

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.”¹ 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.² 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

frontier can be explained most cogently if we locate the origin of the realms of such Moravian rulers as Rastislav and Zwentibald somewhere near Belgrade, not in the vicinity of Brno or Olomouc.

Above all this book reconstructs a frontier military organization that facilitated the movements of monarchs, margraves, and their armies. Since, in the course of the ninth century, numerous wars were waged by the Franks against the principality of Moravia, careful scrutiny of the military infrastructure that supported campaigns against the realms of Moravian leaders reveals much about the comprehensive plans that Carolingian kings had for the central Danubian basin, for they organized there a system of logistics capable of supporting armies operating in a distant region, far from the Frankish heartland in the Rhine, Main, and Meuse watersheds. A study of Frankish operations against the Moravians and the logistics involved in these expeditions leads to the conclusion that their efforts to organize the middle Danube were more far reaching than could be presumed on the basis of northern Moravian assumptions.