

THE RELIGIOUS WARS

TOPIC

ROOM 9: CRISES - 16TH C.

The first religious war (1562-1563)

In 1562 at Wassy (Haute-Marne), François de Guise, a devout Catholic, ordered his troops to attack the Protestants who, in opposition to the Edict of January 1562, practised their religion in the city. The massacres had repercussions throughout the kingdom.

In reaction, the protestants sought to gain control of the major French cities. In March 1563, the Edict of Amboise restored fragile peace in the Kingdom of France.

→ **In Lyons**, the protestant followers of Baron des Adrets seized the town hall during the night of 29 to 30 April 1562 [Inv. N 3819 - **Sac de Lyon par les iconoclastes (the pillaging of Lyons by the iconoclasts) in 1562**]. They destroyed Saint-Jean, Saint-Just and Saint-Nizier as well as the abbaye d'Ainay (Ainay Abbey). The château de Pierre-Scize (Pierre-Scize Castle), owned by the Archbishop, was seized on 7 May 1562. On 15 June 1563, the new governor, maréchal de Vieilleville, a moderate, disarmed the "Huguenots"*.

The destruction had urban repercussions: creation of places des Cordeliers and Confort to the detriment of churches, convents and cemeteries as well as the construction of new roads.

TO READ :

Data sheet
*The pillaging
of Lyons
by the Calvinists*

The second religious war (1567-1568)

On 28 September 1567, the Prince de Condé, a Protestant, attempted to seize the royal family. He failed. Anticipating reprisals, some Protestants attempted to take towns where they exerted influence.

On 23 mars 1568, the Treaty of Longjumeau reaffirmed the clauses stipulated in the Edict of Amboise.

→ **In Lyons**, the Lieutenant Governor, René de Birague, thwarted the Protestants' attempts. Temples were destroyed and Protestant families evicted.



René Cardinal de Birague,
Chancellor of France, lithography,
17th c., inv. 37.207.

The third religious war (1568-1570)

On 25 July 1568, the Catholic party attempted to capture the Protestant leaders: Prince de Condé and Admiral de Coligny. Taking refuge in La Rochelle, the latter mobilised their armies because they feared extermination. In fact, on 12 September 1568, Pope Pie V ordered a crusade against heretics. War broke out, mainly in western France, in the southern Loire region.

On 8 August 1570, the Edict of Saint-Germain put a stop to the fighting. It guaranteed four safe havens for Protestants: La Rochelle, Cognac (Charente), Montauban (Tarn and Garonne) and La Charité-sur-Loire (Nièvre). It gave them limited freedom to practise their religion in standard places of worship and in the suburbs of 24 towns.

→ **Lyons** was spared.

The fourth religious war (1572-1573)

During the marriage of Marguerite de Valois and Protestant Henri de Navarre (future King Henry IV), Catholics tried to assassinate Coligny, causing an uprising in the Protestant ranks. King Charles IX decided to have the "huguenots" chiefs executed. During the night of 23 to 24 August 1572, the massacre of Saint-Barthélemy, which triggered the fourth religious war, started in Paris.

On 11 July 1573, the Edict of Boulogne put a stop to the unrest. It reinstated the clauses of Amboise and removed Protestants from the towns of Cognac and La Rochelle.

Massacre de la Saint-Barthélemy à Paris (1572) [Massacre of Saint-Barthélemy in Paris], German engraving, 16th c., Library of the French Protestantism History Society



→ **In Lyons**, the news spread fast, culminating in a counter-attack massacre, the “vêpres lyonnaises” (vespers of Lyons) under the watchful gaze of the council of Catholic extremists: On 31 August 1572, the prisons were forcibly entered by groups of Catholics and over 700 “Huguenots” died.

The fifth religious war (1574-1576)

The spring of 1574 saw the collusion between the party of “malcontents” (discontented) – led by the Duke of Alençon, the King’s brother, who rebelled against royal authoritarianism – and the Protestant claims. In 1576, the conflict led to the flight of the new king, Henry III. The latter ended up by tending towards the Protestants: the Edict of Beaulieu of 6 May 1576, granted them religious freedom, created coalition parliaments (Catholic and Protestant) and condemned the Saint-Barthélemy violence.

→ **In Lyons**, the Consulate did not apply the Edict because it feared a return to power by the reformists.

The sixth religious war (May – September 1577)

In May 1577, the Catholics provoked the reprisal of hostilities, especially in Brittany and the northern half of the country. In September, the Edict of Poitiers restricted the practice of the Protestant religion to just one town per bailiwick* and only in the suburbs.

The seventh religious war (1579-1580)

Catherine de Médicis wanted to establish permanent peace: she met with Huguenot and Catholic chiefs across the kingdom. On 28 February 1579, she signed the Treaty of Nérac on behalf of the King, granting 15 safe havens to Protestants for a period of 6 months. Six months later, the latter refused to leave these locations and the conflict resumed. The Fleix Treaty therefore granted these safe havens for...six years.

The eighth religious war (1585-1598)

In 1584, the Treaty of Joinville appointed Cardinal de Bourbon as the King’s worthy successor: This was to prevent Henri de Navarre, a Protestant, from ascending to the throne. On 18 July 1585 via the Edict of Nemours, Henry III prohibited the Protestant religion and thwarted Henri de Navarre’s attempts to become king. The war resumed.

Intoxicated by the Catholic victories, the Duke of Guise took over the leadership of the League and the control of Paris. Humiliated,



Henri IV vainqueur de la Ligue (Henry IV, conqueror of the League), oil on canvass, late 16th c., RMN, musée Magnin, Dijon

the king had him assassinated. But the ever-powerful League regained Paris. Henry III was compelled to join forces with the Protestants: He reinstated Henri de Navarre, who, upon the king’s assassination in 1589 by a fanatical monk, succeeded Henry III as Henry IV.

However, the League continued its hold on northern France and refused to acknowledge a Protestant king. Henry IV converted to Catholicism on 25 July 1593: he returned to Paris, was sworn in and set about reconquering the kingdom.

→ Like most French towns, **Lyons** adhered to the Catholic League and rebelled against Henry III in 1589. When Henry IV converted to Catholicism, Lyons joined the bandwagon. Commissioned by the King, Governor Pomponne de Bellièvre (**N 575 Pomponne de Bellièvre**) ended the submission of the town, disbanded the Consulate and drove off the Jesuits. When Henry IV visited Lyons on 4 September 1595, the town greeted him with great pomp and ceremony.

The end of the conflicts

In April 1598, Henry IV signed the Edict of Nantes, which terminated forty years of conflict between the Catholics and Protestants, and created a period of tolerance: religious freedom and over 150 safe havens were given to the Protestants.

→ **In Lyons**, a plot of land within the Town Hall cloister was granted to the reformists in the guise of a cemetery, but they were still only allowed to access this location at night (between 17:00 and 07:00).

glossary

Bailiwick: Administrative district belonging to the bailiff, an agent of the king, authorised to deal with administrative, legal and financial matters.

huguenots: a term used by the Catholics to refer to Calvinist Protestants.