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Fortress of the Soul

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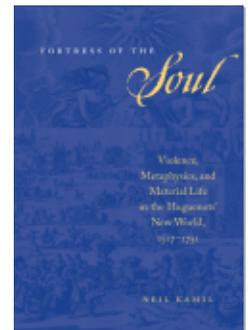
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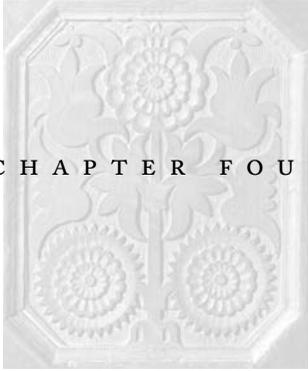
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C H A P T E R F O U R

War and *Sûreté*

The Context of Artisanal Enthusiasm in Aunis-Saintonge

Reformation culture in southwestern France cannot be defined regionally by Genevan sacerdotalism or the conservative political and military apparatus of La Rochelle's orthodox Consistory. Just such a monolithic definition of religious practice in southwestern France has resulted in the automatic juxtaposition of conservative urban southwestern French Huguenot culture with the radical rural southeast. Lay religiosity, theatrical mysticism, and militant radicalism were well known in the southeast, and southwestern French Protestantism owed formative debts to the noble military culture and orthodox Genevan theological aspirations of La Rochelle. Yet the evidence suggests a more ambiguous landscape. A complex religious legacy was carried by Huguenot refugees from southwestern France out into the Atlantic world.

Under the pressure of civil war, spatial tensions between the southwest's dispersed rural population and its centralized medieval fortress system limited consistorial control or influence over Protestant culture on La Rochelle's Saintongeais periphery. As Bernard Palissy's artisanal theory of *sûreté* and the history of Saintes demonstrates, rural violence made a decentralized "system" based on the necessity of military, religious, and political autonomy from the La Rochelle core available nearly a century before 1628. When La Rochelle fell, this "rustic" system was flourishing among Huguenots in nearly all the agricultural and artisanal hamlets of the Charente River Valley and the isolated islands and marshlands along the coast. Patterns of autonomy revealed an artisanal outlook on religiosity that was rooted in rustic lay enthusiasm, and com-

bined *sûreté* and animate materialism with local interpretation of the great Reformation writers, led by Luther and Calvin, as well as Paracelsian alchemy and natural philosophy. Saintongeais spiritual experience was informed by Geneva, which sponsored the diffusion of Calvin's reading of biblical exegesis and sacramental history into the region.

"Pure doctrine" was provided directly by an itinerant such as Philibert Hamelin or under the auspices of the La Rochelle Consistory. Yet rustic experience was isolated and so sometimes in tension with Genevan or Rochelais discipline. Rustic autonomy and power provided a structure to ensure the continuity of lay practice *after* 1628 in the absence of consistorial protection, guidance, and interference, and in the face of growing pressure from absolutism's law-enforcement apparatus. Defeat and genocide in 1628 broke the power of the fortress-based Genevan Reformation in Aunis, and for Saintongeais Protestantism, this signified the permanent institution of lay, informal, personal, and clandestine measures of spiritual and material security, adopted in times of confessional violence on the Rochelais' periphery since the 1550s.

❧ *Parlement* and Consistory in Aunis-Saintonge ❧

Every history of southwestern France must confront 1628. With a few notable exceptions, most Reformation histories that consider the "oppressed" southwestern Huguenots take the dramatic siege of La Rochelle as their starting point. But this is to begin with an ending so overwhelming that the event inevitably obscures both its own significance and the quest to see the process of local cultural adaptation to royal power over time clearly. The year 1628 has come to signify the moment that punctuated and finally defined the region's historical sensibilities. Yet if we look first at the previous century, we find the formative period that suffused this famous event with the power it has come to hold to convey such a prophetic sense of reversal and doom for the future of Protestantism in the early modern transatlantic world.

Étienne Trocmé knew this and was devoted to the reconstruction of La Rochelle's most vibrant period of conversion and Reform before the "end times" that accompanied "its resounding fall in 1628."¹ For Trocmé, 1628 was a vulgar anticlimax to a far more nuanced historical drama. In a seminal article that appeared in 1952 and laid the groundwork for future studies of the Rochelais Reformation before 1628, Trocmé, himself a minister and descendant of seventeenth-century Huguenots, had straightforward archival explanations for the dearth of La Rochelle's history before the siege. Between—and probably during—the two regional catastrophes of 1628 and 1685, substantial sections of the official archive that documented Rochelais society in acts of rebellion was lost. All that remains of the voluminous archives of the Corps de ville, also metaphorically, the "mémoire de ville," are several *registres*. It was no coincidence that

the archives of the Consistory of La Rochelle—the ruling body of its independent theocracy—were also reduced to manuscript fragments and “some debris.”² Additions to the archival record have been found in bits and pieces since Trocmé completed his work, but this abrupt erasure left a gap in the Reformation and Civil War historiography of La Rochelle that paralleled the strangulation of the living voices of oral history in Palissy’s region.³

Trocmé began the task of circumventing the absence of these elusive materials by supplementing the remaining ones with ancillary archival and other primary documentation—much of this discovered outside the region—for the crucial years 1558 to 1628.⁴ Read together with lay (i.e., nonecclesiastical) history that he ignored for lack of interest (he dismissed Palissy as “infantile”), Trocmé’s early observations on the Rochelais Consistory and politics have profound implications for assessing regional behavior patterns for Protestant culture in retreat into the Atlantic world both before and after 1628. Trocmé did not plead the case for La Rochelle’s Huguenots as brave fighters for religious freedom and heroic victims of the voracious statism of Richelieu and Louis XIII, but instead scrupulously reconstructed his Reformation and civil war ancestors as opportunistic victimizers *themselves*. Rochelais Huguenot leaders were intent on systematic and brutally repressive hegemony. Militant Calvinists wrested power from their “mediocre” Catholic opponents and Huguenot supporters of the crown’s interest with ruthless political skill.⁵

Until the late 1550s, nearly forty years after Luther’s texts were first diffused to Aunis-Saintonge, and seventeen years after Calvin’s appeared there, Rochelais Huguenots remained little more than a small if growing minority sect, composed mainly of disaffected intellectuals: low-ranking regular clergy, monastics like Luther (Augustinians in particular), printers and booksellers, and regents as well as the regular faculty of La Rochelle’s municipal schools, who taught Protestantism to their students. In La Rochelle, as elsewhere in France, the earliest heretics were from institutions at the core of the old Church scholasticism.⁶ At the same time, Protestantism began to attract an inclusive cross-section of social and occupational groups in the fortress. La Rochelle’s was neither a proletarian nor a mercantile revolution. Rather, it soon engulfed the entire city. Judith Pugh Meyer’s study of La Rochelle’s economic status and of the occupational distribution of heresy within the fortress concludes: “Though La Rochelle was not insulated from social and economic change, the Reformation’s success in the city was not precipitated by social or economic dislocation. Similarly, political divisions and dissention do not provide an explanation, since the Reformation attracted numerous converts from every occupation involved in internal political conflict.”⁷

Yet the contentious story of La Rochelle’s municipal gift to Charles IX in 1565 shows that inclusiveness did not mean consensus. Factionalism was endemic well beyond

1568, when La Rochelle allied itself with Prince Louis de Condé's militant Huguenot nationalist cause. Even then, dominance was achieved and maintained through dramatic demographic change. Rochelais Catholics were banished from the fortress or stifled criticism for fear of reprisal. Reformed heterodoxy remained strong despite the ministry's best efforts, and in 1562 and then 1572, the city's population of militant Huguenots was augmented further by a steady influx of refugees from north of the Loire, after having been politicized by violence in the first civil war of religion and the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre.

There is no doubt however, that the Rochelais Reformation was fostered and maintained through its conflation in the public mind with the ancient tradition of privileges that gave La Rochelle its roiling confluence of civic autonomy and private interest. Rochelais memory of the city's autonomous privileges was grafted over time onto the increasingly coherent body of Protestant belief, which was also based on autonomy from Roman ecclesiastical control, and fed by revivals whenever threats were perceived to La Rochelle's unshakeable identity of historical independence from the monarchy.⁸ A threat to La Rochelle's privileges was perceived as early as the 1540s, when the crown began to impose taxes from which the town thought it was exempt. Anger and resentment reached a fever pitch in 1542, when François I established the Gabelle in the Saintonge region. Since Rochelais merchants controlled the trade in salt, the economy of the fortress was directly threatened. Tax revolts followed. The economic component of La Rochelle's anxiety over confirmation of its civic privileges in 1565, stemmed, in part, from this quarrel with the crown.⁹ Louis-Étienne Arcère complained that "the people and the bourgeois" had initiated a campaign of "hatred—bitter fruit of civil dissensions that disturbed the harmony of the municipal government. Diverse cabals were formed against the government."¹⁰ Bourgeois and popular disenchantment with authority was directed at the local apparatus of François I's centralization program, which the "cabals" correctly perceived as dangerous threats to communal privileges. Dissension was also heightened when François I reduced the Corps de ville to only twenty *echevins*, while reserving the right to choose to mayor for himself.¹¹

François I died in 1547, and it was not until the 1550s that discontent over autonomy was overtly intertwined with religious reform. During the reign of Henri II, the dangerous atmosphere of local dissent over matters of control, authority, and privilege was charged with religious specificity for the first time. In what was an extremely threatening extension of the harsh anti-heresy policy of his *parlement* of Paris, Henri II appropriated the Corps's judicial privileges in 1551, and invested them in the *présidial*, a sovereign tribunal.¹² The threat to local Protestants from judiciary repression within the fortress walls was made palpable in 1552, when the *présidial* ordered the four standard punishments used by the *parlement* of Paris against heretics—strangulation, burning at the stake, public whipping, and banishment—read publicly into Rochelais law.¹³

To understand the enormous negative impact that the presence of the *présidial* had on the growing Rochelais Reform in 1551–52, consider that Henri II intended it to function as a lesser *parlement*. *Parlements* were very effective in curbing heresy within their local jurisdictions. Philip Benedict explains this pattern in his analysis of Civil War Rouen:

Rouen was also a major administrative center, the seat of a parlement, and such cities proved in general less receptive to the new religion than those cities where the authorities were a comfortable distance away. Most of the greatest Huguenot strongholds—La Rochelle, Montauban, Nîmes—were situated far from the watchful eyes of the local parlement, while those cities which housed high courts proved almost uniformly to be less heavily Protestant than other major towns in their resort [jurisdiction]. Often, as in the case of Paris and Toulouse, they became great bastions of Catholicism. However creaky the machinery of judicial repression might be, its presence within a city nonetheless seems to have acted as a brake on the development of Protestantism. And so it is not surprising that, no matter what success the movement might attain within Rouen and how menacing it might appear at times, Protestantism would never attain majority status. After a period of dramatic growth, the new faith was to level off in the position of an imposing but decidedly outnumbered minority.¹⁴

Under the provisions of the Edict of Fontainebleau (June 1, 1540), Aunis was technically in the jurisdiction of the *parlement* of Paris.¹⁵ Yet Paris could not realistically expect to police a jurisdiction that covered nearly one-fourth of the territory of France without delegating authority to subordinate tribunals. In practice, the *direct* authority of Paris to successfully prosecute and enforce judgments against heresy beyond the city itself ended at the northern Loire Valley. Parisian agents seldom initiated “inquiries, searches, and arrests,” south of the 100-mile stretch of the Loire between Orléans and Angers.¹⁶ Hence, Paris’s intelligence and enforcement apparatus were severely limited geographically. It was forced to rely on the “creaky machinery of repression” assigned to local *parlements*.

Until 1628, the high court for Saintonge was the *parlement* of Bordeaux, whose jurisdiction extended deep into La Rochelle’s rural hinterlands. The presence of a *parlement* in the city curtailed heresy in Bordeaux and held the line against the growth of Protestantism in Saintes. Outside Saintes’s town walls, however, in rural areas and along the coast, Bordeaux’s power to intimidate was limited by distance, isolation, and the lack of reliable paid informants. As Hamelin’s experience demonstrated, moreover, in Saintes and other isolated jurisdictions, responsibility for the capture and earliest stages of prosecution for heresy fell on local “provosts and other judges of inferior status.” Few magistrates in southwestern France prosecuted heresy with fanatical zeal on a day-to-day basis without military support from Paris. All were susceptible to lo-

cal social and political pressure, and many succumbed to heresy themselves. In 1565, Charles IX punished a royal jurist on La Rochelle's *présidial* for failing to prevent the spread of heresy.¹⁷

The need to delegate judicial authority in frontier provinces should not be mistaken for decentralization. The edict of 1540 commanded Protestants of certain ranks convicted in the provincial courts be transported to Paris for final sentencing, or if need be, execution. "By the terms of this edict," Nathanaël Weiss wrote:

clerics who had not received sacred orders, or lay people suspected of heresy, were prosecuted by the provincial authorities, either by the bishops, their vicars, or the inquisitor of the faith, or the bailiffs, prefects, or their general or particular lieutenants. Usually, the inquisitor of the faith commenced by examining the accused, and if he declared them to be heretics, they were tried first in the original jurisdiction, [but] only up until the point of a definitive sentence or torture. . . . The right to pronounce the final sentence belonged to the *parlement* alone. The accused and their trial transcripts were thus sent to Paris—at the bishop's expense—and a special court was instituted there for the purpose of interrogating them, in order to decide if a new inquest was warranted, and ultimately to pass final judgment without hope of further appeal.¹⁸

Although Henri charged the *présidial* with powers of judicial repression usually reserved for *parlements*, its installation in La Rochelle did not stem the tide of heresy (as Benedict reports high courts accomplished elsewhere). Rather, the *présidial* had the opposite effect. This innovation from Paris was considered a radical and illegal abridgment of ancient privileges. Municipal anxieties over the corrupting presence of a royal judiciary in the fortress itself were harnessed to a growing desire for the purity of primitive religious autonomy from ecclesiastical interference. Isolated within a hostile community, the *présidial* was undermined by local opposition backed up by La Rochelle's military strength, which was magnified by isolation from the main roads to Paris, a two-week journey on horseback for royal forces had they been sent to intervene.¹⁹ Hence, the *présidial* could not count on timely, sustained enforcement. "Situated at the periphery of the kingdom," Louis Pérouas has observed, "La Rochelle found itself outside the great axis of road traffic." The port was its means of commerce and communication, and "it opened on the Atlantic." The French interior remained sealed against large-scale intervention.²⁰ The orientation of the fortress changed radically only after the siege. "The secular attachment of the city to its independence practically disappeared with the capitulation," Pérouas writes. "Doleful memory of this event rendered the population docile to royal power."²¹ La Rochelle's *présidial* ultimately combined with the *présidiaux* of Poitiers and Angers and consolidated the reach of the *parlement* of Paris into southwestern France.²²

Much has been written by both European and American historians about the theol-

ogy of orthodox Calvinism and the association of its leaders with a rigid, patriarchal, and hierarchized social armature. Yet, for Meyer, “the strongest clue to Protestantism’s initial attraction comes from the Rochelais’ religious and ecclesiastical experience, particularly their strong sense of lay independence from ecclesiastical authority. The Rochelais had worked for centuries to free themselves from ecclesiastical taxes and ecclesiastical influence in municipal affairs.”²³

Kevin C. Robbins’ masterful reconstruction of La Rochelle’s history from the perspectives of families with conflicting religious, economic, and political interests builds powerfully on Meyer’s work. Robbins dismisses the consistory’s disciplinary program, arguing the Genevans were disdained as foreigners and overwhelmed by popular religious practice. Hence, more local and factional than Genevan, La Rochelle’s was not a conservative Reformation. While lay authority was strong in theory and practice, one must be careful not to overstate the case as the Rochelais Reformation progressed into the late 1550s and the Consistory began to play a more active role inside the walls. Give and take should not be confused with the sort of rustic dominance “from below” that was practiced by Palissy and his lay followers, and described vividly in Saintes’s history in the *Recepte*. Lay influence checked abuses of Calvinist sacerdotalism, and La Rochelle’s ministers could be harried by challenges from their congregations, but at the same time, the Consistory was dedicated to order and control. It tried, with limited success, to assert a ministerial hierarchy as doctrinaire as—and identical in its social and political interests to—its displaced Catholic predecessors.²⁴ In the absence of consistorial archives, it is difficult to assess the extent to which discipline had proved effective against Protestant latitudinarianism and heterodoxy. We do know, however, that between the first great period of conversion, beginning in 1558, and the siege of 1627, the Rochelais Consistory pursued its “task as the defender of the pure doctrine” of Calvin. During that time, the Consistory pursued prosecution of Protestant heretics at La Rochelle. The Consistory’s perceived intolerance of social leveling, doctrinal dissent, licentiousness, paganism, and other disorders was very well known in the Protestant world, especially when these crimes assumed the dissident forms of heterodoxy or enthusiasm within the Reformed Church itself.²⁵ Effective or not, La Rochelle’s Consistory and defense of Genevan purity became synonymous with the city. As its international fame grew, the city retained its image as a defiant fortress of Protestant orthodoxy.

Reasons for such anxiety over internal disorder were suggested by the publication of a “list of warnings and censures” distributed by the Consistory during the first civil war, in 1562–63. This document showed equal measures of the Consistory’s fearfulness over the instability of the laity in wartime, and lack of confidence in its own dominance, as it successfully threatened the disobedient “faithful, all of whom were entirely free to return to Catholicism the next day.”²⁶ While Trocmé tries to moderate this view of an oppressive Consistory by balancing its “severity” against what he calls its “pa-

tience and prudence,” as the ministry struggled to consolidate power, Palissian lay enthusiasm lay claim to the hinterlands, where it could flourish (although still at risk from *both* the Rochelais Consistory and the *parlement* of Bordeaux). The suppressive impulse of the Rochelais Consistory vis-à-vis unorthodox co-religionists in Saintonge was structurally analogous to that of its institutional opposite, the *parlement* of Bordeaux.

Palissy is a perfect example of the sort of Protestant against whom both the regional *parlement* and the Rochelais Consistory would take severe repressive measures given the opportunity. Setting aside the content of his written work for the moment, Palissy was an alternately secretive and bellicose man. He was equally capable of rebelling against either confession, and he found himself facing Catholic and Protestant authorities on charges of heresy or heterodoxy several times. Palissy’s name came before the *parlements* of Guyenne (1558), Bordeaux (1563), and finally Paris (1587–8). Though a warrant for his arrest was handed down at Guyenne, there is no record of a trial. However, Palissy was tried twice for heresy, in Bordeaux and Paris. He survived Bordeaux with the help of Montmorency, but the Paris trial proved fatal, because Catherine de Médicis, his last great patron and protector, died in Blois on January 6, 1589, just after Palissy was condemned to death for heresy, but before he was sent to the Bastille.²⁷

Meanwhile, after Palissy and his family fled Paris for Sedan in 1572 as refugees from the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, he appeared before Sedan’s Protestant Consistory on six occasions on charges ranging from family squabbles to acts of rebelliousness. The most revealing appearances occurred on three occasions in the summer of 1575, when he was charged with creating a “scandal” with “habitual scenes and insolent behavior.” Confrontation escalated to such a degree that the Consistory finally “cut M[aster] Bernard off from the Lord’s Supper for his rebellion, and the cause will be declared publicly the day of the Lord’s Supper during sermon.”²⁸ With his leveler’s attitude of rebelliousness against established authority, it is little wonder that Palissy did not join the thousands of other refugees who fled to La Rochelle after 1572. History and personal experience with the Rochelais Consistory had taught the potter how risky rebellious behavior was for outside in the fortress, particularly in wartime.²⁹ For its part, the Consistory never welcomed him with open arms. Palissy balanced opportunity against risk and went back to his royal patrons in Paris, where he reestablished his workshop and laboratory on the left bank in 1576. He decided that returning to a city purged of Huguenots was preferable to life in either La Rochelle or Sedan.

❁ Jean de Léry, Palissy, and La Rochelle in 1558; ❁
or, A Corrupted New World Fortress

I walked up the Avenida Rio-Branco, once a site occupied by Tupinamba villages, but in my pocket I carried Jean de Léry, the anthropologist’s

breviary. . . . Henceforth, it will be possible to bridge the gap between the two worlds. Time, in an unexpected way, has extended its isthmus between life and myself; twenty years of forgetfulness were required before I could establish communion with my earlier experience, which I had sought the world over without understanding its significance or appreciating its essence.

—CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS, *Tristes tropiques*

Rochelais Protestants were all influenced powerfully by the preaching of Pierre Richier, who had sailed west with Jean de Léry.³⁰ Now both had returned from their failed expedition to colonize Brazil, a Huguenot experiment to advance a systematic plan for settlement in the Americas. Richier returned to La Rochelle, and Léry migrated to another famously ill-fated Huguenot fortress town—Sancerre—by way of Geneva. Admiral Coligny’s colonization project of the 1550s was in retreat, and for many Calvinists, the Huguenot *places de sûreté*—La Rochelle and the less well fortified Sancerre, among others—became the French Reformation’s last hopes of surviving the wars of religion. The Huguenots would not be able to colonize the New World in large numbers until the seventeenth century, when Dutch and English settlements in North America served as their hosts.

Although contention over municipal privilege, the history of the city’s autonomy, and possession of an impregnable fortress were crucial factors, the Reformation in La Rochelle must be framed as a religious process in which the desire for the militant revival of primitive Christianity was paramount. This was the primary agency of change and conversion for the majority of Huguenots in the fortress. La Rochelle’s Protestant Consistory came to power during a religious revival that began in 1558 and was initiated by two Huguenot ministers: the itinerant Charles de Claremont, and the well-traveled Richier, “dit de l’Isle.” Trained in Geneva, the latter was both a formidable theologian and a seasoned adventurer. He had returned to take up the pulpit in La Rochelle after surviving the joint Huguenot and Catholic expedition to colonize Brazil, which had unraveled in chaos, violence, and mutual hatred in 1558. The Brazil expedition was made famous by Richier’s friend and co-religionist Jean de Léry’s account of it. Since Richier was above all associated with the revival of 1558–59 that dismantled the old Catholic order in La Rochelle, how did the Huguenot transatlantic experience inform and contextualize the Rochelais Reformation? Can this process advance our understanding of the concept of artisanal security as a seminal component of New World historiography?³¹

Palissy’s syncretism of artisanal and natural philosophy in the rustic cosmology of the “paysan de Xaintonge” is strikingly similar to that of his Burgundian contemporary de Léry (1534–1611). The famous Huguenot ethnographer was also a Geneva-trained minister, New World traveler, the survivor and historian-witness of famine and

cannibalism during the royal siege in 1573 of the Protestant fortress at Sancerre and, though the fact is often overlooked, a master shoemaker. As the complete title of de Léry's influential history of Brazil makes clear, a formidable natural philosophical agenda was the primary focus of his *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil, autrement dite Amérique. Contentant la navigation, & choses remarquables, veuës sur la mer par l'auteur: le comportement de Villegagnon, en ce pais la. Les meurs & façons de viure estranges des sauuages ameriquains: avec vn colloque de leur langage. Ensemble la description de plusieurs animaux, arbres, herbes, & autres choses singulieres, & du tout inconues par deça*. . . . When the *Histoire* was published in Lyon in 1578—nearly two decades after the Brazil expedition—Palissy's *Recepte* had been in circulation for fifteen years.

The rich historical, cultural, and textual implications of de Léry's artisanal origins are mentioned only by way of passing in recent scholarly readings. This reflects a certain disciplinary bias. Frank Lestringant, a comparative historian who specializes in the literature of the early modern French transatlantic world, devalues the natural philosophical significance of Léry's *History* as wholly derivative of the Franciscan André Thevet, his fierce religious and intellectual rival. Thevet preceded Léry to Brazil, and he was the first to publish a comprehensive ethnography of the Tupinikin Indians of the southern coastal region in *Les Singularitez de la France antarctique, autrement nommée Amérique* (1558). Two years later, Thevet expanded upon his early observations in his influential *Cosmographie universelle* (1575). "The interest of Léry's work," Lestringant argues, is not natural-philosophical discourse. It "lies, rather, in the gaze and the conscience that emerge in the face of the other, in the course of an arduous ocean voyage that takes the narrator into the midst of naked and cannibalistic peoples."³²

No one would dispute the significance of de Léry's contribution to early American ethnography, yet the dismissive reading of de Léry's authorial voice as merely derivative, without fully exploring the meaning of that word, represents a lost opportunity. To pursue debate on this problem is not my task here. I would suggest, however, that this Huguenot's natural-philosophical gaze into the face of America and its aboriginal people was deeply textured by his own artisanal experience. De Léry himself underscores this point, particularly when his ethnographic curiosity focuses on Tupinikin craftsmanship and materials, an interest that was shared and further elucidated by Claude Lévi-Strauss, who claimed de Léry as his direct emotional and intellectual ancestor.³³ Thus, while de Léry scholarship has emerged mostly from the perspectives of comparative literature and anthropology, surprisingly, de Léry remains all but invisible in the history of science, a fluid discipline that has found intensive textual, biographical, and ethnographic analysis of early modern artisans, artisanry, and artisanal materials—termed "manual philosophy" or the "mechanical arts"—to be a fruitful field of inquiry. Paolo Rossi's observations on the stake of the history of science in the "cultural significance of the mechanical arts" summarize the potential. He finds an un-

precedented rise in artisanal status and the “fusion” of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century learned and artisanal knowledge:

Juan Luis Vives in the *Diffusion of Knowledge* (*De tradendis disciplinis*, 1531) makes the statement that scholars would be well advised to study the technical methods of such trades as building, navigation, and weaving; they should, besides, observe the artisan at work and question him on the secrets of his craft. . . . Rabelais, in *The Most Fearsome Life of the Great Gargantua*, numbered among the prerequisites of a complete education the study of the artisans’ crafts. . . . This new interest in technical and mechanical methods, based on a belief in their educative powers, is typical of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The accomplishments of artisan, engineer, technician, navigator, and inventor were considered of equal importance to intellectual achievements, and Bacon, Galileo, and Harvey, among others, explicitly acknowledged their debt to the artisan. Sciences such as chemistry, mineralogy, botany, and geology thrived on the fusion of scientific and technical knowledge. Another consequence . . . was the realisation that theories should be tested before they could be accepted.³⁴

The work of early modern natural philosophers such as Vives, Bacon, and Palissy, reminds us that although the historiographical outcome of de Léry’s voyage to Brazil was one of the first Protestant natural histories of America, this was not his primary project in the New World. In 1554, de Léry was not yet sanctified as a survivor of the siege and cannibalism at the Huguenot fortress at Sancerre, which had occurred in the wake of the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre of 1572. Neither had he written his personal narrative of that experience, the *Histoire memorable du siège de Sancerre* (1573), which resonates powerfully with *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* and invites explicit comparison to the New World in comparative analysis of cannibalism and its epigrammatic sonnet, which likens Sancerre’s destruction to “l’horreur d’Amérique.”³⁵ In 1573, Sancerre had become an apocalyptic completion; a millennial event foretold by the Huguenots’ failure to expand their foothold in America and maintain the security of the fortress at Guanabara. Yet in 1554–55, de Léry was only twenty, and he had still to study theology at Geneva, where he first appears in 1559, upon his return from Brazil. De Léry was merely a colonial Huguenot artisan who, like Palissy, had turned his hand to a specific sort of labor that was at once intensely material and spiritual, with powerful debts to folkloric traditions and the printed word. The pragmatic projectors of the New World settlement were concerned, first and foremost, with recruiting and maximizing scarce colonial labor. Their assessment of de Léry’s value was based on an impressive combination of his natural-philosophical learning in “mechanical arts”—valuable in fortress construction and maintenance—devotion to evangelical Calvinism, and competence as the new colony’s master shoemaker.³⁶ De Léry’s flight to Sancerre in 1572 may also have been understood as a reaffirmation in danger-

ous times of his double identity as refugee artisan and now an ordained minister. Sancerre's fame in France for its tanning industry and the leather trades made the fortress a haven for Huguenot shoemakers.³⁷ A "humble" Huguenot artisan such as de Léry could strive for the exalted status of rustic natural philosopher, and maximize his personal spiritual power, by joining the New World settlement in Brazil. Was de Léry's narrative, wherein he helped sympathetic and pious Tupi artisans build Fort Coligny at Guanabara, based, in part, on naturalistic theories of artisanal security derived from Palissy's essay "De la ville de forteresse," which he did not read until after his return? Was Palissy's text influenced by manuscript (or oral) accounts of fortress building in Brazil that began to circulate in Saintonge in 1558, carried back by Pierre Richier? Perhaps Palissy and de Léry had converged through similar readings of Paracelsus? The rhetoric of the *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* pays homage to the Huguenot branch of the Paracelsian artisanal tradition.

An overview of key personnel involved in the Brazil project reveals significant overlaps among pivotal individuals whose names were common to Léry's and Palissy's readership, patronage, and networks of association. If books published by Léry, Theodore de Bry, Philippe du Plessis-Mornay, Urbain Chauveton, and Calvin himself formed the canon of the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century "Huguenot corpus on America," then it is appropriate to contextualize Palissy and his artisan followers in Saintonge and colonial America within this widely dispersed international community of Protestant artisans, publishers, theologians, and projectors. The civil war vanguard of the Reformation hurried to stake an intellectual claim on the New World, which was becoming a social, scientific, and cultural project of great importance. Calvin sent Richier and three other ministers to evangelize Brazil in 1554, and Léry has documented Geneva's active interest in the colony.³⁸ The "corpus" was read avidly throughout the Protestant diaspora. Nowhere were close readers more readily available than in the publishing centers of London, Geneva, Amsterdam, Leiden, and Frankfurt. Huguenot refugees fled to the entrepôts of both dispersion and the book trades, where readers actively considered the option of New World colonization.

In the late 1560s, Huguenot New World historiography began to exert profound influence on the British discourse on colonization of North America. Elizabethan projectors, particularly Richard Hakluyt, Walter Raleigh, Francis Drake, and Martin Frobisher had the books of the Huguenot frontier and New World chroniclers in their libraries.³⁹ Despite differences in state religion, it was evident to both the English and French monarchies that they shared imperial interests in restricting Spanish overseas expansion. The English in particular admired the aggressive policy vis-à-vis the Spaniards of Gaspard de Coligny's Huguenot colonization program. Coligny's initially secret Protestant sympathies emerged clearly when he became the principal backer of the Brazil colony. Huguenot writers tended to devalue the colonization potential of

the Saint Lawrence River Valley, focusing instead on the tropics (despite calling Brazil part of “France Antarctique . . . Otherwise Called America”). Staples grown in the tropics were highly valued on the world market. They were also of consuming interest to natural philosophers, as potential materials for the philosopher’s stone as well as a source of cash. Coligny’s strategy for exciting the interest of the vacillating French monarchy in the resettlement of Huguenot refugees in the Caribbean region was predicated on economic promise and the ability of his colonies to pose a real military threat to Spain’s supply of Latin American bullion.

A corollary to the Huguenot program was the colonizers’ moral imperative to convert Amerindians to Reformed Christianity, to avoid relinquishing their powerful bodies and fragile souls to corruption by Roman Catholicism, or at least to help the Americans protect their perceived Adamic primitivism from appropriation by the hated Franciscans, if conversion to the true faith proved impossible. In Brazil, the competition for conversion of the Tupi was particularly keen between Protestant and Catholic settlers. Whichever side won an alliance with the Tupi would gain strategic advantages against the other, as well as against Spanish and Portuguese invaders.

At a minimum, grudging respect for natural, if fallen, innocence (at least in the face of the less palatable Catholic alternatives) had an analogue in the rustic “paysan de Xaintonge” and resonated in sixteenth-century French Calvinist theological discourse, which focused primarily on the individual’s conversion experience. This posited a powerful relationship between conversion and the rebirth of childlike innocence, which, in turn, would lead inevitably to a general reconstitution of the primitive Church (or, as Léry would have it, “pure religion”), in a truly godly society. While it may be argued that his learned reading of “the beginning of ideology” as a consequence of the pervasive intellectual and emotional tumult experienced during the early years of the French Reformation in the crucible of religious warfare has overstated the radical origins of sixteenth-century reformed religion, Donald R. Kelley does show how “the word ‘conversion’ has been rich in signification,” and is convincing in his insistence on the stake French Calvinists had in both the transformative power of the conversion experience itself and the mythological status assigned its narrative:

It has encompassed various forms of fundamental change. . . . In individual terms it was associated with Greek ideas of repentance (*metanoia*) and the turning from evil to good (*epistrophe*), and as such it was related to the idea of conscience. In the sixteenth century the process of conversion was central to all varieties of reformed faith, for it (and not the mass or any external observance) signified the most direct encounter between humanity and divinity. . . . Not only did conversion represent the pivotal point in the experience of many persons in this age, it suggested also a basic explanation for the turn which history as a whole seemed to be taking. Most generally, in other words, the conversion experience

was connected to the idea of reform itself in its several senses of restoration, renovation, regeneration and resurrection—a vision of lost innocence recaptured. The basic text was the Pauline exhortation not to conform but to be “transformed in the newness of your minds”. Like “conscience”, then, “conversion” reflected directly and dynamically the psychological aspect of the Reformation and, elaborated in countless works of theology, history and popular literature, became one of the most powerfully transforming myths of modern times.⁴⁰

Huguenot ministers and natural philosophers sensed they need only make the Tupis conscious of the spiritual purity of their childlike innocence—which all but Reformed mankind had lost in the present age—in order to effect a conversion of the Amerindians to their true selves and the simultaneous revivification of the Huguenots’ own conversion to “newness.” Mystical and symbolic reunification of human relics of the primitive earth’s providentially rediscovered naturalistic past with heroic modern men who sought to reform the corrupting artifice of its declining old age was essential to the Huguenot transatlantic project in the 1550s.

This theme was avidly quoted in the large body of Elizabethan colonization literature. Projectors including Hakluyt and Raleigh thought ancient and natural religious affinities existed between Protestant colonists and savage man, and that conversion of the indigenous population of America should result almost spontaneously at initial contact.⁴¹ Unfortunately for Fort Coligny, both Spain and Portugal were alarmed by the French Protestants’ overt and arrogant incursions into territory claimed by Spain since 1492. They responded swiftly and with overwhelming force to the threat to assume control of the most profitable regions of the New World. The Brazil colony was lost to the Portuguese in 1560, only six years after it gained a toehold in Rio de Janeiro. De Léry blamed the invidious command of the Catholic villain of his *Histoire*, the chevalier de Villegagnon, who allowed confessional rivalry to subvert a Christian alliance to promote “the pure service of God” in the primitive world. “I will let you judge how Villegagnon, besides rebelling against the Religion [Calvinism] (contrary to his promise, which he had made before leaving France, to establish the pure service of God in that land), by abandoning the fortress to the Portuguese, gave them the occasion to make trophies of the names both of Coligny and of Antarctic France, which had been placed there,” de Léry wrote.⁴²

Coligny was also the principal name behind the rest of the hugely ambitious Huguenot colonization program between 1554 and 1565. Coligny followed the settlement of Brazil with similar efforts at Charlesfort in South Carolina and La Caroline in Florida. Like Brazil, these too ended in failure. The Florida catastrophe was particularly memorable. On September 20, 1565, when narratives of horrific acts of confessional violence were so commonplace that European readers seldom found news of

any one event particularly shocking, the Spanish commander of St. Augustine, Pedro Menendez de Abila, showed he was capable of transcending the known limits of human cruelty. Menendez marched south from his stronghold and proceeded to put a famously brutal end to Coligny's hopes for the Huguenot colonization of North America with the genocidal massacre of over a thousand purportedly sick and unarmed Calvinist colonists under the command of Jean Ribaut at La Caroline. Menendez defended his actions with a marker that claimed the "innocents" massacred at La Caroline were not women and children, only Protestants. Perhaps the notorious Menendez assumed that if given a similar opportunity, his innocent Huguenot victims would surely have perpetrated the same atrocities on their Spanish Catholic murderers.⁴³ With the end of the colonization program, Coligny returned his attention to France, converted openly to Calvinism, and led successful Huguenot military campaigns during the second and third wars of religion (1567–70).

Coligny's prestige grew after he skillfully negotiated the Peace of St. Germain in 1570, which ended the civil war and gave the Huguenots the right to maintain military garrisons in La Rochelle, as well as in the fortified towns of Montauban, Cognac, and La Cité. Yet Medician court politics (influenced by Philip II) meant that Coligny's skill and prestige made him vulnerable to assassination. On August 24, 1572, the feast of St. Bartholomew's Day, under the personal direction of the Catholic ultra leader Henri, duc de Guise (who had also supervised the massacre of 1,200 Huguenots at Vassy on March 1, 1562), and with the approval of a weak and threatened Catherine de Médicis, Coligny was murdered in Paris, triggering the massacre of the Huguenots, a bloodletting with portentous long-term effects, which quickly took on a bloody life of its own in the streets of Paris and throughout France. Following Coligny's murder, hundreds of Parisian Huguenots were massacred and their bodies thrown into the Seine. Witnesses observed Catholics roast and consume the hearts of their victims. After St. Bartholomew's Day, Pope Gregory XIII had a commemorative medal struck in Rome to celebrate the massacre.⁴⁴ Admiral Coligny was thus international Protestantism's martyr, in part to his own failed experiment to save French Huguenot culture from destruction in civil war by its relocation as a corporate body to the New World. The return of Pierre Richier and Jean de Léry to their respective Old World fortresses was the earliest result of that transatlantic failure. Brazil had fallen as a result of internal religious dissention and external military force.

Beyond the enduring memory of Coligny's martyrdom, the bloody failures of the Huguenot colonization project of the 1550s and 1560s caused cosmological shifts in the Reform movement as it emerged from the first three civil wars in southwestern France. Inhabiting a centrifugal, frontier region with a great naval tradition on the far edge of a mostly landlocked monarchy, La Rochelle's merchant-*armateurs* and the mariners of Saintonge's coastal islands were at the forefront of transatlantic expansion from New

France to the French Antilles and Brazil.⁴⁵ The end of Fort Coligny—which came into being as a result of the Huguenot quest for extraterritorial refuge—caused French Protestant artisans and natural philosophers, including the returning de Léry, to reevaluate old security methods and technologies. Palissy’s “De la ville de forteresse,” read in this context in 1563, provided innovative alternatives to the traditional modes of colonization, at least as it was practiced within the medieval long march and fortress culture in which Coligny, Condé, and the Huguenot noble military leadership had been trained.

The removal of the colonization option meant that southwestern Huguenots would now be forced to become more dependent than ever on this outmoded system of internal fortresses—*places de sûreté*—for personal and corporate security. After the shocking failure of Coligny’s military colonies in Brazil and Florida, and with civil war beginning again, the future of the French Reformation was very much in doubt. The development of new modes of security had become a central issue for international Protestantism. Exploration of a new sort of settlement in the Atlantic world had to be considered if cultural death were to be avoided, and the discourses on artisanal security in “De la ville de forteresse,” which reimagined the Huguenots’ new world in “end times,” absent medieval fortresses, were thus particularly timely.

Palissy’s essay derived from his artisanal experience with manipulation of natural and alchemic material in spiral form. It demonstrated his agenda that French Calvinists must now learn to innovate on the fly, with available materials, to master change on the basis of experience, spirit, industriousness, and dissimulation. Had recent history not shown that it was too risky to follow “ancient” regional traditions by continuing to fashion southwestern Huguenot self-protection based on the survival of a unique eleventh-century fortress at La Rochelle? What had once been the most palpable evidence of the region’s autonomy and its power to dissent from both Paris and Rome was redefined by Palissy at the last stages of Coligny’s colonization program as a threat to the continued existence of Protestant culture in France and the world. Fort Coligny’s failure in Brazil was only the most recent example of the vulnerability of the fortress as a system of security.

Unlike many Calvinist colleagues in the crafts and sciences, Palissy survived the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre unharmed when he escaped to Sedan. He was spared Coligny’s fate because he was still Catherine’s valued creature, and he remained in her employ at the Tuilleries. Palissy undoubtedly mourned Coligny, as had most Huguenots in the 1570s. But Coligny’s reputation was secure long before it was memorialized by martyrologists in 1572, and he was revered by thousands of “common” French Protestants who lived in coastal communities like Aunis-Saintonge and depended on the sea and the admiral’s patronage for their livelihoods. There is also reason to believe that Coligny was likely to have been acquainted with Palissy’s work—both written and material—either directly or indirectly by citation from other texts. This may be claimed

for many reasons, but in particular because Coligny and Palissy were in Paris at the same time and shared a desire to discover a permanent refuge for the Huguenots in rustic or New World environments. With the publication of his first book in La Rochelle in 1563, Palissy became known to the readers of the Huguenot corpus on colonization. This was especially true in Parisian court circles, where Coligny attempted to influence crown politics. In 1565, after his removal from Saintes and the failure of Coligny's transatlantic colonies, Palissy arrived in Paris to construct his rustic grotto and place of refuge for Catherine de Médicis, and subsequently to write and give "lessons" on alchemical and natural philosophical subjects in his now famous rustic persona.

Palissy's demonstrations of adaptation to rural life and arts were well known among the community of Huguenot adepts, physicians, and intellectuals in Paris and would have been attended by anyone as deeply involved in the colonization effort as Coligny. It is reasonable to assume that Coligny knew Palissy's written work and may have visited the potter's laboratory, where Palissy gave public demonstrations "face-to-face" to verify the "truth" of his published experiments. Given strong archaeological evidence that many early modern New World sites built pottery kilns to provide for the settlements' need for ceramic vessels, it is also reasonable to assume that Coligny was interested in Palissy's skills as a rustic potter and builder of his own kiln. Consider, too, Coligny's well-known interest in the development of brazilwood and other tropical staples, in addition to precious minerals, to be exploited for the transatlantic market and carried east on ships owned by Huguenot merchant-*armateurs*. Palissy's natural-philosophical research and experimentation focused on the "formation," through "gestation and growth," of trees and rocks and other mineral formations (including calcified fossils) found "in the bowels of the earth" and "dissected." The potter displayed numerous examples of such living minerals to the public in a cabinet of curiosities at his laboratory in Paris. At the same time that Coligny was concerned with subtropical staple plantation agriculture, Palissy wrote an influential discourse on fertilizer in the *Recepte*. The potter followed this early interest in the *Discours* (1580) with a widely quoted chapter, which he titled in the manner of a transatlantic projector: "How to Find and Know the Earth Called Marl With which barren fields are fertilized, in countries and regions where it is known . . . and in other places where this earth is still unknown."⁴⁶ Moreover, de Léry tells us, Coligny set Villegagnon the Palissian task of directing both colonists and Tupi in the construction of a "rustic" fortress in Brazil, an edifice de Léry called, symbiotically, "the building and refuge."⁴⁷ Unfortunately, Palissy does not make written reference to Coligny. He published a long "catalogue of . . . witnesses," to "my last lessons of the year 1576" in the *Discours* after returning from Sedan the year before. This was the only time Palissy compiled such a list of erudites and patrons. Since the admiral was killed in 1572, it is impossible to prove that Coligny had once been among them.⁴⁸

De Léry's *History* and Palissy's "De la ville de forteresse" both supported the hid-

den craftiness of “naturalistic” fortresses. Both argued for dualistic domestic and military sites, which must emerge from the Huguenot craftsman’s hand almost organically as experiments in interaction with Nature to revive and improve God’s traces and take advantage of local topography to augment artisanal skill and provide strength and concealment. Refugees and colonists would both benefit from available materials and folkloric construction methods learned from local artisans—Saintongeais potters or Tupi builders—with a history of practical manual experience.

De Léry’s description of Fort Coligny’s topography in Guanabara Bay as he imagined it might be perceived when encountered by suspicious Portuguese sailors for the first time tells us something of how this pious Huguenot craftsman projected the mutability of his own shifting identity onto the psyche of potential adversaries. Also, we glimpse what may have been learned from reading Palissy between de Léry’s return to France in 1558 and the publication of his *Histoire* in 1578. Fort Coligny’s assets as a place of refuge lay not only in the treacherous approach, which endangered warships sailing into the bay and kept them out of cannon range, but also in the apparent communication of what de Léry represents as its own ambiguous natural discourse, whereby sailors were compelled to read the geology of the Huguenot site in terms of the conflation of “artificial” and “natural” workmanship. De Léry understood that Fort Coligny’s fragile sense of security was based on the uncertain perception of liminality, like that of the *limace* and the material culture of the Tupis (which became an integral part of the completed site).

De Léry described the fort as a hybrid that occupied unstable territory and was concealed inside a permeable threshold where the natural and man-made mixed, mingled, and were confused. Do I perceive a “mountain” in the distance, or the cannon tower of a Huguenot stronghold, built like the three limestone towers that guarded the entrance to the harbor of the fortress of La Rochelle? De Léry’s assessment of the entrance to Guanabara Bay laid bare the complex, dissimulating power of a shape-shifter that survived challenge by concealing itself in plain sight. Nature was a chameleon made of earth, fire, water, and air, where real strength emerged from a living tableau on the frontier of the New World. Here an enemy’s worst fears and expectations were projected and knowledge was acquired experientially on a first come, first served basis.

De Léry demonstrated how reformed natural-philosophical knowledge was a fundamental condition of Huguenot security in the New World. With spiritual insight and mechanical knowledge, the animate qualities of natural material were harnessed, distilled, and redirected by rustic artisans to merge with the mental and material worlds of *both* besiegers and besieged. As in Palissy’s paradigm, the fortress becomes more than just a static defensive shell. It comes alive—inextricably entwined with what can only be called an inner life—and so the fortress itself was complicitous in the defense of the newly constructed Huguenot domestic and sacred space inside.

Thus de Léry began a discourse on the history of Guanabara's natural fortress by acknowledging and then dismissing the dead letter scholasticism of Thevet's earlier accounts. Like Palissy, he insisted upon the epistemological primacy of personal, lived experience in a specific place. This allowed de Léry to claim authentic knowledge that was bolstered by the providential parallel he draws between the geography of Guanabara Bay and Lake Geneva (where de Léry lived and trained as a lay minister after his return):

I will begin without lingering over what others have chosen to write about it, having myself lived in and sailed around this land for about a year . . . with the mainland lying close by on all sides, Guanabara rather resembles [Lake Geneva] in its situation. As you leave the open sea, you must sail alongside three small uninhabitable islands, against which the ships, if they are not, indeed, well handled, will dash and be shattered; so the mouth is rather troublesome. After that, you must pass through a straight that is barely an eighth of a league wide, bounded on the left side as you enter by a mountain, or pyramidal rock; not only is this of an amazing and extraordinary height but also, seeing it from a distance, one would say that it is artificial. And indeed, because it is round, and like a big tower, we French hyperbolically named it "Butter Pot."⁴⁹

Initially, de Villegagnon overlooked these natural defenses. He tried and failed to build a standard provincial European stronghold with a medieval enceinte. The original site was clearly vulnerable to siege, almost by design. The revolution in the technology of gunpowder warfare made the traditional walled city more vulnerable to attack than ever before. This inspired the growing literature against such fortifications, of which Palissy's essay was a part.⁵⁰ Medieval fortress architecture was designed to be seen from afar; to stand out on flat, open terrain as a visible marker of conquered territory and the extension of feudal power into the frontier: "A little farther up the bay there is a rather flat rock, perhaps one hundred or one hundred twenty paces around, which we called the 'Ratcatcher,' on which Villegagnon thought to build a fortress, having off-loaded his equipment and artillery there upon his arrival," de Léry goes on.⁵¹ "But," he reported, the tide or "the ebb and flow of the sea drove [de Villegagnon] away" from this rock, so he was forced by practical experience with local conditions to change his plans for the original site of the fortress at Brazil.⁵²

For these reasons, de Villegagnon's second choice for a site was, if not the ideal choice according to tradition, far wiser than the first. If well guarded, this site could have allowed the colonists to hold out indefinitely against the Portuguese. De Léry thought it "a superb natural stronghold." His description of the second fortress as a rustic, barely postlapsarian edifice, constructed from unimproved forest materials left behind by the divine artisan for the Tupi, implied that although a refuge was reclaimed by pious artisans from fallen Nature, it must be nurtured and protected by the "pure"

religion of the Gospels in order to retain the power to hide, protect, and recreate. Fort Coligny's innate power of exterior protection came from the choice of a specific natural space "built" by God and then adapted (or reanimated) as a millennial refuge by the Huguenots. The Tupis' primitive structures then extended this naturalistic power of refuge, initially provided by that ambiguous entrance at the mountainous outer ring of Guanabara Bay deep *inside* the interior world of Fort Coligny itself.

These artificial and natural structures were man-made, but in "native style," which is to say, they were artlessly made (in the European sense) of unimproved materials from the Brazilian forest ("wooden logs . . . and grasses"). These buildings created a rustic ring around de Villegagnon's "French" house to protect the heart of this hybrid, idiosyncratic fortress. Perhaps he remembered Fort Coligny as kind of Palissian ceramic basin? De Léry thus revealed a Huguenot affinity for primitive and naturalistic "workmanship," expended on the fortress's interior structures by "the savages [who] were their architects":

A league beyond [Ratcatcher rock] lies the island where we stayed . . . it is only about half a league around, and six times as long as it is wide, surrounded by little rocks that just break the surface of the water and which keep the ships from coming closer than the reach of a cannon shot, it is a superb natural stronghold. And in fact, even with the little boats, we could only land there from the inland side, which is to say from the side opposite to an approach from the open sea; so that if it had been well guarded it would have been impossible to take it by force or in a surprise attack—as the Portuguese, by the fault of whom we left there, have done since our return.

There was a hill at each end of the island, and on each of them Villegagnon had built a little dwelling; on a rock fifty or sixty feet high, at the middle of the island, he had had his own house built. On either side of this rock, we had leveled some small areas on which to build the rooms where we assembled for the sermon and for dining, and some other buildings where all eighty of us, including Villegagnon's men, installed ourselves. *But note* that except for the house on the rock, where there is a little timbered structure, and for some bulwarks where the artillery was placed, and which are covered with some kind of masonry, all the other buildings are huts, which, since the savages were their architects, were built in the native style—that is, of wooden logs, and covered with grasses.

So there you have, in brief, the workmanship of the fort, which Villegagnon named "Coligny in Antarctic France," thinking he would please Messire Gaspard de Coligny, Admiral of France (without whose favor and assistance . . . he would never have had the means to make the voyage, nor to build any fortress in the land of Brazil).⁵³

De Léry takes pains to demonstrate that no intrinsic weakness in the elemental materials reformed by the savage artisans and their primitive Huguenot compatriots from the fallen earth, water, and air was responsible for the loss of Coligny's "natural"

fortress to the Portuguese governor-general Men de Sá. Because it was simply “impossible”—a fortiori, unnatural—that Fort Coligny be conquered materially from the outside in, de Léry’s logic dictated that the purity of its interconnected protective tissues must have been compromised from the inside out. Manichean forces effected an internal corruption of the soul of Fort Coligny.

This bodily corruption had, in fact, emanated from its virtual heart. De Villegagnon himself “was splendidly arrayed” at its precise center,⁵⁴ “on a rock fifty or sixty feet high, at the middle of the island, [where] he had his own house built.” De Léry and the Huguenot contingent endured “the inconstancy and changeability that I have known in Villegagnon in matters of religion,” from the very center of this otherwise pious and natural body, whence “the treatment he offered us under that pretext.” The corrupt heart of the fortress was pinpointed as the source of “his disputes and the opportunity he seized to turn away from the Gospel, his habitual demeanor and discourse in that country [and] the inhumanity he showed . . . beating and tormenting his people in his fort.”⁵⁵ If the “heart” providing the most impenetrable outer shell with the spiritual basis of its material integrity is corrupted, then the natural defenses of the refuge will also be made corrupt and ultimately insecure. Palissy planned for the contingency of a corrupt governor by subdividing his fortress so that even the smallest internal part could resist his corruption. Yet de Léry represented Villegagnon’s religious, or interior body—the “inconstancy and changeability” of his core—as an unconquerable evil.

For the Nicodemite who walked a serpentine line, dissimulation as a defensive characteristic of the outer body was perceived to be natural, ethical, and pragmatic. “In matters of religion,” however, and so at its metaphorical middle, the fortress at heart, like the heart of the pious body, must remain constant and unchanging in the “pure service of God,” to remain a secure refuge and pious space.⁵⁶ De Léry assessed the hopeful rise and premature fall of Fort Coligny more unambiguously: Huguenot artisans and natural philosophers must forge personal covenants with both God and Nature to attain mastery over the soul of earthy matter. Only in this way could a place of refuge be provided with sustained abilities to manipulate external appearances against the threat of overwhelming force. Corruption at the center crippled security. Once again, inhabitants of secure places must cleanse inner corruption to maintain religious unity.

While de Léry revered the martyred Coligny, he utterly despised his intellectual and religious rival, the Franciscan friar André Thevet. Thevet had been in Brazil for ten weeks as the colony’s chaplain when de Léry arrived with Coligny’s expedition in Guanabara and the Huguenots attempted to assert their evangelical reading of “pure religion” over the fragile settlement. Predictably, Thevet left Brazil soon after the arrival of the Huguenot contingent, and he returned to Paris an indefatigable antagonist of Richier, de Léry, and their group.⁵⁷ Having a common interest in the polemics of civil war and the natural philosophy of rustic life, Palissy certainly encountered

Thevet in Parisian court circles. The Franciscan had gained similar lofty patronage among the Valois, as Catherine's chaplain and royal cosmographer to Charles IX. Courtly fascination with New World or aboriginal and rustic themes from distant provinces such as Saintonge fed the upward trajectory of Thevet's career, as it did Palissy's. Europeans consumed domesticated exotic fantasies about Brazilian Indians, which court artists and artisans syncretized with the available classical tropes. Thevet made his reputation at court with the publication of the greatly influential *Singularitez de la France antarctique* (1558), which mythologized the colonists' problematic encounters with the Tupis, settled scores with Huguenot colonists (excoriating Coligny, whom Catherine de Médicis had begun to fear), and gained him the heroic literary reputation of a new Jason or Ulysses.⁵⁸

When the fifth civil war had turned much of France into a killing field, and with Coligny removed from the scene, Thevet increased his anti-Huguenot rhetoric with the publication of the polemical *La Cosmographie universelle* (Paris, 1575), which rehearsed much of the same material that had previously appeared in *Singularitez* but also included controversial additions that openly accused Richier and the other three Geneva-trained Huguenot ministers from the Coligny group of causing the colony to fail.⁵⁹ De Léry did not read the *Cosmographie* until 1577, and as he wrote a year later with disgust in the complex and vitriolic "Preface" to his *Histoire*:

I saw that [Thevet] has not only revived and augmented his early errors, but what is more (perhaps supposing that we are all dead, or that if one of us were still alive he would not dare to contradict him), with no other pretext than the desire to backbite and, with false, stinging, and abusive digressions, to slander the ministers and those—of whom I was one—who in 1556 accompanied them to . . . Brazil, he has imputed [crimes to us]. Therefore, in order to refute these falsehoods of Thevet, I have been compelled to set forth a complete report of our voyage.⁶⁰

De Léry's *Histoire* thus entered the publishing battlefield of the New World historiography of the French religious wars. Yet unlike Thevet, personified as his scholastically trained enemy, de Léry was an artisan and natural philosopher. His *Histoire* uses a number of "key words" that suggest that he had read widely in the Paracelsian philosophical method. So his initial rhetorical move was to unmask Thevet's willful misrepresentations of life in Brazil, quoted with theatrical specificity from the Franciscan's polemical narrative, by launching a subversive appeal to the primacy of his own *personal* experience. "And before I go on," de Léry continues archly, "lest you think I am complaining about this new 'cosmographer' without just cause, I will record here the libels that he has put forth against us, contained in Volume II, Book 21, Chapter 2, page 908":

Moreover [says Thevet] I had forgotten to tell you that shortly before, there had been some sedition among the French, brought about by the devisiveness and partiality of the four ministers of the new religion, whom Calvin had sent in order to plant his bloody Gospel. Chief among them was a seditious minister named Richier, who had been a Carmelite and a Doctor of Paris a few years before his voyage. These gallant preachers, who were trying only to get rich and seize whatever they could, created secret leagues and factions, and wove plots which led to the death of some of our men. But some of these mutineers were caught and executed, and their carcasses went to feed the fishes: the others escaped, one of whom was the said Richier, who soon went to be minister at La Rochelle, where I believe he still is. The savages, incensed by such a tragedy, nearly rushed upon us to put to death all who were left.⁶¹

To this de Léry replied that Thevet “never saw us in America, nor we him.” Thus, “I want to show that he has been in this respect a bold-faced liar and a shameless calumniator.” It was clear “that his report does not refer to the time when he was in that country, but that he means to be recounting an act that took place since his return.” The retrospective logic that corrupted scholasticism had rendered Thevet’s work invalid as well. Manipulation or strategic distancing of the truth of lived experience became the basis of de Léry’s critique of the authenticity of Franciscan natural history, and of Thevet’s lies: “his intention was . . . to have it believed that *he really saw*, in America, the ministers that he speaks of.”⁶² The polemics of civil war historiography had followed the Huguenots and Paracelsians to the New World and back.

❧ Richier’s Return to La Rochelle and the Huguenot Coup d’État ❧

Richier was intent on succeeding in La Rochelle where he had failed at Fort Coligny. There would be no sharing of power or risk of internal corruption of the fortress’s security by Catholics. He came back to La Rochelle in 1558 knowing that American colonization was now a lost opportunity, and his stake in the French Reformation in the near future lay of necessity in the militant exclusionary religious culture and walled protection of the Huguenot *place de sûreté*. For him, at least, the rustic fortress as an idealistic setting for the diversity of man and nature and the “pure service of God,” was no longer an option. Richier knew this was also the conclusion of Admiral Coligny, his patron on the Brazil expedition. Coligny now worked to guarantee secure places and fortified towns in strategic areas in France, with La Rochelle as his centerpiece, so that Huguenots could survive the civil wars and hope for the eventual installation of an enlightened monarchy. Coligny codified this strategy in the Peace of Saint-Germain (1570) before his murder by militant Catholics.

In November 1558, La Rochelle’s Consistory was built around Richier’s preaching.

Upon his return, the “seditious minister created secret leagues and factions, and wove plots which led to the death of some of our men” in La Rochelle, just as Thevet said he had done in Brazil. Yet the Rochelais Consistory remained clandestine only until 1559, while gaining in power and followers. In 1561 and 1562, the Consistory grew from eight to twenty-seven members. This shows how the outbreak of the first civil war—like the failure of the Brazilian settlement before it and the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre afterward—helped build the Rochelais Reformation. The Consistory’s growth reflected the moment when the Huguenot factions, bolstered by an influx of politicized refugees, attained a population majority in the fortress. The Roman Catholic churches of Saint-Barthélemy and Saint-Sauveur were first appropriated for Reformed services as well.

On May 30, 1562, Huguenots performed La Rochelle’s first open air celebration of the Lord’s Supper. That evening, building on this seditious act of public defiance, mobs pillaged the churches, committed iconoclasm on Roman Catholic altars, images, and statues, and massacred thirteen priests in the Tour de la Lantern.⁶³ These acts continued in response to Barthélemy Berton’s 1563 publication of Yves Rouspeau’s attack on the mass, *Traitté de la préparation à la sainte Cène de Nostre seul Sauveur et Rédempteur Jésus Christ*, which was dedicated “to the Christian Reader” and called “the most popular religious treatise published in La Rochelle.”⁶⁴ Rouspeau, Palissy’s friend and the minister at Pons and Saintes, wrote with “wonderment,” of the recent civil war, “with which in the past year 1562, God so rudely chastised us with plague, war, and famine, in this poor kingdom of France.” War provided the apocalyptic context that encouraged him to take up Calvin’s attack on transubstantiation.⁶⁵

The combination of iconoclasm, sacred violence against priests, and the enormous popularity of Rouspeau’s attack from Saintonge on the primacy of the Mass, when harnessed to La Rochelle’s history of autonomy, were turning points in the Rochelais Reformation. “These acts of protest,” writes Judith Pugh Meyer:

robbed religious symbols and sacraments of their inherent power. The attacks demystified and desacramentalized the Catholic religion and reflected definite attitudes about the Catholic clergy and ecclesiastical authority. To deride the sacrament of the Mass was to strike at the heart of both clerical function and authority. By rejecting transubstantiation, Protestants deprived the priest of much of his authority by denying the centrality of his function.⁶⁶

Iconoclasm took place in both Saintes and La Rochelle in 1562. In 1563, Berton published Palissy’s and Rouspeau’s books together at La Rochelle. Thus, these two rustic Huguenots were tied together by personal and publication histories. It is clear that their messages were intertwined so far as “Christian Readers” in La Rochelle were concerned. Hence it followed, if Rouspeau’s book encouraged the desacramentalization

of artifacts associated with transubstantiation by act of iconoclasm (as Palissy himself was justifiably accused of committing in the Saintes Cathedral), then, the *Recepte* was intended to promote the sacramentalization of everyday life. For Palissy, this meant the redefinition and reform of attitudes toward the sacred, in a centrifugal process away from the Church out into the material of the microcosm. By decentralizing the materiality of the sacred, Palissy further illuminated his decision to stop painting church windows, replacing them with everyday things made for the domestic setting. Yet these were to remain powerful objects of his spirit. Transubstantiation had diffused beyond the priest's altar, into the souls of Huguenot artisans. The construction of security dispersed outward into the hands of industrious craftsmen as well. What were fortresses if not cathedrals of security?

By January 1568 (a decade after Richier's revival), the Reformed Church took power:

The coup d'état that threw the city into the Reformed camp in January 1568 sealed the fate of the "Roman" Church: places of worship were confiscated and destroyed shortly thereafter; all religious ceremonies ceased immediately; priests and monks fled or were arrested, many were massacred a short time later by soldiers. Ecclesiastical property was not confiscated, but its administration was consigned to provisional *fermiers* or administrators and the revenue was used to finance the Reformed party during the succession of wars that the latter sustained.⁶⁷

Institution of a Huguenot theocracy in 1568 terminated all royal authority to intervene in local affairs in La Rochelle until 1628. The crown's dissatisfaction with Rochelais autonomy, displayed so dramatically by Charles IX in 1565, peaked in 1568, when Charles threatened to put a royal garrison in the fortress.⁶⁸ This served to heighten fear and drive La Rochelle into a national political and military alliance with the formidable Condé, the militant leader of Huguenot separatism. The city had tried to maintain its autonomy from Condé as well as the state, but events in 1568 had threatened both its independence and the majority's Protestant creed, which helped drive Condé's agenda.⁶⁹ The city had declared itself an independent, international Reformed republic on the Genevan model. Indeed, by 1614, only Geneva, with an average of eight active ministers, supported a larger permanent ministry than La Rochelle, with seven. Paris, by comparison, could never support more than four at once.⁷⁰

La Rochelle became the safe haven for the most notorious Huguenots of the era: Condé, Coligny, Jeanne d'Albret, her son, Henri de Navarre (the future Henri IV), and La Rochefoucault were among the political, military, and theological leaders who took refuge behind its walls.⁷¹ When mass was finally resumed under the new government, it was officially restricted to the tiny Church of Sainte-Marguërite and even then was held only intermittently.⁷² Sanctions and public hostility hounded the remaining five *curés* (representing the five formerly Catholic parishes of La Rochelle, who stayed

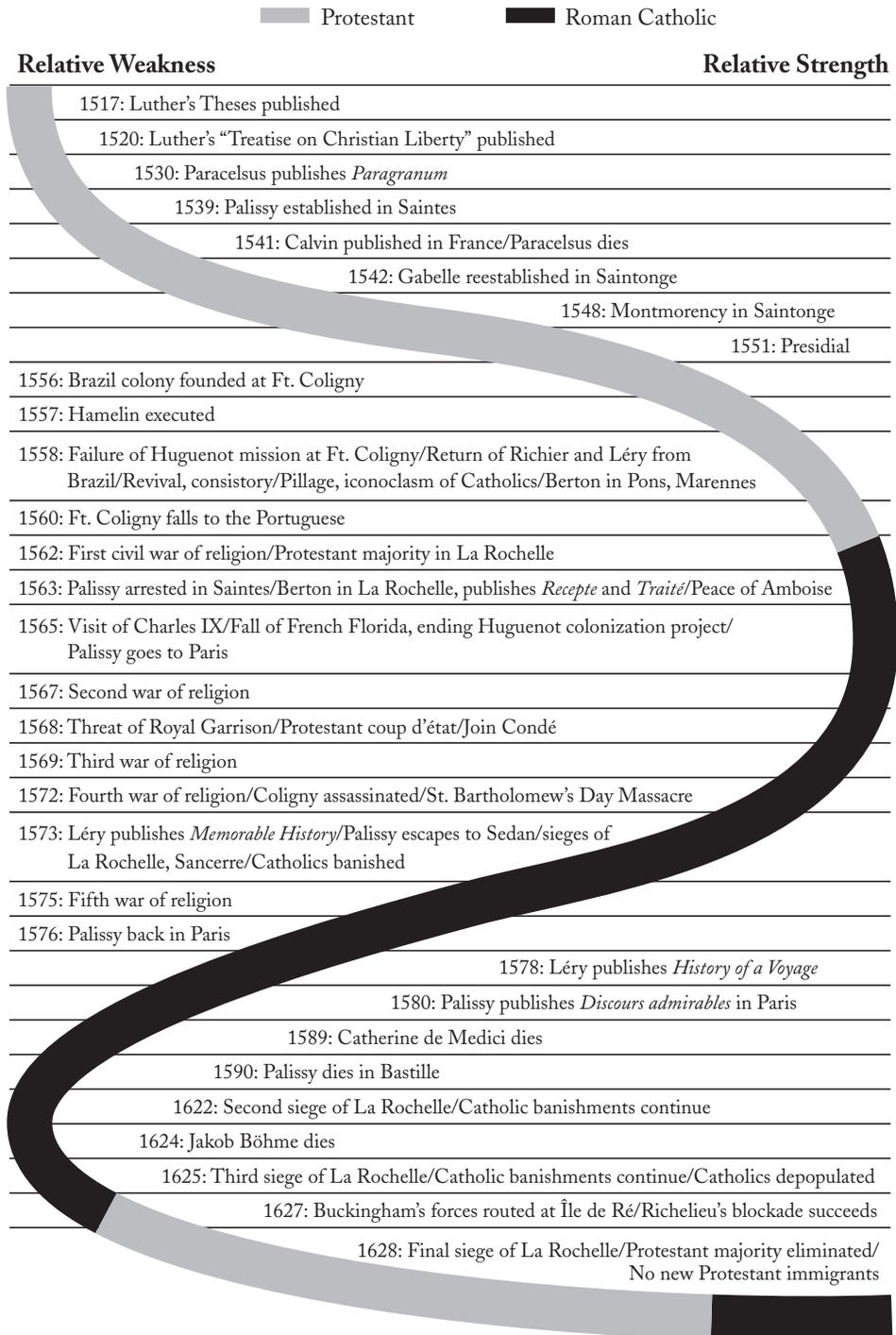


FIGURE 4.1. Power cycles in La Rochelle, 1517–1628.

to maintain Sainte-Margu rite) into nonresidence status at Saintes. In 1599, the bishop of Saintes was forced to recognize their presence and also the decimation of the Rochelais Catholic Church by establishing “a society and small chapter of five priests who were the *cur s* of the five parish churches formerly standing at La Rochelle.”⁷³

Lower-order Rochelais Catholics were restricted from advancing either in the militia (all males were forced to serve) or to master status in the guilds after 1568. Even the *boulangers*, who elsewhere appear to have maintained a substantial Catholic percentage among their number, were mainstays of Protestant political action. Among bourgeois, a few *notaires* and lawyers managed to survive the purge, albeit with their status diminished, probably due to prior professional relationships with influential Huguenot families.⁷⁴ Exclusionary behavior at all socioeconomic levels, and indeed crude vengeance, was common in La Rochelle from 1568 to 1628. This was not surprising, as memory of a precisely parallel situation when the Huguenots had been a minority sect under Catholic dominance was still very fresh.⁷⁵

Violent persecution of the Catholic minority was fairly rare, however, with systematic outbursts restricted to wartime. During these frequent periods, Catholics became scapegoats for community tensions and were assaulted, arrested, or banished. La Rochelle was virtually emptied of Catholics by mass exile in 1625–26, and again, for the last time, in 1627–28.⁷⁶ This systematic process of wartime exile was also imposed for purposes of simple exchange. For every Catholic ejected, there were dozens of Huguenots fleeing battlegrounds (or billeting) waiting to assume vacated positions of relative *s ret * inside the walls.

The year 1568, then, precipitated the first astonishing reversal in Rochelais history. Catholics and Protestants exchanged places and hierarchies like mirror images in the social order. Catholicism assumed “the situation of a nonconformist minority,” Trocm  writes ironically, “that is to say, in good French, a [minority] sect.”⁷⁷ This reversal—accompanied by outmigration, conversions, and banishment of Catholics, and massive immigration of Huguenots displaced from other, less hospitable regions—caused a commensurate demographic shift. La Rochelle achieved a Protestant majority by 1562 and, incredibly, a 1618 census indicated that nineteen-twentieths of the population was then Huguenot. By January 1627, on the eve of the siege, 1,000 marginal inhabitants were separated out as nominally Catholic from a total population of 27,000 Rochelais.⁷⁸ The fortress at La Rochelle had turned in on itself and became a Protestant monolith, now tied exclusively to the Atlantic world. At the same time, the Reformed Church at Saintes had been destroyed, driven underground to the coastal islands. A flow diagram (fig. 4.1) can illustrate the timing of this reversal, forming a cycle of inverted social and religious hierarchies.

❁ 1628: “true images of death” ❁

The coup d'état of 1568 signified the violent reversal of the Huguenot's former status as a marginalized sect. The victorious militants projected their prior condition onto Rochelais Catholics, who were themselves systematically marginalized and then displaced demographically. By extension, the apocalyptic ending of Huguenot dominance in 1628 must also be understood as itself a reversal—that is to say, a reversal reversed. The awesome completeness of that reversal—in terms of both morbidity and mortality—may also be depicted demographically on a cumulative, month-by-month basis (fig. 4.2).

Working from a census taken on the eve of the siege of 1627, which indicated there were 27,000 people living in the fortress, and extrapolating from cemetery burial archives, hospital records, and eyewitness accounts, it is possible to reconstruct a picture of the demographic fate of Protestant La Rochelle during the year of the final siege.⁷⁹ The intractable reality evoked by such demographic evidence—19,800 Huguenots died within nine months; 17,300 in August through October *alone*—makes it nearly impossible not to imagine the fortress transformed into a charnel house during its last days or to dismiss as mere propaganda the apocalyptic images of final things that poured from Protestant printing presses across England and northern Europe in 1627

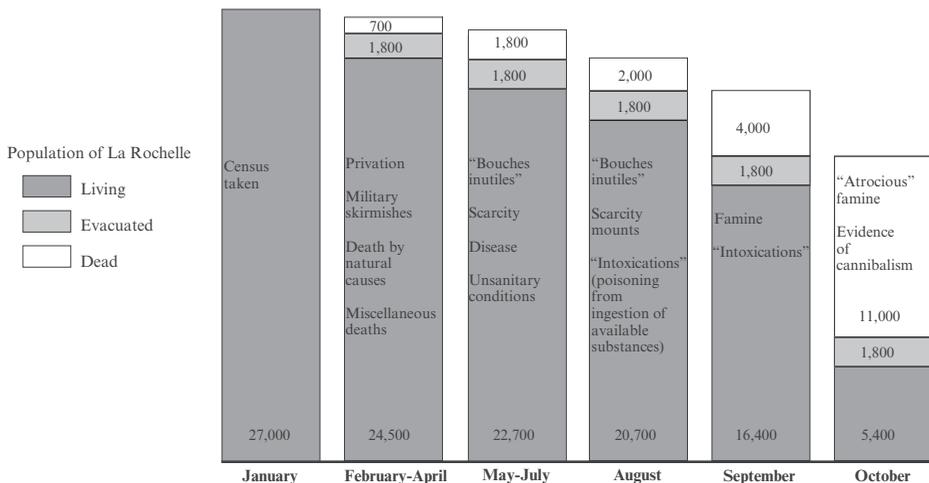


FIGURE 4.2. Morbidity and mortality in La Rochelle in 1628. Demographic figures from Étienne Guibert, “La Rochelle en 1628: État sanitaire des Rochelais et des assiégés, mortalité, morbidité” (M.D. thesis, Université de Bordeaux II, June 26, 1979), 52–53. Beginning in May the *grand conseil* of La Rochelle ordered “beggar children, orphans, mendicants, and the unknown cast outside the city walls.” Such *bouches inutiles* (literally, “useless mouths”) strained the city’s resources. Most died of starvation or were killed by the soldiers of the two armies.

and 1628. These statistics are compounded and made human by the sometimes gruesome explicitness of clinical knowledge of Rochelais morbidity during the siege year.⁸⁰

Only a miniscule percentage (perhaps 1 percent) of the dead fell in battle. The vast majority died from starvation or the side-effects of bodily deprivation. La Rochelle's food reserves, mostly cereals imported from Saintonge, Poitou, and as far north as Brittany that had been in storage pending transshipment to Spain or Portugal, were depleted rapidly.⁸¹

Starving inhabitants foraged the city and marshlands outside the walls for wild grasses, insects, and various crustaceans. As the Rochelais ingested toxic plants, cooked leather products, and the flesh of household pets and rodents, they began to suffer from "intoxications," a lethal combination of starvation and poisoning. The symptoms of "intoxications" included disorientation, delirium, and hallucinations, before coma and eventual death. Although there is no recorded evidence of epidemic disease (perhaps because death came too quickly from deprivation), mortality attributed to serious illnesses, including *mal de terre* (or "falling sickness"), malaria, dysentery, and typhoid, was extremely high as a result of general weakness and unsanitary conditions.⁸²

Yet it was not disease but the inventorylike descriptions of famine victims' decaying *bodies* in the final stages of irreversible malnutrition that drew the attention of contemporary commentators on both sides.

All you could see everywhere were bodies like skeletons, dry and emaciated, whose bones were covered with skin that was black and shrunken; and one could scarcely tell that they were alive except for a dying man's moan, which you would have thought was coming from someone else, or for a slow and frightful walk. . . .

. . . Left without fat and flesh, having nothing more than skin and bones, men and women could not sustain themselves; their emaciation made their clothing so big on them that it had to be tied around their bodies to keep the rain and cold from penetrating. . . .

. . . their faces were hideous, eyes sunken, teeth sticking out of the mouth.⁸³

After Richelieu surveyed the 5,400 survivors, he was able to tell Louis XIII that they represented "true images of death"—a signification probably intended to apply not only to the scene of misery before him but also to genocide both as bodily evidence of corruption caused by the "infection" of Rochelais heresy and of ritual purification caused by the siege.⁸⁴ In this "image of death," the victorious Richelieu perceived *transi*—images of corpses in the late stages of physical decay that were a convention of medieval and early modern funerary sculpture. This depiction meant that Richelieu and many Catholic commentators saw in the surviving Rochelais' physical "decomposition the sign of man's failure . . . the worms which devour cadavers do not come from the earth but from within the body, from its natural 'liquors.'"⁸⁵ Just as Palissy's pious *limace* was fortified by its natural internal liquids, so too Richelieu's

heretics were *destroyed* from within, victims of their own “nature,” pride, delusion, and moral failure. “Good and evil are so different and so opposed to each other that they never should be put in competition,” wrote Richelieu as advice to Louis XIII in the “Punishments and Rewards” chapter of his Machiavellian *Political Testament*. “If the one is worthy of reward, the other is deserving of punishment.”⁸⁶

But how did the *vanquished* perceive the decomposition of their own bodies? By October, the living were too weak to bury the dead, who far outnumbered them in the streets. Richelieu wrote in his *Memoires* of decomposing bodies left to rot wherever they fell, indoors or out. Then, near mid-month, the first of the now famous reports of cannibalism, often in the same family, began to appear:⁸⁷

[On] October 12, in the house of sieur Superville, the body of a woman was found that had had its head removed and was cut up into pieces of meat, which two girls confessed having eaten. In the city, they ate dead bodies eight days before the entrance of the king [for La Rochelle’s formal capitulation], [and] three that ate [the dead] died immediately. . . . It was also said that a mother ate her daughter and a niece.⁸⁸

After returning to France from Brazil by way of Geneva, Jean de Léry reported the occurrence of similar taboo practices among besieged Huguenots in his important victim-as-eyewitness account, the *Histoire memorable du siège de Sancerre*, the narrative of which certainly functioned as the antitype for Huguenot histories of La Rochelle’s ordeal in 1627–28.⁸⁹ De Léry condemned such behavior among these co-religionists, which he compared unfavorably with the cannibalism of the Tupi.⁹⁰ “Les Sauvages Ameriquains,” unlike the Sancerrois, practiced cannibalism as a ritual of their primitivist culture. As such, it was integral to their history and worldview. Prisoners of war who were to be eaten were treated honorably, and indeed (from de Léry’s perspective), participated willingly in the ritual. The prisoner’s death was endured stoically, both as vengeance and closure for Tupi killed and eaten in the past. Tupi cannibals and their victims displayed, in fact, the same sort of discipline, mastery, and craftsmanship in these rituals of death, rebirth, and cultural maintenance as skilled Huguenots in constructing artisanal security. Cannibalism was thus a control against the potential for chaos and unrestrained mimetic violence between primitive Americans, to prevent precisely the sort of behavior de Léry had observed on both sides in the civil wars.⁹¹

However, the cannibalism by starving Huguenots that was observed in Sancerre and later in La Rochelle was not morally equivalent to the barbarous cannibalism that was well known among Catholics in their massacres of the Huguenots. If the people of Sancerre were driven to cannibalize “their kinsmen, neighbors, and compatriots” by the Catholic siege of 1573, what excused the cannibals in the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre? “What I have said is enough to horrify you, indeed, to make your hair stand

on end,” de Léry wrote of Tupi cannibalism in his *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* in 1578:

Nevertheless, so that those who read these horrible things, practiced daily among these barbarous nations of the land of Brazil, may also think more carefully about the things that go on every day over here, among us: . . . if it comes to brutal action of really (as one says) chewing and devouring human flesh . . . what of France? (I am French, and it grieves me to say it.) During the bloody tragedy that began in Paris on the 24th of August 1572 . . . among other acts too horrible to recount, which were perpetrated at that time throughout the kingdom, the fat of human bodies (which, in ways more barbarous than those of the savages, were butchered at Lyon after being pulled out of the Soane)—was it not publicly sold to the highest bidder? The livers, hearts, and other parts of these bodies—were they not eaten by the furious murderers, of whom Hell itself stands in horror? Likewise, after the wretched massacre of one Coeur de Roy, who professed the Reformed faith in the city of Auxerre—did not those who committed this murder cut his heart to pieces, display it for sale to those who hated him, and finally, after grilling it over coals—glutting their rage like mastiffs—eat of it? . . .

. . . So let us henceforth no longer abhor so very greatly the cruelty of the anthropagous—that is, man-eating—savages. For since there are some here in our midst even worse and more detestable than those who, as we have seen, attack only enemy nations, while the ones over here have plunged into the blood of their kinsmen, neighbors, and compatriots, one need not go beyond one's own country, nor as far as America, to see such monstrous and prodigious things.⁹²

Yet de Léry was able to find divine logic in precedent for the practice of cannibalism under similar historical circumstances in book 6 of Flavius Josephus's *Jewish War*, where cannibalism is reported among the starving victims of Titus's final siege of Jerusalem (March to September 8, A.D. 70), which triggered the diaspora of the Jews.⁹³ De Léry's *Histoire* found its ideal antitype in Josephus's *Jewish War*, Géralde Nakam argues: “Léry reconstructed, by a nearly instinctive mimeticism, the chronicle of the defeat of Jerusalem. . . . Sancerre, the little community of the Just, was like La Rochelle, the symbol of Jerusalem on earth . . . always in the vertical dimension.”⁹⁴ The importance of de Léry's seamless “mimeticism” that found a parallel in Jewish history to an anti-Christian war between Christians cannot be overestimated. Moreover, the same mimetic desire for a New Jerusalem rising out of the fragmentation of the aging earth is to be found both in Revelation 21 and in the artisanal work of Palissy and his followers.

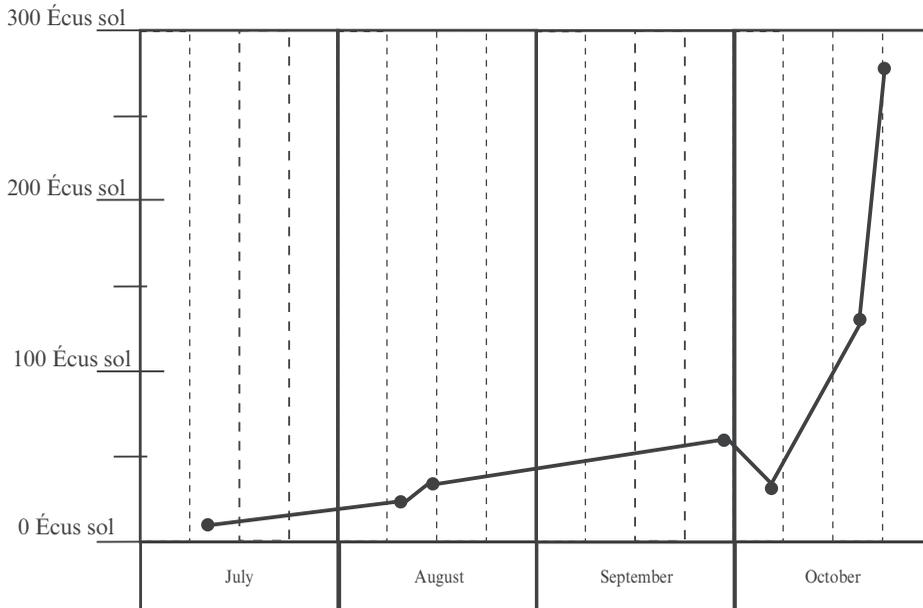
This apocalyptic pattern allowed Léry to transform Sancerre's “pitiful history” of war, famine, and cannibalism into a politically charged Neoplatonic allegory of asce-

tic purification by physical ordeal to cleanse and liberate the soul.⁹⁵ The *Histoire memorable* was thus also an allegory of the monistic soul's stoical triumph over its corrupt, aging, and fragmented corporeal form (bodily, town, and religious) in the last stages of decay. Old Testament history also harnessed Sancerre's Huguenots to God's chosen in this context. In postlapsarian time, Jewish dislocation from God was represented by the dispersion and a series of punishments and ordeals visited upon the tribes of Israel by the deity, angry that the covenant with his chosen people was continually broken. Punishment and ordeal killed off and distilled the tribes almost to the point of extinction, but in every case—the story of Noah being the most famous example—a small fragment was selected to survive the deluge and begin again. Fragmentary survival was at work in Palissy's triumph of tiny and industrious builders over the large and seemingly complete and this ethos was ultimately redirected into the virtual reenactment of a macabre Eucharist in Sancerre, wherein all the martyred dead served as bodily hosts. As in Jerusalem of old, fallen survivors maintained themselves to begin again in dispersion by eating and drinking from the flesh and blood of martyred dead.

Huguenot historians were well aware that A.D. 70 also marked the beginning of the most influential ascetic tradition among Jews of the dispersion following Jerusalem's fall, a process given its charismatic voice by the revival of the commentaries of Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.–ca. A.D.45), which thereafter entered into Christian commentary.⁹⁶ Philo's task was to incorporate the Neoplatonic dualism he had assimilated from Hellenistic philosophy into Judaic thought: "When we are living, the soul is dead and has been entombed in the body as in a sepulchre; whereas should we die, the soul lives forthwith its proper life, and is released from the body, the baneful corpse to which it was tied."⁹⁷

For Philo, the body was a "source of demonic uncleanness"; the denuded *bones* of pious dead alone remained venerable: "by which I mean the only relics of such a soul as were left behind untouched by corruption and worthy of perpetual memory."⁹⁸ Philo extended veneration to incorporate the bodily analogy that would become ubiquitous in his commentaries: bone was to flesh even as the "universal Mind, uncreated and immortal" was to mere sensory perception.⁹⁹ Considered a part of this Neoplatonic ascetic dispersion tradition, the emerging bones of the Rochelais dead and dying signified self-knowledge through destruction of the corrupt flesh of the pious to the Huguenot, while Catholic commentators perceived the revelation of vile hidden corruption.

De Léry constructed a dazzling yet unsettling mimetic strategy. His agenda was to seduce readers (including God) into empathy with the Sancerreois as universal victims and chosen people, even while the question of victimization remained open in both Sancerre and La Rochelle. Within the metaphorical confines of Neoplatonic history, "pitiful" Huguenot victims assumed the moral high ground by pleading their passive



The price of wheat:

About 10 July	average price of 5.3 Écus sol per bushel
About 8 August	20 Écus sol per bushel
About 15 August	33 Écus sol per bushel
29 September	64 Écus sol per bushel
4 October	30 Écus sol per bushel
18 October	133 Écus sol per bushel
21 October	267 Écus sol per bushel

FIGURE 4.3. The price of wheat during the siege of La Rochelle, 1628. Prices from Philippe Vincent, *Le Journal des choses les plus mémorables qui se sont passées au dernier siège de La Rochelle, par Pierre Mervault, rochelais, revu, corrigé et de nouveau augmenté*. . . Rouen: J. Lucas, 1671.

suffering. At the same time, Huguenot historians had disguised another parallel between what happened at Sancerre during the siege of 1573 and at La Rochelle in 1627–28, beyond the pity of famine and cannibalism.

The price of wheat during the siege year (fig. 4.3), reflected the overall price of foodstuffs in the fortress. A combination of dwindling supply due to Richelieu's effective blockade of the port and ruthless profiteering by Huguenot merchants at the expense of their co-religionists, drove up prices approximately 300 percent between July and October 1628. Prices during the siege indicated an unmistakable economy of life and death among Huguenots in both Sancerre and La Rochelle.¹⁰⁰ Writing in *Histoire d'un voyage* with profiteering during the siege of Sancerre fresh in his mind, de Léry compared usury to cannibalism. The pious poor were thus victimized and consumed by physical *and* economic violence:

if you consider in all candor what our big usurers do, sucking blood and marrow, and eating everyone alive—widows, orphans, and other poor people, whose throats it would be better to cut once and for all, than to make them linger in misery—you will say that they are even more cruel than the savages I speak of. And that is why the prophet says [Mic. 3:3] that such men flay the skin of God’s people, eat their flesh, break their bones and chop them in pieces as for the pot, and as flesh within the cauldron.¹⁰¹

By September 1627, John Winthrop Jr., who had joined the duke of Buckingham’s expedition to Saint-Martin, on the Île de Ré, as a clerk and scientific observer, must have shared de Léry’s sentiments. The adventuring son found himself short of funds and wrote his worried father (the future governor of Massachusetts), at Groton Manor, in England, that prices were then prohibitive in La Rochelle and on the Île de Ré. “It is a very dear place for strangers,” he wrote, “and St. Martins is dearer by reason of our army, and that all we have brought in commeth from Rochell[e].”¹⁰² Prices had risen dramatically in La Rochelle, because Rochelais merchants smuggled supplies to the English relief force and profiteered at the expense of the starving inhabitants of the besieged city as well.

The 5,400 survivors whom Richelieu finally confronted as “true images of death” at La Rochelle’s capitulation cannot be considered passive victims in any fundamental sense of the term. Aside from their history of persecution of Catholics in the Rochelais Reformation of the 1560s, which invited acts of revenge, Huguenots survived not by chance but in large part as a result of their high status in the socioeconomic hierarchy and at the expense of compatriots of poor and middling circumstances. The fate of La Rochelle’s *bouches inutiles* (that is, “useless mouths”), was remarkably similar to that of the post-1568 Rochelais Catholics who were banished during wartime, and they exemplified the most extreme manifestation of this pattern.¹⁰³ Rochelais from the city’s *grand conseil* increased their own chances of survival and the available food supply for paying customers by locating and sacrificing marginal groups. In May 1627, the month when food was first becoming scarce, the council ordered that all “beggar children, orphans, mendicants, and the unknown [be] cast outside the city walls.” Once outside, exposed individuals died of starvation or were killed by soldiers from either side. Meanwhile, these councilmen underwent their own analogous process of violent marginalization by the expanding state, which culminated in October 1628. Huguenot survivors of the religious wars possessed a very realistic fear of the deadly consequences of marginality.

Absent La Rochelle’s death registers, lost for 1628, which would have told us the social status of the dead, and since there is no evidence of epidemics, which would presumably have cut across the social hierarchy, certain conclusions seem self-evident.¹⁰⁴ It is safe to say that the vast majority of the 19,800 Rochelais who died belonged to

the lower and middling orders, while the majority of the 5,400 Rochelais who survived derived from elite households. This means that a substantial number of servants attached to elite households may have survived. In addition to ministers and the Consistory, many elite survivors were classified as “gentlemen-merchants.” They had access to cash, as well as smuggled goods or foodstuffs stored for transshipment.¹⁰⁵ The most successful profiteers emerged from this powerful group. Indeed, merchants with well-stocked warehouses in early June undoubtedly extracted fortunes from the desperation of compatriots still alive in late October. De Léry and Palissy would have found it difficult to represent these survivors as other than oppressors in the guise of victims; indeed, as both victims and oppressors simultaneously.

After 1628, many *gentilshommes-marchands* abandoned La Rochelle altogether for Paris and lucrative posts as financiers and *fermiers* in the service of the king.¹⁰⁶ Other survivors prefigured the great exodus of La Rochelle’s merchants after the Revocation of 1685, by emigrating to the destination points of their cargoes. Even as the dead were buried and rapidly replaced by thousands of opportunistic Catholic immigrants from Poitou and Limousin, many of the merchant families that survived 1628 remained. Some continued to practice Protestantism openly, others were *nouveaux convertis*, or secret Protestants. Together, these families kept dynastic control over commerce in La Rochelle, although now under the watchful eye of intendants and jurists through the unstable era of the Revocation and beyond, into the prosperous eighteenth century.¹⁰⁷

The most influential of southwestern France’s post-1628 urban Huguenot population that migrated to colonial British America were connected by family to these ambiguous, ruthlessly hierarchical, and upwardly mobile Rochelais mercantile elites, who had formerly manipulated the repressive and sacerdotal Rochelais Consistory and eventually found a home in the American Church of England. Colonial “Anglicans” were as ambitious as the Rochelais Calvinists but even less successful in maintaining Church discipline against lay initiatives and heterodoxy.

La Rochelle’s lower orders, including its large and militant artisanal sector, were decimated by starvation in the siege. Those who survived 1628 were systematically denied membership in guilds they had once dominated. The vigilant Catholic corporations in La Rochelle perceived a growth in the number of Protestants in town by the late 1650s. Huguenot artisans had reinfiltred the guilds in particular. A Catholic backlash resulted, and in 1661, a purge was undertaken by the corporations with the police to rid the guilds of Protestant tradesmen. Harsh new restrictions against the making of things were placed on Huguenot artisans. There were no new limits to selling things, however, so many tradesmen became merchants and shopkeepers and followed their crafts secretly, if at all. Hence, the Rochelais Huguenot mercantile sector became even stronger, and its artisans either joined the merchants or left town in 1661 for greener pastures.¹⁰⁸ These demographic and political realities were manifested in

colonial America. Some of the 1661 group made their way to New Amsterdam through Holland and contributed to what was to become New York's "old culture" after 1685. But with a few notable exceptions—the Vincent and Coutant craft dynasties were from La Rochelle—the vast majority of all Huguenot artisans in New York, like its turners and leather chair makers, were refugees from Saintonge or the Île de Ré.

Many of La Rochelle's dead were quickly replaced by Catholic outsiders, and the most significant article of Louis XIII's and Richelieu's terms of capitulation forbade the immigration of any new Protestant families into the fortress after 1628. Aided by the massive purge of 1661, this guaranteed that the surviving Rochelais Huguenot families would remain part of an aging minority sect with little or no hope for demographic expansion save conversion to Catholicism or outmigration.¹⁰⁹ It was a formidable first step by the state toward outlawing Protestantism in La Rochelle, though that would not occur until the Reformed religion itself was prohibited in France in 1685. Thus, the Huguenots of La Rochelle were forced to suffer the same devastating social, economic, and religious restrictions the victorious Reformed party had forced on Rochelais Catholics in the 1560s. A decimated "Reformed community in the city found itself transformed overnight from heir to stepchild in a large household with a new head." Yet the economics of mortality in the siege guaranteed that it would remain a very wealthy and influential stepchild indeed.¹¹⁰

Despite their tenacity and continued economic success, the power of the merchant oligarchy to determine events independently of the state was effectively eliminated with La Rochelle's military subjugation and the introduction of the intendancy. These changes were effected by Richelieu himself. The cardinal built an enormous financial interest in both Aunis and coastal Saintonge, which was impossible to maximize without the royal subjugation of La Rochelle and the cooperation of leading merchants. In October 1626, Louis XIII awarded possession of all the monarchy's maritime affairs to Richelieu, including lucrative admiralty rights, which he coveted above all else. After that, Richelieu consolidated his control of Brouage and its salt production—also acquired during the 1620s—and made the tiny fort and ancient competitor of La Rochelle his base of operations in the southwestern provinces. From that point on, Richelieu's purchases made him the largest landowner in Aunis-Saintonge, and after 1628, his large business interests dominated La Rochelle's mercantile activity as well. There was far more at stake than reasons of state in his risky promotion of the siege to the mercurial Louis XIII. By the time the full economic impact of the fall of La Rochelle was felt in France's maritime provinces, Richelieu was not only the king's chief minister but his richest subject.¹¹¹

Since Richelieu was an absentee landlord, he needed reliable *fermiers* to administer his growing properties. Such administrators were recruited during the siege itself, when the cardinal was able to assess the capabilities of Catholic leaders from Aunis-

Saintonge under adverse conditions. Henri de Sourdis, archbishop of Bordeaux and Jean Hilayreau, sieur de La Traversière, oversaw his interests in La Rochelle and its hinterlands, effectively becoming a personal intendency in Aunis-Saintonge, and both entered Richelieu's service during the siege.¹¹² If the siege almost eliminated La Rochelle's Protestant population, Huguenots still controlled much of the rural landscape of Saintonge, especially the coast. Richelieu's men were directed to replace Protestants on the land and in the salt marshes with docile Catholic immigrants where possible to make collection of rents more reliable.¹¹³ Palissy's "plowmen" were thus forced off the land to become economic refugees, as well as another source for the Atlantic migration prior to 1685.

Key to Richelieu's ambitions in southwestern France, however, was his ability to manipulate and control elements of the surviving mercantile sector of La Rochelle. To maximize profits from rents, and liberate agrarian "income from the unforeseeable accidents of collection, transport and the insolvency of *fermiers*," the cardinal diversified away from his reliance on land, and invested capital in banking and seaborne commerce.¹¹⁴ This was accomplished through his patronage of a consortium of three Huguenot bankers and financiers, Gedeon Tallemant, Nicolas Rambouillet, and Marc-Antoine Arcère, who signed a ten-year investment contract with Richelieu in April 1632, and again in 1642. Tallemant, the leader of the consortium, was a bourgeois of La Rochelle, where he held office as late as 1620. When the siege began in 1627, Tallemant defected to the crown's side and was accepted into Richelieu's protection. Almost immediately, this Rochelais merchant began financial operations outside the fortress to profit from the ensuing siege of his former allies. Tallemant's behavior during the siege certainly fit de Léry's description of "what our big usurers do." Still, the consortium's motive was to acquire Richelieu's protection and patronage more than to profit from him. In fact, it lost money between 1632 and 1642. The "advantages were political rather than financial," Joseph Bergin writes, "a form of insurance which, despite bringing few direct profits, enabled them to make greater profits undisturbed elsewhere."¹¹⁵

After 1628, all the merchants of La Rochelle knew that their path to maintaining upwardly mobile status as a subgroup was now serpentine rather than defiant. Success lay in accommodation to the state, or outward assimilation to dominant Catholic norms as *nouveaux convertis*. This was not so easy a process for surviving Rochelais families as it seemed to be for the merchant Tallemant. Religious life inside the once great fortress was now defined by tensions between the necessity for secret devotion and the city's proud history of public witness to Calvinist faith. This tension between revelation and concealment had been resolved for most rustic Saintongeois Huguenots after Philibert Hamelin was executed in 1557.¹¹⁶

Indeed, La Rochelle had been stripped of all urbanity and had nearly come to

resemble its hinterland. A traveler named Elie Brakenhoffer who visited the fallen fortress in 1645, its walls now leveled to the ground, noted sadly in his journal that “it is deplorable that so beautiful a city has been reduced to barely a burg. From many of its streets one can see the bare countryside.” He was most astonished by the exposed condition of “the Huguenots [who] are in a bad posture . . . they are now at the south end of the city, in a dismantled building.” He concluded that their state of reduction was “as bad as possible.” In 1646, Philippe Vincent, a minister of the demolished temple whose family emigrated to New Amsterdam / New York, wrote that the siege of 1628, had left “scars [that] will remain imprinted on us always.” Yet apocalyptic memory was essential for spiritual survival, and “we should think about it often, so that it will be a lesson never to fall again into the same sins, by which we attracted this upon ourselves.” After the purge of Rochelais Huguenots in 1661, jeremiads rained down from the pulpit upon the heads of the dwindling congregation. One such sermon in particular would surely have attracted Bernard Palissy’s attention in 1563. “Each of us has contributed to the destruction of our Temple, [and yet] we make profession of the doctrine of the elect,” a certain Pastor Flanc preached in March 1662. Flanc had finally come to realize the essence of “De la ville de forteresse”: “One does not transplant trees except in order to have them produce more fruit,” he lamented from the rubble of his church, open to the countryside, in the fortress without walls. “It must be that God,” Flanc concluded, “having transplanted us from our Temples into our houses, will give us more fruit of a holy amendment of life.” It is uncertain what his aging congregants, whose lives and city were defined by the open defiance of kings, thought of Flanc’s sermon of transplantation into the shadows. But by 1680, as the Revocation approached, only 4,750 people still called themselves Protestant in La Rochelle.¹¹⁷

With mostly mercantile elites surviving to bridge its polar revolutionary moments, La Rochelle’s Reformation and Counter-Reformation—and ultimately the events of 1568 and 1628—were in the formal sense symmetrical and interchangeable. What insights did interchangeability, considered within the ancient Christian category of reversal, provide for artisanal process and, above all, material representations of Huguenot cultural identity in the process of formation as it was assaulted during the French civil wars of religion and, by 1628, the Thirty Years’ War in northern Europe? Beyond that, how was the ambiguity of victimization and of power relations so central to this process in the Huguenot historiography of both Aunis-Saintonge and colonial British America transformed into a habitual response in transatlantic religious and material culture?

Certain general principles have guided my understanding of La Rochelle 1517–1628: (1) La Rochelle functioned as a looking-glass culture, animated by Protestant / Catholic (or “Reformed” / “orthodox”) mimetic desire, anxiety, and violence; (2) within this system, and especially among elites, it was sometimes impossible to distinguish victim

from victimizer, or oppressor from oppressed; (3) power was thus exercised within a structure in which difference (and *deference*) was ambiguous; (4) the function of this culture, when animated by violence and threatened with entropy was to perpetuate the logic of these formal requirements; (5) Rochelais Huguenots, however, when in temporary asymmetrical relation to the dominant Catholic order, devised strategies, at risk of revenge, to shift precipitously toward equilibrium through violence or, lacking the power to do so, actively disguised and compensated for personal marginality in ways that made their social disequilibrium endurable (and sometimes profitable). This last category became a permanent condition for Rochelais Huguenots after the fall of their *place de sûreté*. Having experienced two generations of near absolute power followed by total defeat, surviving Rochelais elites were strangers to weakness. Now urban Huguenots in Aunis were forced to converge in matters of security with artisanal practices pioneered by their rustic counterparts in the open countryside of the Saintongeais periphery, in place since the time of Bernard Palissy's artisanal interregnum of the 1560s.

As surviving Rochelais elites devised strategies to maintain their commercial viability and a shadow of their pre-1628 Reformed identity in situ for two generations longer until 1685, the task of Santongeais Huguenot artisans after the fall of La Rochelle was to redouble their rustic effort to build equilibrium through confusion of difference between dominance and marginality. After 1628, their even greater social marginalization required the strong reassertion of Palissy's innovations in a world without fortresses, including his Paracelsian material-holiness synthesis and other metaphysical solutions to the continuity of Protestant culture subjugated by the rise of absolutism under Richelieu and eventually the pressures of dispersion into the networks of the Atlantic diaspora.

The moral questions posed by Palissy and de Léry during the civil wars, and by Catholic enemies of the Huguenots, considered alongside evidence of Huguenot behavior during the siege, suggested a reading of the culture of innovation that illuminated Protestant artisanal discourse in a surprising way. Perhaps such a culture possessed no discrete identity of its own coming out of the wars, having emerged only as a *partial*, chameleonlike entity in violent though symbiotic opposition to some perpetually dominant historical host. Palissy's tiny animal fortresses, after all, had to hide themselves inside of other natural and spiritual forces to remain secure. The Huguenot survivors of 1628—both rural and urban—may have been revealed in their purest form as improvisational parasites needing pluralistic societies to maximize their opportunities to innovate, hybridize, and thrive. This claim is amplified by the overlapping meanings of “parasite” and “Nicodemite” in the seventeenth century.¹¹⁸ Blatant violence was no longer a viable option. Only in the most oblique domestic, material, and commercial ways could the now perpetually marginal Huguenots hope to maintain the

structural capacity to subvert in their historical “oppressors” (or hosts) the defeated aspect of themselves that they simultaneously desired most to emulate and so realize the prophesy of reversal in both everyday life and the millennial future.

❁ The Permanent Interregnum ❁

The emergence of profound urban-rural tensions intrinsic to the regional diffusion of metropolitan Genevan models emanating from Geneva and the La Rochelle Consistory, via its ministerial agents, to the presumably intellectually subordinate Saintongeais laity, laid the groundwork for Palissy’s artisanal interregnum in the wake of Philibert Hamelin’s execution in 1557. Disruptions, structural dislocation, and an aggressive lay ascendancy resulted in interruption of the flow of face-to-face ministerial discourse, and with it, orthodox doctrinal influence and ideological control, to the fortress’s periphery. Yet such regional tensions did not mean complete dichotomy. The ministerial presence of Hamelin and his Genevan followers in Saintonge was essential to the process of diffusion. This was driven by the rural laity and artisan-preachers such as Palissy and his followers, who willfully misread metropolitan models that were deemed too hierarchical or were not inculcated and reinforced fully by catechistic repetition. Such models were therefore subject to manipulation from below and finally even outright appropriation in new forms for local use.

Ultimately, these structural tensions were the result of the same sort of frontier geographical isolation from La Rochelle that the fortress enjoyed in relation to Paris. This was exacerbated by disrupted military organization and practice during wartime, which unmasked La Rochelle’s periodic inability to extend its passion for regional centralization to Saintonge. Religious culture was given coherence by the *laity*, whose “free,” enthusiastic, and materialist exegesis of biblical text and the “Book of Nature” combined memory of Roman Catholicism and local folklore with primitive Reformation theology. This worried the Rochelais Consistory, concerned with maintaining regional Church unity and tight discipline under strict ministerial control.

Whether the ministers were dispatched by La Rochelle or Geneva to Saintonge, once in the region, the Rochelais Consistory tried to keep them under its influence and protection. Many promising Saintongeais *pasteurs* were in fact eventually called back to serve at La Rochelle after an apprenticeship in the hinterlands.¹¹⁹ And if we are to judge by the overwhelming number of Rochelais *pasteurs* asked to moderate at the nineteen southwestern regional synods held between 1560 and 1606, then the influence of the Consistory—if not among artisans then among the rural Huguenot elites—was enduring.¹²⁰ Indeed, after 1590, the number of ministers of Rochelais origin who served in the province climbed to an average of sixteen.¹²¹

La Rochelle’s ministerial influence and control suggested by these numbers must

be considered problematic, however. The large presence of the Rochelais ministry in the hinterlands existed at full capacity *only* under ideal peacetime conditions. These were rarely experienced for long during the civil wars. In practice, centralizing efforts by the Rochelais Consistory were consistently undermined by what Trocmé describes as “a constant phenomenon at La Rochelle” during the war years. When royal armies or the Catholic Sainte Ligue threatened, most *pasteurs* (always the targets of torture and murder) dispatched by La Rochelle or Geneva to Saintonge were sent scurrying north—along with thousands of others in harm’s way—to the protection of the fortress.¹²² Hence, Saintonguais Huguenots were left to their own intellectual and spiritual devices for increasing periods of time—during the region’s most intense era of religious anxiety and innovation—with virtually *no* direct consistorial intervention. What had initially been frequent, temporary, patterns of autonomous sectarian behavior acquired by Saintonguais Huguenots during chronic absences of Genevan and Rochelais ministerial authority in wartime was *institutionalized* during the civil wars and expanded to Aunis with the reduction of the great *place de sûreté* after 1628. Palissy’s primitive artisanal church in Saintes signals the origins of this permanent interregnum.

❧ New World Historiography and the Problem with Writing: ❧
 “we can declare our secrets to whomever we choose”

And so we conclude with that moment of entropy and violent abandonment in his personal history that occurred four years before the first civil war of religion, when the Genevan minister Philibert Hamelin, Palissy’s mentor and friend, was absent from Saintes in the coastal islands and about to be captured and sent to Bordeaux, where he was tortured and executed. At this exact moment, Palissy, Hamelin’s main disciple, and his artisan followers, took control of the Reformation in Saintes from below. In so doing, they ushered in the first artisans’ interregnum and established a religious and social tradition made permanent in the entire region when events in 1628 turned southwestern France into a *désert* strewn with demolished churches. This tradition extended to the very heart of the periods of escape, dispersion, and the assemblies of the *désert*, which took place in rustic grottoes that were hidden yet still exposed in the natural world. “Natural” subterranean grottoes were thus the stuff of Palissy’s material life.

It was at this moment that Palissy’s little “History” of “the beginning of the Reformed Church of the town of Xaintes,” properly entered into the historiography of the Huguenots’ New World:

the year was 1557. . . . Some time before Philibert was arrested, there was in this town a certain artisan, poor and indigent to an incredible degree, who had so great a desire to spread the word of God that he made it plain to another man, also unlearned, for neither

one knew much: Nevertheless, the first one advised the other that he should employ the most stirring form of exhortation because that would be the most fruitful; and seeing how the second was totally devoid of learning, this gave him heart: and some days later, he assembled one Sunday morning nine or ten people, and because he was unlettered, he had taken some passages from the Old and New Testaments and written them out by hand. And when they were assembled, he read them the passages or authorities and said: For as each one has received the word, so he shall give it to others, and that all trees that bear no fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire: also he read another authority taken from Deuteronomy, the one that says, You will proclaim my Law in going, and coming, while drinking, and eating, when you sleep, and when you awaken, and when you are sitting in the road; he also propounded for them the parable of the talents and a great number of such authorities, and he was doing that toward two good ends: the first was to show that it is the right of all people to speak about the statutes and ordinances of God, so that one not despise His doctrine because of His abjection [that is, Christ's abject poverty and death—a reference to his crucifixion alongside common criminals]: the second was in order to inspire some of their listeners to follow their example and do the same: for at the same time, there convened together some six among them to give weekly exhortation, so that six of them would each week exhort, meaning that each of the six would take turns preaching every sixth week on Sundays only and because they were getting themselves into something they had not been taught, it was decided that they would write their exhortations and would read them to the assembly, and all these things were done through the good example, advice, and doctrine of Master Philibert Hamelin. This was the beginning of the Reformed Church of the town of Xaintes.¹²³

This long passage documents Palissy's understanding of the process of circular diffusion between the ministry of learned Genevan and Rochelais urban Calvinism and the laity of "poor, unlettered artisans" in Saintonge. "A certain artisan, poor and indigent to an incredible degree" was arguably Palissy's description of himself in the seminal role. Those "others," who "got themselves into something they had not been taught" constituted Palissy's first conventicle, an underground group of artisan followers. A warrant of September 1558 issued by the *parlement* of Guyenne for Palissy's arrest, along with the nine other members of his original secret assembly, for an "inquiry on acts of heresy," provides the names of the accused and most of their trades:

Colete Maudot, wife of Mathurin Seurin, butcher of Xaintes; and likewise . . . Nicolas Veyrel apothecary, Bernard Palisis called the potter, Guillemete Patronne, widow . . . hostess of the public house at the sign of the Noble Vine, André Bodet her son, Mathurin Seurin, butcher, Nicolas the Embroiderer, Joseph the Mason the younger, . . . Master Legier the Mason, [and] Guillaume Girault.¹²⁴

The same arrest warrant also targeted another conventicle of artisan heretics in nearby Saint-Jean d'Angély. This hinted at how widespread the infection was among Saintongeais tradesmen and their wives, many of whom worked in their husbands' shops. This unknown group was smaller than Palissy's, containing only four or five members, and it was led by a glazier, a barber-surgeon, and their wives. All of the members of Palissy's assembly were represented as a community of like thinkers from similar very poor backgrounds. Still, we know nothing more about the lives of Nicolas Veyrel, the apothecary from Saintes, or his co-religionist Cyprien Jousseaulme, the barber-surgeon who lived in Saint-Jean d'Angély. Yet we do know that both of these trades, which used crucibles and distillation by fire—as did Palissy with his pottery glazes and alchemy—were essential to the diffusion of Paracelsian alchemic and manual theory and the practice of experiential natural philosophy that Palissy championed in the *Recepte* and *Discours*. It is self-evident that Veyrel and Palissy had religious insights about Nature in common. However, they may also have perceived the spiritualized transformation of the material world in the same way from closely shared reading, experimental laboratory work, and discussion. Did such religious and artisanal discourse take place in the public house of Guillemete Patronne and her son André Bodet? Publicans were always suspected of harboring heretical artisans and were, for example, targeted for occasional crackdowns by police in La Rochelle after 1628.¹²⁵

Clearly, apart from the Word itself, the group's primary "authority" was Hamelin, and Palissy took great pains to establish that his own authority was derived from the "maistre" himself: "all these things were done through the good example, advice and doctrine of Master Philibert Hamelin." This is made plain in the emphasis on the text and in the transcription of passages directly from (what must have been) Hamelin's own books, carried into the region through colporterage.

Hamelin's "example, advice, and doctrine" is especially evident in Palissy's citation of Deuteronomy [11:19], the book that identifies itself as containing [1:1] "the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness." Revealing his approach to reading, the potter paraphrased the original lines loosely and simply. Yet when Palissy wrote his advice, as "the first" of the "unlearned," that "You will proclaim my Law in going, and coming, while drinking and eating, when you sleep, and when you awaken, and when you are sitting in the road," he recalled that Hamelin had made preaching an invisible part of the rhythms of everyday life and work. Deuteronomy was also the book of laws, in which the Ten Commandments were given to Moses and the tablets placed in the Ark of the Covenant for the chosen [5:1–21; 10:1–5]. Once given, these laws became "a blessing and a curse" [11:26]. If the covenant was broken, Moses warned: "They shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout your land; and they shall besiege

you in all your towns throughout your land. . . . And you shall eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of your sons and daughters . . . in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you [28:52–53].”

Clearly, here was another archaic source for de Léry’s reading of the siege of Sancerre, Palissy’s critique of fortresses, the response from both sides to the siege of La Rochelle, and the abiding sense that the popular mistrust of fortresses was older than historical memory.

The Saintongeais laity would obey the discipline of a Genevan minister while in personal contact if it sensed his egalitarianism, as they did in Hamelin’s case (but not in the case of his immediate successor). Yet Palissy was concerned here with the problem of spiritual maintenance in the *absence* of the official, learned Calvinist ministry. His choice of Deuteronomy 11 as a focal point was appropriate to this context as well. It not only suggested the mobility of refugee artisans, fragmented and preaching on the open road in the Huguenots’ *désert*, but passage 19 also begins by commanding, “you shall teach [the law] to your children.”

Palissy described his assembly as analogous to simple children in their religious understanding. The first pair of artisans were childlike, because they were so “unlearned, for neither one knew much.” So, like the children in “De la ville de forteresse” who learned to defend themselves and provide for the community’s security in time of war, Hamelin’s orphaned spiritual children continued in the master’s footsteps. Palissy chose to supplement Hamelin’s “example and advice” in his own way, as a layman, by teaching how spiritual knowledge was to be diffused by Huguenot artisans who were hidden or limited by their “abjection” and simplicity, and who had no one to teach or lead by example but themselves. “The first one advised the other,” Palissy wrote, “that he should employ the most stirring form of exhortation because that would be the most fruitful: and seeing how the second was totally devoid of learning, this gave him heart.” This was the doctrine of religious enthusiasm, of speaking from a pious heart and religious experience, if not a learned mind. Promoting rustic security, it was emotional, interior, and natural. Hidden as it was in the domain of the spirit, there was safety in the space between man and God and soulish insight enough to read and interpret Scripture, understanding the natural world without benefit of a university education.

Hence, Hamelin’s authority to teach the word was spread from Palissy to the next apparently literate (if unlearned) artisan and then throughout the assembly. Once local artisans gained the confidence to master the “stirring” motion of their inner spirit, they also learned how close they were to Christ himself, as “it was the right of all people to speak about the statutes and ordinances of God, so that one not despise His doctrine because of His abjection.” Then they were ready to chart an independent course into the diaspora, for Palissy’s plan “was in order to inspire some of their listeners to follow their example and do the same.”

Finally, in an attempt to blend oral and written traditions so that unlearned artisans might remember Calvinist doctrine *precisely* as Hamelin had taught it to Palissy, and Palissy to others, text “from the Old and New Testaments” was always written “out by hand” before reading it to the assembly. Calvin originated this advice in order to protect the pure doctrine, and the unlettered Palissy remembered “passages and authorities” that way. Thus, because his followers “were getting themselves into something they had not been taught, it was decided that they would write their exhortation and would read them to the assembly.” As each new artisan-preacher led their own secret assembly, he or she presumably read both the text and a Palissian paraphrase of Hamelin’s interpretation of the Word aloud. In theory, the strangled Hamelin would “speak” again through a genealogy of hundreds of artisans’ mouths and skilled hands preaching in the transatlantic *désert*.

Palissy’s dependency on writing “by hand” as a mnemonic device for spreading both the Word and its meaning to the unlettered in the rustic Huguenot *désert* was also one of the few advantages that Jean de Léry found Europeans held unambiguously over the savages of America. Here was a way in which great secrets might be hidden or made public, almost simultaneously. “For while,” de Léry wrote in his *Histoire d’un voyage*, savages “can communicate nothing except by the spoken word”:

we, on the other hand . . . by means of writing and the letters that we send, we can declare our secrets to whomever we choose, even to the ends of the earth. So even aside from the learning that we acquire from books, of which the savages seem likewise completely destitute, this invention of writing, which we possess and of which they are just as utterly deprived, must be ranked among the singular gifts which men over here have received from God.¹²⁶

De Léry proudly told the story of “when I was first in this country, in order to learn their language I wrote a number of sentences which I then read aloud to them”:

Thinking that this was some kind of witchcraft, they said to each other, “Is it not a marvel that this fellow, who yesterday could not have said a single word in our language, can now be understood to us, by virtue of that paper that he is holding and which makes him speak thus?”¹²⁷

It is difficult to share de Léry’s confidence that the Tupi sentences he copied down when he first arrived in Brazil said precisely what he thought they did; or, even more slippery, yet to the point, that they elicited the convenient responses he remembered his Tupi hearers saying in a language he did not fully understand. Whether the audience consisted of American savages or childlike and rustic (if literate) Huguenot artisans, attempts to order dissemination of meaning through writing—that is, to orchestrate personal, intimate memory and spiritual understanding—failed from the

outset absent strict Genevan discipline. While “we can declare our secrets to whomever we choose,” their meaning or application cannot be limited once that declaration has been made. Secrets will have lives of their own. The tiny pieces of paper packed with text that were intended to signify the end of interpretation had marked only its beginning.