

IAN WOOD

The Panthéon in Paris: *lieu d'oubli*

The Early Middle Ages matter, and have done so for a very long time: certainly throughout the modern period. Kings, churchmen, revolutionaries, their propagandists and even the general public have all turned to the post-Roman past. They have exploited it, transformed it, and forgotten it, sometimes rather surprisingly. They have memorised that past in stories, in rituals, and in places, and they have expunged it from the memory. One such place of memory and oblivion is one of the central monuments of the official collective memory of France: Jacques-Germain Soufflot's Panthéon. In origin the church of Ste Geneviève, built by Louis XV to replace the medieval church, which itself had superceded Clovis' church of the Holy Apostles, the Panthéon was transformed into "a temple of the nation" and "the altar of liberty" in 1791.¹ This was to be the start of a long-running battle between revolutionary and religious claims to the space. It was to be reinstated as a church by Napoléon in 1806, although its crypt continued to be dedicated to the burial of heroes of the state. Ten years later Louis XVIII restored the whole of the Panthéon to the Church, but with the fall of the Bourbons in 1830 the building was returned to its revolutionary ideal. In 1851, however, Napoléon III reversed the change. It was only in 1885 that the Panthéon settled finally into its status as a monument for secular heroes. This history of oscillation between state and ecclesiastical cult is, of course, of importance in its own right. But the Panthéon also provides a remarkable point of entry into the use of the Early Middle Ages in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France. Naturally enough this great building receives a chapter all of its own in Pierre Nora's enterprise, "Lieux de mémoire".² Equally naturally for a work which concentrates on Republican France, that chapter has scarcely anything to say of the association of the Panthéon with Geneviève (Genovefa),³ and makes no comment on the builders of her original church, Clovis and his queen Chlothilde (Chrotechildis).⁴ As a result, at the heart of Mona Ozouf's account of the Panthéon there is a lacuna, or an act of forgetting. Part of the Republic excludes the religious past. It is the relationship of the Panthéon with these Merovingian figures, and not with the heroes of the Republic, that I want to consider.

When Louis XV fell ill at Metz in 1744 he called on Ste Geneviève to come to his aid. For Louis, as for the Bourbon dynasty in general, the Parisian saint was a special patron.⁵ Indeed Louis and his close relatives turned to the saint a remarkable number of times.⁶ There was, therefore, nothing surprising about his calling for her help in the course of his sickness at Metz. Nor was it surprising that he should subsequently go on pilgrimage to her shrine on the Montagne Ste Geneviève in Paris: royal visits to the tomb of Genovefa were not uncommon. What was new was the fact that the canons of the church asked him to rebuild it, which he agreed to do, though it was to take some time before he kept his promise. It was not until twenty years later, in 1764, that the foundation stone of the new building was laid.

When Louis agreed to the rebuilding of Ste Geneviève, it was not just the glory of the saint that he had in mind. He explicitly saw his actions as echoing those of Clovis, his great Merovingian predecessor. After all he, Louis, and Clovis bore the same name.⁷ That the echo was deliberate is made clear in a medallion which Louis

¹ Proposition to the Constituent Assembly, quoted in Alexia Lebeurre, *The Pantheon, Temple of the Nation* (Paris 2000) 16.

² Mona Ozouf, *Le Panthéon: L'École normale des morts*, in: *Les lieux de mémoire*, 1, *La République*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris 1984) 139–166.

³ Ozouf, *Le Panthéon* 141, does comment on Chirac remembering Geneviève, Jeanne d'Arc and Henri I.

⁴ Ozouf, *Le Panthéon* 142–143, explicitly deals with the eclipse of the person of the monarch by "la figure du grand homme".

⁵ Moshe Sluhovsky, *Patroness of Paris: Rituals of Devotion in Early Modern France* (Leiden 1998) 141.

⁶ Sluhovsky, *Patroness of Paris* 221.

⁷ For a comparison between Louis XIV and Clovis, see the dedication of Gabriel Daniel's *Histoire de France depuis l'établissement de la monarchie française dans les Gaules*, 1, 486–768 (Paris 1729) iii, x. The work was originally published in 1696.

had minted to mark the refoundation: on it he effectively presents himself as a new Clovis.⁸ *Cum a Chlodoveo Francorum primo Rege Christiano Basilica Sanctorum Petri et Pauli memoriae dicata Beatae Genovefae sepulchro reliquiis et a pluribus iam Saeculis nomine insignita Vetustate collaberetur; Loudovicus XV Singulari erga Civitatis Patronam pietate, Novam hanc, non procul a vetere, Ampliorem, splendidioremque Extrui iussit Primumque lapidem hic posuit Anno M.DCC. LXIV.*⁹ This reference to the past was not just a momentary aberration. Clovis mattered for the Bourbons, almost as much as did Geneviève. The political classes of France in the eighteenth century were remarkably well informed about their history. The monarchy had deliberately sponsored research into the past: indeed to a large extent royal patronage had put French historical studies on the path towards what we would now regard as professional standards.¹⁰ Princes were expected to be brought up with a knowledge of French history. Louis XV's father had called history "la leçon des princes et l'école de la politique".¹¹ Works of history were addressed to members of the royal family. And parallels were drawn. Le père Daniel had told Louis XIV that no predecessor, not even Clovis, was his equal. He drew an explicit comparison between the Merovingian's christianisation of the Franks and Louis' onslaught against the Calvinists. Equally important, for Daniel, as for many who followed him, Clovis was the founder of the French monarchy.¹² Moreover, the history of the foundation of the church which came to be dedicated to Ste Geneviève was well known: Daniel placed it in the context of Clovis' religious wars against the Visigoths: "Il mit donc toute son application à lui donner tout l'air d'une guerre sainte. La Reine Chlothilde lui avoit proposé autrefois de bâtir à Paris une Eglise à l'honneur des Apôtres saint Pierre et saint Paul: il ordonna que pour attirer sur lui et sur son armée la protection de ces deux Saints, on commençât incessamment à la bâtir; c'est celle de sainte Genevieve d'aujourd'hui."¹³ Louis XV is likely to have been aware that the church of Ste Geneviève was thought to have been built in the context of a war against Alaric II. He must have known that to pose as a new Clovis in rebuilding Ste Geneviève was a loaded act.

Essentially the king was making a stand as a new Clovis, a remarkably ambitious claim, for Clovis was thought to have established the French monarchy and christianised the Franks. The great Merovingian had also defeated all his enemies: something that Louis had signally failed to do in the Seven Years War, which concluded with the Treaty of Paris in 1763. Indeed, his political failures were such that by the time that he laid the foundation stone for the new Ste Geneviève in the following year his government was widely unpopular: he badly needed any kudos he might gain from modelling himself on his Merovingian predecessor.

Whether Louis realised the extent to which the Merovingian past had become a subject over which ideological war was being waged is another matter.¹⁴ For a long while interpretation of the period had been politically charged, but issues were polarised dramatically by Henri comte De Boulainvilliers, whose interpretations of French medieval history had been published in the 1730s, after his death.¹⁵ According to De Boulainvilliers France had been conquered by the Franks, who had enslaved the Gallo-Roman population. As a result the French nobility, who he saw as the descendents of the Franks, ought to have held a particularly privileged position in French society. The monarchy, once the first among equals, had, however, betrayed the nobility by

⁸ Sluhovsky, Patroness of Paris 144.

⁹ "Since the basilica dedicated to the memory of SS Peter and Paul by Clovis the first Christian king of the Franks and already made notable for many centuries by the tomb and relics of the blessed Genovefa, was collapsing with age, Louis XV with special piety for the patroness of the city, ordered this new, larger and more splendid church to be build, not far from the old one, and laid this foundation stone in 1764."

¹⁰ See Thomas E. Kaiser, The abbé Dubos and the historical defence of monarchy in early eighteenth century France, in: Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century 267 (1989) 77–102, at 77–83.

¹¹ Abbé Gabriel Brizard, Éloge historique de l'abbé de Mably, in: Collection complete des Œuvres de l'Abbé de Mably (Paris, An III = 1794/5) 110.

¹² Daniel, Histoire de France 1, xcvi

¹³ Daniel, Histoire de France 1, 58: "He [i.e. Clovis] therefore put all his energies into giving it the air of a holy war. Queen Chlothilde had previously asked him to build church in honour of saints Peter and Paul. He ordered that the building – that is the present church of Ste Geneviève – should be instigated without interruption, in order to gain the protection of these two saints for himself and his army."

¹⁴ For the debates, see Ian N. Wood, The use and abuse of the early middle ages, 1750–2000, in: The Making of the Middle Ages. Liverpool Essays, ed. Marios Costambeys/Andrew Hamer/Martin Heale (Liverpool 2007) 36–53.

¹⁵ His most important work in this respect was his Essais sur la noblesse de France [ed. Jean François de Tabary] (Rouen = Amsterdam, 1732). For a study of De Boulainvilliers, see Harold A. Ellis, Boulainvilliers and the French Monarchy (Ithaca 1988).

making common cause with and granting concessions to the *Tiers État* in order to strengthen its own power. De Boulainvilliers wanted to see the privileges of the hereditary nobility reinstated. It goes without saying that he himself was a member of the class that he thought had been so hard done by. Curiously De Boulainvilliers was to be well regarded by Montesquieu and later by the abbé Bonnot de Mably, the two interpreters of the Early Middle Ages who were most highly regarded in revolutionary circles – and who, as a result, established the dominant interpretation of Late Roman and Frankish history down to the days of Fustel de Coulanges.

De Boulainvilliers' chief critic, the abbé Dubos, by contrast, was to be seen as a monarchist reactionary.¹⁶ Dubos' interpretation saw the Frankish kingdom as originating not in conquest, but in a series of treaties made with the Empire – thus denying the nobility any special position. In Montesquieu's eyes his interpretation was too favourable to the *Tiers État*. Perhaps more important was his denial of the value of Tacitus' picture of a free Germany for any understanding of the Franks or the origins of French history. This was scarcely an appealing interpretation for those Frenchmen of the late eighteenth century for whom *Liberté, Égalité* and *Fraternité* were the guiding principles. Equally harmful to Dubos' reputation was his close association with the monarchy – which perhaps more than anything sealed the fate of his historical writings. In fact his interpretation of the fifth century is not overly conditioned by any political concern, despite the occasional extraordinary paragraph.¹⁷ It still deserves to be read.

The most damaging aspects of the Merovingian past, from the Bourbon point of view, however, were not apparent in 1744, when Louis vowed to rebuild Ste Geneviève. The full development of the notion that the forests of Tacitean Germany presented an ideal model of equality and liberty had yet to occur. This would be prompted most clearly by Montesquieu in books 30 and 31 of *L'Esprit des Loix* (published in 1748), and subsequently by Mably in his *Observations sur l'histoire de France* of 1765.¹⁸

Given Clovis' importance in French history, not just to the Bourbons, but from the sixth century onwards, the church of Ste Geneviève presents a remarkable problem. Clovis' church of the Holy Apostles had not only contained the body of Genovefa, but also that of the royal founder himself, and subsequently of his wife, Chrotechildis, or sainte Chlothilde in French tradition. All three were culted in the church: Geneviève on 3rd January, Clovis on 27th November, Chlothilde on 3rd June.¹⁹ In the eleventh century the community's chief *raison d'être* had been to guard the tombs of these three figures.²⁰ Supposedly Clovis' body was brought from the crypt of Ste Geneviève at about this time.²¹ An effigy was subsequently made – in the eighteenth century le père Daniel recognised that the *gisant* was not contemporary with the monarch,²² and on stylistic grounds it is now dated to the 1220s. It was moved from the old church of Ste Geneviève to a museum in 1793 and in 1816 from there to St Denis, where it still remains.²³ Despite this, it is odd that by the early modern period there was no known grave (as opposed to effigy) of Clovis or indeed (and perhaps more remarkably given her

¹⁶ For Dubos, see in particular, Alfred Lombard, *L'Abbé Du Bos. Un initiateur de la pensée moderne (1670–1742)* (Paris 1913); see also Wood, *The use and abuse*.

¹⁷ E.g. Abbé Jean-Baptiste Dubos, *Histoire critique de l'établissement de la monarchie françoise dans les Gaules* 3 (Amsterdam 1735) 252: "Ce droit sur les Provinces de son obéissance, qui est particulier à la Monarchie Françoise, est la cession authentique qui lui a été faite de ces Provinces par l'Empire Romain, qui depuis près de six siècles les possédoit à titre de conquête. Elles ont été cédées à la Monarchie Françoise par un des successeurs de Jules César et d'Auguste, par un des successeurs de Tibere que Jesus-Christ lui-même reconnut pour Souverain légitime de la Judée, fur laquelle cependant cet Empereur n'avoit pas d'autres droits que ceux qu'il avoit sur les Gaules et sur une portion de la Germanie." "This right over the subject provinces, which is peculiar to the French monarchy, is a genuine grant made of these provinces by the Roman Empire, which had held them for six centuries by right of conquest. They were ceded to the French monarchy by one of the successors of Julius Caesar and Augustus, or Tiberius, who Jesus Christ himself recognised as the legitimate governor of Judaea, over which he had exactly the same rights as over the Gauls and part of Germany."

¹⁸ On Montesquieu as the scholar who created this vision, Alfons Dopsch, *The Economic and Social Foundations of European Civilization* (London 1937) 4.

¹⁹ Dubos, *Histoire critique* 3, 61–65.

²⁰ Michel Reulos, *L'abbaye de Sainte-Geneviève sous les premiers Capétiens*, in: *Media in Francia ... Recueil de mélanges offert à Karl Ferdinand Werner* (Paris 1989) 403–408, at 406.

²¹ Patrick Périn, *La tombe de Clovis*, in: *Media in Francia... Recueil de mélanges offert à Karl Ferdinand Werner* (Paris 1989) 363–378, at 373. See also Périn, *The undiscovered grave of King Clovis I (†511)*, in: *The Age of Sutton Hoo: the Seventh Century in North-Western Europe*, ed. Martin Carver (Woodbridge 1992) 255–264.

²² Daniel, *Histoire de France* 1, xlv.

²³ Périn, *La tombe* 373.

saintly status) of Chlothilde. We are faced with the curious fact that there appears to have been an uninterrupted cult of Chlothilde and Clovis, at least since the eleventh century, and yet by the eighteenth century no one knew the whereabouts of their tombs. By comparison, the Merovingian burials at St Germain were accurately remembered.²⁴

Patrick Périn attempted to solve the paradox by arguing that the destruction of the royal tombs of Ste Geneviève may have taken place during one of the Viking sieges of Paris – an argument which makes sense, but which depends on rejecting the tradition that Clovis' body was moved from the crypt in the eleventh century. The best that one can say is that, however much Clovis and Chlothilde were seen as the founders of the French monarchy, their graves, far from being *lieux de mémoire*, had strangely become places of oblivion – and this even before the Revolution. Despite his desire to present himself as the new Clovis, nothing suggests that Louis XV intended to initiate a search for the body of the Merovingian king and queen and to translate their bodies to the new shrine of Geneviève. That task would be left for Napoléon, who ordered a search for the royal tombs in 1807, during the course of the destruction of the old church of Ste Geneviève.²⁵ One might wonder what Napoléon would have done with the relics of the founders of the French monarchy. He had already made allusion to Clovis' father Childeric and to Charlemagne in the robes designed for his coronation of 1804.²⁶

Nor was the whereabouts of Clovis' grave the only oddity surrounding the commemoration of the king at Ste Geneviève. The church commemorated its royal founder in a liturgy, which Dubos transcribed, but the prayers intriguingly concern not just the king, but also a strange queen called Blanche:

Prop. Eccl. S. Genov.:

Deus indulgentiarum Domine, da famulo regi Clodoveo, famulae tuae reginae Blanchae, et famulis tuis quorum depositionis anniversarium diem commemoramus, refrigerii sedem, quietis beatitudinem et luminis claritatem. Per Dominum, etc.

Secreta: Propitiare, Domine, supplicationibus nostris pro famulo tuo rege Clodoveo, et famula tua regina Blancha, et famulis tuis quorum hodie annua dies agitur, pro quibus tibi offerimus sacrificium laudis, ut eos sanctorum tuorum consortio sociare digneris. Per Dominum, etc.

*Postcommunio: Praesta, quaesumus, Domine, ut famulus tuus rex Clodoveus, Regina Blancha et famuli tui quorum depositionis anniversarium diem commemoramus, his purgati sacrificiis, indulgentiam pariter et requiem capiant sempiternam. Per, etc.*²⁷

Who was this ghostly Blanche? Clearly she could not be Chlothilde, who had her own liturgy. Dubos hypothesised that she must have been Albofledis, a sister of Clovis who is recorded as being baptised at the same time as her brother,²⁸ and whose death is recorded in a letter of Bishop Remigius of Rheims to the king.²⁹ Dubos made the identification on the grounds of the name, part of which could be translated as white. Remigius' letter makes it abundantly clear that her death deeply affected her brother, and burial in his new church of the Holy Apostles would not have been inappropriate. Had the community of Ste Geneviève preserved some memory of Clovis' family, only for the meaning of that memory to be lost?

The major shrine in the church was, of course, that of Geneviève herself, whose memory had not been lost, although it had been transformed since the Early Middle Ages. Her relics had regularly been paraded round the

²⁴ Périn, *La tombe* 371. See for example Daniel, *Histoire de France* 1, 359.

²⁵ Périn, *La tombe* 375. For the search for Clovis' body under Napoléon III, see Heino Neumayer, *Geschichte der archäologischen Erforschung der Franken in Frankreich*, in: *Die Franken. Wegbereiter Europas* 1 (Mainz 1996) 40, with illustration on 41.

²⁶ See Neumayer, *Geschichte* 35f. The importance of the Childeric grave in diplomatic relations is extensively documented by Dubos, *Histoire critique* 2, 302–305.

²⁷ The text is preserved in Dubos, *Histoire critique* 3, 61: "Lord God of indulgences, give to your servant king Clovis, and your handmaid queen Blanche, and to your servants, whom we commemorate on the day of the anniversaries of their burial, a place of consolation, the blessedness of rest and the clarity of light. Through the Lord, etc." "Be favourable, Lord, to our supplications for your servant, king Clovis, and your handmaid, queen Blanche, and to your servants, whose annual day is celebrated today, for whom we offer to you the sacrifice of praise, that you may deign to associate them in the family of your saints. Through the Lord, etc." "Grant, we ask, Lord, that your servant, king Clovis, queen Blanche, and your servants, the anniversary of whose day of burial we commemorate, that having been purged by these sacrifices, they may receive indulgence and likewise eternal rest. Through, etc."

²⁸ Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum* II, 31 (ed. Bruno Krusch/Wilhelm Levison, *MGH SS rerum Merovingicarum* 1, 1, Hannover 1951) 77.

²⁹ *Epistulae Austrasiacae* 1 (ed. Wilhelm Gundlach, *MGH Epistulae* 3, Berlin 1892).

city of Paris, to provide protection on numerous occasions from the Middle Ages, right up to 1725, and they were unveiled as late as 1784.³⁰ They were translated to Louis' new church, where they remained until 1792, when they were transferred to the neighbouring church of St Étienne du Mont, following the transformation of the Panthéon into a revolutionary monument.³¹ A year later they would be destroyed.

These last onslaughts against the saint were not universally popular. Geneviève was, after all, widely revered. Even Voltaire had been somewhat ambivalent about her, calling her the good Gauloise, “my shepherdess” and “my own virgin”.³² Among the arguments put forward to defend her cult was the supposed (but unquestionably erroneous) fact that she was a humble peasant, whom Clovis had honoured by building a great church. Her church was, therefore, already a revolutionary symbol, or so it was claimed.³³

The notion that Genovefa was a peasant is not present in her early *vitae*, where her connections are with the Roman upper classes of the region.³⁴ Nevertheless it had become firmly rooted, and remains so. The origins of the idea seem to lie with a conflation of the historical roles of Genovefa and Jeanne d'Arc, which is already apparent in the fifteenth-century miracle play, “Les Miracles de Ste Geneviève”.³⁵ At least according to her hagiographers, Genovefa played a major role in the organisation of Paris during sieges by both the Huns and by the Franks. She was, therefore, an appropriate saint to call on when the country was under threat. Her relics had been taken in procession in opposition to the English and the Burgundians in 1417 and 1418. It is easy, therefore, to see how Jeanne might be interpreted as a new Geneviève. But aspects of Jeanne's persona also rubbed off on the older saint. Geneviève is explicitly presented as a shepherdess in a poem written in 1512 by Pierre du Pont.³⁶ Philippe de Champagne subsequently depicted her in such a guise. The social origins of Jeanne thus seem to have been attributed to Geneviève. Although the representation of Geneviève as a shepherdess was condemned as inaccurate by Valesius, or Adrien de Valois, in 1694,³⁷ the image stuck. It is a vital element of the pictorial sequence commissioned by Philippe, marquis de Chennevières, directeur des Beaux Arts, in 1874, which still dominates the interior of the Panthéon. Not only is Geneviève portrayed as a shepherdess, but her story is juxtaposed with that of Jeanne.

The triumph of the image of Geneviève as a French peasant did nothing to save her relics. A year after they had been transferred to St Étienne du Mont, the new shrine was dismantled, the relics were tried, found guilty and publicly burned.³⁸ The shrine itself was reconstructed in 1803, and relics gathered from elsewhere were installed.³⁹ These imported remains of the saint are still revered in St Étienne du Mont. Meanwhile much of the original decoration of the Panthéon, which had included three bas-reliefs of scenes from the life of Geneviève, was destroyed. Religious iconography, however, was reinstated when Napoléon returned Soufflot's building to catholic cult in 1806. A new painting for the cupola was designed in 1812.⁴⁰ It was to show “une gloire d'anges emportant au ciel la châsse de sainte Geneviève, Clovis et Chlothilde, son épouse, fondateurs de l'Église, Charlemagne, saint Louis, S[a].M[ajesté]. l'Empereur [Napoléon] et S[a].M[ajesté]. l'Impératrice consacrant la nouvelle église au culte de la sainte.”⁴¹ Clearly Napoléon was intent on exploiting early medieval history just as much as Louis XV had intended. The design for the cupola may provide an indication of how the relics of Clovis and Chlothilde would have been exploited had they been discovered in the explorations

³⁰ Sluhovsky, *Patroness of Paris* 217–222 for lists of processions, supplications and unveilings.

³¹ Sluhovsky, *Patroness of Paris* 207.

³² *Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créquy*, 7 vols (Paris, 1834–5), vol. 2, 130, cited in Sluhovsky, *Patroness of Paris* 206.

³³ Sluhovsky, *Patroness of Paris* 205.

³⁴ For the text of the earliest *Vita Genovefae* (ed. Bruno Krusch, *MGH SS rerum Merovingicarum* 3, Hannover 1896). For a discussion of all the early *vitae* of Genovefa, Martin Heinzelmann and Joseph-Claude Poulin, *Les Vies anciennes de sainte Geneviève de Paris*, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, IVe section, Sciences historiques et philologiques 329 (Paris 1986). Her family background is discussed on 81–86.

³⁵ Sluhovsky, *Patroness of Paris* 48.

³⁶ Sluhovsky, *Patroness of Paris* 52.

³⁷ Sluhovsky, *Patroness of Paris* 52, n. 58.

³⁸ Sluhovsky, *Patroness of Paris* 207.

³⁹ Sluhovsky, *Patroness of Paris* 208.

⁴⁰ François Macé de Lépinay, *Peintures et sculptures du Panthéon* (Paris 1997) 27f.

⁴¹ “A glorious apparition of angels carrying heavenwards the reliquary of saint Geneviève, Clovis, Chlothilde, his wife, founders of the church, Charlemagne, saint Louis, his majesty the emperor and her majesty the empress consecrating the new church to the cult of the saint.”

of 1807. But the new iconography did not confine itself to making a connection between Napoléon and his empress, and Geneviève, Clovis and Chlothilde. There were the additional role models of Charlemagne and Saint Louis – both of whom would reappear in the commissions of de Chennevières. In the event the cupola painting was not complete before the fall of Napoléon, and as a result images of Louis XVIII, the duchesse d'Angoulême and the duc de Bordeaux took the place of those of emperor and empress.

The major iconographic programmes representing Geneviève, however, are those of the late nineteenth century. Already under Napoléon III two large sculptures of “Saint Geneviève disarming Attila with the power of prayer and saving the city of Paris” and “Clovis baptised by Saint Remigius”, by Étienne-Hippolyte Maindron were placed in the peristyle. They were part of the decoration commissioned by Constant Dufeux, following the return of the building to catholic cult in 1851.⁴²

But it was the scheme commissioned by de Chennevières in 1874 that was most important.⁴³ Not all these commissions were related to the life of Geneviève: the scheme is more generally concerned with key aspects of the religious history of France. Charlemagne and St Louis were represented, both of whom had already appeared in the cupola painting. In addition there was Jeanne d'Arc, as well as St Denis – though the martyr's presence could also be justified by the role supposedly played by Geneviève in the propagation of his cult. So too, the battle of Tolbiac, as it was and is known, almost certainly wrongly,⁴⁴ and the baptism of Clovis could be justified on the grounds of the Merovingian's connection with the saint and her burial. In terms of scenes specifically relating to the life of Geneviève herself, there are images of her childhood and meeting with Germanus of Auxerre, and her life as a shepherdess: Attila's siege and Geneviève's calming of the people of Paris: her watching over the besieged city, and her death.

Ozouf states simply that the paintings in Ste Geneviève contradicted the revolutionary heritage of the monument, and she explicitly contrasts the revolutionaries' penchant for statuary with the ecclesiastical preference for painting: “l'idole révolutionnaire, c'est la statue, et non le tableau (le programme de peintures exécuté au Panthéon contredit plus qu'il ne l'exprime l'héritage révolutionnaire).”⁴⁵ Indeed, she goes further, to say that “Le visiteur pressé du Panthéon garde, même globalement, le sentiment que la sculpture y est révolutionnaire et la peinture chrétienne.”⁴⁶ The observation, however, needs some modification in the light of Maindron's sculptures of Geneviève and Clovis, which were only removed from the peristyle in 1970⁴⁷ – itself another moment of erasure.

As for the paintings themselves, the context in which they were originally commissioned by de Chennevières in 1874 was a very specific one, and it suggests that more than a debate about the religious and republican past of the building was at stake. Only three years earlier, during the winter of 1870–1, Paris had been besieged by the Prussian army. It can scarcely be doubted that this fact influenced the artists who depicted the scenes of the siege of Paris by the Huns and the Franks – not to mention Jules-Eugène Lenepveu's portrayal of Jeanne d'Arc at Orléans. The terrifying image of Attila by Jules-Élie Delaunay was surely intended to call to mind the invading Germans. By contrast, Clovis as depicted by Paul-Joseph Blanc, in his representation of the king's baptism, has been transformed into a Gaul with a long blond moustache – and thus de-Germanised.⁴⁸ One might compare the statue of Vercingetorix which had recently been commissioned by Napoléon III for the site of Alesia.⁴⁹ But just as one should not interpret the Panthéon paintings merely as anti-revolutionary, it would be wrong to think of them as no more than crude responses to the Franco-Prussian War. The dramatic portrayal

⁴² Lebeurre, *The Pantheon* 33–34.

⁴³ Philippe de Chennevières, ‘Le Panthéon’, in: *Inventaire général des richesses artistiques de la France*, Paris, *Monuments civils* II (Paris 1889).

⁴⁴ There is nothing to suggest that the Battle of Tolbiac/Zülpich mentioned by Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum* II, 37, ed. Krusch/Levison 87f. is the same as the battle at which Clovis defeated the Alamans (II, 30, ed. Krusch/Levison 75).

⁴⁵ Ozouf, *Le Panthéon* 154: “the revolutionary idol is the statue and not the painting (the programme of paintings executed in the Panthéon contradicts more than it expresses the revolutionary heritage).”

⁴⁶ Ozouf, *Le Panthéon* 165, n. 32: “the hurried visitor to the Panthéon retains the overall impression that the sculpture there is revolutionary and the painting christian.”

⁴⁷ Lebeurre, *The Pantheon* 33–34.

⁴⁸ For a very different reading of the painting, see Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford 2005) 177.

⁴⁹ For a reproduction, see Lothar Mark, *Eine Geschichte – zwei Geschichten*, in: *Die Franken, Wegbereiter Europas* I (Mainz 1996) 6, for an illustration see 4.

by the Panthéon artists of the Merovingian period, indeed of the Middle Ages in general, reflected a serious intellectual reading of the past: notably that of Augustin Thierry.

Thierry had been the most eye-catching French historian of the Middle Ages writing in the first half of the nineteenth century. In many respects his reading of Merovingian history was a deformation of the position taken by De Boulainvilliers, as adapted by Montesquieu and Mably: the Franks were brutal invaders who subjugated the indigenous Gallo-Roman population, with the result that the ordinary people of Gaul lived in a state of permanent oppression. One reason for Thierry's success was his decision to write 'faction' – fictional accounts of the early Merovingian period, which stuck as close as possible to the original sources, while attempting to emulate the vividness of Sir Walter Scott's romances. Thierry's "Récits des temps mérovingiens", which began to appear in 1829, and were collected together in 1840, were an enormous popular success, both in France and England (and indeed the United States), being translated into English in 1845. But they also boast a very considerable critical apparatus of footnotes. The "Récits" revolve around a series of character sketches: "Fredegonde, the ideal of elementary barbarism, without consciousness of right or wrong; Hilperik, the man of barbaric race, who acquires the tastes of civilization, and becomes polished outwardly without any deeper reformation; Mummolus, the civilized man who becomes a barbarian, and corrupts himself in order to belong to his age; Gregory of Tours, the man of a former epoch, but one better than the present, which oppresses him, the faithful echo of the regrets which expiring civilization calls up in some elevated minds."⁵⁰

It is not difficult to detect the influence of this dramatic and highly individualised approach to Merovingian history in most of the paintings of the Panthéon. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that Jean-Paul Laurens, who was responsible for the intensely dramatic depiction of the death of Geneviève on the south wall of the choir, illustrated the deluxe editions of the "Récits mérovingiens" of 1882 and 1887.⁵¹

Augustin Thierry has nothing to say about Geneviève in his "Récits mérovingiens", but his brother, Amédée, dealt briefly with the history of the saint in his "Histoire d'Attila et de ses successeurs",⁵² first published in 1856, and reprinted in 1864, 1865, 1872 and 1874, the very year in which many of the Panthéon paintings were commissioned. Interestingly, he went out of his way to compare Geneviève with Jeanne d'Arc⁵³ – a comparison which can also be found in the Panthéon. It should also be noted that Amédée was wholly aware of the importance of historical commemoration: in 1857 he was consulted by Napoléon III on the exact site of the *bataille de Châlons*, or the Catalaunian Plains, where Attila was defeated.⁵⁴ Amédée eschewed the 'factional' approach of his brother, though the Byzantine historian Priscus provided him with a description of Attila and his court which was every bit as lively as any historical novel.⁵⁵ For his account of Attila's campaign in Gaul, Amédée Thierry had to turn instead to Jordanes, and more importantly to a series of hagiographical accounts, among them the "Vita Genovefae", which allowed him to provide a dramatic description of the siege of Paris.⁵⁶ This may well have been the main inspiration for Delaunay's depiction of the event in the Panthéon.

One of the artists of the Panthéon paintings, however, stands apart: Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, who was responsible for the depictions of the childhood of Geneviève, her meeting with saint Germanus, and her activity during one of the sieges of Paris. By contrast with the dramatic, even melodramatic, images of Blanc, Delaunay and Laurens, Puvis' vision is one of remarkable tranquility and calm. In discussing the distinction between Puvis' works and those of his fellow artists, particularly with Delaunay's portrayal of Geneviève's calming of the people of Paris during Attila's siege of the city, it has been pointed out that while Delaunay's work was commissioned in 1874, Puvis' paintings of Paris under siege were only commissioned in 1889, after an initial commission to the artist Meissonier had fallen through.⁵⁷ It has, therefore, been argued that Puvis' paintings of the besieged city no longer reflected the turmoil of the period immediately following the Franco-Prussian War. However, tranquility is a hall-mark of all Puvis' designs for the Panthéon, including those of the childhood of

⁵⁰ Augustin Thierry, *The Historical Essays* (Philadelphia 1845) 111.

⁵¹ Alexander Callander Murray, *Gregory of Tours, The Merovingians* (Peterborough, Ontario 2005) xxvii–xxviii. A number of Laurens' illustrations are reproduced in the volume.

⁵² Amédée Thierry, *Histoire d'Attila et de ses successeurs*, 5th edn. 1 (Paris 1874) 145–151.

⁵³ Thierry, *Histoire d'Attila* 1, 149.

⁵⁴ Thierry, *Histoire d'Attila* 1, 428–437.

⁵⁵ Thierry, *Histoire d'Attila* 1, 60–120.

⁵⁶ Thierry, *Histoire d'Attila* 1, 145–151.

⁵⁷ De Lépinau, *Peintures* 42.

Geneviève which was among those commissioned in 1874. Of course, the saint's childhood does not cry out for dramatic representation as does an image of a war-torn city. Even so, the fact that all Puvis' paintings for the Panthéon stand out as different from those of his fellow artists demands some more complex explanation.

One factor that should perhaps be taken into account is the question of which siege of Paris is being represented by Puvis. The Delaunay image of Geneviève calming the besieged Parisians is juxtaposed with a portrayal of Attila's army: there can be little doubt that it was the Hunnic siege that he was painting. But the saint was involved in a second siege, by the Franks. *A priori* it is unlikely that Puvis was merely offering his own interpretation of the scene already painted by Delaunay. The descriptions of Puvis' painting are not explicit as to which of the two sieges was intended, saying merely "Ardente dans sa foi et sa charité Geneviève que les plus grands périls n'ont pu détourner de sa tâche ravitaille Paris assiégé et menacé de la famine", and "Geneviève soutenue par sa pieuse sollicitude veille sur la ville endormie."⁵⁸ In fact the reference to supplying the starving city with food may seem to suggest that Puvis was portraying the Frankish siege of Paris. Certainly the "Vita Genovefae" has more to say about starvation in the latter crisis.⁵⁹ In which case one might want to see the calm of Puvis' paintings of the siege as performing the same task as Blanc's baptism of Clovis: the Franks, as opposed to the Huns, were to be portrayed in as sympathetic a manner as possible – their siege of Paris should therefore be presented as a tranquil affair.

The scene of Geneviève's vigil over the sleeping city may, however, tap as deeply into the Parisian experience as do the paintings of Blanc, Delaunay, Laurens and the other painters who worked on the Panthéon. Perhaps more so. The image of the saint in the city under siege was bound to have resonances for anyone who had lived in Paris through the winter of 1870–1. Puvis had stayed within the city throughout the siege: he had even painted two of the most iconic images of the siege years: "Le Ballon" and "Le Pigeon".⁶⁰ The former has as an inscription on the frame "La Ville de Paris Investie Confie à l'Air Son Appel à la France";⁶¹ the latter has "Echappé à la Serre Ennemie, le Message Attendu Exalte le Cœur de la Fièrè Cité".⁶² For all their allegorical style, these pictures both present images of a real war-torn city, with recognisable representation of its fortifications: "Le Pigeon" commemorates the use of carrier pigeons during the siege, while "Le Ballon" alludes to a specific event: the departure of Gambetta from Paris by balloon.⁶³ The image of Geneviève's vigil, which echoes those of "Le Ballon" and "Le Pigeon", of course, lacks any precise observation of the modern city. Yet Puvis may have put more of his experience of the siege into the picture than is at first apparent. Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of the painting is its representation of a moonlit night. One wonders if the artist here was trying to recapture Paris without street-lighting – for the city had become famous for its gas-lights and both the installation and the absence of lighting during the siege were matters that struck contemporaries.⁶⁴

On the other hand Puvis, like Jean-Paul Laurens in his painting of the death of Geneviève, was also very deliberately trying to present a historically accurate image of fifth-century Gaul. But whereas Laurens looked back to Thierry (who, despite his 'factional' approach was determined to present the past as accurately as he could), Puvis seems to have been drawing on the latest in historical scholarship: on the interpretations of Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges. Fustel was a stickler for accuracy in his own scholarship, which he saw as scientific. This might have left him opposed to artistic representations of the past. On the contrary: he even exhorted the painters of his day to paint "la race gallo-romaine au travail, occupée à tisser, à bâtir les villes, à élever des temples, à étudier le droit, à mener de front les labeurs et les jouissances de la paix."⁶⁵ Puvis had already responded to such ideas in a number of commissions, among them his painting of "Marseille colonie Grecque". Moreover Fustel had a strong sense of patriotism: "Le véritable patriotisme n'est pas l'amour du sol,

⁵⁸ De Lépinay, *Peintures* 42: "Ardent in her faith and charity, Geneviève, who could not be diverted from her task by great dangers, provided food for Paris, besieged and menaced with famine"; "Geneviève, sustained by her pious concern, looks over the sleeping city."

⁵⁹ Attila's siege is described in *Vita Genovefae*, ed. Krusch 12–13; that of the Franks, 35–40.

⁶⁰ Hollis Clayson, *Paris in Despair. Art and Everyday Life under Siege (1870–71)* (Chicago 2002) 144–62.

⁶¹ "The town of Paris under siege commits to the air her call to France."

⁶² "Escaped from the enemy talon, the expected message exalts the heart of the proud city."

⁶³ Clayson, *Paris in Despair* 160.

⁶⁴ Clayson, *Paris in Despair* 51–54.

⁶⁵ Aimée Brown Price, *Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Catalogue*, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Zwolle 1994) 17 (with notes p. 26): "the Gallo-Roman race at work, busy weaving, building towns, erecting temples, studying law, experiencing at once the labours and pleasures of peace."

c'est l'amour du passé, c'est le respect pour les générations qui nous ont précédés."⁶⁶ This patriotism is most apparent in a scathing public attack on the great classical scholar Theodor Mommsen, who in the course of the Franco-Prussian War wrote three open letters to the Italian people, urging them to support German claims to Alsace.⁶⁷

Fustel, who was Professor in Strasbourg until the summer of 1870, naturally had extremely strong feelings about Alsace being French. In the summer of 1870 he moved to Paris, where he had been appointed Professor at the Sorbonne. As a result he endured the Prussian siege from within the city walls. It is scarcely surprising that the question of the history of Merovingian and Carolingian Francia – with all the questions that they raised for the relations between Germans and Gauls – came to dominate the last years of his life. Interestingly he reacted by arguing for remarkable assimilation between Franks and Gallo-Romans.⁶⁸

Fustel's reading of the past was very unlike that which had dominated French historiography from the 1790s onwards. He was first and foremost an ancient historian: for many his *magnum opus* is "La cité antique" of 1864. He, therefore, came to the sources for the early Merovingians with all the skills and knowledge of a classicist. In evaluating the evidence for the Germanic peoples of the Late and post-Roman periods, he was much struck by the fact that Tacitus' Germania was largely irrelevant.⁶⁹ Almost every aspect of early Frankish social history could be paralleled in the Roman world.⁷⁰ He, therefore, attributed relatively little to the Franks: certainly not a new sense of liberty or, conversely, a new type of monarchical power. And he lampooned what he regarded as the non-scientific Germanist tradition.⁷¹ Overall his stance was a good deal closer to that of Dubos than it was to Mably and Montesquieu. But whereas Dubos saw the creation of the Merovingian kingdom in political terms, Fustel, as one might expect from the teacher of Durkheim, was more interested in the workings of society.

Despite its novelty, Fustel's reading seems to have been absorbed by Puvis, if not by the other artists employed to work on the Panthéon by Chennevières. According to her hagiographers Genovefa was involved in saving her city from both the Huns and the Franks,⁷² and eighteenth-century historians had commented on the Frankish siege of the city – more so perhaps than have any of their modern counterparts.⁷³ Fustel paused to say a little about the siege, albeit to downgrade its importance.⁷⁴ Faced with the reality of German brutality evident in the Franco-Prussian War, he was careful to make a distinction between the relations of Franks and Gallo-Romans and the conflicts of his own day: "Ces violentes et aveugles haines qui remplissent aujourd'hui le cœur du Germain étaient inconnues à ces ancêtres. Pour les Germains d'alors, 'l'ennemi héréditaire', c'est le Germain."⁷⁵ In the Panthéon one does not see Franks fighting Gallo-Romans: the Franks fight the Alamans, and the violent threat posed to Paris is that of the Huns.

Puvis would seem to have been inspired by Fustel. But even Blanc, Delaunay and Laurens, in their dependence on the vision of Thierry, were responding to serious historical scholarship. In place of the monarchic use of the Merovingian past, as envisaged by Louis XV, the Panthéon of the period after 1874 looked back on Geneviève, and even on Attila, Chlothilde and Clovis, in a different way. Concerns about the origins of the

⁶⁶ Brown Price, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes 17 (with notes p. 26): "True patriotism isn't love of soil, it is love of the past, it is respect for the generations that have preceded us."

⁶⁷ Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *L'Alsace est-elle allemande ou française* (Paris 1870). See François Hartog, *Le XIXe siècle et l'histoire, Le cas Fustel de Coulanges*, (Paris 2001) 59–60. For a discussion of Mommsen's letters, see Patrick Geary, *Historians as public individuals, The Reuter Lecture 2006* (Southampton 2007). Mommsen's letters are reprinted with commentary by Gianfranco Liberati in *Quaderni di Storia* 2, 4 (1976), 197–247.

⁶⁸ The absence of rancour in Fustel's scholarship is noted by Dopsch, *The Economic and Social Foundations* 21.

⁶⁹ Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *Histoire des Institutions Politiques de l'ancienne France 2: L'Invasion Germanique et la Fin de l'Empire*, ed. Camille Jullian (Paris 1891) 226–302.

⁷⁰ Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *Histoire des Institutions Politiques de l'ancienne France 3: La Monarchie Franque* (Paris 1930) 55, 354, 479, 640: for social aspects that he did see as Germanic, see 87, 138, 147.

⁷¹ Most notably in *De la manière d'écrire l'histoire en France et en Allemagne*, in: *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1st September 1872) 241–51.

⁷² Vita Genovefae, ed. Kursch 12–13, 35–40.

⁷³ Dubos, *Histoire critique* 3, 473, with vol. 1, 516.

⁷⁴ Fustel de Coulanges, *L'Invasion Germanique et la Fin de l'Empire* 492.

⁷⁵ Fustel de Coulanges, *L'Invasion Germanique et la Fin de l'Empire* 322: "The violent and blind hatreds which today fill the heart of the German were unknown to their ancestors. For the German of those days the hereditary enemy was the German."

monarchy, and of the power of the aristocracy, had gone, at least in the circle of Fustel. The question of Frank versus Gallo-Roman, which had been of such importance to De Boulainvilliers and also – in terms of the liberty of *Germania* – to Montesquieu and Mably is largely absent from the decorations of the Panthéon, though it could have been highlighted had de Chennevières and his artists so desired. Thus, while there was still piety and patriotism, neither were exactly what they had been. Equally important, there was also a desire to underpin those emotions by reconstructing a realistic image of the Gallo-Roman society as far as was possible.

The artists working in the Panthéon, therefore, offered an up-to-date reading of the late Roman and Merovingian past, even though it was one which echoed their own concerns. Blanc transforms Clovis from a German into a Gaul, while Puvis presents the period of the barbarian invasions as one of Gallo-Roman continuity, much as Fustel was doing.

The history of the Panthéon and its paintings thus cannot be separated from the cult of the Geneviève, Chlothilde and Clovis, nor from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historiography of the Middle Ages, any more than from the circumstances in which it was erected and decorated. The images commissioned by the marquis de Chennevières may not be as obviously relevant to the history of modern France as the issues privileged by Ozouf in her reading of the Panthéon. They do, however, deserve to be remembered: they belong to a series of important debates about past and present which went on throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Ozouf's terms, they impinge on the question of "pourquoi et comment la Révolution française s'en empare et l'insert en un lieu."⁷⁶ They demonstrate clearly that the Early Middle Ages should not be left out of modern history – and indeed that we should not ignore modern history when we read interpretations of the distant past.

⁷⁶ Ozouf, *Le Panthéon* 141: "why and how the French Revolution took hold of and fitted into a place."