

**A gable plaque from a reliquary chasse showing a standing apostle
France, Limoges, from the so-called Chapitre Workshop
c. 1190**



11.3 x 7.1 cm; gilded, chased, and engraved copper with champlevé enamel in blue, red, green, black, white and yellow. Rubbing to the gilding, and some minor losses to the enamel

Provenance

Spitzer Collection before 1890;
Bourgeois Freres, Cologne, before 1904, until;
Their sale, Heberle, Cologne, 19-27th October 1904, lots 383 and 384;
Seligman, Paris, 1925;
The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, inv. 44.95 and 44.96, from 1944 until 1957;
Ratton Collection, Paris;
Sotheby's London, 18th November 1982, lot 3;
Christie's London, 7th July 2011, lot 566;
Private collection, UK

Published

Marie-Madeleine Gauthier, *Émaux Méridionaux, Catalogue International de l'Oeuvre de Limoges: L'époque Romane*, Paris, 1987, p. 170, no. 179, Pl. CLXVIII.

This vividly enameled plaque once decorated a gable end of a reliquary chasse made in the enamel-producing centre of Limoges in south-central France in the late twelfth century. A single male apostle is depicted standing at full length under a Romanesque arch raised on shaded columns and supporting a micro-architectural lantern. Around the figure, and in the spandrel over each arch, is a dense engraved pattern of vermiculé decoration, consisting of tight wheels of rinceaux that

flower into foliate sprays. Semicircular fans extend in from the entire perimeter in a series of contrasting colours.

Neither the provenance history nor the iconography allows for a further identification of this object. Since the apostle depicted on this gable is not accompanied by any attributes apart from the scroll that he holds, it is not possible to identify him further or to suggest an identification of the relics that the original chasse would have contained. The demand for enamels from Limoges in the Middle Ages encouraged the workshops there to create reliquaries decorated by generic biblical imagery which would have worked with a large number of relics (fig. 1). Thus, many of the surviving Limoges objects, just as this one, do not give us many clues about their original setting or the relics that they would have contained. Nonetheless, these relics would have been venerated by both the local community and by pilgrims that were encouraged to travel large distances in order to be in the presence of their miraculous properties.

Stylistically, the stocky physique of the apostle, his heavy, stylized drapery, and his facial features are closely related to a group of objects that have been attributed to a circle of goldsmiths known by the provisional name ‘Chapitre workshop’, active by around 1180 in Limoges.¹ The use of colour in this plaque is distinctive in that the workshop employed a rich palette and even used blue pigment to enhance the engraved face and large feet of the apostle. Closely related plaques, certainly made in the same workshop at around the same date, include an example formerly in the Brummer collection, Zurich and another in the Fundacion Lazaro Galdaro Galdiano, Madrid (fig. 2 - 3). A complete chasse of related stylistic treatment is preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (fig. 1).

The present plaque bears witness to the long-lasting hegemony of the enameling production of the 12th to the 14th century in the geographic region of Limoges. This specialization was a result of profound demand, first from a regional area and later from a far wider geographic area, for sacred objects crafted in the enameling workshops of Limoges.

Related Literature

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Biron, Isabelle, Dandridge, Pete, Wypski, Mark. *Enamels of Limoges 1100 – 1350*. Metropolitan Museum of Art: New York, 1996, pp. 48 – 196.

Gauthier, Marie-Madeleine. ‘A Limoges Champeve Book-Cover in the Gambier-Parry Collection.’ *The Burlington Magazine*. March, 1967, pp. 151 – 157.

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Stratford, Neil. *Medieval Enamels: Masterpieces from the Kier Collection*. Pindar Print: Scarborough, 1981, pp. 22 – 23.

Thoby, Paul. *Les Croix Limousines de la fin du XII siècle au debut du XIV siècle*. Paris, 1953.

¹ Marie-Madeleine Gauthier, *Émaux Méridionaux, Catalogue International de l’Oeuvre de Limoges: L’époque Romane*, Paris, 1987, p. 170, no. 179, Pl. CLXVIII.

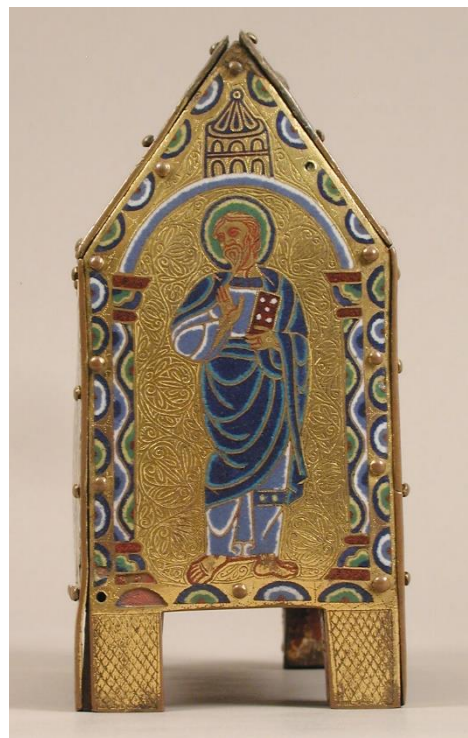


Fig. 1
A chasse with the Crucifixion and Christ in Majesty
France, Limoges
c. 1190
16.7 x 21 x 8.4 cm
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 41.100.155



Fig. 2
A gable plaque from a reliquary chasse showing a standing apostle
France, Limoges, from the so-called Chapitre Workshop
c. 1190
E. Brummer Collection



Fig. 3
A gable plaque from a reliquary chasse showing a standing apostle
France, Limoges, from the so-called Chapitre Workshop
c. 1190
Fundacion Lazaro Galdaro Galdiano, Madrid