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# (Review) Adels- und Königsfamilien im Spiegel ihrer Memorialüberlieferung: Studien zum Totengedenken der Billunger und Ottonen

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Adels- und Königsfamilien im Spiegel ihrer Memorialüberlieferung: Studien zum Totengedenken der Billunger und Ottonen by Gerd Althoff

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textual techniques of Fuhrmann and Mordek. He has of course to deal with the great difficulty that Alger's text is more of a treatise than a collection of laws, so that dicta and canons flow together. The textual solutions are necessary and suitable. The substance of the double apparatus is appropriate, unblemished by printer's errors or proofreading slips. But I do question the forms of notation used in the text and apparatus. Is it necessary to clutter the text with raised letters in order to draw the reader's attention to the variants in the apparatus criticus? A line-by-line notation is surely all that is needed. The variants themselves could have been more simply expressed: many are merely changes in word order. For example, 2.57 (p. 305, line 9) reads "accusatores non debent<sup>m</sup>"; in the apparatus we find "m accusatores non debent] non debent accusatores CT." Why not simply "non debent accusatores *tr.* CT"? Or 3.60 (p. 360, line 14) "apostolica<sup>l</sup> per nos auctoritate<sup>l</sup>," which leads to the variant "i apostolica—auctoritate] auctoritate apostolica per nos T," where "auctoritate apostolica per nos *tr.* T" would have been more efficient and more informative.

The five indices that complete the volume are full and easy to use, except in the case of the last, "Personen-, Orts- und Sachregister" (pp. 403–11). For example, Mabillon, who first published the preface of DMI in 1675, appears in the index in six places, but the important reference on page 157, note 4, is missing. Likewise Alger's use of the term "corpus canonum" (p. 111) deserves some identification in the index.

But these are trifling points. Dr. Kretzschmar has produced a work of outstanding scholarship which well deserves its place in the series *Quellen und Forschungen zum Recht im Mittelalter*.

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GERD ALTHOFF, *Adels- und Königsfamilien im Spiegel ihrer Memorialüberlieferung: Studien zum Totengedenken der Billunger und Ottonen*. (Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, 47.) Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1984. Pp. 440; 4 fold-out diagrams. DM 78.

THIS BEAUTIFULLY PRODUCED and fascinating book should provide rich rewards to anyone interested in the nature of lordship and the family in the central Middle Ages or puzzled by the meaning and social context of the necrological documents so characteristic of the age. Drawing on deep familiarity with the necrologies of Merseburg, Magdeburg, and Lüneburg, which he and Joachim Wollasch have published in a facsimile edition for the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (*Libri Memoriales et Necrologia, nova series* 2 [1983]), Gerd Althoff argues that religious houses founded and continuously influenced by one family best preserve the commemorative records of that family and that the names in their necrologies delineate a circle of *debitores*, that is, those who supported the family and its lordship. A complete analysis of such a necrology should reveal, then, the "social horizons" of both family and lordship at various stages of their development.

Althoff's studies are technical and difficult, but the author and publisher have gone to much trouble to aid the reader. The complexity of the arguments is mitigated by a welcome habit of summing up at regular intervals. The book contains an index of persons discussed in the text, four diagrams illustrating the chronological scope and content of the pertinent necrologies, and, most importantly, almost 150 pages of commentary on the people whose names were entered therein. Although the com-

ments under an individual name are often of little help while reading the text, since they tend to summarize and refer back to its arguments, the commentary as a whole will be a useful tool for future research. The addition of a subject index also would have been welcome.

The necrology of the Saxon monastery of St. Michael, Lüneburg, is the “mirror” in which Althoff is able to read the history of the family of Hermann Billung. But the historical reflections are obscured in the document, since the very nature of a necrology, which lists names by death date and not as a group (as is the case with the confraternity books that have been utilized in the past), means that the various entries must be rearranged before further work can be done. Thus the analysis proceeds archaeologically, uncovering the various layers of the necrology and reconstructing the historical circumstances of their initiation and transmission.

The earliest layer of entries suggests that the Billungs emerged from the “descendants of Widukind,” a family group whose members occupied the most important episcopal sees in northern Saxony in the late ninth century. The preservation of this early layer of memorials by Duke Hermann’s brother Wichmann the Elder and his nephews Egbert and Wichmann means, argues Althoff, that the family of Wichmann held a more central place in the clan in the mid-tenth century than that of his brother. Moreover, because they originated in the family of Wichmann, the Lüneburg memorials reveal the composition of rebellious *coniurationes*, for the Saxon enemies of Otto I entered into pacts not only of aid and protection but of mutual commemoration after death. The ducal family itself appears in the center of the Lüneburg memorials only in the 970s when a rapprochement between Egbert and Hermann’s son Bernhard I led to the latter’s assumption of the duty of commemorating the dead ancestors and *debitores* of the family. This transfer of responsibilities previously seen to by his cousins reveals that the feud within the clan had healed and that the Billungs had by Bernhard’s time become preeminent. Indeed the assumption of commemorative duties and the provisioning of a family foundation to see that they were carried out were, Althoff argues, preconditions of both emergent lordship and (agnatic) family consciousness.

The memorials of the early eleventh century mirror the social map of the ducal house at the height of its development. They show that, contrary to historiographical expectations, the Saxon bishops did not unanimously support the eastern policies of Henry II, but joined with the Billungs in strong opposition to the emperor. The death of Henry and the accession of Conrad II brought an end to the Billung coalition with the bishops and better relations with the emperor, but those did not outlast the reign of Henry III. Unfortunately the Lüneburg memorials give no information on the Billungs and their supporters in the Saxon wars of Henry IV. For reasons that remain unclear, the political influence and the commemorative activity of the Billungs declined sharply in the late eleventh century, and, although the author suspects some connection between the two, he admits that it is not apparent.

When Althoff turns to the memorials of the Ottonians, he faces a different set of problems. First of all, no necrology from the family foundations at Gandersheim, Quedlinburg, or St. Moritz in Magdeburg has survived as such. His archaeological methodology, however, provides the means of excavating the Ottonian memorials from two sources: a group of eighty-two names entered into the confraternity book of St. Gall in 929 and an addition made to the necrology of Merseburg in 1017/18. Secondly, since the historical sources for the Ottonians are so much richer than for the Billungs, little important new information on Ottonian political or family history could be expected to emerge from the analysis. Nevertheless the reconstruction of their

family memorials sheds new light on the relations between commemorative traditions and Saxon historiography and on the practice of commemoration itself.

The St. Gall entry points to Gandersheim, where the Liudolfing clan memorialized its members in the late ninth century. When Henry I emerged as king, he founded a new convent at Quedlinburg as a center for a more intensive phase of commemorative activity. No longer restricted to the “family” alone, the Quedlinburg memorials reveal the social network of Henry’s early supporters among the Saxon nobility and the *Reichsbischöfe*. By the mid-tenth century both the initiative and the preservation of the memorials were clearly the province of the women of the family. In some of the most stimulating pages in his book Althoff gives substance to previous hints at the importance and centrality of Saxon noble women in commemorating the dead. The comparison of texts from charters with the evidence of the necrologies shows that, while the men saw to the material basis needed to fulfill commemorative responsibilities (through gifts of lands and income to support the religious who carried out the prayer duties and to provide the food and alms that were dispensed to the poor for the salvation of those commemorated), the women, such as Queen Mathilda and the Empress Adelheid, often initiated memorials for their families, cared for the necrologies themselves, and saw to the day-to-day and long-term fulfillment of commemorative responsibilities.

The conclusion turns to the ways in which Althoff’s evidence exemplifies the overall nature and circumstances of commemoration among the Saxon nobility. After arguing for the general character of the sexual division of responsibility apparent in Ottonian practice, Althoff reiterates the links between commemoration of the dead and the growth of lordship, noting, moreover, that families also initiated or intensified commemorative activity as a response to domestic crises, such as serious illness or political opposition, or to witness the formation of networks of support among the nobility. The human horizons of the memorials are centered on the family itself, but move out from there to relations by marriage (though not in the face of political differences) and to members of other groupings—some organized for rebellion, others for reasons that are just beginning to emerge from obscurity.

There is much to ponder in these studies, and individual readers will doubtless find some of Althoff’s arguments and conclusions unconvincing. Others, like me, might wish for some clues to the religious or psychological dimensions of the commemorative activities of noble Saxon families. There is, after all, no immediately apparent reason why prayer *pro redemptione animae* should be so central to the social reality of these people. The necrologies are liturgical documents before anything else, and even the charters invariably refer to religious motivations. I could not help asking, moreover, whether the early layers of the memorials “mirror” reality in the same way as the later. Althoff shows how Widukind of Corvey intentionally distorted the genealogy of the Ottonians in order to make the Liudolfings heirs to the Carolingians. Might not the family of Wichmann have taken up the commemoration of the “descendants of Widukind” for similar reasons, that is, in order to strengthen their claims against Otto I and Hermann Billung? Althoff hints at the importance of such questions in his introduction but does not take them up. These considerations, however, do not lessen the impact of his work. Althoff has shown the continued importance for social history of German scholarship on commemorative documents, and his book should stand as a model of what careful analysis of these most reticent of medieval sources has yet to teach us.

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