

GREGOIRE KAUFFMANN. *Edouard Drumont*. Paris: Perrin, 2008.

Bertrand Joly, in his *Dictionnaire biographique et géographique du nationalisme français*, comments that, given the fascination with which allies, disciples, and enemies alike regarded the man who was arguably the most notorious polemicist of the nineteenth century, it is surprising that no rigorous scholarly work has been devoted to Edouard Drumont.<sup>1</sup> While a significant number of pages have been devoted to Drumont, his works, his ideology, and his legacy, it is true that the work has tended to consider Drumont's ideas alone, without stopping to explore how a two-bit journalist came to claim the title of the "pope of antisemitism." Grégoire Kauffmann's biography of Drumont goes a long way towards filling this void.

Kauffmann's work traces Drumont from his birth in Paris in 1844 as the son of a clerk, through his fame as the author of the virulently anti-Semitic and enormously popular *La France juive* and editor-in-chief of the influential daily newspaper *La Libre Parole*, to his decline and fall after the Dreyfus Affair and his death during the First World War. Along the way he paints the portrait of a man marked by contradiction, simultaneously a cynical seeker of fame and a true believer, a rabble-rouser and possible police agent, a dutiful son who nonetheless abandoned his mother after his father's confinement in a mental institution. Locating the roots of Drumont's antisemitism in his devout, if unconventional, religiosity following a conversion experience in the late 1870s, Kauffmann argues that even when Drumont flirted with socialism and even anarchism in the 1890s, his heart, along with his major support base, remained Catholic. Kauffman also makes the case for decoupling nationalism and antisemitism, suggesting that Drumont's antisemitism, especially in its earlier stages, was internationalist in tenor and that Drumont did not embrace nationalist and *revanchiste* rhetoric until the Dreyfus Affair made it expedient.

Although Kauffmann effectively balances his characterizations of Drumont the individual and Drumont the theorist, at times the work suffers from a lack of context beyond the immediate. For example, although Kauffmann's evocation of the ways in which Drumont's fear of hereditary insanity insinuated itself into his work is well-executed and provocative, the author fails to consider as well the obsession with mental illness and pervasive use of medical language to describe social conditions noted by historians of the Third Republic. This failure to contextualize stands in sharp contrast to Kauffmann's scrupulous and creative archival work, made all the more impressive given that Drumont's personal papers and library – unlike, for example, those of his allies Paul Déroulède and Maurice Barrès – are long lost. His discovery of Drumont's correspondence with prominent Jesuit Stanislas Du Lac, correspondence which laid the groundwork for Drumont's conversion experience and paved the way for *La France juive*, is perhaps the most spectacular demonstration of the rewards of looking beyond standard source material. Of note as well is Kauffmann's use of private archives and interviews, including one with Drumont's step-granddaughter. This agglomeration of sources gives Kauffmann insight into Drumont's intellectual and personal development, allowing for a better understanding of the work of a man who, from his youth, as Kauffmann demonstrates, defied classification.

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<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Joly, *Dictionnaire biographique et géographique du nationalisme français (1880-1900)*, (Paris : Champion, 2005), 142.

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