Medieval Faces

SAM FOGG

Medieval Faces

SAM FOGG

3rd - 10th July, 2020

Contents

Introduction

1 An impost capital with three heads amongst acanthus leaves

2 Stone corbel carved with a mask and scrolling vine motifs

3 The head of the Christ Child, from a Sedes Sapientiae group

4 Head of a man

5 A head in three-quarter profile

6 A bestial face with gaping mouth

7 The Head of Christ

8 A monumental crowned head of the Virgin

9 Head of a Young Man

10 A stylised corbel head with bushy eyebrows

11 The face of a Knight, from a full-length effigy

12 A leaf from the 'Hungerford Hours', showing Christ amongst All Saints inhabiting an initial 'S'

13 Four monstrous corbel heads

14 The head of a youth with a jewelled diadem, possibly Saint Michael

15 The head of God the Father surrounded by decorated quarries

16 A shaft support with the head of a man

17 The head of a bearded saint

18 The Meeting of Anna and Joachim at the Golden Gate

19 **A jester Misericord from Saint Peter's Church, Louvian**

20 **A Ducal Privilege granted by Duke Francesco Sforza in 1462**

21 **A portrait of a man in a sugar-loaf hat**

22 **Head of a tonsured cleric**

23 **Head of Balthasar**

24 **The Head of John the Baptist, a Johannesschüssel**

25 **Pentecost**

26 **A carved oak boss with the head of a man amongst foliage**

27 **A Benedictine nun in prayer, possibly Hildegard of Bingen**

28 **A Head of a Young Man**

29 **The Pietà**

30 **The head of a king or nobleman**

31 **The head of a bishop or bishop saint**

32 **Saint Veronica**

33 **Head of a Man facing right**

34 **A terracotta Bust of a Young Man**

35 **Portrait of a shepherd**

Introduction

The human face is better than any other tool of communication in its ability to convey even the subtlest aspects of our feelings, reactions, and thought processes. It is for this reason that we have, since almost the earliest moments of artistic expression, been drawn to it more than any other feature of the natural world. During the long Middle Ages, artists and makers populated every artform available to them with the human visage, from official portraits to caricature, and from likenesses imbued with breath-taking verism to the simplest, most abstracted motifs of a single eye, a nose, or the outline of a head. They did so in the firm belief that our souls reside in our heads, and they must therefore be the epicentre of our whole existence and relationship with the world around us.

The thirty-five paintings, stained-glass fragments, illuminated miniatures, and stone and wood sculptures included in this exhibition together cover a period spanning just over 400 years. The vast majority of them were made before 1500 – a moment marked by a shift in Northern European portraiture that, most modern scholars believe, emerged with the increasing self-awareness of the artist as a creative and inventive force. By inference however, such a theory suggests that artists working before this date lacked self-awareness, freedom of expression, and an understanding of their own status. We routinely consider medieval misericords, figurative embellishments on column capitals and other architectural stonework, the miniature figures in the upper lights of vast stained-glass windows, and the marginalia of medieval manuscripts as exactly that – marginalia. These are beings, often bestial or anthropomorphic in appearance, that apparently existed only in the margins of medieval art, not at its centre. Yet the briefest glance around an English parish church, or across the rippling façade of a grand cathedral, shows that these unruly and often fantastical creatures pervaded every aspect of the built environment, a constant presence in the lives of the European populace. Such figures sprang directly from the imagination of their creators, and could offer sharp commentaries on behaviour, parodies of class difference and stereotypes, and arenas and outlets for personal expression shaped by human contact. Even the most ‘primitive’ faces worked into the inhabited letters of a medieval manuscript or projecting from a roof many metres above our heads speak with a searching, uncompromising language informed not by the abstract concepts of deities and greater beings, but by the tangible facts of our short human existence.

Matthew Reeves

1

An impost capital with three heads amongst acanthus leaves

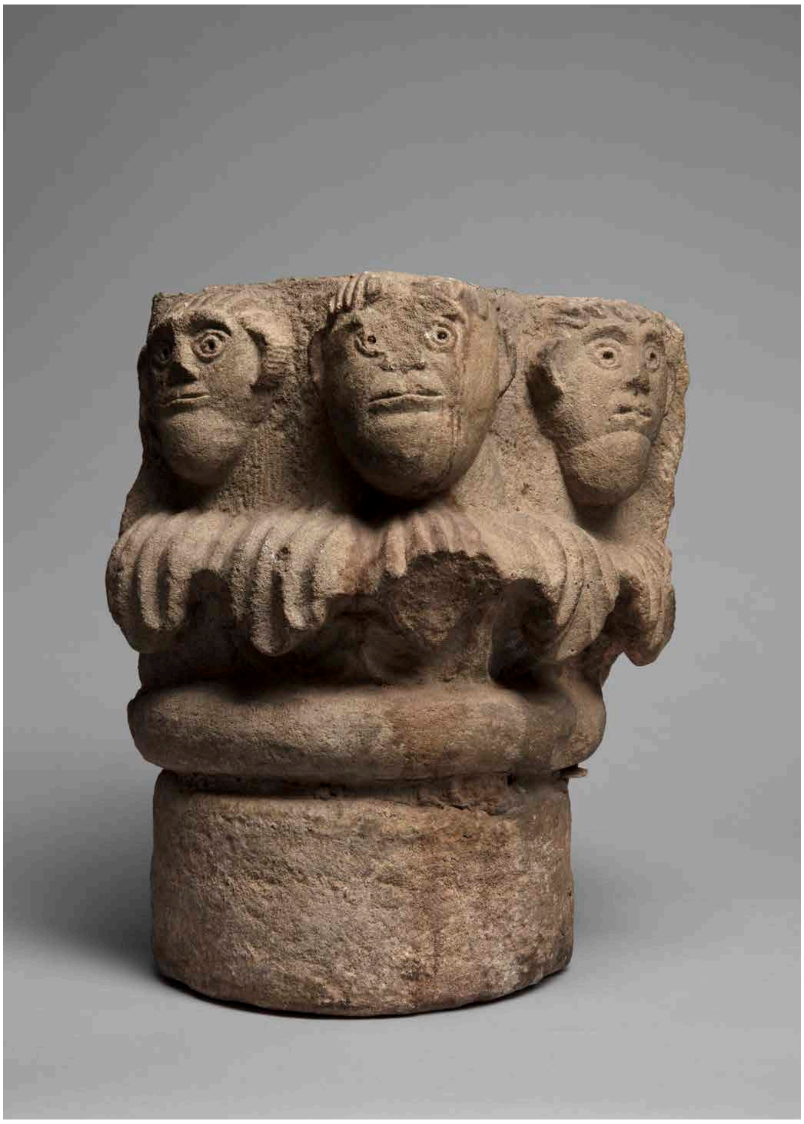
Southern France, Ariège
c. 1100

Provenance
Collection of Alex Brunet, Angers

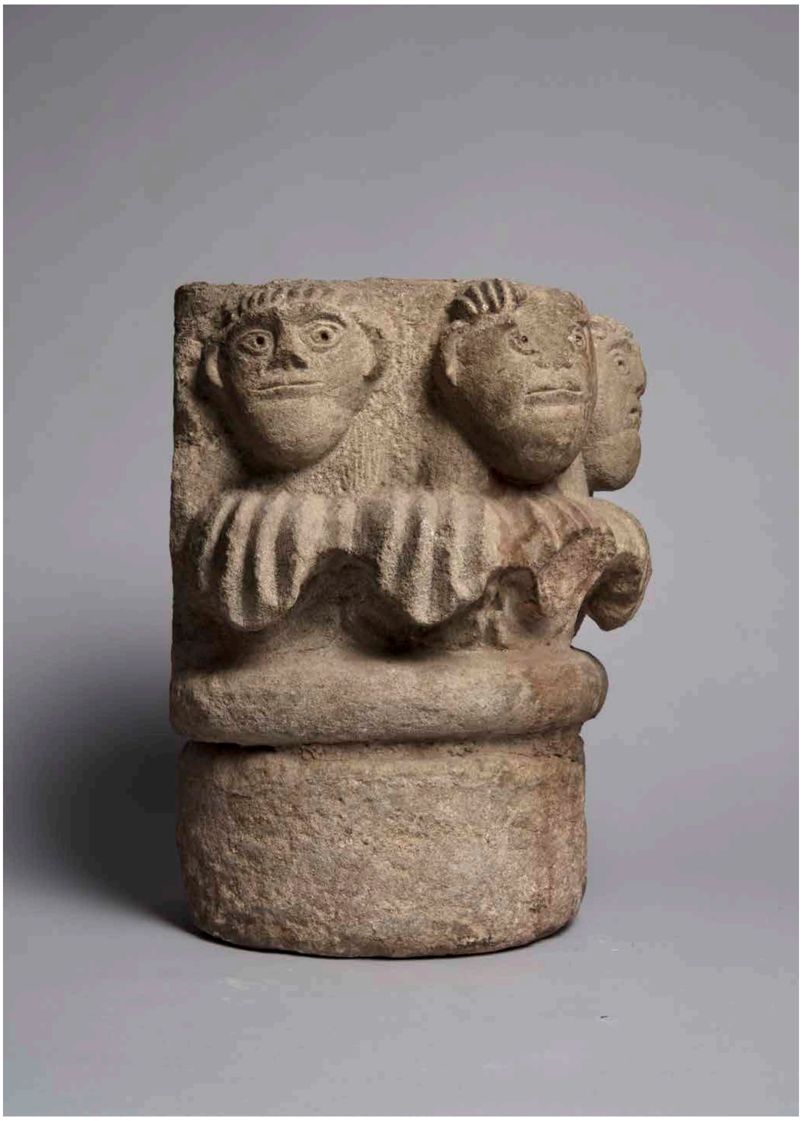
38.5 x 28 x 28 cm; limestone, with some cementitious mortar deposits between the capital and column fragment.

Bold and expressive, three heads with swept-back hair, strong, angular chins, and drilled eyes that stare intensely out at the viewer, jut from surface of this impost capital above the cover of a palm or acanthus, whose broad and spiky leaves curl over themselves in lush growth. A squat half-round moulding ties the leaves together at the base of the capital, and the upper section of a rotund column is fixed to the underside.

In its original location, this impost capital would have nestled in the corners of a stepped door jamb or cloister space, its reverse (cut to form a right angle) engaging the intersecting walls behind it on two sides and allowing it to appear as if built into the surrounding stonework. From such a position, its three unblinking heads would have kept a constant watch over anyone entering or leaving the church, which must have been a substantial structure since the remnants of the column still attached to its base suggest a construction of large proportions. A similarly fashioned impost capital, with three human heads peering out in all directions in a manner identical to our example, is preserved in situ on the door jamb at Notre Dame de l'Assomption in Luzenac-de-Moulis, in the Ariège department of southern France (fig. 1). In fact, a number of sites in the same region preserve similarly raw and bold carvings in a comparable sandy-coloured, dense-grained limestone, including the Romanesque cloister of Saint-Lizier, and the church of Saint-Jean-de-Verges, which lie close to the foothills of the Pyrenees and are believed to have been constructed at the turn of the twelfth century.



1, See in particular V. Chieffo Raguin, *Stained Glass in Thirteenth-Century Burgundy*, New Jersey, 1982.



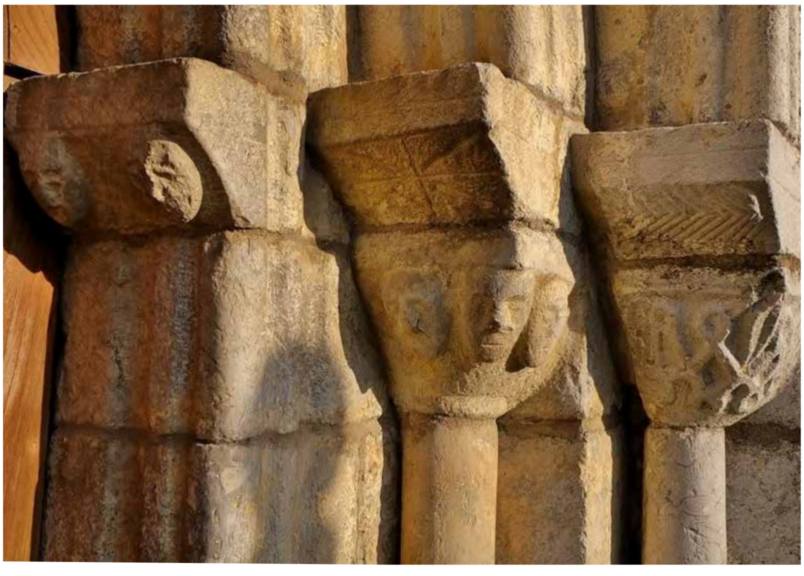


Fig. 1
Impost capital on the door
jamb of the church at
Luzenac-de-Moulis
France, Ariège
c. 1100

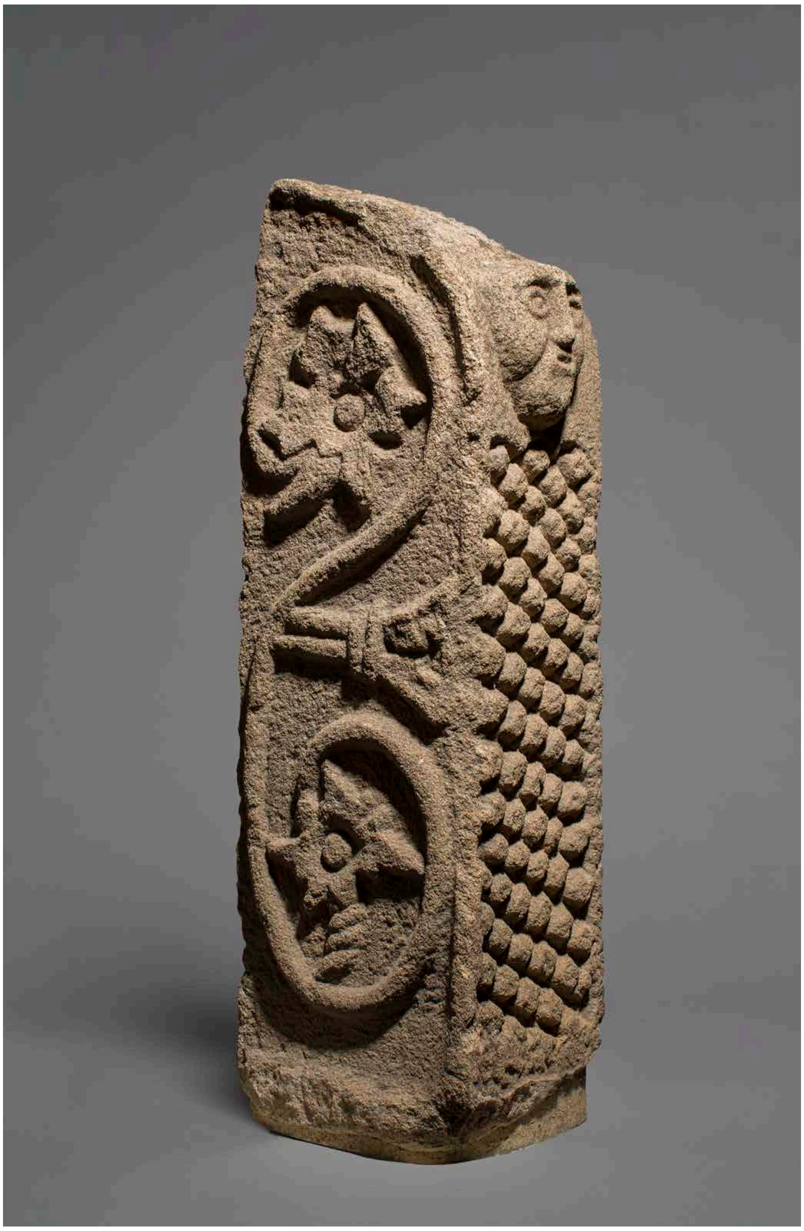
2

Stone corbel carved with a mask and scrolling vine motifs

Portugal
12th century

89 x 32.5 x 23.5 cm; Micaceous schist; the carving extremely well preserved, the lower edge fractured from the rest of the block on removal from the building.

The primitive, essentialised features of a human head punctuate the top of this Romanesque corbel, which once overhung a doorway or roofline and peered straight down at anyone walking beneath. Below the face is a billeted studwork design. One of the exposed faces is carved with curling rinceaux terminating in flowerheads with characterful tripartite leaves, one with a cable moulded stem, and with a short double-strand tassel hanging from its central section.



This corbel would most probably have been positioned on the left-hand side of a central portal into a Romanesque church building. Due to its long format, and its undecorated top and rear face, it would have been incorporated into the masonry of the surrounding structure, rather than jutting out from a wall into space. A shallow ledge of stone surviving on the reverse shows that it was originally 'keyed in' to the surrounding stonework in this manner. As such, it was undoubtedly carved to form as much of a decorative intermediary between the capitals and the tympanum above as it would a structural element along the line of the imposts. Its form, material and composition evoke Visigothic and pre-Romanesque carving from Valença, Galicia and the Asturias (see for example a figurative pilaster with three similar heads in the church of San Miguel de Lillo, Asturias, illustrated in H. Schlunk et.al., Ars Hispaniae; Historia Universal del Arte Hispanico, Vol. II, Madrid, 1947, p. 370), although a localisation to northern Portugal is most likely considering its provenance, material, and unusual combination of motifs. For comparison in this region, see for example the church of Sanfins de Friestas, Valença, particularly the bold designs of the portal corbels carved from a similarly pinkish schist, and the figurative

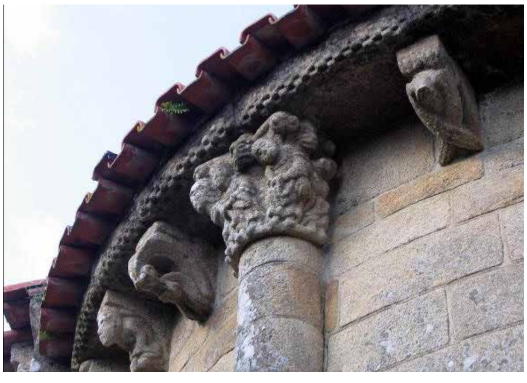
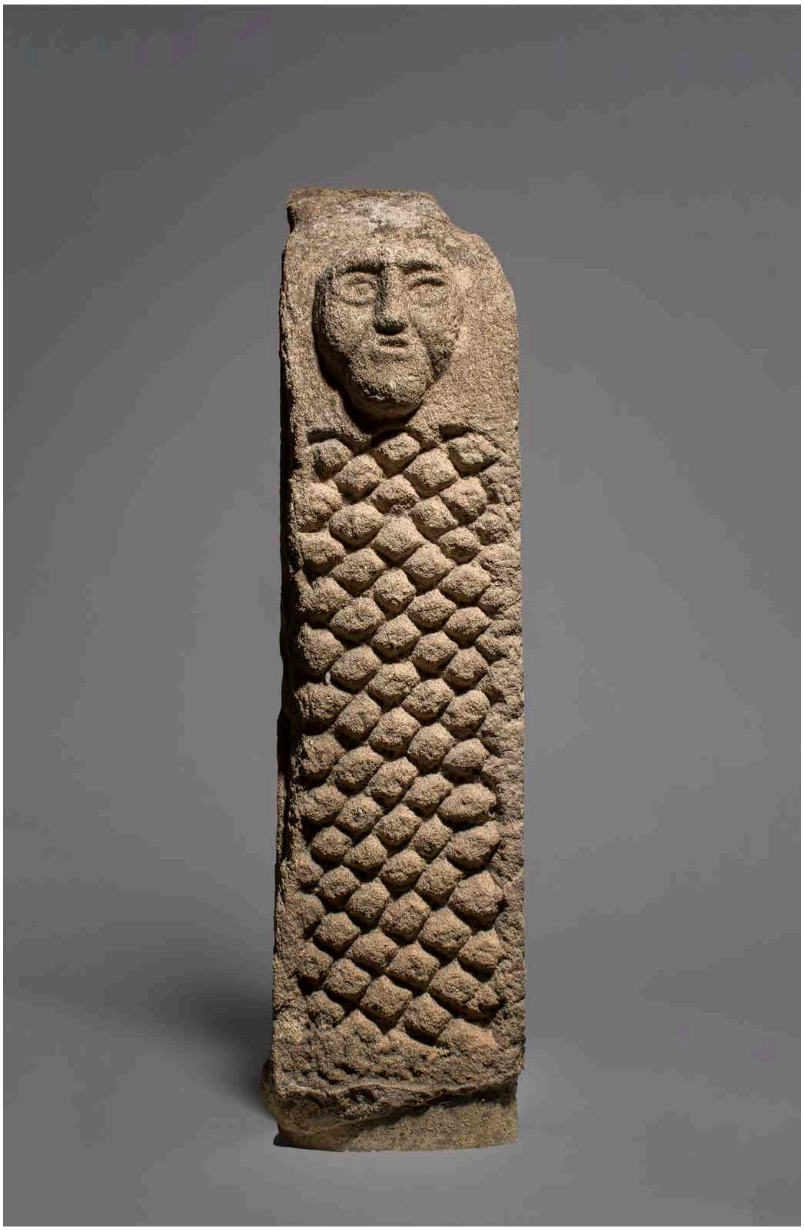


Fig. 1a
Billeted decoration and
bestial corbels
12th century
Sanfins de Friestas, Valença,
Portugal



stonework supporting the roofline (Figs. 1a-c). The portal corbel at the Iglesia románica de Bravães is similarly structured with the face of an animal directed straight down, in a position that would have looked over the medieval congregation as it filed through the doorway. See also the use of corbels and billeted decoration at the Igreja de Aguas Santas (Fig. 3), and for a close comparison with the convex end of the present piece, see the blind corbels at the Igreja de Nossa Senhora de Ourada (Fig. 4).

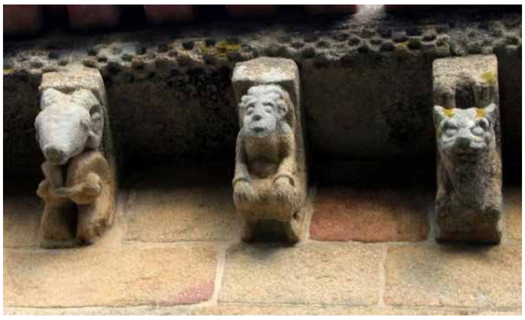


Fig. 1b
Billeted decoration and
bestial corbels
12th century
Sanfins de Friestas, Valença,
Portugal

Fig. 2
Romanesque decoration
at the Iglesia románica de
Bravães, Ponte da Barca,
Portugal

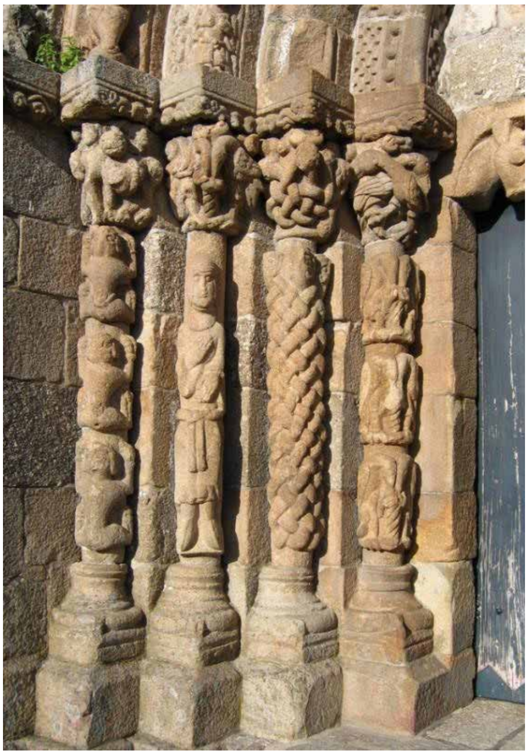
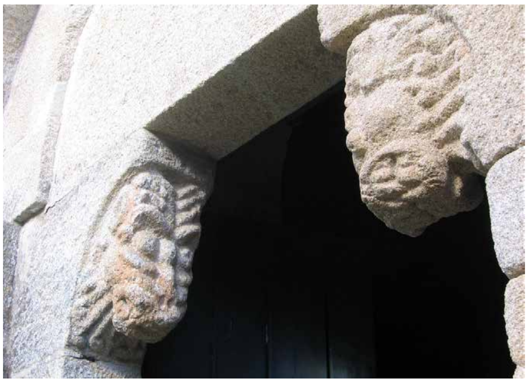


Fig. 1c
Bestial corbels either side
of the portal at Sanfins de
Friestas, Valença, Portugal



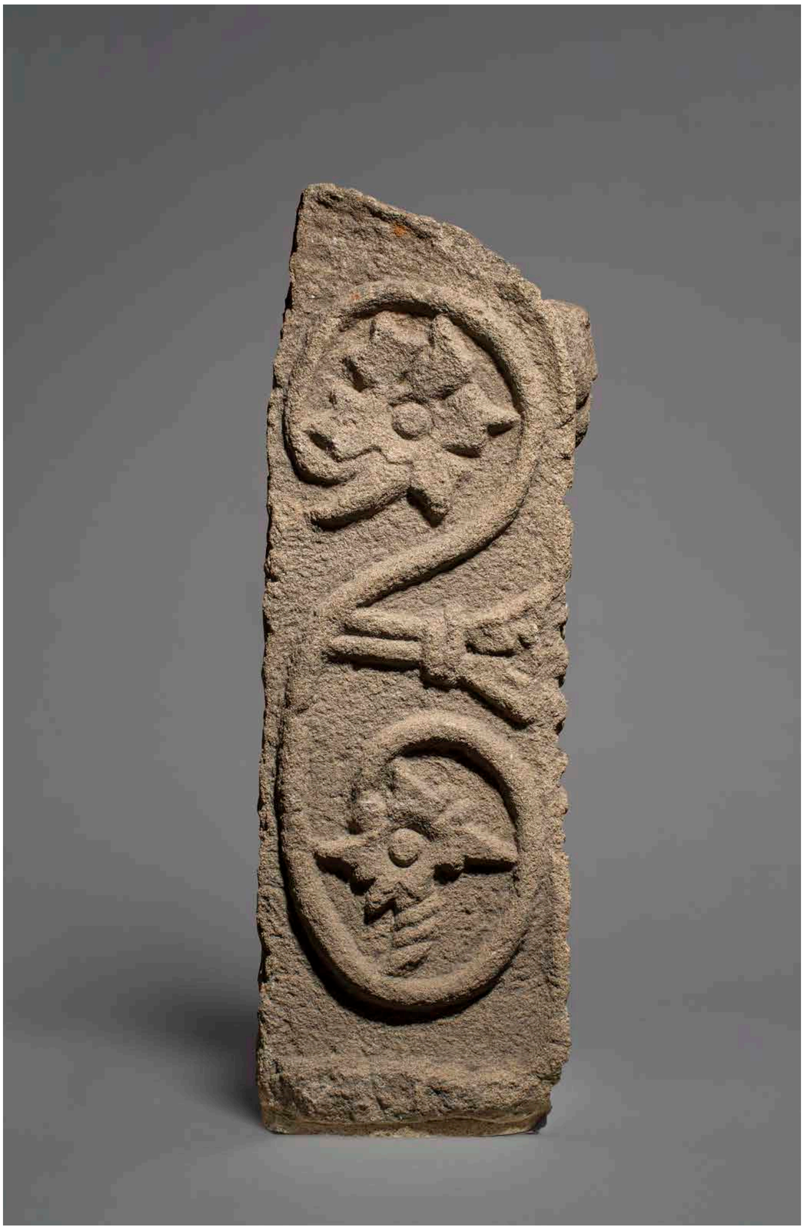


Fig. 3
Corbel with figurative
decoration
12th century
Igreja de Aguas Santas, Maia,
Portugal

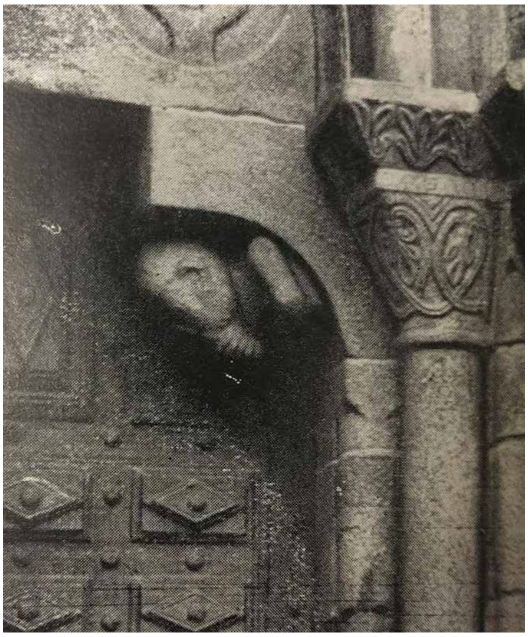
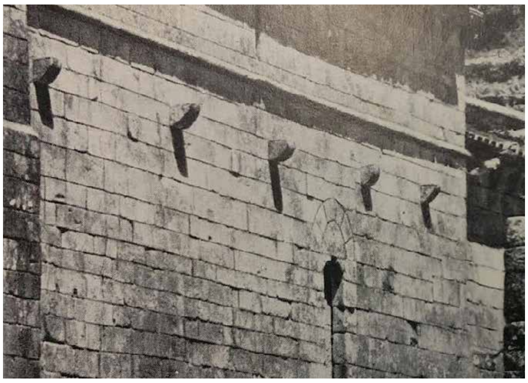


Fig. 4
Blind corbels
12th century
Igreja de Nossa Senhora de
Ourada, Viana do Castelo,
Portugal



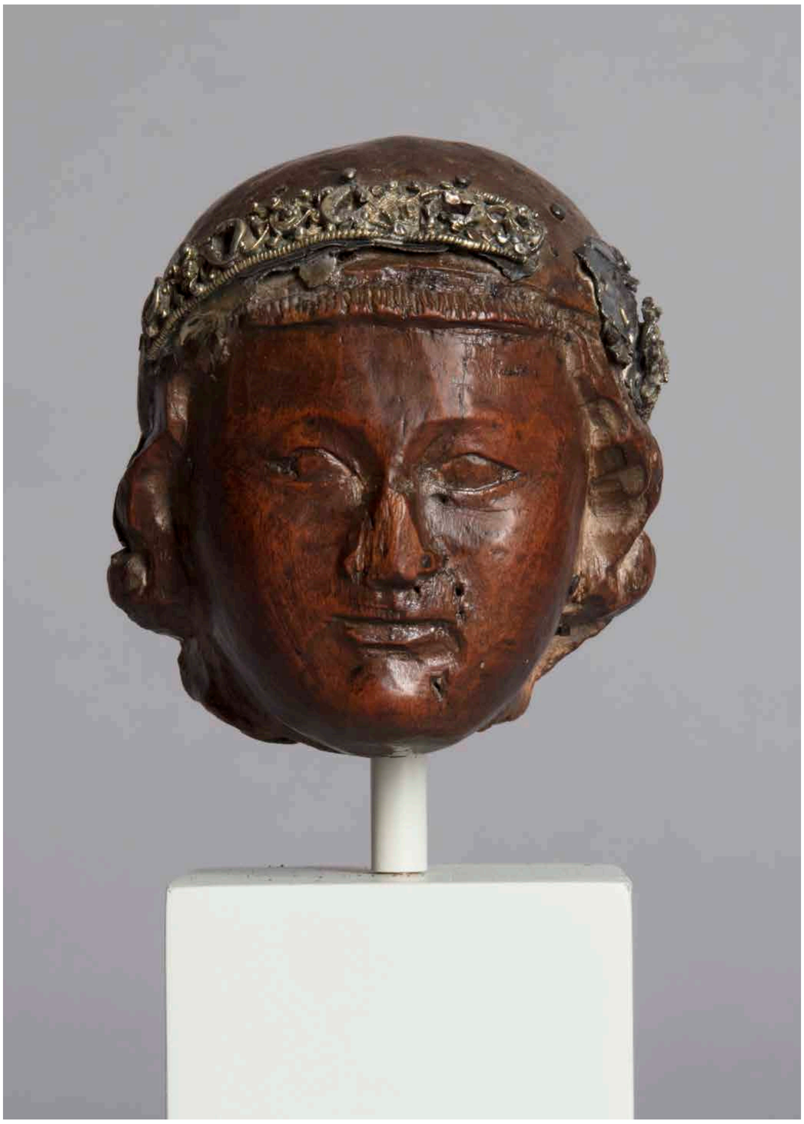
3

The head of the Christ Child, from a Sedes Sapientiae group

Meuse Valley
c. 1220

Provenance
By repute, collection of Julien Bessonneau (1842-1916), and by descent until the 1980s; Collection of Yvette and Jacques Deschamps, Angers

7.2 x 6.4 x 6.2 cm; Carved timber (walnut?) with silver and gilt-silver attachments. Some traces of fixatives or ground layer on the crown of the head. Losses to the tip of the nose. Some minor woodworm and cracking.



A diminutively proportioned head of the infant Christ carved with wide, almond-shaped eyes, a strong nasal ridge, and a subtle smile with delicately separated lips. The child's hair covers the ears and falls in curling ringlets to the level of his neck. He wears the remnants of a diadem or circlet, fashioned from gilded silver metal sheets and coiled wire. Nestled between two parallel borders of twisted wire, the diadem's design consists of a series of regularly spaced cabochon settings (now devoid of their gemstones) encircling the head and interspersed with tight whirls of coiled wire resembling scrolling rinceaux or vine-like stems. Each vine spray sprouts a series of small radiating branches and spirals inwards to culminate in a six-petalled flower head or berry cluster.

Function and Iconography

This intimately scaled carving once formed part of a seated figural group showing the Virgin and Child, an important devotional image type developed early in the Middle Ages and often described by the term Sedes Sapientiae or Throne of Wisdom. Such figures, almost always diminutive in scale, were key focal points within the space of the church, and were processed during liturgical celebrations. As with our head, they were often covered with silver or gold sheet and filigree decoration, as can be seen still on the late 10th-century *Golden Madonna* in Essen (fig. 1), and a similar group in Hildesheim, created before 1022[1]. Along with a Virgin from a German Sedes group formerly in the Rütschi collection, which also retains large remnants

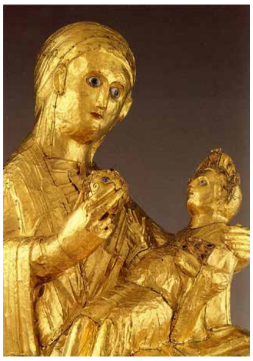
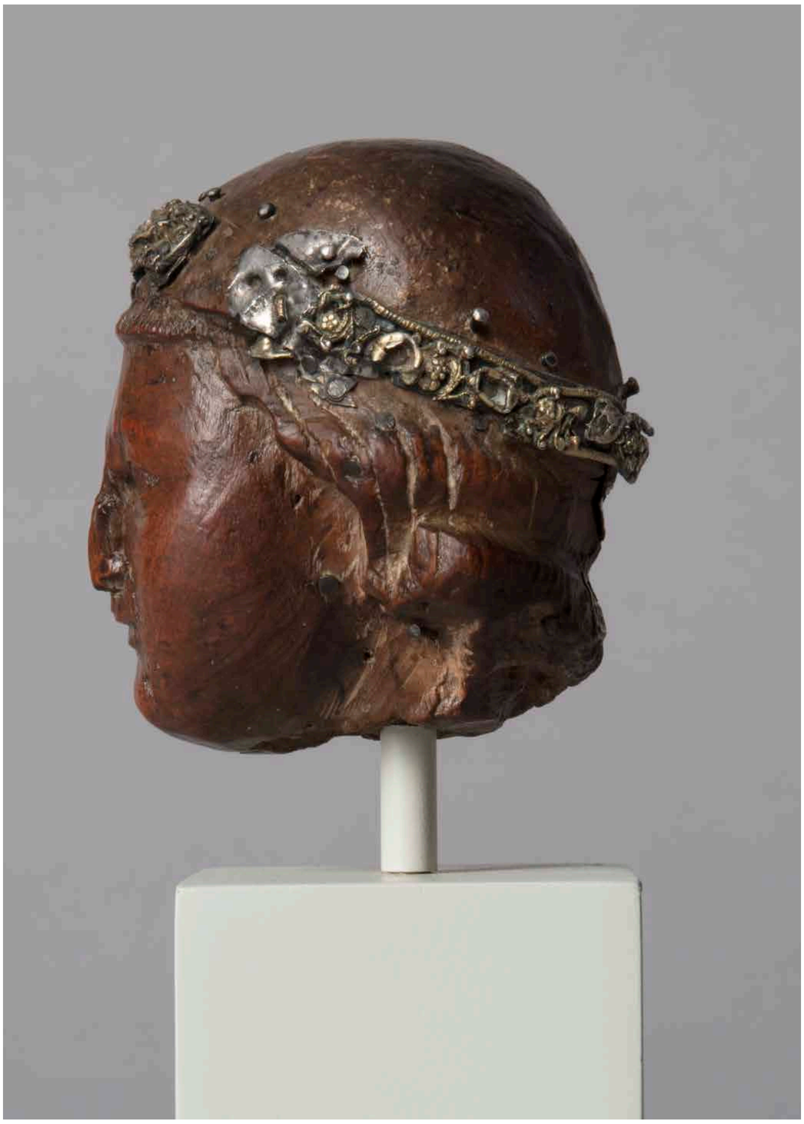


Fig. 1
The so-called Golden Madonna of Essen
c. 980
Essen, Cathedral treasury

---

[1] Cf. E Male, *L'Art Religieux de la fin du Moyen Age en France*, Paris, 1995 ed., pp. 246-258.



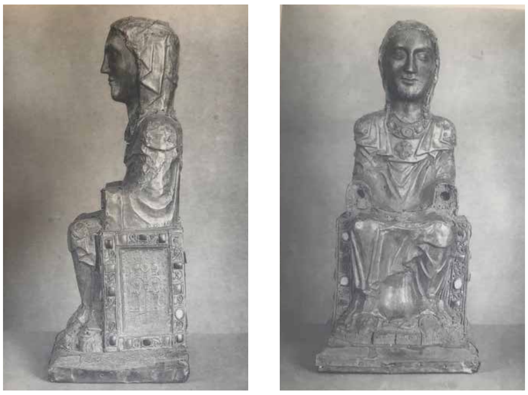


Fig. 2a-b
Sedes figure of the Virgin
12th century
Formerly Rütschi collection

of the same type of decoration (fig. 2), these help to elucidate the context in which our head would have functioned and been seen[2]. As with those examples, the sculpture from which our head comes was clearly intended to be a *Golden Madonna*.

Localisation and Dating

The head's carving style, with its robust, rounded features, is evocative of wood sculptures carved in the early decades of the thirteenth century, including a Rhenish *Golden Madonna* in the Schnütgen Museum in Cologne (fig. 3). Such a dating is further affirmed by the figure's ornate gilt-silver sheet and pearled or beaded wire decoration, survival of which is nothing short of miraculous, not least since it would have been easy for looters, iconoclasts, or impoverished later owners to strip such delicate decoration from the wooden core beneath and melt it down for its precious metals. Its shapely beaded wire adornments are a refined example of a type of goldsmiths' work that became widespread in northern Europe by the 700s, evolving into the form exemplified by the banded coronet on our head in the following century (including on the binding of the mid ninth-century Samuhel Gospel at Quedlinburg Abbey). The move away from what had been an initially sparse, spaced-out language of linear decoration and towards denser whirls of wire ornamented by berry clusters or flower heads in the arrangement seen on our object, came during the latter part of the twelfth century, as can be seen on a small handful of surviving examples including an ornate morse in the Aachen domschatz, dated to c. 1180.[3] These forms became largely superseded in the

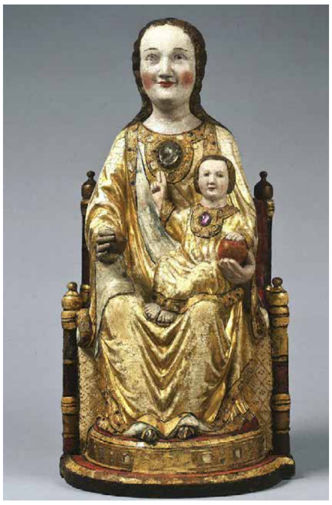
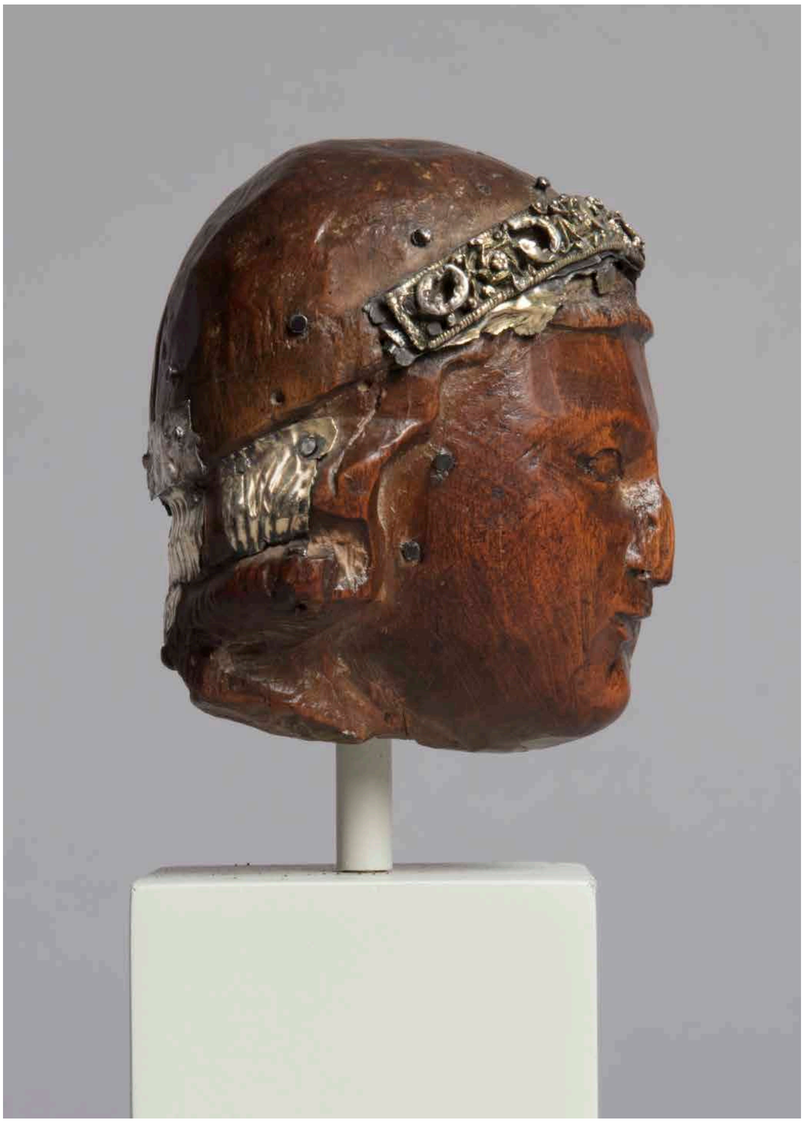


Fig. 3
The Virgin and Child
Cologne
c. 1230, with 14th century polychromy
57.6 x 28 x 23.5 cm; Oak and walnut with gilding, rock crystal, amethyst, paste gems and polychromy
Cologne, Schnütgen Museum, inv. A 14

2, Otto von Falke, Alte Goldschmiedewerke im Zürcher Kunsthaus, Zürich and Leipzig, 1928, no. 192, plate 37.

3, Grosse Kunst aus Tausend Jahren: Kirchenschateze aus dem Bistum Aachen, Exh Cat., Aachen, 1968, no. 7, p. 26 and 111.



second quarter of the thirteenth century by more elaborate arrangements, as typified most notably by the masterful work of Hugo d'Oignies and his workshop (for which, see in particular Robert Didier et al., Autor de Hugo d'oignies, Exh. Cat., Namur, 2003). Our figure's decoration is in fact very close in style to that developed by d'Oignies in the later 1220s, and in particular a monumental cross reliquary preserved in the Musée des Arts anciens du Namurois-Trésor d'Oignies (fig. 4)[4]. It lacks that artist's defining use of applied leaf fronds and foliate sprays, suggesting perhaps that our figure's decoration was created at some point in the 1210s or early 1220s, right on the cusp of d'Oignies' expanded lexicon but still extremely ambitious in its elaborate and densely-worked approach[5]. Closely comparable objects surviving from this date include the cover of the Berthold Sacramentary now in the Morgan Library in New York (fig. 5a-b) and a reliquary casket in the musée de Cluny, Paris (fig. 6).

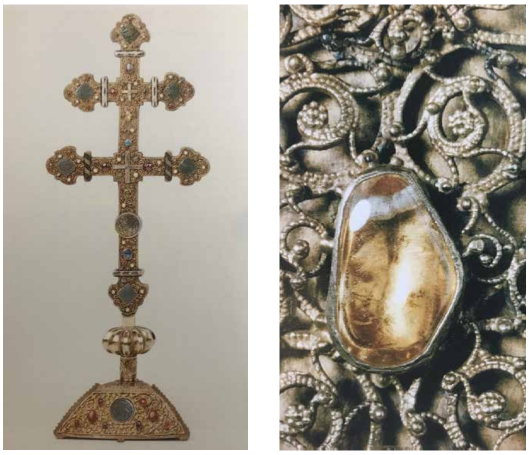


Fig. 4a-b
Hugo d'Oignies
Reliquary Cross, with a detail of its pearled wire decoration
c. 1228-30
64 x 47 cm; silver-gilt with niello and precious gemstones
Musée des Arts anciens du Namurois-Trésor d'Oignies, inv. TOSND 6

Fig. 5a
Berthold Sacramentary, front cover
Germany, Weingarten Abbey
c. 1215-1217
New York, Morgan Library, MS M.710

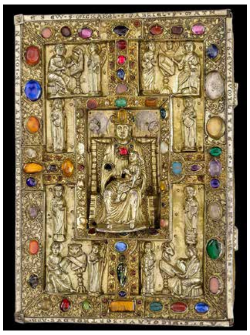
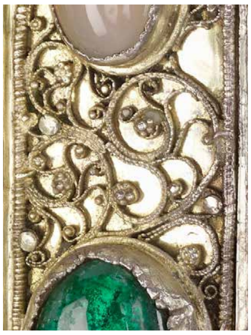
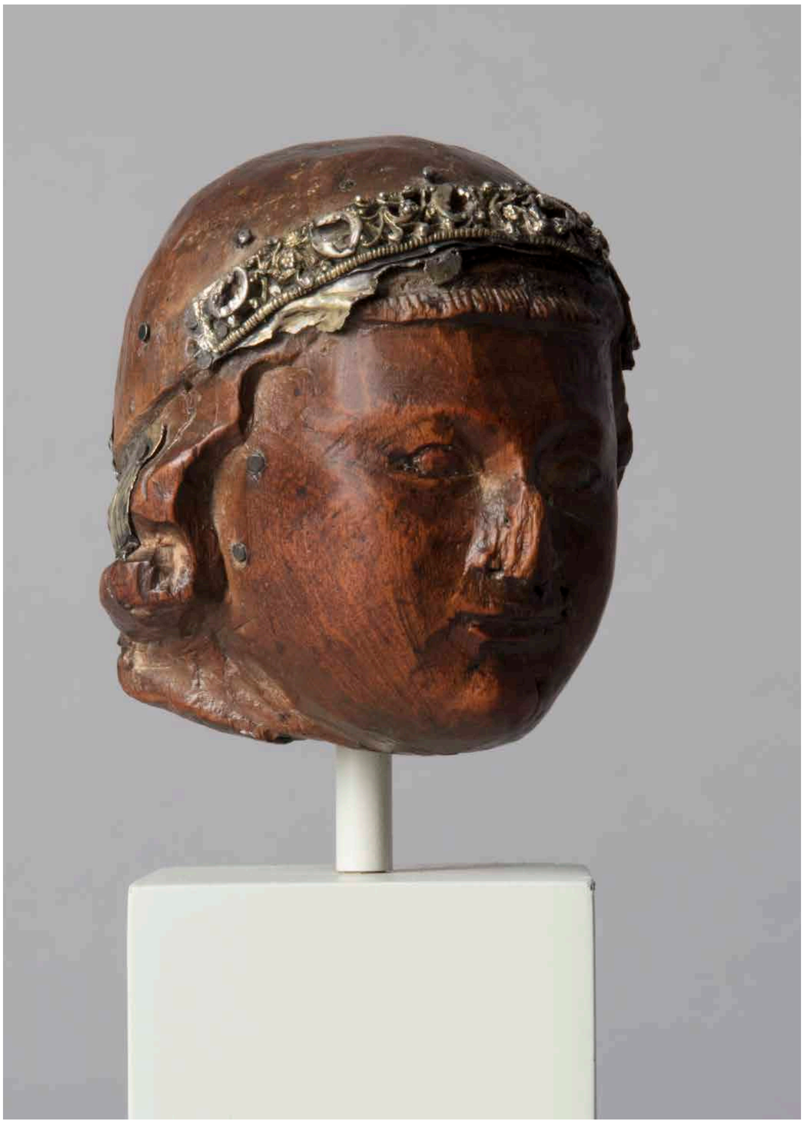


Fig. 5b
Detail of the filigree work on the Berthold Sacramentary cover
Germany, Weingarten Abbey
c. 1215-1217
New York, Morgan Library, MS M.710



4, For more on the reliquary cross in the Musée des Arts anciens du Namurois-Trésor d'Oignies, see Robert Didier et al., Autor de Hugo d'oignies, Exh. Cat., Namur, 2003, pp. 211-6.

5, See also the more fully developed rinceaux of the Prudentia-Schrein in the Church of Saints Stephanus and Sebastian, Beckum, illustrated in Goldene Pracht: Mittelalterliche Schatzkunst in Westfalen, Exh. Cat., Münster, 2012, pp. 91 and 165-6; see also a paten dated c. 1230-50 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, illustrated in Martina Bagnoli ed., A Feast for the Senses: Art and Experience in Medieval Europe, Baltimore, 2016. no. 23, pp. 156–57; Both of these examples would seem without doubt to be of a later date than our head's decoration.



What is only now beginning to be more fully studied is how the decoration pioneered by northern European goldsmiths at this age could be seen to presage the fully three-dimensional cast decorative formulae developed during the early thirteenth century on more monumental objects, including chasses and candlesticks (even as far as the 5 meter Trivulzio Candelabrum in Milan Cathedral), as well as carved ornament on Romanesque churches and cathedrals[6].

Both the applied decoration and the choice of timber used for our figure's core, which appears to be walnut, help to suggest a localization to one of the workshops of the Mosan or Meuse Valley, a region spanning the intersections between present-day France, the Netherlands and Belgium. Given that our head is a fragment of what must have been an extremely important example of an early thirteenth-century Golden Madonna, it may even represent an as-yet unidentified early work produced by the circle of goldsmiths around Hugo d'Oignies in what was without a doubt the most febrile and innovative moment in the evolution of late-Romanesque goldsmiths' work.

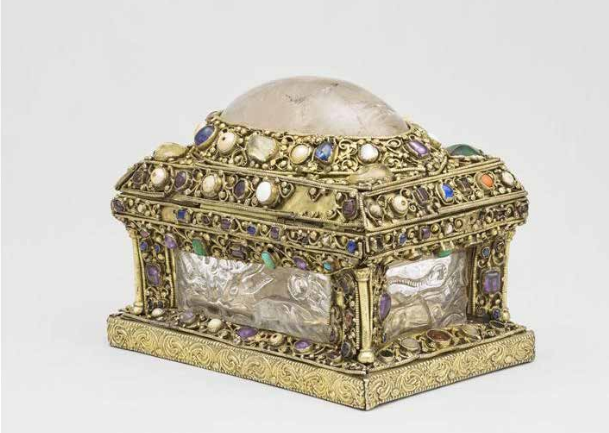


Fig. 6
Reliquary casket with coiled wire and cabochon decoration
Northern France(?)
c. 1200, with Fatimid rock crystal adornments
11.3 x 14.8 x 9.7 cm; silver-gilt, gemstones, and rock crystal over a wooden core
Paris, musée de Cluny, inv. CL11661

6, See Peter Lasko, Ars Sacra 800-1200, Yale, 1994 ed., p. 269.

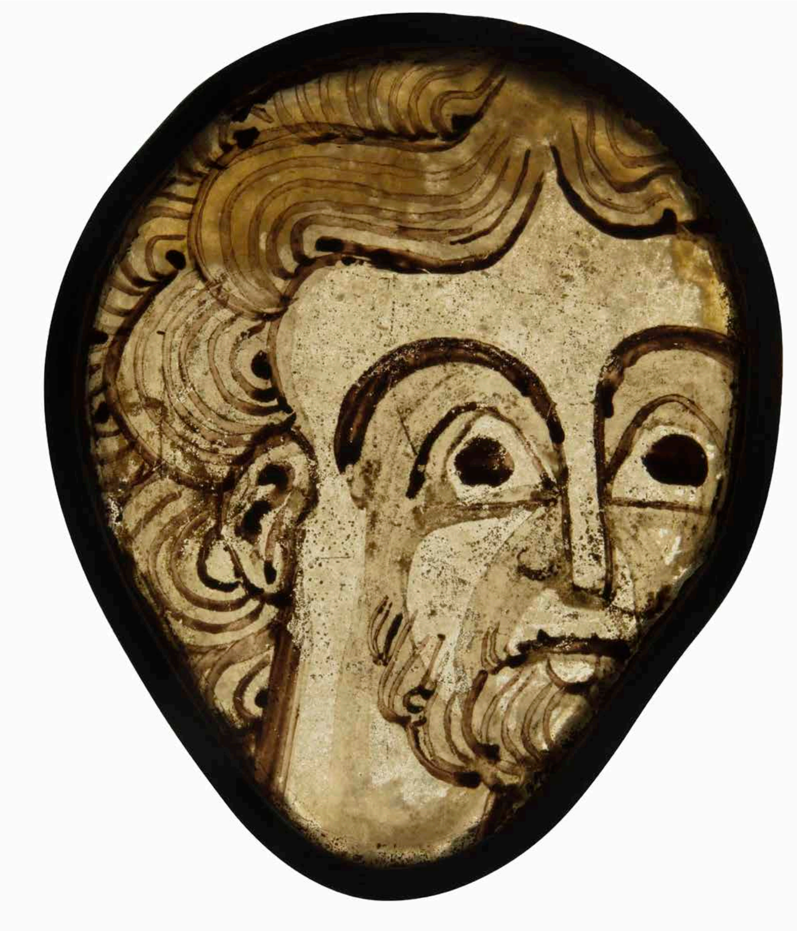
4

Head of a man

France, Amiens Cathedral
c. 1245

8 x 6.5 cm; clear glass with brown vitreous enamel. Some minor repainting of sporadic flake losses to the paint.

The head of a young bearded man turned to our right, his features picked out with dense brown pigment and the contours of the face suggested in pale washes. This facial style, with tight semi-circular locks of hair springing from and returning to the outline of the head, so-called 'popover' eyes, and a comparatively weak chin, is a distinctive feature of the glass painted for Amiens cathedral in the years around the middle of the thirteenth century. Related figures still preserved in situ in the cathedral's windows appear in the Life of Saint James and Life of Saint Giles cycles, executed from 1245 (fig. 1)[1].



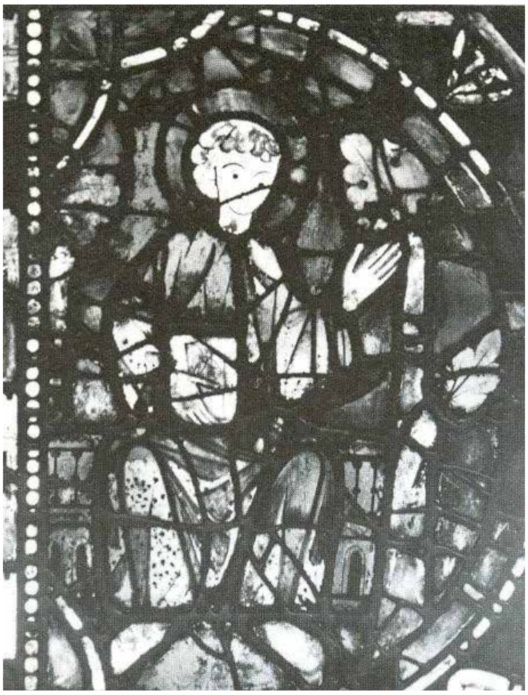


Fig. 1
St. Giles, Amiens Cathedral,
c. 1245
From Louis Grodecki, Gothic Stained Glass (Ithaca, 1984), p. 116.

---

[1] See also Nathalie Frachon-Gielarek, Amiens: Les Verrières de la Cathédrale, Amiens, 2003, pp. 24-27.

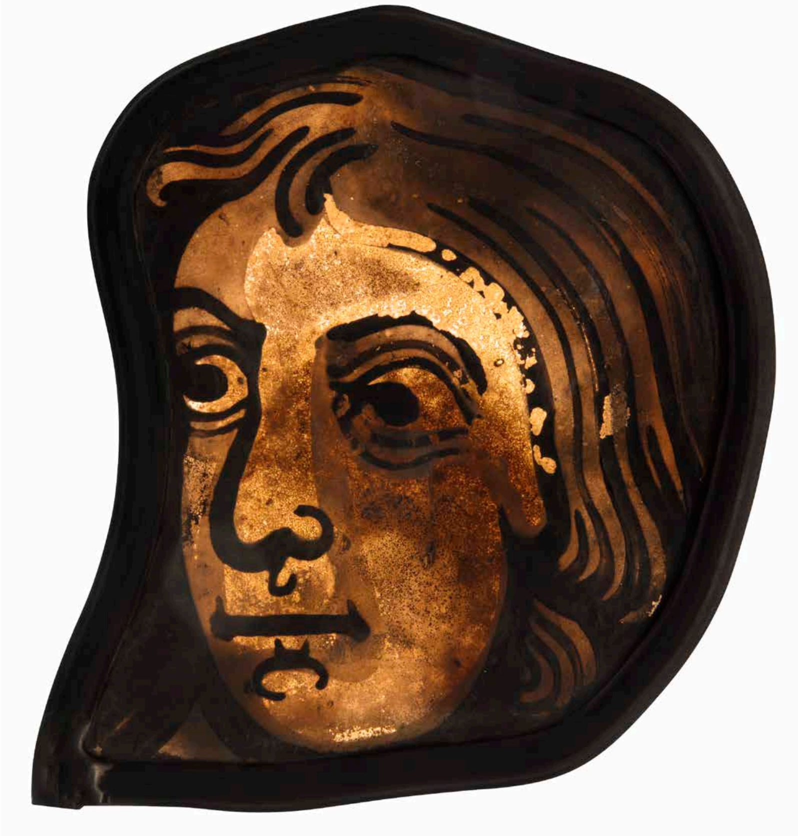
5

A head in three-quarter profile

West-central France, Le Mans?
c. 1250s

7.7 x 7.2 cm; pink-tinted glass with vitreous enamel.

This charming face is picked out on a single quarry of pink-tinted glass marked by its high sparkle and undulating surface. The figure looks to our left, with high arching eyebrows, alert, watchful eyes, and a broad mouth that describes a subtle, spirited smile. Trace lines, the dominant linear elements of the design, are thick, emphatic, and densely pigmented, with sinuously curving lines of varying gauge used to delineate different features, such as the forceful ridge of the nose and the subtler contouring of the philtrum and chin. Shadow on the far side of the face and in the figure's long flowing hair is evoked with a pigmented wash.



By the middle of the thirteenth century, a broad band of centres all located in north-central France (encompassing the Loire Valley to the West, Ile-de-France and Picardy at its heart, and Burgundy to the East) had become powerhouses for experimental, dynamic, and expressive glass painting. No other region in Europe can match the richness of the glazing programs undertaken at this date and in this region. Paris was certainly the leading centre for the medium, but its glaziers travelled out to the surrounding regions in large numbers, to work on the great cathedrals then under construction. One such scheme is the pulsating, luminous choir windows of Le Mans Cathedral, executed shortly after 1250 by highly-skilled glaziers exerting total mastery over the medium. Bold, spirited facial types painted on pink-tinted glass give incredible life to the dense, red and blue backdrops of the scheme's design, particularly in the southern bays of the choir, where a number of the heads relate closely to our example, and may even have been made by the same painters (fig. 1).

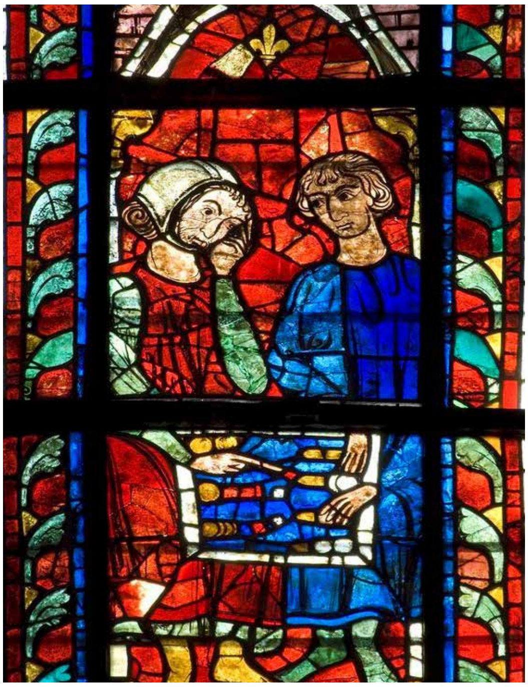


Fig. 1
Tric-Trac Players
c. 1254
Le Mans Cathedral, Choir,
Bay 210

6

A bestial face with gaping mouth

England, Lincoln Cathedral, west facade
c. 1250

13 x 10 x 10cm; limestone with pollution deposits.

Provenance
Carved for the west façade of Lincoln Cathedral; Given by the mason in charge of the restoration of the west façade to George Zarnecki while he was advising the Cathedral on the work in progress.

This fantastically expressive fragment, showing the wide, gaping mouth and upturned nose of a small imp or zoomorphic creature, was carved as part of one of the many small grotesque figures decorating the west façade of Lincoln Cathedral (fig. 1).

Begun in the closing decades of the eleventh century, the construction of Lincoln Cathedral's west front evolved over the subsequent 200 years into a unique amalgamation of architectural and sculptural styles. Incorporating a Norman portal truncated and capped by a fourteenth-century gallery of kings within a larger twelfth- and thirteenth-century framework, it is a stratigraphic textbook covering almost every stage in the development of English architectural sculpture right up to the late Middle Ages. Our fragment comes from its mid- to late- thirteenth-century campaigns, and can be compared in stylistic treatment to the slightly later Lincoln Imp of c. 1280 in the Angel Choir within the Cathedral's east end (fig. 2), as well as to the array of small bestial grotesques that still survive (many in a restored state) on the west façade itself (fig. 3). The latter were executed during the episcopacies of three successive bishops of Lincoln, William de Blois (d. 1206), Hugh de Wells (d. 1235) and Robert Grosseteste (d. 1253). The remarkable build up of carbon pollution deposits in the recess of our figure's mouth also accords precisely with the pattern of pollution deposits on the original carvings still in situ on the façade.

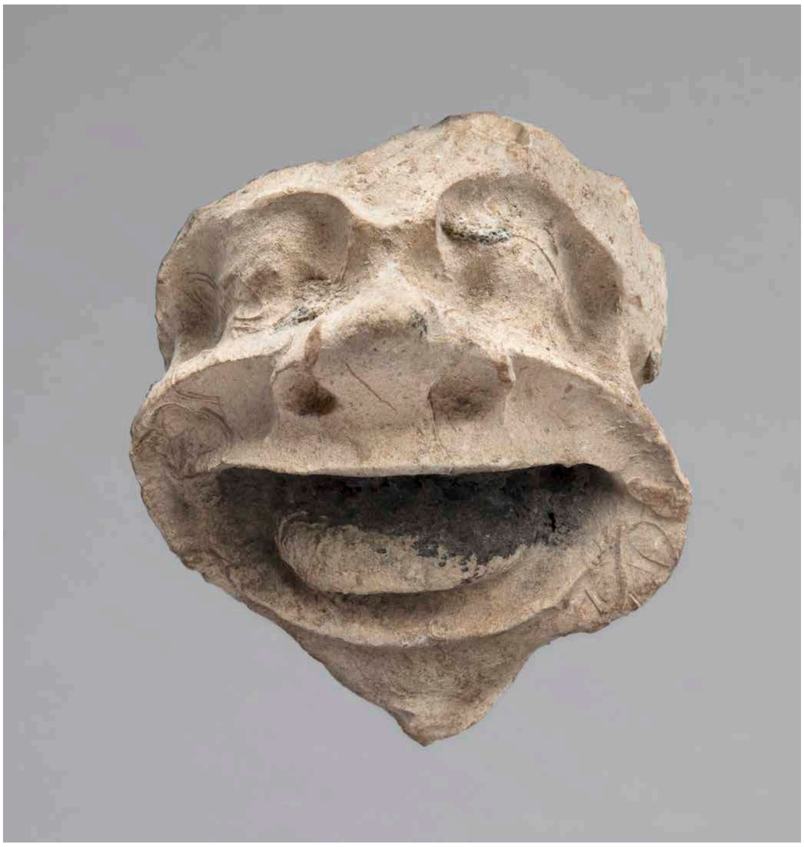


Fig. 1
Frederick Evans
Lincoln Cathedral from the Castle
1896

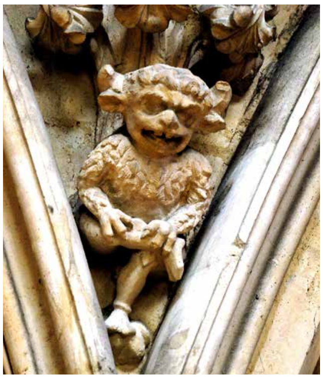


Fig. 2
The Lincoln Imp
c. 1280
Lincoln Cathedral, Angel Choir

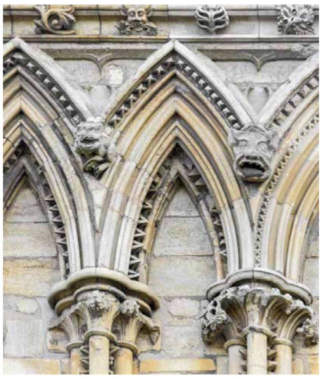


Fig. 3
Grotesque faces on the west façade of Lincoln cathedral
c. 1250

7

The Head of Christ

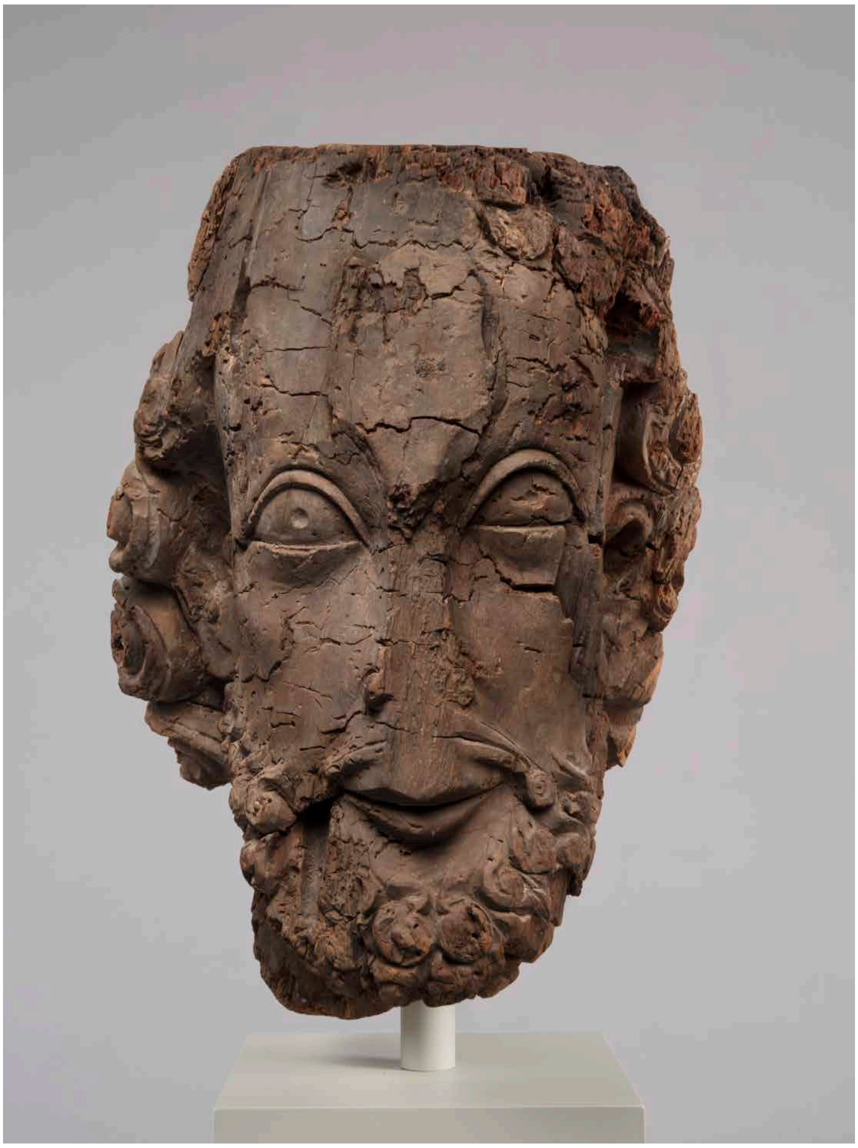
Northern Spain, León
c. 1260-90

Provenance
Josep Maria Gudiol y Ricart (1904-1985), the great historian of Catalonian art;
By descent to his son Manuel Gudiol Coromines (d. 2004);
By inheritance to his widow Victoria Salom, until 2020

41.5 x 28 x 24 cm; Softwood with degraded iron attachments on the reverse. Extensive woodworm and cracquelure to the surface of the timber. Some filling to holes at the bridge of the nose and the proper-left upper eyelid.

Description and Iconography

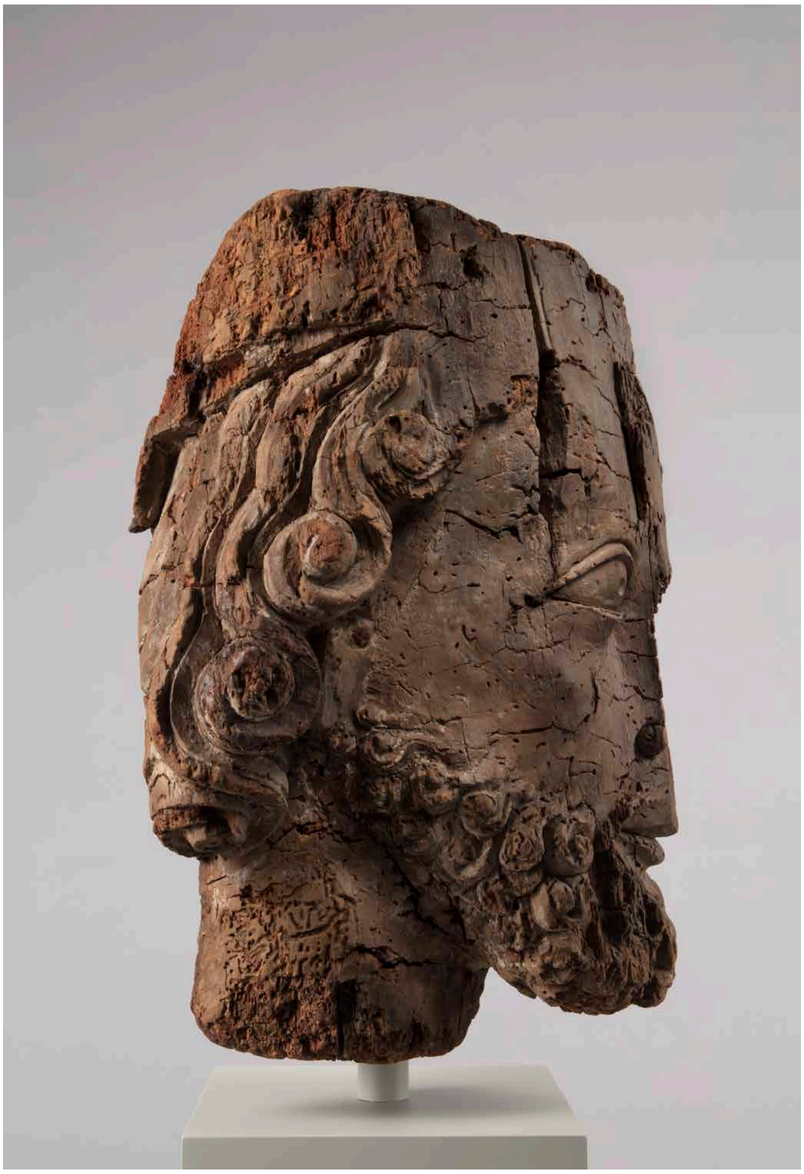
This large head of Christ originally belonged to a statue of monumental proportions carved for a northern Spanish church or cathedral interior. The narrow, elongated face is marked by high, arching eyes with horizontal lower lids and large irises gouged to a shallow depth at their centres, which combine to lend the figure a humane but alert and watchful expression. The nose, now missing (perhaps due to a focused iconoclastic attack), was fairly short in length, sitting high above a long philtrum sprouting a fine moustache and a narrow mouth carved in a pronounced, spirited smile. A short, tightly curling beard grows low on the jawline and thins towards the undersides of the ears, which are set far back on the skull framed and partially covered by tight ringlets of hair that sprout from the sides of the head. A broad, plainly carved band of timber rising above the top of the hair was almost certainly used in its original context to attach a crown of another material, perhaps precious metalwork, which has since been lost. Along with the defining features of the face and hairstyle, this feature affirms that we must be looking at the head of Christ from a post-Resurrection figure that represented his triumph over death, either enthroned or in a standing pose.



Context, Localisation and Dating

The survival of a head of such monumental proportions is miraculous, and few similarly scaled figures survive in any context from the Medieval period. Its early twentieth-century provenance, the use of a softwood as the carving material, and the treatment of its physiognomy and defining facial features all combine to indicate that it was carved for a northern Spanish context, undoubtedly an important church foundation or cathedral. This is likely to have been the case for another monumental Head of Christ preserved in the collection of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art which, like our figure, was also owned by the eminent historian of Catalan art, Josep Gudiol y Ricart (fig. 1). The back of our head is deeply hollowed out with a broad u-shaped gouge, a standard treatment for medieval wood sculpture both to reduce excess weight and to minimize the risk of cracking and warping as the timber aged and seasoned over time. This also means that the figure from which it originates is likely to have been positioned directly against a wall or pillar, perhaps in a set-up like that of the late thirteenth-century choir figures at the cathedral of Carcassonne for example[2] (fig. 2).

The almost complete absence of surviving material in wood from this date means that any analysis of our head's style, treatment, and visual language must instead turn to comparisons amongst the period's monumental stone sculpture, a demand not without problems since, while compatible in many ways, these materials necessarily demand different technical approaches. During the long thirteenth century, northern Spanish early-Gothic sculpture took on a distinctly Francophone visual language. This had manifested itself already by the 1240s on the grand Puerta del Sarmental at Burgos Cathedral, which was heavily influenced by recent developments at Amiens.[2] The trend continued at León in the second half of the century, and it has even been suggested that the Cathedral's architect, Maestro Enrique, was the same Frenchman responsible for the construction



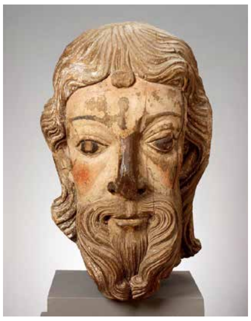


Fig. 1
Head of Christ
Spain, León
c. 1220-40
81.3 x 50.8 x 50.8 cm;
Walnut with polychromy
Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, inv. 59.131

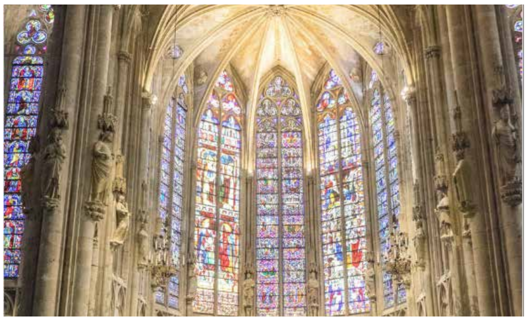
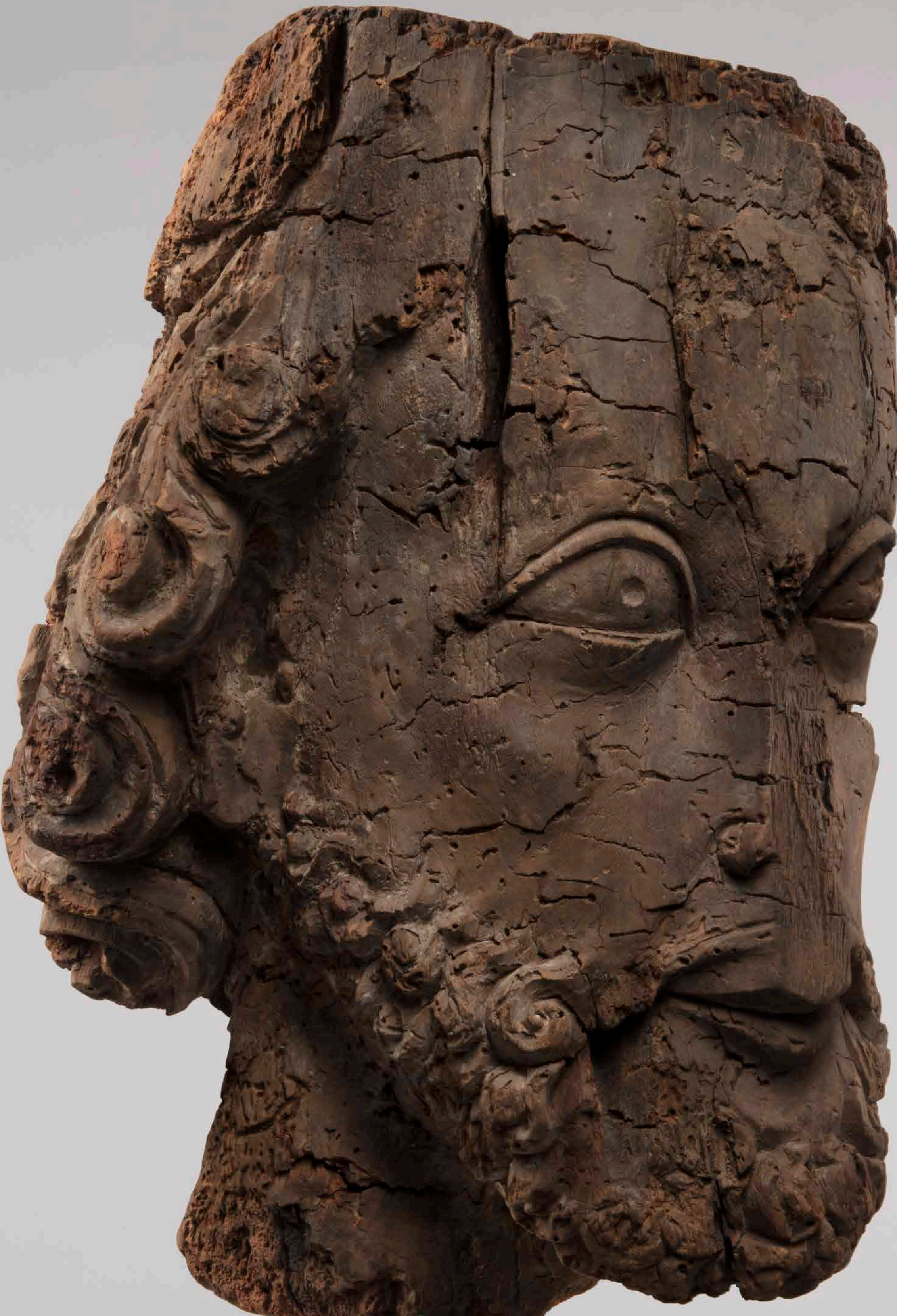


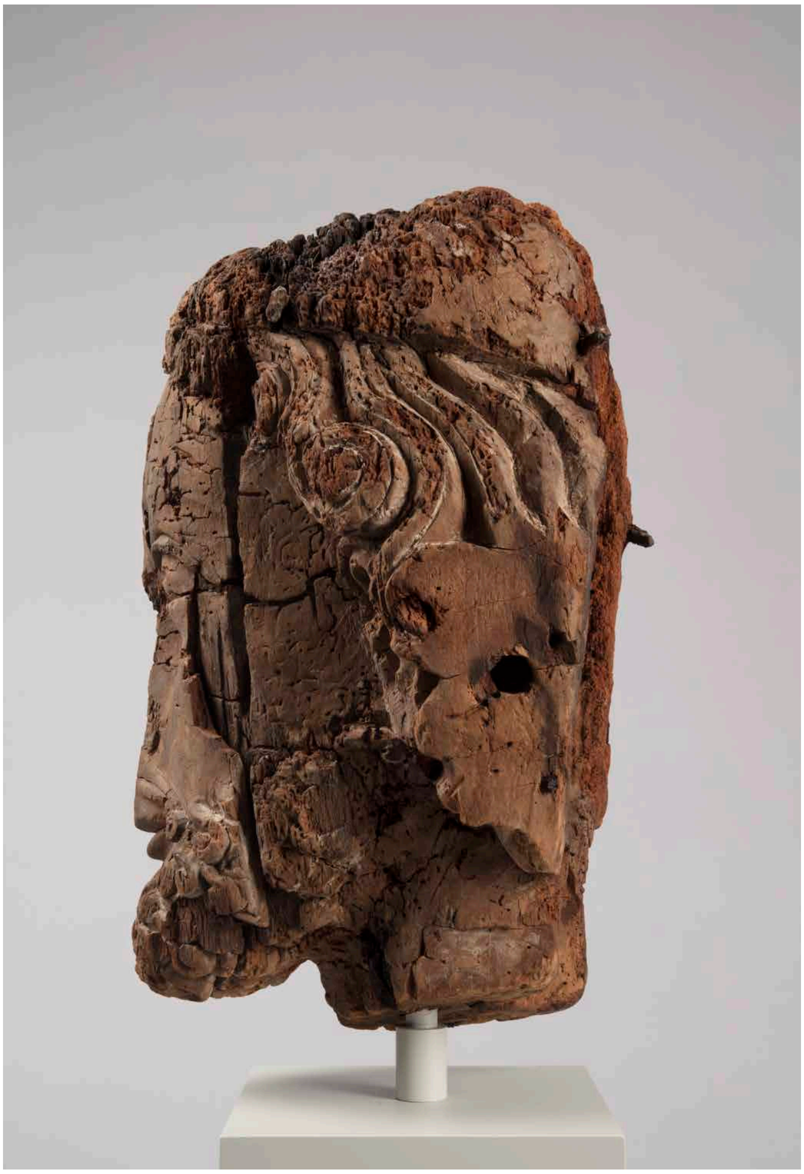
Fig. 2
Carcassonne Cathedral, view of the pier figures decorating the choir
c. 1280-90

1, I am grateful to Paul Williamson for drawing this parallel to my attention, and for his thoughts on the context of function and display that our head might have been made for.

2, Dorothy Gillerman ed., Gothic Sculpture in America I. The New England Museums, New York and London, 1989, p. 376; Paul Williamson, Gothic Sculpture 1140-1300, New Haven and London, 1995, p. 225



of Reims Cathedral in the preceding decades.[3] The c. 1260-65 figures of Isaiah and the Magi on the south transept's central portal at León share our head's elongated physiognomy (fig. 3), as do the slightly later jamb figures of the west façade (dated to c. 1280-1300), with their deep skull structures and ears set far back on, and well in to, the side of the head.[4] The forceful and assured carving of the eyes, with their high-arcing upper lids and horizontal lower lids, finds a close parallel on the c. 1290s figure of the Queen of Sheba on the portal of Saint Francis at León (fig. 4). It could be said that the style of our figure's hair and beard, both marked by tight ringlets, are far removed from any of the León statuary and perhaps point to an earlier date of creation. Though it is true that such a feature seems to have remained in vogue in Castile (particularly Burgos) into the 1290s (as attested by a carved wood Saint John figure now in the MFA, Boston, for which see fig. 5), its distinctively early-gothic outlook must surely militate against a date range too close 1300.



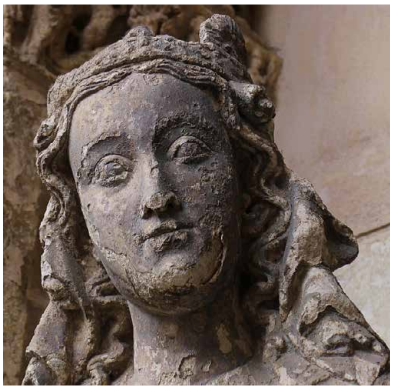


Fig. 4
Queen of Sheba, from the portal of Saint Francis, León Cathedral, detail
c. 1290-95

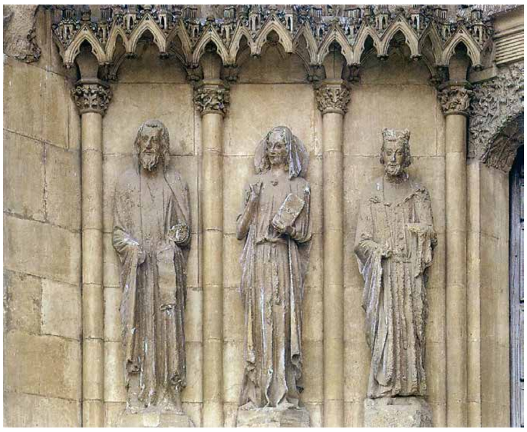


Fig. 3
Isaiah, the Virgin Annunciate, and one of the Magi
León Cathedral, south transept, central portal
c. 1260-65

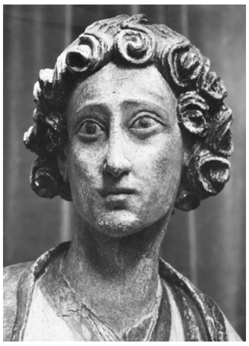


Fig. 5
Saint John, detail
Spain, Castile, Burgos
c. 1280-90
162.5 x 45.1 x 34.3 cm;
Poplar and pine with polychromy
Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. 1967.767

3, Paul Williamson, Gothic Sculpture 1140-1300, New Haven and London, 1995, p. 231.

4, For the west façade figures see Ibid., p. 233, fig. 345.

8

A monumental crowned head of the Virgin

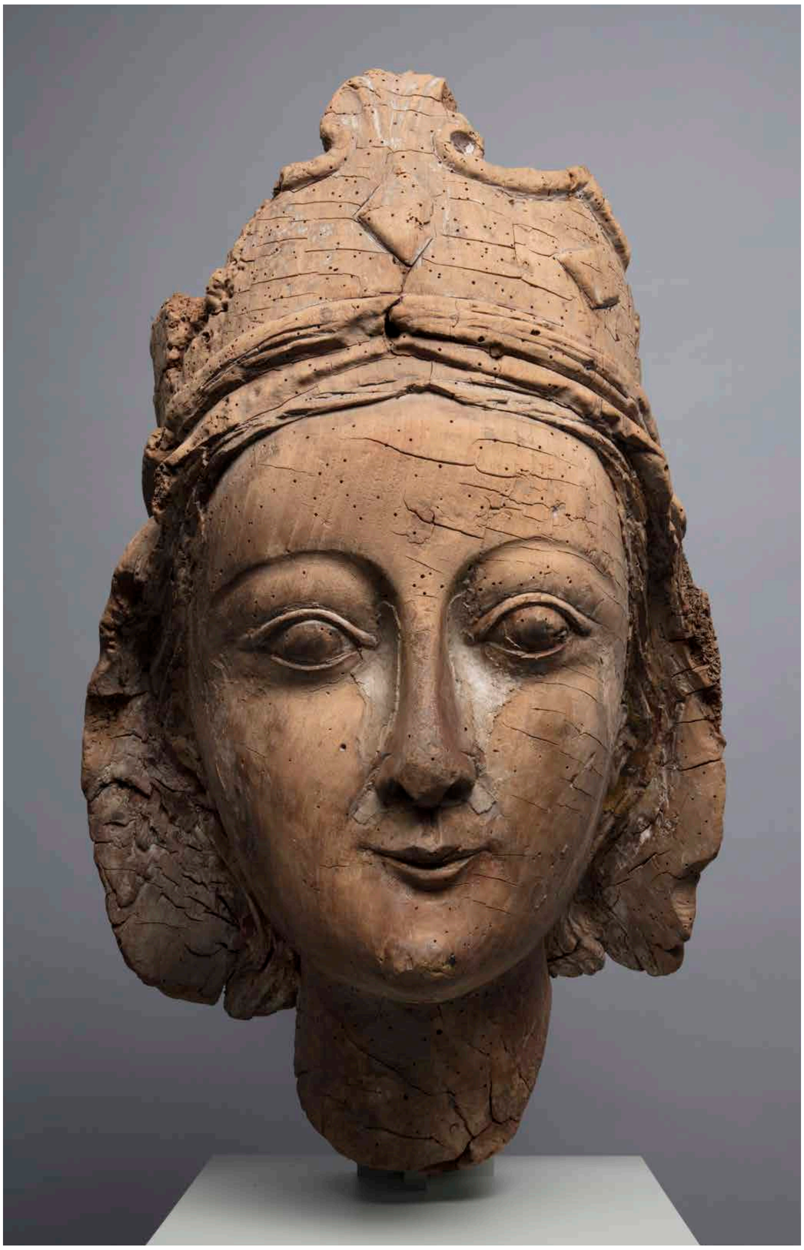
Northern Spain, León
c. 1280

59 x 35 x 32 cm; Softwood (poplar?) with traces of gilding and polychromy. Extensive woodworm and cracquelure to the surface of the timber. Some filling and inpainting to the tip of the nose.

Provenance
Josep Maria Gudiol y Ricart (1904-1985), the great historian of Catalonian art;
By descent to his son Manuel Gudiol Coromines (d. 2004);
By inheritance to his widow Victoria Salom, until 2020

The Virgin is shown as an idealized young woman, with a slender nose and a sweetly smiling mouth. Delicate eyebrows arc high over bright, almond-shaped eyes. She is shown in her role as Queen of Heaven, with a tall crown studded with fictive gemstones perched high on her head and holding in place a veil that frames her face and covers most of her long, gilded hair.

The head's massive scale, which finds few surviving parallels amongst the corpus of gothic wood sculpture, indicates that it must have been carved for a monumental figure, one made to decorate a church or cathedral of great importance. Its early twentieth-century provenance, the use of a softwood as the carving material, and the treatment of its physiognomy and defining facial features all combine to suggest a northern Spanish context. The production of monumental wood sculpture in this region during the thirteenth century is attested to by a tiny handful of extant examples, now dispersed from their original contexts. A large polychromed Head of Christ which, interestingly, shares our figure's provenance, is preserved in the collection of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art (fig. 1). It was probably made for an interior figural group or a single standing figure fixed against a pier, a scheme that can still be seen in the cathedral at Carcassonne for instance (fig. 2)[1]. A full-length recumbent effigy, smaller in scale than our head but nonetheless of imposing proportions, is now at the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard (fig. 3).[2] Said to have come from the convent of Villamayor de los Montes south of Burgos, and dated in the surrounding scholarship to the last quarter of the thirteenth century, it also shows the types of



---

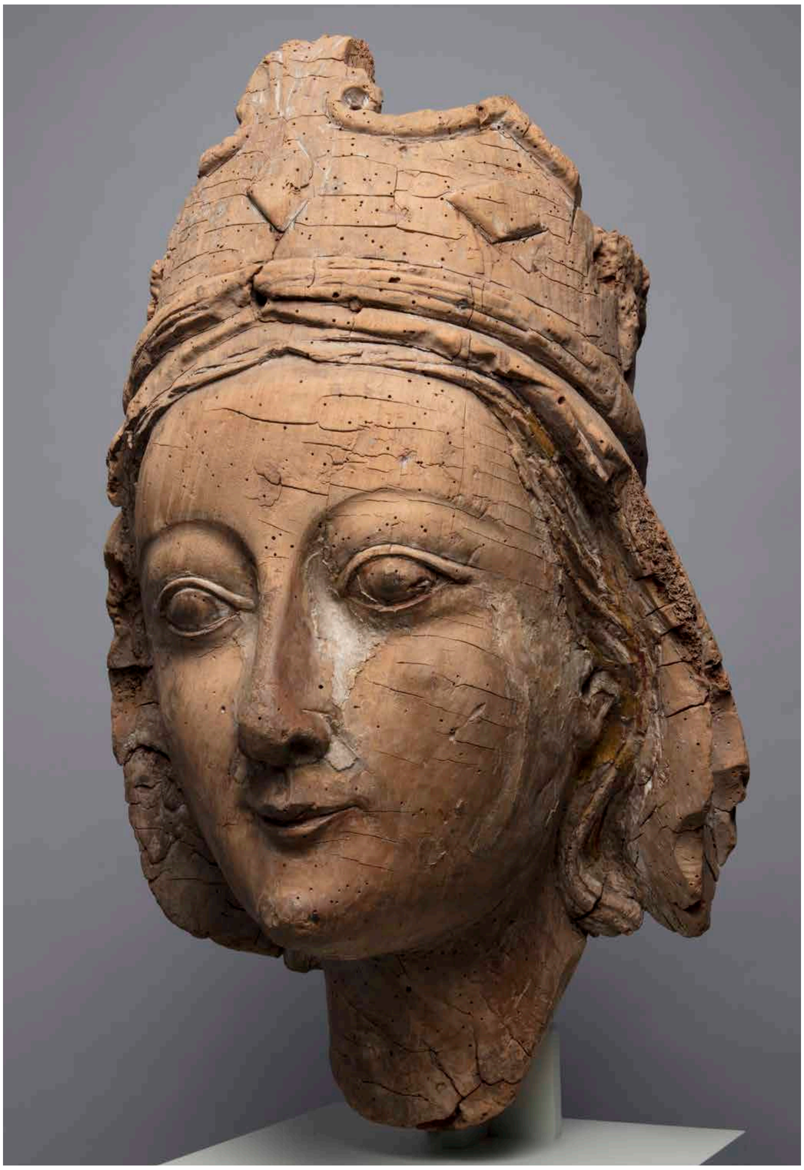
[1] I am grateful to Paul Williamson for drawing this parallel to my attention, and for his thoughts on the context of function and display that our head might have been made for.

[2] D. Gillerman, Gothic Sculpture in America: I. The New England Museums, New York and London, 1989, pp. 174-5.

context in which monumental wood sculpture could be found in medieval Spain.

Aside from these disparate examples, the absence of surviving material in wood from this date means that any analysis of our head's style, treatment, and visual language must instead turn to comparisons amongst the period's monumental stone sculpture, a demand not without problems since, while compatible in many ways, these materials necessarily demand different technical approaches. Even so, the strong triangularity of our Virgin's face, with a clipped mouth and wide-set eyes, as well as the fashion of the veil and hairstyle, do link it to a number of late thirteenth-century stone sculptures preserved in Castile/Léon, such as the c. 1270-80 Queen of Sheba on the south portal at Burgo de Osma (fig. 4), the c. 1265 figures of the Annunciate Virgin and Virgin and Child on the central portal of León Cathedral's south transept (fig. 5)[3] , the Queen of Sheba statue from the Portal of Saint Francis on León Cathedral's western façade (fig. 6), and to a lesser extent the slightly later Virgen Blanca on the same cathedral's north portal (fig. 7). The latter figure's move away from the restrained hairstyle and narrow features of our head suggest that ours predates it and is instead attributable to the period in which the other portals' statuary programs at León were being executed.

The scale and ambition of our figure mean that it must have formed a key focal point within its original context of display, and make it a hugely significant survival from a period from which so little survives.



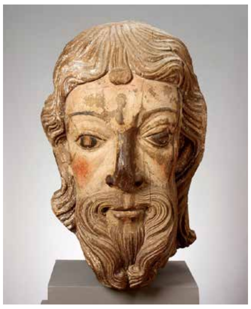


Fig. 1
Head of Christ
Spain, León
c. 1220-40
81.3 x 50.8 x 50.8 cm;
Walnut with polychromy
Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, inv. 59.131

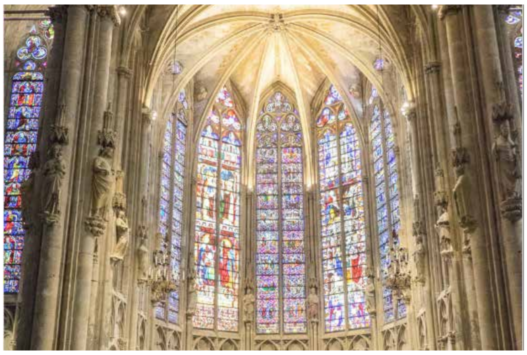


Fig. 2
Carcassonne Cathedral, view of the pier figures decorating the choir
c. 1280-90

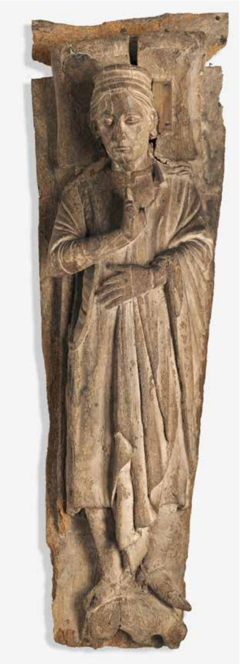
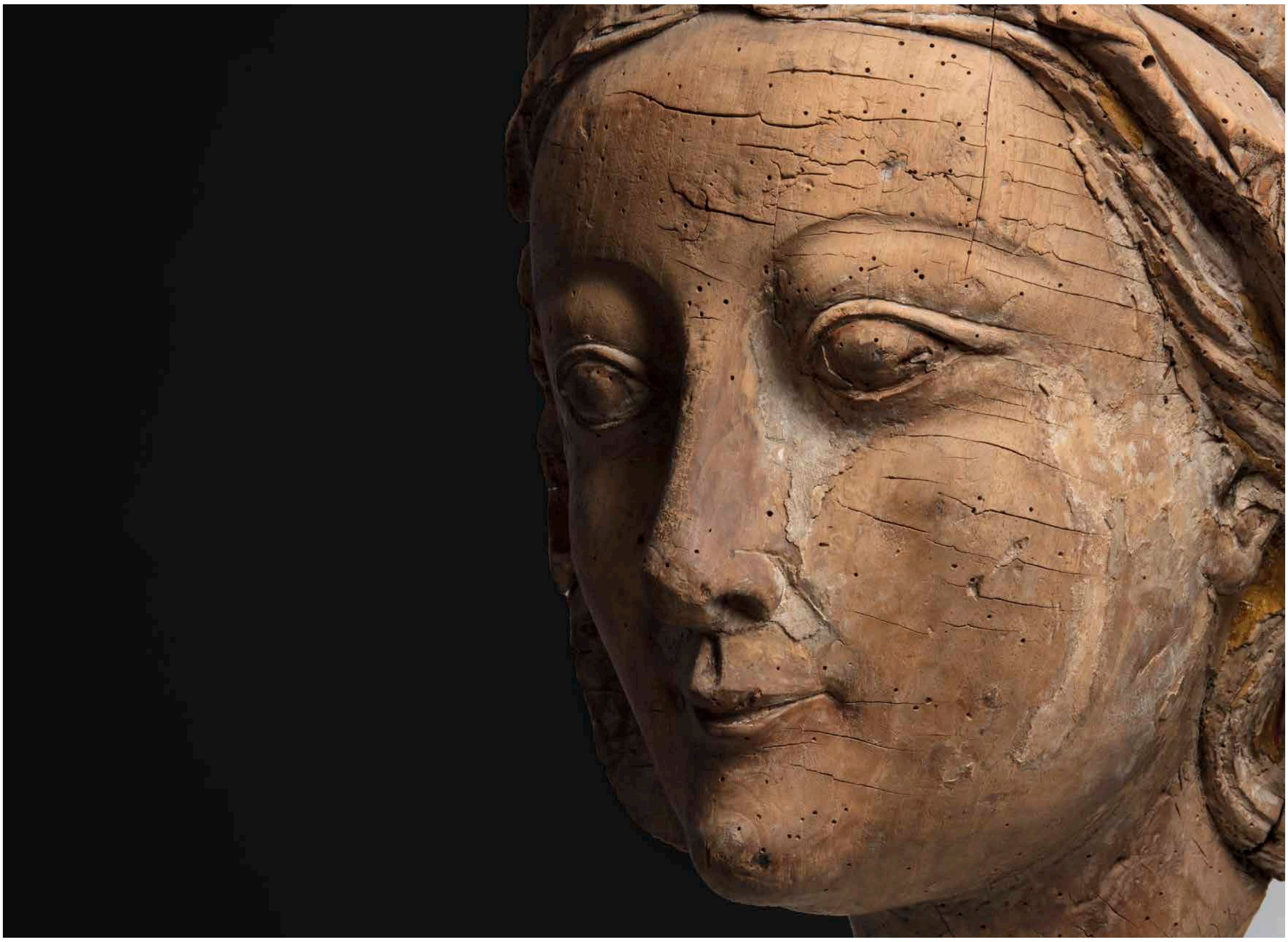


Fig. 3
Recumbent effigy, formerly known as Don Diego Garcia, from the convent of Villamayor de los Montes, Burgos
Last quarter 13th century
40 x 253 x 81 cm; Softwood (poplar?)
Fogg Art Museum, inv. 1936.11

---

[3] D. Gillerman, Gothic Sculpture in America: I. The New England Museums, New York and London, 1989, pp. 174-5.



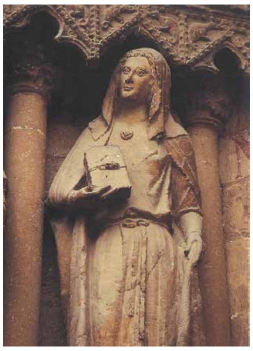


Fig. 4
Queen of Sheba
El Burgo de Osma Cathedral, south portal
c. 1270-80
Image: Paul Williamson, Gothic Sculpture 1140-1300, New Haven and London, 1995, p. 236, fig. 351

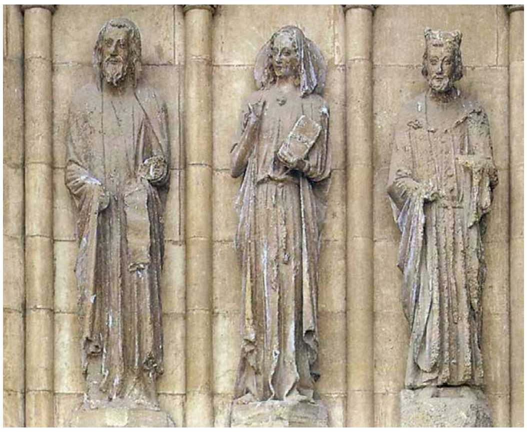


Fig. 5
Isaiah, the Virgin Annunciate, and one of the Magi
León Cathedral, south transept, central portal
c. 1260-5

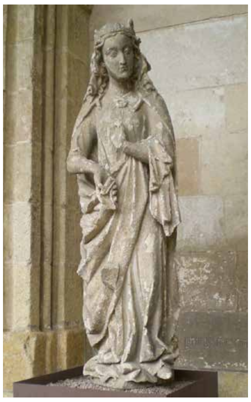


Fig. 6
Queen of Sheba, from the portal of Saint Francis, León Cathedral
c. 1290-95

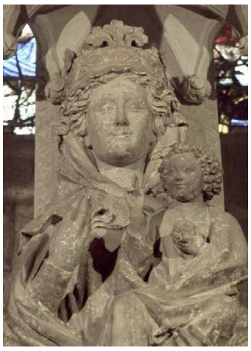


Fig. 7
Virgen Blanca, from the portal of the Last Judgment, León Cathedral
c. 1290

9

Head of a young man

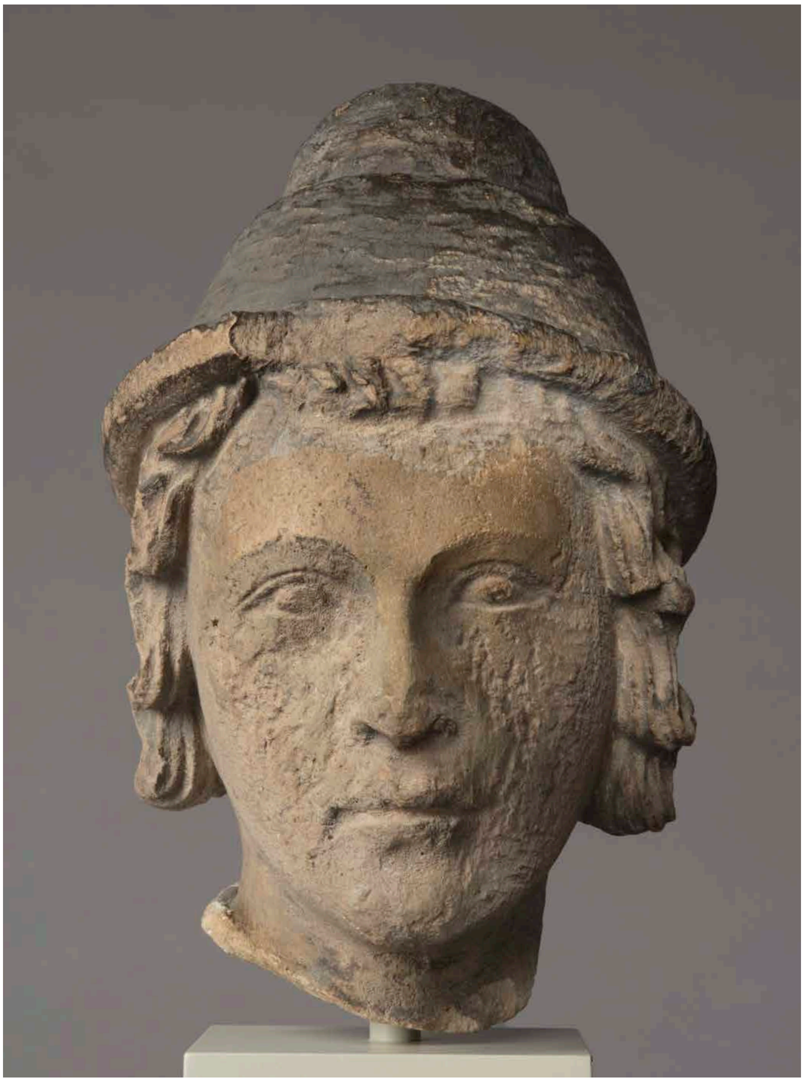
France, Île-de-France
Mid-13th century

Provenance
Private Collection; Deux-Sèvres, France

24 x 14.5 x 17 cm; limestone, erosion of the stone on the cheeks, breaks on the front rim of the hat and along the neck, with some toning-in in both places.

A head of a clean-shaven young man wearing a distinctive hat of conical form. His youthful appearance is accentuated by his smooth, idealised face, sensuously curving jawline, and thick hair which falls in stiff locks. The man's ovoid face is characterised by delicate facial features, well defined eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes that taper towards the temples, a strong nose, and subtly pursed lips. The shaggy strands of hair peek out from under the small brim of the hat.

The serenity and dignified composure communicated by this gently modelled face is a defining characteristic of thirteenth-century sculpture carved across northern France, especially evident on the surviving figural programs of a handful of monuments situated around the country's capital. The carving of the eyes and the idealised face can be compared to figures from the west façade at Amiens, which had a strong influence on sculpture in the region (fig. 1). Similarly composed features can also be found on the portals at Chartres, on a series of slightly earlier jamb figures carved c. 1210-20 (fig. 2). But closest parallels to our figure can be found amongst statuary carved closer to the middle of the thirteenth century in the Île-de-France, including a slightly larger Head of a King carved between 1225 and 1250 for the church at Mantes (west of Paris) and a corbel with the head of a youth believed to have come from St Denis, and dated to the middle third of the century (figs. 3-4).



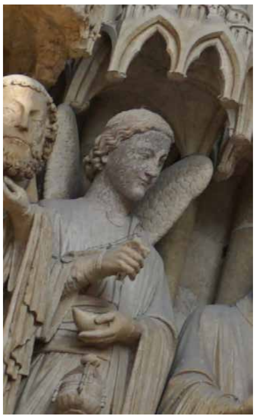
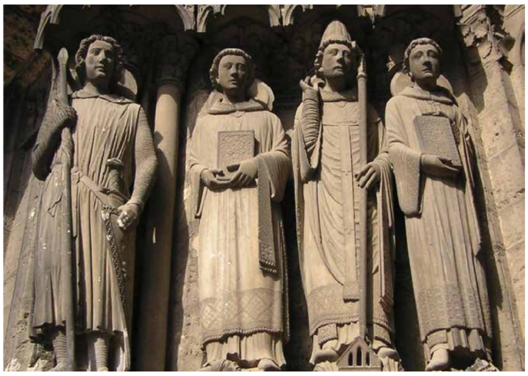
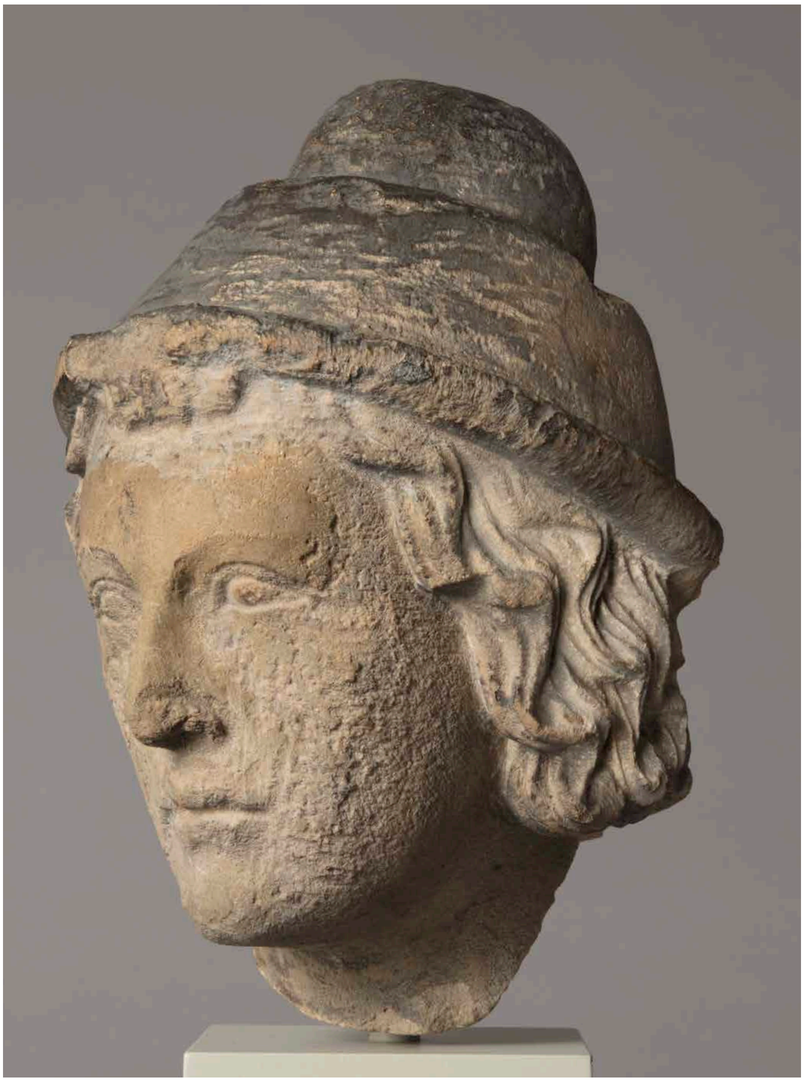


Fig. 1
Angel from the North Portal of the West front of Amiens Cathedral
France, Amiens
c. 1240

Fig. 2
Jamb figures on the south transept, west portal of Chartres Cathedral
c. 1210-20



The well-defined conical headgear worn by our figure may indicate that he was carved as part of a series of Old Testament figures; such headgear was often used in the Middle Ages as a shorthand for figures of Jewish descent.



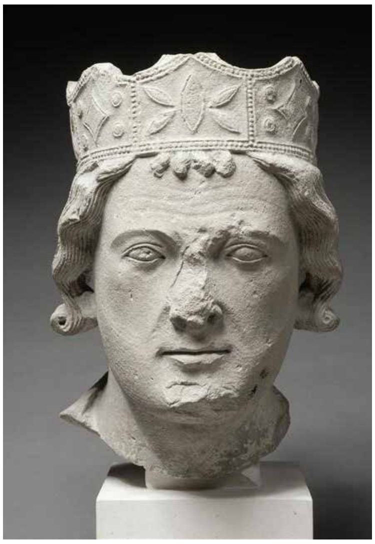


Fig. 3
Head of a crowned man
France, Île-de-France,
Mantes
Second quarter 13th century
36 x 25 x 25 cm; Limestone
Paris, musée du Louvre, inv.
RF 2308

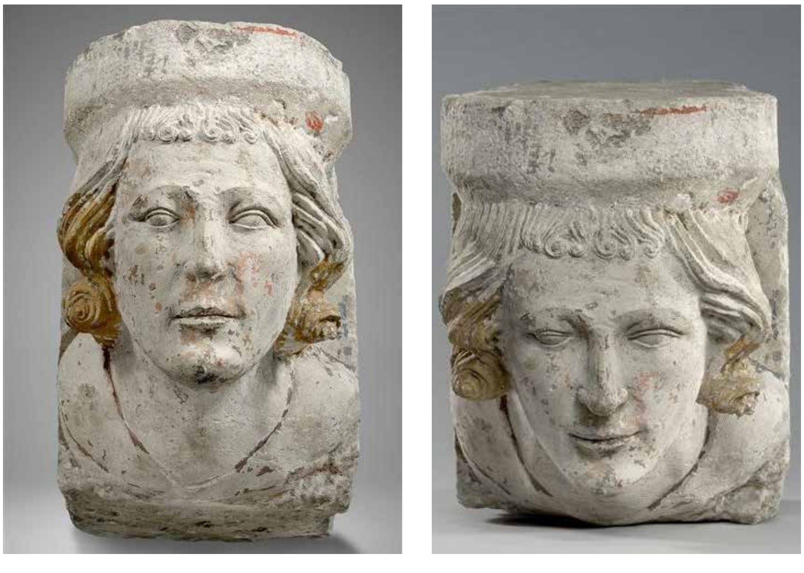


Fig. 4a-b
A corbel with the head of a young man
France, Île-de-France
Second third 13th century
29.5 x 23 x 42 cm; Limestone with polychromy
Paris, musée du Louvre, inv.
RF 440

10

A stylised corbel head with bushy eyebrows

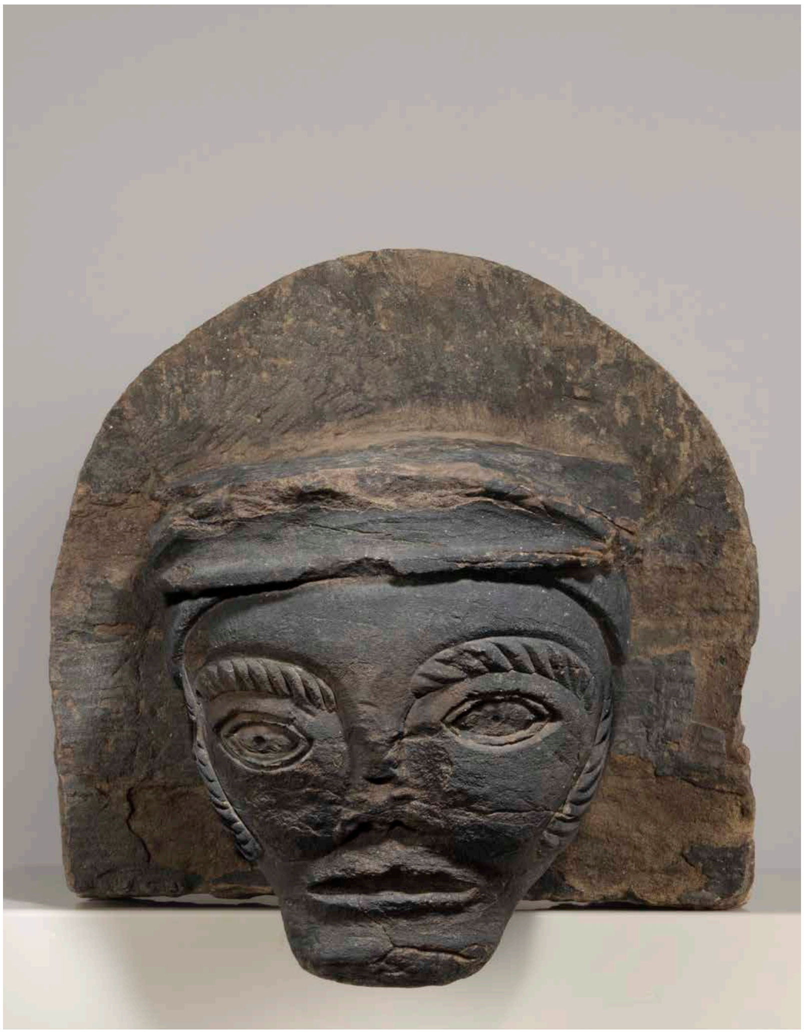
Northern England
c. 1300

29 x 28 x 42 cm; limestone with a blackened
surface patina.

Provanence
Great Barrow, Cheshire, 1960 (by tradition)

This corbel head with boldly-carved, abstracted features, was made to support the shaft of a vaulted ceiling. The head is defined by its triangular shape, narrowing near the chin and wide at the forehead. It has asymmetrical facial features, including large almond-shaped eyes and rope-like eyebrows. Similarly styled, thick sideburns are partially covered by flaps from a hat that is mostly covered by the moulded part of the corbel. The carving is especially distinctive by its pronounced use of shallow gouging, scratched into its surface almost like graffiti, with a resultantly graphic character. This style of carving is also a testament to the rural character of this corbel, which almost certainly originated in a small parish church. Although it is difficult to determine where in a building this corbel would have been mounted, the large section of stone behind the head would have enabled the corbel to safely carry the weight of the roof or the vault that may have been above it. The corbel would therefore have acted not only as a decorative feature but also a structural one.

The shallow carving of this corbel finds analogies with corbels from Ainderby Steeple in Yorkshire, where a similar style of carving is employed (fig. 1). Comparisons can be found



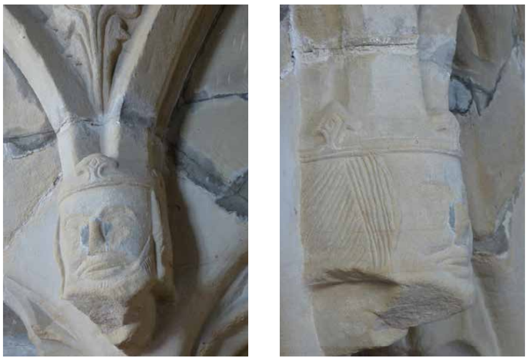
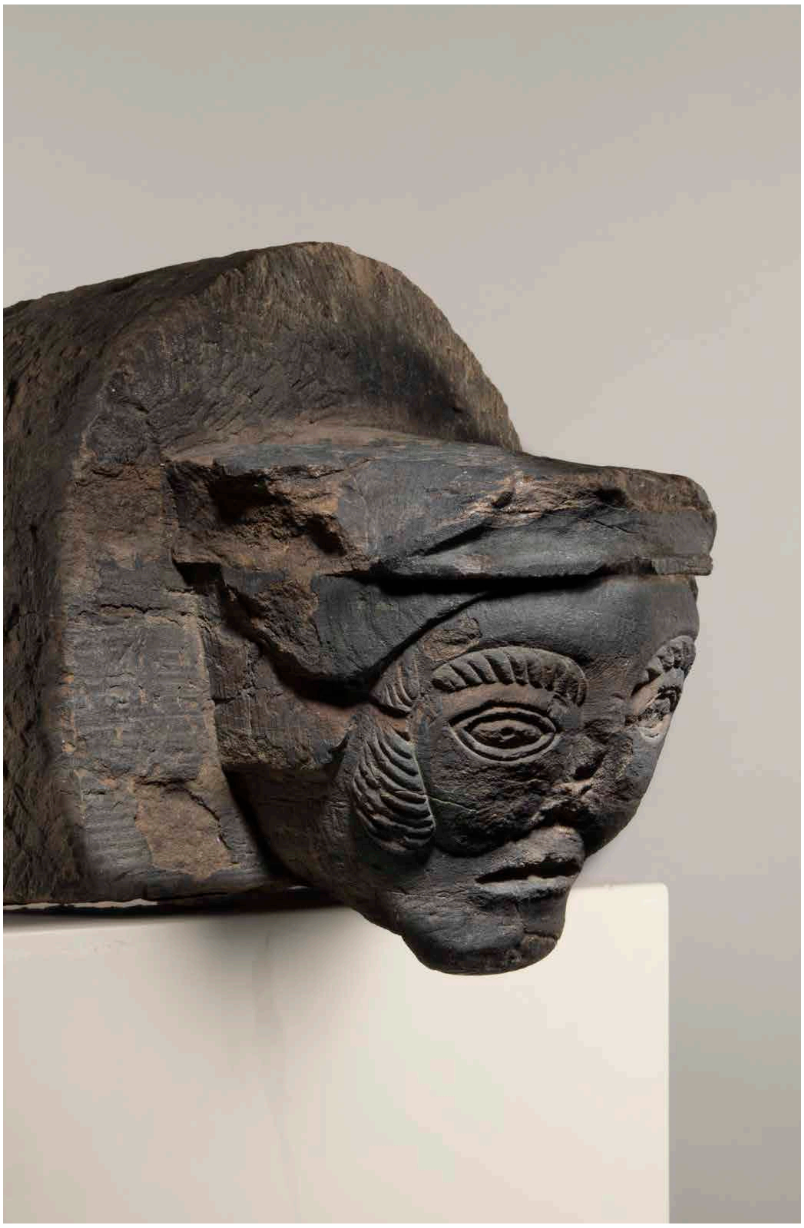


Fig.1
Head of a King
Ainderby Steeple, St Helen's
church
c. 1320

in the almond-shaped eyes, the scratch-carved hair and the simple mouth of the head of a king. A localisation to Northern England is also attested to by the reddish limestone, which has formed a Gypsum crust over time. The abstracted features, almond-shaped eyes and rope-like treatment of the hair can also be compared to early fourteenth-century examples further afield, such as the corbel from Saint Mary Magdalene's church in Castle Ashby (fig. 2). Here the simple horizontal mouth, the rope-like treatment of the facial hair and the abstract features find parallels with our corbel.

The iconography of this corbel can be grouped together with the vast array of fantastical creatures and grotesque heads that can be found on the interiors and exteriors of English parish churches from the Middle Ages. These types of sculptures routinely blurred the lines between religious and profane, and warned the visitors of their fate should their actions or thoughts wander away from the preaching at the altar.



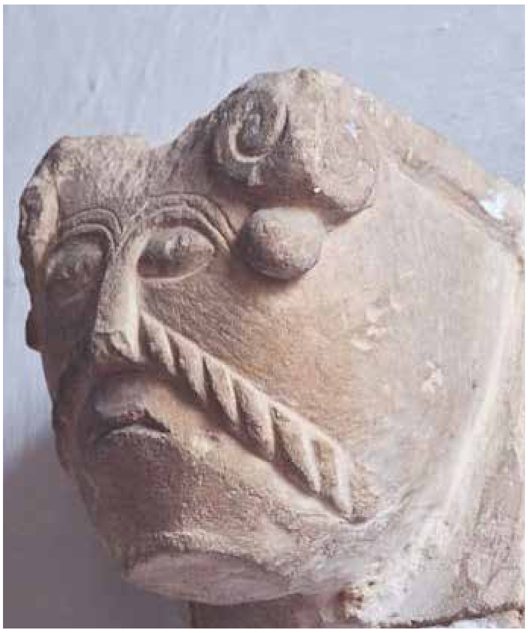


Fig. 2
Corbel Head
Castle Ashby, Church of St
Mary Magdalene
Early 14th century

11

The face of a Knight, from a full-length effigy

England
Late 13th or early 14th century

23 x 22 cm; Limestone with a dark grey patina.
Some rubbing and loss of definition.

Provenance
Collection of Professor Charles Reginald Dodwell (1922-1994), Pilkington Professor of History of Art and Director of Whitworth Gallery, Manchester University 1966-89; and thence by descent

The heavy mail coif which frames the face of this medieval knight, and the sheer size of the carving – over life size – both indicate that we are looking at a fragment of an English tomb effigy. The combination of the full-length, integrally linked coif and its thin circlet encircling the temples and brow line, came into fashion in England shortly after the middle of the thirteenth century and remained in vogue until being replaced by the steel bassinet and aventail in the 1330s. A number of knights' tombs from this period survive in English parish churches both in the form of engraved brasses and sculpted stone effigies, of which examples at the churches of Kelsey and Croft in Lincolnshire show how the coif was worn alongside other armour (figs. 1-2).

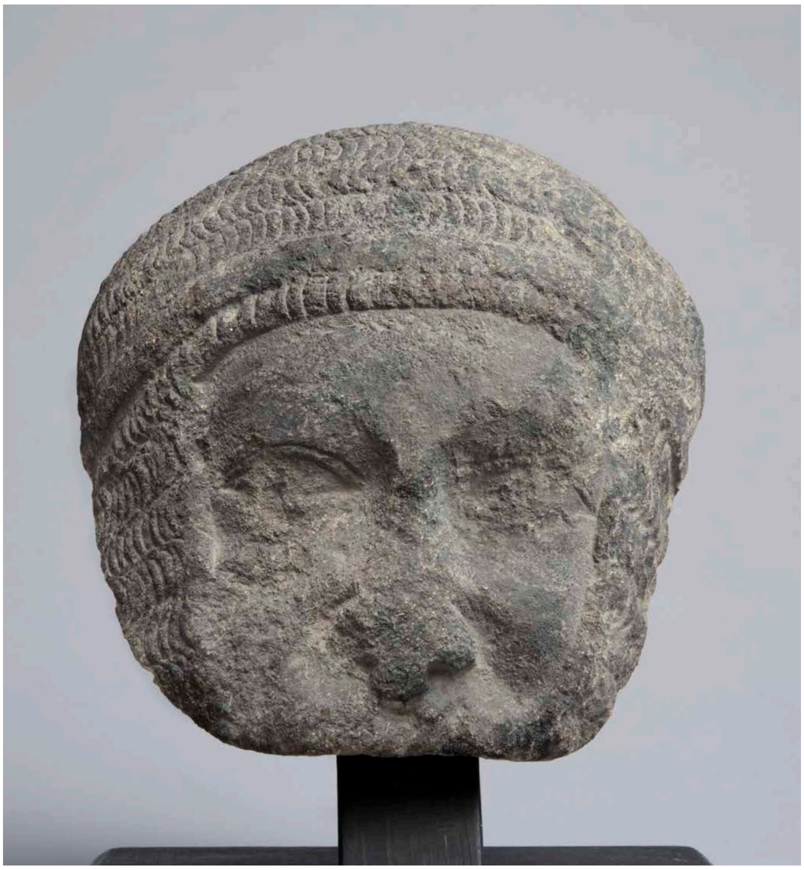


Fig. 1
Tomb effigy of Robert Hansard
1307
Lincolnshire, Kelsey, Church of Saint Mary

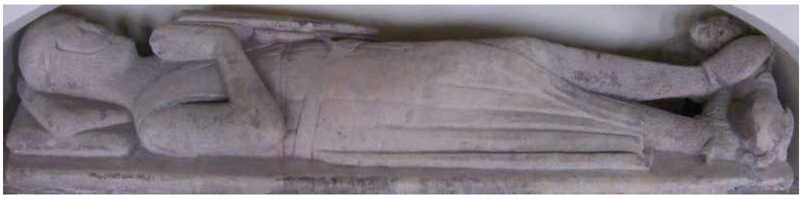
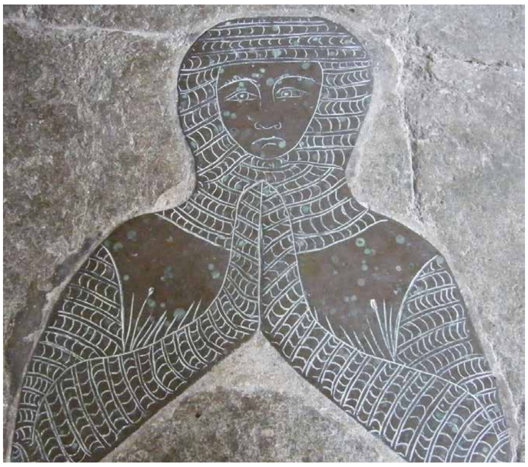
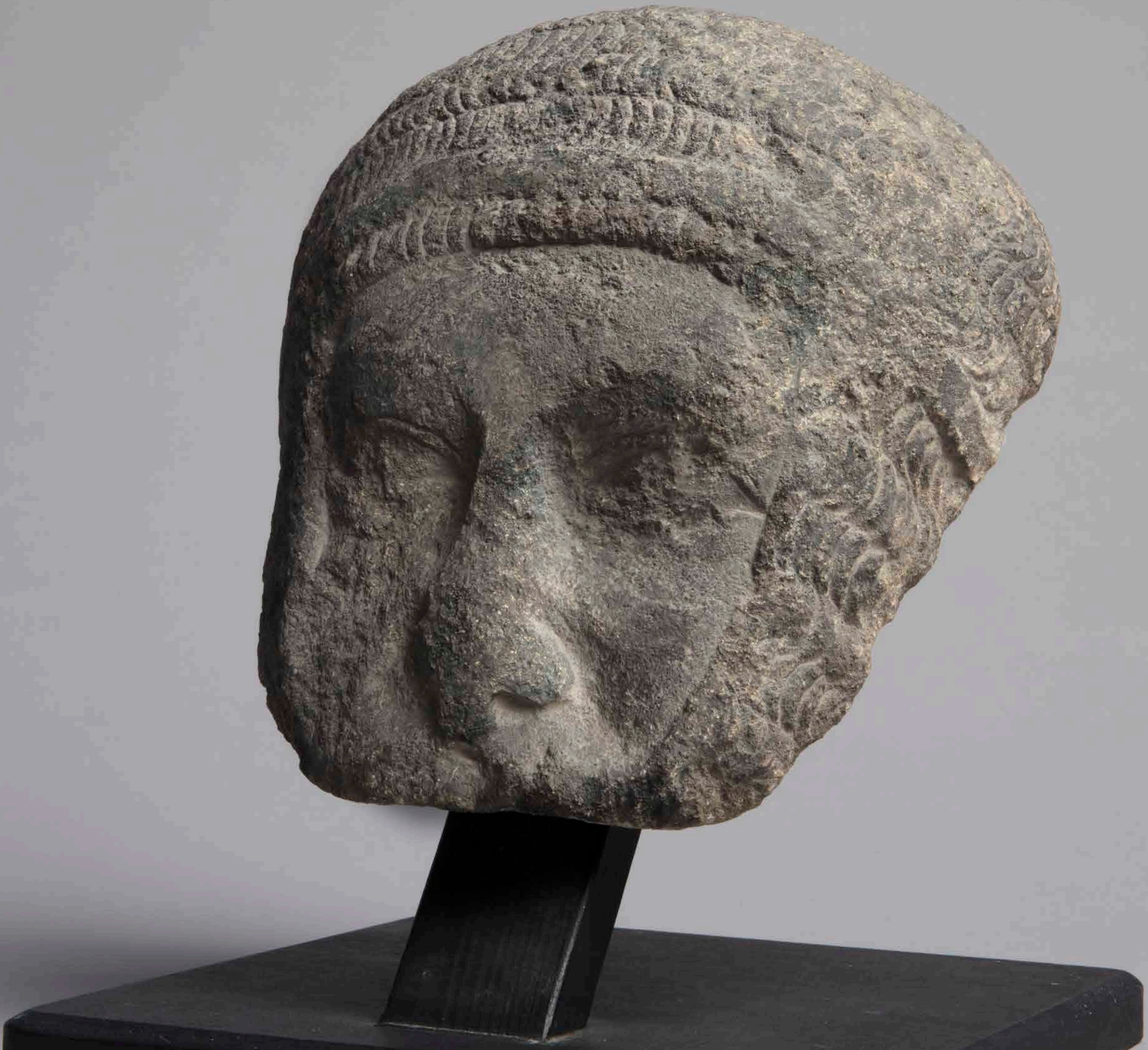


Fig. 2
Torso of a knight effigy in brass
c. 1310
Lincolnshire, Croft, All Saints' Church





A leaf from the 'Hungerford Hours', showing Christ amongst All Saints inhabiting an initial 'S'

England, East Anglia
c.1330

Provenance
Alan G. Thomas (1911–1992) and Charles Ede (1921 – 2002), by December 1969;
Friedrich Georg Zeileis (b.1939) until 2009;
Private collection UK

c. 165 x 100 mm; single folio from an illuminated manuscript on parchment, ruled in brown ink for 17 lines of text written in a fine gothic bookhand, verso with large historiated initial 'S' with foliate extensions around all four sides of the leaf. The recto prayer has a two-line illuminated foliate initial with long marginal extension. Line-fillers in tooled gold, pink, and blue, with white ornament, verse initials alternately gold with blue penwork (faded on the verso) or blue with red penwork.

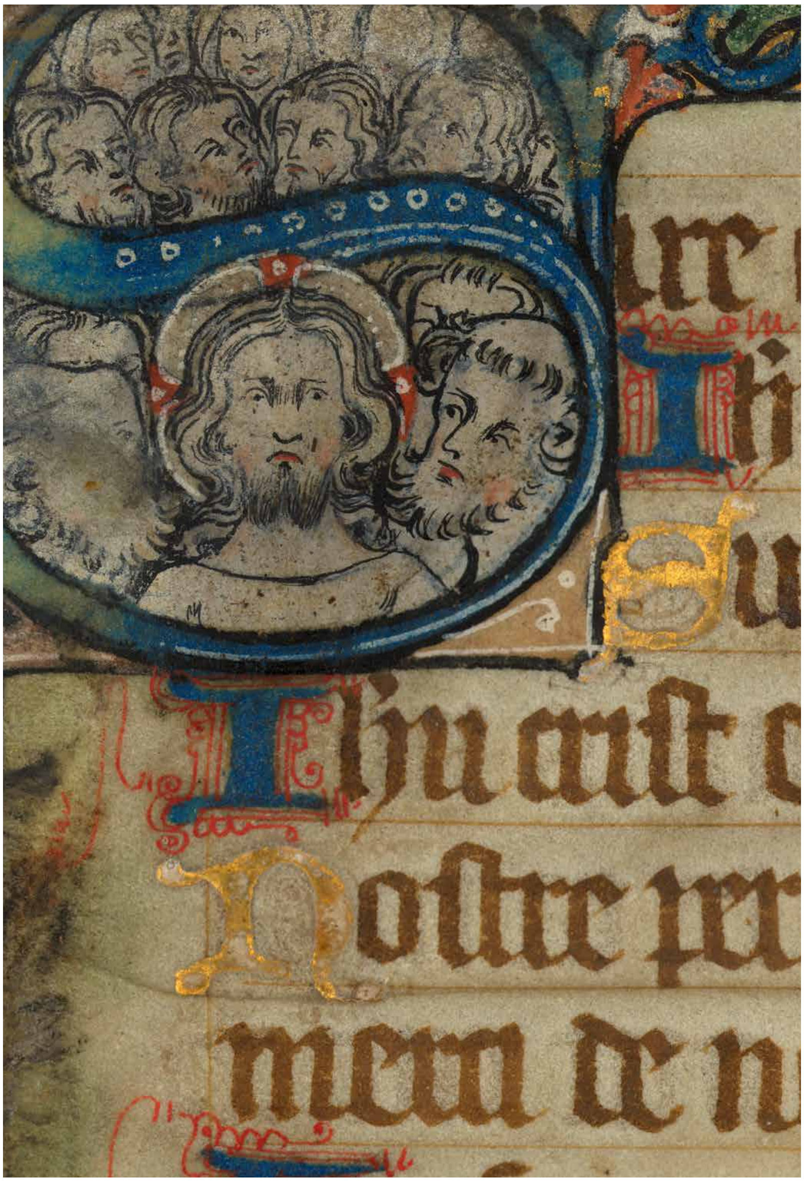
Published
F.G. Zeileis, 'Più ridon le carte': Buchmalerei aus Mittelalter und Renaissance: Katalog einer Privatsammlung (Gallspach, 2002), no. 138 (col. ill.); (Rauris, 2007), no. 152 (col. ill.); (Rauris, 2009), no. 152 (col. ill.) ("Ostengland um 1330").

Framed within the sinuous curling form of an initial S, Christ looks straight out at the viewer, surrounded by a plethora of figures who direct their gaze towards him. He is picked out from the crowded gathering by a large, cruciform nimbus and by long locks of hair that cascade down to the level of his shoulders. He is cast with a worried, anxious expression, a downturned mouth highlighted in red pigment, and wide-open eyes.

Medieval manuscripts are filled with figures, animals, and hybrid creatures, often shown in uncompromising acts and in the most surprising places. English illuminators working in the 1330s, when this manuscript page was decorated, were keenly interested in the possibilities of grisaille (meaning grey, or monochromatic) imagery, paring back their palette to its most restrained and economical ingredients. Offsetting the vivid lapis lazuli blue of the initial S with the graphic qualities of the figurative imagery nestled amongst its forms allowed both elements to be perfectly legible side by side, an incredible feat at such a tiny scale - the illumination measures barely three centimetres in height and width.

This leaf belongs to the highly-celebrated and much studied Hungerford Hours, so named after the obits of Robert Lord Hungerford (d.1459) and his wife Margaret Botreaux (d.1478), added to the manuscript's calendar by its late fifteenth-century owner. It is a fine and impressive example of the desirable East Anglian school of illumination, and though the text of the manuscript is predominately written in Latin, this leaf includes parts of two, probably unique, Anglo-Norman texts.

Michael A. Michael identified the artist with that of a Psalter at Schloss Herdringen in Germany (Fürstenburgische Bibliothek, MS 8), to whom Lucy Sandler has also attributed the Beatus page of a Psalter at Oxford (All Souls College, MS 7) [1], and the Canon of the Mass in the Tiptoft Missal (New York, Morgan Library, MS M.107)[2] . Sandler remarks that the illuminator "drew faces

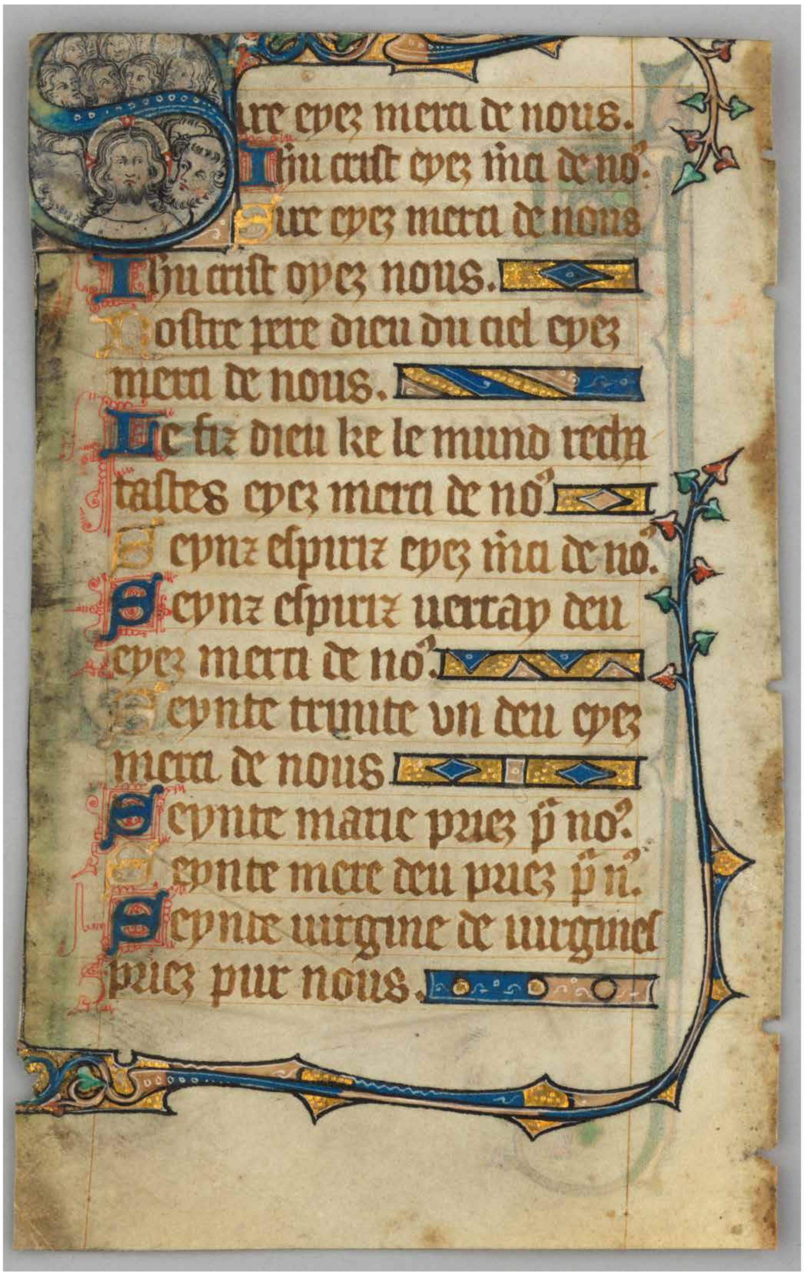


1, L. Sandler, Gothic Manuscripts, 1285–1385, London, 1986, no. 82 and fig. 209.

2, Sandler 1986, no. 78 and full-page colour fig. 199.

with square jaws, arching eyebrows, jutting noses and stubborn mouths"[3] , as seen on the present leaf. That he worked only on the two most important pages of the the Tiptoft Missal and All Souls Psalter clearly indicates his relative status among contemporary illuminators.

The dating of this manuscript can be supported by the dating of manuscripts attributed to the same hand. The Tiptoft Missal is datable 1311–1332, and includes clues that suggest it was intended for use in the diocese of Ely; one of its illuminators also contributed to the Stowe Breviary (London, BL, Stowe MS 12), which is datable 1322–1325 and has a calendar for use in the diocese or Norwich. The All Souls College Psalter is not precisely datable or localisable, but it does contain clues that point to intended use in the diocese of Norfolk or Ely: feasts of Sts Wilfred, Etheldreda, and Winwaloe. Thus all three manuscripts point to a date in the 1320s–30s and a localisation in East Anglia. The East Anglian origin is further corroborated by other leaves from the Hungerford Hours: the calendar includes an exceptionally unusual feast of St Guthlac, of Crowland Abbey, and the litany of saints includes "Seynte Audree" (i.e. St Etheldreda, of Ely).



Literature

J. Backhouse,'An English Calendar circa 1330.' in Fine Books and Book Collecting: Books and Manuscripts Acquired from Alan G. Thomas and Described by His Customers on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday, ed. by C. de Hamel and R. Linenthal (Leamington Spa, 1981), pp. 8–10 (ill. of fol. 1v).

M.A. Michael, 'Destruction, Reconstruction and Invention: The Hungerford Hours and English Manuscript Illumination of the Early Fourteenth Century.' English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700, 2 (1990), pp. 33–108, passim and pls. 1–5.

C. de Hamel and S. Cooper. 'The Hungerford Hours', in Tributes to Adelaide Bennett Hagens: Manuscripts, Iconography, and the Late Medieval Viewer, ed. by J. K. Golden (Turnhout, 2017), pp. 355–69, at pp. 355–58 and Fig. (col. ill.).

L. Sandler, Gothic Manuscripts, 1285–1385, London, 1986, no. 81 and figs. 208, 212–215

3, Sandler 1986, p. 85.

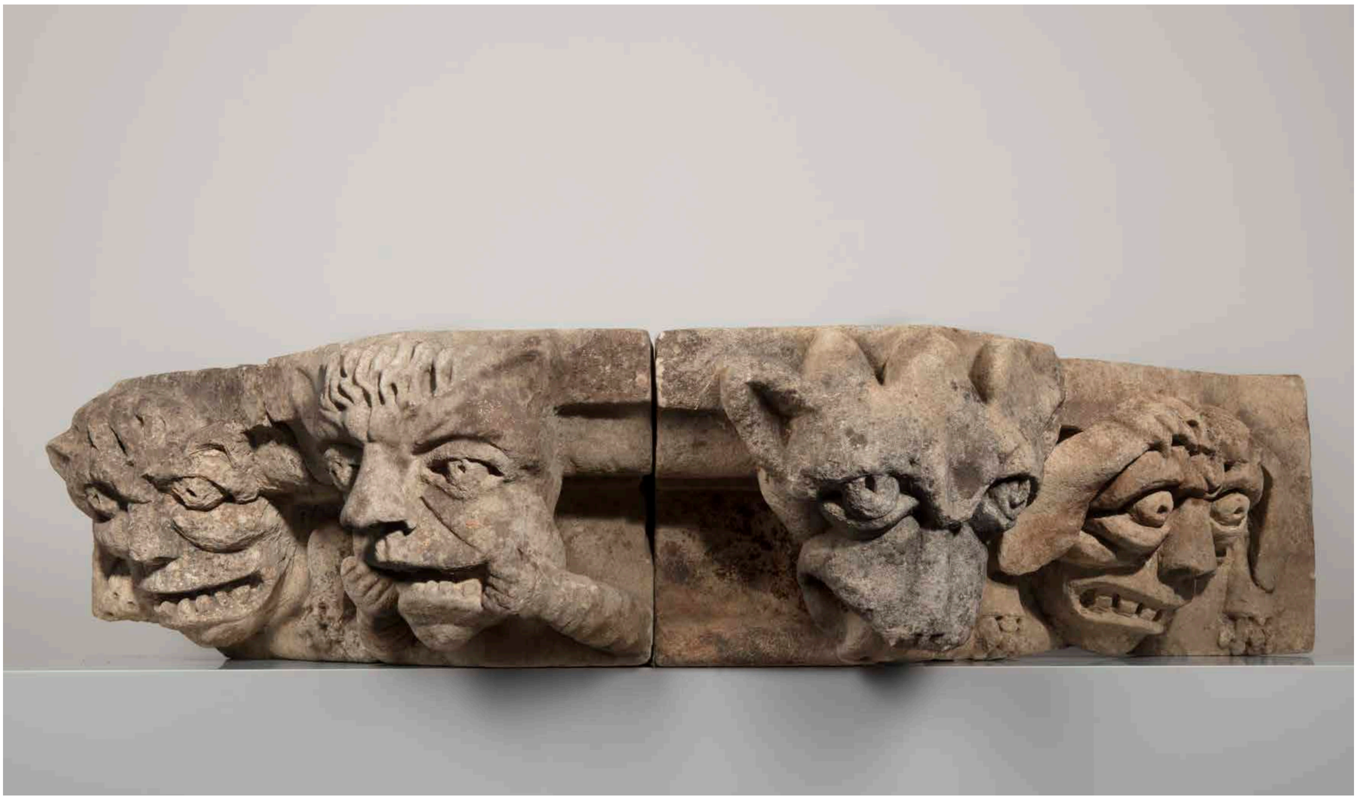
13

Four monstrous corbel heads

England, Oxfordshire
Late 14th - Early 15th century

Provenance
Richard Wiseman Collection;
Private Collection, London

Mouth puller: 27 x 38 cm. Canine head with floppy ears: 28 x 40 cm. Feline head with short ears: 27 x 33 cm. Canine head with tongue extended: 27 x 39 cm. Creamy-grey limestone with weathering and some small chip losses to the surfaces, otherwise in excellent, crisply preserved condition.



A group of four grimacing monstrous heads, positioned along a moulded corbel table. Representing hybrid creatures, the corbels possess characteristics of hounds, cats, serpents and humans. All apart from one display their pronounced teeth, which are seperated by large gaps, and they are all carved with distinctively large bulging eyes. One of the corbel heads is shown pulling its mouth into a contorted grimace, while another sticks its tongue out. Two of the corbels have small hands, which are carved separate from the heads, emerging out of the moulding as if the rest of the creature is stuck behind the walls of the church. From the shape of the corbels and their size, it can be discerned that these heads would have once formed part of a corbel table decorating the exterior of a church. Their location on an angled moulding suggests that the corbels once decorated a tower – perhaps one that was hexagonal or octagonal in shape.

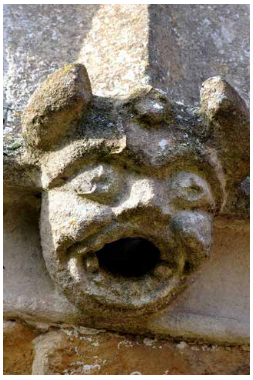
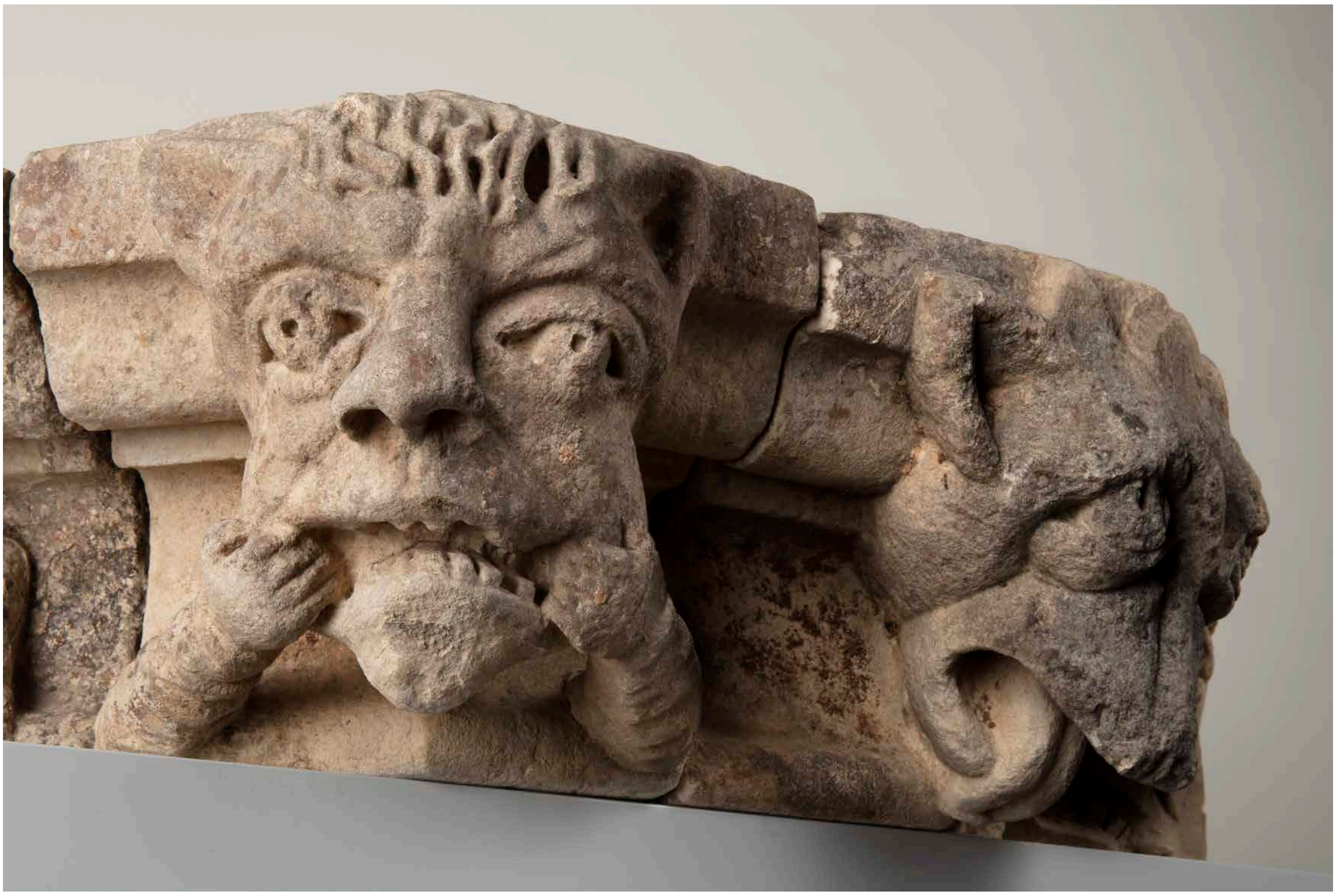


Fig. 1
Gargoyles at the church of Saint-Peter-ad-Vincula, South Newington, Oxfordshire
Late 14th/ early 15th century



The style of the heads clearly places them within a repertoire of late medieval English gargoyles and corbel heads, especially those in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. particularly analogous examples can be found at the Oxfordshire churches of Saint-Peter-ad-Vincula in South Newington and Saint Mary in Adderbury, as well as at Winchcombe in Gloucestershire (figs. 1-3). Oxfordshire is especially well known for its abundance of late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century marginal sculpture, as discussed by John Goodall. In both counties, fantastical gargoyles decorate the roofline of the church. They have grinning expressions with large teeth and protruding, deeply carved eyeballs.

Such figures represent the kind of playful marginalia present on the edges of manuscripts or on the edges of buildings – lurking in the shadows and peering out of corners. These sculptures would have presented the viewer with a stark contrast to the serious and iconographically clear biblical scenes that were at the centre of the church. Michael Camille called these types of images a 'side-show' and

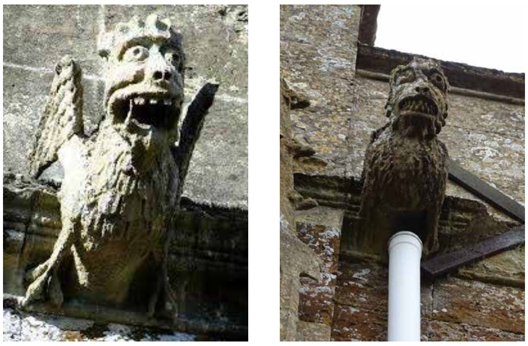
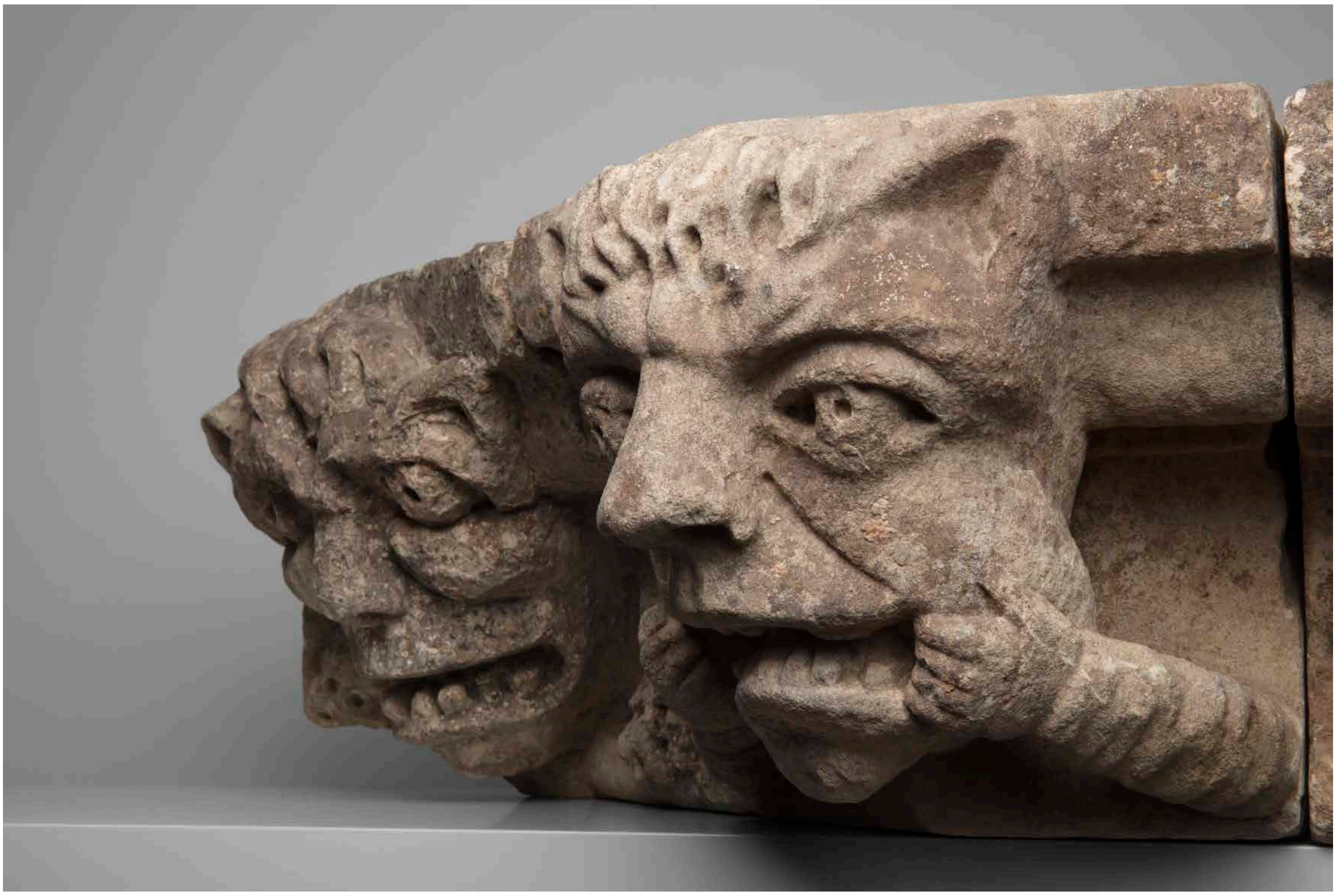


Fig. 2a-b
Gargoyles at Saint Mary's Church, Adderbury, Oxfordshire
Late 14th/ early 15th century



pointed out how these ‘disordered fragments of human personalities stuck onto the edges of the Heavenly Jerusalem, disrupted our notion of the cathedral as a “Bible in stone”, since they refer to no biblical personage or text.’ The meaning of figures like ours and their inclusion in great numbers on medieval churches is likely to have been at least in part intended to ward off evil, yet their appearance would have also been highly charged with playfulness and humour. Studies of medieval gargoyles discuss the iconography of sneering and mouth-pulling at length, noting that their meaning could be anything from apotropaic to sexual innuendo. Examples of mouth-pullers can be found on corbels, on bosses, and even decorating columns throughout England and France.

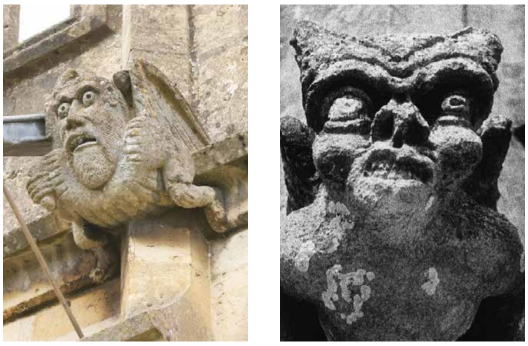


Fig. 3
Gargoyles at Saint Peter’s
Church, Winchcombe,
Gloucestershire
15th century

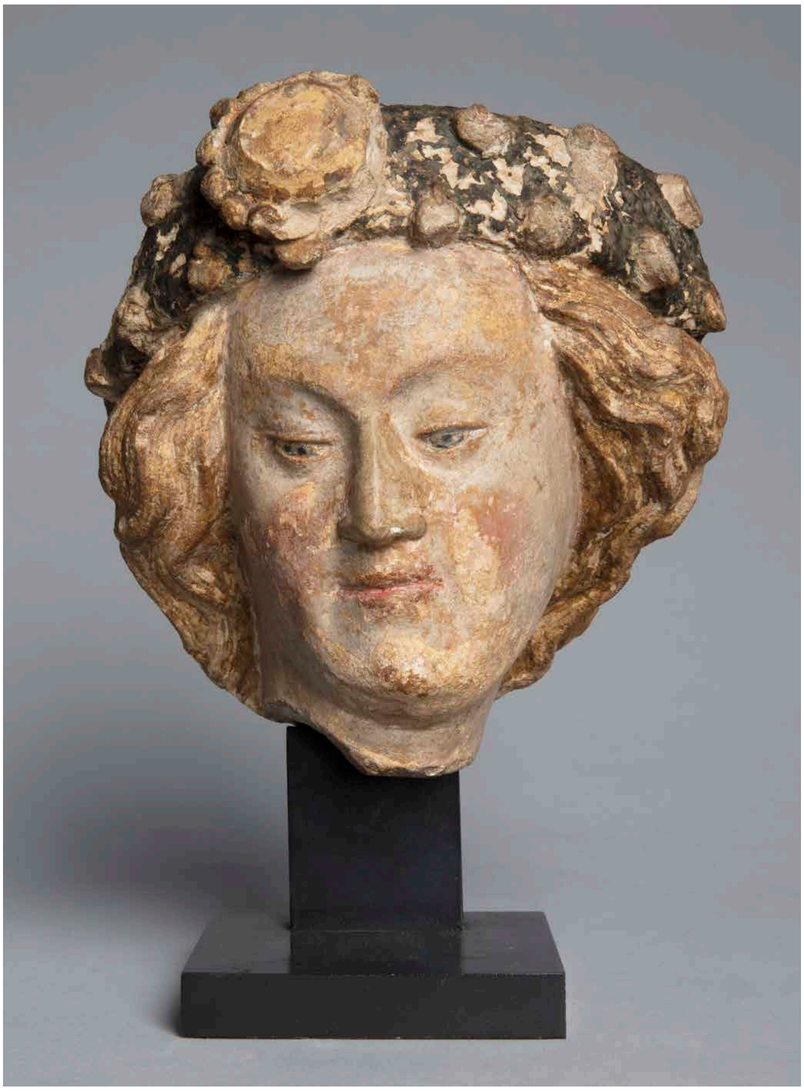
14

The head of a youth with a jewelled diadem, possibly Saint Michael

Central France, Burgundy?
c. 1420-40

17 x 16.5 x 15 cm; Limestone with large vestiges of the original polychromy, traces of several later paint schemes. The nose restored.

Provenance
Collection of Yvette and Jacques Deschamps, Angers, by c. 1980; their inv. no. 55.



An elegant, youthful figure looks down to our left with an almost haughty expression, their eyes carved in narrow, elongated almond shapes and their lips slightly pursed. Long locks of blonde hair picked out with shimmering gold leaf billow around the sides of the face and come together at the back of the neck to frame the head. Seated high on the forehead and resting above the figure's hair is a wide diadem studded with carefully rendered cabochons held in place by clasped settings, with a larger central metalwork setting at the front, its circumference ringed with pearls.

The fashion for large headbands and decorative adornments, coupled with billowing hairstyles with pronounced, ridge-like locks that solidly frame the sides of the face, gained popularity in central France thanks to the work undertaken by Claus Sluter and his nephew Claus de Werve for the dukes of Burgundy at Dijon. De Werve and his circle used exactly these features to impart a robust, firmly-set character to his figures, as can be seen on surviving examples at sites including Poligny, Brémur-et-Vaurois, and Baume-les-Messieurs, which have been associated with that artist's activities during the 1420s (fig. 1)[1]. A number of our head's other stylistic features, including its billowing hair and narrow almond-shaped eyes, confirm de Werve's influence and suggest a date in the third or fourth decade of the fifteenth century.

The regal status of our figure (emphasised by its ornate diadem), its youthful, androgynous visage, slightly aloof or haughty expression, and the downward direction of its gaze, all combine to suggest that it originally formed part of a full-length sculpted group of Saint Michael vanquishing the devil, since the angel saint is routinely represented with combinations of these attributes in French sculpture of the early fifteenth century.

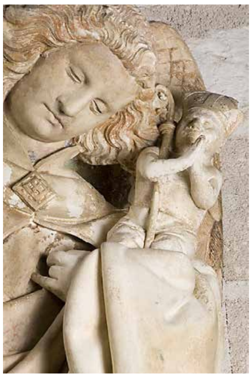
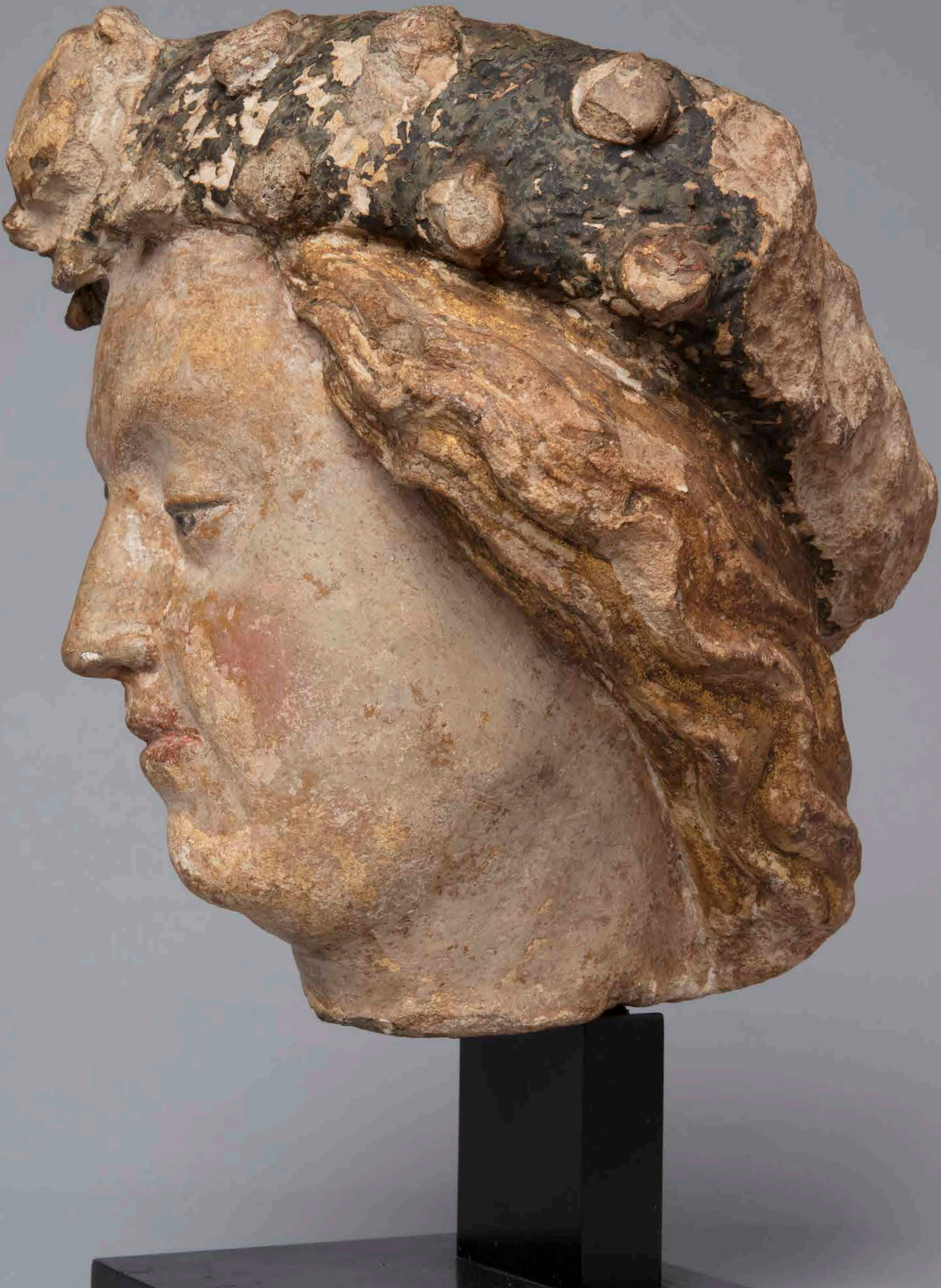


Fig. 1
Claus de Werve
Saint Michael
Burgundy, Dijon
c. 1415-31
Limestone with traces of polychromy
Baume-les-Messieurs, abbey church

1, Sophie Jugie et. al., Art from the Court of Burgundy: The Patronage of Philip the Bold and John the Fearless 1364-1419, Exh. Cat., Dijon and Cleveland, 2004, pp. 248-9, 273, 281.



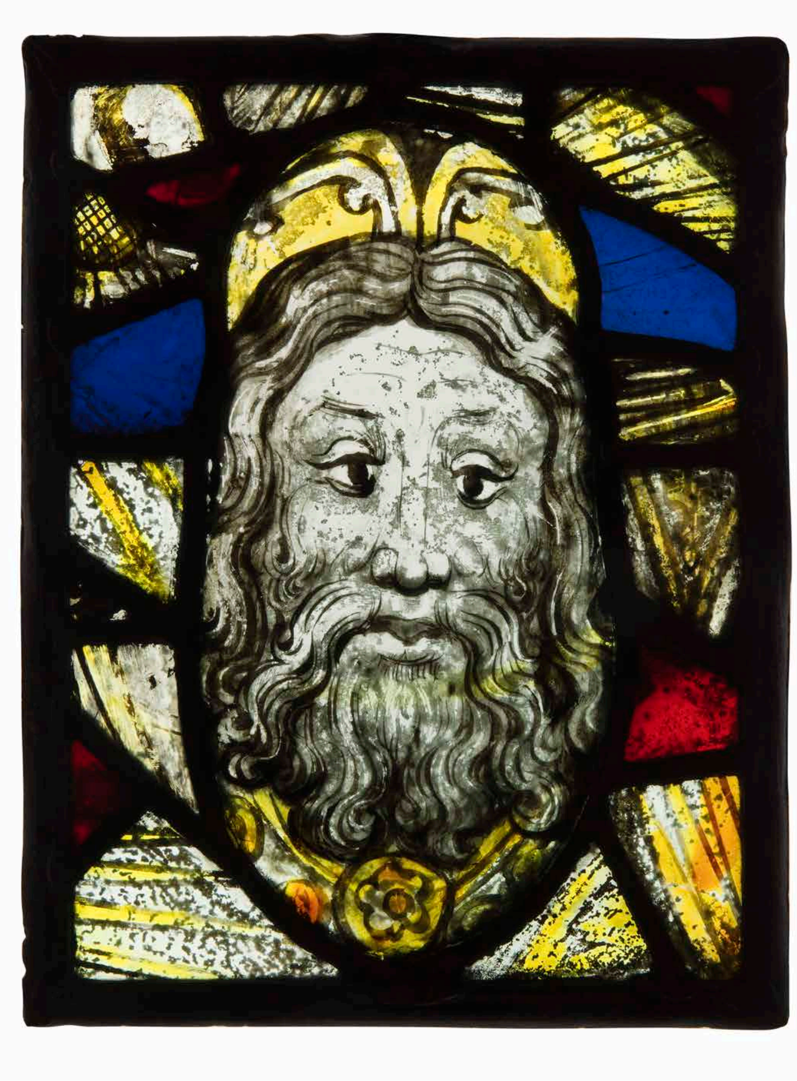
15

The head of God the Father surrounded by decorated quarries

England, York
c. 1400-25

Provenance
Private collection,7th Arrondisement Paris,
for several generations

22 x 16.5 cm; the head alone measures 20 x 10.2 cm; Clear, blue and red glass with silver stain and vitreous enamel. Some pitting and corrosion to the reverse face of the glass commensurate with age and historic exposure to weathering.



God the Father, shown with neck-length hair and a large flowing moustache and beard, looks straight out at us from a composite background of coloured and decorated glass fragments most likely taken from the same destroyed window. visible around his neck is the ornately decorated hemline of a cope or other liturgical garment, held closed by a central morse or clasp. The large size of the head indicates that it was removed from an important church window, perhaps as part of a restoration campaign, but it is miraculous that it has survived in such well-preserved, intact condition with beautifully legible draughtsmanship.

The stylistic treatment of the figure's face is extremely close to a number of heads which survive in situ at York Minster, painted in the second quarter of the fifteenth century (figs. 1-2). he is likely to have comprised part of a representation of the Holy Trinity, a popular late-medieval iconographic theme that united God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in a single image. God the Father is typically shown seated, occasionally as was common for English representations and is a defining feature of our example, with a cruciform nimbus framing his head. Positioned before his body would have been a depiction of Christ on the Cross, its horizontal arms supported by his left hand, and his right raised in the sign of the Benediction (as can be seen on the two York examples illustrated here). The Holy Spirit is normally shown in the form of a dove, positioned either between the two figures, or (less commonly) above God's head.

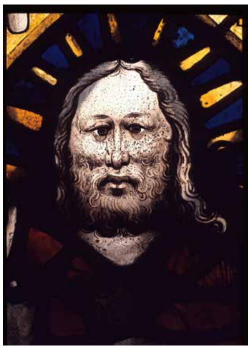


Fig. 1
God the Father
1405-8
York Minster, East Window

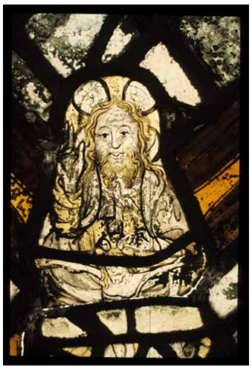


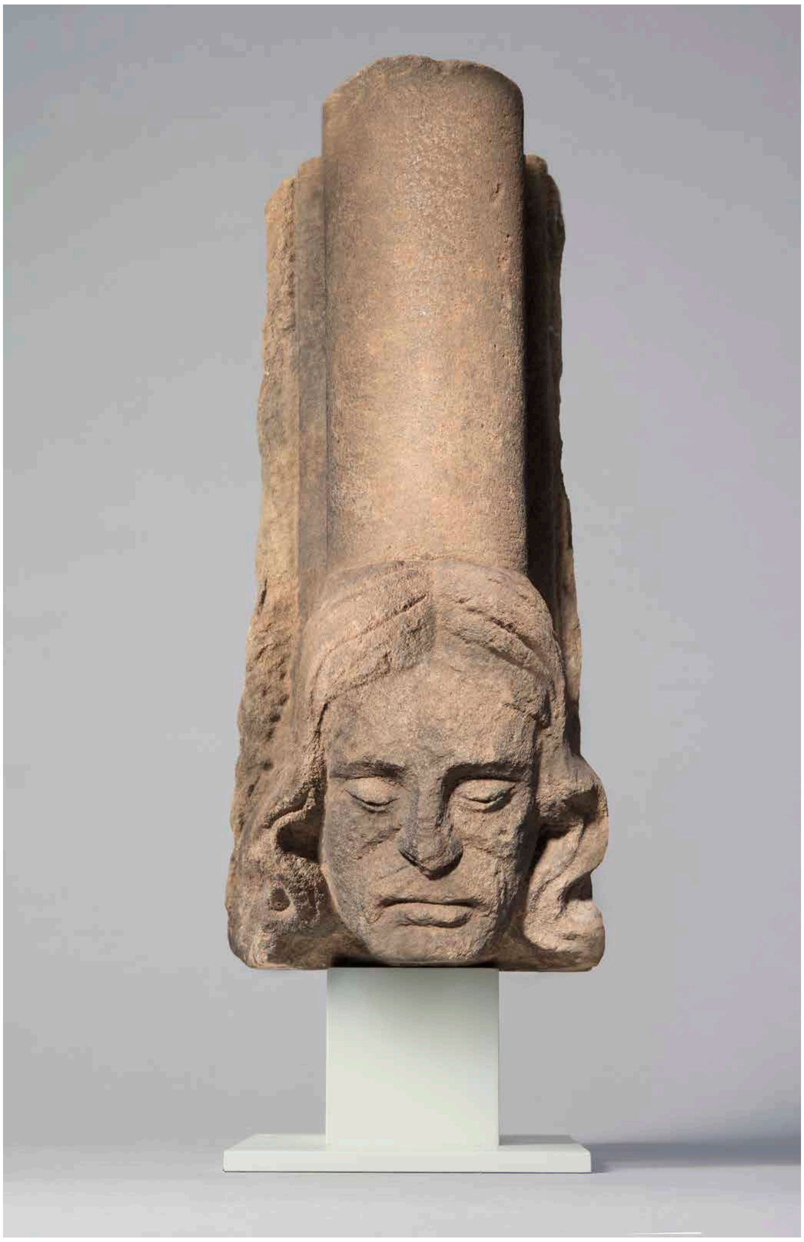
Fig. 2
God the Father
First quarter 15th century
York Minster, nave clerestory
windows

16

A shaft support with the head of a man

England
Mid-14th century

27.5 x 22 x 49.0 cm; limestone, general surface wear and some minor losses to the tip of the nose and the chin.



An elegantly styled limestone corbel head of a man with long hair supporting a shaft. The face is carved with closed eyes, thick lips and a prominent chin. He has a full head of hair that is parted down the middle, falling in elegant waves and covering his ears. Although he is cleanly shaven, his square chin and his deep nasolabial folds suggest his gender and age. Since the head is lacking in attributes, it is not possible to identify it further. Carved integral to the shaft that it supports, this head was created to be both decorative and structural as it once probably supported a roofline. Although it is difficult to discern where in the church this corbel may have been, its size suggests a location in a smaller space, such as a chapel or a cloister walk.

Stylistically, the corbel's elegant facial features can be compared to other Gothic corbel heads in England, especially those that have been directly influenced by French Gothic sculpture. An early example of a distinctive focus on naturalism, imbedded in the ideals of Gothic sculpture, are the heads in the Southwell Minster Chapter House, where the sculptors were clearly drawing inspiration from real people and real expressions (fig. 1). Here, the almond shaped eyes are given more volume through the heavy eyelids, while the varying expressions show an interest in the natural world. The moulding profile of the shaft above our corbel head is also indicative of an earlier date. This moulding could be compared to the corbel heads from Sherston, which support analogous shaft mouldings composed of a simple thick roll (fig. 2). Their elegant facial features bear some resemblance to our head but the degree of naturalism in our corbel, including the heavy eyelids, longer hairstyle and thick lips, suggest that our corbel should be dated several decades later.

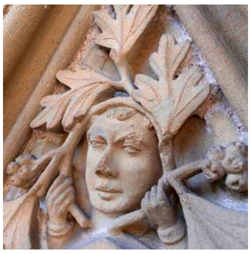
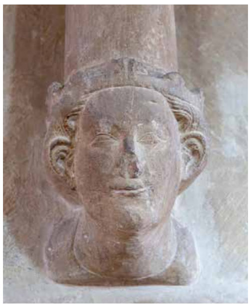
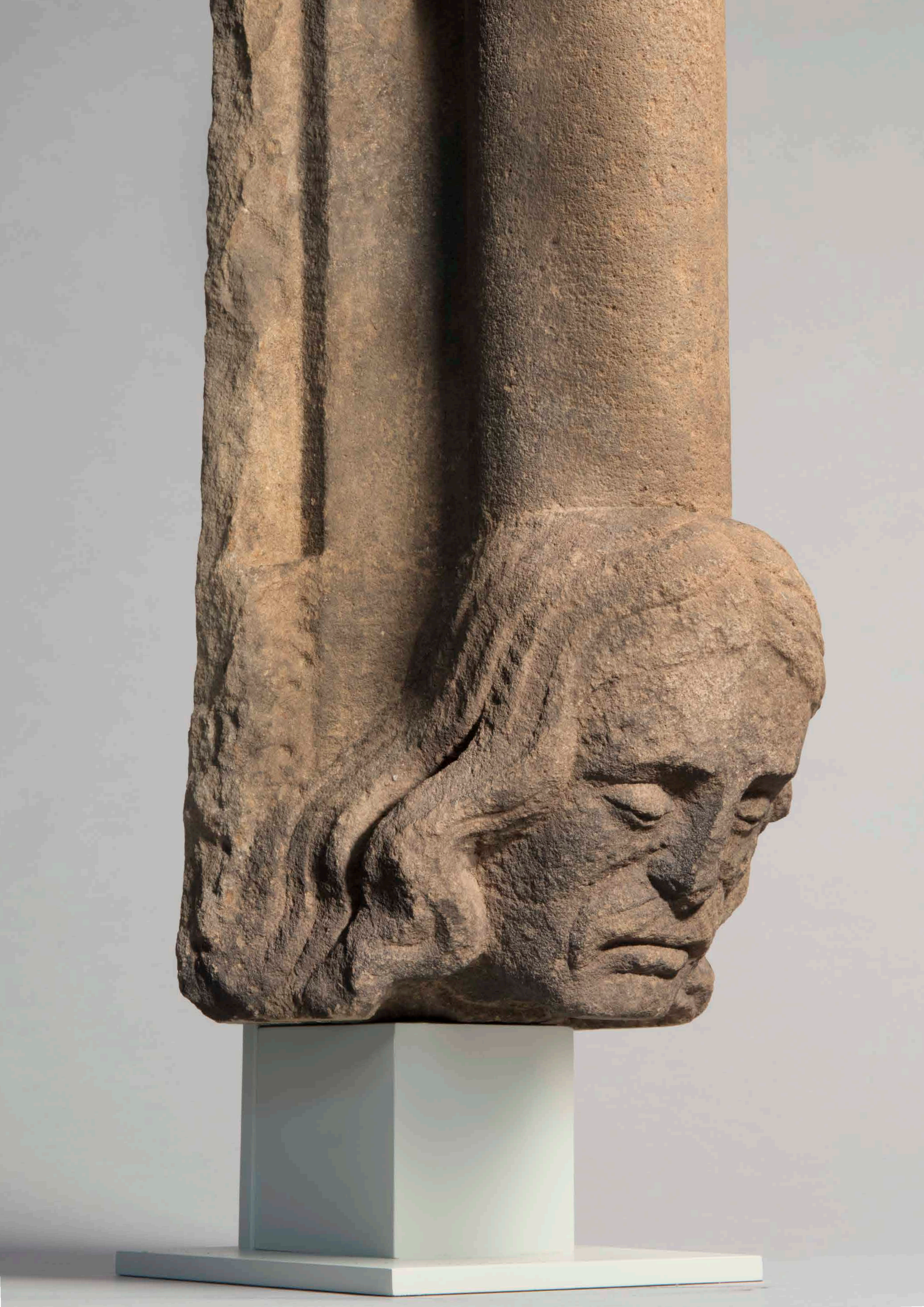


Fig. 1
God the Father
1405-8
York Minster, East Window

Fig. 2
Corbel Head
Church of the Holy Cross,
Sherston, Wiltshire, England
Mid-13th century





The square shape of the face of the corbel and its long hair find parallels particularly with sculpture from the middle of the 14th century, such as the effigy of William of Hatfield, and even with sculpture from the 1370s, such as the effigy of Edward III from Westminster Abbey (fig. 3 - 4). Much like our corbel, both of these examples still possess the elegance and style of late 13th century sculpture, yet they display an interest in naturalism, which is expressed by the flowing hair, the wrinkles and the sunken cheeks. The 14th century has long been discussed as a time defined by the birth of portraiture and our sculpture displays the sculptor's interest in portraying a face modelled from life. The corbel also indicates the way that these early experiments occurred on the margins of buildings, where the sculptors may have had more freedom to experiment with life-like facial features as well as with a variety of facial expressions.

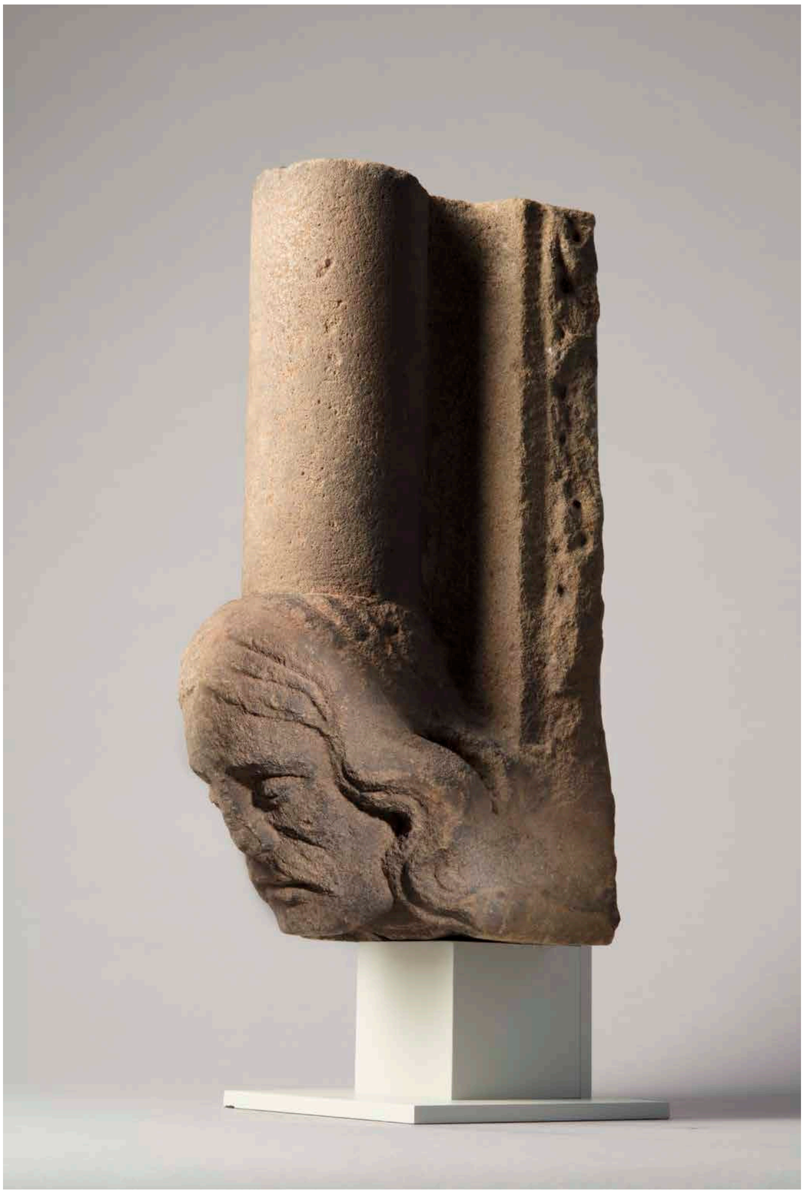


Fig. 4
Effigy of Edward III
1377
England, Westminster
Abbey

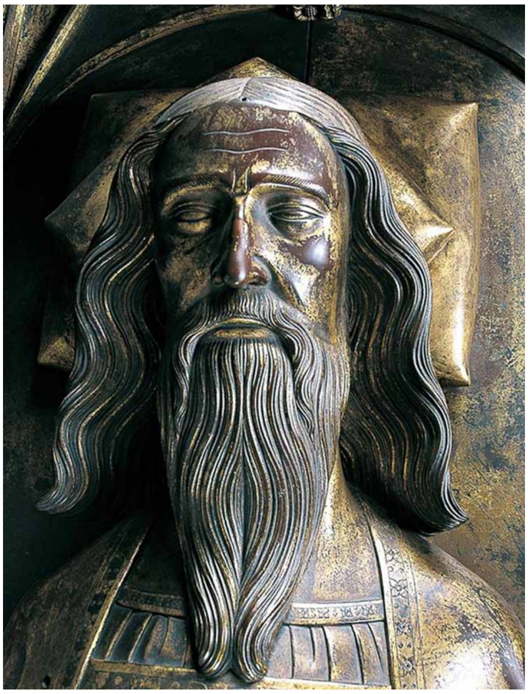
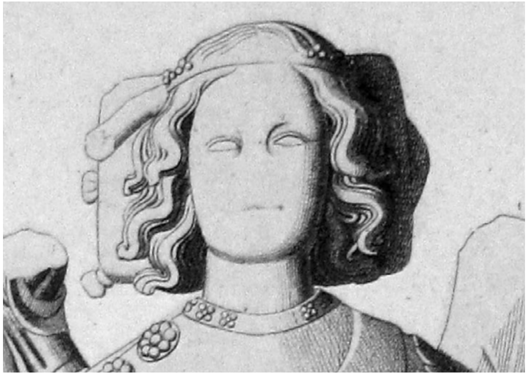


Fig. 3
Effigy of William of Hatfield
c. 1340
York Minster



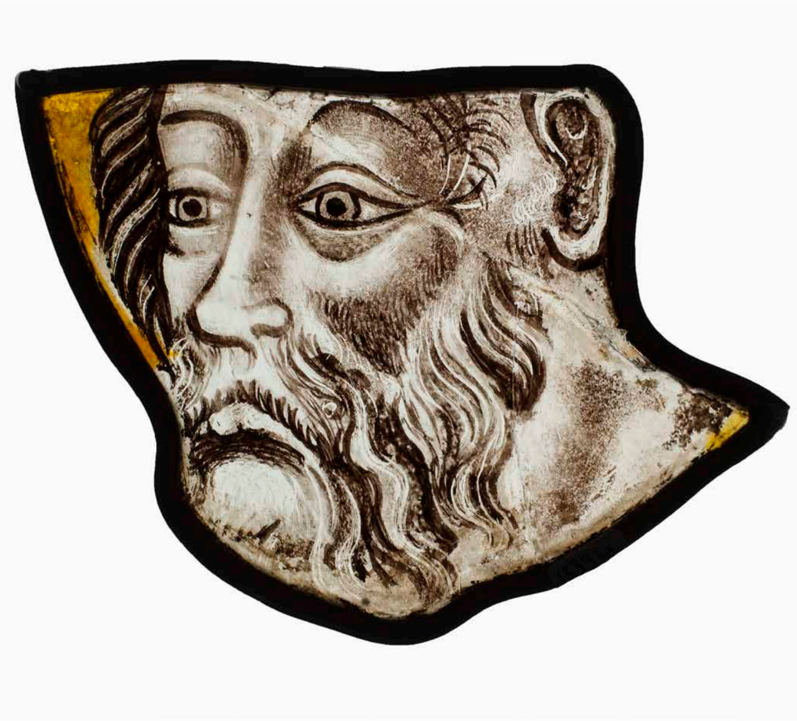
17

The head of a bearded saint

Western France, perhaps Le Mans or its environs
c. 1430s

11.7 x 16.3 cm; Clear glass with sliver stain and vitreous enamel. Some surface wear and a repaired break.

Provenance
Michel Acezat (d. 1943);
Dispersed at the sale of his studio, Galerie de Chartres, 8th March 2009, lot 7



A bearded man of some age looks to our left, with elongated almond-shaped eyes, a thin nasal ridge, and a steeply downturned mouth whose upper lip is covered by a bushy moustache. The fine band of gold limning the left-most section of this intense face suggests that he was originally conceived as a saint, most likely an apostle, with a halo picked out using the alchemical process of silver staining, whereby a silver nitrate solution is painted onto the reverse face of the glass when cold, and then placed in the kiln to fire. The action of the kiln's high temperatures upon the mixture indelibly fuses it to the glass and simultaneously turns it a deep burnished yellow, which gets darker with longer exposure to the heat.

The almost gritty visual texture of the painted decoration on this head, and the heightened use of contrast in the shading of his cheek, nose, and temples, bear close comparison to a group of saints, prophets and Old Testament figures which comprise two windows executed in the mid-1430s at the Cathedral of Le Mans, a city situated on the River Sarthe to the West of Paris (figs. 1-2).

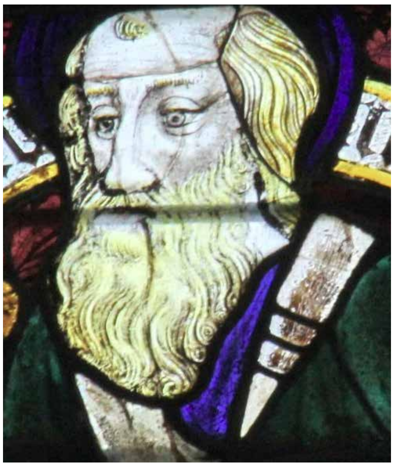


Fig. 1
Saint Andrew
c. 1435
Le Mans Cathedral

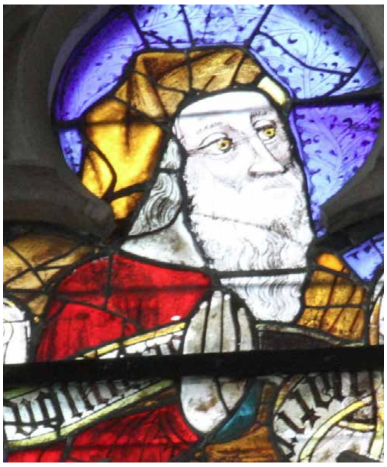


Fig. 2
Noah
c. 1435
Le Mans Cathedral

18

Master of the Bamberg Altarpiece

The Meeting of Anna and Joachim at the Golden Gate

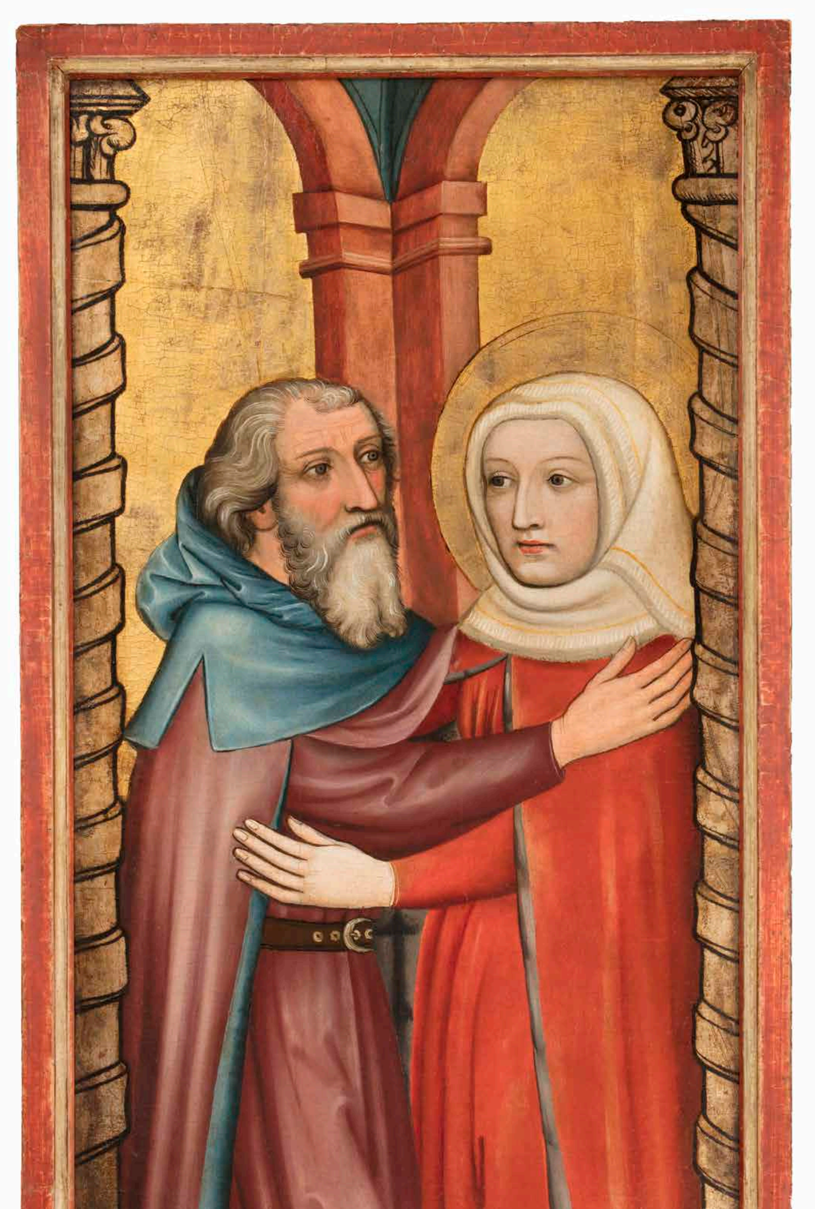
Germany, Nuremberg
c. 1435

Provenance
Munich, collection of Prof. Dr. Johannes Sepp, c. 1900; H. Becker collection, Dortmund; Sotheby's, New York, 1990; collection of Richard F. Sterba

106.8 x 58.1 cm; oil on unidentified softwood panel.

Published and Exhibited
Susie Nash, Late Medieval Panel Paintings: Materials, Methods, Meanings, 2011 pp. 12-21. Exhibition at Richard L. Feigen & Co, New York, 4 November 2011 - 27 January 2012.

Joachim wears a blue hood over a dark purple-red cloak lined with blue, which covers a belted robe of the same colour. He embraces Anna, who wears a red cloak lined with grey fur (the pattern of which is visible under her left arm) over a dress of the same colour red, and a white headdress that completely covers her hair and neck. The headdress is made from one piece of cloth with a crimped edge and with gold piping that has been wrapped twice around her head, forming a wimple under her chin and creating a double row of crimping around her face. Only Anna is haloed. The meeting, which took place at the Golden Gate, is shown here without particular reference to that setting, since there is no gate visible, but instead the scene is set between two twisted gold columns in a vaulted space indicated by arches that spring from the flat piers of the columns behind. That the columns do not represent the gate of the story is indicated by their inclusion in two other panels related to this work, discussed below; they are a compositional device, not an iconographic feature. These columns bracket the figures, which are pushed right to the front of the picture plane and entirely fill its width; they are cut off at just below knee level.



Reconstruction, attribution and date
This panel is one of six fragments that are thought to have been part of the high altarpiece of the church of the Augustinian canons at Langenzenn, just outside Nuremberg. The fragments were first introduced to the scholarly literature by Carl Gebhardt in 1908, who associated two large panels of The Offering of Joachim and The Marriage of the Virgin in the former Augustinian convent in Langenzenn (figs. 5 and 6) with two panels then in a private collection in Munich (the present panel and fig. 8);[1] two other panels, one in Aachen (from a private collection in Erfurt; fig. 9), and another then in Schloss Egg

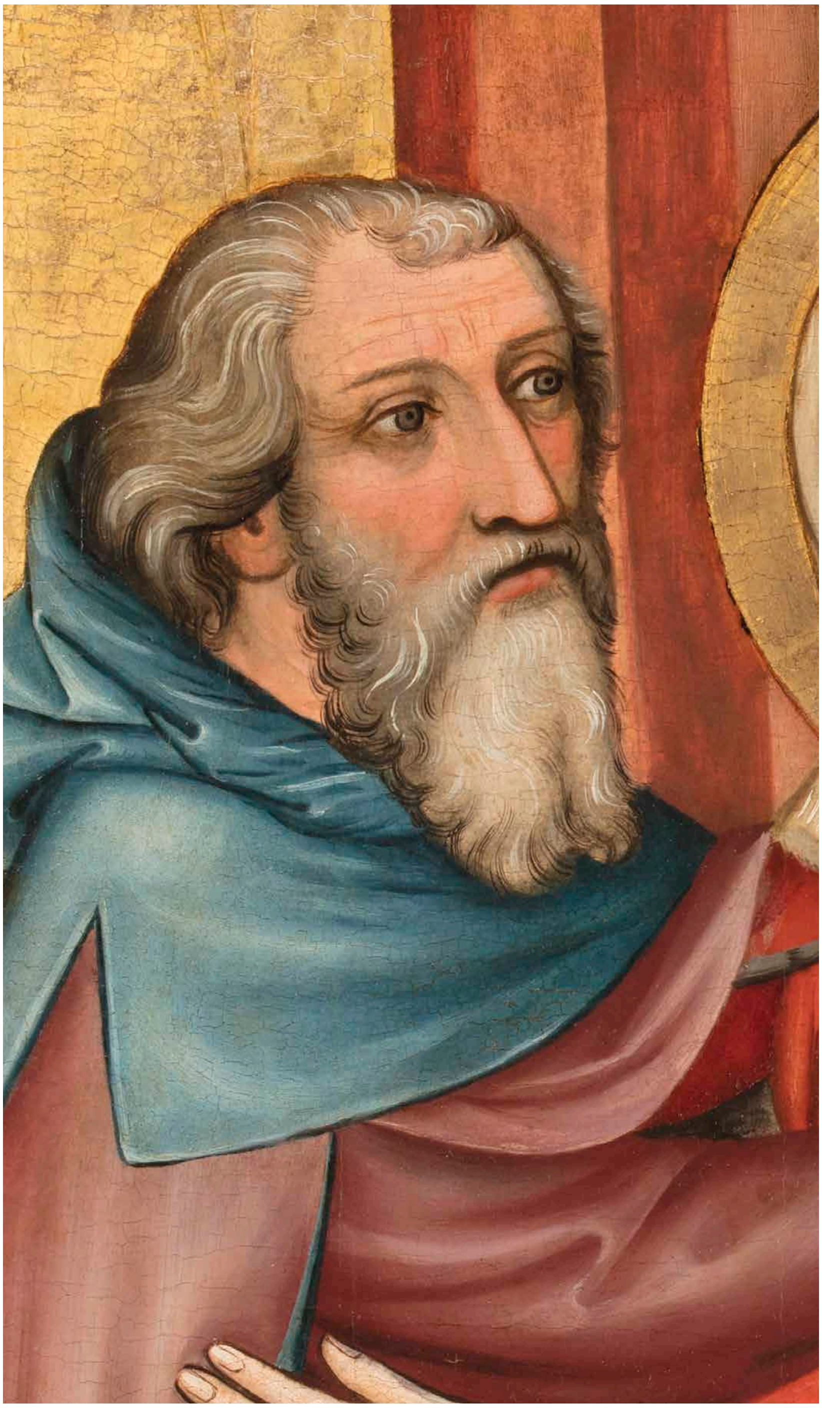
---

[1] Gebhardt 1908, pp. 62–63.

(later the Kisters collection), were added to the group by Zimmermann in 1931.[2]

Two of these fragments, The Virgin entering the Temple in the Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, and a Virgin, presumably from a Visitation, in the Suermondt-Ludwig- Museum in Aachen, are very close indeed to the present panel.[3] All three are of similar height (that in Aachen is much narrower and must have been cut down)[4], all three have twisted yellow-glazed silver-leaf columns defining the edges and confining the figures within them, all three are set in identical spaces, with a central pier from which springs a blue vault, set against a gold ground, and all three have figures that are shown at three-quarter length, presenting the scenes in a restrained manner without any extraneous detail at all, allowing a focus on the faces and hands to explicate the story. Although the figures are truncated this does not seem to have been a result of dismemberment, since the panels all have figures cut off at the same point, and their compositions, especially in the Virgin entering the Temple, do not seem to have a great deal missing from their lower edge.

In the present panel and the Stuttgart panel, the facial types and dress of the figures of Anna and Joachim are identical, with Anna wearing the same red fur-lined robe, the same distinctive headdress with yellow piping and crimped edges, her face modelled in exactly the same manner, with large brown eyes, individual lashes picked out on the top lid, the lines of the eyebrows smoothly drawn and extending down in a shadow that defines the near side of the nose and creates its bridge. The halos also have exactly the same series of incised radiating lines, and the paint handling, notably the strong lines used to outline hands and the impasto use of lead white, is identical. There would seem to be no doubt that these panels are painted by the same artist, or that they come from the same object. The two panels in Langenzenn which depict The Offering of Joachim and The Marriage of the Virgin have similar facial types to those in the Meeting and the Presentation, and must be by the same painter. They also share with the present panel a very similar style of underdrawing[5] but despite these very close relationships they are rather different in format and in overall approach to the narrative and its scope. They are much wider and taller (measuring 192 x 104 cm and 178–85 x 107 cm), and would originally have been taller still, the Offering of Joachim having been cut at the bottom edge (where at least the head of the lamb escaping from the altar has been lost), and



2, Zimmermann 1930–31, p. 33, pl. 132; Zimmermann, Fries and Lutze 1931, p. 31, no. 45(c).

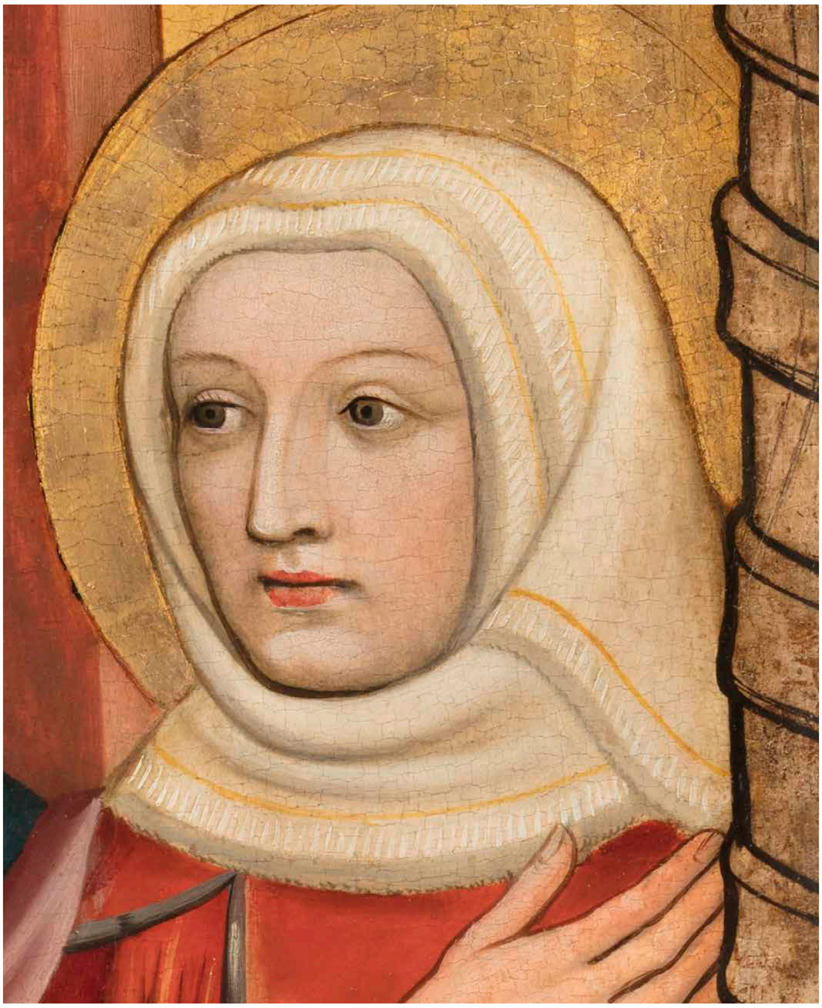
3 The Aachen panel was previously in Erfurt, in the collection of Clemens Lagemann: see E.G. Grimme, Führer durch das Suermondt-Museum Aachen: Skulpturen, Gemälde, Schatzkunst, Aachen, 1974, no. 145.

4 The Stuttgart panel measures 107 x 55 cm; the Aachen panel measures 106 x 42 cm (measurements not checked).

5 We are grateful to Bernd Konrad for taking the infrared reflectograms of the panels in Langenzenn and for his observations on their similarity to the underdrawing revealed in the present panel.

they clearly both originally showed figures at full length. The compositions are relatively crowded, the architectural settings much more complex and ambitious, the palette richer and more varied, with more decorative fabrics depicted, notably the use of what may be a shell gold for the brocade robes of the priest (dressed in exactly the same manner in both works) and the dress of the Virgin. These are panels that were painted for a more elaborate function, and to a different brief in terms of materials and level of finish and invention. The final panel, in the Kisters collection, while again by the same artist, would seem to have nothing to do either with the object to which the first group belongs or probably with the object to which the second group belongs, given its dimensions and format, and it should probably be removed from any discussion of the original appearance of the retable[6].

The present panel and its related fragments can convincingly be attributed to the Master of the Bamberg Altarpiece, one of the most important painters active in Nuremberg in the second quarter of the fifteenth century in the generation before Hans Pleydenwurff[7]. The painter was named after the large retable made for the Franciscan church in Bamberg (now Bayerische Nationalmuseum, Munich), dated 1429, which is characterized by its simplicity of composition, its softly modelled figures with large faces, dark eyes and pointed noses, set against plain gilded backgrounds rather than elaborate punching or press brocade[8]. Associated with this are a group of other works of similar date made for Nuremberg patrons (such as the epitaph for Walburg Prünsteler from the Dominican church there, dated 1434), which indicate the workshop was active in that city in the 1420s and 1430s[9]. The present panel and its related pieces were first given to this Master by Gebhardt, followed by Stange, who saw the Master's hand in the heads but, because of the limited architecture and reduced number of figures, judged the panels rather harshly in comparison with the Master's other works[10]. The most recent scholarship on the panels, by Peter Strieder, gives them to the workshop of the Bamberg Master, but in fact they seem to be remarkably close to the main hand in this group[11]. The Bamberg altarpiece, especially its outer panels, shares many stylistic features with the present panel and its relatives, including the facial types (most notable perhaps are the two figures on the far right in the left wing), the way in which hands are drawn and deployed for narrative action, the handling of paint and colour, including the impasto use of lead white in the eyes and the headdress, and the



---

[6] It measures 140 x 115 cm. For this panel and a reproduction of its reverse see Strieder 1993, pp. 173–75, no. 13. The reverse shows the top of an Annunciation scene; there is no gold ground. This suggests the Presentation was the top section of a folding altarpiece, that had rectangular panels set in two rows on its wings. Without first-hand inspection of the Kisters panel it is not possible to assert whether it might conceivably have been part of the box retable construction posited below for the present panel.

[7] On the Master of the Bamberg Altarpiece see Stange 1934–61, IX, pp. 9–15; K. Löcher, 'Panel Painting in Nuremberg:1350–1550', in R. Kashnitz and William D. Wixom (eds.), Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg 1300–1550, exh. cat., New York, 1986, pp. 81–83 and 150–54, and most recently Strieder 1993, pp. 30–32.

[8] For this altarpiece see most recently R. Suckale, Die Erneuerung der Malkunst vor Dürer, 2 vols. (Petersberg, 2009), I, pp. 27–34.

[9] See the works cited in note 7 above.

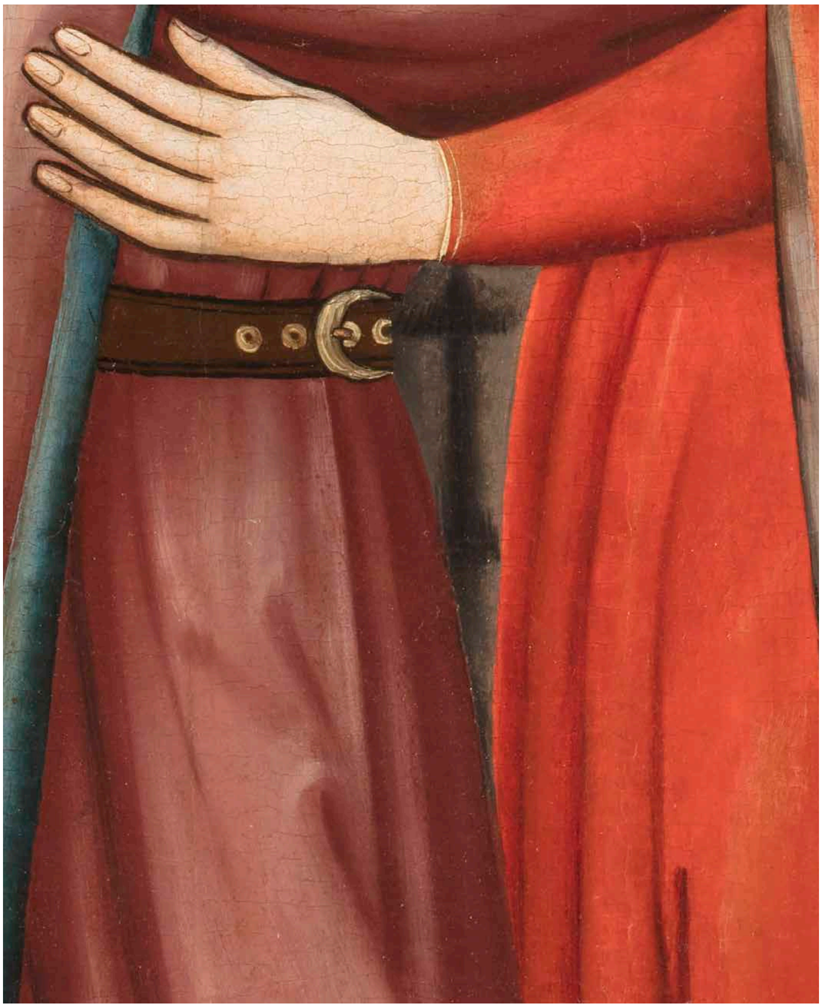
[10] Gebhardt 1908, pp. 62–63; Stange 1934–61, IX, p. 15: "Die Hand des Meisters ist in einigen Marienköpfen zu erkennen, zumeist aber hat ein Gehilfe sein Wollen in eine etwas monotone und leere, mitunter auch etwas derbe Form umgesetzt".

[11] Strieder 1993, pp. 173–75.

simplicity of architectural setting, with extraneous detail suppressed. [12]

In the literature the present panel and the five fragments mentioned above are consistently stated to have come from the same retable, purported to be the high altar of the Augustinian church in Langenzenn. While there is no doubt they are related stylistically to one another and, indeed, would seem to be by the same painter or workshop, the assumption that they are all part of the same altarpiece needs to be reassessed. Firstly, there is no evidence that the panels share a common provenance: while the two in Langenzenn are likely to have come from an altarpiece for that church, the other four panels, when first described in the literature, were scattered among private collections in Munich, Erfurt and Switzerland; their link to the two Langenzenn panels, first made by Gerbreht, who considered them undoubtedly by the same artist and from the same object and whose opinion has not been questioned since, was made on the basis of stylistic similarity and their iconography alone[13]. Secondly, the panels can be divided into three distinct groups in terms of format, narrative and visual complexity, as outlined above, and while the cast of characters and the way they are depicted show some similarities between the groups, they are not identical: Anna wears a similar robe in the Marriage of the Virgin and in the Meeting, but in the latter her underdress is a pinkish lake, not red, and her headdress lacks the distinctive yellow piping and crimped edges of the former, while the Virgin in the Marriage is dressed differently to the Virgin in the Visitation, and the Virgin in the Presentation in the Temple is dressed differently again to either of these, differences that are not wholly explicable by the nature of the subject and which may have been regarded as odd in panels to be seen and read together.

Moreover, when an attempt is made to reconstruct these panels into any type of single altarpiece the problems of how they could have related visually and in terms of narrative chronology become manifest. As shown above, the panels follow two very different formats, but these two formats do not divide neatly into two different parts of the sacred narrative. If the larger, more complex scenes in Langenzenn were part of one storyline (i.e. of Anna and Joachim or of the Virgin's girlhood) and the smaller, simpler scenes with reduced figures and limited architecture were part of a different narrative thread (i.e. of the Virgin's life after Christ's conception), then the differences in their modes of representation might be explicable as relating to two distinct visual fields, one on the exterior and



---

[12] In Staatsgalerie Stuttgart 1957 (pp. 146–47), the panels were unaccountably given to a separate 'Master of Langenzenn'; this was followed on the sale of the present panel at Sotheby's in 1990: Sotheby's 1990, lot 77; Strieder (1993, pp. 30–32) rejected this separation and brought them back to the workshop of the Bamberg Master.

[13] Gebhardt 1908, pp. 62–63; Habel (2004, p. 89) discusses the altarpiece very briefly, without adding any evidence concerning its original form or date or reasons for assuming these panels made up the high altarpiece of the church.

one on the inner wings (although the presence of gold backgrounds in both would still need to be explained, since this would indicate that both were part of the inner, opened view). However the narrative would seem to demand that the Sacrifice of Joachim (crowded and ambitious, no curved columns) and the Meeting at the Golden Gate (three-quarter figures, limited cast of characters, reduced architecture framed by curved columns), scenes that are contiguous, should be set side by side or in close proximity to one another, which would make for a strange conjunction between the different modes of representation.

Given the nature of the surviving fragments, and the uncertainty over their ultimate provenance, it is untenable at the present time to assert that all these works came from the same object. A careful examination of the material evidence of the other panels or further information on their provenance might help resolve their actual relationship, if any. However, by disassociating the Meeting at the Golden Gate and its related panels in Stuttgart and Aachen from the panels in Langenzenn, what we are left with is a more interesting, and potentially more solvable, puzzle concerning their original format and function. The relatively tall narrow shape, the unusual constraining of the figures within the twisted columns, the limited, repeated architectural setting, and the three quarter length format need explanation, as they are not what one would expect from the interior wings of a standard painted altarpiece. If one considers them as forming the inner parts of a box-shrine, or Baldachinaltar, which closed around a central, three-dimensional image of a Virgin and Child or an Anna Selbdritt (the most likely candidates given the panels' iconography), these features are more explicable. An example of such an object, close in date (about 1420) to the present work, is in the Landesmuseum, Darmstadt; another, in a more monumental, later version, is the St Roch retable in the Imhoff Chapel in St Lorenz, Nuremberg, of around 1470[14]. This type of object required panels of a tall narrow format; the unusual twisted columns in the paintings may have been designed to imitate and echo actual carved twisted columns that surrounded the central statue and supported its canopy (the like of which can be seen supporting the baldachin over the Nuremberg St Roch), while the vaulted structures in which each pair of figures are set might have been intended to echo the actual vaulted space of the baldachin that formed the roof space of the shrine. While this reconstruction remains hypothetical, the way forward in studying these panels should be to consider that they came from two, and indeed probably three, distinct objects – which expands the range of the Bamberg Master's work and his commissions. The differences they display with his major altarpieces, which made Stange rather dismissive of them, should instead be considered in relation to the need to invent a compact narrative treatment for a particular compositional challenge; they are not in themselves a reason for dissociating these panels from that Master's hand.

Literature

C. Gebhardt, Die Anfange der Tafelmalerei in Nürnberg, Strasbourg, 1908, pp. 62–63; E.H. Zimmermann, 'Nürnberger Malerei 1350–1450. Die Tafelmalerei', in Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums, 1930–31, p. 33, pl. 132; E.H. Zimmermann, W. Fries and E. Lutze (eds.), Nürnberger Malerei 1350–1450. Ausstellung des Germanischen Nationalmuseums, Nuremberg, 1931, p. 31, no. 45(c); A. Stange, Deutsche Malerei der Gotik, 11 vols., Munich and Berlin, 1934–61,
IX, p. 15; R. Fritz (ed.), Meisterwerke alter Malerei, exh. cat., Schloß Cappenberg, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Dortmund, 1954, no. 9; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Katalog der Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart, 1957, pp. 146–47; R. Fritz (ed.), Sammlung Becker. I., Gemälde alter Meister, Dortmund, 1967, no. 9; A. Stange, Kritisches Verzeichnis der deutschen Tafelbilder vor Dürer, 3 vols., Munich, 1967–78, III, no. 34c; Important Old Master Paintings and Sculpture, sale cat., Sotheby's, New York, 5 April 1990, lot 77; P. Strieder, Tafelmalerei in Nürnberg 1350–1550, Königstein im Taunus, 1993, no. 13, pp. 173–75; S. Habel, Das Augustiner-Chorherrenstift in Langenzenn von 1409–1533, Horb am Neckar, 2004, p. 89

---

[14] For the Darmstadt Baldachinaltar see W. Beeh, Deutsche Malerei um 1260 bis 1550 im Hessischen Landesmuseum Darmstadt (Darmstadt, 1990), pp. 40ff.; for the St Roch altarpiece see H. Dormeier, 'St Rochus, die Pest und die Imhoffs in Nürnberg vor und während der Reformation: ein spätgotischer Altar in seinem religiös-liturgischen, wirtschaftlich-rechtlichen und sozialen Umfeld', Anzeiger der Germanischen Nationalmuseums (1985), pp. 7–72.

19

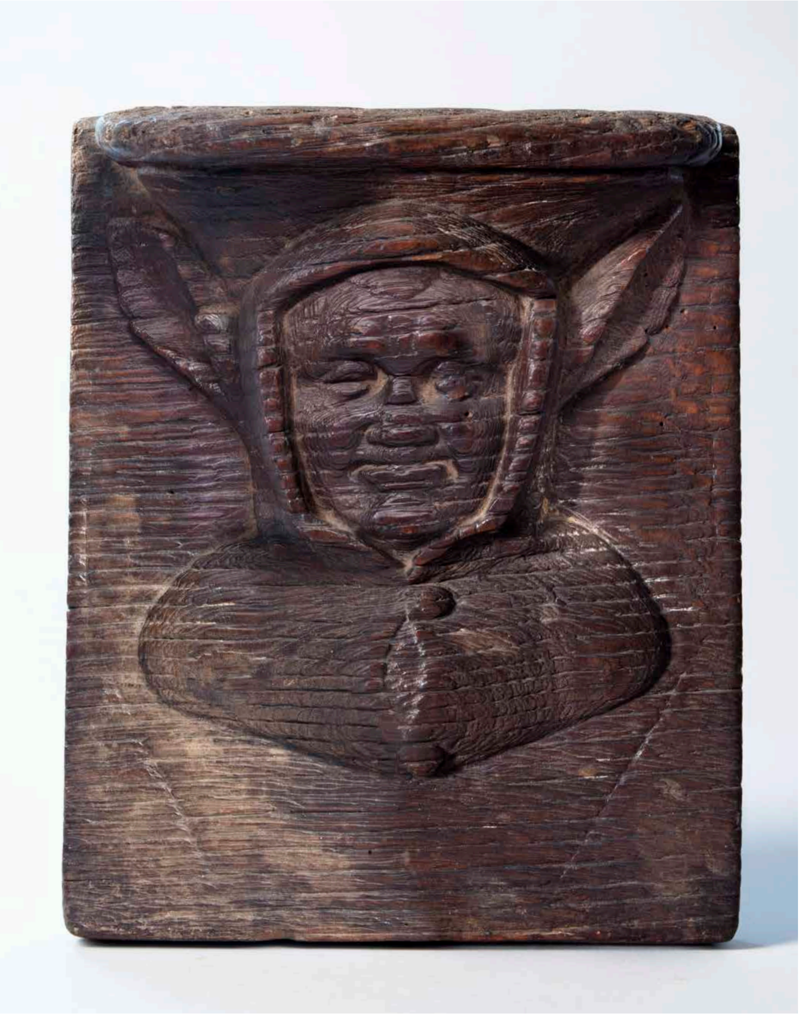
Nicolaas de Bruyne and Gort Goris

A misericord section with the head of a fool, from the church of Saint Peter, Louvain

c. 1438-42

30 x 25 cm; Oak.

Provenance
Collection of Roderick and Valentine Butler,
Marwood House, Honiton, until 2020



Description and Iconography

A pugnacious man shown at bust length and dressed in the costume of a fool, with the large ears of a donkey protruding from either side of the head, stares straight out at the viewer on this fifteenth-century misericord, a type of seat rest used by clerics to perch during long periods of enforced standing in the church. He is carved in relief against a flat plank of oak, with the typical form of the narrow, horizontal seat rest flaring outwards above his head.

The fool or jester was a common feature of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century courtly life in northern Europe, and held a privileged position within the households of the nobility and monarchy. Performers at all forms of social engagement and celebration, they were typically fancifully dressed and performed chants, poetry, fables, stories, slapstick plays and comedic routines for the gathered attendees, lampooning social norms and airs (fig. 1).

Context and Function

Misericords, the name given to the ledge supported by a corbel which is revealed when the hinged seats in medieval choir stalls are tipped up, is taken from the Latin term ‘misericordia’ which means pity, and alludes to the function of such objects as supporting rests for clerics forced to stand during the long sermons of church services in the Middle Ages. The rule of St Benedict, introduced in the sixth century, required the monks to sing all eight of the daily offices of the Church (Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, Nones, Vespers and Compline) standing up. They were only permitted to sit during the Epistle and Gradual at Mass and the Response at Vespers. Such long hours spent standing was particularly arduous for the older and weaker monks and they soon adopted a leaning staff or crutch to help take their weight.

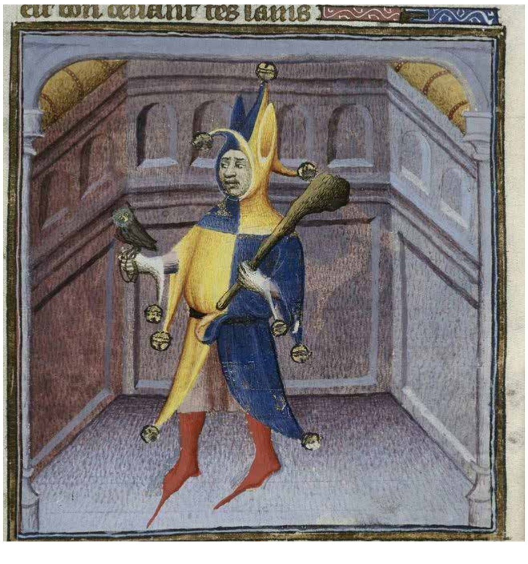
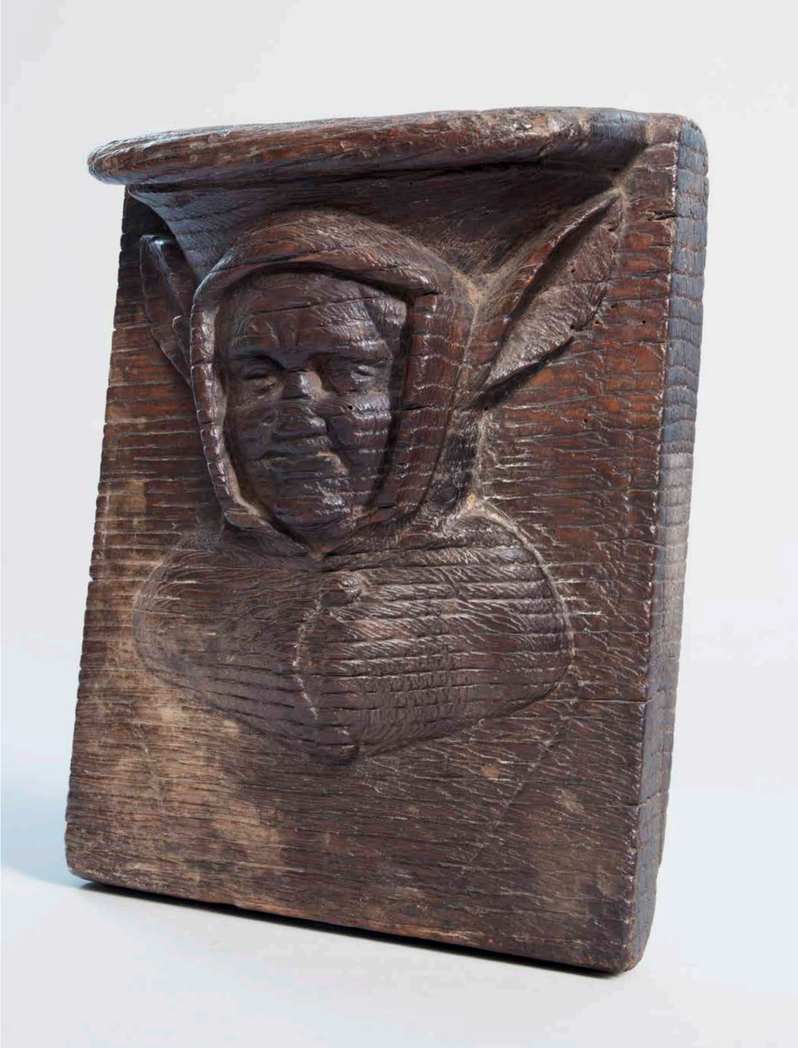


Fig. 1
A fool, from a Bible historiale
Made for Clairfontaine Abbey, Chartres
c. 1411
London, British Library, MS. Royal 19. D III, f. 266

Misericords seem to have been introduced in the eleventh century (as evidenced by references made to them in the rules of the Hirsau monastery in Germany), when regulations were relaxed slightly and a more restful position could be adopted by monks during services.



Misericords provided an ideal platform for medieval craftsmen to carve all forms of narrative scenes and decoration, often with pithy, wry, and lude imagery. Often featuring nude and cavorting figures, fables and moral tales, or rude expressions pulled by leering and jeering faces, they show how medieval craftsmen could inject the hushed reveries of even the holiest spaces with bare-faced comedy and wit.

Localisation and Dating

The style of our misericord's carving, the shape of the seat ledge, and its proportions and dimensions, all indicate that it almost certainly comes from the choirstalls of Saint Peter's church in Louvain, carved between 1438 and 1442 by the Brussels craftsmen Nicolaas de Bruyne and Gort Goris. After being manufactured at their Brussels workshop, the choirstalls were installed in Saint Peter's church in 1442 but only thirty of the original 96 misericords made for the stalls remain in situ. The rest are believed to have been dismantled and dispersed shortly after 1803, when the group was last described as intact and unaffected by the public sales that had otherwise almost totally emptied the church of its contents from 1798 onwards. In 1910, eighteen of the missing 66 misericords were presented to the Victoria & Albert Museum, and several of the museum's examples bear striking comparison to our fragment (figs. 2-3).

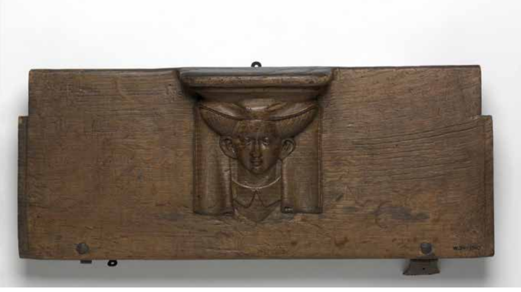


Fig. 2
Nicolaas de Bruyne and Goris Gort
Misericord with a lady wearing a cornet headdress
1438-42
31.4 x 75.4 x 10.5 cm; oak
London, Victoria & Albert Museum, inv. W.24-1910

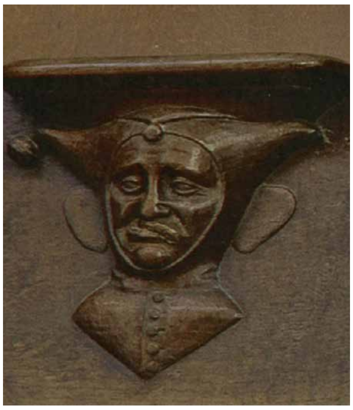


Fig. 3
Nicolaas de Bruyne and Goris Gort
Misericord of a jester
1438–42
The figure approx. 21.6 x 24.5 x 7.5 cm; oak
Louvain, Church of St. Peter

20

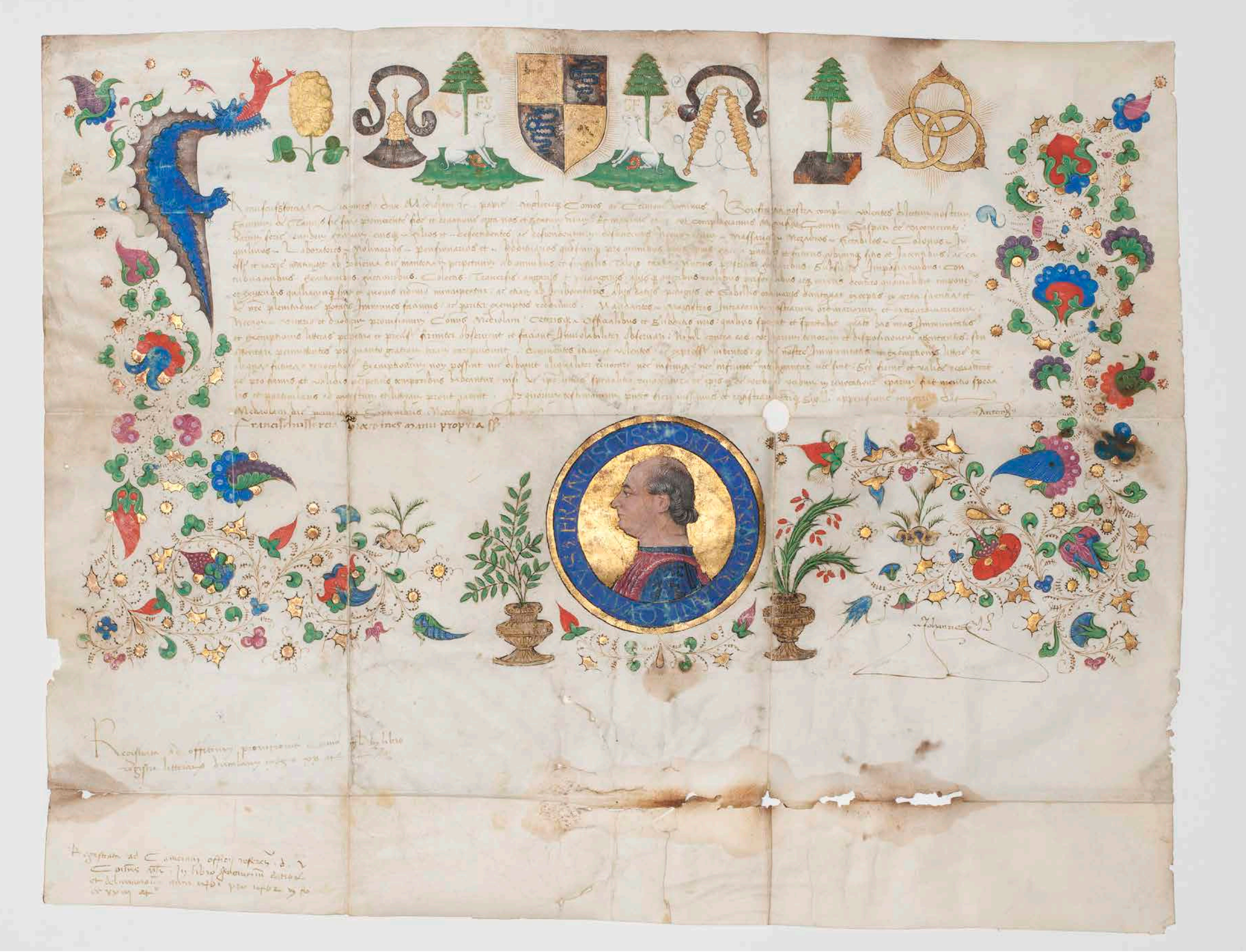
The Hippolyta Master (fl. 1459-75)

Ducal Privilege, in Latin

Italy, Milan
29 September 1462

Provenance
Bernard Breslauer;
Collection of Robert and Lindy Erskine, London, until 2008

35 x 44 cm; Illuminated document on a single sheet of parchment; 15 lines of main text written in a humanistic documentary script, followed by Francesco Sforza's signature in a more gothic script and darker ink, and with various subscriptions; decorated in all four margins with heraldic arms, Visconti-Sforza emblems, and a portrait medallion of Francesco Sforza.



The document on which this incredible miniature portrait, showing the bust-length image of Francesco Sforza Duke of Milan in profile, is painted is a taxation exemption granted by the duke to two men, Facino de Tanciis and Gaspare da Vimercate, in September 1462.

In 1441 Francesco Sforza (1401–66) married Bianca Maria Visconti, whose family had ruled Milan for centuries. When Bianca's father died without a male heir, Francesco took the Dukedom for himself. One way in which he tried to create an impression of a legitimate succession was by adopting many of the Visconti emblems and heraldic devices, which appear prominently in all four corners of the document.

Condition

Three horizontal and three vertical creases, not significantly affecting legibility (the upper horizontal and the leftmost vertical were made by the notary to guide the writing of the first line and left margin of the text); one hole, barely touching the text and not affecting legibility; some water-staining at the edges; the lower horizontal crease stained and cracked in an area

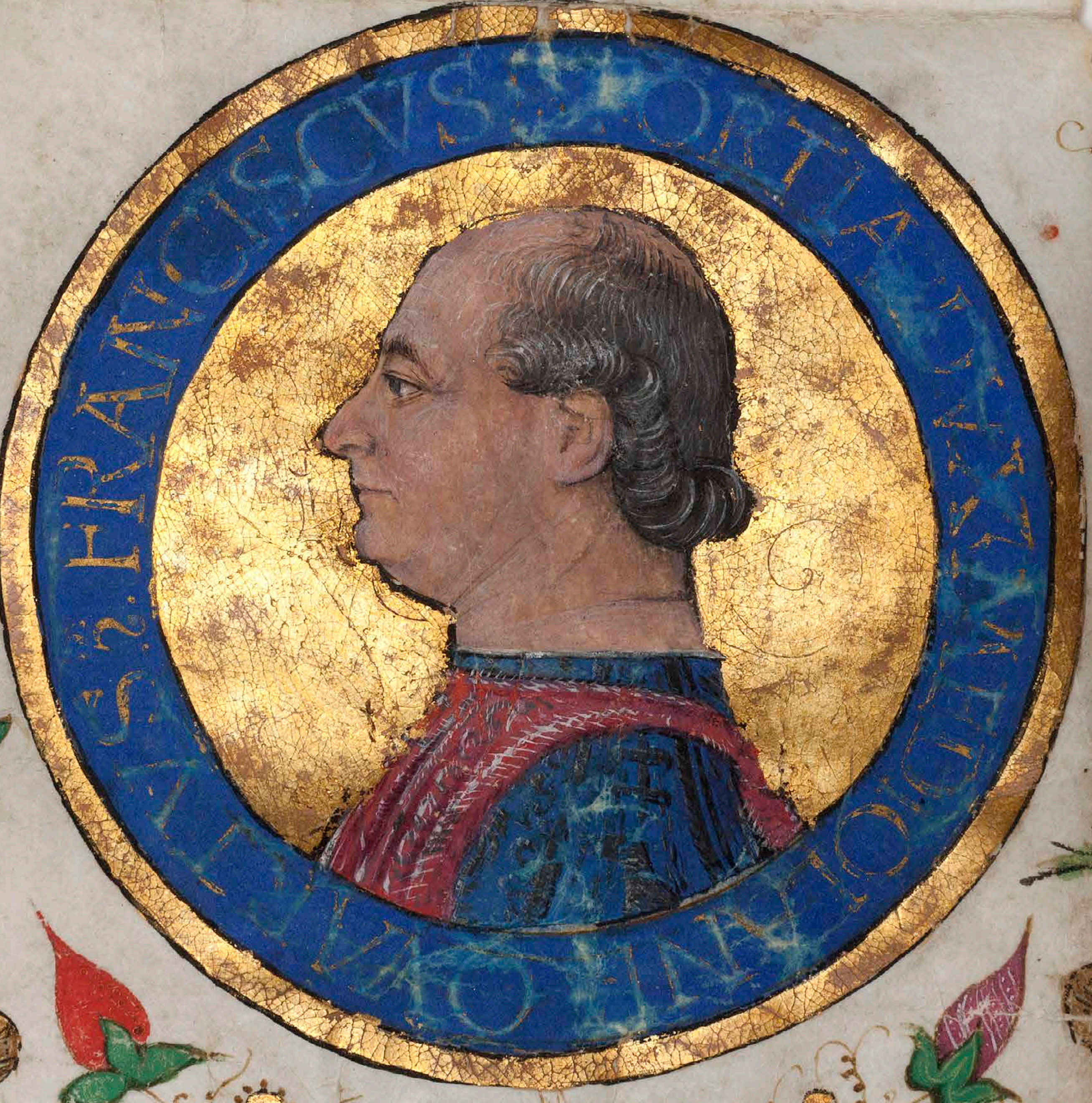
decernentes etiam et volentes: ac expresse iubentes: quod hec n

veant aliqualiter revocari, nec infringi: nec infirmari nisi

de ipse littere specialiter revocantur de ipsis quod de verbo ad

quorum testimonium presentes fieri iussimus et registrari

ant


FRANCISCVS SFORTIA DVX MEDIOLANI QVARTVS

of blank parchment; small holes and rust marks at the upper corners from drawing-pins; some rubbing and flaking of pigment, mostly affecting the heraldic shield and the lettering around the portrait medallion, but not the portrait itself; small holes at the lower edge where a seal (now missing) would have been attached.

Provenance
Bernard H. Breslauer (1918–2004), successively of Berlin, London, and New York, bookseller and manuscript collector, who continued his father's business and traded under his name, Martin Breslauer; acquired privately c.1980; exhibited at the Pierpont Morgan Library (exhibition catalogue: W.M. Voelke and R.S. Wieck, The Bernard H. Breslauer Collection of Manuscript Illuminations (New York, 1992), no.78 and full-page reproduction, pp.202–03).

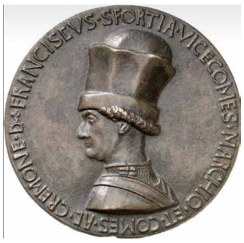
Text
The document is a taxation exemption granted by Francesco Sforza Duke of Milan to Facino de Tanciis and Gaspare da Vimercate.

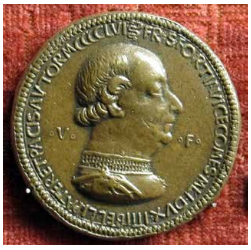
The text opens with Francesco's name and titles; the second line begins with Facino's name ("Facinum de Tancijs") and ends with Gaspare's ("Comiti Gaspari de Vicemercato"). The final line of the main text provides the place and date "Mediolani die penultimo Septembris Mccccłxii" (at Milan, the penultimate day of September, 1462); immediately below this, in darker ink, Francesco has signed the document "Francischii Sforci vicecomes manu propria SF" (Francesco Sforza, by his own hand SF – "vicecomes" can be translated as the rank "viscount" but also as the family name "Visconti"), with two added notes in the lower left corner that the document has been registered in the official book of ducal letters and with the chamberlain's office, and signed in the lower right (by the notary?) "Johannes".

Gaspare da Vimercate (c.1410–1467) was commander of the Sforza troops. For his service he was made Count of Valencia in 1454, and later Governor of Genoa. In 1463, some months after the making of the present document, he donated some land in Milan to the Dominicans, on which they built the church of Santa Maria della Grazie, and in which Gaspare was buried in 1467. Francesco Sforza's son and successor, Ludovico decided to use the church as the family burial place, and commissioned Leonardo da Vinci to paint The Last Supper fresco in the convent's refectory. For a detailed biography of Gaspare see Michele Mauri, Trittico vimercatese: Gian Giacomo Caprotti detto Salai, Gaspare da Vimercate, Gian Giacomo Gallarati Scotti (Missaglia, 2002).
Illumination
Despite being a legal document – such documents are very rarely illuminated – the chancery serving the Visconti and Sforza produced a number of such lavishly decorated documents. Sixteen such documents are studied by Elisabeth Pellégrin in La bibliothèque des Visconti et des Sforza, ducs de Milan, an XVe siècle (Paris, 1955), pp.410–12; and one more in La Bibliothèque des Visconti et des Sforza, ducs de Milan: Supplement avec 175 planches publié sous les auspices de la soueté internationale de Bibliophilie … (Florence, 1969).

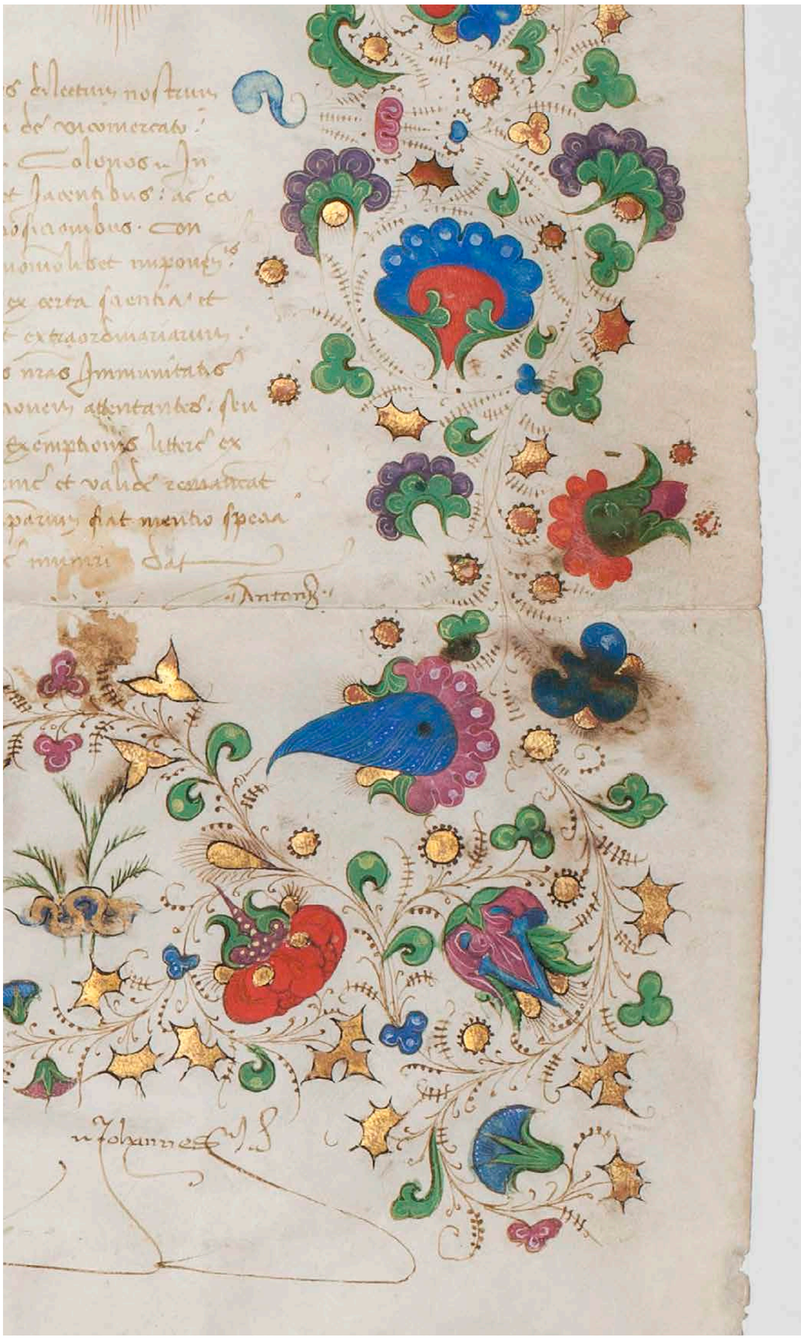
The present document is elaborately decorated with foliate borders, Visconti-Sforza emblems and heraldic devices, and a fine medallion portrait of the Duke. The emblems at the top are (from left to right): the biscione (a viper azure with a child in its mouth gules), here more like a dragon, in the shape of the initial "F" of the opening of the text; a golden quince; a scopetta (little brush) with the motto "Merito et Tempore" (Merit and Time) on a scroll; a greyhound whose red collar is tied to a pine tree with a gold hand nearby, with Francesco's initials "FS" in gold; the Sforza arms (quarterly, 1 and 4, or the imperial eagle sable, 2 and 3 argent, the biscione); a mirror image of the greyhound, with the initials also reversed, "SF"; a morso (horse bit) with a scroll; a pine tree held by a gold hand; three interlocking gold rings each set with a diamond; further emblems flank the portrait medallion at the bottom: a laurel branch and a pine branch; and to either side of these are another emblem: blue and gold waves with palm fronds.

The lower margin is dominated by the magnificent portrait bust of Francesco Sforza. He is shown in profile, facing left, surrounded by an inscription “FRANCISCUS SFORTIA DUX MEDIOLANI QUARTUS” (Francesco Sforza, Fourth Duke of Milan). The medallion is deliberately reminiscent of a coin or commemorative medal: during the Renaissance, with its fervent interest in all things Classical, it was apparent that portraits of Greek and Roman rulers had survived the centuries primarily on coins: coins were therefore seen as a way of ensuring that one’s likeness – and fame – endured into posterity. Gold and silver coinage, however, ran the risk of being melted down, so Italian Renaissance rulers commissioned portrait medals to be struck in bronze as well as valuable metals. Probably the most famous is the medal of Francesco struck in 1441 by Pisanello, which shows him facing left, as in the present manuscript; most other surviving profile portraits of Francesco show him facing to the right, as in a medal dated 1456, which shows him with a balding head, and looking much more like the present portrait.





The illumination of the present document was attributed by the late Prof. A.C. de la Mare to the so-called Hippolyta Master, whose name is derived from his authorship of two manuscripts that Bianca and Francesco presented to their daughter Hippolyta at her marriage in 1465 to Alfonso of Calabria (one is a copy of Domenico Cavalca, now in Paris, BnF, ms.ital. 1712, the other is a copy of Virgil, now in the Bibliotéca Publica, Valencia; see the Bibliothèque Nationale exhibition catalogue, Dix siècles d’enluminure italienne (VIe–XVIe siècles) (Paris, 1984), p.154–55 no.136). The artist illuminated several manuscripts for Francesco Sforza in the last years of his life, and painted some of the finest manuscripts commissioned by his son, Galeazzo Maria Sforza (1444–76), including: a Cicero dated 1461 (Paris, BnF, ms.lat. 7703); the so-called Great Hours of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, c.1461–66 (William Waldorf Astor sale, Sotheby’s, 21 June 1988, lot 58); and a very rare text, by Bonitus Mombritus, c.1465 (Coburg, Landesbibliothek, MS. 2). As François Avril noted in the exhibition catalogue, the Hippolita Master’s style continued several trends established by the Lombard illuminator known as the Master of the Vitae Imperatorum: the same use of finely decorated heraldry and emblems, the same interpretation of stylised foliage, the same flair for depicting animals, and the same attachment to the aesthetic of the International Gothic style, but his painting also betrays a new sense of spatial awareness.



21

School of Nicolas Froment

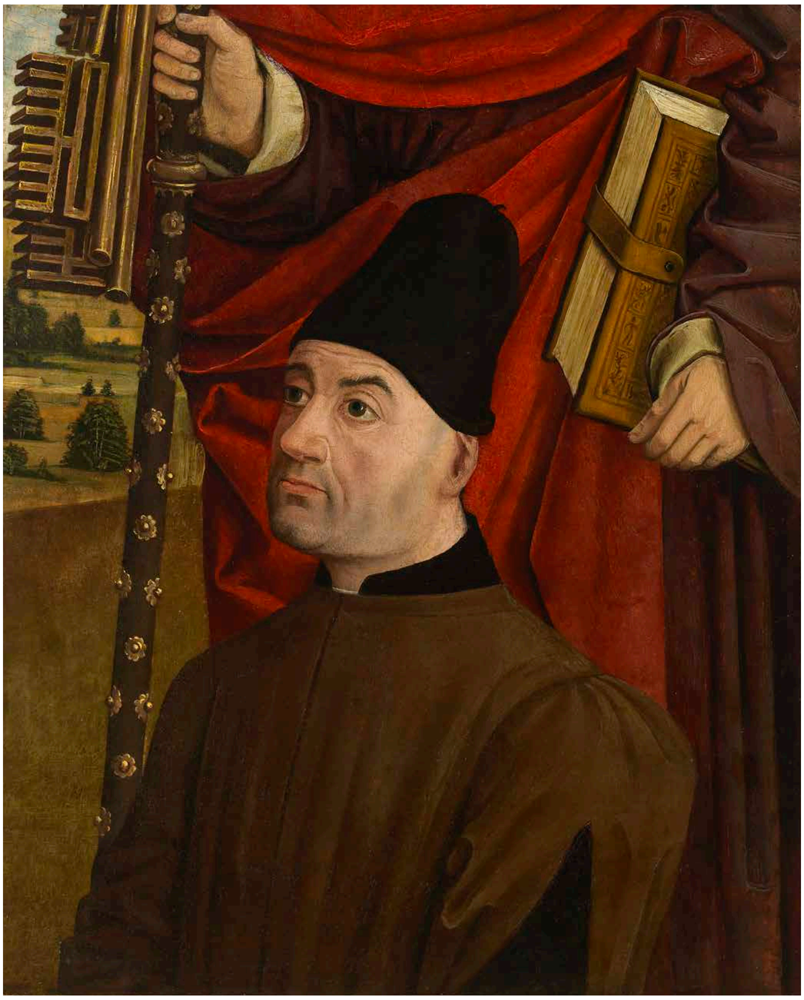
A Kneeling Donor introduced by Saint Peter (a fragment)

France, Provence
c. 1470

43 x 35 cm; Oil on panel.[1]

Provenance
Christophe Joron-Derem, Paris, 2006

This late fifteenth-century panel painting, a miraculous survival cut from a larger composition, shows a kneeling male donor introduced by Saint Peter (cut off above his arms, and identified by his keys). The man's fleshy face is carefully observed, with its hazel eyes, hairy arched eyebrows, large nose and long thin ears. Features like his lower lip, which is thick and prominent, coming slightly to the fore, suggest that the painter had sustained contact with his sitter in the preparatory stages of the painting, picking out the patron's idiosyncrasies in a highly naturalistic manner. His penetrative gaze and tensed facial expression suggested by the wrinkles visible on his forehead give the effect of intense contemplation. His stubble is carefully delineated, and adds a subtle greyish hue to his pink flesh tones. He is wearing elegant yet sober attire with a prominent tall 'sugar loaf' hat and a brown surcoat with slit sleeves revealing a black doublet beneath.



Saint Peter's red robe provides a striking and dramatic frame for the patron's features. His keys, given to him by Christ as a symbol of his dual authority over both the spiritual and the earthly matters of the Church, are not held by him but seem to be hanging from the staff he holds with his right hand, presumably the lower part of a crosier. The staff is wooden but elaborately decorated with metallic flowers, meant to depict gold or bronze. In his left hand, he is holding a closed book with an elaborate, and very up to date, stamped leather binding. The cover is framed by a frieze that alternates vegetal and animal decorative elements among which one may distinguish a man, a hound and a lion, ornaments that are typical of stamped bindings in late fifteenth-century France.[2] He is wearing a purplish robe with white interior lining, under his bright red mantle. The saint's hands seem small in comparison with the rest of his body.

---

[1] This entry has been adapted from a longer version authored by Susie Nash and Emma Capron for the publication Late Medieval Panel Paintings: Materials, Methods, Meanings, London, 2011, no. 16, pp. 216-225.

[2] E. van Vekene, Reliures des XVIe et XVIIe siècles conservées à la Bibliothèque nationale de Luxembourg (Luxembourg, 2000): for a close example see pp. 40–41, no. 10.

Behind both figures a verdant landscape extends, composed of trees, bushes and what appears to be a winding road. A light blue sky with some faint clouds is visible on the upper left corner of the panel. Although in this outdoor setting the lighting should be rather homogeneous, a strong directional light, which does not seem to correspond to any natural source, comes from the right.

Style, iconography, attribution and date

In his short 1990 article about unpublished works from Provence, Charles Sterling pertinently tied the present panel to the Avignon School on the basis of a stylistic analysis that noted its bright colouring, strong light and Northern attention to details.[3] Physical evidence further corroborates this assertion. Walnut, as opposed to oak and poplar that are characteristic of Northern and Italian panels respectively, is rather distinctive of France and was the wood type predominantly used in fifteenth-century Provence[4]. The practice of lining a panel with cloth, frequently encountered in Italy, is also commonly found in France in the fifteenth century, especially in Avignon[5], and can be observed for example in Enguerrand Quarton's Coronation of the Virgin or the anonymous Fountain of Blood in the Musée du Petit Palais, Avignon. Because they would use better-quality oak panels, Netherlandish artists would not need to resort to this practice to smooth the surface of their support. Iconographically, Saint Peter's red and purple vestment departs from the traditional Italian representation of the apostle wearing a blue robe topped by a yellow cloak, which further excludes a Northern Italian origin.

Charles Sterling convincingly associated the present panel with the art of Nicolas Froment (active 1461–84)[6]. Documented in 1461 in the Southern Netherlands, Froment is believed to come from Picardy and to have trained in that region before moving to Provence around 1462.[7] Many Northern painters of the period had made the same move, settling especially in Avignon, attracted by the return to political stability and the economic growth that fuelled a strong artistic demand emanating from both a wealthy laity and clerical institutions. Contracts and records documenting the properties owned by Nicolas Froment testify to the rapid success he enjoyed in Provence. He regularly appears in King René's accounts and notably painted the monumental Burning Bush Altarpiece in Aix-en-Provence for this prestigious patron.[8]

The present painting's attention to details, strong linearity and the vivid expressiveness of the donor's face are all hallmarks of Froment's oeuvre. The use of a panoramic landscape is also reminiscent of Froment. It was a relatively new feature in Avignon at the time, the previous generation of painters, led by Enguerrand Quarton, having favoured decorative gold or brocaded background instead, as visible in the Cadard and Requin Altarpieces respectively in the Musée Condé, Chantilly and the Musée du Petit Palais, Avignon. A Kneeling Donor introduced by Saint Peter could be dated in the 1470s, when Froment's style and workshop would have been established enough to generate talented students and followers such as the maker of the present panel.

The painting to which this panel is stylistically and thematically most close is the Pérussis Altarpiece now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, attributed to Nicolas Froment. In both panels, the strong and uncompromising characterization of the sitter and the treatment of the face, bordering on caricature, are highly typical of Froment's style. Moreover, the way the hands are depicted, with small square fingers, slightly out of proportion with the rest of the body, is consistent in the two panels.[9] The Pérussis Altarpiece also features kneeling donors introduced by saints, in this case Saint Francis and Saint John the Baptist. They are similarly in an outdoor setting that faithfully renders the Avignon cityscape behind, where they adore the True Cross, a devotional interest particularly dear to the Pérussis family, and more generally favoured in Provence.[10]

The present donor's dress indicates that, like the Pérussis, he is a layman. It is worth noticing, however, that, by contrast to the Pérussis panel, he has not removed his hat as a way of honouring the holy figures he is being introduced to. Maybe this is because his rather characteristic bonnet was an indication of his identity and occupation. Indeed, this type of hat seems to have been worn by individuals involved with intellectual matters – university professors, lawyers and notaries[11]. However, it is encountered on other occasions on sitters with other occupations and thus no definitive conclusions may be drawn from it.[12] However, the slit sleeves of his surcoat were fashionable before and during the time of King René's presence in Provence and it is frequently encountered in miniatures by his court painter Barthélémy d'Eyck, especially in La revue des heaumes des tournoyeurs dans le cloître from the Livre des Tournois, where many of the elegant gentleman also happen to wear the sitter's distinctive bonnet.[13] This further confirms a dating in the 1470s, one that corresponds to René's presence in Provence[14]. Moreover, although he does not seem to have been the object of a particular local devotion, Saint Peter is a recurring figure in fifteenth-century Provencal altarpieces, where he is mostly included as a patron saint, for instance in the Pierre Artaud Altarpiece in the parish church at Ventabren or the Saint Robert Altarpiece in a private collection in Aix-en-Provence. If this were the case in the present panel, then it would provide a further clue about the identity of the sitter.

---

[3] C. Sterling, 'Tableaux français inédits: Provence', L'Oeil (December 1990), pp. 46–53, esp. pp. 51–53.

[4] J. Marette, Connaissance des primitifs par l'étude du bois du XIIe au XVIe siècle (Paris, 1961), pp. 63–64: walnut accounts for 18% of the fifteenth-century surviving panels found in France as a whole, against 57% for oak panels. In Provence, however, walnut accounts for 37% of extant panels and 72% of wood types specified in contracts.

[5] For the lining of panel in France, see S. Nash, '"Pour couleurs et autres choses prise de lui ...": The Supply, Acquisition, Cost and Employment of Painters' Materials at the Burgundian Court, c. 1375–1419', in J. Kirby, S. Nash and J. Canon (eds.), Trade in Artists' Materials, Markets and Commerce in Europe to 1700 (London, 2010), ppp. 97–182, esp. p. 115, table 2, entry 28: "fyne toille de lin" for Jean de Beaumetz for 24 panels to put in the monks' cells; p. 120, table 2, entry 51: "grans lynceaux de lin" for Jean Malouel to cover the panels and altarpiece for the church, pp. 122, 159.

[6] Sterling, 'Tableaux français inédits', pp. 51–53

[7] P.M. de Winter, 'Froment, Nicolas', in Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online (2007).

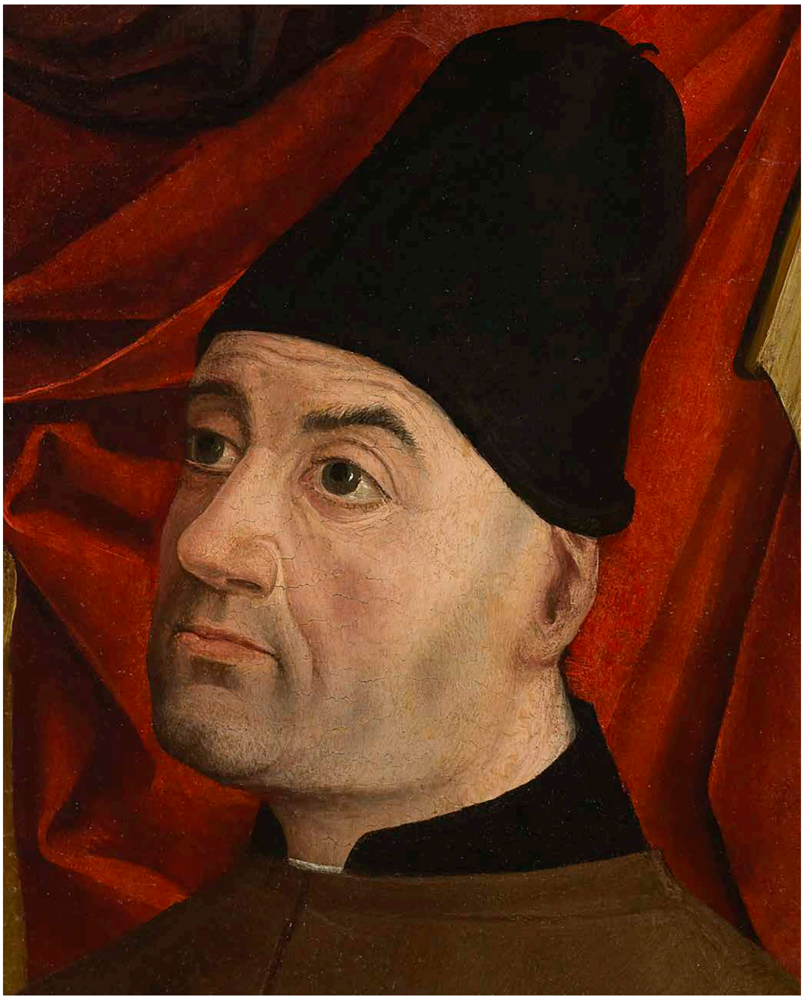
[8] G.A. d'Agnel, 'Peinture et enluminure', Les Comptes du roi René. Publiés d'après les originaux inédits conservés aux archives des Bouches-du-Rhône (Paris, 1908), I, pp. 181–225.

[9] Despite these important similarities, the lack of a first-hand examination of the Metropolitan Museum panel and the discrepancy in the rendering of the landscape prevents a full attribution to the same painter working in the circle of Froment.

Finally, the changes mentioned above made during the painting stage provide an interesting insight into the creative process. The artist seems indeed to have painted large portions of the saint's robe, using a relatively expensive red pigment, only to cover it up afterwards with an enlarged version of the donor. The donor's identity seems not to have changed, as his bonnet and the general shape of his garment follow the same line in the final version. This modification may result from the donor's intervention – a request to be depicted larger – or from a change by the artist from hierarchical to naturalistic proportions. The likeliest possibility, however, since the patron is not underdrawn, is that the artist started painting without having seen or drawn the sitter. Once he had fixed his features on a separate drawing made from life during a sitting that he later used as guidance while finishing painting, he amended his composition accordingly.

Reconstruction

The painting is obviously a fragment that belonged to a larger ensemble, most probably the left wing of a triptych, given that this is the format most often encountered in fifteenth-century Avignon paintings. Its dimensions



---

10 T. Rousseau, Jr., 'The Pérussis Altarpiece', The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, vol. 15, no. 10 (June 1957), pp. 222–27. In addition to the Metropolitan Museum panel, the Pérussis' devotion to the Holy Cross was expressed through a second commission of the same subject recorded by a nineteenth-century drawing and originally located in the church of the Célestins in Avignon. See also M. L. Kekewich, The Good King : René of Anjou and Fifteenth-Century Europe (Basingstoke, 2008), p. 184: René of Anjou had a special devotion to the True Cross as well and owned three fragments of it; one he gave to a church in Angers, one to the church of the Célestins in Avignon, and the last one he kept for his personal use.

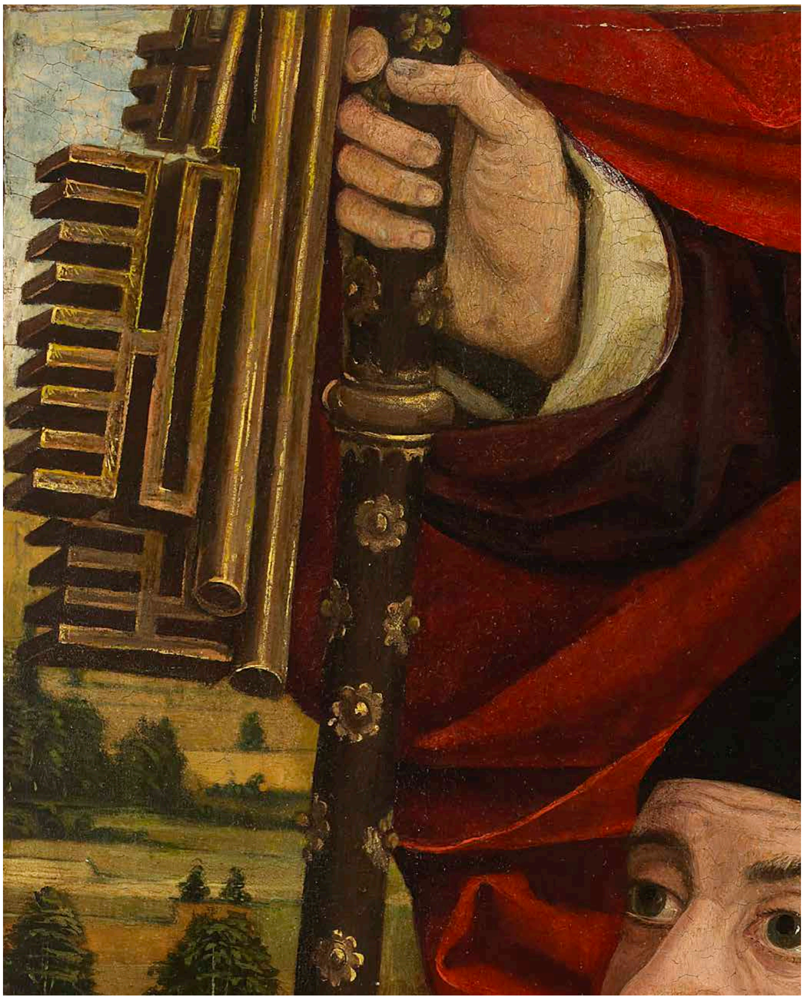
11 L. Campbell, National Gallery Catalogues, The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Paintings (London, 1998), pp. 46–51, inv. NG94. In Dirk Bouts' Portrait of a Man (Jan van Winckele?), the sitter, identified from his clothes as a professor at the University of Leuven, wears exactly the same hat with a stalk as the present donor, only in a purplish-pink colour. Similarly, in a miniature by Loyset Liédet and his workshop from the Histoire de Charles Martel, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, Ms. 8, fol. 7, the scribe visited by Charles the Bold wears a similar hat (illustrated in Campbell, National Gallery Catalogues, p. 179, fig. 4).

12 The same hat is worn by the knights of the Order of Saint Michael in the frontispiece miniature of the Statuts de l'ordre de Saint Michel, by Jean Fouquet (BNF, Manuscripts, Fr. 19819), illustrated in France 1500, entre Moyen Âge et Renaissance, exh. cat., Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, 2010, p. 84, no. 14., and also by the unidentified sitter in an anonymous portrait dated c. 1480 now in the Barnes Foundation, illustrated in Campbell, National Gallery Catalogues, p. 438, fig. 6.

13 For instance in the miniature L'embarquement de Cœur et de Désir in the Livre du Cœur d'amour épris, Österreichische National-bibliothek, Vienna, Cod. 2597, fol. 51; in the miniature La revue des heaumes des tournoyeurs dans le cloîtr' from the Livre des Tournois, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Manuscripts, Fr. 2695, fols. 67–68.

suggest it was part of a work of medium size, at least one-metre high, and a suitable scale for an altarpiece. Lacking evidence, one may only speculate about the donor's missing object of devotion. It could be an enthroned Virgin and Child, although the inclusion of the throne in a landscape setting is not so commonly encountered[15]. Another, likelier possibility is for the donor to be witnessing the Crucifixion or another episode of the Passion or adoring the Holy Cross, all scenes that would more naturally be set in a landscape. The fragmentary condition of the panel also begs the question of the donor's position and gesture. He does not seem to be holding his hands in a standard praying gesture, as one may assume that his hands would be visible if he was. One explanation could be that his hands were depicted very low against his chest in the unnaturalistic manner typical of Froment, visible for instance with King René's hands in the Burning Bush Altarpiece. More probably, the donor could be holding a prayer book, a rosary or another object aiding his devotional contemplation. Also of interest is the placement of the donor at the left of the panel. As rightly pointed out by Sterling, this indicates that any other patron included in the picture was very unlikely to have been a woman[16], but rather a man of higher social status: possibly an older man, a cleric, or someone who contributed more financially to the commission.[17]

As to when and why the panel was cut down, the format clearly suggests that it was meant to be marketable as an autonomous portrait. The interest in early French portraiture emerged in the second part of the nineteenth century and intensified after the 1904 exhibition and so it could be a remnant of an altarpiece which lived a second life as a secularized portrait through the altering action of a rather unscrupulous dealer.[18] However fragmented its current state, this painting is nonetheless an important and rare example of the artistic accomplishments of the Avignon School in the fifteenth century and of the skilled group of artists that gravitated around Nicolas Froment.



---

[14] T. Pécout and C. Roux, 'La Provence au temps du roi René', in J-M. Matz and E. Verry (eds.), Le Roi René dans tous ses Etats (Paris, 2009), pp. 75–97. René settled in Provence in 1471 and remained there until his death in 1480.

[15] Sterling ('Tableaux français inédits', pp. 46–53) mentions the only surviving example of a Virgin and Child enthroned in a landscape, a panel formerly in the collection of Paul-Louis Weiller; see sale catalogue, Gros & Delettrez, 5 April 2011, lot 13, mistakenly attributed to the Master of the Embroidered Foliage.

[16] M.L. Lievens-de-Waegh, 'Les sujets des œuvres', in Van Schoute and de Patoul, Les Primitifs flamands, pp. 183–216, esp. p. 209. The placement of women at the more prestigious right of the holy figures (left of the panel for the viewer) does not occur often in fifteenth-century painting and seems to reflect an Italian custom of gallantry which can be witnessed for instance in the Sforza Triptych attributed to Rogier van der Weyden's studio (Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles) and in the Sassetti Chapel frescoed by Domenico Ghirlandaio (Santa Trinità, Florence).

[17] For instance, in The Virgin and Child between Two Saints and Two Donors, now in the Musée du Petit Palais, Avignon (inv. PP 04), the place of prominence has been given to the clerical over the lay donor.

[18] For a detailed account of the rise in scholarly interest in and art market prominence of the French Primitives, see F-H. Martin, 'Les Primitifs français au XIXème siècle: de l'érudition dispersée aux synthèses conflicturelles' and 'La gloire des Primitifs français (1904–45)', in D. Thiébaut, P. Lorentz, and F-H. Martin, Primitifs français: Découvertes et redécouvertes, exh. cat., Louvre Paris, 2004, pp. 47–74.

22

Head of a tonsured cleric

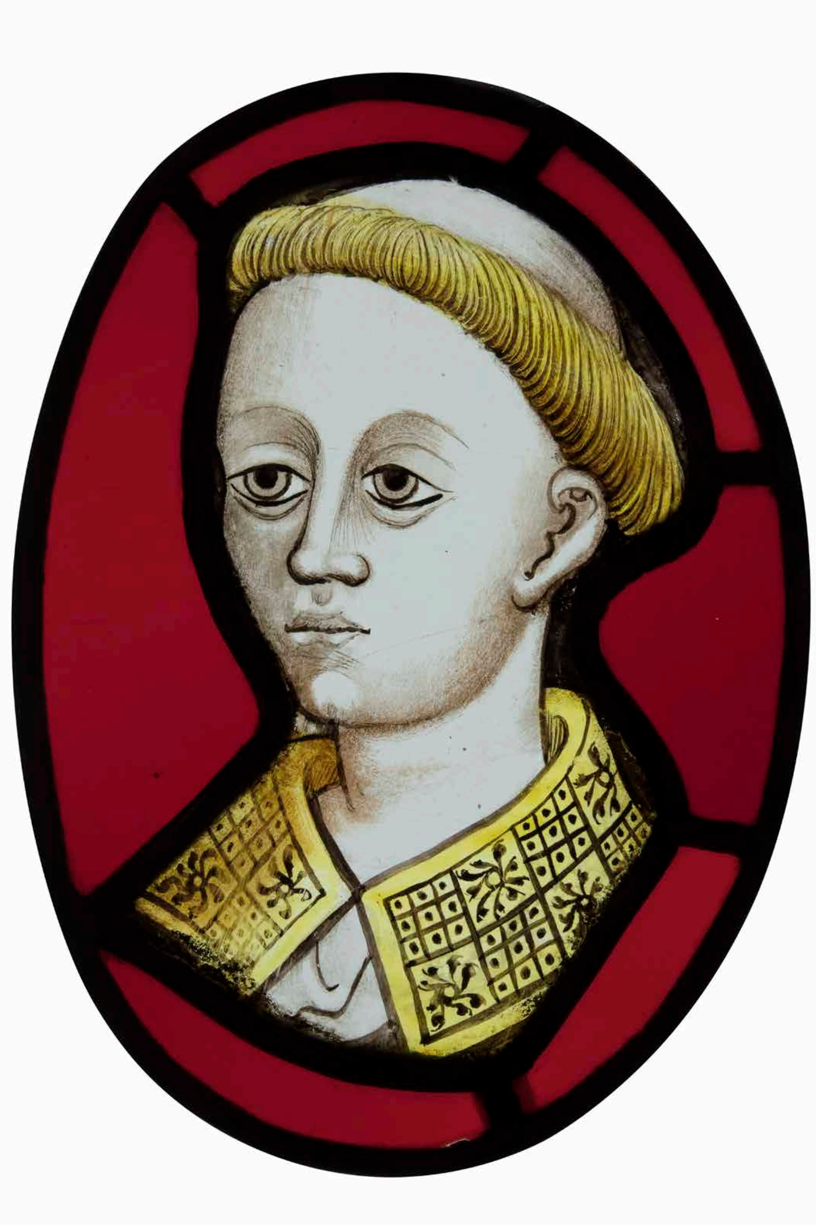
Germany, Rhine Valley, possibly Cologne
c. 1460-80

Provenance
Private collection, Germany

18.5 x 12 cm; Clear glass with silver stain and vitreous enamel, set into an oval surround of modern red glass measuring 22.5 x 16.2 cm. A single repaired break across the jaw and chin

A tonsured cleric, shown turning in three-quarter profile to our left, wears a liturgical vestment with an ornate golden collar embroidered with an alternating pattern of grids and swirling foliate motifs. His heavy-lidded eyes look straight ahead of him over our left shoulder, heavily defined with dense black enamel pigment. His short nose and clipped mouth are outlined with the same material, but are further enlivened through shading in a paler wash of grisaille tone. Subtle linear shadows define the bridge of the nose and the shading around the eyes, chin, upper lip, and jawline. His tonsured haircut is shaved on the crown, leaving only a band of hair encircling the head, narrow and high at the forehead but longer and lower over the ears and towards the back of the skull. What remains is, like the figure's collar, picked out with silver stain fired to an even lemon yellow in the kiln.

The artist responsible for our figure was clearly working in a style developed by stained-glass painters active in Cologne and its environs during the early part of the fifteenth century. He must have seen, for instance, the figure of Saint Lawrence executed in the 1430s and still preserved in the city's cathedral (fig. 1), with its tapering head shape and angled, bushy tonsure. However, his more linear stylistic approach, and the treatment of the ornate vestment worn by our figure belong to a generation hence; they find their closest parallels amongst windows made after the middle of the century, where figures are typified by hard outlines and linear features softened with much more restrained washes of shadow. As with our figure, their eyes



are typically heavy-lidded and passive, mouths tend to be clipped and slightly pursed, and ears are set low and far back on the head. A double-portrait of Saint James and Saint Mary Magdalene painted in c. 1460 and now in the Schnütgen Museum in Cologne comprises all of these features (fig. 2), though the same formula continued to dominate the city's 'house style' for at least another twenty years (as can be seen, for instance, in the late-1470s windows of the Sacrament Chapel in the Cathedral[1]) and without more information concerning the context of its production, a rough date range within this period seems most germane for our cleric's execution.

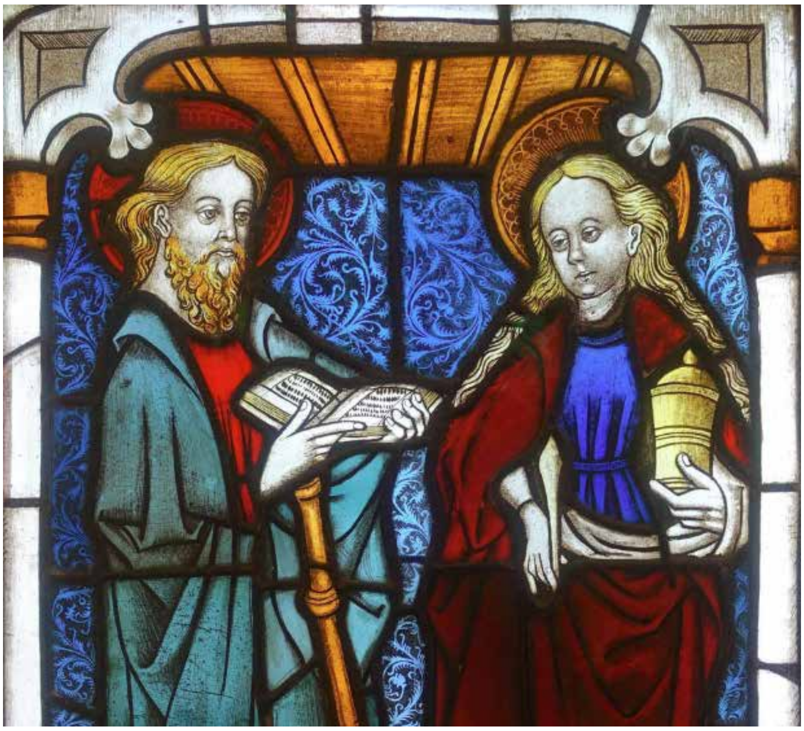


Fig. 2
Saint James and Saint Mary Magdalene
Cologne or Lower Rhine Valley
c. 1460
53.5 x 45.5 cm; Clear, red, orange, and blue glass with silver stain and vitreous enamel.
Cologne, Schnütgen Museum, inv. M 120

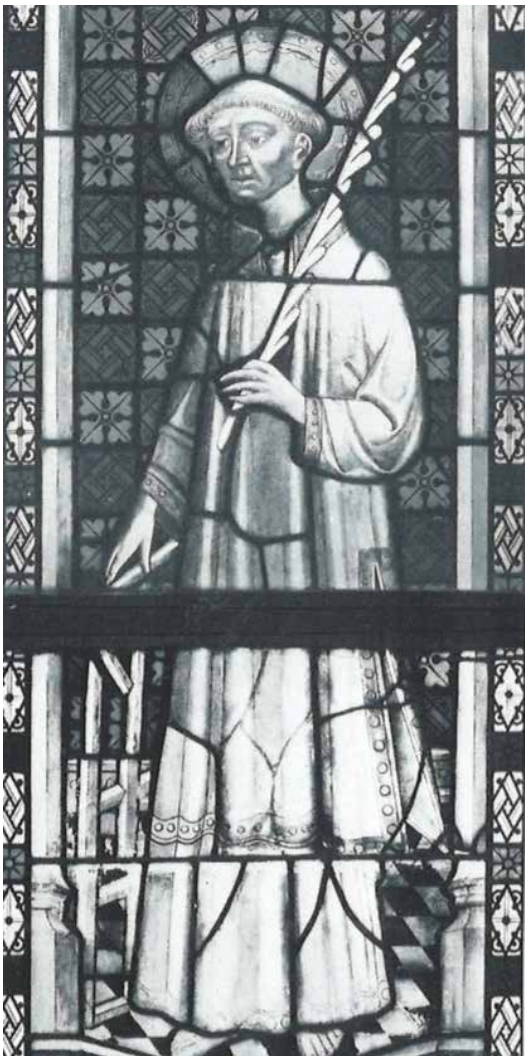


Fig. 1
Saint Lawrence
c. 1430s
Cologne Cathedral, north transept

---

[1] Herbert Rode, Die Mittelalterlichen Glasmalereien des Kölner Domes, Berlin, 1974, plate II, fig. 19-20.

23

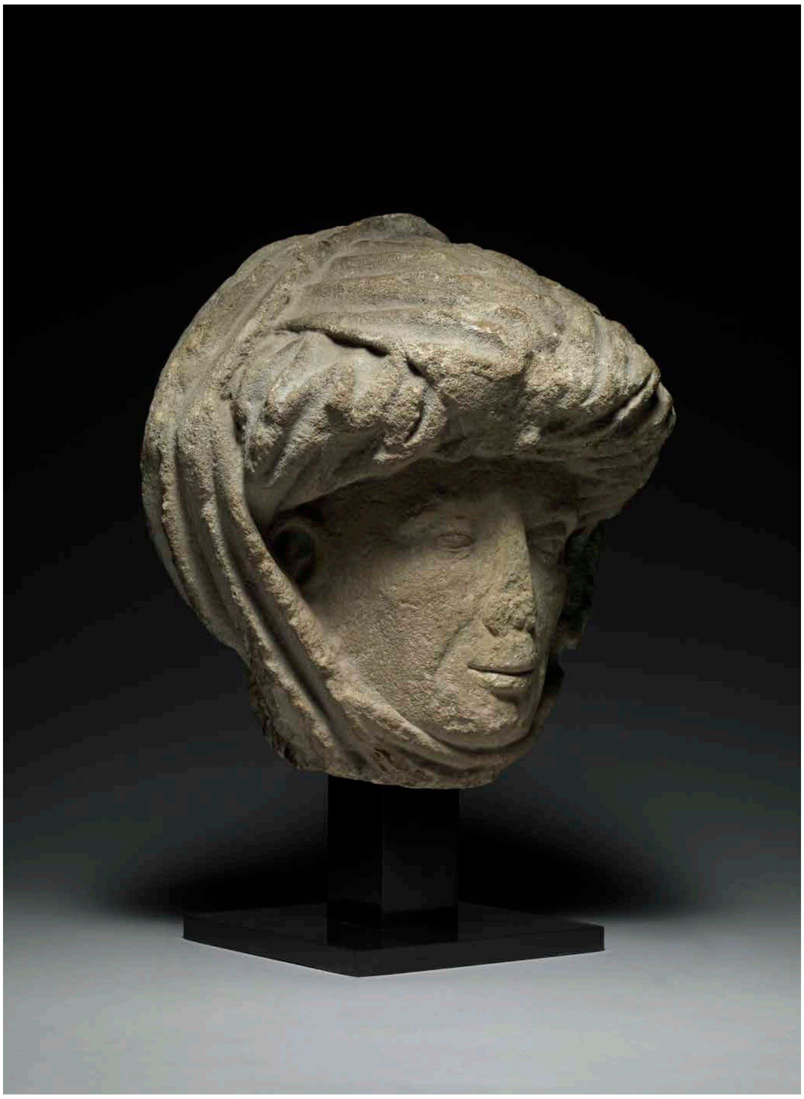
Head of Balthasar

France, Ile-de-France
c. 1480

Provenance
Private Collection, UK

28 x 25 x 25.5 cm; limestone. The head has suffered overall surface damage due to weathering, no polychromy survives. The back of the turban is damaged, probably indicating its original position in a niche. The nose is lost and partially restored.

A head of a man with an elaborate turban. On account of the shaven face and the turban, this head can quite accurately be identified as Balthasar, confirming the rarity of this work as not many large-scale sculptures of this Biblical king survive. It is possible that this head was once a part of a monumental portal sculpture group enacting the Adoration of the Magi. The turban of this figure is its most striking feature as it envelops the head completely, sitting heavily on top of it while another piece of fabric wraps around the turban and under the chin of the figure. The complexity of this fabric crown is further accentuated by the layers within it, which are emphasised by tightly sculpted folds of drapery. With this turban, the sculptor was clearly trying to show off his knowledge and skills in portraying such elaborate headdresses. The head has a round face, hiding beneath the turban, with full lips and heavy eyelids. His large ears can be seen in the spaces between the fabric and his face.

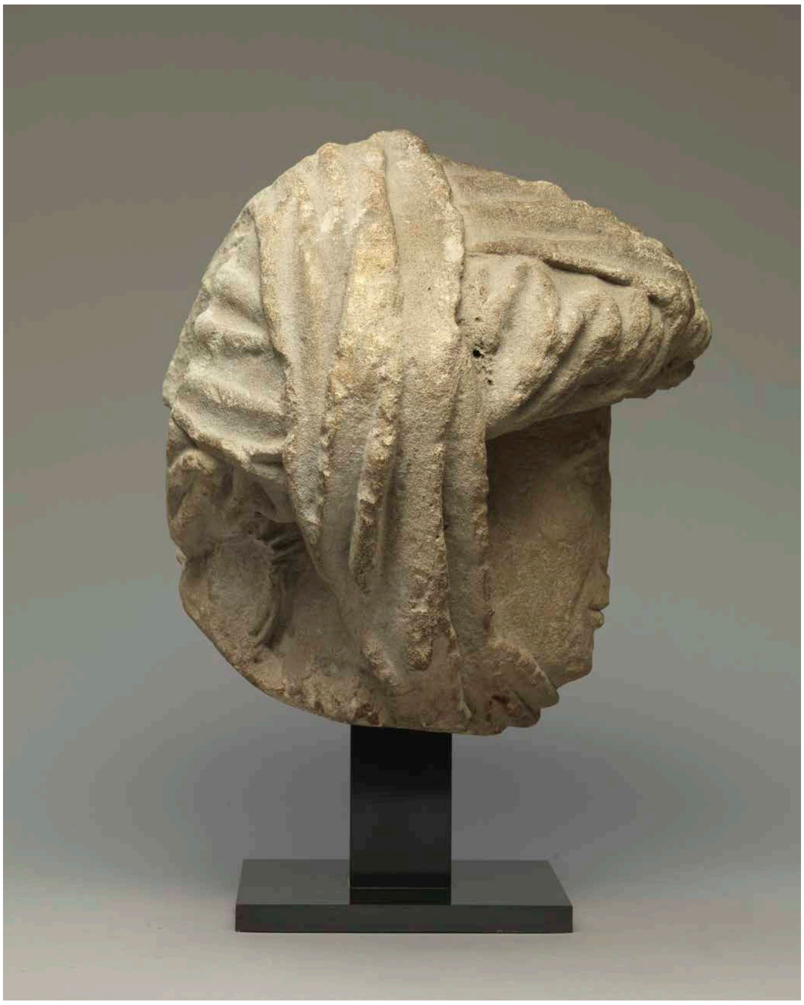


The characteristic sculpting of the zig-zagging drapery folds of the turban as well as the downcast gaze of the figure allows us to draw comparisons with other sculptures from the 15th century. Ruth Mellinkoff notes that the turban 'appears as a multivalent headdress in the visual arts to characterise the exotic foreigner…distant in time, distant in place, or distant in customs or religious beliefs. Fanciful and elaborately designed turbans appear on the Magi, Old Testament Jews, Ishmaelites, Saracens, pagans, and pious and virtuous New Testament Jews.'[1] Although a rare feature, the turban that Balthasar wears can also be compared to turbans and elaborate headdresses that are depicted more frequently in the 15th century both on men and women participating in Biblical scenes (figs. 1-3). In the figure of St Susanne and the Burgundian holy woman, similar drapery folds and similar facial features, especially the downcast gaze, can easily find parallels with the present figure. The turban also gained popularity after the conquest of Christian Constantinople in 1453. A drawing by Albrecht Dürer shows this interest in elaborate headdresses from the near east (fig. 4). Such headdresses were thus no longer reserved for Biblical figures but started to be worn by wealthy men and women in Northern Europe.

The localisation of this sculpture to the Ile-de-France can be established not only by stylistic accounts but also by a scientific analysis which determined that the limestone originates from north of Paris.[2]

Related Literature

Mellinkoff, Ruth. Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages (California Studies in the History of Art. University of California Press, 1994.



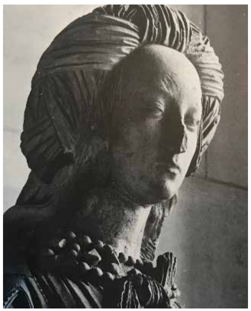


Fig. 1
Figure of St Susanne
France, Chantelle
c. 1500
Musée du Louvre

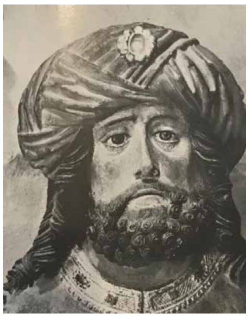


Fig. 3
Joseph of Arimathea
France, Amiens, St German-l'Ecossais
c. 1500

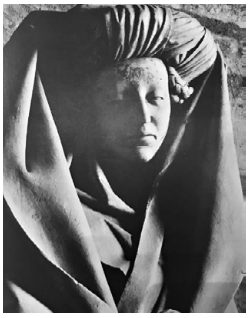


Fig. 2
Figure of a Woman from the Deposition
France, Burgundy, Yonne, Chapelle de l'hôpital de Tonnerre
1454

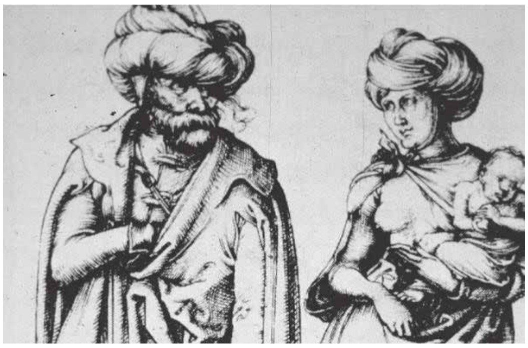


Fig. 4
Albrecht Dürer (1471 –1528)
The Turkish Couple
c. 1496
Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin

---

[1] Ruth Mellinkoff. Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages (California Studies in the History of Art (University of California Press, 1994), pp. 60 – 61.

[2] The stone analysis was undertaken by Annie Blanc.

24

The Head of John the Baptist, a Johannesschüssel

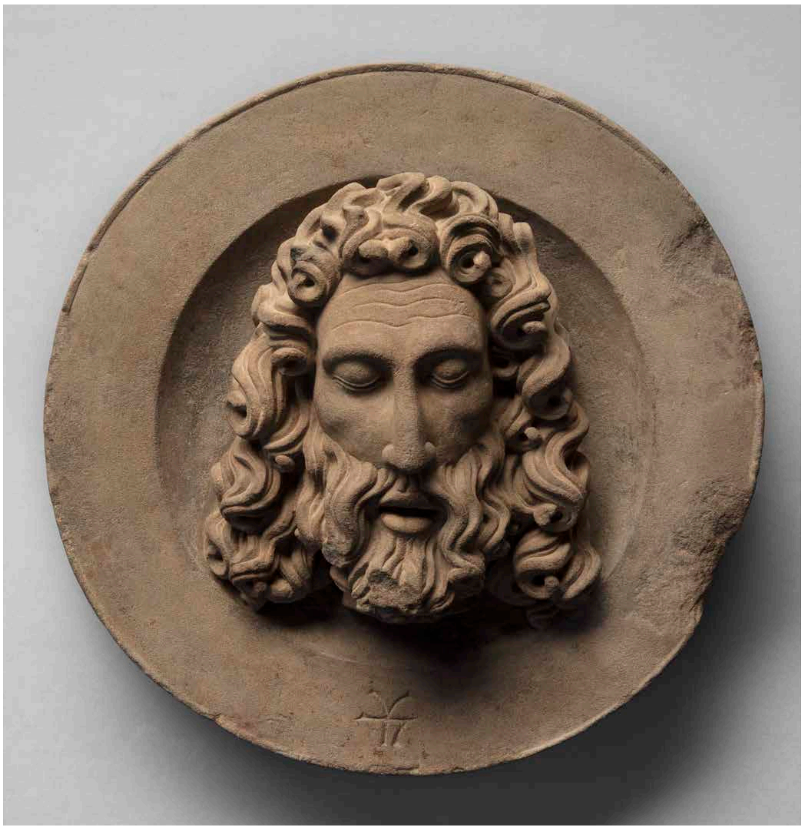
Silesia/Bohemia
c. 1480

Provenance
Count Traugott Hermann von Arnim (1839-1919), Schloss Muskau, Saxony, and by descent;
Buried in the castle grounds in Winter 1945 along with other 'art treasures' from the Schloss Muskau collection, and rediscovered during building and restoration works after the reunification of Germany;
Restituted to Count von Arnim's heirs and sold by them in 2012

37 cm / 14 1/2 inches (diam.) x 17.5 cm / 7 inches (depth); Grey sandstone. A section of the upper rim broken and restored from the 11 o'clock to 2 o'clock positions. Further chipping to the rim and some of the ringlets of the saint's beard.

Description and Iconography

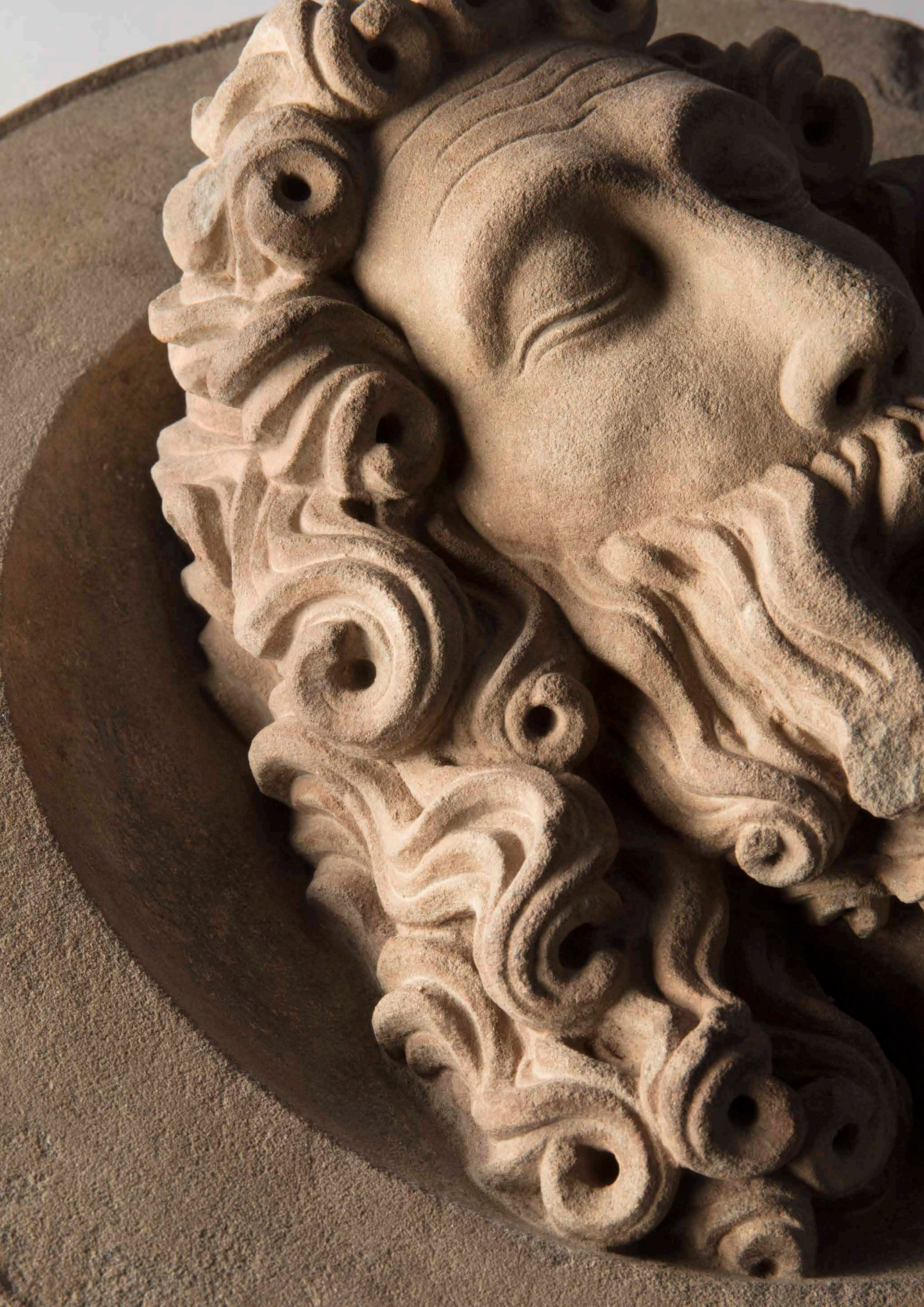
The head of Saint John the Baptist, its windpipe and esophagus protruding from its severed neck, lies in the bowl of a wide-rimmed dish. The saint's long, shaggy hair sprouts in thick, coiled ringlets whose wriggling forms are further echoed by his long beard and moustache. His mouth lolls open and his eyes are closed in death. Deep wrinkles ripple across his forehead but his cheeks and nose have a plump fleshiness suggestive of youth. Both the dish and the head are carved from the same, green-tinted sandstone. Chiselled into the rim of the dish directly below the saint' neckwound is a shape that could be the artist's identifying hausmarke (a form of cypher used in northern Europe during the later Middle Ages by craftsmen such as sculptors, masons, and architects). Not one in a thousand medieval sculptures bear any form of signature, which if it is to be identified thus, would make this example a hugely significant document of its type. Another possibility is that it is in fact a monogram for 'Johannes', with the Y-shaped element signifying the first letter of the name, and the more disguised shapes of an h and n formed by the conjunction of this symbol with the horizontal cross-stroke and its cusped vertical return on the right-hand side.[1]



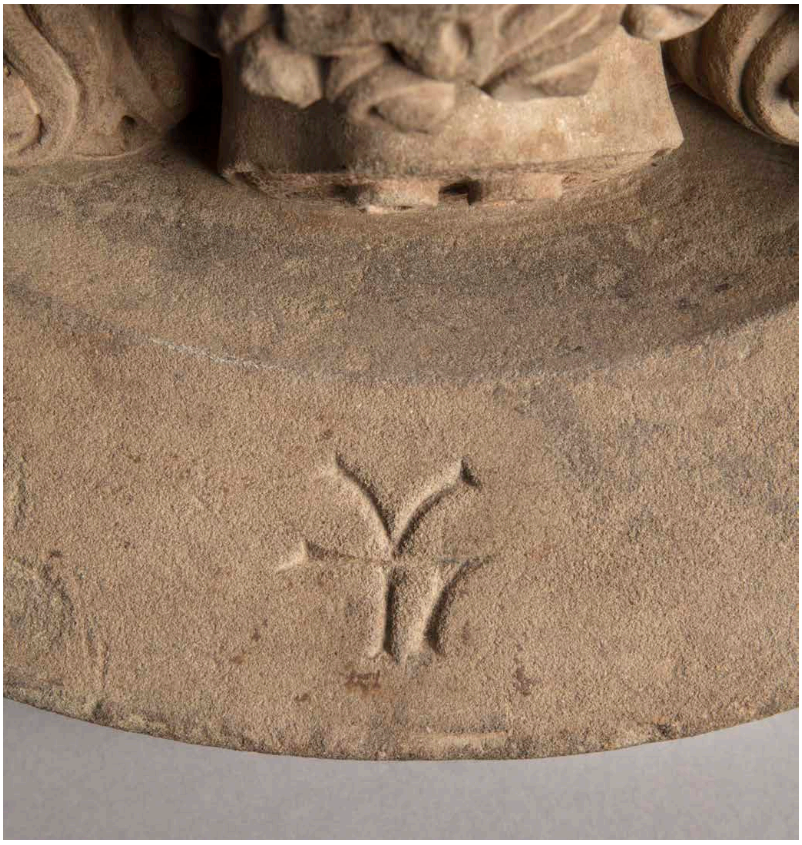
According to the Gospels of Matthew (14:6–12) and Mark (6:21–29), Saint John was arrested for criticizing the incestuous marriage between King Herod and Herodias, the wife of his slain half-brother Philip. Herodias's daughter, Salome, danced for Herod during his birthday banquet and as a reward she was offered whatever she wished. In an act of revenge against John, Herodias had her daughter ask for his head on a platter. Though reluctant, Herod was bound by his promise, and he ordered the execution.

---

[1] We are extremely grateful to Agata Gomolka for suggesting that the mark could be a monogram of the saint's name.



Early accounts suggest that the saint's remains were being venerated as early as the fourth century, having been rediscovered some thirty miles north of Jerusalem. They remained in the Holy Land until 1206, when Saint John's skull was stolen by crusaders returning to France after the Sack of Constantinople. It was taken by one of the crusaders, Walo of Sarton, to Amiens, where it remains to this day in the cathedral built to house it. By the end of the Middle Ages, the relic's reputed healing powers had led to its widespread devotion, and images showing the saint's severed head on a platter had become key devotional aids in churches right across Europe. They are typically known by the German term Johannisschüsseln, or the Latin Caput Iohannes in Disco ('Saint John dishes'). Sculpted versions of the image typically consist of a head either fixed onto a charger of another material, or like our example, carved integrally from the same block of stone (or also wood). Such objects gained incredible currency across the Dutch- and German-speaking lands during the fifteenth century in particular.[2] They had wide-ranging and mutable symbolic potential, serving multiple functions depending on their material or during specific occasions in the liturgical calendar.[3] For instance, many are known to have been processed around the altar or displayed atop the altar table to mark the summer feast days of Saint John's birth (24th June) and beheading (August 29).[4] They also served a Eucharistic function, since Saint John is considered by Christians to be a precursor of Christ, and in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries his execution was seen as a portent of Christ's own death on the Cross. The platter on which the saint's head was presented to Salome also echoed the utensils used during the Last Supper, again recalling the sacrifice made by Christ with his body and blood. Our example is fairly large and heavy, and as a result is not likely to have been moved often. The remnants of carving on the underside instead suggest that it was mounted on a specially made stand or column for permanent or semi-permanent display. Traces of vivid red pigment in the crevices of the neck wound, and of precious gold leaf on parts of the hair and beard, also indicate that it was originally picked out with polychromy, either selectively in combination with the natural colouring of the stone, or completely covering it with a painted and gilded surface.

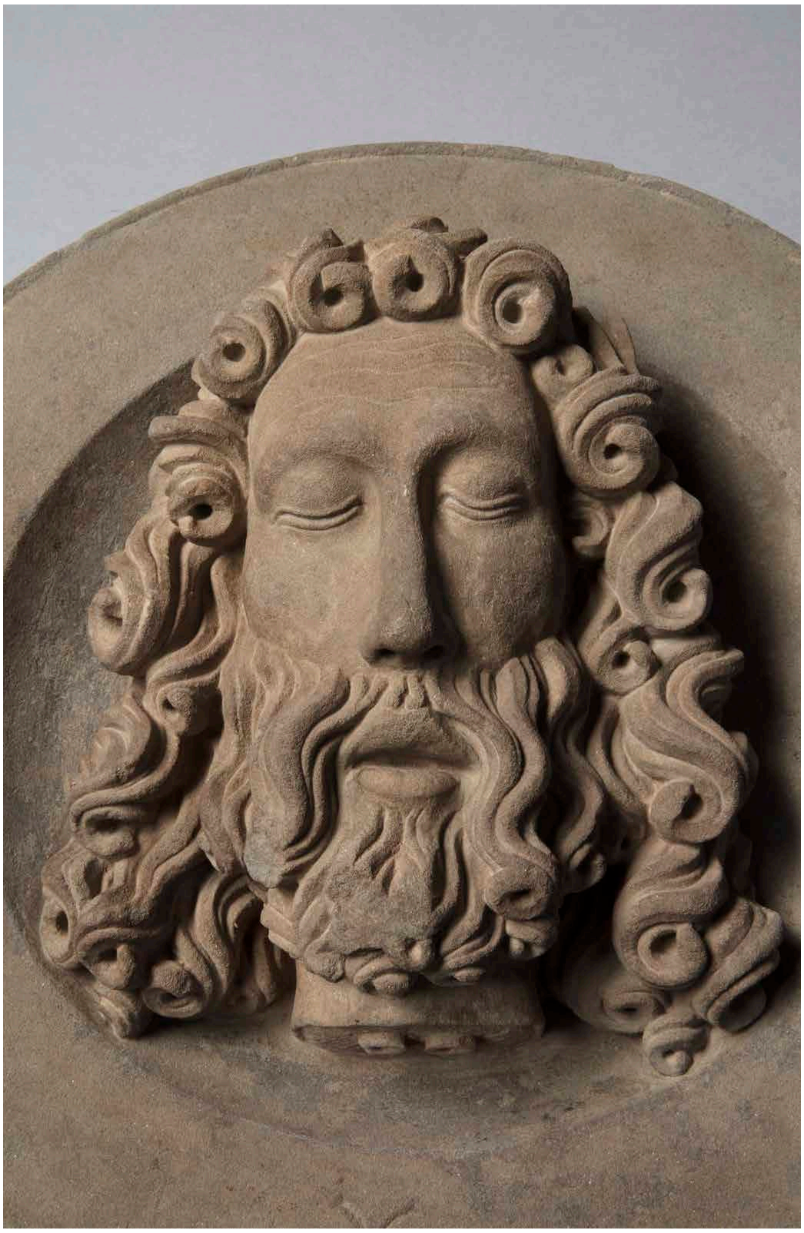


Detail of the sculptor's hausmarke and/or the monogram for 'Johannes'

---

[2] Norbert Jopek, German Sculpture 1430-1540: A Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2002, p. 130.

Saint John was invoked by sufferers of headaches, and was thought to guard against insanity. The latter belief may even have informed the prominent inclusion of the saint as a young boy on the Goldenes Rössl, which was given to the continually insane King Charles VI by his wife in 1405 as a reminder of his royal duties.



History and Localisation

The sculpture was buried in a wooden crate in the park at Schloss Muskau late in winter 1945, together with other valuable objects, to hide it from the advancing Red Army. At the end of WWII the Russian Occupation Forces confiscated and looted the estate. During building work, after the reunification of Germany, the buried art treasure was discovered, and restituted in 2012 to the von Arnim family. In the meantime, the ownership of the palace and its famous park (landscaped by Prince Hermann von Pückler-Muskau in the nineteenth century) was transferred to the Municipality of Bad Muskau and is now a museum.

The high relief and stylised locks of the hairstyle on our Johannesschüssel offer close parallels to contemporary German limewood carvings, and may suggest that our sculptor was also trained at wood carving as well; this dual specialism was in fact a widespread practice amongst Northern Renaissance sculptors, evidenced by the careers of artists including Niclaus Gerhaert and Tilman Riemenschneider[5]. The combination of the figure's tightly wound corkscrew hair curls with the softly modelled physiognomy of the face, and the proportion of the head to the dish, which is marked by its broad, undecorated rim, strongly echoes sculptural developments in eastern Germany and the region between modern-day Germany and Poland encompassing Bohemia and Silesia during the second half of the fifteenth century. Similarly modelled heads with such features can be seen on a small number of altarpieces and polychromed wood sculptures preserved in the museums at Wrocław (fig. 1) and Warsaw (fig. 2) in particular, as well as at the church of Saints Stanislaus and Wenceslaus in Świdnica (fig. 3), and the Benediktinerstift museum at Admont in Austria.

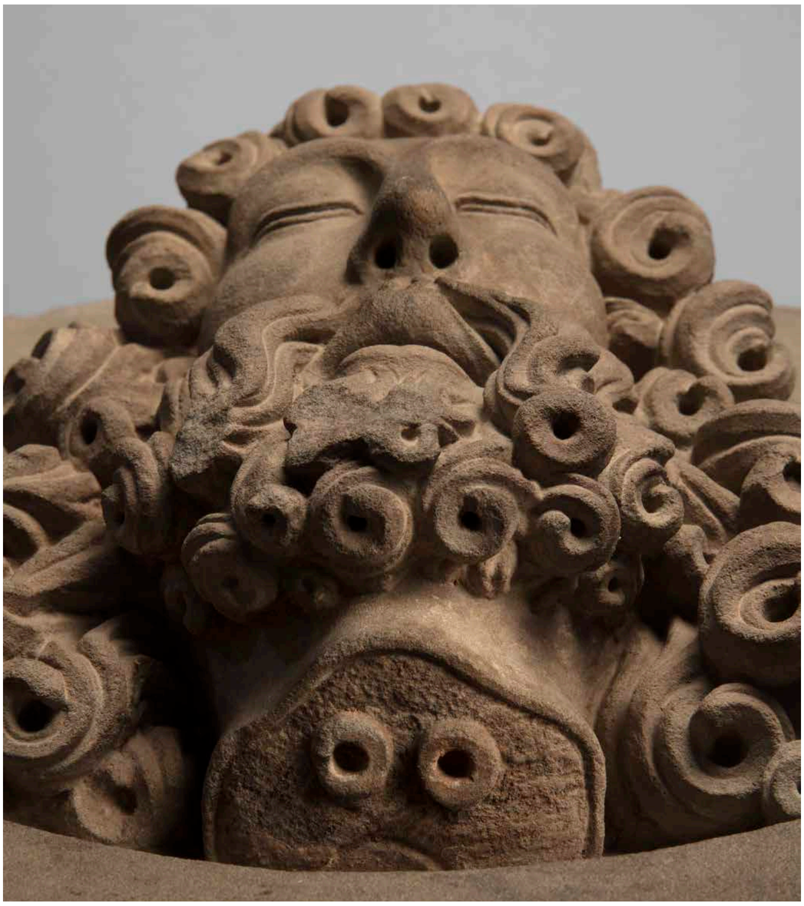
Just as informative is the fact that carved sandstone Johannesshüsseln were produced in large numbers in Bohemia and Silesia towards

---

3 For a discussion on the functions of the image, see Barbara Baert, 'The Johannesschüssel as Andachtsbild: The Gaze, The Medium and The Senses' in Barbara Baert, Anita Traninger and Catrien Santing eds, Dismembodied Heads in Medieval and Early Modern Culture, Intersections, Volume 28, 2013, pp. 117-160.

4 Barbara Baert, Caput Johannis in Disco, trans. Irene Schaudies, Leiden, 2012, pp. 61–82.

the close of the Middle Ages. Alongside having the more standard liturgical functions, examples were also mounted onto the keystones of vaults and church facades, above the doorways of private homes, and in town halls, including at Wrocław (fig. 4a-b). testament to its widespread appeal and veneration in this area, the motif of Saint John's head was even displayed in heraldic contexts, incorporated on the coats-of-arms of local landowners and municipalities.[6]



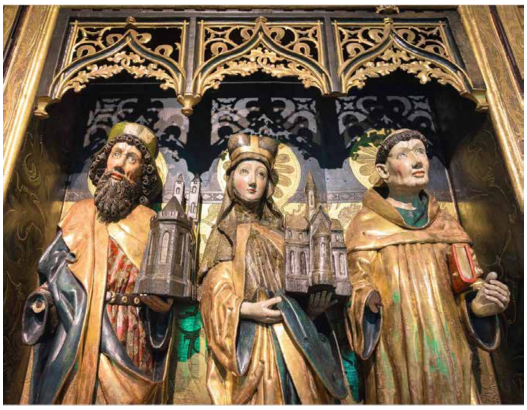


Fig. 1
Saint Hedwig Triptych, (detail)
c. 1470
Wroclaw, National Museum

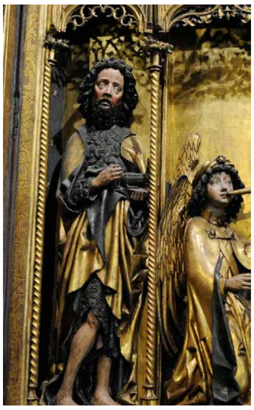
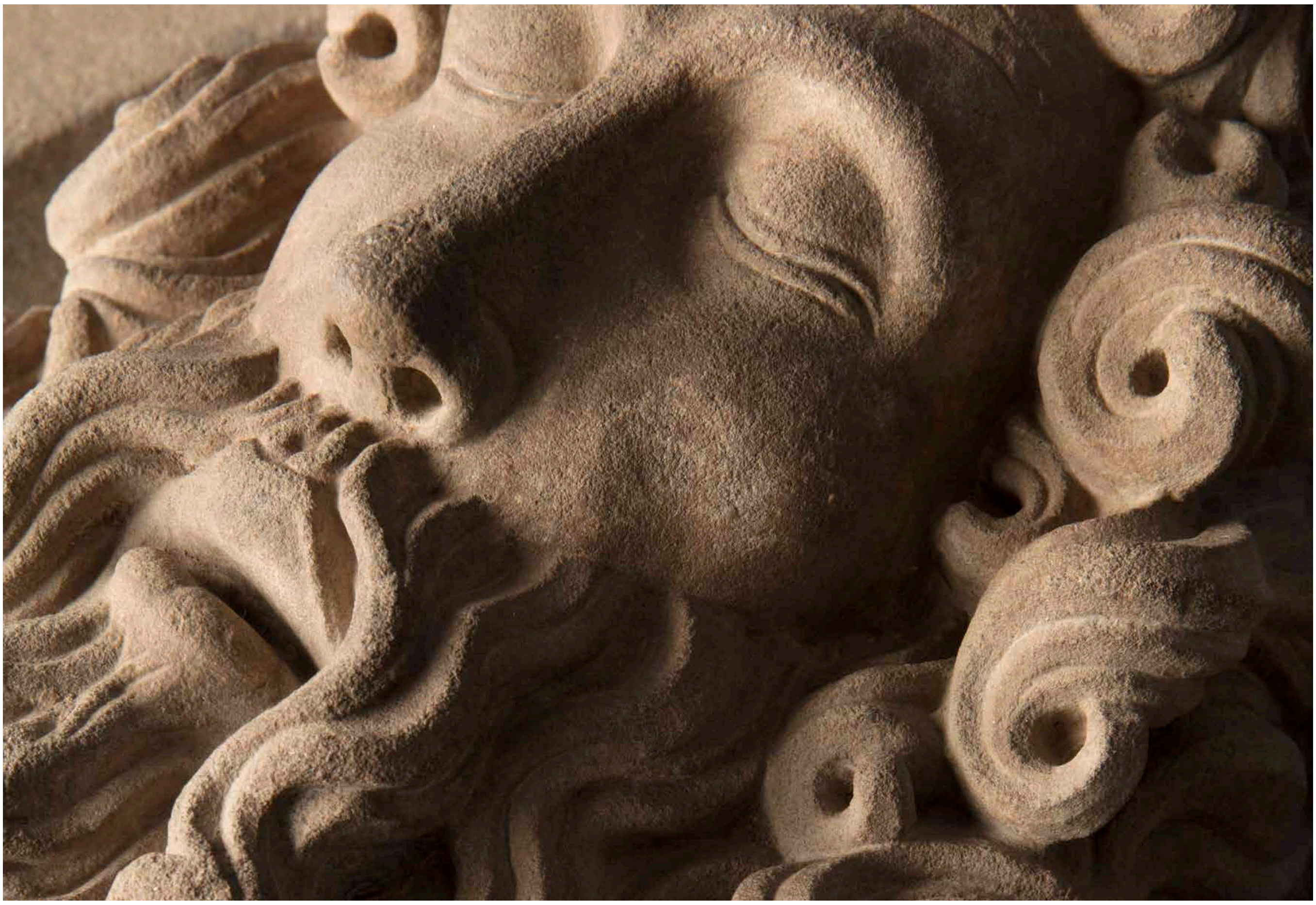


Fig. 2
Master of the Annunciation with the Unicorn Polyptych (active in Wroclaw c. 1475-85)
Annunciation with the Unicorn Polyptych (detail)
c. 1480
From the Church of Saint Elizabeth, Wroclaw (Breslau)
Warsaw, National Museum

---

[5] Stefan Roller, Niclaus Gerhaert: Der Bildhauer des Späten Mittelalters, Exh. Cat., Frankfurt and Strasbourg, 2012; see also Julien Chapuis, Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages, Exh. Cat., Washington and New York, 2000, p. 24 ff.

[6] Romuald Kaczmarek, 'The cultural identity of medieval Silesia: the case of art and architecture', in Przemysław Wiszewski ed., Cuius Regio? Ideological and Territorial Cohesion of the Historical Region of Silesia (c. 1000-2000) vol. 1: The Long Formation of the Region of Silesia (c. 1000-1526), Wrocław, 2013, pp. 193- 214, p. 198.



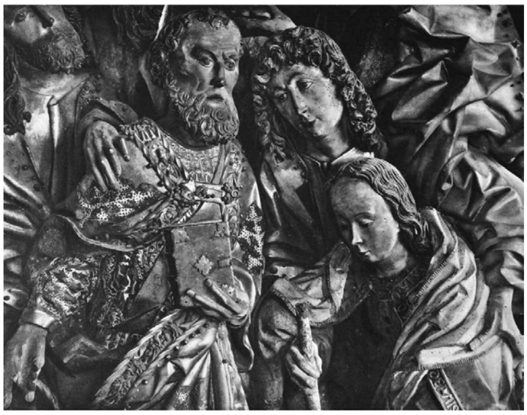


Fig. 3
Dormition of the Virgin
(detail), from the Retable of
the Virgin
1492
Świdnica, Church of Saints
Stanislaus and Wenceslaus

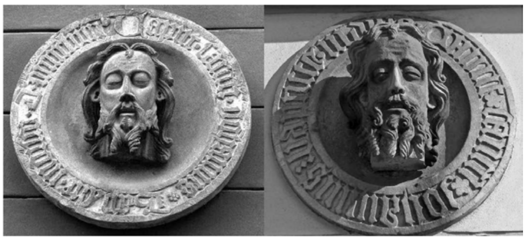


Fig. 4
Johannesschüsseln mounted
onto the facades of buildings
in Wrocław
First half 15th century
Image: Romuald Kaczmarek

25

Master of the Regensburg Hostienfrevel

Pentecost

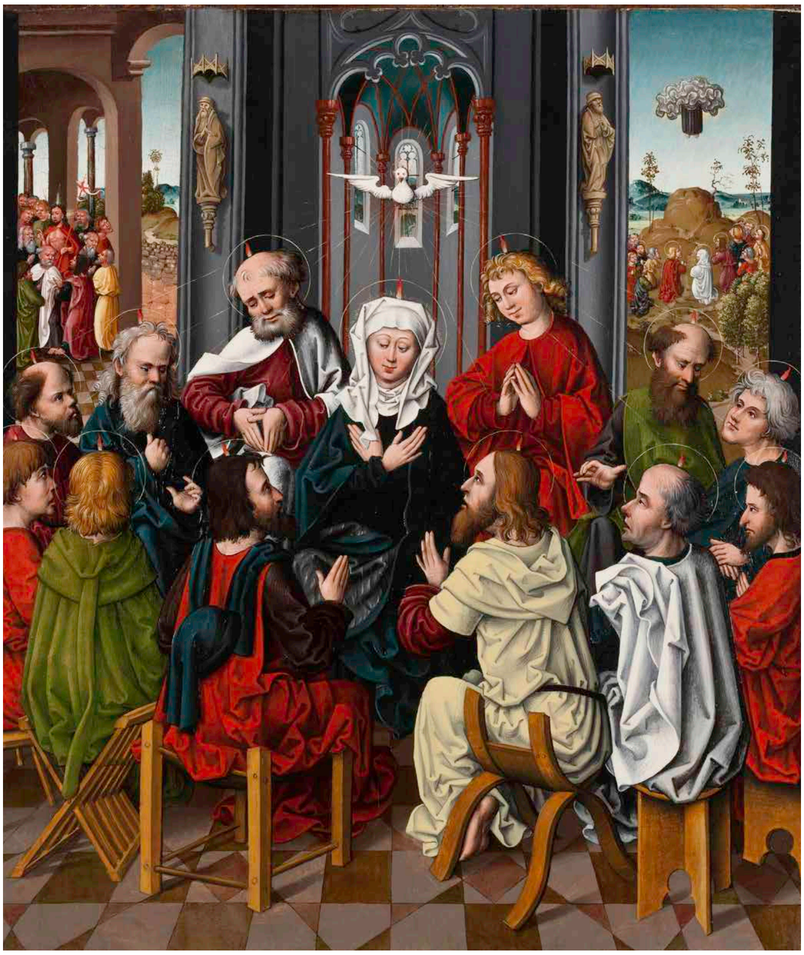
Germany, Regensburg
c. 1480

110 x 96 cm; oil on spruce panel (Picea abies).[1]

Provenance
Zurich, private collections Hofer, Giese (according to photographic archives of the Louvre, Paris); Southern Germany, private collection (from the 1960s)

Description, iconography, and function

The twelve disciples of Christ, each one picked out with carefully individualised facial features, gather around the central figure of the Virgin. The two most commonly individuated disciples, Saints Peter and John, appear immediately to the Virgin's right and left. John is shown as a youthful figure with long blonde hair and plump, fleshy features, while his counterpart Saint Peter is a wizened, balding man with a long greying beard. Their very different ages neatly bookend the collected group of men shown in this scene and suggest the whole arc of human life.



The Virgin hovers the Dove of the Holy Spirit, its idiosyncratically jointed wings widely spread out; it is crested in keeping with other depictions of the same period, with a cruciform nimbus, and emits rays of light. The six apostles closest to the viewer are seated on six different type of stools, the carpentry of each, including their dowelled joints, having been closely observed, though their scale is determined entirely by the requirements of the central figure group and the stools and chairs seem designed for figures of narrow proportions. The stools are used to create a network of contrasting horizontal, diagonal and curved lines across the foreground, and they cast beautifully observed further patterns of shadows on the geometric pattern of the tiled floor. The play between the rigidity of the forms of the furniture and the soft and often very complex curves – almost squiggles – of the apostles' drapery as it falls over or around them is clearly an effect enjoyed by the painter. Four of the six apostles describing the further curve of the circle are also seated, with Saints Peter and John standing. All of the protagonists receive the Holy Spirit in the form of a tongue of flame and all look towards the Virgin, except the two dressed in green, seated second from left (boldly shown entirely from the back) and second from right, who seem to engage in discussion with their neighbours. The concern for balance demonstrated here is carried through the whole composition. Behind the foreground group, and giving an architectural context to the whole, is what appears to be the interior of the east end of a church, concluding in a five-sided apse. The three most distant bays of the apse are pierced by tall round-arched windows and the apse is defined by an entrance arch with four suspended trefoils and by columns of red or polychromed stone whose capitals support a blue vault with red ribs.

---

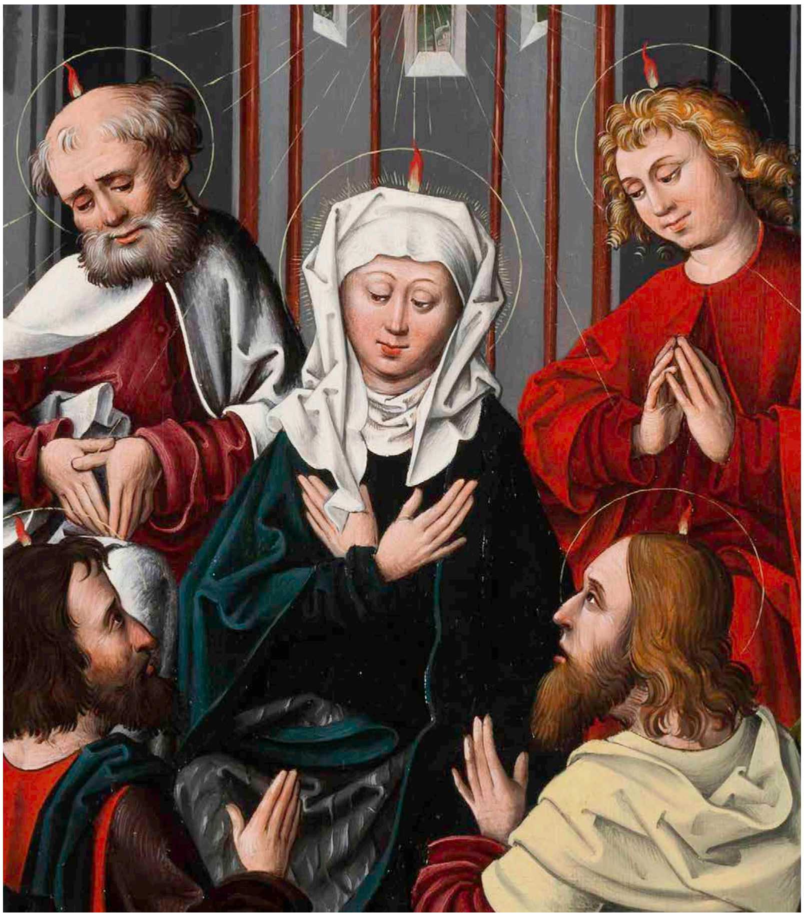
[1] This entry has been adapted from a longer version authored by Jim Harris for the publication Late Medieval Panel Paintings: Materials, Methods, Meanings, London, 2011, no. 5, pp. 76-87.

To either side of the entrance arch is a statue of a prophet in yellow-brown stone, standing on a console beneath a canopy. The background beyond and to either side of the quasi-liturgical space in which the Pentecost is depicted contains two further scenes, each involving the twelve apostles. To the left, in an open, arched area of a different, brown coloured stone, which may be intended as the cloister of the church in which the descent of the Spirit is taking place, the apostles gather around the resurrected Christ, who has appeared among them dressed in a red robe, open to display his side wound, and carrying a cruciform staff with the banner of a red cross on a white ground.

The columns of this cloister, of polished, coloured marble spolia rendered with red glazes over a grey and green base, with white highlights, display an attention to detail which betrays some of the care and skill which have gone into the painting. To Christ's right a bearded apostle holds up his hand, his gaze fixed on the wound in Jesus's side, whilst at the front of the group Peter disputes with a younger man, and it seems likely that the moment depicted is immediately prior to Christ's challenge to Thomas to put his hand in his side.

On the right of the painting, the apostles are gathered again, here with the Virgin also, to witness the ascension. They are shown kneeling at the foot of the mountain, six on either side of Mary, who is clad in white. Christ is seen entering the cloud, with only his legs, clad in a dark robe, and his feet still visible. The cloud is a dark, ruffled confection, highlighted in white and giving off rays of light in the same pale yellow that is used for the apostles' haloes and the light surrounding the dove of the Spirit.

With some facility the painter has sketched in landscapes behind the two subsidiary scenes. To the left, a road winds away beyond a rough stone wall towards tree clad hills giving on to distant blue mountains. This landscape appears to continue across the panel, visible through the

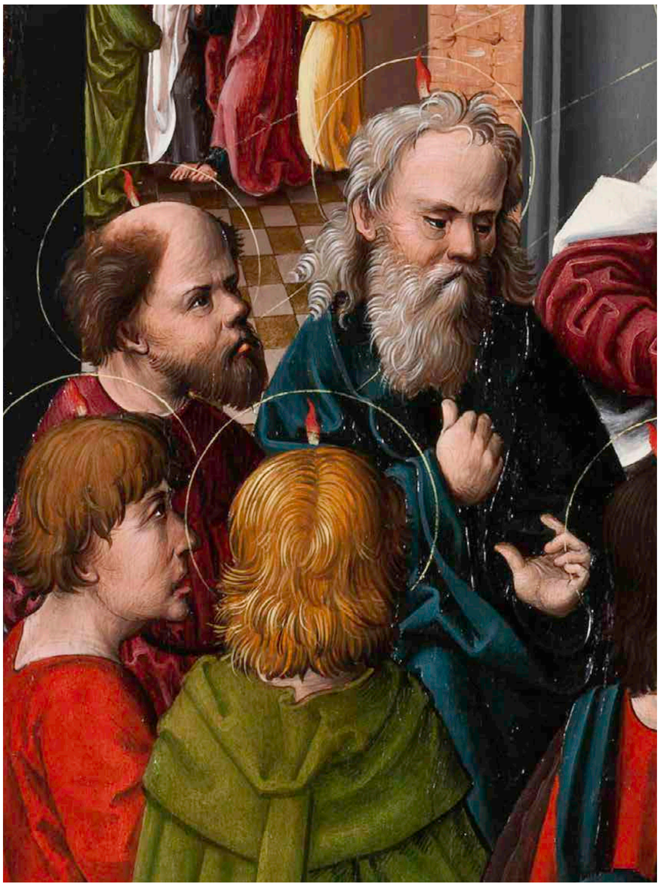


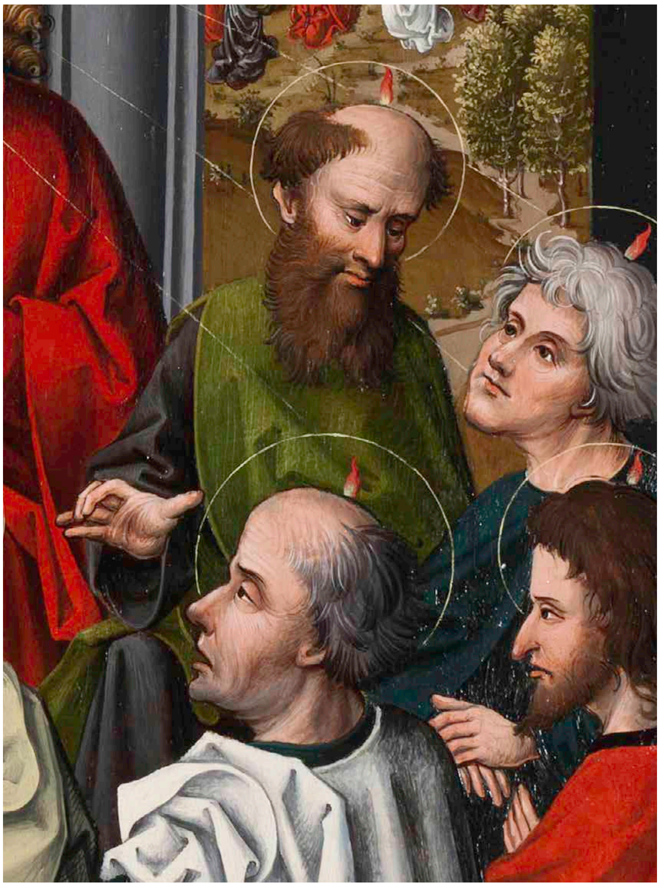
windows of the apse and then described more fully beyond the ascension, where red-roofed churches and a village are suggested by the lightest of brushstrokes. The light is consistent throughout this continuous background and is reminiscent of an early morning, in keeping with the post-resurrection appearances of Christ. Although skilfully drawn and carefully balanced in composition, none of the individual elements of this Pentecost are iconographically remarkable. The gathering of the apostles around the Virgin, the associated narratives of the resurrection and ascension and the dual representation of the Holy Spirit as flame and dove are all to be expected. So too is the location of the scene in a church or liturgical space, seen in other German paintings such as Hans Multscher's Pentecost from the Wurzach Altar, now in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

Style, date and attribution

This painting has previously been associated, by Stange and others, with the style of Sebald Bopp, a painter active in Wurzburg, Bamberg and Nordlingen in the last quarter of the fifteenth century.[2] This attribution cannot be maintained, however, the painting style having little to do with the works associated with that

[2] Hans Rott, Quellen und Forschungen zur südwestdeutschen und schweizerischen Kunstgeschichte im XV. und XVI. Jahrhundert, II, Alt-Schwaben und die Reichsstädte, (Stuttgart, 1934), p. 167ff; Alfred Stange, Deutsche Malerei der Gotik [DMG], 11 vols., (Munich and Berlin, 1934–61), VIII, Schwaben in der Zeit von 1450 bis 1500, p. 96; II, Die Zeit von 1350–1400, no. 1016.





artist such as the altar of the Counts of Oettingen in the castle chapel of Harburg (now Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum).[3] It can, however, be very closely associated with two panels from Regensburg that seem to be by the same hand, as suggested by Stephan Kemperdick, which allow us to localize and date the activity of this painter.[4] These are a pair of late fifteenth-century narrative panels, possibly altarpiece wings, from Regensburg, now in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg. The Regensburg panels depict the story of a Hostienfrevel, a desecration of the host or, more precisely, a Hostiendiebstahl, a theft of the consecrated wafers, which took place in the city in 1476.[5] The left-hand panel shows the young thief, in a lively cityscape, disposing of the host through the window of a winecellar in order to make off with the principal object of his interest, a silver ciborium. The right-hand panel shows the solemn procession following the miraculous rediscovery of the wafers in the cellar by the Bishop of Regensburg and the Abbot of St Emmeram. The pair have been discussed by Peter Streider in the 1975 catalogue of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, in the catalogue Martin Luther und die Reformation in Deutschland, and by Isobel Lübbeke in Regensburg im Mittelalter.

Scholars of the Hostienfrevel panels associate their style with paintings from the city they depict, whilst acknowledging them to be of higher quality than most products of that town. Regensburg in the late fifteenth century produced work full of detail, colour and individuality, typified by workshops such as those of the Graner family and the Master of the Fridolfinger Altars. Lübbeke compares the freshness of their narrative with the work of the Regensburg illuminator Berthold Furtmeyr and his illustrations for the

---

[3] For Sebald Bopp see Cristof Metzger, 'Sebald Bopp', in Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon, XII (Munich and Leipzig, 1996), p. 652.

[4] We are very grateful to Stephan Kemperdick for this suggestion as to the relationship between the present panel and the Regensburg works.

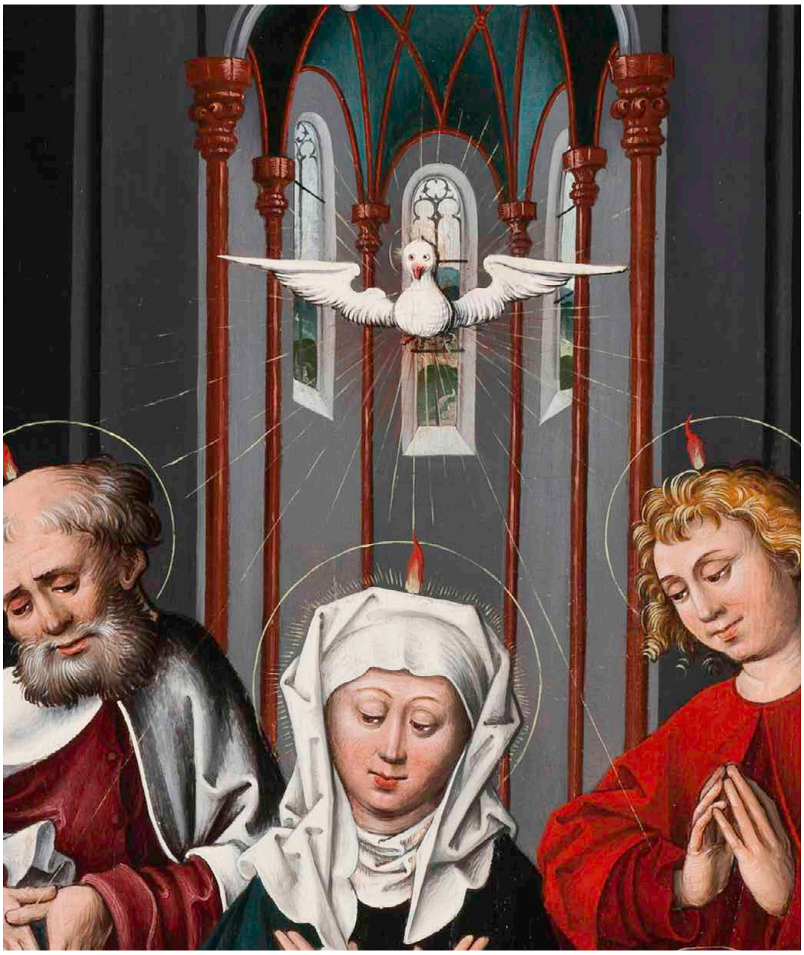
[5] See Peter Strieder, 'Zwei Flügel eines Altars mit Darstellung eines Hostienfrevels in Regensburg', in Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums, Nuremberg, 1975, pp. 149–52; Gerhard Bott (ed.), Martin Luther und die Reformation in Deutschland. Ausstellung zum 500. Geburtstag Martin Luthers, exh. cat., Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, 1983, no. 72; I. Lübbeke, 'Zur spätgotischen Tafelmalerei in Regensburg', in Regensburg im Mittelalter, I: Beiträge zur Stadtgeschichte vom frühen Mittelalter bis zum Beginn der Neuzeit, ed. Martin Angerer and Heinrich Wanderwitz, Regensburg, 1995, pp. 429–34, pp. 439–42. We wish to thank Dr Daniel Hess of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum for his generous help in providing information on these two paintings and the literature relating to them.

Salzburg Missal.[6] The connection between the unknown painter of the Hostienfrevel and the Pentecost, however, appears to be much closer.

Other than their comparably high quality and the general observation of their similarity, marked by vibrant colour, a graphic, slightly flattened, though perspectivally ambitious approach to architecture and a narrative style that is greatly enlivened by the individuality of the characters' faces and their numerous moments of interaction, there are a number of points of direct correspondence between the paintings. The resemblance of the acolytes attending the Bishop and the Abbot in the second panel to the Virgin and Saint John from the Pentecost is remarkable. The notation of features such as the Virgin's eyebrows, her mouth and that of Saint John is extremely similar to that of the faces of the two acolytes. Similarly closely related are the backs of the heads of the apostle seated second from left in the Pentecost and the man drinking from the fountain. The man standing at the front of the group to the far right of the Finding of the Host panel and the grey-haired apostle to the right of the Pentecost share the same, broad, thin-lipped mouth and prominent chin.

Two further pairs of faces bear similar comparison. The apostle seated second from the right of the Pentecost and the attendant in the centre foreground of the Finding of the Host are both shown with an extraordinarily domed forehead, while the woman holding a water pitcher in the Theft of the Host and the bearded apostle to the extreme right of the Pentecost each have the same distinctively down-turned mouth. That the faces in all three paintings should be at once so carefully individuated and yet retain so many similarities suggests that Kemperdick is correct to infer that they are likely to have originated in the same workshop in Regensburg, and quite probably from the same hand.

The similarity of style extends to the physical make-up of the panels: like the present work, they are made of spruce, and they are almost exactly the same size, measuring each 109/10 x 96 cm. The Hostienfrevel panels are known to have been made for one of three altars in a chapel erected shortly after the miracle of the finding of the desecrated Host in 1476 on the site of the wine-cellar, close to what is now Weißen-Hahnen-Gasse in the city. This makes a date of 1480 for the Pentecost panel highly plausible, while its similarity in size and format to the Regensburg paintings suggest that it too may have been intended as an altarpiece,



either alone or as part of a larger ensemble. The presence of the Resurrection and Ascension to either side of the central narrative may hint at its having stood alone, given the possibility that those scenes might otherwise have been used for flanking panels. The original intended location of the Pentecost can similarly only be speculated upon, though the apostles' hair may imply that it represents a lay commission, in contrast to the Wurzach Pentecost whose apostles are tonsured. It provides, however, a much expanded picture of the style of the Master of the Hostienfrevel panels, who until now was only known through the two panels now in Nuremberg, and may help further define painting in Regensburg in the later fifteenth century, and its achievements.

---

[6] We are very grateful to Stephan Kemperdick for this suggestion as to the relationship between the present panel and the Regensburg works.

26

A carved oak boss with the head of a man amongst foliage

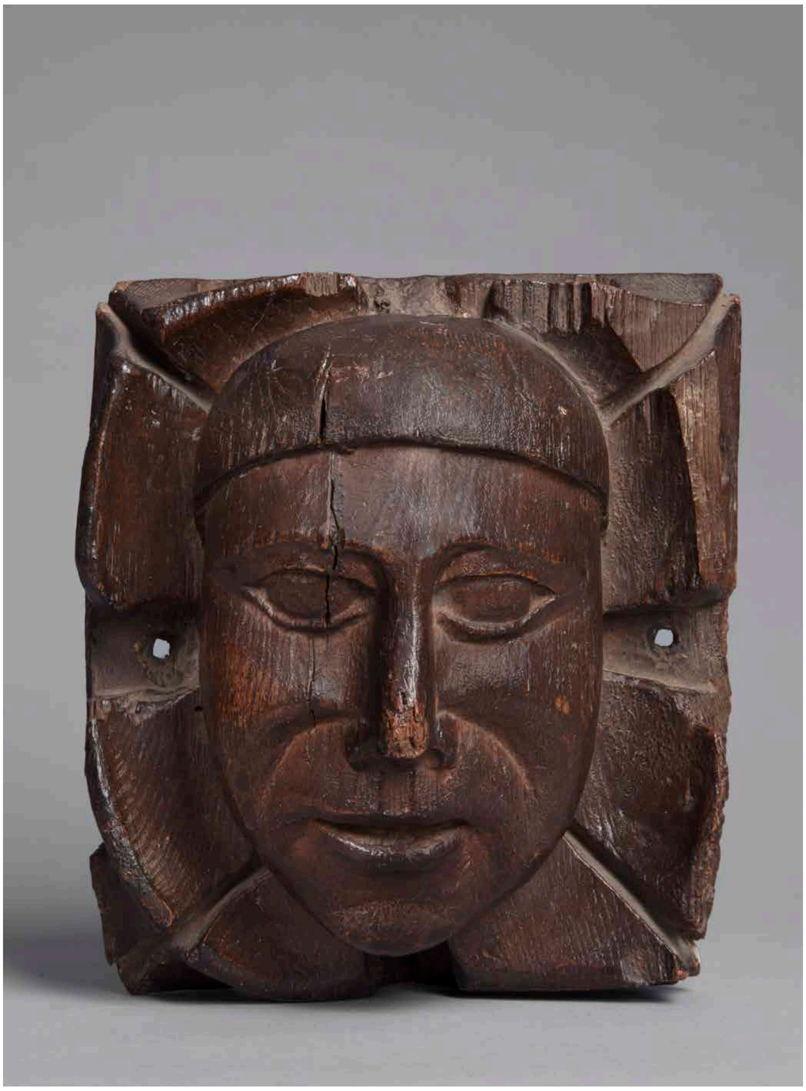
England, Devon
Second half 15th century

25 x 21.5 x 14 cm; Oak.

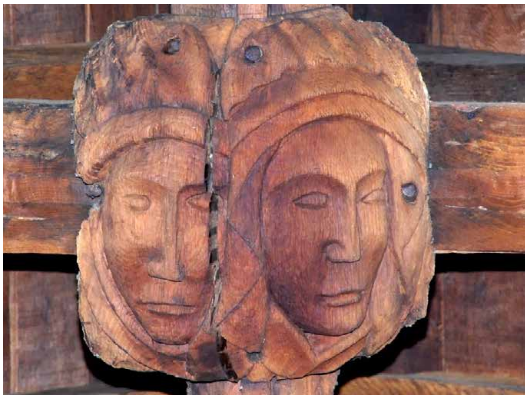
Provenance
Collection of Roderick and Valentine Butler,
Marwood House, Honiton, Devon

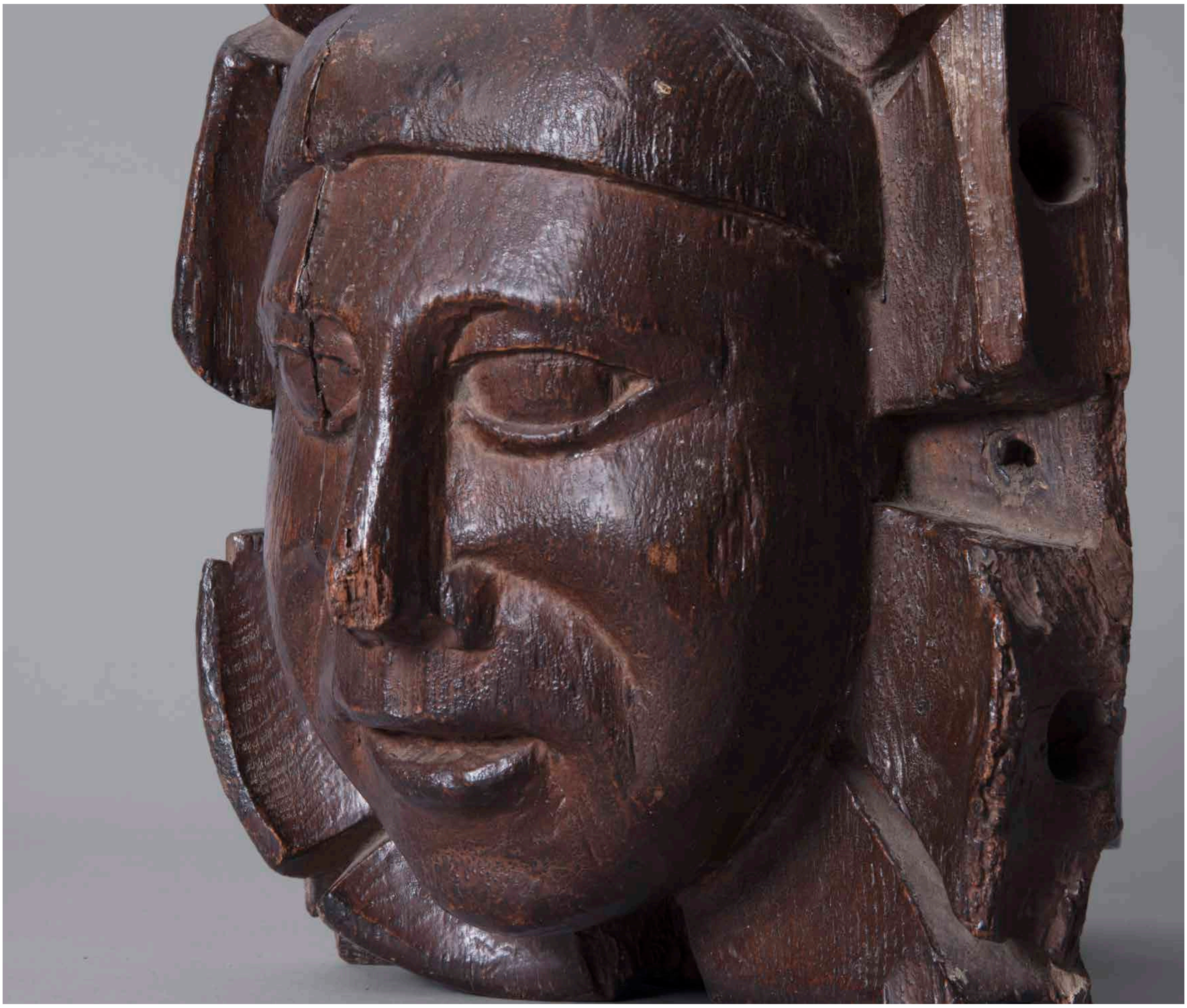
The face of a man wearing a cloth or leather cap peers directly out at us from the leafy fronds of a plant, an iconography suggestive of the phenomenon of the Green Man, which exerted a strong influence on the marginal imagery of church carvings throughout the later Middle Ages. He peers out at us with lips forming a cheeky smile and pronounced, almond-shaped eyes that suggest an ever-watchful presence.

The shaping of the back of the object suggests its use as a boss, and would have allowed it to be attached to the intersection of a curving rib structure, a type of ceiling construction typical of West Country English church rooves of the fifteenth century where all of the supporting and decorative elements are routinely carved from oak. The bold and direct treatment of the image draws close parallels to bosses still preserved in situ at churches in the Devon villages of Clyst, South Tawton, and Ugborough, among others, and help to localise its origins firmly to that county (figs. 1-3). The style of the carving also suggests a date in the second half of the fifteenth century, perhaps as late as 1500.



1 Fig. 1
Roof boss with two faces
Mid-15th century
Devon, South Tawton,
Church of Saint Peter





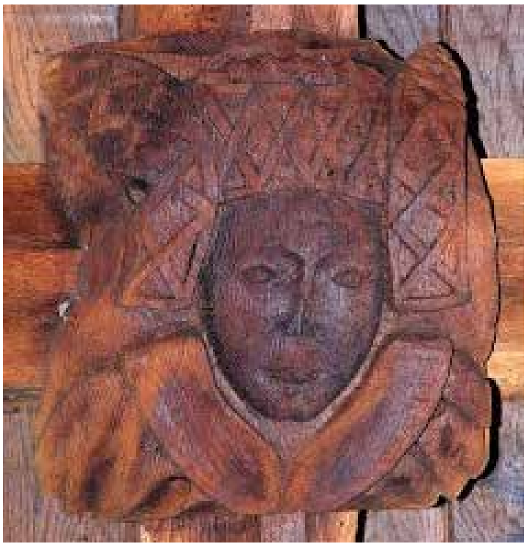


Fig. 2
Roof boss with a female head
in an ornate headdress
Mid-15th century
Devon, South Tawton,
Church of Saint Peter

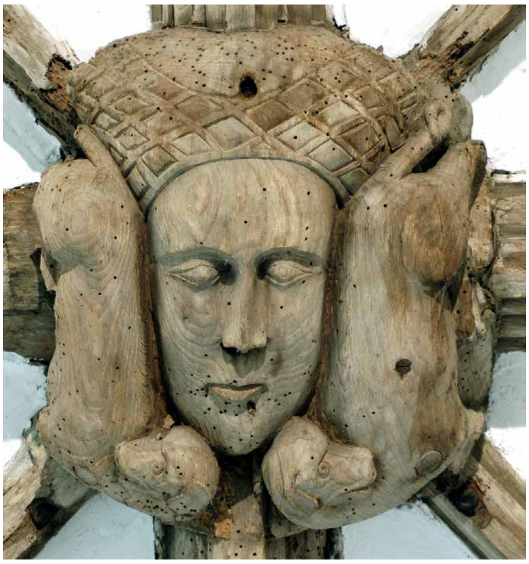


Fig. 3
A female head framed by
two dogs
Second half 15th century
Devon, Ugborough, Church
of Saint Peter

27

A Benedictine nun in prayer, possibly Hildegard of Bingen

Southern Germany, Swabia, Ulm?
c. 1500

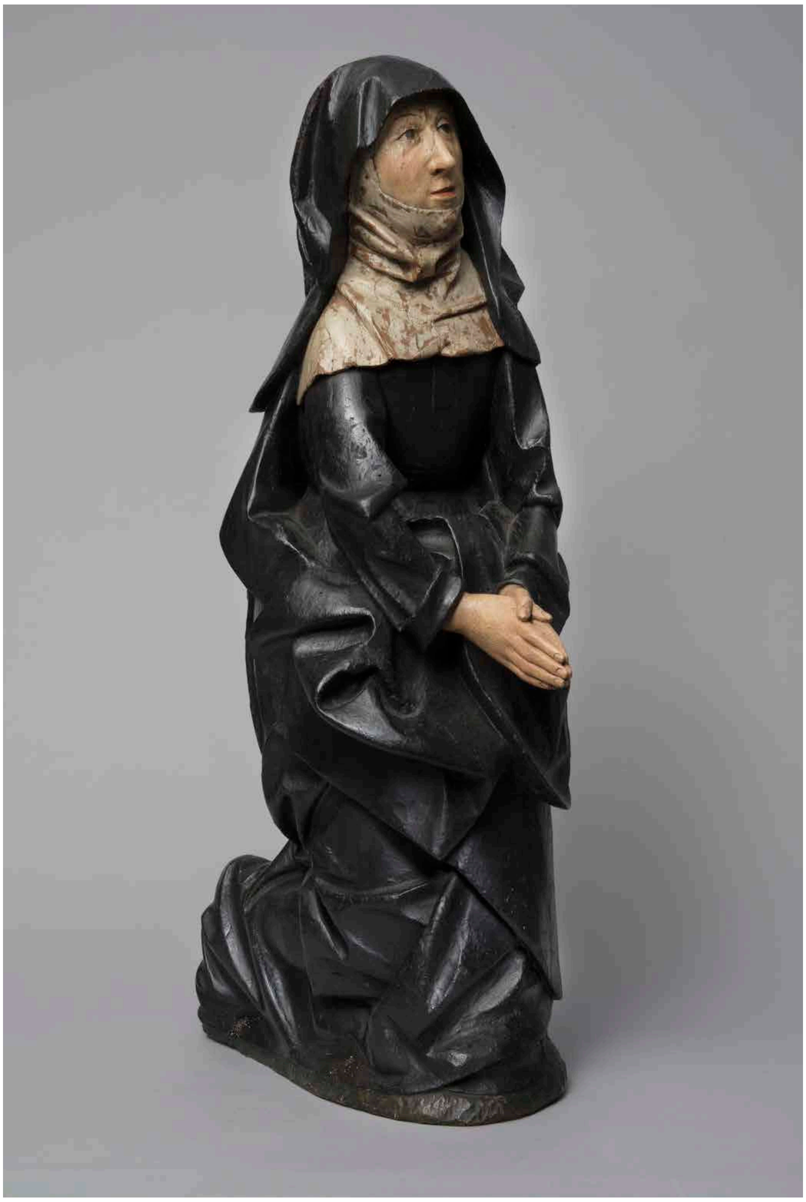
Provenance
Collection of André Rostenne (1911-2007), Ohain, by 1985, and by inheritance until 2020

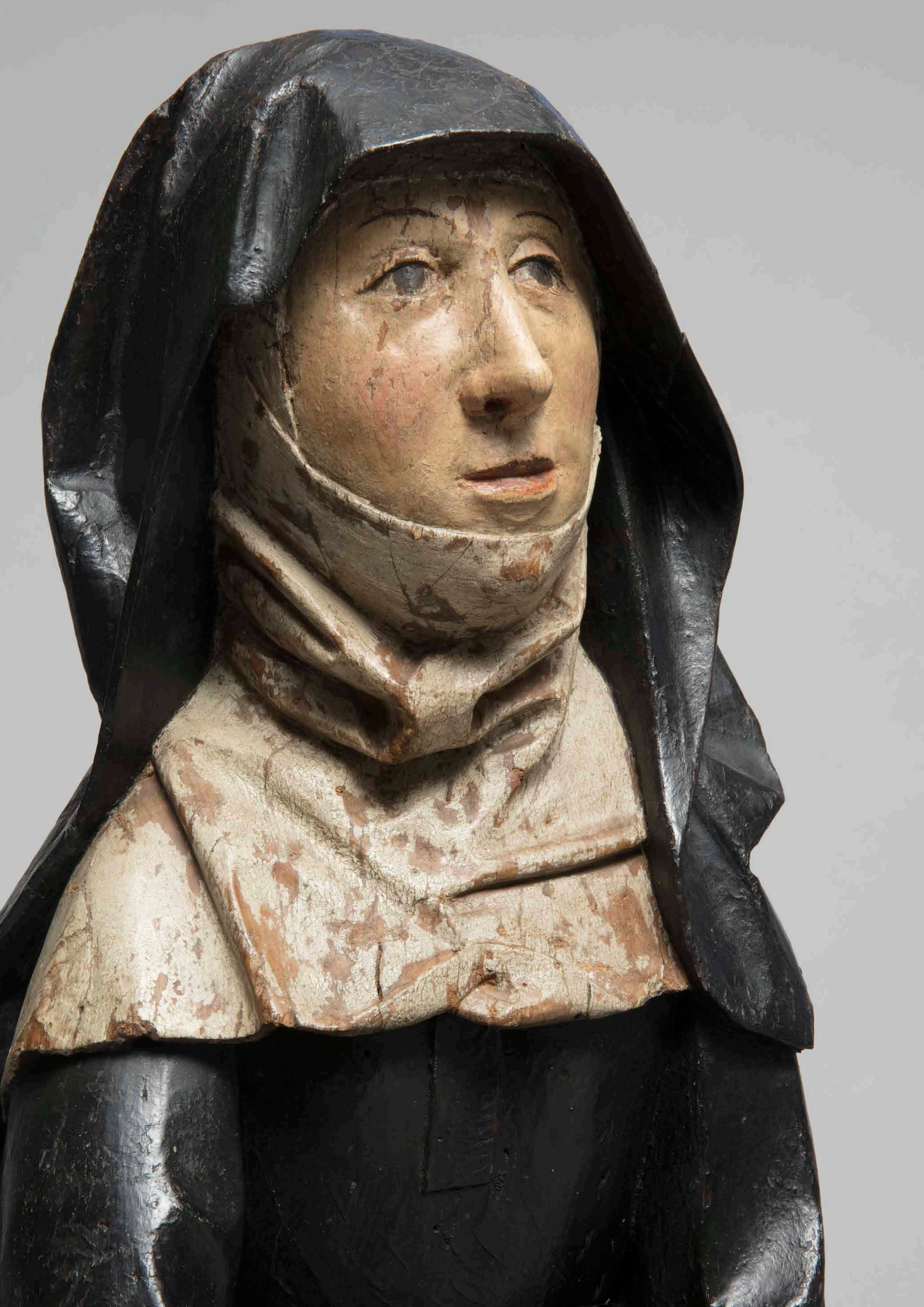
77 x 40 x 22 cm; limewood with polychromy. Three layers of polychromy have been discovered on the figure, with the original surviving in small sections on the face and robes. Repairs to the wrists.

Description and Iconography

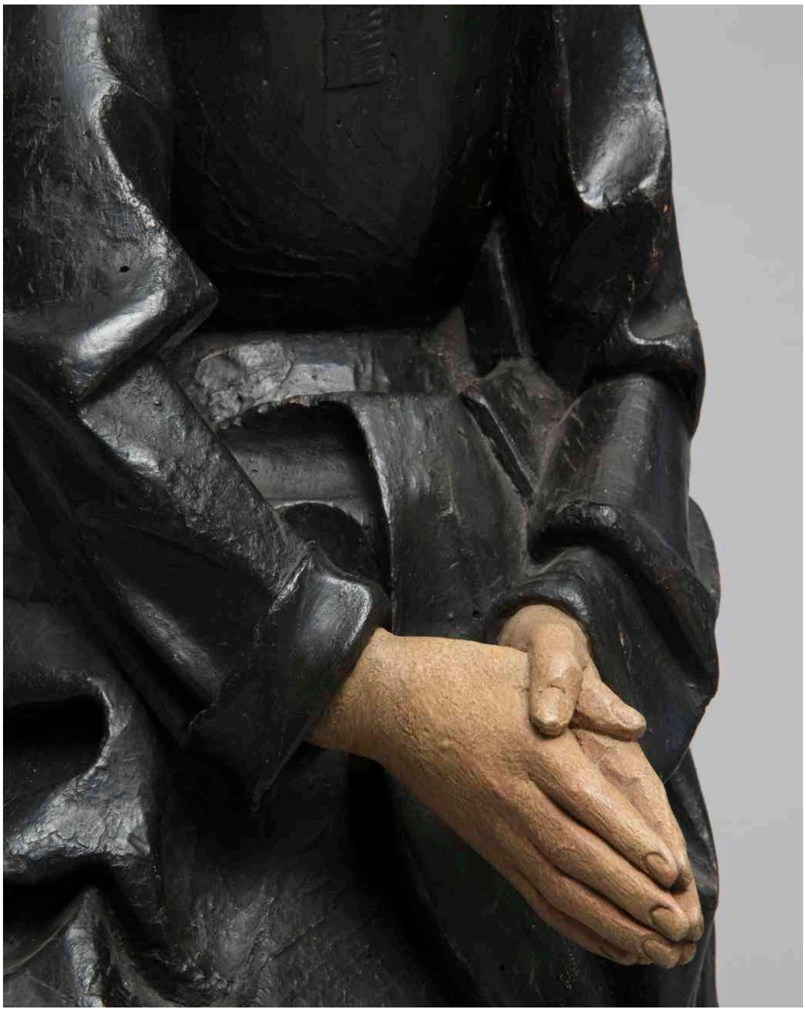
A Benedictine nun kneels in profile, turned to our right with her head raised and her hands touching in prayer in front of her body. She wears a white peplum or underveil around her face, and a black velum, or veil, over her head. Her facial features are idealised, with delicate almond-shaped eyes, a long nasal ridge and fine lips. Her eyebrows arc high above her eyes, as if responding to the vision before which she kneels in prayer.

The identification of our nun must remain speculative without the wider evidence of its original context to help us, but the robes she wears accord with those of the Benedictines, a monastic Order that rose to prominence in Europe by the ninth century and followed a series of strict religious principles established by Saint Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-543) some three centuries prior. It is very possible that our nun represents either the prioress of a Benedictine abbey or monastery or every Benedictine nun, and was most likely incorporated within a large altarpiece with standing saints and a central image of Christ or the Virgin. However, one of the most prominent Benedictine nuns of the Middle Ages was Hildegard of Bingen (c. 1098-1179), also known as Saint Hildegard and the Sibyl of the Rhine, daughter of two lower members of the nobility in the service of the Count Meginhard of Sponheim. She became venerated as one of the leaders of the Order soon after her death. Hildegard's fellow nuns elected her as magistra in 1136, and she went on to found the monasteries of Rupertsberg in 1150 and Eibingen in 1165. She composed theological, botanical, and medicinal texts, as well as letters, liturgical songs and poems; more chants attributed to Hildegard survive than by any other composer from the entire Middle Ages, and she is one of the few known composers to have written both the music and the words.





Hildegard's most significant works are without doubt a series of three volumes devoted to the theme of visionary theology: Scivias (‘Know the Ways’, composed 1142-51), Liber Vitae Meritorum (‘Book of Life's Merits’, composed 1158-63); and Liber Divinorum Operum (‘Book of Divine Works’, also known as De operatione Dei, composed between c. 1163 and 1174). In each case, Hildegard describes a series of enigmatic sacred visions before interpreting their theological significance. Our sculpture may well represent Hildegard herself, kneeling in prayer before one of these sacred visions.



Localisation and Dating

Compelling stylistic, technical, and iconographic links to Southern German sculpture from the first decade of the sixteenth century make the localisation and dating of our figure straightforward. The figure’s pale flesh tones and heavily rucked and ruffled draperies are characteristic flourishes associated with Swabian sculptors in this period, and particular comparison can be made to a group of praying nuns executed in the workshop of the Ulm sculptor Daniel Mauch (1477-1540) between c. 1505 and 1510, and now preserved in the Tiroler Landesmuseum in Innsbruck (fig. 1). A handful of works by other Swabian sculptors including Michel Erhart (especially the figure of Saint Scholastica on his most famous work, the 1493-4 Blaubeuren altarpiece) and the Master of the Blutenburg Apostles (fig. 2a-b) help to confirm that our sculptor was active in this region, most likely in its leading sculpture-producing centre of Ulm.

Related literature

Sophie Guillot de Sudiraut, Dévotion et Séduction: Sculptures souabes des musées de France vers 1460-1530, Paris, 2015

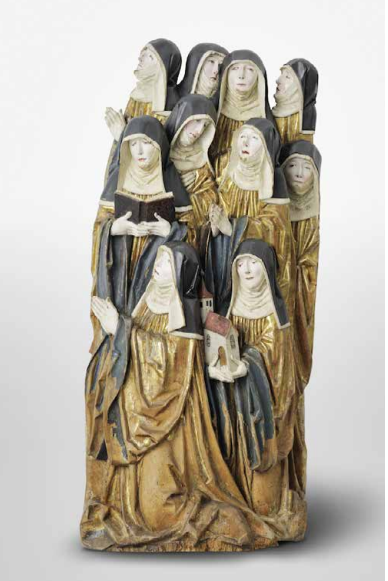
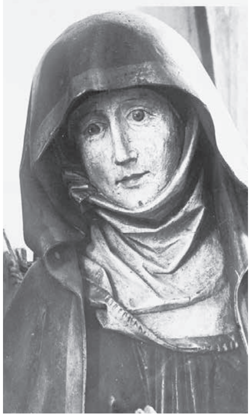


Fig. 1
Workshop of Daniel Mauch
(1477-1540)
Ten Nuns in Prayer
c. 1505-10
Polychromed limewood
Innsbruck, Tiroler
Landesmuseum
Ferdinandeum



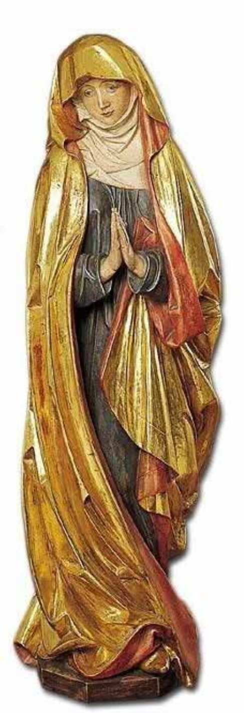


Fig. 2a and b
Master of the Blutenburg
Apostles
The Blutenburger Madonna,
with a detail of the face and
veil
c. 1490-1500
Blutenburg, Klosterkirche

28

A Head of a Young Man

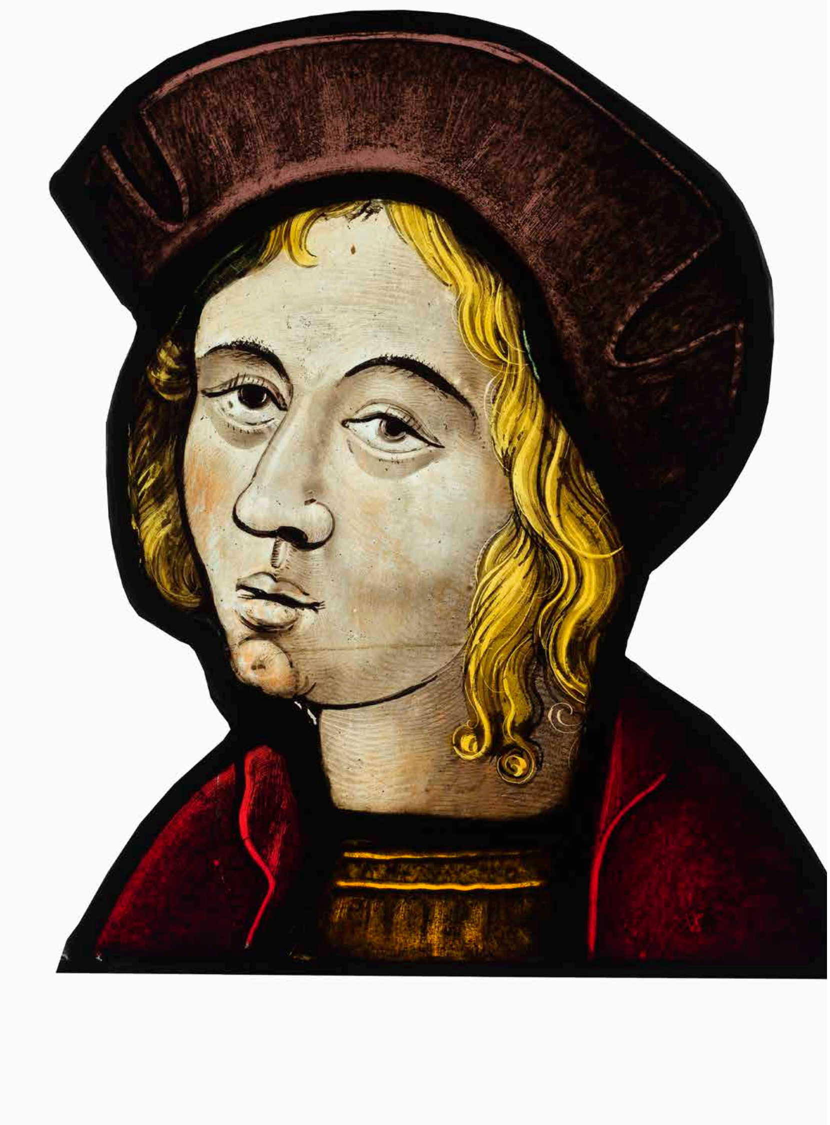
Northern France
c. 1530

Provenance
Private collection, England, acquired before 2005

21.5 x 18 cm; red, purple and clear glass with silver stain, vitreous enamel, and pink sanguine pigment.

A portrait of a youthful and beautiful man with his head turned in three-quarter profile, his eyes glancing almost coyly out at the viewer. He wears a purple cap above his long, shoulder length blonde hair, and a red cloak over a dark yellow, pleated shirt.

The treatment of the face, with pink sanguine pigment used in alongside the more common brownish-black to imbue the cheeks, chin, and neck with a subtle warmth, became a widespread characteristic of glass painting in Northern France and the Southern Low Countries from the early decades of the sixteenth century. Closely related fragments preserved in the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin, have been related on stylistic grounds to contemporary panel paintings produced in this region shortly after around 1500 (fig. 1). Our figure almost certainly comes from the same context as these examples, and is perhaps even attributable to the same painter. His stylish pleated shirt and wide brimmed berretta suggest a young man enjoying the height of fashion.



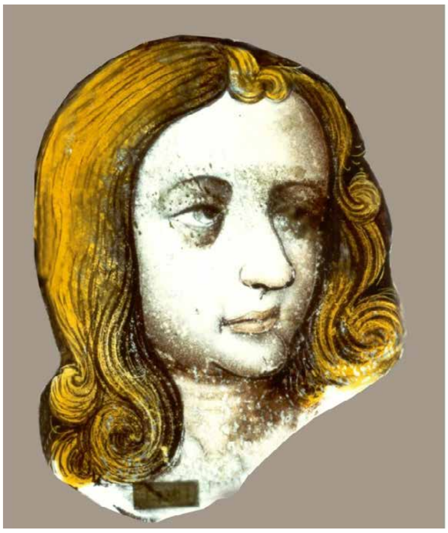


Fig. 1
Head of a figure with long blonde hair
Southern Netherlands or Northern France
c. 1500-10
17.4 x 14.4 cm; clear glass with silver stain, vitreous enamel, and pink sanguine pigment
Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum, inv. F 2381 f

29

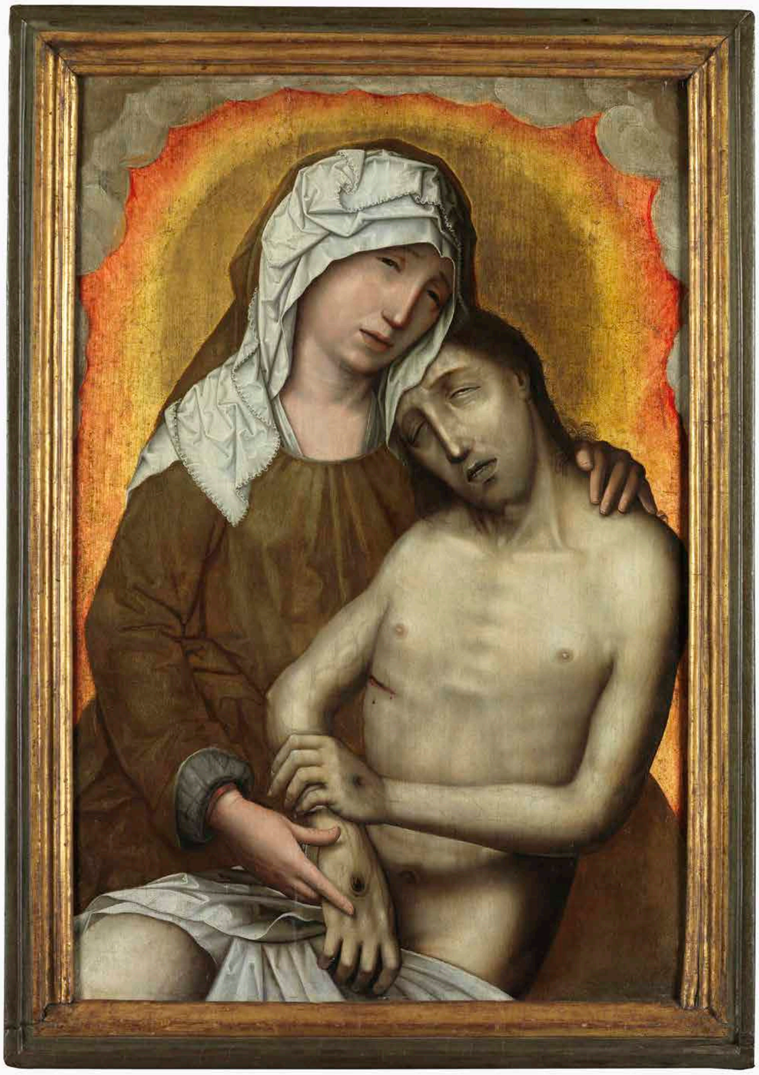
The Pietà

Southern Low Countries, Valenciennes (?)
c. 1500-10

Provenance
Walter P. Chrysler Jr.;
Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia, Acc.no. 71.2119 until sold at
Christie's New York, 20th October 1990, lot 708;
Sam Fogg, London;
Private collection, USA

54 x 38.5cm (without frame), gilding and oil on oak panel, in excellent condition.

Published
Bodo Brinkmannm, 'Ein Frühwerk von Josse Lieferinxe?', in Aus Albrecht Dürers Welt, Turnhout, 2001, pp. 33-40.



This uncompromising image, marked by pathos and emotional anguish, is an intimate and vivid portrayal of the Pietà, showing a youthful figure of the Virgin Mary holding the slumped body of her dead Son on her lap. Christ's physical suffering is rendered in poignant detail - particularly on his visage. His eyes are slightly open and his lips are parted, revealing his teeth and evoking the moment of his last dying breath, while his thin, ashen skin is stretched across his body and shows in intricate detail the blue veins in his arms. While this is clearly an image of a dead man, Christ's face appears still contorted with the agony of his torture, the tendons of his neck protrude stiffly, and his ribcage is subtly rendered to suggest a taut and structured chest. With her right hand the Virgin points to the wounds on Christ's hands, which are depicted with terrifying realism at the same moment as being crossed tenderly in the crook of her midriff. Mary's expression is one of deep sorrow, with her head is inclined towards Christ's and her eyes pursed in a manner that closely resembles those of her Son. Unusually, she wears a dark, olive-green dress with a mantle of the same material and colour draped over her head, its fabric framing the crimped white veil that covers her hair and falls in papery folds over her shoulders. A section of it is painted so as to fall over Christ's forehead and thus keep the two figures' faces from touching, suggesting an intimacy that is nevertheless intertwined with the separation brought about through his death. Moreover, the fabric appears to dress the marks made by the Crown of Thorns, thus further serving to evoke the ritual importance of cloth itself in the Passion narrative, not least through the process of wiping and cleaning Christ's wounds that according to the Gospels took place as he was laid in the tomb.

This dramatic vision of the Virgin cradling her Crucified Son is based not on biblical accounts of Christ's death or on any surviving texts by the early church fathers, but on the evolution

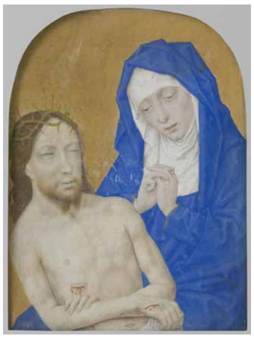
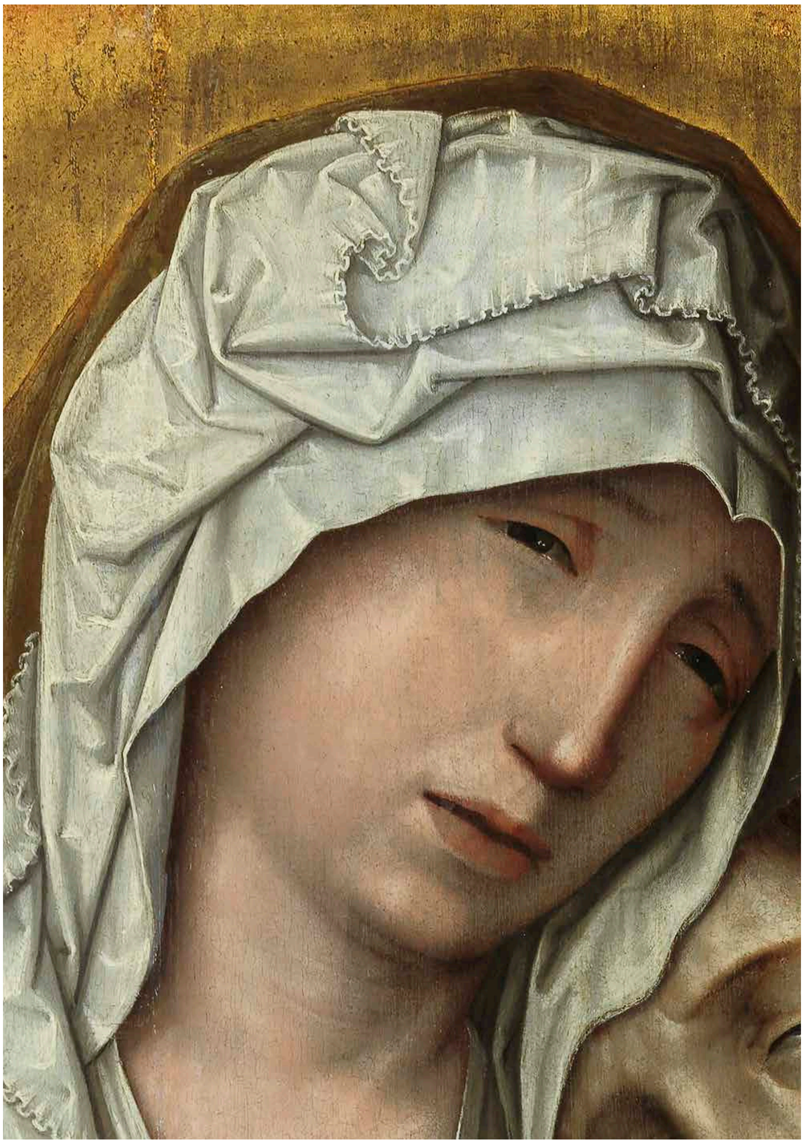


Fig. 1
Simon Marmion
Pietà
Southern Low Countries, Valenciennes
Late 15th century
11.7 x 8.9 cm; illumination on vellum
Philadelphia, Museum of Art, Inv. 343

of the Passion narrative in apocryphal literature appearing over the course of the later Middle Ages. It has its roots in the Byzantine theme of the Threnos, or the Lamentation of the Virgin over the dead body of Christ, and first appears in Italo-Byzantine painting as a scene depicted separately to the Lamentation. Erwin Panofsky considered it to have been an amalgamation of Lamentation imagery and icons depicting the Madonna of Humility, since most depictions show the Virgin seated on the ground at the foot of the Cross[1]. Images of this type became extremely popular in the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries, not least since they expressed themes central to the highly influential Devotio Moderna movement founded by Geert Groote. Quentin Massys, Jan Provoost, and Simon Marmion all created iconic compositions that were in turn proliferated by their followers across the Southern Low Countries (where Devotio Moderna was most populously supported) and Northern France.



Context, Localisation and Date

Although previously proposed to be an early work by Josse Lieferinxe, the Netherlandish painter who spent his working life in Provence, the stylistic and technical treatment of the present panel can be linked most strongly to the work of Simon Marmion, a painter and illuminator active in Amiens between 1449 and 1454, and then in Valenciennes between 1458 and his death on 25th December 1489[2]. In 1468 Marmion became a master of the Tournai painters' guild, and in 1454 was summoned to work on the decorations for Philip the Good's Feast of the Pheasant, a lavish celebration for which the preparations employed a number of the region's foremost artists, sculptors, and glaziers. According to the chronicler Jean Molinet, Marmion was capable of painting anything that could be painted ('toutte rien pingible') and had 'painted and imagined everything' ('tout painct et tout ymaginé').[3]

The style of the figures' facial features, with their eyes and mouths depicted so as to carry the thrust of their emotional and physical states, is evocative of several of Marmion's surviving Pietà images, both on panel and parchment. The manner in which one of Christ's hands is carefully folded over His other forearm finds a parallel in an illumination by Marmion now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Fig. 1), and another painted around 1480 in Marmion's workshop and

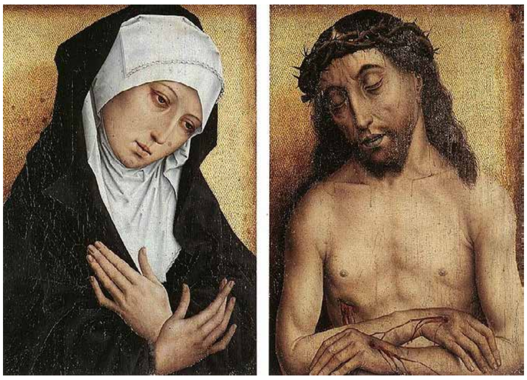


Fig. 2
Simon Marmion
Diptych of the Ecce Homo and Mater Dolorosa
Valenciennes
Late 15th century, before 1489
Bruges, Groeningemuseum

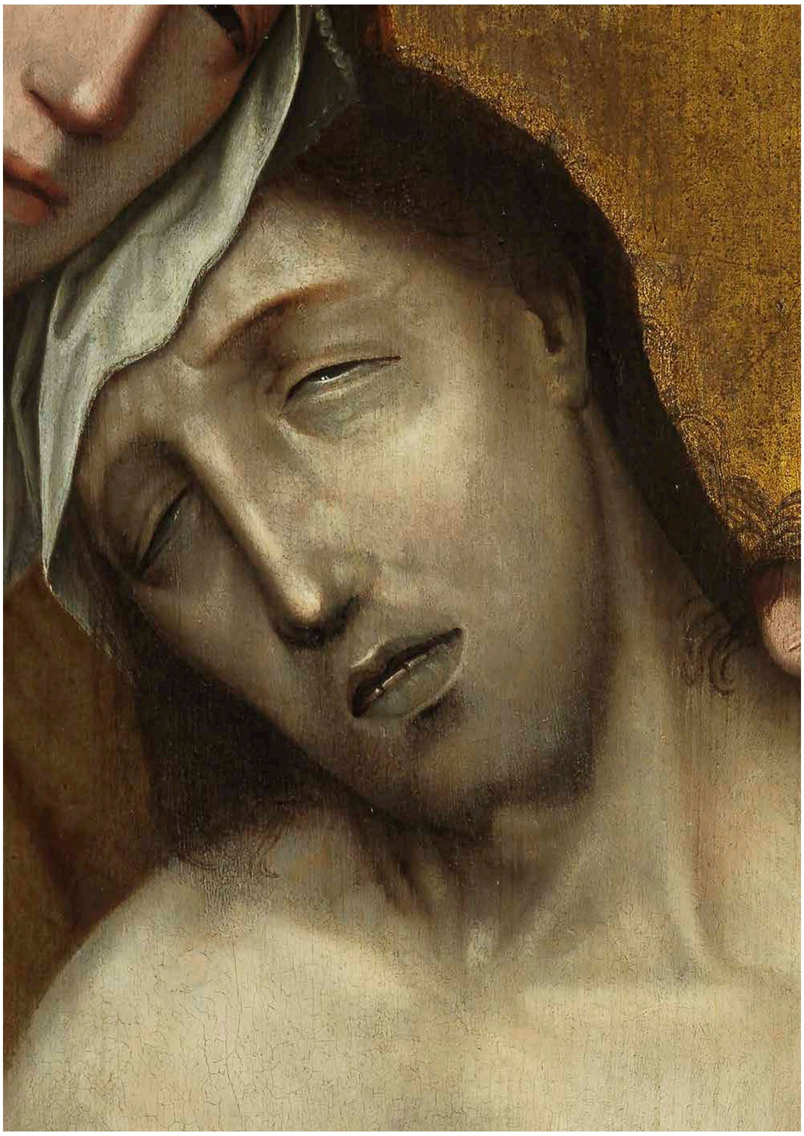
1, Edwin Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting, Cambridge MA, 1971 ed., p. 262

2, See Bodo Brinkmannm, 'Ein Frühwerk von Josse Lieferinxe?', in Aus Albrecht Dürers Welt, Turnhout, 2001, pp. 33-40.

3, Cited in Lorne Campbell, National Gallery Catalogues: The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Schools, London, 1998, p. 300.

now in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (Ms. W. 431, fol. 77v). So too does the figure of Christ relate to an Ecce Homo type created by Marmion and represented by two surviving versions in the Strasbourg Museum of Fine Art (Inv. 523) and the Groeningemuseum, Bruges (Fig. 2). In its graphic qualities, proportions and pallor, and in the careful attention paid to the blood and wounds of Christ's hands and side, our figure relates especially closely to these panels.

Compositionally however, the present panel seems to blend conventional Pietà imagery with a prototype of the Virgin and Child found in the work of Joos van Cleve[4] , Pieter Coecke van Aelst, and others active in the early years of the sixteenth century, in which Christ is shown seated or held by His mother, asleep with His head lolling over her breast. A subtle shift away from Marmion's earlier iconographic models, this would suggest that our painter was active shortly after 1500 when these models became particularly popular and widespread across the Low Countries and Northern France. Nevertheless, the suggestion of such an iconographic moment was without doubt an acutely considered aspect of its intended meaning, and remains an almost unique and highly inventive conceptual decision on the part of the painter. The Virgin's veil with its heavily crimped hemline falling in cartaceous, wriggling folds over her head, also combines elements of Marmion's Bruges diptych with the type of headdress style prevalent in the work of Flemish artists active after 1500, including Quentin Massys, with whom our painter must surely have been familiar. Finally, the effect created by the application of what appears to be a red lake pigment applied in a thin glaze over the gilding behind the figures is unusual – it has been particularly associated with Brussels paintings of the turn of the sixteenth century but may have been taken up elsewhere at the same time.[5] Few surviving early Netherlandish paintings however retain such glazing layers with anything like the state of preservation visible on the present panel, since their inherent fragility and thinness would have suffered from any damage or zealous over-cleaning. Nevertheless, viewed together these attributes all serve to suggest a date of creation for our panel shortly after 1500, and a localisation to the Southern Low Countries, while the refinement and quality of its execution make it amongst the best of its type to have survived.



Likely painted for sale on the open market, it is a rare and important document of artistic invention in Southern Netherlandish panel paintings that was not brought about through private commissions alone, and suggests its creation by a highly creative and erudite artist for a sophisticated mercantile clientele.

4, Compare for example compositions by van Cleve in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, illustrated in Lorne Campbell, National Gallery Catalogues: The Sixteenth Century Netherlandish Paintings, London, 2014, pp. 227-8

3, See in particular a panel of the Virgin and Child painted in a Brussels workshop around 1500, published in Susie Nash ed., Late Medieval Panel Paintings II: Materials, Methods, Meanings, London, 2016, Cat. 20, pp. 286-305.

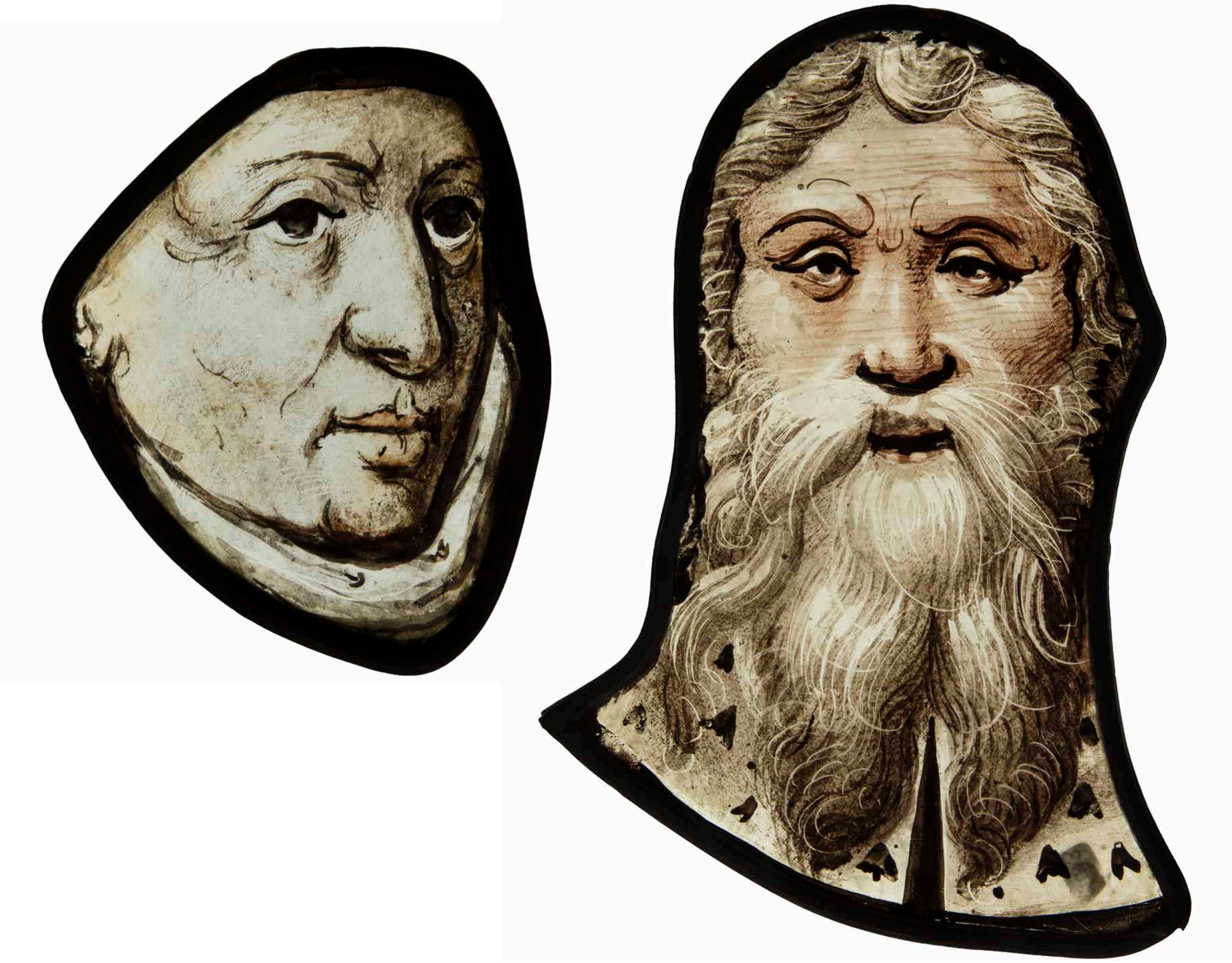
30, 31

The head of a bishop or bishop saint, and the head of a king or nobleman

Northern France
c. 1510-20

Provenance
Private collection, England

The bishop saint: 10.5 x 8.3 cm.
The nobleman: 21 x 13.5 cm.
Clear glass with vitreous enamel and pink sanguine pigment. A single clean break across the centre of the nobleman's head, edge bonded with resin.



These two heads, one showing a clerical figure, perhaps a bishop, in three-quarter profile, and the other a bearded figure facing straight out at the viewer and clothed in an ermine robe, come from a shared glazing scheme executed in northern France during the first decades of the sixteenth century. They bear witness to two of the most profound technological advancements revolutionizing the production of stained glass at the eve of the Renaissance; larger sheets of clearer glass with fewer impurities were starting to be manufactured, and a new pigment, often described as rose- or pink sanguine (which as its name suggests was often used to imbue flesh tones with a reddish, more lifelike warmth), had just been introduced into the glazier's palette.

32

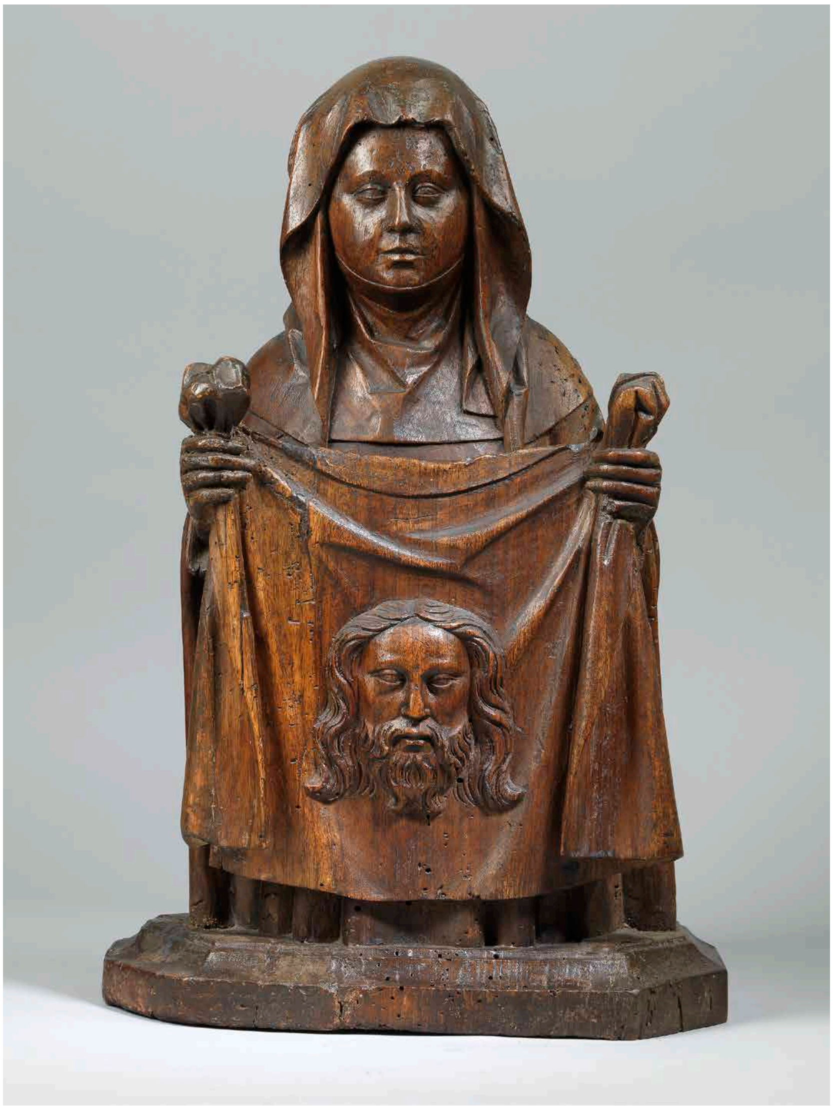
Saint Veronica

Eastern Netherlands or Rhine Valley
c. 1500-1520

47 x 29.5 x 18 cm; walnut with traces of polychromy. Some fillet repairs to the moulded base.

Provenance
Private collection, Germany;
Private collection, England until 2016

One of the most immediate and recognisable of late-medieval devotional images is the figure of Veronica holding up her vernicle to show the impression of Christ's face in its cloth. During the episode of Christ's Passion in which he is forced to walk the road to Calvary carrying his own cross, Veronica is said to have wiped his sweating, bloodied face with her veil. An impression of Christ's features was left in its material, and late-medieval viewers came to venerate the image - a type that became known as acheiropoetoi - which they believed to have been miraculously created. The sculptor responsible for our figure group evoked this miraculous image not by carving or impressing the face of Christ into Veronica's veil, but instead by leaving its idealised form in shallow relief. This is of course a non sequitur, but deftly negotiates the problem of communicating an essentially painterly effect (if the blood, dust and sweat of Christ's face can be described in such terms) in a monochromatic, three-dimensional medium in which fine shadows caught in the image's crevices and forms activate its metaphorical nature. Veronica herself is shown as a passive, delicately smiling figure whose hair is covered out of modesty and humility. The ideal female topos, she takes second place to the fact of Christ's existence, communicated to the faithful and doubter alike through the impression left by his face on a lowly piece of plain cloth.



Christ's Passion was a particularly popular devotional focus in Northern Europe during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. In his Imitatio Christi of about 1425, Thomas à Kempis encouraged piety based on imitating Christ's life and Passion through daily prayer. This devotional surge resulted in the production of objects, like ours, that evoked compassionate reflection on Christ's suffering.

The scale of the image suggests its use as an object for use on the altar table or in a specially reserved niche, but one most suited to intimate or private devotion. A number of carved oak sculptures of a similar type were made on either side of the Rhine Valley around the turn of the sixteenth century. Artists looked particularly to wood block and engraved prints, since they were both comparatively affordable and widely circulated at this date (fig. 1). Their clear, legible imagery provided a wealth of ready-made models and compositional sources that could be adapted to a variety of other media. The facial features of a Pieta group carved in the early sixteenth century now in the Schnütgen Museum in Cologne are of close stylistic relation to our figure, and suggest a localisation to the same region (fig. 2). Walnut was also commonly used in the Netherlands for small-scale carved wood sculpture and an origin on the west side of the Rhine Valley therefore cannot be ruled out.

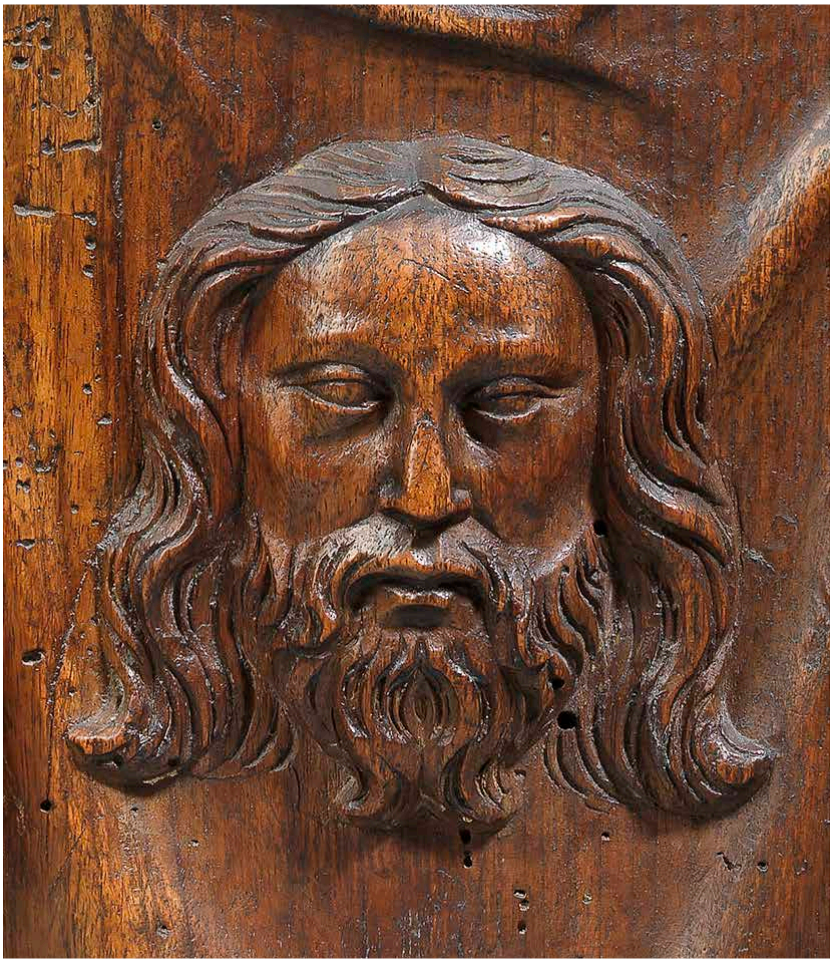
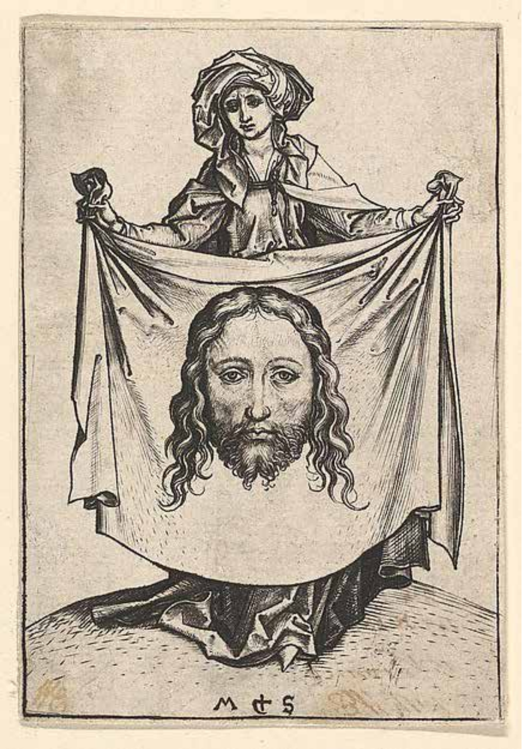


Fig. 1
Martin Schongauer
Saint Veronica
Late 15th century



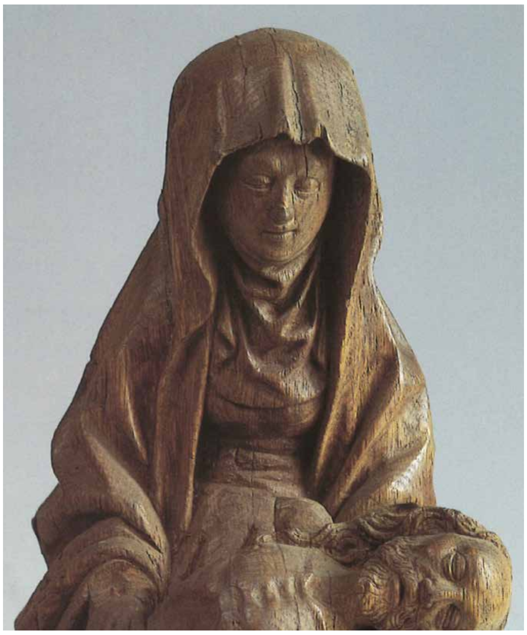


Fig. 2
Pieta
Northern Rhineland/
Westphalia
c. 1500
Cologne, Schnütgen Museum

33

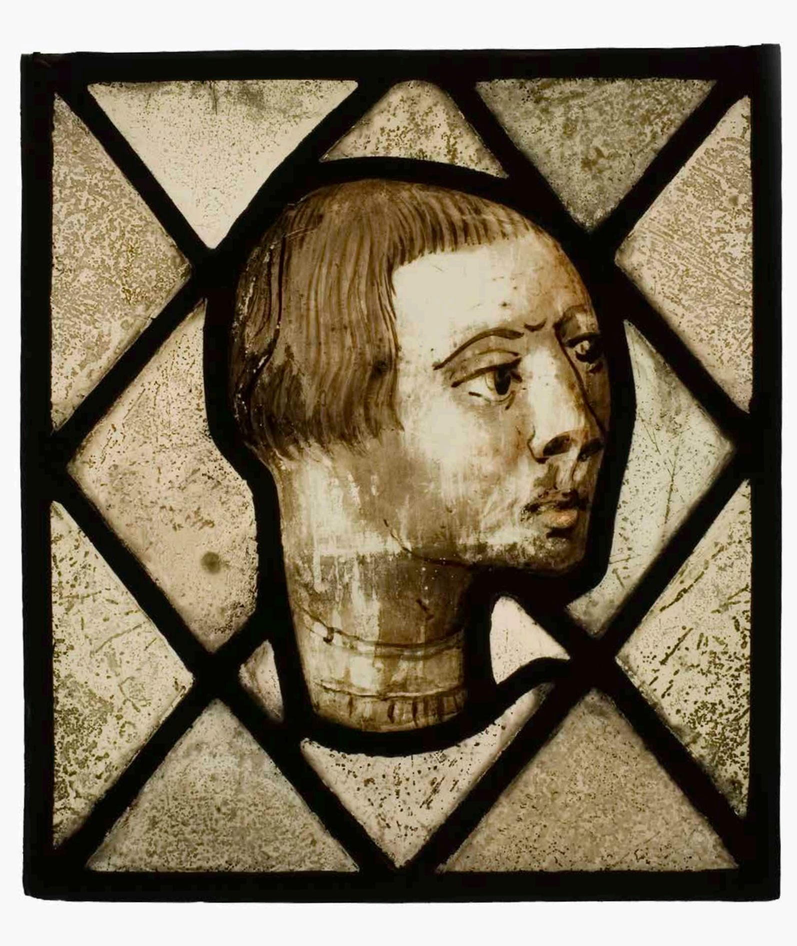
Head of a Man facing right

Southern Netherlands, Brabant
c. 1500-20

Provenance
UK art market, 2004

30.5 x 26.5 cm; Clear glass with brown-hued vitreous enamel and pink sanguine pigment, set into a group of 15th or 16th-century clear diamond quarries.

The loose, fluid brushwork and fine touches of pink sanguine pigment on this male head place him firmly in the first decades of the sixteenth century, a dating supported further by the visible hemline of the fashionable pleated shirt covering his neck. These are all characteristic features of Southern Netherlandish stained glass from this period, and parallels offered by programs such as the early sixteenth-century windows in Antwerp Cathedral, the c. 1500 glazing scheme at Sint Gummarus church in Lier just outside Antwerp, as well as at sites such as Notre Dame du Sablon in Brussels, suggest an artist working in Brabant in the early years of the century.[1]



---

[1] Yvette Vanden Bemden, Corpus Vitrearum: Les vitraux de la première moitié du XVI siècle conservés en Belgique, Tome V, 2000, fig. 44, p. 113.

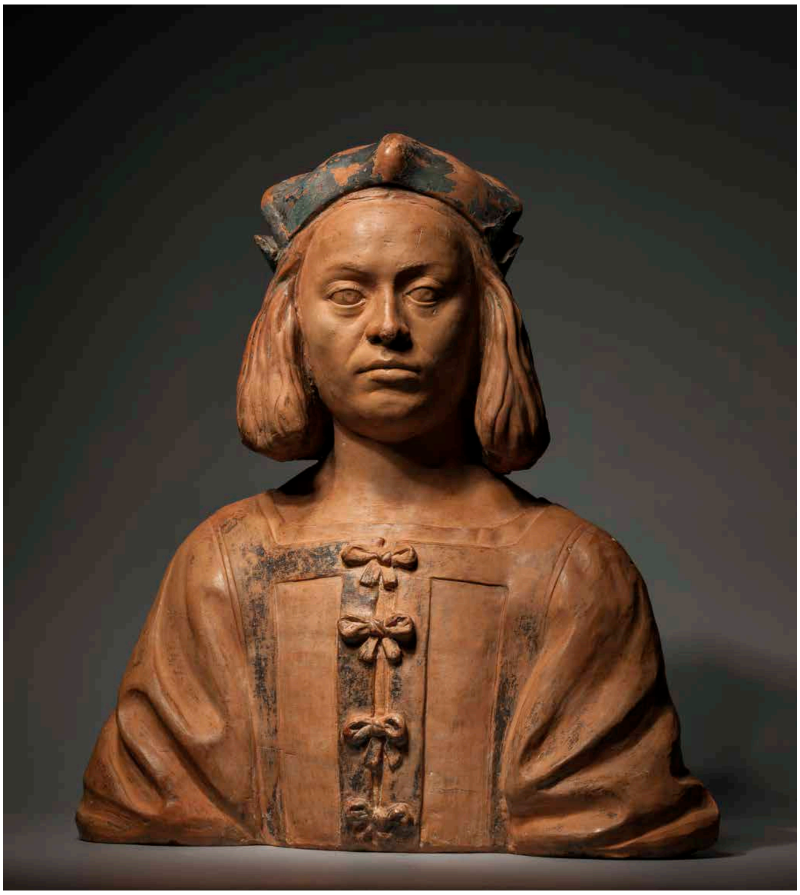
34

Circle of Pietro Torrigiano (1472-1528)

A Bust of a Young Man

Italy, Florence
c. 1510 - 1520[1]

58 x 55cm; Terracotta with traces of
polychromy



A bust-length portrait of a young man with his head turned slightly to his left. He wears a thin camicia underneath a panelled garment tied across the chest with four bows, and a blue berretta cap over neck-length hair, which is parted at the centre and gathers in thick locks either side of the face.

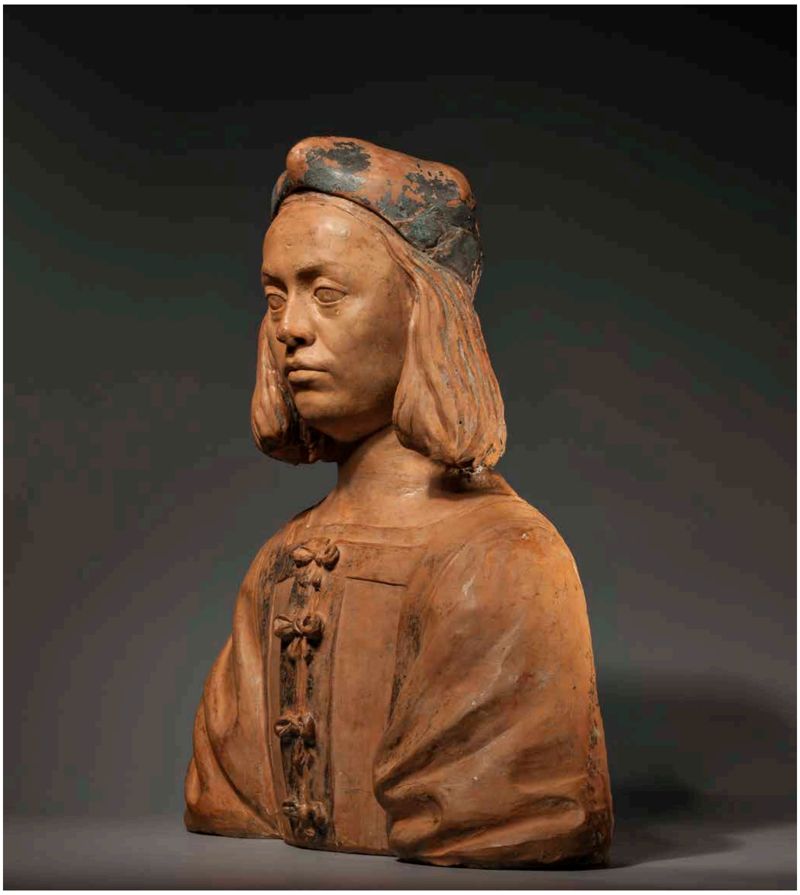
The revival of the sculpted portrait bust, which had reached its zenith during the flowering of ancient Rome but declined as an art form during the Middle Ages, was one of the great artistic developments of the Italian Renaissance. This portrayal of an unknown young man, likely identifiable as a wealthy Florentine merchant, represents the type of finely rendered private portraiture that became prevalent during the early years of the sixteenth century, and which found an immediate and vivid mode of expression in the medium of terracotta. Like other portrait busts of the period, ours is truncated just above the waist, with the head turned slightly off of centre to provide a sense of naturalistic dynamism and vitality. This reflects on contemporaneous aesthetic treatises such as Pomponio Gauricus's De scupltura (published in Florence in 1504[2]), as well as their key influences, the writings of ancient philosophers including Plutarch, who noted that the great Macedonian hero Alexander the Great always held his head tilted to his left.[3] It also continues a tradition established by Florence's greatest Renaissance sculptors of the mid-fifteenth century, which was in turn exemplified in the early sixteenth by artists such as Pietro Torrigiano (1472-1528). Of particular comparison is his portrait of an unknown man dated to c. 1510 - 1515 and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (fig. 1a-b). The dark blue/black colour of the sitter's berretta is echoed by the early, likely original, blue pigment that survives on the cap of our bust, which has become exposed beneath a more fragmentary layer of black paint that would originally have given the whole a similarly muted appearance. Unlike Torrigiano's portrait however, the body of ours survives almost entirely undamaged and is

1, Dating confirmed by thermoluminescence analysis undertaken by Oxford Authentication in May 2013

2, P. Gauricus, De sculptura, Florence, 1504; Trans., A. Chastel and R. Klein eds., Geneva, 1969

3, K. Christiansen and S. Weppelmann eds., The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini, Exh. Cat., New Haven and London, 2011, p. 173

sculpted more fully in the round, thus providing a 180 degree viewing angle (compare with fig. 1b). Perhaps an even closer comparison can be drawn to Torrigiano's portrait of a member of the Rucellai family, possibly Palla Rucellai (1473-1543), now preserved in the Detroit Institute of Arts (fig. 2). The economical treatment of the jacket and the billowing sleeves of the camicia beneath in contrast to the remarkable naturalism of the face would suggest a very close connection indeed, and one that would serve to place the present bust well within Torrigiano's immediate orbit.



The sitter's clothing helps to date it firmly to the early years of the sixteenth century, and can be seen on a number of well-studied painted portraits from the same period. See in this respect Andrea del Sarto's Portrait of a Man (Andrea di Matteo degli Albizi?), painted c. 1512 and now in the collection of the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle. In both the painted portrait and our sculpture, the slightly ruffled neckline of the sitter's camicia is just visible beneath the square neck of a heavier outer garment. The style of the large, puffed sleeves, shown only to the elbow in the bust, also compare closely with the Del Sarto portrait. See also another portrait by Del Sarto, perhaps identifiable as a self-portrait, now in the National Gallery, London (fig. 3). Both figures sport berrettas, a type of cap common during the period, and one which could be worn with the flaps turned up or down. As in both of Del Sarto's painted versions, our sculptor has chosen to depict the berretta with the flaps up, a decision that places greater emphasis on the individualism of the face and thus on the skill of the portraitist in capturing his sitter's likeness.

The resultant date range for the bust would place it amongst a group of works made shortly after Torrigiano's departure from Florence in order to work in the Netherlands, England and Spain. It is highly likely that it was thus created for the still booming market in terracotta portrait busts that remained unsated in Torrigiano's absence, presumably by a member of his workshop or a sculptor who no doubt trained underneath him.

Collections of portraits and specifically portrait busts amassed during 15th-and 16th-century Italy have long been recognised as being indebted to humanist studies of classical literature containing descriptions of exterior and

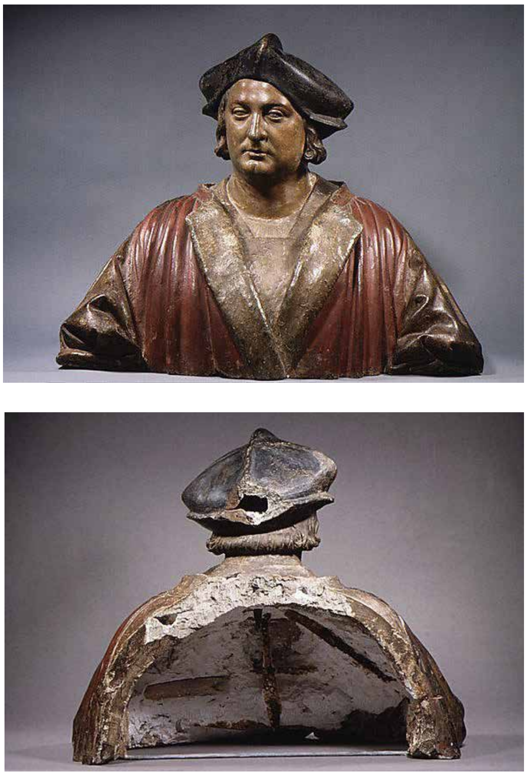
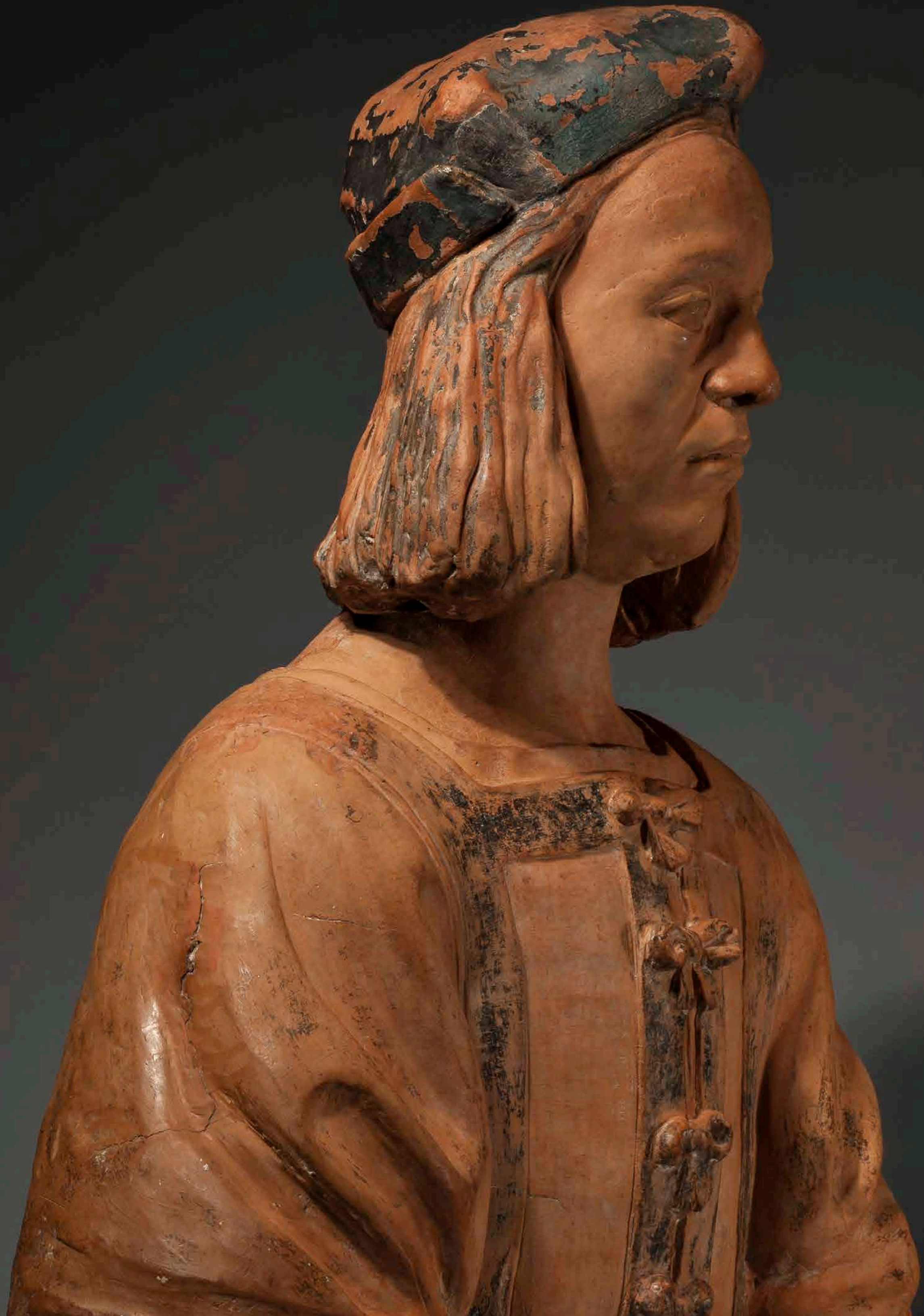


Fig. 1a-b
Pietro Torrigiani (1472-1528)
Portrait of an Unknown Man, perhaps a Florentine Merchant
Italy, Florence
c. 1510 – 1515
62.1 x 78.7 x 35.9 am;
terracotta with polychromy
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Inv. 44.92



interior settings punctuated by busts of famous figures, usually men. Pliny the Elder in his Natural History remarked upon the statues displayed in the libraries of his wealthy fellow Romans, arguing that they embodied the souls of the people they represented, and could therefore speak to the living owner of the library as if to impart wisdom from the grave.[4] The desire for portraits to embellish domestic spaces, frequently the library or studiolo of a house, descends from these galleries of famous historical icons but was also driven by the desire to be surrounded by one's loved ones and familial predecessors, often presented in a manner that stressed their virtue, so that the image was in itself a moralising statement, and that both the sitter and the viewer aspired to exemplary status. Nevertheless, the role of such busts as portraits of the deceased, which were commissioned by the grieving family to adorn church or private chapel spaces, has also been highlighted in the more recent literature on the subject (see for example George Didi-Huberman, 'The Portrait, The Individual and the Singular; Remarks on the Legacy of Aby Warburg', in N. Mann and L. Syson (eds), The Image of the Individual; Portraits in the Renaissance (London: British Museum Press, 1998), pp. 165-88). It is possible that like many others now destroyed, our bust was made to commemorate a member of a wealthy patrician family and placed in a chapel context to incite prayers and remembrance.

The back of the present bust incorporates a single large circular hole, which may have served double duty as a vent hole during firing and a locator for fixings when the bust was displayed. The extensive remains of original polychromy on the hair and costume of the figure survive unusually intact, and offer a significant document of the aesthetic fashions of such objects in Renaissance Italy.

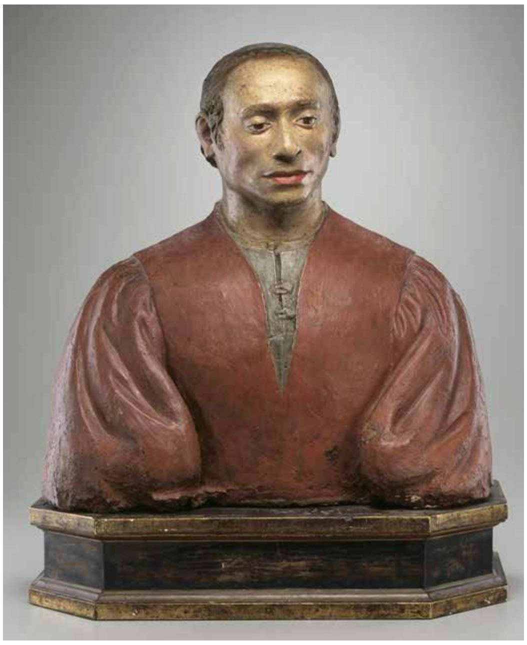


Fig. 2
Pietro Torrgiani (1472-1528), attributed
Portrait of a member of the Rucellai family
c. 1506
57.5 x 86 x 25.4 cm; terracotta with polychromy
Detroit, Institute of Arts, Inv. 43.479

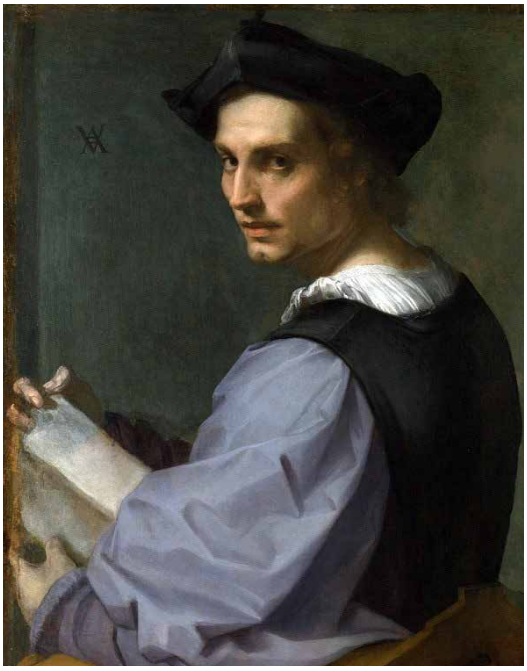


Fig. 3
Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530)
Portrait of a Young Man (Self-portrait?)
Italy, Florence
c. 1517
72.4 x 57.2 cm; oil on linen
London, National Gallery, Inv. NG690

Further reading

N. Mann and L. Syson eds., The Image of the Individual; Portraits in the Renaissance, London, 1998

K. Christiansen and S. Weppelmann eds., The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini, Exh. Cat., New Haven and London, 2011

A. Darr, P. Barnet, and A Boström, Italian Sculpture in the Detroit Institute of Arts, Volume I; Eight to Sixteenth Century, London/Turnhout, 2002, pp. 194-7

---

[4] G. Davies and K. Kennedy, Medieval and Renaissance Art; People and Possessions, London, 2009, p. 288

35

Jean Chastellain (d. 1541/2)

A shepherd from a large window of the Nativity

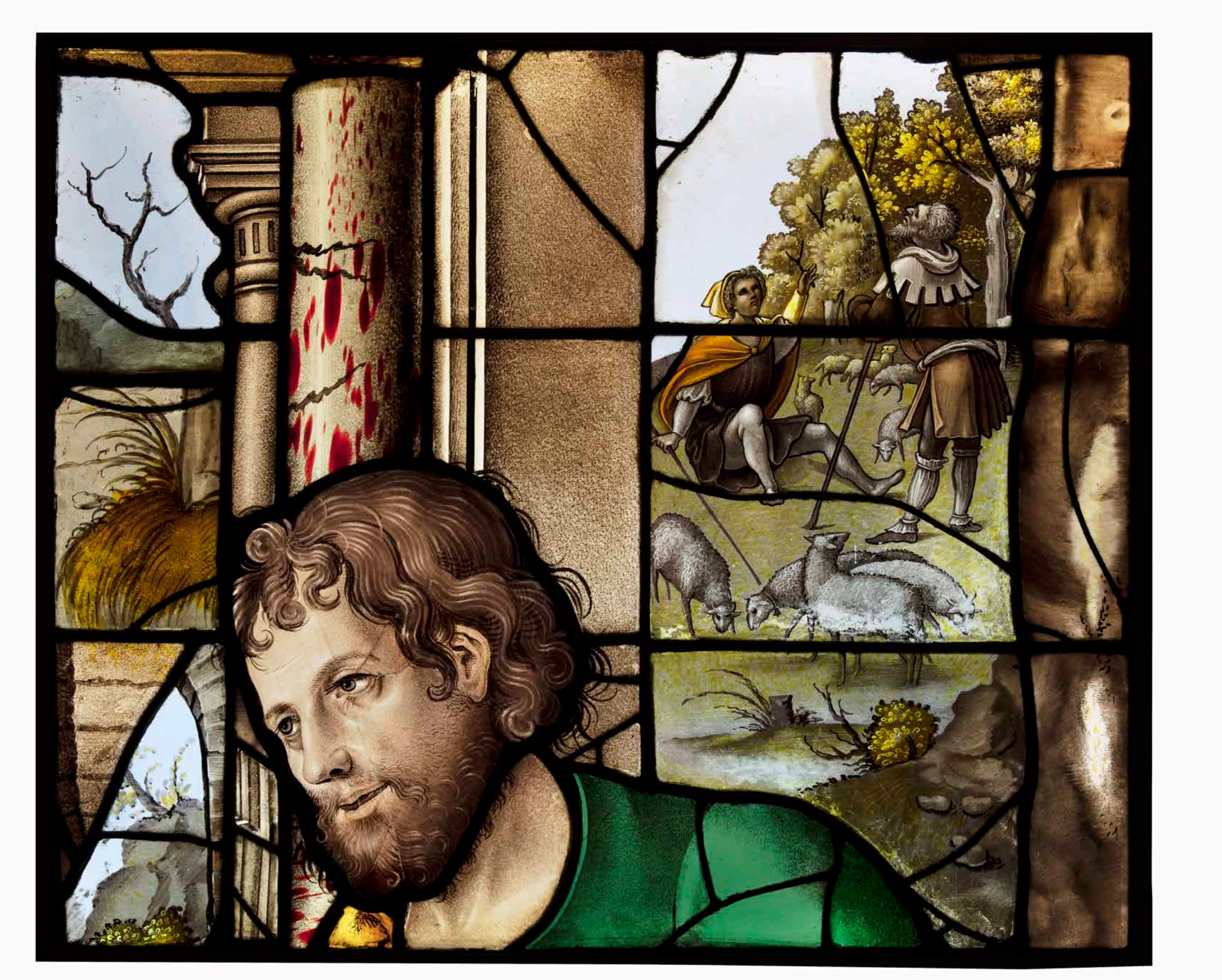
France, Paris
c. 1530

Provenance
Private Collection, France

60.5 x 71.5 cm; green, blue, flashed red and clear glass, silver stain, brown and black paint, back painting, hatching, smear and stipple shading, scratched highlights, bonded and leaded breaks, some early and nineteenth-century inserts

Published
A. Gerbier, 'Marie-Madeleine et Marie Salomé, deux vitraux de la Verrière des Alérions de la collégiale Saint-martin de Montmorency' in La Revue des Musées de France, Revue du Louvre, 2018, no. 1, p. 84, fig. 8.

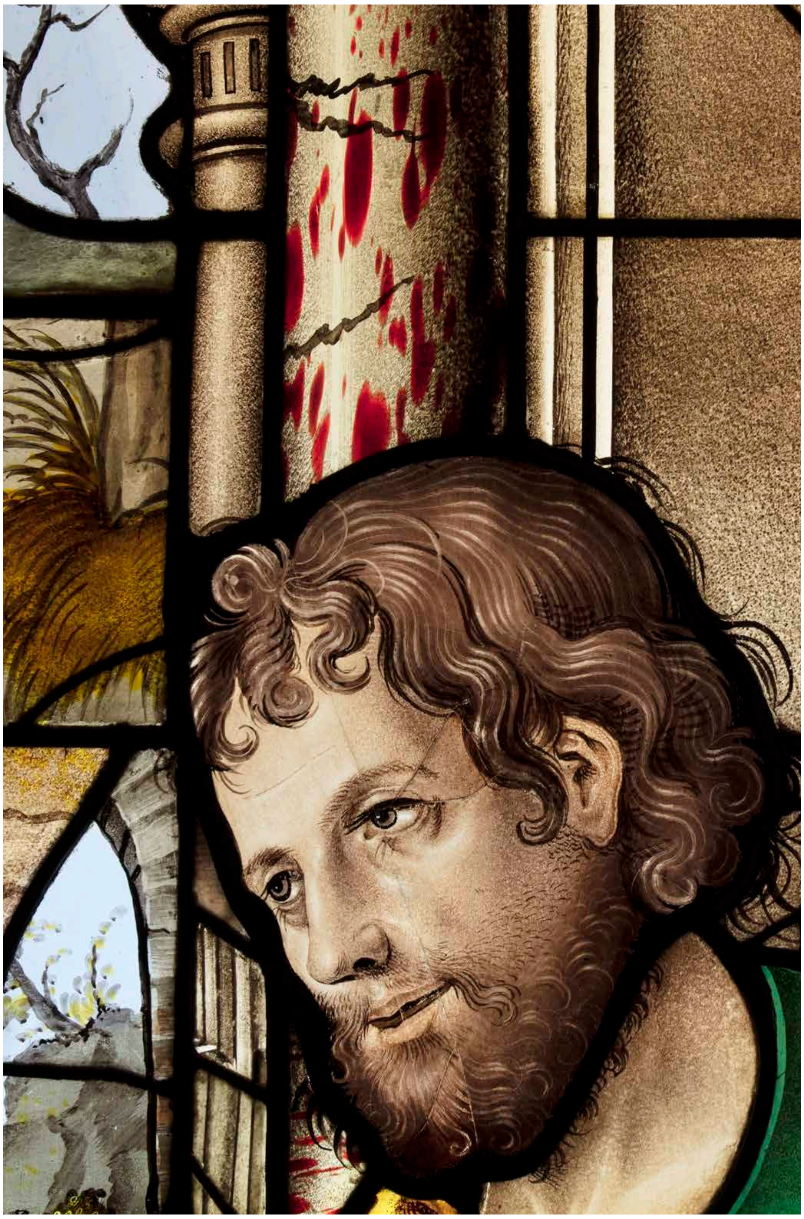
Related Literature
F. Perrot, Les vitraux de Paris de la region Parisienne de la Picardie et du nord-pas-de-Calais: Corpus Vitrearum, Vol. 1, Paris, 1978
M. Leproux et. al., Vitraux Parisiens de la Renaissance, Paris, 1993
M. Leproux, La peinture à Paris sous le règne de François 1er, Paris, 2001



A large stained glass panel showing the bust of a shepherd from a huge Nativity scene, painted by Jean Chastellain in around 1530. Chastellain was a Master Glazier working in Paris in the first half of the sixteenth century (he is known to have died between September 1541 and January 1542). He directed the most important Parisian stained glass workshop in the reign of King Francis I (1515-1547). His name does not appear in the royal accounts until 1528 but there is a great deal of glass produced before this date that has been firmly attributed to him.[1] Chastellain was one of the first exponents of what is now recognized as a complete sea-change in the function and meaning of medieval stained glass. Glass in the fifteenth century and earlier had been utilized as a coloured fill spatially inseparable from the surrounding stonework, but Chastellain and his contemporaries turned stained glass into deep, perspectivally arranged pictures, illusions of the world outside framed by the stonework of the wall.

[1] A full summary of his oeuvre is given in M. Leproux, La peinture à Paris sous le règne de François 1er Paris, 2001, pp.172-3.

The present panel was likely part of a three-lancet glazing scheme of great importance. The bust of the shepherd fills the foreground. He is depicted as a young man, with a beard and curling brown hair. His head is painted in a three-quarter profile, turned to the left, gazing downwards in the direction of the now lost Christ Child. He wears a simple green robe with a round neck. Behind him there are a series of architectural elements including a row of Ionic columns. The column closest to the viewer is beautifully painted, with the skilful use of flashed red glass, to create an effect in trompe l'oeil of marble, and clever shading defines its curvature. Built structures, including an arch, now displaced, on the bottom left of the picture plane, are combined with tree trunks and branches. On the right, now partly restored, the scene of the Annunciation to the Shepherds takes place with two shepherds placed on a meadow surrounded by sheep, looking and pointing upwards.



Chastellain confidently combined a number of different techniques including smear and stipple shading, hatching, sgraffito, backpainting and silver staining to create in this lowly Shepherd one of the finest heads of the period, rendered with incredibly subtle shadow and contour.

There are clear similarities with Chastellain's work on the choir of Saint-Martin in Montmorency, a scheme with which the present panel has been compared closely in recent scholarship.[2] It is particularly close in style to the heads of the donors and Mary Magdalene in the window showing Françoise de La Rochepot presented by Sant Françoise d'Amboise, c. 1524, bay 4, (Leproux , 1993, p.88, Fig. a and b, p.101). Whilst they are all different in character they are rendered using very similar techniques and each is presented in the same three-quarter profile. Like that of our shepherd, the ends of of the Magdalene's hair are not constrained to the glass used for the head itself, but extend onto the surrounding quarries. Their noses are similarly shaped, and are defined with washes of paint carefully rendered to create shadows with a highlight running along the ridge of the nose, and the right cheek, just visible, is highlighted to contrast with and hence define the edge of the figures' noses. The shadowed areas beneath the eyes are carefully rendered with hatching lines, washes of paint and scratched highlights. All have long eyelashes and their eyebrows are defined with hatched lines. The head of Saint Etienne in bay 9 at the church of Saint-Martin likewise incorporates a very similar shading technique, with scratched highlights covered over again with further brushwork.

2, See Gerbier, 2018.

To accompany an exhibition by
Sam Fogg Ltd
15D Clifford Street, London W1S 4JZ
www.samfogg.com

Copyright © Sam Fogg Ltd 2020

Exhibition Direction & Catalogue texts
Matthew Reeves
Jana Gajdošová

PDF & Photography
William Fulton
David Brunetti