

NOTES

The 'Rattlesden' St. John. In the Summer of 1972 a remarkable small figure of bronze-gilt, only $3\frac{11}{16}$ in. (9.5 cm) high, was found by Mr. Arthur Davey of Rattlesden on Cansell Green Farm,¹ some nine miles south-west of Bury St. Edmunds (Plate xxx). There is no monument in the vicinity of the find-place, nor is any site recorded with which the find might be connected.

The bronze-gilt figure—it has lost most of its original gilding—represents St. John the Evangelist. He is shown in the attitude of grief, with his head resting in his right hand, in which he is normally found as part of the crucifixion to the left of Christ, while the Virgin occupies the opposite side. In the crook of his left arm he carries a book. The figure, a solid cast, is fully modelled in three-dimensions, its back as carefully finished as its front. The pose probably derives from an earlier form of iconography, in which the weeping St. John holds a cloth up to his face²—it can be found in English 12th-century sculpture, for example in the Barking Rood and on the Coleshill Font, both dating roughly from the middle of the century.³

The style of the figure clearly relates it to the art of the Mosan region—the area of lower Lorraine along the river Meuse, with the cathedral city of Liège at its centre. There one can find in the 12th century, figures softly modelled in rhythmic contrapposto stance, with rather large rounded heads and close, cap-like hair, ever since the style was first fully formed by Reiner of Huy in his famous bronze font for the church of Notre Dame-aux-Fonts between the years 1107 and 1118.⁴ In the course of the century, this style became somewhat more rigid and systematic, and drapery pulled tightly across the figure, with a thick loop of cloth just below the knee became almost a hall-mark of the style.⁵ This is seen quite clearly in the Rattlesden St. John, and an attribution of the figure to a Mosan workshop must be considered. However, when compared to true Mosan work, like the ivory panel with the Transfiguration now in the Arsenal library, Paris, the Floreffe Bible in the British Museum (MS.Add.17738, fol.4) or the small bronze-gilt angel now

¹ Map reference TL/98105841. The figure was sold at Christies on the 5 December 1972, lot 47, for 35,000 guineas. The Ipswich Museum was unfortunately unsuccessful in acquiring the figure at the auction.

² See e.g. the early 9th-century ivory panel in the British Museum (O.M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Ivory Carvings of the Christian Era in the British Museum*, 1909, no. 51).

³ See G. Zarnecki, *Later English Romanesque Sculpture, 1140-1210*, 1953, figs. 65 and 6.

⁴ See P. Lasko, *Ars Sacra* (Pelican History of Art), 1972, pl. 169 and pp. 162 ff.

⁵ For a full description see W. Sauerländer, 'Sens and York', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, xxii, 1959, pp. 53-69.

in the Bargello Museum in Florence,⁶ our St. John looks somewhat awkward in balance, and a little uncertain in the handling of detail. For example, the hand, which, to judge by its pose should be holding the book of the Evangelist, has only cloth falling over it, while the book itself is precariously balanced and tucked behind the drapery. One cannot help feeling the artist was a little unsure of his model. Also the drapery below his cloak is a little summary in its treatment. The face also does not compare all that well to the Mosan types with its thickly lidded eyes, short nose and fleshy lips, but is more individually and sensitively handled, not at all easy to parallel in the continental tradition. An English adaptation of a Mosan model seems the more likely solution.

It has been pointed out before that Mosan influences on English art in the second half of the 12th century are strong, both in sculpture⁷ and especially in metalwork, and Professor G. Zarnecki has even spoken of a 'veritable "Anglo-Mosan" school of metalwork'.⁸ It is to a bronze-caster of the last quarter of the 12th century, around 1180 that the Rattlesden figure must be attributed.

The figure was clearly part of a crucifixion scene and one regrets profoundly that only a small fragment of what must have been a fine composition has survived. A small number of similar figures has survived in Museum collections and two complete compositions of this type, dating from the early 13th century can be noted. One is the silver-gilt cross of Laon (now in the Louvre, Paris) given originally to the Abbey of St. Vincent of Laon by Abbé Hugo (1174-1205) and the gold reliquary cross of Henri de Hainaut, made by Master Gérard in 1206 and now in the Treasury of San Marco, Venice.

In both compositions, and also in a very similar one recorded in the 13th-century sketch book of Villard de Honnecourt,⁹ the figures of the Virgin and St. John, fully realised in three dimensions, are standing on a kind of foliage scroll attached to the foot of the Crucifix.

This material has recently been published by Mr. W. D. Wixom when a small bronze-gilt Virgin from a similar composition was acquired by the Cleveland Museum.¹⁰ Both the major crosses just mentioned and the two small bronze-gilt Virgins in the Cleveland and the Metropolitan Museum collection in New York are clearly later than our St. John. All of them date after the turn of the century and can be related to the so-called 'Transitional Style',¹¹ rather

⁶ All three are illustrated in H. Swarzenski, *Monuments of Romanesque Art*, 1954, figs. 390, 389 and 383.

⁷ Cf. Sauerländer, *op. cit.*

⁸ G. Zarnecki, *English Romanesque Lead Sculpture*, 1957, p. 23.

⁹ See Hahnloser, *Villard d'Honnecourt*, 1935, pl. 15.

¹⁰ W. D. Wixom, *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, April 1972, pp. 89-92.

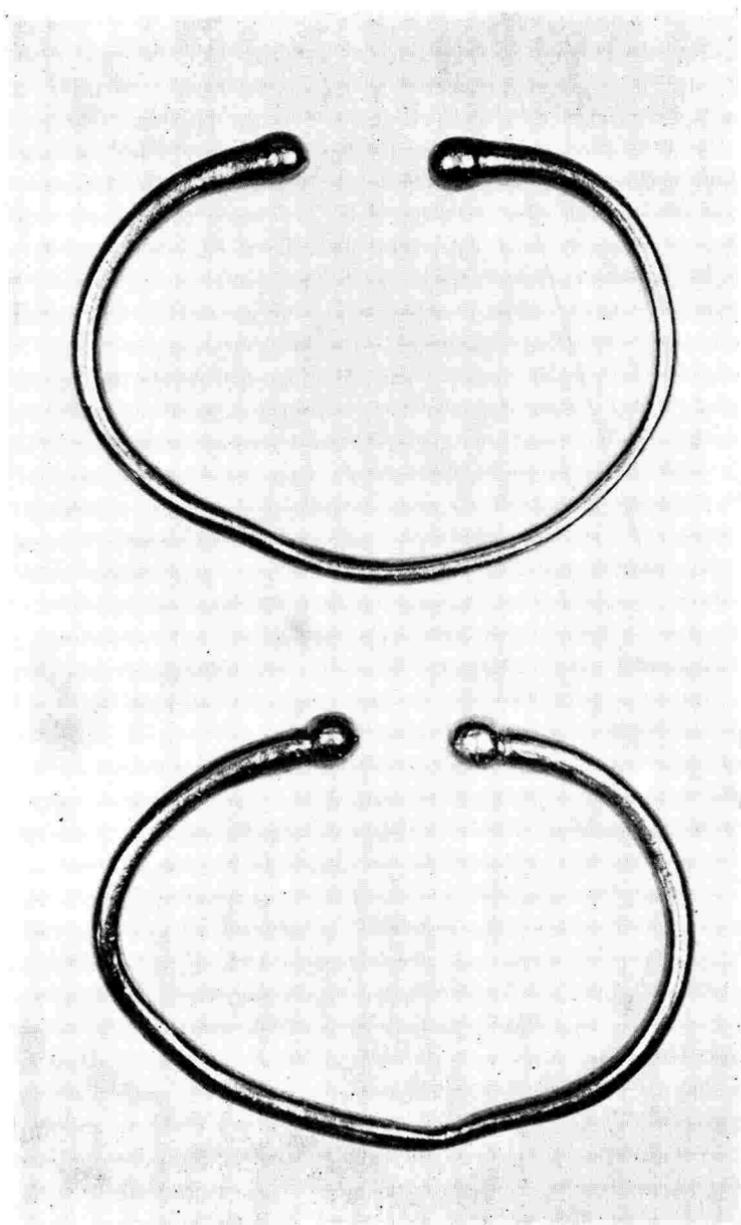
¹¹ See Lasko, *op. cit.*, pp. 240 ff.

PLATE XXX



Bronze-gilt figure of St. John. Scale approx $\frac{3}{4}$.

PLATE XXXI



Gold bracelets from Nowton, Bury St. Edmunds.

than more directly to the Mosan tradition. The Rattlesden St. John therefore is the earliest of the surviving small bronzes from a Crucifixion group and it strongly suggests that this type of composition was created as early as about 1180. It was to enjoy a considerable popularity as altar decoration throughout the middle ages and even into the post-medieval period.¹²

P. E. LASKO

Two Gold Bracelets from Nowton, Bury St. Edmunds. The two gold penannular bracelets (Plate xxxi) which form the subject of this note were discovered by Mr. Terrence Olds while working in a sewer trench situated between the last house on the south side of

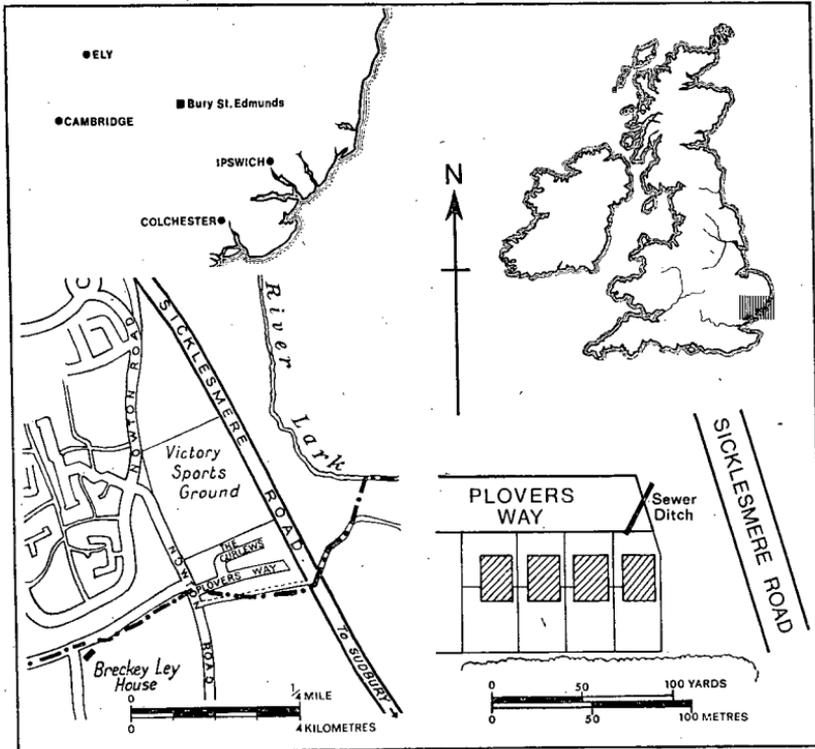


FIG. 50.—Maps showing find-spot of gold bracelets.

Plovers Way and Sicklesmere Road in the district of Nowton, Bury St. Edmunds at NGR TL/866625 (Fig. 50). They were found

¹² J. Braun, *Das Christliche Altargerät*, Munich, 1932.