

**The Allegory of Romance**  
**Secular Ivories from Medieval France**  
**c. 1300- c. 1450**

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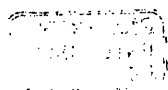


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# Abstract

Secular art from the Middle Ages survives in fragmentary form, is usually rare, and is hence overlooked. The Church's dominant role also accounted for the neglect of secular objects. Throughout medieval times the Church was the chief patron of the arts, and a substantial amount of money was spent on creating objects for worship, and decorating monumental buildings of importance. Religious objects dominate museum collections, while secular artefacts are not given as much importance. The focus of this exhibition is to relive the past, through its secular artefacts especially ivories, which exemplify the analogies that exist between medieval society and present times. The concept of courtship, and love is as alive today as it was several hundred years ago. Literary expansions of medieval themes have infiltrated through the moving image-cinema, television and video. These artefacts have a strong association with the enhancement of personal beauty. Such images are powerful in their own right, made for particular purposes, rituals and moments in time. Often given by men to women and sometimes by women to men. They did not reflect so much as embody medieval love experiences, and were also responsible for providing elaborate fantasies of desire. The aim of the exhibition is not to provide a stylistic evolution over the period, but to approach the topics thematically, in order to draw and keep the attention of visitors. The thematic approach allows objects of different media to be displayed in close proximity to one another, hence breaking the monotony of a chronological approach and regeneration through time.

15,000 words not including bibliography.





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# Vernacular Literature and its Influence on Medieval Art

Love is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight  
of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex.

*Andreas Capellanus*<sup>1</sup>

Romance's history is intrinsically compelled by the creation of aristocratic lay culture in courts and wealthy households throughout the Middle Ages in Europe. However, romance narratives, are seldom images of courtly ideals. The term "romance" used at present in reference to the narratives of chivalric adventures that were first encountered in medieval courts arises from the Old French expression "mettre en romanz" meaning to translate into vernacular French. Hence, a variety of vernacular narratives were dubbed "romans" (and were also sometimes called "contes" [tales] or "estories" [stories/histories]).<sup>2</sup>

These stories shared characteristics with other genres, whose outlines were fluid and versatile. But gradually at royal and feudal courts, emerged an array of exciting and enthusiastic fictions, written first in verse and then in prose elaborating the exploits of knights, ladies and aristocratic families seeking honour, love and adventure. These narratives did not adhere to a single, distinguishable type; but emanated from various sources and took a variety of forms. Medieval romances survive in a variety of narratives whose themes and issues are interwoven into every aspect of medieval social and cultural life.

The earliest vernacular romances were free translations of Latin epics and chronicles translated into French, created in the mid-twelfth century at the Angevin royal court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine in England, where Anglo-Norman, a form of Old French, was the literary language of the aristocracy. Before the close of the twelfth

century we find the Provencal conception of love spreading out in two directions. One stream flows down into Italy and, through the poets of the Dolce Stil Nuovo, goes to influence the Divine Comedy. Another stream travelled northward to amalgamate with the Ovidian tradition, which already existed there, and so to produce the French poetry of the twelfth century.<sup>3</sup>

Sometime around or after 1160, a clerk on the Continent, who signed his work "Chretien de Troyes," created a "molt bele conjointure" ("a beautiful conjoining") of fictional elements that were grafted onto a central stock drawn from Arthurian legend. After the creation of *Erec at Enide*, Chretien wrote a series of stories about Arthur's knights, including those of Lancelot and Perceval. His tales of noble love and chivalric prowess started a fashion for Arthurian fiction that altered the course of literary fiction. Arthurian romances were not the first vernacular courtly fictions, but their tremendous popularity; in a wide range of linguistic registers, cultural settings, and aesthetic settings, established them as a major force that other romance authors might choose to imitate.

The story matter of romance ranges vastly and can be classified into Arthurian and non-Arthurian romances, adventure romances, idyllic, Byzantine, or realistic romances.<sup>4</sup> The same story may have a number of different interpretations, such as the legend of Tristan and Iseult, which greatly attracted the medieval public. The legend recounting the adulterous affair between Tristan, nephew of King Mark, and Queen Iseult, circulated orally in Celtic culture, inspired by some of the earliest romance fictions. Beroul's version comes to us in a fragmentary state with neither beginning nor end.<sup>5</sup> He repeatedly emphasises to side with the lovers against the traitorous felons who pursue them. While Thomas of England shares Beroul's concerns for establishing the authenticity of his version in the face of competitors, he chooses a different stance *vis-à-vis* love.<sup>6</sup> However, these and other written and oral tales of Tristan and Iseult's tragic love travelled widely in Europe throughout the Middle Ages. Their survival in

literature and other forms of art present today, makes the Tristan legend one of the founding romantic myths of European culture.<sup>7</sup>

Guillaume de Lorris's, *Roman de la Rose*<sup>8</sup> offers yet another approach to mixing lyric and romance, through allegorical sources. The narrator is transformed through dream, into lyric lover engaged in a narrative quest for his beloved, now figured and fragmented as a rose in a garden. Unlike Arthurian romance where chivalric prowess generally leads to the rewards of love, the search here is related to the art of loving, and the stages of love that begin with the perception of the beloved's beauty and terminate in love's ultimate goal. Allegorical figures and descriptions proliferate as action slows and then stops: Guillaume's lover fails to achieve his search, which requires the continuation of Jean de Meun to bring it to completion. Before allowing the lover to storm the lady's castle<sup>9</sup> and pluck the rose.

The term "courtly love" was used in 1883 by Gaston Paris<sup>10</sup> with reference to *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* (also known as the *Lancelot*) by Chretien de Troyes, the earliest surviving narrative of the illicit affair between Lancelot and Queen Guenievere. There have been many attempts to define what one might mean by courtly love. For Gaston Paris, it involves concealment because of the risk of discovery, especially for the woman; a consequent raising of her prestige *vis-à-vis* her lover, whom she may treat unpredictably; the responding eagerness of the man to demonstrate his devotion by actions of prowess; and adherence to a code of manners or rules. The next most influential definition is that of C.S. Lewis,<sup>11</sup> which outlines courtly love as love of a highly specialized sort, whose characteristics are Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the religion of Love. The lover always lacks pride. He has to submit to his lady's slightest whim and silently accept her rebukes; these are the only virtues he dares to claim. The lover is the Lady's 'man'. This amatory ritual is felt to be part of courtly life. This love, though neither flirtatious nor sexually immoral in its expression, is always what the nineteenth century called 'dishonourable' love.<sup>12</sup> The poet usually addresses another



man's wife, and seldom concerns himself with the lady's husband, his rival and enemy. But if he is ethically careless, he is no light-hearted gallant; his love is represented as a tragic emotion, and he is saved from complete despair by his faith in the God of Love, who never betrays his worshippers.

The increase and variety in vernacular literature led artists and illuminators to illustrate these accounts using the stories as a source of inspiration. Among French manuscripts, a developed romance iconography does not appear before the mid thirteenth century. In French romance manuscripts, full page or even three-quarter page miniatures are rare. Instead, romances are illustrated with historiated initials or with framed miniatures set into one column of text or, less frequently extending across the entire page<sup>13</sup>. A late thirteenth century songbook or *Chansonniere* (fig. 4) is a good example of such an illustrated manuscript. The composition within the letter S consists of a seated couple courting, the lady with a rabbit and the man with a lapdog. Among French Manuscripts, prose romances are overall more heavily illustrated than verse ones. Hence one can conclude that prose romances can be linked to a different kind of reading, a reception more visual, whereas verse romances were likely to be received through recitation.

Images of courtly love most often appear in Gothic art not in the public sphere of the cathedral program<sup>14</sup> but in the private focus of luxury items such as ivory mirror-backs, caskets, combs, tapestries, embroideries, aquamanile and enamels. For an increasing numbers of wealthy and courts patrons, especially women, these images adorned objects to be used in the act of self-regard. The construction of courtly images can also be seen in this light as subverting sacred codes by analogy, and also freeing the artist to depict new experiences, scenes of erotic encounter and response in which young people touch, move, and embrace free from the confines of schematic religious narrative.<sup>15</sup> The other reason why these poets used the idea of worshipping a visual object was the bleakness of accomplishment implied in the visual itself.

The need to expand the ideological fashions of courtly society saw the need not only to illustrate the act of love but also to deify it. Amor, the god of love, appears in both Gothic ivories<sup>16</sup> and manuscript illustrations. Amor is described in thirteenth century poems as a spirit, as in Guillaume de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose*, where "it seemed he was an angel come straight from heaven" (vv. 904-5). In contemporary representations he does not appear naked like his classical ancestor, Cupid, but is clothed as a courtier and thus linked to feudal and courtly power.

Subjects such as the Fountain of Youth<sup>17</sup>, first appeared in the *Romance of Alexander* by Lambert le Tort of Chateaudun, written around 1180. The earliest texts of the story of Aristotle, around the mid thirteenth century, can be found in the *Lai d'Aristote* by Henri d'Andeli. The tales of Lancelot, Gwain, Galahad, Tristan and Iseult, Alexander, Aristotle and Phyllis, all emanating from vernacular roots, provided a source of inspiration for artists working in different media. Acts of chivalry, prowess, and illicit love, give these objects and subjects of desire, in the proceeding chapters, depth and hidden meaning.

<sup>1</sup> Quotation from Andreas Capellanus's treatise is from the edition with parallel texts in Latin and English by P.G. Walsh, *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, London 1982.

<sup>2</sup> See *Medieval Romance*, edited by Roberta L. Krueger, Cambridge, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> The twelfth century has been described as an "age of Ovid" because of the predominant influence of writings by the Classical Latin poet Ovid particularly on the literature of love. Ovid's influence is particularly strong on courtly texts dating from the period c. 1150-70, which saw the composition of the Old French *Piramus et Thisbe*, *Philomena*, and *Narcissus* (all based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*).

<sup>4</sup> See *The shape of romance in medieval France*, by Matilda Brown, pp 16, in *Medieval Romance*, Cambridge, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> *Le Roman de Tristan: poeme du XII siecle* by Beroul, edited by E. Muret, (4th de. L.M. Defourques), CFMA, Paris 1970. Composed in France perhaps as early as 1155.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas of England's version of *Tristan* is said to have been written around c. 1173, and survives in fragmentary form today.

<sup>7</sup> See *Tristan and Iseult*: a Casebook, ed. Joan Tasker Grimbert, New York, and 1995.

<sup>8</sup> The incomplete poem is completed by Jean de Meun, the continuation stretches Guillaume's unfinished romance from 4000 verses to 20,000 plus, a striking contrast to the standard length of Chretien's romances, between 6000 and 7000 verses.

<sup>9</sup> The first evidence we have for this is the full-fledged Siege of the Castle of Love acted out as part of a festival at Treviso in 1214.

<sup>10</sup> Gaston Paris, "Etudes sur les romans de la table ronde," *Romania*, 12 (1883), 459-534. Gaston Paris was an influential French medievalist for whom the *Lancelot* is the first literary example of courtly love.

<sup>11</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*, Oxford, 1936.

<sup>12</sup> See C.S. Lewis, on Courtly Love.

<sup>13</sup> See 'The manuscript context of medieval romance' by Sylvia Huot, in *Medieval Romance*, ed. by Roberta L. Krueger, Cambridge, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> The episodes of Aristotle, Lancelot on the Sword Bridge, the Capture of the Unicorn, and the scene of Virgil suspended in a basket, all occur on the capital of a column in the church of St. Pierre at Caen in Normandy. These subjects from vernacular literature are rare in the public sphere of cathedral programs.

<sup>15</sup> See M. Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-making in Medieval Art*, pp. 314.

<sup>16</sup> Especially on mirror cases and in the top panel of caskets, where he is seen sometimes standing in a crenellated battlement shooting arrows down at besieger's of the Castle of Love. Other times he is seen sitting in a tree with his bow and arrow.

<sup>17</sup> Is illustrated on the panels of a large number of composite ivory caskets, showing lame and frail elders approaching the fountain of love to be rejuvenated by its water. The subject also appears on tapestries and in wall painting.

## Objects and Subjects of Desire, in Ivory and other Media

He has eyes and he knows not how to see neither can he recognise the rust,  
for courting has now become harlotry.

Marcabru<sup>1</sup>

As image follows text, medieval love lyrics supplied numerous subjects for sculptors in ivory, as well as for the painter, the illuminator, and the enameller. We tend to think of Gothic art in terms of ecclesiastical structures and religious iconography, but an important development in this period was the increase of non-sacred subjects in the depiction of art. Writer's and reader's of vernacular literature sought entertainment and edification from images reflective of their aristocratic lifestyle. The Church had attacked the "tales of Arthur", and especially the rich visual displays of court life, where signs pointed not to the ineffable God but to worldly images of illicit lust.

Secular art has suffered more damage by the effects of change and time, in comparison to religious art. A great deal was executed in perishable textiles such as linen or tapestry and decorated with embroidery; some was enamelled on gold or silver, which could be melted down in times of crisis, and some were painted on wall plaster.<sup>2</sup> Churches and monasteries, despite the Reformation, have not suffered in the same way as secular palaces, castles, and houses, as secular art has not been awarded the same protection.

The images on these objects taught men and women the 'art of love'. They were memorials or embodiments of love and affection, since a gift establishes a special bond between two people. Medieval culture was a gift culture; nothing was handed over free from the implications of reciprocation and contract.<sup>3</sup> A gift was an essential part of the courtship process.

These objects and the images that they illustrate are powerful in their own right, as they are made for specific purposes, rituals and moments in time. Often given by men to women and sometimes by women to men. These objects did not reflect so much as embody medieval love experiences, and were also responsible for providing elaborate fantasies of desire.<sup>4</sup> According to Georges Duby, the French scholar on medieval love, “the historian cannot measure the role of desire.”<sup>5</sup>

Ivories for secular use appeared in profusion at the end of the first quarter of the fourteenth century and were carved in the sophisticated relief style of the Paris religious ivories, which had been developed over the preceding century in the production of diptychs and triptychs, showing the life of Christ and the Virgin. Elephant ivory is not only rare and expensive in this day and age, but was considered to be a precious and exotic material in the Middle Ages. The ivory caskets, combs, mirror cases and gravigours (hairparters), have a strong association with the enhancement of personal beauty and some can be placed in the context of cosmetics. The medium of ivory can be crystalline cold, and have transcendent whiteness, but at the same time be a substance suggestive of the creamy whiteness of flesh, undulating and soft, and probably after wax, the most flesh like of all artistic media. Women were encouraged to paint their faces with flour or lead-filled cosmetics to fulfil the ‘ivory white’ ideal of beauty.<sup>6</sup>

Medieval Architecture was also a source for the arts and supplied them with many decorative forms. A good example is a pair of fourteenth century ivory writing tablets with scenes of hawking and courting, shown under crocketed trefoil arches (fig. C3)<sup>7</sup>, which is reflective of architectural ornament reduced in scale.

The subject matter of these objects is quite versatile. It consists of material derived from activities drawn from daily life, including hunting, hawking, courting, jousting,

music making, game playing, and myths such as the Lady and the Unicorn.

## The Hunt of Love

Hunting with trained birds of prey, known as hawking or falconry, was widespread prior to the invention of firearms. The sport seems to have originated in the Near East, and it was strictly regulated. Only certain classes could own favoured varieties of birds; the eagle was reserved for royalty.

Both men and women are depicted as falconers in medieval art and the falcon itself could be used as an allegory of either the lover, the lady, or even love itself in the poetry of the period. An ivory mirror case (fig. C1)<sup>8</sup>, shows a lady and a gentleman out hawking, both have hawks perched on their hands, while the man discreetly embraces the lady. When a lady is shown holding the bird of prey, it usually means that (within the fiction of love at least), she has her lover under control. An embroidered aumoniere (fig. C2) shows the return of a lover to his lady; the lover can also be interpreted as a personification of the noble bird flying back into the arms of his beloved. The reverse shows the bird perched on the gloved hand of the lady falconer. A lady falconer mounted on horseback with a falcon perched on her raised hand is shown on an Italian marriage chest (fig. C4). When a man holds a falcon (fig. C3) it does not necessarily imply that he is in control of the love situation.

The falcon has a less solemn role as messenger, usually between two lovers. The bird of prey's characteristics of physical beauty and independence of mind enable falconry practises to serve as an analogy of the physical and emotional beauty of woman to man: the man's obsessive wish to bend an independent spirit to his own desires.<sup>9</sup>

The subject of hawking is quite frequently seen illustrated on ivory mirror cases, an

example similar to the one already discussed in (fig. C1), is illustrated in (illus. no.3). Falconry was also associated with noble ladies. A late thirteenth century seal of Isabella of Sevro<sup>10</sup> (illus. no. 1) shows her riding side-saddle holding in her gloved right hand, a hawk. Hunting provided the theme for a pack of playing cards (illus. no. 2)<sup>11</sup>, destined for the Burgundian court. One card shows a lady mounted on horseback, attired in resplendent costume, with a hawk perched on her right arm, while the other shows a man on horseback with a lure and a dog. Both these examples are comparable in composition to the lady on horseback in one of the squares of the marriage chest in (fig. C4). A superbly preserved tapestry shows a pair of lovers in a flowery landscape setting with a stream running down the centre (illus. no. 7). The lady who is seated on the ground bears the beautiful specimen of a falcon on her left hand, a sign of her nobility and her hunting role in this relationship. In the margins of a *Chansonnier* (illus. no. 4), is illustrated a stag hunt. The man on horseback blowing a hunting horn is comparable to the attendant with a horn shown as part of the hunting party illustrated in (fig. C1).

## Lovers Courting

Ivory combs along with mirror cases and grivoirs for parting the hair formed an essential part of the dressing case of the typical wealthy lady or gentleman in the Gothic period.<sup>12</sup> Fewer combs survive as compared to mirror cases<sup>13</sup>. A rare pair of mirror cases, that opened and closed like a modern powder compact (illus. no. 11), depict eight pairs of lovers. Courtly objects like court life itself produced a variety of gestures and expressions of emotion structured according to aesthetic principles. These eight scenes are based on the stages of courtship, which revolve around one significant object of symbolic importance- the chaplet.<sup>14</sup> A similar comb in the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. C5), could possibly be a pair to the mirror cases. The comb shows three scenes of courting on either side, divided by spindly trees, with the chaplet, a symbol of eternal love, being the focus of four of the scenes. In a similar composition in Gratin

*Decretum*, a young man presents a chaplet to a lady, before luring her into following him (illus. no. 10). A page from the late-thirteenth century songbook or *Chansonniere* (illus. no. 4), shows a seated couple in the letter S, with a rabbit and a lapdog. The man gently caresses the lady's face, while stroking his dog. The composition is similar to the scene on the right on the comb (fig. C5), which shows a couple seated with their respective pets, and the man gently caresses the woman<sup>15</sup>.

An ivory mirror back (illus. no. 8) illustrates a lover presenting his beloved with the gift of a comb, the composition is enclosed within a four lobed frame<sup>16</sup>. A grisaille drawing on parchment also shows two messages being delivered to two women (illus. no. 9), wearing flowing gowns. One lady is shown combing her hair while the other holds a chaplet. The symbolic importance of the chaplet can be gathered from its depiction in two more images. In (fig. C2) a lover crowns his lady as he flies back into her arms, and on one of the leaf's of the writing tablet (fig. C3), a kneeling lover gives his beloved a rose to add to her chaplet.

Almoners were a major fashion accessory in both the male and female wardrobe, since clothes had no pockets during this period. <sup>17</sup>An illustration from *Le Roman de la Rose* illustrates a lady feeling her lover's purse (illus. no. 5). An image which has the feeling of intimacy and other subtle connotations which may be interpreted in different ways. She may be discreetly weighing his material assets while being affectionate towards him. Another aumoniere in Hamburg (illus. no. 6), illustrates a lady pulling her lover by his hood towards her while holding a chaplet in her other hand. These purses were probably given by women who embroidered them, to their lovers as embodiments of love. Another sensual image in which a lover 'touch's' his lady's breast (illus. no. 13), is illustrated on a stone console in the nave of Auxerre Cathedral. Caskets were used for storing jewellery and small precious objects of value. They were often given as wedding gifts and hence were decorated with scenes depicting the virtues of love. Episodes of courtly love are illustrated in scenes on the late twelfth-century Limoges



casket in the British Museum (illus. no. 12). Scenes of embracing lovers are also found on the "Talbot" casket (illus. no. 21). The use of a casket is illustrated in a grisaille pen and ink drawing where a messenger opens a casket in which dispatches and letters were sent, before a lady combing her long tresses (illus. no. 9).

Shields were an essential part of a knight's armour in medieval times. They are shown in jousts and tournaments scenes, some with emblems on them. A decorative shield from the British Museum shows a kneeling knight expressing his love for his lady, before a tournament from which he may not return (fig. C14). Another illustration from the Luttrell Psalter shows Sir Geoffrey Luttrell being given a shield by his wife, before a tournament (illus. no. 42).<sup>18</sup>

### Jousting and the Attack on the Castle of Love

Throughout the Middle Ages, tournaments provided the training ground for the mounted knight. It was also an arena for the conscious practise and display of knightly virtues. Many churchmen criticized tournaments not just as idle games that diverted warriors from the battle against the infidel but also because they effeminised males by making them the decorated objects of female desire. Henry of Lancaster related how he deliberately cut a fine figure at a tournament in order to impress the ladies present, though he states that neither tournament nor jousting is essentially sinful.<sup>19</sup>

A small carved chest in the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. C6), illustrates this popular sport. Scenes of jousting were depicted on a variety of objects. A similar scene occurs in the margins of a manuscript (illus. no. 16), showing two knights mounted on horseback with their lances crossed and pointing at each other. A plaque from a girdle (fig. C7) has a similar incised image. An interesting item is a misericord from Worcester Cathedral, which is carved to show two armoured knights on horseback in

combat, with two heralds on either side blowing bugles (illus. no. 17). This composition is similar to the composition on the two central panels of the plaque from Liverpool (fig. C8), with the exception of the spectators in the balcony above. The lid of the composite casket in the British Museum (fig. C9)<sup>20</sup> illustrates a similar scene on the two central sections. An elaborately decorated page from an early fifteenth century French manuscript (illus. no. 18), also shows two mounted knights in combat, with spectators on either side, and the stately figures of a King and Queen are seated in a raised podium.

When the popularity for allegory emerged in the Middle Ages, which had a strong influence on religious thought, came into contact with the frank paganism of *l'amour courtois*, it found new horizons for the creative mind. Wars were waged for and against love. Not before long the siege of a woman's heart was visualized in terms of the siege of a castle. <sup>21</sup>The first evidence we have for this full-fledged Siege of the Castle of Love acted out as part of a festival at Treviso in 1214<sup>22</sup>. Rolandino of Padua relates that to this Court of Solace and Mirth were invited many gentlemen and twelve of the fairest and gayest ladies of Padua. The castle itself is thus described:

“This is the castel of love and lisse,  
Of solace, of socour, of joye, and blisse,  
Of hope, of hele, of sikernesse,  
And ful of alle swetnesse.”<sup>23</sup>

All the stages in this elaborate medieval game were represented on ivory mirror cases and caskets. The siege is illustrated in the left-hand side panel of the plaque from Liverpool (fig. C8), and on either side of the jousting scenes on the lid of the casket in the British Museum (fig. C9).<sup>24</sup> Inventories of the fourteenth century show the popularity of this subject, through its illustration in other media. In the margins of the Peterborough Psalter (illus. no. 14) one finds spirited renderings of the *Chateau*

*d'Amour*. The armoured knights are shown being easily repulsed by a team of ladies throwing roses from the battlements. This subject has also been illustrated on an early fifteenth century ivory comb (illus. no. 15), which is rare on combs. A castle is shown in the centre of the narrative band of the comb. On either side of the castle knights attempt to capture it, but encounter resistance from the two women in the battlements who defend it. The popularity of the theme of armoured knights mounted on horseback can be assumed, from the fact that it is also the subject of a late thirteenth century bronze aquamanile (illus. no. 19).

## The Virgin and the Unicorn

The combination of the Virgin and the Unicorn stimulated a completely different kind of art in France<sup>25</sup>. There the story was coloured by the troubadour tradition. Artists and writers foresaw the consequences of the Unicorn's erotic nature and openly depicted what was implicitly understood by everyone. Mary with the animal's head in her lap was an image easily transferable to the human plane, and the soulful lover identifies himself admiringly with the beast.

On a capital in northern Spain are illustrated several themes from romance literature, including that of the Unicorn and the Virgin, with a mirror in her hand.<sup>26</sup> As the mirror can be a chastity symbol, like the Unicorn itself, one can not be sure whether the woman is one of the deceivers, and the mirror denotes vanity- or the chaste opposite. The side panel of the casket in the British Museum (fig. C9), illustrates two scenes simultaneously, that of Tristan and Iseult under the tree, and the Virgin and the Unicorn. The Unicorn lays in the Virgins lap while a hunter lurching in a tree above slays the beast. The scene on the side panel of the Walters casket (illus. no. 22) is almost identical to the casket in the British Museum (fig. C9).

The mirror is an important requisite in medieval art and can have several interpretations. It may be an attribute of vanity, and arrogance, as in Danish Gothic murals.<sup>27</sup> But it is also an attribute of Prudence and a weapon against evil animals. The mirror is also an attribute of the Virgin Mary, and is a symbol of her purity. An example of a tamed suitor's quest is represented on an enamelled medallion dating from the fourteenth century (fig. C11). A maiden sits within a Gothic clove-leafed frame. The Unicorn kneels before her and she grasps its horn with one hand. In her other hand she holds a mirror reminiscent of a chaplet. It is raised in the middle of the composition towards a young man sitting in a tree, (like King Mark in the legend of Tristan and Iseult), who is slaying the beast. This composition is not stationary due to the rhythms and lines that lead the eye along a continuous movement. This subject seemed to be in popular demand as it was illustrated in a number of different media. A carved misericord from Chester Cathedral (illus. no. 23) shows the same subject illustrated, with the exception of dragons on either side. Two manuscripts one in Oxford (illus. no. 24), and the other in the Pierpoint Morgan Library around c.1170 (illus. no. 25), illustrate similar scenes.

### The Humiliation of Aristotle

The two earliest versions of the story of Aristotle and Phyllis appeared in the thirteenth century, "*Lai d'Aristote*" and the contemporary middle high German version "Aristotle's und Phyllis". Alexander the Great having conquered India, falls in love with a young lady, Phyllis and neglects his duties to pay court to her. His tutor Aristotle demands that he mend his ways. She discovers that the philosopher is the cause of her lover's diminished ardour, and decides to take revenge. She plans to entice him by her beauty, and once she succeeds, she demands that he wears a saddle and bridle and be ridden around the orchard like an animal, while Alexander watches his teacher make an utter fool of himself.<sup>28</sup> The young girl riding the foolish philosopher is the subject of a

bronze aquamanile, which must have been a great source of entertainment for many guests at the dinner table (fig. C10). Phyllis pats her steed's behind and with the other pulls up a tuft of his hair into a horn to make him behave like a beast ruled not by his mind but his lower body. Aristotle has a bemused smile on his face. That such an image, found its place on the noble table is an indication of how self-conscious and ironic peoples views of the courtly system had become by this period. It also shows that the medieval viewer, was more at ease with images that explicitly alluded to sexual acts rather than depicting the act itself, with the allegory rather than the reality of penetration.

The front panel of a number of composite caskets including the one in the British Museum, depict Alexander, Aristotle and Phyllis, juxtaposed with two scenes from the Fountain of Love. The great Aristotle was known only to the Gothic craftsman as the victim of the viles of Phyllis. He is shown at Exeter wearing a crown<sup>29</sup> and saddle (illus. no. 28). The couple is also shown in a section of the Malterer Tapestry, (illus. no. 29), in which Phyllis rides Aristotle while swinging a riding crop.

## The Fountain of Youth

The theme appears for the first time in *Branch III* of the *Roman d'Allexander* of *Alexandre de Paris*, written in about 1180. Life giving liquid can always be found in locus amoenus, "the fount of running water", but the most popular fountain in medieval art, and often pictured on ivories, tapestries and wall paintings, was a variation on this theme in which life giving water rejuvenated love's failing corporeal equipment- the Fountain of Youth<sup>30</sup>. On the Parisian Ivory casket (fig. C9), we see lame elders approaching the fountain but we do not see the miraculous transformation. By contrast later versions of the subject show old men dipping themselves directly into the transforming waters (illus. no. 31). A fresco from the Castello di Manta, in Florence

shows the Fountain of Youth (illus. no.30). Figures are shown pulling of their heavy robes to plunge into their newly sensate flesh. The God of Love surmounting the structure of the fountain is now a statue.<sup>31</sup>

## The Earliest References to Arthurian Images

An introduction to Arthurian chivalry lies in certain passages in medieval prose and poetry and in a few ancient inventories and account books, which mention illustrations of the Round Table cycle.<sup>32</sup>From Wales we get a few brief references during the succeeding centuries which imply the existence of an Arthurian tradition. But before 1125 men of Padua and Modena were bearing the names of Artusius and Galvanus (Arthur and Gwain),<sup>33</sup>and that Arthur and his knights appeared on a sculpture at Modena. The Arthurian legend became popular with all men. It offered, with due respect to Geoffrey of Monmouth, history to the historically curious, love, mystery and chivalry to gallant knights and sentimental ladies. For the religious it presented some of the most sacred relics of the Passion and the conversion of the West. A number of stories emanating from the Legends of Arthur, are carved on the surfaces of fourteenth century Parisian ivory caskets like the one in the British Museum (fig. C9).

## Lancelot on the Sword Bridge

A scene from Chretien de Troyes famous poem, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, recurs on a number of French ivories. Lancelot in his endeavour to deliver the queen from the hands of an abductor, Meleagant, has reached the banks of a stream, which alone separates him from the castle of her captor. The black raging stream is spanned only by a sword as long as two lances, each end fixed into a tree-trunk. This scene is shown in the second section of the rear long side of the casket (fig. C9). Beyond the stream Lancelot descries two lions chained but ready to devour him. Despite this, love inspires

him to remove the mail from his hands and feet and creep across the treacherous bridge. Bleeding he arrives on the other side to find that the lions were just an illusion.<sup>34</sup>

No miniature illustrating the scene in *Charrette* has survived, but certain miniatures of the same adventure in the *Vulgate Lancelot* have simplified the subject so that we have vague wavy lines to represent the stream, a large but not a particularly long sword, and Lancelot in surcoat and chain mail crossing it on hands and knees (illus. no. 32).<sup>35</sup> On the ivory caskets the Lancelot scene occurs with scenes of Gwain's adventures in the Chateau Merveil. The sword bridge scene is also illustrated on a capital of a nave of the church of St. Pierre, Caen (illus. no. 33).

### Gwain on the Magic Bed

The adventures of Gwain in the Chateau Merviel occur both on certain ivory caskets and also at Caen (illus. no. 34) in conjunction with the carvings of the Sword Bridge. One of the adventures that he seems to have inherited was that of the Chateau Merviel, which occurs in Arthurian romance in many forms. <sup>36</sup>As told by Chretien de Troyes in the *Conte del Graal* (c. 1175), Gwain entered the hall of a magic castle, sat upon a magic bed equipped with wheels and bells; at once there was a great noise, arrows and bolts rained down upon his shield; when this attack ceased, a lion pounced on Gwain, and the knight succeeded in cutting off the claws which the beast had fixed in his shield, and head as well.<sup>37</sup> The Museo Civico, Bologna, possesses a mirror case illustrating the adventures of the magic bed (illus. no. 35).<sup>38</sup>

### Enyas and the Wild man

Myths are things that never happen but always are.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, concepts generated by faith tended to be seized upon and externalised in a naive and literal fashion, and thus abstractions became rendered as concrete realities. The wild man, a purely mythical creature, was a literary and artistic invention of the medieval imagination. In physical appearance he differed from man mainly in his thick coat of hair that left only his face, hands, and feet bare. He is depicted in works of art beginning from the fourteenth century and continuing well into the sixteenth century.

The end of a plaque in the British Museum (fig. C12), illustrates an encounter between a knight said to be Enyas, and a wild man. The scene in the other half of the plaque representing a knight receiving the keys of a castle from an old man. Loomis has identified this scene with Galahads<sup>40</sup> capture of the *Chateau des Pucelles*.<sup>41</sup> The hero of the *Queste del Saint Graal*. A side panel of a casket in the Metropolitan Museum (illus. no. 38) presents a similar scene, with the exception that Enyas rescues a maiden from the clutches of a wild man.<sup>42</sup> Enyas and the wild man seems to be a popular theme as it survives on the end panels of four complete caskets. A scene in the southern vault of the painted leather ceiling of the Hall of Justice, in the Alhambra, Granada (illus. no. 36), dating between 1350-1375, shows the maiden, rescued by Enyas, holding a lion on a chain.<sup>43</sup> A painted wooden casket from Cologne (illus. no. 37) shows a struggling maiden being captured by a wild man, while a knight produces not arms in her defence but a ring.<sup>44</sup> A pendant case (fig. C13), also shows scenes of the lady, the knight and the wild man.

### The Tryst under the Tree

Religious iconography of the Middle Ages contained many motifs, which were



repeated endlessly apart from their narrative context and were easily recognised and interpreted by layman and cleric. Arthurian romance provided only one such scene, occurring apart from any illustrations of the narrative context, the meeting of Tristan and Iseult beneath a tree, in which lurks the royal spy King Mark. The earliest instances in art of the tryst beneath the tree are found on ivory caskets from the first quarter of the fourteenth century.<sup>45</sup> It appears on the same panel with the Unicorn theme (fig. C9).

The great hall of the old Palazzo Chiaramonte in Palermo is covered with a painted wooden ceiling, which is covered with medieval secular iconography. Here along with scenes of Aristotle and Phyllis, the Fountain of Youth, are a few scenes from the romance of Tristan. In one section is painted the familiar tryst beneath the tree (illus. no. 39). Here the tree is a laurel, as in *Prose Tristan*, and from it the crownless head of Mark looks sternly at Tristan. The fountain consists of a square marble layer. Another interesting illustration of the tryst is in the Chambre du Tresor of Jacque Coeur's palace at Bourges (illus. no. 40). The undercutting of the trees suggests comparison with a misericord from Chester. Yet again another example of this theme is shown on a beautiful enamelled goblet base produced in Avignon (illus. no. 41). In one of its splayed compartments King Mark's reflection appears in a circular pool and is pointed out by Iseult seated on the right. A perfect subject for a drinking vessel since it invokes the virtue of attentive moderation of pleasure, as we lift the cup to drink from it our own reflections shimmer in the mirror like metal, suggesting that we too are spying on the lovers tryst below.

## Game Playing

The game of chess represented both love and war in the Middle Ages, and the contest is mentioned in many of the romances of the period, including the story of Tristan and Iseult.<sup>46</sup> It appears on ivory caskets, combs, plaques, and mirror cases throughout the

fourteenth century in both France and Germany. The game is illustrated on a number of mirror cases, of which the one in the V&A<sup>47</sup> (fig. C15) and the Louvre are similar<sup>48</sup> (illus. no. 44). Another image on a carved wooden casket shows a lady and a gentleman playing chess (illus. no. 43). A six- petaled flower covers the checkerboard; making clear what the stakes are. The game shown is an elaborate allegory of desire in which the man is about to “check” his mate. Chess was the perfect allegorical device because it articulated the playful tension and the violent conflict inherent in the strategies of seduction that formed the medieval art of love.

<sup>1</sup> Marcabru, *Poesies competes du troubadour Marcabru*, ed. and translated by J.M.L. DeJeanne (Toulouse, 1909).

<sup>2</sup> See J. Cherry, *Medieval Decorative Art*, British Museum, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Courtship has been described as the 'feudalisation of love', by C.S. Lewis in *The Allegory of Love*. Marriages had nothing to do with love and no fuss over marriage was tolerated. All matches were matches of interest that were continually changing. When the alliance, which had answered, would answer no longer, the husband's object was to get rid of the lady as soon as possible. The same woman who was the lady and 'the dearest dread' of her vassals was often little better than a piece of property to her husband. Hence a gift acted as contractual bond between two people, and was not without strings attached.

<sup>4</sup> According to M. Camille, desire had the same paradoxical meaning in the Middle Ages that it has today- a longing for some object that can never be satisfied. Once satisfied, desire dies, so the pleasure of desire lies in its perpetual deferral. The concept of desire is similar to the concept of marginal utility in Economics.

<sup>5</sup> *Male Moyen Age*, Georges Duby, Paris, 1988; as *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, Chicago, 1994.

<sup>6</sup> See *The Medieval Art of Love*, M. Camille, London, 1998, pp 57.

<sup>7</sup> O.M. Dalton, no. 360, Pl LXXXII, London, 1909.

<sup>8</sup> Koechlin 1924, 2: no. 1032.

<sup>9</sup> See *The Hawk and the Hound: The Art of Medieval Hunting*, J. Cummins, London, 1988, Chapter 20.

<sup>10</sup> British Museum, (1987,1-3,1'), seal matrix is printed in reverse so that the inscription can be easily read.

<sup>11</sup> The four suits are herons, hounds, and falcons, enabling players to enter the virtual world of the chase while indulging in the sport of the chamber. Until the invention of the four suits of the modern pack of playing cards in the mid fifteenth century, most medieval playing cards were organised in suits that reflected the classes of society.

<sup>12</sup> Such a set is detailed in the French royal accounts of 1316: "1 comb and 1 mirror, a graviour and 1 leather case, purchased from Jehan le Scelleur; Koechlin 1924, 1: 531).

<sup>13</sup> Can be seen from the number of mirror cases displayed in museums, and published in books, which greatly exceed the number of surviving combs from the fourteenth century. Koechlin has catalogued just four examples plus a fragment in the British Museum. The reason being that most combs probably lost their teeth and were eventually discarded. A number of liturgical combs survive.

<sup>14</sup> Chaplet makers were an important guild in 14th century Paris. They may have been made of gold and pearls for the elite, only fragments of which have survived. For most couples flowers and natural greenery was sufficient. See M. Camille on the *Medieval Art of Love*, London 1998, pp. 54.

<sup>15</sup> The tree behind the seated couple in the letter S is similar to the spindly trees on the comb.

<sup>16</sup> One of the things that distinguished a married woman from an unmarried woman was the style, covering and looseness of her hair. The gift signifies encouragement of beautification, and also control of the beloved.

<sup>17</sup> There were no fewer than 124 crafts persons known as *faiseuses d'aumonieres sarrazinoises* listed in the Parisian guild ordinances, a guild dominated, like all the stitching arts, by women. See M. Schutte, *The Art of Embroidery*, London, 1964.

<sup>18</sup> The shield has his coat of arms on it.

<sup>19</sup> See N. Saul, *The Age of Chivalry*, London 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Dalton, no. 368.

<sup>21</sup> Loomis, *The Allegorical Siege in the Art of the Middle Ages*, *Archaeological Institute of America*, Vol. XXIII, 1919, No. 3.

<sup>22</sup> A fantastic castle was built and garrisoned with dames and damsels and their waiting women, who without help of men defended it with all possible prudence. The castle was fortified with exotic materials and animal skins. They fought against the assault with apples dates, tarts flowers, and spices that were fragrant of smell and fair to see. At this siege a band of Venetian youths were among the guests and formed the storming party. Once the castle was capitulated, the banner of St. Mark was erected. Similar

festivals were popular at the court of Henry VIII of England. See Loomis, *Journal of the Archaeological Institute of America*, Vol. XXIII, 1919, No. 3.

<sup>23</sup> See W. Maskell, *Ivories*, Chapter VII.

<sup>24</sup> The plaque from Liverpool illustrates the elopement from the Castle of Love in the right hand corner, while most composite caskets have scenes from the siege on both the outer side panels.

<sup>25</sup> The image of the Unicorn is ancient one, but it did not gain significance till the Christian Middle Ages, and it's links to the Virgin Mary.

<sup>26</sup> Is also illustrated on the capital of the Church of St. Pierre in Caen (illus. no. 34), the extreme right shows Gwain on the magic bed.

<sup>27</sup> See L. Gotfredsen, *The Unicorn*, New York, 1999, chapter 10.

<sup>28</sup> See D. J. A. Ross, A medieval French Marriage Casket, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, II, 1948, pp112-142.

<sup>29</sup> Which has been suggested, to be Henry III, as being ridden by his foreign favourites, also probably meant to bring some sort of association with the kingship of Alexander.

<sup>30</sup> Also called the Fountain of Love, also shown on the Italian marriage casket (fig. C4).

<sup>31</sup> The Fountain of Youth is above all a male fantasy about loss of potency- and in an age when most men married late to wives who were often in their teens, see M. Camille, 1998.

<sup>32</sup> See Loomis, *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art*, London, 1938, pp. 15.

<sup>33</sup> See Loomis, pp. 9.

<sup>34</sup> See Loomis, pp. 70.

<sup>35</sup> Was probably a design source for the ivories. The caskets on which the crossing of the sword bridge are carved are in the British Museum, the V&A, the Metropolitan Museum, the Bargello, Cracow Cathedral, and the Walters Art Gallery.

<sup>36</sup> Loomis, op. cit., 159-176. PMLA, XLVIII, 1933, 1011-18.

<sup>37</sup> Derived from the adventures of the Ulster hero Cuchulainn, see Loomis.

<sup>38</sup> An unusual subject for a mirror case as most mirror cases have scenes of courting, hawking, jousting or the Attack on the Castle of Love illustrated on them. Most commonly seen on the third panel from the left after the sword bridge scene on the rear long side of composite caskets mentioned earlier, including the one in the British Museum.

<sup>39</sup> T. Husband, *The Wild Man: Medieval Myth and Symbolism*, New York, 1945.

<sup>40</sup> His name is the form of Gilead furnished by the Vulgate Bible- Galaad. It forms part of the most ingenious attempt to spiritualise the character of the hero of the Grail quest and adapt it to the monastic ideal of Christianity.

<sup>41</sup> Loomis's identification was made by comparing this scene to a series of marginal drawings in the Taymouth Hours (the British Library, London, and Yates Thompson Ms. 13). In the Taymouth Hours these scenes are accompanied by Anglo-Norman inscriptions that explain the story,

<sup>42</sup> Enyas attacks and kills the aggressor. As Enyas and the Maiden proceed through the woods, they encounter a young knight, who challenges Enyas for the maiden's hand. Under the misapprehension that she will prove loyal to him out of gratitude, Enyas suggests that she is allowed to choose her favourite, but the maiden promptly chooses the handsome young knight. The youth then demands Enyas's dog, but unlike the maiden the dog remains faithful to his master. He then persuades Enyas into a combat, from which Enyas emerges victorious, which sends the maiden hastily to his side. Enyas, however, discards the maiden in the woods, where she is eventually devoured by beasts. Although the complete story is not known, Loomis suggests that it relates to a similar story known as "The Maiden and the Dogs".

<sup>43</sup> Loomis interprets this as incongruous blending of two unrelated themes.

<sup>44</sup> Symbolic of the union of marriage.

<sup>45</sup> It occurs on 7 caskets together with the hunting of the Unicorn and other romantic subjects; on 2 mirror backs and one handle of a graver it appears alone.

<sup>46</sup> Is also shown on the Palermo ceiling.

<sup>47</sup> Koechlin, 1924, no. 1046.

<sup>48</sup> With the exception that the Louvre mirror case has two attendants in the background. Koechlin 1924, no. 1050.

## Date, Style and Symbolism

The medium of ivory has been used by many cultures to create luxurious objects. It became a major medium for artistic expression in Europe during the thirteenth century. Elephant ivory was accessible through trade across the Mediterranean, at the height of the Gothic period. The carvings created are intricate and challenging, with limitations imposed by size and the curve of the tusk. A number of carvings such as the figures of the Virgin and Child have the characteristic 'S'curve of gothic figures, probably sculpted to improvise for the natural curve of the tusk. These curved figures may have been a model for artists working in other media. The gentle curve in the relief carving of figures on the ivory comb in the V&A (fig. C5) and, the lady with the chaplet on the leaf of writing tablet (fig. C3), are quite prominent. Stylistically they compare well with the illustration of Lancelot on the Sword Bridge, shown in the former Yates Thompson MS. Lancelot, c. 1300-1320, (illus. no. 32). The small spindly trees found in the background of the ivories are also present in the manuscript. The 'cottes' worn by the ladies in all three are similar and they are all dated from roughly the same time.

While it is relatively difficult to date these objects the style of the armour and the clothes worn are a source of approximate dating, by providing us with clues as to what was fashionable during that period. The cotte and the surcoat were often supplemented in cold weather by a cloth mantle. By the end of the twelfth century cloaks of various shapes were already in fashion.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the thirteenth century the hood had become more tailored in shape, with a long hanging end. The lover flying back into his ladies arms in (fig. C2) wears a similar hood. The sleeves of the figures in both (fig. C2) and (fig. C4) trail to the elbows these were at the height of fashion around 1350 but started dying out towards the end of the century. Around the end of the thirteenth century and during the fourteenth century the wimple, with a hanging veil behind was regarded as the most decorous of head-tires. The ladies in (fig. C1), (fig. C3), and (fig.

C15), are all wearing wimples. By the mid fourteenth century the dressing of women's hair became more elaborate, it was sometimes arranged in plaits, or sometimes frizzed ends appeared at ears, (fig. C1), (fig. C10). A scene from the Last Judgement, at the Cathedral of Bourges, c. 1300, shows figures wearing cottes, surcoat, and mantle. On thing that distinguished a married woman from an unmarried woman was the looseness, style and covering of her hair. The clothes worn by Aristotle and Phyllis in (fig. no. 10) were currently fashionable during that time. The lady on the Burgundian Shield (fig. C14) is dressed in clothes reminiscent of clothes worn during the fifteenth century.

With the advent of the chain mail period (1250-1325) we have a rough idea of dating armour. An illustration from *Roman de Toute Chevalerie*, 1308-12, showing the third battle of Alexander and Darius, illustrates mounted knights wearing coats of mail, surcoats, helmets and carrying shields.<sup>2</sup> The illustration of Lancelot on the Sword Bridge (illus. no. 32), dating from c. 1300-1320 also shows him in similar armour to the knights in the ivories discussed and in the various scenes of jousting. Even though the disparity of their materials might suggest different techniques, the gilding and polychromy of ivories are close to those of illuminated manuscripts<sup>3</sup>, many parallels can be found. The theme of the Attack on the Castle of Love (fig. no.8) is popular on casket lids and is also illustrated in the Peterborough Psalter (illus. no. 14). The similarity between the manuscript and the ivory must have been relatively strong when the ivory was polychromatic, with the exception that the ivories were carved in relief. They vary greatly in the quality of carving. (fig. C12) is particularly inferior in workmanship.

Although these secular images seem to illustrate mundane scenes from daily life, they are full of metaphors and eroticism, described through pictorial power, rather than verbal signs. They may mark a couple's status or legitimate their marriage as well as provide them with elaborate fantasies of sexual control, submission and desire.

Literary comparison of the medieval knight to a bird of prey is quite common. The hawk or falcon like warrior is a durable motif, exemplified by Homer's description of Achilles in his pursuit of Hector:

And Peleus' son went after him in the confidence of his quick feet.  
As when a hawk in the mountains who moves lightest of things flying  
Makes his effortless swoop for a trembling dove, but she slips away  
from beneath and flies and he shrill screaming close after her  
Plunges again and again, heart furious to take her;  
So Achilles went straight for him in fury, but Hector  
Fled away under the Trojan wall.<sup>4</sup>

The bird of prey's natural characteristics of physical beauty and independence of mind act as a simile, to express the emotional and physical attractiveness of a woman to a man.

The reoccurrence of the chaplet in these images of love is of symbolic importance. The sexual meaning of this ring is made explicit in a sonnet by the late thirteenth century Italian poet Dante da Maiano, who poses as a riddle: "A fair woman, in gaining whose favour my heart takes pleasure, made me the gift of a green leafy garland; and charmingly did she so; and then I seem to find myself clothed in a shift she had worn; then I made so bold as to embrace her... I will not say what followed- she made me swear not to."<sup>5</sup>Symbolizing love's never-ending desire, the circular form of the chaplet is also a simulacrum of the mirror itself.

Many medieval belts and girdles evoke in their decoration the divided human body- the notion of the rational human above the waist and the animal lust that drives what was described euphemistically as "below the waist." From the belt would hang a purse, the

opening and closing of this purse with its string's emphasizing the underlying sexual connotations of the opening and closing of the female pudenda, and its shape.

The Siege of the Castle of Love can be described as the siege of a lady's heart. Much as he would attack a castle, a knight could besiege a lady and try to take her by force. Such are the intimations of rape that lie behind the playful subject of the Castle of Love.

The casket with its metaphors of opening and closing, interior and exterior was always closely linked to the inviolable female body, open only to her husband. This is true of chests of all sizes and types, from the small ivory caskets made in fourteenth century Paris, to the slightly larger cassone chests. Their imagery of control and containment makes them less private and secret objects than open social signs of exchange of gifts.

The lady's taming and control of her suitor's animal passions helps explain the popularity of the theme of the wild man on a number of objects. These shaggy beast like creatures were used not only to represent the bestial side of human nature but by the later middle ages also came to articulate an early form of primitivism.<sup>6</sup>

Voyeurism is a major theme not only of medieval courtly literature but also of images associated with love. One of the most commonly depicted scenes from a medieval romance narrative was the part of the story of Tristan and Iseult, where Iseult's husband, King Mark, spies upon the couple beneath a tree. They see his reflection in a pool of water below and hence make it appear as if their liaison was not intimate. Voyeurism is observed on a number of objects such as the hunting party (fig. C1), where lovers embrace in the presence of attendants. On the Burgundian Shield (fig. no. 14) the personification of death looms over the lovers.

The Fountain of Youth can be interpreted above all as a male fantasy about the loss of



potency- and in an age when most men married late to wives who were often in their teens. The two great anxieties of this period were the constant danger of the young wife's infidelity and the man's growing impotence.

The game of chess is an elaborate allegory of desire in which the man is about to "check" his mate (fig. C15), as he grasps the tent pole like a phallic lance. The Gothic folds between her legs emphasize her penetrability. Images of lust such as the Virgin grasping the Unicorn's horn (fig. C11) are common in secular art of this period. Caskets such as (fig. C9) are dotted with contrasting images juxtaposed besides each other, like old age and the dream of eternal youth, how love makes fools of the wisest men and innocence and lust, shown on the front and side of the casket. Animal symbolism using squirrels rabbits associated with women, and dogs associated with men are found on a large number of objects in ivory and other media.

- <sup>1</sup> See costume in *A guide to Medieval Antiquities and Objects of a Later date*, British Museum, 1924.
- <sup>2</sup> See V. Sekules, *Medieval Art*, pp. 153, also C. H. Ashdon, *Armour and Weapons*, London, 1925.
- <sup>3</sup> See *Images in Ivory*, Detroit Institute, chapter 4.
- <sup>4</sup> See J. Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk*, 1988, chapter 20.
- <sup>5</sup> See M. Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, Chapter 2.
- <sup>6</sup> T. Husband, *The Wild Man: Medieval Myth and Symbolism*, New York, 1945.

## Conclusion

The concept of 'love' like a myth is eternal, never aging or changing with time. It is also a universal concept that is encountered in all walks of life. The objects or embodiments of love and desire have not changed with time. The survival rate of such superb objects of medieval secular culture, compared with embroidered liturgical copes, candlesticks, and crosses kept in Church and Cathedral treasuries, is very small, which is why we tend to look at medieval art with the eyes of bishops rather than lovers.

Ivory is as rare and expensive today as it was several hundred years ago. Items such as mirror cases, combs, and caskets are both functional and practical in this century. The ivory mirror cases is the equivalent of the modern day 'compact' that graces the inside of many women's handbag's. Beautiful carved combs adorn many dressing tables, and are used by men and women. The double-sided comb still exists in the east, where it is usually made from wood. These caskets are used to store valuable documents and even jewellery. A wide range of caskets is available in different media, from simple functional one's to elaborately decorative one's, although the function is the same. Amulet cases are still uses in the East to ward of superstition. The modern day equivalent of the large marriage chest's are chests produced in leather by companies such as Louis Vuitton, or plain chests of wood or leather. These relics from the past never really went out of fashion.

Medieval literary expansion has been its dissemination through the moving image-cinema, television and video. Cinema has helped realize its dreams of the Middle Ages. *Ivanhoe*, for example, the defining text of Romantic chivalry, was turned into a black and white silent as early as 1913. Shakespeare's Histories have had the full battlefield treatment, in Laurence Oliver's wartime *Henry V*, 1944. And there is *King Arthur* from

Richard Thorpe's *Knights of the Round Table*, 1953, and Joshua Logan's hit musical *Camelot*, 1967. The whole medieval medley is shown in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, 1974. The latest release to join the group is "A Knight's Tale" based on Chaucer's poem. Scenes of jousting and acts of Chivalry have been recreated to relive the past. The scene of a mock joust was performed in Lyon Park in 1971 (illus. no. 20).

The wild man, a myth from the past survives even today and is still celebrated in festivals originating in the regions supposedly inhabited by him. He also makes an appearance on tarot cards in the form of the hermit. Movies such as *Star Wars* have characters similar to the wild man.

The Unicorn is a creature that may not exist, but is alive in the imagination. As a creation of the human mind it continued to exist even if no one expected to find it. The Unicorn appears in children's fiction and toys. It has also been a subject embraced by many twentieth century artists. *La Dame a la licorne* the ballet (illus. no. 26), by Jean Cocteau was performed at the Opera de Paris in 1959. It was inspired by the Cluny Tapestries. Salvador Dali's lithograph shows a caricature of a unicorn. A piece of forest art by Jorn Ronnaau created in 1993 titled 'The Tooth' (illus. no. 27), is yet again another reminder of the mythical beast. These medieval artefacts never went out of fashion and never will even in the future.

Exhibition  
Catalogue

## 1 | Mirror Case representing a Hawking Party

French, 1350-75,

Elephant Ivory,

Diameter: 10.1 cm,

New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, (41. 100. 160).

The hawking party, comprising of a couple, accompanied by two attendants, is depicted in a forested landscape. This busy composition is confined within an eight lobed frame with grotesque masks in the spandrels. The mirror is transformed to a square by four projecting lions at the cardinal points of the circle.

The aristocratic couple riding on horseback attired in resplendent costume, both have hawks perched on their left hands. Two attendants ride parallel to the couple, one blows a horn, and the other swings a lure to attract a hawk. The man's ardent intentions for the lady feeding the hawk are obvious from his intent gaze. His right arm rests on her shoulder. A rabbit scampers along in the lower portion of the composition, a prime target for the hunters.

The body of one of the lions and the head of another are restored. The tail from one is missing. A small dark circular outline lies to the top of the mirror. A number of cracks are visible on the mirror, one extending from the base to the lady's knee is quite prominent.

*Provenance:* Formerly in the collection of Frederic Spitzer, Oscar Hainauer, Berlin; George and Florence Blumenthal, New York.

*Notes:* Hawking was the predominant blood sport of the nobility in medieval Europe,

only certain classes could own a particular variety of birds. The conical hat worn by the gentleman occurs in many images from the fourteenth century. A mirror case in the British Museum shows a hunting party, the man also wears a conical hat (O.M Dalton, plate LXXXVIII, no. 377). These hats are also seen in the frescos in Campo Santo, Pisa (the scene of the three living and the three dead). . Another mirror in the Fredric Spitzer Collection (Koechlin 1924, 2: no. 1014) could be a pair to this case. The dimensions are the same and lions project from the four corners. Ivory mirror cases were usually carved in pairs to protect the polished metal disc inside.

*References:* Spitzer 1890-92, no. 69, pl. XIX, Bode 1897, no. 131, illus. 83, Koechlin 1924, 2: no. 1032, Detroit 1928, no. 65, Boston 1940, no. 74, Ann Arbour 1976, no. 70.



C1.



## 2 | Aumoniere with scenes of Falconing

French, c.1320,

Embroidery,

L: 21 cm; W: 20 cm,

Lyon, Musee Historique des Tisses, (no. 30.020/1&2).

An embroidered aumoniere portraying the delicate relationship between a lady and her lover, falcon and falconer. On the front the lover with his elongated wing like arms outstretched fly's back into the lady's arms and places a chaplet upon her head. They both wear capes, the falconer's cape is hooded and he wears a glove on his left hand. He is possibly a personification of the falcon, who is used to being hooded in order to induce calm and tranquillity. The two figures dominate the composition, and are prominent against the red velvet background. Delicately embroidered flowers and foliage surround the lovers. The lower section is scalloped.

The composition on the reverse is dominated by a centralized figure of a lady falconer, with both arms resting on her waist, and a falcon perched on her left hand. Branches radiate out from behind the figure, but are enclosed by a five lobed frame. The lady falconer's hairstyle is informal compared to the lady being crowned on the reverse.

Gold thread, with red, white and brown embroidery on linen, worked on a thin base and appliqued to red velvet. Satin, stem and split stitch, along with couched work and sequins have been used. The velvet is worn out in places.

Although a man may have worn such a purse, its strong female content suggests that it probably belonged to a lady. Aumoniere's were a major fashion accessory in both male and female wardrobes. They were also popular presents in the courtship process.

*Notes:* There are similar aumoniere's in the Cathedral Treasury, Sens, and Museum fur Kunst und Gewerbe (inv. 56, 137), both illustrate scenes of courting. The one from Sens shows the return from a hunt on one side, and a lady with a chaplet on the other side.

*References:* The Art of Embroidery, London 1964; The Medieval Art of Love, by M.Camille, London, 1998.



C2.

### 3 | A Pair of Writing Tablets with Hawking and Courting

French, 14th century,

Elephant Ivory,

H: 11 cm,

London, British Museum, (MLA. 1856, 5-9, 2.)

Medieval architecture supplied the arts with many decorative forms. Thus architectural ornament, reduced in scale is used as a decorative frame for a pair of writing tablets. Carved in low relief, the scenes on both panels are set beneath single wide trefoil arches, surmounted by a gable, large foliated crockets and floral finials. In the spandrels are two quatrefoils, enclosing youthful masks. Trefoils lie in the centre of each tympanum. The upper borders of each leaf have a row of rosettes, while the other surrounding edges are pearled.

The first leaf shows a man embracing a woman as they ride through the woods on horseback. The man has a falcon perched on his left hand, while the woman holds a crop. A tree curves upwards from the left side. The scene on the second leaf shows a kneeling knight, offering a lady standing, a rose from a rose bush, to add to a wreath; which she holds in her left hand. A squirrel lurches in the branches of a tree, behind the courting couple. The figures are dressed in cottes, which were fashionable during the first half of the fourteenth century.

There is a hole in the ivory surface between the lady's face and the wreath. A long crack starts at the base of the tablet and extends to the horse's head. There are a number of black marks on both tablets.

Notes were written on the waxed side of these tablets, with the pointed end of a stylus

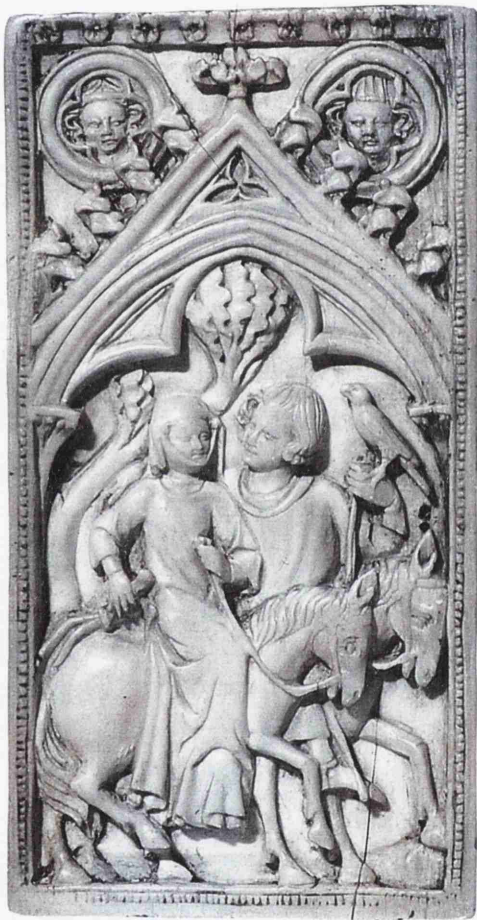
and were erased by rubbing the surface of the wax.

*Provenance:* Given by Felix Slade.

*Notes:* These tablets were among the common objects produced during the fourteenth century. Koechlin lists twelve complete surviving writing tablets with single subjects, and twelve plaques with several subjects. In style and subject matter the mirror cases and the tablets are most closely related.

*References:* O. M. Dalton, no. 360, plate LXXXII, J.Cherry, *Medieval Decorative Art*, 1991, pp. 64.





C3.

## 4 | Marriage Chest with scenes of Hawking and Courting

Italian (Florence or Siena), c. 1350,

Poplar carcass, covered with canvas and painted,

H: 54.5 cm; W: 142 cm; D: 58.5 cm

London, Victoria and Albert Museum, (no. 317-1894).

A brightly painted chest, with applied gesso, decorated with tin foil and low relief figures. The chest is reinforced with bands of flattened and punched iron, which section the vertical red and blue bands of colour, showing alternating scenes of Hawking and the Fountain of Love.

The upper row of the front of the chest has three blue squares showing a lady on horseback, with a hawk perched on her extended left hand, while holding the reins with her other hand. She is surrounded by random floral designs. The three red squares show a lady standing wearing a crown, holding a flower, and a man with a hawk standing besides a fountain faces her. A tree centrally divides the composition. Flowers in the background. The images are reversed in the lower row of the front of the chest. The blue squares show a lady and a man at a fountain, while the three red squares show a lady wearing a crown mounted on horseback, holding a riding crop in her left hand. Floral designs surround her. Along the upper and lower ends of the chest runs an intricate border. The same images are repeated on the lid.

Ornate iron strips vertically divide the two side panels of the chest, the left side is blue and the right is painted red. Dragons are placed in the four quatrefoils. The back of the chest is painted with crude criss-cross patterns.

Since the figures are made of gesso and cast in a mould, with layers of gold or silver tin

foil, the images could be mass-produced. Hence the images on the chest are of a repetitive nature. They were applied to the chest with glue left over from the moulding process.

The decoration on the front and on the lid has undergone some degree of deterioration, although the lid has suffered more damage. The wooden core shows through a damaged portion on the lid. The painted areas of the chest have undergone restoration.

*Provenance:* Purchased from the firm of Stefano Bardini, Florence.

*Notes:* In medieval times chests were an important form of household storage, and may have been used to store linen, bride's clothes and objects of value. This chest is thought to have come from the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova in Florence. There is a similar chest in Fondazione Cini, in Venice, formerly part of the Barsanti Collection in Rome, and another in Castello di Vincigliata outside Florence. According to Wilhelm Bode, a number of similar chests lay in store in the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova in Florence, before entering the art market.

*References:* *Western Furniture 1350 to the Present Day*, edited by C. Wilk, V&A publication.

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C4.

## 5 | Comb with Lovers Courting

French, 1320-30,

Elephant Ivory,

H: 11.5 cm; W: 14.5 cm,

London, Victoria and Albert Museum, (A. 560-1910)

A one-piece double sided comb with relief carving in the central narrative band. Double incised lines mark out the surface between the teeth and the central band. Three scenes of courting are represented on each side of the comb, divided by small spindly trees.

On one side, from the left a seated couple discreetly touch, while the man holds a hawk and the lady fondles her lapdog. In the next scene a lady crowns her lover with a chaplet. The third scene shows a couple embracing. On the reverse side of the comb, from the left a man caresses a lady who cradles a lapdog, in her left arm. In the centre a kneeling lover picks a flower for his lady standing above him, holding a chaplet in her left hand. On the right stand two lovers facing each other, unified by a chaplet that they both grasp.

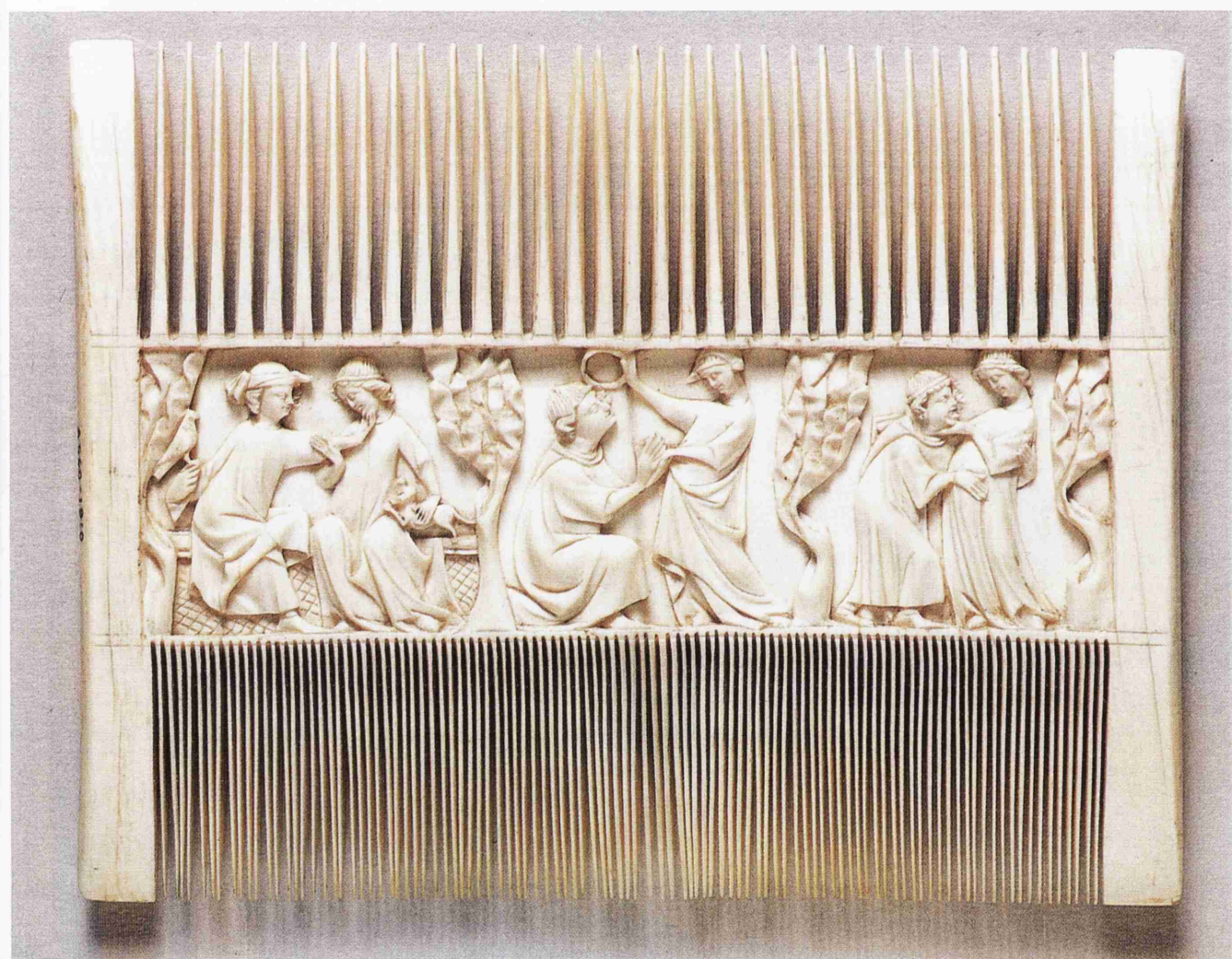
The edges of the comb perpendicular to the narrative frieze have a few hairline cracks within the ivory on both sides.

*Provenance:* Salting Collection, London, until 1910; Salting Bequest, 1910.

*Notes:* Ivory combs, along with mirror cases and grivoirs formed an important part of the dressing case of a typical wealthy person in the Gothic period. A small number of combs survive, compared to the number of surviving mirror cases. The reason being

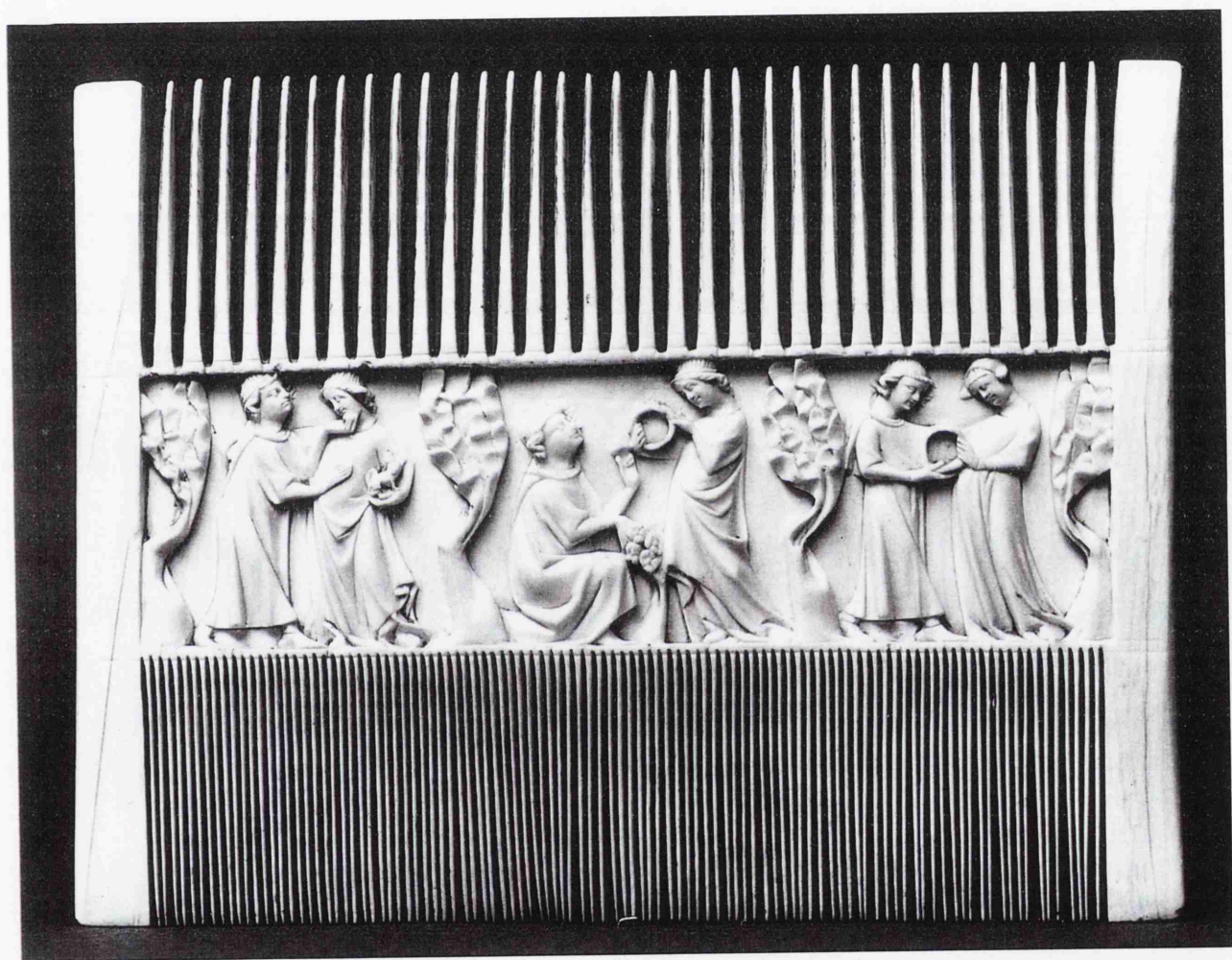
that combs often lost their teeth. A similar comb survives in the Bargello in Florence, (Koechlin 1924, 2: no. 1148, 3: pl. CXCI), with the exception that the scenes take place under four arcades. In iconography and style the V&A comb is similar to a pair of mirror cases in the Louvre (Koechlin 1924, 2: no. 1007, 3: pl CLXXVII), showing four sets of lovers divided by spindly trees.

*References:* Koechlin 1924, 1:426, 2: no. 1147, 3: pl. CXCI, Longhurst 1927-29, 2:50, pl. XLVIII.



C5.





REVERSE

C.5

## 6 | Chest with Jousting Knights

French or English, 1300-1400,

Carved oak,

H: 44.5 cm; W: 91.5 cm; D: 40.5 cm.

London, Victoria and Albert Museum, (738-1895).

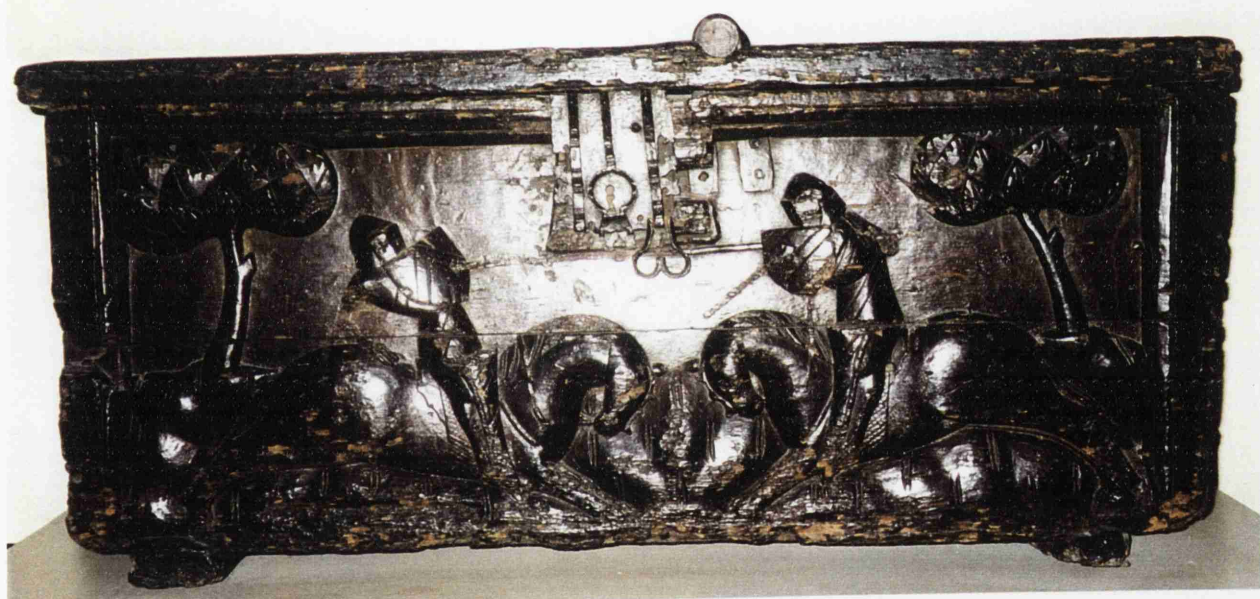
A hutch type chest of a dark brown colour. The five surfaces of the chest consist of two broad planks of oak each. A wooden frame encloses the scene on the front of the chest. The relief carving on the front of the chests shows two armoured knights mounted on horseback, jousting. From the left, the armoured knight with a shield points his lance at the knight facing him; he leans back and rests his right hand on the horse's saddle. The knight on the right leans forward and points his lance downwards. The armour and the shields of both knights have diagonal incised lines, while the saddles have an incised latticed design. The heads of both horses are bent and lie at a tangent to the surface of a shield like object, placed at the centre of the composition. Behind the knights on either side are two trees with large serrated leaves, emanating from a raised rocky terrain.

The chest has three locks on the front, a small cylindrical wooden barrel on the edge of the lid, and iron handles on either side for lifting and carrying. The staple and hinges are of a later date. The chest was probably brightly painted at one time. It has sustained a reasonable amount of damage. The natural colour of the oak shows through in places, the right arm of the knight on the left, and the lances of both knights are missing.

*Notes:* A number of oak chests survive, some are carved while others are plain. Some found in English Churches may have been private possessions left for safekeeping. Chests with three locks, one for the priest and one for each of the two wardens, were usually meant for church use. A similar example of a later date 1480 can be found in

the Chapel of the Pyx, in Westminster Abbey. Tournaments were regarded as a symbol of chivalric courage, representing the prowess of arms for the love of a lady.

*References: Sotheby's Concise Encyclopaedia of Furniture*, edited by Christopher Payne, London, 1999.



C6.



## 7 | Plaques from a Girdle with scenes of Courtly Love

French, c. 1320,

Solid Metal,

Plaque 1, H: 2.5 cm; W: 7.9 cm,

Plaque 2, H: 2.6/9 cm; W: 7.9 cm,

Plaque 3, H: 2.6/4 cm; W: 7.6 cm,

London, Victoria and Albert Museum, (M. 12a-c-1981).

*Plaque 1:* Two knights mounted on horseback, wearing surcoats, plate greaves over mail and caps of mail are in combat on an expanse of rugged ground. They carry kite-shaped shields with incised borders. The knight on the left points his lance diagonally at the horse in front, while the other knights head is turned, and his lance points down. There is a circular flower to the top right.

To the left of this plaque is a hinge, divided into three sections. It is held in place by a double-headed pin. The vertical band on the right has piercing made by three nails.

*Plaque 2:* On the left, a seated woman holds a lance and a shield with a small circular face on it. To the right, a woman wearing a long cote, with loose tresses of hair, is seated on a throne with lions on either side. Behind her are two circular rosettes. She holds a crested helm, the crest with an animal form, which she hands to a kneeling knight. He wears a cap of mail, surcoat, kneecaps and carries a sword.

The left end is in the form of a long cylindrical roll, and the right side is pierced with three holes for a hinge.

*Plaque 3:* Four crocketed arcades, supported by pillars with foliated capitals divide the

composition. The spandrels are decorated with foliage in a trefoil shape. On the extreme left is a seated youth playing a violin, listening to him pensively, under the adjoining arcade, is a lady wearing a mantle. She holds a sceptre in her left hand, while her right hand rests on her heart. Adjacent to her, on the right a seated youth plays a harp. Facing him sits a king holding a sceptre in his left hand, while his right hand is raised.

Both ends of the plaque are cylindrical, no piercing for hinges are visible.

The plaques are of solid metal, the ends are gilt and the original enamel is lost. Each plate is slightly curved, with side and base plates separately made. The scenes are chased and engraved. The plaque with the jousting knights has a large hole in the lower right hand corner.

*Provenance:* Purchased from Sotheby's, 9 April 1981, lot 24, was said to be found in Cyprus.

*Notes:* Girdles of this kind first appeared around 1290, they are shown on many objects from this period.

*References:* 'Metalwork acquisitions at the V&A, 1979-88, *Burlington Magazine*, CXXXI, May 1989, pp. 385-92, *Medieval European Jewellery with a Catalogue of the Collection in the V&A*, 1992.



## 8 | Casket lid with scenes of Chivalric Love and Jousting

French, First half of 14<sup>th</sup> century,

Elephant Ivory,

H: 11.8cm; W: 21.3cm,

Liverpool, Liverpool Museum, (M 8052).

The lid is divided into four sections, showing three scenes of chivalric love; the central two panels are devoted to a single composition. The extreme left-hand panel illustrates the elopement from the Castle of Love. Behind the crenellated wall are partial figures of lovers, the lady with a chaplet, the man holding an unidentified object. Standing below, behind a crenellated battlement and between two towers, a man gently caresses a lady's face. Below, in front of the portcullis, a lady and a knight mounted on horseback, cross a bridge with steps leading to a river. Under the bridge a man in a boat waits for the lovers.

The central two panels depict a joust. Four spectators stand in the latticed balcony in each panel. A woman wearing a crown stands in the left panel. Cloths are draped down from the centre of each balcony. Below two mounted and armoured knights, with helms and crests, and one with a shield with a rose emblem, tilt with three pronged lances. Above them on either side, two heralds sitting in trees are blowing trumpets.

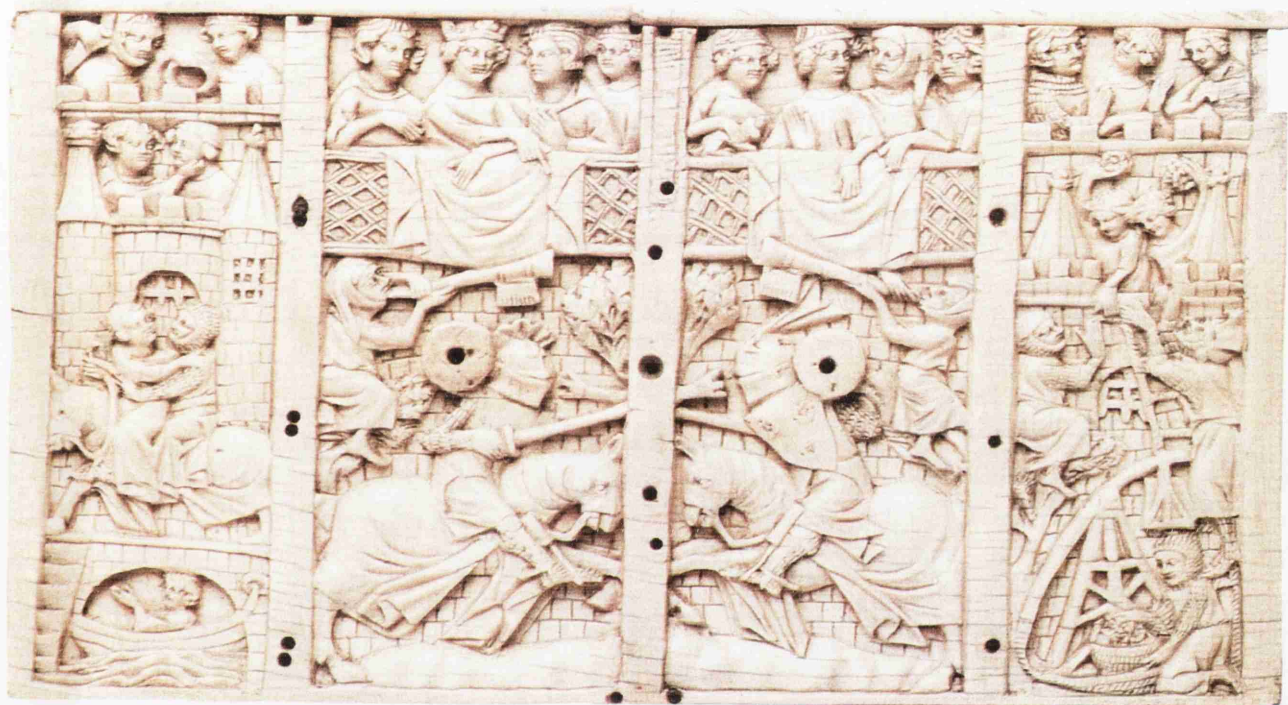
To the extreme right is shown the Attack on the Castle of Love. Above in the crenellated balcony are the partial figures of a knight and two women. Below between turrets, two women hurl roses at knights, who scale the wall with the aid of a ladder. In the foreground a kneeling knight loads a basket of roses into a catapult.

Behind the heads of the jousting knights, are two circular discs with holes, probably

meant for the missing handle. Three vertical strips have drilled holes, indicating the points where decorated metal strips were attached. The Cracow casket is the only one with original mounts (Koechlin 1285). Ivory strips along the upper edge are replacements, are different in colour, and conceal a broken piece at the centre.

*Notes:* A number of complete surviving caskets (Koechlin 1281-7), illustrate the same subject on their lids, with slight variations. The lid of the Cracow casket is quite similar (Koechlin 1285). A large number of mirror cases illustrate the same subject, of romantic chivalry.

*References:* Maskell, p.174, Koechlin 1291; *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* (1979), pp. 86-151, Randall 324-5, Gibson (1986).



C 8.



## 9 | Casket with scenes from Courtly Love

French, c. 1320,

Elephant Ivory,

W: 21.2 cm; D: 12.7 cm; H: 7.3 cm.

London, British Museum, (MLA 1856, 6-23,166)

This casket is a typical example of a composite casket, that illustrates a number of stories from the ancient world, Arthurian romances and the Bestiary. A number of singular caskets also survive, that narrate and illustrate a single story like the casket in the British Museum illustrating the story of *La Chatelaine de Vergi* ( MLA 1892, 8-1, 47).

*Lid:* Is divided into four sections, the central two panels are devoted to a single scene. From the left the Castle of Love is in the process of being besieged. From the crenellated battlement the God of Love aims his arrow down on the two besiegers, who are preparing to attack the castle with a crossbow and a catapult, loaded with roses. A lady standing behind the God of Love prepares to fling roses down onto the attackers.

*Front:* The two scenes from the left illustrate the story of Aristotle. In the first scene Aristotle tutors Alexander, who is infatuated by Phyllis, one of the queen's maids. After cautioning his young pupil against the charms of the lady, he succumbs to the charms of the maid. Alexander watches his tutor from a window in amusement, as he makes an utter fool of himself, being ridden around the garden by Phyllis with a bit in his mouth. The remaining section is devoted to showing the old and frail including a person being carried going to the Fountain of Youth to be rejuvenated by it's water. The next scene on the extreme right shows four youthful figures bathing in the fountain.

*Back:* The scenes illustrated on these panels are from Arthurian romances. From the left Gwain fights the lion. In the next scene Lancelot crosses a raging stream spanned by a sword. He is showered by spearheads from the top. The third scene illustrates Gwain sleeping on a magic bed, with bells along the bottom. He uses his shield , with the injured lions paw on it, to protect himself from the shower of spearheads. To his left is the partial head of the injured lion. To the right stand three young maidens, waiting to be rescued from the enchanted castle.

*Right short side:* Two contrasting scenes occur on this side of the casket. From the left is the Tryst beneath the Tree, one of the main episodes in the tale of Tristan and Iseult. Because of the mistake of drinking the love potion intended for King Mark's wedding night, Tristan and Iseult are doomed to be lovers. Mark is led to suspect their treachery and hides in the tree above the fountain where he is told that they meet. The lovers are seen sitting beneath a tree, Tristan with a hawk perched on his left hand. Between them is a fountain in which they see King Mark's reflection. The other half of the panel is devoted to the story of the Virgin and the Unicorn, a story from medieval Bestiary, in which the muse of placing a Virgin in the forest captures the Unicorn. The Unicorn rests his head in the virgins lap, she holds a chaplet in her right hand and with her other hand holds the Unicorns horn, at this point the hunter slays him with a spear.

*Left short side:* This panel is devoted to a single scene, that of Galahad, the virgin knight receiving the keys to the Castle of Maidens, so that he may rescue them. Galahad is seen shaking hands with an old man wearing a hooded gown, who emerges from a crenellated gateway, holding a large key in his left hand. The knights horse is secured to the branch of a tree, behind him.

*Provenance:* The casket belonged to Mr. S. W. Stevenson, F.S.A, of Norwich, in 1850. In 1856 was part of the Maskell Collection.



*Notes:* The casket belongs to a group, illustrating the same subjects with slight variations. Similar examples can be found in the Bargello in Florence, the Metropolitan Museum, New York, the V&A and on the Cracow casket ( Koechlin 1924, 2: no. 1285). The mounts on the casket are not original, the only casket retaining it's original mounts is the casket from Cracow. The stories illustrated are from romance literature, such as the Romance of Alexander by Lambert de Tort in 1180, which were current at that time.

*References:* *The Burlington Magazine*, 1904, pp. 301-3; O.M. Dalton, pp. 125, no. 368. *The Medieval Art of Love*, M. Camille, 1998; J. Cherry, 1991; Loomis, 1938.



C9.



SIDES

C9.

## 10 | Aquaminale showing the humiliation of Aristotle

French or South Netherlandish, c. 1400,

Bronze,

H: 33.5 cm,

New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, (no. 1975.I.141.).

Aquaminale is the name given in the Middle Ages to a pouring vessel, usually provided with a handle. The spectacle of Aristotle's humiliation is often shown in medieval art, but is seldom seen in Aquamanilia. Aristotle is seen on all fours with his face turned to the left, sporting a bemused smile, wears a tight tunic, with buttons down the front, breeches and long pointed shoes. Around his hips is a wide belt with incised circular discs. Phyllis is sitting cross-legged and sideways on the foolish philosopher's back. With one long spindly arm she pats his buttocks, and with the other she twirls a lock of his hair into a horn, treating him like a beast. She wears a high waisted flared dress, with a wide boat neck, and buttons down the bodice, ending at the wide ornamental belt sitting high on her waist and trailing down to her left knee. Aristotle's hair and beard are styled into spike like horns, with incised diagonal lines. Phyllis has her hair spiralled in braids at the ears and caught in a net; incised lines give her hair texture.

A tap like aperture is attached at Aristotle's neck. Phyllis's arms are soldered at the elbows to the philosophers body by flat rods. The clothes worn by both figures were currently fashionable in the 1400's.

*Provenance:* Was formerly in the collection of Chabrieres-Arles.

*Notes:* One other example of a similar type has been published, an aquamanile in Brussels of roughly the same date, but of a smaller size, (Adolphe Jansen, *Art Chretien*

jusqu'a la fin du moyen age [Musees royaux d'Art et d'Histoire], Brussels, 1964, no. 168, ill.). The Brussels aquamanile has been classified as Mosan, while the one under discussion could be Mosan or from Lorraine. The story of Aristotle is derived from the *Lai d'Aristote* of Henri d'Andely.

*References: La Collection Lehman de New York* (catalogue), Paris, 1957, no. 185, pl. LXXXIII; M. Camille, pp 120, 148.





C 10.

## 11 | Medallion with the Virgin and the Unicorn

French, c. 1320-30,

Enamel and Silver,

Diam.: 7.03-7cm,

Munich, Bayerisches National Museum (M.A 2202).

Platinum plated silver medallion, with an outer border in reserve, enclosing the entire composition. The internal composition is framed by trefoil arches, enclosed by an eight lobed frame, with trefoils within the opaque red spandrels. The spandrels on either side of the trefoil arches are filled with green enamel.

A seated virgin wearing a flowing gown, with long loose tresses of hair, lures a Unicorn into the role of a lapdog with the aid of a mirror, held up in her right hand. She grasps the Unicorn's horn with her left hand. From the left, a hunter, lurching in the upper branches of a tree, spears the beast, lying peacefully at the Virgins feet.

This medallion was most probably a mirror case. It is of translucent enamel with the exception of the red enamel, which is opaque, and is brought to life by intense colours. The background consists of a crisscross design, with another cross within each lozenge. The tree occupying the right hand corner of the medallion has large serrated leaves. The figures face, hands, the hunter's legs, his spear, and the Virgin's mirror are all in reserve. The colours used are sapphire blue, emerald green, lilac, yellow, grey and turquoise. The red enamel in the spandrels is damaged in places.

*Provenance:* From the Convent in Sauerschwabenheim, Rheinhessen.

*Notes:* The story of the Virgin and the Unicorn is from medieval Bestiary. This theme

has been illustrated on a number of tapestries, ivories and in manuscripts. An illumination in a bestiary c.1250 shows the Unicorn being speared, (British Museum, MS Harley 4571 fol. 6v). A series of tapestries in the Metropolitan Museum of Art are devoted entirely to the subject of the Unicorn. It also appears among the sculptures on the facade of the Cathedral of Lyon (L. Begule, *Monographie de la Cath. de Lyon*, pl. opp. p. 202) and the church of St. Pierre in Caen.

*References:* Marie-Madeleine Gauthier, 1972, pp 260; M. Camille, 1998, pp 47, Lise Gotfredsen, 1999, pp 85.





C 11.

## 12 | Plaque with the Knight and the Wild man

French, c.1325,

Elephant Ivory,

L: 13.5 cm,

London, British Museum, (MLA. 55, 12-1, 37).

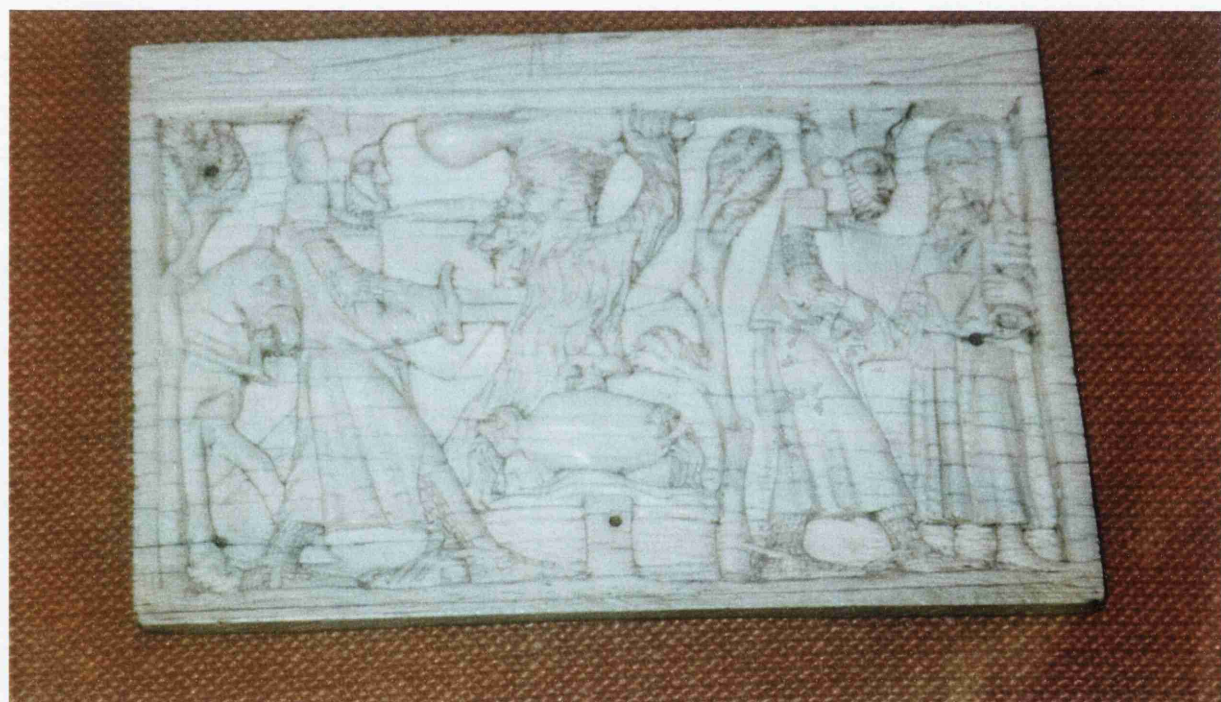
The panel is divided into two scenes, by a small vertical tree with serrated leaves. From the left an armoured knight with a shield, thrusts his sword through the body of a wild man. Behind him his horse waits, tethered to a small tree. The wild man is shown behind a fountain, swinging a club, while looking at the knight. To the right, the same knight with a shield is seen grasping the hand of an old bearded man wearing a hooded cloak, he holds a large key in his left hand.

The quality of the carving on this particular panel is crude, compared to other panels illustrating the same subject. The anatomy of the horse is poor, the figures are disproportionate, and the right leg of the man with the key has been obliterated. The panel has four small holes, one in the lower part of the fountain, another at the waist of the man with the key, and two in the top and bottom corners from the left. The ivory has a number of horizontal cracks.

*Provenance:* Bernal Collection, 1855.

*Notes:* A side panel from a casket in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, (17.190.173), illustrates the same subject, with slight variations in the subject. The knight with a lance instead of a sword is mounted on horseback, and saves a lady from a wild man. Architectural details have been added to the left side. A casket in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts also shows the same subject on one of its side panels.

*References:* O.M. Dalton, 1909, no.369, Pl LXXXVII; Loomis 1938, pp. 76.



C 12.

## 13 | Pendant case with Lady, Knight and Wild man

French or English, c. 1325-40

Translucent enamel and silver gilt,

H: 5.6 cm; W: 5 cm; D: 2 cm,

London, Victoria and Albert Museum, (218-1874).

The pendant case consists of two large and three smaller plaques, of translucent enamel, encased by a silver gilt frame, to form a case for a relic. The top portion of the frame consists of a row of quatrefoils in a filigree design, followed by an intricate design, consisting of a decorated recessed border, surrounding the two larger plaques.

On one side a mounted knight with a shield, on horseback; is being given a lance by a lady in a tower, above the gate of a castle. A blue cloth trails in the background behind the knight's helmet. On the other side an armoured knight mounted on horseback, wears a triangular hat. He emerges galloping on horseback, from the gate of a castle, and spears a wild man. The wild man with his body turned swings a club and tries to protect himself with the aid of a heart shaped shield. The background is of green enamel and is crosshatched with a dot in the centre of each lozenge.

The bottom panel shows a wild man sleeping. The two side panels have an inscription which reads “ Ave Maria Gratia ple (na)”, (“Hail Mary Full of Grace”). The colours used are blue, green, yellow, pink and grey. The frame has two handles on either side and one in the centre at the top of the frame.

*Notes:* This case perhaps hung from a belt, or was worn as a pendant, it could have been a perfume container, a case for a small book or an amulet, which may have protected the wearer from harm. The same romance is illustrated in contemporary

manuscripts, such as the British Library Yates Thompson 13. Secular subjects are rare on medieval enamels.

*References: Medieval Enamels*, Marion Campbell, English Jewellery, *Joan Evans*, 1921.





C13.

## 14 | Shield with Lady and Knight

Flemish, 15th century,

Tempera on wood,

H: 83 cm,

London, British Museum, (MLA 1863, 5-1, 1)

A brightly painted shield of a purely decorative nature. This shield, illustrating scenes of courtly love, was probably either a gift, or a prize in a tournament. The composition on this shield is divided vertically by a wooden support. On the right hand side of the shield stands a haughty lady wearing an elaborate pointed headdress, and a fur trimmed brocade of the Burgundian court. She swings a long golden girdle before a knight kneeling, in the other section of the shield. His right hand is raised. The sword he wears is suitable for a tournament. Adjacent to him lies his helmet, poleaxe and gauntlets. Behind him lurches an emaciated figure, a personification of death, with a skull for a head. His hands extend towards the knight. Above the two figures floats a scroll like band with an inscription, 'vous ou la mort', ("You or Death"). The knight is about to participate in a tournament, in order to win the heart of the lady, but he fears that death may be his destiny.

The background is textured with small red dots. The lady's dress is embossed with a floral design, while the knight's armour is painstakingly rendered. The shield is embellished with rich colours. Double black lines outline both sections of the shield. The outer edges of the shield have suffered some damage.

*Provenance:* The shield is a gift of Revd J. Wilson.

*References:* M. Camille, 1998, pp 63, no. 50; *Human Figure*, edited by J. King, no. 53.





C 14.

## 15 | Mirror case depicting a Chess Match

French, first half of the 14th century,

Elephant Ivory,

Diam. 11 cm,

London, Victoria and Albert Museum, (803-1891).

Framed by a plain moulding, The circle is transformed to a square by four monsters carved at the corners. A lady and a gentleman are seated beneath a tent, playing chess. The tent flaps are tied back and the pole supporting the tent divides the composition into two halves. The man seated to the left wears a hooded gown, crosses one leg over the other, while casually grasping the tent pole with his left hand. His right foot rests at the base of the pole. With his right hand he moves a chess piece on the board. His companion seated opposite him has her left hand raised, and holds a captured chess piece in her other hand. She wears a cotte. The V fold between her legs has been overly exaggerated. A mantle flowing to her shoulders covers her head, under which a wimple frames her face, and covers her chin. The tent drapery frames the composition, in which the chess table and the benches are the only furniture.

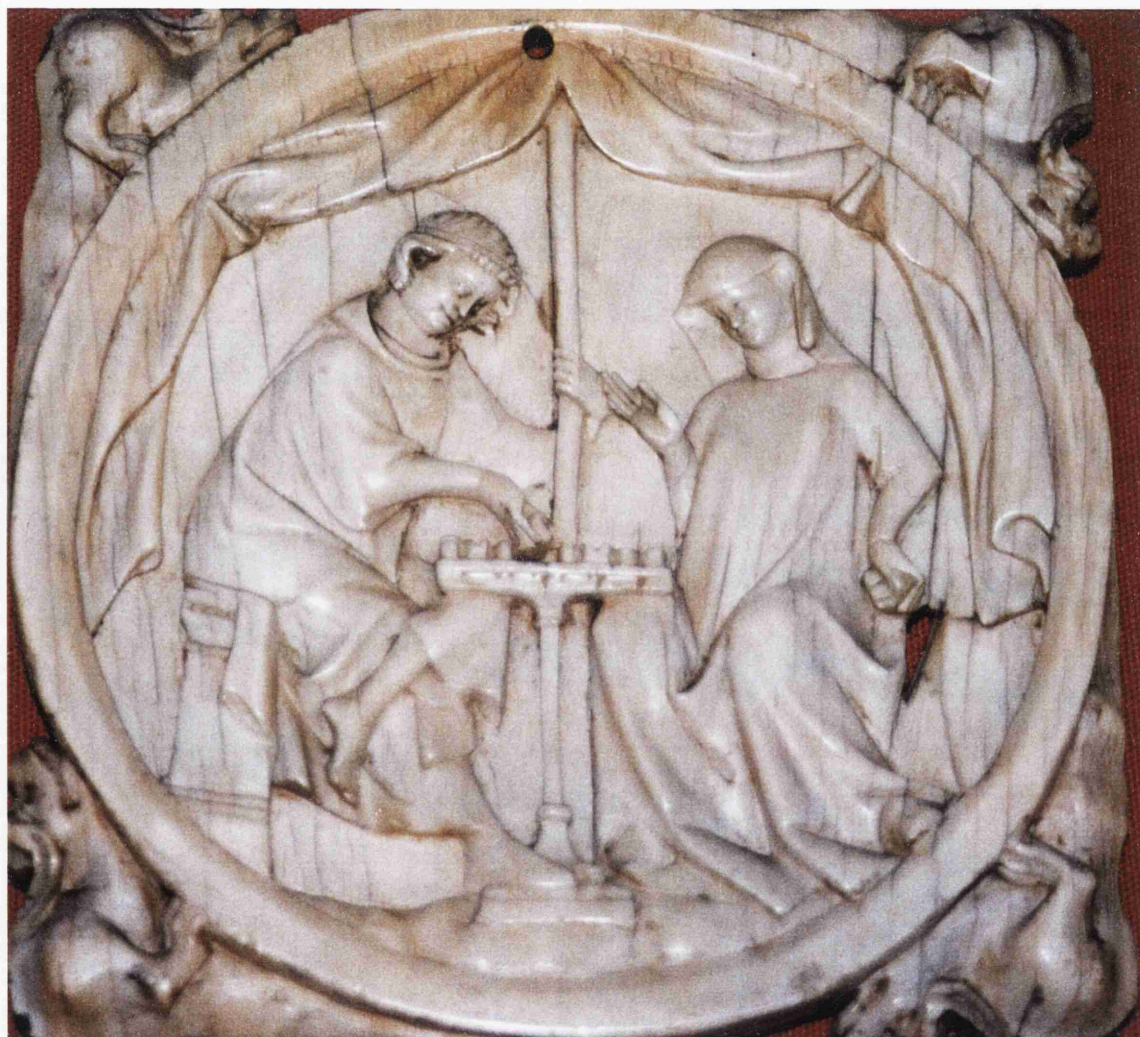
A hole is pierced towards the top of the mirror. There is another triangular hole near the lady's left hand. A small portion of the ground is broken on the right side.

*Provenance:* Acquired from the Zouche Collection.

*Notes:* Two other mirror cases depict the same subject and are similar to the V&A mirror. One in the Cleveland Museum of Art (40.1260), and the other in the Louvre (Koechlin 1924, no. 1050). Two attendants are added in the background of the Louvre mirror. This mirror case may be added to the series of fourteen similar chess scene

mirror cases catalogued by Koechlin (no. 1042-1055).

*References:* M.H. Longhurst, 1929, pp 47, Pl XLII; Koechlin, no. 1046, pl. CLXXX



C 15.

# Comparative Illustrations





illus. no. 1



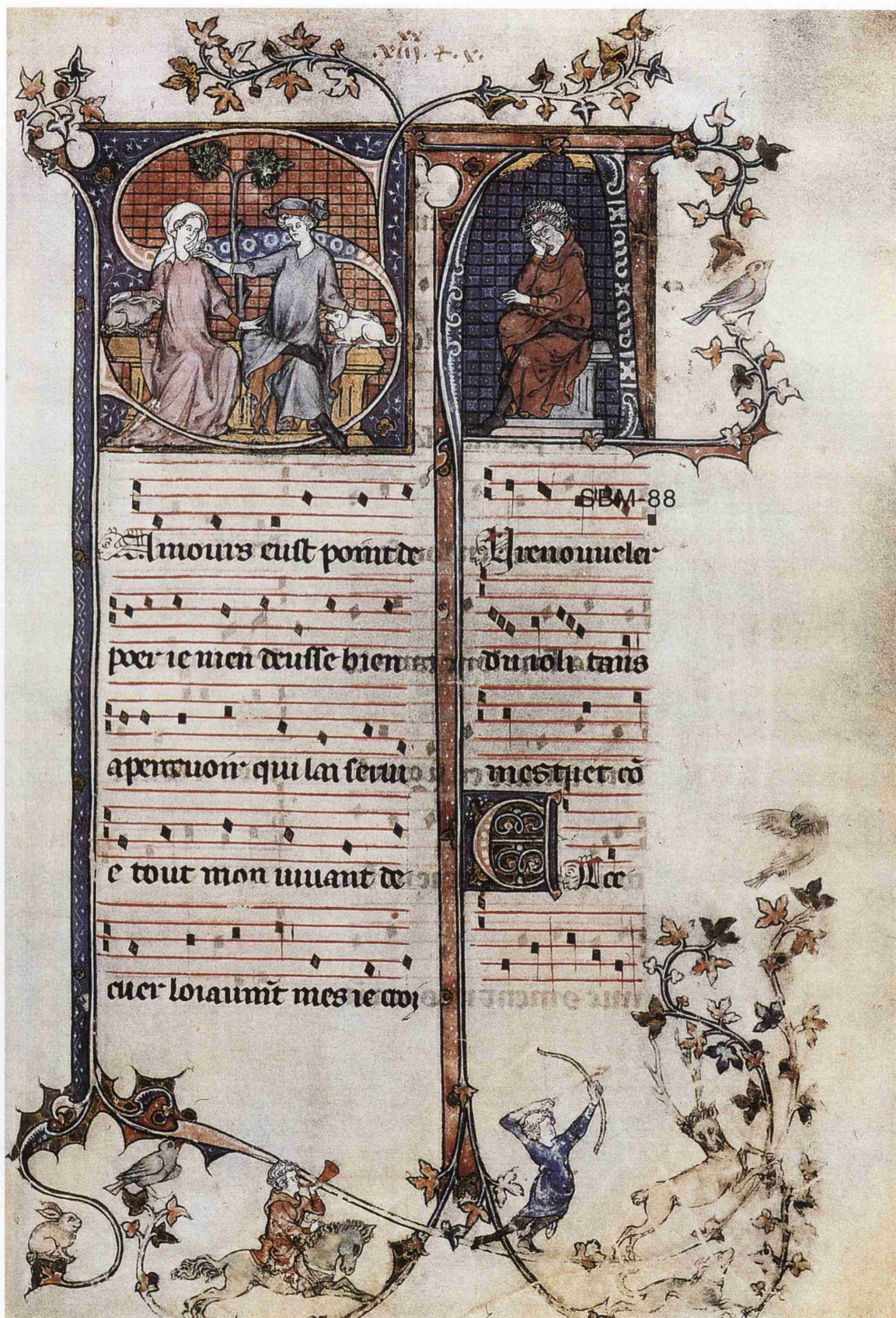
illus.no.2.





illus no.3.







une grande robe



es une grant  
 bourse pesant  
 toute fausie  
 de l'anz  
 Bel la neoit  
 saillir en place

Tout iourant a pleins brach  
 n'...





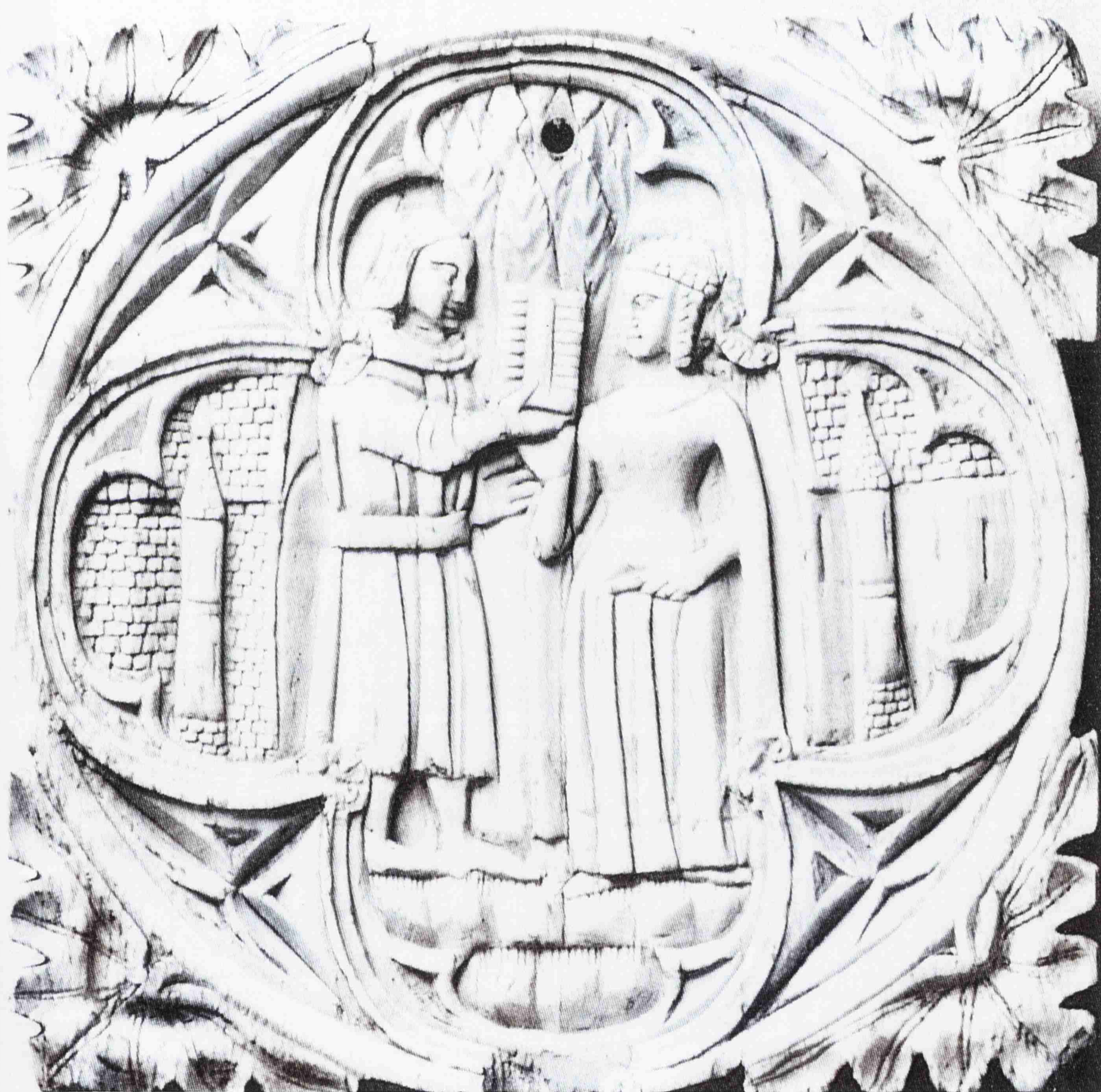
illus. no. 6.



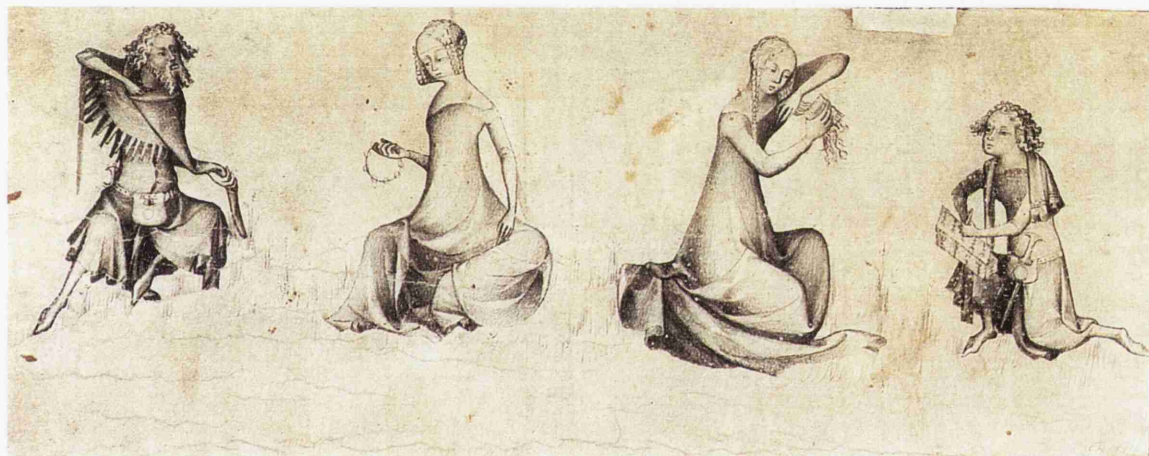


illus. no. 7.





illus. no. 8.



illus. no. 9



ex prioris manu coniungit a tota  
na synodus prorsus inhibuit.





illus. no.11





illus. no.12

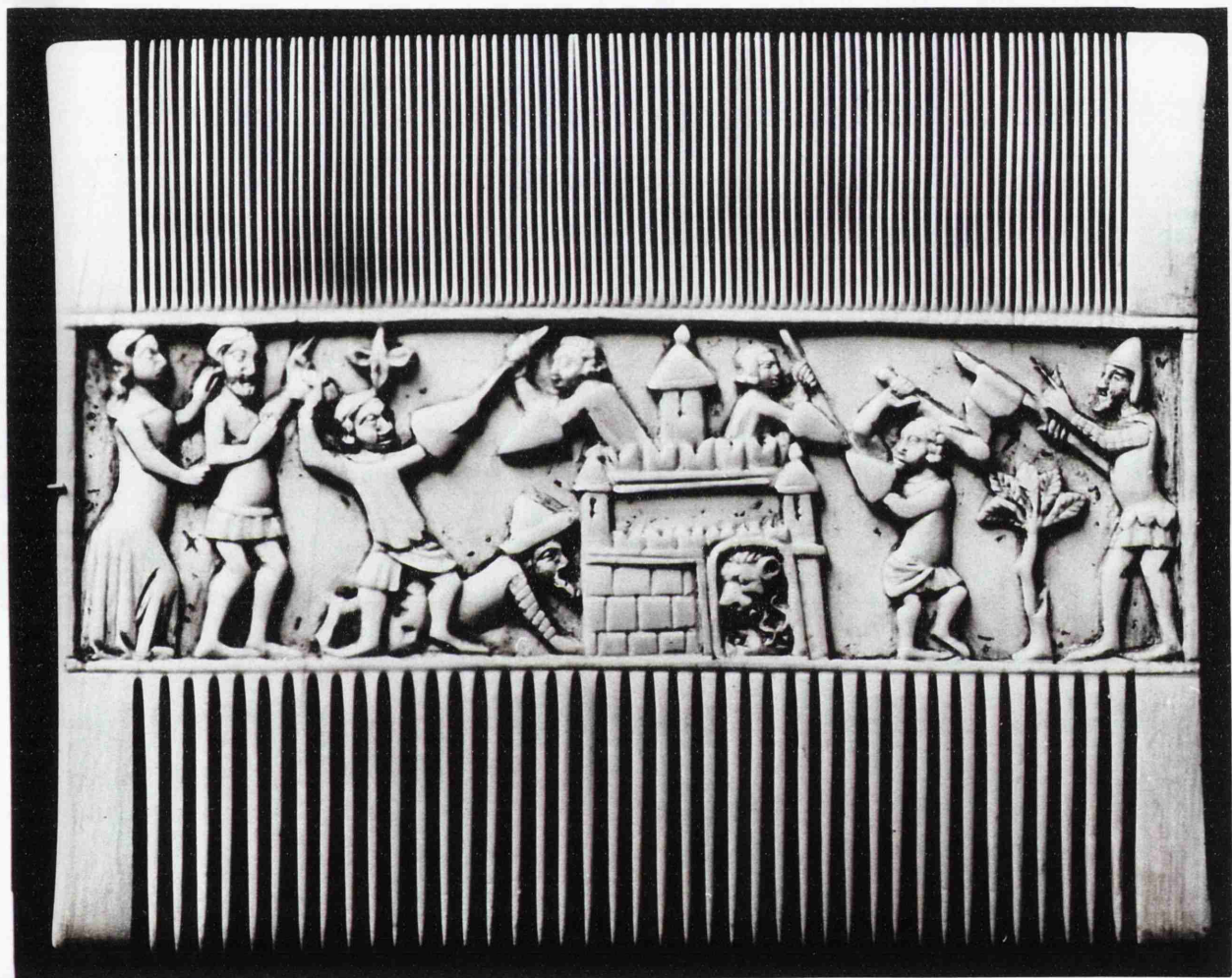


illus. no.13



amminabus quiete pfrun  
 sempiterna. De eundem

The page contains a large, ornate initial 'A' in blue and red, decorated with gold leaf. The initial is shaped like a cross and contains a small scene of a king and queen. The miniature depicts a battle scene with soldiers on foot and on horseback, and a central figure on a throne. The text is written in a Gothic script.



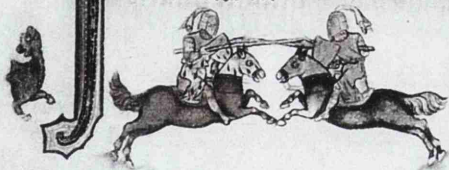
illus. no. 15.





luna pusillanimesisfo ne fle-  
biles ora pro populo interueni  
pro clero intercede pro deuoto fe-  
minico seru. **D**omine exau-  
di orationem meam. **E**t cla-  
mor meus ad te ueniat. oratio.

**C**oncede nos famulos  
tuos quicquidus dñe  
deus perpetua mentis et corpo-  
ris salute gaudere et gloriosa  
beate marie semper uirginis  
intercessione



torum meum interceda

**D**omine ad adiuvandum  
me festina

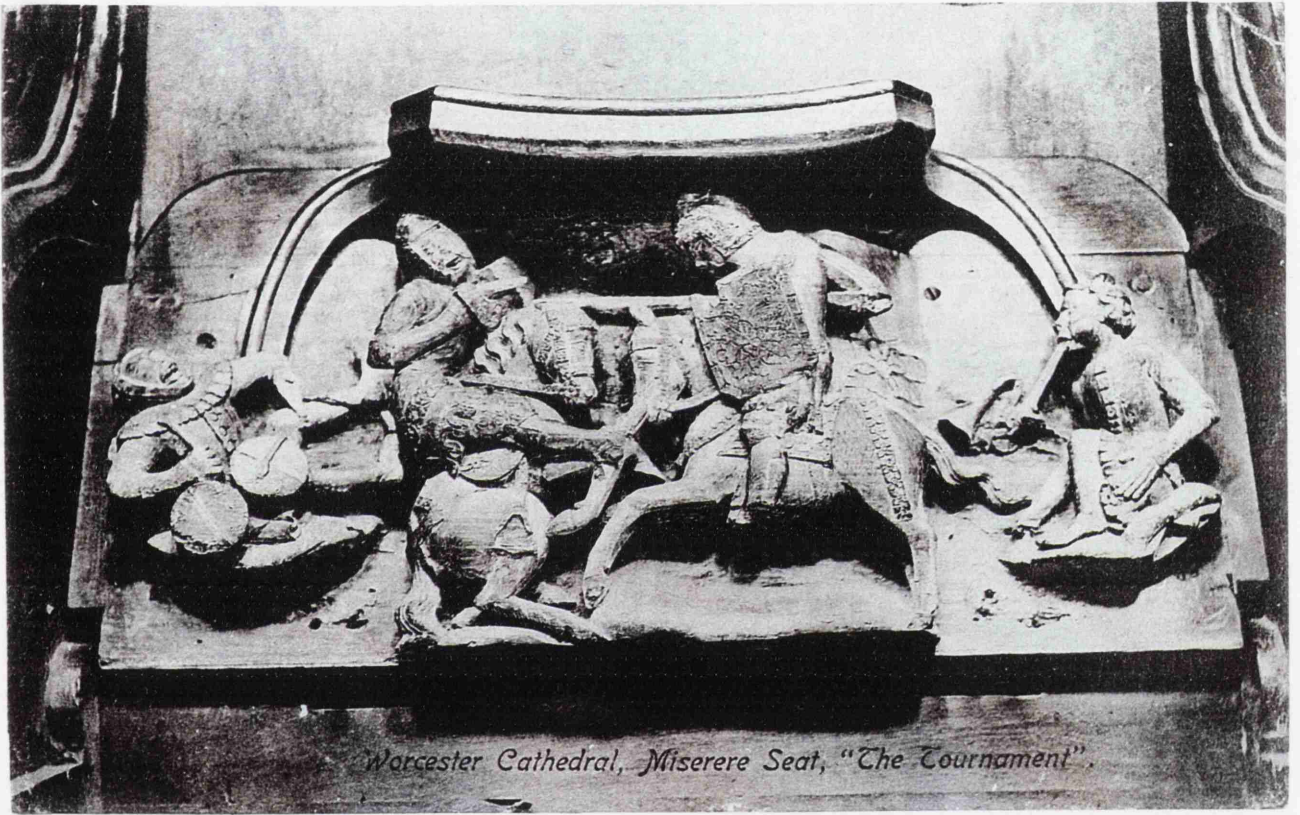
**G**loria patri et filio et spiritui  
sancto

**S**icut erat in principio et  
nunc et semper et in secula se-  
culorum amen alleluia. Ant.

**D**omine iocunditate

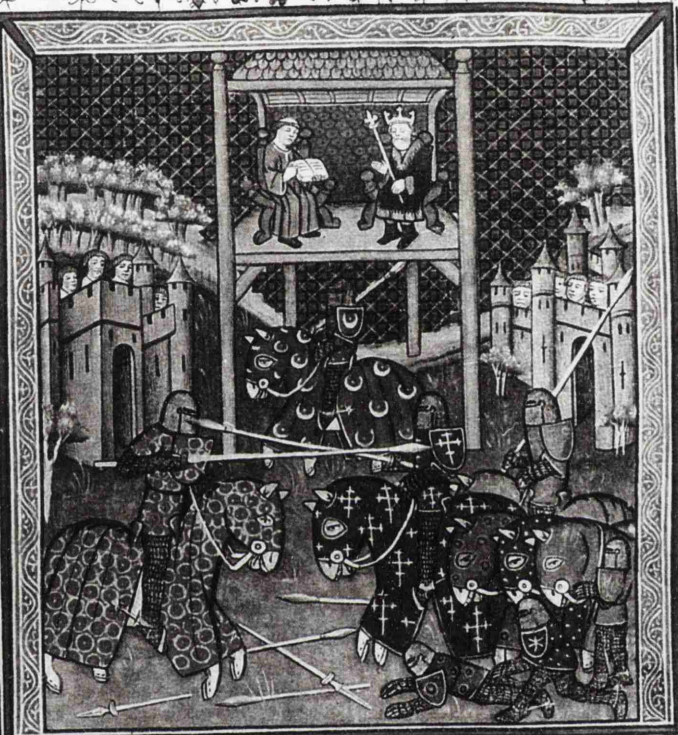
**I**te quo domine obli-  
uisceris meum finem  
ulquo auertis faciem in





illus · no · 17





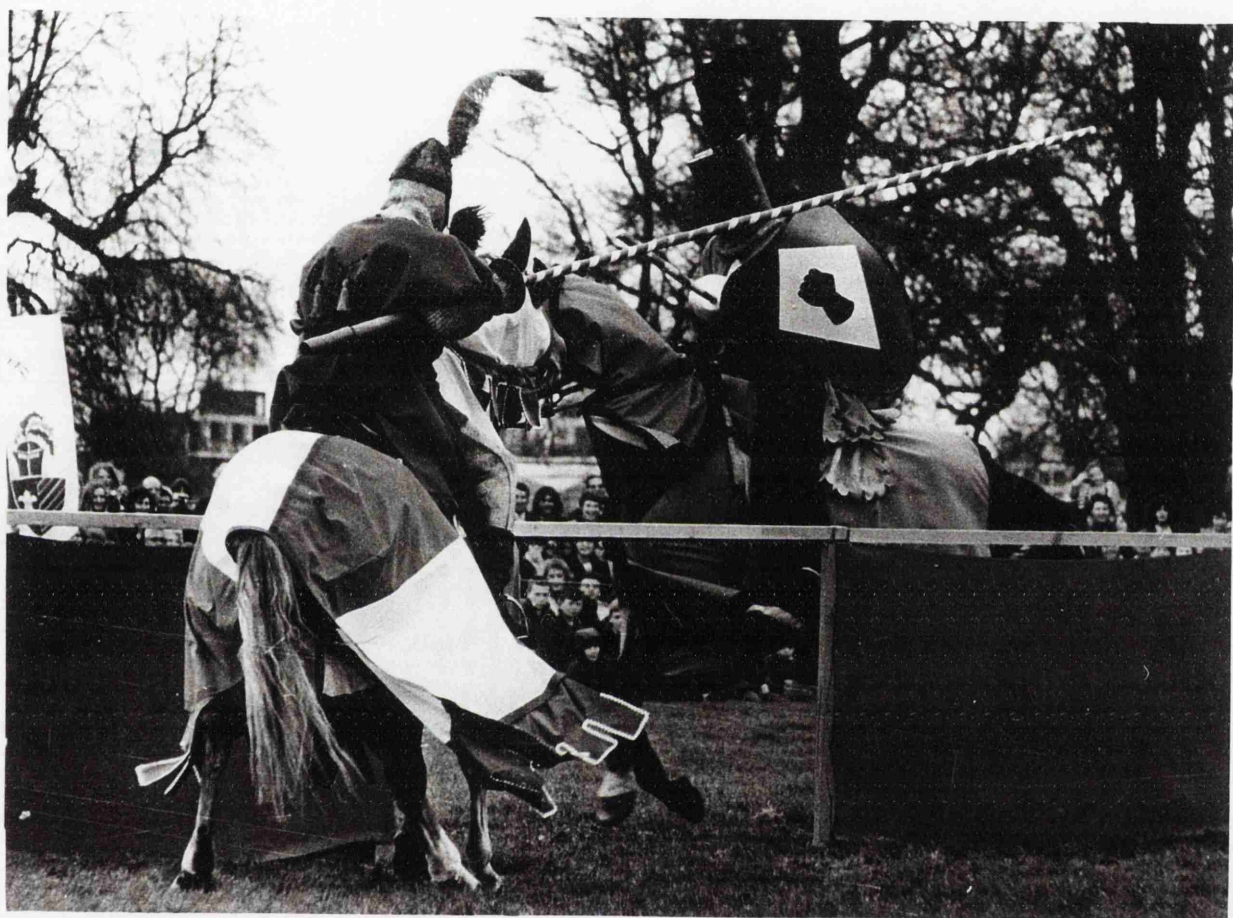
Et comencia l'histoire de melpidius et de qui  
ion le courtois et diu chli sanz pour  
Et p'le pie nneceant de rustians le  
maistre qui amant a l'ur et ap's  
de lano le viel chli qui anoit bien  
digne v' et bies le quel vie ala court  
le roys arvis y die d'uno fesse o lu qui  
enuoia par uiller ala court y anoit  
si reuolt mui chli qui uoulaist ioutier  
coure lui et d'aligne chli  
qui il uoulaist ioutier.

[illegible]



illus. no. 19





illus. no. 20.

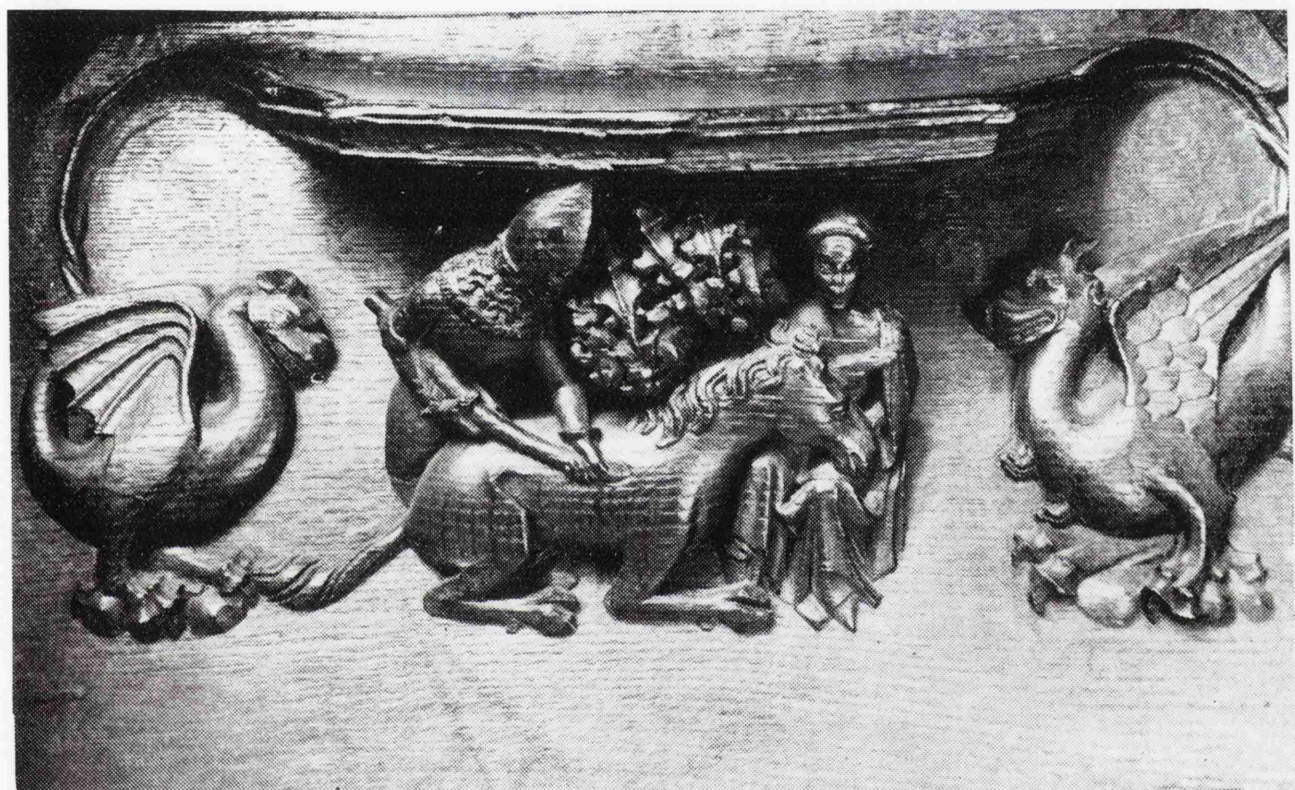


illus. no. 21





illus. no. 22.



illus. no. 23.

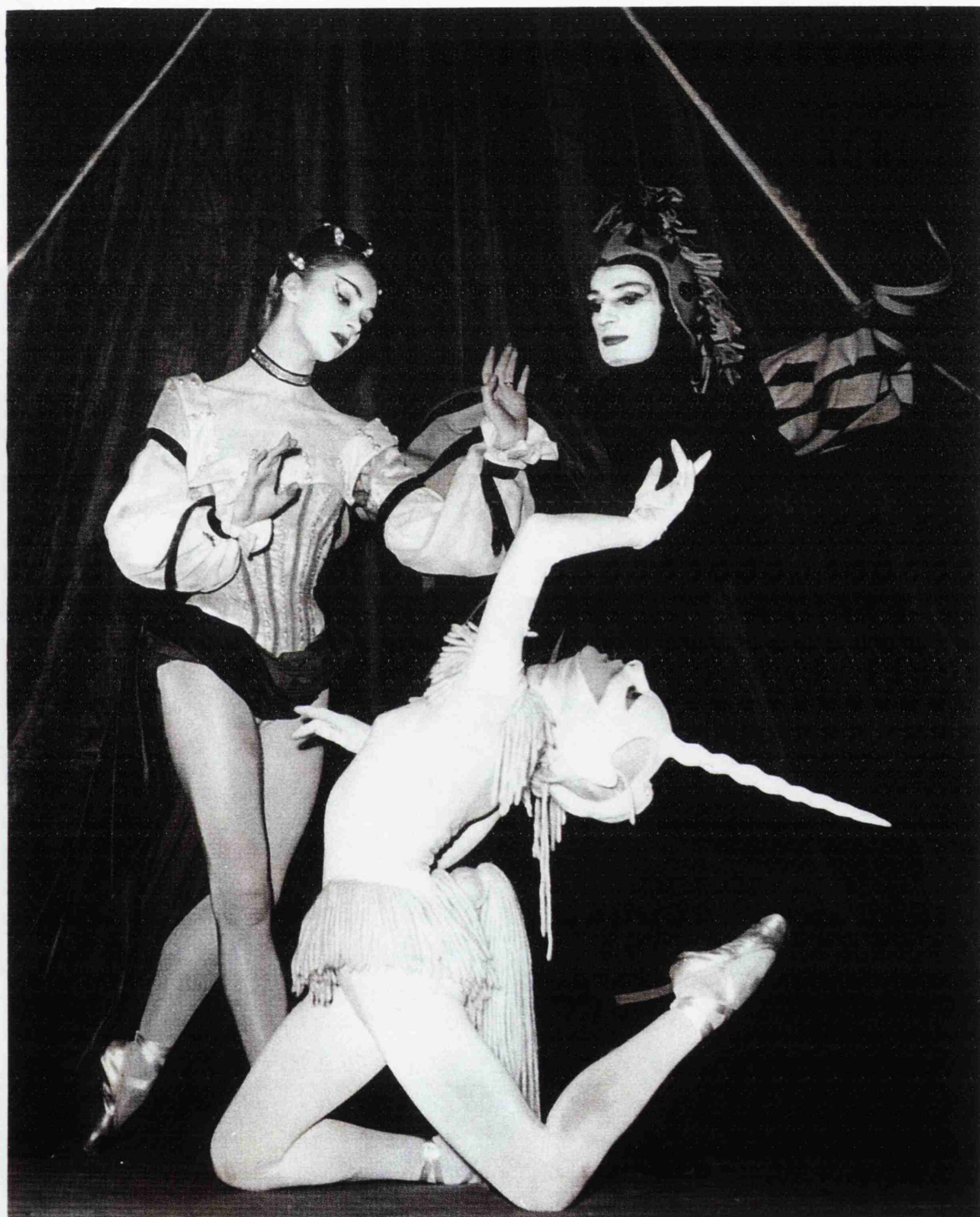






illus. no. 25.



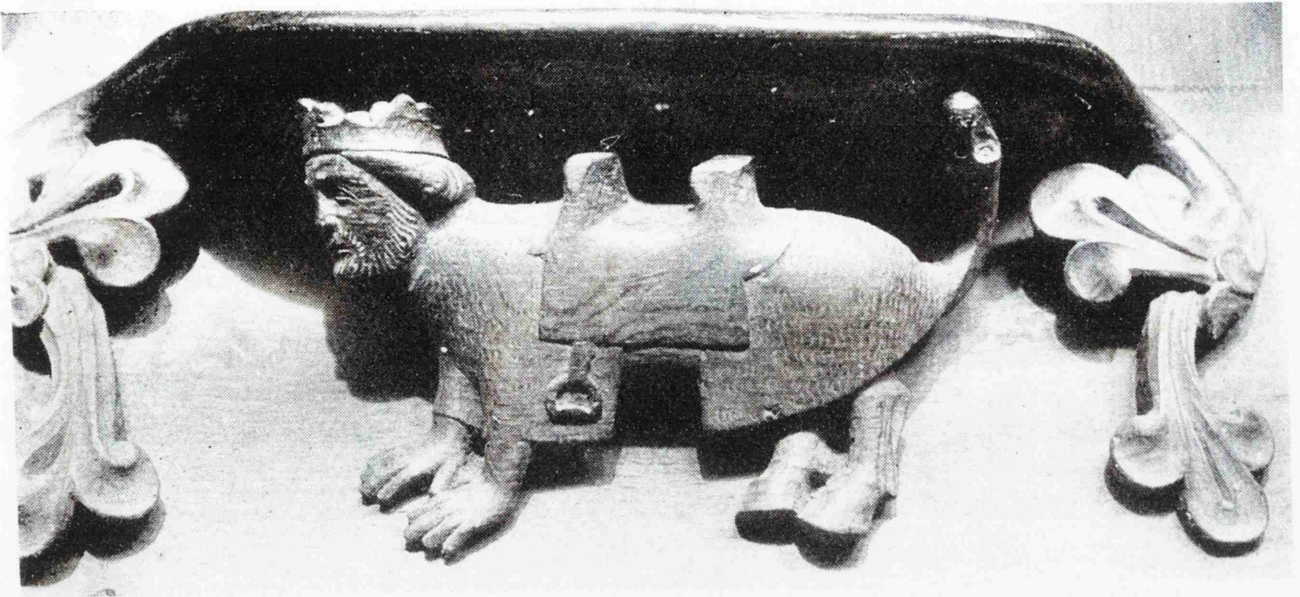


illus . no. 26

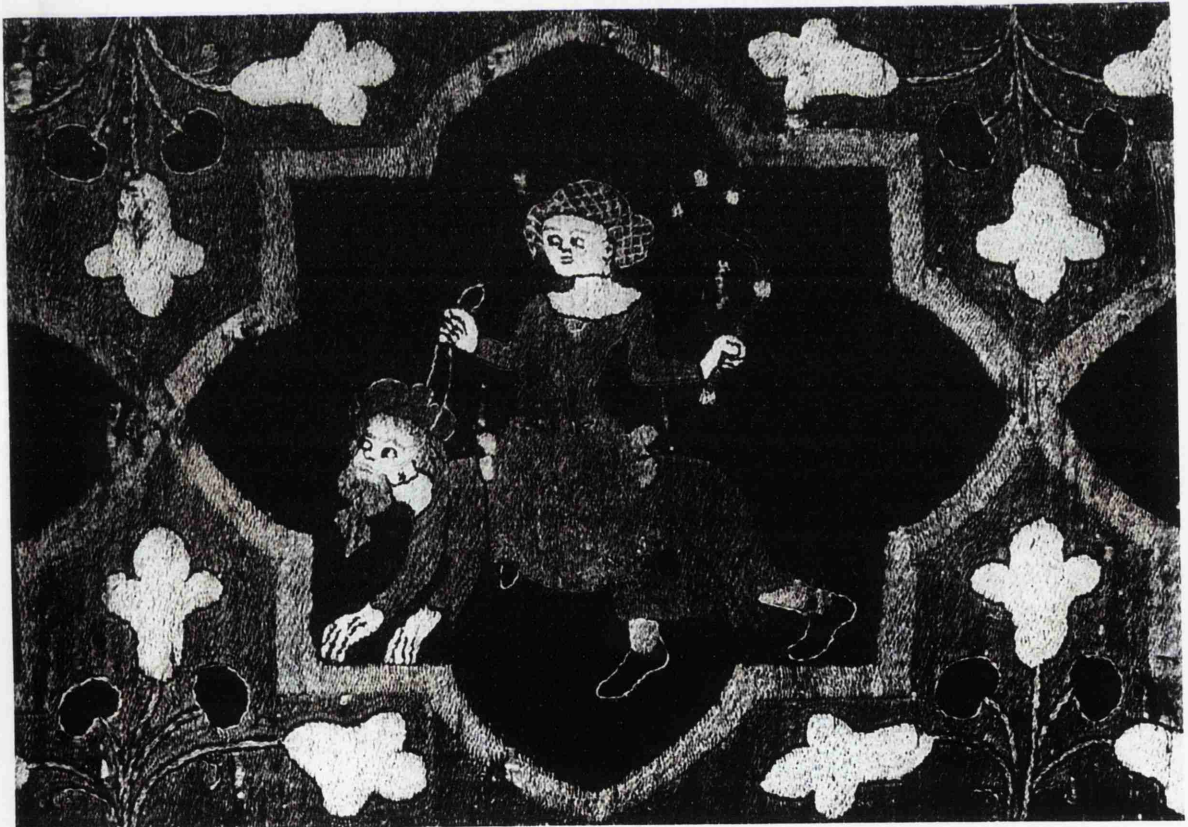


illus. no. 27.



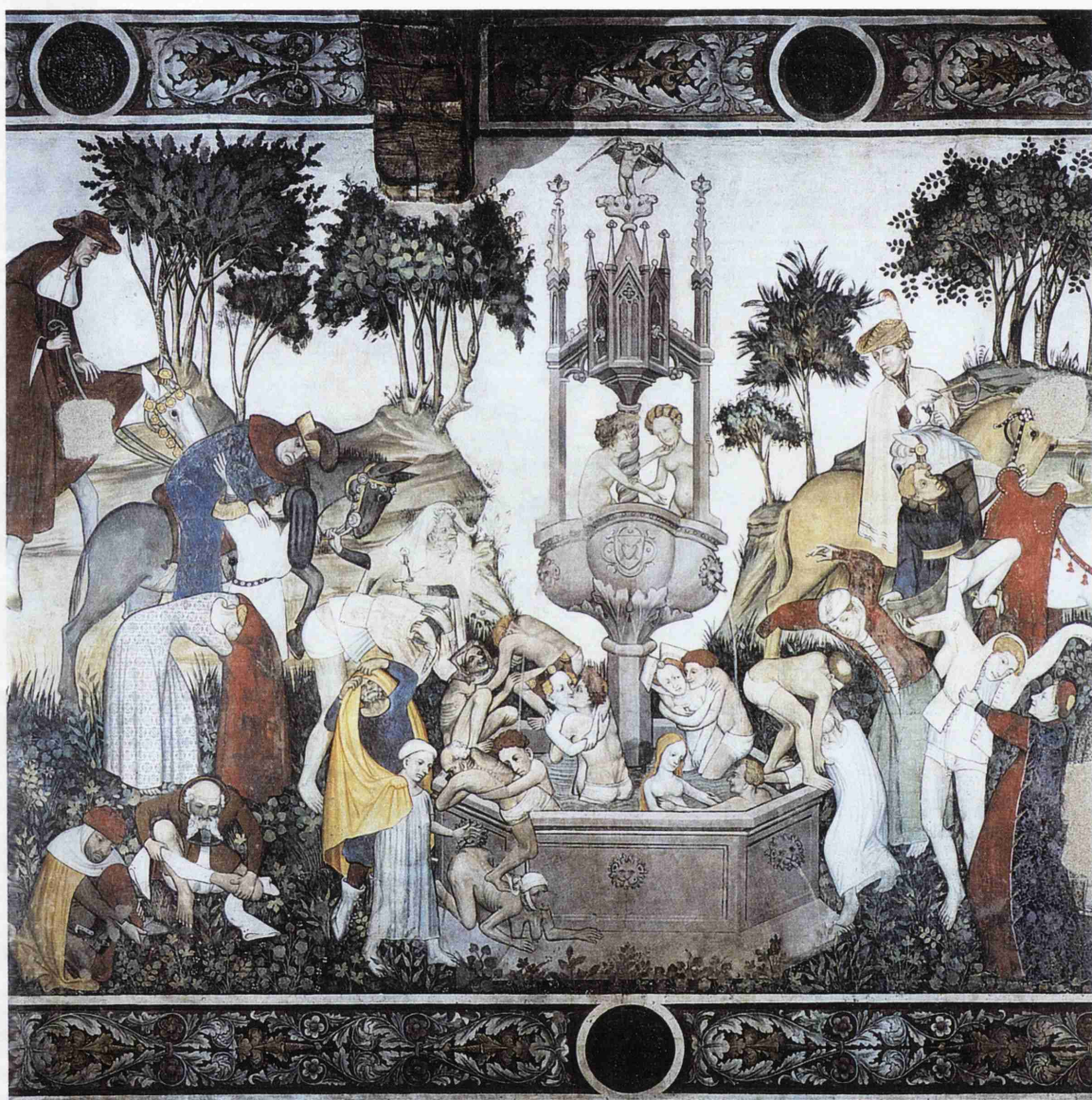


illus.no.28



illus.no.29.





illus. no. 30.





illus. no. 31.

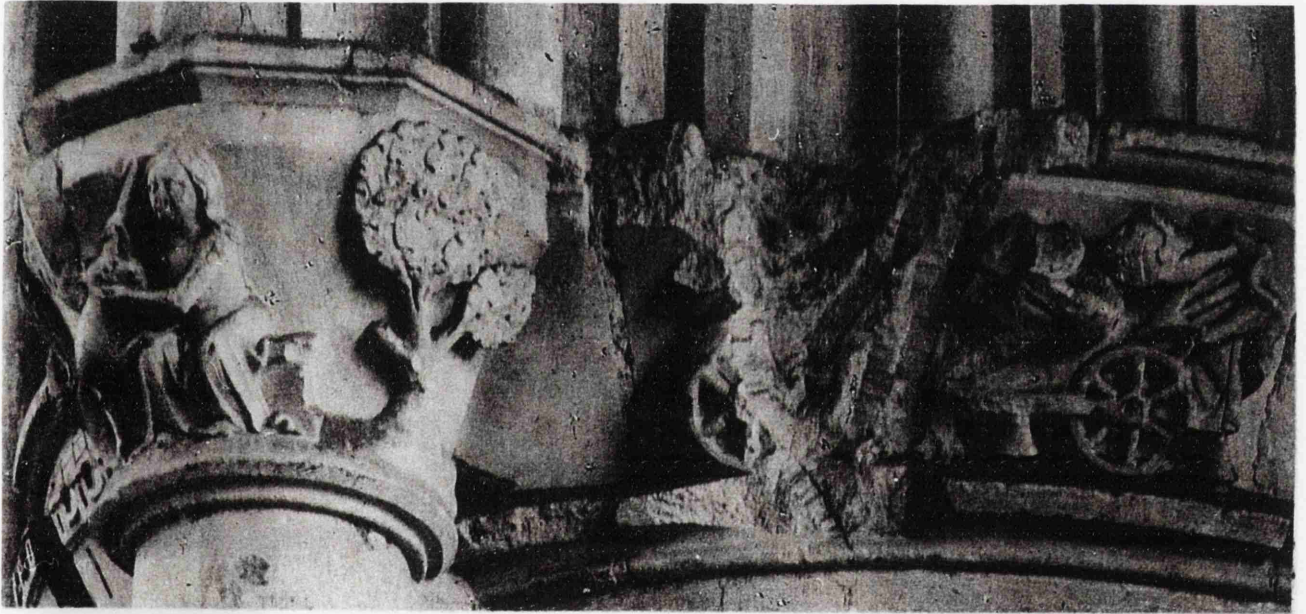


illus. no. 32.

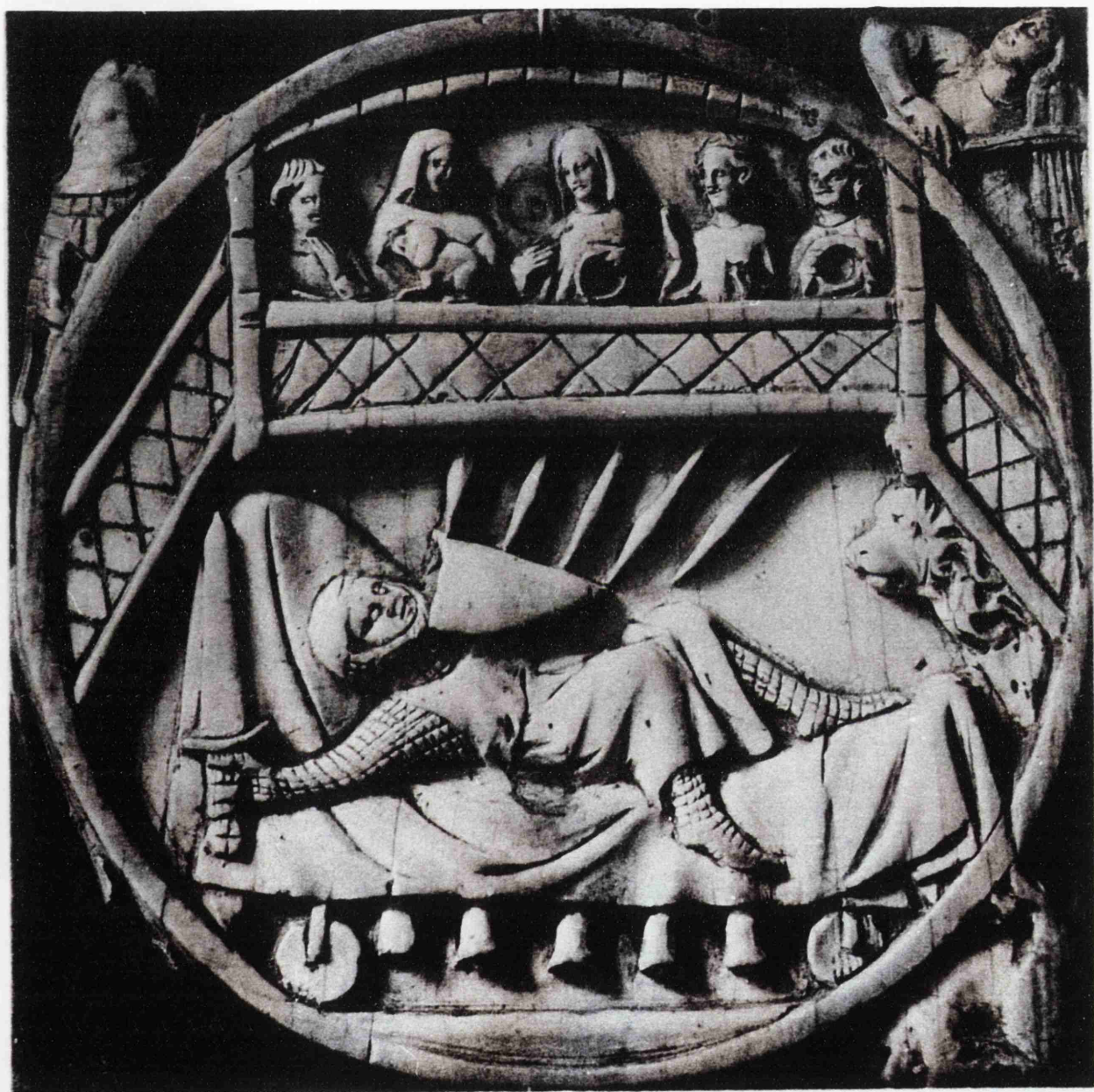


illus. no. 33.





illus. no. 34.



illus.no.35.



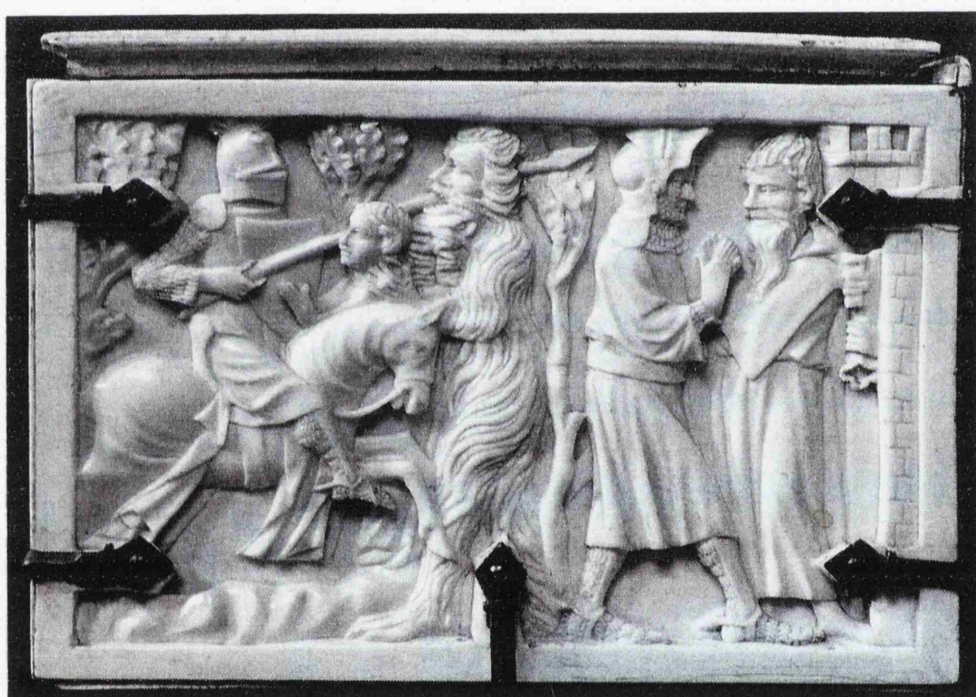


illus. no. 36.

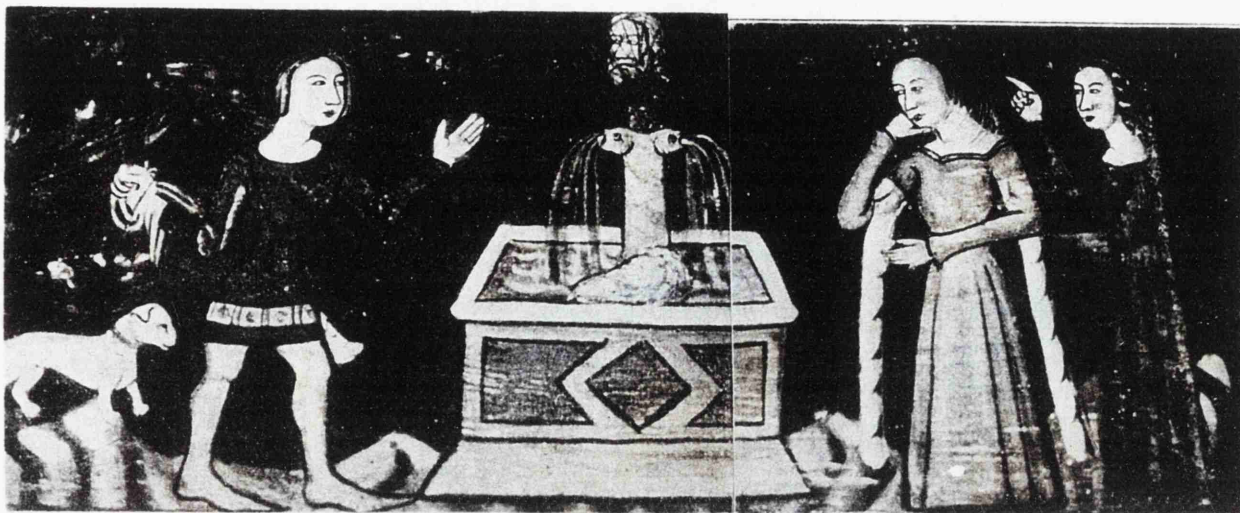


illus. no.37.

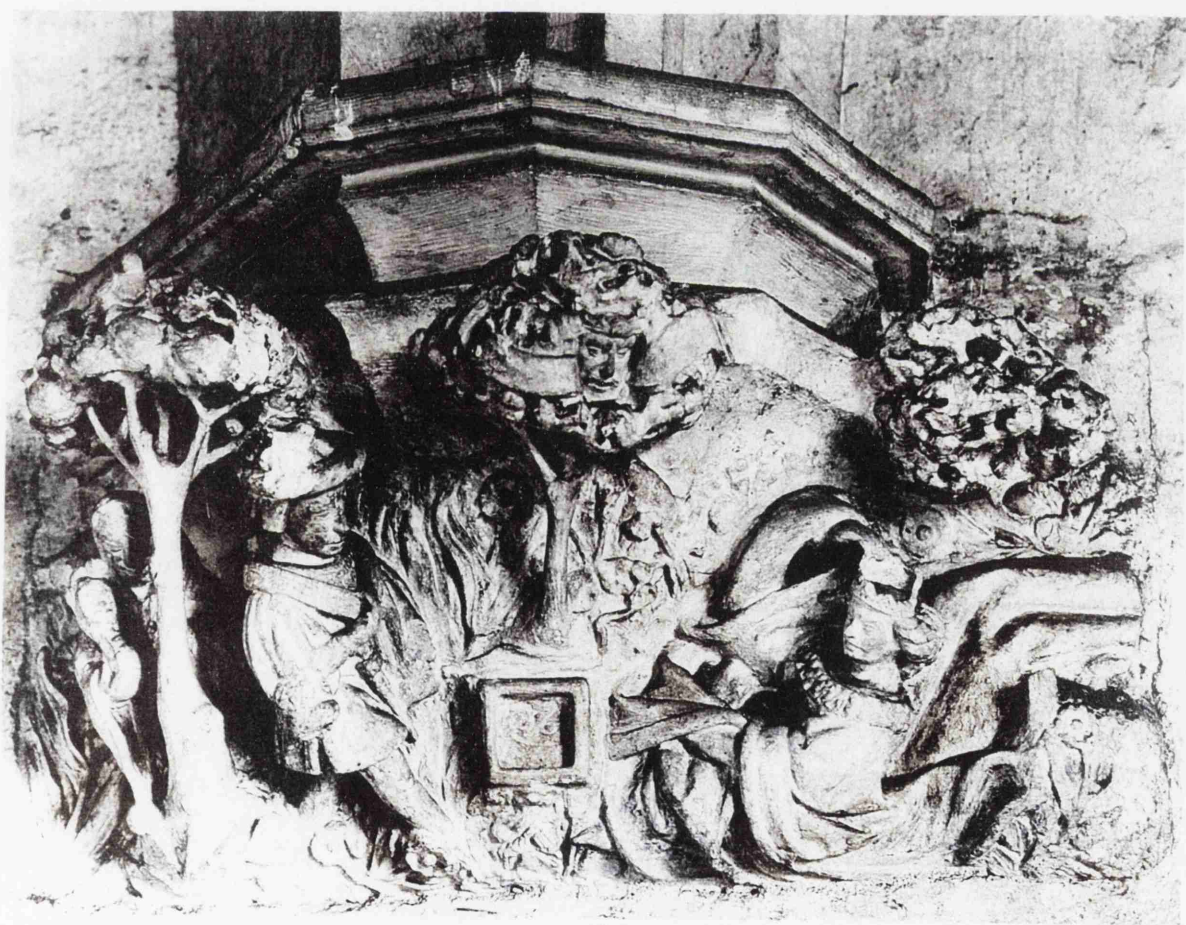




illus. no. 38.



illus. no. 39.



illus. no. 40.





illus. no. 41.

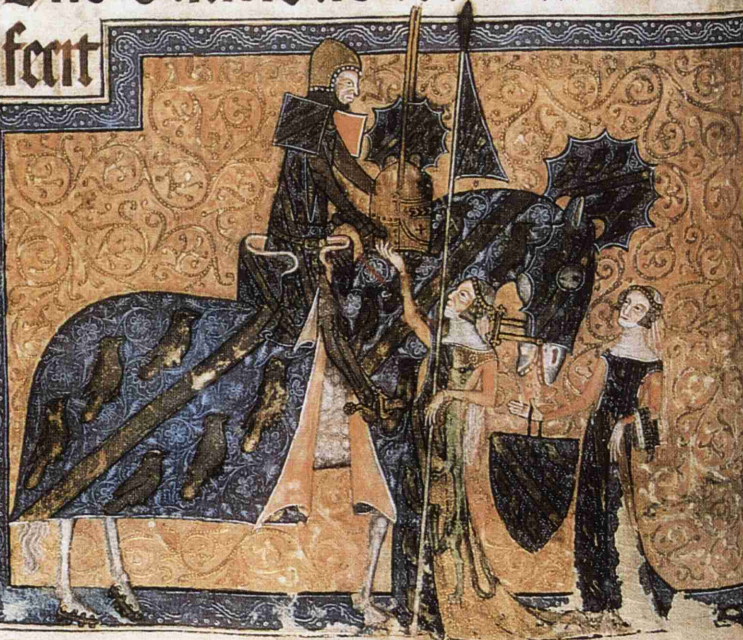


pudore: et operiantur sicut diplode  
confusione sua

**C**onfitebor domino nimis in  
ore meo: et in medio multorum  
laudabo eum

**Q**ui astitit a dextris pauperis:  
ut saluam faceret a persequentibus  
animam meam

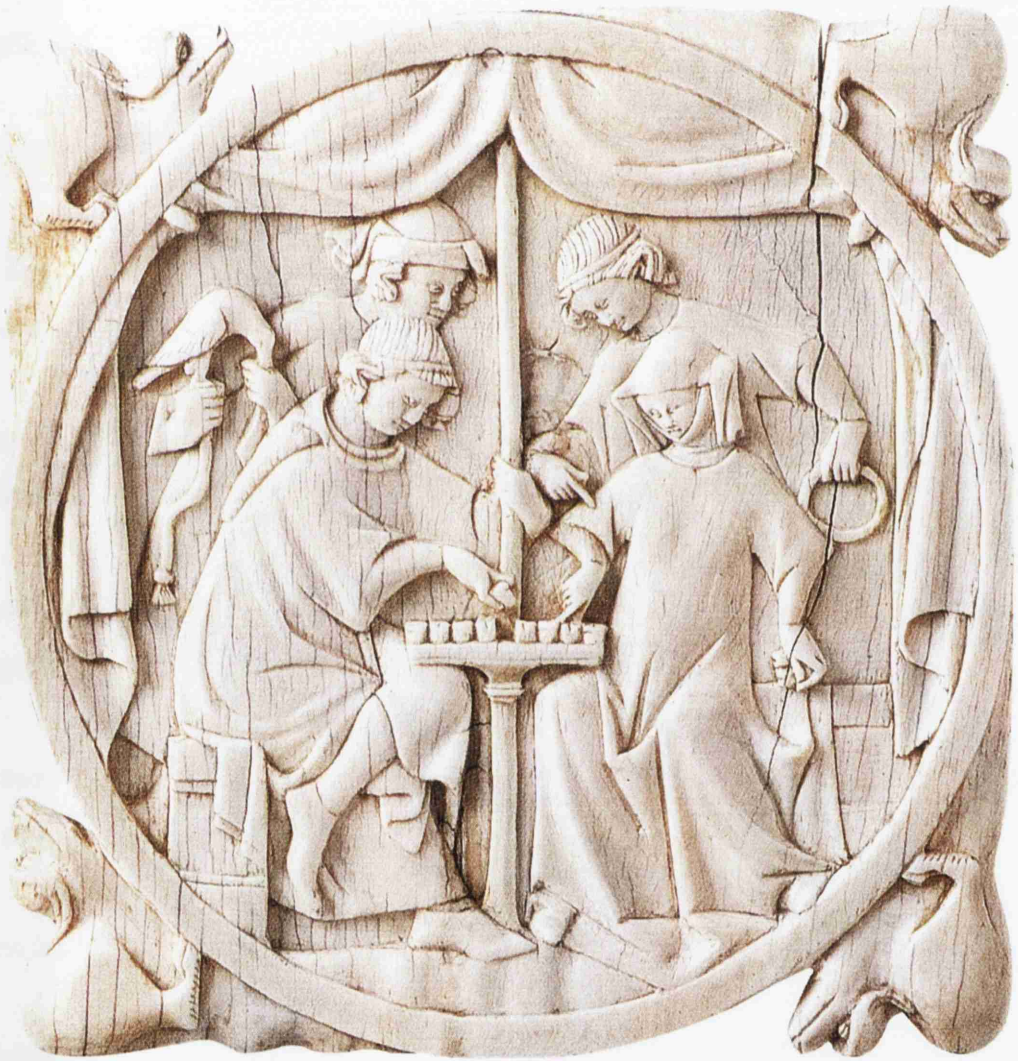
**G**loria patri  
**D**ñs Galfridus louterest me fieri  
fecit







illus. no. 43.



illus. no .44.

## Glossary

**allegory** The representation in a work of art of an abstract concept or idea using specific objects or human figures.

**applique** A piece of any material applied as decoration on another.

**arch** In architecture, a curved structural element that spans an open space.

**atelier** The studio or workshop of a master artist or craftsman, usually consisting of junior associates and apprentices.

**battlement** A series of alternate openings and solid portions on the top of a wall, characteristic of castles, also called crenellation.

**bestiary** A book of moralizing tales about real and imaginary animals especially popular during the Middle Ages in western Europe.

**bronze** A metal made from copper alloy, usually mixed with tin. Also: any sculpture or object made from this substance.

**cinquefoil** A five lobed decorative pattern common in Gothic art and architecture.

**corbel** Early roofing and arching technique in which each course of stone projects inward and slightly beyond the previous layer.

**crocket** A leaf like decorative element found in Gothic architecture often on gables and pinnacles.

**cross-hatching** A technique in which a set of parallel lines is drawn across a previous set but from a different angle.

**cusp** The point between the foils of an arch or tracery form.

**diptych** Two panels of equal size( usually decorated with paintings or relief's) hinged together.

**embroidery** The technique in needlework of decorating fabric by stitching designs and figures of coloured threads of fine materials( such as silk) into another material ( such as cotton, wool, leather or paper). Also: the material produced by this technique.

**enamel** A technique in which powdered glass is applied to a metal surface in a decorative design. After firing, the glass forms an opaque or transparent substance that is fixed to the metal background. Also: an object created with enamel technique.

**filigree** Delicate, lacelike ornamental work of intertwined wire.

**finial** A knoblike architectural decoration usually found at the top point of a spire, pinnacle or gable.

**foil** The lobe or leaf shape formed by applying cusps to an arch or geometrical shape.

**fresco** A painting technique in which water based pigments are applied to a surface of wet plaster. Murals are made using fresco.

**gesso** A thick medium usually made from glue, gypsum, and / or chalk and often forming the ground, or priming layer. A gesso ground leaves a smooth surface for



painting.

**gilding** The application of paper-thin gold leaf to an object made from another medium. Usually used as a decorative finishing detail.

**gold-leaf** Paper-thin sheets of hammered gold that are used in gilding.

**griffin** A creature with the head, wings and claws of an eagle, and the body and hind legs of a lion.

**grotesque** A carved or painted decoration representing a fantastic creature.

**illumination** A painting on paper or parchment used as illustration and/ or decoration for manuscripts or albums. Usually done in rich colours, often supplemented by gold and other precious materials.

**incising** A technique in which a design or inscription is cut into a hard surface with a sharp instrument.

**ivory** A hard creamy-white substance forming tusks of elephants.

**lithograph** A print made from a design drawn on a flat stone block with greasy crayon. Ink is applied to the stone, and when printed, adheres only to the open areas of the design.

**manuscript** A hand written book or document.

**medallion** In architecture, any round ornament or decoration. Also: a large medal.

**mural** A large painting or decoration, done either directly on the wall or separately and affixed to it.

**negative space** Empty or open space within or bounding a painting, sculpture, or architectural design. Negative space emphasises the overall form of the work.

**polychromy** The multicoloured painted decoration applied to any part of a building, sculpture, or piece of furniture.

**portcullis** A fortified gate, constructed to move vertically and often made of metal bars, used for defence of a city or castle.

**quatrefoil** A four-lobed decorative pattern common in Gothic art and architecture.

**relief sculpture** A sculpted image or design whose flat background surface is carved away to a certain depth, setting off the figure. Called high or low( bas) depending on the extent of projection of the image from the background. Called sunken relief when when the image is modelled below the original surface of the background, which is not cut away.

**spandrel** Flat triangular area between two arches.

**stylus** An instrument with a pointed end used for writing and printmaking.

**tapestry** Pictorial or decorative weaving meant to be hung on a wall or placed on furniture.

**tempera** A painting medium made by blending egg yolks with water, pigments and occasionally other materials, such as glue.

**troubadour** Musician- poet.

**trefoil** An ornamental design made up of three rounded lobes placed adjacent to one another.

**undercutting** A technique in sculpture by which a form is carved to project outwards, then under. Undercutting gives a highly three-dimensional effect with deep shadows behind the form.

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