

ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF  
LATE MEDIEVAL PILGRIMAGE  
IN NORTHERN EUROPE AND  
THE BRITISH ISLES  
*TEXTS*

EDITED BY

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE RHENO-MOSAN CHÂSSES OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

Benoît Van den Bossche

At the heart of the pilgrimage lies the reliquary, often a châsse. In many cases, the central iconography of the pilgrimage cult is developed there. Was this iconography conventional or original? Was it distinguished by strict theological qualities, or did it arise purely from popular faith? Did the châsses feature true iconographic programs, or were they merely images juxtaposed without much care for meaningful coherence? These are the questions that will be considered in this essay examining the Rheno-Mosan châsses of the thirteenth century.

The triple châsse of the Magi in Cologne, (fig. 308a) the châsses at the Cathedral at Aachen, (figs. 342, 344) those of the Cathedral of Tournai, (figs. 308b, 312) the châsse of St. Remaclus in Stavelot, (fig. 314) and the largely-disappeared châsse from Nivelles, (fig. 315) all are Rheno-Mosan châsses well-known to art historians who are particularly interested in the western Middle Ages. These reliquaries are imposing, indeed, they are the largest reliquaries that survive from the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Comparison with the attractive Limousin châsses or with the beautiful Saxon châsses of the same epoch allows us to evaluate the scope of these Rheno-Mosan projects.

But despite the celebrity of the Rheno-Mosan works, much more study is required to understand them individually and as a group. Some have been the subject of thorough studies,<sup>2</sup> but others have

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<sup>1</sup> For the dimensions, see Daniel Thurre, *L'atelier roman d'orfèvrerie de l'abbaye de St.-Maurice* (Sierre, 1992), pp. 378–9.

<sup>2</sup> Such as the châsse of St. Servatius at Maastricht; Renate Kroos, *Der Schrein des heiligen Servatius und die vier zugehörigen Reliquiare in Brüssel* (Münich, 1985) or, despite its nearly total destruction, the châsse of St. Gertrude at Nivelles; *Schatz aus den Trümmern. Der Silberschrein von Nivelles und die europäische Hochgotik*, ed. Hiltrud Westermann-Angerhausen (Cologne, 1995–6).

been generally overlooked.<sup>3</sup> Since the mid-twentieth century, scholarly literature has considered them individually through monographic books or articles rather than focusing on the general lines of production. Therefore, the researcher who seeks a general understanding of the issues must revisit older studies, which have retained their relevance.<sup>4</sup>

In Joseph Braun's study of the reliquaries of the Christian cult and their development,<sup>5</sup> he devotes a large section to the iconography of these reliquaries.<sup>6</sup> While he does not deal exclusively with Rheno-Mosan châsses, these are the reliquaries which cites he most often. Generally, Braun clearly distinguishes "ornamental"<sup>7</sup> iconography from "religious" iconography.<sup>8</sup> Within the "religious" iconography, he differentiates the purely "symbolic" images from the "real representations."<sup>9</sup> The "symbolic" illustrate the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit (the Lamb of God, the divine law, or the dove, for example).<sup>10</sup> The "symbolic" also include personifications, such as the Synagogue and the Church, the Sun and the Moon, and the Rivers of Paradise.<sup>11</sup> Among the "real representations," isolated characters are distinguished from scenes, whether they come from the Old Testament, the New Testament, or from hagiographic material.<sup>12</sup>

Today, these distinctions suggested by Braun appear somewhat artificial, because the iconography of a reliquary must always be regarded as a whole. The images constituting the iconography of a châsse cannot be separated from one another. While each one has an intrinsic sense, this sense is modified and enriched in response to the other images. It is the tension between the meaning that an image intrinsically bears and that which is conferred on it by the others that needs to be examined.

<sup>3</sup> Such as the châsse of St. Ermelinde at Amiens, that of Notre-Dame at Huy, or that of St. Suitbert at Kaiserwerth near Düsseldorf.

<sup>4</sup> For the late châsses, see Margarete Fugmann, *Frühgotische Reliquiare. Ein Beitrag zur rheinisch-belgischen Goldschmiedekunst des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Bonn: Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde, 1931).

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Braun, *Die Reliquiare des christlichen Kultes und ihre Entwicklung* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1940).

<sup>6</sup> Braun, *Die Reliquiare*, pp. 587–685.

<sup>7</sup> Braun, *Die Reliquiare*, pp. 589–97.

<sup>8</sup> Braun, *Die Reliquiare*, pp. 597–685.

<sup>9</sup> "Religiöses, symbolisches Bildwerk" and "Religiöse, reale Darstellungen."

<sup>10</sup> Braun, *Die Reliquiare*, pp. 603–14.

<sup>11</sup> Braun, *Die Reliquiare*, pp. 615–8.

<sup>12</sup> Braun, *Die Reliquiare*, pp. 623–75.

The field of this investigation is limited in a somewhat arbitrary manner, for reasons more practical than scientific. The limits are typological, spatial, and chronological. It is dealing only with "châsses," which come from the Rheno-Mosan area, created in the thirteenth century. But exclusive consideration of these châsses can be justified by the fact that, among all the reliquaries, they are the bearers of iconography *par excellence*. In other words, no other type of reliquary has demonstrated iconographic developments of a comparable scope. Among the medieval châsses of the West, those which were created in the Rheno-Mosan area are especially remarkable.

The chronological distinction is less easily justified: the Rheno-Mosan châsses of the thirteenth century are inscribed directly in the tradition of the châsses of the twelfth century, therefore, to be strictly accurate, there is no break in continuity, but the study of the large châsses of the "century of the cathedrals" makes it possible to determine an evolution within the same time frame. From an iconographic point of view, a châsse of Nicolas of Verdun (end of the twelfth/beginning of the thirteenth century) has few points in common with the châsse of St. Gertrude of Nivelles (1272-98). (figs. 315a, 315b) An evolution has taken place. It is this upon which I wish to focus.

There are two modes for studying iconography. One utilizes the image as the starting point of the study, while the other begins with the text. If the image is used as the point of departure, it is necessary for the art historian to determine the message conveyed by the images themselves; if it is the text from which the study originates, the images are by contrast a sort of illustration, thus conditioning their interpretation. The point of departure is here of primary importance. I choose to let the châsses speak for themselves—by their statuettes and their reliefs. The epigraphic inscriptions will not be explored here, although they could be very interesting theologically. It is in the conviction that a focus on the images is a necessary step and that, for a first approach, it is as justified as any other step.

### *Rheno-Mosan Châsses in the Thirteenth Century*

The first of the great Rheno-Mosan feretories which I will consider was begun at the end of the twelfth century; and was finished only in the third decade of the thirteenth century, but not without various modifications which affected the original project. It is largest

golden reliquary which the Middle Ages produced: the *châsse* of the Magi, a masterpiece attributed to Nicolas of Verdun, now displayed in the choir of Cologne Cathedral.<sup>13</sup> (fig. 308a) It must be taken into account that this is a triple *châsse*, because it houses the relics of the Three Kings, brought back from Milan by Bishop Rainald von Dassel in 1164. The richness of the iconography equals the abundance of decorative elements there. I will not describe in detail (for others have already done that) the modifications which the ensemble has known during the course of its creation and its ensuing history.<sup>14</sup> It will suffice to relate its essentials: on the principal pinion, the Virgin and Child are represented in the center of the lower part as part of the Adoration of the Magi scene in which the kings are shown to the left, presented by the emperor Otto IV himself; to the right, one sees the Baptism of Christ; and in the upper part, Christ is shown as Judge, flanked by two angels who probably once held the *arma Christi*. On the secondary pinion, the Scourging and the Crucifixion are shown at the bottom, where between the two scenes, the presence of Isaiah reminds us that the drama of the Passion evoked by these two episodes had been foretold by this prophet. Above Isaiah at the center of the composition is a bust of Archbishop Rainald von Dassel. The upper part of this end also shows the crowning of Sts. Felix and Nabor by Christ—fittingly, for the relics of these two saints were also preserved in the *châsse*. On the long sides, Old Testament personalities are illustrated on the lower level of the structure, with apostles enthroned on the upper story. On the sides of the roofs, the original reliefs (removed in 1781) represented twelve episodes from the life of Christ on the lower roofs, and twelve moments from the Apocalypse on the nave roof.

Thus the iconography of the *châsse* of the Magi is primarily Christocentric. The life, the legend of the Magi are evoked only by the means of the Adoration for which the *raison d'être* rests much more on its Christologic meaning than in its hagiographic value.

<sup>13</sup> On the *châsse* of the Three Kings, see Rolf Lauer "Dreikönigenschrein", in *Ornamenta Ecclesiae* 2, ed. Anton Legner (Cologne, 1985), pp. 216–23.

<sup>14</sup> See notably Herbert Rode, "Der verschollene Christuszyklus am Dreikönigenschrein. Versuch einer Rekonstruktion und einer Analyse", *Kölner Domblatt* 30 (1969), pp. 27–48; Peter Diemer, "Zum Darstellungsprogramm des Dreikönigenschreins," *Kölner Domblatt* 41 (1976), pp. 231–6 (with a review of prior literature).

True, Christ is not represented enthroned on the principal pinion, but all the other scenes bespeak Him. More precisely, on the main pinion are recounted the epiphanic moments of his natural and supernatural existence, i.e. moments during which the dignity of the Son of God were particularly emphasized. The Adoration is the moment of his revelation to the pagans, the Baptism that of his revelation to the Jews, and the Last Judgment that of his revelation to the whole of humanity. On the long sides, other episodes of the life of Christ and those of the Apocalypse must also be understood in their epiphanic dimension. The secondary pinion shows the other side of the coin: the Son of God is presented in his martyrdom (the Scourging, the Crucifixion), and the saints who were led to imitate his sacrifice (in this case, the Milanese Felix and Nabor, whose relics were brought from Lombardy at the same time as those of the Magi). This brief presentation of the iconography of the châsse of the Magi concludes with stress on the importance placed upon the Virtues there—theological and others, not only are they represented, they are also mentioned in the inscriptions.

The iconography of the châsse of Notre Dame of Tournai (completed in 1205)<sup>15</sup> is more elementary than that of the Cologne châsse. It is characterized by an exclusive description of narrative scenes, beginning on the long side with the Annunciation, followed by the Visitation and the Nativity. The Adoration is depicted on the pinion (fig. 308b) and on the other long side are images of the Baptism of Christ, the Presentation, and the Flight into Egypt. On the roof panels, one sees the Scourging, the Crucifixion, the Holy Women at the Empty Tomb, the *Noli me tangere*, the Descent into Limbo, and the Incredulity of Thomas. Finally on the second pinion, an enthroned Christ is surrounded by angels carrying the *arma Christi*. All of the iconography is shown in a narrative sequence and therefore the appearance of the Christ of the Parousia can be regarded as the goal of the history that began with the Annunciation, rather than as in a singular vision. The Last Judgment closes the history of Revelation.

The iconography of the châsse of Charlemagne, preserved in

<sup>15</sup> Rebecca Price Gowen, "Shrine of the Virgin in Tournai, I: Its Restorations and State of Conservation," *Aachener Kunstblätter* 47 (1976/7), pp. 111–76.

<sup>16</sup> *Karl der Große und sein Schrein in Aachen*. Eine Festschrift, ed. Hans Müllejan (Aachen, 1988); *Der Schrein Karls des Großen. Bestand und Sicherung*, 1982–1988 (Aachen,

Aachen (1195–1215),<sup>16</sup> (figs. 342, 346) evokes the “saint” contained there by his representation in the center of the principal pinion and through episodes of his life on the roof panels. On the principal pinion, Charles is flanked by Pope Leo III and Archbishop Turpin of Reims; with the blessing Christ represented in bust just above. On the sides of the roof, one is present at the vocation by the appeal of St. James, at the capture of Pamplona, the blessing of the knights, the miracle of the lances, at the battle against the Saracens, at the confession of Charles, and the miracle of the glove. The series of reliefs ends in Charles’ dedication of the Aachen chapel to the Virgin. On the long sides, the German emperors reputed to have succeeded Charles are illustrated enthroned alongside one another, following the example of the apostles, the Old Testament prophets, and the kings on the ch<sup>â</sup>sse of the Magi. It was understood: the iconography completely conflates the political and the religious spheres. Only the iconography of the secondary pinion takes another tone, depicting the Virgin and Child enthroned, surrounded by the archangels Michael and Gabriel, and surmounted by the three theological virtues.

The ch<sup>â</sup>sse of St. Maur of Florennes, preserved today in Becovned Teplou (c. 1220),<sup>17</sup> introduces in parallel Christ and St. Maur, enthroned on its pinions. On the long sides, one sees the apostles, some with attributes which allow us to identify them. In the spandrels are figurative enamels which present Old Testament scenes (well-known to historians of Rheno-Mosan art because of their typological aspects), including the worship of the golden calf, the sacrifice of Abraham, the burning bush, (fig. 310) the application of the *tau* sign, the brazen serpent, the blessing of the sons of Jacob, and the striking of the rock. On the sides of the roof, the reliefs show, in contrast, New Testament scenes on one side and hagiographic scenes on the other. They include episodes from the life of John the Baptist (the meeting with Herod, the imprisonment, the dance of Salome, the meeting of Herodius and Salome, Salome bringing the head of

1998); Rita Lejeune and Jacques Stiennon, *La Légende de Roland dans l’art du moyen âge* (Brussels, 1967), 1, pp. 169–77. Editors’ note: See Lisa Victoria Ciresei’s essay in this volume.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Didier, “La ch<sup>â</sup>sse de St. Maur de l’ancienne abbaye de Florennes,” *Annales de la Société archéologique de Namur*, 66 (1990), pp. 201–47; French version augmented by Robert Didier, “The Shrine of St. Maurus Rediscovered,” *Apollo* CXXVII/314 (April 1988), pp. 227–43.

John, his burial) and of the life of St. Maur (the blessing by St. Paul, preaching, baptism of St. Apollinaire, the blessing by St. Peter, the judgment, and decapitation). The alignment of the apostles, and the parallel between Christ and the saint whose relics are housed in the ch<sup>â</sup>sse are two conventional iconographic formulas. Yet, the spandrels and sides of the roofs present a quite different narrative iconography where, for the first time on a ch<sup>â</sup>sse, a cycle of Old Testament images is related to a New Testament cycle and to a cycle of the life of a local saint, with martyrdom being the unifying feature.

The iconography of the c. 1230 ch<sup>â</sup>sse of St. Potentin from Steinfeld, on the contrary, does not share this narrative richness. On its pinions one finds a conventional parallel set up between Christ and the saint whose relics the ch<sup>â</sup>sse honors, St. Potentin. The former is flanked by the Virgin and St. Augustine because Steinfeld was founded by the order of the Premonstratensians, whose way of life was inspired by the rule of Augustine. (fig. 311) The image of the latter is flanked by those his sons Felicius and Simplicius. On the long sides, St. Peter, St. Paul, and other apostles are shown standing rather than the more typical enthronement, after the example of the apostles on the lost ch<sup>â</sup>sse of St. Vincent (second quarter of the thirteenth century), formerly the glory of the collegiate church at Soignies.<sup>18</sup> On the sides of the roofs there are prophets in bust and angels. These latter replaced other prophets, now lost. Originally one saw not only Osee, Baruch, Jonas, Daniel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekial and Malachi, but also David, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham.

The ch<sup>â</sup>sse of St. Elisabeth of Marburg (1235–49)<sup>19</sup> is framed in the shape of a church with a transept. Two additional pinions provide two additional places of honor, allowing the presentation of two supplementary subjects, people or iconographic scenes. In fact, the usual pinions are occupied—as would be expected—by Christ and Elisabeth of Thuringia, the saint for whom the ch<sup>â</sup>sse served as the sarcophagus. (fig. 309a) The two other pinions introduce the Virgin and Child, and, in an innovative change, a Crucifixion (Christ on

<sup>18</sup> Albert Lemeunier, "La ch<sup>â</sup>sse et le reliquaire du chef de St. Vincent de Soignies. Deux monuments d'orfèvrerie médiévale disparus," in *Reliques et ch<sup>â</sup>sses de la collégiale de Soignies. Objets, cultes et traditions*, ed. Jacques Deveseleer (Soignies, 2001), pp. 129–43.

<sup>19</sup> Erika Dinkler-von Schubert, *Der Schrein der heiligen Elisabeth zu Marburg. Studien zur Schrein-Ikonographie* (Marburg an der Lahn, 1964).



the cross, flanked by the Virgin and St. John). (fig. 309b) Of course, the subject had already been used on the *châsse* of the Magi; but it was integrated there, in an ensemble of scenes, whereas here, it is of a different nature from images on the other three pinions. For the remainder, one finds once more the conventional apostles on the long sides, and the scenes of the life of the saint venerated in Marburg on the panels of the roof.

The *châsse* of Notre Dame in Aachen (finished in 1239)<sup>20</sup> reflects the same type of miniature building as that of Marburg, with its added transept, expanding the possibilities of the iconography. One would have expected Christ and Notre Dame, more precisely, the Virgin and Child, to occupy two of the pinions, but on the pinion opposite that of Christ, Pope Leo III, already seen on the *châsse* of Charlemagne, is shown enthroned. Similarly, we once again see Charlemagne, (figs. 344, 345) on the pinion opposite that of the Virgin. The iconography of the *châsse* of Notre Dame, however, is less unified than that of the first feretory from Aachen, which I described as politico-religious. On the long sides, the emperors gave their places to the apostles, and on the sides of the roofs, New Testament scenes were represented, rather than the more typical hagiographic scenes.<sup>21</sup> Here is depicted a cycle of the Infancy of Christ and a Passion, with the latter not rendered in a particularly meaningful fashion, including some of the less significant episodes of the economy of salvation and some inspired by the apocryphal literature, while other episodes, much richer in meaning, are cruelly omitted. One sees the bath of the Christ child, but none of the events suggesting Resurrection (such as the meeting of the holy women and the angel at the empty tomb, the *Noli me tangere*, the Ascension) is evoked. On the whole, the iconography of this *châsse* of Notre Dame is disparate and not very convincing theologically.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Fitschen, *Die Goldschmiedeplastik des Marienschreins im Aachener Dom. Eine stilgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998) and *Der Aachener Marienschrein. Eine Festschrift*, ed. Dieter P.J. Wynnands (Aachen, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Ernst Günther Grimme, "Die Ikonographie des Aachener Marienschreins," *Der Aachener Marienschrein* 2000, pp. 101–13.

<sup>22</sup> Benoît Van den Bossche, "Anmerkungen zu einer theologischen Betrachtungsweise des Marienschreines zu Aachen," *Der Aachener Marienschrein* 2000, pp. 101–13.

<sup>23</sup> Benoît Van den Bossche, "La *châsse* de St. Remacle à Stavelot: étude iconographique et stylistique des bas-reliefs et des statuettes," *Aachener Kunstblätter* 58 (1989/90), pp. 47–73; Benoît Van den Bossche, "La *châsse* de St. Remacle à

The ch<sup>â</sup>sse of St. Remaclus in Stavelot (c. 1240–65)<sup>23</sup> is more orthodox. (fig. 314) Curiously, there is no transept here, although it would have suited the iconography on the long sides. At the center of each side, there is a depiction of a local saint, who could have been featured on the transept pinions, but who is seen in the midst of the apostles. On one side is shown St. Remaclus, the main portion of whose relics is preserved in the feretory, and on the other is St. Lambert, his contemporary from Liège. Thus is conferred upon the local saints the status of apostles of the Ardennes and the lands along the Meuse and the Rhine Rivers. On the pinions, Christ and the Virgin and Child are presented, respectively, as the Creator and Master of the Universe, and the Daughter and Mother of God—interpretations reflected in the inscriptions.<sup>24</sup> To decorate the sides of the roofs, eight essential scenes of Revelation were selected: Annunciation, Nativity, Adoration, Presentation, Last Supper, Crucifixion, Holy Women at the empty tomb, and the Ascension.

It is necessary to return to Tournai to describe a new reliquary of grand dimensions, and of uncommon decorative richness, even more lavish than that of the Stavelotan feretory: the ch<sup>â</sup>sse of St. Eleutherius (completed in 1247).<sup>25</sup> Christ, accompanied by an angel holding the instruments of the Passion, is illustrated on the one of the pinions, while on the other is St. Eleutherius, holding in one hand a model of Tournai Cathedral, while trampling a hybrid beast underfoot. (fig. 312) He is accompanied by two angels who present him with a crown and the palm of the victory. On the long sides, eight apostles, flanked by angels represented in bust, occupy the niches. On the roof panels, three more apostles are shown—Philip, Matthew, and Thomas, while on one side is a personification of Synagoga, on the other Ecclesia, along with the archangel Gabriel,

Stavelot: étude des éléments décoratifs," *Bulletin de la Classe des Beaux-Arts de de l'Académie Royale de Belgique* V/1–6 (1994), pp. 109–49.

<sup>24</sup> SOLVVS AB ETERNO CREO CVNCTA CREATA GVBERNO and TV MICH I NATE PATER ET TV MICH I FILIA MATER. Benoît Van den Bossche, "Réflexions sur l'iconologie de la ch<sup>â</sup>sse de St. Remacle," *Bulletin de la Société d'Art et d'Histoire du Diocèse de Liège* LXII (1997), pp. 1–12.

<sup>25</sup> Anton von Euw, "Ch<sup>â</sup>sse de St. Eleuthère," in *Rhin-Meuse: Art et civilisation. 800–1400*, ed. Anton Legner (Brussels, 1972), p. 315; Jean-Marie Lequeux ed., "La ch<sup>â</sup>sse de St. Eleuthère Chef-d'œuvre original malgré les restaurations des XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles?" in *Mémoires de la Société royale d'Histoire et d'Archéologie de Tournai* I (1980), pp. 181–201.

the Virgin Mary, and the Baptist. As imposing and rich as the châsse of St. Eleutherius is, its iconography is still conventional (with the parallel between Christ and the venerated saint, the presence of the apostles, and the Virgin), but it is curiously arranged with (the apostles partly presented in the niches on the long sides, and partly on the roof).

The iconography of the châsse of Sts. Ode and George from Amay (c. 1235)<sup>26</sup> is intriguing in another way. While the reliquary is of modest size, its iconography is quite innovative. Of course, one finds the requisite apostles on the long sides, but each of the two pinions is occupied by a standing saint: Ode and George. Thus Christ and the Virgin do not appear on the reliquary of the collegiate church of Amay, instead its iconography is dominated by the hagiographic discourse, with scenes of the life of St. Ode on one side of the roof,<sup>27</sup> scenes of the life of St. George on the other.<sup>28</sup> (fig. 313)

Another châsse of modest size which deserves to be considered here, because of its remarkable iconography, is the châsse of St. Symmetrus in Lierneux (c. 1250–70).<sup>29</sup> (fig. 317) This intriguing iconography is all the more remarkable since, from a technical point of view, the reliquary is far from perfect; one could even say that it was created by mediocre goldsmiths. On the pinions one sees the Virgin and Child and the Crucifixion—thus fitting the spirit of the times. (fig. 316) On the long sides are the standing apostles. To be honest, it is only the iconography of the roof panels which is distinctive. In spite of certain difficulties in reading the panels due to their poor condition, one can recognize three scenes directly relating to the worship of St. Symmetrus and three scenes summarizing the “Triumph of St. Remaclus.”<sup>30</sup> (fig. 339) The first show (or showed)

<sup>26</sup> Albert Lemeunier, “La châsse de sainte Ode à Amay,” in *Trésors de la collégiale d’Amay*, ed. Thomas Delarue (Amay, 1989), pp. 49–79.

<sup>27</sup> The charity of St. Ode, the piety of St. Ode, her death, and her funeral.

<sup>28</sup> St. George charging the dragon, the martyrdom on the cross, and the martyrdom by beheading.

<sup>29</sup> Benoît Van den Bossche, “La châsse de St. Symètre,” in *Patrimoine religieux du pays de Lierneux*, ed. Benoît Van den Bossche (Stavelot, 1992), pp. 28–43.

<sup>30</sup> The “Triumph of St. Remaclus” refers to an episode from the history of the Principality of Stavelot-Malmedy. This was put into play by the monks of Stavelot returning to Liège with the relics of Remaclus, their founding saint, in order to convince the emperor of their supremacy while he was on sojourn in the Mosan city.

the martyrdom of Symmetrus, the exhumation of his relics, and the deposit of those relics in Lierneux.<sup>31</sup> As for the "Triumph of St. Remaclus," it is pictured by the voyage of the monks of Stavelot to Liege with his relics, the ultimate petition to the emperor whereby a miracle is achieved, and the veneration of the relics of Remaclus. The tone is thus, as on the ch<sup>â</sup>sse of Amay, hagiographic, but a displacement was carried out: the narration is concerned, beyond the saint himself, with his cult and that of St. Remaclus.

It is necessary to finish this too-brief survey with the ch<sup>â</sup>sse of St. Gertrude of Nivelles (1272–98).<sup>32</sup> Following the architectural examples of the Aachen ch<sup>â</sup>sse of Notre Dame and ch<sup>â</sup>sse of St. Elisabeth, this building is provided with a transept, thus creating four pinions. Christ and the Virgin and Child are represented on the pinions of the nave, while St. Gertrude and a Crucifixion scene are depicted on the pinions of the transept. (fig. 315) The Marburg formula is thus reprised, with slight modifications: the inversion between the Virgin and the local saint on one of the pinions of the nave and one of the pinions of the transept, that the Virgin is standing, following the example of Gothic Madonnas, and that the local saint is crowned by angels. The iconography of the roof panels of the ch<sup>â</sup>sse of Nivelles can also be compared with the ch<sup>â</sup>sse of Marburg as the subject matter is, on both sides, hagiographic. However, the history of the Nivelles abbess is characterized on her ch<sup>â</sup>sse by a multiplication of miracle scenes,<sup>33</sup> while the history of Elisabeth is depicted on her reliquary as dominated by testimony to her charity, piety, and morality. At Marburg, one witnesses, for example, the meal given by Elisabeth to the hungry, or her taking the habit; at Nivelles, one sees, on the other hand, "the miracle of the ball of fire," or the hanging of the devil by Gertrude herself.

<sup>31</sup> The relief of the deposit of the relics at Lierneux has unfortunately disappeared.

<sup>32</sup> *Schatz aus den Trümmern. Der Silberschrein von Nivelles und die europäische Hochgotik*, ed. Hiltrud Westermann-Angerhausen (Cologne, 1995/6).

<sup>33</sup> Christina Ceulemans, Robert Didier, Christiane Raynaud, "Die Ikonographie des Schreins der hl. Gertrud," in *Schatz aus den Trümmern. Der Silberschrein von Nivelles*, pp. 208–24; Bruno Boerner, "Zur Interpretation des ikonographischen Programms am Schrein der hl. Gertrud von Nivelles," *Schatz aus den Trümmern. Der Silberschrein von Nivelles*, pp. 225–33.

*Recurrences and Originalities*

As succinct as my presentation of certain Rheno-Mosan châsses of the thirteenth century has been, the recurrences and the iconographic originalities can be highlighted. Christ, the Virgin and the apostles are represented in an almost systematic way—and amongst them, the saints whose relics the châsses honor. The angels and the archangels, as well as the prophets, are less-frequently illustrated. As for the narrative scenes, they represent various types, and the importance assigned to them is variable. In this light, we should reconsider all these figures, and revisit their subjects.

First, let us examine the isolated representations of Christ in Glory. Almost all the châsses considered reserve a central place for Him. In general, the niche contained on one of the two pinions shelters Christ, who sits on a throne whose architectural character is more or less elaborate. Even when, late in the century, the majority of the characters are illustrated standing (on the châsse of Nivelles, in particular), the iconographer still wanted Christ enthroned. One notes that, depending on the details chosen, this or that quality of the Christ in Glory was highlighted. On the principal pinions of the châsse of the Magi and of the châsse of St. Eleutherius, Christ is enthroned as a "Judge," furnished with the instruments of the Passion,<sup>34</sup> whereas the Christ of the châsse of St. Remaclus is represented as the "Master of the Universe," following the example of the Aachen châsse of the Virgin.<sup>35</sup> Once the recurrence of the representations of the glorious Christ is underlined in the iconography of the Rheno-Mosan châsses of the thirteenth century, it is necessary to point out an evolution of nuance, related to the appearance of Christ on the cross. On the pinions of the châsse of Marburg, one sees, a Crucifixion made pendant to an enthroned Christ. This formula will be reprised on the châsse of Nivelles while, later, on the feretory of Lierneux,

<sup>34</sup> Christ as "Judge" as appears on the tympana of the great Gothic cathedrals where his function as judge is rooted in his experience of the Passion.

<sup>35</sup> On the châsse of St. Remaclus at Stavelot as on the châsse of the Virgin at Aachen, Christ holds the universe in his hand, symbolized by a globe. In both cases, the beautiful epigraphic strips also affirm that "He governs all things." Van den Bossche, "Réflexions sur l'iconologie de la châsse de St. Remacle," pp. 10-12. Editors' note: for discussion of the imagery associated with the Virgin, see Lisa Victoria Ciresei's essay in this volume.

Christ on the Cross replaces the Christ in Glory. Finally, on the châsse of Amay, Christ is represented neither enthroned nor suffering, to the extent that one wonders about the theological relevance of the ensemble.

Like Christ, the Virgin and Child is practically omnipresent in the iconography of the Rheno-Mosan châsses of the thirteenth century. Its absence among the statuettes of the châsses of Florennes and Amay is surprising. One will remember here that, on the châsse of Charlemagne, the Virgin and Child occupy the entire niche of one of the two pinions, whereas in the opposite one, Christ is only illustrated in bust, above Charlemagne. The thirteenth century is often indicated as the "Marian century" *par excellence*; the place which Notre Dame occupies on the Rheno-Mosan châsses of the era confirms the assertion.

It is interesting to note that Our Lady is initially represented as the *Sedes Sapientiae*, according to the iconographic canon of the Romanesque epoch. Thus it appears on the pinion of the châsse of Charlemagne, where the Virgin becomes "the throne of Christ" and the physiognomic features of the Child are clearly those of an adult. Gradually, however, the *Sedes Sapientiae* is transformed into the Gothic Madonna, where, on the pinion of the châsse of St. Gertrude, she stands (as she does henceforward), holding the Child as a mother would hold her baby—like the statues of the Virgin and Child who welcome the faithful at the entry of large cathedrals. In this context, the originality of Nicolas of Verdun, who, at the dawn of the epoch taken into account here, was reluctant to isolate the Virgin from a narrative context. On the châsse of Cologne as on that of Tournai, she is an actress in the Adoration of the Magi.

As with the Virgin, the apostles are also, initially, sitting (on the châsse of the Magi and the châsse of Stavelot, in particular), before being shown standing (on the châsse of Steinfeld or the châsse of Lierneux). They are seated on the long sides as Christ and the Virgin are enthroned on the pinions, acting as celestial court for the King and Queen. Thus they surround the saint whose relics are preserved in the châsse, adopting him, so to speak and the saint is regarded as a new apostle. The iconography of the châsse of St. Remaclus shows it particularly well: a statuette of St. Remaclus and another of St. Lambert were inserted among those of the apostles. A little later, on the long sides of the châsse of St. Gertrude, several saints who lived after the time of the apostles are numbered among them,

constituting an even broader assembly, with the majority of these apostles provided with attributes evoking their martyrdom. (fig. 315) Again, in this context, the originality of Nicolas of Verdun should be stressed, as he spurns the display of the apostles on the Tournai châsse of the Virgin, whereas he put the apostles and the prophets in parallel on the châsse of the Magi. The originality of the iconographers of the châsse of Charlemagne is at least equal to this, since the emperors replace the apostles there (fig. 342)—it is at once startling, directly comprehensible, and audacious.

The angels and the archangels are sometimes pointedly present, on the châsses of Aachen, for example, or on that of St. Gertrude, and sometimes astonishingly absent, such as on the châsse of Marburg or that of Stavelot, among others. In certain cases, their functions are clearly specified, such as when they hold the luminaries in their hands on the châsse of Nivelles. In other cases, their presence is not justified in such a way. Generally, the presence of the angels and archangels confer on the iconography a super-terrestrial dimension, as with the archangels Michael and Gabriel flanking the *Sedes Sapientiae* on the Marian pinion of the châsse of Charlemagne, where they situate the apparition in the beyond.

When the prophets are illustrated on the Rheno-Mosan châsses of the thirteenth century, it is not only a question of showing the authors of the prophetic books, but also of illustrating the other great Old Testament figures: Abraham, Moses, or David, to cite only a few. This very broad interpretation of the term "prophet" echoes its contemporary meaning in the thirteenth century. Like the angels and the archangels, these prophets in the broad sense of the term are missing on certain feretories (on the châsses of St. Elisabeth, St. Eleutherius, and of Stavelot), but they enrich other iconographic ensembles. There they are represented standing (on the long sides of the châsse of the Magi) or in bust (as on the sides of the roof of the châsse of Steinfeld). On the châsse of Florennes, they are the protagonists of well-known narrative scenes, but this is exceptional. There it is surprising, when one knows the succession of scenes like the sacrifice of Abraham, Moses in front of the burning bush, or the blessing of Jacob on other Rheno-Mosan metalwork.<sup>36</sup> Whatever

<sup>36</sup> One thinks notably, of the Portable Altar of Stavelot (Bruxelles, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire) or the foot of the Cross of St. Omer (Saint-Omer, Musée de l'Hôtel Sandelin).

way the prophets are illustrated on the châsses of the thirteenth century, they are represented because, by their acts and their words, they announced Christ—his life, his Passion, and his Resurrection.

There is very little space given to personifications<sup>37</sup> on the Rheno-Mosan châsses of the thirteenth century, which is surprising, especially when one considers that allegorical figures are frequently depicted on other Rheno-Mosan metalwork, such as the female busts enamelled on the Pope Alexander head reliquary. One sees Patientia and the theological virtues on the châsse of the Magi; these last are also illustrated on the feretory of Charlemagne. But there are exceptions which prove the rule, such as Sol and Luna represented on the châsse of the Magi, on that of Charlemagne, and on that of Marburg. Let us recall finally that Synagoga and Ecclesia flank the Crucifixion on the châsse of St. Remaclus, and that they are represented as isolated figures on the roof of the châsse from St. Eleutherius. Yet, on the whole, they do not recur.

With regard to the iconography of the saints whose relics are preserved in the châsses, we notice first of all that the place reserved for them varies. In certain cases, the saint is represented on one of the pinions as well as on the roof (on the châsse of Charlemagne), while in other cases, it is almost absent (on the châsse of St. Remaclus, where he is evoked by means of only one statuette on one of the long sides, without ever being highlighted). Two types of images must be distinguished: either the saint is isolated or is an actor in a narrative scene. If the saint is isolated, he is illustrated standing or enthroned, in a niche where he is the main occupant of the space (such as Eleutherius on one of the pinions of his châsse). (fig. 312) Within the framework of a narrative scene, one sees an episode of the *vita* (on the châsse of Marburg) or of the *miracula* (on the châsse of Nivelles). (fig. 315) With time, the necessity for, and the effects of, the worship rendered to the saint are highlighted (on the châsse of St. Symmetrus). (figs. 317, 339)

When hagiographic scenes are not present on Rheno-Mosan châsse of the thirteenth century, one might see some New Testament scenes represented, but true cycles are rare. Only the châsse of the Magi,

<sup>37</sup> By the term "personification," I mean here, as well, the personifications properly designated, that is to say, the human figures embodying intangible realities, that these figures hold before them a medallion on which an inscription or a motif is engraved, designating an exemplar of this type.



those of Notre Dame of Tournai (fig. 308) and of Aachen, (fig. 344) and that of Stavelot (fig. 314) features such a cycle. The cycle of the Cologne feretory, (fig. 308) only partly preserved, is without doubt the most interesting, with its description of epiphanic scenes and episodes recalling the Passion. These scenes are enriched by their setting into an eschatological perspective by indirect reference to the images from the Apocalypse. Compared to this ensemble of New Testament scenes, that of the Aachen ch<sup>â</sup>sse of Notre Dame, which oscillates between a conventional account (curiously incomplete) and a penchant for anecdote, is mediocre, while the iconography of the ch<sup>â</sup>sse of Stavelot displays an almost tedious orthodoxy.

It is astonishing that the iconographers of the Rheno-Mosan ch<sup>â</sup>sses of the thirteenth century had renounced the typological vein which, in the previous century, inspired rich and stimulating ensembles of images; the images evoking the Old Testament episodes were compared with images that foretold the New Testament stories, the Old and the New Testament were thus made to echo one another.<sup>38</sup> On the ch<sup>â</sup>sses reviewed here, the Old Testament and the New Testament are simply not connected. On the subject of the New Testament iconography of the ch<sup>â</sup>sses of the thirteenth century, it is important to note the emergent focus on a very specific subject, which is thus isolated: the Crucifixion. This interesting phenomenon reveals a transition is effected from an iconography of the glorious Christ to an iconography of Christ suffering.

### *Programs*

After reviewing the various subjects, characters, and scenes which constitute the iconography of the Rheno-Mosan ch<sup>â</sup>sses of the thirteenth century, it is appropriate to remember that the iconography of each must also be considered as a whole. Thus certain ch<sup>â</sup>sses present remarkable iconographic programs, while others appear to be merely unreasoned accumulations of images. An ensemble of images should be described as "program" only if those selected were juxtaposed according to a regulating idea, which confers a true coher-

<sup>38</sup> Again, one thinks of the Portable Altar of Stavelot and of the foot of the Cross of St. Omer.

ence on the whole. Thus the group of images offered on the châsse of Notre Dame in Aachen appears incoherent, so much so that it is difficult to articulate in the same discourse the glorious Christ, the *Sedes Sapientiae*, the apostles, a narrative cycle, the Emperor Charlemagne, (fig. 345) and Pope Leo III. By contrast, the iconography of the châsse of St. Remaclus is homogeneous, as is the châsse of Notre Dame of Tournai.

Among the programs, some are particularly elaborate, while others are much simpler. The program of the châsse of the Magi is particularly rich, where the scenes obey not only the chronology of the account, but also display an interpretative will. The choice and juxtaposition of the scenes and the subjects of the principal pinion originate in the idea of the Epiphany, the revelation of glorious Christ. The secondary pinion, on the other hand, focuses on the Passion and the revelation of the suffering Christ, which dominates the message. These New Testament scenes are put in perspective within the framework that evokes the Apocalypse on the long sides. Other particularly complex programs include the anomalous châsse of Charlemagne and the châsse of St. Maur, for which the unifying idea is martyrdom. Some very simple programs are constituted by the ensemble of the statuettes and reliefs as on châsse of Steinfeld or that of Stavelot.

Among the programs, one can distinguish some rather theological approaches (such that of the châsse of the Magi), from the rather hagiographic themes (the châsse of Sts. Ode and George), (fig. 313) and a rather politico-religious program (the châsse of Charlemagne). (figs. 342, 346) Certain groups are concerned with different genres: an iconographic ensemble like that of the châsse of Notre Dame of Aachen consists of a rather theological cycle (the narrative sequence of the roof, Christ, the Virgin and Child, and the apostles) to which a political tenor was conferred (with the presence of Charlemagne and Leo III), (fig. 346) while the iconographic matter of the châsse of St. Gertrude vacillates between the theological presentation of things (Christ enthroned opposed to Christ suffering, the testimony of the apostles and the saints, Gertrude put in parallel with the Virgin) and their hagiographic presentation (scenes of miracles on the roof). (fig. 315)

*Conclusion*

Let us consider that, in a general way, any iconography consists on one hand of vocabulary—the subjects, figures, scenes represented—and on the other hand of syntax—the way according to which these subjects, these figures, these scenes are articulated, the ones with the others. At the end of this work, the iconographic vocabulary used on the Rheno-Mosan châsses of the thirteenth century initially seems composed of a conventional vocabulary, anchored in tradition. Indeed, the Christ in Majesty, the Virgin and Child, the college of the apostles are illustrated in a quasi-systematic way, and when New Testament scenes are represented, they are almost always the same episodes. However, this assertion should be refined by two remarks. First, if the vocabulary is largely anchored in tradition, it does not mean that all the subjects employed by previous Rheno-Mosan metalworkers were reprised—far from it. On the châsses reviewed here, one sees a limited number of biblical scenes and the rare use of personifications. Second, gradually, the conventional subjects presented underwent an evolution. With time, the image of Christ enthroned was supplanted by Christ on the cross, and finally, on the châsse of St. Symmetrus, the Crucifixion omits any representation of the glorious Christ. With time, the Virgin as *Sedes Sapientiae* becomes a Madonna. With time, the enthroned apostles of the celestial court become martyr-witnesses of the same cast as the saints whose relics are preserved in the châsses. Let me emphasize here that the vocabulary of the châsse of Charlemagne in Aachen is largely atypical; the work has the effect of a meteorite.

The hagiographic vocabulary used on the châsses studied was also evolving. Admittedly, it goes without saying the scenes represented vary from one saint to another as the stories are varied. But some viewpoints taken can be ascertained. If, on certain “hagiographic” châsses, the choices of the iconographers were determined by the choice of the episodes echoing the *vitae*, other châsses present episodes pointing out the *miracula*. Lastly, the latest “hagiographic” châsses also evoke the cultic practices for which the relics were the object; the iconography of the châsse no longer relates only to its contents, but also to the châsse itself, the container.

Now let us consider the syntax of the Rheno-Mosan châsses of the thirteenth century. It was understood that it was dominated by a basic recurrent structure: Christ, the Virgin and Child, and apos-

bles. But beyond this recurring structure, which is almost invariably used, the variety of the formulas suggested is very significant. From this point of view, there are no two identical châsses. The chaise of the Magi, that of Notre Dame of Tournai, that of St. Eleutherius, or that of St. Symmetrus are isolated works. It should be recognized however that re-groupings because of certain common points can be carried out between certain feretories: the châsses of Elisabeth and Gertrude, for example, each present four pinions occupied by Christ enthroned, a Virgin and Child, a Crucifixion, and the holy one whose relics are in the reliquary; while on the roof panels of the two châsses, narrative cycles evoke, on both sides, the acts and deeds of the saint.

In posing the question of the syntax implemented in the iconographic discourses contained on the Rheno-Mosan châsses of the thirteenth century, one returns to the determination already made above: the differences in quality between the iconographic ensembles that the châsses carry are considerable. Certain sets are elaborate and intelligent programs, others are very simple, others are nothing more than re-groupings of incoherent and superficial images, and others, while they may not have very convincing programs on the intellectual level, are still attractive.

Certain iconographic sets have a universal import while others are entirely impregnated with local history and tradition. If it is necessary to conclude, it is perhaps by stressing that the first châsses considered relate to the first type, whereas the last châsses are of the second type. I thus observe that, over time, the pilgrimage to which the chaise gives rise—its saint and the cult developed around him—has an increasingly larger impact on the iconography. This iconography loses its intellectual force, but it becomes more stirring.

**PART VII**  
**CULTS AND CULT PRACTICES: EVOLUTION AND**  
**EXPRESSION**

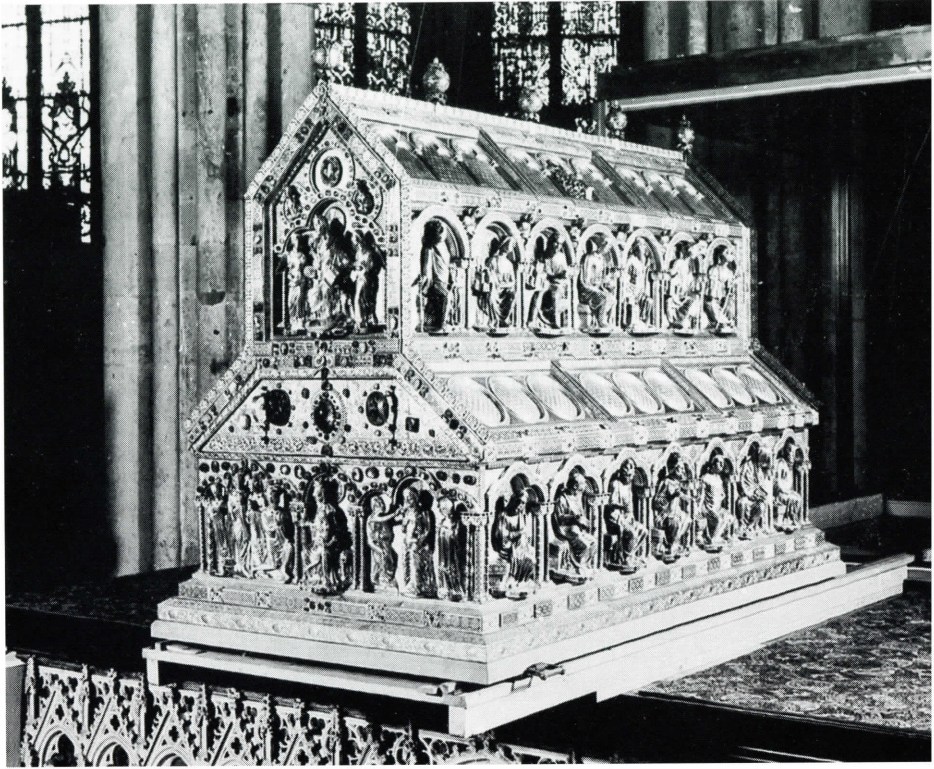


Fig. 308a. Nicolas of Verdun, *Shrine of the Three Kings* (1180-1200). Cologne Cathedral. (Photo: Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, Marburg)



Fig. 308b. Nicolas of Verdun, *Châsse of Notre Dame* (1205). Tournai. Detail: one of the two small sides: Adoration of the Magi. Tournai Cathedral. (Photo: A.C.L., Brussels)



Fig. 309a. *Châsse of St. Elisabeth* (1238). Marburg. Small side, with St. Elisabeth. (Photo Anne Münchow, Aachen)



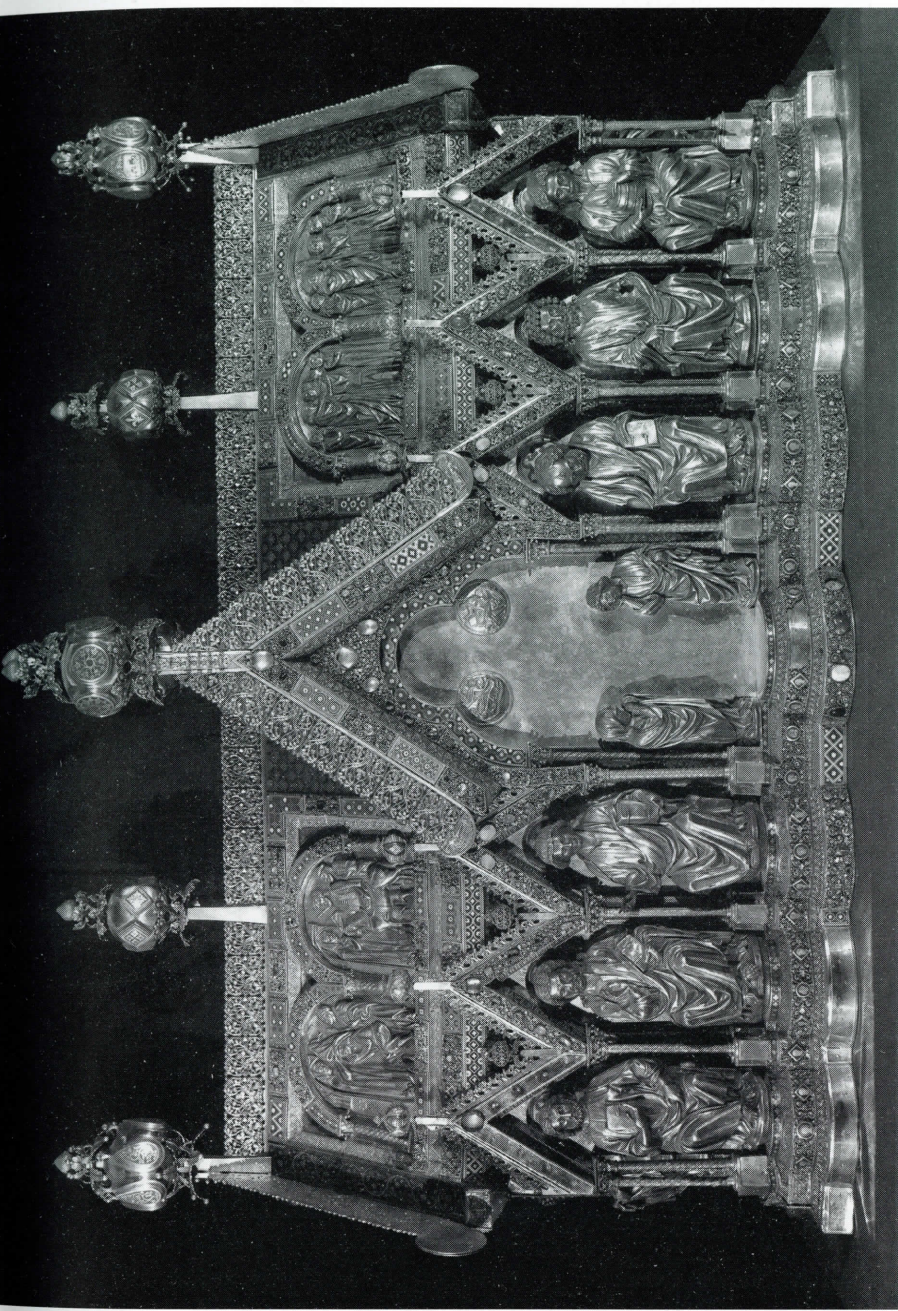


Fig. 309b. *Châsse of St. Elisabeth* (1238). Marburg. Long side, with Crucifixion.

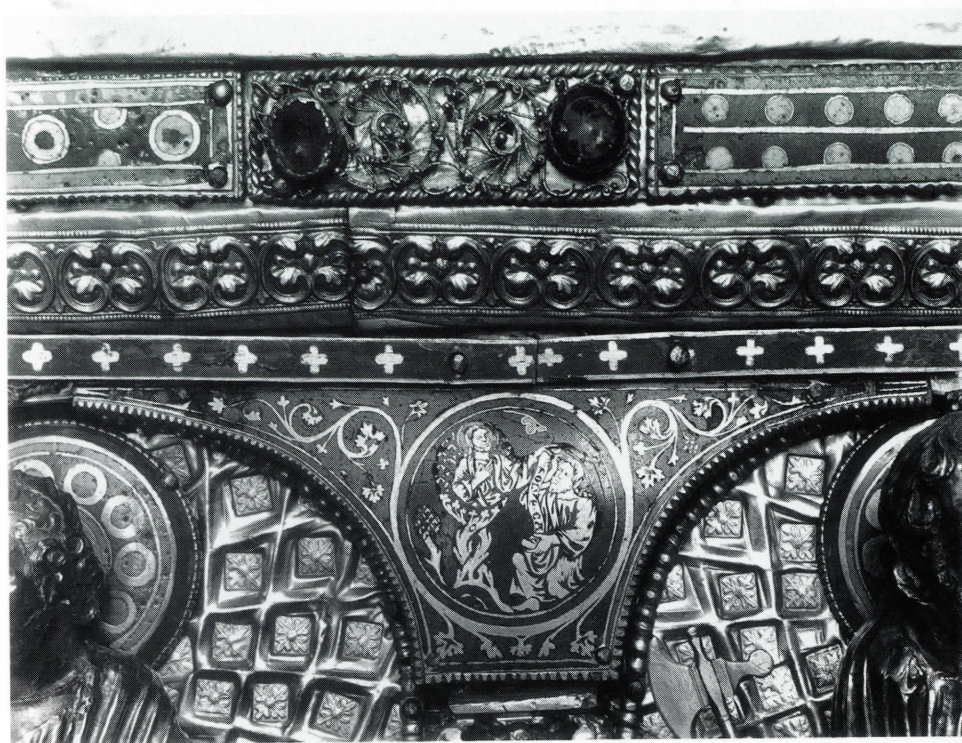


Fig. 310. *Châsse of St. Maur*. Detail: spandrel on one long side: The Burning Bush. Château Becov nad Teplou. (Photo: Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, Marburg)



Fig. 311. *Châsse of St. Potentin*. Detail: one of the two small sides: Christ flanked by the Virgin and St. Augustine. (Photo: Albert Lemeunier, Lille)



Fig. 312. *Châsse of St. Eleutherius* (compl. 1247). Detail: one small side: St. Eleutherius. Tournai Cathedral. (Photo: A.C.L. Brussels)

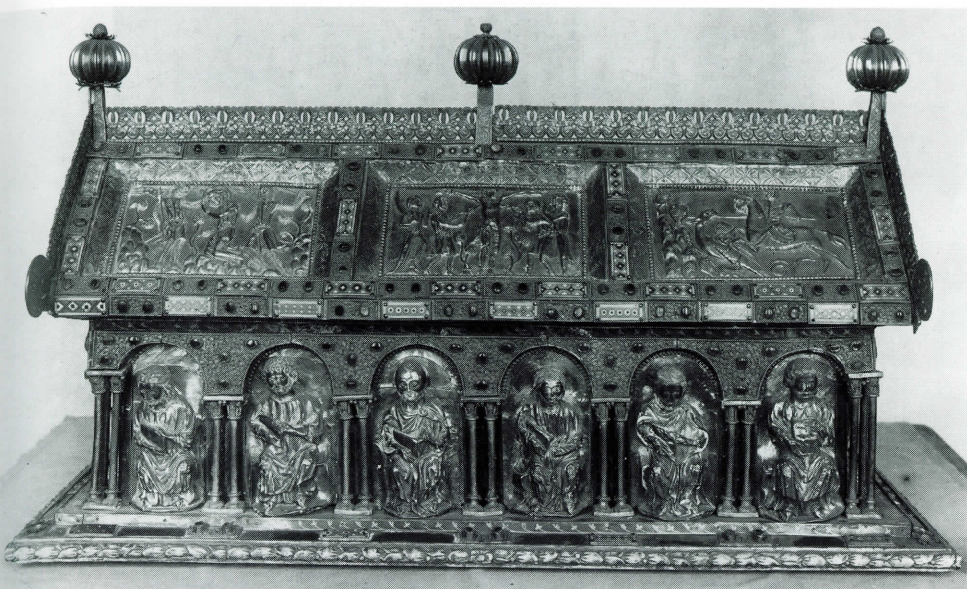


Fig. 313. *Châsse of Sts. Ode and George*. Detail: one long side: eight apostles, scenes from the life of George. Amay, Collegiate Church. (Photo: A.C.L. Brussels)



Fig. 314. *Châsse of St. Remaclus* (1240-65). Stavelot. Long side, with St. Remaclus amidst the Apostles. Roof panels with scenes of the Passion of Christ. (Photo: A.C.L. Brussels)



Fig. 315a. *Châsse of St. Gertrude* (1272-90). Detail: one long side: eight apostles and other saints, scenes from the life of Gertrude.  
(Photo: A.C.L. Brussels)

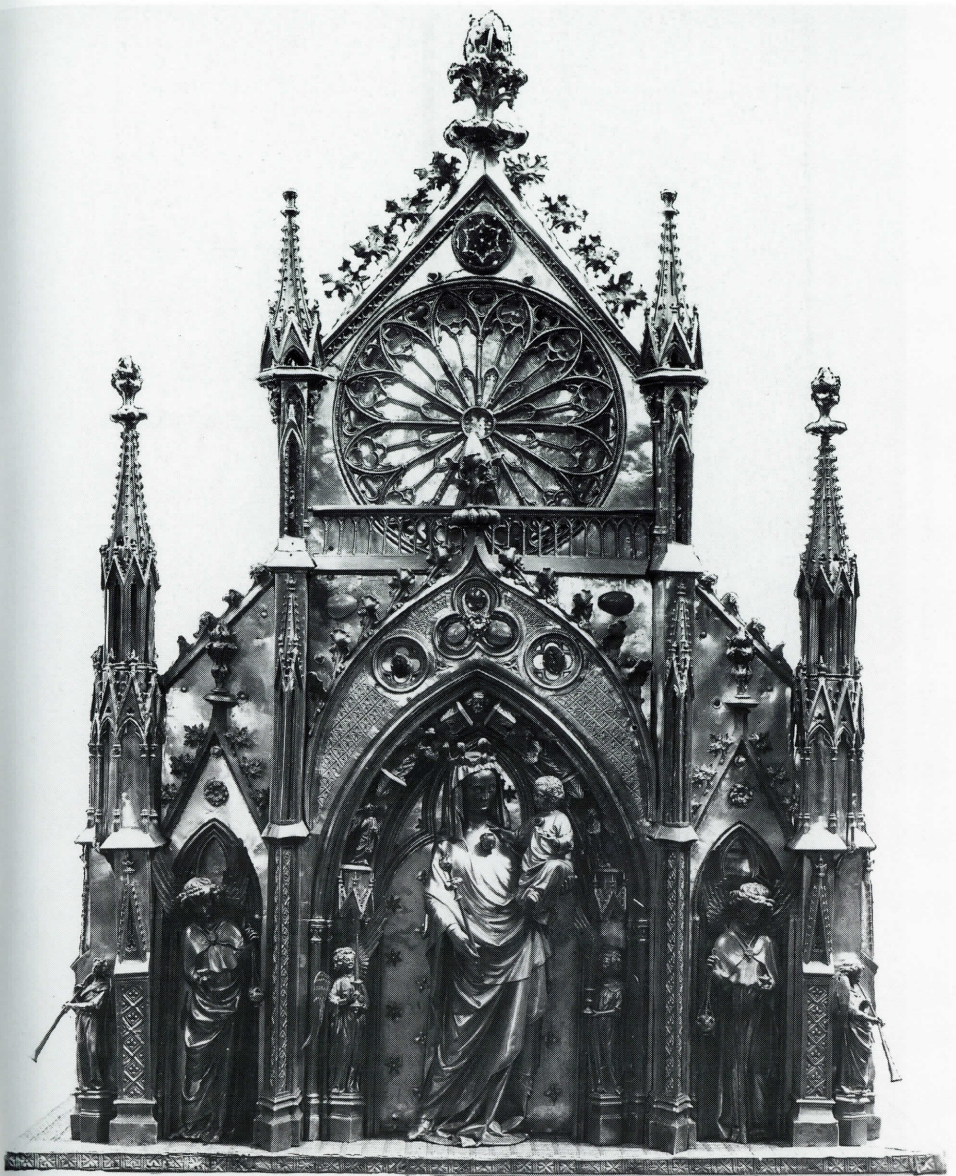


Fig. 315b. *Châsse of St. Gertrude* (1272-90). Detail: small side: Virgin and Child. (Photo: A.C.L. Brussels)

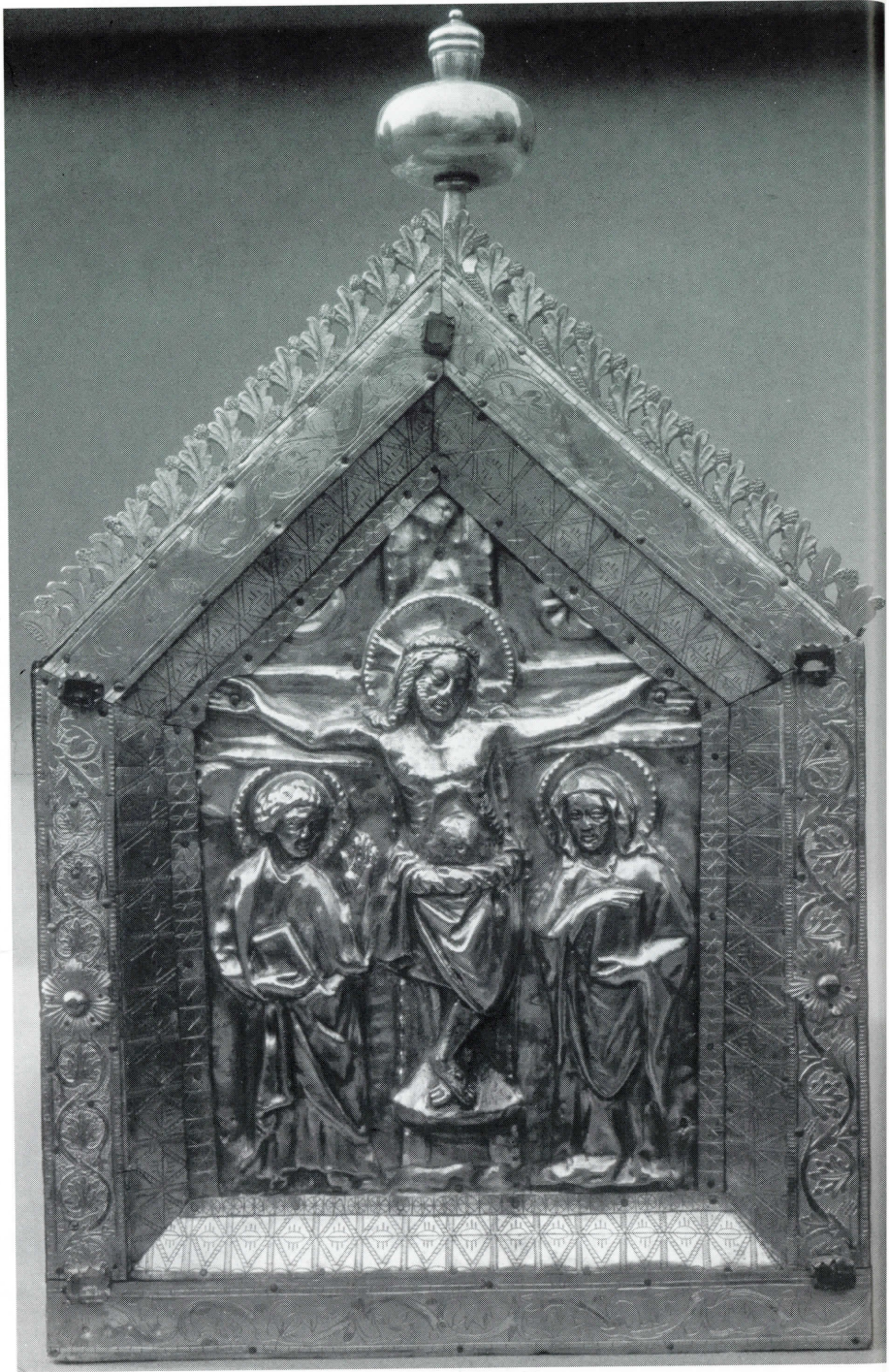


Fig. 316. *Châsse of St. Symmetrus* (1250-70). Detail: one small side: Crucifixion. Paris church, Lierneux. (Photo: Pierre Gabriel, Stavelot)



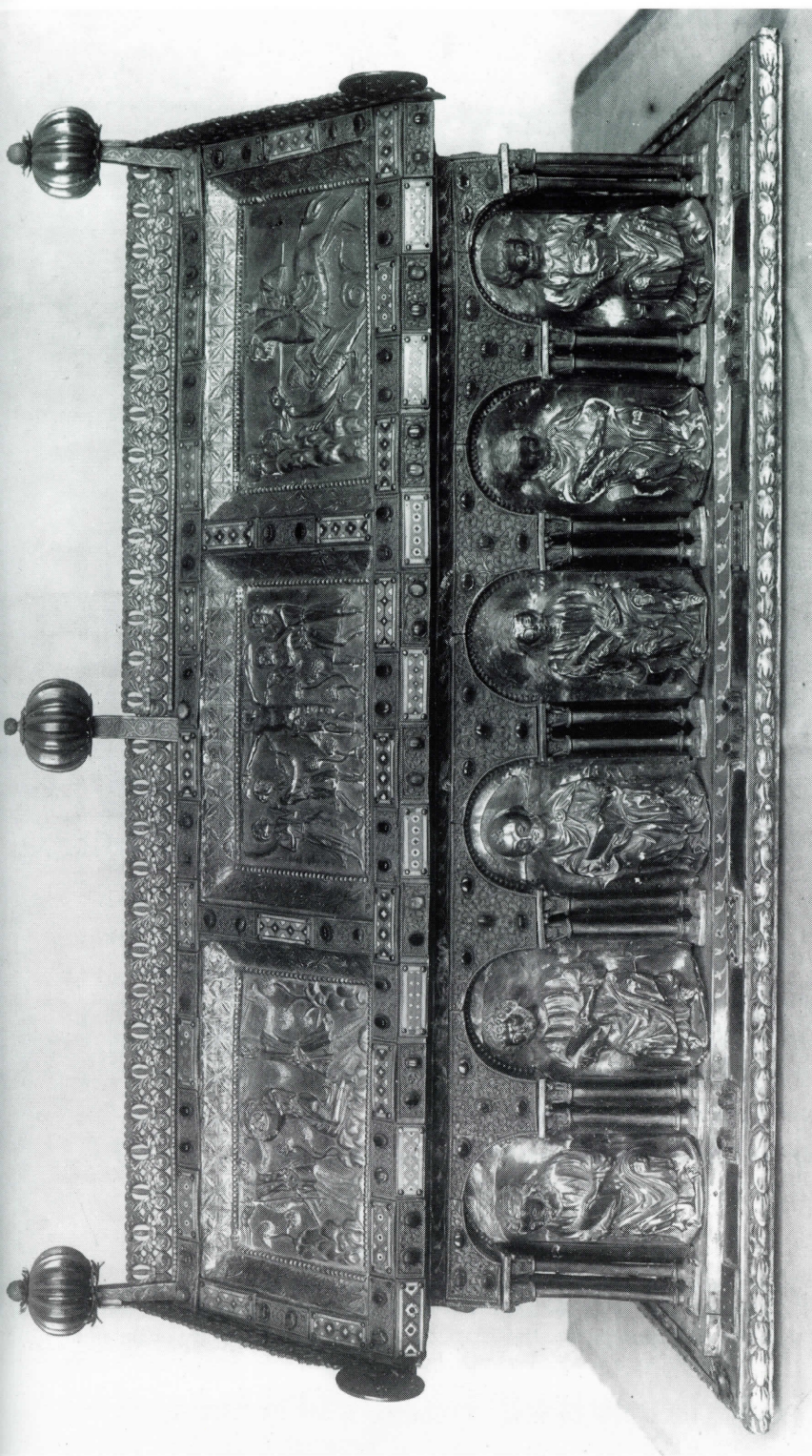


Fig. 317. *Châsse of St. Symmetrus*. Detail: one long side: six apostles, scenes linked to the death and the cult of St. Symmetrus. Parish church, Liernieux. (Photo: Pierre Gabriel, Stavelot)



Fig. 318. "First Ostension: Display of the Celestial Funerary Cloth and Pilgrimage Staff of Servatius," *Xylographic Book of St. Servatius* (c. 1461), Maastricht. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale Albert I<sup>er</sup>, Cabinet des Estamps, ms 18.972, p. 21. (Photo: Royal Library of Belgium, Cabinet des Estamps, by permission)

# STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL AND REFORMATION TRADITIONS

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VOLUME CIV

SARAH BLICK AND RITA TEKIPPE

ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF LATE MEDIEVAL PILGRIMAGE  
IN NORTHERN EUROPE AND THE BRITISH ISLES



ULg - BGPhL-Sc. hist.



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