

ALABASTER TEMPLAR CHALICE 1160 – 1223

Description

A 165mm. high, 135mm. wide (at the bowl) Romanesque chalice; lathe turned from a crystalline, calcareous, agglomerate gypsum*, turned slightly off-true resulting in an asymmetrical, leaning stance to the vessel. The bowl is a squat “poppy head” profile; hemispherical with a flared rim. The stem is a waisted pedestal profile with a medial discoidal flange. The circular base widens abruptly from the stem and has a flat underside. The bowl has four incised crosses within circular frames cut around its circumference, three are a close match with a single larger example of different form.

*The material from which the chalice is made is not indigenous to the Tomar area, and is therefore derived from a location unknown, possibly not in Portugal.

The near-matched trio of crosses are all of the equal armed type, one has V notched terminals (the eight pointed “Maltese cross” awarded to the Templar Order by Pope Eugenius III in 1145), two have plain terminals, all three are set within a plain circular frame. Outside each frame is a halo of close set alternate inward and outward facing triangles. The fourth cross is much larger, set within a compass inscribed circle, the arms are composed of curved back-to-back circular segments each with a V notch in the terminals.

Condition

The patination surface of the chalice is stained with a dark waxy soot deposit, probably derived from a smokey atmosphere such as is caused by church candle and incense burning. The interior of the chalice is pitted, probably by a mildly acidic liquid such as wine dissolving the soluble matrix of the chalice.

Context

The chalice was collected from Tomar in Portugal (see attached certificates of provenance). The Templar castle of Tomar was re-built from 1160 to 1250, the adjacent Templar Charola (Circular church imitating the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem) was constructed 1190 -1225. The fortress of Tomar played a major part in the re-conquest of Portugal in the 12th century. The fortifications were the work of Gualdim Pais Grand master of the Order of the Temple who was buried in St Maria do Olival church Tomar in 1195. After the suppression of the Portuguese Temple in 1308 a successor order, the Order of Christ was founded in 1319 which inherited the former Templar holdings (and ethos) including Tomar castle and Charola around which the Convent of Christ was constructed in the later gothic style from c.1420.

Summary

Thus there is a major Templar context at Tomar from 1160 until their suppression in 1308. The Romanesque style was certainly out-of-date in Portugal by 1250 (attested by the Cistercian building of Gothic Alcobaca Abbey in 1223); hence this chalice must be from a Templar source between 1160 and 1223.

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