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Unique mediaeval pewter spoon

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THE history of the European spoon between Roman times and the Norman period is almost unknown. However, from the early mediaeval era an evolutionary sequence of spoon types becomes apparent. This commences in the late twelfth century with spoons having leaf-shaped bowls, and develops by way of the well known late mediaeval, Tudor and early Stuart spoons with fig-shaped bowls, to the 'modern' spoon which appears towards the mid-eighteenth century. Styles in silver and in the base metals, latten and pewter, are closely similar over the whole period. Somewhere in the early part of this sequence spoons are also found with round bowls, these perhaps being French rather than English in provenance, though they have been excavated in some numbers in this country.

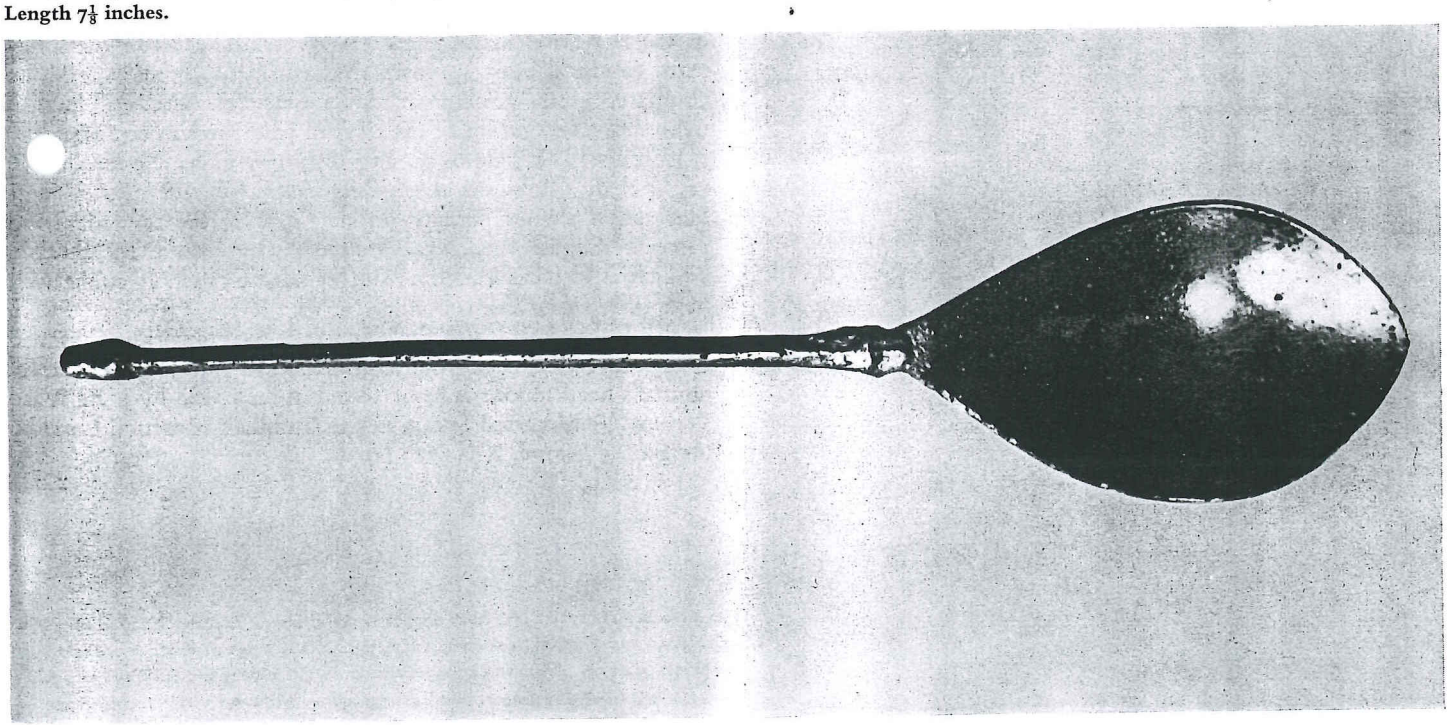
The majority of spoons that have survived from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are either latten or silver; the surviving examples of pewter spoons of this period can probably be numbered on the fingers of one hand. Among these, the present spoon shown in No. 1 with the grotesque animal's head at the root of the stem grasping the leaf-shaped bowl in its jaws, is an important example and appears to be unique. It perhaps represents the earliest surviving mediaeval English pewter spoon; certainly it is the finest.

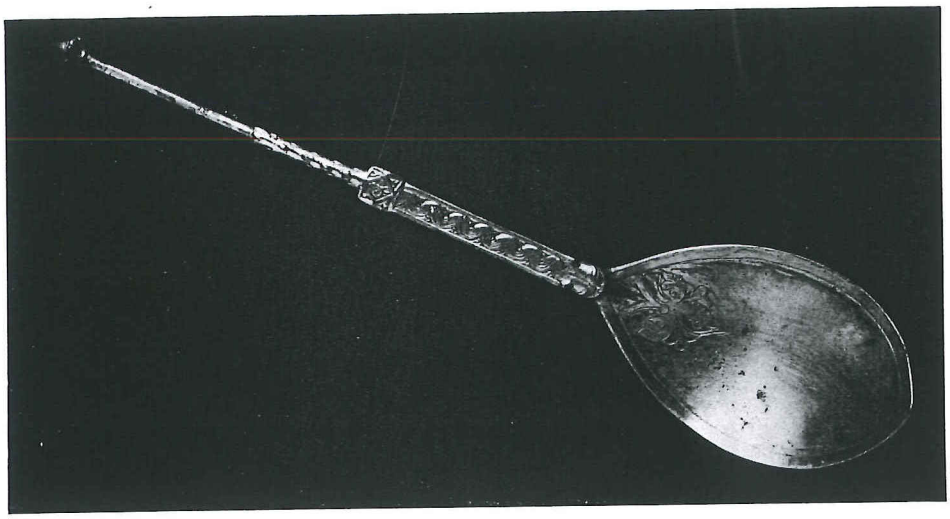
Some half dozen English or Scottish silver spoons with elegant leaf-shaped bowls are known, most of them excavated in this century. One of four discovered in Iona in 1922 is shown in No. 2. This bowl form is known also in a small number of quite plain, and rather crude, latten examples, and, to the author's knowledge in three pewter spoons. One of the latter is illustrated by Michaelis in *British Pewter* (p.27), and has a long slender stem terminating in a ball knop. It is conjecturally dated to the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries.

A feature of the silver examples is the head of a grotesque beast at the root of the stem, from the mouth of which issues the bowl. This motif also persists in silver spoons of a somewhat later date with essentially round bowls, and of early fourteenth-century date. One such, part of a hoard found at Rouen, and dating from *c.* 1330 is shown in No. 3. The bowl, though this is not apparent from the photograph, is slightly pointed, and the stem terminates in an acorn knop.

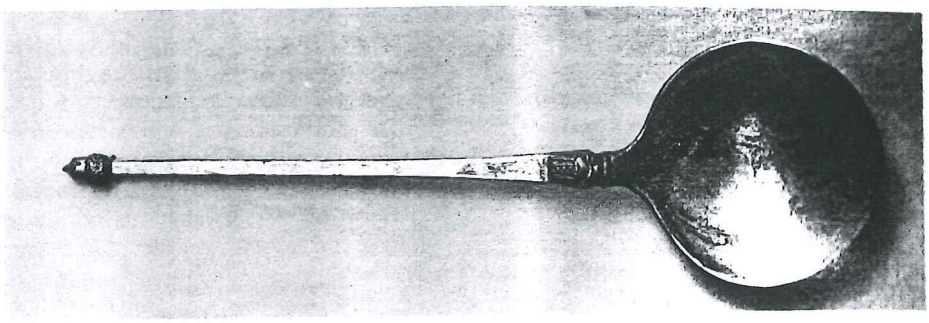
The pewter spoon of No. 1 has the leaf-shaped bowl of the Iona spoon, and the slender stem and acorn knop of the Rouen spoon. The stem of the latter is however of a flattened hexagonal section whereas the pewter example has a stem of diamond section, as does the distal end of the stem of the Iona spoon.

1. Pewter spoon with a corn knop, leaf-shaped bowl, and animal's head between the stem and bowl. Probably English late thirteenth century. Length 7⅛ inches.





2. Silver spoon from Iona, c. 1190. *National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.*



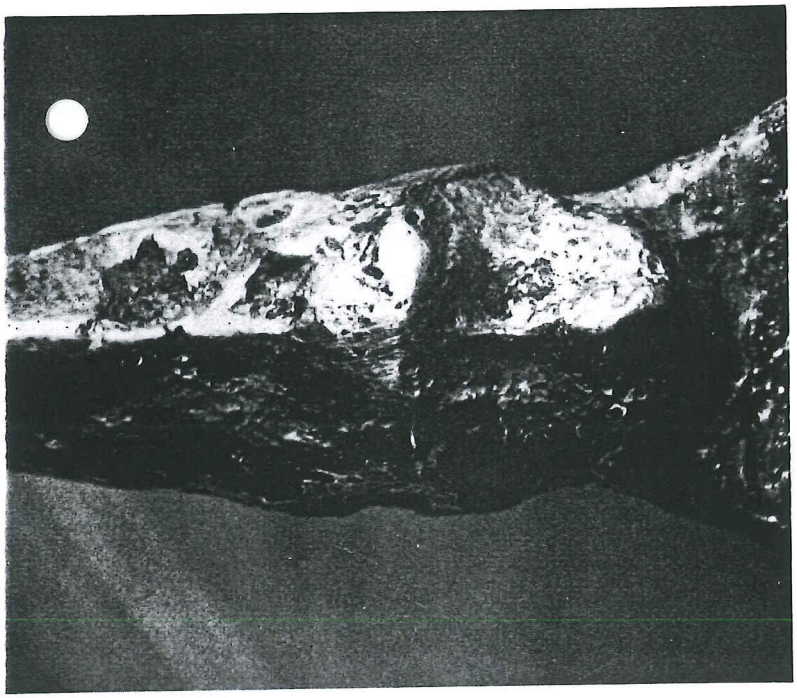
3. Silver spoon from a hoard discovered in Rouen and hidden *c.* 1330. *Victoria and Albert Museum.*

In base metal there are bronze (or latten?) spoons with animal head motifs in the Guildhall Museum (a stem only) and in the Museum for Archaeology and Ethnology at Cambridge. The former is dated on stylistic grounds as of the thirteenth century. The latter, which is a 'double spoon' having an elliptical bowl at each end of the slender square section stem, is of the early fourteenth century and was excavated at Water Beach Abbey. A double bowl silver spoon, probably English, and dating from *c.* 1250 was found at Ribe, Denmark. This again features an animal's head. Four bone spoons with the same feature, found in London, and of uncertain early mediaeval date are also extant. However, no pewter spoon with the animal head as a decorative motif appears to have been previously described. The acorn knop is first mentioned in England in a will of 1348, though the Rouen spoons show that this feature was in use (at least in France) some decades earlier than this.

The present unique pewter spoon appears to be transitional in style between the Iona type spoons of *c.* 1190 and the Rouen spoons of before 1330 and can probably be dated at or somewhat before 1300, it is difficult to put the acorn knop earlier than this, or the leaf bowl much later. The grotesque head of the long-eared mythical beast is shown in detail in No. 4 and should be compared with similar grotesque dragons' heads in English manuscript decoration of the twelfth to thirteenth centuries.

Its remarkable state of preservation may indicate a ceremonial rather than a domestic use, unless it was lost very early in its life, and it should perhaps be classed with the few surviving pieces of English mediaeval church pewter such as the Lincoln sepulchral chalices and the Weoley Castle cruet. It could well have been an incense spoon.

The author is indebted for help to the director of the Guildhall Museum. Much background information on early mediaeval animal's head spoons is to be found in an article by J. B. Ward Perkins, 'A Medieval Spoon in the Guildhall Museum, London' *Antiquities Journal*, XIX, 313 (1939).



4. Detail of the animal's head of the spoon in No. 1.