

Frank SIEGMUND, Alemannen und Franken (Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde Band 23), Berlin – New York: de Gruyter, 2000. X + 472 pp.

This is not the book that its title suggests. Anyone turning to it in the expectation of finding some general survey of the Alamanni and Franks or a detailed study of their interaction will be disappointed. S.(iegmund)'s field of view is much narrower, and more concerned with the science of archaeology than with the history or even the archaeology of the Alamanni and Franks. His aim is to prove that these two peoples are distinguishable in the material record.

As S. is clearly well aware, the associating of archaeological with historical data is a difficult and, for a German-speaking scholar, even dangerous undertaking. It is notorious that the attribution of groups of artefacts to historically attested Germanic tribes was exploited by German nationalists and National Socialists as a means of demonstrating the peculiar continuity of German folk-history (57-63). The practice fell into disfavour after 1945. Early Germanic development is now interpreted in terms of 'ethnogenesis', by which is meant the continuous formation, dissolution and re-formation of ancient peoples under the pressure of events (53, 64). In this process the essential binding force is state of mind—self-identity, 'das Wir-Bewußtsein'—not blood, language or custom. In ethnic terms, people are what they think they are, and who outsiders then take them to be (cf. 41-2, 47-8). Such intangibles elude archaeological detection. In challenging so strongly entrenched a *communis opinio*, S. is taking a brave risk.

The first part of S.s' book (1-84) comprises a lengthy introduction. His section headings are self-explanatory: 'Einführung'; 'Zum Forschungsstand nach den Schriftquellen'; 'Zum Forschungsstand in der Sprachgeschichte'; 'Zum Beitrag der Siedlungsgeographie'; 'Zum Forschungsstand in der Archäologie'; 'Ethnos. Überlegungen zur Begrifflichkeit'; 'Schlüsse und Arbeitshypothesen'. The breadth of his reading and the frankness of his approach are wholly admirable. He provides a judicious and absorbing review not only of modern research on the Alamanni and Franks and their neighbours but also of developments in ethnology and archaeology as a whole, touching, *inter alia*, upon Herodotus, Gordon Childe, 'new' and 'post-processual' archaeology, and post-war Marxism (64-76). In addition, S. does not conceal the difficulties facing his line of argument (cf. 4-5, 26-7, 57-8 [the Kossinna legacy]); and he is at pains to explain what he wishes to demonstrate and how he intends to do so.

His approach is straightforward. (What follows is my synthesis of S.'s position; cf. his remarks on 6, 28, 35, 37-8, 73-6, 78-81.) An idea should not be rejected out of hand simply because it has not worked in the past. Despite continuing difficulties in dealing with the concept of *ethnos*, and so scepticism concerning its usefulness, practising archaeologists continue happily to assign artefacts to known peoples, even when such peoples, foreexample the Baiouarii or the Thuringians, are small and little known. Such association has been encouraged by a re-awakening of interest in historical archaeology and historical *ethne*. It is the archaeologist's duty to contribute to this debate. We know that the Alamanni and Franks existed, and so might well expect to be able to tell them apart archaeologically. Early medieval sources mention that peoples could be identified by their dress and weapons; and field archaeologists regularly distinguish between Alamannic and Frankish burials, though never fully explaining their criteria. Therefore why not make a methodical effort to isolate and classify these differences? Significant divergences are likely to be found not in the study of the typologies and distribution of particular objects ('what they are'), but in that of associations of objects ('how they were used') suggesting regional customs and usages ('Sitten und Gebräuche', a key concept: cf. 38, 66-7, 79-81).

In his next major section, 'Ansatz und Grundlage der Studie' (85-122), S. sets out his methodology. He develops thoughts regarding the superiority of studying assemblages of artefacts over the mapping of the chronological and geographical distribution of particular typologies. He also states what he hopes such study will reveal in his chosen area: a few, distinct *Kulturgruppen*, capable of ethnic interpretation (88). As for handling the sparse and difficult data, he lays emphasis on practicality, advocating approaches that make full use of the objects available for study, and produce broad but robust conclusions. As is well known, the archaeology of the period is overwhelming funerary in nature: we have few settlements. In this context, S. states firmly that he will confine himself to cemeteries, as large and as well excavated and published as possible, rather than individual burials. Likewise, he will set the evidence in just three time-periods: 'A', 450-530; 'B', 530-585; and 'C': 585-670 (91-92). He warns that he will use statistical methods in processing his data (95-6). He accepts that, for a variety of reasons (from ancient élite-burial and grave robbing to the deficiencies of modern archaeology), his statistical populations are not ideal, but argues forcefully that nonetheless these provide valid samples (see further below).

The heart of S.'s work is to be found on 123-252: 'Die Bestattungssitte'; 'Die Gefäßbeigabensitte'; 'Die Waffenbeigabe'; 'Zur Tracht'; 'Siedlungsgeschichtliche Aspekte'. Again, these headings clearly indicate the objects of S.'s atten-

tion, except for the last (a difficult subject, which S. deals with rather differently from the others, and perhaps rather desperately—I ignore it here). This section of S.'s book is long and important, but because it repeats a regular set of procedures it may be summarised relatively briefly. S. examines the occurrence of grave-goods in cemeteries. As said, he is interested in their relationship with each other. So, for example, in respect of vessel-burials, he establishes the proportion of hand-made to wheel-thrown pots per cemetery, and compares this figure with those of other cemeteries. He also calculates the proportion of glass vessels. These figures produce a distribution-pattern which S. first reproduces as it stands, and then subjects to a basic statistical procedure (standard deviation) to improve comparability. According to S., his results consistently reveal regions of different customs and usages in the deposition of vessels in graves: 'culture groups'. He repeats the exercise for weapon-burials (174-212), brooches (221-30) and belt-decorations (230-42). The most remarkable aspect of his findings is that, whatever the class of artefact studied and whatever the time-period, there always appear two large, regular groupings, one in the west and one in the south. In addition, from time to time there appear two other, smaller and less regular groupings, one in the east and one in the north.

By this point, the main work of S.'s book has been accomplished. From his stated purpose, remarks he has already made and one's own knowledge of the subject one can see already where he is heading. His distribution patterns indicate regional culture groups; and these culture groups may be assigned to historically attested peoples: the western to the Franks, the southern to the Alamanni, the eastern to the Thuringians and the northern to the Saxons. S., however, is not finished. Determined to cover all aspects of his topic, he adds a number of chapters, of varying length.

In 'Synthese der Einzeluntersuchungen' (253-292), in order to confirm his findings he subjects his data to a further, more sophisticated, statistical procedure, 'correspondence analysis' (255). This enables him to compare the occurrence of different diagnostic grave-goods directly with each other, i.e. to set cemeteries producing weapons and those containing vessels meaningfully against each other in the same tables and on the same graphs. Correspondence analysis apparently confirms all his groups, and allows him to refine his criteria for the classification of each „Kulturmodell“ (e.g. 267). He also uses this chapter to explain away various anomalies in his findings, and to note the apparent partition of Alsace between the western and southern groups (291-2).

In 'Exkurs: Bewaffnung oder Beigabensitte?' (293-300) he briefly considers the vexed question as to whether continental weapon-burials directly reflect weapon usage in a warrior society, or are symbolic, part of burial ritual. He favours the former.

'Die Deutung der Kulturgruppen' (310-313) reiterates in a summary fashion the main types of grave goods, and S.'s conclusions from them. Here he finally declares that his culture groups represent *ethne*, and identifies these as indicated above.

In 'Zur Oberschicht' (314-50), S. returns to a problem which he touched upon at the start of his book, the significance of rich, upper-class burials. These he had excluded from his tables and graphs in order to simplify analysis, and to avoid involving himself in the controversy concerning the nature of the Merovingian aristocracy: static or peripatetic? He now asks whether such burials show distinct regional characteristics or, conversely, whether they indicate free movement of the upper-classes through the area of Frankish dominion. He finds that, though there are problems in analysis, such burials can be ethnically differentiated, and that there was no significant movement of aristocrats. The burial customs of the rich appear to have been formed by the societies in which they lived, not by any over-arching culture of their own.

Finally, in 'Schlußfolgerungen' (351-61), S. summarises his methods and findings, stresses their objective nature and proposes possibilities for further work. He gives a useful overview of what he takes to be the boundaries of Frankish and Alamannic territory, and stresses the stability of these until the late seventh century.

S.'s book is not an easy read. It deals with a difficult subject in a complex fashion, and does not go out of its way to help the reader—for example, in its peculiar refusal to use chapter- or section-numbers. Assessment depends upon two basic questions. How valid are S.'s findings; and, if so, what are their implications?

As far as the first of these is concerned, I have to say simply that I do not know. A thorough checking of S.'s calculations would involve the close reconsideration of his basic data and his way of handling them, and an informed appraisal of his statistical methods, including the quality of the computer programs employed. The former would take months, if not years, and the latter is beyond my expertise. I could just about follow S. in dealing with standard deviation, but lost him completely when he turned to correspondence analysis, which he produced like a rabbit out of hat. All that I can say in this

respect is that I was somewhat surprised by S.'s defence of his statistical populations at 111-14. In claiming that his data are better than those of contemporary sampling-exercises he does not seem to me to be comparing like with like. Modern surveys are able to use very small sample sizes because they ask precise questions of living people. The archaeologist, on the other hand, can raise only broad issues and conjure up his personal response to them from relatively small and often indifferent collections of artefacts. As John Saltmarsh was famously wont to remark, over a generation ago, when lecturing on ancient socio-economic history at Cambridge, „The dead are beyond the reach of questionnaires.“

But what if S. is correct? In this case, as he claims, he will have given archaeology a useful new tool in the investigation of other cultures. However, whether others will test his techniques remains to be seen. Of more immediate interest to historians of late Antiquity is the extent to which his conclusions force changes in our understanding of the Alamanni and Franks. What he says is, without doubt, uncomfortable. Medievalists, for example, have been concerned by his drawing of the fifth-century frontier between Alamannia and Francia much further south than is usually accepted. Just before the appearance of this book, S. published a summary statement of his findings, including his thoughts on boundaries (in D. Geuenich (ed.), *Die Franken und die Alamannen bis zur „Schlacht bei Zülpich“* (496/97), 1998, 558-80). These were immediately criticised by Pohl (*ibid.* 644), who suggested that S.'s culture groups reflected not ethnic difference but „Formen in der Integration in die römisch-barbarische Zivilisation Nordgalliens“. In other words, if I understand Pohl aright, S.'s sharp line between 'Frankish' and 'Alamannic' burials was created not by ethnic distinction but by the extension of more sophisticated burial customs eastwards and southwards. Pohl expressed the opinion that significant ethnic difference between Alamanni and Franks was unlikely as early as the fifth century. I am inclined to say much the same about internal cultural homogeneity. From 301 S. emphasises that though his western and southern groups are different from each other they show no significant internal variations. This is very strange. For example, with regard to the Alamanni, it seems difficult to reconcile with modern views of their ethnogenesis in former imperial territory in Upper Germany and Raetia, after this had been evacuated by Rome from c. 260. It suggests, for instance, that the numerous mongrel warrior-bands, which are supposed to have settled in this region, very quickly developed a common culture, despite their being dispersed in small numbers over a large and broken area, and despite continuing political and military disunity. Such a culture would also appear not to have been disrupted by continuing immigration into the region from the east, down to the later fifth century. (For current thinking on the Alamanni see generally *Die*

Alamannen [Archäologisches Landesmuseum Baden-Württemberg], 1997; for continuing migration see D. Quast, *ibid.*, 171-90.) My historical intuition is that this is unlikely.

However, I am prepared to keep an open mind. Again, much depends on what happens next. S.'s book deserves very serious attention because of the immense amount of effort which he has invested in it. If it stimulates future work that confirms its findings, it will be seen as a major turning point in the development of ethnic archaeology. If it fails to provoke such work, or if its findings are shown to rest on weak data or statistical methods, it will become a forgotten curiosity of scholarship.

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