

XIII.—THE ALLAN CROSIER.

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Among the antiquities which passed into the society's collection from the old Allan museum was an ivory crosier-head. It is little known, even locally, and appears almost entirely to have escaped general notice.

It is in the form of a dragon-headed volute containing an *Agnus Dei* which bears on its back a germmed cross. The Lamb holds one leg raised before it, while between the others runs a narrow strip representing the ground; it looks backwards over its shoulder, either in piety at the cross, or possibly with the courage of faith at the widely gaping jaws of the dragon; encircling it within the space enclosed by the volute runs a spray of highly conventionalized foliage, from which at intervals spring crocket-like leaves. Similar leaves springing from the neck of the piece support the volute behind the dragon's head. The stem, which is in section a pentagon with rounded angles, is too short to admit of a knop; inside the base is a threaded socket $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long. Two shallow grooves give a finish to the outer surface of the volute. It is $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches in length by $3\frac{7}{8}$ inches wide. (Plates xxxvi and xxxvii. Actual size.)

The design is a common one. The Lamb is symbolic of our Lord in the special aspect of Redeemer; while the dragon's head is said to represent the power of evil in defeat. The modelling is not, as might at first appear, in the round, but consists of two distinct faces in low relief separated by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of solid ivory, the spaces in the design being cut out of the material as though with a fretsaw. This naturally gives the piece a somewhat heavy appear-

ance. Slight traces of gilding remain in the recesses of the design, especially on the cross; but it is impossible to say whether the whole surface or only a part was originally gilt. Except for the minutest details, both sides are identical.

Although it has more than once been stated that this piece comes from Easby abbey, the provenance is unknown; it is possibly Scandinavian or English work of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century.

The history of the Allan museum, the immediate source from which it was acquired, is sufficiently well known, but as the facts are relevant they may be summarized here. This early collection, founded sometime about 1760-70 by Marmaduke Tunstall of Wycliffe-on-Tees, passed in 1791 to George Allan of Blackwell Grange, near Darlington, to whom it owes its name. It was in scope and intent a collection of objects relating to natural history, but besides some ethnographical specimens of the first importance it also contained a small number of antiquities. Both collectors made purchases not only locally but in the London market also, so that no presumption of local origin arises in respect of any of the contents.

Some time after the death of George Allan in 1800 his museum was purchased from his family by the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This was largely the result of the enthusiasm of one man, George Townshend Fox, who also compiled a catalogue of the collection as it stood when it came into the possession of the Literary and Philosophical Society in 1822, and it is to Fox's *Synopsis*¹ that we owe what information we possess of the contents of the Allan museum. In his introduction he gives a full history of the collection so far as he could recover it, and for details reference may be made to his work.

The Allan collection was the immediate cause of the

¹ *Synopsis of the Newcastle Museum*, by G. T. Fox, F.L.S., Newcastle, 1827.

formation of the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, which was originally inaugurated for the express purpose of taking it over from the Literary and Philosophical Society. This it did in 1829, and in 1834 the antiquities in the collection were assigned to the Society of Antiquaries, which was at that time housed under the same roof.

In the matter of publication the crosier-head has not been fortunate. With one exception (see below) all the notices of it which have appeared have been in local publications of greater or less obscurity. Perhaps this is as well, for these notices are not only inadequate but misleading.

The piece appears to have been published first by Clarkson in his *History of Richmond*, 1821, to whose cautious statement on the provenance all later attributions can be traced. Writing of Easby abbey, and in particular of Easby font, also in the Allan collection, he goes on to state (p. 362) that "Two crosiers in perfect preservation, are also to be met with at Blackwell Grange, which are reported to have been brought from Easby abbey." As the second crosier is demonstrably *not* from Easby, and as Clarkson's own statement was carefully qualified, it is surprising that the attribution should have been accepted by later writers in so uncritical a spirit. The engraving in the text is puerile, but serves to fix the identity.

Fox (*loc. cit.*, pp. 181-2) gives an excellent engraving and quotes Clarkson's notice, but adds nothing to our information. In 1851 a drawing by the artist W. B. Scott appeared in his *Antiquarian Gleanings in the North of England*, plate XIII; and again in 1900 two further illustrations of the piece appeared in our own *Proceedings*, one from a photograph by Mr. Parker Brewis, the other being a reproduction of a somewhat feeble cut taken from Fairholt's *Dictionary of Terms in Art*. The brief letterpress is, however, based on Fox, and accepts the Easby provenance without question.²

² *Pro. S.A.N.* 2, IX, lvi and 216.



So much for local publication, and it might have been expected that, short and uninformative as the notices are, the illustrations alone would have ensured that the piece was not passed over by workers in this field generally. Yet by an odd combination of circumstances this is what has happened.

In 1868 the crosier was exhibited at the National Exhibition of Works of Art at Leeds, and that appears to have been the occasion of the taking of one or more casts, for there is one of our piece in the Victoria and Albert museum which was acquired in that year, while a second cast from a different (and much better) mould is to be seen at Oxford in the Ashmolean museum. Yet by 1876 J. O. Westwood had already somehow lost track of the collection in which the original was to be found, and in his *Catalogue of the Fictile Ivories in the South Kensington Museum*, p. 263, the locality does not appear in the description of the cast (no. 745). The omission was not unnaturally repeated in the *Catalogue of Pastoral Staves*, 1924, p. 35 (no. 39), and when the writer last saw it (in December, 1931) the cast was labelled "Locality Unknown."³

The only reference to be found in a general work is in Alfred Maskell's *Ivories*, 1905, p. 215, where our example is listed with a query among crosier-heads of the tenth century. But this notice, too, apart from the dating, is no more than a repetition of Fox, and it is almost certain that the author had not himself seen the original. It was, however, in consequence of this note of Maskell's that an inquiry was sent to Newcastle by the committee of the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1923 in view of their forthcoming Exhibition of Ivory Carvings. The inquiry must have reached the wrong quarter, for the answer was that no such ivory was in the Newcastle museum!⁴

³ The Ashmolean, by an unfortunate confusion of labels, was involved in a statement of which the novelty more than compensated for anything it might lack in simple truth. The Newcastle crosier was stated to be in *the Vatican!* But we who live in glass houses——!

⁴ *Ex inf.* Miss M. H. Longhurst.

This piece, then, has hitherto been known to specialists through two casts only, one unidentified, the other wrongly labelled; and through Maskell's note, which had actually been followed up, only to produce a blank denial. From the point of view of the outside worker all roads of inquiry seemed closed. It was the realization of this position, through recognizing the two casts, that first led the writer to think of adequate publication. Since then further facts have come to light.

The above brief review of the authorities shows clearly how flimsy is the evidence for the provenance which has been so readily accepted. Yet this is a question the importance of which no one would deny. It was therefore by a stroke of singularly good fortune that the writer recognized an entry in an eighteenth century sale catalogue which must refer to this piece.

The catalogue is that of the furniture of the Hon. Mr. Bateman, removed after his death from Old Windsor, and sold in London in May, 1774. Lot no. 73 reads as follows: "An ancient Greek crozier in ivory; and the crozier of Seabrook abbat of Gloucester 1457, taken out of his coffin."⁵ Now Seabrook's crozier is also in our museum, and what is more it came to us from the same source as that now in question. We know that by 1800, the date of George Allan's death, *at latest*, these two crosiers, Seabrook's and our ivory example, were associated in the same collection. The obvious inference is that lot 73 at the Bateman sale was purchased by Marmaduke Tunstall himself; but on any view of the facts it is surely incredible that Seabrook's crozier should have been sold in the same lot with one ivory crozier in 1774, and by 1800 have become separated from the first and yet fallen in with another.

What, then, of the Easby connection? Having carried back the history of the piece for forty-seven years prior to the earliest mention formerly known, we find it in a

⁵ British Museum, MSS. Cole, vol. XXXV, p. 9, quoted in Dugdale's *Monasticon*, ed. Ellis, 1817, I, 536 n.

London sale room without any suggestion of an origin at Easby, but on the contrary with the statement, for what it is worth, that the thing is Greek!^{5a}

It is easy to imagine what has happened. Clarkson published his history in 1821 and would be collecting his materials shortly before that. At Blackwell Grange his information must have been derived at best from the descendants, possibly even from the servants, of the man who had purchased, and to some extent formed, the collection. The first-hand information George Allan had possessed had died with him twenty years before, and Fox expressly mentions the difficulty he had in identifying the specimens so soon after as 1822. In circumstances like this, once a source is forgotten another is soon invented. Both crosiers in the collection at Blackwell Grange were clearly fathered on Easby abbey simply because it was the nearest ecclesiastical house of consequence. This obvious explanation may be accepted with all the more confidence inasmuch as the ascription of Seabrook's crosier to Easby is glaringly untrue as any competent guide could have seen by reading the brass plate on its stem.

Now that we have destroyed one attribution without being in a position to establish another, we are thrown back upon considerations of a general character if we are to try to determine the date and place of origin. Unfortunately there is little evidence to work upon. The comparative material is so inaccessible and so little studied that it is not yet possible to form conclusions on points like this with much confidence.

It would be of the first consequence if it could be shown that our example was a product of English craftsmanship, and there is nothing in the style against such an attribution; but the supposed connection with Easby which might have counted for much in favour of an English origin can no longer be relied upon. Parallels of a kind come from Italy, especially the northern districts, where a group

^{5a} It need hardly be pointed out that the suggestion of a Greek origin is quite unfounded, and is purely eighteenth century guesswork.

of pieces with the same subject and in the same material (sometimes coloured) are known to have been made in the fourteenth century.⁶ The likeness is not, however, very great, and is insufficient to support a satisfactory attribution. There is, moreover, a certain resemblance to Scandinavian work, and between England and Scandinavia the choice at present seems to lie.⁷

The date, too, is not easy to determine, and for similar reasons. The view expressed by Alfred Maskell (*supra*), and reflected till recently in our own labelling, assigned our example to the tenth century. But in the light of later work this can hardly stand. The voluted form of crosier had not at so early a date supplanted the tau-cross then in universal use, except in Ireland which retained the local "walking-stick" form. Early examples of volutes are dated to the eleventh century, but in no case where the centre is so elaborated as in the present. On the other hand, in the matter of mere technical efficiency we are a long way yet from the polished products of the French craftsmen of the fourteenth century. Although we know the subject to have been a popular one with Italian workers of that period, their treatment of it, as mentioned above, is not remarkably similar, and it is hardly conceivable that the century which produced the Soltikoff crosier and the Gothic mirror-cases should have been responsible for a piece which is in the purest Romanesque tradition.

Between the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries it is not easy to decide, and the question is perhaps best left open.⁸ But the treatment of the central design seems to suggest that this is an early experiment in the direction of the filling of the central space with a subject carving. So far as one can judge this was a development which did not come in much before the thirteenth century, volutes of

⁶ The British Museum and the Victoria and Albert each have a single example.

⁷ For much of the substance of this paragraph I am indebted to Miss M. H. Longhurst.

⁸ In a recent letter Miss Longhurst informs me that whereas she at one time thought this to be a twelfth century piece, she now assigns it to the thirteenth century.

an earlier period showing a dragon's head only. Examples are a bronze staff-head at Basle, eleventh century, and one in enamel from Chartres, now in the Bargello, Florence, twelfth century, possibly English work.⁹ There are also two ivory examples of the twelfth century in the Vatican.¹⁰ All these have the dragon's head only. The filled volute is found at the end of the twelfth century, but only where the filling is foliage and there is no dragon head; this must be regarded as a separate type. It is illustrated by two pieces from the graves of early bishops at St. David's.¹¹

On the other hand, many of the common enamelled crosiers of the thirteenth century from Limoges have figure subjects in the volutes. The heavy and archaic appearance of the present example suggests that the worker in metal proved at first able to deal more successfully with the problems involved in true modelling in the round than did the worker in ivory;¹² that in consequence his products for a time exceeded in popularity those of his less progressive fellow-craftsman; and that this may in part account for the undoubted rarity of ivory crosier-heads in this century.¹³ But this may only be an over elaborate explanation of what was, after all, simply a fashion, and it is not a view to which the sinewy realism of the thirteenth century ivory crosier, possibly English work, in the Ashmolean lends much support. It is, therefore, with all reserve that we suggest that a date about 1200 is on present evidence the most probable.

As a work of art no object, perhaps, on so limited a scale can claim to be of the very first consequence. Even

⁹ Both illustrated in Victoria and Albert museum *Catalogue of Pastoral Staves*, plate 3.

¹⁰ Casts are in the Victoria and Albert and the Ashmolean museums.

¹¹ Illustrated, *ibid.*, plate 4.

¹² The many problems of modelling in the round had already been faced, and with some success, by workers in ivory during the twelfth century, and even earlier; but not under the special conditions imposed by the form of the voluted crosier.

¹³ This is, however, only one aspect of a phenomenon which applies to ivories generally. Suggested explanations of their comparative rarity in this period are "a temporary failure in the supply of raw material and the revival and widespread development of monumental sculpture." M. H. Longhurst, *English Ivories*, 1926, p. 36.

were the subject more exacting, the execution less uncouth, this would still remain what by its nature it cannot avoid being, a product of the minor arts, at the best a piece of sensitive craftsmanship. But there are few objects in our museum which can claim to be considered as works of art at all. This is one of the exceptions. Within its limitations it is a thing of real beauty. It has all the vigour of a technique which has not fully mastered the medium it employs, while a certain authenticity of design shows that the lack of finish is not to be accounted for simply as the rustic workmanship of a copyist. This was the work of a master in his day, and for that reason to look upon and to handle the product of his craft is still no common pleasure.



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