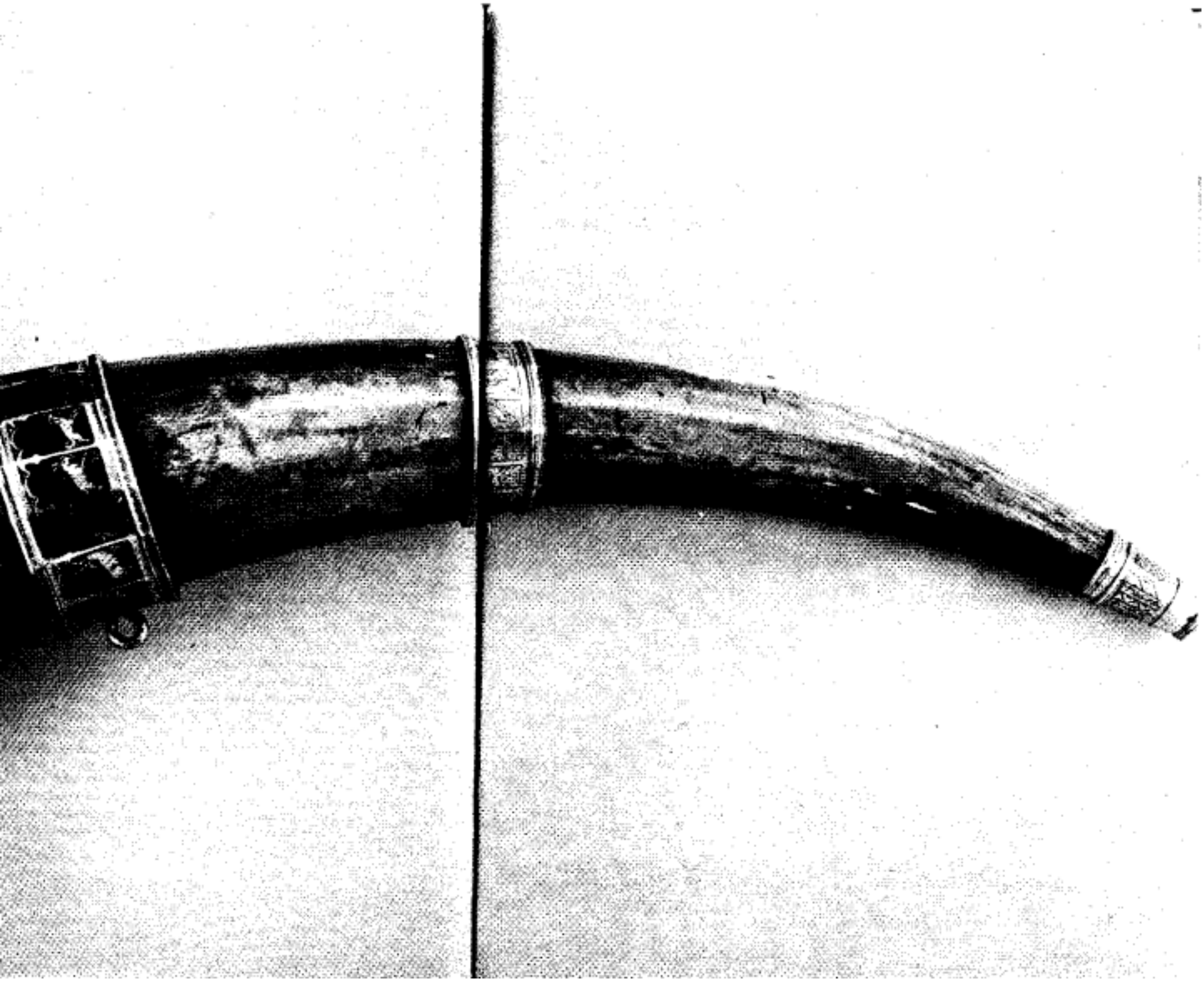

The Savernake Horn

The Savernake Horn (see cover and centerfold of this issue of Olifant) is a magnificent medieval olifant, the precise history of which has been lost to us. Its elephant ivory body was probably carved in Italy during the eleventh century, while decorative silver mounts were added in the fourteenth century in England. The baldric (sling), showing the coats of arms of the Earls of Moray, was made in Scotland at the same period, so the horn may have been captured from the English after the battle of Bannockburn in 1314. If so, it might then have been recaptured by the English during the sack of Edinburgh in 1544, for it appears in Camden's Britannia of 1586 as the "great tenure horn of Savernake Forest" (Wiltshire). For several generations the olifant was owned by the Seymour family. Sometime around 1700 the mouthpiece and a few other parts were attached. In 1946 the olifant was sounded—it makes a tremendous noise—to honor the arrival of George VI at Savernake Forest. Early in 1975 a descendant of the Wilshire family, the present Lord Ailesbury, sold the horn to two London dealers, Ronald Lee and S.J. Phillips, who, in turn, sold it to the British Museum, where the horn may now be seen in a specially constructed case in the entrance hall. Although its price (£210,000) has earned the horn a place in the current Guiness Book of Records as the most expensive piece of silver ever purchased, that price is considered by many to be very low.

The decorative bands, shown in some detail on the cover of this issue of Olifant, are made of silver enriched with translucent enamel. The lower band depicts various animals, while the upper band, furthest from the mouthpiece, shows other animals, a bishop, a king, and a forester with an olifant. (The latter can also be seen in the centerfold photograph.) These decorations suggest that the horn was made for the chief warden of the royal forests of England.

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We wish to thank the trustees of the British Museum for allowing us to publish these pictures. The description given here was compiled from information provided by M. Webb, Deputy Director of the British Museum, and from articles in The (London) Times (April 10, 1975) and The Guardian (April 11, 1975). We also wish to thank Professor I.D.L. Michael, Southampton, for bringing these articles to our attention.

Forthcoming in *Olifant*

Hans E. Keller, "The *Song of Roland:* A Mid-Twelfth Century Song of Propaganda for the Capetian Kingdom." The culmination of years of research, this study synthesizes into a general conclusion all of the major ideas expressed by Professor Keller in a series of recent articles devoted to the *Roland.*

Ian Short, "A Note on Our Eponymous Horn." General comments on the origin of medieval olifants. Do recent theories here have any implication for the study of the Old French epic?

Duncan C. McMillan, Review article on E. Einhorn, *Old French: A Concise Handbook.*

Excerpts from two forthcoming translations into English: *Amis et Amiles* (Samuel N. Rosenberg and Samuel Danon) and *Raoul de Cambrai* (Jean Strandness).