

THE CONTINENTAL SAXONS
FROM THE MIGRATION PERIOD TO THE TENTH CENTURY:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

Edited by

DENNIS H. GREEN and FRANK SIEGMUND

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SOCIAL RELATIONS AMONG THE OLD SAXONS

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The availability of archaeological sources on Continental Saxons differs from that for *Alamanni* and Franks due to other forms of research traditions: many settlements from northern Germany are well known, but relatively few cemeteries especially among those belonging to the Merovingian period have been excavated on a large scale and are seldom published in detail. Hence only about 70-80 cemeteries of the Merovingian period are well-known; their density of about 0.1 find points on 100 square kilometres hovers thus around a factor 20 to 50 below the standard (Siegmund 1998a: 6 tab. 1). All these are based, therefore, on a relatively small set of sources. On the other hand there are also the 'Saxon' cemeteries, particularly those of northern Germany dating to the Roman Iron Age, the Migration period, and later to Carolingian times so that ancient and more recent periods can be observed based on grave finds, as is the case with *Alamanni* and Franks. The research area must be marked out before some theses on social relations are attempted; this means that questions about the archaeological identification of the 'Saxons' must be posed.

The ethnic question

Current archaeological ideas about the early history of the Saxons are based on the attempt to unite the tribal names mentioned in Tacitus' *Germania* with the supposed mention of Saxons by Ptolemy in the middle of the second century AD in a coherent picture and to correlate this with the archaeological conceptions of the late Roman Iron Age (first to third century; e.g. Genrich in Patze 1977:513 ff. with 516 fig. 25; Genrich in Ahrens 1978:43 ff.; Capelle 1998:12 ff.). Those same written sources are now interpreted differently (e.g. Springer 1996, 1999; Pohl 1999). Furthermore, the archaeological record must be verified according to a modern methodology, as far as possible in an argument independent of the supposedly reliable written sources.

In the final late Roman Iron Age and the Migration period (mid-third to fifth century) the 'Saxon urn fields' between the Weser and the Elbe rivers with their typical 'sächsische Buckelurnen' were considered archaeological relics of the Saxons, who were gradually extending southwards (Genrich 1977:521 ff., 529 fig. 28; Genrich 1978:48; cf. Mildenerger 1989:112 fig. 11). The most important archaeological argument brought forward is the observation that urn fields and settlements often continued for long periods of time, and that they show a

remarkable continuity in their funeral and offering ceremonies until the Migration period. As, according to the written sources, the accepted opinion is that the region can be reliably considered as Saxon up to the end of this period, this also allows one to draw conclusions concerning the ethnic classification in earlier times. Certain types of finds and elements of female costume for the late fourth and early fifth centuries show a difference between Saxon graves in the Elbe-Weser region and 'Old-Frankish' funerary remains in the region west of the Rhine (e.g. Böhme 1996:94 fig. 68; Böhme 1999: fig. 11-12).

In recent times new and quite different possibilities for the interpretation of the finds have been developed for the Merovingian period (mid-fifth to seventh centuries); Horst Wolfgang Böhme emphasizes the relation between many phenomena east of the Rhine and finds west of that river where, according to the written sources, they definitely can be regarded as belonging to Merovingian Franks. In his opinion this indicates that some of the peculiarities hitherto considered to be 'typically Saxon' are based on more ancient, common Germanic traditions, which survived for a longer period among 'Old-Franks' east of the Rhine than with the Franks west of that river (Böhme 1999; on Bad Lippspringe cf. Capelle 1998:79 ff.). In his view large parts of Westphalia belonged to this Old-Frankish settlement region even during the sixth and seventh centuries. Christoph Grünewald (1999) explains that Franks, Saxons, and indigenous people [*sic*] in Westphalia cannot be differentiated clearly by archaeological methods. He derives from that a picture of a society based on continuing local traditions, which was only exposed to Frankish and Saxon influences as well as to small immigration groups, but he sees peaceful co-existence in often polyethnic settlement- and funerary communities until the seventh century. Only in the late seventh century does a considerable number of new founded cemeteries with inhumation graves aligned in a south-north direction indicate a massive immigration of Saxons from the north.

The differences in funeral customs between the *Alamanni* and the Franks on the one hand and a large part of the region east of the Rhine appeared to me to be important: cremation graves, the south-north aligned inhumation graves, and a large number of horse burials are increasingly found only there (Siegmund 1999: fig. 11; Siegmund 2000:123 ff., figs. 23-28, 171-172). I would like to outline a region in northern Germany with these characteristics of funeral customs which, for the time being, can be classified as 'not Frankish' and 'not Thuringian' (Fig. 4-1). On the other hand a detailed analysis of these cemeteries shows considerable differences in numerous other characteristics of the offering ceremony (Siegmund 1999:221 f., figs. 12-14). The discovery of clearly different customs in different regions was also pointed out by Friedrich Laux for the cemeteries of Carolingian times (e.g. Laux 1999), and now seems to confirm even different types of houses and settlements (cf. Reichmann 1999; Ruhmann 1999:289 f.), where the well defined forms of houses from Warendorf differ from those of the same period about 30 km away in Halle-Künsebeck (Schroth 1999). In these observations I see references to a greater number of people organized in a simpler way and would like, therefore, to talk in the plural about 'Saxon peoples'— rather than of a unified group as for the *Alamanni*, Franks, and Thuringians.

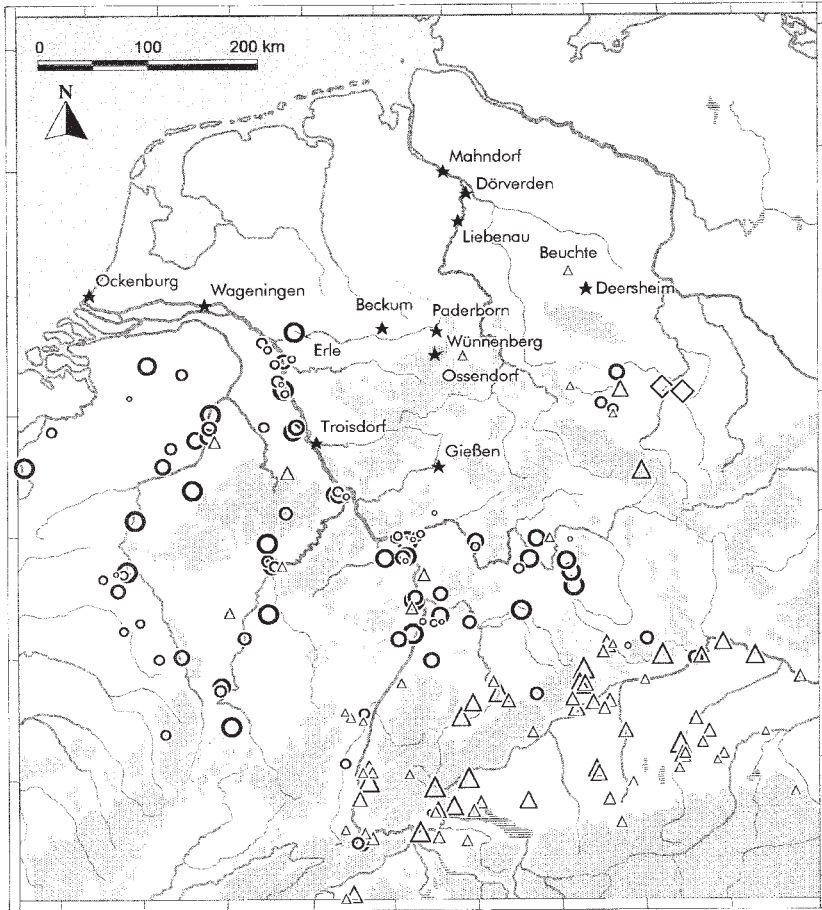


Fig. 4-1: Ethnic classification of the Merovingian cemeteries (approx. 530 - 670 AD). - Circles: Franks; Triangles: Alamanni; Rhombus: Thuringians (only 6th cent.); black stars: cemeteries of the different Saxon peoples. The size of the symbols increases with the certainty of classification.

The basis of these different points of view concerning the ethnic question are the completely different ideas about Franks and Saxons. While Böhme considers the Franks to be an ethnic unit which developed east of the Rhine from the traditions of the late Roman Iron Age, and was subjected to innovating influences in the Roman empire west of the Rhine, sharing at the same time several traditions with the 'Old-Franks' east of the Rhine, Grünewald considers Franks and Saxons as entities with characteristics originating from outside Westphalia, who partly co-existed peacefully in polyethnic settlements with nameless natives in Westphalia. I myself see Franks as more a Germanic ethnic group, whose important characteristics west of the Rhine were first formed under Roman influence. People with a less complex level of organization, who were regarded as completely

foreign by *Alamanni* as well as by Franks lived east of the Rhine; however, among themselves they were so heterogeneous that, according to archaeology, the theory of a uniform 'Saxon ethnos' is not justified for this period.

The numerous efforts undertaken at present towards the editing and publishing of further cemeteries in Westphalia and Lower-Saxony allow us to hope for a significant increase in the archaeological sources in the future, which probably supply further arguments that may help to validate or reject the three models described above.

I would like to emphasize that my theories that follow are not related to the Saxons, but to the different Saxon peoples in the region outlined in Figure 4-1. The few adequately published cemeteries hardly allow us to attribute these people to a particular region. If one takes as a test the cemeteries from Liebenau, Deersheim, Dörverden and Mahndorf, as well as again the related groups from Beckum, Wageningen and Wünnenberg, which have similar funerary- and sacrificial ceremonies, as indicators, this would lead to regions connected to one another in an area of ten to twenty thousand square kilometres. Compared with the settlement areas of the *Alamanni* and Franks—approximately one hundred to two hundred thousand square kilometres—this means smaller regions by a factor of about five to ten which, moreover, according to our present knowledge, were much less densely populated.

In the regions settled by *Alamanni* and Franks, the beginning and extension of funerary rites characterized by lack of funerary sacrifices, and the end of row-grave cemeteries are the indication of a clear discontinuity during the second half of the seventh century, which can also be interpreted as a reduction in social stress and the desire to emphasize demonstrably ethnic differences in the cult of the dead. This is followed by a short, until now hardly well researched period of farmstead graves ('Hofgrablegen') without burial goods (e.g. Quast 1998; Theuvs 1996:755 fig. 613; Böhme 2000:82 ff., fig. 7), this in turn is followed by the era of gifts not destined for burials in Carolingian churchyards ('Kirchhöfe'). Farmstead graves are also known from Westphalia (Schroth 1999:292 fig. 1). On the other hand, in Westphalia and Lower Saxony—besides the usual west-east-oriented inhumation graves—during the Carolingian period we observe a greater duration of burial-gift customs, the continuity of unusual cremation graves, south-north aligned graves as well as animal graves. Considerable regional differences, similar to those in the Merovingian period, are noticeable then (Bärenfänger 1998; Kleemann 1992).

The decrease in settlements in the fifth and sixth centuries

Exceptionally similar finds and many common sacrificial and burial ceremonies on both sides of the Channel relating to the fifth century prove a close relationship between individual communities on the Continent and in England (Gebühr 1997:13). These findings are considered as archaeological remains of a migration of Angles and Saxons to England (an overview is given in articles in '*Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 11 [1998]). At the same time many settlements and many of the large urn-fields in wider areas of northern Germany come to an end in the first half

of the fifth century, the number of finds and sites are remarkably few in the late fifth and early sixth centuries (Häßler 1991:288). The pollen analyses for this period seem to indicate a decline in agriculture along with a re-forestation (Behre 1976). This phenomenon has been interpreted as a further proof of the emigration of many Saxons to England (e.g. Schmid 1978:345 ff., 360; Behre 1976:114 f.; Capelle 1998:68 ff.; in greater detail Häßler 1991:287 ff.).

A new critical examination of similar theories concerning the landscape of the Angles in Jutland has revealed a considerably different picture, according to which the decline is less severe and has to be classified chronologically in a different way, while some phenomena can be explained even without plausible migration theories (Gebühr 1998). There are now similar results for the Saxon area due to the precise evaluation of the cemetery of Liebenau by Maren Siegmann (1999). The particularly favourable preservation conditions by later sand overblowing have made the typical burial forms of the Merovingian period more recognizable (Häßler 1999). The corpses were cremated, and later probably many burnt burial-gifts were picked out of the ashes, while the remains were covered just by a low mound. The places on the surface of those regions where pyres were fired are very sensitive to destruction and are hardly identifiable archaeologically without subsequent sand overblowing (cf. Laux 1991). According to Siegmann's analysis for Liebenau, 62% of the graves are places where pyres were lit without urns during the Migration period (380 to 450 AD), in the Merovingian period (450 to 600 AD) around 69%. In late Merovingian times (600-700 AD) the share is 26%, then these customs came to an end (Fig. 4-2). One could conclude that under the usual conditions of preservation, around two thirds of all the

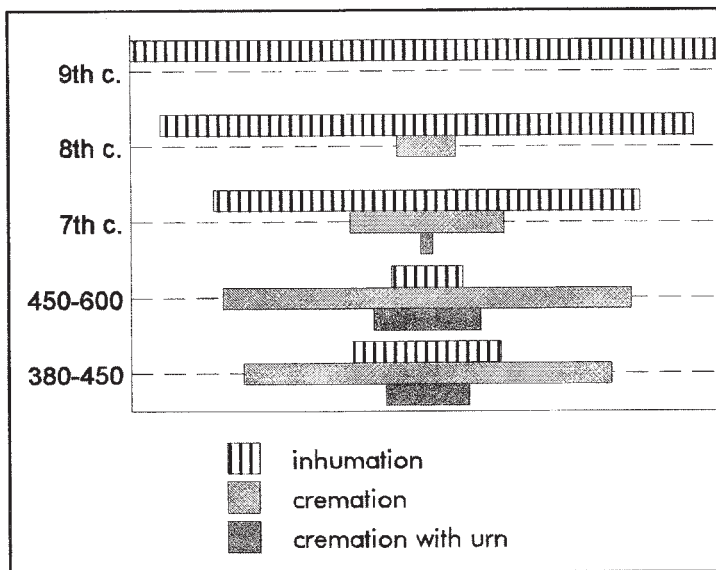


Fig. 4-2: The periodical development of burial customs in Liebenau. - The length of the bars corresponds to the share of the respective custom. According to Siegmann 1999: 24.

cemeteries of the fifth and sixth centuries would have been destroyed. Fig. 4-3 shows that, even beyond Liebenau, the cemeteries of the sixth and seventh centuries in

<i>cemetery</i>	<i>n of graves</i>	<i>dating approx.</i>	<i>time-span in years</i>	<i>graves per year</i>	<i>estim. living population</i>
Westerwanna	3.000	1. - 6. c.	450	6,67	150
Troisdorf	72	100 - 600	500	0,14	3
Perlberg	900	3. - 6. c.	275	3,27	74
Issendorf	3.516	3. - 6. c.	275	12,79	288
Beelen	35	4. - 7. c.	250	0,14	3
Herzebrock	22	midth 5. c.	60	0,37	8
mean			302	3,90	88
Beuchte	11	6. c.	30	0,37	8
Deersheim	42	6. c.	70	0,60	14
Erle	25	6. c.	80	0,31	7
Ossendorf	8	6. c.	55	0,15	3
Beckum	64	6. - 7. c.	185	0,35	8
Dorsten	16	e. 5. - 7. c.	175	0,09	2
Wageningen	24	6. - 7. c.	110	0,22	5
Gießen	11	7. c.	85	0,13	3
Ockenburg	22	7. c.	85	0,26	6
Paderborn	17	7. c.	60	0,28	6
mean			94	0,28	6
Dortmund	97	2.h.6.-9. c.	300	0,32	7
Liebenau	553	380 - 850	470	1,18	27
Lünen	83	3. - 8. c.	500	0,17	4
Mahndorf	400	300 - 850	550	0,73	16
Dörverden	212	600 - 850	250	0,85	19
Soest	ca. 300	2.h.6.-8. c.	250	1,20	27
Wünnenberg	63	550 - 850	300	0,21	5
mean			374	0,67	15
Anderten	131	7. c. - 800	200	0,66	15
Drantum	528	675 - 850	175	3,02	68
Ketzendorf	553	700 - 925	225	2,46	55
Maschen	210	670 - 850	180	1,17	26
Oldendorf	159	600 - 900	300	0,53	12
Wulfesen	692	625 - 900	275	2,52	57
mean			226	1,73	39

Fig. 4-3: Occupation period and number of graves in some of the Saxon cemeteries. Comp. Figs. 4-4, 4-5; dates as per Siegmund 1999:344 ff., Stiegemann & Wemhoff 1999 *passim*, Laux 1983. The figures in the last column are based on an assumed mean life expectancy of 22.5 years. (Cf. Siegmund 1993b:49 with data for the Frankish region).

particular show fewer burials in contrast to the ancient and more recent ones. This validates the assumption that the Liebenau finds of a time-related burial custom unfavourable to preservation can be generalized.

At the same time one should remember that the phenomenon is widespread, as also for *Alamanni* and Franks a considerable number of fifth-century burials are missing, without having to put forward complex migration hypotheses for this (Ament 1992:46 ff.). The complex method of discovery at the cemetery of Issendorf gives a further possibility of distortion to our sources. On the edge of a large Migration period cremation cemetery, deeper lying inhumation graves belonging to the fifth and sixth centuries were discovered accidentally and very recently. Altogether it shows that the specific burial customs of this period can explain the reduction in the frequencies of the finds. The strong decline in the intensity of settlements shown in the pollen profiles, taken to support the older theories, is recognized now as a widespread phenomenon (for Lower-Saxony see Beug 1992:303, 316; for the Rhineland see Kalis & Zimmermann 1997:181 fig. 1; for southern Germany see Rösch 1997:327 f. fig. 357; Smettan 1999). Severe changes in Alamannic and Frankish agriculture are considered as plausibly explained by the development during the Roman period.

The layout of cemeteries

The Alamannic and Frankish cemeteries of the Merovingian period were mostly used for a period over 80 to 185 years (Fig. 4-4) and show about 0.3 to 1.9 burials per year (Fig. 4-5). Compared with them, many, but not all burial grounds in the Saxon area were in use for a remarkably long period; continuous occupation for

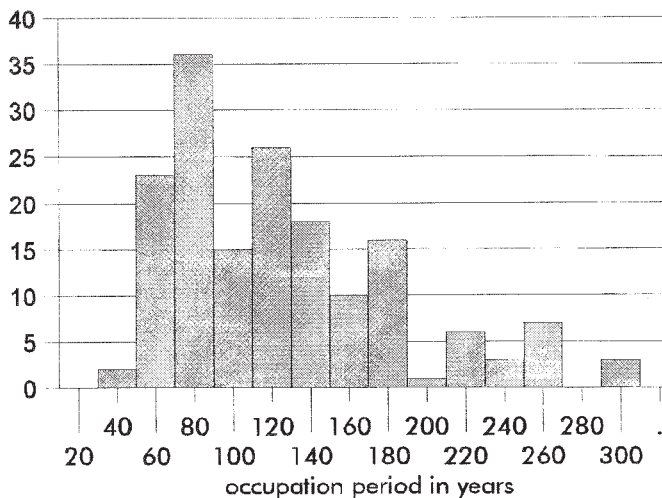


Fig. 4-4: Occupation period of Alamannic and Frankish cemeteries of the Merovingian period. - Sample of 166 places, comp. Fig 4-3. Mean $125 \pm 58,5$ years, median 115 years (50% span 80 - 185).

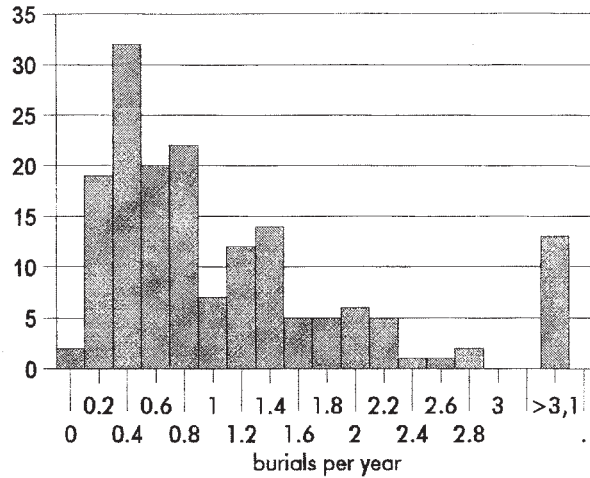


Fig. 4-5: Number of burials per year in Alamannic and Frankish cemeteries of the Merovingian period. Sample of 166 places, comp. Fig. 4-3. Mean $1,161 \pm 1,157$ graves; median 0,78 graves (50%-span 0,32-1,92).

over 300 to 500 years is not rare (Fig. 4-3). The fact that particularly the cemeteries during the Merovingian period in the Saxon area show comparably fewer burials per year, may derive from unreliable sources and can be explained with the phenomena mentioned above. Therefore, further efforts to interpret it are not needed. On the other hand, however, some of the early urn fields especially are considerably larger. This indicates other kinds of burial communities: whereas in the Alamannic and Frankish areas every settlement had its cemetery, it seems in this case that several settlement communities congregated at a central burial ground.

Alamannic and Frankish cemeteries of the sixth and seventh centuries are mostly laid out in 'row graves' ('Reihengräberfelder'). This term describes not only the typical burial gifts, the orientation and the regular placing of the corpses, but also the fact that the graves were laid down in some time-related sequence. To date 'row graves' are unknown in the Saxon region. All the larger cemeteries, which can be adequately differentiated chronologically, show that burials belonging to very different periods lay close to one another. The polycentric organization of the cemeteries indicates that kin relationships between the dead, rather than time, determined the burial place. I suggest this as a significant sign of the existence of kinship groups in the Saxon region.

In this context I would like to put forward the find that many Saxon cemeteries lay besides old burial monuments. The 'Gründergräber' known from the Alamannic and Frankish cemeteries come from dead individuals that existed in reality and had lived in that community (real ancestors); whereas Saxon cemeteries are often noticeably oriented to a clearly visible Stone Age or Bronze Age cairn and thus establish a connection with mythical ancestors (Thäte 1996; Härke & Williams 1997).

Altogether this presents a picture of relatively small, locally stable communities over long periods, which are based on close kin relations and strengthen their identity by relating to mythical ancestors. They had a great respect for dead people; whereas, in the case of *Alamanni* and Franks one third of all graves on average were looted by contemporaries, the plundering of graves by contemporaries was practically unknown in Saxon cemeteries.

Demography

Anthropological research has been carried out only for few cemeteries, a detailed report has been published only for Liebenau (Rösing 1994:202 tab. 12). The statements about demography are, therefore, unfortunately based only on one cemetery, however large.

The impression of an exceptionally low share of children’s graves in Saxon burial grounds is not confirmed by comparative observation (Rösing 1994:202). The presence of children’s graves in the cemeteries of *Alamanni* and Franks during the Merovingian period is usually between 10 and 30 %, accordingly two frequency maxima around 13 and 22 percent can be observed (Fig. 4-6). Liebenau fits very well in this example with about 23% of children’s graves (Rösing 1994:202 tab. 12). The fewer chances of children’s graves to be preserved and, probably more important, other forms of treatment of dead children is a common phenomenon.

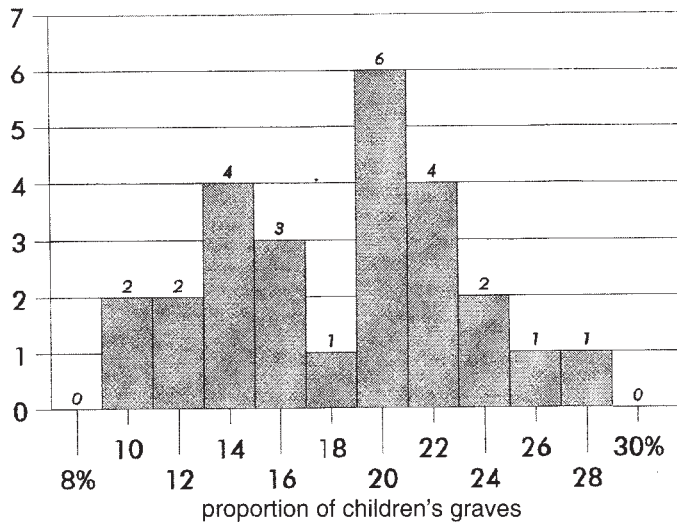


Fig.4-6: Proportion of children’s graves on Alemannic and Frankish cemeteries of the Merovingian period. The histogram shows two groups: eleven cemeteries with a share of 9 - 16 percent (mean 13,2 % ± 2,1) and fifteen cemeteries with a share between 17 and 29 percent (mean 21,8% ± 2,8).

<i>cemetery</i>	♀+♂+? $e_{15} + 15$	♀ $e_{15} + 15$	♂ $e_{15} + 15$
Liebenau	44,3	39,6	40,9
Eltville	38,5	37,6	39,3
Mannheim	46,3	44,0	48,0
Westheim	32,6	28,4	33,9
Kleinlangheim	36,8	35,3	38,4
Altenerdingen	40,0	40,8	42,3
Fridingen	46,5	45,6	47,4
<i>total</i>	40,7	-2,7	

Fig. 4-7: Average life expectancy in case of survival of childhood ($e_{15} + 15$) in some of the big, anthropologically well-examined cemeteries of the Merovingian period.

The average life expectancy of a Liebenau individual who had survived the dangerous phase of childhood was 44.3 years (Rösing 1994:202 tab. 12; for reasons of better comparability I prefer the mean life expectancy of the children that survived

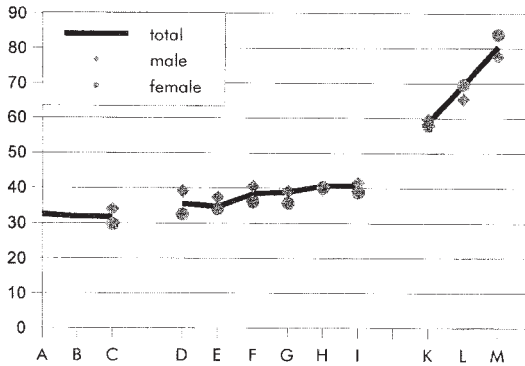


Fig. 4-8: Average life expectancy ($e_{15} + 15$) of people in diachronic comparison - A: Neanderthal man; B: Upper Palaeolithic; C: Early Neolithic in the Near East; D: Danubian; E: Bronze Age; F: Pre-Roman Iron Age; G: Late Roman Iron Age, Germanic areas; H: western Roman provinces; I: Merovingian Period; K: Germany around 1800 AD; L: Germany around 1900 AD; M: Germany 1985 AD.

childhood, usually abridged in demographic tables as $e_{15} + 15$). Even these values fit in quite well with what was usual at that time (Fig. 4-7).

Throughout prehistory until our immediate past, the risk of death for women was higher than that for men. Only Roman civilization brought better living conditions for women in the western provinces, this is evident from the more balanced risks of death for women and men (Fig. 4-8). The increased risk of death for women in their fertile phase is less restricted to a particular age span, between late 20s to early 30s, in Liebenau than in comparable burial grounds of

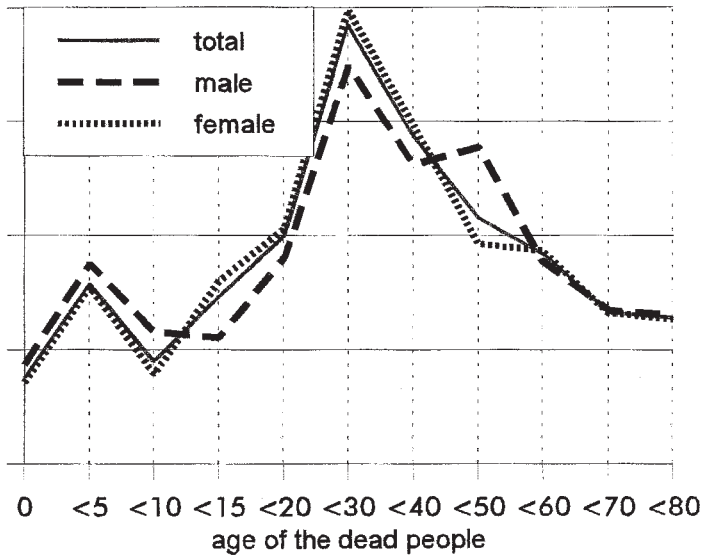


Fig. 4-9: Sex differentiated mortality in Liebenau. According to the data of Rösing 1994: 204 tab. 14.

Alamanni and Franks (Fig. 4-9; cf. Siegmund 1998c:108 ff. with figs. 3-6). Should these observations be confirmed for other Saxon populations, this would indicate a considerably less standardized marriage behaviour.

Women and men

The bigger urn cemeteries of the Migration period are poor in grave-goods, and they mostly contain only the ashes of the dead. The scarce appearance of dress materials is mostly classified as female dresses. Men were usually buried without weapons except for rare exceptions, so that—if one concentrates only on grave-goods—one finds a larger number of women's graves.

The seeming predominance of female graves continues during the Merovingian period. The precise analysis of Liebenau by Siegmann (1999) allows one to understand the phenomenon better: cremation graves tend to be better and more richly furnished as compared to contemporary inhumations. In Liebenau, after each cremation, the remains on the sites of the pyres usually were gathered by hand before being buried in barrows. In this process in which, for obvious reasons, large objects were taken away more easily than small-sized burial-gifts, and weapons, which characterized men's graves, were removed, only typical female grave-goods, such as beads or spinning whorls, had a greater probability of remaining behind. These differences increase with the different values of the objects and, with their help, women and men can be identified. Not every man

could be offered a valuable weapon, whereas few beads and a spinning whorl could also be left in poorer graves.

If one ignores the differences peculiar to cremation rites, then a similar picture can be seen over a long period and in a vast area, as is also the case for *Alamanni* and Franks. Women are characterized by a costume, to which among other things a pair of fibulae, bead necklaces and a spinning whorl belong. Men carry weapons, and weapons as grave-goods are much rarer among Saxons than among *Alamanni* and Franks. The ratio is approximately 1:1.8 in the sixth century and 1:1.6 in the seventh century in case of datable graves. As with *Alamanni* and Franks, sets of a firesteel and flintstone are a part of the male costume (Siegmund 1999:183 f.; Langenbrink & Siegmund 1989:72 fig. 8), combs are usual grave-goods of both genders (Siegmund 1999:187 f.; Siegmund 1998a:114 tab. 15). Differences between gender-specific furnishing of *Alamanni* and Franks seem to be few: tweezers, which in case of Franks exclusively come from male graves (Siegmund 1998a:113 f.), in Liebenau are typical of female graves. Saxon women did not wear earrings.

Grave-goods and age groups

<i>age group</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>25 % - 75 %</i>
neonatus	27	1	0 - 1
infans	61	1	0 - 5
juvenis	45	5	1 - 9,5
adultus	56	5	1 - 8
ad.-mat.	126	6	4 - 9,3
maturus	13	3	0,5 - 9
mat.-sen.	6	8	4,5 - 15,3
senilis	2	(1)	-

Fig. 4-10: Liebenau. Number of burial-gifts per grave, differentiated according to the age groups. The median divides the observations in above and below halves, the column "25% - 75%" shows the surrounding span containing 50 percent of total observations.

Among children, young girls are probably decorated earlier with more lavish costumes—this is evident from the grave-goods consisting of bead necklaces, belt buckles and knives—than boys, even this is a find, which is also seen in the Alamannic and Frankish regions (eg. Siegmund 1994:245 f.).

The offering of gender specific-objects is for obvious reasons mostly related to biological age. In the case of Saxons—as in the case of *Alamanni* and Franks—fibulae and weapons are only offered, if at all, from youth onwards (Fig. 4-10, 4-11, 4-12; Siegmund 1999:704 ff.; cf. e.g. Donié 1999; Grünwald 1998; Halsall 1995:110 ff.; Siegmund 1998b:179 ff.). Exceptions to this rule are seldom found and socially remarkable. However, beads are found even on small girls, but richer bead chains are worn only by adult women (Siegmund 1999:704 ff.).

<i>age group</i>	<i>n male</i>	<i>spatha or seax</i>	<i>spear</i>	<i>shield</i>	<i>arrows</i>
neonatus	-	-	-	-	-
infans	6	1	-	1	2
juvenis	6	3	1	1	1
adultus	21	6	4	7	6
ad.-mat.	37	6	2	17	10
maturus	13	4	1	2	3
senilis	5	-	-	1	1

Fig. 4-11: Liebenau. Offerings of weapons according to age groups.

Among adults the quantity of grave-goods is the same until old age. Even if the few usable burials urge caution, they seem to indicate that the share of particularly rich graves increases slightly with the age groups 'maturus' and 'senilis' (Fig. 4-10). This corresponds to a widespread tendency of the Merovingian period, whereas in many prehistoric populations until the late Roman Iron Age the wealth of the grave-goods decreases slightly with old age.

<i>weapon combination</i>	<i>infans</i>	<i>juvenis</i>	<i>adultus</i>	<i>ad.-mat.</i>	<i>maturus</i>	<i>senilis</i>
spatha/seax	2	3	2	2	1	-
spatha/seax & spear	-	-	1	-	1	-
spatha/seax & spear & shield	-	-	1	1	-	-
spatha/seax & spear & shield & arrows	-	-	-	1	-	-
spatha/seax & shield	-	-	1	1	1	-
spatha/seax & shield & arrows	-	-	-	1	-	-
spatha/seax & arrows	-	1	3	-	-	-
spear	-	1	1	-	-	-
spear & shield	-	-	1	-	-	-
shield	1	1	4	11	2	1
shield & arrows	1	-	-	2	-	-
arrows	1	-	4	6	2	2

Fig. 4-12: Liebenau. Combinations of weapons according to age groups.

Élite

Some 25 years ago Heiko Steuer made some important observations concerning the Saxon élite (Steuer 1978; cf. Steuer 1998). These observations have not been superseded to date. A difficult problem for present archaeology is the widespread common cremation of dead bodies in the Saxon area from the fifth through to the seventh century, which limits the comparability with the élite-funerals of *Alamanni* and Franks. As a detailed analysis of Liebenau shows (Siegmann 1999:711 ff.), in the double-ritual cemeteries, cremation burials clearly were more richly furnished than inhumation burials; particularly the richer burials which are under discussion. Indeed, questions concerning the élite require looking at richer burials, even though we may have bad observation conditions in the Saxon area because cremation burials are poorly preserved.

If one tries to come to an explanation, despite these difficult funerary customs, then one would like to confirm even today the thesis put forward by Steuer, that élite graves, qualitatively comparable with those in the Alamannic and Frankish regions, are not available or are very rare in the Saxon areas. Few rich individual graves and gold finds testify to the existence of a local élite during the Migration period (e.g. for the 'Fürstin von Issendorf' Grab 3532, see Häßler 1994:40 with pl. 4). After the second half of the fifth century typical élite indicators (e.g. graves with Krefeld-type swords and swords with gold handles; see Siegmund 2000:320 ff.) are missing. In the sixth century, for example, helmets of the Baldenheim type or chains as typical grave-goods of the élite are also missing (Steuer 1987). This indicates a considerably less differentiated society.

A short intermezzo is evident in the second half of the sixth century, during which some exceptionally rich graves with ring-swords are well-known, the 'Fürstengrab' in Beckum (distribution map, see Steuer 1987:209 fig. 9; for dating to NRh 6, *ca* 570-585 AD, see Siegmund 1998a:526) and a similar one from Wünnenberg-Fürstenberg Grab 61 (for dating to NRh 5, *ca* 555-570 AD, see Siegmund 1993a:626).¹ Steuer sees in these widespread swords, probably gifts of the Frankish kings, proofs of the 'Gefolgschaftswesen'. Even horse bits, taken by Christlein (1973) as an important element of graves of his quality group C, allow a determination for the second half of the sixth century of a remarkable frequency of high quality evidence particularly in Westphalia (Oexle 1992:107).

This short-lived Frankish influence documented by the ring-swords spreads further both regionally and socially, as exactly at that time in the third quarter of the sixth century—and only in this period—an import of ceramic vessels which are supposed to come from the Rhineland (7 graves with KWT²-2.11, -2.11, -2.31, -2.32 according to Siegmund 1998a:120 ff. in graves of Liebenau Phases IIc-IIIa) is

¹ NRh, meaning 'Niederrhein', refers to a phase in the chronology of the Lower Rhine after Siegmund 1998a.

² KWT means 'Knickwandtopf' a typical Frankish form of ceramic vessels. The additional numbers refer to special types after Siegmund 1998a:120-135.

observed in Liebenau. We can add other 'imported luxury goods' (Häßler 1999:107 f.) like pearl-edged bronze bowls as well as certain glass vessels ('Rüsselbecher', 'Spitzbecher'). Before and afterwards similar proofs are missing. Immediately after this period, very rich burials such as both 'Kammergräber' from Warburg-Ossendorf (end of the sixth century, Siegmund 1999b:252 f. No. 118-119) show strong connections to North and East without any typical Frankish offerings.

According to Christlein's quality group C, élite burials for the seventh century seem to be completely missing (Christlein 1973). The more recent 'Adelsgräber des achten Jahrhunderts' (Stein 1967; cf. Laux 1983) testify to the long life of burial customs with weapons in northern Germany, which do not continue for a similar élite in contemporary Frankish and Alamannic regions (Steuer 1987:475 ff).

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Discussion

AUSENDA: You talk about “70-80 cemeteries of the Merovingian period are well known; their density of about 0.1 find points in 100 sq km² is thus around a factor 20 to 50 below the standard”(page 77). I confess that, in spite of my background, I do not understand these ratios. If you could explain them, then everything will become clear.

SIEGMUND: I collected information about find spots per square km in the areas to the west and south of the Saxons. In those areas we have about 20 to a maximum of 150 find spots per 1000 sq km. In fact a number of 20 to 50 find spots seems typical of the Alamannic and Frankish regions, while in the Saxon area we have only one find spot per 1000 sq km. An exact comparison of these counts is problematic, because one should take into account the different intensity of the various modern archaeological Heritage institutions and the different probabilities of stumbling upon those find spots. However, a rough comparison may be allowed.

AUSENDA: Thank you very much.

DÖRFLER: Do finds mean settlements, or graves, or ancient cemeteries?

SIEGMUND: Whatever we have. They are only very rough estimates because the information we have is very scarce and very different.

DÖRFLER: I would like to raise another point on this page, regarding the Roman Iron Age: the Roman imports in cemeteries, how do you interpret them in terms of social differentiation? Is that an indication of raids, is it trade, or mercenary service, military service in the army? And is this a source indicated by a find?

SIEGMUND: It is difficult to base the decision on how things came to the Germanic populations only on archaeological sources. Were they plunder from raids, were they payments or something else? I have no idea how to distinguish those possibilities. Concerning the social status, you can distinguish individuals who possessed imported Roman luxury goods from those who did not. One should note, however, that many individuals, especially men, possessed objects derived from the Roman military that show the individual's relation to the Roman world.

DÖRFLER: Do you think you can use this for the reconstruction of a social structure?

SIEGMUND: One can try to do so.

STEUER: I have a geographical question. Saxons and their burial grounds in the early period, in the fourth and fifth centuries, are only concentrated in the northeastern part of the country, near and on the left of the Elbe. And as far as locations more to the south, what sites and small settlements can we find there with some typical Saxon items? In fact you designate only a very small part of what is known later as the Saxon area with the label 'Saxon'. This small area is only about 1/6 of the whole. That is the problem.

SIEGMUND: This is true, I have no ready answer to that question for the third to the fifth century. I can only repeat what Horst Wolfgang Böhme (1999) would say. He brought up arguments to show that the area was inhabited by "Alt-Franken" basing his reasoning on certain objects of women's dress, such as hairpins, certain brooches and so on, attesting to close relations between the Frankish cemeteries on the Roman side of the Rhine and cemeteries east of the Rhine. Since there is a clear relationship between the cemeteries in Roman territory with the Franks, the similar ones to the east of the Rhine should be Frankish too, 'Old-Frankish'. I do not accept his argument entirely, but I have no better answer up to now.

STEUER: And you accept the later great Saxon province? How far does this area reach? Or is it valid only for the part with the richest archaeological finds, which is a very small area? Is there some connection between the Saxons in the fourth and fifth centuries and those in the seventh and eighth?

SIEGMUND: At this point I refer to what nearly all archaeologists think about this problem. I have no answer about the third and fourth centuries. My idea concerning the sixth and seventh centuries is written in the paper. In brief, from the Frankish point of view, there were several people with strange customs, cremating the dead, for example. This was something strange for a Frank in the sixth and seventh centuries, although his greatgrandmother might have been cremated too. But at this time it was a very unusual custom. From a Frankish point of view these belonged to a large group of strange people, the Saxons. From their own point of view, I don't believe that they felt themselves to be members of such a large group. I think they were organized in much smaller groups according to a simple social organization. If this is true for the sixth and seventh centuries, this could certainly have been also true before, i.e. for the fourth and third centuries.

STEUER: This is the epoch of ethnogenesis. And it is the epoch of migrations against each other: there is a Frankish expansion to the east and a Saxon expansion to the south and west. You can find the same happening in England, and we have Angles and Saxons both on the Continent and in England. But what people were living in the whole remaining part of Lower Saxony? Frisian or Frankish?

SIEGMUND: Not Frankish, not Alamannic, and not Thuringian. There lived societies on a smaller scale, without a common feeling of being Saxons.

GREEN: You say (page 78), “in his view large parts of Westphalia”, but you have just mentioned two people, Böhme and Capelle. So who is “his”?

SIEGMUND: Capelle.

GREEN: And, if I may, my other point comes on that same page. You say that the funeral customs can be classified, for the time being, as not Frankish and not Thuringian. My question is: are these features not found at all with the Franks and the Thuringians, even from an earlier period, or are they exclusive of the Franks and the Thuringians?

SIEGMUND: Some time before, Franks, Thuringians and *Alamanni* behaved in exactly the same way. They cremated their dead, and when they began with inhumations, they often laid them down in a south-northerly direction. However, in the sixth century they must have forgotten it. There are some old Germanic customs that these Saxon people followed for a very long time, whereas *Alamanni* and Franks had lost them about three generations before.

GREEN: Which would tie up with the point which came up this morning about the conservative nature of the Saxons.

SIEGMUND: Yes.

HINES: But this is not the case with the very large number of animal burials, such as dog graves, horse graves; these are much more of an innovation, and much more distinctive for the Saxon area than for those other areas you just referred to.

SIEGMUND: They are. And, considering horses, we should remember that the first Frankish king was buried with about twenty horses.

STEUER: They could also have been Thuringian customs.

SPRINGER: Yes, but a horse was quite expensive two thousand years ago, too.

SIEGMUND: This is correct, and I didn't want to make some general assumptions on that for all prehistory. In this special situation of early medieval times, we can see that the rites related to the graves were important to the people. They placed very expensive grave-goods in the graves, they buried valuable horses beside the graves. Therefore, I presume, the decision to bury the dead as inhumation or cremation was very important to them. At present in our cemeteries we have a different situation.

SPRINGER: Some Roman *gentes* inhumed bodies and other *gentes* cremated them.

SIEGMUND: The Roman people were quite different, because the most important parts of their graves were above ground. They built great monuments on the graves and, through them, they expressed their social identity, their conflicts and their beliefs. Poor Romans formed clubs, they formed “insurance” groups to obtain a cremation and a funeral. They had strategies to deal with the problem.

DÖRFLER: All these graves, I think, had a function for the living more than for the dead, to demonstrate influence and the position of the clan.

SIEGMUND: I fully agree with you. Yet it was just the burial rite itself that was important. If we take into account the widespread phenomenon of grave robberies, we can conclude that it was important to show that the family gave precious grave-goods to the dead. A few weeks later they felt that they needed that gold and took it back. However, originally there was a high social pressure to give these objects to the dead.

HØILUND NIELSEN: The funeral in itself is a very important social event. Perhaps it is more important at the time of the event than afterwards.

DÖRFLER: If we compare it now with the Saxon area, what do we know about grave gifts? They are all burnt. So you don't know how the cremations were celebrated.

STEUER: We do know.

SIEGMUND: The good preservation conditions at Liebenau and the high quality of the excavations give us detailed information about cremation graves. After the cremation, the grave-goods were thoroughly destroyed. However, by careful analysis of these remains, one can clearly see that cremation graves were much more richly furnished than inhumation graves.

HØILUND NIELSEN: I will also say, if I may, that if you take the proportions of seeds in the marsh areas at Feddersen Wierde, Cuxhaven and so on in the areas in the middle of forests, it will be expensive to have a fire, compared to when you are in woodlands.

MEIER: Not so, because normally, even if not very good firewood, there are enough bushes for a fire also in the swampy areas.

HØILUND NIELSEN: It depends on how many are alive.

SIEGMUND: They need one cubic meter at least. It is a lot.

DÖRFLER: And it has to be dry, so you have to fell the trees months before, or you have to buy dry wood.

SPRINGER: But why not infer the existence of a new religion from new customs? At any rate, the Christian religion changed the funeral customs.

SIEGMUND: Well, Charlemagne forbade the burning of corpses, but the Saxons went on doing it for some time.

MEIER: They did go on, I think, until the tenth or eleventh century; in fact there is an historically reported anecdote concerning a bishop of Bremen, who said, "Oh, what a shame that people are still burning corpses in Dithmarschen". I believe this remark was made in the eleventh or twelfth century.

SIEGMUND: In the *Capitula de partibus Saxoniae*, § 7, cremation was forbidden, the same as burial in the old cemeteries. However, both cremations and burials in the former cemeteries went on with hardly an interruption.

SPRINGER: Oh, but it is clear that a new religion changes the funeral customs.

SIEGMUND: This is a general assumption. I don't believe that it must be true everywhere at all times.

SPRINGER: I think so. Even Protestantism changed funeral customs, because new cemeteries were built, no longer in the middle of the towns, but further away from the centres.

SIEGMUND: What is the meaning of your thesis in relation to the Saxons?

SPRINGER: I have never understood why we infer new peoples from new customs.

SIEGMUND: Did I?

SPRINGER: I did not say that you did, but there are many scholars who do so.

STEUER: So this is the difference between religion and burial customs. Early customs went on until Carolingian times: it was common practice in the Saxon area. Three types of burial sites at the same time: urn graves, cremation graves, inhumation graves with and without burial mounds, and that among the same people. Perhaps each family had its own funeral customs, but sometimes there were different burial customs even in the same family.

SIEGMUND: I fully agree: the cemeteries appear to be organized by kinship groups. If funeral rites are related to single families, I would expect the cremations to lie close to each other in one area of the cemetery, and the inhumations to be in another place. In reality the cemeteries are not organized in that manner. Therefore, I do not believe in family-specific customs.

AUSENDA: You say (page 80): "If one takes as a test the cemeteries from Liebenau, Deersheim, Dörverden and Mahndorf, as well as again the related groups from Beckum, Wageningen and Wünnenberg, which have similar funeral- and sacrificial ceremonies, as indicators, this would lead to regions connected with one another in an area of ten to twenty thousand square kilometres. Compared with the settlement regions of the *Alamanni* and Franks—approximately one hundred to two hundred sq km—this means smaller regions by about a factor five to ten...." I don't understand, could you kindly clarify?

SIEGMUND: Since many ethnographers believe that the number of individuals in a society and their level of social organization are correlated (Earle 1994), I have tried to obtain an idea of the number of people who were organized together in a social system. Since I cannot count individuals directly, I tried to estimate and compare the size of their settlement areas. While Franks and *Alamanni* cover areas of some few hundred thousand sq km, groups in Westphalia and northern Germany seem to cover areas of only about ten thousand sq km.

AUSENDA: Yes, this makes perfect sense.

SPRINGER: I have not understood why you infer from funeral customs to populations. About one hundred years ago a new funeral custom came into being, cremation; but not because a new people migrated to Europe.

SIEGMUND: Did I? No, I didn't.

SPRINGER: But your colleagues do so.

SIEGMUND: When people behave in different ways at the same time, I think they are different.

SPRINGER: But not because they stem from two different peoples. In cemeteries you find inhumation graves and urn graves.

SIEGMUND: In modern times I think it is a sign that the decision is not very important.

SPRINGER: Catholics will not be cremated, I think.

AUSENDA: They used not to be, but now they want to be cremated to save money because cemetery lots have become quite expensive.

HØILUND NIELSEN: What is a “courtyard grave”?

SIEGMUND: It is a bad translation for a a very special term which is ‘Hofgrablege’. Whether ‘Hofgrab’ is a special phenomenon of the second half of the seventh century, where the cemeteries were abandoned. Just about at this time we find some few inhumation graves beneath or in the settlements, very small groups of graves, five or ten graves, no grave-goods or poor grave-goods.

STEUER: Sometimes very rich grave-goods. Five gold-sheet crosses in Lauchheim. There are more than two graves with very rich furnishings, jewellery and weapons.

HØILUND NIELSEN: But that is not Saxony.

STEUER: No, that is in the Alamannic area. In Saxony we do not have such a custom, only in the south of the Netherlands.

SIEGMUND: My point is that there is a short time after leaving the old cemeteries, and before starting with the churchyards, or when starting in the churchyards, a few individuals are buried just beneath their settlement. We now observe this custom in a large region, in the Alamannic and Frankish area. Having now one example in Westphalia I try to say that some Saxons share this special custom which lasted for a short time. They shared some beliefs and customs with the others.

GREEN: That still leaves it unclear, though, what in the German term ‘Hofgrablege’ is precisely meant by ‘Hof’.

SIEGMUND: Farmstead.

GREEN: But then you cannot say ‘courtyard’. ‘Courtyard’ is a small part of a farmstead. I mean ‘Hof’ got three distinct meanings, and we have different words for it in English. I think farm or farmstead, rather than courtyard.

SIEGMUND: I take your point. Farmstead graves.

AUSENDA: Is it possible that, as indicated in the *Capitula de partibus Saxoniae*, because people were obliged to bury their dead in a certain way and they did not want to comply, they buried them under their farmsteads?

SIEGMUND: These special farmstead graves occur hundred years before the *Capitulare*.

STEUER: What do you mean by polyethnic settlements instead of settlements with a homogeneous population? Polyethnic people in the same settlement or neighbouring settlements with different ethnicities?

SIEGMUND: That is not my thesis, this is what Grünewald (1999) says.

STEUER: Always Grünewald! [Laughter].

SIEGMUND: I do not share his opinion, but he developed a picture of a peaceful indigenous people under Frankish and Saxon influence, maybe some Frankish graves, and some Saxon graves. And this is what I call a polyethnic group, when they come together in one single cemetery.

DÖRFLER: You mention a possible discrepancy between botanical and archaeological records (in preliminary draft). I will talk about this in my contribution.

SIEGMUND: There are two different points of view on this question. One is a point I am going to discuss tomorrow. The other point concerns the critique of our archaeological sources; this is shown in Fig. 4-2 (page 81), where I show the development of the funeral customs in Liebenau, where one can see that most of the graves are cremations, sometimes without urns. And you wouldn't see all such cremations without urns. They would have vanished if those special preservation conditions that exist at Liebenau were lacking. You have the same problem in the Alamannic and Frankish area, where we are missing graves of the fourth and fifth century east of the Rhine. There are so many in the sixth century, that I cannot imagine at what point the population started growing, to explain the increase from so few to so many. So it must not be a real phenomenon but one depending on our sources, also due to a change during the fifth century in funeral customs in the Alamannic and Frankish area. As for the correlation with the economy, we should get to it tomorrow.

DÖRFLER: How far do you go with your argument on continuity. Do you see a time when then the population decreased?

SIEGMUND: We see a remarkable continuity especially in the Saxon area, where cemeteries were in use for a much longer time than in the Alamannic and Frankish area. This is what I try to show with the table in Figure 4-3, where you can see the time-spans for several Saxon cemeteries. This can be compared with the data in Fig. 4-4, where Frankish and Alamannic cemeteries are collected. The shorter time-spans, ranging up to about 200 years, which we observe in Alamannic and Frankish cemeteries, are true also of some Saxon cemeteries, but most of them were in use much longer. This must be interpreted as a sign of considerably greater continuity.

HØILUND NIELSEN: Now that we are on Fig. 4-2, does this apply to the entire area, or is it only for Liebenau?

SIEGMUND: Fig. 4-2 is only based on Liebenau. I would want to avoid a generalization to all Saxon cemeteries.

HØILUND NIELSEN: I thought in connection with John [Hines]'s paper on Sunday, whether cremation actually had ceased before Charlemagne's intervention in the area of Saxony.

HINES: It was decreasing before Charlemagne's intervention, and came to an end some time after it. I think that what happened suited Charlemagne's policy, but in fact it probably had very little to do with it.

STEUER: We can discuss it on Sunday, because it looks like a reaction. Innovations started in the ninth century, unless cremation was an act of opposition against the new Carolingian trends.

DÖRFLER: I may mention the second part, "Severe changes in Alamannic and Frankish agriculture are considered as plausibly explained by the development during the Roman period" (page 83). This is the description of the decrease in settlements in the pollen diagrams, but from my point of view you go a little too far with your argument. Of course we don't have a total gap of settlement. We may see it in some diagrams. But very often we have traces of continuity. I think the diagrams show that there is a time of crisis in the fifth century, and that there are

severe changes in the landscape, that are not just accompanied by cultural changes, but also by a large reforestation. And so there must also be, from my point of view, a crisis that diminished the population. If the same number of people had just changed their economy and agricultural practices, there would not have been a reforestation. People need food and food production needs space and cannot be hidden in the palaeobotanical record. There are also crises at other times and these are also combined with political uncertainties in the region at the end of the Roman empire.

SIEGMUND: I agree with you, we have to prove things very carefully. However, as far as I know, the hints about reforestation and the decrease of plants related to agriculture are very widespread as shown by pollen spectra from the fifth century. In the Saxon area this is directly connected with the emigration of Continental Saxons to Britain. But what is your explanation for the same observations concerning the Alamannic and Frankish regions? They did not emigrate massively. Therefore, I would like to ask whether there could be different explanations, for example, some change in the rural economy. Roman agriculture was a special kind of agriculture, heavily based on the growing of wheat. Maybe the Germanic subsistence economy was different, based on working with much smaller economic units and on much smaller fields, and based on more cattle. This would allow people to survive, but it would produce different pollen spectra.

DÖRFLER: You need a certain amount of land to feed a certain amount of people ['carrying capacity']. And if you have reforestation in those areas, you have to expect a decrease in population at that time. I don't know the reasons for this decline in this crisis.

SIEGMUND: But are there any ideas about a quantification? Are there just one half of the people? Could you prove that from the pollen spectra?

DÖRFLER: This is a question of the interpretation of the palynological record. It is the tendency we can see, but it is very hard to give exact data and numbers.

SIEGMUND: Another hypothesis for change could be related to the settlement system. Because pollen analysis looks into the landscape only a certain distance, one can observe what is happening in an area having a diameter of about 3 km or something like that.

DÖRFLER: That is clear. You have to compare several sites, if you want to generalize.

SIEGMUND: Maybe we could develop a model of certain other settlement systems which could cause a decrease in your spectra.

DÖRFLER: Of course, we can make models, but it is difficult to find one that fits the ideas of a constant population.

SIEGMUND: In a way, reforestation can be interesting for cattle. You must not give them grasses. You can feed them as people in the Neolithic age did, they fed cattle on the bark and leaves of the small trees.

DÖRFLER: No, this does not result in reforestation. With a high number of cattle you don't get a regeneration of the woodland, because they keep areas open. And normally you get more calories out of arable production than out of cattle

breeding. Even an extensive economy based on meat production can't be hidden in the forest.

SIEGMUND: I think we could meet somewhere in the middle, but you should move too.

DÖRFLER: Of course, it is difficult to get an idea about population and cattle density in these dark ages. There are traces of settlements in the pollen diagram; but from my point of view they show a diminished number of people. There must have been settlements in the area where those settlements have been known before.

HØILUND NIELSEN: Maybe you didn't look for them in the right places.

DÖRFLER: Maybe some day we shall find the needle in the haystack. From the palynological perspective there might also have been a migration in the area regarding the Saxons, but so far I just see a dramatic decrease in human activities.

WOOD: Well, I was absolutely fascinated by these comments on the Saxon cemeteries oriented on Stone Age or Bronze Age cairns (page 84). Because it seems to me to suggest a totally different view of the past from the one you get in the ethnogenetic traditions of the ninth and tenth centuries. In the literary texts, the Saxons claim to be newcomers coming in from wherever. But in their burial traditions they are in a sense asserting a history which is very, very different from that implied by what Widukind of Corvey or Rudolf of Fulda is saying. These are two very different views of the past.

SIEGMUND: I must be very cautious on that point because my focus is on Merovingian times. When your sources are as late as you showed them to be, we would have had to look at the late cemeteries, which I have not done.

WOOD: Even so, the contrast would still be interesting, wouldn't it? Because it would imply that in the sixth and seventh centuries the Saxons see their past as going back to some mound with mythical associations. In the ninth and tenth, they see their past as going back to a period of migration.

SIEGMUND: Yes, and for the Merovingian times I think we are on safe ground. The Saxons related more frequently in this special way to their mythical forefathers than either *Alamanni* and Franks.

HØILUND NIELSEN: It is quite common in Scandinavia to do that.

SIEGMUND: And there are examples for that pattern in England too.

HINES: I had a series of questions relating to the section on demography (page 85), if I may. This is something that has been studied in relation to the contemporary Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and, therefore, there is scope for comparative material. The first thing is there is a particular formula that you use for average life expectancy at Liebenau, $E_{15} + 15$. What does it mean?

SIEGMUND: A very simple explanation. If you look at the data, as they are published by physical anthropologists, they show considerable differences in the mean life expectancy of the different populations. If you try to understand why there are these differences, you can clearly see that the most important thing is the difference in the number of children's graves. This seems to be more a question of funeral customs or preservation conditions than a reflection of reality. They all had many children and many of them died, but one group of people buried them more

regularly, while others did not dig deep graves for them. If you agree on that point, and if we are interested in the older people, we have to try to do away with these differences in customs. The easiest way to do this is to look at the individuals who lived beyond their childhood. And if E means life expectancy, E_{15} means the remaining average life expectancy of a person who has reached age 15. By that method we obtain numbers that we can compare. E_0 is mean life expectancy at birth, E_{15} is mean remaining life expectancy at age 15.

HINES: That is interesting to me, having worked through similar figures in relation to Anglo-Saxons cemeteries. Again we have a problem how to cut out the children, and the decision seemed to be whether one cut at twelve or at fifteen. For various reasons, when I did similar figures with Anglo-Saxons, I thought 12 was a better figure than 15. Equally, I would be very interested to know in, for instance, figures 10 and 11, how these age groups are actually defined? This is a big problem when one is trying to compare cemeteries because terms like 'infant' are used by osteologists and physical anthropologists, but not always used in the same way from cemetery to cemetery. I would like to know what your definition is.

SIEGMUND: The information available is scant. After burning a corpse there should remain between 1.5 to 1.8 kg of ashes. In Liebenau the cremations gave a mean of 127 grams of ashes (Rösing 1994), which makes the physical anthropologist's job quite difficult. Therefore, the data we have often result in wide age-spans. As an archaeologist, all my information depends on the data I obtain from physical anthropologists. Regrettably, physical anthropologists use different systems of defining age groups. Some are grouped in five-year steps, others use seven-year steps. We have to take the data as they are published.

AUSENDA: What about the children? Is that because you don't know where the children are buried? Is that because they could be buried under the house, or in the yard, or anywhere, so that you don't have a reliable count of the children?

SIEGMUND: Yes, we have no idea where to find the children. They could be buried in the settlements.

AUSENDA: I believe that in that kind of society child mortality was about 50%.

HØILUND NIELSEN: People usually say 40% to 50%.

AUSENDA: I found 40% in the field, but they already had some medical treatment, doctors and so forth. So at that stage the proportion was probably higher, somewhere around 50%. But do you have an idea?

SIEGMUND: There are many discussions about that among specialists, and at present I see no solution or agreement among them. One party tends in your direction with 40% and more. However, a few physical anthropologists believe that proportions of 20% to 30% are closer to the truth.

AUSENDA: No, I believe that those physical anthropologists are wrong. In fact I took the pain to put together the thorough relevant statistics of the Austrian Empire starting in 1865. In the Austrian Empire child mortality before age 5 was 46% in 1872. So I imagine that among the Saxons in the sixth century, it could not have been lower.

Table 4-1
Infant Mortality as a % of Live Births in crown lands of Austria-Hungary

Year	Co.A.	Styria	Carin.	Carn.	Littoral	Tirol	Bohem.	Morav.	Siles.	Galic.	Buko.	Dalm.	Hung.	Cr.S.
1872	44.5	33.9	28.9	30.5	▲44.7	29.5	40.4	41.3	▲47.8	44.6	42.8	26.4		
3	44.2	33.4	31.6	▲40.6	40.6	33.5	▲42.0	▲47.9	39.6	▲56.8	44.4	29.2		
4														
5														
6	39.3	29.0	25.6	28.5	36.1	30.2	35.0	34.3	32.9	39.6	▲49.0	▲42.3		
7														
8														
9														
1880														
1	37.6	▲35.2	30.7	31.2	32.6	29.2	39.5	39.5	35.8	41.3	45.7	23.1	41.7	35.3
2	39.7		33.4		29.2	35.9	40.3	▲36.1						
				44.9	36.5									
3	36.9	33.5	▲31.9	31.4	34.5	31.3	36.7	35.6	36.5	40.3	40.2	31.8	37.1	37.5
4	36.8	30.4	28.4	28.1	36.3	30.5	39.0	35.9	33.0	38.6	37.4	29.4	36.0	36.0
5	39.9	32.1	31.6	29.6	34.8	31.7	37.1	36.7	36.2	38.6	45.2	26.3	38.9	32.5
6	37.4	30.8	30.9	29.4	39.1	28.7	38.8	38.4	38.6	38.4	38.7	26.7	38.9	31.2
7	35.9	31.9	28.6	32.3	34.2	28.4	37.1	35.2	35.7	40.4	37.4	26.1	42.2	35.1
8	35.9	29.7	29.4	33.1	34.8	29.8	39.7	35.2	26.1	38.4	41.6	31.8	38.2	34.6
9	33.8	30.8	32.2	34.4	30.3	28.5	35.3	36.4	34.1	36.0	36.3	31.3	35.5	34.2
90	36.8	33.1	33.9	34.2	38.2	29.4	39.2	41.8	38.4	40.5	41.3	28.9	41.4	40.2
1	36.2	32.4	28.0	29.6	36.2	30.7	36.6	33.2	30.9	37.4	42.2	28.9	41.3	39.4
2	35.8	33.3	29.6	38.0	35.3	30.0	38.0	38.4	35.8	39.9	45.3	31.6	▲45.5	▲50.1
3	32.4	31.3	35.1	33.1	33.1	28.1	35.0	35.0	35.8	33.0	32.3	25.6	37.8	39.3
4	32.4	29.6	30.4	33.5	35.0	27.0	36.6	39.8	37.3	39.5	37.6	28.6	38.7	38.4
5	32.9	31.0	28.2	32.8	28.0	30.8	33.1	33.8	35.9	39.5	42.6	31.7	36.6	35.7
6	29.8	33.6	30.7	37.4	37.8	27.0	31.7	32.2	30.9	35.8	39.4	35.6	35.1	38.9
7	29.9	31.5	30.9	33.3	30.1	28.0	32.5	33.5	34.0	34.5	36.2	28.1	34.0	39.2
8	29.6	28.7	28.9	27.2	33.4	25.5	32.3	31.7	30.8	33.8	31.8	29.2	36.0	34.7
9	29.2	27.9	29.9	29.0	29.4	25.1	32.4	30.0	34.3	36.1	33.0	27.7	32.4	30.2
1900	29.0	28.2	28.4	28.7	33.7	30.1	31.2	30.8	32.3	33.5	33.0	32.8	32.8	32.5
1	26.2	27.9	28.0	26.2	28.1	24.0	29.5	29.7	28.4	33.1	30.2	34.5	30.6	32.8
2	27.3	26.9	30.7	29.2	30.1	23.1	29.7	28.7	28.2	35.1	37.9	26.1	33.8	32.0
3	27.4	26.4	29.0	26.8	30.7	26.2	29.7	28.3	29.3	33.0	35.0	29.5	33.3	32.6
4	26.4	25.2	24.9	25.8	27.3	25.6	29.4	29.7	34.1	31.5	27.4	32.0	29.4	30.3
5	28.5	30.0	29.9	28.9	27.3	25.6	31.8	31.0	31.0	34.9	35.0	32.3	35.2	36.0
6	25.4	23.8	24.2	25.4	25.8	26.8	26.0	27.7	27.4	31.7	33.8	25.1	31.4	31.8
7	25.1	25.3	25.4	27.9	29.7	23.8	26.8	28.0	32.0	30.5	35.5	26.8	31.5	29.6
8													29.7	31.6
9	26.5	27.6	27.1	27.3	28.5	27.3	27.4	28.3	28.2	33.0	37.6	28.0	31.4	30.8
10	24.4	▲22.9	25.0	24.0	26.4	20.3	24.7	▲23.4	28.4	30.7	30.7	▲21.9	29.0	29.9
1	24.8	27.1	26.2	29.1	30.6	28.8	25.0	25.6	26.5	31.6	34.1	28.6	30.8	33.3
2	▲21.6	23.6	▲20.1	▲21.8	▲24.4	▲18.8	24.7	23.8	▲25.5	▲27.2	▲27.7	24.0	▲26.6	▲29.5
3	23.5	23.6	23.1	22.7	27.1	20.6	▲23.3	24.1	26.2	29.8	34.7	26.3		
4	22.9													
5	31.9													
6	30.7													

▲ : Max. for the period. Δ : Min. for the period.

Source: *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Jahr...* (relev. years); *Ungarisches Statistisches Jahrbuch, Neue Folge...* * (relev. years).

Co.A. = Core Austria

Cr.S. = Croatia/Slavonia

After Ausenda 1992:179)

SIEGMUND: It is not my business to decide. The arguments are based on the idea that in the early medieval period there was a much lower population density and that that would minimize the risk of infection.

AUSENDA: I have seen children die in the bush, they die mostly of intestinal diseases which their parents do not know how to treat. In fact, as they become sick, their mothers think that the only way to treat them is to nurse them. Of course they do not have the means to feed them with bottles because they do not have them. In fact nursing is the first thing that one should not do in the case of an intestinal infection, because milk is quite heavy. As they keep nursing them, the children die. Our children do not die because they are fed with bottles with the appropriate liquids. So they die quite easily only because they do not have the appropriate means of feeding them in case of intestinal diseases. This happens also for pulmonary diseases, and so forth. Deaths are not due to infection, but to infant malnutrition and subsequent inability to react to the disease. 20% is a ridiculously low figure. The Austrian Empire child mortality statistics decreased to about 20% just before World War I as medical treatments and food became much better and more effective. I can give you the table I put together. Nowadays child mortality is less than 1%.

HINES: Amongst the Anglo-Saxon cemeteries there is a very wide range of figures of child mortality, with the top end of the range going up above 40%. There are some communities where the apparent child death rate pushes up towards the 50% figure which most people assume ought to have been the actual case. It is also the case that in relation to the one cemetery that I worked on in great detail lately, Edix Hill, where the figure for child mortality was somewhere over 25%, which is around about average within this range. The physical anthropologist who looked at this material reported that the distribution of age at death amongst the children was not the natural one. It seemed that extremely young children dying were massively underrepresented within that figure (Malim & Hines 1998:156-61). This provides a concrete argument for saying that that sort of figure in the high 20s is not representative.

AUSENDA: One should note that those high percentages are taken in stride. These people are so used to having only one child out of two surviving that, when a child dies before having reached its first transition ceremony, i.e. the naming ceremony or circumcision, they do not even give it a funeral. They just bury it in the bush outside the encampment.

SIEGMUND: I do not disagree with you, Giorgio [Ausenda], I am only tired of the discussion.

AUSENDA: I am just saying this for the record, because I think that these calculations are very important.

HINES: You refer to the increased death risk for women within their most fertile phase and indeed this is something one encounters time after time within the burial record. Nevertheless, there is a massive inconsistency between sites in this respect. There is one site where it seems that 2/3 of the men died by age 25 and a majority of older women. There are other sites where there is a considerable majority of

older men, with the majority of women apparently having died by the age of 35. This cannot be explained away in terms of only having excavated certain parts of the cemetery; it can't even be explained away in terms of statistical inconsistency and error. In fact statistics actually indicate that this is real variation between these sites. There is an overall parameter, an overall average life expectancy which for men might have been nearly 40 and for women closer to 35 or something like that. But the differences between individual sites and the unpredictability of life for any one individual must have been absolutely massive. Now this actually reflects upon the point you made at the end, whether these observations can be confirmed as relating to the Saxon population. One could say, it would give us information only of a standardized marriage pattern.

SIEGMUND: In this sense, I believe in some kind of standardized marriage behaviour. However, concerning the Saxons, we have only the data from Liebenau, with no possibility of comparing them with other Saxon cemeteries.

HINES: I was actually interested in what the implications of this would be for marriage behaviour. You could well have seen a situation in which, shall we say, it was normal for a young man and young woman to get married more or less at the same age, and you can expect the woman to die before the man; and it may, therefore, be common for an older man to take a younger wife, but then to die before the younger woman does. You could then have the classic situation of the young widow, with interesting implications for social structure.

SIEGMUND: For Alamannic and Frankish areas, where we have many more and more detailed data, we can see that many women die between their late twenties and early thirties, while many men die in the next age group. Then, one can ask why do the women die earlier and a good explanation seems to me that this is the age when they are married and bear their children, because child-bearing seems to be a special risk for women. Bearing children means to me being married and so we can deduce the average marrying age. In Roman times the marrying age of women was much lower than in Merovingian times.

HINES: That's very interesting. The evidence from the Anglo-Saxon cemeteries shows that teenage girls were often buried in forms of dress that made them indistinguishable from adult women from about the age of twelve onwards (Härke 1997). That would fit with a predictable, marriageable age from the very young teens onwards, which we know of from comparable societies. The physical anthropologist who analysed the Edix Hill skeletons told me that in fact the process of child rearing, of nursing a child up to age three, is as risky for a mother as the actual bearing of the children, assuming, shall we say, that women become more susceptible to disease at their third or fourth child, rather than the first. So it doesn't necessarily imply a high date of marriage for women.

SIEGMUND: I fully agree. The risk is not clearly combined with the first child, it continues for the whole time of child-bearing.

HINES: The average life expectancy for both women and men in the Anglo-Saxon period, this is including the children, is around about 25. There is not actually a very great difference between men and women. If you become adult,

then it is around about mid-thirties. But the difference between men and women is only about one or two years. However, it is still the case that women's life expectancy is below the men's.

AUSENDA: I want to confirm what John [Hines] said. Both among Hadendowa and Beni Amer girls get married as soon as they get their menses, at age 12 or 13. Because they are a risk for the family in that they might be raped by someone and therefore become unmarriageable, and they are used as an enticement for a young man to stay within the extended family. So they marry them off as soon as possible. If you calculate that each family has an average of 3 children (should the number be lower that population would quickly decline) and if you have a 40% child mortality rate, it means that girls have to give birth to 5 children on average. At the rate of 2 1/4 years of nursing between subsequent impregnations plus 9 months of gestation, it adds up to approximately 15 years. This means that when they have given birth to the average number of children required to keep their group going, they reach the end of their life expectancy. One should also note that child bearing is a considerable effort in terms of nutrition and health. And it is not so much from childbirth, but they die from overall stress and malnutrition causing disease such as tuberculosis and the like. Furthermore, women are always fed less than men, because men are considered machines and protectors and women wilfully eat less. So it is much easier for women to become malnourished and die in consequence of that. Menses are around the age of 12 or 13, the same as for the Anglo-Saxons, is that right?

HINES: All I can say is that this is the age at which girls start becoming indistinguishable from women in their twenties and thirties in the burial record.

SIEGMUND: I take all your arguments, but I still can imagine a society where the girls are marrying later, and my Continental data point in that direction. Maybe the historians want to help me: Tacitus wrote about just that situation.

AUSENDA: Tacitus (*Germania* XX) is not that clear.³ Maybe he was referring to the men; this coincides with the marriage customs I observed in the field where, while girls marry quite young, men marry at age 25 or older. Did he refer to both?

DÖRFLER: As far as I can remember, yes.

AUSENDA: If he was referring to the men, I would agree 100%, because a man had to become self-sufficient, and it would take him some time to have enough cattle to feed his family, pay for the brideprice and so forth.

SIEGMUND: I want to express this special difference between the Roman and the Germanic situation. In the Roman situation it is just that men marry quite late, and girls very early.

AUSENDA: That is the same with Beni Amer, Hadendowa, the Bedouin, and most of the people who live at that level of socio-cultural integration. Late for men and immediately for girls. I can give you all the data you want. Anyhow, you are welcome to pursue your point of view.

³ *Sera iuuenum uenus, eoque inexhausta pubertas. Nec uirgines festinantur; eadem iuuenta, similis proceritas....*

HINES: I have one further point, again relating to age. It concerns the figure with the weapons correlated to the age groups at Liebenau (page 88). What we found in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Barrington was that it wasn't just which weapon one got, rather the actual combination of weapons that seemed to vary with different age groups. When one looks at this set of raw figures with adult men, for instance, there are four swords of whatever form and eight spearheads, three shields and three cases of arrows. One doesn't know whether those all occurred in 18 different graves, or in no more than eight different graves there. It is crucially important to have that brought out.

SIEGMUND: So I should add some information to this figure?

HINES: That's right. I think there is more detail that could come out of this set of figures, which would make it more usefully comparable with the sort of studies that Heinrich Härke has produced.

SIEGMUND: I take your critique and will improve it for publication.

HINES: Thank you.

SIEGMUND: What seems important to me is that in earlier times there is a remarkable decrease for mature and senior men mostly. For example in the late Roman Iron Age, they are more or less without weapons. In Merovingian times, over all regions, the mature and older men kept their weapons.

HINES: That is interesting.

DÖRFLER: In the third chapter (page 88), you write "men carry weapons, and weapons as grave-goods are rarer among Saxons than among *Alamanni* and Franks. The ratio is approximately 1:1.8...". What do you mean by this ratio?

SIEGMUND: The ratio between men with and without weapons in their graves in the Alamannic and Frankish area is 1.8, and in the Saxon area it is 1. So it is about 1.5 or 2 times more among Franks and *Alamanni* than amongst Saxons. The latter seem to have fewer weapons.

AUSENDA: I would like to note that your remark that "In the sixth century, for example, helmets of the Baldenheim type or chains as typical grave-goods of the élite are also missing (Steuer 1987). This indicates a considerably less differentiated society." (page 90), makes sense, in that it was a 'simple society' without the economic means to obtain such expensive accoutrements.

SIEGMUND: I will show you later. There are chamber graves for women, one with an arm ring made of ivory. There is a very valuable sword, a man with a horse's equipment with stirrups and the rest, so there are some very rich graves, but no objects within them which are clearly related to a Frankish origin.

HØILUND NIELSEN: So, they are very different.

SIEGMUND: Extremely different. For example, you would expect a ring sword there, but there is none.

DÖRFLER: Concerning Fig. 4-3 (page 82), you have a column "graves per year". Do you have an idea of how many living people are represented by a grave per year? Do you have an idea of the population represented by this number?

SIEGMUND: I could make a calculation, I haven't made it up to now, because the most important thing to me was to show that there is a certain mean in the

Alamannic and Frankish area while some of the earlier Saxon cemeteries give a much higher count. The phenomenon needs interpretation, for example at Westerwanna and Issendorf. Afterwards, especially the sixth-century cemetery shows a mean which lies far below the Alamannic and Frankish mean, which is quite remarkable, too. If you want me to, I can add for publication a further column with the estimates of the population that lived there.

DÖRFLER: My point concerns the question that a cemetery can represent the population of one village, or it can be the burial place for the population of a number of villages.

SIEGMUND: This is just what I am trying to prove. I think that the Alamannic and Frankish cemeteries are destined each one for one village only. In comparison the data for Westerwanna and Issendorf are so much greater that it seems highly plausible that they collected the dead over a wide area from more than one village. This would amount to a remarkable difference in behaviour between Saxons and other populations.

DÖRFLER: I have another question concerning the table. Does the number of graves per year give the average for the whole period?

HØILUND NIELSEN: You think then that the population was the same all the time.

DÖRFLER: Yes, because there can be a positive or negative population development.

HINES: Is it not the case that a recent dissertation (Donié 1999) that has been published on Schretzheim actually seeks to correct the chronology in order to get a more even life expectancy or more even level of population?

STEUER: Perhaps I shall say that this is not the question and it is not easy to answer this question, and these examples are not so good. I actually go on to ask about the Frankish influence. There are many Frankish traces in the Saxon area, but you cannot find where they came from. From the geographical point of view we always encounter special cases. I think Beckum and Fürstenberg near Paderborn are such examples. We cannot compare them with the Saxon area, this is the situation. I have written about this question some twenty years ago and I think the situation has not changed. It wasn't necessary for the Saxon élite to show their position in the graves. Therefore we cannot find them in the burial sites. We have to look at the settlements. However, we have not excavated enough settlements. But we cannot say that the society was less differentiated than the Frankish one. It is impossible to show the social level in the funerary ritual.

MEIER: There are three early medieval strongholds in Dithmarschen: the Bökelburg in the South and the Stellerburg in the North are situated on the edge of the moraines; the stronghold of Kuden is located on a peninsula on a lake in a swampy area south of the moraines in the southern part of Dithmarschen. The strongholds were probably built by local nobles to protect their land. Excavations in the Stellerburg have not yielded any clear information. Buildings inside the walls were small and no graves were found. These strongholds are typical ring-walls of the Saxonian type. When comparing them with the larger ones of the

Slavs, we note many differences. The large castle of Starigard/Oldenburg in the eastern part of Holstein was the most important one of the Wagrier, a Slavonic tribe. Inside this large castle there are graves and large buildings similar to Frankish 'Pfalzen'.

AUSENDA: I want to add something to what I said before, that it makes a lot of sense that the society was not over-differentiated, because from all descriptions we have, it was a simpler society than the Frankish and Alamannic ones.

STEUER: Perhaps or perhaps not. We cannot register this aspect with the help of archaeological finds. Therefore, this conclusion *ex silentio* is not feasible.

AUSENDA: It was more egalitarian.

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