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Decoration of the Grave Goods of King Childeric I
Decoration of the Cloisonné-style Grave Goods from the Grave of King Childeric I († 481/482)

Thomas Calligaro – Michel Kazanski – Patrick Périn

Historical Review

The burial of King Childeric I († 481–482), father of Clovis I (481–485/511), was accidentally discovered in Tournai (Belgium), near the church of Saint-Brice, in 1653 during work on the foundations for a house by the canons. The gold objects and the large monetary treasure that accompanied the deceased were immediately dispersed but soon afterwards partially recovered on the initiative of Archduke Leopold-William, governor of the then Spanish Netherlands. He commissioned his personal physician, the scholar Jean-Jacques Chiflet of Besançon, to study and publish this extraordinary find. Thanks to the gold signet ring with a depiction of the royal bust and the inscription CHILDERICI REGIS, Chiflet concluded that the deceased was King Childeric I, a historical figure cited in particular by Gregory of Tours in his Ten Books of History (Dix livres d'histoire). This is confirmed by the later emissions of Roman coins in the treasure bearing the name of the East Roman Emperor Zeno (476–491).

In 1655, Jean-Jacques Chiflet published this archaeological find in a work entitled Anastasius Childericus I. Francorum regis, sive thessalorium Tornacii Nerviorum effusus, disseminated by the renowned publisher Plantin Moretus of Antwerp. He commissioned his personal physician, the scholar Jean-Jacques Chiflet of Besançon, to study and publish this extraordinary find. Thanks to the gold signet ring with a depiction of the royal bust and the inscription CHILDERICI REGIS, Chiflet concluded that the deceased was King Childeric I, a historical figure cited in particular by Gregory of Tours in his Ten Books of History (Dix livres d'histoire). This is confirmed by the later emissions of Roman coins in the treasure bearing the name of the East Roman Emperor Zeno (476–491).

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Unfortunately, Childeric’s burial equipment was stolen in November 1831 along with many other precious objects and coins. The robbers, who included Fossard, known as ‘Bonnet-Rouge’, a former convict, managed to melt down massive gold objects, including the king’s signet ring, the massive bracelet, the massive brooch, a sign of military and administrative dignity, perhaps given to Childeric for his help against the Visigoths and Saxons while fighting at the request of Syagrius, the last representative of Roman authority in Gaul. The corresponding seventeen gold bars were later retrieved. As for the gold objects inlaid with precious stones, the robbers had no time to remove them, and, surprised by a patrol while taking them to an accomplice’s house on the left bank of the Seine, they sank most of them in leather bags near the Pont-Marie Bridge. In July 1832, all these bags, which contained, among other things, gold objects in the cloisonné style from Childeric’s grave, were recovered.
The Merovingian Garnets Research Programme

Our programme of Merovingian garnets analysis, started in 1999 and initially limited to the Merovingian grave assemblages from the Basilica of Saint-Denis and to objects and costume accessories held at the Musée d’Archéologie nationale (MAN), soon expanded. It also included objects from other French museums and recent excavations, as well as archaeological finds from Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Romania. In this way, it was possible to analyse some 5,000 garnets, which today constitute the most representative database in the field4.

From the beginning, we also expected to be able to analyse the garnets from objects considered as masterpieces of Merovingian art, especially those in the Cabinet des Médailles, just before its long closure for renovation. According to her, a large part of them represent the production of Byzantine, probably Constantinopolitan workshops, since “barbarian” cloisonné goldsmithing of the second half of the 5th century probably did not reach such a level.

The quality of the cloisonné-style objects from Childeric’s tomb has long led scholars to speculate on their Byzantine origin. This point of view is elaborated in great detail by Birgit Arrhenius in her book on Merovingian cloisonné objects11. According to her, the original “barbarian” cloisonné goldsmithing of the second half of the 5th century probably did not reach such a level.

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With the exception of Abbé Cochet’s book, published in 185910, 19th-century scholars showed little interest in these royal antiquities, unlike the scholarly community of the last century, which devoted a number of studies to the Childeric Treasure8. Excavations carried out between 1983 and 1986 by Raymond Brulet (University of Louvain) in the vicinity of the church of Saint-Brice in Tournai have also shown that Childeric had a lavish burial and was interred beneath a large tumulus on the perimeter of which sacrificial horses were buried5 fig. 19.

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a high level of craftsmanship, whether it was cutting garnets into plates or setting them into perfectly shaped cells of gold sheet (compartment cells).

On the other hand, I. Arthénies suggested the possible existence of peripheral satellite workshops that used the same style and identical, but inferior techniques, whether it was cutting garnets or mounting them on paste in less elaborate cells in the western Mediterranean, perhaps in Ravenna or at the court of the Visigoth kings in Toulouse, as shown by the apparently local design of some of the objects—some of the fine cloisonné objects with which he was buried at Tournai, especially the scramasax with a form of decoration typical of central Europe on its scabbard.

The Thuringians were effectively in direct contact with the Byzantine world and undoubtedly with its goldsmith workshops. At all events, and subject to new discoveries, it is likely that it was the grave of Childeric, the westernmost of the royal or princely tombs of the second half of the 5th century, that introduced the cloisonné style to Merovingian Gaul.

**Geochemical Analysis of the Garnets from Childeric’s Treasure**

As mentioned above, the garnets from Childeric’s Treasure were studied in situ in the exhibition rooms of the Cabinet des Médailles of the French National Library. Their composition was determined directly, without touching or damaging them, by X-ray fluorescence (XRF) using specially adapted mobile equipment. These analyses were complemented by images taken with a portable digital microscope (Dyino-Lite with 10× to 100× magnification), which allowed us to measure the dimensions of the garnets and to locate inclusions and, if necessary, to examine the substrate. Given the limited time available for this measurement due to limited access to the collections and equipment availability (four days), the study focused on 93 garnets selected from the total, but which represented a significant sample of garnets used in the objects from the treasure.

As the analysis of the garnets from the previously studied collections was carried out by the PIXE method using the AGLAE particle accelerator at the C2RMF, which is an accurate and fast technique, the X-ray fluorescence (XRF) method used here with the mobile device deserves a more detailed comment. This procedure was made possible by recent advances in methodology and the development of equipment specifically designed for the study of cultural heritage. The instrument used (ELIO Bruker) was bought by C2RMF shortly before this measurement and adapted to the chemical analysis of garnets. Although the XRF analysis is slightly less efficient than the PIXE method, it allows the distinction of clearly Bohemian garnets (pyrope) from garnets from Portugal (type IV), India (type I and II) and Ceylon (type III). This is the core of the study, although it does not always allow the distinction between type I and II garnets, which are however scarcer in the treasure. For details of the method and results, the reader is referred to a previous publication.

The classification of the garnets into five types was made by comparing the chemical composition measured by XRF with the chemical composition previously measured for the assemblage of Merovingian artefacts (5,000 analyses) using statistical methods based on Artificial Intelligence (Machine Learning), in particular, classification using decision trees (Random Forest and Boosted Trees) using the

![Fig. 17: The mound above Childeric’s grave, identified by the location of the two groups of sacrificed horses on its perimeter.
See Beaulieu, fig. 8](image1)

![Fig. 18: A. The potten from Douvres-la-Délivrande accidentally discovered in 1945, with a gold chalice, both of small size. Approx. AD 510. Cabinet des Médailles de la BnF Bibliothèque nationale de France.](image2)

![Fig. 19: Fitting from Limoux (Pyrénées-Orientales) discovered around 1960. Diameter 6.3 cm, 7th century. Cabinet des Médailles de la BnF Bibliothèque nationale de France.](image3)

![Fig. 20: Fragment of the cross of St. Eligius. Approximately 1100. Second quarter of the 12th century. Cabinet des Médailles de la BnF Bibliothèque nationale de France.](image4)

![Fig. 21: Burial equipment from the “princely” tomb of Pouan (Aube) discovered in 1942. Late 5th–early 6th century. Museum of Fine Arts and Archaeology, Troyes (Musée des Beaux-Arts et d’Archéologie de Troyes). Plaques of Troyes.](image5)

![Fig. 22: In situ analysis of garnets from the Childeric’s Treasure in the Cabinet des Médailles using a mobile XRF instrument. Photo T. Calligaro, C2RMF.](image6)

![Fig. 23: Childeric. Detail of the sword hilt (inv. no. 56.448), view 1.](image7)

![Fig. 24: Childeric. Scramasax scabbard chape (inv. no. 56.448), view 1. Measurement points and types of garnets. Photo A. Komenda, Bibliothèque nationale de France and T. Calligaro, C2RMF.](image8)

![Fig. 25: Childeric. Scramasax scabbard chape (inv. no. 56.448), view 2. Measurement points and types of garnets. Photo A. Komenda, Bibliothèque nationale de France and T. Calligaro, C2RMF.](image9)

![Fig. 26: Childeric. Scramasax scabbard chape (inv. no. 56.448), view 3. Measurement points and types of garnets. Photo A. Komenda, Bibliothèque nationale de France and T. Calligaro, C2RMF.](image10)

![Fig. 27: Childeric. Scramasax scabbard chape (inv. no. 56.448), view 4. Measurement points and types of garnets. Photo A. Komenda, Bibliothèque nationale de France and T. Calligaro, C2RMF.](image11)
The garnets in the treasure have a remarkable cut and polish and have been inserted with exceptional care into the sometimes intricately-shaped gold cells. They have very few mineral inclusions. Among the 93 garnets analysed, there are 61 type III pyrálines from Ceylon, 5 type II almandines from India and 27 type V pyropes from Bohemia.

The latter are located on five elements at the border of the decoration: the scramasax scabbard mouthpiece 56.446, the sword scabbard mouthpiece, 56.447 the scramasax scabbard’s chape 56.448, the boss 56.451, and the mount 56.452. If we extrapolate these results to all the objects of the Childeric Treasure and hypothesise that the garnets that were not analysed are of the same type as those analysed according to their shape and arrangement, we obtain an even distribution: 409 Bohemian garnets (pyropes) to 434 Ceylon pyrálides. They are divided as follows: 224 hemispherical cabochons of type V together with 220 flat garnets of type III (item 56.446), 49 flat round and crescent garnets of type V together with 20 flat garnets of type III (item 56.447), 120 type V crescent cabochons together with 182 type III flat garnets (item 56.448), 10 type V flat crescent garnets together with 12 type III flat garnets (mount 56.452) and finally 6 type V flat square garnets (boss 56.451). The diameter of the pyropes for the hemispherical cabochons varies between 2 and 2.5 mm; for the round and flat ones Fig.38 between 3 and 3.5 mm. A “paillon”, or gold foil imprinted with a square grid pattern of 4 squares per millimetre was observed under the garnets Fig.45, identical for all objects.

The parallel between these small pyropes and garnets from two early contexts previously studied is interesting: the bracelet cabochons from grave 123 of the Louvres-en-Parisis cemetery (Seine-Saint-Denis)11 and those on the rim of the pectoral of the grave of Apahida III in Romania12, where the small hemispherical garnets on the border of the loop, 3 and 2.4 mm in diameter, are of type V. The decoration of the sword scabbard from grave 159 of the Louvres-en-Parisis cemetery contains round and flat garnets of type V, but of larger diameter (4 mm)13. The reason for the use of pyropes on small bordering elements, indistinguishable from other garnets, e.g. on the sword scabbard mouthpiece 56.447, raises questions. What they have in common is that they are all small (<4 mm), although they are not always round (see quadrilateral elements). It can be assumed that, since pyrope garnets are always very small, they had to be supplemented with larger garnets of other provenance (type III) to create the central covering decoration. However, these could also have been used for the bordering decoration. The reason for the choice of Bohemian garnets remains an open question. In any case, it is now well documented that from at least the last third of the 5th century the Merovingian world knew and used Bohemian garnets, especially for the complementary decoration of the cloisonné cover, which required larger gems.

Table 1: Type and origin of the analysed garnets and their distribution in the treasure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis no.</th>
<th>Type of garnets</th>
<th>No. of</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
<th>Bohemia +</th>
<th>Bohemia +</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56.443</td>
<td>upper cross-guard of the sword</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>••••••••••</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.445</td>
<td>lower cross-guard of the sword</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>••••••••••</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.446</td>
<td>scramasax scabbard mouthpiece</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>••••••••••</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.447</td>
<td>sword scabbard mouthpiece</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>••••••••••</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.448</td>
<td>scramasax scabbard chape</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>••••••••••</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.449</td>
<td>boss A</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>••••••••••</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.450</td>
<td>boss B (small)</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>••••••••••</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.451</td>
<td>boss</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>••••••••••</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.452</td>
<td>mount</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>••••••••••</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.453</td>
<td>tongue</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>••••••••••</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.454</td>
<td>scabbard boss</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>••••••••••</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
234

Chapter 2: Discovery of the Gold Jewellery hoard at Míc.

E. Kovařík 1957.


3) In the case of the finds from Hrušov - Čestl from the first half of the 21st century, the gold objects are similar in shape with the most powerful relic of the northern barbarians - the Romans.

4) The view of Nydam II, III, IV, and V dated from the Late Roman Period. Ship finds also belong to this period. The Nydam II and III concentrations come from the remains of a large boat, which seems to have been deposited on the shore of the lake. There is little time difference between the Nydam II and III concentration, which consists of approximately 100,000 objects deposited in Svoboda 1695, 258–259.


6) Droberjar 2020, 25, fig. 8:11.


8) There are also other depictions of pages offering a microstructural analysis of the gold sheet which can be found at Kuchta et al. 2014, fig. 21. The test that the gold foil backing came from different ingots with the same origin cannot be excluded. Such pieces were made exclusively by gold and were usually crucible gold. The term “fusible” refers to a state in which an object is in some way fused or transformed.

9) Kuchta et al. 2014, fig. 21.


Chapter 3: Natural Science and Technical Analysis

Non-destructive Analytical Assessment of the Finds

1) SEM/EDS analyses were carried out by the scanning electron microscopy equipped with an energy dispersive system (Tescan Mira 3 LMH). With the EDS analyser Bruker Quantax 2023, at the laboratory of the Museum of Technology, Faculty of Restoration, University of Prague. The measurement of the sample took place in a high vacuum chamber with an accelerating voltage of 20 kV, the detection of backscattered electrons and a data accumulation period of 300s. The data were evaluated using the Bruker Xeptor software.

2) EDS analysis were carried out on the Spectro Midex device in the laboratory of the Department of Chemical Technology, Faculty of Materials Science, Czech Technical University in Prague. For the analysis of the samples took place in the same way as described above.

3) The artefacts from the three Apahida graves are at present curated by the Romanian Institute of Prehistory and the National History Museum of Romania and part of the National History Museum of Romania and part of the National History Museum of Romania.

4) The artefacts from the three Apahida graves are at present curated at the National History Museum of Romania and part of the Historical collections of pages offering a microstructural analysis of the gold sheet which can be found at Kuchta et al. 2014, fig. 21. The test that the gold foil backing came from different ingots with the same origin cannot be excluded. Such pieces were made exclusively by gold and were usually crucible gold. The term “fusible” refers to a state in which an object is in some way fused or transformed.

The largely destroyed cemetery is dated to the time of the migration period, and its research is part of the project ‘Early Germanic burials in Carnia’ (e. g. Krk, Kazanski 1996). The cemetery shows mixed Germanic and Roman elements because Carnia was occupied by Germanic military units that brought their families with them (for the first documentation of the Gothic burials, see Bierbrauer 1975, 102–104, 113). For the largely unexplored Carnia, the term ‘Germanic’ is used, as the Germanic presence is evident in the form of Germanic elements in specific objects, a situation that in the past led researchers to believe in an active border between Carnia and the Gothic-controlled area. The latest finds, however, show that the northern border of the Germanic-controlled area was represented by the River Carniola, located at the southwestern border of Carnia (Knific – Lux 2015).


23 Clif forkl. 553, 240; Karinš 1908, 1–2. A similar mount was found in North Slavic and in Zangari in grave 11b (Małkoci, Karbońska, Bolewski, Republic of, L’O.R. des princes barbares 2002.1, 82).

24 Nowotny 1972.176, 196.


26 Bóna 1981. We see that the common typology does not allow us to use the inscription ‘in valle eiusdem patriae...’ (Rav. Anon., Cosm. 4.22); see also the references in Bóna 1981, 297. Bóna believes that in the first half of the cemetery period, the Germanic cemetery was placed directly in the middle of the Roman cemetery, as in Kranj-Lajh.

The same types of combs appeared in some contemporary Danish and south-Swedish cemeteries. In the cemetery of Kranj-Lajh, the authors mainly summarize these works (e.g. 1994; 2000; 2002). These examples by Brierbrauer. Neither the cemetery nor the settlement have yet been further published or excavated. These graves can be connected in one way or another with the Gotland or Västergötland Oldenburgian groups for the first half of the 6th century. Bow brooches or crossbow brooches (Vogelkopffibeln), square brooches, similar to belt straps with heads (Zangenfibeln), and so-called pincer brooches (Casrobrochen) are predominantly from sites in Sri Lanka and South India, but many also originate from sites in East Africa and Madagascar; the precise location of type II garnets in India is still disputed, although the authors propose a identification with type II garnets (Šmid et al. 2004, 91, table 2; for garnet types, see also Češka et al. 2020).

*Unbekannt 2016, 243–244, fig. 144-A.*

Hornvik 2021, 230, fig. 2a, 4c.

O’Flynn 1983, 133.

Vinkl 1972–73, 178–179. 187. Probably from the Germanic grave (Zangenfibeln) with a horned fibula. These examples originate from a grave (Bulgaria I/188, 49, fig. 1, 2, Pleida 2022, 44, fig. 5, 6). Gold jewelry from the grave of the deceased, of which three were found in 1898 and 2007 (Slabe 1981).


Gold jewelry from the grave of the deceased, of which three were found in 1898 and 2007 (Slabe 1981).


Chapter 16: Discovering a Magnificent Horse Harness Pendant near Revičov

Koren (2021) at (in press).  
E. g. in Volf 1999.  
Aimone 2014.  
Pröttel 2014; Fischer-Lind 2015.  
Fischer 2014b.  
Sarantis 2010, 366. Cf. Steinacher (2010, 345) and Jarnut (1982, 20) are quite certain about this identification.  
Weetch 2014.
Chapter 20: Trade and Relationships at the Turn of the Epochs

1. Hildigis is known through the work Origo gentis langobardorum (7.5), where he appears as an unsuccessful successor to the Lombard throne. Due to his adverse circumstances, he and 2,000 other Lombards had to flee to Vivaris, where he gained an important social position. His later knowledge on his incursions led by the Slavs and Gepids into the Byzantine Balkans and in 550 thanks to his incursions into Italy to help the Ostrogothic king Totilo.


5. E. g. the burial site of Lukiscie in Crimea is also Ambö–Chapadziny 2005, 1922.

6. However, many of the brooches are finds without grave contexts. The graves remain without anthropological identification, and some are female, judging by the accessories, such as beads and pendants (Jabonka 2009). The Arts are located in the territory of the Slavs. They are not an ethnographically homogeneous group, although they have been repeatedly associated with the Slavs.

7. For a recent publication see Huttner 2018.

8. For a later citation the ornaments were dismantled). The treasure can be interpreted, thanks to historical analysis, as indicating that part of the population may have consumed grain, including millet from various sources, e. g. that it was imported to the settlement. Košnar–Hajnálova 2015, 59–147.

9. The Byzantine alphabet has been associated exclusively with the Visigoths for centuries. Michel–Kaczmar 2007, 21–8; 3, fig. 2, 3. 5.

10. On the data of prehistory see Lukiscie–Profantová 1995. Also the Czech translation of Fredegar’s Chronica (Fourth Book / Continuation), 2002. Czech participation in the revolt against the Avars is more hypothetical, but in the other battles it is more evidently also due to the geography of the conflicts.


15. For the recent publication see Huttner 2018.


23. In summary Martindale 1992, 1109–1110; About the RGZM system.

24. Recent E. g. t


28. JI. Bd. 1. Neumünster.


32. Stolpe–Arne 1927, pls. 5:3, 6:5, 36:7.


34. Adám–Kovalevskaja 2010, 97, the quarry IV R. Hartmann was opened.

35. Belinskij–Härke 201 8 (eds), fig. 129:22, 130:35, 131:42, pl. 18.


37. They have been repeatedly associated with the Slavs.


39. Stene továrně z Víckovice k. ú. Mšec (okr. Břeclav) are female, judging by the accessories, such as beads and pendants (Jabonka 2009). The Arts are located in the territory of the Slavs. They are not an ethnographically homogeneous group, although they have been repeatedly associated with the Slavs.

40. As e.g. Náprstek Museum.


43. Jabonka 2009, 118–120; About the Frankish Chronicle.

44. Vrána 2010, 15–21; 23–25, fig. 3, 4.

45. About the treasures e.g. Radvogl 1933, 132; Garam 1971, in later citation the accessories were diminished. The treasure was found in Bratislava Castle or in the Nemzeti Museum in Budapest. In Prague it was exhibited only in 1994 in the Náprstek Museum. Planerova 2016, 2019–202.


47. Planerova 2016, 268–269, fig. 3, 2.


50. Adám–Kovalevskaja 2010, 97, the quarry IV R. Hartmann was opened.


52. About the RGZM system.


Chapter 8: The Belt Buckle from Rûdern


Archeologické rozhledy 54, 903–907.
Adelson, H. L. 1957: Light Weight Solidi And Byzantine Trade During the Sixth
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