EXAMINING THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE REGION OF METZ FROM ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES (5TH–7TH CENTURIES): PROBLEMS, POSSIBILITIES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND*

The region of Metz has always featured prominently in the archaeology of Merovingian Gaul. Several leading figures of the discipline worked on this area: Victor Simon, perhaps the first to understand the correct chronological potential of Roman coins in Merovingian graves; Édouard Salin, author of the monumental four-volume *La Civilisation Mérovingienne*; Frauke Stein, pioneer of the study of eighth-century lavish burials in Germany and whose knowledge of the cemeteries of

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* Some of this chapter originally appeared, in French, as ‘La Christianisation de la région de Metz à travers les sources archéologiques (5ème–7ème siècle): problèmes et possibilités.’ *L’Évangélisation des régions entre Meuse et Moselle et la Fondation de l’Abbaye d’Echternach (Vᵉ–IXᵉ siècle)*, ed. M. Polfer, (Luxembourg, 2000) pp. 123–46. The middle of that paper was essentially a translation of the bulk of ch. 5, above. That is omitted. What remains has been rewritten, with an added discussion of the implications for Anglo-Saxon archaeology. Some of this is founded on a paper, ‘Inhumation avec mobilier, la religion et les relations entre la haute politique et la politique locale dans la Gaule mérovingienne et l’Angleterre anglo-saxonne, ca. 450–ca. 700’, given to the 54th Sachsensymposium/24th Journées Internationales de l’Association Française d’archéologie Mérovingienne at St-Germain-en-Laye in September 2003. This was originally intended to form the basis of a contribution to the memorial volume for Richard Fletcher. As I was unable to deliver that contribution I should like to dedicate this chapter to Richard’s memory in gratitude both for his work on conversion and for all I learnt from him about history and its teaching.

1. The ‘region of Metz’ discussed in this paper is that, centred on the diocese of Metz but extending slightly to the west and south, which formed the subject of S&S.

2. See the excellent history of the discipline given by Patrick Périn in *La Datation des Tombes Mérovingiennes* (with contribution by R. Legoux) (Paris & Geneva, 1980), pp. 3–92. B. Effros, *Caring for Body and Soul: Burial and the Afterlife in the Merovingian World* (Philadelphia, 2002), and ead., *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology and the Making of the Early Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 2003) contain, between them, a splendid critical history of Merovingian archaeology. I am grateful to Prof. Effros for kindly allowing me to read her works in advance of publication and for many discussions of the issues relevant to this chapter.

the region of Metz is unsurpassed; and so on. Consequently, some of the region’s sites are equally well-known: Ennery (Moselle), Lavoye (Meuse), Dieue-sur-Meuse (Meuse), and most recently Audun-le-Tiche (Moselle). The author of perhaps the first real critical study of the problems involved in using archaeological data to study processes of Christianization, Professor Bailey K. Young, has also turned his attention to the cemeteries of this region. With this in mind, it seems appropriate to think once again about the archaeology of the region of Metz and what it may, or may not, tell us about the processes of Christianization in the north of Merovingian Gaul.

The first body of archaeological evidence to which we may turn in considering this topic is the cemeteries. In 1990 I catalogued 305 possible cemetery sites from the fifth to seventh centuries within the diocese of Metz alone. From about 500 AD it became usual for the people

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8 G. Halsall, *Civitas Mediaticorum: Settlement and Social Organization in the Merovingian Region of Metz*, D.Phil. Thesis, University of York, 1990, Appendix 2.a, pp. 414–511. Some sites there are clearly of dubious value, only being recorded on old archaeological maps, but even discounting these the total would still clearly be very close to 300. To that catalogue should be added Fontoy (Moselle; *Archéologie*