

# *Bulletin of*

## **THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS OF THE CITY OF DETROIT**

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**HEAD OF A BEARDED OLD MAN  
BY REMBRANDT, DUTCH, 1606-1669**

*Gift of Mrs. Ellen Stevens Whitall, Mrs. Annie Stevens Woodruff  
and William P. Stevens, in memory of Henry G. Stevens, 1942*

## IN MEMORIAM—EISEL B. FORD

THE City of Detroit was joined by the whole nation in mourning the loss of Edsel B. Ford, whose untimely death on May 26, 1943, brought sorrow to a multitude of friends, associates and acquaintances.

Among his many responsibilities in high places, Mr. Ford was President of the Detroit Institute of Arts. He was appointed May 16, 1925, by Mayor John W. Smith as one of the four members of its governing body, the Arts Commission, and since May 5, 1930, served as its President.

In nearly two decades of continuous service as Arts Commissioner and as President, he devoted himself to enlarging the public usefulness of the Art Institute. From the outset he gave generously to the collection many of its outstanding masterpieces. His benefactions not only enriched every department of the museum, but gave impetus and sustenance to new activities which broadened the scope of its work.

To his interest in art he brought a sensitive and sympathetic understanding, a quiet but effective enthusiasm. He was always thoughtful and considerate of others, sometimes to the point of self-effacement, and it was this quality which so endeared him to all who knew him.

In the death of Edsel B. Ford, the Detroit Institute of Arts has suffered the loss of a capable, generous and steadfast friend and benefactor who gave many years of devoted service to the City of Detroit as Arts Commissioner and President.

C.H.B.

## HEAD OF A BEARDED OLD MAN BY REMBRANDT

THE *Head of a Bearded Old Man*<sup>1</sup> by Rembrandt, which has hung for many years as a loan in our Dutch gallery, has been presented to the Museum in memory of Henry G. Stevens by his brother, William G. Stevens, and his sisters, Mrs. Ellen Stevens Whittall and Mrs. Annie Stevens Woodruff. It thus becomes part of the public wealth of the city as a permanent tribute to a man whose memory is very much alive in the minds of all who knew him.

It is a picture that has been published and exhibited many times since it was found, nearly a quarter of a century ago, in the possession of a private family near Goslar in Germany. It belongs to the last years of Rembrandt's activity in Leyden, 1630-31, immediately before his move to Amsterdam. The old man is a model whom Rembrandt represented many times both in portraits and in Biblical compositions. There is a portrait of him in Cassel (1630), quite similar to ours, and one of about the same time painted by Rembrandt's friend Lievens in the Ernesto G. Fabbri collection, New York. Rembrandt used him also as Jeremiah in *Jeremiah*

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*Mourning for the Destruction of Jerusalem* (1630), formerly in the Rasch collection, Stockholm, and as the apostle Paul in pictures in Vienna and the J. H. Harjes collection, Paris. He also appears in numerous drawings and etchings of this period.

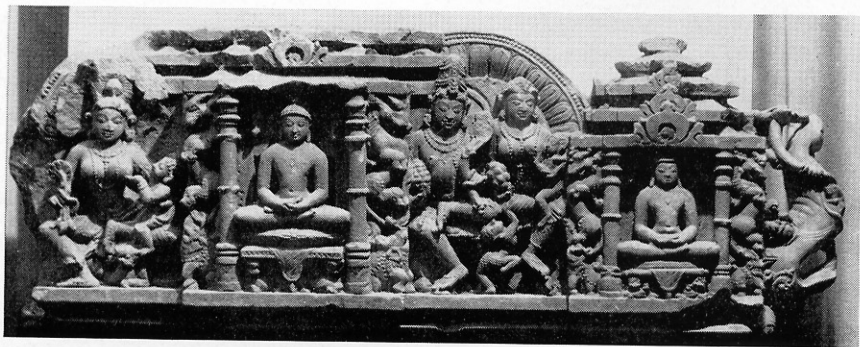
This picture is one of a group of Rembrandt's early works, painted in 1629 to 1632, which are signed with the monogram RHL — *Rembrandus Hermanni Leydensis*, the Latinized name by which he had been entered on the University rolls. At this time Rembrandt was in very close companionship with the painter Jan Lievens, his friend and fellow pupil under Pieter Lastman. Lievens was at Leyden in 1629-30 and returned to Holland from England 1631-32. Lievens' pictures at this time are in a style close to that of the young Rembrandt, so that it was once mistakenly suggested that the RHL pictures were joint products of a common workshop. They represent, however, a different form of relationship.

Constantin Huygens, the great Dutch statesman who was the secretary to the Prince of Orange, was an admirer of both artists and in 1630 wrote his famous comparison of the two. Rembrandt, he said, sought to obtain a grand effect by means of little things in a small area while Lievens had a sense of the grandiose and the magnificent which was pushed even to the point of the exaggeration of large figures. This is a very accurate account of the pictures Rembrandt had done up to this time in Leyden, which are small and composed of little figures. But about 1630 he began a series of paintings in which, emulating the baroque style which his friend Lievens had mastered, he freed himself from the small scale and minute touch of his early manner, painting in life size with a conscious aim of achieving a grand and striking manner. In the course of this effort he made his studies of our bearded man. The portrait in Cassel appears to be the earlier, for it is still relatively tame and in the manner of a set piece. In our picture the energetic thrust of the body and half turn of the head, the stern and vital spirit, present us for almost the first time (as does the *St. Paul* from the same model in Vienna) with a successful achievement of the drama of the inner life for which Rembrandt was reaching. The superficial animation of waving hands and gaping faces that we see in his earlier pictures is gone. It is now simply the revelation of a human soul—mysterious, incalculable and, as Rembrandt would say, an image of the divine—which strikes us by its grandeur.

The picture has an additional interest because it is still in a plain seventeenth century octagonal frame of pine moulding, once black except for gilding on the inner profile, but now worn to a polished brown surface. It is very probable that this is the frame which Rembrandt himself put on it. In any case it must be the original frame and shows how Rembrandt's pictures were framed in his time. It is quite different from the rich gilt frames of the eighteenth century or later, in which we are accustomed to see his pictures.

E. P. RICHARDSON

<sup>1</sup>Accession Number: 42.151. Octagonal panel: Height 21 $\frac{7}{8}$ ; Width 15 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Signed close to the right edge with monogram: RHL. Gift of Mrs. Ellen Stevens Whitall, Mrs. Annie Stevens Woodruff and William P. Stevens, in memory of Henry G. Stevens, 1942. Collections: Private Collection, Goslar; Egon Müller, Hamburg; Henry G. Stevens, Detroit. References: G. Pauli, *Zeitschrift für bild. Kunst*, XXXII (1921), p. 21; W. R. Valentiner, *Rembrandt, Wiedergefundene Gemälde (Klassiker der Kunst)*, Stuttgart, 1923, p. 15; W. R. Valentiner, *Loan Exhibition of Paintings by Rembrandt*, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1930, No. 5; W. R. Valentiner, *Rembrandt Paintings in America*, New York, 1931, No. 9; Kurt Bauch, *Die Kunst des jungen Rembrandt*, Heidelberg, 1933, pp. 147 and 214.



SCULPTURED RELIEF WITH JAINA SUBJECTS  
 INDIAN, FROM THE TEMPLE OF PĀRŠVANĀTHA,  
 KHAJURĀHO, 950-1050 A.D.  
*Gift of the Hill Memorial Fund, 1943*

## A JAINA RELIEF FROM KHAJURĀHO

THE PRESERVATION and exhibition of artifacts in a museum necessarily entails a divorce from the original meaning and context. If they are to be understood as well as enjoyed, these artifacts must be explained in ancient as well as contemporary terms; and when an object is fragmentary, the task is made doubly difficult. There are, however, occasional objects which supply a maximum of material ready at hand for examination. The Indian collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts has recently been enriched by the purchase of such a fragment of sculpture<sup>1</sup> which does much to explain the character of medieval Indian art.

Indian sculpture in particular has suffered in the West by presentation in fragmentary form. Such fragments are admired in aesthetic isolation by many who would be less enthusiastic were they to see the sculpture as it was meant to be, one of many images or scenes ornamenting a temple which in turn was an ornament of religion. Fortunately the newly acquired relief shows, in small scale, the nature of medieval Indian art, complex and robust, containing unit within unit and an immense variety of subject matter, yet possessing an overall effect of energy that does not copy natural life but matches it with a life of its own. This is not the geometric and architectonic sculpture of the purists but the organic sculpture of a living tradition, with an essential warmth which transcends technique and material. The artisan's ritual identification of self with deity informs the stone and makes it more than itself. This is the very nature of mystical experience.

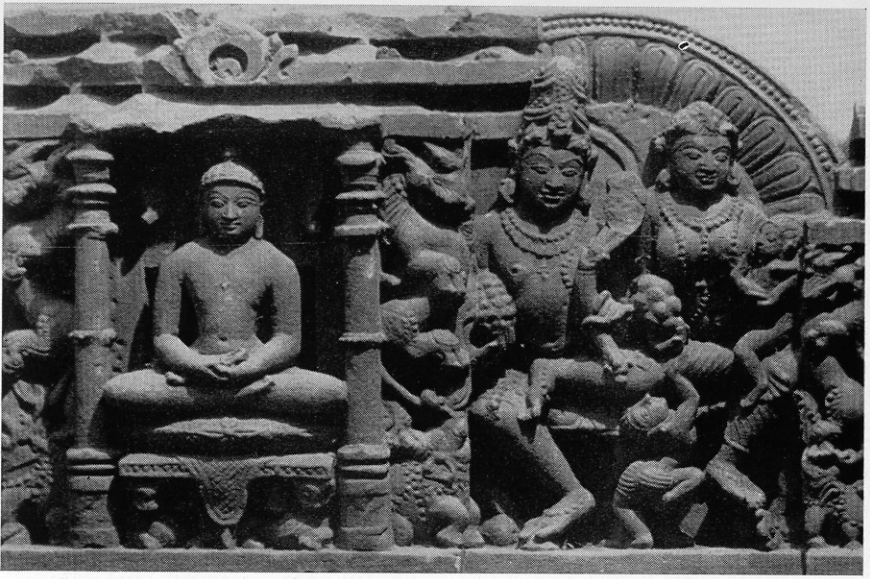
By exceptional good fortune we are able to give our relief an exact provenance from the coincidence that it is shown in a late nineteenth century engraving<sup>2</sup>, lying on the ground beside the Temple of Pārśvanātha at Khajurāho, where it probably served as a lintel over one of the niches on the exterior of the *śikhara* or central tower. Khajurāho itself was once the capital of the powerful medieval kingdom of the Candels in the Bundelkhand (North Central India) and is noted for its many temples in the flowing and curvilinear Nagara or Northern style. Most of the temples are Hindu, the Kaṇḍārya Mahādeva being the most famous, a model of the Nagara type; but there are numerous Jaina temples of which that of Pārśvanātha is a small but perfect representative. It should be noted that these architectural and sculptural styles are not sectarian but regional; our sculpture, though Jaina, is

stylistically congruent with the Śaivaite, Vaiṣṇavite and Buddhist sculptures of the region. The temples at Khajurāho all seem to have been erected at the high tide of the Candell reign, 950-1050 A.D.<sup>3</sup> It should not be thought that this region was at this time more important or more prosperous than any other, for medieval India, like medieval Europe, was not dominated by a single state or ruler, but was composed of numerous contending states and alliances. Social continuity was insured by a basic tradition founded in religion.

The Jaina faith is remarkably similar to Buddhism in many aspects, especially in the life pattern of the historic Jina, Mahāvīra, who was a contemporary of Gautama Buddha in the sixth century before Christ. Like early Buddhism, Jainism rejected the concept of Omnipotent Deity or of Deity as such, and recognized the primary importance of a monastic order. With Buddhism it accepted the fundamental Hindu concepts of *Karma* (Law, Causality) and *Samsāra* (the Ocean of Life and Death) as expressed in the Upaniṣads. In opposition to the Upaniṣads Jainism rejected the idea of world soul in favor of the individual soul with a responsible and free will. Jainism also rejected the Brāhmanical idea of a continuous flowing together of good and evil in favor of a sharp dualism that is parallel to, if not derived from, the tenets of Zoroastrianism in ancient Iran. This particular view of the conflict of light and good with darkness and evil spread to the West also, where it became strong in the Roman world, and thus into Early Christianity, to appear later in the Albigensian heresy of the medieval Church. Like all of these branches from the original tree, salvation in Jainism was to be achieved by the ascetic defeat of darkness through the free agency of the soul, effecting a return to Nirvāna, the ultimate state of pure spirituality. The few who achieved this victory became known as Jinās, "Founders of the Ford." Such an ideal was only possible of achievement within the order; the path could be trod only in varying degree by the laity. Jainism is still relatively powerful in India today. Its endurance, separate from Hinduism proper, can be attributed to the sharpness and fundamental difference of its doctrinal line, which, unlike Buddhism which did not endure in India, was incapable of absorption or exclusion.<sup>4</sup>

Our Jaina relief represents personages associated with Pārśvanātha, an early Jina, who probably lived in the early part of the eighth century before Christ. He appears, then, before the historic founding of Jainism, at the time of the emergence of Hinduism in the early Upaniṣads and at the end of the Aryan conquest and absorption. The ideas developed in the story of his life<sup>5</sup> are already saturated with a dualism that may be related to Aryan sources. The life legend is of the well known hostile brother type: the conflict of personified good and evil through nine rebirths, with the final triumph of Pārśva over Kamātha. Analogous legends come to mind: Osiris and Typhon in Egyptian myth, Cain and Abel in the Hebrew story, and Sunda and Upasunda in the Mahābhārata of early India. The serpent as a benevolent and sheltering force is intimately associated with the Pārśva legend; indeed Pārśva is often represented by a seven-hooded *nāga*.

Identification of the subject matter in the relief is tentative at present, yet reasonably certain. On the left against a damaged lotus wheel is Vāmādevī, the queen mother, with Pārśva after his final rebirth. She holds a lotus and is sheltered by a *nāga*, now damaged, which refers to her dream before Pārśva's birth. Next in a pillared and storied niche flanked by lions with goats horns (*śārdūlas*), sits Pārśvanātha, nude, on a lion throne with two small supporting elephants. Behind his head is a nimbus bounded by three branches of the aśoka tree. He bears on his chest the traditional lozenge mark (*śrīvatsa*) of the Jina, while his pose is the



DETAIL OF RELIEF FROM KHAJURĀHO  
INDIAN, 950-1050 A.D.

traditional *padmāsana* of meditation. Following this niche, against a half visible lotus wheel are Aravinda and Anuddharā, the original noble parents of the twin brothers, Pārśva and Katha. The King and Queen sit in *lalita asana*, the pose of royal ease. Aravinda holds a long-stemmed lotus and a fruit, while Anuddharā holds a fruit in her right hand and supports Pārśva with her left hand. Katha plays at the foot of the lotus throne, a vigorously sculptured little figure. Then follows a repetition, on a slightly smaller scale, of the niche with an image of the Jina. The Northern style tower above is small, with few levels, but complete. Finally, at the right, is a magnificently sculptured head of an elephant with upraised trunk, serving as a terminus for the relief. It is likely that the now missing left side was completed with another niche and a similar elephant terminal. The skillful carving is in high, undercut relief; the detail is crisp, sure and in remarkably good condition. The alternating units of the relief are reflections of Jaina dualism, the crowded scenes of material life and the solitary austerity of the images in the niches.

SHERMAN E. LEE

<sup>1</sup>Accession Number: 43.39. Brown sandstone relief. Height: 12¼ inches; Width: 33 inches. Gift of the Hill Memorial Fund, 1943.

<sup>2</sup>James Ferguson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, New York, 1891, Vol. I, p. 245, fig. 137.

<sup>3</sup>Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, New York, 1927, p. 109.

<sup>4</sup>This brief summary of Jainism should be supplemented by the following: P. Nahar and K. Ghosh, *An Epitome of Jainism*, Calcutta, 1917; Max Muller (ed.), *Sacred Books of the East*, Vols. XXII, XLV, *Gāina-Sūtras*, translated by Jacobi.

<sup>5</sup>Maurice Bloomfield, *The Life and Stories of the Jaina Saviour Pārçavanātha*, Baltimore, 1919.

## A LATE GOTHIC TAPESTRY

THE ROYAL and ducal inventories of France and Burgundy repeatedly mention tapestries illustrating elaborate moralizing allegories. Of such the "Battle of the Virtues and Vices," the "Triumphs" after Petrarch, or the "Hunt of the Unicorn" are the least involved because the antagonism of the parties is clearly depicted. More difficult for the present day beholder are allegorical representations of abstract or philosophical ideas, generally because the didactic treatises which they illustrate have long been forgotten. One of these is the *Repertorium Morale* of Petrus Berchorius. This was written about 1340 by the prior of the Benedictine abbey of St. Eloi in Paris. Since it was printed not less than eleven times between 1474 and 1515, it was easily within reach of tapestry designers and their patrons.

Part of the *Repertorium* is an alphabetical dictionary of 3,514 words used in the Bible, with moral expositions. Here is the key to the understanding of the subject of a late fifteenth century Gothic tapestry, the recent gift of the Founders Society<sup>1</sup>. Our thanks go to Professor Erwin Panofsky to whose great kindness we owe the elucidation of the puzzle.<sup>2</sup>

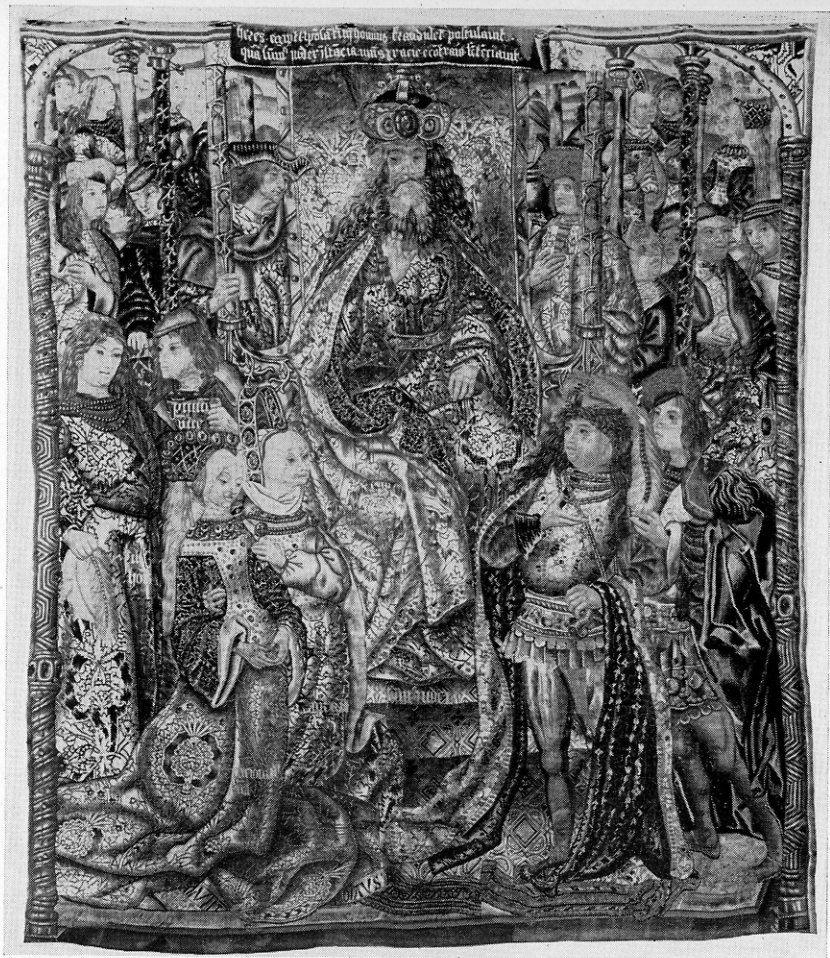
In the center of the top of the tapestry an unfolded scroll bears, on red ground, the inscription which reads, in translation: The heir of Egypt demanded fraudulently the bride of the Son of Man whom (i.e. the bride) the Supreme Judge forthwith declared to be on the contrary the gift of Grace.

According to the laudable habit of Gothic tapestry designers the most important personages have their names marked on their costumes, thus (with abbreviations expanded): *Summus Judex*, *Rationalis Anima*, *Munus Gratiae*, *Filius Hominis* and *Praemium Vitae*. The position of the Heir of Egypt, chief actor, made an inscription superfluous.

From a high throne with a dais supported by jeweled columns the *Supreme Judge* is pronouncing sentence. Before him, on a Spanish rug, stand the protagonists: the blustering *Heir of Egypt* restrained by a companion; *Rational Soul* brought forward by *Gift of Grace*, accompanied by *Son of Man* and *Reward of Life*. These four appear again in conversation in two scenes back of the throne. The middle ground is crowded with the followers of both parties, their advocates stand close to the judge's throne.

During the last decades of the fifteenth century fashions of dress of both men and women attained a wide variety of cut and fabrics. Italy's velvets and pomegranate-patterned brocades called for wide-spreading, trailing robes and mantles. The shape of the shoes changed from the long-pointed *poulaine* to the equally eccentric broad *sabbaton*. The men wore their hair in long locks down to the shoulder. A small skullcap perched jauntily on the side of the head; sometimes a wide-brimmed hat was worn over it, or a turban of fur. The quills of the up-standing or trailing plumes were decorated with a row of pearls or precious stones. Padded shoulders and jeweled belts accentuated slim waists. All these vagaries of fashion are well illustrated in the tapestry. The two women especially might have served as fashion plates.

*Rational Soul* wears an underdress of red velvet of which one tightly fitting sleeve is barely seen at the wrist. The rest is covered by a robe of blue velvet with a pomegranate pattern of the *ciséle* type. The bell-shaped sleeves are fur lined, the skirt is edged with a band of cloth of gold embroidered with dark blue letters, indecipherable because practically hidden beneath the gold brocaded red velvet skirt of the *super-côte-bardie*. This is a late form of the surcoat, modified in its



TAPESTRY: AN ALLEGORICAL JUDGMENT SCENE  
BRUSSELS, LATE FIFTEENTH CENTURY  
*Gift of The Founders Society, 1943*

upper part into mere strips connected with shoulder bands. Such "braces" are pictured also in the *Breviarium Grimani*, as richly jeweled as those worn by *Rational Soul*. The wide collar of gold, pearls and colored stones matches the exaggerated stiffness of the hairnet or caul, which is surmounted by a coronet. The hair, dressed closely to the head, covers the ears and falls in a long tail down the back. This is unusual, for in other instances such headdresses are provided with a white veil.<sup>3</sup> *Gift of Grace* seems to wear the *super-côte-hardie*, or perhaps a jeweled stomacher. Her bag-sleeves are gathered into a narrow band at the wrist. A circular coat is fastened with a chain, which repeats the pattern of the neck ornament. Her hair is entirely covered by a white hood ending in a long scarf which is drawn across the neck like a wimple. An exact parallel for the jeweled hoop has not been



found, but fantastic headdresses of all kind seem to have been prevalent in the latter part of the fifteenth century, as they were to be in the rococo period and again in the late thirties of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

Stylistically the tapestry belongs to a group which was probably created by the Brussels designers.<sup>5</sup> The complete tapestries were divided like a triptych; the center part was a "shrine" or vaulted hall enclosing a throne, the wings contained smaller scenes, generally in two rows. Few complete tapestries are preserved, but the center by itself is always a complete picture. It is tempting to speculate what the scenes flanking the throne may have illustrated. The Heir of Egypt may have appeared as the temptor of the Foolish Virgins, opposite to Christ and the Wise Virgins. He may have held court, surrounded by the individual sins, Ignorance, Deceitfulness, Slander, Adulation, Gluttony, Hypocrisy and many others. With these he may have planned his attack on the Church, which culminates in the picture of the center panel. The interpretation is difficult, but the scene probably represents the Soul (*Rationalis Anima*) freed by the Supreme Judge (*Summus Judex*) from the power of the Lord of the World (*Heres Egypti*) and given into the keeping of the Gift of Grace (*Munus Gratiae*).

ADELE COULIN WEIBEL

<sup>1</sup>Accession Number: 43.29. Height: 12 feet, 2 inches; Width: 10 feet, 3 inches. Wool and silk tapestry, some repairs. The inscription reads: HERES EGYPTI SPOSAM FILII HOMINIS FRAUDULENTER POSTULAVIT QUAM SUMMUS JUDEX INSTANCIA MUNUS GRACIE E CONTRARIO SENTENCIAVIT.

<sup>2</sup>Extract of Professor Panofsky's letter:

"In late medieval ecclesiastical symbolism the chief significance of Egypt is the 'world' (in the theological sense of sin), comprising all the individual sins and especially *Ignorantia*, *Fraudulentia* (important because especially mentioned in your text), *Detractio* and *Adulatio*. The 'heir of Egypt' would therefore be the heir of Pharaoh 'per quem Diabolus denotatur,' and would be absolutely identical with the 'Lord of the World' who, in such representations of the Wise and Foolish Virgins as found in Strassburg, Freiburg and Basel, is the opposite of Christ. As your tapestry represents a marriage scene this is also an interesting association, for Christ is, as we all know, the rightful bridegroom of the Church, whereas the 'Lord of the World' is the seducer of the worldly-minded Foolish Virgins. I should therefore propose as a title something like the following: 'The Illegal Marriage of the Church with the Lord of the World.' The above is based upon the most widely used late medieval handbook of theological symbolism, Petrus Berchorius's *Repertorium Morale*, sub voce 'Egyptus,' where it states that 'Egyptus mundum signat.'"

<sup>3</sup>A jeweled caul with veil is worn by the queen of Richier de Monbendal, king of Acre, in Loyset Liédet's *Roman de Renaud de Montauban*. MS 5074, fol. 62, Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, Paris.

<sup>4</sup>For examples of fantastic headgear see R. van Marle, *Iconographie de l'art profane au moyen-âge et à la renaissance*, The Hague, 1931-32; M. G. Houston, *Medieval Costume in England and France*, London, 1939.

<sup>5</sup>H. Goebel, *Wandteppiche*, Leipzig, 1928, Vol. I, p. 293, mentions a tapestry from the inventory of Duke Philip the Good "... estans en ung tabernacle . . . et est de Brabant."

## THE PRISONS BY PIRANESI

A NOTABLE addition to the Print Department of the Museum is the recent acquisition through the Elizabeth P. Kirby Fund and the special generosity of Hal H. Smith of the famed set of etchings by Piranesi known as the *Prisons*.

Giovanni Battista Piranesi, born near Venice in 1720, the son of a stone-mason, was trained as an architect. Either in Venice or in Rome he may have studied architectural scene-painting with the brothers Valeriani and also been influenced by the work of the Bibiena; the celebrated Bolognese family of stage designers, active in Italy and elsewhere in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

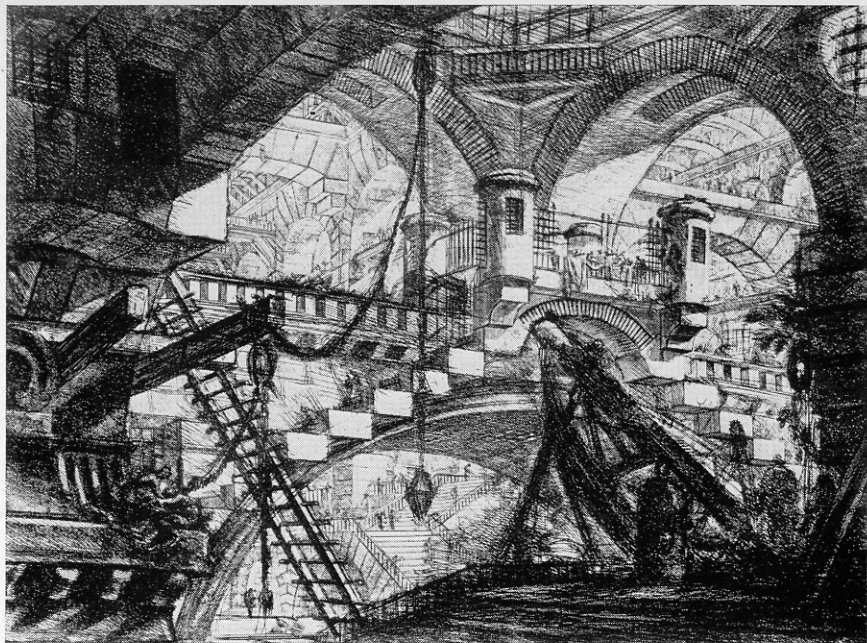
Certain it is that many of Piranesi's prints and especially his imaginative inventions, notably the *Prisons*, show training in the principles of Baroque stage design. The theatres of this age, lighted only by candles, compelled the scene-painter to substitute draughtsmanship and chiaroscuro for color, and to have a mastery of the mathematics of perspective in order to give the illusion of depth. In the plates of the *Prisons* with their fantastic spaciousness created by deep overshadowing arches and luminous wells of light, we see the influence of theatre design in the elaborate perspective, grandeur of mass, and dramatic use of light and shade.

In the suite of the Venitian ambassador to the Papal Court, Piranesi went to Rome in 1740, drawn by the spell of the city where Renaissance culture lay imbedded in the ruins of the ancient world. Here he almost deserted his profession as an architect to devote himself with passionate energy and enthusiasm to the recording of the massive but broken remains of the architectural grandeur of the eternal city on etched plates of large size, great number, and remarkable beauty. Though he lived out his life in and near Rome and secured his living and his reputation as a printmaker and publisher, Piranesi was proud of his origin and his profession, signing many of his publications: *Piranesi architetto veneziano*.

In Rome Piranesi received his training in the technique of etching under Giuseppe Vasi. During a brief return visit to Venice (1743-45), when funds and commissions were lacking in Rome, he is said to have studied painting under Tiepolo and he was certainly acquainted with this artist's style of drawing and etching. Piranesi's first gathering of plates, showing his interests and his talents, appeared in Rome in 1743, the *Prima Parte di Architetture e Prospettive*, and from that time until his death in 1778, the hundreds of his published plates pictured the gates and palaces, the squares and public buildings, the monuments and ruins, and even the smaller antiquities of Ancient and Renaissance Rome. Yet these were not mere historical or archaeological records, but compositions of a fine designer, with deep emotional intensity and a genius for brilliant effects, a delight to the architect, archaeologist, and amateur of the arts alike.

Perhaps as early as 1743 Piranesi was already at work on the plates of the *Prisons*. It is not surprising that among his earliest works should be these imaginative inventions which reveal on the one hand a typical Baroque interest in perspective architecture of the stage decoration sort and on the other a strongly personal approach to the grandeur and contrasting effects of architectural masses and the fantasy of combining diminutive human forms with overwhelming architectural settings.

Possibly the least known and certainly among the greatest of Piranesi's works is the set of the *Prisons*, which appeared in two editions during the artist's lifetime. The first edition or state, issued sometime about 1750 or earlier, by Piranesi's Roman publisher, Jean Bouchard, consisted of fourteen plates including a title page of which there were two variants, one with the publisher's name spelled *Buzard*, and another with the name spelled *Bouchard*. The finest of Piranesi's prints are, however, those issued between 1760 and 1778 under his own supervision. The artist's own edition of the *Prisons*, published about 1761, consisted of sixteen plates including a revised title page mentioning the artist's name and two additional plates. The plates were numbered and many of them signed. The set just acquired by the Museum apparently represents an intermediate and unrecorded state. Of the sixteen plates only the last (XVI) is numbered, the others being proofs before numbering. Nor does the artist's name appear on all the plates as in the edition as finally issued.



ETCHING: PLATE 11 OF THE PRISONS  
BY GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIRANESI, ITALIAN, 1720-1778  
*Gift of the Elizabeth P. Kirby Fund and Hal H. Smith, 1942*

But most important in Piranesi's own edition was the reworking of the plates, showing in the process an extraordinary development of the artist's mind. The early plates had greater simplicity of design and were etched more lightly. In the second state the lines were deeply bitten, giving strength and dramatic effect, and the compositions were radically changed by the addition of more architectural elements, more fantastic engines, more small human figures sketchily drawn or half hidden in the shadows. Although in the second state of these plates the artist has visibly increased the fantastic element and made what once were almost pure studies in perspective into moving compositions suggestive of subterranean vaults, deep prisons, and human fears and suffering, we feel little of the horror associated with prisons and instruments of torture because in all the designs the emphasis is placed upon noble architectural settings. Yet through all is the marvelous imaginative fantasy that is so often the source of pleasure in eighteenth century works of art, in Rococo architecture, in the charming paintings of Watteau, in the textile designs of Pillement, or the music of Mozart.

There may be no truth in the tradition that the architectural fantasies of the *Prisons* came to Piranesi in the delirium of fever, but Thomas De Quincey, opium eater and experienced fantasist, was quick to observe the similarity between Piranesi's designs and his own dreams. Calling these prints *Dreams*, he wrote of them in *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821): "Many years ago, when I was looking over Piranesi's *Antiquities of Rome*, Mr. Coleridge, who was standing by, described to me a set of plates by that artist, called his *Dreams* . . .

Some of them . . . represented vast Gothic<sup>2</sup> halls, on the floor of which stood all sorts of engines . . . expressive of enormous power put forth and resistance overcome. Creeping along on the sides of the walls, you perceived a staircase . . . follow the stairs a little further, and you perceive it comes to a sudden abrupt termination . . . allowing no step upwards to him who reached the extremity, except into the depths below . . . But raise your eyes, and behold a second flight of stairs still higher . . . Again . . . a still more aerial flight of stairs is beheld . . . : And so on until the unfinished stairs . . . are lost in the upper gloom of the hall. With the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in my dreams."

ISABEL WEADOCK

<sup>1</sup>Accession Numbers: 42.61-76. Sixteen etchings on laid paper. Plate sizes: approximately 22 by 16 inches. When acquired these sixteen plates and an etched portrait of Piranesi, dated 1750, by Felice Polanzani (c. 1700-1770) (Accession Number: 42.60. Height: 15¼ inches; Width: 11¾ inches) were bound into a contemporary pasteboard portfolio with the armorial bookplate of Thomas Weld, Esq., Lulworth Castle. As the arms of Stanley are impaled with those of Weld, this set of prints was apparently once the property of Thomas Weld of Lulworth Castle, Dorsetshire, born in 1750, died in 1810, who married Mary, daughter of Sir John Stanley-Massey-Stanley. Thomas Weld was a distinguished member of the Catholic Church and founder of the Jesuit College at Stonyhurst, Lancashire. His son, Thomas (1773-1837) became a Cardinal in 1830. The album may well have been acquired during a visit to Rome directly from Piranesi or his sons, who were active there till about 1800.

<sup>2</sup>Unless he was applying the term Gothic in the sense of strange and different (Sir Christopher Wren had called Gothic a "fantastical and licentious manner of building"), De Quincey (or Coleridge) was mistaken in this description as there is not a trace of what is now called Gothic architecture in the *Prison* set of Piranesi, although there is much that would appeal to the Gothic Revivalists like Horace Walpole, denizen of the pseudo-Gothic castle of Strawberry Hill, who wrote of the *Prisons*: "They would startle geometry and exhaust the Indies to realize . . . What grandeur in his wildness, what labor and thought in his rashness and detail!"

## NOTES ON A FRENCH GOTHIC WRITING TABLET

My tables, my tables,—meet it is I set it down,  
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.

HERE IN *Hamlet* and elsewhere in his plays,<sup>1</sup> when he referred thus to "tables," Shakespeare was thinking of the writing tablets of wood, metal, or ivory on which from the days of the ancient Egyptians to the times of the Stuart kings, at least, it was the custom to keep accounts, make brief records, or write notes. The Romans used *tabellae* or *tabulae* of two or more leaves of wax-covered wood hinged together for public and private records. Diptychs of ivory carved on their exterior faces and plain on the inside for the writing of a message either directly on the ivory or on wax were distributed by the Roman consuls (before 541 A.D.) as formal notification of their accession to office, and not a few of these have survived to our day, many of them preserved through the ages by the Church which adapted them to its own use by inscribing them with lists of bishops, benefactors and saints, or with prayers.

Later in the medieval period the religious ivory diptych was developed with the carved surfaces on the interior so that the subject matter was protected when the leaves were closed. Several examples are on display in the Gothic Hall of the Museum; two of them were included in the group of Gothic ivory carvings recently given to the Museum by Robert H. Tannahill. From this group one item has been



CARVED IVORY WRITING TABLET: THE MEETING AND  
THE OFFERING OF THE HEART  
FRENCH, EARLY FOURTEENTH CENTURY  
*Gift of Robert H. Tannabill, 1942*

selected as the subject of this note—a rare and beautiful writing tablet<sup>2</sup> with secular subject matter, French work of the first half of the fourteenth century.

This writing tablet is a diptych of two rectangular ivory plaques, a lineal descendant of the ancient writing tablet. Although now separated, the three holes yet exist on one edge of each of the two plaques to indicate the location of the hinges, and the slightly sunken rectangular areas on the plain inner faces of the two leaves show that they were once coated with wax on which with a sharp point or stylus of metal, bone, ivory, or wood a housewife of the fourteenth century might record a shopping list or a youth inscribe a sonnet to his lady's eyebrow. The latter would indeed be most appropriate to the subject matter on carved surfaces.

In low relief within the characteristic setting of trilobate crocketed arches, taken over from architecture and the religious ivories, the Gothic craftsman has represented popular subjects from the repertory of courtly love. On the cover panel (to the right in the illustration) is the Meeting in the Garden. Amidst a setting suggested by the formalized trees, the young lover encounters the lady of his choice. He is dressed in a long unbelted tunic or surcoat with a hood, but his head is bare. He carries a falcon on his right hand but his left arm is free to embrace the shoulders of his lady. She wears her hair in the typical style of the late thirteenth

and early fourteenth centuries, with long rolls over each ear, which peep out from under her head-veil. She pulls up the uneven hem of her long robe with her left hand, the same hand that supports her little dog. In pose and dress she resembles the figures of the Virgin in contemporary sculpture as she stands with her left hip thrown out and leans in a long flowing curve toward her lover, placing her right arm around his shoulders. Their meeting is felicitous and their conversation is comprised of sweet nothings.

On the back panel (to the left in the illustration), both lover and beloved receive their rewards. The man kneels and earnestly presents his heart as an offering to the lady who graciously bends over him to place upon his head the garland of flowers—symbol of reward for plighted troth.

Such writing tablets were among the common objects made by the ivoryworkers of the late Middle Ages, particularly in the fourteenth century. Koechlin<sup>3</sup> in his corpus of French Gothic ivories, published in 1924, lists as surviving twelve complete writing-tablets, some twenty-two plaques from writing tablets with single subjects, and twelve plaques with several subjects. The Detroit writing tablet is, however, not recorded by Koechlin. It ranks among the important survivors of its type along with the celebrated writing tablet of Namur in Belgium, consisting of two carved cover plaques and eight leaves, hinged together to form a notebook, preserved in its original leather case. This was formerly in the treasury of the cathedral of Namur but on account of the profane subject matter on its covers (the Meeting of the Lovers and the Offering of the Heart, just as on the Detroit example), it was relegated by a nineteenth century bishop to the city's archaeological museum. Upon one of its leaves is still preserved a portion of just such a message as one would expect to find: *Amours me fait souvent . . . Désir . . .* Fragmentary as it is, the message suggests the lover's sigh, the longing for the sweet suffering of love.

Although the dating of fourteenth century ivories is made difficult by a lag in style and a persistence of iconography, a study of the writing tablets published by Koechlin makes it apparent that the Detroit example falls early in the series and is actually a product of the first half of the fourteenth century before the loose-fitting costumes of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries gave way to the belted sheath-like dress and long pointed shoes of the second half of the century.

This writing tablet can be grouped among the celebrated *articles de Paris*, the artistic products of the Parisian craftsmen which were in demand all over medieval Europe and carried with them everywhere the fame of French workmanship as well as the knowledge of French elegance of living and French Gothic style. The ivoryworkers of Paris, who lived chiefly in the vicinity of the Porte St.-Denis, were known by specialized names, such as imagemakers, combmakers, and tablet-makers (*tabletiers*, a separate corporation of *ceux qui font tables à écrire à Paris*), but there is evidence that these craftsmen did not confine their efforts to one field alone, but that the same shop, if not the same men, manufactured religious images and secular objects.

It is on caskets, mirror cases, combs, and writing tablets that we find the same subject matter, almost always secular or profane, rarely religious or sacred: scenes of courtly love, allegorical subjects, scenes from the romances, amusements and sports. In style and subject the mirror cases and the writing tablets are most closely allied. The same expansive composition, the same large scale of the figures, the same rhythmic curves and broad surfaces appear on the best of each category.

And as a sort of trademark of related categories we note the fantastic animals or basilisks which fill the spandrels on the leaves of the writing tablet are identical with the beasts that square out the corners of the mirror cases and appear as space fillers in the spandrels on a comb.<sup>4</sup>

Among the most charming of Gothic ivories are those with scenes of courtly love (*scènes courtoises, scènes galantes*) and of them all, the Detroit writing tablet is certainly one of the most pleasing from the points of view of style and feeling. Such carvings are the counterparts of the poetry of the time, suggesting the subject of the *Roman de la Rose* (13th Century), the desirable conquest of one's lady, the personal sentiments and amatory thoughts of Guillaume de Machaut (c. 1300-1377) or the pure and simple emotions of Christine de Pisan (1364-c. 1430), who wrote: "For it is well known there is no joy on earth that is so great as that of lover and beloved."

In an age when living was often fraught with dangers and discomforts, when wars were incessant and ferocious, when morals were lax and human lives cheap, it was not so much the Church as the system of tradition of courtly love which guided the thoughts and actions of the aristocracy.<sup>5</sup> The dream of a happier life under the artificial rules of courtesy was substituted for the harshness of reality. The rude life of the late Middle Ages was constantly subject to the control of the aesthetic and ethical values which were a part of courtesy, such as honor, courage, and fidelity. Courts of love were established. Time was whiled away in such courtly occupations as debates of love. Gentlemen pledged fidelity to their ladies (whether the lady was married or single mattered little). Color symbolism was recognized in life and literature (as green for new love, blue for fidelity). There was produced a vast amount of literature pertaining to courtesy and courtly love, such as the treatises of Jean Gerson, illustrious chancellor of the University of Paris (1363-1929), who attacked the bailful and persistent influence of the *Roman de la Rose*, or the highly personal amorous verses of Guillaume de Machaut, or the defense of women's rights and sensibilities by the accomplished Christine de Pisan.

The ideals of courtly love prevailing in the late Middle Ages were the common source of inspiration of a way of life, a body of literature, and numerous works of art, of which the Detroit writing tablet is a significant example.

FRANCIS W. ROBINSON

<sup>1</sup>*Hamlet*, I, v, 107; also I, v, 99; II, ii, 136; *Winter's Tale*, IV, iv, 610; 2 *Henry IV*, II, iv, 489 ("his master's old tables, his note-book"); *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, II, vii, 3 ("who art the table wherein all my thoughts are visibly character'd and engrav'd").

<sup>2</sup>Accession Numbers: 42.136, 137. Two ivory plaques. Dimensions of each: Height: 4 inches; Width, 2½ inches; Thickness: ¼ inch. Gift of Robert H. Tannahill, 1942.

<sup>3</sup>Raymond Koechlin: *Les Ivoires Gothiques Français*, Paris, 1924, 3 vols., with chapters on ivories with secular subjects (Vol. I, pp. 360 ff.), on writing tablets (Vol. I, pp. 432 ff.; Vol. II, Nos. 1161-1720; Vol. III, pls. CXCv ff.), and much material on courtly love (Vol. I, p. 373 ff., *et passim*).

<sup>4</sup>Koechlin: *op. cit.*, for such mirrors, see Vol. III, pls. CLXXV ff.; for the comb, Vol. III, pl. CXCI, No. 1148).

<sup>5</sup>J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, London, 1924.

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