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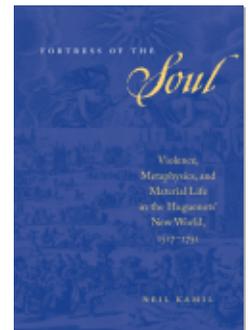
Fortress of the Soul

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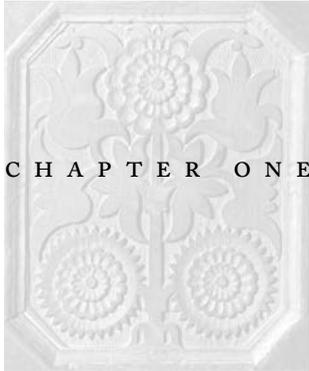


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C H A P T E R O N E

A Risky Gift

The Entrance of Charles IX into La Rochelle in 1565

Unfortunate happenings occurred during the king's stay in La Rochelle. . . . The passions were so fiery and the interests so strong and oppositional that it was not easy to strike a balance or find some sort of equilibrium. . . . People were too inflamed to express their grievances with moderation and to insinuate things [*insinuer les choses*] rather than to express them out loud. But if it is allowed to complain, it is also required that the complaint must be expressed with decency in all its forms and especially that the tone be most respectful and modest. Anyway, the people ignored the fact that the true Christian was expected to suffer without complaint and even die if need be.

—LOUIS-ÉTIENNE ARCÈRE,
Histoire de la ville de La Rochelle et du pays d'Aunis (1756)

❖ Insecurity and Fear ❖

Let us begin by considering the ramifications for Atlantic history and culture of Louis-Étienne Arcère's (1698–1782) understated remark that “unfortunate happenings occurred during the king's stay in La Rochelle.” These “unfortunate happenings” were part of a larger story about a civic gift of an elaborately wrought and engraved gold and silver basin given to Charles IX by “the people” of La Rochelle in 1565. The gift was presented to the young king during the famous two-year “tour” of principal towns and cities in France (1564–66) made by Charles and his mother Catherine de Médicis between wars of religion, immediately after the thirteen-year-old was officially declared of age in the fall of 1563.

The ostensible purpose of the tour was pacification; to use the mystical presence of the young king to reunite discordant religious and political factions, while introducing him to his people. But there was also a strong measure of geopolitical strategy—a quest to master Protestant space—associated with the royal party’s southern itinerary. Some Huguenot commentators thus perceived the tour in an ominous light. This would be no simple circuit of the south, especially given Catherine’s intended meeting with Philip II of Spain at Bayonne (where some charged, albeit without evidence, that plans for the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre eight years hence were made). This, it was argued by startled Huguenot commentators and hopeful Catholics alike, was a “hidden” attempt at a “revolution” to alter the map of France; that is, to “turn” the heretical south on its axis and so into a replica of the relatively pacified north. Be that as it may, the procession south from the heart of Paris of a royal retinue nearly 15,000 strong has been likened to a “traveling city,” whereby Charles IX and the queen mother virtually brought the center of France to its factional and rebellious periphery.¹



The story of Charles IX’s traveling city actually begins in March 1562, when religious warfare raged in France in the first of a series of confessional wars that lasted nearly two centuries. The itinerary of the royal tour thus underscored the fact that the violence centered around the predominantly Protestant regions south of the Loire Valley. Officially sanctioned violence may have been punctuated by numerous formal pauses in the fighting—including the one that allowed time for the gift to be given at La Rochelle—but royal edicts of pacification from faraway Paris failed to allay the pervasive fear of both personal and communal danger from religious atrocities as well as economic and political disenfranchisement on the local level. Savage assaults from both sides on individuals, families, and their property (including iconoclasm in churches and cemeteries), vengeful gang violence, opportunistic thuggery, and even full-scale sieges and destruction of fortified châteaux and towns by private armies were not uncommon during these times of ostensible peace.

Horrific acts of confessional violence causing a pervasive sense of terror were constant, as both sides fought to control pockets of regional power in the face of local resistance, but open warfare did not break out officially between the Catholic and Protestant forces until after September 1561, when the queen mother, Catherine de Médicis, was unable to negotiate an accommodation between the leaders of the two “oppositional” factions at the Colloque de Poissy. The first civil war ended officially on March 19, 1563, when the Edict of Amboise was issued by Catherine in the name of her young son Charles IX, then barely thirteen years old. The fragile Valois dynasty, and the queen mother in particular, were under enormous pressure to survive a crisis of succession that began in 1560, when Catherine’s eldest son François II died within

a year and a half of her husband, Henri II. Given this crisis of succession, Charles IX had become a very vulnerable king at age ten, on December 5, 1560. He was crowned at Reims on May 15, 1561, yet would still not reach his formal majority until the ceremony of attainment was performed at Rouen on August 21, 1563, more than five months after the Edict of Amboise was sealed.²

The Valois dynasty's palpable sense of insecurity about its own mortality influenced Catherine's toleration of religious heterodoxy during the 1560s, a position that was particularly remarkable when compared with the reign of the famously intolerant Henri II. The dangerous relation between insecurity and toleration was made clear during the short reign of François II, when the ultra-Catholic Guise family, whose priority was the enforcement of religious uniformity, took control of the government. This action presented a very real threat to the queen mother's power and her dwindling aspirations to dynastic continuity. Though their period of direct rule was brief, the Guises managed to initiate severely intolerant policies that intensified persecution of the Huguenots. The Guises fully intended to extend these aggressive tactics into the reign of the new child-king through the establishment of a Guise regency. Although it was clear that a regency was absolutely necessary, the queen mother thwarted the ambitions of the Guises by establishing herself in the position. Catherine's deep insecurity did not diminish, however, when she failed to remove the Guises as a threat to herself or her young son.³

The violently uniformist policies initiated by the Guises under François II still had the force of law under Charles IX, as Catherine searched for a strategy to accommodate their interests without relinquishing her tenuous hold on power. To submit fully to the Guises' project would be to ensure their control over the kingdom's dangerously unstable noble orders, while removing the greatest impediment to their return to domination of the court. And such a submission would inevitably invite violent retaliation from the other end of the political and religious spectrum, where the equally dangerous Huguenot Prince Louis de Condé stood ready to mobilize Protestant forces in pursuit of his own claims to the throne.

Catherine's answer to the triple threat posed to the Valois dynasty by confessional violence, noble factionalism, and the weak instability of the monarchy was to maintain power by pursuing a middle course of religious tolerance for the Huguenot moderates, who responded with measured royalist rhetoric claiming loyalty to the king. Huguenot royalist rhetoric was far from unambiguous; yet Catherine's strategy temporarily kept the violent Guises and warlike Condé at arm's length. In pursuit of a strategy to occupy the middle ground against radical competitors, the Colloquy of Poissy became the first of several extraordinarily conciliatory gestures made toward the Huguenots by the queen mother in the 1560s. Here, Catherine risked accepting Calvin's authoritarian deputy Théodore de Bèze as the Calvinists' spokesman on equal

terms with his Catholic counterpart. This was followed in January 1562 by an Edict of Toleration that guaranteed Huguenots the right to maintain their consistorial system and granted freedom of worship in most places.⁴

Such gambits were part of an extremely fluid process and potentially dangerous, despite efforts to play one side off against the other and to neutralize aggression among the factions in an effort to maintain the monarch's (and his regent's) singular authority. To survive, the monarchy was, in effect, reduced to the position of power broker between the magnates. Alliances were formed, dissolved, and then reformed again as authority was negotiated at court, seemingly moment by moment. That is why it is difficult to conclude that Catherine and Charles actually had the power, political support, and resources, at least when the tour began, to "turn" the map in 1564–65. It may have been sufficient that the contending factions—southwestern Huguenot leaders in particular—perceived that they did, and the impressive size of the procession and its formidable military escort could only have added to that desirable perception. Certainly, the tour was intended to shore up the dynasty's faltering position in Paris while "on the move," as was manifestly the case in the ostensibly last-minute decision to change the itinerary and enter La Rochelle in 1565. Even taking Catherine's sometimes desperate attempts at maintaining equilibrium into consideration, however, it was always within the power of the great magnates to force her hand by instigating savage confessional warfare. The duc de Guise did precisely that in March 1562—only two months after Catherine's Edict of Toleration—when he led his private army in the massacre of a Protestant congregation at Vassy, thus provoking the expected response from Condé and precipitating the first civil war of religion.⁵

The massacre at Vassy and the resulting civil war caused deep divisions in the Protestant leadership of La Rochelle. By 1562, the Reformation had succeeded in bringing a Calvinist majority to the fortress, so this new factionalism was not between Protestants and Catholics. Rather, the initiation of full-scale confessional violence in France caused a schism between La Rochelle's moderate leadership, who remained loyal to the crown and favored liberty of conscience for the minority Rochelais (and Aunisian) Catholics, and the rising militant party, who openly supported Condé's subversive political program, which favored the violent suppression of local Catholics and threatened the monarchy.⁶ The context in which this internal factionalism between moderates and militants played itself out was La Rochelle's deeply divided Corps de ville,⁷ the city's supreme political body, where the presumably common will of its magistrates and municipal officers was, in theory, negotiated in private and ultimately presented to the king as a consensus. In practice, however, this ostensibly united body was a chaotic hotbed of confrontation and power shifts, which began in 1562, when civil war broke out, and ended only in 1568, when the militants finally emerged victorious, hav-

ing defeated the once-dominant moderates in a move that enabled them to declare the Corps for Condé.⁸

Factional infighting had intensified to the point where, by the time of the 1563 mayoral election, the Corps was so divided that it was impossible to elect one mayor alone. Each candidate led a faction: Michel Guy was the king's man, representing the moderates, opposed by Jean Pierres, representing the militants. Coalition and compromise were subverted by polemics and confrontation. When neither candidate emerged victorious, Amateur Blandin, a lawyer and *lieutenant particulier*, representing the king's interests, decided the election for Guy. The militants refused to accept the outcome, and La Rochelle was led by two mayors until Charles IX intervened personally to oust Pierres. The resulting animosity between the two opposing factions worsened to such an extent that in order to avoid open conflict (and perhaps civil war) between co-religionists in the city, most magistrates simply absented themselves from the meetings. In time, the Corps was unable to mount a quorum and effectively ceased to function altogether. By December 1563, the king was finally forced to give it his official permission to carry on La Rochelle's business without the usual majority.⁹ Thus, when Charles IX and Catherine de Médicis confronted the Corps de ville of the powerful Huguenot fortress at its porte de Cougnes in 1565, their agenda, once again, was to exploit divisions between oppositional factions. The primary goal was simply to survive the encounter. Given the ascendancy of the militants, Charles's personal security was not guaranteed. Were he to survive the "unfortunate happenings [that] occurred during the king's stay in La Rochelle," and, as part of that process of survival, perform his dominant role as monarch competently in the series of dramatic rituals from "days of yore" that preceded the giving of the gift, then he would also extend the power of the monarchy deep into the divided heart of the rebellion.

❖ The Spirit of Difference ❖

The civil wars of religion took place nearly two hundred years before the publication of Arcère's magisterial two-volume, 1,400 page *Histoire*, arguably the most influential if also the most self-consciously balanced history of La Rochelle during the time of the troubles. In 1756, however, as local historian of the Oratory of La Rochelle, Arcère surveyed the past from his study in the city's medieval monastery of Sainte-Marguerite.¹⁰ To be sure, this had been contested space during the Reformation, but now Arcère occupied a secure, pacified vantage point, located both literally and metaphorically above the ruins of what zealous predecessors had perceived to be the very core of heresy in France.¹¹ The siege of 1627–28 had, however, utterly decimated La Rochelle's Protestant population, and most of the remaining Huguenots of rural

Aunis-Saintonge had of necessity either become *nouveaux convertis* Catholics or migrated out of the region into the expanding world of international Protestantism.¹²

Arcère lamented those who still could not forgive La Rochelle for centuries of heresy and treason against church and state. “One must always condemn rebellion,” he wrote magnanimously, “and [yet] it is sometimes permitted to pity the rebel.”¹³ Eighteenth-century royalist academicians and churchmen would resist the unstigmatized absorption of La Rochelle’s independent local history into Arcère’s new “progressive” master narrative of France’s national past. But Arcère and his order were well connected to patronage networks that combined the interwoven bureaucracies of church and state in both La Rochelle and Paris, a fact emphasized by his modest claim that his work had originally been “outlined” by his fellow *érudit* Père Jaillot (1690–1749), a leading light among Oratorians, and that he himself had had only to complete the task after his famous mentor’s death. The *Histoire* was published with royal privilege and dedicated to a nobleman of the sword, Count d’Argenson, “ministre et secretaire d’état de la guerre.” Arcère commended his patron for the particular care with which he “maintained military readiness through an institution that shapes war heroes,” and for his keen understanding that, above all, “history consecrates the actions of the most powerful kings.”¹⁴ Arcère knew, of course, that such rhetoric about the replication of the *gloire* of kingship through the entire genealogy of the Bourbon dynasty was the “artisanal” task of the court historians of Louis XV in Arcère’s own time, as it certainly was in 1628, when crafted by the court historians of Louis XIII.¹⁵

Arcère argued from his own vantage point, without a trace of irony, however, that now, 128 years after the last of the “passions . . . fiery and . . . inflamed” had subsided, it was at last possible to write an equitable didactic history of La Rochelle and its central role in the wars. “This city has become an object of [historical] interest above all since the era of the civil wars incited by differences in religion,” he wrote.¹⁶ Yet these were fiercely polemical histories, driven by the raw passions of sixteenth-century historians intimately involved with the outcome of events. Unlike Arcère, such historians, whose narratives were “destined” to be “coarse and gothic,”¹⁷ had not perfected rational self-control sufficiently well to master the subtle symmetries of eighteenth-century analysis:

In working on the history of La Rochelle, one has to contend with difficulties not often found in the historical genre. . . . It is very difficult to describe the wars of religion and the revolutions of a place too well known for its long and obstinate defection. . . . This was born in the spirit of difference in belief . . . the most implacable enemy of history. In matters of pure speculation, the light of reason will ultimately dispel the shadows of ignorance, but . . . in a writer struck with this delirium, the pen will follow the natural disposition of his soul rather than the nature of his subject. . . . The voice of the new reform

was ordinarily doleful and too often audacious. . . . The Catholics on the other side were not much more moderate. It was not often with the sweetness of Christian charity that they defended the truth. “True just like false religious zeal,” said a judicious and elegant author, “makes people forget the laws of humanity.”¹⁸

Religious zeal was thus the “implacable enemy” of historical discourse and the lessons history taught about the ethics of social life. Some teaching communities of Oratorians in particular made the militant Church the target of their pedagogy. That is why Jaillot and Arcère chose the historical La Rochelle as the most logical site for this project of retrospective religious pacification and renewal. For progress to be made, rational believers had to analyze the “factual” basis of their grievances with others dispassionately. Most important, since harmony could not always be achieved through analytical discourse, one should learn to “insinuate things” rather than “express them out loud.” In the late seventeenth century, some Oratorians were at the forefront of promulgating this program—sometimes awkwardly called “Cartesianism”—in Paris seminaries and universities. In 1682, because this inner-directed aspect of Oratorian teaching was considered to be in conflict with absolutism, Louis XIV tried to suppress the order in Paris by turning the Oratorians’ seminaries over to the Jesuits, their ideologically more trustworthy competitors.¹⁹

When Arcère completed his *Histoire*, however, the Oratorians had achieved a secure pedagogical foothold in the new diocese of La Rochelle, reconstructed as a consequence of the Calvinist defeat in 1628.²⁰ Between 1604 and 1613, Oratorians were allowed only a tiny presence in the Huguenot-dominated city, and the order was banished altogether by the Corps de ville after another Rochelais military confrontation with the crown in 1621, this time with the young and extremely violent warrior-king Louis XIII.²¹ The exiled Oratorians returned in triumph in 1628, however; and in the late 1670s, their “rich benefices” were considered the envy of every other religious order in La Rochelle.²² It is possible, therefore, to infer that the force of the Oratorians’ patronage and prestige, as well as the order’s local influence in the schools, lay in the continuing stake of the monarchy and the Rochelais leadership in the absorption and domestication of the vivid memory of civil war religious violence and confrontation with the state that had defined La Rochelle’s history. The *Histoire* attempted to demonstrate to the crown that unlike those religious orders during the times of rebellion, La Rochelle’s modern Oratorians were moderate, rational, and loyal. Inasmuch as the *Histoire* was published with royal privilege, Louis XV must have thought there were still lessons to be learned from La Rochelle’s “various revolutions” during those “unhappy times,” not least of which was how to avoid dangerous passions and civil strife among the competing social and political factions that still threatened the status quo in mid-eighteenth-century France. Even as “coarse,” “gothic,” and “unhappy” local his-

tories were absorbed into the master narrative of a French national history progressing toward the perfection Arcère avidly sought, so too society itself was capable of perfection, defined as both religious and regional unity under the rule of a single rational monarch.

Arcère had access to all the available “ancient” histories of La Rochelle. This was no small accomplishment after 1628, since so many of the most important (and politically sensitive) early manuscripts and archives had been lost, destroyed by royal forces or removed by the censorial and covetous Richelieu after the siege. Not everything had vanished, however; some notarial and consistorial archives survived, and “the Rochelais of old wrote down everything that passed before their eyes.” For the entrance of Charles IX in 1565, “the Rochelais of old” was the Huguenot historian Amos Barbot (1566–1625), and Arcère openly acknowledged this debt.²³ Royal patronage also played a crucial role. It would appear that the comte de Matignon, “then governor of the province,” had already gathered together what remained of these materials and made them available to Jaillot and ultimately Arcère.²⁴ Arcère’s approach to sources adhered strictly to his eighteenth-century methodology promoting symmetry between warring confessional historians. For the sake of fairness (as in Barbot’s case), historians from both religious camps were cited in almost every instance. It followed that Arcère would then mediate confidently, adding a final layer of “rational” (as opposed to “superstitious”) interpretation, to forge the required historical synthesis.²⁵ While “an author isn’t always in a position to confirm the truth,” he wrote, he could “support the facts”; and to “authenticate the facts,” it “is natural” that “these historians are always cited in the margin.”²⁶

In his narrative of the gift, Arcère observed these rules of citation scrupulously. He cites three historians, two Catholics and Barbot. These accounts of the royal entry of Charles IX into La Rochelle in 1565, and the town’s civic gift to France’s adolescent king are explicitly interwoven, such that the three, when read together with Arcère’s commentary, have come to constitute a dense narrative of the event. Arcère was careful to commend Barbot’s manuscript (ca. 1613?), though not without professional reservations. Unlike so many of his “doleful” and “audacious” colleagues, Barbot was one of Arcère’s most “impartial” sources:

Of all of our manuscripts, the most considerable is that of Amos Barbot, Rochelais, *bailif* of the grand fief of Aunis, and one of the *pairs* of the Corps de ville. The writing style of this annalist is simple, but too slipshod. Since he doesn’t have the fire to *fondre les matières* [literally, to “found metal,” or “synthesize”], he solders pieces together rather coarsely. He copies the public registers too baldly. Sincere and impartial, he narrates with much naïveté; and though he is a completely zealous Protestant, he sometimes disapproves of the conduct of his brethren.²⁷

Barbot does indeed underscore divisions within the town's Protestant community, speaking from the privileged vantage point of the Corps de ville (of which, as a *pair*, or *peer*, he was a member), and he also comments extensively on Charles IX's visit in 1565. Arcère quotes virtually all Barbot's observations verbatim, citing him as much in the body of the text as in its margins.²⁸ The two Catholic historians Arcère cites were eyewitnesses to the gift ceremony as servants of the court. The manuscript by [Philippe] "Caurian[a]," "Catherine de' Medecis' physician," was, he says, "extremely useful." In this analysis, however, Arcère was also able to display the depth of his own rational disinterest by discounting his co-religionist Cauriana's most extreme biases as those of a "zealous royalist."²⁹

Arcère depended heavily on the work of the other Catholic historian—and the one indispensable published source for everyday life in Charles IX's court during its two years on tour—Abel Jouan's *Recueil et discours du voyage du roy Charles IX* (Paris, 1566).³⁰ Jouan, an obscure figure, identifies himself as "one of his Majesty's servants" on the *Recueil's* title page. He is sometimes referred to as an "orator," "historian," or (least appropriate) a "poet," but Jouan's official title at court was "clerk of the king's larder" ("commis du garde-manger"), an occupation that probably accounts for the scrupulous, quantitative, and almost inventorylike quality of his narrative. It should come as no surprise therefore, that Jouan's typically detailed description of the gift—surviving in lieu of the artifact itself (which is lost)—is compelling in its specificity. No one could ever accuse this court historian of zealotry, except perhaps in compiling lists of basic information about his youthful master's activities. This is both the text's great strength and its great weakness. "Although exhaustive, the *Recueil et discours* is merely a succession of instants, lacking artifice, *mémoire*, or depth; hence, it is in reality the negation of a journey narrative. On the why and how of the narrative, or the social and political practices that it constituted, one must resort to those who were its primary witnesses, above all the actors themselves."³¹

Because his "phlegmatic" methodology separated historians into binary oppositions that privileged the balance of "impartial" witnesses over the instability of "enthusiastic" actors, Arcère would have perceived Jouan as a nearly unimpeachable source.³² Twenty-first-century readers, instinctively repulsed by the exotic rituals of dominance and savage personal violence of the wars of religion, will find comfort in Arcère's narrative impulse to balance religious passions to achieve a "respectful and modest" decorum. But Arcère would fail to "find some sort of equilibrium" in his critique of the history of emotion without finally acknowledging the "absolute" primacy of fear during the war years. If "the people ignored the fact that the true Christian was expected to suffer without complaint and even die if need be," then it was "fear, the feeling that disturbs our soul so strongly, and that rules over all of the soul's functions like an

absolute monarch; fear, [which] commanded them imperiously to disobey, and love of life prevailed over their duty.”³³

If fear was the “absolute monarch” of a sixteenth-century Huguenot’s soul, would “moderation” alone move “the people . . . to insinuate things rather than express them out loud”? What style might this mode of insinuation have taken? An analysis of the ambiguous history and discourse of the royal gift of 1565 may suggest some possibilities.

❁ The King’s Absence ❁

Arcère’s reading of La Rochelle’s “chronicles” from the 1560s suggests that if the majority of La Rochelle’s divided Huguenot leadership could agree on anything, it was their shared fear of Catherine’s well-known tendency to vacillate between factional influences. Every member of the Corps de ville knew that this was a dangerous strategy, which could cut both ways. On some occasions, as with the treaty of Amboise (March 19, 1563), which ended the war, the queen mother might vacillate in the direction of the Protestant factions; on others, such as an ominous decision taken on August 4, 1564—shortly before the gift was given—the pendulum could swing in reverse: “The court took only halfway measures in religious matters. It would make laws and then reverse them. The declaration of August 4, 1564, diminished greatly the advantages given to the Reformed by the Edict of March 19, 1563.”³⁴ Where sixteenth-century commentators saw weakness and confusion in these actions, Arcère perceived balance and reason: “Some writers have suspected that there was not a consistency of views in the government; that it did not produce a coherent policy with which to confront obstacles. This approach, however, must not be underestimated. In effect, during these unhappy times, both gentleness and vigour were equally dangerous . . . it is perhaps this equilibrium that was sought through these variations, but never found.”³⁵

La Rochelle’s Huguenot leadership was far from being of one mind as to how to respond, but some—especially the militant faction in the Corps de ville and, above all, the increasingly militant and influential ministry—were appalled by the reversal of August 1564. Perhaps counting on the court’s weakness, certain ministers openly incited “the people” to resist with “vehement speech” rather than quiet insinuation:

The Protestant party made claims daily and believed they had a right to do so. This caused much dissatisfaction. The ministers of La Rochelle, far from limiting themselves to their functions, dared loudly to censor the conduct of the court. Amos Barbot sincerely believed in such opinions, but he was also a faithful subject and so could not keep himself from chastising the ministers for their excesses. He said that “the ministers—de Lisle [Pierre Richer], Maingault, and de Nord [Odet de Nort]—were carried away with their

zealousness. Their vehement speech criticized the violence and force that was used against those of the [Protestant] religion. In addition to blaming the king and sovereign powers for allowing such license, they spoke out against the king's edicts, saying that the Edicts of Pacification had been broken violently and illegally. Such preaching led the people to resist implementation of the edict's modifications. Because of the actions of these pastors, the inhabitants took various licenses and there were some who spoke slander and invective against the king, the queen, and the council."³⁶

"The people's dissatisfaction," Arcère wrote, "was a portent of sedition. This news was reported to the king, who was then in Bordeaux. The king decided to leave for La Rochelle immediately to calm the dangerous unrest there."³⁷ There is no direct evidence that Charles and Catherine had originally planned a visit to La Rochelle, in part because the court did not wish to appear to give credence to sedition, and also because it was now difficult to guarantee security there. Perhaps they were following the fluid course of events before making a decision on the move. The uprising of militant Protestantism in the city, beginning in earnest in the 1550s, had obviously gained sufficient political and military strength during the civil wars to spark "vehement speech" over the Declaration of August 4, 1564. If well-defended discursive boundaries had been crossed in La Rochelle, then surely the royal person was also in danger there.

These dangers were ultimately outweighed by the realization that the administration of Jarnac, the royal governor of La Rochelle, was losing ground rapidly to radicals in the Protestant party. The governor had barely survived a plot to surrender La Rochelle to Condé in 1563, and the radicals continued to close in on the moderate majority in the Corps. In the governor's desperation, "it seems clear that Jarnac . . . prompted the prince's decision. Jarnac planned to use the royal presence to shore up his administration (which had been faltering since the onset of the most recent troubles) and so gain renewed authority for the office of governor."³⁸ The king may also have been waiting for an invitation. Arcère reports that "Charles IX communicated his decision to visit La Rochelle to the town's magistrates." These anonymous magistrates must have been associated with moderate factions, since "they, in turn, decided to receive him with all the pomp due the sovereign."³⁹ Given the lack of consensus in the Corps, it seems reasonable to assume that this decision was not taken lightly, and that many members feared and resented the king's visit. It is also reasonable to assume that his allies in the Corps reported any dissent to Charles as well.

The elaborate spectacles and gifts eventually presented to Charles on his impending visit could have been negotiated and prepared in the approximately two months it took the procession to wind its way the short distance north from Bordeaux to La Rochelle. More probably, however, these magistrates suspected all along that the king could be persuaded to perform his *joyeux avènement* [joyous advent] at La Rochelle,

and certain factions—including Jarnac, naturally, but also other moderate Huguenots, as well as the dwindling number of remaining Catholic Rochelais—had planned for such a contingency. This cannot be known for certain, but the hurried preparations must have been stressful and expensive. The question of the invitation does provide circumstantial evidence—Barbot infers as much in his *Histoire*—that the Huguenots’ “vehement speech” and apparently united front masked a lack of unanimity within the Protestant community and in the city as a whole. Thus, while La Rochelle tried to mask these differences as its leadership prepared to meet the king, the king was preparing just as industriously to exploit them.

What we do know from the usually terse Jouan is that the court’s progress north to La Rochelle from friendly Bordeaux—the fortress’s bitter religious and economic rival on the Bay of Biscay and the seat of a zealously repressive Catholic *parlement* (royal court)—through rural, heavily Protestant Saintonge had its tense moments. On his journey to La Rochelle, Charles passed through the governor’s ancestral seat of Jarnac, then Cognac, then the king crossed the Charente River at Port Chauveau, “which is the beginning of the country of Xaintonge.”⁴⁰ Then Charles made a royal entry into Gallo-Roman Saintes, a town with “great and ancient antiquities.” Here, Anne de Montmorency, Constable of France, undoubtedly presented his client Bernard Palissy, the famous Huguenot artisan and historian “from Saintes,” to his new patron Catherine de Médicis. Presumably, this was when Catherine commissioned Palissy to construct the ceramic grotto in the Tuileries that would make his name. Palissy quickly left for Paris, quite possibly the same year (the evidence suggests that he arrived there no later than 1567), where he set up his new alchemical laboratory and ceramic shop near the Louvre palace.⁴¹

After two days at Saintes, the tour passed through Corme-Royal, Le Mesnil, and Saint-Just-Luzac, where the inhabitants “all mariners,” and “all dressed in their colors, having their ensigns deployed . . . fired their artillery to honor the king.”⁴² Since the inhabitants of Saint-Just were not only “all mariners” but also almost all recently converted Huguenots, this show of force must have been received as a mixed message, especially by Montmorency, whose job it was to guarantee the king’s personal security.

A similar display met the king at Marennes, also in the coastal salt marsh region. Pausing at Marennes, an acknowledged hotbed of heresy in Saintonge, the king witnessed a “magnificent” display of arms carried by “six to seven thousand men . . . from surrounding villages,” who passed “before the king’s lodgings.” If part of the strategy of the tour was to learn the relative military strength of southwestern Protestantism, this display must have been both impressive and frightening. More unsettling perhaps was the bungled naval display at the small but powerful fortress known as Brouage—one of La Rochelle’s economic competitors on the Bay of Biscay—where “magnificent” ordinance was again fired, this time from vessels in the harbor. “But,” Jouan re-

ports dispassionately, “they did not take care, so they killed two men and wounded several others.”⁴³

Finally, the king returned to remote Marennnes, in the center of the salt marshes, to pass the night. Marennnes was perhaps the earliest center of Protestant activity among artisans and mariners in Saintonge, so it was remarkable that “during the day” of Thursday, September 6, 1565, just nine days before his entry to La Rochelle, “there assembled easily eight or nine hundred persons at the church at this place.” There the throng—which one might speculate was largely, if not totally Protestant—gathered to make a sacramental expression of fidelity to the old religion as a ritual offering to their king. They waited in vain “to have confession and communion” in Charles’s presence. “This was something that could not be done,” as Jouan explained, since “the king was absent, because the leaders of this place were of the religion *prétendue réformée*, what we call Huguenots.”⁴⁴ The king’s calculated absence punished the heretics of Marennnes by denying these dissimulators his most precious gift of the royal presence. The gift of presence was reserved for loyal subjects alone; that is, those who loved their king transparently and were united in his Church. This humiliating denial of royal reciprocity was a rehearsal for the king’s subversion of centuries of ritual at La Rochelle.

❧ At the porte de Cougnes ❧

Early on the morning of September 14, 1565, advance parties for the royal procession arrived at La Rochelle and stood waiting to enter before its famously intimidating limestone walls. This set in motion the first of two dangerous gambles by Charles IX, both of which played with La Rochelle’s traditional—that is to say medieval—ritual expectations of the king. The first of these events occurred at a threshold (the royal gateway at the porte de Cougnes); the second concerned the giving of a special civic gift (an elaborate silver-and-gold basin) and turned ultimately on the possible meanings of the gift itself. If La Rochelle’s Huguenot leaders noted Charles’s strategy of disequilibrium in Saintonge, particularly in relation to their co-religionists at Marennnes, then they should have had a premonition of the “unfortunate happenings” to come in the next few days.

The first to arrive at the porte de Cougnes was the formidable Anne de Montmorency, Constable of France, a tough survivor of wars on the battlefield and at court. Montmorency was also a scion of perhaps the wealthiest and most powerful *noblesse d’épée* (nobility of the sword) family in France. By 1565, Montmorency had ties with the then-moderate Catherine (due, in part, to the Constable’s role as the king’s protector) as well as with her competitors at court, the ultra-Catholic Guises. He also had Protestant nephews in the Châtillon family, whom he did not hesitate to use as brokers with hostile Protestant factions. Montmorency thus communicated across con-

fessional boundaries through family ties if it was advantageous. His patronage of Bernard Palissy (who dedicated his first book, published in La Rochelle in 1563, to the Constable)—and his recommendation of Palissy to Catherine to construct a grotto in the Tuileries gardens—show again that Montmorency was willing to cross confessional lines, because he recognized that the talented, innovative, and fashionable Huguenot artisanal sector was becoming indispensable to the material culture of the Valois court. But the Constable was, above all, France's principal military commander, and his job on March 14, 1565, was to lead the heavily augmented military contingent of 3,000 cavalry and 2,000 infantrymen that accompanied the king to La Rochelle to provide security.⁴⁵

The Constable's first strategic move caught the Rochelais magisterial and especially its military leadership completely off guard. "The Constable of France," Arcère wrote, "who rode ahead to announce the arrival of the king, had the artillery that was placed on top of the ramparts in the place de Château removed, and ordered that it be transported to Maubec Meadow. The Constable's defiance mortified the inhabitants of La Rochelle."⁴⁶ In defiance of La Rochelle's military autonomy and political sovereignty, this provocative action not only asserted royal dominance but also demonstrated how fearful Montmorency was for the king's personal safety.

Shortly after this act of royal defiance of local rights, the king, whose mother and sister, Princess Marguerite, would not catch up to the head of the procession for another day, stopped at the suburb of Saint-Eloi, as everything was made ready at the porte de Cougnes. The city fathers had used their limited time well in making the customary preparations for the royal entry:

First, the magistrates ordered that the bourgeois militias should be adorned with shining parade arms and red and blue uniforms. These were considered appropriate to meet the king. The militia would be led by Jarnac's son and his lieutenant, Jacques du Lyon. The magistrates of La Rochelle had a review stand constructed just outside the town walls, facing the church of Saint-Jean, and had it adorned with a superb drapery. This is where the king and his large entourage of courtiers were to stop to review the troops parading in the king's honor. A triumphal arch decorated with mythological figures was also erected near the porte de Cougnes. [These figures] represented the twelve labors of Hercules and were surmounted by a portrait of the king, with the device *pietate & justitia*, "religion and justice characterizes him." Beneath these words one read *Herculea fortitudo Carolo nono Regi optimo felici auspicio coelo dimittitur alto*, "the Herculean strength is spread from high heaven to Charles IX, the best king, with a favorable omen."⁴⁷

Montmorency's removal of the artillery from the place de Château was obviously to ensure that the appearance of La Rochelle's militia for the ritual at the entrance (he

knew that the militia's commander was Jarnac's son) would be no more than colorful ceremony. But the allegory of the eleventh labor of Hercules—in which he bore the earth on his shoulders while Atlas picked the apples of the Hesperides for him—was nonetheless a particularly complex and problematic representation for La Rochelle. Throughout the tour, especially in the majority Catholic cities, this allegory was updated to represent Hercules in the act of forcing the rotation of the earth and stars back to their proper axis, and it became a standard emblem for Charles IX. Ronsard, a member of the ancient Rochelais Chaudrier family (although himself a zealous royalist), made clear in a poem of 1567 that this terrestrial iconography signified that Hercules—like Charles—was on a warlike purification mission to confront heresy and turn back the Protestant revolution in France's southern provinces:

As Hercules made the earth revolve,
Monsters waged war on all sides;
So too you revolve your kingdom, Sire,
To righteously cleanse your empire
Of all error, and the monsters
Are too ashamed to show their face[s].⁴⁸

Given the potentially virulent anti-Protestant message of this allegory—and the implication that La Rochelle's rebels had gone underground, “too ashamed to show their face[s]”—the Rochelais chose to replace warlike terrestrial messages diffused by the court poet Ronsard, with the open, neutral, and negotiable “labors of Hercules” theme. Their program also adopted the moderate and hopeful motto “religion and justice.” The transmutation of the allegorical themes of a militant monarchy associated with the tour into more ambiguous language that could be read simultaneously in La Rochelle's favor was central to the fortress's strategy of self-representation. But the king received these mixed messages with disastrous results.

Symbolic catastrophes were to begin for the rebellious leadership of La Rochelle, however, even before Charles had a chance to view himself as Hercules on the triumphal arch erected across the threshold of the porte de Cougnes just *inside* the walls of the church of Saint-Jean. Montmorency's tactics the day before had left the militia and the Corps de ville jittery, but preparations for the ancient ceremony at the gate began routinely enough. However, the king still held back in the suburb of Saint-Eloi, where he awaited the arrival of his mother and sister. In effect, when they left the protection of the fortress to enter the king's distant presence, this meant that representatives of the city's leadership endured demotion in status and a sort of disequilibrium in the symbolically balanced relationship between the monarch and the city that subverted the history of the ritual at the gate even before it began:

At the first news of the arrival of the king, the city deputies came outside the walls to welcome him. It was the task of Jean Blandin, an alderman, to lead the welcoming committee. Some hours later, the militias came out bearing arms, followed by all the different orders of the town. The procession stopped at the suburb of Saint-Eloi. When Charles IX arrived there, he received their homage, as well as the keys to the city, which he immediately placed into the hands of the mayor. That night, however, the prince refused to solemnly enter the town without the queen mother and Princess Marguerite. . . . Instead he slept at Saint-Eloi and awaited their arrival the next day.⁴⁹

The mayor, the fiercely divided two hundred members of the Corps de ville, and the *présidial* of La Rochelle (the city's new, contested sovereign court of no appeal), anxiously stood waiting according to rank outside the twelfth-century porte de Cougnes, for the ceremonial royal entrance of Charles IX. Meanwhile, Charles, Catherine, and Montmorency finally assembled with the king's entourage outside the walls. Everyone knew full well, of course, that La Rochelle was then in the midst of its most important and, from the king's, his regent's and Governor Jarnac's perspective, most dangerous and subversive period of Protestant revival, mass conversion, and politicization. Not only was the Corps virtually dysfunctional, but the *présidial*, despised by La Rochelle's ministry and other Huguenot activists as an attack on the city's independence and corporate sovereignty, had been formed to hear civil cases as a new, *local* tribunal by Henri II in 1551, in an ultimately futile but still highly provocative effort to use a royal court to further the king's cause in La Rochelle. What "vehement speech" emerged from the declaration of August 1564, must have been amplified by the continuance of the *présidial*, which was perceived by the Rochelais Protestant hierarchy as a brazen attack from Paris on local judicial privilege, and it was a very specific question of local privilege that would be decided at the porte de Cougnes.⁵⁰

❁ The End of Privilege ❁

Following Abel Jouan word for word (as the Huguenot Amos Barbot had before him), Arcère set the scene:

On the next day, the ceremony started in earnest with the march of the militia, which the king reviewed in good order. With Charles IX nearing the first porte de Cougnes, the aldermen and the peers stretched a silk cord across the passage according to ancient custom, as if to stop him with the intent to supplicate and at the same time to have the king swear confirmation of their privileges. The Constable, who was the first to notice this, was surprised and became angry. He asked the magistrates if they meant to refuse entrance to the city to their master. They replied deferentially, quietly giving the reason for this ritual. But

the Constable, unsatisfied, drew his sword and cut the cord, saying that such usage was no longer the fashion.⁵¹

The insecure young monarch and the intriguing city fathers of the most powerful heretical fortress in France stared through a gateway at each other. The former had only a tenuous hold on power; the latter were trying to complete the fluid process of creating a fully Protestant polity in the face of a strong counterattack by the town's royal governor and his moderate allies on the Corps de ville. The ritualistic aspects of Charles IX's visit thus afforded all actors the opportunity to master their state of flux, if only momentarily, and to construct more permanent identities with which to face their mutable worlds. And because a unique assertion of privilege prompted Charles's visit, here was a chance for the divided Rochelais on one side of the gate, and the monarch on the other, to put themselves on a firmer footing with their respective (or desired) constituencies. The former sought to affirm that the ritual was intended to confirm the endurance of La Rochelle's local privileges given by former kings as permanent rights; the latter, to assert the right of a monarch to subvert the ritual and supersede prior privilege with just cause, because such rights were merely gifts, contingent on loyalty, which monarchs took back at their pleasure.

Thus, one important reason why Charles IX's visit had been in doubt until two months before was that by tradition, the king was expected to come ostensibly to reconfirm La Rochelle's ancient communal privileges, at the start of his young monarchy, as had most of his predecessors since the twelfth century. Indeed, at the beginning of each reign, one method that every new monarch used to announce his accession to the throne was to issue an edict to the different provinces confirming their privileges. But while "privilege was the primary instrument of government and the chief measure of political exchange between state and society . . . [whereby] the monarch tacitly acknowledged the rights of his subjects, who, in turn, implicitly recognized the legitimacy of his claim,"⁵² La Rochelle's particular privileges traditionally went far beyond any in the kingdom and, from the perspective of the crown, went right to the heart of the issue of its crimes of heresy and sedition—and its early prominence in the larger world of Atlantic history and culture—even though La Rochelle's privileges long predated the Reformation. As David Parker has observed:

The privileges about which the Rochelais were so concerned had their origins in the twelfth century. The commune was founded in 1140 by Guillaume, Comte de Poitou; through his daughter Eleanor of Aquitaine it passed first to the French crown and then to Henry II of England, but it was not until it received a charter from King John in 1199 that the corps de ville appeared. . . . In 1371 the Rochelais helped expel the English for the last time from their shore and Charles V rewarded them with a further extension of their

privileges. This included conferment of hereditary nobility on the mayor and echevins and their exemption from taxation. In addition the corps de ville was given complete control over the municipal finances “and all governors, judges and others were forbidden to act in this sphere.” Subsequently La Rochelle’s military strength enabled the municipality not only to preserve these important rights but to build on them at a time when most towns were experiencing a steady erosion of their franchises.⁵³

La Rochelle’s privileges as a *commune* not only gave the city unequaled autonomy among municipalities in France until 1628, but, most threatening to those from the kingdom’s center, the history of these privileges carried with it the mark of Englishness and the *outré-mer* world. This autonomy was not only political—with the Huguenot Corps de ville maintaining the privilege of independence from the royal governor, Jarnac—but also military and, perhaps most of all, economic. This too had English—and Atlantic—origins, since “the intensity of the town’s commercial activity justified its description as a permanent fair,” and after “1199 when it was in English hands . . . its development was rapid.”⁵⁴ Arcère, ever with an eye toward religious conflict, was quick to underscore the linkage in the post-Reformation popular mind between local privileges, La Rochelle’s autonomy, Englishness, and Calvinist republicanism, an idea he cavalierly dismissed as “chimerical.” Still, Arcère perceived one important reality that could not be dismissed so easily. After the Rochelais expelled the English in 1371, they obtained the first of their great treasure trove of privileges (mostly in the form of valuable tax exemptions) from King Charles V, “in the capacity of *strangers* who entered in submission to France.”⁵⁵ In the 1560s, the “strangers” in France’s midst turned again to their former allies, this time in religious complicity. As late as 1627, this expanded to include a famously failed military alliance, and after accepting the capitulation of the city in 1628, Louis XIII would remind his conquered subjects of what the ancient status of “stranger” had ultimately cost them.

The ceremonial entrance of Charles IX in 1565, was thus the centerpiece in a crucial ritual that would, in effect, symbolize the current state of the delicate power relations between Huguenot La Rochelle, with long-standing cultural, commercial, and religious ties outside of France to international Protestantism and the Atlantic world, and a weakened and dislocated Catholic monarchy with centripetal ambitions that, despite moments of moderation intended to keep its enemies at court off balance, mostly feared and bitterly resented those ties. So here was a grand entrance with a venerable history; but one now fraught with strange uncertainty after nearly five hundred years of catechistic repetition—all the more so because of its unique quality. While each province expected the monarch to confirm its local privileges periodically, the extension of such privileges to La Rochelle seems to have had no exact parallel in ancien régime France.

Rochelais tradition dictated that, first, a silk cord was to be strung across the fortified gateway that opened landward (to the northeast), away from Janus-faced La Rochelle's powerful Atlantic allies, and toward the road to Paris, and the Île de France, the seat of the French monarchy and the Gallican church. The mayor performed his role in the ritual by then asking the king to swear an oath to protect the town's "ancient" privileges *before* entering. In 1565, however, in a theatrical gesture calculated to dramatize the crown's dangerous displeasure at La Rochelle's religious infidelity, and hence ingratitude, which rendered all hope of reciprocity impossible, Montmorency galloped forward with sword drawn, through the porte de Congnes, abruptly severing the ribbon of ceremonial exchange prematurely, with the symbol of kingship, noble power, and violence. The centuries-old ritual at the gate—the liminal space par excellence between the fortress and the crown—had been reduced to shambles by this unexpected action and the king's silence. And when Montmorency declared that the ritual at the gateway "was no longer the fashion," he made it absolutely clear who set the style for ritualistic discourse in France. La Rochelle would not dictate terms of symbolic exchange to the king.

Asserting domain over La Rochelle's local rights, custom, and memory, Charles then rode slowly through the porte de Cougnes, without pausing, as was expected of him, to confirm the city's communal privileges:

All of a sudden, the mayor marched up and stood before his monarch, halting the king's horse by grabbing hold of its reins. The mayor then recalled for His Majesty the memory of what former kings—that is, his predecessors—had done on similar occasions, and asked him to reiterate the confirmation of La Rochelle's privileges by stamping them with the august character of his own hand. The prince replied, "Be faithful and loyal servants and I shall be a good king to you." Then, without responding to the mayor's request, he rode on across the city.⁵⁶

The mayor of La Rochelle made the single most dramatic gesture at the porte de Cougnes, by aggressively "halting the king's horse by grabbing hold of its reins," invoking the memory of the king's predecessors and the customary practice of confirming La Rochelle's privileges, and calling for Charles to play his role as scripted and without deviation. The moment had arrived when violence might follow, but the surprised mayor was caught off balance and let go of the horse's reins. The mayor also failed to command the moment in the ritual when La Rochelle's privileges might have been reaffirmed. Charles made it clear that such privileges were the gift of patronage, contingent on the king's personal experience with his subjects, and not determined by historical precedent. The king took his first gamble at the porte de Cougnes and survived; winning convincingly with Catherine's and Montmorency's carefully scripted guidance. The young king had augmented his personal power at the expense of the

most politicized members of the Corps de ville and the ministerial leadership, both of which lost face at court and among competing factions in the city.⁵⁷

Charles was literally chased by the confused and humiliated Huguenot elites as he “rode on across the city.” Forced to scramble in Charles’s wake after he left them behind at the porte de Cougnes, they were nonetheless still determined to maintain a front of unanimity, equilibrium, and politeness, despite what were now overtly strained relations over fundamental questions of communal memory, reciprocity, privilege, and decorum. The mayor, the Corps de Ville, and the Protestant party had suffered an attack on their authority that called into question their ability to maintain the customary course of communal memory. With fading hopes of future reconciliation resting in the balance, the local authorities had little choice but to try to set things right again, by proceeding with the presentation of marvels prepared at enormous expense for the king’s pleasure. Thus, as Charles rode into town ahead of his astonished hosts, he must have felt a real sense of victory when “he beheld a fabulous theater of the streets, strewn with greenery and hung with tapestries in his honor.”

In addition to Hercules, Charles also saw representations of himself deployed on numerous theatrical machines and in various tableaux vivants, all of which—far too many to summarize here—were intended to communicate the dual message of the arrival of a new golden age symbolized by the syncretism of pagan deities and Christianity (here, for example, Charles was juxtaposed with Hercules and other mythological heroes; and there, Charles was seated upon a triumphal chariot pulled by allegorical figures signifying Peace, Victory, Justice, and Prudence). As if to mask the botched ritual at the porte de Congnes, and the rise of the seditious Protestant factions in the fortress, representations of enduring fidelity were especially prominent.

Despite such loyalist rhetoric, undoubtedly quite natural and sincere for most Rochelais, who had no other discourse with which to address their king, it seems possible to read at least one of these spectacles in more than one way. Take, for example:

A theater covered with rich tapestries decorated the crossroads of the Fountain of the Little Benches. There, in the king’s presence, another group of children were to convey the feelings of the public with touching shouts of joy. The background of the theater was decorated with a large painting depicting a vast park. Two men standing at one corner of the park stretched nets between them. Cunning birds fluttered and soared freely above, evading capture as if they sensed the snare. In another corner, two shepherds escorted by their dogs and standing in the middle of their flock observed the actions of the bird catchers. They seemed to enjoy the craftiness of the birds, which made sport of the hunters’ attempts and outwitted their efforts. The shepherds’ feelings were mirrored by words from Solomon’s Proverbs [“it is in vain that one throws a net in front of the eyes of those who have wings”].

On still another side, a man playing a flute was trying to force his way into the park.

But another man who was inside got up on the fence to push him back. From the show of anger that manifested itself, one guessed that the man inside repulsed the stranger because he had hidden his true intentions under the lure of a seductive song. The following verse interpreted his thought; *Fistula dulce canit volucrem dum decipit auceps*: “The bird catcher plays while he beguiles the bird with the sweet pipe.”⁵⁸

“By these symbolic figures,” Amos Barbot interpreted, “the Rochelais wanted to bear witness to the king of their fidelity and vigilance as they protected their town in their obedience. Neither by force nor violence nor seduction would they ever be taken from his service.”⁵⁹ To be sure, this was the moderates’ preferred reading of loyalty, despite religious difference, in the presence of the king. That Barbot chose to supply an appropriate reading is significant, however, stabilizing a text that was meant to be ambiguous and implying different messages to different audiences. While it is true that “shepherd” is a common metaphor for the minister, in this fortresslike enclosed park, shepherds were apparently benign yet potentially seditious. They enjoyed the craft and wit of the hunter’s elusive prey. This may be a comment on different Rochelais ministers; one perhaps more militant in his sedition than another, more moderate and loyal pastor. Could parallel readings suggest that, in this instance, the shepherds were also protectors of La Rochelle from the “seductive song” of the king’s men? Did they command the actions of the men who now repulsed the “beguiling” stranger? What might the piper’s identity be, and was resistance from inside the fence an act of loyalty or subversion? Recall the ninety-first psalm, crucial for the Huguenots in search of refuge during the civil war years, wherein it is said that “the Lord,” is “My refuge and my fortress;. . . For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler.” Surely this psalm had special meaning to the fortress-bound Rochelais, and it is implicit in the tableau. The question remained for a multiple audience: what was the identity of the hunters and of the pious and watchful shepherds? Where is God’s authentic place of refuge? “Under” whose “wings,” as the psalm reads, will you “find refuge”?

The beauty of this allegory from the perspective of multiple audiences in La Rochelle consisted mainly in its playful openness, birdlike lightness, and overall ambiguity. Or, to borrow Arcère’s word, its use as a medium of silent “insinuation,” an artful muffling of the “loud” expression of rebellion.

❖ The Gift ❖

“After the king was taken to his apartments,” Arcère informs us, “the municipal magistrates came and presented him with a silver basin”:

In the center of the basin rose a rock flanked by two figures representing Charles IX surrounded by undulating waves. The basin was also surmounted by a massive gold heart

covered with fleurs-de-lis. The artist had engraved an explanation of this emblem around the inside of the basin. The verses were so bad that it would be almost more proper to leave them in the shadows (in which Amos Barbot's manuscript shrouded them). However, they shall be shown to the Rochelais because of the feelings that these verses expressed.

The heart strewn with flowers sitting upon a rock,
 And the portrait of the king engraved on both sides,
 Demonstrate that Mars did not overcome
 your humble Rochelais, faithful without reproach.
 From father to son upon you the royal lily descends,
 They have consecrated to you their firm will:
 By them of yore the proud English were daunted;
 Piety a companion of justice
 Declare that together they have embraced him.
 The rock surrounded by an undulating sea shows the firm constancy of your subjects,
 Whose hearts, goods and spirits are yours, Sire.⁶⁰

Foremost among these representations of Rochelais fidelity was the civic gift—an expected part of the ritual—but this particular object was a marvel of linguistic and material gamesmanship. It was given to Charles IX at the end of the day, ostensibly in exchange for his presumed grant of communal privilege, in fact denied with such masterful theatricality just hours earlier.

Despite the time and thought lavished on the creation and iconography of this gift, however (and the time modern historians—including this one—have spent interpreting its iconography), the materiality of gifts was probably far more important in the eyes of the king and his court than their symbolic language. It may be that most gifts as elaborate as La Rochelle's basin were recirculated among courtiers in exchange for debts or as royal favors, or simply melted down for specie, especially during the civil wars:

There was usually some sort of gift for the King which had been decided in advance by consultation. This really amounted to a levy and, even in the case of more elaborate gifts created in gold and silver, the weight was the critical factor. One feature which is somewhat surprising is that the King often assigned the gift in advance to a member of the court and then, if he wished to keep it for any reason, he was obliged to give the prospective recipient the equivalent in coin of the realm.⁶¹

If Charles did in fact assign La Rochelle's gift to a wealthy courtier, this leaves open the slight possibility that the missing artifact may resurface some day among the effects of a noble family. Be that as it may, one can easily imagine that Charles was more concerned with his basin's heft than with the "bad" verses of which Barbot was so ashamed.

If the materiality of the gift rather than its discourse was valued most, then perhaps the awkward verses went completely unnoticed by the king. Still, one should never assume that Charles, Catherine, and Montmorency neglected to read them; particularly because they were so carefully transcribed by court historians.

The verses themselves indicate that it was the intention of the magistrates to use the gift as a representation of the fiction of the town's unity and to assert prematurely the reality of its reformed corporate identity under the new Huguenot regime. The verse proclaimed that certain things were fundamental and unchanging. Despite the recent civil warfare (and "slander and invective"), La Rochelle identified itself as subject to the king, "faithful without reproach." Yet again, however, the gift reminded Charles that it was given in reciprocal exchange for privileges granted "From father to son upon you the royal lily descends / They have consecrated to you their firm will." Only the glorious *end* of La Rochelle's medieval English alliance is recalled—hence, again, the reason for the privileges. La Rochelle's English associations are renounced as past, having taken place in days "of yore." The verse ends with a memorable play on word and image, which simultaneously materialized and initiated the ironic history of the place-name La Rochelle—from the Latin *rupella* (which was engraved defiantly on the fortress's walls), or "The Little Rock"—as a civil war polemical figure:

This rock surrounded [*entourée*] by an undulating sea
Shows the firm constancy
of your subjects
Whose hearts, possessions, and spirits
are yours, Sire.

With these supplications contained in the fortresslike shape of the circular walled enceinte (common to other basins that have survived from the period)⁶²—and also including puns and double references to the royal progress of pacification (*entourée*), as it enveloped and surrounded France's "frontier" (but given its Atlantic alliances, not La Rochelle's frontier)—the Rochelais hoped that the silver and gold basin would signify a gift of themselves to the new king that was simultaneously intimate and public. Perceived whole, with all of its mixed messages, the gift and the ritual of *avènement* leading up to its presentation crystallized the ambivalence of La Rochelle's religious and political condition in relation to the monarch; that is to say, the *simultaneous* desire of all its factions to serve both the new faith and the old monarchy. Because the unification of faith and kingship was central to the ideology of the French monarchy—and would serve as the core of seventeenth-century absolutism—it should come as no surprise that the loyal discourse of the gift achieved the opposite effect to what was intended. Unmoved by rhetorical and material protestations of civic unity and the Rock's "steadfast constancy" to images of a militant monarchy engraved on the

fortress's heart, Charles received the gift without recorded comment. And again, instead of completing the exchange of privileges desired by his frustrated hosts, the king took another gamble.

Charles lent his presence to a meeting of Jarnac's anti-Huguenot faction, which had the effect of accomplishing precisely what both the governor and the king must have wished. Having received extensive knowledge of the internecine feuds of the Corps de ville, the king wisely bet that the Rochelais unified identity as represented on the basin was mere bluff and that, in fact, the disunity of the Corps, combined with the events of the king's entry and visit, had already sent the message of the gift careening out of control. In the end, the king's strategic gambles on his ability to manipulate the rituals of privilege worked to promote further intrigue and discord. Moving quickly to take advantage of this, the crown then struck out forcefully at Rochelais Protestantism:

Jarnac had persuaded the municipal magistrates to promote his zeal for the good of the city, his caring, and the advantages of his administration to His Majesty. Jarnac promised in return that he would stress to the prince how satisfied he was with their behavior. A lawyer named Jean de Haize spoke to His Majesty in the presence of the Corps de ville to instruct the king on the state of affairs in the town. He sang the praises of the governor, whom he flattered excessively. Suddenly, Jean placed the Rochelais in the role of the odious opposition, speaking out indecently against them. La Rochelle had to suffer the humiliation of seeing itself torn apart at the hands of one of its own children, whose black treason was armed against his patria by a tongue that was supposed to speak in its defense. The discord that reigned among the citizens added to the evil. Those who feared the resentment of the king intrigued behind the scenes to exculpate themselves at the expense of others.⁶³

The king had won his gambles by exploiting La Rochelle's contentious politics and the possibilities available to the monarch alone in early modern ritual. Charles took calculated personal risks and called La Rochelle's bluff of Protestant unity to assert his dominance over what was, in reality, an unstable situation. In the end, the monarch's traditional military, hunting, and gaming identity, as "the one who always wins," was far more charismatic and solid, even in this young and insecure king, than the shifting and uncertain civic and political identity of La Rochelle's new Huguenot party. This trope of the victorious king was routinely manifested in the more or less constant martial games and elaborate entertainments that occupied much of Charles IX's and the court's leisure time on tour. In several scenarios staged on the road between towns that seemed to foreshadow events at La Rochelle, Charles performed for the traveling court in the role of the legendary hero. This questing knight, through superior strength and guile, single-handedly entered a mythic evil fortress. Once inside, after claiming a great prize, he fought against overwhelming odds before finally escaping with the

treasure unscathed. The uniqueness of the monarch's skill at winning was proven over and over again, particularly by the failure of many other young knights—his would-be competitors—to safely enter the fortress, defeat evil, secure the prize, and attain his *gloire*, which belongs by divine right to the king alone.⁶⁴

As a result of Charles's gamesmanship and its own instability, the Rochelais Huguenot leadership was put on the defensive in 1565, and the town remained without its privileges being officially put in place by the king. Charles was now in control, and he "showed his displeasure with La Rochelle" by issuing an edict forbidding the despised declaration of August 4, 1564, to be changed in any way. In fact, Charles extended its repressive powers. The king censored La Rochelle's Corps de ville and those gift-giving magistrates he considered part of the militant faction, "who," according to Arcère, "were ordered to protect the Catholic religion and to move strongly against those pastors who, going beyond the bounds of their ministry, continued to criticize the government publicly. This behavior [caused unrest because it] made the people wish for better days."⁶⁵

Barbot tells us that the royal campaign against the Protestant ministry of La Rochelle actually began in November 1562, under the command of the brutal duc de Montpensier. Montpensier's solution to the growing politicization of the clergy was to order all Rochelais Calvinist churchmen banished from the city within twenty-four hours or to face immediate death by strangulation. By May 1565, however, the leading Rochelais divines—including the charismatic Pierre Richier (called de Lisle), who played a central role in the Calvinist New World histories of Jean de Léry in Brazil and Bernard Palissy in Saintonge, as well as Noel Magnen, Odet de Nort, and Nicolas Folion (called de la Vallée)—had begun an aggressive campaign from the pulpit against the subversion of the edicts of toleration by Charles and Catherine and openly blamed the violence against the Huguenots that resulted on the monarch himself. In response to this extraordinary challenge to his moral authority, as his royal visit to La Rochelle in September ended, Charles ordered the city's ministry never again "to use scandalous or seditious words touching the honor of his majesty," or to suffer the death penalty. As if to underscore the reality of this threat, Nicolas Folion was banished in perpetuity beyond the borders of Aunis, on pain of death if he tried to return or preach anywhere in France.⁶⁶

To demonstrate his displeasure with the Corps de ville, other outspoken bourgeois, and his own placemen who failed to perform their duty, Charles banished Jean Pierres (one would-be mayor who was elected in 1563, the king's *lieutenant-général*, and the lead criminal prosecutor of La Rochelle's ostensibly royalist *présidial*) and placed him under house arrest in Paris. In addition to seditious activities with the Huguenot party, Pierres had not maintained law and order as required by the *présidial*, and he faced the humiliating prospect of having to report personally to the governor of Paris, who re-

viewed his activities every week and reported them to the king. Far less imaginative banishments were suffered by five additional bourgeois “of less distinguished rank,” who were simply dispersed to live in exile in five different cities throughout France.⁶⁷ As a final theatrical gesture devised by Anne de Montmorency for the king’s security and as a strategy to further humiliate the anxious and threatening Rochelais nobility of the sword, Charles IX boldly refused the obligatory military escort out of town, and made a quick getaway from the fortress, once again through the porte de Cougnes.

❁ “The Rock”: 1565 and 1628 ❁

When a now anonymous Rochelais goldsmith was commissioned to engrave honorific supplications of rocklike fidelity in the midst of historical turmoil on the surface of Charles IX’s gift of “La Rochelle” in 1565, the communal promise of the gift of self was implicitly contingent upon the king’s customary reciprocity with the gift of privilege. But, as the anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu has wisely demonstrated for other contexts, such strategies of gift-giving may evoke effective counterstrategies (though such strategies are sometimes undertaken at risk of violent personal revenge). Holding in abeyance his traditional obligation to grant La Rochelle its privileges *before* crossing the threshold, and therefore extending indefinitely into the future the crucial moment of exchange, Charles subverted the historical power of the gift a priori, while withholding as an instrument of royal power the implied offer of potential symmetry. What the Rochelais had hoped represented their gift to the king in exchange for his privileges already given, had, in effect, had been given unconditionally.⁶⁸

That this moment of symmetry never actually arrived was early evidence of irreconcilable differences between the monarchy and the Huguenot city-state, which could only be reconciled, as the action of Montmorency’s sword implied, through separation and violence. It is clear that the crown stubbornly refused to accept La Rochelle’s strategy of using the language of gifts to signal fidelity, closure, and love, while practicing heresy, treason, separation, and disaffection. Despite the gratitude, reciprocity, and exchange invited, there would thus be no discursive symmetry—no full dialogue—between the state and local, heretical power. While both sides tried to appropriate the language of the gift for their own ends in the quest for advantage, thus subverting reciprocity and closure in the ritual of exchange, the king made it clear that this represented a far greater risk for the Rochelais. La Rochelle’s options during this period of conversion to the international political program of Protestantism were becoming extremely limited.

La Rochelle’s response to its estrangement from the monarchy came three years later, in 1568, when the fortress finally unified sufficiently behind Condé to formally enter his rebellious camp—depending on ideological and economic support from the

expanding Protestant world of the North Atlantic—and the now “radicalized” Corps de ville and mayor declared the city an independent Huguenot republic on the Genevan model.⁶⁹ The term “radical” must be used cautiously, however; here it is used from the perspective of the monarchy. Still, it should be remembered that at the same time, the city refused to relinquish its ancient sense of loyalty to the French monarch and struggled to reconcile the link from “days of yore” with its now virtually unanimous faith in the “new,” albeit “primitive,” religion. By 1627, the Huguenot leadership continued to maintain that the dissonant fiction of dual loyalties was still useful; but an increasingly militant monarchy, guided by Cardinal Richelieu—that most covetous of Counter-Reformation warrior-priests—was already constructing a new historical narrative for the French state, based on the monistic principles of an absolute monarchy, in which the violent synthesis by the expanding state of La Rochelle’s divided loyalties played an essential part.

As for the language of the gift itself, the discourse of the Rock continued to circulate, but with unfortunate consequences for the Rochelais. Listen to this exemplary passage from an oration given on November 1, 1627, three days after the catastrophic rout of English forces under the duke of Buckingham at Île de Ré (ending La Rochelle’s hopes of international aid), and sixty-two years after the series of ritualistic posturings and incomplete exchanges at the porte de Cougnes. The speaker was a dedicated inquisitor: first *président* de Gourges of the *parlement* of Bordeaux, which had regional jurisdiction over heresy trials that originated in the region of Saintonge, in La Rochelle’s southern hinterland. Among his auditors was Louis XIII, then at his base camp at Aytres, well within sight of the southwestern walls of besieged La Rochelle, which would capitulate to Louis and Richelieu in October 1628. “This rock,” Gourges punned, “has always been the *heart*, the first to move [*mouvant*], and will be the last to move among the factions and rebellions in your kingdom. It is a *rock* upon which public tranquility has been shipwrecked fourteen times since the beginning of the troubles with the Huguenots.”⁷⁰

Gourges’s polemical double entendre on “the rock” with a moving heart (a heart he knew was about to stop beating), reactivated—and turned upon itself—language initiated with Charles’s gift in 1565, in which geological metaphors were manipulated ironically by the enemies of Protestantism in conjunction with La Rochelle’s pivotal role in the civil wars of religion. There are many other prominent examples. The royalist poet François de Malherbe, for one, who was to die in Paris on October 16, 1628, days before the final surrender of La Rochelle, nevertheless still managed to compose a lovely (and often quoted) panegyric as a parting gift to his patron, in anticipation of Louis’s triumphant return: “The Rock is dust, its fields deserted / Nothing to see but cemeteries / Where Titans once lived, there they lie buried.”⁷¹ Such geological figures fell largely out of fashion in Counter-Reformation texts after 1628. La Rochelle was

defeated, its population of Protestant rebels all but decimated or exiled, and its walls leveled. By Richelieu's design, the city was repopulated by a Catholic majority and ceased to be of any real consequence to the propaganda apparatus of the state. Given Charles's disdainful response to the gift of the "rock" with a golden "heart" in 1565, one might assume that the king would have shared Gouorges's understanding of the metaphor. Here, even the iconography of the thing itself overtly begged the question of who would control the discourse of the gift—its giver (whose heart could keep rebellious secrets) or the recipient—since, ironically, its metaphoric language called attention to fundamental doubts about loyalty shared by a Catholic king and his heretical subjects. How does one peer into the gift-giver's heart—understood to be the place of his innermost, secret self, his true, hidden identity; his love, friendship, and above all, loyalty—especially when the heart itself is the substance of the gift? What is withheld from the heart that is given? The Rochelais thus appeared to give themselves turned inside-out to their prince in 1565; or rather, the Huguenots insisted that there was no substantive difference between the outward appearance of fidelity made of silver and gold and their innermost feelings.

When a prince peered into his own heart, however, he was also said to see into the hearts, not only of his ancestors, but of all his subjects. The hearts of French kings were symbolically identical and so could never really die. The hearts of kings of the Bourbon dynasty were removed after death and placed in one of two churches—le Val-de-Grâce or Saint-Louis des Jesuites—so that "the royal blood returns to its source and rejoins the heart of Saint Louis. It is always the same blood that runs in the veins of the reigning prince, and it never stops flowing, since the prophesies promise eternity to the sons of Saint Louis."⁷² In the best of times, the triumphal entrance of Charles IX in 1565 would have signified precisely the kind of reciprocal exchange of hearts that La Rochelle claimed in its gift. On those occasions, "the goodness, virtue, and majesty of the prince triumph in the hearts of his subjects, and. . . the love, submission, and obedience of his subjects triumph in the heart of the prince."⁷³ However hard La Rochelle's Huguenots tried to construct a viable discourse of loyalty, Charles, Catherine, and Montmorency—and their followers—understood from both historical and recent experience, that the Rock's disaffected heart did not belong to the kingdom. Despite the language of the gift, La Rochelle had always been seduced by strangers.

• A History of Strangers: Louis XIII's "Relation" (1628) •

It thus remained for the victorious Louis XIII to sum up the events of 1565 in 1628. The king's (and Richelieu's) historian's incisive and vengeful "Relation du siège de La Rochelle" (1628) makes it clear that the fortress's infidelity was tied directly to its historical "freedom of trade and obsession with strangers, and principally the English,

their great friends . . . [England] where criminals of *lèse-majesté* . . . [go to seek] refuge.”⁷⁴ Sometimes Louis XIII simply referred to La Rochelle’s “adherence to strangers.” Not only La Rochelle was accused of infidelity, but the entire borderland region under its foreign sphere of influence; one that Louis mapped—with good reason—along the coast from the Gironde north all the way to the Loire. The totality of southwestern Huguenot culture, then, was condemned as “hidden, secret and not acknowledged by legitimate authority,” or “not authentic.”

This secret inauthenticity was particularly true of Huguenot religiosity: “the most specious pretext, which always serves as a veil to cover their ambition. We know only too well . . . that certain discordant spirits, under the color of religion, have recourse to strangers.” The bodily source of such disloyalty and hidden malice was not a gift of pure constancy, but rather the baneful animus of “rebels who brew poison in their hearts.” The gift of such a heart would mean certain death if it were joined—or exchanged—with that of another, especially an unsuspecting monarch. Thus, the “Relation” warned the Huguenots’ potential royal hosts in the Atlantic world of their duplicity, particularly Louis’s own brother-in-law, England’s Charles I, who attempted to break the siege of La Rochelle in 1627 with the failed expedition to Île de Ré. Perhaps that is why Louis reserved his particular scorn for southwestern Huguenot historians in exile. Surveying the ruins of La Rochelle, the “Relation” quoted with delighted sarcasm “one of their historians . . . writing from Geneva . . . [who] said [to the besieged Rochelais], ‘know that he who pleases God holds the heart of kings in his hand.’” Louis XIII chided the Huguenots that they would always be strangers in the hearts of their hosts. A chain of events that had begun in 1565 with a thwarted ritual of gift exchange thus ended in 1628 with a ritual of violent military and linguistic overthrow.

That Louis XIII and his interlocutors would choose to devote twenty-four lines of the summation of this all-important document to a frontal attack on a Rochelais Huguenot historian in exile is evidence enough not only that southwestern Huguenot historiography was read in court circles but also of how serious a threat to historical memory the crown took it to be. Clearly, Louis’s historians (under the influence of Richelieu’s developing mercantilist policies) were writing in 1628 not only for domestic consumption but also for a growing transatlantic audience—particularly in England, Holland, Germany, *and* the rapidly expanding colonial extensions of the former two countries (as well as New France)—which hosted the refugees and might be misled by their historians. Southwestern Huguenot historiography and the history of the dispersion—of which Louis’s unnamed historian was surely a part—cannot be considered separately from that of the New World, and particularly, beginning much earlier than the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, from that of the colonial American transatlantic experience.

As the French crown clearly understood, historians of southwestern France tradi-

tionally wrote their histories with reference to Atlantic history and culture, which is to say bound up with the history of outsiders (or “strangers”) and not the French territorial state. This was especially so after 1628, when it fell to the oral and material history of the mainly agrarian and artisanal survivors from the Saintonge hinterlands—along with a few surviving Rochelais mercantile families—to labor to reconstitute memory in the remainder of their world, decimated by war and a culture of reciprocal violence since the sixteenth century. For many, the place where this process of reconstitution took place was ultimately in the New World. Ironically, even while the fortress was destroyed and its population of 27,000 all but exterminated or otherwise depleted in 1628, the structures of escape for survivors in the Saintonguais hinterland to the New World—a strong regional source of refugees for the colonial American dispersion—followed old trade routes to the North Atlantic, set up sometimes centuries earlier by La Rochelle merchants. Moreover, as early as the 1560s, Saintonguais historians began to write histories of the long period of Huguenot military defeat and destruction of the temples, which led to the secret and highly risky assemblies of the *désert*, a sort of internal exile. These texts suggest that the Huguenots of Aunis–Saintonge, sometimes long before the time of their physical dispersion, saw themselves to be standing literally at the nexus of Revelation and Genesis. These strangers in their own land occupied sacred space at the beginning of the end of one world, as harbingers of final things, and at the initiation of another, New World experience, while still in situ in France. Given the reality of the apocalyptic context in Saintonge, and the traditional links between the Protestant southwest and Atlantic history and culture, it should be remembered that these were, for the Huguenots, actual as well as metaphorical spaces.⁷⁵ This was especially true of southwestern Huguenot artisans.

• Building with the Destroyer •

All those who seek to generate metals by fire wish to build with the
destroyer. —BERNARD PALISSY, *Discours admirables* (1580)

There is strong archeological evidence—some of it quite recent—that links the beginnings of what I have called the New World historiography of sixteenth-century Saintonge with the complex material life of gifts and gift production, and especially with the Huguenot potter, natural philosopher, alchemist, lay minister, *and* local historian Bernard Palissy of Saintes.⁷⁶ We shall see in chapter 2 how Palissy’s essay “History of the Church of Saintes” (1563) depicted the “beginnings” of the “Primitive Church” of Saintonge, in both the spiritual and the material senses, as a New World Church. The reader will recall that the progress through the southwest that brought the cortège of Charles IX, the queen mother, and Anne de Montmorency to La Rochelle in 1565 to

receive the gift of the fortress's heart, also stopped in Saintes, where Palissy was introduced to his future patron, Catherine de Médicis, the regent. Saintes was an important town on the itinerary, in part because of its evocative Gallo-Roman ruins, but mostly because Montmorency, Palissy's principal patron, was its royal governor.

What were the extraordinarily complex patronage, artisanal, and scientific relationships that linked the fate of the autodidactic Palissy, arguably one of the most prominent and, if his leveler rhetoric is to be believed, anti-aristocratic and anti-Catholic heretics in the region, with the same royal cast of characters that treated the disloyal Rochelais with such complete disdain? As we shall see in subsequent chapters, Palissy's life and work were a masterpiece of the successful use of "insinuation" and of multiple, dissonant allegiances, tactics that the majority of Rochelais were unable (or unwilling) to put into practice systematically in either 1565 or 1627. Palissy managed to engage in precisely the sort of secretive and subversive activities that Louis XIII's "Relation" denounced, but only with the connivance of the court.

In 1562, as the first of eight civil wars of religion between the Catholic majority and followers of the "lutherien et calvinien" heresy consumed southwestern France in a frenzy of confessional violence, Palissy secreted himself inside a fortified laboratory hidden in a tower among the parapets of Saintes, read the German-Swiss natural philosopher and mystical alchemist Paracelsus and the Book of Revelation, and conducted clandestine experiments in his alchemic furnace and pottery kiln. Palissy later claimed, in a narrative of the war in Saintonge, that these panicked experiments resulted in the covert "invention" of ceramic glazes of such astonishing color and translucency that they were mistakenly perceived to have been made in the "bowels" of the earth and not by man. Palissy's life was shaped by the long period of confessional violence that preceded the wars of religion (1562–1598), and then by the wars themselves, which, as we have seen, were sometimes interrupted by short periods of "pacification," when less overt forms of persecution and intolerance were practiced by whatever group of combatants was temporarily in the ascendant in contested regions such as Saintonge. This horrific experience of utter chaos and entropy was shared by everyone who lived in the southwest of France, especially in the valleys of the Charente and Gironde and in the coveted salt marshes along the Atlantic coast of Saintonge. Luther's Germanic critique of the Roman Church resonated powerfully in La Rochelle—the region's metropolis and entrepôt—and tensions peaked throughout the region after 1534, when the Roman Catholic mass was openly denounced by Huguenot polemicists in Paris during the "Affair of the Placards," an event that merged seamlessly with the publication, in 1536, of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Just five years later, a highly disciplined theocracy was established in Geneva, under Calvin and Théodore de Bèze, to challenge Rome's status as Christ's holy city on earth.⁷⁷ Despite having voiced his early conversion to the Huguenot cause—an admission that compelled the

local Inquisition to bend dangerously in his direction, nearly taking his life—Palissy’s artisanal skills as a self-proclaimed “inventor” of “rustic figures” also caught the attention of the powerful Pons family, leaders of the Protestant nobility of the sword in the coastal province of Saintonge, and ultimately of the Constable of France himself.

Even with such influential patronage from local Protestant leaders, the potter had only a limited degree of personal protection from the Catholic authorities and the *marechaussee* (rural police) in Saintes and Bordeaux. Like so many of his co-religionists in La Rochelle’s hinterland, he despaired over his sudden vulnerability. Having seen so many Huguenots die, like the exiled ministers of La Rochelle who preached against the violent attacks on Protestants during times of “pacification,” he became consumed with thoughts of violent death and premature endings. From that moment on, the potter had embarked on a lonely and, from his perspective, heroic struggle to decode the sacred meaning of such violence in the materials of his own life and, by extension, in the French Reformation as well.

Nevertheless, shortly thereafter, this particular heretic’s unique skills in artisanry and self-promotion gave his life value to certain powerful members of the nobility. In time, Palissy’s survival was to become useful to the sometimes equally vulnerable court of Charles IX, then in the process of trying to solidify its unsteady control over the state. The potter’s reputation as a maker of “rustic figures” and naturalistic ceramic grottoes had reached Paris through Montmorency. There, his work excited the demand for novelty at this fragile but ambitious court—which found ceramic (and hence cheap) novelties enormously useful as courtly gifts in a patronage system that relied on gift exchange as an indispensable component of political culture—and, ultimately, Palissy managed to achieve a grant of royal protection from the queen mother, Catherine de Médicis, through the offices of Montmorency, thus linking the potter with two of the greatest contemporary producers and consumers of gifts. The Constable used a tiny portion of his store of personal and financial capital in the region of Saintonge and extricated Palissy from a potentially deadly inquest by the *parlement* of Bordeaux in 1563, which enabled the ruthlessly self-interested Catherine to invite the potter to Paris sometime between 1565 and 1567, where Palissy, now in debt for his life to two of the leading anti-Calvinists in France, set up a kiln and alchemical laboratory. Having depended on powerful patrons to survive both the war in Saintonge and the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in Paris (which followed Catherine’s approval of the assassination in 1572, of the Huguenot leader and New World projector Admiral Gaspard de Coligny), the potter continued his risky double life as a creature of the Catholic nobility and a pious Calvinist. He outlived his resourcefulness as an “inventor” in the late 1590s and finally succumbed to the vicious factionalism of French court politics. Palissy’s long life ended in the Bastille at the turn of the seventeenth century; he was an unrepentant old heretic whose religious errors were tolerated while his skills

and courtly taste for appropriation of the “rustic” style (with which he was personally identified) lasted in Paris.

Art historians cite Palissy as a major figure in production of innovative ceramics during the French Renaissance. At the same time, he has been of interest to the history of science since at least the nineteenth century, having written two significant (if relatively minor) treatises on artisanry and natural philosophy. Most important for our purposes here, Palissy was concerned with the symbiotic—indeed cosmological—relation he perceived to exist between the universal practices of pottery production and the invention of ceramic glazes in the kiln, agriculture, and the earth’s internal production of geological specimens. That is why Palissy’s books and artifacts were understood by him to take the form of natural histories of words and things; that is to say, of the mingling of his experience as an artisan, natural philosopher, and Calvinist seeker. They also mapped his pilgrim’s path as he wandered through the apocalyptic religious, social, and geological landscape of sixteenth-century Saintonge. As such, they are at once religious allegories and careful archaeological inventories of collections of “artifacts” of God-in-nature, which documented an artisan’s search for hidden meanings to make sense of the chaos, instability, and fragmentation that defined his war-torn world.

To varying degrees, both Palissy’s *Recepte veritable* (La Rochelle, 1563) and *Discours admirables* (Paris, 1580) shed light on his pilgrimage in search of a personal material-holiness synthesis. In these deeply metaphysical narratives, the potter assumed the duplicitous persona of a learned but humble craftsman, a survivor who struggled heroically with heart and hands against all odds for the sake of faith, work, and the dream of tranquility. The struggle was not only to survive the effects of violence and alienation that history inflicted upon Palissy and the Huguenots of the earliest years of the *désert*, but also to manipulate effects that he perceived to occur simultaneously in Nature into the material basis for new, less vulnerable forms of social, evangelical, and material discourse. These tasks caused the potter to undertake the creation of both written and material texts drawn from his scientific and artisanal explorations of his endangered “rustic” reality at the deepest level as he meditated on the essences of life. As Palissy pursued personal salvation, he proceeded by harnessing himself physically as well as metaphorically to the alchemic process of purification of local earthy matter retrieved on furtive, solitary walks through the isolated tidal salt marshes of the Atlantic coast and the mudflats of the Charente River Valley of Saintonge. Here the potter labored with the specimens unearthed to comprehend his personal history in terms of his alchemical analysis of these fragments of material life and death. Thus, it was his heightened personal understanding of what historians of early modern science now call animate materialism, and of the universality of the individual’s place in the natural world, that helped bind together Palissy’s identity as a Huguenot artisan and those of his followers in the Protestant communities of Saintonge.

Stigmatized and besieged by Catholics at every level of society as a noted member of France's most highly skilled (and hence most potentially subversive) heretical group, Palissy invented for himself the social role of a manual laborer for the earthly stabilization of the fragmented Huguenot—a kind of metaphysical fixer—amid the ruins of the fallen microcosm of the natural world. He worked to reconstruct the lost prelapsarian purity of his own soul, which, as Paracelsus's mystical writings taught him, was also inextricably linked to a process of destruction and regeneration in the macrocosm. Only after the potter's soul was thus inspired and momentarily purified—uniting microcosm and macrocosm in brief but amazingly productive “flashes” of experimentation and lucidity—could he begin to amplify this process of personal and material cleansing, to reform society and effect historical change in everyday life.

In 1580, when Palissy looked back on his violent past as a pious artisan who struggled to survive and provide a secure context for heterodoxy in Saintonge, he warned that “all those who seek to generate metals by fire wish to build with the destroyer.” In so doing, Palissy resigned himself to writing an ambivalent coda for his part in this painful historical process, one that forced open long-dormant millennial space that lay hidden in the “generative” parts of the human and earthly interior. In these secret places in natural bodies, where violence and the sacred combined to form a symbiotic whole, the Huguenot artisan thought he found the raw materials necessary to “invent” and to “build” fundamental spiritual and material change. To precipitate this process, the metals this potter excavated and fired to purify his glazes came from matter already burned and tempered in the scorched earth of sixteenth-century Saintonge. We shall see how the ambiguous meanings Palissy associated with his “rustic figures” were intended to be fluid, subtly coded, and potentially multiple, whatever his royal patrons may have had in mind; like their maker, to survive, they had to be adaptable to new audiences, contexts, and functions.

Palissy addressed a visually sophisticated audience at every level of early modern society, whose symbolic rules and emblematic structures were drawn from a noble culture that assigned great charismatic value to power created by violence. Thus, much of the communicative value of Palissy's work for the Huguenots—as self-proclaimed “victims” of that violence—lay in the artful and holy ways it represented the natural resilience and creativity of life animated by death. Palissy's figures conveyed (and at times prophesied) an artisan's material sense of his spiritual relation to Christ's sacrifice and the millennial primacy of that sacrifice as the ur-ending, which was also a beginning. As we shall see, it was in the construction of Palissy's tiny ceramic figures that the conceptual foundations necessary for the relocation of survivors to the Huguenots' new world lay. In “the *désert*,” refugee artisans constructed portable millennial spaces to secure soulful fragments of their own sacred bodies in matter saved from total annihilation by “the destroyer.” This alchemical process revealed the inner life of the pi-

ous artisan momentarily to God and his chosen community of believers, before he returned to the security of hiding again.⁷⁸ Mutable experience such as this, absolutely integral to the Huguenots' mobile nature as a diasporic culture, seemed to defy mapping by simple geographic boundaries. Thus, the Huguenots' New World would be located on both sides of the Atlantic. The basic conditions for the existence of this New World artisanal culture were certainly available to Palissy and his followers in Saintonge by the 1560s, at the same time that the first Huguenot refugees from southwestern France settled in the Western Hemisphere.

I shall now begin to show the process by which Bernard Palissy associated himself and his community of Huguenot craftsmen with a very specific millennial and artisanal epistemology based on practical experience with Nature and agriculture, which he (and other natural philosophers) developed out of a syncretic reading of Scripture, the Apocrypha, and Paracelsus (among much else). Palissy was, in fact, a first-generation French Paracelsian, which led him to present himself to Catherine and the court in Paris as a "rustic artisan without learning" and a producer of marvels. It was in this rhetorical guise—a standard persona of self-effacement adopted by Paracelsian artisans—that Palissy constructed the grotto for Catherine in the Tuileries.

Cultural historians of the Renaissance are familiar with much of Palissy's artisanal production, which goes beyond the famous grottoes to include ewers, platters, and rustic figurines, often "live cast" from natural specimens to give the appearance of having been cut out of the Saintongeais salt marshes; portable earthenware microcosms to house tiny plants and animals captured, undisturbed, in the middle of everyday life. But it was not until 1986 that another facet of Palissy's artisanal life was uncovered, when archaeological excavation of his house, atelier, and furnace beneath the cour du Carrousel in Paris (during construction of the new I. M. Pei entrance to the Louvre Museum) revealed that Palissy was also working—indeed, may have established a sort of factory—to produce numerous ceramic medallions with images of noble patrons cast on their surfaces, such as the one of his patron Anne de Montmorency (fig. 1.1). Are these archeological fragments surviving examples of the ceramic gifts Palissy produced for powerful patrons to circulate among their clientage networks as visible emblems of a creature's belonging and loyalty? Most Renaissance medallions were originally cast in bronze, and indeed virtually every design for Palissy's medallions can be traced to bronze prototypes. But bronze was expensive, so some were cast in cheaper lead. Ultimately, Palissy experimented with enameled clay as the cheapest substitute of all—yet, in this potter's workshop, fired clay was an alchemical material that had already achieved the highest spiritual status, to which base lead could as yet merely aspire.⁷⁹ Because he was called to Paris to construct Catherine's grotto in the Tuileries in 1565, and construction was still under way in 1572, his patron spared his life in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, when many of Palissy's artisanal and scientific co-



FIGURE 1.1. Bernard Palissy and workshop, lead-glazed earthenware medallion of Constable Anne de Montmorency, Paris, ca. 1565–67. 5.1 cm in diameter. Courtesy Musée national de la Renaissance—Château d'Ecouen.

hort perished. But the self-dramatizing and innovative heretic survived many years after the completion of this commission, in large part, I would argue, on the basis of his ability as a gift-maker. What we know about the pervasiveness, as well as the structure and function of clientage networks, suggests the centrality of the courtly practice of gift-giving. Hence, by extension, gift-making was an enormous enterprise, in the *material* sense, in the early modern Atlantic world.⁸⁰ Surely it would have been a substantial political and economic asset to possess as one's creature a notable and prolific producer of relatively inexpensive, fashionable gifts, such as Bernard Palissy, that rare artisan whose work was recognized instantly, signifying, with powerful immediacy, the sophisticated "rusticity" of urbane patrons in court circles.⁸¹

How then, in the end, does one begin to determine the meaning of such gifts as understood by the artisans who made them, as well as the audience that received them, inasmuch as evidence suggests that the southwestern Huguenot culture that survived

and whose members dispersed as refugees in the American diaspora was largely artisanal? Of the Rochelais maker of Charles's silver and gold basin we know nothing, except what local historians say about his lost product, and that he was presumably a Huguenot. But, as we shall see, Palissy clearly declared his allegiance to a natural philosophical system that stressed hierarchies of meaning encoded in a sort of material literacy: the primacy of a hidden, interior world—the world of the spiritual heart—over the “dead letter” of inanimate appearances. A master of Arcère's art of political insinuation, Palissy privileged the material basis of craft before its surface iconography. To rephrase as a question an idea borrowed from the anthropologist James C. Scott: how do historians read the “hidden transcripts” that informed Palissy's life and the “invention” (his own word) of his craft in Saintonge?⁸² Palissy's ceramic “transcripts” carried messages into the households of patrons. He was above all a master craftsman, but he was also a teacher and a lay evangelist. Other artisans and clients were meant to receive and replicate material messages as well, even in New York, where southwestern Huguenot makers of leather chairs and merchants followed similar artifactual strategies.

Palissy was, therefore, an artisan and scientist who used the most portable tools and skills available to survive the violence of the civil wars of religion. His primary tool of survival was his physical and craft mobility, which enabled the potter and many thousands of other refugee Huguenot artisans to escape persecution by relocating elsewhere in the Atlantic world. Palissy's written texts and material artifacts tell us in no uncertain terms that his understanding of materials and glazes was inextricably intertwined with his historical status as a Huguenot living and working at what to him was the end of time. What millennial messages and personal expectations were contained and circulated in Palissy's gift medallions, which were applied as ornaments to other ceramic forms from his workshop, or worn like pendants over the hearts of royalist recipients?⁸³ The lessons of La Rochelle's exposed heart were not lost on the “humble” potter from Saintes. To craft frontal resistance may have been the strategy of an impregnable stone fortress heading for destruction after its decision to join Condé's military and political alliance in 1568. But Palissy and his artisan followers on the Saintongeais periphery knew that they were too insignificant and vulnerable to adopt Condé's medieval *noblesse d'épée* security program: an outdated and one-dimensional strategy that the potter would discredit as unfit and in need of reform. That is why, when Palissy was appropriated to Paris as a refugee from religious violence in Saintonge, in order to enter court life as a gift-maker for the same royal household that, at that exact moment, was subverting ritual offerings of fealty made by his brethren in La Rochelle, it seems reasonable to ask: what, in the *material* sense, was this artisan's understanding of the multiple languages of appropriation? In other words, who was appropriating whom?