

Archive Wars: Record Destruction and the Memory of the French Wars of Religion in Montpellier

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This article explores the long-term memory of record destructions committed during the French Wars of Religion. Although the 1598 Edict of Nantes ordered Protestants and Catholics to forget about the wars, in Montpellier the memory of archival loss continued to fuel tensions between the two communities and undermine religious coexistence throughout the seventeenth century. In the aftermath of the wars, Montpellier's priests and friars initiated multiple court cases against the Huguenot community to claim reparations and seek retribution for the loss of their records. Yet the archival destructions also functioned as a catalyst for new record-keeping practices, as both Huguenots and Catholics appointed specialists to retrieve acts, inventory records, and use archival documents as legal evidence against the other community. As such, this essay highlights the importance of record destruction and the emergence of contested memories for prolonging religious conflict in the early modern world.

IN 1654, THE MONTPELLIER LAWYER Henri de la Croix attempted to trace the origins of the local confraternity of White Penitents, of which he had been a member since 1642. Legend had it that Saint Dominic had founded the confraternity when visiting the city in 1218, but to De la Croix's frustration the archival evidence was lacking. As a legal professional, he was well aware of the importance of documenting his claims, which explains why he had spent considerable time sifting through the penitents' registers and the city archives, only to conclude that no medieval documents had survived. Yet this was not because of poor record-keeping: De la Croix accused Montpellier's Huguenots of having purposely destroyed the penitents' records during the French Wars of Religion, wiping out every trace of their glorious past. "If we find no explicit memoirs," he wrote, "it's because in the chaos of the civil wars, which have troubled France for entire centuries, and this city in particular, the ancient documents have been lost or burnt, or covered by the ruins of the chapels or religious houses in which they were kept."¹

¹Henri de la Croix, "Cereimonial de la chapelle des penitens blancs de Montpellier," in *Heures pour les Penitens Blancs de Montpellier* (Montpellier: Daniel Pech, 1654), 2. All translations are the author's. De la Croix's membership is recorded in Archives des Pénitents Blancs de Montpellier, Livre des délibérations, 6 Apr. 1642, 67r. On the penitents of Montpellier, see Jules Delalain, *Les*

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De la Croix was not alone in bemoaning the archival losses suffered during the wars. Throughout the seventeenth century, Montpellier's Catholics repeatedly recalled how the Protestants had not only razed their convents, chapels, and churches to the ground, but had also destroyed the records housed in these institutions. Exiled clergymen who returned to the city in the wake of the wars were particularly haunted by these archival losses. By 1626 the Augustinian friars recalled that the Protestant consuls (town councilors) had confiscated their records in 1561, none of which were ever seen again.² The Carmelites told a similar tale of archival loss, protesting in 1637 that the Huguenots "had plundered and sacked the archives of the said convent, and removed the acts and documents."³ Toward the end of the century, Pierre Serres, a *procureur* in the Cour des aides (a local tax court) and amateur historian of Montpellier, still regretted that "most acts and documents belonging to the churches in which they were kept have perished beneath their ruins, when they were demolished due to the rage of the heretics."⁴

This article explores the long-term impact of the archival destructions committed during the French religious wars. It argues that the loss of records played a key role in prolonging religious conflict in postwar France, as Catholic clerics time and again demanded retribution for both the destruction of their records and the confiscation of their property at the hands of the Protestants. These demands forced the Huguenot community to consult their own archives in order to prove they were the legitimate owners of buildings and lands claimed by the Catholics. The memory of the religious wars, in particular the loss of archival records, thus sustained division and tension between Catholics and Huguenots in early modern France, at a time when both confessions were ostensibly living together in peace.

Indeed, the longevity of local memories regarding archival loss helps to explain why the relationship between the two faiths remained antagonistic in postwar France. Scholars have often argued that the 1598 Edict of Nantes ushered in a period of peaceful coexistence between Protestants and Catholics, whose religious differences were regulated through pragmatic arrangements, including parity in law courts and government, the sharing of cemeteries, and the construction of Protestant churches outside Catholic towns. In many towns they also did

Pénitents blancs et les Pénitents bleus de la ville de Montpellier: Leurs origines, leur histoire, leurs règles (Montpellier: Jean Martel, 1874).

²Petition of the Augustinian friars to Louis XIII [1626], Archives départementales de l'Hérault (hereafter ADH), 41 H 46.

³Requete et ordonnance du Parlement de Toulouse en faveur des reverends pères Carmes contre ceux de la RPR de Montpellier, 26 Jan. 1637, ADH, 35 H 41.

⁴Pierre Serres, *Histoire des pénitens de Montpellier (1602–1684)*, ed. Jean Nougaret and Louis Secondy (Montpellier: Édition de l'Entente bibliophile de Montpellier, 2003), 41. On Serres's life and work, see Émile Bonnet, "Les oeuvres de l'historien montpellierain Pierre Serres," *Mémoires de la Société archéologique de Montpellier*, 2nd ser., 2 (1902): 401–30.

business together and intermarried.⁵ Even so, the wars were not easily forgotten. Recent scholarship has shown that in spite of royal policy to bury the memory of the wars, both Catholics and Protestants continued to revisit the troublesome past, viewing themselves as victims of past injustices for which the other was assigned the blame.⁶ These studies have largely focused on the memories of the elite, considering evidence such as written histories, engravings, and paintings that chronicled notorious wartime events, but in doing so, they have ignored the very local nature of the conflict. The wars had in fact divided both families and entire communities, who were especially traumatized by the material losses they had suffered. The memories of these people were shaped less by official histories than by their own experiences and the stories they heard—what Daniel Woolf has called “the social circulation of the past.”⁷ This article therefore explores how the civil wars were remembered on a local level, asking how memories of material loss impacted on religious coexistence in the biconfessional communities of early modern France.

Studying the impact of archival destruction also offers a new perspective on the uses of early modern record collections. The recent archival turn has produced a growing body of scholarship on the creation of archives, on the archivists who stored, ordered, and looked after records, and on the ways documents were used and interpreted.⁸ During the early modern period, scholars have argued, archives became an important instrument of the ever-expanding state

⁵See especially Gregory Hanlon, *Confession and Community in Seventeenth-Century France: Catholic and Protestant Coexistence in Aquitaine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Keith P. Luria, *Sacred Boundaries: Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early Modern France* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005); Luria, “France: An Overview,” in *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World*, ed. Thomas Max Safley (Brill: Leiden, 2011), 209–38; and *La coexistence confessionnelle à l’épreuve: Études sur les relations entre protestants et catholiques dans la France moderne*, ed. Didier Boisson and Yves Krumenacker (Lyon: Université Jean Moulin III, 2009).

⁶*La mémoire des guerres de religion: La concurrence des genres historiques, XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles*, ed. Jacques Berchtold and Marie-Madeleine Fragonard (Geneva: Droz, 2007); Philip Benedict, “Divided Memories? Historical Calendars, Commemorative Processions and the Recollection of the Wars of Religion during the Ancien Régime,” *French History* 22, no. 4 (2008): 381–405; Benedict, “Shaping the Memory of the French Wars of Religion: The First Centuries,” in *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Erika Kuijpers et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 111–25; and Tom Hamilton, “The Procession of the League: Remembering the Wars of Religion in Visual and Literary Satire,” *French History* 30, no. 1 (2016): 1–30; David van der Linden, “Memorializing the Wars of Religion in Early Seventeenth-Century French Picture Galleries: Protestants and Catholics Painting the Contested Past,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (2017): 132–78.

⁷Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500–1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁸See in particular Markus Friedrich, *Die Geburt des Archivs: Eine Wissensgeschichte* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2013); *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World*, ed. Kate Peters, Alexandra Walsham, and Liesbeth Corens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and the special issues “Toward a Cultural History of Archives,” *Archival Science* 7, no. 4 (2007); “Archival Knowledge Cultures in Europe, 1400–1900,” *Archival Science* 10, no. 3 (2010); “Archival Transformations

bureaucracy. Randolph Head, Jacob Soll, and Filippo de Vivo have shown that magistrates relied increasingly on documents to claim authority: well-ordered archives became sites of power, created to regulate and control populations.⁹ These archives might have served to store and preserve the past for use in the present, but, as Markus Friedrich has pointed out, archives were also prone to chaos, theft, and destruction, in particular during times of conflict.¹⁰ In fact, it was the loss of records and the ignorance of what had happened during the wars that drove the renewed effort expended on record-keeping in the wake of the French religious wars, as Catholics realized that in order to contest Huguenot privileges, they had to take seriously the reconstruction and management of their archives.

This article takes the city of Montpellier, the administrative capital of Languedoc and an important center of commerce and learning, as a case study. Montpellier is a particularly rich example for study because it suffered multiple rounds of iconoclasm and archival destruction, first in 1561/62, again in 1568, and finally in 1621, each of which had a profound impact on the city's memory culture.¹¹ Moreover, at the close of the wars, Montpellier's population of around 16,000 was made up of equal numbers of Protestants and Catholics, who somehow had to find a religious *modus vivendi*.¹² To probe Montpellier's memory culture, this article concentrates on urban record collections. Despite growing scholarly interest in state chancelleries and secretaries, the vast majority of early modern records were held in local depositories, and were thus scattered across churches, convents, town halls, law courts, and magistrates' homes. It was only during the French Revolution that these papers were confiscated as remnants of the Ancien Régime and stored in the centralized *archives départementales*

in Early Modern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (2016); and "The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe," Supplement, *Past & Present* 231, S11 (2016).

⁹Randolph C. Head, "Knowing Like a State: The Transformation of Political Knowledge in Swiss Archives, 1450–1770," *Journal of Modern History* 75, no. 4 (2003): 745–82; Head, *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe: Proof, Information and Political Record-Keeping, 1400–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009); and Filippo de Vivo, "Ordering the Archive in Early Modern Venice, 1400–1650," *Archival Science* 10, no. 3 (2010): 231–48.

¹⁰Friedrich, *Geburt des Archivs*, 82, 102–6, 160–62.

¹¹Louise Guiraud, *Études sur la Réforme en Montpellier* (Montpellier: Veuve Louis Valat, 1918), 1:206–13, 342–43, 774–83; and Jean Nougaret and Marie-Sylvie Grandjouan, eds., *Montpellier monumental* (Paris: Monum, éditions du Patrimoine, 2005), 1:95–97. On the memory of iconoclasm in Montpellier, see Barbara Diefendorf, "Religious Conflict and Civic Identity: Battles over the Sacred Landscape of Montpellier," *Past & Present* 237, no. 1 (2017): 53–91.

¹²Philip Benedict, "Faith, Fortune and Social Structure in Seventeenth-Century Montpellier," in *The Faith and Fortunes of France's Huguenots, 1600–1685*, ed. Philip Benedict (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 121–49, esp. 126–27.

and *archives nationales* that still exist today.¹³ This article begins by examining the scope of the archival destructions and the royal legislation issued to counter these losses. Subsequent sections concentrate on Catholic attempts at reconstruction and reparation in the wake of the wars, exploring several cases of litigation between Montpellier's clergy and the Huguenot community in which archival documents played a key role. The article concludes by evaluating the impact of archival losses on religious coexistence in early modern France.

ARCHIVAL DESTRUCTION DURING THE WARS OF RELIGION

The civil wars that engulfed the French kingdom in the second half of the sixteenth century wreaked unprecedented havoc in urban archives, in particular those held in the Catholic churches and monastic houses that fell victim to Protestant iconoclasm. Spurred into action by both Calvin's denunciation of idolatry and by the more mundane need to secure their own places of worship, Huguenots seized control of Catholic churches and convents in the early 1560s, purging them of sacred images and seizing the archives.¹⁴ When the Huguenots took control of Montpellier in October 1561, virtually all the city's relics, images, and ecclesiastical accoutrements were looted or destroyed within a matter of days, while the Protestant consuls had the remaining movable goods, including archival documents, confiscated and deposited in the town hall for safekeeping.¹⁵ According to the eyewitness Jean Philippi, a president in the local *Cour des aides*, the Huguenots ransacked a total of sixty churches, convents, and chapels. Following the outbreak of the first civil war in 1562, at least twenty-five of these were completely destroyed.¹⁶

The confiscated documents constituted archives in the early modern sense: more-or-less ordered, intentional collections of documents believed to be important, in particular property acts and privileges.¹⁷ Although Montpellier's convents and churches lacked full-time archivists and elaborate inventories for retrieval, the importance they attached to their documents was apparent from their careful storage, usually in the sacristy, which functioned as a storeroom

¹³Marcel Baudot, "Les archives municipales dans la France de l'Ancien Régime," *Archivum* 13 (1963): 23–30; Krzysztof Pomian, "Les archives: Du Trésor des chartes au Caran," in *Les lieux de mémoire*, vol. 3, pt. 3, *Les France: De l'archive à l'emblème*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 162–233; and Lucie Favier, *La mémoire de l'État: Histoire des Archives nationales* (Paris: Fayard, 2004), 9–67.

¹⁴On Huguenot iconoclasm, see Olivier Christin, *Une révolution symbolique: L'iconoclisme huguenot et la reconstruction catholique* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1991).

¹⁵Guiraud, *Réforme en Montpellier*, 1:206–11.

¹⁶Jean Philippi, "Histoire des troubles de Languedoc," in Guiraud, *Réforme en Montpellier*, 2:46–47; and Nougaret and Grandjean, *Montpellier monumental*, 1:95–96.

¹⁷Randolph C. Head, "Mirroring Governance: Archives, Inventories and Political Knowledge in Early Modern Switzerland and Europe," *Archival Science* 7, no. 4 (2007): 317–29, at 318.

for other valuable items like reliquaries, silverware, and crucifixes.¹⁸ The papers belonging to the Augustinian convent, for example, were kept in a chest in the sacristy, just like the property acts of the Dominicans, which were stored in a “white chest with black fringes.”¹⁹

Despite the efforts of Montpellier’s consuls to safeguard these clerical records in the town hall, the vast majority did not survive the wars. A closer look at the fate of the record-collections of the four mendicant orders (the Augustinians, Carmelites, Dominicans, and Franciscans) demonstrates that the archival destructions were fairly comprehensive. In the night of 21 October 1561, a Huguenot crowd attacked the Augustinian convent, destroying all images and plundering most of its precious possessions.²⁰ The next day the consuls had all remaining goods transported to the town hall, including the “acts, papers, and documents of the said convent.” Yet after the wars these documents had gone missing; according to the friars, they had been “destroyed and usurped by the said consuls.”²¹ The Carmelite archives suffered a similar fate. Although the prior had sensibly transported relics, vestments, and documents to the cathedral of Saint Pierre ahead of the ransacking crowds, he could not avoid their confiscation a few days later, after which they were never to be seen again.²² By 1611 the Franciscans likewise reported that their archives had been “seized, stolen, and burnt” during the troubles, just as the Dominicans complained that the Huguenots had “stolen, plundered, burnt, taken away, and robbed each and every act, and document, register and IOU.”²³ When the mendicant friars returned to Montpellier in the wake of the wars, nothing of the medieval splendor of their record collections remained.

The loss of archives can partly be explained as collateral damage of the iconoclastic revolt, but there is evidence the Huguenots also deliberately targeted clerical archives. The erasing of archives became an act of purification, a ritual purging of all traces of the old religious regime. The attack on Montpellier’s cathedral record office in 1621 is a case in point. Following the Council of Trent, French cathedral chapters had spent the final decades of the sixteenth century

¹⁸On sacristies as archives, see Yann Potin, “Archives en sacristie: Le trésor est-il un bâtiment d’archives? Le cas du Trésor des chartes des rois de France (XIIIe–XIXe siècle),” *Livraisons d’histoire de l’architecture* 10, no. 2 (2005): 65–85.

¹⁹Request to the Parlement de Toulouse, 3 Nov. 1650, ADH, 41 H 1; Inventaire des meubles, titres et documents du couvent, 11 April 1576, ADH, 38 H 5, 67v.

²⁰Procez verbal des reliques, argenterie et meubles prins lors des troubles par les consuls de Montpellier, 22 Oct. 1561, ADH, 17 H 16.

²¹Request to the Parlement de Toulouse, 3 Nov. 1650, ADH, 41 H 1.

²²Coppie d’inventaire des ornements et biens trouvés en led. couvent en l’an 1561, ADH, 35 H 8. See also Factum pour le syndic du couvent des anciens Carmes de la ville de Montpellier, ADH, 35 H 41.

²³Arrest du Parlement de Toulouse pour le scindic de l’Observance de Montpellier, 7 Apr. 1612, ADH, 17 H 16; and Memoires concernant les papiers du couvent de Montpellier, undated [after 1657], ADH, 38 H 75.

professionalizing their record-keeping. The 1581 Council of Rouen in particular ordered all French bishops to assign “a certain space for their secretaries, where the registers of ordinations, provisions, collations, and other acts... are to be preserved in perpetuity, so that their memory will not perish.”²⁴ The cathedral chapter of Saint Pierre had deposited its records in a separate office on the nearby Place de la Canourgue, but its status as a secular building failed to protect either it or the documents it contained. In 1621, Montpellier’s Huguenots rose up in arms to join the last war of religion, laying waste to the Catholic churches and convents that had been painstakingly rebuilt after the 1598 Edict of Nantes had restored Catholic worship.²⁵ During an official inquest held in 1624 several eye-witnesses, including four priests, testified that on the night of 3 December 1621, a crowd had broken down the front door of the cathedral record office. Although the priests who had been sleeping inside escaped via the rooftops, the Protestant mob had proceeded to plunder “all the furniture and papers kept there, most of which were burnt, torn up, and destroyed, and the others hidden away, and since then nothing is known about them.”²⁶ The Protestants also targeted the records of the reconstructed Dominican convent: a memorialist later recalled that these “ravaging wolves” had set the archives ablaze, while a friar who tried to smuggle out documents was apprehended by a Huguenot who beat him severely and burnt his papers on the spot.²⁷

The loss of archives was not restricted to Montpellier, however, nor to one side in the conflict. Throughout the wars both Huguenots and Catholics engaged in the systematic destruction of records across France. In Toulouse, for example, a series of municipal registers was destroyed in May 1562 following a foiled Huguenot coup to seize control of the city that had ended with the murder of some two hundred Protestants; both sides accused each other of deliberately erasing the paper evidence of their involvement in these events.²⁸ The Huguenot move to control Lyon in the same year was a success, however, and they subsequently plundered the records stored in churches and convents. Catholic commissioners who went to inspect the archives of the cathedral chapter in 1563 found heaps of torn registers and all the vital property acts missing.²⁹ In 1594, the Parlement de

²⁴*Recueil des actes, titres et mémoires concernant les affaires du clergé de France* (Paris: Veuve François Muguet, 1719), 7:987. See also Friedrich, *Geburt des Archivs*, 62–63.

²⁵Guiraud, *Réforme à Montpellier*, 1:763–87. On the 1621 conflict as the last war of religion, see Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562–1629* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 178–94.

²⁶Testimony of the priest François Salendre, *Extrait d’enquete faite sur le prisemant et bruslemant des tiltres, pour le scindic du chapitre cathedral de Montpellier*, 4 Sept. 1624, ADH, G 1836.

²⁷Essai de l’histoire du couvent de Montpelier de l’ordre des FF. Prêcheurs depuis l’an 1220 jusques à l’an 1706, ADH, 38 H 24, 20.

²⁸Pierre-Jean Souriac, “Guerres religieuses, histoire et expiation: Autour de l’émeute toulousaine de mai 1562,” *Chrétiens et sociétés* 20 (2013): 31–62.

²⁹Report by Jehan du Fournel, 7 July 1563, Archives départementales du Rhône (hereafter ADR), 10 G 416.

Paris (the most important court of appeal in France) even took the momentous decision to erase all offensive records from the period of the Holy League, when it had opposed the ascension of Henri IV to the French throne. That some of these records escaped destruction was because of the councilor assigned to destroy them, Pierre Pithou, disobeyed instructions and instead preserved them for posterity in a separate miscellany.³⁰

To remedy the archival losses the French Crown issued extensive legislation aimed at reconstruction. Whereas the peace treaties of Amboise (1563) and Longjumeau (1568) only discussed the restitution of confiscated property in general terms, article 31 of the Edict of Saint-Germain (1570) explicitly ordered that “all acts, papers, property titles, and documents that have been seized, will be returned and restituted by either side to those to whom they belong.”³¹ Similar articles instructing the restitution of documents appeared in all subsequent peace treaties, including the 1598 Edict of Nantes.³² The Peace of Montpellier (9 October 1622), which ended the royal siege of the city and allowed for the resumption of Catholic worship, likewise ordered the Huguenots to return all confiscated property.³³

Edicts were of little use to Montpellier’s clerics, however, because they dealt only with the return of those confiscated records that had survived the wars, not with the many papers that had gone up in flames or otherwise disappeared during the troubles. Demanding financial compensation was equally problematic, as the edicts themselves proved open to multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations. The restitution of archival records clashed with articles 76 and 77 of the Edict of Nantes, which granted a general amnesty to Protestants who had participated in the plundering of clerical property, as well as secret article 2, which exempted them from financial reparations.³⁴ Montpellier’s Capuchins thus failed to gain compensation for the destruction of either their convent or their library, because the Protestants pointed out the edicts prohibited their prosecution in court, even though the friars argued that “these are heinous actions

³⁰*Actes du parlement de Paris et documents du temps de la Ligue, 1588–1594: Le recueil de Pierre Pithou*, ed. Sylvie Daubresse and Bertrand Haan (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012); and Sylvie Daubresse, “Le greffe du parlement de Paris à la fin du XVIe siècle: Quelques opérations d’autocensure,” in *Une histoire de la mémoire judiciaire de l’Antiquité à nos jours*, ed. Olivier Poncet and Isabelle Storez-Brancourt (Paris: École Nationale des Chartres, 2009), 81–91.

³¹Edict of Saint-Germain (1570), art. 31, cited in André Stegmann, *Édits des guerres de religion* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1979), 76.

³²Peace of La Rochelle (1573), art. 23; Edict of Beaulieu (1576), art. 43; Peace of Bergerac (1577), art. 44; Peace of Fleix (1580), art. 32, all cited in Stegmann, *Édits des guerres de religion*, 92, 111, 145, 200; and Edict of Nantes (1598), art. 69, cited in Élie Benoist, *Histoire de l’Édit de Nantes: Contenant les choses les plus remarquables qui se sont passées en France avant & après sa publication, à l’occasion de la diversité des Religions* (Delft: Adriaan Beman, 1693), 1:appendix, 78.

³³Benoist, *Histoire de l’Édit de Nantes*, 2:appendix, 62.

³⁴Benoist, *Histoire de l’Édit de Nantes*, 1:appendix, 80–81, 86.

that are exempt from the king's edicts."³⁵ In 1636, when the Franciscans sued the Protestant community for the destruction of their monastery, the Huguenot representative at court argued the case should be thrown out because article 76 of Edict of Nantes forbade the punishment of plundering.³⁶ Clerics thus had to devise more ingenious strategies to reconstruct their lost archives. In Montpellier, these efforts would lock Catholics and Protestants in conflict throughout the seventeenth century, and turn archival records into a bone of contention that would help to undo the fragile coexistence between the two faiths.

HUNTING THE HUGUENOT ARCHIVES

As Catholic demands for archival restitution and Protestant reparations fell on deaf ears, Montpellier's clerics began to seek reparation for their wartime losses through a more aggressive strategy: they tried to deprive the Huguenots of their place of worship. Catholic confidence was renewed after 1622, as clerics who had fled the city during Protestant rule gradually returned to Montpellier, where they began to rebuild their destroyed churches, convents, and chapels, and to mark their presence in the city by holding processions.³⁷ The Catholic resurgence also turned into a punitive campaign against the Huguenot community, one that relied heavily on archival documents, or the lack of them. To prove they had legitimately acquired their church, the Protestants were forced to sift through the archives and turn up documents that would stand up to legal scrutiny; without such written proof they faced the closure of their temple, or even the suppression of Protestant worship.

The anti-Huguenot campaign was driven by the cathedral chapter, and in particular by the influential priest Pierre Gariel. Born in Montpellier in 1584, he had taken his vows at the age of thirteen and had become a canon in the cathedral chapter by age nineteen, in 1603. Gariel had also witnessed the Huguenot takeover in 1621 when he was forced to flee the city together with many other Catholics, an experience that turned him into an ardent supporter of Catholic renewal upon his return to Montpellier.³⁸ Gariel was especially vocal in pleading for the restoration of the cathedral of Saint Pierre, which had lain in ruins since 1562, "serving only the raven and owls to nestle in," as he remarked, a painful reminder of the destruction of Montpellier's sacred landscape undertaken by the

³⁵Attestation of 22 Aug. 1623, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Latin 10001, 137r. The friars referred to art. 86 of the Edict of Nantes, which ordered that "heinous acts will remain exempt from the said abolition, such as the abduction and rape of women and girls, the burning, murders, and thefts, which have been committed... not as acts of war but to exercise a particular vengeance." Cited in Benoist, *Histoire de l'Édit de Nantes*, 1:appendix, 83.

³⁶Extrait des registres du conseil privé du Roy, 28 Feb. 1636, ADH, 17 H 16.

³⁷Diefendorf, "Religious Conflict and Civic Identity," 77–82.

³⁸Alexandre Germain, "Pierre Gariel: Sa vie et ses travaux," *Mémoires de la Société archéologique de Montpellier* 6 (1870–76): 193–412.

Huguenots. Although the reconstruction itself was to prove a costly process that would last for decades, by April 1634 Gariel proudly participated in a procession to celebrate the reconsecration of the now partly restored cathedral. Throngs of Catholics pressed through Montpellier's narrow streets to witness the first Mass to be held in the cathedral since the outbreak of the wars. "The city seemed to leave its tomb like this poor Church, and renew itself like our Holy Office," Gariel observed, while noting gleefully that "heresy was bursting with spite, rage, and envy."³⁹

Besides the reconstruction of sacred space, Gariel also pushed for a symbolic cleansing of the urban landscape as he tried to have the Protestant church in the heart of Montpellier closed down. Known as the Grand Temple, it had been the official place of Protestant worship since 1565. Although the Huguenots had initially confiscated the parish church of Notre Dame des Tables for their services, they were forced to return it under the terms of the 1563 Edict of Amboise, subsequently moving to a building known as the Cour du Baile. In 1582, they acquired three adjoining houses and began construction of a formidable vaulted church with galleries, which was completed in January 1583.⁴⁰ The church not only served to remind Catholics of the Huguenot presence in Montpellier, but the fact that they were allowed to worship within the city walls, rather than in the suburbs, was also evidence of the power they wielded.

The cathedral chapter appointed Gariel as its syndic so that he might start official proceedings against the Protestant church, a task for which he appeared eminently suited, since he also served as chapter archivist, and was often asked to retrieve important documents from the vaults for which he also kept the keys.⁴¹ In March 1634, Gariel made a deposition before the intendants of Languedoc, Robert Miron and Antoine Le Camus, arguing the Huguenots had contravened a clause in the original sale contract. The Cour du Baile had been sold to the Protestant consistory in 1565 by the Huguenot Guillaume Tuffany, but Gariel claimed that when Tuffany had acquired the house and adjacent chapel from the Montpellier town council in 1558, he had promised never to alter its physical appearance. Because the transformation of the property into a Huguenot temple clearly violated this clause, Gariel demanded that the Huguenots "relinquish ... the Grand Temple together with the chapel, having always belonged to the said supplicant and Catholic inhabitants of the city, so that divine service can be held there in the future."⁴²

³⁹Pierre Gariel, *L'origine, les changemens, et l'estat present de l'église cathedrale de S. Pierre de Mompelier* (Montpellier: Jean Pech, 1634), 150–51. On the restoration of the cathedral, see Nougaret and Grandjouan, *Montpellier monumental*, 1:148–51.

⁴⁰Philippe Corbière, *Histoire de l'église réformée de Montpellier depuis son origine jusqu'à nos jours* (Montpellier: Ferdinand Poujol, 1861), 35–37, 106–8.

⁴¹Germain, "Pierre Gariel," 253.

⁴²Request presented by Gariel to Miron and Le Camus, 7 Mar. 1634, Archives Nationales (hereafter AN), TT 256B, fols. 588–89.

The Huguenot consistory wasted no time in rebutting Gariel's claim, arguing it could easily disprove his "illusory pretexts" by producing archival evidence. Accumulating all the necessary acts would take time, however, because these had to be copied from the dispersed archives of the Parlement de Toulouse, the local Cour des aides, and several notaries. The intendants duly granted the Protestants a fortnight to submit their archival evidence, ordering all notaries and scribes, as well as Montpellier's Catholic town secretary Étienne Viala, to provide the Huguenots with the extracts they required.⁴³ The archival hunt that followed was led by record-keeping professionals drawn from Montpellier's world of legal affairs, in particular the Huguenot syndic Jean Tallodier Degan, a procureur in the local Cour des aides, and the consistory secretary Pierre Pujol, who served as secretary in the same court. Together they collected a series of twenty-six documents, including Tuffany's 1558 act of purchase, which Pujol transcribed from the registers of the Cour des aides, and the 1565 act of purchase for the Cour du Baile, kept in the Huguenot church archives. The acts were bundled in a sack, as was customary in early modern French court cases, and presented as evidence to the intendants. In addition, the documents were copied out into a separate register and countersigned by two Protestant notaries before being stored in the church archives for future reference.⁴⁴

This overwhelming volume of evidence was enough to save the Grand Temple from imminent closure. By 1635 the intendants had dismissed Gariel's demand, "acknowledging that the said syndic of the cathedral church had no right over the said temple and adjoining houses."⁴⁵ Ironically, the Huguenots had a clear advantage when it came to proving their right to worship: while the cathedral chapter had lost most of its archives during the wars, the Protestant community had meticulously preserved its own records and could mobilize the legal expertise of its consistory members to unearth additional documents. The chapter's attempt to undermine the Protestant claim to the site of the Grand Temple may well have been self-defeating, as it alerted the Huguenot leadership to the necessity of putting its archives in order. In subsequent years, the synod of Lower Languedoc would repeatedly instruct all Protestant churches "to carefully search for the acts that prove the exercise of the Reformed Religion, in order to keep these in the archives and produce extracts, so that the memory may be more

⁴³Request of the Huguenot consistory to Miron and Le Camus, Mar. 1634, AN, TT 256B, fols. 590–91; the intendants' decision, dated 13 Mar., follows at the end.

⁴⁴The register has been preserved in *Livre des tiltres et documents de l'église Chrestienne Refformee de la ville de Montpellier*, ADH, 12 J 1. See also Philippe Corbière, "Les registres consistoriaux de l'ancienne église réformée de Montpellier," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du Protestantisme français* 2 (1854): 89–95, although he erroneously attributes the creation of this register to the later consistory secretary Pierre Régis.

⁴⁵*Livre des tiltres et documents de l'église Chrestienne Refformee de la ville de Montpellier*, ADH, 12 J 1, 47r.

easily preserved.⁴⁶ These registers would indeed prove useful in later years, when Montpellier's friars rallied themselves to start another round of archival conflict with the Huguenot community.

ARCHIVAL RECONSTRUCTION

The campaign against the Huguenot church had forced the Protestant community to improve the management of its archives, but around the middle of the century the record-keeping practices of the mendicant orders also underwent a change as they began to reconstruct their lost records, draft new registers, and compile inventories in order to navigate them. This professionalization of monastic record keeping was driven primarily by the need to restore prewar possessions. Without documentary proof of the friars' extensive landholdings, tenancy agreements, and other sources of income, neither the recovery of property nor the expensive rebuilding of convents was possible. This was the dual tragedy of the religious wars: not only had the clergy lost much of their possessions, but they had also suffered the destruction of the archives that documented these lost possessions, which made the task of recovering them in the aftermath of the wars even more daunting. When the cathedral priests of Lyon tried to reclaim their confiscated lands in the wake of the first war, for instance, the Huguenots shrewdly dismissed their claim for want of evidence, "asking the said supplicants to show them their acts, which is impossible for them." They knew the task to be impossible as the chapter had lost its archives to Huguenot plundering.⁴⁷ The challenge was arguably more formidable in Montpellier, which had experienced the near-total destruction of clerical archives and the extensive alienation of Catholic property.

The French monarchy had already acknowledged the clerical predicament in the aftermath of the first civil war. Alerted to the destruction of archives across southern France by the bishops and abbots of Languedoc, in 1563 King Charles IX ordered local authorities to assist the clergy in the reconstruction of their archives, in particular those records that documented the church's extensive property holdings. These had to be recorded in separate cartularies, which henceforth constituted legal proof of the clergy's possessions.⁴⁸ The renewal of war and further loss of archives prompted additional complaints and a string of royal edicts aimed at restoring confiscated property. In 1580, and again in 1584, King Henri III ordered the creation of new registers and exempted clergy from

⁴⁶Acts of the synod of Lower Languedoc, Nîmes, 19 Nov. 1648, Bibliothèque du Protestantisme Français, MS 333, 1:6v.

⁴⁷Lettres patentes du Roy Charles IX pour Messieurs les Comtes de Saint Jean de Lyon, Toulouse, 10 Feb. 1565, ADR, 10 G 1789.

⁴⁸Arrest du Conseil pour servir au recouvrement des biens de l'esglise, Paris, 11 Dec. 1563. Copies are kept in ADH, 17 H 16, and ADH, 38 H 75.

the need to produce documents to justify they were the legitimate holders of confiscated property.⁴⁹

Yet it seems very little came of archival reconstruction during the wars. Although some of the exiled priests and friars returned to Montpellier shortly after the first religious war, with little in the way of income and their convents in ruins, they were hard-pressed to rebuild their communities, let alone their archives. The Carmelites, for example, had returned to Montpellier by 1569, settling in the abandoned house of a Catholic who had converted to Calvinism and joined the Huguenot army.⁵⁰ The friars remained in this makeshift convent for the rest of the wars, because although Catholicism was officially tolerated in Montpellier from 1570 onwards, the Protestants had sufficient political clout to prevent the reconstruction of churches and convents. In 1621, they again destroyed the Carmelite convent, looting the few archival documents that remained. Only in 1639 did the friars acquire new property within the city walls and gradually rebuild their convent.⁵¹ It comes as no surprise, then, that the Carmelites' first priority during these tumultuous decades was to invest in the reconstruction of their spiritual home rather than their lost records. As the Carmelite syndic later explained, the friars "only had the liberty and means to carry out a search for their acts since their reestablishment. In addition, it was impossible for them to work on this first, because the first care that occupied them was finding the means to survive in their great poverty."⁵²

Fortunately for Montpellier's monastic orders not all urban records had been lost. The archives of the *consulat* (town council) had survived the wars and held precious evidence on the friars' prewar properties. Among these documents were copies of notarial deeds as well as the *compoix*, a series of cadastral registers dating back to 1380, drawn up to assess the value of each property in Montpellier and tax the owners accordingly.⁵³ This wealth of legal and financial documents was typical of French municipal archives, which had greatly expanded since the thirteenth century, when town councils began systematically to preserve their

⁴⁹Edict of Melun (1580), art. 26, and response to the Cahier des remonstrances du clergé de France (1584), arts. 49 and 51, cited in *Actes, tiltres et mémoires concernant les affaires du clergé de France* (Paris: Antoine Vitry, 1646), 2.1:37, 67–69.

⁵⁰Lettres patentes de Charles IX pour le rétablissement des Carmes, Paris, 25 July 1569, ADH, 35 H 4. See also the brief historical notice in Arrest by Louis XIV granting the Carmelites a plot of land [1678], ADH, 35 H 16.

⁵¹Requete et ordonnance du Parlement de Toulouse en faveur des reverends pères Carmes contre ceux de la RPR de Montpellier, 26 Jan. 1637, ADH, 35 H 41; Charles d'Aigrefeuille, *Histoire ecclésiastique de la ville de Montpellier* (Montpellier: Rigaud père et fils, 1739), 284–87.

⁵²Esriptures pour le sindic des reverends peres Carmes contre ceux de la RPR, 1682, ADH, 35 H 41.

⁵³Bruno Jaudon, *Les Compoix de Languedoc: Impôt, territoire et société du XIVE au XVIIIe siècle* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014); and Henri Michel, "Note sur les compoix montpelliérains de la fin de l'Ancien Régime," in *Les cadastres anciens des villes et leur traitement par l'informatique*, ed. Jean-Louis Biget and Jean-Claude Hervé (Rome: École française de Rome, 1989), 189–208.

legal and administrative papers for future use, and to compile property registers for the purpose of taxation.⁵⁴ The oldest archival inventory of Montpellier dates back to 1264, listing around forty medieval charters.⁵⁵ Together with other precious charters they were stored in the chapel of the town hall, in a cabinet known as the Grand Chartrier, while documents that were regularly consulted, including tax registers, accounts, council resolutions, and notarial deeds, were kept in several chests and bags in the claverie, the room used by the city accountants and town secretary.⁵⁶ The records were moved to a purpose-built *chambre des archives* after 1647, when the town hall was substantially remodeled to accommodate a larger meeting room for the Estates of Languedoc.⁵⁷

Gaining access to the city archives was not self-evident, however, as they were not public spaces, but instead were carefully regulated, and could only be entered by permission of the archivist, whose function was to protect rather than share those records entrusted to his care. Because French society was based on an intricate system of privileges, strangers were only reluctantly granted access to archives, as it was feared that the discovery of long-forgotten records might be used to stake a claim in court.⁵⁸ The gatekeeper of French town council archives was usually the city secretary, known in Montpellier as the *greffier consulaire*, whose main duties included taking minutes during meetings of the consulat and managing the city's correspondence.⁵⁹ Although the office of greffier had often been held by Huguenots, from 1628 onwards the position was entrusted to Catholics only. As the consuls observed, "it is very important to this city, . . . and in the interest of the Catholics, to choose and appoint to this office an intelligent person of known probity."⁶⁰

Montpellier's mendicant orders nevertheless struggled to gain access to the city archives. In the 1650s they jointly petitioned the Parlement of Toulouse, complaining that in their attempts at archival reconstruction "they are encountering great difficulties, because of the suppression of registers, notes, and other public acts by their holders." The friars therefore demanded that the notaries and

⁵⁴Baudot, "Les archives municipales."

⁵⁵Ferdinand Castets and Joseph Berthélé, *Archives de la ville de Montpellier: Inventaires et documents* (Montpellier: De Serre et Roumégous, 1895), 1:iii–iv.

⁵⁶Pierre Chastang, *La ville, le gouvernement et l'écrit à Montpellier, XIIe–XIVe siècle: Essai d'histoire sociale* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013), 79–85; and Christine Feuillas, "Les archives de la ville de Montpellier," *Bulletin historique de la ville de Montpellier* 28 (2004): 9–17.

⁵⁷Charles d'Aigrefeuille, *Histoire de la ville de Montpellier, depuis son origine jusqu'à notre tems* (Montpellier: Jean Martel, 1737), 420; and Nougaret and Grandjean, *Montpellier monumental*, 1:212. On the creation of dedicated archival spaces, see Friedrich, *Geburt des Archivs*, 165–66.

⁵⁸Friedrich, *Geburt des Archivs*, 140–42, 243–52; and Krzysztof Pomian, "Les historiens et les archives dans la France du XVIIe siècle," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 26 (1972): 109–25.

⁵⁹The functions of the consular secretary are defined in Édît portant création d'offices de greffiers consulaires, Sept. 1668, ADH, 1 B 5, fol. 63.

⁶⁰Town council minutes of 30 Apr. 1670, Archives Municipales de Montpellier (hereafter AMM), BB 256.

town secretary be forced to open up their archives.⁶¹ In a separate petition the Dominicans also protested that both the current greffier consulaire Pierre Sabatier and Mademoiselle De Planque, described as the *archiviste*, demanded “great sums” for showing and transcribing relevant documents.⁶² If the friars had only been interested in writing a general history of their order, they could have relied on documents borrowed from “persons of quality,” as French authors commonly did when barred from local archives.⁶³ Yet for Montpellier’s friars the stakes were considerably higher, as in order to prove their ownership, they had to locate original deeds that would stand up as courtroom evidence, and the only way to do so was to conduct systematic archival research. As the Franciscans noted, “the acts, papers, and property titles are necessary to prove and preserve our rights, real estate, inheritances, and possessions. They are perpetually authentic, and are the irreproachable witnesses of the rights that belong to each.”⁶⁴ Following repeated complaints from the national Assembly of the Clergy, in 1657 Louis XIV finally issued a declaration that ordered French city councils “to produce the contracts demanded by the clerics in due form, in exchange for a moderate salary,” threatening that noncompliance was punishable by a fine of 4,000 livres.⁶⁵

But local authorities often dragged their heels when executing royal orders, so when Montpellier’s city archives were eventually opened up, it was first and foremost the result of a growing awareness among the consuls themselves that archival documents were directly relevant to undermining the position of the Huguenots, and therefore had to be made accessible. The 1660s consequently witnessed renewed efforts at managing the city records closely paralleling those of Montpellier’s Protestants and mendicant friars, including the search for documents, the copying of old registers, and the creation of new inventories. This new archival consciousness was prompted by the king’s decision in 1661 to appoint two commissioners to investigate local infractions of the Edict of Nantes, the Catholic intendant of Languedoc, Claude Bazin de Bezons, and the Protestant judge Balthazar de Peyremales from Nîmes.⁶⁶ Montpellier’s Huguenots seized this opportunity to file a series of complaints in April 1662. They demanded they be readmitted into the consulat, from which they had been barred since 1628, as

⁶¹Request au Parlement de Toulouse pour les syndics des Religieux Mendians de la ville de Montpellier contre ceux des notaires & gardes des archives, undated, ADH, 17 H 16.

⁶²Petition to the siège présidial of Montpellier, undated, ADH, 38 H 75. Sabatier was appointed as secretary on 21 Aug. 1640: AMM, BB 401, fol. 4. Unfortunately, I have not been able to identify Mlle. De Planque in other archival sources.

⁶³Virginia Reinburg, “Archives, Eyewitnesses and Rumours: Writing About Shrines in Early Modern France,” Supplement, *Past & Present* 231, S11 (2016): S171–90.

⁶⁴Annotated extracts from the edicts of pacification, undated, ADH, 17 H 16.

⁶⁵Pierre Gohard, *Traité des bénéfices ecclésiastiques* (Paris: Antoine Boudet, 1765), 6:appendix, 112. Handwritten copies are preserved in ADH, 17 H 16, and ADH, 38 H 75.

⁶⁶Benoist, *Histoire de l’Édit de Nantes*, 3:409–11. On the bipartite commissions of the 1660s, see Élisabeth Labrousse, *Une foi, une loi, un roi? Essai sur la Révocation de l’Édit de Nantes* (Paris: Payot, 1990), 111–15.

well as granted entry into Montpellier's hospital and city college, and asked permission to install church bells and purchase a second cemetery.⁶⁷ The alarmed Catholic consuls realized that to counter these demands and draw up their own complaints it was crucial to recover "good and legitimate acts" from the city archives, so they ordered consular secretary Estienne Marye (who had succeeded Sabatier in 1657) to assist them in the search for relevant documents.⁶⁸ This was not an easy task, because the city archives were in a state of utter chaos. The medieval compoix were nearly falling apart as a result of continuous handling, while the tax officers struggled to decipher the old script and marginal notes added over time. The chambre des archives had also become an impenetrable jungle, its documents "all piled up and in disorder, exposed to the rats and dust." The consuls therefore resolved to hire two professional archivists, Pierre Louvet and François Joffre, to compile an inventory of all the city records and copy out the compoix into new registers.⁶⁹ Just as Gariel's 1634 deposition had forced the Huguenot community to search the archives, so the Protestant demands of 1661 caused a similar flurry of archival energy among Montpellier's Catholics, as the consuls and town archivist combed through the city archives to locate documents that could be used in the anti-Protestant campaign.

ARCHIVE WARS

As the mendicant orders gained access to the city archives, they inevitably came into conflict with the Protestant community, especially because their quest for archival reconstruction gradually shifted in purpose from documenting prewar possessions to holding the Huguenots responsible for wartime confiscations. Among the notarial deeds and tax registers stored in the town hall, they not only found evidence of the lands, rents, and houses their orders had owned before the outbreak of the wars, they also realized these documents could be used to reclaim property annexed by the Huguenots during the wars. Although the terms of the Edict of Nantes that forbade the persecution of wartime plundering were still technically active, by the middle of the century local authorities were more willing to apply the edict in its most conveniently strict sense, hoping to deprive the Huguenots of their privileges and places of worship once and for all.

⁶⁷Cayer des plainctes et demandes que les habitans de la ville de Montpellier faisans profession de la religion prethendue refformée presentent à vous Nosseigneurs De Bezons et De Peyremales, 7 Apr. 1662, AMM, GG 5. Most demands were ultimately refused. See Benoist, *Histoire de l'Édit de Nantes*, 3:appendix, 122–24.

⁶⁸Town council resolution of 22 Apr. 1662, AMM, BB 403, 66v–67v. Marye's appointment is recorded in Town council resolution of 3 Apr. 1657, AMM, BB 402, 4v–5r.

⁶⁹Town council resolution of 22 Apr. 1662, AMM, BB 403, 73r–74r. See also Castets and Berthelé, *Archives de la ville de Montpellier*, 1:xxx–lxxix. On the chaos of early modern archives and the importance of inventories, see Friedrich, *Geburt des Archivs*, 75–82; and Head, "Mirroring governance."

These archival wars between Catholics and Protestants culminated in a case brought against the Grand Temple by the Carmelites. The Carmelite order had begun putting its records in order in 1653, when friar Henri Salard was tasked with drawing up an inventory of all the documents stored “in utter confusion” in an old chest.⁷⁰ Salard also gained access to the city archives, where he copied extensive extracts from the *compoix* to reconstruct the order’s possessions, in particular houses, vineyards, olive trees, and fields.⁷¹ His research was not exhaustive, however, because in 1670 additional documents were discovered by commissioner Matheron, who styled himself a “decipherer of old letters & translator,” and who had been hired by the Lazarist order to search the Montpellier archives. During his research, Matheron also came across the long-forgotten property acts of other monastic orders, including the Augustinians, Mercederians, and Carmelites, which prompted him to offer his services in exchange for payment.⁷² At the request of the Carmelite prior, Matheron subsequently compiled a complete register of the order’s prewar possessions, including a small but highly significant bequest made to the Carmelites in 1484: a house adjacent to the Cour du Baile.⁷³

Further digging in the archives revealed that the history of this donation began in 1451, when the pious widow Marie Beringuiere founded two chapels in Montpellier, one devoted to all saints in the Carmelite church, and another to Saint Hilary in the church of Saint Firmin, endowing each with an annual pension of five florins. After her death payments fell into disarray, until in 1484 her inheritor Pierre Raymond made up for the arrears by transferring to the Carmelites one of the houses formerly owned by Beringuiere, located next to the Cour du Baile. By November 1680, the Carmelites had amassed sufficient evidence to bring a case before the court of Montpellier: they claimed that when the Huguenots had seized the city in 1561, the Beringuiere house had been confiscated and integrated into the Grand Temple (see fig. 1). Although in 1565 the governor of Languedoc, Henri de Montmorency-Damville, had permitted the Protestants to construct a church inside the city walls, he had explicitly forbidden them to build on land owned by the clergy. The Grand Temple, in other words, was an illegal church that ought to be destroyed.⁷⁴

⁷⁰Inventaire raisonné des documens trouvés dans les Archifs du Couvent des Peres Carmes de Montpellier l’an 1653, ADH, 35 H 9.

⁷¹Extrait des livres cadastres de la maison de ville de Montpellier pour scavoir ce qui appartient de present au couvent des Carmes et ce qui a appartenu autrefois, 1653, ADH, 35 H 12.

⁷²Matheron to Augustinian prior, ADH, 41 H 1; Matheron to Mercedarian prior, ADH, 50 H 27; Recueil faicte sur les vieux compoix de Montpellier pour servir a madame labesse & religieuses de St. Felix, ADH, 58 H 2.

⁷³Recueil des perquisitions que j’ay faictes tant dans les archifs royaux de Nymes, que a Montpellier en divers endroits pour le Reverend pere prieur du Couvant de Nostre Dame de Montcarmel dudit Montpellier [1670], ADH, 35 H 12, fol. 96.

⁷⁴Esriptures pour le sindic des reverends peres Carmes contre ceux de la RPR, 1682, ADH, 35 H 41.

The Carmelite allegations prompted a thorough search in the Huguenot church archives, as the Protestants dug for further evidence to prove they had lawfully acquired the house. This was essentially a genealogical exercise. The Huguenots had to construct an alternative timeline of successive home owners based on notarial documents, which would demonstrate that the property had not been confiscated but had changed hands legally over time. Genealogical research was a particular obsession of early modern society, as nobles relied on archival evidence to demonstrate their pedigree, and civic and ecclesiastical authorities claimed privileges based on charters, acts, and laws. Tracing the genealogy of a particular property thus fit into a larger pattern of record keeping and archival research, at a time when archives were mined first and foremost for their legal uses.⁷⁷ Montpellier's Huguenots could fall back on the register of documents created in 1634 to counter the claims of the cathedral chapter. It contained not only the 1565 act of purchase for the Cour du Baile and Governor Damville's permission to construct the Grand Temple, but also notarial acts tracing the genealogy of all adjacent houses acquired by the Huguenot church.⁷⁸ These acts culled from the Huguenot archives demonstrated that Estienne Raymond had indeed donated the house to the Carmelites in 1484, but the Protestants also unearthed a sales act that proved the friars had sold the building again in 1485. Additional documents showed the house had changed ownership several times since then, until the Huguenot community had bought it from the lawyer Jean Azemar in 1582. As the Huguenot syndic observed, "the aforementioned documents refute very clearly what the Carmelites have advanced without any proof: that they were the owners of the said house."⁷⁹

In spite of the archival evidence, however, both the local court and the Parlement de Toulouse ruled in favor of the Carmelites, ordering the Huguenot community to surrender the land on which the Beringuiere house had once been built and to pay the friars 18,000 livres in compensation.⁸⁰ This judgment indicated the relative weakness of the Huguenots in the decade prior to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which was marked by a barrage of edicts limiting their rights and a disregard for legal tradition.⁸¹ Yet before the order could be executed the church was suddenly closed down, and for entirely different reasons. In November 1682 the Huguenot minister Dubourdieu was found guilty of allowing a young girl to take communion in the Grand Temple, even though

⁷⁷Friedrich, *Geburt des Archivs*, 261–66; and Woolf, *Social Circulation of the Past*, 73–137.

⁷⁸Livre des titres et documents de l'église chrestienne Refformee de la ville de Montpellier, ADH, 12 J 1, esp. 25v–51r.

⁷⁹Factum pour les habitans de Montpellier faisant profession de la R.P.R. contre les religieus Carmes de la mesme ville et Mr. Jean Beros prebstre [1681], ADH, 35 H 41. See also Petition of Montpellier's Huguenots to Louis XIV [1682], AN, TT 256B, fols. 541–49.

⁸⁰Sentence du Juge des ordinaires pour les peres Carmes contre les huguenots de Montpellier, 24 Oct. 1681, ADH, 35 H 41; and Arrest pour le sindic des R.P. Carmes de Montpellier contre le sindic de ceux de la R.P.R., 28 Apr. 1683, ADH, 35 H 41.

⁸¹Labrousse, *Une foi, une loi, un roi?*, 174–79.

she had recently converted to Catholicism after her father had locked her up in a nearby convent. In 1680, the king had forbidden ex-Protestants to return to their former confession, a crime known as *relaps* that was punishable by the closure of the church that welcomed them.⁸² The Grand Temple was thus torn down in December 1683, leaving the Carmelites with no option but to negotiate with the city council, which had turned the site of the demolished church into a public square: the friars eventually received 2,000 livres in compensation.⁸³

CONCLUSION

This essay has sought to demonstrate that the destruction of records during the French Wars of Religion played a key role in sustaining religious conflict between Huguenots and Catholics in postwar France. Officially, the 1598 Edict of Nantes prohibited both sides from remembering the wars in an attempt to promote peace, but a case study of the local memory politics in Montpellier shows that the destruction of archival records and the confiscation of clerical property proved impossible to forget, let alone forgive. The memory of the material losses suffered during the wars remained a bone of contention throughout the seventeenth century, fueling tensions and undermining religious coexistence. Regardless of royal injunctions, the priests and friars of Montpellier repeatedly sought compensation for the destruction of their records and tried to have the Huguenots convicted for wartime plundering and the alienation of property. The wars of religion were essentially transferred from the streets into the courtroom, where Protestants and Catholics did battle with ink and paper instead of arms, relying on edicts, tax registers, notarial deeds, sentences, and petitions to assert their version of the past.

Paradoxically, it was the destruction of documents rather than their growing expansion that set in motion these record-keeping efforts. The Protestants were forced to search the archives for documents to prove their right to worship, while the mendicant orders scoured the city archives for notarial deeds and tax registers to reconstruct their prewar possessions. Prior to 1562, the monastic archives had been more or less dormant and disorganized repositories, but in the aftermath of the wars the loss of records functioned as a catalyst for the appointment of friars and professional archivists to make inventories, retrieve property acts, and use archival documents as evidence against Montpellier's Huguenots.

Tracing the ebb and flow of these archival wars throughout the seventeenth century also underscores the tenacity of the memories of archival loss, right up to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. It is especially striking that the destructions resurfaced in local consciousness around the middle of the century,

⁸²Corbière, *L'église réformée de Montpellier*, 230–38; and François Gaultier de Saint-Blancard, *Histoire apologetique, ou Defense des libertez des Eglises Reformees de France* (Mainz: Jean Le Blanc, 1688), 1:300–315.

⁸³Town council resolution of 24 Oct. 1684, AMM, BB 405, 268v–70r.

when a generation had come of age that had not lived through the wars, yet still felt wronged by the loss of records decades earlier. Whereas Gariel's anti-Huguenot campaign in the direct aftermath of the wars was clearly motivated by personal experience, the Carmelite friar Henri Salard, who only searched the archives in 1653, had not been present during the Huguenot takeover of Montpellier in 1561, and was probably too young to have experienced the destructions committed in 1621, if he had lived in the city at all. Indeed, the Carmelites later argued that by the time a new generation of friars had reestablished the convent in 1639, much of what was once known was lost, thus requiring new archival research to reconstruct the orders' prewar possessions.⁸⁴ Coupled with the arrival of royal commissioners in 1661, which triggered additional archival research on both sides of the religious divide, this local timing of events may well help to explain the upsurge in archive fever and confessional conflict in the middle of the century.

The interdiction of Protestant worship in Montpellier did not mark the end of archival loss and reconstruction. In December 1683, just before the Grand Temple was demolished by local masons and workmen, consular secretary Jean Bonier was ordered to search the consistory room and confiscate the records of the Huguenot community, but he noted that "no papers were found, because they had previously been taken away by those of the so-called Reformed Religion."⁸⁵ The disappearance of the Huguenot archives at Montpellier was not unique. In the years leading up to the Revocation, royal officers across France confiscated and destroyed Huguenot archives in an attempt to erase the memory of a "false religion," not unlike the Protestant destruction of Catholic archives during the civil wars. Some records escaped destruction because they were hidden or spirited out of the kingdom by Huguenot refugees, only to resurface in the nineteenth century, when a renewed interest in Huguenot history led to the establishment of a library for the history of French Protestantism in Paris, which over time acquired numerous church records from Huguenot descendants.⁸⁶ To this date, however, the archives of the Huguenot church of Montpellier have never turned up. The irony is that as a result, much of the city's early modern Protestant past can now only be reconstructed using Catholic archives. 📖

⁸⁴Esriptures pour le sindic des reverends peres Carmes contre ceux de la RPR, 1682, ADH, 35 H 41.

⁸⁵1 Dec. 1683, AM Montpellier, BB 199, 224v.

⁸⁶Raymond A. Mentzer, "La mémoire d'une 'fausse religion': Les registres de consistoires des Églises réformées de France (XVIe–XVIIe siècles)," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 153, no. 4 (2007): 461–75.