

Grieg, Sigurd

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Światowit 24, 611-617

1962

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SIGURD GRIEG

A NORWEGIAN DRINKING-HORN FROM THE EARLY 1300'S

Among the earlier antiques belonging to the archaeological collections of the University of Oslo there is a drinking-horn from South Austad farm (No. 1.4), Austad parish, Bygland in Aust-Agder. This horn is 37 cm long (dagger length) and approx. 8 cm. in average thickness. There is a bronze mount round the orifice. This mount is decorated with a plain, engraved vine. Along the upper and lower border of the decoration there is a horizontal line. The lower end of the mount ends in a number of pointed triangular tongues, decorated with shading — while the upper end has smooth edge for drinking. This bronze mount appears to be an addition of a later date as it partly covers and obscures the carved plant decoration in the horn itself. Contrary to what is the case with most mediaeval drinking-horns, the orifice-edge lacks any form of inscription. It will be noticed that the horn has no stand and thus had to be emptied at one draught.

The lower end of the horn is quite smooth, ending in a plain bronze mount having a knob with a profiled hollow underneath. Otherwise the entire horn is covered with carved mediaeval vine-like plant decorations having large, broad leaves. Between the leaves and the vine itself may be seen two horsemen and a hound. One of the riders is obviously a king with a crown on his head. The hound is following the scent and the king is following the hound. The royal steed is carved out with great care, with a bushy tail and equipped with a saddle, which has been done by shading in squares, reins and harness with bells. The royal figure has been rather poorly carved. The king's face is turned towards the spectator and he is wearing chain-mail trousers reaching to the knees, while the feet are bare. He is not using stirrups. The crown is plainly dentated, the projections consisting partly of crosses, partly of gothic leaves. The coat-of-arms on the shield also consists of three „gothic” plants connected by a stem.

In the next row there is a knight or cavalier — he too being mounted, carrying a three-sided shield and cloth cap. This knight is also barefoot, but both rider and horse are even worse carved than the king, apart from the fact that the knight's face is seen in profile. The pointed shield, three-sided like the king's, has a cross and dots as coat-of-arms. In front of the knight's mount

there is a hunting-hound running. The tail of the hound may be seen between the legs of the horse. As both hounds are shown running there can be little doubt that the decoration depicts a hunting-scene — and that the plant-decorations are intended to represent the „forest”. The composition is completed with a tongued contour along its lower edge¹.

The ornamentation of the horn is of excellent workmanship. It appears that the horn-carver has been familiar with such ornamentation in wood-carving. The depiction of the figures seems on the contrary to have caused the artist considerable difficulty.

This is, however, a well-known characteristic of nordic art from the time of the migration of peoples and the Viking-age, compare for instance the art-

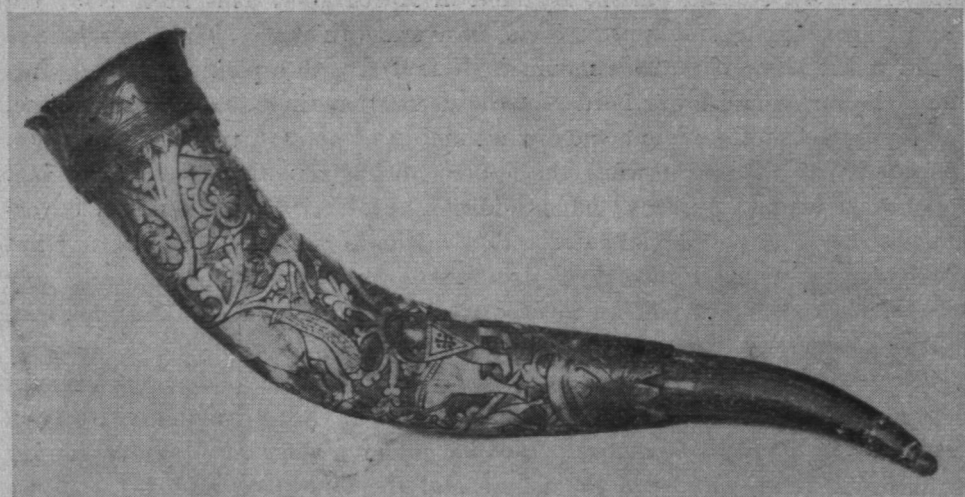


Fig. 1. Drinking-horn from South Austad farm, Austad parish, Bygland in Aust-Agder.

-work on the Oseberg-wagon and its ornamentation with the ornamentation on the sledges².

It seems justifiable to consider this Norwegian drinking-horn as a Norwegian imitation of a Byzantine hunting-horn decorated with hunting- or battle scenes, as for instance Ole Worm's hunting-horn from about 1100 A.D. (Cf. Poul Nörlund in *Fra Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark* 1950, s. 1—10) (*From the work of the National Museum* 1950, p. 1—10).

But how old is this drinking-horn? An examination of the crown takes us without difficulty back to the crown of Magnus Lagaböter from 1263—1280

¹ C. 1013. Unpublished. *Archeological Collections, Univ. of Oslo*.

² H. Shetelig, *Illustrations in the Art of the Iron Age*, p. 224 and following, "Archeology, *History Art. Culture*", Bergen 1947.

as it is represented in a drawing of Thor K i e l l a n d³ based on the preserved royal seal. But a similar crown, only slightly more elaborate, may be found in the royal seal (illustration l. c., fig. 132)⁴ of Hakon V Magnusson (died 1319). His crown appears to resemble the crown on the drinking-horn as closely as is possible. The „royal” shield may, however, give even more reliable evidence-

As far as is known there is not a single three-sided shield extant from the Middle Ages in Northern Europe — all that we have are drawings of such shields, but at least these permit us to follow the main steps in the deve-



Fig. 2. Detail drinking-horn from South Austad farm.

lopment of such shields. The oldest type of three-sided is to be found on the Bayeux tapestry. In shape it resembles a paper kite, is quite flat and pointed downwards. The shield of the Bayeux tapestry is semicircular at the upper end and is in part provided with a coat-of-arms, partly only with an umbo and sometimes with an umbo in connection with an elaborate cruciformed iron-mount under and around it. From Norway this type is represented by

³ T. Kielland, *Norwegian Goldsmith's Art in the Middle Ages*. Oslo 1926; p. 79, frieze fig. 5.

⁴ H. Fett, *Studies on Norwegian Mediaeval Seals*. "Annual Reports of the Archaeological Society", 1903, p. 78, fig. 15.

the shield depicted for the month of May on the Baldishol tapestry from Nes in Hedmark, of late 12th century date. This shield, however, is not provided with boss or mount, but is quartered with decorations in different colours. Such shields were used both on horseback and by infantry and were carried in a strap across the shoulder. In battles on horseback they played an important part because they covered the rider's left side which has always been difficult for a rider to protect. On the Hyllestad-gateway from Setesdal Sigurd Favnesbane is shown with such a shield whose upper edge is curved — this shield is also provided with an umbo. The Hyllestad-gateway was carved between 1170—1200⁵.

Such a shield from Röldal Church in Hardanger — doubtless originally hung as an epitaph — is reproduced in "Museum Wormianum" and later in "Museum Regium". It is supposed that this shield was made of laminated wood with a hide covering. It is concave, has a curved upper end, and is pointed at the lower end. The reverse side has three handles probably made of leather. A triangular shield is also depicted on a 13th century equestrian figure from Kvale in Sogndal in Sogn, now preserved at the Historical Museum of the University of Bergen. But a closer examination of this shield will reveal that it is cut straight across at the upper end. The change we here encounter seems to have been innovated towards the end of the 12th century. Such shields are first depicted in the *Hortus deliciarum* from about 1180⁶.

The well-known set of chess-pieces from Lewis in the Hebrides dates from about the year 1200 A.D. This set has frequently been mentioned in literature and was in all probability carved by a Norse bone-carver. In this set of chessmen all the warriors' shields are three-sided with approximately straight upper-edge (see f. inst. *Det norske Folks Liv og Historie*, II, p. 339) (*The Norwegian Peoples Life and History*, II, p. 339), while others have curved upper edges.

It is of interest to the present subject that among these chessmen there are some "Queens" which have been carved with drinking-horns in their hands. (see: *Historical Remarks on the Introduction of the Game of Chess*

⁵The shield from the Hyllestad-gateway may be compared to the slightly earlier three-sided shields with curved upper edge known from reliefs in Norman stone-churches in Denmark. See for inst. Eigil Rothe, *Equestrian battle-scene in Aal church together with other mediaeval battle-scenes in Danish churches*. "Yearbooks of Nordic Archaeology and History", 1908 pp. 91, 94—95, 97. Western European candlesticks and of the 12th and 13th centuries prove that the old shields of the Bayeux-type persisted in use for some time in western Europe. See: *Bronzgerät des Mittelalters*; O. von Falke und E. Meyer, *Giessgefässe der Gotik*. Berlin 1935, fig. 193, text p. 31 and 109 from the middle of the 12th century. See also fig. 253 from the 12th century, fig. 291 and 294 from the 13th century. Finally l.c. fig. 298 a—b from the 13th century.

⁶, "III. Yearbooks of Nordic Archaeology and History", 1867, p. 84.

in Europe. Chessmen discovered in the Isle of Lewis "Archaeologia" Vol. XXIV (London 1832).

Curved three-sided shields are also carried by the two knights in the painting on the ceiling of Torpe church. These paintings must have been created



Fig. 3. Detail drinking-horn from South Austad farm.

towards end of the 13th century. It is reasonable to suppose that the "closed shields" of the "Kings Mirror" are of this same type. That this shape was in use for a considerable time may be seen from the fact that there is a closed shield on the tombstone of the knight Björn Finnson in Nidaros Cathedral, dating from the end of the 1200's. There are many further instances of such shields being in use at considerably earlier dates. Besides on the Kvale-relief previously mentioned, they are to be seen on the shrine from Hedal church

in Valdres depicting the assassination of Thomas a'Becket — dated between 1200 and 1250 A. D.

On turning to the famous church-door from Valpjoftadur in Nordmúlasýslu, Eastern Iceland⁷ from the latter part of the 1100's or a little later, we find depicted the battle between Kong Didrik of Bern and the winged dragon. On the two representations of the hero the cruciform-decoration on the shield varies somewhat (one of the shields has an umbo), but the shape is the same with pointed lower end and straight cut-off upper end. It is also plain that the shield has not been closed. Three-sided shields with straight cut-off upper edge seem to have been in common use during the early 13th century. They are seen reproduced on the Blaker-chair from Lom in Gudbrandsdal from about the year 1200 and on the Kaupang — frontal from Sogn from about 1250.

A fresco in Aal church, Vestre Horne district in Ribe, Danmark, shows pictures of several knights in battle carrying three-sided shields of which three are closed, while one is flat and with a straight cut-off upper edge. The date of this fresco is from the latter part of the 1100's.

The oldest tombstone having a shield with a noble family coat-of-arms is to be found in Hellerslev church, Thy, in Jutland. The tombstone is placed over the graves of Thorkild and Margrethe and the shield is three-sided with a straight upper end. It is decorated with two rosettes in relief. The style of the work dates this tombstone to about 1250⁸.

With regard to Norwegian workmanship the small, pointed shield from the early 14th century found on the gravestone of the knight Pål in Nidaros Cathedral is worth especial mention.

A pointed, but somewhat broader shield provided with the Norwegian lion is reproduced on the well-known tombstone from Fjære in Aust-Agder. This stone is found on the grave of Baron Isak Gautesson's (born 1260—65, died soon after 1302) daughter. The latin inscription in translation says: "Here lies Isak's daughter of the Norwegian king's and the Danish princes' happy kin". The stone shows a woman with a crown, wearing a flowing garment and in the coat-of-arms may be found the Norwegian lion uncrowned, probably with a sword in the front paws and possibly also a leopard in front of this. This is known to be a part of the coat-of-arms of the Danish Royal House. Gustav Storm has therefore presumed that the daughter of Isak Gautesson was married to some relation of the Danish princes. As it is known that Count Jakob av Halland often stayed in Stavanger and Ryfylke (where the family resided), it seems natural to suppose that he is the person

⁷ *III. Nordic Culture, Volume on Art* p. 325, Worsaae 1859, fig. 505.

⁸ I. B. Löffler, *Danish Mediaeval Tombstones*, Copenhagen 1869, Table XII, fig. 66.

aluded to in this epitaph in memory of one of Isak's daughters. The stone must therefore be from the early 14th century.

Similar shields may be found depicted on the seal of the Bergen Shoemakers from about 1300 A. D. and on the seal of Lodin Arnesson from Bakke, dated 1313 (Illustrated in Huitfeldt Kaas: *Norwegian Mediaeval Seals*, Christiania 1899—1902, fig. 64 sl. pl. II fig. 28 and pl. III fig. 55). The same pointed shield of the old type from the 13th century is also part of the equipment of Håkon V Magnusson on his seal of 6th October, 1302 (III: Chr. Brinchmann: *Norwegian Mediaeval Seals. Royal and Princely Seals*, Chra. 1904, pl. XII).

There he carries a shield as part of his equipment, from which fact the conclusion may be drawn that shields of this type were in use in Norway till the 14th century when the new, short and broad style came into use. On this latter shield an equilateral triangle could be drawn. This type of shield is depicted for the first time on Sigurd av Skjerven's seal from 1334 (ill: Huitfeldt Kaas: *Norwegian Med. Seals*, pl. XIII fig. 258, sl. pl. XVII fig. 336), after which time its history is easy to trace through the 14th century.

Somewhat older are probably the shields reproduced on the wellknown Norwegian "Royal Horn" in the National Museum in Copenhagen. Thor Kieland has dated these shield to the first half of the 14th century.

The shield reproduced on the drinking-horn from Austad seems to resemble most closely the type previous to 1330, for instance the shield on the knight Pål's tombstone in Nidaros Cathedral (illustr. "Fortidsfor. Årsberetning", 1924 p. 31). But the artist has taken certain liberties in that the upper edge of the shield is slightly curved while the long sides are straight. Even so the present writer believes that one is justified in presuming that the drinking-horn in question was made sometime between 1300 and 1330 A. D.⁹

⁹ S. Grieg, *Shields of the Middle Ages (Nordic Culture. XII Volume: Weapons)*, Stockholm 1944, p.p. 71—81.