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Dufresne's Book on Fifteenth Century Feminist Culmination of 24 Years Work

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Dufresne's Book on Fifteenth Century Feminist Culmination of 24 Years Work

Quick Facts

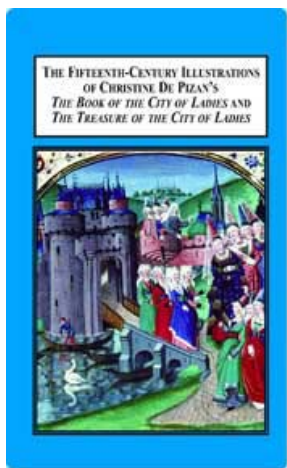
- Art history Professor Laura Dufresne spent 24 years compiling material for her book, "The Fifteenth-Century Illustrations of Christine de Pizan's 'The Book of the City of Ladies' and 'The Treasure of the City of Ladies.'"
- The book's foreword, written by Jo Koster, an English professor who chairs the medieval studies program at Winthrop, reports that Dufresne's wide knowledge of art history allows her to contribute to a deeper understanding of Pizan's agenda.



Laura Dufresne

ROCK HILL, S.C. – Women's studies became an American academic discipline only in the late 1960s but women have been studying and writing about other women as early as 15th century France.

Art history Professor **Laura Dufresne** spent 24 years compiling material for her book, "**The Fifteenth-Century Illustrations of Christine de Pizan's 'The Book of the City of Ladies' and 'The Treasure of the City of Ladies.'**" A French Renaissance writer who was well-educated and wrote some of the very first feminist pieces of literature, **Christine de Pizan** became the first woman in Europe to make a living successfully through writing.



Pizan's most famous book was "**The Book of the City of Ladies**" (1404-05), along with its sequel "**The Treasure of the City of Ladies**" (1405). She details the famous women who have ruled in history, who have honored their parents, guarded their chastity, been faithful to their husbands, and who have become martyrs for their faith.

"**The Book of the City of Ladies**" stood out because it was a testimony to the greatness and achievements of women, putting them on the same level as men. With "**The Treasure of the City of Ladies,**" Pizan wrote about the education of all women, from the future queen to the prostitute. She advises women on their role in governing, withstanding a siege, household finances, living with an abusive spouse and the dangers of following fashion (to their finances and their reputation), among other things.

"She is one of the great women of history," **Dufresne** said of Pizan. "Her wisdom stretches across the ages and much of her advice is still true today."

Dufresne's book, which was released this fall by Edwin Mellen Press, is written for a wide range of scholars and students of art history, women's studies, medieval cultural and French literature.

Born in Italy around 1364, Pizan moved to France at age five when her father, **Tomasso de Pizzano**, a famous physician and astrologer, was invited to the court of King Charles V of France. She remained in France for the rest of her life.

Widowed at age 25 with three small children, her mother and a niece to support, **Pizan** wrote more than 40 works of poetry and prose, songs and ballads to support herself. She included great deal of

autobiographical information, which was unusual for the time, and covered topics of interest to the French aristocracy, including her opinions on the Hundred Year's War, and the broaching of new topics – feminine culture, the history and education of women, real world advice and personal finance for women.

Dufresne's main focus is on **Pizan's manuscript illustrations**, providing 12 color illustrations and 50+ black and white illustrations. The cover shows a French manuscript, with three levels of French women identified and grouped by their clothing – the upper class, upper middle class and middle class. Pizan is shown in a tower, along with her muses the three Virtues, wearing a blue dress and white headdress bidding adieu.

Dufresne discusses Pizan's recognition of the **power of images** and **her prominent role in the production** of her own manuscripts, which were written out by hand in the days before the printing press. The illustrations for Pizan's writings changed after she passed away, became less dramatic and sometimes even contradicted her messages, Dufresne writes.

The book's foreword, written by **Jo Koster**, an English professor who chairs the medieval studies program at Winthrop, reports that Dufresne's wide knowledge of art history allows her to contribute to a deeper understanding of Pizan's agenda.

Dufresne will give a talk, "**Medieval Best Sellers: Christine de Pizan's City and College of Ladies**" on Tuesday, March 19 from 11 a.m.-noon in Rutledge 119, Winthrop campus, and in Charlotte on April 17 from 2-3 p.m. at **Central Piedmont Community College** during their annual **Sensoria: A Celebration of the Arts**.

Dufresne came to Winthrop in 1989, later earning tenure in 1996 and the designation of full professor in 2006. She holds a Ph.D. in art history from the University of Washington-Seattle.

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