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BOOK REVIEW

Cooijmans, Christian. 2020. *Monarchs and Hydrarchs: The Conceptual Development of Viking Activity Across the Frankish Realm (c.750-940)* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge)

Dain Swenson

Scholarship on the Viking Age has to some extent surfed the wave of renewed popular interest in the subject during the last decade. As a result, there has been a growth in academic diversification, in addition to an increase in research output in the field. In the previous century, English-speaking scholarship tended toward an emphasis on the Scandinavian mainland and the westward Norse expansion into the UK, Ireland, Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland, and the short-lived efforts to explore North America. That is not to say that Viking and Norse activity in Central Europe, the Mediterranean, and Eastern Europe has been neglected. However, since the turn of the millennium, scholarship has benefited from a move towards increasing international cooperation and interdisciplinary research. This move has partially resulted in research on the eastern and southern Norse expansion moving from a national level to an international sphere of cooperative research.

Christian Cooijmans' *Monarchs and Hydrarchs* offers an examination of the evolution of the Norse waves of trading, Viking raids, and settlement in the Frankish realm through the creation of a structural sequential model of the intercultural activity between the Franks and the Vikings from the mid-eighth to mid-ninth centuries. Cooijmans draws from multiple spheres of data, including textual sources and archaeological research, to create the sequential model of changes in the Norse-Frankish relations during the Carolingian period. In contrast to the popular image of the opening of the Viking Age beginning in England with a lightning

attack on the Lindisfarne monastery that was unprecedented, *Monarchs and Hydrarchs* weaves through a nuanced and long-term perspective of the causes, reactions, and consequences of Norse attacks against the Franks during the Viking Age. The book is somewhat dependent upon acronyms for the plethora of textual sources and requires frequent backtracks to the acronym list for the unfamiliar reader, though the list of medieval textual sources for the book is robust and serves as an excellent opportunity for the reader to introduce themselves to medieval accounts in Carolingian Frankia. In addition to textual sources, archaeological research is referenced where available, but as the author notes, in comparison to other regions of Europe, the physical evidence of long-term Norse and Viking activity in Frankia is sparse.

The sequential model of hydrarchic activity, or the activity of ship-borne Scandinavians led by chieftains into Frankia, is illustrated by Cooijmans in an abstract manner with geospatial and politico-economic aspects, and with four distinct phases of activity (p. 5). The four phases of the model unfold in chapters two through seven. The terms ‘monarch’ and ‘hydrarch’ were not mutually exclusive roles during this period, as the roles were at times interchangeable (p. 34). This sequential model requires a background explanation of the region and parties involved to properly understand and put into perspective the intricacies of the actions and reactions of the Norse and the Franks.

Chapter two, ‘The Scandinavian Perspective’, lays the foundation for the Viking Age activities of the Norse with an overview of the end of the Iron Age in Scandinavia, and examining the earliest records of Norse kingdoms and the trade and contact that predated the Viking Age plundering of Frankia. This section demonstrates that rather than raiding villages or cities as the Norse came upon them, a pre-existing network of intelligence and familiarity with the region helped to facilitate the later piratic activity of the Vikings in Frankia. Carolingian Frankia was a massive realm, with an estimated 10-20 million people spread out over more than one million square kilometres (p. 67). The administration of such a realm, the intricacies of the laws and the counties, political alliances, and the fragility of stability in Frankia is a complex topic. A degree of familiarity is essential to appreciate conditions that facilitated Viking incursions for such a long period of time. Cooijmans deconstructs these aspects of the Carolingian state in chapter three. With an introduction to the state of Frankia for the reader, chapters four, five and six delve into the textual and archaeological evidence of trade between Scandinavia and Frankia preceding the Viking Age, the exchange of knowledge that the Norse would use to their advantage (p. 91), the Viking phenomenon as it evolved over time, and the eventual decline.

The commencement of regular Viking incursions into Frankia and the Carolingian response to raids into their territory is explored in chapter five. The Norse had ample targets and means to penetrate Frankia in the early stages of the Viking Age. However, even at an early period, the Franks were taking into consideration means to frustrate and deprive incursions into their territory. It is noted in chapter six that hydrarchic activity during this period was not singularly antagonistic towards the Franks. Indeed, the Franks had a far more complex relationship with the Norse even during a period of increasing Viking activity. Frankish elites would employ Norse parties against domestic political rivals as well as other potential Viking raiders (p. 92). This would eventually culminate in the establishment of Norse settlements, particularly Normandy, which would in later centuries exert a far-reaching influence on medieval European events. While Cooijmans's overview of this period for the purposes of the sequential model of hydrarchic activity is fairly comprehensive and detailed, it is heavily reliant upon contemporary written sources and there is little time devoted to discussing any fine details in the archaeological record that demonstrate the trade, violence, or movement of the Norse around Frankia. However, understanding the larger narrative is the more pressing concern of the book for the purposes of illustrating the model of hydrarchic activity through time.

The three case studies for the application of the model are the Lower Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt basin, Seine basin, and Loire basin. The model constructed for the study reflects Norse activity, with phases of the sequential model represented through the changes of activity seen in each area. The author does correctly point out some inconsistencies between case studies, such as the absence of evidence for Franco-Scandinavian trade activity in the Seine and Loire basins (p. 227). There is also unfortunately a missed opportunity to apply the model to an independent scenario such as England or Ireland to observe if activity in areas of the North Sea followed a similar path or experienced a marked difference in the evolution of Norse activity in these regions. However, due to the amount of time dedicated to introducing the dynamics at play between the Franks and the Norse to understand the model, it is understandable that doing so would not allow sufficient space to properly explain the variables at play. This leaves ample room for future applications of this type of sequential model to other regions in the Viking Age.

Monarchs and Hydrarchs is an informative read for the uninitiated in the Viking Age in Frankia, and the development of the model of hydrarchic activity during these centuries establishes a framework with which to observe trends in activity in Franco-Norse relations

during this formative period of both Scandinavia and Frankia. The book gives the reader an excellent overview of the period from multiple perspectives, and a solid introduction to medieval Frankish primary sources. The book may disappoint some archaeologists due to the emphasis on primary accounts, but there is a healthy bibliography of citations which offer excellent additional reading suggestions. The gradual move towards interdisciplinary cooperation within the field of Viking Studies creates a wide audience for the book and many will find something of value to learn.