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Georgia Cosmos, *Huguenot Prophecy and Clandestine Worship in the Eighteenth Century: 'The Sacred Theatre of the Cévennes*. Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005. ix + 220 pp. Illustrations, map, table, bibliography, and index. \$94.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-7546-5182-7.

Review by W. Gregory Monahan, Eastern Oregon University.

Few events in the history of French Protestantism have aroused as much interest among historians as the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and its aftermath. In both France and the Anglophone world, scholars have explored the monarchy's efforts to force confessional orthodoxy upon a population that was at first cowed by overwhelming force, then gradually turned to both pacific and violent forms of resistance.[1] One of the most interesting forms taken by that resistance in the immediate post-Revocation period was the appearance, first in the Dauphiné, and then in the Vivarais and the Cévennes, of popular prophetism among the Protestant population. Isabeau Vincent, a young shepherdess in Dauphiné, began to speak in the voice of the Holy Spirit in her sleep in 1688, drawing an increasing audience that included suspicious royal authorities. While experts as distinguished as the Protestant theologian Pierre Jurieu and the Catholic bishop Esprit Fléchier debated the issue of her prophetism, people flocked to hear her, and others also began to hear the word of the Spirit. Some among her listeners carried the divine gift of prophecy to the Vivarais, where the first male prophet of whom we have any documentation, Gabriel Astier, began to hold assemblies which took on the real aspect of what François-Maximilien Misson later called "sacred theater." Astier (not mentioned in the work under review) would preach in a trance, and other prophets and prophetesses would fall to the ground, shake violently, then begin to speak in a calm and ethereal voice as frightened listeners gathered around to hear their words. The miraculous nature of the experience was heightened by the fact that illiterate women and children as young as five or six spoke French rather than Occitan, and appeared to speak as clearly and forcefully as the pastors of old. The movement soon spread into the Cévennes, and there became explicitly violent in 1702, as the spirit instructed the prophets to strike out at the forces of Babylon and Egypt, igniting the bloody war of the Camisards.[2] Once that war had ended, many of the original prophets took refuge in England, where their continued prophetism inspired considerable controversy, a court case, rioting, and a furious war of pamphlets and books debating their experiences.

This is fertile ground for historical scholarship, and Georgia Cosmos joins a substantial historical tradition. The title of her book is something of a misnomer, however, since she is largely concerned to explicate the text and context of François-Maximilien Misson's *Théâtre sacré des Cévennes* and its reception in London between 1707 and 1708, rather than tracing the history of "Huguenot Prophecy and Clandestine Worship" throughout the eighteenth century.[3] The book is likewise drawn largely from two articles published in the *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society* as well as an unpublished Masters thesis at La Trobe University.[4] As such, it enjoys the advantages and suffers the weaknesses of any work that attempts to link together prior articles rather than being written as a unified whole.

Cosmos sets her first chapter in London, where Misson drew together the recollections that constituted his famous work. In terms somewhat reminiscent of Hillel Schwartz's excellent books on the French prophets (which she cites), she briefly traces the context for and reception of the refugee prophets in that city's growing Huguenot community.[5] Chapter two begins the discussion of Misson's *Théâtre sacré*, in which the author argues for the veracity of the depositions, even given the fact that their stories were occasionally shaped by the questions they were asked. She notes that Cévenols were accustomed to various forms of narrative and that male witnesses outnumbered female ones, but she does not analyze

gender as a factor either among the story tellers or in the stories themselves. She argues that “temporality as reflected in the stories told by the witnesses consists in the unity of future, past, and present events,” (p. 32) an interesting argument, but one which occasionally obscures what was in fact a clear chronology and evolution in the content of the prophetic messages themselves. The first prophets, like Isabeau Vincent, called largely for simple repentance. Astier and the pre-Camisard prophets demonstrated a greater will to resistance, encouraging determined defiance of royal efforts to force attendance at the mass. Finally, the Camisard prophets called for and directed violent rebellion against the Church and those royal officials who were assumed to protect and promote it.

Chapter three retraces the first assemblies in what, after the renowned Protestant preacher Claude Brousson, believers called the *désert*, calling to mind not only the remoteness of their location, but also the biblical underpinnings of their experience.[6] Here we get a description of the intensely physical experience of the prophets, the violent shaking, apparent trances, ethereal voices, and use of French among Occitan-speaking peasants. Chapter four offers a thorough explanation for the use of French, noting that the Huguenots were effectively drenched in it from an early age through constant reading of their French Bibles and singing of psalms. There is likewise an interesting discussion of the important role of children as prophets, but not much analysis (rather than description) of the prophetic experience itself. Chapter five takes us to the beginning of the Camisard war, and drawing largely from the memoirs of the fiery prophet Abraham Mazel, narrates the beginning of that conflict. Oddly, she has not consulted Henry Mouysset’s valuable little book, which analyzes the beginning of that conflict in detail, though she has consulted some of the more famous works on the war.[7] There is a considerable discussion of the crown’s efforts to coerce the religious education of children, even to the point of forcing them into boarding schools for the purpose, and the inference that this policy helped to ignite the war, but there is no real argument connecting the two. In fact, that policy proved a failure, since the crown lacked the resources to make it work, and Cosmos indicates that not one of those giving depositions for the *Théâtre sacré* suffered what was effectively the sanctioned kidnapping of a child. Widespread *fears* of such an occurrence were real and certainly played a role, so that, as was so often the case, the crown’s intentions got it into far more trouble than its actions, but the author nowhere makes this interesting connection. As Joutard, Bosc, and others have argued, the Camisard war was an immensely complex event with many causes, of which the threatened kidnapping of Protestant children was only one.

Chapter six is drawn almost entirely from the author’s article on a particular miracle near the village of Sérignan in August 1703, when the prophet Pierre Claris appeared to be consumed by fire, then walked miraculously out of it without any effect at all.[8] There were, in fact, a number of apparent miracles performed by prophets before and during the Camisard war, though this one was certainly among the more dramatic. Oddly, her discussion does not concentrate on analyzing the miracle itself in the context of prophetic imagery and meaning, which could offer interesting insights and help to draw together some of the disparate themes explored in prior chapters. Rather, she chooses to discuss the complex ways in which this incident was remembered, communicated from one person to another, and argued over in the Netherlands and later in London. Here we get our only hint at the later fury of the prophets in London over the denial of his own prophetic past by the most famous Camisard leader, Jean Cavalier. The first rebel leader to accept the amnesty offered during the war by the Maréchal de Villars, Cavalier later accepted a commission in the British army and worked hard to put his prophetic past behind him. His memoirs constitute the most problematic source for the period, but we get no thorough analysis either of those memoirs as a refutation of prophetism, or of his conflict with his former comrades in arms.[9] Since it is entirely possible that Cavalier’s denials played at least some part in the publication of the various memoirs of the Cévenol prophets, discussion of this issue would have been germane.

With chapters seven and eight, we are back in London for the first time since chapter one, and once again in the territory explored some years ago by Hillel Schwartz and Clark Garrett.[10] Here the

author chooses to study three hostile broadsides and one pamphlet among many published during the controversy over the French prophets in 1707 and 1708, describing the message of each in some detail. It is not clear why these and not others have been chosen for such close attention, and only one of them is actually quoted in full (pp. 157-158, at the end of chapter seven, though there is no indication in the discussion of the piece earlier in the chapter that it has been appended). Since she is treading ground that Schwartz in particular has already covered, a more explicit discussion of his work and the ways in which her own agrees with or differs from it would have been helpful. Schwartz was particularly concerned to explore the intellectual and religious opposition to the prophets rather than the bases of popular opposition, and an analysis of why, for example, crowds gathered at the scaffold to heave abuse and offal at the prophets condemned by the English courts to suffer that public humiliation, might have deepened our understanding of the connections between religious enthusiasm and social actions. Did those crowds gather because crowds always gathered for such spectacles regardless of who stood upon the scaffold, or was their participation explicitly related to the broadsides and pamphlets that flowed back and forth between the two sides?

She does return in chapter eight to Misson's *Théâtre sacré* in the light of opposition to that work and its author by the Huguenot authorities in London. She discusses some witnesses who later denied their testimonies (one under formidable pressure of interrogation), but she never analyzes these supposed retractions in the context of her other comments about Misson's work. If, as she argues in her first chapter, the depositions in Misson's work were true, why was the style of his work so uniform? And why were there two depositions in John Lacy's translation of Misson's work that do not appear in the French original? [11] Why did some of the witnesses interrogated by the hostile Huguenot authorities deny their original stories? Were they only trying to avoid trouble before that church's consistory, or were they simply refusing to recognize the authority of those questioning them? The last would have been entirely consistent with the practice of Camisards and prophets captured and interrogated by the authorities of Louis XIV during the war. A reading by the author of the many interrogations found mostly at the archives of the Hérault in Montpellier would show that they almost invariably denied everything no matter how strong the case against them. Thus the denial by some in London promises yet another lost opportunity to explore and analyze important issues from Misson's endlessly fascinating text.

In her conclusion, the author makes some observations about "social meanings directly related to place," returning to the concept of the *désert* and the idea that Cévenol prophetism became effectively rootless once it was removed from its geographic/social context. This is certainly an interesting argument that would have been considerably strengthened had it been made consistently through the book. It would also be instructive to contrast it to Garrett's argument that place was not important, and that the reason French Protestants felt so free to have services in remote caverns and meadows after the Revocation was that it was the words, not the temple itself, that mattered. [12] She closes with an appendix reprinting a piece written some years ago about René Allio's film *Les Camisards* which largely summarizes that film and lauds its realism without necessarily analyzing Allio's own somewhat Marxist take on the war, or, since it is a reprint, placing the film in the context of her own previous discussions. [13]

In the end, this is a book that cannot decide precisely what it wants to be. Does it want to be an *explication de texte* of Misson's *Théâtre sacré*? If so, it would need to explore in far greater detail the life of Misson himself, the background on those who testified in his work, and the many charges made explicitly against that book by its most important English critic, Richard Kingston, and others. [14] Does it want to be a history of Cévenol prophetism between 1685 and 1707? If so, it would need to analyze that prophetism more fully from the standpoint of social structure and gender, as well as its intellectual origins in the history of western Christianity. Does it want to be a history of the origins of the Camisard war? If so, it would need to delve deeper into the actions of the royal government and

particularly of the policies and attitudes of the famous intendant Lamoignon de Basville (entirely absent from the book) as well as the French Catholic church against whom that rebellion was principally directed. Does it want to be a study of opposition to the prophets in London in 1707-1708? If so, it would need to come to grips more explicitly with the work of Schwartz and Garrett in offering a broader social and anthropological analysis of that opposition.

The author's ambition to make her book try to all those things at various times is laudable, but poses considerable problems of focus and consistency. There are certainly some fine insights, and for those unfamiliar with the subject, the book can serve as a useful introduction to Cévenol prophetism after the Revocation. She has explored Misson's text with a depth it has not heretofore enjoyed, and there are good discussions of some of the heated debates over prophetism that accompanied its transplantation to eighteenth-century London. That said, a work that attempts fully to analyze and synthesize the histories of "Huguenot Prophecy and Clandestine Worship in the Eighteenth Century" still awaits its English-language historian.

NOTES

[1] In the vast literature on the Revocation, see especially Elisabeth Labrousse, *La révocation de l'Édit de Nantes* (Paris: Éditions Labor, 1985) and Janine Garrisson, *L'Édit de Nantes et sa révocation: Histoire d'une intolérance* (Paris: Seuil, 1985).

[2] Among the important works cited by the author, Philippe Joutard, *La Légende des Camisards: une sensibilité au passé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977) and Henri Bosc, *La Guerre des Cévennes 1702-1710*, 6 vols. (Montpellier: Presses de Languedoc, 1985-1993) are the most renowned.

[3] See the newest edition, with an introduction by Jean-Pierre Richardot: François-Maximilien Misson, *Le Théâtre sacré des Cévennes* (Paris: Éditions de Paris, 1996).

[4] Georgia Cosmos, "Huguenot Storytellers in London in the 18th century," *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society* 27 (2000): 403-417; "Trial by Fire at Sérignan: An Apocalyptic Event in the Cévennes War and its Echoes Abroad," *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society* 27 (2002): 642-658; "The Singing Angels and Prophesying Children: Religious Cultures of Protestants after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, 1685-1689," (M.A. Thesis, La Trobe University, 1992).

[5] Hillel Schwartz, *Knives, Fools, Madmen, and that Subtle Effluvium: A Study of the Opposition to the French Prophets in England, 1706-1710* (Gainesville, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1978), and *The French Prophets: The History of a Millenarian Group in Eighteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

[6] The recent biography by Walter C. Utt and Brian E. Strayer, *The Bellicose Dove: Claude Brousson and Protestant Resistance to Louis XIV, 1647-1698* (Brighton and Portland, Or: Sussex Academic Press, 2003) may have been published too late for Cosmos to consult.

[7] Henry Mouysset, *Les premiers camisards juillet 1702* (Montpellier: Presses du Languedoc, 2002).

[8] See note 4 above.

[9] Jean Cavalier, *Memoirs of the Wars of the Cévennes, Under Colonel Cavalier, in Defence of the Protestants Persecuted in that Country* (Dublin, 1726). Frank Puaux translated the published English original into French as *Mémoires sur la guerre des camisards* (Paris: Payot, 1918), but the original French manuscript, with interesting differences from its own English translation, and copies of which exist in the archives of The Hague and in the manuscript collection of the Bibliothèque de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français, has not yet been published.

[10] Schwartz's works are cited in note 5 above. The author also cites the valuable work of Clark Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion from the Camisards to the Shakers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

[11] The "extra" depositions are by Marie and Anne Rouvière of Baix, discussing the prophecies of Gabriel Astier, in John Lacy, *A Cry from the Desert [sic] or Testimonials, of the Miraculous Things Lately come to pass in the Cévennes in France, Verified upon Oath, and by other Proofs* (London, 1707). The American scholar Thomas Lockett has prepared an outstanding critical edition of Lacy's book which awaits publication.

[12] Garrett, *Spirit Possession*, pp. 23-24.

[13] Georgia Cosmos, "Holy War and Apocalyptic in Film Narrative: 'Les Camisards'," *Film and History CD-ROM Annual*, Cleveland, 2001, n.p.

[14] Richard Kingston, *Enthusiastick Impostors, No Divinely inspir'd Prophets...* (London, 1709). This is the most thorough attack upon the French prophets, and analysis of it might offer an interesting and more symmetrical contrast to Misson's original.

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