

FRANKS AND ALAMANNI  
IN THE MEROVINGIAN PERIOD  
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

Edited by

Ian Wood

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Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Social Stress  
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## SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND RELATIONS

FRANK SIEGMUND

*Seminar für Ur- und Frühgeschichte der Georg-August-Universität, Nikolausberger Weg 15,  
D-37073 Göttingen*

### Sources

From about AD 500 up to 650-700 the *Alamanni* and Franks buried their unburnt corpses in cemeteries outside their settlements. They were buried in their everyday clothing and men often had their weapons with them. From the finds of pottery and glassware we can draw conclusions on the offering of food and drink. These cemeteries are well-investigated over vast areas and even in great numbers and represent the main basis of most archaeological statements about this time. Unfortunately, more extensive excavations of settlements are quite rare even up to the present day.

### Élite

Even historians are still discussing the question of real nobility in Merovingian times. The reason for this discussion is the fact that the *Pactus legis Salicae*, written before AD 507 (for an overview of Merovingian law: Wood 1994:102 ff.), only mentions Romans and *Germani*, free and unfree, and some functional groups, such as 'fertile women' or 'men on a war-path'—but neither a special privileged class nor any term for nobility above the free (for an opposite interpretation of this see: Grahn-Hoek 1976; Irsigler 1969). On the other hand, mainly in the narrative sources we do find indications of leading families, so most historians consider the existence of a nobility as highly plausible (R. Wenskus in *RGA* 1:60-75; Schneider 1990:73 ff.). At least, the *Pactus Alamannorum*, probably written down at the beginning of the seventh century (Wood 1994:115 ff.), mentions three different social groups within Alamannic society: *primus alamannus*, *medianus alamannus* and *minoflidus* (e.g. §§ 77-79), but it is an outstanding question whether any legal status was fixed by birth. There is great scepticism about the possibility of producing any evidence to answer questions of this kind by archaeological research.

The fundamental problem of whether different assemblages of grave-goods also reflect different social status has been discussed for a long time and is still unsolved (overviews: Steuer 1982; Steuer 1994). There is no doubt that extremely rich graves can only be those of élite members, but in the individual case it might be difficult to estimate the value of the grave-goods and to associate the probably derivable archaeological groupings with any legal status-groups mentioned in

written sources, as e.g. *servi, liberi, nobiles*. Former researchers tried to combine certain kinds of weapons directly with social status-groups (e.g. sword = *ingenuus*), which is very questionable and no longer under discussion. Rainer Christlein (1973) tried to estimate the value of the grave-goods by means of a neutral catalogue for general and far-reaching use. He defined four levels of richness ('Qualitätsgruppen'), which he named A to D in ascending order. Here, not a special type of grave-good, but these value-groups were directly associated with social classes (Christlein 1973; Christlein 1978:83 ff., esp. 87), whose existence was derived from written sources.

Further researchers raised two main objections from the archaeological point of view against Christlein's system: (1) some characteristics vary in time (overview: Steuer 1994:16-7), (2) some characteristics were proved to be influenced by local and/or ethnic burial-customs (e.g. the deposition of horse-bits: Oexle 1992:108). So the intended comparability over a wider space and time is not permissible.

Heiko Steuer emphasized several times that in his opinion it is questionable to assign an individual directly to a certain social position. He derived his considerations from textual sources and tried to demonstrate that an individual first occupies a position in his *familia* and that this position changes during his lifetime, but only the *familia* as a whole refers to society and social strata (Steuer 1982: 519 pl.114). Steuer confronts the common view of a strictly stratified society (*servi/liberi/nobiles*) with that of a much more flexible 'open ranked society', where positions are mobile and grades are more fluid.

So the discussion seems to be at a deadlock: there are many legitimate objections to Christlein's rigid system. Steuer's reflections give us some convenient models and questions to be asked, but in the meantime we do not have any possibility of verifying or rejecting this by archaeological research. Methods for more distinctive descriptions of grave assemblages, separate from research on the Merovingians, have been developed for the late Roman Iron Age. The most convincing approach in my opinion is that of Lars Jørgensen (1987), who pleads for operating only with the frequency or rarity of find-groups, in order to estimate their relative values by computation, and to find a potentially continuous scale for their richness (similar thoughts, e.g. Arnold 1980:109). Unfortunately, that kind of approach has not yet been used on continental Merovingian cemeteries. We shall consider an example in the following pages.

Furthermore, physical anthropology is scarcely considered. The physique of the skeleton provides a number of informative details on life and death of human-beings, apart from their grave-goods. Diseases caused by malnourishment and, conversely, high-grade food, wear and tear caused by activities or even injuries; all this can be observed on skeletons and provide results which can be compared with more or less richly-furnished graves (e.g. Wenham 1989:123 ff.). Unfortunately again, an anthropological review of Merovingian graves is limited mostly to the question of age and sex, and, even if we have closer observations, they are sometimes not connected to the archaeological discussion (an important exception: Härke 1992a:152 ff.; Härke 1992b:179 ff.).

The problem of families, which was emphasized by Steuer, could be contrasted with kinship in a genetic sense, which can be observed by modern physical anthropology, where several approaches are provided (Alt & Vach 1994). Unfortunately, research of this kind is rare and the best documented cemetery, Eichstetten near the Kaiserstuhl (Black Forest), has not yet been published (in the meantime: Sasse 1989; cf. Härke 1992b:200 ff., pl.41).

This generally sceptical summary of former research and some of the most promising new approaches, which have not yet been pursued or published, leads one, on the whole, to the conclusion that archaeology cannot provide any convincing statement concerning the question of 'social structure and relations'. In my opinion this impression is caused by the fact that researchers concentrate on the interests of historians and their attempts to prove the existence of nobility. If we abandon this particular perspective, we encounter a number of interesting statements (Hodder 1980:161).

## Life development

Child mortality during early medieval times is estimated at approximately 45-60%. Even if this is debatable, we definitely have a lack of children in early medieval cemeteries (Acsádi & Nemeskéri 1970; Bach & Bach 1971). Neonates and babies are scarcely represented; the proportion of children is about 13% ( $\pm 2\%$ ) in about two fifths of all cemeteries. Even those graveyards which could be regarded as demographically representative of anthropological characteristics contain only about 22% ( $\pm 3\%$ ) childrens' graves (Etter & Schneider 1982; Grupe 1990:107 ff., pl.1; Hahn 1993:387 ff.; Sasse 1988:134 ff.). So only between a quarter and a half of all children were regularly buried.

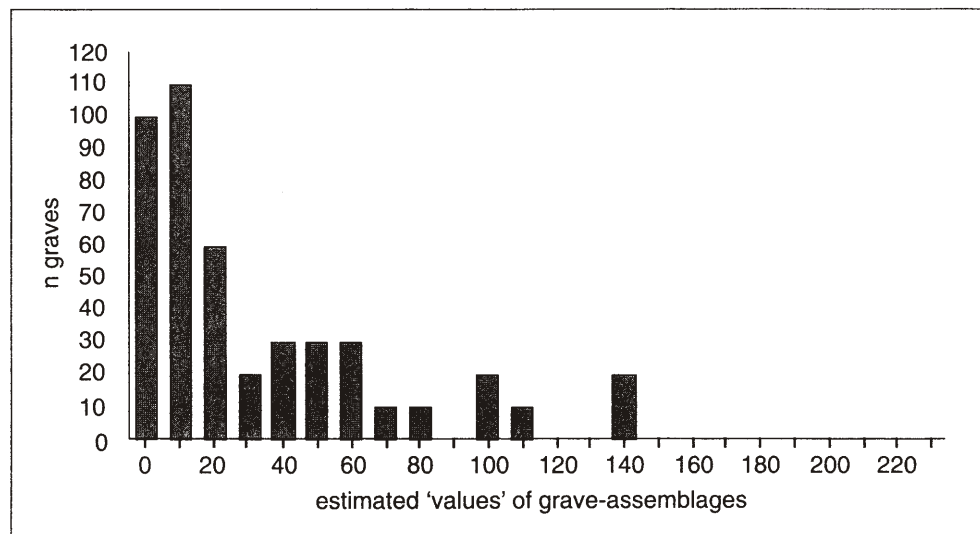
The few neonates and infants (*infans* I: age 0-6) buried were not given many grave-goods and practically no weapons. The first but rare offerings of weapons or brooches is to be observed in graves of elder children (*infans* II: age 6-12) and youths (*juvenis*: age 12-18) (Härke 1992b:183, pl. 33; Ottinger 1974), but brooches and weapons are frequent only in the graves of adult and mature people. In comparing these results with the fines (*wereguldus*, *wirigeldus*, 'wergeld') mentioned in the *Leges*, where we find the same values for girls as for adult men, while boys even reached a three times higher value (*Pactus legis Salicae* § 24), we notice a considerable difference between law and life.

Children became legally responsible at age 12 (*Pactus...* § 24.5). At about this age they seem to be buried regularly without exception, but their grave-goods are still poorer than those of adults; for example, we seldom find weapons in graves of younger boys or male youths. Usually these graves contain only arrow-heads and, in some exceptional cases, two types of weapons, i.e. a seax or spear in addition to arrow-heads (Knaut 1993:209 ff.; Sasse 1989:30-1; Wotzka 1989:237-8; cf. Härke 1992b:187-8). The typical combination of weapons is normally found in graves of

adults (aged 18 and older). This escalation of armament during one's life-time might also explain the basically puzzling escalation in fines for the joint kidnapping of young women (*Pactus...* § 13,1-3): the three main perpetrators—the law only mentions the plural form—had to pay 30 *solidi* apiece, their fellow-travellers 5 *solidi* apiece and 'qui cum sagittas' (those with arrows) only 3 *solidi*. These regulations make sense if we imagine the three adult men armed with seax or spear and the youngsters only with their bows and arrows.

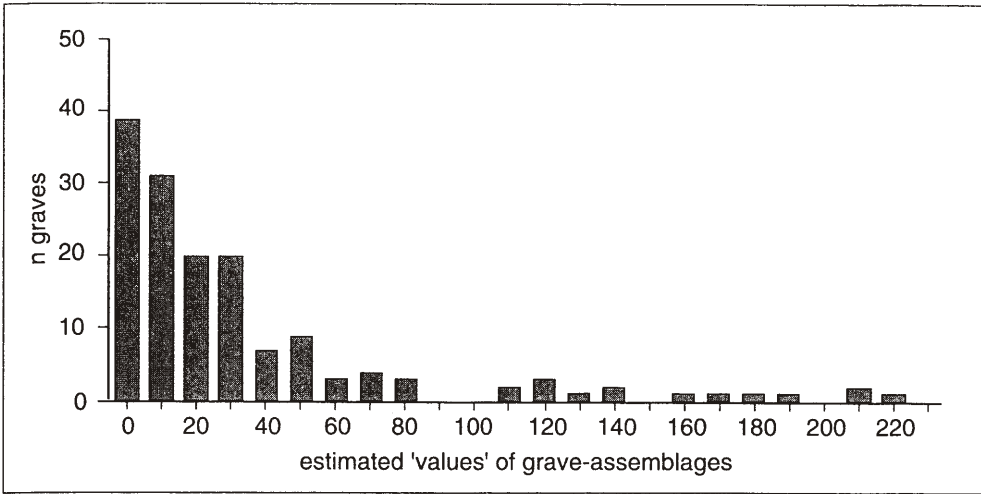
We can observe a slight difference in risk of death between women and men in cemeteries which have been investigated by physical anthropologists. Normally, women between 18 and 30 years had a greater chance of dying than men of the same age, while more men between 30 and 40 years died than women of the same age (Hahn 1993; Hirst 1980:239 ff.; Sasse 1988:136 ff.; Sasse 1989:36, pl. 21). This can be explained by the higher risk of death for women of child-bearing age. If this is true, it allows us to estimate the typical age at marriage and child-birth, which then seems to have happened mostly around the age of 25-30. Women of this particular age stood under special protection, their fines were threefold the normal ones (*Pactus...* § 24.6). We could expect, therefore, relatively richly-furnished graves for women of this age, but, unfortunately, there are no comprehensive investigations into the relationship between grave-goods and the ages of the deceased.

To make a spot check, we shall now look at two cemeteries, Basel-Bernerring (Martin 1976) and Köln-Müngersdorf (Fremersdorf 1955), which have been only slightly robbed. The values of grave-goods were estimated according to Jørgensen's methodology, (figs. 6-1, 6-2) and an average value was calculated for every single age-group by considering only those graves for which the age of the skeleton could be determined within reasonable parameters (figs. 6-3, 6-4). Both



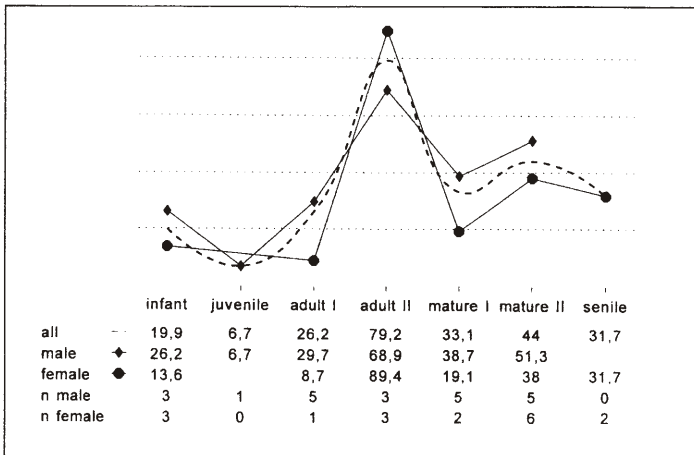
**Fig. 6-1:** Basel-Bernerring (CH). Estimated 'values' of grave assemblages (calculations based on the methodology of Jørgensen 1987).





**Fig. 6-2:** Köln-Müngersdorf (D). Estimated 'values' of grave assemblages (calculations based on the methodology of Jørgensen 1987).

cemeteries should be regarded separately, because the results of the anthropological investigation, as well as the grave assemblages, are not comparable. The graphs (figs. 6-3, 6-4) show first of all that there is no significant difference between men and women and we can see that both sexes at ages between 18 and 30 ('adult I') have relatively poor grave-goods, while women and men aged between 30 and 40 ('adult II') have relatively richly-furnished graves. Whereas at Basel-Bernerring the values drop off in graves of older persons, they rise proportionately at Köln-Müngersdorf. In any case, it can be demonstrated that older women received more precious grave-goods, i.e. those women, who were beyond child-bearing age.



**Fig. 6-3:** Basel-Bernerring (CH). Average 'value' of grave assemblages related to the age of the individuals buried.

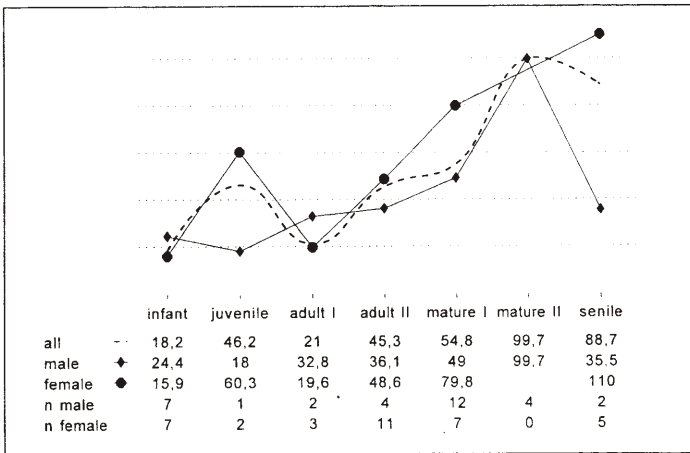


Fig. 6-4: Köln-Müngersdorf (D). Average 'value' of grave assemblages related to the age of the individuals buried.

Almost the same can be shown for male graves; here, old individuals scarcely fit for military service are comparatively well-armed (Härke 1992b:182; Knaut 1993:209 ff.; cf. Sasse 1989:31-2). Here too, we notice an interesting difference between the *Leges* and real life. The treatment of the older deceased during Merovingian times is quite different from the burial rite of Germanic people in *Germania libera* (1st to 4th century). There the young were endowed with richer grave-goods than their elders, 'mature' and 'senile' (Gebühr *et al.* 1989:92 ff.; Siegmund 1996:100 ff.).

### Size of communities

If we take the number of graves in the cemeteries as an indication of relative settlement sizes, these were small communities. Numbers of inhabitants between 8 and 50 individuals (1-6 farms?) seem typical; larger funeral communities are rare; they imply populations of up to 200 individuals (Donat & Ullrich 1971; Donat & Ullrich in *RGA* 2:231-361; Siegmund 1993:49). Only a few towns, continuing from Antiquity, were much more populated (Schneider 1990:126-9). From such considerations one can develop more general estimates of population density; in the eastern part of the kingdom this may have been some 4-5 persons per square kilometre (Siegmund 1993; Zimmermann 1996). As a consequence, the archaeological sources estimate that about 250,000 individuals lived in the whole of *Alamannia*.

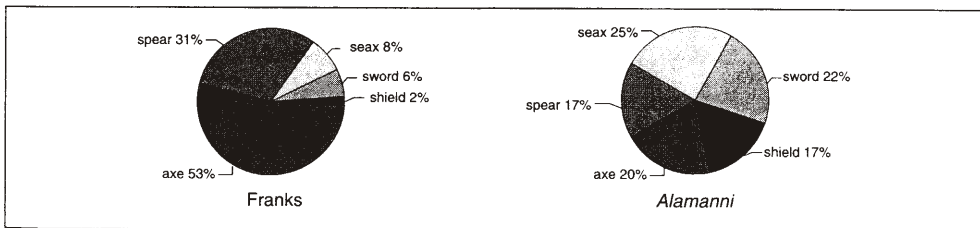
As a result of their small size, the rural settlements were not self-sufficient, so it was necessary to undertake exchanges with neighbouring settlements for special handicrafts, and also for bride-seeking. The practice of looking for brides among neighbours and the sometimes violent nature of this custom enacted by gangs of young men is proven by the *Leges* (*Pactus...* § 13, § 15). Neighbouring settlements

in some Frankish areas would be 2.5-3 km apart, in some Alamannic areas only 1-2 km apart (Siegmund 1992; 1998). Finds clearly produced in the same workshop, such as saucer brooches with sheet metal ('Preßblechfibeln') based on the same model (Klein-Pfeuffer 1993:81 pl. 13; for comparison e.g. Arnold 1980:104-5), or pottery decorated with the same stamp (Koch 1972: pl. 18; Koch 1994:62 f.) show in various cases a considerable spatial scattering, but they are mostly distributed within a radius of about 15-20 km, and this special distance might also reflect the normal radius of the activities of rural communities. According to a rough estimate, the population of such an area would number about 1000-3000 individuals in 50-100 settlements.

In spite of this considerable communication area, we observe special features in each individual cemetery. For example, the offering of pottery and glassware is practiced according to quite different burial customs in the Lower Rhine area and ends in the seventh century, but at different times and ways, even in neighbouring graveyards.

## Ethnicity

Trying to work out common regional features and differences apart from local peculiarities, we do not find a multitude of small regions but a few widespread 'culture-groups', which in my opinion can be related to early medieval ethnic groups. To differentiate them, it is essential to look at the offerings of vessels and of weapons in men's graves (extensive discussion in Siegmund n.d.; for comparison see Härke 1989:57; Härke 1992b). In the West and North-west one finds cemeteries in which spear-heads and axes have a higher proportion within the spectrum of weapons, whereas in southern Germany swords and seaxes are prevalent (figs. 6-5, 6-7). For the sixth century one can point out certain cemeteries in the East (Obermöllern, Stößen) which deviate considerably from both patterns of assemblages; they are characterized by high proportions of swords and spears,



**Fig. 6-5:** Weapon spectrum in 5th-century cemeteries (ca 440-530).

as well as a general lack of seaxes (fig. 6-6). Purely as an example, two cemeteries in northern Germany, Liebenau and Deersheim, can demonstrate the character of the Continental Saxons (figs. 6-6, 6-7). During the whole period the intensity of offering pottery and glass also varies considerably (figs. 6-8, 6-13). In the North

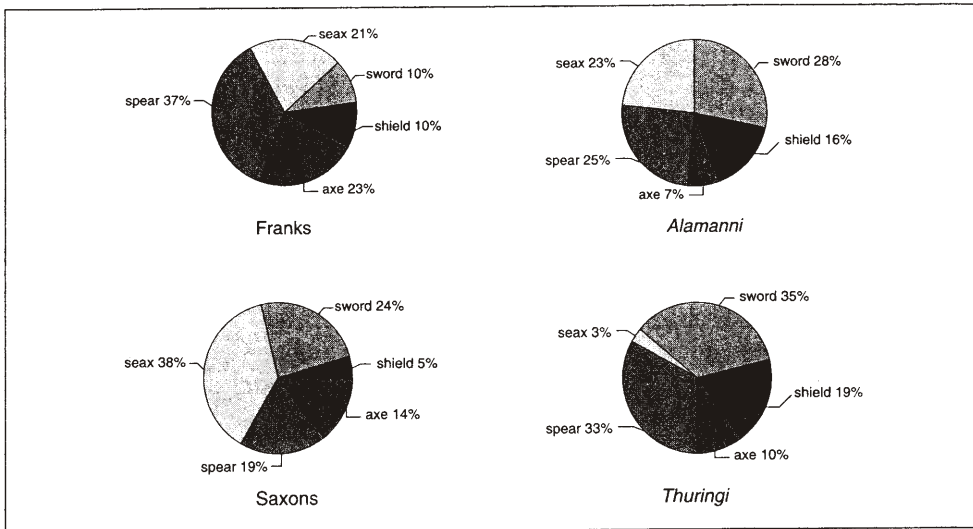


Fig. 6-6: Weapon spectrum in 6th-century cemeteries (ca 530-585).

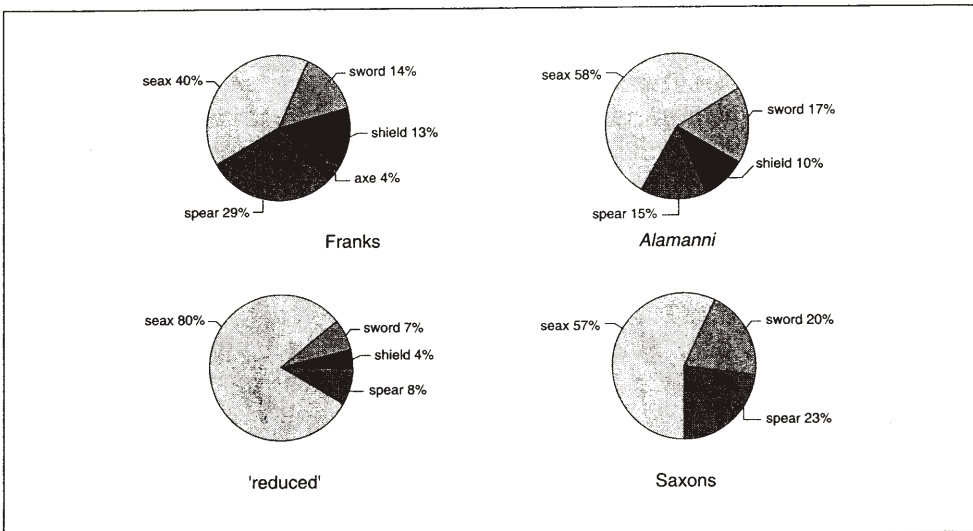


Fig. 6-7: Weapon spectrum in 7th-century cemeteries (ca 585-670). - 'Reduced': many cemeteries in the West and on the northern edge of the Alps this time reveal a marked reduction of weapons in graves which is no longer explainable as an ethnic characteristic.

and North-West far more vessels occur than in southern Germany; especially common is the offering of pottery vessels in the Saxon area (figs. 6-9, 6-10), where glass is almost entirely lacking (figs. 6-12, 6-13). Within the pottery itself, wheel-thrown vessels predominate in the North and North-West, whereas hand-made vessels are common in southern Germany and Thuringia, and particularly among the Saxons (figs. 6-8, 6-10).

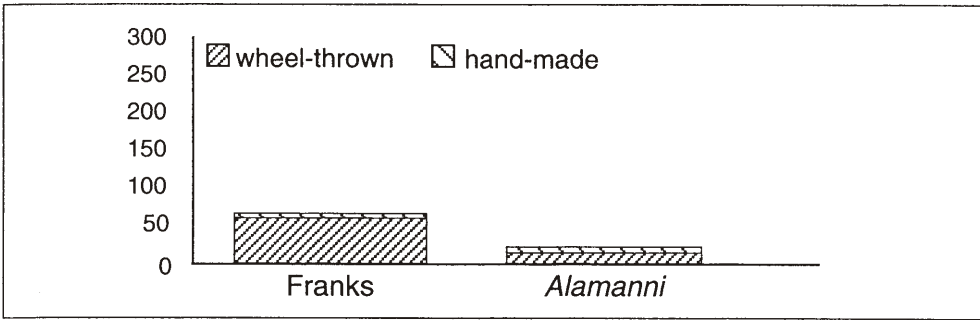


Fig. 6-8: Pottery spectrum in 5th-century cemeteries (ca 440-530). - Each number relates to 100 datable graves.

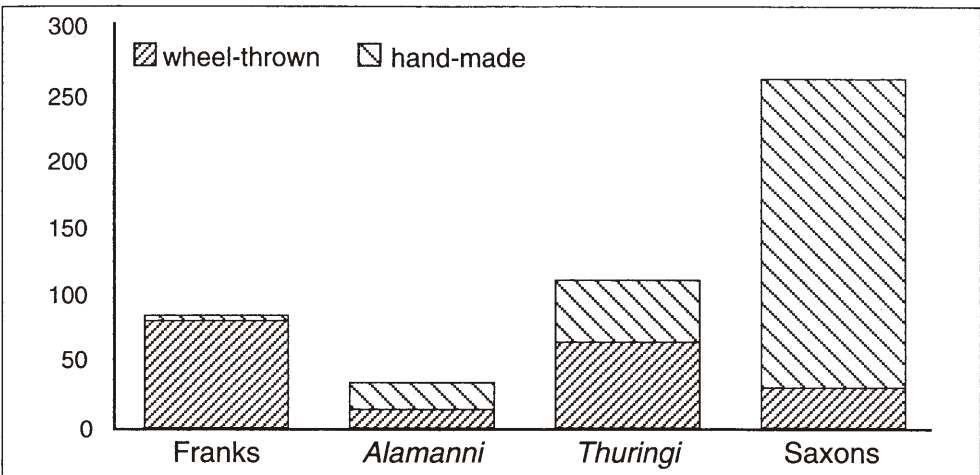


Fig. 6-9: Pottery spectrum in 6th-century cemeteries (ca 530-585). - Each number relates to 100 datable graves.

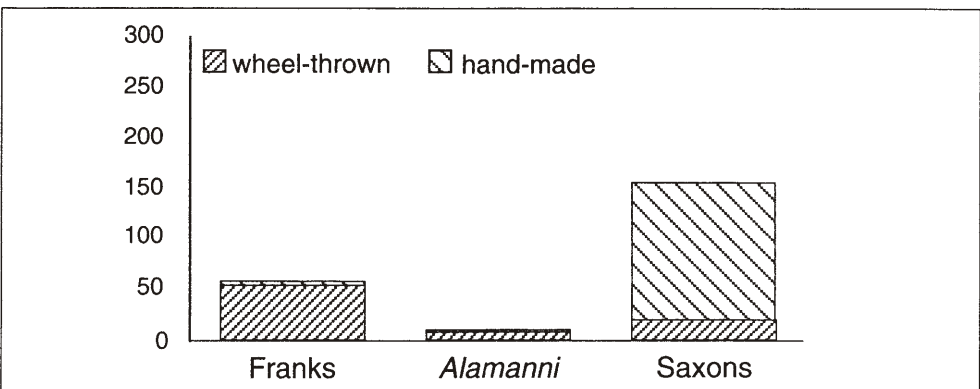
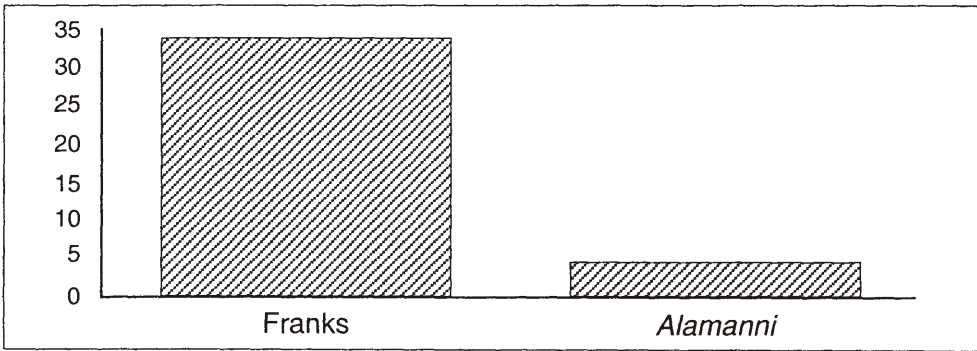
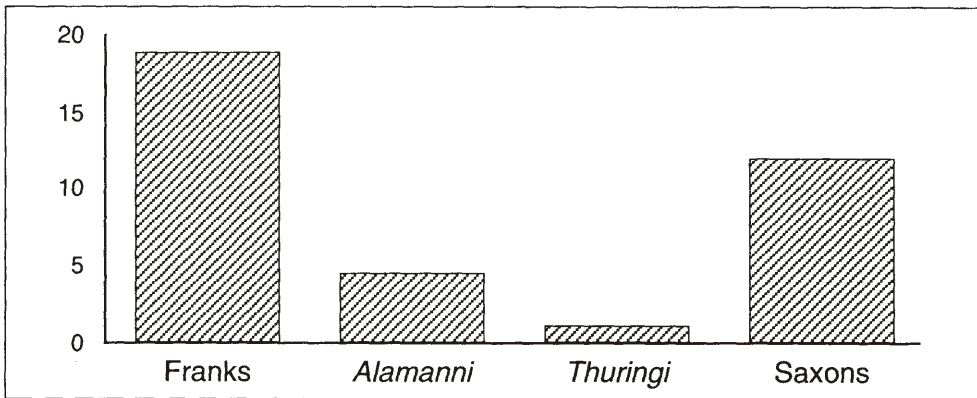


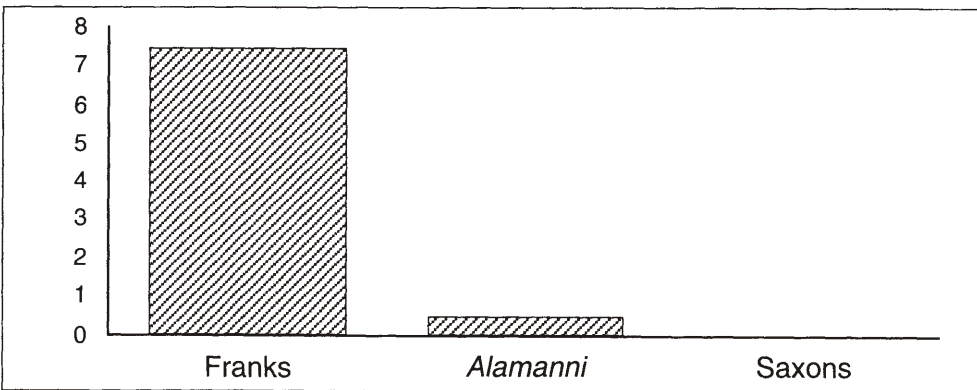
Fig. 6-10: Pottery spectrum in 7th-century cemeteries (ca 585-670). - Each number relates to 100 datable graves.



**Fig. 6-11:** Glass in 5th-century cemeteries (ca 440-530). - Each number relates to 100 datable graves.

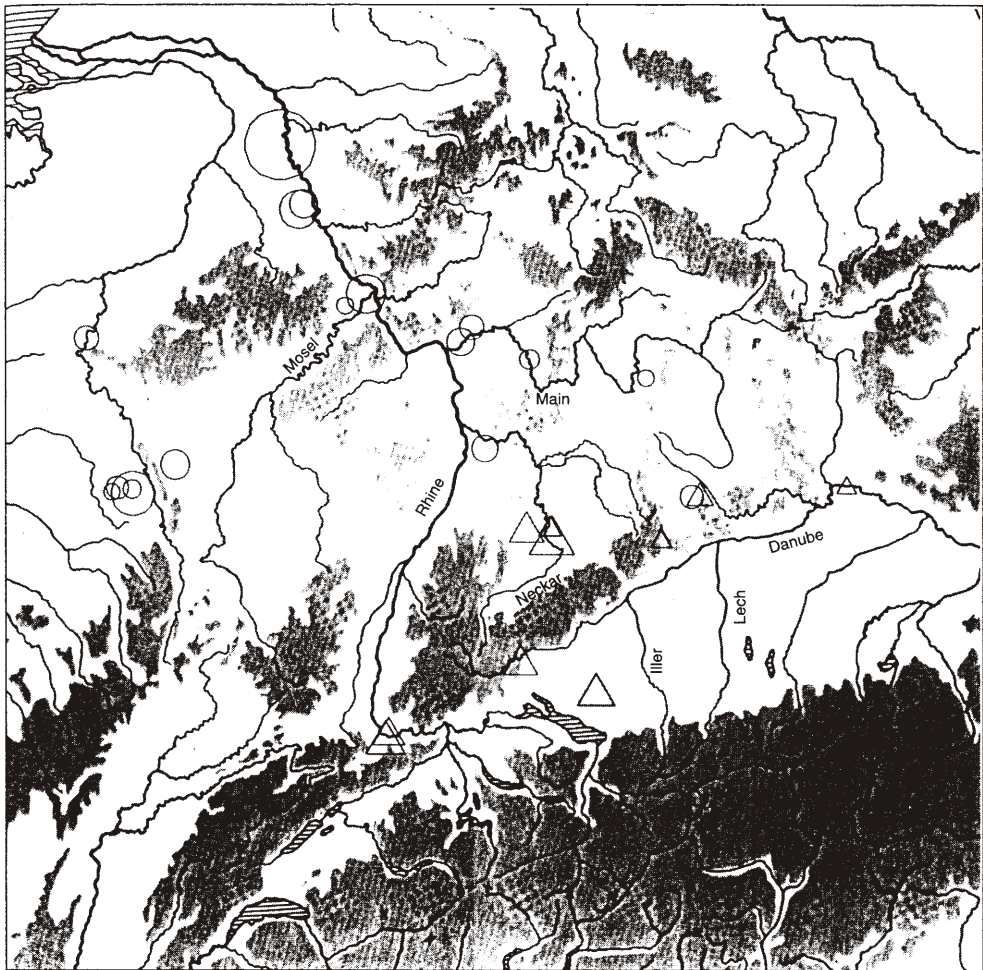


**Fig. 6-12:** Glass in 6th-century cemeteries (ca 530-585). - Each number relates to 100 datable graves.



**Fig. 6-13:** Glass in 7th-century cemeteries (ca 585-670). - Each number relates to 100 datable graves.

The distribution of these cultural groups does not differ too much from our knowledge about the distribution of early medieval ethnic groups derived from



**Fig. 6-14:** Ethnic distribution of 5th-century cemeteries (ca 440-530). - Circles: Franks; triangles: *Alamanni*. - Scale ca 1 : 5,000,000. - The size of the symbols increases with the similarity to the respective cultural model; smaller symbols mark cemeteries which diverge from their model.

written sources, and allows us to combine these purely archaeologically defined 'culture-groups' with early medieval ethnic groups (figs. 6-14, 6-16).

Cemeteries in use over a long period usually display a homogeneous structure during the whole period. 'Changes of identity' are few and geographically concentrated in a given region (figs. 6-17, 6-18). This corresponds to what the written sources in the seventh century refer to as *Francia orientalis* (overview: Quarthal 1984).

These observations indicate stable ethnic units from the archaeological point of view, but this opinion does not correspond to modern views of historians on

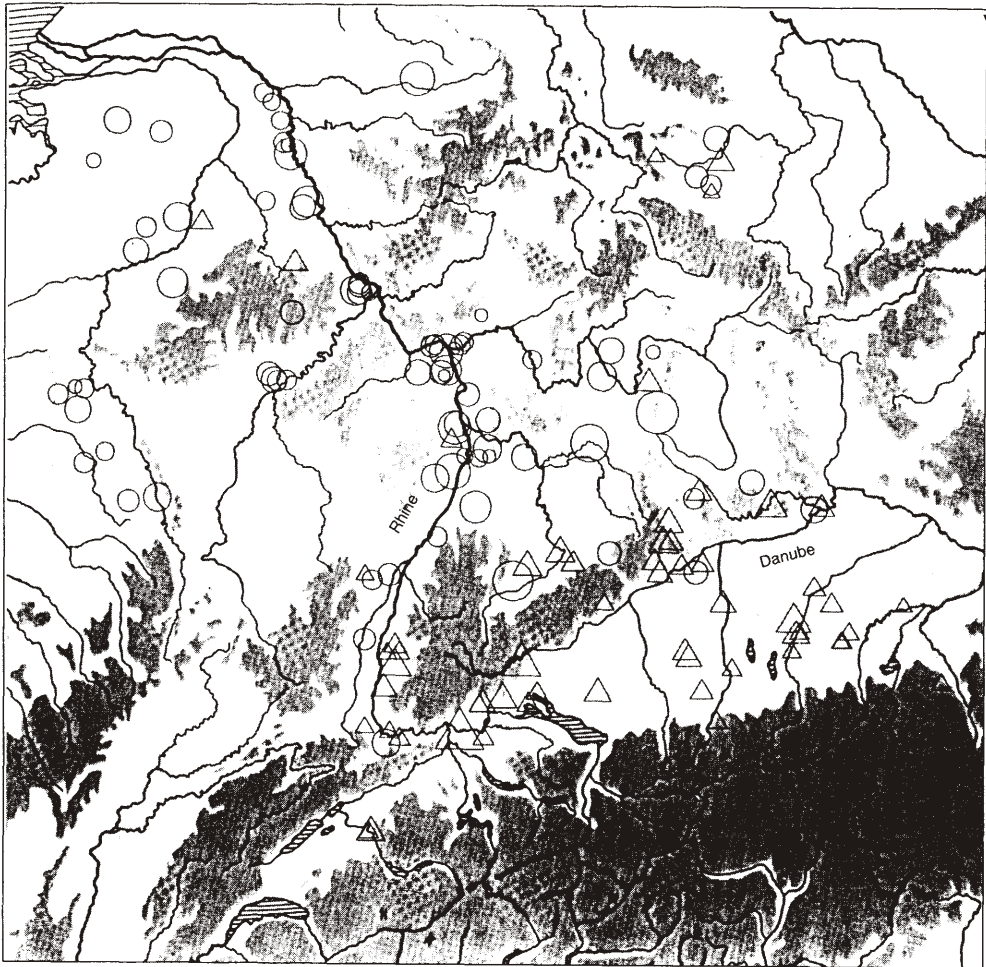


**Fig. 6-15:** Ethnic distribution of 6th-century cemeteries (ca 530-585). - Circles: Franks; triangles: *Alamanni*; rhombi: *Thuringi*; cross: Saxons. - Cf. fig. 6-14.

‘multicultural’ polyethnic units drawn up following Rainer Wenskus’s pioneering study of 1961 {Goths (Wolfram 1979); Avars (Pohl 1988)}, a contradiction which might be explained by different perspectives—on the one hand the élite of nomadic peoples (Goths, Avars), on the other ordinary people of mostly stable ethnic groups (*Alamanni*, Franks).

Concerning dress, especially the wearing of brooches by women, we do not observe comparable differences (Strauß 1992). The development of costume proceeded in a uniform way within vast regions and shows that early medieval *Germani* largely followed a common development through time (‘fashion’). The adoption of the fashion of multi-partite belt-sets (‘vielteilige Gürtelgarnituren’) coming from Italy and moving northwards during the early seventh century does





**Fig. 6-16:** Ethnic distribution of 7th-century cemeteries (ca 585-670). - Circles: Franks; triangles: *Alamanni*. - Cf. fig. 6-14.

not show any local differences, as it takes place entirely during a single chronological period. Here, we can give an example proving the intensity of widespread communications and the possibly very short time for the diffusion of fashions and customs. Apart from these common features depending on time and fashion, ethnic differences will be found; such differences are stable over a long period.

The archaeologically tangible characteristics of ethnic identity during the sixth and seventh centuries which are most clearly definable are closely related to those of the fifth century; a chronological development is discernible. This observation also answers Guy Halsall's justifiable question (1992:207) as to whether the 'early Germanic' graves of the fourth and fifth centuries in Gaul are to be interpreted



**Fig. 6-17:** Change of identity from the 5th to the 6th century. - Circles: Franks; triangles: *Alamanni*; hatched circles: change from Alamannic to Frankish; hatched triangles: change from Frankish to Alamannic.



**Fig. 6-18:** Change of identity from the 6th to the 7th century. - Circles: Franks; triangles: *Alamanni*; hatched circles: change from Alamannic to Frankish; hatched triangles: change from Frankish to Alamannic.

ethnically (Germanic, *laeti/foederati*) or socially (*baucadae*). I believe that an ethnic interpretation is the only sensible one. During this period the characteristics of the newly emerging Germanic peoples of both *Alamanni* and Franks develop from several roots (Halsall 1992:199 fig. 17.1).

### Ethnic units and elite

How did nobles relate to the ordinary population with regard to these ethnic contrasts? To take a closer look at this special problem, one can carry out a spot check of graves which have an undeniably high-ranking social position, beginning with those containing swords of the 'Krefeld-type' from the second third of the fifth century (Böhme 1994). Such graves are surprisingly poor and seem to be hardly standardized (table 6-1); except for the sword, there is usually only a shield. Obviously, not only in the typology of these swords, but also in the general method of armament we can see a tradition continuing from late Antiquity, because this kind of armament reminds us of the apparently paltry equipment of late Roman military leaders (cf. Stilicho's ivory diptych in Monza, Italy). Axes and *angones*, as well as the offering of pottery or glass, are found, but only in the North and

Table 6-1  
Graves with Krefeld-type swords (second third of 5th century)

B	M	grave	sword	seax	axe	spear	ango	arrows	shield	horse	vessels
GREAT BRITAIN											
5)	14)	Abingdon gr. 42	Krefeld	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6)	18)	Petersfinger gr. 21	Krefeld	—	yes	slit	—	—	yes	—	—
FRANCIA											
12)	16)	Samson gr. 11	Krefeld	—	yes	—	yes	—	yes	—	glass
13)	17)	Samson gr. 12	Krefeld	—	Franz.	yes	yes	yes	yes	—	bucket; br.bowl; glass; wP
15)	—	Vieuxville gr. 14	Krefeld	—	Franz.	slit	—	—	yes	—	—
9)	12)	Gellep gr. 43	Krefeld	—	—	—	—	yes	—	—	wP; glass
10)	15)	Oberlörick gr. 13	Krefeld	—	—	—	—	—	yes	—	?
—	—	Wenigumstadt gr. 141	Krefeld	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	wP
ALAMANNIA											
19)	13)	Hemmingen gr. 21	Krefeld	—	—	slit	—	yes	yes	—	—
20)	—	Wyhl gr. 22	Krefeld	—	—	—	—	—	yes	—	—
—	—	Neresheim gr. 45	Krefeld	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	Möhringen gr. 3	Krefeld	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

B: Böhme 1994:82 ff. / M: Menghin 1983.

Abbreviations for tables 6-1 to 6-4:

longs.: longseax / Franz.: Franzisca / slit: spearhead with slit-socket / unsl.: spearhead with unslit socket  
wP: wheel-thrown pottery / hP: handmade pottery / br.: bronze.

West, where *Francia* is presumed to be; they are completely missing in south-Germanic graves of this group.

As a spot check for the élite of the final third of the fifth century, we should now look at graves with gold-hilted swords, a kind of weapon also found in the grave of Childeric (table 6-2). Typologically, such weapons are separated into two groups distinguished by hilts and mounts as 'Franconian' and 'Alamannic' (Quast 1993:21 ff., 43 ff.). Both show different distributions (Quast 1993:48 pl. 25). Graves of this group are without exception richly-furnished and yield extensive offerings of weapons and vessels, but it is no longer possible to make any distinction, as was the case for the periods before and after.

Table 6-2  
*Graves with gold-hilted swords (final third of the 5th century / ≈ 500)*

**Graves with 'Frankish type' gold-hilted swords**

Q	M	grave	sword	seax	axe	spear	ango	arrows	shield	horse	vessels
1)	1)	Tournai 'Childeric'	'Frank.'	longs.	Franz.	slit	—	—	yes	bit	?
2)	45)	Rue St.Pierre	'Frank.'	—	yes	yes	yes	—	—	—	bucket; wP
3)	47)	Arcy-St.Restitute	'Frank.'	—	—	—	—	—	—	spurs	—
4)	46)	Lavoye gr. 319	'Frank.'	longs.	—	—	yes	yes	—	—	2 br.jugs; glass
5)	2)	Pouan	'Frank.'	longs.	—	—	—	—	—	—	glass
6)	11)	Rommersheim	'Frank.'	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	br.bowl; wP; glass
7)	43)	Flonheim gr. 5	'Frank.'	"seax"	Franz.	slit	yes	—	yes	—	bucket
related:											
—	49)	Joches gr. 2	'Frank.'	—	yes	yes	—	—	yes	—	br.bowl; glass; wP
—	85)	Köln-St.Sever. V.205	'Frank.'	—	—	slit?	yes	—	yes	—	—
—	56)	Planig	'Frank.'	longs.	Franz.	slit	yes	yes	yes	—	br.bowl; glass; wP

**Graves with 'Alamannic type' gold-hilted swords**

Q	M	grave	sword	seax	axe	spear	ango	arrows	shield	horse	vessels
10)	8)	Pleidelsheim gr. 71	'Alam.'	longs.	—	slit	—	—	yes	—	—
11)	40)	Baden-Oos	'Alam.'	—	Franz.	slit	—	yes	yes	—	—
13)	7)	Gültlingen 1901	'Alam.'	—	Franz.	slit	—	—	yes	—	glass
—	15)	Entringen 1904	'Alam.'	—	—	slit	yes	—	—	—	—
16)	5)	Entringen 1927	'Alam.'	long?-s.	—	yes	—	—	yes	—	br.bowl; glass
18)	39)	Kleinhüningen gr. 63	'Alam.'	longs.	yes	unsl.?	—	—	yes	—	hP
17)	3)	Blučina	'Alam.'	longs.	—	—	—	yes	—	saddle	2x glass
related:											
—	37)	Hemmingen gr. 2	'Alam.'	—	Franz.	—	—	yes	—	—	hP
—	38)	Kleinhüningen gr. 212	'Alam.'	—	—	slit	—	—	yes	—	glass; wP
—	51)	Mézières gr. 68	'Alam.'	—	Franz.	slit	yes	yes	—	bit	glass

Q: Quast 1993: 131 list 1 / M: Menghin 1983.

(Abbreviations: see Table 6-1)

As leitmotifs for extremely high-ranking sixth-century graves (more precisely: second to final thirds of the sixth century) we can refer to ring-swords and to

Baldenheim-type helmets (tables 6-3, 6-4; Hedeager 1992:295-6 figs. 53-54; Quast 1993:30 ff. pl.13; Steuer 1987). Such graves are equally rich in offerings of weapons and vessels, and a separation into two groups seems possible: the combination of *franzisca* or axes with *angones* and the offering of arrow-heads are only to be found in *Francia*, but not in south-Germanic graves, with the exception of Gammertingen. Rich offerings of vessels in all graves can also be distinguished by trends: in the South glass is very rare, even in rich graves; pottery is scarcely added and, when represented, of hand-made ware, while in the 'Frankish' graves we find wheel-thrown vessels only. Thus, we notice the same contrasts as in the normal

Table 6-3  
*Graves with ring-swords*

S	M	grave	seax	axe	spear	ango	arrows	shield	horse	vessels
<i>FRANCIA</i>										
11)	57)	Chaouilley gr. 20	yes	Franz.	slit	yes	yes	yes	—	br.bowl; bucket; glass; 3x wP
13)	61)	Mézières gr. 66	—	Franz.	slit	yes	yes	yes	—	wP
12)	—	Villers-Semeuse gr. 16	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	wP
8)	103)	Beckum	yes	yes	slit	yes	—	—	bit	br.bowl; bucket; glass
9)	101)	Orsoy gr. 3	yes	—	slit	—	yes	yes	bit	br.bowl; glass; wP
10)	84)	Gellep gr.1782	yes	Franz.	unsl.	yes	—	yes	bit	5 br.vessels; bucket; 2x glass
7)	93)	Mainz-Kastel	?	—	slit	—	—	yes	—	br.bowl; 2x glass
<i>ALAMANNIA</i>										
5)	109)	Schretzheim gr. 79	yes	—	unsl.	—	—	yes	—	—
6)	104)	Niederstotzingen gr.9	yes	—	unsl.	—	—	yes	bit	br.bowl; br.jug
4)	—	Kosching gr. C 2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
98)	—	Langenenslingen gr. 4	—	Franz.	unsl.	—	—	yes	—	—

graves of this time, in addition to the characteristic 'noble' features of the grave-goods. Extremely rich seventh-century men's graves and sixth- and seventh-century women's graves can be distinguished in the same way.

Quite apart from characteristics of wealth or status, the warriors with 'Krefeld-type' swords and the élite graves of the sixth and seventh centuries are typical in their ethnic features of their time. Despite the mobility of the upper class, a hard rule holds, with few exceptions: Alamannic lords in *Alamannia*, Frankish lords in *Francia*. Only the group of gold-hilted swords of the last third of the fifth century deviates from this picture—these splendid graves do not seem to be standardized at all.

Are the élite or is the ordinary population decisive where ethnic contrasts are concerned? According to many historians one would expect that the élite would supply the leading example (e.g. Wenskus 1961; Wolfram 1979), but too many detailed observations contradict this model. Were the warriors with 'Krefeld-type' swords to be representative, graves containing shields would have to be much commoner than they actually are. If the wearers of the gold-hilted swords

Table 6-4  
Graves with 'Baldenheim-type' helmets

Q	S	grave	sword	seax	axe	spear	ango	arrows	shield	horse	vessels
<i>FRANCIA</i>											
24)	11)	Gellep gr.1782	yes	yes	Franz.	unsl.	yes	—	yes	bit	br.vessels; 2x glass
25)	10)	Morken	yes	—	yes	2 unsl.	yes	—	yes	bit	br.bowl; bucket; 2x glass; wP
26)	9)	Planig	yes	yes	Franz.	slit	yes	yes	yes	—	br.bowl; glass; wP
<i>related:</i>											
—	2)	Köln 'Knabengrab'	yes	yes	Franz.	unsl.	yes	yes	yes	—	bucket; br.bowl; 3x glass; drinking-horn
—	3)	Bretzenheim gr. 1	yes	—	Franz.	slit	yes	yes	—	bit	3x br.vessels
<i>ALAMANNIA</i>											
23)	6)	Baldenheim gr.1	yes	yes	—	slit	—	—	—	—	wP; hP
27)	8)	Gültlingen 1901	yes	—	Franz.	slit	—	—	yes	—	glass
28)	7)	Gammertingen	yes	yes	yes	unsl.	yes	yes	yes	bit	2 br.bowls; glass; wP
<i>THURINGIA</i>											
29)	12)	Stößen gr. 35	—	—	—	slit	—	—	—	—	wP

Q: Quast 1993: 130ff. fig.13; 131 list 2 / M: Menghin 1983.

(Abbreviations: see Table 6-1)

represented the ideal, cutting weapons and spear-heads (with slit-sockets!) would also have to be common in southern Germany. A more detailed comparison of tables 6-1 to 6-4 with figures (6-5 to 6-13) uncovers many more clues of this nature. Only the contrary point of view provides a logical picture: ethnic differences are specific to the normal population. Apart from their upper-class traits, the élite blend with the ethnic identities of their own people.

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## Discussion<sup>1</sup>

HALSALL: What exactly do you mean by stability? I follow your chronological scheme. It seems to me that through time there are some quite interesting changes. For example, among the West Franks as, which is easily demonstrable, the saxe comes to predominate while the axe is much, much less common and eventually drops out of use by the seventh century. There were similar changes among the East Franks and so on; these things seem to be changing quite a lot, so how does that tally with stability?

SIEGMUND: Sure, there is a common development over time. The axes, for example, were important in the beginning and then they become fewer and fewer until they vanish in the seventh century. The saxe increased from about AD 500

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Siegmund's study on ethnicity was written in the summer of 1995. Some of the following discussions refer to his pre-circulated paper which was based on a previous stage of his research. In this he differentiated between eastern and western Franks and identified some cemeteries in the Upper Main area as belonging to a separate group. The above paper, presented at the symposium, is a revised version.

and became more important. So, you can read my graphics in the sense of a chronological development which I didn't want to show. In comparing Franks and *Alamanni*, you see the Franks in the fifth century mostly have spears and axes and the *Alamanni* in the fifth century have only a few spears and axes. Looking at the same things in the sixth century you can see many spears and axes are Frankish and few spears and axes are Alamannic, and so on. So stability means that the contrasts between the two areas are stable over time.

HALSALL: But then when you get to the seventh century the Franks don't have lots of axes and spears, they've got lots of saxes. So are the Franks getting less Frankish and the *Alamanni* more Frankified? What does that change mean?

SIEGMUND: If you could agree that the grouping is true, this would be an interesting question. Indeed, I think that the differences become smaller in the seventh century. We can see it in the pottery too.

HALSALL: I don't want to sound as if I disagree; I think it is right that there are different weapon-burying customs in different parts of the Merovingian kingdom and that this has to relate to different regional customs. That kind of regional custom is surely part of the shared customs and beliefs which go to make up an ethnic identity. The only other point I had is that basically the conclusion you come to supports the political difference between the East Franks and the West Franks and *Alamanni*, but surely your first step in dividing archaeological areas was to use the historical documents which describe these political units. In that sense, it is a circular argument.

SIEGMUND: I hoped I had shown that I didn't. In general it is impossible to forget the results of previous researchers. But I started my thoughts by looking at the cemeteries and counting pots and weapons. This resulted in histograms where one could see some groupings, which made me divide the material into groups. By mapping these groups one can observe areas of similar weaponry and burial customs.

HALSALL: You do this statistically then.

SIEGMUND: Statistically and with no previous assumption taken from historical sources.

HALSALL: So for each cemetery you show statistically the integration into one area or another? Can it be shown that there is a statistical difference between each side of the Rhine, between the Alamannic and East Frankish areas? But without using the Rhine in any pre-determined way can you show, without any historical knowledge, that these things change, and group the data into meaningful units purely on an archaeological basis?

SIEGMUND: Yes.

GREEN: I like your defence that it is impossible to forget previous research. So to that extent we are all, whether we like it or not, in the middle of a circular argument.

HALSALL: My question really is, how do we know that the difference between Franks west and Franks east of the Rhine is significant? The difference in frequencies of weapons seems quite small sometimes, and blurred. I bet that if you

looked closely there is much more of a continuum from one extreme to the other which you probably couldn't statistically split into groupings unless you started with a pre-conceived idea of a barrier between East and West Franks.

SIEGMUND: The question of Western and Eastern Franks is not a central one in my paper. There are some archaeological difficulties with the fifth and seventh centuries. In the fifth century we have very few cemeteries, so I collected every place which seemed remotely useful. By doing that you obtain some chronological difference: 'West Franks' means cemeteries belonging to the early fifth century further west of the Rhine, and the collection of 'East Franks' includes the cemeteries of the second half of the fifth century situated more or less along the Rhine. So, there are some chronological effects in this picture. In the seventh century we observe a rapid change of burial customs whereby weapon depositions gradually decrease. This had some effect on the composition of the armament. The saxe was the last weapon to vanish. For this reason it appears to be dominant in the West. However, this is not the real phenomenon, but only a result of the gradual vanishing of the entire armament. As a whole, I would not make an ethnic contrast between Western Franks and Eastern Franks from these observations. The ethnic contrast is between Franks and *Alamanni*.

AUSENDA: We are on weapons in burials. I'll come right away to your diagrams. Based on field experience. I think that they are extremely interesting: I look at the value of the weapons in the following way. Hadendowa carry swords and some Beni Amer do too. Swords are a prestige symbol and, until about fifty years ago, they were fairly expensive, but now they are made from automobile springs so that almost every adult male has a sword. The items which are most expensive are shields because they are made of elephant or rhinoceros hide. There is a sequence of values which goes from the shield which is the most expensive of all, to the sword and the least expensive is the spear. Nowadays they make spears from sharpened reinforcing bars; when they go abroad at night they carry these spears with which they can keep hyenas or other predators at bay. Coming to your diagrams after this brief introduction, I think that I can detect that also amongst the Franks there is a scale of values. There again the most expensive, judging by the low frequency, seems to be the shield, then comes the sword, then the saxe and last spear and axe. Fig. 6-1 seems to confirm that in the fifth century the West Franks were wealthier than the East Franks. In the sixth century the West Franks were still wealthier than their eastern counterparts as far as the proportion of shields, swords, saxes and spears seems to show. But in the seventh century the eastern Franks seem to become wealthier. Is that the meaning or not?

The second question concerns pottery and there too I have a consideration to make. It seems to me that hand-made pottery is correlated with living in the countryside and wheel-made pottery with urban living. It looks to me as if the Saxons at the time were more traditional and less urbanized. As far as glass is concerned, I think that should be related to wealth and it also shows the shift from West to East Franks. Would you like to comment on that?

SIEGMUND: Yes. Beginning with the glass. Merovingian glass might be produced only in a restricted area, maybe in Cologne. Therefore, it is possible that the opportunity of getting it may not be the same over the entire area. It might be easier to buy it in Cologne and more difficult to buy it in Stuttgart. But I think one can show that these are the effects of different burial customs too. The easiest way to prove this is given by elite graves (tables 6-1 to 6-4). In southern Germany there are certain expensive and imported grave goods, but almost no glass. Placing a glass vessel in a grave is not only a question of wealth but of burial custom. I would agree with your interpretation as far as hand-made pottery is concerned, but it seems to be due less to a difference between countryside and urban areas than to an economic one: wheel-thrown pottery is produced by specialized craftsmen, hand-made pottery may be produced at home, maybe by craftsmen, but not specialized.

On the different value of the weapons: we know very little about it. From the *Lex Ribvaria* § 40.11 we learn that the minimal armament of a Frank consisted of a shield and a spear, and we can see that swords are more expensive. Shield and spear together were valued at 2 *solidi*, a naked sword was valued at 3 *solidi* and a sword with its scabbard and belt at 7 *solidi*. However, I would like to read your observations in a different way, because I do not believe in generally poor Franks with spears and wealthier *Alamanni* with swords and saxes. I think that this is due to two ethnically different burial customs which reflect a different armament in real life and/or a different system of value-estimation of the weapons.

AUSENDA: I know, but what do you say about this shift from West Franks to East Franks as far as swords are concerned? From the fifth to the seventh century.

SIEGMUND: As I pointed out before, in the fifth century it might be more a question of chronology, in the sixth and seventh century it is a question of burial customs.

AUSENDA: So, you don't think that this shows that the East Franks are becoming wealthier than the West Franks.

SIEGMUND: Maybe, but I can't see it from my pictures.

WOOD: You need numbers as well as proportions to make that inference.

SIEGMUND: And that's a problem indeed. Pottery and glasses were not the object of grave robbers and, therefore, theirs can be counted as real frequencies. Weapons are more frequently the objects of grave robbery. I can show that counting weapon frequencies is problematic, but that the proportions between weapons after grave robberies do not change. Therefore, I took proportions for my further analyses and that brings in problems when talking about wealth.

HALSALL: Can we judge wealth from these kinds of things at all? The increase in the saxe amongst the West Franks is, as you said, part of the process whereby weapons in graves become much fewer and much more standardized, not that it is becoming more common in real life, or less expensive. In the sixth century you can see a wide array of different types of weaponry in Frankish burials. Shields are not very common in West Frankish areas. They seem to be in the elite graves, but not because shields are expensive, I'm sure; it is because it has to do with the burial custom in the region. It also looks as though in the sixth century these

different weapons have different kinds of symbolism and that in the seventh century all these subtle differences were fused into one symbol. You just put a saxe in the grave and it served to stand for all the diverse things that weapons could mean in the sixth century. At that time weapons symbolized adult males, especially young adult males, perhaps in the seventh century they just meant 'males'. I think the difference between the West Frankish and the East Frankish situation, or the Alamannic situation, is also to be explained by different kinds of social change, or differential social change. That standardization in West Frankish burials has to do with an increasingly stable social hierarchy. Among the East Franks this burial evidence suggests a greater degree of competition existing in the sixth century. I think there is a political geographical explanation too: there seems to be more lavish display, and thus more competition, on the fringes of the Merovingian world, as one might expect. At the end of the day we still have to explain why people are performing the rituals. They may do it in different ways because of different regional customs which probably make it part of what it meant to be Alamannic or what it meant to be Frankish or Thuringian. We still need to explain why they have grave-goods at all, and that is a fundamental failing of most interpretations of social structures from burial evidence.

DAMMINGER: I want to come back to the question of glass in the graves and what you [Siegmond] said about this disappearing custom. I think there might be also other reasons apart from burial customs whereby we do not find glasses in seventh century graves in southern Germany. As I see it a glass is not only a product made of special material, but it also served a certain purpose. In graves of the seventh century you can find other objects which served the same purpose, for example drinking vessels made of ceramics. It is the same kind of object in a cheaper version; so I don't think it's a change in the burial custom, because a change in the burial custom would mean no more drinking vessels in graves, but you still have drinking cups made of ceramics or wood. Well, I think it is more a question of distribution and communications. The decrease especially in graves in southern Germany could mean that the inflow from the production centres decreased. I think that has nothing to do with ethnicity, it just says something about communications, and economics remain hypothetical.

SIEGMUND: There might have been glass production in Cologne, but I can show Cologne cemeteries in the seventh century where you can see the very same thing you mentioned: small pottery vessels which are put into the graves instead of glass because they are cheaper, and this effect can be seen over the whole area. Apart from that you can see a decrease in putting vessels into the graves whether they are of pottery or glass.

DAMMINGER: This decrease could mean two things; it might be a change in burial rites: they tend to put cheaper goods into the graves; or it might be that glass became more expensive and no longer affordable to be put in graves.

SIEGMUND: I think my model fits the things one can see in élite graves. The élite are wealthy and have no problems in depositing expensive grave-goods. Look at the seventh century élite graves in southern Germany: almost no glass.

HARDT: I always look for silver goods in Alamannic cemeteries, but I couldn't find any in the graves.

DAMMINGER: Well, there are glasses at least in the late seventh century, but only a few special types.

HUMMER: I have a question about the deviation among graves and among cemeteries. Are there some graves or cemeteries in the Alamannic region that look Frankish, or some in the Frankish region that look Alamannic? You look at the data in the aggregate, but this may disguise ethnic diversity within the 'Alamannic' or 'Frankish' regions.

SIEGMUND: Well, I looked at the cemeteries as a whole. It seems to be important for this approach because we know that this was a time of some mobility, when we may expect some Franks in Alamannic cemeteries and viceversa. So, I believe it was necessary to aggregate the data to do away with few individual effects that I wanted to get rid of. In my maps I tried to show the general variation between the cemeteries by the different size of the symbols. Cemeteries which are very close to the ideal Alamannic or to the ideal Frankish cemetery have a larger symbol and those which are somewhat removed from the ideal cemetery have smaller ones. Hence a certain kind of variation is expressed in the maps.

GREEN: I would like to ask you a more general question, but one which is of obvious importance for non-archaeologists. You rightly talk about the inability to correlate archaeological groupings with social status groups, and that could be extended obviously to the difficulty of correlating archaeological groupings with ethnic or with tribal ones. My question is: does archaeology see now any prospect or is it developing a methodology for overcoming this difficulty and achieving some form of correlation?

SIEGMUND: I've tried to give a short history of different approaches in previous research, but I think they don't fit. I actually prefer the system which Lars Jørgensen (1987) developed, basing his argument, as Giorgio did, on the rareness of finds, and concluding that rare finds are expensive and common finds cheap. In following that approach I obtained figs. 6-1 to 6-4 which show many graves having less wealth and some with considerably greater wealth.

GREEN: Yes, but my question aimed beyond that to the correlation with non-archaeological groupings. What methods are being developed, if any, in the archaeological side to achieve such correlations?

SIEGMUND: What do you mean by non-archaeological groupings?

GREEN: Ethnic groups, tribal groupings.

SIEGMUND: I think I showed it.

GREEN: Yes, but is this methodologically a current preoccupation of archaeology or not? I am asking the question beyond the confines of your paper, but applied to your discipline at large.

SIEGMUND: Actually most archaeologists are quite sceptical as to whether regional patterns can be related to ethnic groups, or whether such methods of wealth estimation can be related to historical social categories such as 'free' and 'unfree'.



DAMMINGER: I would like to mention a Master's thesis on a cemetery in Oberderdingen where the author did some work along these lines. He tried to get a 'fingerprint' of the cemeteries looking at each cemetery as a whole under certain aspects to find regional differences. He used other categories, but it is basically the same method Frank tried to use.

SIEGMUND: Something similar has been done by Heinrich Härke (1992). He used weapon graves to analyse social questions not questions relating to ethnic groups, but I think he sometimes showed that there is an ethnic component to social questions too.

GREEN: You understand that this is the problem which is most pressing for non-archaeologists. What can archaeology yield for other disciplines?

HALSALL: I have two points on this. The first is that I think you have to be very careful when you try to find ethnic differences. I mean you said in your paper that there are lots of other regional variations within the grave-good burying regions of what had been Roman Europe; we have to be careful that we don't only choose the ones which suit us and which fit the documentary and historical picture of ethnic groupings. The other point is that where there are differences between ethnic zones, and there are some, they are much vaguer than has perhaps been suggested. Where there are these differences, at least in the extremes, from one area to another in burial customs, those differences in custom are surely what goes to make up ethnicity. Therefore we can see a connection between burial customs and ethnicity but only if you accept that these customs are being used deliberately, actively, to try and *create* an ethnic identity, and do not use the archaeological evidence to suggest that everybody buried in a particular way is somehow biologically or genetically a Frank or an *Alamannus*, or descended from one. This is a period when new political units were being created and material culture, things like burial style, was amongst the sort of things that were used in the creation of ethnic identities. So, when we see the burial of specific combinations of weapons which on Frank's map is in what we know to be Alamannic regions, then that kind of burial, to the people who carried out, or viewed, the burial there, may well have been part of what it meant to be Alamannic. But I don't think that if you see a similar kind of burial somewhere else, you can say off hand "it's an *Alamannus*", or that these people buried in Frankish style are somehow people who appeared in or moved into a region. So, yes, burial customs were part of what it meant to be Frankish, but in a much more flexible sort of way.

WOOD: I just wanted to pick up on the question of ethnicity. But I think there is a real problem with what we all understand by this. I'm not certain that there is necessarily a conflict between the notion of biologically unified group on one hand and a polyethnic mix as suggested by Wenskus and Wolfram on the other. *Lex Ribvaria* (§ 35.3) contains our only text on ethnicity, and there ethnicity goes with place of birth; it does not go with blood at all. And I think that that's the one handle we've got. I wonder whether your emphasis on common people doesn't suggest more biological stability than one might expect.

SIEGMUND: My problem with Herwig Wolfram (1979) is his view that society is dominated by the kings. One became a Goth if one said "I am a Goth", or better, if one became part of the Gothic king's army. And I have difficulties with this picture of a totally fluid society. When we look in my paper at the difference between commoners and leading groups, it seems that the commoners are carrying these things which make the ethnic differences. So these differences are not related to the kings.

WOOD: But the conclusion then would be that we probably don't know what these common people are calling themselves. In general, medieval ethnicity doesn't have to have anything to do with blood.

LOSEBY: Yes, I'm picking up on that. I wonder about your labeling of these samples. I mean you said in your introduction to the paper you now reject the idea of the Upper Main area as a distinct region, as opposed to a group within the region. And yet if you look at the fifth-century sample the people look very much in between your Frankish samples and your Alamannic ones. So they are not a distinct group. Which do you think they belong to if you intend using the ethnic labels to define these?

SIEGMUND: It was in fact a problem. They are somewhat in between the two and I was trying to form a third one by itself and try it: it doesn't fit. So it's an area where things are moving. I showed you the maps (figs. 6-17 and 6-18) where cemeteries seem to change their identity with time and they are concentrated in this specific area. Therefore this region in some aspects seems to lie between the others.

LOSEBY: Why do you want to reject it? I mean, it seems to be useful to present the Upper Main area as distinct.

SIEGMUND: It is a question of the background and our interpretation of the variation. There are differences within the Frankish area; we talked about the question of West and East. So we have to decide where the main level of differences lies; to me it seems to be the one between Franks and *Alamanni*. Going one level lower, one can see certain differences within the Frankish and the Alamannic area. The Upper Main area, which I've shown only in my pre-circulated paper, is in my opinion only founded on such differences at the lower level.

LOSEBY: So, if you rejected the Alamannic area, then on your other level are these supposed to be Franks or *Alamanni*? You can't say because they are between the two.

SIEGMUND: I beg your pardon, I refer now to my actual maps and there most of these cemeteries belong to the Franks.

DAMMINGER: May I make a practical remark on this. You could have chosen another way of presenting the data here, for example a kind of diagram where every mark for a cemetery indicates the rate of occurrence of the criteria examined by you. If there really are distinctive clusters within this statistical frame you have to look whether the cemeteries which are represented by the marks of a cluster form a geographical or regional unit. In a following step you can try to label the units and, if they coincide with tribal areas, interpret them ethnically. On the other hand, it would not be correct to use historical or regional presuppositions to create groups within an otherwise fluid statistical structure without distinct clusters.

SIEGMUND: That's the background of my decision about the Upper Main area, based on which I'm presenting the results here. The background are some statistics, and the statistics show that there are clusters, but there are only two main clusters: Frankish and Alamannic, and the Upper Main area belongs to these clusters but does not form a single cluster itself.

HARDT: A question about ethnicity and ethnic change in this Main area especially the rural Main area to the north; in 496 after the conversion of Clovis, there was a battle between Franks and *Alamanni*. The common opinion is that, at this time, *Alamanni* lived on Glauberg and Dünsburg in hill-forts near Büdingen, Hessen, and that, after their defeat, they moved back to the inner areas of the later Suebic tribal region. Is there anything in the cemeteries and grave-goods that could show this change? Could it be that *Alamanni* really lived in these regions north of the Neckar?

SIEGMUND: It is a very special question pointing to a time and a region where we have only few cemeteries. In general I think that from the middle of the fifth century onwards there are no, or maybe very few, Alamannic settlements north of the Lower Neckar.

HARDT: What do you think about the cemetery at Eschborn near Frankfurt/Main. It was published by Hermann Ament as an Alamannic burial-place (Ament 1992).

SIEGMUND: In my opinion Eschborn is a Frankish cemetery.

DAMMINGER: There is evidence that at least some parts of the population were affected by the change in power in southern Germany. That doesn't mean a total relocation of the Alamannic population, but the cemeteries of the Hemmingen type which you can find all over southern Germany stop around 500 AD. This indicates at the least the emigration of those persons who held important positions within the Alamannic system. This corresponds to an archaeologically provable immigration of Alamannic groups into *Raetia* and even into Italy. The change in power had some political effect, but probably not for the whole population. Unfortunately we haven't yet found any settlements of this time which ended about 500 AD.

SIEGMUND: Such cemeteries which end at about 500 AD can be found in southern Germany, but there are also some cemeteries which run through this time.

DAMMINGER: There are examples of both: Pleidelsheim, for example, was less affected than the classical 'Hemmingen' cemeteries.

HARDT: We have examples of both continuity and change.

SIEGMUND [changing the subject]: Whether we see real armament or not is an old question which I can't really decide. We have rusty iron weapons and we cannot see whether they were used or not. Sometimes shield bosses or helmets show traces of sword slashes, so they were really used, but these are rare observations. I don't know whether the armament I see in the graves is armament which was really used. There are some hints that it is just armament which was used. Taking my pictures of the armament in the Frankish area and looking at the frequency of the axes, I would like to recall the word *franzisca* and its relation to the word 'Franks'.

WOOD: Are they related?

GREEN: Yes. It meant a typically Frankish weapon.

SIEGMUND: When we see the axes dominating in one area and only few in another area, and there is some linguistic linkage between the name of Franks and the name of the weapon, this could be seen as a hint that the weapon was really used here. I wanted to show that there is a conflict. In the *Leges* we see the *pueri*, the young boys are worth a twofold fine (wergild). Archaeologically we recognize that children mostly aren't buried formally and the few who are obtain only few grave-goods. It's a real contrast. It seems to me that older persons tend to get wealthier grave-goods. And that's not what the *Leges* say. The *Leges* say that a fertile woman is an expensive woman.

AUSENDA: You were talking about the laws? I would like to recall that in Langobardic law, weapons were important symbols because people swore on them as if they were a part of their soul that they would be buried with. They swore on their spear and arrow, on *gaida* and *gisil*. I would like to go back to your diagram, which I find very interesting, and ask you, would it be possible to name culture groups on figs. 6-14 to 6-16? The other question is: does continuity increase when the population surveyed shows a greater degree of urbanization where the people were more active and may have lived longer? Concerning tables 6-1 to 6-4, it would be very interesting if you could explain the diagrams and correlate the data with the socio-political situation; in other words, can you tell us about numbers of expensive swords, where they were produced and who produced them? I understand they had gold handles, and of course this is a sign of considerable wealth.

SIEGMUND: In my pre-circulated paper I didn't put any ethnic names on the maps. I think the triangles are the Alamannic cemeteries and the circles are the Frankish ones. The little stars refer to the material in the Upper Main area. To your question about the grave-goods of the élite: well, we don't know how they got their grave-goods. Heiko Steuer (1987) discussed helmets and ring-swords and he didn't use the word 'redistribution', but I assume he thought about processes like that. Such swords cannot be obtained at a local market; they are goods which are obtained from kings through systems of redistribution. I think this is a model which fits gold-hilted swords and maybe also helmets and ring swords. But I don't know whether this model fits other grave-goods. For example, how did the Mediterranean cast-bronze bowls come to the people?

FOURACRE: I want to go back to the differences with the Southern law codes on settlement. There are unreconciled differences between the two papers on settlements, because the figure mentioned by Folke (p. 69 n10, this vol.) was of about 50-60 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, but you say that the population was very sparse. The number of people in settlements has very obvious implications for your social contacts and the definition you give of them.

SIEGMUND: Well, I tried to estimate the population density. There is a certain mathematical formula for cemeteries which is commonly used. I think we agree about this formula. Maybe there are a few differences in using this formula but that does not explain the considerable difference between our statements. Estimates for

one cemetery are not the problem, but how does one obtain information about population density. How do we get mean estimates for an average cemetery? Trying to get data for more than one cemetery one simply would go through our books; one would get a sample based on our larger and, therefore, published cemeteries. Instead, my calculations are based on a region: the Lower Rhine, where I did some research and took all cemeteries which in my belief were more or less completely excavated. By doing that all the smaller ones are included in the sample too, and one gets lower population densities.

DAMMINGER: It is also a question of archaeological sources. The rural settlement of today is linked to the Merovingian settlement system. This affects the frequency with which the different kinds of cemeteries are discovered. Usually the large 'Ortsgräberfelder' lie close to the centre of the present villages. On the other hand, there are small burial places lying outside the villages of the 'Gemarkung' where once in a while single graves are discovered. You rarely have any modern building activity going on there, so hardly any of these cemeteries are completely excavated. In many cases they are not even certainly identified as early medieval burial sites. So, there is quite a potential relating to cemeteries and connected settlements which are simply not discovered or recognized yet. If you consider this, this would raise the population size of the 'Gemarkungen'. In Knittlingen, for example, the cemetery of Oberhofen had about one hundred graves, while its grave-goods only filled one little box. The population calculated by me was about one hundred or, if I stretch the occupation time, 60 individuals.

SIEGMUND: I think it would be very worthwhile if we could get better counts and better numbers. But the effect is not so important as one thinks. Most estimates lead to numbers of about 4 to 6 people per sq. km.

If your average cemetery were a little greater it would not make this number increase much. So, the most important impression is: there are very few people in the western area and in southern Germany. I'm not talking about the centre of the Merovingian kingdom.

AUSENDA: It is interesting, I came up with a figure of 7 per sq.km. in Britain in the fifth century. You came up with 6 for *Germania*.

SIEGMUND: I think there is no great difference between such an estimate of 6 or 7.

DAMMINGER: That would give about 40 individuals for an average size 'Gemarkung'. This figure is a lot smaller than my 100 to 200. But it is interesting that, in the Kraichgau, huge areas of arable land were not settled before the Carolingian period. So it seems that there was no population presence on these areas in the Merovingian period, which would confirm your opinion that there wasn't a great population density at that time.

DE JONG: I have one question about the burial of boys, because I thought that there was something like forty to fifty percent infant mortality. Then you found only 20 percent boys. Does your infant mortality include little babies, which were not buried in graveyards. What were the ages of the children in the graves you found?

SIEGMUND: The real mortality rate decreases from birth to adolescence. Indeed most newborn die just after birth. Physical anthropologists say that the

infant mortality rate must have been about 40 percent to 50 percent. In our cemeteries we find about 15 to 25 percent of children including infants. So there is a gap of about one third to two thirds.

DE JONG: Unless most of those deaths are babies.

HALSALL: You don't often find neonates in a cemetery. This partly results from the possibility that babies were not buried in the community cemetery, and partly from purely archaeological problems, that very small bones such as of very small babies probably don't survive in the ground.

SIEGMUND: It is difficult to give accurate judgements, and to compare cemeteries because they all show different conservation conditions. But as far as I know, even cemeteries with good bone conservation show the above mentioned proportion.

AUSENDA: Could I say something on the burial of children? Small children are not normally buried in cemeteries. In the bush they are buried close to or within the encampments, because they haven't yet gone through the first socializing transition, be it a naming ceremony or a circumcision. Usually it is the circumcised children who are buried in cemeteries. As far as infant mortality is concerned, in the civilized Austro-Hungarian empire in the 1870s the average mortality rate for infants, including five-year olds, was about 40 percent. I think it is safe to conclude that in the Merovingian period the mortality rate was at least 40 percent, if not greater.

LOSEBY: So what happens to infants if they are not buried, and they are not neonates?

SIEGMUND: I don't know, and I would like to know.

DAMMINGER: I have one case of a female burial in Bretten with probable traces of a newborn child between her legs. Unfortunately it is a rather old find of the 1920s, but they documented something in this area that looks like the shape off of a small body. So in some cases women dying in childbirth were buried with their babies. I also excavated one grave in Frankenthal-Eppstein which was extremely small. It might not necessarily have been a newborn, but at least it was a baby.

HALSALL: My point is that the graves of small children would be very small and shallow and are probably easily destroyed through ploughing.

WOOD: Also wild animals eat them up.

DAMMINGER: On the other hand there might have simply been a different burial rite for the newborn. According to Roman burial customs, deceased children were not cremated before they had their first teeth. It would not be surprising if there was a different treatment for children dying so young. You could think of any solution.

HARDT: So it is possible that they were buried outside the settlements. Because I know that at a later period in Germany children are found in settlement-houses under the floor and one can see that people's graves are....

HALSALL: As I was saying yesterday, the degree of attention wished on a burial is somehow related to the degree of stress the death causes the family, so that an adult, a family-head, who dies before the next generation is in place, gets

lots of attention. Similarly among the Franks, it can perhaps be seen in the way that, in old age, graves are less well furnished, because there the next generation is in place, and the stress caused by the deaths is less.

WOOD: That takes you closer to the laws.

HALSALL: But in the law, a young boy has a high wergild, whereas in the archaeology male child-graves are not well furnished. The burial evidence reflects the stress such a death causes in local social relations; but the laws are about the potential damage to a family by another family. So the tensions are not necessarily the same when a child dies, and when one family kills the potential heir of another.

WOOD: The law puts emphasis on pregnant women, children, the next generation.

HALSALL: The difference is that wergilds are about compensation for damage done by one family to another and the burial furnishings reflect the need for a family to recreate social ties and so forth after the death of a family member.

AUSENDA: They are two different things. In one case you have living children; in the other dead children. Now, a living child represents a future investment for the family. If that child is dead, they don't know what to do with it. So there are different attitudes. Guy is right: you have to look at the law as protecting a living child, especially a male, who will become an important support for the family, but if he dies for natural reasons, his value becomes zero.

HALSALL: I think different dimensions of social structure are reflected by the different forms of evidence. For example, in Lorraine there is a really neat correlation between the lavishly furnished female burials, which start when women reach 14 and stop when they are 40, and what *Lex Ribvaria* says about wergilds, which are eight times the normal amount when women are between first child-bearing and 40. However, I think the correlation is just too neat to be true. The Law's reference to 40 years of age is much more a sort of shorthand than anything precise. But, different dimensions of social organization are represented in different types of evidence. The law suggests that the damage done to a family by the killing of a woman was seen to have been less once a woman had ceased to be able to have children. However, there are all kinds of other dimensions of social status which might be demonstrated in burials other than through grave-goods, and yet not be of interest to the lawmakers. There are regional differences. In Lorraine, it seems that young women have jewellery and old women have none. This is very different from the situation at Köln-Müngersdorf, which Frank has studied, and the cemeteries in *Alamannia* where old women have jewellery, but of different types. There is a big difference in the treatment of women. I think that the ways in which women are treated in burial, change regionally much more than is often believed.

## References in the discussion

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