Frauwen und Hebammen Rosegarten was not first published in Paris in 1535, but already by the printer Egenolf in Frankfurt in 1532.

All in all, Brunel can be congratulated on this immense achievement and a very reliable edition of Sammarthanus’s works, which will provide an indispensable basis for any scholarship and discussion in the future. Apart from that, the bibliophile décor with its reproduction of title pages of former prints and engraved portraits as well as the delicately facsimilated ornamentation deserve praise. We can already look forward to the fifth volume including Sammarthanus’s essential Gallorum doctrina illustrium... elogia and the final sixth volume.


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This collection of 13 essays offers a well-deserved homage to Yvonne Bellenger, eminent scholar and Du Bartas specialist. Three sections divide the volume, each devoted to a specific theme.

The first part, “Merveilles du Ciel et de la Terre,” suggests the range of Du Bartas’s explorations in the sciences of his day, stirring with the momentum of new intellectual fashions. In his cosmogony, La Sepmaine ou Création du monde (1581), Du Bartas (1544–90), a fervent yet pacifist Protestant born in Gascogne, employs his superior literary talents to praise the divine handiwork that surrounds us as a perennial reminder of God’s ineffable majesty. Jean Céard’s article addresses the compositional and philosophical challenges confronting a poet who wishes his work to be both totalizing and specific, encyclopedic and pedagogical. Céard links the sense of the marvelous, which pervades Du Bartas’s understanding of the world in all its aspects, with the term “singularité,” a special aspect of “le merveilleux.” This geographical term, used often in Renaissance travel and exploration literature, refers to an entity distinguishing itself absolutely from any other. Du Bartas’s preface, the Brief Advertissement, keenly assesses the dilemma that makes the composition of his epic poem daunting: how to keep wonderful singularities and totality dwelling together in harmony, without writing “a book as big as the world”? As a partial answer, Du Bartas addresses his semantic invention of expressions uniting two epithets; for example, the moon is a “flambeau guide-passant” (a torch guiding while passing by). This poetic quest for unity, as Céard demonstrates, also surfaces in La Sepmaine’s set pieces illustrating how the characteristics of animals and plants reflect our own physical and spiritual realities as they are coded on the chain of beings.

Stephen Bamforth revisits the “merveilleux” with a more insistent theological emphasis and points out the importance of a verse of Psalm 45, “Come and [scrutinize] the works of the Lord and the marvels he put on earth.” Bamforth underlines the perilous aspects of the belief in the precept “all is in all” because it leads to magical speculations in popular culture and medicine that are often Satanic in their allure, a phenomenon Du Bartas brands “this harsh scourge.” On the other hand, the Christian marvels springing from the Renaissance’s overwhelming reliance on analogical or “sympathetic” epistemology cannot readily be dismissed, and the poet must tread the slippery boundary between allowable and not allowable interpretive maneuvers. François Roudaut focuses upon Copernicus’s protectively worded heliocentric proposal (1543). The sun, obviously, is the
domineering torch of the universe, the mirror-like “unique archetype.” Montaigne himself, refusing Copernicus on skeptical grounds, criticizes the myth of a central sun as an instance of reason’s unreliable conclusion, whereas Ronsard composes a striking hymn to the sun. Roudaud remarks that the worship of Helios readily corresponds to religious propensities to use the Sun God as a metaphor for the illumination of and by faith. The torch of the world is spiritual at its core, but its centrality risks installing a heathen idolatry.

Lavillatte investigates the paradoxical proposition that astrology in the Renaissance parallels scientific progress. Du Bartas did not consider many prognostications as impious, although Calvinists roundly condemned them. In a somewhat rationalist stance, he counters that God placed in us the geometric and mathematical faculties allowing for a comprehension of both a “natural astrology” and a universal theory of the elements. Antipathies and sympathies animate the heavens and reach into the most recondite systems controlling plants, animals, and physical and spiritual aspects of human beings. For example, the plant called “Lunaire” bears a seed ending with a crescent shape, and Du Bartas speculates on the magnetization between moon and plant, a force “explaining” their transworldly attraction.

The second section examines the state of three scientific endeavors in the Renaissance (ichthyology, ornithology, and anatomy) and evaluates Du Bartas’s grasp of their increasingly empirical tendencies. With respect to fish (Denis Bjaï) and birds (Paul J. Smith). Du Bartas does not seem much taken by the groundbreaking works of the famous naturalist Pierre Belon (1517–64), who first attempted to produce plates comparing the skeleton of a bird to that of a man. Instead, the poet, inspired by the zodiacal “Pisces,” grants fishes a great deal of analogical attention. One of the most well-known passages of La Sépmaine (5, 6–535) is a hymn to them and to other sea and river creatures. It repeatedly wonders at the marvelous semantic and physical realities linking the piscatory domain to ours. The notorious case of the tiny remora, a fish that latches onto endangered ships in order to guide them, provides the poet with a potent allegorical motif stressing good remora/husband’s protective relationship with his “weaker” spouse, traditionally less able to restrain her sexual urges.

François Rouget studies how Du Bartas understands anatomy, a practice that, with celebrated work of Paré, Vesalius, and Fallopius, empirically founds modern surgery. The poet finds here a perfect venue to deploy his rhetorical mastery (hymn, panegyric on the dignity of the sciences) and effectively to teach his readers the significance of the scalpel’s signal achievements. He demonstrates how his own hermeneutic involvement is similar to dissection and reconstitution of an organic whole. Ekphrasis dwells at the heart of this versified tour de force and reflects the intense interest the Renaissance invests in a protracted meditation on the topos ut pictura poesis.

The last section examines dimensions of Du Bartas’s poem that are crucial for the comprehension of any Renaissance text: influences (Sabine Lardon on Pliny), commentaries (Violaine Giacomotto-Chiarra on Simon Goulard, and Nicolas Lombart on Pantaleon Thevenin), theological implications (Veronique Ferrer), and Sylviane Bokdam’s views on Michel Quilliam’s continuation of La Sépmaine. For some twelve centuries, Pliny’s name was a synonym for a natural history spiced with healthy pinches of the “merveilleux” but also containing solid advice about agriculture. Lardon establishes a table showing specifically what Du Bartas borrowed from the Roman gentleman farmer and how he transformed it into a compelling encyclopedia. As Lardon shows, Du Bartas extracts moral exempla from Pliny in a manner recalling the long tradition of the “Ovide
Moralisé.” Ferrer’s article positions the tone and accomplishment of Du Bartas’s “science de Dieu.” The Gascon maintains a very conciliatory and endearing stance vis-à-vis his Catholic counterpart, and refuses to brew the vitriol of religious controversies. He uses his scientific interests in order to stress the beauty of the world, which should instill harmony and peace in human contemplations of his work. His meditation on the “aymant” appropriately underlines the loving interactions that govern the mechanisms of the Universe and that should convince us of its eternal goodness. Giaccomotto-Chiarras closely studies the effect of Simon Goulart’s commentary on contemporary readers’ engagement with the often challenging text of La Sepmaine. She brings out how the commentator’s abundant entries contribute to the heuristic value of this “scientific epic.” For the educated readers of the times, Goulart’s indexes and other comments become integral to Du Bartas’s masterpiece and contribute “to fashion the image of an erudite poet who was able to nourish himself on the most recent [scientific developments] and put them to the service of praising the divine.” The question of the relationship between commentary and object text also occupies Lombard’s article, which turns to the second monumental glossateur of Du Bartas’s work, the catholic Pantaleon Thevenin. Hymns majestically punctuate La Sepmaine, and Lombard provides a helpful tabulation of their presence and of the thrust of Thevenin’s thematic, semantic, and theological observations. Ronsard, the most famous of these hymnists, stands as their paragon and provides the high standards against which we can gauge the quality of Du Bartas’s efforts. Lombard’s assessment adds much to the collection as it tackles technical matters of style and esthetics not frequently dealt with by the other contributors. Bodkam, through her expert reading, resurrects a long forgotten continuation of La Sepmaine, the work of the Breton poet Michel Quillian, a fervent Catholic who, during the reign of Henri IV, retained a strong allegiance to the extremist “ligueurs.” His epic, divided, just as Du Bartas’s, into seven days, has no scientific nor encyclopedic pretensions. Rather, his La Derniere Semaine ou Consommation du Monde (1596) is apocalyptic through and through, and bewails the certain arrival of the Antichrist who has fostered the heresies of the Wars of Religion. It manages a pastiche of Du Bartas’s flamboyant rhetorical skills, but its political and pamphleteering stridency reduces its literary scope. Bodkam’s essay, which questions the limits of the epic genre at the end of the French Renaissance, functions as the perfect bookend for this notable sheaf of analyses which, each in its own right, will continue to animate and further our readings of the oeuvre of Guillaume Du Bartas.

Quand l’esprit vient aux plantes: Botanique sensible et subversion libertine (XVIe– XVIIe siècles). Dominique Brancher.

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Before early modernity, Aristotelian and medieval paradigms had structured the standards that determined the place of plants on the great chain of being. Regarding the vegetal world, they established ontological notions limiting plants to the narrow zone of reproductive abilities and denying them most other characteristics of sentient entities, although they were greatly appreciated for their unique medicinal properties.

The author establishes how intellectuals and artists developed, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a respect and fascination for the green universe that led them