

XX.—A BRONZE GRAVE-CHALICE FROM HEXHAM  
PRIORY CHURCH.

BY WILFRED CRIPPS, C.B.

[Read on the 29th April, 1891.]

THE chalice found in the stone coffin of a priest at Hexham priory church must certainly be one of the most ancient vessels of its class that has yet been discovered. Many of these are now known, but none seem to be earlier than the twelfth century, from which time they range down to the chalice found in the coffin of archbishop W. de Melton, buried at York minster in 1340.

The most ancient appear to be two of those at Chichester, which were discovered in the tombs assigned to bishops Seffride and Hilary, both prelates of the twelfth century, but these are soon followed by the fine chalice brought to light only last year at Canterbury, from the tomb attributed by the best authorities to archbishop Hubert Walter, who died in 1205.

The characteristics of these three are shared by those which are supposed to be of the same period, and have been long preserved at York minster, with the cup we have already mentioned as pertaining to archbishop Melton. The dates of these are only to be guessed from the fashion of the vessels; they all have the round foot, with the knop or usual plain projection in the middle of the stem, and have the slight lip, which disappears soon afterwards, for it is not found upon any chalices which are known to belong to the second half of the thirteenth century.

The Hexham chalice is of an earlier type; it is of a rude and Romanesque character, and its more highly arched foot and almost globe-shaped stem quite distinguish it from the chalices of even the twelfth century.

It more reminds us, but in feeling and general character rather than in detail, of the noble cup preserved in the Mauritius church at Münster. This is attributed by the learned Dr. Lübke to the eleventh century, it having been found in the tomb of bishop Frederick of Münster, who died in 1084. This, too, is of brass, like the Hexham vessel, though the latter is mentioned as having been strongly gilt. Many of these chalices are of base metal, but not all; chalices of silver being often found in the coffins of prelates and priests of great distinction; and ancient wills occasionally contain the wish of the testator



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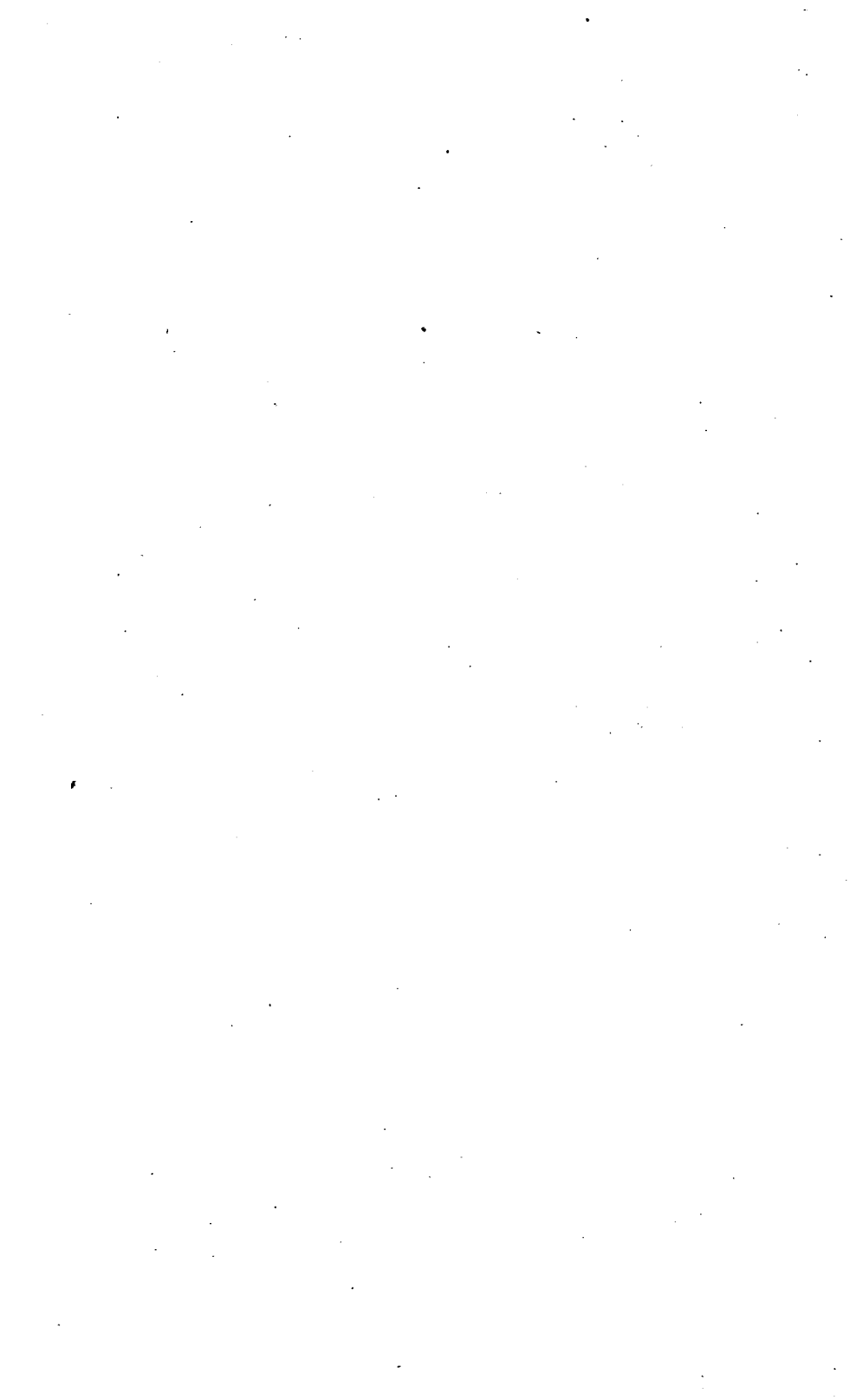
2.



3.

C. C. Hodges, Photo.

HEXHAM GRAVE-CHALICE



that his massing chalice, which would almost necessarily have been of silver, should be buried with him.

Much that is interesting about coffin chalices has been given in the *Archaeological Journal*, vol. iii., in an article from the pen of the late Mr. Albert Way.<sup>1</sup>

DESCRIPTION OF THE CHALICE ; by Charles Clement Hodges.

The chalice measures  $2\frac{9}{16}$  inches in height : the diameter of the bowl is  $2\frac{5}{16}$  inches, and that of the foot  $2\frac{1}{8}$  inches. It weighs 3·235 ounces troy. It is made of bronze, and is composed of four pieces. The bowl, the foot, the stem, and a band of bead ornament where the bowl joins the stem. The metal has been beaten with a hammer to the required form, and some concentric annular markings seem to indicate that it has been finished in a lathe. The stem is formed by bending a piece of flat bronze in the form of a convex ring, as the joint is quite distinct. Into the two ends of this ring the bowl and foot are respectively fastened, by 'brazing' probably. The small beaded band is used to cover the junction of the stem and the bowl. The foot has a flat 'lip,' and the chalice has now a 'tip' forward, but whether this is intentional or due to subsequent damage it is difficult to say. The thickness of the metal is nowhere as much as one-sixteenth of an inch, and the whole has been heavily gilded. The gilding is most perfect under the foot, a portion of the surface which would naturally be subject to the least wear.

The chalice is said to have been found in the transept of the church in 1860, but the exact locality is not known. It was most probably in the southern portion of the transept, the site of which, in the days of the pre-Conquest church, was devoted to a cemetery for the clergy, and it may have been in the grave of some notable ecclesiastic that the chalice was discovered. It is difficult to even guess who could have been its owner. Its date cannot be as early as the time of the last bishop of Hagustald, nor very much later than the death of the first prior of the Augustinian house. May it have belonged to one of those hereditary priests of the church of Hexham who intervened between the decline of the ancient see and the foundation of the priory by archbishop Thomas II. in 1113 ?

<sup>1</sup> Cripps, *Old English Plate*, 4th ed.; and *Archaeological Journal*, vol. xliii., may also be consulted with advantage.