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Comptes rendus

DEBLOCK Geneviève, *Le Bâtiment des Recettes. Présentation et annotation de l'édition Jean Ruelle, 1560* | BRAEKMAN Willy L., *Dat batement van recepten. Een secreetboek uit de zestiende eeuw*

Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015 |

Brussel, Omirel UFSAL, 1990

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p. 119-122

Référence(s) :

DEBLOCK Geneviève, *Le Bâtiment des Recettes. Présentation et annotation de l'édition Jean Ruelle, 1560*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015, 306 pages

BRAEKMAN Willy L., *Dat batement van recepten. Een secreetboek uit de zestiende eeuw* [Reprint of *Een nieuwe tractaet / ghenamt dat Batement van recepten / inhoudende drye deelen van Recepten. Nv van nieuws gecorrigeert ende verbeterd*, Antwerpen, Hans de Laet, 1549], Brussel, Omirel UFSAL, 1990, 144 pages

Texte intégral

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- 1 Geneviève Deblock's *Le Bâtiment des Recettes* is a critical edition of a sixteenth-century French recipe compilation. It is of special interest as scholarly republications of vernacular recipe books—also commonly referred to as books of secrets in English scholarship—are rare. The *Bastiment de receptes* (1560)—a small manual that was originally printed by the Parisian printer Jean Ruelle in a palm-sized 16° format—is republished here in its entirety. It comprises a translation of the *Dificio di ricetta*, a recipe collection that was first printed in Italy in 1525.
- 2 Most frequent in this heterogeneous collection are medicinal and cosmetic recipes that appealed to a broad vernacular readership. But *Le Bâtiment des Recettes* also comprises an interesting series of artisanal recipes for genteel writing technologies (p. 116-121), including instructions for coloured inks (p. 120: B48) and “to write in gold or in a colour that appears like gold” on finely coloured parchments (p. 118:B42). Two other thematic sections are devoted to practical magic and diversions including recipes for candles that are made from snow or can burn under water (p. 141-145), and the fine art of confiture “as there is nothing more comforting to a disturbed stomach than confiture” (p. 146-150).¹
- 3 French editors had extended the Italian compilation in the course of the centuries with more recipe collections. Deblock chose a French edition that includes a small series of “other medical secrets, expressly addressed to women” related to pregnancy and childbirth (p. 170-175) and another anonymous collection entitled *Le plaisant iardin* with a mixture of medicinal recipes, sleights of hand, pranks and practical magic, that had also been published separately (p. 176-209)
- 4 The original Italian text, which is not included in Deblock's publication, was an instant success and appeared in as many as 28 editions between 1524 and 1562 (p. 20). Its first edition is of special interest, as it is one of the earliest printed recipe collections that is known to us today. Nonetheless, Deblock had good reasons to choose the later 1560 French edition, as French translations were instrumental in the wide distribution of the *Dificio di ricetta* throughout early modern Europe. The miscellaneous collections of artisanal, medical, cosmetic, and domestic recipes were copied in manuscript and reprinted in great numbers throughout the next centuries, yet not many copies have survived.
- 5 The fine extant copy she consulted has survived in the Bibliothèque interuniversitaire de Santé de Paris. It comprises all additions that have been appended to the French translation in the 1550s which were maintained in most subsequent editions and reprints during the following centuries. Unfortunately, it has not been digitised yet, but an earlier edition from 1544 is preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France and can be consulted online.²
- 6 With its introductory chapters and extensive critical apparatus, Deblock's scholarly edition has much to offer to scholars from different fields, including history of medicine and science, book history, history of reading, material culture studies, and artisanal technologies. Deblock's annotations and

commentaries for the almost four hundred recipes provide explanations to ingredients and references to later publications in which recipes from this collection have reappeared. Of special interest to many historians will be the well-researched edition history of *Le Bâtiment des Recettes* that spans from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.

7 Already in the sixteenth century the work became popular in the Low Countries, where the French edition was quickly translated into Dutch to make a profit on the local book market (1549, 1551: Antwerpen by Hans Laet; 1578: Rees by Derick Wylx van Santen). From the first Dutch edition the only known extant copy has been preserved in the university library in Ghent. Already in 1990 the historian of Netherlandish folklore, Willy L. Braekman (1931-2006), published a scholarly edition of the Dutch translation, that was supplemented with a short introduction, a page-numbered table of content, and a glossary of ingredients with an explanatory commentary. Braekmans' *Dat batement van recepten* is since 2009 available as an open access publication.³ By comparison Deblock's scholarly edition of the 1560 French edition is more substantive.

8 Deblock's shows that the French translation (and not the Italian editions) can best be described as a true "longseller", a concept she borrowed from Mario Infelise to describe "works with a long life that remain accessible to a reading public over centuries and are disseminated through re-editions, but also in manuscript" (p. 42, p. 79). These "longsellers" should not be confused with "bestsellers": books that are published and sold in great numbers, but whose popularity is by comparison short-lived. By contrast, long-selling recipe collections saw many editions and were republished, translated, read and copied over centuries, such as the today more widely known *De secreti del Reverendo Donno Alessio Piemontese* (1st ed. 1557) ascribed to Girolamo Ruscelli, and Giambattista della Porta's *Magia Naturalis* (1st ed. 1558, ext. 2nd ed. 1585). Deblock's critical edition provides insightful comparisons between the anonymous recipe compilation comprised in *Le Bâtiment des Recettes* and these more famous recipe collections that scholars have paid more attention to (p. 27-28). Deblock points her readers to recipes that appear in similar versions in the later published *Secreti* (p. 131: B80, p. 124: B57) or the *Magia* (p. 142: B112-115; p. 195: PL111) and shows that many later (medical) editors have drawn on *Le Bâtiment*. It is also worth mentioning that Deblock devotes a section to the rare illustrations in Italian and French editions, of which reprints are included.

9 Much of the scholarly commentary is devoted to the long life of the extended French compilation which makes this publication not only valuable for Renaissance scholars, but also for readers interested in early modern recipe collections, vernacular readerships, and the complex edition and reception histories of these 'longsellers'. They will appreciate the detailed information Deblock provides on ex-libris, annotations, and additions in manuscript that she found in the extant copies consulted for this publication.

10 The excellent preface by Lilian Hilaire-Pérez, who has published widely on practical knowledge, situates Deblocks work within recent scholarship in history of science and technology. She praises Deblock's fruitful approach that opens up "a dialogue between book history and histories of making and knowing" (p. 16). This is evident in Deblock's extensive critical apparatus that includes a detailed overview of all sixty identified editions (p. 213-243), tables that illuminates the re-arrangements of para-texts in the pre-1700 editions (p. 246-247), and that illustrate the (dis)appearance of additional recipes in the print editions (p. 248-250). These annexes support Deblock's argument that

editors shaped and re-shaped *Le Bâtiment des Recettes* throughout its edition history and adapted the work to changing book markets and readerships. A topic that is discussed in more detail in the subsections devoted to the reception (p. 29-33) and evolution (p. 33-44) of the work.

11 Despite their immense and long-lasting popularity, books of secrets have long remained understudied. Deblock shows that this lack of scholarly attention was partly due to the crude editorial work and bad quality of eighteenth century cheap reprints in blue bindings. They belong to a popular ephemeral print culture, better known to French readers as *Bibliothèque bleue*, of which the biggest collection has been preserved in the Médiathèque du Grand Troyes. Outside of France, early modern printed recipe compilations became better known with John Ferguson's extensive bibliography of books of secrets, compiled between 1896-1914, that mentions an earlier edition of the *Bâtiment des Recettes* (Antwerp, 1541) of which a few copies have survived in the collections of the British Museum. With the publication of William Eamon's *Science and the Secrets of Nature. Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (1994) this genre attracted more scholarly attention among historians of science on both sides of the Atlantic. In the last decades a growing community of scholars has devoted its attention to the study of recipe literature. Among recent English publications, let me mention Elaine Leong's and Alisha Rankin's *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science, 1500-1800* (2011) and the popular academic blog *The Recipe Project*⁴.

12 Of great value for an expanding community of recipe literature researchers and material culture historians will be the comprehensive table of ingredients that Deblock included. It lists the historical names of materials mentioned in the recipes (p. 251-275) with cross-references to recipe numbers, and also mentions variations in spelling, related terms, and where relevant more specific information on the material form of the ingredient, for example when a historical name refers here to an oil (e.g. Amande, Aspic), a pulverised substance, a seed, herb, root, or flower. Unfortunately, the recipe numbers in Deblock's and Braekman's translations of *Le Bâtiment des Recettes* are not the same as they are based on different editions. Nonetheless, scholars will appreciate that these publications allow for comparisons between the French and Dutch translations. The glossaries provide important information on the great diversity of historical names in the European vernaculars. With this laborious and assiduous editorial work, Deblock and Braekman give voice to a socially diverse early modern readership that was engaged in medical preparations, artisanal technologies, cosmetics, and domestic experimentations, but also in a variety of pleasant diversions, including calligraphy, sleights of hands, and wondrous particulars.

Notes

1 All page numbers refer to Deblock's 2015 critical edition of *Le Bâtiment des Recettes*.

2 "Notice bibliographique *Bastiment des receptes*": <https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb33256093f>.

3 Digitale bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse letteren: http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_bat002wlbr01_01/

4 *The Recipes Project | Food, Magic, Art, Science, and Medicine*: <https://recipes.hypotheses.org/>.

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