CHAPTER SEVEN

TO THE CITY OF BLOOD, 1570-1572

a. The Royal Road: La Rochelle, September 1570-August 1571

The Edict of Pacification of August 1570 ended the third War of Religion. It also marked the beginning of a one-year period during which, it has been said, Queen Jeanne ruled from La Rochelle as 'queen of the Calvinists'.¹ In this chapter I will follow the path marked by Jeanne's search for justification by blood, in which her failure to secure a 'Promised Land' for the Reformed of France through the blood of battle was now, in a time of peace, replaced by a new effort to achieve the same end through the authority and power of the blood of her dynasty.

This period at La Rochelle is marked by two recurring obsessions: marriage, and piracy, related by a common element of blood. The obsession with marriage will be considered first, following as it does directly from Jeanne's goal of justification through the blood of her dynasty, as embodied in her son Henry as 'first prince of the blood of France'. On 20 September 1570, little more than a month after the Edict of Pacification, the Spanish ambassador Alava² sent a coded message from Paris to the duke of Alba, then governor-general of the Spanish Netherlands³: a 'great rumour' had been heard of the impending marriage of Jeanne's son Henry to Marguerite, princess of France.⁴ The strength of the rumour was, apparently, sufficient to

¹ Boysonn, in Invasion Calviniste, pp.133-6, describes the Queen of Navarre as 'installée dans la porte de La Rochelle comme dans sa capitale, la comtesse de Périgord et vicomtesse de Limoges, devenue reine des Calvinistes.' Boysonn was, of course, presenting a Catholic view; but, as has been noted, the phrase 'Queen of the Huguenots' was used by Jeanne's biographers Nabonne and Roelker.
² Francès de Alava (1564-1572), successor as Spanish ambassador in France to Perrenot de Chantonnay (1560-1563).
³ Ferdinand Alvarez de Toledo, duke of Alba (or Alva).
⁴ Simancas MS K.1517, no.112, fol.1r, Paris, 20 September 1570, Alava to Alba (decoded original).
cause Alava to refer to Jeanne as 'the Queen of Navarre', rather than the usual 'Madame de Vendôme'.

The next day, a further coded message from Alava to Alba made the connection between any development which would increase the power of the queen of Navarre, and the danger to Spain posed by her — and Henry's — control over Guyenne and the area surrounding Bordeaux: that is, the blockage of the line of communication between Spain and Paris via Bayonne and Bordeaux. The furious pace of messages resumed a few days later with a long report to Philip II about ways in which papal approval for the marriage might be withheld. These included the existence of illegitimate family members, Antoine's son Charles on the Bourbon side, plus Pedro d'Albret among the Navarres, and possibly others, and prospects for claiming a relation of unlawful consanguinity between Prince Henry of Navarre and Princess Marguerite of France.

By November 1570, Spanish intelligence appears to have accepted the marriage as 'forthcoming'. In January 1571, a letter from Catherine de Médicis to Jeanne confirms (to us) that the rumour is fact, by urging Jeanne to bring Henry with her to the court to arrange a marriage agreement. It is clear, however, that problems and conditions of settlement remained to be resolved or negotiated. Jeanne's letter to Catherine of the same day displays her suspicion.

The spate of correspondence between Jeanne, Charles IX, and Catherine de Médicis from this period reflects negotiations for the marriage, combined with Jeanne's other demands. Jeanne blamed her health for her delay in coming to court, but the tones of her letters to the king and queen mother, alternately whining and cring-

---

5 Ibid., fol.1v, 'vassallos de la Reyna de Navarra'.
6 Simancas MS K.1517, no.114, fol.1r, Paris, 21 September 1570, Alava to Alba (decoded original) on Jeanne and the Bayonne to Bordeaux axis.
7 Simancas MS K.1517, no.120, Paris, 26 September 1570, Alava to Philip II (decoded original), fol.5v-r, on the various Bourbon and Albret bastards, real and imagined, and the matter of consanguinity.
8 Simancas MS K.1518, no.30, 6 November 1570.
9 Lettres de Catherine de Médicis (ed. La Ferrière), vol.4, pp.22-24, 3 January 1571, Catherine to Jeanne.
10 BNF, n.a.f. 21603 (copies), no.53, fol.52, La Rochelle, 3 January 1571, Jeanne to Catherine.
11 BNF, n.a.f. 21603 (copies), no.53, fols. 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 17, 19, 24, 26, 27-29, 32, 46, 51, 52, are from Jeanne at La Rochelle August 1570 – February 1571.