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Catherine Randall, *From a Far Country: Camisards and Huguenots in the Atlantic World*. Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 2009. 176 pp. Index. \$44.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 13-978-0-8203-3390-8.

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The traditional interpretation of the Huguenot experience in the New World has long held that the French settlers assimilated rapidly into their new surroundings, intermarrying with those already settled and often abandoning their own French churches for the more comfortable conformity of Anglicanism.[1] Recent literature, however, has questioned some of the assumptions underlying this orthodoxy, as historians have begun to discover ways in which the Huguenots who settled on the shores of the Americas maintained their own cultural identity.[2] Into this debate comes Catherine Randall, herself descended from Huguenot forbears, to join those arguing for a revision of the standard interpretation. What makes Randall's slender monograph (116 pages of text) different from those that have preceded it is her introduction of the Camisard Rebellion into the mix, and her argument that the Huguenots of the New World were influenced in their desire to retain aspects of their own culture by what she calls the "Camisard survival strategy," one that involved an outward conformity hiding a more inward rebelliousness, with an enthusiastic form of pietism thrown in for good measure.

This is an interesting argument, and in her efforts to trace the longer term impact of the Camisards, Randall joins a small but distinguished group. Hillel Schwartz years ago charted the path of the Camisard prophets to England (where they became known as the "French Prophets") and their rejection there by established religious institutions, and Clarke Garrett argued in favor of their influence on eighteenth-century Methodism and the later establishment of Shaker communities.[3] More recently, Georgia Cosmos has explicated the principal text of the French Prophets, Maximilien Misson's *Théâtre sacré des Cévennes*, and its reception in England.[4] Randall wants to go a very large step further and argue that the Camisards influenced the Huguenots of the diaspora, and she chooses to explore this topic by concentrating principally on three New World Huguenots as case studies. To make her overall argument about Camisard influence work, however, she needs to demonstrate the exact mechanism of that influence, and to do that, she has to define exactly what a Camisard was. This is where she gets into considerable trouble.

The term "Camisard" was first used toward the end of 1702 to describe the mountain rebels who had begun their rebellion against the crown and the Catholic church by murdering the most effective royal persecutor in the Cévennes, the abbé du Chaila, in July of that year.[5] The more common term applied to rebels at the time was "fanatiques" because of the popular and apocalyptic prophetism that characterized their movement. For the monarchy, fighting a guerilla war with officers and soldiers trained to fight a more traditional one proved very difficult, and the king's officials were constantly flummoxed by an enemy that would appear from nowhere, ambush royal troops, and disappear just as quickly. As in the case of most insurgencies, officials and officers alike soon figured out that popular support in the villages was the key to the survival of the various Camisard bands, and began a wider campaign of state terror designed to cut off that support. In the fall of 1703, the crown decided to burn most of the villages in the mountainous Cévennes, thereby forcing the rebel bands into the more manageable terrain of the Vaunage near Nîmes, where they were finally defeated in 1704. Amnesties

were soon offered, and most of the rebels surrendered. Remnants remained, of course, and the rebellion was not definitively extinguished until the death of its first and most important prophet, Abraham Mazel, in 1710. [6]

In the book under review, Randall begins by widening the definition of the word “Camisard” to include any Protestant from the Cévennes before, during, or after the rebellion itself. Thus, Antoine Court, who thoroughly rejected prophetism and never fought in the war at all (he was seven years old when it started) becomes a “Camisard pastor” (p. 25) and more bizarrely, a “Camisard soldier” (p. 95). Court’s fellow Cévenol Pierre Corteiz, who later became a pastor and who also strenuously rejected Camisard prophetism, becomes a Camisard (pp. 25-27). The definition then grows wider. Claude Brousson, the Toulousain lawyer who became the most important of the lay preachers whose sermons were so influential but who was executed in 1698, four years before the beginning of the rebellion, becomes a “Camisard leader” (p. 4). Finally, all the Huguenots who left France in the aftermath of the Revocation are grouped together under that label. “By 1686,” Randall writes, “more than 40,000 Camisards were in prison, more than 2,000 were serving as galley slaves, and more than 200,000 had clandestinely fled the country” (p. 36). Such a widening of the definition of a word that had a very specific and chronologically-confined meaning to contemporaries as it has to modern historians makes it relatively easy, but not very informative, to apply some kind of Camisard influence to later Huguenots in the New World.

More often, rather than being conflated under one heading, Huguenots and Camisards are simply grouped together. Thus, among many examples, “it should be recalled that Huguenots and Camisards did not immigrate exclusively to New England” (p. 62) and on the next page, “Camisards and Huguenots fled in order to retain their religious beliefs” (p. 63). Using the more traditional definition, there is, alas, no evidence that a single rebel—that is, any real Camisard who fought during the war—ever emigrated to the New World. Indeed, the inability of many poorer artisans and peasants to emigrate anywhere at all (much less across the ocean) forced them to remain in a France that was violently hostile to their religion and became a major cause of the rebellion. Even after the rebellion, very few left. As Garrett argued years ago, whatever influence the rebellion and its attendant prophetism had on those who came after was complex and often indirect.

Aside from problems with this essential definition, the book suffers from a multitude of errors surprising in a monograph published by a university press. To cite only a few examples among many, we are told that Louis XIV was encouraged by “his minister Richelieu” (p. 112) in his religious policies, this even though Richelieu was his father’s minister, dying when Louis XIV was four years old. The king’s most powerful provincial *intendant*, Nicolas de Lamoignon de Basville, is here divided into two fictional people, an “Abbé Basville” (using the traditional spelling of his name) “commissioned to oversee this project” to “eliminate French Protestantism in France” (pp. 8, 15) and a “commandant Bâville” (using the modern spelling) put in charge of a company of dragoons (pp. 11, 14). The real Basville, the *intendant* who oversaw royal efforts to crush the rebellion, is nowhere in sight. Even the most important commanders of the rebellion are confused. In place of Pierre Laporte, who took the *nom de guerre* of Rolland, and Jean Cavalier, whose surrender helped end the rebellion, we get a mythical leader named “Rolland Cavalier,” “a twenty-one-year-old former shepherd turned baker” (p. 19). Even more confusingly, the real leader Jean Cavalier then appears as himself later in the same paragraph, but is not credited with his own surrender.

All of these errors and issues of definition in the first half of the book form a kind of thicket that makes it difficult to penetrate Randall’s interesting discussion of the three Huguenot immigrants in the second half. The last three chapters discuss Gabriel Bernon, Ezéchiel Carré, and Elie Neau, all born in France, the first two hailing from La Rochelle, the third from Poitou (and none of them from the Cévennes). Bernon was born in 1644, making him around sixty years of age at the time of the Camisard rebellion, and later emigrated in 1686 to New England in the immediate aftermath of the Revocation of Nantes

and there became an enthusiastic church member and successful merchant. Alas, Randall can prove no link at all between him and the Camisards other than the somewhat hopeful statement that “he was frequently in London on business when the French Prophets were active, so he, like Wesley, Whitefield, and their contemporaries, would have heard their message and been influenced by aspects of it” (p. 70). Moreover, Bernon decided by 1699 to convert to Anglicanism, becoming a pillar of the church in Providence, where he helped found the very Anglican chapel of the Cathedral of St. John. It is difficult to think of a better case for thorough-going assimilation by a Huguenot immigrant.

Ezéchiél Carré was a French pastor educated in Geneva who also emigrated soon after the Revocation, becoming a minister to a French church in Rhode Island before moving on to Boston. Randall concentrates her discussion of him around a sermon he published in 1689, thirteen years before the start of the rebellion (and even before the advent of the popular prophetism that ignited it). The principal goal of this sermon was to counter anti-French sentiment growing in the colonies, and no less a figure than Cotton Mather wrote its preface, defending the Huguenots and pointing to their opposition to the increasingly unpopular monarchy of Louis XIV. Randall writes that “Carré went quite far in legitimizing the Camisards’ armed resistance to Louis XIV’s dragoons” (p. 93), but here, of course, she’s talking about Huguenot resistance during the period of the Revocation. That Carré was an enthusiastic Huguenot partisan cannot be doubted, but there can have been no “Camisard” influence on a pastor educated in strictly orthodox Geneva who wrote long before the rebellion ever started.

The final immigrant studied is Elie Neau, who fled France for Boston in 1686, became a sailor, was captured by the French in 1692, and sent to the galleys. There he became something of a Protestant *dévôt*, preaching, forcefully singing psalms, and generally making life as difficult as possible for his jailers. Finally exasperated, they dispatched him to the dreaded Château d’If, where he became even more strenuously devoted. (Randall argues, bizarrely, that the Château d’If “was where most Camisards were sent” [p. 103].) Released in 1698 after the Peace of Ryswick, Neau gradually made his way back to New England, where he published an autobiography in 1701, a year before the start of the rebellion. Like Bernon, he also became an Anglican (in 1705), and his long imprisonment caused him to sympathize with slaves, leading him to found a slave school. Neau was certainly an energetic Huguenot (and presumably, an equally energetic, if assimilated Anglican), and his unhappy experience as a prisoner made him no friend of Louis XIV. Yet, beyond a shared dislike of the monarchy and an affection for loudly singing psalms, there is no evidence for any Camisard influence. Neau appears to have been a biblical Protestant, and his opposition to the monarchy, however spirited, never turned to physical violence or prophetic visions.

For Catherine Randall, any opposition at all by Protestants to the monarchy of Louis XIV was “Camisard” as was any support for that opposition by anyone anywhere, whether French or not. Likewise, any particularly energetic devotion to the French Huguenot community in the American colonies must have been motivated by this universal if totally unproven Camisard influence. The best one can say for such an argument is that the Camisard rebels themselves would have been delighted by it. They constantly regretted the lack of support for their cause from the powers fighting against France during the War of the Spanish Succession, and those few who did escape France for other countries (if not to the American colonies) made no secret of their fury at having been betrayed by their co-religionists. Being credited with such a vast import would certainly have confirmed them in their belief that their apocalyptic and prophetic visions were true and that their cause was just.

What Catherine Randall has given us is an interesting view of three fascinating French Protestant expatriates trying to find their way in a world that was new and occasionally hostile to them. That they had no connection at all to the mountain rebels who fought so valiantly--and violently--against the monarchy of Louis XIV during the first decade of the eighteenth century does not make them less worthy of study.

## NOTES

[1] The earliest work was Charles W. Baird, *History of the Huguenot Emigration to America* (New York: Dodd, Mead 1885; reprint: Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1998), but as the author notes, the standard for years has been Jon Butler, *The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in New World Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[2] See in particular Neil Kamil, *Fortress of the Soul: Violence, Metaphysics, and Material Life in the Huguenots' New World, 1517-1751* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

[3] Hillel Schwartz, *The French Prophets: The History of a Millenarian Group in Eighteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) and Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion from the Camisards to the Shakers* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) retitled for its issue in paperback in 1998 as *Origins of the Shakers From the Old World to the New World*.

[4] Georgia Cosmos, *Huguenot Prophecy and Clandestine Worship in the Eighteenth Century: the Sacred theatre of the Cévennes* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2006). Misson's work has been reprinted with a new introduction: Maximilien Misson, *Le Théâtre sacré des Cévennes* (Montpellier: Presses du Languedoc, 1978).

[5] The first use of the word I have found is in a "Histoire des Camisards" written by an anonymous inhabitant of St. Hippolyte, a town just south of the Cévennes mountains in November 1702 (Ms. Languedoc, 446.2, fol 47 in the Bibliothèque de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français), but the word came into more common use during the first months of 1703. The best discussion of the origins and meaning of the word is still the old but invaluable work of Antoine Court, *Histoire des troubles des Cévennes ou de la guerre des camisards sous le règne de Louis le Grand* originally published in 1760 but reprinted in a critical edition by the Presses du Languedoc in 2002, p. 141.

[6] Despite Randall's odd statement that "the stories recounted in these pages have been, to date, essentially unknown," (p. 2) the literature on the Camisard rebellion, especially in French, is so large that it prompted a definitive historiographical study by Philippe Joutard, *La Légende des camisards. Une sensibilité au passé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977). The standard, if quite indigestible work in French is Henri Bosc, *La Guerre des Cévennes*, 6 vols. (Montpellier: Presses du Languedoc, 1985-1993) and most recently a shorter survey based on secondary and printed sources by Lilliane Créte in *Les camisards* (Paris: Perrin, 1992), the last two works cited by the author in her bibliography. In English, the rebellion has been explored in the books of Schwartz, Garrett and Cosmos cited above, as well as in the early chapters of Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, *Pont-de-Montvert: Social Structure and Politics in a French Village, 1700-1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), and two articles, one by Linda Frey, "The Camisards: Litany of a Revolt," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 13 (1986): 61-70; and Marsha Frey, "The Camisard Insurrection: A Revolutionary Model?" *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 13 (1986): 71-79. The author cites the works of Bosc, Schwartz, Garrett, and Cosmos. More recently, the rebellion has figured largely in Roy McCullough, *Coercion, Conversion and Counterinsurgency in Louis XIV's France* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) as well as several articles by this reviewer which may have appeared too late to be consulted by the author.

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