



Christian Martens, MA

(Université catholique de Louvain)

The St. Bartholomew's Massacre, Royal Propaganda, and the Protestant Answer: The Role of François Hotman



Picture: Édouard Debat-Ponsan, Une porte du Louvre, le matin de la Saint-Barthélemy, 1880 (Musée d'art Roger-Quilliot, Clermont-Ferrand).

The French protestant jurist and polemicist François Hotman (1524-1590) is best known for his *Francogallia* (1573). In it, he purportedly offers a summary of the true constitution of the kingdom of France by means of a deep historical analysis carried out 'without anger and passion' (to use Tacitus's phrase). The ostensibly neutral tone of Hotman's radical treatise on public law, which reduces the role of the King in favour of that of the Estates General, has continued to baffle historians. In this presentation, I will further investigate his use of this rhetorical strategy in another of his texts, the *De furoribus Gallicis [...] vera et simplex narratio* (1573), the first widely-spread Protestant account of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Up until now,

researchers have been prejudiced against this short tract, seeing it as but one of the many pieces of post-Massacre Protestant polemics. Against this historiographical tradition, I will show how and why, in this text, Hotman rigorously abides to the rules of the *simplex narratio* genre, giving it much less of a polemical outlook, at least in its narrative sequence. I will then offer an analysis of the tract's structure, in which a pseudo-objective account of the events seamlessly leads into a seemingly universal indictment of the King's criminal actions, which is itself buttressed by the publication and translation into Latin of thirteen original public documents demonstrating his hand in the Massacre. With this new reading of the *De furoribus Gallicis*, it will then be possible to present it as a masterly piece of subtle counter-polemics. In the end, this point-by-point, supposedly reliable answer to the royal propaganda produced in the aftermath of the Massacre aimed at nothing less than offering to all Frenchmen a true, just and inculpatory account of the bloodbath.

Date and Venue:

Wednesday, 22th March 2023, 6pm
Zentrum für Alte Kulturen („Atrium“), SR 1
Langer Weg 11, 6020 Innsbruck