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**François Igersheim**, *L'Alsace et ses historiens, 1680-1914. La Fabrique des monuments*. Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2006. 524 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. 32 €. ISBN 978-2-86820-269-7.

Review by Rebecca McCoy, Lebanon Valley College.

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Although the tension between the periphery and the center is a major theme in French history, the relationship of Alsace to France has been far more problematic than that of any other province. Despite the cultural and linguistic diversity of France, Alsace also shares a language and culture with Germany, and the province has been the subject of territorial contestation longer than any other region of the country. In the seventeenth century, France claimed Alsace through an insistence on "natural frontiers." [1] With the advent of the French Revolution, Alsace became integrated into the French polity on the basis of shared political values of liberty and equality. At the same time, German nationalism began defining nationhood in terms of a shared language and culture. After victory in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, Germany annexed Alsace on the basis of cultural and linguistic similarity. In the course of this struggle, the people of Alsace developed a specifically Alsatian identity, insisting on their particular blend of French and German culture. In a study that owes much to the themes set out by Pierre Nora for France as a whole, François Igersheim explores the relationship between history and identity in Alsace from 1680 to 1914, showing how both written records and artifacts became the "sites of memory" for the Alsace that was "always there" no matter what nation state dominated the region. [2]

Igersheim is eminently well qualified to undertake this task. A professor at the Université Marc Bloch of Strasbourg, he is the author of two other works on Alsace in the period 1848 to 1914. [3] The "sites of memory" or "monuments" of the title include the edited collections of manuscripts, archives, libraries, museums, ruins and archaeological sites, and historic buildings. Hence, he draws on a broad array of sources: archives, printed historical works dating from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, archival inventories and exhibition catalogs, printed reports from public commissions, newspapers, and scholarly journals and local histories from the entire period.

Igersheim opens his account with the late seventeenth century after the reunion of Strasbourg with France. He explores how Alsatian historians set the agenda for the understanding of their history first as part of the Holy Roman Empire and then as a French province. Igersheim shows how the historians working during this period established the basis for the ways in which Alsations approached their history. The earliest historians of this period, primarily Jesuits and other Catholic clergy, compiled many of the early chronicles of medieval Alsace and drew up inventories of statues and inscriptions. In so doing, they set the agenda that Igersheim has used to structure his book; that is they viewed history as grounded in both written documents and artifacts. This section of the book is brief albeit informative, and the real focus of his study lies in the second half of the eighteenth century and later.

The period after 1750 was even more important for setting the foundation of a regional Alsatian history. Some of the impetus came from Paris with the formation of a royal archive service. An attached "Comité des Chartes" was established by Jacob-Nicolas Moreau, who appointed provincial historians to promote historical work and preservation in their respective regions. In Alsace, Abbé Grandidier was appointed as the regional correspondent for the Committee. But Grandidier was not just an apologist for a Catholic interpretation of Alsatian history. Imbued with the ideas of the Enlightenment, he argued for reconciliation between faith and reason and for a universalist view of regional history. Moreover, his approach received the support of Bishop Louis-César-Constantin de Rohan (d. 1779) who had encouraged cooperation between the two confessions. The growth of freemasonry in the province during the same period also transcended confessional differences. Therefore, for the first time, Alsatians were able to form learned societies that bridged the religious divide. This period also witnessed the spread of French usage in learned circles. Significantly, Grandidier was the first Alsatian historian to write in the French language. Nonetheless, in the spirit of tolerance and universalism, Alsatian intellectuals remained open to contacts with Germany and German cultural influences. German romantics such as Goethe and Herder, who lived in Alsace in the 1770s, contributed to the interest in the history of Alsace as a province.

In a section on the Revolution that covers the period from 1789 to 1830, Igersheim lays out the importance of both the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. In one of the more dramatic parts of the book, the author describes the sheer scale of the private libraries, archival collections, and the cart loads of art expropriated from the seigneurs and monasteries, which the revolutionaries then had to house and catalog, a task not completed for decades. He also describes the vast numbers of buildings, especially churches, monasteries, and chateaux, that were left abandoned and in ruins by the Revolution.

In contrast to the destruction of the revolutionary period, efforts to organize the enormous amounts of material that had been appropriated and stored characterized the Napoleonic era. It was in this period that the departmental and municipal archives and classification systems--the systems that all historians of France use--were established. At the beginning of the Restoration, both the academies and the government (under François Guizot as Minister of the Interior) began to inventory Alsace's physical monuments.

Even as Alsace became more closely integrated with France and its history, Alsatian historians of the period were able to maintain close ties with colleagues in Germany because Napoleon's Empire straddled both sides of the Rhine. Intellectual exchanges with Germany persisted even after 1814. The German emphasis on cultural nationalism that led to the romantic rediscovery of German folklore emphasized the importance of local history. This trend was influential in Alsace. But if Alsatians were open to both French and German traditions during this period, the fault line between Protestants and Catholics had reappeared due because of revolutionary persecution of the Church. Until after 1830, therefore, Catholic clergy were less important in the production of Alsatian history.

Igersheim portrays the July Monarchy as another important turning point in defining Alsace's relationship with its past. He describes this period as one when liberal rationalism and organization prevailed. The role of Guizot, an historian as well as a statesman, was again paramount. Under his guidance, legislation defined the role of

the municipalities in terms of cultural patrimony and provided more funding and personnel for the archives and libraries that housed the sources of history. The government also appointed an inspector of monuments and then established a Commission of Historical Monuments. It encouraged the role of local notables in writing history, especially through participation in historical societies.

The reemergence of heightened confessional tensions also marked this period. André Raess, who became Bishop of Strasbourg in 1843, took the initiative in promoting a renewal of Catholic historiography. The various Catholic reviews of the era emphasized the connection between the Church and Alsatian identity, rejected the revolutionary tradition, and even attacked Protestantism in some articles. More liberal publications emphasized the role of the bourgeoisie, the continuities between the republican tradition of Strasbourg and the French Revolution, and finally the way in which the Revolution had made Alsace French. This line of thought emphasized the pluralistic tradition of Alsace.

Renewed debate about the use of French and German also marked this period, particularly because French was becoming more widespread among the Alsatian bourgeoisie. Most Alsatian Protestants were Lutheran, and Catholicism was associated with France. Yet the debate over language did not take place entirely along sectarian lines because both religious groups had ties with the rest of France (the Church and the French monarchy for the Catholics and trade with Paris for the Protestant bourgeoisie) and with Germany (the German churches, learned societies, and universities for both groups). This issue of language was central in terms of both historical writing and the publication of historical document collections. All of these tensions demonstrated the complexity of the debates over the Alsatian past.

Igersheim also devotes an important section of his study to the period between 1851 and 1870. He describes the French Second Empire as a centralizing regime that nonetheless encouraged decentralization in terms of historical writing. Government officials recognized that only the locals understood the relevant languages and so encouraged people from each region to write their own histories. But these local histories were to be assimilated with a larger narrative of French history. Each local history was to show how a region contributed to the formation of France. The government also promoted more translations of sources into French. For Alsace, part of this project coincided with rising tension between France and the German Confederation given French involvement in Italy and German efforts at unification. In this context, the nation-wide historical project of promoting local history in the service of the nation had heightened significance. Nonetheless, Alsatians during this period continued to be the intermediaries between French and German culture. Igersheim shows, for example, how both Germany and France shared a similar movement in founding historical societies and how Alsatian historians were influenced by the new German concept of *Kulturgeschichte*, which emphasized the importance of ethnography.

The final three sections of the book (of seven) are devoted to the period between 1870 and 1914. With annexation by Germany, the writing of history and historical monuments (both sources and artifacts) became part of a more general project of effacing Alsace's French past and reaffirming its essential "Germanness". As with his sections on France, Igersheim first discusses the institutional and legal framework, showing that in this area at least, much of the French structure such as departmental archives remained in place.

During this period, German policies in both politics and culture drove a wedge between Alsatians and Germans, thereby inserting another fault line into Alsatian life. The Germans justified annexation on the basis of cultural and linguistic similarity and they promoted historical writing that proved that Alsace had always been German. Nonetheless, the Germans administered Alsace as a conquered province and imposed a policy of germanization, thereby alienating their new subjects. The establishment of a Protestant and German university in Strasbourg was central to this project. This included a spread of "German Science" (not new but now imposed rather than freely adopted as a model by individual historians) in terms of shaping approaches to history. This history, moreover, was now primarily undertaken by Germans because most of the personnel at the university as well as of the learned societies included few Alsatians. The new German faculty argued that under the French, Alsatian history had remained local as part of France because it bore no relation to the French nation. Now as part of a German Second Empire, Alsatian history would be more important because it was part of the universal German state. Thus, the Germans promoted the study of Alsatian history but in service of their own national project.

In this period as in others, the traditional divisions in Alsatian life continued to play a role in the actual writing of history. Given that the province had come under Prussian administration and that the *Kulturkampf* extended to Alsace, this history was primarily Protestant in interpretation. Catholic historiography, however, reemerged in the 1880s. Although the Germans emphasized the way in which Alsace would fit into a universal history, their own historiography encouraged a continued emphasis on *Kulturgeschichte*, but now with a focus on local economic and social history. In Alsace, this approach was influential because any attempt to write interpretive history foundered on debates over the region's national identity. The Alsatians, who had instigated an autonomy movement in the political realm, insisted on their "double culture" in which Alsace was German in terms of culture and language but French in administration and egalitarian principles.

Igersheim ultimately argues that, because of the German domination of academic history and institutions, local societies became the guardians of Alsatian history and monuments. Ironically, it was the Club Vosgien, with its affiliates, that became the model for local history societies. Founded as hiking societies on the model of similar organizations in Germany, the clubs not only promoted tourism, but also an interest in seeing the monuments, ruins, and other cultural sites of the province. After the turn of the century these clubs began to be the most active organization in encouraging interest in the history of the province. Unfortunately, Igersheim's account ends with 1914 and the war and does not point to the changes that came after Alsace rejoined France. How the *Annales* school, which developed at the University of Strasbourg after re-annexation by France in 1918, fits into Igersheim's argument would be of great interest to many historians.

Igersheim's work illuminates some important themes that link it to both French and German history. In showing how, with every change in regime, the Alsatians had to redefine their relationship to France and Germany he makes an important contribution to understanding how the regions of Europe have had to fit into a system structured by nation-states. He shows how the Alsatians, even when pressured by the politics of statehood, ultimately came to define themselves as culturally German and politically French. Igersheim also is quite successful in providing a nuanced picture of how religious divisions within Alsace influenced historical writing and preservation. The question of bias and neutrality of any history

written by someone from the region is important, especially when that history is so contested. Igersheim's book, in fact, makes assimilation by the French appear to have been a much more benign process than the German efforts after 1870. That said, Igersheim's interpretation resonates with the conclusions drawn by other historians who have written about issues of national identity in Alsace. Although he cites some of this work, he might have made more use of it as a way to show how scholarship by historians from outside of the region, and indeed, from outside France and Germany, confirm his own conclusions.[4]

In conclusion, Igersheim's book is a major achievement. He reminds us that the sources we read, whether archives or printed material, have their own history and were potentially part of the intellectual debates of the time in which they were produced. Most historians work with written sources, but Igersheim also points to the links between written and archaeological monuments and between historians and other professions that specialize in examining the past. His work, therefore, enables us to see how the people of a region preserved sources and monuments and debated about how their past should be remembered. In doing so they shaped the history that we write today.

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#### NOTES

[1] Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

[2] Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, 3 vols. (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1992).

[3] Francois Igersheim, *L'Alsace des Notables, 1870-1914* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1981); and *Politique et administration dans le Bas-Rhin (1848-1870)* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1993).

[4] Although he cites John Craig's study of the University of Strasbourg, he does not mention the work of Dan Silverman, *Reluctant Union: Alsace-Lorraine and Imperial Germany, 1871-1918* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984); Stephen Harp, *Learning to Be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850-1940* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1998); or a series of articles by Rebecca McCoy, "Between Violence and Toleration: The Culture of Accommodation in an Alsatian Community, 1648-1715," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 52 (April 2001): 244-281; "The Société Populaire at Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines: Local Culture and National Identity in an Alsatian Community during the French Revolution" *European History Quarterly* 27 (October 1997): 435-474; "Alsations Into Frenchmen: The Construction of National Identities at Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines, 1815-1848," *French History* 12 (December 1998): 429-45.

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