

## H-France Forum

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

Review Essay by John J. Contreni, Purdue University

Leslie Poles Hartley famously observed in his 1953 play, *The Go-Between*, "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." Constance Bouchard's rewriters and re-rememberers of the medieval past would not agree. She suggests what their view might have been with William Faulkner's aphorism from *Requiem for a Nun*, "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (p. 1). This makes sense for communities that celebrated the Eucharist every day in memory of their god as if it were the very first Last Supper and whose cycles of liturgical observations kept the past forever in the present. Furthermore, "[w]hen people lived in times of long ago, they never thought they lived long ago. They thought they lived Now" (p. 8). And when it came to recreating their past in terms that made sense to their Now, literate medieval people could not help but think teleologically. What mattered to them constituted memory; what did not matter to them was forgotten.

Constance Bouchard's latest book is inviting, bold, and provocative. Its engaging prose cloaks a thoroughly revisionist project that is always thought-provoking and sometimes controversial. The book is indeed about saints and ancestors (usually royal or at least noble), but it is also as much about property. The getting, holding, and reclaiming of property was a powerful stimulant toward creating a useful past. And while the chronological canvas is indeed large, stretching from the sixth through the twelfth centuries, the "France" of the book's examples, documents, and rewriters essentially amounts to Burgundy-Champagne, a region that Bouchard's earlier work has made a very familiar landscape to her. The focus in the new book is not so much on setting memories straight as it is on appreciating how memories were constructed and what they meant to those who constructed them. To do this, Bouchard proceeds in reverse chronological order moving from the twelfth century to the sixth since memories, recalled and forgotten, are always of the past. The book is built on a series of case studies, studies of particular kinds of documents and momentous events especially rich in potential memory-making.

The first two chapters explore cartularies, rather prosaic, seemingly "unproblematic" and "unambiguous" sources. Historians are drawn to cartularies, collections of a monastery's or cathedral's rewritten archives, for the information the individual documents preserve. The cartulary itself, thus, becomes "invisible" (p. 10). But, Bouchard suggests, the collection of documents between the covers of a cartulary represents choices and decisions about how a community wished to remember itself. Modern editions of French cartularies, for example, commonsensically enough publish the documents in chronological order, an order not necessarily observed by the compiler of the cartulary. Medieval compilers had a different sense of the past in which time was less important than arranging documents by names of donors or by locations of properties. Composition of cartularies also did not necessarily invite destruction of the rewritten originals, since originals often survive alongside the cartulary copies. So, why compose a cartulary? Bouchard downplays this new form of the written word as an epiphenomenon of the "literate mode" (pp. 18-19) of the High Middle Ages, since the very possibility of a cartulary depended on earlier concern for writing and record-keeping. Cartularies enabled communities to reorganize a sheaf of charters into patterns that made sense to their Now and, not trivially, into handwriting that made consultation easier for contemporary eyes. And, as the scribe of one cartulary noted, in case of fire it was much easier to scoop up and rescue a cartulary than it was to gather loose charters.

Bouchard's third chapter explores how cartularies and chronicles were used in twelfth-century narrative histories. Hugh of Flavigny used both sources when he composed his *Chronicon*. Chronicles anchored the early years in Christian history, and, as the lens tightened to focus on Flavigny and more recent times, Flavigny's cartulary enabled him to narrate the significance of his house. Charters confirmed or granted by Merovingian and Carolingian kings linked Flavigny to a wider and more powerful network. Antiquity was always a measure of a monastery's prestige, but in Francia it was bishoprics that traced their origins back to apostolic and post-apostolic times. Monastic houses were a much more recent development. In remembering a monastery's past, writers grasped at any lead they could to give their house a remoter past. When the monks of St.-Pierre-le-Vif in Sens composed their history, the earliest document available to them was a seventh-century episcopal charter that mentioned that the monastery sheltered the tomb of a Queen Teodechildis. The monks easily elided this woman with Clovis's daughter, Theuchildis and thus added two centuries to their monastery's past while at the same time linking it to the assumed wellspring of Christianity in Francia c.500.

Polyptychs, the subject of the fourth chapter, were much less useful to twelfth-century rewriters. The past these ninth-century inventories recorded comprised memories that could easily be forgotten. When composers of cartularies came to polyptychs with their myriad details of people, places, and dues owed, they encountered a world that no longer existed. Not only were many place names mysterious to them, but also the terminology of ninth-century peasantry and agricultural property did not match their own contemporary nomenclature. Documents that were created to preserve memory were useless three centuries later to Now. The fate of polyptychs suggests to Bouchard that debates about the "supposed 'transformations' of the year 1000" (p. 61) may be misplaced. Rather than puzzling over the feudal mutations of the year 1000, scholars need to try to understand the agricultural changes of the year 900 that began to make ninth-century polyptychs obsolete tools when medieval writers tried to understand their past.

The great forgeries of the ninth century, the subject of chapter five, fared differently. Of limited impact in the ninth century, the forgeries accepted as authentic proved very useful to eleventh- and twelfth-century polemicists. The Le Mans forgeries and Pseudo-Isidorian decretals show that "creative memory was at its most creative in the ninth century" (p.63), when forgers created a monumental and imagined past to vindicate their rights or to escape control. Bouchard asserts that the forgers were not successful in their own time "because their audience was not nearly as credulous as they would have liked" (p. 85). One wonders why this was so, however, and why their "greatest triumph" occurred in the eleventh century. And if it is true that the mid-ninth-century context of Pseudo-Isidore has received little scholarly attention (p. 78), readers will want to catch up on the last two decades of work by Klaus Zechiel-Eckes and Abigail Firey.[1]

The ninth century's creative memory was also at work when it came to constructing a memory of the Carolingians. Here, in Bouchard's sixth chapter, Einhard is the chief memorializer, but poets and painters also contributed to limning a portrait of rulership that made the Carolingians alone seem predestined to rule. "Publicists" rather than mere reporters, they proposed a multi-faceted model, at once Roman, Frankish, and biblical, which may also have had something of self-fulfilling prophecy about it. Vindicating the dynasty's legitimacy required that dynasts try to live up to the lofty model writers and artists created. Legitimizing the dynasty also involved forgetting about the previous dynasty or at least remembering it only as "ridiculous" (p. 100). Modern historians of the mid-eighth-century revolution that saw the Carolingians replace the Merovingians might raise their eyebrows a bit when they read that Carolingian publicists were so successful in downplaying Carolingian usurpation that modern scholars "may have overlooked the radical nature of the transfer of royal authority" (p. 95). On the contrary, these same scholars have detailed the process of *damnatio memoriae*, the careful papal-Frankish maneuvering, the exuberant celebration of the new rulers, rebellions against Charlemagne's

authority, and the family feuds that all bespeak a transfer of power that was indeed radical and fraught and not as seamless as Carolingian publicists would have hoped.[2]

Rare is the modern history of the Carolingians that does not provide a nice, tidy family tree, usually including Charlemagne's ancestors and his numerous descendants. Chapter seven explores how the notion of the Carolingian dynasty was constructed, albeit in a not too tidy fashion. Here, Bouchard investigates three sources, Einhard, Paul the Deacon, and the *Annals of Metz*, which offer their own verbal versions of the Carolingian family tree. She also helpfully provides a figure on p. 111 that shows graphically not only how these versions differ, but also how they compete with each other. In their remembering, they also engage in a lot of forgetting, forgetting genealogical twists and turns that might spur troublesome reminders of ancestors best ignored.

The same "publicists of the Carolingian court" (p. 126) who worked to situate their patrons in an acceptable past also described the pre-Carolingian church in plain disarray the better to vaunt Carolingian-age reforms. But, Bouchard argues in chapter eight, "Western Monasticism and the Carolingians," since the church experienced difficulties under Charles Martel and Pippin the Short, the church's problems cannot be laid on the doorstep of the Merovingians. In what may well be the most controversial statement in her book, Bouchard writes, "I shall argue that in many ways the rise of the Carolingians did not contribute to the regularity and well-being of Frankish churches but was instead a disaster for them" (p. 128). Carolingian warlords controlled monastic property and monastic appointments as critical military and political assets, but it does not necessarily follow that they were not also interested in monasteries as holy places and as centers of culture and cult. Charlemagne's letters to Abbot Baugulf of Fulda and Abbot Fulrad of Saint-Denis offer two sides of the same Carolingian coin. A letter to Fulrad specifies all the military equipment the abbot is to assemble in preparation for the year's campaign and closes with a stern warning not to forget the gifts the abbot owes the king. The letter to Baugulf urges monks to cultivate the study of letters in order to better understand scripture and reminds them that Christians need to be impressed not by how monks look, but by what they say. Carolingian involvement with monasticism was intensive and complex and cannot be reduced to either/or formulas. Churchmen always felt embattled, under siege, but from the 820s on religious leaders confidently challenged Carolingian rulership in forms as divergent as the monk Wetti's vision of Charlemagne in Hell, or in the revolts against Louis the Pious that Courtney Booker and Mayke de Jong have recently studied, or in the protracted resistance to Lothar II's divorce.[3]

That the late-eighth-, early-ninth-century gaps in monastic charter evidence are "the result of a uniquely terrible time for the monasteries" forms the matter of chapter nine. The focus here is on Burgundy, specifically on evidence from the cartulary and formulary of Flavigny. This clutch of documents stretches from the eighth into the ninth century, with a gap from about 800 to 840. Before the gap, the documentary practices of the Flavigny monks seem late Roman to Bouchard. After the gap, changes in documentary practices indicative of "an important transformation in human geography between the eighth and the ninth" centuries (p. 165) and new kinds of lordship are apparent. The gap observed in the Flavigny evidence can be observed elsewhere, although as Bouchard notes, there are no gaps in the records of monasteries in eastern Francia or in places closely associated with the Carolingian family. The deficit in the records of western monastic communities are symptomatic of "the depredations of Saracens, Vikings, and Carolingians" (p. 171) and of Carolingian "rejection of the Merovingians and their churches" (p. 172). This dire portrait is difficult to square with evidence pointing out that of the 1254 monasteries in existence in 855, 417 of them or 49.8 percent of the total were founded between 768 and 855.[4] Also, Bouchard's first appendix, "Monasteries in Burgundy and Champagne" (pp. 233-244), provides a roster of forty-five houses founded between the fifth and tenth centuries. Of these, fourteen or about a third were founded in the ninth century. Ninth-century bishops, abbots, and secular leaders also rebuilt or re-established fifteen of the twenty-seven houses founded in the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries. Certainly there were changes in monastic life and historical context from century to century, but why these should be "uniquely terrible" is not readily apparent.

Chapter ten, “Great Noble families in the Early Middle Ages,” considers another eighth-century gap, but in this chapter the gap concerns seventh-century aristocratic families that did not make it into the ninth century. The most readily apparent explanation for their disappearance is that they simply died out. But their disappearance is due more to the rewriters and re-rememberers who chose only to memorialize families that amounted to something, that became dynasties or that came close to forming one. With the exception of the Etichonids, Robertians, and Arnulfings/Carolingians, eleventh-century writers forgot those families that did not matter in telling the story of monarchy.

*Rewriting's* final two chapters focus on the sixth century, in which rewriters and re-rememberers exercised their own creative powers. Chapter eleven considers early Frankish monasticism. Monks of the sixth and seventh centuries presumed that in the past their communities were just as they experienced them in their present and that their monastic predecessors were monks just like themselves. But the truth of the matter was far from this flattened out reality. Hermits and wanderers sometimes made certain sites holy, sites that eventually became monasteries. In the house histories and saints' lives, however, the original hermit saints became founders of monasteries with foundation charters in hand, property assured, and monastic rules at the ready. Thus, a golden age history of monastic foundation was erected that could prove useful in times of trouble, when reform in the guise of a return to pristine origins was required. Rewriters also filled in gaps when it came to “remembering martyrs and relics in sixth-century Gaul” (chapter 12), when saints, cult sites, and pilgrimages proliferated. But modern saints were not as impressive as the martyrs of old, so hagiographers began searching for links that would transform their saints into saints of old. They apparently found the hook they needed in an account of Emperor Aurelian's third-century persecution of Christians north of the Alps. Christians hid the bodies of these martyrs, which lay forgotten until their rediscovery in the sixth century after a long period of forgetting. The important point was not that humans forgot about the now early martyrs, but that the martyrs had always had their powers, had always been present to Christians in Gaul. Seeming to prove that the past indeed was not a foreign country, when the writers of saints' lives imagined the lives of their saints, they imagined lives and a church not very different from their own sixth-century experience.

Sixth-century hagiographers are the last entrants in Bouchard's long list of writers who worked “malleable memory” into shapes that their contemporaries could recognize while discarding memories that did not fit contemporary molds. “Thus the past was not simply an exemplary tableau of venerated predecessors and their actions but something that continued to live in the present. For this to be so, however, regular updating and reworking were always necessary to keep the past current and intelligible,” concludes Bouchard (p. 232). In alerting us to recognize and appreciate the medieval encounter with its past, Constance Bouchard's book joins those of Walter Goffart, Patrick Geary, Rosamond McKitterick, and Mary Carruthers in teaching us how much the past was alive in the Middle Ages.[5]

## NOTES

[1] Klaus Zechiel-Eckes, “Ein Blick in Pseudoisidors Werkstatt: Studien zum Entstehungsprozess der falschen Dekretalen. Mit einem exemplarischen editorischen Anhang (Pseudo-Julius an die orientalischen Bischöfe, JK + 96),” *Francia* 28 (2001): 37-90; idem, “Auf Pseudoisidors Spur oder: Versuch, einen dichten Schleier zu lüften,” in Wilfried Hartmann and Gerhard Schmitz, eds., *Fortschritt durch Fälschungen?: Ursprung, Gestalt und Wirkungen der pseudoisidorischen Fälschungen -- Beiträge zum gleichnamigen Symposium an der Universität Tübingen vom 27. und 28. Juli 2001* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2002), 1-28 (as well as other essays in this volume); Abigail Firey, “Ghostly Recensions in Early Medieval Canon Law: The Problem of the *Collectio Dacheriana* and Its Shades,” *The Legal History Review* 68 (2000): 63-82; eadem, “Lawyers and Wisdom: The Use of the Bible in the Pseudo-

Isidorian Forged Decretals,” in Celia Chazelle and Burton Van Name Edwards, eds., *The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 189–214; and eadem, “Codices and Contexts: The Many Destinies of the Capitula Angilramni and the Challenges of Editing Small Canon Law Collections,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Kanonistische Abteilung* 94 125 (2008): 288–312.

[2] See on these themes, Matthias Becher and Jörg Jarnut, eds., *Die Dynastiewechsel von 751: Vorgeschichte, Legitimationsstrategien und Erinnerung* (Münster: Scriptorium, 2004); Roger Collins, *Charlemagne* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); and Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), for modern scholars well aware of the spin Carolingian publicists put on the usurpation of 751.

[3] For Wetli and other political dreamers, see Paul Edward Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Courtney M. Booker, *Past Convictions: The Penance of Louis the Pious and the Decline of the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Stuart Airlie, “Private Bodies and the Body Politic in the Divorce Case of Lothar II,” *Past and Present* 161 (1998):3–38; and Karl Heidecker, *The Divorce of Lothar II: Christian Marriage and Conflict under Louis the German, 817–876*, trans. Tanis M. Guest (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010).

[4] Mark Stansbury, “Early-Medieval Biblical Commentaries, Their Writers and Readers,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 33 (1999): 79 (Table 2).

[5] Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A. D. 550–800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Rosamond McKitterick, “Constructing the Past in the Early Middle Ages: The Case of the Royal Frankish Annals,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser., 7 (1997): 101–129; eadem, *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.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); and Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

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