

For Whom the Bell Tolls: Rural Engagement During the French Wars of Religion: the Case of Brittany

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Abstract In 1589, French rural communities in Brittany committed themselves in the last of the wars of Religion. Their community reality, officering, weaponry and forms of action showed that the integration of rural parishes into the "political body" of the kingdom was then both active and militarily functional. They had no specific agenda on the socio-economic level. Their choice of a political camp in that civil war seemed to be a mere consequence of their defensive engagement against a direct aggression. The main purpose of that rural mobilization, as many others, was then reestablishing order and security in their country.

Introduction

Ernest Hemingway recalled the engagement of combatants in the Spanish Civil War in his novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. His title is well adapted to my purpose because I am going to discuss the engagements which begin when the bell tolls, more precisely the tocsin, and for which the death knell will be sounded, in a way, at the end of this paper.

On the subject of the armed mobilisations of rural populations of the modern era, for the past fifty years, historiography has seen two great successive phases: from the 1950s to the 1970s, all attention was at first concentrated on what were called popular revolts.¹ Then, progressively starting in the 1980s, historical thought about these mobilisations or others turned toward the relationship of the people to politics. This produced two notions: "popular politics" in English (in the works of Andy Wood or Ethan Shagan for example) and "politique du peuple" in French (such as in the work of Roger Dupuy).² The meaning of these terms exceeds the framework of mere armed conflict. When the conflicts were sparked by a feeling of injustice, there is an evident parallel with the noble "devoir de révolte" (duty to revolt), defined in France by Arlette Jouanna.³ It often implies the defence of privileges, particularly fiscal, which were challenged in one way or another.

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In this paper I will examine a specific case from a slightly different perspective: the participation of rural parishes, located around Vitré in North-East Brittany, in a locally important episode in the last of the sixteenth century French religious wars. Vitré was the only Breton town with a sizeable Protestant population, although it was clearly in the minority.⁴ In March of 1589, Brittany entered a civil war, as part of the crisis set off in France when Henri III had had the two Guises murdered three months earlier.⁵ The Catholic majority was divided throughout the kingdom: some stayed faithful to the king, others broke with him and regrouped in a Holy Union or League. League members accused the king of having assassinated, in the Guises, those who favoured the policy of waging all-out war against Protestants.⁶ On the 21st of March 1589, Vitré's Protestants, helped by some Catholics faithful to the king, took control of the town. Other inhabitants mobilized against them, and immediately called out to surrounding rural parishes for help. On the 23rd at the latest, the latter were in front of Vitré to try and retake the town. The rural population were here reacting to an act of aggression that had not come from a legitimate authority: nothing to do here with, say, an uprising against an increase in taxation. The country people were almost immediately joined by the troops of the province's governor, the duke of Mercœur, who was the highest authority in Brittany and who chose the League's camp at the same time.⁷ However the whole of the League forces led an almost five month-long siege in vain.⁸ The rural populations were involved in a number of operations directly or indirectly linked to the siege. But at the announcement of the arrival of royal reinforcements, the duke of Mercœur lifted the siege on the 14th of August. The rural parishes continued to be militarily involved in the area, but they were progressively neutralized by royal troops, who imposed a severe repression.

As always for popular uprisings in this era, sources are quite incomplete and there is often not a great deal of evidence to rely on. However, they are relatively abundant in this case. Many narrative sources exist, and even more from a substantial inquiry into spring League uprisings in the whole Upper Brittany. A lot of witnesses came and denounced Leaguers' misdeeds before the court of the royalist seneschal of Rennes. Their narratives are biased, as is expected in such source, but they give us precious and sometimes unexpected details about the nature of the mobilisation. And numerous accounts recall the action of rural parishes in the Vitré area.⁹

The term "rural" does not need specification here: it refers to all of the populations living in rural communities, mainly peasants and artisans, organized into parishes. For this episode, the term

“war of *communes*” has been retained by local historiography: the word “commune” did not have an administrative meaning at that time. But the link between the various aspects of the collective life of the community was even tighter in Brittany because a unique institution (the *fabrique*, or parish council) managed them all. At first analysis, *commune* must be understood in the sense of “rural parish(es) under arms”,¹⁰ which is/are mobilized at the sound of the tocsin. Later we will see that the word “commune” could take a complementary political meaning. Let us note in passing that the mobilisation took place in an economically dynamic region, where cloth production accompanied agriculture, between two rich and important towns (Rennes and Vitré).

We will first examine the conditions of the rural mobilisation (which will lead to the forms it took), then return to the logic behind the enlistment (and thus to supposed motivations), taking into account the changes that took place in the course of these events.

The Conditions of the Mobilisation

Within what framework was this community mobilisation structured? Available sources give no direct indications on the role that existing parish institutions played (parish councils, friaries): they mention only all-encompassing realities (the parish, *la commune*), or individual actors, generally to denounce their role. Members of the clergy were involved, and many are found among those pursued by royalist authorities. However, unlike in other regions, no allusion is made to the mobilizing role of more or less impassioned preachers. This can undoubtedly be explained by the conditions behind the mobilisation: it was responding to direct aggression and did not need to be encouraged in any other way.

Generally, apart from some individuals, it is difficult to pinpoint acting minorities who exerted their influence or authority in this mobilisation. But this is certainly not an accident. Indeed, the logic behind this uprising rested on a form of parish unity. Of course, this unity was sometimes strained: in a parish, people were fined if they did not take up arms, whether because they had none or because they did not want to fight.¹¹ Yet one has to be careful of the false evidence of always effective local solidarity. But because everyone was concerned, because unanimity was required, a form of local coercion was exerted. It was the evident legitimacy of the action that forced everyone to bear his part of the collective load. So, the mobilisation demonstrated community whilst at the same time, constructing it: such a mobilisation was most certainly a factor of its reinforcement. When one parish of the sector in arms (Chancé) stayed out of the fray, it was there

that originated denunciations of the "League" engagement of a neighbouring parish (Louvigné-de-Bais), and one of the witnesses of Chancé declared in passing that he did not know any League members in his own parish.¹² What we notice here is the need to affirm unanimity.

The common action of all the parishes is not that clear. A more specific study would perhaps make it possible to show how inter-parish social networks, linked for example to local noble families or to commercial circuits (cloth, grain) concretely facilitated this common action. It is also probable that seigniorial structures played a role, even more so because they did not follow parish borders. When we see that royalist authorities – those of the other camp – asked that the arms be dropped in this marquisate or that barony, we have every reason to think that social networks and connections were important here.¹³ Lastly, although the boundaries of the mobilisation around Vitré are still difficult to define with precision, it stopped dead at the province's border, located a few kilometres east of the town under siege.

The institutional question seems central, in fact: everything points to the fact that this mobilisation occurred against a military background already in place, with types of more or less stable districts, above and beyond parishes and manors (*seigneuries*), with officials responsible for leading troops in case of military necessity. Probably large titled lordships (such as baronies) played a role as official frames for mobilisation. But this raises the problem of the coincidence between their exact boundaries and those of the parishes.

Fifteen years earlier, in February 1574, there had been an attempt by armed Protestants to take control of Vitré. It was put down in a few days, precisely thanks to the mobilisation of rural communities. At that time, one of the local lords (*seigneurs*) involved in taking back the town clearly said in a letter the parishes that he and another gentleman were "responsible for" that.¹⁴ The operation then was a quick success, with the blessing of the authorities. This structure can be supposed to have been alive and ready to intervene if necessary, in so far as there had been a clear-cut climate of tension in Brittany since at least 1587, which had intensified since early 1589. What we have here is an inherited and still living tradition of self-protection, which fuelled local mobilisation across an entire country and not only inside parishes. It was maintained first by dukes of Brittany, then by the monarchy. They had one or several soldiers with arms and fiscal privileges at their disposal in each parish (named *francs archers* and *élus*, in Brittany), whose role was mentioned on several occasions at the time of the Wars of Religion. Through these means, the integration

of rural parishes into the “political body” of the kingdom seemed both active and militarily functional at the same time: it took the form of the “*commune*” in arms.

It is, undoubtedly, important not to exaggerate the degree of its development – but the institutionalised nature of this mobilisation is reflected in the available indications of oversight or supervision. The identified “parish captains” were all nobles or lords (*seigneurs* or *sieurs*). Some more modest commoners may have acted as leaders in the upheaval, but they never appear as captains.¹⁵ It is difficult to know how they were appointed: in some parishes at least, this was done by election, maybe following procedures close to those in use for parish council treasurers. I believe that these were (at least in this area) relatively stable posts, which does not automatically mean that they were all always filled: in one of the armed parishes (Visseiche), a witness declared that the inhabitants have told him that they “had none to command them”. At the same time another witness, referring to the same parish, denounced an individual as the one who “commanded” them, but he added that he knew it only from hearsay.¹⁶ The mention in certain parishes of lieutenants, ensigns, and even “*dizanniers*” (responsible for ten men) reinforces the hypothesis of the previous existence of structures of mobilisation, as Yann Lagadec has already highlighted.¹⁷ Finally, it is also possible that larger gatherings were of the same sort as those in 1574. This could have been the case when a noteworthy League member of the town of Vitré, captain of a specific rural parish (Livré), was denounced for taking part in the siege at the head of a group of eight or nine rural parishes.¹⁸

The mobilised “communes” could have had a certain number of weapons available to them, apart from the tools that could be used as weapons. Indeed, parish treasuries harboured arquebuses, blades and defensive equipment meant for the “*francs archers*”.¹⁹ Moreover the notables, especially nobles, generally were well equipped. It seems, according to Lagadec, that it was easier to find weapons in this country in 1589 than during the Revolution.

The “communes” participated in various military operations during the siege: watch and guard, excavation work, control of major roads, harassment of royalists throughout the region, particularly when they tried to come to the aid of Vitré in June.²⁰ What is essential is the offensive aspect of their engagement, far beyond their own parish territory. But it is necessary to note that, contrary to 1574, this counter-offensive failed and got bogged down.

After the lifting of the siege and the departure of Mercoeur's troops, information is rarer but reports that the roads were blocked and that markets were not receiving supplies.²¹ However, during this phase, the offensive changed camps and royal troops came to

take control of the area: only one large combat is recorded, that of Etreilles, just south of Vitré, in November 1589. The parishioners of Etreilles "and their confederates" suffered a clear defeat, marked by the storming of the village and its church, with maybe two hundred deaths on the losing side.

Of course, all inhabitants fit to arm themselves were not mobilized continuously for nine months. The entry into action was undoubtedly effective, or at least quick, thanks to the tocsin, the dormant structures and the available weapons. There were also, at least in some areas, standing posts to control roads and travelling, with barrier or barricades. But then we must imagine relatively brief individual participation, maybe with systems of rotation, at an unknown rhythm. This was true at least during the siege phase; the second phase is even less well understood.

Despite its ultimate failure, the prevailing impression is one of rather efficient mobilisation. The Vitré region's rural communities seem not to have yet gone through high internal tensions and were not dismantled by the civil war that was just beginning here. This explains their ability to react to the event and their capacity of mobilisation. Likewise, the local climate (incidents in Antrain in early March 1589, barricades in Rennes the 13th of March, arrival of Mercoeur with his troops at the gates of Fougères on the 21th of March . . .) undoubtedly produced fear and justified a form of alert, which was maintained by the easy circulation of information.²² In such a favourable context, armed community mobilisation reinforced a collective conscience and was fuelled by it, first in the action and then in the memory left by dramatic events like those in Etreilles.

Engaging "Communes": The Motivations

Is it possible to go further, and penetrate the motivations behind their engagement in these military operations? As is often the case, there are no existing accounts of the words spoken by these modest rural dwellers: there is no collective proclamation, no declarations of parishioners. But the nature and the practical details of the action taken are suggestive.

The commitment of communes did not seem to derive from older socio-economic grievances for example.²³ The attack on Vitré might reflect such motivations to some extent:²⁴ it targeted those close to their lord (the count of Laval, who was also baron of Vitré, was Protestant) and a town home to merchants who were masters in the cloth trade. But many of the key men in this trade were part of the Catholic Vitréens who fought on the side of the League. As for the baron of Vitré, he seems to have been the only lord to have

become a focus for rural resentment, although he was only a distant suzerain. Some of his rights as landlord may have seemed hard to bear, especially taxes to maintain castles and garrisons and to ensure safety of the barony (*droit de guet*).²⁵ Nevertheless, many lords, both important (like the marquess of Espinay) and small (like many parish captains), were involved on the side of the “communes” in common combat. When a lord was targeted, it was because he belonged to the enemy “camp”, and not because of his social position, even if it seemed that certain attacks used the movement locally to serve social grievances.²⁶ Obviously, the royalists would interpret the community mobilisation as a simple “desire to pillage”, which precisely made it possible to dismiss all thoughts about the other motivations behind their combat.²⁷

This desire for pillage, which seemed to threaten Vitré first and foremost, became a serious problem for a small town named Châteaugiron, located between Vitré and Rennes. Indeed, upon several occasions in June and July, men from parishes mobilized against Vitré entered Châteaugiron to empty it of the royalists, particularly those holding the town’s castle. However, the day after the third attack, the men from these parishes were chased away from town themselves, according to the account of an inhabitant, the schoolmaster Duval, “by a company of other peasants proclaiming themselves in favour of the king [Henri III]”.²⁸ Duval called the defeated: “Leagued/bonded parishes”. Partisans of the king on one side, those attached to the League on the other. This very brief passage has often been commented in previous studies of this “war of *communes*”. Indeed it hints at the involvement of country people in national partisan politics. Even more so that, exceptionally, they seemed to have a voice, at least those whom Duval declared “proclaimed themselves” for the king . . . But was it sincere partisan support with, on one side, followers of Mercoeur or even of the Duke of Mayenne’s “national” League, and on the other, royalist supporters who held Vitré and Rennes, and thus those faithful to King Henri III? It should be noted here in passing, that the contrast was not between Protestants and Catholics: indeed the latter were permanently divided, and the mobilisation was incidentally not formulated along religious lines.

In any case, we have to be very cautious here, for a number of reasons. First because the “Leagued/bonded parishes” as Duval called them, were defined by themselves as, above all else, “la commune”, thus by a term which was not at all partisan. Then, those who most certainly intervened in Châteaugiron came from the barony of Vitré: none among them belonged to the territory of the barony of Châteaugiron. We have a sense then, but so far without absolute proof, that the parishes which according to Duval

came to stop the pillaging and re-establish order in Châteaugiron, were actually parishes of that barony and not those of the barony of Vitré. It could particularly have been those to the northwest of Châteaugiron and which were in July victims of atrocities by the troops of the duke of Mercœur, an attack which was perhaps a revenge from the League camp. So, political cleavage could depend on spatial and institutional anchoring, linked here with different choices (or at least engagements) from a barony to another.

And when they declared themselves to be acting "for the king", people of royalist parishes were undoubtedly thinking less of the king as somebody like a party leader than as the incarnation of a principle of order, an order affected by the successive attacks by country people from the Vitré region who were connected to the League camp. Declaring themselves "for the king" is probably, at their political level, to undermine the legitimacy of their adversaries.

After this third intervention, between the 17th and 20th July, the cycle of rural attacks on Châteaugiron does stop. The reference to "national" issues seemed then for the most part to be a specific exploitation of partisan views, used in combat to re-establish local order. It is difficult to know how much instrumentalisation there was in their "national" styling, either by themselves or by people from elite groups. Nevertheless, it shows a certain kind of politicization of the warriors in the *communes*. This "rising of the generality", (*montée en généralité*), however it was experienced and accepted, something which is eventually almost impossible to know, marked people deeply. We will encounter below a similar problem of interpretation for the parishes of the Vitré region.

Indeed we must come back to the basis of their own engagement, at the beginning of the conflict. When the *commune* enters the action, around the 22nd of March, many must have remembered the mobilisation of 1574 against the previous Huguenot aggression. The Protestant once again was undoubtedly an enemy by virtue of being a heretic. But the baron of Vitré had been a Huguenot for a long time; Vitré and its surrounding area had been home to Calvinists for four years despite a royal edict in 1585 which had given them the choice only between conversion and exile. Yet these heretics had not provoked any uprising against them to that point. In March 1589, the Protestants, and their Catholic allies of the moment, were troublemakers above all who, as they had in 1574, risked plunging the region into war. Locals, called by the tocsin, in the context discussed above, mobilized above all for the "defence of the country". They fully subscribed to a political form which assured order and it was without a doubt an essential element of their idea of the state, "seen from below". The ideology of their

commitment was based on the defence of the common good. Service of the king, of the common good, of the (true) religion were undoubtedly difficult values to disassociate for them: but above and beyond a "local" reaction, we can suppose that this more general horizon had a place in their involvement. Their "silence" is thus perhaps more understandable: their commitment "goes without saying". It is not a matter of lack of sources, either never written or lost since 1589. Carried by tradition and community, their engagement does not call for any particular justification. Isn't the word *commune* itself directly linked to the defence of the common good? Echoing E. P. Thompson's concept of "moral economy", perhaps an important element is found in this mode of involvement by rural parishes, constituent of a "moral politics" of their own?²⁹ This civic commitment was founded on maintaining order and the desire for security. It is even more significant because it did not stop at each parish border, but implied rural intervention in the neighbouring town.

Emotional issues here merge with political commitment. In the moral economy, feelings of injustice and anger seem to play a central role; in moral politics, the main feeling could be probably fear of trouble, combined with a true sense of responsibility and honour, when acting to maintain order. In both cases, this is a response to something perceived as an aggression. And the people were not doing it to serve one side in particular, but to re-establish the order that had been upset by an attack. In July in Châteaugiron, as was said above, the *communes* re-establishing order were supposed to fight for the King, when in March, around Vitré, other *communes* acting in the same logic, had been fighting for the opposite side under the banner of the Catholic League.

The event is of considerable significance. In the crisis that was taking shape in Upper Brittany in March and April, the heretofore legitimate authorities (governor, lieutenant general, *parlement* etc.) became divided.³⁰ The beginning of civil war thus challenged, in the eyes of some, the legitimacy of rural mobilisation. Those who in 1574 had been unanimously applauded by the authorities for their efficient reaction against the troublemakers, were this time caught off-balance. The stable and recognized order that their intervention claimed to defend no longer existed and the legitimacy was henceforth fragmented. Thus their mobilisation was quickly read by the royalists not as an engagement in the service of order, but as a rebellion in the service of a party. Incidentally the royalists stated that the parishes rose up at the call of the duke of Mercœur. Here the rising of the generality was distorted. The country people rose up as defenders of order, as a low but sizeable echelon in the defence of the common good. Yet they found themselves labelled as

"Leaguers", as much by their adversaries as by those whose side they were fighting on. Wanting to defend the norm, they were dismissed as transgressors and in turn, and in some ways unwillingly, became agents of dissension.

But their participation lasted. Did they progressively accept this enrolment in a partisan camp? Ambiguity could have prevailed throughout the siege of Vitré, against adversaries who had been the same since March. I suggest that, from the lifting of the siege in mid-August, a division into two camps occurred among local "Leaguers" abandoned by Mercœur and his army. A noble and partisan League operated from then on with its volunteer networks and on what was no longer a truly community base. The *communes*, for their part, withdrew to the parishes and faced with the interventions of royal troops, contented themselves with largely defensive action, as in Etreilles in November.

The League rising of the generality possibly left its mark here, however: we would like to know in particular what the effect on the peasantry was of a Huguenot king's accession to the throne (Henri IV in August 1589, after Henri III's assassination), in that the spectre of Protestant troublemakers had played a large part in the initial mobilisation. But known sources are mute on that point.

At the end of 1589, after the battle of Etreilles, the *commune* mobilisation, as such, of the Vitré region was old news, even if conflict did not disappear from the area. This decline can be understood as a simple consequence of the military defeat in the field and the dissolution of the traditional structures of mobilisation. But maybe it is necessary to look for other explanations, which would go for regions far beyond that of Vitré, following their own local chronologies. Perhaps what we're seeing here is the realization that their mobilisation was henceforth susceptible to serve one camp and so keep the civil war going rather than serving the common good through the return of peace. On the local scale, which was that of the mobilisations of 1574 and 1589, there would no longer be a will to mobilise.³¹ Self-protection no longer worked except on a strictly parochial level, where the principle of the defence of the common good kept its legitimate value, political and ethical at the same time: numerous accounts exist which show that the engagement continued at this level. Fruit of their political and civic experience, this new attitude reveals another facet of the "moral politics" mentioned above, in expressing a new political response: instead of accepting the "choice" imposed by the separation into two camps, which from then on prevented an obvious involvement in favour of the common good, they preferred a real retreat to refuse the camps which kept the war going.

The earliest evidence of such an attitude comes from the beginning of May: two peasants from another area near Rennes (Mélesse, on the north of the town) are asked to declare to what camp they belong to. They answer that they belong to none.³² It is the only allusion of that type in the whole *Information* so often used in this paper, concerning individuals, and not *communes* as a whole: for the latter, as we have just seen, silence seems sufficiently meaningful. Our two peasants, although they are in Rennes, in the royalist camp, do not want to choose one of them. Such a clue remains a modest one, but seems significant.

A parallel is perhaps possible here with the *rieurs* (laughing men), gentlemen who refused to enlist in the service of the king or of the League.³³ Their attitude was presented by Drouot and others as pure egotism, personal desire to stay in peace far from the storm of the civil war, or even cowardice. But maybe some of these withdrawals were also a form of conscientious objection, or at least a civic-grounded desire for neutrality, not to heighten the violence. In the case of the rural populations as in that of the nobles, it did not prevent them being victims of atrocities by both camps. Sudden bursts of enlistment sometimes occurred nonetheless, in the course of the wars of the League, with the mobilisations of the *communes* precisely to put the pillaging to an end and bring back security and if possible peace.

A lot of peasant insurrections towards the end of the wars of religion and during the League need to be studied through this viewpoint, not only in Brittany (for instance Lower Breton mobilisation against Guy Eder de La Fontenelle, a pillaging gentleman),³⁴ but in the whole kingdom. It is worth doing it for the *Croquants* in the Southeast in 1593–1595³⁵ as for the *Gauthiers* in Normandy (1589), the *Ligue campanère* in Comminges (from 1591 on) or the *Bonnets rouges* in Burgundy (1594).³⁶

Whether an accepted choice or just the state of things, the attitude of withdrawal was facilitated by the Leaguer camp that the situation had linked to the rural populations of the Vitré region. In fact their long-term military enlistment seemed to pose a problem even to their allies. The taking up of weapons by rural populations and their participation in campaigns, even under captains issued from nobility and although it was something traditional and approved of in normal times, contributed, in the special context of the civil war, to build a new political situation which could frighten authorities and social élites. This was still certainly far from the socio-political risk present all over Europe among those who feared seeing the armed people “turning Swiss”.³⁷ But there are several clues which show that this type of mobilisation ended up being badly seen by Leaguers. In Lower Brittany, an urban League

council explicitly asked for the disarmament of all country people, apparently including those on their side: they should have been working the land, not ringing the tocsin, and should have left the way free for soldiers and men of war.³⁸ As for Mercœur, he abandoned them without scruple to royalist retaliation. Even if the danger of subversion was largely fantasy, it is present in many texts, which feared the social pride that swelled up in the hearts of rural parishioners, especially peasants, in arms.³⁹ Through the fears of the elites, appeared another social aspect of the conflicts. The clear impression prevails that political and military leaders on both sides much preferred seeing the people pay for their supposed defence, rather than to contribute to it themselves through armed engagement.

Conclusion

So we go back, at this stage, to John Donne's line used again by Hemingway and quoted at the beginning of this paper: *for whom the bell tolls*. Here it is no longer the tocsin bell, but the death knell which tolls, the death knell of one form of rural mobilisation. Its model, sketched out here, ceased to exist in France from the seventeenth century onward. It played an important role in the political and civic structuring of rural communities, at least from the fourteenth century and in relation with the rise of the State, even if sometimes this relationship was a bit ambiguous. It belonged to the lower storeys of a legitimate military mobilisation, with the lifting of the seigniorial ban, when every owner of a *fief* was compelled by royal authorities to go to war and that of locally maintained infantry such as the *francs archers* mentioned above. This politically and socially important phenomenon deserves a much larger study at the scale of the French kingdom, which I am currently beginning to undertake.

Comparisons are possible here, for example with the Clubmen of the English Civil War.⁴⁰ They mobilized in certain sectors of the most disputed counties to try to neutralise the troublemakers. They had "a common concern to end the war" (A. Wood) and allied themselves locally to those susceptible to win and re-establish order. The incarnation of "parish politics in arms" (A. Wood), their horizon was generally, in the manner of the rural populations of the Vitré area, an intermediary spatial scale, a "region", smaller than a county.⁴¹

In France, the model of self-defence of the war of the *communes*, suitable for a regional projection, disappeared and was only replayed in a totally partial and skewed fashion during certain tax revolts (which did not concern the Vitré area). The

upheavals could use the same features as the traditional mobilisation of the *communes* under arms, but from then on, no authority called them, not even a debatable one as had been the case in time of national civil war. The monarchy thus carried out the centralisation of the means of violence more and more clearly and at the same time led to a form of de-politicization of rural populations by the ban on the defensive use of arms, even in times of conflict.

Notes

¹ Seen from France, there was first the great debate between Boris Porchnev, *Les soulèvements populaires en France de 1623 à 1648*, Paris, SEVPEN, 1963 and Roland Mousnier, *Fureurs paysannes. Les paysans dans les révoltes au XVII^e siècle (France-Russie-Chine)*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1967. In the seventies, the most influent book was Yves-Marie Bercé, *Histoire des Croquants. Etude des soulèvements populaires du XVII^e siècle dans le sud-ouest de la France*, Genève, Droz, 1974.

² Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2003); Andy Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (New York and London, 2002); Roger Dupuy, *La politique du peuple. Racines, permanences et ambiguïtés du populisme* (Paris, Albin Michel, 2002).

³ Arlette Jouanna, *Le devoir de révolte. La noblesse française et la gestation de l'État moderne, 1559–1661* (Paris, 1989).

⁴ Daniel Pichot, Valérie Lagier et Gwenolé Allain (eds.), *Vitré. Histoire et patrimoine d'une ville*, (Paris, 2009).

⁵ Hervé Le Goff, *La Ligue en Bretagne: Guerre civile et conflit international, 1588–1598* (Rennes, 2010).

⁶ On the national context: Jean-Marie Constant, *La Ligue* (Paris, 1996); Nicolas Le Roux, *Un régicide au nom de Dieu. L'assassinat d'Henri III* (Paris, 2006).

⁷ Ariane Boltanski and Philippe Hamon, 'Le duc de Mercœur gouverneur de province : entre statut, Ligue et Bretagne, 1589–1598', in Emmanuel Buron and Bruno Méniel (eds.), *Le duc de Mercœur. Les armes et les lettres, 1558–1602* (Rennes, 2009), 75–97.

⁸ Philippe Hamon, 'Vitré, qui s'en alloit perdu (Brantôme). Le siège de Vitré et les engagements militaires en Haute-Bretagne au début des guerres de la Ligue (mars-août 1589)', *Mémoires de la société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Bretagne*, 97 (2009), 111–151.

⁹ Frédéric Joûon des Longrais, 'Information du sénéchal de Rennes contre les Ligueurs, 1589', in *Bulletin et Mémoires de la Société Archéologique du département d'Ille-et-Vilaine*, 41 (1911), 5–347. Quoted hereafter as *Information*.

¹⁰ We find an equivalent in the great South-West uprising of 1593–1595, where rural parishes in the same situation call themselves 'the tiers état qui est en armes' (the third estate which is under arms).

¹¹ *Information*, 50.

¹² *Information*, 209.

¹³ For the parishes of the marquisate of L'Espinay: Archives départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine, 1Bf 58 (13-6-1589); for those of the baronies of Vitré and Châtillon-en-Vendelais: *Information*, 221.

¹⁴ Arthur de La Borderie, *Le calvinisme à Vitré* (Rennes, 1851), 6–7.

¹⁵ For examples of commoners in Cornillé (a tailor and a linen-draper): *Information*, 227 and 247.

¹⁶ *Information*, 46.

¹⁷ Yann Lagadec, 'Les communes rurales pendant la Ligue en Haute Bretagne : une préfiguration de la Garde nationale? (1589–1789/1792)', in Serge Bianchi and Roger Dupuy (eds.), *La Garde nationale, entre nation et peuple en armes: mythes et réalités, 1789–1871* (Rennes, 2006), 27–39.

¹⁸ *Information*, 222.

¹⁹ Bruno Restif, *La Révolution des paroisses. Culture paroissiale et Réforme catholique en Haute-Bretagne aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Rennes, 2006), 45.

²⁰ One of the main fights involving the *communes* occurred on 10 June: Philippe Hamon, 'La chevauchée fantastique: Vitré-Rennes, 10 juin 1589', in *Mélanges en l'honneur d'Alain Cabantous*, forthcoming.

²¹ Jean du Matz, sieur de Montmartin, 'Mémoires', in Charles Taillandier, *Supplément aux preuves de l'Histoire ecclésiastique et civile de la Bretagne*, at the end of the second volume of his *Histoire de Bretagne* (Paris, 1756), CCLXXXIII.

²² Hervé Le Goff, *La Ligue.*, p. 75–80. For Antrain: Archives départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine, 1Bf 56 (11-3-1589). On the political atmosphere in Upper Brittany during these months, see Philippe Hamon, '“Le malheur du temps qui court”: Les accidents politiques à Rennes en 1589', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, 22 (2011), 335–356.

²³ This work in progress will need an extended research in archives not directly linked with the uprising; they are supposed to give deeper insights on the social logic of mobilisation, expectedly complementary to this paper, and not contrary to it.

²⁴ See Michel Lagrée, 'La structure pérenne. Événement et histoire en Bretagne orientale (XVIe–XXe siècles)', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 3 (1976), 404.

²⁵ Tension about garrison in 1569 and lawsuit in 1576 against a parish of the barony which refused to pay for castle's upkeep: Malcolm Walsby, *The Counts of Laval: Culture, Patronage and Religion in Fifteenth-and-Sixteenth-Century France* (Aldershot, 2007), 144 and 146.

²⁶ *Information*, 208.

²⁷ Sieur de La Mériaux, 'Extrait d'une relation du siège de Vitré', in Anatole de Barthélemy, *Choix de documents inédits sur l'histoire de la Ligue en Bretagne* (Nantes, 1880), 19 and 23.

²⁸ 'Journal de Duval, maître d'école à Châteaugiron' in Anatole de Barthélemy, *Choix de documents*, 107–119 and 110.

²⁹ Edward P. Thompson, 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century', *Past and Present*, 50 (1971), 76–136. A recent and stimulating article on this subject: Didier Fassin, 'Les économies morales revisitées', *Annales Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 64, 6 (Novembre-Décembre 2009), 1237–1268.

³⁰ See Philippe Hamon, 'Paradoxes de l'ordre et logiques fragmentaires : une province entre en guerre civile (Bretagne, 1589)', *Revue Historique*, n°671, 2014/3.

³¹ Such a realization in some parishes perhaps occurred even before the lifting of the siege. In the middle of July, a witness spoke about parishes

which were 'liguées' (i.e. mobilized in the League camp) and which had left the common combat and were no longer under arms: *Information*, p. 214.

³² *Information*, p. 45.

³³ The word 'rieur' (laughter), used in some documents of the Ligue's period, has been introduced in the historic research to qualify neutral nobles by Henri Drouot, *Mayenne et la Bourgogne: étude sur la Ligue, 1587-1596* (Paris, 1937), partt. = part. I, 311-313.

³⁴ Chanoine Jean Moreau, *Mémoires sur les guerres de la Ligue en Bretagne*, Henri Waquet ed. (Quimper, 1960), 117-119.

³⁵ Yves-Marie Bercé, *Histoire des Croquants*, 260, 266.

³⁶ An short but accurate synthesis about those mobilisations based upon self-defense, underlining their will to fight against troublemakers and warriors and to enforce peace in Arlette Jouanna, *La France du XVI^e siècle 1483-1598* (Paris, 1996), 627-631.

³⁷ Thomas A. Brady, *Turning Swiss: Cities and Empire 1450-1550* (Cambridge, 1985). This book studies cities, but its title is significant and the reproach is made to a lot of people. Writing about a rural uprising in 1490, the canon Moreau (*Mémoires sur les guerres*, 12) charges peasants with wanting to slaughter all nobles, as Swiss peoples have already done.

³⁸ Declaration of the *Chambre de l'Union* of Morlaix: Anatole de Barthélemy, 'La chambre de la Sainte-Union de Morlaix: Cayer pour les affaires de la ville', *Revue historique de l'Ouest* (Juillet 1885), 98. See also the Provincial States of Burgundy forbidding in October, 1590 'aux villages de communes de prendre les armes . . . [même pour] faire la guerre aux ennemys' [to the commune villages to take arms [even to] make war to the enemies]: Henri Drouot, *Mayenne et la Bourgogne*, part 2, 141, note 3.

³⁹ Canon Moreau provides some good examples of such a fear: *Mémoires sur les guerres*, 75-76. For a critical discourse about mobilisation of communes in general, and more especially denouncing Mercoeur's initiative in March 1589: Brantôme, Pierre de Bourdeille, seigneur de, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. L. Lalanne (Paris, 1873), part V, 191.

⁴⁰ See for instance the works of David Underdown, and especially 'The Chalk and the Cheese. Contrasts among the English Clubmen', *Past and Present*, 85 (1979), 25-48; and a broader point of view: idem., *Revel, riot and rebellion: Popular politics and culture in England, 1603-1660* (London, 1985). For a critique of Underdown's model see Neil Davie, 'Chalk and cheese? "Fielden" and "forest" communities in early modern England', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 4, 1 (1991), 1-31.

⁴¹ Andy Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics*, see 145 and 149 for the quotations.