

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



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**Sainte-Marthe, Scévole de.**

***Œuvres complètes. I. Œuvres de jeunesse, Les Premières Œuvres (Livre I).***

**Édition chronologique avec introduction, notes et variantes par Jean Brunel.**

Textes littéraires français 606. Geneva: Droz, 2010. Pp. cclxxv + 955. ISBN 978-2-600-01390-1 (paperback) \$113.

***Œuvres complètes. II. Publications 1569–1572, Le second Volume (1573),***

***Canticorum Paraphrasis Poëtica (1573), Hymne de G. Aubert (circa 1573).***

**Édition chronologique avec introduction, notes et variantes par Jean Brunel.**

Textes littéraires français 620. Geneva: Droz, 2012. Pp. 752. ISBN 978-2-600-01521-9 (paperback) \$78.

***Œuvres complètes. III. « Opera 1575 », Publications 1575–1578, Les Œuvres***

***(1579). Édition chronologique avec introduction, notes et variantes par***

**Jean Brunel.**

Textes littéraires français 623. Geneva: Droz, 2013. Pp. 610. ISBN 978-2-600-01724-4 (paperback) \$90.

The three volumes that have appeared so far comprise half of the projected edition of Scévole de Sainte-Marthe's complete works. They take the reader up to 1579, leaving much to come from a poet who lived until 1623. However, since volumes 5 and 6 will contain Sainte-Marthe's prose writings (notably his *Elogia*), what we have in the present volumes is most of his poetic production. Jean Brunel has given Sainte-Marthe the same exhaustive and masterly treatment that he already provided to Nicolas Rapin, and Droz has made possible what can be called a spacious edition.

Among the defining characteristics of Sainte-Marthe that stand out in these volumes are his practice of *varietas*, which includes a systematic bilingualism, and his self-revision throughout his career. Jean Brunel emphasizes how Sainte-Marthe's published verse shows a desire to build a career upon both Latin and French. In this respect Joachim du Bellay is his model, although during the earlier part of his career Sainte-Marthe mingles both languages in the same collection as du Bellay did not. This is particularly striking in the *Premières Oeuvres* (1569), where for example the "Quatrième livre des Imitations" brings together translations into both French and Latin. These imply verse originally in these two languages, which in some cases is printed in the 1569 edition (and is always included in the present edition).

It is normal for sixteenth-century poetry to reveal networks: of patronage, friendship, and literary community. Sainte-Marthe's long association with Poitiers (Contrôleur général des finances in Poitou and mayor of Poitiers) made him part of the lively literary scene there, but, as Jean Brunel shows, that is only the most obvious of his connections with place. Other communities include fellow students at the faculty of law in Bourges, for example Vauquelin de la Fresnaye; Parisian acquaintances, notably Jean Dorat and members of the Pléiade; and the impressive number of literary-minded royal functionaries like himself. Another more complex network is the community of belief: Sainte-Marthe's evolution from Protestantism to Catholicism, and how that relates to situations of patronage, is a fascinating topic that spans his career.

Volume 1 is mostly dedicated to the poet's first collection, the *Premières Œuvres* of 1569. Its four books, each full of what are called "imitations," provide a good idea of the variety and the magnitude of Sainte-Marthe's ambition. The first book contains selections from Palingenio's *Zodiacus vitae*. That strange and sprawling poem is mined by the French poet for some ethical passages, largely avoiding the taint of heterodoxy that had led to the condemnation of the Latin poem. One exception, a passage entitled "De l'infiny" from book 12 of the *Zodiacus vitae*, is completely omitted from the *Œuvres* after the 1599 edition. The practice of ethical poetry continues in the second book of *Imitations*, with verses translated from Solon and Agapetus as well as from Sainte-Marthe's friend Guillaume Aubert. However, the second book begins with a French rendering of the story of Ceyx and Halcyon drawn from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; and the amorous subject matter introduced by Ovid is pursued in the third book, containing a number of translations of Marcantonio Flaminio's pastoral verse, as well as original verse along the same lines. The fourth book of *Imitations* is the most miscellaneous, combining amorous verse, elegies, friendship verse, epigrams, and *chansons morales*. Here as well as elsewhere, Sainte-Marthe presents poems as translations of his own, otherwise unknown, verse ("De son français," etc.). What is perhaps a poetic fiction becomes part of the role of bilingual poet.

In the second volume of this edition, Sainte-Marthe's *Second Volume* (1573) pursues the formal and thematic variety of its predecessor; here the term applied is *poésie meslée*. One of the most interesting experiments of the 1573 volume is the *Metamorphoses Chrestiennes*. It constitutes one of the more original appropriations of Ovid in the sixteenth century, as well as one of the more

intriguing attempts at biblical poetry. Tales from Genesis (Abraham and Isaac, Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's wife, Jacob and Esau) are interwoven with emphasis on transformational motifs, as if to show that metamorphosis is by no means a pagan monopoly. In a separate volume also published in 1573, *Canticorum Paraphrasis Poëtica*, Sainte-Marthe displays a different but similarly ambitious approach to biblical poetry. The choice of canticles from both the Old and the New Testament highlights lyrical moments and the subjectivity of the speakers (Moses, Isaiah, Judith, the Virgin Mary, and Simeon among others).

Volume 3 includes the principal collection of Sainte-Marthe's Latin verse, the *Opera* of 1575. More than a few of the pieces had been previously published (the biblical canticles reappear here), but the architecture of the 1575 collection is based on formal distinctions: *silvae*, epigrams, *carmina diversi generis*. It is revealing that all three formal genres are characterized by their variety. With the 1579 edition of Sainte-Marthe's *Œuvres*, also in volume 3, we see the reworking of his collected verse that will continue for the rest of his career; in this way as in others he resembles his friend Ronsard.

The wealth of material included in this edition is remarkable. Occasionally that can lead to some lack of clarity in presentation, as when the original of a translation is printed on the facing page even though the original did not appear in the sixteenth-century edition. The generosity of inclusion may occasionally exceed what is strictly necessary from a philological point of view. It might also be wondered whether readily available texts like Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or the *Zodiacus vitae* really need to be printed here. But such doubts are tiny quibbles considering the immense service Jean Brunel has performed for anyone interested in sixteenth-century poetry. Scévole de Sainte-Marthe is a poet not blessed with the Muse's highest gifts, but unquestionably granted a passion and a talent for *varietas*.

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