



Rare silver ritual bowl decorated with Viking bird motif

Bowl, England, 8th - 9th century and Viking decoration 9th-11th century

Northern Europe, Viking or Viking Rus culture, ca. 9th to 11th century CE. A very rare bowl, formed from a hammered sheet of high-grade (92%) silver, most likely deposited in a Viking hoard. The bowl would not originally have been made by Vikings, but its surface has been modified to include Viking motifs.

The elegant design of the body is adorned with 16 raised teardrop-shaped bosses encircled with stippled borders as well as 16 smaller circular bosses around the rim which create a wonderful textured surface. Encircling the exterior rim is an incised register displaying a pair of birds with sinuous, unceasing bodies, perhaps depicting Huginn and Muninn, the avian informants of Odin the Allfather that fly around the world and deliver information to their master. The smooth, polished basin imbues the bowl with a lustrous appearance.

The bulbous form of this bowl somewhat resembles the Ormside bowl, found in the early 1800s in what is today Cumbria, England. That bowl is actually made from two bowls, manufactured roughly 100 years apart, and fastened together with silver clips. The outer part - the oldest part, which has the bulbous projections - is thought to have been made at an Anglo-Saxon monastery in Northumbria sometime around 750 CE. Famously, the Vikings looted Anglo-Saxon Northumbrian monasteries in 793 CE, when

the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle" states, "Never before has such terror appeared in Britain as we have now suffered from a pagan race... the heathens poured out the blood of saints around the altar, and trampled on the bodies of saints in the temple of God, like dung in the streets." As a result, it is believed that the exterior part of the Ormside bowl was stolen by a Viking from its original monastery home and taken with him to his final resting place, which was a burial with other grave goods in Cumbria. Although this bowl lacks the ornately decorated exterior of the Ormside bowl, it probably came to be in the Vikings' possession in a similar manner.

The Ormside bowl, British Museum

Origin

Northern Europe : Bowl, England, 8th-9th century and Viking decoration, 9th- 11th century.

Condition

No visible restorations, minor damages to the edge of the bowl. The object has been cleaned by a professional restorer.

Measures

Ø 12.7 cm - h: 4.3 cm – w: 106 grams

Exhibitions

Approved and exhibited at Tefaf Maastricht 2019.

Provenance

Private collection New York, USA

Exhibitions

Tefaf2019 - Tefaf 2020

Literature: