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Geoffrey Koziol, *The Politics of Memory and Identity in Carolingian Royal Diplomas: The West Frankish Kingdom (840-987)*. Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 19. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2012. xix + 661 pp. Map, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$145.00 U.S (cl.); 100.00 €. ISBN 978-2-503-53595-1.

Review essay by Hans J. Hummer, Wayne State University

Spoiler alert: Geoffrey Koziol has written a magnificent and rich examination of west Frankish politics from the reign of Charles the Bald to the end of the Carolingian line in 987. Whereas the analysis and adjudication of narrative sources form the spine of most political histories, and royal diplomas play supporting roles to fill out, correct, or add texture to the reconstituted narrative, Koziol has reversed this order. Narrative sources, as well as other genres, are made handmaidens to the diplomas that, he argues, were central to the stories kings wished to tell, the memories they wished to cultivate, and the alliances they wished to establish. The driving analytical concept is the idea that diplomas were performative acts; that is to say, they *were* the politics through which policies were constituted, commemorated, or advertised. This is to be distinguished from treating diplomas either as performances of political decisions already made or as dispositive legal documents and thus acts of a routinely functioning administration.

The book is divided into two parts, a first with seven chapters on diplomas; and a shorter, second part that applies the lessons of part one to an examination of the enigmatic careers of Charles the Simple and Robert of Neustria.

The first chapter introduces “Charters, Diplomas, and Performative Acts” (pp. 17-62). Diplomatic scholarship, and by extension the entire source editing project, has been both a blessing and a curse to the Carolingian historical enterprise. On the one hand, the “science” of diplomatics has established rules for judging truth or falsity of charters in order to secure sources for the writing of history. On the other hand, the authoritative critical editions have eclipsed the manuscripts themselves and subtly transmuted documents so that they all but seem as if they had been written by scribes acting as if they were the early medieval equivalents of Mitarbeiter at the Monumenta Germaniae Historica. If historians have long admired the achievements of diplomatists, they have also chafed at the control and remained attuned to the variability and pragmatism of medieval charters. In recent decades, many medievalists have been going back to the manuscripts to get behind the critical editions and deal with the documents actually seen and used, rather than the (artificial) standardized texts produced by editors.[1] Koziol does a good deal of this himself, examining the manuscripts of diplomas for tantalizing interpretive cues and clues, yet as he concedes in his sympathetic survey of “*Diplomatik* and *Urkundenforschung*” (pp. 17-42), the toilsome work of editors remains fundamental to any analysis of diplomas. Indeed the weight and progress of diplomatic scholarship itself, he notes, have drawn attention to the celebratory nature of royal documents and the irregularity of practices, so that as studies have accumulated, charters have begun to look ever less like evidence for the routine administration of a functioning state. This realization, in combination with the insights of pragmatic social history, has established that Carolingian diplomas rest upon personal and associative networks. Koziol acknowledges his debts to this scholarship and seeks to build on it by augmenting the German work done on high Carolingian and east Frankish diplomas with a study of the west Frankish acts, to provide an “analytical narrative” and bring some order to an immense range of specialized studies, and finally to offer tightly contextualized examinations of the performative dimensions to specific acts. He emphasizes that these performative acts are not merely rhetorical; they are records of actual actions and

speeches that were performed as a kind of political liturgy. Moreover, they cannot be evidence of routine administration because they are too few and cluster around specific political conjunctures. Further, the people who drew them up were usually the beneficiaries, either personally or as members of the benefiting institution.

Chapters two and three examine the accession and succession acts of kings ranging from Charles the Bald to Louis d'Outremer. Accession acts were issued to mobilize support for claims to kingship, which often took weeks or months. In a world without a mechanism for the clean transfer of power, kingship had to be won. Consequently, these accession acts usually followed upon successful military campaigns and accrued to strategically located monasteries. Succession acts were confirmations of predecessors' grants to demonstrate one's rightful rulership of a territory. These were the events that usually proclaimed one a ruler, rather than the anointing; and the grants were dispensed to institutions closely associated with predecessors whom the claimant considered legitimate. That is, the extant accession and succession diplomas are not random survivals, nor are they evidence of monasteries opportunistically fleeing kings for rights as they happened to pass nearby.

Chapters four and five turn to the diplomas of Charles the Bald and those issued after his reign, respectively. Koziol recapitulates the narrative of decline for west Francia and the role that diplomatic evidence has played in telling that story: the number of diplomas decline, and those that have come down to us are scandalously sloppy by comparison with those of Charles of Bald. Koziol accepts the broad outlines of this narrative, which does track with the emergence of the territorial principalities in the 880s, so that diplomas came to express alliance and the collectivity of power, rather than Carolingian royal majesty. Be that as it may, the diplomas of Charles the Bald also reveal that the territorial magnates did not suddenly appear in the 880s; they can be traced to Charles's manipulation of loyalties and lay abbacies and the complaints of corruption and calls for reform of church property that ensued. Charles gave in to these demands, though always in ways that dovetailed with his own ambitions, so that properties were assigned to monasteries particularly important to him and his loyalists. As a result, his later diplomas reveal a select handful of powerful magnates who in effect exercised regional spheres of authority.

Chapter five offers a perceptive and sympathetic exploration of late-ninth- and early-tenth-century diplomas. Koziol argues that these diplomas are ripe for performative analysis because they were limited to fewer important players (both individuals and institutions) and because charters of this era were more open to incidental narrative details. Much of the chapter is devoted to Odo, whose diplomas betray the absence of an established court network and the devolution of writing to provincial institutions. While the irregularity of style and content is a reflection of the turbulence of the period, the diplomas were also more interactive, meditative about the past, and express alliance formation, rather than the assignment of favors from on high. That said, Koziol admits that the paucity of diplomas after the first few years of Odo's reign points to the breakdown of the wider west Frankish political community as magnates concentrated on developing their own regional power. The diplomas issued in Odo's latter years, and during the reigns of his tenth-century successors, were fewer because diplomas were now limited to high political moments orchestrated to affirm the preeminence of a great magnate or the restoration of a king.

Chapter six treats the diplomas of monastic reform, itself part and parcel of wider anxieties about an undivided church and empire that had been bound together by the trans-regional aristocracy. This explains the persistence of far-flung aristocratic connections into the tenth century and the emergence of alliances of *amicitia* in the late ninth century as a means to reconstitute peace and wholeness. The bonds of *amicitia* are visible in the monastic memorial books (*libri memoriales*) of east Francia and in west Francia in charters. Monastic reform was crucial because the commemorative prayers of reformed monks bound families, monks, and Heaven into an integrated community. The monasteries most deeply implicated in these reforms could trace their genealogy of demands back to complaints made to Charles

the Bald. Having thus framed the chapter, Koziol turns to the diplomas. The alliances outlined in the previous chapter are more clearly identified now as monastic alliances that paralleled the alliances of the monasteries' lay lords. In other words, magnates might jump on the reform bandwagon not only out of sincere spiritual conviction (which seems to have been real), but also because reform entailed the transformation of a monastery's identity and its realignment to a political alliance. In this way power brokers engineered alliances that spanned regions and redirected the centrifugal forces of disintegration to the re-formation of political communities. Again, Koziol insists that the patterns of surviving diplomas are hardly arbitrary, that some monasteries received lots of charters because they were important, which in turn explains these institutions' attention to preservation, and thus the availability of their diplomas to posterity.

Chapter seven turns to the issue that troubles medievalists of all stripes, especially those working with diplomas: forgery. The issue is not limited to the technical diplomatic problem of sifting true from false charters (though this remains a basic concern) because some diplomas can be authentic yet make false claims, and others can be technical forgeries but reproduce accurate claims. The scale and frequency of forging documents, Koziol says, point to the larger question of motive and why people did it with such regularity and ease. He works through the various explanations: verification of documents was difficult, and, besides, like the steroid era in baseball, everyone was doing it, so why be left at a disadvantage? Subjective and self-righteous notions of truth also provided a rationale to concoct claims or entire documents that the author and patron felt should have been there. On the other hand, we are still confronted, he points out, by contemporaries' outrage at the idea of forgery and their well-developed insistence on rules and concern at violations of them. Koziol situates the phenomenon within a wider discussion of the rampant lying and ax-grinding that went on in Carolingian histories and the erasing or rehabilitation of individuals in other commemorative sources such as the *libri memoriales*. Thus, histories and commemorative books were, like diplomas, also performative acts. Charters were considered "true" if the person advocating for a diploma was adjudged a true (i.e. righteous) person by his array of oath helpers, whose support and testimony attested to standing, power, and influence. Charters themselves were not dispositive; rather they were material witnesses to the words and actions that attested to the veracity of the claims made at the time of the transaction. Thus, forged acts, even bald ones, demonstrated the power of the person who succeeded in having his diploma vindicated and the concomitant mocking and humiliation of enemies. Or they might, in the case of the failed Le Mans forgeries launched during the reign of Charles the Bald, stand as a forlorn witness to the poverty of influence at court.

In part two of the study, Koziol shows how diplomas might connect us to the personal aspirations and the identity of individual kings, so that we might understand them as more than cynical political operators. He wants to get in touch with human beings. Consequently, chapter eight on Robert of Neustria opens with a discussion of "Stories, Memories and Diplomas," which argues that diplomas offer excellent fodder for stories because they were meant to tell stories (pp. 409-414). This explains why they were saved at all and sometimes woven into histories that were little more than narratives of diplomas. Koziol admits that the gapped record of the early tenth century, especially between the years 903-918, presents challenges of interpretation, but he asserts that the context worked out and laid down in previous chapters provides a productive framework for inferences. He argues that the tense relationship between Robert and Charles the Simple, in combination with the transformation of diplomas into acts of alliance, means that the diplomas of the period are particularly revealing of contrasting aspirations and minds. That is, they allow "a significant reinterpretation of one of the most important events of the ninth and tenth centuries" (p. 414). Koziol rehearses the narrative accounts of the period before 903 and after 918, which depict a fraught relationship between Charles and Robert. On the basis of Charles's diplomas, however, their relations have been assumed to have been excellent during this fifteen-year interlude, so that only a compressed and combustible series of events beginning in 920 led to Robert's rebellion, his election as king, his death in battle against Charles, and Charles's sudden capture by the villainous Herbert of Vermandois. Koziol thinks this is incorrect. The length of

memories rooted in familial rivalry, differing conceptions of kingship, and the long continuity of Robert's clientele point toward simmering distrust, exacerbated by Charles's entertainment of the ambitions of the Robertians' mortal rivals, the Normans. The abbey of Saint-Denis in particular became a bone of contention because it was so closely associated with Charles the Bald, to whose legitimizing legacy every royal aspirant, Carolingian or Robertian, staked his claims. From Robert's lone surviving diploma, Koziol infers an "entire political theory" based on the collective wisdom of the leading lay magnates of the realm (p. 457).

Robert's diploma contrasts sharply with the more authoritarian sentiments of Charles the Simple's charters. Koziol recapitulates the traditional view of Charles, whose surname, the Simple, supposedly expresses his ignominious failures. In reaction to this, more recent treatments have taken to calling him Charles the Straightforward to emphasize that he was not a dullard but sincere and direct.<sup>[2]</sup> Koziol's examination of the semantic field, however, reveals a strong association of monastic simplicity, or innocence, with someone perceived to be naïve and unduly trusting. Koziol concludes that Charles was in the end too trusting of his exalted sense of himself as a Carolingian king whose destiny could not be withstood. The problem, however, was that his conception of majestic Carolingian kingship was backward-looking and out of step with the drift toward notions of collective rule. Koziol finds justification for this interpretation in Charles's selective genealogical reminiscences and the distinctive sentiments of his diplomas, which betray a close attachment to places of dynastic memory and lofty expressions of Gelasian majesty that subordinated magnates to kings, as in the days of Charles's Carolingian forefathers. These sentiments were activated in Charles's commitment to comprehensive monastic reform and the ending of lay abbacies as part of his program to exalt his own authority and undermine the magnates' pillars of support. In this sense, Koziol sees Charles as comparable to Louis the Pious, whose elegant imperial schemes ran afoul of aristocratic opposition and provoked rebellion.

The book makes valuable contributions to diplomatic scholarship and offers a stimulating demonstration of how one might coax to life the apparent sterility of diplomatic evidence. Anyone working with late Carolingian diplomas will want to consult the explications of particular diplomas advanced here and the vast bibliographic edifice that accompanies them. The study also adds a crucial dimension to the reevaluation of Charles the Bald and the long shadow his reign cast over the formation of early France. Charles has attracted much attention over the last several decades, but mostly from the perspective of high Carolingian politics. Here, we view Charles the Bald from the other end of the telescope, from the perspective of his wake in the late Carolingian period. More broadly, Koziol's study makes a fundamental contribution to the ongoing reevaluation of Carolingian political culture which has done much to illuminate the opacity of Carolingian institutions and practices.

This is a long book, too long and detailed for anyone but specialists, though Koziol's characteristically irreverent wit and lively style help the 563 pages of text and the density of analysis go down easily. I myself particularly enjoyed the entertaining discussion of the lying liars of Carolingian historiography, even if I have some reservations about depicting their deceptions as lying. The humanity evident throughout, from the dedication to the last page, perhaps explains the author's eagerness to look beyond the semantic puzzles and political impulses exhibited in diplomas to the voices, actions, and sentiments of the flesh and blood people who once existed, but whose careers lie buried beneath layers of diplomatic scholarship or whose aspirations are often considered unknowable in these postmodern times. The book stands as a reminder, too often forgotten, that historians are called not to declare what they cannot know or to engage in reflexive revision, but to take matters in hand and animate the past with a disciplined imagination. People really were sorely aggrieved; their sense of justice, no matter how self-serving, was deeply felt; and some kings were vilified for good reasons because they were, well, failures.

Any study as rich and daring as this one is bound to provoke questions and leave many on the table. Koziol frequently asserts that this or that feature of his diplomas is characteristically west Frankish, though in the absence of deeper comparative work, the claims remain provisional. In some cases they

seem not to be true. For example, did west Francia really prize “the consensual nature of politics” more than east Francia? (p. 311) Were not the impulses of consensus politics equally strong, and indeed activated, during the reign of another early tenth-century king, Henry the Fowler of east Francia?

Koziol also wants to insist that the extant diplomas more or less faithfully reproduce the patterns of distribution that once existed. I find the contention plausible, though at times he makes it sound as if the absolute numbers of charters have roughly remained the same. In any case, the point receives more insistence than is perhaps necessary since the conclusions Koziol draws would hardly be affected if more diplomas suddenly were to appear. More diplomas would only present more grist for elucidating the specific conjunctures surrounding their performance, and so on, which would only sharpen and add depth to the arguments he advances. In a similar vein, Koziol may push other inductions further than many will be comfortable with, particularly in his exploration of the careers of Charles the Simple and Robert of Neustria, though he is up front about this, and his conclusions are imminently plausible.

Lastly, the epilogue might have speculated on the similarity of Carolingian practices to modern ones, since the histories we write about the past necessarily represent commentaries on our own times. Koziol plays up to the reigning conceit that modern scholarship is slowly uncovering what *they* in the past believed and how *they* acted, in contrast to how *our* modern government works. But how far is this true? How consistently routine and administrative is the modern state? Are not many documents of state today performative and subject to narrow political conjunctures? Initiatives are conjured after a tragedy to give voice to popular discontent, only to be shelved once the moment has passed. A bill “is 1,300 pages loonngg!,” a senator might screech, theatrically brandishing a pile of papers for the cameras as a symbol of a bureaucracy gone haywire. In response to criticisms of nihilism, an opposition party quickly trots out a skimpy twelve-page outline in response, brandished in turn as evidence—despite its vacuousness—of an alternative “plan.” Perhaps we are not as different as we believe. And if we can acknowledge that, we may understand Carolingians politics even better: the good, the bad, and the ugly.

## NOTES

[1] Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); Jason Glenn, *Politics and History in the Tenth Century: the Work and World of Richer of Reims* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Richard Landes, *Relics, Apocalypse, and the Deceits of History: Ademar of Chabannes (989-1034)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[2] Jason Glenn, *Politics and History in the Tenth Century*; Janet Nelson, “Rulers and Government,” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume III, c. 900-c. 1024*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 95-129.

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