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## Project Description

### **Christian Symbols on Military Equipment – The Christian Warrior in the Frankish Empire**

This project examines the possible existence of a Christian warrior in the Frankish Empire during the Merovingian period (5th – 8th century AD).

The numerous graves of the Reihengräberfelder as well as those in churches, in which the dead are buried with standardised grave furnitures that symbolise their social status are serving as the main source. For example the typical equipment of a male burial consisted of either one or two swords (spatha and sax), lance, axe, shield and sometimes a helmet. This weapon equipment characterised him as a warrior ("warrior graves").

In order to approach this topic two areas of early medieval life have to be examined and combined: the significance of the military, respectively the warriorhood, and the progress of Christianisation. Ever since the Frankish Emperor Clovis I (466-511) got baptised together with 500 men of his guard, the Frankish Empire is considered christianised. This is evident in historical sources as well as hinted in archaeological findings.

This paper focuses primarily on the archaeological perspective. The term "Christian warrior" will be used as a heuristic concept and is defined by the archaeological manifestation (small finds and features) of a possible expression of Christian faith in weapon bearing burials dating from the 5th to the 8th century on Frankish territory. For that, the sites of burials per se as well as the grave goods will be investigated. Indicating factors are mainly objects with Christian depictions and symbols, such as the cross which is said to have an apotropaic function.

At the beginning of the Merovingian period, Christian symbols are primarily found on imports of Byzantine or Mediterranean origin. A good example for this are the so called Spangenhelme of the Eastern Roman army that can be found in very richly furnished male burials. But their importance and value as expensive prestige goods is to be ranked higher than their function of expressing Christian faith. It is only in the 7th century that Christian symbols are decorating locally crafted goods more frequently. Considering military equipment, the image carriers are mainly shields, swords, lances, but also belts and parts of horse-gear. Besides those, there are also personal objects such as cross pendants, that are influenced by the Byzantines. To give reliable answers to the initially posed questions, several aspects have to be considered: How can the expression of Christian faith in warrior graves be defined? Which influence did Byzantine craftsmanship have on its development? What can be said about the buried in reference to their social status? Are there chronological developments? Are there local customs? Do the archaeological finds correspond with historical sources and depictions like those of warrior saints? Through these interdisciplinary observations the Christian warrior shall be portrayed as comprehensively as possible.