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EPIC ARTS *in* RENAISSANCE FRANCE

PHILLIP JOHN USHER

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critic, my intellectual soulmate.

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A Note on Editions and Translations

References to classical epics are signalled only by the name of the text, the numbers referring to book and verse (e.g. *Aeneid* 1:1–10). Unless otherwise stated, quotations are from the following Loeb Library editions: Homer, *Odyssey*, translated by A. T. Murray, revised by George E. Dimock (2 vols; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Homer, *Iliad*, translated by A. T. Murray, revised by William F. Wyatt (2 vols; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Virgil, *Aeneid*, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough, revised by G. P. Goold (2 vols; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Lucan, *Pharsalia*, translated by J. D. Duff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977). I have sometimes preferred to modify or replace these translations with my own. Bible quotations are from: *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. Roger Gryson (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003), and *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008). Unless otherwise noted, all other translations are my own. Throughout, Latin is quoted directly from the various editions, meaning that the differentiation of u/v and i/j follows the respective editors' choices.

Introduction

Anyone who has visited the *châteaux* of France's Loire Valley can tell you: not only is their architecture frequently heroic, echoing through grandiose doorways, intricate façades, and decorative reliefs the grandeur we know from the temples and triumphal arches of Antiquity, but the paintings, tapestries, and sculptures that they house frequently feature gods and heroes familiar from classical epic—from Achilles and Aphrodite to Zephyrus and Zeus.[1] For modern-day travellers with a love of Homer or Virgil or Lucan or of their early modern descendants, the palaces of Renaissance France are magical places, which localize and animate, in full colour and in three dimensions, our readings of epic.[2] As the sixteenth century unfolded, the heroes and themes of epic (and more generally of mythology) came to be, I state with only slight exaggeration, *everywhere*—in paintings and frescoes, in decorated galleries, in sculptures, on ceramics, on enamel plaques, and even on the plates and pitchers placed on royal tables. Benvenuto Cellini (1500–71), an Italian artist who spent five years working for François I^{er} (r. 1515–47), even made a gold, ivory, and enamel salt cellar (or *saliera*) for the king, which depicted the relationship between the sea and the earth, via the figures of Poseidon, god of the sea, and Demeter, goddess of agriculture (Figure 0.1).[3] Whence sprang a paradox—or so it seemed—and the origins of the present book. On the one hand, mythology in general, and epic in particular, were clearly ubiquitous in Renaissance art; and modern-day visitors can still get this impression simply by walking through those palaces that survived both random fires and the French Revolution. Yet, on the other hand, many of the French epic poems actually composed during this period, most often

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[1] Many studies detail the rebirth of classical forms in sixteenth-century France. For the architectural context, see Frédérique Lemerle and Yves Pauwels, *L'Architecture à la Renaissance* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005), 201–33. On the Renaissance collecting of classical forms (e.g. statues imported from Rome), see Jean Adhémar, 'The Collection of François I^{er}', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 30 (1946), 4–16; C. Malcolm Brown, 'Major and Minor Collections of Antiquities in Documents of the Later Sixteenth Century', *Art Bulletin*, 46 (1984), 296–507; Margaret McGowan, *The Vision of Rome in Late Renaissance France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), esp. chs 3–4.

[2] The French term *château*, for which there is no satisfactory English equivalent, has a range of meanings—it can refer, for example, to both a medieval defensive castle and an Italianate Renaissance *palazzo*, two very different kinds of architectural (and social) structure. When referring to Renaissance *châteaux*, I will generally use either the French term or the English word *palace*, a choice seemingly justified by its use to name buildings such as Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, England.

[3] Although an allegorical portrait rather than a specific scene from classical epic, the *saliera* nevertheless partakes of epic: Poseidon is obviously omnipresent in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid* (as Neptune); as for Demeter, Homer calls food the 'gift of Demeter' (*Iliad* 13:322), both Homer and Virgil (who calls her Ceres) talk of her as a friend of peace (*Iliad* 1:500; *Aeneid* 4:58).

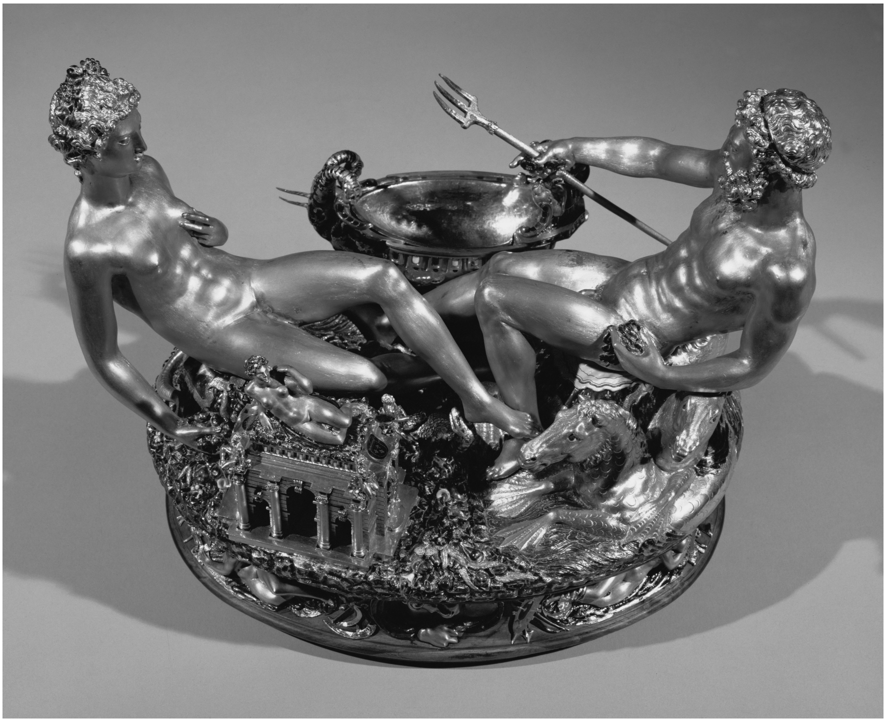

Figure 0.1. Benevenuto Cellini, *Saliera* (1543), depicting the relationship of the earth and the sea via the figures of Poseidon and Demeter. Gold, enamel, ebony. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria. Inv. 881. (*Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.*)

adapted from or in one way or another inspired by their classical models, have been forgotten by all except a few specialists. And the few epics of the period whose titles are perhaps at least recognized by a wider audience—Ronsard's *Franciade* or D'Aubigné's *Tragiques*—do not enjoy the kind of reputation so firmly established for the epic-inspired art on display at Fontainebleau and elsewhere. Whereas Louis Dimier once asserted that French artistic taste was invented at Fontainebleau, a view more recently expounded by André Chastel,[4] the epics fashioned in France at the same time clearly did not have the same lasting impact on French literary taste. Such then, in its most imprecise form, is the thought that gave rise to the present project. How did it come to be, I wondered, that visitors flock to the Loire Valley palaces and to the Louvre and other museums to see epic art produced in Renaissance France, yet few ever pick up and read those contemporary literary epics without which the obvious predilection for the heroic in the arts would seem either quirky or purely pedantic? And even more pressingly: should not the fascination for epic in the sister arts have direct counterparts in contemporary literary production?

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[4] André Chastel, 'French Renaissance Art in a European Context', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 12/4 (1981), 102.

Such questions rapidly evolved as it became apparent just how many epics Renaissance France did actually produce—more than 200, in fact. Scholars Klára Csűrös and Denis Bjaï recently produced a (probably nearly exhaustive) inventory of epic works, going chronologically from Valerand de la Varanne's *De inclyta Caroli octavi Francorum Regis in agro Fornoviensi Victoria... Carmen* (1501), an author (slightly) more famous for his heavily Virgilian epic poem about Joan of Arc, *De gestis Joanne virginis* (1516), up to Nicolas Geuffrin's *La Franciade, ou Histoire générale des rois de France* (1623), a sequel to Ronsard's *Franciade* (1572).[5] Moreover, there are many traces in sixteenth-century French literature of a longing for epic, both in *arts poétiques* and in literary texts themselves.[6] Joachim du Bellay's *Deffence, et illustration de la langue françoyse* (Defence and Glorification of the French Tongue) (1549), a veritable manifesto for the renewal of French letters—ironically inspired by a foreign model, Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo delle lingue* (1542)[7]—announced that a French epic 'fera hausser la Teste [à ton pauvre Langaige]' ('will allow your poor language to raise its head proudly') and bestow on the vernacular such glory as to make it equal 'aux superbes Langues Greque, et Latine' ('to the stately Greek and Latin tongues').[8] Jacques Peletier du Mans, another associate of the Pléiade, made similar statements in his *Art poëtique* (1555): 'L'œuvre héroïque est celui [*sic*] qui donne le prix, et le vrai titre de Poète' ('A work of heroic poetry is what will decide the poet's worth and true title').[9] Du Bellay's other writings are also textured by this longing for epic:[10] his most famous sonnet, known to all French schoolchildren, begins 'Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage . . . ' ('Happy is he who, like Ulysses, has made a fine journey . . . ');[11] he attempted to write a short epic, the 'Monomachie de David et de Goliath' ('Monomachia of David and Goliath') (1552);[12] he translated books 4 and 6 of the *Aeneid*;[13] and his *Antiquitez de Rome* (1558)—which Edmund Spenser translated as the *Ruins of Rome*—owes a great debt to the desperation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*.[14] Moreover, in sonnets 157–9 of the *Regrets*, Du Bellay connects literature with architecture by proposing to build a textual palace to house Homer, Virgil, Petrarch (who penned the epic *Africa*), and Ronsard—'Chacun aura sa forme et son architecture, | Chacun ses ornements, sa grace et sa peincture' ('Each will have his own form and architecture, | Each his own ornaments, his own grace and painting').[15]

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[5] Klára Csűrös and Denis Bjaï, 'Le Long Poëme narratif à la Renaissance: Tableau chronologique', *Nouvelle revue du seizième siècle*, 15/1 (1997), 185–214. See Valerand de la Varanne, *De inclyta Caroli octavi Francorum Regis in agro Fornoviensi Victoria... Carmen* (Paris: J. Moeart, 1501) [BnF Rés M–YC–930(4) and Gallica] and *De gestis Joanne virginis, France egregie bellactricis, libri IV* (Paris: J. de la Porte, 1516) [BnF Rés M–YC–8ß51(1)]. A biographical sketch of this author is available in James K. Farge, *Biographical Register of Paris Doctors of Theology* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980), entry no. 269. On his Joan of Arc epic, see Dumitru Murarasu, *La Poésie néo-latine et la renaissance des lettres antiques en France (1500–1549)* (Paris: Gamber, 1928), 63–9. Nicolas Geuffrin, *La Franciade, ou Histoire générale des rois de France, depuis Pharamond jusques à Louys le juste... mise en vers françois par le sieur Geuffrin* (Paris: A. de Sommaville, 1623) [BnF 8–L40–2 and Gallica].

[6] For overviews of such a longing for epic, see Françoise Charpentier, 'Le Désir d'épopée', *Revue de littérature compare*, 4 (1986), 417–26. See also the preamble—titled 'Préambule: Le Désir d'épopée'—in Bruno Méniel, *Renaissance de l'épopée: La Poésie épique en France de 1572 à 1623* (Geneva: Droz, 2004), 19–29.

[7] On this irony, see the dated but still useful study by Pierre Villey, *Les Sources italiennes de la Défense et Illustration de la langue française de Joachim du Bellay* (Paris: Champion, 1908). For more recent comment, see also Ignacio Navarrete, 'Strategies of Appropriation in Speroni and Du Bellay', *Comparative Literature*, 41/2 (Spring 1989), 141–5.

[8] Joachim Du Bellay, *La Deffence, et illustration de la langue françoyse*, ed. Jean-Charles Monferran (Geneva: Droz, 2007), 139.

[9] Jacques Peletier du Mans, 'De l'œuvre héroïque', in Francis Goyet (ed.), *Traités de poétique et de rhétorique de la Renaissance* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1990), 305. On the place of epic in Renaissances *arts poétiques*, see Jean-Charles Monferran and Olivia Rosenthal, 'Le Poème héroïque dans les arts poétiques français de la Renaissance: Genre à part entière ou manière d'illustrer la langue?', *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 100/2 (March–April 2000), 201–16. Monferran and Rosenthal note that 'les chapitres consacrés à l'œuvre héroïque semblent... jouer un rôle particulier dans la disposition des arts poétiques: ils servent moins à délimiter les contours d'un genre qu'à préciser la mission du poète, et plus exactement, à définir la bonne manière d'illustrer la langue' ('the chapters dedicated to the epic poem seem ... to play a particular role in the organization of *arts poétiques*: their purpose is less to define a genre's contours than to delineate the poet's mission and, more exactly, to define the right way of illustrating [i.e. making famous] the [French] language) (p. 201).

Given this huge corpus and the palpable longing for epic in the writings of Du Bellay and his contemporaries, the terms of the original paradox—epic art *versus* epic literature—called for an investigation that would question the very formulation of what first felt like a paradox. What if, I wondered, the gap that seems to exist between epic *châteaux* and epic texts was a product of later ages? Or of some misunderstanding? The aim, scope, and method of the enquiry that follows began to come into focus when I started to look at the initial puzzle from a new perspective, one from which questions of canonicity and of the success or failure of literary epic appeared suddenly less important than the very concrete connections that, in the process of reading and reflecting, had begun to appear between specific epic texts and individual realizations in the sister arts. The more I read French Renaissance epic, the more epic art and epic literature seemed to grow from and respond to similar concerns, opportunities, and constraints. The more, too, they seemed to respond to each other aesthetically. And the more both appeared to be the product of, and to make sense within, communities in which writers and artists shared (or hoped to share) patrons, in which readers were also cultivated consumers of art, and in which artists relied upon the translations, commentaries, and original writings of contemporary authors. In other words, it became increasingly evident that the relationship between epic art and epic literature in Renaissance France could be better grasped if approached not as a puzzle, an enigma, or a discrepancy, but rather as a constantly renegotiated exchange, defined by the complex interactions between the various members of interpretive communities. Such is the approach adopted here. My goal, then, is not to address a *décalage* or gap between literature and art by, for example, affirming the existence of, or creating, an epic canon, nor is it to understand why French epic supposedly failed or fell short of expectations. It is, rather, to reinscribe literary epics within those exchanges with art that presided over their composition and early reception, with the general hypothesis that such an enterprise will afford new readings somewhat liberated from the demands made by comparison with modern literary taste.

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[10] See Phillip John Usher, '*Victor est quisquis patriam tuetur*: Du Bellay and the Elusive French Epic' (unpublished typescript, 2007), and Marc Bizer, 'From Lyric to Epic and Back: Joachim Du Bellay's Epic Regrets,' *Modern Language Quarterly*, 71/2 (2010), 107–27.

[11] Joachim du Bellay, *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Henri Chamard (Paris: Cornély, 1908–34), ii. 54. Much has been written about the meaning of this sonnet. See George Hugo Tucker, 'Ulysses and Jason: A Problem of Allusion in Sonnet 31 of *Les Regrets*', *French Studies*, 36/4 (1982), 385–96. Thanks to Philip Ford's edition of Jean Dorat's *Mythologicum, ou, Interprétation allégorique de l'Odyssée, 10–12 et de L'hymne à Aphrodite* (Geneva: Droz, 2000), Marc Bizer has been able to offer an updated analysis of the sonnet in his 'A Source of Du Bellay's Most Famous Sonnet: "Heureux qui comme Ulysse"', *Romance Notes*, 42/3 (2002), 371–5.

[12] The 'Monomachie' has been called (with some exaggeration, I would suggest) the 'only significant attempt at writing an epic, albeit a very short one, by a member of the Pléiade before the publication of Ronsard's *Franciade*' (Thomas M. Greene, *The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 252).

[13] On Du Bellay's translations/adaptations of the *Aeneid*, see Geneviève Demerson, 'Présence de Virgile chez Du Bellay', in Ian D. McFarlane (ed.), *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Sanctandreani: Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies* (Binghamptom, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1986), 319–30. See also Corinne Noirot-Maguire, 'The Politics of Translatio: Du Bellay and the Death of Palinurus', in Phillip John Usher and Isabelle Fernbach (eds), *Virgilian Identities in the French Renaissance* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), 189–212; and Todd W. Reeser, 'Du Bellay's Dido and the Translation of Nation', in the same volume, pp. 213–35.

[14] Frank McMinn Chambers, 'Lucan and the Antiquitez de Rome', *PMLA* 60/4 (December 1945), 937–48. See also the chapter on Du Bellay in Jean-Claude Ternaux, *Lucain et la littérature de l'âge baroque en France, citation, imitation et création* (Paris: Champion, 2000).

[15] Joachim du Bellay, *Œuvres poétiques*, ii. 118. See also Jean Balsamo, 'Le Poète et l'architecte', in Yvonne Bellenger (ed.), *Du Bellay et ses sonnets romains* (Paris: Champion, 2009), 61–75.

For a first glimpse at the kinds of connections I will be seeking out here, it is useful to begin with a trip to the Renaissance room at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Two example artefacts will help define the contact zones between epic literature and the sister arts that interest me. On one wall of the room, the visitor sees a selection of French enamel plaques, executed in the 1530s, which recount—in an episodic structure not dissimilar to that of a comic book—Aeneas' journey from Troy to Italy (Figure 0.2). As I have discussed elsewhere, the enamels, largely based on the woodcuts designed by Sebastian Brant for a German edition of Virgil's *Opera* (published in Strasbourg in 1502 by Johannis Grüninger), retell Aeneas's story in a manner that closely corresponds to the ways in which readers understood Virgil's epic at the time.[16] In other words, standing in the Metropolitan Museum, one is looking not just at a visual representation of Aeneas's story as everyone now knows it from paperback editions of Virgil's classic, but a visual representation of Aeneas's story *as it was understood in France in the early 1530s*, which, in a nutshell, means as an allegory for the life of a good Christian. When we look at the image reproduced in Figure 0.2, we should see—if we are to aspire to gaze in a way comparable to that of early modern viewers—not just Aeneas leaving Carthage and abandoning Dido, but also a Christian leaving behind his lustful ways and returning to the path of virtue. Images such as this one assume and indeed refer to an interpretive community and to specific incarnations of epic texts. Both the *Aeneid*, as it was available to the French in various editions and translations in the 1530s, and the enamels produced in Limoges partake in a shared hermeneutic and aesthetic enterprise.[17] The plaques take on their full meaning only in the light of

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[16] See Phillip John Usher, 'The *Aeneid* in the 1530s: Reading with the Limoges Enamels', in Usher and Fernbach (eds), *Virgilian Identities in the French Renaissance*, 161–87.

[17] On the various editions and translations of Virgil, see Alice Hulubei, 'Virgile en France au XVI^e siècle', *Revue du XVI^e siècle*, 18 (1931), 1–77, and Valerie Worth-Stylianou, 'Virgilian Space in

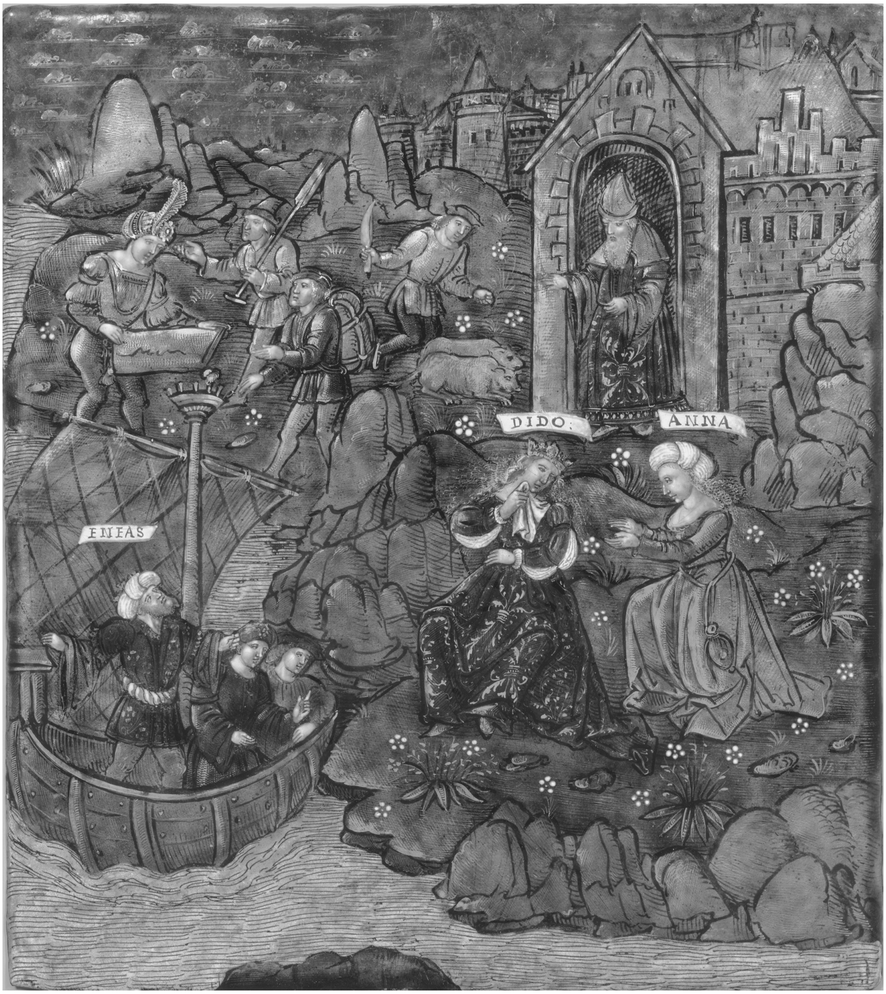

Figure 0.2. Master of the Aeneid. *Aeneas Departs from Carthage* (1530s). Painted enamel on copper plaque, partly gilt. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Rogers Fund, 1925 (25.39.4). (© *The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY.*)

what Virgil's text, as it was then available, meant to contemporary readers. Likewise, viewers of the enamels—for example, of the ghastly (and specifically Christian) Mouth of Hell by which Aeneas' catabasis in book 6 is illustrated—would take back to their reading of Virgil's text lessons learned from the images.

Productions in the sister arts as they relate to epic texts, as this series of enamel plaques underscores, are never *just* illustrations or echoes of an abstract and

Renaissance French Translations of the *Aeneid*,' in Usher and Fernbach (eds), *Virgilian Identities in the French Renaissance*, 117–39.

unchanging text. In fact, there is no such thing as a timeless and deterritorialized artistic 'version' of a work of literature—such 'versions' are always, so to speak, appropriators or purveyors of specific ways of reading the texts upon which they draw. And, similarly, the production of translations and adaptations of classical epic took place within communities familiar with epic not just through texts, but also via the various sister arts. Still in the Renaissance room at the Metropolitan, the visitor can see a magnificent marble representation of *The Reign of Jupiter* (Figure 0.3).[18] Measuring approximately 30 x 48 centimetres, the sculpture shows a bearded Jupiter, the king of the pagan gods, who sits on his Olympian throne, thunderbolt in hand; to his right, Mercury is in flight, accompanied by his herald's staff (called a caduceus). From Jupiter's rocky ledge-like throne water flows down into the fountain below—perhaps to echo the fountain of Fontainebleau. Zodiacal signs (Gemini and Sagittarius) are on each side. Most importantly, the depicted scene

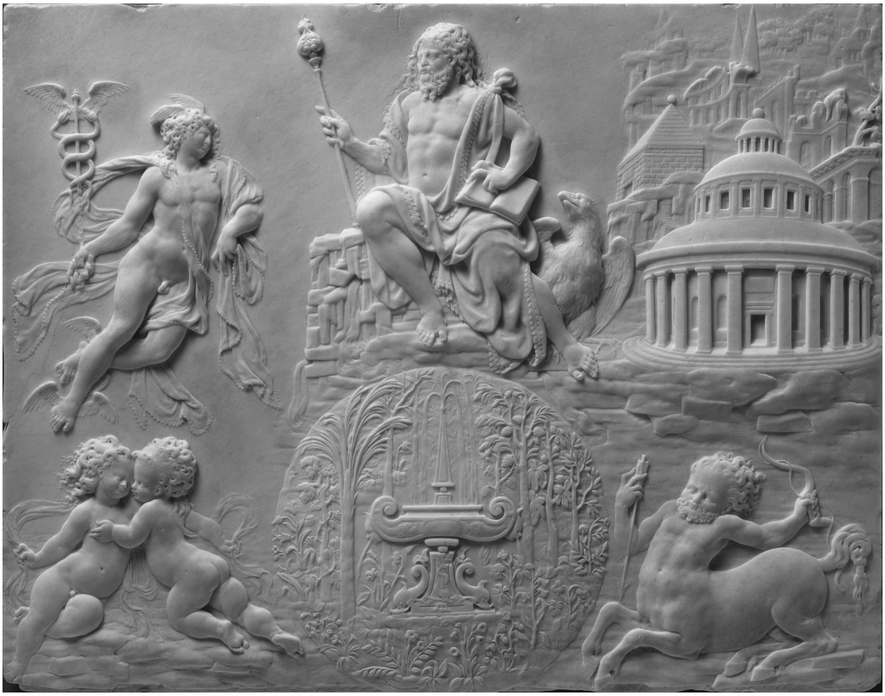

Figure 0.3. Anonymous, *The Reign of Jupiter* (1555–60). Marble. Metropolitan Museum, New York City. (*The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Coudert Brothers, 1888 (88.3.85). Image provided by Academic Publishing (IAP). Reproduction of any kind is prohibited without express written permission in advance from The Metropolitan Museum of Art.*)

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[18] *Renaissance and Baroque Europe Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, NS 55/2 (Autumn 1997), 33.

recalls again, among other things, Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which Jupiter sends Mercury down to remind Aeneas of his mission to found Rome, causing him, as just noted, to abandon Dido and sail to Italy, a scene repeated in French adaptations of the *Aeneid* like Ronsard's *Franciade* (1572), to which I shall return in Chapter 3. The tone of this marble relief is clearly less allegorical, more about Aeneas' (and most likely the French king's) mission as the leader of a nation or *gens* (people, race, tribe)—a change in line with the general tendency, as the century progressed, *away from* editions of Virgil accompanied by voluminous allegorizing commentaries. Just as the enamel plaques might have been on the wall of a French lord or the marriage chest of a young rich couple, so this marble would probably have been part of daily life at Fontainebleau and the epic's story would here have been perceived as having less to do with Christian virtue than with kingly mission. It is not hard to imagine that a visitor to the palace might return home with a renewed idea of the contemporary relevance of the *Aeneid* and of the growing public expression of a call for French epic. Again, the sister arts appropriate, problematize, and make public, rather than just reproduce, the epic. They offer a specific reading of epic—and, conversely, ask something of the translators and writers of epic. Viewing the Limoges enamels or this marble depiction of the king of the Olympians re-creates, in miniature, the experience that sixteenth-century visitors must have had when walking through Renaissance dwellings: epic was all around and its heroes were now part of shared (and evolving) understandings of epic.

François Rabelais's *Quart livre* (1552) testifies to the fact that the kinds of intuition I am exploring here—about the connections between epic texts, artistic objects, and interpretive ventures—were already perceptible in, and indeed central to, the culture of sixteenth-century France. In the second chapter of Rabelais's work, Pantagruel and his companions, who have voyaged to a New World on board a great ship called the Thalamège, land on the Island of Medamothi, 'belle à l'œil et plaisante à cause du grand nombre des Phares et haultes tours marbrines, des quelles tout le circuit estoit orné, qui n'estoit moins grand que de Canada' ('beautiful and pleasing to the eye because of the great number of lighthouses and high marble towers, which decorated the island's shoreline' which was no smaller than Canada).[19] For sale near the port are 'divers tableaulx, diverses tapisseries, divers animaulx, poissons, oizeaulx, et aultres marchandises exotiques et peregrines' ('various paintings, various tapestries, various animals, fishes, birds, and other exotic and foreign merchandise').[20] Frère Jan, Panurge, Epistemon, and Rhizotome all buy paintings. Pantagruel, who has Gymnaste do his shopping for him, purchases instead a tapestry: 'la vie et gestes de Achilles en soixante et dixhuict pieces de tapisserie à haultes lisses, longues de quatre, larges de trois toises' ('the life and deeds of Achilles, in seventy-eight pieces of tapestry, four *toises* long by three *toises* wide

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[19] François Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Mireille Huchon (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1994), 540. For a recent study of the Island of Medamothi within the context of the *Quart livre*, its overlap with Jacques Cartier's *Relations*, and the question of spatial palimpsests, see Phillip John Usher, *Errance et cohérence* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2010), 59–92.

[20] Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 540.

[approximately 8 x 3 metres]).[21] Made of Phrygian silk and embossed with gold and silver, the long tapestry tells the story of Achilles, the Greek hero of the Trojan War and the greatest warrior of Homer's *Iliad*. As Rabelais describes it, Pantagruel would have seen in his newly acquired work of art the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, the birth and youth of Achilles, the latter's exploits as a warrior, his death, and finally the appearance of his ghost, as well as the sacrifice of Polyxena (whom Achilles was to marry had he not died). It is as if Pantagruel finds on this distant island an object originally manufactured for Fontainebleau. Perhaps even manufactured *at* Fontainebleau, for in 1540 François I^er^ had set up a weaving workshop within the palace grounds for the production of tapestries based on the Galerie François I^er^ (which I discuss in Chapter 2) and which indeed depicted, among many other things, the *Education of Achilles*.[22] This particular literary trace of a fascination for epic art is all the more eloquent in that it problematizes the connection by foregrounding the literary origins of the tapestry: Rabelais tells us the textual sources of the tapestry (Statius Papinius, Homer, Ovid, Quintus Calaber, and Euripides). The episode on the Island of Medamothi testifies not just to a fascination for epic-themed decoration, but also to an awareness for the inherent connection between literature and what I have been and will be calling throughout this work, using a long-existing term most thoroughly explored by Jean H. Hagstrum, the 'sister arts'.[23] The episode on the Island of Medamothi is not a chance occurrence. It points to a constellation that connects epic literature with both history and the sister arts. About forty years before Rabelais published the definitive edition of the *Quart livre*, another French author, Jean Lemaire de Belges, published a rather remarkable book called the *Illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troyes* (Illustrations of Gaul and Singularities of Troy) (1511), which, via a kind of specious etymology popular at the time, made Paris, son of Priam, the founder of Paris, the city.[24] Lemaire's work sought to articulate and legitimize a correlation between early modern France and classical antiquity via the fiction of a Trojan genealogy. At an early point in the text, Lemaire puts words into the mouth of Mercury to convey that his enterprise, which charts its course between truth and fiction and between history and mythology, is also inherently, as with Pantagruel's tapestry of Achilles, about connecting words to productions in various domains of the fine arts. Lemaire has Mercury complain about earlier generations of French writers who 'ont tousiours erré iusques icy' ('always, until now, made errors'), how they did not satisfy 'la dignité de lhistoire [*sic*]' ('the dignity of the history') they were trying to tell, the history in question being, of course, that of both France and the French. The heart of his criticism was, however, that:

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[21] Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 541.

[22] Jean Jacquart, *Francois I^er^* (Paris: Fayard, 1981), 319. For a reproduction of Rosso's *Education of Achilles* in the Galerie François I^er^, see Henri Zerner, *L'Art de la Renaissance en France* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), 80.

[23] Jean J. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

[24] See George Huppert, 'The Trojan Franks and their Critics', *Studies in the Renaissance*. 12 (1965), 227–41; and Judy Kem, *Jean Lemaire de Belges's Les Illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troye: The Trojan Legend in the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

> Toutes peintures et tapisseries modernes de quelque riche et coustengeuse estoffe quelles puissent estre, si elles sont faites après le patron desdites corrompues histoires, perdent beaucoup de leur estime et reputation entre gens sauans et entenduz (all modern paintings and tapestries, however rich and expensive their fabric, if they take as models the aforementioned corrupted stories, lose a lot of their value and reputation amongst learned and cultivated people).[25]

In other words, Lemaire argues for the interdependency of painting, tapestry, history, and literature. Given his subject matter, epic narratives obviously occupy a privileged position in such an alignment.[26] It is just such interdependency that lies at the heart of what follows.

The present study, then, situated at the intersection of several disciplines, grew from the puzzlement, intuitions, and perspectives discussed so far. Each of its four chapters explores a specific set of interconnections between epic literature and the sister arts in early modern France. As already noted, there were many epics published in sixteenth-century France, and only a tiny handful can be considered in the present study—this book makes no claim to be anything like exhaustive. For the sake of clarity, I will first map what is included before attempting to make clear how I arrived at this particular selection of texts.

After seeking out the origins of epic art in the painted panels of marriage chests (*cassoni*) in fifteenth-century Italy, Chapter 1 discusses the subsequent trend, in Italy then in France, of epic galleries. I then study in detail three such sixteenth-century galleries located in different regions of France, each of which appropriates an important classical epic. A first section looks at the Homeric *Galerie d'Ulysse* at Fontainebleau just outside Paris; a second section focuses on a gallery largely indebted to Virgil's *Aeneid* at the Château d'Oiron in western France; and a third section deals with a gallery at the Château d'Ancy-le-Franc in Burgundy that takes up Lucan's *Pharsalia*. As well as offering a first map of epic art and interpretive communities around Renaissance France, this chapter sets the scene, and indeed performs much interpretive groundwork, for what follows by analysing the dialogues between the three tenors of Ancient epic and the artists and patrons who found enough contemporary resonances in their narratives to want to live (quite literally) within them. The remaining three chapters, ordered chronologically, turn to epics written by French authors in Renaissance France.

Chapter 2 takes up a neo-Latin epic and its French adaptation, Etienne Dolet's *Fata* (1539) and *Les Gestes* (1540). It shows an author eager to document his competition with the sister arts within the context of a France and a French king dealing with the consequences of military defeat at the Battle of Pavia (1525). I argue that Dolet creates an epic—or rather *two* epics—that position themselves in relation to both the politics (François I^{er}'s second ascension) and aesthetics of Fontainebleau (painterly allegory echoed in epic simile). I further suggest that Dolet's epics take on their full sense only when reinscribed within the context of artistic representations of the Battle of Pavia realized within the Imperial circle of Charles V. Dolet keeps his promise, in a sense, and shows his epic to be capable of something that French art could not do. Chapter 3 traces the production and reception of Ronsard's *Franciade* (1572), beginning with the initial announcement of the project in 1549, in the wake of Henri II's arrival on the throne. The chapter subsequently traces Ronsard's connections to the new Louvre, whose façades, designed by Pierre Lescot and Jean Goujon, perhaps alluded to Ronsard's epic, and discusses finally the *Franciade*'s presence at the royal entry of Charles IX and the epic's afterlife at one of Henri IV's palaces. In such readings, both Dolet and Ronsard are seen to be in competition with France's artists and at the same time desirous to mimic certain royal aesthetic choices. Both arguably align themselves not just with the political power of the French monarchy, but with the artistic forms frequently associated with that power—Dolet's epic project might be described as being *bellifontain* (that is, in the style of Fontainebleau); Ronsard's project, much more complex in its interactions with art, could be termed (as we shall see) at once classical and mannerist, architectural and painterly. Chapter 4 turns to a very different situation and deals with the horror of France's Wars of Religion (1562–98), by reading the textualization of Parisian architecture and of other artworks in Agrippa d'Aubigné's *Les Tragiques*. In this final chapter, a new form of connection between epic and the sister arts emerges in which the text appropriates artistic structures and surfaces in order to destroy them—something like the way graffiti covers and disfigures existing structures. Unlike the classical or Renaissance epics studied in the first three chapters, here epic seeks not to imitate art or the artist, but to dislodge them and to rewrite the history of art in order to affirm a specific (Calvinist and apocalyptic) vision of the future. The book's conclusion extends the *tableau* by enquiring into possible directions for further research and by turning attention to other periods of French literary history.

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[25] Jean Lemaire de Belges, *Œuvres*, ed. Auguste Jean Stecher (Louvain: J. Lefever, 1882–4), i. 4.

[26] In making such a connection, Lemaire is echoing Alberti, who in 1435 recommended that painters, in order to succeed in their art, acquaint themselves with poetry, a concern sounded a century later by Ludovico Dolce in his *Aretino* (1557). See Margaret McGowan, *Ideal Forms in the Age of Ronsard* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 63.

This study's trajectory requires a few explanations to elucidate why it was chosen, what has been left out, what it takes for granted, and how it builds on existing scholarship. To begin, then: why *this* trajectory? The most obvious limits are chronological. I have selected a corpus that traces a historical arc from François I^{er}'s triumphalism and the renewal of French art and literature that followed the disaster at the Battle of Pavia (here, epic art and literature complement each other even as they compete), up to a Protestant perspective on France's bloody civil wars (at which time epic asserts its power to destroy art). The present study thus begins in the late 1530s because a number of roughly contemporaneous developments in art and literature point towards a growing *rapprochement* between epic art and literature. In the wake of the Battle of Pavia and as part of François I^{er}'s second ascension, French art (architecture, painting, and so on) underwent a sudden renewal, in particular via the importation of Italian and more generally Ancient models and archetypes, an evolution that in turn gave rise to a sudden flourishing in France of epic-related art, such as the various galleries discussed in Chapter 1—the Homeric Galerie d'Ulysse, for example, was begun *c.*1541. At around the same time, the publication of Dolet's verse *Fata* (1539), followed by his own French prose translation *Les Gestes* (1540), signalled, as detailed in Chapter 2, a distinct evolution towards what would soon be a central goal of the Pléiade: the illustration of the French language and of French monarchy via the production of a classically inspired literary epic. Dolet's epic is also, as far as I am aware, the first French epic to signal, self-consciously and explicitly, its own competition with other art forms. My end point is marked by the publication, in 1616, of D'Aubigné's *Tragiques*—but this text was mostly written at the end of the sixteenth century, so the date of 1616 can be taken in many ways *cum grano salis.* My end point is really slightly earlier, with the Wars of Religion, which closed with the Edict of Nantes in 1598. I end with the *Tragiques* because they constitute a key point in epic's relationship to the arts, in which the text asserts its power over art, in order to reconfigure existing artworks. Were I to study more fully the early seventeenth century, the writings of César de Nostredame, the son of the more famous Michel, might suggest themselves for analysis,[27] as might Nicolas Bergier's *Poeme Heroique sur une antique piece de tapisserie, en laquelle est representé le voyage du Roy Charles VII. en sa ville de Reims* (1613)[28] and Jean Fermeluy's *Poeme spirituel contenant l'histoire de la vie, mort et miracles de sainct Roch* (1619),[29] two epic texts based on tapestries and thus, as one commentator phrased it, direct 'rivals' of the sister arts.[30] Had I included discussion of Nostredame, Bergier, Fermeluy, the arc traced here, from royal triumphalism to the destruction of official art, would probably curve back upon itself, as these texts seemingly seek models and authority in art rather than attempt to destroy art. Such a statement reminds us that the present investigation is just one volume of a vaster and as yet unwritten history of epic and art in France—I shall return to the long history in my conclusion.

Even within such fixed chronological limits, difficult choices had to be made. As this is the first book-length study focused entirely on the connection between epic art and literature in Renaissance France, I deemed it important to include extended discussion of the most obvious candidates—that is, those epics that, despite everything, are the least forgotten. Still, other obvious candidates were not retained and such choices deserve some explanation. One key criterion that deserves mention here is that the epics retained for analysis in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are all, in a broad sense, historical—and this clearly determines the kinds of relationship such texts entertain with the sister arts: Dolet deals with the reign of François I^{er}, Ronsard with the mythical history of France (as a pre-history of the reign of Charles IX), and D'Aubigné with the Wars of Religion. Other kinds of epic are not considered here. I have not included discussion, for example, of epics that might be termed scientific or encyclopaedic. Had I done so, I would probably have found different kinds of connections with the sister arts—probably of a more theoretical type. Such connections deserve study on their own terms and call out for their own book-length analysis. For example, in the 3003 verses of Scève's posthumously published *Microcosme* (1562), the individual reconnects with the universe after the solitary idealism of *La Saulsaye* (1547)[31] and the poem is, in this sense, worldly—but this worldliness is arguably not the result of any extended concrete connection to the sister arts. Although it is true to note that some passages of the *Microcosme* are 'd'une puissance digne de Michel-Ange' (of a power worthy of Michelangelo),[32] there is, as far as my preliminary investigations have suggested, no more concrete connection between the poem and the painter. Similarly, when Scève discusses the five orders of architecture,[33] he does so primarily to determine 'entre l'homme et sa demeure un rapport presque physiologique' ('between man and his dwelling an almost physiological relationship').[34] For similar reasons, I have left aside discussion of Du Bartas's *La Sepmaine*. Although often read in the light of definitions of the baroque,[35] a term that straddles literature, art, music, and philosophy, *La Sepmaine* is—again, to the best of my knowledge—not connected with any major realizations in the sister arts. For sure and as Nelly Finet has observed, Du Bartas's epic is both (*a*) painterly in its frequent use of *enargeia* and appeals to the visual and (*b*) close in terms of subject matter to the paintings of (again) Michelangelo.[36] But the connections are at once less precise and more theoretical than

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[27] César de Nostredame, *Le Songe de Scipion, poème héroïque et très excellent, de César de Nostredame, gentilhomme provençal, dédié à . . . Charles duc de Savoye* (Toulouse: Impr. des Colomiez, 1606) [BnF Rés YE–2077 and Gallica] and, by the same author, *Pièces héroïques et diverses poésies, de César de Nostredame, gentilhomme provençal* (Toulouse: par la vefve de J. Colomiez, 1608) [BnF Rés YE–2072 and Gallica]. The latter (*Pièces héroïques . . .*) includes the *Rimes spirituelles* discussed by Cave in relation to paintings of the nativity. See Terence Cave, 'César de Nostredame: Poet & Painter?', in his *Devotional Poetry in France* c.*1570–1613* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 266–85, and, by the same author, 'Peinture et émotion dans la poésie religieuse de César de Nostredame', *Gazette des Beaux Arts* (January 1970), 57–62.

[28] Only published in 1628 in *Recueil de plusieurs inscriptions proposées à mettre sous les statues du roy Charles VII et de la pucelle d'Orléans qui sont élevées sur le pont d'Orléans des l'an 1458 et de diverses poesies faites à la louange de la pucelle, de ses freres et leur postérité qui se trouvent à la fin* (Paris, 1628) [Arsenal 8–H–7896], an (augmented) re-edition of Charles Du Lys's *Recueil de plusieurs inscriptions* (Paris: E. Martin, 1613) [BnF 4–LN27–527(A) and MFILM 4–LN27-527(A)].

[29] Jean Fermeluys, *Poëme spirituel contenant l'histoire de la vie, mort et miracles de saint Roch, avec plusieurs odes et prières chrestiennes et devotes* (Paris: publ. by the author, 1619) [BnF YE–7577 and Arsenal 8–BL–15408, 8–BL–15409, and 8–BL–15410].

[30] Denis Bjaï, 'Le Long Poème narratif à la Renaissance: Essai de présentation', *Nouvelle Revue du XVI*^{e} *Siècle*, 15/1 (1997), 25.

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[31] Scève's epic presents, as a recent editor noted, 'le miracle d'une activité dépouillée des défauts propres au *negotium* et riche . . . de toutes les profondes exigences de l'*otium*' ('the miracle of activity relieved of those faults specific to *negotium* and enriched by the fundamental demands of *otium*') (Enzo Giudici, 'Introduction', in Maurice Scève, *Microcosme*, ed. Enzo Giudici (Paris: Vrin, 1979), 28).

[32] Giudici, 'Introduction', 29.

[33] Scève, *Microcosme*, 3.725–6.

[34] Albert-Marie Schmidt, *La Poésie scientifique en France au seizième siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1938), 159. Although it would probably lead in directions different from those advanced in the present book, it would of course be of great interest to reread Scève's verses on the architectural orders in dialogue with, for example, Sebastiano Serlio's *I sette libri dell'architettura* (first volume published in 1537) or with Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola's *Regola delli cinque ordini d'architettura* (1562), translated into French only in the seventeenth century. See Maria Walcher Casotti, 'Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola: *Regola delli cinque ordini d'architettura*', in Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, *Trattati*, ed. Elena Bassi (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1985), 499–577; Frédérique Lemerle, 'Les Versions françaises de la *Regola* de Vignole au XVII^{e} siècle', *Monte Artium*, 1 (2008), 101–20.

[35] See, *inter alia*, Bruno Braunrot, *L'Imagination poétique chez Du Bartas: Eléments de sensibilité baroque dans la* Création du monde (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, Department of Romance Languages, 1973), and Claude-Gilbert Dubois, 'Itinéraire et impasses de la "vive représentation" au XVI^{e} siècle', in *La Littérature de la Renaissance, Mélanges offerts à Henri Weber* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1984), 405–25.

[36] See also Micheline Hugues, 'La Représentation des eaux du Déluge de Léonard de Vinci à Milton', *Revue de Littérature comparée*, 70/2 (1996), 137–61.

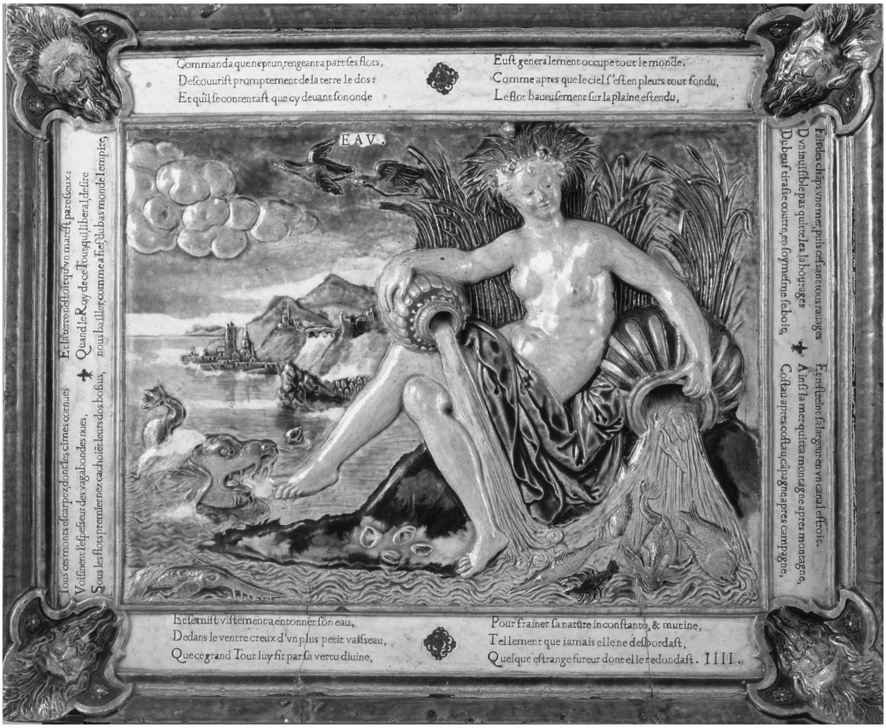
Commanda que neptun, rengeant a part ses flots,
Descouurist promptement de la terre le dos:
Et qu'il se contentast que cy deuant son onde
Eust generalement occupe tout le monde.
Comme apres que le ciel s'est en pleurs tout fondu,
Le flot baueusement sur la plaine estendu,
EAV.
Tous ces monts escarpez, dont les cimes cornues
Voisinent l'espesseur des vagabondes nues,
Sous les flots premiers cachoient leurs dos bossus,
Et la terre n'estoit qu'vn marest pareßeux:
Quand le Roy de ce Tout qui liberal desire
nous bailler, comme a fief, du bas monde l'empire,
Ainsi la mer quitta montagne apres montagne,
Costau apres costau, campagne apres campagne,
Et restreint sa largeur en vn canal estroit.
Et se mist vistement a entonner son eau,
Dedans le ventre creux d'vn plus petit vaisseau,
Que ce grand Tout luy fit par sa vertu diuine,
Pour frainer sa nature inconstante, & mutine,
Tellement que iamais elle ne desbordast,
Quelque estrange fureur dont elle redondast. IIII.

Figure 0.4. Bernard Palissy, *Allegory of Water* (*c.*1575). Glazed faience. (© *RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.*)

concrete: 'aucun document ne [fait] allusion aux peintures de Michel-Ange comme source d'inspiration de Du Bartas' ('no document [makes] any allusion to the paintings of Michelangelo as a possible source for Du Bartas').[37] Even though, more than Scève's *Microcosme*, *La Sepmaine* did entertain a relationship with some contemporary realizations in the sister arts, as seen both in the presence of woodcuts in the sixteenth-century editions and, for example, in *Allegory of Water* (Figure 0.4), a painted clay *plaque* (*c.*1595) now at the Louvre Museum and which contains, around its edges, verses from the poem,[38] it is arguably not the case that the *Sepmaine* depends to any great extent, in intent or reception, on such connections.[39]

Nor is Le Fèvre de la Boderie's *La Galliade* (1578) analysed here. The text's encyclopaedism coincides with a relationship between art and epic that is

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[37] Nelly Finet, 'Du Bartas et la peinture', in James Dauphiné (ed.), *Du Bartas 1590–1990* (Mont-de-Marsan: Editions InterUniversitaires, 1992), 288.

[38] Scève, *Microcosme*, 3.19–40.

[39] The *plaque* is titled in the Louvre catalogue as follows 'Plaque ornée d'une allégorie de l'Eau inspirée d'une gravure de Sadeler d'après Maarten de Vos' [OA 3363] and can be seen in Room 30, Case 4, on the first floor of the Richelieu building.