Important Glass Bowl

Circa: 4th - 5th Century A.D.

Merovingian or Gallo-Roman

4th - 5th Century A.D.

Glass

H: 9cm W: 11.8cm

Gallo-Roman or Merovingian, A pale green glass bowl, with everted lip, standing on a ring-foot. The surface has been separated into four panels, separated by vertical strips decorated by raised horizontal bands; with horizontal borders above and below, the above decorated with a raised zigzag pattern. In the centre of each panel is a hollow-blown claw. An antique label is attached to the base, giving us the date 1849. The present bowl bears great similarity to a number of 4th-5th century A.D. glass bowls that have been found in Northern France, Belgium and Luxembourg, and that are presumed to have been made by the local Gallo-Roman population. One example, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, was found in the cemetery at Steinfort, Luxembourg and dated 375-425 A.D. This kind of hollow-blown claw decoration was evidently popular with the 5th-century Frankish invaders and subsequent Frankish-Merovingian society, as glass featuring this style of decoration has been found dating up the 8th century. It also inspired the Anglo-Saxons, as glass claw beakers have been found in Anglo-Saxon burials. This bowl was discovered in the mid-19th century in a Gallo-Roman stone sarcophagus unearthed underneath the walls of the Chateau de Montataire, in northern France. Montataire is a well-known Merovingian necropolis, discovered in the 19th century and further excavated in the 20th. The earliest funerary goods found there date to the late 5th century A.D. Scientific studies show that the population of Montataire was predominantly Gallo-Roman, which was Christianised early and shares many similarities with the early Christian Gallo-Roman cemetery of Marteville, Picardie. A similar bowl to the present one was recovered from the grave of a man there, along with a coin with the Emperor Gratian (359-383 A.D.). It is unclear if the tomb where the bowl was found was part of the main necropolis, as it is set a little apart. The other funerary goods recovered from Montataire are quite poor, and this bowl categorically stands out. Other glass vessels are also rare. Given the parallels, it is likely the present bowl was created in a similar context to the Steinfort and Marteville bowls. It is a prime example of the sophisticated glass-blowing technique which was first brought to the area by the Romans and later perfected.

Literature:

George Ferdinand, Baron de Condé, Histoire d’un vieux chateau de France: Monographie de Chateau Montataire, Paris 1883, pp. 33–35

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