

XI.—*On a Silver Bowl and Cover of the Ninth or Tenth Century.*

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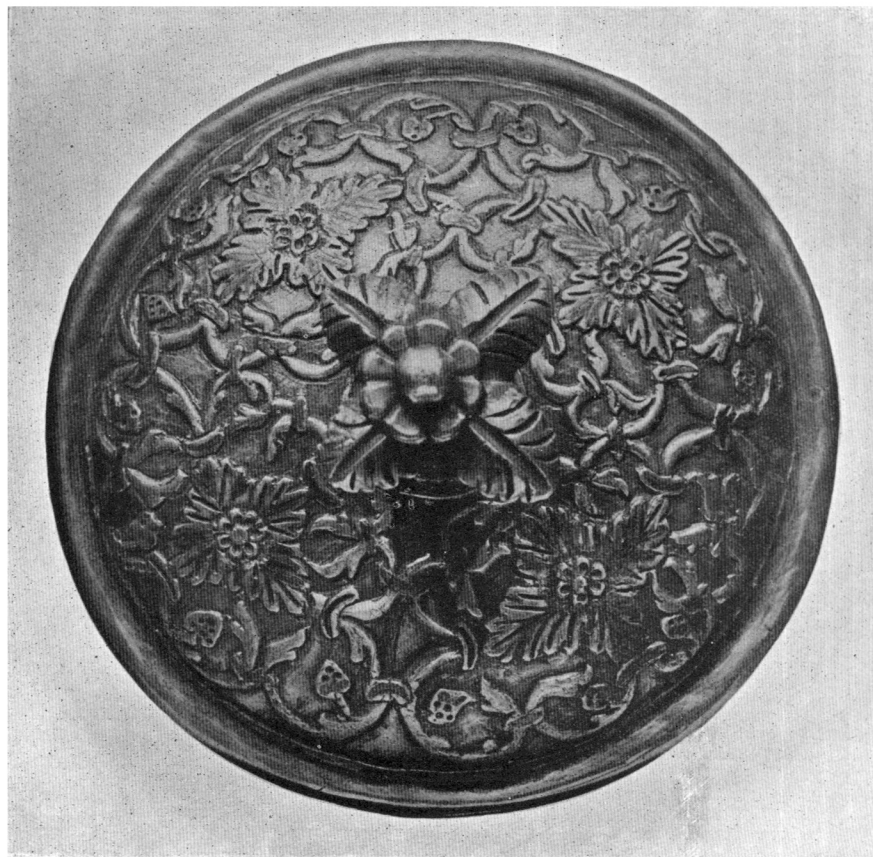
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THE silver vessel here illustrated (Plate XLVII. b) was acquired many years ago by Sir A. W. Franks, and at his death passed by bequest to the British Museum. It is a deep bowl, with a cover made to be lifted by a projecting handle in the form of a quatrefoil upon a vertical stem, the height, without the cover, being  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches. The whole of the exterior both of bowl and cover is richly decorated with designs in relief. Four equidistant panels each containing a large quatrefoil are enclosed by vine stems, with occasional bunches of grapes at which birds are pecking; in the interspaces between the panels the stems unite to form a lozenge containing a quatrefoil of smaller dimensions. Wherever two stems meet they are bound by collar-like bands, which are doubtless conventionalized representations of closely-twining tendrils. The design thus forms a continuous pattern well adapted to the sides of a vessel; it is repeated on a smaller scale upon the cover. The grapes, the leaves, and the bodies of the birds are all inlaid with niello. The ground throughout is gilded, as is the interior of the bowl. The bottom has been rasped or filed on the exterior, though the interior remains in its original condition. It has been suggested that the bowl may once have had a foot.

The design and the form of this bowl alike point to the ninth or tenth century as the probable period of manufacture. It is said to have been obtained



SILVER BOWL AND COVER OF THE NINTH OR TENTH CENTURY. (1.)

in Spain, but its place of origin is more likely to have been north-western Europe, either in some part of the Frankish dominions or possibly in our own country. Some reasons may be advanced in support of these opinions.

Vine-scrolls of this character, developments of a well-known Early-Christian decorative design, perhaps originating in Syria, appear in the west of Europe at an early date; it is well known that the type is found upon the Northumbrian high crosses of the seventh or eighth centuries. But the closest parallels to the design upon this silver vessel are to be found in Carolingian art, and in the Anglo-Saxon art of the south of England.

In the Sacramentary of Drogo, son of Charlemagne, the vine-motive is treated much in this way; there is the same impression of luxuriant growth, and the characteristic lozenge-shaped figure formed by the stems in the interspaces is a conspicuous feature.<sup>a</sup> The same luxuriant vine-foliage recurs upon the early ivory diptych in the treasury at St. Gall, ascribed to the monk Tutilo, who flourished towards the year A.D. 900.<sup>b</sup> Here the lozenge-arrangement of the interspaces has become the principal design of a rectangular panel of ornament, while the more important quatrefoil has been rejected. We find the same thing on the back of the bronze seal of Ælfric of Hampshire (d. A.D. 1016) in the British Museum,<sup>c</sup> and also upon Anglo-Saxon coins. Variants appear at a rather later period in the art of different countries, as in a mosaic pavement of the tenth-eleventh century in St. Mark's at Venice, and in illuminated MSS. of the twelfth century.<sup>d</sup> The general disposition of the vine-scrolls resembles that found upon a group of ivory vases, the date of which lies between the sixth and tenth centuries; one of them is in the British Museum, another at South Kensington.<sup>e</sup> Several of these vessels are similar in form to the silver bowl, and one or two of them have lids; it is probable that they themselves reproduce the decoration of earlier silver vessels. In these ivory examples the

<sup>a</sup> Comte A. de Bastard, *Peintures des Manuscrits*, Part V. 132 (British Museum Copy). The connection of Carolingian MSS. with the Early-Christian art of Syria is well established.

<sup>b</sup> E. Molinier, *Histoire des arts appliqués à l'industrie*, vol. i. *Ivoires*, pl. x.; A. Maskell, *Ivories*, pl. xx.

<sup>c</sup> *Victoria County History, Hampshire*, i. 398.

<sup>d</sup> C. Errard and A. Gayet, *L'art byzantin*, i. *Venise*, pl. xix.; MS. of Beatus on the Apocalypse in the British Museum, fol. 7 b (Add. MS. 11695).

<sup>e</sup> British Museum, *Catalogue of Ivory Carvings of the Christian Era*, No. 15; A. Maskell, *Ivories*, pl. xvi.

vines are shown diverging from diminutive vases replaced at equidistant points on the base-line, and the due subordination of the parts to the whole design is never forgotten.

The evidence seems to point to the ninth rather than to the tenth century as the date of this silver bowl. The ornament retains its logical disposition ; sections of it which are in themselves of secondary importance do not receive undue preponderance. The birds pecking at the grapes, which are generally found in early specimens of such designs, but often drop out in the later, are still to be seen amidst the foliage. The form of the bowl is also early. It is similar to that of other silver nielloed bowls of about the ninth century found in Laaland, Zeeland, and Jutland, with decoration of panels containing beasts and foliate designs, the whole upon a ground of animal interlacings of northern character.<sup>a</sup> An example from nearer home is the bowl found in 1815, with coins of Cnut, at Halton Moor, near Lancaster, now also in the British Museum. The shape of this example approximates to that here shown, and the gilding is of the same pale colour ; but the finish is superior, and the character of the ornament is later. It consists of animals drawn with much spirit within circular medallions, the interspaces, borders, and base being filled with formal foliage.<sup>b</sup>

It has been already suggested that this rare and interesting silver vessel was probably made in north-western Europe. The evidence of the ornament seems to point either to a Frankish or an English origin, and perhaps more definitely to the former. The vine-scrolls are certainly of a Carolingian type, and elaborate niello was used by silversmiths upon the Continent as early as A.D. 775, the approximate date of the chalice offered by Tassilo, Duke of Bavaria, to the church of Kremsmünster.<sup>c</sup> But we may recall the high reputation of our own countrymen as goldsmiths at this period, proved not only by surviving examples of their art, such as the royal finger-rings in the British Museum, but also by the mention of Anglo-Saxon work in the *Liber Pontificalis*. The popes ordered silver from Anglo-Saxons, and among the objects due to their skill were lamps (gabata), some with lions, gryphons, etc. upon them, recalling the ornament of the Halton bowl ; there is

<sup>a</sup> *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires du Nord*, 1872-1877, pp. 374-5.

<sup>b</sup> *Archæologia*, xviii. 199-202. The Halton Bowl is much less massive than the present example.

<sup>c</sup> Nesbitt and Thompson, *Vetusta Monumenta*, 1885, p. 9 ; J. H. von Hefner Alteneck, *Trachten Kunstwerke und Geräthschaften*, pl. viii.

also particular mention of niello, in the use of which the English certainly excelled.<sup>a</sup> King Egbert (d. A.D. 858) on his visit to Rome is stated to have brought with him silver vessels from his own country, and the date is not very far from that to which our vessel may be assigned. If therefore anyone should prefer to call the bowl English, it might be difficult to disprove the claim.

<sup>a</sup> S. Beissel, *Zeitschrift für Christliche Kunst* IX. 1896, pp. 364 ff. It may be recalled that there was an Anglo-Saxon colony in Rome from the first half of the eighth century, established in the neighbourhood of the Vatican. Niello had been freely used on the ornaments of the pagan Anglo-Saxons.