LOT 24
GERMAN, SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN, OR SCANDINAVIAN, 14TH CENTURY
LION AQUAMANILE
copper alloy
28.5 by 33.5cm., 11⅜ by 13¼in.

ESTIMATE £100,000-150,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 250,000 GBP

PROVENANCE
Erholm, Denmark, until circa 1935;
Mrs Major Brandt, Oslo, Norway, by 1935;
Ragnar Moltzaus collection;
by whom loaned to the National Museum for Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo, Norway (inv. no. OK 307);
private collection, Switzerland
EXHIBITED
Oslo, National Museum for Art, Architecture and Design (inv. no. OK 307)

LITERATURE

CATALOGUE NOTE
Aquamanilia are some of the most remarkable objects to have passed down to us from the Middle Ages. Produced from the 12th until the 15th centuries, they represent the first hollow-cast metalwork pieces to be made in Western Europe since Antiquity. The knowledge of the cire perdue technique had been lost, and was not re-introduced to Western Europe until the renovation of the 12th century, when trade routes around the Mediterranean expanded and contact with Islamic metalworkers increased. Aquamanilia were used during ritual handwashings, in both sacred and secular settings. Nearly all aquamanilia are zoomorphic in form, with the lion being the most common. The lion, in high medieval bestiaries already indicated as the first among all animals, and known as the ‘King of Beasts’ with exceptional strength, was associated with both Christ and worldly kings. Its use, both in ecclesiastical ritual and as an ostentatious showpiece on the noble banqueting table, was therefore apt.

Most aquamanilia were produced in Germany, with important workshops based in Lower Saxon, Nuremberg, Braunschweig and Lübeck. However, a number of these vessels, like the present example, cannot be confidently attributed to those centres. Like all lion aquamanilia, the present piece shares certain features with the famous Braunschweig lion (Barnet and Dandridge, op. cit. p. 14), including the individually lobed locks of hair of the mane, and the stance with the hind legs stretching out below the body. Even closer comparison can be made with those lions produced in Lübeck and across the Schleswig-Holstein region during the fourteenth century. Ursula Mende (op. cit) convincingly attributes a group of lion aquamanilia and door-knockers to this region, where workshops operated within the circle of Johann Apengeter (before 1300-after 1351). The aquamanilia within this group are distinguished, most importantly, by the collar-like band around the head, which terminates in the large round ears. Further distinctions include the close-set almond-shaped eyes, the handle in the shape of a dragon, and the tail with several knobs. Prime examples of this group are the lion aquamanile in the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin (inv. no. 17,105) and the Samson and the Lion in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (inv. no. 40.233; see Barnet and Dandridge, op. cit., no. 16 and Brandt, op. cit., no. 49).

The present Lion Aquamanile, sharing many of the features of the Lübeck group, is likely to have originated in the same region. Compare also to Falke and Meyer, op. cit., images 446-450. However, Falke and Meyer identify a group of five lions, cat. nos. 493-497, including the present Lion, as seemingly more provincial, and therefore possibly manufactured in Scandinavia (op. cit. p. 76-77). They base this distinction from the Northern German lions on a certain heaviness in the execution, the detailing on the collar and the legs, and the fact that these were all preserved in Scandinavian localities, including the National Museum in Copenhagen and the Brandt Collection in Oslo. Mende (op. cit., p. 99) states that due to Hanseatic trade around the Baltic Sea during the fourteenth century, the influence of the Apengeter workshop is likely to have spread to Scandinavian countries in the region, such as Denmark, but she considers it more likely that the finished aquamanilia, produced in Schleswig-Holstein, were then traded throughout the Baltic Sea region. Falke and Meyer acknowledge in their seminal work that firmly determining the origin of these items is very difficult. However, the present Aquamanile, of impressive stature and size, presents the rare opportunity to acquire a published aquamanile of exceptional quality.

RELATED LITERATURE
U. Mende, Die Türzieher des Mittelalters, Denkmäler deutscher Kunst, Bronzegefäße des Mittelalters, vol. 2, Berlin,