

An Inlaid Iron Folding Stool in the British Museum

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IN 1957 the British Museum purchased a folding stool (PL. v, A) of iron, inlaid with bronze, which has had a somewhat chequered history.¹ It was originally in the Forman collection and although it cannot be identified in the sale catalogues, it was apparently sold with the rest of the collection in 1899/1900. In 1901 it was exhibited by the purchaser, Mr. E. J. Seltman, before the Société des Antiquaires de France with a so-called legionary standard and was published in the *Bulletin* of the Society.² It was alleged that both the stool and the standard were found in England some fifty years previously and that they had been lost during the 'campagne sanglante contre Boadicea, reine des Icenis, en l'an 63 (*sic*) de notre ère'. This confident statement of provenience was improved on in later years by Mr. C. O. Seltman, who wrote:

'elles viennent de la collection de feu M. Forman, et c'est très significatif que ce collectionneur, en 1827, ait fait des excavations dans la comté d'Essex.'³

This is an improvement on an earlier contention of the same writer:

'He (sc. Forman) is well known to have made excavations in various parts of England, e.g. in Essex in 1827.'⁴

As a result of these statements the legend grew up that the stool was an English find from Essex.⁵

The stool next appears in the archaeological literature in a terse note by Mr. R. A. Smith,⁶ where it is recorded that the standard and the stool did not together fetch more than £200 at an auction at Sotheby's on 7th December 1920. After this sale the stool passed into the hands of Mr. C. O. Seltman's brother, Dr. Charles Seltman of Queens' College, Cambridge, and while in his possession it was seen by a number of Roman archaeologists, who have mentioned it in print. From Dr. Charles Seltman it passed through the hands of two dealers and was ultimately acquired by the British Museum.⁷

¹ I would like to thank Prof. G. Haseloff, Dr. W. Holmqvist, M. E. Salin, Mr. C. H. Blair and my colleagues Mr. J. W. Brailsford, Mr. R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford and Mr. Donald Strong, who have so generously helped me in my study of this object, and my wife for making the drawings.

² *Bulletin de la société nationale des antiquaires de France*, 1901, p. 168.

³ C. O. Seltman, 'Deux trophées romains', *Rivista italiana di numismatica*, XXV (anno xxx, 1912), 37.

⁴ C. O. Seltman, 'The oldest trophies of Britain', *Numismatic Circular*, 1908, cols. 10505 f.

⁵ Repeated for example by N. Degraffi, 'La sella plicatalis di Pavia', *Arte del primo millennio, Atti del II° congresso per lo studio dell'arte dell'alto medio evo* (Pavia, 1950).

⁶ *Antiq. J.*, I (1921), 141.

⁷ Reg. No. 1957, 4-5, 1. The history of the piece after it passed from Dr. Seltman's hands (about 1950) is recorded in the confidential documents of the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities of the British Museum. The transactions between 1950 and 1957 between the dealers and various museums were purely commercial and need not concern us here.

It can be seen from this rapid sketch of the stool's history that there are certain grounds for the doubt that, more than once, has been cast on its authenticity. One of the chief reasons for this doubt has been the allegation that this was the *sella castrensis* of the commander of the legion that destroyed Boadicea's power, and that the standard, with which it was associated, was that of the IX Legion; there is not one iota of evidence for this wild and unjustified hypothesis. The second argument against the authenticity of the stool has been its association with a standard which is no longer accepted as genuine. The stool has had its champions; it was illustrated, for instance, by Miss Richter in 1926,⁸ but the opinion of most Roman archaeologists is summed up by Miss Liversidge:⁹

'Another iron stool coated with a wash of silver and inlaid with patterns in a gold-bronze alloy is illustrated by Miss Richter. Although it is alleged to have been found in Essex, recent investigations have cast considerable doubt upon its reputed provenance . . . the stool, after it has been folded up in the normal way (can) be folded again so that the four legs lie side by side. This ingenious device, unparalleled in the three folding stools so far described, is sufficient to cast grave doubt on the authenticity of the object. Analysis in the British Museum Research Laboratory has shown that the actual metal of the framework is ancient, but it is quite another question whether that metal assumed the form in which it is now made up in antiquity. We cannot on the evidence now available claim this stool as a British find. Indeed the decorated metal may be of Gaulish origin.'

Miss Liversidge's reaction is typical of that of many scholars. It stems from the idea that the stool, if it be genuine, must be Roman because so many of its parallels are Roman. It must be admitted that the stool does not fit in with theories and schemes of historians of Roman furniture and they have dismissed it, sometimes in puzzlement, sometimes with doubts as to its authenticity as an antiquity.

Now, in this paper I want to consider this stool as of sub-Roman or dark-age date and not as a Roman antiquity. But, first, the allegations made by Miss Liversidge and others, that the metal from which the stool is made may not have 'assumed the form in which it is now made up in antiquity', must be countered by a detailed description of the object in its present state, which will, I hope, prove conclusively that the form of the stool is as ancient as the inlaid metal bars of which it is constructed.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STOOL (PL. V, A-B; FIG. 10)

The stool is formed of two rectangular frames pivoted in the centre by means of dome-headed rivets and washers. The long sides of these frames form the legs, the short sides are the stretchers. The bottom stretchers are made in two parts and are joined in the centre by rivets which act as a hinge. One of the top stretchers is also centrally hinged but the other is not joined. Each half of this unjoined stretcher terminates in a globular knob and is supported by a modern

⁸ G. M. A. Richter, *Ancient Furniture* (Oxford, 1926), fig. 301.

⁹ J. Liversidge, *Furniture in Roman Britain* (London, 1955), p. 31 f.

strut.¹⁰ The stool can thus be folded twice, first so that the two rectangles lie together and secondly so that the four legs lie side by side (PL. V, B).

Face A. (Taking the unjoined top stretcher as the front of the stool this is the right-hand side.) The outer leg (leg A 1) is 61·4 cm. long and is constructed of three bars welded together in the same plane: the bars are 2·1 cm. wide and 1 cm. thick. The lower of these three bars is 27·7 cm. in length. Its foot takes the form of a hoof carved in the round with a gracefully curved ankle. This hoof,

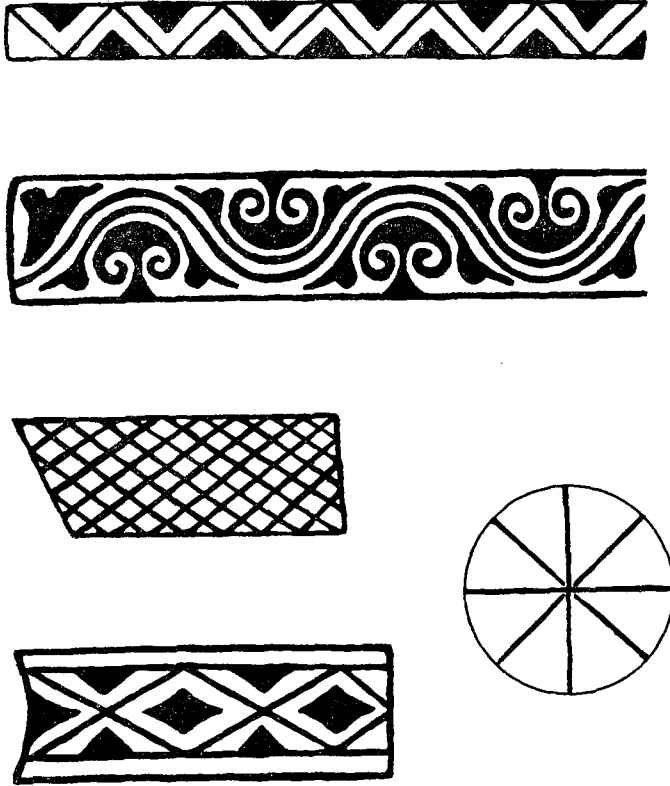


FIG. 9

Diagrammatic representation of the inlaid ornament on the folding stool in the British Museum (p. 41 f.). Sc. $\frac{1}{3}$

which is hollowed out slightly on its under side, is set at such an angle that its sole is flat on the ground when the leg is opened out to an angle of about 90° with leg A 2. Three incised lines occur above the hoof. The outer face of this lower part of the leg, above the foot, is inlaid with a rectangular panel of ornament, bordered by a straight line of inlaid bronze wire. Within the rectangular panel is a wavy line of five and a half crests; between and beneath each crest is a formalized palmette over which is a semicircular band terminating in a leaf-like feature (FIG. 9). In the lower corner of the panel is a spiral hook and in the top corner

¹⁰ The restored parts of the stool are described in detail on p. 44.

is a solid triangle. All the ornament on this bar and on the rest of the stool is carried out in bronze wire and bronze plaques inlaid in the iron. The central bar is 12.4 cm. in length and is welded to the lower and upper bars at opposite corners. A rivet with a domed head pierces the centre of the bar to act as a pivot. The head of the rivet, which is 2.7 cm. in diameter, is decorated with eight short lengths of wire inlaid radially in its surface. The bar expands slightly round the rivet to a width of 3.0 cm. On either side of the rivet are rectangular panels, each having a double lateral border, containing a running lozenge pattern (FIG. 9; two and a half lozenges in the lower panel and one and two halves in the upper). The lozenges and triangles so formed are inlaid with plaques which are the same shape as the field in which they are contained (FIG. 9). The upper section of the leg is 25.5 cm. in length and is surmounted by a human bust (PL. VIII, A). The bust portrays a bearded man with receding hair and incised features. Lying far back on the sides of the head are prominent, well-moulded ears. The hair, eyebrows, lips and beard are inlaid with short strands of bronze wire. Below the head, which in this instance is much worn, is a panel of ornament exactly similar to that on the lower part of the leg, save only that the wavy line rises to five crests with half crests at either end. There is, however, no spiral in the corner, both corners being filled with a plain, triangular plate. The sides of the leg are decorated with a zig-zag pattern contained within two parallel lines. The triangular fields formed by this pattern contain triangular plates. The back of the leg is plain, the lower stretcher being welded to the leg some 6.5 cm. above the foot and the upper stretcher being welded in at the base of the head. The main decorated face of the leg has been damaged in a number of places and part of the inlay has been broken away, but the description is corrected in conformity with the evidence that the ornament repeats itself with regularity.

Leg A 2 consists of three inlaid iron bars which have been welded together and is pivoted to A 1 by the central rivet. The ends of the central bar are welded, on its front face, to the ends of the back face of the two flanking bars. The strange structure of this leg enables it to interlock with the crook at the centre of A 1 (see PL. VI). The leg is 61.6 cm. in length and varies in width between 1.9 and 2.1 cm. It is 1.0 cm. thick. The bottom bar is 26.0 cm. in length and in all but minor details is decorated in the same manner as the lower portion of leg A 1. It differs in that the upper corner of the inlaid panel contains a triangle executed in inlaid wire while the lower corner contains a loop over an amorphous plaque. The mean length of the central bar is 14.6 cm. It expands slightly in the centre to a width of 2.7 cm., where it is pierced by the rivet. On either side of the rivet are two inlaid panels of quadrangular shape, with one sloping side, decorated with a trellis pattern of inlaid wire. The upper bar of this leg is 23.2 cm. in length and is decorated in a similar fashion to the upper part of leg A 1; it is however much more worn. The wavy pattern, within the rectangular field, has five and a half crests, the bottom corner being decorated with a loop over a triangle while the top corner is obliterated. The sides of the bars are decorated in the same manner as the sides of the leg A 1 and the back is plain. The lower stretcher is welded to the back of the leg 6.9 cm. above the foot and the top stretcher is welded

to the back behind the head. The rivet passes through the centre of the leg and is riveted over a washer on the back side; the washer is split along the radius at one place.

Face B. The arrangement of legs on the left-hand side of the stool is the same as on face A. The outer leg (B 1) is very badly worn and is broken near the bottom, where it has been repaired with a modern angle-iron. It is 61.6 cm. in length and varies in width between 1.9 and 2.1 cm., it is between 1.0 and 0.9 cm. thick. The lowest of the three bars of which it is constructed is 27.9 cm. long, the central bar is 11.9 cm. long (expanding in the centre to a width of 2.7 cm.). The dome-headed rivet is 2.7 cm. in diameter. The upper bar is 25.3 cm. in length. In all details of structure the leg corresponds to leg A 1. There are minor differences of decoration: in the panel of the lower bar the wavy band rises to six and a half crests and there is a triangular plate in the top corner (the bottom corner is obscured by damage to the surface). In the panel of the upper bar the wavy line rises to seven crests and the ornament of the corners is missing. All the other ornament of this leg corresponds exactly to that of leg A 1.

The length of the fourth leg (B 2) is 61.8 cm.; it is 2.0 cm. wide and 1.0 cm. thick. The lower bar is 26.3 cm. long, the central bar 14.2 cm. long and the upper bar is 23.5 cm. long. The leg corresponds in form and function to the leg A 2 and is similarly ornamented. The panel of the lower bar is filled with a wavy line that rises to five and a half crests; the upper corner is inlaid with a loop while the lower corner is damaged. The wavy ornament in the panel of the upper bar rises to five crests with a half crest at either end; the lower corner is filled with an inverted V-shaped motif enclosing an amorphous plate, while the ornament filling the upper corner is unclear. The washer through which the rivet passes can be seen on the back side of the leg and is between 2.6 and 2.8 cm. in diameter.

Face C (the front(?)). The upper stretcher is divided into two, each arm terminating in a domed knob. Both arms are of square cross-section and are undecorated. They join the legs behind the heads and have two modern supports running from behind the knob to a short way down the legs: these struts were probably not present originally, the upper stretchers being presumably meant to be strong enough in themselves to carry the leather seat and the weight of the sitter. The stretcher on the right-hand side (Face A) of the stool is 14.4 cm. in length and has a mean cross-section measurement of 1.2×1.0 cm.: the left-hand stretcher is 14.8 cm. in length and is about 0.9 cm. square. The lower stretcher is formed of two bars hinged in the centre—this mechanism is a modern repair but as a complete hinge survives in a similar position on Face D the reconstruction is probably correct. The bars make two right-angled bends towards the centre so that the hinge is on a lower plane than the main part of the stretcher. The internal length of this inset is 10.5 cm. and it is undecorated save on its inner, upper face. The overall length of the stretcher is 38.5 cm. and in cross-section it has a mean measurement of 1.2×1.2 cm. On each of the two upper faces of the main part of the stretcher is the same inlaid zig-zag pattern, between two straight lines with triangular plates in the intervals, that appears on the sides of the legs.

Face D (the back(?)). Only the hinge and one half of the lower stretcher of

this face remain; the rest is restored. The lower stretcher makes a double right-angled bend upwards so as to interlock with the corresponding stretcher on Face C when the stool is folded up. The surviving length of the stretcher is 21.5 cm. The bar is about 1 cm. square. Two rounded flanges on the surviving portion of the missing stretcher interlock with a single flange on the complete example, a rivet passing through the three flanges to form a hinge pin. The outer upper face of the surviving stretcher is decorated with an inlaid pattern, similar to that on the corresponding stretcher of Face C, and the same pattern appears on the upper inner face save for the short length between the two right-angles. Only half the upper stretcher survives, although the central hinge survives and corresponds structurally to the hinge of the lower stretcher. The stretcher is quite plain and has a mean cross-section which measures 1.1 × 1.0 cm. Its surviving length is 21 cm.

THE RESTORATION AND THE RESTORED PARTS

As has been indicated, certain restorations can be seen on the stool (see FIG. 10):

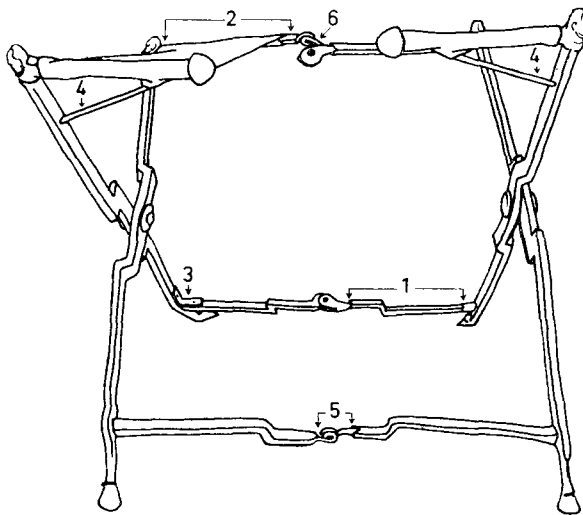


FIG. 10

Sketch of the folding stool in the British Museum to show its method of construction; the numbers indicate restored details

- (1) One half of the lower stretcher of Face D is restored between the arrowed points.
- (2) One half of the upper stretcher of Face D is restored.
- (3) An angle-iron strengthening the join between leg and lower stretcher on leg B 1 is a modern repair.
- (4) The struts supporting the top stretchers of Face C are modern.
- (5) The hinge on the lower stretcher of Face C is modern.
- (6) The supplementary hinge on the upper stretcher of Face D is modern, although the ancient lug survives.

Some of the replacements have been partly covered with a coating of adhesive and rust and the leather seat now on the stool is modern.

Exhaustive examination by the Research Laboratory of the British Museum has produced no other evidence of modern manufacture.¹¹ There has been no attempt to disguise the various restored parts and despite Miss Liversidge's assertions¹² there can be no doubt that the object is indeed ancient and that it has always been a stool.

DISCUSSION

Form. The simple folding stool, made of two rectangular frames pivoted in the centre of each side, has a long ancestry. It is known in Egypt at a very early date¹³ and even in northern Europe it appears in as early a context as the Danish early bronze age. A well-made wooden stool, with an otter-skin seat, was found in the Guldhøj coffin¹⁴ and fragments of some eighteen examples of similar folding stools are known from Denmark, Sweden and Holstein.¹⁵ Similar stools were used in Greece and Miss Richter quotes the charming passage of Athenaeus which tells of slaves carrying stools of this kind for their Athenian masters when they went abroad, 'in order that, if they wished to sit, they might not be forced to put up with any chance seat'.¹⁶ Miss Richter summarizes the evidence for Roman folding stools and illustrates one of the two folding stools from Pompeii¹⁷ as well as the stool at present under discussion.¹⁸ Her mention of the British Museum stool is interesting in that she, the leading specialist on Roman furniture, could not conceive of it being anything but Roman. I shall return to this problem of attribution later.

In their study of folding stools of the Roman period scholars have drawn evidence from surviving stools and from representations on coins, ivories and sarcophagi: they have quoted the literary evidence and have illustrated one or two of the surviving examples.¹⁹ I cannot list here all the known examples from the Mediterranean Roman world. The two most important Roman stools are those from Pompeii,²⁰ which are of course securely dated to before the time of the destruction of that town. Another example came from Ostia and is now in the Louvre.²¹ Others are illustrated in the art of the period. Ransom, for example,

¹¹ I would like to thank Dr. Plenderleith and the staff of the British Museum Research Laboratory for their help in the examination of this stool.

¹² *L.c.* in note 9.

¹³ Richter, *op. cit.* in note 8, fig. 108.

¹⁴ H. C. Broholm, *Danske Oldsager*, III, *Ældre Bronzealder* (København, 1952), fig. 213.

¹⁵ O. Wanscher, 'Nordische Klappstühle aus der Bronzezeit', *Artes*, VIII (Copenhagen, 1940), 175 f.

¹⁶ Richter, *op. cit.* in note 8, p. 39.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 126, fig. 300.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, fig. 301.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126; V. Chapot in C. Daremberg and E. Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, IV, 2 (Paris, n.d.), 1179 f.; C. L. Ransom, *Couches and Beds of the Greeks, Romans and Etruscans* (Chicago, 1905), p. 105; Liversidge, *op. cit.*, in note 9, p. 28 f.

²⁰ One is illustrated by Richter, *op. cit.* in note 8, fig. 300; both by Quaranta in *Real museo Borbonico* (Napoli, 1830), pl. xxvii.

²¹ A. de Ridder, *Cat. sommaire des bijoux antiques* (Musée nationale du Louvre, Paris, 1924), no. 2156, pl. xxviii.

mentions two folding stools depicted on Christian sarcophagi in the Lateran Museum.²²

The most satisfactory parallels to the British Museum folding stool are, however, to be found north of the Alps, and it is perhaps on these grounds that the stool has been thought of as a product of one of the outlying parts of the Roman Empire. One of the most distinctive features of the stool is the split upper stretcher. This is paralleled in a number of places, e.g. at Fouron-le-Comte, Liège,²³ at Holborough in Kent,²⁴ in one of the Bartlow Hill barrows,²⁵ at Simontoruya, Tolna, and on other Hungarian sites.²⁶ The feature is lacking in other stools of the period, many of which are more sturdily built. Typical of this heavier type of stool is that from Nijmegen in the Rijksmuseum van G.M. Kam, Nijmegen,²⁷ belonging to the collection of St. Carnisius's College. It has two pairs of crossed legs shaped as a slow S-curve and a central pivot which takes the form of a long spindle stretching from one side of the stool to the other. The stretchers and this spindle are circular in cross-section and each has three collars spaced along its length. Fragments of a similar stool were found at Newstead.²⁸ This type of stool is apparently the Roman *sella curulis*, an altogether heavier and more substantial type than the *sella castrensis*, of which the Holborough, Fouron-le-Comte and Bartlow Hill stools are typical representatives. The British Museum example has been classed in this latter group by Seltman²⁹ and the treatment of the pivots, the light structure and the break in the top stretcher argue for this classification. These three features and the general form of the stool are the main reasons for aligning it with Roman examples. But the search for Roman parallels has often in the past caused confusion among scholars and sometimes it has even, as we have seen (p. 40), led to doubts as to its authenticity. Jessup in his discussion of the Holborough stool implies a disbelief in the attribution of the British Museum stool to the Roman period when he compares it with an example from Pavia and another in the Victoria and Albert Museum³⁰ and concludes his description with these words:

'The chair cannot be an English find. It has some features in common with the (sc. provincial Roman) chairs under discussion, but a modern laboratory examination with a view to determining the age and the structure of its various parts would be desirable.'

Let us however compare our stool with other inlaid stools, for the bronze

²² Ransom, *op. cit.* in note 19, p. 105.

²³ *Bull. inst. archéol. liégeois*, XXXII (1901).

²⁴ R. F. Jessup, 'Excavation of a Roman Barrow at Holborough, Snodland', *Archaeol. Cantiana*, LXVIII (1954), 22 f., pl. ix.

²⁵ J. Gage in *Archaeologia*, XXVI (1836), 300 f., pls. xxvi-xxvii.

²⁶ Cf. the two examples illustrated by G. Karoly, 'Okori Kocsik Helyreallistaa', *Archaeologiai Értésítő*, X, 101 and 121.

²⁷ W. G. J. R. Vermeulen, *Een Romeins graufeld op den Hunnerberg te Nijmegen* (Amsterdam, 1932), 173 f.; Liversidge, *op. cit.* in note 9, pls. 40-41.

²⁸ J. Curle, *A Roman Frontier Post and its People, the Fort of Newstead* (Glasgow, 1911), pl. lxiv; Liversidge, *op. cit.* in note 9, pl. 39.

²⁹ *Op. cit.* in note 4, col. 10505 f.

³⁰ *Op. cit.* in note 24, p. 32, n. 4.

inlay is its most distinctive feature. In France there is one folding stool inlaid with bronze which has known associations. It is in the Musée des Antiquités Nationales at St. Germain-en-Laye and comes from the famous cemetery at Franques de Breny (Aisne).³¹ The stool consists of two pivoted rectangular frames, bound with thin, flattened, bronze wire which has been inlaid into the iron frame. It was found in a grave with a series of sixth-century objects which include a silver-gilt animal-headed pin, a necklace, a silver ring, a bucket and a pottery jug decorated with impressed ornament. The front stretcher is not split but in all other respects it complies with the form of the Roman *sella castrensis*. Rusted to the topmost stretcher, at either end, are small bars which may be the remains of arms,³² but the present condition of the stool is so poor that it is impossible to interpret these features.

Another inlaid stool from France, which appears to be unpublished,³³ is in the museum at Annecy. This stool (PL. VII, B), which has no provenience and therefore cannot be dated by association, is in fairly good condition. Basically it is constructed of two rectangular frames pivoted in the centre of each long side by means of a small pin. The upper stretchers, which are riveted to the legs, each consist of a flat bar of metal with three long slots through which, we must suppose, passed the girths which formed the seat. The outside edges of the stretchers are decorated with inlaid patterns (FIG. 11, d), but the portions which were covered by the girths reveal no traces of inlay. The legs are made of iron bars, rectangular in section at top and bottom and octagonal for most of the length; the octagonal portion swells to an entasis towards the centre where the hinge rivets occur. The legs are decorated with various motifs on the outer faces (PL. VIII, C; FIG. 11, a-c). The bottom stretchers show no traces of inlay.

Six iron folding stools occur in the Langobardic cemetery at Nocera Umbra in Italy.³⁴ One of these is inlaid with silver and niello³⁵ and is very closely related to the example from Annecy. The slotted upper stretchers are missing, but the form and shape of the legs are almost exactly the same. The decoration (FIG. 12) is rather different and may be perhaps tenuously related to that of the British Museum example (but see below). This stool is associated with a group of grave goods of varying date, but it might be safe to assume a sixth-century date for the stool.³⁶

Another inlaid stool is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.³⁷ It

³¹ *Album Caranda: les fouilles de Breny 1880* (St. Quentin, 1881), pl. 7, no. 1; E. Salin and A. France-Lanord, *Le fer à l'époque mérovingienne* (Paris, 1943), fig. 69.

³² Or possibly they may represent a structure like that on the Pavia stool, see below and PL. VII, A.

³³ It is briefly mentioned in E. Salin, *La civilisation mérovingienne*, III (Paris, 1957), p. 167. In my discussion of this piece I must acknowledge my indebtedness to M. Édouard Salin, Membre de l'Institut, and M. J. P. Laurant, Curator of the Annecy museum; but most especially to M. Pierre Burdin of Annecy for providing me with the sketches of the ornament which are used as the basis of FIG. 3.

³⁴ Found in graves 1, 5, 17, 60, 67 and 100.

³⁵ R. Pasqui, 'Necropoli barbarica di Nocera Umbra', *Monumenti Antichi*, XXV (1918), 171, figs. 21-22. Unfortunately these objects are not available for study at the moment and I have had to rely on the published drawings, which are very stylized. See further the description in N. Degraffi, *op. cit.* in note 5, p. 66.

³⁶ For the dating see R. Paribeni, *Le terme di Diocleziano e il Museo Nazionale Romano* (Rome, 1928), col. 350, and M. Salmi, 'La necropoli barbarica de Nocera Umbra', *Rassegna d'Arte*, VIII (1921), 152 f.

³⁷ Reg. No. 696-1904.

consists of two rectangular, inlaid iron frames pivoted in the centre with projecting feet and rounded upper terminals. At the top of each frame are two stretchers; the lower of these is plain and carries the leather seat, while the other is decorated,

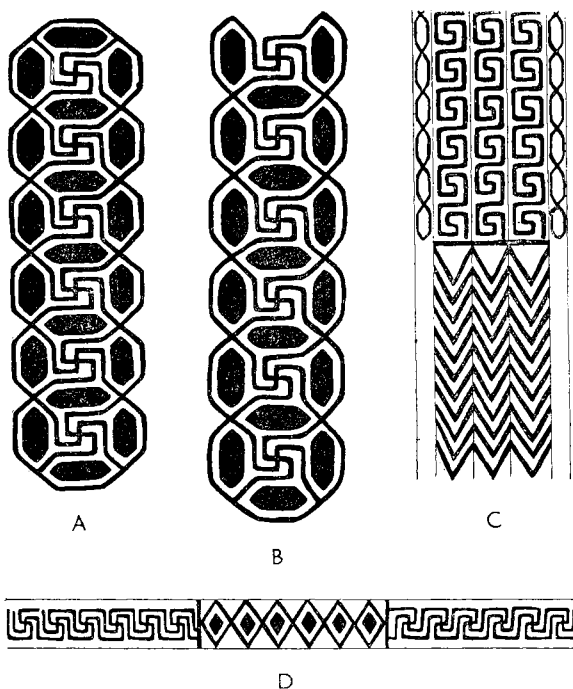


FIG. 11

Diagrammatic representation of the inlaid ornament on the stool in Annecy Museum (p. 47)

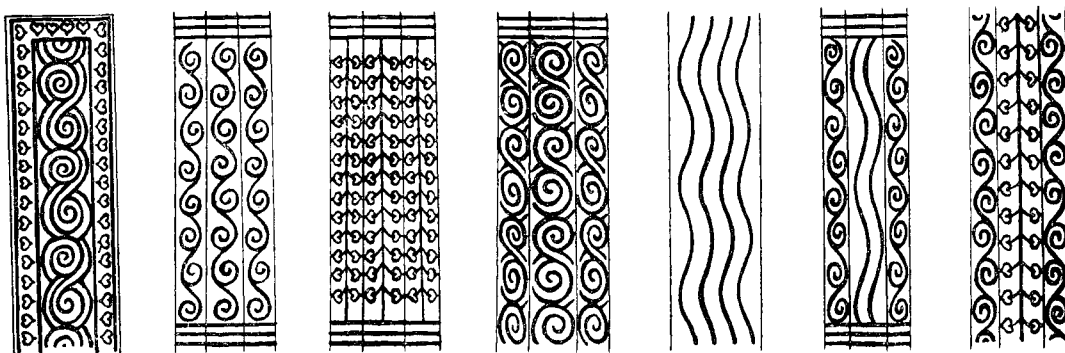


FIG. 12

Diagrammatic representation of the inlaid ornament on a stool from Nocera Umbra, Italy (p. 47)

as are the legs, with inlaid silver and copper wire. The legs and the upper and lower stretchers are decorated with applied collars. The knob-like terminals are decorated with a foliate motif which, with the inlaid barbed pattern of wire, has

caused the stool to be attributed to a Byzantine twelfth-century context, although this dating is arbitrary and of arguable accuracy.

The closest parallel to the British Museum stool, as has already been pointed out by Degraasi, is provided by the folding stool found in building a bridge across the river Ticino at Pavia in 1950 (PL. VII, A).³⁸ The construction is elaborate. The two upper stretchers are of hogs-back shape, with upturned, knob-like terminals; a plain bar below them supported the seat, which has been reconstructed as a series of straps. About a quarter of the way along each bar two supports make a 50° angle with the bar and join a straight, vertical bar which is pivoted at the centre. The same process is repeated for the lower part of the stool where the

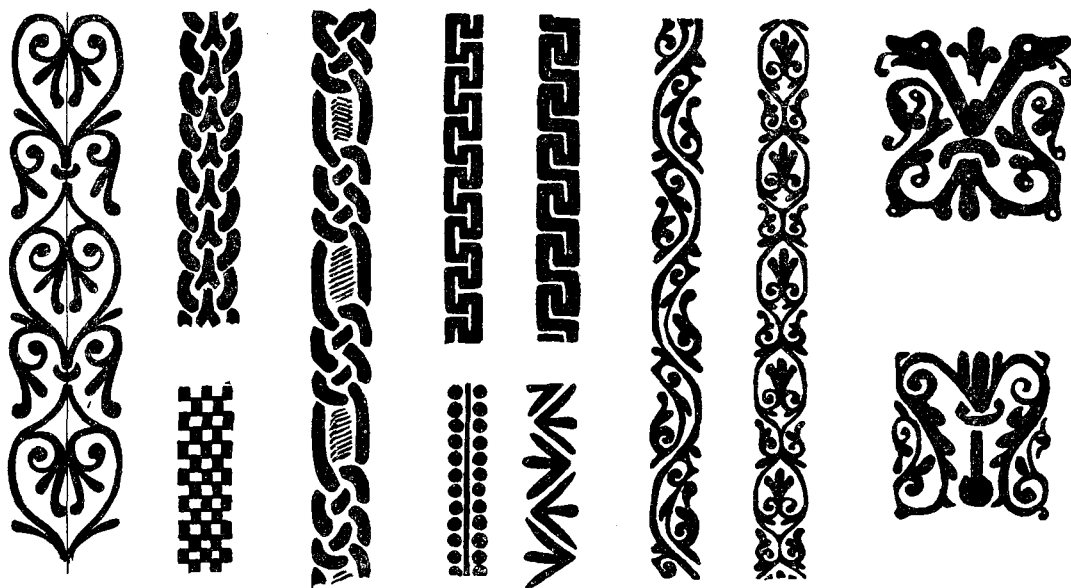


FIG. 13

Diagrammatic representation of the inlaid ornament of the stool from Pavia, Italy (p. 49)

bottom stretcher is hog-backed and turned down to hoof-like feet. The whole is inlaid with silver and gold in varying patterns (FIG. 13). The structure of the pivot³⁹ is of great interest as it is formed of a rivet with a domed head at either end. This mechanism is exactly similar to that on the British Museum stool, as is the use of the hoofs as feet. The use of hoofs or other forms of animal feet as terminals of the legs of stools is quite a common conceit on this sort of object⁴⁰ and stems back to classical Greek times.⁴¹

³⁸ *Fasti Archaeologici*, IV (1949), no. 5319, fig. 141; P. E. Schramm, *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik*, I (Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae Historica, XIII, no. 1, Stuttgart, 1954), 331 f. and pls. 31-33; Degraasi, *op. cit.* in note 5, p. 56, pls. x-xxii.

³⁹ Schramm, *op. cit.* in note 38, pl. 32b and c.

⁴⁰ Cf. the fragments from Avernas-le-Baudin, Belgium, in *Guide sommaire du musée arch. (Maison Curtius)*, sections belgo-romaine et franque (Liège), p. 12; also the stool from Ostia, de Ridder, *op. cit.* in note 21, no. 2156, pl. xxviii. The latter, incidentally, is plated with silver but is purely classical in character.

⁴¹ Richter, *op. cit.* in note 8, fig. 112, as depicted on a stamnos in the Munich collection.

The 'Throne of Dagobert'⁴² is the only surviving post-Roman *sella curulis*. It is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and for many years belonged to the abbey of St. Denis. The stool is ascribed to Dagobert by Abbot Suger (born 1081 and abbot of St. Denis from 1122 until his death in 1151) who writes:

'Nec minus nobilem gloriosi regis Dagoberti cathedram, in qua, ut perhibere solet antiquitas, reges Francorum, suscepto regni imperio, ad suscipienda optimatum suorum hominia primum sedere consueverant, tum pro tanti excellentia officii, tum etiam pro operis ipsius precio, antiquatam et disruptam refici fecimus.'⁴³

It can be seen from this description that the stool was restored by Abbot Suger and it is usually believed that the pierced openwork at the sides and the back was added by him. The lower part of the stool is usually dated, on the grounds of its ornament, to the early Carolingian period.⁴⁴ Schramm points out that the tradition that it was the coronation stool of the king of the Franks is interesting in the light of a stool of similar form to be seen in a miniature portraying Lothar I in a manuscript in the British Museum which is dated 845.⁴⁵ This stool, however, has little relationship to the example at present under discussion.

Another inlaid stool of much later date, quoted by Schramm, is the thirteenth-century stool in the Museo dell'opera del Duomo in Perugia,⁴⁶ which is of wood, elaborately decorated and inlaid with ivory and metal. Like the 'Throne of Dagobert', this stool has ferocious animal heads at the top of the legs and lion-paws at the feet.

Emery records nine iron folding stools from the Nubian cemetery at Ballana, some of which are fitted with bronze feet.⁴⁷ One of these stools has six uprights and each of the six feet take the form of the front half of an animal. The stools are dated to the period between the third and the sixth centuries and are in a classical tradition.

We have a continuous pictorial record of folding stools in manuscript art (FIG. 14). Some of the portrayals are careful, and presumably accurate. Representations of them in the classical period have been summarized by Miss Richter,⁴⁸ in Daremberg and Saglio⁴⁹ and, more recently, by Jessup.⁵⁰ Post-Roman folding stools have never been dealt with in the same detail and we must list a few of the places where they occur (see also FIG. 14). In the manuscripts they are illustrated

⁴² J. Hubert, 'Le fauteuil du roi Dagobert', *Demareteion*, I (1935), 17 f.; C. Lenormant, 'Notice sur la siège de Dagobert', in C. Cahier and A. Marty, *Mélanges archéologiques*, I (Paris, 1847/9), 157; Schramm, *op. cit.* in note 38, 326 f., pls. 29-30; M. Conway, 'The Abbey of Saint-Denis and its ancient treasures', *Archaeologia*, LXVI (1915), 121, fig. 5.

⁴³ *De administratione*, XXXIV: see E. Panofsky, *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St. Denis and its art treasures* (Princeton, 1946), 72, 192, fig. 20.

⁴⁴ R. Lantier and J. Hubert, 'Les origines de l'art français', in *Nouvelle encyc. illustrée de l'art français* (Paris, 1947), 147, followed by Schramm, *op. cit.* in note 38, p. 327.

⁴⁵ B.M.Add.MSS. 37768 f. 4 r: illustrated by Schramm, *op. cit.* in note 38, fig. 35, and *id.*, *Die deutschen Kaiser und Könige in Bildern ihrer Zeit*, I, 751-1152 (Leipzig/Berlin, 1928), fig. 18a.

⁴⁶ Described and illustrated in detail by A. Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der romanischen Zeit, XI-XIII Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1923), pls. xl-xlii, and further illustrated by Schramm, *op. cit.* in note 38, pl. 34b.

⁴⁷ W. B. Emery, *The Royal Tombs of Ballana and Qustul* (Cairo, 1938), pl. 95, p. 359.

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.* in note 8, *passim*.

⁴⁹ *L.c.* in note 19.

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.* in note 24, 26 f.



FIG. 14. FOLDING STOOLS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL ART

a, b. Modena cathedral archives i. n. 2 f. 156, and Cod. Vat. Reg. Christ. 438. f. lv, both 10th cent. copies of 9th cent. originals (after Schramm); *c.* Ivory casket in Rome (Venturi, II, fig. 428); *d.* Ivory, 9th cent., of school of Tours (Goldschmidt, I, pl. lxx, 153); *e.* French MS. of 10th cent. (after Viollet-le-Duc); *f.* Cod. Egberti (Trier Stadtbibl. cod. 24), c. 980 (after Janzen); *g.* Ivory panel, c. 962-73 (?) (Goldschmidt, II, pl. v, 13); *h.* French ivory casket, c. 1100 (Goldschmidt, II, pl. 50); *i.* Mosan ivory panel, c. 1100 (Goldschmidt, II, pl. xlvii, 166); *j.* Panel in St. Mark's, Venice, 12th cent. (after Venturi), (pp. 50 ff)

mostly in tenth-century contexts, as for example in the picture of Archbishop Egbert of Trier in the *Codex Egberti* (Trier Stadtbibl. Cod. 24),⁵¹ which is dated to c. 980 (FIG. 14, f). The portrait of Lothar I in B.M. Add. MSS. 37768 seated on a stool that might be interpreted as the 'Throne of Dagobert' has already been mentioned. Other emperors are portrayed seated on similar folding stools; Charlemagne, for example, is seen on a stool in an eleventh-century copy of a ninth-century manuscript, the *Capitulary of Ansegis* (Gotha Bibl. 84 f 2v),⁵² and Pippin appears on a folding stool in a late-eleventh-century north Italian manuscript (Modena Cathedral archives Ord. 1. n. 2 f. 156).⁵³ The stools are usually cushioned and appear to be used indiscriminately with the crossed legs to the front or to the side.⁵⁴ The cushioning can clearly be seen in the stool portrayed in the relief of St. Demetrios at St. Mark's, Venice, where the bolster-like cushion appears on top of the leather or fabric seat (FIG. 14, j); cushioning of this sort is frequent in these representations, as can be seen in FIG. 14. Folding stools also appear on ivories and other representational art of the post-Roman period⁵⁵ and here again it seems to be immaterial whether the legs are to the side or to the front. In the Roman period the correct use appears to have been with the crossed legs to the side.⁵⁶

Human busts do not appear to occur on any stool that I have encountered save, secondarily, on the Dagobert Throne where heads appear on the superstructure added by Suger. The style and form of the heads on the British Museum stool will be discussed below. Animal heads of cat-like form (PL. VIII, B), however, occur on a Roman stool from Hungary in Mainz.⁵⁷

Decoration. The ornament of our stool is stylistically difficult to parallel. Certain ornamental elements, such as the lattice patterns, are so common as to arouse no comment at all in any period from the beginning of our era onwards. Other elements, such as the pelta within the wavy band, surmounted by a loose and formless tendril, seem impossible to parallel, while even the heads that decorate the terminals of each leg present many problems and are not easy to place in a fixed and dated context.

The hoofs at the bottom of each leg are paralleled by the series of animal-paws and bird-claws that appear on stools of all periods from classical Greek times onwards.⁵⁸ There are to my knowledge no exact parallels for these hoofs on the few surviving examples of furniture, though hoofs do occur on the Pavia stool. Similarly, so far as I know, human heads do not appear on any of the surviving folding stools, save only those added to the Dagobert Throne (p. 50), presumably

⁵¹ H. Jantzen, *Ottotonische Kunst* (München, 1947), fig. 92.

⁵² Schramm (1928), *op. cit.* in note 45, fig. 9 b.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, fig. 10 a.

⁵⁴ But see below.

⁵⁵ A. Grabar, 'Le trône des martyrs', *Cahiers archéologiques*, VI (1952), pl. vi; A. Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, II (Milan, 1902), fig. 370; cf. also the panel of St. George from the same place, *ibid.*, fig. 371.

⁵⁶ Cf. the tenth-century panel from Milan or Reichenau, A. Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser*, II (Berlin, 1918), pl. v, 13 and the slightly earlier example, *ibid.*, I, pl. lxxv, 153, of the school of Tours.

⁵⁷ Römisch-Germanisches Zentral-Museum, Mainz, reg. no. O.1810.

⁵⁸ See Richter, *op. cit.* in note 8, and Jessup, *op. cit.* in note 24.

by Abbot Suger, in the twelfth century. The animal heads on the Hungarian stool from Mainz (PL. VIII, B) have little to tell us.

Although the inlaid ornament of the British Museum stool is not exactly paralleled on similar surviving objects, certain small details may be taken as indicating its relationship with some of them. It is noticeable that on the Annecy stool certain spaces in the developed swastika pattern are filled with inlaid metal plates (PL. VIII, C); the same technique is used to fill in the centres of the lozenges on the top stretchers. This technique can be related to the inlaid metal plates in the zig-zag and lozenge patterns of the British Museum stool where the same filling of a running, geometrical pattern can be seen. The running pelta ornament of the British Museum stool can perhaps be considered as a formalized, or even degenerate form of the regular foliate ornament on the hogs-backed stretcher of the Pavia stool (FIG. 13). It might even be possible to venture a similar comparison with the foliate ornament of the stool from Nocera Umbra (FIG. 12). These small similarities must not be laboured and are probably fortuitous; the most significant parallel is the filling of running patterns with inlaid plates.

Even when we look outside the rather narrow field of study provided by ornamented metal stools of this type, we are at once struck by the comparative rarity of ornamental parallels among the multifarious iron objects decorated in a similar technique. The cross-hatched panels are reasonably easy to parallel: the loop of the well-known iron buckle from the Bifrons cemetery in Kent⁵⁹ is decorated with similar lattice hatching; a buckle of the same form from Karlich on the Rhine,⁶⁰ a sword pommel from Vendel, Grave I, Sweden,⁶¹ and fragments from Carnuntum⁶² and Pry, Namur, Belgium⁶³ demonstrate the use of this motif throughout Europe in the dark ages. But this motif is of little use in giving either a date or a cultural milieu for the manufacture of the British Museum stool. It is an unimportant detail in the stool's ornament and one that would not be seen when the stool was completely folded.

The filled-in running lozenge pattern can again be paralleled in inlaid metal work, for instance on the silver inlaid bronze strap-end from Chessel Down in the Isle of Wight.⁶⁴ A similar, but less pronounced, parallel for this feature is to be seen on a buckle from Alfriston.⁶⁵ It is not, however, a very common motif; the usual running pattern of the post-Roman period which appears on inlaid metalwork and ivory and in manuscripts has a single stroke which divides one lozenge from the next.⁶⁶ Similarly, the zig-zag lines with inlaid triangles, while not common in this period, do occur.

The pelta within a wavy band is impossible to parallel either in this medium

⁵⁹ E. T. Leeds, *Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology* (Oxford, 1936), pl. vii b.

⁶⁰ W. Holmqvist, *Tauschierte Metallarbeiten des Nordens* (Kungl. Vitterhets, Historie och Antikvitets Akademien's Handlingar, LXX, pt. 2 (Stockholm, 1951), fig. 25, 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, fig. 71.

⁶² *Ibid.*, fig. 6.

⁶³ A. Dasnoy, 'Les premières damasquinures mérovingiennes de la région namuroise', *Annales soc. archéol. de Namur*, XLVII (1954), pl. ii.

⁶⁴ V. I. Evison, 'Early Anglo-Saxon inlaid metalwork', *Antiq. J.*, XXXV (1955), pl. viii a.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pl. v c.

⁶⁶ Salin and France-Lanord, *op. cit.* in note 31, pl. xxx-xxxi, 1.

or in any other, the nearest related motif in inlaid metal being that on a small iron buckle inlaid with silver from Castel Trosino, grave 142,⁶⁷ but this is a long way from the ornament of the British Museum stool. The wavy band in itself is known and is recognized as a distinct type of ornament by Salin and France-Lanord⁶⁸ but nowhere does it occur combined with the pelta and the degenerate foliate band. This form of pelta occurs frequently in the art of Roman and sub-Roman Europe, for instance on a number of Roman tessellated pavements,⁶⁹ inlaid in niello on pieces from the Gallo-Roman military grave at Vermand (Aisne),⁷⁰ in solid bronze on an openwork disc in the Linz Museum⁷¹ and on a very similar object in the Trau collection, Vienna.⁷² Two tendrils running out on either side of a palmette are perhaps the forerunners, or successors, of the curved, foliate

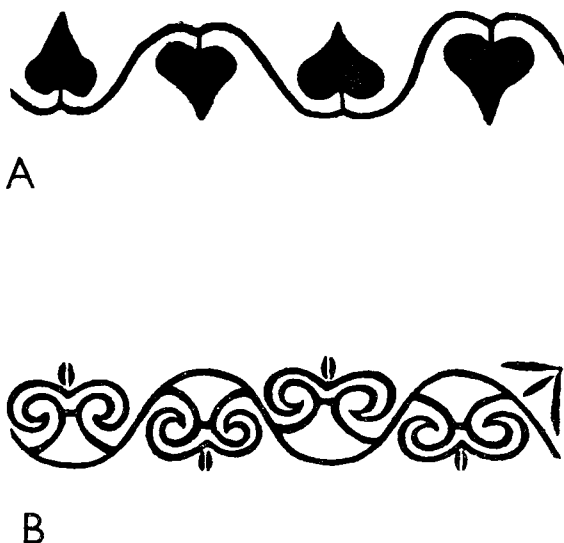


FIG. 15

DIAGRAM OF ORNAMENTAL DETAILS

- a. Late Roman tessellated pavement, Halicarnassus, Caria.
 b. 6th century stone carving, Cividale, Italy.
 (p. 54 f.)

band that appears above each pelta on the stool. We must consider this palmette only as a degenerate or developed form of the regular tendril pattern; it is easy to see how the pattern could grow from such a simple motif as that which occurs for example on the borders of certain pavements from the late Roman villa at

⁶⁷ R. Mengarelli, 'La necropoli barbarica di Castel Trosino', *Monumenti Antichi*, XII (1902), fig. 211; N. Åberg, *Die Goten und Langobarden in Italien* (Uppsala, 1923), fig. 283. Cf. also the inlaid pattern illustrated by H. Spoll, *Die Alamannengräber von Hailfingen in Wüstenberg* (Berlin, 1939), pl. 28, 9 and 15.

⁶⁸ *Op. cit.* in note 31, fig. 21.

⁶⁹ E.g. from London: R. P. Hinks, *Catalogue of the Greek, Etruscan and Roman Paintings and Mosaics in the British Museum* (London, 1933), fig. 109, etc.

⁷⁰ T. Eck, *Les deux cimetières gallo-romains de Vermand et de Saint-Quentin* (Paris/St. Quentin, 1891), pl. ii, 2 and 7.

⁷¹ A. Riegl, *Die spättrömische Kunst-Industrie nach den funden in Österreich-Ungarn*, I (Vienna, 1901), pl. xv, 6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pl. xv, 4.

Halicarnassus (FIG. 15, *a*)⁷³ and on the sixth-century pavement from Carthage.⁷⁴ An even closer relationship can be seen on a stone carving from Cividale⁷⁵ of sixth-century date (FIG. 15, *b*). It is an unfortunate fact, however, that no immediate parallels present themselves for comparison with the main decorative motif of the stool.

Technically the form of the human head is almost without parallel. The only example of an iron human head inlaid with another metal, of which I have knowledge, is that illustrated by Holmqvist from Väte, Gotland.⁷⁶ The head of this horse-trapping is, however, very formalized and is not related to the heads that terminate the legs of the British Museum stool. The almost rectangular head, high forehead and pronounced eyebrows of our busts are closely allied to the features of late Roman portrait-busts such as one (no. 1959) of fifth-century date in the British Museum,⁷⁷ a fifth-century bust in the Terme⁷⁸ and the bronze St. Peter, bearded in a similar manner, in St. Peter's, Rome.⁷⁹ But our greatest difficulty is one of scale. It is hard to draw parallels in terms that are more than general between these small iron heads and, say, life-sized marble sculpture: it is even hard to draw parallels with such objects as the ivory which depicts a bearded figure of St. Paul in the Walters Art Gallery.⁸⁰ It would be tedious to enter into further discussion of the parallels for this head—suffice it to say that it would not be out of place in a late-fifth-century, or early-sixth-century, context.

It is profitless to enter into further discussion as to the parallels of the simpler patterns on the stool beyond the evidence provided by inlaid metal-work. The running lozenge, zig-zag and lattice pattern are too common in too many periods for comment here.

Technique of inlay. The technique of inlaying iron and other metals has been thoroughly discussed by Holmqvist⁸¹ and Salin.⁸² The conclusions reached by them are perhaps of interest in our study of this stool and although they can help little in determining the date of an object, they may give a general indication of the period to which it should belong. As a rule it would appear that the earlier examples of inlaid metalwork use thicker and heavier wire and plates than the later examples.⁸³ This is generally true for the Merovingian region and while the rule has its exceptions it can be taken as a reasonably accurate guide. By these standards the stool, which is inlaid with the heavier type of wire and plates, should be of fifth- or sixth-century date.

⁷³ Hinks, *op. cit.* in note 69, figs. 151 and 152.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, fig. 140.

⁷⁵ Venturi, *op. cit.* in note 55, II, fig. 109.

⁷⁶ W. Holmqvist, *op. cit.* in note 60, fig. 58, 4.

⁷⁷ R. P. Hinks, *Greek and Roman Portrait-Sculpture* (London, 1935), pl. 48 *b*.

⁷⁸ B. M. Felletti Maj, *Museo Nazionale Romano, i Ritratti* (Roma, 1953), fig. 325, and p. 163, where it is compared with H. P. L'Orange, *Studien zur Geschichte des spätantiken Porträts* (Oslo, 1933), fig. 220.

⁷⁹ Venturi, *op. cit.* in note 55, I, fig. 167.

⁸⁰ The Walters Art Gallery, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (Baltimore, 1947), no. 102.

⁸¹ *Op. cit.* in note 60.

⁸² *Op. cit.* in note 33.

⁸³ For general discussion on this subject see *ibid.*, p. 166 f.

CONCLUSIONS

Bearing in mind the technical conclusion as to the date of this object we must look for further evidence of a late Roman or early dark-age date. First of all the parallels of ornament, and even more of structure, show that this stool cannot be considered as a product of metropolitan Rome; if of Roman date it is of provincial workmanship. In form the split upper stretcher can be paralleled on provincial sites as far apart as Kent⁸⁴ and Hungary.⁸⁵ The double folding action is, however, without parallel. The fact that the stool is inlaid is interesting in that, with the exception of the classical Roman stool from Ostia in the Louvre, all the inlaid stools known to us are of post-Roman date. Three (the Pavia, Annecy and Victoria and Albert Museum stools) can be considered post-Roman on the basis of art-historical dating, and another inlaid stool (from Franques de Breny) was found in a grave with objects dating from the sixth century, while another was found in the Langobardic cemetery at Nocera Umbra. On these rather slender grounds it might be possible to date the stool to the post-Roman period. It is interesting in this connexion to note the filled running-lozenge pattern of the Annecy stool and compare it with the similar pattern on the British Museum example. Further, it is interesting to note the mechanical parallel between the crossing of the legs of the Pavia stool and the British Museum example. The stool must, when seen in this light, belong to the post-Roman group of stools rather than to those from a provincial Roman context.

It has been demonstrated that the ornamental features of this stool are difficult to parallel. A hypothetical derivation from the late classical leaf motif has been advanced for the pelta within a wavy line that forms the main ornamental feature of the stool, but the nearest parallel that could be adduced was the border of the Cividale slab (FIG. 15) dated to the sixth century. Similarly the dating of the heads at the terminals of the legs has proved unsatisfactory although certain fifth-sixth-century features are apparent.

On the basis of the evidence of the parallels, technical and ornamental, that have been drawn in this paper it might be possible to give a post-Roman date to this object. Tentatively it might further be possible to date the stool to the sixth century of our era. A number of disturbing factors, however, render it impossible to make a more conclusive judgment; two of these are that the split upper stretcher is purely Roman in form, while the crossing and pivoting of the legs is best paralleled on a ninth-century example.

It is similarly difficult to ascribe this stool to any particular geographical area, but on the basis of the parallels both of form and ornament adduced here, it would be reasonable perhaps to place its area of manufacture in the south-east of France or in the north of Italy. Further study of unpublished material in the museums of France and Italy might help to solve this geographical problem and might also solve the even bigger problem of its chronological setting.

⁸⁴ Jessup, *op. cit.* in note 24, p. 22.

⁸⁵ G. Karoly, *l.c.* in note 26.