Preface

history department faculty; funds raised in this manner are used to support various research projects. The History Institute awarded me a substantial grant in 1988 to purchase library materials, and in 1994 its board voted to contribute funds for the present publication. The NEH partially funded my travel to the MGH in Munich at a critical stage of my research. This institution deserves my thanks as well.

Throughout the years Archie Lewis was a great supporter, mentor, and friend, whose scholarly breadth continually inspired me to explore new concepts. I am very sorry that he is not present to witness the publication of this book. I am further indebted to Lynn H. Nelson, University of Kansas, who first introduced me to the methodological rigors of medieval studies. And, of course, I must mention Imre Boba, who wrote that "appalling" book that got me into controversies that I did neither seek nor want. Although I have cursed the name of Imre Boba many times over the past twenty years, we have become friends. He forced me to return to the sources of ninth-century history and to reexamine every assumption upon which modern historical constructs have been based.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family. My long-suffering children not only endured endless discussions of Franks, Moravians, and Magyars at supper time, but they also made numerous contributions to these topics. Both have accomplished much in the equestrian arts, and, as such, they functioned as experts-in-residence concerning technical matters of horsemanship, essential knowledge for anyone wanting to write medieval military history. My daughter Cordelia not only managed to survive these family discussions, but also to develop a genuine interest in central and eastern European languages and history. Christopher is studying animal science. He eventually hopes to utilize his knowledge more profitably than advising his historian father on such matters as the proper nutrition for pack and war horses. My wife Barbara, an accomplished scholar in her own right, has accompanied me along every step of this journey. Without her constant support, her knowledge, and her sensitivity, the present work would have remained unfinished. I dedicate this study to her. Needless to say, the errors in this book are my responsibility alone.

Munich, April 1994

1. Hypotheses and Methodologies

Introduction

This book takes a new look at Carolingian attempts to control the central Danubian basin and the struggles that consequently arose there between the Franks and other peoples, most prominently Avars, Moravian Slavs, and Magyars. Although Carolingian efforts to organize this region have been studied by many talented scholars, the history of the basin during this era has been subject to misinterpretation because few have questioned prevailing assumptions concerning the geographic location of ninth-century Moravia, a polity often designated as "the Great Moravian Empire." Most modern scholars believe that Moravian Slavs settled in the northern Morava Valley (modern Moravia, a part of the current Czech Republic). Since the publication of Imre Boba's southern Moravian hypothesis more than twenty years ago, however, the geographic assumptions supporting the traditional view can no longer be taken for granted. As we shall see, the emergence of ninth-century Moravia must have occurred several hundred kilometers to the southeast, near the modern Serbian-Hungarian-Romanian border, a geographic fact that (if true) alters dramatically our understanding of the dynamics of the relationships that existed between the peoples of the region.

It is necessary to insist on the possibility that the Moravians settled in the southeastern portions of the central Danubian basin because many scholars have been unwilling to reread the scarce and laconic written sources with open minds. The traditional location on Czech and/or Slovak territory is viewed not as a possibility whose plausibility needs constant scrutiny, but as a proven fact, an immutable point of reference. Unless one admits that this dogma rests on arbitrary assumptions and tenuous argumentation, no reinterpretation of the spotty and ambiguous evidence is possible. I suggest that the Carolingian sources, scrutinized thoroughly according to modern historical methodologies, offer considerable support for a southern location of Moravia. The organization of this Carolingian
Some having centers situated well beyond the region - a condition also of the region - a salient feature of frontier societies, and (3) "frontier" implies a zone of interaction between indigenous and intruding cultures, into contact, (2) Franks, Moravians, and Magyars; but this tug-of-war also involved, from time to time and in varying degrees, such neighboring centers of power and influence as the Bulgarian khaneate, the Byzantine Empire, and the Roman papacy. Magyars eventually emerged the victors when, in the early tenth century, they succeeded in defeating first the Moravians, then the Franks, and, subsequently, they achieved hegemony over the entire basin, whence they launched raids that terrorized Europe for roughly fifty years. Their victory in 907 ended Frankish attempts, begun by Charlesmagne with his first Avar campaign in 791, to organize the middle Danube. Yet, in spite of their ultimate failure, Carolingian efforts to control this region were important because they represent the first systematic effort since the late sixth century to wrest the central Danubian basin from the domination of inner-Asian nomads, to secure a dangerous frontier that had been left unguarded for centuries, to convert the peoples residing there to Christianity, and to reestablish a terrestrial link between the Latin West and the Byzantine East.

Physically the basin is dominated by the Danube river system and its surrounding mountains. In addition to the Danube, the Drava and the Sava flow from the eastern Alps, the Tisza from the Carpathians, and the Drina and southern (Serbian) Morava from the Balkans. These rivers, natural arteries for the movement of men, goods, and ideas into the region from several directions, all join the Danube less than 150 kilometers from Belgrade, the capital of modern Serbia. The confluences of these rivers with the Danube form what I shall call the waterfront of the basin.

From east to west the basin may be subdivided as follows: (1) Transylvania, a mountainous region of modern Romania consisting of the western slopes of the Carpathians; (2) Great Alföld, an open plain extending westward from Transylvania to the Danube; (3) Transdanubia, the rolling and hilly country of western Hungary, including parts of modern Slovakia, Croatia, and Slovenia, as defined by the Danube, Drava, and Sava watersheds. Of these regions, only the Great Alföld may be regarded as a part of the greater Eurasian steppe, a suitable habitat for nomads who periodically threatened the agrarian-based civilizations of the Mediterranean, the Iranian plateau, the Indian subcontinent, and northern China. Although Transdanubia contains a smaller plain, the Little Alföld, stretching eastward from Neusiedler Lake (Lake Ferö) to the Raba River, the latter is insufficient to support a viable nomadic culture. Transdanubia with its moderate...