

# THE HUMANISTS OF LYONS

TOPIC

## ROOM 9: CRISES - 16<sup>TH</sup> C.

### Lyons – capital of humanism

#### Making knowledge accessible to all

Humanism is a movement of thought, which was created in Italy during the Renaissance period and subsequently spread throughout Europe. Derived from the Latin term *studia humanitatis*, which refers to Latin and Greek letters, it advocated a return to the culture, texts and sciences of Antiquity. Humanists, in allowing themselves, like the ancient thinkers, to question the universe, broke away from the medieval idea of divine knowledge, and replaced themselves at the centre of the universe. To promote free will, humanists seek to make all knowledge accessible to all, including religious knowledge. The humanist theory thus promotes the notions of curiosity, openness, independence and freedom.

#### Lyons – a place conducive to humanism

Often termed the “capital of humanism”, Lyons attracted and produced major figures sharing this train of thought during the 16<sup>th</sup> c. Its famous fairs attracted great travellers – a characteristic of humanists. What’s more, during the Italian wars, the visits of the kings of France fuelled Italian humanism. Finally, in the 16<sup>th</sup> c., Lyons became the 3<sup>rd</sup> printing centre in Europe: now BOOKS, which make knowledge accessible to the wider public, was the leading source carrier and distributor of humanism! Meetings between printers and humanists resulted in the soar of a specifically Lyons form of humanism.

### Heroes of the Lyons humanist printing industry

#### Sébastien Gryphe, printer of French humanists

Originally from Wurtemberg, Sébastien Gryphe (1492-1556) was trained in his father’s printing workshop and then in a major printing company in Venice. He arrived in Lyons in 1523

and, from 1528 onwards, threw himself into printing the work of leading humanist authors: Erasmus, Politian, Thomas More and Guillaume Budé, etc. He thus swapped Gothic letters for Italic and Roman as well as Greek and Hebrew characters\*. His reputation soon made him the Editor of the greatest French humanists of the era: He published the explanation of the “*Aphorismes d’Hippocrate*” (*Aphorisms of Hippocrates*) by François Rabelais. His headquarters became the meeting place of lawyers, intellectuals (Barthélémy Aneau, Alciat) and local writers (Rabelais, Maurice Scève). His books sold throughout Europe in Latin and in Hebrew as well as in common parlance to boost their circulation. It was under his influence that the humanist trend caught on in Lyons.

#### Étienne Dolet, printer accused of heresy!

From a noble family and possibly, as dubious tradition would have it, the illegitimate son of François I, Étienne Dolet (1509-1546) studied in Paris and then in Padua before becoming Secretary to the Bishop of Limoges and French Ambassador to the Venetian Republic. On returning to France, he published, via Sébastien Gryphe, the “*Dialogus de imitatione Ciceroniana*”. This was followed by two volumes of “*Commentariorum linguae Latinae*”, a work dedicated to François I, who accorded him a period of 10 years in which to print any work in Latin, Greek, Italian or French that flowed from his pen or composed under his supervision. He settled as a master-printer in Lyons, and published the works of Rabelais, Galen and Marot. His satirical tone and apparent Catholicism were clearly portrayed in all of the work emanating from his printing presses: Some of his publications were so blatantly tinted with religious criticism that he was imprisoned in 1542, accused of atheism. He subsequently escaped and sought refuge in Piedmont before unwisely returning to Lyons to print letters appealing for the justice from the King of France. But, branded an “escaped atheist”, he was tortured and burned with his books on August, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1546 in Paris.

*Antiquitatum variarum auctores*, detail of frontispice, Sébastien Gryphe, 1560, Inv. 38.247.7



Portrait of Sébastien Gryphe, according to a 16<sup>th</sup> c. engraving, 1550, Inv. N3543.4



### Jean de Tournes, evangelical printer

A former typesetter\* for Sébastien Gryphe, the well-read Jean de Tournes (1504-1564) opened his workshop in 1542. His press very quickly took on a Protestant direction: he published reformed works such as the illustrated Bibles of Calvinist inspiration in all languages. The arrest of Étienne Dolet led him to focus on less focused literature: fables and the work of Greek poets, books of emblems/symbols, etc. His fame also spread because of his engraver, Bernard Salomon, who provided him with wonderful illustrations. His death in 1564 marked the end of the great period of humanist printers.

## Major humanists of Lyons

### A Lyons speciality: poetry.

In the mid 16<sup>th</sup> c., the people of Lyons, inspired by Neo-Latin\* poetry of the early part of the century, were renowned for their remarkable poetry: these poets were a never-ending source of eulogies on love and about themselves, and made increased references to astronomy, science and symbols. One of them, Maurice Scève (Inv. 1324.10 **Maurice Scève**), known as the "Prince of rhetoricians", as well as his muse, Pernette du Guillet, a poetess of Lyons and, above all, Louise Labé (Inv. 001.2 **Louise Labé**), "la Belle Cordière" – the first woman to sing about love, turned prejudices upside down:

*"Baise m'encor, rebaise moy et baise:  
Donne m'en un de tes plus savoureux,  
Donne m'en un de tes plus amoureux:  
Je t'en rendray quatre plus chaus que braise"*

Louise Labé, extract from Sonnet XVIII, Works of 1555

All three formed what is known as "l'école lyonnaise" (the school of Lyons).



Marble bust of Pernette du Guillet, Jean-Louis Pirot, 1898, Inv. 566

grey words: items that can be seen in this room

### The Fourvière Academy

In the early 16<sup>th</sup> c., Alderman François Sala and physician and author Symphorien Champier founded a literary society known as the "Académie de Fourvière" (*Fourvière Academy*). The society met at la maison de l'Angélique (House of Angélique) close to Notre-Dame-de-Fourvière street. Here, society members discussed the sciences and letters, and debated about poetry, religion, death and the discipline to adopt in order to perfect morals and the mind. Sonnets were recited here. Many women attended the meetings of this intellectual society (Louise Labé, Pernette du Guillet, Thalie Trechsel, Philiberte de Fuers and Clémence de Bourges, etc.).



View of the Pierre Gay passageway and the House of Angélique, photograph, around 1870, anonymous, Inv. N 1087

### Visits to Lyons

Illustrious humanists stayed in Lyons. Rabelais (Inv. 55.155 **Rabelais**) installed himself at the Hôtel-Dieu where he was a physician from 1532 to 1535. He published two of his most famous works in Lyons: "Gargantua" in 1531 with printer F. Juste, and "Pantagruel" in 1532 with C. Nourry. The poet Clément Marot stopped off in Lyons on his return from exile in Italy and published a collection of his "Poems" in 1538. Lyons was a most hospitable town as celebrated by Erasmus in one of his *Colloques (Colloquia)*: "l'atmosphère Lyonnaise, ses hôtelleries et la grâce de ses jouvencelles" (*the atmosphere of Lyons, its inns and hostels, and its damsels' grace!*)

#### TO READ:

Topic data sheet  
*The Printers*

#### glossary

**typesetter:** in printing, the person who puts the characters together to form the words on the pages.

**type:** in printing, a font unit.

**Neo-Latin poetry:** literature using a language based on Ancient models and believed to be more grammatically correct than that of the Middle Ages.