

ŠTÚDIE

VASSALS OR FREEMEN? RETHINKING MILITARY ORGANIZATION DURING CHARLEMAGNE'S REIGN (R. 768 – 814)

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BEŇA, S.: Vassals or Freeman? Rethinking Military Organization during Charlemagne's Reign (r. 768–814). *Vojenská história*, 1, 29, 2025, pp 7-16, Bratislava.

In this study, the author examines the military organization of the Frankish Empire during the reign of Charlemagne (768 – 814) and his successors. The article aims to summarize the dominant military-historical perspectives on this subject. The study highlights two main paradigms through which historians have viewed the military structure of the Frankish Empire. A further objective of this study is to attempt a synthesis of both viewpoints. Drawing on methodological perspectives from military sociology and an analysis of period sources, this study demonstrates a possible symbiosis between both types of military organization. Special attention is paid to the social composition of Frankish forces, as well as the relationship between power distribution in the Frankish Empire and its impact on the mobilization and military-strategic potential of the Carolingian dynasty's armed forces.

Keywords: Charlemagne, Carolingian military organization, Frankish Empire, medieval military professionalism, Frankish vassals (*vassi*), Frankish freemen (*liberi*)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69809/vojhist.2025.29.1.1>

Introduction

Crowned by Pope Leo III (d. 813) as an Emperor in 800, Charlemagne (r. 768–814) is regarded by both traditional and modern historiography as a figurehead of a consolidated empire in Europe after a period of political fragmentation following the fall of the Roman Empire in the West. However, this victory came after a long and hard-fought military struggle against internal and external foes alike. Charlemagne's allies and subjects had to endure frequent hardships and sacrifices related to expenses on war and military service itself. There were, in fact, only two years, up until his crowning as emperor in 800, when no mobilization of the royal army (*hostis / exercitus*) took place.

Yet, there was a silver lining to all this. For the Frankish heartlands, at least, the military conquests and consolidation enforced by the Carolingian regime brought many benefits. First, the cessation of large-scale armed violence, kept largely on the frontiers of the empire. The peace and security provided by the regime not only enabled the rule of law but also increased economic prosperity. The Frankish subjects, unburdened by the threat of violence and military activity within the polity itself, could thus create a larger agricultural surplus and, concomitantly, focus on more productive activities. It is perhaps no surprise that the intellectual achievements of the period, the so-called “Carolingian Renaissance,” coincided with the period of imperial governance.¹

¹ For a useful overview with additional literature see: NELSON, L. Janet. *King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021. Compare: BACHRACH S. David – BACHRACH S. Bernard. *Warfare in Medieval Europe c.400–c.1453*. New York: Routledge, 2017, p. 105-116 and *passim*.

A key instrument in building up and consolidating the empire were the emperor's armed forces. Indeed, the subject of Carolingian military organization has a long pedigree in historiography. This paper charts out the two dominant competing paradigms regarding military service under Charlemagne's regime. I will argue that these seemingly incompatible paradigms can, in fact, be reconciled into a synthesis.

State of the Art

The armies of Charlemagne, operating in different parts of Europe with almost annual frequency, are deemed remarkable for the post-Roman period. Indeed, while historians have downplayed any military-technological innovations of this era and most argue for strong elements of continuity, the nature of Carolingian military organization remains highly debated. A simple yet controversial question lies at the heart of the matter: what were the principal mechanisms of military mobilization in the Carolingian period? What was the legal framework of military service and, concomitantly, who formed the bulk of the manpower available to the royal government?

A "conservative" paradigm, established since the early 20th century, conceptualized the armies of the Carolingians as seasonally mobilized, unpaid forces of "freemen". Historians imagined these forces being commanded by royal agents such as counts and bishops, but the rank-and-file was thought to be recruited from a broad spectrum of the male population. The freemen (*liberi*), interpreted as a broad legal category, were made up of diverse socio-economic groups. Basing their analysis on Carolingian capitulary evidence (mainly from the ninth century), the conservative narrative imagined a system of mobilization revolving around compulsory, unpaid recruitment of freemen—who, in essence, formed a potential reservoir of armed manpower for the royal-imperial regime that did not possess a large professional standing army akin to the imperial Roman legions.²

The royal government thus framed military campaigning as compulsory public service and a kind of tax in itself. The enforcement of this service by the regime rested on a penalty called *haribannus* (or alternatively *heribannus*). During the time of Charlemagne and his successors this entailed a heavy fine for a defaulter that included property confiscation and in extreme cases capital punishment. The foundational historiography thus envisaged a whole spectrum of people taking part in military operations on behalf of the king—starting from the magnates and their armed households on top, throughout the middling landowners and down to the kingdom's poorer sections, who "clubbed" together to provide resources to equip at least a single lightly equipped warrior from among themselves.

This long-established paradigm of Carolingian military organization was challenged by a wave of revisionism, headed by Timothy Reuter (1947–2002) in the 1980s and is still maintained in a modified form up to the present by scholarly authorities such as Guy Halsall. In principle, the revisionists argue for a two-phase process of military organization and reform under Charlemagne. During the first phase—characterized by Frankish armies of conquest (ca. 770–800)—the royal army had a vertical structure of the kings and the magnate's household troops, joined by military contingents of their vassals and sub-vassals.

The bulk of personnel in these moderately sized field armies were filled by professional volunteer warriors. These served out of a sense of loyalty to their own lords and for the vision of material gain. However, after the imperial coronation of 800 and the slowdown of territorial conquest, the revisionists argue, plunder diminished and the defense of the

² For an in-depth summary of this view see: GOFFART, Walter. The Recruitment of Freemen into the Carolingian Army. In *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 2018, no. 16, pp 17–22.

vast imperial fatherland required a different approach. Thus, Reuter (and others) argued for a change in military organization—based on the mobilization of freemen—which in turn explained the existence of the newly recorded military duties found in capitularies that did not feature previously in Carolingian legislation.³

Recently, Walter Goffart⁴ convincingly challenged the revisionist position on several grounds and reinvigorated the conservative paradigm. First and foremost, much of the revisionist argument is made on the basis of weak argumentation *ex silentio*. Secondly, Goffart pointed out that the supposed dichotomy between offensive and defensive war—and, by extension, the argument about a two-phase military organization—has no basis in historical sources. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Goffart convincingly argues about the persistent existence of the *exercitus-haribannus* dynamic of armed service, stretching from the late Merovingian rule to the successor polities of Charlemagne's empire.⁵

Benefices, Royal Vassals and Military Service

Thus, at present, there are two main competing analytical narratives. Yet, when one confronts the competing narratives from a broader perspective, further critical questions arise. The proverbial elephant in the room is, of course, the period evidence referring to royal vassals (*vassalli nostri qui beneficia habent, vassi dominci*, etc.) and their direct ties via benefices (conditional upon military service) to the royal court.⁶ What was the reason for their existence?

³ IBID. 22-23. Notable example of this school of thought include: REUTER, Timothy. Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire. In *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*. NELSON, L. Janet (ed.). Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 231–50; IDEM. The End of Carolingian Military Expansion. In *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*. NELSON, L. Janet (ed.). Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 251–67; IDEM. Carolingian and Ottonian Warfare. In *Medieval Warfare. A History*. KEEN, Maurice (ed.). Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 13–35. Compare: HALSALL, Guy. The Western European kingdoms, 600–1000. In *The Cambridge History of War VOLUME II: War and the Medieval World*. CURRY, Anne – GRAFF, David (eds.). Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 50–82. An outlier to these two schools of thought was the work of Bernard S. Bachrach (1939–2023). In his earlier works, he stressed the continuity of the Roman state and the presence of large-scale standing armies in the post-Roman kingdoms of the West. His more recent work acknowledges that the existence of a Carolingian standing army is a controversial notion and that military organization under the Carolingians differed significantly from that of the Roman Empire. See BACHRACH, S. Bernard. *Early Carolingian Warfare: Prelude to Empire*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. Compare: BACHRACH S. David – BACHRACH S. Bernard, *Warfare*, c. d., pp. 105–119.

⁴ GOFFART, W. *Recruitment of Freemen*, c. d., pp. 23-33. IDEM. »Defensio Patriae« as a Carolingian Military Obligation. In *Francia*, 2016, no. 43, pp. 21-39.

⁵ It is also important to mention John France's observation—whom Goffart credits on this point—who, although essentially agreeing with the revisionists, argued against the existence of a separate offensive and defensive military organization under the Carolingians. Moreover, France envisions the existence of a large royal army drawn from the class of freemen, though he maintains that such an army was only summoned in extraordinary circumstances. The core of his argument remains focused on the military potential of Frankish magnates and their retinues. See: FRANCE, John. The Composition and Raising of the Armies of Charlemagne. In *Warfare, Crusade and Conquest in the Middle Ages*. FRANCE, John (ed.). New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 61-82. Goffart categorizes France's paper alongside the revisionists: GOFFART, W. *Recruitment of Freemen*, c. d., p. 20, 23.

⁶ The military role of *vassi dominici* was already highlighted by the premier authority on Carolingians. See GANSHOF, François, Louis. Benefice and Vassalage in the Age of Charlemagne. In *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, 1939, no. 6, pp. 147-175. Similar observations were done by Giuseppe Albertoni who has recently revisited the topic of Carolingian vassalage from the perspective of Italian evidence. See ALBERTONI, Giuseppe. Vassals without Feudalism in Carolingian Italy. In *After Charlemagne: Carolingian Italy and its Rulers*. Ed. GANTNER, Clemens. Cambridge University Press: b.m., 2020, pp. 94-115.

The service in the *exercitus* was, in principle, a public service compulsory for broad strata of Frankish society. What need would the rulers, and by extension royal agents such as counts and bishops, have for beneficed vassals? Why would the royal government go to great lengths to allocate precious resources from the royal fisc and the church to support this “feudo-vassalic” arrangement if it could (in theory) exact military service from its loyal subjects for free by threatening them with the *haribannus*? Aside from having an infamous place as a conceptual black hole in historiography (to cite the famous opinion of Susan Reynolds⁷), what’s the rationale behind the idea of a royal vassal tied to the ruling regime by a “military” *beneficium*?

I believe that perspectives on military professionalism used by scholars for other time periods may offer valuable insight into this matter. Two principal military-historical phenomena are of note: the enforcement of discipline by professional agents and the specialized use of mounted units. These factors made the coexistence of freemen and royal vassals historically not only plausible but even synergistic for the Carolingian military leaders.

Vassals as Agents of Discipline

At first glance, the parallel existence of royal vassals and duty-bound freemen in the royal *exercitus* seems redundant. Since the ruling government could spare few precious resources, there must have been a very compelling reason for the existence of military benefices. From a structural perspective, *vassi dominici* residing in a certain *pagus* of an empire (administrative district) fell directly under the authority of a count (or bishop) of that province.⁸ Moreover, as further capitulary evidence shows, the livelihood of a royal vassal was directly conditional upon their service to the government. Should a vassal disobey a royal order, the royal authority stripped the defaulter of these *beneficia*—a punishment comparable to that enacted upon the freemen by a *haribannus*. However, in addition to this, any arms and armor tied to the benefice (e.g., *brunia*) were confiscated as well.⁹ These measures effectively demilitarized the vassals and their dependants, who, in turn, lost their socio-economic standing. Thus, the royal vassals were more closely bound to the king than most other freemen who had military duties. Their livelihood (and those of their satellites) depended more strictly upon their loyalty to the royal regime.

The delegation of royal power is further connected with the issues of discipline and military professionalism. Indeed, a principal concern facing the royal agents when recruiting manpower for law enforcement and military operations alike is the quality of recruits. Although the

⁷ See ALBERTONI, G. *Vassals without Feudalism*, c. d., p. 94, which also summarizes the polarizing historiographical views on fiefs and vassals. Other foundational literature includes: PATZOLD, Steffen. *Das Lehnswesen*. München: C. H. Beck, 2012; BAGGE, Sverre – GELTING H. Michael – LINDKVIST, Thomas (eds.). *Feudalism: New Landscapes of Debate*. Brepols: Turnhout, 2011.

⁸ Primary sources related to Italian Carolingians clearly point out the subordination of royal vassals to the counts and bishops, see ALBERTONI, G. *Vassals without Feudalism*, c. d., pp. 111-113. For hierarchies of royal-imperial agents in general see DAVIS R. Jennifer. *Charlemagne’s Practice of Empire*. Cambridge University Press, b.m., 2015. Compare: BACHRACH S. Bernard. *Charlemagne and the Carolingian General Staff*. In *The Journal of Military History*, 2002, Vol. 66, No. 2, pp. 313-357.

⁹ The Capitulary of Thionville (805) mentions this connection explicitly: “De armatura in exercitu, sicut antea in alio capitulare commendavimus, ita servetur, et insuper omnis homo de duodecim mansis bruneam habeat; qui vero bruniam habens et eam secum non tulerit, *omne beneficium cum brunia pariter perdat*.” [Italics mine] The quote is from GANSHOF, F. L., *Benefice and Vassalage*, p. 160, footnote 68. In addition, Ganshof also refers to other pieces of legislation related to the treatment of beneficia by the royal vassals. All royal property, including its inhabitants, had to be well-managed. Should the vassal prove to be inept or rapacious at managing the estates, he was stripped of his benefice. See IBID. pp. 161-162.

vast strata of freemen could provide the army leaders with an impressive number of people for the time, the aggregate quality of these men was of equal importance. How well were these forces equipped and disciplined? How could these men cope with challenges on an operational scale related to long-distance marching, reconnaissance work, foraging, and camping? How well-prepared was the average freeman for the “face of battle,” and concomitantly, how well-motivated was he to sacrifice his own life and well-being for his leaders and his king?¹⁰

Not all freemen were born and bred warriors; that much is evident from the sources. References to shirking military service—either by entering the church, showing up badly equipped for the muster, or by plain refusal—indicate that the royal *missi*, the counts, and bishops—the principal delegates of royal power in the Carolingian provinces—had a very heterogeneous human material to work with.¹¹

The issue of military discipline is further illuminated by a letter (ca. 804-811) from Charlemagne to Abbot Fulrad of St. Quentin. The king instructs the abbot to gather an armed force and lead it to an assembly. The letter concludes with an admonition that the warriors ought to proceed peacefully throughout the empire and requisition nothing except fodder, wood, and water. Fulrad is also further instructed to have his own men march along the carts and the horsemen “so that the absence of a lord may not give an opportunity to his men to do evil.”¹²

The inference from Charlemagne’s letter to Fulrad regarding military discipline is two-fold: first—as was usual in other times and places—a large seasonally-collected force was prone to ill-behavior, even in its native territory. Secondly, a special picked force is envisaged to enforce discipline upon the multitude. In this context, the royal vassals (as well as their sub-vassals and the household troops of the abbot itself) could easily fit the role as supervisors of discipline—serving as additional “muscle” in case of subordination and punishment.

Vassals as Military Specialists: Garrison Duty and Mounted Troops

Other reasons for the investment of the royal government in the vassal-benefice system are also related to principal themes of military professionalism. Permanent, all-year readiness is a key feature of professional standing forces throughout history. As the pattern of royal

¹⁰ The now-standard work on professionalism in military history, which borrows from military sociology and includes medieval and early-modern case studies, is TRIM, J.B. David (ed.). *The Chivalric Ethos and the Development of Military Professionalism*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. Other relevant items include the seminal article by Dennis E. Showalter, as well as more recent commentators who deal with more specific case studies: SHOWALTER, E. Dennis. Caste, Skill, and Training: The Evolution of Cohesion in European Armies from the Middle Ages to the Sixteenth Century. In *The Journal of Military History*, 1993, Vol. 57, No. 3. pp. 407-430. Compare: DEVRIES, Kelly. The Question of Military Professionalism. In *Arms and the Man. Military History: Essays in Honor of Dennis Showalter*. NEIBERG, S. Michael (ed.). Leiden: Brill, 2011, pp. 113-130 and MARVIN, W. Laurence. Medieval and Modern C2: Command and Control in the Field during Western Europe’s Long Twelfth Century (1095–1225). In *War & Society*, 2016, Vol. 35 No. 3, pp. 152–179. For a *longue durée* look at the issues of military mobilization, campaigning, and combat activity in the context of medieval warfare, see ROGERS, J. Clifford. *Soldiers’ Lives through History - The Middle Ages*. Greenwood Press: Westport, CT, 2007.

¹¹ For instances of ill-prepared freemen see: REUTER, T., *The End of Carolingian Military Expansion*,” c. d., p.255.

¹² The English translation comes from DUTTON, Paul Edward (ed.). *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader*. Broadview Press: Essex, UK, 1999, p. 74. The original Latin does not mention vassals, but the letter clearly envisions a picked force of the Abbot’s own men for supervision: “et uniuscuiusque vestri homines una cum carris et caballariis suis vadant et semper cum eis sit usque ad locum predictum, qualiter absencia domini locum non det hominibus eius mala faciendi [Italics mine].” BORETIUS, Alfred, (ed.). *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Legum sectio II. Capitularia regum Francorum tomus I*. Hannover: Hahn, 1883, p. 168.

letters and capitularies shows, large-scale mobilization was a seasonal matter. After the end of a military campaign and the cessation of major hostilities, the bulk of the drafted freemen went home.¹³ However, there was a strategic need to man strongholds all year round—especially those located in the frontier marches. Indeed, several capitularies from the early 800s mention benefices given in the context of border protection. In this context, therefore, the population and resources of the frontier areas (often newly conquered) would be granted to a royal vassal (or other government agent) in exchange for permanent frontier defense.¹⁴

The last advantage that made the military fief-and-vassal system appealing to the Carolingians was its ability to furnish specialist mounted troops. Although the long-standing consensus is that men fighting on foot formed the core of the Carolingian armies, recent discussions have highlighted the equal importance of cavalrymen and mounted warfare.

Clifford J. Rogers, in particular, has argued for the existence of well-mounted and well-equipped cavalry forces under Charlemagne and his descendants. These units, commanded by elites from among the royal courtiers, were used not only in pitched battles (in a combined arms fashion with foot soldiers) but also as “flying columns” for surprise attacks deep into enemy territory—an undertaking impossible with a more conventional force that included footmen and ponderous wagon trains.¹⁵

In economic terms, one well-armed cavalryman was worth twelve *mansi*—a unit of tax assessment that effectively corresponds to twelve farmsteads. In this context, the beneficed vassals (being full-time professionals) and their retinues had both the leisure and the resources that ordinary freemen did not. Through royal patronage, vassals and their satellites had access to quality mounts as well as additional arms and armor. Furthermore, the leisure time enabled them to focus solely on war-related activities—honing their skills in riding and collective mounted combat.¹⁶

Conclusion

The conservative and revisionist narratives of Carolingian military organization need not be antagonistic. In fact, from the perspective of military professionalism (and additional inferences from sources discussing the specifics of period warfare), it can be concluded that both scholarly perspectives are, in fact, complementary.

Thus, the “magnate’s retinues” (in the form of beneficed vassals) as well as the freemen had interdependent roles to play under Charlemagne and his successors. The wide strata of

¹³ BACHRACH, S. D. *Warfare in Medieval Europe*, c. d., pp. 109–111.

¹⁴ REUTER, T. *The End of Carolingian Military Expansion*, c. d., p. 254.

¹⁵ ROGERS, J. Clifford. Carolingian Cavalry in Battle: The Evidence Reconsidered. In *Crusading and Warfare in the Middle Ages. Realities and Representations. Essays in Honour of John France*. ed. JOHN Simon–MORTON, Nicholas. London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 1–11. A seminal article regarding horses, horsemen, and their role within Carolingian military strategy remains FRANCE, John. The Military History of the Carolingian Period. In *Warfare, Crusade and Conquest in the Middle Ages*. FRANCE, John (ed.). New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 81–99. France argued for the primacy of sieges, infantry warfare, and the use of horses mainly for travel and the transportation of war materials. Rogers’ recent essay argues to the contrary. Both perspectives, however, highlight the potency—both tactical and strategic—of military horsemanship, as well as its high expense.

¹⁶ The *mansus* is discussed by BACHRACH, S. D. *Warfare in Medieval Europe*, c. d., pp. 110–111; For the necessity of leisure time and long years of training to upkeep cavalry forces in Western medieval context see: BLOCH, Marc. *Feudal Society, Volume II: Social Classes and Political Organization*. MANYON, L. A. (trans.). Routledge: London, 1989, pp. 293–294, and GAITE, Pierre. Exercises in Arms: the Physical and Mental Combat Training of Men-at-Arms in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries. In *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 2018, vol XVI, pp. 99 – 122.

freemen had supplied the royal regime with raw seasonal manpower of ordinary warriors and cheap labor. The vassals, on the other hand, acted as a supervisory force of the royal regime and provided the king and his officers with additional military options. Whether this arrangement was a (rationally driven) top-down development, an emergent system, or perhaps a case of “structural contingency” encompassing both phenomena, however, remains to be seen.¹⁷

S. BEŇA: VAZALI ALEBO SLOBODNÍ? PREHODNOTENIE VOJENSKEJ ORGANIZÁCIE ZA VLÁDY KAROLA VEĽKÉHO (768 – 814)

Tradičný historiografický pohľad nazerá na vojská franských panovníkov z rodu Karolovcov ako na sezónne zmobilizovanú silu slobodných mužov (*liberi*), ktorí vzhľadom k svojmu sociálno-právnomu štatútu podliehali (časovo obmedzenej) povinnej vojenskej službe. Z tradičného pohľadu boli úspešné dobyvateľské vojny Karola Veľkého uskutočnené za pomoci početných, avšak skôr poloprofesionálnych síl podliehajúcich len dočasnej vojenskej službe. Na druhej strane, revizionistickí historici vidia najväčšiu zásluhu na dobyvateľských aktivitách karolovskej dynastie hlavne v menších, profesionálnych jazdeckých zboroch vazalov (*vassi dominici*) udržiavaných magnátmi, prelátmi, ako aj samotným panovníkom. Na rozdiel od väčšiny slobodných franských mužov, vazali (a členovia ich družín) mali pre svoje živobytie k dispozícii rozsiahly pozemkový majetok. Ten však bol podmienený vojenskou službou voči ich pánovi. Je neodškriepiteľné, že slobodní (*liberi*) tvorili základ väčších kráľovských vojsk. Užitočnosť vazalských družín (z pohľadu panovníckej moci) však spočívala v ich permanencii a profesionalite. Obsadenie pohraničných hradov trvalými posádkami viedlo ku konštantnej projekcii moci franského panovníka v sporných pohraničných územiach. Schopnosť týchto družín, často udržiavaných z hospodársky vzácných panovníckych domén, umožnila vládnucej dynastii taktiež využitie profesionálnych jazdeckých jednotiek, či už na taktickej (napr. kombinácia pechoty a jazdectva v rozhodujúcich bitkách) alebo strategickej úrovni (napr. náhle jazdecké výpady do tyla nepriateľského územia bez trénu a pešiakov). Na základe analýzy historických prameňov z pohľadu vojenskej sociológie tvrdíme, že oba systémy mobilizácie a vydržiavania ozbrojených síl existovali simultánne a vzájomne sa dopĺňali.

S. BEŇA: VASALLEN ODER FREIE? EINE NEUBEWERTUNG DER MILITÄRISCHEN ORGANISATION UNTER DER HERRSCHAFT KARLS DES GROSSEN (768 – 814)

Die traditionelle historiografische Perspektive betrachtet die Heere der fränkischen Herrscher aus dem Geschlecht der Karolinger als saisonal mobilisierte Kräfte freier Männer (*liberi*), die aufgrund ihres sozialrechtlichen Status einer (zeitlich begrenzten) militärischen Wehrpflicht unterlagen. Die erfolgreichen Eroberungskriege Karls des Großen wurden (aus traditioneller Sicht) mit zahlreichen, allerdings größtenteils nicht ausgebildeten Kräften geführt. Revisionistische Historiker hingegen schreiben die größten Erfolge der Eroberungsaktivitäten der karolingischen Dynastie vor allem kleineren, professionellen Reiterkorps von Vasallen (*vassi dominici*) zu, die von Magnaten, Prälaten sowie vom Herrscher selbst unterhalten wurden. Im Gegensatz zu den meisten freien

¹⁷ On this last point see: MORRILLO, Stephen. Contrary Winds: Theories of History and the Limits of Sachkritik. In *The Medieval Way of War: Studies in Medieval Military History in Honor of Bernard S. Bachrach*. HALFOND I. Gregory (ed.). Ashgate: Surrey, UK, 2015, pp. 205-223.

fränkischen Männern verfügten die Vasallen (und die Mitglieder ihrer Gefolgschaften) über umfangreichen Grundbesitz für ihren Lebensunterhalt. Dieser war jedoch an den Militärdienst gegenüber ihrem Herrn gebunden. Es ist unbestreitbar, dass die Freien (*liberi*) das Fundament der größeren königlichen Heere darstellten. Der Nutzen der Vasallengefolgschaften (aus der Sicht der königlichen Macht) lag jedoch in ihrer Permanenz und Professionalität. Die Besetzung von Grenzburgen durch ständige Garnisonen führte zu einer konstanten Machtprojektion des fränkischen Herrschers in umstrittenen Grenzgebieten. Die Fähigkeit dieser Gefolgschaften, die häufig aus den wirtschaftlich wertvollen Domänen des Herrschers unterhalten wurden, ermöglichte es der herrschenden Dynastie zudem, professionelle Reitereinheiten einzusetzen, sei es auf taktischer Ebene (z. B. die Kombination von Infanterie und Kavallerie in entscheidenden Schlachten) oder auf strategischer Ebene (z. B. plötzliche Kavallerieangriffe in den Rücken des gegnerischen Gebiets ohne Tross und Fußsoldaten). Basierend auf einer Analyse historischer Quellen aus der Perspektive der Militärsoziologie behaupten wir, dass beide Systeme – die Mobilisierung und der Unterhalt der Streitkräfte – gleichzeitig existierten und sich gegenseitig ergänzten.

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