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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 Constance B. Bouchard, University of Akron

Medievalists have been waiting a long time for Geoffrey Koziol's new book. His first book, *Begging Pardon and Favor*, published twenty years ago, demonstrated convincingly that for a medieval aristocrat to act as a suppliant was not a sign of weakness, but rather (perhaps paradoxically) of strength: rapid surrender was often the best offense.^[1] The book was sometimes frustrating but based on a thorough familiarity with northern French primary sources; the approach was intriguing and suggested further insights to come.

Koziol's new book is both narrower and wider in scope. Its particular focus is French royal charters (diplomas) from the late Carolingian period, from the death of Louis the Pious to the permanent establishment of the Capetians on the French throne. One would have thought these diplomas were already well understood, especially since, as he suggests throughout, he is particularly interested in the parchments of the archives, and yet all of these royal charters have been given excellent modern editions. A few of these diplomas are reproduced as plates at the end of the book, unfortunately very washed out and hard to decipher. (Many other diplomas, of course, exist not in originals but in later copies.) But from this starting point he takes off in a number of directions, including monastic reform and the nature of forgeries, in a book that spreads over 650 pages.

The Carolingian era has received a great deal of scholarly attention in recent years, as the period, about which we once thought we knew everything, has been reexamined for ideas about such disparate topics as public penance and the role of women.^[2] Koziol's principal argument here is that royal charters should be seen as "performative." By this he means that the charters were issued not merely to record a royal ruling but also to mark an event as highly significant politically. A king issuing a privilege for a monastery, for example, was establishing a close personal connection to the monks. Indeed, Koziol suggests, a king's royal succession would be marked more by his issuing of privileges than by rituals of consecration. In addition, charters were written in reference to earlier royal charters, so that they became acts of memory as well as statements of current policy. In Koziol's phrasing, they exhibited intertextuality.

The topic of performative acts has become trendy in recent years, yet Koziol is doing more than following the latest trend.^[3] Rather, he has adopted the rubric of performance to help him explain the nature and purpose of early medieval royal charters, something he admits throughout may be difficult to put into words. Indeed, this difficulty means that sometimes he ends up contradicting his basic premise, as when he states (p. 354) that a document was a record of, but not a substitute for, words and actions—which one might therefore conclude were the real performatives.

In spite of this, Koziol has much to offer on the nature of charters (royal and otherwise). Chapter one provides both a discussion of the ways medieval charters were composed and a history of the science of diplomatics, as Jean Mabillon dubbed the study of charters in 1681. Here Koziol makes clear that royal diplomas cannot be seen as analogous either to modern administrative records or to modern judicial rulings and that the partial survival of what was written down in the Carolingian period (some texts survive but certainly not all) cannot be attributed solely to the accidents of history, but rather in part to

what archivists at the time thought worth preserving. Chapter eight also contains some insightful ruminations on the way that a charter was designed to capture a specific, important moment or event and how its composition would have been in part a response to other, earlier charters. These chapters would be an excellent starting point for a graduate student just beginning to use charter evidence.

The principal shortcoming of the book as a whole is that it tries to balance itself too much on a handful of documents. Koziol's bibliography contains most of the chronicles, letters, memorial books, annals, and cartularies on which our knowledge of the late Carolingian era is based (alphabetized oddly, with titles beginning with "Der" or "The" listed under the D's and the T's, respectively). With all these rich sources, it seems awkward at best to expect the royal charters alone to carry the weight of a wide-ranging discussion. And in fact they do not; much of the book has little to do with royal pronouncements or diplomas, focusing instead for long stretches on chronicles or on documents issued by other individuals or institutions during the period.

Indeed, probably the most interesting parts of the book have nothing to do with charters. For example, chapter ten evokes what Koziol terms places of memory (pp. 535-536), locales that became attached in memory to significant events or, alternately, that once were the sites of palaces or sacred enclosures but have lost all their connotations over the years. Chapter seven similarly contains a very interesting and lively account of bishops and Carolingian publicists rewriting history to score political points in their own time, but this has little to do with royal diplomas or performative acts.

In addition, the organization is often unclear, with far too many divergent ideas crammed together. The same chapter seven, purportedly on Carolingian-era forgeries, gets distracted for a number of pages by a discussion of the way comital courts (*placita*) functioned and the role of oath-helpers. Sometimes it almost seems as though every idea Koziol has ever had about the Carolingian era has wound up in this book. It might have worked better to have written a short, focused book on royal diplomas as performative acts (his chapter four on Charles the Bald's diplomas could have been a good centerpiece for such a volume) and then another book or books on such topics as saints, monastic reform, royal accession, early medieval conceptions of individuality, and the dynastic change from Carolingian to Capetian—all of which appear together here.

It does not help that the book is extremely dense; most of the arguments would be hard to follow if one were not already familiar with the major players of late Carolingian history. Koziol's introduction begins with the comment that the smallest details matter, and this is certainly a book that includes every small detail. Even more significantly, many scholars are going to disagree with what Koziol has to say or to find his conclusions a bit of a stretch. Few are likely to be convinced, for example, by his attempt to make the Le Mans forgeries a stage-managed aspect of the political conflict in Brittany (for one thing, Le Mans is not even in Brittany) (pp. 372-382). Similarly, the argument that a decidedly odd-looking charter of King Boson was forged by his enemies in order to make him look ridiculous seems far-fetched (p. 387). And his discussion of a charter of Pippin I of Aquitaine, which may have actually been issued by Pippin II based on the handwriting of the chancery subscription (p. 104), would have been more convincing if he had examined the charter himself, rather than relying on an eighty-five-year-old edition.

Too often Koziol argues from silence, building a conclusion on a series of very tentative inferences. For example, at one point he states, "Charles the Simple is never declared the enemy ...; on the contrary, he is identified as the enemy precisely because he is not mentioned" (p. 14). He argues that the Robertians had consistently sought to overthrow the Carolingians from the ninth century onward, even though the first source to say so was written in the eleventh century, suggesting that this late source "let out the dirty secret" (p. 423). Most will similarly find overblown his effort to find a complete rationalization of Robert I's deposition of Charles the Simple hidden within the language of a gift to the abbey of Saint-Denis (pp. 447-58).

Particularly problematic are the sections on monastic reform. Some of his ideas here are novel and intriguing, such as that the exemption from outside interference, which was spelled out in Cluny's foundation at the beginning of the tenth century, may have originated some fifty years earlier in efforts of monasteries and their patrons to withstand the depredations of Charles the Bald (p. 275). But far too much of his discussion consists of speculation about the political machinations that he argues could have worked behind the scenes to motivate monastic donations. Indeed, although Koziol gives lip service to the desire for salvation and closeness to the saints that inspired lay donors, all his particular cases posit a desire to score political points as an explanation for foundations or gifts to the monks. For example, he describes the dedication of the monastery of Sauxillanges to the Trinity as a rejection of Cluny, Saint Peter, the pope, and the French king who had recently made a gift to Cluny (p. 287).

The book will receive a lot of attention, at least at first, because it was written by a very smart person who has read everything relevant in at least four languages (plus Latin), thought carefully about it, and tried to explain it all clearly in a large book with a great many footnotes. The problem comes with explaining it clearly. The book disappoints because it never has a clear focus; as soon as Koziol makes one interesting point he shoots off to something unrelated. In spite of all his extremely detailed discussion of the words in a charter or a series of political events, the book will never become something that everyone writing on the Carolingians will need to cite. But one can still nurture hopes for his third book.

NOTES

[1] Geoffrey Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992).

[2] A few recent examples: Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Karl Heidecker, *The Divorce of Lothar II: Christian Marriage and Political Power in the Carolingian World*, trans. Tanis M. Guest (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010); 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); Valerie L. Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009); and Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Koziol cites all of these except the Costambeys et al. volume, which appeared too late for him to have seen.

[3] For example, Carol Symes, *A Common Stage: Theater and Public Life in Medieval Arras* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007).

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