

HISTOIRE DES COLLECTIONS NUMISMATIQUES ET DES INSTITUTIONS VOUÉES À LA NUMISMATIQUE

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THE COINS AND MEDALS COLLECTION OF THE GALLO-ROMAN
MUSEUM IN TONGEREN (BELGIUM)

The Coin and Medal Collection of the Gallo-Roman Museum in Tongeren is the former Coin and Medal Cabinet (*Munt- en Penningkabinet*) of the Province of Limburg. It is an important collection, comprising over 30,000 coins and exonomia. The collection reflects the coins produced and in circulation in the region from antiquity to the 19th century and is unique because many were excavated locally.

When the Coin and Medal Cabinet was established in 1985, the province's own collection consisted of the collections belonging to the Royal Limburg Historical and Antiquarian Society (*Koninklijk Limburgs Geschied- en Oudheidkundig Genootschap*) and the barons Philippe de Schaetzen and Armand de Schaetzen de Schaetzenhoff. These form the core of the collection, together with the collection of the former Small Seminary of Sint-Truiden, on loan from the Diocese of Hasselt. With the acquisition of several private collections, the Coin and Medal Cabinet achieved its target of 10,000 items.

An active collecting policy was implemented and the collection soon doubled in size, largely thanks to gifts. Furthermore, Belgium's Royal Court made over Prince Charles' personal collection to the Coin and Medal Cabinet as a long-term loan. Systematic efforts were also made to acquire the coin hoards found in the region.

At the end of the last century the Province of Limburg decided to fully integrate the Coin and Medal Cabinet into the archaeological collection of the Gallo-Roman Museum. As the museum collects regional archaeological finds from prehistory to the Merovingian period, a passive collection policy for the later periods was implemented. Celtic and Roman coins are presented to the public in an archaeological context as part of the museum story and Merovingian coins are to be added in future. The new museum presentation won the European Museum of the Year Award 2011, awarded by the European Museum Forum under the auspices of the Council of Europe.

The Coin and Medal Collection contains a representative selection of regional Celtic coins. The real highlights of the collection are the gold hoards from Beringen and Heers. The Beringen hoard¹ is a ritual deposition from the second half of the 2nd century BC and bears a strong similarity to the Niederzier hoard. As well as one complete and two fragmentary torcs and a fragment of a bracelet, the gold hoard contains 22 rainbow cup staters and three Atrebatas staters. According to current data, the Heers hoard² (Fig. 1) contains 158 staters: 116 belonging to the Eburones, 38 to the Nervii and one each to the Treveri, Remi and Veliocasses plus a flan. On the basis of recent research comparing it to the hoards of Maastricht-Amby, Fraire and Thuin, the Heers hoard can be dated with certainty to the Gallic wars³. It is likely to have a connection with Ambiorix's uprising against Caesar in 54–53 BC.

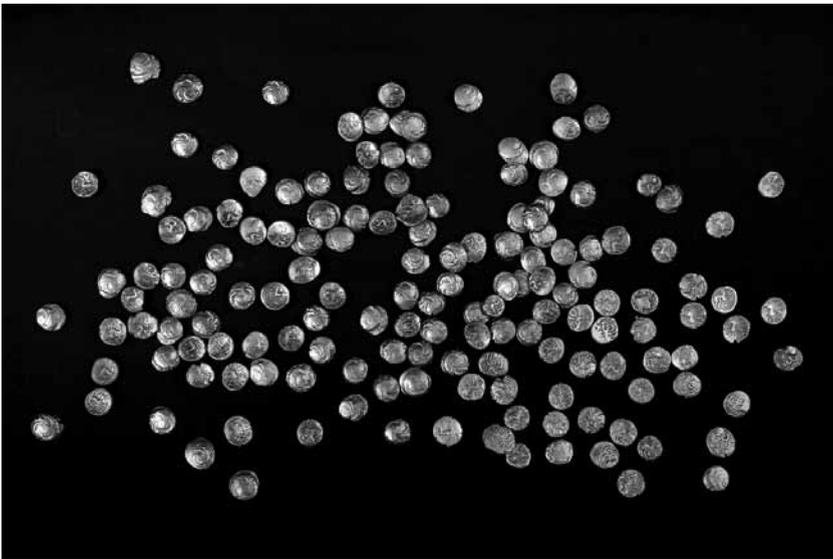


Fig. 1: The Heers gold hoard (Gallo-Roman Museum)

Approximately half of the collection is made up of Roman coins, chiefly from the imperial period. As most were found in Tongeren, they partially represent the coins in circulation in the Roman city. In the Roman period Tongeren was the capital of the *civitas Tungrorum* with the status of *municipium*.

1 Van Impe et al. 1998.

2 Scheers / Creemers 2001; 2002 and 2012.

3 Roymans et al. 2012.

Interesting is a foundation deposit consisting of nine republican and Augustan denarii (Fig. 2) in an earthenware beaker from a post hole in a town house from the time of Tiberius (14–37 AD). Another extraordinary item is a military belt with a purse containing 47 late-Roman bronze coins⁴ from a grave which can be dated to the time of Valentinianus III (425–455 AD).



Fig. 2: The deposition from Kielenstraat in Tongeren (Gallo-Roman Museum)

Not all the Roman coins come from Tongeren. A number of mainly bronze coins from the imperial period, and to a lesser extent republican denarii, were found for example on a rural cult place in the village of Wijshagen, where in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD they were deposited in large numbers together with small bronze objects. Also in the collection are a double sesterce and 80 antoniniani from the Riemst coin hoard⁵, most of which were saved up at the beginning of Postumus' reign (260–269 AD) and buried in the turbulent period at the end of Postumus' reign or in the next quarter of the century. The Coin and Medal Collection also contains a small number of early-Roman and Greek coins which were never in circulation in the region.

The medieval and later periods are well represented in the collection, particularly by coins from the Southern Netherlands and Liège. The Coin and Medal Collection manages one of the finest collections of coins from the prince bishopric of Liège (10th to 18th centuries).

4 Van Heesch 1992.

5 Thirion 1967, 142; Hombroux 1982.

Generally speaking, the emphasis is on coins minted in the region or in circulation here. The region was highly fragmented administratively, which meant there were scores of mints coining money⁶. The collection also contains the 17th and 18th-century coin hoards from Opgrimbie, Tongeren, Lummen, Koersel and Eksel. The mid-18th-century hoard from Lummen⁷ (Fig. 3) is a fine example of a savings hoard. It consists of 91 ducatoons, 169 half and 168 quarter ducatoons struck by the empress Maria Theresa (1740–1780). A reference collection containing coins from all over the world provides a wider context.



Fig. 3: The Lummen hoard (Gallo-Roman Museum)

The Coin and Medal Collection also contains an important collection of paranumismatica, such as tokens, medals, insignia and decorations, seals and seal matrices, weights and tools. There is an important collection of 16th and 17th-century tokens and a representative collection of modern Belgian medals, including the almost complete oeuvre by Dolf Ledel⁸ (1893–1976). Furthermore, the Coin and Medal Collection contains a collection of 19th-century tools for engraving stamps. So the reference collection of exnumia is extremely important.

6 Hombroux et al. 1981.

7 De Callataÿ / Van Laere 1994.

8 Vandamme [2007].

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