Bowl

Place of origin: Al-Mina (Port Saint Symeon (Port St. Simeon) / al-Mina, made)

Date: ca. 1220 to 1268 (made)

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Buff earthenware covered with a white slip and with incised decoration

Museum number: C.900-1936

Gallery location: Ceramics, Room 143, The Timothy Sainsbury Gallery, case 15, shelf 3

Descriptive line

Bowl, shallow with flat everted rim, of buff earthenware covered with a white slip and incised with a bird, painted with green and brown glazes; Al-Mina/Samandag, Hatay province, Turkey (Port Saint Symeon), 13th century.

Physical description

Flattened horizontal rim, with a sharp ridge round the inner edge; deep, rounded well, and projecting foot-ring. In the well is incised a figure of a bird facing to the right, with a large triangular filling ornament in the field above. The rim is divided into square compartments by pairs of radial lines, and each compartment contains a diagonal leaf on a brown and green field. The outside has neither slip nor glaze.

Dimensions

Weight: 620 kg, Diameter: 23.6 cm, Height: 6.8 cm

Museum number

C.900-1936

Object history note

Bought from Mr. E. Safani, Meiers Hotel, Upper Bedford Place, London (36/6481), when it was described on the purchase form as 'Sgraffiato, Persian'.

However, a note from Ashton, the Museum's Directo to the curator Arthur Rackham (12.11.36) states:

'This bowl is presumably Byzantine, in the most general use of the term, and as such is a rarity owing to its completeness. The delightful incised bird has a strong Byzantine flavour and the incised border pattern could, I think, be paralleled in the Athlit painted fragments. Apart from its interest as a rare type, it is an object of considerable beauty and its quality, manifested in a charming delicate flange to the inner bowl and in an unusually fine body, is outstanding.'

Athlit, or Atlit Castle, now known as Château Pèlerin, is located near Haifa, on the North East Coast of Israel. It was built by the Knights Templar from 1218, until it was taken by the Mamluks in 1291.

Historical context note

At the time of acquisition, this dish was considered to be Persian. In 1939, it was re-attributed as Port St. Simeon (Port Saint Symeon) ware. More recently (1970s?) it was given a provenance of 'Byzantine'.

A somewhat similar dish is in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (see &lt;i&gt;Medieval Ceramics &lt;/i&gt; , p.25, ill.6) which is given an attribution of 'Byzantium (?), 13th century'.

Extract from &lt;i&gt;Medieval Ceramics &lt;/i&gt;catalogue:

In Arabic "al-Mina" means "the harbour". The site is located at the mouth of the Amuq River, the classical Orontes River, situated in northwestern Syria, now Hatay province in Turkey. Port Saint Symeon, or Al-Mina,was the chief port for the historic metropolis of Antioch (now modern Antakaya) farther inland. The site was excavated in 1936-37 by Sir C. Leonard Woolley (1880-1960), yielding significant ceramics of the ninth through the thirteenth centuries. Large quantities of imported wares from Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Levant were found; but more significant were the kiln wasters indicating that the "al-Mina Ware", this incised slipware with green and yellowish-brown under a lead glaze, was indeed made at this site.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O85364/bowl-unknown/