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# (Review) Mémoires carolingiennes: L'épitaphe entre célébration mémorielle, genre littéraire et manifeste politique

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**Comments**

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Brabant and its dukes long languished in the shadow of neighboring Flanders, an inferiority that was fiercely disputed by a series of medieval chroniclers whose works provided material and structure to the anonymous author of the *Excellenste Cronyke*. Drawing upon the work of Jacob van Maerlant and Jan van Boendale, the author wrote three intertwining narratives, presented on the foldout in the form of a genealogy, which narrate the larger story of the unfolding of salvation, while giving Brabant a particular place as a most holy land, ruled by holy princes, of ancient and most noble lineage. These were conservative ideas, formulated, Tigelaar believes, in a monastery probably in Antwerp, but there was also an element of urgency as well. With the end of Brabant's line of native princes in 1404, Burgundian princes became dukes of Brabant, and the duchy played a new role as a keystone of Burgundian state building. But the direct male line of that dynasty ended with Charles the Bold's death in 1477, leaving most of the Burgundian inheritance to the Habsburgs. Thus there is a bit of the *speculum principis* about the chronicle as well, as the author may have had the young prince Philip the Fair in mind as he composed it.

Brabant blessed, royal, and ancient is the threefold message of the chronicle, and in pursuit of that image Tigelaar traces and interprets the unfolded foldout and its complementary text. Saints are an important strand here, particularly those who have a close connection to Brabant, and they are portrayed in the foldout in special colored circles. "Saintly Brabant" was a historical creation of the Windesheim school of monastic chronicle writing, which had deep roots in the duchy. Not surprisingly, where rulers and saints intersect, as in the cases of Clovis, Charlemagne, and Louis IX of France, both the chronicle and foldout give added prominence to their lives and portraits. Commingling Louis and his line with the dukes of Brabant seems strange at first sight, since joint descent from the kings of France ended with the Carolingians. Yet it was precisely in the author's time, with the dukes of Burgundy/Brabant, that the royal house of France rejoined that of Brabant, thus grafting the Capetians to the Brabantine line stretching back to Charlemagne.

A tour de force of detective work ends the book, as Tigelaar sets off to discover the identity of the chronicle's author. Candidates have been proposed before, all unlikely. From his deep knowledge of the text and context, Tigelaar composes a profile of the author: fervently monastic, a native of Brabant probably from Antwerp, and skilled as a history writer. A Carthusian monk, Johannes Vekenstijl, fits the profile quite well indeed. A graduate of the University of Leuven, author of historical works, resident of the Antwerp charterhouse, which was deeply influenced by Windesheimer reforms, he seems the man. But with characteristic caution, Tigelaar does not proclaim him the chronicle's author, leaving it to others to find "the smoking gun"—an admirable end to an admirable book.

JAMES M. MURRAY, Western Michigan University

CÉCILE TREFFORT, *Mémoires carolingiennes: L'épitaphe entre célébration mémorielle, genre littéraire et manifeste politique (milieu VIIIe–début XIe siècle)*. (Histoire.) Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007. Paper. Pp. 387; 82 black-and-white illustrations and tables. €22.

This is Cécile Treffort's second major contribution to the history of death in the early Middle Ages. In the first, *L'église carolingienne et la mort* (Lyons, 1996), she traced the main lines of Carolingian cultural development that aimed to bring the living and the dead together around a common purpose (the salvation of all good Christians) and a common place (the parish church and cemetery). In this book, her sharp focus on a seemingly minor aspect of that cultural project takes the measure of its success. She persuasively argues that Carolingian epitaphs, long overlooked because of their fragmentary and scattered remains and formulaic character, reflect a set of religious, literary, and political notions central to

the dreams of imperial power and Christian community that motivated so many during the period. Moreover, Treffort's close attention to their material aspects, whether as carved in stone, painted on walls, scratched onto tablets, or written on parchment, gives an added dimension to her analysis. Take, for example, the epitaph that Charlemagne commissioned for Pope Hadrian I after his death in 795. Its text, composed by Alcuin but presented as Charlemagne's own words, was carved into a marble slab in "letters of gold" and sent to Rome to mark the pope's grave. It celebrates Hadrian, of course, but also Charlemagne, and especially the personal relationship between the two. The king speaks as a son bereft of his father, asks those who read the epitaph to pray for them both, and begs Hadrian not to forget him at the Last Judgment. A visually striking object in a highly public setting—its deliberately classicizing style, new to both Franks and Romans at the time, harking back to the age of Constantine—Hadrian's epitaph memorializes the Frankish-papal alliance and its political and religious objectives while simultaneously associating the king and pope together in an eschatological drama that mirrors their earthly collaboration.

In five sections of two chapters each, Treffort moves from the most anonymous and intimate of epitaphs, those (which she dubs *endotaphs*) that were hidden from view inside a grave or coffin, to the most public, like Charlemagne's epitaph for Hadrian. The core of her data comprises some 250 inscribed epitaphs from France, which she catalogues in the back of the book (pp. 313–49). Any drawbacks to using a database so weighted toward West Francia are mitigated by the sensitivity with which she treats all her sources and by her regular use of examples from other places (supported by 82 carefully chosen photographs and drawings and a number of helpful charts). Although Treffort is clear about how much more work needs to be done, not just on epitaphs but on Carolingian inscriptions in general, she makes a strong case that the essential elements of Carolingian epitaphs were present wherever the power of the Franks, and the Frankish church, was felt and that their ubiquity and uniformity are a marker of the deep penetration of Carolingian cultural norms across the empire.

The repetitive nature of the material, which previous historians have seen as a defect, becomes an asset in Treffort's hands as she illustrates how appropriate even the most formulaic of epitaphs were to their most commonly shared purpose: to allow the dead to solicit the prayers of the living as efficiently as possible. As she studies their material aspects, a picture of an almost entirely lost world of Carolingian churches and cemeteries begins to emerge, with more visible memorials—freestanding or on floors, walls, and columns and carved, painted, or inlaid in a variety of materials and colors—than I had ever imagined. As she analyzes their literary aspects, she exposes the surprisingly central place they occupied in Carolingian education. As she considers which members of the aristocracy got the most elaborate memorials and where, she shows how epitaphs helped maintain a web of relationships linked by blood or service to the Carolingian family. As she ponders the far more common examples, which record as little as a name, month, and day of death and a simple request for prayers, she speculates that their simplicity, directness, and clarity made them legible not just to elites but also to ordinary people, perhaps even the illiterate.

It is a bit disconcerting, after reading that requests for prayers were one of three indispensable elements of Carolingian epitaphs (p. 167), to see only six among a group of twelve ninth-century examples from the Church of Saint-Oustrille de Bourges (pp. 193–95), of which only one is in a standard form. Treffort takes the shared vocabulary and syntax of the group—which commemorates four women and eight men—as evidence of a written formulary behind their composition. She may well be right, but what about the even more intriguing possibility that they were composed by and for a mixed-gender "Society of the Twelve Apostles," with its own burial church? Ildia's epitaph asks "anyone who reads" it to pray for her, but it also adds the unusual expression "we should all pray for her soul," which appears again in the epitaphs of four of the men. Such language may point beyond

even the use of a common book to the presence of an organized spiritual community. Missing this is less the result of any lapse by the author, however, than of the abundance and interest of the evidence she has so carefully laid out in this splendid piece of scholarship.

FREDERICK S. PAXTON, Connecticut College

JAUME VILAGINÉS I SEGURA, *Cavallers, pagesos i templers: Santa Perpètua de Mogoda a l'edat mitjana (segles X–XIII)*. (Beca de Recerca Santa Perpètua de Mogoda, Col.lecció Fermí Vinyals, 3.) Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2007. Paper. Pp. 159; 13 black-and-white figures.

Today Santa Perpètua de Mogoda is a fast-growing industrial suburb of Barcelona with a population of over twenty thousand. In 1137 there were perhaps just seventy-five households; in 1386, probably fewer. Yet just as the town is dwarfed today by the nearby centers of Sabadell and Terrassa, in the Middle Ages it was overshadowed by the monastery of Sant Cugat and the castle of Montcada, not to mention Barcelona itself. Its aristocrats were third- and fourth-rank families, vassals of vassals of vassals of the count. Its most famous lineage gained renown through association with the military orders rather than with the town itself. Nevertheless, in the evidence-rich world of Catalonian history, a student of this sort of relatively unimportant place can draw on some four hundred documents from before 1300. While this study of Santa Perpètua is history at its most local, it is nonetheless finely textured.

Jaume Vilaginés i Segura is the author of two previous monographs and a substantial collection of articles on the Vallès region; he is thus very much in his element. The world he describes holds few surprises for scholars with an interest in Catalonia or in the general socioeconomic history of the central Middle Ages. The study traces the implantation of feudalism and its consequences in the tenth through thirteenth centuries. Tenth- and eleventh-century Santa Perpètua fits easily into the framework established for Catalonia by Pierre Bonnassie and developed in more recent years by Josep Maria Salrach and Lluís To Figueras. The thirteenth- and fourteenth-century society is more or less familiar from the work of Mercè Aventin, Paul Freedman, and others. (On the whole, however, the secondary bibliography is not as up-to-date as it might be.) Seigneurial pressure transformed a relatively unstratified group of subsistence agriculturalists into emphyteutic tenants paying higher rents to lords, working land more intensively and extensively, paying for the use of forges and mills, subject to the degrading payments of the *mals usos*, and increasingly implicated in a monetized and market economy. The landscape itself was transformed, with the appearance of the *mas*, the *sagrera*, and the parish—all viewed here as units of seigneurial exploitation. Aristocratic lineages emerged from the shadows in the eleventh century, adopted military service as their particular function, practiced primogeniture, engaged in hypergamy, built castles, and arrogated public and ecclesiastical revenues. Peasant society underwent its own parallel transformation, with the development of lineages based on the *hereu* (single heir) and the emergence of an upper stratum of well-to-do peasants who adopted toponymics and composed written testaments. The author makes no claims of universality for his findings, but scholars looking to confirm or refute these various arguments will find ample fodder in his footnotes and a brief but useful subject index.

The most significant contributions of this study are perhaps the detailed histories, mostly based on testamentary documents, of the town's modest aristocratic families: the Rovira, Canalies, Santiga, and Mogoda. The first of these produced Pere, Catalonia's first Templar provincial master; the second seems to be connected to the woman Mel-lo, whose husband and son were taken captive in al-Andalus and whose fascinating testament in advance of a Rome pilgrimage records substantial donations to Sant Cugat; the lands of all four, as