A TREASURY AT THE CLOISTERS

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The first of three groups of recent accessions is now on view in the Room of Special Exhibitions at The Cloisters. For about a year the liturgical vessels and other objects of gold, silver, enamel, and bronze from great European collections, and other rare items of Gothic furniture and ironwork, will be kept together before they are installed in the appropriate galleries. Sculpture and tapestries will be shown as soon as they can be prepared for exhibition.

When The Cloisters was opened to the public in Fort Tryon Park just ten years ago, a place in the new building was reserved for a future sacristy pending the time our collections of small precious objects might permit us to have a treasury worthy of the architectural monuments, sculptures, tapestries, and other examples of medieval art. The limited material formerly exhibited in the small sacristy at the old Cloisters—a fragment of silk, an iron lock, a few copper-gilt Limoges enamels, and a wax crozier—was put in storage for the time being. The new accessions, supplemented by a selection from the rich collections at the Main Building that are not at present on exhibition, will be installed permanently at a later date.

In building up our collections we worked for more than twenty years in close collaboration with the late Joseph Brummer. In his inimitable way, Mr. Brummer had since his youth been bringing together a private collection of the finest medieval objects available in the international art market. His keen eye, the excellence of his judgment, his refusal to brook the interference of his competitors, and his accumulated knowledge and taste resulted in the assembling of an extraordinary collection. The present writer owes Mr. Brummer a particular debt of gratitude which he feels impelled to express at this writing. A great many objects at The Cloisters have been acquired as the result of our close relations.

During Mr. Brummer’s lifetime it was impossible to secure any of the pieces that have recently come into our possession. He preferred cherishing them in his place of business, sure in his own mind that many of the most desirable would one day find their way to the Museum. Now, with funds provided by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., we have purchased a selection made from the thousands of objects Joe Brummer, with the help of his brother Ernest, acquired through agents and competitors all over the world. They came via the Hermitage in Russia, great private collections in Paris, and the little fellow around the corner in Brooklyn.

Cathedrals like Cologne and Rheims had large treasuries housing the precious achievements of the medieval artisan. Many of these objects were made by monks for liturgical use and for the enrichment of their churches. The monastic code of rules prepared in the sixth century by Saint Benedict says that the monastery itself ought if possible to contain within its walls places for the exercise of the various crafts, so that there would be no occasion for the monks to wander abroad. The powerful Suger, Abbot of Saint Denis (1122-1151), had a more worldly method for enriching the House of God. In an account of his abbey and its art treasures he speaks of having appointed a supervising goldsmith, skilled in gold and silver ornament, and of acquiring vessels of gold and precious stones from the French kings and other friends of the Church. Both objects and artists came from remote places—as many as seven goldsmiths from Lorraine were working at Saint Denis at one time.

About this period the monk Theophilus, in his Treatise upon Various Arts, described the approved techniques for working gold, silver, copper, iron, stone, and wood in “industrious” Germany, as well as practices current in Italy, France, and Arabia. He favored the use of niello, a hard compound of silver and sulphur, for contrasting inlays in silver and gold.

237
The niello bowl shown opposite is all that remains of a ciborium used to hold the consecrated wafer. Now that it is again cleaned, it is not difficult to agree with one scholar who has called it the handsomest piece of medieval goldsmith’s work that has come down to us.

The bowl was purchased in an open market in Novgorod, where metalwork pieces were imported from the West in the xii and xiii centuries, by Alexander Basilewski, in whose Paris house it was much admired prior to the sale of his collections in 1884 to the Russian emperor for the Hermitage. Until Hanns Swarzenski pointed out a chalice of identical style and technique in the Stockholm museum it was generally thought that this bowl was unique. The Stockholm chalice and other objects were discovered in 1881 by ditch-diggers in a pasture in Dune, in Gotland. They are said to have been buried to protect them from invaders who ravaged Visby and the surrounding region in 1361. The chalice and our bowl have been thought to be French because of a striking resemblance to an enamel and metalwork ciborium in the Louvre, signed by Alpais, who worked at Limoges. Owing to stylistic similarity with objects from both sides of the English Channel, it seems preferable to ascribe them to the Channel School.

Curiously enough a buckle, described as silver-gilt, identical in style with the clasp on the opposite page, was also found at Dune. The Swedish suggestion that the model the goldsmith worked from was prepared by the native Tingstäd master, who was of foreign extraction, is less convincing than an attribution to Nicholas of Verdun or one of his close followers.

The interchange of such wares, from the xi century onwards, was part of a general trade revival, chiefly among cities belonging to the Hanseatic League. Under this league old European trade centers were linked with the East and the North. Gotland established trading rights with Novgorod in 1229, with England in 1237.
Theophilus urged craftsmen to develop “a more ample invention”: “Hasten to complete with all the study of thy mind those things which are still wanting in the House of the Lord.” Fans, or flabella, are among the most spectacular of liturgical objects. They were sometimes carried in pairs by deacons, as shown in the illustration at the left, from the thirteenth-century Jumièges missal in the Library at Rouen. These disks, often with cruciform decoration, derived from the liturgical fans used in early Christian times to keep away flies during the celebration of the Mass. In the later Middle Ages they were used as altar crosses and sometimes as reliquaries. In style and craftsmanship the flabellum illustrated here recalls the cresting and filigree of the cele-
Flabellum of gilded bronze, gold, silver, champlevé enamel, and jewels. Rhenish, about 1200. From the Hermitage. The central filigree boss, which swings on a hinge, once held a relic.

brated shrines of the Three Kings in the treasury of Cologne cathedral, that of Charlemagne at Aix-la-Chapelle, and the Saint Mauritius shrine at Siegburg. Stone statues in the cathedral at Cologne and in the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris are shown holding flabellum. The small illustration opposite also shows a chalice, the cup used in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Chalices varied in shape and decoration from the simplest to the most elaborate.
This parcel-gilt silver chalice was made by Brother Bertinus in 1222. The name suggests the vicinity of St. Omer in northern France, where there was a great abbey dedicated to Saint Bertinus. Related chalices have been traced to Spain, Ireland, Iceland, and Scandinavia. The simple outlines contrast with the delicate openwork of animals and foliage on the knob.
The reliquary above, of parcel-gilt silver with niello and jewels, is in the style of Brother Hugo of Oignies, the famous Lorraine goldsmith, who worked about 1230. Such reliquaries (see also those on pp. 248 and 249) were made in the shape of the relics they contained. The niello panels show the “Greek” foliage and “graceful circles” recommended by Theophilus.
The chalice, paten, and straws shown here are of parcel-gilt silver with niello and jewels. The chalice and straws were used at the Mass for the sacramental wine, the paten for the sacramental bread. Complete sets like this are very rare. This one was made in the early XIII century for the abbey of Saint Trudpert near Freiburg in Breisgau. Saint Trudpert, a local saint, is portrayed in niello below the figure of Christ on the paten. On the richly decorated chalice are Christ and the twelve apostles in niello around the bowl, four New Testament scenes in gilded relief around the knob, and on the foot the four related Old Testament scenes that prefigure them. This group of sumptuous pieces was acquired by Czar Alexander III from the Basilewski collection and until a decade ago was one of the treasures of the Hermitage.
These pieces are examples of the enamel and copper-gilt work produced in Limoges in France in the xii and especially in the xiii century. Following established forms and conventional techniques and types of decoration, such objects were made in great quantities, largely for use in the medieval liturgies. The eucharistic dove, symbol of the Holy Ghost, was suspended above the altar and used for keeping the Host in reserve. An unusual feature of this example is the movable wings. The rare altar candlesticks, one of two pairs recently purchased, retain their original gilding. The spouted basin was used for washing at meal time. It is called a gemellion, from the Latin word meaning twin, as such basins were made in pairs. Their secular and heraldic designs are unusual decoration for the time. This one represents a coronation scene surrounded by various merry-making figures. Altar cruets were also made in pairs for the Mass, one for water, one for wine. The example illustrated is one of the seven known to exist today. The copper-gilt figure below, now holding a reliquary cylinder, formerly held a church in its hands.

The general term for the enamel technique shown here, for which Limoges was famed, is champlevé, in which the designs are
engraved in the body of cast or repoussé copper, filled with powdered glass and metallic oxides, baked, and then polished. The exposed copper was mercury-gilded to give the object a resplendent and lasting surface. Theophilus, writing before Limoges reached the height of its productivity, describes the purification of copper, burnt copper as he calls it: "From the copper you can work whatever you may wish to make, for gilding, in ductile work, in figures and animals and birds, in censers and different vases."

By the XIII century Limoges workshops, with copper available in mines only a few miles from the city, attained the proportions of an industry. Her exports were to be found in the Middle Ages all over Europe. For over a century now, public and private collectors have been bringing together reliquaries, book covers, pyxides, croziers, and a variety of objects of the type represented on these two pages. The collections of these enamels in the Metropolitan Museum are perhaps the richest in existence, owing largely to the collecting enthusiasm of the elder Morgan.

Although a great deal of study has been devoted to such pieces as these, we still do not know a great deal about the classifications and development of champlevé enamels.
ABOVE: Silver-gilt bowl with repoussé and chiseled decoration. Swiss, xiv century.

BELOW: Shoe reliquary of leather with traces of paint. French, xiv century. The embossed and tooled scenes are from the life of Saint Margaret.
Pilgrimages across the continent of Europe and crusades to the Holy Land were occasioned by the cult of sacred relics. These venerated remains were often kept in containers wrought with the consummate devotion and skill of the medieval craftsmen. The finger reliquary is made with an elegant simplicity. The leather shoe with an iron lock was most probably a protective case for a metal reliquary that held a bone from a foot.

The Old Serbian inscription on the back of the Swiss bowl shown on the opposite page says: “In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, may God give joy to him who drinks from it but let him not forget the poor.”
The chandelier in this detail of Jan van Eyck's portrait of Jan Arnolfini and his wife (1434) in the National Gallery, London, though somewhat less elaborate, bears a striking resemblance to the one shown on the opposite page. Similar ones are also in the Berlin and Victoria and Albert museums. Our chandelier was cast in separate pieces, each arm having assembly marks corresponding with marks on the central shaft. The entire surface was hand-
Flemish or German bronze chandelier similar to the one in van Eyck’s painting, XV century

tooled and the rough parts made smooth before the final polishing.

The dirt of centuries and gradual oxidation, known as patina, have obscured the true original character of many bronze objects that once glittered in the ecclesiastic and domestic interiors of northern Europe. Cleaning these wares, like caring for brass doorknobs and baptismal fonts in any well-to-do society, was part of the daily housekeeping routine.

Though bronze utensils and other objects were made in various places, they were often called “Dinanderie” because of the important foundries at Dinant in Flanders. At Aix-la-Chapelle about the year 1581 there were a thousand craftsmen working in copper and brass. They even used power-driven hammers.

Medieval goldsmiths were adept in casting and refinishing various metals. With a bold use of their media they achieved even in small ob-

251
Pilate washing his hands, from a xii century manuscript in Besançon; dragon swallowing a man, German, xii or xiii century; lion, German, xiii century; ewer, West European, xii century

252
Horsemen, North European, xiv and early xv centuries; horse, German, about 1400; turret, West European, xiv or xv century. The painting opposite shows the use of these aquamaniles.
jects the plastic quality of monumental sculptures. The use of zinc in combination with copper made a readily workable alloy. Like modern brass, this so-called auricalcum glistered like gold when it was polished. It has not been customary in museums to clean medieval bronze objects. The vast improvement in the bronzes in the present exhibition, now restored as nearly as possible to their original condition, is very revealing. To safeguard against further tarnishing and the need for constant polishing, these metalwork objects have been given coats of preservative lacquer.

Though there are relatively few monumental medieval bronze doors, fountains, and baptismal crosses, and incense burners have remained in the sacristies of Europe or are in public and private collections. No group of objects is more fascinating than the containers for water known as aquamaniles. An inventory of about 1150 for the treasury of Mainz cathedral describes “ewers of various shapes, called manilia because water is poured from them on the hands of the priests. Some have the shape of lions, others of dragons, birds, griffins, and other animals.” To what extent these animals were symbolic and whether aquamaniles were used for domestic purposes is not known.

A number of lavers, with spouts at each side, are seen in late medieval paintings. They were also used for washing the hands. The picture on the opposite page shows a laver suspended in a niche. As lavers appear to have been fastened to chains, not hung on open hooks, they must have been filled from other vessels. The chaining of books and other objects that were not securely put away in a sacristy or in a solid piece of furniture is an old custom.

The alms boxes placed conveniently for donations for the poor had to be doubly secure. The one illustrated has cast figures, probably representing the Coronation of the Virgin. It no doubt had an iron padlock. Donation boxes of iron in the shape of small chests occur more frequently. Utilitarian objects saw hard service and rarely survived. No similar example has been found.

There are many paintings showing how furniture was used. The central panel of the Mé-
rode triptych (about 1430) by Robert Campin illustrates the use of several objects in the exhibition. There are a pair of andirons, an iron candle bracket (see p. 258), and a hanging bronze laver similar to those in this painting.

Domestic dwellings in the Middle Ages were sparingly furnished. Tables and stools, a chair for people of importance, a cupboard and a chest or two sufficed for the furnishing of the great hall. The small stools on page 257 were used as seats and side tables. They could be readily moved about and placed as required near the heavier, more stately, high-backed seats. The chair on page 260 recalls certain German choir stalls but was probably made in France or Flanders. The hard oak seat was surely padded with a colorful pillow, as were most seats in the houses of the nobles. In the bench on page 256 there is storage space under the hinged seat. The cabinetmaker borrowed many of his ideas from architecture. The applied buttresses and moldings have no structural meaning in woodwork. Linen-fold panels were produced in infinite variety.
The paintings here, the Virgin from a North French Annunciation (1451) in the Museum and a detail of the Last Supper by Dieric Bouts, from an altarpiece (about 1468) in Louvain, illustrate typical Northern interiors. The rare xv century French table shown above had drawers at each end. The central cupboard space may have been used for storing bread. Tables received such hard use that few Gothic examples have come down to us. Medieval tables sometimes had reversible tops. When one side had served for preparing a meal, the top was turned and used for dining. An example of this type is in Anne Hathaway's cottage in Stratford-on-Avon.
Catalan ironworkers achieved great fame. In 1250 two of them were called to Paris to execute the grilles in Notre-Dame. The extraordinary chair and candlesticks and the candle bracket inscribed ave maria gratiae plena, which resembles those in the painting on page 255, are xv century pieces. The lectern, though found in Italy, is similar to Catalan examples. The xiii century brazier on wheels was a type that continued through the centuries. Its use is shown in the xv century Catalan painting of the Nativity of the Virgin.
High-backed oak chair with carving of the Tree of Jesse. French or Flemish, xv century. Chairs like this were sometimes painted.