

**A candlestick foot in the form of a cockerel**  
**Germany, Lower Saxony**  
**Second half 13<sup>th</sup> century**



*7.7 x 3.2 x 12 cm; hollow (lost-wax) cast, chased, engraved and punched copper alloy with a deep brown patina. A central drilled hole, presumably used for fixing the candlestick in place, runs through the upper and lower sections of the body. The proper right leg restored below the hock, and a small fill on the tip of the beak. The central sickle feather of the tail broken at the tip. A sprue hole on the bird's rump.*

*Provenance*

Private collection, Massif Central, France

This diminutive cast-bronze cockerel stands proudly in full crow, its weight carefully balanced over its delicately modelled talons. The bird's head, with its tooled comb and wattle standing proud from the skull, is turned subtly to the left as it crows, giving it a dynamic and naturalistic sense of action further emphasised by the angling of its legs as if paused in mid-stride. A cape of sharply backswept feathers modelled in low relief enclose the neck above a bare breast, and overlap the bird's wings, which are represented with a pronounced wing bow and a combination of engraved and modelled feathers. The large, elegant feathers of the down-swept tail are separated from the wings and body by a saddle of smaller feathers encircling the back. The feet have three toes, a claw extending from the reverse, and a spur below the hock joint. The bird's underside is smoothly modelled without feathers.

The defining features of this strutting cockerel place its creation in the second half of the thirteenth century, when the famed bronze casters of Hildesheim in Lower Saxony led the technological and aesthetic advancement of the artform. Large free-standing monuments such as the eagle lectern of the c.1230s in Hildesheim Cathedral (fig. 1) brilliantly elucidate how the Hildesheim bronze casters' and their sculptor collaborators had developed an acute sense of anatomical verism, and an attentiveness towards naturalistic balance, with animals and birds carefully poised over their feet in a thoroughly believable pose. Following the example of the Hildesheim lectern, key documents of this approach to verism, weighting and balance are a series of cockerel aquamaniles thought to have been produced in the region toward the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The example now preserved in the Metropolitan Museum in New York is modelled so as to balance perfectly over its claws, and just like our much smaller bird it has a similarly opened beak, with the same hooked upper section, as well as comparably arranged wattles and comb (fig. 2). A similarly conceived dove aquamanile, also standing over its feet and with its head and neck positioned in an identical manner to our bird is in the Kolumba Museum in Cologne.<sup>2</sup> Two other surviving cockerel aquamaniles (in Frankfurt and Nuremberg respectively: see figs. 3-4) also have elements of this approach, though both are supported in three places by way of their tail feathers or projecting struts respectively. Technically, the presence of a sprue hole in the rear feathers of our bird is especially analogous to the Nuremberg vessel, suggesting a similar approach to the founding process in spite of differences in scale.



These parallels all serve to highlight the question of function. While larger cockerel aquamaniles clearly served as vessels for pouring water and potentially also other liquids, our bird has no apparent place or capacity in this context, despite its opened beak and the piercing through to the interior of the casting visible at the back of the mouth. The drill holes present in the top of the body (bordering the saddle feathers just behind the cape) and on its underside suggest that the figure was attached by way of a pin or screw to a larger object, perhaps a base of some form, and that it supported a superstructure of some form on its back. Such features are in fact absolutely typical for cast copper alloy candlesticks and candle 'feet' of the period, which were often assembled from multiple parts held together by a central column, stem, or pin. The diminutive scale of our cockerel also serves to bolster such a reconstruction, being closely

<sup>1</sup> Alternatively dated in the surrounding scholarship to the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century or c. 1300; see Ursula Mende, *Die mittelalterlichen Bronzen im Germanischen Nationalmuseum: Bestandskatalog*, Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2013, pp. 189-190.

<sup>2</sup> Otto Falke and Erich Meyer, *Romanische Leuchter und Gefässe: Giessgefässe der Gotik*, Berlin, 1983, p. 101, fig. 232.

analogous to a number of surviving anthropomorphic and zoomorphic candlesticks cast in thirteenth-century Hildesheim. Of these, the famous *drachenleuchten* or dragon lights preserved in museums around the world offer direct parallels, particularly in their approach to engraved surface detail (fig. 5). The language of the tooling used on our cockerel, with small circular or 'ball-point' punches texturizing the comb and wattle, and engraved linear elements enlivening the various feather motifs over the body, all accord closely to the techniques and decoration of Hildesheim metalwork at this time, both larger aquamaniles and the variously sized *drachenleuchten*.<sup>3</sup> It would appear, however, that our cockerel is the only surviving example of its type and iconography, making it a unique document in the story of Hildesheim metalwork of the thirteenth century.



#### *Related literature*

Michael Brandt ed., *Bild und Bestie; Hildesheimer Bronzen der Stauferzeit*, Exh. Cat (Hildesheim, 2008)

P. Barnet, P. Dandridge, *Lions, Dragons and other Beasts, Aquamanilia of the Middle Ages, Vessels for Church and Table*, Exh. Cat (New York, 2006)

Michael Hütt, *Aquamanilien; Gebrauch und Form* (Mainz am Rhein, 1993)

Ursula Mende, *Die Mittelalterlichen Bronzen im Germanischen Nationalmuseum*, Nürnberg, 2013

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<sup>3</sup> cf. horse and rider aquamaniles dated to c. 1225-50 and now in the Nationalmuseet in Copenhagen, inv. nos. D 333/1974 and D 334/1974, illustrated in Michael Brandt ed., *Bild und Bestie: Hildesheimer Bronzen der Stauferzeit*, Regensburg, 2008 p. 203, abb. 12-20. See also a number of Hildesheim-type dragon candlesticks with feathers engraved in an identical manner to those on our cockerel, illustrated in pp. 73-79.



Fig. 1  
The Hildesheim 'Eagle Lectern'  
Lower Saxony, Hildesheim  
c. 1230-40  
*57.5 cm (height); cast, chased, engraved and punched copper alloy*  
Hildesheim Cathedral



Fig. 2  
Cockerel aquamanile  
Germany, Lower Saxony  
Second half 13<sup>th</sup> century  
*25.2 x 10.5 x 24.7 cm; cast, chased, engraved and punched copper alloy*  
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 1989.292



Fig. 3  
Cockerel aquamanile  
Germany, Lower Saxony  
Second half 13<sup>th</sup> century  
*cast, chased, engraved and punched copper alloy*  
Frankfurt am Main, Museum Angewandte Kunst, inv. WMF 1



Fig. 4  
Cockerel aquamanile  
Lower Saxony  
13<sup>th</sup> century  
22.5 x 21.8 cm; *cast, chased, engraved and punched copper alloy*  
Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, inv. KG490



Fig. 5  
Candlestick in the form of a dragon disgorging a knight  
Lower Saxony, Hildesheim  
c. 1250  
27.7 x 28 cm; cast, chased, engraved and punched copper alloy  
Stuttgart, Landesmuseum Württemberg, inv. 9462