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Kirrily Freeman, *Bronzes to Bullets: Vichy and the Destruction of French Public Statuary, 1941-1944*. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2009. xviii + 246 pp. Maps, tables, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. ISBN 978-0-8047-5889-5

Review by Robert Aldrich, University of Sydney.

Among the other French victims of the Second World War were between 1527 and 1750 statues melted down for copper—copper was four-fifths of the composition of bronze—that was then shipped to Germany for the armaments industry. It is often thought that the German occupiers held responsibility for the destruction of the statues; they and their Vichy allies allegedly targeted allegorical monuments to the nation, liberty and the republic, and the statues of the heroes of the Revolution and the Third Republic whom they despised. In her concluding historiographical chapter, Kirrily Freeman examines the tradition, part of the Resistance myth, that the French authorities tried to preserve this monumental heritage in the face of the iconoclasm perpetrated by the Germans. However, Freeman convincingly shows that much in this view is false.

The primary motive behind the smelting of statues was the German demand that France supply copper for its industries. The French people were ordered to provide metal voluntarily, then an *impôt métal* was imposed, with first cash and later vouchers for wine (though the scarcity of wine meant that the payments were seldom made) distributed in exchange for the machinery, musical instruments, stills and kettles, café countertops, spare parts and other metal turned over to the authorities. Supplies nevertheless remained insufficient for the Germans who, elsewhere in Europe, confiscated and melted church bells. In France, however, the close relationship between the Vichy regime and the Catholic Church saved the bells, and statues paid the price, their destruction mandated by a decree of Marshal Pétain on 11 October 1941. *Monuments aux morts* to Franco-Prussian War and First World War soldiers gained exemption, as did statues of Joan of Arc, Henri IV, Louis XIV and Napoleon; a provision that statues with great historic or aesthetic value be spared saved very few, although statues on private property generally went untouched. Committees set up around France submitted lists of statues worthy of being kept, but central officials in Vichy often radically shortened the lists, consigning even more to the furnaces.

Freeman's study is a fascinating analysis of the destruction of the monuments, with many details about the economic aspects of the metal shipments, the administration set up to manage the requisition of statues and the reaction it provoked. She comes to some significant conclusions. First, she suggests that there was no direct attack on symbols of the republican regime; statues were taken for their metal value not their symbolic significance, even if the removal did have the side benefit for Vichy of getting rid of monumental enemies. (Stone statues of figures condemned by the National Revolution remained standing.) Secondly, she shows that the Vichy regime (and ultimately Admiral Darlan) was willingly complicit in the destruction. Vichy continued to say to the French that the requisition of monuments served solely to provide metal for French industry and copper sulphate for viticulture, all the while complying with the shipment of all of the metal to Germany. The post-war memoirs of *fonctionnaires* involved exculpate themselves — they plead that they

tried to save statuary -- but the archival evidence proves that Vichy agreed to the German plan and thoroughly and efficiently enforced the destruction of the monuments. Thirdly, Freeman demonstrates that the demolition created relatively little reaction in Paris, a city with a plethora of monuments following the 'statuemanía' of the Third Republic, and some were pleased to be rid of mediocre nineteenth-century works. In the provinces, however, the story was different.

Provincial officials, especially mayors, reacted strongly against the destruction of their patrimony, protesting at considerable personal risk about loss of adornments to their towns and the toppling of figures of native sons and local heroes. Freeman links this reaction to the regionalism still strong in France, and ardently nurtured by Vichy. Destruction of provincial monuments, thus, seemed not only an attack on local heritage but also a betrayal of the very ideals of regionalism that the regime promoted. The smelting of statues counted among the many Vichy actions that alienated a population not necessarily opposed to some goals of the National Revolution.

Freeman's volume includes many micro-histories of conflicts about particular statues, one of the most interesting of which is the destruction of a monument to Frédéric Mistral in Arles. Mistral himself disliked the statue, which (like many erected under the Third Republic) had little artistic value, but its destruction represented an attack on Provence and on the revival of cultural regionalism for which Mistral served as a major proponent. The empty plinths in Arles and throughout France also served their value as sites for assemblies and the leaving of flowers; on one appeared a note (which police quickly removed) saying that the missing gladiator had gone to join the maquis. A number of statues were recast after the war, though many others were never replaced; in the 1950s, funds and interest lacked to recreate statues of often forgotten figures.

Bronzes to Bullets, developed from a doctoral dissertation at the University of Waterloo and based on research in archives of more than a dozen *départements* and cities, is a very fine little book. Freeman might have said more on the German destruction of monuments; only in passing does she refer to their dynamiting of a statue to General Mangin in Paris and destruction of a monument in Reims to black soldiers in the Great War. Something more could be said, as well, on Vichy commemoration of its heroes. A few details could have been deleted and some quotations condensed with little loss, and it would have been good for the specific illustrations (which are excellent), contained in portfolios between chapters, to have been signalled in the text. One regrets that the publisher did not include a header in the endnotes with an indication of chapter or page of the text to make it easier for readers to locate particular notes.

Monuments, statues and memorials, carved in stone or cast in bronze, are not silent witnesses. The passing of time turns 'great men' into little known figures, but statues also attract crowds and focus ceremonies and commemorative gestures, and they suffer defacement and demolition. A change in regime often sees the redesign of the commemorative landscape. The urge to put up monuments endures -- in Paris, recent additions have included the statue of General de Gaulle outside the Grand Palais, and monuments to the dead of the Algerian War and to the emancipation of slaves. Freeman's book, in providing an authoritative study of the monumental cleansing of wartime France, provides a persuasive argument that the destruction responded to the exigencies of the German war machine, aided by cooperation from Vichy authorities, rather than to pointedly ideological concerns. But in the provincial reaction to the destruction that she documents, we also see the political, cultural and sentimental stakes vested in monuments that embodied local and national heritage.

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