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The Sound of Memory: Acoustic Conflict and the Legacy of the French Wars of Religion in Seventeenth-Century Montpellier

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This article explores the commemorative meaning of sound in early modern Montpellier, focusing on the use of processional music and church bells to remember the French Wars of Religion. Scholarship has demonstrated that music in post-Reformation Europe often served to consolidate confessional identities, but this article argues that in religiously mixed communities like Montpellier, sound also served as a memory vector. In the wake of the French religious wars, Protestants and Catholics developed competing soundscapes that revived painful memories about the wars and sustained religious tension throughout the seventeenth century. Catholics relied on frequent processions to recall the destruction of their churches and monasteries at the hands of the Protestants, and chose specific songs to underline their triumph in re-establishing Catholic worship. The memory of losing their church bells also prompted them to fight Protestant attempts at installing their own bells after the wars. On the basis of untapped archival sources, this article also reconstructs the musical culture of Catholics in seventeenth-century Montpellier, paying particular attention to the cathedral chapel and the confraternity of White Penitents.*

KEYWORDS French Wars of Religion, soundscape, memory culture, religious conflict, processions, sacred music, church bells

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On the evening of 30 November 1625, a solemn procession of Catholic clergymen, magistrates, and inhabitants wound its way through the narrow streets of Montpellier. Their destination was the Place de la Canourgue, where bishop Pierre Fenouillet planted a cross to mark the site for the rebuilding of the cathedral of Saint Pierre, which had been ruined during the first decade of the French Wars of Religion. The ritual was accompanied by an overwhelming acoustic performance: soldiers of the local garrison fired a round of salutes, the sound of cannons reverberated across the city in celebration, and the cathedral chapel sang the psalm *Exaudiat te Dominus*, followed by the hymn *Te Deum laudamus*.¹ These sounds were all part of the standard liturgical repertoire for religious processions, but Catholics participating in the 1625 procession would also have been aware of their commemorative significance. They had not forgotten that during the religious wars, the Protestants had banned Catholic worship and destroyed their churches and convents, including the cathedral of Saint Pierre.² Marching through town and planting a cross to mark the new building site thus signalled the Catholics' resolve to reclaim sacred space, as did the thundering sound of muskets and cannons. The psalm *Exaudiat te Dominus* reinforced this commemorative message, as the text echoed the suffering of Montpellier's Catholic community and its reestablishment after the wars:

May the Lord hear thee in the day of tribulation: may the name of the God of Jacob protect thee.

May he send thee help from the sanctuary: and defend thee out of Sion.

[...]

They are bound, and have fallen: but we are risen, and are set upright.³

This article explores the commemorative meaning of sound in early modern France, in particular the use of processional music and church bells to remember the religious wars. It argues that, in post-war France, Protestants and Catholics developed competing soundscapes that revived painful memories about the wars and sustained religious tension throughout the seventeenth century. As scholars have shown, music was crucial to the consolidation of confessional identities during the Reformation: Protestants and Catholics defined themselves by what they sang or heard.⁴ Yet music was also an instrument of conflict, especially in bi-confessional cities where Protestants and Catholics tried to manipulate and control the urban soundscape

¹ Archives départementales de l'Hérault (hereafter ADH), G 1418, Sur la réédification de l'Eglise Cathedrale ruinée par les troubles de la R.P.R., 30 November 1625.

² Jean Nougaret and Marie-Sylvie Grandjouan, eds., *Montpellier monumental*, 2 vols (Paris: Monum, 2005), 1, pp. 1, 95–97.

³ ADH, G 1418, Sur la réédification de l'Eglise Cathedrale ruinée par les troubles de la R.P.R., 30 November 1625. The translation from the Latin is taken from the Douay-Rheims Bible.

⁴ Recent overviews in Christopher Boyd Brown, 'Music,' in *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformation*, ed. by Ulinka Rublack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 621–42; Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 40–75; Noel O'Regan, 'Music and the Counter-Reformation,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*, ed. by Alexandra Bamji, Geert Janssen, and Mary Laven (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 337–54; and Chiara Bertoglio, *Reforming Music: Music and the Religious Reformations of the Sixteenth Century* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

by producing their own sounds, and by silencing those that contested their power. Singing psalms, chanting hymns, or ringing church bells thus became the cornerstone of distinct yet conflicting acoustic communities.⁵

This article argues, however, that sound was not only a marker of religious identity, but also served as an auditory cue that prompted divisive memories about the civil wars. Music and church bells were instrumental in remembering past divisions and perpetuating religious animosity, turning French cities into an acoustic and mnemonic battleground between Catholics and Protestants. Exploring these acoustic conflicts is particularly instructive for understanding why religious conflict continued long after the Edict of Nantes had officially ended the wars. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that despite royal injunctions to bury the past, the troubles were never really forgotten, and continued to divide Catholics and Protestants.⁶ Because the focus has mostly been on elite memories, considering evidence such as written histories, engravings, and picture galleries, we know little about the experiences of ordinary, often illiterate people, who relied on aural and material memory vectors to recall the past. This article therefore explores how sound channelled conflicting memories of the religious wars. It focuses on the city of Montpellier, the administrative capital of Languedoc, where Protestants and Catholics vied for control of urban space in the aftermath of the wars.⁷ As a result, processional music and church bells became powerful vectors in remembering past injustices and perpetuating the troubles that had just been laid to rest.

Marching for Faith and Retribution

For Montpellier's Catholics, processions were one of the most powerful auditory tools to memorialize the past and restore a pre-Reformation world of Catholic piety swept away by the wars. Processions on the Catholic liturgical calendar were in themselves designed as commemorative events: theologians argued that as the faithful walked behind the cross and the Holy Sacrament, they followed in the footsteps of Christ carrying his cross through the streets of Jerusalem, and remembered that he had sacrificed himself for their sins. In his 1585 *Traicté des processions chrestiens*, the Parisian priest René Benoist wrote:

⁵ Kate van Orden, *Music, Discipline, and Arms in Early Modern France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Alexander J. Fisher, *Music, Piety, and Propaganda: The Soundscapes of Counter-Reformation Bavaria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Amy Graves-Monroe, 'Soundscapes of the Wars of Religion: Sensory Crisis and the Collective Memory of Violence,' in *Memory and Community in Sixteenth-Century France*, ed. by David P. LaGuardia and Cathy Yandell (Ashgate: Farnham, 2015), pp. 55–69.

⁶ Philip Benedict, 'Divided Memories? Historical Calendars, Commemorative Processions and the Recollection of the Wars of Religion during the Ancien Régime,' *French History*, 22 (2008), 381–405; Tom Hamilton, 'The Procession of the League: Remembering the Wars of Religion in Visual and Literary Satire,' *French History*, 30 (2016), 1–30; David van der Linden, 'Memorializing the Wars of Religion in Early Seventeenth-Century French Picture Galleries: Protestants and Catholics Painting the Contested Past,' *Renaissance Quarterly*, 70 (2017), 132–78. See also my forthcoming article 'Archive Wars: Record Destruction and the Memory of the French Wars of Religion in Montpellier,' *Sixteenth Century Journal* (2019).

⁷ Barbara Diefendorf, 'Religious Conflict and Civic Identity: Battles over the Sacred Landscape of Montpellier,' *Past & Present*, 237 (2017), 53–91.

esperons & tendons tousiours à la [Cité] celeste, en laquelle nous esperons parvenir par la grace de Dieu & merite de Iesus Christ nostre Redempteur & Mediateur, suyvant le chemin de la croix, lequel il nous a ouvert & battu, y passans le premier, en nous baillant exemple & commandement de marcher apres luy, & le suyvre.⁸

Yet processions gained in commemorative significance during the French religious wars, because Catholics came to understand them not merely as references to a distant biblical past, but also to their recent suffering during the troubles. Authorities relied on processions to bolster support for the Catholic faith as well as to re-sacralize urban space contaminated by heresy — what Barbara Diefendorf has called ‘rites of repair’.⁹ In May 1574 for example, Lyon’s Catholics organized a general procession to pray to God for the extirpation of heresy in the kingdom, symbolically carrying the Holy Sacrament along all the churches sacked by the Protestants in 1562, and chanting the psalm *Exaudiat te Dominus* to praise God for the restoration of Catholic worship.¹⁰ Many cities also instituted processions to commemorate specific wartime events, in particular foiled Huguenot sieges or the deliverance from Protestant rule. Every year, Toulouse celebrated the five days of street-fighting in May 1562 that had prevented a Protestant takeover, while on 7 September the Catholics of Poitiers marched around the city walls to commemorate that in the summer of 1569 the city had successfully resisted a Protestant siege led by Admiral Coligny.¹¹

Montpellier had developed a rich processional culture prior to the outbreak of the civil wars. Religious processions frequently appear in the city registers from the fourteenth century onwards, recording how the consuls (city councillors), cathedral priests, and mendicant friars carried the Sacrament through town or went to honour the relics kept in one of the many convents.¹² The Wars of Religion obliterated this medieval tradition, because under Protestant rule the exercise of the Catholic faith and processions were banned, while during the intermittent periods of bi-confessional coexistence attempts to commemorate Catholic victories were frequently forbidden, as royal authorities saw them as a threat to the precarious religious balance. In 1570 two commissioners sent to implement the Peace of Saint-Germain thus put an end to the annual procession instituted by Montpellier’s

⁸ René Benoist, *Traicte des processions des chrestiens, auquel il est discoursu pourquoy la Croix y est eslevee & portee* (Paris: Michel de Roigny, 1589), fol. 4^{r-v}.

⁹ Barbara Diefendorf, ‘Rites of Repair: Restoring Community in the French Religious Wars,’ *Past & Present Supplement*, 7 (2012), 30–51. See also Denis Crouzet, ‘Recherches sur les processions blanches, 1583–1584,’ *Histoire, Économie et Société*, 1 (1982), 511–63.

¹⁰ Archives départementales du Rhône, 10 G 3626, Antoine Richard, *Journal de l’église de Sainte Croix*, 16 May 1574, fol. 92^v.

¹¹ Benedict, 395–96; Antoine Coutelle, ‘Espace urbain et commémoration à Poitiers au XVII^e siècle: la procession générale en mémoire du siège levé par l’admiral devant ceste ville,’ in *Terres marines*, ed. by Frédéric Chauvaud and Jacques Péret (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006), pp. 207–12.

¹² Noël Coulet, ‘Processions, espace urbain, communauté civique,’ *Cahiers de Fanjeaux*, 17 (1982), 381–97; Jean-Arnault Dérens, ‘Les ordres mendiants à Montpellier: Religieux de la ville nouvelle ou religieux du consulat?,’ *Annales du Midi*, 107 (1995), 277–98. For a list of pre-Reformation processions, see Louise Guiraud, *Études sur la Réforme en Montpellier*, 2 vols (Montpellier: Veuve Louis Valat, 1918), 1, p. 34.

Catholics in July 1568 to celebrate the expulsion of the Protestant leadership from the city.¹³

Catholics were eager to resume their processions in the wake of the troubles, hoping to restore their pre-war traditions and efface the period of Protestant rule. But although the 1598 Edict of Nantes allowed them to worship within the city (article 3) and observe all customary feast days (article 20), local government remained firmly in the hands of the Protestant consuls, who blocked attempts to reintroduce Catholic processions. In 1601 Montpellier's Catholics had to petition the governor of Languedoc, the Duke of Montmorency, to ask that the consuls respect their feast days and allow processions on Corpus Christi Day.¹⁴ Catholic worship was proscribed once again in 1621, when Protestants across southern France rebelled and took control of the major cities, including Montpellier. The churches and convents that had been painstakingly rebuilt after the wars were once again razed to the ground, while most of the Catholic clergy and inhabitants fled the city. Montpellier was retaken by King Louis XIII after a brief siege on 20 October 1622, which paved the way for the exiles' return and the restoration of Catholic worship.¹⁵ These events proved foundational to the memory culture of Montpellier's Catholics. In the decades that followed the deliverance of the city, they would time and again recall how the Mass had been banned and their sacred property destroyed twice over, until God had allowed them to triumph over heresy.

It was within this atmosphere that processions emerged as a key instrument to remember the past and reclaim Montpellier for the Catholic faith. The first commemorative procession took place on 20 October 1622, the day Louis XIII entered his reconquered city: after celebrating Mass, the bareheaded king participated in a general procession that carried the Holy Sacrament through town. All the houses along the processional route were suitably decorated, including those of Protestant families.¹⁶ The procession became an annual event that would last until the French Revolution, similar to the commemorative processions organized in Toulouse and Poitiers. Each year on 20 October, the Catholic consuls led the way in their splendid scarlet robes, followed by the mendicant orders carrying crosses, children bearing torches, and the bishop and priests of Montpellier carrying the Sacrament. In the evening, clergy and city officials attended vespers at the cathedral of Saint Pierre, where an appropriate sermon was preached on the deliverance of the city from Protestant rule.¹⁷

¹³ Philippe Corbière, *Histoire de l'église réformée de Montpellier depuis son origine jusqu'à nos jours* (Montpellier: Ferdinand Poujol, 1861), p. 87. The 1568 procession is recorded in the official city chronicle, the *Petit Thalamus*: Archives municipales de Montpellier (hereafter AMM), AA 9, Petit Thalamus de Montpellier, fol. 546^v, available via <http://thalamus.huma-num.fr/chronique-francaise/annee-1568.html> (accessed 22 November 2018).

¹⁴ AMM, GG 5, Demande contenant articles baillés par les catholiques de Montpellier contre ceux de la Religion, 2 September 1601.

¹⁵ Guiraud, 1, pp. 763–87.

¹⁶ Archives des pénitens blancs de Montpellier (hereafter APBM), Livre des deliberations, 20 October 1622, fol. 51^v.

¹⁷ The most detailed description is provided in AMM, BB 197, Memorial des choses les plus remarquables arrivées en la ville de Montpellier, 20 October 1640, fols. 8^v–9^r.

Far more ubiquitous, however, were the many processions that punctuated the liturgical calendar. By 1670, at least 16 annual processions took place in Montpellier, in particular during Holy Week, with processions on Palm Sunday and Holy Thursday, but also in summer, when each of the parishes organized its own procession after Corpus Christi Day.¹⁸ Although these processions were primarily linked to religious feast days, they were also part of a campaign to re-sacralize urban space in the wake of the religious wars and expunge the period of Protestant domination. Prior to the wars, one of Montpellier's most important annual processions was held on 31 August, the feast day of Notre-Dame des Miracles devoted to the Virgin Mary. After a vigil at the parish church of Notre-Dame-des-Tables, the procession would cover most of the city, halting at the churches of Saint Firmin and Saint Gilles, where the appropriate hymn *Salve Regina* was recited, before returning to the town hall.¹⁹ The procession only reappears in the city ceremonial in 1662, most likely because Notre-Dame-des-Tables had been ruined by the Protestants during the wars and was not rebuilt until 1655.²⁰ The 1662 ceremony began with a Mass at Notre-Dame and the distribution of consecrated bread and candles to the parishioners, followed by the firing of muskets and cannons, and a procession accompanied by the sound of drums.²¹ The reinstatement of the Notre-Dame des Miracles procession thus served to recall as well as to efface the religious wars, celebrating the restoration of pre-Reformation tradition as a triumph over Montpellier's Protestants.

Chanting the Past

Counter-Reformation processions were intended as spectacles that assailed all the human senses, including the smell of incense and the visual splendour of the monstrance, but they were first and foremost an acoustic performance. The communal singing of hymns and psalms, the sound of musical instruments, the tolling of church bells, and the firing of muskets and cannons all formed an integral part of the processional soundscape. Penitential processions — especially those held on the Feast of St Mark and Rogation days — typically included the singing of litanies, with invocations to God, Christ, Mary, and the saints, followed by communal responses such as *ora pro nobis*, while on festive occasions like Corpus Christi Day joyous hymns dominated the repertoire, in particular *Pange lingua* and *Ave Maria*.²²

Yet the music performed during religious processions in post-war France also helped to remember the civil wars, as Montpellier's Catholics understood the hymns and psalms not simply as liturgical invocations, but also as auditory cues

¹⁸ The processions are recorded in the city ceremonials: AMM, BB 197, BB 198, and BB 199.

¹⁹ Gretchen Peters, *The Musical Sounds of Medieval French Cities: Players, Patrons, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 22; Louise Guiraud, *Histoire du culte et des miracles de Notre-Dame des Tables* (Montpellier: Jean Martel aîné, 1885), pp. 29–31.

²⁰ Nougaret and Grandjouan, 1, pp. 154–56.

²¹ AMM, BB 198, Memorial des choses quy se sont faictes & observées au sujet des eslections, vizittes et harangues du Consulat de Montpellier, 31 August 1662, fol. 42^r.

²² Fisher, pp. 245–51; Florie Rousset, 'À l'écoute du paysage sonore des processions clermontoises,' in *Les bas chœurs d'Auvergne et du Velay: le métier de musicien d'Église aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, ed. by Bernard Dompnier (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise-Pascal, 2010), pp. 297–318; Noel O'Regan, 'Processions and their music in post-Tridentine Rome,' *Recercare*, 4 (1992), 45–80.

that celebrated their suffering and subsequent triumph. As Christopher Brown has noted, liturgical hymns and psalms did not necessarily pick a confessional battle, but their use in specific contexts could render them politically significant or explosive.²³ Kate van Orden has likewise argued that the music sung by Protestants and Catholics during the Wars of Religion was nothing less than a battle cry, while Alexander Fisher has observed that the sound of litanies and choirs reverberated across entire cities, extending the acoustic horizon of processions beyond their narrow physical space and rendering them clearly audible to Protestants.²⁴ In the wake of the French religious wars, processional music only gained in political significance, as Catholics chanted for faith as well as for retribution.

Processional music in early modern French cities was typically produced by the cathedral chapel, headed by a choirmaster (*maître de la musique*) directing the choral priests, instrumentalists, and choirboys. Although musicologists studying ‘Baroque music’ often focus on secular airs and operas, sacred music in fact constituted the most common aural experience of early modern Frenchmen. For a long time, the genre received little sympathy from scholars, who labelled it as conservative and a mere continuation of Renaissance styles.²⁵ Yet in recent years the study of sacred music has received a fresh impulse, as archival evidence has revealed a vibrant culture of church music throughout the kingdom. The cathedral chapels of southern France in particular developed a reputation for sacred music, including Narbonne, Aix-en-Provence, Béziers, and Le Puy-en-Velay.²⁶

Montpellier’s musical tradition was more modest, even though it predated the Reformation. In the mid-fourteenth century Montpellier had actually been one of the first French cities to establish a civic wind band of five minstrels, who played their shawms, bombardas, and slide-trumpets during civic and religious processions.²⁷ Yet the Protestant occupation of Montpellier — in particular the desolation of the Catholic sacred landscape and the alienation of clerical property — had a devastating impact on the cathedral chapter, which struggled to regain its footing in the wake of the wars.²⁸ In 1622 the chapter hired a new choirmaster, Joseph Petit, who had previously served the cathedral of Agen.²⁹ Probably for want of resources, the chapel initially comprised only vocalists singing plainchant, whose performance seems to

²³ Brown, p. 634.

²⁴ Van Orden, pp. 125–27; Fisher, pp. 267–69.

²⁵ See for example James R. Anthony, *French Baroque Music from Beaujoyeux to Rameau*, 3rd edn (Portland: Amadeus, 1997), pp. 199–203; Peter Bennett and Georgia Cowart, ‘Music under Louis XIII and XIV, 1610–1715,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to French Music*, ed. by Simon Trezise (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 69–87.

²⁶ Bernard Dompnier, ed., *Maîtrises & Chapelles aux XVIIe & XVIIIe siècles: Des institutions musicales au service de Dieu* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise-Pascal, 2003); Dompnier, ed., *Les bas chœurs d’Auvergne et du Velay*; Alex Bèges and Janine Bèges, *La chapelle de musique de la cathédrale Saint-Nazaire, 1590–1790* (Béziers: Société de Musicologie du Languedoc, 1982).

²⁷ Peters, pp. 7–32.

²⁸ For a cursory overview of Montpellier’s musical life in the seventeenth century, see Annick Gelbseiden, *La vie musicale à Montpellier de 1600 à 1789*, MA diss., Université de Sorbonne-Paris IV, 1982. A brief summary was published as ‘La musique à la cathédrale Saint-Pierre aux XVIIe et XVIIIème siècles,’ *Bulletin Historique de la Ville de Montpellier*, 10 (1988), 21–24.

²⁹ ADH, G 1983, Attestation delivered to Mr. Petit, 20 November 1609. The year 1622 is marked on the reverse.

have been less than satisfying: in 1653 the provost warned that six out of the sixteen choral priests were ‘inutiles et ne peuvent pas chanter,’ while ‘tous les enfans de coeur sont en tres mauvais estat et que sy on ny remedié pas promptement on sera constraint de fere cesser la musique’.³⁰ Ideally, the chapel should have 32 singers, but in the meantime the chapter ordered the assistant-cantor to train the priests in plainchant and look out for a skilled choirmaster.³¹ Around the same time the chapter also hired a serpent and cornetto player to assist the choral priests.³² Still, this was a rather small ensemble, forcing the cathedral to hire a troupe of violinists on joyous occasions, in particular on the feast day of Saint Peter, the patron saint of the cathedral.³³ Despite these obstacles the chapel nonetheless performed during all major religious processions, including the feast days of Saint Peter and Saint Firmin, and on 20 October, when the capture of Montpellier in 1622 was commemorated.³⁴

Unfortunately, the chapel’s actual repertoire during processions remains unknown for want of ceremonials or partbooks, but the registers of the local confraternity of White Penitents do contain detailed information on the hymns and psalms sung on specific occasions. Like elsewhere in Europe, confraternities had multiplied in France during the Counter-Reformation. These devout associations of Catholic lay and religious members relied heavily on music for their devotional practices, cultivating inward piety through the chanting or reciting of prayers, and outward devotion through processional singing.³⁵ Montpellier’s confraternity of White Penitents, established during the thirteenth century, was particularly active in performing music during processions.³⁶ Their 1654 ceremonial specifies that on Holy Thursday and Good Friday the choirmaster would select several friars to walk directly behind the cross and at each station sing verses from the hymns *Vexilla Regis* or *Stabat Mater*. Meanwhile twelve friars walking at the centre of the procession sang the most famous of penitential psalms, the *Misere mei*, to which the other members responded with *Miserere nostri Domini, Domine miserere nostri*.³⁷ Most of the penitents’ music thus consisted of plainchant, but on occasion they would hire musicians to accompany them, usually for their annual procession following Corpus Christi Day.³⁸

³⁰ ADH, G 1747, Capitular registers, 22 October 1652, fol. 177^{r-v}.

³¹ ADH, G 1747, Capitular registers, 20 April 1654, fol. 335^v.

³² ADH, G 1147, Pastoral visit of 1 April 1658, fol. 230^r.

³³ ADH, G 1747, Capitular registers, 4 September 1656, fol. 562^r.

³⁴ Gelbseiden, pp. 48–49; AMM, BB 197, Memorial des choses les plus remarquables arrivees en la ville de Montpellier, 20 October 1640, fol. 8^v.

³⁵ Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society, and Religious Change in France, 1580–1730* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 339–65; Fisher, pp. 246–47; Noel O’Regan, ‘Per cagion della music tutte le strade erano piene: Roles Played by Music in Articulating the Place of Confraternities in Early Modern Roman Society,’ in *Listening to Early Modern Catholicism*, ed. by Daniele V. Filippi and Michael John Noone (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 259–75.

³⁶ Louis Secondy, ‘Processions et cortèges religieux à Montpellier au XVII^{ème} siècle,’ in *Espaces religieux et communautés méridionales* (Montpellier: Fédération historique du Languedoc méditerranéen et du Roussillon), pp. 239–51. On the penitents’ history, see Jules Delalain, *Les Pénitents blancs et les Pénitents bleus de la ville de Montpellier: leurs origines, leur histoire, leurs règles* (Montpellier: Jean Martel aîné, 1874).

³⁷ ‘Ceremonial de la chapelle des penitens blancs de Montpellier,’ in *Heures pour les Penitens Blancs de Montpellier* (Montpellier: Daniel Pech, 1654), p. 9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 23.

From the penitents' registers it also becomes clear that they staged processions and music to recall the Wars of Religion, when Protestants had destroyed their chapel and carried away the relics. In 1657, for example, the Montpellier consuls allowed the local Jesuit college to erect a massive stone cross on the Place des Cévenols, just a stone's throw away from the Protestant temple. Despite complaints from Protestant neighbours the cross was formally consecrated on Mardi Gras, after a procession led by the White Penitents. The friars first assembled at the Jesuit college to sing the *Miserere mei*, before marching defiantly through town and in front of the Protestant temple. Once arrived at the square, they knelt down at the cross to sing the hymn *O crux splendidior*, merging Christ's suffering with their own history of plight in Montpellier, in particular when chanting the hymn's concluding lines: 'Sweet wood, sweet nails, that bore the sweet burden, / save your flock assembled here to sing your praises.' As the penitents marched back to their chapel, they sang the familiar psalm *Exaudiat te Dominus*.³⁹

Likewise, on 10 May 1683, after the authorities had closed down and demolished the Protestant church of Montpellier, the penitents led a gleeful procession to what was henceforth called the Place du Grand Temple. They knelt at a stone cross that marked the site of the former church, singing the following strophe from the hymn *Vexilla Regis*:

Hail Cross, of hopes the most sublime!
 In the mournful Passion-time
 grant to the just increase of grace,
 and every sinner's crimes efface.

The hymn was particularly appropriate that day, as the bishop of Montpellier received the abjuration of twenty Protestants beneath the cross.⁴⁰ The penitents' collective chanting thus expressed hope that God would forgive the converts for their former errors, and that more would follow their example in order to efface Montpellier's troublesome history of religious division.

War Against the Bells

Whereas religious processions were the preferred acoustic weapon of Montpellier's Catholics in their struggle to reclaim the city from the Protestants, church bells were used as an aural memory vector by both confessions. Like processions, bells not only had a centripetal function, drawing together distinct confessional communities by calling them to prayer and worship, they also worked as centrifugal powers, extending their sound across parishes and entire cities to ward off danger, evil spirits, and heresy.⁴¹ According to Gilbert Grimaud, a canon priest from Bordeaux, bells were charged with emotion: when people heard them ring they became part of an acoustic community, because 'il semble que Dieu anime le son de ce metal pour penetrer les

³⁹ APBM, Livre des deliberations, 13 February 1657, fols 179^r–180^v; AMM, BB 197, Memorial des choses les plus remarquables arrivees en la ville de Montpellier, 23 February 1657, fols 163^r–164^r.

⁴⁰ APBM, Livre des deliberations, 10 May 1683, fols 125^r–127^r.

⁴¹ Fisher, p. 193.

cœurs'.⁴² Yet from the very beginning of the French Reformation church bells also provoked conflict between Catholics and Protestants, who rang their bells to signal the beginning of church services as well as to drown out the sounds of the other community. In Montpellier, Protestants had initially assembled in secret at night, but by 1560 their numbers and confidence had sufficiently grown to hold public services during the daytime. This provoked the ire of local Catholics, who tolled their church bells whenever the Protestants assembled, hoping to drown out their psalm-singing and sermonizing minister.⁴³

The outbreak of the civil wars saw the emergence of church bells as a divisive *lieu de mémoire*, echoes of which could be heard long after the troubles had ended. Montpellier's Catholics never forgot that between 1561 and 1563, when the Protestants had first seized control of the city, they had almost completely obliterated the medieval soundscape by destroying the bell-towers of churches and convents, and by melting down the bells for bullion and weapons. Only the bells of Notre-Dame-des-Tables and Saint Firmin survived the first religious war, because the Protestants appropriated these churches for their own services, as did the largest cathedral bell, which was swiftly repaired in 1564. During the second war the surviving bells were nonetheless melted down: when peace was signed in 1568, only the belfry and the bell sounding the hours at the town hall remained.⁴⁴ An inventory of lost bells, probably drawn up in the aftermath of the second war, records a total of 89 bells that had once adorned 39 churches and convents across Montpellier, including the twelve cathedral bells.⁴⁵ The silencing of the Catholic soundscape would fuel animosity long after the wars had ended. By 1634, Pierre Gariel, a canon priest in the cathedral of Saint Pierre, fumed that the Protestants 'declarent la guerre aux cloches suivant les maximes des Mores, ils les cassèrent, ils les briserent, sans reserver que celle qui sonnoit les heures, & qui appelloit les compagnons au crime & la confusion'.⁴⁶

In the wake of the wars Catholics undertook serious efforts to replace their lost bells. New bell-towers and bells were planned, but due to a lack of financial resources the process of reconstruction took years. In 1651 the cathedral chapter therefore decided on a provisional basis to transport the bell at the merchant's lodge to the restored bell-tower of Saint Pierre, so that it could be rung for Mass.⁴⁷ Another option was to reclaim church bells, which Catholics suspected had been re-appropriated for use in Protestant churches and town halls. In 1667 authorities in neighbouring Provence thus despatched commissioners to inspect all Protestant church bells; if these were found to have images of the saints, the Virgin, Christ, or the cross, they were duly confiscated as Catholic property.⁴⁸ Around the same time, Montpellier's Franciscan friars claimed that

⁴² Gilbert Grimaud, *La Liturgie sacrée, où toutes les Parties et Cérémonies de la Sainte Messe sont expliquées avec leurs Mystères et Antiquitez* (Lyon: Antoine Jullieron, 1666), part III, p. 175.

⁴³ Corbière, p. 18.

⁴⁴ Guiraud, I, pp. 246, 287, 311, 343; Jean Philippi, 'Histoire des troubles de Languedoc,' in Guiraud, II, pp. 96, 131. On the melting of church metal, see also Hugues Daussy, 'Financing the Huguenot War Effort during the Early Wars of Religion, 1562–1570,' *French Historical Studies*, 38 (2015), 593–609.

⁴⁵ AMM, GG 68, Inventory of churches and destroyed bells in Montpellier.

⁴⁶ Pierre Gariel, *L'origine, les changemens, et l'estat present de l'église cathedrale de S. Pierre de Mompelie* (Montpellier: Jean Pech, 1634), p. 129.

⁴⁷ ADH, G 1747, Capitular registers, 24 March 1651, fol. 34^v.

during the war of 1621, the Protestants had confiscated their bell and melted it into another, which was now in possession of minister David Eustache.⁴⁹

The painful memory of lost bells explains why matters came to a head in 1643, when the Protestants decided to install a bell on top of their church, located at the heart of Montpellier and known as the Grand Temple. Until 1623 they had rung the bell of the nearby town hall to call the faithful to worship, but when they lost control of city government after the siege, they were also deprived of the right to ring this bell.⁵⁰ The Edict of Nantes nominally allowed them to install church bells instead: secret article 34 stipulated that ‘en tous les lieux où l’exercice de lad. Religion se fera publiquement, on pourra assembler le peuple, mesme à son de cloches’.⁵¹ Yet the contentious nature of the secret articles meant that the provincial courts never registered them, including the Parlement of Toulouse that held jurisdiction over Montpellier. The articles thus depended exclusively on the king’s authority, which made them vulnerable to Catholic attacks.

Indeed, alarmed at this ‘novelty’, the Montpellier consuls persuaded the intendant of Languedoc, François de Bosquet, to forbid the Protestants to proceed.⁵² In a memoir sent to Paris, Bosquet argued the Protestants did not require a separate bell to signal the beginning of worship, because the sound of the municipal bell-tower striking the hours could be clearly heard throughout the city — the consuls even employed a bell-ringer to sound the intervals. He also feared the Protestants would use their bell to foment rebellion, warning that they wished ‘davoir un signal maintenant pour sassembler en eux de besoiing soubz pretexte des prieres publiques et se rendre maistres de la ville, comme ilz avoient fait autre fois’.⁵³ In early modern times bells were often rung to announce danger and call citizens to arms, usually by short, irregular ringing.⁵⁴ Yet it seems that Catholics associated the ringing of Protestant bells first and foremost with rebellion. Grimaud for example argued that if the Protestants had not destroyed all Catholic bells during the wars of religion, it was only to repurpose them and ‘instigate murder & sedition’.⁵⁵ It is also significant that after La Rochelle surrendered to Louis XIII in 1628, the king ordered that the town hall bell be melted down, because it had served the Protestant consuls to convoke meetings where they had voted to rebel against their lawful sovereign.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Henri Gélén, ‘Les cloches protestantes,’ *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, 40 (1891), 591–607, here 599–600.

⁴⁹ ADH, 17 H 16, Requête à Monseigneur le prince pour les religieux observantins contres les habitans de la RPR, undated, but ca. 1662.

⁵⁰ This history is briefly outlined in AMM, GG 5, Cahier des plaintes of the Protestant community of Montpellier, 7 April 1662, article 4.

⁵¹ Edict of Nantes, secret article 34, in ‘L’édit de Nantes et ses antécédents,’ ed. by Bernard Barbiche, [http://elec. enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit_13](http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit_13) (accessed 11 December 2019).

⁵² AMM, GG 4, Petition by the Montpellier city council to intendant Bosquet, 1643. His decision dated 11 July is marked on the same document.

⁵³ Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Français 15833, [François de Bosquet] Memoire de la demande de ceux de la R.P.R. de Montpellier pour avoir des cloches, 11 December 1643, fols 241^r–242^r.

⁵⁴ David Garrioch, ‘The Sounds of the City: The Soundscape of Early Modern European Towns,’ *Urban History*, 30 (2003), 5–25, here 12.

⁵⁵ Grimaud, part III, p. 178.

⁵⁶ *Declaration du Roy, sur la reduction de la ville de La Rochelle en son obeissance, contenant l’ordre et police que Sa Maiesté veut y estre establie* (Le Mans: Veuve F. Ollivier, 1628), p. 10.

Whether Bosquet referred to a specific incident remains unclear, but we know of at least two instances when Montpellier's Protestants had rung the bells to call citizens to arms. In 1600, royal commissioners sent to implement the Edict of Nantes had ordered the Protestants to return the church of Notre-Dame-des-Tables to the Catholics, which prompted angry Huguenots to sound the town hall bell and call to arms. In the tumult that ensued, the commissioners and canon priests narrowly escaped the scene.⁵⁷ A similar incident took place in 1612: as southern France was hit by a prolonged period of drought, the Capuchin friars organized a procession to the shrine of Notre-Dame du Grau in nearby Agde, praying God to bring rain. When the friars and nearly 3,000 of Montpellier's Catholics returned from their pilgrimage five days later, the Protestants shut the gates and sounded the city bells to call all able-bodied men to arms, claiming that the Capuchins were smuggling weapons back into the city to massacre the Protestants.⁵⁸

Despite efforts by the Protestant community to overturn Bosquet's decision, his ban would remain in force. The Protestants initially scored a small victory before the *Chambre de l'édit*, a bipartisan court seated in Castres that was composed of equal numbers of Protestant and Catholic judges, who in June 1644 overturned the intendant's decision and allowed the Protestants to put their church bell in place. Yet this ruling proved of little value, because both the consuls and the new intendant to Languedoc, Jean Balthazar, refused to obey it.⁵⁹ The Protestants did not relent, petitioning the king in 1650 to allow them a church bell, as well as the two royal commissioners sent to Montpellier in 1661 to investigate contraventions of the Edict of Nantes. The commissioners refused their demand, observing that the Huguenots did not require a church bell because their services always began at the same hour.⁶⁰ Ultimately, it was the deep-seated memory of past rebellion and the destruction of church bells that prevented Montpellier's Catholics from conceding what appeared to be a minor Protestant demand.

Conclusion

The soundscape of early modern French cities was infused with commemorative meaning. Processional music and church bells not only served as markers of confessional identity, they also prompted deeply divisive memories about the Wars of Religion. The 1598 Edict of Nantes nominally prohibited Catholics and Protestants from remembering the wars in an attempt to restore religious coexistence, but the acoustic conflicts that were played out in Montpellier demonstrate that the wartime annihilation of the medieval soundscape by Protestants proved impossible

⁵⁷ Guiraud, 1, pp. 570–74.

⁵⁸ Archives départementales du Haut-Garonne, 122 H 13, Recueil Chronologique des choses qui concernent la fondation et le progrès de la province des Capucins d'Aquitaine ou de Tolose, fols 190–91.

⁵⁹ AMM, GG 4, Ruling by the *Chambre de l'Édit* of Castres, 22 January 1644; Ordinance by intendant Jean Balthazar, 1 March 1644.

⁶⁰ Archives Nationales (hereafter AN), TT 431, dossier 1, Cahier présenté au Roy par le Deputé general de la Religion pretendue Reformée, 1 April 1650; AMM, GG 5, Cahier des plaintes of the Protestant community of Montpellier, 7 April 1662, article 4.

to forget. The banning of Catholic processions as well as the destruction of church bells remained a bone of contention throughout the seventeenth century, fuelling tensions and undermining religious coexistence. These aural conflicts were essentially the continuation of religious war by other means, as Protestants and Catholics relied on sounds instead of arms to provoke the other community and confront them with the suffering inflicted during the wars.

The contested urban soundscape of Montpellier was not unique to early modern France, but the intensity of such post-war conflicts depended heavily on the course of events during the wars. A brief comparison with other urban communities suggests that cities that experienced similar periods of Protestant control were also likely to develop a Catholic memory culture that privileged processions and sparked conflicts over church bells. For example, when La Rochelle came under Huguenot control in 1568, the Protestants outlawed Catholic worship and processions, and destroyed churches and bell-towers. The obliteration of the Catholic soundscape prompted efforts to organize regular processions after the wars, as well as lengthy disputes when Catholics began taxing the Protestants to decorate their houses along the processional route.⁶¹ La Rochelle's Protestants in turn prevented Catholics from restoring their bell-towers or even sounding the bells at Christmas and All Souls.⁶²

In cities that had been under mostly Catholic control, on the other hand, the acoustic conflict between the two confessions took shape differently. In Lyon, for instance, Protestants were forced to surrender and restore Catholic worship in 1563, leaving them an exposed minority that was further decimated in the 1572 Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. After 1598 Catholics thus had little need for combating a small Protestant minority by means of processions and church bells, but they never forgot about the short-lived Protestant domination of their city in 1562, when their churches were sacked and most bells melted down. As a result, Lyon's Protestants lived in constant fear of persecution, their sounds strictly curtailed by the Catholic majority: in 1605 they complained that their neighbours were singing offensive songs as they went to church and were 'ordinairement aux escoutes et espient si on chante des pseumes dans nos maisons'.⁶³

In the bi-confessional cities of early modern France, then, sound had the potential to undermine coexistence, as the echoes of past suffering were still heard decades after Protestants had laid waste to the medieval soundscape. These findings also suggest that we should reconsider the importance of music in Reformation Europe. Whereas scholarship has convincingly demonstrated that the singing of psalms and hymns, the ringing of bells, and the processions organized by churches and confraternities helped to define the confessional identity in the wake of the Reformation, little has been done to probe these sounds as aural memory vectors. The case of France suggests, however, that there was a deeper meaning to performing and silencing music in religiously mixed communities, as these sounds were able

⁶¹ AN, E 1692, Arrêt du Conseil du Roi, Paris, 18 February 1647, fol. 400^{r-v}.

⁶² Médiathèque Michel Crépeau de La Rochelle, MS 165, Cahier des plaintes of the Catholic inhabitants of La Rochelle, 1617, article 17, fols 81–88.

⁶³ Archives municipales de Lyon, 3 GG 78, Cahier des plaintes of the Protestant church of Lyon, 3 July 1605, articles 1 and 2.

to revive past conflict and dissolve the regime of coexistence. Probing the mnemonic aspects of urban soundscapes may thus bring us a step closer to explaining why confessional conflict remained an enduring feature of post-Reformation Europe, long after the religious wars had ended.

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Biographical Note

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