

Emmanuel Fureix, *L'Œil blessé. Politiques de l'iconoclasme après la Révolution française*, Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2019. 357 pp. 27.00€. (pb). ISBN 0-19-820717-X.

Review by Richard Wrigley, University of Nottingham.

The image chosen for the cover of *L'Œil blessé* is a suitably elaborate and many-layered introduction to the themes traversed within, as Emmanuel Fureix explains at the outset. A photograph shows four men on scaffolding, apparently engaged in chiselling away at and trying to detach an equestrian relief sculpture of Henri IV on the façade of the Hotel de Ville in Paris. Above Henri IV, the motto Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité is partially visible inscribed on the facade. Three of the men look down, as does Henri IV. However, the fourth man's face has been blanked out, adding a puzzling, and slightly disturbing element of this scene - who did this and why? Yet what we see is in fact a simulated act of iconoclasm, for the sculpture was not destroyed but removed to the interior of the building albeit with damage from bullets and crowbars, with the wholly unintended consequence that it survived the torching of the building in 1871 during the Commune. The sculpture in question, made by Philippe Henri Joseph in 1834 (and installed in 1838) had replaced one by Pierre Biard from 1606, which had survived until 1792, when it became a victim of a wave of iconoclasm directed at images of kings.

The way this episode--or saga--is made up several of facets exemplifies both the subtlety and depth of Fureix's research which run throughout his impressive and compelling account of political iconoclasm after the Revolution. A key question is that of agency, both that of those acting on the object-image, and also that of the viewer (ensorious, investigative, celebratory). In addition, the fact that the photograph has been tampered with adds a further dimension to the sense of active engagement with the sculpture and the image, and also the making sense of the image. Fureix rightly emphasises the fact that iconoclasm is an extremely contingent, variable sort of activity. One material aspect of this, which has to do with the nature of the image under attack, is that this most often involved altering rather than destroying an object, which inherently leads to less clear-cut judgements on what was at stake. In more historical terms, we have in this case a royal image from the seventeenth century, whose disappearance in 1792 corresponded to a relatively dramatic change of regime, followed by a retrospective reprisal re-enacted in 1871 on the replacement. The 1834 sculpture in due course became part of the collections of the Musée Carnavalet, at once a document in the history of Paris, but also a work of art.

The book has a complex structure, designed to show the variety of approaches needed to create a coherent account of its subject, and which also keeps in play continuities and their disruption. Three long chapters range across a panoramic diversity of material. The first chapter, "L'empire des signes et des images," is in the manner of an exposition of methods, at once mapping out the heterogeneous media and materials which will be reviewed, and also the synthesis of approaches drawn on in order to make suitably nuanced sense of the examples in question. This is tantamount to a thoughtful and supremely well-informed disquisition on how we should understand the nature and workings of iconoclasm. Another way of getting a sense of the range of his topic is to read through his copious list of archival sources where we find a lexicon of

iconoclastic incidents: on the one hand, the apprehending and confiscation of *signes séditeux*; on the other, records of the *enlèvement, mutilation, dégradation*, and *insultes* visited upon official imagery and sites. The second chapter, "Le désordre des signes, 1814-1830," covers the congested toing and froing of Napoleon and Louis XVIII, with its plethora of effaced and renewed symbols, and the turbulent years of the Restoration, in which the regime had to deal with the prolific residue not only of the Revolution, but the Empire. The third and final chapter, "Iconoclasme et révolutions, de 1830 à 1871," is less chronological, although it concludes with a series of portraits of successive phases under the heading "Cycles et discontinuités iconoclastes."

Although Fureix's title signals his focus on nineteenth-century France, effectively closing with the Commune, a high proportion of the materials and practices which make up his narrative derive from the Revolution. *Écharpes*, cockades, flags, liberty trees and caps, for examples, recur throughout, as do attacks on different royal symbols (such as the fleur de lys). Types of emblem forged in the early years of the Revolution endured through repeated phases of repression. They stand as evidence that, if, as so often asserted, there was a shortage of major monuments and substantial artistic productions created to commemorate the Revolution, it lived on in visual culture at the level of dress, badges, and individual gestures, as they were enacted under, and against, successive royal or imperial regimes. However, one could also draw from Fureix's brilliant exposition the conclusion that the people who acted iconoclastically were often conscious of historical precedent, whether wishing to renew a republican overwriting of royal emblems and images, or else, as was indeed the case during the Revolution itself, trying to deflect accusations of barbaric destructiveness which had been all too easily and reductively labelled *vandalisme*.

Indeed, Fureix's book is a compelling and significant complement to the existing literature on iconoclasm and the Revolution. Its enormous breadth and the richness of its documentation is matched by the detailed analyses which the author applies to his subject. It is precisely through the succession of major and minor incidents, with their mixture of personal witness and official accusatory documentation, that the dense and absorbing narrative texture is built up. A comparison which comes to mind are the writings of Maurice Agulhon, notably his two studies of Marianne, especially *Marianne au pouvoir. L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaine de 1880 à 1914*, because of the way he dug deep in archives provincial and metropolitan and built up an overview consisting of local examples, manifesting both recurrent motifs and idiosyncratic representations. This socio-iconographical study was underpinned by the kind of approach used in his earlier book, *La République au village. Les populations du Var de la Révolution à la Seconde République*.^[1] The role played by religion in shaping or interacting with attitudes to political imagery is another shared concern. One could say that Fureix inherits Agulhon's innovative engagement with visual material, which both integrates analysis within specific historical contexts, but also insists on combining imagery outside of conventional artistic hierarchies with the terra cognita of statues, paintings and prints. Fureix's documentation echoes the inclusive and meticulous construction of a picture of local conditions, motives, protagonists, and their intricate interactions.

One of the premises of Fureix's topic is that the proliferation of political images, especially once maximised through new media, created a superabundance of raw material for iconoclastic acts as one regime followed another. In place of the notion of the royal image as a magical emanation

of the king, the multiplication and dissemination of images of the sovereign rendered them more commonplace and contingent. This was partly the result of the new insignia of the regime in power having to take its place on official administrative documents, which were thereby all the more accessible to individual interventions.

Fureix also emphasises the way that the reading of signs varied across classes and, moreover, that judgements about such social difference were inscribed in official reports, as in the case of sceptical accounts in the early Restoration of Napoleonic sympathisers who claimed to see the three colours around the moon. A further aspect of the archival sources he uses to such fascinating effect is the way that they sometimes reveal quirky or eccentric behaviour and what might be termed inventive threats to exact iconoclastic punishment on images, insignia, and edifices. This is a corollary to attempts to apply more systematic campaigns of removal and effacement. In this case, there is some sense that, as in the matter of eliminating Napoleonic images under the Restoration--especially during the ebb and flow of the *Cent Jours*--there was an ambition to pursue such quarry, not only in public spaces, but also in private and domestic spaces, driven by the anxiety that subversive objects might be concealed and stored up ready to be displayed in anticipation of a reversal of royal fortune.

Broadly speaking, the book has a chronological structure, but my impression is that Fureix works towards a synthesis, using each phase to draw out lessons as to the evolving workings of iconoclasm, its modes, preoccupations, and techniques, rather than merely wishing to present an account of the way successive regimes either employed or were on the receiving end of types of updating of imagery. That said, Fureix offers a somewhat formalised analysis in his conclusion, a kind of taxonomy of iconoclastic actions as they occurred under different conditions, different types of regime, with individuals and/or collectivities being the primary protagonists, and taking account of the question of time (abrupt, fluid, regenerative) in relation to "image-breaking" and the aftermath, immediate and subsequent. That this follows his meticulously detailed narrative adds ballast to what otherwise might come across as a somewhat abstract proposition. Overall, Fureix's book constitutes an absorbing and lucid tour de force which should attract the attention of all those who work with visual culture and its political ramifications across nineteenth-century France. Given the richness and originality of the material, it is frustrating that there is neither a bibliography of secondary literature nor an index.

NOTE

[1] Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir. L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaine de 1880 à 1914* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989) and Agulhon, *La République au village. Les populations du Var de la Révolution à la Seconde République* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).

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