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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 Thomas F. X. Noble, University of Notre Dame

Drawing on her exceptional knowledge of west Frankish charters, Constance Bouchard has given us a fresh, stimulating, and important book. She does what her title and subtitle promise—and I shall say a good more about this shortly—but she does more as well. The attentive reader will find in this book sparkling comments about the history of the church in Western Europe, especially about monasteries, some of which will be revelatory and some of which will be controversial (in the best sense: they will stir up discussion).

The book proceeds backwards, from the twelfth century to the sixth. Here is Bouchard's own explanation of her book: It does not seek a "more accurate picture of the early and high Middle Ages, but rather how the versions that writers of the Middle Ages wanted to be remembered were constructed and how elements that did not fit into that version were reworked, re-explained, or quite deliberately forgotten" (p. 6). She goes backwards to stress that memory is what is at stake. I am not sure that was a good idea, and I do not think it was essential for the substance of the arguments presented. In so far as memory is central to the book's argument and methodology, I think that telling the reader what happened and then telling the reader how it was remembered would have worked more smoothly than doing things the other way around. But this is a quibble. The book's organization occasions no difficulties in understanding it. Indeed, the book is terrific. It tells one new things, tells one things one already knew while putting them into new contexts, and repeatedly makes one think.

Bouchard's first two chapters discuss cartularies, volumes into which the documents of a religious house were copied, in whole or in part, usually according to some geographical rather than chronological organization. These chapters should become required reading for beginning graduate students because Bouchard deftly synthesizes a mountain of scholarship. The earliest cartularies date from the ninth century, and not all houses prepared one. It is the cartularies from the eleventh and twelfth centuries that especially catch Bouchard's attention. She notes that scribes were scrupulous about what they copied but did not choose to copy everything. Cartularies were more for internal record keeping than for external validation. They worked alongside narrative and liturgical texts to create a carefully structured sense of a house's history and identity.

Her discussion of cartularies leads Bouchard to talk about two other kinds of sources. First, she considers the kinds of chronicles that were essentially house histories. They usually contained embedded charters, partly to tell and partly to authenticate the history. These chronicles worked with cartularies to create a simple, direct history of a house: details about foundation, reform, and rebuilding. She helpfully goes into some detail about St.-Pierre-le-Vif at Sens to illustrate the point that twelfth-century writers told a story that made sense to them, a story that fit their time. She notes, too, that in many cities there were rivalries between the cathedral and the principal monastery or among the monasteries to establish a degree of precedence. History and documents mattered, but both were combined in the service of memory. Second, Bouchard examines how Carolingian era polyptyques were tactfully forgotten. These estate inventories—the six extant ones are all ecclesiastical—may have been prepared by analogy with Charlemagne's Capitulary *de Villis* that required precise inventories of royal estates. Some of these documents were copied in the high Middle Ages but many more, apparently,

were not. Their original context and use were no longer known or understood, and they could not be fitted, as charters could, into narratives of memory. Their disappearance was an act of conscious oblivion—always the flip-side of memory.

Chapter five tackles the vast corpus of forgeries generated in the ninth century, arguing that forgery is a particularly effective way of remembering and remaking the past. Bouchard observes that the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals, or the Le Mans Forgeries, or Benedictus Levita only made sense, only had some claim to authority, in a world where the written word mattered. These collections combined authentic more or less contemporary documents with forged or interpolated earlier documents to make claims about property or to assert papal or episcopal rights. They invented the pasts they needed to create useful memories in the present. In this chapter, as in others, Bouchard warns against the old-fashioned positivist tendency to focus on authenticity alone. As in her treatment of twelfth-century cartularies, so too in her treatment of ninth-century forgeries, Bouchard aims to show how memory was mobilized to serve contemporary needs.

Chapters six through nine are among the most original in the book and, I suspect, will generate the most discussion. No one will dispute Bouchard's argument that Carolingian publicists meticulously managed how the Carolingians would be remembered. Other scholars, including me, would perhaps place the emphasis in slightly different places, but we have all aimed at the same target.[1] Bouchard stresses several basic themes: how the Carolingians "dis-remembered" the Merovingians; how the Carolingians created a dynastic family out of disparate shards of documentation and memory (and how, interestingly, other great families tried to mimic the Carolingians in this regard); and what the Carolingians actually did vis-à-vis the church versus what the Carolingian-engineered record says they did. The first two points are unlikely to prove controversial. The latter will draw fire. Anyone who knows anything about the Carolingians knows that they were great church reformers. They inherited a church long neglected and abused by the Merovingians. Not so fast, says Bouchard. The record shows that the Carolingians exploited and dominated the church mercilessly. In large measure their reformist rhetoric was designed to conceal this ugly fact. In particular, however, the Carolingians made common cause with bishops, and together they exploited the property of the monasteries. To my very considerable surprise I found Bouchard's argument disarmingly persuasive. That said, I would love to ask her two things. First, how should we understand the Benedictine reforms of Benedict of Aniane and the monastic legislation of 816-819? Bouchard's argument for monastic distress is based largely on an absence of charters, but other evidence does not confirm her picture.[2] Why not? Second, while it is true that later ninth-century people envisioned Charles Martel in Hell for (mis)appropriating church property, legitimate ninth-century canonical legislation, as well as the forgeries Bouchard discusses, put as much emphasis on alienated episcopal as monastic property. The Carolingians did not uniquely abuse monasteries, and bishops squawked more loudly than monks did. I have a sense that something is slightly out of focus in Bouchard's picture. Let me be clear. I do not think she is wrong. I do think she has said something fresh and, probably, largely correct. I just do not think she has it quite right. Further, it is in this section of her book, especially, where Bouchard steps aside from her reflections on memory to make important and original contributions to church history more generally. I am keen to see how her arguments play in this area for they remind me of the sacred cows she slaughtered in her *Sword, Mitre, and Cloister*. [3]

Bouchard's ninth and tenth chapters ostensibly treat quite different subjects—Burgundian monasteries and Frankish family structures—but actually have a common theme: the years from about 720 to the beginning of the ninth century as a decisive turning point in French, indeed in European, history. In both cases, but especially in the former, there is an astonishing gap in the documentary evidence. I do not recall anyone's having pointed this out before. I should here say that Bouchard's default is always Burgundian evidence, which will surprise no one who is familiar with her voluminous previous scholarship. Throughout the book she draws on bodies of evidence from other parts of what became France and also from other parts of the Frankish world, but her telling examples and detailed

assessments are almost always Burgundian. What she sees in Burgundy is a decline in literacy, a sharp drop-off in monastic foundations, and changes in settlement patterns that are contemporaneous with the rise of the Carolingians. This cannot be coincidence, she says. Where noble families are concerned, she notes that there were rich, powerful, famous families aplenty in the Merovingian period, but virtually none of them are traceable into the Carolingian period. This decline is likewise contemporaneous with the rise of the Carolingians and, again, she says, not coincidental. But whereas Burgundian monastic decline almost certainly lines up with a general Carolingian exploitation of monasteries, the “decline” of Merovingian families is something of an optical illusion caused, according to Bouchard, by the fact that the Carolingians consciously set out to create a dynastic family that extended over several generations and that exhibited both legitimacy and continuity. Beginning in the ninth century other families sought to emulate the Carolingians, and eventually families such as the Robertians did so successfully. If, as she suggests, the Merovingian world was literate, and literate standards declined as the Carolingians rose, is there some contradiction in her assertion that the mid- to late-ninth-century forgeries imply the importance of the written word? Look where one will, however, the years from, say, 720 to 800 marked a real turning point. Without explicitly saying so, Bouchard here takes a stand on the question of whether the Carolingians represent the culmination of late antiquity or the beginnings of a new era.

Bouchard’s last two chapters treat the Merovingian era, an era that has in some respects been a background note to all the book’s music. Her basic argument is that monasticism grew slowly in Gaul in the years, roughly, 400 to 600. Monasticism and writings about monasticism grew exponentially after that. Oversimplifying a bit, I would summarize Bouchard’s argument this way: Early Gallic monasticism was poor, sparse, and ascetic. Eventually, corporate, not personal, poverty, intercessory prayer, entanglements with the rich and powerful, the increasing prominence of relics, tombs, and pilgrimages, and episcopal impresarios wrought dramatic changes and effectively created the familiar patterns of medieval religious life. What Bouchard discovers is that hagiographical texts from the late sixth century on re-remembered the history of the whole post-apostolic period, but especially of the fourth and fifth centuries, to conform to what was needed as model and precedent for the sixth and later centuries. It is in these last chapters that Bouchard returns most forcefully to the manipulation of memory with which she started the book. The book’s central chapters do treat memory, as I have noted, but they also make serious interventions in ecclesiastical history.

This is an important book for anyone interested in medieval history between about 500 and 1200 and in almost any subfield of that period. Bouchard has read almost everything of real significance relevant to her topic, and her command of the sources is exemplary. This is a major book that is always stimulating and sometimes, honestly, fun to read.

NOTES

[1] Others have emphasized religious, political, military, and even heroic achievements. Robert Morrissey, *Charlemagne and France: A Thousand Years of Mythology* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003) begins with the Carolingian sources and tracks them deep into the twentieth century. What he does for France, Max Kerner, *Karl der Grosse: Entschleierung eines Mythos* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2001) does for German lands. A tighter focus on the medieval period is maintained by Matthew Gabriele and Jace Stuckey, eds., *The Legend of Charlemagne in the Middle Ages: Power, Faith, and Crusade* (New York: Palgrave, 2008). In this book I look at the construction of Charlemagne’s image in the ninth century: “Greatness Contested and Confirmed: The Raw Materials of the Charlemagne Legend,” pp. 3-21. In the same volume, Paul Edward Dutton reviews the ninth-century materials from other angles: “KAROLUS MAGNUS or KAROLUS FELIX: The Making of Charlemagne’s Reputation and Legend,” pp. 23-37. Matthew Gabriele, *An Empire of Memory: The Legend of Charlemagne, the Franks, and Jerusalem before the First Crusade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Anne A. Latowsky, *Emperor of the World: Charlemagne and the Construction of Imperial Authority, 800-1229* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013) track the memorialization of Charlemagne for topics ranging from

identity formation to political theory. The standard reference now for Carolingian historical writing *per se* is Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). In my introductory material and annotations, I have addressed the biographies of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious: *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious: Lives by Einhard, Nother, Ermoldus, Thegan, and the Astronomer*, translated with introductions and annotations by Thomas F. X. Noble (University Park, Penn.: Penn State Press, 2009).

[2] The literature on Carolingian religious and ecclesiastical reform is vast. Normally scholars evaluate the reforms positively, while admitting that achievement often fell short of aspiration, and take the Carolingians to have been sincere in their efforts. For instance, Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms, 789-895* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977) passes in review several major kinds of source material without detecting the concerns that are central to Bouchard's analysis. Three major studies of monastic reform make virtually no mention of property or of exploitation by the Carolingians: Myke B. de Jong, *In Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Thomas Schilp, *Norm und Wirklichkeit religiöser Frauengemeinschaften im Frühmittelalter* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1998); and Martin A. Claussen, *The Reform of the Frankish Church: Chrodegang of Metz and the Regula Canonicorum in the Eighth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Susan Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), esp. pp. 191-338, does not identify the problems Bouchard does.

[3] *Sword, Mitre, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980-1198* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987).

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