

Abstract: A Military Elite in Merovingian Gaul? An Attempt towards a Societal Qualification, Attribution and Definition

Merovingian society lacked longer periods of peace as during the Pax Romana. The military was of central importance, not only on the field. Although the militarisation of post-Roman society has never seriously been in doubt, the Merovingian elite has not yet been studied more particularly in consideration of its military role. This paper analyses which military groups could be considered part of the elite and which criteria might be used to define it from a modern perspective. As the military and the secular increasingly converged, this is not an easy task indeed. The study argues that even though several groups may be gathered as being part of a military elite, this is much more difficult at less elevated levels of the upper social strata, at which the transition between the elite and the rest of the freeborn military active population is fluid.

Keywords: military; Merovingian; society; elite; office bearers; antrustiones; leudes; weapon graves; perception; militarization.