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Rouen during the Wars of Religion

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View of Rouen

Source: Sebastian Munster, *Cosmographie universelle*, rev. ed. aug. by François de Belleforest (Paris, 1575).

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Erratum

The strength of shading in maps 6 and 7 on pages 82 and 87 has been incorrectly represented. A general description of the correct relative strengths of population is provided in the text.

Preface

The revolution in French historiography that has occurred over the past two generations has affected our understanding of one period of French history curiously little, that of the Wars of Religion. Once, when political history was king, the later sixteenth century's wealth of dramatic events and intriguing personalities made it among the most studied eras of France's past. More recently, however, as narrative accounts of high politics have given way in popularity to detailed local studies seeking to reconstruct basic conditions of existence, nearly all French historians of *l'époque moderne* (the years from ca. 1500 to 1789) have shifted the focus of their attention to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Few tumultuous events interfere with the study of persisting *structures* in these centuries, and the massive, serial source materials of the kind necessary for social history are far more abundant than they are for the sixteenth century. Over these same years, English and American historical writing about the Wars of Religion has hardly been affected at all by the newer currents stirring within the historical profession. Our view of these years of civil war has not, of course, remained entirely static since the classic histories of Lucien Romier and Henri-Jean Mariéjol were written over fifty years ago. The often brilliant work of such recent scholars as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Natalie Zemon Davis, Richard Gascon, and Janine Estèbe has opened up new vistas, and it is possible now to see the Wars of Religion not merely as the struggles for influence of rival clans of great noblemen, but a profound social and cultural crisis affecting the entire society. Still, measured against the changes in our understanding of the last two centuries of the Ancien Régime, we continue to know relatively little about the civil wars as they involved and affected the people of France. At a time when the general thrust of historical scholarship has been to understand the repercussions of national political events within the local community and to rehabilitate the role of the ordinary inhabitants of a country as actors, not merely passive spectators, in the making of their own history, the available literature about the Wars of Religion remains characterized by an overwhelming – and distorting – concern with international diplomacy and court politics. Many fine studies have chronicled the actions of the leading

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political figures of the day, probed the degree of foreign involvement in the events within France, and analyzed the political ideas of the time. Of few if any periods of French history do we have such a poor view of how matters looked from the perspective of a provincial town.

This book attempts to help rectify this imbalance. One overriding concern guided the research which went into its making: to re-create and to understand, in so far as the often frustratingly sparse documentation permitted, the full experience of a major provincial capital's inhabitants over nearly forty years of conflict. The story stretches from the first, highly agitated decade of the Religious Wars, when Rouen was temporarily secured by the Protestants in 1562 and serious incidents of violence occurred almost yearly thereafter, through a period of relative calm in the later 1570s and early 1580s, to the ultimate crisis, that of the Catholic League, when it was the turn of Catholic militants to revolt against the crown and seize control of the city. Why did the growth of Protestantism lead to such bitter confessional violence? How can the pattern of that violence be explained? To what extent did the conflicts also reflect social or economic tensions? Did Catholicism respond to the Protestant challenge with measures of internal reform and revitalization as well as violence? And what was the impact of over three decades of intermittent warfare on the city's economy? Did the economic disruption which ensued in turn affect political developments? These were the major questions my research sought to answer.

As the answers to these questions began to emerge, and as this study passed through its successive metamorphoses from its first drafts as a Princeton University doctoral dissertation to the version presented here, a dialectical process which seemed to be at work in the city's history also imposed itself more and more clearly on my attention. This was the reciprocal interplay between political events and religious *mentalités*.

Events and *mentalités* – even to mention them together in one sentence may seem surprising to those familiar with recent French historiography. The history of *mentalités*, usually approached in a relatively static fashion that owes a good deal to the influence of structuralism, represents the very newest of the *nouvelles vagues* that have come rolling out of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes for over thirty years now, transforming in the process our entire view of the scope of history. *Histoire événementielle* – the traditional narrative of political events – has meanwhile been a genre scorned by the French, who tend to regard it as something best left to foreigners and other fossils of an earlier epoch in the evolution of historical study. Rarely have these two sorts of history been combined.¹

¹ Several recent articles have intimated, even proclaimed, a certain 'return of the event' in French historiography (e.g. *Communications*, 18 (1972), special number 'L'événement'; B. Barret-Kriegel,

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I do not believe that events and structures can be so radically divided. In its day, the disdain shown by the partisans of 'a new form of history' toward mere events may have been a necessary weapon in the struggle to unseat a historical establishment perhaps more unrepentantly Rankean in the breadth (or, rather, narrowness) of its preoccupations than any other in Europe. Now that the insurgent partisans dominate the scene as completely as ever did their predecessors, this anti-*événementielle* ideology has surely outlived its utility. Political events indicate cleavages and solidarities within a given society; they show what values were considered sufficiently important to be worth struggling for; and they reveal the social grievances which moved people to action. For all of these reasons, their study can help illuminate a society's social structure, economic conditions, and widely shared value systems. At the same time, *l'histoire sérielle* – quantitative history based on long series of comparable data studied over time – often leads back to the *événementiel*, for it can point up certain events as crucial turning points in the demographic, economic, or religious evolution of a community. Rather than being artificially separated, events and structures are often best studied together if each is to be properly understood. This is especially true if one is examining agitated periods of conflict over fundamental values, precisely the sorts of periods (viz., the French Revolution) that Annales-school historiography has been the least successful in illuminating.

It is the basic contention of this book that the rapid religious and political changes of the later sixteenth century simply cannot be properly grasped unless events and *mentalités* are juxtaposed. The conflicts which followed Protestantism's sudden development into a mass movement around 1560 were motivated above all by two radically hostile sets of religious beliefs and attitudes which must be understood before the violence can be explained. These attitudes subsequently were themselves modified under the impact of political events, so that by the aftermath of the most traumatic episode of all in the early years of the Religious Wars, the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, Protestantism – the minority religion – found itself so radically transformed in both size and political stance that the conditions which had produced the violence were no longer present. Tranquility returned to the city until exogenous political developments, notably the emergence of the Protestant Henry of Navarre as heir-apparent to the throne, sparked the final crisis, that of the League. The city's Catholics responded not only with militant political action but also with the first major surge toward a renewal of Roman religious life seen

'Histoire politique, ou l'histoire, science des effets', *Annales: E.S.C.*, xxviii (1973), pp. 1437–62. Few concrete demonstrations of this trend have appeared as yet, although Michel Vovelle's *Religion et révolution: la déchristianisation de l'an II* (Paris, 1976) is a welcome recent step in this direction.

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in Rouen over the entire period. Once again, the force of political events produced a change in the religious attitudes.

If this study began as a regional contribution to the understanding of the Wars of Religion, the interplay of religious attitudes and political events which it revealed thus also made it a case study in the process of religious change – to be specific, a study of how the emergence of a new religion touched off a cascade of internal conflicts and attitudinal changes that only ceased when a new equilibrium was finally reached again over thirty years later.

No genre has proliferated within French historiography more rapidly in recent years than the local study, and this proliferation has revealed both the strengths and the potential dangers of this mode of enquiry. Certain of the advantages of focussing on one community are obvious. It is often only by restricting the geographic scope of an investigation that the historian can hope to master the source material available about a given period or problem. It is also only by examining and comparing all of the material concerning a specific community – tax rolls, lists of membership in different churches or political parties, narrative sources, etc. – that one can begin to see interrelationships between different aspects of social reality – between social structure, ideological choice, and political action, for example. The multiplication of local studies has underscored the attention which must be paid to the specific configuration of economic circumstances, social relationships, and past historical experiences shaping events in any given community. By redirecting attention away from what has often been an excessive concentration on events in Paris, it has also reminded us once again of the great diversity of that remarkably heterogeneous collection of provinces and regions that was, and still is, France. At the same time, however, any local study runs the risk of leaving certain crucial questions unanswered simply because the relevant sources do not exist to answer those questions for the community under examination. Amid the recent multiplication of local studies, a disturbing tendency to treat each area as *sui generis* has also appeared. Purely local conditions are at times cited to explain developments that were in fact widespread, while broader regional or nationwide trends tend to become obscured beneath the proliferation of individual cases. On occasion the demands of research compel the historian to cast his or her net wider than the specific community under study in order to choose among several possible explanatory hypotheses suggested by the local data, yet local historians are often loath to venture into that *terra incognita*, the next town's archives.

In writing this book I have tried to keep the strengths and weaknesses of the local study in mind and to compensate for the weaknesses whenever possible. I have not felt that because I was studying Rouen I was therefore

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compelled to limit my vision strictly to local sources. I have used pamphlets, printed sources, and local records from other towns to clarify problems that could not be resolved solely on the basis of materials from Rouen. This has been done, however, only where the attitudes or experiences reflected in these documents seemed to be the product of conditions similar to those which prevailed in the Norman capital. I have also tried not to lose sight of the need for larger comparisons and generalizations. Where appropriate in the body of the text I have tried to point out contrasts and similarities between Rouen's experience and that of other French towns. The conclusion addresses directly the question which inevitably arises at the end of any local study: How typical was this community which has just been examined? Explicit comparisons with other regions are made here in an effort to indicate what this study of one city's history might contribute to a larger reinterpretation of the Wars of Religion.

Finally, a point of organization deserves mention. Jack P. Greene has recently commented that one of the major challenges facing today's partisans of a broader, more social scientific form of history is that of devising a literary form capable of presenting the results of complex and often arcane quantitative techniques in a fashion that appeals to a wide audience.¹ That challenge was particularly acute in this study. Because it analyzes an unfolding process of change, the basic structure of the book necessarily had to be chronological, yet much of the research which went into its making involved the quantitative exploitation of such sources as parish registers, trade statistics, and the membership rolls of churches and confraternities. Serial data normally demand a form of presentation that is profoundly anti-chronological: a lengthy preamble on the source materials and techniques used is necessary to give the reader an opportunity to assess the reliability of the findings, and these are best presented in the form of long curves stretching over many years so that their patterns of rise and fall may emerge most clearly. I have tried to reconcile these conflicting rhetorical imperatives in the following manner. The analytical sections on such topics as the social composition of the rival confessions, the numerical evolution of Protestantism, or the changes in popular Catholic religious life over the course of the period have been inserted at those points in the narrative which seemed most appropriate. In order not to overburden the narrative unnecessarily with material that was not always relevant to the theme of the interplay of religion and politics, I have chosen to eliminate from the pages which follow all of the technical discussion of the material I gathered concerning Rouen's economic and demographic evolution. Only the major findings on these questions have been included

¹ Jack P. Greene, 'The "New History": From Top to Bottom', *The New York Times*, Jan. 8, 1975, p. 37.

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here, and then only when they help illuminate the political or religious climate. Fuller examinations of Rouen's demography and its foreign trade have been or will be published elsewhere.¹ The reader who is particularly interested in these subjects, or who simply wishes to see how the findings cited here were obtained and to verify their reliability, would be well advised to consult these articles directly. Appendixes 3 and 4 present in summary fashion two of the better indicators of the general movement of the city's economy: the level of baptisms and the fluctuations in house rents. These are alluded to at appropriate points in the text. Whether or not these decisions have produced a readable text is, of course, for the reader to judge.

I have accumulated many debts in the course of preparing this study. Only others who have also arrived on foreign shores, badly disoriented and not a little ill at ease, can fully understand the gratitude one feels to those who help cushion the initial shock of working in alien archives. I am especially grateful to Denis Richet, who welcomed me to his seminar at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes and counselled me about my research in France, and to Jean-Pierre Bardet, who helped guide me through the archives in Rouen and generously shared with me many ideas and some of the material he had gathered in his own research. I also realize now how unusual was the warm atmosphere of mutual assistance which prevailed at the Archives Départementales de la Seine-Maritime. I must thank collectively all those who would gather for lunch at the Champlain, and must single out for individual mention Jonathan Dewald and David Nicholls, both of whom were kind enough to pass along information from their notes. Outside Rouen, Natalie Zemon Davis and Pierre Jeannin also graciously communicated unpublished material to me. Finally, I am indebted to the many archivists and librarians for their unfailing help in the course of my research.

Others provided assistance as I wrote. By far my greatest debts here are to my teachers and advisors at Princeton, Theodore K. Rabb and Lawrence Stone. The advice, direction, and critical comment which they provided greatly improved the pages which follow, but my debt to them goes beyond the specific assistance they provided with this project. As teachers, they always encouraged me to think critically and imaginatively about historical problems. To the extent that this book succeeds in doing so, much of the credit surely goes to them, and to my undergraduate mentor, H. G. Koenigsberger. Jean-Pierre Bardet, Jonathan Dewald, Myron

¹ Philip Benedict, 'Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Rouen: The Demographic Effects of the Religious Wars', *French Historical Studies*, ix (1975), pp. 209–34; 'Rouen's Foreign Trade during the Era of the Religious Wars (1560–1600)', forthcoming in *The Journal of European Economic History*.

Preface

Gutmann, Robert Harding, Robert Kingdon, Herbert Rowen, and Madeline Zilfi also read and commented on some or all of the text at one stage or another in its maturation. An early draft of Chapter 8 was presented at the Ecole Pratique and to the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies at Princeton. I am grateful to all these readers and listeners for suggestions which helped clarify my thinking and my prose. Chapter 8 was first published in a somewhat different form as 'The Catholic Response to Protestantism: Church Activity and Popular Piety in Rouen, 1560–1600', James Obelkevich, ed., *Religion and the People, 800–1700* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1979). I would like to thank the University of North Carolina Press for permission to reprint large parts of that article.

Material support for the making of this book came from several sources. Much of the archival work was carried out under a grant from the Fulbright Foundation, while Princeton's Shelby Cullom Davis Post-doctoral Fellowship and an award from the American Council of Learned Societies provided me with a year off from teaching duties during which I was able to write the final draft.

Finally, from start to finish my wife provided the most important assistance of all. She helped me with some of the archival research, clarified any statistical problems I encountered, and patiently edited and re-edited each successive version of the manuscript. These reasons, and others, explain why the book is dedicated to her.

PHILIP BENEDICT

Providence, R.I.
January 1979

Abbreviations

A.C.	Archives Communales
A.C.R.	Archives Communales de Rouen
A.D.	Archives Départementales
A.D.S.M.	Archives Départementales de la Seine-Maritime (Rouen)
A.N.	Archives Nationales (Paris)
<i>Annales: E.S.C.</i>	<i>Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations</i>
B.M.R.	Bibliothèque Municipale de Rouen
B.N.	Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris)
<i>B.S.H.P.F.</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français</i>
<i>Bull. Soc. Emul. S-I.</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société Libre d'Emulation du Commerce et de l'Industrie de la Seine-Inférieure</i>
<i>Cal. S.P. For.</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth</i> , ed. Joseph Stevenson et al. (London, 1863–1950)
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées au royaume de France</i> , ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and R. Reuss (Paris, 1883–89)
<i>Inv/Sommaire</i>	<i>Inventaire-Sommaire des Archives Communales antérieures à 1790. Vol. 1 Délibérations</i> , ed. Charles de Robillard de Beaurepaire (Rouen, 1887)
<i>L.C.M.</i>	<i>Lettres de Catherine de Médicis</i> , ed. Hector de la Ferrière and Baguenault de Puchesse (Paris, 1880–99)
Michaud and Poujoulat	J.-F. Michaud and J.-J.-F. Poujoulat, eds. <i>Nouvelle collection des mémoires sur l'histoire de France</i> (Paris, 1836–54)
Petitot	C.-B. Petitot, ed. <i>Collection complète des mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de France</i> (Paris, 1818–29)
R.P.	Registre Paroissial

List of abbreviations

Ruiz	Archivo Simon Ruiz, Archivo Histórico Provincial y Universitario de Valladolid
S.P.Dom.	Public Record Office (London), State Papers Domestic