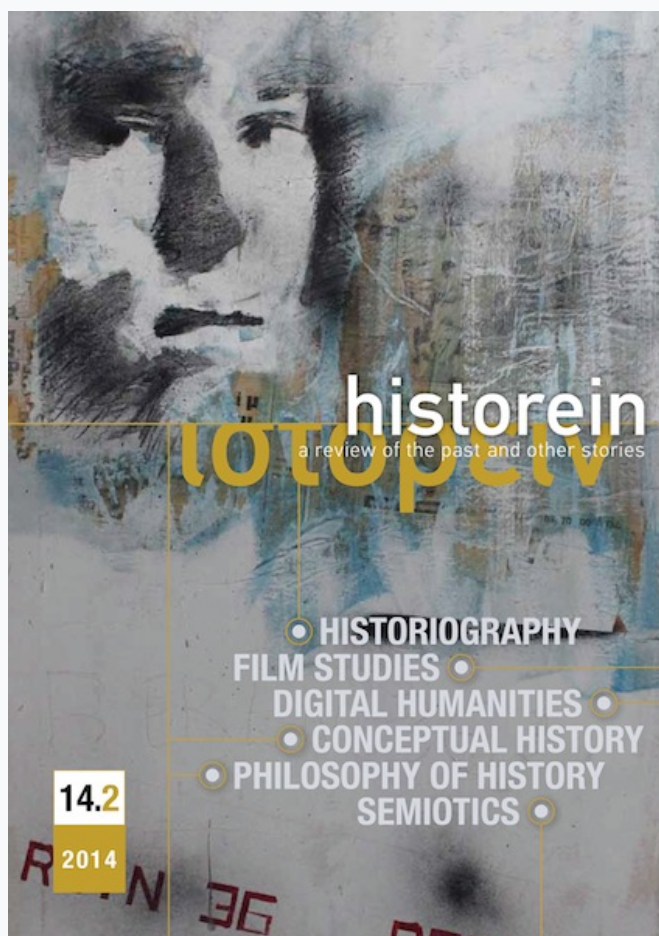


Historein

Vol 14, No 2 (2014)

Historein 14/2 (2014)



Review of Photini Danou's "Προδότες της Βασίλισσας και του Έθνους". Καθολικισμός και λόγος περί προδοσίας στην ελισαβετιανή προπαγάνδα (1558-1585) ['Traitors to the queen and the nation': Catholicism and discourse about treason in Elizabethan propaganda, 1558-1585]

Aglai E. Kasdagli

doi: [10.12681/historein.290](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.290)

Copyright © 2015, Aglai E. Kasdagli



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Kasdagli, A. E. (2014). Review of Photini Danou's "Προδότες της Βασίλισσας και του Έθνους". Καθολικισμός και λόγος περί προδοσίας στην ελισαβετιανή προπαγάνδα (1558-1585) ['Traitors to the queen and the nation': Catholicism and discourse about treason in Elizabethan propaganda, 1558-1585]. *Historein*, 14(2), 130-133.
<https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.290>

Photini Danou

«Προδότες της Βασίλισσας και του Έθνους». Καθολικισμός και λόγος περί προδοσίας στην ελισαβετιανή προπαγάνδα (1558–1585)

['Traitors to the queen and the nation': Catholicism and discourse of treason in Elizabethan propaganda, 1558–1585]

Athens: Herodotos, 2013. 518 pp.

Aglaia Kasdagli

University of Crete

My immediate response when I first took this book in my hands was that any original historical study in Greek that deals with a non-Greek topic is an encouraging sign that Greek-language historiography is becoming mature enough to expand its research interests beyond the “thousand trifles of our small world” and participate on equal terms with their counterparts in the global academia – quite a formidable challenge for people blessed or otherwise with a marginal mother tongue and a country that in the grand scheme of things is equally marginal. At this point, something more has to be said about an issue central to a book drawing evidence from non-Greek documents and dealing with theories relatively “new” to a Greek audience; the issue is of wider significance given that the development of Greek technical terminology is still in its infancy. I therefore have to express my appreciation of the fact that in her study, Photini Danou takes special care to elucidate the intricacies of a historical period unfamiliar to her Greek readership, an era with its own institutions and specialised terminology. Her suggested translations show a linguistic awareness and this is a commendable contribution to the sensitive

process of enriching the Greek vocabulary in order to accommodate terms introduced to the language for the first time. To this end, a longer glossary than the one presented (491–492) would have been very useful.

My initial reaction when asked to review the present volume was that, as is obvious from her bibliography and abundant references, the questions that Danou investigates have been the subject of extensive research, resulting in innumerable studies, traditional as well as innovative, both in Britain and the United States. On the other hand, being myself a non-British historian, familiar with early modern English history but by no means specialised in it, would I be able to assess accurately the original features of the author’s contribution? This remains true, but in the end realism prevailed because who is an expert in Greece, apart from Danou herself?

My second reservation was a point of elementary contrariness owing not so much to the generational gap but rather to the fact that the author and I belong to an altogether different school of thought. This made me wonder whether it would be fair on Danou to have her book reviewed by a historian who has a different historiographical approach. Nevertheless, I persisted because my third and more measured thought was that the important elements were all there: I was interested in the subject, in the way it was treated, in the issues raised and in the authorities on which the proposed model was based. After all, I concluded, dialogue is supposed to be a beneficial process.

Throughout the book, the author employs a careful and not overtly committed way of stating opinions and ideas, which I cannot quite share: it will be seen that I prefer stating my ideas in a more explicit and direct way. Be that as it may, Danou can hardly be fault-

ed for strict adherence to academic virtues: meticulous referencing, analysing theories, putting forward conflicting points of view in a well thought-out way and presenting her own conclusions where appropriate. All this is admirable in a doctoral thesis (which is how the volume started), but in its present form as a mature study it might be considered almost excessive; personally, I would have expected the author to wear her erudition more lightly. Likewise, one could say that the architecture of the book is somewhat convoluted, starting with an introduction (which is subdivided into chapters I, II and III), followed by parts A, B and C (each in turn also subdivided into chapters I, II and III and conclusions) and ending with a short epilogue. The author takes pains to explain the intricate layout in a chapter entitled "The structure of the chapters and the sources" (chapter three in the introduction). However, rather than offering a concise elucidation (the necessity of which is telling in itself), the explanatory chapter is a further admixture of reviewing the literature and authorial commentary, and in my own, prosaic perhaps, view the effort to analyse structured complexity could be dispensed with by merely not structuring the complexity in the first place.

For the rest, the introduction includes chapter one, on "Theories about nation and treason", and chapter two, on "Historicising the public sphere: from the eighteenth century back to the century of the Reformation". From the very beginning (25ff) the author states unambiguously her intentions and the general methodological framework within which she will operate, and this is a bonus for both the casual reader who can sail through the text supplied with a compass and the reviewer who obtains a ready standard against which to judge consistency and clarity of purpose. As for methodology, Danou states that she follows the precepts of the new cultural his-

tory, "which attempts to trace the interinfluence of symbolic representations and social and political reality". She goes on to explain that to investigate the various meanings of "nation" and "treason" she will use the tools of discourse analysis, by which she means not just "language" and "language in use", but also discourse "according to the latest approaches established in the field of cultural and political studies" as "a network of social practices of production of meaning that take place in history", and this is followed by a footnote (27, note 15) quoting a multitude of studies published between 1989 and 2005 and some discussion of developments in the last two decades. This illustrates well my earlier point, that Danou has stopped short of shaking off the vestiges of her doctoral thesis: here it is probably my historiographical bias at work, but in this mature version of her study I would have expected, rather than an extensive review of the literature, only a brief introduction about the state of the art and subsequently the author's own ideas and arguments flowing unfettered from this and that theory, with the inclusion of findings by other scholars only when and where they fit the model put forward by the author. In introducing a model for the "public sphere" or "public discourse" before the eighteenth century in chapter two, Danou discusses the theory that was first formulated by Jürgen Habermas (urban public sphere, eighteenth century), and subsequently adapted by several other theorists, such as David Zaret ("democratic public sphere" in mid-seventeenth-century England), Ethan Shagan (critique of Habermas' theory using the example of the "Pilgrimage of Grace", the early sixteenth-century Catholic uprising against Henry VIII's establishment of the Church of England and break with Rome) and Natalie Mears (focusing on oral but also written and printed communication in the Elizabethan period).

The three main parts constitute the core of the research. The first, which examines legal aspects of the matter relating to the central question of the “construct of the Catholic traitor of the English nation” through legislation, the law on treason and the perceived “Catholic threat”, which Danou shows by presenting detailed documentary evidence to have been very real. This did not involve Elizabeth’s Catholic subjects by and large but specifically English exiles who were actively engaged in various intrigues. The last subdivision of the chapter presents political events, military conflicts and conspiracies, both in England and abroad, and highlights the interdependence of cause and result.

A peripheral observation in the first chapter of the first part (105–108) relates to the meaning of law in early modern England. Danou rightly introduces the theme of English “common law”, i.e. the form of customary law peculiar to that country, but leaves it at that. Although one cannot disagree with Christopher Brooks’ cited observations about changes that took place in jurisdictional and legal matters between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, I believe that these did not alter the fundamental nature of law or those aspects that Danou herself emphasises for state law: in fact, the older and seemingly more informal custom had been equally multidimensional and a principal factor of social cohesion. Although this is probably just an unintentional oversight of secondary significance, it calls to mind a general tendency among modern historians to overlook anything belonging to preindustrial times and consider their own craft the pinnacle of sophisticated methodologies and theories unattainable to historians of older periods – if anything, even early modern history does not often feature in their scheme; the beginning of true history is usually placed along the Enlightenment or the French Revolution.

The second part presents two very public trials of “traitors” or “Catholic heroes/martyrs” as theatrical performances or jurisdictional ritual (“communicative approach”). These trials, virtually a terra incognita for the Greek readership, were, like all such political happenings, patently biased and had a predictable outcome; they are, however, reported in fascinating detail, complete with many quotations from contemporary sources.

Part three deals with the uses of typography in the game of power between the opposing interests that the Protestant and Catholic factions represented. In Danou’s own words, she attempts to display the way in which the spectacle of the punishment of a Catholic traitor is transformed into “political theory” through its transfer to the press. She begins with a lengthy commentary on various recent studies about “the construction of martyrdom”, includes her own readings of them and goes on to discuss these pamphlets and provide many extracts illustrating the ways in which the state machinery and its supporters attempted to express a number of political, religious and social principles and values, which would eventually constitute the model of Englishness that each faction wished to promote. As all propaganda, its aim was to control the conscience of as wide a readership as possible. Danou writes persuasively about the mechanisms through which the awareness of a separate “nationalistic” or “English” identity was put in place during Elizabeth’s reign and about the stance of the queen, along with her council: Elizabeth, an astute politician who had taken to heart the negative example of her sister Mary’s divisive policies, made sure of promoting as a matter of priority a nascent sense of patriotism, which helped tone down religious tensions. The discussion about the construction of traitors as much as martyrs is particularly interesting and, although I do not suggest any easy com-

parisons, it is painfully redolent of procedures nearer to home, such as the relentless proclamations of terrorists and all other ideological, nationalistic or religious persecuted outcasts and their inevitable opposites celebrated as fighters, heroes or martyrs.

A final observation concerns my objection to the confident use by many historians and other social scientists of the concept of “choice”, for example: “In a society like the one under examination, where the identities that people *chose* to adopt in their everyday life had indistinct and fluid boundaries” (467); or “I examine whether and to what degree the subjects of Queen Elizabeth . . . *had chosen* to establish their Englishness.” I do not know the rationale behind this usage, but to my understanding choice is a concept devoid of hermeneutic power, for the simple reason that there was nowhere and in no historical period such an option for human beings. It is just empty notion that modern societies, for their own reasons, try to persuade their members that it is their birthright along with a bagful of other by now intentional and constantly manipulated fallacies, such as democracy, human rights or freedom.

The scope of the book is so wide and includes so much material that I could only be highly selective. Other readers will certainly want to explore other points of interest and I hope there will be many such forays because, in conclusion, I would say that the book is a valuable, thought-provoking contribution that will open our historical horizons. For my part, I am looking forward to Photini Danou’s new ventures

Pierre Birnbaum

A Tale of Ritual Murder in the Age of Louis XIV: The Trial of Raphaël Lévy, 1669

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012. 178 pp. + 12 illus.

Giorgos Plakotos

University of the Aegean

In this microhistorical study, Pierre Birnbaum, a well-known historian and sociologist of the French Third Republic, delves into an earlier period and a largely neglected ritual murder case from the seventeenth century. The study, translated into English by Arthur Goldhammer, originally appeared in French in 2008. Birnbaum tells the double “life” of the Raphaël Lévy affair: first in the late 1660s when the Jewish livestock trader Raphaël Lévy was charged with and sentenced to burn at the stake for the kidnapping and ritual murder of four-year-old Didier Le Moyne in the forest of Glatigny, Lorraine; second, in the late nineteenth century when the memory of Lévy resurfaced during the Dreyfus affair. Between these two episodes, the Lévy case was first “discovered” and served as reference point in another case of ritual murder involving Jews in Damascus in 1840, which caused an extraordinary sensation in Europe. A final act in the affair unfolded while writing this review; in January 2014 the authorities of the village of Glatigny exonerated Lévy and declared him “a Jewish martyr”.¹ This decision was probably the outcome of recent efforts on behalf of the accused and accusers’ descendants to *prove* Lévy’s innocence. Birnbaum touches on the early steps of that endeavour back in 2001 in his introduction. This reconfiguring of local history and collective memory apparently shares some basic assumptions with Birnbaum’s study, which