A Shrine for a Queen

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For those who are even the least bit curious about the private possessions of medieval dukes and duchesses, kings and queens, the inventories and account books of their households make very exciting reading. Here are listed and described their wardrobes, the furnishings of their castles, the manuscripts in their libraries, their gold and jeweled treasures. With a little imagination one can feast with them at a table where the saltcellar is of “silver-gilt, made in the manner of a peacock . . . with enameled wings . . . and the base [is] studded with small garnets and pearls of Scotland.” One can drink from a silver-gilt goblet enameled “in blue on which are Tristan and Iseult and the head of King Mark in a tree. And inside the cover there is a round blue enamel with rosettes of gold where there is a lady who holds a mirror and [there is] a unicorn in front of her. . . .”

One can pray with them in their private chapel before such a small altarpiece as this one:

“Within . . . is a statuette of Our Lady . . . holding her Child in her arm and in her right hand a twig of roses; and the said tabernacle has closing doors enameled with the life of Our Lady on the inside, and on the outside engraved (ciselées) in a design of lozenges. And above the head of the statuette is a square tower of masonry enameled with apostles. . . .”

The three descriptions quoted above were taken from an inventory, dated about 1379, of the possessions of Louis I of Anjou. This inventory lists over 3600 similar objects of goldsmiths’ work and jewelry; the pity of it is that not a single one of them is known to exist today. Such items could be melted down and converted into cash; Louis himself converted most of his treasures in this way to finance his campaigns in Italy.

A similar story could be told of other great collections of goldsmiths’ work of the fourteenth century. And so we are especially fortunate to have acquired for The Cloisters a shrine of the same type as that described in Louis’s inventory—probably the most glorious little private altarpiece of silver-gilt and enamel to have survived to our time (Figure 1, Color plate). Only three others are known to exist: one is in the Poldi-Pezzoli Museum in Milan (Figure 3), one in the cathedral treasury of Seville, and the third in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

Ours is the largest and most elaborate of the group and the most resplendent. In the center (Figure 4) is a lovely, solemn Virgin Mary, crowned as Queen of Heaven, and preparing to nurse her son, an eager youngster with bright eyes and curling hair. On either side stand angels like cheerful children, holding high their boxes containing relics. These exquisite little figures are enhanced by the folding wings of the shrine, enameled front and back in brilliant colors, with cobalt blue, amethyst, topaz, and emerald green predominating. The translucent enamels have something of the splendor of stained-glass windows, or a design of precious gems. The ensemble, in its architectural framework of silver-gilt, is a triumph of the goldsmith’s art, a jewel fit for a queen.

There is reason to believe that the shrine did belong to a queen. Although of French origin, it has been preserved for centuries in Hungary, and Hungarian art historians say that it was once in the possession of Elizabeth (Figure 16), daughter of King Vladislav of Poland, sister of Casimir the Great. In 1320 she married Charles Robert of the Angevin line of Naples, who had been called to the Hungarian throne at the death of
the last king of the Árpad dynasty. The documents available at present cannot prove beyond a doubt that Queen Elizabeth once owned our entrancing little altarpiece. However, the heavy weight of Hungarian tradition, backed by the research of Hungarian scholars, leads us to accept this attribution.

Elizabeth was beautiful, all the contemporary chroniclers state, and she was the gracious mistress of the royal court in Visegrád. It was a very gay court until, in 1329, a discontented nobleman tried to assassinate her husband and children. The attempt failed, but Elizabeth, trying to defend her family, lost the four fingers of her right hand, "that hand," says the monk-chronicler Mark of Kált, "which she extended so many times to the poor and the miserable . . . those fingers with which she embroidered so many altar cloths for so many churches."

The experience was a sobering one. Soon afterward, in 1334, Elizabeth founded in Óbuda (Old Buda) the first Hungarian convent of the Poor Clares of the order of St. Francis. This bit of history is important to the story of our enameled shrine, because the first recognizable reference to it is found in an inventory of the Clares, made at the time of the dissolution of the convent in 1782. It is described as a "small altarpiece with two wings for a house chapel, in the center part of which the image of the Holy Virgin is giving her breast to the Child Jesus, flanked on both sides by the figures of virgins. The whole is made of gilt silver." Earlier inventories of the convent mention "a small silver gilt altarpiece," but unfortunately they add few specific details. An inventory of 1656 states that in the altarpiece "there is the image of the Holy Virgin." This


inventory was made when the Clares were at Pozsony (now Bratislava), having fled there for refuge from the Turks. An inventory of 1714, made after the nuns had returned to Óbuda, lists a “silver gilt altarpiece,” which was “used by the Queen for her devotions.” In the records of the Clares, “the Queen” without exception referred to Elizabeth.

Elizabeth was proud of the convent she had founded “in honor of the blessed Virgin,” claiming that it was “the largest for nuns in all of Hungary” and that she “educated there more than one hundred nuns and many girls of noble origin.” Her gifts to the convent were lavish. She also gave rich presents to St. Peter’s in Rome, to the church of St. Nicholas in Bari, the Hungarian chapel in Aachen, the church of St. Louis in Marseilles, and to the popes in Avignon.

She was a very wealthy woman. Part of her income was derived from gold-mining towns in north Hungary, which had been granted her by the king, and Elizabeth administered her mines with such acumen that she received an extremely large income in pure gold every year. The contemporary chronicler John of Küküllő records that when she went on a trip to Naples and Rome, she took along with her over two tons of gold in coins and goldsmiths’ work.

Queen Elizabeth enjoyed traveling. Her journey to Naples and Rome was undertaken in 1343, a year after the death of Charles Robert and the accession of her son Louis to the throne. John of Küküllő relates how in Rome, “all those who saw her with admiration and joy praised God with one voice because so noble a woman and so illustrious a queen should leave her home and her kingdom to come to the ends of the earth like the Queen of Sheba.” On a pilgrimage to Aachen and Cologne in 1357, when she was “accompanied by 700 equestrian sol-

4. Central figures of reliquary shrine in Figure 1 and Color plate, with architectural framework removed
diers,” she was acclaimed everywhere. At Mar-
burg, in her honor, the reliquary of St. Elizabeth
of Hungary, her patron saint, was carried in sol-
emn procession through the street, with “princes
and lords” in attendance.

Her interests were international. Especially
pertinent are her connections with France. Her
husband, Charles Robert, was related to the
French kings. Her sister-in-law Clemence (1293-
1328) was queen of France, wife of Louis X.
Several protégés of Elizabeth studied in Paris,
and two members of the royal court, one of them
a member of the queen’s chancellery, went there
to teach. She also played an important role in
the negotiations for the betrothal of her grand-
daughter Catherine to the Duke of Orléans, son
of Charles V of France. It was on this occasion
that her son Louis the Great ordered as a gift
for the French king the manuscript known as
the Pictorial Chronicle of Hungary, which still ex-
ists today. Undoubtedly important gifts were
sent from France to Hungary in return. Fin-
ally, Elizabeth’s relations with the papal court
in Avignon were continuous.

Elizabeth had a busy life and a long one. On
December 29, 1380, she died in her palace at
Óbuda at the relatively great age of about eighty
years, and at her request was buried in her be-
loved convent of the Clares. She was one of the
great queens of the Middle Ages and was venerated as a saint by the Clares of Hungary. Among
her many bequests to the Clares was this item: “a
small altarpiece for domestic use of silver-gilt.”

Is this our small altarpiece? One wishes that
the description were more informative.

The general structure of our shrine recalls
French “tabernacles” carved in ivory, which
were also intended for private devotion. For-
fortunately ivory was not readily convertible into cash, and thus a relatively large number of these tabernacles exist, several of them in the Museum (Figure 2). The design of our silver-gilt shrine, like those in ivory, is essentially architectural. Although building in France in the fourteenth century was relatively minor compared to the tremendous activity in the earlier cathedral age, the compelling French interest in architecture continued to express itself even through these small, portable objects. Typical are the trefoil arches, the gables decorated with crockets and topped by finials, the pinnacles reaching upward. Over the heads of the Virgin and relic-bearing angels is a complete little cross-ribbed vault as carefully constructed as if it were intended to be in full view of the worshiper. But, of course, the medieval goldsmith would have believed that only a perfect ceiling could be good enough to shelter "Our Lady" and her angels. Especially fine are the two bosses that terminate the trefoil arches, tooled in leaf patterns, and also the tiny statuettes (Figure 13), set in niches under canopies on the piers flanking the central group. The upper pair represent John the Baptist and John the Evangelist; the lower pair, two deacon saints: Stephen with the stones by which he was martyred, and Lawrence, holding the gridiron that was the instrument of his death.

There are restorations in the architectural framework of our piece: several pinnacles, half of the upper balustrade of quatrefoils, and the gabled roof. We can only speculate on the original form of the upper part of our shrine. Perhaps the pitch of the roof was steeper, and it may be that from it rose a clocher, or tower, topped by a spire. The shrines in Seville, Milan (Figure 3), and the Pierpont Morgan Library all have such spires, though partially restored or incomplete. On the other hand, while some inventories mention clochers on similar tabernacles, very frequently there is no reference to a spire even when the architecture is described in detail. Thus, it may well be that the restoration of the roof of our tabernacle repeats its original form more or less exactly. The proportion of the central part of our shrine is entirely different from the other
three existing shrines; hence an entirely different treatment of the roof may have seemed to its creator to be desirable. Even without a spire our shrine, especially when closed, is like a miniature chapel, enclosing and protecting the precious gilded statuettes inside.

"Within the ... tabernacle is an image of Our Lady who holds her Child in her left arm ... and on each side of Our Lady is an angel who carries a reliquary of crystal..." This item and others in the inventory of Louis of Anjou suggest that such a grouping of figures was not uncommon in reliquary shrines of this type. Angels were frequently given the job of holding or supporting reliquaries in the Middle Ages. That these two figures are angels and not "virgins," as described in the 1782 inventory of the Clares, is shown by the existence of attachments for wings on the backs of their shoulders and heads. Although the composition seems to leave little room for such an addition, wings may fortunately be large or small, outward-spreading or high and narrow. The artist has only to choose.

The wings of our small angels were probably very fragile; at any rate, they had apparently disappeared before 1782, although the angels themselves are preserved in almost mint condition. The form of the sockets seems to indicate that the wings were not soldered on but were to be slipped in and out. They may have been of very thin metal, or they may have been enameled "in many colors," such as several described in the inventories. An example of reliquary angels with such enameled wings may be seen in the elaborate crucifixion group formerly in the cathedral treasury at Basel, and now in the Schlossmuseum of East Berlin. There is a slight possibility, too, that real feathers were inserted in the sockets on the backs of the statuettes. To quote the Anjou inventory again, one angel is described as having wings "très vivement plumetées." This phrase may imply merely that the feathers were suggested in a realistic way by careful working in the metal. However, in the same inventory, over and over again, wings that are worked in metal are noted as "dorées et ciselées" (gilded and engraved) or "bien ciselées," and it is known that a pair of Siennese angels, according to the records, once had wings of real ostrich feathers. In the case of our angels, the viewer may choose, as if he were the artist, which kind of wings he likes best.
The angels stand proud and straight: here is not the relaxed S-curve so beloved of fourteenth century sculptors and goldsmiths. And yet there is no stiffness either. The weight of each is borne slightly more on one foot than the other, and the golden gowns in simple but varied folds reveal the bodily form beneath. There is movement in the drapery at the lower hems and in the play of light over the whole shimmering surface. The painted faces and hands add a touch of reality as well as variety to the golden composition. The use of paint on precious metal is rare but by no means unknown in the fourteenth century. Once again the inventories prove helpful: three items in the papal inventories in Avignon describe silver pieces as “incarnatum,” that is, with faces painted to look lifelike. In the inventory of Louis of Anjou there are even more such references to “visaiges et mains paintes,” and among existing fourteenth century silver-gilt figures are two pairs of reliquary angels, in the Louvre, with painted faces and hands.

Our two angels, with their straightforward pose and glance, seem to be paying very little attention to the Virgin seated between them. Nevertheless they form a stalwart bodyguard for her and her Child. “Our Lady” was highly revered and well loved throughout the Middle Ages; in the fourteenth century she reigned supreme. She was Queen of Heaven with power over devils. As contemporary stories of her miracles testify, she could get a poor sinner into Heaven if she liked him well enough and he deserved it. She could enjoy a minstrel-monk playing and somersaulting before her statue even if he knew no other words of the Latin prayers but Ave Maria. She could be severe to a knight who had vowed allegiance to her and then had fallen in love with an earthly woman. She was much more than the revered Mother of Christ in the Bible. She was a queen with human foibles and superhuman power. Above all she was merciful.

Our statuette shows her as a queen enthroned, and also as a mother preparing to nurse her child. The theme of the nursing Madonna, which can be traced back to Early Christian and Byzantine times, was especially popular in the fourteenth century. The wide interest shown in this intimate scene is partly due to the general tendency of the time to emphasize the human aspects of “Our Lady.” The thirteenth century Franciscan writer known as Pseudo-Bonaventura, who addressed his work of mystical visions, Meditations on the Life of Christ, to a nun of the order of Poor Clares, said: “Watch her [the mother] attentively as she cares for Him assiduously and wisely, nursing Him and render-

He described the delight of the Virgin suckling her son: “How readily she nursed him, feeling a great and unknown sweetness in nursing this Child, such as could never be felt by other women!” Pseudo-Bonaventura’s book had wide appeal and influenced many a work of art in the fourteenth century. The subject was promoted by the Cistercians, too, who were proud to relate how the Virgin once gave to St. Bernard of Clairvaux three drops of her milk. Theologians interpreted the subject as a visual expression of the Mater Omnium, the Mother of All, and also as Maria Mediatrix, the Intercessor, whose pleas for sinners could not be refused by the son whom she had suckled. In a Florentine painting at The Cloisters, for example, there is a Virgin kneeling in supplication with bared breast and the inscription “Dearest Son, because of the milk that I gave you, have mercy on them.”

In Italian interpretations of the Maria Lactans, the Virgin is often shown seated on the ground, without a crown, as the Virgin of Humility. There is, however, no suggestion of humility in our small Virgin from France. She is a little haughty, a bit remote, and definitely a fine lady, from the tips of her elegant pointed shoes to her carefully arranged hair. She is an unsmiling queen who takes her job seriously and with great dignity. Her son is a very human and endearing child, leaning toward his mother with eager anticipation. The goldsmith has suggested the weight and form of the small body beneath the golden tunic. It is a pity that at some time the painted flesh tones of the Virgin’s breast were removed, probably for reasons of prudery: traces of the original paint can still be seen immediately above the Virgin’s hand.

Like many another tabernacle described in the inventories ours “has doors which close, enamelled inside with the life of Our Lady” (Color plate). Enameling, that is, fusing powdered glass on a metal surface at red-hot heat, was one of the great arts of the Middle Ages. There are translucent cloisonné enamels on gold and silver of the Byzantine era, opaque champlevé enamels on copper of the Mosan and Rhenish workshops of the twelfth century, and, in the thirteenth century, also in the champlevé technique on copper, Limoges enamels in great quantities. Toward the end of the thirteenth century a new type of enameling was invented, called basse-taille, which is translucent enamel on silver or gold that has been chiseled and engraved in low relief. It was the most popular kind of enameling in the fourteenth century, and our small altarpiece presents one of the most splendid ensembles of the type still in existence.

Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571) in his Treatises describes the process of basse-taille enameling, which was still the same in his day as in the fourteenth century. “Now let us talk about the beautiful art of enameling,” he begins. “You can grave in intaglio on your [gold or silver] plate anything that your heart delights in... legends with many figures or anything else you like to cut with your graver and your chisels, and with all the cleanness that you possibly can... The more care you put into this part of your work the less liable your enamel will be to crack and peel off hereafter.” He explains how the colored glass should be “well ground... in a little round mortar... with very clean water.” Then the first coat of powdered glass should be applied “very thin and neatly, and just as if you were painting in miniature... each [color] in its place.” The plate with its “painting” in enamel paste should next be fired in a furnace until the glass “begins to move” but not to “run.” After it has cooled slowly, the second coat should be applied “just as carefully as before” and fired at greater heat. And the process should be repeated as “often as necessary,” or until the enamel is of the proper thickness. Finally the enamel should be rubbed to a smooth surface and polished to a high shine.

It was a painstaking and difficult technique, but it yielded results of great splendor. The colors, of jewel-like intensity, are enhanced by the gleam of metal through them and by the play of light over the surfaces. The low-relief tooling in the metal serves not only as modeling for the figures and setting but also as modeling for the color itself, which is richer where the relief is deep and paler on the high parts. The variation in tonality thus achieved has a vibrancy that flat, uniform color can never have. Color is more
important than anything else in these enamels, and luckily enamel colors do not fade. Unfortunately the enamel itself is very fragile and easily chips away: several existing silver-gilt objects have lost every vestige of their original enamel, and many more have suffered serious damage. The enamels of our shrine have been somewhat restored, but twelve of the panels remain intact, and fifteen others have only negligible bits of new fill.

All have a background deeply tooled in a lozenge pattern, with enamel of a wondrous blue. Benvenuto Cellini especially admired this color, which he called *Aqua Marina*. Emerald green and amethyst are also important and, like the blue, are on the “cool” side of the spectrum. These colors are at their truest and best over silver, as here; when applied over gold they take on a less pleasant yellowish tinge. The topaz enamel, the touches of vermilion, and the gilding of the borders and other details provide the warmth that is needed in the design. The vermilion is not translucent, but opaque. Cellini explains that this opaque red must be “used on silver” instead of “rouge cler,” transparent red, “because that metal will not take the other.” The heads, haloes, crowns, and many details are reserved in the silver, engraved, and gilded. The engraved lines are filled with enamel, sometimes blue for the eyes, amber or brown for the hair.

There are thirty-six plaques in all. On the inside are scenes of the infancy of Christ. As in one of the treasures of the Duke of Anjou: “In one is the Annunciation of Our Lord, in another his Nativity, in another the Epiphany, in another how Our Lady and Saint Elizabeth greeted each other, in another the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple, and in another how Our Lord was taken into Egypt.” In our shrine the appearance of the angel to the shepherds has also been included. In the gables at the top are angels “playing divers instruments,” two with cymbals, one a transverse flute, another a kind of oboe, one a psaltery, and the last a snare drum. The narrow outer wings of the shrine, which were originally hinged and movable, have been reversed and are now soldered fast. The apostle James the Less with his fuller’s club and St. Bartholomew with his knife, on the left, and the youthful John the Evangelist, on the right, belong with their fellow apostles on the back of the wings. They should be replaced by Sts. Mary Magdalene, Catherine, and Margaret, who are now among the apostles on the reverse. Curiously enough, the unidentified female saint of the lower right panel is in correct position. It is surely fitting that all twelve apostles should be together and that the statuette of the Virgin should be surrounded by scenes from her life, female saints, and, of course, music-making angels. Unfortunately, because of the fragility of the enamels it would be dangerous to melt the solder and return the panels to their original sequence.

The apostles are privileged to be accompanied by musical angels also. In the gables they are performing on a panpipe, Arab kettle drums, a trumpet, a vielle, a gittern, and a small pipe that is probably a recorder. When the shrine is closed, the sides are entirely decorated with angels. The full-length angels are playing a large vertical pipe, a gittern, a double trumpet, and a psaltery. With their peacock wings they are an engaging orchestra. Before the fourteenth century, angels were scarcely ever shown playing musical instruments: they held candlesticks and swung censers as if they were acolytes at the altar; they supported reliquaries and carried instruments of the Passion; at most they blew trumpets, to announce the Last Judgment. But then, in the fourteenth century, they were frequently given the delightful occupation of performing on pipes.
and strings and cymbals and drums. Music-making angels add greatly to the joyousness of many a religious scene—and to our small altarpiece.

It is the enamels that provide the best evidence of where and when our shrine was made, although the other elements help considerably to establish the general region of its origin. As for the architectural framework, it is typical of northern Gothic building of the period; however, the miniature pier figures on the corner columns closely resemble those on the enameled base (Figure 12) of the famous silver-gilt statuette of the Virgin in the Louvre, which, according to the inscription, was presented by Queen Jeanne d'Évreux of France to the royal abbey of St. Denis in 1339 and may be presumed to have been made in the Île-de-France. The small statues in the center of our altarpiece, moreover, are similar in style to monumental sculptures from the Île-de-France. The Virgin may be compared to a statue (Figure 5) in the Cloisters collection (now exhibited in the Main Building), which is said to have come from St. Denis. The proportions of the two are similar—rather long from waist to hip, rather short from knee to foot; the handling of the drapery of the gown, the cloak, and the head veil are comparable, as is the relationship of Mother and Child. The face of the Virgin in our shrine, however, more nearly resembles that of a lovely limestone Virgin from the Île-de-France, now in the Louvre (Figure 6), with its broad forehead, rounded cheeks, small pointed chin, pronounced eyebrows, and, above all, its straight unsmiling mouth. This statue was found in a tower of the church of La Celle, a small village about fifty miles from Paris. The angels of our altarpiece recall the marble angel in the Louvre, originally from the royal abbey of Maubuisson, also in the environs of Paris (Figure 7). But the carefully chiseled and brilliantly colored enameled scenes on the wings of our shrine are closely related to enamels and manuscripts from the city of Paris itself.

The group of related works in basse-taille enamel include the Milan shrine; a covered goblet, also in the Poldi-Pezzoli Museum in Milan; a triptych in the cathedral treasury of Namur; a crucifix in the Bargello in Florence; a paten in the St. Annen Museum of Lübeck (Figure 14); a paten dated 1333, a chalice, and a cruets (Figure 15), all in the National Museum in Copenhagen; parts of a censer in the Stockholm Museum, and several others. The cruets in Copenhagen and the Stockholm censer both bear the fleur-de-lis stamp that proves that these pieces were made in Paris. Although no one of these basse-taille enamels is exactly like another, they all have distinctive similarities in color scheme, technique, and style, and were all, we believe, inspired by manuscripts, most particularly the miniatures or pattern books from the Paris workshop of Jean Pucelle. From about 1320 to 1350, Pucelle was the most distinguished painter of miniatures in Paris, a city already famed for its illuminators for over a century. Because he introduced new ideas and also maintained a high quality of painting, his manuscripts were in great demand among the noble lords and ladies of France. He was the artist of the exquisite Hours of the Prodigal Son. French (Paris mark), about 1330. Silver-gilt and enamel. National Museum, Copenhagen
of Jeanne d'Évreux at The Cloisters and is known to have shared with assistants in the illumination of the Bible of Billyng and the Breviary made for Jeanne de Belleville in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Several other manuscripts are attributed to him or his atelier, among them the Hours of Jeanne II of Navarre (whereabouts unknown), the Hours of Jeanne of Savoy in the Jacquemart André Museum in Paris, the Bible Historiale in the Library in Geneva, and the Franciscan Breviary of Blanche of France in the Vatican Library, Rome.

It is not strange that the creators of basse-taille enamels should be influenced by, or even copy, the manuscripts and pattern books of the popular Pucelle. Figures 8 through 11 and Figure 17 demonstrate the similarities between enamels on our shrine and miniatures of Pucelle or his associates. It is natural that the illuminations are more facile, since it is easier to draw with pen and brush on parchment than to chisel and engrave in silver and then apply the different colors in enamel. The compositions are similar, and many of them are alike in significant details. In the scene of the Annunciation (Figure 10), for instance, the Virgin is seated with a reading stand before her; the iconography of the seated Virgin is not typically fourteenth century French, but is probably borrowed from Italian paintings, which had a strong influence on Pucelle. In the Nativity (Figure 11), the Child is placed above the reclining Virgin in a crib resembling an altar. Joseph sits at the foot of the bed and the Virgin Mary reaches up to touch her son, a composition found in several manuscripts of the Pucelle workshop.

There are distinctive likenesses in the figure style also. In both miniatures and enamels, the drapery is fluid and the folds are carefully modeled to achieve subtle gradations in light and shade. In contrast, the heads in both are depicted largely by means of lines. The eyes are large and deep-set, the eyebrows are pronounced. All the women wear their hair parted in the middle; almost all the men have a tuft of hair protruding over their foreheads. There are similarities as well in many of the backgrounds of the enamels and miniatures, which are decorated with precise geometrical patterns, and in the foregrounds of stylized rocks. The resemblances in the architectural framework are also impressive: the general structure of the shrine with its gabled roof, piers, pinnacles, trefoil arches, and quatrefoil balustrade can be seen in the Geneva Bible Historiale (Figure 17); the same balustrade and also borders with crosses are found in many of the illuminations in the Hours of Jeanne d'Évreux (Figure 8). And finally there is the unusual interest in musical angels, shown both in our enamels and in the Books of Hours of the Pucelle atelier. Exceptional for this early period are the peacocks of the angels on our shrine. Many of the angels in the Hours of Jeanne II of Navarre, though tiny, have the unmistakable “eyes” of peacock feathers speckling their wings (Left).

Because of the close relationship of the enamels with Parisian miniatures, the similarities in drawing and technique with the Copenhagen cruet stamped with a Paris mark, and the stylistic likenesses of the statuettes to sculptures from the Île-de-France, we venture to attribute our shrine to the goldsmiths of Paris. In the fourteenth century Paris was the greatest center for enameling and goldsmiths’ work in all of France, and possibly in all of northern Europe. During this century at least 273 Parisian goldsmiths are known by name.

The date, however, is not easy to determine.
The paten in the National Museum in Copenhagen bears the date 1333. The silver-gilt Louvre statuette of the Virgin and Child presented by Jeanne d'Évreux to the abbey of St. Denis is dated 1339. The related Pucelle manuscripts range from about 1325 to about 1350. We suggest that the decade between 1340 and 1350 is a reasonable date for our small altarpiece.

Earlier we quoted a description of the shrine at the time of the dissolution of the Clares of Óbuda in 1782. In 1784 it was bought by the Hungarian count Ignác Batthyány, bishop of Transylvania, and it remained in the possession of the Batthyány family for over eighty years. Then, in 1867, it was placed in the hands of a wealthy dealer in Frankfort and was sold to one of the Paris Rothschilds, who must have had a fine eye for important and beautiful medieval objects of art. This rare and superb treasure is now and forever in the “inventory” of The Cloisters, purchased with funds provided by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who also delighted in beautiful medieval objects of art.

I would like to express my grateful thanks to George Szabó for his research on the Hungarian sources, essential to the history of our shrine.

REFERENCES


17. Christ in Majesty, with the Evangelists. Illumination attributed to Jean Pucelle, from the Bible Historiale. About 1330. Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, Geneva, MS Français 2