



# The Memory of Rebellion (Lyon, 1529)

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**Citation:** A. Bérroujon (2024) The Memory of Rebellion (Lyon, 1529). *Jems*. 13: pp. 147-170. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.36253/JEMS-2279-7149-15293>

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

**Editors:** D. Pallotti, P. Pugliatti (University of Florence)

## *Abstract*

The first half of the sixteenth century saw an explosion of popular revolts throughout Europe. Focusing on the French city of Lyon, the article analyses written expressions of revolt, including street bills, posters and, indirectly, oral relays. In April 1529, the city was devastated by the *Grande Rebeayne* (great revolt), triggered by a placard accusing the municipality of incompetence and corruption and calling for a riot. Despite the harsh repression, others appeared in the following years in an effort to rekindle the flame of rebellion. How did these writings come down to us and under what conditions were they produced? Despite the anonymous popular signature, did they really express the views of subaltern people? Can the precedents and customs on which they rely be reconstructed, given that the archives were jealously preserved by the municipal councillors? How does a chain of insurrectionary writings take shape over time and is there evidence of re-use in popular memory? Drawing on rare traces produced chiefly by political elites (handwritten consular archives and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century histories of Lyon), the article seeks to answer these questions and to counterbalance the dominant discourse by articulating the written protest and the social memory emerging from it.

*Keywords:* Lyon, *Placard*, Popular Politics, Riot, The Poor

## 1. Introduction

As is well known, the history of popular rebellions in the early modern period is rarely written from the point of view of the rebels. The very term ‘rebellion’ marks its failure, its disqualification by the victors. Many historians have noted the selective process conducted after the fact, as the dominant viewpoint of the flouted authorities rectified, simplified and impoverished what should not have happened: the plot is then reduced to that of a lowly people who, in the heat of the moment, were dragged along by a few leaders who reawakened their old demons (antifiscal, frumentary, political or religious). The insurgents only leave minute traces, which are difficult to track down. The memory of their revolt is written outside of them, and they are doubly dispossessed of it:

because they failed and because their movement is normalised. It is therefore through the study of a repertoire of recurrent actions (Thompson 1988; Bercé 1986), reported gestures and words (Farge 1992) and the notations of traumatised elites (Scott 1990) that we can find the complexity of the meanings of the riot. As for the ‘alternative memories’ (Wood 2007, 244), those running counter to the official account of the rebellion, they are apprehended in bits and pieces, through oral transmission over time (Joutard 1977) or during new insurrectionary episodes where models or counter-models, key notions, names and symbols re-emerge (Wood 2007).

In this article I will focus on one revolt in particular: the *Grande Rebeyme* of Lyon.<sup>1</sup> Firstly because it frightened the powers more than others, as can be seen from the significance of the material in the archives and the stories it generated, both immediately and afterwards. But, above all, because it was preceded by *placards* giving the reasons for the discontent, in particular poor grain management, and called for an uprising. Yet, though the riot has been studied extensively by historians (Gascon 1961; Bayard and Cayez 1990; Chopelin and Souriac 2019), the *placards* have been neglected and, before the nineteenth century, completely ignored.<sup>2</sup> Why were these posters obscured for so long? What message did they convey? Did this writing nurture a local culture of revolt?

Lyon, Sunday 25 April 1529: a thousand people gathered in the Place des Cordeliers, rang the convent’s tocsin, rampaged through the surrounding streets and looted the houses of the rich. The following day, a granary in the town, where the reserve grain was stored, was targeted. On the third day, the rioters went to Ile Barbe, on the edge of the city, where there were abundant supplies of grain. Then came the repression, which was very harsh: hangings, galleys, banishments, whippings and ladders for those accused of being part of the rebellion. It was a long process: the search for the culprits lasted until at least 1531. In recording the event in the consular registers, the town clerk noted that it all started with posters: ‘Le dimenche vingt cinquiesme avril mil cinq cens vingt neuf apres pasques ... Est assavoir que la sepmaine precedent ledit dimenche plusieurs placartz furent trouvez affigez en plusieurs carrefours d’icelle ville’.<sup>3</sup> He then copied the text, before beginning the story of the revolt. Although the original documents have not been preserved, this careful copy is available: initially ephemeral, the writing was thus perpetuated and entered registers designed to uphold the honour of the magistrates. Is its content so unusual that it should be recorded? It is known that posters, *Flugschriften* (flying sheets), pamphlets and flyers spread throughout Europe, even before Luther and even more so after him, in support of dissenting ideas (Lecuppre-Desjardins 2010; Cohn 2014; Deschamp 2016): in the Holy Roman Empire alone, there were the *Bundschuh* uprisings (1493-1517), the unrest over the Lutheran cause (1517-1521), the iconoclastic crises (1521-1522), the Palatinate knights’ mutiny (1522-1523), the Peasants’ War (1524-1525) and its 12-article manifesto (Hoyer 1979). But the planning of a riot by clandestine posting to the entire urban population is more rarely attested.<sup>4</sup>

It is on the making of these *placards* that I will first focus, by studying their verbal semantics and visual grammar, as well as the context of reception. A series of distinct acts must be consid-

<sup>1</sup> *Rebeyne* means ‘revolt’ in Lyon’s dialect.

<sup>2</sup> With the notable exception of Henri Hauser, who used the *placard* as evidence of the religious dimension of the revolt (1896).

<sup>3</sup> Archives Municipales de Lyon (hereinafter AML), BB47, 237 (On Sunday the twenty-fifth of April 1529 after Easter ... It is to be known that the week preceding the said Sunday, many placards were found posted in many crossroads of this city). Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, it is not possible to claim to have knowledge of all the revolts that took place in Europe in the years 1510-1520. Furthermore, some revolts may have been triggered by a written document calling for a meeting to be held on a certain date, without any record of it having been kept.

ered (Fraenkel 2006): writing (for which we can assume several versions prior to the drafting of the final text); handwritten or printed copy; display; reading and recopying. Which act was decisive? For whom? In what way did the time lag between one act and another play a role and modify the perception of the written word by the author(s)/the authorities/the population? I intend to show that the posters triggered not only what the political elites called ‘emotion’, a term generally used to designate popular sedition (irrational disturbance) but whose relevance is particularly questionable here given that the revolt was preannounced and argued for, but also a series of actions that began before the riot. A further question concerns the identity of the author(s) concealed behind the anonymity of the signatory, ‘Le povre’ (The poor). Although the purpose of the posters pertains to a widely shared political culture, did the *placards* emanate from the common people? I will also show that these combative writings were linked to others which preceded and followed them. Even if they were undoubtedly a massive shock for the councillors in charge of the city, these insurrectionary *placards* did not arrive out of the blue: it is possible to situate them within a chain of writings stretching over thirty years, but also to link them to words that the common people allowed themselves to utter, ‘hidden transcripts’ (Scott 1990), the sources of which were unveiled for a moment in time. Finally, I will study the reasons for their disappearance from local histories half a century after the event. To conclude, the effects on urban space (Castillo Gómez 2006) will be examined: what impact could the choice of the display mode have had, was there a reclaiming of the lost space by the authorities, and beyond that, can two information systems be pitted against each other?

I will not study a large number of manifestations of exposed writings, as I have done in part in other publications (Béroujon 2009). Instead, I seek here, on the basis of one case and its relation to others, to contribute to a history of the materiality of the written word and its meticulous contextualisation, in order to identify the effects of an object in terms of political and social history (Jouhaud and Viala 2002).

## 2. *Writing, Reading and Responding*

The text of the *placards* is known since it appears in the register of the minutes of the year 1528-1529 and in the large and imposing register copy, which varies slightly from the first register.<sup>5</sup> However, the composition of the original *placards* copied into the consular registers is not available since it has not been preserved: what was the size of the *placards* and of the letters? What type of character was used? Although probably handwritten, can we nevertheless envisage a printed format, or a mixed format, opening with print and ending with a handwritten subscription? How legible was it? What was the visual device? There is nevertheless a titling effect in its inscription: it is addressed to the whole ‘commune’. And the subscription, which is accompanied by a final drawing, is also highlighted. We adopt here the first form of the text of the minutes:

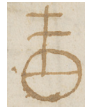
L'en fait assavoir a toutes gens de la commune de la ville de lion  
Premierement a tous ceulx qui ont desir de soubstenir le bien publicq pour repugner la malice et fureur  
des faulx usuriers plaise vous a avoir regard comme le destriment du blé nous tumble sus sans l'avoir  
merité a cause de leurs greniers plains de blez lesquelz il veullent vendre a leur dernier mot ce que n'est

<sup>5</sup> In particular at the end of the text: ‘du povre comme de ceste ville de lion’ (of the poor as well as of this city of Lyon), AML, BB47, 237v, and not, as at first, ‘de povre commune de ceste ville de lion’ (of poor commune of this city of Lyon), AML, BB46, 101v.

de raison et se dieu n'y met la main ilz fault en gecter en l'eau tant y en a Et aussi veu la grace dieu et la bonne disposition du temps et qu'il ne se fait nulz amas de blez pour la guerre Et en oultre que justice favorise avecques gouverneurs et conseillés usuriers et larrons y mettre ordre faignant user d'équité ilz nous rongent de jour en jour comme par verité le voyez devant voz yeulx advenir la cherté dudit blé et autres denrées qui est chose vile et infame par quoy a l'exemple des autres bonnes villes que toute la commune soit délibérée y mettre ordre telle que l'on fait au ble avant que l'on l'oste de la paille c'est que l'on le bat et escoux il nous fault faire ainsi a ces maulditz usuriers et a ceulx qui ont greniers et encherissent le blé. / Sachez que nous sommes de quatre a cinq cens hommes que nous sommes alliez faisons assavoir a tous les dessusdits qu'ilz aient a se trouver dimanche apres midy aux cordelliers pour donner conseil avec nous d'y mettre ordre et police et ce sans faulte pour l'utilité et prouffit de povre commune de ceste ville de lion et de moy

Ainsi subscript

Le povre<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> (We make known to all the people of the commune of the city of Lyon Firstly to all those who have the desire to support the public good to repel the malice and fury of the false usurers, please have a look at how the lack of the wheat is falling on us without having deserved it because of their granaries full of wheat, which they want to sell at their last word what is not reasonable and if God does not put the hand on it it will be necessary to throw some in the water so much there is And thus given the grace of God and the good disposition of the weather and that no heap of wheat is made for the war And in addition that justice favours with people governors and consuls usurers and thieves to put order there, pretending to use equity they gnaw at us from day to day as by truth you see it before your eyes happening the dearness of the wheat and other commodities what is a vile and infamous thing by which with the example of the other *bonnes villes* (good cities) that all the commune is deliberated to put order there such as one makes with the corn before one removes it from the straw it is that one beats it and shakes it we must do thus with these damned usurers and with those which have granaries and raise the bid the corn. / Know that we are from four to five hundred men that we are allied, let us make it known to all the aforementioned that they have to be on Sunday afternoon at the cordeliers to give council with us to put there order and police and this without fail for the utility and profit of poor commune of this city of Lyon and of me Thus subscribed The poor).



Figure 1 – Ville de Lyon, Archives Municipales, BB46, 101r-101v. Licence ouverte 2.0

By holding the city's leaders and speculators responsible for the shortage and the high cost of wheat, by calling on everyone (who can fail to support the public good?) 'de mettre ordre' in public affairs, by giving a date for the following Sunday, by saying that a force is already in place and ready for the fight, the *placard* is an argument-driven call for insurrection. The venue for the meeting – the square by the Cordeliers convent – is fraught with threat, as it is situated in the heart of the peninsula, in the most working-class district of Lyon. What was the reaction of the authorities to these accusations and threats of violence and uprising? Nothing is said about a possible 'cleaning' of the poster sites by the councillors: it is possible that the consuls sent some men for this purpose and that they collected a certain number of posters, as happened in Spain (Castillo Gómez 2017). But more probably they were satisfied with collecting a few copies, either by their men or by themselves, given the lack of time and a police force. A few years later, this was how they became aware of new clandestine writings: 'ont esté rapportez deux placartz trouvez ...'<sup>7</sup> For their part, passers-by were able to seize some of them for possible reading in small groups (perhaps indoors and in circles of trust?). The mention of 'plusieurs carrefours' (many crossroads) in the register shows in any case that the *placards* were widely disseminated across the city;<sup>8</sup> this is also attested by the historian Symphorien Champier, who published these details shortly after the events: 'les tilletz qu'ilz avoient miz & affichez par les places et carfourc' (Champier 1884, 40).<sup>9</sup> Otherwise unspecified high traffic areas and gathering points are targeted without further information: this is a classic method of posting clandestine writings in the most visible places. A century later in Geneva (Barat 2019-2020), the practices of clandestine posting were described in detail: it involved notes being hung on the pillars and doors of buildings, stuck in the joints of shop benches, attached to a bell, and stuck or scattered in the streets.

In Lyon, the posting was probably done during the night between Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 April 1529, with the *placard* being discovered in the early morning and subsequently taken down, transported and read at the town hall, the venue for consular meetings. Despite the absence of any explicit mention of the reception of this placard, it is possible to measure the responses to the display, in other words to constitute the action as a reading key: on Sunday 18 April, in the early afternoon 'apres-disner' (after dinner), a time when business was normally at a standstill, the councillors met as a matter of urgency to decide on a first series of measures.<sup>10</sup> Only five of them were at the meeting, though there were 12 elected representatives and at least 7 were usually present. But given the urgency of the situation they had to make do with those present on what was a day off and favourable to gatherings and collective discussions after Mass, undoubtedly chosen to this end by the authors of the posters. The first measures that were taken – blocked price of bread, a ban on grain exports, the obligation to quickly bring in wheat from Burgundy, and the opening of the granaries of private individuals – show the seriousness given to the core complaint, i.e. the accusation of collusion between the various authorities (councillors, men of justice and governor) and the wheat merchants, suspected of stocking up on wheat in order to raise prices and enrich themselves by maintaining a fake shortage. A classic accusation and an equally classic response, of course, but one that cannot be brushed aside too quickly: it came at a very particular time, after a series of setbacks in dealing with the people's expectation of a management system attentive to the fair price of grain (Kaplan 1986; Thompson 1988; Montenach 2009).

<sup>7</sup> AML, BB63, 168, April 1545 (two *placards* have been found and brought back ...).

<sup>8</sup> At the time, *plusiers* meant 'many, numerous' in French (Furetière 1690, 157).

<sup>9</sup> (the bills they had put up & posted in the squares and crossroads).

<sup>10</sup> AML, BB47, 231.

For eight months, the activities of the councillors were essentially focused on the regulation of grain: they expected a bumper harvest in the summer of 1528 and let wheat circulate liberally in April, May and again at the end of July 1528; but obviously the new harvest was insufficient and quickly, from the month of August onwards, the consulate had to look for ways to deal with the shortage and high prices. When reading the consular registers kept between 1528 and 1529, three main issues stand out: the regulation and search for wheat; the ransom of the royal children held hostage in Spain, with Lyon being asked to contribute a very large sum, which the councillors had to raise; and the buyback of the *gabelles* farm (tax on foodstuffs and raw materials consumed in the city) that the city had lost. The first issue, which saw several men from the consulate go to court with the town secretary, eventually led, on 21 January 1529, to the granting of permission to do a trade deal with neighbouring Burgundy, the granary of the Lyonnais. However, the consulate, which had been lobbying the court intensively for three months to obtain this agreement, backed down a few days later: on 31 January, having already sent one of its own men to Auxonne to collect and transport the wheat, it yielded this right to the merchants who wanted to take advantage of it.<sup>11</sup> Instead, it decided to put all its financial effort into the *gabelles*.<sup>12</sup> During the fifteen days preceding the poster, the first fortnight of April 1529, the councillors allowed wheat to go out, in spite of the prohibitions which they had set up, justifying it in the register of municipal deliberations by the fact that the granaries of the city were full ('il y en a en cette ville assez bonne quantité dieu grace',<sup>13</sup> the secretary wrote on 5 April) and that a relaxation of the rules would encourage the farmers and the wheat merchants to return to the Lyon markets.

Tensions must therefore have been high on Sunday 18 April among the councillors present at the crisis meeting. The consuls were traditionally responsible for the smooth running of the urban market, and in particular for ensuring an equitable price for bread so that the poorest could eat. However, the posters say that the markets were not busy and that the price of a *bichet* (measure) of wheat had risen,<sup>14</sup> even though there is nothing in the records to indicate a major concern about wheat (the meetings in April were overwhelmingly concerned with the question of buying back the *gabelles*), nor any shortages or high prices in the days leading up to 18 April.<sup>15</sup> Did the councillors forget to bail out the Grenette market (the public grain market) to bring prices down? Did they think that the critical threshold had not yet been reached? Similarly, the insults 'larrons' (thieves) and 'usuriers' (usurers), the traditional figures of infamy, regularly targeted by sermons (Todeschini 2015), were cause for concern, while the choice of the basis of the new tax (to pay the royal ransom) would have particularly affected the common people (it would be levied on both landlords and tenants – and since officers had just finished collecting tax information from residents, there must have been some apprehension) as well as the fact that the debt taken out in March with brokers had to be paid or renewed.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> AML, BB47, 194.

<sup>12</sup> Recently acquired by Robert Albisse, whom the councillors made out to be a dangerous stranger in their records, but who had been a councillor himself some years before.

<sup>13</sup> AML, BB47, 224 (there is in this city a rather good quantity of it god grace).

<sup>14</sup> In previous years it was eight to ten *sols*, in October 1528 it was 15-16 *sols*, at least 20 *sols* in March, and 34 *sols* on 2 May (consular registers).

<sup>15</sup> The town rented granaries to store the 750 *emines* of wheat (about 1,500 donkey loads) brought from Burgundy in February by an eminent former councillor, Henri Gimbre; two whole boats were unloaded by the merchant Ducournal.

<sup>16</sup> For the purchase of the *gabelle* farm, at 3% from Galle against the usual average rate that R. Gascon establishes at 1% (1971, 250).

In the week following the posting and while the accusations in the *placard* were permeating through the population, the increase in the search for wheat in the town, the decision to send emissaries to Burgundy and Dauphiné to bring in corn, and the attempted desertion of certain members of the town council, who were harshly called to order by the others, marked a rise in tension as the deadline drew near. On Saturday, the day before the planned uprising, the councillors marshalled their forces by summoning the 41 *quarteniers*, i.e., the leaders of the town's militia, mainly craftsmen. They gave them a firm speech, asking them, among other things, to be ready for the riot. The next day at noon, the Place des Cordeliers was flooded with people (300 to 400 men according to the court witnesses, 1000 to 1200 in the consular registers, 2000 according to Champier), and the *quarteniers* and their troops of *dizainiers* (neighbourhood police) did nothing to prevent this. If we read about the event in the municipal deliberation register, the looting was far from indiscriminate, contrary to what several historians have written (for example Gascon 1961, 97-98): the gangs of rioters directed their attention in particular towards the houses of the members of the consulate and their close circle. Although the secretary did not mention this, as he obviously did not want to make explicit causal links, the names and functions of the figures concerned make it possible to reconstruct this: two former consuls still frequently called in as *notables* for important decisions, the emissary of the consulate who had just been to negotiate for wheat in Burgundy, an agent of the *gabelles*, a wheat merchant who was meant to supply the town according to the arrangement made with the consulate (the only one to be taken to prison by the rioters, a strong symbolic act of the restoration of justice), the town secretary, the town prosecutor and the caretaker who kept the consular archives.<sup>17</sup> These powerful people and their staff were all involved in decisions concerning wheat. However, they were not the only ones to be molested. As in any uprising, the gangs operated with order and disorder (Wood 2007, 151), and if the names of the people mentioned are not surprising, this is also because the consuls, who controlled the writing of the registers (Fargeix 2007), wanted to highlight the scandal of the attack against these elites. Beyond the names mentioned, other Lyonnais were targeted by the rioters ('plusieurs autres maisons' [many other houses], 'méchanceté dudit populaire qui continua jusques à la nuyt').<sup>18</sup>

The text of the poster was copied under the date of Sunday 25 April, followed by an account of the three days of rioting. But when was this writing actually done? On Tuesday 27 April, when the consular meetings restarted in a place of refuge? Or later? In any case, it is only after the threat it bore had been realised that the *placard* was noted. It was only registered by the authorities once the rebellion had been recorded. We can thus discern several levels in this copying within a book jealously guarded by the consuls in their archives. It gave a performative function to the *placard*. It must also have served as evidence in future trials against the rebels. And it kept alive the memory of the accusatory violence suffered by the consuls and served as a warning to their successors. Was it intended to calm or, conversely, reactivate the emotion of councillors taking office? One comment stands out from the register: the town was well managed, it was not short of

<sup>17</sup> Respectively described as 'Symphorien Champier docteur médecin' (Symphorien Champier doctor), 'honorable hommes Humbert et Henri Gimbre frères marchans et bourgeois gens riches et des apparans de ladite ville' (honourable men Humbert and Henri Gimbre brothers merchants and burghers rich people and of the apparents of the aforementioned city), 'Pierre Morin', 'Laurent Ducournal patissier et tavernier riche homme opulant en biens fort bien meublé' (Laurent Ducournal pastrycook and tavern-keeper rich man opulent in goods very well furnished), the 'secrétaire du consulat' (secretary of the consulate), Claude Granier (who was absent from his house at the time), the 'procureur de la ville' (town prosecutor) François Fournier (who was also absent), and the 'consierge' (caretaker) of the town hall and keeper of the archives (AML, BB47, 238-239).

<sup>18</sup> AML, BB47, f. 239 (meanness of the people which continued until the night).



grain ('et ne fault entendre que ce fust par faulte de blez'),<sup>19</sup> and it was the injustice of the rioters that was emphasised. As if the dazed consuls were still looking for a good reason for the revolt.

How was the *placard* perceived by the townspeople? One statement (the only one, the reaction of a group of men), shows that the preparation and displaying of the poster was a key, almost heroic moment. On 4 May, the day when the witnesses to the riot were interviewed, two masons testified. However, they talked not about the riot, but about the *placard* event and its repercussions:

le jour saint George 23 d'avril dernier, estans ensemble devant Saint-Nizier survenit ung nommé Guillot Jardin masson, demourant en rue thomassin, avec plusieurs autres, desquelz ils n'ont congnoissance, lesquels tombarent sur le propoz des placards mys et apposez par la ville contre mons. le gouverneur, mess. de la justice, et conseillers, disant iceulx Boteront et Caryé qu'ilz s'esbaysoient qui avoit fait et posé iceulx placars, lequel Jardin respondit qu'il savoit bien qui c'estoit, et que c'estoit ung sien beau-frère. (Guigue and Guigue 1886, 276-277)<sup>20</sup>

Boastfulness? We do not know who this brother-in-law was; we merely have the profession of the person who, according to the witnesses, was doing the bragging, a mason, and his address, rue Thomassin, located in the heart of the printing district of Lyon. Was this brother-in-law a printer in this district? Did he write, copy or print and then put up the *placards*, or did he simply take part in their production? What is certain is that five days after it was posted, the *placard* was the talk of the town, bringing together discussion groups from backgrounds that were not very literate, which however did not prevent them from debating. Discussion took place in the street, in front of the church of Saint-Nizier, and therefore just next to the town hall where the consuls met. The atmosphere seems to have become so heated that the proximity of the powerful and their symbols had no deterrent effect. The masons, discussing this incendiary *placard*, were caught between astonishment and admiration ('amazed'). The poster, summed up in a lapidary manner as a charge against all the authorities, had spread throughout the city. Was it passed from hand to hand, hidden in pockets? Was it seen or read? Or was it merely summarised, as here? Were those who posted it the first to 'find' it and pass it around (Barat 2019-2020, 25)? It incubated and fuelled debate, posed and raised questions about its author. It must also have led to decisions: to join or not to join, to leave, to barricade oneself in, decisions that might mutate according to the circles and moments involved. Anticipation of the event, whether fearful or impatient, must have been strong for all.

Following the denunciation of witnesses, ten days after the uprising, the consulate promised a large reward (paid 'sans difficulté' – without difficulty) and protection to those who reported the names of the anonymous authors of the *placards*.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. *The Anonymity of the Placard*

Who was behind the poster? The authorities did not find out,<sup>22</sup> and we can only conjecture: 'quatre a cinq cens hommes' (four to five hundred men) signed under a common name, *The*

<sup>19</sup> AML, BB47, 239 (it should not be understood that it was for lack of wheat).

<sup>20</sup> (On Saint George's day, 23rd of April last, in front of Saint-Nizier, a mason named Guillot Jardin, living in rue Thomassin, with several others, of whom they have no knowledge, came across the placards put up and affixed by the city against the governor, gentlemen of justice, and councillors, saying Boteront and Caryé that they were amazed who had made and put up these placards, to which Jardin replied that he knew well who it was, and that it was one of his brothers-in-law).

<sup>21</sup> AML, BB47, 6 May 1529, 248.

<sup>22</sup> At least at the beginning, until 1531, when a clerk is named as its author, but no further details are known (see below).

*poor*: these words suggest the popular masses in a then densely populated city of about 50,000 inhabitants. The clear demarcation (the binary structure of a text articulated around us/them – ‘nous’/‘ils’, ‘eux’, ‘leurs’), the phenomena of repetition and emphasis (‘usuriers’ and ‘commune’ appear three times) and the classic pattern of monopolisation refer to an argumentative base that was undoubtedly familiar to the majority of the population (making it immediately striking), resulting initially in an indistinct populace. This is the dominant interpretation as given by Symphorien Champier, a witness and victim of the riot: a social confrontation between the councillors and the rogue artisans, ‘ung tas de populaire’ (1884, 33).<sup>23</sup> The world of the small against the world of the big.

The use, by the revolt leaders, of the signature ‘The Poor’ is also attested elsewhere; for instance, the insurgents in the English North in 1536-1537 claimed to be led by ‘Captain Poverty’ (Wood 2007, 176). Similarly, the ‘commune’ was widely used as a rallying banner: the notion was a flagship for other revolt movements in the late Middle Ages and early modernity – the *comunidad* in Spain, the *Gemeinde* of the Peasants’ War in the Holy Roman Empire, the ‘Commonwealth’ against enclosures, again in association with poverty. ‘Le povre’ in the signature thus takes on a very strong collective popular dimension, and it is possible, as historians have done since the end of the nineteenth century, to interpret the final wording (text and drawing) as a rebus, the cruciferous globe being related to the world: ‘le pauvre monde’ (the poor world).<sup>24</sup>

By calling on ‘toutes gens de la commune’, the author of the *placard* is perhaps trying to stir the memory of the riot, also called *rebeyne*, which began on Easter Monday, 9 April 1436, and lasted until June 1436, when an assembly of up to 2,000 people, gathered this time with the approval of the consulate, attempted to confront the King’s tax demands and triggered the revolt – which was finally put down. The notables and *terriers* (group of wealthy rentiers) had demanded that ‘everyone’ be invited (Fédou 1958, 141). The venue for the meeting, also the Cordeliers, echoed this. But beyond this insurrectionary episode, the notion of ‘commune’ resonated more widely, in the sense of those who care about the common good and who are not reducible to a small economic elite. And, although direct democracy never existed at the beginning of the Lyon commune, at the turn of the fourteenth century, the city’s government was nevertheless able to recruit more widely than in 1529. The comparison with ‘les autres bonnes villes’ (the other good cities), given as an example by the author of the *placard*, also served as a point of reference to show that elsewhere in the kingdom of France, powerful cities continued to bring together all the heads of families, not exactly to deliberate but to give their consent to serious measures (Chevalier 1982, 208). This anchoring in the space of the kingdom and in the past (the custom) was to serve as a benchmark and a spur to revolt.

Was the ‘commune’, however, in the spirit of the *placard*, reducible to the world below, to the ‘people menu’ (small people)? This is not certain. But those who responded to the appeal launched by the *placard* were partly from it: they were the ones singled out by the consulate: ‘menu peuple povres mesnagers serviteurs femmes et enfants de quinze à vingt ans’.<sup>25</sup> And one of the first to be arrested and hanged was a ‘joueur d’épée’ (sword player – whether a professional swordsman or a circus performer, definitely a man of the small people). If the *placard* reached beyond them, it did not prevent the common people from appropriating its content. The words reported by witnesses during the riot point in the same direction: that of a fusion

<sup>23</sup> (a bunch of popular people).

<sup>24</sup> Steyert 1899, perhaps influenced in this interpretation by the 1534 *placard* against the Mass where ‘le pauvre monde’ (the poor world) is spelt out several times.

<sup>25</sup> AML, BB47, 238 (lowly people, poor householders, servants, women and children aged fifteen to twenty).

between the political imaginary and social data. A spectator said he heard ‘Vela la Commune qui s’avance contre les gros accapareurs de ceste ville’.<sup>26</sup> The ‘Commune’ here were all the underprivileged,<sup>27</sup> including women, whereas the poster targeted a virile, male world. It is clear here that its reception constituted ‘appropriations that transform, reformulate and exceed what they receive’ (Chartier 1990, 30), a strong expectation of the top-down reversal that was now taking shape thanks to the written word. The graphic sign at the foot of the poster features a double cross, like the one set in the middle of the Hôtel Dieu in Lyon, which was responsible for assisting the sick poor. Taken as a whole, the sign of the globe and the cross may represent the Christ of the Last Judgement.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it is for social justice that the *placard* calls. Power (omnipotence? – the *Reichsapfel*, imperial orb) of the Poor of God. In the *Bundschuh* revolts, the banner with the laced peasant shoe embroidered on the flags of the insurgents was sometimes accompanied by the motto ‘Rien que la justice de Dieu’ (Deschamp 2016, 108).<sup>29</sup> The poor man and the sign of the cross and the globe brought to mind notions of social justice, love for one’s neighbour and charity in the face of practices deemed unjust and abusive.

But if the rhetoric of the *placard* as a political critique of power was shared and not specific to a much more educated group, its production on the other hand implied a certain level of wealth and education. Wealth was needed in order to obtain paper and ink, to employ a pool of copyists or a printer, and to recruit the poster men if accomplices did not take on the task themselves; the argumentation also required a certain education, since it was written in a French that alternated between scholarly and popular registers (for example in the image of the wheat being threshed, which also referred to the well-known biblical metaphor of separating the wheat from the chaff). Were the printers hiding behind this anonymity? There were many of them in Lyon, which already had a solid printing tradition dating back some fifty years to when the first printworks were established. They were grouped in official and unofficial brotherhoods, lively brotherhoods of craftsmen that the councillors intended to ban two months after the revolt. Beyond the rebus, the cruciferous globe that accompanies the signature may also allude to the traditional marks of merchants and craftsmen, to the world of trades and in particular to the printing trades, whose marks frequently combined the double-cross and the T-world on their title pages. The figures for the typographic marks of Nicolas de Benedictis, Guillaume Boullé, Jean Clein, François and Constantin Fradin, Jacques Juinta, Louis Martin, Guillaume de Millis, Jacques Sacon and Barthelemy Trot are very similar to the one on the *placard*. A rare trade absent from the representation of the masters of the trade (called to elect the consulate and mandated during exceptional assemblies), printing was a world wracked by anxiety, whose companions were organised as a force for social opposition (Davis 1979a). The final threat of the *placard*, ‘nous sommes de quatre à cinq cens hommes’, is strangely close to

<sup>26</sup> Guigue and Guigue 1886, 263 (Here is the Commune advancing against the big monopolists of this city).

<sup>27</sup> In his *Histoire de notre temps* (1552), the historian Guillaume Paradin spoke of the ‘Communes’ to designate the insurgent lower classes (660). At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the term ‘Commune’ was mostly used in this sense: in his study of the Croquants’ revolts, Y.-M. Bercé notes that the term was socially marked (1986, 13). In 1690, Furetière’s dictionary consecrated this meaning, which had become dominant: ‘Commune: Le menu peuple. La Commune s’esmeut facilement. Les Magistrats ne peuvent pas retenir la Commune’ (Commune: The small people. The Commune was easily stirred up. The Magistrates cannot hold back the Commune). This connotation of subaltern communities in confrontation with the municipal oligarchy is attested to as early as the Middle Ages, as the negative of the *universitas* of medieval jurists, even if it is not the only meaning of the word (Barrio Barrio 2014; Dumolyn 2014).

<sup>28</sup> As, for example, the image in the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, 1415-1425, Kanonie sv. Petra a Pavla 80, 44v.

<sup>29</sup> (Nothing but God’s justice).

another notation, written ten years later by the book workers in the middle of a strike: ‘nous sommes quatre ou cinq cents pauvres compagnons imprimeurs’ (Davis 1989, 321).<sup>30</sup> Could this have been a reworking of the insurrectionary *placard*? This is at least a possibility in this writing, supporting the journeymen printers’ desire for social justice and intended for the Parliament of Paris, especially since the term ‘alliez’ (allied) in the poster resonates with the oaths taken and the clandestine nature of the brotherhood of book workers.



Figure 2 – Some Lyon printers’ marks from between 1510 and 1530. Title pages: *Opera Sallustiana*, Lyon, Jean Clein, 1528 (Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon, Rés. B509779). Licence ouverte 2.0; *Legenda Sanctorum*, Lyon, Constantin Fradin, n.d. (BML, Chomarat A13684). Courtesy of Michel Chomarat

Another hypothesis, relating the *placard* to jurists, is an easier path to follow. The accusation of collusion between the rulers and the wheat merchants suggests the political factions who had good knowledge of consular decisions, in particular the latest decisions taken, as did the men of the secular court (that of the archbishop, which still had precedence over the royal court). The vocabulary of the poster is of the kind used by men of justice in particular (‘bien public’ – public good –, ‘équité’, ‘utilité et profit’, ‘ordre et police’ – equity, utility and profit, order and police) and suggests opposing factions and a political battle for power, factional competition that could generate discussion and critical thinking among a wide audience (de Vivo 2007). The final subscription (‘ainsi souscrit’ – thus subscribed), which gives solemnity to the act, mimics notarial formulas, even in its association of the signature with the cruciform sign resembling a notarial seal. It is possible that the poster was made by one or more legal practitioners. The double crossbars of the cross suggests the archdiocese. Its clerks had caused ripples in Novem-

<sup>30</sup> (we are four or five hundred poor companion printers).

ber 1528, when they went to the consulate to denounce the bad wheat management and the corruption of one of the councillors. Etienne Savary, prosecutor at the secular court:

a product ... un mémoire commençant advertissemens ... en oultre a requis estre commis ung procureur pour le populaire attendu que Me François Fournier procureur general de la ville a esté chargé par Antoine Lacte d'avoir retiré en sa maison certaines caisses plaines de blez lesquelles contre les défenses de non tirer ble hors de la ville furent arrestées par les commis de la ville au pont du Rosne ...<sup>31</sup>

The consulate, although forced to appoint this popular prosecutor, a few days later denounced Savary and 'certains autres procureurs de la cour séculière'<sup>32</sup> who had asked to check the accounts of the 'rêve', i.e. the tax on the movement of goods, in particular on grain exits, and addressed its remonstrances to the archbishop, the governor and the seneschal against the 'entreprises ... pour esmouvoir à sédition de peuple'.<sup>33</sup> In February 1529, a few days after backing down on the wheat trade deal with Burgundy, it excluded from consular assemblies everyone who had not been explicitly invited.<sup>34</sup> It then recommended the utmost confidentiality in the negotiations for the purchase of the *gabelles*, trying to curb the leak of information.<sup>35</sup> But in 1528, by multiplying the assemblies (of *notables*, *terriers* and masters of trades, and general assemblies) to deal with the royal ransom, the consulate had itself widened the audience for public affairs: up to 160 people whose opinions were heard.<sup>36</sup>

Craftsmen and men of justice in coalition, seeking a mass mobilisation against the rulers? This is what had happened a decade earlier, when the 'poor' were already mentioned in anonymous libels.

#### 4. Chain of Writing

In April 1515, two anonymous letters addressed to the councillors were found at the consulate, in the same place on the gallery of the common hotel but a few days apart. The first letter reads as follows:

A noz seigneurs les conseillers et gouverneurs de la cité de Lyon. Seigneurs consulz qui avez la charge de la chose publique et qui devez estre soigneulx du prouffit et sollagement de pouvre peuple pour Dieu ne souffrez faire une si grand playe à la ville que pour remplir cinq ou six meschans larrons, trestres et susseurs du sang des pouvres tout votre populaire soit mys à perpétuel pouvreté et indigence et emploiez

<sup>31</sup> AML, BB47, 4 November 1528, 149v (produced ... a memorandum beginning warnings ...; moreover required to be committed a prosecutor for the popular whereas Master François Fournier general prosecutor of the city was charged by Antoine Lacte to have withdrawn in his house certain boxes full of corn which against the defenses not to draw corn out of the city were stopped by the clerks of the city at the bridge of the Rhône ...).

<sup>32</sup> AML, BB47, 4 November 1528, 157 (certain other procurators of the secular court).

<sup>33</sup> AML, BB47, 12 November, 157-158 (undertakings ... to stir up sedition of the people).

<sup>34</sup> AML, BB47, 1 February 1529, 195: 'doresnavant nully ne assistera... au consulat fors que messieurs conseillers procureur général et secrétaire de la ville sinon que par expres il y soit appelé et retenu par mesdits seigneurs les conseillers' (From now on, no one will attend ... the consulate apart from the councillors, the public prosecutor and the secretary of the town, unless they are expressly called and retained by my lords the councillors).

<sup>35</sup> AML, BB47, 15 March 1529, 216: to hold ready the 15,000 l. for the repurchase of the farm of the *gabelles*, 'affin de obvier à quelque trouble que pourroit survenir si la chose estoit manifeste ... pour autant qu'elle est de grosse conséquence ... , aussi que ceste matière n'a mestier d'estre devulguee de peur de quelque empeschement' (in order to obviate some trouble which could arise if the thing were known ... insofar as it is of great consequence ... , also that this matter should not be disclosed for fear of some impediment).

<sup>36</sup> AML, BB47, 29 April 1528, 6v-9.

notre bon chevalier et gouverneur Jehan Jaques et si vous et luy n'estes assez fors, nous aurons fer, feu et eau et cueur pour en faire l'exécution si après qu'il en sera perpétuel mémoire et notez notez et notez. Et au dessoubz par v. pe follé et destruit.<sup>37</sup>

The second letter:

Messieurs, Messieurs, vous ne tenez compte de l'aide que vous avons offert et tenez votre conseil sans nous appeller, auquel savez bien que l'en veult excuser ces larrons de la substance et sang du povre peuple, il n'y a regnard, lou ne autre de ses complices que ne facons finir de mort amère s'ilz ne rendent tout tout et tout ce qu'ilz ont robbé et trompé la communauté de povre populaire et qu'ilz ne laissent leurs années entreprinse des draps de soye et savons très bien qui sont les trompeurs et les larrons. Noble sieur mareschal et vous conseillers tenez bon pour votre povre peuple ... V.P.P.D.L [Votre Pauvre Peuple De Lyon].<sup>38</sup>

As has already been well demonstrated (Gascon 1971; Fargeix 2007), the tax issue (silk cloth farm) concealed more general problems. These two letters arrived in a poisonous climate of accusations concerning the falsification of the city's accounts and at a time when a party, the craftsmen's party, was being formed. This party was initially led by jurists and wealthy merchants, who were on the doorstep of power; they asked, a few days after the discovery of the letters, to leave the co-optation electoral system by allowing the craftsmen to designate by themselves the masters who would be electors of the councillors (the system was in fact locked since the consuls appointed the masters of the trades and *terriers* who had to elect them). The town council was then made up of major merchants, clothiers, silk merchants, grocers and, secondarily, lawyers. Since 1490, no new families had entered the town council. The city had become a commercial and banking capital; its four fairs were re-established in 1494 and the consulate became the emanation of this merchant oligarchy which sequestered power through a few large families. Following the first charge made by the anonymous libels, the demands became clearer and more powerful. The leaders of the faction took the name 'procureur des artisans' (prosecutor of craftsmen) and 'procureur des habitants' (prosecutor of inhabitants), and the media mobilised in their struggle included the concept of a satirical show (a farce against the councillors, intended to brighten up the queen's entrance in 1516, which was immediately banned by the consuls), but also insults and verbal interruptions at solemn moments when all the Lyonnais were gathered, such as the proclamation of the election of new consuls each December – interruptions which their authors asked to be recorded.

Public writing thus returned in 1518 with a higher degree of visibility when Jean Gautier, a rich apothecary at the head of the discontented, had an epitaph engraved on a tomb in the

<sup>37</sup> Quotation in Fargeix 2007, 488. (To our lords the councillors and governors of the city of Lyon. Lords consuls who have the responsibility of the public thing and who must be careful of the profit and relief of poor people for God, do not suffer to make such a great plague to the city that to fill five or six wicked thieves, traitors and suckers of the blood of the poor all your people be put to perpetual poverty and indigence, and employ our good knight and governor Jehan Jaques and if you and he are not strong enough, we will have iron, fire and water and heart to make the execution of it to the point that it will be perpetual memory of it and note note and note. And below by y[our] pe[ople] trampled and destroyed).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 489 (Gentlemen, gentlemen, you do not take into account the help we have offered you and hold your council without calling us, where you know well that one wants to excuse these thieves from the substance and blood of the poor people, there is no fox, wolf nor other of his accomplices that we do not make finish of bitter death if they do not return all all and all that they have stolen and deceived the community of poor people and that they do not leave their damned company of silk sheets and know very well who are the deceivers and the thieves. Noble lord marshal and you advisors, hold fast to your poor people V.P.P.D.L [Your Poor People of Lyon]).

church of Saint-Nizier (Fargeix 2007, 516). It read, among other things, that he was ‘Procureur contre ceulx qui ont osté à la chose publicque’.<sup>39</sup> In response, the councillors requested that the inscription be modified so that ‘qu’il soit escript en sondit épitaffe qu’il a esté et est contre la chose publicque de ceste ville, ou en quelque autre lieu publicq affin qu’il en soit mémoyre perpétuelle’.<sup>40</sup> The judgement handed down a few years later, in the great days of Auvergne, proved them right; it ordered: ‘suppression de l’inscription suivante tracée, à la suite de son nom, sur la tombe de Jean Gautier, apothicaire: Procureur au bon office des habitans artisans de Lion, contre tous ceulx qui par intention vont contre droit de la chose publique’ (Rolle 1865, 19)<sup>41</sup>.

The craftsmen’s prosecutor had set his sights high: the church of Saint-Nizier was the place where new consuls were elected and proclaimed, the place where consular meetings were sometimes held, where the town archives had previously been kept in the adjoining chapel, and last but not least, the church was situated opposite the town hall.

It is in relation to these precedents that the *placards* of 1529 must be understood: the method of electing consuls had already been questioned and compared with a golden age in which the whole population would have been consulted; the terms ‘thieves’ and ‘usurers’, and the idea of defending the ‘public thing’ had already left their mark on the town – first confidentially, then much more visibly in a public place over three years (unless the epitaph had been hidden from view during this time. Where was it? In a side chapel, or in the nave?). The defence of the people and the poor by procurators reminiscent of the official institution of the Procurator of the Poor in the fourteenth century (Gonthier 1978) was agitated. The revival of a ‘procureur du populaire’ (people’s procurator) in November 1528 must therefore have greatly concerned the consuls.<sup>42</sup> The public posting of April 1529, amplified by a significant number of exposed *placards* signed by a full and complete entity which no longer referred to the consular authority (‘the poor’ had lost the possessive ‘your poor’ that attached it to the consulate, whose reason for being was, on the contrary, questioned – and it was no longer written in the acronym form ‘VPPDL’), and followed by the revolt, could only result in repression. This repression was commensurate not only with the fear aroused by the looting itself but also with the series of acts of protest committed in the months or even years that preceded it. The causal chain, running over fifteen years, was registered by the councillors themselves a few years later.<sup>43</sup> Faced

<sup>39</sup> AML, BB37, 152v, quotation in Fargeix 2007, 516 (prosecutor against those who have taken away from the public thing).

<sup>40</sup> AML, BB37, 152v-153, quotation in Fargeix 2007, 518 (it be written in his epitaph that he was and is against the public thing of this city, or in some other public place so that it may be remembered in perpetuity).

<sup>41</sup> (suppression of the following inscription traced, following his name, on the tomb of Jean Gautier, apothecary: prosecutor to the good office of the inhabitants craftsmen of Lyon, against all those who by intention go against the law of the public thing).

<sup>42</sup> One of the former leaders of the 1515-1520 rebellion, Pierre Sirodes, reappears in the consular registers at the end of 1528, without it being known whether this affair (settling the still unresolved question of the fines owed by Sirodes and the consulate) had any link with the 1529 revolt (AML, BB47, 3 December 1528, 163v).

<sup>43</sup> In 1534, in admonishing a private individual who refused the tax, they say that it is ‘[ce n’est] chose nouvelle que de veoir aucuns particuliers murmurer... parce qu’il y a quelques temps qu’une partie du populaire dudict Lyon, appelez les artisans, voulurent imposer ausdits conseillers plusieurs malversations touchant les deniers à eulx octroyez par le Roy; et fut l’issue de leur poursuite si malheureuse pour eux qu’ilz furent condamnez par arrest à faire amendes honorables’ (not a new thing to see some private individuals murmuring ... , because some time ago a part of the people of Lyon, called the craftsmen, wanted to impose on the aforementioned councillors several embezzlements relating to the money granted to them by the King; and the outcome of their pursuit was so unfortunate for them that they were condemned by decree to make honourable fines). For three years now, the consuls add, ‘se sont trouvez en ladite ville plusieurs mutins et séditieux, lesquelx ont pillé, saccaigé des plus apparentes maisons de ladicte ville, et mis les conseillers et gouverneurs d’icelle en dangier de leur vie’ (several mutineers and seditious)

with what may have been a resurgence of the old artisans' party, the gallows and exemplary punishments marked the accounts of the consulate throughout 1529. However, they did not completely calm the agitation in Lyon.

Anonymous writing was once again mobilised against the councillors a year later, and was also displayed in public:<sup>44</sup> within a context of recurring plague, wheat shortages and an influx of people from the countryside, on Sunday 23 October 1530 a *placard* was found 'apposé à la porte du couvent saint bonaventure [les Cordeliers] ceste nuyt lequel a esté prins par le provost et baillé audit sieur Levyn conseiller'.<sup>45</sup> Nothing more is said about it except that it contained 'entre autres choses menasses à messieurs de la justice et conseillers avec grosses parolles injurieuses';<sup>46</sup> the next day it was exhibited and read to the various judicial authorities (secular court and royal court) whom the consulate asked to 's'enquérir par tous moyens s'il est possible trouver le personnage qui a fait ledit placard affin que pugnition en soit faicte'.<sup>47</sup> During the general assembly called in its wake by the town council, several notables demanded that the real culprits of the sedition of 1529 be prosecuted (Denis Thurin, for example: 'il y a encore quelques coupables attendu le placard ainsi mis et apposé dernièrement'<sup>48</sup>).

A week later, again on a Sunday, 30 October, and again at the door of the Cordeliers – not one but several *placards* were found 'à la porte de l'esglise saint bonaventure qui ont esté veuz et leuz au bureau contenans plusieurs parolles blasphematoires mesmement contre messieurs de l'esglise et aussi contre la justice et conseillers de la ville'.<sup>49</sup> Doubtless there were others in the days that followed: on Thursday 3 November, an abruptly ended entry in the consular register states that 'pour ce que journallement aucuns seducteurs mectent des placardz parmy la ville tendans à sedition et emouvoir le peuple contre les gens d'esglise de justice et conseillers de la ville'.<sup>50</sup> Six months later, on Wednesday 10 May 1531, the consular register records a fresh occurrence:

monsr pomponis de trevulce a mandé parler à luy messrs les conseillers ... esquels il a dit que monsr le marechal gouverneur luy a dit qu'il est besoing faire faire une crie que celluy qui declarera qui a planté et affigé un placard commencent Monsieur le comte de saint jehan vers saone derrière la maison de l'archevêché de lion aura cent escus d'estrenne.<sup>51</sup>

Again, the content of the poster is omitted.

Since the salvo of *placards* in October and November 1530, however, repression had resumed in earnest. The printers were in the consulate's sights. A 'Jean Balsarin', banished in June 1529

have been found in the said town, who have pillaged and ransacked the most visible houses in the said town and put the councillors and governors of the town in danger of their lives) (AML, CC359, quoted in Rolle 1865, 274).

<sup>44</sup> Henri Hauser quoted these resurgences (1896, 301-303).

<sup>45</sup> AML, BB49, 209 (affixed to the door of the convent of Saint Bonaventure [i.e. the Cordeliers] this day, which was taken by the provost and given to the councillor, Sir Levyn).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* (among other things, threats to gentlemen of justice and councillors with large insulting words).

<sup>47</sup> AML, BB49, 210v (inquire by all means if it is possible to find the person who made the said *placard* so that punishment may be meted out).

<sup>48</sup> AML, BB49, 216 (there are still some culprits awaiting the placard thus placed and affixed recently).

<sup>49</sup> AML, BB49, 225 (at the door of the church of Saint Bonaventure which were seen and read in the office containing several blasphemous words, even against the gentlemen of the church and also against the justice and councillors of the town).

<sup>50</sup> AML, BB49, 227 (for what some seducers daily put up placards around the town tending to seduce and stir up the people against the clergymen, the justice system and the councillors of the town).

<sup>51</sup> AML, BB49, 276v (mr pomponis de trevulce [the governor] mandated to speak to him mrs the councillors ... to whom he said that monsr the marechal governor told him that it is necessary to make a cry that the one who will declare who planted and affixed a placard beginning Mister the count of Saint Jean next Saone behind the house of the archbishopric of Lyon will have a hundred ecus of étrenne).



(Guigue and Guigue 1886, 292), was perhaps one of the sons of the printer Guillaume Balsarin: Jacques Balsarin, also called Jean, was not mentioned again after 1529 and his brother, Bonin, left the city to print in Grenoble at that date (Baudrier and Baudrier 1964, 35-71). On several occasions in October 1530, the printers were targeted for forming bands that marched day and night, consisting of 'grant membre de gens tant estrangers que autres'.<sup>52</sup> Everything pointed to their being the troublemakers. It was a mobile population, welcoming workers from all over Europe and composed of travelling companions able to make comparisons and take up the signs, gestures and rallying devices that marked political, social and religious revolts throughout Europe at the time. None of the Lyon printers were arrested for the 1530 affair of the seditious notes, and it is not known whether they were behind it (it was not specified that the posters were printed), but some, such as Pierre de Vingle, migrated to Geneva or Neuchâtel; there the latter published the 1534 *placard* against the Mass, which immediately became famous.

On the other hand, the 'clercs', religious and lay lawmen forming a large and diverse class in Lyon (Fédou 1964, 375), few of whom were victims of the first repression (only one clerk had been banished in 1529), were actively sought: in the Roannais region, a clerk, Simon Girard, was prosecuted in January 1531 for being the author of the 1529 *placards* that were the 'cause de la sédition' (Guigue and Guigue 1886, 419) (cause of the sedition); the 'procureur du populaire' Etienne Savary, who had fled from Lyon after the riot, was also arrested in March 1531,<sup>53</sup> in Saint-Julien in the county of Burgundy, 15 leagues from Lyon. His trial was still in progress in 1532.<sup>54</sup> Five more people had been arrested by 10 May. But they were not the right ones or else they had backup since, as we have seen, a new *placard* arrived.

It was then that the repression intensified: about thirty people were imprisoned and tried over three months through to August 1531. These were mostly commoners: in addition to a miller, a carpenter and a mattress maker, there were also breadwinners, maids, boatmen, beggars, etc. Women were arrested for their 'mauvaises paroles' (bad words – Farge 1992). There were many of them in the revolt itself, as noted in the consular accounts and Champier's stories, and several died in prison. They caused anxiety among the consuls who feared their ability to stir up and mobilise via their accusations of theft and stockpiling: on 10 May 1531, Pernette Barbière was accused of having 'semé parole par la ville qu'il fallait tuer tous ces gros larrons de la ville et que chacun le dit par la ville, compris le passage de la rivière' (Guigue and Guigue 1886, 421);<sup>55</sup> a servant was put in the pillory on the Saône bridge 'pour avoir dit que messieurs les conseillers avaient envoyé gens dans les champs pour garder de venir le blé en ville' (*ibid.*);<sup>56</sup> and a chambermaid was put on a ladder for having spoken ill of the councillors.<sup>57</sup> In the case of the rioters, these acts of repression can be understood as 'a systematic attempt by the authorities to sever the autonomous circuits of folk discourse and to deny this heterodox story any social site where it could be safely retold and interpreted' (Scott 1990, 126). Hanging or banishment were meted out to most of the rioters. This great brutality must be read as a response to critical discourse but also to the 'hidden transcripts' perceived by the dominant (which we can only assume to be insults, looks, postures, gestures, lack of deference, all rendered in the consular

<sup>52</sup> AML, BB49, 210v (large numbers of people, both foreigners and others).

<sup>53</sup> Although he had asked the king for a pardon in November 1530 (AML, BB49, 228v).

<sup>54</sup> Guigue and Guigue 1886, 256, 293, 419.

<sup>55</sup> (spread the word through the town that all these big thieves in the town should be killed, and that everyone said so through the city, until the river crosses).

<sup>56</sup> (for having said that the councillors had sent people into the fields to prevent them from coming to the town with the wheat).

<sup>57</sup> Guigue and Guigue 1886, 418, 421.

registers as ‘murmuration’). It was a response that was commensurate with the fear felt not just in one precise moment but over many months or years of tension. It contrasted with the consulate’s much less severe repression of the *rebeyne* a century earlier in the context of consensus between the councillors and the people and to the detriment of the king’s men (Fédou 1958).

The severity on the part of the authorities was accompanied by a new treatment of poverty. From May 1531, faced with an influx of poor people from the countryside who came to join those from the town (under the influence of a priest, Jean de Vauzelles, whose brother was a very influential judge), the consulate took charge of the system that provided assistance: taking a census of all the poor, it set up an effective relief system at several points in the town. The system of *Aumône Générale* (General Alms) was perpetuated in 1534: the poor had to be domiciled in the city to be entitled to assistance, and therefore had to be registered. Forbidden to beg, they received their bread at a fixed time and place in exchange for a token; this assistance was accompanied by the obligation to work (Gutton 1971). Even though it was part of a European context of charity reform, it is difficult not to see this series of measures as a response to the fear aroused by the *rebeyne* and particularly by the signing of the poster of 1529. The poor man was no longer the seditious one, the political leader, the divine hand of justice. He became the assisted, the disciplined. This is how the municipal elites wanted it, as can be seen in the engraving in the booklet of the Institution of General Alms, where poor people can be seen waiting to receive alms, one after the other (Davis 1979b, 65).

Did the *placards* stop after 1531 and the agitation calm down? Certainly, there was no further mention of them in the registers for about ten years.<sup>58</sup> Then the *placards* started up once again: ‘seditious *placards*’ were posted in 1543 and the consular register betrayed an air of panic: the city prosecutor, sent to the king’s court, was admonished because he did not seem to grasp the measure of the threat, ‘placardz seditieux et scandaleux [ont été affichés] par ladite ville comme l’on luy a escript ... desquelz placartz l’on luy en a envoyé ung pour le monstrier par dela duquel l’on s’esbaist qu’il ne faict aucune responce’.<sup>59</sup> A new episode was attested to in mid-April 1545: was the month chosen on purpose?

Ont esté rapportez deux placartz trouvez sur le pont de saonne affigé au pillier de la justice et par ladite ville incitant la justice de donner ordre au fait du bled qui escherit journellement autrement y leur en prendra mal avec plusieurs parolles malsonnantes et comminatoires incitant à sédition et à mutination de peuple.<sup>60</sup>

The pillar of justice on the Saône bridge: like the sign on the 1529 *placard*, the chosen venue refers to the demand for social justice.

Although the people of Lyon no longer mobilised – this probably dried up following the repression of the 1530s –, attempts to stir up the population by means of posters continued. The anonymous posting of *placards* throughout the city became the rioters’ favoured *modus*

<sup>58</sup> Nothing is mentioned, at least in the inventories (Rolle 1865) or by historians who have worked on the 1530s registers (Dureau 1998; Etienney 1999).

<sup>59</sup> AML, BB61, 22 November 1543, 159v-160 (Seditious and scandalous placards [were posted] by the said town as written to him ... of which placards one was sent to him to show it ... it is amazing that he made no reply). Case cited in Etienney 1999, 74.

<sup>60</sup> AML, BB63, 168 (Two placards found on the bridge of Saone posted at the pillar of justice and by the aforementioned city inciting the justice to give order to the fact of the wheat which bids daily otherwise it will take to them badly with several unwholesome and comminatory words inciting to sedition and mutiny of people). Case cited in Etienney 1999, 74.

*operandi*. However, it was quickly obscured in local histories. This process of concealment shows the extent to which the memory of insurrections and their obscuring play a part in the formation of social and political identities (Merle, Jettot, Herrero Sánchez 2018).

### 5. *The Forgotten Placard*

From the end of the riot, the narrative of the consular registers, as we have seen, gives the *placard* a high profile. But these registers were not intended to go beyond the narrow circle of the consulate. The history printed the same year as the riot by the doctor and historian Symphorien Champier, and reprinted the following year – this time for the purchasing public – clearly mentions the ‘tilletz qu’ilz avoient miz & affichez par les places et carfourcz la ou il y avoit escript que le dimanche iour saint marc se trouveroient quatre cens en la place des cordeliers pour bouter ordre aux blez’ (Champier 1884, 40),<sup>61</sup> adding that the consuls should have anticipated the revolt better since it was announced and should have had the two main squares of the town, the Cordeliers and the Jacobins, guarded (*ibid.*). Shocked by the event, Champier engages throughout his account in a very violent diatribe against the lower classes and foreigners, who were guilty of drinking, reduced to primitive instincts, accused of having joined the Vaudois sect<sup>62</sup> and, above all, accused of having robbed him, whereas he says he had always worked in favour of the people.

About fifty years after these accounts were written by the targets of the riot, a chronological history of the city of Lyon appeared. Coming to the reign of François I, the author, Guillaume Paradin, a cleric, tackles the question of the *rebeyne*. Taking up Champier’s account, he keeps the essential framework but omits the *placards*. Like Champier, he gives a place to the supposed drunkenness of the rioters: it was because of a tax on wine that the people had revolted:

le jour Saint-Marc coururent tous ces petits compagnons (en nombre de plus de 2000 et 200 femmes de telle farine, ou environ), en la place des grands cordeliers, tous armez de bastons, tels que la furie leur avoit mis entre les mains ...: & y estoit toute la lye du peuple, sans bride, sans chief. (Paradin 1573, 283)<sup>63</sup>

The emphasis is on the lower world as the eternal troublemaker: the ‘étrangers’ (foreigners), ‘les crocheteurs, gaigne-deniers, petits métiers qui n’ont rien à gagner et encore moins à perdre’ (*ibid.*),<sup>64</sup> in short this ‘inifinie lie, & escume de populasse, qui n’est autre chose qu’inconstance, ligiereté & tumulte’ (*ibid.*, 285).<sup>65</sup> The account of the revolt takes up three pages. It is followed by 18 pages devoted to the setting up of the charitable institution of the General Alms.

The historian who succeeded Paradin in describing Lyon’s history is Claude de Rubys, a lawyer and a former League member and alderman. While he had ample opportunity to consult and compile the consular registers, he does not say a word about the *placards* either. Stressing the political dissensions of the years 1515-1521 (the party of the craftsmen), he then passes

<sup>61</sup> (billets they had put up & posted in the squares and crossroads where it was written that on Sunday, Saint Mark’s Day, there would be four hundred people in the place of the Cordeliers to put the wheat in order).

<sup>62</sup> Because of iconoclastic acts committed in front of his house (*ibid.*, 54). Henri Hauser is the only historian to insist on a religious reason for the revolt. It is indeed possible that the turbulent context of the early Reformation and the resurgence of old dissident currents such as the Vaudois, also called the ‘Pauvres de Lyon’, played a role (1896, 266).

<sup>63</sup> (on Saint Mark’s day, all these little companions (more than 2,000 in number and 200 women of the same species, or thereabouts) ran to the place of the great cordeliers, all armed with canes, such as the fury had put in their hands ...: & there were all the dregs of the people, without bridle, without leader).

<sup>64</sup> (the carriers, the breadwinners, the small trades who have nothing to gain and even less to lose).

<sup>65</sup> (infinite dregs, & scum of the rabble, which is nothing but inconstancy, levity & tumult).

quickly on the *rebeyne*, ‘ceste furieuse esmotion de la populace de Lyon’ (Rubys 1604, 365).<sup>66</sup> Pillage is described; the cause is the ‘pretext’ of rising wheat prices. The need to get drunk is also a recurrent motif. The cries of the rioters nevertheless summarised the words of the *placards*, without quoting them: ‘criants tout haut que les riches avoyent arrisquees les bleds & les laissoyent pourrir en leurs greniers, plustost que de les vendre & distribuer aux pauvres gens à prix raisonnable’ (*ibid.*).<sup>67</sup> The *Histoire littéraire* by the Jesuit Dominique de Colonia in 1728 does not add much to the now established account of events. The *Histoire de la ville de Lyon* written by the doctor and scholar Jean-Baptiste Monfalcon in 1846-1847 does not introduce anything novel either, except from accentuating the oral nature of the exchanges as a triggering factor: ‘Plusieurs attroupements se formèrent dans les rues et sur les places publiques; des gens, qui se disaient bien informés, parlaient d’accaparements du blé par les riches, pour affamer le peuple’ (Monfalcon 1847, 8).<sup>68</sup>

It was not until the archivist Marie-Claude Guigue’s publication of the consular archives concerning the *rebeyne*, in 1886, that the *placards* became topical again: in the now republican context of France, André Steyert published a *Nouvelle histoire de Lyon et de ses provinces* in a tone committed to the people: ‘le commun peuple de la ville avait été convoqué par des placards anonymes signés d’un rébus, le povre (le pauvre monde)’ (Steyert 1899, 54).<sup>69</sup> Historians by this point mention the *placard* and quote from it. Three centuries after its beginnings, the insurrection of 1529 had regained a place in public thought.

What happened in the three hundred years during which the poster was forgotten? The insurrection was summed up in a few lines: it was sudden, and originated among the poorest Lyonnais and foreigners, and it was violent, with a lot of looting (and very little wheat) by an intoxicated and gullible crowd. Lieutenant Du Peyrat, a true hero, dealt with the situation by making the crowd believe that there was wheat to be had on Ile Barbe, so as to keep it away from the town and in the meantime regain control. At the end of the nineteenth century these clichés were revisited. Even if the *placard* generally remains overlooked, the revolt is preceded by posters. The rioters are a composite crowd and Ile Barbe is targeted with good reason, as it was well known that it had a large reserve of grain.

To conclude, the events of 1529-1531, while part of a chain of writings that began at least fifteen years earlier, are nonetheless distinct from preceding protests in that they created a political practice that instituted public writing as the engine of the uprising. While the content of the *placards* that appeared for some fifteen years afterwards is not recorded, it is known that the act of posting occurred on several occasions and that the threat that the writings carried was recorded by the consuls. Beyond the written text itself, the very materialisation of the posters on the city walls was charged with subversion. A few well-placed signs, such as the cruciferous globe, could inspire it. Moreover, there must have been many reading relays, at a time when city dwellers were widely exposed to the written word – and even more so in Lyon, a printing centre.

The year 1529 also saw the establishment of a venue as a forum for critical discussion, that of the Place des Cordeliers convent, a gathering place designated by the rioters (what was

<sup>66</sup> (this furious emotion of the populace of Lyon).

<sup>67</sup> (shouting aloud that the rich had monopolised the wheat & left it to rot in their granaries, rather than selling it & distributing it to the poor at a reasonable price).

<sup>68</sup> (Several gatherings formed in the streets and public squares; people, who claimed to be well informed, spoke of the hoarding of wheat by the rich, to starve the people).

<sup>69</sup> (the common people of the city had been summoned by anonymous placards signed with a rebus, le povre [the poor world]).

the involvement of the monks?), and then taken up again in 1530 (and probably afterwards) as a venue of display. This square was already commonly chosen as a meeting place for general assemblies of the population, both official and illegal; incidentally, Symphorien Champier reminds us that there were not enough squares in Lyon to hold a large number of people. But from 1529 onwards, without becoming the equal of the Venetian Ghetto or the Roman Pasquino, it had to take on another dimension. The Place des Cordeliers had the advantage of being at the heart of the popular district and an important place for gatherings of all kinds. Its use changed according to who conquered it: a venue for the call to insurrection in 1529, it became the seat of the Alms Office instituted by the consuls in 1534.

Did reconquest by the authorities also involve the use of the *placard* as a weapon? At the time, the circuits of official information were conveyed above all through the orality of the town crier. This was the system that prevailed for all: the underground *placard* itself took up the exergue of the official proclamations ('L'on fait à savoir'), as it could not afford to shout them out across the whole town. Proclamation in a loud voice that bounced from crossroads to crossroads was something the underground movement could not allow itself. For the authorities, publication was first and foremost oral, ahead of written publication, even if posters were well used by the consulate, and increasingly so (Fargeix 2007, 165). And the reconquest of the lost space was a reconquest by the cry: the long cry of the measures taken for bread on 20 April 1529 and then on 24 April; after the riot, the reading aloud on 28 April (in front of the assembled authorities and the notables 'en bon gros nombre'<sup>70</sup> – in good number); the reading of letters showing the actions taken by the councillors and the governor in the search for wheat; the crying out throughout the city on 6 May, to bring about the denunciation of the authors of the *placards*, and an identical system of crying out and reading in 1530-1531. It is not said that these proclamations were accompanied by *placards*. Power consisted in occupying the sound space. In contrast to the indiscriminately shared written word which produced a 'rupture of monopoly' (Castillo Gómez 2013, 310) and a 'rebalancing of propaganda forces' (Lecuppre-Desjardins 2010, 156), the 'cri public' (public cry) was the territory of power. Nevertheless, reflection on publicising the written word must have accelerated on the occasion of these public critiques of good government. It is interesting to note that one of the first surviving municipal *placards* for Lyon<sup>71</sup> dates from the 1530s,<sup>72</sup> and it is precisely a *placard* on the regulation of the price of bread. Like the caesuras and gaps in the consular registers,<sup>73</sup> this preservation may not be accidental. Omission and conservation are political practices. It is indeed an omission which, for three hundred years, deprived the insurgent people in 1529 of their strength of organisation and reflection. To forget the *placard* is to forget both the reasoning that led to the looting (which can then be described as 'emotion', as a raw and drunken force) and the skills of some of the rioters – and therefore their insertion into the dominant cultural codes. Although we are not certain of its author, the uprising placard was appropriated by the rioters and in the following

<sup>70</sup> AML, BB47, 241.

<sup>71</sup> AML, 6Fi 00653.

<sup>72</sup> According to Jeanne-Marie Dureau 1998. A recent study dates this bread price poster from a few years later (Cumby 2017).

<sup>73</sup> After the *placard* of 1529 and the account of the emotion (AML, BB46), another register is opened for the minutes (AML, BB48); the first pages are missing. However, this gap is filled by the ceremonial register (BB47). After the *placard* of 1531, the register (AML, BB49) is interrupted; another (AML, BB52) begins with the tidying up on the following day, 11 May 1531. René Fédou noted for his part ten years of interruption of the registers after the *rebeyne* of 1436 (1958).

years became a recurrent *modus operandi* designed to reactivate the still-vivid memory of the event. ‘L’espoir est une mémoire qui désire’ (Balzac 1842-1848, vol. 12, 110)<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> (Hope is a memory that desires).

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