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François Béroalde de Verville: Le Moyen de parvenir
(review)

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Henri IV and Sully together reap praise for innovations in paving, sewers and lighting, perennial problems for the early modern capital. Henri IV focused on the beautification of Paris and, between the Place Dauphine and Place Royale, he began an architectural trend towards structuring and organization in Paris that would lead to comparisons with Rome by the end of Louis XIV's reign. Architectural matters, including interior decoration, are carefully tracked throughout the book, tracing trends, innovations and disasters. Among the praise lavished on Henri IV, he is credited with being the first king to become involved in public-private partnership, controlling construction of buildings funded by private capital. Thus, the Marais, the Île Saint-Louis and the Palais-Royal were devised and built. If Henri IV is the initial hero of this book, later chapters address the complexity of a fiery capital submitting to absolutism, under more specifically topical headings, including the construction aspirations of the nobility, women writers, Parisian 'corporations' (guilds, schools, *académies*), the Fronde, the concept of the heroic ideal, noble behaviour, religious zeal and, finally, the splendours of Paris under Louis XIV. Most impressive is Ranum's succinct account of the minefield of religious houses, allegiances and factions in the seventeenth century. For this topic alone, this essay is surely a crucial text for any student or aspiring seventeenth-century scholar. For pure pleasure, it is recommended reading for all lovers of Paris.

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FRANÇOIS BÉROALDE DE VERVILLE: *Le Moyen de parvenir*. Tome I. Transcription avec présentation, notes et index par HÉLÈNE MOREAU et ANDRÉ TOURNON, avec la collaboration de JEAN-LUC RISTORI. Paris, Champion, 2004. 497 pp. Hb €43.00.

FRANÇOIS BÉROALDE DE VERVILLE: *Le Moyen de parvenir*. Tome II. Fac simile éditée par HÉLÈNE MOREAU et ANDRÉ TOURNON avec la collaboration de JEAN-LUC RISTORI. Présentation d'ANDRÉ TOURNON. Paris, Champion, 2004. 322 pp. Hb €76.00.

In 1984 Hélène Moreau and André Tournon brought out what was then, and has remained ever since, by far the most scholarly and useful critical edition of *Le Moyen de parvenir* (see FS, XXXIX (1985), 195–96), the extraordinary fictional banquet at which hundreds of voices of famous people, living and (especially) dead, from Caesar to Ronsard, produce a disturbing mixture of philosophy, satire and obscenity that questions the value of language, learning and ethics. Moreau and Tournon's edition has played a large part in Verville's transformation into a writer of celebrity status: at a recent conference in France on Renaissance riddles, more papers were devoted to him than to anyone else. Now, with another publisher and an extra collaborator, they have revised their edition considerably, not only taking account of what has emerged since, such as the dates of Verville's death (1626) and of the earliest known edition (between 1614 and 1617, probably 1616), and not only revising key elements of their edition — such as the excellent introductory essays, the illuminating brief footnotes, and the punctuation system used for transcribing — but also now adding important, more extensive endnotes by Jean-Luc Ristori, which identify major intertexts,

including Verville's earlier writings that are reworked in *Le Moyen de parvenir* in precise ways. As before, two versions of the text are supplied: on the one hand a facsimile of what the editors demonstrate convincingly to be the earliest known state of the earliest known edition, and on the other hand a modernized transcription of that edition, which gives useful variants and also shows the tradition of dividing up and attributing the speeches that has become common since the eighteenth century. The transcription volume also concludes with an overview of Verville's voluminous writings (*Histoire vraie* is a slip for *Histoire véritable*, p. 456) and excellent indexes of themes and names. In physical terms alone, these sturdy and elegantly produced hardback volumes are designed to last much longer than the 1984 version. So there are many reasons why any person or library possessing that earlier version should, if it all possible, replace it with this one.

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MARIN MERSENNE: *La Vérité des sciences contre les Sceptiques ou Pyrrhoniens*. Édition et annotation par DOMINIQUE DESCOTES. (Sources classiques, 49). Paris, Champin, 2003. 1025 pp. Hb €120.00.

This work of 1625 comes from an early stage in Mersenne's career, before he became the centre of a dynamic intellectual network, and, as Descotes points out in his admirable introduction, it has therefore often been underestimated (although it is discussed in Popkin's *History of Scepticism*). Yet it deserves to be explored. Mersenne's preface represents scepticism as a strategy promoted by *libertins* targeting youthful pleasure-lovers: by sapping their faith in the sciences they hope to weaken their religion. Formally, the text is a dialogue, with, in the first book, the sceptic being confronted by an alchemist and a Christian philosopher. The two former are used to demolish each other, and the Christian philosopher picks up the pieces (an anticipation, Descotes suggests, of Pascal's technique in the *Entretien avec Monsieur de Sacy*). After Book 1, the alchemist disappears and the sceptic dwindles almost to nothing. For those interested in the history of scepticism, Book 1 is therefore the most rewarding. In Chapter 11, the Christian philosopher gives a succinct summary of Pyrrhonism, noting the technique of mutually destructive arguments, and enumerating the famous tropes, which he refutes as he goes along. However, the sceptic carries on the fight as long as he can using Pyrrhonist manoeuvres, already present in the *Apologie de Raymond Sebon*: attempts to justify knowledge involve a vicious circle, or an infinite regress from one reason to another. The validity of the syllogism, and Bacon's critique of it, are also discussed, as is the Baconian taxonomy of idols. The detailed and methodical nature of the discussion means that Mersenne is doing far more than merely restating Montaigne's presentation of Pyrrhonism, and there is much of interest in his attempts to rebut it. However, not content with a general refutation, he aims also to provide a specimen of certain knowledge, in the form of an abridgement of mathematics, which occupies the rest of the work and deals with arithmetic, algebra, geometry and trigonometry. As Descotes observes, Mersenne's text thus allows us to gauge 'ce que l'honnête homme pouvait savoir et comprendre des mathématiques du