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Worlds on a string: on beads and exchange in Merovingian Northern Gaul

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Propositions Dissertation Worlds on a String: on Beads and Exchange in Merovingian northern Gaul

1. Due to their prevalence and varied provenances, beads found in the graves of the rural population of Merovingian northern Gaul are the best material category through which early medieval exchange and the networks the rural population participated in can be studied.
2. The similarity of beads and strings of beads found in early medieval graves throughout Europe is a strong indication that 'common' people across Europe were connected in a network through which beads and/or 'bead-ideas' were exchanged.
3. The decline in beads that were made outside of northern Gaul during the late sixth and seventh century may have been a result of *both* a larger demand for beads created by a growing population which kick-started the production of beads in northwestern Europe itself, *and* a decline in bead production and exchange due to political and economic turmoil in the regions southeast of Europe.
4. The chemical analyses of complete strings of beads from the Merovingian cemeteries Lent-Lentseveld, Wijchen-Centrum and Elst-'t Woud suggest that complete strings of beads were exchanged during the sixth century instead of singular beads.
5. Bead exchange from production sites to the person assembling a string of beads during the sixth century was organised in such a way that allowed beads from the same production or 'bead-making event' till their final deposition in graves to stay together: strings of beads were not strung and restrung time and again.
6. Strings of beads found in sixth-century graves can be considered as 'integer', as singular objects that were perhaps not supposed to be dismantled.
7. The switch in beads (and other items) from 'far away' to 'from the region' may reflect a change from a society on the so-called horizontal cosmographical axis, in which objects with distant origins are associated with ancestors and the supernatural world, towards a society on the vertical cosmographical axis, that imbues value and meaning from a celestial world.
8. Merovingian beads were clearly circulating in various 'spheres of exchange'; the contexts they are found in represents them as both gifts and commodities; they were present in transactions of both the short and the long term; they could have both alienable and inalienable qualities; they had the potential to travel between spheres of exchange and along both horizontal and vertical cosmological axes. This demonstrates the complete entanglement of exchange and social life in Merovingian northern Gaul.
9. Instead of remaining a 'niche' material category that is categorically underestimated as it is usually classed as a feminine tier of research, the insights Merovingian bead studies provide need to be more commonly deployed in studies of the Merovingian period.
10. When archaeologists work together to practice *social science* in the literal sense of the phrase, a great many new insights into the past can be gained.
11. A pan-European typology for early medieval beads is imperative for further studies of connections between communities across the continent.
12. Completing a dissertation is mostly about grit: if you do not commit, it will never get done.