Froissart project, which provides representative sample transcriptions of numerous manuscripts of the author's *Chroniques*, focussing specifically on the manuscripts which have formed the base for the most widely-used scholarly printed editions. This approach relies on the idea of plurality of readings, set in the context of a central textual tradition. This is the same idea implicit in Denis Sauvage's edition of Commynes, and, indeed, in his edition of Froissart, which followed some years later. Recognizing the advantages of such an approach for the reader but also, and crucially, for the editor, contributes significantly to our understanding of the text's message.

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