The Metropolitan Museum
of Art BULLETIN

The Great Copper Pelican in the Choir: *The Lectern from the Church of St. Peter in Louvain*

JAN CRAB   *Director of the Municipal Museum, Louvain*

Up until the end of the eighteenth century, the great brass lectern shown in Figure 1 stood in the collegiate church of St. Peter in Louvain, Belgium. Then, in 1798, it was sold. There seem to exist no records that tell who ordered it, exactly when and where it was made, the name of its maker, who bought it after it was sold in 1798, or where it was then kept. The only certainty about the lectern is the fact that it is mentioned in the notes of M. F. Pelckmans, an amateur historian of Louvain, as being part of the furniture of the church of St. Peter. These notes list the objects in a sale that took place on the outside steps of the church on the eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh of August 1798. The sales list of August 8 (Figure 2) includes, as number 13, *den grooten coperen pelicaen aldaer* – "the great copper pelican in the same place [as number 12: in the choir]" – which was sold for 315 livres.

This sale was not unique. It was one of a series of confiscations ordered by the French rulers. On July 18, 1794, for instance, following a decree confiscating works of art in religious institutions, a triptych by Quentin Massys and a painting by Gaspard de Crayer were taken from the church of St. Peter in Louvain and sent to Paris. By the decrees of September 1, 1796, many other works from the Louvain region that belonged to noble families and guilds, trade organizations, and religious institutions were confiscated in the name of the French nation. These pieces were stored in the old deaconry, the Driutiuscollege, and the convent of the Augustines, but most were later placed at the disposal of the Academy of Art, established in 1801, and of the reestablished Municipal Museum in 1823.

The sale of 1798 was one of many held during that year as a result of the decree of November 14, 1797. This decree ordered the closing of churches; it also ordered the public sale, administered by the French Commission of National Property, of all confiscated furniture, buildings, and real estate owned by churches, abbeys, monasteries, convents, cloisters, chapels, trade organizations and guilds, any other institutions, and the nobility.

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FRONTISPIECE:

1. Eagle lectern, from the collegiate church of St. Peter in Louvain. Possibly to be attributed to Aert van Tricht the Elder and Aert van Tricht the Younger. Mosan, about 1500. Brass, cast and chased; height 6 feet 7½ inches. The Cloisters Collection, 68.8

[Handwritten manuscript sales list in Dutch, dated "1798 Augusti", with an itemized numbered list 1–15 and a column of figures:]

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1 ........................................ 40   0
2 ........................................ 25   0
3 ........................................ 18   0
4 ........................................ 65   0
5 ........................................ 76   0
6 ........................................ 80   0
7 ........................................ 63   0
8 ........................................ 400  q.
9 ........................................ 131  0
10 ....................................... 160  0
11 .......................................
   ........................................ 565  0
12 ....................................... 250  0
13 ....................................... 315  0
14 ....................................... 200  0
15 ....................................... 70   0
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2. *Detail of the sales list of August 8, 1798. City Archives, Louvain, MS 0065*

During the sale on the steps of St. Peter's, in addition to the great lectern, other interesting items of cast brass were sold: the "small pelican in the choir," the tomb plates, the big paschal candlestick of 1484-1485 (comparable to that still existing in the church of St. Leonard in Léau in Brabant) by Renier I van Thienen, the holy-water vessel, and an eighteenth-century enclosure for the tabernacle in which the Holy Sacrament was kept. Still other remarkable ecclesiastical ornaments were sold on the ninth, tenth, and eleventh, including sculptures, furniture, altars, ironwork, and embroidery.

Many pieces were secretly bought by trustworthy people on behalf of the churches and the other religious organizations to whom they had belonged. Because of these clandestine deeds, when the churches reopened in Louvain on January 28, 1800, some of their original furniture and works of art were back in place.

Nevertheless, through the sales a major part of our artistic patrimony went to dealers, antiquarians, and less responsible buyers. A typical loss can be illustrated by the recorded fact that some French gendarmes bought the wooden statues of St. Joseph, St. Norbert, and St. Theresa from the church of St. Peter, and when they could not resell them at a profit, they simply chopped them to pieces for firewood.

During the early 1800s, a large number of these art treasures were available for sale. An important sale, for instance, took place on May 10, 1837, in a gallery at 3 Savoyestraat in Louvain. The sales list includes a set of four panels painted on both sides from the church of Korbeek-Lo near Louvain, and pictures by famous masters, Flemish and non-Flemish, among them works by Isaac van Ostade, Hendrik van Balen, David Teniers, Jan van Goyen, Gonzales Coques, Joachim Patinir, Nicolaes Berchem, Jan Molenaer, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Willem Claesz. Heda, Peeter Snayers,

Jan van Huchtenburgh, and Pieter ("Velvet") Brueghel. These and other works came, through dealers specializing in medieval art, into the possession of private collectors both at home and abroad. Most of these art lovers were English, because the Gothic Revival had created enormous interest in medieval art. The revival of the Gothic in England during the first half of the nineteenth century paralleled the revival of Roman Catholicism. Many new churches, convents, monasteries, and colleges were built in neo-Gothic styles, and were often decorated with authentic medieval works of art, most of which had been bought in the southern Netherlands and in the Rhineland. Among the buyers was England's great proponent of the Gothic Revival, A. W. Pugin, who traveled all over these regions with his friend and protector John, sixteenth Earl of Shrewsbury.

Pugin used the objects he acquired on his trips as illustrations in his theoretical writings (such as his *Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament and Costume* of 1844) and as inspiration for his designs for neo-Gothic artistic works, including ecclesiastical furniture, stained-glass windows, liturgical items, and so forth. He also placed some of the pieces he had bought into the neo-Gothic churches, cloisters, and colleges for which he drafted the plans, and for whose furniture and decoration he was responsible. A typical example of these projects is St. Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham. In St. Chad's, next to Gothic Revival works can be found real medieval objects. Among these is a pulpit that had been sold from the church of St. Gertrude in Louvain on July 30, 1798: it is a late Gothic work, carved of oak in a Brabantine workshop in about 1520. And, at the cathedral's inauguration in 1841, the Earl of Shrewsbury gave it a great brass eagle lectern; according to a tradition current in Birmingham in the first half of the nineteenth century, this lectern had belonged to the church of St. Peter in Louvain. In 1851 it was transferred to the chapel at St. Mary's College at Oscott near Birmingham, and last year was bought from the college for The Cloisters in New York. St. Mary's, one of the many Roman Catholic colleges

founded during the Gothic Revival, still owns several sculptures and church vestments from Brabant, as well as a cylindrical silver-gilt monstrance, dated 1547 and stamped with the town mark of Louvain, the deacon's letter R, and the maker's mark M, indicating the goldsmith Matthius of Louvain. A famous historian from Louvain, Edward van Even, recorded seeing the eagle lectern at Oscott in 1858, and mentioned the tradition that it had originally belonged to St. Peter's.

This tradition is believable and probably based on fact. Pugin could have bought the lectern during one of his trips to the Netherlands, when he bought other works from the Louvain region, such as the pulpit from the church of St. Gertrude, now in St. Chad's, the silver-gilt monstrance in Oscott, and a copper statue of the Madonna, also in Oscott, made during the last quarter of the fifteenth century in the Brussels workshop of the van Thienens. The latter may have come from the paschal candlestick of St. Peter's at Louvain; this candlestick was auctioned off in 1798 with the eagle lectern and with another copper statuette, representing the Virgin in Glory (now in Oscott), the product of a metalcasting workshop in the southern Netherlands and made about the end of the fifteenth century. It is possible that the Virgin in Glory was

3. *The Cloisters lectern*
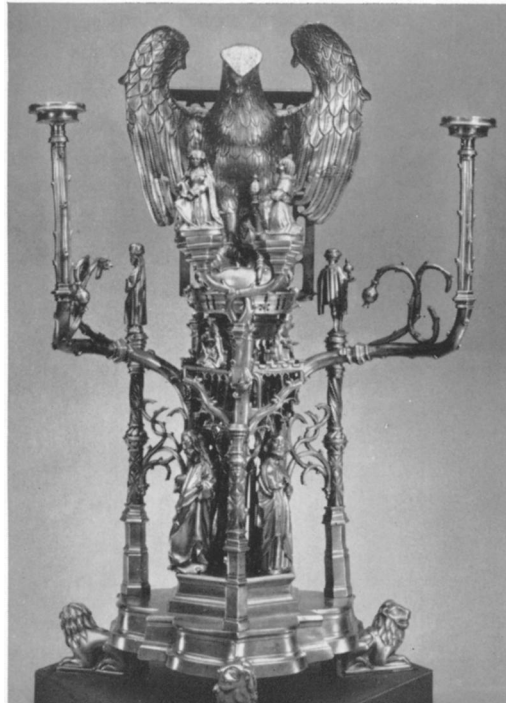
part of the chandelier from the church of St. Leonard at Léau, mentioned in 1888 as being in a church in Birmingham; this chandelier may have been part of a lot of copperwork sold in St. Leonard's to the English in 1827.

Support for the tradition of the lectern's Louvain origin can be seen in one of the elements of its iconography. This is the statuette of St. Peter (Figure 6) on the base, which could point to the church of St. Peter and to the city of Louvain, of which Peter is the patron saint.

The lectern does not appear in old paintings or drawings of the interior of St. Peter's, such as the one painted by Hendrik van Steenwyck the Younger and Frans II Francken in the beginning of the seventeenth century, nor in the one by Wolfgang de Smet (Figure 7), dated 1667. This fact, however, should be considered in the light of the lectern's ecclesiastical function: a church's big – or gospel – lectern was placed to the left of the officiating priest, and the small – or epistle – lectern was placed on the other side of the choir. All the known pictures of the interior of St. Peter's give a view up the middle of the nave; the sides of the choir (and the lecterns) cannot be seen, for they are mostly hidden by altars on both sides of the church.

It is probable – although admittedly hypothetical – that the lectern belonging to St. Peter's at Louvain and sold by the French in 1798 is the one presented to St. Chad's Cathedral in 1841, transferred to Oscott in 1855, and bought last year by The Metropolitan Museum of Art for The Cloisters.

4-6. St. Barbara (probably a XIX-century replacement), Christ, and St. Peter, on the Cloisters lectern

Technologically, the eagle lectern is one of the most monumental cast-brass pieces from about 1500 still in existence. In form, type, and technique it is similar to the lecterns in the parish churches of Venraai (Figure 9) and Vreren (Figure 10). All three are probably products of the same Mosan workshop, and possibly by the metalcasters Aert van Tricht the Elder and Aert van Tricht the Younger of Maastricht.

The lectern was assembled from many separately cast parts. The hexagonal base is supported by lions couchants. The central prism-shaped core is surrounded by statues of Christ the Saviour, St. Peter, and St. Barbara, each beneath a baldaquin surmounted by the figure of a seated prophet. Three knotty branches spring from the core, two ending in candle holders and the central one supporting statues of the Virgin and Child and a kneeling Wise Man. The other Wise Men are borne by two of three vertical columns that rise from the base (the statuette of a lion that once surmounted the third column, shown in a nineteenth-century drawing, is lost). Three small lions, which probably held armorial shields, ring the top of the core, and from this rises, in the pride of his beauty, the magnificent eagle with spread wings, holding in his claws a dragon symbolizing evil. The eagle's wings support a big bookrack, with a smaller rack, possibly for the use of the choirboys, below.

Some scholars believe that the parts were cast by the lost-wax technique, in which a clay mold is made of a wax model, the clay heated so the wax melts and runs out through a hole, and the metal then poured into the seamless mold. Other specialists think that the sand piece-mold process was used, in which the mold is made of sand mixed with clay, and is composed of several sections. Personally, I think both techniques were used. Further technical research and studies of contemporary records could lead to a solution of this problem in the near future.

In all probability the lectern was repaired and some additions were made during Pugin's time. Differences in style, technique, color, and weight indicate that the statues of St. Barbara (Figure 4) and the Wise Man kneel-

7. *Interior of the church of St. Peter in Louvain, by Wolfgang de Smet, Flemish. Signed and dated 1667. Oil on canvas, 5 feet 6½ inches x 7 feet 5 inches. Municipal Museum, Louvain*

ing before the Virgin were made in the nineteenth century. During the 1930s the lectern was painted black and gilded, in which condition it was found in a coal shed at Oscott in 1961. When the overpaint was removed in the conservation department of the Municipal Museum at Louvain, in preparation for the exhibition *Ars Sacra Antiqua*, we found that under the black and gilt layers was another, of blue and red laid on a ground made of white lead and chalk. After all this paint was taken off, the brass was polished with fire clay mixed with pumice and chalk. Thus the great eagle lectern regained its original splendor.

Translated from the Flemish by F. Lenaerts

REFERENCES

E. van Even, *Monographie de l'Eglise de Saint Pierre à Louvain* (Louvain, 1858) gives the history of the church of St. Peter's. He mentions seeing the eagle lectern at Oscott on p. 35.
Flanders in the Fifteenth Century: Art and Civilization (Detroit, 1960), exhibition catalogue, pp. 267-271, refers to the paschal candlestick by Renier I van Thienen.

8. *The Cloisters lectern*

9. *Eagle lectern. Possibly to be attributed to the van Trichts. Mosan, about 1500. Brass, height 6 feet 7½ inches. Church of St. Peter Banden, Venraai*

10. *Eagle lectern. Possibly to be attributed to the van Trichts. Mosan, about 1500. Brass, height 6 feet 1¼ inches. Parish church, Vreren*

C. Piot, *Rapport à Monsieur le Ministre de l'Intérieur sur les travaux sur les tableaux enlevés à la Belgique en 1794 et restitués en 1815* (Brussels, 1883), pp. 4-5, gives the fact that paintings by Massys and de Crayer were taken from St. Peter's to Paris in 1794.

J. A. Torfs, *Geschiedenis van Leuven* (Louvain, 1899), p. 379, says that the Louvain churches were reopened in 1800 with some of their original objects back in place.

J. Crab and L. van Buyten, *Inventaris van de papieren betreffende de kunstverzameling D. Van den Schrieck, François Schollaert en Joris Helleputte* (Louvain, 1966), p. 33, give more details about the 1837 sale.

"*Kunstwerken herkomstig uit Leuvense en andere Zuidnederlandse bedehuizen bewaard in Engeland*" in *Ars Sacra Antiqua* (Louvain, 1962), exhibition catalogue, pp. 167-176, and W. Graeney, *A Catalogue of Pictures, Wood Carvings, Manuscripts and Other Works of Art and Antiquity in St. Mary's College, Oscott* (Birmingham, 1880), describe the medieval objects at Oscott.

Ars Sacra Antiqua (Louvain, 1962), exhibition catalogue, gives more information about the pulpit from St. Gertrude's (pp. 185-186, Eng. 25), the silver-gilt monstrance (p. 192, Eng. 34), the copper statue of the Madonna (p. 188, Eng. 30), and the Virgin in Glory (pp. 188-189, Eng. 31).

P. V. Bets, *Zoutleeuw, beschrijving, geschiedenis, instellingen* II (Tirlemont, 1888), p. 140, suggests that the chandelier from St. Leonard's at Léau was among the copperwork sold to the English in 1827.

Catalogus der Oude Schilderkunst, Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België te Brussel (Brussels, 1959), p. 101, no. 448, mentions the painting of the interior of St. Peter's by Steenwyck the Younger and Francken.
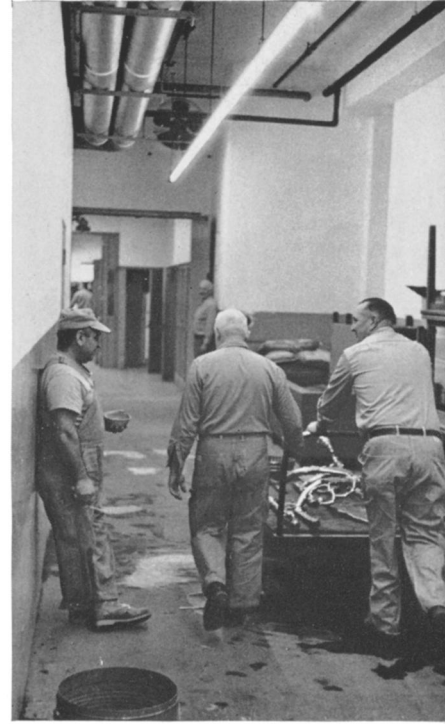
V. Demunter, *Catalogue du Musée Communal Van der Kelen-Mertens* (Louvain, 1927), p. 14, no. 18, mentions the painting by de Smet.

During the *Ars Sacra Antiqua* exhibition in 1962 Professor J. K. Steppe made the comparison of the three lecterns that points toward their attribution to the van Trichts.
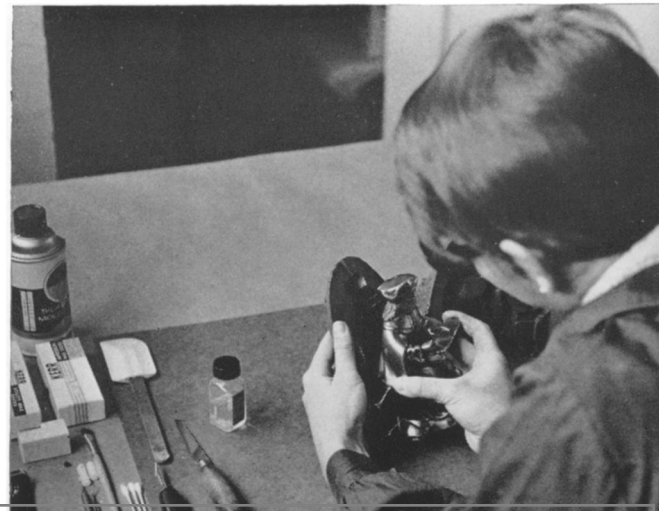
The Lectern
Arrives at
the Museum

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1. The boxes containing the pieces of the lectern were delivered under Customs bond to Storeroom 1, where every object that enters the Museum must be registered. Here, the pieces are examined by the curator, after having been inspected and cleared by a Customs official.
2. The lectern was taken to the Board Room to be shown to the Trustees, to the Photograph Studio, and then to the Conservation Department.

3. It was in excellent condition and needed little work. Parts of the protective lacquer were renewed, and brass pins were carefully shaped to fit each of the tapered holes.
4. The Museum is making a reproduction of one of the seated prophets for sale in the Art and Book Shop. Here the completed plastic piece mold is removed, section by section.

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5. The lectern was taken to The Cloisters, where each of the pieces was checked off the master list.

6-9. Restorers assembled the lectern in the Late Gothic Hall. The job was simple, since the parts were keyed to their place on the framework by various combinations of punch marks.

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Photographs 6, 7, and 9 by James Romeo; others by Alexander Stuart

"Pilate Answered:
What I Have Written I Have Written"

SABRINA LONGLAND *Research Assistant, Medieval Art and The Cloisters*

"And Pilate wrote a title also: and he put it upon the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title therefore many of the Jews did read: because the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city. And it was written in Hebrew, in Greek, and in Latin. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate: Write not: The King of the Jews. But that he said: I am the King of the Jews. Pilate answered: What I have written I have written." (St. John 19:19-22)

(Scripsit autem et titulum Pilatus, et posuit super crucem. Erat autem scriptum: Jesus Nazarenus, rex Judaeorum. Hunc ergo titulum multi Judaeorum legerunt, quia prope civitatem erat locus, ubi crucifixus est Jesus; et erat scriptum hebraice, graece et latine. Dicebant ergo Pilato pontifices Judaeorum: Noli scribere: Rex Judaeorum, sed quia ipse dixit: Rex sum Judaeorum. Respondit Pilatus: Quod scripsi, scripsi.)

According to tradition, which identifies St. John as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" and to whom He entrusted His mother at the foot of the cross (John 19:26), John is the only Evangelist who witnessed the Crucifixion; he is also the only one to describe the argument over the title on the cross. St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke are briefer in their accounts of this event and do not mention Pilate at all. Luke says: "And there was also a superscription written over him in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (23:38); Matthew writes: "And they put over his head his cause [accusation] written: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (27:37); and Mark simply says: "And the inscription of his cause was written over: THE KING OF THE JEWS" (15:26).

The incident of Pontius Pilate and the High Priest Disputing the Title seems to have been neglected by the patrons of Christian art, for it is almost never represented. Thus the scene's appearance on the Romanesque ivory crucifix in The Cloisters (Figure

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1. The Bury St. Edmunds Cross. English, 1180-1190. Front view, showing the cross as the Tree of Life and scenes of the Passion of Christ. Center medallion: Moses and the Raising of the Brazen Serpent, a prefiguration of the Crucifixion, with other Old and New Testament figures holding prophetic scrolls. Base: Adam and Eve. Bottom plaque: Christ before Caiaphas (?). Right terminal: The Deposition and The Lamentation; left terminal: The Resurrection and The Holy Women at the Sepulcher. Top plaque: The Ascension, watched by the Virgin and Apostles. Walrus ivory, made in seven interlocking pieces, 22⅝ x 14¼ inches. The Cloisters Collection, 63.12 and 63.127
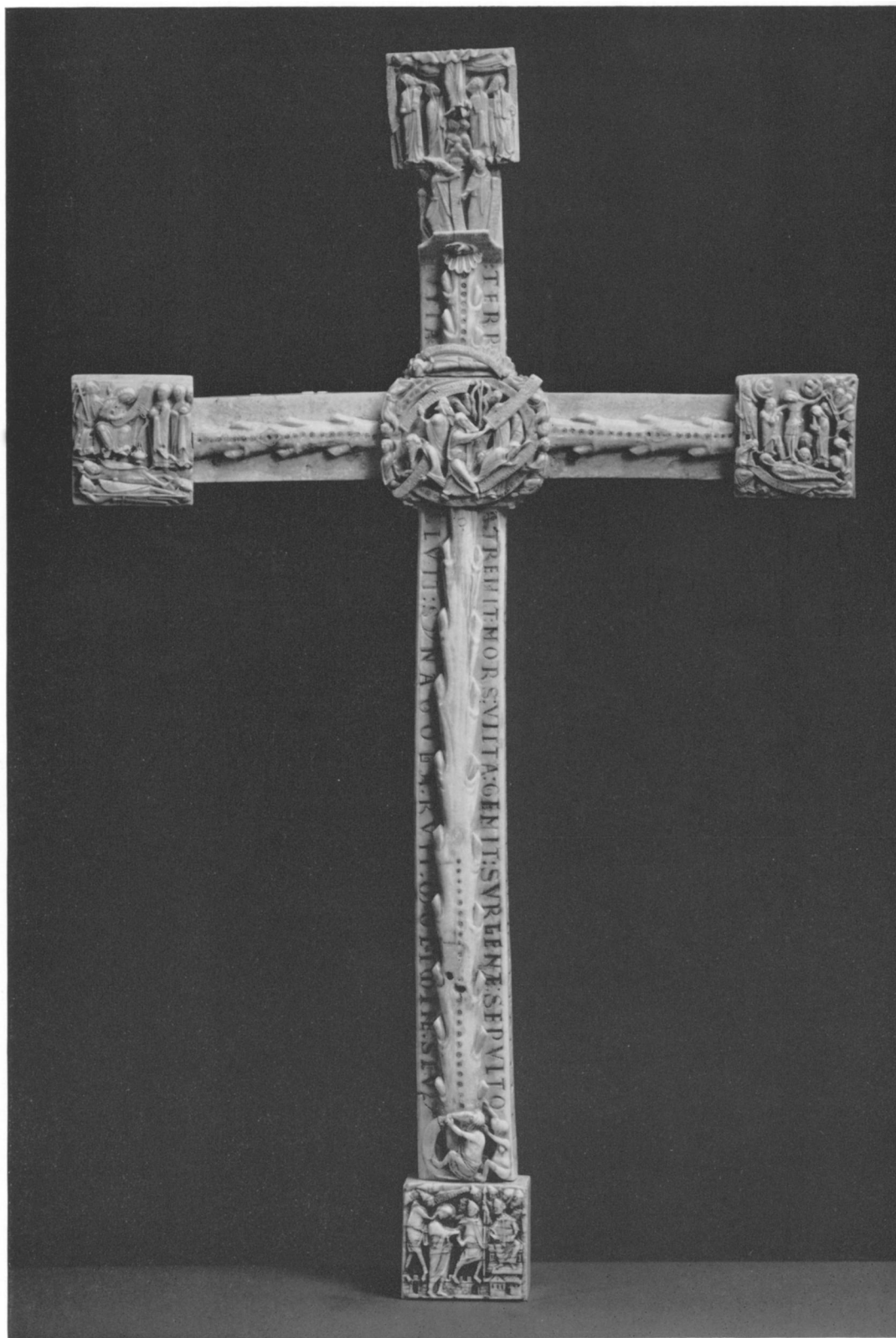
1) – known as the Bury St. Edmunds cross – is exceptional, and worthy of special attention. The emphasis given to it here is just as remarkable as the particular way in which the title itself is written: while the source for the scene as a whole is the text of the Gospels, the sources for the words on the title are many and varied, as will be shown further on.

Immediately beneath the Ascension plaque (Figure 2), in fact with their heads overlapping the Apostles' bare feet, stand Pontius Pilate, who was the Roman procurator of Judea at the time of Christ's death – he was recalled to Rome in A.D. 36 – and a Jewish high priest who is either Annas or his son-in-law Caiaphas. It is almost certainly Caiaphas since according to the Gospels he was High Priest for that year, and it was at his incitement that Christ was condemned; it was Caiaphas who said "it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people. . . ." (John 11:50; 18:14). Three of the Gospels describe Christ's trial before him (especially Matthew 26:3 and 57-68), but only John mentions Annas as holding a preliminary trial. Caiaphas, wearing a high pointed hat, holds a scroll as tall as himself, which is inscribed: NOLI: SCRIBE: REX. IUDAEORUM S[ED]. QUIA: DIX[IT]: REX. SU[M]: IUD[AEORUM] (John 19:21). With

his right arm he points vehemently at Pilate and wags his first finger accusingly. But the Roman governor is adamant in his refusal of the priest's request; his scroll reads: QUOD: SCRIPSI: SCRIPSI (John 19:22). With his right hand he jabs down at the cross placard on which they both stand, emphasizing its contents. His expression is stern, and he glares at the inscription. Behind Caiaphas a shadowy figure is outlined; judging by his pointed hat, he is another Jewish priest.

The object of the dispute, the placard (Figure 3), juts out over the place where Christ would have hung (the figure is now lost). It is inscribed with His kingly title, or as Matthew and Mark call it, his cause or indictment *(causam)*, in Greek, Latin, and a jumble of make-believe letters supposed to look like Hebrew. Although the scene comes from John, the order of languages is that given by Luke. The words of the inscription read in Greek, I[ESU]S: NAZARENUS [BASI]LEOS: EX-OM[O]LISSON, and in Latin, IHS: NA[Z]A-REN[US]. REX. [CON]FESSOR[UM]. The translation of the Greek and the Latin, and presumably the so-called Hebrew, is the same: "Jesus of Nazareth King of the *Confessors*," and not the usual "King of the Jews."

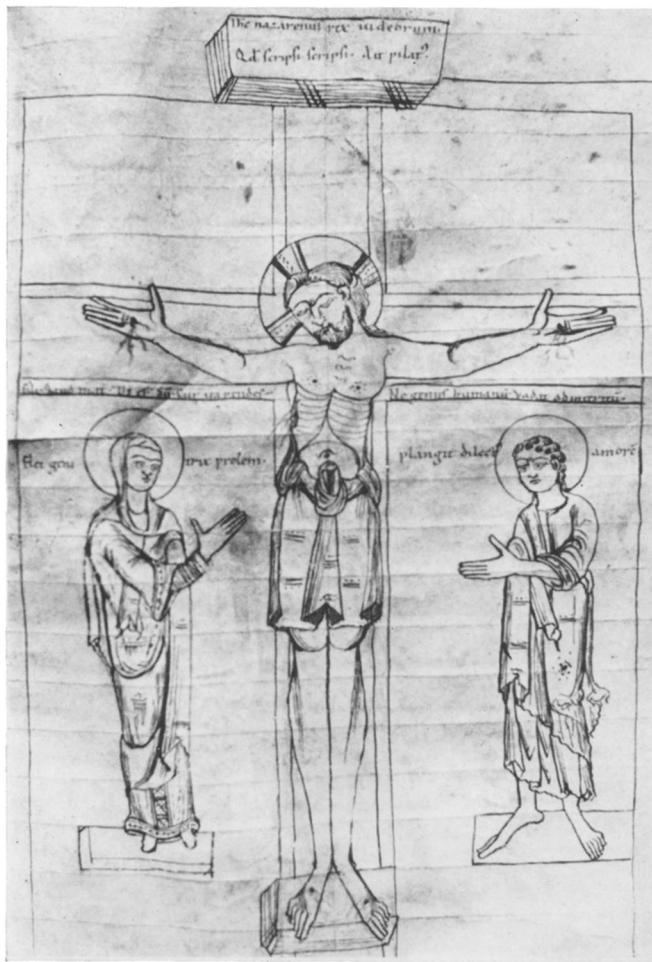There are only two other surviving exam-

2. *Pilate and the High Priest Disputing the Title*

3. *The Title and the Hand of God*

4. *The Crucifixion. From a Bible (?), German (Werden), second half of the XI, century. Stadtbibliothek, Trier,* MS *14, f. 9v*

tury, made in France probably between 1226 and 1234. The illustrated pages are arranged in two columns of four medallions each with narrow columns of texts between. These medallions show scenes from the Old and New Testaments, alternating with literally "moralizing" scenes and commentaries that explain the meaning of each Biblical event. On folio 64 of Volume III, the top right medallion shows Christ nailed to the cross and a man on a ladder fixing the title above His head (Figure 5); the inscription reads: IESUS NAZARENUS REX IUDEO[RUM]. At the foot of the cross stands a group of Jewish high priests, recognizable by their hats; the foremost one is in the same position as the high priest on the ivory cross, even to the huge pointed index finger and tilted head. On the right sits Pilate, with a disdainful smile on his face as he points downward with left hand and forefinger. Both expression and gesture are very close to that of Pilate on the Cloisters cross. The text on the left is a summary of Matthew 27:37 and John 19:19-22:

> And they put over his head his cause written: Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews. It was moreover written in Hebrew, in Greek, and in Latin. Then the high priests of the Jews opposed Pilate on this. Pilate's reply was "What I have written, I have written."

The medallion underneath depicts a Christian priest, with the faithful, celebrating Mass, while a group of Jews refute it with gesticulating hands and rolling eyes. Tiny naked figures who represent penitent souls emerge from billowing clouds at the top of the picture. A translation of the accompanying Latin text reads:

> The fact that in death Jesus was given a triumphant title, signifies that whoever is truly penitent through his confessions [*penitentie*] will reign with Christ. That the Jews spoke against the Scriptures and that Pilate confirmed them signifies that the Jews opposed the faith of Christ but that the pagans accepted and maintained it.

The most striking parallel between the cross and the Bible scenes is the emphasis on confession. Christ is hailed as "King of the Confessors" on the cross title, and in the Moral-

ples in medieval art that refer to the episode of Pilate and the title. A manuscript, probably a Bible, of the second half of the eleventh century, has a drawing of the Crucifixion (Figure 4) where Pilate's response is incorporated *into* the inscription of the title itself, shown as a large wooden block above Christ's head: *Ihe[sus] nazarenus rex iudeorum Q[uo]d scripsi scripsi. di[xi]t Pilat[us].* As far as I know, this is a unique example of the inclusion of Pilate's words on the cross title.

The vivid little scene on the ivory cross, however, does anticipate closely, both in iconography and in feeling, an illustration in a Moralized Bible of the early thirteenth cen-

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ized Bible the title is said to signify that confession is the passport to a state of grace and life with Christ. The role of Pilate as the unconscious but all-important Christian agent in the event is also conspicuous in both. The cross is the earlier of the two by at least forty years, but the scenes are so similar that they may have been inspired by some common earlier source. There could also have existed a lost intermediary model used by the author of the original Moralized Bible (possibly a Dominican working in the early thirteenth century), who drew from numerous literary and artistic sources for his allegories. In the absence of any comparable examples, the relationship can be defined no further than this.

It is surprising that the scene was not more popular, because Pilate certainly appears in art from the fifth century onward, although iconographic interest in him was limited to the Trial (which probably took place in the Governor's fortress or *praetorium*), Pilate washing his hands before the crowd, and Pilate being asked by Joseph of Arimathea for Christ's body and by the Jews to guard the sepulcher. Also there was always a fervent interest in such an object as the title of the Saviour's cross. According to St. Ambrose and St. John Chrysostom, who wrote later in the fourth century, the relic of the title was discovered by St. Helena under Mount Calvary, together with the True Cross, while she was on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 326. It was sent by Helena to Rome, along with a large fragment of the True Cross, which was enshrined at St. Peter's. To house the relic of the title, her son, the Emperor Constantine, built the basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, where it remained throughout the Middle Ages and is venerated to this day. (The two remaining pieces of the True Cross were divided by Helena between Jerusalem and Constantinople, where they underwent endless vicissitudes in the following centuries.)

There are three reasons that might explain why the title dispute was an unfashionable subject. The first is that John is the only Evangelist who relates the incident, presumably because it happened right at the Crucifixion,

of which he was an eyewitness. Secondly, there does exist a large amount of Apocryphal literature on and around Pilate, but at no time is there any reference to the altercation between him and the high priests. Concerning the cross title there is only this brief report in Part I of the Acts of Pilate: "And Pilate . . . commanded his accusation to be written for a title in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew, according to the saying of the Jews: that he was the King of the Jews."

The early Christian writer Justin Martyr (about 100-165) mentions "the Acts of Pon-

5. *Above: Pilate and the High Priests Disputing the Title. Below: Jews Refuting the Christian Mass. Detail from a Moralized Bible, French, 1226-1234. Toledo Cathedral, Vol. III, f. 64*

tius Pilate" in his *First Apology*, and Tertullian, writing around the year 197, refers to an official report allegedly sent by Pilate to the Roman Emperor Tiberius about the crucifixion of Jesus. It is unlikely that such a report was ever made or sent, but the Christians probably *concocted* at a very early date a letter of some sort from Pilate to Tiberius; and this "letter" may have led to the writing of the best-known Apocryphal work on Pilate, the Acts of Pilate, sometimes called the Gospel of Nicodemus. Part I is concerned primarily with proving indisputable evidence for the Resurrection and with showing Pilate's innocence during the Trial to the disadvantage of the Jewish priests and elders. In some copies of Part II, the Descent into Hell, an interesting chapter describes the confession of Annas and Caiaphas behind the closed doors of the Temple, after which Pilate writes the letter to Claudius (nephew of Tiberius) excusing himself and laying the entire blame on the Jews, particularly the high priests. This whitewashing of Pilate's character is also found in other Apocryphal works and was to be put to good use by Christian polemicists of later centuries.

The clue to the third reason for the rarity of the title scene lies below the pointing finger of Pilate on the ivory cross – in the contents of the title itself. It seems that in the first Christian centuries and indeed until the twelfth century, various learned ideas on the title of the Holy Cross circulated only in a literary "in-group" of Biblical scholars, from which they never emerged to be included in artists' iconographic schemes.

The early Church Fathers could search the Old Testament and find a prophecy, however obscure, for every event of Christ's Passion, and in this case obscure the prophecy certainly is. The first significant thing that they found about the title was that it was clearly predestined to be unchangeable, hence Pilate's victory in the altercation with the priests. This immutability the Fathers deduced from the headings of two of the Psalms; those of 56 and 57 include the phrase – and here I quote from St. Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible, called the Vulgate: *In finem, ne disperdas.*

David in tituli inscriptione.... ("Unto the end, destroy not. For David, for an inscription of a title. . . ."). It should be noted here that the Psalms are traditionally ascribed to King David, who is mentioned in most of the headings.

St. Jerome knew the Psalms better than anyone else of his time, since when he revised the corrupted Latin text of the Old Testament in the late fourth century, he began with the Psalms and during his life made three recensions of them, the first two based on Greek texts and the third translated from the Hebrew after he had studied the language. Jerome was considered the authority *par excellence* on Biblical matters throughout the Middle Ages; his translations and commentaries were used by monasteries everywhere. Writing in his *Summary of the Psalms* around 391-392, he says about the heading of Psalm 56: "This means, do not corrupt the inscription of the title, when Pilate wrote above the Lord's cross in three languages: Jesus King of the Jews. And those people said: 'Write not King of the Jews. . . .'" About Psalm 57, Jerome continues – putting words into Pilate's mouth: "You suggest falsehood, I shall not corrupt the truth: what I have written, I have written. The Psalm contains the voice of the Prophet reminding [us] of judgment and justice."

St. Augustine, a contemporary of Jerome's (he was about twelve years younger), wrote expansively on this subject both in his *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* and in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John.* In a few of the passages from the *Expositions*, he adds to what Jerome says. Writing on Psalm 56, he states: "I do not see how that [phrase] 'Do not corrupt the inscription of the title' can apply to . . . David. For there was no inscribed title of David's that Saul wanted to change. We see, however, in the Passion of the Lord that there was a title inscribed, King of the Jews, in order to reproach their countenances because they had laid hands on their king. . . . The Jews were indignant that the title was inscribed, King of the Jews: it shamed them that they had a king whom they could crucify. They did not realize that this cross to which they had fixed him was in the future to be stamped

on the foreheads of their leaders."

The fact that the inscription was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin was also considered to be important and symbolic. Augustine says that the title was inscribed "in three languages just as if it were proven by three witnesses, because 'in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall stand'" (Deuteronomy 19:15). In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* he is more specific: "Certainly these three languages here stand out above the others: Hebrew on account of the Jews glorying in the Law of God; Greek on account of the wisdom of the Gentiles; Latin on account of the Romans, already at that time ruling over many or nearly all of the Gentiles" (Sermon 117).

One need only quote from two such important authors as Jerome and Augustine to show what the general interpretation of John 19:19-22 and Luke 23:38 was to be – copied, amplified, and embellished – in the works of later writers. Cassiodorus (about 485-580), who established an active center for copying and correcting texts at his monastic foundation, Vivarium, in Calabria, based his *Summaries on the Psalms* on Augustine's *Expositions*. He explains without any hesitation that the *"tituli inscriptionem"* in the headings of Psalms 56 and 57 signifies the title written by Pilate above Christ's cross, and that it was destined not to be "destroyed" *(deletam)*.

The interpretations of men like Jerome and Augustine sprang from a basic intellectual curiosity with not a scrap of vindictive anti-Jewishness, although one can safely say that the "whitewashing" of Pilate into a pro-Christian role was certainly in vogue from the time of Tertullian (second century) and the rise of the Apocryphal literature (third to fourth century), and fitted in with a conscious effort to point out the Jewish fault.

A similar academic interest in the cross title is found from the sixth to the ninth centuries among the Irish monks and their circles. An anonymous work entitled *On the Wonders of Sacred Scriptures*, attributed to Augustine but probably Irish and of the seventh century, has a chapter, "On the Dispersion of Languages," that includes this comment: "Cer-
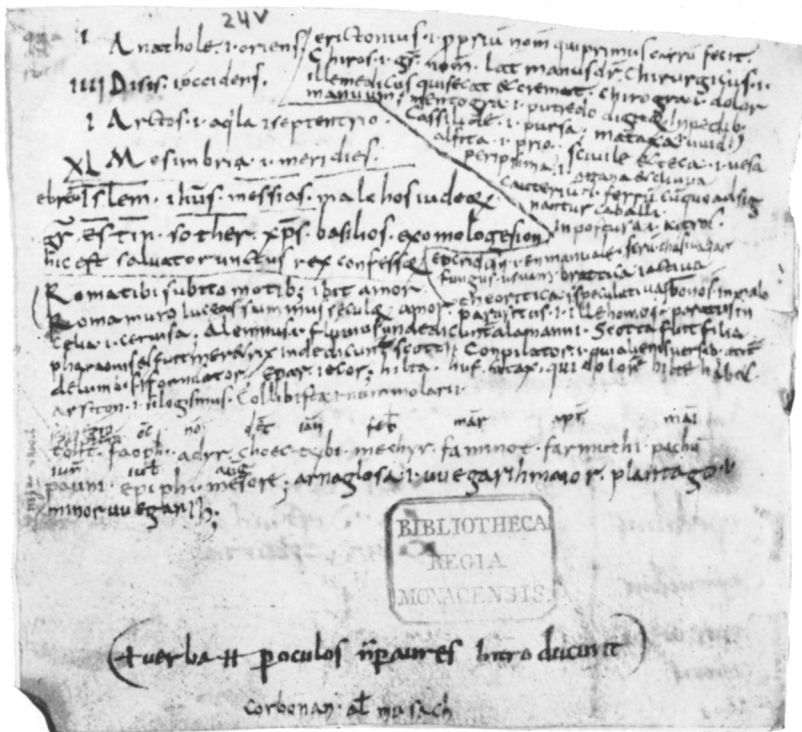
tainly of all these languages, at the time of the New Testament, the first place was surely given to the three languages of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin; for witness is borne by the Evangelical authority that the title of Christ's cross was written in those letters of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin."

The significance given to the three languages was sometimes applied even to liturgical matters. German clerics in the ninth century accused the brothers Sts. Cyril and Methodius (the "Apostles of the Slavs") of conducting Mass in a *lingua barbarica* (Slavic), when it should have been done strictly according to the inscription on the cross – *hebraice, graece et latine*.

But it is in the writings of the Irish scholars that one finds the most revealing definitions and explanations concerning the cross title, especially with regard to the "King of the Confessors" variant that is used on the placard of our ivory cross. Along with the intellectual curiosity of the Irish went the desire to be as authentic as possible in their understanding of the Scriptures. So they enthusiastically went beyond the Latin sources, frequently to the Greek and sometimes to the Hebrew, but the results were often Westernized.

It was not enough to discuss the holy significance of the languages; the title had to be recreated *in* these languages. Inspired by Jerome and echoing his nonpolemic, academic attitude, they reconstructed the cross title and probed its etymology. In his *Liber de nominibus Hebraicis* Jerome gives *confitens, vel laudator* ("confessor" [literally "one who confesses"] or "one who praises") as the synonym for *Juda* (Judah, the predominant tribe of Israel), *confitentibus* ("those who confess") for *Judaeis* (Jews or Jewish), and *confessionem* ("confession") for *Judaismum* (Judaism, i.e. the Jewish religion). In this singular way, *Rex Iudaeorum*, "King of the Jews," could become *Rex Confessorum*, "King of the Confessors."

Jerome's synonyms were given more than an etymological meaning by Isidore of Seville, famous archbishop of that city from about 600 to 636, who was a popular author in the Irish schools. In Book VII of his *Etymologies* he explains: "The Jews are interpreted as confes-

6. *The title inscription in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Irish grammatical writings, mid-IX century. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Clm. 6411, f. 24v*

("In Hebrew: [He is?] Jesus the Messiah King of the Jews

In Greek: He is Christ the Saviour King of the Confessors

This is the anointed Saviour King of the Confessors.")

Malchos is a Westernized form of the Hebrew word *meilech* meaning "king"; it was also sometimes written as *malchus, malcus,* or *melachin,* as we shall see further on.

At this point something must be said about the special meaning of "confessors." Why should the Irish – or anyone for that matter – have wanted to make a special point of this synonym? The word *confessor* (from the Latin *confessus,* past participle of *confiteri,* "to confess" or "acknowledge"), was used in the early Church, by the late second century at least, to denote those Christians who suffered acutely and continuously for the faith but did not die for it, thus distinguishing them from martyrs. Confessors were considered companions of the martyrs, worthy like them to be crowned by Christ (Figure 7); like the martyrs their relics were often buried in a crypt called the *confessio* below the High Altar. In the third and fourth centuries arose the concept of the Christian who acknowledged or confessed to Christ with virtuous deeds, preaching, and an ascetic life of penitence and prayer; this daily "confession" of Christ – a kind of spiritual martyrdom – applied particularly to hermits and isolated monks observing a strict rule. Jerome talks of "the Egyptian confessors, already martyrs by inclination." The Christian Irish of the sixth to the early ninth centuries possessed their own peculiar brand of piety and devotion, which followed the ascetic spirit of the Near Eastern desert hermits. The *Rule of Saint Columbanus* (late sixth century), probably modeled on life at his native Bangor in northeastern Ireland, is very severe, with emphasis on silence, obedience, fasting, and mortification. Such austerity and piety were certainly conducive to the pursuit of Biblical knowledge in its extreme. It is therefore in no way strange that the Irish monks should invoke Christ as their own special "King of the

sors. For many of them follow the confession, who formerly had been possessed by faithlessness." This gave the Irish their cue.

An example of a careful attempt to reconstruct the title in the three languages, using Jerome's interpretation of "confessors" for "Jews" and so forth, occurs in a mid-ninth-century Irish manuscript (Figure 6). This book contains the writings of an Irish grammarian, Cruindmelus, as well as extracts from the works of the celebrated Latin grammatist Priscian, who was highly esteemed in Ireland. On one folio there are seven lines written tidily and evenly on the upper left of a page already full of other writings in cramped, irregular lines. The acrostic at the top is composed of the four points of the compass derived from ADAM; immediately below is the inscription, which when transcribed reads:

ebreum istem ihesus messias malchos iudeorum
gr[aecum] estin sother Christus basilios exomolo-
gesion
hic est salvator unctus rex confessorum

Confessors," meaning "King of the Monks" – the best of all Christian confessors – and that this somewhat obscure and erudite notion should appear in remote Ireland at an early date. In the words of Edmund Bishop, from *Liturgica Historica*: "the Irish were in those days a people enamoured of the strange, the odd, the rare."

The Venerable Bede (about 673-735), in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, refers both to the scholar-monks of Ireland who taught abroad and to those who received English visitors at home. He was possibly influenced by something he had read in Irish exegesis or by Jerome's synonyms as well, when he discussed the title in his *Commentary on Luke*: "Now since this name was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin [although he is commenting on Luke, Bede uses John's order of the three languages], this means, as the Apostle said: 'And . . . every tongue should confess [*confiteatur*] that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father' [Philippians 2:11]. Therefore whether the Jews like it or not, every kingdom in the world and all the mysteries of Holy Law bear witness that Jesus is King of the Jews, that is to say, Emperor of the believers and God of the confessors [*confitentium*]."

Bede was not named "the Venerable" less than a century after his death for nothing. His Biblical writings ranked with those of the Fathers, and his words on Luke 23:38, *quod Jesus est imperator credentium et confitentium* ("that Jesus is Emperor of the believers and of the confessors"), were among those included in the vast and important *Glossa Ordinaria*. This collection of extracts from Biblical commentaries of the third to early twelfth centuries was compiled – probably by Anselm of Laon and his pupils – to form a standard schoolbook on the Bible. The extracts or "glosses" are written beside the Bible text in both margins and between the lines. The *Glossa* was certainly in use as a class text by about the middle of the twelfth century or shortly thereafter, as Petrus Comestor, teaching at Paris, refers to it around 1168.

An odd literary piece, which turns up in a strange context, is worth quoting here as it reflects an early interest in the title and also gives us a momentary insight into the medieval imagination. It is a curious description in the Old Slavonic version of Josephus's *History of the Jewish War*:

> And in it [the Temple] there stood . . . pillars, and upon them titles in Greek and Latin and Jewish characters. . . .

> And above these titles there hung a fourth title in these characters, announcing that Jesus the King did not reign, but was crucified by the Jews, because he prophesied the destruction of the city and the devastation of the Temple.

This extract is one of several "additions" to the original, first-century version of the *Jewish War*. It cannot be dated exactly, but it

7. *Christ in Majesty, with choirs of equally-ranked martyrs, confessors, and virgins. The Aethelstan Psalter; English additions, about 925-940. British Museum, Cotton MS Galba A. XVIII, f. 21*

8. *The Deposition. From a Psalter, from Hastières (near Dinant, Belgium), mid-XI century. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 13067, f. 17v*

is certainly a Christian interpolation added during the Middle Ages and not before the ninth century. The most revealing thing about the passage is that it reflects the medieval author's strong visual concept of a title similar to that on the cross, which according to him hung in the Temple at Jerusalem and proclaimed Christ's kingly status despite His crucifixion. For all we know, some medieval pilgrim returned from the Holy Places really had seen such a title.

A remarkable Deposition miniature in a mid-eleventh-century Psalter appears to be a unique example of the reconstructed cross title in art before the twelfth century (Figure 8). Because it shares certain features with the title on the ivory cross – the same order of languages, that of Luke, several Westernized Greek letters (Figures 9 and 10), and a substitute Hebrew that is apparently gibberish – the two works have been likened. It will be seen that their resemblances really reveal no more than a similar scholastic spirit and striving for the "real thing." They were in fact written with two very different intentions.

In the miniature there is a large title, flanked by the Greek letters alpha and omega, with the inscription "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews" written out in Greek and Latin, then in Anglo-Saxon runes in place of Hebrew. The initials G, L, and B immediately to the left of the inscription stand for *Graece, Latine,* and *Barbarice* and point out the three different languages used.

The artist's effort to be genuine by his use of Greek and especially by his use of runes instead of Hebrew provokes two questions. The first: how good is his Greek? The second: why the runes, and what sort of reflection do they give us of the intellectual milieu in which they were conceived? The answer to the first is that he did not know Greek properly, since the top inscription consists of Latin words written with Greek characters. Even his transliteration itself is not pure, as it uses at least two Westernized forms for letters, ⋺ and ⋺-ᴄ, both of which he could easily have taken from Anglo-Saxon copies of Greek alphabets like the one in the tenth-century Ben-

edictional of Archbishop Robert (Figure 11). A partial answer to the second question is that he clearly did not know any Hebrew and considered runes to be "barbaric" enough to be unintelligible to the layman, and therefore to be indistinguishable from Hebrew. He was of course banking on the fact that nobody else would know Hebrew either.

The very name rune is evocative of mysterious pagan lore; the word itself means "mystery" and "secret" in Early English. Broadly speaking, runes are symbolic letters that evolved from picture-symbols used by the primitive Germanic peoples for magic rites and the casting of lots. Anglo-Saxon settlers probably introduced them to England; Bede in the *Ecclesiastical History* mentions the casting of lots as a custom among the "*Antiqui Saxones*" and also refers to the popular belief in runic magic by local Northumbrians. Despite Christianity, runes were deep-rooted enough in England to survive in poetry and on monuments at least until the tenth century. Gradually they became an antiquarian and "bookish" hobby of monks both in England and on the Continent, being used for the composition of Latin riddles or runic alphabets with corresponding Latin letters. Three alphabets of this type are in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript of the tenth or eleventh century (Figure 12).

One consequently supposes that an edu-

ABOVE:

9. Detail (enlarged) of Figure 8. The cross title in Greek, Latin, and runes

10. Title on the Cloisters cross. In the first three lines are the Westernized Greek letters ꝺ and ꝺ-� (half obscured) that it shares with the inscription above

LEFT:

11. Greek alphabet. From the Benedictional of Archbishop Robert, English (Winchester), late X century. Bibliothèque de la ville, Rouen, MS Y. 7, f. 187v. From The Benedictional of Archbishop Robert (London, 1903) by Henry E. Wilson

cated monk of the mid-eleventh century would certainly look upon runes as heathen and "barbaric." Yet this would not deter him from employing their decorative quality – visually akin to the "pictorial" look of Hebrew – to make his cross inscription look authentic. Nor would it prevent him from possessing an excellent knowledge of runes. When translated into their Latin equivalents, these runes spell apparent nonsense (Figure 13). Helmut Nickel has studied the inscription and shown that the man was very clever, deliberately scrambling the symbols in a secret code (Figures 14 and 15).

The cleverest part of the whole scheme, which proves how well our scholarly monk, or someone in the monastery, knew his rune lore, is that he thereby avoided using the highly unpropitious runes I, H, and N for the actual initials of Christ's name. Every rune has a magic meaning, hence there are victory runes, love runes, battle runes, and so forth. The names for I, H, and N are "Ice," "Hailstorm," and "Need, Plight, Disaster," which were most ominous, being the root of all human woe. Instead, our author made from Christ's name a set of the most favorable and successful runes: "Cattle" (symbolizing wealth); "Gift"; "Day, Light, Prosperity"; "Rivermouth" (originally "God"); and "Sun."

This is, strange to say, the only known example of a runic inscription used in such a way. The manuscript, a Psalter with additions, was originally made for the Benedictine community of Waulsort and Hastières near Dinant, Belgium, which had been founded in

12. *Three runic "alphabets" with corresponding Latin letters. Anglo-Saxon, X-XI century. British Museum, Cotton MS Vitellius A. XII, f. 65r*
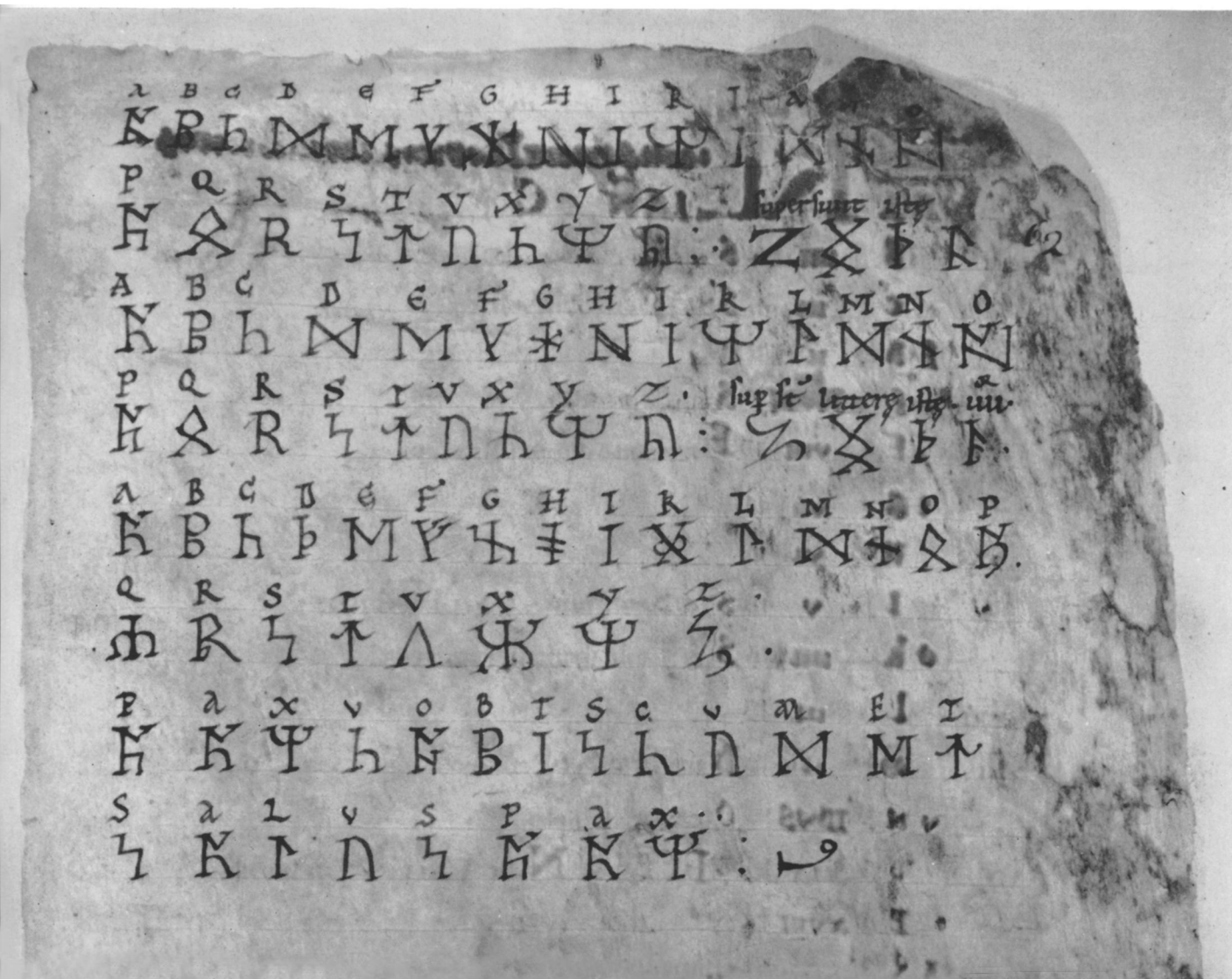
the tenth century specifically for the use of Irish monks and an Irish abbot. The presence of three Irish saints in the Litany and the inclusion of the famous *Navigation* of St. Brendan confirm that the manuscript came from an Irish environment.

It has been said that centuries are only arbitrary conveniences for the historian, but it is also true to say that during the twelfth century the learned theories of earlier men were reapplied with fresh zeal and in the light of contemporary events and feelings. There was clearly a revival – more successful than its forbears – of interest in the title of Christ's cross, which was part and parcel of a particular moment in history that had many other manifestations both in art and literature.

A glossed Psalter from the Abbey of Saint-

F G D O V (S)

J A Z A N D J (US)

N D X G Q C

A D L I N Q

13

A B C D E F G H I J L M N O P Q R S T U V X Y Z

14

13-15. Runes from the Hastières Psalter and corresponding Latin letters; the code applied; the inscription decoded. The monk took the Latin alphabet minus K and W and gave each letter a rune from the Anglo-Saxon futhorc (so-called from the first six runes) of thirty-three letters using Ƶ for Z and the "ing" rune (⊗) for Q; Z and Q do not exist in true runic characters. He split the twenty-four-letter alphabet into three sets of eight letters. In the first division, he replaced each Latin letter with, instead of the corresponding rune, the preceding one – D rune for E and so on; A has no preceding rune, so it is represented by the A rune itself. In the second division, he did the same, only substituting the third preceding rune – F rune for I. The third division he subdivided, using the fourth preceding rune as a substitute in the first half, but giving the last four letters – V, X, Y, Z – their exact counterparts

I H E S V (S)

N A Z A R E N (US)

R E X J U D

A E O R U

M

15

16. *The cross title in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Detail from a Psalter, north French (Abbey of Saint-Amand), mid-XII century. Bibliothèque Municipale, Valenciennes, MS 36, f. 173*
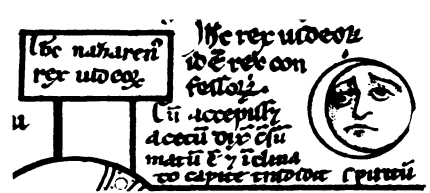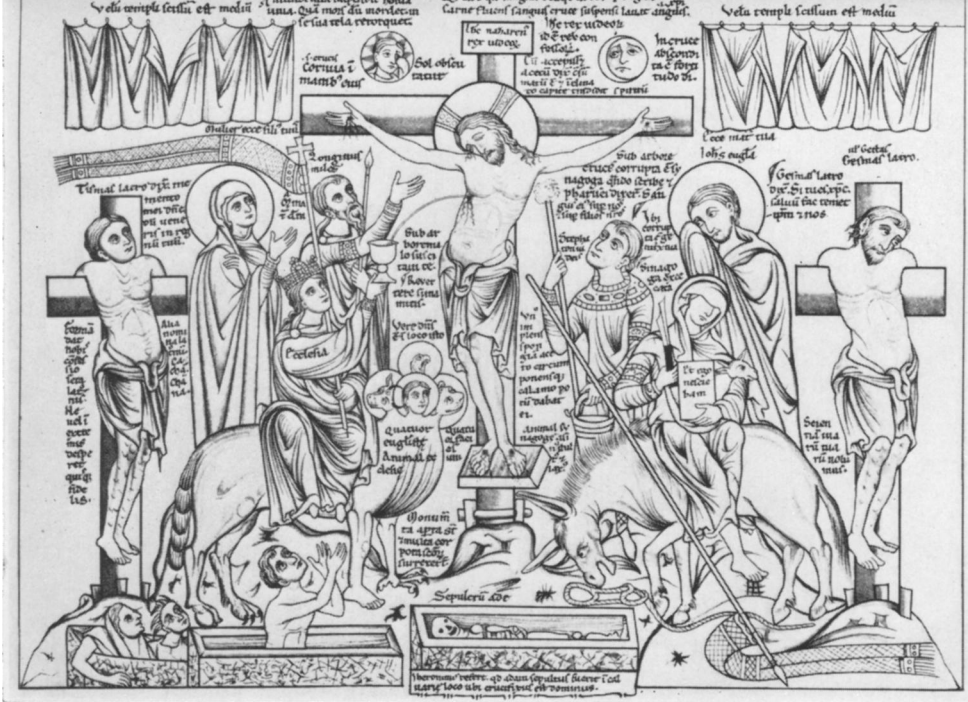
17. *The cross title in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Detail from a copy of the Venerable Bede's Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, north French, XII century. Bibliothèque de la ville, Evreux, MS 90, f. 192v*

Amand, which was one of the great literary centers of northern France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, has the following inscription on its last folio (Figure 16):

> *Titul[us] sup[er] posit[us] cruci.*
> *Hebraice. Malcus iudeor[um].*
> *Grece. Basileos omolismon.*
> *Latine. Rex confessor[um].*

("The title set over the cross:
In Hebrew: King of the Jews
In Greek: King of the Confessors
In Latin: King of the Confessors.")

The Psalter must have been written before 1168, as it is included in an inventory com-

piled at Saint-Amand between 1150 and 1168. The scribe apparently did not know how to write Greek or Hebrew characters, but it is odd that he did not even make the attempt, since on the folios immediately preceding there are two Hebrew alphabets and one Greek alphabet. The word *omolismon*, an incorrect form of *exomolisson*, completes the picture of a scribe unwittingly copying from a wrong original or from something he could not understand and therefore not decipher. The wording of the inscription as a whole follows the tradition of the ninth-century Irish manuscript in Figure 6.

Another twelfth-century northern French book, this time a *Commentary on Luke* by Bede, has the trilingual inscription in the order of John, but with no "Confessors" (Figure 17):

> *Hebraice. Ih[esu]s anazurit melachin Iuda.*
> *Grece. Ysos Nazarenus basileos ton Iudeon.*
> *Latine. Ih[esu]s nazaren[us] rex Iudeor[um].*

("In Hebrew: Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews
In Greek: Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews
In Latin: Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews.")

The most interesting literary example of the mid-twelfth century comes in the *Historia Scholastica* of Petrus Comestor ("Peter the Eater," because he "devoured" the Scriptures), which was written, and presumably completed, at Paris while Peter was chancellor there and in charge of the theological school between 1164 and 1178, when he died at the Abbey of Saint Victor. The *Historia*, a sacred history condensing the Bible, with numerous interpretations and embellishments, was a best seller not only with the theology students at Paris and other universities but also in monasteries everywhere. It was probably finished by 1176, because Peter dedicated it to the Bishop of Sens, Guillaume aux Blanches Mains, who died in that year.

Chapter 172 is entitled *De titulo triumphali* ("Concerning the Triumphant Title"), and the relevant part reads: "Whether however the beginning of the title was written in three languages is uncertain, but the end, that is

rex Judaeorum, is written thus: in Hebrew,
Malcus Judaeorum, in Greek, Basileos exomo-
soleon [misspelling for exomolisson], in Latin,
Rex confitentium. The cross, moreover, did not
have anything on the transverse beam, having
a tau [T] form. But Pilate set a wedge [cavil-
lam] and a fixed tablet on the top of it, and on
the tablet was thus the title." Peter's text
represents the same tradition as the Saint-
Amand Psalter and the Irish Cruindmelus
book, but like Bede he uses confitentium in
the place of confessorum.

About the same time as Petrus Comestor
wrote his Historia at Paris, the nun Herrad
von Landsberg was peacefully composing the
Hortus Deliciarum at her convent of Hohen-
berg, Alsace, where she was abbess from 1167
until 1195. Herrad's introduction speaks for
itself: "This book, which is called a garden of
delights, I have collected from the different
flowers of Holy Scripture and philosophy, like
a little bee inspired by God." Among her
many sources were the Venerable Bede and
Petrus Comestor, so it is not surprising to find
in the symbolic Crucifixion miniature the
words Iesus rex iudeorum id est rex confessorum
("Jesus King of the Jews, that is to say King
of the Confessors") inscribed beside the title
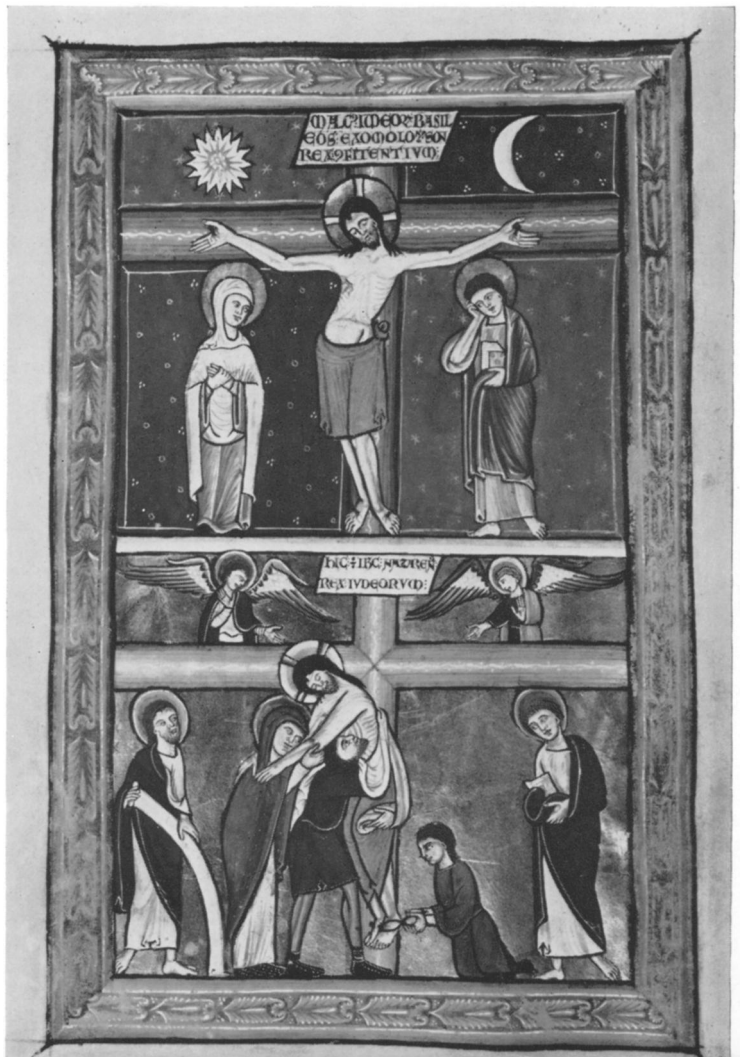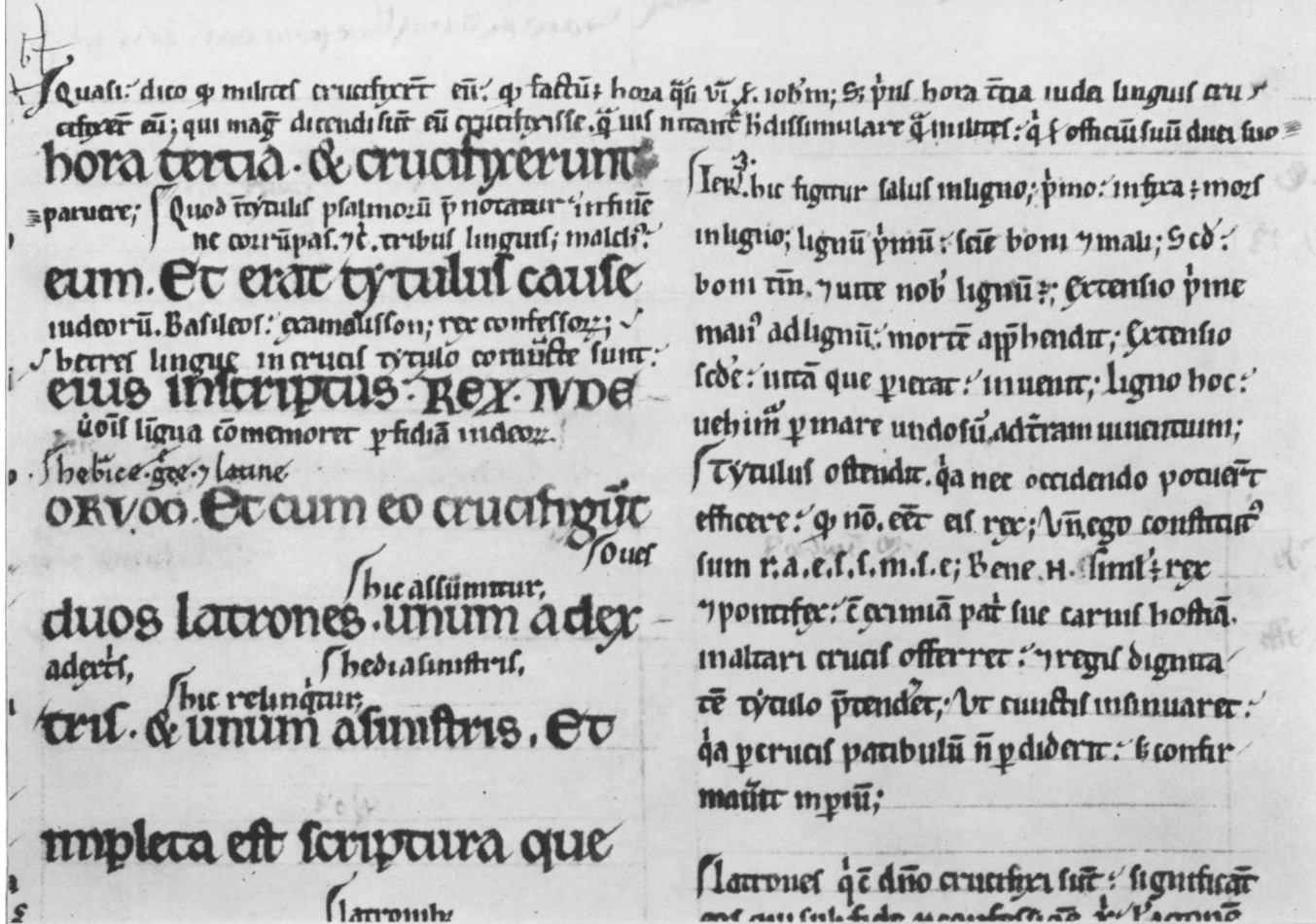
(Figure 18). The whole of this unique manuscript was burnt in 1870, but drawings of many illustrations had been made, including this one by Comte Etienne de Bastard.

Another instance of a special title in twelfth-century art, besides the Cloisters cross, comes in an English Psalter of around 1200 or the early thirteenth century. The Crucifixion scene (Figure 19) has a large slanting placard over the head of Christ that bears the words: MALCUS: IUDEORUM: BASIL EOS: EXOMOLOYSON REX: CONFITENTIUM. The title in the Deposition below says the usual HIC EST IHES[US] NAZARENUS REX IUDEORUM from Luke and John. The artist thus shows us the Bible text in one scene and his reconstruction in the other. One gathers that his knowledge of Greek was minimal, as first of all, like the two northern French books, he uses Latin letters; furthermore, EXOMOLOYSON is a misspelling of *exomolisson*.

There doubtless exists more evidence than is shown here that the idea of the special title became established in its own small way in literature and in art by the twelfth century.

The most interesting aspect of the whole inquiry is to observe how writers and artists through the centuries treated this theme. The title of the Cloisters cross, which was probably carved during the decade 1180-1190, displays the archaeological curiosity of St. Jerome, the Irish monks, the anonymous French books, and Petrus Comestor. But the angry debate going on up above the title, with Pontius Pilate's finger jabbing down at EXOM[O]LISSON and [CON]FESSOR[UM], implies that Christ is the exclusive "King of the Confessors" – of the good Christians – and not of the Jews, thereby thrusting the ivory cross into a new role. This role emerges only in the latter part of the twelfth century and is explained perfectly by an apparently unique passage

written in the late twelfth century in a Gospel of Mark from the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds (Figure 20). The text in question is an interlinear gloss on Mark 15:26, which sums up the features surrounding the cross title. It says: "Because it was indicated in the headings of the Psalms [that] at the end it should not be corrupted, and with three languages: King of the Jews [*malchus iudeorum*], King of the Confessors [*Basileos examolisson*], King of the Confessors [*rex confessorum*], wherever the three languages lie together in the title of the cross, *voīs*[?] languages commemorate the faithlessness of the Jews, in Hebrew, in Greek, and in Latin."

Here we have the incorruptibility prophesied in the Psalms, the importance of the three holy languages, and "confessors," but as on the ivory cross all used with anti-Jewish implications – a different intention indeed from the friendly runes of the Hastières Psalter! Whether or not "King of the Confessors" is being used in this case or on our cross to hail Christ as king of any individual community or order of monks, one cannot tell. It is tempting to think that it might be. The feasible connection between the ivory cross and the important monastery at Bury St. Edmunds, which suggests itself from stylistic affinities and an inscription found on the sides of the cross almost identical to one originally in the choir of the Abbey church, is certainly strengthened by the convenient provenance of this manuscript from the library at Bury. The gloss in the right-hand margin, which is a standard extract from the *Glossa Ordinaria* and is from Bede's *Commentary on Mark*, is worth quoting simply because it throws even more light on the contents of the ivory placard. It starts nine lines from the top of the page (see Figure 20): "The title shows that by killing they could not stop him from being their king; . . . For indeed he is at once king and priest, [and] when he offered to the Father the priceless sacrifice of his flesh on the altar of the cross, he presented the dignity of a king with the title, so that everyone should realize how through the ignominy of the cross he had not lost, but confirmed his empire."

The historical circumstances of the twelfth century that brought the title of the Holy Cross into focus and gave it additional implications were varied in nature. This was an era of wars to wrest the Holy Places from the infidel, of intensified pilgrimage, and above all an era when churchmen reassessed the historical and literary evidence of the past to pronounce fresh values. The First and Second Crusades of 1095 and 1144 kindled a more passionate concern than ever before in Jerusalem and in the True Cross set up there by St. Helena. Between and during these two Crusades, pilgrims continued to flock to the Holy City; closer to home they could worship the part of the True Cross in St. Peter's in Rome. Also on view in Rome was the relic of the cross title, which had been in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme since its translation by Constantine and was re-installed there by Cardinal Gerard (Pope Lucius II from 1144-1145) after he rebuilt the church in 1143-1144.

In 1492 the relic was discovered in a walled-up niche near the top of the apse, inside a lead coffer that was fastened by three seals inscribed with Gerard's name. The relic was described as being about twelve inches long and eight inches wide. Still legible were bits of the inscription in Syriac (a form of Aramaic – the language Christ spoke), Greek, and Latin; apparently, traces of white paint and red lettering (all Roman judicial sentences were thus colored) were also still visible. The engraving

21. *The relic of the True Cross title.*
Santa Croce in Gerusalemme,
Rome. Engraving from La
Trionfante e Gloriosa Croce
(Rome, 1610) by Jacomo Bosio
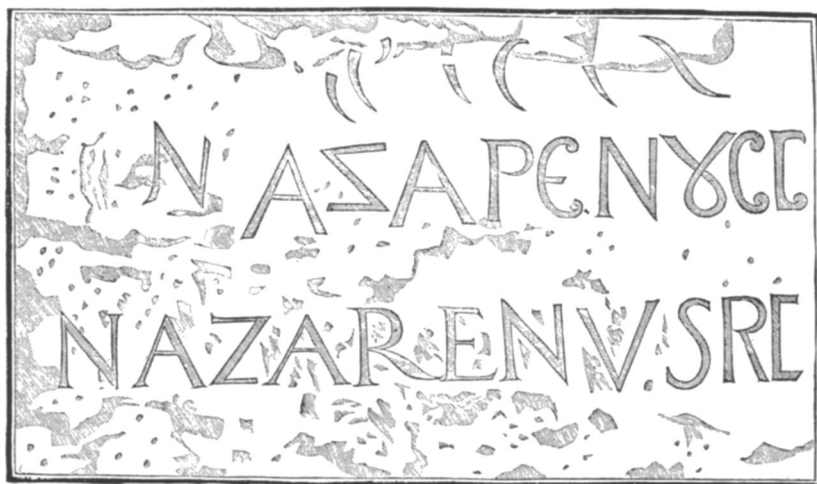
made by Jacomo Bosio for his book *La Trion-fante e Gloriosa Croce* in 1610 shows enough of the characters for one to discern *Nazarenus Re[x]* . . . (Figure 21). Whether or not this relic, which is undoubtedly the one displayed by Cardinal Gerard and discovered in 1492, is the one sent by St. Helena to Constantine is immaterial. It was real enough to twelfth-century eyes; one can be certain that it was on show and that it was a good piece of convincing propaganda during the time of the Crusades.

Saladin and the Saracens captured the True Cross on the battlefield of Hattin, near Tiberias, in July 1187, and in September Jerusalem fell to the Muslims. When the news reached the West, it precipitated the Third Crusade in a blaze of Christian outrage; through preaching such as Pope Gregory's Encyclical and the English Archbishop Baldwin's fervent roadside sermons, the cross became a vital issue. Caused in part by misplaced crusading zeal against all non-Christians, and fostered by a growing resentment of the Jewish moneylenders to whom kings, lords, and monasteries were beholden for so much, a strong agitation against the Jews came to a head in the last decades of the century with grievous riots, massacres, and discriminations. It was exactly this emotion that had caused Peter of Blois (about 1135-1212) to quote the Apocryphal Letter of Pilate to Claudius in his tract *Against the Perfidy of the Jews*. His aim was to completely exonerate Pilate and to produce impressive archaeological evidence, as it were, for the governor's innocence.

John Chrysostom had given Pilate an even more pro-Christian role in his *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John* (about 390): " 'And Pilate wrote a title also' at the same time to avenge himself on the Jews and to defend Christ. . . . Moreover it was no slight matter that was being disposed of, but an all-important one. . . . At a later date [the cross] would be sought for . . . hence provision was being made that the one belonging to the Lord might not go unrecognized. . . ." John Chrysostom's works became available to the West after Burgundio the Pisan translated them from the Greek in the mid-twelfth century; they were widely read, and this passage is precisely the sort of straightforward moral interpretation that could have inspired Pilate's militantly Christian role on the Cloisters cross.

Interpretations for unusual scenes in medieval Christian art, which, like that of Pontius Pilate and the High Priest Disputing the Title on the ivory cross, were inspired by more than one source, generally exist in some form or other among religious writings. Positive explanations are for the most part attainable, but sometimes an element of added speculation considerably heightens the interest of the scene in question.

The title on the ivory cross could have a double meaning: while the invocation "King of the Confessors" certainly signifies "King of the Monks" (particular monks or monks in general), it could at the same time intend "confessors" in the second and alternative sense of the word, denoting those priests who would hear the confessions of sinners. This double meaning suggests itself from the way in which the cross scene foreshadows the allegory in the thirteenth-century French Bible (Figure 5). In the words of this Bible: "The fact that in death Jesus was given a triumphant title, signifies that whoever is truly penitent through his confessions [or repentances: *penitentie*] will reign with Christ."

A complete understanding of this comment is found in another allegory a few pages further on in the same Bible (Figure 22). On folio 68 there is an illustration of John 19:34: "one of the soldiers opened his side, and immediately there came out blood and water." In the explanatory scene beneath, a priest baptises a man, while next to him another priest chastises a penitent. The Latin text elucidates: "This means that Jesus through His death established in the Church the two sacraments for the washing away of sins. Evidently, baptism . . . signified in the water, and the sacrament of penance [*penitentiam*] . . . signified in the blood." Thus, says medieval dogma, at the very moment that the soldier pierced Christ's side and His blood flowed forth, the Sacrament of Penance was instituted.

The first and vital part of this Sacrament of Penance as practiced by the early and medi-

eval Church was *confession* of one's sins; without it "there is no pardon . . . no entrance into Paradise," said Peter Lombard around 1150 in his celebrated *Sentences*. In the context of the Moralized Bible scene in Figure 5, *confession* is clearly implied in the word *penitentie*. Priests (and bishops) held the power to hear confession; in this capacity they were looked upon as Christ's representatives and consequently as the mediators between men and God. But "the mediator between God and Man, Christ Jesus, gave the rulers of the Church this power. . . ." wrote Pope Leo the Great in the fifth century. The question of confession was vigorously debated by many leading churchmen of the twelfth century and was finally resolved in the thirteenth by St. Thomas Aquinas. Thus the naming of Christ on the Cloisters cross as the supreme mediator and confessor for all mankind would be a most natural invocation.

22. *Above: The Piercing of Christ's Side. Below: Baptism and Penitence. Detail from a Moralized Bible, French, 1226-1234. Toledo Cathedral, Vol. III, f. 68*
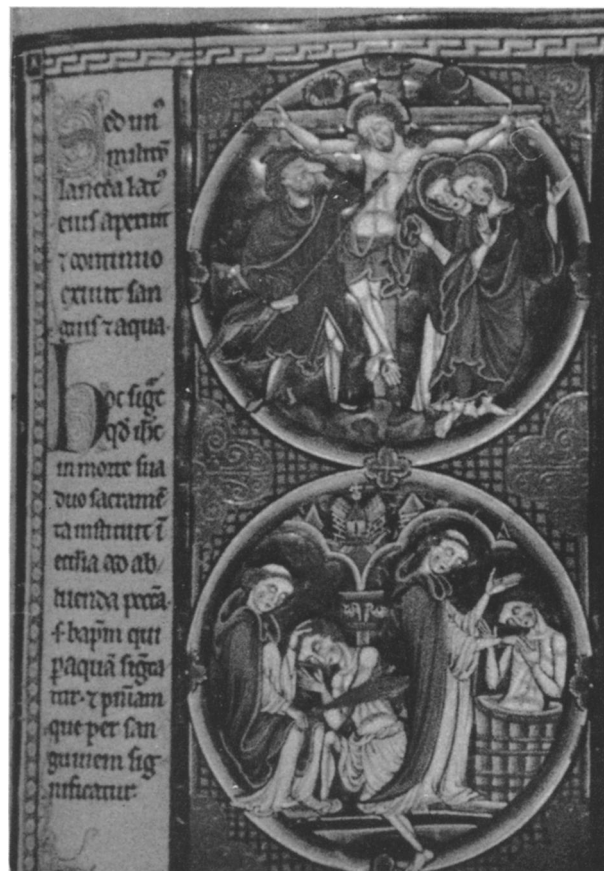
Adam's Two Wives

JEFFREY M. HOFFELD *Cloisters Fellow*

The two sculptured figures of a hexagonal boxwood statue base at The Cloisters (Figure 4), sometimes mistaken for Adam and Eve, but usually referred to as Eve and the serpent, are actually a late fifteenth-century Flemish manifestation of a long and complex exegetical tradition concerned with what is basically a divorce, Biblical style. Close examination reveals that the figure to the observer's left of the Tree of Paradise, who not only dares to eat the forbidden fruit but keeps two apples in reserve as well, is certainly human and is indeed the disobedient Eve; she seems to lie prone merely to comply with the sculptor's composition. Her companion, however, peering at her through human eyes, has no limbs, the vertebrae of a reptile, and the uncanny undulations of a serpent. That this half-human creature is the first wife of Adam – Lilith – so frequently represented during the Middle Ages, is what I hope to demonstrate.

It is an unfortunate misconception of some modern observers that both the clergy and laity of the Middle Ages had an unsearching and rarely critical approach to the Bible. On the contrary, most of what remains to us of the theological writings of the Middle Ages are attempts to comment upon or to interpret the Bible: attempts to lift the veil of often ambiguous language in order to reveal the hidden meanings of the authors. Some of the resulting commentaries or exegeses were often used as ancillaries to the reading of the Holy Scriptures, while others were themselves frequently elevated to the stature of sacred literature, as were the writings of the Church fathers. For the historian of medieval art, such texts often provide the solutions to seemingly inexplicable representations or to complete iconographic programs. Such is the case with the subject of the Cloisters pedestal, which is the plastic expression of a *midrash*, or Jewish commentary on the Old Testament adopted by Christian authors.

What perplexed the commentators was what appeared to be an account in Genesis of a creation of woman that preceded the creation of Eve:
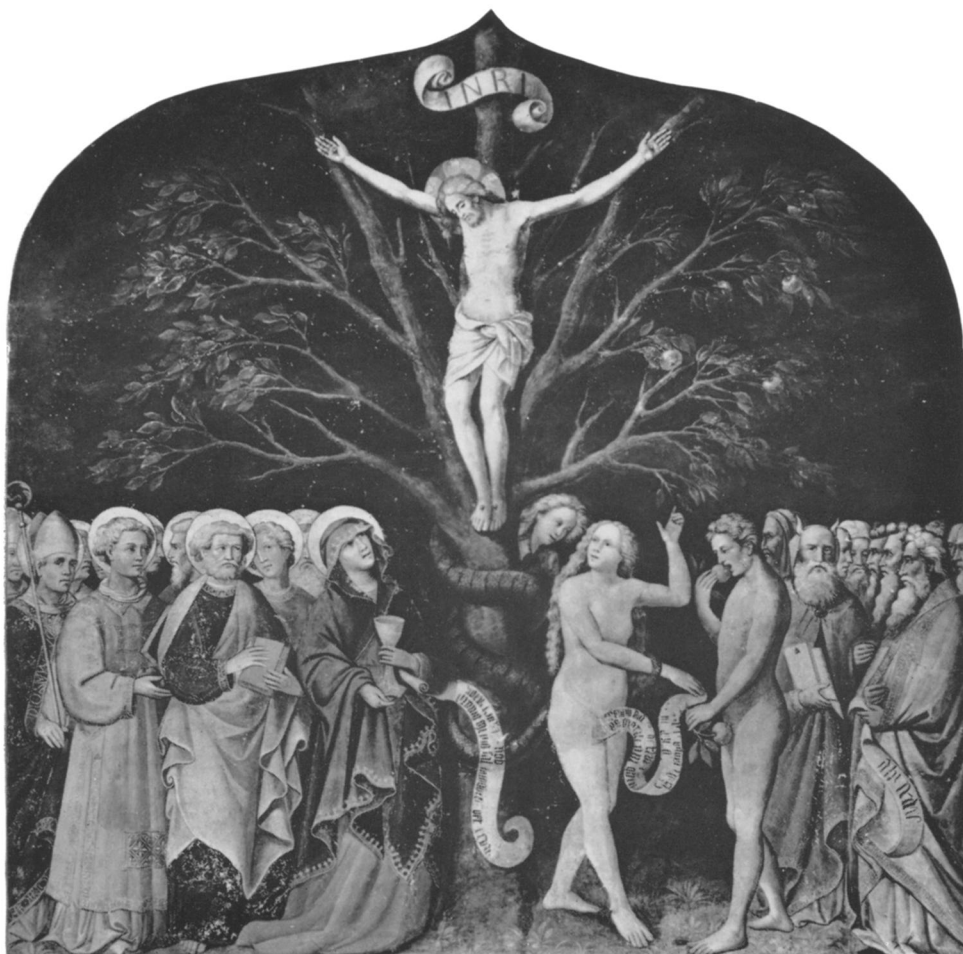
> And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. And God blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth. (Genesis 1:27-28)

For the commentators, a literal reading of the passage revealed that the creation of

1. The Temptation. Detail of a Moralized Bible, French, XIII century. Österreichische National-bibliothek, Vienna, Cod. 2554, f. 2

מיכאל גבריאל רפאל נוריאל קדומיאל מלכיאל צדקיאל פדאל תומיאל חספריאל צוריאל רמאל יופיאל סטורי גזריאל ודריאל להריאל חזקיאל רחמיא
קדשיאל שבניאל בריקאל אהאל חניאל לאהאל מלכיאל שבניאל רחסיאל רומיאל קרסיאל רמאל קרשיאל קראל חכמאל קרשיאל ענאל עזריאל חכמאל
מחניאל קניאל גדיאל צורטק גדיאל עופפיאל רחמיאל סנסניה ודרגזה רסטיאל רומיאל סניאל מהריאל יעזריאל
נריה סמכיאל עינאל תסריה רנאל צריה פסירה עריאל סכביא מתניה קנונירה קנונירה יואל פטרוסיה חוניאל
זכריאל ועריאל דניאל גדריאל בריאל אהניאל

אדם וחוה חוץ לילות — אדם וחוה חוץ לילות
וסמנגלוף — וסנסנוי — סנוי — סמנגלוף — סנסנוי — סנוי

2. *Amulet. From an edition of the Book of Raziel printed in Amsterdam in 1701. British Museum. From page 225 of Amulets and Superstitions (London, 1930) by E. A. Wallis Budge*

בשם אהיה והא ההא אא בב או מאכ אאא

אשבעית עלן חוה ראשונה בשם שהוא יוצרך ובשם שלשת מלאכים ששלח יוצרך יתברך וסלאך באי הים ונשבעת להם במקום שתמצא שמותם שלא
תזיקו אתה ולא אחת ממחנותיך ומשרתיך ולא לכל מי שיש שמותם לכן בשמות ובחתומם הכתובים פה אני משביעך ואת מחנותיך ומשרתיך שלא תזיקו את
ילרת פלונית בת פלונית ולהילד שנולר לה לא ביום ולא בלילה לא בכאכלם ולא במשתם לא בראשם ולא בלכם ולא בשני מאורת וארבעט
ושמונה אבריהם ולא בשלשה מאות וששים וחמשה גדרמם בכח השמות והחתומות האלה אלו אני משביעך ואת מחנותיך ומשרתיך

3. *The Crucifixion, by Giovanni da Modena, Italian. About 1420. Fresco in the Church of San Petronio, Bologna. Photograph: Alinari – Art Reference Bureau*

4. *Eve and the female-headed serpent by the Tree of Paradise. Statue base, Flemish, late XV century. Boxwood, height 3½ inches. The Cloisters Collection, 55.116.2*

woman was, in fact, coincident with that of man, and that she was presumably created from the same substance, earth, and was to rule with man over the creatures of the earth. This was inconsistent with the account later in Genesis (2:21-22) of the creation of Eve: that she had been created after Adam, out of his rib, and as a "help meet" for him.

By the beginning of the third century A.D. interpretations of the Scriptures and rules of conduct, many of which were already centuries old, were compiled and edited and became part of the sacred law of the Jews in the form of the *Mishnah*, comprising a portion of the Talmud. In the six books of the *Mishnah* many aspects of life and of the doctrines of the faith came under the scrutiny of the Jewish scholars; among these was the nature of impurities and uncleanliness. It is here, in the chapter *Niddah* ("menstruous woman"), that we find mentioned the half-human female creature Lilith, described as a winged demoness of whom women must beware. The appear-

ance of Lilith in a chapter on impurities is not without scriptural justification, although the description of her physiognomy does not occur in Isaiah's prophecy of the devastation of Edom, to which the author of *Niddah* may have been responding:

> And the martens shall meet with the jackals, and one goat shall call to his fellow; only the screech-owl shall rest there, and find for herself a place to repose. (Isaiah 34:14)

In the Hebrew version the word for screech-owl is *lilit*, which appears as "Lamia" in the commentaries of St. Jerome, as "screech-owl" in the King James version of the Bible, as "night hag" in the Revised Standard Version, and as "sibyl" in other translations. Because the *Mishnah* is merely the compilation of ancient anonymous teachings, we can presume that this interpretation of Lilith predates the third century A.D. The name *lilit* was often confused with the Hebrew word for night, *layelah* (lai'la). But in addition to this semantic confusion, there are other reasons for her

association with creatures of the night, such as the owl, because in *Niddah* she is described as winged; there is said to be a fragment of a Canaanite plaque of the eighth century B.C. that refers to her as the "flying one"; and several of the earliest representations of her (for example, Figure 1) during the Middle Ages picture her with wings. As a nocturnal demoness Lilith came to be associated with the temptation of men who slept alone, and with harming infants and pregnant women.

By the tenth century (and the oral tradition was probably much older) the legend of this harpy-like demoness of the night was fused with the double account of the creation of woman in Genesis to produce the figure of Adam's first wife, Lilith. This conflation occurs in the *Alphabet of ben Sira*. (Ben Sira was one of a great number of Jewish mystics, called Kabbalists, who tried to achieve a more intimate and personal relationship with God, especially through a better understanding of the circumstances of creation.) According to

the *Alphabet*, Lilith was the first wife of Adam, created from the earth at the same time as he, and designated by God as the coruler of the creatures of the earth. In time Lilith demanded that she be more than Adam's companion, but her pleas for more rights and less subservience were unanswered by the Lord and ignored by Adam. Unyielding in her requests, the plaintive Lilith pronounced a magical incantation, and disappeared from Paradise. The companionless Adam asked God to bring her back; God sent three angels – Senoi, Sansenoi, and Samengeloph – after her, instructing them to tell the disobedient Lilith that one hundred of her wicked children would be destroyed each day until her return. But Lilith refused to come back. She did not take lightly the destruction of her young, and avenged their death by becoming a predator of infants and pregnant women. Thus, the creation legend had been neatly embroidered to incorporate Lilith's former associations with evil deeds of the night.

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5. *Virgin and Child, above a scene of Eve and the female-headed serpent by the Tree of Paradise. Northern French, early XV century. Boxwood, height 15 inches. Victoria and Albert Museum*

When, prompted by the loneliness of Adam, God created Eve, as related in Genesis, Lilith became filled with jealousy and desired to further avenge her fate. She consorted with the devil and took on the form of a serpent, with the features and long hair of a female (fulfilling her earlier reputation as a seducer). It was in this form that she became the serpent in the Garden of Eden, associated with the fall of man in Genesis.

The legend of Lilith was not merely the preoccupation of scholarly Jewish mystics, but was widely disseminated by Christian writers in the form of Latin commentaries on the Bible (such as those written by Petrus Comestor in the second half of the twelfth century). These inspired innumerable representations of her, from the Middle Ages on, as the temptress-serpent. There is also evidence of her popularity among the masses, in the form of amulets, or charms to protect the bearer from witchcraft or mischief. Several amulets designed to ward off the evil Lilith appear in the printed edition (Amsterdam, 1701) of an eleventh-century Kabbalistic writing, the *Book of Raziel*. One of the amulets is illustrated in Figure 2 to indicate how literally the legend of Lilith could be taken. The two portions of text are the names of seventy angels (above the diagram) and incantations to Lilith (below the diagram); the bold lettering above the lower inscription tells how the mother and infant will, by the name of God, be protected from the dangers described in the text. The hieroglyphic-like rectangular diagram between the inscriptions is the most curious part of the charm. In the compartment on the right we first read the inscription *Adam, Eve, Chatz Lilit* ("Adam, Eve, away from Lilith"). Below this admonishment are three symbols, labeled, from right to left, Senoi, Sansenoi, and Samengeloph, with several magical words, such as *chai*, the Hebrew word for the number eighteen as well as for the word "life" (the *Book of Raziel* was well known as a source for numerology during the Middle Ages). In the other compartment the warning also appears, with three different symbols, again identified as the three angels sent

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by God. Such a diagram, in addition to appearing in a book, may also have been painted on a wall or doorway near the chamber of a mother and her newborn child.

There was, to be sure, a certain amount of resistance to the legend of Lilith as Adam's first wife, and this resistance may help to explain some of the representations of the temptation that do not depict the serpent as half-human. One such denial of the Lilith story occurs in a famous book of the Kabbalah, the *Zohar*, or "Book of Splendor," a work of the early thirteenth century in the form of conversations between rabbis, not unlike Plato's *Symposium*. In a section on the creation of man, Rabbi Simeon says the following:

> Moreover, we may regard the words "Let us make man" as conveying this: to the lower beings who derived from the side of the lower world God disclosed the secret of how to form the divine name Adam, in which is encompassed the upper and the lower, in the force of its three letters *alef*, *dalet*, and *mem* final. When the three letters had come down below, there was perceived in their form, the name Adam, to comprehend male and female. The female was fastened to the side of the male, and God cast the male into a deep slumber, and he lay on the site of the Temple. God then cut the female from him and decked her as a bride and led her to him, as it is written, "And he took one of his sides, and closed up the place with flesh" [Genesis 2:2]. In the ancient books [such as the *Alphabet*], I have seen it said that here the word "one" means "one woman," that is, the original Lilith, who lay with him and from him conceived. But up to that time, she was no help to him, as it is said. "but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him" [Genesis 2:20]. Adam, then, was the very last, for it was right that he should find the world complete when he made his appearance.

It would be instructive to examine the content of one instance of Lilith's appearance that is approximately contemporary in date with the Cloisters statue base. It is a fresco of about 1420 by Giovanni da Modena in San Petronio, in Bologna (Figure 3). Here the Crucifixion divides the picture into two parts. Christ is crucified on a tree that is at once the Tree of Life, *lignum vitae*, from which the cross was

ABOVE, LEFT:
6. *Virgin and Child, with the female-headed serpent beneath. French, XIV century. Marble. Musée du Louvre. Photograph: Les Archives Photographiques d'Art et d'Histoire*

ABOVE, RIGHT:
7. *Virgin and Child, with Eve (?) beneath. French, XIV century. Musée du Louvre. Photograph: Marburg*

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8. Virgin from the choir screen of Strasbourg Cathedral. French, 1247-1252. Sandstone, height 58½ inches. The Cloisters Collection, 47.101.11

made, and the Tree of Knowledge in Paradise – a connection made in the legends of the True Cross, which traced the history of the tree from the Garden of Eden to the Crucifixion. To the right of the tree are Adam and Eve tempted by a female-headed serpent, which is coiled around the trunk. And together with these three Old Testament figures are the prophets of the Old Law, including Moses with the tablets. To the left are the apostles and ecclesiastical figures of the New Law with Mary who, catching the blood of Christ in the chalice, represents both the Mother of God and the Church. Thus the iconographic program of the fresco is a sophisticated and harmonious one, centering on the visual and theological connection of the Old Testament with the New: the parallel between the Garden of Eden and the site of the Crucifixion and, more important, between Eve-Synagogue *(synagoga)* and Mary-Church *(ecclesia)*.

The sculptor of the Cloisters base was dealing with a similar program on the pedestal and the statue that once surmounted it. Although only impressions in the wood and a hole on the top of the base indicate where the missing statue was originally mounted, we can speak with confidence about the nature of the lost piece because a similar carving with the statuette intact is preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Figure 5). This sculpture, said to be of the early fifteenth century from northern France, less sensitively executed than the Cloisters piece, reveals by analogy the subject matter of our statue. It too contains on its base a half-human serpent confronting Eve at the Tree of Knowledge, here surmounted by a New Testament theme, the Madonna and Child. The two components of the sculpture are not disparate in subject matter but, as was often the case with Gothic consoles and the statues above them, they are intimately related and dependent on one another for the realization of the theme. The placement of the Madonna and Child above the temptation indicates how the fall of man is the literal foundation of the Incarnation, for without original sin there would have been no need for Christ's life on earth. The superposition of the Virgin and Child is also a triumphant attitude: it symbolizes the fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New, and the triumph of the Virgin and Child over the forces of evil, best represented by man's original sin. And it is a symbol of the redemption.

These carvings, however, represent a much broader spectrum of relationships, which are not at first obvious to us. It is not inappropriate, for example, that the Virgin and Child are associated with the key agent of the temptation, the serpent, for there is scriptural justification for the antagonism between serpents and woman and her progeny. Speaking to the serpent after Eve has succumbed to its advice, God says:

> And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

In addition to suggesting Lilith's predisposition for harming infants and pregnant women, this passage also provides the prophecy of a conflict between the Virgin and the serpent, literally represented since the Middle Ages by the Madonna (usually holding the Child) with her foot on a serpent's head.

Two instances of this iconography during the fourteenth century are especially relevant to the Cloisters and Victoria and Albert objects. The first (Figure 6) is a marble statuette in the Louvre that shows the serpent Lilith trampled under the feet of the Virgin. In the second example (Figure 7), the Virgin and Child surmount an almost embryonic, tadpole-like Eve. Certain sinister details, such as her teeth and the sinuousness of her body, which seems to lack feet and taper like a serpent, are more suggestive of Lilith, or of an extremely unusual – if not unique – conflation of the two figures. It is likely, however, that this apparent duality is a highly individualistic interpretation of writings referring to the Virgin as the "new Eve," for here, eating an apple and not having her head bruised by the Virgin, the figure may be symbolic of Eve. In the Victoria and Albert sculpture the relationship is similarly fulfilled, as it probably originally was in the Cloisters pedestal and its missing statue, by the position of the Virgin above the serpent Lilith.
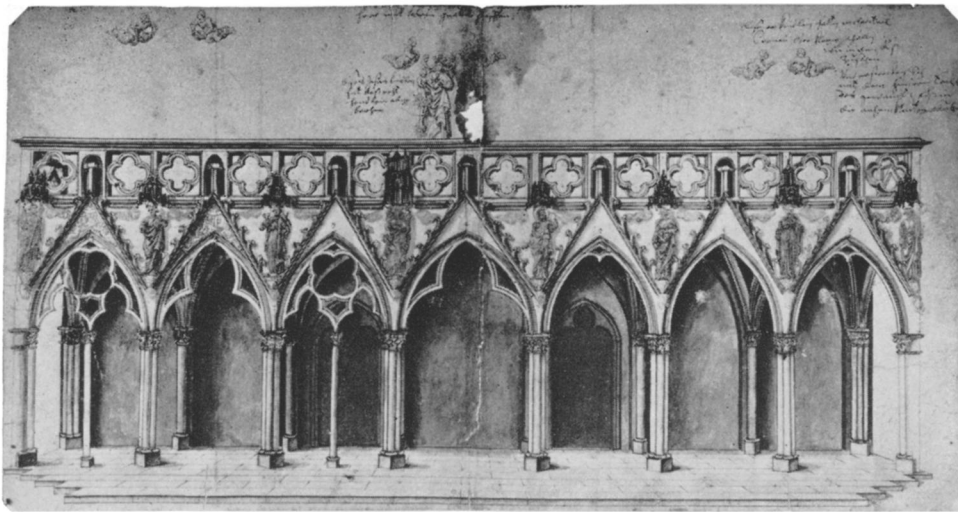
9. Choir screen of Strasbourg Cathedral. Drawing by J. J. Arhardt, about 1660. Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart

The Virgin has also been frequently associated with trees. Often she is represented, with Christ, seated by the Tree of Life, or between the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life; at other times the *arbore della vergine*, or fruitbearing tree, itself symbolizes the virgin mother, even in her absence. It is indeed ironic that a tree having so many inauspicious associations should become the symbol of Mary's fecundity, but many writers, St. Bernard (1091-1153) among them, expressed the difference between the two trees as the *radix amaritudinis Eva* ("the tree of the bitterness of Eve") and the *radix aeternae dulcendinis Maria* ("the tree of the eternal sweetness of Mary"). The original state of another object in the Cloisters collection (Figure 8), known from a seventeenth-century drawing (Figures 9, 10), indicates that the Virgin and Child from the choir screen of Strasbourg Cathedral was associated with a rosebush, the scent of which was symbolic of the sweetness of the Virgin, while the redness of the roses was likened to the blood of Christ.

The medieval mind would have made still another conceptual connection between the tree on the Cloisters pedestal and the statue of the Virgin and Child above: that of the tree of Jesse and its culmination in Christ. The twelfth-century cross attributed to the Eng-

10. Detail of Figure 9

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11. Joran Rex and Eliachim. Fragment of an orphrey. English, XIV century. Embroidery, silk and metal threads, height 25 inches. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Martin, L50.11

lish abbey of Bury St. Edmunds (Figure 13) makes an explicit visual play not only on the story that the cross was raised on Adam's burial place, Calvary, but on a passage from Isaiah:

> And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the spirit of the Lord shall be the root of Jesse, whom standeth for an ensign of the people. (Isaiah 11:1,10)

In interpretations of the Latin text of the first verse, *Et egreditur virga de radice Jesse et flos de radice eius ascendet, virga* was frequently taken to mean Virgin, *radix* to mean tree, and *flos* to be Christ. The medieval iconographer interpreted the prophecy literally, and composed what was, in essence, a genealogical tree, starting with Jesse (the genealogy being drawn from Matthew 1:1-16). Examples of this iconography may be seen in the original setting of the Strasbourg Virgin, as well as in other objects in The Cloisters. The first (Figure 11) is part of an ecclesiastical vestment, an orphrey, depicting two members of Christ's family tree, Joran Rex and Eliachim. The other (Figure 12) is the high back of a chair, representing twelve crowned figures who are surmounted by their descendants, the Madonna and Child.

Eve, the last component of the composition of the pedestal, offers the most interesting visual relations with the statue above. In medieval commentaries on the Bible, comparisons between Eve and Mary are innumerable. Often the comparisons are so fundamental as to call the Virgin the "new Eve," as St. Bernard did, or to note that the salutation *ave* ("hail," as in *Ave Maria . . .*) is Eva spelled backward, symbolic of how the Virgin reversed the course set by Eve in the Garden of Eden. And, as we observed in the Bolognese fresco. Eve often symbolizes the Old Testament and the Synagogue, while Mary represents the New Testament and the Church.

One aspect of the connection between Eve and the Virgin seems to predominate. It was not uncommon, even in the art of the earlier Middle Ages, to draw visual parallels between Eve offering Adam the forbidden fruit and the Virgin offering the infant Jesus a comparable attribute, especially an apple. In an at-

12. Chair decorated with the Tree of Jesse. French or Flemish, XV century. Oak, height 82 inches. The Cloisters Collection, 47.101.67

tempt to humanize the representation of the Mother and Child, the Virgin is often pictured offering her breast to the Child, as is the case in the Victoria and Albert carving, and thus probably in the original Cloisters statue. This more domestic motif is reminiscent of the temptation in the garden. Indeed, the sculptor of the Cloisters pedestal has realized the analogy in the form of a visual pun, which imbues the object with a character that is not present in the Victoria and Albert sculpture. For it is not merely fortuitous that when we look at the Cloisters pedestal it is difficult to distinguish the apples that Eve holds in her left hand from her breasts. Although Eve's breasts are visible from the side of the sculpture, the orientation of the object is most certainly from the front, and the confusion of the spherical forms again draws our attention to the analogy between the Virgin and Eve in an imaginative fashion.

Christ, too, had counterparts in the Old Testament, where there are prefigurations of the events of his life as well. Among the many types for Christ, Adam was a popular figure during the Middle Ages. Christ is often called the *Adam novus*, or "new Adam" (as in the works of Gerohus Reicherspergiensis, 1093?-1169), and such parallels were built into the New Testament, for example in St. Paul's comparison: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Corinthians 15:22). While in the Cloisters statue base only the confrontation of Eve and Lilith is represented, Adam's presence may be implied, especially through Eve's holding the apples as if waiting for him. The parallels between the Virgin and Child, and Eve and Adam are thus realized.

There are still other themes of redemption and souvenirs of man's fallen state. For instance, the alternating four- and six-petaled flowers that decorate, as in precious metalwork, the upper and lower perimeters of the base may not be merely decorative, but may be part of the imagery chosen to remind us of the Virgin, and of the vivid comparison made by St. Bernard and others between Eve the thorn and Mary the rose, reflecting the belief that Eve and the Virgin were indeed of

13. *Detail of the cross shown in Figure 1 on page 411*
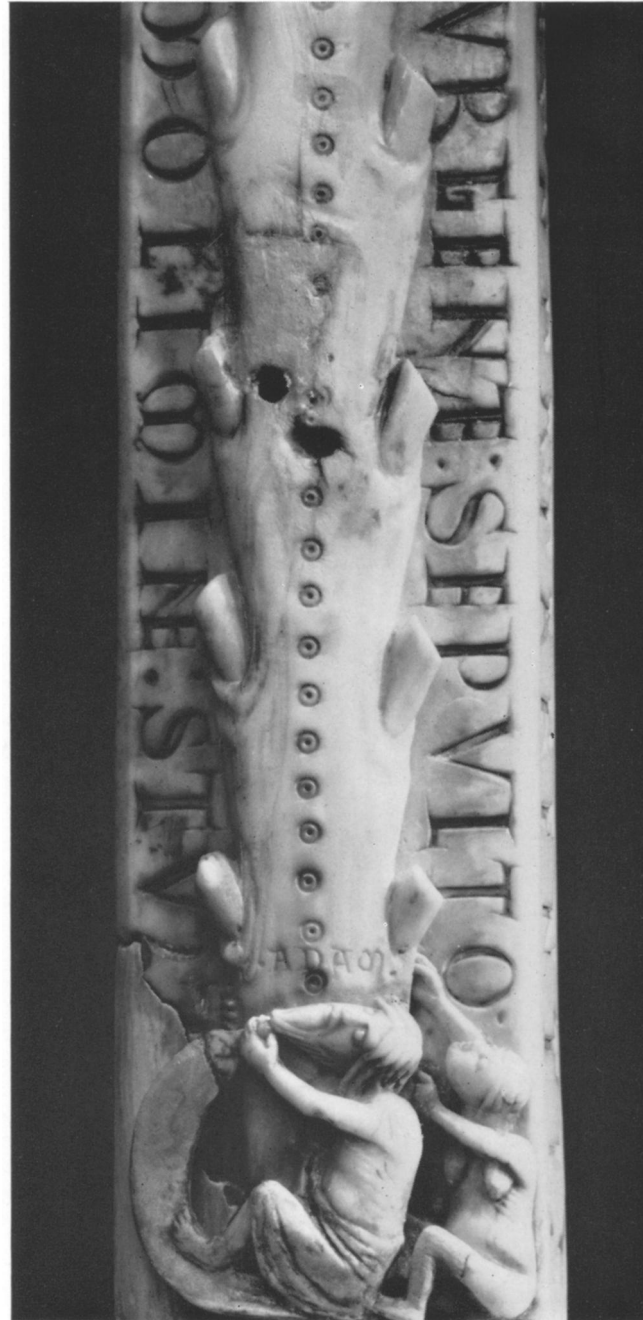
the same substance, but that the nature of the one was prickly and irritating, and perhaps an accident of nature, while that of the other was soft, soothing, and a deliberate creation.

The apples are a more obvious mnemonic device. Only the word "fruit" occurs in the Genesis account of the temptation; the forbidden fruit was taken to be an apple only in interpretations of scripture. Latin commentators not only tried to select a deliciously sensuous fruit that would warrant the adjective "forbidden," but they also indulged in a play on words, because the Latin for apple is *malum* – the same word as for evil. And if we view the base in the light of medieval numerology, it is revealed that the seven apples carved on the front of the base (four in the tree, and three held by Eve) may well refer to the writings of some fifteenth-century authors, such as John Gerson (1363-1429), who enumerated seven sins stemming from the Tree of Knowledge: pride, envy, wrath, avarice, sloth, unchastity, and drunkenness.

For medieval man, redemption was real and imminent, and in the Cloisters carving he could visualize the original sin, understand man's fallen state, and read the signs of the coming salvation. For modern man, these levels of interpretation are more difficult to discern. But in our effort to peel back each layer

of meaning and examine it both independently of the whole composition and in relation to it we have, to some extent, had a "medieval experience." In allowing each element of the Cloisters pedestal to trigger any number of responses in us, be they visceral or cerebral, we have undergone reactions that are similar to those experienced by the pious of the fifteenth century.

Too often we underestimate the sophistication with which the medieval artist approached the demands of his subject. Content, which was usually prescribed to him, presents the artist with a problem that he resolves by bringing the fullness of his talent as a sculptor or painter to bear on the extra-artistic concerns of iconography. Such is particularly the case with the sculptor of the Cloisters statue base, who in his understanding of the intimate relationship of style, composition, and subject matter meant to engender free associations in the mind of the beholder. Such an approach is not peculiar to this object: it is a commonplace in the art of the Middle Ages. Although the coalition of conceptual and visual phenomena reaches an exceptional degree of perfection in the Cloisters statue base, the appreciation of this object may be used as a touchstone for understanding similar works of medieval art.

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The Monkeys & the Peddler

BONNIE YOUNG

Senior Lecturer, The Cloisters

"Simia is a Greek word meaning 'with squashed nostrils.' Hence, we call monkeys this, because they have turned-up noses and a hideous countenance with wrinkles lewdly puffing like bellows." From this description in a medieval bestiary, one would hardly recognize the suave and elegant group of animals that decorate both the inside and outside of the fifteenth-century enameled beaker called the "monkey cup" (Figures 1, 2, 8) at The Cloisters. The same bestiary, however, goes on to say: "They are called *simia* in the Latin language because people notice great *similitude* to human reason in them," and this statement is peculiarly appropriate, because the monkeys on the cup are indulging in very human actions. All around the outside, a group of monkeys rob a peddler asleep in the woods and then proceed to cavort among the trees, playing with their booty. On the inside, two monkeys, standing upright like human beings, are in the forest on a hunting expedition. It looks as though the two are working as a team, for one stalks the prey, blowing his hunting horn as his hounds pursue the chase, while the other slyly approaches from the opposite direction and aims his bow and arrow at the stags that are being driven toward him.

1. The monkey cup. Flemish-Burgundian, 1425-1450. Silver, silver-gilt, and enamel, height 7⅛ inches. The Cloisters Collection, 52.50. The cup was made in two pieces, and unscrews at the lower gilded band

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2. *The monkey cup*

In further pursuing the "nature" of the monkey, statements in medieval bestiaries range from such simple descriptions as "a monkey has no tail" – and the monkeys on the cup are tailless, like the Barbary ape, the species most familiar to medieval Europe – to more complicated stories such as the following two concerning the hunting of the ape, both stemming from classical antiquity. Because the monkey is like man and imitates him, the hunter, when wanting to catch one and knowing the monkey is watching, puts on a pair of boots weighted with lead, then takes them off and goes out of sight. Naturally, the monkey approaches and, copying the hunter, puts on the boots himself; when the hunter returns, the monkey can escape neither by running nor by climbing a tree because the boots are too heavy.

The other story tells of the mother monkey: when she has twins, she loves the one child and hates the other. Hence, when pursued by the hunter, she clasps the one she loves in her arms and carries the one she hates "round her neck pickaback" . . . so when she is exhausted and can no longer run or wishes to climb a tree, "she has to throw away the one she loves and carries the one she hates willy-nilly."

In addition to compiling the natural history of animals, the bestiaries often interpret beasts in terms of Christian allegory, and other medieval writers also used animals symbolically to illustrate moral teachings. From the two stories about the hunting of the ape, for instance, the monkey became the sinner, pursued and at last captured by the devil. Through the mother ape, who was overloving of her "treasure" and was compared to the "impious who now embrace pleasures and riches," the monkey became associated with the avaricious rich and with riches in general, particularly ill-gotten ones. Eventually, through similar moralizations, the monkey was accused of being, among other things, vain, curious, and foolish, and in this last capacity he became a sort of court jester of the animal kingdom. The animals, particularly those on the outside of the cup, live up well

to these characteristics. They are very much involved with ill-gotten gains, greedily making off with the peddler's wares. They study their booty with obvious curiosity: one admires himself in a mirror, while others perform on musical instruments and show off brazenly as they swing through the trees, their antics recalling those of the court jester as well as those of the live trained monkeys who often accompanied the medieval minstrel.

A story of monkeys robbing a peddler does not seem to occur in either classical or medieval literature. H. W. Janson, in his *Apes and Ape Lore*, has suggested that the figure of the peddler may have evolved from that of the hunter who first used boots, and later possibly mirrors and other attractive trinkets like those in a peddler's pack, to trap the monkeys, but a hunter who succumbed to sleep while waiting and thus enabled the monkeys to turn the tables on him. In a scene on the base of the cup, boots figure prominently, for one monkey has turned one of the peddler's boots upside down and is looking up into it; another monkey holds his nose, while one in the tree has put on the other boot.

The whole idea was obviously an appealing one, and the fact that the apes rob a peddler seems particularly fitting, because peddlers were traditionally endowed with many of the same vices as the monkeys, and was, in his own way, the court jester of the merchant world – a slick showman, a bit of a trickster, not always acquiring his wares by honest means, and plying them with enticing words without too much regard to the quality of the merchandise. Judging from his reputation, given this particular situation, the majority of people would have been on the side of the monkeys.

The earliest known representation of the scene is in a series of marginal drawings in a fourteenth-century manuscript of the Decretals of Gregory IX, written in Italy but illuminated in England (Figure 3). At first, the monkeys watch a peddler resting underneath a tree; then, when he is definitely asleep, they open up his pack and start taking things out;

3. *The monkeys and the peddler. Marginal illustrations in the Smithfield Decretals, English, XIV century. Page 18 x 11¾ inches. British Museum, MS Royal 10 E. IV, f. 149, 149v, 150, 150v, 151. One of the monkeys is holding a tankard in its paw, suggesting the cause of the peddler's slumber*

the next three scenes show the monkeys enjoying their loot: one plays on a flute, one in the tree looks in a mirror, and several dress up in the peddler's clothes.

The theme was also familiar in the fourteenth century in the Low Countries, for around 1375, under Albert of Bavaria, count of Holland and Hainaut, a series of frescoes were carried out by the painter "Loys" in the count's castle, known as La Salle-le-Comte, in Valenciennes. One scene is described only as *merchier as singes* – "merchant with monkeys" – which certainly sounds as though it showed the thieving monkeys.

Although there is probably no direct connection between this fresco and an *entremet* (a sort of pageant) presented in the following century at the court of the dukes of Burgundy, the two houses were allied by marriage and, after 1433, the lands of the counts of Holland and Hainaut belonged to Burgundy. As part of the extravagant, week-long festivities in 1468 in celebration of the marriage of Duke Charles the Bold to the English princess, Margaret of York, the story of the monkeys robbing the peddler was acted by people costumed as monkeys. It was described in the memoirs of Olivier de la Marche, maître d'hôtel and captain of the guard of Charles the Bold – who was also one of the persons in charge of arrangements for the wedding festivities. A huge tower had been erected in the banquet hall, a tower that reached all the way to the ceiling; from the lower gate of this tower came a *singe* so true to life that the company was amazed. Then followed another and another until there were seven in all: of these, one was a lady monkey. They were very graceful in their turns and movements; they found a *mercier* sleeping near his goods, and one monkey stole his flute and tambourine and began to play, and another took a mirror, and another a comb, and in the end they left the peddler with only a few possessions. The monkey with the tambourine played a *morisque* (evidently a kind of morris dance), and dancing this *morisque* they went all around the tower and returned whence they came. The description immediately brings to mind

the decoration of the Cloisters cup – such details as the monkey at the top with the drum and flute, the one with the comb and mirror, and, in addition, the allover effect of the lithe, graceful monkeys almost dancing around the exterior.

By far the closest parallels to the design of the monkey cup are two almost identical Florentine engravings (Figures 4, 5), dating from around 1470 to 1490, which echo its decoration very closely. The poses of the sleeping peddler and of the monkeys who have removed his hat and appear to be picking fleas from his hair are similar; although the peddler's purse is still around his waist in the prints, on the cup one monkey has already removed both belt and purse, and sits in the tree holding a coin that he has taken from it. The monkeys looking into the upside-down boot are almost exactly alike in the cup and prints; in all three, there is a monkey playing a drum and flute at the top of the tree, monkeys looking in mirrors and combing their hair and hanging from branches, and there are the same sort of belts, purses, and other trinkets stolen from the same kind of wicker basket. At the top of the cup there is a small rectangular object with tassels at the lower corners, on which are rings, flowers, and round golden objects, probably bells; a similar banner appears in one print. If this occurred only on the cup, one might wonder hopefully whether it was some sort of badge that could help to identify the owner; but if it is compared to Figure 6, a monkey wearing such a placard around his neck, it would appear that this might be a peddler's sign or his sample card.

There is one major difference: in the prints, the peddler sleeps at the trunk of a real tree while, on the cup, the tree turns into a pattern of delicate leaves, like scrollwork. A detail in one of the prints that is not included in the cup gives a new insight into the monkey-peddler relationship, for an empty jug lies beside the peddler's hat. An Italian inscription at the bottom of the other print is even more explicit: "Sleep fast, master pieterlin, we shall empty your purse and your basket

4, 5. *The monkeys and the peddler. Italian (Florence),
about 1470-1490. Engravings, the one on the left
hand-colored, heights 11¼ x 8¼ inches and 10⅛ x
7⁵⁄₁₆ inches. Topkapi Serayi Museum, Istanbul, H. 2153,
f.145; British Museum*

6. *Monkey as a peddler. Marginal illustration in a Book
of Hours, English, 1300-1325. Page 6¼ x 4 inches.
British Museum, Harlean MS 6563, f. 100*

so that you may travel light. May your quick hand and the wine in your head guide you." It seems that the peddler on the cup, too, is in a drunken stupor, for the monkeys obviously have no fear of waking him up, and are actually in the process of taking off his clothes.

The prints are not only several decades later in date, but rather crude and simplified versions of the theme on the outside of the monkey cup. So the prints were definitely not the source of the cup's design. Were they inspired by the cup itself or one similar to it? An entry in the 1464 inventory of Piero de Medici gives some support to the possibility, for the Medici owned a beaker with a silver-gilt foot and cover that was completely enameled inside and out with a "*fiera*" of monkeys. The word *fiera* has been variously translated as "fair," "farce," and "market," and any of these could describe the type of activity our monkeys are engaged in. According to the inventory, the monkeys were enameled in white on a blue ground. Our cup's design, to be sure, is enameled primarily in variations of white and slightly bluish gray, but against a background that gives an initial impression of being black rather than blue. Under certain lights, however, the background – particularly in the interior – does seem dark blue.

The concensus today is that the cup was made around 1425 to 1450 in a workshop in the Low Countries for the Burgundian court. According to their expense accounts, by the late fourteenth century the dukes of Burgundy were ordering from a number of Flemish goldsmiths, and though they still patronized Parisian workshops, as the fifteenth century progressed they tended to order more and more from goldsmiths of such cities as Bruges, Brussels, and Ghent. An inventory made for Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy after the death of his father in 1467 lists various objects in silver, silver-gilt, and enamel that sound as if they had decoration similar to the cup's. Several luxurious vessels with enameled lids appear: on one lid was a monkey, on another a woman riding a bear; another cover had strange beasts, and another had "personages" enameled in white on blue.

There was also an item described as a goblet of silver-gilt worked inside and out: "inside is a child seated on a monkey and other personages, and outside, personages with pairs of herons."

The fact that the monkey cup or one very much like it belonged to the Medici presents no problem, nor do the two Italian engravings, because there were close connections between Flanders and Italy at this time, from both an artistic and an economic point of view. For instance, the Burgundian dukes ordered many rich Italian textiles from Italian merchants in Bruges. The cup mentioned in the Medici inventory could have been a gift from some prosperous Florentine resident in Flanders, or the Medici could well have afforded – and would probably have been eager to import – such a fascinating object. As for the prints, the use of *pieterlin* in the inscription instead of an Italian version of the name indicates that the engraver knew, or at least assumed, that the idea originated north of the Alps.

The technique used for the monkey cup is referred to as painted enamel, for the enamel was applied freely, like paint, over a metal base without the aid of cloisons or grooves, or even the incised patterns used in earlier transparent *basse-taille* enamels. In the case of the cup, opaque enamel was used, with the dark background laid over a lightly scored silver base, and the design painted over it. This method of enameling was evidently somewhat of an innovation for the time, a forerunner of the techniques developed in Venice and Limoges in the late fifteenth century.

There is a relatively small group of painted enamels still in existence that have been related to the monkey cup. Of these, three are strikingly similar – a medallion (Figure 15) and two spoons (Figures 9, 10). Some of the others, like the beaker in Figure 12, are decorated with birds and animals; in these the creatures are reminiscent of the birds and animals on the monkey cup and spoons, but aside from this they give a very different overall impression.

Like the cup, the three closely related ob-

7. *Detail of the monkey cup*

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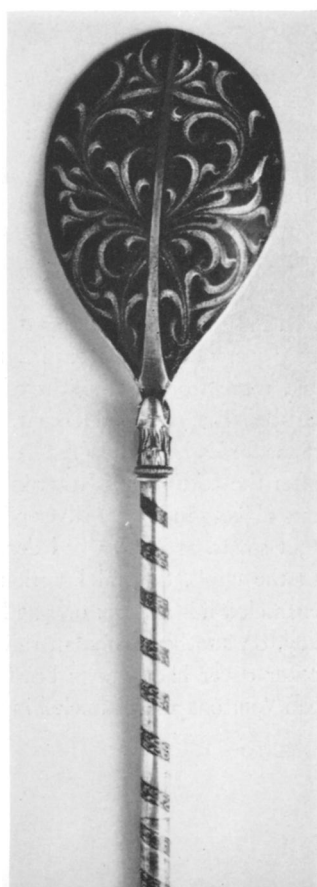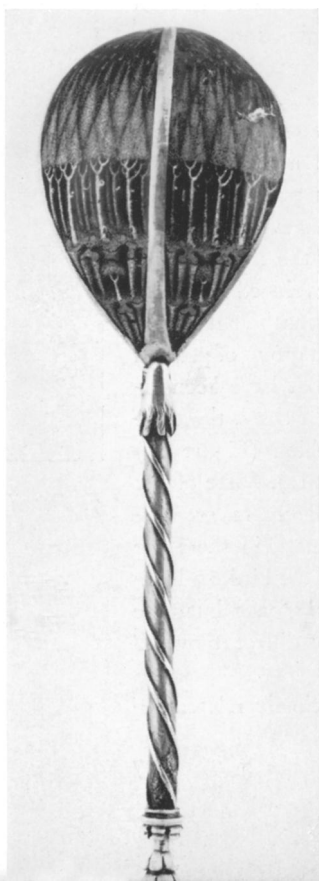
8. Interior of the monkey cup

9, 10. Two spoons. Netherlandish-Burgundian, first half of the
XV century. Painted enamel, lengths 6⅛ and 9½ inches. Museum
of Fine Arts, Boston, Helen and Alice Colburn Fund, 51.2472;
Victoria and Albert Museum, C 2-1935

11. Beaker ("pokal") and detail. Painting in Das Hallesche Heiltum,
1520s. Height of painting 13¾ inches. Schlossbibliothek,
Aschaffenburg, Germany, MS 14, f. 329v

jects are enameled on both sides, primarily in grisaille on a dark background variously described as black, dark blue, or midnight blue. One other piece that seems very close to the monkey cup is a covered "pokal" (Figure 11), of which a painting and description were included in an inventory of the treasury at Halle made for Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg in the 1520s. Like the cup in the Medici inventory, it is described as being enameled in white on blue; this time, however, the blue was qualified as a dark or dull blue.

Almost a trademark of this group is a distinctive motif enameled on the inside of the monkey cup: a beautiful white and gold stylized cloud band from which issue both golden rays and drops. It appears on the medallion and spoons, and although no clouds can be seen in the painting of the pokal, there are the same rays and drops. The group is united by other similarities, such as the cup's cliffs and graceful little clumps of trees, enameled in golden brown and gray, which also occur on the spoons and the pokal. The head of the peddler, too, is almost an older edition of that of the Christ child on the medallion: the same curly hair, large ears, heavy-lidded eyes, and broad nose and chin; and the same stippled building up of enamel was used to create texture in the peddler's clothes and those worn by the man on the reverse of the medallion.

Another factor that sets the decoration of the cup, spoons, and pokal apart from other painted enamels of this period is that their decoration is narrative rather than decorative. On one spoon (Figure 10), a monkey, a close relative of those on the cup, rides a stag; on the other (Figure 9), a fox preaches to a flock of geese, as another fox sneaks out from under the pulpit and seizes the neck of one of the listeners. In the top enameled band of the pokal, a naked lady, possibly a wild woman or even a representation of Venus, is riding a fantastic animal resembling a lion in pursuit of a stag, as a monkey grabs her spear; around the base a naked woman is again seen, with what appear to be hairy wild men or wodehouses. These scenes have much the same sort of down-to-earth, popular appeal as that of the mon-

keys and peddler, and this type of subject evidently delighted the nobility as well as the lower classes. Such rather lascivious details as the disrobing of the drunken peddler, or the goings-on hinted at by the nude woman and wild men – particularly when presented as elegantly as on the enamels – must have been a welcome change for court circles from the more traditional episodes of romantic chivalry and themes of courtly love.

At least one of the vessels described in the duke of Burgundy's inventory sounds as if it represented both the type of decoration on the monkey cup and court scenes: the inside was worked with "a child seated on a monkey and other personages, and outside, personages with pairs of herons." The description of this cup's exterior could also be applied to another enameled beaker of the same shape as the monkey cup, but known today only through a later painting by Roger de Gaignières (Figure 13). Compare the vigor – almost rowdiness – of the monkey cup's decoration with this typical courtly scene: elegant men and women stroll amid little clumps of trees like those on our cup. This decoration is very much in the International Style, which reflected the taste of court circles throughout western Europe in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

Although the monkey-cup group of enamels (except the medallion) break away from the International Style in subject matter, stylistically they have several features that reflect it. Their animals, for example, are like those in the sketchbooks of the Italians Giovannini di Grassi and Pisanello, and the cliffs and clumps of trees appear many times in manuscripts and paintings of this earlier period.

The medallion has been associated with two of the most beautiful manuscripts of the Franco-Netherlandish manifestation of the International Style, for the Virgin and Child has been compared to miniatures in both the *Belles Heures* and the *Très Riches Heures*, illuminated around 1410 to 1415 by the three Limbourg brothers. The face and hair of the peddler also recall the rather fleshy faces and carefully curled hair of some of the men in the *Belles*

12. Beaker. Burgundian (?), XV century. Painted enamel, height 11¼ inches. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, no. 88

13. Beaker. Watercolor by Roger de Gaignières (1645-1715), French. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Gough Drawings – Gaignières 16, f. 63


14. The Large Garden of Love, by the Master of the Gardens of Love (active during the first half of the XV century). Engraving, 8⁹⁄₁₆ x 11¹⁄₁₆ inches. Kupferstich-kabinett, Staatlichen Museen, Berlin. Photograph: Walter Steinkopf

15. Medallion. Flemish-Burgundian, early XV century. Painted enamel, diameter 2 inches. The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 44.462

16. St. George and the Dragon. From the Belles Heures of the Duke of Berry, illuminated by the Limbourg brothers, Franco-Netherlandish, about 1410. Page 9⅜ x 6⅝ inches. The Cloisters Collection, 54.1.1, f. 167
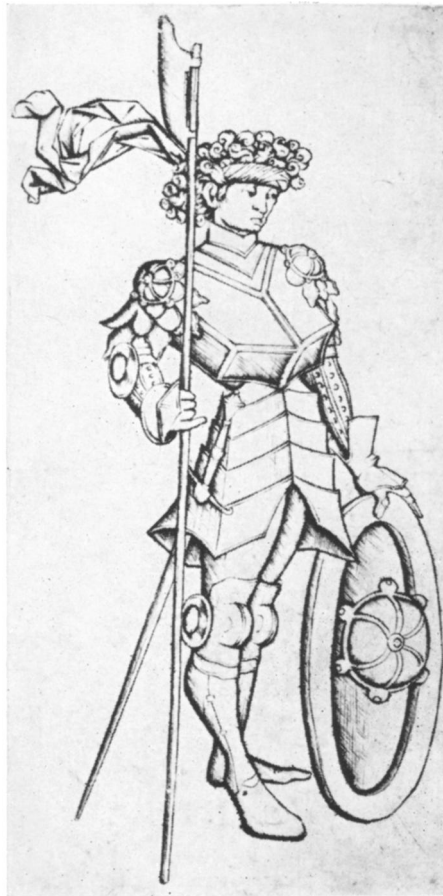
17. Knight, by the Master of the Mount of Calvary (active during the first half of the XV century). Engraving, 6⁵⁄₁₆ x 3¼ inches. British Museum

Heures (Figure 16), and the leafy scrollwork on the monkey cup and the back of one of the spoons is reminiscent of the gold-leaf tracery in the backgrounds of illuminations in both manuscripts.

In style the enamels also recall Northern engravings, especially earlier ones still very much in the International tradition, and believed to be of Franco-Burgundian origin. For example, an engraving of a knight (Figure 17) by the Master of the Mount of Calvary suggests in an exaggerated way the face and curled hair of St. George in the *Belles Heures* (Figure 16), and also resembles the peddler and the medallion's Christ child and bearded man. An engraving by the Master of the Gardens of Love (Figure 14) has the same sort of birds and tree clumps as the monkey-cup group, and the same elegant costumes and general atmosphere as the beaker in the Gaignières drawing.

It is interesting that the technique of making impressions on paper from engraved metallic plates was emerging in Europe at just about the time the monkey cup was made. In fact, some of the first engravers were probably also goldsmiths. The scrollwork patterns of the cup's background are similar to the allover patterns frequently incised on metalwork. An engraving (Figure 18) by Master E. S. (who evidently was also a goldsmith) has a scrollwork background against which, riding a unicorn, is a naked lady very much like the lady on the pokal. The animals, birds, and wild people on the painted enamels are also like those represented on playing cards of the fifteenth century, engraved by Master E. S. and others.

Some engravings very probably served as goldsmiths' patterns: the stiff animals on the beaker in Figure 12, for example, could have been derived from such a source. But the more sinuous, fluid quality of the decoration on the monkey cup suggests that its designer used an original drawing or even a miniature painting. One cannot help wondering whether it may have been the goldsmith-enameler himself who created the design of the monkey cup, as well as carrying out its decoration with such amazing technical skill.

18. Ornament panel with a tournament between a man and a woman, by Master E. S. (active during the mid-XV century). Engraving, 2¾ x 3⅛ inches. From Die Kupferstiche des Meisters E. S. (Berlin, 1924) by Max Geisberg

A sequence of fox scenes in the English four-teenth-century Decretals have been identified as scenes relating to the *Roman de Renard*. This tale recounts how Renard (the fox) is called to cure the lion, King Noble, and among the things he uses for this is a special herb that he had stolen from a pilgrim sleeping under a tree in the forest. It has been suggested that there may have been some oral tradition, in England at least, connecting Renard to the monkeys and the peddler, a tradition that was echoed much later in a popular seventeenth-century literary composition. If such a connection was intended in the Decretals, it would seem to be more of a spur-of-the-moment idea, for Renard is shown curing the king, not robbing the pilgrim; furthermore, the monkey-and-peddler scenes are widely separated from the fox scenes, while other scenes of an episodic nature seem to be together.

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19. Detail of the monkey cup

Alahan Monastery

A Masterpiece of Early Christian Architecture

MICHAEL GOUGH   *Director of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara*

Some fifteen hundred years ago a great monastery, the monastery of Alahan, was founded in western Cilica, the ancient Byzantine province of Isauria, one of the most wild and mountainous regions of southern Asia Minor. In antiquity this province had a reputation for lawlessness, and the pirates who harassed the Roman fleets in the eastern Mediterranean during the first century b.c. were natives of the area. It was pacified only with difficulty by Pompey the Great, but with time and with the building of roads through the mountain passes, Isauria became progressively urbanized, with the Hellenistic foundation of Seleucea on the Calycadnus River as its metropolis and, in Christian times, the see of an archbishop as well as a center of pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thecla, disciple and companion of St. Paul. As in the rest of Asia Minor after the conquests of Alexander, Greek was the *lingua franca* of the province, while in art and architecture the local tradition, though never completely submerged, accommodated itself gradually to the canons of Greco-Roman taste. Thus, Isaurian builders who in the centuries before Christ had chiefly devoted their skill to the construction of massive fortifications and watchtowers in polygonal masonry, were employed under the Roman Empire to meet the more sophisticated needs of the new urban communities with baths, theaters, porticoes, and, eventually, with churches and monasteries.

One prosperous Romanized city of Isauria was Claudiopolis, sited in a fertile plain about forty miles upstream from Seleucea on the Calycadnus and astride the mountain road leading from the Mediterranean coast to Iconium in central Anatolia. Overlooking this road, in the mountains north of Claudiopolis, was the monastery of Alahan (Figure 1). Leading to an important pass in the Taurus range, the road will have been frequented in early Christian times by imperial and ecclesiastical dignitaries, by men of letters, artists, and craftsmen, on their way to and from the major cities of Anatolia, the southern coastlands, and the Levant. Thus a staging post that grew up beside it might

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well, like the Turkish Seljuk *hans*, or caravan-serais, of the Middle Ages, have been described as a "poor man's university." It is against such a setting of cultural communication that the superb architecture and decorative sculpture of Alahan monastery should be considered.

We are fortunate enough to have documentary evidence – rare in this area and at this period – concerning the date of the monastery. The epitaphs of two monks interred in the funerary area of the complex have been preserved; the first, which was never completed, reads: "Here lies Tarasis, son of Tarasis, priest and custodian, who lived in this place from the consulship of Gadalaippus in the fourteenth indiction [A.D. 461] until the — indiction in the consulship of —. He lived — years." The second is more explicit: "Here lies Tarasis of blessed memory, the founder of the hospice, who died on the thirteenth of February in the fifteenth indiction [A.D. 462] after the consulship of the illustrious Fl. Severianus and Fl. Dagalaipphus, on Tuesday of the first week of the Holy Fast [Lent]." Dagalaipphus and Gadalaippus are variants of the same name, and it is not improbable that Tarasis the custodian was the son of Tarasis, founder of the hospice. Although the epitaphs do not pinpoint the date of the buildings themselves, the necessity for a hospice and a watchman suggests the existence at Alahan in the mid-fifth century of a sizable settlement with permanent buildings. Since 1961, five seasons of excavation by the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara have brought to light the remains of what may well have been the richest and most elaborate monastery complex in Anatolia.

1. Alahan monastery from the west. The basilica is in the foreground, with Koja Kalessi in the distance. Photographs for this article by G. Bakker

2. Alahan monastery: ground plan, showing the principal structures

0   10   20   30   40   50 M

The first monks to settle at Alahan had a good eye for a site. At about thirteen miles out of ancient Claudiopolis (now called Mut) on the road to Laranda (Karaman) is a relatively fertile area, watered by small streams coming down from the Taurus Mountains, and here a Roman settlement was established, very probably in the second century A.D. Three hundred yards above, in the heart of the pine forests, is a long terrace, sheltered by a limestone outcrop from the prevailing north wind. At the west end of this terrace, the rock is honeycombed with natural caves; and it was these caves, with an abundant supply of water nearby and an unrivaled vista over the valley of the Calycadnus (Göksu) to the mountains, that must have attracted the earliest religious community. The presence of the settlement at the bottom of the slope would have been an additional advantage for the monastery.

A large cave at the western end of the complex was the first place of worship at Alahan, since its rock-cut apse projects into the narthex of the great basilica that superseded it. Had the basilica been built first, the rock would have been cut back, as it was elsewhere, to suit the line of the narthex facade. This primitive cave-church has not yet been fully excavated, but nothing found so far suggests that it and the cells in the cliff to the west of it were sufficiently important to call for the founding of a hospice on the site as it was then.

The basilica (in the foreground of Figure 1, and at the left of Figure 2) is a large building, measuring 105 by 52½ feet. Its architect was faced with a difficult problem since, while on the northern side of the site solid rock rose to a height of some 82 feet, to the south the ground fell away toward the valley. His solution was to use the limestone face, lined with masonry, as the north wall of the building, and to seat the freestanding southern wall at a much lower level on the bedrock. This necessary safety measure left him with room for an undercroft, entered by a door low down in the south wall. The main threat to a building so sited was a possible rockfall from the north, and such a fall almost certainly caused the abandonment of the church, probably early in the seventh century. Certainly the

squatters who returned to the site some five hundred years later found the basilica in ruins and choked with rubble. Why otherwise should they have piled up primary building blocks, including column capitals, bases, and screen fragments, along the original stylobates (the foundation of the interior colonnades), and stacked the rest of the material against the north and south walls? After a short occupation, the church was again abandoned, this time for good, and in 1961 only the great western portal, part of the apse, and the southern wall were still visible above ground.

Excavation and the demolition of the walls the squatters had erected, resulting in the recovery of most of the original material, has enabled us to reconstruct the plan (Figures 2, 16) and elevation of the basilica with a reasonable degree of certainty. East of a narthex with a central arched opening and two side doors was the church proper, itself entered through three portals, of which the central one was most lavishly decorated. Internally, the church was divided by two rows of Corinthian columns into a central nave with side aisles, of which the southern one terminated in a diakonikon (a room for the preparation of the Eucharist) entered through an arched door. Above the arcading of the aisle colonnades and standing on a low wall crowned by

3. The basilica: symbol of St. Luke. Detail of the tetramorph below the lintel of the west door

a string course was a second, slightly smaller order, and above this again a clerestory lit by a series of arched windows, probably arranged in pairs. It is very likely that there were galleries above the aisles, since the column bases of the upper order were grooved to take screen slabs, just as were the bases of the lower colonnades. The floor of the apse was originally inlaid with multicolored marbles *(opus sectile)*, of which a few pieces were found in situ. During the excavation, a mass of crumbling plaster with mosaic tesserae was discovered in the area of the synthronon (the seating for the clergy). The glass tesserae were gold, red, green, blue, and turquoise; others, of stone, were white, gray, pink, and black. The cubes were usually less than one-third of a square inch in area, while others of irregular shape were still smaller. This mosaic – most likely some fine scene with figures – once adorned the curved wall and semidome of the apse. Also used in the enrichment of the basilica was deep red porphyry, imported from Egypt, as well as white marble from the imperial quarries on the island of Proconnesus in the Sea of Marmara. This suggests that Alahan was a wealthy foundation, since transportation costs from so far afield would have been heavy.

The chief surviving glory of this basilica at Alahan, however, is its architectural sculpture. The great western portal has never been buried, and its reliefs, though weathered, are still memorable. On the face of the lintel two flying angels support a medallion encircling the head of Christ, with four human busts (probably representing the Evangelists) on the outer faces of the jambs. Within the reveals, one on either side, are the archangels Michael and Gabriel. The identity of the objects or beings trodden beneath their feet is still disputed, but there is little doubt that the action symbolizes the Church's conquest of paganism. On the underside of the lintel is the finest composition in the monastery, a tetramorph of the four winged beasts of Ezekiel's vision, the beasts that recur in the Apocalypse and were later used in Christian iconography to symbolize the Evangelists (Figure 3). Unknown, however, until the excavation was the rich molding that once crowned the

portal (Figure 4): this consists of a crisply cut frieze of vine scrolls with clusters of grapes, surmounted by a frieze of crossed fish, partridge, and basket motifs. This handsome molding was supported at its corners, on either side of the lintel block, by a pair of acanthus-fronted consoles, each one carved on its outer face with an almost heraldic dolphin (Figure 7). Two complete slabs (Figure 8) of a larger cornice with almost identical motifs between the horizontal consoles were unearthed in excavation south of the basilica in 1965; fragments had already been observed, including two with a ram's head carved almost in the round. Set above a magnificent frieze, carved separately, with acanthus scrolls and rosettes, this larger cornice crowned the south wall of the building, with the rams' heads occurring at intervals along its length as vestigial rainwater spouts.

4. *The basilica: detail of the cornice of the west door*

LEFT:

5. *Koja Kalessi: detail of the south door*

RIGHT:

6. *Koja Kalessi: south door and aisle*
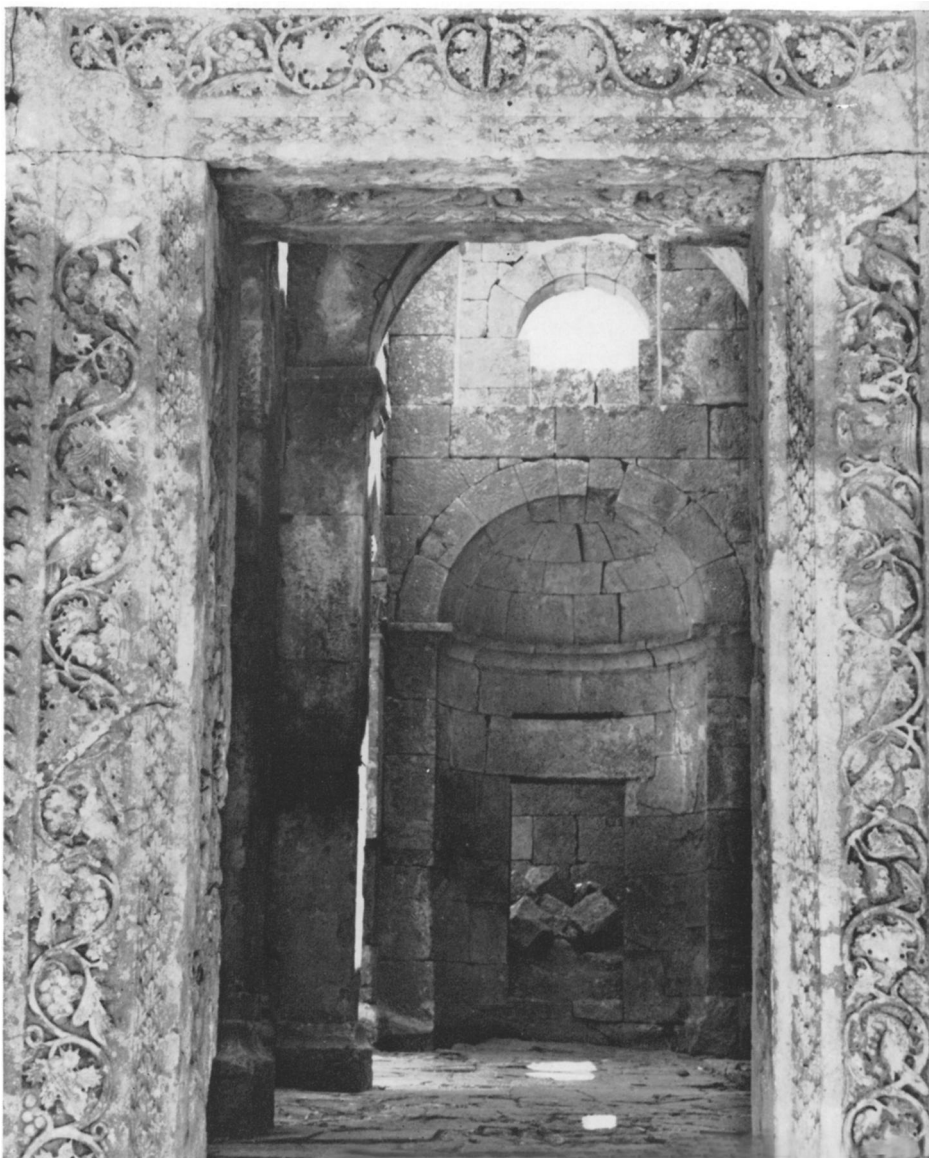
Another rich feature of the basilica is the stylobate (Figure 10), projecting very slightly into the nave, at the foot of the six eastern columns on either side. It is slotted along its top surface to take screen slabs, and returns across the entrance to the chancel, thus cutting it off from the nave except for an opening left in the center to permit access from one part of the church to the other. The sides are most delicately carved with a running guilloche enclosing rosettes, small fish, crosses, and acanthus florets.

Remains of the sculptured screens that once acted as a low barrier between the chancel and the eastern ends of the aisles and the nave survive in plenty, in the form of fragments, large and small, recovered from the secondary walls into which they had been inserted as fill. So much has been discovered that the size of individual screens and the quality of their decoration are reasonably easy to assess; moreover, had they been fashioned of a material more durable than limestone, and had not some of the fragments been unmercifully hacked to suit their secondary purpose, the collection would be even more impressive than it is.

The screens fall into two main types, the first carved on both sides and probably to be considered as having been fitted across the entrance to the chancel, and the second decorated on one face only, and so more likely to have been slotted between the columns, with the worked side facing the nave and the blank one facing the aisles. There is a wide variety of decoration, the simplest consisting of a wreathed cross, a cross entwined in foliage, or a cross with rosettes set in the angles of intersection of the arms. More elaborate are

7. *The basilica: console of the main west door*

8. *The basilica: detail of the large cornice and frieze of the south wall*

9. *Koja Kalessi: detail of a panel on the northern reveal of the south door*

the slabs decorated in high relief with luxuriant foliage, or with a combination of vine and pomegranate motifs (Figure 12). Yet others are carved with shoals of lively, writhing fish (Figure 11), while one fragment depicts a seagull with a fish in its beak. Most of the slabs are bordered with deeply undercut leaf moldings, some even pierced through their whole thickness. In several cases individual screens were divided into four panels, each one with its own different decoration. So far as can be ascertained, the calculated dimensions give a width of about four and a half feet and a height of about two and a half feet. These sculptures, like those of the main west portal and of the frieze and cornice blocks of the same building, have an exuberance and lack of formality that make the fifth century a rather more credible period for the building of the basilica than that of Justinian (reigned 527-565), as put forward by some scholars. Furthermore, its architecture bears a considerable family resemblance to that of the Acheiropoeitos in Salonika (Figure 13), a church generally thought to date to the third quarter of the fifth century.

Not long after the monks had erected their splendid basilica, they embarked on further architectural activities – a small baptistery in the center of the monastery, the important basilica known as Koja Kalessi at the eastern end of the complex, and a colonnaded walkway connecting the new basilica with the old. This construction may have been inspired by a sudden influx of worshipers or converts: the monks themselves would have had no need of a baptistery, being already baptized, and Koja Kalessi, which has somewhat less decoration than the western basilica, may have been intended for the use of the pilgrims.

Koja Kalessi has aroused a storm of controversy among art historians that has been flaring up at intervals over the past seventy-five years and still shows no sign of dying down. The argument arose over two closely related problems: the first concerns the accuracy, or otherwise, of describing the building as a domed basilica, the second centers on the probable date of its completion.

Paradoxically, the first problem has been aggravated by the fine state of the church's preservation, since even a cursory inspection of the interior establishes the fact that, incorporated in the plan of a long-aisled basilica, is a tower with squinch arches at the angles (Figure 14), rising above the area immediately west of the chancel. From this the obvious snap judgment is that the tower was originally crowned by a cupola, and many scholars have confidently asserted that this was the case. There are, however, good reasons for rejecting this view, particularly in so far as it suggests the existence of a stone dome. In the first place, the tower is not square, but oblong – a difficult shape to adapt to a dome's round base. The walls of the tower and the crossbracing seem inadequate to withstand the downward and outward thrust of a heavy mass of masonry, and the same may be said of the squinch arches and their supporting colonnettes. Finally, no stones suitable for a dome

10. The basilica: screen base and detail
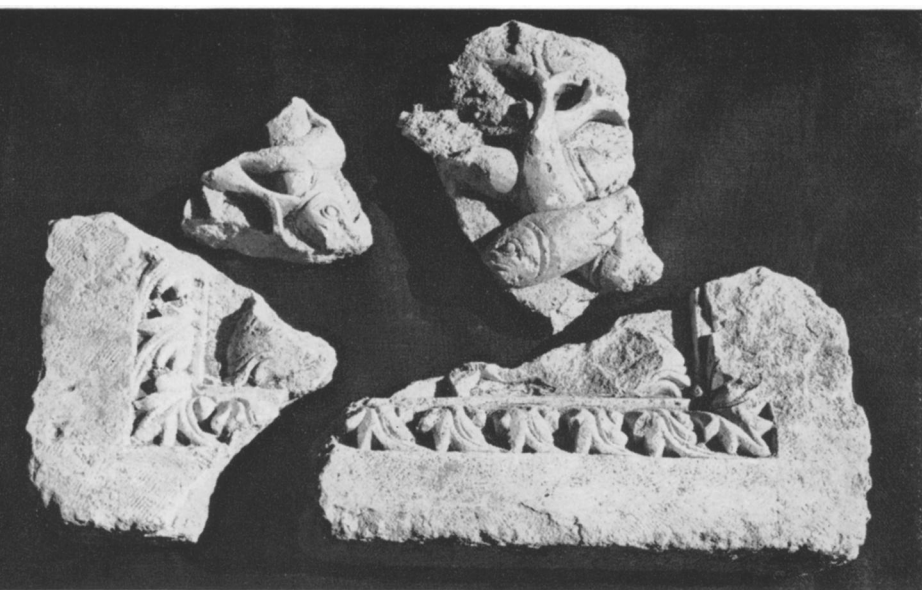
11, 12. *The basilica: fragments of two of the screens*

13. *Church of the Acheiropoeitos, Salonika: section. The western basilica at Alahan probably resembled this. From page 75 of Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture (1965) by Richard Krautheimer*

60 FEET

20 METRES
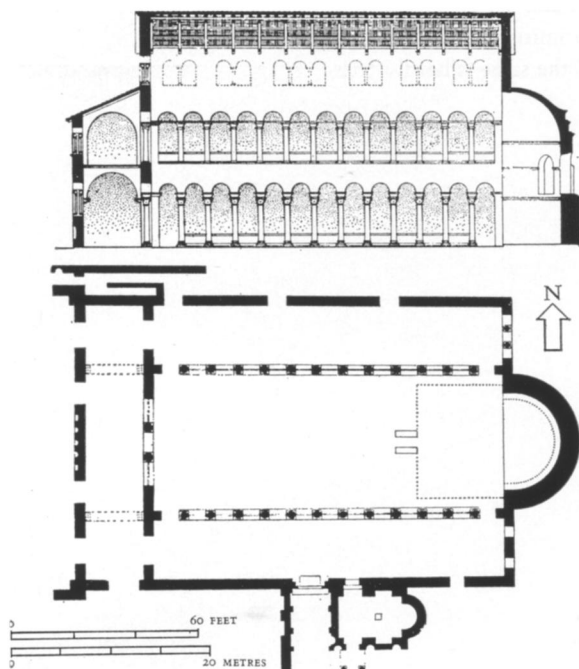
have been found during the clearance of the nave in the area below the tower. Rather than being domed, the tower may have been capped by a pyramid of timber, which could have been accommodated on the oblong base, would have exerted little thrust, and, once fallen, would have left no trace after the lapse of centuries. Nevertheless, when all is said and done, the use of squinch arches at the angles of the tower strongly suggests that the architect was familiar with the basic principles of domical construction, and this alone would make Koja Kalessi a building of exceptional interest if, as some scholars have believed, it was built a good half century before the most distinguished of all domed basilicas, the church of St. Sophia in Istanbul, begun in 532. The dating of the building therefore assumes great importance.

The recent excavations have been an aid in assessing the place of Koja Kalessi stylistically and chronologically in relation to the other parts of the monastery. First of all, the western basilica has been shown to have had a simpler plan, but more elaborate decoration. For instance, at Koja Kalessi the projecting molding blocks, slotted for screen slabs, at the base of the six eastern columns are much simplified and undecorated, and the ornamentation of fragmentary screens found in that church is comparatively austere. Further, excavation has shown that the walkway and its colonnade were constructed westward from Koja Kalessi, and that the work was abandoned before its completion. Column plinths and bases were found in situ at the east end of the colonnade, and shafts, capitals, and voussoirs have been recovered from the slope below. Further west no remains of columns have been found. Again, while the easternmost change of level in the walkway is signaled by a flight of steps, this feature is missing at the next, equally abrupt descent westward. The probable building sequence of the main features at Alahan is then: a) the basilica, b) the baptistery and Koja Kalessi, and c) the colonnaded walkway.

This eastward progression of the building program, if accepted, must entail the existence of a path, earlier than the colonnaded walkway, for the transportation of building

material and scaffolding. This was, in fact, discovered in the excavation campaign of 1967, at a slightly lower level than that of the later walkway and sustained to the south by a dry-stone wall.

The stylistic homogeneity of all the architectural sculpture at Alahan has frequently been observed, and it has never been seriously suggested that such differences as do exist imply important divergences of date between the main buildings. For example, the fish decorating the underside of the lintel and the reveals of the south door of Koja Kalessi (Figure 5) are in recognizably the same style as those on some of the basilica screens. Even the detail of a seagull with a fish in its beak is repeated. The two flying angels on the lintel of the west portal of the basilica are echoed on the pediment of a small shrine incorporated in the colonnade of the walkway (Figure 15), and throughout the complex such decorative moldings as the running acanthus scroll are repeated with barely a variation in design or sculptural technique. Only the greater architectural sophistication of Koja Kalessi and perhaps the rather rigid, coloristic treatment of its Corinthian capitals may be thought to indicate positively a later date for this building than for the basilica.

If the cave church and its group of cells may be thought too primitive to have needed an associated hospice, the same is hardly true of the basilica. The epitaph of Tarasis, the founder of the hospice, would then suggest that the basilica was completed not long after the middle of the fifth century, and neither its architecture nor its enrichment would militate against such a supposition. On the other hand, the decorative elements of Koja Kalessi are sufficiently close for that church to have been built within a generation at most of the basilica, during the last quarter of the fifth century. It is also significant that of the large number of coins found in the excavation there is a heavy preponderance of fourth- and fifth-century issues. Had Koja Kalessi been built in the sixth century under Justinian, as some scholars have claimed, more than a handful of that emperor's coins and of his successors might reasonably have been expected.

14. *Koja Kalessi: squinch arch of the tower*

15. *Shrine in the walkway*

Although the monastery at Alahan has been known to Western scholars since 1826, when Count de la Borde published a summary account of the site (*Voyage en Orient*, pp. 124, 126), it made its first real impact on the architectural and archaeological world with the appearance of A. C. Headlam's excellent report of 1893 ("Ecclesiastical Sites in Isauria [Cilicia Trachea]," pp. 9-19), which came out as an *Occasional Paper of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies*.

J. Stryzgowski (*Kleinasien, Ein Neuland der Kunstgeschichte* [1903], pp. 109-113) was as insistent on a stone dome for Koja Kalessi as he was for a fourth-century date for that church. George H. Forsyth published the plausible suggestion that the achievement of the tower was a timber pyramid in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* XI (1957), p. 228 ff.

A small-scale sounding of the site at Alahan was carried out by the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara in 1955. Thereafter, preliminary reports of the seasons of 1961, 1962, 1964, and 1965 have been published in *Anatolian Studies* XII (1962), pp. 173-184; XIII (1963), pp. 105-115; XIV (1964), pp. 185-190; XVII (in press).

Koja Kalessi was dated as having been built in the reign of Justinian by Forsyth *(op. cit.)*. Headlam (*op. cit.*, p. 18) and Paolo Verzone (*Alahan Manastir* [1956], pp 52-54) both suggested a fifth-century date for the church. Richard Krautheimer (*Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* [1965], p. 179) is undecided as between the fifth and sixth century. C. Mango (*Polychronion, Festschrift F. Dölger* [1966], p. 364), with Verzone and the present writer, is now prepared to assign it a date in the last quarter of the fifth century, together with churches of similar type at Meryemlik and Dag Pazari.

16. The basilica from above. The stones of the main arcade have been laid out along the aisle colonnades