
REVIEWS

DIE NORDWESTSLAVEN UND DAS FRÄNKISCHE REICH: BEOBACHTUNGEN ZUR GESCHICHTE IHRER NACHBARSCHAFT UND ZUR ELBE ALS NORDÖSTLICHER REICHSGRENZE BIS IN DIE ZEIT KARLS DES GROSSEN. By *Raimund Ernst*. Osteuropastudien der Hochschulen des Landes Hessen, series 1. Giessener Abhandlungen zur Agrar- und Wirtschaftsforschung des europäischen Ostens, vol. 74. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot in Kommission, 1976. 244 pp. Paper.

Recognizing that most studies of the *Drang nach Osten* have begun with Slavic-Germanic contacts in the tenth century, Raimund Ernst has examined the earlier history of these contacts in order to place them in proper perspective. The result is a careful and enlightening study of Merovingian and Carolingian contacts with the Northern Slavs which suggests that, by the death of Charles the Great in 814, the course of Slavic-Germanic interaction was far from set.

The book's virtues are threefold: the author's intelligent introduction to the general problem of early medieval borders; his careful examination of the scarce documentation concerning Frankish contact with the Northern Slavs; and his conclusion that into the ninth century the Franks considered their Slavic neighbors ethnically distinct but neither naturally inferior nor hostile. The book's two weaknesses are closely interrelated: the author concentrates exclusively on the political interaction of Slavs and Franks and limits himself to the discussion of written sources only. The result of these two limitations is that the book is a useful but narrow history of Frankish *Ostpolitik*, rather than a study of Frankish-Slavic relations.

Prior to the Saxon wars, Frankish contact with the Northern Slavic peoples was minimal, except for the unsuccessful war of Dagobert I against the kingdom of Samo. With the campaigns against the Saxons during the reigns of Pepin the Brief and Charles the Great, the Elbe Slavs became of real consequence to the Franks, who supported missionary activities among the Slavs and made military alliances with them, thus demonstrating that they considered the Slavs, and particularly the Obodrites, worthy allies. For strategic reasons, at the conclusion of the Saxon conquest, Charles established the Elbe as his border, but Ernst shows that this choice was neither absolute nor firm until the threat to this new part of the empire by the Danes and Vilzi led to the fortification of a border which roughly followed the Elbe to the sea.

One can find little to criticize in this survey, except, perhaps, what appears to be a sense of Frankish manifest destiny which views the ultimate conquest of all the other Germanic peoples as simply a matter of time (p. 70). What one does miss is a real sense of the nature and geographical realities of Germanic and Slavic settlement in the Elbe region. The state of North Slavic archaeology is, one must admit, not as well developed as that of the South. Nevertheless, Ernst would have done a real service had he brought to bear his knowledge of the documentary evidence on the archaeological material and attempted to correlate the two. The results might have been an important discussion of the actual nature of Germano-Slavic social and material interaction in the region along the lines that Herwig Friesinger and his school are doing for lower Austria. Finally, the total absence of maps of the region makes it difficult to sense the geographical realities of the Elbe during the Early Middle Ages.

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