

RELIQUARY

Unique ID: NLM-C0C27C

Object type certainty: Certain

Workflow status: Awaiting validation

Gold reliquary. A lozenge-shaped box of composite construction with rich ornate decoration rendered by an applied combination of fine twisted gold strips and spherical gold granules of two sizes [of diameters 1.5mm and 1mm] attached to a plain but roughly textured plate. The sides of the box are of plain smooth gold sheet and it is closed by a plain sheet metal back plate bordered by a further cabled wire. The back borders appear to have been run along the corners of the rhomboid as single strands from the front, though now absent entirely from one of the four corners. There are three tiny cylindrical sheet metal collets at either end of the box, with four gold pellets – three small and one large above them in a triangular arrangement – retained in these settings. A larger collet [of diameter c.2mm] is set centrally on the display side of the box and is now roughly torn, suggesting the loss of a further pellet or, for more dramatic impact, perhaps a coloured gemstone.

The granulated appearance of the decorative components confers an impression of a complex design which is perhaps best understood as a loosely constructed knotwork cross. An outer border is formed by a doubled row of twisted gold strips which are drawn into the base of the end collets at top and bottom. Single cabled strands then describe a series of loops which may originate from the larger central collet, which itself retains a basal border of applied cabled wire. Each loop has a pellet or granule nested within its coiled end, and further pellets in groups of two or three are used to infill spaces between the doubled wire border and the loops which it encloses. It is possible that larger granules were disposed at the cardinal points of a rhomboid form, each with a cabled border and with smaller pellets serving an ancillary infilling role. A maximum of five smaller pellets are combined in one zone of the lower part of the plate, and some apparent asymmetry in their disposition may arise from the loss of an odd granule here and there.

The original provision for the suspension of the object is uncertain, but there are now four roughly torn holes in the four sheet metal sides, and comparable larger ragged holes in the back plate. Between them, these could afford ample scope for suspension by a cord or chain, though they are unsightly and presumably improvised replacements for some other arrangement.

The dating of the object has been debated. This reporter initially proposed a post-medieval date [see 'notes' below]. Review of the record by Dr Kevin Leahy and by specialists at the British Museum now tilts the probable dating to an earlier period. The key feature is the construction of cabled strands by the twisting of thin strips of gold, a delicate operation most closely associated with fine Frankish metalwork. Dr Niamh Whitfield kindly comments as follows: 'Twisted ribbon, as I call it, is common on Merovingian filigree and is also found on Irish work (under Merovingian influence, in my view). I have not seen any other examples elsewhere, but of course I am not familiar with Ottonian work'.

In view of its age and material this object is to be submitted to the Treasure process, ref. **2022 T356**. Suggested date: Early Medieval, 650-950

Length: 24.3mm, Width: 17.8mm, Thickness (overall): 4.5mm, Weight: 2.60gms

Notes:

The rhomboid form is paralleled by a lozenge-shaped reliquary of the early 16th century from Hockley, Essex (PAS ref. ESS-2C4836). The form was deemed appropriate to sacred subjects, as illustrated by the Middleham jewel which is dated by its artistic rendition to the reign of Richard III (1483-1485). The granulated decoration is typically 16th-century, though use as a reliquary would have become increasingly unlikely from the accession of the Protestant Elizabeth I in 1558 onwards.

Subsequent actions

Subsequent action after recording: Submitted for consideration as Treasure

Treasure details

Treasure case tracking number: 2022T356

Chronology

Broad period: EARLY MEDIEVAL

Subperiod from: Early

Period from: EARLY MEDIEVAL

Subperiod to: Late

Period to: EARLY MEDIEVAL

Ascribed Culture: Frankish style

Date from: Circa AD 650

Date to: Circa AD 950

Dimensions and weight

Quantity: 1

Length: 24.3 mm

Width: 17.8 mm

Thickness: 4.5 mm

Weight: 2.6 g

Discovery dates

Date(s) of discovery: Friday 25th March 2022

Personal details

This information is restricted for your access level.

Other reference numbers

Other reference: NLM49816

Treasure case number: 2022T356

Materials and construction

Primary material: Gold

Completeness: Incomplete

Spatial metadata

Region: [Yorkshire and the Humber](#) (European Region)

County or Unitary authority: [North Lincolnshire](#) (Unitary Authority)

District: [North Lincolnshire](#) (Unitary Authority)

To be known as: Winteringham

Spatial coordinates

Grid reference source: GPS (from the finder)

Unmasked grid reference accurate to a 0.01 metre square.

Discovery metadata

Method of discovery: Metal detector

General landuse: Cultivated land