

Mero-Jewel

Production, Materials and Exchange of Merovingian Jewellery (5th-8th centuries)

DURATION
01/02/2023 – 01/05/2027

BUDGET
€ 340 431

PROJECT DESCRIPTION



The Merovingian period of North-Western Europe (5th–8th century AD) can be defined in many domains as a period of transition which is characterized by population movements and profound changes on a socio-political, economic as well on a religious level. At the same time, Merovingian civilization has produced a rich and varied material culture that presents a strikingly uniform character throughout its territory and testifies to the existence of several extensive networks of cultural, material and technological trade and exchanges. While many neighbouring countries have in the past decade initiated important research projects that focus on different aspects of the material culture of the Merovingian period, Belgium seems to lag, although a

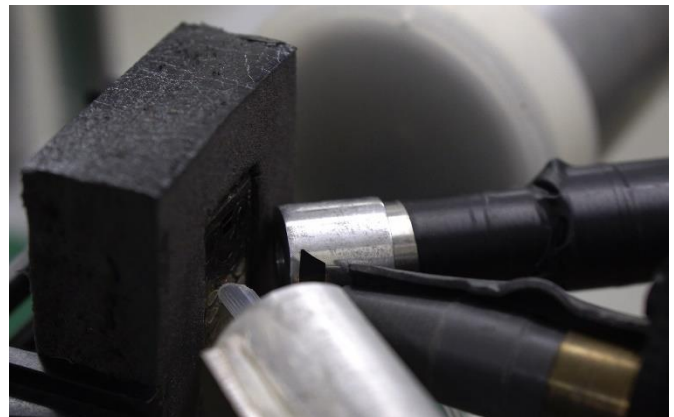
multitude of important archaeological sites from the Early Middle Ages, exposing large numbers of artefacts including jewels, have been investigated since the end of the 19th century. Gold and silver jewels have so far not yet been subjected to an encompassing material-specific research.

The general aim of Mero-Jewel is to increase our current knowledge of Merovingian jewellery in North-Western Europe from the last third of the 5th century AD until the beginning of the 8th century AD.

Three clearly defined research objectives are considered:

- 1) Characterization of the materials (raw materials, alloys, mixed materials, composition of fillings ...)
- 2) Understanding technical gestures and processes of the early medieval artisans
- 3) Characterization and optimizing the material preservation

The core collection used in the framework of Mero-Jewel will be the Merovingian collection of the RMAH, which currently holds more than 150 pieces of jewellery in gold and silver. They stem from archaeological excavations that were executed between the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century at the prominent sites of Harmignies, Sint-Gillis-bij-Dendermonde, Lede, Anderlecht and Marilles. The corpus will be completed with items from recently excavated or studied sites in both Flanders and Wallonia (e.g., Broechem, Viesville and Bossut-Gottechain) and from other public (museum) collections (Gallo- Romeins Museum Tongeren, Musée royal de Mariemont, Agence Wallonne du Patrimoine). This will allow us to establish a representative research collection that covers the entire Belgian territory and spans the entire Merovingian period.



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In order to reach these objectives, our method relies almost solely on the material culture and the objects that were produced, used and buried during that time. Mero-Jewel will apply an original material-based approach that combines different methodologies. In order to collect, describe and manage the necessary research data, a flexible and open research database will be used that can be tailored and customized to the specific needs of the project. Following this approach, we will collect administrative as well as historical and archaeological information. The material analysis will then be the focus of the project. Typological and archaeological studies of the different items will be executed. The individual description of each jewel will be based on multiple macro- and microscopic observations that will help us determine the descriptive morphological, decorative and technical criteria. This will also allow the selection of objects for detailed analytical examination by applying several non-invasive methods (PIXE-PIGE, EDXFR, SEM-EDX, radiography and Raman). Some of the objects will be scanned in 3D and linked to the database. A condition assessment will build further on these analyses in order to uncover damage patterns characteristic to Merovingian jewellery. Factors affecting future decay of the objects are to be identified through a risk assessment. At micro level this will be specifically applied to the degradation patterns of the precious metals (gold and silver) in combination with the associated materials observed on the Merovingian Jewellery. At macro level, the risks arising from the storage environment will be evaluated and directions for preventive conservation measures determined. Finally, all the data gathered by the different observations and analyses will be crossed by quantitative and statistical methods in order to establish relationships between the determining criteria of production and used materials.

The principal impact of the Mero-Jewel project is on scientific knowledge as it aims to quantitatively and qualitatively characterize and understand the nature and the use of precious materials and their production methods in the Early Middle Ages. It will also enrich the still scarce data available on the functioning of the early medieval exchange and production of precious materials. The provision of online methodological tools is intended to lay the foundations for shared, accessible and collaborative research. The interdisciplinary approach to these artefacts could serve as a reference for future studies on material culture in Belgium. Finally, a better knowledge of these collections will, furthermore, enhance conservation and management issues due to the in-depth identification and extensive imagery of the items.

By these actions, Mero-jewel will allow the delivery of several scientific papers in international peer-reviewed 'open access' journals. It will also organize a small-scale online exhibition and make it visible through a specific marketing campaign on social media. Finally, it will provide a monography for a broader audience on 'Merovingian Jewellery'.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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