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Jean-Raymond Fanlo, *L'Évangile du démon: La Possession diabolique d'Aix-en-Provence (1610-1611)*. Ceyzérieu: Champs Vallon, 2017. 336 pp. Notes, figures, and bibliography. €27.00. (pb) ISBN 979-10-267-0455-3.

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The demonic possession/witchcraft trial that took place in an Ursuline convent in Aix-en-Provence in 1609-11 is among the most famous recorded cases of possession and sorcery. In fact, it was the first time a case of possession in a convent mutated into a witch trial, a transformation that was to reshape cases of demonic possession throughout the seventeenth century in France and beyond. The renown of the case was such that possessed nuns in later cases reported that they had read publications about the Aix case, while some of the participants in Aix went on to participate in exorcisms in other convents.

The demonic possession in Aix erupted in summer 1609, when two young nuns, the peasant Louise Capeau and the noblewoman Madeleine de Demandolx, exhibited signs of spiritual disquiet, among them visions, bizarre gesticulations, and screams. It terminated on March 30, 1611, in the public square in front of the Cathedral of Saint-Sauveur, when Louis Gaufridy, a *Marseillais* priest, who had been found guilty of kidnapping, bewitching, and seducing Madeleine, was burned alive. But the case lived on. Madeleine started a new life as a visionary, an itinerant penitent, and a spiritual advisor, until, in 1653, she was accused yet again of witchcraft. During a new investigation, it was determined that she had been suspected by numerous people of practicing witchcraft, that she had faked a mystical pregnancy and long fasts, and that she was actually living with an Italian cleric while claiming an aura of sanctity. She was condemned to perpetual exile and died in 1670. The story also lived on in the heavy tome that the Dominican exorcist Sébastien Michaëlis published in 1613, describing his travails, and in the notes and exorcismal practices of the second exorcist, François Doods, who put the techniques to good use a few years later, in 1623, when a mass possession disturbed the Brigidines nuns of Lille.[1] Their demons revealed that they, too, like the exorcist himself, had participated in the events in Aix a few years earlier (and the nuns themselves admitted that they had read Michaëlis's book on the case). Recent historians, among them Robert Mandrou and Sarah Ferber, have also dealt with the case, so it seems fair to ask whether there is anything new to add.[2]

I must admit that I approached the book with suspicion. Too many semi-academic books are being published in France that indulge in portraying cases of demonic possession and witch trials in a sensational and titillating manner. But Fanlo's book is the exact opposite of these works. It is a major contribution to the revision that has been going on over the last twenty years or so in our understanding of diabolic possession, the spirituality of nuns, and the dynamics of exorcism. In fact, Fanlo introduces into French scholarship the insights of a generation of Italian, Spanish, and English-language authors, prominent among them Gabriella Zarri, Carlos Buil Puyol, Anne Schutte, Nancy Caciola, and others.[3] He rejects previous identifications of demonic possession with female hysteria, and agrees with recent interpretations arguing that exorcism precedes the possession, rather than vice versa. In other words, the exorcists configured and diagnosed an undetermined behavior as a physical, verbal, and gesticular

manifestation of demonic presence within a body. Only then did the body in question fine-tune its actions and movement to fit the diagnosis. And like other recent scholars, he connects the disturbance in the Ursuline convent to the implementation of this new religious order in Provence and to the struggle of its young nuns to establish their new spirituality in confrontation with established orders and widespread suspicion.

Fanlo's book is divided into two parts. The first offers very careful readings of the documents that record the dramatic events in Aix-en-Provence. In this section, he tries to assert whose voices are actually being heard through the mouths of the energumens, voices that only reach us in the written records (both manuscript and printed versions). When do the transcriptions represent demonic voices? When do the women themselves talk? And, what exactly did the exorcists (and later authors) insert into the nuns' and the demons' alleged verbalizations of the diabolic presences? Separating these voices is a precondition for the second, more analytical part of the book, that centers on making sense of the case within numerous settings: the political, eschatological, French, and Provençal, and in connections with struggles between secular and regular clergymen and debates over female spirituality following the church council of Trent.

There is much to be admired in this book, and I will highlight just a few of Fanlo's important contributions. First, he offers close readings of the manuscripts themselves and points out the numerous places in which mistranslations, wrong transliteration, and editorial decisions skewed what actually was said by the protagonists. He reminds us that the possessed nuns spoke Provençal, and one of the two exorcists was a Wallon and spoke Flemish. He took notes in Latin, and probably addressed the nuns in Latin (a language they may well have not understood). The court scribes (*greffiers*) often distorted what was actually said, and the judges then reviewed the notes and elaborated as well as selecting and omitting accounts when they thought fit. In addition, it is clear that the long theological harangues put into the mouths of the demons represent too closely Michaëlis's own theological writings. Indeed, this is an additional major contribution of the book, whose author read carefully all of this exorcist's previous writings and sermons, and demonstrates the degree to which the demons' theological arguments and the nuns' alleged rhetorical skills echo Michaëlis's eschatology and his style. His conclusion, which I find convincing, is that what we have in front of us are *récits*, literary products, rather than records of possession, and furthermore, that *récits* are what all possessions are made of.

Another aspect of the book that is worth mentioning is the parallel analyses of the exorcism that took place mostly at the Mary-Magdalene sanctuary of Sainte Beaufort, and the trial, happening concurrently at the Parlement of Aix-en-Provence. These were two "psychodramas" (p. 235), Fanlo remarks, with two established liturgies and rituals (p. 80). One rite, especially, stands out in Fanlo's analysis, and this is the ritual of confession. Both the reconfigured liturgy of exorcism and the traditional procedure of judicial trials in cases of witchcraft accusations demanded an avowal, an admission of guilt, and an act of contrition or expiation. Indeed, the court used all its power to guarantee Gaufridy's confession, including repeated torture. At the end, of course, it achieved its goal, and the autographed manuscript of the confession still exists and is reproduced in *L'Évangile du démon* (pp. 302-15). Fanlo's careful reconstruction enables us to follow each twist and turn in the long process of shaping and reshaping the sorcerer's confession, for example his resistance to admitting the abuse of sacraments. But Gaufridy's suggestion that the devil might have anointed him with an ointment that erased his memory of the event obviously confirmed his collision with demons. His pathetic retractions lasted until his very last day, but only prolonged his torture, until, as was the case in the Soviet Purges, he wrote down in his own hand all that was expected of him. There is a fascinating parallel here that Fanlo demonstrates between two processes of reconstructing or inventing truthful (false?) memories: the judicial and the exorcismal. Michel Foucault, of course, pointed it out long ago in his own discussion of demonic possession. Fanlo's use of this and other observations of the philosopher adds a layer of sophistication to this important book. [4]

NOTES

[1] Sébastien Michaëlis, *Histoire admirable de la possession et conversion d'une pénitente, séduite par un magicien* (Paris: Chastellain, 1617); [François Dooms],

“De la vocation des magiciens et magiciennes par le ministère des demons” in Jean Le Normant, *Histoire véritable et memorable de ce qui c'est passé sous l'exorcisme de trois filles possédées és pais de Flandre* (Paris: Nicole Buon, 1623), Part II.

[2] Robert Mandrou, *Magistrats et sorciers en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1968); Sarah Ferber, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[3] Gabriella Zarri, *Le sante vive: Profezie di corte e devozione femminile tra '400 e '500* (Turin: Rosenberg and Sellier, 1990); Carlos Buil Puyol, *Inquisición y política en el reinado de Felipe IV* (Madrid: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1993); Anne J. Schutte, *Aspiring Saints: Pretense of Holiness, Inquisition, and Gender in the Republic of Venice, 1618-1750* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

[4] Michel Foucault, *Les anormaux: Cours au Collège de France, 1974-1975* (Paris: Gallimard & Le Seuil, 1999).

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