THE HILDESHEIM SILVER TREASURE: BY CHARLES A. BRASSLER.

WITH the interest in the rich collection of silver antiquities discovered several years ago in a Roman villa at Boscoreale, near Pompeii, and presented to the Museum of the Louvre by Edmund von Rothschild, the attention of scientific and artistic circles has again been drawn to the still more valuable collection of antique Roman silverwork which has been for some decades the most precious ornament of the "Altes Museum" in Berlin.

The discoveries at Boscoreale were the result of deliberately planned excavations; but the treasures found in Germany were given to the modern world through the merest chance. In October of the year 1868, some soldiers of the garrison at Hildesheim were making a rifle-range on the southwestern slope of the Galgenberg, a hill near the town. The work was nearly completed; but in altering the angle of the target, which was erected at the back of a troughlike depression in the mountain, one of the men came across a piece of dark metal. Thinking it a fragment of iron, he threw it aside; but presently his shovel struck another hard object, with the ring of metal, which proved on examination to be a flat plate covering a large vessel, standing upright. The ground was now carefully searched, and a large number of vessels brought to light, packed together in a pit. In the center was a tripod and a candelabrum, and grouped around these were large vessels containing a quantity of smaller ones, all of whose handles, feet, etc., had come off in the lapse of time. Covered with earth and discolored by the black coating of oxide, the metal was hardly recognizable as silver. Some of them were nearly destroyed by oxidation, and fell to pieces in the hands of their finders. Loaded upon three wheelbarrows, they were trundled over the rough streets of the town to the barracks, and the next day, under the hands of a silversmith, assisted by two soldiers, their true nature and value became evident. At first they were thought to be of the period of the Renaissance, but later an archaeologist identified them as works of classic antiquity. Meanwhile, a second examination of the ground brought to light some additional fragments, but unauthorized hands had already been burrowing through the hillside, so that the collection probably does not comprise the entire contents of the pit.
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When these vessels were brought to the Berlin Museum, about a year after their discovery, they were left in practically the same condition as when found. A few most necessary repairs had been made, the handles and other broken-off parts fastened on with wires, some of the holes and crevices filled in with strips of linen. Thus they remained almost thirty years, until, a few years ago, the directors of the Museum resolved to undertake a careful restoration of them, and to give this treasure the fitting place in the Museum which it had hitherto been denied. In the process of restoration, the loose fragments were utilized not only in the completion of other pieces, but, what is still more remarkable, several entirely new ones were constructed from them. Handles, etc., are riveted, not soldered; the patina and the thick coating of chloride of silver, as far as these were not removed in the first cleaning at Hildesheim, have been left undisturbed; but the holes and crevices have been filled up with silver. The vessels are of cast and embossed work, the monotone of the silver enlivened by tasteful gilding on some of the single parts, but niello and enamel were but sparingly employed. The material used in soldering was tin.

The treasure consists principally of a table service, together with some other utensils necessary to the dining-room of a wealthy Roman gentleman. The drinking vessels are richly decorated, the other dishes more simple in design. About sixty or seventy pieces in all were found in the pit. Carefully packed together, we may suppose them to have been concealed by their owner, either before battle or during flight. These circumstances point to the battle of Varus in the Northern forests, A. D. 9, and the treasure may probably be correctly ascribed to that time, perhaps even to Varus himself; at all events, it belongs to an early period of the Christian era. The vessels were for real use, not for ornament—as is often the case with those found in graves—and they give us a vivid picture of the customs and habits of the aristocratic Romans of the First Empire. Some of them are in sets of two or three, and from the fact that in other cases the companion pieces are missing, it may be inferred that the number of pieces which originally belonged to the service was considerably larger. In order to understand the forms, the number and the purposes of these various utensils, it must be
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recalled that the Romans, like the Greeks, reclined on couches around small tables, and held the plate in the hand, resting against the breast; also that knives and forks were unknown. It was the custom to place three such couches around a table, which perhaps explains the fact that in several cases there are three dishes of a kind in a set. Of the oval plates, for instance, and the plain bowls, in three different sizes, were found three of each. The plates had two handles, one of which would be held by the carver when passing it, and the other grasped by the guest.

The small table, about the height of a stool, was for the purpose of setting aside the dishes. For a camp outfit this table was a tripod which could be taken apart, the top consisting of a round, removable silver plate. Three such plates were provided for the different courses. One of these tables occupied the center of the space where the Hildesheim treasure was found. Of the candelabrum, which stood beside the table, only the pedestal exists, of the familiar type, three light, curved feet ending in claws, and palm-leaves drooping between. Three small dishes with decorated rims, and two dishes in the shape of casserole, with long slender handles, would seem to have been used in serving, and were probably placed over the fire. They must be easy to cleanse, and were perfectly plain, but the handles, of simple, but admirable form, excellently adapted to their purpose, were ornamented with leaves. Besides these are a shallow bossed dish, perhaps intended for holding eggs, a little salt-cellar similarly decorated, and a small flat dish upon three feet, probably for spices, with an engraved garland of leaves filled out with niello. First in importance among the drinking vessels is a large mixing-bowl, or crater, in which, according to the custom of the ancients, the wine was mixed with water. Accompanying it are water-vessels, ladles and drinking-cups, the most precious of which may have served only for ornament.

The accompanying illustrations will give some idea of the great artistic value of the collection. With the crater, in the shape of an upturned bell, about fourteen inches in height, the restoration has done wonders. When found, it was in a most sorrowful condition. The missing foot was found, however, together with other fragments, and at present, with the exception of one considerable piece of repairs, it looks almost uninjured. The restoration has also had other results.
RICHLY CHASED CUPS AND FOOT OF CANDLABRUM, FROM THE HILDESHEIM TREASURE
CYPRIAN DISH OR PATERA

VASE ORNAMENTED IN REPOUSSÉ, AND MASSIVE TRAY.
HILDESHEIM TREASURE
CUPS, BOWL AND CRATER FROM THE HILDESHEIM TREASURE
DEUS LUNAS PATERA. PATERA WITH INFANT HERCULES AND TRAYS, HILDESHEIM TREASURE
HANDLES OF CASSEROLES

MINERVA DISH OR PATERA. HILDESHEIM TREASURE
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Formerly, in the unfavorable manner in which the collection was exhibited, the surface of the bowl gave the impression of repoussé work. On careful examination it was found that the whole crown of the bell was cast, and the delicate relief of the ornamentation given by chasing. It has an outer and an inner casing. The former is made from a sheet of silver, thin enough to lend itself easily to repoussé work; the latter is firm, plain, and removable, so that it could be cleansed separately from the costly outer casing. The decoration of leaves and vines begins at the foot, starting from two pairs of griffins, and rising lightly upward; all is in low, soft relief, giving interest without interrupting the lines of the background. The scattered figures, representing little naked boys chasing aquatic animals, have reference to the water which, among the ancients, was generously mingled with the wine. The foot is not complete, but probably had a garland of leaves. The handles were soldered on, and had fallen off, as from all the other pieces. With the bowl belonged two ladles, with short, beautifully executed handles, one of which was made to hang upon the rim of the bowl. This crater, and the Minerva dish, or patena, are the two most splendid pieces of silver which have been preserved from ancient times, and show all the characteristics of antique art.

THE drinking vessels are not in sets of three, as in the case of the other dishes, and as might be expected, but are single or in pairs, perhaps for convenience in arranging them as show-pieces. There are only two of the larger plain cups (which may have been used for syrups or sweets) and four heavy shallow dishes with a garland of grape-leaves, in niello. The other eleven cups and shallow dishes are richly decorated. The prevailing form is broad, with two handles, either flat and straight or curved in vine-forms. All the cups are double, like the crater, the inner casing plain and the outer one ornamented. The motif of the exterior decoration is taken from the ceremonies of the worship of Bacchus, first from the culture of the vine, and then from the theater connected with the vintage festivals, and dedicated to Bacchus. Over the animals’ skins and thyrsus wands of the Bacchantes, hang masks, both tragic and comic, principally such as belonged to the games of the satyrs, together with staves and garlands; two shallow dishes have an ornate decoration.
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of leaves only, in calyx shape, and one cup is ornamented with large
twigs of laurel. The relief is sometimes high, but in that case is
skilfully dominated by the rim of the vessel. The chasing, in exec-
ution of detail and subordination of this to the whole effect, shows
the highest degree of artistic perfection.

The four large, flat drinking-vessels are different from the others;
the outer casing is plain, the decoration applied to the inner one.
Two of them, pendants or companion pieces, have in the center the
figure of an Asiatic divinity, in high relief, the third has a half-length
figure of the youthful Hercules killing the serpents. The finest is
the Minerva cup, or patera, almost Greek in form, flat, on a low foot
with a slender shaft, the handles standing off horizontally, with a
ring beneath to put the fingers through. The outer casing is in calyx-
form, lightly embossed. The inner one, not removable, has an
embossed border of palm-leaves. The bottom is made of a plate,
soldered on, upon which the decoration is beaten up with such skill
that some parts are in three-quarters relief. It represents a goddess,
apparently Minerva, perhaps the Dea Roma. The figure is
extremely beautiful. Some of the separate parts are gilded, as in the
other vessels of the collection; the background of the Minerva is
silver, the garments and weapons are gold, the face and arms again of
silver. The raised figure seems to contradict the idea that the vessel
was used for a drinking cup, and some have supposed that it was for
ornament only. But its form shows, on the contrary, the greatest
artistic refinement of the pleasure of drinking. When the Minerva
cup was filled with the Southern wine, its color lightened by water,
the ruby liquid would show darker or brighter with the varying relief,
and when the cup was raised to the lips, the head of the goddess would
lift itself in full light from the crimson flood, and reflections as of
jewels play upon the silver and gold.

Soon after the discovery of the Hildesheim treasure, the pieces
were copied in plaster. Christofle, in Paris, has improved these
casts and made models in silvered copper.

According to information from Germany a selection of reproduc-
tions in embossed silver of these wonderful creations of a bygone age
has been presented to the German Crown Prince on the occasion of
his recent wedding.