A cultural perspective on Merovingian burial chronology and the grave goods from the Vrijthof and Pandhof cemeteries in Maastricht
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Citation for published version (APA):

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Conclusion to part II

With regard to the previous sections, it can be concluded that the application of already existing typo-chronology schemes, when isolated schemes cannot be obtained on the basis of the available dataset (as it is the case for the Vrijthof and Pandhof cemeteries), involves two aspects each with different problems. First, a classification of the finds has to be made on the basis of these schemes; second, the dating of the types comes into question on the basis of which graves can be dated. It was stated that a chronological typology is required for chronological analysis. Both Siegmund and the Franken AG made considerable effort to meet this condition. Their typological classes are for the majority relatively refined.

The typological scheme of Legoux, Pépin and Vallet, which is the ‘final’ result of each of their previous works, is less ‘objective’, and resulted, in comparison with Siegmund and the Franken AG, for the majority of the objects in broader typological classes (compare for example their classification of pottery). Although the published cemeteries of the Middle Meuse Area are at first sight the most qualified to form the basis for the classification and dating of the grave goods from Maastricht, it was concluded that the grave goods from these cemeteries are for the majority classified and dated on the basis of Böhner’s typology, which is considered to be outdated for chronological analysis. The available publications of the cemeteries from the Middle Meuse Area are useful for insights in distribution patterns of resembling objects in relation to Maastricht, but not for typo-chronological analysis without a new research programme. The typo-chronological analysis of Siegmund and the Franken AG are the most recent studies in which the typologies are explicitly based on the chronological significance of the object-types. Their typology schemes do not cover the dataset from Maastricht completely, and their research area (the Lower and Middle Rhine Area) is considered to be culturally different from the Middle Meuse Area. The classification and dating of the grave goods on these schemes alone is insufficient. The objects from Maastricht will also be classified and dated, where possible, on the basis of Legoux, Pépin and Vallet, but also on the basis of specialised studies of categories of objects and on more distant typo-chronologies from Southern Germany, Switzerland and the Mediterranean world. On the basis of resembling grave goods it is concluded that these regions all have a, although for now not exactly defined, connection with Maastricht. These are distant cemeteries compared to the Lower and Middle Rhine area and the research areas of Northern France, which surround, although with some distance, the location of Maastricht (Fig. 11).

Classifications are made on the basis of the available objects from a period of considerable length. A classification will therefore always, more or less, reflect the gradual change in the material culture over time. This can be assumed to be a given characteristic of each considerable dataset which covers a substantial period. In contrast, the ordering of graves is based on their resemblance of combinations of object types and the gradual change in material culture is not reflected to the same degree in the obtained typo-chronological schemes because the processes in the period after production till deposition (distribution, acquisition, use and transmission) is becoming an influence. On the basis of
the discussions in part I of this thesis, it is concluded that these are complex processes which distort the image of gradual change of material culture. That the objects were the possessions of the persons with which they eventually were buried stands at the basis of the presumed gradual change in material culture in a seriation of graves. Therefore, not so much the development through time of the material culture we encounter in graves is questioned, but much more the reflection of this gradual change in the burial evidence and therefore the possible precision of the periods in which graves can be dated. Moreover, if the circulation periods of the various objects in one grave are observed more closely, it appears that considerable variation can be detected which are only sporadically discussed as a consequence on the predominant focus on the establishment of burial phases of graves.

The analysis of the skeletal remains, in combination with significant research questions, can contribute to insights with regard to the character of the connection between grave goods and the deceased and the associated circulation periods. The dataset of the Vrijthof and Pandhof, as it was argued, is too small to offer significant patterns of age at death and associated grave goods assemblages. A number of research questions were offered instead on the basis of which it can in the first place be investigated whether burial with inalienable personal possessions can either be accepted or rejected as general practice that resulted in the burial evidence to be analysed. On the basis of the illustrative examples of the Vrijthof and Pandhof cemeteries, but also the patterns which were identified in other cemeteries, it seems that other choices were made with regard to the selection of objects as grave goods. A connection between the dead and their grave goods did exist, but this connection is more complicated than ‘inalienable personal possessions’ pictures it to be. Certainly the process of objects distribution, acquisition and transmission was more complicated than this connection implies. The examples of Maastricht graves revealed a variety of circulation periods for each assemblage. Not the widest range has to represent the factual circulation of the objects, but a narrow dating of the grave underestimates the underlying circulation processes. A cultural perspective on Merovingian burial chronology should in the first place investigate the relation between grave goods and the deceased, and should focus more on the variation of circulation in a grave than on the dating of the complete assemblage to a restricted period of time. Therefore, as a conclusion, it is argued that more effort should be put in the creation of independent chronological sequences of the various object-types other than on the basis of the chronological phasing of assemblages. How this should be obtained on the basis of objects, which are predominantly known from the specific contexts of graves, remains a challenge for future research. In this thesis the objects are still dated on the basis of dates that were obtained as such because this was the only available framework for the dating of a dataset such as the one from Maastricht. The difficulties that were encountered regarding the application of this chronological framework, however, created the chronological discussion in this thesis.

Some choices with regard to the classification and dating of the objects from the Vrijthof and Pandhof cemeteries had to be made with these conclusions in mind. These choices are the following:

1. The classification of the grave goods on the basis of the discussed typologies
   The grave goods from the Vrijthof and Pandhof cemeteries are classified according to Siegmund’s typology scheme in which the alterations made by the Franken AG will be followed. The classification will be extended with typological discussions from other cemeteries or specialised studies of certain object groups when relevant.

2. The absolute dating of the grave goods on the basis of existing typo-chronologies
   The dates of the types of Siegmund and the Franken AG will be used. These will be compared with the dates from Legoux, Périn and Vallet, and others when relevant. A relatively broad date range for each individual object will be aimed at, not the narrowest possible.

3. The absolute dating of the graves on the basis of this result; broad dating ranges will be preferable.
   The Franken AG phases are for now translated into Maastricht phases (Table 14). This phasing does more justice to reality than Siegmund’s phasing (the phases are (slightly) broader than those of Siegmund for the Lower Rhineland), and the Kölner Bucht is not far from Maastricht. The result is an
ordering of the grave goods in Maastricht phases 1-10 (list 2: list of dated objects), on the basis of which the final dates for the graves are realised (list 1: list of dated graves). In this stadium the graves will be dated relatively broadly, not as narrow as possible as the date range of the youngest objects in graves would make it possible (see the introduction to the discussion of the grave finds). As a result, graves are scarcely dated to just one Maastricht phase, but for the majority in two or more phases.

The final conclusions relate to the creation of a new typo-chronology of Merovingian grave goods for the Middle Meuse area on the basis of numerous cemeteries and an extended number of grave goods assemblages. Should such a scheme be aimed at, and should it be based on, a refined classification in order to obtain reliable chronological results? It was stated that every dataset of a considerable number of objects of a substantial period of time will always represent a change of features which are related to time. A seriation of assemblages of grave goods will distort the picture of this gradual development to a certain degree due to complex cultural processes of object distribution, acquisition, use, transmission and finally the choice to bury them with the dead. Despite the findings of Siegmund and Nieveler, that cluster analysis proved that the dataset on the basis of which Siegmund performed his seriations has an underlying structure that shows a gradual development of the grave goods assemblages, it is stated that the interpretation of a chronological seriation is the most reliable when the graves are dated in relatively long phases which should perhaps not comprise less than 50 years. Such a scheme, based on a chronological classification of the grave goods, offers relatively reliable chronological phases of graves on the basis of which the development of the burial rite in the Middle Meuse area can be analysed. There exists a difference between the process of dating graves and dating objects.

For separate categories of objects, such as for example biconical pots, refined classifications of their characteristics separately can be seriated on the basis of which it can be possible to obtain a detailed change of features over time. Probably this would be the most solid method to obtain chronological sequences of object-types. The dating of refined classes of objects should preferably not be based on the seriation of graves, but on separately performed seriations of various object groups from a restricted region. Such orderings can provide insights in the chronological change of their characteristics, but attaching absolute dates to them will still be a challenge. The various circulation periods of the objects which are associated with each other in a grave, however, provides more cultural insights in burials than the dating of the complete assemblage to one specific phase.

The problems of complex processes of exchange, acquisition and transmission were discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis. Another image of cultural reality is created, which stands in contrast with the alleged unaltered status of objects as personal property. This last perception of grave goods is expressed by several researchers, such as discussed in the sections above, which are primarily concerned with chronological analysis. But on the basis of which considerations are the boundaries of the chronological groups established? It appeared that this was a rather subjective process, based on meagre evidence. For Siegmund, this process resulted in 11 so-called Rhineland phases, of which the sixth century consists of phases of 15 years. The typo-chronological scheme of Legoux, Périn and Vallet consists of nine phases with more or less the same length (40-50 years). Does this mean that the rapid change in grave goods as was observed in the sixth century in the Lower Rhine area did not occur in the Ardenne-Meuse region, or is it that certain methodological choices underlie this phenomenon? I suggest that in the process of classifying, seriation and/or topo-chronological analysis, and relative and absolute phasing, so many steps and choices are made that the final chronological result lies far away from the already selective burial evidence that a high degree of accuracy is difficult to accept for these results. This problem is especially urgent for the acceptance of short burial phases. It appeared that the underlying circulation periods for the majority of the object-types comprise longer periods. Despite these being averages, and the individual circulation periods of objects cannot be grasped, it can be a starting

412 See also the list of steps in the introduction to the discussion of the grave goods from Maastricht.
point for burial chronology from a cultural perspective to accentuate the variation in circulation in isolated graves apart from the burial phases of graves. The variation in circulation offers possibilities to address questions regarding various processes of distribution, exchange, acquisition, keeping, transmission and burial, or in other words the social component of the variety of early medieval objects prior to their selection and deposition as grave goods.