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**Bernard S. Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare: Prelude to Empire*. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. Pp. xii, 430. ISBN 978-0-8122-2144-2.**

**Review by James R. Smither, Grand Valley State University (smitherj@gvsu.edu).**

*Early Carolingian Warfare*, first published in 2001 and now reissued in a most welcome paperback edition, remains the definitive work on its topic. Bernard Bachrach (Univ. of Minnesota), an established expert in Western European medieval political and military history, shows a full command of the available source materials in arguing that the military successes of the early Carolingians, including Charles Martel's victory at Poitiers (AD 732), were achieved by a well developed military system that drew heavily on ancient Roman precedents.

The greatest obstacle to the study of early medieval history is the paucity of primary sources. While historians no longer view the seventh and eighth centuries as "Dark Ages," contemporary narrative histories and other documents are thin on the ground as compared to the situation for later periods. Bachrach does wring the extant sources nearly dry in structuring and developing his arguments and interpretations. He manages to identify a long-term strategy pursued by Mayors of the Palace Pippin II (d. 714), Charles Martel (d. 741), and Pippin, later King Pippin, III (d. 768). Though the chronicles he mines were written during or after the reign of Charlemagne (AD 768-814), Bachrach builds a strong case for the engagement of the earlier Carolingians in a deliberate, prolonged effort to rebuild the original Frankish kingdom as a single coherent polity.

As the book's title indicates, Bachrach examines the Carolingians' military organization, training, and equipment; he shows that the Franks still had access to an assortment of Roman military manuals. Their adherence to Roman military traditions, he writes, made Carolingian armies a good deal more than armed mobs or collections of independent warriors. To support this claim, Bachrach broadens his canvas to religious and literary works, to reveal the morale of Carolingian soldiers or, more specifically, just what led them to serve willingly even on protracted campaigns. He establishes that Carolingian military leaders were more than just charismatic individuals; their careful attention to logistics and supply ensured that they could pay and feed as well as properly train and equip their soldiers. This brought them victories on a fairly consistent basis and the wherewithal to overcome periodic setbacks and defeats.

A chapter devoted to battlefield tactics refutes the negative stereotypes of Frankish soldiers and armies that appear in Byzantine military sources. In his account of the Battle of Poitiers, Bachrach juxtaposes Byzantine claims about the Franks with other contemporary accounts of the battle that represent Charles Martel as carefully following Roman practices, including the use of scouts.

At Poitiers on Sunday, 26 October 32, Charles Martel, upon reaching the environs of the enemy's fortified camp (*castra*), within which numerous tents and pavilions had been erected in neatly standing rows, halted his forces. The court chronicler reports that from this position Charles sent out scouts in order to reconnoiter the enemy position in preparation for an all-out assault on the Muslims' fortified position. Charles' precaution is diametrically opposed to the Emperor Maurice's assertion regarding the standard operating procedure of the Franks. The emperor, though recognizing the importance of scouts for successful military operations, indicates rather ambiguously that the Franks either are neglectful in their deployment of scouts or do not use them at all. Maurice leaves the reader to infer that the failure to take full advantage of scouts hurt the Franks (and anyone else who fails to employ this basic intelligence gathering technique). (188)

Bachrach buttresses this point by citing a later Carolingian military manual by Rhabanus Maurus that discusses the use of scouts on the march, something not discussed in the older Roman manuals. He repeatedly adduces evidence for the effective discipline, complex tactical doctrine, and systematic military organiza-

tion that enabled Charles Martel to assemble and maintain a very large army in the field; in short, Charles's victory was the logical consequence of painstaking preparation rather than a lucky break.

In a telling comparison, Bachrach looks back to the Battle of Rimini (AD 553), where a Byzantine army led by Narses defeated an apparently well trained and effective Frankish force through the use of a feigned retreat, an event which seems to have informed Maurice's commentary, and then notes how the Franks themselves had learned from their defeat and were prepared to deal with it when later opponents, including Muslim invaders from Spain, tried it on them.

Maurice observed concerning the Franks: "They are easily broken by a feigned retreat which is followed by a sudden turning back [and counterattack] against them." Maurice may have surmised from Agathias' account or perhaps from other sources that the Frankish defeat at Rimini was the result of a loss of command and control. Thus, he asserts, relevant to the present context, that the Franks "are disobedient to their leaders" and "they despise good order, especially on horseback." It is clear, however, by contrast with the situation at Rimini and Maurice's possible generalization from it, that Charles Martel's phalanx at Poitiers did not break ranks and engage in an undisciplined hot pursuit of a beaten or only a presumably defeated enemy. In addition, as already noted, whatever mounted troops that may have been attached to Charles Martel's force at Poitiers either had dismounted and fought on foot within the phalanx or were deployed to the rear as a reserve and thus deliberately were kept out of the action. (187)

Once more, the Franks had demonstrated discipline and tactical flexibility and were far from the barbarian horde of Maurice's imagination.

Bachrach next considers the early part of Charlemagne's reign, finding no lessening of military discipline or tactical proficiency. Regarding a defeat of Frankish forces by the Saxons, he notes that the chronicler of the battle faults poor command decisions, including deviations from agreed upon operational plans and a disorganized cavalry charge against a tightly organized infantry formation. Such rash moves were now, however, the exception, not the rule.

The book concludes with a survey of several long campaigns, primarily Pippin III's in Aquitaine (AD 760-768); these were marked by shrewd coordination of units, sometimes involving multiple field armies, in conducting sustained operations, such as sieges. As throughout the book, Bachrach offers persuasive analyses of the implications that may be gleaned from extant sources. Pippin, he writes, fully appreciated the capacities of his own forces and those of his enemy, and capitalized on his well trained army and efficient logistical system to frustrate his enemies' plans and gain his own objectives.

Bachrach strives mightily<sup>1</sup> to extract support for his arguments from the sparse available source material, yet must often, as he himself admits, resort to speculation. While he certainly proves that the early Carolingian military system was more advanced than it has often been thought to be, he gives less attention to matters of politics and governance and their effect on the military. The death of each Carolingian leader triggered disorder and rebellion. Over the course of the later seventh and eighth centuries, each successor had to put the pieces together again, a task that finally overtaxed Charlemagne's ninth-century successors, who had trouble holding their kingdoms together or fending off new invasions with armies that fell below earlier standards. Such issues, however, go beyond the scope of *Early Carolingian Warfare*, which continues to be indispensable reading for anyone seriously interested in early medieval military history.

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1. In no less than 120 pages of notes, he engages with specific issues regarding the meaning of the sources and the rationale for his explications of them.