
H-France Review Vol. 20 (February 2020), No. 46

Marie-Hélène Sangla, *L'invention d'une Méditerranée, patrimoine, création, identité en Roussillon de la fin du XVIIIe siècle à l'entre-deux-guerres*. Collection Histoire de l'art 10. Perpignan: Presses universitaires de Perpignan, 2016. Figures, notes, and bibliography. 383pp. €28.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2354122607.

Review by Elizabeth C. Macknight, University of Aberdeen.

Tension often drives a good story. At the heart of Marie-Hélène Sangla's book is a story of tensions between national feeling and local identity. This is a study of the ways in which members of artistic and cultural milieux in Roussillon thought about and expressed their concurrent allegiances to France and to their region across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Published as a volume within a collection on the history of art, the book contains detailed analyses of a broad spectrum of fine and decorative artistic production, as well as of buildings and monuments including village churches, cloisters, fountains, urban homes, and municipal institutions. There is remarkably wide coverage of creative media, ranging from paintings, preparatory sketches and architectural drawings to statuettes, tapestries, sculpture, façades, and frescoes. Attention is carefully balanced between artwork in private ownership and structures and décor designed for public spaces in the department of Pyrénées-Orientales, notably in its prefectural city of Perpignan. A selection of specific works discussed by the author are illustrated in the book's sixty colour or black and white photographs.

The central narrative thread about a twin sense of belonging to France and to Roussillon links the two halves of the book treating different chronological stages. In addition to splitting the 150-year period into two shorter time spans, Sangla has chosen to make a more subtle thematic split. Chapters one to three, grouped under the subtitle "Un siècle de réflexion et d'action autour du patrimoine (1789-1880)," are mostly concerned with examples of tangible cultural and natural heritage. These include sites and monuments identified in nineteenth-century scientific investigations of antiquities and illustrated works for a wider learned readership about the geography, topography, and history of the Pyrénées-Orientales. This department in the south of France was created during the French Revolution from the former *comté* of Fenouillèdes and the province of Roussillon. Prior to 1789 Roussillon had been "defined" from an administrative point of view by the French monarchy and an intendant was appointed to manage its territory following the Treaty of the Pyrénées in 1659. Chapters four to six, grouped under the subtitle "Identité et création (1880-1935)," are oriented more toward examples of intangible cultural heritage. Issues pertaining to languages, regional dialects, and folklore feature strongly in this latter section. The author provides a rich analysis of literary publications from the turn of the century and interwar years to investigate how contemporaries perceived the relationship

between the French language and Catalan dialect, and how linguistic connections between Catalan and Occitan were understood.

Throughout her study Sangla ensures that the reader never loses sight of the interdependence of tangibles and intangibles as she weaves her story about artistic creation and identity implicated in the “invention of the Mediterranean.” This is an important achievement, for it requires the author to move away from a discipline-specific stance in order to adopt a rather more interdisciplinary approach to questions about culture, space, material objects, and people’s imaginings of the past. Sangla’s research and scholarship reveals her deep familiarity not only with the relevant art history literature but also with literatures in other fields such as archaeology, linguistics, natural sciences, and anthropology. In line with UNESCO’s definition, Sangla concentrates on the methods by which cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation whilst simultaneously being recreated by socially diverse communities and groups in response to their environment and their interaction with nature and history.

In the first part of the book, dedicated to the years 1789-1880, Sangla is concerned to trace the shifts in “French” meanings and interpretations of *patrimoine*, which could be said to have contributed to people’s feelings about the environment in which they lived in different regions of France. This exploration of the connections between “heritage” and emotional connectedness to place involves teasing out from archival records and publications the expressions of national sentiment that existed in productive tension with the expressions of sentiment about the Pyrénées-Orientales. Sangla’s micro-level analysis performed on case studies of *roussillonnais* restoration projects, involving actors at local and regional levels, is framed by the developments unfolding at the national level during the nineteenth century. Those developments included the beginnings of a systematic approach to identification and documentation of heritage under the July Monarchy. In 1830, at François Guizot’s instigation, the Ministry of the Interior hired art historian Ludovic Vitet and author Prosper Mérimée as inspectors of historic monuments to identify and catalogue France’s most significant sites and structures. From 1840 restoration of structures on the list of classed monuments was undertaken with the supervision of architects appointed by the Commission des monuments historiques. France’s first law on historic monuments was adopted on 30 March 1887, right at the end of the period under examination in the opening half of Sangla’s study.

Sangla introduces the reader to nineteenth-century figures who were active in the field of publishing about history, geography, and antiquities, as well as of managing and advising upon restoration of monuments in the Pyrénées-Orientales. Joseph Jaubert de Réart, François Jaubert de Passa, Pierre Puiggari, Dominique-Marie-Joseph Henry, and François Jalabert were among the men who built careers as scholarly authors and specialist advisers on architectural and artistic matters. As Sangla recounts, conservators acting on behalf of the state had to navigate their way through a gamut of operational and intellectual issues common to their profession. Practical matters such as the availability of artisans and materials, and financial constraints, occupied their minds as much as nebulous “higher” concerns such as respect for authenticity and religious sensibilities, or the value of oral testimony vis-à-vis written sources of evidence. The figure of François Jaubert de Passa looms large in the history of Pyrénées-Orientales as the chief inspector responsible for the conservation of historic monuments within the department from 1835. In this role Jaubert de Passa and his deputy Prosper de la Barrière, chevalier de Basterot, had to liaise with various ministries, notably those of the Interior and Public Instruction. Jaubert de Passa was a collaborator on the famous multi-volume publication, *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans*

l'ancienne France, a project led by Isidore-Justin-Severin Taylor, Charles Nodier, and Alphonse de Cailleux. Jaubert de Passa's personal acquaintance with Prosper Mérimée also served him well, aiding recognition of his competencies by officials in the French capital and leading to his nomination to the important departmental post. Sangla's methodical archival work underpins the narrative of bureaucratic struggles, collaborative efforts, and at times competing interests of local parties, as well as the fine portrayal of the personalities involved. She draws on an extensive range of documentation from private and public *fonds* deposited in the Archives départementales des Pyrénées-Orientales, Archives des Monuments historiques, Archives du diocèse de Perpignan, and Archives nationales.

In the second part of the book about the years 1880-1935 Sangla's purpose is to explore the nexus of artistic creativity and regional identity in Pyrénées-Orientales, relating it to how individuals and communities felt about their parallel allegiance to the French nation. She skillfully situates her analysis within the historiography of the regionalist movement in France. In the early twentieth century this regionalist movement was growing and enriching its intellectual bases established during preceding decades. It was characterised both by distinctive territorially-based activities and cultural production in various parts of the country as well as collaborative and promotional initiatives by umbrella organisations. Scholars have often studied the movement from the perspective of languages and literature; for example, they have examined the flourishing interest in regional dialects stimulated by the rediscovery and valorisation of centuries-old literary traditions and crafting of poetry and song. Sangla has gathered together much fascinating information about the intellectual roots of *roussillonnais* regionalism, highlighting its differentiation from the models offered within Catalonia and within Provence.

Sangla develops her argument with close attention to the theorists and activists at the core of the regionalist movement in Pyrénées-Orientales. Her archivally-based research on the politics and personalities in this part of the story about tension between national feeling and local identity makes for compelling reading. Sangla argues that the particularism of *roussillonnais* regionalism emerged out of loyalty to Mediterranean and Latin culture as well as to the traditions of the Catholic Church. One of its most prominent defenders was the bishop of Perpignan, Monseigneur Jules de Carsalade du Pont, a man of Gascon aristocratic origin. Born in 1847 in the department of Gers, Carsalade du Pont was ordained a priest in 1871 and became a teacher at the seminary in Auch where he established a museum dedicated to history and archaeology. From his appointment as bishop of Perpignan in 1899 Carsalade du Pont began to learn the Catalan dialect; perhaps as an extension of his intellectual interests, rather than for spiritual reasons, he authorised priests within the diocese to celebrate Mass in Catalan. In 1920, Carsalade du Pont founded the *Revue historique et littéraire du diocèse de Perpignan*, a publication through which he personally championed regional dialects. The Association de la presse littéraire, that supported the bishop's *Revue*, as well as other related journals, sought to build fraternal links between interested persons within the *roussillonnais* cultural milieu.

In addition to scouring the archives of specialist reviews put out by learned societies, Sangla has undertaken detailed research on artists, architects, and designers based in the Pyrénées-Orientales. Among the individuals who feature in the later chapters are Louis Delfau, Célestin Manalt, Han Coll, Henry Perrault, and Édouard Mas Chancel. Sangla discusses examples from their cultural production, devoting particularly in-depth treatment to the works of Gustave Violet, an art theorist, architect, potter, and sculptor. Through commissioned public sculptures for the town of Perpignan, Violet sought to convey an authentic "essence" common to the Catalan

people. The monument “Génie Catalan” by Violet at the town hall of Perpignan is one example of this artistic endeavour. Violet was heavily into allegoric representations of motherhood as a conduit for transmission of rural traditions, and the notion of woman as the “flesh of the countryside” (p. 283). Yet he and several other *roussillonnais* contemporaries in the early decades of the twentieth century also represented the female body in other ways as symbols of the Mediterranean ideal. Small statuettes of bathers and dancers were purchased by bourgeois collectors and exhibited in the galleries and art fairs of Paris and Barcelona.

In her conclusion about imaginings of the Mediterranean in Roussillon, Sangla reflects upon a passage in Gabriel Audisio’s *Sel de la mer* about the role of the sea being not to separate but rather to join together. The artistic and intellectual movements that Sangla has interpreted drew upon diverse influences from antiquity, Arabic, Aragonais, and Catalan cultures that are manifest in artworks and literary publications originating in the Pyrénées-Orientales of southern France. Roussillon in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, no less than in earlier times, was a geographic area where identities were shifting and unstable like the waves of the sea. It was also a frontier territory, a *pays* in which people were accustomed to border-crossings and simultaneously where some inhabitants defended deeply rooted traditions perceived to be as ancient and immutable as mountains.

L'invention d'une Méditerranée is a thought-provoking and beautifully produced book that will be welcomed by readers in a wide range of disciplines for its sensitive engagement with issues pertaining to languages and literature, art, architecture, religion, and natural environment. It is an ambitious, lively, and thoroughly researched treatment of a very fundamental subject: that of humans knowing that they belong to more than one culture and seeking to bring oppositional elements within those cultures into reconciliation.

Elizabeth C. Macknight
University of Aberdeen
e.macknight@abdn.ac.uk

Copyright © 2020 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