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REMEMBERING THE HOLY LEAGUE

Material memories in early modern France*

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Remembering the Reformation in early modern France was always contentious. The movement for religious renewal had led to a series of civil wars between Catholics and Protestants, known as the French Wars of Religion (1562–1598). Although the 1598 Edict of Nantes ultimately installed religious coexistence between the two confessions, the monarchy was well aware that recalling past divisions risked undermining the hard-won peace. King Henry IV therefore ordered the wars to be forgotten, decreeing that ‘the memory of all things that have happened on either side, since the beginning of the month of March 1585 until our coronation, and during the preceding troubles, shall remain extinguished and suppressed, as if they have never taken place’. The king hoped that by leaving the past behind, former enemies would be able to ‘live peacefully together as brothers, friends, and fellow citizens’.¹

Yet the policy of forgetting was not just aimed at burying the conflict between Protestant and Catholics; it was also an attempt to cover up the rifts that had opened up between Catholics. It is significant that the edict singled out the period between March 1585 and Henry’s coronation on 27 February 1594 as worthy of particular forgetting, as these dates marked the rise and fall of the so-called Holy League. This alliance of Catholic noblemen, clergy, officeholders, and devout laymen had vowed to eradicate Protestantism and had disputed Henry’s accession to the throne, because he had been born and raised as the Protestant prince of Navarre. By 1588 the League controlled most major cities in France, including Paris and Lyon, leaving Henry IV with the arduous task of regaining his kingdom through a series of battles and sieges, supported by both Protestants and moderate Catholics.²

Because Henry ultimately succeeded in defeating the League, the movement was best consigned to oblivion, scholars have argued. The king was indeed keen to wipe the slate clean, pardoning his Leaguer opponents and offering them

prominent places in government to ensure their loyalty.³ Former Leaguers often agreed that the less said about their rebellious past, the better. In his otherwise exhaustive history of Lyon, the former Leaguer councillor Claude Rubys skipped the five years in which the League had held sway over the city, writing that ‘I will not give a specific account, not only so as not to violate the amnesty, which has been ordered by the edicts of His Majesty, but also because it would not be fitting for me, given that even I howled with the dogs’.⁴

This essay argues, however, that edicts and official histories are poor guides for understanding how the League survived in historical consciousness in early modern France. For despite the rhetoric of forgiving and forgetting the troubles of the League were actively remembered, especially in material form. Post-war France witnessed a proliferation of purpose-made objects that memorialised the troubles of the League, including triumphal arches, monuments, statues, gifts, and paintings. That memories of the troubles were codified in tangible objects is not surprising. At a time when the vast majority of the French population was illiterate, objects — especially those displayed in public — could communicate the past far more effectively than written texts. And because objects could survive for decades, they also offered the possibility to transmit memories to future generations. Images of the infamous Procession of the League, for example, perpetuated the memory of the League far beyond 1598.⁵ Material memories of the League proved to be contested ground, however, as post-war France witnessed the emergence of two competing narratives of the troubles. On the one hand, the monarchy and turncoat Leaguers propagated a royalist memory of the League, presenting it as a dangerous rebellion that had undermined a legitimate monarch with the aid of Habsburg Spain. Committed Leaguers, on the other hand, held on to their experience of opposition and developed a proud counter-memory that resisted official narratives about the recent past.

Forgetting the League

That the Holy League should be remembered in post-war France was not self-evident. As a growing number of Leaguer governors and cities surrendered to Henry IV from 1594 onwards, the king actually promised his former enemies to forget the troubles of the League. Between January 1594 and March 1598 Henry IV issued over 70 capitulation treaties, assuring Leaguer partisans they would not be prosecuted for rebelling against his rule, and prohibiting discussion of events that had occurred during the League.⁶ Lyon, the second Leaguer city to side with Henry IV in February 1594, was granted an edict in which the king promised ‘to forget everything that may have happened on the authority of the city council against our authority & service, since the beginning of the last troubles until the return to our obedience’, and forbade anyone from seeking redress in court.⁷ Subsequent treaties would repeat this injunction to forget the League. Upon entering Paris in March 1594, the king even had a tract handed out in the streets, informing citizens that ‘His Majesty [...] wants & intends that all the things that have happened & occurred during the troubles will be forgotten’.⁸

The king had compelling reasons to issue such oblivion clauses. Legal scholars had theorised the necessity of granting amnesty in order to transition France from civil war to durable peace and concord. Foremost among them was Antoine Loisel, a lawyer in the Parlement de Paris (the most important court of appeal in France), who, quoting the ancient author Lucian, argued that 'the best defence against civil war is oblivion'.⁹ Remembering past injustices only helped to 'embitter and renew old wounds', Loisel argued, which could provoke a new cycle of violence. The only remedy was 'to efface everything as quickly as possible, to ensure that nothing remains in the minds of the people on either side, and to never speak or think of it again'.¹⁰

Yet Loisel's passionate defence of expunging the past does not explain how Henry IV expected people to forget about the League. After all, the monarchy could not police the minds of those who had experienced the wars. Yet scholars have argued that the aim of these oblivion clauses was not to impose forgetfulness, but to control public discourse about the past. Both the Edict of Nantes and the preceding capitulation treaties issued a moratorium on evoking or investigating the troubles of the League, which was not quite the same as ordering complete forgetfulness. Past injustices were not pardoned; rather, by pretending they had never occurred, the monarchy prevented people from acting upon their knowledge of the past, in particular in court. In essence, oblivion was a form of legal amnesia to prevent future conflict.¹¹ Antoine Loisel confirmed this crucial distinction between forgiving and forgetting in his opening speech to the court of Guyenne. The pardoning of past crimes was unwise in the wake of civil war, he observed, because neither party would admit to its guilt, while people would surely feel wronged if their suffering was not acknowledged. Oblivion, on the other hand, had the virtue of avoiding the thorny question of assigning blame: it did not deny past crimes, but only suspended their prosecution.¹² The monarchy hoped that as long as Frenchmen conformed to the public fiction that the League had never existed, it was possible that its private memory would slowly be forgotten, too.

Yet despite Henry's repeated injunctions to bury the memory of the League, its memory survived across France, in particular as material representations, appearing in monuments, paintings, statues, and even gifts to the monarch himself. This may seem surprising, since recalling an episode that was likely to embarrass ex-Leagueurs seemed at odds with the king's attempts to leave the past behind and co-opt the support of his former opponents. But as Judith Pollmann has suggested, precisely because oblivion clauses forbade citizens to evoke past events, they also created an opportunity to formulate new historical narratives, preferably ones that superseded former divisions.¹³ Indeed, royalists quickly realised that the memory of the League could help to overcome past conflict, by portraying the civil wars not as a religious struggle between Protestants and Catholics, but between Frenchmen who had been loyal to the monarchy, irrespective of their faith, and those who had colluded with Spain to overthrow it. The antithetical memory of the League thus deflected attention from the religious struggles, uniting the nation around the monarch as the restorer of order.

The League in Lyon

As the second city to fall into royalist hands in February 1594, Lyon functioned as a key laboratory for the forging of this new memory of the League: royalists and turncoat Leaguers both began to propagate a mythical story of Lyon as a loyal city, which they claimed had voluntarily broken the shackles of Leaguer domination to acknowledge Henry IV as France's legitimate ruler. The city had joined the Leaguer rebellion in 1589, after King Henry III, fearful of the growing influence of the nominal leaders of the League, the Duke and Cardinal de Guise, had ordered their assassination. Yet Henry's attempt to regain his authority backfired spectacularly: Catholics throughout France rallied to the League, including in Lyon. On 2 March 1589 the town council renounced the king's authority, instead proclaiming loyalty to the Parisian League, and swore a solemn oath to defend the Catholic religion at all cost. In addition, a separate *conseil d'état* was set up, headed by the Duke of Nemours and Archbishop Pierre d'Épinac. Yet dwindling trade and the wars of the League soon saddled the city with a financial deficit, while the Duke of Nemours alienated the city council by trying to create a personal fiefdom in the region, with Lyon as its capital. In order to end the duke's authoritarian rule, in 1593 the council imprisoned Nemours in the citadel of Pierre-Scize. The city still refused to acknowledge Henry IV, until on 7 February 1594 royalists inside Lyon proclaimed their support for the king and opened the city gates to Alphonse d'Ornano, the royal governor of Dauphiny.¹⁴

Following the royalist take-over of Lyon, the city council was purged of League supporters and replaced with men loyal to Henry IV. The new council arrested 65 prominent Leaguers, putting 6 under house arrest and banishing the others.¹⁵ The council also moved to destroy all material evidence recalling the city's prior adherence to the League. Black and red sashes — symbols of the League and Spain — were burnt throughout the city, along with the coats of arms of King Philip II, the Duke of Savoy, and the Duke of Nemours. The city executioner also burnt an effigy of the League, painted in the form of a sorceress to symbolise the enthralling power the League had held over people's minds. On 16 February, finally, children constructed a pyramid hung with war trophies on the Place du Change, which was set ablaze to celebrate the demise of the League [Fig. 5.1].¹⁶

Having cleansed Lyon of all apparent vestiges recalling the League, royalists and former Leaguers began supplanting its memory with a new material narrative. The first indication that this royalist memory centred around objects idolising the king's triumph over the League came during the take-over of Lyon in February 1594. On the morning of 7 February, one of the city councillors suspended a painted portrait of the king from a town hall window, telling the assembled crowd: 'Here's the portrait of our King, he wants to preserve us in the Catholic, Apostolic & Roman Religion. Let us obey him, let us pray God for his prosperity, health, & long life, & let us all cry out *Vive le Roi!*' The portrait played a pivotal role in persuading the population to acknowledge Henry IV, as it was subsequently paraded through town and displayed at the Place du Change for another week, where inhabitants flocked to salute their king with more shouts of *Vive le Roi!*¹⁷



FIGURE 5.1 The capitulation of Lyon in February 1594: *Warhafftige Zeitung auß der Statt Lyon wass sich für freyden haben zugetragen nach dem sie sich dem König von Navarra ergeben den 7. tag February des 94. Jars* (Nuremberg: Georg Lang, 1594). Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, QB-201(11).

Royalist memories

The royalist memory of the League that spread across France in the next decade found its expression in a recurring visual narrative. On the one hand, allegorical images regularly depicted Henry IV as Hercules slaying the Hydra of Lerna, the ancient monster that now symbolised the rebellious League, while historical images showed the king triumphing over his Leaguer opponents in a series of epic battles and sieges. Both representations found their origins in the abundant print culture of civil war France, in particular the visual propaganda produced by royalists to defame the League.¹⁸ Many of these engravings and newsprints were preserved by the diarist Pierre de l'Estoile, who collected them in order to expose 'the abuses, impostures, vanities and furies of this great monster of the League'. Indeed, several of the anti-Leaguer prints in his collection depict the League as the Lernean Hydra slain by Henry IV.¹⁹ Likewise, representations of Henry's battlefield victories may well have been inspired by a series of newsprints produced in the workshop of Frans Hogenberg, who memorialised the troubles of the League from 1587 onwards.²⁰

In Lyon, both expressions of this royalist memory of the League — allegorical as well as historical — came together in the ceremonial entry of Henry IV in September 1595. Royal entries were an enduring feature of Renaissance France, as monarchs relied on this ritual to affirm their often precarious authority in the face of powerful urban elites.²¹ Henry likewise used his entry into Lyon and other Leaguer cities to consolidate his authority and reconcile formerly rebellious communities with the monarchy.²² Chancellor Pomponne de Bellièvre, who had arrived in Lyon in June 1594 to ensure the city's smooth transition to Bourbon rule, had repeatedly insisted that a royal entry was crucial in securing popular support, since the city still counted many disgruntled Leaguers keen to undo the royalist coup. In July 1594 he assured the king that 'your presence, Sire, will reassure all those who have a French heart, and dispel and confound the malice of your enemies'.²³

When Henry made his way to Lyon in the late summer of 1595, the town council hired two local artists, Jean Maignan and Jean Perrissin, to paint a series of triumphal arches, statues, and columns that would line the king's entry on 4 September. Perrissin was well-suited for this task, as he had previously worked on the *Quarante Tableaux*, a series of engravings documenting the first three religious wars. The design of the monuments was entrusted to Pierre Matthieu, a playwright and lawyer who had served as secretary to the Leaguer *conseil d'état* in Lyon, but had since managed to convince Bellièvre of his loyalty to Henry IV — it was the chancellor who persuaded the town council to hire Matthieu as artistic director.²⁴

The elaborate iconography Matthieu developed in consultation with Bellièvre focused on Lyon's submission to Henry IV, who was praised for ending civil discord by defeating the League. Matthieu designed a series of arches that celebrated the virtues of a just ruler: piety, clemency, force, and courage [Fig. 5.2].

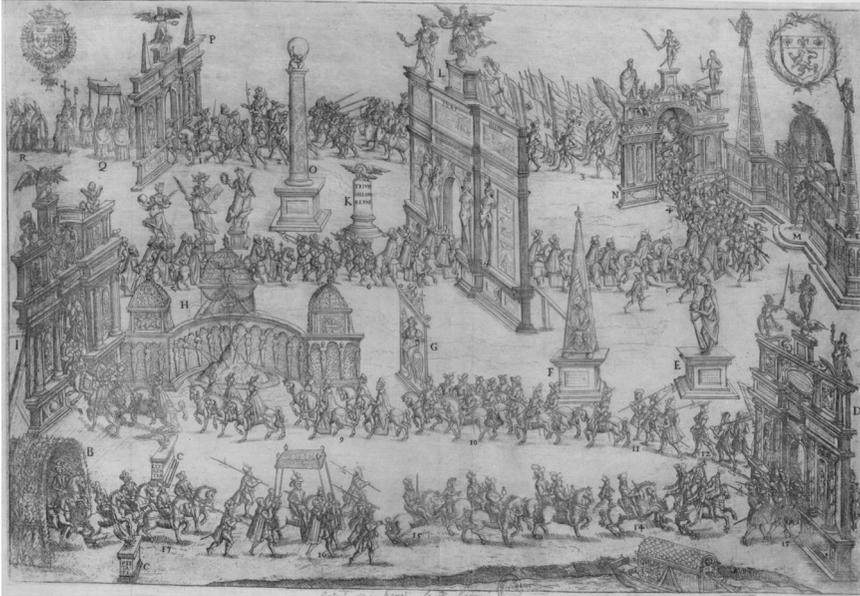


FIGURE 5.2 Royal entry of Henry IV in Lyon on 4 September 1595. Anonymous engraving, in Pierre Matthieu, *L'Entree de tres-grand, tres-chrestien, tres-magnanime, et victorieux prince Henry III. Roy de France & de Navarre, en sa bonne ville de Lyon* (Lyon: Pierre Michel, 1595). Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, QB-201 (12).

The second arch, dedicated to Henry's clemency, showed a lion strangling the Hydra of the League, along with an appropriate verse: 'This generous ire dashes forwards/ by means of fire and the sword/ to plunge into Hell/ the Hydra that ravaged France'. The arch was topped with a lion offering his prey to Hercules, an allegorical image that evoked Lyon's surrender to Henry IV.²⁵ The third and most spectacular arch praised the 'victories & triumphs of the King'. It focused entirely on the troubles of the League, showcasing three battle scenes: Henry's victory against the Duke of Mayenne at the Battle at Arques in September 1589, the Battle of Ivry on 14 March 1590, and the defeat of a combined army of Leaguer and Spanish soldiers at Fontaine-Françoise, near Dijon, on 5 June 1595.²⁶

Towards the end of his procession the king also encountered a commemorative column, modelled after Emperor Trajan's column in Rome, which was painted with 'the most remarkable events of these last troubles', and crowned with a statue of Atlas shouldering the world — another reminder of Henry's herculean struggle against the League. A melange of historical as well as allegorical images, the ten scenes lining the column included Henry's ascension to the throne in 1589, the siege of Paris in 1590, an allegorical image of piety to symbolise Henry's conversion to Catholicism in 1593, the surrender of Leaguer cities from 1594 onwards, and the figure of Leaguer rebellion falling into an abyss.²⁷

This visual decalogue of Henry's recent life once again recalled his triumph over the League as well as his conversion to the Church of Rome, an important turning-point in his struggle with the League.

Henry's entry into Lyon and other Leaguer towns offered communities a form of closure, as they could distance themselves from a disgraced past by touting their loyalty to Henry IV. Yet in doing so, cities were paradoxically forced to recall the troubles of the League, if only as an abhorrent counter-example. These visual memories, painted on arches, columns, and other monuments, were as much an attempt to leave the troubles of the League behind as an effort to preserve its memory in post-war France. In the preface to his published description of Henry's ceremonial entry, Pierre Matthieu even advised his readers to 'keep this book as a Medal of happiness of this great French Alexander' and to 'use it as a rich tapestry of the history of these last troubles'.²⁸ Long after the makeshift arches and columns had disappeared, the book was to serve as a material reminder of the League and its ultimate defeat. It even contained a fold-out engraving of the entire procession, not unlike a tapestry, which was probably designed by Jean Perrissin, who had also been hired to produce plates of the event.²⁹

Reciprocal memory-making

It is worth underlining that this royalist memory of the League was not imposed top-down, but was the result of a reciprocal process of peace-making between the king and former Leaguers. Although Henry IV carefully choreographed his entries into Paris and Rouen, most other Leaguer cities, including Lyon, Cambrai, Abbéville, and Moulins, planned and designed the entry themselves.³⁰ The city of Lyon even entrusted the project to a former Leaguer, Pierre Matthieu. This reciprocal process was further encoded in precious gifts to the king, as Leaguer cities aimed to restore their fragile patron-client relationship with the Bourbon monarchy.³¹ Following Henry's entry, the Lyon town councillors offered him a small golden statue produced by two local goldsmiths, which showed the king extinguishing the fire of rebellion with one hand, while in the other he presented an olive branch and pomegranate — the tokens of peace and concord — to a kneeling lion, which had freed itself from the shackles of the League to offer Henry a crown.³²

That Leaguer cities actively participated in the creation of a royalist memory of the League is also evident from another example of gift-giving: in December 1600 the city of Paris offered Henry IV a rapier and companion dagger to celebrate the king's marriage with Marie de' Medici. These were not only precious objects, the rapier was also a material memory, depicting in both visual and textual narrative the troubles of the League [Fig. 5.3]. Rapiers had originally developed in Renaissance Europe as weapons of self-defence, meant to be worn not into battle but with everyday clothing. They gained in popularity around 1600, as the wearing of armour declined and noblemen sought to retain their warrior status by wearing ornamented and flamboyant rapiers.³³



FIGURE 5.3 Anonymous artists, Blade detail of the rapier gifted by the city of Paris to Henry IV, 1600. The medallion of Aries corresponds to a cartouche recalling the battle of Ivry (March 1590) and the capture of Paris (March 1594). Paris, Musée de l'Armée. © RMN-Grand Palais/Pascal Segrette.

Because rapiers were mostly worn sheathed, owners would usually have the visible pommel and hilt decorated, but the rapier gifted to Henry also sported an embellished blade, offering further evidence that it was intended for ostentatious display. The blade was encased with twelve mother-of-pearl medallions representing the signs of the zodiac, interspersed with golden cartouches that contained brief texts commemorating the troubles of the League. Covering the period from 1587 until 1598, the blade memorialised Henry's battles at Coutras, Arques, and Ivry; the submission of Leaguer towns, including Lyon, Paris, Rouen, Le Havre, Orléans, Bourges, and Amiens; and key events from the king's life, such as his reconciliation with Henry III and subsequent ascension to the throne in 1589, Henry's coronation at Chartres in 1594, his reconciliation in 1595 with the Leaguer chiefs, the Duke of Mayenne and the Duke of Nemours, and the Peace of Vervins concluded with Spain in 1598.³⁴ Besides the incongruous 1587 battle at Coutras, where Henry had led a Huguenot army to victory against King Henry III, all the other cartouches focused on his victorious campaign against the League and the reconciliation with his former enemies. The rapier, then, sought to expunge the shameful memory of Leaguer rebellion, initiated by the city of Paris in 1588, replacing it with a triumphant royalist narrative that depicted the king as the restorer of order and a clement ruler pardoning his rebellious subjects.



FIGURE 5.4 Antoine Schanaert, *The Capture of Grenoble*, c. 1615. Grenoble, Bibliothèque municipale de Grenoble.

Courtesy of the Musée dauphinois, Grenoble.

The royalist memory of the League also appeared in another form of material memory: picture galleries decorating the chateaux of the monarchy, nobility, and office-holders. In the wake of the wars Henry IV undertook a vast campaign of architectural renewal of his palaces, including the creation of galleries that were often decorated with scenes recalling his victories against the League. The Galerie de Diane he constructed at the palace of Fontainebleau, for example, contained ten canvases depicting King Henry's victories, including the battles at Coutras, Arques, Ivry, Fontaine-Françoise, and Honfleur, and the surrender of Mantes and Vernon-sur-Seine, the inhabitants kneeling down to hand Henry the city keys.³⁵

Historical picture galleries commemorating Henry IV's victories quickly spread to aristocratic galleries across France. In the aftermath of the wars several royal clients created similar galleries in their chateaux, showcasing the same royalist victories against the League that Henry IV had chosen at Fontainebleau, alongside wartime events that had marked their own lives. A striking example was the gallery of the Duke of Lesdiguières, a royalist commander from Dauphiny, who in 1614 installed seventeen tableaux depicting events from the wars, in his castle at Vizille. Nine of these paintings narrated Henry IV's well-known triumphs: the battles of Coutras, Arques, Ivry and Fontaine-Française, the capture of Rouen, Amiens, La Fère, and Montmélian, and the king's entry into Paris in 1594. The eight paintings on the opposite side, however, traced Lesdiguières' personal military triumphs in Dauphiny, beginning with his capture of the Leaguer stronghold of Grenoble in 1590 [Fig. 5.4].³⁶

Similarly, in 1632 the Catholic nobleman Matthieu Sève, who had served as town councillor and prévôt des marchands of Lyon, had the Italian artist Pietro

Ricchi painted a series of mural frescos in his chateau at Fléchères, several of which evoked the troubles of the League. In the so-called *Chambre de la Parade*, Ricchi depicted soldiers parading in full gear to evoke the participation of the Sève family in opening the city to royalist troops in 1594 and preparing the king's royal entry of 1595. In the nearby antechamber, Hercules can be seen wrestling with the Hydra, a familiar reference to Henry's triumph over the League [Fig. 5.5].³⁷

Just like the city councillors of Paris and Lyon, then, Lesdiguières and Sève buried the memory of Leaguer rebellion in favour of a royalist memory that celebrated Henry's supremacy. This royalist memory of the League, which graced monuments, commemorative objects, and picture galleries throughout France, helped to remember the wars without descending into partisan conflict again — the defeat of Leaguer rebels by the Bourbon monarchy became a shared visual and material topos that transcended the memory of religious opposition.



FIGURE 5.5 Pietro Ricchi, *Hercules wrestling with the Hydra*, 1632. Fareins, Chateau de Fléchères.

Courtesy of the Chateau de Fléchères.

Leaguer counter-memories

Despite the rapid spread of a royalist memory that condemned the League to perpetual ignominy, not all Catholics embraced this narrative. In the privacy of their homes and convents, committed Leaguers continued to cherish memories of resistance, long after they had ostensibly rallied to the Bourbon regime and sworn to bury the past. Michel Foucault has coined the term 'counter-history' to describe this process, defining it as a narrative that resists official versions of historical truth.³⁸ Counter-histories are born out of oppression, opposing the powers that be by remembering a past that is deliberately being obscured or twisted. The aim of counter-history, Foucault writes, is 'to disinter something that has been hidden, and which has been hidden not only because it was neglected, but because it has been carefully, deliberately, and wickedly misrepresented'.³⁹ Counter-histories thus focus on experiences that have not been heard and integrated in official histories; they are a form of remembering against the grain, by people whose memories do not fit the dominant historical narrative. As such, the memories of French Catholics who refused to accept the narrative of the League as a misguided movement are a poignant example of counter-memory, a form of resistance against royalist attempts to rewrite the recent past.

This counter-memory was especially resilient among the French mendicant orders, who had been ardent supporters of the League. Franciscan preachers in particular had condoned regicide in their sermons and had created lay confraternities across France in defence of the Catholic faith.⁴⁰ The Franciscan order eventually accepted Henry IV's authority after the defeat of the League, but the Capuchins continued to oppose the king, their repugnance bolstered by the issuing of the Edict of Nantes in 1598. The friars not only preached against the edict, they also organised public prayer sessions and processions in Paris, asking God to prevent the implementation of the edict. In response the king had the most vocal Capuchin preacher, Jean Brulart, banned from the capital in 1599.⁴¹

Crucially, these residual Leaguer sympathies were fuelled by memories of past resistance against the monarchy, which proved to have a reactivating power even after Henry IV had conquered Paris. On 27 December 1594 the king narrowly escaped an assassination attempt by Jean Chastel, the son of a Parisian merchant draper, who attacked him with a knife. During his interrogation Chastel claimed to have acted alone, but the authorities discovered that his Jesuit tutors at the Collège de Clermont — a known Leaguer hotbed — had exercised a powerful influence on the boy's conviction that it was lawful to assassinate a heretical ruler. When officers raided the college they found the Jesuit father Jean Guignard in possession of various sermons and manuscripts, written in his own hand, that eulogised Jacques Clément, the Dominican friar who had murdered King Henry III in 1589, and that condemned Henry IV as a tyrant who should be executed.⁴² It is noteworthy that the Parlement of Paris subsequently accused Guignard not only of composing seditious writings, but of keeping alive these memories of Leaguer resistance in flagrant contravention of the oblivion edict issued in 1594.⁴³

Both Guignard and Chastel were swiftly executed for lese-majesty, while the Parlement used the botched assassination attempt to expel the Jesuits from its jurisdiction. The court also ordered the creation of yet another material memory of

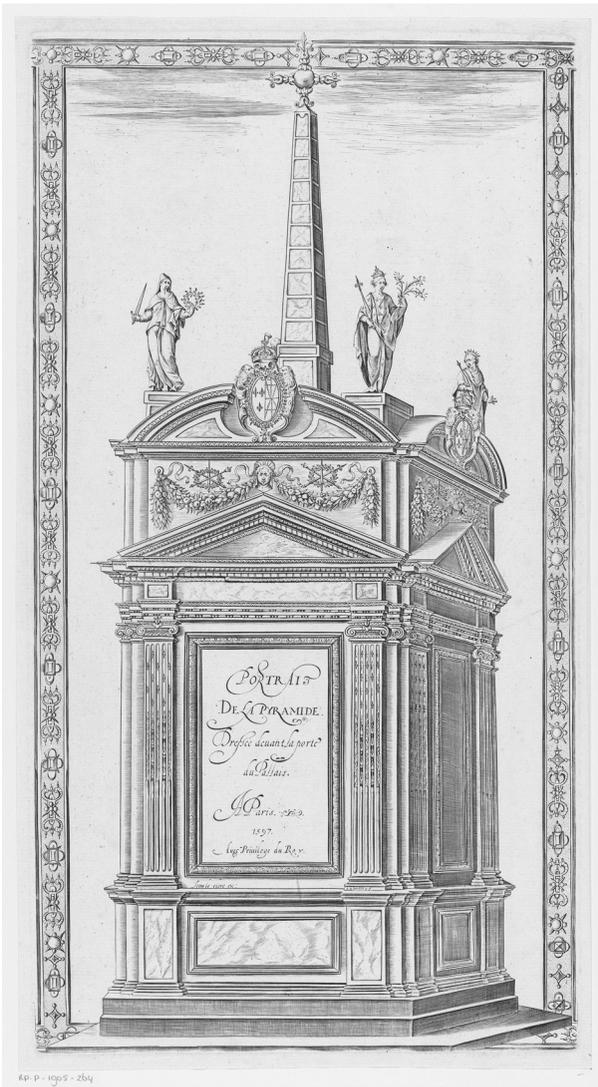


FIGURE 5.6 Jacob de Weert, *Portrait de la pyramide dressée devant la porte du Palais*, 1597. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

the League: the house of the Chastel family, located on the Île de la Cité just opposite the Parlement, was raised to the ground, and a pyramid erected in its place to memorialise Chastel's crime and the expulsion of the Jesuits; the sentence of the Parlement was even etched in marble on the monument [Fig. 5.6].⁴⁴ The Chastel pyramid, then, was another attempt at keeping a lid on Leaguer memories, by supplanting them with a royalist memory of the troubles.

News of Chastel's assassination attempt soon reached Lyon, where a *Te Deum* was sung, followed by a general procession to thank God for preserving Henry's life. Yet memories of the League still cast a dark shadow over the city: unrest had been growing since July 1594, when the Duke of Nemours had escaped from the citadel of Pierre-Scize disguised as his own valet, and now threatened to raise 8,000 troops to retake Lyon for the League.⁴⁵ Bellièvre also reported that clerical opposition to the king was rife, despite the submission of Archbishop d'Épinac and the clergy of Lyon. The chancellor worried in particular about the monastic orders that clung to their Leaguer past, writing to the king that 'in some monasteries that are partial to those of the League they say among themselves that Your Majesty cannot avoid an attempt on his life'.⁴⁶ Bellièvre saw his worst fears confirmed in July 1595, when he discovered a plot to assassinate the king on his imminent visit to Lyon, orchestrated by a group of Capuchin friars loyal to the League. Founded in Italy in 1525, the Capuchin order had settled in France as part of the Counter-Reformation campaign to halt the Protestant tide, opening a first convent in Paris in 1574. A second convent opened in Lyon in 1575, funded by wealthy Italian merchants, three of whom would become important League financiers — a past for which they would suffer banishment in 1594. Lyon's Capuchins played an important role in stimulating popular devotion during the League: in 1593 the friars exposed the Host for forty hours at the church of Sainte Croix, where it became the focus of communal veneration, followed by a moving sermon and a procession attended by the Duke of Nemours.⁴⁷ The Capuchins continued to support the League after Lyon had surrendered to Henry IV. They were the only monastic order that boycotted a 1594 procession celebrating the royalist take-over of Lyon, just as they refused to hold a *Te Deum* service after Chastel's failed assassination attempt in 1595.⁴⁸

Bellièvre uncovered the Capuchin plot by chance: on 24 July 1595 his officers intercepted a letter written by the head of the Capuchin order, who instructed his abbot in Lyon not to let friar Cherubin talk to anyone. When Bellièvre had the friar interrogated, Cherubin claimed that five of his Capuchin brothers were planning to assassinate Henry IV, and that several others were prepared to travel from Italy 'to suffer martyrdom'.⁴⁹ Material counter-memories played a crucial role in keeping alive this Leaguer resistance. Cherubin singled out two friars as especially dangerous because they owned Leaguer relics that proclaimed their true allegiance. Father Anastase was so devoted to Philip II, Cherubin explained, that he owned a portrait of the Spanish king.⁵⁰ He also disclosed that father François had stabbed an effigy of Henry IV with his knife, 'believing that this would cause harm as he has seen happen by those who use evil spells'.⁵¹ Lyon's Capuchins thus ascribed objects both supernatural and mnemonic powers, which helped them to keep alive a counter-memory of Leaguer resistance.

The persistence of Leaguer images among devout Catholics was far from unique. Parisian post-mortem inventories reveal that some people owned portraits of prominent Leaguers long after 1594. When the notary Nicolas Nourry passed away in 1608, an image of the Duke of Mayenne was found in his home, and as late as 1633 the wine merchant Pierre Sotty owned five portraits depicting the Guise brothers.⁵² Perhaps these pictures were simply an unwanted inheritance, difficult to offload on the art market after the oblivion clauses had banned the League from public view. Yet the picture gallery of

Sébastien Zamet, a former Italian financier of the League, suggests that some Catholics did preserve portraits to memorialise the League with a sense of pride. Although Zamet had joined the royalist cause in 1593, he never forgot his Leaguer past, commemorating the troubles in a picture gallery he had constructed in his Parisian townhouse in 1598. The gallery included nineteen portraits that stressed the links between France and the Spanish Habsburgs, in particular their support for the League. Zamet owned portraits of Philips II and his French wife, Elisabeth of Valois, as well as of his successor Philip III and his consort, Margaret of Austria. The gallery also contained a portrait of the Duke of Parma, who had invaded France in 1590 to relieve Paris from the besieging troops of Henry IV, and portraits of the archdukes Albrecht and Isabella, who had captured Calais and Amiens in 1596–1597. The gallery thus showcased a visual pantheon of figures who had supported the League in its attempt to depose Henry IV, a counter-memory that sat uneasily with Zamet's support for the new Bourbon regime.⁵³

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the French Wars of Religion, Catholics and Protestants faced the difficult task of reconciling competing memories about the conflict, but this was especially true for Catholics, who had also been divided between supporters of the Holy League and royalists who had backed King Henry IV. Although royal edicts ordered them to bury the Leaguer rebellion, its memory nonetheless survived in cities, convents, and chateaux across France, especially in material form, ranging from ceremonial gifts and commemorative pyramids to royal entries and picture galleries. The communicative power of material memories, which were accessible to illiterate audiences and could be transmitted across generations, explains why both royalists and proud Leaguers disregarded the injunction to forget the past: royalists sought to control public discourse about the troubles of the League, while unrepentant Leaguers wished to strengthen their identity as uncompromising Catholics.

In doing so, royalists and turncoat Leaguers cast the movement as an abhorrent example of the dangers of rebellion and touted their loyalty to the Bourbon regime by celebrating Henry IV's triumphs over the League. Purged city councils in the wake of Leaguer capitulation propagated a historical narrative that bridged the divisions between citizens, not unlike the attempts of confessionally mixed cities elsewhere in Europe. In Leiden, for instance, the confiscation of Catholic property and expulsion of clerics by Dutch Calvinists was superseded by a new narrative of collective suffering during the 1574 siege by Spanish troops. The citizens' bravery and subsequent lifting of the siege became a topos in urban memory culture that bonded Protestants and Catholics together, irrespective of their faith.⁵⁴ Lyon likewise used the painful episode of Leaguer rebellion to claim the city had been led astray by Spain, until it had voluntarily broken the shackles of foreign domination to acknowledge Henry IV. Rather than portraying the League for what it really was — a radical Catholic movement that had opposed the Protestants and Henry IV — the memory of the troubles was used to unite former Leaguers, royalists, and Protestants around the monarchy as the restorer of order. A minority of committed Catholics, on the other hand, continued to eulogise the League, formulating a proud

memory of resistance against the dominant royalist narrative of the League. This counter-memory was especially popular among the mendicant orders, who had been instrumental in garnering public support for the League, and who found it difficult to accept Henry IV and his policy of religious pluralism.

These competing memories are reminiscent of a solution that was crucial in managing religious pluralism in early modern Europe more generally. As Benjamin Kaplan has shown, authorities often allowed religious dissenters to worship in the privacy of their homes and house chapels, as long as their meetings remained invisible and did not disturb the fiction of religious uniformity in the public realm.⁵⁵ It appears that French magistrates pursued a similar course of action in handling the troubles of the League. The monarchy's main purpose of decreeing oblivion was to put an end to the conflict and control public narratives about the past, but it could do very little to police the private memories of those who had adhered to the League. The amnesty offered by Henry IV was above all a pragmatic *quid pro quo* to help end the wars, not a move to extinguish all memories of the League. Indeed, the existence of Zamet's gallery suggests that Leaguer counter-memories were tolerated as long as they did not become visible and threaten the public peace. Hidden from view in picture galleries, monastic cells, and jealously guarded manuscripts, these counter-memories only emerged in the open when they inspired renewed resistance or even regicide, as in the case of Chastel and the Lyon Capuchins, which prompted authorities to invade these private spaces and police the boundaries of admissible memory. This battle over the memory of the League was ultimately won by the French monarchy: as the royalist memory of the troubles came to dominate the historical narrative, it profoundly shaped the negative image historians have long conjured up of the Holy League.

Notes

- * Research for this essay was funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO). I am grateful to Tom Hamilton and the editors for their insightful comments.
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