

TRAVELS THROUGH TIME

Kate Mosse: City of Tears (1572)

Artemis Irvine: Welcome to *Travels Through Time*, the podcast made in partnership with ColorGraph.

[Intro Music]

Artemis Irvine: Hello, I'm Artemis, and in today's episode we're travelling to Paris in the year 1572, to witness a wedding that promised to heal a nation, and a massacre that destroyed it.

[Break]

Artemis Irvine: You look back at this period of history and you think, as a novelist, you can't improve on it. That's how my guest – the international bestselling author Kate Mosse – described the year we'll be visiting today. It's a moment in French history which is packed with just about every dramatic component you could possibly imagine. There's a young couple, forced into marriage; drunken celebrations after a big royal wedding; deep personal and political rivalries; assassinations; poisonings – I could go on – all set against the backdrop of one of the most important Renaissance cities of the time: Paris. As you'll hear, Kate's descriptions of the summer of 1572 are romantic, almost cinematic. But we also grapple with some timeless themes in human history, in particular the fear of the other.

Kate Mosse is the author of ten novels, including the Number One, multi-million-selling Languedoc trilogy. Her books have been translated into 38 languages and published in more than 40 countries. In 2013 she was awarded an OBE for her services to literature and women and her latest novel, *The City of Tears*, is the second her "The Burning Chamber" series. I spoke to Kate just last week.

[Interview begins]

Thank you so much for joining us on *Travels Through Time*, Kate. It's such a pleasure to have you. I know you must be so busy promoting your book, so thank you for squeezing us in.

Kate Mosse: It's brilliant to be here. It's lovely talking to people outside my household [laughter].

Artemis Irvine: Yes, I feel exactly the same way. In fact, I have to thank you for writing this book because I read it during the third national lockdown in the UK. I was just not leaving my house at all and yet every time I read this book, I was on these amazing adventures with these amazing characters.

Kate Mosse: Ah, thank you. Yes, it's the one time, when writing a mighty book over 500 pages, a lot of people have said, "This is what we need in lockdown, a book to see us through," [laughter] so it's great for me.

Artemis Irvine: Exactly. I know that, in your work, you've written about lots of different historical periods: medieval France and also modern day as well. I was just wondering what made you decide a set under Wars of Religion. What drew you to this particular subject and time period?

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Kate Moose: It's usual for me because most of my historical fiction are love letters to Carcassonne in the southwest of France and, as you say, I have written about that particular city and Toulouse in Languedoc at different periods in its history. That's part of what I've enjoyed to do and to see what a place that I love would look like 800 years ago or 400 years ago. In fact, this whole series of books comprises of four books in all, which will cover 300 years from 1562-1862 and *The City of Tears* is the second of those and that runs from 1572-1594. This series started on the other side of the world in Franschoek in South Africa and the prologue is set there in 1862. It was going to that wonderful frontier town, as it once was, in the Western Cape for the first time and learning about the history of a handful of Huguenot families. Fleeing persecution in Europe, particularly after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1688, they had found their way, via Amsterdam, as refugees to the Cape. I was just blown away by this piece of history and standing in the Huguenot graveyard and seeing all the old names. I found that very, very moving and then, of course, it meant that I then wanted to know who were these people who were refugees? They were refugees twice really. They'd fled from France to Amsterdam and then Amsterdam to the Cape. Out of that, I thought, 'Oh, I think I have a story here.' So, of course, being in love with Carcassonne, I thought, 'I will go right back to the Wars of Religion and start there and find what Carcassonne was like when the Wars of Religion broke out.' So for me, it's never the history that comes first but it's the combination of the history and place, finding out what it was like to be in a particular place at a particular period in history and then off I go.

Artemis Irvine: I noticed as well that, in a lot of your work, there's always this really strong connection between great swathes of history. It's never just focused on one particular moment. You're connecting it to something that happens later, like you were saying, with these series of books and that they cover 300 years of history. I just wanted to talk a bit about that because I guess, in some ways, that's kind of what we try to do on the podcast with the time travelling aspect and finding connections between something that seems so remote and then finding links to it across hundreds of years.

Kate Moose: We are who we are because of the people who came before us. It sounds so blindingly obvious to say it but, nonetheless, it needs repeating. We are indebted to the past. We are also sometimes overshadowed by the past. The mistakes that were made in the past are ones that, if we learnt anything, it would be to not repeat them but often history, as you know, is a pendulum. It goes backwards and forwards. It doesn't move forward wonderfully with everything getting better all the time and staying there. So for me, I'm always interested in standing in other people's shoes, standing in the shoes of the people of the past and asking those questions. Who would I have been? Would I have had the courage, in the Wars of Religion, to stand firm for what I believed in? Would I have had the courage to shield people or to hide people?

I'm older than you are but I'm lucky enough and you're lucky enough in that we haven't lived through a period of war in our own country in the way that many people, of course, have and are still doing in other parts of the world. My father fought in the Second World War and it was very interesting towards the end of his life when I would talk to him about the things he had learnt about being part of history. I think now, almost uniquely in my lifetime, we all know we are living through history. Whereas actually, five years ago we didn't. I would do events and I would say, 'Of course, I write imaginary characters against the backdrop of real history and of big, violent changing history that alters the world on its axis. We don't know when we're living through history but they did.' Now, of course, I can't say that because of the combination of Brexit, the previous president and certainly the pandemic. We know that this is a period of time now that our descendants will look back on and study. That is a wonderful thing for a historical

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novelist because that's what I try to do and put the emotions and the truths of people of the past on the page. Their heart broke just as much as ours would do at the loss of a child or the death of a loved one. The minute we start to think they were different and they didn't feel the same as us, that's a very, very dangerous route to go down. That's why I love to look back because I think it tells us who we are now.

Artemis Irvine: Yeah, that's wonderful and I think that's something that comes across so strongly in the book. These characters are painted so vividly and you really feel all of the traumatic things that they go through. That was one of the things that I enjoyed the most about it and particularly the central character of Minou. I'm not going to give too much away, obviously, because I want people to read it for themselves. So today, we're just going to focus on the year that the book opens in, I think. If you could travel back in time to any year, what year would you choose?

Kate Mosse: I've chosen the year 1572 which is, as you say, the year that *The City of Tears* opens. It's ten years after the outbreak of the Wars of Religion and there have been three wars and uneasy peaces in that decade. There is now a proper chance of peace and of this being over. The background is very straightforward, in a funny sort of way. Wars of religion are never about faith, as we know. They're always about power and influence. There was a triumvirate, I suppose you could say, at court who were all fighting and all jostling for power. There was a weak king, Charles, who was the third son of Catherine de' Medici. Her two older sons, who were more suited to being kings, had been killed and she had ended up with Charles, who she had been the regent for for some time and he was a strange and quite disturbed person by the sounds of things. It's hard to know, obviously. There's Admiral de Coligny, who is the leader of the Huguenots and Henry of Navarre, who is the great hope of the Huguenots. He is a Huguenot. There is the Catholic family of Guise, who are very powerful and stirring up trouble. All three of these individuals, if you like, are essentially fighting at court for control of the king. The two queens, Catherine de' Medici and Henry of Navarre's mother, Jeanne d'Albret - another powerful queen, the Queen of Navarre - broker a marriage between their children. Henry does not want to marry Marguerite de Valois. Marguerite de Valois does not want to marry Henry but they don't have much choice in the matter. There are rumours that Marguerite is, indeed, the lover of Henry of Guise. It is a real and absolutely extraordinary melting pot of vengeance and jealousy and a great deal at stake. The marriage is brokered between these two extraordinary women and then it all goes to hell in a handcart, essentially [*laughter*].

Jeanne d'Albret comes to Paris for the royal wedding, which is scheduled for 18th August 1572, and when she arrives in June, she dies. There are many rumours that she has been poisoned. Poisoning was rife and everybody lived in fear of it at the court and, indeed, that day that she became ill, Catherine de' Medici has sent round a pair of beautiful gloves. The rumour goes round that they have been poisoned; that she put the gloves on and she has died. After five days, Jeanne d'Albret does die but the wedding is still going to go ahead. I think that you look back at this period of history and, as a novelist, you can't improve on the history. All you can do is put your imaginary characters as witnesses to the history that we know or suspect.

Artemis Irvine: I didn't know anything about the Wars of Religion until I read this book and I thought, 'Oh my god, it's not just the Reformation. It's everywhere.' [*Laughter*].

Kate Mosse: You're so right. It is everywhere. I think what fascinates me about this particular year is that the wedding is scheduled for 18th August and it goes ahead. You can imagine all of the emotions that were going on there with all the different factions watching. There is even a suggestion that Marguerite de Valois has not assented. Somebody has to push her head down

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when she's asked, 'Do you assent to this marriage?' There's a discussion about that. She then goes on into Notre-Dame but her groom - her brand new husband, Henry of Navarre - cannot go in because he is a Huguenot. The idea that these two young people - they were young around 19 or 20 - were going to sort all of France's problems out is an enormous burden on anybody but it happens. We are talking to each other in the shadow of extraordinary history having been made on 20th January and many people all over the world were watching the inauguration of the 46th President of the United States, Joe Biden, who actually has Huguenot ancestry too. His middle name is Robinette. There was anticipation and fear, in some ways, as everybody was watching that. Would it go alright? Now that is exactly as everybody was feeling in Paris on 18th August 1572. It looks like it has.

Artemis Irvine: Jeanne d'Albret is staying in Paris and that's the first scene that we're going to travel back in time to. Could you tell us a bit about where she was staying and where we are?

Kate Mosse: In that period of history, there were several courts. Navarre had its own court and it was the leading Protestant court, obviously. Navarre is right down in the South, essentially the border between what we think of now as France and Spain and it was an independent territory. It was completely normal, however, for a court to be away from its primary palace for sometimes years and go on a voyage around their countries. It wasn't at all odd that Jeanne d'Albret should have left her own court much, much earlier. The marriage was brokered and sealed, essentially, in April of that year. She was gently travelling up through France to arrive in Paris. She is staying in the Bourbon Palace because the two great families of France were about to be joined and they are the Bourbon dynasty and the Valois dynasty. In this period of time, we see the last of the Valois kings and, of course, Henry of Navarre himself will be crowned king of all France in 1594 and it will be the beginning of the Bourbon dynasty. As I said, we also have the Guise family, who are another very powerful Catholic family. So Jeanne d'Albret has come with her court, essentially, and she is staying in the Bourbon Palace because they are the leading Huguenots there. It is complicated because the Duke of Bourbon is actually a Catholic and there are many, many archbishops on the Bourbon side of the family who are mostly Catholic. So Jeanne d'Albret is an extraordinary woman. She is a scholar. She is a writer. She has ruled as Queen of Navarre since her husband's death and so although Henry is King of Navarre, he still is respectful to his mother. She has come to show good faith, I think. Of course, I have this in my novel, *The City of Tears*, in that the reason my imaginary Huguenot family, Minou Joubert and her husband, Piet Reydon, do decide to go to Paris is as senior Huguenots for the same reason as Jeanne d'Albret; to show good faith and that they believe that this is meant in the spirit of peace. She has set up court in the Bourbon Palace and has not been there very long before she becomes ill and she dies on 9th June 1572. There is a real chance then that the wedding will be stopped but Catherine de' Medici, at this point, sees the best hope for securing her line and making sure that nobody else gets the throne by marrying her only surviving daughter off to Henry of Navarre. That is, indeed, what happens. She is the one that really holds it together and Guise does not arrive in Paris until a couple of days before the wedding.

Artemis Irvine: I just wanted to talk a little bit about the fact it seems that this period is actually full of quite a few really powerful and influential women and female monarchs. You've obviously got Catherine de' Medici and the Queen of Navarre in France but in England, at this time, you also have Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots and before Elizabeth I, Queen Mary as well. The historical power of women is definitely a theme that you explore in the book a bit and I was just desperate to talk to you a bit about it. There was one bit I was really struck by that I made a note of. A bit later in the book, you talk about an army of women in Amsterdam who are using their powers of moderation and persuasion to get the men to lay down their weapons. This is later in the book and not in Paris. That is a kind of theme throughout the book that there are these

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women who are influencing political activity around them, in their own way, with the tools that they have available to them. It struck me that that's what these two queens are doing as well and rather than opting for violence or war, like had been happening for the last ten years, as the wars raged on, they had brokered this marriage instead. I don't want to over generalise, which is a particularly feminine thing to do, but what do you think about these two powerful female characters and the roles they were playing in history?

Kate Mosse: What I feel is, and I feel this very, very strong, I write historical fiction with women heroes because, for me, the hero is the protagonist of a story. It's the person with agency and the person who drives the plot forward, so my heroes are women. What I think beyond that that matters is that we know (and listeners will know this because history is the thing that unites us all) the discipline of history, in terms of writing the events of the past and it becoming studied in the universities, until very recently in terms of time, was a pretty much solely male discipline. Consequently, an awful lot of what is therefore seen as 'The history is a very narrow narrative and it is often only the story of kings, and popes, and generals; religious leaders as well and not just Christians but all of the other faiths. It also means, therefore, that women's contributions throughout history have often been left out of the history books. You would be forgiven sometimes in the 16th century for thinking that there were no women, except for queens, princesses, mistresses and a few people in the fields. The truth is that the world has always been all of us and women were always there and always part of things. During the period of time I'm writing about in *The City of Tears*, the men had been at war for a generation and so do we think were binding the books, writing the books, teaching the children to read, baking the bread, cutting the wood and opening the gates? Women.

So it's very important to me to say let's use some common sense here. We can see that we are being told a partial version of history. It's that old cliché of saying that history is written by the victor. It's a cliché because it's true but also history is written with an agenda and the agenda that men did stuff and women were at home was never true. There are women's expectations in different periods of history and their confinement. Absolutely. But in terms of women being bright, intelligent human beings, that has always been the case. It sounds absurd to me to say it out loud but often in history, it's easy to forget that because women are very absent from much history. With this period, there are a lot of powerful women in the courts and that does make it very unique in some respects but there are also powerful women everywhere else. I wouldn't use the word feminine. I would say that it is pragmatism. Catherine de' Medici and Jeanne d'Albret are tough women. They've lost children and I don't, for a minute, want to suggest that men's hearts don't break too when they lose children but I think that there is something particular with this period of history. Catherine de' Medici had a lot of children and they did not all survive, even to adulthood and even the ones that did survive to adulthood, she outlived, pretty much, the lot and that must be heartbreaking, obviously. More to the point, France was bankrupting itself by these wars. They were losing a lot of the most wonderful people but also both sides were being bankrupted. I think that a lot of the brokering of the marriage deal is about that and saying, 'The land is decimated. We can't afford to keep fighting. We don't want to keep losing the best and the brightest of our young men to wars and never seeing them. Let's see if we can try to bring peace.' I think it's pragmatism versus belligerence, if you like, which is how I see it, more than feminine versus masculine.

Artemis Irvine: Just to go back to the scene that we're at, at the Hôtel de Bourbon. I would love you to paint a picture of what this court looks like. I know that Catherine de' Medici was very famous for being a patron of the arts and there were lots of great festivities going on. Would that be similar for this particular court as well? I'd love you to paint a bit of a picture of what scene we're in.

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Kate Mosse: The Hôtel de Bourbon, as it would have been known - essentially, it's a grand stately home - is also on the banks of the Seine. It is slightly further upriver than the Louvre but very, very close by. They are kissing cousins, as it were. There will have been beautiful glass in the windows; tall, high windows overlooking the water. The windows will very probably have been shut because the Seine, as well as being the waterway and a place for trade, was also where people did their washing, where people washed and where people did all of those other things. It was not a clean and fragrant stretch of river, shall we say. There would have been that. It was August and it was a humid August. There had been a bad harvest that year and there had been a lot of rain earlier on. Paris is a city that's ready to blow, I would say, because there's quite a lot of poverty. All these visitors have come from all over Europe and particularly, all the Huguenots have come in and so all the houses are occupied by visitors and foreign visitors. They have brought their funny ways with them, as it were.

One of the things that Marguerite de Valois said about Henry of Navarre was that you could see that he was coming from a long way away because of the smell of his breath because he chewed raw garlic all the time. He wore his hair en brosse, which basically means combed right back off his forehead and down. That was so far from the glamour of the Catholic court and she thought he looked like a 'paysan' - a peasant. She was very unimpressed with the look of him and the smell of him. In the Bourbon Palace, there will have been some Catholics, obviously, because Bourbon himself was Catholic but it will have been much more austere. You would be able to tell, at a glance, that you were in a Catholic court, even though Jeanne d'Albret's Bourbon court were Huguenot (not the Bourbon Palace itself), because of the huge difference in dress. The Huguenots tended to wear black and tended to wear quite modest, high collars. Ruffs and cuffs were detachable in those days but they wore small ruffs rather than enormous great, big, ostentatious ruffs. Their hair tended to be oiled down and very unostentatious. Everybody's hair would be covered. However, if you went into the Louvre Palace, you would see velvet, silk and gold and the Duke of Anjou, who most histories would suggest was gay and had all of his followers around him, was incredibly flamboyant. He wore his hair in ringlets and all his followers wore their hair in ringlets. They wore silks, huge ruffs and carried lots of pets around in bags, like monkeys and dogs. You would know which court you were in just at a glance. Also, of course, there were small chambers off it but the big spaces were designed for festivities. They were going to hold some of the feasting in the Bourbon Palace and some would be in the Louvre Palace. They were going to move about and so there would be an enormous central hall where a masque or a banquet would be held. That would be pretty much empty until the time that those things were going to happen. You'd then have enormous, great, big, long tables and benches. There would be much more opulent chairs, almost like thrones, at the end of the room. There would be drapes and musicians with long, single-valved trumpets with pennants hanging off them. All of that would come in for the particular events. As I imagine it, I think it's a quiet atmosphere in the Bourbon Palace; a thoughtful atmosphere and maybe a bookish atmosphere. Whereas, there is a slightly febrile atmosphere in the Louvre. Catherine de' Medici has her own house and she doesn't live in the Louvre all the time. She is building her own palace in the Tuileries Gardens just a little bit down the way but it's not finished yet.

[Break]

Artemis Irvine: Hello, it's Artemis. At *Travels Through Time* we're incredibly proud to be partnering with Jordan Lloyd and ColorGraph. Jordan is one of the world's leading visual historians. Through his excellent craftsmanship he brings black and white photographs of the past to life in startling colour and clarity. Jordan's extraordinary work, as well as that of his contemporaries, can be found on the website colorgraph.co. At colorgraph.co you'll be able to

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[Break]

Artemis Irvine: That's fascinating. I love that really visible visual difference. I can really picture it. She sent these gloves - well, we don't know if the gloves were the reason behind her death but she dies very tragically. It seems the timing is somewhat suspicious but I think that maybe it's time for us to move on to the second scene, which is the main event, which is the reason that these two very different courts and dynasties have met in this amazing city and that is the wedding itself. Would you like to tell us a bit about the wedding between these two young people?

Kate Mosse: I had a wonderful time writing the wedding scene. I usually don't put real historical figures on the page. I really admire people who do and do it well but I always feel slightly uneasy about putting my imagined words in the mouths of real people who lived and died for fear of distorting the history or distorting them. However, with this, there simply had to be a few scenes with the protagonists on stage because my imagined characters have come to witness that. The day of the wedding is 18th August. There have been extraordinary constructions made from the Louvre Palace to Notre-Dame which is where the wedding is going to take place. A platform has been built all the way so that Marguerite de Valois will never have to put her perfect feet on the ground and she will be able to kind of glide. Marguerite de Valois wrote about it. We have her descriptions of her wedding dress, the train and all of these things. It's not relying on external observers, if you like, to write this down. She wrote these things herself because it was an unhappy marriage, they were divorced and she was sent into exile. She made good use of that tragic exile really by writing so much of it up. It's not very far from the Louvre to Notre-Dame and anybody will know that Notre-Dame is on a little island. At that stage, there was just one big island and lots of little islands. There are wooden bridges that take everybody on from both sides of the Left Bank and the Right Bank. This wooden platform was built and it was covered in gold. It wasn't heavy gold but gold material and so she looked like a vision. People in wealthier houses would have paintings on the wall, of course, but for many ordinary people of Paris, the colour and the beauty they saw in their life would be in these things, like the cathedrals and the outside of the grand buildings. They didn't own these things for themselves. I can just imagine her with her train, all of the attendants and her mother, who always wore black. We also know that Henry of Guise has arrived in Paris the day before the wedding and has set every maiden's heart aflutter. He is described as a 'golden' man and he comes with huge numbers of attendants and everybody is beautifully decked out, so it's an extraordinary scene.

They have built, in what they call the Parvis 'the paradise' outside Notre-Dame, which is the stone in front of the West Door, big stands on both sides for the favoured guests and because he is a Huguenot, the wedding is happening outside the cathedral and not inside which, again, is an extraordinary thing. I imagine it almost looking like a joust and the Catholics are on this side and the Huguenots are on that side with their colours and their clothes telling them apart. In the

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middle, you have this young woman and a young man who, for dynastic reasons, are about to be joined together. The service happens and when she is asked, 'Do you take this man?' it looks like nothing happens. Her brother, King Charles, forces her head down and that is gossip in the streets afterwards. Did she assent? Are they really married? After the wedding has taken place, the whole of her party go into the cathedral of Notre-Dame for a benediction and Henry is left outside with his men because they are Huguenots. You couldn't get a more brilliant visual image of what divided France than that. The thing that I find quite touching about it is that it is clear that both Henry of Navarre and Marguerite de Valois did have a certain amount of respect for one another's intellect. They came to respect one another and in the events that are to follow, in the next few days, she plays quite a significant role in saving his life.

Artemis Irvine: Really? I resist the urge to ask you more about that because I want to save it all for the final scene that we're visiting. Could you tell us a bit more about her? I know that she's this great romantic heroine in lots of ways or she's become a great romantic heroine. She's the subject, the heroine, of the famous novel by Alexandre Dumas. I know that you wrote, in the introduction to your book, that you were somewhat inspired by his book, *La Reine Margot*.

Kate Mosse: Yes, she wasn't entirely unwilling. From that point of view, she wanted status but what, of course, will happen in the future is that she will find that, oddly, she has less power than she believed. The inadequate brothers will be chosen over her, of course, because France, in the North, had that system where the male heir mattered more than the female heir, who didn't inherit. Whereas, at that moment in England (as it then was), we have a queen on the throne in her own right. It is very interesting. I think she is seen as a great romantic heroine. I would say she was her mother's daughter and I think she had a lot more of her mother in her than people often credit. I think Catherine de' Medici has been dealt a very bad hand in history by male historians and biographers who have not approved of her power and her wielding of it. Would I like to sit down and have dinner with her? Probably not but I would say that a lot of what she did would have been seen as strength in a man. Whereas, it was dismissed as interfering where she shouldn't have done because she was a woman. I think Marguerite took after her in many, many ways.

Artemis Irvine: I think that leads us on perfectly to our third and final scene that you're going to take us to. Would you like to introduce where we are? This is 24th August and it's about four days after the wedding has taken place. Is that right?

Kate Mosse: Yes. The bells start to ring out. It is one of the most extraordinary moments in history in that we will never know for sure who gave the order that there was to be a massacre and, actually, what was intended. There are two separate things there. We know that there were meetings in the Louvre Palace between Catherine de' Medici, the king and Henry of Guise. We do not know who was saying, 'We must kill the leading Huguenots.' They were known as the War Huguenots. Coligny, who is the senior 'thinking' Huguenot, I suppose, and the leader and separate from Henry of Navarre, is very beloved of King Charles and Guise and Catherine de' Medici fear his influence over the very fragile and emotionally immature king. Coligny is summoned to see the king and on his way home from that, on 22nd August, he is shot. He is shot by an assassin who is in a house that is owned by the Guise family but many houses are owned by the Guise family and you can't say for sure that they knew he was there. The assassin also gets away, which suggests that there has been proper planning of this. Coligny is badly wounded but he is not killed and he is taken into his quarters. This is a very extraordinary turning point in history because the king himself comes to say sorry and to say, 'I'm going to root out whoever did this. This is a disgrace. You have my support.' But yet, a few hours later and very, very late on the night of 23rd (either the eve of 23rd or 24th August which is St.

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Bartholomew's Day), the toxin bell begins to ring out, which is an alarm bell. It rings out from Saint-Germain d'Auxerrois, which is a church by the Louvre Palace, which is essentially the parish church of the Louvre Palace. Somewhere between King Charles visiting Coligny and giving him his word that he will be protected and a few hours later, Guise arrives at Coligny's dwellings with armed men. They hack their way in and go up to the bed chamber where Coligny is lying. They drag a wounded and old man out of bed and throw him out of the window. They decapitate him and his head held up. That is essentially the sign for a massacre to begin.

A lot of historians would say that what happened was not intended and that there was a deliberate attempt to kill the senior Huguenots, absolutely. It's the idea that they were all gathered together in Paris and this was a great opportunity. Therefore, they would assassinate the Huguenot leadership. That certainly was planned and prosecuted and almost all of them were murdered. Henry of Navarre and a few others were spared because of Marguerite de Valois' intervention. He had to convert to Catholicism and he was essentially held a prisoner for the next few years within Paris and the Louvre Palace but he is not killed. Almost all the other War Huguenots are murdered. People have white marks daubed on their doors to show which are Catholic houses and which are inhabited by Huguenots and there is also an idea that the Catholics have got white scarves tied around their arms so that they can be identified too. There is clearly a properly planned assassination but then what happens instead - or possibly, this was intended - is that the combination of three days of drinking and feasting, the overcrowded streets, the temperature, the temperature is running high, tempers are overboiling and what, in those days, would be called a bloodlust takes over. The mob takes over and runs riot. Rather than the senior Huguenots only, during the course of St. Bartholomew's day and that night, maybe as many as 3,000 people are hacked to death, including men, women and children. Many of them are slaughtered by the sword and some are burnt and there are bonfires burning everywhere. Many of them drown and are thrown into the Seine because, oddly, for people who lived by rivers and sailed on boats, many, many people did not swim in those days. Chains are put across the streets of Paris to stop people from fleeing, and this is where the research of the size of the medieval streets is so important, and, of course, all the gates of Paris are barred.

Artemis Irvine: In light of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, do you think that the wedding and the political aim of the wedding have been made redundant? Is it helpful at all in resolving the conflict between the two sides or does it fall by the wayside and overshadowed by the massacre?

Kate Mosse: It's completely overshadowed by the massacre because many of the surviving Huguenots, the ones that escape, believe therefore that it was all a plot just to get them all to Paris. It means that the conflict becomes more bitter. There will be another five wars that will happen now. It will be attritional and will bring France to her knees. It will destroy France's coffers. Catherine de' Medici will see all of her sons take the throne and die one after the other and so Henry of Navarre will be the King of France but Paris will never accept him. He is forced to convert to Catholicism after this wedding and then he escapes a few years later and becomes a Huguenot again. In the end, he will convert and he will convert to Catholicism with the famous words, 'Paris is well worth a mass.' He will be crowned, unlike all the other kings of France, in Chartres Cathedral because everywhere else is still slightly dangerous territory and still disputed territory. The main conflict against him will be Henry of Guise. He will be his main enemy and, indeed, there is a war that is called the War of the Three Henrys between a de Valois Henry, a Guise Henry and a Navarre Henry. It's known as the War of the Three Henrys.

In the end, Henry of Navarre is crowned in 1594 and he does bring peace to France and every normal person in France has had enough. It is a tragedy of quite epic proportions that he will be

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assassinated by a crazed Catholic monk in 1610. Actually, I haven't double-double-checked but I'm pretty sure it's 1610 that he will be assassinated and then France will then be plunged back into persecuting the Huguenots. The Edict of Nantes gives a certain amount of religious freedom to the Huguenots and his grandson, Louis, will revoke that in the famous revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1688 and the few final remaining Huguenots will leave French soil at that moment. It is the most incredible period of French history and one that I'm obviously revelling writing about.

Artemis Irvine: Definitely. Such powerful and emotional events and that's what is so great about this book because, like you say, your characters are witness to these events. It makes you think what it is to be a witness to history, as we are at the moment, like you were saying at the start. So just before we head back to the present and to comparatively safer times, you're allowed to bring back a memento with you from the year 1572. I was just wondering what memento you would like to bring back.

Kate Mosse: I found this really hard to decide what I would bring back, in a way, because there were so many extraordinary women writing so many extraordinary books. I thought, 'Could I bring Jeanne d'Albret's library back with me?' and all of these sorts of things. In the end, I thought that given my intention is always to put the ordinary people, the people like me, back into history, that I would want to bring something that any Huguenot might have owned. I think, therefore, I would bring a little steel Huguenot cross that might have been worn on a belt. It might have been just carried in a pocket. It might have been worn on a chain around the neck and they were very widespread. They're almost like stars or four fans that meet in the middle with little details between them. It was quite a distinctive cross and it would be one of those things that people would carry and you would, in very difficult times, be able to show and you would know that this person was a friend and not a foe. It would be almost like a secret symbol. Also, in better times, they were worn very visibly as a piece of jewellery or a very clear statement of faith. It was much less ornate than the very lavish crucifixes that the Catholics were wearing and that would often be covered in jewels, like sapphires and diamonds. I would bring back a steel Huguenot cross that had seen some action and that I would just keep on my desk beside my computer. There's the wonderful phrase from the very great Neil MacGregor, who used to be, of course, in charge of the British Museum and is now, sadly, lost to us in Germany. He's doing amazing things there. He always called this the 'charisma of things'; the idea that certain objects, when you hold them, they're kind of infused with all the history and all the biographies of the people that have gone before and have held that same object. I think a Huguenot cross in the palm of my hand would be just perfect.

Artemis Irvine: That sounds wonderful. Yeah, I love that. It's been an absolute pleasure to speak to you and to relive this adventure of a book. I really could not recommend it highly enough to any listeners. It's been such a pleasure to speak to you.

Kate Mosse: Thank you. It's been lovely to be able to just talk about history for a bit *[laughter]*.

Artemis Irvine: Exactly.

[Interview ends]

Artemis Irvine: That was me, Artemis Irvine, talking to Kate Mosse about the year 1572. One of the things that I enjoyed most about my conversation with Kate was just how sensory all of her descriptions were: different colours of the Catholic and the Huguenots' clothes; the smell of the city after six days of celebration; the heat in August; and even the shape and size of the

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streets that people would have been walking down. I really hope that you enjoyed the interview too. It looks like we might be indoors for a little bit longer yet, so if you're looking for an adventure, I can't recommend *The City of Tears* enough. It's published by Pan Macmillan and it's available to buy right now.

But, until next week, goodbye.

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