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Review Essay: Poly, Jean-Pierre, and Eric Bournazel. *The Feudal Transformation, 900-1200*

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bureaucratic state with its attendant cadres of literate, reform-minded clergy in the post-Gregorian age.

To buttress his thesis of an official 'persecuting society', Moore draws above all on social theories of Max Weber and Michel Foucault. Weber had observed the tendency of ruling classes to shape a 'superior community of faith' in order to promote the religious and social unity of the state. This in turn prompts the need to identify those who do not meet this standard and punish them accordingly. Moore finds a fertile insight as well in Foucault's analysis of power relationships, especially in the tendency of authorities to rely on intimidation and persecution as primary ways of controlling behavior and dissent in order to secure their hold on the levers of power.

Most persuasive are the segments on heresy. Least convincing is the treatment of the leper as a persecuted class. Although recent literature on leprosy is analyzed and summarized admirably, the sequestering of lepers from the twelfth century on cannot, on the face of it, be equated morally to the officially sanctioned oppression of heretics and Jews. Lepers, because of their contagious affliction, had long been considered a serious threat to their neighbors and had been segregated accordingly in the ancient Mediterranean societies. The term *persecution* seems in this respect to be applied too loosely and ambiguously, thereby weakening somewhat the general argument.

Nonetheless, Moore has made an excellent case for viewing persecution in the High Middle Ages from a much broader and more coherent perspective. The premise of a calculated, often co-ordinated, assault on dissent and difference by medieval 'power élites' could well be applicable to other topics. Issues of gender and ethnicity, for example, might be amenable to similar investigation in accordance with the methods of historical sociology.

In any case, the paperback edition will be welcomed by instructors looking for provocative supplementary reading for their courses.

Donald Sullivan
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Poly, Jean-Pierre, and Eric Bournazel. *The Feudal Transformation, 900-1200*. Trans Caroline Higgitt. Holmes and Meier, New York 1991. 404 pp. \$42.95.

The question of the nature of feudalism has plagued each generation of historians since the term was coined during the French Revolution. During the middle decades of the twentieth century, historians believed they had found the definitive answer in the great synthesis created by Marc Bloch in his famous *Feudal Society* (1939). However, nearly twenty years ago the synthesis created by Bloch stumbled and fell before the advance of research. Although still a classic of medieval history, *Feudal Society* lost its place as the definitive text concerning feudalism. Lost, too, were many historians who, because they were not students of feudalism, had come to rely on Bloch for an understanding of feudal society and for teaching material. For a time, historians labored without the benefit of a work

of synthesis until 1980, when Poly and Bournazel published *La mutation féodale, X^e-XII^e siècles*. This important book is now available in English.

Poly and Bournazel's book is actually less a work of synthesis than it is a survey of research and a presentation of the current state of knowledge concerning feudalism. As such, it serves as a guide for the perplexed by providing an overall view of the transformation of feudalism from the tenth through the twelfth centuries. The book owes much to the work of Jean-François Lemarignier, Jean Schneider, Georges Duby, as well as many others.

What lay behind the demise of Bloch? Bloch's analysis was not comprehensive enough and focused too sharply on the 'classic' feudalism that Bloch found between the Rhine and the Loire. Today, the existence of a 'classic' feudalism is denied. According to Poly and Bournazel, one single, changing movement covered all Europe and began at the end of the tenth century to destroy the old independent peasant society. Within a relatively short space of time — perhaps only a few generations in most places — dependence had replaced independence. The agencies of this change were the castellans who established local tyrannies in the environs of their castles and ended freedom in the countryside. Everywhere the peasant fell under control of the lord. This fact stands above all in the new understanding of feudalism.

In building their case, the authors review medieval society during three centuries and, in doing so, present a great survey of contemporary scholarship. The book is divided into two parts. The first — 'What Is Known' — surveys Europe from the emergence of the castral system in the wake of declining royal power and failing public institutions to the spread of dependency throughout society. The second — 'New Interpretations' — reflects on the consequence of this change.

Poly and Bournazel have done a great service in writing this book. It is badly needed and it fulfills its mission admirably. In addition to providing the latest scholarship in its pages, the book is richly documented, contains an excellent bibliography (augmented for the English translation), and an adequate index. Although at times crowded with factual material, it is well written throughout. Above all, *The Feudal Transformation, 900-1200* is very useful to the scholar and to the teacher.

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Adelman, Janet. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays: Hamlet to The Tempest*. Routledge, London 1992. xii + 379 pp, note on the text, notes, author index, index to Shakespeare's works, subject index. \$49.50 / \$15.95.

Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays: Hamlet to The Tempest* is reviewed on pp 172-3.