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978-0-521-02804-2 - Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Patrick Collinson

Edited by Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts

Excerpt

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1 Nicolas Pithou: experience, conscience and history in the French civil wars

Mark Greengrass

The closing pages of Jean Morély's *Traicté de la discipline & police chretienne*, published in Lyons amidst the first civil war in 1562, contained an interesting suggestion.¹ He completed his critique of the newly agreed French Protestant discipline by proposing that, in each province of the French churches, 'a grave, wise and learned person' should be selected 'who should be entrusted to compile its Ecclesiastical history'. By means of this public record of each Protestant congregation's trials and tribulations the community at large in France would have an 'eternal witness' from which it might draw strength and direction for its future.² Morély deliberately avoided saying that it would be written by a pastor; in his view, the active embodiments of the congregation were more likely to come from the laity. The suggestion was one part of a book which placed a *pétard* under the chassis of the freshly framed Discipline of the French Protestant churches. The propositions it contained would be anxiously debated at the fourth National Synod, meeting in Morély's native Lyons in August 1563. A bitter controversy ensued, echoing through the colloquies and synods of French Protestantism during the following decade. But his proposal for ecclesiastical histories, appropriately tamed by the Genevan pastorate, was generally welcomed. The decision was taken: 'que les églises seront adverties de faire un recueil fidèle de tout ce qui est arrivé de plus remarquable par la Providence diuine aux lieux de leur ressort et d'en enuoyer les relations à nos révérends frères de Genève, avec toute la diligence possible'.³ Thus would 'le chariot triomphale de la vérité de Dieu' (as Morély put it) be proclaimed, the distinctive Protestant perception of God's providence working through history be demonstrated.⁴ In provincial synods across

¹ I am grateful to Anthony Milton and Penny Roberts for their helpful comments on a draft of this paper.

² J. Morély, *Traicté de la discipline & police chretienne* (Lyons, 1562; reprinted Geneva, 1968), 344.

³ J. Aymon, *Synodes nationaux des églises réformées de France* (The Hague, 1710), I, 47.

⁴ J. Morély, *Traité*, 103.

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France, local Eusebiuses were put to the task; by May 1565 the results were piling up in Geneva, 'tantae molis' lamented Beza 'ut camelum, nedum asinum possint obruere'.⁵

For the city of Troyes, capital of Champagne, Nicolas Pithou was assigned to the task, probably by the provincial synod held at La Ferté in April 1564.⁶ The choice would have pleased Morély, for he was the epitome of the 'grave, sage & docte personnage' whom he had envisaged for the task. Pithou's bulky memorandum was almost certainly already in Beza's hands by May 1565, joining the others which were about to break the camel's back. He doubtless expected to see the published results quite soon; but he was to be disappointed. Like many editors – even of festschrift volumes alas! – Beza was frustrated by late deliverers. At the same time as he was writing to Bullinger about the bulk of the memoirs which had arrived, he was writing apologetically to Pithou: 'Les longs delays desquels on a usé en plusieurs lieux m'envoyer mémoires, m'ont fait retarder jusques à maintenant l'ouvrage que savez: mais j'espère bientôt y mettre la main.'⁷ In reality, the famous *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées au royaume de France* only appeared on the shelves fifteen years later, in 1580.⁸ By then, however, the climate and context for Protestant history had completely changed. 'Truth's triumphal chariot' no longer had the same drawing-power. A history of French Protestantism which stopped in 1563, had it appeared in the 1560s, might have read as the story of stoic defiance, costly success. So much more had happened by 1580 that it was bound to read more like heroic failure. *L'Histoire ecclésiastique* did not enjoy great acclaim and was not reprinted in the sixteenth century. To Nicolas Pithou, the eventual compilation could not do justice to the measure of his personal experiences. He had provided full, detailed, circumstantial documentation for the congregation of Troyes and what were the results? Thirty-eight succinct paragraphs are dispersed through the first two published volumes, digested highlights (occasionally employing the *ipsissima verba* of his original account) which inevitably lose the freshness, circumstantial detail and passion of the original.⁹ Worse, the compiler had made

⁵ Beza to Bullinger, Geneva, 3 May 1565 (*Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, ed. H. and Fl. Aubert, H. Meylan, A. Dufour *et al.* (15 vols. in prog., Geneva, 1973–91), vi, 73.

⁶ Referred to in *ibid.*, iv, 61. Cf. *Calendar of State Papers Foreign 1564–5*, ed. J. Stevenson (1870), no. 357, which provides a *procès-verbal* of the synod.

⁷ Beza to Nicolas Pithou, Geneva, 22 May 1565 (*Correspondance de Bèze*, ed. Aubert *et al.*, vi, 93).

⁸ *L'Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées au royaume de France* (3 vols., Geneva, 1580; ed. G. Baum and E. Cunitz, Paris, 1883–9) – henceforth *Hist. eccl.*

⁹ The passages are as follows: *Hist. eccl.*, I, 82–3, 101–2, 104–5, 106, 135, 163–4, 333–4, 848–51; II, 461–76. These passages can be compared directly with the equivalent

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mistakes. He garbled, for example, the way in which the Protestant *colporteur* from Senlis, Jean de Gannes, having been arrested in Troyes for possessing a bail of heretic books, was subsequently set free in early April 1559. He was probably confusing it with another, rather similar set of events from later that same year, also elaborated by Pithou, of the freeing of the Protestant minister in Troyes, Girard de Corlieu.¹⁰ Pithou was moved to amend the text of his manuscript history at this point, scratching out one passage and recording instead: ‘sur quoy je mesbahi comment celuy qui sest meslee de ~~dresser et~~ sen imprimer l’histoire Ecclesiastique des Eglises reformees au Royaume de france racomptent au premier uolome de lade histoire de faict dernier <dict>, que ceulx que le menoient luy donnerent conge, chose de tout contraire a la verite et mesme contre les memoires quen furent enuoyez pour linserer en lade histoire’.¹¹ Beyond such matters of detail, however, one suspects that the *Histoire ecclésiastique* disappointed the Eusebius of Troyes in a more general way. Pithou had not envisaged that he was merely contributing a provincial ‘case-study’ of the Troyen Reformation, a chronicle of local events. Inspired by the classical historians, he had pretensions to write a history which divined the forces of destiny and virtue (or their Protestant equivalents – providence and conscience). This, or something like it, explains why he reworked his initial memorandum on the reformation in Troyes into the remarkable manuscript which he entitled ‘L’histoire ecclésiastique de l’église réformée de la ville de Troyes’. In 20 books, 516 folios and over 400,000 words, Pithou detailed the tumultuous history of the Reformation in Troyes, taking it through to 1594. Exactly when he wrote it is impossible to determine although the numerous alterations and intercalations strongly indicate a progression over time. It is likely that he worked from earlier drafts but rewrote or revised the manuscript in detail as time passed. There is no sign that he ever attempted to print the history and it would have offended many of the Troyen elite had he done so. Even now, after a century of attempts and an inadequate selection of published extracts apart, it still remains consultable only in

accounts given in Pithou’s manuscript ‘L’histoire ecclésiastique de l’église réformée de la ville de Troyes’ in Bibliothèque Nationale MS Dupuy 698 – henceforth Pithou. It is thanks to the generosity of Dr Penny Roberts that I have been able to consult her microfilm copy of this manuscript.

¹⁰ *Hist. eccl.*, I, 163; Pithou, fol. 148v.

¹¹ Pithou, fol. 123. In this, as in succeeding citations, the numerous alterations of the manuscript are provided unless otherwise indicated. Additions to the text are indicated within chevron brackets. Additions within the additions are shown in bold type. Although wearisome for the reader, these alterations provide a precious testimony to Pithou’s techniques of composition and the refinement of his historical perspectives.

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manuscript.¹² Yet Pithou's history is, quite simply, the most important, detailed, circumstantial account which we possess of what the urban Reformation in France was actually *about*. Written from the perspective of the disinterested observer (Pithou's name appears from time to time in the text, and always in the third person), it nevertheless presents – at least for the periods when he was resident in Troyes – an eye-witness account of its Reformation. Where he was not an observer, he drew on testimonies and affidavits which were available to him as a leading authority in the city, known to defend Protestants in difficulties with the authorities. It was contemporary history, written by someone who was in a privileged, if not unique, position to exploit the new historical methodology which was a distinctive feature of the French Renaissance.

The intellectual milieu of Nicolas Pithou and his brothers reflected the aspirations and interests of their father, Pierre Pithou the elder. He was educated at the university of Orleans at the time when the first effects of new ways of teaching Roman law were being felt.¹³ In the hands of a great humanist proponent like Guillaume Budé (who, as canon of the cathedral in Troyes, knew and influenced him), this experience had a transforming impact, particularly on the study and writing of history.¹⁴ The 'niaiseries' of medieval chronicle writing were to be abandoned. Historical sources were to be critically scrutinised, compared and assessed, using the new science of philology. Through the application of this methodology would emerge a rounded and complete historical picture, a broader accompanying reality. Pithou's Protestant contemporary, La Popelinière, wrote of a 'nouvelle histoire' – not, of course, the last time that such a claim would be made for French contributions to historical methodology!¹⁵

Although Pithou's father did not publish anything himself, he influenced the achievements of his sons. He had good contacts with other French humanists in Paris and elsewhere. He transformed the education offered in Troyes through attracting first-rate humanist teachers of Latin and Greek to posts at the local *collège* which his children attended. He

¹² C. Recordan, *Le Protestantisme en Champagne* (Paris, 1863), published some fragments (not always accurately transcribed) of the history.

¹³ J. Grosley, *Vie de Pierre Pithou: avec quelques mémoires sur son père, et ses frères* (2 vols., Paris, 1756), 1, 1–38, provides basic details.

¹⁴ Donald R. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship. Language, Law, and History in the French Renaissance* (New York and London, 1970), ch. 3.

¹⁵ G. Huppert, *The Idea of Perfect History. Historical Erudition and Historical Philosophy in Renaissance France* (Urbana, 1970), esp. ch. 2.

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Nicolas Pithou

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was amongst those responsible for the appointment of Jean Lange as its principal and of Nicolaus Stickler as one of the regents in 1539, the latter being also a private tutor to Nicolas for a time.¹⁶ Before they went to college in Paris, Pierre Pithou's sons apparently had a good knowledge of Latin and Greek and some basic awareness of Hebrew. Pierre Pithou also built up an excellent library for which, using his position as *bailli* to the cathedral in Troyes, he acquired copies of unique medieval manuscripts from ecclesiastical libraries. At the same time he amassed a collection of Latin inscriptions.¹⁷

The influences of this background are everywhere apparent in the scholarship of Nicolas Pithou's distinguished half-brother, Pierre.¹⁸ He used his philological skills, his knowledge of manuscript sources, his unrivalled range of contacts around the humanist milieu of later sixteenth-century France to aid his research into French law and history and transform the study of its medieval past. Pierre, the 'Varro of France' as he came to be known towards the end of his life, kept in touch with Nicolas, corresponding about books and manuscripts as well as sharing his views of contemporary political developments.¹⁹ Nicolas' own scholarship was ultimately less distinguished but his delight in manuscripts and books was as highly attuned. The destruction in 1567 of the library of books collected by Nicolas Pithou and his twin brother Jean is mentioned eloquently in the History: 'un fort grand nombre de livres, tant de l'escripture sainte, que autres qui estoient fort rares et exquis, et fort bien reliez et accoustrez, ensemble tous leurs labeurs depuys vingt ans: qu'ils tenaient plus chers et pretieux, qu'un bien grand tresor'.²⁰ The majority were burnt on the orders of the *prévôt* Francois Mauroy, Pithou's half-cousin, in the provost's courtyard. Yet Pithou's learning was appreciated by many of his contemporaries. Beza, a friend of the Pithou family, wrote a Latin epitaph in his honour after his death, acknowledging his erudition as well as his devotion to

¹⁶ G. Carré, *L'Enseignement secondaire à Troyes du moyen âge à la Révolution* (Paris, 1888), 35.

¹⁷ His manuscripts included some Roman law-codes which had been used, with acknowledgement, by Cujas in 1566 in his edition of the Theodosian law-code. These were subsequently edited and published by Pierre Pithou in 1571, beginning with Theodosius. One can reconstruct some elements of Pierre Pithou senior's library from J. Boivin, *Petri Pitheoi vita* (Paris, 1711), and *Les Richesses de la bibliothèque de Troyes* (Troyes, 1951).

¹⁸ See Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship*, ch. 9; also L. de Rosanbo, 'Pierre Pithou', *Revue du Seizième Siècle*, 15 (1928), 279–305.

¹⁹ This correspondence is scattered through various volumes of Bibliothèque Nationale MSS Dupuy, esp. MSS 688 and 700. I have not had the opportunity to study his surviving letters.

²⁰ Pithou, fol. 334.

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virtue.²¹ His historical perspective was particularly appreciated by Simon Goulart, who may have been the compiler of the *Histoire ecclésiastique*. Goulart dedicated the second edition of his Latin history on the life of Justinian to Nicolas Pithou, declaring in its preface that the work had benefited from his view of how the knowledge of the past should be applied to the present in order to draw comfort for the future.²²

These influences are also to be traced, albeit *sotto voce*, in Pithou's 'Histoire ecclésiastique de l'église réformée de la ville de Troyes'. The first book displays a considerable critical and destructive flair for the legends concerning the early history of the city of the kind which one would expect; 'Je ne puy dire veritablement', 'je n'en ay peu oncques rien apprendre de certain', 'qui est-ce qui ne voit que c'est vn compte faicte a plaisir?'.²³ Medieval chroniclers had created a fabric of myth to buttress the Catholic establishment of the city; Pithou had little difficulty, probably drawing on the researches into provincial history of his half-brother, in dismantling it. The remainder of the work, however, was contemporary history, and that posed the opposite problem to that confronting the humanists who were reconstructing the distant French or Roman past. Their task was to divest the fullness of the past from its fragmentary record; his was to invest the fullness of the present into an inevitably partial account, where, like all observers, Pithou would see what he chose to see. Yet some of the skills of the 'nouvelle histoire' could be applied to contemporary history. Institutional background was fundamental, but it should not dominate the structure; Pithou's history is emphatically *not*, whatever the title might imply, a history of the Protestant church as an institution in Troyes. Social, cultural and linguistic awareness was vital in order to be able to capture the recent past; Pithou's history is distinctive in the degree to which he is able to enable us to relive the events of Troyes. The lessons of the distant past should not be entirely forgotten when it comes to interpreting the present; there are more (uncited, but unambiguous) references to Livy

²¹ *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, 20 (1870), 158–9; Beza to Jean Pithou, Geneva, 1 Sept. 1599; the inscription had been written for 'vostre bon frère et nostre commun amy'. Referring to the forthcoming epitaph, the Genevan pastor Charles Perrot wrote: 'Il s'étoit comme enseveli vivant avec vous, ses amis & ses livres, en la méditation de plus louable antiquité' (Grosley, *Vie de Pithou*, I, p. 60). Later, Beza would complain (3 Jan. 1600) that the epitaph had been mutilated by the Paris printers and its editors. Beza had been particularly assisted by Nicolas Pithou towards his scholarly edition of the writings of Tertullian, a manuscript of which was in the Pithou Library ('Lettres de Théodore de Bèze à Nicolas Pithou . . .', *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, 32 (1883), 255–6).

²² S. Goulart, *Iustiniani Avgvsti Historia* (Lyons, 1594; copy in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris I.87, 315), epistle dedicatory, dated 10 February.

²³ Pithou, fol. 1.

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than to the Genevan reformers Calvin and Beza in the text. Above all, there was an obsession with precision and factual accuracy. In the successive recensions of the history, evident in the corrections of the manuscript, we can see his efforts to achieve this. 'Plusieurs' becomes 'dix ou douze'; 'un certain personnage' acquires a name when he finally learns it. He is scrupulous about endeavouring to express exactly what he meant. When, for example, he describes the involvement of one of the Catholic city guard in the first civil war, his initial rendition: 'capitaine Belin envoyé de la part des catholiques' becomes, in due course, 'capitaine Belin envoyé de la part du lieutenant Coiffart et ceux de sa faction'; the detail of what has been altered is incidental but its effects on the significance of the incident are important, making it more 'factional' than 'sectarian'. The overall result could hardly be objective; contemporary history rarely is. But it was a vehicle for transferring experience into history which was, one suspects, vital to Pithou – rather in the same way that Primo Levi's cool, clinical account of what he had seen in Auschwitz was, he later recorded, a necessary contribution to his sanity because, quite simply, he felt himself to be a living witness of what he had seen. In his detailed, almost compulsive, narration of the violence perpetrated by citizen upon citizen in and around Troyes, the accounts of barbarous acts of cruelty and killing of men, women and children, each coolly pinned down to the written page as carefully as butterflies in a collection – Pithou was testifying to what he had experienced and been touched by. In the process he was able, for himself, to put it into some sort of perspective.²⁴ La Maconne, 'pauvre femme de la religion', was killed on the steps of a church because she refused to kneel before a statue; her body was dragged to the bridge over the Seine and dumped there. The town's lieutenant, the sieur Desbordes, came to investigate the incident, and ordered her body to be fished out of the river. Yet, when he was told of 'la qualité de lade femme' and of the reasons for the incident, he instructed the watch to throw the body back in.²⁵ Huguenot life was cheap in Troyes, at least if you were not a Pithou. There was the woman cut into four pieces and her mutilated body arranged in the form

²⁴ The detail of religious violence in Troyes, provided by Pithou, does not (in general) conflict with the interpretation offered by D. Crouzet, *Les Guerriers de Dieu* (2 vols., Paris, 1990). Its analysis needs to be undertaken, however, in the context of an urban study of Troyes in the sixteenth century, the nature of its Protestant community and in relation to other similar urban studies. This has been successfully undertaken by Dr Penny Roberts in her recent doctoral thesis, 'A Town in Conflict: Troyes during the French Wars of Religion' (University of Birmingham PhD, 1992). I am grateful to Dr Roberts for her permission to cite this thesis in the preparation of this article.

²⁵ Pithou, fol. 231r.

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of a cross around that of her husband; or Guillaume Venet, a child about ten or twelve years old, who bragged to a cloth weaver in the Catholic town guard of the money in his purse, only to be led down a side-alley and killed for his pains; or another child, about the same age, shot for being heard to repeat the Lord's Prayer in French; or the woman, about to give birth, who was killed, along with her child. In the case of the latter incident, Pithou was careful to report that there were no independent eye-witnesses to the event but only the later testimony of the perpetrator. Yet his account of this, in itself, was yet one more painful encounter with the vaunting, bragging, gloating which Pithou's *History* carefully records as part of the trauma. During the first civil war the Catholic soldiery in Troyes, for example, 'se promenerent tout le long ~~du iour~~ de ce iour parmy la ville, avec les tabourins sonnans, portantz au col de fort grosses patenostres, au bout desquelles pendoit vn gros crucifix de bois, qu'ilz presentoient a baiser a tous ceux qu'ilz rencontroient. Ceux qui en faisoient la moundre difficulté, estoient chargez de coups et grandement outragez'.²⁶ Such brutality, such behaviour is 'barbare' to Pithou – 'les barbares auroient horreur de les ouy reciter'.²⁷ Putting it all in the past meant committing it to history for its better comprehension by others who had not experienced it directly. The same point was made in the introduction to the *Histoire ecclésiastique*: 'attendu que l'histoire est le seul moyen par lequel la mémoire des choses passées estant conservée, l'homme peut cognoistre ce qu'il n'a oncques veu ni ouy, voire sans aucun danger, & trop mieux, bien souvent, que si luy-mesme l'avoit ouy ou veu'.²⁸

Implicit throughout Pithou's 'Histoire ecclésiastique de l'église réformée de la ville de Troyes', of course, is its Protestant sense of history. Superficially, this was dictated by a retrospective picture of Providence at work. God was a 'merveilleus ouvrier, et qui par sa sainte providence scait bien admener toutes choses (contre l'opinion des hommes) au point qu'il a déterminé'. When the Protestant minister in Troyes was saved from the mob in 1562, partly through the unanticipated thoughtfulness of the 'bons hommes' of the city guard who shut the gates of the city and let him escape without the pursuit of the Catholic crowd behind him, Pithou's comments are entirely conventional: 'Par ainsy nostre dieu ~~laisse~~ monstra en l'issue et retraite de ce pauvre ministre, des

²⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 226v.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, fols. 241, 270; in the case of the latter incident, Pithou is scrupulous to record that there were no independent witnesses but that the evidence came from the testimony of the perpetrator somewhat later.

²⁸ *Hist. eccl.*, I, I.

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tesmoinages et signes fort mermarcables, de sa faveur paternelle, et providence admirable envers les siens.²⁹ Even with the depressing turn of events in Troyes during the first civil war, as the Protestants lost any degree of political protection which they had enjoyed as well as their own optimism, Pithou felt compelled to record:

qu'il sembloit proprement au iugement humain, que dieu voulust entierement ruiner et confondre cest pauure Eglise. Car les meutres, qui se commirent en icelle durent ce temps, par les ennemys de la verité, furent telz, et si grands, que mal-aisement les pourroit on reciter, tant il se trouva de corps morts de ceux de la religion, sur le pavé, et en l'eau, qui avoient esté inhumainement tuez et massacrez . . . Mays quoy que Satan, comme victorieux et triomphans de ceste pauure Eglise, si est ce que au plus fort de ses triumphes, et au milieu de tant de misereres et de calamitez, qui pour lors y regnoient, nostre bon Dieu ne laissa point les siens, sans quelques signes et marques evidents de assistance et bonte paternelle envers ~~les siens~~ eux.³⁰

At the same time, Pithou firmly rejected any sense that human invocation to God to operate in and through history could be effective.³¹ When it was attempted, it was an open door to tyranny and abuse.³² The response amongst the peasantry of Champagne around Troyes to the poor harvest of the previous year, compounded by a severe drought during the following winter months, was to organise mass 'processions blanches' towards the end of Lent 1556. The villagers marched on the town, ostensibly to pray at the shrines of Sainte-Helène and Saint-Mâtie in the cathedral.³³ Children, dressed in linen and barefoot, took part in separate processions. Wine barrels were opened and available to passing penitents in both the villages and the streets of Troyes. Penitential rituals were re-enacted; in one procession, a poor young man, playing the part of Jesus carrying the cross of Calvary and virtually naked, was beaten (some said to death). When the pilgrims arrived in Troyes, they were initially welcomed. Candles, tabernacles, statues and images were erected in the city and its citizens (including those from the elite) joined in.³⁴ Pithou

²⁹ Pithou, fol. 230v.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 256v.

³¹ Cf. D. Crouzet, *Les Guerriers de Dieu*, I, 640–8, which has much influenced the following analysis.

³² Pithou provides a summary account under the year 1557 of a treatise entitled 'Plaidoyer faict par un certain Advocat de Paris, a l'encontre de quelques gens qu'il appelle pseudochrestiens' – one which he had perhaps composed himself. It is a commentary on the classical story of Umma Pampilius who invented gods for his superstitious people to worship (with apparent success) and how this was an invitation to tyranny.

³³ F. Lebert, *Les Processions blanches au XVIe siècle* (Meaux, 1918); Pithou, fols. 87v–9v.

³⁴ 'Les filles de meilleures et plus apparentes maisons de la ville estoient de la partie, voyre mesme quelques personnages de reputation, et qui estoient tous des plus sages et myeux aduisez de la ville . . .' (Pithou, fol. 89).

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could not resist some comparisons with the sacrifices undertaken in classical Rome before pointing out that their efforts were in vain and ‘une servirent que d’irriter Dieu de tant plus. Car de faict le ciel fut tellement fermé, que depuis le caresme iusques au temps de l’iuer, il n’y eut . . . aucune pluye, synon la veille et le iour qu’on appelle la feste Dieu.’ Worse, as the importunity of the pilgrims increased and the possibilities of disruption in the city grew worse, the city fathers were forced to close the gates and mount guards on the streets. For Pithou, such processions were both pathetic and odious. They encouraged immorality (their promiscuity, drunkenness and near nudity open encouragement to ‘orgies’); by exploiting the superstitions of ignorant people, they perpetrated a cruel trick on their participants, encouraging them to believe wrongly that God was the one who would redress their wrongs. But God, according to Pithou, does not work through history like this. There would be no supernatural solutions. History was about the laws of nature, including human nature, the good and evil in us. As if to reinforce the point, Pithou described how it was through human agency that the processions were dispersed:

Car *comme* ces desordres et pauuretez se *renforcerent* de plus en plus il [God] esmeut si bien les coeurs ~~des catholiques~~ de ceux de la religion romaine que voyant qu’il n’y auoit point de bout en ces processions, ils y aduiserent de pres pour la crainte qu’ilz eurent, que quelques boue feux meslez parmy ces troupes, n’apportassent quelque *dommage* irreparable a la ville.³⁵

With fears spreading that the city would be set on fire (as it had been in 1524) the processions were halted by the authorities and dispersed. The Protestant community, Pithou carefully notes, continued its meetings throughout this season, in disdainful and dangerous isolation.

So Pithou’s explanatory framework for Troyes during the civil wars contains no comets, strange portents, monstrous births or divination. When there were ‘tonnerres horribles, orages et tempestes’, such as accompanied a meeting of the lieutenant from Troyes, the sieur Desbordes and the duc de Nevers in the autumn of 1562, Pithou took pains to record the superstitious reactions of the Protestants’ superstitious and guilty adversaries. Instead the history is a demythologised and desacralised one of the plots, machinations and duplicities of the Protestant community’s enemies and the stoic courage and patience of its adherents. In the case of the politics, Pithou’s account is best understood on two levels. At one level it is a history of what actually happened; at another, it is a metahistory of the fears and suspicions generated on

³⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 89v.