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Théophraste Renaudot, *De la petite fille velue et autres conférences du Bureau d'Adresse (1632-1642)*. Edited by Simone Mazauric. Paris: Klincksieck, 2004. xxxviii + 154 pp. Notes. €14 E.U. (pb). ISBN 2-252-3444-0.

Review by Kathleen Wellman, Southern Methodist University.

Simone Mazauric has edited a collection of twenty of the more than four hundred conferences held under the auspices of Théophraste Renaudot every Monday afternoon from 2 to 4 in Paris for nine years. This volume introduces readers to the diverse intellectual fare these conferences offered to both participants and readers in the early seventeenth century. The conferences offer a unique vantage point for observing the workings of the Republic of Letters and allow one to witness, Mazauric contends, the day to day working of an academy in the age of the baroque.

Mazauric's introduction places the conferences in the context of intellectual and academic traditions, extending their roots back to Italian Renaissance academies. Renaudot's conferences shared with these earlier manifestations a commitment to an ethos of civility. However, Mazauric also reinforces the distinctive character of Renaudot's gatherings and the published conferences they produced. The gatherings were public, open, restricted neither by status nor membership, and egalitarian, accessible to the hundred people who filled the meeting room each Monday. But the conferences were not simply distinctive in form; they also took an unconventional approach to knowledge, which Mazauric characterizes as syncretic and encyclopedic (although she concedes that it is an encyclopedia without a structure). Although she separates the topics generally into those dealing with science and those dealing with social issues, Mazauric also concedes that the content of the conferences blurs specializations and generally reveals the porousness of seventeenth century fields or disciplines. Any modern editor or scholar might well wish to classify such diversity; however, the conferences almost defy such efforts; they both treated a vast array of topics and attempted to bring all available interpretations to bear on each topic.

This collection of material from the conferences is divided into four sections. The first section includes some of the material Renaudot wrote to introduce the bound, hundred-conference volumes. (The conferences were also printed on cheap paper for dissemination immediately after they occurred.) This section also features several of the conferences that self-consciously addressed the nature and purpose of the conferences as a means of disseminating as wide an array of opinion as possible on any given topic. The conferences Mazauric selected for this section convey to the reader Renaudot's intentions and his participants' expectations for productive results from this new and unusual academic forum. The conferences would, as Renaudot put it in the preface to the first volume of collected conferences, allow "le jeune s'y façonne, le vieil y rafraîchit sa mémoire, le docte s'y fait admirer, les autres y apprennent et tous y rencontrent un divertissement honnête" (p. xx).

A second brief section considers a list of innovations that participants presented and features a conference on mechanics. Mazauric notes that participants spent a third hour discussing inventions after the first ten conferences (although such discussions were not included in the published proceedings). The section includes a long list of inventions discussed over a vacation period in 1634. Mazauric suggests that this interest in invention continued, although it was not featured in the conference proceedings. This particular section is designed to highlight the interest of conference participants in technology. To feature a section on technological interests, albeit a brief one, reflects perhaps more our

expectation that scientific interests are inherently connected to technological developments. However, the connection this section suggests between science and technology is not one that is central to the conferences themselves.

A third, much more extensive section features a series of nine conferences focusing on topics that might be deemed loosely scientific. (Mazauric's title for this section is "Le monde physique.") Some of these conferences treat topics we might consider reflective of specific modern scientific disciplines, such as "Des zoophytes ou plant'animaux" or "S'il est bon de se servir des remèdes chimiques." Some conferences included in this section address questions topical in the seventeenth century, such as "Du mouvement ou repos de la terre." Others raise topics of a perennial interest, such as "Du phénix," or examine commonplaces, such as "Pourquoi les morts saignent en la présence de leurs meurtriers." Such conferences demonstrate the participants' desire to scrutinize all beliefs by the standards of reason and to bring to bear the best contemporary knowledge and most compelling evidence on each topic. However, the conferences are less familiar to scholars of this period than they should be, in large part, because they are so thoroughly rooted in the scientific and intellectual concerns of the early seventeenth century in all of its diversity; many of those concerns are no longer familiar to us. For each of these conferences, Mazauric provides a useful one to two page introduction, which places the specific topic treated into the contemporary context for such an issue. For example, she sets the conference "Du mouvement ou repos de la terre," discussed at Renaudot's academy in October of 1633, in the context of the condemnation of Galileo for subscribing publicly to heliocentrism the previous June.

A final section reproduces seven conferences treating topics Mazauric classifies as "morale et société." This section addresses conventional ethical topics, such as "Si la vertu consiste en médiocrité," and more immediately topical issues, such as "Si la langue française est suffisante pour apprendre toutes les sciences." Once again, Mazauric briefly situates each of these topics in its seventeenth-century context. For example, she places "S'il est expédient aux femmes d'être savantes" in the context of the "querrelle des femmes."

A number of features of this collection enhance its utility for a reader. Mazauric's brief introduction to each specific conference provides a useful orientation. She also provides excellent footnotes on specific points in each conference to explain seventeenth-century allusions likely lost on most modern readers. This collection offers a tantalizing taste of the rich offerings of Renaudot's conferences complete with useful background and explanatory notes. This short collection might provide significant access to a source, which should be better known but is found only in rare book collections. Specialists might, once they are familiar with the work generally, consult the specific topics covered in the conferences relevant to their own research interests. As a collection in French, it is not likely to be useful to introduce students to the seventeenth-century issues Renaudot's conferences explore.

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