

Publication

Agriculture, food and environment during Merovingian times : plant remains from three early medieval sites in northwestern Switzerland

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Author(s) Brombacher, Christoph; Hecker, Dominique

Author(s) at UniBasel [Brombacher, Christoph](#) ;

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There have been only a few archaeobotanical investigations of early medieval sites in Switzerland (5th–7th century AD) until now. Recent archaeobotanical studies of plant macroremains from three Merovingian settlements in the Canton du Jura, northwest Switzerland, have added to our knowledge of past landscapes, agriculture and food. One was located within an intra-Jurassic basin while the others were situated in the Ajoie plain to the northwest of the Jura mountains. The principal cultivated cereals were *Avena sativa*, *Triticum aestivum*, *T. spelta* and *T. mono-coccum*, followed by smaller frequencies of *Hordeum distichon/vulgare*, *Secale cereale* and *T. dicoccon*. Two types of millet, *Panicum miliaceum* and *Setaria italica*, were found only sporadically. Legumes such as *Lens culinaris*, *Pisum sativum* and *Vicia faba* were also regularly present in these settlements. Finds of cultivated vegetables and spices like *Coriandrum sativum*, *Apium graveolens* and *Anethum graveolens* were rare. These records, together with those of *Malus* sp. (probably cultivated) and *Prunus domestica*, demonstrate the past existence of gardens and orchards. Isolated remains of *Juglans regia* were also recovered. At Develier-Courtelette, with its partially waterlogged sediments, finds of *Linum usitatissimum* and *Cannabis sativa*, together with dyeing and carding plants such as *Reseda luteola*, *Xanthium strumarium* and *Dipsacus sativum/fullonum* underline the importance of textile production. Among the wild plants found, many taxa are from cultivated fields, meadows and pasture land. Most of these are typical of rather damp, calcareous soils. Plants characteristic of dry grassland are rare, despite this habitat being widely present in the Jura until the first half of the 20th century. Compared to other contemporary sites in Switzerland, northeastern France and southern Germany, only small differences in the spectra of crop plants from the 4th to the 6th century AD are detected. However the relative proportions of these crop plants vary quite significantly, which could indicate that the significance of the individual taxa at the studied sites differed.

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