Horn

Place of origin: Amalfi (possibly, made)
Salerno (possibly, made)

Date: 1000-1100 (made)

Materials and Techniques: Carved ivory with metal mounts

Museum number: 7953-1862

Gallery location: Medieval & Renaissance, Room 8, The William and Eileen Ruddock Gallery, case 10

Public access description
An oliphant is an ivory horn. This one is carved with a network of interconnected circles containing birds, antelopes, hares and other, more fantastic creatures. The style of decoration is derived from Islamic art, possibly textiles or ceramics produced in Cairo between the 10th and 12th centuries.

Descriptive line
Horn of Oliphant, ivory with metal mounts, decorated with carvings of animals, Italy (Amalfi or Salerno), 11th century

Physical description
Horn or Oliphant, ivory with metal mounts. Covered with a network interconnected circles containing figures of birds, hares, goats, an elephant, an amphisboena and other fantastic beasts carved in relief on the surface. Bands of similar decoration appear at the mouth and the wide end. Between are four narrow bands of foliage scrolls, one on either side of two sunk bands.

Dimensions
Height: 30.5 cm, Diameter: 13.5 cm, Width: 57.5 cm, Depth: 13.3 cm, Weight: 2.76 kg

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Object history note
The oliphant was formerly in the Soltykoff collection, Paris and was acquired by the museum in 1861.

Historical significance: During the course of the eleventh century it seems possible that ivory carvers from Egypt settled in Southern Italy or Sicily. They apparently transferred their style of decoration which is derived from Islamic works to Southern Italy.

Historical context note
Many of these horns, or 'oliphants', are in existence and were mentioned in medieval inventories of cathedral treasuries. For example: in the 1245 inventory of St Paul's cathedral four horns are mentioned one of which was referred to as a 'cornu eburneum gravatum bestiis et avibus, magnum' This horn which would would have belonged -had it survived- to a large group of olifants showing animals and birds within medallions such as the present horn. These horns often contained relics.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O93335/horn/