



current issue

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Review: *Historein: The Past and Other Stories*, vol. 2, Nefeli Publishers (Athens: 2000). ISSN: 1108 - 3441

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Historein is a Greek journal, although most of the articles are in English. Its contents could not be better described than with a quick note on the title: *historein* is the infinitive of the verb from which *historia* is derived, which means both history and story (like the German *Geschichte*). This double meaning circumscribes the broader cultural and intellectual concerns of the journal. The articles are invariably based on the conference organized every year by the editors, which guarantees a thematic unity. This issue deals with 'Heterodoxies: Constructions of Identity and Otherness in Medieval and early Modern Europe.' Besides this, there is an interview with Hayden White, reviews, and a section called 'Bulletin' which includes reports from conferences and other current issues.

A necessarily selective review is a difficult task, given the high quality of all the writing. We will start with Christine Angelidi's article 'Byzantine Heterodoxy and the Search for Identities: Some Thoughts on the Byzantine Iconoclasm' which is a new look at the veneration of icons in the 8th and 9th centuries. Angelidi argues that the documents from the period participated in the polarized discourse of the iconoclasts and the iconophiles. Thus, the identity construction of that period is drawn with reference to otherness: the definition of who one is is drawn with regard to where one's alliances lay. But the story becomes complicated when one tries to interpret documents based on this opposition, because the arguments of the combatants employ parallel or analogous *topoi*. For example, the destruction of Christ's icon by emperor Leo III may be used in the construction of women's identity: according to the accounts, it was 'pious women' who opposed the emperor's act, and as a result were put to death. Despite the fact that the majority of the historical documents claim that women sided with the iconophiles, Angelidi observes that this cannot be taken at face value: the binary opposition of strong men versus weak women "reminds one of the narrative strategies used in hagiography" (129). Indeed, analogous sanctifying moves have survived in iconoclast literature, prompting Angelidi to conclude that "we may, then, deduce that positive perception of the female element is not a secure indicator for attributing texts to either of the groups in conflict" (130). The upshot is that the heterodoxy-based identity formation in historical sources cannot be taken as steadfast; rather, Angelidi proposes a fluid model of identity for the period influenced by the icon debate.

The concerns of Antonis Liakos' highly theoretical article, 'The Transformation of Historical Writing from Syntagmatic to Paradigmatic Syntax,' depart from a semiological distinction as Liakos seeks to describe two different types of the theory and writing of *historia*. The proponents of syntagmatic syntax, on the one hand, arrange their history according to a pre-existing time order which refers to preconceived historical objects. On the other hand, paradigmatic syntax is structured according to the problem with

which the author concerns himself. In the latter case, the text is dialogical because the reading becomes contemporized. Thus, what is taken as evidence is an elaborate interplay between 'fact' and 'conceptualization':

Instead of evidence representing events [as happens in a syntagmatic syntax], the events are used as evidence in a theoretical construction. ... This course of starting from a theoretical debate, plunging into empirical data, and returning to the theoretical debate constitutes the general pattern within which paradigmatic history is inscribed (49).

The shift from one type of *historia* to the other is traceable to and conjoined with the modernist narratives of Proust, Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Liakos singles out the work of Natalie Zemon Davis and Carlo Ginzburg as examples of the paradigmatic syntax.

Actually, both Davis and Ginzburg have contributed articles to *Historein*. Davis writes about 'Cannibalism and Knowledge' in 16th and 17th century European accounts. Starting from the observation that cannibalism, as both real event and metaphor played an important role in Christian doctrine, she cites a number of examples of the construction of identity and otherness in stories of cannibalism. For instance, the gregarious story-teller Panurge in *Pantagruel* fabricates a story about how he escaped being eaten by Turks and "through the blind spots, callousness, and lies of Panurge in regard to Turks, Rabelais shows his readers the process by which alterity is imagined and reinforced" (18). Davis also points out that in accounts of cannibalism the identification can be with the eater or the eaten, and she poses the question whether such a double identification can be explicated in terms of

that early modern image of the expectant mother, the woman being eaten by the child, the child in the womb feeding on her? If so, then we have another example, as in witchcraft, of the female body as pregnant in meaning for fundamental processes in early modern Europe (27).

Is versification only about 'style?' Decidedly not, Ginzburg would reply. In his paper 'Selfhood as Otherness: Constructing English Identity in the Elizabethan Age' Ginzburg demonstrates that the prosody debates have been crucial in shaping the self-perception of the English as against the 'Continentalists' in the 16th century. The author offers a close reading of English books on versification, starting with Roger Ascham's *The Scholemaster*, and carrying on with Sir Philip Sydney, George Puttenham, Thomas Champion and Samuel Daniel, emphasizing the 'moral' arguments which under-pin wider nationalist concerns in the treatises. Ginzburg summarizes his argument:

The *quarrelle des anciens et des modernes* did not start in France, it started in England, triggered by the debate on rhyme. One of the themes in this debate was precisely the relationship between England and the Continent - between England and France, as well as, on a more symbolic level, between England and Italy. The rejection of quantitative verse based on Greek and Latin models in favour of rhymes led to a declaration of intellectual independence from the continent. 'Barbarous' became a positive word, a sign of pride (42).

The full list of contents are available at *Historein's* website: <http://www.historein.gr>. There is also information about their forthcoming conference, titled 'Claiming History: Aspects of Contemporary Historical Culture.'

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