

## Île-de-France and Lorraine

### Île-de-France

The cult of the Virgin spread throughout the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the representation of the Madonna holding her Child became a favoured subject of those commissioning works at the end of the century. Some regions are particularly good illustrations of the quality of sculptures, starting with the Île-de-France and Lorraine. One such work housed by the museum is this small piece, the precious appearance of which is accentuated by the partial survival of its polychromy: badly mutilated, with both the Virgin and Child having lost their heads, this small seated sculpture (A. Cl. 18768) demonstrates a strong sense of spatiality and, above all, a remarkable focus on the ornament, both in terms of the attention paid to the Madonna's garments and the throne upon which she is seated.

### Works from the Abbey of Longchamp (Île-de-France)

Produced almost half a century later, the *Virgin* (B. Cl. 19254) probably in the Abbey of Longchamp originally is just as fine although less exuberant. Adopting a well known iconography, the Child is playing with a bird, probably a goldfinch, mediaeval tradition dictating that this bird received the red mark on its head when it passed under the Cross, making it an image of the Passion. Originating in the same abbey but sculpted almost a quarter of a century later, the sculpture of *Saint John* (C. Cl. 19255) has often been attributed to one of the great sculptors of the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Jean de Liège. While the serious, even stern, character of the face goes against this attribution, it is nonetheless obvious that this is a work of very high quality, but one which differs from the rest of the sculpture of the time. Rather than the smooth, fluid, draping style that the majority of contemporary sculptors liked to use, here the artist preferred to adopt a jerky, sharp treatment, helping to give his work an exceptional physical presence.

### Madonna and Child sculptures of Lorraine

Their squat, almost thick silhouette, with a crowned head bearing a short veil, as can be seen at the cathedral and

## Room 14 English

## 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century sculpture

*While the 13<sup>th</sup> century followed on naturally from the previous century in terms of the prime importance granted to monumental sculpture, the last two centuries of the Middle Ages marked a change, with the development of private worship on one hand and the interest for narrative works on the other hand. The domination of the cold scholastic theology - the most important representative of which was Thomas Aquinas in the 13<sup>th</sup> century - was called into question by the propagation of a more mystical piety, emphasising the direct link between believers and the divine world.*

museum of Saint-Dié-des-Vosges, for example, make the Madonna and Child sculptures of Lorraine easily recognisable. One of the best works from this region (D. Cl. 18944) is on display in the museum. The slightly oval head resting on a broad, thick neck, the obviously protruding hip despite the thickness of the body, the finesse of the hands, the suppleness of the long coat, the concentration of the Child, intently studying his breviary, the attention to detail- especially the belt, the end of which goes back under the coat before slipping into a fold above the right knee-: all combine to give this sculpture a subtle elegance. Like other similar Madonnas- the ones from Saint-Dié, and also the one from Maxéville (close to Nancy), - this one, by marrying the refinement of the Parisian sculpture of the first decades of the 14th century and a steadier, if not static, tradition, paves the way for the studied elegance of sculpture in the Western part of the Empire in the 1350s.

### Altarpieces from the Southern Netherlands

In the Southern Netherlands (region corresponding approximately to today's Belgium), the 15<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of a particularly organised system for the production of sculpture, specialising in altarpieces made of wood highlighted in polychromy (an altarpiece is an element that is sculpted, painted or worked in gold or silver, designed to be placed behind the altar (in Latin: *retro tabula*)).

### Corporations

These groups played a central role in this system. They carefully organised creative production, stipulating all the technical components in detail, from the choice of wood to the choice of pigments, also determining who was responsible for a particular task. Each city affixed a certification mark on the works produced under its authority, according to the rules that it had set, the most famous of these marks probably being the Antwerp hand (fig. 1), which first appeared around 1470 and which can be found both on sculpted elements and on the altarpiece casing itself.



A. Cl. 18768



B. Cl. 19254 (detail)



C. Cl. 19225 (detail)

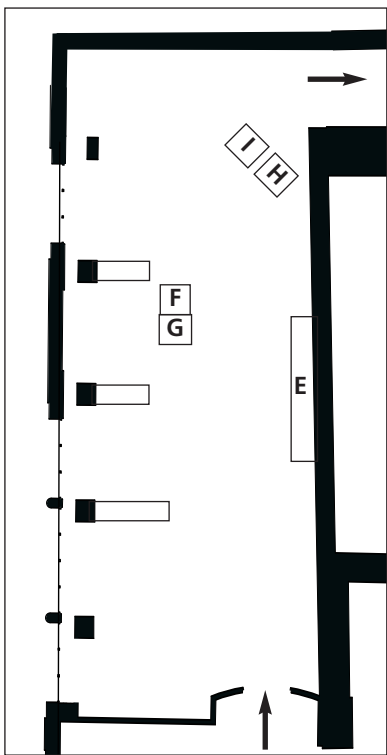


D. Cl. 18944 (detail)



(fig. 1) Antwerp hand

1215 Fourth Council of the Lateran. Dogma of transubstantiation	1255 Isabella of France founds the Abbey of Longchamp	1406 Death of Claus Sluter. Claus de Werve succeeds him	Circa 1418 Writing of the <i>Imitation of Christ</i> , probably by Thomas a Kempis	Circa 1470 Appearance of the Antwerp hand
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### Flemish and Brabant altarpieces

In addition to numerous fragments, two large complete altarpieces housed in the museum are testimony to the significance of this work in Brabant. This one from the Premonstratensian abbey of Averbode, in Brabant, and the work of Jan de Molder's Antwerp workshop (**E.** Cl. 240), was installed on the altar of the Holy Sacrament at Easter in 1514. Its iconography is relatively original since it is not dedicated to childhood scenes or the Passion of Christ but to a burning aspect of theology throughout the Middle Ages and which was then once more a prominent focus of debate: transubstantiation (the transformation of bread into Christ's flesh and wine into his blood). Thus, in the centre, just above the lower altar, was the host, presented in a monstrance, lifted by two angels, each wearing a dalmatic (a long, wide-sleeved tunic worn mainly by deacons)-. Above, Christ rises from the main altar at the very moment that Pope Gregory I consecrates the Eucharist, one of the miracles traditionally cited to prove the reality of transubstantiation. In the left compartment, Melchisedech, the King and High Priest of Salem, blesses Abraham, an Old Testament scene widely interpreted by mediaeval theologians as proclaiming the miracle of the Eucharist, while the Last Supper is depicted on the right.

### Small altarpieces

The development of private worship from 1300 onwards led to the appearance alongside the large sculpted or painted altarpieces of other smaller ones, sometimes in precious materials or sometimes in painted and gilded wood, destined for private chapels. Two examples of these are seen here.

### In Burgundy

The first (**F.** Cl. 23311), which has lost its side sections, is dedicated to a classic scene of private worship, Lamentation over the dead Christ, that of the seven sorrows of the Virgin, best lending itself to a simultaneously intimist and morbid interpretation, in line with the piety of the end of

the Middle Ages. The taste for heavy materials with very marked hollowed out folds and for graphic movements is characteristic of the art in the Duchy of Burgundy, and in particular that of the son-in-law and successor of Claus Sluter, Claus de Werve, whose workshop sculpted this altarpiece. It is perceptible here, both in the gestures of Saint John and Mary Magdalene and in the contrast between their positions: the verticality of the Virgin's body and the oblique of Christ's.

### In the Lower Rhine

The second altarpiece belongs to a completely different world (**G.** Cl. 3269), although the subject is roughly the same. Instead of a focused depiction of the four main characters, monumental in nature despite the small size of the Burgundy altarpiece, Arndt de Kalkar (a town in the Lower Rhine) chose to place the scene within a structured landscape, Glogotha (or Calvary), outlined by a series of planes with marked angles, one of the characteristic elements of this artist's style. There are numerous characters and, in the foreground, in the bottom right-hand corner, should be noted the presence of a donor, a Carthusian monk presented by Saint Andrew. Whilst the folds are fluid, the postures, in contrast, are tortuous, accentuating the expressions of pain. Following the conventional reading order of the time (from top to bottom for the left-hand section then from bottom to top for the right-hand section), the inner face of the painted side sections trace episodes of the Passion: the night on the Mount of Olives, Judas' kiss, the Flagellation, the Crowning with thorns, the Carrying of the Cross and the Crucifixion.

### Other sculptures from the Southern Netherlands

Although large altarpieces largely dominated their work, the sculptors of the former Southern Netherlands also produced sculptures in the round. A particular example of these sculptures is the magnificent Mary Magdalene (**H.** Cl. 1851) housed in the museum, recognisable from the jar of unguent that she is carrying, here depicted as a sophisticated woman, with a high, slim waist, a slightly oval face and a dress trimmed with braided fabric. This sculpture is particularly remarkable for its very elaborate hairstyle, with braids wound round the bonnet then passing back through the loop that they form before falling to the shoulders. Another remarkable work, the Virgin to the waist (**I.** Cl. 11490), can be linked to another set of Virgins dating from the end of the 15th century, all preserved in the region of Louvain, particularly that of Piétrebas, which offer the same oval shape of the face, the same nonchalant expression, the same long wavy hair, the same almost enticing pout. Was she originally only to the waist? This form, common in Italy, was nonetheless rare in Northern Europe; it is possible that she was originally sculpted full-length then subsequently severed to the waist.



E. Cl. 240



F. Cl. 23311



G. Cl. 3269



H. 1851 (detail)



I. Cl. 11490

**Xavier Dectot**, *curator*

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