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Review Of "Reichsintegration Im Spiegel Der Herrschaftspraxis Kaiser Konrads II" By E. Müller-Mertens And W. Huschner

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Reichsintegration im Spiegel der Herrschaftspraxis Kaiser Konrads II.
by Eckhard Müller-Mertens and Wolfgang Huschner

Review by: Stephen P. Bensch

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ECKHARD MÜLLER-MERTENS and WOLFGANG HUSCHNER, *Reichsintegration im Spiegel der Herrschaftspraxis Kaiser Konrads II.* (Forschungen zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte, 35.) Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus, 1992. Pp. 452; tables. DM 112.

The present work devoted to the reign of Conrad II (1024–39) provides the second installment in a series of detailed studies on the itineraries and patterns of charter production of the kings of east Frankland and the German emperors from 843 to 1056. The project represents the most ambitious and complex analysis ever undertaken on the movements of medieval rulers. Eckhard Müller-Mertens, professor at Humboldt Universität in (formerly East) Berlin, laid the methodological groundwork for expanding research into itineraries a decade ago in his study of Otto I, *Die Reichsstruktur im Spiegel der Herrschaftspraxis Ottos des Großen* (Berlin, 1980); the techniques and organization remain identical with those established in the original study, but Wolfgang Huschner, a student of Müller-Mertens's, provides half the labor for the current project. By carefully examining the average length of time required for the imperial court to travel from one point on its itinerary to the next and by assembling information concerning the duration of imperial visits from narrative and diplomatic sources, the authors extrapolate from the fragmentary records to fill in substantial gaps in our knowledge about the movements of Conrad II. The results are convincing. While one may quibble with individual assumptions about the precise routes and travel times, the projections in their entirety offer considerable refinements to earlier attempts to trace out imperial itineraries; although the sources mention the precise location of Conrad II during only 4.5 percent of his reign, the new methodology can locate the imperial court during 90.6 percent of that time. The precision contributes significantly to the ongoing debate about the emergence of the eastern portion of the Carolingian world into a German political community and its place within the Ottonian-Salian empire.

To provide a new perspective on the question, Müller-Mertens and his school employ the physical presence of the court in a region and its issuance of diplomas as the primary means of measuring the political integration of the kingdom of Germany and its place within the empire. Following upon his earlier work, Müller-Mertens clearly believes that Germany did not constitute an integrated realm until the late eleventh century; instead the Ottonians and early Salians centered their power on dynastic core regions that touched other territories only through occasional family ties or irregular visitations. This view contrasts sharply with other scholars who place the turning point earlier; Hagen Keller in particular has recently argued that in the decades around 1000 the emperors extended their authority into all the major regions of Germany. The reign of Conrad II provides a good test case for the problem of political continuity since he was the first member of the Salian dynasty to ascend the throne.

Huschner composed the first half of the study, devoted exclusively to the imperial itinerary and summarized in eight appendices that spread out over fifty pages. The analysis revolves around the identification of three types of political regions depending on the periodicity and length of imperial visits: core, associative, and remote zones (*Zentral-, Nah-,* and *Fernzonen*). Otto I passed 28.8 percent of his time in three core regions, eastern Saxony–northern Thuringia, lower Lothringia, and the Rhenish Franconia; Conrad II, despite his family's ties to Franconia rather than Saxony, spent almost the identical proportion of his reign (28.7 percent) in the same three regions, although the first Salian emperor did distribute his visits more evenly among them rather than concentrating on the Harz as Otto I had done. Still, the itineraries offer strong evidence for continuity. The seasonal rhythms of the court also come through clearly as it wound its way leisurely through the familiar villages, palaces, and estates during late spring and summer in Saxony and Franconia and rushed off to hold grander assemblies at favored towns in more distant areas in the fall and winter. With rare exception the emperor returned to the Harz in

late June, the starting point for his itinerary, to live on his estates and make plans for war against the Slavs; more distant regions generally received the emperor between Christmas and Easter. In determining the imperial itinerary, seasonal cycles and political will appear to outweigh the needs of provisioning from the fisc. One is tempted to think of Germany as a winter kingdom.

In his half of the book, Müller-Mertens, whose conclusions are the terser and more cutting of the two, examines the geographical and political aspects of the extant diplomas: where they were issued, who received them, and what was granted. The results show more deviations than the itineraries from the practices of Otto I. Under Conrad II only 76 of the 256 diplomas whose place of issuance is known went to recipients from the political region where the court was held; under Otto, on the other hand, recipients often traveled to the Harz in order to receive imperial favors. The first Salian emperor also granted more charters to bishops than abbots, again a deviation from earlier Ottonian practices and a signal of increasing imperial reliance on the German episcopacy. Conrad II, however, did not issue diplomas in an effort to restructure imperial power. The charters contain a high proportion of confirmations, issued early in the reign, and they did not grant princes, bishops, or abbots lands or rights beyond their local political bases. Basically conservative in nature, the diplomatic activity of Conrad II extended the role of the court to associative regions without changing the basic structure of imperial rule.

In its methodology, careful checking and cross-checking, and wealth of detail, the book cannot fail to impress, but it is heavy going. Although beautifully printed, the numerous tables lack titles and concise headings to guide the browser; one often must plow through the preceding page or two before deciphering the information presented. The absence of maps, on which the results of much labor could be economically presented and immediately understood, is also disappointing. Most troubling, however, is the lack of engagement with larger issues of state formation and the forging of German identity in the introduction and conclusion. Non-Marxist scholars roundly criticized Müller-Mertens for his historiographical preface with its heavy ideological cast in the initial volume devoted to Otto I; the ponderous analytical precision of the current volume, however, weighs heavily on the reader and at times leaves one nostalgic for Marxist doxology to get the blood flowing. Because the methodology places a remarkably detailed, but rigid, geographical template on the function of political power, it tends to reduce all imperial courts to the same level. Distinctions in ceremonial occasion, the ritual interaction of the parties present, and the use of symbolic objects, all aspects that have received considerable attention in German scholarship, need to be incorporated in order to deepen our understanding of how the rulers manifested their power on their incessant wanderings. The authors may well have stepped back from drawing broad conclusions until other reigns have been studied. Yet Müller-Mertens and his school have begun a vast project at a particularly significant moment, for, when completed, it will surely stand as one of the most substantial products of medieval scholarship bridging the period of German reunification. Those involved have an obligation to articulate as fully as possible how their own views are evolving as they explore the nature of the German political community under the Ottonians and Salians.

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DAVID NICHOLAS, *Medieval Flanders*. London and New York: Longman, 1992. Paper. Pp. xiv, 463; 3 maps. £14.99.

Despite its relatively compact size, the county of Flanders had an importance during the high and late Middle Ages that far surpassed many larger polities. Its dense popu-