HISTORY, FRANKISH IDENTITY AND THE FRAMING OF WESTERN ETHNICITY, 550–850

This pioneering study explores early medieval Frankish identity as a window into the formation of a distinct Western conception of ethnicity. Focusing on the turbulent and varied history of Frankish identity in Merovingian and Carolingian historiography, it offers a new basis for comparing the history of collective and ethnic identity in the Christian West with other contexts, especially the Islamic and Byzantine worlds. The tremendous political success of the Frankish kingdoms provided the medieval West with fundamental political, religious and social structures, including a change from the Roman perspective on ethnicity as the quality of the 'Other' to the Carolingian perception that a variety of Christian peoples were chosen by God to reign over the former Roman provinces. Interpreting identity as an open-ended process, Helmut Reimitz explores the role of Frankish identity in the multiple efforts through which societies tried to find order in the rapidly changing post-Roman world.

HELMUT REIMITZ is Professor of History at Princeton University. His previous publications include *Cultures in Motion*, *Vergangenheit und Vergegenwärtigung: Frühes Mittelalter und Europäische Erinnerungskultur*, *Staat im Frühen Mittelalter* and *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages*.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work on this book started in Vienna, where Herwig Wolfram, more than 30 years ago, finished the first edition of his study on the Goths which he himself called a *Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie*, an outline of, or even an experiment in, historical ethnography. With this book, Wolfram started a time of intensive and lively experimentation and debate on the question of the salience of ethnic identity for social and political integration in the late and post-Roman world. In the decades since the first publication of the book his outline and his impulses have been further developed and were also changed in many ways by scholars from not only Vienna but also from many other places; new tools were developed and applied, reflections on the terminology, the inclusion of hitherto neglected evidence such as the rich body of patristic works and sermons, or the rich and varied manuscript transmission of many works written in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. In Wolfram's own Vienna, it was above all Walter Pohl who – in close co-operation with Wolfram – based the research on new theoretical foundations by analysing ethnic identity as a discourse (in the sense of Michel Foucault). The multiple determination of ethnicity, which had formed Wolfram's implicit starting point, was thereby turned into the object of historical study. Pohl thus analysed the cultural practices and performances and the political conditions within which the meaning of ethnic identity must necessarily be continually renegotiated. His suggestions were crucial for the development of a comparative perspective on ethnic identity and ethnicity and to explore ethnic identity as one form of social identity among others. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the ongoing work and experiments in historicising ethnic identity and ethnicity in late Roman and post-Roman West culminated in a five-year project on 'Ethnic Identities in Early Medieval Europe' (2005–10) funded by the Wittgenstein prize of the Austrian Science Fund (Fonds zur Förderung

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der wissenschaftlichen Forschung), which Walter Pohl received in 2004. It was during this project that my own *Entwurf* of a history of Frankish identity in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages started to take shape. I could not have been luckier. Not only have I profited directly and individually from the scholarly wisdom, the openness and generosity of my two teachers, Walter Pohl and Herwig Wolfram, who have continued to give invaluable advice and guidance also after my move to the USA and have both read various drafts of the manuscript, but the combination of their respective styles and temperaments also created a unique learning culture that motivated many people to join in the scholarly experiments in late Antique and early medieval history in Vienna. They inspired lively discussions and debate with and among younger generations of scholars from Vienna at the Institut für Mittelalterforschung of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung. My debt for the inspiration and help that I received from my friends and colleagues working in the Viennese workshops, including Richard Corradini, Max Diesenberger, Nicola Edelmann, Clemens Gantner, Karl Giesriegl, Cinzia Grifoni, Gerda Heydemann, Marianne Pollheimer, Roland Steinacher, Vladmira Stipkova, Veronika Wieser and Bernhard Zeller, goes far beyond this book. This is also true for many colleagues and friends from other places than Vienna whom I have had the privilege and pleasure to meet. Stefan Esders, Andreas Fischer, David Ganz, Patrick Geary, Eric Goldberg, Yitzhak Hen, Michael Maas, Janet Nelson, Pavlína Rychterová, Karl Ubl and Ian Wood have all read drafts of the manuscript or parts of it and have generously continued to educate me, have given invaluable advice and comments and have also shared their unpublished work with me. For many conversations and the exchange of ideas, insights, published and unpublished, I am also greatly indebted to Julia Becker, Kate Cooper, Jennifer Davis, Albrecht Diem, Guy Halsall, Wolfgang Haubrichs, Martin Heinzelmann, Damien Kempf, Conrad Leyser, Régine LeJan, Simon MacLean and Julia Smith.

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