

# PROMATECH

## Production, Materials and Techniques of Copper Alloy Alms Basins in Northern Europe (15th - 17th centuries)

**DURATION**  
15/12/2020 – 15/03/2023

**BUDGET**  
314 620 €

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The interdisciplinary PROMATECH project, which involves partners from different institutions (KMKG-MRAH, ULG-CEA), aims at conducting an emergent technical and material research devoted to copper-based alloy hammered and decorated basins, called “alms basins”, produced between the fifteenth, when the production of these objects took off and the seventeenth century, when they fell into disuse, in northern European workshops.

The discrepancy between the limitations of historical sources and existing scholarship, on the one hand, and the potential of careful examination of the alms basins themselves to provide evidence about their historicity, on the other, indicates the need for fresh research, involving methodologies from different disciplines, and the combination of expertise from several scientific fields. Given their intensive circulation and the broad range of their uses, it seems clear basins made from copper alloys were mass-produced all over Europe to meet high demand. However, the concrete conditions of their production, in terms of organization, skills and materials, remain unclear. As a response, this project intends to transcend the traditional art historical approach, focused on questions of provenance and attribution, in favour of a material-based approach. It will help highlight the fundamental technical characteristics of these basins, in particular those least studied, such as the composition of alloys. By comparing these material data with historical sources (written, iconographic and archaeological), this project intends to renew the perspectives of studies relating to every day utensils made of copper alloys.

### New online resources and tools

The core aim of the project is to create and give access to online reference resources that will gather data from historical and material sources. These resources and tools will help draw attention to these neglected objects, which suffer from not being considered as research topic per se. In this respect, the team assumes that a better understanding of these objects will lead to a better preservation, as it will both gather the documentation and the references that could be reused by a large public (scientific actors, scholars, curators, collectors, art lovers, etc.) and provide an exhaustive methodology to classify and study any type of alms basin preserved. The valorisation of museum and ecclesiastical collections will also contribute to remedy the lack of interest in these objects – often devalued as minor arts – by linking them to their historical context of production. This perspective will contribute to defining alms basins not only as art objects but also as artifacts, i.e. material sources for social, economic, and cultural history and for the history of technology.



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## For a broader approach to the work and skills of copper-based alloy craftsmen

The PROMATECH project plans to make a substantial contribution to the field of material culture studies, a still emerging research domain in Belgium, and aims at shedding new insights on one of the most emblematic object belonging to the exceptional “dinanderie” history and production for which Belgium has enjoyed a long-lasting international recognition.

The comparison between material data, provided by the study of objects, and surveys carried out in historical sources will provide a framework that will enable us to understand gestures, practices, techniques, skills and strategies of copper-based alloy craftsmen from the end of the Middle Ages to the 17th century.

In this respect, the core impact of the project is to encourage dialogue with other research studies about copper-alloys objects in order to create a network of competence and expertise and re-usable data, favouring comparisons between objects, workshops and *chaînes opératoires*.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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## LINKS

<https://www.kmg-mrah.be/fr/scientific-research/promatech>