

**TITLE:** Merovingian looped Fibulae **LOCATION:** France or Southwest Germany **DATE:** Mid-sixth century

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**ARTIST:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PERIOD/STYLE:** Early Medieval Europe. **PATRON:** Most likely a wealthy Merovingian woman.

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Silver gilt worked in filigree, with inlays of garnets and other stones

**FORM:**

Cloisonné was a popular form of the time. It required creating a metal filament or tiny rope-like structure and filling it in with enamel. It has an appearance similar to that of stained glass, but in miniature. This can be seen in the fish design at the center of the fibulae, as well as in the various shapes that decorate its surface, including hearts and crosses. It's possible to see the countless tiny circles that fill the interior of the fibulae. These tiny circles were an example of filigree work, a process that involves arranging silver in intricate and delicate designs and then gilding it in a gold veneer. More than 10 round red garnets are affixed to the fibulae, extending from the scalloped edges toward the bottom and running along the edges on both sides. Often these fibulae and other beautiful pieces of jewelry would be buried with their owners, showing the importance of style even from the grave.

**FUNCTION:**

Fibulae have been around for quite some time. Greeks used these pins to secure their togas and prevent wardrobe malfunctions. They weren't the only ones who needed help, though. The Merovingian looped fibulae was a particular version of the accessory that showed off Merovingian design elements such as cloisonné and filigree. They were so fancy that Merovingian women of high standing sported them to all courtly events—hundreds of years after the Greeks first sported them. These are known as prestige objects.

**CONTENT:**

Portable Merovingian art objects often included zoomorphic figures such as the fish that we see in this example. These fibulae feature garnet stones and gold filigree and cloisonné. This example also shows a popular motif in barbarian art of the middle ages: eagles! The eagle, originally a pagan symbol of the sun, was used by Imperial Rome, and would later become an emblem to St. John. The end of these fibulae are in the shape of Eagle heads, and little fish are shown on the main body of the brooches. Garnets were used to decorate the eyes of the eagles, and a wide range of gems were used to decorate the rest of the fibulae.

**CONTEXT:**

Clovis I was the first key ruler of the Merovingians. He came to power in the late fifth and early sixth centuries as the founder of the proto-French state. The Merovingian kings didn't stay in power for very long, only a couple of generations, primarily because it was the law for a king to divide his kingdom equally among his heirs. This meant that the kingdom was divided and subdivided, and then sometimes reunited, but then divided again, until nobody knew who was in charge of what. The last Merovingian ruler was Childeric III, who decided to quietly step down from the throne and live out the rest of his years in a monastery. Pepin the Short, the first ruler in the new line of Carolingian rulers, promptly succeeded him. When Pepin died, his son Charles I, commonly known as Charlemagne, took over the reigns of the kingdom. He became a warrior king in the image of the Merovingians, but he conquered vast lands in the name of Christianity, not magical hair or sea creatures or whatever. In the year 800, Pope Leo III officially crowned Charlemagne the Holy Roman Emperor. This title would pass down through many, many generations, eventually falling to the Spanish Habsburgs.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

In fact, the word cloisonné literally means “partitioned” in French. The artisan would solder wires onto a metal base and fill the areas those wires created with stones (to be distinguished with cloisonné enamel, which has colored enamel baked within these partitions).

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

**INTERPRETATION:**

When commissioning such expensive objects, the owners are going to want an object that resonates with their identity. For such a widespread object as the fibula, it is normal for similar groups to have similar artistic styles, and for more diverse groups to have less in common. These extraordinary examples of fibulae are proof of the diverse and distinct cultures living within larger empires and kingdoms, a social situation that was common during the middle ages. One could review the story of Beowulf to get a sense of the royal burial tradition of this time.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

The Merovingian kings in particular claimed mythical heritage. According to seventh-century lore, the wife of one ruler had a liaison with a sea creature called a quinotaur. The result of this steamy encounter was Merovich, the first king in the Merovingian line.

**TITLE:** Lindisfarne Gospels **LOCATION:** Britain (Northumbria) **DATE:** 680-720

Early medieval (Hiberno

**ARTIST:** Eadfrith **PERIOD/STYLE:** Saxon) AKA Insular **PATRON:**

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Illuminated manuscript (ink, pigments, and gold on vellum)

**FORM:**

Lindisfarne Gospels are an excellent example of a Christian illuminated manuscript, or a text augmented with marginalia, designs along the borders or margins

**FUNCTION:**

The eye-catching designs of St. Matthew's carpet page pulled the reader in by putting him or her into the role of supplicant, just as the real carpet functioned as a surface on which to pray for the monks. This particular example features interlinking Celtic designs that resemble Celtic jewelry, with a cross at the center.

**CONTENT:**

Like other Gospels, these depict the life of Jesus based upon the accounts of four of his disciples and evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In the Lindisfarne Gospels, Eadfrith used four different cross designs for each of the carpet pages: one for each of the four evangelists. After encountering the carpet page, a reader would then turn to the incipit page, where the first letter of the gospel was blown up. St. Luke's gospel begins with an oversized "G." This letter is not your typical alphabet character, but a massive form that contains intricate abstract and repetitive motifs in bright red, green, yellow, and royal blue. This text features a mixture of Celtic imagery and Christian theology.

**CONTEXT:**

In the middle ages, scriptoria, or scribal workshops in religious institutions were the chief producers of illuminated manuscripts. The creation of prayer books, gospel s and other texts served not only as a form of devotion, but also as a kind of meditation for the pious monks and nuns who created them. Eadfrith was the bishop of Lindisfarne. It is written in Latin with annotations in English between the lines. The English was added in 970, making this the oldest surviving manuscript of the Bible in English. The translation used comes from the "Vulgate" meaning that it was the Saint Jerome translation of the Bible.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Hiberno Saxon art relies on complicated interlace patterns in a frenzy of horro vacui. The borders of the pages harbor animals in stylized combat patterns, sometimes called the animal style. Each section of the text opens with huge initials that are rich fields for ornamentation. The Irish artists that worked on these books had an exceptional handle on color and form. Often referred to as "Insular" this hybrid style draws on native Anglo-Saxon and Celtic designs as well as Roman, Coptic, and Eastern traditions.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Like most sacred Christian documents of the period, the Lindisfarne Gospels were written in the Latin vulgate. Later, in the tenth century, the Gospel's owner, the Minister of Chester le Street, had the gospels translated into Anglo-Saxon. Though the Romans had converted parts of their province of Britain to Christianity, by the seventh century there was some disagreement about the nature of these beliefs. There were two camps, the Romans and the Celts. These two went head-to-head at the Synod of Whitby, held in Northumbria in 664. The Roman version of Christianity won out. The king at the time believed that St. Peter was a more divinely ordained figurehead than anyone of Celtic origin. This was reflected in the creation of the Lindisfarne Gospels; when Eadfrith embarked on the long project of illuminating the gospels, he did so in Latin, the language of the Roman church.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The St. Luke image and incipit page feature symbols associate with Luke such as the calf. He is identified as "Hagios Lucas". His beard gives him great authority as an author. Incipit means the opening words of St. Luke's gospel. In the lower right corner of the incipit page there is a stylized cat that has swallowed 8 birds.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Hiberno Saxon style is intricate designs that combined Celtic, Anglo Saxon, and Roman elements. It took 130 calf skins to create this book. The Chi-Ro monogram are the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek. Chi (X) and rho (p). The rho also holds the additional symbolism of looking like a shepherds crook.

**TITLE:** Church of Sainte-Foy and reliquary **LOCATION:** Conques, France **DATE:** 1050-1130

**ARTIST:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PERIOD/STYLE:** Romanesque **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Stone (architecture); stone and paint (tympanum); gold, silver, gemstones, and enamel over wood (reliquary)

**FORM:**

The Church of Sainte-Foy itself was built in the Romanesque style and features a barrel-vaulted nave lined with columns and arches, giving petitioners a clear view of the altar and the sense of grandeur as soon as they enter. The interior of the church is almost 68 feet high, and this already impressive height is intensified by the repeated columns and arches. The entire church is laid out in the shape of a cross, which besides having a strong religious significance, also helped pilgrims circulate without bumping into one another.

**FUNCTION:**

The church of St Foy was built as a pilgrimage stop on the way to Santiago de Compostela. It is also an abbey, meaning that the church was part of a monastery where monks lived, prayed and worked.

**CONTENT:**

The Last Judgment tympanum, or semi-circular space, above the western entrance. In The Last Judgment, Christ presides over souls waiting to enter the afterlife. The Archangel Michael and a nameless demon weigh the hearts of the deceased. The righteous skip away to heaven on the right, but the damned are ushered to the left, where they are eaten by a Leviathan, excreted into hell, and depicted roasting for eternity.

**CONTEXT:**

The Church of Sainte-Foy was also a monastery, and the monks sought a relic to bring in Christian pilgrims. The monks of Conques resorted to some risky business; they decided to steal the relic from another monastery located in Agen. Although the details of the heist have been lost to time, we know it worked because St. Foy ended up in Conques and is now safeguarded in the monastery's museum. If the monks of Sainte-Foy seem a little shady, they weren't alone. There was a black market for religious relics in the Middle Ages that was pretty darn lucrative.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The architects has gone back to building with stone instead of Concrete, and they use barrel and groin vaulting like the Romans, thus the nickname of Romanesque.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Over time, the pilgrims paid homage to the remains of St Foy by donating gemstones for the reliquary so that her dress is covered with agates, amethysts, crystals, carnelians, emeralds, garnets, hematite, jade, onyx, opals, pearls, rubies, sapphires, topazes, antique cameos and intaglios. Her face, which stares boldly at the viewer, is thought to have originally been the head of a Roman statue of a child. The reuse of older materials in new forms of art is known as spolia. Using spolia was not only practical but it made the object more important by associating it with the past riches of the Roman Empire.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The story of St. Foy is a little more gruesome. She died a martyr at the age of twelve under the rule of the pre-Christian Romans, who attempted to burn her at the stake. When she didn't die by fire, she was eventually decapitated. Dying for the Christian cause in an era in which Christians were persecuted gave martyrs like St. Foy their titles and the reputations for standing up for the cause. The Reliquary of St. Foy was called upon to perform its share of miracles, including curing the herniated scrotum of a male devotee.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

St. Foy means Saint Faith.

**TITLE:** The Bayeux Tapestry      **LOCATION:** Cantebury, England      **DATE:** 1070

**ARTIST:** Anglo Saxon Artists (England)      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Norman Romanesque      **PATRON:** Odo, Bishop of Bayeux

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Although it is called the Bayeux Tapestry, this commemorative work is not a true tapestry as the images are not woven into the cloth; instead, the imagery and inscriptions are embroidered using wool yarn sewed onto linen cloth.

**FORM:** At 229 feet long, 19 inches wide, and 850 pounds, the Bayeux Tapestry recounts the Battle of Hastings in 1066 C.E. It is embroidered with dyed woolen yarn stitched on linen, meaning that it is not a true tapestry at all. (Tapestries were usually woven, not stitched.) Whatever the method of creation, the result is a medieval cartoon strip portraying seventy different events that sometimes show the same character more than once within a frame at different moments of action. Dogs, horses, birds, trees, ships, and buildings also play supporting roles in the Bayeux Tapestry. Latin inscriptions explain each scene, all of which recount the conflict between Harold, Earl of Wessex, and William, Duke of Normandy, who vied for the English throne after the death of Edward the Confessor.

**FUNCTION:** Originally, this tapestry probably hung in court and in various churches to display William's victory over the Anglo-Saxons. Though it is unclear when, the tapestry was eventually moved to the Bayeux Cathedral in the town of Bayeux, France. It was kept there until the French Revolution, when, according to legend, the tapestry was nearly lost. Saved at the last minute, the tapestry was then displayed in Paris. It wasn't returned to Bayeux until after WWII.

**CONTENT:** The Bayeux Tapestry consists of seventy-five scenes with Latin inscriptions (tituli) depicting the events leading up to the Norman conquest and culminating in the Battle of Hastings in 1066. The textile's end is now missing, but it most probably showed the coronation of William as King of England. King Edward's death left a power vacuum that several prominent men hoped to fill, but it was Harold and William who eventually went head-to-head for the throne. The tapestry depicts the moments leading up to the conflict, including Harold swearing an oath to William just before King Edward's death. Going against his oath to William, Harold is crowned king, depicted facing forward among the courtiers. A comet can be seen in the sky, an omen of Harold's eventual downfall at the hands of William, while in the following scenes, William prepares his ships for an attack. Scene 43 depicts William feasting before he goes to battle among warriors and bishops.

**CONTEXT:** Measuring twenty inches high and almost 230 feet in length, the Bayeux Tapestry commemorates a struggle for the throne of England between William, the Duke of Normandy, and Harold, the Earl of Wessex (Normandy is a region in northern France). The year was 1066—William invaded and successfully conquered England, becoming the first Norman King of England (he was also known as William the Conqueror).

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:** The Bayeux Tapestry provides an excellent example of Anglo-Norman art. It serves as a medieval artifact that operates as art, chronicle, political propaganda, and visual evidence of eleventh-century mundane objects, all at a monumental scale. Made for a Norman audience by English women using textile narratives based on Scandinavian precedents, linguistic clues within the embroidered text, like Old English words among Latin, and the content of the tapestry's marginalia. The borders of the Bayeux tapestry include 3 different types of imagery, decorative animal motifs, elements from the central strip that have crossed their containing boundaries, and vignettes based on scenes from classical fables.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:** In a quirky portrayal of the events, the artist pictured the battle from both the Anglo-Saxon (Harold) and Norman (William) points of view. The battle commences, and horses of every color (blue, green, and red) can be seen charging into battle as arrows fly overhead. Bodies tumble to the ground and horses fall on their heads in the chaos. The Normans are pictured gaining the upper hand, eventually shooting King Harold in the eye with an arrow and then cutting him to bits for good measure. William is shown as the victor, though the last panel of the tapestry has been lost to time. Art historians speculate that it may have depicted the moment William was crowned the first Norman king of England.

**INTERPRETATION:** The tapestry is sometimes viewed as a type of chronicle. However, the inclusion of episodes that do not relate to the historic events of the Norman Conquest complicate this categorization. Nevertheless, it presents a rich representation of a particular historic moment as well as providing an important visual source for eleventh-century textiles that have not survived into the twenty-first century.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:** The Battle of Hastings was one for the ages, since it marked the end of Anglo-Saxon rule in England and the beginning of Norman rule under the leadership of King William. William had been promised the throne years before King Edward's death but, to William's chagrin, King Edward flip-flopped at the last moment and gave the crown to Harold instead. When William heard the news, he immediately prepared to attack Harold, leaving Normandy by ship shortly thereafter. The Battle of Hastings commenced on October 14, 1066; William won and was crowned King of England on New Year's Day, after which time he reigned for nearly twenty years.