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## Printing and publishing in France 1470-1700

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During the early modern period, France developed one of the most vibrant publishing cultures in Europe producing and exporting thousands of editions every year. Paris became the most important single city for the printing of books in the world, and yet the first presses only settled in the kingdom decades after Gutenberg had begun printing in Mainz.

The first books printed in France came off a press run by a trio of German artisans that was set up at the behest of the rector of the university of Paris in 1470. The role of the university in this instance prefigured much of what came to characterise the Parisian print industry over the following decades and centuries. From the very start printing and publishing was institutionalised and controlled. The most important figures of the local book trade were integrated into the university, thereby bestowing upon them valuable privileges, but also retaining power over them. Such a situation encouraged a conservative outlook and in that regard it is unsurprising that most of the innovations in French printing in the incunabula period did not come from Paris but from Lyon.

Lyon rapidly became France's second most important city in the book trade. Printing began there only three years after Paris and, crucially, in a very different context. From the beginning, Lyon based its print industry around its flourishing mercantile population and it was a local businessman, Barthélemy Buyer, who invited the first printer into the city. Once the workshop set up, a series of other printers flowed into Lyon, profiting both from the considerable amount of capital available and from the more relaxed local legislation that allowed printers and publishers to set up shop without going through an apprenticeship and becoming a master. This entrepreneurial freedom encouraged a more experimental approach: it was in Lyon that the first illustrated book was published, that the first French text was printed and that the smaller octavo format was first adopted.

Parisian printers soon followed suit, adopting these innovations as their own, producing larger print runs and flexing their considerable financial power that profited from the presence of a large local market: the city's population was by then probably the largest in Europe with perhaps as many as 300,000 inhabitants. During the 1470s and 1480s printing spread to numerous

provincial towns, though many of them struggled to man the presses in the long run, especially when faced with the strong competition coming from Paris and Lyon. The main secondary centres to emerge from the incunabula age were Rouen, Toulouse, and Poitiers.

The books printed in France were exported far beyond the borders of the realm. Paris and Rouen looked north, producing numerous editions for the English market in particular. Toulouse published editions for Spain, but it is perhaps Lyon which became the most important producer of volumes for the international market. In the first decades of the sixteenth century, Lyon publishers began to specialise in large books of law. Written in Latin, with high added value, and centred on the *Corpus juris civilis* and the *Corpus juris canonici* which were important for the whole of Europe, these were the perfect items to export. Profiting from the city's strategic geographic location between northern and southern Europe, merchants took barrels of books to be sold at the great book fairs of Frankfurt and, later, Leipzig in the Holy Roman Empire, and of Medina del Campo in Spain, as well as using their Italian connexions to send tens of thousands of copies to the south. In order to finance such large operations, the publishers gathered together in a series of companies of which the membership fluctuated over time.

In Paris, the trade turned towards religious books. During the first half of the sixteenth century, Parisian books of hours were one of the most distinctive type of books produced anywhere in Europe. The hundreds of editions and many thousands of copies led the printers to use metalcut rather than woodcut illustrations. More robust, the particular technique used, known as *criblé*, rendered the background as if speckled with white dots and visually very different from other illustrations. The success of these books was underlined by the production of works for the specific use of tens of different ecclesiastical jurisdictions and often published in conjunction with local booksellers who could look after the distribution of the copies.

The creation of the Royal College in Paris in 1530 gave new impetus to intellectual publishing in the city. A market for books printed in Greek began to emerge and certain printers had specific fonts made in order to meet demand. Alongside this, the use of Gothic type, that had hitherto dominated the publication of vernacular texts, gave gradually way to Roman and Italic with talented punch-cutters such as Claude Garamont designing new types. Another innovation revolutionised music printing with the fashioning of type that included both the staff and the notes which led to a significant development as first Pierre Attaignant and then Adrian Le Roy and Robert Ballard specialised in the domain and were prolific printers. The illustration of books also became subtler with the introduction of copper engravings in Lyon and Paris, though this new technique only really supplanted woodcuts as the preferred option of French publishers in the early seventeenth century.

The Reformation had, to begin with, little impact on French publishing: Luther remained a mainly Germanic concern and there was no equivalent in France of the tidal wave of *Flugschriften* that inundated the market in the Holy Roman Empire. But though the effects were less immediate, the gradual rise of religious contestation resulted in increasing repression both from the Sorbonne and from Francis I. The printer Étienne Dolet was burnt at the stake with his books for printing texts that were considered to be heretical, whilst others such as the King's own official printer, Robert Estienne, fled the kingdom. Estienne sought refuge in Geneva which, at this point, was little more than a quiet backwater in the European printscape. But his arrival, along with the presence of Calvin and other French refugees such as Conrad Badius, the son of one of the most influential printers of the early sixteenth century, transformed the city into an important centre of print. Through the following centuries, the western cantons

of the Swiss Confederation played a vital role in the dissemination of texts banned in France, but also in the production of classics and became a major source of books for French retail booksellers, much to the chagrin of French printers and publishers.

Within the kingdom, the rise of the Reformation was met with an increase in the production of French language works of popular piety and of texts denouncing the errors of the Protestant Reformers. Paris, but also towns such as Reims and Toulouse were at the forefront of this production. The contestation remained, however, strong and in certain cities such as Lyon, the presence of strong Protestant sympathies in the book community meant that the output of local printers in the 1550s and early 1560s was seen with suspicion elsewhere. The death of Henry II and the Tumult of Amboise in 1560 led to the formation of a strong Protestant party and to the publication under the aegis of the Prince of Condé of the first real pamphlets of political opposition in Orléans and then elsewhere. France had thus its first pamphlet moment, but unlike in Germany or in the Netherlands, the in-octavo format rapidly became the format of preference of these pamphlets. The forty years of civil strife that followed made these imprints a common part of the French book world. The second great pamphlet moment of 1588-1589 emphasised how much these pamphlets had become an integral part of political opposition. This would remain the case throughout the seventeenth century as the great debates around the meeting of the Estates General in 1614 and the *Fronde* revolt in 1648 confirmed.

Apart from launching the pamphlet, the Wars of Religion profoundly modified the existing commercial equilibrium of the kingdom. Lyon suffered particularly, its printing industry beginning a decline that, with lulls and short recoveries, would nevertheless continue throughout the seventeenth century. The chaos that followed the rise of the Catholic League in the late 1580s and the 1590s led to new towns such as Troyes and Rouen emerging as centres increasingly specialised in the production of popular print and of literary works, known collectively as the *Bibliothèque bleue* that would thrive in the seventeenth century. It was also a period in which fake imprints became more common as printers and publishers sought to hide their production from the authorities with anonymous imprints and invented workshops – a tradition that had its most famous incarnation a century later with the appearance of Pierre Marteau whose probable first work was, fittingly, a history of the reign of Henry III printed in 1660.

The start of the seventeenth century also witnessed changes in the form of the books themselves: the duodecimo format was introduced and adopted for many literary texts, the quality of the paper deteriorated as publishers sought to sell their volumes cheaper. The industry as a whole became more regulated as a series of statutes were adopted in the major cities that organised the book trade and looked to make it easier to control. Access to the profession also became more difficult as the regulations strengthened the position of established shops and tried to limit the number of master printers and booksellers. Through the following decades there were repeated attempts to clamp down on the publication of unauthorised editions as the Bourbon monarchy sought to strengthen its grip on power.

The new century was also that of the triumph of French over Latin even in the field of religion. The works of Bishop Jean-Pierre Camus, one of the most prolific authors of the first half of the seventeenth century, are a case in point. Known for being the author of over two hundred works, he wrote solely in French. The importance of vernacular printing was also illustrated by the rise of Rouen – the production of the city's workshops outstripping that of their Lyon counterparts in the course of the seventeenth century. As an important trading centre with a

population perhaps twice that of Lyon in 1600, Rouen was also able to profit from its position on the Seine. Indeed, apart from the easy access it afforded to Paris, ships could sail up the river directly from the sea, allowing the booksellers of the city to both export and import books to and from other countries.

The rise of French language publications was also the result of two other phenomena. The increasing level of education of the population meant that the market for French books rose. Significantly, the strengthening of the political power and cultural aura of the French monarchy meant that the sphere of influence of the language was expanding rapidly. This was true through the geographical expansion of France with the annexation of centres of print such as Douai in the north and Strasbourg in the east. But it was also the result of the rising prestige of French thinkers and authors that saw French gradually become a language spoken amongst the elite of other countries and particularly in the Holy Roman Empire during the reign of Louis XIV. This was crystallised in the creation of institutions such as the *Académie française* as early as 1635 and, in its wake, of the *Imprimerie royale* four years later, proof of the ambitions of the Bourbon monarchy in the world of the book.

*Highlights from the collection*

Jacques Bouchet, *Epitaphes des Roys de France, qui ont regné depuis le roy Pharamond, jusques au roy Francoys premier de ce nom* (Bordeaux: Jean 'Mentcle', ca 1540), USTC 13301; Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. L 37 4



Figure 1: Portrait of Francis I, L7r

Printing in the sixteenth century was not only about the great names of humanist and literary publishing such as the Estiennes, the Gryphes, the de Tournes or Badius. Most editions were produced by less prestigious workshops, many of which have long escaped scholars mainly attracted by the leading lights of the Renaissance book. The *Epitaphes des Roys de France* is a case in point. The text attributed to Barthélemy Chasseneu on the title page was in fact a rewriting of the printer and poet Jacques Bouchet's work *Les anciennes et modernes genealogies des Roys de France* and comprised a series of short biographies of the 58 kings of France, starting with the mythical King Pharamond, whose Trojan descent gave added legitimacy and prestige to the royal lineage, and ending with Francis I. Written entirely in French verse, Francis is the only king to receive a short Latin eulogy that

concentrates on his military successes and his generosity. Each king received his own woodcut portrait inserted into a passe-partout frame. They range from the completely fabricated, for the more ancient monarchs, to a vague likeness, in the case of the more contemporary ones.

The Bordeaux imprint followed in the wake of a number of editions of this popular text, the first of which was printed by Bouchet in 1527/8. However, this version differs from its predecessors as it jettisons the long prose accounts of the reign of each king to preserve only the short verse introductions. The impression that this is a downmarket iteration is reinforced by the woodcuts: they are crudely cut copies of those that feature in the initial edition, simplifying the hatching and sometimes removing details from the originals. The deformed name of the publisher, given as Jean Mentcle, suggests this might be a pirate edition: Jean Mentcle was in fact Jean Clement, the bookseller inverting the first and last syllable of his name – a process very common in modern French slang known as *verlan*.

Decrypting his name in the way allows us to track down Clement's will in the Bordeaux archives which reveal a slightly more complex story: he was an itinerant figure whose peripatetic career took him not just to Bordeaux, but also to Poitiers where he had business connections to the Marnef shop which published with Bouchet a new edition of the text in 1545... This suggests that the Clement edition was perhaps at least implicitly authorised, a cheap in-octavo iteration that sought to popularise the text further without contaminating the Bouchet and Marnef brand before the publication of the more prestigious in-folio edition a few years later.



*Requête présentée au Roy et a la Royne par le Triumvirat. Avec la response faicte par monseigneur le Prince de Condé* ([Orléans: Éloy Gibier], 1562), USTC 1350; Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. Lb33 78 A.

Between 1562 and 1598 France was torn asunder by a violent series of conflicts known collectively as the French Wars of Religion. It is estimated during this period that some three million people lost their lives as a direct consequence of the civil wars and the religious, political, economic and social turmoil left a long-lasting impression on France. The printing press played a major role as all sides sought to justify their actions and shore up public support. In this regard, the start of the conflict was a pivotal moment as the Protestant party sought to organise itself and promote its message in an accessible manner. To achieve this, the main aristocratic leader, the Prince of Condé, had a series of short imprints printed in Orléans by the printer and bookseller, Éloy Gibier.

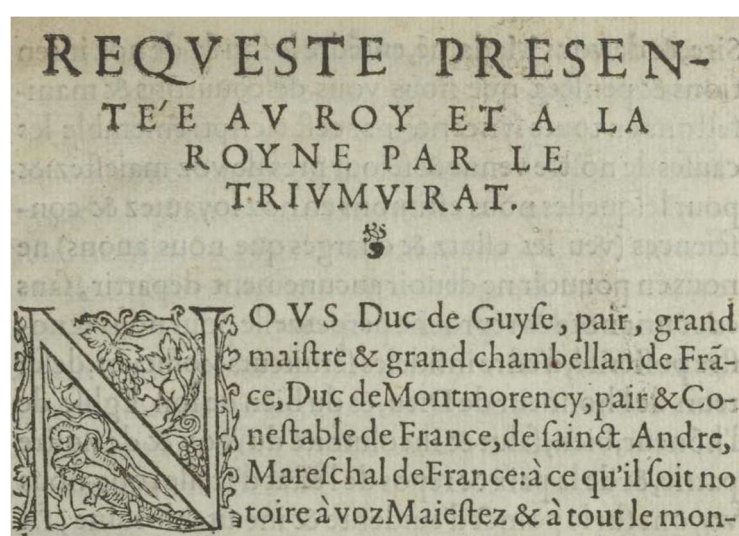


Figure 2: Incipit of the pamphlet , A2r

These pamphlets were a new genre in France, a country where there had not previously been an outburst similar to that witnessed in the Holy Roman Empire following the publication of Martin Luther's 95 theses. France's first 'pamphlet moment' occurred in the run up to the outbreak of the conflict. The Protestant party mimicked the German *Flugschriften*, adopting an in-quarto format for these imprints – a short-lived experimentation before adopting the smaller in-

octavo form that dominated French

ephemeral printing in this period. The printer chosen to produce these items was a modest provincial workshop with a Protestant master printer who was reluctant to put his head above the parapet for his faith. The series of Condean tracts to which this item belongs were produced under the cover of anonymity, though Gibier continued to use his ornamental material which made identification relatively straight forward.

The success of the pamphlets led to each text appearing in a number of different editions in quick succession as the print runs ran out, each new version scrupulously copied on the previous iteration. The pamphlets were not only bought as separate items, but often conglomerated into a single item, probably as soon as they were acquired. These composite volumes, known by their German name *Sammelbände*, signifying literally 'bound together', are important witnesses to how the pamphlets were sold, how their owners collected them and the context in which a text such as the *Requête* would have been read and then preserved for future generations.

*Le miroir de la mort, en breton* (Cuburien: s.n., 1575), USTC 5266;  
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. p Yn 1

The ability of print to convey not just the ideas of high theology but also a message of popular piety as had been demonstrated by the impact of Luther in Germany, was very much heeded by the French Catholic Church. They responded to the danger posed by the message of the Protestant Reformation by developing Catholic printed books aimed not simply at theologians capable of understanding erudite Latin, but by targeting a much wider public by publishing in French. In this domain the reaction of the Gallican Church was reinforced by the rulings of the Council of Trent which encouraged some members of the French clergy to take this further and delve into printing in regional languages such as Breton, as is illustrated by this imprint.

The Mirror of Death was not the first Breton language title – there had been printing in Breton during the incunabula era – but it marked a change from what had preceded it. Early imprints had mainly been books of hours, generally printed in Paris and shipped to the duchy. In this case we have a work printed within the Breton speaking half of Brittany and produced outside the normal context for most publications in this period. Indeed, rather than being printed in a city for a commercial publisher, this work came off a press that had been set up within the walls of the Franciscan convent of Cuburien close to Morlaix. It formed part of a concerted effort in the aftermath of Trent to promote Catholicism. But here it was not aimed at a population that had been seduced by Protestantism: the Reformation's impact was mainly to be felt amongst the nobility and in some of the towns of the French-speaking eastern half of the duchy. Instead it sought to deal with the very peculiar and often unorthodox traditional beliefs of the Breton-speaking population.

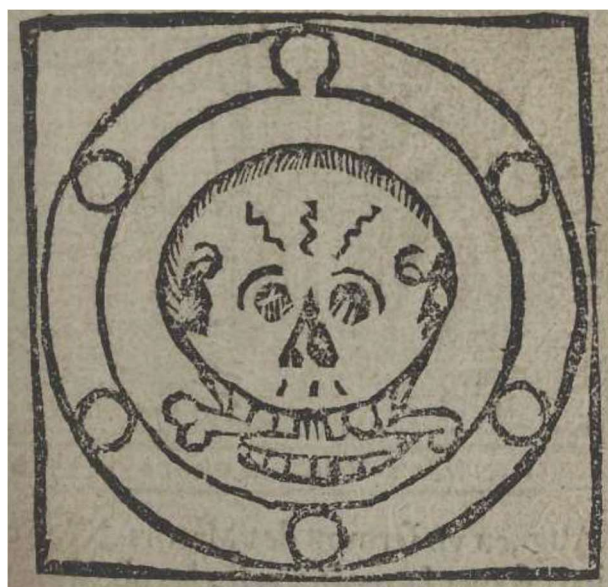


Figure 3: *The mirror of death*, title page woodcut

The press had undoubtedly been set up by the local Franciscan theologian and future head of the order, Christophe de Cheffontaines. Though he was born into a noble family, Cheffontaines first language was Breton and he understood the need to communicate more effectively to the locals in order to strengthen their faith. The nature of the book emphasises the care and thought that has gone into targeting the Bretons: it is based around the question of death, central to many of the popular beliefs as is illustrated by the figure of the Ankou and by the numerous skulls that adorn the monuments of the parish enclosures of Lower Brittany. Indeed, a skull stares out from the title page of this edition that seeks to deliver its message not in dull prose but in lively

verse that intersperses the Breton text with French chapter headings to guide the reader through fundamental religious issues such as the final judgment and gaining access to paradise.

The imprints from Cuburien are extremely rare: they were produced to be distributed locally to a population that did not collect books and the exemplar digitalised as part of this collection is the only known surviving copy.



*Almanach ou pronostication des laboureurs* (Troyes: Jean Oudot, ca 1622),  
USTC 38958; Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. p V 233.



Figure 4: 'Figure de la roue solaire', B1v

The end of the Wars of Religion and the rise of the Bourbon monarchy led to a redefinition of the French printscape with statutes organising bookselling and printing in the main French centres in the early 1620s. But this reorganisation was not simply a question of state regulation but also the result of market opportunities identified by different publishers scattered throughout France. The Oudot enterprise in Troyes that produced this almanac is a case in point. The Oudots were a well-established Troyes family that had been selling books since at least the early sixteenth century in the city. Successive generations had carried the family business through the turmoil of the civil wars, becoming printers and publishers, initially following the tried and tested route of working for local institutions.

Their imprints were of rudimentary quality, probably to keep costs down, and they increasingly specialised in the production of cheap print. In order to appeal to a wide popular audience, they sought to publish texts that would be of interest to readers who were not necessarily attracted to serious works of scholarship. Thus, their output diversified during the early seventeenth century to include a diet of outmoded chivalric romances, classic school books, as well as almanacs and prognostications that would be bought and used beyond the confines of the cities wall. Because their affordability was a major part of their attraction, they were not necessarily bound in relatively expensive materials such as leather. Instead, they were protected by coarse low quality blue paper which gave them the name *Bibliothèque bleue* under which they are still known today.

The almanac has all the expected traits of this type of imprints. The book is printed in the small in-octavo format and is illustrated by woodcuts to make the work more attractive, but to limit costs they are reused from previous editions. The engraving on the verso of the title page represents the author as a praying monk – a figure whose portrait was undoubtedly used in many different imprints to illustrate a religious scene. The numerous breaks in the frame of the picture stands testament to the age of the woodcut that has clearly been used many times previously. Similarly, the wheel of the solar circle represented on B1v starts not in the year of publication but in 1589, suggesting that it was made decades earlier for a different edition.

*Recueil de plusieurs pieces servans a l'histoire moderne* (Cologne: Pierre du Marteau, 1663), Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Nationale bibliotheek van Nederland, KW 224 g 41.

The increasing power of the Bourbon monarchy during the seventeenth century reached its paroxysm during the personal reign of Louis XIV. The use of the printing press as a means of control and of propaganda was emphasised by the use of the privilege system to check and, when necessary, to censor the output of the workshops based in France. In such a context, authors sought to have texts printed abroad and then disseminated both elsewhere in Europe but also in France itself. There was nothing new in this: networks of distribution for shipping and selling books printed in Geneva had been set up as the French Reformation gathered pace during the sixteenth century. But opposition through print became subtler and no longer necessarily linked to religious issues. The continuing stream of imprints aimed at the French market that emanated from French speaking Switzerland was swelled by the increasing involvement of publishers based in the Netherlands who used the power of their burgeoning role as the bookshop of the world to produce works for a French readership.

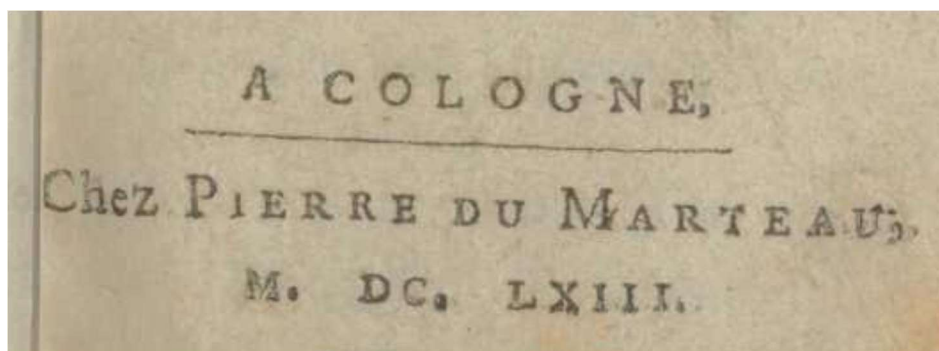


Figure 5: Address of 'Pierre du Marteau' on the title page

For some of the more active publishers, this involved some subterfuge: they wished to produce and sell classics and editions of texts under their own name, as they would not be banned from sale in France, and also profit from the lucrative trade in censored books. The most obvious manner of avoiding recognition was therefore either printing anonymously or publishing under a pseudonym. The most famous of these was the one used on this imprint: Pierre (du) Marteau. Ostensibly based in Cologne, a Catholic city to allay the fears of the religious authorities, Marteau was a pseudonym first used in 1660 that became the most famous of false addresses for illicit material. Workshops in different cities used the name as a cover on the title pages of their editions.

The *Recueil* printed in 1663 is a perfect example of this phenomenon. It was in fact published by perhaps the most iconic of all the seventeenth century Dutch publishers, the Elseviers in their classic in-duodecimo format. Comparatively, this is a carefully anonymous edition: not only does the title page give the name of a non-existent bookseller, but there is only the simplest of arrangement of fleurons on the page, and the rest of volume is devoid of all headers, typographical ornaments, and ornate lettering, making identification more difficult. The nature of the text explains why the Elseviers did not want their name to figure prominently on the volume. An overview of a selection of well-chosen events recent French history, starting with in the latter half of the reign of Henry IV, the work – whilst ostensibly pro-French – would not

have sat comfortably with the authorities as it focused on some of the most sensitive moments of the seventeenth century.