Quel Horreur!: Violence in Reformation France

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By

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History 4995: Independent Study on Violence in the French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629

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Oh happy victory! It is to you alone Lord, not to us, the distinguished trophy of honor. In one stroke you tore up the trunk, and the root, and the strewn earth of the heretical vermin. Vermin, who were caught in snares that they had dared to set for your faithful subjects. Oh favorable night! Hour most desirable in which we placed our hope.¹

Michel de Roigny, On the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, 1572

The level of sectarian violence that erupted in Reformation France was extraordinary. Otherwise ordinary Catholics tortured their Huguenot neighbors to death and then afterwards mutilated their corpses, sometimes feeding the disfigured remains to farm animals. Catholic children elicited applause from their coreligionists as they killed adult Huguenots by tearing them to pieces. Huguenots assaulted Catholic priests during the Mass, pillaged Catholic churches, and desecrated the Host. Indeed, as the sectarian duel increased in frequency and intensity, a man could be killed for calling someone a Huguenot; both sides used religion to rationalize the assassinations of dukes and kings.

Our understanding of this violence depends on the suspension of our twenty-first century attitudes toward violent behavior. Norbert Elias reminds us in his influential work on the development of Western mores that our modern view of violence has evolved over an extended period of time. Specifically, Elias notes that the “courtization of warriors” and the monopolization of force by the state facilitated a “civilizing process” that originated within the European nobility in the seventeenth century and gradually penetrated the lower classes of European society.² Over time, this process transformed Western society so much so that what

¹ Michel de Roigny, “Discours sur les occurrences de s guerres intestines,” (Paris, 1572), 4. “O heureuse victoire! À toy seul est Seigneur, non a nous, le trophée insigne de l’honneur. D’un coup as araché le tronc, & la racine, et la terre ionché, d’heretique vermine. Vermine, qui se prit la buit dans les filets, quelle avoit osé tendre aux fidelles subjects. O favorable nuict! Heure plus desiree, qu’elle n’avoit esté des nostres esperée.”
was once considered acceptable behavior in early modern France—a duel in response to a verbal insult—now seems excessive. Thus, I would like to ask the reader to suspend judgment when considering early modern violence in order to appreciate its normative aspect.

Roman Catholicism, albeit with local variations, dominated Western European religious life until the advent of the Reformation. The Catholic Church maintained this hegemony because it violently prevented the spread of heterodox beliefs. A prominent example of this is the Albigensian Crusade in which tens of thousands of French Cathars were killed from 1209-1229. The vast majority of adherents to Catharism lived in southern France, the same geographic area that was most receptive to Protestantism after 1572. Protestants acknowledged this affinity as a crucial part of their identity, although recent scholarship has questioned the extent to which Catharism was an established church with a coherent system of beliefs. Indeed even during the conflict some crusaders were not sure whom to attack; one soldier supposedly asked the Cistercian abbot Arnaud Amalaric how to distinguish a heretic from a true believer.

4 William Beik recognizes that the French crowd “had a tolerance of physical violence which we do not share,” in “The Violence of the French Crowd from Charivari to Revolution,” Past and Present 197 (2007): 86; and Denis Crouzet acknowledges the “immense distance” that separates us from our subject matter: “Face à cette fin du XVIe siècle, la distance est immense, car il faut reconnaître que les protagonistes de cette histoire sanglante étaient portés à penser et à agir en fonction de systèmes immédias de l’imaginaire qui étaient spécifiques de leur époque.” La nuit de la Saint-Bathélemy: Un rêve perdu de la Renaissance (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 12-13.
7 The estimated number of casualties widely varies among the sources.
The abbot allegedly responded, “Kill them all! God will recognize his own.” The impulse to kill the adherents of heterodoxy was an integral part of medieval religiosity.

The existence of a widespread alternative faith in open conflict with the established church was a momentous innovation. Many sixteenth century Frenchmen responded to this situation with the same impulse to commit violence as their medieval forbearers. Thus, in the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, Catholics painted white crosses on their hats to identify themselves, and they killed anyone who did not follow suit. Some Catholics were killed by mistake, and yet the rioters generally believed that God would not hold them accountable for the errors. The Reformation inherited more from the medieval period than a general tendency to commit violence against adherents of alternative belief systems. An analysis of the patterns of violence that accompanied the Protestant and Catholic Reformations in France reveals that the Wars of Religion forced Frenchmen to adapt older forms of violence from the medieval period to a new reality.

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I. Popular Violence: The Crowd during the Wars of Religion

When [Coligny] promised himself
   An assured victory
On the other foot he walked and danced
   Because he was an infidel.
He wanted so much to massacre
   The little lambs of the Great Shepherd
On account of his presumptuous pride,
   He who was so vicious. 14

Benoist Rigaud, On Coligny’s role in the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre

One historian defines popular violence as the “social interaction involving threatened or
real physical damage to persons or property, carried out by a group of individuals on the spot or
through prior planning.” 15 Popular violence can be divided into three categories: isolated actions
committed by a group of people against one person; local rioting by a crowd against one or more
targets; and open rebellion across multiple regions. 16 Religious motivations for violence are
most clearly evident in the second of these categories. The majority of these religious riots took
place during the decade from the Massacre at Vassy in 1562 to St. Bartholomew’s Day in 1572,
which historians have termed the “golden age of the religious riot.” 17

The terms “popular” and “collective” simply mean non-battlefield violence that was
acceptable to, or practiced by, a crowd of the same religious identity. 18 The terms do not mean
that every member of a particular religious denomination participated in the violence, or that

Une victoire en assurance/ D’un autre pied il marche en danse/ Parce qu’infidelle il estoit./ Aussi qu’il vouloit
massacrer/ Par son orgueil presumptueux./ Luy qui estoit tant vitieux./ Les aigneletz du grand berger.”
15 William Beik adapts this definition in “The Violence of the French Crowd” (p. 78) from Charles Tilly, The
18 Natalie Z. Davis defines popular violence as that which was committed “by people who were not acting officiellly
and formally as agents of political and ecclesiastical authority.” “Rites of Violence,” in Society and Culture in Early
most even approved of it. Thus the definition of popular religious violence includes the Huguenots who vandalized Catholic churches as well as the Catholics who mutilated Huguenot corpses, even if most Huguenots and Catholics did not actually partake in this violence.

The typical religious riot was not an uncontrolled mob of religious fanatics roaming around town and committing random acts of violence. Rioters usually came from the menu peuple, those who “derived their livings from skilled or semiskilled crafts, shops, or small agricultural holdings.”19 The crowd was bound together by a social network: family members, friends, coworkers, and fellow parishioners typically rioted together.20 Many riots occurred for local reasons and had specific targets. For example, in Dijon in October 1561, Protestant businessmen started rioting because the authorities were unfairly favoring Catholic interests at the marketplace. Local wine growers, whose businesses bound them to the Roman Church, responded by starting their own riot, which forced the Protestants to leave Dijon.21

Men were not the only ones who rioted in Reformation France—women also played a prominent role. Since the Old Regime limited the criminal liability of women, they were easily tempted to act out public feelings of resentment with impunity.22 Some of the most violent rioters were the youngest, usually less than fifteen years old. On July 23, 1562 in Paris, as soon as a Huguenot was executed for sedition, children seized the corpse, dragged it through the mud, ripped it apart, and threw it into the river.23 Children displayed a propensity to participate in violence for two reasons: first, peer pressure served as a motivation for excessively violent actions; second, several studies have shown that young people are especially susceptible to

19 Ruff, Violence in Early Modern Europe, 205.
20 Ibid., 186-188.
22 Ruff, Violence in Early Modern Europe, 206.
propaganda. The content of sermons and political pamphlets during the Wars of Religion was extremely divisive. In other words, partisan leaders directed their vitriol against members of the opposing faith, and young people, more than any other demographic, took the rhetoric seriously.

The notion of legitimacy was a central characteristic of the religious riot. The presence of leaders within the crowd was very important; they sanctioned the rioters’ actions and allowed them to act freely. Crowd leadership also carried the added benefit of minimizing bloodshed. Massacres occurred because either the crowd’s violence spiraled out of control or because the crowd lacked clear leadership. In both cases, rioters sought to legitimize their actions by appealing to authority. Riots frequently started with the ringing of the tocsin, the official sign for a civic emergency. Even in the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, the ultimate example of unrestricted bloodletting, Catholics believed that the king had sanctioned their actions—Henry Duke of Guise allegedly uttered, “It is the king’s command.” Since these words suggested that the violence represented the royal will, this utterance can be understood as the explanation for why the massacre became so bloody.

A large and growing body of literature also suggests that early modern crowd violence was not blind violence. Religious riots occurred for five main reasons. First, crowds wanted to carry out official justice by popular demand in reaction to a specific offense against the community. This motivation can be seen under the framework of a “moral economy,” wherein the crowd acted defensively to restore a violated norm. Crowds held a “legitimizing notion” of their actions: “…the men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were

24 Davis, “Rites of Violence,” 165-166.
25 Ibid., 162.
defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community.”

This violence was limited in scope and directed against defined targets. Although the term “moral economy” was originally intended to elicit meaning from English bread riots, one historian applies this framework to the French religious riot, stating, “When the magistrate had not used his sword to defend the faith and the true church and to punish the idolaters, then the crowd would do it for him.”

Consider the Parisian parish of Saint-Médard in the fall of 1561. Protestants, suspecting an attack, orchestrated an assault on their Catholic counterparts and led them off to the Châtelet. According to the “moral economy” paradigm, the crowd’s actions should be understood as a response to a perceived injustice that the rioters sought to correct.

Second, crowds actively carried out justice when they believed the authorities were dysfunctional or deficient. For example, in 1551 a group of masked Protestants kidnapped a goldsmith’s journeyman who had been found guilty of heresy in Lyon. The group eventually released him to the local magistrate when they were convinced that justice would be done. Other riots explicitly usurped the function of the magistrates, either in mimicking their official roles or doing their jobs for them. Thus in October 1572 in Provins, after a Huguenot was hanged for theft and murder, a dispute broke out among a group of Catholic boys about which way the corpse was to be dragged. They elected lawyers and a judge from among the group to argue the case in front of a hundred spectators. Once the direction was determined, they dragged the corpse through the streets and set it on fire. Rioters also regularly took convicted criminals

29 Davis, “Rites of Violence,” 161.
30 Ibid., 162.
31 Ibid., 163.
32 Ibid., 163.
from the prison and carried out their sentences. This happened to a man named Bosroger who, since he was accused of being a Huguenot, was beaten and then shot to death by a Catholic mob in Rouen in 1562. The mob left his corpse on the pavement, where it lay for twenty-eight hours.  

Third, religious rioters attacked the authorities with whom they disagreed. If the object of their angst was the king, then they attacked symbols of his power. This was especially true during the reign of King Henry III, who promulgated the Edict of Beaulieu in 1576 that gave Huguenots the right of public worship. In December 1588, King Henry also ordered the assassination of Henry I Duke of Guise, an influential member of the Catholic League. The next year a man named Duranti, the president of the Parlement of Toulouse, died at the hands of a mob because they believed he supported Henry’s assassination of the Duke of Guise. The crowd dragged him through the streets, hanged him alongside a picture of the king, and then pillaged his home. It was even rumored that a portrait of the king was buried with Duranti, an obvious indication of the king’s unpopularity.

Fourth, the crowd sought to provide for “the defense of true doctrine and the refutation of false doctrine through dramatic challenges and tests.” In other words, the crowd’s religious violence can be understood by appealing to an underlying belief system. Recall Saint-Médard’s parish, which began tolling its bells to interrupt a nearby Huguenot service in December 1561. When a Protestant delegation failed to convince the Catholics to silence their bells, a fight broke out between the two sides. In the ensuing struggle, the Huguenots stole

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35 Davis, “Rites of Violence,” 156.
36 Benedict, Rouen during the Wars of Religion, 60.
Saint-Médard’s chalices and destroyed its statues and crosses. In this case, the belief systems of both polemics provided the motivation to disrupt the other’s service. Consider another example. After the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, Catholic crowds from Normandy and Provence stuffed pages of the Protestant Bible into the mouths and wounds of Huguenot corpses, saying, “They preached the truth of their God. Let them call him to their aid.” According to the Catholics in the crowd, this effectively demonstrated the inefficacy of Protestantism.

It was common for these “dramatic challenges” to occur during important religious festivals, a characteristic of ritualized violence from the medieval period. In his seminal work, *Communities of Violence*, David Nirenberg argues that popular violence expressed communal identity. In order to make his case, Nirenberg explores the interactions between Christian, Jewish, and Islamic communities in southern France and the territories of the Crown of Aragon during the Middle Ages. Nirenberg discovers that all three groups frequently participated in a dialogue of violence that defined social boundaries. He further argues that communal violence was common and ritualized, especially during Holy Week, and that coexistence for these groups “was in part predicated on such violence.” He finds that popular violence always targeted specific individuals for particular reasons, and that the violence was usually non-lethal.

Nirenberg’s analysis suggests that popular religious violence in the medieval period enforced a status quo. The same theoretical structure applies to Catholic riots in the Wars of Religion. For example, on Palm Sunday in 1561, Toulousain Huguenots decided to express their faith by orchestrating a procession of palms through the streets, the city’s first major manifestation of Protestantism. A few days later, the authorities burned at the stake an

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40 Ibid., 200-202; 9.
apothecary and a bookseller from Geneva who were accused of participating in the procession. Violence with startlingly similar roots recurred five years later during Pentecost at Pamiers.

Catholics usually celebrated the holy day by singing and dancing around a statue of St. Anthony, which they carried around town in a procession. In previous years, local Protestants disrupted the festivities by throwing stones at the Catholics. But in 1566, when the Catholic procession reached a Protestant neighborhood they began shouting, “Kill! Kill!” and three days of fighting resulted. In both of these examples, the perpetrators of the violence sought to discredit the belief system of their targets, and the specific context of a religious festival allowed them to do so. The same theme appeared again and again in religious riots.

Violence frequently revolved around the Eucharist, one of the major sources of division in the Reformation. This was especially true whenever a priest carried the Host outside of the confines of a Catholic church. While Catholics paused to kneel in front of the priest—men also removed their hats—Protestants who wished to deny the validity of the sacrament would remain standing, a sign of disrespect in the eyes of Catholic partisans. On a Sunday in March 1571 in Rouen, a group of Huguenots were walking to their own service as they passed by a priest carrying the Host to a sick person. Catholics yelled at the Huguenots because they would not acknowledge the sacrament, and the Huguenots replied by throwing stones at the Catholics. A fight broke out between the two sides, and forty Huguenots were killed. It was especially common for violence to accompany Corpus Christi, a holy day on which priests prominently carried the Host, displayed in a monstrance, in a procession throughout town. In August 1562, a

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42 Ruff, Violence in Early Modern Europe, 200.
Huguenot bookseller refused to kneel in front of the procession, and Parisian children seized him, killed him by “tearing him to pieces,” and then set his corpse on fire at a garbage dump. 45

Popular violence did not always occur as a direct response to a specific provocation. The fifth motivation for popular violence started with the shift from attacking “the other” because of his beliefs, to attacking “the other” because he was “the other.” This shift can be seen in the association of “the other” with garbage and pollution. In 1560, Huguenots from Rouen threw garbage at a Corpus Christi procession, and during the spring of 1572, Catholics hurled mud and garbage at houses belonging to Protestants near the Pont Notre-Dame. 46 This analogy can also be found in the pamphlets that circulated around French cities. Federicus Morellus, a cleric who witnessed the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, wrote a treatise in which he blames the civil wars on Admiral Gaspard de Coligny and “a few others” (paucis aliis). 47 He repeatedly refers to these Huguenots throughout his tract as “a stain” (macula), “filth” (limus), and “pollution” (pollutio). 48

The association of “the other” with pollution was deeply rooted in the medieval period. In The Formation of a Persecuting Society, the eminent historian R. I. Moore argues that from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, clerics and courtiers invented a new “rhetoric and a set of assumptions and procedures” that made persecution “more likely to happen” and “more severe and sustained for longer.” 49 Moore understands persecution as any violent action or verbal insult that separated a targeted individual from the community, either through death or by exile. In other words, Moore’s thesis proposes that the authorities created an environment in which

48 Ibid., 40, 43.
49 The Formation of a Persecuting Society, 145.
persecution could be committed against heretics and Jews, and that this environment continued
to exist long after the thirteenth century. This persecution took the form of communal
purification, in which the authorities eradicated specific targets lest they pollute the
community.  Although Moore admits that this type of persecution was not “popular violence,”
the same motivation clearly manifested itself in early modern religious riots.

Catholics associated Protestantism with sexual deviance and libertinism, a perception that
was reinforced by the secrecy of their services. Huguenots were also suspicious of the secrecy
of the Catholic Mass, which was performed in Latin with the priest facing away from the
congregation. In addition, Catholics thought that the Protestants were planning a coup against
the French government. A former Huguenot who converted to Catholicism, Pierre Charpentier,
vouched for this conspiracy in a letter to his friend and former colleague François Portus, stating,
“For what does the “Cause” [of the Huguenots] have in common? I have learned that it does not
pertain to the true worship of God, but has rebellion as its object.” The pollution analogy and
the mutual suspicions of secrecy, combined with rumors of a grand Protestant conspiracy, all
provided a key shift towards the dehumanization of the enemy, which supplied a rationalization
for exceedingly bloody violence.

Both Catholics and Protestants believed that the only way a community could rid itself of
“the polluting other” was by violently eliminating it. However, the violence in Catholic

50 Ibid., 94-95.
51 Ibid., 106-111.
52 Brandon Hartley, “War and Tolerance: Catholic Polemic in Lyon During the French Religious Wars” (PhD diss.,
The University of Arizona, 2007), 155-158.
Caussa? Comperi eam ad verum Dei cultum non pertinere, sed ad rebellionem spectare.” For Charpentier’s
background: Donald R. Kelley, The Beginning of Ideology: Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation
54 Davis, “Rites of Violence,” 181.
55 Denis Crouzet, Guerriers de Dieu: La violence au temps des troubles de religion, (vers 1525- vers 1610), vol. 1
(Seysel: Champ Vallon, 1990), 692-699.
communal purification differed from that in Protestant communal purification. Whereas Catholics typically committed acts of violence against the bodies of their enemies, Protestants usually focused their energy on vandalizing Catholic property. The common way of eliminating waste products was by dumping them into a river, which is how Catholic crowds discarded enemy corpses throughout the Wars of Religion. This happened to a Huguenot military leader at Sens who was dragged through the streets by children. At each street corner they stopped to burn his body with oven spits, and then they threw his body along with those of several other dead Huguenots into the river Yonne.\(^{56}\) Similarly, Protestants sought to eradicate Catholic idolatry by desecrating symbols of Catholicism, especially the Host. Huguenot expressions of iconoclasm happened across France throughout the Wars of Religion.\(^{57}\)

The identification of patterns in religious violence, however, needs to be qualified in order to remain valid—not every example of popular religious violence follows this division. Huguenots usually focused their energy on assailing Catholic priests when they attacked the bodies of their enemies. For example, an audacious Huguenot wrestled the pastor of Saint-Séverin’s parish to the floor during Mass on December 22, 1563.\(^{58}\) Huguenots occasionally committed acts of mass murder, which is what happened at Reims in 1567 when the Protestants killed eighty Catholics.\(^{59}\) Protestant armies also contributed to massacres, such as those at Beaugency and Mornas in 1563.\(^{60}\) French Catholics typically sought personal financial gain

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\(^{57}\) Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion*, 61.  
whenever they attacked Huguenot property. This was especially true for Catholic militias; they pillaged Huguenot houses at Troyes in April 1568.\textsuperscript{61}

The different forms of communal purification undertaken by Catholics and Protestants occurred for two main reasons. Catholic violence in large measure reflected behavioral patterns of early modern French and European societies. A growing volume of scholarship has revealed rates of reported homicide and assault far above late twentieth and early twenty-first century levels. Moreover, close studies of early modern societies reveal that physical violence was not confined to the poor and marginalized. Elites possessed as ready a recourse to violence as their social inferiors, and riots for a variety of reasons were as common in early modern society as are strikes in modern society.\textsuperscript{62} The real question, thus, is not so much why Catholics frequently resorted to physical violence as why Protestants eschewed it much of the time. The answer seems to lie in the fact that Huguenots were always in the minority throughout France even if they constituted a majority in specific urban areas in the southern part of the country.\textsuperscript{63} In other words, Protestants had insufficient numerical strength to commit widespread and prolonged massacres, so they usually destroyed Catholic property and attacked Catholic priests instead.

Catholic crowds, however, often did not simply “purify” their communities by killing Protestants—they frequently continued to mutilate their corpses long after death in paradoxical desecration. Examples abound in the primary sources, and one historian states that, “Most of the real cruelty, when it occurred, was inflicted on corpses, not on living persons.”\textsuperscript{64} For instance, in

\textsuperscript{61} Penny Roberts, \textit{A City in Conflict: Troyes during the French Wars of Religion} (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996), 132.
\textsuperscript{64} Beik, “The Violence of the French Crowd,” 88.
Rouen in February 1563, a crowd assembled to witness the execution of two criminals, one Catholic and one Protestant. While the Catholic criminal recanted his sins and died in communion with the Roman Church, the Protestant refused to renounce his beliefs. Instead of allowing the Protestant to die by hanging, as the order of his execution stated, the crowd cut the rope and lit a bonfire underneath his heels. But before he died, the crowd hacked his body into pieces, dragged it through the streets, and dumped it into the river Seine.\footnote{Benedict, \textit{Rouen during the Wars of Religion}, 111.} In another case, after the Battle of Cognat in 1569, the body of a Protestant captain was exhumed by his Catholic enemies and stabbed several times. They dragged the rotting corpse through the streets and then fed it to farm animals.\footnote{Carroll, \textit{Blood and Violence}, 178.}

Catholic crowds mutilated corpses for three main reasons. First, the crowd wished to deny their target the dignity of a Christian burial. If the Huguenots were not worthy of life, then they did not even deserve the solace of a proper resting place. Second, the crowd’s anger was not satiated with the death of their target. This explains why the crowd continued to inflict violence on corpses long after the body could be recognized. Third, the mutilation of corpses was not an impulse—it was a pan-European form of violence that predated the Reformation.\footnote{For examples of corpse mutilations between Italian Catholics, see Edward Muir, \textit{Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta and Factions in Friuli during the Renaissance} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 168-169; 198-200.}

The practice was not exclusive to mobs; the authorities also ordered the corpses of criminals to be dragged and mutilated in order to make an example for the community. For instance, the Parlement of Paris issued an edict in 1573 stating:

\begin{quote}
To repair these crimes, [the Parlement] has ordered and orders that the body of Coligny if found may, if it is intact, be taken by the executor of high justice, led, taken & dragged on the dirt… to be hanged in the gallows which for this purpose
will be built & erected in front of the city hall… hanging there in the most high & eminent place.  

Thus the mutilation of corpses was an ordinary form of violence inherited from the medieval period.

II. Private Violence: The Duel and Tyrannicide

Cruel man of blood, barbarous hand, and infamous
Animal without reason, what made you pollute?
If Satan could prevail, to such an extent on your soul,
Why treacherously kill your true Prince? 

Soldat François, On the assassination of King Henry IV, 1610

Collective violence constitutes only a part of religious violence in the Reformation, for the rise of French Protestantism also influenced the individual level of private violence. Private and collective violence can be difficult to distinguish. Although both categories could involve several accomplices, the difference lies in the nature of the violence: private violence always occurred between individuals. However, the term “private” is not meant to imply secrecy, for it often occurred in full view of the community. Similar to popular violence during the Wars of Religion, an analysis of the French duel and tyrannicide reveals deep connections between medieval and early modern private violence.

One type of private violence that played a prominent role in Reformation France was the duel, a form of dispute resolution rooted in the medieval period. In his influential work, *Land*

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68 Michel Iouer, “Les arrests de derniere execution,” (Lyon, 1573), 3-4. “Et pour reparation desdits crimes, a ordonné & ordonne que le corps dudit de Coligny, si trouver se peut, sinon en figure, sera prins par l’executeur de la haute iustice, mené, conduit & trainé sur une claye… illec pendu en une potence qui pour ce faire sera dressee & erigee devant l’hostel de ville… pendu en iceluy au plus haut & eminent lieu.”

69 Soldat François, “La deploration de la mort lamentable de Henry,” (n.p., 1610), 4. “Cruel homme de sang, main barbare, & infame/ Animal sans raison qui t’a faict polluer?/ Mais si Satan a peu, tant giagner sur ton ame./ Que de traistreusement ton vray Prince tuer?”

and Lordship, Otto Brunner develops an understanding of the medieval Austrian feud that can provide the background for a discussion of the French duel. Brunner rejects the notion that the feud was an archaic phenomenon flourishing prior to the establishment of a law-abiding society. 71 He argues that the feud actually represented a deep commitment to a “moral or legal duty” to exact retribution for an evil done, and thus was an integral part of the medieval Austrian judicial system. 72 In Brunner’s analysis, private violence was intimately connected to the conception of justice, which was itself predicated upon a man’s honor. 73 After the Wars of Religion, Frenchmen also believed that the right to bear arms and defend one’s honor was an essential aspect of justice. Since a similar honor system existed in Reformation France, the same framework that Brunner posited for medieval Austrian violence can be applied to the French duel.

Before the sixteenth century, it was common for French nobles to resolve conflicts by resorting to judicial combat, where the victor won the judicial case. 74 The last time a judicial duel occurred in France was in 1547, when François de Vivonne, seigneur de la Châtaigneraye, battled Guy Chabot, comte de Jarnac, in front of the king. 75 It was also commonplace for young nobles to prove themselves by participating in a tournament of arms. 76 Both of these practices declined as adult males entered the military service during the Wars of Religion. When battle-hardened men returned from the field around the turn of the century, however, dueling quickly

72 Ibid., 19-21.
73 Ibid., 42-43.
74 Ibid., 15
75 Ruff, Violence in Early Modern Europe, 77.
76 Walton, Policing Public Opinion, 16.
became the most popular mode of conflict resolution for the simple reason that the weakened French state was left with much less control over private warfare.\textsuperscript{77}

The duel reached its zenith of popularity during its “golden age” of the 1620s.\textsuperscript{78} One historian defines the duel as “a fight between two or several individuals (but always with equal numbers on each side), equally armed, for the purpose of either proving the truth of a disputed question or the valor, courage and honor of each combatant.”\textsuperscript{79} A man’s honor depended on objective criteria such as birth, titles and privileges, and subjective criteria like the opinions of others.\textsuperscript{80} The frequency of dueling declined as a man aged; although, of course, the elderly could theoretically challenge someone to a fight. For example, man named Zamet fought two duels at the age of sixty.\textsuperscript{81} But for the most part, the classic French duel was exclusive to middle-aged men of the upper classes.

Duels typically followed a pattern: someone impugned a man’s honor, he issued a challenge to the offender, both sides agreed upon a weapon, and the two dueled. The weapon of choice in the French duel was the rapier, a one-handed sword that nobles usually carried on their persons. It was less common for duelers to use pistols, but it was standard for the duelers to fight on foot, without armor, and in public. Once the authorities outlawed the duel, combatants moved away from public areas and into the woods. This partly explains the lack of sources regarding the lethality of the duel, but the best estimate is that between 300 and 500 people died during the

\textsuperscript{78} Carroll, \textit{Blood and Violence}, 260-261.
\textsuperscript{81} Billacois, \textit{The Duel}, 73.
first few decades of the seventeenth century. Duels often ended before someone died—each combatant usually brought his own “seconds” to stop the duel at the sight of first blood.

Duels between noblemen often took the form of “quarrels over precedence.” An insult over precedence could involve a simple gesture such as refusing to completely remove one’s hat in the presence of another gentleman. This is exactly what happened between two noblemen, Deslandes and Duplessis-Châtillon, in 1640. The ensuing fight spilled into the streets, resulting in wounds for both men. But not every insult necessitated a duel, especially if the insulter was of a lower social standing. For instance, the Duke of Elbeuf—an illegitimate member of the royal family—refused to participate in a duel after a “simple gentleman” insulted him. Insults over religion, however, were a guaranteed way to impugn a man’s honor and instigate a duel. Since honor was considered “as important as life itself,” it is not surprising that accusing a Catholic of being a Huguenot would result in violence.

Even though dueling was technically outlawed after 1602, it remained a common form of dispute resolution until Louis XIV’s reign. One major reason was that the king did not want his nobles killing themselves. Historians estimate that noblemen comprised only about two percent, or 380,000, of France’s population during the sixteenth century, and the non-battlefield deaths of noblemen put a strain on the military’s leadership. The monopolization of force by the state and the inculcation of less-violent behaviors in young men were also important factors. The establishment of institutions, such as the Academie d’Equitation founded by Antoine de Pluvinel in 1594, taught politeness and manner to young noblemen. During the seventeenth century it

82 Ruff, Violence in Early Modern Europe, 79.
83 Billacois, The Duel, 77-79.
84 Carroll, Blood and Violence, 87.
85 Billacois, The Duel, 74.
86 Ruff, Violence in Early Modern Europe, 76.
87 This figure is perhaps a relatively high estimate; Davis Bitton, The French Nobility in Crisis, 1560-1640 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 40.
became the mark of a gentleman to be cultured in this sense, although it was still important for him to be able to defend his own honor when the occasion arose. Thus, just as the Reformation inherited the duel from the medieval period, the duel was passed down to later generations.

Another form of violence inherited from the medieval period was tyrannicide, which both Catholic and Protestant scholars countenanced. The philosophical origins of tyrannicide can be traced all the way back to pre-Socratic philosophers. Throughout history, distinguished thinkers such as Aristotle and Cicero approved of the practice. In the medieval period, John of Salisbury and then Thomas Aquinas both sanctioned the killing of a head of state under certain conditions. Thomas Aquinas appealed to Cicero to justify this position, stating, “Then indeed he who kills a tyrant for the liberation of his country, is praised, and he receives a reward.” By the sixteenth century, Catholics such as Juan Mariana, a Spanish Jesuit who taught in Paris from 1569-1574, stipulated that if a leader qualified as a tyrant then private citizens had a moral responsibility to assassinate him. For Mariana, the religious affiliation of the tyrant functioned as the most important qualifying criterion. Protestants, such as Theodore Beza, advanced a somewhat different argument, positing that lesser magistrates should lead a rebellion against a

88 Baumgartner, *France in the Sixteenth Century*, 262-263.
89 This was an extremely controversial issue because what was anarchic regicide to one man was lawful tyrannicide to another. Harald E. Braun, *Juan de Mariana and Early Modern Spanish Political Thought* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 81.
94 Richard Dessens, *La pensée politique de Jésuite espagnol Juan de Marian* (Lille: Atelier national de reproduction des thèses, 2003), 147-149.
tyrant in defense of the true faith.\textsuperscript{95} Although speculating about what might justify tyrannicide greatly differs from actually killing the king, the manifestations of tyrannicide in Reformation France must be understood within these traditions.\textsuperscript{96} A brief consideration of the assassinations of Henry I Duke of Guise (1588), King Henry III (1589), and King Henry IV (1610) reveals the unique status of tyrannicide as an innovation from the Wars of Religion.

Henry I Duke of Guise formed the Holy Catholic League in 1576, an organization that un成功地 sought to prevent the ascension of Henry III to the throne of France. The League drew most of its members from the Parisian bourgeoisie, not the \textit{menu people}, which gave its leader tremendous political power.\textsuperscript{97} French Catholics knew Henry as their champion on the battlefield; he commanded several military victories over the Huguenots in the Wars of Religion. He was also popular because it was rumored that he had ordered the assassination of Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, his Huguenot counterpart. The Duke of Guise also had designs on the throne. On May 12, 1588, the Day of the Barricades, the duke arrived in Paris, incited a revolt, and forced the king to flee the city, which left the Catholic League in control of France.

King Henry needed to act boldly if he was to reassert control over the country, so it is not surprising that the Duke of Guise met a violent end. On December 23, the king summoned the duke to the royal court and had him promptly assassinated. Interestingly, in order to preserve the honor of each individual present, multiple assassins killed the duke in a “collective act” by stabbing him at the same time.\textsuperscript{98} As a result, no single person could be blamed for the murder. King Henry also ordered the assassination of the duke’s brother, Louis II, Cardinal of Guise, the

\textsuperscript{95} Robert D. Linder, \textit{The Reformation Era} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 133.
\textsuperscript{96} J.W. Allen, \textit{A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century} (London: Methuen, 1951) 304-308.
very next day. In the aftermath of two assassinations in which he was complicit, the king could not remain in control of the government, and he was forced to move with his Parlement to Tours. But the Duke of Guise’s death carried more far-reaching consequences than the temporary relocation of the king’s Parlement. For the first time, a French king used religion as the state-sanctioned rationalization for murder, which qualified him as a tyrant in the eyes of many French Catholics. This led to the downfall of King Henry himself.

King Henry III was unpopular before the assassination of the Duke of Guise because he had aligned himself with Henry of Navarre, a Huguenot and future heir to the throne. After the duke's death, only a handful of cities remained loyal to the king, so he spent the remainder of his reign trying to gain control of France. On July 31, 1589, the king spent the night outside of Paris at Saint-Cloud, planning to assault the capital. On the next day Jacques Clément, a twenty-two year old Dominican lay brother, pretended to have a confidential message for the king. Once he was close enough, Clément mortally wounded the king with a dagger that he had concealed underneath his cloak. The royal guards immediately killed Clément, and the king died the next day.

The first case of tyrannicide in the Reformation sparked an outburst of joy among French Catholics. This was understandable for Parisians, whose city was under siege by the king’s army. But Jacques Clément’s portrait was placed on the altars of several monasteries, Pope Sixtus V praised his actions, and many French churchmen even lobbied for his canonization.

Many Catholics saw the killing as a “miracle.”\textsuperscript{103} The death of the king portended danger for future French monarchs.

Henry of Navarre, the future King Henry IV, was a Huguenot before he ascended to the throne, which was a serious concern for many Frenchmen. After the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre he was compelled to nominally become Catholic, but he remained a Protestant at heart.\textsuperscript{104} Pope Sixtus V passed a papal bull in 1585 that dispossessed Henry of his rights to the crown because of his Protestant sympathies.\textsuperscript{105} As a result, several \textit{politique} advisors urged Henry to publicly embrace Catholicism and submit to the pope’s wishes. This is exactly what André Maillard argued in a work published in 1585.\textsuperscript{106} Not only would the traditional ceremonies of royal succession have to be adjusted if the prince remained a Huguenot, but a Huguenot monarch would send confusing signals about national unity.\textsuperscript{107} On July 25, 1593 Henry publicly accepted the Roman faith at the abbey of Saint-Denis in the presence of several French bishops.\textsuperscript{108}

Despite the eventual conversion of Henry and his ascension to the throne, other members of French society loathed the king for giving limited freedom of worship to the Huguenots in the 1598 Edict of Nantes. Catholic fundamentalists argued that the king embodied the definition of a tyrant, and therefore needed to be killed.\textsuperscript{109} François Ravaillac was a Catholic zealot who believed that if the king was murdered, then the Wars of Religion would resume and France would be purged of Protestantism once and for all. On May 14, 1610, he successfully entered

\textsuperscript{103} Crouzet, \textit{Guerriers de Dieu}, vol. 2, 485.
\textsuperscript{105} Mousnier, \textit{The Assassination of Henry IV}, 110.
\textsuperscript{106} André Maillard, “Advertissement au Roy de Navarre de se reunir avec le Roy & la foy Catholique,” (n.p., 1585), 4. For Maillard’s background, see: Baumgartner, \textit{Radical Reactionaries}, 70-71.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 27; 30.
\textsuperscript{108} Mousnier, \textit{The Assassination of Henry IV}, 111.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 158-183.
the king’s carriage—which was fortuitously exposed due to slow traffic—and stabbed him to death. 110 Although he never admitted to having any accomplices, the logistics of Ravaillac’s attack strongly suggest a wider conspiracy to murder the king. 111 Ravaillac was tortured with “pincers, molten lead, boiling oil, burning pitch, and molten wax” before he was “dismembered by four horses” before his remains were “reduced to ashes and thrown to the wind.” 112 This punishment was unprecedented only because it combined several pre-existing methods of torture within one victim. 113 Just as the ideology supporting tyrannicide predated the sixteenth century, so too did the punishments for it.

III. Coexistence and Toleration

Certainly not every Frenchman participated in religious violence, and many were vehemently opposed to the civil wars. 114 For example, one pamphlet written in 1568 by an anonymous author states, “Of all the evils that the civil wars have brought to France, certainly the most deplorable and the most pernicious is… violence…. Unto whom God has given the grace to see and to know the proper remedies for the [war], the consequence of dubious weapons, closes their mouths and ties their hands.” 115 Even during the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, a relatively small minority of Parisian Catholics carried out the bloodletting while the vast majority of Catholics remained at home. 116

110 Ibid., 24.
111 Ibid., 28.
113 Ibid., 117-119.
114 This is a general characteristic of popular violence. Charles Tilly, The Politics of Collective Violence, 12.
115 “Exhortation à la Paix,” (n.p., 1568), 2. “Entre les maux, que les guerres civiles ont apportez à la France, cestucy le plus deplorable & le plus pernicieux est…violence…. Ausquels Dieu ait fait la grace de voir & connoistre les remedes propes pour c’est effect, le douteux evenemet des armes les rend irresolus, & le peu d’assurance qu’ils ont, leur ferme la bouch, & leur lie les mains.”
116 Diefendorf, Beneath the Cross, 104-105.
At the same time, not every Frenchman supported the cessation of the Wars of Religion. Some Catholics despised Henry IV’s policies of religious coexistence so much so that they decided to exile themselves from France. The majority of these people came from the Parisian wing of the Catholic League, and they found a home in the homogenously Catholic city of Brussels.\footnote{Robert Descimon and José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez, *Les Ligueurs de l’exil: Le refuge catholique français après 1594* (Seyssel, France: Champ Vallon, 2005), 67-68.} One historian, when discussing why the Leaguers left their home country, states, “The Leaguers were Christians who struggled to reform themselves, they were not unconditional Tridentines; they became so out of necessity, because the Catholic Reformation was the only credible response to the Protestant Reformation….”\footnote{Ibid., 46.} Once it became apparent in the 1590s that Protestantism was a permanent part of France, Catholic Leaguers were forced to choose between a multi-religious community or exile.

Given the endemic violence of the Wars of Religion, it is perplexing that early modern France produced the first European experiment with religious coexistence. The Edict of Beaulieu (1576), the Edict of Poitiers (1577), and the Edit of Nantes (1598) gave Protestants unprecedented, although qualified, rights to freedom of worship. And yet religious violence did not simply fade into the past after the Edict of Nantes. The mutilation of corpses persisted throughout the early modern period, noblemen continued to duel into the twentieth century, and the speculative justifications for regicide remained powerful after the Wars of Religion.\footnote{William Beik, *Urban Protest in Seventeenth-Century France: The Culture of Retribution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres, 1997), 68-69; Billacois, *The Duel*, 182-188.} Religious tolerance was not always assured; in the 1685 Edict of Fontainebleau, King Louis XIV revoked the rights granted to Huguenots almost a century earlier. Thus just as the patterns of violence inherited by Frenchmen in the Protestant and Catholic Reformations derived from the
medieval period, the same forms of violence persisted throughout France long after the sixteenth century.
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