

### Antiquarianism and Urban Identity in Sixteenth-Century Nîmes

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Urban identity in France underwent significant change during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in response to rising sectarian violence, the growing intrusiveness of royal authority and social changes in the municipal notability. As the heyday of the once fiercely independent *bonnes villes* passed, new ways of representing urban identity came to be formulated to replace the fast disappearing or increasingly irrelevant symbols of civic pride found in a town's walls or charter.<sup>1</sup> Erudite local histories of particular towns became a popular new expression of urban identity. Indeed, it seemed that interest in a town's hoary past grew as these vestiges of municipal autonomy vanished. Some erudite histories approached the subject by focusing on a town's ecclesiastical history, looking at its religious institutions, laws and monuments. Others delved into the ancient past or *antiquité*, modeling their accounts after the *laudes civitatum* found in classical exemplars and still quite popular during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Efforts to aggrandize a town's standing often drew on the medieval literary tradition that traced the French back to Troy or some other ancient place, throwing in along the way large dollops of fantasy and myth to enliven the account.

Antiquarian interest in early modern French towns combined legend, classical histories, biblical sources, medieval chronicles, topographical descriptions, archival research and even archaeological excavations to paint what seem at first glance rather eclectic portraits of particular towns. Yet this eclecticism was perhaps unavoidable, if not purposeful, given the fragmentary state of the record—from random documents to the shattered remains of ancient artifacts—that antiquarian scholars drew upon when recovering the historical memory of a particular town. A deep cultural tension lay at

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<sup>1</sup> On *bonnes villes*, see the classic work by Bernard Chevalier, *Les bonnes villes de France du XIVe au XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1982).

the core of these antiquarian endeavors, one that Thomas Greene called some thirty-five years ago in a seminal article the “double impulse of Renaissance humanism,” that moment of near gestalt when humanist scholars realized that their burning, naive desire to reclaim the classical past was really an exercise in invention and imagination.<sup>2</sup> As such, the antiquarian sensibility of these erudite men, while ostensibly oriented toward the past, also foreshadowed attitudes and views now considered quintessentially modern and even post-modern.

The appearance of antiquarian urban histories, such as Gilles Corrozet’s *La Fleur des Antiquitez de la noble et triomphante ville et cité de Paris* (1532) and his compendium entitled the *Catalogue des villes et citez assises en trois Gaules* (1539), reflected a localizing of the established historical genres that recreated royal genealogies or rewrote the history of ancient Gaul, as typified in the works, for example, of Jean Lemaire des Belges and Jean Bouchet.<sup>3</sup> As a genre, the antiquarian history of individual cities found its heyday in the early seventeenth century and reflected the first appearance of that sense of nostalgia so redolent of modern sensibilities. In the early 1600s, André Du Chesne, François Des Rues and Jacques de Fonteny published surveys of towns and castles across the kingdom marked an initial effort to catalogue a heritage fast disappearing in the face of campaigns to embellish and rationalize urban spaces.<sup>4</sup> Jacques Du Breul spent much of his life sifting and sorting the rich ancient legacy found in Paris, as did Pierre Bonfons, just as the capital city underwent renewal and considerable growth.<sup>5</sup>

Antiquarian urban histories thus represented an effort to historicize particular places in the emerging national narrative, tied as it was so closely during the period to

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas M. Greene, “Resurrecting Rome: the Double Task of the Humanist Imagination,” in P. A. Ramsay, ed., *Rome in the Renaissance: The City and the Myth: Papers of the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies* (Binghamton, NY, 1982), 41-55 and his *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven, CT, 1982). On antiquarians, see the seminal essay by Arnaldo Momigliano, “Ancient History and the Antiquarian,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13 (1955): 285-315.

<sup>3</sup> David Cowling, *Building the Text: Architecture as Metaphor in Late Medieval and Early Modern France* (Oxford, 1999), discusses both of these writers.

<sup>4</sup> André Du Chesne, *Les Antiquitez et recherches des villes, chasteaux, et places plus remarquables de toute la France* (Paris, 1609); and François Des Rues, *Les Antiquitez, fondations, et singularitez des plus célèbres villes, chasteaux, et places remarquables du royaume de France*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris, 1608). Des Rues issued an expanded version of his catalogue in 1620 under the title *Description contenant toutes les singularitez de plus célèbres villes et places remarquables du Royaume de France: avec les choses plus memorables aduenues en iceluy, reueu, corrigé, et augmenté du sommaire de lestat, cartes des provinces, et de quelques portraitz des plus signalées villes dudict Royaume* (Paris, 1620). Jacques de Fonteny, *Antiquitez, fondations, et singularitez des plus célèbres villes, chasteaux, places remarquables, églises, forts, forteresses du royaume de France* (Paris, 1614). All these works relied on the collaboration and contributions of other scholars in erudite circles that formed the nexus for the formal provincial academies established later in the century.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Du Breul, *Le Théâtre des antiquitez de Paris* (Paris, 1612; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1639); idem, *Supplementum antiuquitatem urbis Parisiacae* (Paris, 1614); and Pierre Bonfons, *Les Antiquitez et choses plus remarquables de Paris de Pierre Bonfons* (Paris, 1608).

the story of the monarchy, to carve out in historical space, so to speak, a place a town could call its own.<sup>6</sup> The rediscovery of antiquity entailed four methods: the recovery and editing of literary texts; the description of archaeological remains; a close study of ancient history; and the systematic reconstruction of singular aspects of classical civilization. Antiquarian works usually involved a didactic arrangement of these materials into a pastiche, supported by both the text and its accompanying illustrations of ancient objects, which meant to provide the readers with an almost tactile sense of contact to the past.<sup>7</sup> The rhetorical technique of exemplarity also became commonly employed, as antiquarians deployed—one might almost say larded on—their various findings and related minutiae to plant their subject, or so they thought, in the very ground from which it sprang to form *historia*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> William J. Kennedy, *The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France and England* (Baltimore, MD, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> See also Élie Vinet, *L'Antiquité de Bourdeaux, présentée au Roy le treziesme jour d'avril, 1565* (Poitiers, 1565) and Jacques Androuet Ducerceau, *Livre des edifices antiques romains* (n.p., 1584).

<sup>8</sup> See John D. Lyons, *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton, 1989) and Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, NY, 1990).

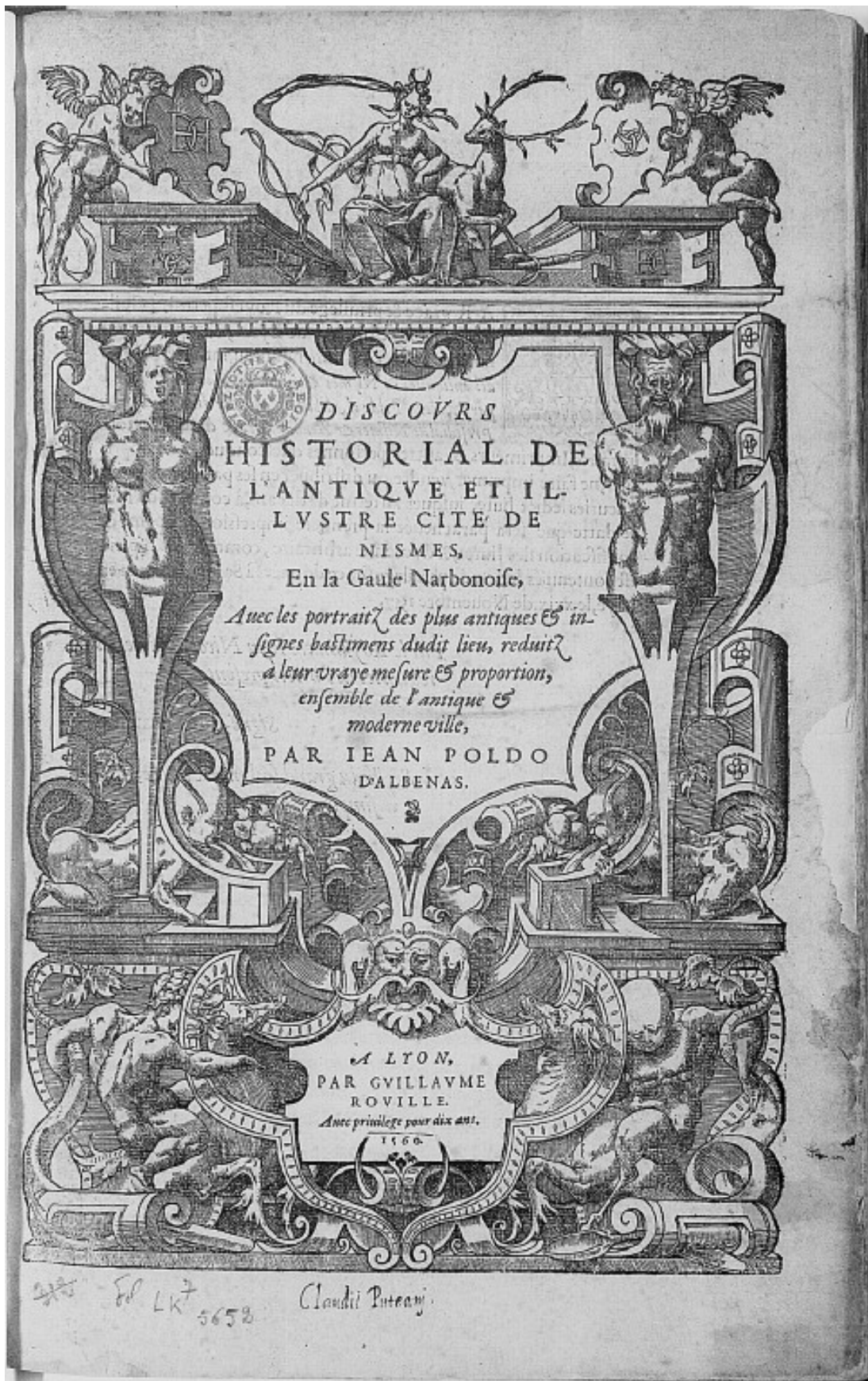


Illustration #1: Frontispiece to Poldo's *Discours*.

The early modern genre of *historia* connected the study of nature and the study of culture from the early Renaissance to the eighteenth century. The ubiquity of *historia* as a descriptive method across a variety of disciplines—including natural history, medicine, antiquarianism and philology—indicates how closely intertwined these scholarly pursuits were in the early modern period. *Historia* can be considered a key epistemic tool of early modern intellectual practices and descriptive sciences which coupled observational skills with philological learning, empiricism with erudition. In this way, *historia* forged important but often unexamined links between the culture of humanism and the scientific revolution.<sup>9</sup>

Jean Poldo d'Albenas's *Discours historial de l'antique et illustre cité de Nisme*, published in Lyon in 1559 and then again in 1560, offers a very interesting example of how this new genre sought to recover an urban past and express through it a new sense of urban identity. Not much is known of Jean Poldo, who was born in Nîmes in 1512 and died there in 1563. Textual evidence in the *Discours* suggests that Jean Poldo's father served in municipal government, overseeing—among other things—public works projects such as the city's fortifications. Jean Poldo was trained in the law and sat on the *présidial* court. He reportedly flirted with Protestantism before returning to the Catholic fold prior to his death. The Albenas family was closely related, through intermarriage and as godparents, to other Catholic members of Nîmes's elite, including another prominent family of jurists, the Calvières, who became Protestant. A quarrel between the Catholic Albenas family and the Protestant Calvières, headed by Guillaume Calvières, the president of the *présidial*, numbered among the contributing factors to the bloody Huguenot coup in 1567 known as the Michelade, during which Jean's brother Bernard Poldo d'Albenas was killed.<sup>10</sup>

Judging from the *Discours*, Jean Poldo received a solid humanist education, for besides mastering Latin and Italian, he indicates more than a passing knowledge of Greek and Hebrew as well as an acquaintance, likely self-taught, as was common with antiquarian scholars, with philology, numismatics, architecture and epigraphy. He also possessed or at least had access to a well-stocked library, for he cites some 270 different sources, most printed but some in manuscript form. He mentions a trip to Lyon, a major publishing center that held an annual book fair, to procure books. Other than these slight particulars, not much more about Jean Poldo can be gleaned from the text or from manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Municipale of Nîmes. Even so, the *Discours* reveals him as a passionate, serious-minded scholar who prided himself on his open-mindedness and evinced a deep, abiding love for his hometown.

As already intimated, Jean Poldo's hometown faced mounting troubles in the 1550s, a situation that assuredly motivated him to pen its illustrious history. Reformist sentiment grew steadily after the 1530s so that by the time of the *Discours*' publication, a majority of Nîmois had rejected Catholicism but not all had yet

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<sup>9</sup> Gianna Pomata and Nancy G. Siraisi, eds., *Historia, Transformations: Studies in the History of Science and Technology* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Albert Puech, *Une ville au temps jadis, ou Nîmes à la fin du XVIe siècle* (Nîmes, 1884); idem., "Les débuts de la Réforme à Nîmes, d'après des documents inédits," in *La Renaissance et la Réforme à Nîmes* (Nîmes, 1893); Ann Guggenheim, "Calvinism and the Political Elite in Sixteenth-Century Nîmes" (Ph.D. diss. New York University, 1968); Allan A. Tulchin, "The Michelade in Nîmes, 1567," *French Historical Studies*, 29:1(2006):1-35; and Joshua A. Millet, "A City Converted: The Protestant Reformation at Nîmes, 1532-67" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2000).

embraced the Genevan reformed model of Jean Calvin. Along with sharpened religious differences came rising sectarian violence, which in fact became so bad in 1562 that the crown installed a Catholic garrison to ensure order in the city. However, matters only became worse as five years later the Huguenots rose up to seize the city in the bloody coup known as the Michelade. While lamenting civic dissent and disorder, Jean Poldo hoped his book might if not turn them around, at least preserve the memory of Nîmes's erstwhile grandeur.<sup>11</sup>

As his preface makes clear, upholding virtue required the preservation of the social hierarchy, which in turn had to be aligned with the natural and celestial realms, resting ultimately for him on a series of Platonic correspondences uniting the city with the greater universe. Order thus became a cosmic function. Besides utility and a professed "amour de la Patrie," another motive pushing Jean's pen was his desire to counter those whom he called "the depraved doubters" and "ignoramuses" who dared to call into question the city's august historic heritage. Finally and perhaps most interestingly was Jean Poldo's meditation on why Nîmes experienced so much decline since antiquity. Contrary to popular belief, it was not the Goths who wrecked the noble city of Antiquity, but rather the early Carolingians. Indeed, Jean returns time and again to the horrific destruction that Charles Martel wrought on the city in the mid-eighth century for daring to resist his rule. Charlemagne's grandfather, a man Jean calls a "Barbare, & et cruel tyran...dilapidateur, & enraigé tyran," (p. 114), thus looms as the principal villain in the historic drama of the city's rise to greatness and long descent into vice and corruption.<sup>12</sup> Because the French crown only passed later to Martel's son, Pepin the Short, Jean Poldo could attack the progenitor of the Carolingians without showing disrespect to the French monarchy, which in other parts of the book he flatteringly compares to the Roman Empire. Interestingly, Jean ascribes positive influences to the Goths, such as their love of self-rule and veneration for churches, qualities that continued to mark the Nîmois, in his opinion.

Jean Poldo spends little time dwelling on the cruel centuries following Nîmes's destruction but instead fixes his gaze on the much longer period—according to him—during which Nîmes prospered as one of the leading cities of the world. Time for him moves in a long linear arc that, like a "river of oblivion" as he puts it, gradually wears away the memory of the past. His book thus aims to recover all remaining vestiges of the city's ancient greatness that survived this ruination. Writing provides a way to preserve memory, to stave off the pressing "iniure des siècles." Like a *cabinet des curiosités*, Jean Poldo's *Discours* collected together the artifacts of memory that, though but shattered shards, still enabled him to piece together a compelling portrait of the city's past. The very incompleteness of the record necessitated what might be called an aesthetic of the fragmentary, one that requires intuitive leaps of imagination in order to fill in the inevitable gaps. For this reason, Jean Poldo's book can only be described as a "history" in the loosest sense of the term, especially when compared to the more rigorous and critically acute notion of history advocated by his contemporaries Jean Bodin and Étienne Pasquier. The

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<sup>11</sup> "...qu'au temps présent nous, qui sommes descendus, & procréés de tant nobles peres, eussions retenu quelque ombre de leur vertu, pour seulement chaser hors de nostre Republique ceux deséditieux, & mutins, que nous cognoissons bien, lesquels je ne nommeray point, pour en les deshonorant, ne les honorer de telle quelle memoire, que mes labours pourroyent, peut estre, avoir, si le meritent." Poldo d'Albenas, *Discours*, 55.

<sup>12</sup> Poldo d'Albenas, *Discours*, 114.

antiquarian aesthetic becomes much clearer when considering the wide range of items that for Jean Poldo constituted evidence and his sources and methods of research.

Let us first briefly consider the sources he used. Jean Poldo read very widely, but not very deeply, when researching his study of the antiquities of Nîmes. I have culled some 270 different authors, with multiple titles cited for many authors (twenty alone for Cicero), directly referenced in the body of the book. While Jean Poldo makes a show of knowing some Greek, a little Hebrew, and the Visigothic alphabet, his reading ability was apparently confined to French, Italian, and Latin. The two dozen or so Greek authors whom he cites, for example, all had been translated into Latin and were readily available in print by the mid-sixteenth century. Roman writers made up more than a third of all the sources Jean Poldo cites, which is not surprising since Nîmes's golden age as described in the *Discours* coincided with the rise of the Roman Empire. Works by Italian humanists written in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries constituted the next largest body of literature upon which he relied, making up almost a third of the sources cited. Next came two dozen Greek authors, then a dozen or so French and German humanists each, followed by medieval chroniclers, Byzantine historians, reputed writers from the ancient Near East, like the legendary Egyptian priest Manetho and Chaldean divine Berosus, who we now know were fakes, and finally a handful of authors and texts that as yet remain unidentified.

Every one of these subgroups was a rather motley assembly. Take the Italian writers, for example. They included the esteemed archaeologist and historian Flavio Biondo, the popular Neapolitan poet Jacopo Sannazaro, and the monumental fabricator and forger, Giovanni Nanni, better known as Annius of Viterbo. Indeed, of all the historians cited by Jean Poldo, none receives higher praise than Annius of Viterbo, for he could always be relied upon to furnish spurious "documentary proof" that predated the works of early Greek historians such as Herodotus. In addition, Jean Poldo mentions consulting manuscripts found in area churches when filling in chronological gaps during the ninth and tenth centuries. And he spent a great deal of time transcribing and deciphering ancient inscriptions, which were quite ubiquitous and apparently a hot collectible at the time, for he mentions visiting the homes of several fellow jurists in Nîmes and Arles to consult inscriptions in their possession. Altogether, Jean Poldo marshaled an impressive array of sources which he used rather uncritically, settling disputed claims not through applying any method of historical verifiability (which existed at best in an embryonic condition at the time) but instead proclaiming as true the author who offered in his mind the most plausible information on a given subject. This again explains why canny forgers such as Annius of Viterbo wielded so much authority in Jean Poldo's eyes.<sup>13</sup>

A proclivity toward anecdotes when contemplating Antiquity in part reflected the venerable school of historiography associated with the Greek historian Herodotus. In his *L'Apologie pour Hérodote* (1566), for example, Henri Estienne defended the use of anecdotes rather than rigorous, systematic investigations as the best way to avoid dogmatism and maintain a healthy skepticism about assertions of historical veracity. His embrace of doubt and concomitant interest in the fragmentary, bound

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<sup>13</sup> On Annius of Viterbo, see Anthony Grafton, "Invention of Traditions and Traditions of Invention in Renaissance Europe: The Strange Case of Annius of Viterbo," in Anthony Grafton and Ann Blair, eds., *The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1990), 12-29. On the general significance of such forgeries, see, again, Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton, 1990).

nature of anecdotes resembles Poldo's fascination with inscriptions. Estienne's attitude likely sprang from his recent work editing the writings of Sextus Empiricus in 1562.<sup>14</sup>

A popular, if often misleading technique for recovering historical memory was through the study of place names or onomastics. While a legitimate field today, onomastics as practiced in Jean Poldo's day largely consisted of strained and superficial etymologies that began with the assumption that the history of a particular place began in the act of naming it. This explains why the opening chapters of the *Discours* delve into the city's origins by exploring what different ancient authors said about the meaning of the words Gaul and Nemausus, the two names by which France and Nîmes were known in the ancient world. Here we learn, for example, that Gaul derived from the Greek word for milky, which referred to the light complexion of its inhabitants, while in Hebrew the root of the word meant swallowed by waves, an obvious reference for Jean Poldo to the biblical story of the Flood. Nemausus varyingly referred to a Gallic god associated with a local spring or one of the sons of Hercules, who had originally conquered the area before bequeathing it to his sons. This Hercules, we eventually learn, actually hailed from Egypt, which gave credence—at least in Jean Poldo's eyes—to the claim that the foundation of Nîmes predated that of Rome by over four hundred years.<sup>15</sup> Further on, he debunks the notion that the Visigoths had destroyed the city. To the contrary, the Goths, who were very cultured as well as warlike, as he explains later in the book, honored the Nîmois by supporting the restoration of important monuments to their original splendor. Jean Poldo further considers the four distinctive regions making up ancient Gaul as demarcated by the rivers Marne, Rhine, Seine, Garonne, and Rhône, relating place names to a hodge-podge of Gallic terms, Roman deities and signs of the zodiac. It would be a mistake to criticize Jean Poldo for his uncritical and occasionally contradictory layering of etymologies, for he aimed not so much to relate the historicity of these places but rather relate the various ethnic, religious and astral forces that had shaped Nîmes, Gaul Narbonnaise and greater Gaul itself. Through recounting the city's legendary foundation and subsequent history, Jean Poldo established its preeminence by situating it in relation to the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Celts and Goths. All the great civilizations of antiquity had left their mark on Nîmes; indeed, words literally infused the place, lying underground in stone inscriptions, often only in piecemeal condition, waiting to be unearthed and read.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Bénédicte Boudou, *Mars et les muses dans L'Apologie pour Hérodote d'Henri Estienne* (Geneva, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Poldo d'Albenas, *Discours*, 17. Jean Poldo likely followed the lead of Italian urban antiquarians in drawing this connection with Egypt. See Anthony Grafton, "The Ancient City Restored: Archaeology, Ecclesiastical History, and Egyptology," in *Rome Reborn: The Vatican Library and Renaissance Culture*, ed. Anthony Grafton (New Haven, Conn., 1993), 87-123; and Brian A. Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance: The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy* (Chicago, Ill., 2007).

<sup>16</sup> One of the sketches of "Ogdoade" written by Guillaume du Bellay planned to discuss the origins of various peoples and place names which later was published by Martin du Bellay as *Épitome de l'antiquité des Gaules et de France, par feu messier Guillaume du Bellay, seigneur de Langey, chevalier de l'ordre du Roy et son lieutenant général en Piedmont,—Avec ce un prologue ou une préface sur toute son histoire, et le catalogue des livres alléguez en ses livres de l'antiquité des Gaules et de France.—Plus sont adjoustées une oraison, et deux épistres faictes en latin par*



Customary laws and privileges granted to Nîmes by the Romans also figured among the artifacts examined by Jean Poldo. Among the more unique features of the *Discours* is not just the absence of the anti-Roman bias so commonly found in Gallican histories at the time, but rather Jean Poldo's celebration of the city's close ties with ancient Rome.<sup>17</sup> He makes much of the fact, for example, that Antonius Pius, perhaps the most virtuous of all of Rome's emperors, came from Nîmes. Another signal honor fell to Nîmes when the Emperor Augustus picked a number of its leading citizens to establish a colony in Egypt, which of course, according to the legend of Nemausus, is where the Nîmois originally came from, which meant in effect that they were really returning home. Jean Poldo also tries to make the case that Nîmes, which he already claimed was older than Rome, never really lost its liberty when it came under Roman sway but instead enjoyed the highly privileged status conferred by the "droit Italique" as a reward for its "honnesteté" and loyalty. He refers in several places to the regime in Nîmes as a republic, vestiges of which can still be found in some customary practices and again in inscriptions proclaiming the sovereignty of the Senate and people of Rome. In chapter twenty, for example, he reviewed what the Romans considered to be the five principal marks of a free people as every citizen enjoys inalienable liberty, trial by peers, no torture or forced confessions, enlisting in the army and rising up through the ranks based on merit, and the unfettered authority of the father over his children. That these rights no longer existed in Nîmes showed just how far Nîmes had declined morally over the centuries, he laments.

Another type of artifact examined by Jean Poldo concerned distinctive, if not peculiar, local customs. He cites an account from Pliny the Elder, for example, that describes in almost military terms how men and dolphins worked together to catch mullets in an estuary not far from Nîmes. The virtuous Nîmois of yore lived in harmony with dolphins, one of nature's most intelligent and compassionate creatures. However, the close rapport with the dolphins ended, according to Albert the Great, when men ceased to show them the requisite gratitude. Jean Poldo thus reinforces the theme of moral decline. Another custom was cockfighting, which Jean Poldo recalled playing with his classmates during Lent when they would take a break from their studies. The boy's rooster who won was proclaimed "Roy ludique de la compagnie" (p. 62). The band of young men then marched about town to publicly celebrate the cock's triumph. His reminiscences of this blood sport set the stage for a long ethnographic riff by Jean Poldo on this venerable custom, which he says went all the way back to the Greek's wars against the despotic Persians. According to legend, on the eve of the battle of Marathon, Themistocles saw cocks fighting along the route to meet the enemy. The ferocity of the birds gave the hoplites courage the next day to vanquish their foe. The practice of cockfighting then found its way to Rome and France, according to the sources Jean Poldo consulted. Again citing Albert the Great, Jean Poldo relates that lions (read kings) fear the sound and sight of roosters (which we all know symbolized Gaul) because the bird was an animal manifestation of the sun, as was the lion, but superior to it in the animal kingdom. A convoluted discussion of about the cosmological implications of the movement of the zodiac, cycles of the moon and sun and the course of other celestial bodies then followed, as the chapter finally closed with a peroration about the cock crow at dawn heralding the Second

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*ledit auteur et par luy-mesmes traduites du latin en françois* (Paris, 1556).

<sup>17</sup> Philip Jacks, *The Antiquarian and the Myth of Antiquity: The Origins of Rome in Renaissance Thought* (Cambridge, 1993).

Coming of Christ. As much could be said about bullfighting, a sport in which Jean Poldo had also apparently dabbled. Jean Poldo adds this postscript to a chapter that began with childish games and concluded with portents of the Apocalypse.

Among the most interesting artifacts that Jean Poldo sought to recover came in his imaginative appeals to the senses, evoking to readers the sights, sounds and smells of ancient Nîmes. In one chapter, he describes savory regional dishes and fine local cheeses, while in another he appeals to the auditory when taking up the controversies over the origins of the great basilica, Nîmes' present-day cathedral, which according to some historians went back to Emperor Hadrian. Jean Poldo agreed, adding that the emperor had built the temple in memory of his mother, Plotina. He then brings the reader into the sanctuary by describing its interior, which then opens the way for a very interesting—and rather lengthy and detailed—meditation on the development of ancient sacred music. It was as if he wished to recapture the sounds that once reverberated in these chambers. He also invokes the pungent smell of the burnt offerings once made to the gods. He covers the varieties of Orphic and Dionysian hymns, what he calls “chansons rurales” to deities such as Ceres, which formed the basis of the Eleusian Mysteries; erotic verse and types of love poetry, such the Orphic Hymn to Venus found in Lucretius's *De Natura Rerum*; and the various kinds of hymns offering or refusing prayer, praising or condemning men or songs of lament sung at funerals, citing snippets of each type of verse in Greek. Poldo again stresses the underlying cultural continuities between the pagan and Christian periods in Nîmes, arguing that the early Christians continued these song forms in their hymns to God and the martyrs. But alas, time, that “dévorateur de...bonnes inventions,” consumed these poetic sensibilities, leaving the basilica now silent, echoing at most the footfalls and whispers of its shuffling visitors.<sup>18</sup>

Another evocative section of Jean Poldo's *Discours historial* is the chapter exploring the great arena, which to this day continues to impress visitors to Nîmes. In the sixteenth century, the great arena housed several hundred families whose makeshift houses formed a sort of slum. Seedy taverns, such as the *logis de la Flascon*, offered residents a chance to drown their troubles in drink. It was, in fact, drunken Huguenot thugs from this neighborhood who provided much of the muscle in the 1567 Michelade massacre of Catholic civilians.<sup>19</sup> Yet the decrepit, menacing hulk which the arena had become is not the place Jean Poldo saw; instead, he imagined it as it once had been. After scrupulously measuring, as he does for other ruins he describes, the arena's size and dimensions, he then launches into a fairly long description of the cheering crowds that once packed the stands to watch the ancient games. He notes how the seating arrangements reflected social status, drawing contemporary analogies with similar kinds of protocols in judicial courts and churches. He again draws cosmic parallels between the social order reflected in the arena crowd and the hierarchies found in the natural and supernatural worlds. It was as if Nîmes were the fulcrum of a series of harmonics that ascended from the social to the cosmic. Jean Poldo's vision of a Nîmes restored to its ancient glory actually became a concrete proposal later in 1630 when Anne de Rulman, a learned magistrate

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<sup>18</sup> Guillaume de Choul's evocative account of ancient religions likely influenced Poldo d'Albenas. See Félix Bourriot, “Un ouvrage lyonnais de la Renaissance: *Discours de la religion des anciens Romains* par G. du Choul, Lyon, 1556,” *Revue du Nord* 262/66 (1984):653-676.

<sup>19</sup> Joshua Evans Millet, “A City Converted: The Protestant Reform in Nîmes 1532-1567” (Ph.D diss., Harvard University, 2000), 201.

in the *présidial* court who also took a keen interest in the city's archaeology and history, requested that Louis XIII pour money into restoring the city's various monuments.<sup>20</sup> His notebooks still constitute important sources. He also proposed that the crown restore the amphitheater to its original condition.

This hermetic sense of place informed Jean Poldo's forays into the past splendor and present ruination of Nîmes's antiquities when he conducts a walking tour of the city. The journey began with a long hike around the circuit of the ancient walls, which measured over 40,000 paces according to his calculations. With the reader in tow, Jean Poldo set out from the Tour Magne (named, he claims, after Charlemagne) overlooking the city, went past some windmills and a hermitage with three old fountains, and then descended to the castle abutting the ancient wall. He then took the reader to the edge of a ditch that started just past the Porte des Carmes and proceeded to the old Tour Vinatière (named after a wine tax that paid for its construction), passing an old portal near the poorhouse ("la laderie") then up to the Caderaud before finally returning to the Tour Magne. An accompanying map and chorographic view of the city (a copy of a woodcut by Frans Hogenberg) allow the reader to visualize the itinerary. A table identifies major civic and ecclesiastical buildings and ancient monuments. As a point of contrast, Jean Poldo also outlined in his map of the city's perimeter the considerably smaller circuit of new walls that served an additional illustration of Nîmes's diminution over the centuries.

Jean Poldo drew on the trope of contemporary Rome as a corpse lacerated and ravaged by the passage of time, which experts sought to revivify. The process of raising the dead began with the act of reading and identifying the remains. Likewise, the trope of infusing present-day society with ancient virtues formed one of the principal motives behind Flavio Biondo's work on classical Rome, as it did later in that of Lipsius.<sup>21</sup> Biondo devised a five-fold classificatory schema: archaeology, religion, public administration, the army and private life. In this respect, Jean Poldo was quite typical of antiquarians, for whom practical purposes loomed larger than pedantry; his was a socially committed humanism. Jean Poldo's evocation of ancient Nîmes aimed not for a historical representation of the city at any particular time but rather to capture its essential character and set of virtues, corrupted but not destroyed by the passage of time. Moreover, the rise and fall of great cities was ruled by God and stood as mute testimony to the eternal recurrent rhythm of growth and decay found in all temporal affairs. Monuments served as both memorial and monitory lessons on the transitory nature of things and human *vanitas*.

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<sup>20</sup> Anne de Rulman, *Plan des oeuvres mêlées* (Nîmes, 1630), volume III, unpaginated. Rulman's notebooks, now housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale, still form an important source for reconstituting the state of Nîmes's urban infrastructure in the early modern period. See, for example, his "Inventaire particulier des histoires et des antiquités de Nîmes depuis Nemausus qui la fonda, l'empereur Adrien qui l'illustra de ses antiques edifices, le dernier comte Raymond qui rebâtit ses murailles modernes, et le roi de France qui revêtit le château, jusqu'en l'année mil six cent vingt-six."

<sup>21</sup> Justus Lipsius published or planned a number of treatises on aspects of Rome's classical past that adhered to this rubric. He treated Roman law and institutions in *Leges regiae et leges Xvirales* (1576), gladiatorial games in the *Saturnalia* (1582), Roman amphitheaters in *De amphitheatre liber* (1584) and the *De amphitheatris quae extra Roman libellus* (1584), and the Roman army in *De milita romana* (1595). In fact, Lipsius drew on Jean Poldo, among others, for the second study on Roman amphitheaters above.

Consider the relationship between collecting inscriptions—epigraphy—and the Renaissance interest in emblems. Seen through Renaissance eyes, epigraphy becomes doubly enigmatic: mysterious in the way of all remnants from an alien culture and at the same time composed in a style that may have been intentionally elliptical to begin with.<sup>22</sup> And it also reflected a sensibility of the enigmatic, of indeterminate (or multivalent) meaning. In these respects, Jean Poldo followed in the footsteps of Flavio Biondo, for whom archaeology was ancillary to the study of texts.<sup>23</sup> Biondo's *Roma instaurata*, published in Verona in 1481, became for a century the major work on Rome's urban topography in relation to ancient texts. Before digging into the ground for texts, Biondo was trained as a specialist of the spoken language of the ancient Romans, much as Jean Poldo sought to recapture the lost voices of the ancient Nemausians.<sup>24</sup> Another model was Bernardo Rucellai's *De urbe Roma*, which also sought to reconstruct the ancient city based on both textual and archaeological sources using a wide array of scholarly tools: history, philology, epigraphy, numismatics and mechanical systems of measurement.

The Renaissance fascination with ruins—a monument to moral musings on mutability and the ravages of time—became expressed early on in the Latin elegies of Petrarch, Poggio Bracciolini's *De varietate fortunae* and the enigmatic yet spicy *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, all of which helped to create the discipline of archaeology.<sup>25</sup> The antiquarian interests of Jean Poldo d'Albenas lacked methodological rigor yet foreshadowed the new fields of specialized scholarship developing in the seventeenth century as, for example, in the work of the German polymath Johannes Praetorius.<sup>26</sup>

Jean Poldo's interest in ruins prompted a rhetoric of decline and *mutandis mundi* that persisted as a distinctively modern sensibility in the centuries to come. If one looks at Piranesi or Winckelmann, the fragment appears to be the very defining visual trope of neoclassicism. Later on, the Romantic *topos* of "the pleasure in ruins" marked aesthetic sensibilities in the early nineteenth-century—as expressed in the

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<sup>22</sup> See Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Antiquity*, (Oxford, 1969), 160-66 for further debates at the time about interpreting epigrams and more generally Christopher S. Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance: Humanists, Historians, and Latin's Legacy* (Baltimore, Md., 2004).

<sup>23</sup> J.-Y. Boriaud, "Biondo et l'inscription à travers la Roma instaurata," *Eutopia* 3 (1994): 7-17.

<sup>24</sup> Anne Raffarin-Dupuis, "Les 'antiquaires' et les débuts de l'archéologie à la renaissance la *Roma instaurata* de Flavio Biondo (édition, traduction, commentaire)" (Thesis, Université de Lille III, 1997). Raffarin-Dupuis published the French edition of Biondo's work in Paris in 2005 by Belles Lettres.

<sup>25</sup> On this subject in the Renaissance, see in particular Leonard Barkan's *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven, Conn., 1999), esp. ch. 3 "Fragments" and ch. 4 "Reconstructions," where he likens the study of truncated statuary as a form of autopsy, as well as Joscelyn Godwin, *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Gerhild Scholz Williams, *Ways of Knowing in Early Modern Germany: Johannes Praetorius as a Witness to his Time* (Aldershot, 2006), argues that Praetorius opened the way for such modern disciplines as ethnography, anthropology, and physical geography, gender theory, notions of intellectual property, and competing, and sometimes conflicting scientific and theological explanations of natural anomalies or "wundern."

poetry of John Keats or the haunting landscapes of David Caspar Friedrich—while the sense of incompleteness accompanying fragmentation inspired modern poets, like Rainer Maria Rilke in his “Archaïscher Torso Apollos,” as well as theorists such as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer to convert the fragment into an index of twentieth-century modernity. At the heart of the post-modern condition perhaps lies the fragment, as the literary analyses of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida have suggested when considering, for example, the scattered bits and pieces of Sappho’s lyric verse.<sup>27</sup>

Back in the sixteenth century, it was the very physical incompleteness of the ancient record—both textual and archaeological—that opened the imaginations of artists and scholars like Jean Poldo to new forms of enigmatic meaning, for whom past destruction cleared the way for new creation. The *Discours historial* did not strive so much for historical accuracy but rather aesthetic effect, for Jean Poldo’s work was an attempt to recover and restore, much as a conservator today does with a piece of art, the city’s memory and thus identity as a great city from the ruins and shards he so scrupulously collected. His project sought to reclaim and restore, if only in book form, the past glory of his hometown, Nîmes. It was not terribly profound or original. Indeed, its very banality as an example of antiquarian scholarship reflects the growing awareness at the time of the historicity of familiar, often quotidian objects. From the words one used, the foods one ate, the places one walked, viewed, even touched, Jean Poldo hoped to furnish not just expanded knowledge about the history of Nîmes but what we might today call a virtual experience of a city that only existed in the imagination. For in recovering this memory, Poldo only sharpened the sense of loss that came with the realization of the past’s irretrievability.

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<sup>27</sup> For these various theoretical approaches to the study of the fragments, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute* (Albany, 1988), 39-78; David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), who likens life in modern cities generative of “fragmentation”; Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of the Form* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986); Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth-Century Art* (New York, 1984), esp. 24-28; and Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* (London, 1994). Fragmentation as a process of mutilation raises questions now posed by the new field of disability studies.