

Evelien Chayes. *L'Éloquence des pierres précieuses: de Marbode de Rennes à Alard d'Amsterdam et Remy Belleau. Sur quelques lapidaires du XVI^e siècle.* Bibliothèque littéraire de la Renaissance 78. Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2010. 426 pp. index. illus. bibl. €75. ISBN: 978-2-7453-1965-4.

This book discusses the reception and influence of Marbode of Rennes's eleventh-century *Liber lapidum* among Renaissance scholars, with particular attention given to the Dutch humanist Alardus of Amsterdam and the French poet Remy Belleau. Marbode's work, which details not only the physical properties of sixty minerals and stones, but also their mythological origins, symbolism, planetary affinities, and perceived therapeutic uses, was one of the earliest and most influential of medieval treatises on stones. As such, it is not dissimilar to other thematic compendia of the medieval era, such as bestiaries and herbals. Much of Marbode's information derives from Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, but Chayes also points to Theophrastus, Pliny the Elder, Dioscorides, and Damigeron as primary sources. Of particular interest is the observation that Marbode's text contains no explicit reference to stones of the Bible — hence, says Chayes, any

magical or medicinal powers that it ascribes to stones can be traced back to the ancient belief in planetary influences.

The first three chapters of Chayes's book deal with Alardus of Amsterdam and his edition of Marbode's *Liber lapidum*. In all, seven editions of Marbode's treatise were published between 1511 and 1579. The Alardus edition, fourth in the series, appeared under the title *De gemmarum lapidumque pretiosorum formis, naturis, atque viribus* (1539) and contains a substantial amount of paratextual additions that predispose readers toward a symbolic Christian interpretation of Marbode. Noteworthy additions include an emblematic representation of Aaron's breastplate on the title-page, prefatory remarks by Alardus, and numerous *flores* from Jewish, classical pagan, and Christian sources. Overall, says Chayes, the work's "pragmatic halo" invites readers to look beyond the literal significance of the stones in Marbode's text for a deeper spiritual understanding. Accordingly, Renaissance poets, many of whom were steeped in Neoplatonic thought, looked to Marbode's work as a sourcebook of symbolic imagery.

Chapter 4 offers a brief survey of prominent Renaissance authors dealing in the lore of precious and semiprecious stones, including Jean Lemaire de Belges, Jean de La Taille, François La Rue, Girolamo Cardano, and Conrad Gesner. There is also discussion of the *Rime degli accademici occulti* (1568), a work that defined the theoretical concepts of the Italian *impresa*. While the *Rime* contain no systematic description of stones, Chayes feels that there are nonetheless noteworthy similarities between it and Belleau's writing, in particular with regard to the Neoplatonic theory of animal spirits.

The second half of Chayes's study focuses on Remy Belleau's *Les Amours et nouveaux échanges des pierres précieuses* (1576), a collection of twenty-one poems written on the properties of gems and inspired by Marbode's *Liber lapidum*. Presumably the importance of *dispositio* (general structure) in Belleau's collection can be seen in the strategic placement of the initial, central, and final stones — amethyst, sapphire, and chalcedony — in a sequence dictated by the poet's objective. That objective, says Chayes, is at once a quest of the Neoplatonic One (or Christian truth) and a movement toward moderation. Numerology may have played a significant role in the poet's placement of individual stones, especially if one considers possible thematic links with the depiction of Heavenly Jerusalem in Apocalypse 21:12 and 21:21. Similar studies have argued the importance of symbolic order in Rabelais, Montaigne, Du Bellay, and others.

Belleau's *style mignard* and the theory of poetic mimesis that he shares with other poets of the Pleiade are among Chayes's final topics of inquiry. The distinction between faithful imitation and forgery was a commonplace in medieval literature that reappears in Belleau's *Pierres précieuses*, most notably in his portrait of the ruby whose divine inner flame serves as a symbolic reminder of Christ's blood. In contrast to deceitful jewelers who traffic in counterfeit merchandise, Belleau implicitly portrays himself as a model of the inspired poet capable of revealing Truth.

Chayes's copious bibliography and useful indices at the end of the volume are valuable tools that will help readers find information quickly. Her proleptic writing

style, which begins frequently *in medias res*, assumes, however, that her readers are already familiar with her topic. Notwithstanding the difficulty that less-informed readers may encounter in such a style, her book remains a very thorough, thought-provoking, and insightful study of lapidary lore in Renaissance literature.

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