MEDIEVAL AND EARLY RENAISSANCE

The medieval period roughly includes the thousand years from 400 A.D. to 1400 A.D. While Byzantium, the eastern remnant of the Roman empire (which had been officially Christianized a hundred years earlier by the Emperor Constantine, see Grauer’s eighteenth-century Baroque sculpture of St. Constantine) maintained a continuous sovereignty, the empire in the west disintegrated. Christianity, however, firmly established, provided a unifying force which kept learning and knowledge of the useful arts alive. By the thirteenth century, when the Church was at the height of its power, western Europe had evolved as a great and original civilization, constantly stimulated by influences from the Greco-Roman past and from Byzantium and the world of Islam, though ever reworking those influences in novel ways. The Church also preserved Roman materials not directly related to religion: the Latin language, Roman law, administrative organization and practice, and the ideal of Roman empire—all elements which were susceptible to entirely secular application.

Though the spirit of Christianity was oriented toward the world of the supernatural, there was, by the thirteenth century a new curiosity about man’s natural environment. Such curiosity was expressed in the great compendia of knowledge, the encyclopedias, such as Vincent of Beauvais’ Speculum Majus (the Great Mirror). These encyclopedias were not objective or scientific analyses of nature in the modern sense, however. Descriptive records of the appearances of things were rather understood as the reflection of God’s glory and beneficence. Thriving towns provided a stimulus for commerce and industry, made possible by the invention of tools and mechanisms that extended man’s powers over his environment and facilitated manufacture. Free craftsman, not slaves as in the ancient world, organized into guilds and were the medieval agents of production.

The terms Romanesque and Gothic have been used to describe the style of later medieval art and architecture. Romanesque art, characterized in architecture by rough stone masonry and massive rounded arches, thrived mainly from about 1000 to the middle of the twelfth century. The term Gothic is generally used to describe the style which predominated from 1150 until around 1450. Gothic was first used as a term of derision be Renaissance critics who scorned its lack of conformity to classical Greek and Roman standards, and had mistakenly believed that the style had originated with the Goths. At first centered around Paris, during the thirteenth century regional styles of Gothic art began to assert themselves. Toward the middle of the following century, however, these regional achievements influenced each other until, about 1400, a surprisingly homogenous International Gothic style prevailed almost everywhere in Europe. Shortly thereafter, this unity broke apart and a new art emerged in Italy, that of the Early Renaissance, though elements of the Gothic style persisted in many parts of Italy and the rest of Europe. The Museum is fortunate to have a number of fine works dating to this period, many of which were donated by the Kress Foundation in the early 1960s and now comprise the Museum’s Kress Study Collection.

Further Reading:
MEDIEVAL AND EARLY RENAISSANCE

General Characteristics of Medieval Art (800-1450)

- Ambiguous, symbolic spatial relationships
- Unnaturalistic backgrounds—often god, unnatural plate-like halos
- Elongated proportions
- Linear pattern are often more important than a suggestion of 3-D mass
- Unnaturalistic sizes, as the sizes of figures often relate to their spiritual importance
- Interest in decorative pattern and textures, as well as rich materials
- Romanesque = heavy, solemn, highly stylized
- Gothic = lighter, delicate, naturalistically stylized

General Characteristics of Traditional Greek, Russian and Easter Orthodox Art (ca. 700-Present)

- The style owes a great deal to Byzantine art, maintaining many elements of Byzantine style and iconography
- Continued interest in Byzantine "icon" format. Icons are holy images thought to contain aspects of the figures they represent.
- Because icons were so closely tied to the holy figures they pictured, the poses, expressions and styles of the figures changes little over the centuries.
- Richness of materials reflects spiritual splendor
- Though the Byzantine influence remains, later Orthodox images begin to reflect characteristics of the nations and cultures from which they come.

Arrangement of European and American Gallery

The organization of the paintings in the European and American gallery is chronological. Museum-goers visiting this gallery get an overview of many of the important art historical movements of the Western tradition between 1450 and 1900. Starting with the Saint King (facing visitors as they enter the room from the bridge), one encounters paintings from the Early Italian Renaissance (1450-1500), Northern Renaissance (1450-1550), High Italian Renaissance (1500-1530), Italian Mannerist period (1530-1600), Italian/Dutch/Flemish Baroque (1600-1700), Eighteenth century (1700-1800), Nineteenth-century Realist period (1830-1900), and finally the nineteenth-century period in Missouri.
MEDIEVAL AND EARLY RENAISSANCE

Follower of Bonozzo Gozzoli (also known as “Alunno di Bonozzo”), Italian
Devotional Cross, c. 1480-1490
Polychromed and gilded wood (61.73)
Kress Study Collection (K 372)

Published: *Handbook*, no. 118

Crosses of this type, as well as other types of devotional images, were often placed on alters, or used for private devotional purposes. Sometimes, crucifixes were affixed to poles and carried in processions (see also the *Madonna and the Man of Sorrows*) although there is nothing on the back of this object to indicate that it was used in this way.

The cross is a crucifix terminated with four quatrefoils. At the top, God the Father blesses and holds the Book of the Word open to reveal an “alpha” and an “omega” — the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet — signifying that God is both the beginning and the end. The Virgin Mary, on the left, and St. John the Evangelist, on the right, both mourn Christ's death. They were believed to have been present at the Crucifixion, and were traditionally depicted in representations of that scene (see also *Mater Dolorosa* and *St. John the Evangelist*). At the bottom, Saint Catherine of Sienna displays her stigmata, miraculous wounds in her hands and feet that resembled those suffered by Christ on the cross. Catherine received these wounds while meditating on a crucifix probably very similar to this one. Her image thus encourages other viewers to likewise meditate on the sufferings of Christ.

Above the cross is the inscription INRI (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews) surmounted by the image of the Pelican of Piety. According to medieval legend, the pelican, more than any other creature, had the greatest love for its young. When her offspring appeared to have died, she was said to have pierced her side in order to feed them with her own blood. Her action was thus seen as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The skull and crossbones at Christ's feet are a reminder that Christ was crucified at Golgotha (meaning "place of the skull"), also believed in the middle ages to be the place where Adam was buried.
Anonymous, Italy

Madonna and the Man of Sorrows, late 15th century
Tempera on fine canvas (61.75)
Kress Study Collection (K 461)

This painting is composed of two registers separated by the inscription, "REGINA CELI" (Queen of Heaven). Above, Christ as the Man of Sorrows, with pierced side and Crown of Thorns stands in a marble sarcophagus surrounded by the Instruments of the Passion, the sufferings of Christ during his last week of earthly life. Below, the Madonna is seated before a hilly landscape holding the Christ child who displays the Eucharistic bread.

During the fourteenth century the Man of Sorrows was sometimes considered more popular and influential than the image of the crucified Christ. This form of devotional image had originally derived from icons imported from Byzantium during the thirteenth century, though it took on an entirely different function than that of the Byzantine icon in the east. Whereas the eastern icon was seen as an actual physical presentation of the person portrayed, the meaning and content of the devotional image in the west was believed to change continually in accordance with the needs and expectations of the viewer. Since the Man of Sorrows was not limited to the depiction of a particular narrative episode (the Deposition or the Lamentation, for example) it was able to symbolize and inspire a full range of meditation on the Passion, the sufferings of Christ's last week of earthly life. That such an iconographical type was still being used in the late fifteenth century demonstrates its appeal.

The juxtaposition of the Man of Sorrows with the Madonna and Christ child further expands the context of the images devotional potential. The viewer was able to meditate on the whole of Christ's life, including his institution of the Eucharist, the ceremony during which ordinary bread and wine are believed to become his actual body and blood. The Virgin Mary, Queen of Heaven, was also seen as an intercessor between Christ and the faithful, as one who would hear their prayers. Her image was thus also a common and appropriate one for devotional purposes.

This image is painted directly on fine canvas rather than on the more traditional wood panel. Canvas images were relatively uncommon until the sixteenth century, when the innovation of oil paint made it possible to actually transport paintings by rolling them. (Tempera dries to form a brittle surface unsuitable for folding or rolling.) Tempera images on cloth had the advantages, however, of being less expensive to produce, and being lighter in weight. This image may therefore have been used as a portable standard, or banner, to be carried in procession during Holy Week, the week when the Passion and Resurrection are commemorated in church liturgy. Pictures on cloth were also associated throughout the middle ages with "miraculous images," like Veronica's Veil, a cloth on which the imprint of Christ's face was said to have miraculously remained after Veronica wiped sweat from his brow.

MAA 12/95
Michele di Matteo, Italy
*Mater Dolorosa [Sorrowful Mother] and Saint John the Evangelist*, c. 1440
Tempera and gilt on panel (61.81)
Kress Study Collection (K 1195)

Much of what is known of late medieval painting has been gleaned from Cennino Cennini's *Il Libro dell'arte* (*The Book of Art*). This early fifteenth century treatise details the practice of painting in northern Italy, where the artist of these panels worked (specifically around Bologna).

The materials used in these panels are also characteristic of later medieval techniques. Like the *Flight Into Egypt*, they are painted on wooden panels. This technique had originally come from Byzantine culture, with which Italy had maintained close ties during the middle ages. From the thirteenth through the early fifteenth centuries, backgrounds and haloes were almost always gold leaf. Haloes were often punched after gilding to create a decorative pattern, as in these panels [see also Alunno de Benozzo's *Processional Cross*]. Tempera, ground colors mixed with egg yolk, was then applied in very accurate, neat strokes, since it dried very quickly and mistakes were difficult to repair. Color was used symbolically in the middle ages, and the blue color of the Virgin's mantle, or cloak, symbolized her truth and role as an intercessor between God and man.

These two panels were probably originally at either end of the horizontal arms of a large painted crucifix, as in Alunno di Benozzo's *Processional Cross*. The mourning Virgin and St. John were traditionally depicted as witnesses of the Crucifixion. In this case, they were recombined later to form a diptych, or work consisting of two panels.

The flattened, decorative style of these two panels is related to the International Gothic style, which was characterized by an exaggerated and sinuous type of drapery. The lining of the borders of the robes with pseudo-kufic, or pseudo-arabic, designs emphasizes this linear quality. Unlike some late gothic Italian sculptors, who had already adopted a more rounded renaissance style, many painters of this period retained a flattened, linear manner. In his book, Cennino had, in fact, promoted drawing as the foundation of all art, and advocated the flattened style.

The artist, Michele, was fond of giving all his figures a sad, convulsed aspect. Such stylistic devices were intended to convey the tragic aspect of the Crucifixion as well as to solicit the empathy of the viewer.
Anonymous (Austrian)
*Virgin and Child*, 1430-1440
Painted and gilded lindenwood (65.110)

Gothic devotional sculptures of the Virgin and Child were common throughout Germany and France during the later Middle Ages. Fifteenth-century sculptural depictions of the Madonna often represent Mary as a young mother presenting the baby Jesus to the viewer. Because of their delicate, “soft” style, historians often group figures such as this one into a subset of sculptures called *Beautiful Madonnas*.

The type of wood used in this sculpture indicates that it comes from southern Germany or Austria. Most lindenwood sculptures were originally brightly painted and gilded, and traces of this decoration are still visible on this object. Although the statue was originally full-length and free-standing, it was cut down to its present size at some point prior to its acquisition by the Museum.
Workshop of Baldassare degli Embriachi (Italian, active 1389-1409)

*Entry of Christ into Jerusalem*, ca. 1400
Bone (67.59 a, b)
Gift of Mr. J. Lionberger Davis

The Embriachi were a family of Italian carvers active throughout the fifteenth century in Florence. Baldassare was a member of the Florentine sculptor’s guild, but seems to have been an entrepreneur who spent much of his time traveling and selling the products of his workshop, along with other luxury items he acquired. The surviving fragments produced by the Embriachi indicate that their bone and ivory carvings were mass-produced and could be assembled into various configurations, such as boxes, mirror frames, and devotional diptychs.

These plaques may have been part of a chest or altarpiece with narrative scenes from the life of Christ. They exhibit the influence of compositions by Giotto and his followers, as well as Italo-Byzantine works. In the left panel, Christ rides into Jerusalem astride a donkey with his hand raised in blessing. The right panel presents a group of worshippers celebrating Christ’s arrival at the city gate.
Anonymous, Lower Austrian  
The Ascending Christ, c. 1490  
Polychromed [painted in many colors] lindenwood  
(68.419)

The late Gothic period was characterized in the north by a creative proliferation of religious sculpture. Elaborately crafted altarpieces and small wooden figures made of lindenwood were produced throughout the southern Germanic regions. There the climate favored the growth of this relatively soft wood, which lent itself well to elaborate carving. Stylistically, the drapery of this figure can be compared with that in the panel painting Flight into Egypt. Note the “hard” folds in the painted image and the deep undercutting in the three-dimensional work. The function and history of the sculpted figure, however, make it quite unique.

The Feast of the Ascension, the commemoration of Christ’s being taken up into Heaven, was an important Church festival in the late Middle Ages. Every effort was made to emotionally involve the congregation through the use of elaborately staged liturgical drama. For most of the year this figure of Christ and others like it were displayed standing on an alter. At the climactic moment during the Easter ceremony, however, by means of a rope-and-pulley system, the figure would have been raised slowly above the congregation amid clouds of incense and jubilant singing—to simulate Christ’s Ascension into heaven. In some churches, the figures were even drawn up through a hole made in the roof of the church. Conservator's examinations of this work have shown that a metal hook was once attached at the back of the figure’s head to which a rope would have been tied.

During the Protestant Reformation, however, sparked by Martin Luther in the sixteenth century, many such religious statues met with a different fate. In response to the materialistic excesses in which the Catholic Church increasingly indulged, Luther and other reformers in the north called for restraint. As a result, many came to view all liturgical art as part of these idolatrous excesses. The Reformation was thus characterized by a strong feeling of iconoclasm, or hate of images. The power that these images had held was attested to by the violence of reactions against them.

Today only a small number of late medieval Ascending Christ figures survive (around 35 are known). Careful examination has also shown that this figure—like many others—was decapitated during this period. It appears, however, to be the only one of the Ascending Christ figures still extant which is known to have survived this mutilation, and to have been pieced back together. This figure, then, was literally "resurrected" from its near destruction!
Bernardino Fungai
(Italian, 1460-1516)
A Saint-King, ca. 1490
Tempera and gilt on wood panel
Samuel H. Kress Study Collection (K378)
61.74

The Italian artist Bernardino Fungai worked in a conservative, early Renaissance style in late fifteenth-century Siena. This painting was probably once part of an unidentified multi-paneled altarpiece, and the pose of the figure (facing left) indicates that the saint was positioned to the right of a central panel. The figure has not been positively identified, although he is thought to be either Saint Louis, King of France (1214-1270) or Saint Sigismund, King of Burgundy (died 574). The young king’s regalia includes an orb and a scepter decorated with a gold fleur-de-lis. These attributes appear in fifteenth-century Italian representations of both saints.

Although the figure’s face and hands are modeled in a naturalistic early Renaissance manner, elements of the work recall earlier International Gothic conventions. The elongated figure, the patterned robe and the additions of gold leaf reflect the continuing interest in the Gothic style during the fifteenth century.
Altarpieces constituted many of the largest commissioned works of medieval panel painters. Changes in the liturgy, the way the Catholic church service was performed, were partly responsible for their development. Prior to the thirteenth century, the celebrant of the Mass, the priest, stood behind the altar facing the congregation (as is the case in most Christian congregations today). As a result, decoration was generally limited to the front of the altar, where it took the form of painted wooden panels called altar frontals. In the late thirteenth century, however, the priest’s orientation was changed, so that he stood in front of the altar with his back to the congregation throughout most of the service. This new arrangement allowed large decorated panels to be placed on or immediately behind the altar. Wealthy families became patrons and donors to large churches and cathedrals, and often commissioned elaborate altarpieces for their families and deceased loved ones. The priest and the rest of the congregation were able to visually focus on the images throughout the service.

The original altarpiece to which the Flight belonged may have incorporated eight panels, making it a polyptych, a work made up of more than three wooden panels. Each panel would have illustrated an episode from the life of Christ. The prayers and ceremonies of the Catholic liturgy changed over the course of the year to symbolically reenact the events; altarpiece panels were hinged so that different scenes could be on view according to the liturgical season.

The scene depicts the Holy Family fleeing Bethlehem. Paintings of this scene typically show the Virgin riding on an ass, with the Christ child in her arms, while Joseph leads them through a landscape. Their flight was in response to Herod's attempt to find the child prophesied to become King of the Jews and destroy him. (Some depictions of this scene show children being killed according to Herod's decree, called the “Massacre of the Innocents,” in the background). An angel appeared to Joseph, however, and warned him to take the infant Jesus into Egypt, where the Family remained for several years. After Herod's death, they returned to live in Nazareth. This later episode, called the “Return from Egypt,” is sometimes confused with the scene of the “Flight,” though it can be distinguished by its depiction of Christ as a young boy rather than an infant.

The hard, angular drapery style in this work resembles that of another northern work from this period in the collection, The Ascending Christ.
Anonymous, French
*Tympanum*, begun 1145-1155
Chartres Cathedral, southwest of Paris
Plaster cast (91.271)
Gift of Memorial Art Gallery,
University of Rochester, New York

Anonymous, French
*Jamb Figures*, 1140-1150
Church of Notre Dame, Corbeil, France
Plaster cast (91.272.1, 91.272.2)
Gift of Memorial Art Gallery,
University of Rochester, New York

This tympanum, the triangular area enclosed by an arch and lintel, is a plaster cast of the tympanum from the western facade of Chartres Cathedral in Chartres, France, located southwest of Paris.

The city of Chartres was ravaged by fire in 1134, although its eleventh-century church was untouched. This fire, however, prompted new work to be done to the west of the existing structure's early Romanesque nave. The north tower, called the was built after this fire, and construction on the south tower was already in progress by 1145. The area between these two towers became the west portal of Chartres Cathedral.

Another fire destroyed most of the early Gothic cathedral in 1194; it was rebuilt from 1194 to 1230. The western facade survived this second fire. Begun between 1145 and 1155, the west portal is one of the few surviving sections of the original structure, and shows excellent examples of Early Gothic architectural sculpture. Architectural sculpture aided in the war against sin by reminding the faithful of the need for constant worship and obedience to the Commandments. In addition, the sculpture illustrated the lessons of the Bible for the illiterate, and told of the Last Judgement and Second Coming.

A cathedral's west portal was typically the most elaborate since worshippers entered from this side. Chartres west portal has a tripartite division: the north door measures 7'8" in width, and the south door measures 7'4" in width. The Museum's tympanum is cast from the tympanum of the central door of this west portal and is the widest of the three entrances, measuring 12'9".

The sculpture on the west portal shares the theme of *Majestas Domini*, or Christ in Majesty. Viewed together, the three tympana show the beginning and end of Christ's life. The right tympanum depicts the Virgin Mary seated on the throne of divine wisdom. She is flanked by angels and holds the Christ child in her lap. The left tympanum shows Christ's Ascension, as he floats on a cloud with two angels at his side.
The Museum's tympanum renders the Second Coming and Last Judgment. It dominates the other two tympana because it is more deeply recessed, allowing for three rows of archivolts (the semi-circular bands surrounding the central scene). In addition, it rises higher and is wider across.

This central tympanum carries the western facade's main theme of salvation. Here, Christ offers salvation rather than damnation as seen in many earlier Romanesque works. Christ is enthroned in a mandorla (the large oval surrounding the figure of Christ as a symbol of holiness) and surrounded by the four Apocalyptic beasts described in the Vision of St. John. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are represented by the angel, lion, ox and eagle respectively. The figures on the lintel are the apostles. The inner archivolt shows angels with scrolls, while the middle and outer archivolts show the Elders of the Apocalypse.

Originally painted in many colors, as was all architectural sculpture on cathedrals, the tympanum has been deeply cut, making the lion and ox, in particular, almost free-standing. In addition, the division of the plaster tympanum into sections reflects the cuts in the stone of the actual tympanum.

To the sides of tympanum are two jamb figures; these are the sculptures that flank a doorway. The jamb figures often represented Old Testament kings and queens. It was commonly believed that these figures were royalty, thus causing the west portal to be regarded as the "royal portal" or "Heavenly Gateway to Jerusalem."

Here, the figures thought to be the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon were cast from the jamb figures on the west portal of the collegiate church of Notre Dame at Corbeil, France, which is located on the Seine River in the south of France. Notre Dame's west portal was destroyed in 1793. The two jamb figures were saved through purchase, and restored in 1860. They have been in the Louvre in Paris since 1916. The remainder of the church was destroyed between 1818 and 1823.

Thought not from Chartres cathedral, the jamb figures date from approximately the same time period as the tympanum, 1140-1150, and relate stylistically to the jamb figures. The jamb figures at Chartres were typically Old Testament kings and queens, and do, the Corbeil figures are in keeping with those that border the Chartres tympanum. At Chartres, the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon appear on the left jamb of the right portal of the north transept, and were done circa 1220.

The Corbeil jamb figures show greater delicacy and refinement than those at Chartres, although the jamb figures from both churches show elongated proportions since they were carved from long, narrow blanks of stone. The figures stand on a conical, sloping base that cause their feet to slope downward as well.

The gift from the Memorial Art gallery at the University of Rochester, New York, complements the existing ancient plaster casts in the Cast Gallery. The tympanum and jamb figures represent medieval architectural sculpture, providing viewers with a sense of the monumentality of the sculptures themselves, as well as with an appreciation of the technical proficiency of the makers and builders of the Gothic period.

MAA 12/95
Anonymous (French)
*Illuminated page from a Psalter in Latin*,
c. 1200-1210
Ink, Pigments and gold on parchment
(2002.15)
Gilbreath-McLorn Fund

This page comes from a Psalter, a bound collection of the 150 Psalms, which provided medieval readers with tools for private and communal devotions. Stylistically, this leaf resembles other manuscripts produced in Northeastern France, Paris and England during the reign of the French monarch Philip Augustus (1179-1223). The script is written in a Gothic liturgical hand, and the large illuminated initials and painted line-endings were created at the same time as the text. The linear penwork infills and flourishes were probably added after 1250.

The high quality of the decoration, together with the lavish use of gold and lapis blue, indicates that this page comes from a book made for a member of the royal court or a high-ranking cleric.
Anonymous (Netherlandish)  
*Adoration of the Magi from a Book of Hours*, ca. 1480  
Ink, pigments and gold on parchment (2003.1)  
Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a fashion developed among wealthy Europeans for lavishly illustrated Books of Hours. These manuscripts contained psalms and prayers for recitation and devotions throughout the eight canonical hours of the day. In Books of Hours devoted to the Virgin Mary, an image of *The Adoration of the Magi* traditionally accompanies the text for *sext*, to be read during the mid-afternoon.

The anonymous artist who painted this leaf probably worked for a well-to-do Netherlandish patron. The painter filled most of the page with the adoration scene, and the convincing landscape reflects the new Northern Renaissance interest in naturalism. The Gothic architecture, elongated proportions, and gold drapery striations, on the other hand, attest to the continued popularity of the late Medieval, International Gothic style.
Anonymous (French)
Calendar page for the Month of January from a Book of Hours in Latin, ca. 1460
Ink, pigments and gold on parchment (2003.2)
Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a fashion developed among wealthy Europeans for lavishly illustrated books of hours. These manuscripts contained psalms and prayers for recitation and devotions throughout the eight canonical hours of the day. Books of hours also generally contained a calendar identifying important feast days and saints’ days throughout the year.

This leaf from a French book of hours presents the calendar for January. The dates of feasts and saints’ days are listed in the central rectangle, which is surrounded by decorative marginalia. Scenes of the month of January appear in roundels on each side of the page. The recto presents an image of a man feasting, the “labor of the month” associated with January. On the verso, a roundel contains an image of the nude water carrier Aquarius, the astrological sign connected with January. The intricate border also contains images of people, animals, and hybrid creatures.
Anonymous (French)
*Bible Leaf from the Book of Judges*, mid-thirteenth century

Ink, pigments and gold on parchment

(2003.3)
Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund

This page from a Medieval manuscript Bible was probably used for personal devotion. The text is written in a Gothic script in two columns for easy reading. The small size of the letters allowed the writer to fit many words onto each page, condensing the Bible into a small, albeit thick, portable book. Notes in the margins provide commentary on the scripture.

A large illuminated initial “P” marks the beginning text of the Book of Judges. The “P” is inhabited with an image of God appearing to the Old Testament hero Gideon. Gideon wears a Medieval tunic and chain mail. He holds a sword and shield and stands against an embossed gold ground. Stylistically, the script and image can be associated with Parisian workshops of the mid-thirteenth century.
Anonymous (German or Flemish, 14th c.)
Panel from a Diptych Showing the Adoration of the Magi
3rd quarter of 14th century
Ivory (2007.5)  Gift of Museum Associates

Medieval worshippers used many types of visual aids in their devotions, from the monumental images that enriched their churches to the illuminated prayerbooks that guided the contemplations of the upper classes. Many wealthy people also owned small sculptures and folding diptychs made of precious materials that, depending on their size and format, could function as altarpieces for private chapels or as tiny, jewel-like 'books' that could be carried about tucked in a sleeve or belt-pouch. An influx of elephant ivory into the European market in the later medieval period translated into a wealth of luxury items, but ivory had long been a prized material. Not only did it foster a sense of connection to objects described in the Bible, like the throne of the wise King Solomon (3 Kings 10:18), but the creamy, smooth material could be carved into minute forms and patterns and could be further enlivened with paints and gold leaf.

This ivory panel is the left wing of a diptych, the right border of which is now lost; the style of its carving suggests that it was made in Germany or the Netherlands in the later fourteenth century. The hole in the center top suggests that the panel, or even the whole diptych, was suspended from a chain or ribbon at some point in its history. The scene depicts the Adoration of the Magi: beneath an architectural canopy of trefoiled arches, the seated Virgin Mary holds the Christ Child on her lap as he turns toward the Magus kneeling before them. One of the standing Magi holds his pot of myrrh or frankincense in one hand and looks down at the seated group; the other turns back toward his companion while pointing up toward the star of Bethlehem. Originally, the enlarged pointing hand also would have guided the viewer's eye toward the opposing leaf of the diptych, which most likely depicted either the Crucifixion, or the Last Judgment. This object would have been read from left to right, from Christ's birth to his death, or to his second coming, and would have evoked the cycle of the Christian liturgical year, and the entire scope of Christian history, for its owner.
During the medieval period, artists and artisans invented the stained-glass technique to embellish architectural interiors. Colored glass pieces were painted and fastened together in lead frames to fashion pictures and ornamental designs that were placed in windows. Light shining through these windows created walls of color that transformed ecclesiastic interiors into otherworldly, spiritual spaces.

This small quatrefoil is a fragment from a much larger window. It consists of a central square panel, or "boss," surrounded by eight lobes decorated with leaf designs. An unusual ornamental knot encloses a small decorative motif at the center of the boss. The deep blues, rich yellows, and bright reds create a beautiful ensemble of primary colors that is typical of French stained-glass during the thirteenth century. Each panel is delicately hand-decorated with black paint, and the brush strokes are visible on close inspection.