

Rafael Wagner, *Schwertträger und Gotteskrieger. Untersuchungen zur frühmittelalterlichen Kriegergesellschaft Alemanniens, Zürich (Chronos) 2019, 524 S., zahlr. farb. Abb., 2 Kt. (St. Galler Kultur und Geschichte, 42), ISBN 978-3-0340-1551-6, EUR 68,00.*

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The military history of the German-speaking lands in the period from late antiquity to the First Crusade has benefitted from increasing scholarly attention over the past 15 years from a variety of perspectives. The various »barbarian« law codes, and particularly those of the Bavarians and Alemanni, are now recognized to provide considerable information about both Roman and Frankish military organization. Scholars drawing on the vast corpus of material information regarding fortifications, developed through excavations, have illuminated the extensive levels of governmental control over human and material resources that was required for the construction of these sites.

Concomitantly, scholars are now beginning to recognize the large-scale of military operations that were necessary for the capture of the very numerous fortresses throughout the German-speaking lands as well as in neighboring regions. In addition, recent scholarship that focuses on narrative sources has recognized the tendency of writers to emphasize the exploits and participation of the elite in military affairs, and thereby to downplay the important contributions made by middling and small-scale landowners and landholders, who provided the numerical preponderance of fighting men throughout the period extending from the end of Roman imperial rule up through the crusading age.

It is against this growing body of scholarship on military matters that Rafael Wagner, *wissenschaftlicher Archivar* at the Stiftsarchiv at St. Gallen, has written his study on arms-bearing men in the region of Alemannia/Swabia with a focus on the 9th–11th centuries, but extending somewhat later as well into the 12th century. Wagner also casts his glance, on occasion, to the early Middle Ages, and particularly the period of Carolingian rule under Charlemagne (768–814).

This volume, which is a revised version of the author's dissertation, is organized into two major sections, each with numerous sub-sections, as well as an introduction and conclusion. Wager uses the introduction to explain his use of particular terms, including nobility, elite, functionary, transformation, and revolution, and also to discuss the main sources for his study. These include the large collection of charters preserved in the cartulary of the monastery of St. Gall, which deal primarily with the 8th and 9th century, and the *corpus* of Alemannic/Swabian



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narrative sources, many of which were composed in the 10th and 11th centuries.

The first section of the book, titled »Militarization and Reform«, is divided into three parts: 1. »Warriors and Arms Bearers«, 2. »Dependents, Servants, and »Minsterials«, and 3. »Roman Castles, City Walls, and Rural Refuges«. The first of these parts seeks to address a number of questions relating to the military organization of the Swabian region, particularly during the 10th and 11th centuries. Wagner discusses in some detail the campaign by Duke Burchard I of Swabia (917–926) to Italy in 926, examines the use of particular terms such as *exercitus*, *milites*, and *militia* in narrative sources, and discusses the roles played by various types of officials in the conduct of military affairs in Swabia. In this context, Warner posits a fundamental change in military organization in the 10th century, which focused on the large-scale recruitment of unfree dependents to serve in the military households of magnates.

In the second part, Wagner engages in a lengthy – 100 pages – excursus on the nature of unfreedom and dependence in Swabia, drawing largely on charters in the St. Gall collection, as well as early medieval law codes and high medieval regulations issued by bishops to govern the behavior of their extended *familiae*. In this context, Wagner describes a wide variety of types of unfreedom and dependence, including those individuals denoted as *mancipia*, *servientes*, *tributarii*, *censuales*, *servi*, and *ancillae*. The purpose of this discussion ostensibly is to show that unfree people participated in military activities in Swabia during the 10th and 11th centuries. However, most of the discussion in this section has little or no connection to military affairs.

The third part of section one, the shortest of the three, considers a range of questions dealing with the presence of fortifications in Swabia. The longest sub-section in this part provides an overview of Roman fortifications in this region before turning to the strongholds that were constructed in the first half of the 10th century to deal with the threat posed by raids by the Hungarians. The next sub-section considers fortified royal palaces as well as episcopal seats, before finally turning to a discussion of urban centers, and the beginning of aristocratic fortifications in the 11th century.

The second major section of the text, entitled »Mutations of Power«, also is divided into numerous sub-sections, but does not have much direct connection to military matters, or very much original to say. The first part of this section is focused on the comital office and comital duties, particularly in the 11th century. The second part concerns the officials and administration of the monastery of St. Gall, as well as the information that the charters of St. Gall can provide about members of the local elite and various types of officials. The third part treats the ducal office in Swabia, with a particular focus on Burchard I and Berthold II (1061–1077). In general, this section does not add new insights or information to the considerable body of scholarship that deals with local officials, counts, or dukes in Swabia.

In the conclusion to the work, Wagner reviews the main points of the two main sections and some of the sub-sections, and restates his main argument that the supposed transformation



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of military organization and societal structure in the 11th and 12th centuries was brought about by a major transformation in the nature of military service in the 10th century. Of particular importance, in Wagner's view, was the supposedly new extension of military service to the unfree dependents of ecclesiastical institutions, such as St. Gall, and the creation of a new *Kriegergesellschaft* that brought together members of the old aristocratic elite, professional »warriors« and unfree dependents (the new ministerials) into a new class, that ultimately would become the Swabian knighthood.

The volume is equipped with an extensive apparatus of notes, a bibliography of sources and scholarship, an index of personal and place names, and two appendices. The first of these provides a list of Swabian counts and counties from the 8th to the 11th century, and the second provides a glossary of Latin terms, used in the text. Finally, there are two maps that show, in turn, fortifications in the Bodensee region and central points belonging to the abbots of St. Gall.

In sum, Wagner deserves credit for addressing the still significant *lacunae* in the military history of the Swabian region in the period before the First Crusade. He is correct to point out the important role played by dependents, including unfree dependents, in the military forces of magnates in Swabia, as well as to emphasize the importance of a general militarization of the population to societal organization. What is missing, however, is a coherent treatment of military matters within the broader context of the institutions of the Carolingian period, which were adopted wholesale by the Ottonians, and an understanding of the ways in which the realities of military organization in Swabia are illuminated by those in other regions of the German realm, particularly Bavaria and Franconia.

In this context, Wagner begins with a fundamentally false premise regarding Carolingian military organization, which he presents p. 84 as an elite core of royal troops supported by a poorly armed rabble summoned through the *Heerbann*. In reality, the Carolingian campaign armies under Charlemagne and his successors, including those who ruled in the east, were comprised of three distinct elements, all of which were well-equipped and prepared for extensive campaigns that were focused on siege operations against large-scale fortifications. These elements were the royal military household, which included men from a wide range of backgrounds including the unfree, the military households of magnates, which also included unfree, and finally the great mass of middling to small-scale landowners and landholders. It is this last group that is conspicuously absent from Wagner's discussion of military affairs.

Another problematic point is Wagner's argument, which is not substantiated, that the military threats of the 10th century required a novel recruitment of unfree dependents to serve in the military household of the king's appointed officials, i. e. counts and duke, as well as by ecclesiastical magnates, because of a supposed lack of fighting men. But this argument is not consistent with the reality of military organization in Swabia or elsewhere in the German-speaking lands. First, the recruitment of unfree men to serve in



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military households was part already a well-established pattern under the Carolingians. Secondly, there is no reason to believe that military demands were higher in the 10th century than they were in the 9th century. Thirdly, and most importantly, Wagner completely ignores the already militarized population of landowners in Swabia, who served in the armies of the Carolingians and the Ottonians.

One final point that should be addressed is Wagner's insistence that in Swabia it was local magnates and not the king or even the duke, who played the central role in military affairs. He argues, in this context (p. 243), that the construction of the so-called *Ungarnburgen*, that is rural fortifications to which populations could flee in the face of Hungarian attacks, were evidence for local control over military matters because Swabia was too far away from the Ottonian kings from them to be concerned about local defenses. In this context Wagner incorrectly asserts (p. 290) that the Ottonian kings had lost the right and power to license the construction of fortifications. He also completely ignores the question of how any local authority, who did not hold the royal *bannum*, could have mobilized the local population, including those with the expertise for designing fortifications, to participate in the construction of the *Ungarnburgen*. Indeed, any understanding of military organization in Swabia in the 10th or 11th century also must take into account the public obligation to participate in the construction and defense of fortifications.



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