

**Head of the Christ Child,  
Ile-de-France  
c. 1300**



*10.8 x 10.5 x 10 cm; limestone, some general surface wear with a scar across the left eye and a minor break at the right eyebrow, otherwise in good condition*

**Provenance**

Private Collection, France.

A fragmentary head of a child with elegant facial features. The delicate features of the child are positioned in the centre of a fleshy face. The almond-shaped eyes are sculpted with rounded upper eyelids and flat lower eyelids. The nose of the figure is small with a wide base and a narrow bridge, which connects to the eyebrows above. The mouth is small and the cheeks appear plump. The child's hair is fashioned into long loose waves and a short fringe. The child appears serene and composed and is sculpted in the round, suggesting that this was a part of a free-standing sculpture.

The delicately sculpted head of a boy almost certainly depicts the Christ child, and was once a part of a Virgin and Child composition. Images of the Virgin and Child became more popular than ever before in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and emphasised the tender relationship between a mother and a child (fig. 1). By the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, the single devotional image (especially of the Virgin and Child) became the 'primary vehicle for sculptural experimentation.'<sup>1</sup>

The refinement of the Christ Child's features is evidence that this head was sculpted by a skilled craftsman at the height of French Gothic period. The sweet, yet elegant features immediately recall the facial types that developed in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century in north-eastern France, particularly in Parisian courts. The style has been described as naturalistic, elegant and serene, and one early example of it is the figure of Isabella, daughter of Louis IX (see fig. 2). This sculpture was once a part of an ensemble of figures of the royal family, which occupied the choir of the priory church of Saint-Louis in

<sup>1</sup> Paul Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture 1140 – 1300* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1995) pp. 173.

Poissy. Her round, fleshy face, stylised features, almond shaped eyes, and serene gaze are all very comparable to our head.

The style of head can also be compared to early 14<sup>th</sup> century court sculpture, such as the statue of Saint Louis from Mainneville (fig. 3). Here the facial features remain stylized and concentrated in the centre of the face, drawing on the style that developed in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The hairstyle also exhibits similar properties to our example in that St Louis has a short fringe and longer hair that curls outwards under the ears.

Although fragmentary, the refinement of this head, which combines sweet childlike characteristics with a sophisticated court-style, is evidence that this was once a part of an exemplary sculpted group.

## References

Schmoll, Josef. *Die Lothringische Skulptur des 14. Jahrhunderts*. Michael Imhof Verlag: Petersberg, 2005.

Williamson, Paul. *Gothic Sculpture 1140 – 1300*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1995.



Fig. 1  
Details of Madonna and Child Statue from the Musée de Cluny (inv. 18.944)  
France, Lorraine (Paris?)  
c. 1330



Fig. 2  
Isabella, Daughter of Louis IX  
France, Poissy, Collegiate Church of Notre Dame  
1272 -75



Fig. 3  
St Louis  
France, Mainneville, Saint Pierre  
c. 1305 - 10