

DISPERSED AND NUCLEATED SETTLEMENTS IN SOUTHWEST GERMANY IN MEROVINGIAN TIMES¹

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In contrast to the many Merovingian grave finds in southwest Germany (*Dauber 1976; Christlein 1978, 39 ff.; Menghin 1990, 79 ff, Abb. 65; Donat 1991, 149 ff.*), settlements of the same period have been recently examined only in small numbers and often only partially (*Fig. 1*). Perhaps this is one of the reasons why continuation of the settlements from 4./5. century to 11./12. century is verified only by a few examples (*Bücker et al. 1997, 311 ff.*).

Nevertheless first tendencies can be observed concerning settlement structures in southwest Germany. We have hints concerning social differences between inhabitants of settlements or amongst settlements by the finds but also by the topographical structure of the site of the settlement and the structures of development. It seems that a change of power structures during 4th to 8th century caused a change in settlement structures in south-west Germany (*Geuenich - Keller 1985, 135 ff.; Steuer 1994b, 82 ff.*). This area includes more or less a region of Alemannic and Bavarian tribes (*Christlein 1978, 23, fig. 8; von Freeden 1996, 308 ff., fig. 247; Menghin 1990, 72, fig. 60*). In the following report you will find some examples about the development of settlement patterns and their social differences in southwest Germany.

Settlement Structures from the Late Roman period till beginning of Merovingian age (4th/5th centuries AD)

In the first three centuries AD, after the expansion of the Roman empire over great parts of Middle-Europe, North-Africa and Asia, and of course over south west Germany, its hegemony was weakened through numerous attacks from outside, especially at the Rhine-Donau border, and also through internal political crises in the 3th century. In the middle of the 3th century the region between Rhine, Donau and Iller, the so called "Dekumatland", was gradually given up. With the immigration of the Alamannics in this region a great change of population, language, religion, settlement and economic structures took place. The region between the Donau and the Alps, the Roman Raetia province, was a part of the Roman empire until the final decline in the second half of the 5th century (*Kaiser 1993, 5 ff.*).

Since the second half of the 3rd century the former Roman "agri decumates" was colonized by Germans (*Schach-Döriges 1997, 95 ff.*), while the late Roman border was drawn back to the Rhine and was guarded by forts after 369 AD (*Bakker 1997, 111 ff.*). We know through reports of the Roman historian Ammianus Mar-

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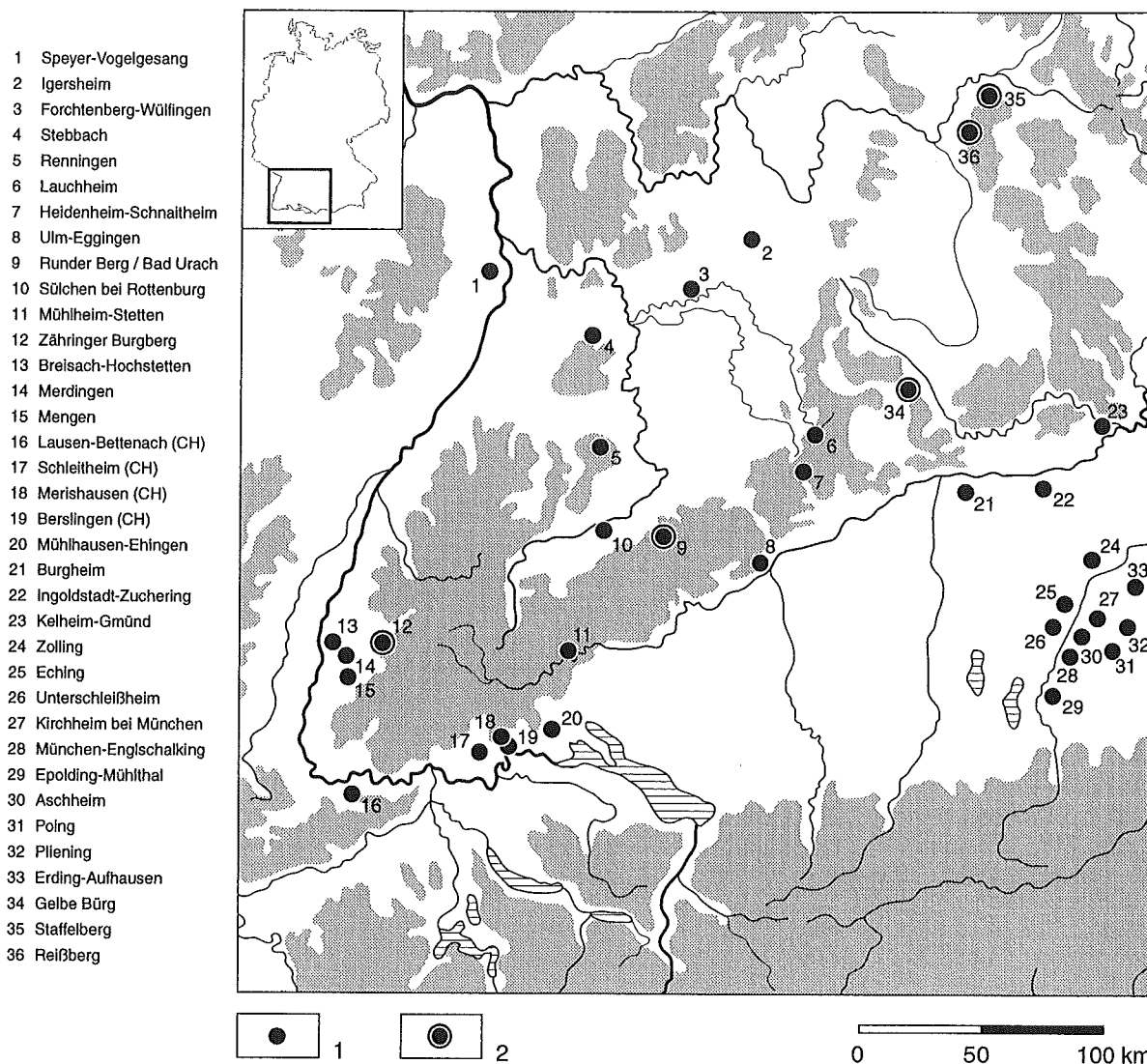


Fig. 1. Settlements of the Early Middle Ages in Southwest Germany (4th-12th century), that have been examined in a greater area. 1 - Settlements in the lowlands; 2 - Hilltop settlements.

cellinus about wars or relations regulated by contracts between the Roman Empire and the German tribes during 4th century (Dirlmeier - Gottlieb 1976, 49 f.). Some Alamannic leaders who ruled as minor kings (*reges, regales, optimates*) are known by name.

Germanic settlements in the lowlands and on hilltops are archaeologically verified (Bücker 1999a; 125 ff.; Steuer 1990a, 139 ff.; Menghin 1990, 48 ff.). Amongst the known rural housing schemes no social differences can be found, especially as until now only few places have been excavated extensively. That is why only little evidence can be given concerning structures of rural settlements during 4th/5th century AD.

The often mentioned fortified farmstead of Sontheim in Stubental south-east of Stuttgart (Fig. 2) cannot be dated to 4th century AD, but from 6th century BC taking newest investigations into account (Bücker 1999a, 136 ff.). But the unfortified farmstead next to it, consisting of main building, outbuilding and storehouse, certainly belongs to the 4th century AD (Planck 1990, 80 ff.). You can compare it to the early Alamannic farmstead in Mengen im Breisgau (Fig. 3), that has a large building with posts at ground level, a storehouse and a pithouse (Bücker 1994b, 28 ff.; 1999a, 209, fig. 61). It is more regarded as an agricultural building complex because of the finds of the settlements in the lowlands containing simple handmade Germanic pottery and the proof of textile craft material, as well as the small amount of bones and iron work - meant more for domestic requirements (Bücker 1999a, 161 ff., 198 ff.).

New excavations of the settlement site from Vörstetten near Freiburg seems to confirm, that the settlements of the fourth and fifth century were composed of single farmsteads (Bücker 1999b, 197 ff.). On an area

of almost 6000 m² a single farmstead, similar to Sontheim and Mengen, could be verified. The excavation will be continued in the next year.

The hilltop settlements show their grand character immediately by their location. At this time we know of 50 hilltops in southwest Germany bearing finds from early Alamannic times (*Steuer 1990a*, 139 ff.). But only few of them have been properly scrutinized, such as the Runder Berg close to Urach Urach (*Bernhard et al. 1991*) or the Zähringer Burgberg close to Freiburg (*Steuer 1990b*). Until now we are not able to date back building structures to the early Alamannic times with certainty, surely we can suppose that we have here an concentrated settlement organisation.

The hilltop settlement on Zähringer Burgberg lies at the foothills of the black Forrest about 200 m above the plain of Breisgau (*Fig. 5*). During 4th century big terraces were built on the top to increase settlement areas (*Fig. 4*) (*Bücker 1994a*, 168 ff.). The large scale alterations can only be imagined to be run under the management of an influential ruler.

A large percentage of the finds consists of Roman imported ceramics. Roman table ware is predominant (*Bücker 1994a*, 133, fig. 2), which certainly was meant to represent a good image of the owner (*Bücker 1997*, 135 ff.). The same is true for Roman drinking vessels (*Bücker 1999 c*, 215 ff.) and expensive accessoires for clothing (*Steuer 1990b*, 37 ff.). A military importance of the hilltop settlements is attested by weapons, for instance tips of spears, arrowheads, throwing axes and helmets, as well as parts of military belts (*Steuer 1997a*, 149 ff.). The hilltop settlements differ from those in the plains by dint of craftsmanship in non-ferrous metal, for instance tools, silver bars, smelting-pots and cut bronze (*Steuer 1994a*, 128 ff.). At the time being the hilltop settlements are interpreted as residences of Germanic rulers with their vassals, whose names are mentioned by different sources.

Alltogether the first German settlement is still orientated at Roman structures (*Hoeper 1994a*, 55 ff.); therefore one starts from the assumption that especially the Germans situated in front of Roman Rhine-bor-

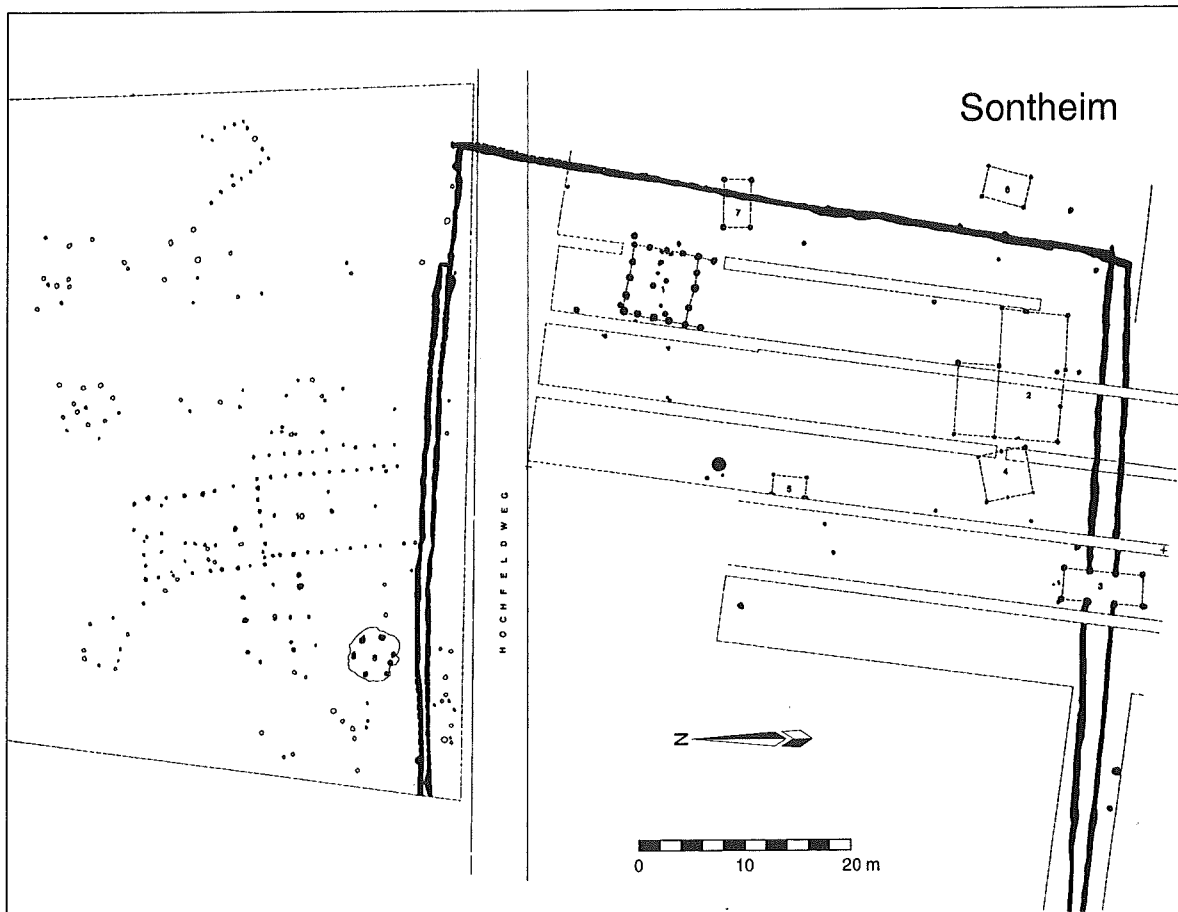


Fig. 2. Sontheim in the Stubental, Kreis Heidenheim (south-east of Stuttgart). Plan of the excavated settlement. The unfortified farmstead dated to the 4th century AD, but the fortified farmstead dated back to the 6th century BC (after *Planck 1990*).

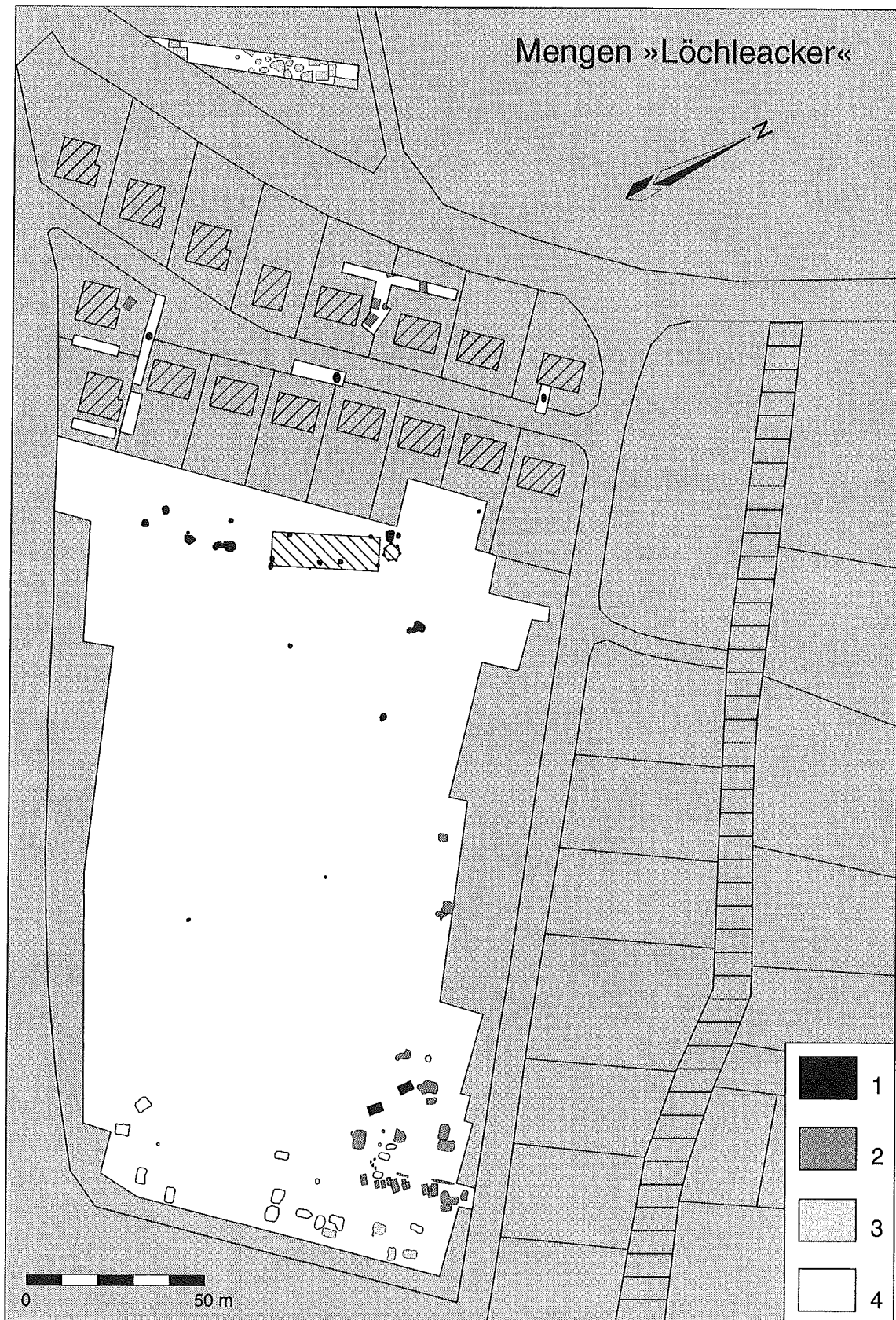


Fig. 3. Mengen, Kreis Breisgau-Hochschwarzwald (south of Freiburg). Plan of the settlement from the 4th to the 11th century. 1 - 4/5th century; 2 - 6/7th century; 3 - 8/9th century; 4 - 10/11th century.

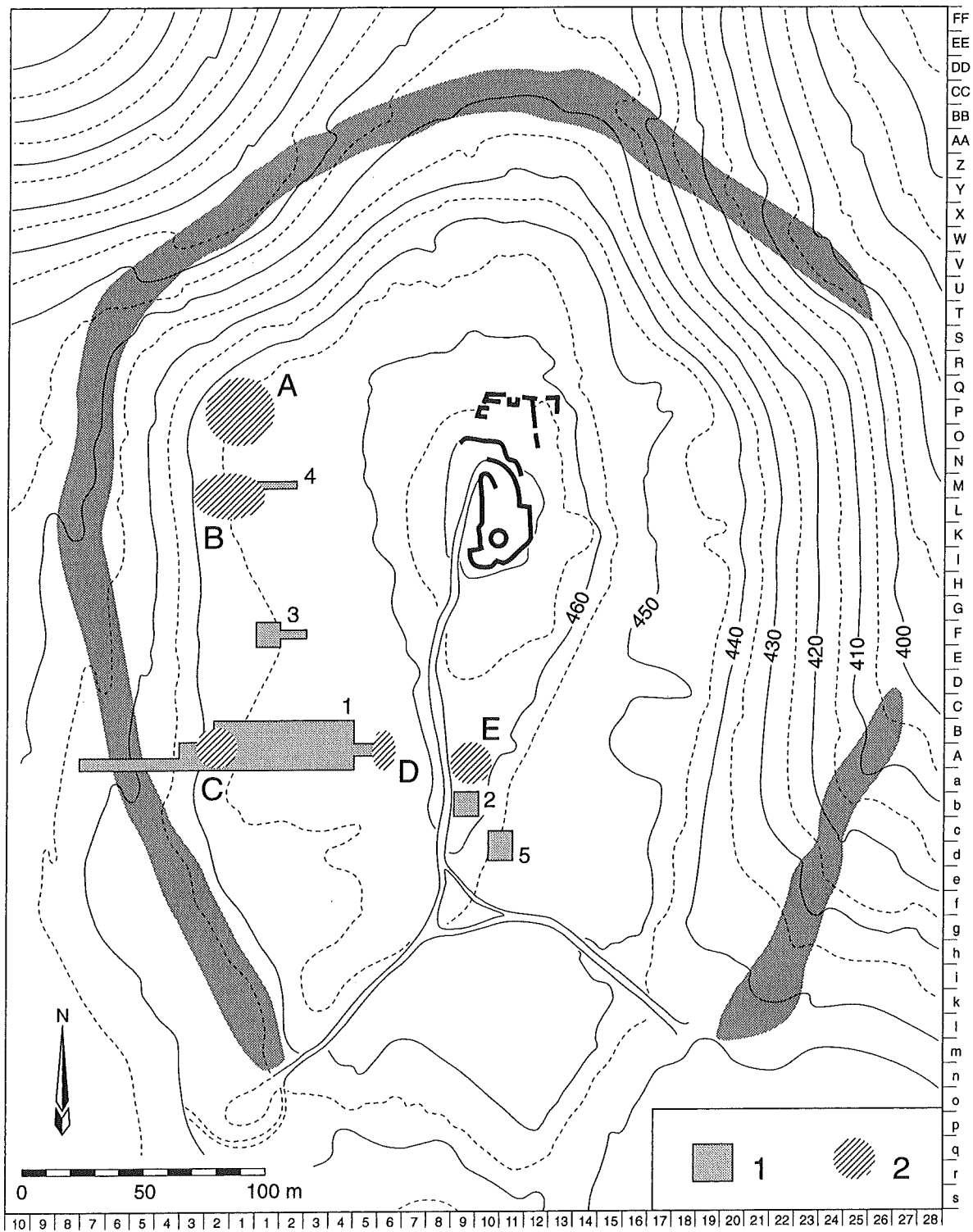


Fig. 4. Zähringer Burgberg, Kr. Breisgau-Hochwarzwald (north of Freiburg). Plan of the hilltop settlement. 1 - Excavation areas (1-5); 2 - Areas with workshops of non-ferros metal (A-E).

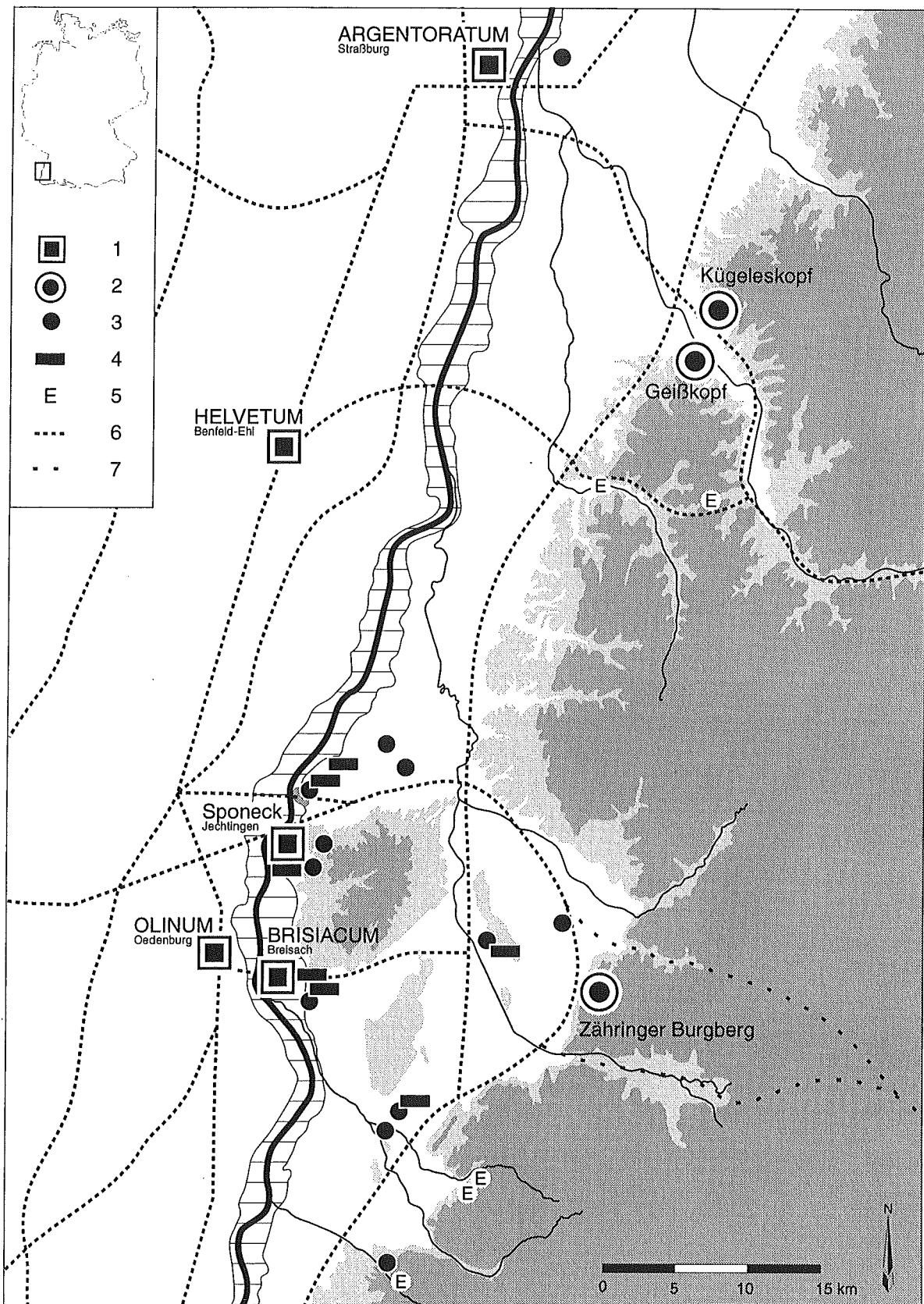


Fig. 5. Map of the German settlements up to the Roman Rhine border in the 4/5th century. 1 - Roman forts; 2 - Hilltop settlements; 3 - Settlements in the lowlands; 4 - Cemeteries; 5 - Single finds of the 4/5th century; 6 - Certain Roman streets; 7 - Uncertain Roman streets.

der (Fig. 5) were - at least for a certain time - part of Roman power politics (Fingerlin 1997b, 108; Bücken 1999, 218 f.).

It is an indication, that the establishment of settlements in most cases were composed of individual farmsteads or hamlets. However the hilltop settlements shows us one possibility of concentrated villagelike structures, which, in their function, possess the character of ruling centers.

Merovingian settlement structures (the 6th to middle of the 7th AD)

Through the constant threats of the German tribes against the Roman provinces on the Rhine-border and after the withdrawal of the Roman military in the year 401 AD, the Frankish tribal unions in the north Rhine region were able to expand their control over a part of the Roman regions. Elsewhere, Frankish mercenaries in the Roman army succeeded in high positions and through federations and movements of parts of the Frankish population into the Roman empire, a development of a symbiosis which had already taken place in the northern provinces (Kaiser 1993, 17 ff.).

After the final decline of Roman Empire during 5th century Frankish kings took over Roman power structures and since the 6th century they subjugated the majority of German tribes (Staab 1996, 12 ff.), amongst them the Alemannics (Geuenich 1997, 92 ff.).

About 500 A.D. at the latest settlement on the hilltops came to a stop (Steuer 1997a, 160 ff.) and continuation of rural settlements took place only in rare cases during 6th century (Hoepfer 1994a, 87 ff.; Bücken et al. 1997, 311 ff.). Perhaps settlement areas change or shift, or the building method changes (Steuer 1988, 33 ff.). Finds of settlements can be found again on a larger scale at about 600 and especially during the 7th century. We can assume, that settlements had been built on fertile soil close to rivers and creeks during 6th century AD, considering the row-grave-cemeteries, which surely were not far from the settlement areas (Hoepfer 1994a, 69 ff.). In all prehistorical and early historical periods with an agricultural economy these places were preferred.

About 500 A.D. in south-west Germany there is a proof of row-grave cemeteries and also of a small group of graves some of which contain very rich burial objects (Quast 1997, 171 ff.). The shift of the elites' domiciles from the hilltops to the plains is verified by the graves containing golden sword hilts, which are taken as signs of Alemannic elite (Steuer 1994b, 92 ff.; 1997a, 159 f.). Amongst a recently discovered small group of graves in Gültlingen near Stuttgart, there are some rich graves of women and also two graves of men with such splendid swords (Quast 1993). Parts of such swords were also found on the hilltop settlement of Runder Berg close to Urach (Steuer 1997a, 152, fig. 149).

After the defeat of the Alamannic in the battle of Zülpich 496/497 most of these little burial grounds were not used any more. This could be connected to the Alamannic settlements being incorporated into Frankish empire and to the dismissal of high ranking Alamanni (Koch 1997, 191 ff.).

About 500 AD the settlement of Mengen in Breisgau (Fig. 6) is attested by well-appointed burial finds lying 800 m away in the row-grave cemetery (Egger 1994, 55 ff.). The settlement (Fig. 3) shows an interruption of use of approximately 100 years starting with the 2nd half of 5th century (Bücken 1994b, 28 ff.). Until now the settlement of Mengen has not been totally excavated. Therefore it could be found outside the excavated area, because of the shift of settlements that is also true for other periods.

Starting only in the 2nd half of 6th century the excavated area of 4.5 ha (11.1 acres) again shows signs of settlement consisting of pit houses and rubbish pits (Fig. 3). The number of preserved rests of posts of one store building is not enough to be able to recognize structures of the farmyards. The concentrations of several pit houses and rubbish pits may perhaps indicate several farmyards, which are partly separated by some 100 m.

On the basis of the find material so far we cannot assume a socially special function of the settlement in Mengen. A rather high proportion of imported wheel-thrown ware of Frankish origin tells us that it could have been a small market place of regional importance (Bücken 1994 b, fig. 20,6-11; fig. 21,1-5). The evidence of processing non-ferrous metal from 7th to 11th century at the same place indicates the same conclusion (Bücken 1994b, 47 ff.).

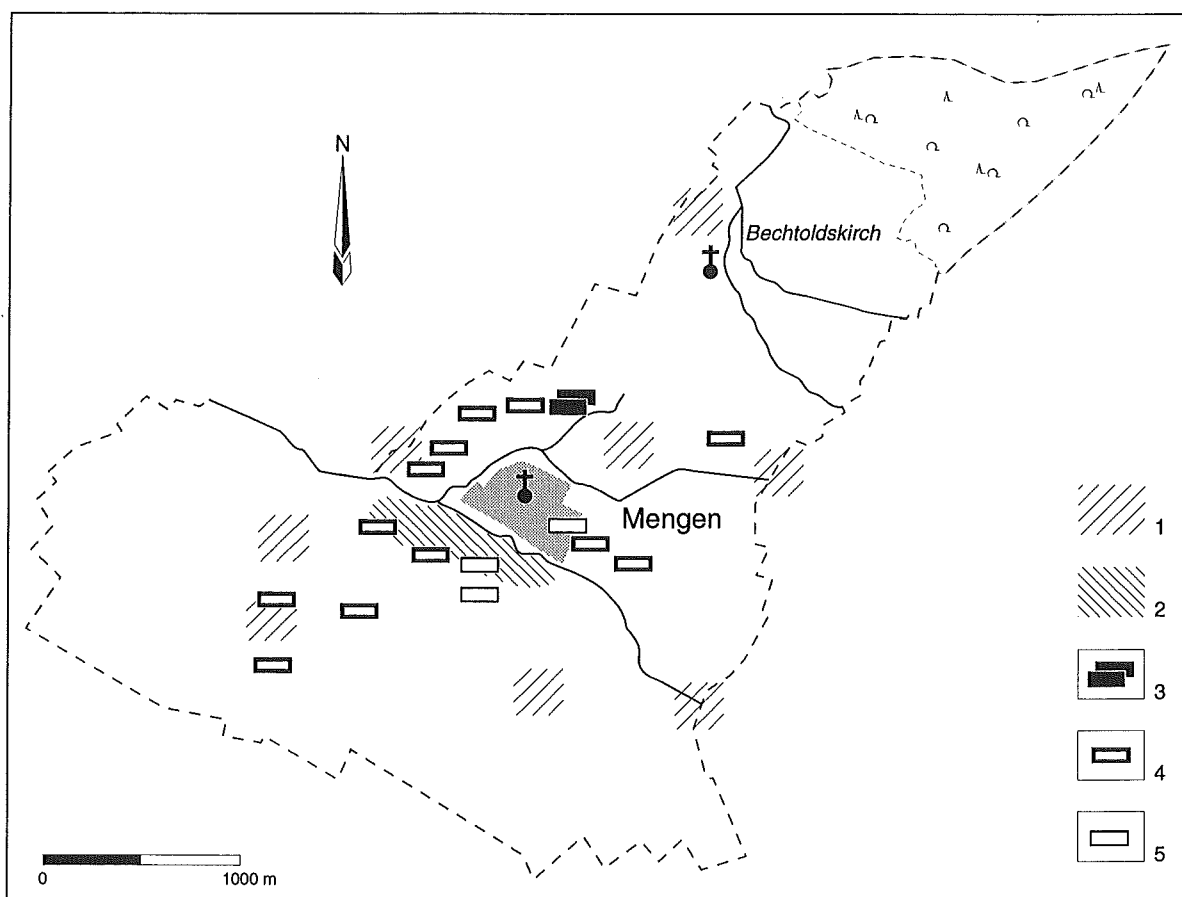


Fig. 6. Mengen, Kreis Breisgau-Hochschwarzwald. Map of the mark of Mengen with numerous small cemeteries in the vicinity of farmyards. 1 - Roman settlements; 2 - Area of the excavated settlement; 3 - Row-grave cenerie with 1050 graves (5th to 8th century); 4 - Small cemeteries with graves of stone boxes; 5 - Small cemeteries with graves.

Until now a continuity of Early Medieval settlements without interruption lasting longer than 5th century could be determined only for the Early Medieval settlement of Speyer (*Bernhard 1982, 217 ff.*) and Mühlhausen-Ehingen near Lake Constance (*Bücker et al. 1997, 314 ff.*). In Speyer the site of the settlement Wüstung "Winternheim" was moved along the ancient bed of the Rhine in one direction, until the 12th century. In Mühlhausen-Ehingen a settlement is attested for the 4th/5th century until the 8th century (*Fig. 7*). This settlement consists of 2 to 3 farmyards per phase on a rather small area of approximately 1 ha (2.5 acres). The settlement is situated on a small island of gravel, which is slightly raised and surrounded by small creeks at the edge of today's village. Surprisingly no groups of graves close to the farmyards have been discovered so far as they are known by many examples in other settlements of the 7th century (*Hoeper 1994a, 115 ff.; Böhme 1996, 477 ff.*).

Alltogether we can conclude that social hierarchy of the known settlements of the 6th and first half of the 7th century can seldom be found. This is very much in contrast to the row-grave cemeteries, where social differences clearly emerge (*Steuer 1997b, 275 ff.*). We can finally perceive a rich upper class by the late Merovingian grave fields which do differ in richness (*Theune-Grosskopf 1997, 471 ff.*). This is seen in the middle of 7th century. They are located close to the farmyards. This nobility probably had an overriding political influence (*Böhme 1993, 455 ff.*).

Settlement structures from late Merovingian times till beginning of Carolingian times (2nd half of 7th century till the 8th century)

Under the Frankish rule, duchies were installed in the different tribal regions. The same development took place in the Alamannic and Bavarian regions. For this reason, powerful regional upper classes, a new nobility, were formed (Kaiser 1993, 110 ff.).

In the 6th and 7th century, when conversion to Christianity took place, accompanying Frankish power politics (Kaiser 1993, 101 ff.), the first monasteries were founded and churches were built (Zettler 1997, 481 ff.; Scholkmann 1997, 455 ff.). The recently founded settlements with the suffix "kirch" in these names were perhaps places of Frankish religious politics (Hoeper 1994a, 138 ff.; 1997, 234 ff.). During 7th and 8th century - the transitional period towards Carolingian rule (Geuenich 1997, 103 ff.) - the development of the manorial system resulted in the dissolution of the large burial grounds for the communities as well as the small cemeteries on the privately owned land close to the farm or the church (Hoeper 1994a, 161 ff.), as they are known in Bavarian set-

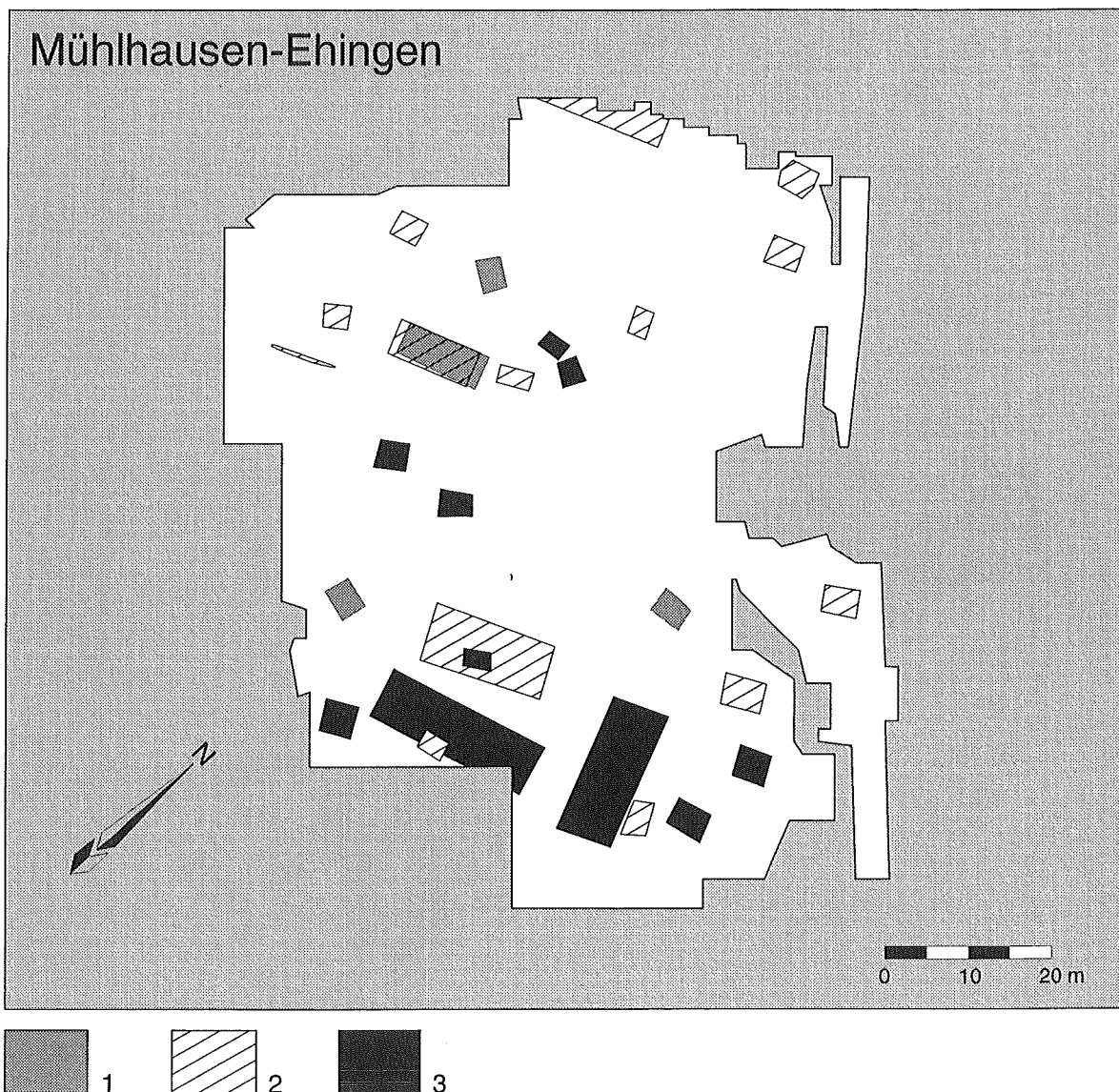


Fig. 7. Mühlhausen- Ehingen, Kreis Konstanz (near Lake Constance). Plan of the settlement. 1 - 4/5th century; 2 - 6th century, 3 - 7/8th century.

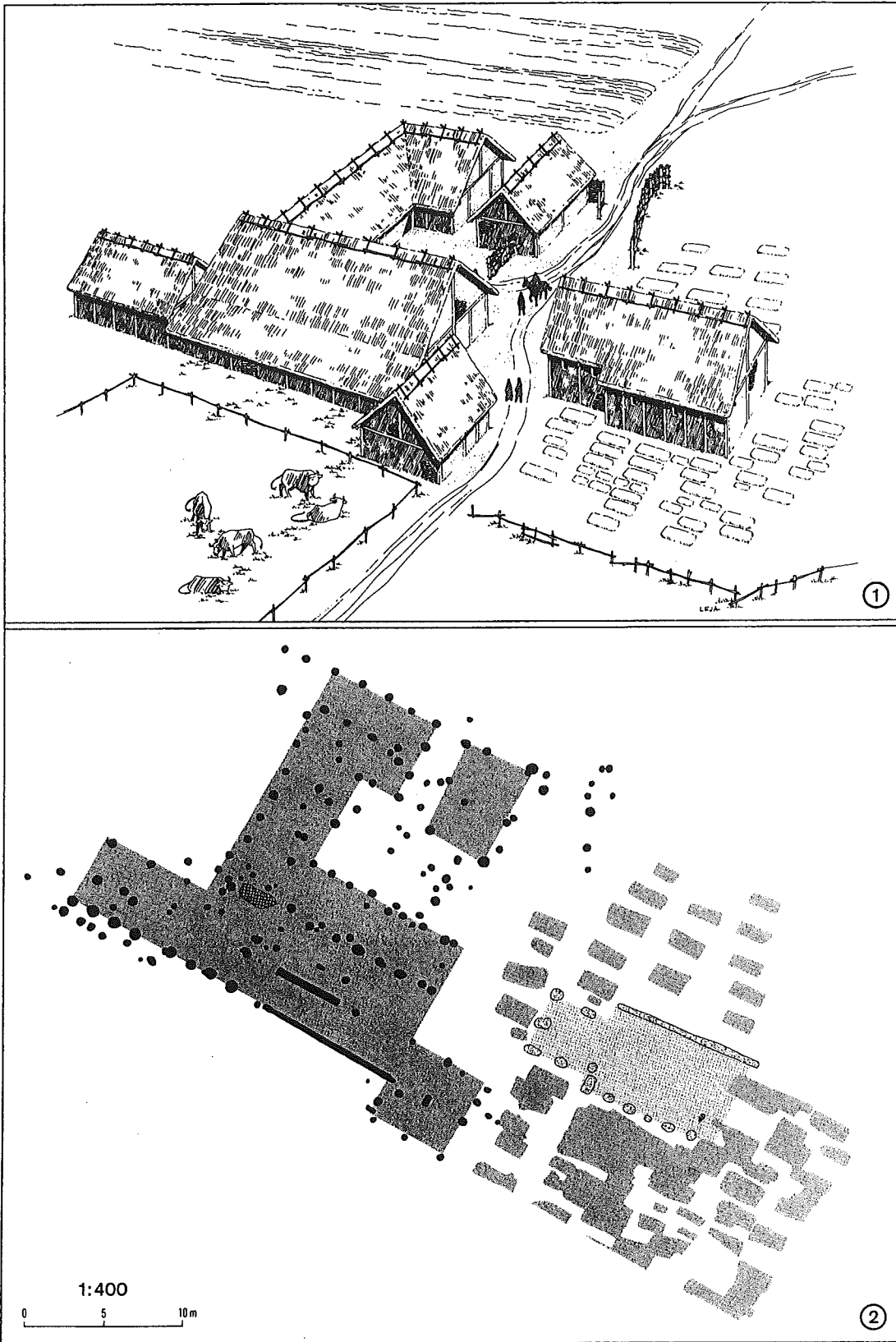


Fig. 8. Barbing-Kreuzhof, Stadt Regensburg. 1 - Reconstruction of the farmstead with a church and the cemetery of the 9/10th century. 2 - Plan of the excavation (after Schwarz 1989).

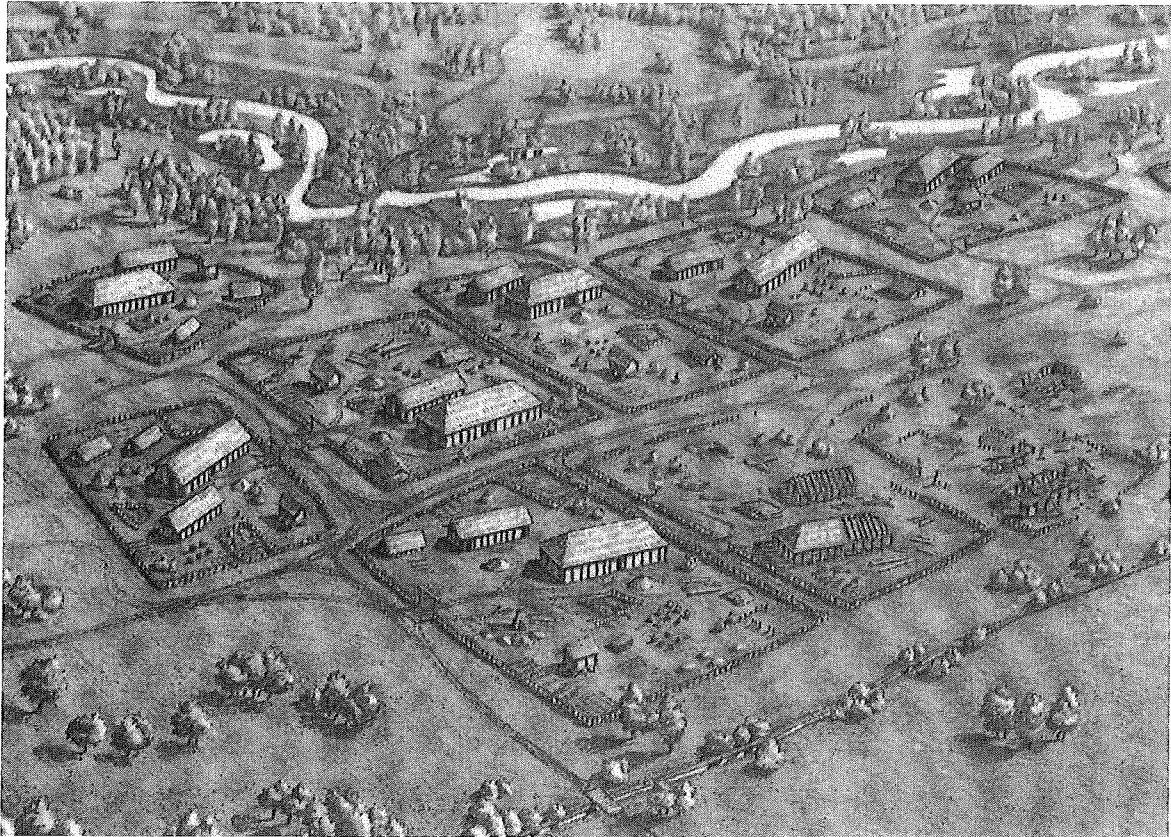


Fig. 9. Lauchheim-Mittelhofen, Ostalbkreis (east of Stuttgart). Rekonstruktion of the settlement in the 7th century (without the manor farm in the east, see Fig. 10) (after Stork 1997).

tlements. Examples of these includes the results of archaeological research of the settlements of Barbing-Kreuzhof (Fig. 8) (Osterhaus 1977; Schwarz 1989) and Herrsching close to Ammersee (Keller 1995, 7 ff.).

This development can be seen first concerning high-ranking German elites, because in the earliest private burial grounds from the middle of the 7th century onwards you will - in most cases - find graves containing very rich objects (Böhme 1996, 477 ff.).

An outstanding example is the nearly completely examined large settlement (5.5 ha = 13.6 acres) of Lauchheim-Mittelhofen together with grave-groups lying east of Stuttgart on the Alb (Stork 1997, 301 ff.). Settlement took place from around 600 AD till early 12th century and it lies on a gravel area at river Jagst. The farmsteads were fenced round and lined up along a central pathway (Fig. 9). Inside the fence the numerous phases of construction of the main buildings and the adjoining buildings overlap each other until the 12th century. Here the structure did not shift inside a larger settlement area - as can be observed in many other places - but only inside a fenced yard. The main buildings were 6 to 7 m wide and 18 m long at average. Some of them could be identified as combined living and stable houses by phosphate analysis.

There is one outstanding farm of 3000 m², which is three times larger than the others (Fig. 10) (Stork 1995, 52 ff.; 1997, 306). The archaeological remains found within the fence of this farm are interpreted as a manor house. Traces of posts of a larger main building as well as several outbuildings and small rectangular storehouses with 6 extraordinarily deep-rooted posts were found. On the site of this farm, an outstandingly rich group of 6 graves dating back to 700 AD was found (Stork 1997, 307 f.).

The custom of private burials at farmsteads with objectless graves or less well-equipped burial grounds can be seen at nearly every settlement at the end of 7th and during 8th century (Hoeper 1994a, 115 ff.); as for example in the above-mentioned settlement at Mengen (Bücker 1994b, 28 ff). Near pit-houses of the 7th century remains of a tiny fence ditch could be verified (Fig. 3). Alongside it there were 11 objectless graves of late Merovingian times that probably belonged to a farmstead at this spot (Hoeper 1994, 23, Fig. 6).

We cannot find out whether these dead were buried without objects because of their christian attitude - contrast to the Lauchheimer cemeteries - or whether they belonged to the poorer inhabitants or the depen-

dants of the farmstead. Numerous small cemeteries in Mengen (*Fig. 6*) are proven by graves of stone boxes or stone plates dating back to late Merovingian and early Carolingian times (*Hoeper 1994b, 18 ff.*). On top of this there are hints of farmsteads of the same period lying next to them. Though not yet excavated, the Mengener district seems to have been a dispersed settlement structure during that phase.

In all areas of southwest Germany during late Merovingian and early Carolingian times, we can ascertain the existence of dispersed settlements in one district as well as village-like settlement structures, for instance close to Lauchheim (*Stork 1997, 302 f.*) or close to Kirchheim next to Munich (*Fig. 11*) (*Winghart 1995, 12 ff.*). General social differences between these two types of settlement could not be found until now. There are hints for some cases, as in Äschheim close to Munich (*Fig. 12*), that a first church is being built probably in the vicinity of a manor house, which later became the center of the medieval village (*Dannheimer 1988, 114 ff; Eule 1998, 25 ff.*). Supposedly the first concentrated villagelike settlements assembled themselves in time around the early churches. The growing manorial order probably laid down the groundwork for this system, so that farmsteads weren't resited around in a larger area but were rebuilt inside the same fenced-in farmyard.

During the 7th century, resettlement of the representative hills by an elite can be detected, for example Zähringer Burgberg close to Freiburg (*Steuer 1987, 186 ff.*) and Runder Berg close to Urach (*Koch 1991, 111 ff.*). Precious drinking vessels, for example Reticella-glasses, and also imported ceramics from both hilltop settlements are proof of the high rank of the inhabitants.

The hilltop settlements and the extraordinarily rich cemeteries of farmyards indicate a new self-confidence of Alamannic and Bavarian nobility. This seems to be connected to the developing power ambition of Alamannic elites aiming at Frankish royal power (*Geuenich 1997, 103 ff.*). The longing for independence of

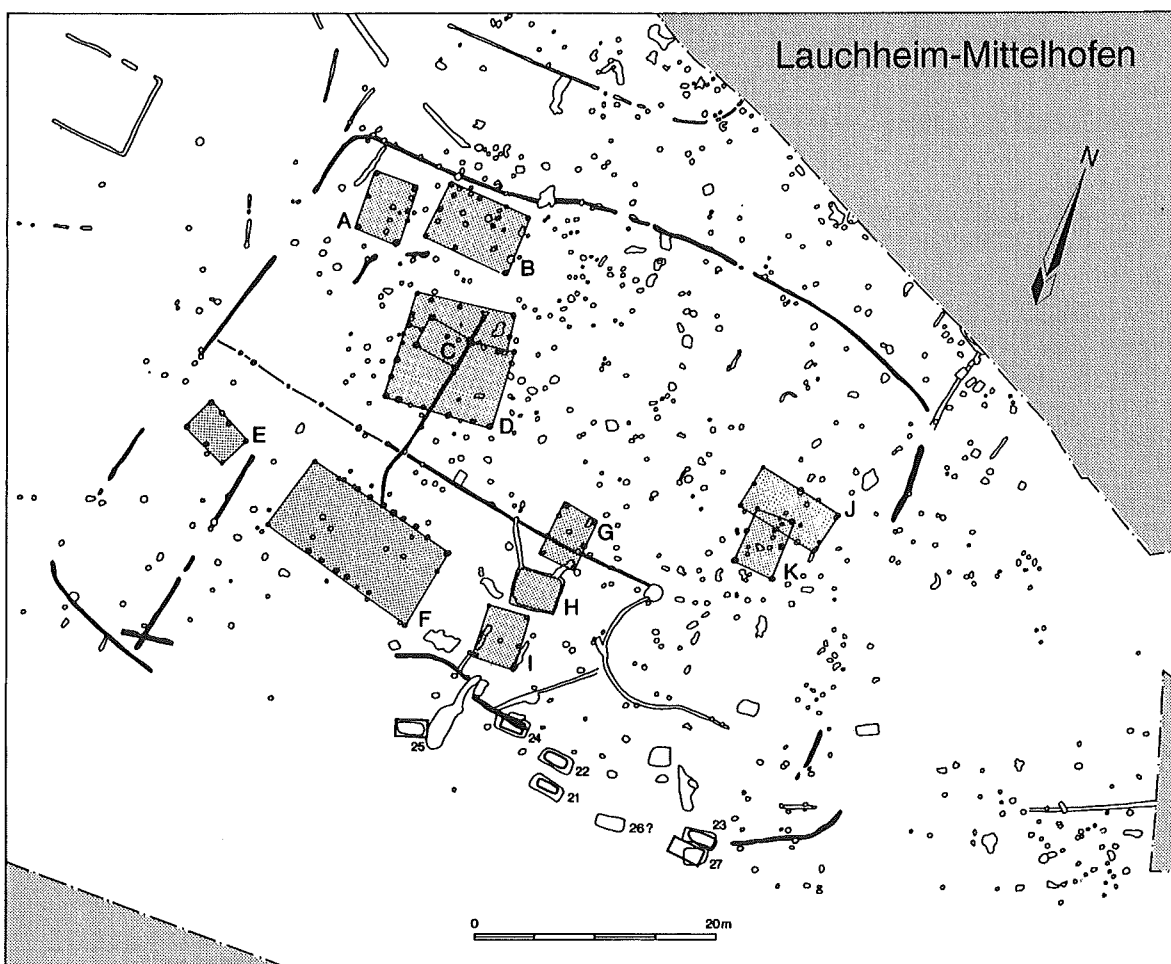


Fig. 10. Lauchheim-Mittelhofen, Ostalbkreis (east of Stuttgart). Plan of the farmyard with the manor house (F), stables (B, D), storehouses (A, C, E, G, H, I, J, K) and graves (21-27) (after *Stork 1995*).

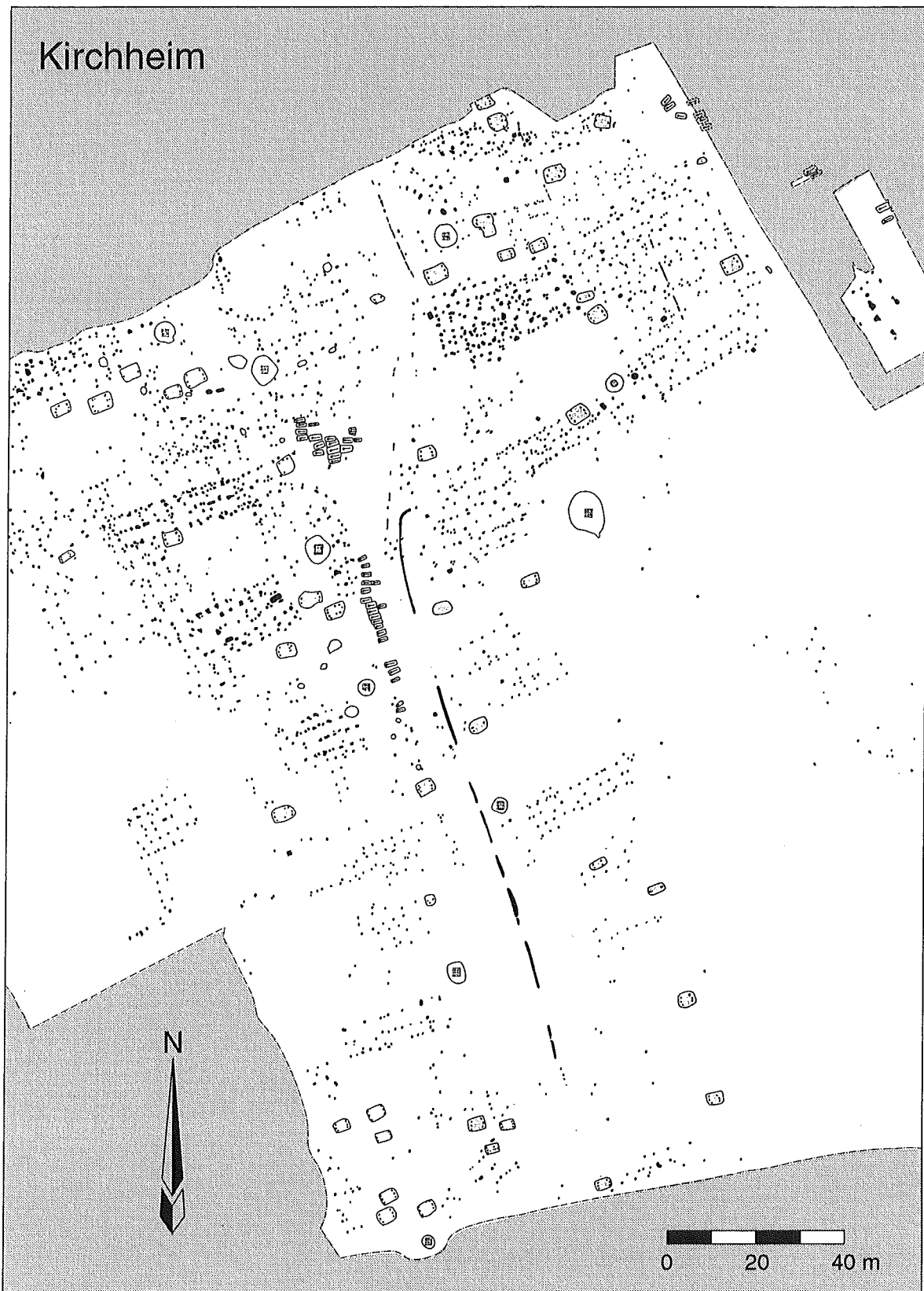


Fig. 11. Kirchheim near Munich. Plan of the excavated area of the settlement with numerous farmsteads and grave-groups (after Wingarth 1995).

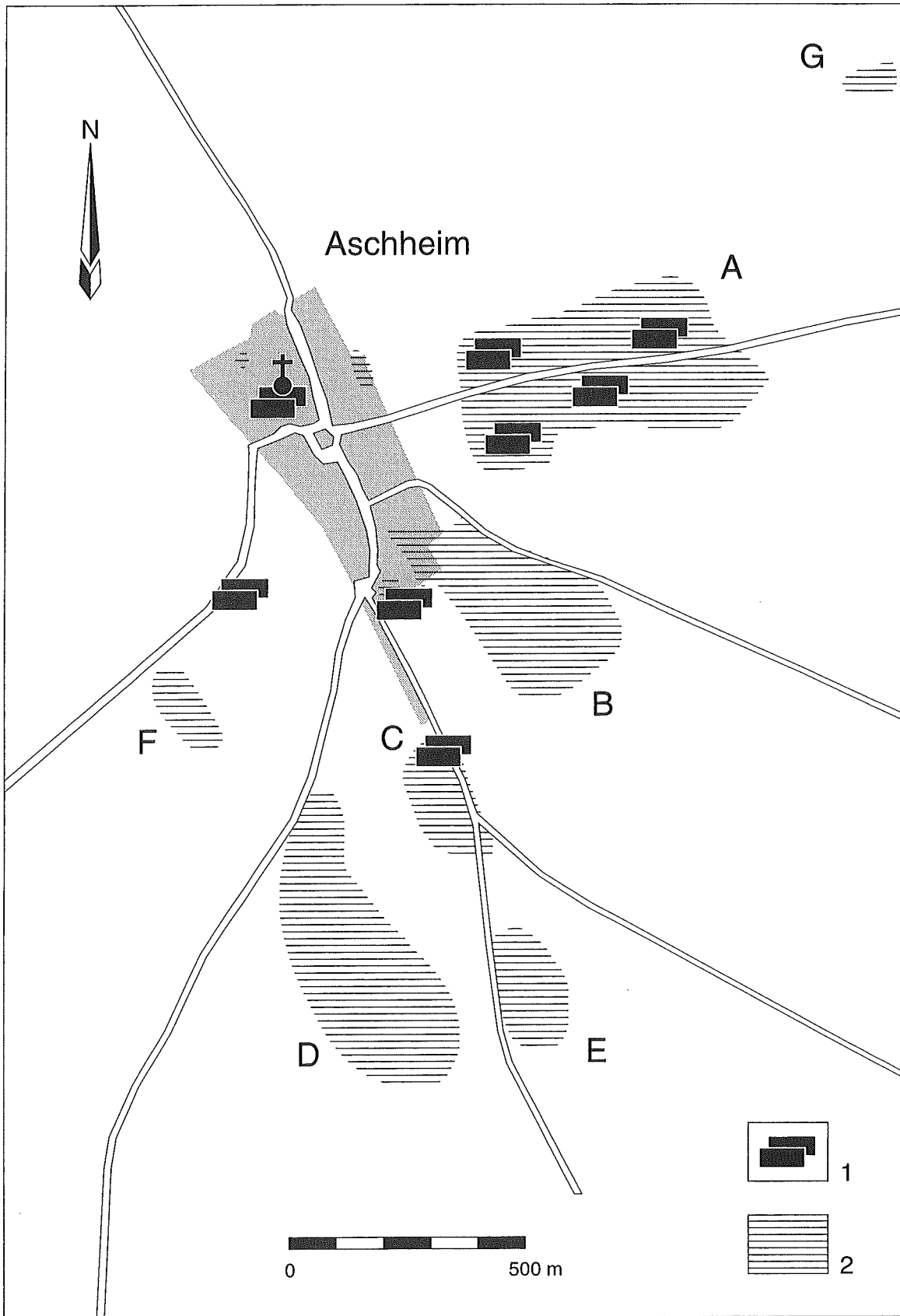


Fig. 12. Aschheim near Munich. Map of the settlement-areas in the Early Middle Ages (after Dannheimer 1988; Eule 1998).

the Alemannic dukes was finally suppressed at the courtday of Cannstatt (746 AD) by Carolingian royalty. The Bavarians under their Duke Tassilo III. on the other side remained independent till the end of 8th century (794 AD) - at least partly (Wolfram 1988, 160 ff.).

*SÜDWESTDEUTSCHE STREU- UND GRUPPENSIEDLUNGEN
ZUR ZEIT DER MEROWINGER*

*L'HABITAT ET DISPERSÉ GROUPÉ DE L'ALLEMAGNE
DU SUD-OUEST À L'ÉPOQUE MÉROVINGIENNE*

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