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Archaeology and history:
Proposals on the social structure of the Merovingian
kingdom

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1. Preliminary remarks

In recent years, research into the structure of Germanic society during its prehistoric to early modern periods has gained new momentum through the rapidly expanding archaeological data base. So great is the scale of increase that it even demands a reassessment of the written sources of information. This paper, accordingly, is addressed to a confrontation of archaeological data with the written sources. I have been occupied with such problems for many years, and it goes without saying that my conception of Germanic social organization has changed in the course of time (Steuer 1980, 1982, 1984, 1986-87, 1988). The central elements of the structure of society in the Merovingian kingdom can be summarized as follows: in the period between prehistory and the medieval state the Merovingians formed a ranked society with differences of rank between and within families; powerful individuals were supported by groups of followers. In the following sections I shall present, in an admittedly somewhat provisional and disparate form, a series of observations on both the historical and archaeological sides of the picture.

2. Historic foundations

The Frankish kingdom of the Merovingians and the later Carolingian Empire were both founded on the concept of *Personenverbandstaaten* - states of united people. This is an intrinsically Germanic tradition, and not one stemming from classical antiquity. The *Personenverbandstaat* is neither one of territorial area nor of fixed borders. It reflects shifting personal relations. And the concept, as used here, can be construed as the opposite of the later

institutionalized state. An empire (*Reich*), or a state of united people, existed wherever the king resided with his band of warriors and his royal wealth. Tribes from many Germanic groups, such as the Goths and the Vandals, migrated through Europe, even reaching as far as the north African littoral: the community of king and his followers, or *Personenverbandstaat*, is thus to be conceived not in terms of territory, but in terms of individuals, their settlements, and ultimately their burials. Furthermore, within the Frankish kingdom, family relations, bonds which reached beyond any narrow affiliation to a war band, the assumption of offices and titular posts — such as that of count — and the granting of property as rewards, were all factors which provided the individual, high-ranking members of the leading groups with widely dispersed properties (*Streubesitz*). This was a process directly opposed to concepts of enclosed properties or sharply demarcated areas of domination and ownership.

Moreover, the different types of office (*Amt*) also exercised dispersed authority: hence the concept of *Streugrafschaft*. An individual holding a position in the Alamannic area might thus have exercised his authority in various parts of the kingdom. In fact, the concepts of districts, provinces (*Pagi*) and counties do not occur till very late in the Carolingian period (Borgolte 1984, 248 pp.). The state structures under Chlodwig, founder of the Frankish kingdom, arose with the installation of officials, dukes and counts, who were assigned land. But it must be stressed that this property was not open to inheritance.

The central significance of the war bands in the construction of the Frankish kingdom has long

been evident to historians. “The French Kings’ war band... (did not merely)... form the core of the army... (but this)... archaic retinue became an important element in the royal gentry and in the formation of the state” (Schulze 1985, 47). Schulze continues his summary: “The right to hold a body of followers was obviously restricted to the royal family in the Merovingian period” (ibid. 1985, 49). Donat similarly writes: “The nobility, named in the reporting sources, did in fact belong more or less closely to the royal family, or were high-ranking officials” (1988, 12).

The present state of the debate on social structures in the 7th century is perhaps most clearly expressed by W. Stromeier (1988, 224): “The last great tribe to emerge, the Bavarians, seems to have been a voluntary group of free peasants, joining arms together under a leading duchy. Fundamentally, the whole tribe was organized as a body of followers, a structure which we see as a foundation for early states”. “The rule of the Bavarian duke in the earliest era is the form of control by retainers” (ibid. 1988, 225). Several groups of retainers must, in this case, have been united, since only five *genealogiae* were recorded in the *Lex Baiuvariorum*. Free retainer warriors ruled the country with the duke, creating large courts; and huge contributions of land for outstanding services gradually formed the basis for some rather loose form of property rights (ibid.). It was not until 770 that the *Lex Baiuvariorum* records the first known incidence of inheritance rights over a fief, and thus marks the beginning of continuous property rights.

At the beginning of the 7th century, *Dominus Chlotharius rex*, Chlotar II (584-629), issued the oldest edition of the *Lex Alamannorum* to a congregation which included 33 bishops, 34 dukes and 72 counts (Schmidt-Wiegen 1988, 64). This congregation consisted mainly of the king’s retainers, whose individual centres of power were spread over the whole territory like a net. These officials came from very different ethnic groups; they were of variably ranking descent; and they were highly mobile. The offices of the royal retainers were temporary, and they were extremely well-paid. When an official died, his property reverted to the king, so that the build-up of a dynasty, or the concentration of power on a territorial basis, could not, as indeed it should not in this political system, occur. (In the western Gothic *Reich* of Spain, under

King Eurich, there are, however, instances of land inheritance in special cases (Wolfram 1983, 15).

The presence of these retinues as accumulated power only, is also reflected in all so-called tribal rights in so far as these applied not to a district, but to a people. The *Lex Alamannorum* thus applied to the Alamans, whether they lived in Alamannia, in the Frankish settlements or in Italy (Kottje 1987).

In Italy we find a late demonstration of widely dispersed retainers safeguarding the conquered areas. After 774, the Carolingians began to secure the newly conquered province of Lombardy. This was undertaken through a determined policy of building up a loyal nobility, and filling all important posts with nobles from north of the Alps. These included 360 Franks, 160 Alamanni, 15 Bavarians and 2 Burgundians; in total over three-quarters of the counts and margraves came from the north. In their previous settlements all of them had possessed additional dispersed land and each brought a big vassal company (Hlawitzka 1960). The social order of this train of followers itself led to an extension of the base of the hierarchy.

There is no doubt about the importance of the retinue or train of followers in the Merovingian period. Indeed, this concept also applies to areas outside the Frankish kingdom to the north, and probably also to the east. The most eloquent written evidence for these areas remains the epic poem *Beowulf* in which we find all aspects of the structures of personal relations characteristic of a *Personenverbandstaat*. Power (in *Beowulf*) depends on the trains of warriors and the king’s wealth, but also on property, which could be given away (temporarily) in payment. The leading groups of the Goths (*Gautar*), the Swedes (*Sviar*) and the Danes are all related to each other. High-ranking warriors — like *Beowulf* himself — are portrayed as leaving home at an early age to stay at the courts of foreign kings; often adopted as sons, they might thus return later with their own bands of warriors to give military assistance. The king presents *Beowulf* with property, and also with weapons and gold. It is thus not sufficient merely to consider the salient archaeological artefacts of the Migration Period in Scandinavia — the boarhelmets, the magnificent inherited swords, the burial mounds or the ringgold —, one must also look at the picture of political power structures in early state-

hood; and these structures do not stop at frontiers, but stretch far beyond them owing to well-established personal relationships. The poem can be dated by the following circumstances: King Hygelac (Beowulf's uncle) fights the Frisians in the Frankish kingdom, a conflict which is referred to by Gregory of Tours as occurring in 516-522 (*Hist. Franc.* III, 3). The grave at Sutton Hoo has established a factual background to the poem (Bruce-Mitford 1975, 1978, 1983). It should also be noted that *Beowulf* was written not in Denmark or southern Scandinavia, where the eponymous hero lived and acted, but in England and in Old English between the 7th and 9th centuries.

The archaeological connections between England, Scandinavia and the Frankish kingdom have been repeatedly demonstrated in the archaeological literature. I shall here refer only to the custom of using the ringsword as a retainer symbol, and the custom of wearing a magnificent helmet as a sign of belonging to a particular group-ideology (Steuer 1987). In the Frankish kingdom such swords were used to give proof of the relations subsisting between retainers. This was also true in Scandinavia (Arrhenius 1985), where the "Frankish" model was repeatedly copied as high-ranking warriors, who had themselves been serving as retainers at foreign courts, returned to their homelands bringing with them experiences from other political structures. Traditional chiefs with their limited numbers of subjects and limited economic resources could not compete in this system which favoured wide support and high mobility. A king of the Frankish type, the leader of a body of retainers from throughout his extensive realm, had countless connections and was able to draw on support, and exercise power, wherever he happened to be. He was thus also in a position to take power away from the traditional chiefs.

A number of interesting problems are posed in attempting to use archaeological methods to trace territorial leaders who were participating in a power system based on mobility and personal relations. Regional chiefdom territories, as suggested for southern Norway in the immediately post-Roman period (Myhre 1987) and also for the Danish islands in the late Roman period (Hedeager 1980), are — in my opinion — not so obvious. Social structures based on dispersed retinues were certainly introduced into Gaul under the Frankish

king Chlodwig, since they are documented in the written records; but among the Germanic tribes they are probably older. Already in the early imperial period of Ariovist we may note that the core of Germanic political units was formed by retainers. It is probably here that we should look for the roots of the later *Personenverbandstaat*, since Ariovist's warriors and a large group called the Suebs constituted a rather similar organization.

It is notable that the traditional, early Roman period German tribal communities and their chiefs disappear, as do their tribal names, from the written Late Roman sources. The Franks and the Alamans of the latter period are representatives, in short, of a new kind of group formation.

Such a development is repeated in the early history of all the Germanic peoples of the Migration Period, and is also reflected in the archaeological record. Groups of retainers from the time of Ariovist and the Suebs have been detected in contemporary weapon graves (Peschel 1977, 1978a, 1978b). A retinue can also be traced in the so-called princely graves of Lubsow type (c. 1st-2nd century A.D.), in the princely graves of the Hassleben-Leuna-Himlingje type (c. 300 A.D.), in the stately graves from the Attila and Childeric era, and in the magnificent burial sites from the *Reihengräber* civilization (6th-7th centuries) (Steuer 1982).

Such bodies of leaders accompanied by their retinues were both the cause and the mainstay of the migrations. Their catalysts were the Roman Empire and its army, in which Germanic troops were often incorporated as complete fighting units. Returning groups of retainers and followers were thus destined to change the social structure in their native lands. This poses the question of whether the graves containing rich imported Roman articles indicate repatriated barbarian mercenaries or perhaps even Roman citizens (Rausing 1987). I would assert, indeed, that the princely graves of the Hassleben-Leuna-Himlingje horizon reflect such retainer structures in society, in much the same way as the later princely graves containing goldhandles, spathae, ring-swords or helmets (Steuer 1987).

To conclude, the Frankish kingdom was a *Personenverbandstaat*. As such, it exerted an influence on the North, and caused similar political structures to emerge in the Scandinavian area from the

beginning of the 6th century. To the East, too, there was a similar development, though it was somewhat delayed (Vignatiouva 1987, Charvat 1987): there has been some discussion about the evidence for bodies of retainers and private property at the time of the empire of Magna Moravia.

At the end of the Migration Period Chlodwig founded the Merovingian Frankish kingdom in western and central Europe. This kingdom soon united the scattered Germanic tribal societies of the Franks, the Burgundians, the Alamanni, the Thuringians and, periodically, the Bavarians too. Initially this Germanic acquisition of land took place partly with and partly without the consent of the Roman population. Consent is manifested in the system of accommodation, the so-called *hospitalitas* (Goffart 1980, Wolfram 1983, Behrends 1986). The subsequent acquisition of land during the period of the kingdom's expansion also took place partly with and partly without the consent of an already established Germanic population; by which is meant simply that the Frankish aristocracy acquired the areas inhabited by the Alamanni and Thuringians. The conquering groups were — according to the written sources — war bands that had separated from the old tribal societies. The leader in question paid the war bands in land, i.e. property rights passed into their hands, but with an in-built form of dependency on the king, and with the proviso that the right to hold land was for a lifetime only: it was not inheritable.

Based on the above observations and concepts, the remainder of this paper will also consider the ongoing discussions between Western and Marxist scholars concerning the time when property rights were established as so-called feudal property, and when the change occurred from tribal or genteel nobility (aristocracy) to feudal nobility (Donat 1987; 1988). I would like to propose that the emergence of temporary manorial property rights, in dependency on a king, coincides with the formation of the Frankish kingdom. In the Frankish kingdom of the 5th/6th century allotments existed no longer as freehold private property, but as feudal property. During the period between the 5th and 8th centuries feudal conditions of production and the basic feudal classes were thus formed (Donat 1988, 10). By pushing back the date of the emergence of feudal conditions of production I

presuppose at the same time that the rural population buried in the *Reihengräber* sites is wholly to be interpreted as one of manorial households (Donat 1988, 21; and Bohner 1958, 336 ff.).

3. *Archaeological foundations*

Investigations concerning Merovingian social organization based on archaeological source material are aimed at elucidating, or identifying, questions of rank, the emergence of the nobility, and its legal and political significance. These questions are often based on models of society which presuppose a class division according to the fixed steps of the *Wergeld* of the *Leges barbarorum*, for instance in connection with the legal classification “serf/unfree, freeborn, noble”. It therefore seemed appropriate to compute the quantity and evaluate the wealth of the grave goods included in Merovingian burials — weapons, jewelry, tools — and also to take into account the overall splendour of the burial practices themselves. The first analyses of grave goods from the Merovingian period only considered the graves of men and evaluated the weapons included in them. According to the way in which these burials were equipped, researchers thought themselves able to gauge the legal status of the deceased as respectively noble, freeborn or unfree. Such studies, however, do not lead to convincing results. Christlein's study (1973) took into account all goods included in the graves of both men and women. These goods were counted and evaluated, and a classification of the *Reihengräber* produced from the results: they range from quality group A (poor or without any grave goods included) to D (almost royal) — a classification in which group C would describe *Adelsgräber* (nobles' graves). Various summaries of these quality groups are given in the tables (Figs. 1-2). The groups were equated with social ranks; thus graves with swords or pairs of fibulae, for example, are ascribed by Christlein to group B — rich freeborns with authority at the local level; graves with bronze containers, riding tackle, gold jewelry and weapons decorated with precious metals, to group C — exceptionally rich freeborns or *optimates* with more than merely local control; and graves with extraordinary objects, mainly imported, to group D — the rank of *reguli* or *duces*.

Criticism of this particular approach was mainly voiced because it assumes uniform burial practices

<i>General Significance</i>	<i>Male Graves</i>	<i>Female Graves</i>	<i>Quality Group</i>
Markedly poor/poor	No grave goods /“sax”; down and arrows; undecorated belt buckles	No grave goods / glass beads; knife	A
Averagely wealthy/ wealthy	Sword; “sax”; lance; shield; decorated belt buckles; glass vessel (6th century)	Fibulae; hair pin (bronze); earrings (bronze/silver); head necklace; pendants; belt attachments; leg bindings; shoe buckles; silver finger ring; glass vessel (6th century)	B
Above averagely wealthy	Sword; “sax”; “ango”, axe; lance; shield; decorated belt buckles; snaffle and horse harness; gold finger ring; bronze vessel; bronze fitted wooden bucket; glass vessel (7th century)	Complete fibula jewellery; hair pin (bronze or silver); earrings (silver, gold); bead necklace; pendants; belt chain attachments; leg bindings; shoe buckles; gold finger ring; bronze vessel; bronze fitted wooden chest; glass vessel (7th century)	C
Unusually wealthy	Like C, in addition specially manufactured objects		D

Fig. 1. Ranking criteria and their respective order at the top of the social scale, Roman imperial territory in south-western Germany and Alemannia in the same region ca. 300-400 and ca. 500-650 A.D. (after Christlein 1978).

over a time-span from 500 to 750 AD, and from an extensive geographic area stretching from northern France to northern Italy, a distance of over 1000 km. It also assumes consistent behavioural patterns through time and space of a society made up of very different tribal groups (Steuer 1982). Comparisons of this type are therefore valid only where they involve contemporary graves within one burial site, or when they deal with neighbouring burial sites.

Samson (1987) is one of the most recent scholars to voice reservations about Christlein's method. These go beyond my own collected “counter-examples”, which he refers to as anecdotal, and are more fundamental in character. He stresses the point that we can only penetrate into the former social reality if we take into account not merely the buried individual and the objects deposited in his/her grave, but also the motives of the group which arranged the burial and decided on the objects included in it. New research has also

been conducted on English data. Harke (1987) has presented a dissertation in which he analyses the Anglo-Saxon weapon graves of the 5th to 7th centuries. His analysis provides further confirmation that the supposed equation between the weapons in the grave, weaponry and social structure does not correspond to reality. It also suggests that the probabilities of being able to identify social legalities, or social roles, through the archaeological record are slim. His thesis reads as follows: (1) As also on the Continent, one fifth of all graves, i.e. half of the men's graves, contain weapons. (2) An increase in the quantity of weapons in the graves, reaching a maximum around the middle of the 6th century, can invariably be registered. (3) The weapons in the graves are always a selection of the actual weaponry, that is to say that the *status*, and not the function, of the warrior, is represented in death. Besides, it is definitely the lifestyle, rather than the function, of the deceased that is reflected in the equipment in the grave, as shown by the

<i>Roman Imperial territory</i>	<i>Alemannia ca. 300-400</i>	<i>Archaeological Characteristics</i>	<i>Quality Group</i>
Tribunus, Vir spectabilis, later bishop (?)	Duke, Regulus	?	D
High ranking officer (Praefectus cohortis), rich landowner, high government official, rich merchant	Optimates with territorial authority	Gold jewellery; silvered belt and weapon fittings; silver, bronze and glass vessels	C
Mid-ranking officer (Centurio), average and smaller landowners, tenant farmers, merchants	Rich freemen with local authority (rich farmers etc.)	Silver jewellery; bronze belt fittings; bronze vessels	(C)-B
<hr/>			
<i>Alemannia ca. 500-600</i>	<i>Archaeological Characteristics</i>		<i>Quality Group</i>
Duke	Specially manufactured objects (not for sale)		D
Freemen with above average wealth	Bronze fittings; horse fittings, gold finder rings; gold handled swords		C
People with average wealth	Pairs of fibulae; swords etc.		B

Fig. 2. Ranking criteria and their respective order as based on the "Reihengräber" from Alemannia in the sixth to early seventh centuries A.D. (after Christlein 1978).

inclusion of drinking goblets. (4) The weaponry included is attached to particular families, and only represents an act of symbolism. Solberg (1985) has incidentally attempted a similar approach for the burials of the Merovingian and Viking periods found in Norway. But in his study he has, in my view, jumped to conclusions about the relationship between weaponry found in graves and social status.

New analyses of the tribal laws of the 7th and 8th centuries have likewise shown that the legal position of the freeborn has nothing in common with, nor is it equivalent to, their social or economic situation. Thus there is no necessary relation between tribal rights or statements of *Wergeld* and the contents of graves; the latter belong to a completely different area, namely that of lifestyle. Furthermore, the differentiation between *nobili* and

liberi, between nobles and freeborn, appears very late. Originally the Frankish law made no mention of nobles, only freeborn, the only "nobles" being of the Merovingian dynastic line. It was only after 770, in a supplement to the *lex Baiuvariorum*, that nobles appeared in their own right, alongside the freeborn. Hitherto only the family of the duke Agilofinger — related to the king of Lombardy — was mentioned in the texts, along with five other families (*genealogiae*).

There is yet another way of summarising the present state of research: in general, the central European archaeologist prefers an inductive approach; and this also holds good for the socio-historical analyses of the *Reihengräber* and the objects included in them. This has led inter alia to a quantifying description as exemplified by Christlein's approach. Since it is convenient to sort the

archaeological material into prearranged slots, this procedure enjoys great popularity. The artificially determined “cut-off” points on a continuum between few and many grave goods are used to define quality groups A to D, while the choice of only certain objects (e.g. bronze containers or riding tackle) as the main characteristics of these groups tends to obscure the continuum and to define, or reinforce, cut-off points where none exists in reality. I grant that this kind of quantifying analysis does have its merits, in that it may ease communication between archaeologists, but its claims to bridge the gap between the archaeological findings and their social and historical interpretation are merely illusory.

I would also like to express serious misgivings as to whether the statistical-topographical analyses of the range of finds within (for example) “core” and “periphery” areas will enable us to describe early statehood. We can only achieve this by means of archaeology if we presuppose undisturbed tribal developments during the emergence of a genteel nobility and a chiefdomship which entailed the formation of territorial entities (cf. Hedeager 1980 and Myhre 1987, with the above comments). The written sources from the Merovingian period, however, suggest in the main groups of people independent of any set territorialism.

A different approach opts for a deductive methodology. In the following I will attempt to use archaeological material to analyse, or corroborate, relevant information extracted from the documentary sources, in particular the formation of a state based on a system of retainers and their property rights. This will be undertaken in the form of ten *propositions*; these I will propound, but will not be able to demonstrate fully here. The propositions are aimed at deducing the social behaviour of a population that buries its dead in the so-called *Reihengräber* practice, and the concomitant establishment of a state organization that is not a simple kingdom, but an empire of united people, in fact a *Personenverband*.

4. The propositions

The Migration Period came to an end on the Continent with the creation of the Merovingian kingdom under Clovis and his sons. Incorporated into this empire were the Franks, the Burgundians, the Thuringians, the Alamannic and other Germanic

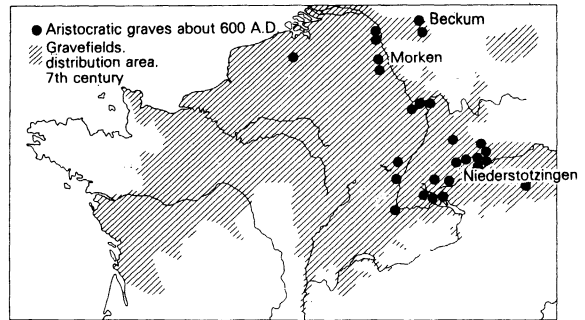


Fig. 3. Distribution of “Reihengräber” cemeteries of the seventh century A.D. in the north-western part of the European continent, and selected aristocratic graves from about 600 A.D. (after Müller-Wille 1983 (etc.)).

tribal groups. This was one of the most decisive changes in the history of the Germanic peoples. A specific way of life led by the leading groups within the Merovingian kingdom was reflected in their burial practices.

4.1 My first proposition refers to the social order of the Germanic population generally in the period between 480 and 750 AD. It states that the so-called *Reihengräber* burial custom (fig. 3), with its extensive use of grave goods, is the expression of an important facet of the way of life in the Merovingian period: a way of life compounded of retinue, warfare, banquets and heroic ballads. This particular burial custom had its origins in the widely branching network of the Merovingian royal family. The burial of Childeric, the Frankish Merovingian king — and Roman general — was undertaken by his son Clovis. The burial had foreign features, both Eastern and Roman in character, and was to set a standard, or create a fashion, for all high-ranking individuals and their kin in the emerging Merovingian Empire. Depending on their wealth and possessions, families now undertook the burial of their deceased kinsfolk with particular significance being attached to the individual’s renown. People displayed a particular behaviour in mortuary ritual in order to impress their neighbours and thus demonstrate their social rank. In this context family (*familia*) refers to the larger extended family which goes beyond kith and kin and includes servants. What was at issue in the burial process was not the preparation of the deceased for the after-life, as this was unnecessary or inappropriate in a largely Christian society.

More important was the manifestation of the family's own rank through a suitably striking burial of one of its members. (The Frankish nobles were practically all Christians since the baptism of Clovis and his army: (fig. 4)). It should be noted that the Christian faith served to legitimize the rule of the Merovingians when they established their state — a situation to be repeated some 500 years later by the Danish king Harald who had Christ put on his famous runestone.

Periods of innovation, *Gründerzeiten* (Kossack 1974), repeatedly lead to strikingly “representative” burial practices. A visit to the cemeteries of the latter half of the 19th century would readily confirm this.

4.2 My second proposition therefore states that the social organization of the Merovingian kingdom, based on the structures of retinues, was that of an open, ranked society, and that the funerary evidence for this period mirrors differences in rank not only within families in the broadest sense (*familia*), but between families. The material value of the goods included in graves and the splendour of the burial thus display “rank”, but not social strata or fixed classes or even group membership, which would have run across the whole of society as do modern classes. Burial variation within high-ranking families, usually called “nobles” in the scientific literature, covers anything from small landowners to high-ranking officians in the Merovingian case.

Starting from the centres of the Merovingian kingdom, the practice of the *Reihengräber* spread across the entire realm, also influencing neighbouring regions such as England and southern Scandinavia. But over distances of several hundred kilometres and over several generations in time, this burial practice could not, in the nature of things, remain consistent or subject to the same immutable norm. The community of a particular village would conform its behaviour to that of its neighbours as regards burial practice through mutual observation and comparison. Yet the greater the distance involved, the less people would know of each other's behaviour, thus giving rise to divergencies in practice. There are, for instance, differences between Frankish and Alamannic or Bavarian (or rather between western and southern and eastern) burial sites which cannot be interpret-

ed in terms of social or even ethnic disparities.

Thus, archaeological groupings determined according to the quantity or value of grave goods included in burials may lead not to a social stratum or class definition of the population groups of the Merovingian period, but merely to a description of local (and contingent) factors. Stated in this way my second proposition is in particular a counterproposal to previous approaches aimed at quantifying grave goods with statistical procedures, right down to cluster analysis and dendrogrammes, which shed no light on past social reality. The open, ranked society of the Merovingians followed no standardized behavioural patterns, in burial practice. The advent of social standardization in fact marked the end of the development from an open, ranked society to a true state society, which has classes into which individuals are born. Such a state, in this case the beginning of the Carolingian era, cannot be ascertained through studies of grave goods simply because these were no longer in use.

Families in open, ranked societies require both for the presentation of their respective rank, and for the expression of their behavioural patterns of life, a burial practice which varies in splendour according to the “means” and status of the deceased and his family. The crucial factor is the burial process. The objective of the activities surrounding the burial was to demonstrate the rank not merely of the deceased, but also of the group to which he/she belonged, especially its head. I propose, therefore, that the splendour of the burial and the opulence of the grave goods were intended to reflect rank within and between families, and to impress individuals from outside the group. A note of caution, however, should be voiced about the objects buried with the dead: a belligerent lifestyle leads to a basic attire, weapons, banqueting materials, etc., which are likely to be associated with all individuals of high rank, not just a few.

4.3 My third proposition claims that the existence of war bands can be proved archaeologically. In the first half of the 6th century swords were laid in the graves of certain men; these swords displayed an intertwined pair of rings on the pommel — the so-called ringswords. Moreover, it can be observed that the rings, made out of precious materials, including gold, were mounted on the weapons at different times; some examples even

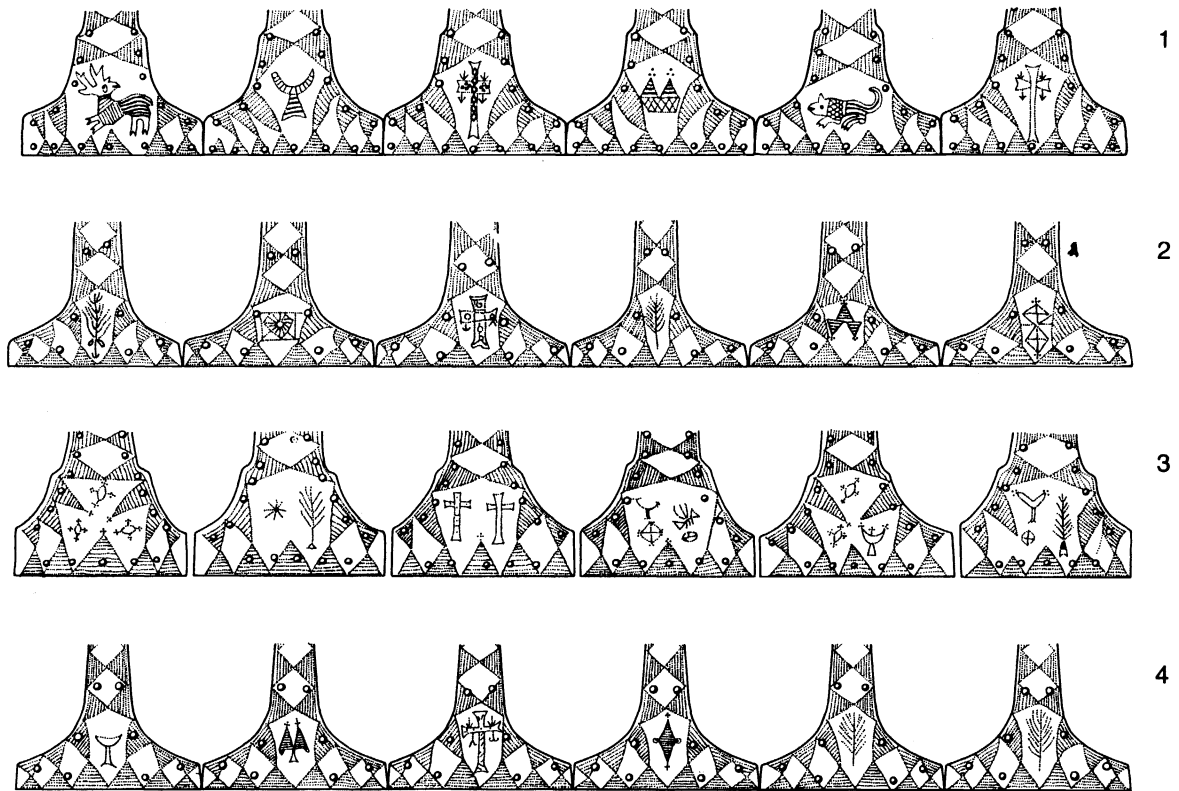


Fig. 4. Crosses on helmets of the Merovingian period (after Steuer 1987).

show that rings had been removed (Not until the 7th century were swords produced with a device for mounting rings or with rings pre-cast into place). Swords of this type are found not only in the Frankish Empire, but also beyond it, in England, Scandinavia and Italy. Recently, I have even come across an example, shorn of rings, from Hungary. Not all the swords have gold-plated pommels; there are also normal weapons among the group of ringswords. How should we interpret this interesting phenomenon?

In a paper written in 1987 I tried to show how we can gain an understanding of a society through this long-debated custom of applying so-called “oath-rings” to sword pommels (for a discussion of the rings see in particular Evison 1967 & 1975). I conceived the owners of these swords as members of a group of followers who were awarded this token or sign by their lord — a lord who might have been king or one of his high-ranking officials who could “bind” and “pay” other warriors. Here we are once again dealing with groups of followers of varying rank, but merely in the form of

individuals whose graves were discovered by chance. The warriors buried in the “*Fürstengrab* (royal grave) of Krefeld-Gellep, or from the grave at Beckum (Doppelfeld, Pirling 1966; Muller-Wille 1983) were without doubt members of a body of followers. The individual warrior buried at Schretzheim (Klingenberg, Koch 1974) could, in terms of wealth, be a low-ranking member of a body of followers. The decisive factor for our purpose is that warriors similar in terms of their social function received burials of varying “wealth” from their relatives. The amount of goods included in their graves reflected the fortune of their family, the ringswords their social rank and proximity to the king. The gold-handled spathae of the early 6th century presumably had a similar function a generation earlier (Ament 1970; Steuer 1987). Werner (1980) declares the golden open-ended bracelets (*Kolbenarmringe*) in the graves of high-ranking individuals of Childeric’s time — another generation earlier — to be a sign of membership of a *stirps regia*, an explanation which certainly goes too far. But through their gold value

these rings may in fact indicate rank and membership of a royal body of followers. This assumption finds confirmation in a comparison with the graves of the Danish Islands and finds from Sweden which contain gold snake-head and open-end bracelets (Kyhlberg 1986). The open-end bracelet in Childeric's own tomb does not contradict this interpretation; as we have seen, the sons of kings grew up as followers at other kings' courts. The ringswords in England and Sweden have to be seen in a similar light. Warriors from these countries were in the royal band of followers of the Frankish kingdom, and later returned to their homelands, an observation which is also indicated by the special almandine decoration of their swords (Arrhenius 1985). In settlements near burial places containing ringswords — at Krefeld-Gellep for example — land may have been given to the deceased owners of such weapons as rewards of property for service to a lord.

Graves with gold-handles *spathae*, such as Flonheim, or graves with ringswords, like Krefled-Gellep, often belong to the earliest burials in the cemeteries in question (Pirling 1986).

4.4 My fourth proposition states that the earliest burials in a particular burial place are to be recognised as those of the relatives of landed proprietors; an indication of the fact that this property was not yet hereditary. For my next example I wish to look at the so-called "Thuringian-Frankish burial places of nobles and followers of the 6/7th century near Zeuzleben" close to Würzburg (Wamser 1984). The oldest and "richest" grave, number 25, is of a woman; it is placed at the centre and formed the origin of the burial site in question. It consists of a huge wooden chamber measuring *c.* 3 by 5 metres, and embedded almost 4.5 metres deep; the reconstruction (fig. 5) shows a three-storey building. Here, in the first half of the 6th century, a woman was interred with a four-wheeled wagon and the harnesses for a team of horses which were buried in a nearby grave. Wamser, who excavated the entire burial site, interprets his findings as follows: those buried in it were members of a noble lordship with warriors and servants — a high-ranking body of followers. The grave-house over burial 25, and similar structures in the cemetery, are seen as *memoria* for the dead, and do not, in spite of the grave goods they

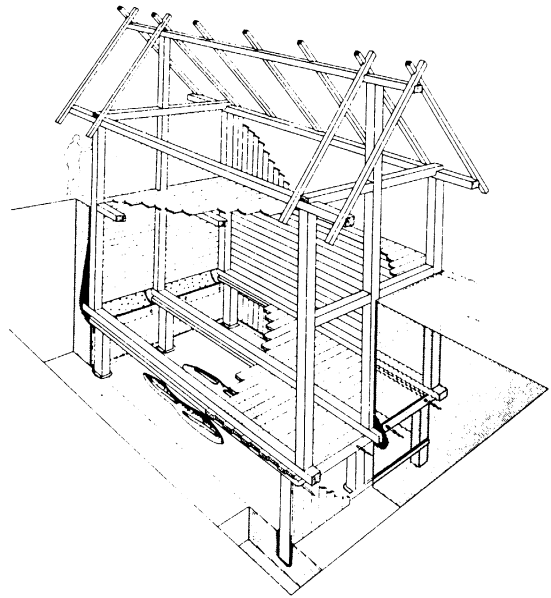


Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the grave with several levels at Zeuzleben (grave 25) (after Wamser 1984).

contain, contradict the Christian (Arian) faith. It is important to keep the following circumstances in mind: the "wealthiest" grave was also the earliest in the cemetery, a so-called founder's grave; but the person buried in this particular example

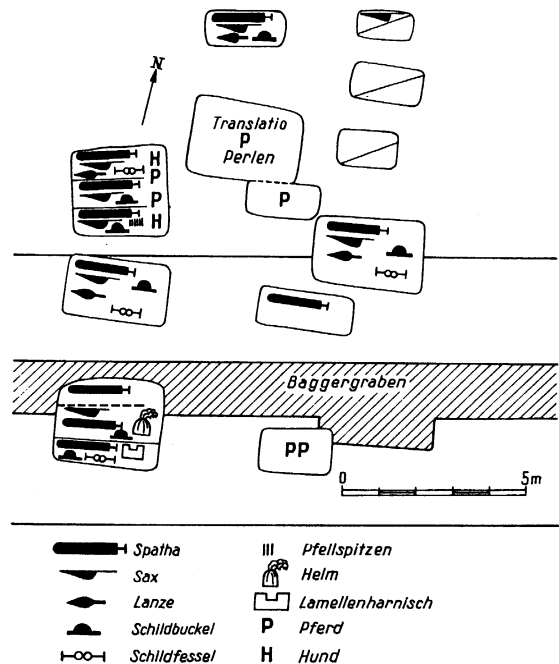


Fig. 6. Plan of the cemetery at Niederstotzingen (after Paulsen 1967).

was a woman. We know from written tradition that she could never have been the head of a family nor the landlord, but she might have been his wife. To assess the rank of the first burial we should look not at the individual buried in it, but rather at those who did the burying.

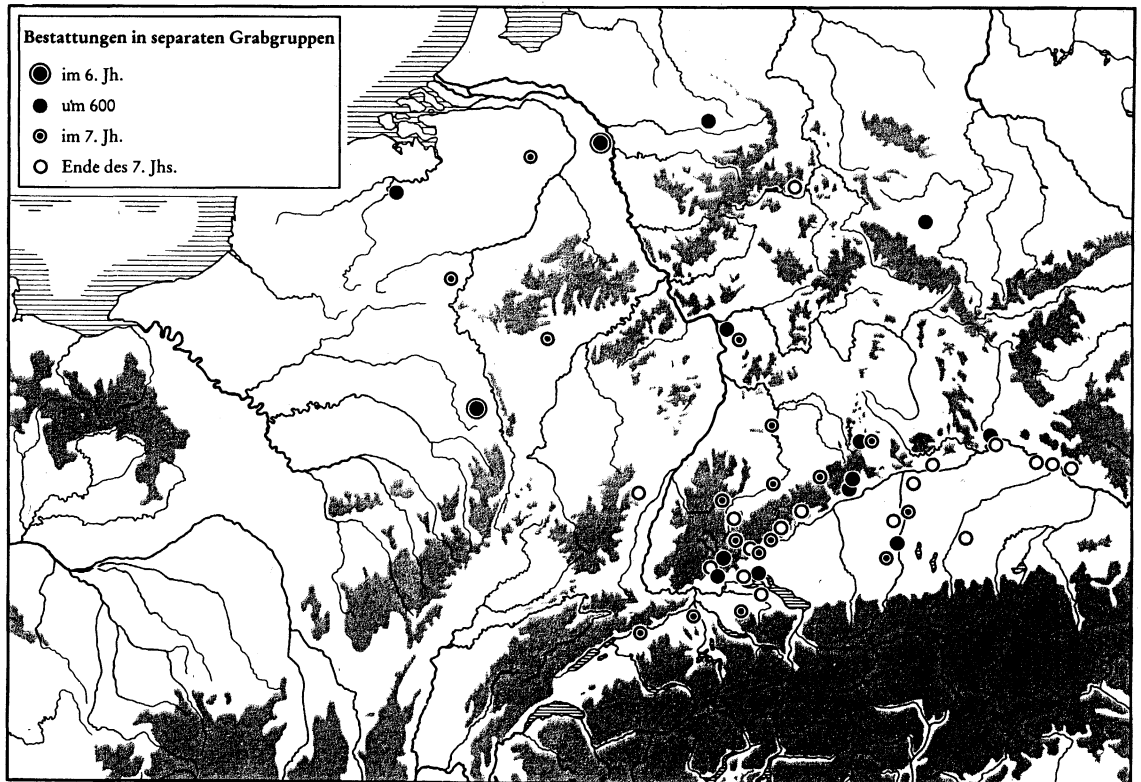
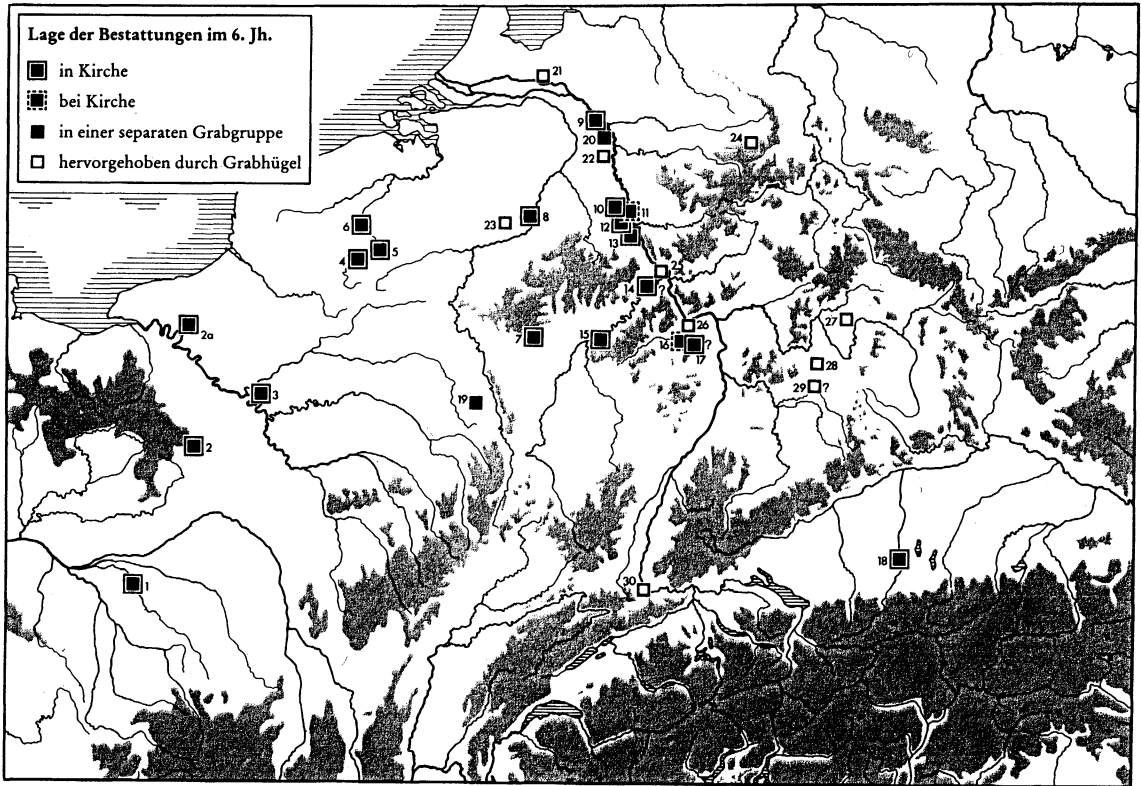
The aspects important to the following arguments have already been rehearsed: the body of followers, manorial lordship, nobility and Christianity. The first person buried in the cemetery had been given — from whence and by whom? — manorial disposition over this land. The individual's fortune allowed, indeed required, the representative burial of his deceased wife to demonstrate his, the highest, rank in the settlement. The burial place then became a burial site for all other members of the *familia*, their blood relatives and their followers, though not all were buried with the same splendour, of course. If the husband had died first, he would have received a striking burial from his family, his wife or his sons, as can be proved from many other examples of the so-called founders' graves. These thus indicate the rank of the land-receiving family, the new landlords. The following examples may be cited: the burial place at Hufingen, the "normal" Alamannic village burial site in the *Gewann* "Auf Hohen" (*Gewann* is a plot of land in a village), and the nobles' cemetery "An der Giersalde" with the founder's grave in a burial chamber which has been dated (dendrochronologically) to 606 AD. Among the goods included in this grave is a precious harness with two silver phalerae of Christian content: a new lord gaining important influence in the previously settled mark and expressing this influence through representative burial practices, although he was Christian. A further example of a high-ranking Christian grave is the burial of Eschwege in Hessen with silver phalerae showing pictorial representations of both Christian and pagan content (Fingerlin 1985; Sippel 1987). It should be stressed once more that the social positions of the Merovingian period were not hereditary, but temporary.

Whether, as described above, the Carolingians militarily secured their Lombard lands through the settlement of high-ranking Franks, Alamans and Bavarians, or whether the Thuringian empire, or that of the Alamans, in the 6th century, was politically connected with the Frankish realm, the

process was the same: holders of important positions were settled in crucial localities. The richly furnished graves on the old military roads have in fact always been associated with the holders of such positions. For example, Schmidt (1976) interprets Thuringian graves equipped with Frankish goods as being those of officials, as does Paulsen (1967) for Alamannic graves at Niederstotzingen in Württemberg (fig. 6). It was not always high-ranking Frankish nobles who gained important positions, however; individuals from other tribes were also able to become officials, but in such cases they remained dependent on the king and formed part of his retinue. Archaeologists have also suggested the existence of these officials on the basis of the so-called magnificent graves, the *Adelsgräber*, the graves of Christlein's categories C and D (1973). It is noticeable that such rich graves are particularly to be found on the eastern edge of the Frankish kingdom, where it extends towards the Alamans and Saxons (Bohem 1985; Muller-Wille 1983) (figs. 3 and 7). Officials with temporary positions of power clearly wished to display their rank in death and therefore received magnificent graves (Kossack 1974). The widely dispersed Merovingian royal family did not need to do so, and was for a long period interred in specially constructed or selected churches (Kruger 1971). Moreover we do not find any magnificent graves for several generations in the life-span of many of the *Reihengräberfelder*, because no "nobility" was attached to their specific locality. Thus, in the case of the Rubenach-*Reihengräberfeld*, it could be shown that the series of particularly rich graves in the cemetery, supposed by Ament (1973) to be those of a family attached to a certain area, were in fact rich graves belonging to different families that had come to the locality at various times (Wierczorek 1988).

4.5 As my fifth proposition, I conclude that the granting of land can be demonstrated archaeologically even in later generations in an old community. This can be achieved, I suggest, through the so-called separate cemeteries. These existed for

Fig. 7. Top: separate graves in the sixth century A.D. (square with frame = in or at church; small frame = grave under barrow). Bottom: separate small cemeteries in the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. (after Böhme 1985).



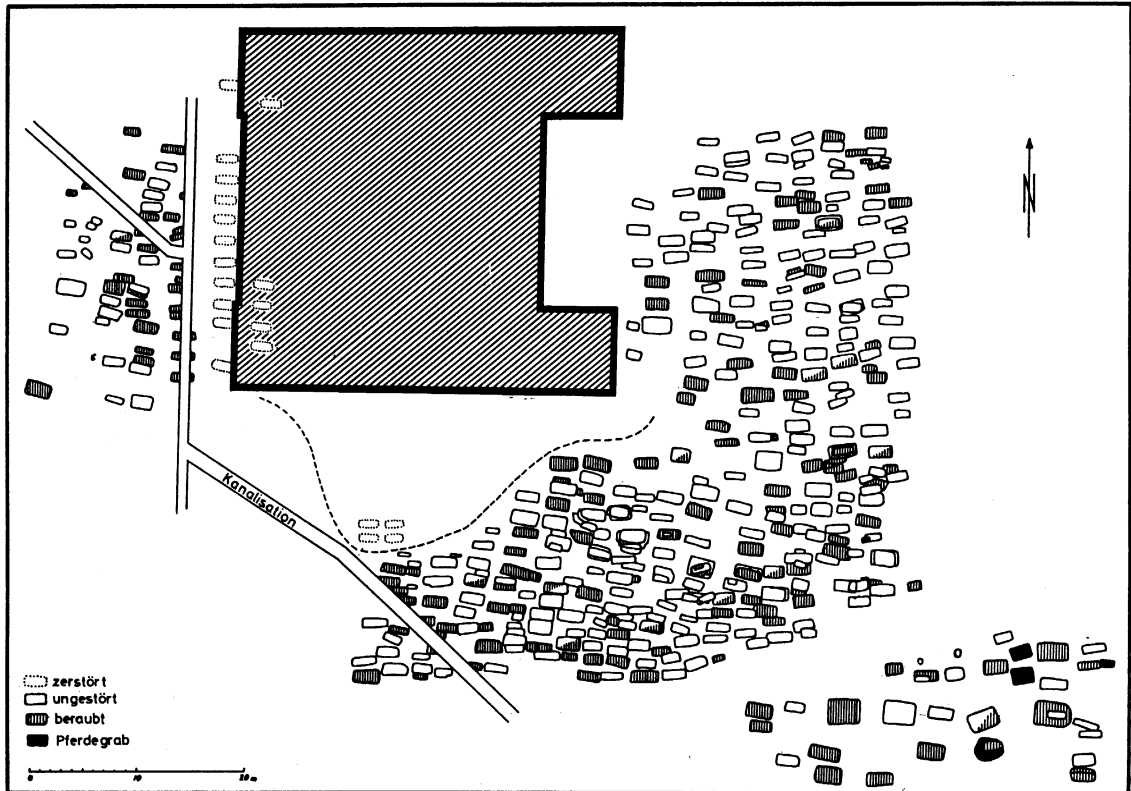


Fig. 8. Plan of the "Reihengräber" cemetery at Kirchheim am Ries (after Christlein 1978).

some time during the filling of a cemetery; they often contain a founder's grave and other rich burials. As an example I may point to the burial places of Fridingen and Kirchheim (fig. 8). There have been attempts to interpret the development of these separate cemeteries as a visual expression of a single family's separation from the community and thus a reflection of an emerging nobility. In a critique of this interpretation (1982) I pointed out that such separate cemeteries often exhibit not only differing wealth, but also diverging burial practices; these include burial inside large tumuli, within circular trenches and under mortuary houses. I interpreted this phenomenon as evidence of the arrival of a family from outside, which joined the existing community. High rank is not precluded. On the contrary, in the above context, the receipt of land can, I believe, be inferred: a new family, in other words, has gained or received land property rights in the vicinity of an existing settlement. Once again we have reason to assume a gift or donation from the king himself or from

another high-ranking official. In the Alamannic area this procedure can be demonstrated during the Frankish integration of the area into the Merovingian kingdom. The burial site of Niederstotzingen with its rich warriors' graves has similarly been interpreted as a Frankish-founded posting-station on an important land-route (fig. 6). The reorganization of the settlement system through the abandonment of settlements and burial sites of the Hemmingen type (Müller 1976) in the period around 500 AD also represents Frankish interference — a point I will return to later. I stress that we are thus able, from the archaeological record, to recognise land donations and, concurrently, the development of manorial lordship in its earliest form. (Manorial lordship later turns into "local nobility", and in addition we see lordship with scattered land property in many places).

The spread of this practice of creating separate cemeteries actually moves from east to west, from the Frankish to Alamannic areas, in the 6th and 7th centuries. This is exemplified in a recent map

(fig. 7) compiled by Bohme (1985). After the consolidation of the Merovingian kingdom there was no more unclaimed land. Instead the land was organized, granted and thoroughly structured by the king and his highest-ranking officials. From its very beginning the Merovingian kingdom was “free” — in fact, an open society with ranks, although there were also dependencies on the royal or ducal lord. This is the inference that can be drawn from the archaeological record. The weapons in the grave, an expression of the rank of the free warrior (Bodmer 1957), were granted by the king or lord in question together with land as an economic basis. I believe we can actually demonstrate several stages in the granting of land after the emergence of the *Reihengräber* civilization; we can do so, I suggest, by means of certain kinds of grave goods like gold-handled spathae or ring-swords, or even more clearly by means of the temporal sequence of founder’s grave, separate cemetery and church founder’s grave.

We should constantly bear in mind the written sources concerning the role of followers in the formation of the Frankish kingdom. The royal body of followers, the *trustis dominica*, was rewarded with land and did not always stay at the court of the king; its members belonged to the highest — ranking leading groups of the empire, the *optimates*. Archaeology can furnish evidence for some of these optimates, and at the same time for the growth and spread of the Frankish Empire. An early group, identifiable through the presence of gold-handled spathae, was granted land and settled in the central Frankish and bordering Alamannic region; the next group, associated with ringswords, already included the entire new Frankish sphere of influence, and at the same time reflected the intensive character of the Frankish model of social structure for the neighbouring areas in England, northern Italy and Scandinavia, whence members of the royal followers had presumably come and whither they had carried the idea of empire formation back north again (Arrhenius 1985).

As early as the time of the Roman Empire, German mercenaries had carried the Roman way of life into the Germanic regions, such as central Germany and the Danish islands (Rausing 1987). Something comparable happened during the Migration Period; the burial place at Hogom in northern Sweden may serve as one example

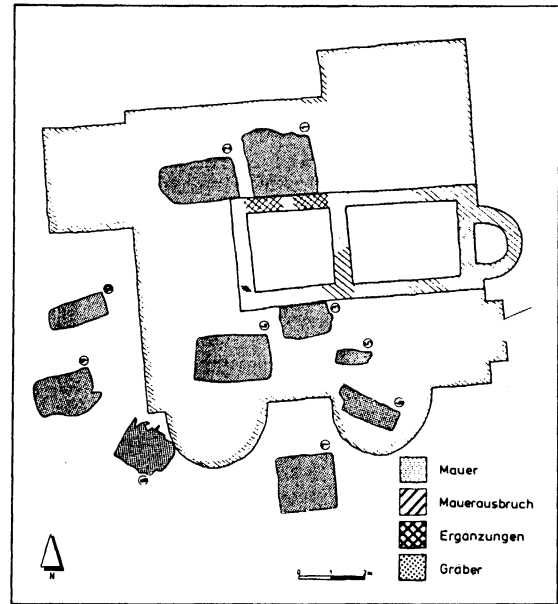


Fig. 9. Early medieval church with rich contemporary graves, on the ruins of a Roman bath, at Regensburg (after Rieckhoff-Pauli 1987).

(Ramqvist & Müller-Wille 1988). But this is not the place to expand on the relationship between the later graves of Sutton Hoo, the Swedish Vendel and the Alamannic burials, deduced from the inclusion in each of decorated pressed metal sheets and their pictorial content.

4.6 My sixth proposition puts the so-called church founders’ graves into line with founders’ graves and separate cemeteries. The church founders’ graves situated in their own churches characterise the later phase of the *Reihengräber* practice, i.e. the 7th and 8th centuries. We are dealing here with burials that are located in a central site in a church, but that may also contain precious goods. The church was in effect built as a cemetery for the land holder’s family. At the same time it became the centre of a parish, and later attracted the burials of other dependent families (Kruger 1971; Christlein 1974; Fehring 1987). The confirmation of this process lies in the very history of the funerary churches of the royal Frankish dynasty, beginning with Clovis who was buried in the church of St. Genevieve in Paris, which he himself had built in the year 511. Other great Franks chose their burial places in and around churches too; i.e. they would erect churches for their burial if they were

“sufficiently Christian”. Subsequently other members of the family may also have built churches over their graves. The findings at Flonheim (Ament 1970) and Morken (Bohner 1959) may be cited as examples. The foundation of a church as a burial place was an important means of perpetuating the memory of one’s forefathers (Schulze 1986, 41; Donat 1988, 20). There were several ways of doing this: a church might, for instance, be erected near an existing burial place — as at Morken, Flonheim or Staubing in Bavaria. In Staubing the rich burials were situated in front of the church. Near Regensburg a church was built over the ruins of a Roman bath; around it were several rich graves (Rieckhoff-Pauli 1987) (fig. 9). Or, alternatively, a church might be built in the vicinity of a village and attract a number of graves, while the other families in the settlement continued to bury their dead on the old burial site (eg. Bulach, Wittslingen). Churches were also being

built without being used for the burial of their founder or owner or members of his family.

Without being able to challenge Christlein’s previously mentioned discussion here, we can say that as a consequence of land gifts and the evidence of landlords, the newly built churches with graves were the latest link in the following chain: founders’ graves, separate cemeteries, church founders’ graves. Moreover, once again we can observe the development spreading from west to east (figs. 7 & 10). Thus the structuring of manorial lordship, and the consolidation of the system of owned churches and the parish churches of organized Christianity, ran parallel to each other without any necessary interdependence (see Dannheimer 1987); Roth 1981; Müller & Knaut 1987). Incidentally the spread of the consolidation of noble proprietorship from west to east is in particular shown by the richest graves of quality levels C-D (about 300 of which are known), by the separate

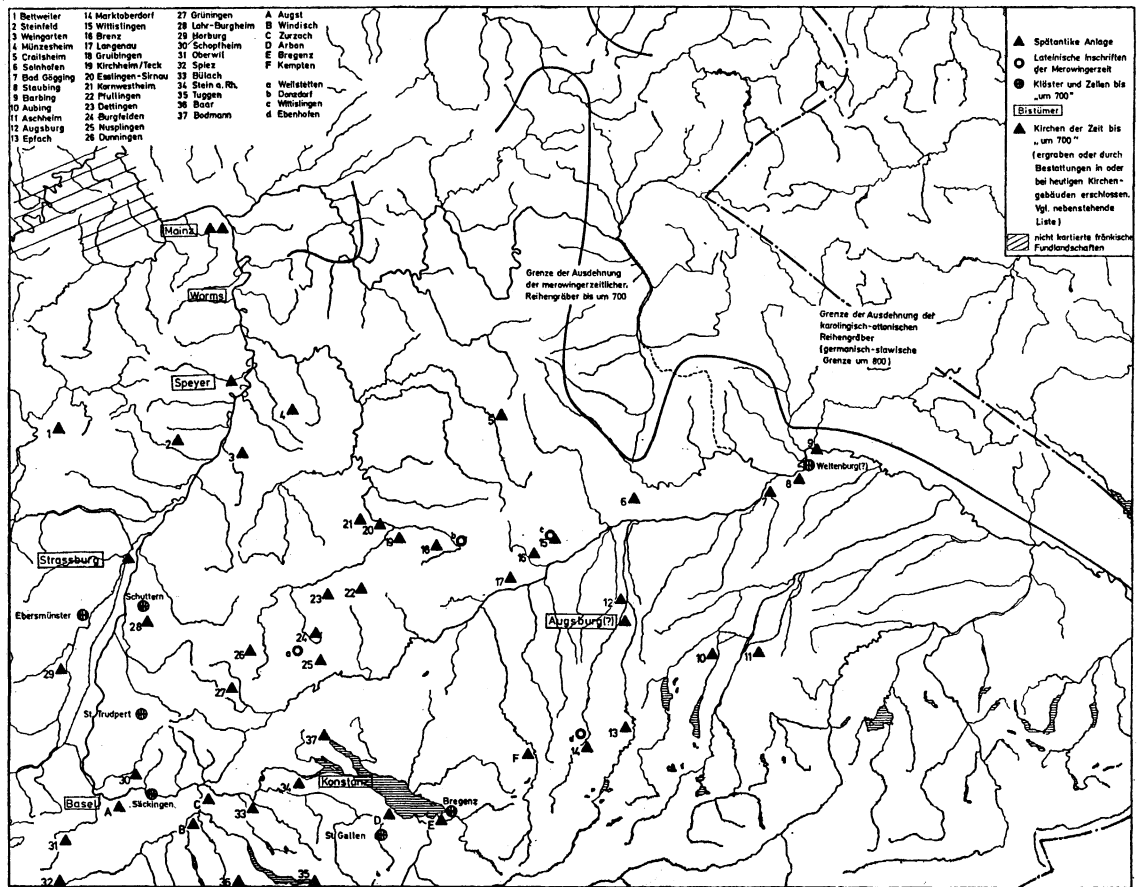


Fig. 10. Church-buildings in south-western Germany before A.D. ca. 700 (after Roth 1981).

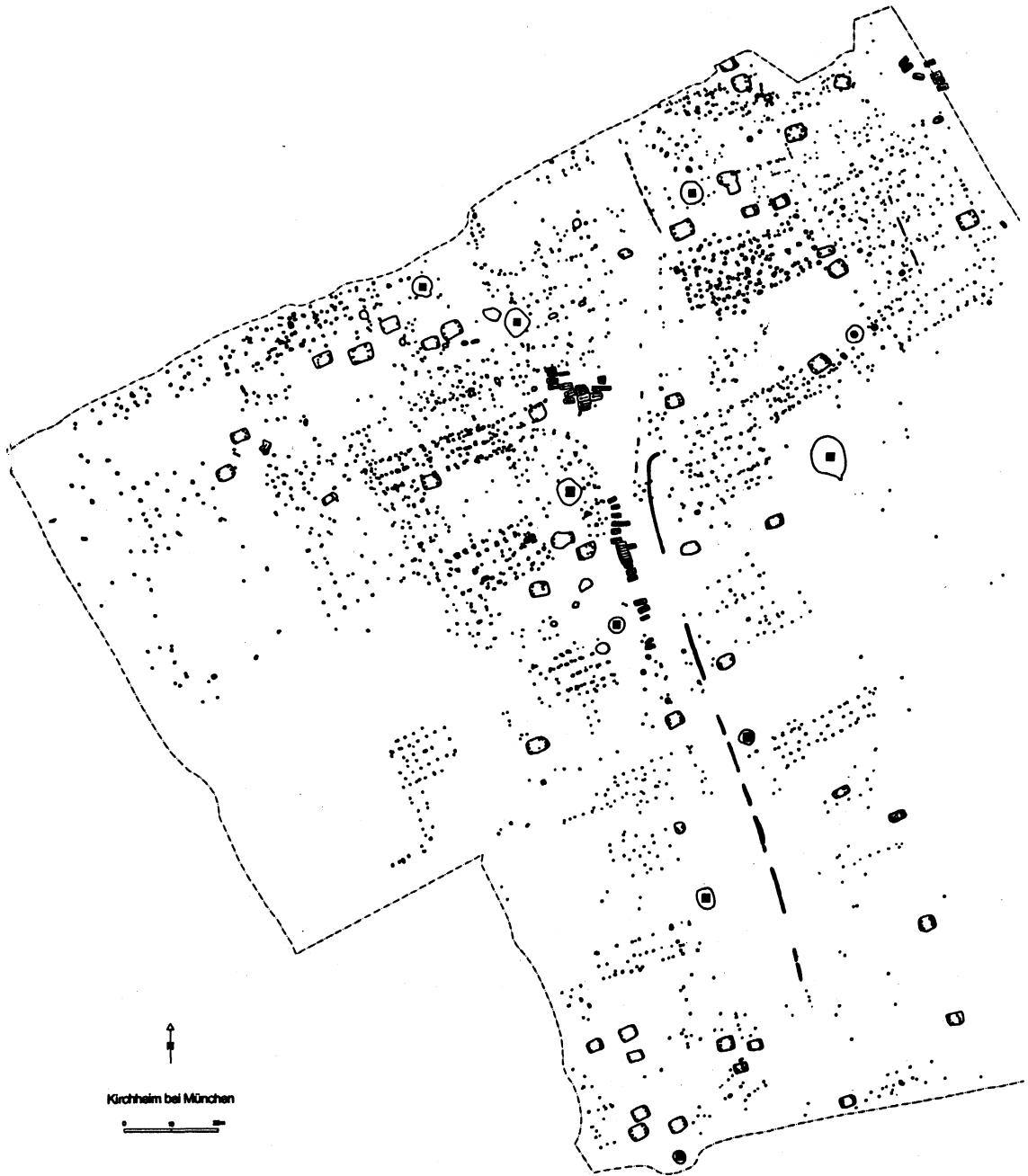


Fig. 11. Plan of the early medieval settlement with grave-groups (graves marked with dashed o's) at Kirchheim bei München (Munich) (after Christlein 1981).

cemeteries (50 of which could certainly be named), and by the graves within churches (of which 50 could be counted in 1970, as against 70-80 today).

The emergence of the *Reihengräber* practice and the end of this burial custom, or rather the abandonment of the burial places associated with it, define a period which covers the consolidation of the

Frankish kingdom and the power of the Merovingian kings. We cannot therefore posit any continuity between the graves with burial goods in the Frankish cemeteries of north-east Gallia of the 4th/5th centuries, or the early Alamannic burial places of south-west Germany, and the burial places of Merovingian times, as Werner assumed

in his famous article “Zur Entstehung der Reihengräberzivilisation” (1950). The power and dependency relationships that developed in the 4th/5th centuries created a pattern of settlement that was later changed because the Merovingians, on gaining the upper hand, created a new proprietorship situation. The old burial places were abandoned because the old families had lost importance. At the same time, old burial practices disappeared, such as the north-south alignment of graves. Weapons and precious materials characterized the way of life both before and after the change, but there is certainly no continuity. Such changes in burial practices can also be registered in the Alamannic area around the year 500 and shortly after as the Franks expanded their power and integrated this region into their empire (i.e. the abandonment of the Hemmingen-type burial places).

The end of the *Reihengräber* practice was thus brought about on the one hand by the consolidation of the ecclesiastical organisation, on the other by the manorial lords.

4.7 Soon dependent farmsteaders had to bury their dead near the churches which belonged to their lords. As already proposed by Last and myself (Last & Steuer 1969) in a review of Stein (1967) concerning 8th century nobles' graves, only the last of the freeborns could avoid doing so. My seventh proposition therefore claims that it was not the nobles who were buried in the weapon graves of the 8th century, but the last freeborn, or independent farmsteaders, who still remained independent of the great manorial lordships and their churches. While the latter no longer had to demonstrate their consolidated rank through inclusion of grave goods, it remained a necessary practice for the last of the freeborns to do so. They now buried their dead right next to their own farmstead, at the edge of the farm's fence. One of the best examples is arguably the settlement of Kirchheim near Munich (Christlein 1981; Geisler 1988; Steuer 1987 & 1988; Osterhaus 1987) (fig. 11). It was not until recently, once settlements started to be analyzed, that this aspect of the burial practices of Merovingian times has come to be recognised. Graves with weapons and spurs of the final *Reihengräber* period, earlier interpreted as nobles' graves, can now be assigned to farmsteads in a vil-

lage. Forming groups of 10-30 burials, they represent, it may be presumed, the small cemetery of the inhabitants (*familia*) of a farmstead.

4.8 My eighth proposition interprets the robbing of graves (Roth 1977 & 1978), the systematic plundering of Merovingian period cemeteries, as a sign of a social situation characterized by the predominance of fewer and more powerful lords who held the majority of the rural population in subjection. The abandonment of the *Reihengräber* cemeteries and the shift of burial place for certain families to the church or to the farmstead are interconnected events stretched out over a longer period of time. Up to 75% of the burials may have been robbed (fig. 12). There is hardly any period in prehistory or early history in which the earlier cemeteries of the same population were robbed to such an extent. Various explanations of this phenomenon have been offered: it was allegedly caused by a scarcity of precious metals; or by an economic decline that turned the iron in the graves into a precious commodity; or by the influence of Christianity that diminished the importance of ancestors. But each of these explanations can be refuted. The plundering of the cemeteries of one's own people, and with it the obvious disregard for the peace and inviolability of one's dead ancestors, also reflects a break with the past. If the Migration Period brought about what appears to have been a revolutionary change of the older social structures, which led to the development of the *Reihengräber* practice — parallel to the emergence of the Frankish kingdom — then the changes leading to the abandonment of the *Reihengräber* sites and to the increase in grave robberies must have been even stronger. It seems as if families had lost the desire or the right, or even the possibility, of protecting the peace of their ancestors and of respecting the dead and their graves. Kinship relationships and family ties must have become unimportant, lineage irrelevant, and so been cut off (Steuer 1980).

As an interpretation of the phenomenon, I propose that manorial lordship was consolidated at this time and became totally accepted. Nobles and freeborn families, whose judicial status was guaranteed by law and birth no longer needed to demonstrate their social role through luxurious grave goods and burial practices. Dependent fa-

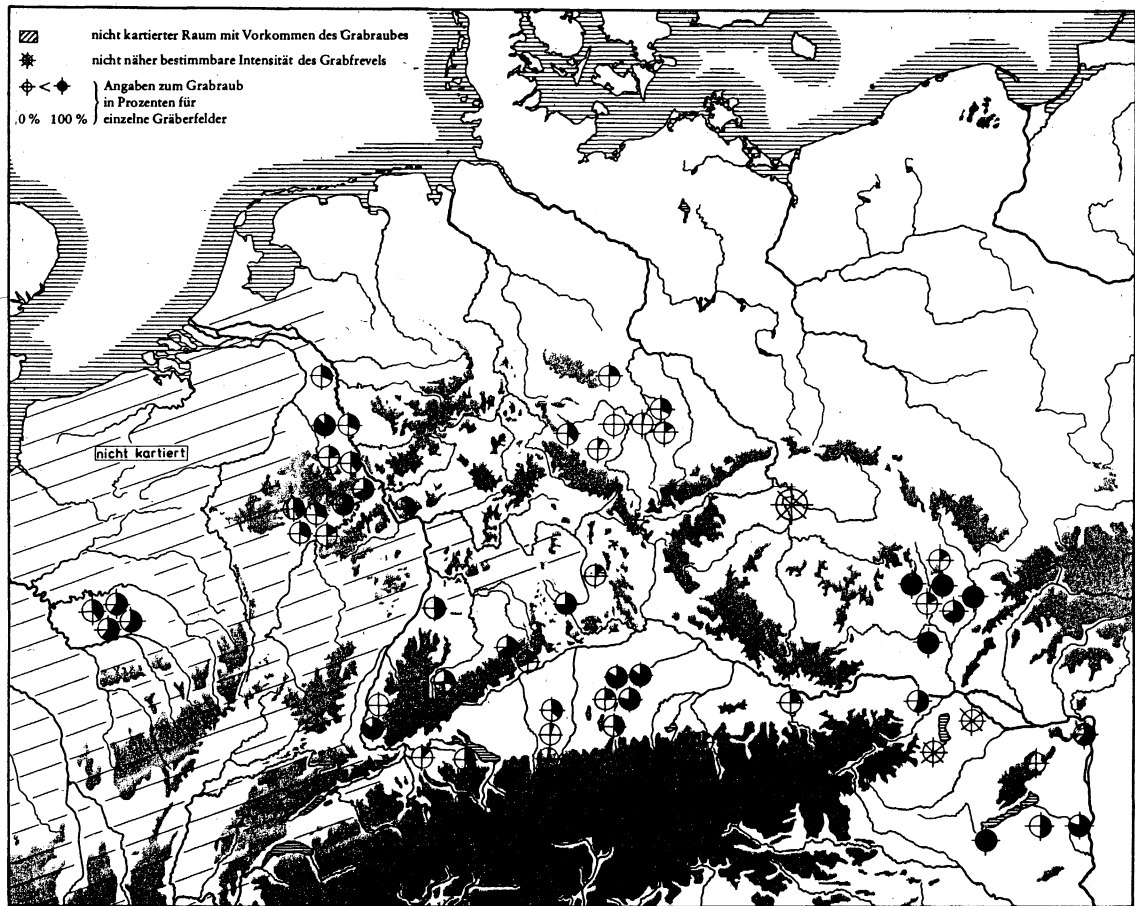


Fig. 12. Frequency of grave-robbing in Central Europe during late Merovingian times (after Roth 1978).

milies who no longer had free command over their belongings, and who could be relocated, given away, resettled or separated at the whim of their lord, were no longer able to keep up the cemetery reserved for their family over generations or provide their dead with precious goods. It is striking that very often it is the richly furnished founders' graves, i.e. the graves of the lords, that were not robbed. Indeed, we can go further and claim that it is precisely among the latter that those who organized and carried out the tomb robberies should be sought.

4.9 At this stage in our argument it becomes necessary to move away from the burial practices and look instead at the settlement pattern. My ninth proposition asserts that the constant socio-economic factor of settlement since the beginning of the Merovingian kingdom was not the village but the village *mark*. Excavations in Jutland, in

northern Germany and in the Netherlands have shown that the settlements of the early Merovingian period were usually villages — single farmsteads not having been established in any area at this time — and that these villages were not permanent at the local level. Each generation moved from its previously fixed settlement site, but at the same time remained within the borders of its *mark*. Waterbolk (1982), for instance, has convincingly shown that in the Drenthe region in the Netherlands, as is also evident in other areas, it was not the village but the *mark* which had constituted the constant settlement factor ever since La Tène times or the Roman period. In those regions of the Merovingian kingdom that had formerly been Roman, such as south-west Germany, the size of the *mark* may have stemmed from Roman subdivisions. (I refer to the Roman system of accommodation, the *hospitalitas*). In any case a single settlement area or *mark* was a possession which the king,

for example, would initially transfer to his followers as a whole. Later several lords may have owned property in a *mark* and severally wielded authority over land and people.

The archaeological picture that emerges with regard to the *Reihengräber* civilisation now shows — with variants of course — not only that the settlement shifted within the *mark*, but also that there is usually evidence for several cemeteries in the same *mark* which may vary in size, wealth and the length of time they were in use. Previously it was assumed that the various burial places — mainly consisting of only a few graves — belonged to isolated farmsteads or hamlets which grew into a single village at a later date. Yet the results of recent excavations have shown that during the history of a *mark* and settlement within it, a number of separate localities for burial sites, reflecting the shifting settlement pattern within its territory, presumably existed. In other words, we have to reckon with a complex system of settlement and burial which is far from having been satisfactorily discovered or understood. In general terms we can sketch the process as follows: after receiving a *mark*, the recipient follower founded a settlement for himself and his people, and when either he or one of the leading members of his family died a burial place was established (founder's grave). This burial place continued to be filled even if its respective village were subsequently transferred. If new families joined the village in the course of time, either because another family replaced the lord or because it had gained property rights in the *mark* and built a farmstead in the village, then this family could either bury its dead in the original cemetery, by now far away, or establish a new burial place (separate cemetery). This process could thus lead to the creation of several new burial sites in the same *mark*. When the village became permanently settled on one site — a development usually coinciding with the erection of a church — it is possible to capture the end of this process; it probably made no sense to let the village move away from the church. However, we should avoid monocausal explanations, as changes in house construction show. For not long afterwards the post-hole technique of building houses was replaced by a construction which involved a solid stone foundation. This effectively put an end to the movement of villages. Those farmsteads which had been built

in the traditional post-hole manner, and became fixed in space in the 8th century, now had to be renewed more frequently on the same site. This can also be proved archaeologically (Steuer 1988).

The transfer of a village could only occur if the entire population were to decide on such a measure, and the same is true for the establishment of a new burial site. Yet once a single lord, and later a number of different lords, came to have rights and property in a village, relocations of the old type were no longer practicable, or even desirable, especially since these lords owned scattered property and did not live in the village themselves. The village thus remained in the same place as the church and its cemetery, and this situation has lasted from the eighth century down to the present day.

Two examples of this phenomenon in the Merovingian Empire can be cited (Steuer 1988). First, the excavated settlement site of Speyer-Vogelgesang. This is one example of a shifting village (Bernhard 1982): the farmsteads were moved several times from the 5th/6th century down to the Middle Ages, before the settlement eventually dissolved in the municipal borough of the town of Speyer. An area extending over a kilometre in length is covered with traces of settlement. The second example is the *Mark* of Wittlingen (Bohner 1986) in southern Germany (fig. 13). Surface exploration has revealed several as yet unexcavated settlement sites and a number of cemeteries. The findings suggest the presence of several farmsteads in the *Mark*, and the following overall picture of its settlement pattern emerges: namely, that the site of the same village was repeatedly moved, and subsequently new burial places were opened, possibly by manorial lords who had amassed more and more property in the *Mark*. This is suggested by the rich burials accidentally discovered.

Schmid (1957) long since pointed out the low level of stability within the noble families in the early Middle Ages, and spoke of “fluctuating families” which led to a high mobility of property. Similarly Donat (1983, 23) writes: “Because the nobles’ graves were often used only for a short period and rarely exhibit family groups, they furnish evidence for a high mobility among the nobles, which can only be explained by scattered property in more than one place” (quoted by Christlein 1987). A parallel development from the

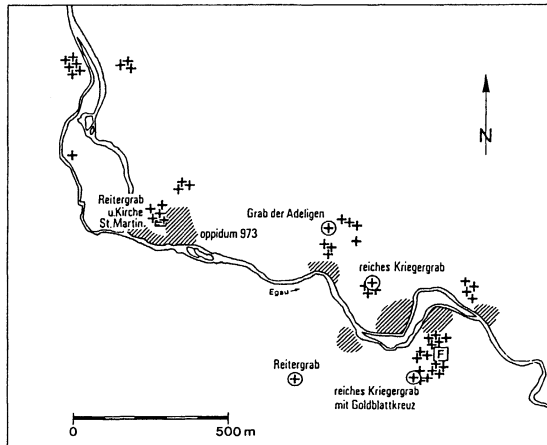


Fig. 13. The early medieval topography of Wittislingen (shaded areas = Alemannic settlements; crosses = cemeteries; circles = rich graves; F = early Alemannic settlement in Roman ruin) (after Böhner 1986).

end of Merovingian times is the abandonment of the *Reihengräber*, their plundering and the emergence of cemeteries near churches as well as within villages. There is a remarkable dynamism in the changes in the settlement area, the *Mark*, which reflects one and the same social process: the consolidation of a manorial structure. It may thus be suggested, though not demonstrated, that at the time when the village was not yet hereditary property, the land-lord, who was given the village by the king, could rebuild it on a new site. The constantly changing property relations thus led to changes in the village's structure. The dependence of "free" warriors and their families on the king or the highest-ranking *optimates* who paid them with land, gradually turned into the dependence of the rural population on a number of local nobles. In turn this number diminished in proportion as the great manorial lords accumulated property and gained scattered property in many villages.

4.10 My tenth proposition links the statements based on, or the inferences drawn from, historical and archaeological sources with a further source, that of place names. Hitherto it has been assumed in the relevant literature that the villages founded soon after the conquest usually remained fixed in the same locality, underlying today's villages, and that the names of the latter could consequently be projected back in time. In fact, variability in the settlement pattern and a fixed name only allow the

conclusion that it was not the shifting settlement, but the *Mark*, that carried this name.

The observation that settlements west of the Rhine in Alsace bear names ending in *-heim* while settlements east of the Rhine have names ending in *-ingen* has always been interpreted as reflecting different settlement and proprietorship movements (Fingerlin 1974, Janichen 1972); for the Alamannic people lived on both sides of the Rhine after the conquest. A novel political influence of Frankish organizational practice west of the Rhine is thought to have brought in a new settlement pattern, which is reflected in the place names associated with it: the Frankish practice of naming settlements with the suffix *-heim* in fact presupposes locally stable villages, not least because of the frequent combinations with names denoting the direction of the sun, such as Norheim, Sudheim, Westheim and Ostheim. (With shifting settlements the direction of the sun could not always remain the same). Only the *Mark* themselves remained constant in their relative position. Whether the *-ingen* names reflect a personal, older, genteel settlement organization, while the *-heim* names evince a more progressive manorial orientation, cannot be resolved with certainty yet (Schubert 1983). But attention should be drawn to the fact that throughout the Alamannic area, far into its easternmost region, we know *-heim* settlements for which *Reihengräber* burial sites have been excavated (Kirchheim, Sontheim) (Christlein 1978, catalogue). The naming of the settlements in question undoubtedly represents a procedure relevant for social history; and if it is analysed in relation to the archaeological findings it will probably indicate the spread of a certain type of manorial structure, or rather successive waves of land donation. The *-heim* names occurring far into the east probably reflect the expansion of the Frankish Merovingians, and the gift of land to their followers.

5. Conclusions

If we try to discover the social structures and developments of the Merovingian kingdom, then the evidence of the written sources can certainly help us to understand the archaeological findings. The common quantification of grave goods, however, presupposes a society which cannot be extracted from the written sources. Schulze (1985), in his "Grundstrukturen der Verfassung im Mit-

telalter'', asserts that the foundation of the Frankish kingdom was one of the most consequential results of the Germanic Migration Period, with the Frankish manorial system as an element of Germanic origin fulfilling a most decisive role.

The *Reihengräber* are an expression of the open, ranked society of the Merovingian kingdom, in which the farmer-warriors were dependent on the king and a few magnates such as the dukes, members of the Merovingian family, in the broadest sense of the term, or on high officials. Landownership characterized the situation right from the beginning of the conquest. Around 500 AD there was as yet no feudal property, as Keller (1984) writes: "(the) *optimates* cultivated their land themselves or with the help of serfs, like other estate owners". He continues: "It was not until the land gifts in connection with the expansion of the Frankish organization of the kingdom that the nobles were able to enforce a position beyond the community of the settlement, as it is reflected by the growing number of nobles' graves or of graves in churches

from the 7th century onwards'' (quoted by Donat 1988, 26).

At the end of the Merovingian period, and its transition to the Carolingian epoch, the open, ranked society was replaced by an hierarchically structured, closed society in which a noble class with birthrights had emerged. This class society no longer needed a luxurious burial cult for its own self-presentation. It was characterized instead by stable property, settlement in fixed places, and solidly built churches. Many archaeological facets of the *Reihengräber* reflect this wider transition of the Merovingian kingdom from a state of followers to the Carolingian Empire, a true feudal state. It would indeed be a fascinating task to follow up the very similar but chronologically different process for the Norse empires or the society of Magna Moravia, again on the basis of archaeological sources.

To conclude, the formation and spread of the magnificent burials during and after the Migration Period reflect the creation and spread of a state organization based on bodies of warriors.

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