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## Is the cooking pot, *higuenotte*, the origin of the term for French Calvinists, the RPR, Huguenots?

John de Bry, PhD, Director of the Center of Historical Archeology in Melbourne, FL, explores the origins in an essay, *On the Origin of the Word "Huguenot"* that appeared in the Spring 2019 edition of the THE CROSS OF LANGUEDOC. With his permission, I am posting his original essay as it was posted on Academia.edu. With many thanks to the author, I think this is the most clear and sensible explanation that I have read or heard.

### **On the Origin of the Word "Huguenot"**

*By John de Bry, PhD.*

It seems that there is a lot of confusion regarding the word "Huguenot," a word that has been used respectfully or derogatorily to designate French Protestants. In the United States more than anywhere else many people proudly claim to be of "Huguenot descent," while in the French Larousse dictionary<sup>1</sup> this word is described as having a German origin and commonly used by French Catholics to designate Calvinists, i.e. followers of Jean Calvin (1509-1564), the French Protestant leader who lived and died in Switzerland. This word is a true enigma and many historians and linguists have, over the centuries, given their opinion on that subject.

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<sup>1</sup> HUGUENOT, E n. et adj. (all. *Eidgenossen*, confédéré). HIST. Surnom donné par les Catholiques français aux calvinistes. *Le Petit Larousse Illustré*, p. 554, Larousse, Paris 2008.

Gottfried Wilhem von Leibnitz<sup>2</sup> made fun of those who claimed that the word *Huguenot* came from a Protestant speech that started with *Huc nos venimus*<sup>3</sup>, while others simply stated that it came from the Swiss word *heusquenaux* which designated seditious people. Others thought the word originated from *huet*<sup>4</sup>, a condescending word used in 16<sup>th</sup>-century French and Swiss dialects. It should be noted that in many French dictionaries *Huguenot* is described in various ways<sup>5</sup>. Others claimed that the word came from *higuenotte*, a term used in the certain countryside of France to designate a cooking pot, especially in the Bourges region of Central France<sup>6</sup>. Certain learned people went as far as looking into the possibility that the word had its origins in Greek; *καλά* well, *ξέρω* know, because, it is said that Protestants knew the *real* doctrine. Yet the best informed linguists insist that the word *Huguenot* comes from the German word *eidgenossen*, member of an alliance such as *parteigenosse* as in WWII [sworn] Nazi Party Members, it seems, according to the French actual dictionary, that this is the origin of the terminology that has endured. Yet everything, so far, seems unfounded, or certainly without real merit.

So where do we go from here? Firstly we must remember that this particular name, *eidgenossen*, has never been used in Germany to designate members of the Reformation, and secondly we must also keep in mind that such members have always been called Lutherans, at least in Germany, only the French Protestants have been called Huguenots. In fact a distinct difference was made between Huguenots and Lutherans. In an official speech made by the Chancellor of the Hospital of the General Headquarters, which opened right after the death of François II in December 1560 he declared "Aside from these diabolical designations, the names of those parties of sedition, Lutherans, Huguenots, and papists, etc."<sup>7</sup>

So clearly Huguenots were *French* Protestants, nothing else, and this word was used only to designate such persons, not German, not Swiss. The great Italian historian, Cesare Cantù (1804-1895), writing about the French Protestants under François II, stated

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<sup>2</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm (von) Leibnitz (1 July 1646 – 14 November 1716) was a prominent German polymath and philosopher in the history of mathematics and the history of philosophy. His most notable accomplishment was conceiving the ideas of differential and integral calculus, independently of Isaac Newton's contemporaneous developments.

<sup>3</sup> *Here we come.*

<sup>4</sup> An idiot of whom people make fun of, *un sot, dont on se moque, dont on fait des huées.* Dictionnaire des Termes du Vieux François ou Trésor des Recherches & Antiquités Gauloises et Françaises, Volume I, p. 346, by Borel, Niort 1882.

<sup>5</sup> Huguenot. Subriquet (sic *soubriquet*) donné à ceux de la Religion réformée : dont on donne beaucoup d'étymologie, comme de *Jean Hus*, ou de *Heuquenaux*, mutins de Suisse, ou de *Huc nos* ; parce qu'on dit que quelques Allemans Protestants estans députéz firent une Harangue commençant : *Huc nos venimus*... Dictionnaire des Termes du Vieux François ou Trésor des Recherches & Antiquités Gauloises et Françaises, *opus cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Bourges is a city in central France on the Yèvre River. It is the capital of the department of Cher, and was also the capital of the former province of Berry.

<sup>7</sup> Adrien de Barral in Revue du Centre, 9th year, No. 10, 15 October 1887.

“Opposition increased, thanks to the fanatics from the Reformed people, who went by the name of Swiss confederates (*eidgenossen*), named themselves Huguenots.” In Geneva, Philibert Berthelier organized a youth group that eventually became a political party, then a religious society, naming themselves “Allied through Pledge” (*eidgenossen*). Some historians believe that it is this name that was “transported” from Switzerland into France to eventually become “*Huguenots*” but this explanation does not make any sense. Another feeble explanation comes from a Swiss name, *heusquenaux*, but had no solid base. So could it have been the French word *higuenotte*, cooking pot, possibly used by Catholic soldiers to mockingly designate French Protestants? Although it seems more logical than *eidgenossen*, it still does not really make sense.

It would make more sense to look for a French source for this word rather than look for an improbable German or Swiss origin. Let us first realize that *Huguenot* appeared in the French language well before the 16<sup>th</sup>-century, a family name used by individuals long before the Reformation, so would it make sense that this term may have been used after a leader by the name Huguenot? When the Reformed people of France started resisting their Catholic leaders and the general Catholic populace and took up arms, could it have been a military leader by the name of Huguenot who would have given his name to designate Protestants? In southwestern France, especially in the Poitou region, a good number of families still bear the name Huguenot, and this region has been a stronghold of Protestantism from the beginning of the Reformation movement in France, yet the family name has been around well before the 16<sup>th</sup>-century and the Reformation<sup>8</sup>. A learned priest by the name Victor Huguenot, from the same southwestern France region, even wrote essays on poems, yet he was obviously Catholic<sup>9</sup>. It is very possible that an early leader of the Reformation was named Huguenot, such as a captain of a small troop fighting as insurgents against the Catholic leadership, and through his accomplishments the word *Huguenot* was coined.

Although this is just an assumption, this researcher believes that it is the only one that really makes sense. We now know that the family name Huguenot has been around before the 16<sup>th</sup>-century, so well before the Reformation, and that this family name is found mostly in the Poitou region of southwestern France, a known bastion of Protestantism.

John de Bry, PhD  
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<sup>8</sup> Archives départementales d’Indre-et-Loire, Série G. 69.

<sup>9</sup> Huguenot, Victor, (priest), *Littérature Universelle, Histoire Générale de la Prose* par l’abbé V. Huguenot, Tours 1881.