

DU BARTAS' VISIT TO ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND IN 1587

The Huguenot poet Guillaume de Saluste Du Bartas (1544-90) visited Scotland in the summer of 1587 as an emissary from Henri de Navarre to negotiate a marriage match between James VI and Henri's sister, Catherine de Bourbon.¹ James had personally invited Du Bartas to Scotland, and showed great hospitality towards him: Du Bartas wrote a letter on 16 July from the King's residence at Falkland Palace, Fife, where he was enjoying himself hunting deer and hares.² The Frenchman received expensive gifts towards the end of his visit: velvet saddle pads worth a hundred crowns were being prepared for him in early September, while in a dispatch dated 18 September the French ambassador Courcelles reported to Henri III that James 'gratefyed Du Bartas at his departuer with a chaine of 1000^v and as much in redie monie, made him knight, and accompanyed him to the sea side, wher he made him promise to retourn againe'.³ James's admiration for Du Bartas' poetry was already well-known: Essayes of a Prentise (1584) contained a translation of 'L'Uranie', while Poeticall Exercises at Vacant Houres (1591) would include translations of 'The Furies' (II.i.3) and the opening of 'Eden' (II.i.1) from the Semaines.⁴ The amity between Du Bartas and James is an important factor in the poet's subsequent popularity in English and Scottish literary culture, but needs to be understood within slightly wider contemporary networks of diplomacy and poetry.

Urban Tigner Holmes and John Coridon Lyons pointed out that Du Bartas was travelling from England when he visited Scotland in 1587, declaring that he landed in England

¹ The Memoires of Sir James Melvil of Hal-hill, ed. by George Scott (1683), Z4v-2A1r; Harry Ashton, Du Bartas en Angleterre (Paris, 1908), 18-30; James VI and I, Lusus Regius, Being Poems and Other Pieces, ed. by Robert Rait (Westminster, 1901), 58-61. I thank Amy L. Juhala and Tom Hamilton for their assistance, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council for financial support.

² Samuel F. Will, 'An Unpublished Letter of Du Bartas', MLN, xlix (1934), 150-2.

³ Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh A.D. 1573-1589 (Edinburgh, 1869), 500 (6 September 1587); Extract from the Despatches of M. Courcelles (Edinburgh, 1828), 80. See Amy L. Juhala, 'An Advantageous Alliance: Edinburgh and the Court of James VI', in Sixteenth-Century Scotland, ed. by Julian Goodare and A. A. MacDonald (Leiden, 2008), 337-63 (356). Juhala found a reference in the Edinburgh Treasurers' Account (1581-96, fol. 449) to a payment made between Martinmas (28 November) 1587 and 1588 of 'ye annuell [i.e. tribute] of 900 merkis tayne upoun ye commoun guid quherof 400 merkis to ye kingis grace to gif Sengezeour Dubartas'. This entry is only slender evidence for a second visit, however, since Du Bartas was not necessarily in Scotland to receive the gift, and the entry may refer back to the gift offered before his departure.

⁴ The Poems of James VI of Scotland, ed. by James Craigie, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1955).

on 7 May and arrived in Scotland on the 25th, probably having travelled over water to Leith.⁵ Closer inspection of the state papers, however, corrects this account and yields valuable new details about Du Bartas' itinerary. These findings make us more aware of the nature of Du Bartas' visit, his role as a conduit between the English, Scottish and Navarrese courts, and how his diplomatic service may have affected his poetry's early reception in England.

In a letter dated 30 March/ 9 April to Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth's principal secretary, Du Pin (possibly the Jacques Du Pin who dedicated Les Suites de la Seconde Semaine to James in 1603) vouched for Du Bartas' character:

You will learn from M. du Bartas, the bearer, the state of our affairs. His name and fame are known to all. You will know him by sight, and will find in his actions piety, uprightness and fidelity. The King has given him cong  only that he may kiss the hands of the Queen your sovereign and dedicate himself to her service, not wishing him to go further unless it should be to fulfil what may be commanded him by her Majesty, counting all service done for her as greater than if done to himself. He is trusty and faithful; you may use him confidently in anything you judge fitting.⁶

A postscript informs Walsingham that Du Pin will 'leave it to M. du Bartas to tell you many particulars, that I may not weary you by a long letter'. Du Bartas was probably not with Walsingham in London during April, though: a letter from Paul Choart, Seigneur de Buzanval on 1 May informed Walsingham that Du Bartas had prepared a sonnet that day to present to him on behalf of the Queen.⁷ Du Bartas may well have arrived shortly afterwards, and took his leave in a meeting with the Queen on 8 May, as reported in a letter from Walsingham to

⁵ Works of Guillaume de Saluste Sieur Du Bartas, ed. by Urban Tigner Holmes et al., 3 vols (Chapel Hill, 1935; repr. Geneva, 1977), I, 20-1; citing Francisque Michel, Les  cossais en France, les franais en  cosse (London, 1862), II, 107-15.

⁶ Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Elizabeth, 1558-1589, ed. by Sophie Crawford Lomas (London, 1927), XXI.1, 260-1. For the dedication, see Holmes et al. (ed.), I, 228.

⁷ Lomas (ed.), Calendar, 287.

Archibald Douglas (who was posing as Scottish ambassador in London).⁸ A meeting of the Privy Council on the same day, attended by Walsingham, led to Du Bartas and his company (which included his secretary Henri de Sponde, brother of the poet Jean), being issued with a passport for safe passage through England: he had ‘latelie come over into England to see her Majestie and the Realme, [and] did also, with her Majesties good favour and license, repaire from hence into the Realme of Scotland’.⁹

Travelling by the post horses mentioned in the passport, Du Bartas may well have taken two weeks to travel along the London-Holyhead road to James [correction, March 2015: from London to Edinburgh Castle]. A letter dated 12 May from Richard Douglas, who was in Edinburgh, to his brother Archibald comments that James’ ‘good meaning [towards Navarre] will increase at Du Bartas’ arrival’; the poet may not yet have arrived by 22 May, since another letter reports James’ excitement at the prospect of welcoming him, after hearing news contained in an earlier letter from Archibald on 3 May: ‘Of that his Majesty was so glad that he could not contain to say that he [Du Bartas] was the welcomest man that came to him this long time, which he should be about to let him understand at his arrival.’¹⁰ From these letters we can infer that Du Bartas was probably already in London on 3 May and that having left on the 8th or shortly afterwards by road, he arrived at Edinburgh Castle on about the 23rd.

Other letters sent between the Douglasses record that Du Bartas and James travelled up to Falkland on 27 May, and that on 7 June the French poet was ‘with his Majesty in very good credit’.¹¹ Two letters dated 17 July indicate that Du Bartas’ Scottish visit was being monitored by Henri III and his ambassador, and by noblemen like the Earl of Mar.¹² Roger

⁸ Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. the Marquis of Salisbury, Preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, ed. by S. R. Scargill-Bird (London, 1889), III, 253 (item 533). Herbert Maxwell, A History of the House of Douglas (London, 1902), I, 290-1.

⁹ Acts of the Privy Council of England, ed. by John Roche Dasent (London, 1897), XV, 73; Michel, Les écossais en France, 108.

¹⁰ Scargill-Bird (ed.), Calendar, 254-5 (items 536 and 537).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 259-62 (items 540 and 542).

¹² Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547-1603, ed. by William K. Boyd (Edinburgh, 1915), IX, 455 (item 368) and 452-3 (item 367).

Aston reported to Walsingham that the marriage negotiations were on-going in August, and a final letter written by Richard Douglas, contradicting Courcelles' account, records that Du Bartas had not yet left Scotland on 22 September, but was awaiting a fair wind in order to sail home from Dumbarton.¹³

In retracing the details of Du Bartas' embassy to England and Scotland, we learn that he did not just travel to Scotland to discuss a royal marriage, but met more widely with members of the Elizabethan court, helping to ease tensions after the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, which had happened just three months earlier. He probably kissed Elizabeth's hand, and was certainly acquainted with Walsingham. He was a trusted agent in diplomatic communications between England, Scotland and France during a difficult period in relations between the three.

This new information makes it likelier that references in Du Bartas' 'Babilon' (*Semaines*, II.ii.2; first printed 1584) to Elizabeth, Nicholas Bacon, Thomas More and Philip Sidney were made with specific English readers in mind. Du Bartas exchanged letters with Anthony Bacon (son of Nicholas, brother of Francis) back in 1584, and at least two English translators knew that he did, for they dedicated printed works to Bacon.¹⁴ Sidney's now-lost translation may well have reciprocated Du Bartas' responsiveness to his writing: Warren Boutcher cites a document prepared for Robert Naunton before his first official visit to Paris which mentions that Du Bartas had learnt English to read the *Arcadia*.¹⁵

Du Bartas' diplomatic role in England and Scotland almost certainly reinforced the genuine admiration that his divine poetry provoked in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The connections between Anglo-French diplomacy and poetic translation deserve

¹³ Boyd (ed.), *Calendar*, 478 (item 387) and Scargill-Bird (ed.), *Calendar*, 282 (item 587).

¹⁴ British Library, Cotton MS Nero B VI, fol. 288; *First Day of the Worlds Creation* (London, 1595; *ESTC* 21658), A2r-v; *The Seconde Weeke*, trans. by Josuah Sylvester (London, 1598; *ESTC* 21661.5), E2r-v.

¹⁵ On Sidney's translation, see *The Poems of Philip Sidney*, ed. by William A. Ringler (Oxford, 1962), 339; Boutcher, "A French Dexteritie, & An Italian Confidence": New Documents on John Florio, Learned Strangers and Protestant Humanist Study of Modern Languages in Renaissance England from c.1547 to c.1625', *Reformation*, ii (1997), 39-109 (96).

further scrutiny: for example, the translation by Josuah Sylvester (best known for his English Semaines) of Odet de la Noue, Seigneur de Teligny's Paradoxe (1588), which was written whilst de la Noue was imprisoned during the Wars of Religion and was printed in English as Profit of Imprisonment (1594), may well have been directly inspired by current affairs. Du Bartas' visit to England shows that the French poet's popularity was not solely nurtured at the Jacobean Scottish Court, but that he was certainly known personally both as emissary and poet south of the border as well in the 1580s.¹⁶ His divine poetry promoted religious and political solidarity across the Channel and between England and Scotland, as well as being lauded for its literary merit. Du Bartas' example indicates new directions, following recent work by Timothy Hampton and others, for pursuing relations between French, Scottish and English literature and late-sixteenth century diplomatic culture.¹⁷

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¹⁶ Cf. Peter Auger, 'The Semaines' Dissemination in England and Scotland before 1641', Renaissance Studies (forthcoming).

¹⁷ Hampton, Fictions of Embassy (Ithaca, NY; London, 2009) and see, for example, Diplomacy in Early Modern Culture, ed. by Robyn Adams and Rosanna Cox (Basingstoke, 2011).