

SEMINARI DEL CENTRO INTERUNIVERSITARIO  
PER LA STORIA E L'ARCHEOLOGIA DELL'ALTO MEDIOEVO

3

FROM ONE SEA TO ANOTHER  
TRADING PLACES IN THE EUROPEAN  
AND MEDITERRANEAN EARLY MIDDLE AGES

PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
COMACCHIO 27TH-29TH MARCH 2009

EDITED BY SAURO GELICHI AND RICHARD HODGES



BREPOLS

ANNEMARIEKE WILLEMSSEN  
Dorestad, a medieval metropolis

*I. (Re-) Introducing Dorestad*

*The Dorestad year*

In the Netherlands, 2009 turned out to be the year of Dorestad, with a large exhibition in the National Museum of Antiquities at Leiden, which was seen by over sixty-six thousand visitors and accompanied by a popular book, lectures, an educational programme and a scholarly congress<sup>1</sup>. For the exhibition, various new research projects have been undertaken, as the Ministry of Culture awarded a grant within the so-called 'Odyssee' programme for new research regarding Dorestad. Until 2013, researchers from governmental bodies, various universities and museums will be working together to process, analyse and present Dorestad to the world<sup>2</sup>. As a result, Dorestad has now officially become one of the most important *cold cases* of Dutch archaeology. Excavation reports<sup>3</sup> were delayed by decades, most of the documentation was not digitised, and the hundreds of thousands of finds largely gathered dust, with large groups of objects never researched at all. Important finds were never on show to the public and were difficult to access for scholars. All of this led to major misunderstandings about the nature of Dorestad: namely, that the findings and the settlement itself were disappointing and that Dorestad was really not a town at all.

All of the activity in 2009 was aimed at opening up Dorestad to the public, showing what was found and what it means. Dorestad was defi-

<sup>1</sup> See: [www.rmo.nl/dorestad](http://www.rmo.nl/dorestad) for the popular book: A. Willemsen, *Dorestad, een wereldstad in de Middeleeuwen*, Zutphen, 2009; and the congress proceedings in A. Willemsen, H. Kik (eds.), *Dorestad in an international Framework. New Research on Centres of Trade and Coinage in Carolingian Times*, Turnhout, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See: [www.vicusfamosus.eu](http://www.vicusfamosus.eu).

<sup>3</sup> W.A. Van Es, W.J.H. Verwers, *Excavations at Dorestad 1: The Harbour, Hoogstraat I*, Amersfoort, 1980; W.A. Van Es, W.J.H. Verwers, *Excavations at Dorestad 3. Hoogstraat 0, II-IV*, Amersfoort, 2009.

nately a metropolis, considered from the perspective of its time, which makes it unique in Dutch history; there was nothing of similar size, status and atmosphere either in the five centuries before or the five centuries after. Dorestad flourished in the middle of the Dark Ages, a time-span that is not well-known to a large audience, but which often evokes exciting images of Vikings and of Charlemagne, who was personally involved with the town. The large Dorestad brooch (in Latin, *fibula*), an icon of Dutch archaeology (fig. 1, Colour Plates), connects this trading town in the Low Countries with Charlemagne's imperial court. July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009 marked the fortieth anniversary of the discovery of the brooch. It was high time for Dorestad to be back in the spotlight.

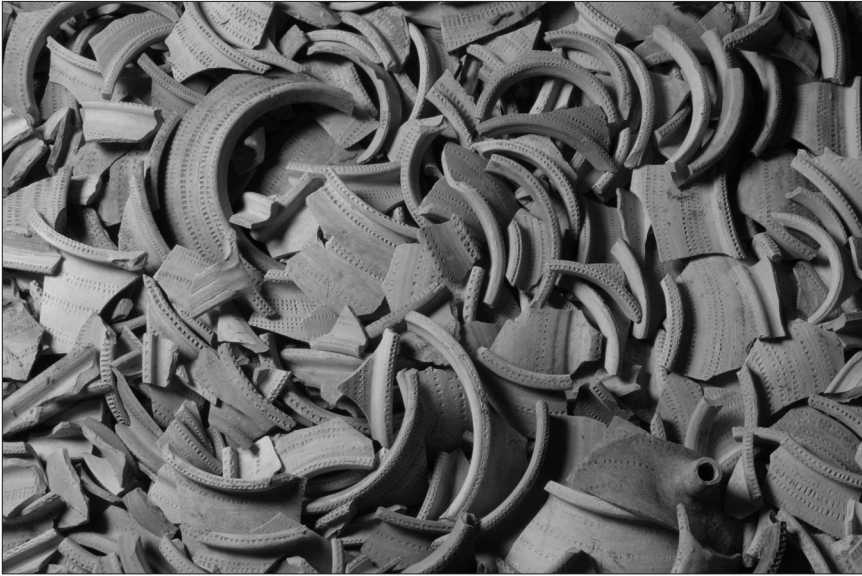
When speaking about Dorestad, superlatives are hard to avoid. Not only was Dorestad the largest town of the Netherlands in the early Middle Ages, but the excavation campaign of the National Archaeological Service in Wijk bij Duurstede in the 1960-70s was also the largest excavation ever conducted in the Netherlands. Over thirty-five hectares were excavated, sometimes on five levels. The numbers of finds are equally impressive. Common excavations of early medieval settlements usually yield only a handful of imported, luxury ceramics, a few loom weights, a single millstone or grindstone, while glass and amber especially are mere curiosities. In Dorestad, hundreds of thousands of sherds have been found, literally filling thousands of boxes, among them at least twenty-three thousand rim sherds of pots of Badorf ware and relief band amphorae from the Rhineland (fig. 2)<sup>4</sup>. Over two thousand loom weights, over one thousand fragments of millstones, over two hundred fragments of mortars, and over four hundred grindstones<sup>5</sup>. During the excavation of a small section of Dorestad in 2007 alone, eight hundred and twenty-two fragments of glass were found, including coloured glass (fig. 4a, Colour Plates), mosaic tesserae and sherds with gold foil decoration<sup>6</sup>. The sherds with gold foil decoration are the most expensive type of glass known during this period, found in only thirteen sites worldwide (fig. 4b, Colour Plates). Moreover, Dorestad yielded over five thousand lumps of amber (fig. 3, Colour Plates). According to Jan van Doesburg, when a level was opened, amber glittered everywhere in the sun, and only the large pieces could be collected<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> A. Willemsen, *Dorestad. Een wereldstad in de Middeleeuwen*, p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> W.A. van Es, W.J.H. Verwers, *Excavations at Dorestad 3*, p. 323-327.

<sup>6</sup> J. Dijkstra, G. Williams, *New research in Dorestad. Preliminary results of the excavation at the former Fruit Auction Hall ('Veilingterrein') at Wijk bij Duurstede*, in A. Willemsen, H. Kik, *Dorestad in an International Framework*, 2010, p. 59-63.

<sup>7</sup> A. Willemsen *Dorestad. Een wereldstad in de Middeleeuwen*, p. 125.



2. Sherds of Badorf ceramics produced in the Rhineland. Leiden, National Museum of Antiquities, from box 9101.  
Photo: RMO/Peter Jan Bomhof.

### *Battling for Dorestad*

The numbers also make clear that Dorestad was an exceptionally wealthy town. The reason that a town as large and wealthy as Dorestad could not survive either before or after the period between c.750 and 850, is because favourable political, economical, environmental and cultural circumstances simply did not coincide. Thanks to her position on the junction of waterways and in the shadow of a Roman *castellum*, the settlement 'Dorestat' grew into a harbour and market alongside the river Kromme Rijn in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. It was situated in the contested border region between the Frisians and the Franks. In 695, the Franks, led by Pippin (the father of Charlemagne), conquered the Frisians for the first time in the "battle near the *castrum* Dorestad<sup>8</sup>", but only after the death of King Radbod in 716 did the Frisians completely relinquish the town. With that, Dorestad became part of the empire of Pippin and his successors. In the relatively peaceful Carolingian Era, Dorestad saw its hey-day. The emperors Charlemagne,

<sup>8</sup> S. Lebecq, *Marchands et navigateurs frisons du Haut Moyen Âge. Vol. 2. Corpus des sources écrites*, Lille, 1983, p. 256, 328.

Louis the Pious, Charles the Bald and Lothar I favoured Dorestad with political and military actions protecting it against the growing Viking threat in the first decades of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

After the first reports of surprise attacks by Norsemen shortly before 800, Charlemagne, realising that his empire was vulnerable, established a defence system along the coast of Holland in an attempt to halt the northerners before they could penetrate the empire via the large rivers. Einhard, Charlemagne's biographer, mentions that the emperor fitted out a war fleet against the 'Norsemen' and had ships built on the banks of the rivers "that flow from Gallia and Germania into the North Sea". Because the Norsemen continuously attacked and destroyed the coast of what is now Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and France, Charlemagne created guard posts and defences in all ports and at the mouths of all the large, navigable rivers, "and thus prevented the enemies from going ashore and plundering". During the reign of Charlemagne, as Einhard recorded, Gallia and Germania were "spared from the Norsemen" except for a few islands in Frisia<sup>9</sup>. The Vikings only began attacking these regions in 834, long after the death of Charlemagne. Subsequent emperors took action as well, for instance, when Dorestad was attacked in 837, according to the annals the sovereign, Louis the Pious interrupted his journey elsewhere and hurried to Nijmegen in order to successfully chase the Vikings from the region<sup>10</sup>. This imperial protection was an important precondition for the hey-day of Dorestad in the first third of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

#### *An overview of the town*

Dorestad was not a settlement around a single nucleus, but rather a conglomerate of nuclei and less densely populated areas. It is remarkable how elongated the town was, especially when looking from a bird's eye perspective, as the reconstruction made by illustrator Wim Euverman for this exhibition does (fig. 5, Colour Plates). From the northern quarter to the Roman *castellum* (from front to back in the drawing), Dorestad stretched out alongside the Kromme Rijn for over four miles. Alongside the original river bank ran a street that corresponds with the present-day Hoogstraat ('high street') in Wijk bij Duurstede. The town, at its widest point reaching five hundred metres, was laid out to the west of the river. Near the river, the 'business houses' stood quite close together, while further to the back, larger 'town farms' sat further apart and within larger yards. In between these quarters were at least three cemeteries, of which the one on De Heul ('the hill') was concentrated around

<sup>9</sup> Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni / Das Leben Karls der Großen*, Stuttgart, 1981, p. 36-37.

<sup>10</sup> S. Lebecq, *Marchands et navigateurs frisons du Haut Moyen Âge*, p. 335.

a stone well and a small church. From the Hoogstraat, streets led westwards, one of which ended at this cemetery on the Heul (fig. 6, Colour Plates).

At this time, the Roman *castellum* in the southern part of the town must still have been inhabited. We think that there was a church as well, mainly because one Dorestad church is called Upkirika ('upper church') in the written sources<sup>11</sup>, which suggests that there was a 'lower church' as well. A church in the *castellum* would have been located downstream from (and therefore 'under') the church on the Heul further north. According to the sources, the Roman *castellum* was still standing around 700, but seems to have been swallowed by the river in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. At the location where the *castellum* must have stood, called 'Rijswijk' (not to be confused by the town of the same name near The Hague), concentrations of phosphate have been found indicating long-term inhabitation<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, during dredging in the area, both Roman building material and Carolingian weaponry have been found, the latter indicating an elite presence at the time of Dorestad. Because the *castellum* itself has not been excavated, the following is speculative, but it is at least probable that the local rulers used the Roman fort as a base comparable to that at Utrecht and elsewhere. These places were chosen as settlements not only because of the availability of durable building materials and protective walls, but also because the Frankish kings and Carolingian emperors saw their empire as a direct successor of the Roman empire and therefore made it a point to occupy formerly Roman establishments. The Vikings would have aimed for the sites like the *castellum* too.

The unruly Kromme Rijn floated freely through the riverbed and moved further and further east during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. The resulting free space to the east of the Hoogstraat was reclaimed by the people of Dorestad who filled it in with garbage and built a large complex of jetties and platforms upon which temporary and probably also permanent buildings stood. At its widest point this 'parquet floor' was two hundred metres wide. This land reclamation was undertaken on a large scale: there were once between one hundred fifty thousand and two hundred thousand wooden poles in the harbour zone<sup>13</sup>. Wood from these poles and from water wells was dendrochronologically examined, demonstrating that jetties were built from c.650 onwards. The platforms were systematically expanded until they formed a single, fairly straight line in around 725. After that, there was continuous

<sup>11</sup> S. Lebecq, *Marchands et navigateurs frisons du Haut Moyen Âge*, p. 409.

<sup>12</sup> J.H.F. Bloemers, L.P. Louwe Kooijmans, H. Sarfatij, *Verleden Land, Archeologische opgravingen in Nederland*, Amsterdam, 1981, p. 135.

<sup>13</sup> *Dorestad Speciaal*, theme issue «Spiegel Historiae» 13, April 1978, p. 278.

building and expanding of the works until after 825<sup>14</sup>. These exact scientific dates confirm that this harbour town grew quickly in the second quarter of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and declined from the second quarter of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

### *Exotic visitors*

Dorestad was, in fact, one large harbour: ships could moor over almost the full length of the town. This permitted the presence of a large number of ships and merchants, which allowed the town to grow into a kind of permanent annual fair, starting in spring and lasting the entire navigable season. The merchants and craftsmen usually hung around for some time, causing the town's population to grow significantly during market season. Demographically, there must have been a big difference between summer and winter in Dorestad, a bit like in a holiday resort nowadays. In winter, stock was created and repairs were made until the first ships started arriving. They came from all over Europe, from Scandinavia to Spain, bringing products from every corner of the world as it was known then. For the Dorestad market this meant that the music of the marketplace – vendors calling out, buyers bargaining and the continuous sound of goods being dragged, unloaded, and exchanged – echoed everywhere. Visitors not only brought their trade goods, but also their own fashions, habits and languages.

When taking a bird's eye view (see fig. 5), it is easy to understand why Dorestad was impossible to defend. What made Dorestad profitable for tradesmen – accessibility and wealth – also made Dorestad profitable for pirates. From 834 on, Dorestad was attacked dozens of times by Vikings<sup>15</sup>. It was not destroyed at once, as no traces of slaughtered animals and people (i.e. mass graves) or large fires (i.e. charred wood and a fire layer) have been found. It is precisely the fact that the Vikings returned almost annually that tells us about the town's resilience; obviously enough was to be found at Dorestad each time to merit a return visit. The inhabitants of Dorestad almost seem to have grown accustomed to the attacks. They certainly took basic measures for security, but they definitely continued trading as well. After an attack, they usually repaired the damage over a single winter. In other places too, repeated attacks are evident: the royal annals for the year 837 mention that Vikings had acted out surprise attacks 'as usual'.

The very last mention of a Viking attack on Dorestad, in 863, states that the town was set on fire, that a portion of the inhabitants were killed and

<sup>14</sup> *Dorestad Speciaal*, theme issue «Spiegel Historiae» 13, April 1978, p. 273-74.

<sup>15</sup> S. Lebecq, *Marchands et navigateurs frisons du Haut Moyen Âge*, passim (Annals of Utrecht, Tiel, Xanten and St. Bertin).

that another portion ran away<sup>16</sup>. This attack seems to have been a crippling blow, but is not the main reason that the town went down in the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Its decline, like its rise, was the result of a combination of various factors: too many floods and terror threats, not enough protection and investment, and the rise of other centres like Tiel and Deventer. In 881-882, one of the most successful Viking campaigns in history caused serious damage to, among other sites, Zutphen, Maastricht, Liège, Tongeren, Cologne, Bonn, and destroyed the royal palace at Aachen and the royal abbey in Prüm. Dorestad is not mentioned in the annals of this attack, indicating that the Vikings must have passed it by, and there must not have been much to gain there.

The once famous Dorestad disappeared from the map at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and all that remained was an agricultural estate described in 948 as “*villa quondam Dorsteti autem Vvik nominata*”<sup>17</sup>, now called Wijk. After the fall of Dorestad, it would take centuries before any town in the Low Countries would reach comparable importance and size.

## II. The Dorestad Brooch and the Dorestad Sword

### *Unexpected treasure*

The best-known find from the Dorestad excavations is the so-called ‘Dorestad brooch’ (see fig. 1, Colour Plates). It is generally considered one of the most important archaeological finds from the Netherlands, at least from the Middle Ages. On the other hand, the iconic status of the brooch has also isolated it. The brooch was often considered a unique piece without context, and – as was found out when preparing the exhibition – it had never been properly examined, let alone with new techniques.

The *fibula* was found on Friday July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1969, by members of the Dutch Youth Club for the Study of History (NJBG) during a summer camp. After one particular level had been documented, the youths were assigned the task of excavating the water wells to see – or rather feel – if there was anything to be found. Hans van Sluis, then sixteen years old, pulled the disc from the well. During an interview (after Hans had been retraced) in 2008, he said that he did not think they were aware at the time that the disc was gold, nor did they look for the brooch’s missing stones; nevertheless, they immediately saw that this was an important find. One picture

<sup>16</sup> S. Lebecq, *Marchands et navigateurs frisons du Haut Moyen Âge*, p. 307 (Annals of St. Bertin).

<sup>17</sup> S. Lebecq, *Marchands et navigateurs frisons du Haut Moyen Âge*, p. 307 (Annals of St. Bertin).



was taken by Judith Schuyf on the side of the trench, but after that, the brooch was quickly taken to the work cabin and by the evening it was in a safe. Hans van Sluis only saw it much later, behind glass, in the Leiden museum; and only then did he grasp how beautiful his find was<sup>18</sup>.

The youth club also unearthed, on the very same day, near to the well in which the brooch was found, an 'iron strip in the sand' that turned out to be a luxurious double-edged sword with a highly decorated, gilded hilt (fig. 7, Colour Plates). The pommel and the hilt were decorated with interlacing patterns, which were later gilded. The pommel consists of two pieces, of which the triangular top is older than the horizontal guard. This means that part of an older, probably important, sword was reused when this specimen was made. Both parts of the hilt were restored at the National Archaeological Service (ROB) and stored there until 2007.

Accompanying the sword was a large lance head. Forty-seven (fig. 8) centimetres of the lance head had been preserved, but the remaining portion of the weapon had been broken off at the edge of the shaft. The shaft was most likely broken just above its two protruding 'wings', which were used to keep the lance from going through game for which it was used to hunt. In these times, the hunt was reserved for the elite and permission was needed to carry a lance. The winged lance was therefore a clear status symbol (fig. 9). In his article "Gladius cuius capulus aureus erat", W.A. van Es suggests that the sword and the lance were originally from a grave containing weapons that was disturbed later<sup>19</sup>. It would have been the grave of someone with noble rank (fig. 10).

### *Hilt looking for blade*

In the article mentioned above, van Es describes the sword's blade as having a *damast* pattern (fig. 11). And since he thought the blade had been lost, he reconstructed the sword on the basis of the remains surviving below the guard. In fact, the blade had been in the storerooms of the National Museum of Antiquities for decades. In 1978, the full assemblage of finds from Dorestad was given to the National Museum by the Ministry of Culture; the National Archaeological Service (ROB) in Amersfoort handed over the brooch with a large number of less important finds, among which was the missing blade, numbered 7085. All of the other objects, which were still being examined or studied, remained in Amersfoort.

<sup>18</sup> A. Willemsen, *Dorestad. Een wereldstad in de Middeleeuwen*, p. 85.

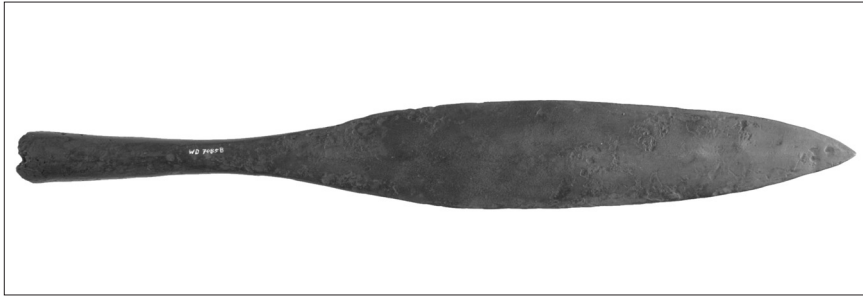
<sup>19</sup> W.A. Van Es, «Gladius cuius capulus aureus erat». Een zwaard met een gouden gevest uit Dorestad, in: O. Brinkkemper *et al.* (eds.), *Vakken in vlakken. Archeologische kennis in lagen*, (Nederlandse Archeologische Rapporten 32) Amersfoort, 2006, p. 73-84.

It was only in 2008, when the ROB gave up its storerooms, that the last sixteen hundred boxes of excavated material belonging to the assembly actually came to Leiden. In one of the last boxes was the hilt.

It was not only the numbers that matched. The line of the blade's fracture fits the remains in the crossbar seamlessly. After forty years and another fifty-six hours at the restoration workshop, *Restaura* in Haelen, the sword and its gilded hilt were complete again, measuring eighty-two centimetres (fig. 11). The remains of metal in the pommel and on top of the guard enabled the reconstruction of the dimensions of the grip. The tip of the blade is missing, but the lines of the edges give a good impression of the total length, enabling reconstruction of the tip as well. The additions have not been coloured, in order to show what is original and what is reconstructed. An X-ray analysis of the sword showed that the guard and the pommel are hollow, enabling the placement of thin metal bars that connect the pommel, through the grip, to the top part of the blade. Because of its fragility, the sword was fastened to an aluminum frame.

Meanwhile, the brooch itself was also re-examined. Because it has been safely put away in its own showcase-safe and is always on display, we actually know very little about the object. A lot has been written about the inlay, consisting of precious stones, pearls, enamel, almandine and coloured glass, which form two intersecting crosses. These basic Christian symbols have led to far-fetched interpretations of the inlays: the central red stone symbolizing God or Christ, the four smaller stones on the rim representing the four evangelists, the series of sixteen pearls alongside the rim might fit within a broader symbolism involving the number four, and the 'trees bearing fruit' between the fitted precious stones have been explained as trees of life or of paradise. In addition, both bird's beaks and fire steels have been recognized in the openwork parts, while the reverse shows the remains of an attached pin. In short, there has been a lot of speculation based on the same few photographs of the Dorestad brooch.

Moreover, theories have been developed about the contemporary owner of the brooch: did it belong to a high-ranking clergyman? A bishop? Or rather, was it a worldly chief, since the clergy was generally poor at this time, but Carolingian noblemen were inclined to show off their new faith? In one article, the brooch is connected to Willibrord himself. Finally, a variety of reasons have been put forth to explain why such a large (8.4 cm in diameter) and expensive object ended up on the bottom of a water well. It does not seem logical that it fell in accidentally, since it is valuable enough to dredge for until it was retrieved. Could it have been hidden in the well, in a time of danger, with the intention of regaining it later?



8. Lance head, found with a sword. Leiden,  
National Museum of Antiquities, inv.no. WD 7085B.  
Photo: RMO/Peter Jan Bomhof.

Could that danger have to do with the Vikings? After all, the brooch is dated to the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century. Was the brooch, like the sword, once placed in a rich grave, as W.A. van Es suggests in his article? Or was it thrown into the well as an offering, as Vincent van Vilsteren of the Drents Museum in Assen once proposed?

For our analysis, we first put the brooch under a magnifying glass and a microscope. That was enough for an important discovery on the brooch's reverse (fig. 12). The oval remains of the attachment of the pin have been hammered flat and clearly filed away, after which, holes for nails were punched through the remains of the attachment. That proves that the disc was once fastened with small nails onto something, most likely a casket or a book cover. The holes go all the way through the brooch, but pieces of red glass have been placed into the open spaces in a neat way, so the nail heads would not have been visible. Therefore, the disc brooch was not always worn, but in the last phase of its life it may have been part of a richly decorated book cover.

On a Monday in the autumn of 2008, the brooch travelled in secret to Amsterdam, where it was analysed by Dr. Luc Megens of the Dutch Institute for Cultural Heritage (ICN) using an X-ray fluorescence spectroscope (fig. 13). With this machine, the chemical composition of every single piece of inlay, each stone and every cell of enamel was documented. In this way, it was determined what kind of precious stones they were. The red stones are, as was expected, semi-precious *almandines*; four of the smaller stones were mined from the same quarry. The green stones, however, are not precious stones at all, but little balls of glass. The pearls are real, but the flat red sheets, that have always been called almandine, seem to be red glass. The analysis also points out that there is no modern material in the brooch, proving that it has not been restored recently. Furthermore, some residue

of the material used for making the cast for the two known replicas of the brooch in the 1980s was discovered<sup>20</sup>.

The repairs of the 9<sup>th</sup> century appear to have been executed using the original material: for instance, the composition of the red sheets inserted above the nail holes does not deviate from the rest of the red inlay. Finally, in spite of strong visual similarities, the cloisonné enamel in the brooch was of a quite different composition than the two pieces of cloisonné enamel that were found separately in Dorestad (fig. 14, Colour Plates) dated stratigraphically to the 7<sup>th</sup> century. This means that that a century separated the production of the object in which the pieces of cloisonné enamel were found and the production of the large brooch.

### *Brooch looking for context*

The Dorestad brooch fits well into a group of stylistically and technically related objects that were attached to book covers or caskets and therefore, the brooch may not have served as a brooch at all. This group of objects is often much different from the other classifications of large circular brooches with precious stones and cruciform inlays, like those found in the graves of wealthy 7<sup>th</sup>-century women in Rosmeer (now in the Gallo-Roman Museum of Tongeren, Belgium) and Wittislingen (now in the National Archaeological Collection of Munich, Germany)<sup>21</sup>. Although there are many similarities between these Merovingian disc brooches and the Dorestad brooch, the differences are equally important. For instance, the 7<sup>th</sup>-century brooches all incorporate filigree work, typical for the precious metalwork of this period, and absent in 'our' brooch.

What is remarkable about the Dorestad brooch is its combination of various techniques. Besides the fitting of precious stones and the intricately inlaid cells, something also seen in older brooches, shapes have been cut out *in ajour* and pieces of cloisonné enamel have been placed between other inlays. This cloisonné enamel, which forms a sort of mosaic, combined with precious stones and glass inlay, appears similarly on liturgical objects and book covers dated close to 800. The best parallels, however, are a casket and a jug from the immediate vicinity of the imperial court. The small purse-shaped reliquary casket of Enger (fig. 15, Colour Plates) was, according to tradition, given by Charlemagne to the Saxon king Wittekind in 807 upon his conversion to Christianity, and the so-called 'Charlemagne's

<sup>20</sup> L. Megens, «Chemical characterization of glass-inlays from Dorestad. Preliminary results of non-destructive x-ray fluorescence analyses», in A. Willemsen, H. Kik, *Dorestad in an International Framework*, 2010, p. 119-122.

<sup>21</sup> A. Willemsen, *Dorestad. Een wereldstad in de Middeleeuwen*, p. 86-88.



9. Horsemen carrying winged lances, depicted in the Golden Psalter of St.-Gallen, 9<sup>th</sup> century. Sankt-Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 22, f 140r.

Photo: Stiftsbibliothek.

jug' (in the treasury of the Swiss abbey of St. Maurice d'Agaune) is traditionally believed to have been owned by Charlemagne himself<sup>22</sup>.

Book covers with comparable cloisonné enamel, like those of the Metz Sacramentary (fig. 16, Colour Plates) and the Lindau Gospels (in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York) were commissioned by the emperors. It is likely that the Dorestad disc, like the Metz Sacramentary and the Lin-

<sup>22</sup> A. Willemsen, *Dorestad. Een wereldstad in de Middeleeuwen*, p. 89-90.



10. A nobleman holding a sword with a golden hilt.  
Detail from the Gold Codex of St. Emmeram, 9<sup>th</sup> century.  
Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CLM 14000, f 5v.  
Photo: BSB Munich.

dau Gospels, originates in the surroundings of the Reichenau and St. Maurice d'Agaune abbeys in southern Switzerland. The disc, with its obvious Christian symbolism, would have been part of a book or reliquary in a church or cloister treasury. The pieces of glass still in place above the nail holes and the surface damage indicate that the disc was pulled off its original surface with some force. Perhaps the disc was thrown into the well in a times of unrest after all. In any case, even if the old and new questions surrounding the Dorestad brooch are never answered, the large brooch constitutes a link between the Low Countries and the Carolingian Court – between Dorestad and Charlemagne.

### *III. Two closing questions*<sup>23</sup>

#### *Was Charlemagne ever in Dorestad?*

During the reign of Charlemagne, Dorestad was an important *emporium* on the edge of the large Carolingian empire. One of the ways in which Charlemagne managed to keep his empire together is by continuously trav-

<sup>23</sup> These questions featured in the 2009 exhibition in Leiden as well.



11. The Dorestad sword after its restoration in 2009.  
 Leiden, National Museum of Antiquities, inv.no. WD 7085 .  
 Photo: Restaura, Haelen.

elling and literally showing his face everywhere. He resided in Aix-la-Chapelle, which is not far from Dorestad, at least not when travelling by boat. And another of his palaces was in Nijmegen, from where one could easily reach Dorestad. Unfortunately, we do not know his itinerary, but he must have been in Dorestad at some point.

So, what was it like, to have the emperor visiting? He would have made a striking entry into the town, on horseback and surrounded by his noblemen. His clothes would have immediately shown that he was the emperor. Perhaps on this occasion he wore gold-lined clothes, a gold brooch and a sword inlaid with precious stones, all of which are mentioned by Einhard as part of the outfit Charlemagne wore on festive days. It is likely that the local ruler welcomed him, offered him dinner, had music played for him, gave him gifts and showed him around the town. Mass would have been celebrated by the local clergy, and a procession may have been held displaying relics or treasures. The emperor would have spoken to the people of Dorestad. Was it a good speech? Did he bestow privileges upon the town? Did the inhabitants erect a throne for him, or hang banners? Did they decorate their houses and wear their best clothes? Was it a day to remember<sup>24</sup>?

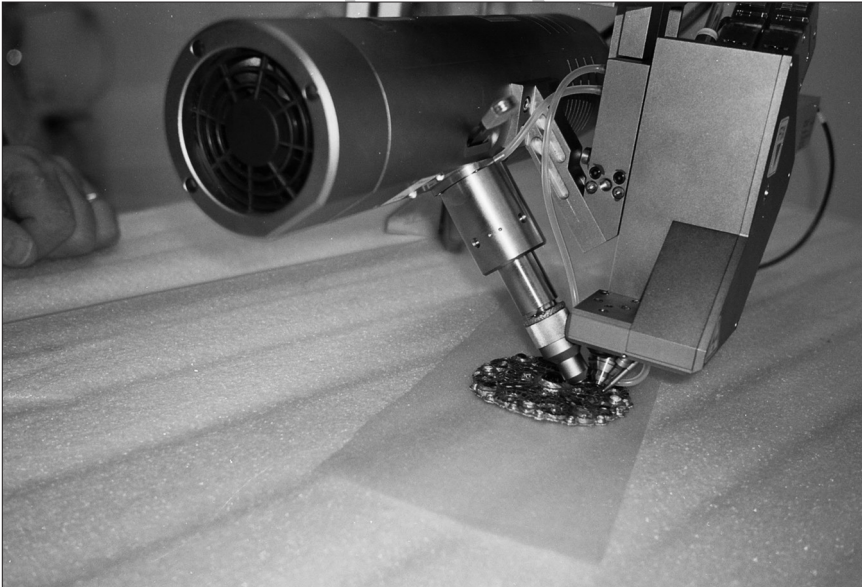
*Could people in the market of Dorestad talk to each other?*

Asked specifically if the people on the market of Dorestad could communicate, Dr. Wouter Jansen replied: “Usually, yes. Not much is known of the spoken language in this period, but it is possible to draw a comparison with later situations in which groups of people speaking different languages meet each other regularly. For instance, anthropological linguistic research has investigated spoken language on regional markets in very thinly populated areas. In situations like these, a mix language, called ‘pidgin’, often arises naturally. It is very functional because the vocabulary is limited, yet practical. For trade goods and selling/buying in particular,

<sup>24</sup> A. Willemsen *Dorestad. Een wereldstad in de Middeleeuwen*, p. 65-66.



12. The reverse side of the Dorestad brooch. Leiden, National Museum of Antiquities, inv.no. f 1978/1.1.  
Photo: RMO/Peter Jan Bomhof.



13. The Dorestad brooch examined at the ICN Amsterdam with an XRF.  
Photo: Annemarieke Willemsen.



there are terms that everybody is familiar with. Even when a pidgin is not needed, words and terms are often exchanged, adapted and mixed at markets. Traders sometimes start to use those words at home as well, so the 'trade language' influences the regular language too. Besides goods, language must have been exchanged in Dorestad and within the early-medieval trade network, making communication not only possible, but self-evident<sup>25</sup>.



<sup>25</sup> Dr. Wouter Jansen is a linguist of Birmingham City University; he was interviewed in 2008, see A. Willemsen, *Dorestad. Een wereldstad in de Middeleeuwen*, p. 127.