

THE BAIUVARII AND THURINGI: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE.

Edited by Janine Fries-Knoblach and Heiko Steuer, with John Hines. Pp. vii and 388, Illus 99. The Boydell Press (Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology, 9), 2014. Price: 75.00. ISBN 978 184383 915 6.

This is the latest addition to a series of 'ethnographic' perspectives on post-Roman European peoples originating in a series of conferences held in the 1990s and 2000s. This volume brings us the Thuringians and Bavarians, a somewhat under-treated pair of neighbouring peoples from Central Europe, who appear in the historical sources around AD 400 and 550 respectively. These multidisciplinary collections (e.g. I. Wood, *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period*, 1998; G. Ausenda, P. Delugo and C. Wickham, *The Langobards before the Frankish Conquest*, 2009) have always supplied enlightening blends of philology, history, and archaeology, in which a light editorial hand, permitting freedom and even contradiction between the perspectives of contributors, is only made evident by its sensitive management of disciplinary balance.

This volume is no exception to that commendable tradition. After a brief introduction by the editors, the book commences with a philological chapter by the late Dennis Green, providing critical insight into the origins of the tribal name of the Baiovarii, traditionally linked with the Celtic tribe of the Boii and Bohemia. The following chapter by Haubrichs continues the linguistic theme with a detailed characterization of Old Bavarian that investigates the relationship of the language and its lexicon to the rest of the West Germanic group. Neumeister's chapter shifts to the early history of the Thuringians, challenging the received picture to ask what we really know about this group from written sources in the shadowy fifth and sixth centuries. The late Giorgio Ausenda's chapter forms the only truly ethnographic contribution and concerns the likely changes in wedding exchanges that may have occurred when agro-pastoralist Germani moved into the former territory of the Western Empire.

These chapters are followed by archaeological offerings. The first is in the form of Steuer's contextual characterization of Bavarian and Thuringian burials within the massive Continental zone of furnished inhumation. This is followed by Fries-Knoblach's comprehensive study of rural settlement in Bavaria, which will surely become an important point of reference, detailing new findings from recent excavations of a previously very poorly understood subject. Martin then surveys the range of brooch forms and weaponry that circulated in post-Roman Europe, indicating how some of these objects might be used to locate and characterize majority and minority ethnic groups in cemeteries. Theune's essay takes up similar themes and objects, if from a different theoretical perspective, showing how some brooches and ceramics may or may not have become symbols of group membership. Grahn-Hoek's essay returns to the written sources, in particular the *Lex Thuringorum*, a text made under Carolingian supervision, but one that preserves native peculiarities that shed some light on the preceding centuries. Ian Wood's chapter represents a thorough scouring of written and archaeological evidence for traces of religious belief, revealing some tantalizing clues amongst a frustrating lack of specific evidence. The final chapter, by Henning, provides an archaeological and historical review of the evidence for post-Roman agriculture in Central Germany, banishing outdated views of primitive post-Roman rural economies.

Beyond the considerable academic merits of most contributions, the worth of this book is the manner in which it brings recent research on early medieval Central Europe to an Anglophone audience. In most cases this will be for the very first time, which makes it a highly valuable and long overdue volume. It is therefore worth commenting that the translations are all of a very high standard indeed, despite the occasional untranslated quotation. However, any reader expecting a taxonomic introduction to two easily defined early medieval peoples will be frustrated. This, however, may well be to their benefit. While the Bavarians evade almost any graspable definition, besides their geographical location, the Thuringians are in the reverse situation of having a somewhat easier identity to pin-down, but one that escapes a precise territory. This may initially seem at odds with a book of this title, but dealing with any early medieval people demands a delicate harmonizing of diverse sources of evidence, some of which, if not held in check, will reify ethnic terminology too far, whilst others will endeavour to conjure it into the ether. This book is an admirable and masterly collection of essays that does not hide any of these contradictions, but shows the intellectual pursuit of the early medieval past at its most scholarly level.

TOBY MARTIN