

THE 'DESERT' SOCIETY IN LANGUEDOC (1686-1704)
AS POPULAR CULTURE AND THE ROOTS OF FRENCH QUAKERISM

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ABSTRACT

The 'Desert' society in Cévennes, Languedoc, was an offshoot of the persecution of French Protestants by Louis XIV. The clandestine assemblies that met in the ravines gave rise to lay ministry, as the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685) had forced professional ministers to flee abroad. At first, *Prédicants* replaced ministers, then Prophets and Prophetesses in turn replaced the killed *Prédicants*. The 'Desert' society gave birth to a popular culture. At the end of the seventeenth century, the Protestants' resistance was peaceful, but as persecutions grew, the *Camisard* war broke out in 1702. But a minority of Prophets refused violence, even in self-defence, as a solution to the Protestants' problems. They gathered in the Vaunage valley, around Congénies, near Nîmes. Their spiritual descendants met British Friends in 1785, and joined the Religious Society of Friends in 1788. They also belonged to the popular culture of the 'Desert' society.

KEYWORDS

French Prophets, French Quakers, Shakers, Congénies, lay ministry, millennium.

The 'Desert' society originated in the Cévennes Mountains in Languedoc, in the South of France, as a direct response to the persecution of French Protestants by Louis XIV and the Catholic Church. After 1685, in spite of the heavy risks they ran, Huguenots met in forests, caves or ravines to pray, sing psalms and listen to those who spoke God's message, first the *Prédicants* (lay preachers) and later the 'Prophets'. The purpose here is to explore the existence of the 'Desert' society, the *Prédicants*, (1686 - 98), the Prophets (1688 - 1702) and the *Camisards* (1702 - 07), whose members who were in exile in London from 1706. In 1980, Hillel Schwartz published *French Prophets*, a study which examined the lives of the exiled *Camisards*, known as 'French Prophets', and their British followers, and considerable work on this topic has also been undertaken by Jean-Paul Chabrol.¹ In his conclusion, Schwartz asked 'what happened to the

French Prophets? Why, after little more than fifty years, did they disappear?'² This remark nevertheless applied to 'French Prophets' who had taken refuge in Britain and not to those members who remained in France. Additional questions can be asked about the 'Desert' society in France: did they have a popular appeal, were they a peaceful or violent community, and did they leave a lasting legacy?

In a recent article, on the Nantucket Quakers' petition as an alternative to Benjamin Franklin's declaration to the French revolutionary government, it was possible to demonstrate the Nantucket connection with Congénies, the home of French Quakerism in Languedoc.³ In this study, the origins of French Quakerism were explored along with the experiences of Jean de Marsillac,⁴ who acted as the link between French *Inspirés* (or *Couflaires*) and British and American Friends. These sentiments were also reflected in the work of Peter Brock who discussed conscientious objection in revolutionary France, the origins of Quakerism at Congénies, and the significance of de Marsillac. A much earlier written study by Charles Tylor in 1893 had argued that the French Friends saw Daniel Raoul as their spiritual ancestor.⁵ Tylor had come to this conclusion after visiting the French Quaker community at Congénies, and his views were confirmed half a century later in H. Van Etten's 1945 monograph.⁶ French Quakers today tend to follow this line of argument, and rightly so if only the eighteenth century is taken into account. But it is possible to make a case that French Quakerism has an older and broader foundation, rooted in the popular culture of the 'Desert' society at the end of the seventeenth century. Arising from my earlier investigation, this paper will now explore the comparisons between the culture of the French 'Desert' society and that of the British Quakers. By so doing, it is my intention to put into perspective the origins of French Quakerism in Congénies, in the Vaunage Valley.

THE PERSECUTION OF PROTESTANTS BY LOUIS XIV

On 13 April 1598 the Edict of Nantes was signed by Henry IV and brought some welcome relief to French Protestants, who believed that the Edict was finally in place. By the 1680s, however, it was increasingly clear that there was less tolerance shown to the Protestants, and progressively pressure was exerted on them to convert to the Catholic Church. In spite of the associated risks these Protestant remained true to their faith and courageously resisted all attempts at coercion. Claude Brousson, a Protestant lawyer, advocated a novel kind of passive resistance: on a Sunday, all the 'Reformed' would meet near the ruins of Protestant churches, and sing psalms, even though such practices were forbidden. Brousson tended to be a lone voice as few Protestants followed him, which naturally weakened the resistance movement.⁷ In 1683, the Protestants in Languedoc were again subject to oppression, and Brousson had to seek refuge in Switzerland. Two years later, Louis XIV signed the Edict of Fontainebleau,

which immediately revoked the Edict of Nantes, the Protestant religion was banned, ministers were given two weeks to convert to Catholicism or leave the country, and Protestant religious services were forbidden. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of Protestants fled abroad, while others pretended to become Catholics. Despite these draconian measures, the Protestant religion survived in France as co-religionists held clandestine meetings, and this period became known as the 'Desert'. What Louis XIV and the Catholic Church had not foreseen was that depriving Protestants of their ministers would not crush their religion or destroy their meetings. One of the basic principles of the Protestant church was the universal ministry. The *Prédicants* were a perfect example of this, as the combination of the absence of an official ministry and clandestine meetings made it possible for the development of a lay ministry, and for 'prophecy'.⁸

THE ORIGINS OF LAY MINISTRY

Lay ministry started with men called *Prédicants* (lay preachers), notably François Vivens, a 20-year-old teacher. At first, the total number was about 60, representing craftsmen, weavers, shoemakers, and farmers, and consequently they had not studied theology nor were they professional ministers.⁹ In 1686, shortly after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, they began preaching after being 'elected' by Protestant families who had resisted the oppression of the Catholic Church by holding clandestine meeting and by reading the Bible at night.¹⁰ Furthermore, even though the children were forced to attend Catholic schools, they were provided with Protestant culture at home and in the Desert, where *Prédicants* would preach in front of large assemblies, placing a reliance on the Bible, which they came to know by heart. Brousson, although not a professional minister, had a wide religious and intellectual background, and assisted the lay preachers by providing sermons from his place of exile in Switzerland.¹¹

Men, such as Brousson, were nevertheless a rarity, and he deeply regretted the exodus of Protestant ministers. In 1685, he published a 'Lettre au clergé de France' ('Letter to the French Ministers') exhorting them to return to France.¹² This, of course, would have been very dangerous for them. In 1689, determined to avail the Protestants of a preaching ministry, Brousson returned to the Cévennes, where he became a *Predicant*, but was forced back into exile at Lausanne, in 1694, when his life was threatened. It was during this period of exile that he officially became a minister. Undaunted by his earlier setbacks, Brousson went back to France and held many clandestine assemblies. Another period of exile followed in 1697 when he forced to seek refuge in the Netherlands. The following year he visited southern France, but was arrested in 1798, brought to Montpellier, condemned and immediately executed.¹³ The execution of such a charismatic leader greatly troubled the Desert population, particularly as many other *Prédicants* were either sent to the galleys or put to

death.¹⁴ For example, the women were kept prisoners in the Tower of Constance. Here many of them died,¹⁵ and these events are still vivid among French Protestants.¹⁶ The persecution of *Prédicants* led to another kind of popular culture: prophecy.

PROPHECY

Prophecy began with child-prophets who shamed their parents by exposing their deceitfulness, particularly the compliance with the French government's desire to make them conform to Catholicism while they remained clandestine Protestants. Indeed, these young prophets exposed those who attended mass, celebrated their weddings and christened their children in Catholic churches in order to avoid persecution, while in the safety of their home they taught their children the Protestant way of praying and reading the Bible.¹⁷ Women were particularly active as prophetesses. The most famous Prophetess was a shepherdess, Isabeau Vincent in Dauphiné, who began her prophecies in 1688 at the age of fifteen. She spoke with her eyes shut, interpreted the Bible, and called on her co-religionists to repent because they had pretended to become Catholics. Crowds attended her prophecies and she was eventually thrown into jail, but continued to keep preaching while imprisoned. Consequently, she became famous throughout Europe.¹⁸ The prophetic movement thus started in Dauphiné, Vivarais, and Velay, in the east of France, then spread to the Cévennes in Languedoc in the south of France. Although the Bible was significant for these Prophets, they relied mainly on divine inspiration. Furthermore, they insisted on the need for repentance, and the coming of the millennium.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF FRENCH QUAKERISM AND THE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE 'DESERT' SOCIETY AND CONTEMPORANEOUS BRITISH FRIENDS

The French authority most associated with the 'Desert' society is Phillippe Joutard, particularly his study *Les Camisards*, a rich anthology compiled in 1980.¹⁹ But Joutard, although a known expert on this community, does not seem to have worked on the Quakers, either British or French. This is often the case with most French historians of French Protestant history. Another anthology is also very helpful for the study of Protestantism in France. Maximilien Misson's *Les théâtre sacré des Cévennes*, originally published in 1707, offers an accessible account to the French reader.²⁰ These are testimonies by former Prophets concerning the 'Desert' society and the *Camisard* war. Yet to date there is no complete historical study published on French Friends, particularly as Van Etten's monograph, written over a half a century ago, only mentions the 'Desert'

society in a few lines,²¹ and specifies that the origin of French Quakerism can be dated to 1702. The historian who questioned whether Congénies Quakers were derived from the 'Desert' society was Charles Tylor, but again he placed greater emphasis on eighteenth century Quakers and spent but little time on the seventeenth century 'Desert' society. He simply observed the execution of the 'Quaker' Claude Gristan in 1698.²² Moreover, while most historians of French Quakerism specify that Daniel Raoul, executed early in the eighteenth century, was from the second generation of French Quakers, significantly they have made no comparison between the development of seventeenth century British Quakerism and the peaceful Desert culture of the same period in France. In his *Notes pour servir à l'histoire des Quakers de Congénies* published in 1976,²³ Pierre Poivre insisted on the Desert spiritual origins of the French Quaker movement, but he did not draw a comparison with the British Quaker movement of the same period. In a recent lecture to the Académie de Nîmes, French historian Jean-Marc Roger confirms Pierre Poivre's assumptions.²⁴ Joutard and Misson's anthologies, among other sources, nevertheless enable us to draw these comparisons, notably in the social composition of the *Prédicants* and British Friends as craftsmen in the textile industry. Despite the similarities between the two religious communities, the Desert culture was nevertheless not influenced by Quakerism in the Cévennes. This was simply because, even by the end of the seventeenth century, at least so far as we know, no contacts had been made with British Friends.

Further comparisons, however, can be made. First, the universal ministry or lay preaching ministry, which was common to both Desert Prophets and Friends, and in the equality they both advocated for members. The Desert period was a very democratic period of Languedoc Protestantism as women and children could replace their menfolk as ministers, and although many of the community were illiterate, there was a widespread belief that they could be a voice for God. As such, the Prophets' culture was definitely a very popular one. The advocacy of non-violent action, before the *Camisard* war occurred in 1702, was one more common link with Friends. Even before his execution, Claude Brousson pleaded for non-violence, and his sentiments were echoed by the child Prophets who called their audience to reconciliation. At one 'Feast of reconciliation', they proclaimed 'Repent. Get out of Babylon. You must forgive one another', and then kissed each other and the villagers. Quickly the spectators, overwhelmed by emotion, also kissed one another, weeping, and confessing their faults, they forgave one another.²⁵ The *Théâtre Sacré des Cévennes* bore testimony to these developments. Mathieu Boissier observed,

I met several times in Genève a girl from Languedoc, who received inspirations. When in ecstasy she said several things about me which were unknown to her. She could only be informed by the divine spirit²⁶

Jacques Bresson similarly wrote,

Several times I was a witness to the fact that those who were inspired were concerned to reconcile the people who did not live easily with one another. And everyone could tell that what they said and did, always aimed at harmony and the creation of harmony.²⁷

The behaviour of some Prophets and Prophetesses under pressure of persecution is a reminder of Quaker attitudes in Britain in the second half of the seventeenth century. For example, when soldiers came to arrest Flore Viala, an attractive young woman in good health, she fell to the floor and then began to prophesy. After this she stood up, smiled, and danced with one of the troop, while the people sang 'John dances better than Peter'. The soldiers, surprised and relieved, beat time with the butt of their muskets against the cobbles,²⁸ and this was reminiscent of Quaker activity during persecution. It ought to be stressed that during periods of persecution the *Prédicants* and French Prophets of the seventeenth century were in even more danger than British Friends of the same period. They were often killed, whereas British Friends were quite often imprisoned. Even in North America, where Friends sometimes had been put to death in the 1650s, notably in Massachusetts, their lives were no longer in jeopardy in the 1680s.²⁹ Thus, it seems that direct inspiration claimed more victims in the Desert than among Friends in Britain and elsewhere. Another connection between Prophets and the first Friends was the fact that they did not need a church or even a house to hold their meetings. Claude Brousson remarked:

My dove, the Lord said, that shelters in the cracks of the rocks and the caves of mountains, you look like the Church that does not live in kings' palaces, nor in magnificent houses like the lords of the unchristian church, but rather in shepherd's houses, stables, garrigues and the fathom of torrents, as our saviour did.³⁰

A final similarity between Prophets and the Friends of the seventeenth century was their millenarian prophecies and apocalyptic revelations. Thereby it is possible to argue that a pathway to Quakerism was already open in the Desert at the end of the seventeenth century in spite of the fact that the French *Prédicants* and Prophets did not know about British Friends. Clearly, both communities went through parallel experiences, and took great risks when proclaiming their message in public.

THE CAMISARD WAR, 1702 - 04, AND THE IMPACT ON THE 'DESERT' SOCIETY

From a peaceful movement, prophetic utterance became violent in tone. The main reason for the change was the increase in the State's repression, which led to violent revolt, and exasperation was at the root of the *Camisards'* rebellion.

Peaceful Prophets and Prophetesses were either sent to prison or killed, and in many cases the nature of the inspirations subsequently changed. The message transmitted by the Prophets was no longer one of reconciliation, but rather revenge, God's revenge. The main leaders were Abraham Mazel, Elie Marion, then Jean Cavalier and Rolland. The war began with the murder of a priest, Abbé Chayla in July 1702, and the first confrontation took place on 11 September 1702 near Collet-de-Dèze. For the first time many Catholic churches were burnt, with many more churches encountering the same fate thereafter. After so many Protestant churches had been destroyed, the Prophets began to respond in kind, and whereas many Protestant ministers had been forced to flee to save their lives, Catholic priests were now no longer safe. The revolt spread in 1702, and it was during this period that the Prophets were called *Camisards* because they wore white shirts.³¹

The *Camisards*, however, lost their war and eventually capitulated in 1704 but only after they were given an amnesty. They had become very famous throughout Europe during this period, and, as Philippe Joutard notes, monthly magazines often devoted more than five per cent of their space to the movement with occasional peaks between 16 per cent and 21 per cent.³² He also specifies that this violent Protestant resistance drew much more national and international attention than the mainly non-violent period which lasted for over one century.³³ Joutard goes to the extent of suggesting that, 'Never did a popular movement in France, except for the French revolution of 1789 and the Commune of 1871, produce so much print.'³⁴ With the onslaught of the *Camisard* war, the 'Desert' society changed. It was still a part of French Protestant popular culture, but this time it was violent popular culture. Violence had made them popularly known throughout the known world, but at the same time, such activity took them away from Quaker-like culture.

CAMISARDS EXILED IN BRITAIN

Several *Camisard* Prophets, especially the war leaders, Abraham Mazel and Elie Marion, along with a cousin of Jean Cavalier, took refuge in London in 1706. Hillel Schwartz, who has commented that 'the history of the French Prophets is the history of what happened when three *Inspirés* left the Desert and made their way to London', documents their story.³⁵ Yet the fact that the war leaders were known as 'French Prophets' is typical of the misrepresentation of the 'Desert' society. Had they been called 'French *Camisards*' it would have been a more accurate appraisal. The former ministers who had fled from France immediately after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes despised these men. Part of the explanation for this attitude may be the jealousy experienced by professional ministers vis-à-vis improvised preachers, as pointed out by Jean-Pierre Richardot in his introduction to the modern edition of *Les Théâtre Sacré des Cévennes*.³⁶ These Prophets had created a popular church at the risk of their

own lives. But, being reasonable and moderate people, the 'Refuge' Ministers, who had fled from France in 1685, disapproved of the violence of the *Camisard* war, and they publicly showed their disapproval. In 1708, John Lacy translated *Le Théâtre Sacré des Cévennes* as *A Cry from the Desert*, and bore witness to the Prophets' sufferings, but also to the *Camisards*' violence.³⁷ However, the attacks they endured did not discourage the 'French Prophets', who attracted British disciples, the British Prophets, particularly some Scotsmen.³⁸ They also attracted some Quakers for a short time.³⁹ But the British Prophets' movement itself was not located in popular culture as it aimed at reaching the social and intellectual elite. Consequently, it attracted less support, and finally died out around 1750.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SHAKER MOVEMENT

The most significant consequence of the French and English Prophets' movement in Britain was the development of the Shaker movement, started by two English Quakers, Jane and James Wardley around 1747. According to Shaker theologians and initially confirmed by historians of Protestantism, the Wardleys resigned their Quaker membership and founded the Wardley Society, which claimed to go back to the original French Prophet movement in Cévennes.⁴⁰ What particularly appealed to them was the ecstatic character of the Cévenol Prophets' revelations, the millenarian character of the prophecies, such as those of Pierre Jurieu, the role of women in the prophetic movement of the Cévennes, the lay character of this movement, and its popular appeal. The ecstatic behaviour of the new movement explains why its members soon called themselves 'shaking Quakers', then 'Shakers', while their official name is the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming. The Shakers clearly had a close affiliation to earlier millenarian principles, and it can be argued that one of the failures of their movement and, indeed of the 'French Prophets', but also of the early Quakers, were the pronouncements concerning the imminent Second Coming of Christ. Later generations of Quakers abandoned such prophecies as did the Shakers when their millenarian prophecies became less and less convincing. The Shakers also shared a pacifist inheritance, which owed its heritage more to Quaker influence than to that of 'French Prophets', particularly as the 'French Prophets' who had sought refuge in London in 1706 were war veterans.⁴¹

Unlike the movement of British Prophets, the Shaker movement was rooted in the people, and aimed at recapturing the popular appeal of the French Prophets, which it partly succeeded in achieving. In contrast to the Wardleys, who were tailors by profession, Ann Lee, who joined the Wardley Society in 1758 and replaced them at the head of the Shaker movement,⁴² came from a very humble background and was illiterate. Moreover, Lee's enduring appeal to the Shaker movement was rewarded in 1774 when she was followed by many adherents to North America. The claim of Shaker theologians about their

Quaker and French Prophets' roots has long been accepted by historians, such as Henri Desroche, Clarke Garrett, and Hillel Schwartz, but as Jean-Paul Chabrol recently stated even Garrett and Schwarz now have some reservations about these origins.⁴³ Most notably, they have considered whether the influence of the French Prophets was direct or indirect, but they do nevertheless accept that there was some influence. More significantly, given that the Shaker movement itself is now practically extinct with very few adherents,⁴⁴ their decline mirrors that of the French Prophets in the middle of the eighteenth century.⁴⁵ But whereas the prophets can at least claim an indirect influence in the United States, the Shakers do not have that privilege. But what was the influence of the Desert society in eighteenth century France?

THE 'DESERT' SOCIETY IN FRANCE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

As shown earlier, the French Prophets in London were war veterans, but what happened to those members who stayed in France after 1704? They met with the same kind of difficulties their brothers had met with in London, particularly the disapproval of the Protestant establishment. Moreover, whether this establishment was in exile in London or in Geneva, or still clandestine in Languedoc, it developed its own rules of conduct, of sanction and of exclusion. After the *Camisard* war and under the influence of Antoine Court, Protestants became more sedate, often at the expense of inspiration. Antoine Court, with the assistance of Paul Rabaut, worked hard to restore law and order in the Protestant Church, and the synod of 1715 agreed that synods, official ministers, and liturgy in religious services had to be restored. The synod of 1716 confirmed that all so-called revelations ought to be rejected, while the biblical testimony became central to their beliefs. The ministers of 'Refuge' all agreed with Court except for Pierre Jurieu, whose prophecies had been very influential during the *Camisard* war.⁴⁶

Antoine Court was an ambiguous figure. In 1995, a conference at Nîmes organised by Hubert Bost and Claude Lauriol examined Court's contribution to French Protestantism. Was he the man who 'reconstructed' Protestantism after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), until the Edict of Toleration (1787) and the Declaration of Human Rights (1791) down to the present time? Or, was he old-fashioned in his views: a man who did not understand prophetism and led Protestantism in the wrong direction, not perceiving the changes in mentality that were characteristic of the century of enlightenment?⁴⁷ One of the contributors to the conference, Daniel Vidal, gave a paper entitled 'Antoine Court à contre-temps: champ calviniste et horizon prophétique.'⁴⁸ Vidal suggested that: 'It looks as though piety, faith, and vivid communion among the congregation into the sacred Word, had suddenly frozen into a shadow of pure rhetoric, a flame that has lost its fire.'⁴⁹ With the restoration of law and order in the eighteenth century, the Protestant church drifted away

from popular culture, making it seem to Antoine Court and his contemporaries that in this period one had to choose between violent popular culture, as typified by the *Camisard* war, or 'peaceful' bourgeois culture, as though peaceful popular culture were not an option. It is interesting to note that Antoine Court led his reform programme with the help of Prophets who were war veterans.⁵⁰ In this respect, there was some continuity between the *Camisard* war and the reconstruction of the Protestant church, especially as both ignored peaceful popular culture. Antoine Court and his colleagues would nevertheless have claimed little, if any, association with *Camisard* war, and thus it is our own perceptions that suggest continuity. Moreover, these veterans did not represent all French Prophets. A minority of the Prophets disapproved of violence at the beginning of the war, and in their proclamations they unwittingly remained faithful to the Quaker principles of non-violence and to the Desert tradition in France. For example, on 7 January 1703 Daniel Raoul wrote to the *Camisard* leaders:

A publicly reliable noise informs us that there are among you pyromanes and killers... That you carry iron and fire in your hands to take revenge upon your enemies, that you cut their throats in their sleep and burn their houses, so that at sunrise one sees in their stead only burnt out monuments and human blood pitilessly spilled.⁵¹

NON-VIOLENT FRENCH PROPHETS IN FRANCE AND IN BRITAIN

Henry van Etten pointed out that Daniel Raoul's appeal to *Camisard* leaders seems to have moderated them somewhat, and further appeals were made from Raoul's followers. Jean Flottier wrote to the rebel Huguenots from Nîmes prison where both he and Raoul had been incarcerated, and called upon them to look towards forgiveness and reconciliation.⁵² These followers, including female supporters, called themselves '*Inspirés*', and they were often given the provençal name, *Couflaires*.⁵³ One such devotee was Isaac Elzière who announced:

My name is Isaac Elzière, and I confess in front of God and men that I follow neither the Popish nor the Lutheran law, nor any of the diverse sects invented and similarly made out by men's philosophy. But I belong to the religion of Christ, his Prophets and his apostles, and all those who received the Holy Spirit, through faith or prophecy, like the Prophets, apostles and faithful believers of former times.⁵⁴

These men and women gathered in 'Vaunage', a valley 20 km from Nîmes, and more particularly at the village of Congénies. During the eighteenth century a few men from Vaunage bore testimony to Quaker ideology overseas.

One such example was Jean Benezet whose Huguenot family from Vaunage had fled to England in c.1715. He spent a few months in Rotterdam, then became a member of the Religious Society of Friends, while his son, Anthony Benezet, was a well-known Quaker in Philadelphia who worked hard for the abolition of slaves and an improvement to the treatment of native Americans.⁵⁵

According to Henry van Etten, Paul Codognan, another of these inspired people from Vaunage, also became a Friend in Britain after 1769.⁵⁶ In the Netherlands he heard about British and American Friends, and sought further information from the British Quaker, John Eliott.⁵⁷ He was certainly not alone as Jean de Marsillac, who acted as link between British Friends and *Inspirés*, assisted the fledgling Society.⁵⁸ From 1788, a French Quaker community developed in the Vaunage valley, around Congénies, and so the *Couflaires*, by joining with Friends, remained distinct from the Protestant church reconstructed by Antoine Court. This demonstrates that between inspiration and violence a narrow path was created that could combine inspiration and non-violence. French Protestant churches down to the present time have largely ignored this third way. The paradox, however, is that by ignoring this alternative these Protestant Churches have tended to overlook the significance of the *Camisards* because they could not openly accept their violent heritage.

THE PRESENT RE-DISCOVERY OF FRENCH PROPHETS BY FRENCH PROTESTANTS

On 2 September 2001, French Protestants met at Mialet in Mas Soubeyran, as they have done once a year since 1911, for the Desert Assembly. This time they inaugurated a Meeting to commemorate the *Camisards* in Cévennes, 2001 being the tercentenary of the origins of this movement. The Protestant minister Regina Muller gave a sermon on Acts 2:17,

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old ones shall dream dreams.

In his final message, another Protestant minister Marcel Manoel commented 'I am happy to see that these Prophets and Prophetesses are reintegrated into our history. For they (and women particularly) have been so much excluded, and considered as outsiders!⁵⁹ The commemoration of the *Camisard* war is thereby an opportunity for French Protestants to continue research on the prophetic culture of the 'Desert' society, particularly in the period before 1702. The purchase of the *Maison quaker de Congénies* by France Yearly Meeting in May 2003 is also an incentive to dig further into the spiritual roots of French Quakerism.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Desert culture was a popular one, part of it violent and another section promoting peace. Yet its history has remained strangely forgotten by both French Protestants and by French Quakers, despite the fact that both were beneficiaries of it. The French Quaker movement remained a small minority and kept apart from the reconstructed Protestant Church, even when the latter had become 'peaceful'. It was such a minority body that the *Couflaires* movement probably would have vanished if they had not met British Friends and become part of the world family of Friends as they did in 1788, but as this paper has shown, their spiritual and historical origins are broader than imagined. As French Protestants rediscover the 'Desert' society, it is hoped that French Quakers will do the same. This might generate a fruitful dialogue between these two heirs of a popular culture.

NOTES

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- 16 <http://huguenotsinfo.free.fr/galeres/galeres.htm>
- 17 Misson, *Le Théâtre Sacré des Cévennes*, p. 30.
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- 20 Full details are provided in n.7.
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- Nîmes, 20 December 2002, published by the Académie de Nîmes. Mémoires de l'Académie de Nîmes, 2003, tome 76, année 2001 - 02, pp. 258-98. Roger also casts a few doubts on the authenticity of the founding texts of French Quakerism. I commented on this in a paper given on 7 February 2003 at a conference organised by Roger in Nîmes. The paper entitled 'Les Couflaires de la Vaunage et les Quakers Anglophones: une rencontre providentielle à la fin du XVIIIème siècle' will be published in the proceedings in 2004.
- 25 Joutard, *Les Camisards*, p. 89.
 - 26 Misson, *Le Théâtre Sacré des Cévennes*, p. 65.
 - 27 Misson, *Le Théâtre Sacré des Cévennes*, p. 76.
 - 28 Joutard, *Les Camisards*, p. 89.
 - 29 Barbour, H. and Frost, M., *The Quakers*, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1994, ch. 5.
 - 30 Cabanel, P., *Histoire des Cévennes*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. Que sais-je Series?, 2000, p. 49.
 - 31 Poton, D. et Cabancl, P., *Les Protestants Français du XVIème au XXème siècle*, Paris: Nathan Université, 1994, pp. 56-57.
 - 32 Joutard, *Les Camisards*, p. 9.
 - 33 Joutard, *Les Camisards*, p. 9.
 - 34 Joutard, *Les Camisards*, p. 10.
 - 35 Schwartz, H., *The French Prophets: the history of a millenarian group in eighteenth-century England*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980, p. 36.
 - 36 Mission, *Le Théâtre Sacré des Cévennes*, p. 33.
 - 37 Lacy, J., *A Cry from the Desert, or testimonials of the miraculous things lately come to pass in the Cévennes. Verified upon oath and by other proofs*, 1708.
 - 38 Desroche, H., *Les Shakers Américains. D'un néo-christianisme à un pré-socialisme?*, Paris: les éditions de Minuit, 1955, p. 24.
 - 39 Schwartz, *The French Prophets*, pp. 52, 170.
 - 40 Desroche, *Les Shakers Américains*, p. 22.
 - 41 For a study of the Shakers, see Garrett, Clarke, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: from the Camisards to the Shakers*, Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.
 - 42 Also called the Millennial Church.
 - 43 Details of Jean-Paul Chabrol's arguments are provided in <http://www.camisard.org/clie-maion-fr.htm>.
 - 44 Less than ten elderly members in one community in Maine in the United States.
 - 45 <http://www.camisard.org/elic-marion-fr.htm>.
 - 46 Poivre, P., *Congénies en Vaunage*, Comité d'Etude et de sauvegarde du patrimoine de Congénies, 1975, p. 46.
 - 47 The conference was entitled 'Entre désert et Europe, le pasteur Antoine Court, 1695-1760' ('Between Desert and Europe, Pastor Antoine Court, 1695-1760').
 - 48 'Antoine Court against the grain. Calvinist field versus prophetism.' This was later published by Bost, H. and Lauriol, C., (eds), *Entre désert et Europe, le pasteur Antoine Court*, Paris, Champion, 1998, pp. 145-70.
 - 49 Bost and Lauriol, *Entre Désert et Europe*, p. 154.
 - 50 Joutard, *Les Camisards*, p. 222.
 - 51 Van Etten, *Chronique*, p. 29.
 - 52 Van Etten, *Chronique*, p. 29.
 - 53 Van Etten, *Chronique*, p. 36.
 - 54 Poivre, *Congénies en Vaunage*, p. 56.
 - 55 Barbour and Frost, *The Quakers*, pp. 292-93.
 - 56 Van Etten, *Chronique*, p. 40. As yet little is known about Paul Codognan although for several historians his trip to Britain is a certainty.
 - 57 Jaulmes, E., *Les Quakers de Congénies*, Nîmes: imprimerie A. Chastanier, 1898, p. 25.
 - 58 See Louis, 'The Nantucket Quakers' Message', *passim*.
 - 59 <http://museedudesert.com/Desert.htm>. Le 'Désert' on la clandestinité des protestants de France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles (2002).