International workshop

THE ORIGIN OF EARLY MIDDLE AGES GARNETS
Trade between the Indian subcontinent and Europe from the 5th to the 7th c. AD

June 22 - 23, 2017
Musée d’Archéologie Nationale, Château Place Charles de Gaulle, Saint Germain en Laye
Centre de recherche et de restauration de musées de France C2RMF, Palais du Louvre, Paris

Objective

The workshop aims at presenting the results of research projects on the circulation of garnets, the emblematic gem of the cloisonné style which, in the 5th and 6th centuries, characterized almost all the Western world, from the Black sea to Anglo-Saxon territories and from Scandinavia to North Africa. A majority of these investigations has been carried out using the transnational access to the AGLAE accelerator of the C2RMF open for more than a decade to the scientists working in Heritage in Europe, following the ‘Merovingian Garnet’ programme initiated in 1999 on the collection of the MAN. These programmes focused on garnets mounted on famous archaeological museum collections from France (notably from the MAN and the Cabinet des Médailles of the Bibliothèque nationale de France) and elsewhere in Europe (Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Romania, United Kingdom, etc.) with often unreleased results.

Day 1 at the MAN in Saint-Germain-en-Laye

Presentation of the results of the garnet analyses carried out in the framework of the European programs - Eu-ARTECH, CHARISMA and IPERION and other programs elsewhere in Europe (International Framework / Weltweites Zellwerk) or in the rest of the world. While garnet analyses has shown that a restricted number of sources, mainly from India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), were used everywhere in Europe during the 5th and 6th centuries, those exploited later are of European origin, a fact indicating a major change in the Indo-European trade around 600.

The participants will be invited to the inauguration of the exhibition ‘Austrasia, the forgotten Merovingian Realm’ in the evening.

Day 2 at the C2RMF in Paris

The place of the garnet trade in the long-distance commerce between early Middle Ages India and Europe will be discussed, in particular with historians and archaeologists of ancient India. The terrestrial and maritime routes will be considered (Silk Road, Berenike, etc.). The investigation of garnet raw and worked beads excavated from workshops in Mediterranean rim and from coastal emporia in India will be reported. Finally, the extension of the program to garnets from late Antiquity, notably present on necklaces, rings, intaglio, will allow establish the link with preceding periods. A round table discussion will be organized to provide a synthesis, draw perspectives, and plan the publication.

Context

The existence of a long-distance trade, mainly the sea route but also the silk road, between the Indian subcontinent and the Mediterranean world in the Greco-Roman period is well attested by both writings and archaeological evidences, more as concerns the latter in India than in the Western World. On the other hand, written sources that could confirm the persistence of this trade during the early Middle Ages are scarce, at least in the West, and except the Christian Topography by Cosmas Indicopleustes in the 6th c testifying that precious textiles, spices and gems were still reaching the West, whereas written Indian and Persian sources, and later Arab ones attest it better. However, apart from a few textile remains conserved in church’s treasures or exceptionally recovered from excavations like those found in Merovingian graves of the Saint-Denis basilica near Paris, material evidences of this trade remain very rare.

This is no longer the case today, thanks to recent excavations in Western Europe and pioneering laboratory work. It is now possible to establish that at the beginning of the Merovingian period garnets from India and Ceylon were massively employed in the manufacture of cloisonné jewels, which testifying to survival, till the end of the 6th c, of continuous exchanges between the Indian subcontinent and the Mediterranean world.

Organising Institutions

Centre de Recherche et de restauration des Musées de France (I. Pallot-Frossard, director)
Musée d’archéologie Nationale - Domaine national de Saint-Germain-en-Laye (H. Multon, director)
with the support of the Département des Affaires Européennes et Internationales (DAEI) from the Direction Générale des Patrimoines et du Département de la Recherche, de l’Enseignement Supérieur et de la Technologie (DREST).

Publication

The workshop proceedings will be published in a special volume after the workshop.

Communication

F. Durand and A Vervueren (MAN), M. Lionnet-de Loitiere, S. Lefevre and V. Fournier (C2RMF)

Registration

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The workshop is bilingual French/English

Websites

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