

## Comptes rendus — Book Reviews

LUDOLF KUCHENBUCH. — *Bäuerliche Gesellschaft und Klosterherrschaft im 9. Jahrhundert. Studien zur Sozialstruktur der Familia der Abtei Prüm. Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, Beiheft 66. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1978. Pp. xv, 443.*

In 893 Regino, abbot of the royal Benedictine monastery of Prüm in Lorraine (modern Rhine Palatinate), had completed the decade-long labours of his predecessors to compile a detailed survey of the properties of his house. Though now surviving only in a thirteenth-century transcript, the Prüm *Urbar* remains one of the main later examples of that Carolingian concern for careful ecclesiastical management best known to non-specialists in the polyptychs of Irminion or of St. Remi of Reims. The *Urbar* and related texts have enabled a young German medievalist, Ludolf Kuchenbuch, to analyse and reconstruct the social structure of this early medieval lordship. His book reflects the broad intellectual awareness and careful traditional methods of a new generation of German medievalists.

Kuchenbuch intends to study to the limits of his sources all possible elements of social differentiation and solidarity among the dependants of Prüm, the abbey's *familia*. In choosing this unit of analysis he consciously places his inquiry in the context of earlier German legal, institutional and socio-economic history but, further, draws his readers' attention to innovative approaches pioneered by recent French scholars and other students of traditional peasantries. A lengthy examination of relevant texts and a brief sketch of the abbey's history also preface the social investigation itself. In this the book manifests its origin as a dissertation.

For an early medieval lordship that of Prüm is extraordinarily well (which is not to say fully) documented. Kuchenbuch can elicit information on a wide range of social formations and compare his findings from the middle kingdom of Lotharingia with others from western and eastern Frankland. Tools, houses, sex roles, brewing, marketing, salt production, messenger services, and noble kin groups are just a few of the topics raised. In the wealth of detail Kuchenbuch rightly highlights issues of recognized significance, most of which involve the demonstrable mainstay of the social order, the *mansus* peasants. Readers of this journal will especially value his examination of family household types among these subsistence-oriented, grain-producing peasant farmers. East of the Rhine such people lived in extended family groups with servants and unmarried kin joining the nuclear family in exploiting whole *mansus* units; in the west related but separate nuclear units without servants divided the *mansus* between them. The centrally located estates of Prüm contained a mixture of both family types. The structure of rent (surplus labour extraction) possessed a different kind of variability within the norm of what were mainly labour services. Tenants of legally free status in any given group of properties generally owed duties specified by time or task and unrelated to grain production on the abbey's own land; the legally servile owed less defined labour more closely connected to cereal farming. But at each site the particular obligations of both groups were even more strongly determined by that property's place in fulfilling the regionally organized needs of the abbey itself. This overriding of legal differences by the demands of lordship is further confirmed in a later section on

the ninth-century replacement of status-specific social terminology with terms indicative of common subordination in the *familia*. Valuable contributions to the operation and mentality of peasant society are also made in discussions of village officials (the *majores*) and of village priests and their relations to their parishioners, their bishop, and their lord. Scholars already familiar with problems of peasant social behaviour will find here suggestive comparative data. The author ends by suggesting two conceptual frameworks for overall comprehension of his work: the Prüm *familia* is to be seen as a "real type" of early medieval social configuration, the monastic lordship (*Klosterherrschaft*); the importance of the *mansus* peasants should cause the entirety of the early middle ages to be subsumed under the anthropological rubric of "peasant society" (*bäuerliche Gesellschaft*) rather than conventional chronological or political ones.

The conclusion itself illustrates strengths and weaknesses in Kuchenbuch's broad conceptual awareness. Citations in the last few pages include Norbert Elias, Max Weber, David Thorner, Teodor Shanin, Eric Wolff, and Georges Duby, but the ideas drawn from these do not always obviously contribute to the coherence and direction of the argument made. *Klosterherrschaft*, it seems, is used to emphasize the limits to the Prüm data as a case-study in that royal, episcopal, or lay lordships had different needs and structures. But the potentially broadening idea of "peasant society" serves no clear purpose here. It had not been an object of proof nor had it served to generate testable hypotheses in the course of the study. Kuchenbuch, like many medieval social historians, knows the social science literature but has a hard time integrating this knowledge into the structure of his discourse and reasoning. His quandary is not unique. Medieval texts tell at once too little about some human behaviours and too much about others. The theory at once engulfs too much and predicts too little. The operational nexus of research design and presentation has not yet been solved, although efforts like this one are valiant moves in the right direction.

The conceptual difficulties which Kuchenbuch shares with most innovative medieval social historians, especially those who would encompass a whole past society, cannot obscure his important substantive contributions. The predominance of nuclear family households has been pushed still earlier in yet another region of Europe and the complex interaction among status, rent, and lordship given carefully integrated analysis. Kuchenbuch moves with skill and knowledge between the general and the specific and is fully willing to concede ignorance where his texts finally fail him. His book can thus be taken as a worthy representative of the new German medieval social history. From the national historiographic tradition Kuchenbuch and others have learnt the skills of source criticism and meticulous analysis. To these they add a new openness to other scholarship and disciplines and, in the process, an increased conceptual sophistication. Thus Kuchenbuch has attained a cautiously pragmatic stance, less purely antiquarian or polemical than some of his predecessors, less richly speculative or potentially seminal than a product of the *Annales* school, but thereby more balanced, more documented and more careful. It is a solid work of creative scholarship.

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