CROSSROADS

TRAVELLING THROUGH THE MIDDLE AGES

15.11.2018 – 25.8.2019
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EXHIBITION BOOKLET
Dear visitors!

The exhibition “Europa in Bewegung – Lebenswelten im frühen Mittelalter” (“Crossroads: Travelling through the Middle Ages”) covers the most important facts about the objects on exhibit. If we have in fact caught your interest and you would like to learn more, then this booklet is just what you are looking for. We have compiled some additional information about a few of the particularly interesting pieces that are presented in the exhibition. For your orientation, we have reprinted the gallery texts of the exhibition here in this booklet. They precede each chapter. Technical terms are explained in the glossary beginning on page 93. In the exhibition itself, topics or displays that are discussed in more detail in the booklet have been designated with a hand and a number.

Additional information, such as texts cited from contemporary written sources, have been designated with a sofa.

You could take a moment to read these through at leisure in our exhibition library or the museum café. Or you could take a copy of the booklet home with you: it is available for purchase for 3.50 euros in the museum shop.

We hope that you enjoy your journey through the Early Middle Ages!
In the Late Antique period, many different peoples lived within and outside of the borders of the Roman Empire. These “gentes” differed both in their clothing and in their way of life, their customs and traditions. Finds discovered during archaeological excavations of their settlements and burial sites are an important source of information about these peoples.

Local inhabitants, immigrants, refugees, peoples who had been resettled and allies: people of different backgrounds lived and fought as allies with each other from time to time. Group affiliation was not necessarily decided by birth alone, but was determined by an individual’s sense of identification with a particular group. And this could change depending upon their prospects and the political climate.

Roman historians only made mention of these “gentes” when they came into contact with the Roman Empire as allies or enemies; the names that were used to describe them were often coined by the Romans, as was the case for the “Franks”. These peoples and groups only began to record their own histories as their political sovereignty became more established in the Early Middle Ages. Their historical accounts generally traced the beginnings of their people and ruling families back to mythical origins.
In Scandinavia, an entire period lasting from the late 8th to the 11th century has been called after the **Vikings**. They occasionally referred to themselves as “vikingr”, or “pirates”. However, many other names were also used for them: in Eastern Europe, they were known as “Waräger”, or “they who swear oaths to one another”. They were called “Rus” by the Arabs and Slavs; this can be translated as either “the red-haired people” or “those from the Roslagen region”. Today, this not only evokes the pillaging warriors who sailed on longboats across the seas and down rivers to loot and burn down towns, settlements, monasteries and convents, but also the merchants and craftspeople as well as the women, children and old people who farmed the land while the men were gone.

The Celtic-speaking people of **Ireland** were ruled by many kings and only converted to Christianity in the 4th century. The monasteries were the true centres of the Irish church, which remained independent from Rome. The monks created precious manuscripts decorated with ornamentation that combined the artistic styles of Ireland under Celtic influence with late antique and Germanic elements. The Irish monastic communities sent large numbers of monks to the mainland, among them St. Columban, a monk who was born around the year 540. They did missionary work in the rural areas of Central Europe, which up until this time had been Christianised only superficially, and founded prominent monasteries.
The Kingdom of the **Franks** emerged in the territory of the Roman provinces of Germania and Gallia. Following the collapse of Western Roman state power and administration, the leaders of the former Roman auxiliary forces established more or less autonomous centres of power. Their political structure was also influenced by members of the Roman aristocracy. Clovis of the Frankish Merovingian dynasty united these small kingdoms under his rule until his death in 511. The Merovingians ruled over the territory that today comprises France, Belgium and large parts of Germany and the Netherlands until they were replaced by the Carolingian dynasty.

Written sources first mention the **Goths** after they invaded the Roman Empire on its eastern frontier in the 3rd century. After numerous battles and changing alliances, the tribes known as the Visigoths advanced all the way to Spain. Other Goth tribes settled in the Black Sea region. Ostrogoth tribes ruled in Italy under their king Theoderic the Great from A.D. 493–553.

The **Lombards**, who probably originally came from the Lower Elbe region, invaded the Roman province of Pannonia, today western Hungary, in the 2nd century. Archaeological finds have shown that they settled in the southern parts of Lower Austria and Marchfeld near Vienna in the late 5th century. They fought against the Ostrogoths and the Eastern Roman Empire, at times forming alliances with the one, at other times with the other. Threatened by the Avars, they moved to North and Central Italy in 568 together with many other tribes of diverse
origins. In 774, Charlemagne conquered their empire and was crowned king of the Lombards in Pavia.

The name **Copt** was derived from the Greek word for Egyptian. After conquering Egypt in the mid-8th century, the Arabs called the local inhabitants Copts. As this region gradually converted to Islam, this designation was increasingly used only to refer to those parts of the Egyptian population who founded their own Christian theology and church on the basis of Greek philosophy and Christian traditions.

With the emergence of **Islam**, the situation in the Mediterranean region and Middle East not only changed fundamentally in terms of religion, but also politically and economically. Prior to this, the region was greatly influenced by the hegemony of the Eastern Roman Empire. Trade and cultural life flourished in the cities under Islamic rule. Scholars of different religions taught and were educated at the academies, thereby perpetuating the scientific knowledge of Antiquity.

The name of the Sasanian Empire was derived from the last pre-Islamic Persian dynasty of the **Sasanians**. From the 3rd to 7th century, their kingdom’s territory approximately comprised what is today Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was a major military and economic rival of the Eastern Roman Empire. Important trade routes, such as the network of roads that made up the Silk Road, led through
this kingdom. At its universities, scholars translated the works of Greek philosophers and scientists.

After the division of the Roman Empire in the 4th century, the Eastern Roman Empire continued on until it was conquered by the Turks in the 15th century. Its capital was Constantinople, which also was called Byzantium. The emperor was the leader of the Imperial Byzantine Church, from which Eastern Orthodox Christianity developed. The Byzantine Empire was the largest economic, cultural and military power in Europe until the foundation of the Arab caliphates.

“For the race of the Huns, which had been long hidden behind inaccessible mountains, suddenly rose up in anger and fell upon the Goths, scattering and driving them from their old homes.”

This is an excerpt from the “World History” of Orosius (c. 385 to 415) and describes the advance of the Huns into the territories of the northern Black Sea region west of the River Don.

And with this the Huns, confederations of mounted warriors from the Asian steppes, entered the stage of European history, invading the territories of the Roman and Sasanian Empires.

To avoid the looming threat, tribes such as the Alans and Goths began to move west and southwest, which is why the
Huns are considered to be responsible for the beginning of the Migration period. The Roman Empire paid them ten thousands of pounds of gold to prevent any further wars. The turning point in their ascendancy occurred when the Huns attacked Gaul together with their allies and were beaten back by an army of Romans, Franks and Visigoths in A.D. 451 in the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains in northeastern France. Their supremacy crumbled shortly thereafter. However, the changes that were taking place at the frontiers of the Roman Empire could no longer be stopped.

A confederation of various nomadic riders and Eastern European peoples, the Avars appeared in late 6th century accounts just as suddenly as the Huns had before them. They took over the hegemony in the Carpathian Basin and the Roman province of Pannonia in what is today Hungary. Roman citizens as well as Germanic peoples lived in their territory, a number of whom were followers of the Christian faith. The Avars destroyed a large number of border fortresses along the lower Danube. Consequently, Byzantium bought peace by making annual payments in gold. The Wars of Charlemagne put an end to Avar independence in the 8th century.

The first account about the Slavs was written by Gothic historian Jordanes in the 6th century. A great deal of controversy remains in scholarship today about the origins and development of their language and other cultural similarities. Archaeological excavations have found evidence of a peasant culture with pit
houses and one-storey houses grouped into smaller villages, the production of handmade pottery and the practice of cremation with the use of urns for the remains. Findings show that, beginning in the 6th century, they began to spread out from northern and western Ukraine, first to the south, then, as of the 7th century, continuing on as far as northeastern Germany and the southern parts of eastern Germany. At the Baltic Sea, a brisk trade with goods arose, particularly with the Scandinavian territories. Missionaries were sent to their territories both from the Byzantine Empire and from the Carolingian Empire.
**Vikings**

(1) Oval fibula (copy), found near Schleswig, 10th cent., RGZM

(2–3) Pair of oval fibulae (copies), found in Sandby on Öland (Sweden), 1st half 10th cent., RGZM

“Each of the women has fastened upon the two breasts a brooch of iron, copper, silver, or gold – according to the wealth of her husband...”

Ahmad ibn Fadlan on the jewellery of the Rus along the Volga, chronicle of the voyage of an embassy sent by Caliph al-Muqtadir, chap. 82,921.

The fibulae are decorated with gripping beasts and knot patterns and were used to hold together the skirts of Viking women. Archaeologists call this “Borre style” ornamentation after the village of Borre in today’s Norway.

Viking women were often buried together with these valuable pieces of jewellery; the men were primarily buried with their weapons.
The surfaces of the large bow fibulae are entirely covered with intricate decorative elements, creating quite striking pieces of women’s jewellery. Ornamental patterns and techniques were exchanged over long distances and then developed further. The individual animals can still be clearly identified on the fibula from Kaltenengers (2). This so-called “Style 1 animal art” was primarily produced in England and Scandinavia. In contrast, the animals on the later piece, the fibula from Engers-Mülfhofen (3), are an example of “Style II animal art” and are indistinguishably interlaced on the woven band.

Try to find all the animals depicted on the Mülfhofen fibula.

Head
Jaw
Torso and front leg
Hind leg
Sasanians

(1) Luxurious tableware with engraved figures and animals, silver, Iran, c. 600, Allard Pierson Museum
(2) Needle, gold, precious stones and glass, Iran, KMKG
(4) Finger ring, gold, precious stones (garnet, topaz, emerald, amethyst), blue glass. Probably made in Byzantium, found in Tournai (Belgium), 6th/7th cent., KMKG

Bowls and jugs made of silver played an important role in eating culture and were used for representation purposes at the Sasanian court and by its nobility (1); this has been described in written accounts. Local workshops created bowls decorated with peaceful scenes of animals and mythical creatures; however, nothing is known about their patrons.

Animals were popular motifs in Sasanian art. Architectural sculpture and sumptuous textiles were decorated with heraldic animal patterns. These also had an influence on medieval Byzantine and European art. Even the floral shape of the head of the needle (2) resembles motifs found on the luxurious fabrics woven for the nobility.

The intaglio (4) features a male bust under a cross and an inscription in Classical Syriac. The cross and script indicate that its owner belonged to a Christian minority living in the Sasanian Empire.
Islamic World

(1) Oil lamps, pottery, end of 9th/beginning of 10th cent., provenance Fustat (Cairo), KMKG
(2) Bottle, glass, Egypt, 8th/9th cent., KMKG
(3) Bowl, glazed pottery, northeastern Iran or Central Asia, 9th–11th cent., KMKG

“Shine, oh lamp, do not burn out and let your light shine” – this phrase was written on a lamp from the Islamic period (1). This kind of clay lamp was already being produced in the ancient world; what is new is the inscription that has been added. However, on some pieces, the ornamentation only looks as though it is writing (1).

Ancient traditions live on in Islamic art. Artists in medieval Iran adopted the technique of blowing glass into shapes (2) from Sasanian and Byzantine craftsmen. The craftsman of this bowl (3) was also following Chinese traditions when he painted it with manganese red and copper green paint.
This jug depicts scenes from the Gospel of Matthew: the three kings, who are called “Magi” in the Greek Bible text, pay homage to the infant Jesus. This was a popular motif for Christian art as of Late Antiquity, in particular for sarcophagi. The story of the Adoration of the Magi was embellished during the Middle Ages. The names Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar emerged in the Western Latin church as of the 6th century. The second scene depicted on the jug shows the Magi visiting Herod. They are wearing trousers, tunics and Phrygian caps, which indicates that they have come from the East. According to legend, St. Helena found their remains around the year 326. The relics then made their way to the seat of the bishop of Milan as a gift from Emperor Constantine. At this time, the first written accounts of the relics appear. Finally, in 1164, they were presented to the archbishop of Cologne, Rainald von Dassel, by Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. They have been preserved in a sumptuous shrine and revered at Cologne Cathedral ever since.
Huns

(1) Pot, bronze, Högyész (Hungary), 5th cent., HNM

These kinds of high, narrow bronze pots with long handles are prominent finds from Hunnic territories. They are often found in the Carpathian Basin in what is today Romania. However, similar pieces have been found in regions extending to Inner Asia. The largest pot found to date was from Törtel (Hungary). It is 89 cm high and weighs 41 kg.

The tradition of grave goods, which were buried slightly away from the burial site, also point to the Eurasian Steppe. Long swords, gold trimming on recurve bows and saddles attest to the extremely skilful Hunnic art of war. This was described by Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus in the 4th century: the Huns were able to shoot a number of arrows in quick succession across the rear of their horses at a full gallop. The momentum of the arrows was so great that their tips could even penetrate Roman armour.
Avars

(2) Buckle, gold, Tépe (Hungary), mid-7th cent., HNM
(3) Jug and goblet, Kunágota (Hungary), 1st half 7th cent., HNM

Everyday items made of priceless materials were used for representation purposes. Gold and other precious materials were also highly coveted by the Avars. They created new showpieces by melting down the spoils of war or Byzantine gold coins, called “solidi”. The gold buckle (2) is one such example. The jug and goblet (3) are two of the many artefacts found in the tomb of an Avar leader who was buried together with his weapons and his horse in Kunágota in Hungary. Comparable pieces have been found in Central Asia. For more information on the sword and its history, please see the holobox in the section “War and Diplomacy”.
Experiencing the Early Middle Ages at first hand

23.11.2018 from 5-7 p.m. A tour of experiences showcasing select pieces of jewellery led by goldsmith and restorer Stefani Köster.

As part of the European Year of European Cultural Heritage, exhibition curator Dr Elke Nieveler talks about artefacts from the Frankish Empire found during excavations in the Rhineland and their international connections.

16.02.2019 from 6:30–11:00 p.m. Culture Dinner “Haute Cuisine at the Royal Court”  
Experience the Early Middle Ages with all of your senses: a walk through the exhibition followed by a set menu dinner. The chefs from DelikArt offer a new and contemporary take on recipes from the cookbook of a Byzantine doctor at the court of the Frankish king.

[Time to be announced]  
Expert tour “Gold aus der Steppe” (“Gold from the Steppes”). Fascinating interpretations from research of the priceless gold artefacts found in Avar graves provided by the curator of the National Museum of Budapest, Dr Szenthe Gergely.

12.05.2019 from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Family day at the medieval exhibitions of the LVR-LandesMuseum; the programme will be available on the museum website as of 1 Mar. 2019.

You can find the complete supporting programme and all further information on the website: www.landesmuseum-bonn.lvr.de
By the late 4th century, the Roman Empire had already disintegrated into the Western Roman Empire with its capital in Rome and the Eastern Roman Empire with its capital in Constantinople.

The Eastern Roman Empire survived until 1453 and largely continued to perpetuate Greco-Roman culture. Economic problems, corruption, internal unrest and external attacks led to the decline of the Western Roman Empire, which approximately comprises the territories belonging to western Europe and northern Africa today.

In 476, Odoacer, the leader of the Germanic soldiers in the Roman army, deposed the Roman Emperor. Shortly thereafter, in alliance with the Eastern Roman Empire, the Goths under Theoderic the Great conquered Rome and ruled Italy. The remaining parts of the empire separated into many smaller successor states.

The peoples living in these territories dealt with the Roman cultural legacy, such as its language, art, customs and traditions, religion, commerce and system of government, in very different ways. They maintained its legacy, combining it with a myriad of other influences to create entirely new traditions.
Theophanu (c. 960–991) – Byzantine princess in the East Frankish Empire

At about the age of 12, Theophanu, the niece of the Byzantine emperor, was married to Otto II, the king of the East Frankish Empire. The marriage was celebrated by the pope and she received the imperial crown on 14 April 972.

The Ottonian kings ruled “out of the saddle”, travelling from palatinate to palatinate. These were probably much more modest than the court in Byzantium. Theophanu accompanied her husband on these arduous journeys. She had brought treasures with her from her homeland: sumptuous robes and fabrics, gold, silver, jewellery, vessels, perfume and carvings. However, the people were also impressed by her appearance and bearing. In this, the “Greek woman” aroused both admiration and disapproval. After the death of Otto II in 983, she took on the regency for her three-year-old son together with her mother-in-law Adelheid. She was respected and recognised for her political skills.

In the Chronicon, Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg wrote:

“Although of the fragile sex, her modesty, conviction, and manner of life were outstanding, which is rare in Greece. Preserving her son’s rulership with manly watchfulness, she was always benevolent to the just, but terrified and conquered rebels.” (Thietmar of Merseburg, Chronicon IV.10).
Political programme

(1/2) Crossbow fibula, gilt bronze, and bowl, glass with wheel-cut decoration, Bonn, Jakobstraße, c. 400, LVR-LMB

Around the year 400, a widely-travelled resident of Bonn was laid to rest in one of the Roman cemeteries south of the camp. He was one of the soldiers stationed at the fort, but was probably originally not from Bonn. The sarcophagus was rediscovered during excavations in the Kesselgasse, formerly known as Jakobstraße.

A valuable glass service consisting of a glass bowl (2) and jug rested against his upper thigh. The bowl has been engraved with four figures carrying a bundle of plants. It was probably made in the environs of Cologne. Other pieces found in the grave came from various regions in the Roman Empire. In addition, the deceased man was buried with his long sword, the “spatha”, which had been placed at his left side. This tells us that he must have come from a region beyond the borders of the Roman Empire, because, in this period, the custom of burying men together with their swords was primarily practiced in southern Russia and on the Hungarian Plains.
However, the most remarkable find was the bronze, gilded crossbow fibula (2). Similar pieces have been found in Roman provinces from the Danube region. It was used to fasten the military cloak, the “chlamys”, at the left shoulder. A Christogram has been placed at the base of the fibula; however, this does not necessarily mean that the wearer was Christian. In Late Antiquity, garment brooches of this kind were used in the Christian Roman Empire to decorate meritorious officers and officials. Therefore, it is more likely that the Christian symbol reflects the viewpoint of the state than the personal conviction of the individual.
A unique work of art between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

(4) Bishop’s throne ("cathedra") of Maximianus of Ravenna (498–556), 5th – 6th cent., copy, original made of wood with ivory, RGZM

In Rome, the “cathedra”, a throne-like chair (4), was a symbol of the authority of public office holders. This is reflected by the depiction of a victorious Roma on the fibula that is also on exhibit here. Similar to other pieces of furniture, the chair was often decorated with ivory carvings. As so many other objects that were used for representation purposes in the Roman Empire, the “cathedra” was also adopted by the Christians. In the church, the seat of the bishop is a symbol of his teaching authority and is placed in a prominent position by the altar.

This ornately decorated “cathedra” was probably given to Maximianus as a gift from the Byzantine emperor Justinian. As Justinian’s confidant, he became bishop of Ravenna in 546, at a time when Byzantium and the Ostrogoths were fighting for supremacy in Italy. In 402, Ravenna was made the capital of the Western Roman Empire, thus elevating the small town with a military port to one of the most important centres of Late Antiquity and of the Early Middle Ages. As in Constantinople and Rome, the best architects erected magnificent public buildings and churches.
The apse mosaic of the famous church of San Vitale in Ravenna, which is one of the city’s main attractions, depicts the imperial portraits of Justinian I and his wife Theodora. The mosaic was reworked to include a portrait of Maximianus. The ornamentation of this “cathedra” is worthy of the bishop of such an important city. The 39 elaborate ivory panels were made in Byzantium, Alexandria or Italy. Several craftsmen were likely involved due to stylistic differences displayed by the figures.

The evangelists and St. John the Baptist are depicted on the front, narrative scenes from the life of Christ decorate the back rest, and scenes from the Joseph cycle from the Book of Genesis can be found on the sides. The name of the bishop has been inscribed on a medallion.

The design of the panels can be traced back to late antique consular diptychs. Literally translated, “di-ptychon” means “folded double”. Oblong panels were bound together to form diptychs; these were presented to the consuls at the time of their appointment and decorated with their portraits.

The Byzantine workshops were famous for the high-quality religious objects made of ivory they produced and adorned, such as buckets for holy water (“situla”), host boxes and reliquary shrines (which are also on exhibit in this area of the exhibition), liturgical combs and crosses, bishop’s crosiers or book covers for sacred writings.

The “cathedra” of Maximianus is one of the most valuable examples.
A key foundation of the Roman Empire was its highly developed written culture. In the West, private and state matters, literary works and art were recorded in Latin, in the East in Greek and in the Islamic world in Arabic. It was of paramount importance for the different religions to maintain precise written records of their doctrines of salvation and rituals.

A large number of Greek works were translated in Baghdad, the cultural centre of the Islamic world, thus preserving them until today. In the western parts of the Roman Empire as well as later in the Germanic kingdoms, Latin remained the language of the sciences, government, diplomacy, art and church liturgy.

However, correct grammar, writing and reading were restricted to a small circle of scholars in the church and government. Many of the texts that are still in existence today were transcribed by monks in the scriptoria of monasteries. Monastic libraries preserved versions of the Bible in Greek and Latin as well as liturgical texts, but also maintained archives for manuscripts describing the ideas and theories of Antiquity.
Hasdai ibn Shaprut (A.D. 910–970) – A Jewish scholar at the court of the caliph

Around the year 910, Hasdai ibn Shaprut was born to a Jewish family in what is today Spain. At an early age, he had mastered several languages: Hebrew, Arabic and Latin as well as the local language Old Castilian. He studied the Talmud and founded a Talmud school, but was also well-versed in Arabic literature as well as in the fields of medicine and pharmacy.

At the court of the caliph of Córdoba, he was first appointed inspector general of customs, then worked as a diplomat, building up a diverse network of personal contacts. His correspondence with the Khazar ruler has survived; the Jewish faith played an important role in this kingdom in the steppes of southern Russian. Hasdai ibn Shaprut also attended to the embassy sent to Córdoba by Otto I during their stay at the court.

In the year 950, the caliph received “De materia medica” from Byzantium, written in Greek by Dioscorides in the 1st century. It contained a compilation of the medical and pharmacological knowledge of Antiquity. Together with a Byzantine monk, Hasdai ibn Shaprut translated this work into Arabic. He was a renowned physician, who had also achieved fame for treating Sancho I the Fat, the king of Léon who had been deposed because of his extreme obesity.
“The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the Lord is upon many waters.” (Psalm 29:3).

This Bible verse has been written six times on one side of the panel in Greek, but using the Coptic alphabet. Much of the reverse side has been scraped off, but the Greek alphabet can still be identified, written six times, followed by six additional Coptic characters and a number of Greek vowels.

The panel likely has a ‘magical’ context: the 24 letters of the Greek alphabet and the six Coptic letters represent the deities that were invoked during the 30 days of the solar month; the vowels symbolise the seven spheres of the universe. They were probably placed into the grave of a Coptic Christian as an amulet.
Boëthius was a Roman scholar, philosopher, theologian and politician during politically very turbulent times. He wanted to make all of the works of Plato and Aristoteles available in Latin translation, because fewer and fewer people in the Latin-speaking West had any knowledge of Greek. He also wrote numerous treatises on arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music theory as well as theological works. His best-known work is “consolatio philosophiae”, “The Consolation of Philosophy”.

He was the most important transmitter of Greek logic and mathematics in Late Antiquity and thereby had a significant influence on pedagogy until the end of the Middle Ages.

His life can be described as a series of ups and downs. His birthplace is unknown. His grandfather and father were prefects in the imperial Praetorian Guard, his father was also consul of Rome. As his father died very early, Boëthius was raised in the home of the philologist, historian and consul Symmachus, later marrying his daughter.
He held high offices during the rule of the king of the Ostrogoths, Theoderic the Great, in Italy. He was appointed consul in 510 and held a speech in praise of the king of the Goths. In 522, Theoderic gave Boëthius’s sons consulships with the approval of the Eastern Roman Emperor and appointed him head of the imperial administration as “magister officiorum”. However, he became entangled in the serious disputes between the Ostrogoth king and the emperor in Byzantium. Two rival factions formed among the politically active Romans, leading to dangerous intrigues. Boëthius was accused of sending traitorous letters to the emperor. The High Court of the Senate sentenced him to death – by the sword as befitting his station – and ordered his property confiscated. His father-in-law Symmachus, who interceded for him, was executed as well.

“Ill is it to trust to Fortune’s fickle bounty, and while yet she smiled upon me,
The hour of gloom had well-nigh overwhelmed my head.
Now has the cloud put off its alluring face,
Wherefore without scruple my life drags out its wearying delays.
Why o my friends, did ye so often puff me up,
Telling me that I was fortunate?
For he that is fallen low did never firmly stand.”

(consolatio philosophiae, first book)
The teacher of Europe

Codex “De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii” (On the Marriage of Philology with Mercury) by Martianus Min(n)en(i)us Felix Capella (5th or early 6th cent.), from a 10th century manuscript, Erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek Köln (Archiepiscopal Diocese and Cathedral Library, Cologne)

Little is known about Capella, even though he was one of the most influential teachers in Europe. He was probably born in Carthage, but not even the exact dates of his birth and death are known.

Towards the end of his life, he wrote an encyclopaedia of nine books. He dedicated them to his son in the form of an allegory: among the gifts presented to Mercury, the Messenger of the Gods, at the time of his wedding to the maiden Philologia, Learning, are seven maidservants. These maidservants personify the seven liberal arts. Each presents her science: grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and harmony (musical). In the ninth book, the maidservant Harmonia explains music theory, which not only includes the theory of harmony, but also the principles of rhythm. Also discussed are the effects of music on the body and soul and its use in medicine. The eighth book devotes itself to astronomy. Capella believed that the planets Mercury and Venus do not orbit the Earth, but the sun, and was therefore in opposition to the geocentric world view that predominated at that time.
Copernicus paid tribute to him for this in the 15th century. A moon crater was officially named after Capella in 1935.

With his encyclopaedia, Martianus Capella established the structure and foundation of the content of the educational system in the first millennium. His work has been preserved in the form of more than 200 transcripts. The oldest were transcribed in the second half of the 9th century.
The treatise written by Masha’allah ibn Athari with instructions on how to use an “astrolabium” has its origins in Ancient Greece. Knowledge about the astrolabe made its way from Alexandria via Syria to the Arabs, who perfected the use of this instrument. In the 10th century, it finally reached the Latin Occident via Muslim Spain. Around 1050, the Benedictine monk Herman “the Lame” (1013–1054) from Reichenau Island on Lake Constance wrote a construction manual as well as an instruction manual on its use. From the Middle Ages to the 17th century, astrolabes were the most commonly used astronomical instruments.

The name “astrolabium” means “the one that catches the heavenly bodies”. The instrument is made up of a disk that could be used to measure the rotation of the heavens, a kind of rotatable star chart. It showed the position of the sun and stars on a circular surface. By observing the height of the stars, it was not only possible to tell time, but also measure distances. However, complex adjustments and extensive knowledge of astronomy and mathematics were required to carry out these astronomical measurements.
Judaism, Christianity and Islam: these three religions played an important role in the Early Middle Ages. All three are characterised by the belief in one God. In contrast, ancient belief systems had multiple deities.

Jews lived in many parts of Europe and the Middle East. Rabbinic Judaism emerged after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. At the same time, Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire. A clear legal distinction was made between Christians and Jews for the first time in the Code of Justinian (527–565). Within the Christian church, disputes rage for centuries over the “right” faith, the correct interpretation of the Bible and liturgy. Independent Christian communities emerged in isolated regions such as Ireland or Egypt. The Orthodox church, but also the Egyptian Coptic church, are still not affiliated with Rome to this day. However, the religions all have one thing in common: the use of symbols and rites, such as the cross or pilgrimages to the burial sites of the saints.

Islam quickly spread in the first half of the 7th century, fundamentally changing religious circumstances from the Arab peninsula all the way to Spain. Both Jewish and Christian scholars, officials and diplomats worked in Islamic centres. They worked together with Islamic scholars to translate ancient texts, the Bible and Torah, into a number of different languages.
Egeria (4th century) – Attentive pilgrim in the Holy Land

Egeria embarked upon an extended pilgrimage that took her from northern Spain to the Holy Land in the years 381 to 384. She was warmly welcomed by congregations, bishops and cloisters. She made good progress on the well-built roads of the Roman Empire, reaching Egypt and what is today Syria, Mount Sinai and Jerusalem. She sometimes went by carriage, often on the back of a donkey, but mostly on foot, rarely accompanied by an escort and often in a group with other pilgrims.

She wrote an account of her travels in Latin. Two fragmentary manuscripts from the 11th and early 10th century have survived. Her account was addressed to the “ladies, reverend sisters”, which leads to the assumption that they, and perhaps Egeria herself, were nuns. She wrote eye-witness accounts of the liturgy celebrated on various Christian feast days, such as the processions leading from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to celebrate the Nativity of Christ and to the Mount of Olives on Palm Sunday as well as the night vigil held on the eve of Maundy Thursday in Gethsemane. She discussed at length the life in the convents that extended their hospitality to her, and described sounds and smells. She visited the countryside and holy sites mentioned in the Bible: “We came on foot to a certain place where the mountains, through which we were journeying, opened out and formed an infinitely great valley, quite flat and extraordinarily beautiful, and across the valley appeared Sinai, the holy mountain of God.”
Political art for the faith

(1) Box ("pyxis") with the depiction of the Raising of Lazarus (Joh. 11), ivory, provenance unknown, 6th–7th cent., LVR-LMB

(2) Book cover ("diptych"), ivory mounted on gilded sheet metal, blue glass inlays, produced in the late 8th cent. in Northumbria (England), depiction of the Triumphant Christ on one side, on the other narrative scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary (Annunciation and Visitation), from the church in Genoels-Elderen near Tongeren (Belgium), KMKG

(3) Small box, wood, ivory, remnants of polychrome and fabric, Byzantine Empire (Constantinople?), 10th–12th cent., KMKG

Church Father Saint Augustine wrote: “God may be present everywhere and He, the creator of all things, is not enclosed or restricted by any space ... However, as to those things that are visible to the human eye, who can comprehend His plan, why such miracles occur in one place, but not in another...”.

Human beings have always believed in the power of holy objects, symbols and places. Most religions – including Judaism, Christianity and Islam – are familiar with the salvific effect of pilgrimages, donations and sacred souvenirs. The belief in these things springs up from the well of yearning that rests deep within humans for blessings, gifts of grace and miraculous powers.
“And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.” (Joh. 11:43-44)

This narrative scene from the Bible is depicted on the wall of the box (1). The body of the deceased, the central figure, is wrapped diagonally with bandages. Christ holds a cross in His left hand, with the right He blesses Lazarus, who is then resurrected from the dead. The relief also portrays the apostles in tunics and mantles (“pallium”); they hold a book in their hands (“codex”).

Nothing is known about where the piece was made or found, but the quality of the work dates the piece to the early medieval period in the 6th/7th century.

A number of craftsmen were specialised in producing high-quality objects out of ivory, particularly in Late Antiquity. Examples of such works are the above-mentioned consular diptychs (cf. the “cathedra” page 26–27).
The priceless liturgical objects (3) that were produced in the Byzantine Empire followed the same tradition as the secular, political objects. Very little ivory was used in the Frankish Empire in the 8th century, but bone or whalebone carvings have been found adorning everyday items. This diptych (2), which was made towards the end of the 8th century in Northumbria (England), was preserved in St. Martin’s Church in Genoels-Elderen near Tongeren, is an example of early Carolingian art. In contrast to works from Late Antiquity, the execution of the scenes is flatter. The woven bands are decorative motifs common to the British Isles.
Profession of faith and protection

(6) Reliquary buckle, according to the inscription, made by Siggiricus ("Siggiricus fecit"), in the Burgundian region of the Frankish Empire, found in burial grounds at Kobern-Gondorf (Mayen-Koblenz district), hollow on the inside to hold blessings and/or reliquaries, highly interrelated and ambiguous motifs, depiction of Daniel in the Den of Lions, the ejection of Jonah and the battle between the crocodile and snake, copper alloy, 6th/7th cent., LVR-LMB

(7–8) Cross fibulae from the graves of Frankish women in Iversheim (Bad Münstereifel, Euskirchen district), copper alloy, 7th cent., LVR-LMB

(9) Cross fibula, from a woman’s grave under the Church of St. Peter in Beuel-Vilich (Bonn), manufactured according to models of pectoral crosses from the Mediterranean region, gold with garnet inlays, 2nd half 7th cent., LVR-LMB

(10) Grave goods from a woman’s grave in Rübenach (Koblenz): disc fibula with garnet and white glass inlays arranged into a cross shape, glass beads, shoe buckle and finger ring, end of 6th cent., LVR-LMB

In the Byzantine Empire, the belief in the miraculous powers of relics and the protection they accorded their owners found expression in the widespread custom of wearing relics in crosses around the neck. This custom was widely practiced by people of all social standings.
In the Frankish Empire, the cross fibulae (7–10) may also have been more than just a profession of faith. Gregory of Tours reported that Clovis, the king of the Franks, converted to Christianity after he made a vow to Christ and was granted victory over the Alemanni in His name. (Gregory of Tours, Historiarum II.30).

Not one but three motifs are depicted on the buckle of Siggiricus (6), which represent deliverance from dire straits and protection.

Delving deeper:

The riddle of the images depicted on the buckle (6): which images did Siggiricus hide on the buckle? You can find the solution on page 49.
Tombstone of Musa

Tombstone of “Makki ibn al Hassan, ibn Musa” (Makki, son of al-Hassan, son of Musa), marble, A.D. 829, Egypt, KMKG

The inscription, which was translated into French from Arabic by F. Bauden, reads in English:

1. In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful
2. In God there is comfort for all misfortune,
3. Recompense for those who have died and continuation of
4. all that has happened before. The greatest of all catastrophes
5. is surely the loss of the Prophet Mohammed, may God bless him,
6. bestow upon him blessings and redemption.
   Here is that which bears witness
7. Makki, son of al-Hasan, son of Musa. He witnesses
8. there is no God, but God, the only God
9. and Mohammed is His servant and prophet.
10. It is He who sent his messengers with leadership and the true religion,
11. to grant them victory over all the religions,
12. ...
   He died
13. at the end of the month dhu l-Hijjdja of the year
Who was Menas?

(1–7) Flasks with the image of St. Menas (so-called ampullae of St. Menas), pottery, provenance unknown, 4th cent. APM
(8–9) Flasks with the image of St. Menas, Egypt, 5th–7th cent., KMKG
(10) Field flask, pottery, from a grave in Nickenich (Mayen-Koblenz district), 7th cent., LVR-LMB

Saint Menas is particularly revered in the Coptic church. He is most commonly depicted as a mounted soldier, as a dragon slayer, in combination with camels or holding his hand over a flame.

His remains were brought to Egypt on the back of camels and interred at the site where the camels refused to go further. A miraculous spring arose close by his grave. Beginning in the 4th century, it became a major pilgrimage site, one of the most important sacred sites of Late Antiquity. The site was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979.

Since Late Antiquity, pilgrimage souvenirs, the “St. Menas flasks”, have been sold to pilgrims who wanted to take water from the spring back home with them. They have been found all over the Mediterranean region and in many areas of Europe and Asia, including England and Samarkand, today Uzbekistan.
In the Catholic Church, St. Menas is the patron saint of merchants and helps to find lost items; the faithful also turn to him in difficult times. His feast day is 11 November. Koblenz-Stolzenfels is the only place north of the Alps that has a parish church dedicated to him.

Many holy sites offer souvenirs to pilgrims, particularly in the Middle East. These include small flasks made of pottery, glass or metal, pendants or rings or medallions that have been made and fired from the clay found at the holy site.

Solution to the picture riddle (page 46)

- Daniel in the den of lions
- Jonah and the sea monster
- The battle between crocodile and snake
Excluded writings

In both Judaism and Christianity, there are a large number of writings that were not included in the Holy Scriptures. These apocryphal writings have caused and continue to cause extensive problems for scholarship and theology; this issue was already being debated by the church fathers in the 3rd and 4th centuries. The apocrypha include the so-called Protoevangelium of James, which was probably written around the mid-2nd century and was translated into many languages: Syriac, Georgian, Slavic, Armenian, Latin, Coptic, Arabic and Ethiopic. This reveals just how interesting its contents are – and they are truly unique because the book describes the origins and life of Mary, the Mother of God.

Sacred images

Icon, copy of the original from the 15th cent., wood, mosaic stones made of glass, gold and silver, depiction of the Virgin Mary with the Christ child, original from Trigleia in Turkey, BCM

Images of venerable people are part of a tradition that has its origins in Greco-Roman Antiquity. The imagery used for the icons in the Orthodox church of the Byzantine Empire developed out of the veneration of imperial images as of the 6th century. However, they are more than just painted panels depicting saints or narrative scenes from the Holy Scriptures. Icons are considered to be a means of communicating with the spiritual world and some are even considered to be miraculous. Only very few objects from the period prior to the 9th century have survived. The battle of the images raged between the Eastern church and the imperial family from 726 to 843; this “iconoclasm”, or “smashing of the images”, led to their destruction. They remain inextricably linked with piety and religious practices even today.
In Late Antiquity, violent conflicts raged both inside and outside of the Roman Empire. These conflicts broke out at the frontiers of the empire for various reasons: climate change, the need to escape from aggressive neighbours, but also the promise of prosperity and cultural achievements.

Both Eastern and Western Rome used different approaches to address these problems, including changing alliances, tribute payments, forcible resettlement or the inclusion of non-Roman ‘war experts’ in the Roman army to defend the borders. The Eastern Roman Empire maintained diplomatic and intelligence services. With the collapse of the political structure in the Western Roman Empire, a new structure was established by the old Roman elites in Gaul together with the rising Frankish military leaders and their liegemen. After about three generations, this led to the foundation of the Frankish Empire.
Olympiodorus of Thebes (c. A.D. 375 – after 425) –
The diplomat with the parrot

Olympiodorus was born in Egyptian Thebes; he was erudite, spoke Latin and Greek as well as Coptic and was well-versed in philosophy and Greek literature. He was inquisitive, adventurous and knowledgeable in geography, which made him ideal for the diplomatic service of the Roman emperor.

In 412, his diplomatic missions took him to the Huns in the Danube region and later along the River Nile to the Blemmyes, a Nubian tribe in what is today Sudan. He was accompanied by a parrot that could “imitate people, dance, sing, curse and a lot more”.

Sometime after 425, he wrote an historical account in Old Greek, in which he described Syene, today Aswan, Thrace, an area in what is today Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey, Ravenna, Aemona (Ljubljana, Slovenia), Athens and Rome. He wrote about prominent personages and political events, but also about contemporary problems such as the difficulties in maintaining a working water supply in Rome after it was conquered by the Goths. He was also interested in such topics as the financial costs of holding games or the large blocks of flats (“insulae”) that housed most of Rome’s inhabitants. As a contemporary witness, he passed down valuable information about internal unrest and outside threats from such groups as the Germanic tribes or the Huns in the period between A.D. 407 and 425, one of the most turbulent periods of the Roman Empire.
Not only for representation

Decorative plates of a so-called Spangenhelm, gilded bronze, from the Danube in Hungary, 1st half 6th cent., HNM

“...there are a few who wear helmets ...”. Agathias of Myrina, Historiae II, 5 on the Franks

“When he then ... was made count, his conduct was so inconsid-erate and haughty that he even entered the church with shield and armour, a quiver on his shoulder, a spear in his hand and a helmet on his head.”

Gregory of Tours, Historiarum libri decem V, 48

Today, when one pictures the warriors of old, they are usually wearing helmets. Helmets, however, were not part of the standard equipment of the Frankish armies. They are only rarely mentioned in written accounts, and then usually only in connection with military leaders. This is why they have been found only in the graves of warriors that also contain a wealth of other grave goods.

According to the “Lex Ribuaria”, a collection of laws passed in the 7th century for the Franks living in the Rhine region, a helmet was valued at six “solidi”, a sword with scabbard at seven “solidi” and a riding horse at between 7 and 12 “solidi”. It can be assumed that the value of the ornate gilded helmets would have been much greater.
More than 40 helmets have been found at 37 sites in regions from northern Europe to northern Africa. This military equipment was made for high-ranking Byzantine soldiers or confederates in the weapons workshops of the Byzantine Empire. The helmets were found in regions outside of the empire because they were brought there through personal contacts, following the completion of military service for the Eastern Roman Emperor, as gifts or as loot (1).

A so-called Spangenhelm was made of oval plates, usually of iron, mounted with gilded and decorated bronze sheets. These were held together by riveted straps and attached to a headband. Cheek flaps made of gilded bronze and neck protection made of iron rings were also attached to the headband. The inside of the helmet consisted of a layer of felt and a leather liner. The varying diameters indicate that the helmets were custom-made to fit the head of the wearer.

The drawing depicts the individual parts of the Spangenhelm from the collection of the LVR-LandesMuseum Bonn (page 58–59). It was placed into the grave of a warrior known as the “lord from Morken”.

Chop marks on the helmet indicate that this shiny golden piece was also worn in battle.
Battle-hardened – The tale of the bones

Skull of the lord from Morken, Bedburg-Morken, late 6th cent., LVR-LMB

All that remains of the skeleton of the lord from Morken are fragments of the arm and leg bones and a skull with all of its teeth including the wisdom teeth. His remains have been examined by anthropologists at the University of Mainz. He was approximately 1.70 m (5’7”) to 1.80 m (5’11”) in height and died sometime between the ages of 40 and 55. Although the teeth show signs of great wear, none are missing from the jaw and none show signs of cavities. This is very unusual for a person living in the early medieval period and sets the lord from Morken clearly apart from the village population. The frontal bone exhibits a lesion completely healed that was caused by a sharp object, probably a sword. The area of the lesion shows no sign of infection, which indicates good health and good wound care. He did not die from the wound, because the lesion occurred many years before his death. However, he probably bore a visible scar. Thus, the weapons found in the grave were not just status symbols, but had been carried into battle during his lifetime.
A heroic poem on Conda, major-domo at the Frankish court, written in Latin by Venantius Fortunatus (poet and bishop of Poitiers, * c. A.D. 540, † shortly after 600) describes the difficult life of a vassal of the king with its many privations. It was written around the year 576, thus around the time of the lord from Morken’s interment. To modern ears, the poem seems somewhat exaggerated and ingratiating, but it reveals individual elements that in this period were considered important for a heroic and successful life: ancestry, great deeds in battle, careful economic management, generosity towards liegemen, political thinking and dealings and, most importantly, loyalty to the royal family.
“For long years rich splendour has been glorious in the king’s court through your merits, Conda.

For once it spied you as a young man with alert heart, it chose to have you always with itself even as an old man.

What intellect was it and what maturity of feeling, when you were thus the single love of such great king? Your noble mind is glorious with splendid light, which magnified your forebears with its very merits. The succeeding generation, through which its own origin is dignified, flourishes and causes your forefathers of old to rise in praise. For if he who maintains the family’s honour is esteemed, how much more praiseworthy is it to ennable a family?

So he who wishes to exalt his name by his deeds, let him speedily think upon your achievement. Starting from humble beginnings, you have always advanced to the heights and through all stages held to the lofty pinnacles.

Theuderic, rejoicing, adorned you with the office of tribune, from that point you already had the mark of successful advance. For Theuderbert granted you the prize of being a count, and added a belt in recognition of your services. He saw that excellent characters deserve better, and was soon willing to raise the rank you had earned. He saw it urgently that you then became domesticus, you rose suddenly, and the court rose with you. The revered palace flourished together with you, and the household applauded its vigilant marshal.
Then, whilst Theubald’s young child was yet alive, your great care was for his nurture. Thus by distinguished action you fostered the public order, that you could bring the young king to mature age. You governed yourself, as though you were there as guardian and the business entrusted to you flourished.

Again, you held sway in Lothar’s great court, who ordered the household to be ruled with the same love.

Kings changed, but you did not change your offices, and as your own successor you were worthy of yourself. So great was the people’s love of you, so great was your expertise in management, that no-one would willingly have taken the task away from you.

For now through the love of gentle King Sigibert, gifts are lavishly given to reward your services. He has commanded you to establish yourself amongst the noble magnates, appointing you his table companion, a promoted post. The king, more powerful than the rest, has provided rightly better awards, and your case demonstrates what he values more highly.

Thus your condition has always been to deserve better, and your honours have grown as your life has progressed.

Saxony in mourning proclaims the valour you had; it is praise to a valiant old man that he did not fear arms, for the prayers of his country and the great love of his king, for which two dear sons lie dead. May you not mourn grievously that both died manfully, for to die with praise will be to live forever.
Your countenance radiates joy from your happy expression, and bears sure rejoicing without any cloud of mind. In generosity and kindness you bestow gifts in plenty on all, and bind men to you by your gifts.

May long-lived wellbeing be with you, with ever more blessing through serene years, may glorious children restore their father.”

English translation from: Venantius Fortunatus, Personal and Political Poems, Chap. 7.16 Conda the domesticus.
Well-equipped

7 Francisca (throwing axe), iron, Neuwied-Heddesdorf (Germany), LVR-LMB

In the 6th century, the francisca belonged to the standard equipment of Frankish warriors, who were usually foot soldiers. It could be used both as a striking as well as a throwing weapon. Isidor of Seville, an eminent writer of the Middle Ages (* A.D. 560, † 635), explained that the axe was named after the Franks because of their partiality to this particular weapon.

A 6th century writer, Agathias, wrote an account of the fighting style of the Franks:

All their preparations proceeded with ease since as a nation their style of fighting equipment is simple and of a kind which does not require a variety of mechanical skills for its maintenance but can, I believe, be put right, in case of damage, by the men themselves who wear it. They are ignorant of the use of breastplates and greaves and most of them fight with their heads unprotected, though there are a few who wear helmets. Back and chest are bare as far as the waist, the legs being encased in linen or leather trousers.
Rarely if ever do they use horses, being adepts in infantry fighting, which is the customary mode of warfare of their nation. They wear a sword slung from the thigh and a shield hanging at the left side. Bows and arrows, slings and other weapons capable of hitting a distant target form no part of their equipment. Two-headed axes and their “angones” are in fact the arms with which they do most of their fighting.

Angones are spears which are neither especially short nor especially long, but can be used both as javelins and, if need be, as thrusting weapon in close combat. They are almost entirely encased in iron so that very little of the wood shows through and even the spike at the butt-end of the spear is partly concealed. At the top of the spearpoint, presumably on either side of the spear-head itself, curved barbs project and are bent round, not unlike fish-hooks.

Now your Frank throws this ango of his in the midst of the fray. If it strikes any part of the body then the point goes in, of course, and it is no easy task either for the wounded man or for anybody else to pull out the spear. The barbs prevent it, sticking to the flesh and making the pain more agonizing, so that even if it should happen that the enemy has not been mortally wounded he still dies.

If it pierces a shield then it remains attached to it with the butt-end trailing on the ground. The man whose shield has been hit is unable to pull out the spear because its barbs are embedded in his shield. He cannot hack it off with his sword, either because the interposing layers of iron prevent him from getting to the wood.
As soon as he perceives this the Frank puts his foot out suddenly and stepping onto the butt weights the shield down, so that the man holding it loosens grip and his head and chest are left unprotected. He then makes short work of his defenceless victim either striking him in the front part of the face with an axe or driving another spear through his windpipe.

This then is the type of equipment the Franks have and the manner in which they were preparing for battle.”

A sense of personal identity is usually developed through contact with and in relation to others. It serves either to build up a feeling of a group affiliation or to establish boundaries between one’s own and other groups.

In the early medieval period, religion, ancestry, status, sex and age were key factors in the development of identity. This is reflected in many customs and traditions, such as burial rituals and the custom of interring the dead together with grave goods. Equally important in endowing a sense of identity were not only symbols and clothing, but also different religious beliefs, social or settlement structures. And lastly, the rulers of the Germanic successor states of the Roman Empire legitimised their rule by tracing their lineage back to mythical origins, designing their symbols of power and traditions after those of their role models, the rulers of Antiquity.
Ohthere of Hålogaland (end of 9th century) – Europe grows together

Ohthere was a Norwegian seafarer and merchant. Most of his journeys took him along the northern coasts of Scandinavia. On one of his journeys in the year 890, he visited the king of Wessex, Alfred the Great. He introduced himself as a wealthy man who lived “further north than any other Northman”.

He owned reindeer, sheep and pigs and traded in luxury goods such as furs and walrus tusks, which he acquired primarily from the Sami people in what is today Finland. During his travels, he visited the White Sea, the Kola Peninsula and Karelia, today part of Russia, Ireland, southern Norway and Denmark. He wrote accounts of his travels and described landscapes as well as people and their way of life.

During this period, King Alfred had Latin manuscripts translated into English, including the early 5th century work of Paulus Orosius, “Historiae adversum Paganos” (“History against the Pagans”). The first book of this work began with a short geographical description of the “known world”. For Orosius, this included those regions around the Mediterranean Sea that were oriented towards the Roman Empire. However, Alfred the Great was also aware of the many regions beyond these borders, which were, of course, also deserving of mention. For this reason, he had Ohthere’s account of the land of the Northmen and a description of the Baltic region by Wulfstan of Hedeby, an Anglo-Saxon traveller, added to the translation.
The Tomb of Childeric – The find of the millennium

1 Two bee-shaped fittings from the sword belt (copies made of gilt copper alloy with garnet inlays, original gold with garnet), from the grave of the king of the Franks, Childeric I (c. 440–481/482), in Tournai (Belgium), KMKG

2 Signet ring of Childeric I, king of the Franks, (copy made of gilt copper alloy, original gold), Tournai (Belgium), KMKG

Very early on, in 1653, a tomb with an extraordinary wealth of grave goods was discovered in Tournai, now a part of Belgium, during the construction of a new poorhouse. Even today this tomb is considered a sensational find. It is very rare that artefacts can be attributed to a specific person known from written sources – in this, again, the tomb is an exception. The gold signet ring with the inscription “Childericici regis” then dispelled any remaining doubts: this was the tomb of Childeric, King of the Franks!

The tomb has been the subject of many research studies. Very few other early medieval tombs have contained such a wealth of artefacts. The tomb is not only significant because it is possible to link written accounts to artefacts from an archaeological excavation. It tells of the “two faces”, or two roles, of Childeric in a period of political upheaval.

Clovis I, his son and successor, staged Childeric’s funeral as a great political event. An exact account of the funeral has not been handed down, but some of it can be pieced together: Childeric was laid out in full regalia on a bier outside of his tomb
with the grave goods placed nearby, to ensure that both would be visible to all who attended the funeral. A speech may have been held, in which several of the grave goods were used to effect, as they symbolised the stations of his life. Weapons that were not only ornamental, but could have been used in battle, were interred with him. This was also a symbol of his standing as a member of a non-Roman military elite. His horses were then killed – a bloody, but very impressive ritual. In the 5th century, this was only customary for members of the elite class living outside of the Roman Empire in the region extending east of the Rhine to the central Danube region and unheard of in Gaul.

The mantle and crossbow fibula, however, belonged to the uniform worn by Roman officers. These pieces served to emphasise that he was a member of the legitimate government and not just a foreign interloper in Gaul. The use of a part of the royal treasure, on the other hand, is a reference to the long tradition of the family and their claim to power.

Although he was only 16 years old, Clovis clearly took advantage of the opportunity this presented, not only to emphasise his father’s position as a leader, but also to stake his own claim to power.

The tomb by itself already makes for an exciting story, but the tale of the investigations into the tomb turns it into a thrilling mystery: If it were not for a work published in 1655 by
Jean-Jacques Chiflet, physician to Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria, governor of the Spanish Netherlands, we would know nothing about the grave goods from the tomb of Childeric. Even by today’s standards, the publication is remarkably exact and professional with skilfully executed illustrations. The illustration shows the crossbow fibula. Lacking comparable findings, Chiflet mistakenly identified it as a stylus. It was the insignia of the Roman civilian and military aristocracy in the 5th century (cf. page 24-25).

Many of the grave goods were already lost in the years between the discovery of the tomb and the publication of Chiflet’s work, including the remnants of the crimson-hued silk mantle and what were supposedly more than 300 bee-shaped fittings (1). The grave goods were stored in the Viennese Treasury in 1656, but then given to King Louis XIV of France in 1665. He had them placed in the Cabinet des Médailles of the Louvre Museum in Paris.

If it were not for the drawings of Chiflet, we would not be able to make any sort of assessment of the tomb today because, during a robbery at the royal library on the night of the 5th to the 6th of November, 1831, the original works were stolen and to a large part destroyed.
On Sunday morning, the 6th of November, the employees were met with a scene of utter devastation: a large number of works lay strewn across the floor next to pieces of the broken cabinets and display cases. The crime scene was visited by the lieutenant general of the Paris police, the minister of trade and the crown prosecutor. Other works of art besides the grave goods from the tomb of Childeric had also been stolen. The damage was estimated at about 270,000 francs; today, this would be equivalent to an amount far in excess of two million euros. The damage to scholarship is impossible to quantify. Some of the grave goods that the police were able to recover are preserved today in the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris. Impressions taken from the signet ring (2) in 1653 have survived.

The crossbow fibula, with the corresponding officer’s mantle, and a hoard of coins including more than 200 silver coins and more than 100 gold coins from Constantinople are symbols of Childeric’s military alliance with the Roman Empire. However, the coins are probably only a small part of the royal treasure. The massive gold bracelet is a symbol of his position as Germanic king. A sceptre is crowned by a rock crystal sphere; this was already being used as an insignia of the power of the gods on Roman coins. In addition to other sumptuous grave goods, such as an agate vessel and Childeric’s sword, the scabbard of which was ornamented with gold and garnets, at least 21 horses were buried near the tomb. The tomb was located on the right bank of the Scheldt river, directly across from the late antique “castrum” of Tournai, centrally placed in a late antique-early medieval cemetery and probably covered with a mound.
Two crowns, Bronze, tin-plated, Greece, 10th cent., BCM

The crowns were probably worn during a church ceremony. A cross has been engraved on the semi-circular fields. One of the crowns bears the inscription “Lord, help Thy servant, Spathorokandidatos Romanus”. “Spathorokandidatos” refers to a high office at the court of the Byzantine emperor; later, it was used as a general honorary title. A verse from a psalm of David is inscribed on the second crown (Psalm 21:3-4):

“...thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked life of thee, [and] thou gavest [it] him, [even] length of days for ever and ever.”
“The Emperor’s New Clothes...”

So-called quadriga fabric, silk, produced in the Byzantine Empire, burial shroud of Charlemagne, c. 800, Aachen Cathedral Treasury

Patterned silks, priceless and exotic textiles arrived at the court of Charlemagne as gifts, tribute payments or loot. The so-called quadriga fabric came to Aachen in a similar fashion. It was used as the burial shroud at Charlemagne’s funeral on 28 January 814.

During his lifetime, however, Charlemagne was not partial to these types of fabrics for his own clothing. His biographer Einhard described the clothing he wore, indicating that he generally refused to wear clothing from foreign lands. However, among the upper classes of his kingdom, silk fabrics were very popular and were sewn into luxurious clothing. Furthermore, they were often used to create sumptuous covers for relics or the mortal remains of saints. Priceless textiles were donated by rulers and members of the court and are still preserved in church treasuries today.

The triumphant charioteer depicted on the crimson-hued textile with his servants, who are pouring out coins as an allegory of generosity, resemble late antique ruler portraits. The ibexes in the spandrels of the medallions were more likely derived from the formal repertoire of Persian art. The fabric itself was made in the complicated weave known as samite and is luxurious and elaborate in design.
Scholars have yet to agree on the provenance of the fabric, but the court workshops in Byzantium or one of the large workshops in the eastern Mediterranean region have been suggested as possible places of origin.

The fabric that is today preserved in the Aachen Cathedral Treasury was originally part of a “pallium”, a larger, unfinished length of fabric. However, in the mid-19th century, the silk fabric preserved in Aachen was divided and one of the pieces was sold to the Louvre.

“He used to wear the national, that is to say, the Frank, dress – next his skin a linen shirt and linen breeches, and above these a tunic fringed with silk; while hose fastened by bands covered his lower limbs, and shoes his feet, and he protected his shoulders and chest in winter by a close-fitting coat of otter or marten skins. Over all he flung a blue cloak, and he always had a sword girt about him, usually one with a gold or silver hilt and belt; he sometimes carried a jewelled sword, but only on great feast-days or at the reception of ambassadors from foreign nations. He despised foreign costumes, however handsome, and never allowed himself to be robed in them, except twice in Rome, when he donned the Roman tunic, chlamys, and shoes; the first time at the request of Pope Hadrian, the second to gratify Leo, Hadrian’s successor. On great feast-days he made use of embroidered clothes, and shoes bedecked with precious stones; his cloak was fastened by a golden buckle, and he appeared crowned with a diadem of gold and gems: but on other days his dress varied little from the common dress of the people.”

https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/einhard.asp
Medieval sourcebook: Translation Samuel Epes Turner 1880, chapter 23
Gallery text: Connections

The political collapse of Western Rome did not disrupt the wide-ranging networks that had been developed throughout Europe: pilgrims travelled to the Holy Land, diplomats were exchanged, slaves from eastern European territories were traded to Spain. Ambers and furs from Scandinavia were sent to the Mediterranean region and precious stones as well as spices from southern Asia were brought to the North.

The Eastern Roman trading network lost important trading centres in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa and Sicily through the Arab conquests. However, luxury goods from the East, such as silks, could still be acquired from Asia via the widely branched road network of the Silk Road.

Ideas, fashions, customs, symbols, religious ideas and knowledge spread across Europe by means of gifts, tribute payments, goods and people.
Abul-Abbas (died A.D. 810) –
The elephant of Charlemagne

There is a saying, “small gifts preserve the friendship”. However, big ones are also greatly appreciated. Harun-al-Rashid, the famous Abbasid caliph of Baghdad (reign 786–809) sent Charlemagne (reign 774–814) an enormous, weighty diplomatic gift: Abul-Abbas, an Indian elephant. The elephant represented a sign of good will and at the same time underlined the power and affluence of the gift giver.

In 801, Isaac, a Jewish merchant, interpreter and ambassador of Charlemagne, led the elephant along the southern coast of the Mediterranean via what is today Egypt and Libya to an area that is now part of Tunisia. A fleet sent by Charlemagne brought him from Carthage to Genoa. After spending the winter in Vercelli on the shores of Lago Maggiore, they crossed the Alps in the spring. In Aachen, the elephant was presented to Charlemagne together with a large number of other priceless gifts. The elephant accompanied Charlemagne as he travelled from palatinate to palatinate and particularly during his military campaigns.

The Royal Frankish Annals reported that the elephant suddenly died in 810 after crossing the Rhine near Lippeham, probably around what is today Wesel. However, he was never forgotten completely. When the bones of a mammoth were discovered near Wesel in the 18th century, it was first thought the bones of this legendary elephant had been found.
International models

(1) Pair of disc fibulae, silver gilt with garnet inlays, Harmignies (Belgium), 6th cent., KMKG

(2) (Pairs of) disc fibulae, silver gilt with garnet inlays, 6th cent., from various cemeteries in the Rhineland, LVR-LMB

(3) S-shaped fibulae, silver gilt with garnet inlays, 6th cent., from various cemeteries in the Rhineland, LVR-LMB

(4) (Pairs of) bird fibulae, silver and silver gilt with garnet inlays, 6th cent., from various cemeteries in the Rhineland, LVR-LMB

(5) Cross-shaped facing, silver gilt with garnet inlays, late 7th cent., from a grave near Königswinter-Oberdollendorf (Rhine-Sieg district), LVR-LMB

(6) Bow fibulae, silver gilt with garnet inlays, from graves in Bornheim (Rhine-Sieg district), 6th cent., LVR-LMB

(7) Bird-shaped head of a hairpin, silver gilt with garnet inlays, Rödigen (Düren district), 6th cent., LVR-LMB

(8) Hairpin with the head of a bird, silver gilt with garnet, Nettersheim (Euskirchen district), LVR-LMB
(9) Hairpin, gold and garnet, Andernach, LVR-LMB
(10) Earrings, silver gilt with garnet and white glass inlays, Cologne, Andernach and Engers, 6th cent., LVR-LMB
(11) Pendant for a necklace, gold with garnet inlays, Wesel-Bislich (Wesel district), 2nd half 6th cent., LVR-LMB
(12) Finger ring, gold, pearls and garnet, Kleve-Rindern, 6th cent., LVR-LMB
(13) Gold disc fibulae, gilt-silver foil, with garnet and glass inlays, copper alloy base plate, from graves in Meckenheim (Rhine-Sieg district), Niederbreisig (Ahrweiler district), Andernach (Mayen-Koblenz district), Engers (Neuwied), Weißenthurm (Mayen-Koblenz district), 7th cent., LVR-LMB
(14) Uncut garnet from India and the Alpine region (privately owned)
Current research of the LVR-LandesMuseum Bonn – Priceless long-distance trading goods for the Frankish Empire

The LVR-LandesMuseum Bonn has one of the largest collections of early medieval artefacts in Europe. Each day this collection grows as new pieces are added from archaeological excavations. We are conducting ongoing research on these pieces, constantly discovering new, interesting facts about the artefacts to pass on to our visitors as well as new perspectives from which to examine this long-ago period.

The most popular gemstone of the early medieval period, and particularly of the Frankish Empire, was the luminous red garnet. The iron-aluminium garnet, the almandine, was the most common type of garnet used. Not only women’s jewellery, but also weapons were decorated with this gemstone. Most often, the stones were applied as garnet cloisonné (1–4) inlay, which involved filling so-called cloisons, or small cells, formed by gold, silver or gilded filaments, with garnets, or they were mounted in individual settings of gold (5).

Garnet deposits are found in India, Sri Lanka and Bohemia. As a long-distance trading good, the garnet offers a starting point for research on issues relating to economic history, e.g. commercial and technological exchanges, transportation routes as well as social connections.
In recent years, the geochemical “fingerprints” of deposits have been identified using non-destructive analytical techniques such as X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF) and analyses carried out by experienced mineralogists. This in turn has made it possible to determine the provenance of gemstones.

The LVR-LandesMuseum Bonn applied and, in January 2014, was accepted as an independent affiliated partner of the project “Weltweites Zellwerk” (“International Framework”), which is part of the funding initiative “Die Sprache der Objekte – Materielle Kultur im Kontext gesellschaftlicher Entwicklungen” (“The language of objects – material culture in the context of societal developments”) of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz (RGZM, Roman-Germanic Central Museum) was the primary applicant and initiator of this interdisciplinary European project. The Rhineland was the ideal region to use as a model for the study of the development of garnet ornamentation from the 5th to 7th century because of the high density of artefacts and excellent research base. The study focused on the provenance and workmanship of the stones as well as observations relating to the goldsmith techniques that were applied and the distribution and social significance of the stones.

A representative sample of artefacts was used to distinguish identifying marks left by specific goldsmith techniques as well as by the shape and workmanship of the stones. However, a key
factor of the study was the more than 1000 XRF readings that were taken at RGZM and the determination of provenance.

The results of the analysis were that, in the northern Rhine-land, the provenance, amount and in particular the quality of the garnet works were subject to significant fluctuations over time and with regard to social factors. Another finding was that the pieces were produced in workshops that followed different workmanship traditions.

Generally, the garnet objects that were found in men’s graves were unique, skilfully executed specimens. These were always fewer in number in relation to the rest of the grave goods and were only found in graves with the highest-grade goods. In contrast, marked differences were found in women’s jewellery over the course of time. The largest amount of garnet jewellery was found in women’s graves from the period
between 500 and 560/70. Here, individual, elaborately executed pieces became “trendsetters” for the production of larger numbers of more simply designed pieces.

The stones found in the Rhineland that dated back to the early 6th century were mined in India and – to a lesser extent – in Sri Lanka. This same conclusion was reached by colleagues who analysed stones found in the Paris Basin. This is surprising, because the Rhineland was more of a peripheral region during this period, while the Paris Basin was the very heart of the Frankish Empire. We believe that this concurrence is due to a centralised supply of stones or works with inlaid stones. Good quality stones were also available to the broader masses and were not limited to the richest of graves.
These circumstances changed significantly over the course of the second half of the 6th century. Garnets began to be used only in small amounts for individual, high-quality gold disk fibulae (10). The filigree and gold disk fibulae that emerged at the end of the 6th and in the 7th century reflect a new heyday for jewellery. However, garnets became rare and, if used at all, then primarily as individual stones in single settings with only the occasional cloisonné piece. The quality of the workmanship, particularly the cut of the stones and the finish of the settings, the amount and workmanship of the precious metals markedly declined, as did the number of fibulae, which were limited to the most affluent of graves. By the end of the 7th century, the circle of people who had, as an example, cross fibulae or cross-shaped facings (5) of gold foil with garnets instead of the cast fibulae, became even smaller. The find-spots of these few artefacts suggest that these were only people living in urban and religious centres.

Thus, as of the late 6th century, the parallel phenomena of a scarcity of garnets and a decline in the quality of the works of the goldsmith’s art and stone workmanship, was accompanied by a greater concentration of pieces among those persons whose grave goods can be considered the most opulent of their time. As a basis for discussion and starting point for further research, we currently assume that the decline in garnet jewellery was not only due to the breakdown of the trade routes in the Mediterranean region with the expansion of Arab hegemony in the 7th century, but also a result of structural, economic and/or social changes in the Frankish Empire.
Glossary

Almandine – A type of garnet containing high levels of iron and aluminium; the stones are red to almost black in colour.

Cathedra – Throne-like chair; in Antiquity a symbol of the authority of the holders of public office. In the Early Middle Ages, it was a symbol of the bishop’s teaching authority and was placed in a prominent position by the altar.

Charon’s obol – A coin that was buried with the deceased to allow the dead to pay the ferryman Charon for their passage across the river to the afterworld.

Clavus – A perpendicular decorative band found on a tunic.

Cloisonné – Filigree metal filaments inlaid with gemstones, in particular almandine.

Codex – A book made by stitching a number of sheets of parchment together.

Diptych – Pairs of flat wooden panels held together with threads containing a recessed space filled with wax; used for writing.

Fibula – Brooch used to hold together and fasten clothing according to the same principle as a safety pin.

Franzisca – Axe made of iron. It was used both as a striking and as a throwing weapon.

Intaglio – Incised gemstone.

Niello – A black-coloured incised design on a metal object. The black colour is obtained by heating a powder mixture made up of silver, sulphur and a copper alloy.
**Orbiculus** – A round, disk-shaped pendant, usually made out of bronze. Decorative elements can be both geometric as well as figural.

**Pallium** – A Roman mantle made out of a rectangular length of cloth. It was worn around the shoulders over the tunic.

**Pyxis** – A rounded, cylindrical lidded container made of wood, bone or metal.

**Samite** – Fabric weave (weft-faced compound twill) made with two different warps, almost exclusively used for silk fabrics.

**Sax** – Single-edged short sword.

**Sceatta** – Silver coins having a weight of approx. 1 to 1.5 grams, minted in Friesland, Jutland and in Anglo-Saxon England.

**Solidus** – Gold Roman coins; the main currency of the Byzantine Empire.

**Spatha** – Double-edged long sword.

**Tabula** – Writing tablet made of wood or metal coated with wax.

**Tremissis (also Triens)** – Gold coin of the early medieval period (1/3 solidus).

**Tunic** – A shirt made of wool or linen that was cut and sewn together out of two parts.
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