Germaanse samenlevingen tussen Rijn en Weser: 1e eeuw voor-4e eeuw na Chr.

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SUMMARY

GERMANIC SOCIETIES BETWEEN RHINE AND WESER

The subject of this thesis is the Germanic societies between Rhine and Weser, from the Late Iron Age through the Late Roman period (1st century BC-4th century AD). The research is part of the project “Power and elite”, focused on long-term developments in the socio-political organization in the pre- and early history of Northwestern Europe. The societies between Rhine and Weser are interesting because they remain unconquered by the Romans and retain their martial character and segmentary socio-political structure, as opposed to the “warrior societies” of Northern Gaul. In the long run Germanic tribes contribute to the disintegration of the Roman Empire through frequent raiding, but at the same time the Franks of the Rhine-Weser area play an important part in the maintenance of the Roman army and administrative structure. Therefore knowledge of these societies is indispensable for understanding the genesis of Early Medieval Europe.

According to current opinion, Germanic socio-political organization underwent fundamental transformations during the Roman period. The typical tribe of the Late Iron Age is believed to have been a small, kin-organized unit ruled by a king with primarily “ritual functions”. Some members of the elite with their Gefolgschaft (retinue) of young aristocratic warriors achieved many victories, and consequently booty, land and new subjects. This attracted warriors from other tribes and led to the disintegration of existing ethnic entities. During their military expeditions, some Gefolgschaften grew into new, large units, such as the Franks, Saxons and Alamanni.

I examined to what extent these images are in accordance with “historical reality”, considering the ideas behind the texts of both classical authors and modern historians and archaeologists. Besides attention is given to possible emic views of the Germans on the social and cosmological order, because these directed their actions.

This study is focused on three questions about the socio-political organization of the societies between Rhine and Weser. The first concerns the nature of the social organization and the basis of power of elites around the beginning of the first millennium. The second examines to which extent these changed and the third investigates the causes of the changes.

After the first introductory chapter, the second surveys existing theoretical approaches in archaeology. The extent to which each approach succeeds in solving the core problems of archaeology can help us to direct our own research. The first problem concerns the definition of the object studied: societies or cultures. The second is about the fact that the acts and thoughts of past peoples are to be reconstructed out of silent and imperfect remains, features and artefacts. This implies that the reconstruction is to be completed with the help of texts from contemporaneous outsiders and knowledge about non-Western cultures or our own society. Our images of the past automatically become somewhat a-historical and static.

Cultural-historical archaeology rightly paid attention to the specific culture of past societies, but never succeeded in breaking loose from the idea of continuity between Germanic and modern (German) society. This prevented the serious study of Germanic values and practices. The fact that scholars had always equated people, race, language and material culture resulted in a merely descriptive archaeology once the ethnic interpretation was deemed politically incorrect. In the same fashion the history one wrote was primarily concerned with the typological development of artefacts.

Within “settlement archaeology” the research of a important data-set was developed, and consequently excavation- and research methods in general. Because it was rooted in culture-historical archae-
ology, the approach remained empirical and still equated prehistoric and modern man. Research focused on “real”, quantifiable data on the physical landscape, ecology and local economy. Social and ideological aspects, as well as the historical context of past societies were hardly taken into account.

Processual archaeology had many achievements, firstly because it led to the general acceptance of theoretical discussions about the ways to increase archaeological knowledge, as well as the improvement of research methods in general. Secondly, anthropology was integrated into archaeological research, a very important step in making the latter a historical social science. Unfortunately inspiration was sought in neo-evolutionary anthropology, which reduces the cultural diversity of man into a few ideal types and presents change as sudden transformations. Processual archaeology can also be criticized for its view on culture as a means of adaptation to the social and natural environment. In practice attention was merely paid to the latter, making the approach not very different from existing settlement archaeology. Man was viewed as a passive being and material culture as a direct (although incomplete and distorted) reflection of human “behaviour”.

The use of structural Marxism in the study of Germanic societies was only applied by Danish archaeologists. Especially important is the notion that “tribal economy” is embedded in social relations; it is the first step in recognizing prehistoric man as someone whose way of thinking differs from ours.

The last-mentioned notion was elaborated in post-processual archaeology. Another important contribution was the acknowledgement of the role of the researchers’ own subjectivity in reconstructions of the past. In addition scholars finally realized that man is not a passive creature, that material culture is not a direct reflection of behaviour, and that a mere history of “events” must be rejected. Inside the range of post-processual approaches Hodder’s contextual archaeology is the most interesting, because it is more than a “noncommittal” philosophy of science, but really tries to handle the archaeological data. Putting his ideas into practice remains problematic, however. Debatable is the focus on individuals rather than groups, the way Hodder thinks to detect meaning from material culture and the method of “reliving the past”. The danger exists that the prehistoric “other” is again endowed with modern characteristics.

Personally I try to use the elements from existing approaches that were positively valued above. The resulting archaeology, in essence also practised by the other participants in the Pionier-project, can be called “historicizing” and “anthropologizing”. Because of the differences between the participants however, one cannot speak of a “paradigm”.

Chapter 3 focuses on the problem of the “poor” material culture of the Rhine-Weser area, compared to that of surrounding Germanic regions. Because the explanation is often sought in the ethnic situation, our attention is first turned to the anthropological study of ethnicity. Ethnicity is part of the classification in which groups place themselves and others when ordering the elements of the everyday world and the universe as a whole. Because groups often envisage themselves as biologically self-perpetuating and endogamous, classifications can be modelled as genealogies (in which the supernatural is incorporated). In reality kinship is metaphorical rather than biological. The element of differentiation in ethnicity becomes more important as interaction with other groups increases, and can be manipulated to achieve certain aims.

Classical sources present us with a classification of Germanic groups: the so-called Mannus genealogy. It is unknown however, which tribes considered themselves part of the supra-tribal categories of the Ingaevones, Istaevones and (H)ermiones and in which contexts they did this. More is known about the supra-tribal unit of the Suebi. It is clear that the participating tribes were united in certain situations (cult, descent-myths), but most of the time were seriously divided, even inside the tribe itself. Finally, the supra-tribal unit of the Germani is primarily an etic construction in which the Romans placed a large number of groups living east of the Celts and the Rhine. For the tribes themselves, the label Germani was probably only important in interaction with Rome, while the name had martial connotations.

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Because ethnicity is a cultural construct, people can use a range of symbols to express it. The archaeologist never knows in advance which symbols he has to trace, and frequently these did not survive. Language however, is often important in the perception and classification of the world, and is a powerful means of expressing ideas and values. Therefore the "Nordwestblock-hypothesis" of the German scholars Hachmann, Kossack and Kuhn is interesting, since it uses linguistic arguments to explain the cultural individuality of the Rhine-Weser area.

In the study area names of places and waters occur that are unaffected by the sound shifts used to define the Germanic languages. East of the Weser on the other hand, these shifts had taken place by the beginning of the Christian era. This is not enough however, to prove the existence of a separate language – not Celtic or Germanic – between Rhine and Weser. Therefore it remains a hypothesis that this language was relevant in defining the ethnicity of the inhabitants. The only fact seems to be the relatively old age of the "unshifted" names, which implies a certain continuity and stability in the occupational history of the area between Rhine and Weser.

The only aspect of the material culture in which the supposed cultural individuality of the Rhine-Weser area is reflected, is the absence of characteristic elements of the "Celtic" and "Germanic" archaeological cultures. In this study I have highlighted the differences with the "Germanic" core-area east of the Weser. In that area the material culture of the elite consists of weapons, bronze vessels and gold and silver objects. Almost all these items are discovered in graves, virtually none in ritual deposits and settlements. Therefore an explanation for the "poverty" of the Rhine-Weser area must be sought first of all in the burial ritual.

The causes for the relatively small number of known cemeteries are the low percentage of urn-graves and the practice of burning the grave-goods on the pyre. This reduces the chances of discovering graves. The known cemeteries are small as a rule and seem to contain only a part of the inhabitants of the accompanying settlements. The number of "elite-graves" can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and in the remaining graves (parts of) bronze vessels and weapons are rare. In the Holocene coastal areas only one cemetery is known, as well as about twenty isolated graves.

On the basis of the known grave-finds from the study area a number of scholars believes the society was non-hierarchical, almost egalitarian, while the groups in the rest of Germania had a considerable vertical stratification. On the one hand this contrast is based on the images created by classical authors, and on the other hand on the assumption that burial ritual reflects social structure.

Among other things, anthropological studies of mortuary ritual demonstrate that this last assumption is not true. Only a small proportion of the graves reflects the social position and/or wealth of the deceased. The grave is more a location to store the mortal remains and less a residence for the "soul". The social roles, claims, rights and possessions of the deceased are to be redistributed among the descendants and the rest of the (local) community. However, when the redistribution is problematical, or the social relations are not clear, the grave of an individual can become important in the "ritual communication" with the outside world.

Ritual communication in the Rhine-Weser area may not be expressed in the archaeological visible elements of the mortuary ritual, but probably took place in other contexts, such as tribal assemblies. Subsequently, it is relevant that the burial ritual is characterized by a scant monumentality of the graves and a small number of grave goods, already since the Middle Iron Age. In the Elbe area on the other hand, there is a continuous tradition of depositing metal objects in graves, which presented a model for the elaborate burial ritual of the elite around the beginning of the era.

Finally attention is paid to the phenomenon that the bronze vessels and weapons in the Elbe area are imported. It is plausible that the objects, manufactured in Italy and Gaul, were obtained in exchange-relationships with Gallic elite-groups after military assistance was given by the Germans. The objects were put in the graves because they referred to the vastness of the exchange networks and the martiality of
their owners. The burial ritual in the Rhine-Weser area prevents any insight in the possible contacts of the elite with Gaul. A small number of glass armrings and Celtic coins, however, demonstrates a certain amount of interaction.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the socio-political organization. In the first place it is described how the generally accepted model for the development of Germanic society was generated in the Verfassungsgeschichte. It is chiefly a stereotype of a “primitive” socio-political organization, founded on kinship and ritual power, that is replaced by “real” power, originating from landownership and military success. Comparable ideas can be found in the neo-evolutionism of processual archaeology.

On closer investigation the written sources do not point to a decreasing importance and changing meaning of kingship. Some groups lack kings for several generations due to intense elite competition in and around the stirps regia, but in the long run kingship is structural. During the whole of the period studied, the king performs both “sacred” and “profane” functions. Only the changing terminology of the Late Roman authors suggests a change of meaning.

An increasing importance of the Gefolgschaft or comitatus cannot be proved. The Gefolgschaft, a group of young aristocratic warriors holding a special position within the clientele of a princeps, is already fully developed in the Early Roman period. As an institution it never dominates the tribe. Members of the elite participate in inter-tribal networks and at every moment competition inside the tribe exists. When a princeps cannot meet his obligations, his Gefolgschaft disintegrates.

In the remaining part of the chapter an attempt is made to approach the socio-political organization from a different angle. I make a plea to refrain from making the artificial difference between “real”, economic-military power and “ideological” power. People in the past did not differentiate between the two, and in practice exercising power was strongly related to the cosmology and central values. The central values of the inhabitants of the Rhine-Weser area probably resembled those expressed in Beowulf, an epic that may be seen as an emic text of the Germanic warrior societies. More anecdotal remarks of the classical authors about the deeds of Germans often match the ideas expressed in the epic.

Power is not simply the result of the disposition of booty, land, tributes and people. A warrior must acquire “fame” or good reputation by noble descent and bravery. A leader has to acknowledge this by words and gift-giving. The power of leaders and warriors is bound by the obligation to keep acting bravely, and most of all to be and stay generous towards other members of the elite and his clientele. This constantly diminishes material wealth obtained. Moreover, not all objects of high intrinsic value are suitable for gift-giving, but only those with a long “history” and “fame”, referring to the reputation of former owners.

Archaeologists can only trace the ideologically less important spheres of short-term exchange, consisting of agrarian products, raw materials and valuables of a lower order. Valuables belonging to long-term exchange are deposited in the soil only exceptionally, because their high value is acquired and maintained during circulation only. In the Rhine-Weser area there is the additional complication that graves and ritual depositions, in which one may expect to find valuables, play a minor role. Cattle and certain Roman imports (such as silver and gold coins) are the only goods that may be viewed as prestige items, though not belonging to the highest category of valuables.

The fifth chapter is about the settlements, an important source of information about the agrarian production, crafts and the social and economic differences between households. After explaining the current opinions about the development of the settlement system, as well as regional research traditions, the results of more than 40 settlement excavations are examined. I discuss more or less completely excavated sites, of which at least a plan and a rough chronology is published.

I focus on the longhouses (Wohnstallhäuser) as central element of yards, and pay less attention to the
outhouses, because these can seldom be matched with specific houses. On the basis of a number of arguments, the average life-span of farmhouses is taken as 30-35 years. This makes better comparisons of the development of different sites possible. Granaries as well as sunken huts (Grubenhäuser) have multiple functions. Possibly the former become somewhat larger and the latter somewhat more numerous during the Roman period. The number of fences also increases, and the yards get a more regular layout; this cannot be taken as an indication of the introduction of the private ownership of land, however. The farmhouses on the sandy soils become longer and are divided into ever more parts. This points to a separation of activities and an increase of their number. However, the function of most rooms remains unknown.

Concerning the Holocene coastal area the settlements of four (micro-)regions are discussed. The first region, the “Oer IJ estuary”, is interesting because of the occurrence of different types of settlement. On the older coastal barriers settlements are small and shifting as a result of the susceptibility to sand-drifting. The isolated farmhouses on the peat are also moved often, because the peat-cushions on which they lie subsided. On the former creek-levees farmhouses as well as sod houses (without stables) were built. The excavators believe that the enclosures constructed next to the sod houses were used for cattle, and can be taken as an indication for cattle-raising on a larger scale. It is more probable, however, that these complexes were “satellites” of farmhouses and represent a settlement-type that either did not exist, or still remains to be discovered in other regions.

In the northwestern part of Groningen the larger terp (dwelling mound) of Ezinge and the smaller, non-raised settlements of Paddepoel were excavated. Both are exemplary in their development. The larger sites are founded in the Middle Iron Age, and quickly grow into terpen with several households. The smallest settlements only come into being later, when the border zones of the coastal areas are reclaimed, and grow into low dwelling mounds at the most. These settlements had to be abandoned later in the Roman period, while the large terps remained inhabited in the 4th and 5th century AD.

On the levees of the Ems river dwelling mounds as well as non-raised settlements existed. Bentumersiel, belonging to the latter category, seems less an agrarian settlement than a location for special activities (trade, transshipment?). An fascinating aspect of this site are the early Roman goods that can be connected with the presence of Germanicus’ troops in the vicinity.

Feddersen Wierde serves as a model for the series of large terps in the Land Wursten. I add critical observations to Haarnagel’s idea of the Häuptling (chief) attaining his position solely on the basis of accumulation of cattle. Certainly other factors were also important, while the number of cattle per farm on his Wirtschaftsverband is low compared with other households. Further it is concluded that the crafts in the settlement were practised in a less specialized fashion than Haarnagel believes. Those involved were by no means full-time craftsmen, but continued to play a part in the agrarian production and kept their claims on land. Moreover, the inhabitants of the “normal” farmhouses also practised crafts.

At present it is not possible to sketch the specific developments for each region on the sandy soils. Therefore it was decided to discuss the material by period and category of settlement. In the Iron Age a number of locations in a Celtic field were occupied, each with one or two farmhouses. Periodically the houses are situated elsewhere, so that the fields can lie fallow for some time.

A number of defended sites of the Late Iron Age are known, mainly from the northern fringe of the Drenthian plateau. Except for the ramparts and ditches there are no structures indicating special functions, only granaries and farmhouses. It remains possible however that the sites acted as centres on the micro-regional level and had a function in the exchange with the coastal regions as well. The presence of a number of contemporary farms reflects the process of concentration of settlement that begins in this period.

The number of simultaneously existing farms in settlements such as Flögeln and Wijster is smaller than generally believed. As a result of the clustering of households and population growth they reach a
size of ten to fifteen households. As said before, the regular lay-out is no indication for the private-ownership of land. Moreover, the regularity is only a phenomenon of some generations, because the yards start to move again in the Late Roman period. Not a single yard on the sandy soils can positively be identified as a Herrenhof or chieftain’s residence. It is difficult to gain any insight in the organization of crafts by archaeological means, but they were probably a side-activity of agrarian households, as in the coastal areas.

The average settlement remains much smaller than the type just mentioned and consists of two to four households. The lay-out is not very regular and often there is a gradual movement of the settlement area. Even later in the Roman period isolated farms (Einzelhöfe) remain in existence, in landscapes with small inhabitable areas as well as in the proximity of larger settlements. These sites are rarely excavated, because there is a relatively small chance of discovering isolated farms.

In chapter 6 the agrarian system is considered. In the Late Iron Age, barley was the most important cereal, followed by millet and emmer wheat. Barley was ousted by rye in the Roman period. This did not happen as a result of the Roman presence south of the limes, because in those areas bread wheat dominated, combined with high percentages of barley and spelt wheat. In the coastal regions barley remained the most important cereal, not because of bad agricultural conditions or conservatism, but thanks to the tolerance of the crop for salinity. The importance of agriculture along the coast is often underestimated. It is true that the emphasis was on stock-breeding, but the same applies to the sandy soils (see infra). Agriculture was crucial everywhere in the subsistence sphere, and it is difficult to imagine that cereals from the Pleistocene were exported on a large scale to the coastal regions.

The growing importance of rye cultivation was not the only important change on the sandy soils. It is likely that the more extensive Celtic field agriculture was transformed into more intensified systems, concentrated on “infields” on the soils with the highest loam-content. Unfortunately, remains of fieldsystems from the Roman period are unknown, as well as the precise chronology of the changes. Perhaps it was a lengthy and gradual process, taking place in the centuries around the beginning of the era.

In the Rhine-Weser area there are only nine or ten sites with enough bone-material to inform us about the composition of the livestock. Virtually all assemblages are from the coastal areas, and none point to changes through time. The small Germanic type of cattle, primarily kept for meat, predominates on every site. There are no serious arguments for considering the taller individuals as Roman imports. In the coastal areas sheep are more important than pigs, on the sand the reverse is the case. The horse appears in high percentages on some sites; perhaps people here specialized in breeding the animal. Its meat was consumed on a relatively large scale.

Usually only the importance of livestock as a food source is stressed and generally it is believed that just enough food was produced. The food situation was not as bad as is often thought, however. The livestock of most of the households was relatively large in numbers, and even those with only four head of cattle were probably self-supporting.

It can be argued that livestock, especially cattle, was also very important in the social and ideological spheres. Cattle functioned as a source of food and raw materials, as well as an item to be exchanged in the prestige sphere. Although it represented no valuable of the highest category, it could be used with more ease in exchange because of a more standardized value, availability and convertibility. The evidence for the importance of cattle lies in a number of indications in the written and archaeological sources. Cattle in its role as booty from raiding appear in Indo-European origin-myths and sources about the “warrior societies” of Early Medieval Ireland. Although stockbreeding was a topos often applied to barbaric societies, its importance can be distilled from the works of classical authors. The existence of the Wohnstatthaus, with people and cattle living under the same roof, is an archaeological indication. Furthermore there are the ritual deposits of animals in some settlements, as well as the low
height at the withers of cattle, which may be taken as an indication that a large herd was considered more
important than a qualitatively good one. Perhaps cattle were not used on a large scale for trading with
the Roman empire, because of their social and ideological importance in Germanic societies.

The subject of chapter 7 is the Germanic-Roman interaction from the beginning of the era onwards;
the Late Iron Age was discussed in chapter 3. Only at the end of the chapter do I write about the
archaeological material, most attention being paid to the written sources.

On the basis of the sources we can distinguish three periods: that of the Augustan-Tiberian cam­
paigns, the period of ca. AD 16-250, and the Late Roman period. This division is primarily dictated by
the characteristics of the texts and the number of sources available. I chose to give a “history of events”
in the first place to demonstrate the dynamics of the interaction. Apart from a overview of the Roman
military and diplomatic actions however, an attempt is also made to highlight the more structural histo­
ry, especially from the “Germanic” perspective. By this the perception of the participants on the Roman
presence is meant. Attention is paid to the opportunities it offered them to unfold their elite way of life.

The course of the Augusto-Tiberian campaigns is well known. In my opinion the primary objective
was the defence of Gaul. This goal was achieved, since German raiding across the Rhine stopped. The
military actions led to instability in Germania however. New trouble-spots were constantly developing,
and these called for Roman counter-actions. Thus in retrospective the impression arose that it always
had been Rome’s intention to conquer and occupy large parts of Germania.

Although raiding in Gaul was prevented, the practice remained important inside Germania. Service
in the Roman army offered new opportunities for expressing martial ideals. Members of the Germanic
elite served as officers, sometimes commanding irregular units of Gefolgschaft- or tribal warriors. The
aristocrats enlisted after signing treaties. Even when these originated from defeats they could be posi­tive­ly evaluated in the Germanic perception. A treaty implied clientele relations – expressed as “friendship”
or “kinship” – with members of the Roman elite, sometimes even the imperial family. This kind of
relation gave prestige within one’s own society.

Even after the end of the campaigns in AD 16, Rome thought she was entitled to intervene in
Germania, but this did not happen very often and gradually a closed border was formed. In addition to
few actions with limited goals, diplomatic activities were undertaken. Rome did not create a buffer zone
of Klientelhandstaaten, but kept specific members of the Germanic elite as contacts, signed treaties and
presented gifts. However, military support was never given to friendly Germanic leaders who were los­
ing ground in the elite-competition. Germanic warriors were enlisted only during crises in the Empire,
such as the events in AD 69/70, the Marcomannic wars and the emergence of usurpatores. At the same
moments it was possible for Germanic tribes to raid in Gaul. It is possible that individual Germans and
small units were enlisted on a more regular basis from the end of the 2nd century onwards.

In the 3rd and 4th centuries, groups from the Rhine-Weser area, now called Franci, undertook a
large number of raids in Gaul. In the latter century they played an important role in the Roman army.
Members of the elite, often of royal blood, served in the highest ranks. Sometimes they led their own
Gefolgschaft. A number of Frankish tribes formed units of hundreds of men in the auxilia palatina elite­
corps. In addition to booty and pay, Germanic warriors gained access to elite networks all over Europe.

The material reflection of the Germanic-Roman interaction is not treated at great length, because it
was recently studied in detail by Erdrich. His main conclusion is that during the Roman period a con­
tinuous, slowly growing stream of imports does not exist. Only during a limited number of periods, that
can be dated relatively precisely, did a certain amount of goods reach Germania, mainly by diplomatic
contacts. An intensive trade, with an accompanying influence on the economy and ideology of
Germanic groups, never existed.
The coin finds are discussed in more detail because they date the periods of interaction and are relevant from an elite-perspective. Furthermore they give important information on the Late Roman period which was not discussed by Erdrich.

Especially the coin-hoards offer interesting insights. A limited number of denarii-hoards dates from the Augusto-Tiberian period, and a large series from the second half of the 2nd century. The silver must have been obtained as a result of diplomacy and military service. Even though the data on the find-contexts are scarce, it is certain that a number of hoards were ritual depositions in “watery contexts”. Above all the coins from the hoards sometimes circulated for generations as part of the “thesaurus” of elite-families. The hoards of the Late Roman period consist mainly of gold. They got to Germania within the framework of treaties with specific Roman emperors. Again there are hoards from watery contexts. Furthermore gold solidi were melted and made into neckrings, a conversion of coins into valuables of a higher category. In addition to gold a relatively large number of copper coins circulated, which points to a certain level of economic integration with the Roman empire. This can also be concluded from the growing similarity of the material culture on either side of the Rhine.

Chapter 8 again offers a discussion about ethnicity, this time in connection with questions about an increasing mobility of tribal groups, the replacement of Kleinstämme by Großstämme and the meaning of the latter. As in chapter 3 we are confronted with the problem of classical authors only mentioning names of tribal groups, without informing us about their character and the location of their territories.

If considered attentively, the mobility of groups does not increase during the Roman period. As in the preceding centuries there are continuous fissions and migrations for longer and shorter distances. The number of tribes seems to decrease because of biased accounts in the sources. Compared to the Augusto-Tiberian period and the second half of the first century, there is a lack of detail in the Late Roman reports on Germania, especially about the areas further away from the limes. As a consequence it appears that a number of tribes does not exist any more.

The character of the historical sources also deceives us about the importance of labels such as Franci, Frisii, Saxones and Alamanni. Most of all they have a geographical meaning, the Franci being the Roman enemies against Germania inferior and the Alamanni against Germania superior. The areas away from the limes are a kind of terra incognita. For this reason the Frisii disappear already before AD 300 from the sources, after being classified as Franci for a few decades, and cannot be considered a Großstamm. After some time the name Saxones becomes synonymous with everything living in the North and raiding by sea.

The classical texts are too brief to throw any light on the real meaning of the term Franci, and to reveal the original tribe of that name. Probably members of the Chamavi, Salii and Bructeri called themselves Franci when playing the part of prominent, martial warriors in the Roman army. The same applied to the name Germani in the Early Roman period. It is significant that the latter name is not used any more in Late Roman times alongside that of the Franci and Alamanni.

The most relevant conclusions in the framework of the central questions of this study are discussed in chapter 9. In spite of the scanty information in the classical sources, we may say that the socio-political organization around the beginning of the Roman period was already more differentiated than generally thought. The king, his kin and other aristocrats had a clientele of young warriors, the Gefolgschaft, as well as of men of lower rank. Within the elite intense competition existed. Positions of power were by definition unstable because of the obligation to keep performing brave deeds and to redistribute valuables and goods.

The instability mentioned is an important cause of the relatively static nature of the socio-political organization. Society consisted of a pyramid of patrons with clients, the latter acting as patrons them-
selves at a lower level. When a leader enlarged his group of dependants, in most cases this was only temporarily. Even when a king extended his rule by conquering another ruler and his tribe, this did not change the basic structure of segmentary society, for only a new patron was added at the top of the pyramid. After some time the new kingdom collapsed and split into a number of smaller entities.

Archaeology shows an increase of the primary production, a gradual population growth and expansion of settlements. In the perspective of local or (micro-)regional relations this could provide leaders with a greater basis of power, but on the (supra-)regional level things remained unstable and dynamical. In the periods of more intensive contacts with the Roman Empire leaders could acquire valuables and prestige, but only in the Late Roman period did they gain access to larger networks for a long time.

The present images of the societies between Rhine and Weser present the occurring changes as too far-reaching, by underestimating social differentiation in the Early Roman period and overestimating the impact of Roman “civilization” on the “primitive barbarians”. Certainly the interaction affected Germanic society, but not to a greater degree than autonomous processes of change.