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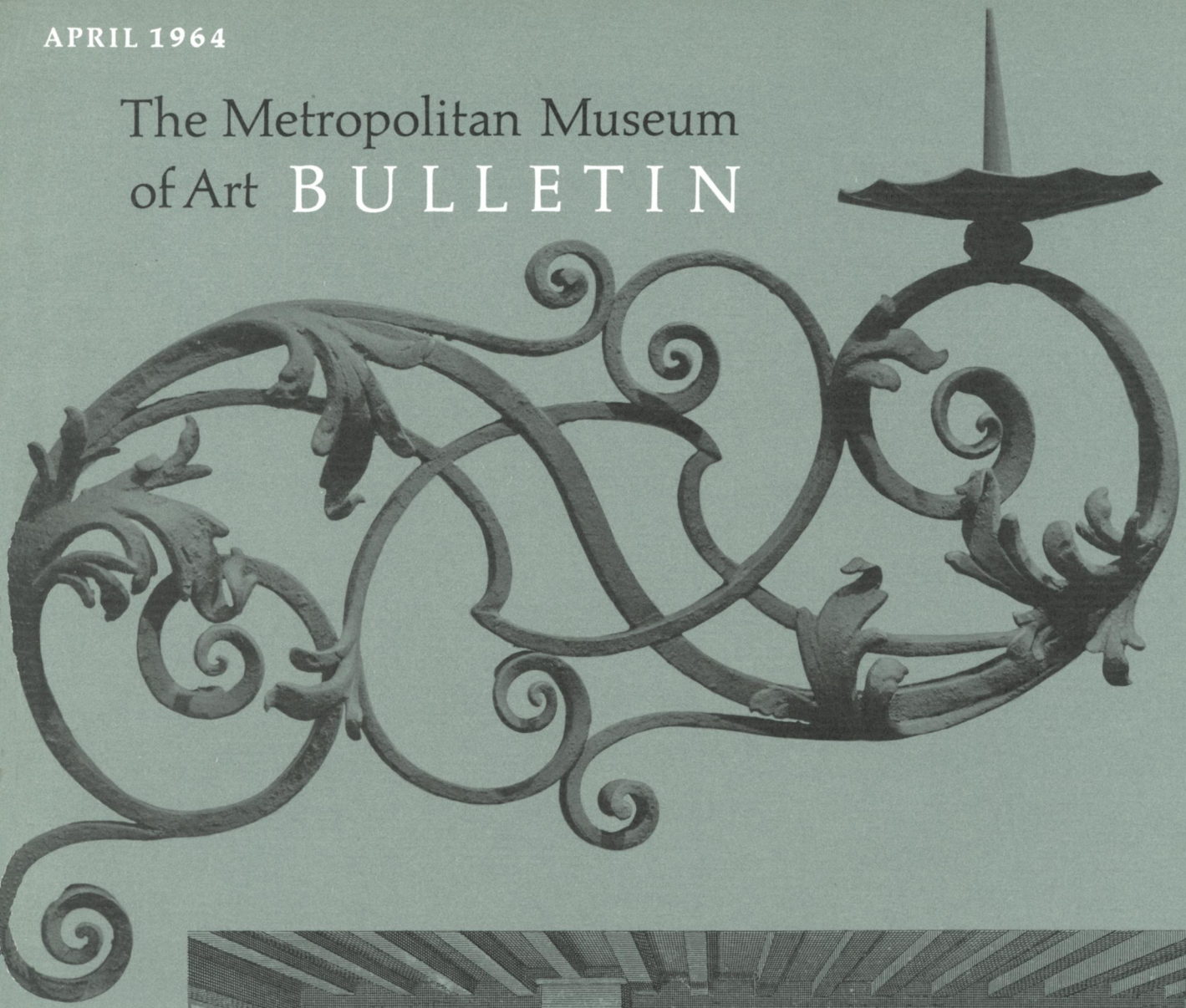
The Metropolitan Museum of Art BULLETIN



Lucio Piccinino

Master Armorer of the Renaissance

STEPHEN V. GRANCSAY *Curator Emeritus of Arms and Armor*

By comparison with the immense fame enjoyed by the painters, sculptors, and architects of the Renaissance, relatively little is known of their contemporaries in the applied and decorative arts. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the enormous production of pictures and statues and buildings was paralleled by a similar burst of creative energy in the fashioning of textiles, ceramics, glass, and all kinds of metalwork; but the artisans who worked with such skill and talent in these fields all too often go unsung – their handiwork unsigned, their names unrecorded.

As a result, the references to such craftsmen that do appear in contemporary documents are all the more valuable in establishing their identity and in recognizing their work. The chief source of information, for example, about one of the great armorers of the sixteenth century, whose distinctive creations grace several museums in the world, is a few sentences in an obscure book published in 1595, *La Nobiltà di Milano*, collected biographies of the locally illustrious by one Paolo Morigia. In it he describes a family of armorers named Piccinino: the father, Antonio, and one son, Federigo, were bladesmiths; a younger son, Lucio, was an armorer who, said Morigia, "in his ornamentation of iron in relief with figures, animals, and grotesque masks, etc., and likewise in his damascene work, produced masterpieces that are the most choice and precious." Lucio Piccinino would nonetheless be little more than a tantalizing name, were it not for the further, fortuitous remark by Morigia that among the notable pieces executed by him was "armor of great value for His Grace Alessandro Farnese, duke of Parma." With this clue and Morigia's fleeting description of Piccinino's style it has been possible to identify with certainty this suit (Figure 2), which once belonged to one of the most notable soldiers of the time. It is now in the Waffensammlung in Vienna; richly embossed and damascened, and so elaborately decorated that the duke could have had no other like it, this harness can only be the one he presented in 1579 to Archduke Ferdinand of the Tyrol, who placed it in his collection of the armor of famous personages in Castle Ambras. The most important of these pieces, including the Farnese armor, were transferred to Vienna in 1806, and there they still remain.

Contents

IRONWORK

FRONTISPIECE:
Detail of the breastplate shown in Figures 1 and 4

ON THE COVER:
Sconce, one of a pair. French, first half of the XVIII century. Width 17 inches. Dick Fund, 57.137.41

Blacksmiths assembling a foliated ornamental crest. Detail of Plate XII, dated 1717, from the Art du Serrurier (Paris, 1767). Engraving. Dimensions of whole 10¼ x 16 inches. The Library of the Metropolitan Museum

1. *Half-armor of Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, duke of Alba, by Lucio Piccinino (about 1535 – after 1595), Italian (Milan). About 1570. Gift of William H. Riggs, 14.25.714*

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From such strong though slender evidence hangs a considerable sequence of further attribution; Piccinino's craftsmanship was so superlative and his use of decorative motifs so individual that a number of other works have been assigned to him by their strong resemblance to the Farnese armor. Among these are a half-suit once belonging to Alfonso II, duke of Ferrara, and now in the Wallace Collection in London; another, that once belonged to Prince Philip (later Philip III) of Spain, in the Royal Armory of Madrid; a breastplate for a youth, in the Victoria and Albert Museum; and a cuirass in the Louvre. At least two works by Piccinino, amply illustrating his diverse talents, are in the Metropolitan: a pair of gauntlets (Figures 13 and 19) from Prince Philip's suit, and a half-suit (Figure 1) that belonged to Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, duke of Alba.

Piccinino's masterpieces are representative of the last great development in the art of making body armor: the highly ornamented "dress" or "parade" harnesses that were a special product of the Renaissance. About the turn of the sixteenth century an important change occurred in the armorer's craft. Through most of the fifteenth century the principal emphasis had been upon structural strength and simplicity of contour, with form dependent upon defensive function even when the piece was designed essentially for display. Such Gothic armor was often extensively decorated, but with paint or with embroidered cloth or leather coverings that did not affect the form of the metal. The revival of classical art and thought, however, brought with it an interest in every aspect of antique culture, including armor – particularly the splendid decorative armor, described in ancient literature and shown in ancient sculpture, worn by victorious generals in triumphal processions. This interest did not manifest itself immediately in actual armor; it was first expressed in the vigorous though often fanciful adaptations that appeared in paintings, sculpture, and prints (Figure 3). Not until the end of the fifteenth century did the armorers begin to follow where these artists had led, and to

2. *Armor of Alessandro Farnese, duke of Parma, by Lucio Piccinino. About 1570. Waffensammlung, Vienna*

3. St. George, by Carlo Crivelli (active by 1457 – after 1495), Italian (Venice). Tempera on wood, gold ground. 38 x 13¼ inches. Rogers Fund, 05.41.2

OPPOSITE:

4. Breastplate of the Alba armor. Height 16⅛ inches

create a style in which the surface of the metal itself provided the medium for complex ornamentation.

This new style required a new kind of craftsmanship, in which the talents of several artisans were required, among them the armorer, to fashion the contours of the piece, the ornament designer, to plan the pattern of decoration, and the goldsmith, to execute the design. Renaissance goldsmiths were not simply craftsmen in precious metal; their trade was considered the epitome of all the arts of metalwork, for it necessitated a knowledge of painting, sculpture, and every kind of design. The goldsmith was expected to fulfill any commission in fine metalwork; he modeled and cast medals, carved sword mounts, and embossed armor – just as he would fashion a necklace or chalice – and worked in gold, silver, copper, or iron with equal facility. Furthermore, Renaissance goldsmiths were closely allied with artists in other fields, and their shops were often the training grounds for painters, sculptors, and printmakers, among them Ghiberti, Donatello, Pollaiuolo, Verrocchio, and Botticelli. These pupils frequently continued to produce metalwork or metalwork designs after completing their apprenticeship. Pollaiuolo, for instance, in addition to painting, ran a thriving establishment in Florence that produced prints and metalwork of various kinds (one of his commissions was for a silver helmet presented by the city to the Duke of Urbino in 1472). To show his mastery of both crafts, Francesco Raibolini, generally known as Francia, signed some of his paintings "Francia Aurifex," and his metalwork "Francia Pictor."

It was therefore natural that as the art of armor developed from the shaping of contour to the embellishment of surface, the functions of armorer and goldsmith should blend. In many cases this was a matter of collaboration, for the different crafts involved were complex, difficult, and time-consuming. It could well take a year to make a complete suit of decorated armor, even when several masters were cooperating. Sometimes one man would have the ability to carry out every aspect of the job, such as the Mantuan Giorgio Ghisi, who was a painter, draughtsman, engraver, armorer, embosser, and damascener all in one. A parade shield in the British Museum bears his signature, and his prints are known to have inspired other works in armor. Even in the case of Piccinino, who, it seems certain, depended upon other artists for designs and the execution of details, the work is so consistent and individual in style that his personal supervision at every stage cannot be doubted.

The Piccinino pieces in the Museum all come from collections in Spain, and it is more than coincidence that so much of the fine ornamental armor of the sixteenth century was in Spanish hands. The Spanish royalty and nobility were about the best customers the armorers of this period had; their taste for the pomp and pageantry of formal processions was well-nigh insatiable, and they squandered much of their Mexican and Peruvian gold on ceremonial dress – of which fancy armor was the most elaborate and costly form. In reality, inflation and the drain of disastrous warfare kept Spain constantly impoverished, and the extravagance of ceremony was a luxury the country could ill afford. This, however, did not prevent kings, nobles, and cities alike from vying with each other in making pageants and state entries as magnificent as possible, or from presenting distinguished leaders with specially commissioned helmets and shields on important occasions. The Spaniards were particularly fond of the richly sculptured, classically inspired armor produced in the Lombard provinces of northern Italy, of which Brescia and Milan were the chief centers. Milan was in fact a political dependency of Spain for much of the sixteenth century, and exerted a good deal of influence on Spanish culture through trade, gifts, and the exchange of artisans. At any rate, the period of greatest brilliance in north Italian armor coincided almost exactly with the period of Spain's greatest power, and declined with the waning of Spain's hegemony toward the end of the sixteenth century.

The armor of the Duke of Alba (Figure 1) represents the ornate Milanese style at its

best. The original owner was one of the most famous soldiers of his day – one of the two really able generals who fought for Spain in its lamentable wars against the rebellious Netherlands (the other, incidentally, was the Duke of Parma). The suit remained in the family for almost three hundred years, and then was rescued from neglect by the famous American collector William H. Riggs, who provided an oral account of its acquisition when he gave it to the Museum in 1913. Sometime between 1855 and 1865 he had been shown pieces of it, in a sad state of disrepair, during one of his visits to the Alba palace of Liria in Madrid. There was a family tradition that it had been damaged in a fire, although it is more likely that it was simply stored away in a trunk, wrapped in cloths that absorbed moisture and allowed the slower but no less destructive oxidation of rust to eat into its surface. Mr. Riggs nevertheless recognized the quality of the work even from these dismembered and disintegrating fragments, and knowing of his host's interest in Spanish cup-hilted rapiers, he suggested a trade: attractive rapiers from his own collection in exchange for the damaged armor.

These details are recorded in a letter of 1925 from the Museum's curator Bashford Dean to the descendant of the duke who made the trade. The continuation of the account deserves quotation in full: "In time the valet [of Mr. Riggs] appeared with a series of champagne baskets packed with rapiers. These were

OPPOSITE:

5. *Back of the left pauldron (shoulder defense) of the Alba armor. Width as shown 12¾ inches*

6. *Design for the front of the left pauldron of the Farnese armor. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna*

7. *Satyr mask on the left pauldron of the Alba armor. Height 5 inches*

unpacked in the hall at Liria, and at the same time Mr. Riggs, who with his great collecting instinct had learned that your forebear had taken great interest in a certain prize saddle horse then on sale in Madrid, caused the horse to be marched into the courtyard. The fine horse and the bunch of cup-hilted rapiers produced such a favorable constellation, that the exchange was made then and there, Mr. Riggs using the same champagne baskets in which to carry the embossed armor out of the palace. I have no doubt that many of the cup-hilted rapiers which are now in your great hall there, and which I remember so pleasantly seeing on my early visit with you, are doubtless part of this plunder."

Cleaning and repair have helped restore

8. Lion mask on the left elbow of the Alba armor. Height 2 inches

some of the original magnificence of this suit, and aside from a few restorations the whole ensemble is original. This is of no little significance, since so many supposed suits are "composed" (to use the professional euphemism) from miscellaneous elements. Furthermore, the whole harness was originally so enriched with decoration that what remains gives substantial evidence of its maker's skill and working methods.

Every element – even in areas that would ordinarily be covered up by the overlapping of the plates – is decorated with luxuriant designs in relief, drawn from the classical repertory (Frontispiece and Figures 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 12). These feature Medusas, satyrs, sphinxes, putti, bound captives, anthropomorphic lion masks, and figures of Mars and Victory – all derived, or rather adapted, from antique art, for both the choice and execution of these motifs betray a fascination for the grotesque that is characteristic of the mannerist phase of the Renaissance. The organization of these decorations is by no means haphazard; they are for the most part arranged in symmetrical, vertical bands, joined by festoons of fruit or by strapwork from which masks and bunches of fruit are suspended (Figure 4). This systematic arrangement, its formality giving clarity and additional emphasis to the fanciful motifs, is so similar to that on the Farnese armor and other works attributed to Piccinino that there is virtually no chance of coincidence. Together with the motifs themselves, and the manner of using raised beads of silver to accentuate the framing strapwork (Frontispiece), it can almost be considered a signature of Piccinino's work.

This family resemblance becomes particularly clear when one compares an arm defense

9. Design for the left arm defense of the Farnese armor. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

10. Left arm defense of the Alba armor. Length as shown 20 inches

and pauldron (shoulder defense) of the Alba armor (Figures 5, 7, 8, and 10) with drawings for the same elements of the Farnese armor (Figures 6 and 9), which still exist and are now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. The Alba pieces are, as it were, variations upon the theme of the Farnese designs, with certain modifications in the subjects used but a remarkable homogeneity in the overall scheme. These drawings were an intermediate step in planning the decoration. It is probable that Piccinino himself did not conceive the basic motifs; like many of the armorers of the time he seems to have obtained them chiefly from prints – especially the ubiquitous engravings of Marcantonio Raimondi and his numerous followers (Figure 11), who provided all Europe with the decorative vocabulary of the Renaissance. But the choice, combination, and placement of these motifs were probably carried out by Piccinino or a draughtsman under his supervision, and mapped out on drawings from which the actual work was done.

Once the elements were shaped, and the decorative scheme decided, the embossing of the relief was begun. The art of embossing – raising ornaments upon a metal plate by hammering from beneath – was known from antiquity, but was raised to new standards by Renaissance metalworkers. In this technique,

OPPOSITE:

11. Ornament print, after Agostino Veneziano (about 1490 – about 1540), Italian (Venice). Engraving. 9⅜ x 7¼ inches. Dick Fund, 24.10.15

12. Detail of the chin defense of the Alba armor, showing preserved damascening. About actual size

the metal is treated as a plastic substance to be shaped to the desired form; iron and even steel are far from being the rigid, unyielding materials they seem, for given sufficient pressure or tension they may be stretched or molded almost indefinitely. To emboss armor, the design was first drawn on the face of the element, and the essential outlines were hammered lightly with a blunt punch so they would show on the back. The plate was embedded face down in a yielding medium such as asphalt, and the relief hammered into it. The plate was then reversed and re-embedded face up, and the background was hammered down, the two steps being repeated until the desired height of relief was achieved. Fine details were then rendered by chasing – that is, chiseling – which gives the impression that the design has been carved out of the metal, whereas in fact the embossing process is essentially one of modeling.

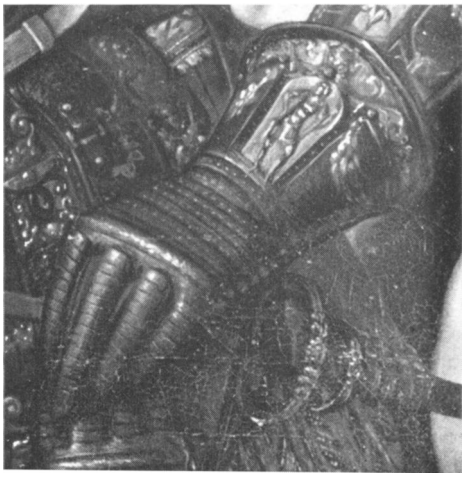
Embossing was not the only method of embellishing the surface. Areas might be mercury-gilded or chemically blued to create contrasts of metal color, and flat surfaces could be intricately damascened to produce a similar result on a finer scale. The process of damascening, or inlaying fine wires into incised patterns, was introduced to Europe from the Near East in the Middle Ages, but in the sixteenth century became the special province of Italian armorers. The unembossed sections of the Alba armor were once entirely covered with graceful damascening, which now remains only on isolated parts that were protected from rust (Figure 12). The surface of the element was scribed with the pattern desired, and the design either crosshatched or cut with burred edges to hold the inlay. Fine wire, usually of gold or silver, was then worked into the pattern, and hammered and burnished flush with the background, creating a lacy effect of great delicacy.

If the ravages of time have ruined much of the surface of the Alba armor, the beauty of Piccinino's damascening is evident on the gauntlets (Figures 13 and 19) for Prince Philip's armor. In the unembossed areas of the cuffs and across each of the plates that form a protection for the back of the hand are

13. Right gauntlet of a pair made for a suit of embossed armor of Prince Philip of Spain (Philip III), by Lucio Piccinino. About 1590. Fingers lacking. Length 7⅛ inches. Rogers Fund, 19.128.1

lavish patterns of damascening, accented by rows of the raised silver beading that are so typical of Piccinino's work. The fingers are missing, but a portrait of Philip wearing this suit (Figures 14 and 15) shows how they looked. It also indicates how the long central cartouche on the cuff, with its flanking festoons of fruit, continues and completes the formal, rhythmical design on the arm – again strongly characteristic of Piccinino's style.

These gauntlets became separated from their matching harness (Figure 16) under mysterious circumstances in the nineteenth century. The collection of the Royal Armory of Madrid, founded in 1565 by Philip II in honor of his father, Charles V, has suffered several calamities over the centuries; not the least was the disappearance of several hundred items in 1839. These turned up at Christie's auction house in London and were auctioned off, mainly to English dealers and private collectors. Among the pieces were several pairs of gauntlets – comparatively easy to remove because they were not securely fastened to the suits with which they belonged. Of thirteen harnesses for boys exhibited in a single gallery of the royal palace, across the court from the armory, only one still has its gauntlets, and it is not surprising that gauntlets in other mu-



14. Detail of Figure 15, showing one of the gauntlets as worn by Philip

15. Allegory of the Education of Philip III, by Justus Tiel, Flemish. About 1594. Museo del Prado

16. Half-armor of Prince Philip, to which the gauntlets shown in Figures 13 and 19 belonged. Royal Armory, Madrid

seums and collections are often identified with this group. In the case of the Museum's pair there can be no doubt: even if the technical and stylistic relationship with the suit of Philip III were not so strong, the portrait would provide absolute confirmation.

The Museum possesses still another pair of gauntlets (Figures 17 and 18) that can be associated with this group – and with Piccinino as well, although they have never been attributed to him. They were unquestionably part of the Christie's sale in 1839, described as "A Pair of Page's Gauntlets, the right-hand fingers of chain, chased and engraved with figures." On these gauntlets, overlapping scales such as those shown in Prince Philip's portrait are used on the left hand, but are replaced on the right by bands of mail, which were apparently substituted for scales at some time before the Christie sale. This difference is such an unusual feature that it makes the pair unique. There is another portrait of Philip III, showing him in the suit that matches these gauntlets – but without *any* gauntlets!

There is some circumstantial evidence to link these gauntlets to Piccinino. The suit to which they belonged is known to have been given to Philip, as was the suit of embossed armor, by the Duke of Terranova, governor of Milan. It does not seem farfetched to suppose that both harnesses were commissioned from the finest Milanese armorer of his generation. The strongest evidence of all, however, comes from direct comparison of the two pairs

of gauntlets themselves. Although the relief decoration of the pair with fingers is simply chiseled rather than embossed, the construction and damascening are very similar, and the armed classical warriors on the cuffs are almost exactly alike. The same characteristic silver beading also appears on both pairs. If not the work of Piccinino himself, the chiseled gauntlets must be from another Milanese shop very much under his influence.

It is a pity that Lucio Piccinino had no Vasari to record his career in detail. Only scattered pieces remain as testimony to his skill. We know, however, that the family tradition of craftsmanship did not die out with him. There is in the Museum a Milanese cup-hilted rapier of the seventeenth century, one of the finest in existence, its hilt magnificently chiseled in relief; on the exterior of the cup, near the opening for the blade, is the signature Carlo Piccinino.

NOTE: I should like to thank José Gudiol, director of the Instituto Amatller de Arte Hispánico in Barcelona, for providing photographs of Tiel's portrait of Philip III; Javier Cortés, former director of the Royal Armory in Madrid, for facilitating the study of the princes' armor; and the Duke of Alba, for supplying a photograph of ancestral armor. The major monograph on Piccinino is August Grosz's "Vorlagen der Werkstätte des Lucio Piccinino," published in *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 36 (1925).

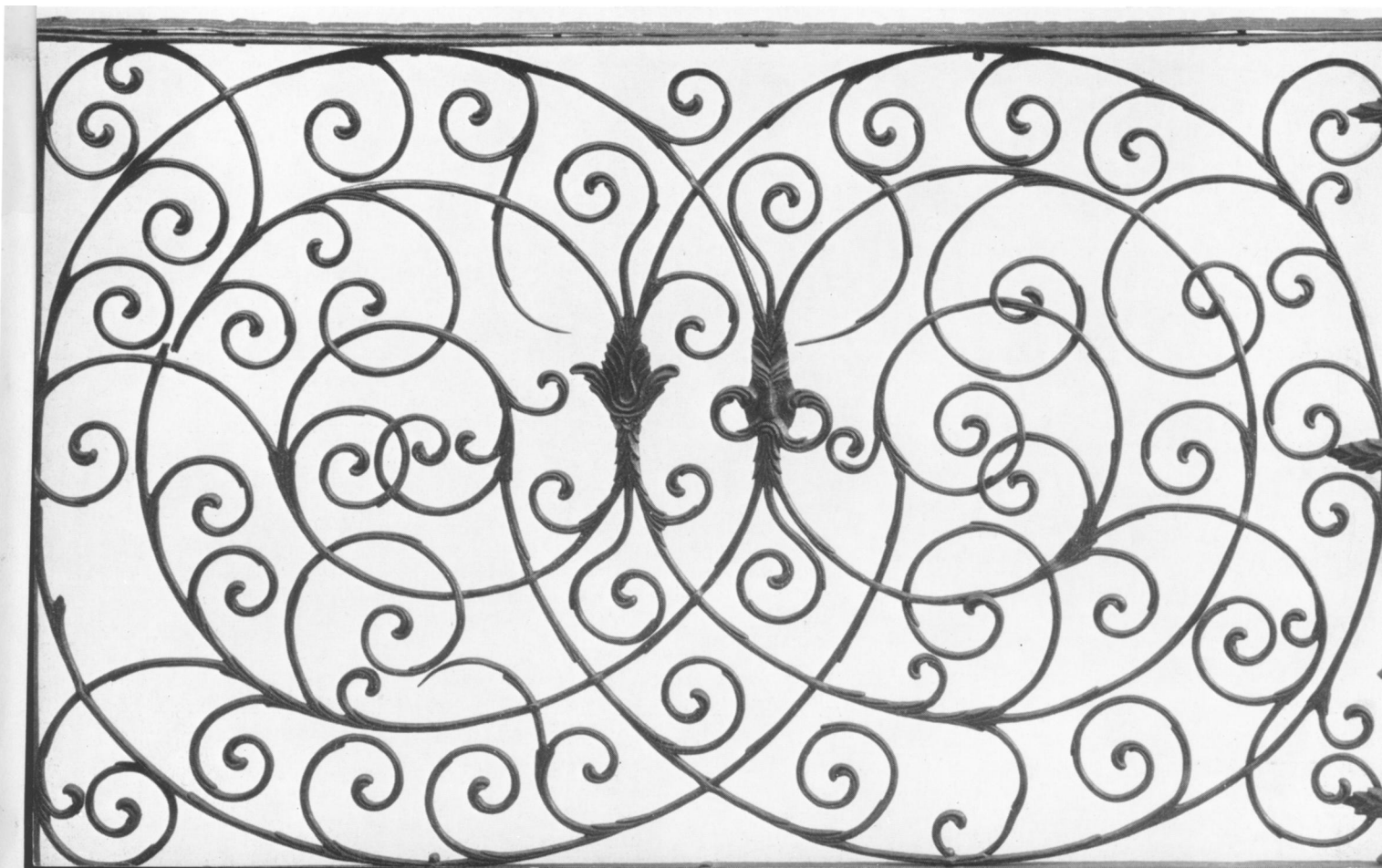
17, 18. Pair of gauntlets made for a suit of chiseled armor of Prince Philip. Italian (Milan). About 1590. The mailed fingers on the right hand are a restoration. Length 9 inches. Rogers Fund, 04.3.34-35

19. Detail of an embossed gauntlet, the mate to which is shown in Figure 13

Precious Objects in Iron:

EUROPEAN wrought iron, like other applied arts, shared in the development and growth of the styles prevailing at various periods among the fine arts. Because of the relative intractability of the medium, a wrought-iron object rarely existed as an end in itself, yet it often was made to delight the eye as well as to serve a practical purpose. A number of examples of well-wrought and beautifully ornamented ironwork, including twenty grills and screens from the collection of William Randolph Hearst and more than seventy pieces from the collection of Samuel Yellin, have come to the Museum in recent years. Ranging in date from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century, and in size from a small, delicately chiseled key designed by the French mannerist Jacques Androuet Ducerceau to the majestic, fifty-two-foot choir screen from the Cathedral of Valladolid, these objects form a representative selection of some of the best European artistry in iron.

In Italy, where the revival of the art of classical antiquity was of central importance,

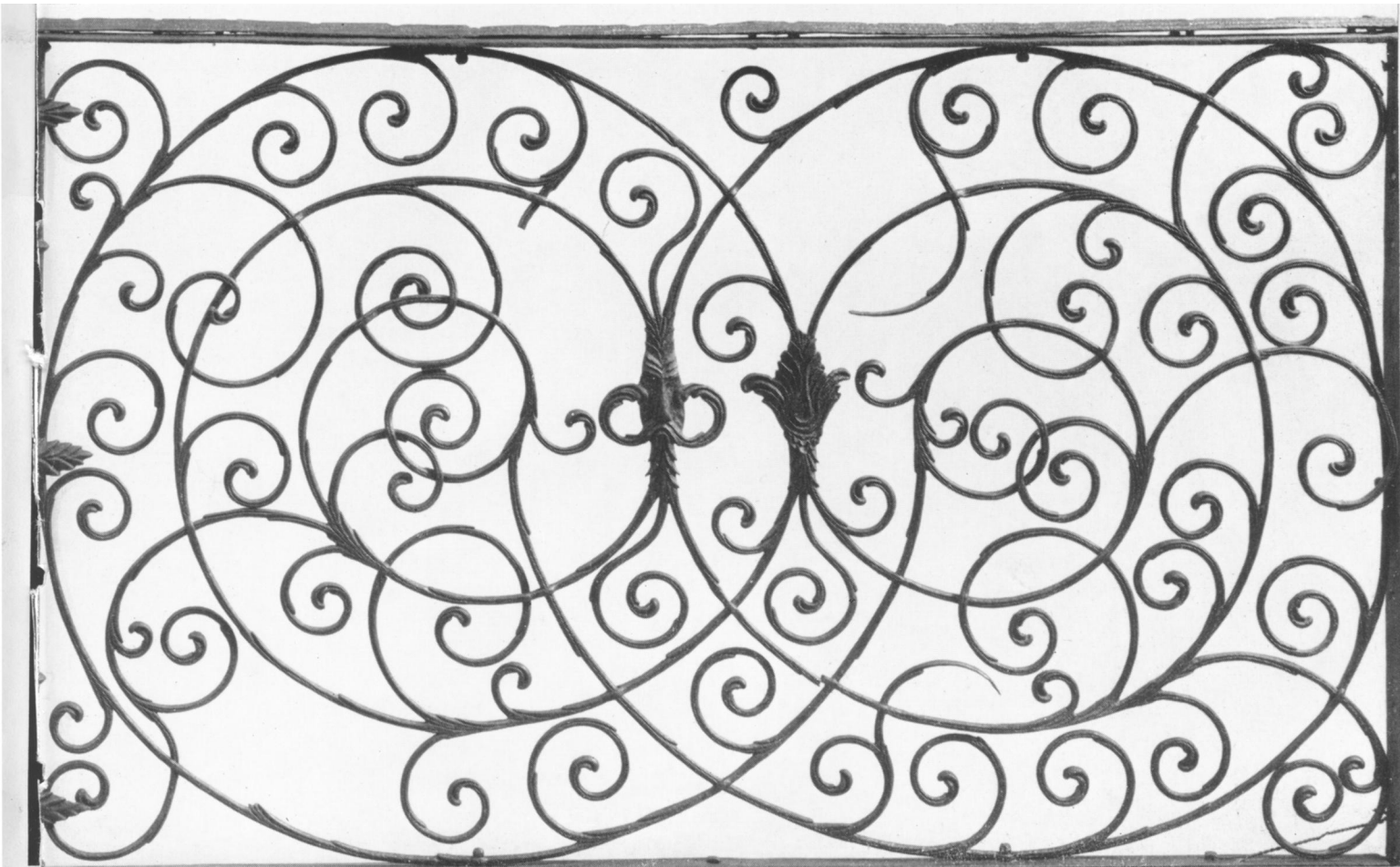


Two Collections of European Smithing

CLARE VINCENT *Curatorial Assistant, Department of Western European Arts*

the Renaissance smith was apparently somewhat limited by the absence of classical models for decorative ironwork. In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, therefore, Italian smiths tended to continue to use late medieval forms as the basis of their designs, gradually adapting them to new aesthetic standards. In contrast to Florentine work of the same period (which is often composed of motifs patterned after architectural elements, such as columns and cornices), ironwork in the Tuscan city of Siena reflects the new Renaissance interest in sculptural form, but retains the medieval tradition of preserving the identity of the iron bar from which it was worked.

An iron door knocker in the shape of a dragon (Figure 3) was probably made in Siena, for it is most closely related to such a prized accessory of the Sienese palazzo as the griffin-shaped banner holder on the Palazzo Grisoli (Figure 2). The dragon is in all likelihood not much later than the first quarter of the sixteenth century, since in knockers made later in that century the spontaneity of the earlier Sienese work seems



1. Balcony grill. South German or Swiss, second half of the XVII century. Width 10 feet 9¾ inches. Dick Fund, 57.137.57

to have been lost. Both dragon and griffin were constructed from an iron bar, rapidly bent into shape while hot from the forge. Separate pieces for wings and feet were then heated, drawn out, and attached to the bar with iron rivets. Finally, hammer and punch were used to supply the identifying features of the animals and to create a satisfying surface decoration, as, for example, the pattern of hammer blows on the dragon's body that suggests its scales. These vivacious creatures demonstrate the strength and liveliness of form of the best work of the Tuscan Renaissance blacksmiths.

In the course of the sixteenth century, the Renaissance ideals cultivated in Italian art gradually replaced the late Gothic in the north and west. In Spain, France, and the Germanic regions, up-to-date ironworkers felt the influence of the new taste and reacted in a surprising variety of ways.

Renaissance architecture and ornament appeared in Spain at a time when the wealth of the Spanish overseas empire provided the wherewithal for magnificent architectural projects. The Spanish ironworker shared from the first in the flowering of the new style, adopting Renaissance ornamental elements as readily as did the contemporary Spanish architects. In addition, the Spanish smiths, in contrast to the Italians of the preceding century, were provided with numerous commissions, of which the most important were the *rejas*, or iron screens used to divide certain parts of a church from others. Spanish chapel screens of ambitious proportions were already being made during the last years of the fifteenth century, but the Renaissance in Spanish ironwork began early in the sixteenth century when the smith replaced the square or twisted iron bar with the slender, rounded iron spindle, a sort of iron adaptation of the Italian stone baluster. The Renaissance *reja* was composed of two or three tiers of spindles, hammered from solid iron in the lightest, most symmetrical of forms and cold-chiseled with decorative foliation. The tiers were divided and crested with horizontal bands of embossed iron elaborately decorated with Renaissance motifs, and they were accented vertically with wooden pilasters, sheathed in iron embossed with Italianate grotesques.

These early *rejas* proved so satisfying a solution to the screening of Spanish choirs and chapels that they remained the models for the *rejero* until well into the seventeenth century. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, however, the ornament became more restrained, when the severe architectural style of the Escorial, begun in 1563 by Juan Bautista de Toledo and finished by Juan de Herrera in 1584, prevailed. In 1585 Herrera also provided a most ambitious plan for the Cathedral of Valladolid. The cathedral was begun in 1589 and consecrated in 1668, although only a part of the original plan was actually carried out. The cathedral archives show that in the latter year the ironmaster Pedro Juan was paid for the making of the choir screen. The cresting and gilding were not, however, completed until 1764.

The tiered design of spindles, separated by horizontal iron bands, links this *reja*, now in the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 4), directly to the illustrious line of Spanish Renaissance masterworks. But the restrained use of decoration and the intensification of the rhythmic repetition of the spindles achieved by the suppression of pilasters in favor of accenting spindles, slightly thicker in section and displaying baroque twists at their bases, combine to give the screen a formal magnificence that reflects the intervening influence of Herrera.

2. *Banner holder on the Palazzo Grisoli. Italian (Siena), XV century. Photograph: Alinari – Art Reference Bureau*

Several small Spanish grills show the application of the severe style on a less magnificent scale. One of these (Figure 5), bearing a panel worked with the ironmaster's name, Francus Gōzales (probably a Latinized abbreviation of Francisco Gonzales), illustrates a curious disinterest on the part of the smith for any element but the spindles, which are beautifully finished by applying thin gold leaf to the surface so that the pleasingly wrought texture of the iron remains visible. In its reliance on the decorative effect of the repetition of spindles of highly sophisticated proportions, the grill is related to a small confessional grill in the Museum that is inscribed with the date 1629. The repeated cherub heads that hover between the spindles of the Gonzales grill further indicate a seventeenth century date, for they have been cast in bronze and gilded rather than individually embossed in iron, as they almost certainly would have been in a fine example of the preceding century.

When the Renaissance arrived in sixteenth century France, two groups of metalworkers, the armorers and the locksmiths, especially flourished. The work of the latter is represented by a gilded key decorated with French mannerist ornament (Figure 7). The key belongs to the very old tradition of *chefs d'oeuvre*, or "master pieces," test pieces made by apprentices seeking admission to the locksmiths' guild. As early as 1393, Paris apprentices were expected to produce one or more examples of their proficiency after an apprenticeship of seven to eight years, and this requirement, with certain exceptions, lasted throughout the subsequent history of French locksmithing. The French were renowned for these test pieces, which usually consisted of one or more varieties of lock and key. They are often magnificent examples of cold-chiseled iron, carved like sculpture from solid metal, and the finest of them, decorated in whatever style of ornament was current, were often pierced and gilded as well.

3. *Door knocker in the shape of a dragon. Italian (probably Siena), late XV or early XVI century. Height 14¼ inches. Dick Fund, 57.137.27*

It is generally difficult to prove that any specific lock or key was made as a test piece and not by a master locksmith as part of his day's work. Unusual evidence, however, suggests that the Museum's key was indeed made as a master piece. In a book of designs for metalwork, known as "Modèles de Serrurerie," by the architect and ornamentalist Jacques Androuet Ducerceau the Elder, appears an engraving of four designs for keys labeled "*Pour clefs de che doeuure*" (Figure 6), and one of these looks very much like our key. Most of the major elements of the design have been followed: the scrolled brackets, the female terms, the grotesque heads, and the restless miniature statue of the male nude set within the architectural frontispiece. Ducerceau's book seems to have been published during the third quarter of the sixteenth century, and it is in this period that the key was probably made.

Another sixteenth century French key (Figure 8) represents a quite different tradition: the key as a symbol of favor or office. It belongs to a group of keys comparable in structure and design, such as one in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Both have a carefully filed, comblike bit attached to a hollow column or pipe, which is surmounted by a capital. The bows consist of pierced designs of winged, addorsed figures and animal or human heads supporting broken architraves, which in turn support small urns flanked by tiny dolphins. A small ring on the top of the urn on the Victoria and Albert's key provides the means by which the key can be suspended. The pierced finial on the urn of the Metropolitan's key once undoubtedly secured a similar ring, and the cover of the urn itself is made to swivel, allowing the key to hang freely. This whole group of keys is distinguished for the exquisite use of cold chiseling, which renders them as finely finished as any goldsmith's product. Indeed, they were probably displayed as proudly as gold pendants would have been.

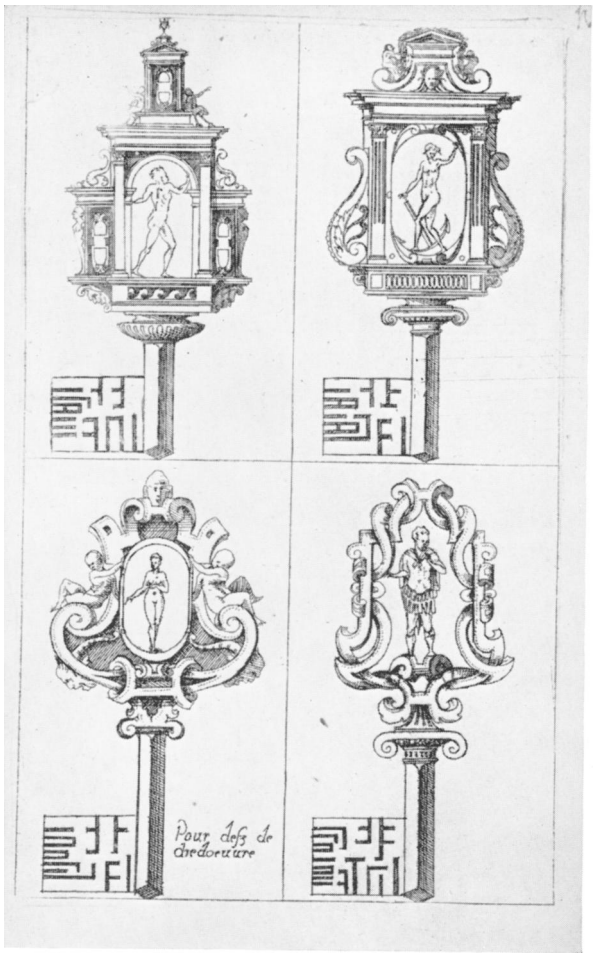
These highly ornamented keys were probably made during the last third of the sixteenth century for French royal courtiers. Though no contemporary descriptions of them have come to light, an entry in the account book of Henri III for 1580 indicates that they did exist: it records the payment of seventy crowns for "sixty-six ounces of wide ribbon of silver and silk, of white, orange, and dove color, to serve to suspend the keys of the *gentilshommes ordinaires* of the King's Chamber." In 1585, for the first time in French history, a set of regulations strictly governing the movements and privileges of the courtiers in the royal palaces was published by Henri III. Entrance to the royal apartments was forbidden to nearly all the old nobility who had formerly claimed that privilege, and even the admission to the king's audience chambers was severely restricted. Thus a courtier's possession of such a key must have held special significance after 1585, and special care must have been taken in their workmanship. Keys of this sort, however, were already considered marvels of another age in 1627 when Mathurin Jousse illustrated four of them (Figure 9), including two that strongly resemble the ones here and in the Victoria and Albert, in his *Fidèlle Ouverature de l'Art de Serrurier*, the most extensive treatise on French locksmithing before the eighteenth century. Jousse, whose authority was still being cited by the eighteenth century encyclopedists, comments in his chapter on antique locksmithing that such decoration was accomplished "*selon la capacité des ouuriers tellement que cela est long & difficile à faire comme on peut voir dans les 4. Clefs suiuantes*" ("according to the ability of the artisans, to such an extent that the making is long and difficult, as can be seen in the four following keys").

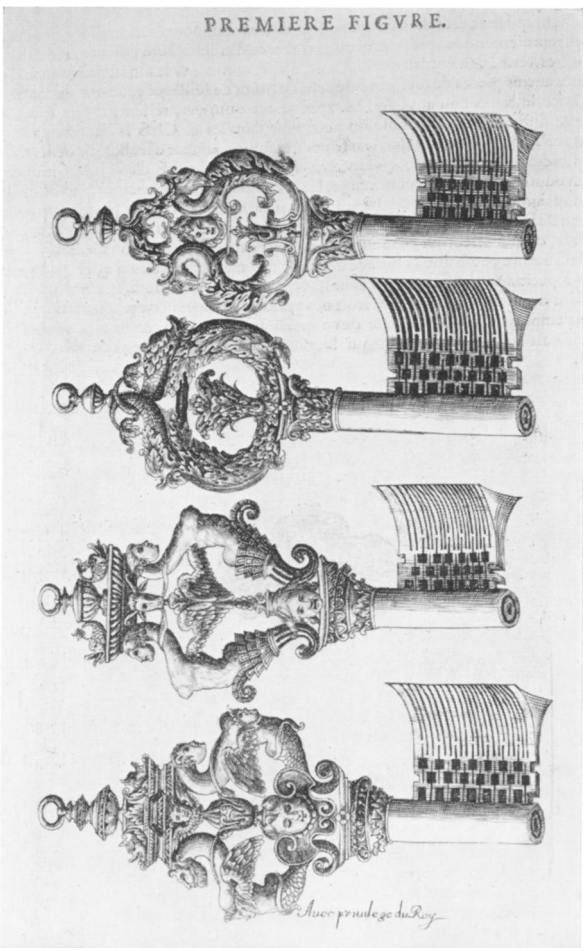
In sixteenth century Italy the technique of cold-chiseling sculpturesque subjects remained primarily the province of the armorer. Sculpturesque ornament extended even to the tools of the armorer's craft. The jaws of an iron vise (Figure 10) are decorated with a mermaid and a merman, while another merman adorns the back. The vise is inscribed with the date 1588 and the name of its maker, Jacopo da Ferrara, about whom nothing further is known, though his name suggests he had left Ferrara when this piece was made. Although the three creatures of chiseled iron are less finely finished than many of those of the sixteenth century

OPPOSITE:

4. *Choir screen from the Cathedral of Valladolid, Spain, executed in 1668 by the iron master Pedro Juan. The gilding and cresting were completed a century later. Height 52 feet. Gift of The Hearst Foundation, 56.234.1*

5. *Grill bearing the name "Francus Gōzales." Spanish, XVII century. Height 43 inches. Gift of The Hearst Foundation, 56.234.12*


Pour dess de
chedoeuure


PREMIERE FIGVRE.
Auec priuilege du Roy

OPPOSITE:

Above:

6. *Four designs for master-piece keys by Jacques Androuet Ducerceau the Elder (about 1510-about 1584), from a book known as "Modèles de Serrurerie." French, third quarter of the XVI century. Engraving. 3¾ x 6⅛ inches. Dick Fund, 32.55.1*

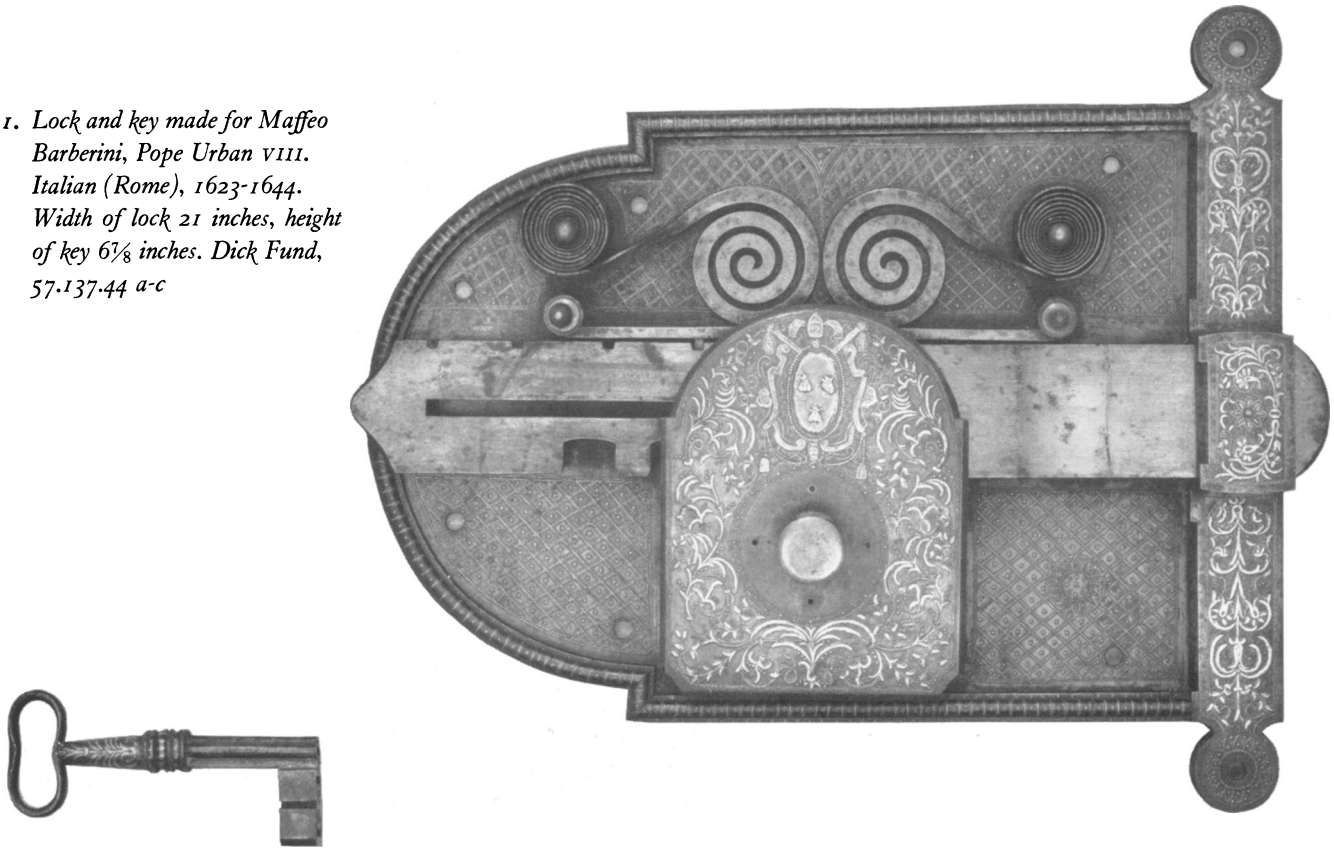
7. *Key made as a test piece for admission to the locksmiths' guild. French, probably third quarter of the XVI century. Height 3⅝ inches. Dick Fund, 58.16.2*

Below:

8. *Courtier's key. French, about 1580-1589. Height 5 5/16 inches. Dick Fund, 58.16.3*

9. *Four keys. Plate I from the Fidèlle Ouverature de l'Art de Serrurier by Mathurin Jousse, published by Georges Griveau (La Flèche, 1627). Engraving. 7½ x 11½ inches. Dick Fund, 26.6.3*

10. *Armorer's vise, by Jacopo da Ferrara. Italian, dated 1588. Height 10 3/16 inches. Dick Fund, 58.16.5*



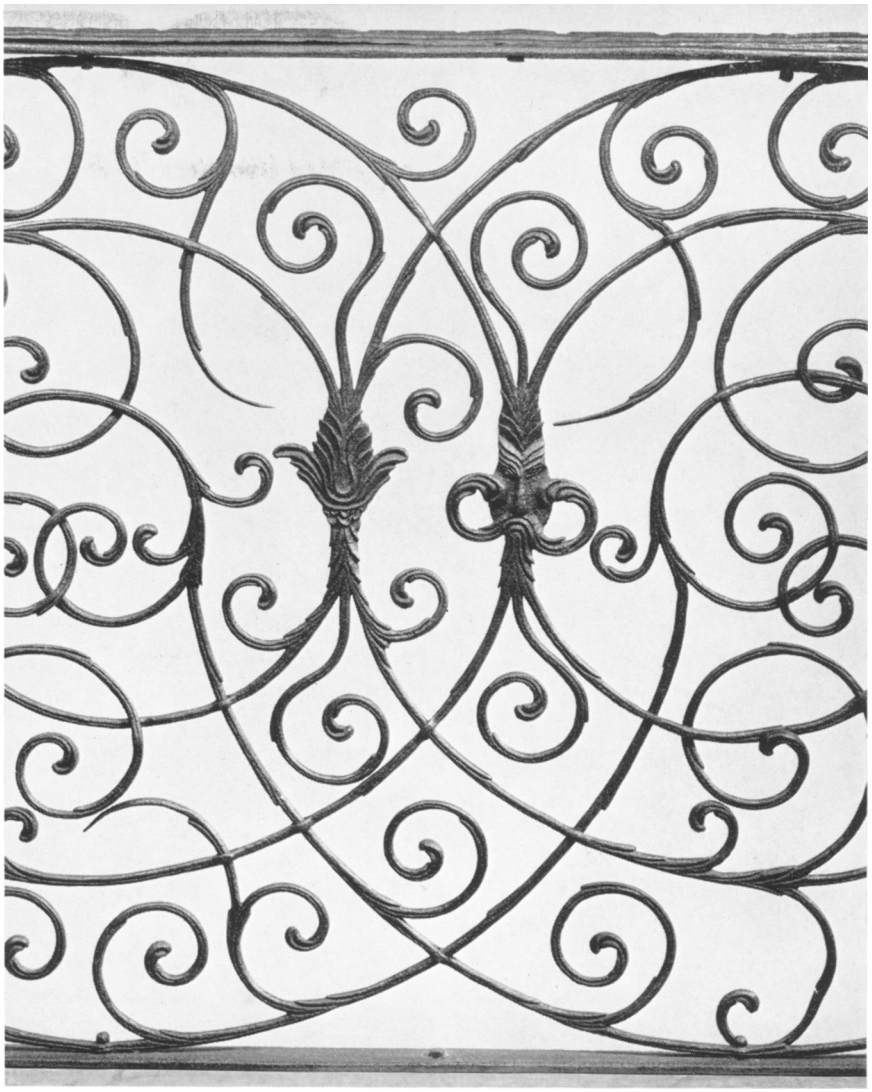
11. Lock and key made for Maffeo Barberini, Pope Urban VIII. Italian (Rome), 1623-1644. Width of lock 21 inches, height of key 6⅞ inches. Dick Fund, 57.137.44 a-c

Milanese armorers, who were world famous for the beauty and delicacy of their sculptured ornament, they are far more lively in conception. In the taut, powerful anatomies of the mermaid and merman braced against each jaw of the vise, Jacopo was able to express all the straining power of the mechanism they adorn.

Another technique for ornamenting metalwork, and one in which the Italians excelled, was damascening, a process of inlaying metal with patterns of thin silver, gold, or copper wire. The decoration of an Italian lock and key (Figure 11) of the second quarter of the seventeenth century was applied by this difficult and delicate process. The lock, nearly two feet wide, was probably placed on the inner side of a door, where the bolt and spring mechanism could be left exposed. These functional elements of polished iron have been visually contrasted to the rest of the metalwork, which has been lightened in effect by the ornamentation of silver damascening. The simple diaper pattern of the massive supporting plate, which is bordered on three sides with a damascened torus molding, is further contrasted to the swirling foliations on the plates that guide the bolt and protect the mechanism. The central plate also bears the three golden bees of the Barberini family surmounted by the papal tiara, the arms of Maffeo Barberini, Pope Urban VIII, for whom a number of architectural projects were carried out in Rome during the years of his pontificate, 1623 to 1644. One of these projects was undoubtedly the original site of the Museum's lock.

In the Germanic regions, smiths continued to employ elaborate late Gothic designs until long past the middle of the sixteenth century. When such motifs were at last abandoned, they were replaced by essentially flat patterns of flowing, interlaced curves. In contrast to the sculptural, mannerist designs of the French and Italian cold-chiseled ironwork of the same period, these Germanic arabesques were produced from hammered iron beaten thin and interthreaded, then decorated with floral and foliate forms. For the next century such pat-

12. Detail of the balcony grill shown in Figure 1

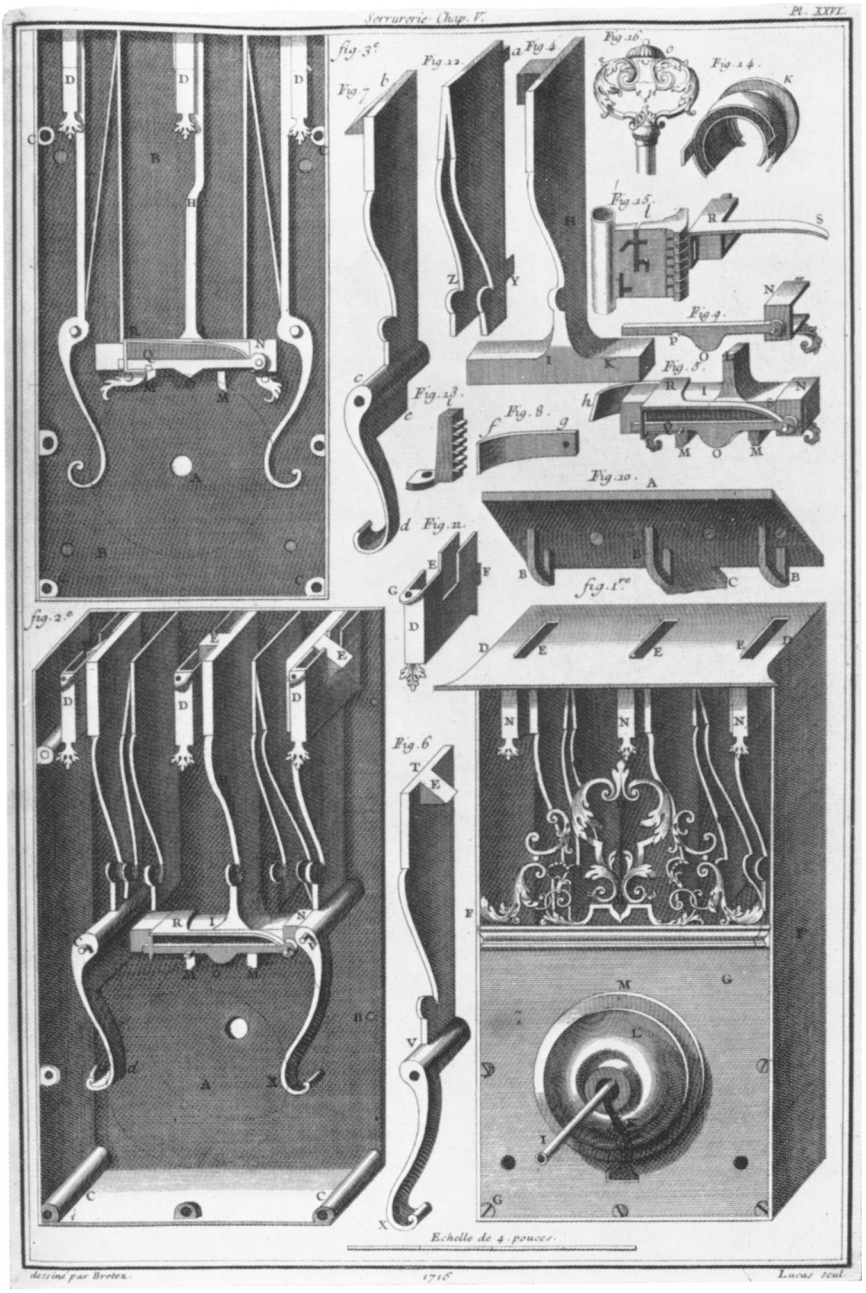


terns were used on well canopies, window grills, sign brackets, and as applied decorations on locks and door fittings. Toward the middle of the seventeenth century the intersecting arabesques became even more two-dimensional, and the matter-of-fact floral and foliate elements were replaced by fanciful little grotesques worked into the structure itself.

The incredible airiness of such ironwork is demonstrated by a balcony grill (Figures 1 and 12) of the second half of the seventeenth century. The examples closest in style and execution to this piece are found in the region of Switzerland and the southwestern German state of Baden, such as the semicircular stair rail in the Cathedral of Constance (Figure 13). A close examination of the Museum's grill (Figure 12) shows that the smith has reduced the iron rods to the minimum thickness needed to carry the weight of the material. His technical sophistication can be seen in the skillful assemblage of these countless rods and in the incised, attenuated foliations, which not only disguise the welding of the rods but also emphasize the rhythm of the curves. The structure has been further lightened by the mortising of the major intersections and by the welding, rather than riveting or collaring, of the rest of the joints. A whimsical touch has been added by transforming one of the two foliate ornaments at each end of the grill into a grotesque mask.

The last twenty years of the seventeenth century marked the flowering of baroque ironwork in Italy, France, and England. French engravers, architects, and blacksmiths led the way in this development, publishing an unprecedented number of design books for blacksmiths and locksmiths that were disseminated throughout Europe. Jean Lepautre, Jean and Daniel Marot, and Jean Bérain are among the most illustrious who included ideas for iron-

13. Stair rail from the Cathedral of Constance. South German, second half of the XVII century. (Plate 25 from Deutsche Schmiedeeisenkunst, II, by Ferdinand Stuttmann)



14. Design for a coffer lock, showing the mechanism. Plate XXVI, dated 1716, from the Art du Serrurier (Paris, 1767). Engraving. 10¼ x 16 inches. The Library of the Metropolitan Museum

work among their books of ornament, but lesser men such as Nicolas Guérard and the smith Michel Haste contributed greatly to the wealth of published designs. Foliated S-scrolls and C-scrolls were used in endless combinations by French designers, and they began to appear on a wide variety of metal objects. Iron grills, locks, and metal inlays for furniture all were decorated in the baroque manner. A coffer lock (Figure 15) is a survival of the traditional lock with three catches, a type described by Mathurin Jousse more than half a century before, but decorated with pierced designs in the newest scrolled patterns. Its key is modernized only by the decorative use of heavy baroque S-scrolls on its bow; otherwise it is derived directly from earlier models like those Jousse illustrated, with a delicately filed bit, a hollow pipe of triangular section, and a chiseled capital and bow.

This kind of lock lasted well into the eighteenth century. Its mechanism was illustrated, for instance, in the *Art du Serrurier* (Paris, 1767), the volume on ironwork from the encyclopedic series "Description des Arts et Métiers," published under the auspices of the French Royal Academy of Sciences as an officially approved alternative to the politically unorthodox "Encyclopédie" edited by Diderot. This engraving (Figure 14), from a design by a smith named Bretez, was apparently prepared over fifty years before the publication of the book, for it, like several others in the volume, is dated 1716. In the chapters on locksmithing, the academician Réaumur commented that such a coffer lock of only three catches was a relatively simple mechanism and that, for the more difficult coffer locks made as master pieces, it was usually necessary for the apprentice to demonstrate his skill by providing a greater number of catches.

Vignettes on other plates from the same treatise, these dated 1717, show blacksmiths fashioning foliated scrolls for the crest of an iron grill (Cover). The same techniques were used to create the graceful ironwork of the French rococo with its asymmetrical designs. A pair of sconces (Cover and Figure 16) provide small but delightful examples of rococo

iron. Their repeated scrolls were fashioned on a form, or pattern, in the manner described in the *Art du Serrurier*: the smith heated an iron bar, which he had drawn out from an ingot, until it was white-hot at one end. Using a hammer and vise, he started the inner curves of the scroll freehand. He then clamped the iron bar to the pattern and, little by little, hammered the bar along its exact curve. The smaller revolutions of the scroll were customarily finished by diminishing the thickness of the iron with chisel and file, imparting a ribbonlike lightness to the work. Some of the scroll ends of the Museum's sconces were finished in this manner, while others were hammered into dot shapes known as "snub ends." The scrolls were then welded or mortised together to form at once the structure and decoration of the sconces. The final test of the blacksmith's skill came, however, in the cutting and shaping of the various leaf forms to be welded to appropriate points on the scrolls. According to the *Art du Serrurier*, the ability to impart a natural look to the form and placement of the leaves demonstrates "all the taste and skill of the craftsman, talents that one can acquire only by long practice."

By the middle of the eighteenth century, rococo design prevailed throughout Europe. Even such objects as the Venetian gondola prows or *delfini* ("dolphins," as they were fancifully called by the Venetians), of which two are now in our collections and which were the product of a long, local evolution, bore traces of rococo ornament. One of these prows, a rare survival from the mid-eighteenth century (Figure 17), displays a typically asymmetrical rococo cartouche set among the more traditional Italian engraved arabesques and grotesques. The arms enclosed in this cartouche and surmounted by the cap of office, or *corno*, of the doge are those of the Delfini family. Like other Venetian aristocrats who counted doges among their ancestors, the Delfini recorded the honor on their family crest. Indeed, the silhouette of the flat iron blade itself is an allusion to the *corno*. Below the blade there are four small teeth facing forward, two of which secured the prow to the gondola. Gradually six became the standard

15. Coffer lock and key. French, about 1680-1700. Height of lock 6 5/16 inches, height of key 5 5/8 inches. Dick Fund, 57.137.7 a-b

16. Sconce, one of a pair. French, first half of the XVIII century. Width 17 inches. Dick Fund, 57.137.40

number, giving rise to the legend that they symbolized the six districts of Venice.

The earliest reference to iron gondola fittings dates from the late fifteenth century. A deed of 1485 speaks of a gondola "*sine delphini*," or "without dolphins," but these could not yet have been common, for they never appear on the little black gondolas with pointed ends in the contemporary narrative paintings of Gentile Bellini and Vittore Carpaccio. Small, clublike *delfini*, attached to each end of the flat-bottomed gondolas by means of projecting pins, were clearly in use when Cesare Vecellio's charming account of fashions, *De gli habiti antichi et moderni de diverse parti del mondo*, was published in Venice in 1590 (Figure 18). The book describes the *delfini* as "those irons at the stern and bow that, due to their gleaming condition, seem to be of silver."

No fixed date can be assigned to the abandonment of the *delfino* at the stern and the evolution of the prow into the graceful plaque that we know today. The change had already taken place, however, when the gondola hull evolved into the present-day asymmetrical, flat-bottomed shell with the long axis to one side of the center, allowing the narrow side to offset the weight of the gondolier on the cross axis, while the prow balances his weight on the long axis. If the accurate eyes of the Venetian artists can be trusted, the final change took place sometime between 1725 and 1740, for in the paintings of Marieschi and Canaletto of this period the gondolas are pictured with the single iron and the characteristic tilt of the asymmetrical hull. The moored vessels in the detail from a Marieschi engraving shown in Figure 19 provide excellent examples of the final appearance of the sleek, efficient little craft.

The presence of the rococo cartouche on the Delfini prow establishes it as well within the final evolution of the gondola prow as a counterweight to the gondolier. The prow's silhouette and its engraved family arms set it apart from the more standard designs of the period and indicate that it was used only on a family gondola.

As late as 1894, century-old prows were still in use; as Horatio Brown, author of *Life on the Lagoons*, commented: "They used to be made of hand-wrought iron, light and pliant, that would bend and not break if they came in contact with a bridge. Now the new *ferri* [iron prows] are cast in moulds, and are heavy and brittle. A good gondolier will, very likely, possess an old *ferro*, which may have been an heirloom in his family for many years, for the *ferri* if properly cared for and not allowed to rust . . . will outlive many gondolas." The Delfini prow has indeed outlived many gondolas, and, like the other iron objects in our collections, proves that utility need not preclude beauty.

NOTE: I should like to express my thanks to the Museum's Department of Prints for aiding my extensive study of their material in preparing this article. In addition, I should like to thank Juan José Martin Gonzales of the Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueologia of the University of Valladolid for his searching of the Valladolid cathedral archives.

The information relating to the reign of

OPPOSITE AND BELOW:

17. *Gondola prow made for the Delfini family. Italian (Venice), mid-XVIII century. Longest dimension 56¾ inches. Dick Fund, 58.16.10*

18. *Sixteenth century gondolas with delfini at bow and stern. Page 122 from De gli habiti antichi e moderni di diverse parti del mondo by Cesare Vecellio, published by Damian Zenaro (Venice, 1590). Woodcut. 4⅛ x 6⅜ inches. Rogers Fund, 21.36.146*

Henri III was taken from the *Comptes de Dépenses de Henri III: 1580-1588* and the *Ensuyvent les Règlemens Faicts par le Roy le premier jour de janvier mil cinq cens quatre-vingt cinq*, volume 10 in the first series of the "Archives Curieuses de l'Histoire de France" (Paris, 1836), edited by M. L. Cimber. That relating to guild apprenticeship came from *Les Métiers et Corporations de la Ville de Paris* (Paris, 1879) by René Lespinasse and François Bonnardot, volume 2 of the "Histoire Générale de Paris." *La Fidèlle Ouverature de l'Art du Serrurier* (La Flèche, 1627) by Mathurin Jousse and the *Art du Serrurier* (Paris, 1767) by Henri Louis Duhamel du Monceau and René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur (volume 16 of "Description des Arts et Métiers") provided the technical sources for both locksmithing and blacksmithing.

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19. Eighteenth century gondolas with delfini at prows. Detail of Templum S. Mariae Salutis by Michele Marieschi (1696-1743), Italian (Venice). Engraving. Dimensions of whole 18⅝ x 12½ inches. The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, 59.508.84

The Trustees for Orphans in Amsterdam, by Nicolaes Eliasz. Pickenoy (1590/91-1654/56), Dutch. Dated 1628. Oil on canvas. 70 x 91¾ inches. Lent by the City of Amsterdam through the courtesy of the Rijksmuseum

Notes

On the occasion of the New York World's Fair, the City of Amsterdam is lending to the Metropolitan Museum one of the most exclusively Dutch types of painting: a seventeenth century group portrait. For the first few weeks it will hang in the front hall, and later it will find its place among paintings of the same period in our galleries, adding to the Museum's rich representation of single Dutch portraits a missing and therefore most welcome aspect of Holland's heritage.

The Dutch group portrait presupposes a corporation whose members coordinate their individuality for a practical purpose and a civic service. No other country has ever produced this type of portraiture – nor appreciated it. Rarely have such paintings found their way outside of Holland, while there they still abound in museums, town halls, and guild rooms, testimony to social organization and civic pride. Family portraits, pictures of friends gathered together (as cultivated in England), representations of religious confraternities were painted almost everywhere; but groups of unrelated, usually elderly and dignified, men or women joined for the benefit of their community were portrayed in Holland only. This odd species of painting saw its start in the sixteenth century and flourished prodigiously all through the seventeenth, especially in Amsterdam. First came the *Schutters-Stukken*, portraits of military clubs ready to defend their home town in case of need, but doing a great deal of eating and drinking in the meantime. Those by Frans Hals are brilliant examples, while Rembrandt's "Night Watch" is the most famous. Toward the end of the sixteenth century the *Regenten-Stukken* became equally popular, representing governors or trustees of workhouses, guilds, hospitals, or, here, of the city's orphans.

This group portrait, painted in 1628 by Nicolaes Eliasz. Pickenoy, represents the college of trustees for the orphans of the city of Amsterdam, together with their senior beadle. The orphan trustees, or *Weesmeesters* as they were called, held one of the most respected though non-political public positions in the complex city government. Composed of ex-burgomasters and other honorables, they ranked high in the city's official hierarchy. Appointed as a senior college in the fifteenth century, they superintended the estates of orphans and watched over their

financial interests, somewhat as an orphans' court does today. In the accounts of the Weesmeesters we find, for example, repeated mention of Titus, Rembrandt's son and heir to the estate of his deceased mother Saskia; after Rembrandt's bankruptcy and insolvency, the Weesmeesters stepped in and appointed guardians to protect Titus's inheritance.

For a number of years this portrait must have hung in the chamber of the old town hall where the trustees for orphans met. But after the old and overcrowded building burnt down in 1652, the picture does not seem to have been transferred to the splendid room allotted to the trustees in the magnificent new town hall. Instead, it is first recorded, in 1784, as hanging in the regents' room of the "spinning house," the house of correction for women, and therefore has been thought to represent the trustees of that institution. Recent Dutch scholarship, however, has found the clue to the picture's identity in the scene depicted in the painting hanging behind the men. There four officials stand behind a long counter with several men and women and a little boy in front. This picture hardly relates to a women's prison; instead, the presence of the child makes the meaning clear: he is an orphan, and his relatives or guardians have come to account for his estate.

In our portrait the four Weesmeesters, seated solemnly behind a table, are listening to such an account. A question has been asked and the spectator finds himself in the place of the interrogated. The eyes of all the officials are fixed on him. There is a moment of intense, arrested attention, and we expect the men to move again as soon as the answer is given, to pay out some guilders and to enter the decision into the ledger.

Old records tell us the names of the four trustees in 1628: Reinier Adriaensz. Pauw (1564-1636), Pieter Jansz. Reael (1569-1643), Dirk de Vlaming van Oudtshoorn (1574-1643), and Harmen van de Poll (1599-1634) or Pieter Matthijsz., called Schrijver (1557-1634), who succeeded Poll in 1628. Of these only Pauw can be identified with certainty, on the grounds of another portrait, as the man on the left. Burgomaster of Amsterdam for seventeen years, director of the East India Company, leader of the Calvinist party, he was the most prominent of the four and head of the college – which is indicated by the gesture of the beadle, who hands him a note. A link with the New World is established by his son Michiel Pauw, after whom, in 1629, the Dutch settlement of Pavonia was named – still the name of a town near Camden, New Jersey.

The others are difficult to identify because of their sameness, all elderly and bearded, clad in somber black and wearing immaculate ruffs and broad-brimmed hats, effectively reflecting the gravity of their office. It is probably largely the painter's fault that in trying to flatter and ennoble them he leaves them lacking in individual characterization. And yet this row of single portraits, united just by space and time and varied only slightly by posed gestures, expresses the democratic equality that is the essence of Dutch group portraits. This sacred tradition was violated only once: by Rembrandt's "Night Watch," where the action is tumultuous, the actors (though they all paid for their portraits) hardly visible, and the light dramatic – equality subordinated to the artist's vision. Rembrandt later returned to the fold and in his "Syndics" conformed to the rules, but imbued the old formula with the most penetrating and powerful characterization.

Pickenoy was an able painter, not a genius. His family came, perhaps, from a village of a similar name in French Picardy, which would explain his name. His wife's good connections and his honest skill ensured a successful career. He was one of Amsterdam's most fashionable portraitists, and many of his pleasant portraits are still attributed to better-known names. This one is initialed NEP at the left and dated 1628 at the right (the last digit is now illegible), making it a key picture in Pickenoy's oeuvre. It puts before us now a faithful document of the citizens' integrity and public responsibility that made seventeenth century Amsterdam proud and powerful. It also reflects the spirit of the Dutch settlers of our city, and thus is a meaningful loan to New Amsterdam.

CLAUS VIRCH,
Associate Curator of European Paintings

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART