

Book Review: Christoph Haack, *Die Krieger der Karolinger: Kriegsdienste als Prozesse gemeinschaftlicher Organisation um 800* (Berlin, DeGruyter, 2020), 273 Pages, ISBN 978-3-11-062614-8

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Published as volume 115 of the series *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, edited by Sebastian Brather, Wilhelm Heizmann and Steffen Patzold (Haack's dissertation supervisor), Christoph Haack's monograph, *Die Krieger der Karolinger: Kriegsdienste als Prozesse gemeinschaftlicher Organisation um 800* (The Carolingian Fighters: Military Service as a Process of Communal Organisation ca. 800) is based on his 2018 doctoral dissertation submitted to the Eberhard Karls-University Tübingen. As its main title suggests, its focus is on the Carolingian fighter, and as the subtitle prefigures, the study's conclusions point to a novel understanding of the sources commonly recited as the constituting texts for Carolingian military organisation.

Die Krieger der Karolinger is structured in four parts: The first part traces the historical and historiographical development of the key concepts involved with the study; the second part deconstructs the concepts; the third part reconstructs the concepts based on the findings developed in the second part; and the fourth part formulates conclusions and outlook derived from the process.

Throughout, Haack writes in a refreshingly readable style, even when discussing nineteenth-century German historiographical dogmatics, and the reader has no problem following his argument. His propositions are rigorously referenced; the 'canonical' renderings of the sources in *Documenta Germaniae Historica* are subjected to scrutiny and critique, and alternative and supplementary sources and transmission traditions evaluated for validation and comparison. Repetitions are few, and where they occur should assist the reader interested in only selected sections of the work.

In the monograph's first substantive part, Haack meticulously traces the various academic streams developed in both the Anglophone and the German academic discussion. Since the subject-matter of his work nurtures deep-rooted political and academic controversies with reverberations into current affairs and cultural trends, this section is helpful in placing argumentative traditions in context and separating the ideological controversies from the merely academic.

Two terms stand out in this discussion: 'feudalism', which will be dealt with in the next section, and Haack's choice of '*Krieger*' to describe the individuals relevant to his study. For the Anglophone reviewer, this choice immediately highlights a problem of translation: Haack justifies his choice with the linguistic argument that a *Krieger* is simply 'he who engages in war (i.e. *Krieg*)'. The easy translation would be to use the English

term ‘warrior’. However, to this reviewer at least, the English term ‘warrior’ is far more loaded with ideological markers than the German word ‘*Krieger*’ (as Haack acknowledges, that term too is loaded, but not to the same extent as the English term, so justifying Haack’s choice). For that reason, I have preferred ‘fighter’ as transposition of ‘*Krieger*’. Mainly, Haack wants to avoid the terms ‘soldier’ or ‘levy’, so as not to prejudice a finding on whether the participants in Carolingian hosts were mainly full-time professionals.

The second part deconstructs the received wisdom, ‘turns’, and rival schools on Carolingian military organisation. The argument here revolves around the theories variously identified with, for example, Bernard Bachrach and Timothy Reuter, and based on ‘warband’, ‘conscription’, or ‘feudal tenure’. Here again, the stereotypical Anglophone and German academic perceptions (with apologies to the atypical) diverge. The Anglophone scene is dominated by Susan Reynolds’ *Fiefs and Vassals*; in its wake, the very concept of ‘feudalism’ in any guise has been questioned. Ideologically loaded as the concepts were (to an extent not readily appreciable to Anglophone academics, and in this argument I go beyond Haack’s exposition), the German academic discussion sought to side-step the controversy by separating ‘*Feudalismus*’, which as a term has a Marxist tinge and can be dismissed as a concept, from ‘*Lehnswesen*’ (i.e. substantive feudalism or feudal order), and without which German constitutional history makes no sense.

Haack concludes – confirming Reynolds’ more general analysis, but also expanding on it – that the capitularies do not support any of the proposed theories on military organisation. In his third part, he then proceeds to offer solutions to the aporetic conclusions of the second part. While *militare* in Carolingian terminology refers to a general obligation of service, which may or may not be military in the modern sense, it is an obligation the lower-ranking individual owes to a higher-ranking entity, however they may be described. For Haack, persuasively, this obligation is clearly an obligation in public law, not in private law – the dichotomy of public v. private law being a far more binary one in civil law systems than in Common law, and hence of great systematic concern to civil law legal historians.

However, the public law nature of the obligation, which in the ideality of public law obligations should preclude any room for negotiation, did not in fact do so. Whether the constraints, given the tools of the time, were the administrative practicality of implementation, the realistic ability of enforcement, or the political acceptance of the measures, the actual extent of the obligation could not be unilaterally defined by the ruler, but was the result of adaptation to what was doable and acceptable in the specific circumstances – the ‘process of communal organisation’ in Haack’s subtitle.

The capitularies, then, are *ad hoc* ‘high command’ reactions to contemporary problems impeding the Carolingian army mustering in the face of specific military threats at the time, problems resulting from weather-related harvest failures and hence a reduced

capacity of the yeomanry to respond to call-ups. As such, and Haack impressively traces the drafting history of a key capitulary, they portray military organisation in action. They do not evidence an attempt by Imperial or Royal authority to construct a new military constitution; the eagerly sought-after 'Carolingian revolution' in military matters cannot be documented. But Haack is too careful to be dragooned into the 'long late Antiquity continuity' camp; the absence of a revolution is not evidence for the absence of change.

The final chapter summarises and tests the findings and analyses of the previous chapters.

Not all questions are answered by the reconstruction, and some are actually generated by it: If the capitularies were issued to solve a specific problem with a specific aspect of the military constitution, were there elements of the military constitution which were not affected by the problem and hence do not find mention in the capitularies? The monograph focuses on warfare, and within the context of the discussion to date, such a thematic definition is understandable; but if *militia* referred generally to a public-law function, is such a narrow scope sensible, bearing in mind that the various elements of government (police, market regulation, tax collection, judiciary, etc., in addition to the strictly military) were not yet specialised in Carolingian times?

If the salient feature of academic discussion of Carolingian military organisation has been an inability to see the wood for all the trees, then Haack's monograph has the merit of dealing with the trees and so enabling a fresh view of the wood.