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ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY ON RURAL BURIAL SITES IN NORTH-EASTERN RAETIA

Manuela Struck

North-eastern Raetia differs from the rest of the province (west of the river Lech) in several respects: firstly, it was only conquered by the Romans during the Claudian – early Flavian period, and not under Augustus (Glüsing 1965: 7–8). Secondly, there are only few roads, namely a road along the south of the Danube, a north – south connection between *Castra Regina* (Regensburg) and *Pons Aeni* (Pfaffenhofen), and a road along the valley of the Isar heading for the Danube (Christlein 1977: 33; fig. 1). Thirdly, until now there is no indication for the existence of any *civitas* in north-eastern Raetia (Fischer 1990: 112). Fourthly, the archaeological material shows links to the adjacent province Noricum and to Germania.

It meant a drastic change to this – from a Roman point of view – underdeveloped part of the province, when in AD 179/180 the *Legio III Italica* was stationed at *Castra Regina*. This date is of great importance for the history of the region and the chronology of the sites.

As in the whole of Raetia our knowledge of Roman cemeteries from the middle Roman period in the north-east is still poor (cf. Kellner 1971: 124–25; von Schnurbein 1977; Mackensen 1978; Rieckhoff-Pauli 1979; Fasold 1985; Fasold and Hüssen 1985; Fischer 1985; Fischer 1990; Fasold 1992: 83). Research has been restricted to two regions: the neighbourhood of Regensburg (Fischer 1990) (Fig. 5.1) and the Isar valley (Struck forthcoming) (Fig. 5.2). Most of the cemeteries are completely or almost completely

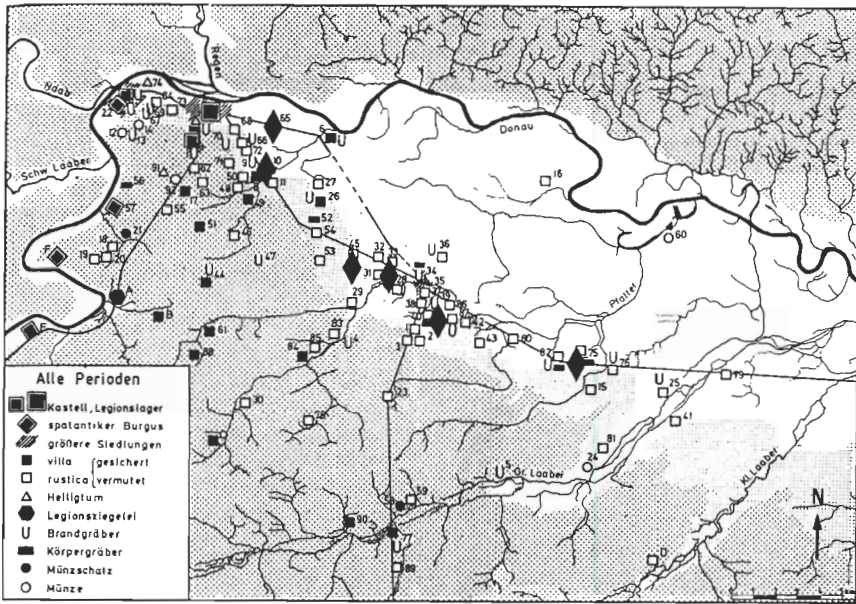


Figure 5.1. The region of Regensburg in the Roman period (after Fischer 1990). Rhombuses mark the cemeteries discussed in this paper.

destroyed or only partly known. Planned excavations have only been undertaken very rarely. In two instances whole cemeteries have been excavated, namely the unpublished site of Mintraching (Lkr. Regensburg) and Ergolding (Lkr. Landshut) (Fig. 5.2 no. 15; Struck forthcoming). The latter contains 79 certain burials in an area of 73 m by 22 m and seems to have been used from the middle of the 2nd until the middle of the 3rd century (Fig. 5.3). Altogether there are 35 rural burial sites which all belong to *villae rusticae*. In addition to the 79 graves from Ergolding there are a further 78 from 12 other sites, which have only been partly uncovered, mostly in the course of rescue excavations. These graves date to the period from AD 80 to 260. Finally we have two small groups of burials which are known completely: Günzenhausen with 11 cremations from c. AD 130 to 170 (Fasold 1988) and the mausoleum of Niedererlbach within a walled enclosure (Christlein and Weber 1981; Kohnke and Struck 1985) (Fig. 5.4). Its seven graves – five in the building itself, two in the precinct – probably do not date before AD 180. Because of the described state of research Ergolding will stand in the centre of this article and results gained there will later be compared with the other sites.

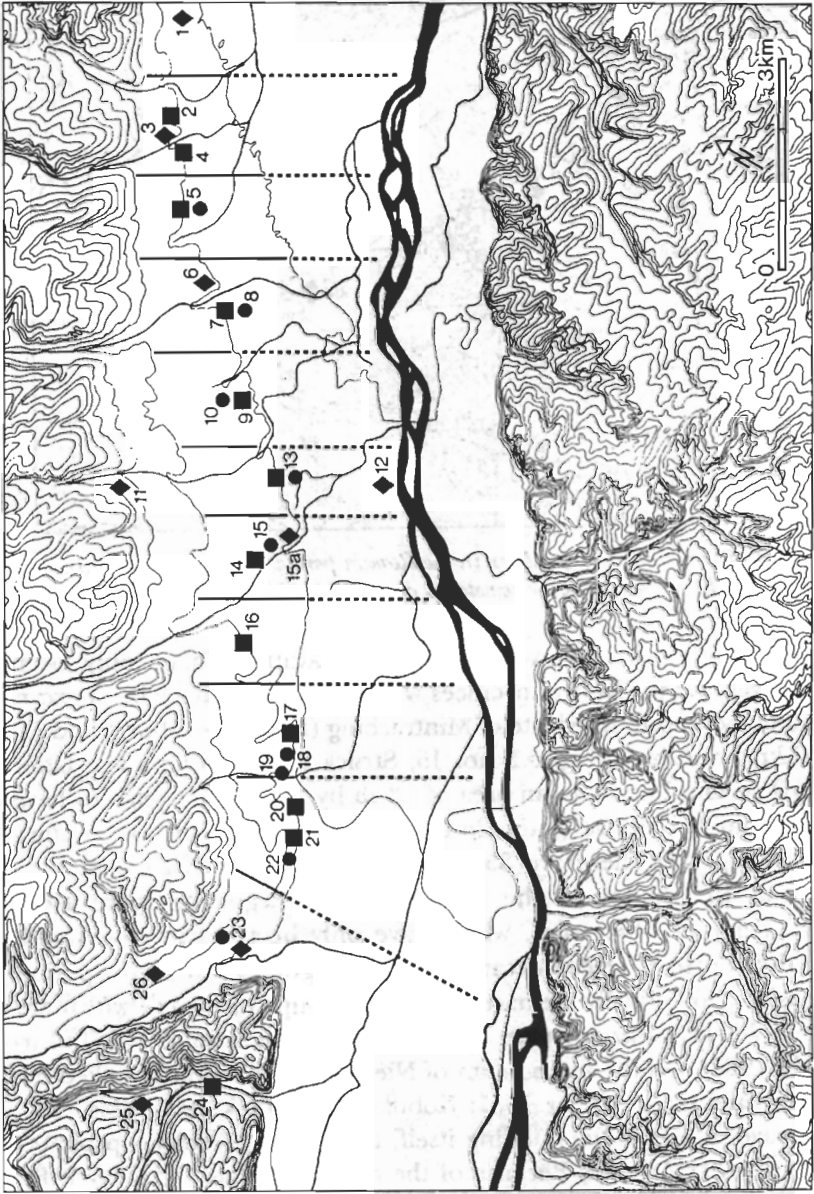


Figure 5.2. The lower Isar valley in the 1st to 3rd century AD with the estimated extent of the villa estates. Squares: villae rusticae; Dots: burials; and Rhombuses: finds of uncertain character (J. Koschorreck, Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege, Landshut).

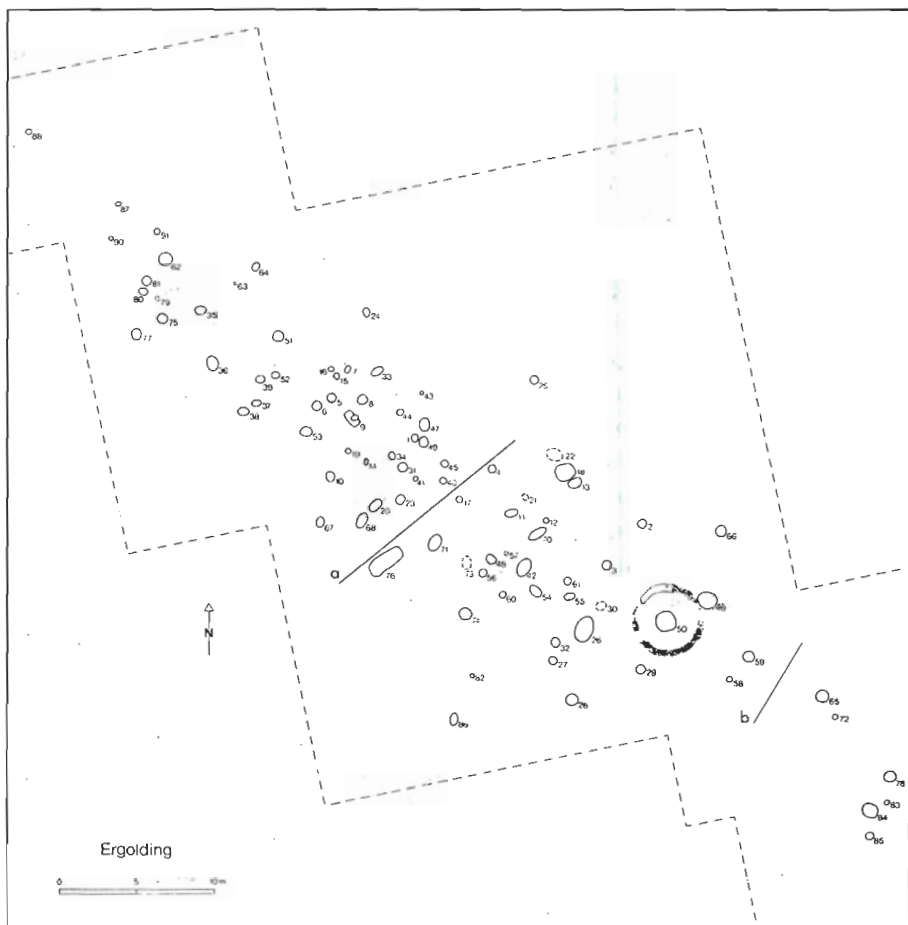


Figure 5.3. The cremation cemetery of Ergolding, Lkr. Landshut (Lower Bavaria) (after Christlein 1981: 36).

Except for four inhumations from the first half of the 4th century (Fischer 1990: 95) all the burials are cremations not later than AD 260. The invasions of the Germans in AD 259/260 cause a break in the history of north-eastern Raetia and therefore form the upper chronological limit of this paper (Fischer 1990: 116–18).

In what follows the burial rite and archaeological material will be analysed to demonstrate the social and cultural diversity in this region. Evidence from settlements will be used in addition to the data from the cemeteries, but for our purpose the burials in this region offer the best data.

Apart from some neonates and small babies people were cremated. One finds the usual cremation types encountered in the rest of the empire in the middle Roman period. Characteristic for Raetia is the dominance of cremations with some sort of container for the cremated bone (Raetian burial custom described by Kellner 1971: 120 ff.; von Schnurbein 1982: 6-7; Fasold 1992: 11-19). But incinerations without urns are also found, so-called *Brandgrubengräber* (cf. Bechert 1980). Only in two instances had the dead been burned and buried on the same spot, in a *bustum* according to antique terminology (ibid.). As in the rest of the province the grave-goods had normally been placed on the pyre. Except for the urns there are only few unburnt objects in the graves. The inventories consist mainly of pottery which, together with the remnants of the pyre (charcoal, iron nails etc.), filled the simple grave pits of round or oval shape. Apart from some exceptions to be presented later no grave markers are preserved.

The population of north-eastern Raetia was seemingly well integrated in the distribution system of Roman objects, given the existence of glass, terra sigillata and other industrially manufactured pottery as well as items like bronze vessels, lamps, coins, *strigiles* and writing equipment. *Strigiles* and writing equipment also prove that the Roman way of life had been adopted to a certain extent as classical services of terra sigillata and mortaria demonstrate the knowledge of mediterranean cuisine and 'table manners'.

Nevertheless indications for a Romanised form of burial rite are rare: coins, lamps, incense burners, *unguentaria* and unburnt vessels for libations, as found in the graves of Rome and middle Italy (cf. Fasold 1993), do not appear very often and only on a few sites. Generally the Romanisation does not go far enough to suppress grave furnishing completely. With the exception of grave no. 26, only the mausoleum of Niedererlbach contains five cremations which bear all the signs of an Italic or Romanised burial rite: no grave-goods or hardly any secondary grave-goods (an unburnt lamp in one case is the only exception). In view of the monumental form of the funerary building, the glass urns and the quality of the few cremated objects, this lack of grave-goods does not document the low economic status of the buried, but a deliberately chosen kind of burial rite. Furthermore the whole floor of the mausoleum was covered with broken pottery which also filled a pit in the building (Kohnke and Struck 1985: 145-46). This seems to be the remains of a funerary feast or commemoration known from the written sources (Toynbee 1971: 50-51).

When we try to detect foreign elements in the burial rites of Raetia we have to consider the fact that we know hardly anything about native burial

customs (cf. Bittel, Kimmig and Schieck 1981: 134). Like in other provinces archaeological evidence for late La Tène burials is scarce. We can only record deviations from the norm in the Roman period.

Obviously intrusive is the tumulus which originally mounted the stone circle around grave no. 50 at Ergolding. It is quite likely that this is not the only barrow in the lower Isar valley as there are indications for more of them. I tend to the interpretation that they derive from the Noric-Pannonian barrow culture (cf. Urban 1984).

Certainly foreign in Raetia are the *busta*. Within the wide distribution of examples there are some areas where they are more frequent, i.e. the Rhineland, southern France, upper Italy, the Balkans with Dacia, and to a certain extent Hadrian's Wall. The interpretation of this distribution is not entirely certain. But it is at least clear that *in situ*-cremation was known in several provinces before the arrival of the Romans, so the practice did not certainly originate in upper Italy. And it is not possible to link this rite exclusively with Roman legionaries and other soldiers (Struck 1993a). But the furnishings of the two graves from Ergolding follow a rather Romanised fashion, and this remains at the moment the only indication for the provenance of the deceased, i.e. from a Romanised part of the empire.

Another exception among grave-goods in Raetia is the wagon fitting from Niedererlbach, grave no. 4 (Christlein and Weber 1981: 140, fig. 111). Graves with whole wagons concentrate in Pannonia and Thrace whereas single pieces of wagons have a wider distribution (Röring 1983: 33). But it is nevertheless tempting to link the burial from Niedererlbach with this eastern appearance of wagon graves.

As time goes by we can notice a change. By the end of the 2nd century unusual and precious grave-goods disappear, along with signs of a Romanised belief in the after-life. Elaborate grave ensembles are now characterised by large amounts of pottery, especially terra sigillata. It can be shown that this tendency, also observed at other Raetian cemeteries (for instance Nuber and Radnóti 1969: 36), does not reflect an economic decline but instead a change in burial rite.

Looking at the graffiti of the pottery one notices that most names are not represented in Raetia elsewhere, but occur in Italy and in the adjacent provinces in the west. In one instance the person recalls her provenance with the name SEQVANA, i.e. she came from the *civitas* of the Sequani around Besançon (for further evidence of Sequani away from home, see Dietz and Weber 1982: 420 ff.). There are also signs for the presence of veterans in the region. The inscription from Ergolding, grave no. 26, is read GENIO

C(ENTVRIAE) PAVLI.

Among the personal ornaments there is a quantity of so-called *militaria*, namely belt fittings (*cingula*) and fibulae typical for Roman soldiers. For example a fibula in shape of a horse (cf. Jobst 1975: 114) comes from the same grave as the graffito GENIO C PAVLI. Generally most fibulae have their main distribution in the noric-pannonian region (Struck 1992: fig. 4). From Flavian times onwards a resemblance in costume between Raetia and Noricum is no longer apparent (von Schnurbein 1982: 21). Nevertheless according to S. Rieckhoff-Pauli Raetia still belonged to the so-called Danubian group of fibulae (Rieckhoff-Pauli 1975: 45). It is therefore not possible to prove an immigration from the east into north-eastern Raetia, but it seems highly probable. In the lower Isar valley two Iron knee-shaped fibulae have been discovered which very likely come from Germania (Fasold 1988: 183, 196 fig. 5, 4; Struck 1992: fig. 4, 6). In this context it should be mentioned that hand-made pottery of pre-Roman tradition constantly occurs in the material of the sites. The geological analysis of some pots shows that they are partly locally made and partly come from Germania (Fasold 1988: 214–15). So far it can neither be decided who made the pots in north-eastern Raetia nor how they came into this region. Immigration and trade are equally probable.

As there are good reasons to think the supply system and after-life belief were more or less uniform for the members of the community of Ergolding the quality – not quantity – of grave-goods, and the effort undertaken in building the grave can be taken as an indicator for the economic situation of the deceased or of the people who conducted the funeral. The qualitative classification of the grave inventories led to the recognition of seven groups which reach from 'rich' to 'poor':

- I. elaborate grave construction, valuable 'antiques', precious metals and glass (with one exception not represented in the 3rd century);
- II. large set of terra sigillata, glass and sometimes bronze;
- III. small set of terra sigillata and glass;
- IV. small set of terra sigillata or presence of terra sigillata, sometimes personal ornaments of bronze or iron;
- V. fine ware (no terra sigillata) and glass;
- VI. fine ware;
- VII. only coarse wares.

The interpretation of these groups should not be taken too far, as such artificial constructs only serve as an aid for analysis. Nevertheless it is clear

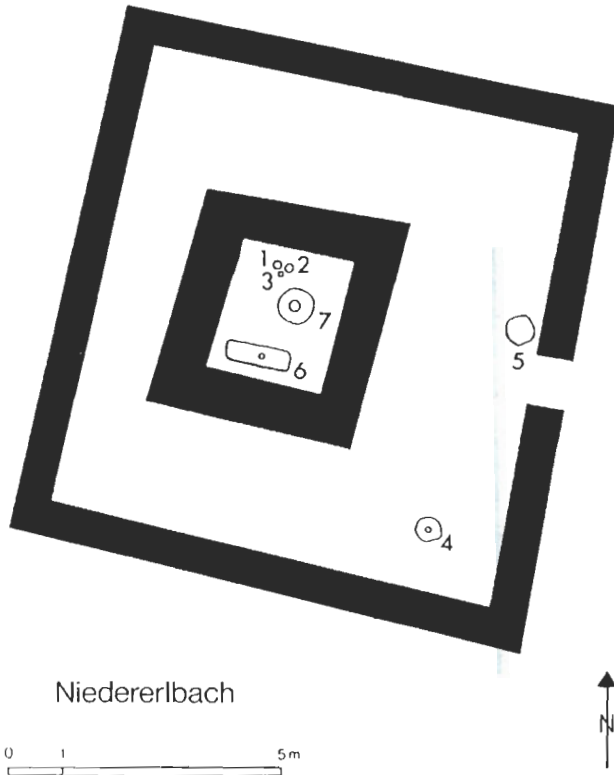


Figure 5.4. The mausoleum of Niedererlbach, Gde. Buch am Erlbach, Lkr. Landshut (Lower Bavaria) (after Christlein and Weber 1981).

that in the cemetery of Ergolding the whole population of a villa rustica is represented – both the owners and the workers (cf. van Doorselaer 1967: 24). Cemeteries of workers have for example been excavated at Courroux (Switzerland) and perhaps at Köln-Müngersdorf (Martin-Kilcher 1976: 102; Fremersdorf 1933: 85).

Regarding the distribution of grave-goods, burial rites and quality groups within the cemetery of Ergolding, two main parts can be identified on the plan: firstly, a central part with evidence for a Romanised burial rite and only few animal bones (meaning either no meat at all or more expensive bone-less pieces), with personal ornaments and a dominance of the higher quality groups (Fig. 5.3, mainly between line a and b). Secondly, a part north west of the central part with hardly any indications for a Romanised after-life belief, obligatory animal bones in the graves, only few personal

ornaments, lower quality groups and a concentration of the hand-made pottery mentioned above. I was able to show that these distributions have no chronological relevance and interpreted them as the expression of at least two groups of people, different in culture and social status.

Turning to the other sites, we find a clear difference and spatial distinction at Niedererlbach too (Fig. 5.4). Whereas the Italic kind of burial practice was stressed above for the five cremations within the mausoleum, the two graves in the enclosure contain a large amount of primary grave-goods and pyre remains (Kohnke and Struck 1985: 145–46), as was customary in this province. Differences are not only to be found within the burial sites, but also when the single cemeteries are compared. At Günzenhausen for example the links to the east, with eastern pottery, fibulae and knives (Fasold 1988: 191–92) seem to be stronger than at any other site in the region and, as mentioned above, the graves from Niedererlbach show the highest degree of Romanisation. There are also differences between the sites concerning the care with which the cremated bone was selected, or the choice of pottery etc.

What was assumed for Ergolding above can be repeated for the other cemeteries: the archaeological evidence speaks for a heterogeneous population. This is well confirmed by the results gained from other Raetian sites – like Kempten-Cambodunum where M. Mackensen could detect a mixed population from Italy, the western provinces, Noricum, Germania and the Alps (Mackensen 1978: 181). In north east Raetia the connections to the east seem to dominate instead. Immigration is also attested by the epigraphical sources: K. Dietz for instance found evidence for the settlement of veterans from the Dacian wars under Trajan (Dietz 1984: 214) and for immigrants coming from the European provinces reaching from Hispania to Illyricum (Dietz and Weber 1982: 430 fig. 3). The archaeological traces of the pre-Roman inhabitants of Raetia north of the Alps are scarce (Schön 1986: 62 ff.). This can only partly be explained by the state of research: obviously the population was not large (Fischer 1990: 23–24). An organised settlement programme was necessary, reflected for example in the regular settlement pattern in the lower Isar valley (Fig. 5.2). Finally the stationing of the Legio III Italica was the moment when a large number of *villae rusticae* became necessary for supplying the troops. Thus the archaeological material of most settlements begins only in the second half of the 2nd century (Fischer 1990: 115 fig. 'Karte 4'; Struck 1992: fig. 5). The gradual standardisation of the burial rites could then be understood as an expression of a mixed population growing together.

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