RECENT REINSTALLATIONS
OF MEDIEVAL ART

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When architectural monuments and works of art have ceased to fulfill their intended purposes and have been uprooted from their original backgrounds, showing them to their best advantage presents many problems. Like displaced persons, or Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author, they require new horizons if they are to continue to have a part in the world of today. The recent reinstallation and rearrangements described in this article are the result of an attempt to present our medieval objects to better advantage.

These changes have included the removal of two monumental exhibits to The Cloisters from the Main Building, as we believe that The Cloisters affords the most appropriate setting for most of our medieval architectural objects. The first of these is the ciborium, or altar canopy, illustrated here, which, following a plan envisaged some time ago, has been reinstalled in the Romanesque Chapel. The history of this chapel and of other objects exhibited together at The Cloisters has been told in Medieval Monuments at The Cloisters; As They Were and as They Are. The installation of the ciborium is another step in combining architectural objects which, in point of date and original use, appropriately belong together. And its removal to The Cloisters has made possible an important rearrangement in the Main Building, also to be discussed in this article.

The ciborium is an imposing white marble structure, well suited to the proportions of the Romanesque Chapel, having been built for an apse of about the same size in the church of Santo Stefano near Fiano Romano. It has undergone few changes in the course of its history. The mellowing of the marble with age has scarcely altered its appearance, and it still has the original geometric gold and colored mosaic inlays on the architraves. The roofs, although they are later restorations, preserve the original slant, as we know from the grooves with beveled sides in which they are placed. The ciborium has been in several locations before its present reinstallation (see p. 200). In 1889, after the church of Santo Stefano had been secularized and had become the property of Vincenzo Montenovesi, it was still over the altar. When the Museum bought it at auction in 1909 it was in the Gramercy Park residence of Henry W. Poor.

Most of the existing ciboria of this type are native to Rome and the surrounding provinces. Purists may object that such a structure would not have been in a French church in the twelfth century. But they cannot be certain; the eleventh-century ciborium at Cuxa was not unlike the later Italian examples. And to a less pedantic view the ciborium seems by no means foreign to its new setting.

Perhaps the best known of the Italian ciboria of the Cloisters variety is the one in the church of San Lorenzo fuori le Mura, built in 1148 by the sons of Paulus, the marble worker, and considerably restored in the nineteenth century. The ciborium in Sant'Andrea in Flumine near Ponzano, not far from Fiano, almost identical with ours, was made, as in all probability ours was also, by the Roman marble workers Nicolaus Ranucius (a follower of Paulus) and his sons Giovanni and Guittone. Another, in Santa Maria in Castello at Corneto (Tarquinia) was built in 1168 by the two sons alone. It has been assumed that the ciboria of Sant'Andrea and Santo Stefano, built while the father, Nicolaus, was still alive, were made a few years earlier, or about 1150.

Following the removal of the ciborium to The Cloisters, the thirteenth-century stained-glass window presented in 1924 to the Museum by one of its trustees, the late George D. Pratt, and exhibited for a decade in the Department
Ciborium reinstalled in the Romanesque Chapel at The Cloisters. Rogers Fund, 1909
The ciborium in its original location in the church of Santo Stefano near Fiano (1886); in the Gramercy Park house of Henry W. Poor (1909); in the Morgan Wing; and in Gallery D 15.
of Arms and Armor has been placed in the chapel-like room under the main staircase where the ciborium formerly stood. In this more suitable setting and with a strong light from behind, the window once more delights the observer with the glory of its colors and the interest of its story, the martyrdom of Saint Vincent of Saragossa. It is a survivor from a series once in the refectory of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the history of which makes dramatic reading.

On his victorious return from Spain, where he had besieged the Visigoths and the city of Saragossa, Childbert—son of Clovis and king of the Franks from 511 to 558—brought back as a trophy one of Saint Vincent’s garments. In honor of this and other relics he founded an abbey in what became the center of old Paris, with a basilica, dedicated on the day of his death to the Holy Cross and Saint Vincent, in which he was buried. Sometime in the eighth century the name of the foundation was changed to Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and in the ninth the basilica was burned by the Normans. Many changes were made during the period of Saint Louis’s encouragement of the arts. It was at this time (1299), according to Dom Bouillart, historian of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, writing in 1724, that the abbot Simon directed the famous architect Pierre de Montereau to construct the refectory. Today practically all that remains of the once flourishing conventual enclosures—the burial place of the kings of France before Saint-Denis—is the small church with sturdy tower and Romanesque portal that replaced the basilica. It too has undergone so many alterations that it continues to be the delight of archaeologists. It has many memories for the artists and writers who congregate at the Café des Deux Magots across the street and for many who heard the solemn mass celebrated there in the closing months of the war for the École des Beaux-Arts students “morts pour la France.”

The refectory was damaged during the French Revolution and was subsequently torn down. When in 1803 the church was opened again for religious services, many changes were in progress in the district of Saint Germain. In 1804 the rue Bonaparte was continued up to the very portal of the church and the rue de l'Abbaye cut through the site of the refectory and other buildings.

The story of the glass in the refectory has been traced in published records. The window is illustrated with others representing Blanche
of Castile and Saint Louis, in *Statistique Monumentale de Paris* (1867), by Albert Lenoir, son of Alexandre Lenoir, the official French architect at the time of the Revolution. Alexandre Lenoir had acquired two sets of windows from Saint-Germain, as we know from the following documents: a letter written in 1796 by the Minister of the Interior authorizing him to exchange a marble baptismal font and a terracotta Virgin and Child for a series of thirteenth-century stained-glass windows coming from Saint-Germain, and a receipt given by Lenoir in 1799 to the curate of Saint-Germain for a series of eight panels of thirteenth-century stained glass. The first group of windows are no doubt those shown in drawings published in 1821 in *Souvenirs du Musée des Monumens français*. The Musée des Monumens français was founded in 1791 by Lenoir, who was bringing together a large number of objects displaced as a result of the Revolution. In volume vi of his *Souvenirs* (1803) Lenoir published as coming from the refectory of the Abbey of Saint-Germain the panels of Queen Blanche and Saint Louis illustrated with our window in the later publication of his son. The size of the windows, as indicated by a scale on the illustration, is the same. We must conclude, then, that the refectory was decorated with scenes from the life of Saint Vincent and the French king and queen.

Our Saint Vincent window, like the few remaining thirteenth-century windows of similar style, those in the cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris, for instance, is a brilliant reminder of the great cycles of legend that decorated medieval monuments. Reading from below, our window represents: Dacian, governor of Spain under Diocletian and Maximian, ordering his henchmen to seize Valerius, Bishop of Saragossa, and Vincent, his deacon, and put them in chains; Childebert and his brother (?) come to Saragossa from Paris; Vincent and Valerius brought in chains before Dacian for trial; and Vincent and Valerius forced to walk from Saragossa to Valencia “chained and covered with abuse.” In the lancet arch (not included in Albert Lenoir’s colored reproduction) are represented: the miraculous return of the body of Saint Vincent from the depths of the sea to the shore near Valencia; a figure with a horn, possibly announcing the arrival of the relic in Paris; an
angel with a censer appearing above the prison.

An unusual, cryptic indication that this window was restored as early as 1711 appears on one of the sections of blue glass in the lower left corner, where one can read, *Robert Pruno/Cossette Conqgnon/Vitrier an 1711*. Oil-paint restorations on the window when it was first shown at the Museum have since been removed.
Additional panels from our life of Saint Vincent are in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore. The records accompanying the purchase of the glass did not reveal its origin, but the composition, color, and details leave no doubt that it too came from Saint-Germain.

The other monument moved to The Cloisters is the Spanish alabaster retable formerly in the main hall of the Morgan Wing, which we have recently erected in the room with the fifteenth-century stained glass from Boppard. When the late J. P. Morgan first visited The Cloisters, he suggested that, if the other Museum authorities so desired, they might transfer to our new branch museum of medieval art in Fort Tryon Park a limited number of appropriate objects given by him and his father. The removal of this imposing monument from the center of the pseudo-classical McKim, Meade and White gallery to the simple surroundings of the Boppard Room serves two purposes. It creates a very pleasing effect, as the yellowed alabaster retable looks particularly well in the auspicious light of changing skies that filters through the colorful glass. And it brings together in a suitable setting the glass from the church of Saint Severinus at Boppard on the Rhine and a contemporary Spanish retable. The connection is not a chance one; the influence of Rhenish artists in fifteenth-century Spain is well known.

The retable came originally from the archbishop’s palace in Saragossa. It was sold about 1909 by the archbishop and subsequently purchased in Paris by J. Pierpont Morgan. The scenes represent Saint Martin dividing his cloak, Christ appearing to Saint Martin, Pentecost, Saint Thecla’s miraculous escape from the flames, and Saint Thecla listening to Saint Paul preaching. The two figures holding heraldic shields bearing the arms of Archbishop Don Dalmau de Mur (1431-1456) were purchased from the Rogers Fund in 1914, and a small fragment of one of the other figures on the retable was presented by Mr. Émile Pares in 1916. A new altar, incorporating three heraldic shields bearing the arms of Don Dalmau
The Entombment from the château de Biron. Gift of J. P. Morgan, 1916

and the instruments of the Passion, has been constructed in accordance with a photograph of the altar in the archbishop’s palace.

The retable is well known in the literature of Spanish sculpture. It is usually ascribed to the sculptor Pedro Juan de Vallfogona (died 1447)
on the basis of similarity to his great retablos still standing in Saragossa and elsewhere.

It has been decided not to remove medieval sculptures to The Cloisters when they can eventually be shown to advantage in the Main Building. The projected reinstallation of the Entombment and Pietà from the château de Biron in the new building of the Metropolitan Museum will bring these most important sculptural groups into better surroundings. Some very beautiful stained-glass panels of the same period, bequeathed to the Museum by Mr. Pratt, will help provide this more sympathetic background. The sculptures were formerly in a chapel, as shown in the drawing below. The Entombment can be seen behind the screen at the upper right; the Pietà is above the altar at the left. Because of their unsuitable location these sculptures, the finest of their kind in America, have been much neglected by Museum visitors.