

BOOK REVIEW

Lok, Matthijs. *Europe Against Revolution: Conservatism, Enlightenment, and the Making of the Past*

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The main counterrevolutionary writers—Rivarol, Maistre, Bonald, Mallet du Pan, and Barruel—did not oppose the overcoming of the ancien régime, but distanced themselves from 1789 because, according to them, anarchy and despotism had taken over. Patrice Gueniffey convincingly suggests that their counterrevolutionary choice “manifeste moins . . . l’attachement au passé qu’une horreur du present.” His words resonated when reading Matthijs Lok’s book on how counterrevolutionary authors in the first decades of the nineteenth century reformulated a specific European past in original ways.

Lok’s book is a brilliant work that aims to emphasize how the construction of a specific European past—based on a set of institutions and values that made the continent exceptional—was also (if not mainly) the work of the enemies of the French Revolution. In their political polemic against 1789, they made constant recourse to history and invented a past of pluralism and freedom, thanks to which Europe experienced a centuries-long season of progress. Using and abusing the past to find support for a future without revolutions, these men thus gave shape to a historical Europeanism, around which the political debate on the meaning of the continent would develop in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The book is built around a few of the counterrevolutionaries whose works illuminate how a specific European political past was constructed. Right from the introduction, in which Lok illustrates the main aspects of the historical reconstruction by counterrevolutionary writers, it is made clear how porous the cultural boundaries between revolution and counterrevolution are. The enemies of 1789 shared the same cultural background with their opponents: they were familiar with the Enlightenment and the Anti-Lumières, they made cosmopolitanism their own, they had no nostalgia for a past in which they often did not recognize themselves, they admitted that the ancien régime and the churches had to be reformed, and they differed from their opponents namely on their rejection of nationalism, the poisoned fruit of 1789, to which they countered a cosmopolitanism capable of uniting so many different homelands—cities and villages, provinces and regions, states and empires.

Lok illustrates the ways in which at the beginning of the nineteenth century a peculiar vision of Europe was constructed by the writings of a number of counterrevolutionaries, to each of whom he dedicates a chapter. The analysis begins with Nicolas de Bonneville, an ardent revolutionary and the animator of the *Cercle Social*, a society that would favour revolutionary acceleration until the birth of the French Republic but would share nothing of the experience of the Terror. However, the analysis of Bonneville’s text on modern European history introduces the affinities—*maxime* cosmopolitanism—that the man shared with those who would become his adversaries. Subsequently, in order to illustrate the characteristic traits of counterrevolutionary historical thought, Lok reviews the Belgian Jesuit Feller, Louis XVI’s disgraced minister Alexandre de Calonne (whose cultural association in London with Edmund Burke he illustrates), the German jurist Adam Müller, the Germanic history professors Vogt and Heeren, and finally Joseph de Maistre and the Dutch Groen van Prinsterer.

Lok admits that the choice excludes a large part of Europe—one thinks of Italy and Spain, which would have offered not only ideas but also arms and weapons to the counterrevolution—although in reality, his selection is by no means limited, reflecting the borders of eighteenth-century Europe. Within this geographical framework, the analysis of the above-mentioned authors makes it possible

to highlight how historical Europeanism was the result of multiple suggestions, often of very different origins, such as the preservation of a universal history à la Bossuet, the insistence on the role of ancient institutions of the ancien régime, the rejection of the French *philosophie*, the calls for cosmopolitanism and perpetual peace. On the whole, the history of Europe that was taking shape oscillated between regret for a lost golden age and the hope that tradition would prevail over revolution, but it ended up reviving the reasons for a European primacy that the eighteenth century had so punctually magnified. In any case, the new history of Europe that emerged from the rejection of the French Revolution kept its distance from absolutism because it identified in political and cultural diversity, as well as in the plurality of governing institutions, the foundation of its specific freedom. A renewed image of European civilization was born, destined for a safe path and a mould where other forms of Europeanism would take shape.

Lok's book therefore constitutes an important work, destined to mark a landmark in European history studies, which until today have mostly insisted on the tradition linked to the importance of 1789.