

**A reliquary chasse showing Christ in Majesty
France, Limoges
c. 1200**



16 x 20.2 x 9 cm; Copper alloy with gilding and champlevé enamel over a replaced but early oak core, with ironwork hinges. Very well preserved with only the gable missing as is often the case. Brilliant lustre and intensity to the enamels all over. Rubbing to the highpoints of the gilding, and minor losses to the enamel on one end, around the lock, and on the rear, left leg-panel. An old collection number on the underside of the core inscribed in white 1897.

Provenance

Collection of Frits Philips (1905-2005), Eindhoven;

His sale, Sotheby's, Eindhoven, 4th-5th December 2006, lot 421, sold for 204,250 euros;

With Blumka Gallery, New York, acquired from the above;

Treasury of the Basilica of Saint Servatius, Maastricht, deconsecrated and deaccessioned in 2020

An enameled and gilded reliquary chasse decorated with the figures of Christ in Majesty surrounded by saints, and constructed in the shape of a building with a pitched roof and an opening in the lower panel of the reverse face. The lower of the two front panels is of a tri-partite composition with Christ occupying a central mandorla and two microarchitectural structures framing the figures of the Virgin and Saint John on either side. Christ wears a crown and a full-length garment beneath a mantle wrapped around the shoulders. He sits upon an arc with his feet

on a foot rest, before a deep blue background punctuated by four-petalled flower-heads in multi-coloured enamels. His right hand is raised in the sign of the Benediction, and in the crook of his left arm he supports a large bound book, signifying the Word of God. In the reserved spaces around the mandorla appear the symbols of the four Evangelists. On the upper plaque four saints appear in an arcaded cloister on either side of a further mandorla, within which the Virgin is shown in the guise of the Queen of Heaven, wearing a crown and holding a fleur-de-lys sceptre in her left hand. As is conventional for chasses of this type, all of the figures have heads formed from cast copper elements applied by way of rivets onto the face of each plaque. The gabled plaques at either end of the chasse are also decorated with standing saints under arched vaults. The reverse is decorated on both plaques with a pattern of four-petalled flowerheads on a deep blue ground. An incised gridwork pattern decorates each of the object's four feet.

Fewer than two dozen Limoges-made enamel chasses showing Christ in Majesty have survived from the Middle Ages. Iconographically and stylistically, the present example is directly related to a small number of others with comparable decorative schema and applied, cast heads, all of which have been dated in the surrounding scholarship to the years around 1200. Close parallels can be drawn to the chasse of Chamalières, on deposit at the treasury of the Cathedral of Clermont-Ferrand, as well as to that of the Church of St. Jean in Lyons in particular. While missing the galleried cresting that would originally have surmounted its roofline, the present version is a very important surviving example with almost all of its enamels perfectly preserved, and with much original gilding enlivening the engraved and incised decoration of its surfaces.



Above: The present chasse on display in the Saint Servatius Basilica treasury's upper chapel space, visible on the far left



Above: Saint Servatius Basilica treasury

Right: The present chasse photographed on display in the treasury's upper chapel space

