

The 5th-century advance of the Franks in Belgica II: history and archaeology

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Confronting historical sources with archaeological data has often been attempted in the case of the Great Migrations and the Barbarian kingdoms.² With only a few exceptions, however, such as the graves of Childeric in Tournai or of Arégonde in Saint-Denis,³ this bringing together of written sources and archaeological findings is rarely conclusive. More often than not, one is tempted to use the texts in order to date some archaeological material, or conversely, to use the dating of such material in order to wring more content from imprecise texts. Many such attempts have enriched discussion and opened the way for interesting new research hypotheses.⁴ With this in mind, we intend to re-examine the historical-archaeological question of the advance of the Franks in Northern Gaul or, more precisely, in *Belgica II*, at the time of Chlodio, Merovech, Childeric and Clovis, that is to say, during the second half of the 5th century.

¹ This article is based on a joint presentation by the authors at the Early Franks Workshop, which was held in the superb setting of Borg Rusthoven, at Wirdum, on Saturday, March 25, 2000. We offer our warmest thanks to all those whose suggestions have helped our contribution and to Bailey K. Young, professor of history at Eastern Illinois University (Charleston, USA), who translated the text.

² See the series of examples in Périn 1980, 166–68.

³ For Childéric, see the state of the question in Kazanski & Périn 1988. For Arégonde, see Périn 1991.

⁴ See the comments regarding Vidimer and the question of funerary deposits among the the Visigoths in Gaul and Spain (5th–6th centuries) by Périn 1993.

1 Historical sources

The historical sources on this subject are few and hard to interpret. There are, however, enough to allow us to outline the advance of the Franks from the lower part of the Rhine to the River Seine (Fig. 1).

The issue of the 'Salian' Franks

Before examining these sources, some general notions need to be reviewed. Until recently, historians considered that the Franks, whose league of warriors was formed in the middle of the 3rd century, were divided into two groups – a western group, the *Salii*, that was to give rise to the lineage of Clovis and the Merovingians, and an eastern group, that of the Franks of Cologne and the Middle Rhine, formerly, and anachronistically, called *Ripuarii* (the earliest use of this term dates from the 7th century) and today commonly called by German scholars *Rheinfranken* (the Franks of the Rhine).⁵

In a recent article entitled *Gab es ein Volk der Salier?*,⁶ Matthias Springer questioned, not the existence of two main Frankish groups, one in the west, the other in the east, but the use of the word *Salii* as a name for the western group. Briefly, he demonstrated convincingly that this word never had any ethnical or geographical basis. In its Greek form, *Salioi*, it was first used by Julianus, shortly after the middle of the 4th century, as a name for those Franks he was fighting against on the River Meuse.⁷ Matthias Springer suggests that Julianus coined this name as a result of a faulty interpretation or translation of the adjective *saljon* (Julianus was indeed culturally Greek), which he had heard used in respect of the Franks and had understood to be a synonym of the word *Fraggoi* / Franks, which he himself never used. This Old German adjective *saljon* was to give rise to *gisell(i)o* / *sellum*, that is to say, 'Geselle', 'Genosse' / *collega*, *socius*, *civis*. Following Julianus, Ammianus Marcellinus changed *Salioi* into *Salii*⁸ and he too made it a synonym

⁵ For example Musset 1965, 119; Zöllner 1970, 30–31; Demougeot 1979, 265–79; Werner 1980, 260–61; James 1988b, 51–59; Lebecq 1990, 38–39.

⁶ Springer 1997; summary in Springer 1996.

⁷ JULIANUS, Letter to the Athenians, VIII (ed. Bidez, 227). Cf. Springer 1997, 60–61, and previously De Boone 1954, 86; Stengers 1959, 18; Demougeot 1979, 269–70, etc.

⁸ AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Rerum gestarum*...XVII, 8, 3–4 (ed. Sabbah, 60–61): *Quibus paratis, petit primos omnium Francos, eos videlicet quos consuetudo Salios ap-*

of *Franci*. It is significant that the authors who were later to use the word *Salii* never established any link between this name and the Franks. The word was last used by Sidonius Apollinaris in 456.⁹ After that, it disappeared and is never found in Merovingian sources; on the contrary only the adjective *salicus* is found, which was frequently used. Using previous studies (such as Jean Stengers'),¹⁰ Matthias Springer confirmed that this word derived from the Old German *saljon*. It had become a legal term, the equivalent of *qui lege Salica vivit*.¹¹ As such, it was applicable to all the Franks, rather than to a single group of them incorrectly labelled *Salii*.

We agree with Matthias Springer, and thus no longer call *Salii* or Salian Franks those western Franks whose progress in the north-west of Gaul we would like to outline. Moreover, it seems obvious that these 'western Franks' do not form a single coherent group, but contain different political entities, among them the Franks of Childeric and Clovis, but also the Franks around Cambrai or elsewhere in northern Gaul.

The Franks in *Toxandria*

We owe to Ammianus Marcellinus the first explicit reference to the Franks in *Belgica II*. He recounts that Julianus attacked them on the River Meuse in

pellavit, ausos olim in Romano solo apud Toxandriam locum habitacula sibi figere praelicenter. Cui (= Juliano), cum Tungros venisset, occurrit legatio praedictorum... Cf. Springer 1997, 66, and previously, De Boone 1954, 90; Stengers 1959, 16–17; Demougeot 1979, 92–94 and 270, etc.

⁹ SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS, Panegyric of Avitus (ed. Loyen, carmen VII (54–77), approx. 235–237 (p. 63)): *Vincitur illic / cursu Hērulus, Chunus iaculis Francusque natatu, / Sauromata clipeo, Salius pede, falce Gelonus*. Cf. Springer 1997, 69–70; and previously, Stengers 1959; Demougeot 1979, 270–71, etc.

¹⁰ Stengers 1959, 27–31.

¹¹ It seems to us possible, and even probable, that the first redaction of the *Pactus legis salicae* (the prologue and the first 44 chapters) occurred in the middle of the 4th century (in 350–353?), and that it was at first a penal code intended for Franks under Roman military authority, as suggested by Poly 1993 and accepted by Magnou-Nortier 1997. On the other hand, we do not follow Poly with regard to the etymology of the term *Salii* (we accept M. Springer's thesis on this point), nor with regard to the additions to the first version of the Salic Law (since the Charbonniere forest evidently cannot be identified with the Ardennes and since the Ligeris river must be the Loire and not the Lys, the redaction of the Pactus in 67 chapters must date from the end of Clovis's reign), nor in most of his toponymic identifications concerning 'banners' or place names cited in the Pactus, or, finally, in related texts as discussed in this article, which is very stimulating but, alas, often unconvincing.

358, after they had gone into Roman territory *apud Toxandriam locum*, a place situated in an area usually identified as the *Toxandria* of the Middle Ages, that is to say, approximately the modern Belgian and Dutch provinces of Limburg and North Brabant.¹² These Franks are sometimes considered to be the descendants of the Frankish *dediticii* whom Constantius Chlorus had established in the "Island of the Bataves" (the Betuwe), around 293–294.¹³ Libanius specifies that they were under Roman authority.¹⁴ They had been driven away from Betuwe by the Saxons around 340–341, as Zosimus testifies,¹⁵ sought asylum within the Empire, and were settled in *Toxandria* by Constantius in 342, perhaps under the same statute.¹⁶ According to Julianus, the usurper Magnencius was later to recruit soldiers among them.¹⁷

In the autumn of 357, Frankish groups raided *Germanica II* several times and fought the *magister equitum* Severus near *Iuliacum* (Jülich)¹⁸. They took over two forts on the Meuse that Julianus himself had to come and recapture in January 358.¹⁹ Peace was concluded in Tongres after Julianus secured the

¹² AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Rerum gestarum libri*, XVII, 8 (text cited *supra*, n. 8). For *Toxandria*, see Musset 1965, 122, Zöllner 1970, 19–20, and Demougeot, Vol. 2, 78–79 and 92–94, who locates *Toxandria* south of *Batavia*, in west Brabant and Limburg. But Musset does not exclude the region west of the Schelde where Pliny mentions the *Texuandri*. The question is discussed in Stengers 1959, 18–22, who concludes, on the one hand, that Ammianus Marcellinus' language implies that *apud Toxandriam locum* may be translated as "in the area of the places called *Toxandria*" and, on the other hand, that the precise identification of *Toxandria* is impossible and therefore that we must be content with an approximation (a place somewhere between Tongres and the great rivers which form the northern border of the Empire). To the bibliography given there, one should add the various studies of F. Theuws, although they mostly concern a later period than that treated here, notably Theuws 1986, 1988 and Theuws & Bijsterveld 1991.

¹³ EUMENIUS (?), *Panegyric of Constantius Chlorus*, VIII–IX (ed. Galletier, 88–90). Cf. De Boone 1954, 57–58; Demougeot 1979, Vol. 2, 31–32; etc.

¹⁴ Late 348 or early 349: LIBANIUS, Funeral oration of Julianus (= *Oratio*, XVIII), 75 (ed. Norman, 326–329). Cf. De Boone 1954, 81; Stengers 1959, 18; Demougeot 1979, Vol. 2, 78–79; etc.

¹⁵ ZOSIMUS, *Historia nova*, III, 6 (ed. Paschoud, 15–17). Cf. De Boone 1954, 93; Stengers 1959, 13–15, n. 1.

¹⁶ De Boone 1954, 80–81.

¹⁷ JULIANUS, Oration of Constantius (= *Oratio* I), 28 (ed. Bidez 1932, 50–52). Cf. De Boone 1954, 85; Demougeot 1979, Vol. 2, 80–82 and 93.

¹⁸ AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Rerum gestarum libri*, XVII, 2, 1–4 (ed. Sabbah, 42–43). Cf. De Boone 1954, 88.

¹⁹ AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Rerum gestarum libri*, XVII, 9, 1–2 (ed. Sabbah, 62). Cf. De Boone 1954, 96–98 (with a discussion about the identity of the three forts); Zöllner 19.. 20; Demougeot 1979, Vol. 2, 78–79 and 92–94.

surrender of the Franks following a new victory. The Franks obtained confirmation of their settlement in *Toxandria*, where they had lived since 342.²⁰

Not much is heard of the Franks in *Toxandria* in the following decades, unlike other Frankish groups established further east on the Rhine, who on several occasions, at the end of the 4th and in the first half of the 5th century, attacked the cities of Cologne, Mainz and Trier. There is, for example, such written evidence about Trier in 388, 390, 410, 413, 420, 435, 453/461 (etc.) and about Cologne in 355 and 386.²¹

The Franks reach the River Somme

The Franks were mentioned again not long before the middle of the 5th century, not in contemporary sources but later on, at the end of the 6th century, by Gregory of Tours quoting Sulpicius Alexander and Renatus Profuturus Frigiritus²², apropos King Chlodio. According to Gregory, who considers he could have been Clovis' grandfather, Chlodio resided in the fort of *Dispargum*, in the country of the *Thoringorum*. Since it is unlikely that Chlodio would have resided in the territory of the Thuringians, the identification of *Dispargum* with Asberg near Mörs was thought to be doubtful and it was suggested that Gregory could have confused it with the town of Tongres.²³

²⁰ AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Rerum gestarum libri*, XVII, 8, 1–4 (ed. Sabbah, 60–61; text partially quoted *supra*, n. 8). Cf. De Boone 1954, 90; Musset 1965, 123; Demougeot 1979, Vol. 2, 275–77 and 487–90.

²¹ For the destruction of Trier and of Köln, the dates and context, see Zöllner 1970, 31–34; Demougeot 1979, Vol. 2, *passim*; Steuer 1980; also in various studies by Eugen Ewig and more recently in Anton 1987; Kuhnen 1996; Paffgen & Ristow 1996; Staab 1997, Vol. 1, 539–66; etc.

²² GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum decem*, II, 9 (ed. Krusch-Levison, Vol. 1, 58): *Ferunt etiam tunc enim Chlogionem utilem ac nobilissimum in gente sua regem fuisse Francorum qui apud Dispargum castrum habitabat, quod est in terminum Thuringorum. In his autem partibus, id est ad meridianam plagam, habitabant Romani usque Ligerem fluvium. (...) Chlogio autem, missis exploratoribus ad urbem Camaracum, perlustrata omnia, ipse secutus, Romanus proteret, civitatem adpraehendit, in qua paucum tempus resedens usque Sumenam fluvium occupavit. De huius stirpe quidam Merovechum regem fuisse adserunt, cuius fuit filius Childericus.* Cf. De Boone 1954, 140–42; Zöllner 1970, 27; etc.

²³ For Demougeot 1979, Vol. 2, 489, *Dispargum* could have been located in the small kingdom of the Warnes, next to that of the Thuringians on the right bank of the Lower Rhine, the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 3, perhaps suggesting that the fortress was beyond the Charbonniere Forest from which Chlodio had departed. See also De Boone 1954, 142; Zöllner 1970, 27, notes 6–7; James 1988b, 58; etc.

Such a confusion, however, is not easy to accept. Whatever the case may be, Chlodio, so Gregory tells us, defeated the Romans. He seized Cambrai for a short period and later occupied the land down towards the Somme at a time which must have been after 443, since Gregory specifies that the Burgundians had already settled east of the River Rhone.²⁴

This advance of the Franks to the Somme is confirmed by Sidonius Apollinarius. In the Panegyrics of Majorian, in which he reports that Majorian, a general of Aetius who had just fought the Bagaudes of Armorica and freed Tours in 448, joined Aetius "shortly after" to fight the Frank Chlodio, as the latter had occupied the "plain of the *Atrebates*", in other words, the city of Arras.²⁵ This is when the Roman troops happened on a Frankish wedding at *Vicus Helena*, a place often identified with Helesmes in the French Nord department, near Denain²⁶. The Roman troops were victorious. This famous 'fait divers' was often interpreted as a new stage in the continuing advance of the Franks and of Chlodio towards the river Somme.²⁷

It is commonly accepted that on this occasion Aetius concluded a peace treaty with Chlodio, who would then have evacuated the cities of Cambrai and Arras, keeping Tournai where he perhaps resided²⁸. Thus it is likely that by the middle of the 5th century, the Franks had made considerable progress towards the south, starting from *Toxandria* or elsewhere, and had probably already reached the Somme.

Masters of Belgica II

After that, thanks to the famous letter that Saint Remi, Bishop of Rheims and metropolitan of the Roman province of *Belgica II*, addressed to Clovis in

²⁴ GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum decem*, II, 9 (quoted *supra*, n. 22).

²⁵ SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS, Panegyric of Majorian (ed. Loyen, Vol. 1, carmen V (28–51), approx. 209–218 (36)): *Ligerimque bipenni / excisum per frusta bibit. Cum bella timentes / defendit Turonos, aberas (= Aetius) ; post tempore parvo / pugnastis pariter, Francus qua Cloio patentes / Atrebatum terras pervaserat. Hic coeuntes / claudabant angusta vias arcuque subactum / vicum Helenam flumenque simul sub tramite transmiserat agger. / Illic te posito pugnabat ponte sub ipso / Maiorianus eques*. Cf. De Boone 1954, 140; Stengers 1959, 25–26; James 1988b, 57; etc.

²⁶ SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS, Panegyric of Majorian, approx. 219–229, ed. Loyen, 36–37. The meeting took place between 446 and 451. See a discussion in Will 1966.

²⁷ Musset 1965, 123; Demougeot 1979, Vol. 2, 490.

²⁸ Demougeot 1979, Vol. 2, 490; Zöllner 1970, 28–29.

481/482 on the occasion of his coronation,²⁹ we learn that the Frankish king had “taken charge of administering *Belgica II*”, just as his ancestors had done “for the longest time” (*sicut parentes tui semper fuerunt*). This valuable document thus assures us that Childeric, and in all likelihood Merovech (mentioned only by Gregory, who merely states that he was Childeric’s father³⁰), were already administering this large and rich province in the north-west of Gaul. The question thus arises whether the southern border of this province was also the limit of the Franks’ advance in the north-west of Gaul. To answer this question we must look closely at Childeric’s political and military relations with the *magister militum* Egidius (456/457–464/465), and later with his son Syagrius (464/465–486/487), whom Gregory only calls *Romanorum rex*.³¹

This is what Gregory tells us in his *Decem libri historiarum*: Egidius drove Childeric away and was then acclaimed king by the Franks. Childeric took refuge in Thuringia for eight years.³² Returning from exile, he fought the Saxons and the Visigoths at Orleans, on the River Loire, probably as an

²⁹ *Domino insigni et meritis magnifico Hlodoveo regi, Remegius episcopus*, ed. W. Gundlach 1892, 110–53, n° 2, 113 (edition reprinted in *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*, Vol. 117, Turnhout, 1957, Ep. Austr. 2, 408–409): *Rumor ad nos magnum pervenit, administrationem vos Secundum Belgice suscepisse. Non est novum, ut coeperis esse, sicut parentes tui semper fuerunt*. There are many commentaries on this very famous letter. See most recently Rouche 1996.

³⁰ GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum decem*, II, 9 (ed. Krusch-Levison, 58; cf. *supra*, n. 22).

³¹ GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum decem*, II, 27 (ed. Krusch-Levison, 71): *His ita gestis, mortuo Childerico, regnavit Chlodovechus, filius eius, pro eo. Anno quinto regni eius Siacrius Romanorum rex, Egiidi filius, apud civitatem Sexonas, quam quondam supra memoratus Egidius tenuerat, sedem habebat*.

³² GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum decem*, II, 12 (ed. Krusch-Levison, 61–62): *(Childericus) Thoringiam petiit. (...) Abiens ergo in Thoringiam, apud regem Bysinum uxoremque eius Basinam latuit. Denique Franci, hunc eiectum, Egidium sibi, quem superois magistrum militum a re publica missum diximus, unanimiter regem adsunt. Qui cum octavo anno super eos regnaret (...). Ille certa cognoscens inditia, quod a Francis desideraretur, ipsis etiam rogantibus, a Thoringia regressus, in regno suo est restitutus*. We support the reality of Childeric’s Thuringian exile (which has often been doubted), if for no other reason than Childeric could never have seduced Queen Basina, future mother of Clovis, elsewhere than at the royal court, in the heart of this kingdom which stretched between the middle Weser and the middle Elbe. Cf. in particular Zöllner 1970, 40–41; Martindale 1980, 285–86 and, above all, Jarnut 1994 (see also n. 5 of the previous bibliography), which argues convincingly for the historical value of Gregory’s information (Childeric’s exile and the royal title held briefly by Egidius).

ally of Egidius.³³ Lastly, we learn that in the fifth year of Clovis' reign (486/487), if we agree to follow the chronology given by Gregory of Tours for this reign, Syagrius was residing in the city of Soissons, thus in *Belgica II*.³⁴ This led to the conclusion that the Frankish advance toward the south had its limits north of the city of Soissons.³⁵ Accordingly, most historical maps show the Somme as the border between Childeric's kingdom (or rather the western Frankish kingdoms, since Gregory also mentions the kingdom of Cambrai) and the territory administered directly by Syagrius, traditionally called the 'Roman kingdom', as Gregory gives Syagrius the title of *rex*. In fact, Gregory might have used this word for want of a better one, to imply that since the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476, Syagrius had governed for himself the territories entrusted to him by Rome. We cannot exclude the possibility, however, that this was an official title of some sort.³⁶

It seems to us that such a literal interpretation of the sources raises a number of difficulties. It is indeed hard to admit that, at the end of Childeric's reign, *Belgica II* was divided into two parts, with some territories in the hands of the Franks to the north of the Somme and to the south territories that would have remained Roman even though administered by the same Frankish king. This contradiction is resolved if one concedes that Egidius, and later Syagrius, only occasionally resided in Soissons.

In Egidius' case, we know from Gregory of Tours that he was acclaimed "king" by the Franks while Childeric was in exile in Thuringi.³⁷ This suggests that the *magister militum* must have established his authority over the whole of *Belgica II*, and possibly over other territories controlled by the Franks. On the other hand, even if our sources do not specify this, Egidius, in all likelihood, must have relinquished Soissons when Childeric recovered his throne and, as *rex foederatus*, started to govern *Belgica II* again.

³³ Regarding Childeric's role in these military operations, see the critical remarks of James 1987; 1988a; 1988b, 70–72.

³⁴ GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum decem*, II, 27 (ed. Krusch-Levison, 71; text quoted supra, n. 31). For Soissons in this context, see parts of Dierkens & Périn 2000, 267–304 and 282–84.

³⁵ For example Musset 1965, 124.

³⁶ See James 1988b, quoted supra, n. 33; Jarnut 1994, quoted supra n. 32.

³⁷ GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum decem*, II, 12 (ed. Krusch-Levison, 61; text quoted supra, n. 32).

In the case of Syagrius, Gregory only says that in the fifth year of Clovis' reign, he was residing in Soissons, 'a city that Egidius had formerly possessed'.³⁸ From such a laconic phrase we cannot determine whether this had been the case recently or whether that city had remained the current residence of the representative of Roman authority in Gaul since the time of Childeric's exile in Thuringia. The first possibility seems, however, to be the more likely one – and we shall see that archaeological data support this view. As related in the *Vita s. Genovefae* (written around 520),³⁹ the Franks were present around Paris for ten years, probably from 476/477. This leads us to believe that relations between Childeric and Syagrius had deteriorated, perhaps after the Western Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was deposed by Odoacre in 476, an event which would have left the direct representative of Roman authority in Gaul free to act for himself, as we have already mentioned. The Frankish king, no longer content with governing *Belgica II*, would then have attempted to reach the Seine. One can readily imagine that Syagrius would have wanted not only to reconquer the territories situated between the Seine and the southern limit of *Belgica II* but also the whole province. He would thus have reached the Somme by the beginning of Clovis' reign and this would account for his residing in Soissons.

With this in mind, we can now re-examine the archaeological evidence – in this case funerary material – that may correspond with the reigns of Chlodio, Childeric and Clovis.

2 The Archaeological evidence

The archaeological material which can be securely dated to the 5th century was for many years so poorly understood that the period used to be termed an "archaeological hiatus". This has changed, thanks to the work of a number of scholars. In 1956, for the first time, Jacques Breuer and Heli Roosens published a 5th-century cemetery at Haillot in Belgium, while André Dasnoy

³⁸ GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum decem*, II, 27 (ed. Krusch-Levison, 71; text quoted *supra*, n. 31).

³⁹ *Vita Genovefae virginis Parisiensis*, XXXV (ed. Krusch, 204–38, esp. 229): *Tempore igitur, quo opsionem Parisius bis quinos, ut aiunt, annos a Francis perpressa est*. Refer to Heinzelmänn & Poulin 1986, 97–103, for all the arguments concerning these events reported to the narrator (*ut aiunt*).

revealed the existence of other 5th-century assemblages in the Namurois.⁴⁰ In subsequent years, Joachim Werner, and after him Kurt Böhner, published the first transregional studies on the Germanic warrior graves of Late Antiquity;⁴¹ then, in 1974, Horst Böhme produced the major synthesis of information on 'Germanic' graves between the Elbe and the Seine.⁴² In France, Claude Seillier studied the cemetery of Vron (Somme) (partly published in 1989),⁴³ and René Legoux the important site of Bulles (Oise), before going on to study the region of Picardy (1998)⁴⁴ and, with Francoise Vallet, offering an overview of the north of Gaul as a whole (1997).⁴⁵ Thanks to them, and to other French, Belgian, German and Dutch researchers – we would like to pay a particular tribute here to that pioneer and good friend, the late Jaap Ypey⁴⁶ – we now know much more about this once enigmatic century.

For the Late Antiquity period Böhme had proposed in 1974 a relative and absolute chronology with three phases (I = ca. 350–400; II = ca. 380–420; and III = ca. 400–450).⁴⁷ In 1987, he further refined this for the 5th century, distinguishing between a 'Group A' (the end of the 4th century and the first third of the 5th century) and a 'Group B' (the second third of the 5th century).⁴⁸ The second half of the 5th century and the beginning of the 6th century correspond to Stufe II in Böhner's system for the Trier region, which today can be subdivided into IIa (corresponding to Böhme's 'Group B') and IIb, which matches rather well with the reigns of Childeric and Clovis respectively.⁴⁹ We will use this new subdivision of relative and absolute chronology for the later 5th century here, although we must point out its limits. For example, in the current state of research this double classification is wholly based on funerary finds, and these are not all that numerous for the regions concerned.⁵⁰ Furthermore, we do not yet have general studies and

⁴⁰ Breuer & Roosens 1956; Dasnoy 1955.

⁴¹ Werner 1950; Böhner 1963.

⁴² Böhme 1974.

⁴³ Seillier 1989, 599–634.

⁴⁴ Legoux 1998, 137–88.

⁴⁵ Vallet 1997, 219–44.

⁴⁶ In particular, see Ypey 1969, 89–127.

⁴⁷ Böhme, cited *supra* note 41.

⁴⁸ Böhme 1987, 770–73.

⁴⁹ Böhner 1958.

⁵⁰ While recourse to statistical methods is certainly useful in refining the chronology of funerary assemblages to a great extent, there are limits to the degree of precision possi-

distribution maps for all the artefact types (for ceramics, for example), so we must reason on the basis of certain weapon types, some brooches, buckles and other belt ornaments. We must also warn that our evidence does not include finds from settlement sites which have not yet been adequately identified and excavated in our region.

Swords of the 'Krefeld-Gellep' type and with cloisonné decoration

For the second half of the 5th century, we can compare the distribution patterns of two sword types which correspond to a horizon of Germanic warrior elites and turn up often between the Rhine and the Seine. The first is the 'Krefeld-Gellep type',⁵¹ which seems to have been manufactured in Late Roman workshops still functioning in northern Gaul. It is characterised by bronze scabbard ornaments, whose vegetal motifs imitate the hip-carving technique, and by terminal ornaments which depict a stylised human face accosted by birds of prey (Fig. 2). The second sword type is named after the chieftain graves of the so-called 'Flonheim-Gültlingen' group⁵². It is characterised by fancy dress swords with a hilt sometimes covered in gold leaf and with scabbard decorations made of gold cloisonné (Fig. 3).

Archaeologists continue to discuss a precise dating for these sword types. Wilfried Menghin assigns the first type to Childeric's era and the second to the time of Clovis.⁵³ Max Martin suggests that the Krefeld-Gellep type goes back to the second third of the 5th century, being replaced by the cloisonné type during the third quarter of the same century.⁵⁴ Horst Böhme⁵⁵ believes the two types were contemporary during the second half of the 5th century and represented different groups. For him the Krefeld-Gellep type belongs within the milieu of German *Foederati*, closely linked to Late Roman culture in Northern Gaul, while the cloisonné type was favoured by 'parvenu' Germanic warrior elites who were strongly marked by Mediterranean influences.

ble, in particular since people died at various ages, wearing or carrying objects which were themselves of various ages. See Périn 1980, 187–98, and Périn 1998, 189–206.

⁵¹ Böhner 1987, 414 ff.; Böhme 1994, 74 ff.; Menghin 1983, 27–31 and 154–55.

⁵² Cf. previous note: Böhner 1987, 421 ff.; Böhme 1994, 79 ff.; Menghin 1983, 32–36 and 157–58.

⁵³ Menghin 1983, nn. 49 and 50.

⁵⁴ Martin 1989.

⁵⁵ Böhme 1994, 103 ff.

The archaeological evidence, viewed in the light of historical sources, leads us to think that Max Martin is right. That the two sword types follow each other chronologically seems clearly confirmed by their concentric geographical distribution⁵⁶ (figs. 4 and 5). The Krefeld-Gellep type swords – and other contemporary objects, such as bronze non-articulated plate buckles with monster-head terminals and a trapezoidal buckle plate or small iron inlay plate buckles (including the type with silver leaf)⁵⁷ – are found predominantly between the Lower Rhine and Middle Meuse, as well as in the Decumates fields. With only one exception (Bulles in the Oise dept.), these objects all originate from the north of the Somme valley. By contrast, the swords with a gold cloisonné decor are found on the southern and eastern periphery, and, with the exception of Childeric's tomb in Tournai, they are all found south of the Somme and all the way to the left bank of the Seine (a group called "frankish" by German scholars) and also on the Middle Rhine and its right bank (the "alaman" group).⁵⁸

The historical interpretation of these maps is clear enough to be convincing. The distribution of the Krefeld-Gellep sword type, although these weapons were not exclusive to the Franks since they are found also among the Alamans, nonetheless does seem to coincide in the north of Gaul with the historical advance of the Franks under Chlodio from *Toxandria* towards the Somme and the Middle Meuse. This pattern seems to be a valuable clue for confirming a date before and after the middle of the 5th century, as Max Martin suggests.

As far as the fancy dress-swords with hilt and scabbard decorations made of gold cloisonné are concerned, their geographical distribution between the Somme and the left bank of the Seine has long been considered as an archaeological illustration of the first conquests of Clovis, following his victory at Soissons in 486 (following Gregory of Tours' chronology). But a number of recent studies, among them Françoise Vallet's,⁵⁹ have shown that some of these fancy swords, as well as objects of feminine ornament (brooches of the types of Gross-Umstadt, Nieder-Florstadt/Wiesloch, Jena-Loreda/Cutry-Wiesbaden, Bulles/Krefeld-Gellep, Hermes/Beauvais, Loenen/Tournai, Bulles/Sindelfingen, Chessel-Down, Bifrons/Preure and Gondorf,

⁵⁶ Martin 1989, 123 ff.; Périn 1995, 249 ff.

⁵⁷ Böhme 1994, 98 ff.

⁵⁸ Böhner 1987, 426 ff.

⁵⁹ Vallet 1997.

according to Alexander Koch's typology⁶⁰) date from the third quarter of the 5th century and were therefore anterior to the *terminus post quem* supposedly given by the date of 486, as far as the distribution of Frankish objects south of the Somme is concerned (Fig. 6). We find here confirmation by archaeological evidence of historical sources according to which, as we have shown, the Franks had reached Paris by the end of Childeric's reign. They were then driven from there by Syagrius, probably temporarily, at the end of Childeric's reign or the beginning of Clovis's.

The case of the Danubian type fibulas

The geographical distribution of Danubian fibulas is also very interesting in regard to the historical evidence for possible Frankish movements in northern Gaul. These are large fibulas of hammered silver, sometimes complete with bronze appliquéés, offering a semi-circular head, often with projecting digitations, and an elongated foot⁶¹ (Fig. 7). With a few exceptions discovered south of the Loire and in the Saône and Rhone valleys, these fibulas show a remarkable concentration between the Somme, the Seine, and the Marne, with a few examples also turning up in Lower Normandy (Fig. 8).

Even though all agree that this type of brooch originated in the Danube region and was characteristic of female ornamentation among the Eastern Germans, some scholars disagree as to its dating and historical interpretation. Volker Bierbrauer dates these objects to the end of the 5th century and the first decades of the 6th century and relates them to the defeat of the Visigoths at Vouillé in 507 and Clovis's subsequent conquest of their kingdom of Toulouse.⁶² According to him, the Franks would then have brought Visigothic women back with them to Northern Gaul. They can be identified in the cemeteries thanks to their characteristic ornaments. Others, such as Christian Pilet⁶³ or Françoise Vallet,⁶⁴ suggest an earlier chronology, pushing them back to the time of Syagrius and Childeric around the third quarter of the 5th century. They interpret these female tombs as the indirect testimony (through women) of the presence in Northern Gaul of Germanic auxiliaries

⁶⁰ Koch 1988.

⁶¹ The bibliography concerning this fibula type is extensive. For the principal references, see Kazanski 1989 (1990), as well as Kazanski 1990.

⁶² Bierbrauer 1997.

⁶³ Pilet 1990, 98–107; Pilet *et al.* 1993, 160 ff.; Pilet 1995, 327–34.

⁶⁴ Vallet 1990, 95–97.

of the Roman army, coming from the Danube area. Alfried Wiczorek opts for Visigothic auxiliaries in the armies of Egidius, then of Count Paul, and finally of Syagrius.⁶⁵

In fact, as Michel Kazanski has shown,⁶⁶ following the creditable studies of A. K. Ambroz and Jaroslav Tejral,⁶⁷ there is no single interpretation for the whole group of Danubian type fibulas found in Western Europe. One must instead distinguish two types appearing one after the other over time.

The first type, with a lozenge-shaped foot, is typical of the Danube regions, as distribution maps confirm (Fig. 9). This is Tejral's Group D.3, dating from the third quarter of the 5th century. The examples found in Italy and Spain (the two sites known in Spain have furnished several examples of the type) can be linked, as we showed some years ago, with the army of the Ostrogothic King Widimer.⁶⁸ These troops were sent to Italy in 472 by Emperor Anthemius in connection with the civil war being waged against the Patrician Ricimer, and then were sent on to Spain, where they helped King Euric to conquer the Tarraconnaise in 472–474.⁶⁹ There are also some isolated finds of D.3 type Danubian brooches in the north of Gaul, which we would explain as belonging to Germanic auxiliaries in the Roman army who had come directly from the Danube frontier.

The second Danubian fibula type presents a tongue-shaped foot and belongs to Tejral's Period E, the last quarter of the 5th and the opening of the 6th century.⁷⁰ It also shows a striking geographical pattern (Fig. 10). One does not find these fibulas in the Danube; rather they occur in Spain and in the north-west of Gaul, but not at all between the Loire and the Pyrenees, not, in other words, in the historic Visigothic kingdom of the 5th century.

We would interpret the group of E-brooches in Spain as being the result of a local evolution from type D, at a time when the Ostrogothic troops who had come from *Pannonia* with Widimer were still helping the Visigoths to extend their domains. At that time, the absence of such fibulas in Aquitaine is not surprising, for we now know that the core Visigothic group, who had migrated into Gaul from the Black Sea regions via the Balkans and Italy, had given up their earlier custom of dressed burial. It was only after their defeat

⁶⁵ Wiczorek 1996.

⁶⁶ Kazanski 1996; 1990.

⁶⁷ Ambroz 1996; Tejral 1988; Tejral 1997.

⁶⁸ Périn 1993, 411–23.

⁶⁹ The main events and principal sources are summarised in Wolfram 1990, 196–202.

⁷⁰ Tejral 1988, 223–304; 1996, 321–52.

at Vouillé, when they recreated a kingdom in Spain, that they revived these traditions.⁷¹ There they came into contact with Widimer's Ostrogoths, who had maintained their traditional dressed burial practices, and we attribute the rapid spread of dressed burial (but without weapons in the male graves) in the second decade of the 6th century kingdom of Toledo to this contact.

And what about the Danubian type E brooches in north-western Gaul? In this case, the cartography does not reflect the archaeological reality, and the situation cannot be compared to that in Spain – here one finds only one or two such fibulas in a cemetery. Nor are these always worn at the shoulder in pairs or complemented by a plate buckle with a rectangular plate, according to the rules of Gothic female fashion. It is clear, then, that these finds do not reflect a homogeneous and well-organised ethnic community like that of the Ostrogoths and later of the Visigoths in Spain. They must be taken as individual and isolated cases, which sometimes show signs of distinct acculturation.

It is quite significant, however, that the map of these finds, which go from the left bank of the Seine to the Somme, coincides so exactly with the zone of military contact between the Franks and the last upholders of Roman authority in Northern Gaul, Egidius and then Syagrius. Since the early chronology for these objects, conclusively demonstrated by Tejral, excludes relating their distribution to the battle of Vouillé, another explanation for it must be sought. Alfried Wiczorek's suggestion is doubtless the best. These objects reflect the traces, through the graves of their wives, of the contingents of Visigothic troops which Egidius and then Syagrius obtained, perhaps from King Alaric, to help fend off the Frankish advance during Childeric's reign.⁷² Even though the written sources are silent on this subject, Syagrius's flight to the court of Alaric after his defeat at Soissons in 486

⁷¹ We have naturally considered that the almost total absence of Gothic-style objects in Gaul must have been one of the consequences of the rapid acculturation of the Visigoths, who had given up dressed burial practices. However, if Gothic women did continue to wear a distinctive traditional costume, one might expect to find some parts of it from non-funerary contexts in the Kingdom of Toulouse. It seems to us more probable to conclude that, after forty years of wandering about in the Balkans and in Italy, the Visigoth 'army' that entered southern Gaul was no longer distinguishable by a specific material culture, particularly where female fashion was concerned. It also seems significant to us that the only Gothic brooches discovered between the Loire and the Pyrenees, at Lezoux (Puy-de Dôme), date from Tejral's period D.3, and thus post-date by some time the arrival of the Visigoths in the Narbonne region.

⁷² Demougeot 1979, vol. 2, 641–42.

suggests that an alliance between the two had existed for some time.⁷³ Such an alliance could have arisen as a response to one that is attested in the written sources, linking Childeric to Odoacre after the latter became master of Italy in 476.⁷⁴

Another possibility is that, given the degree of acculturation suggested by several of these female grave assemblages of north-western Gaul, these tombs could point to dispersed elements of Syagrius' Visigothic contingents who, after his defeat, were integrated into the Frankish army.

In the interests of greater objectivity, we would like to suggest another possible historical scenario to explain the distribution of Danubian brooches of Tejral's type D between the Seine and the Somme. Although a formal alliance between Syagrius and Alaric is plausible, it is still a hypothesis, unlike the alliance that Childeric and Odoacer made against the Alamans. With this in mind, it is quite possible that the new master of Italy sent to his friend the Frankish king contingents of eastern Germans whose wives would undoubtedly have worn ornaments similar to those that reached Spain along with the troops of Vidimer. In this case, the brooches of Tejral's type E would no longer have to be connected with the attempt by Syagrius to recapture *Belgica II*, with the help of Visigoth troops, but, as is the case for the cloisonné swords, with the advance of Childeric towards the Seine. Unfortunately, we cannot use the dating of the brooches themselves to come to a definitive opinion, as these possible and successive historical events are confined within too narrow a time frame to accommodate the possibilities of archaeological datings.

To conclude, we think that comparing historical sources and archaeological evidence concerning the advance of the Franks in *Belgica II* under Chlodio, Childeric and Clovis raises no major problem. It appears particularly evident that the texts are clear enough to enable us to choose among those archaeological hypotheses whose precise chronology remains open to question. We consider it established, therefore, from both viewpoints, historical and ar-

⁷³ GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum decem*, II, 27 (ed. Krusch-Levison, 71): *Itaque inter se utrisque pugnantibus, Syagrius elisum cernens exercitum, terga vertit et ad Alaricum regem Tholosa curso veloci perlabitur.*

⁷⁴ The lost Chronicle of Angers, cited in GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum decem*, II, 18–19 (ed. Krusch-Levison, 65): (...) *Odovacrius cum Childerico foedus iniit Alamanusque qui partem Italiae pervaserant subiugarunt.* On this treaty, see recently Werner 1996, 25–27.

chaeological, that the Franks under Chlodio (by the middle of the 5th century) had advanced as far as the Somme, and that, under Childeric, they advanced up to the Seine. We also think that archaeological evidence throws significant light on the historical sources concerning Syagrius's reconquest of the regions between the Seine and the Somme at the end of Childeric's reign or the beginning of Clovis's, probably with the help of Visigoth troops. Needless to say, these suggestions remain hypotheses which are open to discussion.

In a recent article⁷⁵ Eugen Ewig revisits the interpretation of the passage in Gregory of Tours *Decem Libri Historiarum* which refers to Frankish settlement in the Rhineland.⁷⁶ He argues once again, and cogently, that *Thoringia* should be identified with the region of Tongres (Toxandria); we find less persuasive that the place Gregory calls *Dispargum castrum, quod est in terminum Thoringorum* is Duisburg, near Tervueren, today in the province of Flemish Brabant. But the *Thoringia*/Toxandria equation⁷⁷ does not evidently imply that Gregory made the same mistake when he spoke of Childeric's seven years of exile in *Thoringia* at the court of king Bisin and of queen Basina, who was to leave her husband and follow Childeric into *Belgica Secunda*.⁷⁸

Elsewhere,⁷⁹ Guy Halsall seeks to explain the richness and the originality of Childeric's grave by the troubled character of the times, particularly in regard to an old quarrel between Childeric and Egidius, as well as to the tensions between the sons of these two men, Clovis and Syagrius. Taking as his point of departure the argument that the chronology of the early part of Clovis's reign, based entirely on the affirmations of Gregory of Tours, is unreliable, Halsall develops a scenario very different from ours. We cannot discuss in detail here his ingenious arguments, but must note that it suffers from ignoring the archaeological sources and from some inexact statements of historical geography. We cannot allow, for example, the idea that Tournai and Soissons were located in *Thoringia* (Halsall translates this by the neologism *Tungria*/"Tongria"), and thus in the region where the Franks were set-

⁷⁵ Ewig 2001.

⁷⁶ GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum decem*, II, 9.

⁷⁷ GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum decem.*, II, 9.

⁷⁸ GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum decem.*, II, 12.

⁷⁹ Halsall 2001.

tled within the Empire during the IVth century : Tongres and Toxandria were located between the Rhine and the Charbonnière Forest in *Germania Secunda*, while Tournai and Soissons were in *Belgica secunda* (the province over whose destinies Childeric and then Clovis were to play the determining role). Tournai was probably chosen for Childeric's burial simply because he happened to die there : it was, after all, the capital (*caput civitatis*) of one of the *civitates* of *Belgica Secunda* ; the choice certainly does not reflect the will of Clovis to return to the site of the foundation of Frankish power in the Empire.

Additional note

Childeric's tomb itself remains, at least in the light of recent research, extraordinary in every respect. In effect, whether one considers the grandiose *tumulus* above the royal burial chamber, the surrounding pits packed with many sacrificed horses (there may have been even more than the three excavated pits) or the extravagant grave-goods (the spread of gold-and-garnet cloisonné ornament in northern Gaul begins with this grave), there is no comparable discovery in the Roman West nor, for that matter, in the western Germanic realms. There are, however, a series of contemporary royal or princely graves discovered in Central and Eastern Europe (Apahida, Blucina, Zuran, etc.),⁸⁰ which show that Childeric's rich funerary display was not something wholly isolated, and was likely inspired by that of the barbarian courts in the East, several of which were active in the service of the Roman Empire. In our view the most plausible explanation, which we have already formulated more than once,⁸¹ is that Childeric became familiar with the East-Germanic high-prestige styles of ornament and weaponry, and with their reflection in funerary practice, during his Thuringian exile at the court of King Bisin (455–463?). One need not, in our view, explain, as Guy Halsall proposes to do, Childeric's funerary splendor uniquely by a troubled historical context and by the desire of his son Clovis to affirm by funerary extravagance the legitimacy of his power, whether in regard to Roman authority or to the other Frankish kings in northern Gaul. On the contrary, it strikes us as much more probable that Childeric, a figure perfectly integrated into the

⁸⁰ Cf. Catalogue 2000.

⁸¹ Kazanski & Périn 1988; 1996.

Roman world with his authority as administrator of *Belgica Secunda*, designed his own funeral, taking as his model the lavish display of eastern Germanic rulers, which he had gotten to know during his exile. Indeed, he seems to have pushed this to an extreme at Tournai, judging from the unprecedented number of sacrificed horses.⁸² By these acts Childeric and Clovis could affirm, in a public and spectacular manner, a new royal style in the Germanic West, thus advancing the supremacy of their lineage and anchoring ever more firmly the emerging Merovingian dynasty.

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⁸² Müller-Wille 1998.

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Figures

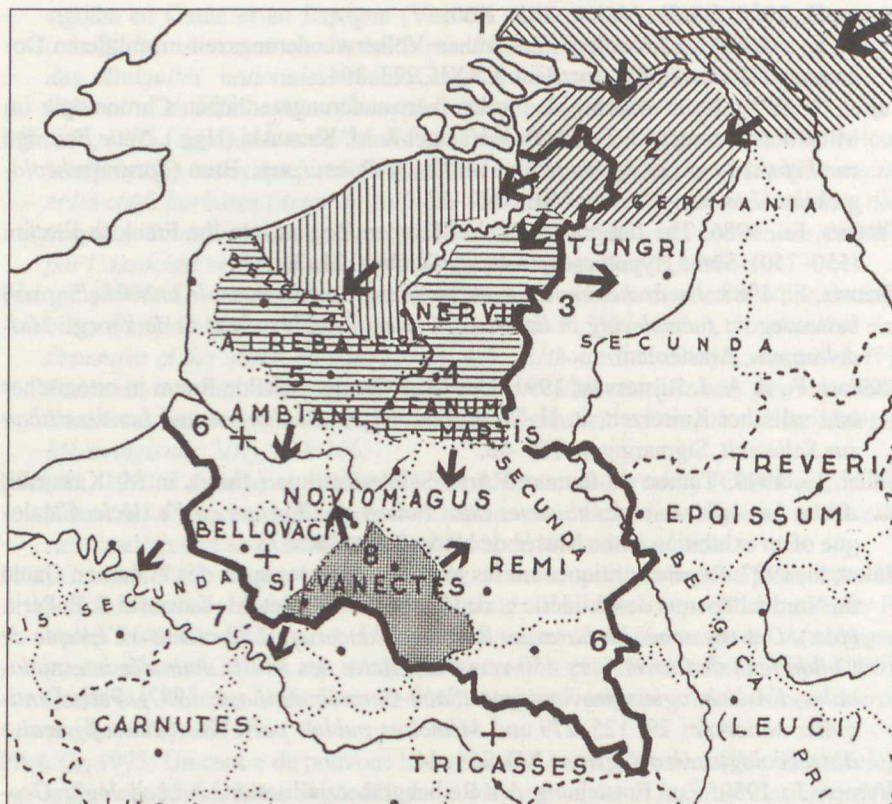


Fig. 1 The advancement of the Franks.

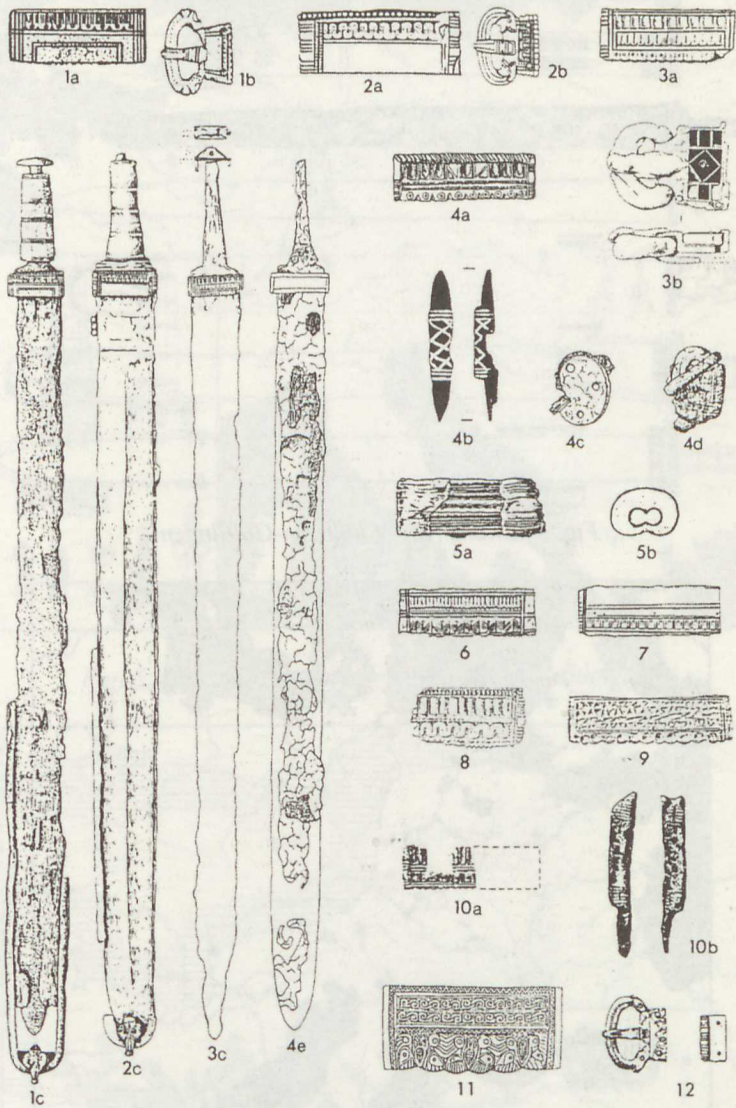


Fig. 2 Sword type 'Krefeld-Gellep'.

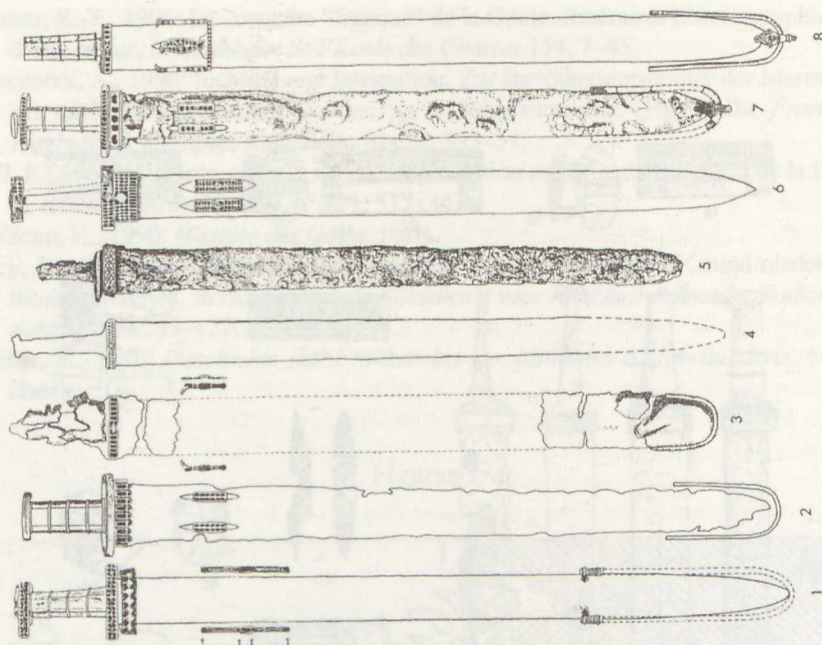


Fig. 3 Sword type 'Flonheim-Gültlingen'.



Fig. 4 Distribution of the type 'Krefeld-Gellep'.

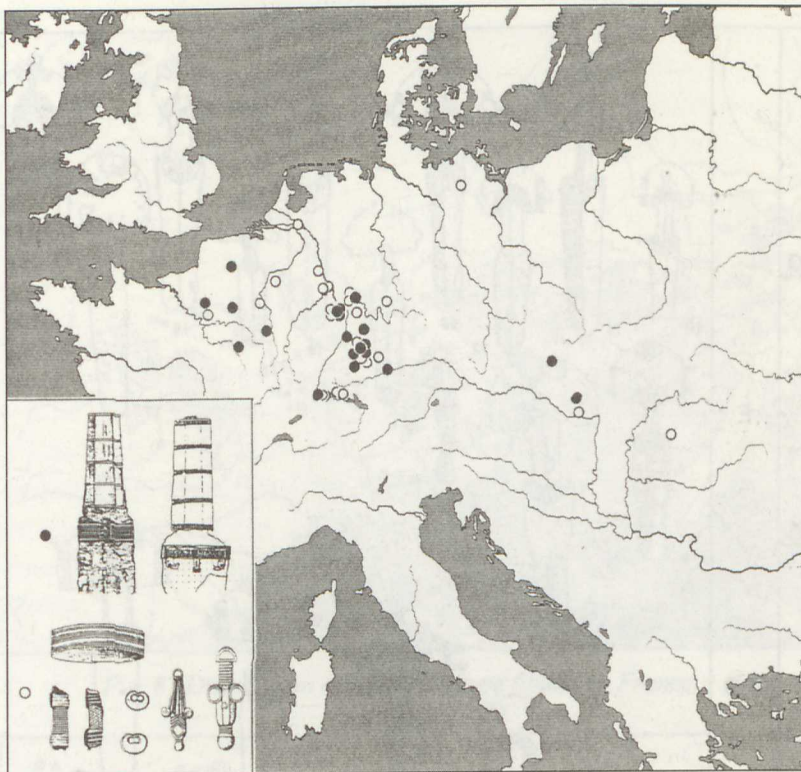


Fig. 5 Distribution of the type 'Flonheim-Gültlingen'.

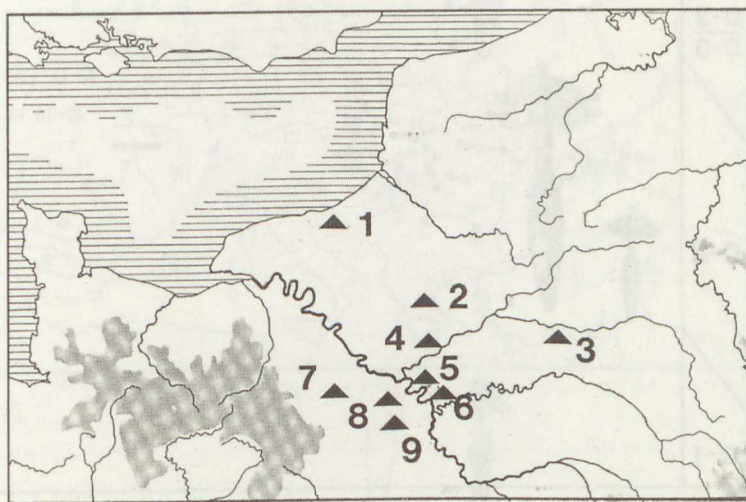


Fig. 6 Distribution of Frankish objects south of the Somme.

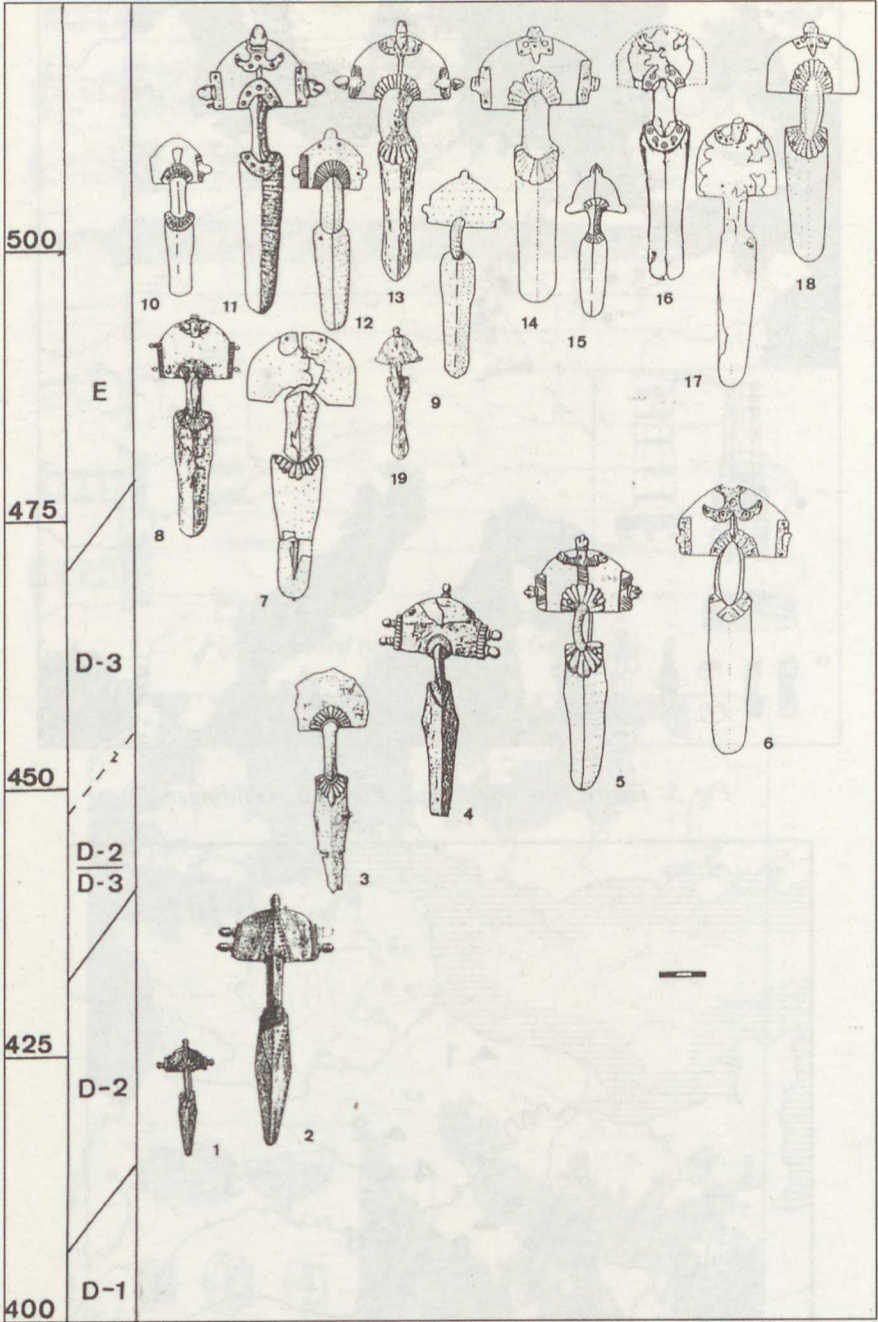


Fig. 7 Development of Danubian type fibulas.

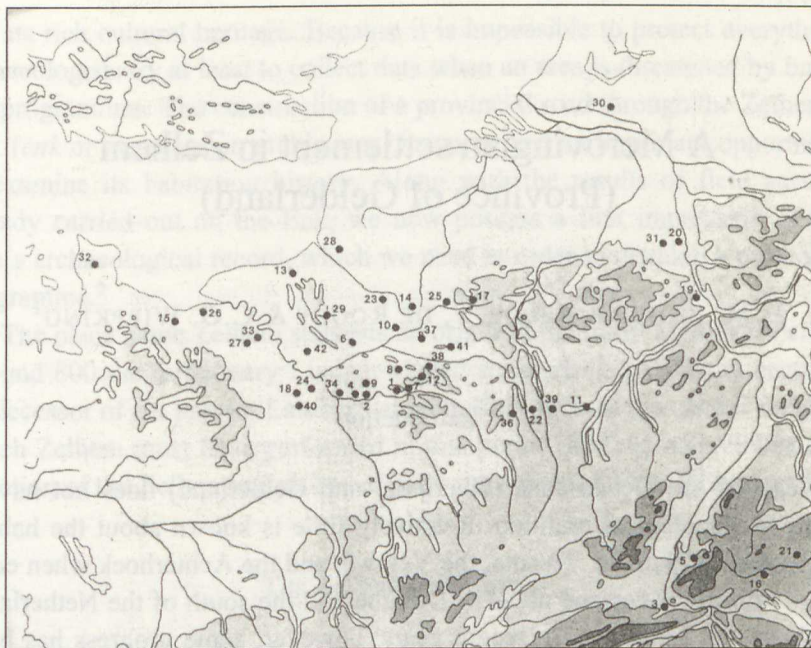


Fig. 8 Distribution of Danubian type fibulas in France.

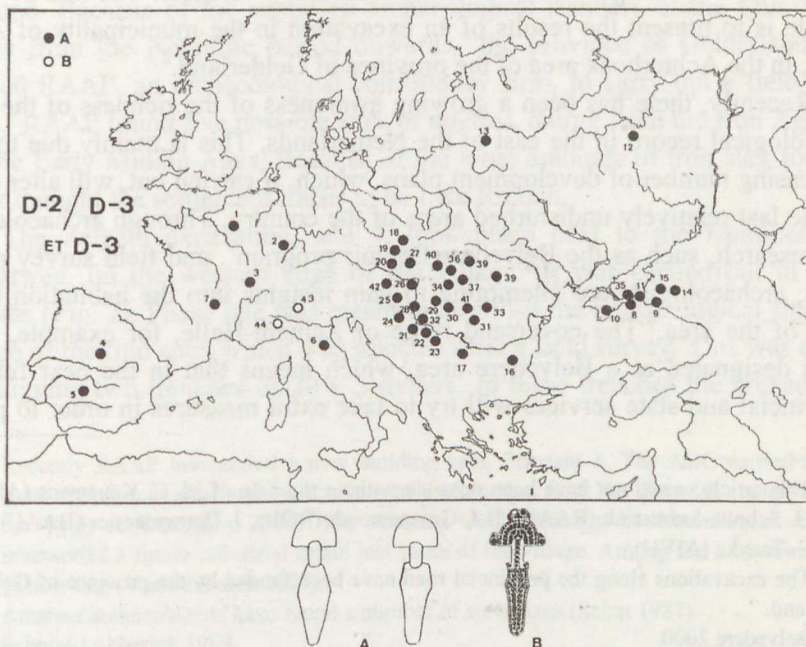


Fig 9 Distribution of the Danubian fibula type Tejral Group D.3.