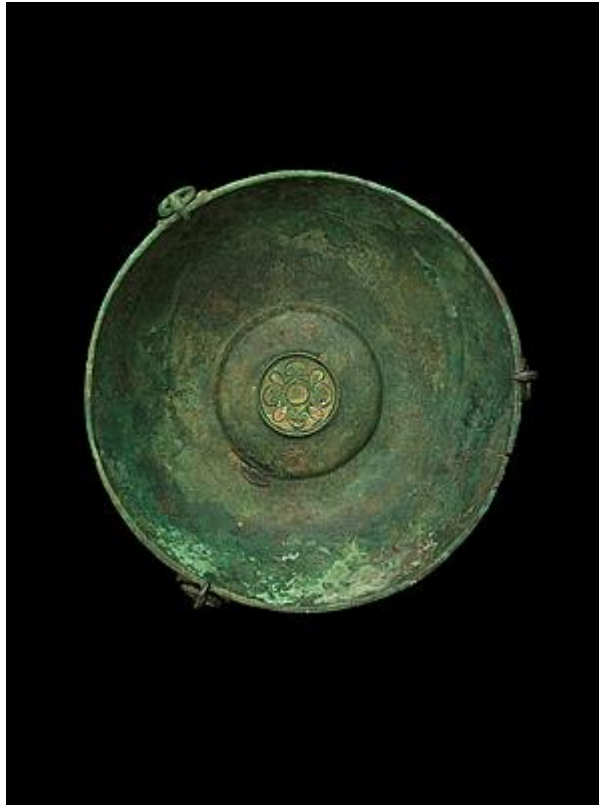


DAVID AARON



Anglo-Saxon Hanging Bowl

British Isles

Bronze

550-700 A.D.

H: 3.6 cm, Diam: 20 cm

A very rare and near-complete copper-alloy hanging bowl and associated fittings. Crafted from a single sheet of bronze, the body of the bowl is curved, with a slightly recessed lip. The bowl features three matching hooked escutcheons and suspension rings, evenly dispersed around the circumference and adorned with patterns of incised lines and raised zigzags, and with a curlicued vegetal motif in the centre of the raised escutcheon. The basal disc features a delicate circular design of raised curls around a central point.

Hanging bowls are a distinct class of object associated with the period between the end of Roman rule in Britain around 410 A.D. and the emergence of the Christian Anglo-Saxon kingdoms during the seventh century. Most have been found in Anglo-Saxon graves, dating them between the sixth and late seventh century. However, the style of decoration seen across the bowls can be viewed as Celtic in origin, suggesting they may have been manufactured well before they were interred. Most are known from East Anglia, with some examples known from Pictish and Irish contexts. If the bowls did originate from Celtic hubs in Wales or Scotland, then they would have travelled far over the course of their lifetime.

The use of these bowls remains a mystery to scholars, with one theory that they were used during religious ceremonies or to hold holy water. Some bowls have been found with deliberate knife marks prior to their burial, perhaps intended to remove their power. Another theory is that they served as gifts or tribute to accompany peace, marriage, or trade deals, or that they may have been used for the Roman custom of mixing wine and water at the dining table. It is also unclear whether the bowls were suspended from threads extending from a central fulcrum, or whether they hung from hooks on a tripod. A tripod would allow easier access to liquids in the bowl for ritual or liturgical purposes. One possible parallel can be found in images of the Oracular Cortina, or Delphic Tripod, a three-hooked bowl suspended from a tripod used by the oracle of Delphi and high priestess of Apollo in Ancient Greece.

Exhibitions

Frieze Masters, London, October 2023