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Decentering Reformed Martyrdom from Calvin and the Martyrologies Through Bezan Sources

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Abstract: Martyrdom in the sixteenth-century French and Swiss Reformations has long been an exciting area of research for scholars. However, the subject has almost exclusively been studied through large collections called the “martyrologies” or through Jean Calvin’s writings, at the expense of other sources. The article first examines these historiographical trends and then addresses some critical issues of a martyrology—or a Calvin-centered approach. It provides some methodological tools to overcome such issues and advocates for considering alternative source bases that have been neglected thus far. The introduction to an ongoing survey around the figure of the poet and reformer Théodore de Bèze illustrates the range of possibilities. Decentering Reformed martyrdom would allow scholarship to better acknowledge its complexity and its corrigibility.

Keywords: martyrdom; de-Calvinization; corrigibility; Théodore de Bèze; Reformation studies; historiography; sixteenth century; French Wars of Religion; St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre

1. Introduction

The sixteenth century was rooted in religious violence. The emergence of the Reformation brought the deaths of numerous supporters of the new doctrines. Should they refuse to abjure, they were tried for religious and political crimes and often executed. Starting in Brussels in 1523, pyres spread quickly in the neighboring kingdom of France. There, several royal decrees increased the pressure on Protestant communities, placing many on the path to exile in the Swiss cantons. The reformer Jean Calvin addressed their issues in facing persecution. Under Calvin’s pen, the Reformed were valorized as the True Church under the Cross. At the beginning of the 1550s, the intensification of the burnings led Calvin to exhort the convicts who had been arrested to stay true to their faith until death and, furthermore, to present them as examples of *constantia* to their community. In 1554, Jean Crespin, a lawyer from Arras in the Spanish Netherlands, published the first Reformed “martyrology” (or “martyrbook”, “book of martyrs”), a compilation of stories recounting how the faithful endured death for their faith, and labeling them “martyrs”.¹ Crespin’s work met with great success, with no less than six new, ever-growing editions appearing in Geneva before the compiler’s death in 1572—and this is without taking into account other surreptitious editions or Crespin’s intermediate publications of additional content. In 1582, the French Reformed polygraph Simon Goulart from Senlis undertook the continuation of Crespin’s work, which lasted until the last edition of the book of martyrs in 1619, bringing the total number of complete editions to ten.

Yet the transition from the pyres to Crespin’s book in this chronology seems rather abrupt. Does it mean there was no conceptualization of martyrdom prior to the martyrbook



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besides Calvin's? Furthermore, was Reformed martyrdom as monolithic as it appears when one studies the corpora? Are other, non-martyrological sources available?

In two successive sections, this article will first outline the current state of research on Reformed martyrdom. In doing so, I wish to clearly highlight how scholars have focused on two points of entry thus far: the martyrologies and Calvin's writings. In a third and a fourth section, I will set out the issues with such approaches, with the aim of demonstrating the pertinence of, if not the necessity for, broadening the corpus. Finally, I will introduce some observations taken from ongoing research dedicated to pyres, martyrdom, and anti-martyrdom around the work of Théodore de Bèze (ca. 1550–ca. 1600) as an example of new possible approaches to Reformed martyrdom.² In this way, I wish to provide methodological tools while advocating for a consideration of martyrdom beyond the traditional corpora.

2. Discussion

2.1. Historiography on Reformed Martyrologies

Overall, one can observe three main approaches towards the Reformed martyrologies that are not always exclusive of one another. First, a factual approach aims at documenting the rise and affirmation of the Reformation in France and the Low Countries, while evaluating the martyrologies' historical reliability. Secondly, the bibliographical *modus operandi* examines the evolution of Crespin's and Goulart's martyrbook throughout its numerous editions. Finally, I will examine an approach proceeding from the history of representations and influenced by works in anthropology and literature.

After the Reformation, the memory of the Reformed martyrs faded up until the massive editorial enterprises on the fundamental Reformed sources during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. At that time, a few pastors from Toulouse felt the need to provide a critical edition of Crespin's (and Goulart's) work in order to make this "golden book" of French Protestantism once again accessible to the "sons of the martyrs", and to strengthen their faith (Crespin and Goulart [1619] 1885, vol. 1, xxi, xxiii).³ Meanwhile, the *Bibliotheca Belgica* provided the first consistent description of the martyrology's editions.⁴ Since then, studies on Protestant martyrdom have flourished, starting in Belgium. At first, scholars focused on Adriaan van Haemstede's *Het Offer des Heeren* (1569), the Reformed book of martyrs for the Low Countries. Jean Meyhoffer especially proved the great potential of martyrological sources in providing key, even if partially lacunary, information on the development and affirmation of the Reformation in the Low Countries. He also underlined the accuracy of the number of executions in such materials by examining them with historical chronicles and judicial archive sources (Meyhoffer 1907; see Halkin 1976). Some historians remained reluctant in dealing with Protestant martyrbooks, however, as it seemed too subjective to Catholics and too hagiographical to Protestants (see Halkin 1952, pp. 63–64). Nevertheless, studies on martyrbooks multiplied from that point.

The first extensive investigation dedicated to the French and Swiss Reformed martyrology was undertaken not in Belgium but in Switzerland. The *Notes* of Piaget and Berthoud remain to this day one of the rare surveys that considered both Crespin's and Goulart's editions. The editors' aim was to pay tribute to Crespin's work and to honor the memory of those among the compiled martyrs who originated from the Neuchâtel region, while critically assessing the methods of the compilers. Piaget and Berthoud expressed mixed feelings towards the martyrbook's historical value first on the basis of the numerous additions, reductions, and corrections throughout the editions. Secondly, they questioned its historical reliability through the prism of several Catholic anti-martyrologies of the seventeenth century, which had vehemently opposed the Reformed book of martyrs (Piaget and Berthoud 1930).

To confirm Meyhoffer's statements on the accuracy of martyrological sources, one had to wait for Halkin's research project with his students at the University of Liège, which consisted of 30 case studies of martyrs from the Low Countries. The results showed Crespin's high reliability, which allowed Halkin to assert, at the end of a decisive overview on the Reformed martyrologies, that "one can no longer write on sixteenth-century religious history without referring to Crespin, van Haemstede, Rabus, Foxe or van Braght" (Halkin 1952, p. 64; see also Moreau 1957).

A second approach considered Crespin's martyrology in its materiality. With the help of material bibliography, Jean-François Gilmont delivered a key understanding of Crespin's life and work as a printer-bookseller that had not yet been considered. This approach also allowed Gilmont to insert the martyrbook into a broader context while identifying its issues, sources, and methods. Gilmont's survey thus enabled him to revise Piaget's and Berthoud's assessment of Crespin being "an unscrupulous hagiographer", and to stress the juxtaposition of quality and less reliable materials. Gilmont also identified three phases in Crespin's martyrological work: the first adjustments (1554–1555) were followed by further amplifications of the content, before a complete revision of the layout to its final form appeared, with the latter's ambition being the transition to an ecclesiastical history under the influence of John Foxe (1564–1570) (Gilmont 1981a, 1981b).

Yet the debate over Crespin's and Goulart's historical reliability was far from concluded. Halkin's seminar had focused on matters with which Crespin was familiar—namely, executions that occurred not far from the compiler's hometown, in regions where he had a good network of informers. At the end of the twentieth century, scholars widened the scope. This time, they relied on heresy proceedings in judicial archives to estimate the number of executions for religious crime and compared the results to the martyrology. William Monter's investigation showed how the number of executions conducted for heresy in sixteenth-century France had generally been underestimated by Crespin, but also that his precision significantly increased when dealing with events after 1554 (Monter 1996a, 1996b, 1999). Raymond Mentzer's survey on heresy trials in the Languedoc region also prompted caution in asserting the martyrbook's historical accuracy (Mentzer 1984). Aside from archive materials, scholars followed in Gilmont's footsteps in comparing the martyrology's editions and considering them with Crespin's sources: Pierre Cameron added some useful information to Gilmont's study and advocated giving general credence to Crespin's documentation while bearing in mind that verifications are in order (Cameron 1995, pp. 301–41); David Watson's thesis as well both underlined and tempered the martyrology's reliability (Watson 1998). Therefore, if that compilation of martyr stories constitutes an important source of information to document the history of the Reformation, one must proceed with caution when relying on it for historical facts.

The third main axis of the Reformed martyrologies emerged at a turning point in the set of questions historians would ask of their sources. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, death and violence, along with their respective representations, became objects of historical enquiry in their own right. Historians took a fresh look at the paradigms of violence during the French Wars of Religion, seeing the period as one marked by crowd violence (Zemon Davis 1973) or conditioned by eschatological anxiety (Crouzet 1990). One of the main contributions regarding Reformed martyrdom was by David Nicholls, who considered martyrdom a "theatre", or a ritualized drama (Nicholls 1988). Such in-depth analyses, new perspectives, and groundbreaking outcomes forged a consensus on the legitimacy of methods inspired by anthropology in both Reformed and martyrdom studies.

In his global survey on Protestant martyrdom, however, Brad Gregory denounced a "reductionist" anthropological approach in martyrdom studies (Gregory 1999, p. 99). Such critiques, which have remained marginal, proved unfounded, as the same can be

said of his own conception of anthropology (for such responses, see, i.e., [Benedict 2002](#); [Grosse 2006](#), p. 222, n. 6). Nevertheless, Gregory's study is not without merits when it comes to reinserting Crespin's work in a global landscape and pointing out the continuities of the Protestant martyrologies with medieval hagiography.

Meanwhile, studies in literature, especially focused on Agrippa d'Aubigné's *Tragiques* (1616), elevated the place of poetics of death for faith while encapsulating the chronology of violence in sixteenth-century France. According to Aubigné, a glorified *Temps des Feux* ("Age of Fire") characterized by the burning of the pyres had preceded a dark *Temps des Fers* ("Age of Iron"), in the meaning of massacres and pitch battles ([Lestringant 1991](#); [Fragonard 2004](#)).

Two prominent studies on martyrdom were particularly dependent on these trends in the history of representations, anthropology, and literature. Both also heavily contributed to shaping historiographical categories from Aubigné's *Temps des Feux* and *Temps des Fers*. Especially influenced by Crouzet, David El Kenz offered a socio-historical survey on the martyrs compiled in Crespin's work. From prison to the last gasp on the pyre, El Kenz also reconstructed the Reformed martyrological narrative, thus offering a helpful framework for interpreting both Catholic and Reformed stands and symbolics in such contexts. Contradicting previous theses on Calvinist passive resistance towards the royal authority, El Kenz suggested that the invitation to embrace martyrdom partook of a "political culture of disobedience". According to him, the meaning of martyrdom would have then faded during the *Temps des Fers*: due to the destruction of the trial records and to the shift from burnings to massacres and pitch battles, Crespin would have lacked further materials. The martyrology kept meeting with editorial success during the Wars of Religion, yet the "gap" with the glorious time of persecution by fire would have kept growing, underlining a "lack of inventiveness". According to El Kenz, St. Bartholomew's Day massacre dealt the final blow to the Reformed martyrology, as the killings would have shifted the focus away from martyrdom, rendering it definitively anachronistic ([El Kenz 1997](#), pp. 185–234).

In a more literary vein, Frank Lestringant also perceived the history of Reformed martyrdom through Aubigné's nostalgia for the *Temps des Feux*. He described what he called the "light of the martyrs" as the paradoxical radiance found in a defeat turned triumph. Both Protestants and Catholics claimed this "light" as they waged war against one another (a "war of the martyrs"). As Lestringant showed, this dynamic was manifest in Catholic sources, especially in Verstegan's *Theatrum crudelitatum* (1587), as well as in Raemond's and Severt's anti-martyrologies. Lestringant also pointed out the Reformed take on the juridical dimension of martyrdom based on Augustine's well-known axiom *martyrem non facit poena, sed causa* ([Lestringant 2004](#)).

Other studies of Crespin's martyrbook have been dedicated to specific martyrs as case studies (e.g., [Godineau 2002](#)), or to specific themes, like prison as an experience for future martyrs ([Graves 2019](#)). The shaping of a Reformed identity throughout the martyrology has been especially investigated. Charles Parker looked at how the Reformed perceived themselves as children of Old Testament Israel ([Parker 1993](#)). Nikki Shepardson studied Reformed identity-building through the "rhetoric of martyrdom", which she understands as the fashioning of the martyr narrative. This rhetoric expresses itself in a plurality of ways, in dealing with gender, Nicodemism, or the execution of a magistrate. She was right to underline El Kenz's contradiction in claiming the inadequacy of martyrdom after 1560 while acknowledging its editorial success until 1570. Yet she agreed with him on the brutal end of its actuality after St. Bartholomew's Day massacre ([Shepardson 2007](#), pp. 25–26, 142–46). Finally, in paying attention to Crespin's different editions like Shepardson, Jameson Tucker dedicated his thesis to the shaping of a Protestant identity through the insertion of foreign Protestant martyrs (i.e., the Vaudois and the Lutherans), which highlighted Crespin's borrowings from other martyrologists such as Rabus or van Haemstede ([Tucker 2017](#)).

Considering all these contributions, it is striking that the martyrology has almost exclusively been considered for its editions preceding the death of its first compiler on the eve of the 1572 massacres. Scholars have mainly taken interest in Goulart's first edition in 1582 for its account of the St. Bartholomew's Day killings (Crespin and Goulart 1582). Gérard Moreau underlined Goulart's tendency to mix the faithful massacred during the wars with the martyrs, contrary to Crespin's previous criteria. Indeed, the victims did not have the opportunity to confess their faith on trial; therefore, it proved impossible to ensure they had died for the right *causa*. Goulart, regretting this "devil's trick", ended up blurring the meaning of martyrdom (Moreau 1975, 35; see also Graves 2003, p. 84; Huchard 2007, pp. 326–28). Since then, most noticeable has been Amy Graves's survey of Goulart's *Briefve remonstrance* published in other compilations—*L'Epistre de Pierre Martyr* in 1574, and the *Memoires de l'estat de France sous Charles neufiesme* from 1576 onwards—before integrating the martyrology. She emphasized how these texts shed light on Goulart's views on martyrdom and abjuration in his continuation of Crespin's work (Graves 2003). Regarding the 1582 edition, Jean-Raymond Fanlo has given some insight on how Goulart continued the historicization process of the martyrology—that is, with a pragmatical consideration for the political context (Fanlo 2013). However, a systematic study of the evolution of Reformed martyrdom during the last quarter of the sixteenth century and the first quarter of the seventeenth century is still lacking, and the contribution of the printer-booksellers (Eustache Vignon and his lineage) has barely been touched. That being said, too few scholars know that this deficiency is partially compensated for by David Watson's dissertation, which highlights Goulart's sources and methods in the 1582 edition mostly, thus completing Gilmont's survey. On some matters, Goulart's continuation shifted slightly from Crespin's views, like in putting a strong emphasis on the divine punishment of the executors; on others, Goulart followed the directions already taken by his predecessor, like the progressive transitioning from a martyrology to an ecclesiastical history (Watson 1998, pp. 165–85; see also Lestringant 2004, pp. 121–25).

If the tendency to distinguish between Crespin's and Goulart's editions (e.g., Bernard 2008; Conconi 2023) or to acknowledge the limits of preferring some editions over others (e.g., Stawarz-Luginbühl 2016, p. 140) has slightly increased in recent years, several contributions have continued to pay little or wholly insufficient attention to the martyrology's editorial history. This may be due to the challenge of examining every single edition to follow the evolution of a martyr's notice, even though some valuable tools are at the disposal of scholars.⁵ Yet intertextuality through the martyrology's editions remains greatly advisable. One of the most striking counter-examples can be found in Catharine R. Coats' textual materialist analysis of Protestant martyrdom literature (Coats 1992, pp. 57–83). According to her method, there is a substantial "embodying" of Crespin's compilation. The martyrbook was made up of parts just like a corpse, she argues, and putting these parts together allowed the compiler to "resurrect" the deceased bodies of the martyrs. Although thought-provoking, Coats' thesis is hampered by factual errors and approximations, alongside a questionable management of evidence and chronology. Indeed, she is missing Goulart's implication and thus ends up crediting Crespin for the 1597 edition (the last one, she states) even though he had died in 1572, and then manages to only compare that edition to the *editio princeps* without acknowledging the major alterations in between.⁶ Camille Collin's article also illustrates the point. While arguing for a laicization of martyrdom among the Reformed around Anne du Bourg's execution and among the Catholic League after the assassination of the Guise brothers in 1588, she takes no account of the martyrology's different editions, although these are essential to follow the relative but well-evidenced emergence of monarchomach theses in Crespin's compilation (Collin 2018).⁷ Several other surveys have been limited to a given edition, especially to the one from 1619 on the grounds that

it is the most complete and that a modern critical edition is available (i.e., [Parker 1993](#); [El Kenz 2009](#); [Graves 2019](#)). But it is also, according to Watson, the least reliable ([Watson 1998](#), p. 165). Moreover, such an option overlooks the stratification of the martyrology and rather provides a rigid picture of concepts that may have taken decades for the martyrologists to elaborate.

Apart from Crespin's and Goulart's book, some attention has also been given to the *Histoire des persecutions et martyrs de l'Eglise de Paris*. This Parisian martyrology was authored by the Reformed poet Antoine de La Roche-Chandieu ([de La Roche-Chandieu 1563](#)). It was then assimilated into Crespin's 1564 edition. Historians have drawn Crespin's relation to it ([Piaget and Berthoud 1930](#); [Gilmont 1981b](#), pp. 180–84; [El Kenz 1997](#), passim) and emphasized its setting of a "theatre" of suffering ([El Kenz 1994](#)) or, through urban topography, the narrative of a symbolic reconquest of Paris ([Lombart 2021](#)). Yet since it was "absorbed" by Crespin's compilation, Chandieu's *Histoire* does not draw as much interest or gets forgotten about by scholarship.⁸

2.2. Historiography on Reformed Martyrdom Outside of the Martyrologies

Outside of the martyrologies, Reformation historians have had a strong preference for the figure of Jean Calvin. Special attention has been paid to the conditions of the emergence of a thought on death for faith in Calvin's work. In his aforementioned survey, El Kenz traced the reformer's theology of martyrdom. Calvin's conceiving of a theology on death for faith was at first strictly reactive and pragmatic: in the *Institutes*, he provided to the faithful tools on how to behave when confronted by persecution. Calvin answered by exhorting to the imitation of Christ, which articulated in enduring afflictions *cum patientia* (mortification) while investing in a renewal of sanctity in Christ (election) ([El Kenz 1997](#), pp. 67–89; see also [Opitz 2011](#), pp. 344–46).

Calvin also used martyrdom (still without naming it) in his polemical writings. There, it was intended as a means of distinguishing between the True Church and the rest of the Christians. In condemning the cult of saints as idolatrous, he opposed a new sanctity through the model of Christ. In proscribing Nicodemism, he valorized refusing to receive Mass, which would lead to the path of exile or to death for faith ([El Kenz 1997](#), pp. 90–103; [Opitz 2011](#), pp. 339–41). As scholars have stressed, exile too served as a mold out of which emerged the discourse on martyrdom ([Pettegree 1997](#); [Grosse 2006](#), pp. 233–35). Regarding the direct connection between the question of the Eucharist and the reflection on martyrdom, Christian Grosse has put forward the hypothesis of a reinterpretation of the idea of sacrifice in Reformed culture, emerging in the years 1540 and 1550. He suggested that the faithful's suffering, previously thought of as through Christ's gift exclusively, shifted to a more personal experience. This experience was marked by "the expression of a gratitude [towards Christ], which takes the form of self-sacrifice" ([Grosse 2006](#), p. 246). This trend in Reformed culture would have fueled the process of making suffering and martyrdom key elements of Reformed collective consciousness, a process evidenced in 1552 by the insertion into the liturgy of Calvinian prayers of an exhortation to the persecuted to show constancy ([Grosse 2006](#), pp. 224–26; [Grosse 2008](#), pp. 154–57).

Finally, through his letters, Calvin spiritually accompanied the faithful imprisoned for their faith during the 1550s, comforting them and ensuring their commitment to the doctrine. His support and doctrinal advice were especially decisive in the perspective of the confessions of faith the convicts would have to make during trial to either renounce or claim their faith. Calvin's correspondence would also serve to exhort his fellow believers with the example of their brethren facing trial ([El Kenz 1997](#), pp. 104–20; [van Veen 2003](#); see also [Opitz 2011](#), pp. 341–43). In the same vein, Pierre Janton has shown how the reformer

developed in his preaching at about the same time a pastoral practice underlying his doctrine of resistance for the convict (Janton 2011).

There are only a few exceptions to the focus on Calvin and the martyrologies, which underline even more the dependence of historiography on these corpora. Christian Grosse is among the few scholars who have ventured to place the focus on Calvin's works in the context of those of his fellow reformers (Farel, de Bèze) who shared a similar shaping of a collective consciousness on death for faith in their devotional writings (Grosse 2006). Studies on Anne du Bourg's case represent the most substantial exception thus far. Du Bourg was a lower magistrate at the Parlement of Paris who was executed in 1559 for a seditious act towards the king after openly defending the Reformed being persecuted during a session of the Parlement. Following his execution, several pamphlets were published to advocate for his cause, making extensive use of the rhetoric of martyrdom. Scholars have used these texts to compare them with Crespin's account. Du Bourg's case has been considered as a turning point in the process of martyrdom becoming an act of resistance towards secular authorities at the eve of the *Temps des Fers* (El Kenz 1997, pp. 176–84). It has also been used to illustrate the making of a martyr (Shepardson 2007, pp. 30–80) and has even been regarded, more controversially, as a sign of a laicization of martyrdom (Collin 2018). I see here an example of the possibilities that Reformed literature offers beyond the martyrologies, even if external sources have mostly been used in a subsidiary way to complement the two core corpora.

Two remarks can be made from this bibliographical overview. First, regarding the rising interest in Reformed martyrdom from the end of the nineteenth century until now, studies have heavily concentrated on martyrological literature. Secondly, the exceptions to this martyrology-centered approach have focused almost exclusively on Calvin's work. These observations raise important issues.

2.3. Issues with Martyrology-Focused Perspectives

With the preference for reading the concept of martyrdom through the martyrologies only, four main issues arise that hamper a clear view of Reformed martyrdom.

The first limitation comes with a paradox—that is, the discrepancy between the time of the first executions and the time of the martyrologists. Crespin's martyrology only came to light in 1554—that is, 30 years after the first burnings for heresy that it narrates. It is true that the first edition also compiled recent martyr stories, like the ones of the five students from Lausanne who died in 1553 in Lyon and, according to Crespin, may have been the reason why he started the project of his martyrology (see Gilmont 1981b, pp. 167–68; Watson 1998, p. 186). Nevertheless, the book does not provide an immediate account of all its martyrs; it is, in fact, a reconstruction of three decades of persecution, and a snapshot of a certain conception of martyrdom at the time of the compiler. As Monter demonstrated, Crespin was not the most reliable when it comes to the period prior to the publishing of his book. Therefore, historians must also rely on other sources to follow the evolution of martyrdom before the martyrbook's publication.

Secondly, the theme of martyrdom unfolded in Reformed literature long before, parallel to, and even long after Crespin's collection. As for the period preceding 1554, on the contrary, martyrdom was rarely expressed explicitly in the sources. The reason was that the Reformed remained hesitant to use the term to refer to their fellow believers who had died for their faith. Indeed, the term "martyr" was associated with hagiography and hence came with a risk of idolatry. Above all, many learned people among the Reformed reserved it to designate the first Christians who were persecuted by the pagans. This exclusivity was more liable to have raised difficulties for Crespin himself in the publishing of his book, as the Genevan magistrates asked him to remove the terms "saint" and "martyr"—the title was

subsequently changed from *Livre des martyrs* to *Recueil de plusieurs personnes qui ont enduré la mort pour le nom de N[ostre] S[eigneur] J[esus] C[hrist]* (see [Gilmont 1981b](#), pp. 166–67, 169). This may also be the reason why such use of the term “martyr” in Calvin’s preserved correspondence only made its first appearance in 1553 (see [El Kenz 1997](#), pp. 104–5).

Therefore, one must look at how the breakthrough in the explicit use of the term “martyr” occurred and how it was previously formulated. Since the term conveyed such a heavy meaning at that time, the Reformed had to be creative in allusions and discursive strategies to express martyrdom without naming it. This caution came with two exceptions: referring to the first Christians as martyrs, and vilipending heretics as “martyrs of the devil” (see [Meylan 1959](#)). In Reformed polemical sources, one can thus observe the coexistence of three uses of the term: first, when referring to early Christian martyrs; second, when denouncing heretics such as the Anabaptists or Servetus by labelling them as “false” or “devilish martyrs”; and third, when making discreet, unspecific allusions to righteous death for faith at the time of the Reformation.⁹ Meanwhile, the pyre, by far the most striking and visual means of execution, conveyed multiple meanings that the martyrological readings tended to standardize. Studying its uses in Reformed poetry and satire primarily brings into focus the complexity of this image, which could be instrumentalized at the same time for identity-building of the French exiled community and for retaliation against their persecutors, fighting fire with fire.

To understand the transition from implicit to explicit use of the term, one must consider the years directly preceding the martyrology’s 1554 edition. Indeed, the very first years of the decade were a time of great effervescence concerning the theme of death for faith. Among other circumstances were the edict of Châteaubriant (June 1551) delegating the repression of heresy to secular authorities, the imprisoning in Lyon of five students from Lausanne (the “Five of Lyon”, May 1552) until their burning (May 1553), and, in England, the controversy following the abjuration of the duke of Northumberland just before his beheading on Mary Tudor’s order (August 1553). Finally, in Geneva, there was the Servetus Case (from August till October 1553) and the ensuing controversy over whether it was up to the civil Magistrate to punish heresy by death. These events, all packed in a very short amount of time, challenged the Reformed to take a stand on the concept of death for faith and on the legitimacy of applying the term “martyr” to their contemporaries. Crespin’s issues with the Genevan magistrates on the terms “saint” and “martyr” and the title of his book were but one of many testimonies to the wider dynamics at play surrounding the idea of martyrdom. Therefore, one must consider a large variety of sources referring to this multi-faceted context.

A third issue comes with the evolution of the concept after the 1550s. If the events in the years 1551–1554 enabled an explicit use of the term as referring to the Reformed dying for their faith, still it was not to be used lightly. However, frequent critical events and trends throughout the second half of the sixteenth century repeatedly reshaped the concept. This led to the coexistence of several definitions, understandings and uses of martyrdom, making it a polymorphous term. Indeed, the French Wars of Religion did play a role in the evolution of the concept in Crespin’s and Goulart’s martyrology, and especially St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre, as historians were keen to underline (i.e., [Moreau 1975](#), p. 35; [El Kenz 1997](#), pp. 128–29, 185–234; [Shepardson 2007](#), pp. 26, 142–46)—“from that point on”, states Shepardson, “survival trumped sacrifice” ([Shepardson 2007](#), p. 26). However, outside of the martyrbook, such changes were far from linear, and the complexity of a multidirectional evolution can only be perceived, once again, through a diversified corpus.

Among other sources, Théodore de Bèze’s *Icones* illustrate that semantic scattering: the book of portraits included many names one could find in Crespin’s last edition ([Crespin 1570](#)), but also a newcomer, Jean Le Masson. Le Masson had been summarily

murdered shortly before the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre without prior trial, a trial that Crespin and Calvin would have considered necessary for including this individual among the martyred (de Bèze 1580b, fol. Aa iiii). De Bèze also enlisted what I would call some "post-mortem" martyrs, i.e., characters who were martyred *after* their death. Among them was John Wycliffe, whose bones had been disinterred and burned long after his last breath (de Bèze 1580b, fol. A iir).¹⁰ Peter Martyr Vermigli—this is his name—was even called *μάρτυς* by de Bèze, although he had died peacefully (de Bèze 1580b, fol. P iiii).

These few examples prove that by 1580, new understandings of martyrdom had emerged: death for faith was no longer restricted to the faithful who had the opportunity to confess in front of the judges. The palm of martyrdom would even be conceded to righteous people who had not been put to death but whose execution had later been reenacted, like Wycliffe's, or whose actual name was sufficient in itself to confer on them such status, like Peter Martyr Vermigli's. Such scattering of the concept brings us quite far from the cautious beginnings in the 1550s.

Moreover, the prominence given to the theme of martyrdom in the *Icones* indicates de Bèze's attempt to propose a new, hybrid formula of martyrdom literature, both completing and competing with Crespin's compilation.¹¹ This observation calls for a revision of the widespread thesis of the decline in Reformed martyrdom during the Wars of Religion and especially after St. Bartholomew's supposed trauma. By looking beyond the martyrologies, one can notice the vitality of discourses on Reformed martyrdom throughout the *Temps des Fers*.

When inscribed in a larger chronology and typology than Crespin's martyrology, such a variety of sources also underlines a fourth issue in relying only on martyrological documentation: the compilation's effect results in a deceptive conformity. Certainly, Crespin and Goulart collected a vast amount of documentation, but their work was framed within their own relatively coherent vision. Although subject to change through the editions, their conceptions led them to select, silence, or alter the information in the process. This is what can be observed when comparing Foxe's English Protestant martyrology and its materials—alas, the ones that were used for the French martyrologies did not survive to the present day (Greengrass and Freeman 2011, pp. 401–2, 411). The standardization of the stories to fit in the doctrinal boundaries of the French Reformed martyrbook acted as an "orthodoxy filter", one that has much to do with Calvin. Indeed, Lestringant underlined the conformity of Crespin's compilation with Calvin's doctrine: "from the outset, [Crespin's martyrology] was an undertaking Calvin had wanted and wished for" (Lestringant 2004, p. 33; see also Tucker 2017, p. 4). Carrying out research on martyrdom outside of the martyrologies thus also means seeking to investigate the topic independently—at least partially, from Calvin's thought. Indeed, sixteenth-century martyrdom was far from uniform. On the contrary, it was deeply protean. The martyrologies present a facilitated, condensed point of access to martyr narratives that are at once also normalized and shaped within their successive compilers' frameworks. Consequently, and despite the valuable documentation they offer, they can also not be taken as fully representative of the conceptions of martyrdom in a given culture.

2.4. Issues with Calvin-Centered Perspectives

I have already mentioned the problem of deceptive conformity that ties up the martyrologies and Calvin's corpus, yet putting the emphasis on the Geneva reformer in studying martyrdom raises additional issues.

The first "catch" is obvious: Calvin died in 1564. If the reformer's work provides much valuable information on the emergence of martyrdom within the Reformation, his death interrupts the chronology. Therefore, one must rely on other sources to figure what

happens afterwards. Does the pastoral call inherited from the discourse on exile in the 1540s endure? Does martyrdom remain primarily a theological concern—if theology ever had any exclusivity in this matter? What should be taught, for instance, to the next generations, those who have never “witnessed” the spectacle of the pyres? What first had needed to be carefully established and legitimized now had to be maintained, secured, and questioned.

Secondly, Calvin did not commit to certain genres, or only did so with much restraint and little success—as we know, dramaturgy, satire, and poetry were not his forte. Driven by pastoral and identity-shaping concerns, the reformer’s take on martyrdom, although it evolved through time, remained mostly theological. Yet Reformed martyrdom goes far beyond theology: it was heavily polemical in sources like satires, it became a historical matter with the evolution of the martyrology and with the *Histoire ecclésiastique*, and it was also a question of aesthetics, especially in poetry. Poetry, for instance, would constitute a plenteous field of research: one could ask how martyrdom was expressed in verses, and whether it was strictly kept in the meaning of “death for faith” or whether some other concerns, such as aesthetics, came into play—here, I think again about de Bèze’s epitaph to Vermigli. It is true that some poems were incorporated in the martyrologies, the most famous one being Jean Tagaut’s *Votum*, which prefaced Crespin’s martyrbook from 1556 on. However, scholarship has paid insufficient attention to their editorial history, both inside and outside the martyrologies. As a compilation, Crespin’s and Goulart’s martyrology attracted external elements, e.g., the verses “To the persecutors of the Church of Jesus Christ” included in both Latin and French from 1597 on (Crespin and Goulart 1597, fol. * ivr), but actually borrowed from de Bèze’s *Emblemata* in his *Icones* (de Bèze 1580b, fol. Ll iir; de Bèze [1580] 1581, fol. Hh iiiv). Tagaut’s *Votum* shows an opposite, centrifugal movement, as it was published in 1597 in a very different context among the *Sylvae* of Bèze’s *Poemata* (see Engammare 2019). Again, intertextuality seems mandatory, in prose as in poetry, to apprehend martyrdom. These examples are only taken from verses in relation to the martyrologies, but there are plenty more besides. Among Calvin’s co-religionists, one could look into several poets, like Des Masures, Tagaut, Chandieu, or Henri Estienne the Younger. This is not to mention the numerous compilations of Reformed spiritual songs, which can assemble materials from various origins, contexts, and subjects—it is no coincidence that Henri-Léonard Bordier dedicated an entire chapter in his *Chansonnier huguenot* to martyr songs (Bordier 1870, vol. 2, pp. 333–414).

Last but not least, if the Geneva reformer was one of the main intellectual guides in the shaping of Reformed martyrdom, the concept has to be considered in its communal dimension and must therefore include a variety of views, some convergent, some divergent. A quick look at a variety of works published in Geneva during the year 1554 suffices to enlighten such dynamics. While Crespin was finalizing the first edition of the martyrology (published in August), de Bèze rejected the idea that the late duke of Northumberland belonged to the Reformed (in March). To this inconstant figure who had abjured before his execution, he opposed the example of the Five “martyrs” of Lyon—the term is used explicitly (de Bèze [1554] 1959, pp. 31–32). Shortly after, Calvin (in February) and de Bèze (in September) had to deny that Servetus could be labelled a martyr after his burning at Champel. To this extent, they relied on a rhetoric of anti-martyrdom. In this instance, de Bèze’s discourse proved more systematic than his spiritual father’s (Calvin 1554; de Bèze 1554; see Bourgaux 2023). Furthermore, in his *Des actes des vrais successeurs de Jesus Christ*, published in July, Viret helped to draw the link between the first early Christian martyrs and those from his time: “the martyrs whose bodies are sacrificed to God daily by the bloody hands of the executioners of the pope and his people” (Viret 1554, pp. 551–52). That very year, however, others were also capitalizing on martyrdom. This is the case of Guillaume Guérout, a dissident to Calvin and de Bèze on the question of the translation of the Psalms (see, i.e., Boccassini 1985). With Simon Du Bosc, Guérout published de Bèze’s spiritual

song *Seché de douleur* as if it had been authored by the five students of Lausanne just before they met their demise in Lyon (Guérout 1554). Martyrdom had thus quickly become “fashionable” and could serve different interests. This series of examples shows a collective effort by the reformers to reinstate martyrdom. Framing this as Calvin’s or Crespin’s doing would be far too reductive. Furthermore, as scholarship has regularly pointed out in recent decades, Calvin’s co-religionists deserve to be investigated in their own right, not just as his “collaborators” or as his “successors” (e.g., Backus 2007, p. 9; Crousaz and Solfaroli Camillocci 2014).

2.5. Beyond the Martyrologies: The “Bezan Universe”

Martyrological sources are convenient for channeling martyrdom-related content, but once one is willing to venture outside of the traditional corpus, various possibilities arise. As an example to such alternative approaches, I will introduce an ongoing survey on the poet and theologian Théodore de Bèze (1519–1605). I will be focusing on the bio-bibliographical reasons and stakes in choosing this figure as an entry point, on the constitution of a corpus, and on ways of dealing with sources that do not have martyrdom as their main theme.

Among the Reformed thinkers, de Bèze’s profile offers many advantages to dig into the Reformed ideas on death for faith. His literary life is wide, typologically and chronologically speaking. Indeed, de Bèze was a Renaissance polymath: he started as a poet before his conversion, then he also published pamphlets, a theater play, paraphrases of the Psalms, satires, theological treatises, and books on history and grammar. His bibliography lists more than 70 titles in Latin and in French (Gardy 1960)—that is, without their numerous translations or new editions. His period of authorship activity—from 1544 to 1603 roughly—forms a bridge between the *Temps des Feux* and the *Temps des Fers*. De Bèze experienced the reality of the burnings in France, and he was himself condemned to be burned *in effigie* after his flight to Geneva in 1548 (see de Bèze [1553] 2004, pp. 14–16). In Lausanne, he quickly revealed himself as a prominent figure of the Swiss Reformation, and later, in Geneva, became Calvin’s successor. Yet, as scholarship has shown, he cannot be reduced to “Calvin’s shadow”. On the contrary: Geneva saw a succession of “two exceptional figures” at the head of its Church during the sixteenth century (Nicollier 2007, p. 577—underlining is hers). De Bèze was then an important actor in the Wars of Religion. He witnessed the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre and the Edict of Nantes from afar while always living with the real threat to the Genevan Republic from the duchy of Savoy. His longevity makes him a privileged witness to the evolutions of the notion of martyrdom, its coherences, and its inconsistencies throughout the second half of the century. Because of de Bèze’s status after Calvin’s passing, discourses on death for faith were published in Geneva with his *nihil obstat*, while he exerted a formidable influence on what El Kenz and Burschel call the Protestant “culture of martyrdom” (El Kenz 1997; Burschel 2004). For example, de Bèze’s contribution as a psalmist innervated the whole of Reformed spiritual poetry, in which unfolded the concept of martyrdom and the image of pyres. Therefore, examining his conception of martyrdom partially amounts to studying that of his coreligionists. Inheriting Calvin’s theology of martyrdom but facing the necessity of adapting it to new circumstances, de Bèze offers an ideal entry point to consider Reformed martyrdom.

At the start of my research, the abundance of de Bèze’s *œuvre* seemed problematic for delimiting my corpus. The reformer supervised core sources related to martyrdom—the *Icones* and the *Histoire ecclésiastique* (de Bèze 1580a), which were obvious choices. They contain a great deal of relevant content and might have sufficed to provide a new image of Reformed martyrdom in the year 1580. But I have also chosen to leave room for sources in which martyrdom was a less central matter, as it was my wish to retrace the evolution of the concept. To make a selection from de Bèze’s prolific bibliography, I have estimated each

source's liability to evoke martyrdom regarding its subject and its context of publishing. For example, I decided to include his play *Abraham sacrificiant*, as the theme of Gen. 22 resonates with death for faith (de Bèze 1550). Seemingly, the importance of Paul's epistles to the Romans in the controversy ensuing Servetus's killing made me examine the notes taken by one of the reformer's students at lessons on Romans and Hebrews in 1564–1566, and once again they proved fruitful (de Bèze 1988). Conversely, results were quite poor in de Bèze's *De praedestinatione*, where martyrdom was not treated per se and was comprehended, if anything, in a broader discussion on the elect (de Bèze 1558).

However, I did not want to be limited by biographical tunnel vision as in Calvin's case. De Bèze appears as a nodal point for a community of Reformed authors like Pierre Viret, Conrad Badius, or Heinrich Bullinger, who thought together or, at least, concomitantly on the question of death for faith. In truth, de Bèze's thought cannot always be isolated from the ideas of his fellow Reformed, and martyrdom-related uses and patterns rarely belong to a specific author. The Bezan corpus itself encourages the widening of research to some extent, as its authorship is not always certain for several works, which corroborate and complete de Bèze's labeled writings. The anonymous *Satyres chrestiennes de la cuisine papale* offer the best example: de Bèze seems the best contender to have held the pen, and the influence of his *Passavantus* is manifest, yet one cannot elude some strong arguments pointing towards other authors like Viret, Badius, or Estienne. It would thus be safer, concludes Charles-Antoine Chamay, to consider "a collaboration between several of these satirists" (de Bèze and Chamay [1560] 2005, pp. lxix–lxx). Here lies another crucial point: de Bèze did not always write by himself but also among a team of collaborators (e.g., the *Histoire ecclésiastique*). Further, some of the reformer's texts were translated by others, like Goulart (de Bèze [1580] 1581), and alterations no less than potential variants must be considered. Moreover, I have included sources close to de Bèze's work, sometimes influenced by it or having influenced it. The most telling example lies in the Reformed satires published in Lausanne, Geneva, and Lyon from 1553 to 1563. Their interplay of borrowings and their treatment of common themes have made them relevant to consider as a sub-corpus (i.e., de Bèze 1553; du Chalard 1562; Badius 1561). Rather than a Bezan corpus, one can thus speak of a "Bezan universe" gravitating around the reformer. In total, my corpus constitutes about 40 printed works of very uneven size and various typologies, to which I have added a dozen letters (Meylan et al. [1960] 2017).

Once the corpus was established, two types of sources emerged: plain martyrographies, such as de Bèze's *Icones* or his elegy on the Five of Lyon published in his *Poemata* (see Summers 2021), and non-martyrographical sources—that is, those that do not have martyrdom as a main line of focus. Regarding sources that directly address martyrdom, the documentation proved far too extensive, as with the *Histoire ecclésiastique*. In such cases, I decided to conduct in-depth case studies, but not without understanding the general aims of the source. Intertextuality is also much needed to insert the text in a broader tradition of martyrographies. As for the *Histoire ecclésiastique*, it is impossible to highlight its specificities or its continuations if not compared to Crespin's last edition, a necessity that has already been stressed by scholars (Greengrass 2014; for other sources, see Carbonnier-Burkard 2007a, 2007b). This emphasis, however, has never been applied systematically when referring to the text. The same can be said for the martyrologies, and especially for Goulart's first edition: it would be fruitless to compare it to Crespin's last edition without taking into account the intermediate additions of the *Histoire ecclésiastique* that Goulart copied extensively.

As for non-martyrographical sources, one has to look for scattered allusions to the subject, asking whether the source's liability to evoke martyrdom proves correct. If so, such discourse will not always be explicit. As discussed above, the problematic and

decisive issues of the term led the authors to consider it with caution, especially in the 1550s. Therefore, one must pay close attention to the semantic environment in order to reveal implicit allusions. The themes of sacrifice, constancy, persecution, and affliction, as well as the image of the pyre, are liable to carry a martyrdom-related meaning. For example, the term *fasciculos* in de Bèze's *Passavantus* alludes to the burnings in the kingdom of France and is used in a systemic way either to valorize "the saints" or impugn the methods of the inquisitors (i.e., de Bèze [1553] 2004, pp. 158–59, 202–3). There is, however, a risk of overinterpretation, as those themes, which are recurrent in the Christian tradition of suffering, are not always specific to martyrdom, such as when de Bèze addresses the question of the elect in his *De praedestinatione* without discussing the martyred among them. One must thus consider the context of the excerpt, the source's typology, and the context of publishing. Intertextuality often dispels any doubt.

3. Conclusions

Studies on the French and Swiss Reformed martyrologies are manifold. These imposing compilations have drawn the interest of scholars aiming to enlighten the history of the persecutions, and the evolution of the narratives based on these persecutions. Yet relying on such sources to the detriment of others does not come without major issues, including the question of historical reliability, the chronology of their publishing, the overshadowing of alternative discourses, and their deceptive conformity. One must therefore wish for scholarship to invest more in intertextuality. Alternative sources can be parted in two. First, there are the other martyrographies, i.e., writings focused on martyrdom—in my case, from poems like de Bèze's elegy on the Five of Lyon to works of history like the *Histoire ecclésiastique*. Secondly, discourses on martyrdom also unfold in sources that do not engage with the question of martyrdom head on, like satires, letters, or theological treatises. There, martyrdom is likely to appear at the turn of a page, even implicitly.

Calvin's *œuvre* has been the notable exception to studies on martyrbooks. It has allowed scholarship to bring to light invaluable elements on the emergence of the concept in Reformed thought. Yet, this second over-emphasis remains highly problematic due to an evident limitation in chronology, the exclusion of several literary genres, and a tendency to attribute the product of communal thinking to one man.

I am not advocating for putting aside the two traditional corpora—they still have much to offer—but for a decentering of the way we look at Reformed martyrdom. A larger spectrum would offer new opportunities to study a variation of uses, to examine when and how crucial features were dealt with or avoided, and to reconsider chronology. The actual roles of the martyrologies and of Calvin's discourses would also become clearer when inserted in a bigger picture. Finally, considering alternative sources would help to identify both similarities and inconsistencies between the texts—the ones of religious opponents, and the ones among the community itself or even within an author's work. Such perspectives can also be relevant, perhaps, when it comes to other Protestant cultures of martyrdom—for example, the historiography on Lutheran martyrdom has followed a strikingly similar path.¹²

In other words, considering martyrdom beyond the martyrologies and beyond Calvin would restore the complexity of an enduringly controversial concept and challenge the presumption of its incorrigibility. Certainly, scholarship has shown that the notion did evolve throughout Calvin's work and between the first edition of Crespin's martyrology and the last. Still, the picture appears too monolithic, too coherent, and too linear. As emphasized in the preliminary observations of my case study, martyrdom in the sixteenth-century Reformation was a far more versatile and polymorphous concept, subject to change according to historical context and literary genre. I cannot help but think back to the contrast

between the rigid meaning of death for faith around 1554 and Pierre Martyr Vermigli's "martyrdom". Surely we need to better acknowledge the capacity for correction among the Reformed, a capacity that increases as Reformation progressively shifts from Calvin's sphere to the "Bezan universe". The progressive Reformed restoration and scattering of martyrdom were the result of a community of thought in which each author deserves to be considered per se, not just as a subsidiary of Calvin or the martyrologies. Herein lies the opportunity to shift away our over-emphasis on the martyrbooks and to "de-Calvinize" Reformed martyrdom.

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Notes

- ¹ A "martyrology" (pl. some "martyrologies"), or "martyrbook" or "book of martyrs", designates any compilation of martyr stories. The term "martyrology" (without any article) also designates the science or discourse on martyrdom, yet I will not use this term to avoid confusion. In French, mostly, scholars refer by convention to the generic term "the (Reformed) Martyrology", with a capital, to encompass Crespin's compilation until 1572 and its continuation from 1582 on by Simon Goulart, without regard to any specific edition. This also allows them to distinguish Crespin's and Goulart's work from the other French Reformed martyrbook by Antoine de La Roche-Chandieu (1563), and from other Protestant martyrbooks—Foxe's or Pantaleon's, for instance. For the sake of clarity in English, however, I will not follow the capitalization convention here. Finally, I will use the adjectival form "martyrological" to refer to the martyrologies.
- ² The Ph.D. thesis is conducted under the supervision of Annick Delfosse at the University of Liège (*Transitions R.U.*) and Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci at the University of Geneva (*Institute of Reformation History*), with the temporary title "Bûchers, martyres et anti-martyres dans l'univers bézien (1550–1600)".
- ³ Daniel Benoit's and Matthieu Lelièvre's volumes remain the only critical edition of Crespin's and Goulart's martyrology to this day. The quality of its critical apparatus, very minimal in the first volume, improves over time.
- ⁴ Shortly after, the entries on Crespin's martyrology were included in the *Bibliographie des martyrologes protestants néerlandais* (van der Haegen et al. 1890). The *Bibliotheca Belgica* has since been reedited (van der Haegen and Lenger [1880] 1975).
- ⁵ In addition to the set of content descriptions and indexes in the martyrology's editions themselves, and to the aforementioned bibliography, I can point out the tables published by Cameron, which list, in alphabetical order, the presence or the absence of every martyr along Crespin's complete or partial editions—not Goulart's (Cameron 1995, pp. 387–439). Moreover, Halkin and his team provided, in their anastatic reprint of Crespin's 1570 edition, a complete index of every single name or place mentioned in the book (Crespin [1570] 1964).
- ⁶ In the title of her chapter on Crespin, Coats even gives the date of 1564, which corresponds to another edition than the one from 1554 that she claims to have consulted. Neither of the editions are included in the final bibliography. In the following chapter, Coats considers the *Icones* of Théodore de Bèze as part of the martyrologies, a statement that is both abusive and reductive, although it has the merit to include it among the sources relevant to Reformed martyrdom; her thesis on the spectacularization of de Bèze's own body in his *Icones*, among other things, does not convince (Coats 1992, pp. 85–115).
- ⁷ Collin has no knowledge of Gilmont's study, and claims the 1570 edition to be Crespin's second edition (Collin 2018, p. 35).
- ⁸ For instance, an anonymous sonnet, "To the faithful martyrs of Jesus Christ", was framed in the frontispiece that appears just after Tagaut's *Votum* in Crespin's 1570 and Goulart's 1582 editions. It had first been published under the pseudonym "A. Zamariel"

(Chandieu) in the Parisian martyrology (de La Roche-Chandieu 1563, fol. cc 8^r); however, since Crespin generally silences authorship, it is easy to forget (e.g., El Kenz 2009, p. 184). The status and function of Chandieu’s verses changed according to the place they were given in each book’s structure.

- 9 The complementarity between those three uses remains effective in polemical texts even after the first uses of the term to allude to contemporary victims, as authors were willing to discredit their opponents without providing them a foothold that would have enabled them to strike back with the same arguments. This can be observed, e.g., in the *Satyres chrestiennes de la cuisine papale* (de Bèze 1560).
- 10 In his martyrbook, Crespin was inspired by Foxe to include the burning of Wycliffe’s bones in his book, but without giving it a martyr-related reading like de Bèze did (Crespin 1570, fol. 3^r).
- 11 Among the 149 “illustrious men and women in piety and doctrine” listed in de Bèze’s *Icones*, 90 of them are labeled martyrs. These martyrs are split up into 35 of the 89 biographical and historical notes. (For a recent account on de Bèze’s *Icones*, see Bourgaux 2024.)
- 12 Most scholars in Lutheran Reformation history have focused on martyrological sources like Ludwig Rabus’s compilation (Kolb 1987). Some did consider non-martyrological sources, like a tragedy by Gryphius (Burschel 2004), but little attention has been paid overall to earlier texts. This was the case until recently for the well-known burning of the very first martyrs of the Reformation, Johann van den Eschen and Hendrik Voes, two Augustine friars who died in Brussels in 1523: the event created a “watershed”, as the news was widely spread and instrumentalized by prints—Luther himself dedicated a hymn to celebrating their constancy (for a recent account, see Christman 2020). As for Luther’s conception of martyrdom, it had not been considered per se before David Bagchi’s study (Bagchi 1993).

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