

Goldsmithing in the early Middle Ages and the Romanesque period (5th-12th centuries)

Metal arts

The Kingdoms (Merovingian, Visigoth, etc.) resulting from the migratory movements of populations in the 3rd-5th centuries and succeeding the Roman Empire, witnessed various different – even antagonistic – artistic trends. The emergence of Christian art accompanied the conversion to Christianity of the West. This led to the production of religious objects, such as the liturgical strainer (A. Cl. 23248 - case 6) used to filter communion wine, and the affirmation of Christian symbolism and iconography: the pectoral cross (B. Cl. 14964 – case 4), designed to be sewn onto a garment, the shrine (reliquary) with the Virgin and Child, Saint Peter and Saint Paul (C. Cl. 13968 – case 4). The continuity with the classical world demonstrated by the cross (B), which uses the classical technique of stamping, and the figurative iconography of the shrine (C), contrast with Germanic ornamental art, with its geometric motifs and stylised animals, such as the pair of fibulas (a type of brooch to fasten clothing) in the form of an eagle (D. Cl. 3479-3480 – case 5). This aesthetic change was accompanied by the advent of new techniques. A taste for colour encouraged the dominant use of gemstones (especially garnets) and coloured glass, worked using two crimping processes. Cloisonné goldsmithing consisted in inserting them into a blanket network of small compartments (Visigoth fibulas D). The technique of stones in claws (small individual compartments) that was to be used throughout the Middle Ages is brilliantly illustrated in the gold crowns that the Visigoth kings of Spain had made in the 7th century to suspend in sanctuaries as a sign of piety (E. Cl. 2879, Cl. 2885, Cl. 3211 – case 1). The practice of fully-clothed burial in force up until the 7th century has led to the discovery of a wealth of jewels, finery, weapons and day-to-day objects in tombs, and, in particular, these numerous belt buckles or this Frankish ceremonial sword and its sheath (F. Cl. 7957 – case 4). In Carolingian times, despite the references to classical art

In the Middle Ages, the term “goldsmithing” referred to work with precious metals (gold or silver) or considered to be precious (gilded copper), gemstones and enamelling (presented in another file). Religious goldsmithing, more abundant since it has been better preserved, includes objects of worship dedicated to Christ, the Virgin and saints (statuettes, reliquaries) and liturgical objects: pyxes and ciboria (to hold Eucharistic hosts), chalices and patens, censers, crosses, holy book bindings, etc. Secular goldsmithing, composed of jewels, decorative objects, tableware, is less well preserved, often having been melted down to recover the metal or produce fashionable objects.

and the desire to depict reality accompanying the *Renovatio Imperii* (imperial renaissance), the ornamental art of the period remained vivid, illustrated here by a gold harness bite (sword cover) (G. Cl. 3410 – case 4) decorated with filigree (smooth or striated metal wires soldered on).

Romanesque goldsmithing

Around the year 1000, a new type of aesthetic began to flourish, not only in goldsmithing but also in sculpture and architecture: in addition to an extreme regional diversity, a predominant feature of Romanesque art was its stylised character, seeking more to evoke rather than represent reality, as is demonstrated by an inscribed cross (H. Cl. 13229 – case 8), *The binding plate of the four rivers of Paradise* (I. Cl. 1362 – case 10) - both remarkable for the quality of their engraving – or the *Clairvaux crozier* (J. Cl. 948 – case 7 see the illustration over).

Up until the 12th century, the main commissioners of works were sovereigns, churches and abbeys. The craftsmen having made the works are generally unknown, with the exception of a few names, such as Roger de Helmarshausen (perhaps the author of the cross H). The works were almost never signed and documents identifying the commissioner of the piece and its maker are very rare. However, the techniques used to make them are known thanks to the crucial testimony of the *Essay on various arts* written in the 12th century by the monk Theophilus (perhaps Roger de Helmarshausen).

Gothic goldsmithing (mid 12th century-15th century)

The major production centres

From the middle of the 12th century onwards, the Gothic period marked a turning point in goldsmithing. Paris asserted itself as the European capital of precious arts from the reign of Saint Louis onwards (1226-1270). The Sainte-Chapelle church, built from 1243 to 1248 in the heart of the Royal Palace, was gradually endowed with a wealth of goldsmithing treasures, one of the few remaining pieces of



B. Cl. 14964 – case 4



C. Cl. 13968 – case 4



D. Cl. 3479-3480 – case 5



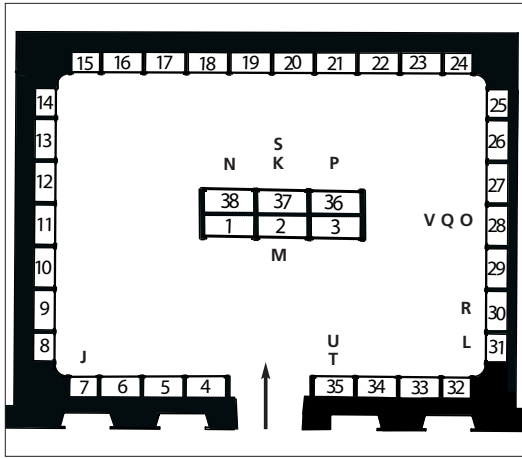
E. Cl. 3211 – case 1



G. Cl. 3410 – case 4



I. Cl. 1362 – case 10



which, the *Reliquary of Saints Lucius, Maxius and Julius* (K. Cl. 10746 – case 37), evokes the building intended to house it.

The link between goldsmithing and other arts, in particular architecture, sculpture and engraving, grew stronger, as evidenced by the *Reliquary of Christ's umbilicus* (L. Cl. 3307 – case 31). This work, which stands out for its plastic qualities, is a brilliant illustration of the sophistication of the Parisian milieu in around 1400.

Other artistic centres competed with Paris from the 14th century onwards. Avignon, to which the papacy moved in 1309, became a melting point welcoming artists from all over, thanks to the sponsorship of the popes and cardinals. The *Gold rose* (M. Cl. 2351 – case 2) commissioned by Pope John XXII from the Siennese artist Minucchio, was given to the Count of Neuchâtel, who had his coat of arms added to it. The *Reliquary Brooch with eagle* (N. Cl. 3292 – case 38) is testimony to the rise of Prague as an artistic centre under the dynasty of the Luxembourgs, Kings of Bohemia and emperors of the Holy Roman Empire. Perhaps made for Emperor Charles IV, this precious object combining engraving, enamels and gemstones, is both a brooch, designed to hold together the panels of a heavy coat, and a reliquary.

Rise of secular goldsmithing and evolution of religious goldsmithing

The rise of secular goldsmithing was linked to the growing importance of non-religious customers. From relatively modest works to the sumptuous pieces of royal and princely courts, jewellery and tableware marked the social status of their owner, such as the knife (O. Cl. 22193 – case 28) bearing the coat of arms and motto of Philip the Fair (“*aultre n'arat*”). The “treasure of Colmar” (case 36), buried during the persecution of the Jews during the Black Death, consists of jewels and finery in vogue in the 14th century: rings, hoops, belts, clasps (type of fastener for garments), buttons and appliquéés (sewn onto clothing); the only specifically Jewish object in the treasure is the wedding ring in the form of a small aedicule bearing the inscription

MAZEL TOV (“good luck”) (P. Cl. 20658 – case 36). One of the hanaps (drinking vessels) of the “Gaillon treasure”, probably collected by a Norman owner, bears an enamelled medallion decorated with a pelican (Q. Cl. 1951 – case 28), a religious theme that it is no surprise to find on a secular object.

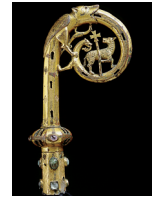
Religious goldsmithing diversified, at the same time reflecting the evolution in piety at the end of the Middle Ages. Reliquaries took a wide variety of forms: anatomical examples, such as the *Saint Adalhard's foot-reliquary* (R. Cl. 1400 – case 30), statues (L, U), medallions, etc. True Cross reliquaries (S. Cl. 3294 – case 37), called staurothecas, proliferated after the taking of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204 and the resulting influx to the West of fragments said to come from Christ's cross. The increased need of believers to see relics and the Eucharistic host led to the production of reliquary-monstrances and monstrances. The rise in popularity of private worship was incarnated by small objects decorated with images used as supports for individual prayer, such as this reliquary in the form of a book (T. Cl. 19968 – case 35) the narrative surfaces of which were inspired by contemporary engravings, clearly illustrating the close link between goldsmiths and engravers at the end of the Middle Ages.

Commissioners and artists

The end of the Middle Ages saw the unprecedented development of royal and princely sponsorship, in parallel with the emergence of collectors, such as Queen Clementia of Hungary or Louis of Anjou, the brother of Charles V. Non-religious, aristocratic and also bourgeois (merchants, bankers, etc.) customers were increasingly common. The *Reliquary-stature of Saint Anne Trinitaire* (U. Cl. 3308 – case 35) was produced in 1472 for Anna Hofmann, wife of the tax collector of Ingolstadt, as is indicated by the inscription, which also specifies the price of the object and the name of the artist, Hans Greiff.

The provenance and the authors of the works became better known than previously. Written documents increased: statutes of brotherhoods of crafts (the future corporations), including the *Livre des Métiers* (Book of Crafts) (circa 1268), contracts, accounts, inventories, tax documents, etc. The city's stamp was imposed by an edict issued by Philip the Bold in 1275, and the master's hallmark by order of John the Good in 1355, but they were not yet widespread in the 15th century. The goldsmith's stamping table from Rouen (V. Cl. 3451 – case 28), dated 1408, which identifies the hallmarks of the city's 145 goldsmiths, engraved on a copper plate alongside their names, remains an exceptional document. At this time, more and more works were being signed, but these were still in the minority. While written sources make it possible to identify a number of goldsmiths, the majority of the works described have been lost; conversely, the works that still exist today are rarely documented.

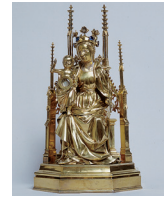
Christine Descatoire, curator



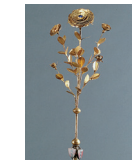
J. Cl. 948 – case 7



K. Cl. 10746 – case 37



L. Cl. 3307 – case 31



M. Cl. 2351 – case 2 (detail)



N. Cl. 3292 – case 38



P. Cl. 20658 – case 36



Q. Cl. 1951 – case 28



U. Cl. 3308 – case 35

1243-1248 Construction of the Sainte-Chapelle	Circa 1268 Book of Crafts by Etienne Boileau	1275 Philip the Bold's edict on the city hallmark	1309 Installation of the Papacy in Avignon	1347-1352 The Black Death	1355 John the Good's order on the master's hallmark
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