
H-France Review Vol. 6 (May 2006), No. 52

Response to W. Gregory Monahan's review of **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.

Response by Georgia Cosmos, The University of Melbourne.

In his review, Professor Monahan raises a number of important questions which concern the representation of the texts of the *Théâtre sacré* in my book. I am grateful to the Chief Review Editor of H-France for the opportunity to respond to his comments.

A book's title should give a good indication of what it contains. My study focuses upon *désert* religiosity and the outbreak of prophesying in the region of the Cévennes in south eastern France during the early years of the eighteenth century. As its title indicates, it draws principally upon *Le Théâtre sacré des Cévennes*, a unified collection of narratives published in London in April 1707. It was from the deposition of Mathieu Boissier that François Maximilien-Misson (the collector of testimony) drew the phrase which inspired the title of the work. Boissier's depiction of the landscape of the Cévennes as "sacred theatre" was a vision shared by the majority of the witnesses (pp. 179, 183).

Studies which trace the history of Huguenot prophecy and clandestine worship, as I note in my literature review (pp. 4-8), span the period 1685-1800. Such works, which draw upon a vast array of material, have already been undertaken by French historians. Among the most notable are Philippe Joutard's "Les déserts 1685-1800" in *Histoire des Protestants de France* (Toulouse: Privat, 1977); and Daniel Vidal's *Le Malheur et son prophète: inspirés et sectaires en Languedoc calviniste 1685-1725* (Paris: Payot, 1983). Readers familiar with this subject will recall that Joutard had described the *Théâtre sacré* in his essay as a work "qui reste l'une de nos principales sources sur le phénomène" in the Cévennes" (p. 210).

The English translation of *Le Théâtre sacré des Cévennes*, accomplished by John Lacy, was entitled *A Cry from the Desert*. The most serious omission of the work, in terms of its English readership, is the collector of testimony's preface, "Au Lecteur." This piece is an integral part of the original which describes the aims of the work, its historical significance and the immediate context in which the depositions were collected in London. Contemporary reactions to *désert* prophecy (traced in chapter seven),^[1] are central for an understanding of the circumstances which compelled Misson to undertake the collection of sworn evidence from former inhabitants from the region who claimed to have witnessed miraculous phenomena in the Cévennes. Witnesses who came forward between November 1706 and March 1707 to give testimony were cautioned against making false or inaccurate statements; they were to report "la vérité pure et simple" speaking only of events they could distinctly remember (pp. 24-7). It is probable that the depositions of Ann and Mary Rouviere dated 20 March 1707 and which appear only in editions of the English translation, may not have been verified in time for publication in the original French work (see note 10, p. 24).

Most of the research on which *Huguenot Prophecy* is based, as I indicate in the introduction, was originally undertaken during my Ph.D. studies. Three articles, drawn from key chapters of my thesis, were published in journals as this work was compiled. My study does not, as incorrectly asserted in the review, draw upon my Masters thesis, an earlier unpublished study of the child prophets of the

Dauphiné. Examination of their exhortations and prophetic messages revealed that the *dauphinois* prophets not only called upon Protestants to repent their apostasy; they also promised that deliverance of their church was imminent.

The texts of the *Théâtre sacré* confirm earlier contemporary reports documenting the occurrence of prophesying in adjacent provinces: the phenomenon had first appeared after the Revocation in 1688 in the Dauphiné, after which it spread to the Vivarais and Velay. The outbreak of prophesying in the Cévennes after 1700 was perceived by believers to be of a similar nature to the “miracles” which had occurred earlier in these provinces. Witnesses’ accounts of these events in their depositions reflect understandings of unified dimensions of time (pp. 34-6).

The depositions of the *Théâtre sacré* are distinct from records of interrogation held in archival repositories in France (p. 2). They are voluntary testimonies given by French exiles in London. It should be emphasized that most were collected after the act proclaimed against the Camisard *inspirés* in the Savoy church in January 1707. In all probability, witnesses were not unaware of the action taken against the three men by the ministry of this church. At the time of the collection of the depositions, it is unlikely that any of the witnesses could have imagined that they would later be summoned to verify their statements many of which were given under oath before Masters in Chancery (p. 166).

Only five out of the total number of witnesses who gave depositions for the *Théâtre sacré* gave declarations in support of assertions in the *Examen du Théâtre sacré*, a pamphlet published anonymously in London in 1708 (p. 170). Denial of former testimony was prompted by the very real fear of reprisal by the consistory. Evidence in consistorial records, for example, reveals that action was taken against persons who continued to attend the *inspirés*’ meetings after their denunciation by the ministry of the refugee churches (p. 168). It is also not inconceivable that witnesses could have denied their former statements so as to avoid further involvement in this controversial affair.

The *Examen*, as I show in chapter eight, was translated into English and inserted into the second part of Richard Kingston’s *Enthusiastick Imposters*.^[2] The many charges made against the *Théâtre sacré* by this English critic were drawn from this pamphlet, attributed to the minister Claude Groteste de la Motte. Readers exposed to Kingston’s translation were, however, treated to a distinctly different style of rhetoric: the exaggerated mocking tone that characterizes both volumes of his polemical treatise.

The declarations of Jean Cavalier, the former Camisard leader, given at the Hague on 2 December 1707 and reaffirmed by him in London on 25 February 1708, also appeared in Kingston in English translation (p. 125). Cavalier’s statements, concerning the character, comportment and prophetic warnings of the *inspirés*, as I show in chapter six, had been utilized by the Savoy ministry to verify their claims to divine inspiration and also their stories of the trial of fire recounted in their depositions for the *Théâtre sacré*. In my account of this event in *Huguenot Prophecy*, I locate this story within the context of the apocalyptic piety of the *désert* and also show how its reception in London provoked requests for verification of the miracle.

Evidence which may shed some light on the absence of references to events such as the trial of fire and the prophesyings in Cavalier’s *Memoirs of the Wars of the Cévennes*, published in Dublin in 1726, is to be found in his correspondence to Misson in London in 1708, in particular, his letters of 9 March and 10 April.^[3] In his memoirs, Cavalier recounted what happened in the Cévennes between 1701 and 1704 whilst he was commander of a troop of Protestants who “took up Arms in defence of their Religion and Lives” (p. 9). It is significant that he attributed their successes in battle to “the Hand of God” (p. 175). The religious meaning of this phrase in Protestant writings in its original form (“le doigt de Dieu” or “la main de Dieu”) was usually associated with divine intervention. If Cavalier’s use of this phrase in this

context was, in fact, an allusion to the Camisards' recourse to orders communicated by inspiration during the revolt, it would certainly challenge the view that his memoirs "constitute a refutation of prophetism."

It should be noted here that an account of the campaign of persecution and conversion in the Cévennes after the Revocation is to be found in Cavalier's memoirs. In respect of the *enlèvements*, he asserted that "The Clergy shut up in Convents and Seminaries all their children of both sexes in order to instruct them in their Religion; hoping by that means that when the Old People were dead, the Protestant Religion in France would be at an End" (p. 9). As I show in my study, *intendants* of provinces with the greatest concentrations of Protestants welcomed the proposal to remove children from their families and place them in Catholic establishments (p. 95). Whilst the witnesses of the *Théâtre sacré* did not speak of the impact of this policy upon their immediate families, fragmentary evidence which appears in the depositions suggests that large numbers of children were detained in prisons throughout the region (pp. 95-6). To give a single example, Jacques Bresson declared that the *enlèvements* were a frequent occurrence at Brignon. This witness was among youth taken from this village by a detachment of royal troops in July 1703 (p. 87).

Readers will note that references to Basville, the *intendant* of Languedoc, are to be found in *Huguenot Prophecy* in several places. For example, the royal ordinance prohibiting religious assemblies issued by Basville [De Lamoignon] on 29 March 1686 at Montpellier is reproduced in chapter three (p. 52); in chapter four, see my discussion of the findings of physicians at the medical faculty of Montpellier, who were appointed by Basville to examine child *inspirés* imprisoned at Uzès after the spread of prophesying in the region had caused alarm in the court (pp. 70-1); see also the reference to the reward of two hundred *pistoles* promised by Basville at the beginning of the insurrection for the capture of Jean Cavalier and which was later increased to one thousand *pistoles* (p. 113).

Among the most powerful evocations of the insurrection in the Cévennes as "holy war" is the historical film *Les Camisards* by René Allio.[4] Perspectives on the film in review literature are many and varied. Of particular relevance to my study is its framing of the Cévennes landscape, its recreation of clandestine worship in the *désert*, its portrayal of inspiration amongst the Camisards, and its subtle depiction of the *nouveaux convertis'* double game (pp. 185-94).

In closing, I would like to emphasize that each chapter of *Huguenot Prophecy* explores questions that emerged from a close reading of the texts of the *Théâtre sacré*. The organisational scheme of the book, outlined in the introduction, was largely influenced by the rich complexity of witnesses' stories and was intended to convey something of the unity of the work's structure.

NOTES

[1] The printed pieces analysed and reproduced in this chapter (pp. 127-58) are linked by their subject matter. The selection includes two broadsides, a dialogue extract and a *pasquinade*. Studies depicting the opposition to the prophets in London which I consulted include those of Schwartz, Ascoli and Vesson. I discuss the work of Schwartz in my literature review (p. 4).

[2] Richard Kingston, *Enthusiastik Imposters, No Divinely inspir'd Prophets, the second part* (London: 1709), chapter two.

[3] Extracts from Cavalier's letters to Misson are included in the *Mémoires inédits d'Abraham Mazel et d'Elie Marion sur la guerre des Cévennes*, ed. Charles Bost (London and Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1931), pp. 167-77. See also references to Cavalier's memoirs in Philippe Joutard, *La Légende des Camisards: une sensibilité au passé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p. 85.

[4] *Les Camisards* (La Sept/Video-Argos Films: 1993). In my study, I reconstruct the events which culminated in the first act of war following the arrest of young emigrants attempting to flee to Geneva in chapter five. I was unaware of the publication of Henry Mouysset's *Les Premiers camisards juillet 1702* (Montpellier: Presses du Languedoc, 2002), before the manuscript of *Huguenot Prophecy* was completed and sent to the publisher in early 2003.

Georgia Cosmos
The University of Melbourne
cosmosg@unimelb.edu.au

Copyright © 2006 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies. ISSN 1553-9172