Mobility in Thuringia or mobile Thuringians: A strontium isotope study from early medieval Central Germany

Introduction: the interdisciplinary Langobard project

The migration of the Langobards in the 5/6th century has been studied very intensively by historians and archaeologists. Written sources and grave goods from cemeteries provided the foundation for the development of a detailed picture of Langobardic movements from the lower Elbe region to Moravia, Pannonia, and finally to Italy (Pohl, 2005). An interdisciplinary project, “Isotope analysis and mapping to investigate the origin of nonlocal groups during the early Middle Ages – New approaches to Langobard research” (German title: “Analyse und Kartierung von Isotopen zur Herkunftsbestimmung ortsfremder Personennichtvölkervielle der Frühmittelalters – Neue Wege der Langobardenforschung”), designed to test the existing hypotheses, is currently supported by the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

The three-component project allows researchers to take a new, more detailed and comparative look both at the material culture and its regional ties and at the skeletal remains of the people themselves, with the help of multi-isotope analyses. Strontium and oxygen isotope ratios provide information about human mobility (Ericson, 1985; Schwarcz and Knyf, 1991; Tütken et al., 2008), while carbon and nitrogen isotopes are an archive of dietary information (Ambrose, 1993). Within this project, nine cemeteries in four countries have been chosen as case studies (Fig. 1). Samples have been taken from a total...