Politics and Power in Early Medieval Europe

Alsace and the Frankish Realm, 600–1000

Hans J. Hummer

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POLITICS AND POWER IN EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE

How exactly did political power operate in early medieval Europe? Taking Alsace as his focus, Hans Hummer offers an intriguing new case study on localized and centralized power and the relationship between the two from *c.* 600 to 1000. Providing a panoramic survey of the sources from the region, which include charters, notarial formulas, royal instruments and Old High German literature, he untangles the networks of monasteries and kin-groups which made up the political landscape of Alsace and shows the significance of monastic control in shaping that landscape. He also investigates this local structure in light of comparative evidence from other regions. He tracks the emergence of the distinctive local order during the seventh century to its eventual decline in the late tenth century in the face of radical monastic reform. Highly original and well balanced, this work is of interest to all students of medieval political structures.

HANS J. HUMMER is Assistant Professor of History, Wayne State University. He has published articles in a number of journals, including *Early Medieval Europe*, *Francia* and *Deutsches Archiv*.

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For Sara, Genevieve and Peter

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book examines the operation of political power in early medieval Europe, with Alsace as a focus. It explores the networks of monasteries and kin-groups that formed the basis of the local political order, and the connections between local power and the political centre between approximately 600 and 1000. The study draws upon a variety of sources primarily from Alsace, namely charters, notarial formulas, royal instruments, hagiography and Old High German literature, but also upon comparative evidence from other regions, to show how this distinctive local order took shape during the seventh century and came to an end in the late tenth century with the emergence of radical monastic reform. These basic local networks provide the backdrop for interpreting the progress of Carolingian consolidation in the eighth and ninth centuries, the processes of political fragmentation in the latter half of the ninth century and the transformation of aristocratic power during the Ottonian period.

Academic studies are never exclusively the result of one's own effort, and this book is no exception. As is perhaps fitting for a study that deals with issues of kinship, associative alliances and institutions, this one rests on the kind support of a wide network of family, friends and funding agencies. I owe the deepest gratitude to my spouse, Sara, and two children, Genevieve and Peter. It goes without saying that I asked for much, and they willingly gave, although importantly not without insisting that the personal relationships that invest study, work and career with meaning continue to develop and grow. I thank the members of my family of origin, who contributed to who I am: my parents, Lloyd and Mardeane Hummer, my late mother, Dorothy Hummer, and my four sisters and two brothers, and their families. I am also grateful for the encouragement and understanding of my wife's parents, Bill and JoAnn Drews, and her five sisters and their families. Then there is the family of Pat and Mary Geary, who have become like extended relatives to us.

The research in this book has benefited foremost from the comments, criticisms and scholarly example of my graduate advisor, Patrick Geary. Without his steadfast support, encouragement and belief, this project would not have been seen through to its completion. Carol Lansing and the late Robert L. Benson contributed importantly to my intellectual development; as did Christopher Stevens, who was an expert guide in matters of Old German. I am grateful to John McCulloh, my undergraduate advisor, who early on instilled high scholarly standards. I express my thanks to those who read versions of this study in its entirety and offered fruitful criticisms: Thomas Head, Piotr Górecki, John McCulloh, Paolo Squatriti and an anonymous reviewer for Cambridge University Press; and to those who read and criticized portions of it: Catherine Bogosian, Warren Brown, David Foote, Jason Glenn and Eric Goldberg. I owe special debts of gratitude to Barbara Rosenwein and Rosamond McKitterick, both of whom read the manuscript twice and offered lengthy criticisms and suggestions. Their intervention has made this study better and richer than it otherwise would have been. I also would like to acknowledge those scholars now deceased, some long before I was born, whose work has been inspirational and become so familiar that I feel as though they might as well be old acquaintances: Albert Bruckner, Heinrich Büttner, Eugen Ewig, Karl Glöckner, Bruno Krusch, Christian Pfister, Karl Schmid and Gerd Tellenbach. Needless to say, any shortcomings are entirely my own, and for any mistakes that might persist in these pages – to borrow the plea of Herodotus – 'may gods and heroes forgive me!' Finally, I wish to thank the faculty of the history department at Wayne State University, in particular my supportive chairperson, Marc Kruman. They have been, and are, everything that one could want in daily colleagues.

Research abroad for this study was supported by a grant from the German Academic Exchange Service. I wish to express deepest appreciation to my German *Doktorväter*, Dieter Geuenich and Thomas Zotz, who arranged an *Arbeitsplatz* for me in the Institut für Landesgeschichte at the Universität Freiburg. Both offered valuable advice at an early stage of this project and warmly received me, my wife and our daughter, who arrived during a memorable year of research in Germany. This study also benefited from the stimulation of Professor Zotz's seminar and from interaction with the *Mitarbeiter* of the Institut, especially Karl Weber. A separate research excursion to Alsace was made possible by the outstanding support of the Barber Fund for Interdisciplinary Legal Research, Center for Legal Studies, Wayne State University. In addition, this project was supported at various stages by a dissertation fellowship from the University of California at Los Angeles, two particularly humane teaching

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Finally, I would like to thank Simon Whitmore and the production team at Cambridge University Press, which displayed impressive diligence, expertise and professionalism. In particular, I wish to extend my appreciation to Alison Powell, who kept the production on a brisk and organized schedule, and Chris Jackson, who livened up the otherwise tedious process of copy-editing with a deft wit.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

a.	anno
a. (in maps and tables)	ante
AB	*Annales Bertiniani*
AF	*Annales Fuldenses*
ARF	*Annales Regni Francorum*
D	*Diplomata*
KIII	*Karoli III*
Karol.	*Karolinorum*
LG	*Ludowici Germanici*
LoI, LoII	*Lotharii I, Lotharii II*
Merov.	*Regum Francorum e Stirpe Merowingica*
MGH	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
OI, OII, OIII	*Ottonis I, Ottonis II, Ottonis III*
SS	*Scriptores*
SRG	*Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum*
SRM	*Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*
Trad. Freising	*Die Traditionen des Hochstifts Freising*
Trad. Wiz.	*Traditiones Wizenburgenses*

INTRODUCTION

In 1049 the great reform pope, Leo IX (1049–54), embarked on an ambitious itinerary north of the Alps to root out simony and clerical corruption. In the midst of a pressing schedule of councils, this former bishop of Toul paid a visit to his homeland, to 'sweet Alsace' as his biographer called it. There, Alsace's famous son dispensed blessings, relics and papal privileges to a number of reformed monasteries throughout the region, among them Altdorf, Hesse and Woffenheim which, as Leo proudly recalled, had been founded by his own kin, the so-called lords of Dabo and Eguisheim.[1] In his grants to two other monasteries, Lure and Hohenburg, the pope was strangely oblivious to even deeper ancestral ties. For if Leo had emerged from the line of Dabo and Eguisheim, he and his near ancestors also were the direct descendants of a more ancient kin-group, the Etichonids, who had arisen in the seventh century, produced an illustrious line of dukes in the eighth century and been the patrons of Lure, Hohenburg and at least nine other Alsatian monasteries, but who had been transformed around the millennium into a new family, the lords of Dabo and Eguisheim.

Eclipsing Leo's view of his recent Etichonid heritage was a profound revision in his ancestors' lordship in the late tenth century, a revision which marked the transformation of a distinctive political order in early medieval Alsace stretching back to the seventh century. As kin-groups such as the Etichonids founded and patronized monasteries, whose unique burden it was to replicate the permanence of the divine order on earth, they had encouraged the growth of institutions whose proprietary endowments formed the material basis of stable and enduring networks of lordship. Indeed, the kin-groups that rose to prominence

[1] Hans Hummer, 'Reform and Lordship in Alsace at the Turn of the Millennium', in Warren Brown and Piotr Górecki eds., *Conflict in Medieval Europe: Changing Perspectives on Society and Culture* (Burlington, Ver., 2003), pp. 69–84, esp. pp. 69–70, 80–1.

during the early medieval period, whether their dominance was realized on the local, regional or supra-regional levels, were those that successfully cultivated a local basis of power in this way. With the advent of radical monastic reform in the tenth century, the Etichonids' identity, which was closely bound up with their patronage of monasteries, was swept away.

As the pope's activities might indicate, the cultivation of lordly power in early medieval Alsace also was integrally connected to the larger story of power in early medieval Europe. Alsatian monks and lords never operated in a vacuum; their rights and privileges were inextricably tied to the legitimizing authority of popes, kings and emperors. These representatives of the political centre in turn sprang from families whose power and influence was based on the kinds of associative networks pervasive in Alsace, so that the extension of broader political authority was predicated on the possibilities inherent in monastery-based lordship. Thus, if the formation of the lineage of Dabo and Eguisheim was tied to the emergence of reformed cloisters, and if the fate of the Etichonids had been bound to an archipelago of earlier foundations in Alsace, the prestige of these ecclesiastical institutions likewise was dependent upon the grants dispensed by popes and kings, both of whom in 1049, it turns out, were kinsmen to one another and had arisen from families deeply implicated in the patronage of local monasteries.

Needless to say, the problem of power has long occupied the attention of early medieval historians. Some have devoted themselves to elucidating the formal political, military, judicial, legal and ecclesiastical structures through which Frankish officials, especially those of the Carolingian Empire, the most ambitious and successful political unit of the early middle ages, attempted to rule.[2] Others have found this view incomplete, even unsatisfying. The notion of a system of governance directed from the political centre, they caution, can give off the impression that early medieval kings simply delegated authority to subordinates and exercised power through discrete public institutions. Attention to actual practice, as opposed to prescriptive exhortations, appears to reveal that early medieval kingdoms lacked the salient feature of a state: a routine administration coordinated by a ruler and his representatives. Thus, a countervailing

[2] Heinrich Brunner, *Deutsche Rechtsgeschichte*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1887–92); Louis Halphen, *Charlemagne and the Carolingian Empire*, trans. Giselle de Nie (Amsterdam, New York, Oxford, 1977); François L. Ganshof, *Frankish Institutions under Charlemagne*, trans. Bryce and Mary Lyon (Providence, 1968); *Feudalism*, 3rd edn, trans. Philip Grierson (New York, 1964); and Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians: A Family Who Forged Europe*, trans. Michael I. Allen (Philadelphia, 1993); and Bernard Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare: Prelude to Empire* (Philadelphia, 2001).

tradition has long called attention to the limitations of early medieval 'government'.[3]

Skepticism about maximalist views of governmental organization and the attractions of social history have combined to generate an alternative vision of the past that has emphasized less formal conduits of power. Over the last couple of decades, some historians have shifted the focus away from the agency of kings to the primacy of local context, from formal institutional and political history to custom, kinship, gift-exchange and compromise justice. Influential has been the work of the so-called Bucknell group in Britain[4] and of a group of American social historians dubbed with some exaggeration by French medievalists as the 'new school of American medieval history'.[5] According to this view, power was exercised most regularly at the local level, and it is there, social historians have argued, that we must look if we wish to grasp the essential stability of medieval society.

While this fruitful work has succeeded in evoking the vitality of medieval organization independent of formal politics, it in turn has raised additional issues for scrutiny. The close examination of the local social context has brought historians face to face with local institutions, local power brokers, their ties to one another and the relevance of royal authority for the perpetuation of political order. Consequently, the formal elements that social historians have been tempted to set aside as epiphenomenal have reasserted themselves as integral to the formulation of power. Governance in early medieval Europe might have been less abstract by comparison with bureaucratically ordered societies, but its political landscape included formal institutions (especially ecclesiastical ones),

[3] Heinrich Fichtenau, *The Carolingian Empire*, trans. Peter Munz (orig. pub. 1957; reprint: Toronto, 1978); J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West: The Early Middle Ages A. D. 400–1000* (New York, 1962); Timothy Reuter, 'Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th series, 35 (1985), pp. 75–94.

[4] Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre eds., *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1986); in particular, Ian Wood, 'Disputes in Late Fifth- and Sixth-Century Gaul: Some Problems', pp. 7–22; Paul Fouracre, '"Placita" and the Settlement of Disputes in Later Merovingian Francia', pp. 23–44; Janet L. Nelson, 'Dispute Settlement in Carolingian West Francia', pp. 45–64; Wendy Davies, 'People and Places in Dispute in Ninth-Century Brittany', pp. 65–84; Chris Wickham, 'Land Disputes and Their Social Framework in Lombard-Carolingian Italy, 700–900', pp. 105–24; and Patrick Wormald, 'Charters, Law and the Settlement of Disputes in Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 149–68.

[5] Patrick J. Geary, 'Vivre en conflit dans une France sans état: Typologie des mécanismes de règlement des conflits (1050–1200)', *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 42 (1986), pp. 1107–33; Patrick J. Geary, 'L'humiliation des saints', *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 34 (1978), pp. 27–42; Geoffrey Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, 1992); William I. Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago, 1990); Barbara H. Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of St. Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909–1049* (Ithaca, 1989); and Stephen D. White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints: The Laudatio Parentum in Western France, 1050–1150* (Chapel Hill, 1988).

political offices and law codes; and its kingdoms possessed a central focus in the person of the king and his court. The authority wielded by kings might appear at times to have been weak and uneven, but it was active, it was both feared and revered, and it was exercised often enough with jarring ruthlessness to ensure a measure of compliance.

It is now less evident that social analysis of non-prescriptive sources, the so-called 'documents-of-practice', can recover the hard, as opposed to propagandistic, reality of medieval society. In these postmodern times not only have such sources turned out to be as rhetorically charged as prescriptive texts,[6] albeit in a different way, but when we examine the circumstances surrounding their production, we often discover that they appear to be the debris left over from struggles for power at the highest levels of early medieval society. This does not mean that documents of practice cannot be used to do traditional social history, but it is to say that the circumstances that provoked documentation often provide clues to the contact points between high politics and local affairs.

The accumulation of research emanating from Germany has made it eminently clear that royal power cannot simply be marginalized as a contaminating artefact. Long preoccupied with issues of political constitution, German medievalists have investigated with ever greater subtlety the relationship between the long dominance of the aristocracy and the evolving manifestation of royal power. As a part of the effort to work out the composition of the aristocracy, they have developed the prosopographical methods and source-critical techniques that have made it possible to work out the connections that run from the highest levels of authority to the lowest.[7] This sophisticated work has established the crucial place of kingship in the maintenance of aristocratic power at all levels.

[6] Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'History, Historicism and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages', *Speculum* 65 (1990), pp. 59–86; and Paul Freedman and Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'Medievalisms Old and New: The Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies', *American Historical Review* 103 (1998), pp. 677–704.

[7] Gerd Tellenbach, *Zur Bedeutung der Personenforschung für die Erkenntnis des früheren Mittelalters*, Freiburger Universitätsreden, Neue Folge, 25 (Freiburg, 1957); Karl Schmid, 'Der "Freiburger Arbeitskreis": Gerd Tellenbach zum 70. Geburtstag', *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* 122 (1974), pp. 331–47; 'Programmatisches zur Erforschung der mittelalterlichen Personen und Personengruppen', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 8 (1974), pp. 116–30; Hagen Keller, 'Das Werk Gerd Tellenbachs in der Geschichtswissenschaft unseres Jahrhunderts', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 28 (1994), pp. 374–97, esp. pp. 389–92; Otto Gerhard Oexle, 'Gruppen in der Gesellschaft: Das wissenschaftliche Œuvre von Karl Schmid', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 28 (1994), pp. 410–35; Timothy Reuter ed. and trans., *The Medieval Nobility: Studies on the Ruling Classes of France and Germany from the Sixth to the Twelfth Century* (Amsterdam, 1978); John B. Freed, 'Reflections on the Medieval German Nobility', *American Historical Review* 91 (1986), pp. 553–75; and Stuart Airlie, 'The Aristocracy', in R. McKitterick ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. II, *c. 700–c. 900* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 431–50.

Over the last decade some investigators have begun to confront anew the problem of political order in the Frankish world by integrating the rich work of social historians on kinship, property-holding and dispute resolution with the scholarship on the aristocracy.[8] In essence, these historians argue that the crux of the matter is in the details: because an abstract government did not exist, insights into the operation of politics in the early middle ages must be won from close analysis of local contexts. These studies demonstrate that the investigation of a particular locality can never simply be constituted as the study of a discrete region, disconnected from wider politics, but necessarily entails the investigation of power ecumenically. This approach has essentially revealed that the flow of royal power was both enabled and regulated by local networks of power.

I shall draw pragmatically from the wisdom of statists and processualists to delineate the outlines of political order in early medieval Europe, with Alsace as my focus. Although the Carolingian era looms large in the following pages, the study is not limited to that period.[9] The weight of scholarship has established the seventh and eleventh centuries as the proper termini for the early medieval era, both of which pre- and postdate the Carolingian period proper. The prodigious research on late antiquity has made it abundantly clear, implicitly or explicitly, that Henri Pirenne was right, if for the wrong reasons: the seventh century rather than the fifth marked the end of antiquity.[10] I will begin then not with a Roman

[8] Warren Brown, *Unjust Seizure: Conflict, Interest, and Authority in an Early Medieval Society* (Ithaca, 2001); and Matthew Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley, 400–1000* (Cambridge, 2000). See also, Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre eds., *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1–16, 245–71; and individual articles there by David Ganz, 'The Ideology of Sharing: Apostolic Community and Ecclesiastical Property in the Early Middle Ages', pp. 17–30; Ian Wood, 'Teutsind, Witlaic and the History of Merovingian *precaria*', pp. 31–52; Paul Fouracre, 'Eternal Light and Earthly Needs: Practical Aspects of the Development of Frankish Immunities', pp. 53–81; Janet Nelson, 'The Wary Widow', pp. 82–113; Paul Wormald, 'Lordship and Justice in the Early English Kingdom: Oswaldslow Revisited', pp. 114–36; and Timothy Reuter, 'Property Transactions and Social Relations between Rulers, Bishops and Nobles in Early Eleventh-Century Saxony: The Evidence of the *Vita Meinwerci*', pp. 165–99.

[9] On the problem of the Carolingian period as a distinct era, see the pessimistic view of Richard E. Sullivan, 'The Carolingian Age: Reflections on Its Place in the History of the Middle Ages', *Speculum* 64 (1989), pp. 267–306; and the more optimistic assessment of Janet L. Nelson, 'Presidential Address. England and the Continent in the Ninth Century I: Ends and Beginnings', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th series, 12 (2002), pp. 1–22.

[10] Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, trans. Bernhard Miall (orig. pub. 1939; reprint: Totowa, 1980); Eugen Ewig, *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien: Gesammelte Schriften (1952–1973)*, 2 vols., ed. Hartmut Atsma, Beihefte der *Francia* 3/1–2 (Zurich, 1976–9); Patrick J. Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (New York, Oxford, 1988); Walter Goffart, 'From Roman Taxation to Mediaeval Seigneurie: Three Notes', *Speculum* 47 (1972), pp. 165–87, 373–94; Reinhold Kaiser, *Das römische Erbe und das Merowingerreich*,

order that had ceased to exist, but with a close treatment of the late Merovingian period when a fundamentally different order based on networks of monasteries and kin-groups coalesced.

This early medieval order held sway until the eleventh century, when it underwent profound transformation. The literature here is enormous and sharply debated, but suffice it to say for the moment that although historians disagree on the extent of change, a range of studies written from a variety of perspectives has established that Europe experienced deep and abiding change between Carolingian times and the emergence of the high medieval monarchies and an autonomous Church by the twelfth century.[11] It is important to stress that, although these changes may not have been unconnected to the transformation of the Carolingian world in the tenth century (at least in some areas),[12] they fit only uneasily with the narrative of the collapse of the Carolingian Empire in others.[13] In many areas, such as Alsace, the posited transformations noticeably post-dated the end of the Carolingian era.

If the seventh and the eleventh centuries mark off the early middle ages as a distinct epoch, then we should be able to account for its coherence with positive evidence. That is, the early medieval period should not simply present a convenient space to trace out the vestiges of a dying Roman order or the emergence of monarchical government in the twelfth century, as is often the case with those working on either side of the period, and even by some working within it. The rulers, prelates

Enzyklopädie deutscher Geschichte 26 (Munich, 1993); Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce A. D. 300–900* (Cambridge, 2001); Pierre Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West, Sixth through Eighth Centuries*, trans. John J. Contreni (Columbia, S. C., 1976); Chris Wickham, 'The Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism', *Past and Present* 103 (1984), pp. 3–36; and Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450–751* (London, New York, 1994).

[11] On the west, see Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 2 vols., trans. L. A. Manyon (Chicago, 1961); Richard W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven, London, 1953); Robert Fossier, *Enfance de l'Europe, X^e–XIIe siècles: Aspects économiques et sociaux* (Paris, 1982); and Jean-Pierre Poly and Eric Bournazel, *The Feudal Transformation 900–1200*, 2 vols., trans. Caroline Higgitt (New York, 1991). For Germany, see Gerd Tellenbach, *Church, State and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest*, trans. R. F. Bennett (orig. pub. 1940; reprint: Toronto, 1991); Gerd Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century*, trans. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge, 1993); Hagen Keller, *Zwischen regionaler Begrenzung und universalem Horizont: Deutschland im Imperium der Salier und Staufer, 1024 bis 1250* (Berlin, 1986); and Stefan Weinfurter, *The Salian Century: Main Currents in an Age of Transition*, trans. Barbara M. Bowlus (Philadelphia, 1999). On Europe in general, see Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350* (Princeton, 1993); and Robert I. Moore, *The First European Revolution, c. 970–1215* (Oxford, 2000).

[12] Chris Wickham, 'Society', in Rosamond McKitterick ed., *The Early Middle Ages: Europe 400–1000*, The Short Oxford History of Europe (Oxford, 2001), pp. 90–4.

[13] See now Simon MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge, 2003).

and aristocrats of the early middle ages created and perpetuated a coherent political order which – whether they realized it or not, but which we, who have the advantage of hindsight, can nonetheless see – was neither merely a survival of late classical forms nor a prelude to bureaucratization in the high middle ages. In early medieval Alsace, this order flowed from a distinctive symbiosis of familial, ecclesiastical and royal interests.

Aspects of early medieval society that we might conceive of as sociological – custom, networks of kinship and friendship and gift-exchange – are crucial for understanding the formulation of this political order. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that these 'informal' processes were not necessarily more fundamental than other factors, because the networks that bound people to one another, so far as we can access them, were often mediated by formally constituted institutions. Any treatment of associative networks should blend what we retrospectively distinguish as formal and informal modes of organization. Although I shall use such terms as 'local' and 'central', 'political' and 'social', and 'family' and 'monastery', I do not use them to represent oppositions whose dialectical interaction somehow can be seen to drive historical change. They are merely analytical, meaningful for differentiating the larger Frankish polity from its constituent parts and for identifying patterns of activity in terms that we as outside observers might recognize. Indeed, they are useful for helping us to understand that the distinctions we reflexively draw between local and central power, social and political history, and formal and informal processes are difficult to sustain in an early medieval context. Under the pressure of analysis, general and local order often turn out to be two sides of a coin, political and social life are often indistinguishable, and the relationships between families and the monasteries they patronized were extraordinarily fluid and in any case mutually reinforcing.

I also will de-emphasize the distinction between lay and ecclesiastical interests, as many early medievalists have been doing more systemically.[14] Scholars long have pointed out that almost all the sources that survive from the period were preserved by ecclesiastical institutions and so reflect 'church' interests. A typical strategy for overcoming this bias has been to abstract from the sources the (lay) society that must have existed beyond the monastery.[15] While there is some justification for trying to fill out the wider world encoded in the sources, at least for understanding the

[14] Mayke De Jong, 'Introduction: Rethinking Early Medieval Christianity: A View from the Netherlands', *Early Medieval Europe* 7, 3 (1998), pp. 261–75.

[15] Chris Wickham, *The Mountains and the City: The Tuscan Appennines in the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1988); and Wendy Davies, *Small Worlds: The Village Community in Early Medieval Brittany* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1988). On the tendency to overlook the ecclesiastical agency behind the documentation, see David Herlihy's review of Wickham's *Mountains and the City*, *Journal of*

contingencies of power, it is by no means clear that one can understand the long continuity of aristocratic power without moving ecclesiastical institutions, which were responsible for our sources, into the centre of the story, not simply as objects of aristocratic activity but as something integral to the structuring of power. In the early middle ages, lay and ecclesiastical spheres were coordinating, rather than subordinating, entities, populated by the same class of aristocrats linked together by networks of friendship and kinship. Monasteries were founded by families who sent their sons and daughters to staff their foundations as monks and nuns and even to administer them as abbots and abbesses, so that the webs of kinship that formed the matrix of this society encompassed both religious and lay persons. Monasteries never simply advanced their own interests; they remained wealthy and vibrant only so long as they attended the interests of their lay and royal patrons.[16]

Finally, because a central bureaucracy did not exist in the early medieval period, any investigation of political order needs to be approached from the local context. This strategy is not to be confused with the regional monographs pioneered by Georges Duby in France or by the practitioners of *Landesgeschichte* in Germany, many of whom have pursued detailed analysis quite consciously at the expense of broader political history.[17] The popularity of both types of regional history may have its origins in anxieties about political centralization in the modern period, in the search for intimacy and belonging in an increasingly impersonal and bureaucratized world.[18] Nor is it to be confused with centre-periphery studies. These can be useful for investigating the relationship between the Frankish empire and its marches[19] but are less helpful for understanding a system of internal order mediated by local frameworks. Rather, the local arena is simply the place where one is best able to view the interplay of Frankish politics at all levels.

Interdisciplinary History 19 (1989), pp. 662–4. The tendency is also evident in the research on memorial sources, a primary goal of which has been to elucidate (lay) aristocratic groups, see Gerd Althoff, *Adels- und Königsfamilien im Spiegel ihrer Memorialüberlieferung* (Munich, 1984); and more recently Uwe Ludwig, *Transalpine Beziehungen der Karolingerzeit im Spiegel der Memorialüberlieferung*, MGH Studien und Texte 25 (Hanover, 1999).

[16] Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 77–134; and John Nightingale, *Monasteries and Patrons in the Gorze Reform: Lotharingia c. 850–1000* (Oxford, 2001).

[17] Georges Duby, *La société aux XIe–XIIe siècles dans la région mâconnaise*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1971); Pankraz Fried ed., *Probleme und Methoden der Landesgeschichte* (Darmstadt, 1978); and John B. Freed, 'Medieval German Social History: Generalizations and Particularism', *Central European History* 25 (1992), pp. 1–26.

[18] Howard Kaminsky and James Van Horn Melton, introduction to Otto Brunner, *Land and Lordship: Structures of Governance in Medieval Austria* (Philadelphia, 1992), trans. Howard Kaminsky and James Van Horn Melton, pp. xvii–xxvii, xxxix–xliv.

[19] See for example, Julia Smith, *Province and Empire: Brittany and the Carolingians* (Cambridge, 1992).

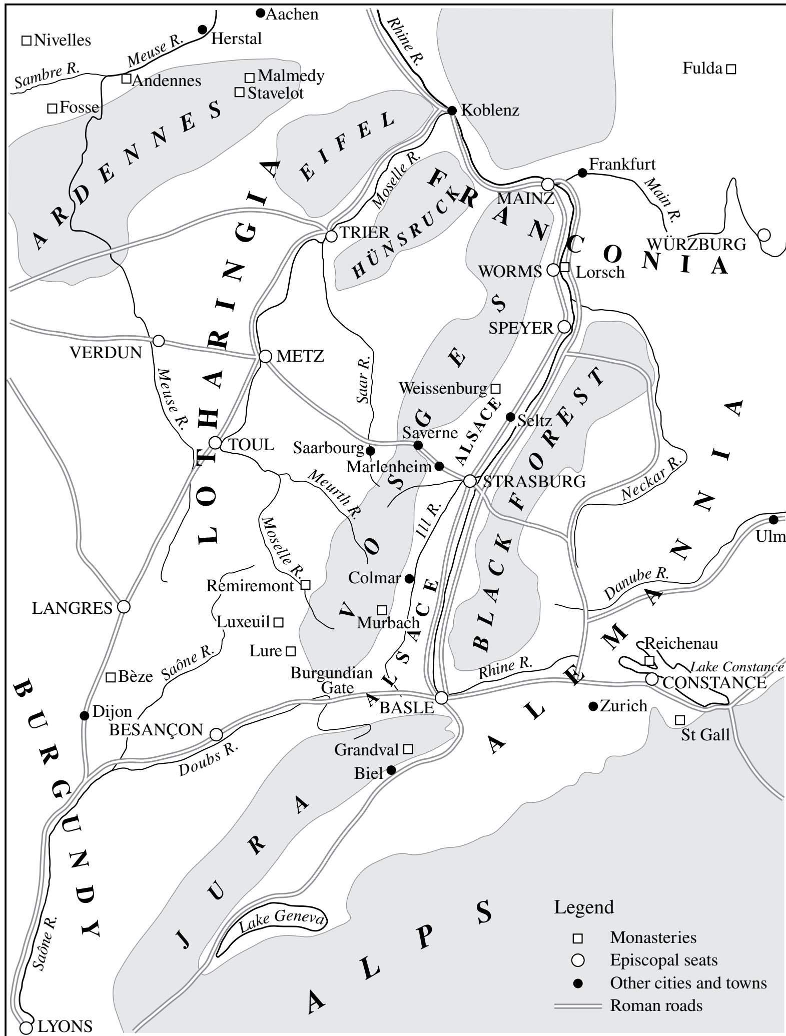
ALSACE AND THE VOSGES

The unique political geography of Alsace lends itself to a fruitful analysis of the issues of centre and locality posed in this book. The region was advantageously located in the middle of Frankish Europe and open to influence from the surrounding centres of power: to the north lay the Frankish heartlands of the mid-Rhine and Ardennes regions, to the east, the powerful dukedom of Alemannia, to the southwest, the Merovingian kingdom of Burgundy, and to the west the Meuse-Moselle basin, which formed the heart of the ninth-century kingdom of Lotharingia (see map 1). Consequently, the Alsatian territories stood at the nexus of several critical frontiers within early medieval Europe whose frequent ruptures have exposed the inner workings of the Frankish order to the inquiring eyes of investigators.[20] We shall examine these divisions more closely as they present themselves but, briefly, during the seventh century they ran along the frontier between the Merovingian kingdoms of Austrasia and Burgundy, and along the upper-Rhine frontier between Austrasia and Alemannia, a subordinate but frequently rebellious dukedom. In the Carolingian period, Alsace hosted the revolt of Charlemagne's grandsons against their father Louis the Pious (814–40) and subsequently became a bone of contention along the frontier between the eastern and western Frankish kingdoms. On the other hand, Alsace was at various stages either left largely to its own devices, as was the case during the late Merovingian period; free from disturbance and fully integrated into the Carolingian Empire, as was the situation during the long reign of Charlemagne (768–814); or open to direct royal control, as happened during the late Carolingian and Ottonian periods. In sum, the area is ideal for investigating the interactivity of local networks, royal power and episodic centralization throughout the early medieval period from a variety of perspectives.

The *pagus Alsatiae*, the 'district of Alsace', first emerged in the immediate post-Roman period, probably in the sixth century. The term 'Alsace' derives, as best as philologists can decipher, from an old Germanic phrase, *ali-land-sat-ja*, which meant 'one who sits in another land'.[21] It

[20] On early medieval Alsace, see Heinrich Büttner, *Geschichte des Elsaß I: Politische Geschichte des Landes von der Landnahmezeit bis zum Tode Ottos III. und Ausgewählte Beiträge zur Geschichte des Elsaß in Früh- und Hochmittelalter*, ed. Traute Endemann (Sigmaringen, 1991); Christian Pfister, *Le duché mérovingien d'Alsace et la légende de sainte Odile* (Paris, Nancy, 1892); Fritz Langenbeck, 'Probleme der elsässischen Geschichte in fränkischer Zeit', *Alemannisches Jahrbuch* (Lahr, 1957), pp. 1–132; Michael Borgolte, 'Die Geschichte der Grafengewalt im Elsaß von Dagobert I. bis Otto dem Großen', *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* 131 (1983), pp. 3–54; and Dieter Geuenich, Edward Sangmeister, Heiko Steuer and Béatrice Weis, 'Elsaß', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, 2nd edn, vol. VII (Berlin, New York, 1989), pp. 175–88.

[21] Béatrice Weis, 'Elsaß: Namenkundliches', in Geuenich et al., 'Elsaß', pp. 175–7.



Map 1 Alsace and the surrounding territories

presumably referred to the Alemanni who lived on the left bank of the Rhine, but the term appears first only in the seventh century, in Fredegar's chronicle.[22] The *pagus* extended from just south of Weissenburg in the north to the Burgundian Gate in the south, and

[22] Fredegar, *Chronicarum Quae Dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici Libri IV cum Continuationibus*, ed. Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM* 2 (Hanover, 1888), bk 4, c. 37, p. 138.

encompassed the plain between the upper Rhine to the east and the Vosges mountains to the west. Frankish Alsace was slightly smaller than its modern equivalent, and only in the tenth century was it subdivided into two districts, the *Nordgau* and the *Sundgau*. The *pagus* probably descended in some way from the old Roman administration of the area, which by the third century AD had divided the territories west of the upper Rhine into several *civitates*.[23] Although the antique city-based administration had largely disappeared by the seventh century, the Roman imprint remained deeply etched into the region. The dioceses of Strasburg and Basle, which were patterned after the *civitates*, provided the ecclesiastical administration of northern and southern Alsace, respectively. Frankish Alsace also had inherited from its Roman past an impressive system of roads which ran the length of the Rhine and linked the area to the mid-Rhine region, the former Danube provinces and the Alpine passes beyond. To the west, the roads cut through the Burgundian Gate, penetrated the Vosges at the Saverne gap, and thereby linked Alsace to Besançon and the Saône–Rhône corridor, and to Metz and the Moselle basin, respectively. Late Roman emperors, many of whom spent whole careers defending the Rhine frontier, developed an extensive network of imperial residences and fiscal lands which formed the foundations of the Frankish royal estates. In Alsace, these royal lands were concentrated in the north around the old *civitas* of Brumath and the Roman fortress at Seltz, in the central regions around Strasburg and the palace at Marlenheim, and in the south near Colmar and Basle. The infrastructure of roads, estates and palaces provided an attractive framework for the organization of Frankish lordships and royal power in Alsace.

Although Alsace was open to influences from beyond, its geographical coherence and its peripheral status with respect to the neighbouring centres of power meant that it also possessed a strong local character. The lands immediately east of the Rhine, between the river and the Black Forest, were not so well developed. The centre of Alemannic power lay farther east, between the Danube and Lake Constance, and only in the eleventh century was the Black Forest settled on any scale. The Frankish kings maintained a higher profile in the two poles of Frankish power, the Paris basin and the mid-Rhine territories, although in the early seventh century, and again after the mid-ninth century, the royal presence in Alsace was quite pronounced. The highly developed infrastructure, the relative isolation from political turbulence and the richness of the local

[23] Cf. Anthony King, *Roman Gaul and Germany* (London, 1990), pp. 54–62, 153–71; and John F. Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul: The Three Provinces, 58 BC–AD 260* (Ithaca, 1983), p. 93 ff.

agricultural economy probably help to explain the impressive resilience of Alsatian lordships.

The promising ecology of early medieval Alsace – ripe for exploitation by virtue of its well-developed infrastructure – offered much to sustain an emerging lordship or monastery. The fertile loess soils of the plain yielded abundant harvests of cereal crops, the rolling hills beyond nurtured a promising viticulture, and the Vosges mountains provided the rivers and streams that watered the hill country and the alluvial flats. The broader plain north of Strasburg is scored by a number of short, west-to-east-running rivers that flowed into the Rhine: from the north, these were the Lauter, the Sauer, the Moder, the Zorn and the Brusch. Southern Alsace is drained principally by the Ill, which flows southwest to northeast, from the Burgundian Gate to Strasburg. The Vosges did not isolate Alsace from the lands immediately to the west; rather its broad and accessible valleys attracted intensive settlement, especially during the seventh century, when an impressive array of monasteries was founded by enterprising aristocrats and Irish holy men.[24] The exploitation of the vast mountain forests and constant communication among the monasteries drew the surrounding populations into an interdependence which was manifest in the close connections that bound the powerful kin-groups on either side of the massif to one another.[25]

Since Neolithic times, settlements have accumulated in the foothill regions and plains surrounding the Vosges near rivers and streams.[26] The Roman period witnessed a busy phase of settlement, especially during late antiquity when the military build-up attracted Roman provincials and barbarians from beyond the Rhine. Place names reveal the Alemannic and Frankish dominance of the area in the post-Roman period, although this most likely was wrought by the implantation of Frankish lordships, rather than the large-scale relocation of population.[27] Miracles of modern civil engineering now allow towns to crowd the river banks with impunity, but in pre-modern times villages were more commonly situated on higher ground near minor, rather than major, rivers, safely removed from

[24] Joel Schweitzer, 'Apport pour une étude de l'Alsace rurale au Haut Moyen Age', in Jean-Michael Boehler, Dominique Lerch and Jean Vogt eds., *Histoire de l'Alsace rurale* (Strasburg, 1983), p. 73.

[25] See below, chapter 1, p. 37.

[26] On rural settlement and economy, see André Thévenin and J. Heim, 'La préhistoire'; and François Petry, 'Les campagnes en Alsace de l'époque celtique à la fin de la période romaine', in Boehler et al. eds., *Histoire de l'Alsace rurale*, pp. 23–39, 43–69, respectively. See also Madeleine Chatelet, 'L'évolution du peuplement entre la Zorn et la Bruche durant le Haut Moyen Age', in Bernadette Schnitzler ed., *Vivre au Moyen Age: 30 ans d'archéologie médiévale en Alsace* (Strasburg, 1990), pp. 132–8.

[27] Langenbeck, 'Probleme', pp. 49–71; cf. Heiko Steuer, 'Elsaß: Frühgeschichte', in Geuenich et al. 'Elsaß', p. 182; and Dieter Geuenich, 'Elsaß: Historisches', in Geuenich et al., 'Elsaß', p. 185.

the violence of floods. The inhabitants of these villages tilled rich fields of wheat, rye and barley, cultivated small orchards and vineyards, grazed cattle, sheep and pigs, raised chickens and gardened vegetables; and they turned this agricultural produce into bread, meat, lard, eggs, cheese and apples to eat, beer and wine to drink, and leather and wool to wear. While the crops grew and the animals grazed, the inhabitants fished the waters and hunted wild game.

They also exploited the thick forests for other valued resources.[28] The Vosges are flanked by mixed deciduous and coniferous woods and crowned with conifers, except in the highest elevations of the southern Vosges, where the sandstone has eroded to expose the granite core of the massif.[29] These bald mountain tops are well suited to shepherding; the broad Vosges valleys, to agriculture and animal husbandry. The vast forest of the highlands and surrounding plains provided pasturage for pigs; they were gleaned for firewood, nuts, mushrooms, herbs, and wild apples and berries, exploited for timber, their animals trapped for furs, and their bee hives plundered for honey and wax. Yet for all its wealth, the forest was a place of dread: its treasures were not free for the taking, but were guarded by ill-tempered bears, wolves, foxes and wild boars. The battle between humans and the environment, and the effort to tame the forest sometimes structured the dramas in early medieval hagiography. The *Life of Columbanus*, for example, celebrated the adventures of the eponymous heroic Irish saint who, while taming the wild forests of the southwestern Vosges, ordered marauding bears from their dens, repelled the attacks of terrorizing wolves, scolded thieving birds and affectionately played with squirrels.[30] The power of God was not the only weapon against these ferocious and cunning beasts; the spear worked well too: the Vosges forests also were home to some of the favourite hunting preserves of Frankish kings.[31]

The Vosges linked Alsace to the rich agricultural zones beyond: the cool and wet cereal-producing areas of the Moselle basin to the west and northwest, and the comparatively more temperate, cereal and

[28] Chris Wickham, 'European Forests in the Early Middle Ages: Landscape and Land Clearance', *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo* 37 (Spoleto, 1990), pp. 479–545.

[29] On the geography of the Vosges, see Etienne Juillard, *Altas et géographie de l'Alsace et de la Lorraine (la France rhénane)* (Paris, 1977), pp. 119–37; Georges Chabot, *Géographie régionale de la France*, 3rd edn (Paris, 1975), pp. 238–42; Hilda R. Ormsby, *France: A Regional and Economic Geography*, 2nd edn (London, 1950), pp. 329–30, 377–80.

[30] Jonas of Bobbio, *Vitae Columbani Abbatis Discipulorumque Eius Libri II*, in Bruno Krusch ed., *Jonae Vitae Sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Johannis, MGH SRG* (Hanover, Leipzig, 1905), pp. 1–294; bk 1, cc. 8, 10, 15, 17, 27; pp. 166–7, 169, 181, 178–9, 185–6, 216.

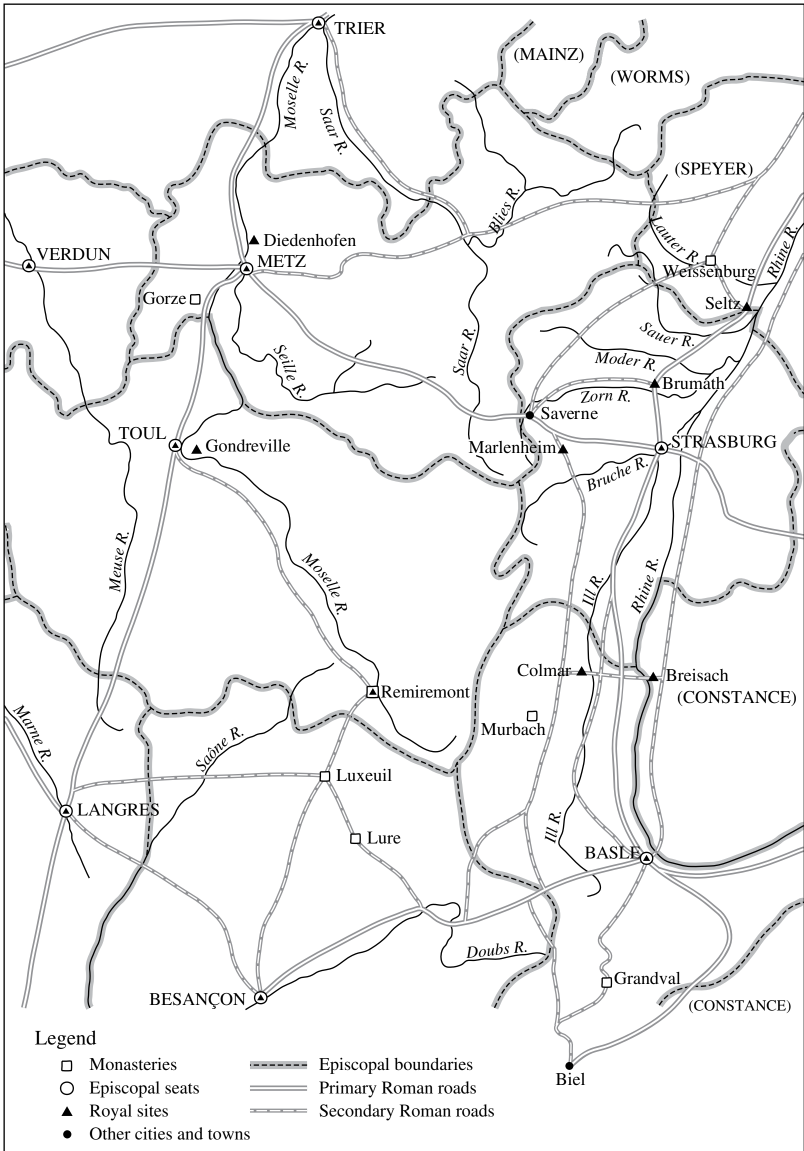
[31] Charlemagne and Louis the Pious avidly hunted there, *Annales Regni Francorum*, ed. Friedrich Kurze, *MGH SRG* (Hanover, 1895), a. 805, 817, 821 and 825; pp. 120, 147, 155, 167.

vine-growing regions of the Saône basin to the southwest.[32] The upper-Moselle territories west and northwest of the Vosges lack the starker geological features of Alsace; they form, rather, a transitional zone that links the scarp lands of the Paris basin to the block-mountain systems, such as the Vosges, that form the ramparts of the Rhine valley. Here the transition from mountains to lowlands is less drastic: the Vosges dwindles into forested hills and vales, scarp-edged plateaux and broad valleys that gradually melt into a higher elevation plain. The plain is bounded and drained by two major rivers: on its western edge by the Moselle, which arises in the southern Vosges; and on its eastern edge by the Saar, which flows out of the central Vosges just south of the Saverne Gap, runs north along the hill country abutting the Vosges and eventually empties into the Moselle near Trier. The Moselle and the Rhine, which meet at Koblenz, form a waterway that nearly encircles the Vosges. The weather, the hills and the plain of the upper-Moselle basin combine to yield rich and productive lands for the cultivation of cereals, and lush meadows and pasturage for the grazing of cattle. In modern times, the area has become famous for its rich deposits of coal and iron; in the early middle ages it was exploited rather for another important mineral, salt, which is entombed in the plains and accessible at the surface in shallow pans and basins.

The Burgundian Gate separates the Vosges from the Alpine Jura mountains to the south and forms a gap that joins the upper Rhine basin to the Saône-Doubs watershed to the southwest. The exposed granite core of the southern Vosges falls steeply to the foothills of the Gate, the Jura gradually by a series of descending plateaux. As the Saône flows south, the lands on either side become increasingly more productive and broaden into the Burgundian Plain, where it receives the waters of the Doubs just south of Dijon. The Doubs arises in the Jura and winds its way north through forested mountain valleys to the Gate. In geological ages past, it flowed thence to the Rhine, but today turns abruptly southwest, rounds the Jura massif, winds its way through pastoral plateau country to Besançon, and then on to the Burgundian Plain. The Saône continues south to Lyons, where it meets the Rhône. Together, the Saône and Rhône valleys form a north-south corridor that extends uninterrupted from the southern Vosges to Provence.

Similar to the upper-Rhine region, these territories had been organized in Roman times into administrative *civitates*. As one moves clockwise around the Vosges massif, these cities were, from the north: Mainz, Worms, Speyer, Brumath (near Strasburg), *Augusta Rauricorum* (near Basle), Besançon, Langres, Toul, Metz and Trier. With the Christianization

[32] Chabot, *Géographie régionale*, pp. 221–61, 273–81; Ormsby, *France*, pp. 261–80, 323–40, 353–89.



Map 2 Episcopal boundaries of the Vosges region

Map 3 The districts and monasteries of the Vosges and adjacent regions

of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, these cities – with the exceptions of Brumath and *Augusta Rauricorum*, which were superseded in importance by Strasburg and Basle, respectively – became the seats of ecclesiastical dioceses (see map 2). All were connected by a network of roads