

Navigating Early Medieval Europe

The Rural Riches Database Manual

Manual 0: Very short introduction

RURAL RICHES
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European Research Council
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The Rural Riches database contains data on archaeological sites and material culture, including inscriptions, as well as historical attestations dating to **the first part of the early Middle Ages (c. 450-725)**. This period is otherwise known as the Merovingian period, early Anglo-Saxon period, the Ostrogothic and Lombard period, Vendel period, etc. each with their own start and end dates, depending on the country involved. Such designations refer to national archaeologies.

This database has as one of its objectives to develop a transnational pan-European early medieval archaeology.

We excluded information on previous (Late Roman) and following (Carolingian) periods in order to avoid false impressions on habitation and find distributions dating to the period the database focuses on. However, we were not always very strict in this. Moreover, relevant sites might have started before the period involved and continued to exist afterwards. It can be considered relevant to include sites from c. 350 on (or any other suitable date, but preferably not before the fourth century) in order to better understand what happened in the mid fifth century. We will consult foreign colleagues on this.

The data in the database almost exclusively concerns published data. Only in exceptional cases unpublished data of an excavation were included when the data was considered important to an overall image of early medieval society in a specific region or when a specialist recorded information.

We started this database in the context of the Rural Riches project, but it is our explicit goal to share the data and to involve ever larger groups of scholars who acknowledge the importance of a research instrument as this.

It was decided to create **ONE DATABASE ONLY** for everything archaeological and historical in the period under consideration. So, anything from complete sites to results of scientific analyses of material and information from written sources are recorded in this database. It has the advantage that anything from that period can easily be combined with anything else.

We choose to make **THE SITE** the starting point of everything archaeological. Every observation is related to a 'site'. A site is simply a location in the landscape where remains dating to the period c. 450-725 have been found. The following types of sites were defined: cemetery, settlement, hoard, river find, stray find, other. So, any site can be recorded. 'Other' are for instance revetments of a canal.

Next, sites consist of **CONTEXTS**, such as graves, sunken featured buildings, pits or postholes and of course 'Other'. Any find on a site is assigned to a context. A stray find has as context 'Other'.

Next, contexts contain coherent sets of finds such as a number of vessels (ensemble: vessels) or brooches (ensemble: brooches) or one or more strings of beads (ensemble: beads) or metal fittings of a belt (ensemble: buckles and mounts) or a set of weapons (ensemble: weapons and armour) etc. In a grave several such sets may be present. These coherent sets are termed **ENSEMBLES**. A find is always in an ensemble even when there is only one specimen (one bead only: ensemble beads; one lance head only: ensemble weapons and armour). So, before you can record finds in a context (grave) of a site (cemetery), you have to create an ensemble from a predefined list. Ensembles allow to study sets of objects that relate to one another. Skeletal remains will be considered an ensemble of its own.

Next you can assign individual **FINDS** to such an ensemble (for instance to the ensemble vessels: a ceramic pot, a glass vessel, a copper alloy basin and a wooden bucket, they are all part of one ensemble of vessels).

Finally, you can assign information on **COMPONENTS** of those finds such as the chemical composition of the various colours of a bead. We have to further develop that part of the database, because of the sheer amount of data available after measuring hundreds of beads.

So, the string of archaeological information in the database is: **SITE > CONTEXT > ENSEMBLE > FIND > COMPONENT**

How this all works will be clear when you go through the manuals.

It is also possible to record information on **SPATIAL ELEMENTS** such as lines (Roman roads) and polygons (town perimeters, regions etc) directly into the database.