

MARY

& the women she inspired

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Introduction

I often joke with students that reading the Christian Gospels and an Irish family tree have something unexpected in common: a disproportionate number of women called Mary. Across the canonical Gospels, there are between five and seven women named Mary - meaning that every other woman identified by name is likely to be called Mary! This ambiguity extends into other early Christian literature, including the Gospel of Mary and the Pistis Sophia, where characters called Mary also appear with limited context or clarification. Scholars cannot determine even how many women are named Mary, let alone who each of them is.

To a modern historiographical mind, it seems almost unbelievable that there could be such confusion. Even from a purely literary perspective, distinguishing between characters is one of the hallmarks of clear storytelling. There are, however, two key factors at work. Firstly, Mary was one of the most popular names for Jewish women in late antiquity, with the most comprehensive study by Tal Ilan suggesting that around a quarter of women bore this name.¹ Secondly, and disappointingly, the ambiguity reflects the diminished status of women in these texts. Though somewhat reductive, the aphorism in Biblical Studies that the Gospels are written by men, for men, about men is a helpful summary of these texts' androcentric focus. Across all four accounts of Jesus' birth, ministry, death and resurrection, women remain at the margins of the narrative.

In Matthew and Mark, both authors appear to have forgotten to mention that women formed an integral part of the group travelling with Jesus in the years leading up to his death. Both evangelists seem only to realise their error when they include the detail that women were "looking on from a distance" as Jesus is crucified (Mark 15:40, Matthew 27:55), adding as a hasty afterthought that these women have been with Jesus since Galilee, following him and providing for him. In these texts we encounter Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph/Joses and "the other Mary". The author of Luke, having the advantage of knowing the texts of Mark and Matthew, amends this oversight in his restructuring of their narratives. He describes the group accompanying Jesus during his ministry as including "some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities...who ministered to them out of their own resources" (Luke 8:1-3). The only Mary mentioned here is Mary Magdalene, who is consistently present across all four Gospels. Luke soon introduces Mary, the sister of Martha (Luke 10:39), who may or may not be the same Martha and Mary who are the sisters of Lazarus according to John (11:1ff.). John also introduces Mary of Clopas in his crucifixion account (John 19:25).

Of course, one Mary remains much more easily identified than the others and is (for the most part!) spared the speculation and conflation they endure - Mary the mother of Jesus. Though she is not named in John, Mary the Mother appears across all four Gospels, in narratives of Jesus' miraculous conception and nativity (in Luke and Matthew), during his ministry (Mark) and at the foot of the cross (John). If Mary Magdalene has the most textually prominent role as witness to the resurrection in each account, Mary the Mother has the most theologically prominent role in Christian tradition. Revered variously as *theotokos* (the God-bearer), immaculately conceived, and a virgin mother, she has been considered a model of faith and obedience and a powerful intercessor since the earliest days of Christianity. Marian devotions (including the Rosary, hymns and feasts) have played a prominent role in popular piety, and belief in apparitions and miracles have cemented her theological, spiritual, and religious import.

¹ Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity. Part I: Palestine 330 BCE – 200 CE*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002)



Most significantly for our purposes, however, is the fact that Mary the Mother has become the prism through which all other Marys are viewed. Mary Magdalene, mythologised as the repentant sexual sinner, has been held in binary opposition to the mother for most of patriarchal history. Women who fail to live up to the Mother's perfection, risk falling foul of the same failures as the Magdalene. The other biblical Marys are often homogenised into a Marian chorus line, filling out the space between the moral extremes of Magdalene and Mother. Mary of Egypt, the desert penitent so often confused with the Magdalene in iconography, is one of a number of other women in Christian tradition inspired by this centring of Marian purity. The stories of many of the women saints, including Saint Cordula and Saint Columba, centre around a desire to follow Mary's example in purity and obedience to God. As the objects in this show demonstrate, their artistic presentation also places them squarely in her footsteps.

Mary & the Women She Inspired picks up the muddied mantle of the women who have been marginalised by misidentification. It delves into the rich tapestry of biblical stories, exploring the complexities of identity, representation, and the enduring power of their associated images. By pulling at the threads of text and tradition, these twenty-two objects, ranging from a sixth-century Coptic textile to striking high Gothic sculpture invite visitors to approach familiar Christian iconography with a new curiosity. In so doing, it underscores the importance of Mary and other women in understanding medieval art and culture. This magnificent Marian menagerie is testament to that legacy.

Siobhán Jolley, May 2024

AN EARLY CHRISTIAN ICON OF THE VIRGIN AND CHILD

Northern Egypt
6th century
78.9 x 38 cm

Materials and Condition

Multicolour woven wool threads on a tabby weave in undyed linen, on a modern mount, losses to the surrounding areas, fragmentary survival of a fretwork frieze and an inscription above and to the right of the two figures, which has been joined with the figures.

Provenance

Chafik Chammas, Paris, acquired by 1964; Galerie Simone de Monbrison, Paris, 1968; Jean Roudillon (1923-2020), Paris; thence by descent until 2023.

Published

L'Art Copte. Paris, 1964, Cat. 186.

Bourguet, Pierre. *Die Kopten. Kunst der Welt*. Baden Baden, 1967.

Arts Antiques, Arts Primitifs. Ex. Cat. Paris, 1968, Cat. 9.

Bourguet, Pierre. *Coptic Art*. London, 1971, Plate 9.

Shepherd, Dorothy. 'An Icon of the Virgin: A Sixth-Century Tapestry Panel from Egypt.' In *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, vol. 56, no. 3, 1969, pp. 118, no. 29.

An important icon of the Virgin and Child, this textile belongs to a group of early woven figures, which would have been used as wall hangings in Coptic churches and monastic institutions. The two figures face the viewer with the Virgin supporting the Christ Child as he raises both of his hands up in benediction. The abstracted composition looks as though the Virgin's neck grows out of the body of Christ – the rest of her upper body and veil illustrated only by an outline. Her hair is bound by a cap, which closes around the head, while the Christ child is shown with short black hair. The figures' lower bodies are abstracted – Christ's square feet are seen resting on the Virgin's blue garment, which terminates in a straight line, with her fragmentary feet below it. The style of the two figures is characterised by severe frontality and abstraction. Above them is an indication of the fret border that would have run along the top of this wall hanging. The fragmentary



Fig. 1
Virgin and Child Icon
Egypt, Byzantine Period
6th century
Cleveland Museum of Art Inv. 1967.144

Coptic inscription to the right of the Virgin's head (AP HA and X ΓΓ) has been interpreted as APXHAΓΓΕΛΟΣ "Archangel," indicating that a now lost part of the textile would have shown the archangel Gabriel or Michael (or both flanking the Virgin). The Coptic script is based on the



Greek uncial alphabet with some additional letters from the Egyptian demotic.

While rare, textiles of this early date survive more readily in Egypt than other contemporary textile centres because of the favourable climate conditions there. One of the most celebrated examples of Coptic art, which shares with our textile an unusual iconography, is a Virgin and Child icon in the Cleveland Museum of Art (fig. 1). In this latter example, which was inspired by imperial Byzantine art, and which retains links to classical tapestries, the Virgin and Child is flanked by two archangels – a rather unusual detail. While images of the Virgin and Child gain popularity as early as the 5th century (after the Council of Ephesus), it is in the 6th century that a new variation is invented, in which the Virgin and Child is placed between the two angels. Examples where the Virgin and Child is accompanied by angels include not only the Cleveland tapestry but also the Virgin and Child icon from Sinai and the Saint Apollinaire Nuovo mosaic in Ravenna. As Dorothy Shephard underlines, ‘this theme so outnumbers all others that one is inclined to regard it as the sixth-century iconography of the *Theotokos*.’¹ Dated also to the 6th century, our textile shares its iconography and chronology with the Cleveland Virgin and Child icon; however, our textile, by contrast, belongs to a group that comes from a rather different cultural and economic centre. Shephard thought that textiles in this small group were produced as wall hangings and that they were the work of ‘provincial artisans, which, in this instance, were very probably members of some monastic centre in Upper Egypt.’²

The group consists of fragmentary artworks, which have been often wrongly patched up, and includes textiles from the Detroit Museum of Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Museo Benaki in Athens, the Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg, and Christie’s 2003 (figs. 2-4). They are made in a technique that shows mosaic-like weft-loop weaving, but the effect is different because the knotted wool threads are pulled through and cut so that the work resembles a carpet pile. The patterns are set on a ground fabric of coarse tabby weave in undyed linen. This technique results in pixelated, abstracted figures and



Fig. 2
Fragment of a Large Hanging
Egypt, Byzantine period
6th century
Cleveland Museum of Art Inv. 1954.573

‘because enormous amounts of weft threads are needed to create the design, the fabric is weightier, more structured, and provides better insulation.’³ That these fragments used to be a part of much larger compositions and therefore also served the practical purposes of insulation can be observed in a wall hanging from the same group, which has been carbon dated to the 4-6th century, now in the Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg (Inv. No. 2439 & 2638).⁴

Stylistically, this group of textiles depicts the figures in severe frontality and abstraction, their clothing shown very flat with no suggestion of light and shade. The figures have short arms that project from their ‘plank-like’ bodies, large heads, and wide, cylindrical necks. Their facial features are drawn with very few, mostly red and black straight lines. The shape of the faces, the style of the facial features and the ‘fringe of little dentils on the brow’ are all the same.⁵ Shephard argued that the similarities are so great, they may have been made by one hand.⁶ The Coptic textiles from this group therefore show the reinvigoration of the abstract and decorative character, which materializes in various aspects: a more rigorously transcendental-religious aspect with incorporeal figures covered in robes with smooth surfaces covered by a few

1 Dorothy Shephard, ‘An Icon of the Virgin: A Sixth-Century Tapestry Panel from Egypt,’ in *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, vol. 56, no. 3, 1969, p. 93.

2 Dorothy Shephard, ‘Saints and a ‘Sinner’ on Two Coptic Textiles,’ in *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, Vol. 61, No. 10 (Dec., 1974), p. 336.

3 Elizabeth Dospel Williams, ‘Sacred Imagery,’ in *Woven Interiors: Furnishing Early Medieval Egypt*, Washington, 2019, p. 67.

4 Sabine Schrenk, *Textilien des Mittelmeerraumes aus spätantiker bis frühislamischer Zeit*, Riggisberg 2004, pp. 47-53.

5 *Ibid.* p. 337.

6 *Ibid.* p. 337; see also Klaus Wessel, *Coptic art*. New York, 1965.



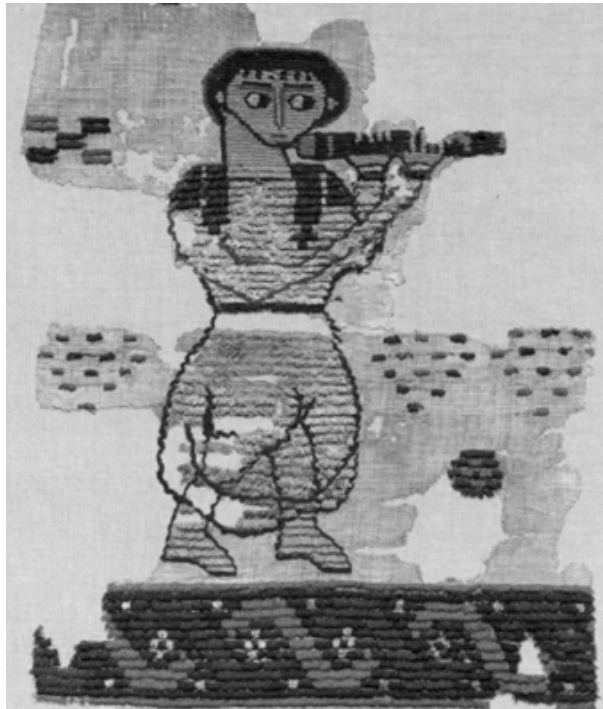


Fig. 3
The Piping Maenad
Egypt, Byzantine Period
6th century
Cleveland Museum of Art Inv. 1968.74

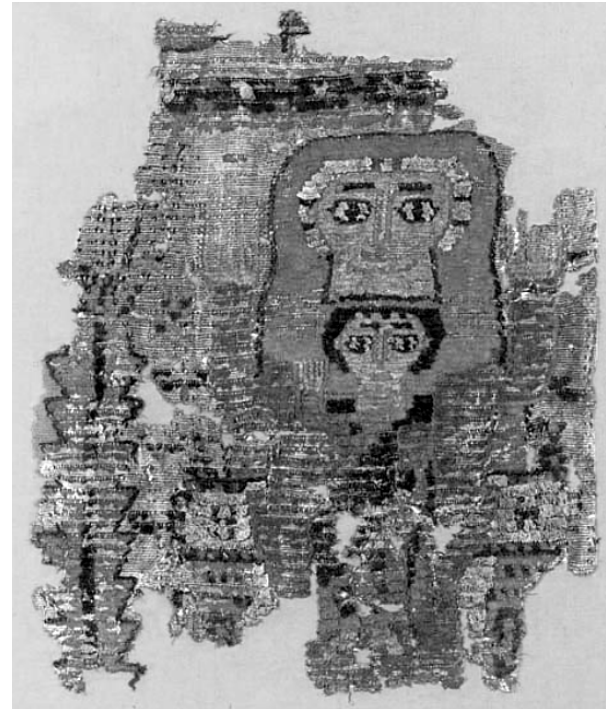


Fig. 4
A Coptic fragmentary textile hanging of the Virgin and Child
Egypt, Byzantine
6th century
Sold at Christie's, 29 Oct. 2005 Lot 280

vertical folds and a more decorative aspect that reveals bold, rigorously implemented linear elaborations.⁷

While it is generally difficult to date textiles from such an early date precisely, convincing arguments have been made to date them to the sixth-century. In our example, this dating is further substantiated by the 6th century iconography, as noted above. While the group shows a departure from the surviving late Classical style which 'still dominated most contemporary Egyptian textiles' such as the style exemplified by the Virgin and Child icon in Cleveland (fig. 1), they share a lot of affinity with sculpture from the period – especially the grave steles from Upper Egypt. One example of this is the funerary stele now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which features a wide-eyed, frontally positioned orant figure flanked by two spiral columns (Inv. No. 10.176.40). Some of the facial features of the figures in these textiles and steles might also derive from marginally earlier Coptic sculpture, such as the limestone head from Toronto, which shows the same short fringe, large almond-shaped eyes and an abstracted physiognomy (Royal Ontario Museum, Inv. No. 910.152.17).

The affinity between the textiles and the steles are not only in their facial features/ figure types but also in the decorative borders that surround the figures – often fret borders like the one in our example. The Coptic stele in the Dumbarton Oaks collection in Washington DC is one such example, featuring an orant figure of a deacon-monk surrounded by a thick fret border punctuated by rosettes (Dumbarton Oaks Collection Inv. No. BZ.1935.11).



⁷ Géza de Francovich, 'Legitto, la Siria e Constantinopoli,' in *Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale d'Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte*, vol. 11/12 (1963), pp. 155-8.

A CAPITAL WITH THE VIRGIN AND CHILD ENTHRONED

Spain, Catalonia
Last quarter 12th century
28 x 23 x 17 cm

Materials and Condition

Limestone; breaks at the top of the capital and to the head of the kneeling angel, general surface wear.

Provenance

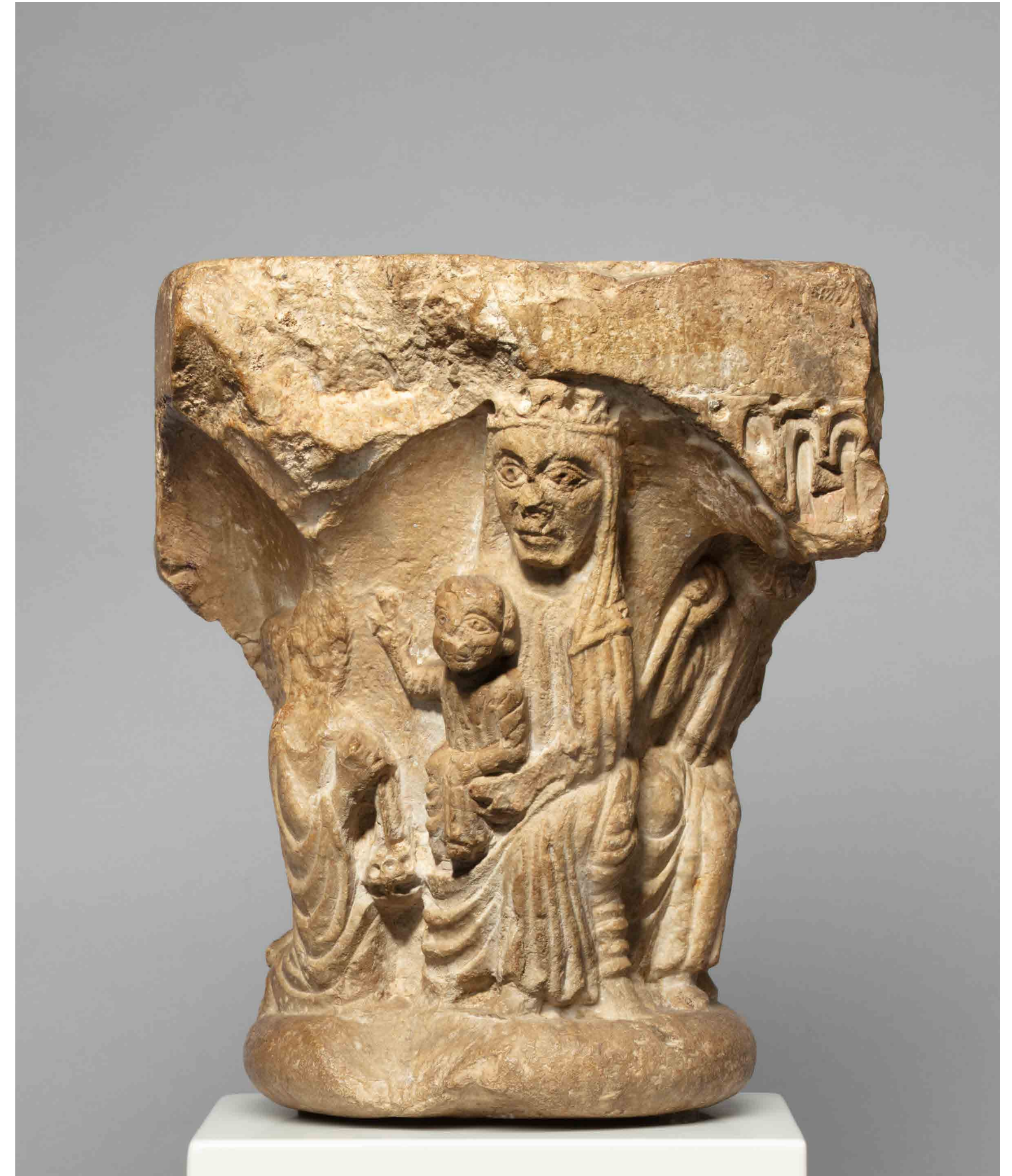
Clavell & Morgades Antiguitats, Barcelona; Collection of Fabio Beccaria, acquired from the above 2 December 2005.

An enthroned Virgin and Child sit beneath an arch, which is formed underneath the abacus of the capital. The Virgin Mary dominates the scenes, her large crowned head touching the arch above her. Behind them on the shorter side of the capital is a seated male figure, presumably Joseph, while an angel kneels in front of the seated Virgin and Child on the opposite shorter side. The spandrels are decorated with microarchitectural arcades, sticking out in the same way that volutes would have done on classical capitals. The figures are frontal and motionless. The tunics they wear are composed of stylised draperies with regularly spaced pleats. Large almond-shaped eyes dominate their facial features as they stare into the distance. This capital was originally probably a part of a cloister, a context where another capital, perhaps depicting the three Magi, would be able to interact with this scene.

The stylistic features and carving of our capital align closely with capitals from twelfth-century Catalonia. A group of surviving examples dated to the last quarter of the twelfth century are now preserved in the musée de Cluny and offer some of the most direct parallels to our example (figs. 1 and Cl. 19002, Cl. 23900). The micro-architectural details, the drapery and facial types, and the general composition of the capitals are all analogous to our example.



Fig. 1
Capital with episodes from the history of Abraham
Spain, Catalonia
c. 1175-1200
Paris, musée de Cluny - musée national du Moyen Âge Inv. Cl. 19000



TRIPTYCH WITH VIRGIN HODEGETRIA AND SAINTS

Byzantine Empire
c.1350-1400
5.6 x 8.5 x 1.2 cm (open)

Materials and Condition

Steatite with traces of gilding, an old repair at the base of the triptych, on the top of the frame and to the hinged edges of the wings; the figures on the exterior of the wings slightly worn.

Provenance

Private Collection, Saint Tropez, 1950s/1960s; Private collection, Toulon, France, purchased in 2018 from above.

This steatite triptych opens to reveal an image of the Virgin 'Hodegetria' protected by a niche on the central panel. As is characteristic of this type image, the Virgin is shown holding the Christ child at her side as she extends one hand towards him – presenting him as a source of salvation. A scene of the Annunciation flanks this central image with the Angel Gabriel on one of the wings and the Virgin on the other. Gabriel confidently walks to the Virgin, his hand raised in blessing, while the Virgin sits on a cushioned throne and pulls away in shock. Four saints decorate the exterior of the wings: St Procopius, St, Nestor, St Demetrios and St. George (clockwise from top left). Two small figures of angels are in the spandrels above the arch, which has a slight point to it. All figures have large halos around their heads and wear robes composed of thick linear drapery.

Steatites of this type started to be produced in the tenth century and continued throughout the fifteenth century. The size and subjects of these types of objects 'distinguish them as icons for private use, while their technique and material are means to meet this demand. The appeal of steatite icons is inseparable from the appeal of the stone – the few written sources that mention steatite carvings praise the stone more than the workmanship.'¹ Just as ivory, though softer, steatite allows a carver to create fine and precise surface detail. The softness of the stone, however, 'has generally led to the effacing of surface detail, although

the sharpness of excavated pieces proves that this wearing takes place only after generations of use.'²

We can date our triptych based on stylistic similarities to others that survive in museums and private collections. The closest comparisons are a plaque now in the Schnütgen Museum, Cologne, a Virgin Hodegetria in the British Museum, London, and an Annunciation now



Fig. 1
Virgin and Child
14th century
British Museum, London, Inv. No. 1878,1101.62



¹ Ioli Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, *Byzantine Icons in Steatite* (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1985), p. 13.

² *Ibid.* p. 13.

in the Benaki Museum, Athens (figs. 1). All dated to the fourteenth century, these objects share compelling similarities with our piece – including the drapery style, exaggerated facial features with stretched almond-shaped eyes and the decorative character of the borders. Although some of these may have been made as early as 1300, the pointed arch on our example suggests a slightly later date in the 14th century.

Although Byzantines preferred the green coloured steatite, darker varieties were also used, such as the example in the Benaki Museum (fig. 2).



Fig. 2
Archangel Gabriel
c.1300
Benaki Museum, Athens, Inv. No. 13507





AN ANNUNCIATION TO THE VIRGIN MARY

Germany, Middle Rhine
c.1480
103.5 x 45 cm (each panel unframed)

Materials and Condition

Oil on panel; minor hairline cracks, minor retouching, the reverse inscribed 'Tafel 1' and 'Tafel 2' and a stamp of the painting restorer G. Kreuter, Basel, handwritten date 'Oktober 1966' on reverse.

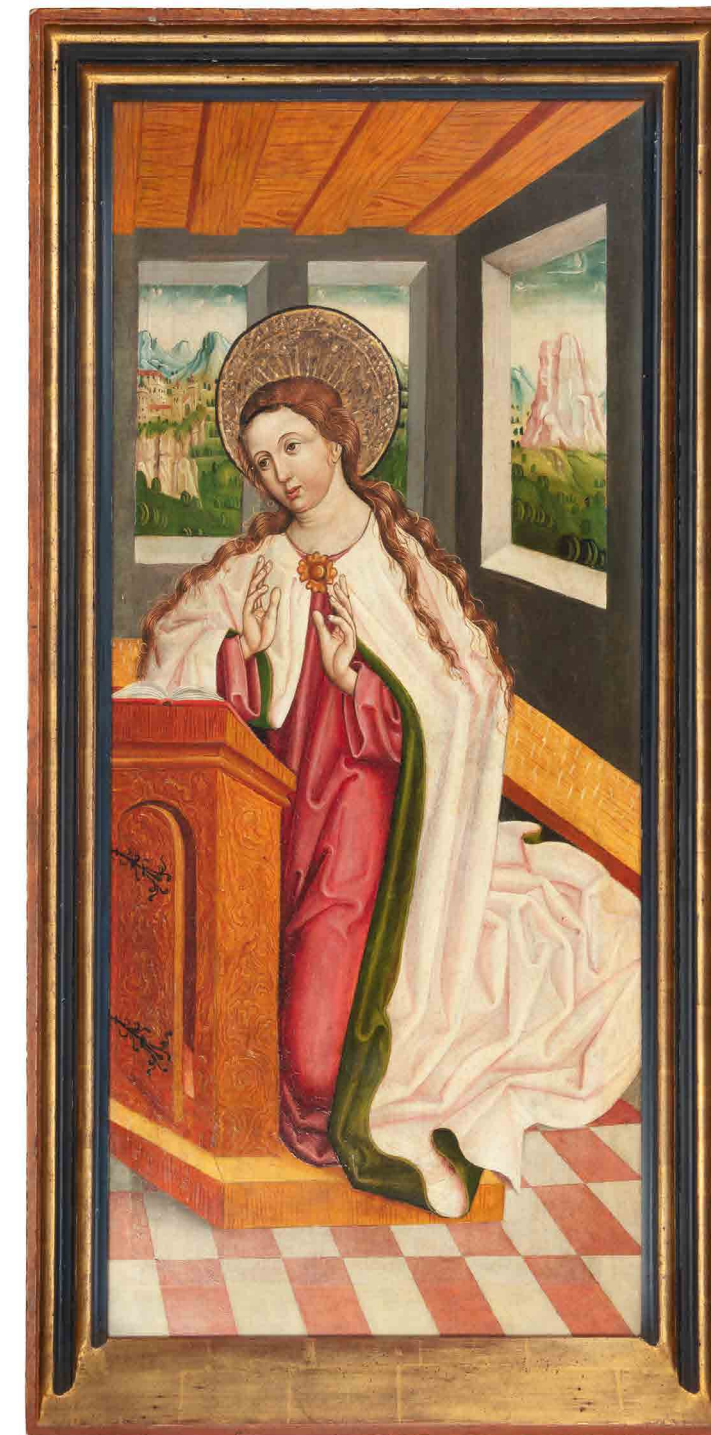
Provenance

G. Kreuter Restoration, Basel, October 1966; Private Collection, Germany.

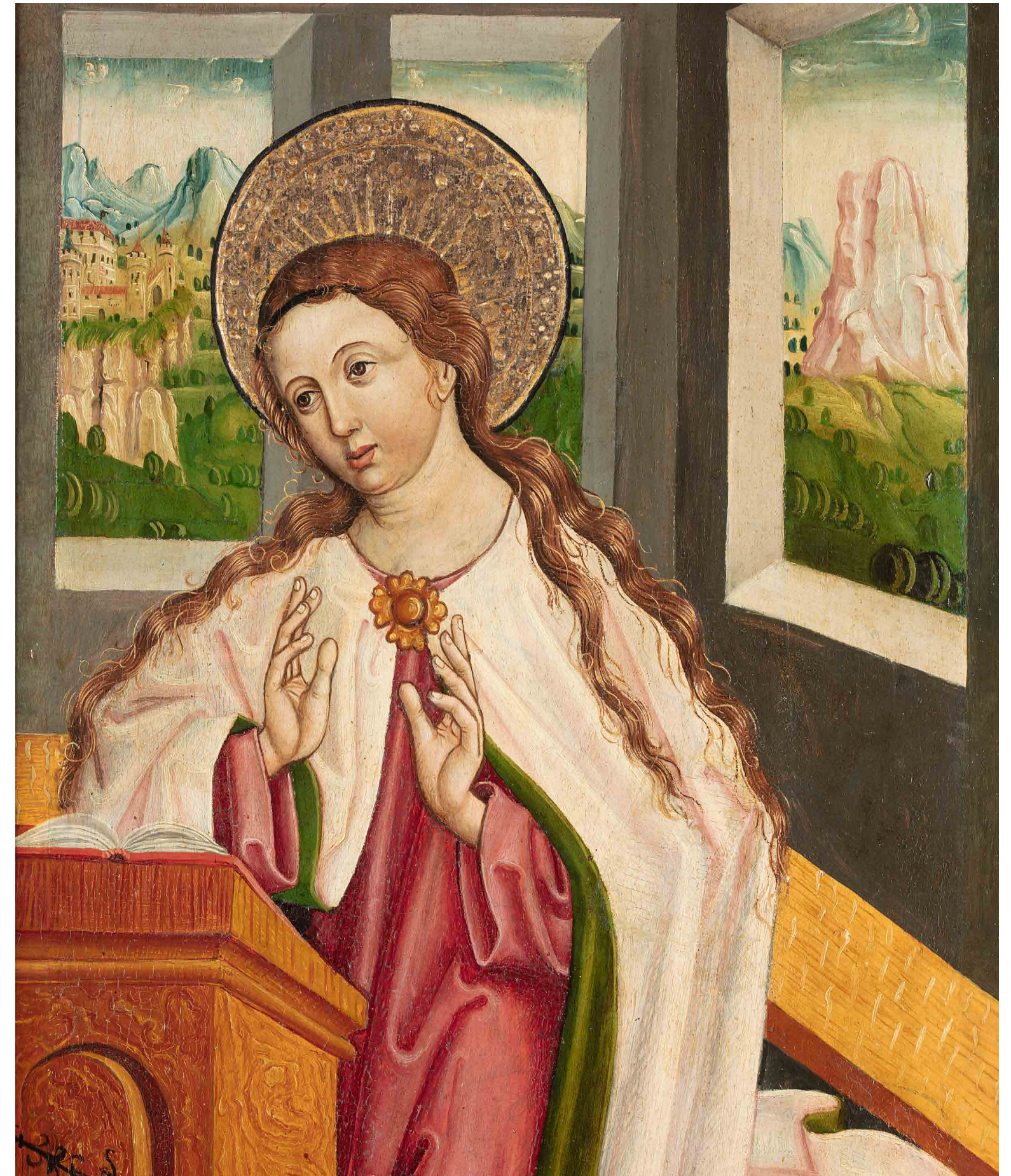
The Annunciation, one of the most popular themes in late-medieval painting, stretches across two panels here. The Virgin and the archangel Gabriel are shown in a tiled-floored room, and although the space does not give much away, the flowerpot and the reading desk that the Virgin kneels at suggest that this is a domestic setting. Through the windows, the view opens onto rolling green hills, a fortified city and rock formations. The archangel is shown interrupting the Virgin during a moment of private prayer. The Virgin is depicted wearing a white cloak, elegantly lined with green on the inside, which is fastened at her neck by a gold brooch. Beneath the cloak, she dons a delicate pink dress that complements her gentle demeanour. A halo encircles her head, signifying her sanctity, and her long hair flows softly over her shoulders. Gabriel, seen on the left panel with his right hand raised in declamation and his left holding a gold sceptre, appears just to have entered the space through the arched doorway behind him; his wings remain partially unfurled and he is in the process of kneeling before the Virgin Mary. In contrast to the Virgin's comparatively simple garments, Gabriel's bold red cloak is of extreme richness and expense, adorned at the hems with gilding and precious gems. A narrow banderole surrounds the sceptre that Gabriel holds, inscribed with the Angelic Salutation 'Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum' (Hail Mary, full of grace, The Lord is with thee). Finally, a large vase supporting a stem of white lilies – symbolic of the Virgin's purity – is positioned on the lower right of the left panel.



Fig. 1
The Annunciation: The Angel Gabriel
Martin Schongauer
Germany, Middle Rhein
c. 1470–80
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art Inv. 34.94.1



As the Annunciation here is spread over two panels, it is likely that these two panels were the exterior panels of a triptych and thus exposed only when closed. The composition of the scene follows the model of Martin Schongauer, exemplified by the etching in the Metropolitan Museum of Art but also by his own painting of the Annunciation which is also painted on the exterior of a triptych and housed in the Unterlinden Museum, Colmar (fig. 1). The bold and blocky paint technique, however, is rather different from the painting style of Martin Schongauer and suggests a follower – perhaps someone active in the Middle Rhine. The panels have previously been attributed to the Master of the Nieder-Erlenbach Altar, a painter also known as Nicolaus Schit who was responsible for an altarpiece in the church of Nieder-Erlenbach but also for a Nativity panel in the Bavarian State Collections.



THE VIRGIN AND CHILD

Southern Low Countries, Brussels
c. 1500
51.4 x 36.8 cm

Materials and Condition

Oil and gilding on Baltic oak panel; single high-quality oak panel with its original frame; some minor retouching in the inscription below the figures and isolated flake losses across the composition, traces of underdrawing can be seen through the paint layers.

Provenance

Christie's London, 9th December 2009, lot 165;
Private collection, New York.

This panel depicts the Virgin nursing her Son, or the *Virgo Lactans*. The naked Christ Child, cradled on a white cloth in her arms, gazes up at his mother. Surrounded by a ray of golden celestial light, the Virgin is portrayed in half-length against a red background. She is wearing a blue cloak with a green hem over a black and red dress; the cloak's hood has fallen loosely to the back of her head, leaving the top of her head uncovered. Her long golden-brown hair is falling in waves around her shoulder while at her right part of it is tucked inside the white veil that hangs loosely around her neck. At the top of the panel, the composition is framed by golden foliage from which two pomegranates sprout, while along the bottom of the panel an inscription is written in a gold gothic script: *Ave regina celoru(m) Mater regis a(n)geloru(m) O maria flos v[ir]giniu(m) / velut rosa vel liliu(m) funde preces ad filiu(m) pro salute fidelium*. (Hail, queen of heaven, mother of the king of angels, Mary, flower of virgins / like as the rose and as the lily, Pour forth prayers to your son, for the salvation of the faithful).

This image of the Virgin nursing the Christ Child belongs to the iconographic type known as the *Virgo Lactans*, which finds its biblical source in the Gospel of St Luke (11: 27): 'Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breast that nursed you'. This type of imagery gained prominence throughout Europe from the fourteenth century onwards, as the popularity of small devotional objects with this subject matter coincided with the rise of the *Devotio Moderna* movement in the late 1500s, which placed



Fig. 1
The Virgin and Child
Southern Netherlands
c.1500
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Inv. SK-A-2552

greater emphasis on the role of the Virgin in late-medieval devotion. A popular devotional image, the Virgin engaged in the act of breastfeeding her infant son emphasized not only the Virgin's intercessory power but also the human aspect of Christ and the unbreakable love between mother and child. Small and intimate panels like this one were meant to enhance the owner's devotional experience in a private setting. While praying, one could focus on Christ's prominently displayed hands and feet in order to contemplate the impending Passion that awaited this



innocent child. The two golden pomegranates in the golden foliage at the top of the painting are a Christian symbol of not only the Resurrection and hope of immortality, but also of fertility.¹ The inscription at the bottom of the panel is a variation of the *Ave regina caelorum*, one of the four principal antiphons to the Virgin.

This is one of the most inventive and refined versions of a celebrated composition popularised around the year 1500 amongst Brussels workshops, particularly by a group of artists known in modern scholarship under the provisional name 'The Master of the Gold Brocade'. The manner in which the fingers overlap and the vivid red background contribute to the effect of a precious surface akin to enamelled goldsmith's work, making our artist stand out from his counterparts in the flourishing commercial milieu of the late-medieval Southern Netherlands. A handful of variants survive in public collections around the world, including the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lille, and the Royal Musuem of Fine Arts in Brussels (fig. 1).² It is believed that the original prototype for this composition was formulated in the workshop of Rogier van der Weyden, shortly before the middle of the fifteenth century.³ In this respect, images such as Rogier's *St Luke Drawing the Virgin* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) revolutionised the way the Virgin and Child were represented. His followers successfully transformed large-scale compositions of this nature into intimate, half-length visions perfectly suited to private devotional practice. Dating of the present panel to around 1500 is supported by similar attributions in the scholarly discourse surrounding the group to which it belongs, as well as through stylistic comparisons to painterly practice at this date.

¹ Hildegard Schneider, 'On the Pomegranate', *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 4 (1945), p. 120.

² Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting vol. II: Rogier van der Weyden and the Master of Flémalle*, Leiden and Brussels, 1967, pp. 83-84.

³ On the influence of Rogier's *lactans*, see for example C. Stroo and P. Syfer-d'Olne, *The Flemish Primitives: The Master of Flémalle and Rogier Van der Weyden*, vol. 1, Brussels, 1996, pp. 165-195.



A MONUMENTAL 'BEAUTIFUL MADONNA' (SCHÖNE MADONNA)

Kingdom of Bohemia
c. 1420 - 1440
175 x 50 x 24 cm

Materials and Condition

Polychromy and gilding on poplar; minor restoration to the surface area, breaks to both of the arms of Christ.

Provenance

Private collection, Austria, acquired in 1950s or 1960s on the Austrian art market.

This monumental Schöne Madonna stands on a crescent moon, supporting the Christ Child with her left hand. Although the body of the Madonna is noticeably vertical, there is a delicate 'c' curve visible in her posture. The curvature is accentuated by her cloak, which seems to be pulled to one side by the foot of the Christ Child. Gilded on the outside and blue on the inside, her cloak falls to her feet in heavy v-shaped folds and it is fastened at the collar with a floral brooch. The wavy hair of the Virgin is covered by a folded veil of the type that is commonly found on the Schöne Madonnas, falling delicately around her round face. The indent at the top of her head is undoubtedly an indication that she would have originally been decorated by a large crown. The naked Christ Child sits upright with his legs crossed, staring into the distance. His hair is composed of tight curls that lie flatly on his head, creating a pattern that is often seen in Bohemia at this time. The faces of both the Virgin and Christ are reminiscent of icons, with highly arched eyebrows, long narrow noses and delicate mouths.

The figure stands quite firmly within the oeuvre of the so-called Beautiful Style (Schöne Stil), which emerged in the middle of the 14th century in Prague. Schöne Madonnen, or Beautiful Madonnas, are perhaps the best-known exponents of the 'International Gothic' a term coined by Otto Pächt in 1962 to describe a style that emerged in Europe around 1400. At the cradle of the 'International Gothic' movement stood Prague, the capital of the Holy Roman Empire from 1355, and Emperor Charles IV, one of the most strong-minded patrons of art in fourteenth-century Europe. Charles brought to Prague relics, artworks



Fig. 1
Master of the Týn Calvary
Virgin and Child,
Czech Republic, Prague, Týn Church
c.1430

and artists from all corners of Europe, including Italy, France and Germany. Scholars agree that it was this concentration of artists, both local and foreign, that caused the birth of this new style in Prague.



The Beautiful Style was distinguished by 'a new gracefulness in its human figures, by the unreal, almost fairy-tale atmosphere in which these figures moved, by a drapery style that combined sculptural fullness with sinuous elegance, and by a distinct fondness for ornament and decorative effects.'¹ Nevertheless, the style was not uniform and had many guises, which evolved over several decades. The present Beautiful Madonna, for example, fits within the circle of the Master of the Týn Calvary, responsible for the enthroned Virgin and Child in the Týn Church (fig. 1). Flourishing at the time of the Hussite Wars, his style deviates somewhat from the early aesthetics of the Schöne Stil in that the figures are much more serious and tranquil. The drapery is still ethereal and soft but much more clearly defined. The Christ Child is also no longer an unruly baby struggling in the arms of the Madonna). Rather, he sits motionless and looks forward, harking back to a much earlier iconography.

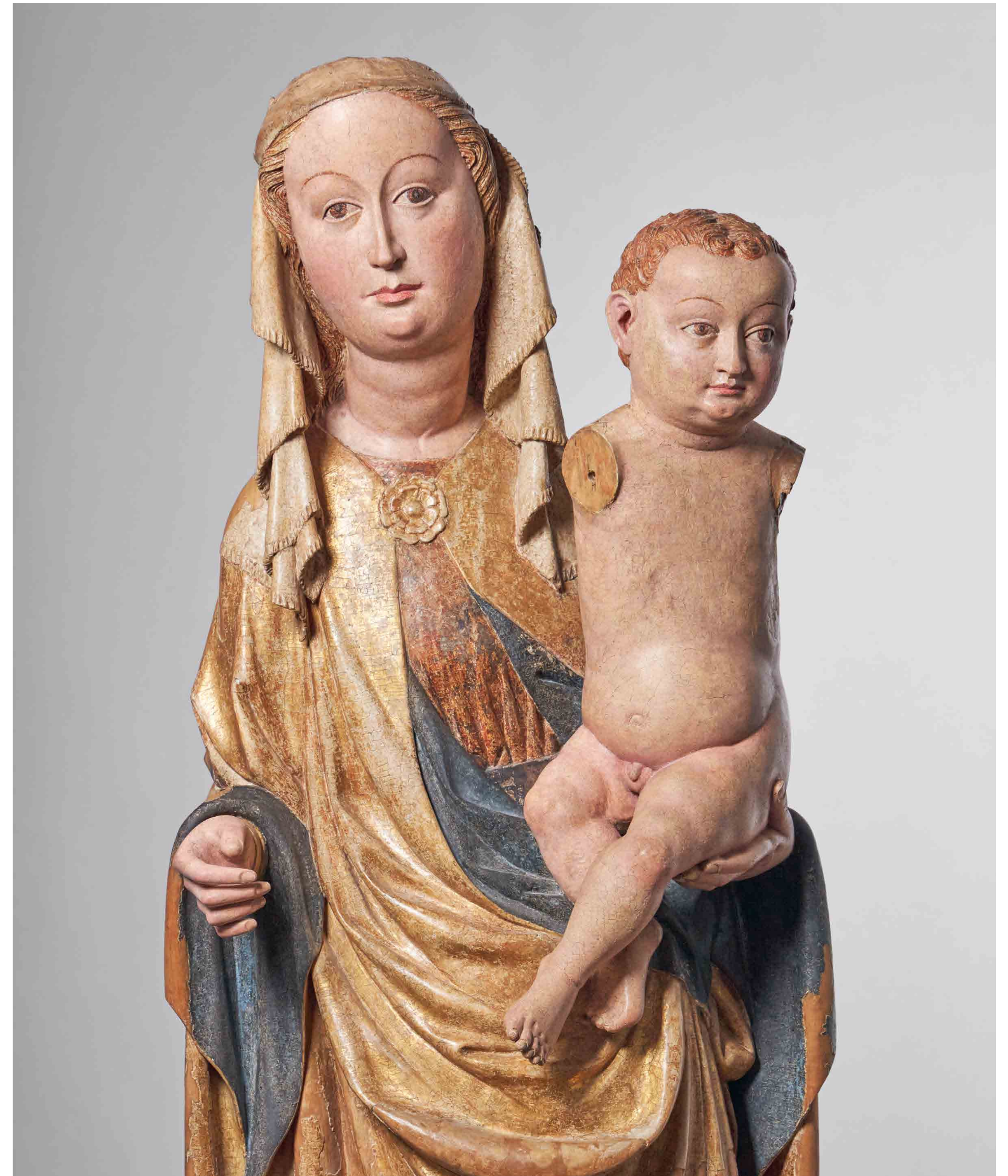
While the style of our figure finds strong parallels with Prague sculpture of the early 15th century, it can also be closely compared to examples in other parts of the Bohemian Kingdom, such as Moravia or Silesia. Testifying to the apparent diffusion of this style from the capital to other regions of the kingdom, the Virgin from Morašice creates a particularly compelling comparison (fig. 2). While the facial features of the two sculptures are not made in the same manner, their upright stance, the drapery patterns of their robes and the half-moons that they stand on are remarkably analogous. The facial features of our sculpture are most unusual in that the Virgin has a particularly long and narrow nose, icon-like eyes, and a gaze directed forward into the distance. Reminiscent of Byzantine icons, this style was present in many panel paintings produced in Prague around 1400, which had clear Italo-Byzantine influences. The facial features of our sculpture can also be compared to the so-called the Cappucine Cycle, which includes Christ, the Virgin Mary and the 12 apostles. The style of the faces in this cycle has been called angular and harsh; it is comparable to Byzantine prototypes and deviated from the facial features in early Beautiful Style figures.

The monumentality of this figure and its exceptional quality suggest that it was not only made for an important foundation but also that its master intimately followed the latest artistic developments in Prague.

The sculpture has been radiocarbon dated by RCD Lockinge in 2021. The calibrated age ranges for this sample (with 95% confidence intervals) were AD 1307 – 1364, plus AD 1385 – 1425.



Fig. 2
Madonna from Morašice
Czech Republic, Morašice
c.1430-40
Moravian Gallery Inv. Z2700



¹ Gerhard Schmidt, 'The Beautiful Style,' in Prague: *The Crown of Bohemia*, New York, 2005, p. 105.

AN ALABASTER OF THE DEATH OF THE VIRGIN

England, Midlands
c. 1440-1460
44 x 26.4 x 5.8 cm

Materials and Condition

Alabaster with traces of polychromy; Copper wires set into the original lead plugs on the reverse for attachment to a timber carcass. The background in the upper righthand corner of the relief broken away. The candle held by St John and the Virgin jointly is missing its tip, and the censer swung by John's adjacent counterpart is broken and missing. Some chip losses to the cushion, bedclothes and tester hangings. Two of the kneeling disciples are missing hands.

Provenance

Formerly in the chapel of the Chateau du Breuil-Benoît (formerly a Cistercian abbey), Marcilly-sur-Eure, Normandy, by the late 19th century and until 1997; Private collection, until their sale, Sotheby's London, 6th July 2017, lot 21a.

Published

Bouillet, A. 'La fabrication industrielle des retables en albâtre', in *Bulletin Monumental*, LXV (1901), pp. 45-62.
Cheetham, Francis. *English Medieval Alabaster: With a catalogue of the collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, Oxford, 1984, p. 198.

The Death of the Virgin in this scene takes place as she lays in her deathbed, its bedclothes drawn around her torso and under her arms. Her body and the bed on which she lies bisect the composition through its horizontal centre line, neatly differentiating the four apostles kneeling in the foreground from the eight who stand behind her and lower their heads to look towards her face. This clean spatial arrangement is given a single vertical boundary by a tall tester canopy, which borders the panel at its top left corner, and from which its hanging draperies are cut away rather than drawn back to frame the men who gather closely beneath its shadow. At the head of the group is the youthful, cleanshaven figure of Saint John, who holds a palm branch in his left hand and uses his right to place

a candle into the Virgin's hands. According to legend, a branch of the 'Palm of Paradise' gathered three days before the Virgin's death was presented to her by an angel who instructed that it be carried before her bier.¹ Several of John's older counterparts hold books, though the disciple who appears immediately at his left elbow instead swings the chain of an incense burner to purify the air and bless the Virgin's body. A sliver of background is visible around the heads of the standing apostles, punctuated with discs in reserve against a gold ground; originally these reserves would in fact have been raised and gilded pastiglia decoration that textured an otherwise unbroken gold surface, but their loss over time has exposed the clean surface of the alabaster beneath. The Virgin's bedclothes



Fig. 1
An early 20th(?) century photograph of the chapel at the Chateau du Breuil-Benoît, showing our panel third from the left.

¹ Francis Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters: With a Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, Oxford, 1984, p. 198.



were also once decorated, and traces of the design (which consisted of circular motifs enclosing letterforms) are still faintly visible in the surface of the stone.

This relief was probably carved for an altarpiece dedicated to the Life of the Virgin, but today it is one of only three recorded examples depicting her Dormition that are known to have come down to us. The other two are at Saint Mary's College of Education in Strawberry Hill, and in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (inv. A9-1946). In the nineteenth century, our panel was incorporated along with sixteen others into a reredos arrangement in the chapel of the Chateau du Breuil-Benoît (fig. 1).² Evidently united from several separate altarpieces, they highlight how the majority of English alabasters survived by dint of having been exported to Europe both before and after the Reformation, rather than remaining in English contexts. It is in fact extraordinary to think that while not a single intact alabaster altarpiece is preserved in situ in an English church, *thirty-three* survive in France alone.³



² Another panel from the group at Breuil-Benoît is now in the Wyvern Collection in London, for which see Paul Williamson, *The Wyvern Collection: Medieval and Renaissance Sculpture and Metalwork*, London, 2018, no. 110, pp. 210-211.

³ William Anderson, 'Re-discovery, collecting and display of English medieval alabasters', in *Journal of the History of Collections* vol. 16, no.1, 2004, pp. 47-58. An exception may be the Passion altar in the chapel of Saint Nicholas, Haddon Hall, although it seems to be missing at the very least its central Crucifixion scene.

ARNT VON ZWOLLE AND WORKSHOP

THE DEATH OF THE VIRGIN

Germany, Lower Rhine, Kalkar
c. 1490
73 x 110 cm

Materials and Condition

Oak; constructed from two planks measuring 46.7 and 63.3 cm in width respectively, both partially hollowed on the reverse. The butt joints reinforced with iron bars applied to the reverse at a later date. Small fillets of oak backing the relief at both outer edges. Further small fillets of timber applied to reverse and base to reinforce the timber. A split between the two sections and thermal cracks to each member consolidated with glue in the modern period.

Provenance

Flemish private collection.

The moment of the Virgin's dormition, or death (a scene not mentioned in the Bible but instead derived from an apocryphal text), takes place as she lays in her deathbed, its bedclothes drawn up to her waist. She lies clothed in a long-sleeved nightdress and with her hair covered by a veil, but the peace and serenity of her final moments, communicated through her subtly smiling mouth and closed eyelids, is broken sharply by the crowd of disciples who gather tightly around her bed, looking on. Several of the men raise their hands in gestures of prayer while their counterparts console them or looking on in stern-faced grief. Saint John the Evangelist (identifiable as the youngest man in the group) places a candle in the hands of the Virgin, reflecting the medieval custom of placing a taper in the hands of a dying person as a symbol of the light of Christ. Other objects held by the disciples include an incense burner, being swung by a long-haired disciple on the far left on the bed, and a book, held open by the capped man at centre right. While all of the figures at first appear to direct their focus towards the Virgin, a single disciple turns away to our right. He is shown cleanshaven (unusually, as this is typically an attribute given to Saint John who stands to the left of him), wearing a late-medieval headdress and open-sided tunic, and we think for these reasons that he may be intended to represent the relief's donor or patron.



Fig. 1
Arnt von Zwolle and Jan van Halderen
Christ washing the feet of the Apostles
1490s
Kalkar, Sankt Nicolaikirche

The lyrical carving of the figures' hairstyles with their rhythmic design of long, repetitive curls arranged in symmetrical compositions, and the sharp, angular treatment of their cheeks and facial structure, are characteristic - almost hermetically so - features of wood sculpture carved in the Northern Rhenish city of Kalkar and the nearby town of Kleve (also spelt Cleves) in the years leading up to 1500. Situated in the far west of Germany, Kalkar was an important trading centre along the Rhine Valley, with links (both trade-related and artistically) to Nijmegen and the Dutch peninsula in the north-west



during the later Middle Ages, and benefiting from the trade route down river to Cologne. Specifically, our relief relates closely to Netherlandish workshops' altarpieces still preserved in situ in the Church of St Nicolai in Kalkar, such as a God the Father figure from the *Trinity Retable* reliefs carved during the 1490s by Arnt von Zwolle (d. 1492; also called Arnt von Kalkar) and Jan van Halderen for the church's high altar (fig. 1), and other smaller-scale stand-alone reliefs such as an example depicting the Crucifixion in the Sankt Nicolaikirche in Kalkar.¹ Other works attributable to Arnt, such as a *Lamentation* relief believed to have been carved by him for the Carthusian monastery at Roermond (fig. 2), and a large *Saint Sebastian* now in the Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Ghent, show the same figural style, with pronounced eyelids, tightly clipped jawlines and lips, and meticulously rhythmical locks of hair, and indicate that our relief was carved under the same direction.



Fig. 2
Arnt von Zwolle
The Lamentation
c. 1480
54cm x 40cm; oak
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Inv. BK-1956-31



¹ B. Rommé et al., *Gegen den Strom: Meisterwerke niederrheinischer Skulptur in Zeiten der Reformation, 1500-1550*, Exh. Cat., Aachen, Berlin, 1996, p. 29, fig. 14. See also R. Karrenbrock (ed.), *Die Holzskulpturen des Mittelalters II, Vol. 1, 1400-1540*, Museum Schnütgen, Cologne, 2001, pp. 28-35 and pp. 287-289, no. 47. Friedrich Gorissen, *Die klevischen Beeldensnijder: Niederrheinländische Holzplastik 1474 - 1508*, Exh. Cat. Kleve, Städtisches Museum Haus Koekoek, Kleve, 1963.

A BOOK OF HOURS BY THE TROYES MASTER

INCLUDES 12 LARGE MINIATURES
FOR THE USE OF CHÂLONS-SUR-MARNE, IN LATIN

France, Champagne, Troyes
c. 1410 - 1415
19.5 x 14 cm

Materials and Condition

Illuminated manuscript on vellum; ii + 196 + i, apparently complete, collation: 112, 23 (of 4, iii a cancelled blank), 3-88, 96, 10-258 (the final gathering ruled blank, partly uncut and unopened, final folio pasted to flyleaf), preserving some catchwords, prickings evident in final gathering, 15 lines, ruled space: 59 x 97mm, one- to two-line initials alternating blue and gold throughout, eight three- to four-line illuminated initials with three-quarter ivy-leaf borders, 12 large miniatures within three-quarter bar frames and full borders of ivy-leaf spirals in burnished gold and colours, each set above a large illuminated initial. French 19th-century light brown polished calf, gilt and blind-tooled on covers and spine, inside gold dentelle, gilt and gauffered edges, joints repaired.

Provenance

Office of the Dead is for the use of Châlons-sur-Marne (now Châlons-en-Champagne), while the calendar contains Champenois saints, notably those venerated in the nearby city of Troyes: the feast of Lupus of Troyes (29 July) appears in red in the calendar, along with St Aventine (4 February). The Hours of the Virgin are for the use of Paris; Ownership inscription on blank leaf at the end: 'Ex libris adpertinet le Sr Bidault,' 18th century; Sotheby's, 25 July 1932, lot 189, sold as 'The Property of a Lady of Title,' Mrs J. Möring Huth, of Hamburg-Blankenese. Millard Meiss erroneously described the manuscript as being on deposit at the Hamburg Kunsthalle, ms. fr. 2, apparently on this basis (*The Limbourgs and Their Contemporaries*, p.406); Sotheby's, 11 July 1978, lot 50; bought by Charles W. Traylen for £26,000; Collection of Elaine and Alexandre Roseberg, Ms 16, acquired from H.P. Kraus in 1979; Christie's New York, 23 April 2021, lot 1.

Illumination and Content

Calendar ff.1-12; Gospel Extracts ff.13-15v; antiphon for the Hours of the Passion f.15v (lacking final leaf); Hours

of the Virgin, use of Paris ff.16-69: matins f.16, lauds f.26v, prime f.37v, terce f.42v, sext f.46v, none f.50v, vespers f.55, compline f.62; Seven Penitential Psalms and Litany ff.70-92v; Office of the Dead, use of Chalons-sur-Marne ff.94-135; Stabat mater ff.135v-137v; O intemerata ff.138-142; Obsecro te, in the masculine ff.142-146; Prayer to the Virgin and to St John the Evangelist, O intemerata ff.146-148; St Bernard's prayer to the Virgin, Summe summi ff.149-154; Prayer to the Virgin, Ecce ad te ff.154-157; Marian antiphon and prayer ff.157-158; The Seven Spiritual Joys of Mary according to St Thomas Becket, Gaude flore virginali ff.158-160; Prayers to the Trinity ff.160-174; Salve mater and further prayers to the Virgin ff.174v-189; ruled blanks ff.190-196.

The subjects of the miniatures are as follows: Annunciation f.16; Visitation f.26v; Nativity f.37v; Annunciation to the Shepherds f.42v; Adoration of the Magi f.46v; Flight into Egypt f.50v; Presentation in the Temple f.55; Coronation of the Virgin f.62; God Enthroned f.70; Funeral Mass f.94; Crucifixion f.135v; Virgin and Child f.174v.

This elegant early fifteenth-century book of hours is illuminated by the Troyes Master, otherwise known as Master of the Troyes Hours, an artist named for a book of hours made for the notable Berthier family of Troyes and now in the Bibliotheque Nationale de France (Paris, BNF, ms. Latin 924). It has been remarked that the Troyes Master worked with a 'goldsmith's precision', and his work is preserved here in pristine condition, from the burnished gold decoration peppering its pages, to the manuscript's wide, clean margins.¹

Stylistically, our manuscript is close to two Books of Hours illuminated by the Master around 1410-1415, for the use of Troyes and Sens respectively: the first is held at the Troyes médiathèque (MS. 3713), the second at Edinburgh University Library (MS. 44). Details are reused



¹ François Avril, *Très riches heures de Champagne: L'enluminure en Champagne à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Hazan, 2007, p. 82.

across these manuscripts: the carved bed and circular pillow on which the breast-feeding Virgin reclines in our Nativity miniature appear in Troyes MS. 3713, while a pair of spectacles are shown perched on the nose of one of the monks at the lectern in the Funeral Mass miniatures in all three manuscripts. The ivy-leaf borders and general compositions also find close parallels here.

Troyes at the beginning of the 15th century was a period that witnessed the flowering of manuscript production in France under the patronage of Charles VI and the Duc de Berry. The Troyes Master illuminated manuscripts – primarily Books of Hours – for Troyes and two other towns nearby in Champagne: Sens and Châlons-sur-Marne. Although we know very little about this artist, he seems to have been active from about 1390 to 1415.² His aesthetic is anchored in the elegant Gothic style of the 14th century; however, he incorporates contemporary trends emanating from Paris, exemplified in the Nativity miniature (f.37v) in this manuscript by such 'bourgeois' details from daily life as the carved bed draped with a brightly coloured and striped coverlet and the ornate headboard. The scene is equally as compelling with Joseph sleeping at the edge as the Virgin Mary sits up in bed, breastfeeding the Christ child. The master also displays a marked taste for decorative profusion, setting his figures against a rich variety of patterned grounds, and a preference for bold colours. This trend is illustrated in the Nativity miniature with the gilded checkerboard background but also with the richly gilded ivy that surrounds the scene.



² Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Limbourgs and Their Contemporaries*, London, 1974, pp. 406-407.

AN ALABASTER OF A QUEEN SAINT

England, Midlands
c. 1440
56.3 x 17.3 x 7 cm

Materials and Condition

Alabaster with remnants of vermillion red and gilding. The hands and attributes missing. An area of plaster repair across the neck and upper chest, following a historic break through the figure.

Provenance

Private collection, France.

This relief of a crowned female saint is an extremely important surviving medieval sculpture in alabaster, which is far larger than the majority of such figures. Though she can no longer be identified – whatever attributes she once held in her hands have evidently broken away over time – she probably represents one of Christianity's more popular virgin Queen Saints, such as Barbara, Catherine, or Elizabeth. She stands with her head and gaze turned subtly to our left, her gilded hair pinned by a cusped crown but flowing unbound over her shoulders. Her arms are raised to the level of her chest, and her hip describes a subtle but sensuous *contrapposto*. She wears a simple, full-length dress beneath a long mantle lined in red and hemmed with gold. Its fabric is drawn up around the figure's forearms, and one end has been wrapped across the front of the body and pinned under one elbow to create a delicate and carefully rendered series of swagged pleats. Two drilled holes let into the back of the panel evidence the manner with which she was secured to a larger structure, presumably an altarpiece (though evidently one which would have been of considerable scale and grandeur).

The general disposition of the draperies on our figure is so like those on a group of Apostles dated to between 1440 and 1460, and now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (A.148-1922), that it was clearly carved in the same

production centre with recourse to shared master models.¹ Both our Queen Saint and the V&A Apostles also have a strong degree of stylistic overlap with the figures carved to encircle the alabaster tomb of Sir Richard Vernon (d. 1451) and his wife Benedicta de Ludlow in Saint Bartholomew's Church, Tong, Shropshire. Quite different to either group, however, is the meticulous and rhythmical arrangement of dished folds seemingly scooped out of our saint's mantle where it crosses her midriff. It seems to be a hangover from an earlier stylistic trend and may indicate that our sculptor was working at an advanced stage in their career. For example, it can be seen – if only subtly employed – on the draperies of a *Trinity* dated to c. 1400 and now preserved in the V&A.² The most closely comparable approach, combined with the same exaggerated out-sweep to the hair on either side of the head, characterizes a statue of Saint Peter in the musée départemental des Antiquités in Rouen which surely dates to the same moment in time as our Queen Saint.³ It is also visible on an unidentified Bishop Saint seen by Francis Cheetham in a private collection in Lisbon, and suggests a shared artistic outlook which nonetheless seems to have found little currency much after the middle of the fifteenth century.⁴



¹ For the entire group, which is thought to have constituted an Apostles Creed altarpiece or Rood screen, see Francis Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters: With a Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, Oxford, 1984, p. 69.

² Cheetham, 1984, no. 225, p. 297.

³ Laurence Flavigny et al., *D'Angleterre en Normandie: Sculptures d'albâtre du Moyen Age*, Exh. Cat., Rouen and Evreux, 1998, no. 71, p. 128.

⁴ Francis Cheetham, *Alabaster Images of Medieval England*, Woodbridge, 2003, no. 101.

MARY MAGDALENE AS A HERMIT

France, Ile-de-France
c. 1305 - 1313
151 x 40 x 30 cm

Materials and Condition

Limestone (stone analysis done by Annie Blanc in 2012 revealed that this is lutetian limestone, and that according to the fossils in the stone, it is possible to suggest the limestone was extracted from the lower level of the old quarries in Paris or from its immediate surroundings.); minor losses to the tip of Mary's nose; restoration to the tips of her fingers and to the lower right-hand edge of the base; a general level of historic abrasion to the surface of the stone.

Provenance

Collection of Dikran Kelekian, Paris, by 1942; Dr and Mrs Fred Olsen, Guildford, Connecticut; North Carolina Museum of Art (G.57.14.15), bequeathed by the above in June 1957; Deaccessioned by the museum and sold November 2011; Private collection, Canada, until 2024.

Published

The North Carolina Museum of Art Bulletin, Volume 1, Summer 1957 (registrar's report of new acquisitions, February 7 to July 15, 1957).

Her hands in prayer, this life-sized figure of Mary Madalene stands wearing nothing but a suit of her own hair. The figure references the time Mary was believed to have spent in the desert, living in penance as an ascetic hermit after the death of Christ. With great skill the sculptor managed to give shape to what might otherwise have been just a solid mass. A contrapposto stance is just visible: a slight bend to the right leg, with the subsequent curve of the left hip over the supporting leg. In 591, Pope Gregory the Great, in his homily on Luke's gospel which describes a 'sinful woman' (7:36-50), conflated that sinful woman with Mary Magdalene – forever altering her story. From that point on, Mary was thought to be a prostitute, and was traditionally depicted as a beautiful young woman with long, loose hair in courtly dress. Here, she is indeed presented as young and beautiful, but the sculptor goes



Fig. 1
Mary Madgalene
France, Écouis, Collegiate Church
c.1315-20

one step further: with great subtlety he manages to hint at her more sensory qualities, carefully sculpting her fleshy belly and thighs, details of which are only clearly readable in sharp light.

This iconography represents a departure from the traditional representation of the saint who would normally be richly attired in an ornate dress, perhaps carrying an ointment jar (a further confusion with yet another woman from the gospels). Still, this iconography of a woman clothed in hair is not unique to the Middle Ages and might



actually point to another conflation of two stories: those of Mary Madgalene and Mary of Egypt. The *Vita* of the latter was written by Sophronius of Jerusalem in the 7th century. Identified as a harlot, Mary of Egypt converted to Christianity in Jerusalem, where she travelled with a group of men. After that she withdrew to the desert, living on three loaves of bread to an old age. When a monk discovered her, Mary's clothed had disintegrated and she was naked. In western iconography, however, this nakedness was an unacceptable attribute to portray, and she was instead depicted covered in a suit of hair. From the 11th century, the story of the life of Mary Magdalene started to resemble the story of Mary of Egypt, though it took on a western context. According to Theresa J. Gross-Diaz, through the 10th century, it was accepted that Mary Madgalene was buried in Ephesus – something that was accepted in both the East and the West. This, however, changed when the Abbey of Vézelay reinvented her story. The abbey was facing many difficulties in the early 11th century and needed something or someone to elevate itself. Then suddenly in 1026, the abbey 'made known that the "apostle to the apostles" and the apostle of Gaul, Mary Madgalene, was the patroness of the abbey. According to the *apostolica* that Vézelay began to circulate at this time, Mary Madgalene had fled Jewish persecution', went to Marseilles and Aix, baptising the people there and preaching the gospels.¹ According to the Golden Legend, Mary Magdalene then suddenly retreated to a desert in France, where she lived out her days, surviving only on 'the glorious song of the heavenly companies' – a story very similar to that of Mary of Egypt. The Magdalene was finally buried in Aix and her body was then translated to Vézelay in a sacred theft. Though some theologians raised doubts about the authenticity of this story, it was eventually embraced, fostering a deeper reverence for Mary Magdalene in France.

When rendering this French part of her story in images, depictions of Mary of Egypt almost certainly played a part – a fact that has confused these two figures when they are removed from their original context. The identity of our figure as *Mary Magdalene* is therefore not indisputable and warrants some discussion. That this is actually the figure of Mary of Egypt cannot be as easily ruled out and Dorothy Gillerman, who published on a similar figure in Notre-



Fig. 2
Jeanne de Saint Martin
France, Écouis, Collegiate Church
c.1305-13

She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark. And what did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices?

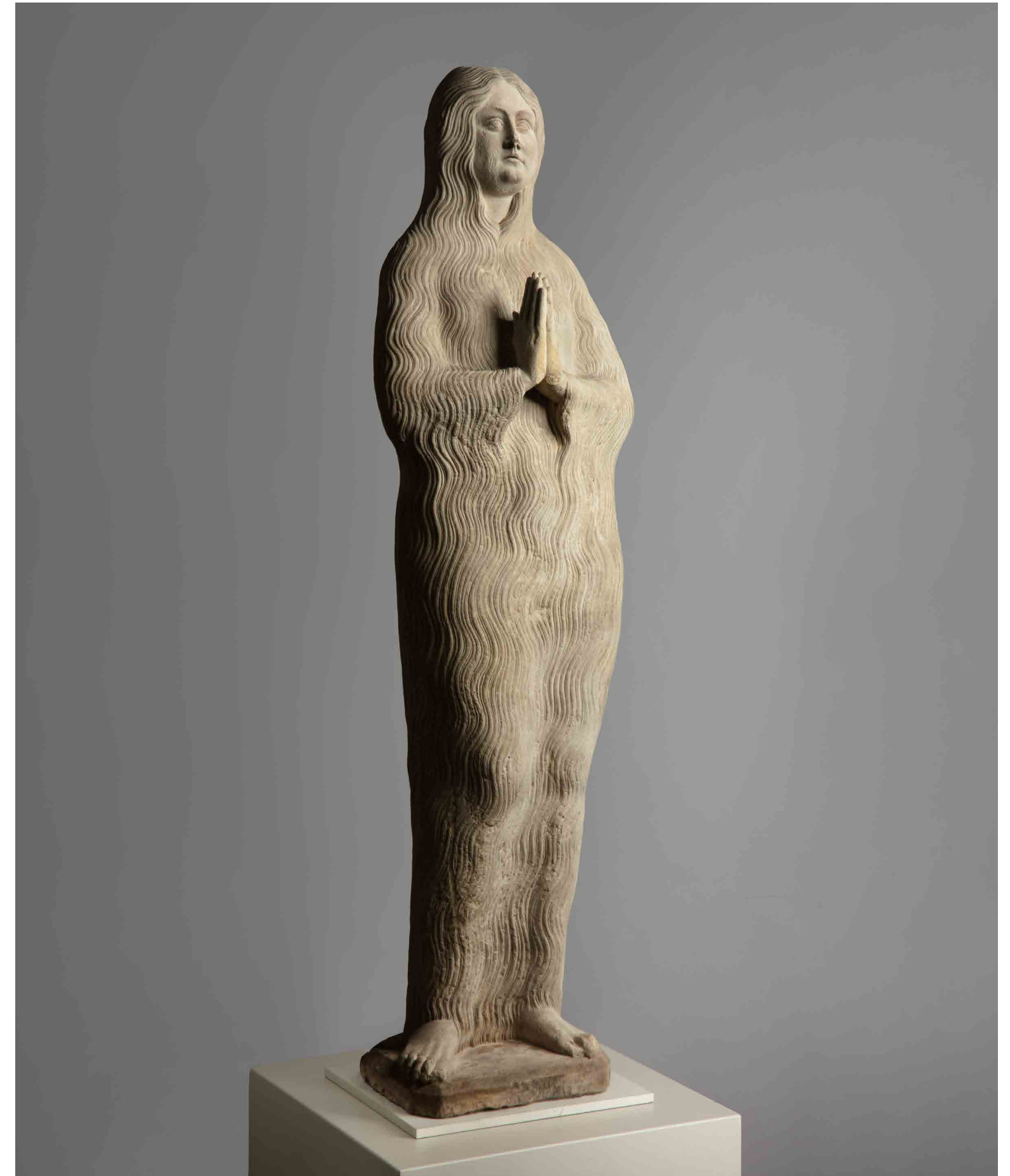
-Pope Gregory the Great, Rome 591

Dame in Écouis, describes that figure as *Mary of Egypt* (fig. 1).² Gillerman argues that the presence of that saint on the *Portail des Libraires*, a commission by Enguerrand de Marigny, and a later portrayal at the Sainte-Chapelle at Châteaudun, dated 1451-1464 (fig. 2), is evidence enough to assume the Écouis hermit must be *Mary of Egypt*.³ Countering this, one would normally expect Mary of Egypt to be holding three loaves of bread, which sustained her during her time in the desert, like the Châteaudun figure. François Baron catalogued the Écouis hermit as *Mary Magdalene*, noting among other reasons, that relics of that saint were in possession of the church at Écouis, as

¹ Theresa J. Gross-Diaz, "The Cult of Mary Magdalen in the Medieval West," in *Mary Magdalene from the New Testament to the New Age and Beyond*, Leiden, 2019, pp. 7-8; see also Alexandra Gajewski, "The Abbey Church at Vezelay and the Cult of Mary Magdalene: "invitation to a journey of discovery,"" in *Architecture, Liturgy and Identity: Liber Amicorum Paul Crossley*, eds. Zoë Opačić and Achim Timmermann, Turnhout, 2011, pp. 230ff.

² Dorothy Gillerman, *Enguerrand de Marigny and the Church of Notre-Dame at Ecouis. Art and Patronage in the Reign of Philip the Fair*, Pennsylvania, 1994, fig. 45, pp. 78 and 188-189.

³ Gillerman, 1994, pp. 173 and 169.



recorded in the inventory of 1565.⁴ In both Écouis and our example, Mary is shown with her hands in prayer – a likely reference to the popular iconography of the Assumption of Mary Magdalene. And although Mary of Egypt is occasionally found with her hands clasped in prayer in later Spanish or Italian paintings (see for example the Valdecris Triptych (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Inv. No. 39.54), in a French context, this is less likely.

Stylistically, the aforementioned figure in Écouis, commissioned by Enguerrand de Marigny as part of a larger programme of sculptures, between 1310-1313, bears striking resemblance.⁵ François Baron catalogued the Écouis example as carved either in Normandy or the Ile-de-France.⁶ Gillerman places it more precisely in Paris, between 1310 and 1313.⁷ As described by Baron, the Écouis Magdalene was boldly innovative for its time and certainly the present work must have been either a model for or modeled upon the Écouis example. There is an extremely strong argument for the former as it is very close stylistically to an earlier female figure also in Écouis, thought to represent *Jeanne de Saint Martin*, carved in Paris around 1305-1313. This example, like the Écouis *Magdalene*, was commissioned by Marigny. Scholars believe it was an earlier commission, first intended for another chapel of his, Saint-Martin, but then a change in plan saw it sent to Écouis to form part of the same sculptural scheme as the Écouis *Magdalene*, at the time of the chapel's dedication.⁸ Comparison of the present work to the figure of *Jeanne de Saint Martin* reveals similarities including most notably the treatment eyes and the narrow upturned nose, as well as the thin lips, the prominent chin and the treatment of the jaw. The eyes are characterized by their distinctive shape and lines which are defined with relatively sharp edges. Both figures have notably narrow, sloping shoulders. The stylistic connection is also supported by a physical one; stone analysis confirms that both works are carved in Lutetian limestone which differs from the stone used for the Écouis *Magdalene* and the other Écouis carvings. Lastly, the figure of Saint Margaret, also a part of the sculptural programme in Écouis, serves as a further stylistic comparison (fig. 3). Her wide jaw, smooth hair, broad anatomy and clasped hands all find parallels with our figure.

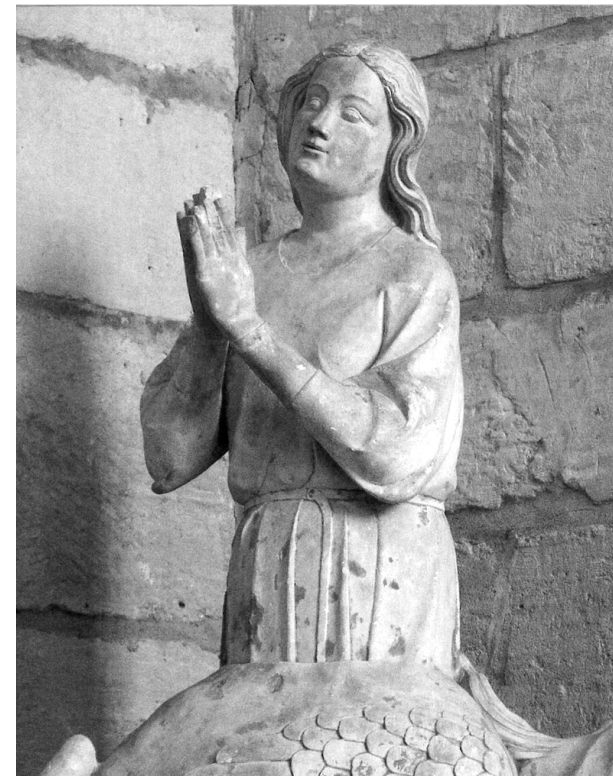
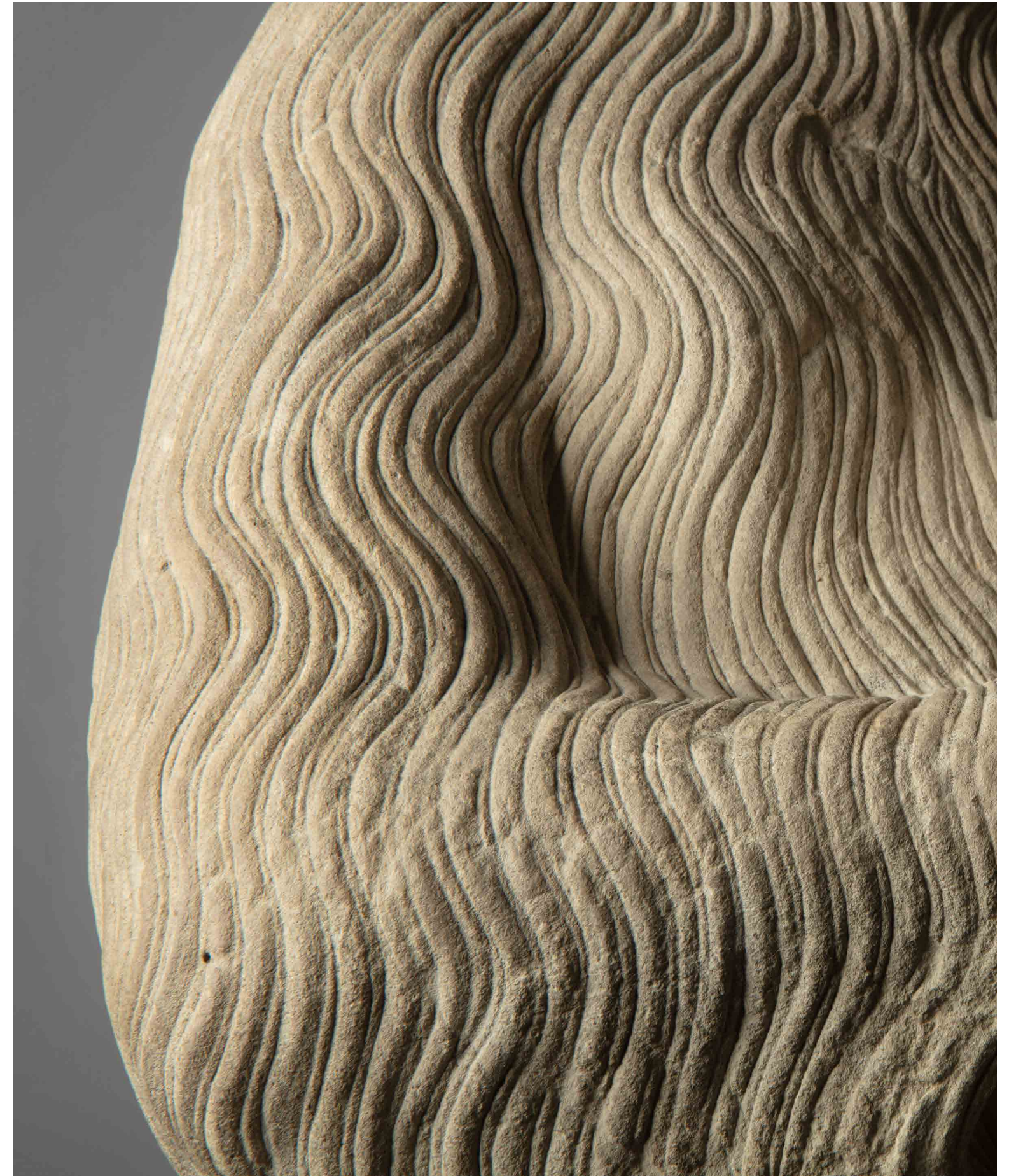


Fig. 3
Saint Margarete
France, Écouis, Collegiate Church
c.1313

Our sculpture stands as a striking testament to the boundless imagination and allegorical richness of the era. In this unusual depiction of Mary Magdalene, her hair, once a symbol of vanity and temptation, now act as a cloak of humility and repentance. While not entirely unprecedented, its uniqueness lies in the nuanced interpretation it offers, challenging viewers to contemplate the depths of this mysterious female figure.



4 François Baron, *L'art au temps des rois maudits: Philippe le Bel et ses fils*, Danielle Gaborit-Chopin etc., Paris, 1998, cat. 54, p. 107; Régnier, *L'Eglise Notre-Dame d'Écouis*, Paris and Rouen, 1913, pp. 257-273, appendixes C and D, 324-61; Gillerman, 1994, 201, note. 15.

5 Inv. no. MH 1905; illustrated in François Baron ed., *Les Fastes du Gothique. Le siècle de Charles V*, Paris, 1981, cat 34, p. 90; Gillerman, 1994, fig. 45, p. 78.

6 Baron, 1998, cat. 54, pp. 106-109.

7 Gillerman, 1994, fig. 45, pages 78, 102-109 and 188-189.

8 Gillerman, 1994, fig. 40, 184-185.

THE MASTER OF THE BELVEDERE WIENERIN

THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY MADGALENE & THE VISITATION (ON THE REVERSE)

Austria, Vienna
c.1480 - 1490
112 x 90 cm

Materials and Condition

Oil and gilding on panel, some minor retouching with losses on the lower right of the Assumption panel.

Provenance

Private Collection, Cologne.

This double-sided panel painting, vividly painted with striking colours, was once a wing of an altarpiece. Set against a rocky backdrop, the exterior of this panel portrays the Assumption of Mary Magdalene – a figure both revered and shrouded in mystery. At its centre, the nude figure of Mary Magdalene ascends gracefully towards heaven. Her hands are crossed in front of her chest, and she is draped solely by the cascading veil of her own flaming red hair. Surrounding her are angels, their wings ablaze with a rich variety of colours, serving as both guardians and guides on her celestial journey. While four of the angels wear long white or yellow robes, the one to the right of the Madgalene's shoulder is clad in a scaly jumpsuit and a green cloak. The Visitation is depicted on the reverse. The tender exchange between the Virgin Mary and her cousin Elizabeth unfolds with exquisite grace. Their hands meet in a gesture of familial warmth, while their gazes lock in mutual understanding and joy. Despite the difference in their age, both women's facial features are depicted with a timeless youth. Virgin Mary's flowing red locks cascade freely below her waist, while Elizabeth's advanced age is symbolized only by a white headdress and wimple, intricately adorned yet gracefully concealing her silvered hair. The striking red colour of Elizabeth's mantle is a bold contrast to the pale green in the background. The two women are shown outside of a large gate while a city can be seen between their heads in a distance. The gilded background of this side of the panel indicates that this, more precious side, would have been on the interior of the altarpiece.

The original altarpiece that this panel belonged to would have almost certainly had scenes from the life of Mary



Fig. 1
Master E.S.
Assumption of Mary Madgalene
Southern Germany
c.1450
Kupferstichkabinett, Dresden

Madgalene on the exterior and scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary on the interior. Iconographically, the image of the Assumption of Mary Madgalene is inspired by a commonly circulated composition – one that derives from an engraving by Master E.S. (fig. 1). Mary's head tilt, her crossed arms in front of her chest, and the draping of her hair exhibit striking similarities with the print. Additionally, the rocky scene and the manner in which the



angels support the figure of the Magdalene—some clad in robes and others in scaly jumpsuits—is notably alike. On the reverse, the composition of the Visitation derives from the Gospel of Luke which describes this scene as follows: 'At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy' (1:39-56). Though these two iconographies are distinct, the artist ingeniously intertwines the narratives of these two Marys by drawing a visual parallel in their appearances – the Virgin Mary bears a striking resemblance to Mary Magdalene, both sharing similar facial features and cascading, fiery-red locks of hair.

The painter of our panel was undoubtedly active in the second half of the fifteenth-century in Vienna – a period marked by the blossoming of Viennese panel painting. Close stylistic details bear striking resemblance to the portrait of the Belvedere Wienerin in the Belvedere Museum in Vienna, which seems to have been painted by the same hand as our panel. The museum has attributed the portrait to the so-called Albrechtsaltar Master, who is known for painting a retable for the church of Unsere Liebe Frau bei den Weissen Brüdern now in Klosterneuburg (fig. 2).¹ More recently, however, Bodo Brinkmann has reattributed the portrait of the Belvedere Wienerin to the Eggenburger Master, who was responsible for a series of panels from the altarpiece that was once in the Redemptorists Monastery in Eggenburg and redated it to the 1480s.² While Brinkmann's dating is more appropriate to the portrait, neither of these attributions are entirely satisfying, especially when considering the notable differences between those panels firmly attributed to two masters and the two paintings discussed here. In contrast, when comparing the portrait to our painting, the similarities are immediately obvious: the eyes of the figures are strikingly rounded, their noses feature a subtle bump, a testament to the artist's commitment to capturing the nuances of their individuality; and



Fig. 2
The Belvedere Wienerin (Head of a Female Saint)
Austria, Vienna
c.1480
Vienna, Belvedere Museum Inv. Lg 2082

their lips have a full lower lip which is accentuated by a delicate white outline. The use of such vibrant colours, especially the reds and greens, alludes to a painter from a younger generation – perhaps someone that trained in the Albrechtsaltar Master's workshop or even someone connected to the workshop of a master known as the Wiener Schottenmeister. His depiction of Saint Florian, especially the elongated body of the saint, the colour of his flesh, and the use of reds and greens, finds many parallels with our painting (Stift Klosterneuburg Inv. No. GM54).

In this double-sided panel painting, Mary Magdalene and the Visitation embody distinct yet interconnected aspects

¹ We would like to thank Judith Hentschel and her colleagues at the GNM for suggesting this connection. We would also like to thank Agnieszka Patala from Wrocław University for her advice. Christa Gardner von Teuffel, 'The Carmelite Altarpiece (circa 1290-1550). The Self-Identification of an Order,' in *Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 57, no. 1, 2015, pp. 2–41.

² Bodo Brinkmann, *Deutsche Gemälde im Städel 1500-1550*, Mainz, 2005, pp. 280-81.



of Marian devotion. On one side, Mary Magdalene's Assumption invites contemplation of redemption and transformation and, on the reverse, the Visitation exudes the anticipation of new life as Mary, pregnant with the Christ Child, shares a momentous encounter with her cousin Elizabeth. The connection between these two Marys transcends mere juxtaposition; it speaks to a deeper theological resonance, linking themes of redemption with the anticipation of salvation.



MARY OF EGYPT

North or North-Central France, Loire Valley?
c. 1470-1480
93 x 26 x 18.5 cm

Materials and Condition

Walnut with vestiges of gilding and polychromy. A crack below the right arm of the figure, losses to the wrist and right forearm, the integral base, and the tips of the feet, a short passage of hair on the proper right-hand side of the face restored.

Provenance

Adrien Mithouard (1864-1919), président du Conseil de Paris, Château de Bazouges, Sarthe; by descent to his great-grandson Gilles Serrand, Château de Bazouges, until 2023.

Sophronius of Jerusalem wrote the *Vita* of Mary of Egypt in the 7th century, where he recalled that Mary ran away from home when she was twelve years old and lived the life of prostitute for seventeen years. After a visit to Jerusalem for the Great Feasts, she had a vision in front of the Holy Sepulchre and repented her sinful way of life. She subsequently retreated to the desert, sustaining herself on three loaves of bread until old age. Upon her discovery by a monk, Mary was found unclothed, her garments having worn away. She began to be venerated in Europe as early as the 8th century and her story soon became merged with that of Mary Magdalene.¹ The Magdalene's own narrative was reinvented in the guise of Mary of Egypt as the former began to be portrayed as a hermit saint. At the same time, the Magdalene's long hair replaced Mary of Egypt's short white locks, as described in her *Vita*, in order to conceal her body.

This walnut sculpture embodies the desert saint who survived years in the wilderness, her body veiled in a cascade of intricately carved hair strands symbolic of her life of austerity. She turns her eyes subtly downwards, her facial features defined by a prominent nose and well

delineated lips. A short length of white cloth is draped over her forearms, falling gently to cover her belly. She gently cradles her three loaves of bread, a poignant reminder of the divine sustenance that sustained her during her solitary asceticism.

Though widely used in Northern Europe for carving sculpture during the Middle Ages, walnut was a particularly favoured timber among French artists of the fifteenth century, who capitalised on its relative softness and its versatile suitability for both crisp and robust carving alike. A pair of figures from a *Calvary* group carved in Touraine in the third quarter of the fifteenth century, and now split between the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Inv. No. 16.32.184) and the musée du Louvre in Paris (Inv. No. RF 1383), attest to how the greatest wood carvers of the period could manipulate its properties with astonishing, emotive effect. Another figure in walnut also preserved in New York, depicting a wealthy courtier in full garb, has a similar delicacy of approach to our Magdalene, despite the gender divide (inv. 17.190.375). Material links get us only so far of course, but our figure is also closely analogous from a stylistic standpoint to statuary produced in the Touraine and along the Loire Valley in the second half of the century. A small clutch of related works in this respect include two kneeling angels carved c. 1460-70 to decorate the funerary chapel erected by the de Bueil family in the church of Saint-Michel at Bueil-en-Touraine (Tours, musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. HG D 968.028.0001) and the well-known limestone statue of Jehan Dunois of c. 1480 in the chapel of the chateau at Châteaudun, which show the same curving lower eyelids, which sweep downwards away from the upper lids in a slung bow.

Our figure is particularly significant for another reason however. It seems to have been the prototype for, or

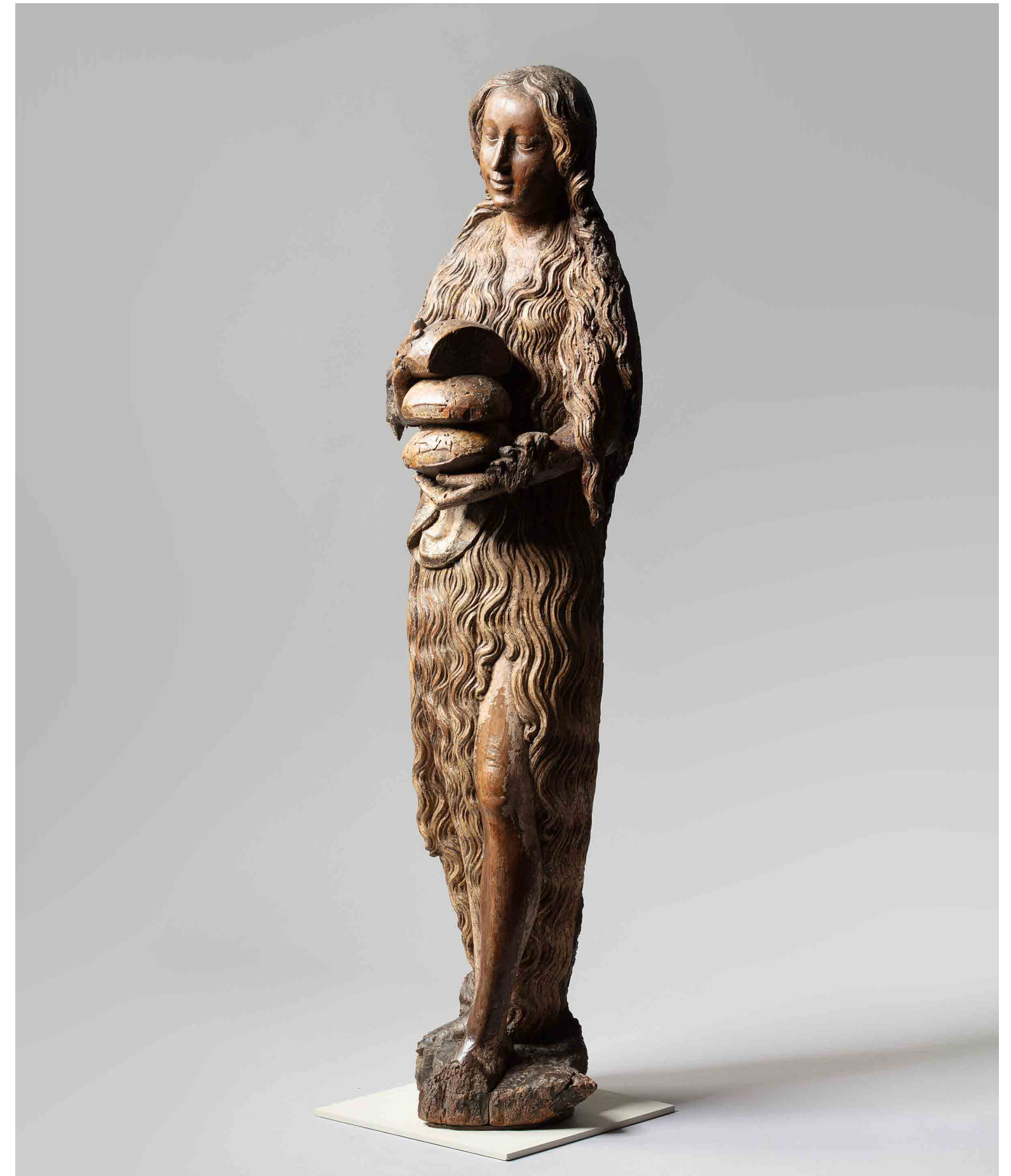
¹ Theresa Gross-Diaz, 'The Cult of Mary Magdalene in the Medieval West,' in *Mary Magdalene from the New Testament to the New Age and Beyond*, Leiden, 2019, p. 2.



was otherwise devised from the same model as, a larger version with the same iconography thought to have been carved in Paris around 1490 (certainly before 1498), which survives in the church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois (fig. 1). The draping of the fabric over the figure's forearms, and the carving of the loaves of bread as rounded domes complete with the scars of having been torn apart from one another after baking, are features common to both versions, as is the positioning of the left leg forward of the right and the visibility of the thighs which appear through splits in the locks of hair in exactly the same manner. That the artist of the Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois figure knew of our version or a close variant of it seems clear, and it thus offers an important 'missing link' in our understanding of the transmission of the image across French artistic circles in the years before 1500.



Fig. 1
Mary of Egypt
France, Paris
c. 1490 (before 1498)
Limestone with gilding and polychromy
Paris, Church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois



HANS SÜSS VON KULMBACH

MARY CLEOPHAS AND HER FAMILY; MARY SALOME AND HER FAMILY

Germany, Nuremberg
Dated 1513
54.6 x 28.9 cm

Materials and Condition

Oil on softwood panels, each support constructed from a single plank aligned with its grain running vertically. Both panels thinned and cradled on the reverse.

Provenance

Count Cauda, Berlin, 1925; Julius Böhler Gallery, Lucerne; Hugo Perls (1886-1977), Berlin, 1928 (inv. no. 19); Jacques Goudstikker, Amsterdam, 1928; Looted by the Nazi authorities, July, 1940; Recovered by the Allies, 1945; in the custody of the Dutch government; Lent to the Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague 1951; Ownership transferred to the Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague, Inventory number 904 in 1960; Restituted to Marei von Saher, Greenwich (the heir of Jacques Goudstikker) in February 2006; Christie's, London, 5 July 2006, lot no. 6.

Exhibited

Gemälde alter Meister aus Berliner Privatbesitz. Kaiser-Friedrich-Museumsverein. Akademie der Künste, Berlin. July – August 1925, no. 208.

Catalogue des Nouvelles Acquisitions de la Collection Goudstikker, October – November 1928, no. 21.

The Hauge, Mauritshuis, on loan since 1960 (inv. nos. 904-905).

Published

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van Suchtelen, A. Y. Bruijnen, and E. Buijsen. *Art on Wings. Celebrating the Reunification of a Triptych by Gerard David*. The Hague, 1977, pp. 84-89, nos. 10.

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Fig. 1
Hans Süss von Kulmbach
Mary Salome and Zebedee with their sons
Germany, Nuremberg
c.1511
Saint Louis Art Museum 175:1951



Fig. 1
Hans Süss von Kulmbach
Mary Salome and Zebedee with their sons
Germany, Nuremberg
c.1511
Saint Louis Art Museum 175:1951

These two panels depict Mary's two half-sisters (also called Mary) with their husbands and children in domestic settings. According to medieval legend, after the death of Joachim, Anne married two more times and had two other daughters. The daughters of these two marriages were called Mary like their half-sister, the mother of Jesus. St. Anne's second daughter, Mary Cleophas, was married to Alphaeus, and bore four sons, three of whom would become Apostles. On the left of the panel depicting the family of Mary Cleophas is Judas Thaddaeus identified by his club; in the centre, James the Less with his staff, his hair being deloused by his mother; on the right, Simon the Zealot with a saw; and behind, Joseph the Righteous. In the panel representing the family of Anne's youngest daughter, Mary Salome, are the future Apostles James the Greater with his staff, and John the Evangelist with his chalice. Their father, Zebedee, is shown writing, a reference to his fatherly role as teacher. A variation on the composition of the Mary Salome panel by Hans Süß von Kulmbach is preserved in the St. Louis Art Museum (fig. 1).

These two panels must originally have belonged to an altarpiece dedicated to St. Anne and her apocryphal descendants: the Holy Kinship. As the cult of St. Anne became important in the late Middle Ages, especially in the Rhineland and the Low Countries, altarpieces with images of St. Anne with the Virgin and Christ Child, and the Holy Kinship became very popular. Each of our panels was originally a double-sided wing panel and was, at some point before the mid-1920s, split to separate the painted front and reverse sides. The painting originally on the reverse of the Mary Cleophas panel depicted St. Anne and Joachim at the Golden Gate, and is now preserved in the Barnes Foundation Museum, Philadelphia (fig. 2). An Annunciation to Joachim, originally on the reverse of the Mary Salome panel, is now lost, known only from a photo in the Max J. Friedlander Archive in the Netherlands Institute for Art History in The Hague. The exact configuration of the altarpiece to which these panels belonged is not known. The ensemble may have presented a comprehensive portrait of the Holy Kinship, including scenes of St. Anne with her husbands, St. Anne with her daughters, and Christ with St. Anne and the Virgin, perhaps in a central position.

Hans Süß von Kulmbach belongs to the first generation of German Renaissance artisans to engage with humanism and the focus on domestic settings in our paintings illustrates this clearly. Kulmbach had been a pupil of the Italian printmaker and painter Jacopo de Barbari (c. 1460/70-c. 1516) as well as a journeyman under the

employ of Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), before setting up his own workshop in Nuremberg in 1511. His early works show the formative influence of both Dürer and Jacopo de Barbari, who worked in Germany in the first years of the 16th century. Although de Barbari's painterly brushwork permanently influenced Kulmbach's style, he is best remembered as Dürer's foremost disciple in Nuremberg. By the second decade of the century, as Dürer himself took on fewer major commissions, Kulmbach emerged as the most important and prolific designer of stained-glass windows and painter of altarpieces for the city's churches. At times, Kulmbach's works have been confused with those of Dürer; however, his work is distinguished by a more liquid and luminous manner of handling paint, and by the simplicity and tenderness of his interpretations of religious themes.



Fig. 2
Hans Süß von Kulmbach
Meeting at the Golden Gate
Dated 1515
Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia BF871



THE SECOND MASTER OF ANTIPHONAL 'M' OF S. GIORGIO MAGGIORE

THE BIRTH OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST FROM ANTIPHONAL 5 FRONTISPIECE

Italy, Piacenza, Benedictine Monastery of San Sisto
1460-65
60 x 41 cm

Materials and Condition

Parchment, minor wear and discolouration consistent with age, cut down from original size.

Provenance

Benedictine Monastery of San Sisto, Piacenza; Monk Benedetto Affaticati Family Home, early 19th century; Michele Cavaleri acquired from descendants of above, 1864; Enrico Cernuschi (d. 1896), Paris, acquired from above in early 1870s; Hiersemann of Leipzig (dealer) sells Ceruschi collection on behalf of family in 1897; Private Collection 'R,' France.

This monumental manuscript leaf vividly portrays the birth of Saint John the Baptist, within the initial 'E,' which begins the first antiphon of Lauds for the feast of St. John the Baptist (June 24), 'Elisabeth Zacharie magnum virum genuit johannem baptistam precursorem domini' (Elizabeth [the wife] of Zachary, gave birth to a great man, John the Baptist, the precursor of Christ). Surrounded by a bustling gathering of women, Saint Elizabeth rests in an ornately decorated bed, with a canopy above her head. The room is alive with the presence of numerous women, each engaged in various supportive roles. Midwives in the foreground are preparing a bath for the infant, while others prepare linens or carry food. The women's garments are richly coloured, with flowing fabrics and intricate patterns that add to the scene's vibrancy. Amid the gathered women, the Virgin Mary stands out with her serene and composed demeanour. She is depicted wearing a blue cloak, decorated with gold stars and a gilded lining, and is shown pouring water into a bowl where Elizabeth washes her hands. A radiant halo encircles her head, highlighting her sanctity. In the background, the aged Zechariah reads from a scroll. The room's architecture, featuring shades of purple, red and pink, adds depth and a sense of boldness to the composition.

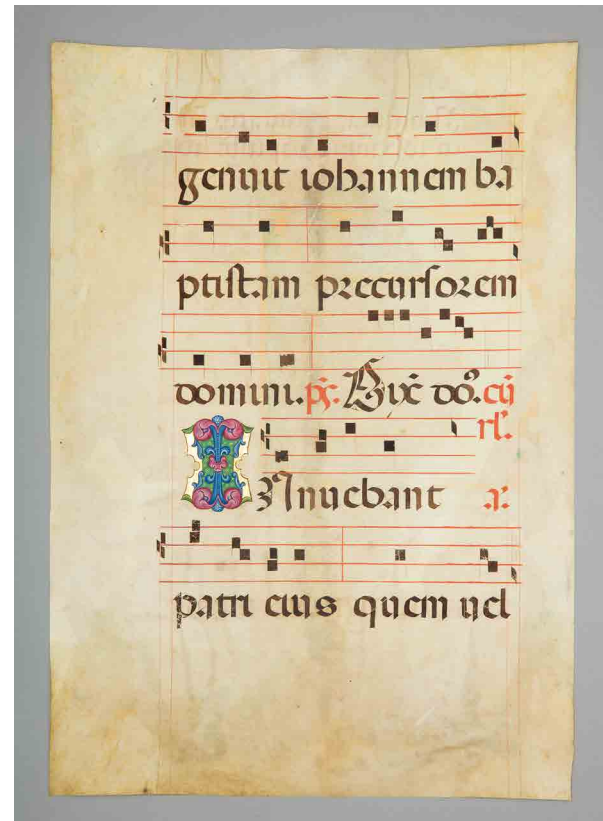


Fig. 1
Second Master of Antiphoner M of San Giorgio Maggiore
Antiphoner 5
St. Giustina, f. 143r
Private collection

This leaf comes from a manuscript identified as Antiphonal 5 from a collection of monastic choir books commissioned for the Benedictine Monastery of San Sisto



in Piacenza, created between 1465 and 1500.¹ The books were hidden by a monk called Benedetto Affaticati, who concealed them from the French army in the attic of his family home in the 19th century. The miniature on our leaf is attributed by Joanne Filippone Overy to 'the Second Master of Antiphonal M of S. Giorgio Maggiore,' who was also responsible for a wonderful miniature of S. Giustina, which shares with our miniature the same facial features, treatment of drapery and decorative character (fig. 1).



Reverse



¹ Joanne Filippone Overt, 'Reconstructing the Monastic Choir Books of San Sisto in Piacenza,' in *Rivista di Storia della Miniatura* 14, 2010, p. 151.

RELIEF OF THE LAMENTATION

Upper Rhine Valley, likely Colmar
c. 1470 - 1480
34 x 40 cm

Materials and Condition

White limestone, with some vestiges of original polychromy. The upper corners missing and restored with small infills. Abrasion to the surface of the stone and the highest points of the carving. Small chip losses to Christ's nose, the edge of the Virgin's veil, the tip of John's hair, and Christ's proper-right thumb.

Provenance

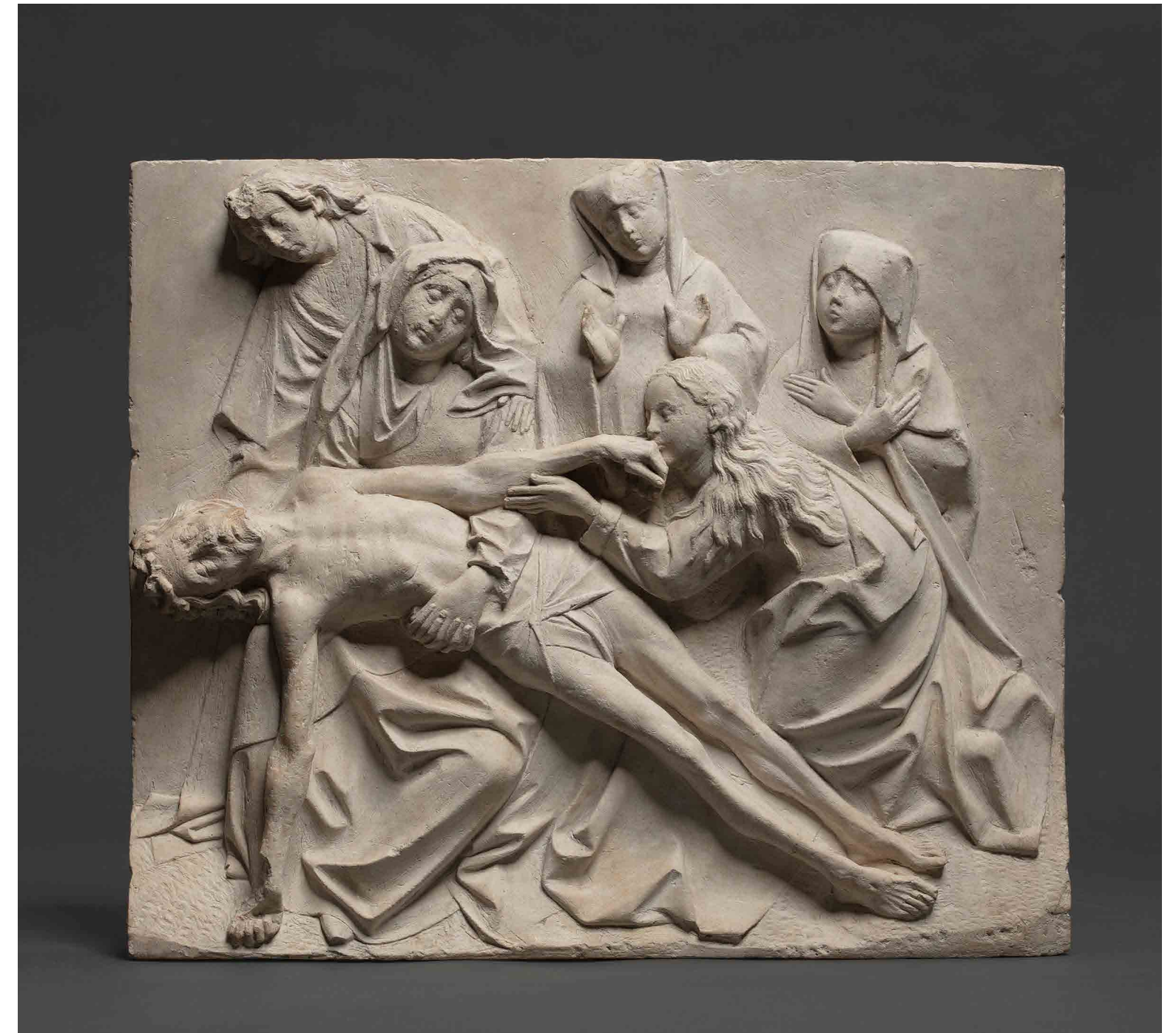
Private Collection, Austria.

A carved relief showing the four Marys accompanied by Saint John the Evangelist mourning over the dead body of Christ. The relief is a fusion of two closely linked iconographic representations: the Pieta and the Lamentation. As one would expect to find in a Pieta, the Virgin Mary supports the body of Christ; however, the scene includes four other figures, giving it the narrative setting typical of a Lamentation image. The Virgin Mary is partway between a sitting position and physical collapse as she supports her son with her arms interlocked around his waist. Her tightly clenched hands convey the weight of Christ's body that she is supporting entirely on her own. His body bisects the composition as his right arm falls down to the ground below him. His other arm is being gently lifted and kissed by the figure of Mary Magdalene who can be identified by her unbound hair, which is highly particular to her and is symbolic of her believed sinful past. In the Middle Ages, Mary Magdalene was thought to be a prostitute; this was first suggested by Pope Gregory the Great, in his homily on Luke's gospel dated 14 September 591, and it follows a conflation between Luke's description of a 'sinful woman', in his Gospel 7:36-50, and the persona of Mary Magdalene. Behind Mary Magdalene, two other women, likely identifiable as Mary Cleophas and

Mary Salome, can be seen with their arms composed in opposite gestures of mourning. On the far left is the figure of Saint John, who extends his right arm to hold Christ's head while his left delicately rests on the Virgin's shoulder.

Elements of the composition of this relief certainly derive from Netherlandish prototypes – the lolling body of Christ and the dynamism of the Magdalene, who rushes in to take hold of his hand, depend on the work of Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1400-1464); these elements can be seen on at least two surviving Brussels reliefs closely associated with Rogierian precedents.¹ A number of elements derive specifically from Rogier's paintings, which were conveyed to a broader audience through pattern books and prints, and which circulated already during his lifetime.² Rogier returned again and again to the iconography of the Lamentation. The way in which the Virgin Mary uses both hands gripped together to support the weighty body of her dead Son is perhaps the most notable here, as it is extremely uncommon. It can be found in Rogier's *Miraflores Triptych*, dated to c. 1440 (Berlin, Staatliche Museen Zu Berlin, Gemaldegalerie, Inv. no. 534A). Rogier seems to have also borrowed gestures from earlier works in three dimensions. The touching gesture of the Magdalene kissing the hand of Christ for example can be found in a Hainault Entombment, c. 1400-1410 in Ath, Musée Royal d'Histoire et de Folklore.³ This gesture can be seen again in two wooden carvings of the *Lamentation*, c. 1460, by a Brussels workshop and kept respectively in Brussels, Royal Museums of Art and History (inv. no. 1) and a private collection.⁴

The style of the carving, including the figure types and the rounded fleshy faces, is much closer to late fifteenth-century carving from the Upper Rhine and Swabia. The



¹ Lorne Campbell and Jan Van der Stock, *Rogier Van der Weyden 1400 – 1464: Master of Passions*, Leuven, 2009, pp. 520-522.

² The influence of his oeuvre on other artists and media on the art of the low countries was the main focus of the exhibition *Rogier Van der Weyden 1400 – 1464: Master of Passions* and catalogue by Lorne Campbell and Jan Van der Stock, Leuven, 2009.

³ Exh. Cat., Leuven, 2009, fig. 25, p. 76.

⁴ Both published in Exh. Cat., Leuven, 2009, cat. 79, and ill. 79.1, pp. 520-522.

same broad face and pronounced eye sockets, as well as the looping nature of the crown of thorns, informs a large Entombment figure carved for the cathedral at Freiburg (illustrated in Heribert Reiners, *Burgundisch-Alemannische Plastik*, Strasbourg, 1943, p. 85-7). The use of hands in the gestural poses and the face and headdress type reappears in the carving of the Ulm-based sculptor Michael Erhart (c. 1440-1522); see for example the diminutive figures in the skirts of the Virgin in his *Virgin of Mercy*, c. 1480-1490, in Berlin, Skulpturengalerie, Staatliche Museen (illustrated in Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, Yale, 1980, pl. III, p. 178). A connection to workshop of Nikolaus Gerhaert (c. 1420-1473), who moved from Leiden to Strasbourg, may help to explain the confluence of themes and stylistic traditions conveyed by our relief. Small-scale statues such as Gerhaert's *Virgin and Child* in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (inv. 1996.14) display comparable facial types and hair styles. The closest comparison, however, can be drawn to a relief believed to have been carved in Colmar around 1510 and now on loan to the Musée Unterlinden (illustrated in Benoît Delcourte, Suzanne Plouin and Pantxita de Paepe, *Musée Unterlinden: Guide to the Collections*, Colmar, 2015, p. 130). While of later date, it reprises the very same composition, and suggests that in Colmar artists were working from a successful and celebrated prototype for many years. Along with our relief's stylistic and technical roots, which are anchored in the latter part of the fifteenth century, there is (unlike the Colmar relief) no overt attention to details of dress and little sense of the mannerism which pervaded sculpture carving after 1500. The relief is thus a key exemplar of a seemingly lost prototype whose imagery and composition reappear again in the Colmar relief, and its survival is of extreme significance for the study and understanding of late-medieval stone carving and sculptural transmission across Northern Europe in the 1400s.

The scale and shape of this relief are unusual and the lack of comparative examples means that it is not immediately easy to understand what type of object this carving was intended to be part of. The small scale of this piece and the carefully conceived details indicate, however, that it was intended as a private devotional work perhaps taking the place of a painting or ivory altar. It is likely that the patron would have specified the focus on the Magdalene, whose role as the reformed sinner echoes the human condition following Adam and Eve's Original Sin and has traditionally been of enormous appeal as a result.



NICCOLÒ DA BOLOGNA (ACTIVE 1349-1403)

THREE MARYS AT THE TOMB, INITIAL 'A' FROM AN ANTIPHONARY

Italy, Bologna
c. 1365 - 1370
74 x 52.5 cm

Materials and Condition

Parchment; minor wear to the surface and along the edge, consistent with the age of the leaf; the edges cut down slightly.

Provenance

Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1912; Paris, Leonce Rosenberg collection, 1913; Colorado Springs Mark Lansburgh collection; his sale London Sotheby's, 11 July 1966, lot 191; New York, Bernard Breslauer collection; Christie's London, *Manuscript Illuminations from the Bernard H. Breslauer Collection* (sale 6652a), 11 December 2002, lot 7; Sam Fogg, London, 2002; McCarthy Collection, London, acquired May 2003

Published

Freuler, Gaudenz. *The McCarthy Collection: Italian and Byzantine Miniatures*. London, 2018, Cat. 37, pp. 121-3.

Three Marys led by the Magdalene in the initial of this monumental leaf are shown finding the empty tomb of Christ, where an angel tells them that Christ has been resurrected. The text on the leaf echoes the imagery with the offertory for Easter Mass: The angel of the Lord descended from heaven and said to the women, Whom are you seeking? He has risen, as he said. Alleluia (Angelus Domini descendit de coelo et dixit mulieribus: quem quaeritis, surrexit sicut dixit, alleluja). The sacred narrative unfolds here with poignant clarity, revealing the moment that the Three Marys arrive at the sepulchre, guided by the steadfast presence of Mary Magdalene, who points to the ointment jar that she is holding and who greets the angel with a stern expression. Her loose hair and bold red dress identify her clearly. While the figures overlap each other, it is to be understood that each figure behind the Magdalene also carries an ointment jar. The angel sits on the edge of the open sarcophagus while a group of soldiers sleep

below. A vibrant array of acanthus borders emerges from the initial and extends along the edges of the leaf.

Niccolò di Giacomo da Bologna, also known simply as Niccolò da Bologna, was one of the most important and prolific manuscript illuminators in fourteenth-century Bologna. Other leaves from the same manuscript as ours include *The Lamb of the Apocalypse victorious over the kings* in an initial D on a cutting from an Antiphonal (Philadelphia, Free Library, Lewis EM 45:06); *David gathered with a Dominican and Noblemen in front of the gates of Jerusalem to pray to God* in an initial S on a leaf from an Antiphonal (London, Christie's 21 November 2012, lot 15 (formerly, London, Sotheby's, 11 July, 1966, lot 190); and *The Ascension of Christ* in an initial P (Los Angeles County Museum of Art. acc. no. M.75.3), on which Niccolò signed his name as *Ego Nicholau da Bologna fecit*.

As noted by Gaudenz Freuler, this leaf and its companions 'mark a moment when, after his initial phase of highly crowded and turbulent narratives, Niccolò di Giacomo's compositions became increasingly composed, while his figures started to be of a more stocky breed, acting with somewhat more controlled gestures'.¹ Despite portraying a tense encounter in this scene, the painting indeed exudes a serene energy while striving to imbue each figure with individuality. Through nuanced details and expressions, the artist invites viewers to ponder the unique character of each Mary, despite the confusion surrounding their identities in biblical texts.

¹ Gaudenz Freuler, *The McCarthy Collection: Italian and Byzantine Miniatures*. London, 2018, pp. 121-3.



MARY FROM AN ENTOMBMENT GROUP

France, Lorraine or Burgundy
c. 1400 - 1450
75.5 x 34 x 17 cm

Materials and Condition

Limestone with traces of polychrome; damage to the polychrome, breaks to both hands and to the lower part of the figure's body, minor retouching of the polychrome.

Provenance

Robert von Hirsch (1883 - 1977); Sotheby's Parke Bernet, The Robert von Hirsch Collection, 22nd June 1978, lot 381; Michel Dumez-Onof, 109 Mount Street, London, 10th July 1981; Private Collection, West Yorkshire.

A relief of a sorrowing woman, this figure is almost certainly one of the three Marys from an Entombment of Christ group. Depicted as a youthful woman, her face is articulated by fleshy cheeks, a small nose and pursed lips. She wears a veil and a wimple, and her cloak is fastened at her chest with a small round brooch. She has a downcast gaze and a serene facial expression.

Large scale Entombment Groups with multiple life-sized figures became popular devotional monuments in the second half of the fifteenth century, carved for churches throughout north-central France. Often created in the late Gothic style, the sculptures capture the sombre moment of Christ's burial, whose limp body is surrounded by key biblical figures such as the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and other mourning women. These sculpted groups, which were often used for mystery plays, are notable for their detailed and expressive representation of grief, combining theological depth with artistic sophistication, and they provide invaluable insight into the religious and cultural life of medieval France.

Stylistically, the sculpture fits within the aesthetic oeuvre of late medieval north-central France. One comparison is a group carved by a disciple of Jean de la Huerta, c. 1460, in Hôpital du Saint-Esprait in Dijon.¹ Another is the

Entombment group in Allier, Souvigny, in the Church of Saint-Peter and Saint-Paul, c. 1480-90,² or the Entombment group made by the so-called Maître de Chaurce, active in the late 15th century (fig. 1). The rounded facial types, with sad expressions and elaborate veils, are all very reminiscent of our relief. Sculpted groups of the Entombment of Christ from this part of France masterfully blend the stark reality of Christ's death with the refined elegance characteristic of Gothic sculpture. Despite the sombre theme, these works feature young, idealized faces, opulent dresses, and an abundance of flowing fabrics, reflecting the era's artistic conventions.



Fig. 1
Maître de Chaurce
Two Holy Women from an Entombment Group
France, Chaurce, Church of St. John the Baptist
c. 1500 - 1515



¹ Jacqueline Boccador, *Statuaire Médiévale en France de 1400 à 1530*, France, 1974, p. 277, fig. 289.

² Boccador, 1974, p. 76.

SAINT HELENA, FROM THE KNYVETT HOURS

England, East Anglia
Last quarter 14th century (before 1381)
20 x 13.5 cm

Materials and Condition

Ink, pigments and gilding on vellum; few smudges and some minor flaking in places, some oxidation to the silver, discolouring the vellum from use, lower escutcheon overpainted in red early in its history, otherwise in excellent condition.

Provenance

Knyvett family of East Anglia, perhaps John Knyvett of Winwick (c. 1322-1381); Marset Alouf (probably the daughter of John Alouf, a member of Henry VI's court); Rebound by Gerard Pilgrim (d. 1536) of Oxford in 16th century; Thomas Boycott (his bookplate, dated 1761); Mrs Wight-Boycott of Rudge Hall, Pattingham, Wolverhampton; Sotheby's, 3-5 June 1918, lot 259; Quaritch Ltd., offered as item 56 in Catalogue 1931, when the book still had 32 miniatures; Later in his Catalogue 478, 1933, item 3; H. P Kraus, New York by March 1941; Rudolf Wien, New York (a dealer who evidently broke up the book; several leaves from the volume were sold anonymously at Sotheby's, 9 February 1948, lots 215 and 216); H.P. Kraus offered the present leaf in his catalogue 80 (1956) as item 16c; European private collection.

Published

Quaritch, Bernard. *A Catalogue of Illuminated and Other Manuscripts*. London 1931, no. 56.
Kraus, Hans Peter. *The Eightieth Catalogue: Remarkable Manuscripts, Books and Maps from the IXth to the XVIIIth Century*. New York 1956, no. 16c.
Kidd, Peter. *The McCarthy Collection, Vol. II: Spanish, English, Flemish and Central European Miniatures*. London, 2019, no. 18 pp. 91-98.

This astonishing miniature, which shows Saint Helena standing at full length with her right hand supporting

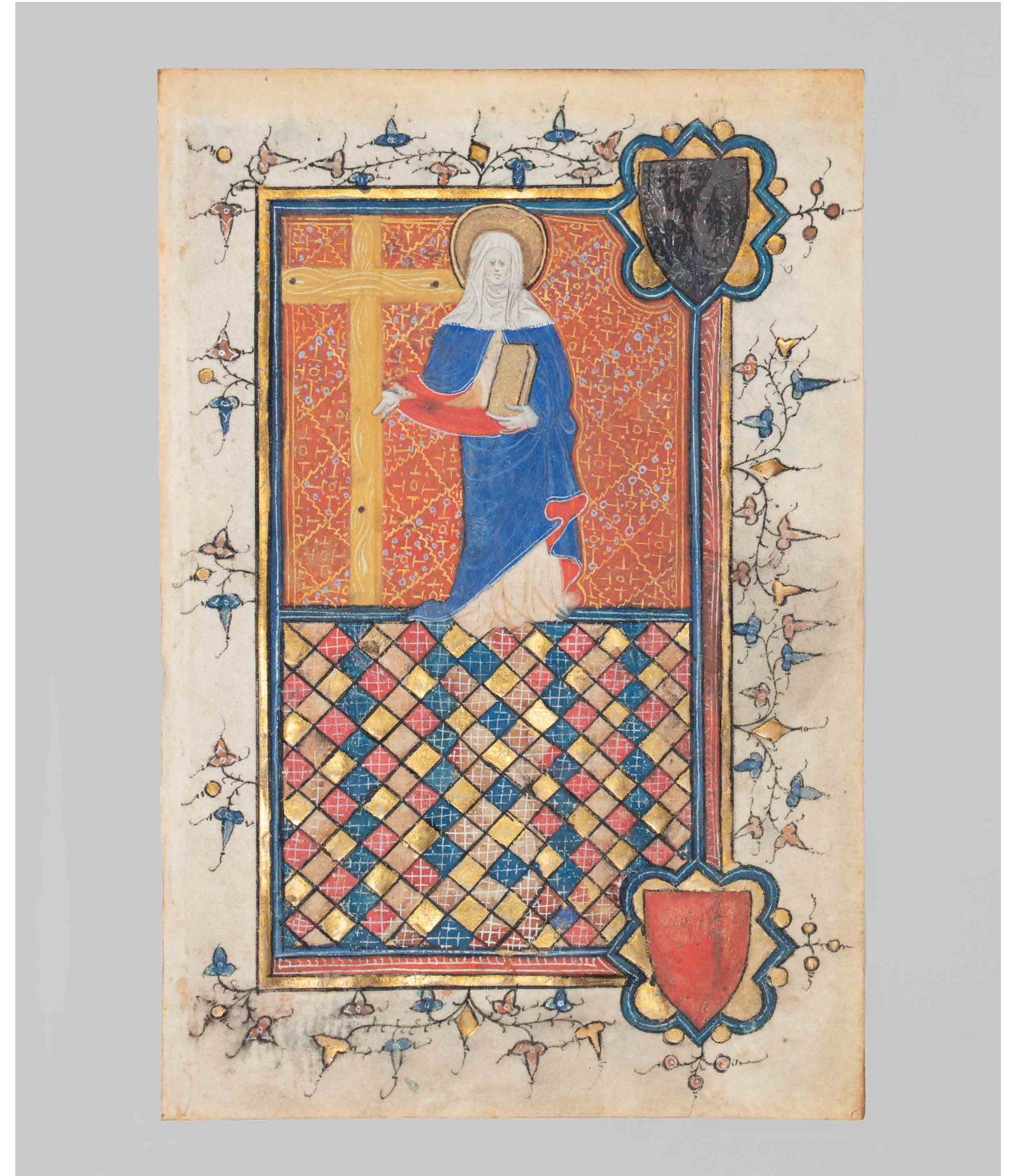
a large wooden cross (an attribute that symbolizes her discovery of the three crosses on which Christ and the two thieves were crucified at Golgotha), comes from a lavish Book of Hours thought to have been illuminated for a prominent member of the Knyvett family of East Anglia in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Among the miniature's most striking features is the large amount of space allocated to the dazzling design of floor tiles beneath Helena's feet. All of the surviving miniatures from the parent manuscript are decorated in this way, though their designs vary and not all take the form of a diapered pattern. Parallels for this form of decoration can be found among the bold tessellated backgrounds in two manuscripts of Guillaume de Deguilleville by the same illuminator (New York Public Library, Spencer MS.19, and Bodleian Library, Laud, Misc.740¹), and in an alchemical manuscript compiled for Richard II in 1391 (Bodleian Library, MS.Bodley 581²), but no convincing comparison has yet been made between the miniatures of this manuscript and any other.

The parent manuscript from which this leaf was cut originally had 32 such miniatures, each of which was painted full-page and depicts a standing saint or a scene from the Lives of Christ and the Virgin, including an apparently unique series of six devoted to Saint Mary Magdalene. Other features that are rare or unique among English Books of Hours are the inclusion of the Penitential Psalms in rhyming French verse (in addition to the Penitential Psalms in Latin), and the presence of very unusual verses in French before some of the Suffrages. Other miniatures from the manuscript are preserved in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Ringling Museum, Sarasota, (nos.730-1), and in a number of European and American collections.³

¹ Otto Pächt and Jonathan Alexander, *Illuminated manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, Oxford, 1966-73, Vol. III, pl.lxxxviii, 925a-b.

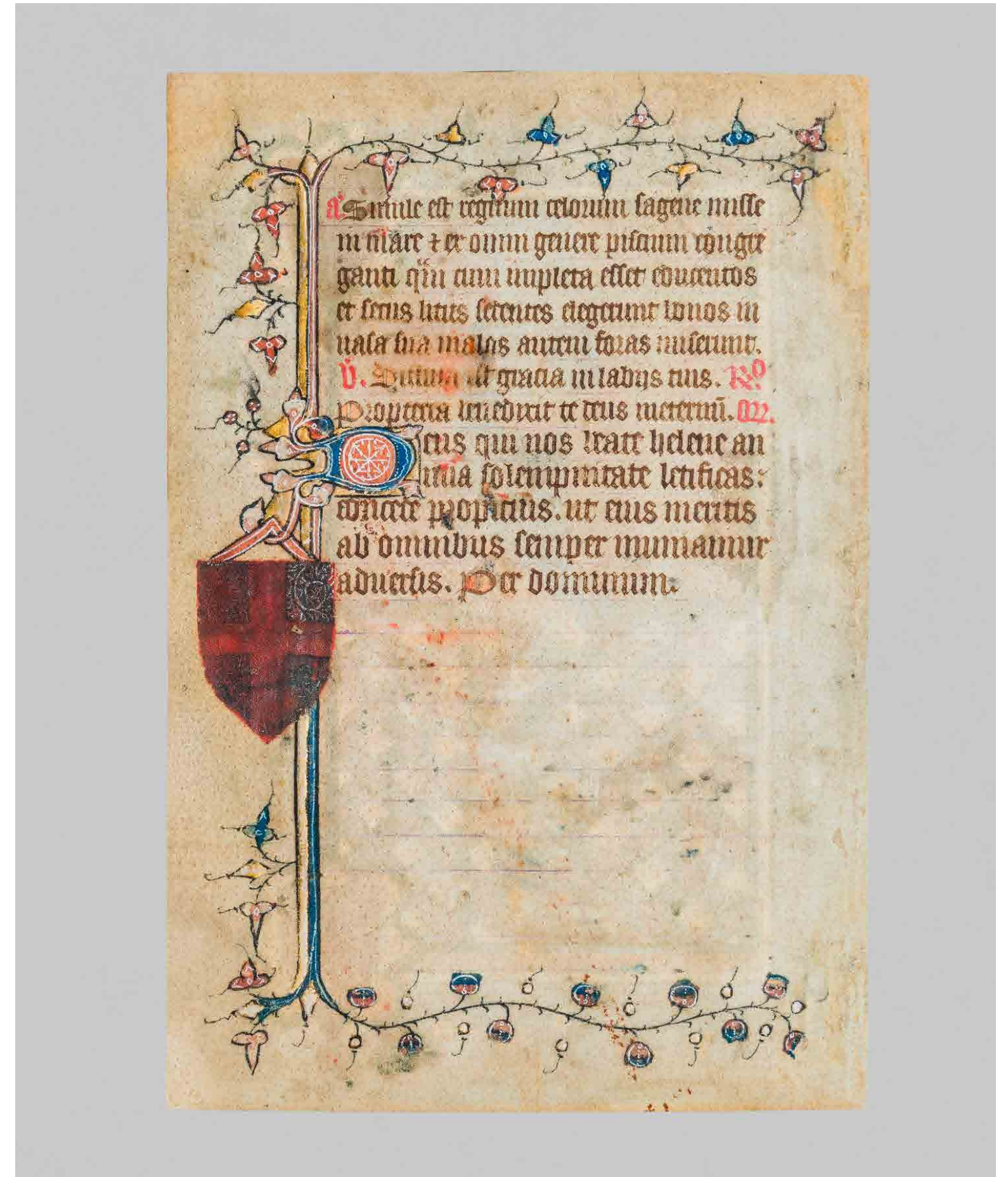
² *Ibid.*, no.673, pl.lxx.

³ For a full breakdown of the location of the known miniatures see Peter Kidd, *The McCarthy Collection, Vol. II: Spanish, English, Flemish and Central European Miniatures*, London, 2019, pp. 91-92.



Although none of the heraldry appears to relate to the Knyvett family of East Anglia, several of the manuscript's borders incorporate the letters 'k', 'n', 'e', 'y', 'f', and 't' – usually in that order – which point strongly to their patronage. Peter Kidd has recently drawn attention to the red heraldic shields visible in several of the miniatures including ours, suggesting that they may be overpainted versions of the Knyvett arms.⁴

⁴ Ibid., p. 96.



Reverse

Spain, Catalonia, Girona
c. 1470s
162 x 100 x 10 cm

Materials and Condition

Oil, tempera, gilding, silvering, and pastiglia relief work on softwood panel, in a partially applied frame. The frame's upper horizontal member and its lower sill are modern restorations. A small portion of the base of the frame's left-hand member restored. Historic splits between the planks of the support stabilized and infilled where necessary. The gilding beautifully preserved but restored selectively in small areas where abrasion had removed its surface from the highpoints of the pastiglia decoration.

Provenance

Private Collection, France.

Once part of a larger retable group, this painting depicts Saint Anne, the mother of the Virgin, enthroned with angels against a rich ground of pastiglia work. Dressed in a voluminous but austere black cloak, the draping folds of her mantle are trimmed in gilt stucco embellishment. The mantle opens at her front to reveal a garment of rich crimson and gold brocaded silk-velvet, secured tightly around the upper waist with a leather belt decorated with gold. She gazes out directly at the viewer from beneath the white wimple typically associated with Anne, indicating her status as a pious, married woman. Her distant gaze and morose expression are also typical of depictions of Anne and suggest her fore-knowledge of the passion of Christ. She is depicted with stern facial features, a long nose, thin arched eyebrows, and large almond-shaped blue eyes. The saint's hands emerge from the deep folds of her voluminous mantle, the right holding onyx rosary beads around her neck, and the fingers of her left hand holding her place in a prayer-book lying on her lap to the opening of the Hours of the Virgin:

'Domine labia mea aperies et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam Deus in adiutorium meum intende (Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall tell forth thy praise. God, come to my assistance)'

Saint Anne appears with more frequency in European

painting, sculpture, and print culture throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as her cult and the cult of the Holy Kinship gain popularity. Anne is often depicted with the attribute of an open book, often teaching the Virgin to read – an iconography which echoes the piety of the Virgin studying the scriptures in the Annunciation. Anne is not often depicted on her own and is more often

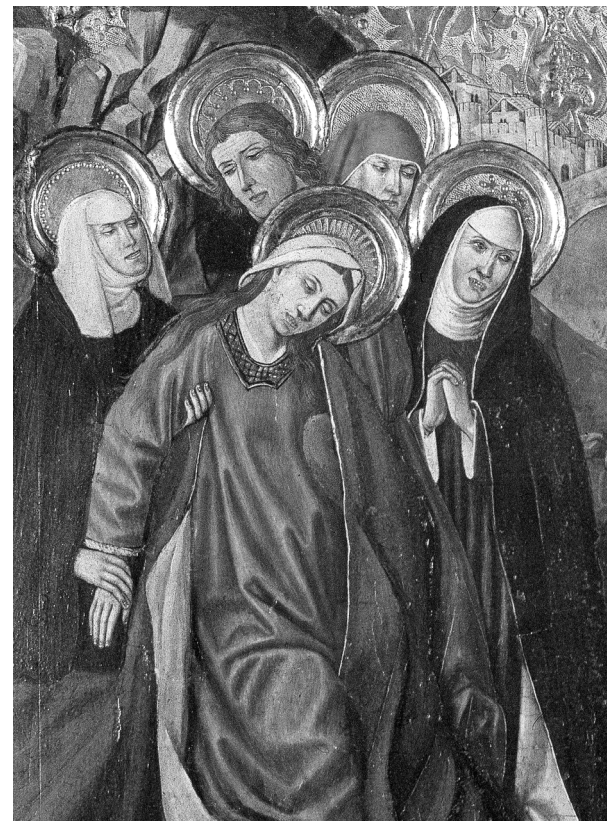


Fig. 1
Master of Girona (Ramon Solà)
Crucifixion detail
Spain, Girona Cathedral



represented in scenes of the Holy Kinship, or in Anna selbdritt (literally “Anne in a group of three”) compositions where she holds the Virgin and Christ Child in her arms. Hence, it is reasonable to presume that originally this panel of Saint Anne formed part of a larger context – perhaps an altarpiece dedicated to the Holy Kinship.

The rendering of the figure of Saint Anne and the ornamentation of the panel with pastiglia work is typical of the workshop production of the Catalan artists known as ‘The Master of Girona’, also identified as Ramon Solà II (fig. 1 – 2).¹ Ramon II trained alongside his brother Esteve in the workshop of their father, the Catalan painter Ramon Solà I (c. 1445-1502), and is documented in Barcelona in the early 1460s. Ramon II also worked alongside the Barcelonan master Jaume Huguet (1412-1492) on an important commission for Peter V of Aragon (1463-1466) to paint the main altarpiece of the chapel of the Palacio Real Major of Barcelona in 1465 with the Epiphany. The influence of Jaume Huguet is evident in Ramon II’s production; most of which is associated with his return to Girona and active years there between 1471 and 1494. The artist identified as Ramon Solà is probably the same artist known as the Master of Girona, to whom the main altarpiece in the Cathedral of Girona is attributed (fig. 1). The association is made in part due the painter’s distinctive technique for modelling fabric in paint using a grid-like formation, a technique which also appears in the workshop production of the artist’s master Jaume Huguet.² The depiction of the figure Saint Scholastica (also identified as Saint Claire) in one of the side panels echoes the features of our panel with Saint Anne, including the rendering of the wimple, the open book, and the extensive use of gilded pastiglia (fig. 2).

In addition to the altarpiece of Girona Cathedral, Ramon II completed at least three other major altarpieces in and around Girona, including an altarpiece dedicated to the Virgin in the parochial church of Púbol (missing since 1936); an altarpiece dedicated to Saint James now in the Museu d’Arqueologia de Catalunya, Barcelona (inv. 64064); and an altarpiece dedicated to Saint Bartholomew for the church of Santa Eulalia in Cruïlles. A number of altar panels from other programs also survive, including a panel painting with Cavalry from a larger altarpiece, now in the treasury of Girona Cathedral, and a Virgin and Child now in the Museo de Bellas Artes, Asturias. Diagnostic Catalan elements are employed by the artist, including the strict frontal depiction of the main figure; the use of gilt relief stucco work for the ground and for the nimbuses of the figures; and the demarcation of space using micro-

architectural furniture rather than perspectival interiors or landscapes of contemporary Northern Renaissance painting.

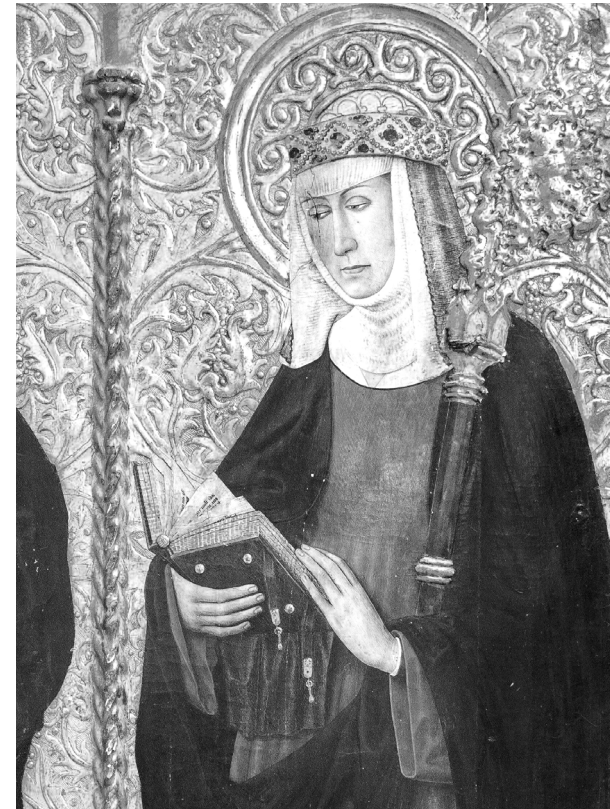
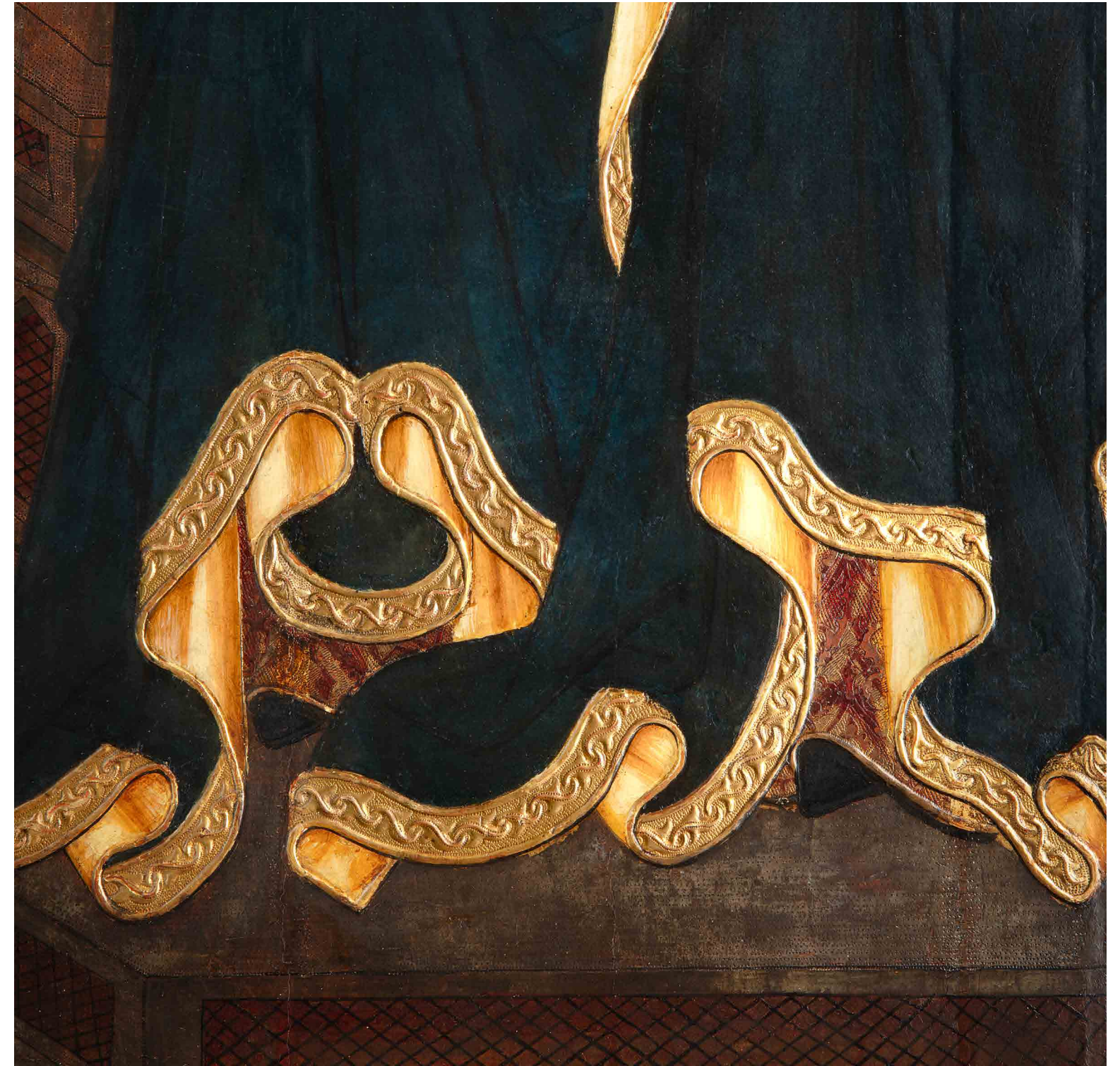


Fig. 2
Master of Girona (Ramon Solà II)
Saint Claire
Spain, Girona
c.1460



¹ Alberto Velasco González, ‘Atribuït a Ramon Solà II (doc. 1431-1484). Sagrari amb el Crist de Dolors, la Mare de Déu i sant Joan Evangelista’, in *Catàleg de pintura antiga. Museu del Cau Ferrat. Sitges, Sitges, Consorci del Patrimoni de Sitges*, 2020, pp. 23-26.

² Josep Gudiol, Gudiol, *Pintura Gòtica Catalana*, Barcelona, 1986, pp. 181-183, figs. 81, 84, 85.

MASTER OF THE LEGEND OF SAINT CORDULA

THREE TUCHLEIN PAINTINGS WITH SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF SAINT CORDULA

Germany, Cologne, Church of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem and Saint Cordula
c. 1490-1500
141.8 × 81 cm / 138 × 82.5 cm / 140.5 × 76.6 cm

Condition and Materials

Oil and gilding on linen, relined in the modern period; a repaired tear on the red bed hangings in the scene of Saint Cordula before Johanniter Ingebrant. The gilding and brocaded detail on Saint Cordula's dress in the scenes of Saint Cordula before Hildentrut and Saint Cordula before Johanniter Ingebrant restored.

Provenance

Formerly in the Church of Johanniter-Kommende St. Johannes und Cordula, Cologne; Collection of Count Werner Moritz Maria von Haxthausen (1780-1842); By marriage to the daughter of Werner von Haxthausen, Countess Maria von Haxthausen-Neuhaus, collection of Baron Hermann von Brenken (1820-1894), Schloss Wewer; Collection of Professor Dr. Hans Lorenz (1865-1940), until; His sale, Dorotheum, Vienna, 4th June 1935, lot 358; Lempertz, Cologne, 8.11.1961, lot 83; Private collection, Château de Courtaney, Switzerland.

Exhibited

Church of Saint Severin, Cologne, 1826, lent by the Count von Haxthausen.

Published

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Stange A. *Kritisches Verzeichnis der deutschen Tafelbilder vor Dürer*. Munich, 1967, p. 78, no. 236.

Schmidt, H. M. 'Der Meister des Marienlebens und sein Kreis. Studien zur spätgotischen Malerei in Köln.' In *Beiträge zu den Bau- und Kunstdenkmälern im Rheinland*, 22. Düsseldorf, 1978, p. 120.

Schaden, C. 'Die Neuausstattung der entleerten Pfarrkirche St. Severin 1805-1828.' In *Lust und Verlust*, 1995, p. 117.

Simon S. 'St. Johannes und Cordula.' In *Colonia Romanica*.

Vol. X, 1995, 198.

Lust & Verlust II. Corpusband zu Kölner Gemäldesammlungen 1800-1860. Cologne, 1998, 317f.

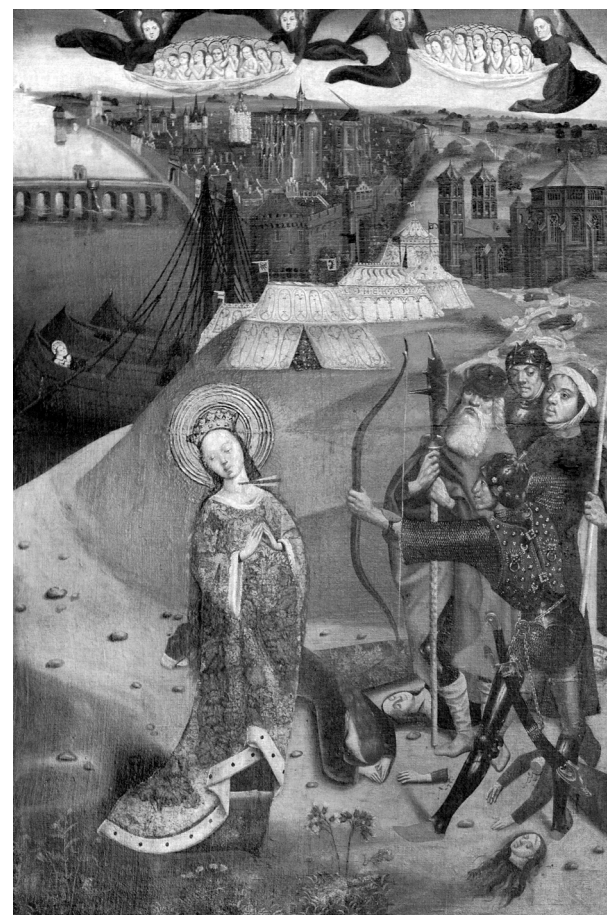


Fig. 1
The Martyrdom of Saint Cordula before the city of Cologne
c. 1490-1500
Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, inv. Dep. 0599





These three panel paintings, originally part of a larger altarpiece, depict scenes from the legend of Saint Cordula, who is shown distinctively in each scene with a halo around her head, while wearing a crown and a gold dress. The scene in each painting is identified by an inscription at the bottom with the following: Eyn hillige jouffrau hillendrurt geheysschen was. der wart van sant Codulen kunt gedarn. dat sy verkunde sant reuchen den joufferen das. [...] / Eyn ritter broder sant Johans ordens hersch ingebrant. dede Cordula kunt ir graff und ouch iren namen. myt kurten worden dede he it syme priyor bekant. und den gemeynen broderen des ordens all samen / Albert Magn eyn wyrlich bischoff hoe gelehrt. hat sant Cordula erhoven met wyrlicheit. myt manchen myracelen hat sy yr heilicheit bewehrt. as auch her by kleyrich geschreven steyt. The inscription describes the three scenes as: 1. Saint Cordula before Helentrudis. Cordula reports the apparition of the abbess, who steps out of the door of the monastery accompanied by a sister and a canon; 2. Saint Cordula appears to Ingebrant, a knight from the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, and reveals the location of her grave to him. The knight conveys this apparition to his prior; 3. Albertus Magnus raises the relics of Saint Cordula and stands in front of her tomb monument in the church. A the founder with his five sons and six daughters stand in the foreground. A fourth painting which belongs to this set depicts the martyrdom of Saint Cordula before the city of Cologne (fig. 1). It was separated from our three painting at some point after 1961 and it is now in the collection of the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne.

Saint Cordula is an apocryphal saint, whose story only starts to circulate in the late Middle Ages. She was thought to have been one of the 11,000 virgins that were slaughtered in Cologne alongside Saint Ursula. In the 12th century, Cordula appears in a dream to Helentrudis, a nun in the convent of Heerse. She identifies herself to Helentrudis and tells her that she was one of the 11,000 virgins and that she concealed herself before being killed. Then in 1238, Cordula appeared in several dreams to Ingebrant, a knight of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem. In these series of dreams, Cordula instructs Ingebrant to find her 'in the orchard of the priory, under the filbert tree.' Ingebrant tells this information to his prior, who allows him to dig up the relics of Cordula, who gains veneration in medieval Germany. Her relics are translated into the church by Albertus Magnus, a bishop of Cologne, in 1278. These set of paintings were originally located in the Church of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem and Cordula in Cologne (Johanniter-Kommende S. Johannes und Cordula), which was located on the Johannisstrasse

in the Altstadt-Nord in the city (fig. 2). By the middle of the 13th century, after the discovery of the relics of Saint Cordula, the order received further properties on the Hofergasse and the Machabaerstrasse. The church was rebuilt after a fire in 1388 and further extensions to the building happened in the 1420s. The order was abolished in 1802 and the church was demolished in 1807. It was the interior of the late 14th/early 15th century church that must be depicted in the third painting in this cycle.

Saint Cordula's journey from hiding to martyrdom, in life and death, embodies the transformative power of faith and conviction. Her initial instinct for self-preservation during the massacre of the virgins gave way to a profound commitment to her beliefs, ultimately leading her to stand alongside her fellow virgins in the face of persecution.

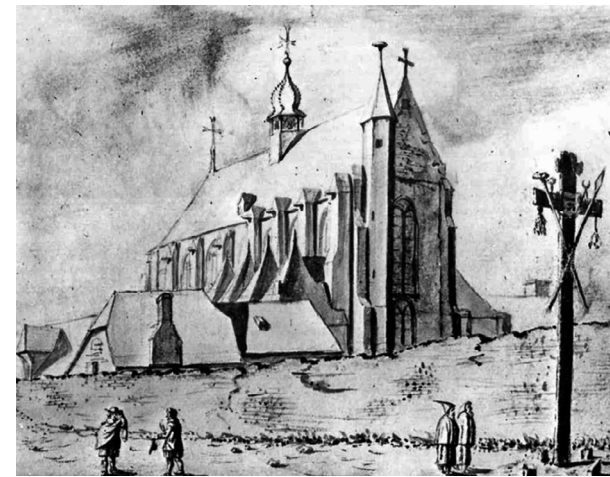


Fig. 2
Church of the Order of Saint John and Cordula
Germany, Cologne
1665 (drawing by Justus Finkenbaum)



Albert magi eyn wyrdich bisschoff hoe gelehrt
hat sant Cordula erhoven met wyrdicheit
myt manchen myracelen hat sy yr heilicheit bewehrt
as auch her by kleyrich geschreven steyt

Spain, Palencia, Villamediana, Church of Santa Columba in Villamediana
ca. 1440-1460
135.5 x 63.5 cm

Materials and Condition

Tempera and gold on panel; with remnants of the original gilded frame, in particular the moulded semicircular arch at the top with plaster pastillage decoration in the spandrels; the rest of the frame added in the 20th century.

Provenance

The Church of Santa Columba in Villamediana, Palencia, until c. 1525, kept in storage in the Church of Santa Columba after the replacement of the gothic altarpiece until c. 1920-1930; Private collection, Madrid, by c. 1930, recorded in an undated archival photograph from the Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic, Barcelona; handled by Antigüedades Linares, Madrid (label on back), 20th century; Private collection, Madrid, until 2021.

This panel, showing the martyrdom of Saint Palencia, once formed part of the main altarpiece of the church of Santa Columba de Villamediana in Palencia, one of the most important ensembles of the International Gothic style in the region, as noted by Fernando Gutiérrez Baños.¹ The style, composition, original gothic elements of the frame, and dimensions of the panel attest to the fact that the painting belongs to the aforementioned altar. The altarpiece was dismembered during the first half of the sixteenth century when the current one replaced it. Whilst some of the old Gothic panels were incorporated into the new structure, others were stored in the church and later dispersed and kept in private and public collections. Seven of the panels are preserved in the Diocesan Museum of Palencia; an eighth is in the Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia; while a ninth has recently appeared on the London art market in 2019 (fig. 1). This panel thus constitutes one of ten fully preserved, known panels from the important Palencia altarpiece. Additional fragments from the same altarpiece are also preserved in the Church of Villamediana, where they were incorporated into the new altarpiece.

The group of ten panels have been attributed to the hand of the Master of Villamediana. Though he has been identified only as the painter of these panels from the Church of Villamediana, his style reflects an important contribution to the development of the International Gothic style in Palencia during the half of the fifteenth century. The style of Master of Villamediana's painting is related to the contemporary school in Valencia, and reflects the slow penetration of the International Gothic in Castile. The faces of the figures retain the linear qualities typical of the fourteenth century; his figures remain somewhat rigid; and he relies on the gold grounds and flat surfaces of the early Castilian gothic style. Altogether, these stylistic elements suggest that the Master of Villamediana was working in the years 1440-1460, before the arrival of Northern influences and late Gothic formulae that characterized the final years of the fifteenth century.

The elongated panel is divided into superimposed planes which illustrate two scenes from the martyrdom of Santa Columba. In the foreground, the saint appears hanging upside down by her feet from a gibbet, surrounded by six henchmen who strike her with hammers. She wears a long golden tunic and black clogs; her hands are bound behind her back and her legs are also bound with rope. Her golden halo identifies her as a martyr and crowns her head with long, flowing golden hair. The simple features of her face include the half-open eyes distinctive of the Master of Villamediana, whilst her serene expression reflects her saintliness in the face of violent oppression. Her oppressors wear elaborate costumes, with jaunty footwear, hats and bright garments that serve to reinforce their characterization as ribald, un-Christian types.

The background and second plane of the painting is dominated by a dignitary figure seated on a throne-like dais with Nasrid-style inlaid marquetry and Gothic tracery at the base. The throne rests on a Nasrid or Turkish carpet



¹ Fernando Gutiérrez Baños, 'Retablo del Hospital de San Millán de los Palmeros. Amusco. Siglo XV,' in *La pieza del mes*, Palencia, Museo de Palencia, 2011.

with geometric motifs and star forms and is topped by a lavish green canopy with red fringe. In addition to these luxurious surrounds, the figure is dressed in an ermine-trimmed robe and sports a high, red Phrygian cap. Four male noblemen, dressed in elegant fifteenth century Burgundian fashions with elaborate caps and headdresses, stand in deference before the dignitary. The enthroned dignitary holds court with the men before him, and gestures at the sword held in the hand of one of the courtiers with his right hand. The scene appears against a ground of gold stucco relief work with scrolling vegetal decoration.

There has been some dispute over the identification of the iconography of this and the other panels that made up the mid-fifteenth century altarpiece that made up the church at Villamediana. While some scholars have maintained that the panels represent the traditional theme of the martyrdom of Saint Columba, patron of the church of origin, others have argued that the panels do not seem to correspond to a single hagiographic legend, and instead may have been dedicated to a number of female saints, including Eulalia and Catherine.² Though the identity of the dignitary figure is unclear, he presumably represents a corrupt dignitary overseeing the martyrdom of the saint below. This would support the argument that the panel represents the hagiography of Santa Columba of Sens (often amalgamated with Santa Columba of Córdoba) a saint of Hispanic origin documented in Visigothic Spain, who converted to Christianity and fled the persecution of Emperor Aurelian. When she arrived in the town of Sens, she was imprisoned and brought before the emperor, who proposed that she marry his son. She refused and was finally beheaded. The iconography of this panel corresponds with most elements of this legend; including the imprisonment of the saint by the imperial figure above; who gestures at the sword of a young courtier (perhaps the emperor's jilted son) as if to order the saint's beheading.

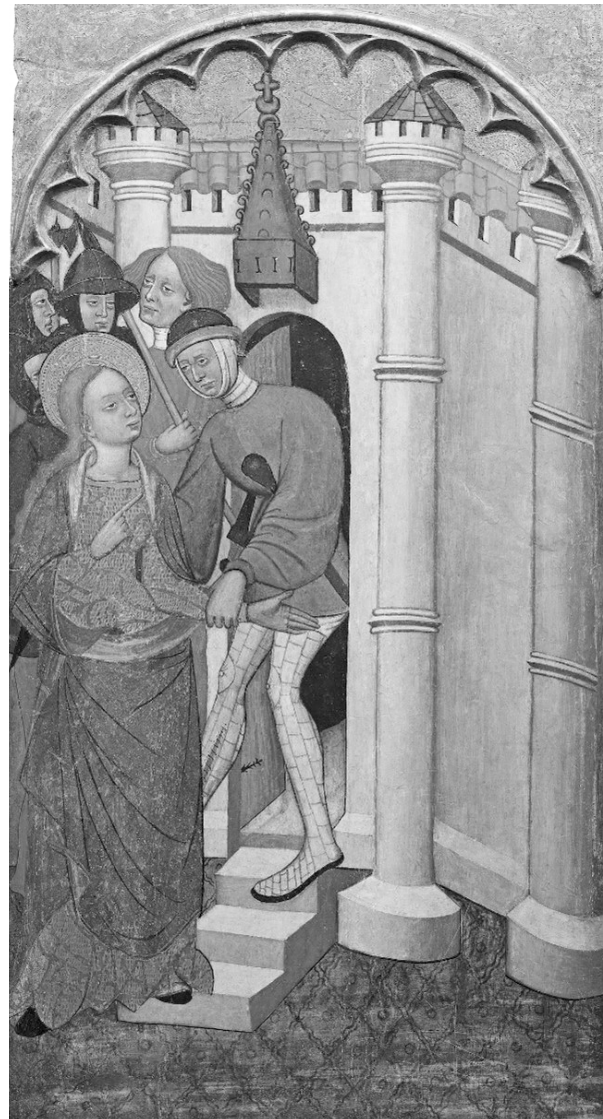


Fig 1.
Attributed to Master of Villamediana (Palencia active circa 1430-circa 1460)
A scene from the life of Saint Columba
Spain, Palencia
c. 1440-1460
Sold Bonhams, London 2019



² Chandler Rathfon Post, *The Hispano-Flemish Style in North-Western Spain (A History of Spanish Painting, vol. IV)*, Cambridge, 1933, pp. 657-659; Josep Ricart Gudiol, *Pintura gòtica (Ars Hispaniae, vol. IX)*, Madrid, 1955, p. 233; Àngel Sancho Campo, *El Museo Diocesano de Palencia. Origen, formación y estado actual*, Palencia, 1999, pp. 143-149 and 154.

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