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Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Rewriting Saints and Ancestors: Memory and Forgetting in France, 500-1200*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. Pp. xiv + 362. Map, figure, notes, appendices, bibliography, and index. \$79.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8122-4636-0

Review Essay by Yitzhak Hen, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

A new book by Constance Bouchard is always a reason for celebration. From its title, you can never tell what exactly it is about, but you can rest assured that it will be well written, meticulously researched, and persuasively argued. *Rewriting Saints and Ancestors* is no exception. It bears all the “Bouchard” trademarks of a thought-provoking book and an engaging read. I myself found it extremely exciting for two reasons: the topic and the arrangement of the chapters.

Ever since the publication of Michael Clanchy’s ground-breaking book *From Memory to Written Record*, memory and its interaction with the written word has become a recurrent theme in studies of medieval life and thought.[1] Some seminal books, such as Rosamond McKitterick’s *The Carolingians and the Written Word*, Mary Carruthers’s *The Book of Memory*, or Patrick Geary’s *Phantoms of Remembrances*, made an enormous impact on our understanding of the ways in which memory gradually gave way to written records, as well as the ways in which men and women recorded, interpreted, and used their memories of the past.[2] Consequently, “memory” and “literacy” have become in the past three decades or so the most frequent buzz-words in studies of medieval society and culture, second only to “gender” and “identity.” *Rewriting Saints and Ancestors* builds on this well-established scholarly tradition of focusing on the interface between memory and written documents. But, as its author clearly states at the very beginning, this book takes “the study of medieval memory one step further, using it as a tool to ask questions about both the political and the ecclesiastical history of France in the early and high Middle Ages” (p. 4). In other words, Bouchard is less interested in how people recorded their memories of the past than in how written records were designed to (and in actuality effectively did) create, shape, and re-shape the image of a fictional past. She calls this phenomenon “creative memory,” a parallel to what has long been identified as “creative history” in writings from Antiquity and the Middle Ages.[3]

Since Bouchard is interested in the ways the past was creatively remembered and recorded, the core of her book is a critical reading of written sources, and the various sources she chose dictated the structure of her book. Each of the twelve chapters in *Rewriting Saints and Ancestors* centers around a particular type of written record and addresses specific issues within the process of “creative memory.” The first and the second chapters give a brief introduction to cartularies, which evolved into a well-defined genre of its own in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries. As Bouchard points out, those who collected and edited the documents preserved in their archives did not create written historical accounts, but rather reorganised and, to some extent, invented the documentary memory of their past, making it part of the present. Similarly, the third chapter delineates how the monastic chronicles of the high Middle Ages were another way of organizing and presenting the past in a way that would be both comprehensible and useful to the present.

In chapter four, Bouchard turns her focus to the Carolingian era, a significant period of literary production in the West. Chapter four is dedicated to the ninth-century polyptyques, those detailed inventories of monastic holdings, which were produced as part of an effort to organise memory and fix it for the future. The fact that, unlike charters, the Carolingian polyptyques were not copied in the eleventh and twelfth centuries implies that although not completely ignored, they were deliberately forgotten. Chapter five deals with two famous Carolingian forgeries—the so-called Le Mans Forgeries and the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals—both of which were an exercise in creating a useful past by combining authentic documents with pure fabrications. The various strategies used by Charlemagne’s court scholars in order to shape the memory of the early Carolingians and their ancestors are the core of the sixth and the seventh chapters; whereas chapter eight adds the monastic perspective.

The eighth century—the transitional period between Merovingian and Carolingian rule—was a true time of forgetting, as Bouchard argues in the ninth chapter. The relative documentary silence suggests that it was a time of social breakdown and reorganisation, perfect for the new dynasty to consolidate its power in Francia. The last three chapters of the book concentrate on the Merovingian period, exploring how the noble (chapter ten), monastic (chapter eleven), and saintly (chapter twelve) memories of the past were used and abused in Merovingian Gaul.

Those who are familiar with the various sources used by Bouchard will find very little to disagree with in her analyses and insights. Some of her observations were already made (many by Bouchard herself) in previous studies, and others could be anticipated by reading the recent scholarship on the matter.[4] What is appealing in Bouchard's *tour de force* is the fact that she manages to place her painstaking analyses against a broader historical and historiographical context and that she chose to do so in a most creative way, by looking backwards, from the twelfth century down to the Merovingians. I found that arrangement extremely exciting, although I am not sure it does justice to Bouchard's argument and to her audience. As she explains, "the reverse chronology was chosen in order to emphasize that the central concern is not particular events but rather the memory of those events" (p. 6). But, by doing so, Bouchard relies on the fact that her readers already know the previous chapter in Frankish history, otherwise they will not be able to appreciate the nuances and complexity of her analyses. Having said that, Bouchard's book deserves full admiration for its clarity, prowess, and panache. Hence, it would be unfair to point out some minor inaccuracies or to carp at this massively learned study. All I should like to do is to point at some issues for further research that may add to and strengthen the argument presented by Bouchard.

First, there is no doubt that written documents, as masterfully argued by Bouchard herself, had a crucial role in forging the memory of past events and social institutions. But written documents were only part of the game. Other cultural components, such as architecture, art, music, rituals, and liturgical celebrations, also played a seminal role in constructing the memory of the past. It was only the combination of these cultural elements with the written word that made "creative memory" so effective and enduring. An excellent case in point is provided by the liturgical sources. The masses for the king and his entourage, as well as the *laudes regiae*, to give just one example, project a certain political image that was, to a certain extent, the result of the complex process of "creative memory." These masses were said in churches throughout the kingdom, and their audience was much larger than the readership of any cartulary at any given time.[5] The messages embedded in the liturgy were disseminated far and wide, and their important role in forging communal memory cannot be ignored.

Second, it would be interesting to see how gender manipulated the shaping of memory. Bouchard mentions in passing the fact that the *Annals of Metz* were probably written by a woman, possibly by Gisela, Charlemagne's sister (p. 286, n. 51). Women were undoubtedly part of the game, and as Yaniv Fox has recently pointed out, they played an impressive role as guardians of family memory and as shapers of familial elite identity.[6] Hence, looking at things from a gendered perspective may add an illuminating dimension to our understanding of the social processes and agendas that stood behind the re-organisation and fabrication of past memories.

Finally, in order to get a better understanding of "creative memory," we should study our documents in their codicological context as well. We are doing exactly that with cartularies. But whenever we are dealing with histories, official letters, hagiographical texts, or legal documents, we tend to separate the specific work we are interested in from the works that were copied before and after it. I believe we should approach each of these codices as a coherent whole that can profitably be studied as a reflection of "creative memory." A fine example of such a codex is Paris, BnF lat. 2777 (commonly, but unjustly, known as the *formulae* of Saint-Denis), which touches upon several of the issues discussed by Bouchard in her book. This late ninth-century manuscript contains a collection of twenty-five letters and privileges, most of which in formulaic form, as well as the earliest known Frankish version of the *Constitutum Constantini*. Since it relies on material from Saint-Denis from the time of Fulrad, Maginarius and Fardulfus, it would be interesting to see how the compiler of this compendium endeavours to re-shape the memory of Saint-Denis and the early Carolingians.

There is still much work to be done, but Bouchard's *Rewriting Saints and Ancestors* will be the starting point for any future discussion of "creative memory" in early medieval France.

NOTES

[1] Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979).

[2] Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). See also Rosamond McKitterick, ed., *The Uses of Literacy in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[3] See, for example, Doron Mendele, "'Creative History' in the Hellenistic Near East in the Third and Second Century BCE: The Jewish Case," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 2 (1988): 13-20. See also the various papers in J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, ed., *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays presented to Richard William Southern* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes, eds., *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Pierre Chastang, ed., *Le passé à l'épreuve du présent: Appropriations et usages du passé du Moyen Âge à la Renaissance* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008).

[4] See, for example, Constance B. Bouchard, "Episcopal *Gesta* and the Creation of a Useful Past in Ninth-Century Auxerre," *Speculum* 84 (2009): 1-35; eadem, "High Medieval Monks Contemplate Their Merovingian Past," *Journal of Medieval Monastic Studies* 1 (2012): 41-62; eadem, "Reconstructing Sanctity and Refiguring Saints in Early Medieval Gaul," in Karl F. Morrison and Rudolph M. Bell, eds., *Studies on Medieval Empathies* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013), pp. 91-114; Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); eadem, *Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2006); and Helmut Reimitz, "Cultural Books of a Common Past: History, Identity and Ethnicity in Merovingian Historiography," in Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann, eds., *Strategies of identification: Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013), pp. 257-301.

[5] I have discussed some of these aspects in my *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul to the Death of Charles the Bald (877)*, Henry Bradshaw Society, subsidia 3 (London: The Boydell Press, 2001).

[6] Yaniv Fox, *Power and Religion in Merovingian Gaul: Columbanian Monasticism and the Frankish Elites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

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