

Miriam Eliav-Feldon, *Renaissance Imposters and Proofs of Identity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 304 p. ISBN 978-02-30547-063

This ambitious and wide-ranging book seeks to re-define the European early modern period as an “age of imposters.” Between 1500 and 1650, driven by a fear of heresy, of gypsies, of witches and of the poor, secular and ecclesiastical authorities regulated and sometimes punished suspected non-conformists in their midst. Eliav-Feldon asserts that fear of dissimulation drove early modern states to try to identify imposters more intensively than in earlier ages, with techniques as varied as branding the body of the criminal to issuing individuals passports for travel. With a talent for the telling anecdote and a broad knowledge of European history, Eliav-Feldon compresses into a short, easily digested volume, an introduction to the research on early modern deviants, outcasts and imposters. The volume’s aim to offer a major re-conceptualization of the early modern period falls short, however, in large measure because the broad-stroke approach taken here evokes the apparent paranoia of the age without explaining why it came about.

Although she acknowledges that during the Renaissance the very notion of personal identity was in flux and recognizes that this preoccupation probably sensitized Europeans to dissimulation, Eliav-Feldon makes it clear that the rise of self-conscious secular individualism is not her chosen object of study. Rather, her subject is the marginalized peoples of Europe and how authorities identified and persecuted them. By focusing on the social experience of outcasts and imposters, she draws compelling parallels between different sorts of marginalized individuals or groups. Transvestites, rogues posing as deserving poor, religious nonconformists, and ethnic minorities were all at one point or another discriminated against because they were caught failing to conform to mainstream Christian and civic norms.

One of the successes of the volume is its integration of Jewish experiences into a broad-ranging comparative analysis of European history: Spanish conversos, like gypsies and prostitutes throughout Europe, were expected to wear distinctive clothing and were barred from entering or living in certain neighborhoods; self-proclaimed Jewish ambassadors from the Middle East were treated with the same mixture of credulity and suspicion as Turkish emissaries and former Christian captives of the Barbary pirates returning to Europe; Jews accused of ritual murder and witches charged with cursing their neighbors were both assumed to have been perverting Christian rituals for diabolic ends.

Eliav-Feldon’s strong grounding in Mediterranean history results in a southern-inflected portrayal of these phenomena, but she draws examples from all over Western Europe to demonstrate that fear of imposters was a widespread preoccupation of elites. European authorities, from the Inquisitions to French legislators to German city councilors, regularly sought to impose gender and religious con-

formity on their populations and to distinguish clearly, through clothing or bodily markers, the honorable/honest from those impersonating normativity. In large measure because these traditional means of identifying imposters were inadequate, Eliav-Feldon demonstrates that states began to systematize new means of registering and documenting marginal populations. By the seventeenth century, captives, criminals, beggars and international travelers were increasingly provided with government-issued documents (which could be easily forged) that sought to prove their authenticity. Regulating deviants and mobile populations during the early modern period was the first step, she argues, toward the modern surveillance state under which we all now live.

Although Eliav-Feldon clearly demonstrates that European authorities feared dissimulation and repeatedly notes that early modern preoccupations with imposters, particularly their fear of the devil and of religious deviance, were different from our own, her reasons for singling out the early modern period as a decisive moment in the history of imposters are unclear. Her claim that the more widespread use of travel passports developed “for reasons connected neither to Renaissance individualism nor to the New Monarchies erecting elaborate state machineries, but rather to the general struggle against fraud and imposture” (200) is unsatisfying. She dismisses out of hand and fails to offer a convincing alternative to Valentin Groebner’s thesis in his 2007 volume *Who are You? Identification, Deception and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe* that new technological and institutional developments drove the European obsession with identification. Similarly, she does not grapple with the claims of most historians of the early modern witch hunt who argue that its intensification after 1500 was directly related to the rise of more assertive judicial institutions and the reception of Roman Law.

Eliav-Feldon has done readers a service in pointing out the widespread nature of the early modern obsession with imposters, but a compelling explanation for how and why this came to be will have to await further research in this exciting new field of investigation.

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Gabri van Tussenbroek, *Alzo zult gijlieden dat maken. Gebruik en ontwikkeling van bouwcontracten en bestekken in de Noordelijke en Zuidelijke Nederlanden tot 1650* (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2013) 272 p. ISBN 978-90-5997-159-2

Met zijn nieuwe boek *Alzo zult gijlieden dat maken* levert Gabri van Tussenbroek opnieuw een fundamentele bijdrage aan het bouwhistorisch onderzoek, dat de