

## The Figure Style



Towards the end of the fifth century the infiltration of Oriental, in particular Byzantine art into all the lands of the West and the gradual abandonment under its influence of the realistic style is evident in the renderings of both human figures and animals. There had been premonitory signs of this break with the past even before the Byzantine invasion (c. 540) in Justinian's reign, not only in Ravenna but in the rest of Italy. Its effects were so rapid and so widespread that soon the new 'Byzantine style' came to be regarded as basic to the national art of all the territories of the former Roman Empire. It is not always easy to distinguish the part played by the Germanic invaders in this drastic change-over to a new form of art. In any case the Mediterranean element predominated, especially in Italy (as has been demonstrated in the magisterial studies of Cattaneo, Mâle, Wulff and Toesca). Byzantine works of art found their way into all the western lands and indigenous artists hastened to draw inspiration from the ivories, the silver dishes adorned with ancient motifs and above all the precious silks imported in large numbers, many of which are still preserved in the treasures of Roman churches, in the cathedrals of Sens and Cologne and in several museums. The feeling for plastic values dwindled in all these lands at approximately the same speed, reliefs became steadily flatter, more purely linear. Perspectival effects were eliminated, movement was arrested. Human and animal forms tended more and more towards abstraction and were symmetrized as far as possible, with the result that by the end of the eighth century illusionist effects had been suppressed *in toto*.

Characteristic of the age is the marked predilection for toreutic art. But stone and marble carving now fell out of favour. Art and all its manifestations were aligned to the requirements of the Church. This is why most of the reliefs of this age represent scenes concerned with Christ and the lives of the saints. Secular works are the exception; most interesting among them is the golden hen and her seven chickens, in the Monza treasure. The style of this work seems too advanced for it to be assigned to the time of Theodelinda and we are inclined to date it to a later period (it may even be an Islamic work).

Stone was almost always reserved for architecture in the early Middle Ages and was employed throughout this period almost exclusively for the capitals of pillars, pulpits, choir stalls, ciboria and sarcophagi. Metalwork was employed for the adornment of altar frontals, ciboria, candelabra, chalices and patens. The ever-increasing cult of relics called for sumptuous reliquaries. Only a small proportion of these finely wrought works of art has come down to us, but the treasures of abbeys and monasteries still contain some admirable pieces which have escaped the ravages of pillagers—and ill-advised attempts to modernize. By dint of an intensive study of ancient documents—this has been undertaken in France by Paul Deschamps, Bréhier and Ebersolt—it should be possible to compile an almost complete

description of the metalwork of the early Middle Ages. Of no less interest for the light they throw on the history of medieval style are the smaller objects, such as the buckles and fibulae discovered in sixth-century tombs.

Though artistically inferior to the works made in the ateliers under royal patronage and those of the monasteries, these objects keep well abreast of the widespread progress of the decorative arts. But in the eighth century this progress seems to have taken a different turn. Thus hardly any objects are now found in the tombs and such few as have survived derive from workshops maintaining an exceptionally high standard. The transition from the classic-Byzantine style of the sixth century to an ever-increasing stylization can be seen most clearly in Italy, in the art



270 - HEN AND SEVEN CHICKS. CATHEDRAL TREASURE, MONZA.



271 - FRONTAL PLAQUE OF A HELMET. BARGELLO, FLORENCE.

of Ravenna. Whereas in the confronted peacocks among vineshoots facing the monogram of Christ on the sarcophagus of Archbishop Theodore (a fifth-century work) we still find a concern for plastic values, the change that came over art in the next century is evidenced by the sarcophagus of St Ecclesius in San Vitale on which the peacock motif recurs, but treated calligraphically, without the least hint of depth. The style adopted here resembles that of another sixth-century work, the ambo of Archbishop Agnellus (556-569) in the cathedral. From the iconographic viewpoint the gilt-bronze helmet front discovered at Val di Nievole, near Lucca and bearing the effigy of King Agilulf (591-615) enthroned, recalls the effigies of the emperors made in late antiquity. This, the earliest representation of a Germanic monarch seated on his throne that has come down to us, illustrates a new form of barbarian stylization. And, comparing it with the portrait of the Emperor Theodosius on a *missorium* at Madrid, we can see how far the art of the first period of the Middle Ages has departed from its prototypes.

Further east, another active centre of Lombard stone carving flourished in the Friuli district, chiefly at Cividale. A number of striking works from this region have been preserved, among them the animal figures, representations of peacocks, sea monsters, griffins and stags, in which the School of Cividale excelled. They adorned seven archivolts of the octagonal ciborium above the font, originally in the baptistery, now housed in the cathedral of Cividale. They have close affinities with the reliefs at Pavia and with the one bearing the name of Bishop Lopicenus in Modena museum, though they do not attain the same high quality. The ciborium dates to the time of the patriarch Callistus, who supervised the building of the baptistery (c. 730). Thus this work is contemporary with the altar of San Martino, which was



272 - FRONTAL PLAQUE OF A HELMET, DETAIL: KING AGILULF ON HIS THRONE. BARGELLO, FLORENCE.

built by Duke Ratchis (from 734 on) thanks to donations made by Count Pemmo, and completed about 737. On the front is an effigy of Christ in Majesty and on the sides are represented the three Kings of the East and the Visitation of the Virgin. Though the iconography clearly derives from the East, no trace of Oriental influence can be detected in the style. Here the abstraction of the human figure and the systematic rejection of any attempt to render space are carried to the highest possible pitch; bodies are treated as mere ornaments, little more than symbols. The plaque representing two evangelist symbols—this motif was reproduced on the balustrade of the baptistery of San Callisto—has suffered greatly from the ravages of time; it belongs to a late phase of Cividale sculpture, whereas the triple cable moulding of the upper string-course is inspired by earlier models. The two evangelist symbols, which are treated with an even greater spareness, point the way to one of the outstanding, and latest, works of this group: the plaque representing the evangelists, utilized later as a baldachin in the baptistery. This piece is dated by an inscription on which can be deciphered the name of the prelate commissioning it, the patriarch Sigualdus (762-776).

Soon after this came one of the most remarkable and most discussed works of the period: the stucco decorations of the so-called Tempietto (Santa Maria in



273 - CIVIDALE, SANTA MARIA IN VALLE. ENTRANCE WALL

Valle) at Cividale. They have been assigned to various periods ranging from the eighth to the thirteenth century. After a close examination of the structure of the edifice and the nature of the decorations E. Dyggve has been convinced that the stuccoes date to the eighth century; they were added to an already existing building, and the paintings were made later. Only one part of the decoration has survived, that on the entrance wall. The upper register, on either side of a window whose arch is adorned with plant motifs, contains six figures of saints in relief. In the lower portion of the wall a relatively large portal lunette is lavishly decorated with palmettes, vineshoots and bunches of grapes, also in relief. Two friezes of rosettes separate the upper from the lower register. When we observe the ample modelling of the reliefs, the hieratic postures of the figures and their ceremonial garments (in the Byzantine style) we cannot fail to be surprised by the differences between this work and its immediate predecessors, for example the Pemmo altar. It is easy to see why some authorities, among them Geza de Francovich, have assigned these reliefs to a later (the Ottonian) period. Nevertheless, a comparison of them with Byzantine reliefs such as the ivory plaque representing a female saint from Sant' Ansano, Fiesole, suggests that these stuccoes may very well have been made about the year 800 or a little earlier.

The same applies to the decorations and ornamentations, characterized by an exceptional feeling for strong effects of light and shade, which led Strzygowski to see in them signs of Oriental (chiefly Syrian) influences. Indeed the differences from all previous Lombard works, both in their technique and in the maker's lively sense of plastic values, are so pronounced that, like Cattaneo, we can hardly fail to see in these works the hand of Oriental artists. There is no knowing if these were Byzantine artists expelled from the East who had made their way to Cividale as a result of the iconoclast controversy. In any case there can be no doubt of the basic affinities between their work and the Castelseprio frescoes. This drastic break with tradition might also be accounted for by a difference in the taste of the new Frankish overlords, a predilection for a classicism resembling that which was making headway in the north at the Palace School of Charlemagne. On the other hand, there are conspicuous differences between the stucco reliefs at Cividale and Ottonian reliefs, for example those of the ciborium of Sant'Ambrogio, Milan, or the representation of the sun at Solnhofen (Bavaria)—works that are datable to about the year 1000 or even later. And, stylistically, the stuccoes in San Pietro al Monte at Civate, near Como, and those at Müstair in the Grisons (Switzerland) are still more different. Here Byzantine influences, though still perceptible, are already losing ground in this late period.

In central Italy figure sculpture underwent much the same changes as in northern Italy, and differed only in its more primitive handling of forms. Traces of Lombard elements have almost completely disappeared. The few representations of human figures and above all those of animals have an unquestionable kinship with Oriental art. Of the works that have survived, the altar of Magister Ursus (San Pietro in Valle, near Ferentillo) commissioned by Duke Hilderic Dagileopa of Spoleto (after 739) is a typical example.

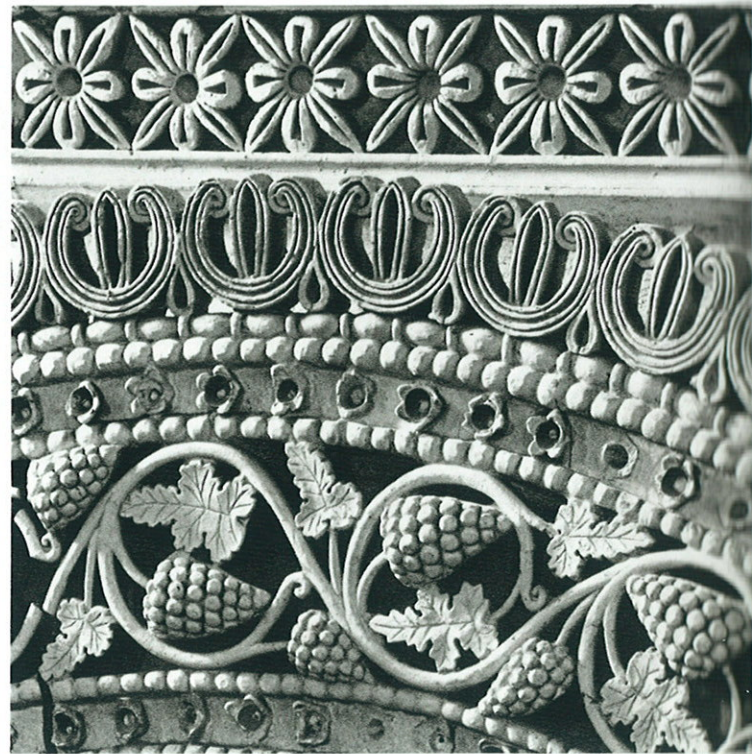


274 - CIVIDALE, SANTA MARIA IN VALLE. ENTRANCE WALL, DETAIL: THREE HOLY WOMEN



275 - CIVIDALE, SANTA MARIA IN VALLE. ENTRANCE WALL, DETAIL.

276 - CIVIDALE, SANTA MARIA IN VALLE. ENTRANCE WALL, DETAIL.



ALTAIR OF DUKE RATCHIS: CHRIST IN MAJESTY. CHAPTER ROOM, SAN MARTINO, CIVIDALE.

ALTAIR SLAB OF MAGISTER URSUS. SAN PIETRO, FERENTILLO.





279 - ALTAR OF DUKE RATCHIS: ADORATION OF THE MAGI. CHAPTER ROOM, SAN MARTINO, CIVIDALE.



280 - ALTAR OF DUKE RATCHIS: ADORATION OF THE MAGI, DETAIL. SAN MARTINO, CIVIDALE.



281 - ALTAR OF DUKE RATCHIS: THE VISITATION. CHAPTER ROOM, SAN MARTINO, CIVIDALE.

In its handling of linear relief, without recourse to any effects of plasticity, eighth-century art was brought here to a perfection never attained elsewhere, not even in northern Italy. Beneath three cruciform disks stand Ursus and another man, both treated as purely ornamental motifs. This abstract style prevailed in central Italy over a long period, and was especially appreciated at Rome, as is evidenced by the reliefs with hunting scenes in San Saba in Rome and at Civita Castellana. Only a few examples of the pre-Carolingian art that flourished in art centres in Campania have been preserved in Naples and Cimitile. However, such works of a high artistic quality as have come down to us show that in this region Oriental and above all Byzantine influences were of paramount importance. Nevertheless the art of antiquity was by no means extinct: copies of antique bas-reliefs were still being made.

Germanic elements played a very minor role, even in the works adorning the residences of the Lombard aristocracy at, for example, Capua, and their courtly art was tributary in the main to Byzantine-Italian influences. Still there were some exceptions, for instance two interesting, if rather perplexing bas-reliefs representing animals and a knight fighting a dragon, in the cathedral of Aversa. Stylistically this relief pertains to the Lombard art of northern Italy, whereas its theme seems to derive from Nordic models. But on another part of the same plaque, where elephants and other animals are grouped in a circle, we can see unmistakable reminiscences of Byzantine and Islamic textiles.

The same is true of a curious altar screen in Sant'Aspreno, Naples, decorated with fabulous animals. The carvings in San Felice at Cimitile, near Nola, are datable to approximately the same period (from 700 on) as these pieces in southern Italy: the period when Bishop Leo III had the old church rebuilt and its woodwork and pillars decorated in the Oriental manner.

The contemporary figure sculpture of the Visigoth empire followed the same course as Italian art; its Mediterranean connections are evident. After the break-up, in 507, of the kingdom of Toulouse, the transfer of the capital to Toledo, and the achievement of religious unity under King Reccared, the fusion of Visigoth and Italic elements was carried a stage further. Here, too, at the end of the sixth century, Byzantine art firmly established itself. Soon the new forms imported by the sea routes from Egypt, North Africa, Italy and Sicily became the order of the day. The carvings and, above all, the many objects in bronze that have been discovered, buckles and fibulae, testify to a progressive decline of the Visigothic style down to the time (c. 711) when it was totally extinguished by the Arab invasions. As in Italy, figure carving was almost exclusively restricted to monumental sculpture; hardly any free-standing statuary has come down to us.

Even in the kingdom of the Franks it is extremely hard to trace the evolution of figure art in the pre-Carolingian period. Political upheavals, wars and famines account for the disappearance of all but a few examples of it. To make things worse, recurrent changes and cleavages at every level of the social system impeded any orderly development.



◀ 282 - KNIGHT FIGHTING A DRAGON. CATHEDRAL, AVERSA.



283 - HELMET OF A PRINCE. ALBERTUMMUSEUM, MAINZ.

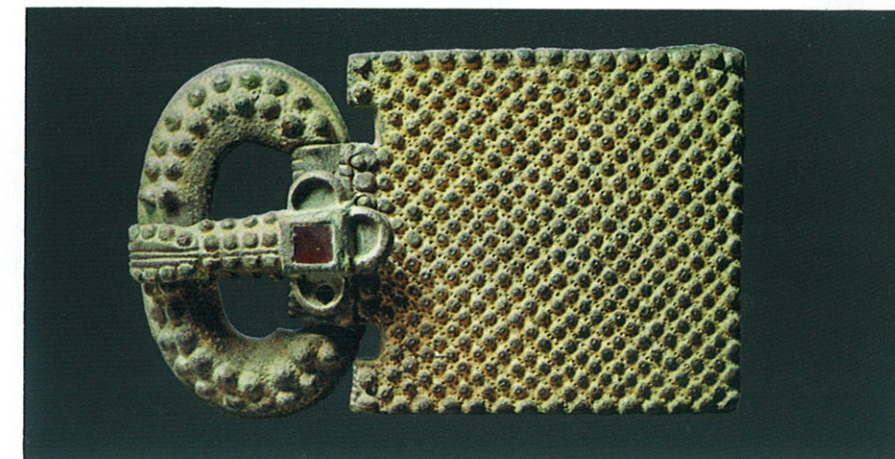


284 - BELT BUCKLE. MUSEO ARQUEOLOGICO, BARCELONA.

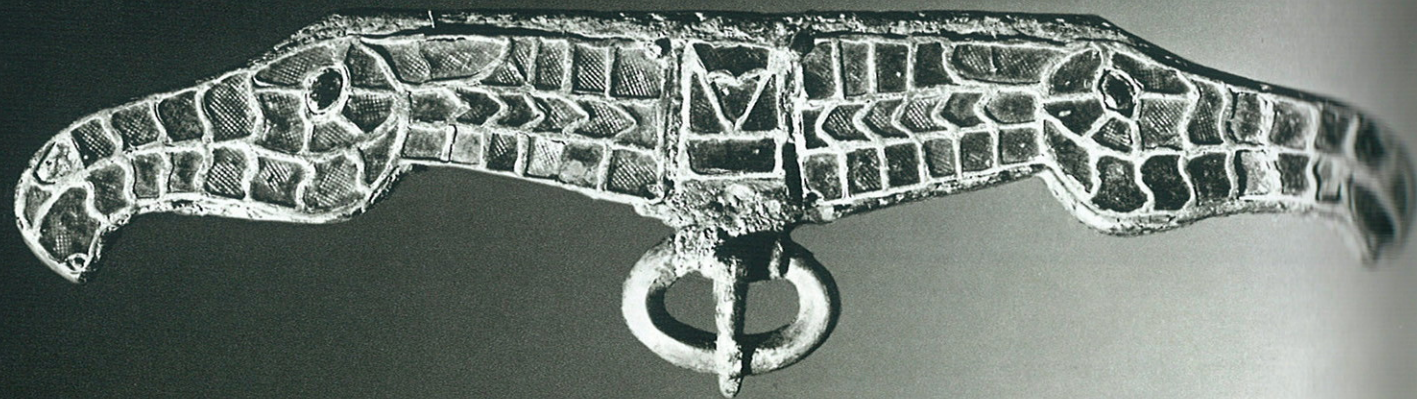
Whereas the Gallo-Roman substratum of the population remained obstinately attached to the art traditions of antiquity, the new overlords, scions of the Frankish nobility, did their utmost to promote an aristocratic art congenial to their status, while the Frankish peasantry was in course of creating a popular art stemming from more distinctively Germanic sources. Many examples of this peasant art have been found in the tombs in public graveyards. To the Gallo-Roman population must be added the many foreigners, mostly engaged in trade and commerce, who had poured in from Syria, Egypt and India. In 585 King Gontran was welcomed at Orleans by three races: Latins, Syrians and Jews. These were certainly the men who, along with the pilgrims, introduced Oriental works of art into Gaul. There are innumerable references to these works in contemporary records.

Several manuscripts, one of them the *Gesta Dagoberti*, also contain references to precious fabrics adorning the walls, pillars and vaults of churches. It is round about the year 500 that we find the first figurative motifs inspired by Oriental models. These are the adornments of the warriors' helmets specially made to be buried in princely tombs. Mention may be made in this context of the recent finds in

285 - BELT BUCKLE. MUSÉE DE CLUNY, PARIS.







286 - CLASP FOR A BAG. MUSÉE DES ANTIQUITÉS NATIONALES, SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE.

the royal graves at Morken and Krefeld-Gellep (Rhineland) and the helmet of the 'Young Prince' in Cologne cathedral. The fronts of all these helmets were adorned with a profusion of figural elements, either stamped or engraved. Two such helmets are in an exceptionally fine state of preservation: one at Chalon-sur-Saône, decorated with scenes of fighting animals, the other, found at Planig near Mainz, with birds pecking at grapes.

Both these decorative motifs are Oriental; they are often found in Syrian mosaics and Coptic textiles. Quite possibly these helmets were imported from the Ostrogothic domain, but their widespread popularity in the Frankish empire proves that they answered to the taste of the great feudal lords of western Europe.

Two highly interesting works dating to about this period are a bronze flagon from a tomb at Lavoye and a gold clasp (for a bag inset with garnets) which was found along with it; both are now in the Musée des Antiquités Nationales at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. The flagon, which is decorated with Christological scenes stamped in relief, points to a change of attitude on the part of the Franks *vis-à-vis* the productions of the early Christian age. True, the decorations on the rim still resemble those of the pottery of the post-Roman period, but the stylization of human forms has been carried much further. And on other cult objects of the same type, such as the piece (now lost) from Miannay (Somme) and the one from Wiesoppenheim, near Worms, the human form has undergone a still greater transformation. Yet even here we can discern reminiscences of ancient models. This becomes evident when we compare them with early Christian (fifth-century) bronze reliefs such as those from Vermand, Mainz and Trier.

287 - FLAGON WITH CHRISTOLOGICAL SCENES. SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE.





289 - LEAF OF THE SAINT-LUPICIN DIPTYCH, DETAIL. PARIS. — 290 - LEAF OF A DIPTYCH. THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK.

Though in these works traces of antique art are still discernible, the break with western tradition in the treatment of figures was a *fait accompli* after the middle of the sixth century. Henceforth the iconography of the Eastern Church and its art style were paramount throughout the West. The ecclesiastical authorities in particular enjoined the use of eastern models for the works they commissioned, and to such effect that it is often hard to say if a given work is of eastern or of local provenance. An example is the Saint-Lupicin ivory diptych in five panels now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, on which figure Mary and the Christ-child, with scenes from the life of Christ on the edges. Its kinship with the diptych

— BOOK COVER, DETAIL. TREASURE OF SAINT-ANDOCHE, SAULIEU.



291 - CLOSURE SLAB: CHRIST BENEATH AN ARCH. MUSÉE CENTRAL, METZ.

from Echmiadzin, which was certainly made in the eastern part of the Byzantine empire, is unmistakable. And its close affiliation to the ivory throne of Bishop Maximian at Ravenna enables us to date this diptych a little after 550. Here the clumsiness of the bodies, as compared with those on authentically Byzantine reliefs, and the decline in the quality of the composition are so marked that we are tempted to assign it to a workshop in Gaul. This view is supported when we compare it with the book covers representing Christ and the Madonna, now at Saulieu, in which we see the barbarization of the forms of the large diptych carried a stage further. The over-large heads, the stiffness of the folds of garments and the squat bodies are typically Gallo-Roman. Another group of works, assignable to the end of the Merovingian period and preserved in what was then north-eastern Gaul—the apostle figures from Trier, Tongres and Mettlach—evidence a still more complete disintegration of forms. When, for example, we compare the Mettlach St Peter (Metropolitan Museum) with analogous reliefs in the cathedral of Ravenna, it is clear that, though the iconography has not changed, the process of ‘disincarnation’ has been carried to its extreme limit. The development of Frankish art, which always kept in touch with the royal courts, was not wholly uniform. In it we find extraneous elements, sometimes hard to identify, intermingling with the ‘Byzantine’ style. Moreover local schools seem to have played a much greater part in it. But the examples that have survived are too few and too fragmentary for us to differentiate between the various ateliers.

Such works from the east of the Frankish kingdom as have come down to us are of poor quality and their style, as compared with that of the eastern Mediterranean, is patently Germanic. Thus, on the chancel slabs of Saint-Pierre at Metz, a typically Germanic decoration of animals and interlaces figures beside Oriental palmettes resembling those on early Aquitanian sarcophagi. The representation of Christ under an arcade has much in common with a stucco bas-relief in the Orthodox Baptistery at Ravenna and sarcophagus reliefs of the south of France. This curious mixture of Mediterranean human and animal forms is also found in works of smaller dimensions, such as Burgundian ‘Daniel’ and Orant buckles, and the gold fibula from Limons studded with small garnets, in which a circular faceted band entirely made in openwork and shaped like a nimbus surrounds the Holy Face.

Some large stone monuments were set up in the heart of the Rhineland, not far from Andernach. They are now preserved in Bonn. On one of them, a tomb stele from Gondorf on the Moselle, figures the bust of a bearded man holding a book and clad in a tunic and pallium. This may well be an image of Christ, a *Majestas Domini*, since two doves perch on the man’s shoulders. In this relief the influence of Mediterranean models is evident, even more than in the chancel slabs of Metz. On the tomb stele in the Christian-Frankish cemetery of Niederdollendorf Germanic idiosyncrasies are still more pronounced; nonetheless it may have been made in one of the same workshops.

The dead man is shown on the front of the stele, armed with his Breitsax (broadsword) in a sheath of riveted leather—a type form widely current in the



292 - BELT BUCKLE. MUSÉE D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE, GENEVA. — 293 - ROUND FIBULA. BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, PARIS.



295 - TOMB STELE (FRONT AND BACK). RHEINISCHES LANDESMUSEUM, BONN.

last three quarters of the seventh century. The warrior is combing his hair and above him swoops a serpent—symbol of death—seeking to devour him. On the back Christ is shown in kingly mien carrying a spear. The old-fashioned technique of this stele recalls that of the early wood carvings. Stylistically, a contemporary stele from Moselkern (near Kochem) has affinities with it; on it, too, figures an image of Christ on the Cross, treated however in the Christian spirit. Here the artist seems to have taken guidance from insular as well as from Mediterranean prototypes.

The last phase of this progressive stylization can be seen in motifs of the reliefs (now in a fragmentary state) on the large reliquary casket in the church of Essen-Werden. As on the Niederdollendorf stele the figure of Christ crucified between two angels on the front is designated 'REX'. The animals on the lid are reminiscent of Mediterranean and Oriental models. Here we can gauge the extent to which the feeling for plastic values had died out in the Frankish art of the

294 - RELIQUARY CASKET. CHURCH OF ST LIUDGER, ESSEN-WERDEN.



Rhineland during the eighth century. An enormous number of small articles adorned with figure motifs have been brought to light by excavation. The bulk of the works of art found in graveyards of the late sixth and the seventh century consisted of objects in repoussé-work or moulded: buckles, fibulae, ornamental disks. Far fewer eighth-century works have been found, since the dead were then no longer buried in cemeteries containing several rows of graves. With the spread of Christianity more and more burials were made near churches and no grave goods were placed in the coffins.

The coins which have been found in a great many tombs enable us to date their contents. When these finds are classified and compared it becomes clear that the cultural evolution of all the Germanic tribes did not proceed everywhere on the same lines. The various communities can be clearly distinguished not only by the shapes of their buckles and fibulae but also by the nature of the figure motifs. Nothing definite is known as yet about the workshops where they were made, but it seems safe to assume that most of the goldsmiths and metalworkers lived in the larger towns and that they belonged to and catered for different social classes. The mass-produced objects made for the humbler walks of society differed greatly from those intended for the nobility. Ancient models were imitated, but given cruder forms, and this 'popular art' incorporated a larger number of purely Germanic elements. But often the objects made for the upper classes too were, stylistically speaking, barbarized.

For the cheap, mass-produced objects, the process usually employed was that of stamping. As early as the fifth century copies were made in the northern lands of the medallions of Roman emperors and this led to the large-scale manufacture of gold bracteates, stamped medallions which to begin with exactly reproduced the ancient prototypes. Before long, however, they became completely stylized. These imitations of ancient models made their appearance on the continent at an early date. The effigy of 'Rome enthroned,' adapted to the Germanic taste, figures on pieces found in women's graves at Andernach, at Dotzheim (near Wiesbaden) and also in France, at Maizières-le-Vic (near Nancy). Elsewhere, in tombs at Monceau-le-Neuf and La Sablonnière, we see the emperor riding in his triumphal chariot.

It is quite possible that the populace at large regarded these ornaments as prophylactic amulets. That is certainly true of the pieces bearing religious images: the Adoration of the Magi, warrior saints or knights in prayer. Pagan and Christian images, such as a representation of the Roman emperor and that of St George slaying the dragon, are sometimes combined on the same piece—as on the Enna-beuren reliquary, made in a workshop of south-west Germany active in the seventh century. To the same century is to be assigned the bronze disk representing the Adoration of the Magi found at Minden (near Trier). Here, again, we have an obvious imitation of Mediterranean models of the fifth or sixth century, made in bronze in Rome and in stamped gold in southern Italy. The fact that bronze was always used for copies of this kind made in northern Europe is easily accounted for by the shortage of precious metals in the seventh century.



296 - TOMB STELE: CHRIST (?). RHEINISCHES LANDESMUSEUM, BONN.



297 - RELIQUARY CASKET: A HOLY KNIGHT AND DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN. CHURCH OF ENNABRUH



298 - ROUND FIBULA. RHEINISCHES LANDESMUSEUM, TRIER. — 299 - DISK. MUSEO ARCHEOLOGICO NAZIONALE, CIVIDALE.

One of the images most in favor with the Germanic cultural élite was that of the 'holy knight,' appealing as it did both to Christian and to pagan sentiment. A leitmotiv of (pagan) Germanic symbolism, it figures on many Nordic works, such as the helmets from Wendel and Sutton Hoo and, later, on the Hornhausen tombstone (Halle Museum). A survey of all the antecedents of the knight image in antiquity and its syncretic derivatives in early Christian art would take us too far afield. These seventh-century figurations were certainly inspired by fibulae imported from the East, and the same is true of those of La Copelanz, Güttingen and Strasbourg. The motif was also very popular in the Lombard region, where we find the same knight represented on a stamped gold disk found at Cividale, but under a barbarized aspect, carrying a shield and spear. Here the style has been completely transformed and the image of the dragon-slayer of late antiquity, surrounded by elaborate strapwork, is barely recognizable. In view of its distinctively 'period' style this disk is reminiscent of the stamped gold cross adorned with heads found in the tomb of Gisulf at Cividale. The figure has been identified by some authorities as the Duke of Friuli, killed in a battle with the Avars in 611. But, given the fact of the affinity between its style and that of the late seventh-century stone carving at Cividale (e.g. the stele of Sigualdus), this work might equally well be dated later, to the second half of the seventh century. The Cividale disk also



300 - JEWELLED CROSS ADORNED WITH EIGHT HEADS. MUSEO ARCHEOLOGICO NAZIONALE, CIVIDALE.

recalls the effigy (in lead) of Christ crucified from Paspels which is now in Chur cathedral (Grisons, Switzerland).

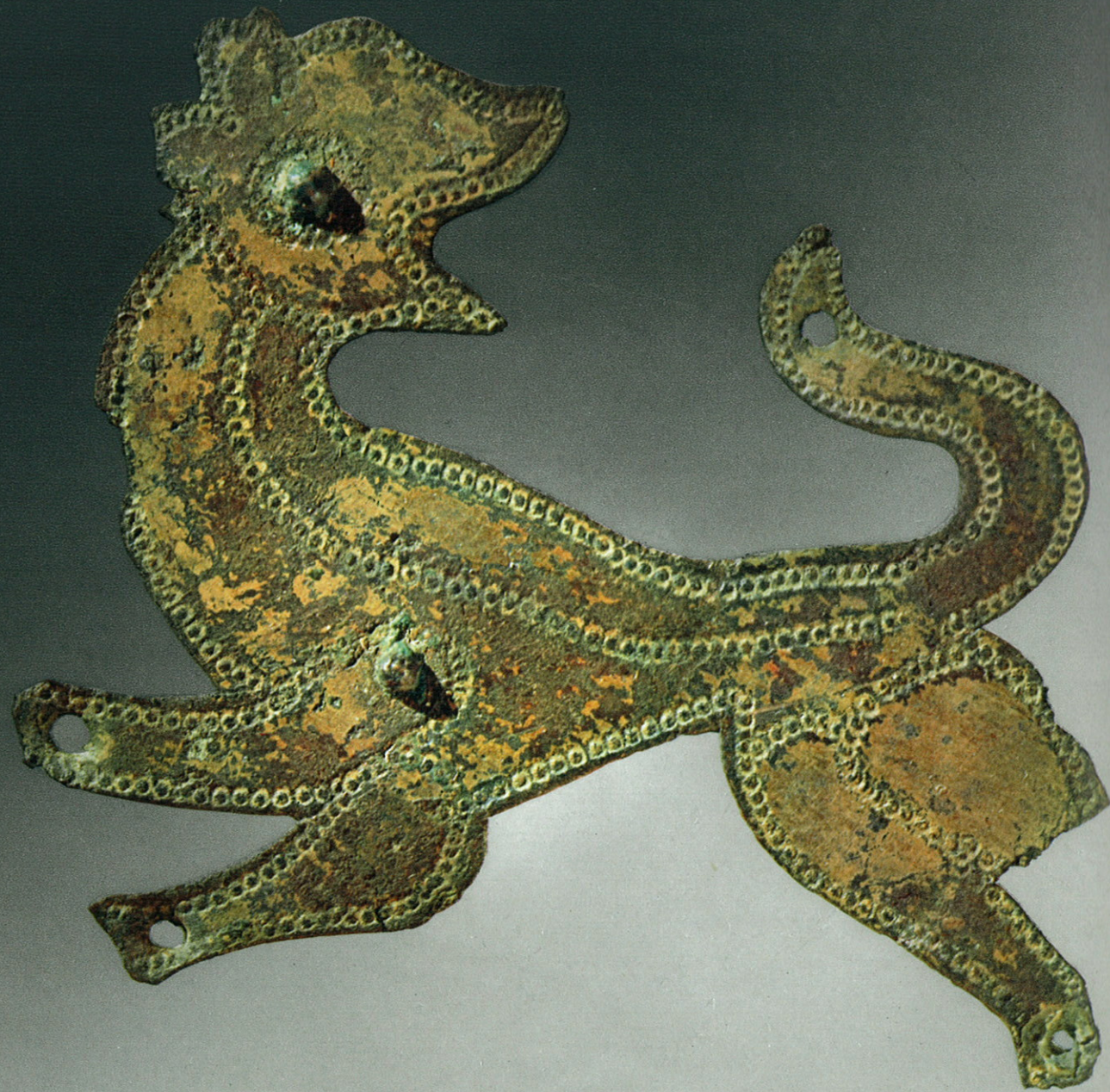
Related to this is the work (now in the Stuttgart museum) in stamped iron gilt stemming from the Alamannic regions, which was found at Pliezhausen. On comparing it with the Cividale disk, we find the stylistic mutation carried a stage further. The horseman, pursued doubtless by a demon and brandishing his lance, is riding in a manner that recalls the figurations on the helmet from Sutton Hoo; stretched on the ground beneath him lies a foeman who is thrusting his sword

into the horse's breast. Quite possibly this Alamannic bracteate worked in the manner of a fibula derived from Lombard prototypes and not directly from Roman imperial medallions or from gravestones. The motif of symmetrically disposed lions above the horseman's head tends to confirm this view.

The horseman with lowered lance, cast in bronze and gilt, which was found near Stabio (Ticino, Switzerland) more resembles a *venatio*. It served as a decoration on a circular Lombard shield and was made in the seventh century in the same atelier as the Pliezhausen horseman. The other appliques on this shield, two dogs

301 - ORNAMENTAL PLAQUE FROM A SHIELD. HISTORISCHES MUSEUM, BERNE.

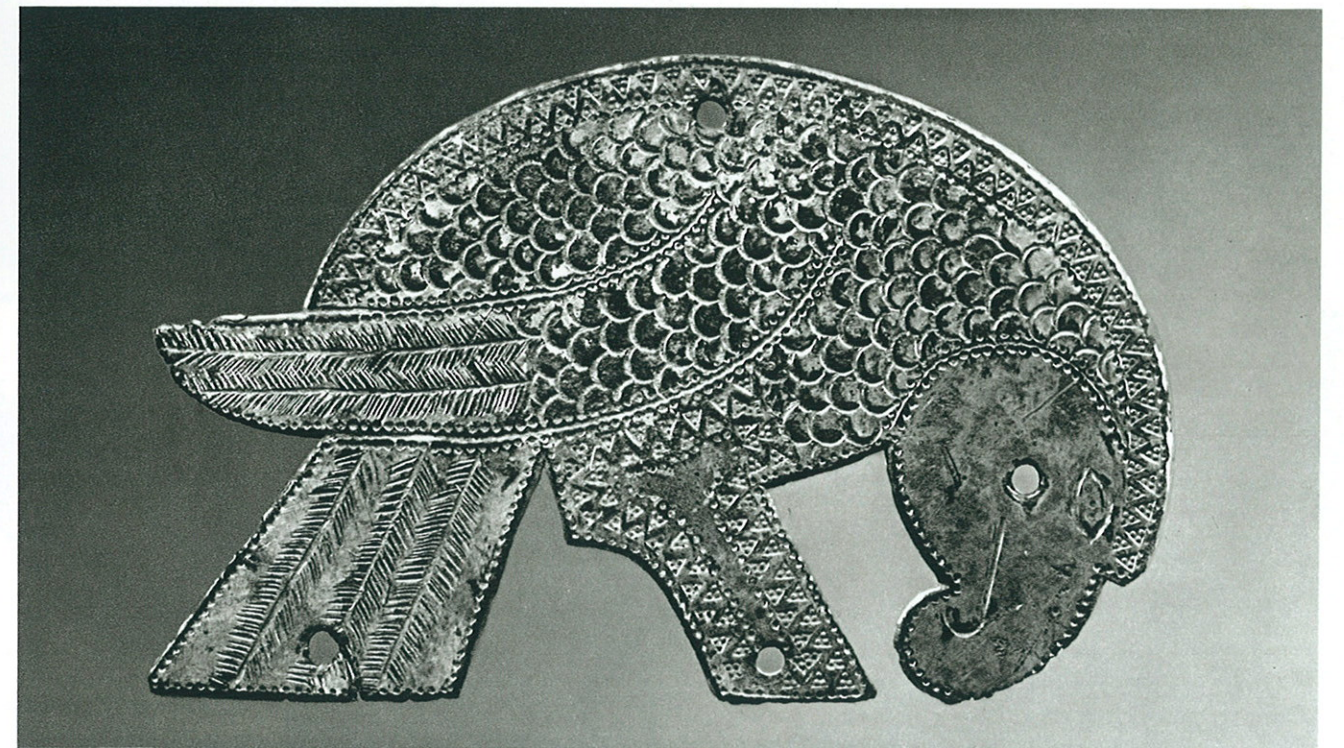




302 - ORNAMENTAL PLAQUE FROM A SHIELD. HISTORISCHES MUSEUM, BERNE.

and a tree, show that it is a hunting scene like the ones often represented in late antiquity on textiles, mosaics and metal objects (e.g. the silver plate in the Vatican and the Ittenheim phalera). Its verve and the frankly realistic presentation of horse and rider have exact parallels in certain works of late antiquity, such as the silver disks in the Vatican, Perugia and Verona. Thus we are justified in assigning this piece to an Italian armourer's workshop patronized by the Lombard nobility. The pendant of the Stabio horseman, made in the same workshop, is in the Museo Nazionale, Florence. On the other hand it seems likely that some other figure adornments of Lombard shields were made by Germanic craftsmen. The gilt eagle in the Musée de Cluny, Paris (which may have figured on the same shield as the two other applied ornaments in Munich) is a striking example of this; it is wholly Nordic both in conception and in its thoroughgoing stylization.

In the Alamannic domain, this horseman image developed into a more specific type, representative of which are some openwork disks found in women's tombs of the seventh century. An excellent specimen is the one discovered at Bräunlingen and now in Karlsruhe museum. On all these disks the rider is presented realistically, with his spear pointing downwards. Whether these works were of pagan or Christian provenance is still an open question. However this may be, it is clear that they had a symbolic value. This is confirmed by the fact that their equivalents, the openwork disks in bronze, equally numerous, made in the Frankish and (to a lesser extent) in the Burgundian domains, always show the horseman in



303 - ORNAMENTAL PLAQUE FROM A SHIELD. PRÄHISTORISCHE STAATSSAMMLUNG, MUNICH.





304 - OPENWORK DISK. ESSLINGEN.

the Orant attitude. Quite possibly this motif was borrowed directly from Coptic originals, such as the wooden combs on which an Orant rider often figured.

Typical of the art of the Burgundian region are the bronze buckles, representing Daniel in the lions' den, produced in large numbers in the neighbourhood of the Lake of Geneva. In them the Christian significance of the motif and its derivation from Early Christian prototypes are particularly evident. Quite possibly Irish monks, in close contact with the Egyptian monasteries, introduced it into the Rhone region. In the Germanic countries it seems to have been regarded as a talismanic symbol, averting evil from its owner. The earliest of these buckles, dating to about the year 600, such as those from Dailens, Lavigny and Chalon-sur-Saône, while still inspired by models made in the Christian East, were barbarized versions, executed in a purely linear style.

The changes that came over this type form are of much interest to the art historian. In the first half of the seventh century the purport of the theme grew



306 - OPENWORK DISK. FÜRSTLICH HOHENZOLLERNSCHE MUSEUM, SIGMARINGEN.



307 - BELT BUCKLE. MUSÉE DES ANTIQUITÉS, ROUEN. ▶



◀ 305 - BELT BUCKLE. LAUSANNE.



308 - OPENWORK DISK. PRÄHISTORISCHE STAATSSAMMLUNG, MUNICH.

less and less distinct, until finally, under the influence of Animal Style II, the lions become mere heraldic emblems and Daniel's face and body dwindle almost out of recognition, as on a buckle from Yverdon (Switzerland). In the Visigoth domain, however, the Daniel theme was treated in a different manner, dominated by Byzantine influences, as is evidenced by a buckle in the Berlin Museum on which the prophet is represented half-length, without any trace of Germanic stylization.

When the motif on the buckle plaque is presented vertically, the animals flanking the main figure are omitted and all that remains is a man in the Orant posture. But, as is shown by a buckle from La Balme, now in the Geneva Museum, the figure soon underwent a stylization, a regression to a primitive type of imagery. All the works of this group have such a pronounced family likeness, even in technique, that we believe they were made in the same workshop, located quite likely in Geneva. We see a west Frankish variant in an openwork belt buckle found at Criel, now in Rouen Museum; it represents a demon, its dangling arms tipped with birds' heads pointing downwards, beneath a two-headed snake. This device had clearly a protective, evil-averting function and the same applies to the Alamanic openwork disk from Gammertingen. The central figure, a crouching bearded demon, probably represents Hercules, club in hand, and is surrounded by a circle of eagles' heads. Other Burgundian buckles are adorned with motifs stemming from the Christian East, such as Christ's Entry into Jerusalem and the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace. But an imperfect understanding of the basic themes has led not only to the transformation of the figures into mere ornaments but to



309 - BELT BUCKLE. MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS, TROYES.

an illogical multiplication of their original number. Sometimes, on the belt buckles, paired heraldic animals are combined with such ancient Oriental motifs as the Tree of Life and the Fountain of Youth. This imagery is found both on Visigothic openwork buckles and on the more diversified buckles of the Burgundian domain. Also to the Germanic Merovingian milieu are assignable the openwork disks mentioned above, most of which are adorned with geometric designs, but some with figures. We have an example of this latter class in a group (whose theme is obscure) of two warriors fighting and a man and woman. A circular ornament in wrought iron, unique of its kind, was discovered in a Bavarian tomb at Mühlthal and is now preserved in the Munich museum. It contains figurations of three squatting winged horses (or griffins) of the Burgundian type arranged wheelwise, so that spun round it would give an effect of animals in movement. (The Tree of Life is not included.) Though Oriental influences can be seen in the surviving Burgundian and Visigothic works, they are still more evident in the massive belt buckles made in a Frankish workshop active in Aquitaine. Here the fabulous animals, usually gazing backwards, set out in rows or isolated in medallions, show marked divergences from their equivalents in the Germanic lands. Both the technique, of large empty spaces telling out on a profusely chiselled ground, and the style, in which we sense a lively feeling for natural forms, are quite different. The backward-gazing animal had already made its appearance in the north of France in the sixth century but under a modified form, in which filigree work and inset gems played a considerable part. An example is the large belt buckle, in fine condition, now in the museum of Troyes.



310 - SCABBARD (LOST).

From the technical viewpoint the stamped reliefs on a silver scabbard that was found at Gutenstein in an Alamannic tomb of the second half of the seventh century are akin to those on the horseman disk from Pliezhausen. The imagery on it reflects the religious conceptions and practices of the northern Germanic races and might indeed be described as a sublimation of their theogony. Similar images, executed in the same technique, figure on the sumptuous helmets found in the graves of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian princes and on the stamped bronze objects from Torslunda and the embossed helmet decorations from Sutton Hoo. The figures, especially those of the two warriors wearing wolf masks, carrying sword, spear and quiver, and the surging throng of capering animals, are treated in a typically Germanic spirit, as is the man in combat with two confronted animals.

This use of figural representations executed in the repoussé technique was not

confined to the adornment of such objects as helmet plaques, weapons and fibulae. We find the same technique employed in a large group of Merovingian reliquaries, some of them made to be hung at eye level. The house shape given these objects recalls the far more sumptuous reliquary embellished with precious gems from Saint-Maurice-d'Agaune, whereas the much less elaborate execution of the Merovingian reliquaries produces the effect of a relatively inexpert imitation. Some, for example those of Chur and Andenne (at Namur), are adorned merely with an interlace, while others carry embossed figurative stamped designs and still show affinities with the Ennabeuren casket. The execution is so primitive in places as to rule out any reliable dating. Hence the importance of the Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire reliquary, since it is known to have been presented by a lady named Mumma to the abbey of Fleury-sur-Loire, the date of whose foundation (651) is established. The effigies of the six half-length angels (or apostles) on the lid are stylized, purely linear. Other reliquaries of the same type, in copper repoussé-work, keep to this same primitive



311 - RELIQUARY CASKET OF MUMMA. ABBEY CHURCH, SAINT-BENOIT-SUR-LOIRE



312 - RELIQUARY CASKET: VIRGIN AND CHILD BETWEEN ST PETER AND ST PAUL. MUSÉE DE CLUNY, PARIS.

style; for example the caskets adorned with two busts at Saint-Bonnet-Avalouze, the more elaborate reliquary shrine in the Musée de Cluny, Paris, on which are represented the Virgin and Child between Sts Peter and Paul, and above all the chris-mal reliquary in the church of Saint-Evroult at Mortain. Reliquaries of this type persisted until the beginning of the Carolingian period, when a new, more realistic



313 - RELIQUARY CASKET. TREASURE OF SAINT-EVROULT, MORTAIN.



314 - RELIQUARY CASKET OF PEPIN OF AQUITAINE. TREASURE OF SAINTE-FOY, CONQUES.



315 - RELIQUARY CASKET OF BISHOP ALTHEUS. CATHEDRAL TREASURE, SION.

style came into vogue. The most significant examples of this change are a reliquary from Enger (Westphalia), now in Berlin, and the one commissioned by Bishop Altheus (died 799 at Sion), dating to about the same time. Similar in conception is the famous reliquary said to have been presented by Pepin of Aquitaine (died 838) to the monastery of Conques. We must not, however, overlook the fact that when it was restored in 1955, it seemed that only the form of the original reliquary and some small enamel plaques had survived unchanged. The image of Christ crucified, between the Virgin and St John (found inside it) and its filigree ornamentation enhanced with gems and intaglios belong in part, already, to the Romanesque period.

W. F. VOLBACH



316 - RELIQUARY CASKET. STAATLICHE MUSEEN, BERLIN.

## Conclusion

THE authors of this volume have collated a variety of data—facts and documents—bearing on the period it covers. They have abstained from reviving or discussing the often heated controversies which formerly loomed large in studies of European art of the period following the capture of a portion of the Roman Empire by the barbarians. These controversies had their point when they arose but they now seem sadly antiquated. Yet there is no question that by passionately taking sides for or against Rome, for or against the barbarians, those early writers, whether romantics or classicists, rendered no mean service to art history, for these conflicts of ideas stimulated the intensive research whose fruits we reap today.

One of the objects the present work achieves is to demonstrate and illustrate the beauty and originality of the so-called 'barbarian' metalwork. That traditional epithet is justified by the fact that this fascinating art, which reigned supreme in all the new states founded by the invaders, owed much to craftsmen hailing from northern and eastern Europe. However, recent research has made it clear that this 'barbarian' metalwork derived the best elements of its style and some of its techniques from contacts with the arts of the Mediterranean basin. Nor must we forget that, during the first part of the early Middle Ages, there was no change from the methods current in the Late Empire so far as stone-built architecture and marble sculpture were concerned.

Until the violent upheavals due to the conquest and occupation of a large part of the Roman world by the barbarians, Christian art had displayed a remarkable unity. This was shattered by the great invasions. In the sixth century Syria, Byzantium and the ancient provinces of the Roman Empire contained, like Italy, Spain and Gaul, schools of religious architecture which, though each had characteristics wholly peculiar to itself, had also certain similarities testifying to their common origin. In the religious architecture of some countries, there was a very real decadence, while in that of others the old standards were faithfully maintained. The latter was the case with those parts of the Empire in which the barbarians had failed

to secure a foothold; for example Byzantium and Syria. The same course was followed by the minor arts. For many centuries the great cities of the East, Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria, remained intact, and their populations were swelled by refugees. On the other hand, there was a steady decline in the population of Rome, then passing through her darkest hour. The larger eastern cities maintained the schools, factories and workshops to which they owed their wealth and thanks to which they now were in a position to export more luxury goods than ever—textiles, ivories, bronzes and other metal objects, papyri and spices—to the ancient Roman towns of the West, now overrun by the invaders. In these towns, trade was in the hands of Orientals, mostly Jews and Syrians. The old organization of commerce and long-distance traffic had survived the collapse of the Empire, but the main axis of the new Roman world had shifted eastwards. It still ran principally between Greece and Asia Minor even after Justinian's reconquest in 534 of south Italy and part of North Africa. Thus the East and its specific art forms enjoyed a certain ascendancy over a considerable period, as a result of the historical situation. Meanwhile, however, another change was in progress. The Nordic peoples, whom the Romans had failed to colonize, took steps to develop their overseas commerce and with this in view, introduced a common coinage, while their ships plied a busy trade along the coasts. Nonetheless the Mediterranean remained over a long period the one true seminal centre of western civilization.

Had it not been that barbarian Gaul took over from Rome the custom of honouring the dead by decking them with jewels and burying them in finely carved sarcophagi stored in the safe recesses of a vault, we should know but little of the Merovingian civilization. Thus we are limited to vague conjectures as to the origins of the remarkably expert carvings on the stone crosses of the British Isles, dating to the early Middle Ages. However, these are works of high quality and it is evident that by some channel Mediterranean skills found their way to this barbarian culture of the North. In short, there are enormous gaps in our knowledge of the period. Nevertheless, in the light of such historical data as are now available, there can be no question of the high importance, for the development of art in Europe, of the three centuries previous to the rise to power of Charlemagne.

After the ill-starred reigns of the last Merovingian kings, the Carolingian renaissance, viewed in historical perspective, presents itself as the triumph of order over disorder, with a well-organized, sagacious administration putting a stop to anarchy. This view is correct up to a point, but it calls for an important qualification. As readers of this volume will have noted, we can trace to approximately the second half of the sixth century the beginnings of that gradual advance in the quality of art which, with occasional setbacks, continued until the end of the eighth century and led directly to the renaissance of the age of Charlemagne. And all the progress that was made in the Merovingian period has this distinctive feature: it was not due to kings or bishops, but to an institution which then was taking a new form, the monastic system.

The monk (*monachos*) was, to begin with, as his name denotes, a solitary. In the countrysides of the West as in the eastern deserts, the first *laurae* were occupied

by hermits living in grottoes or isolated cells. Then, like the monks assembled by St Martin of Tours at Marmoutier, a colony of several hundred monks and nuns established itself at the end of the fifth century in the vicinity of Condat (now Saint-Claude) in the forests of the Jura. When the group of wooden huts they occupied was burnt down, their abbot, Eugende, prudently decided to replace these by stone buildings. Many religious edifices of this type were built in the following century. There was no uniformity in their plans. Even their churches were given different orientations, as has been demonstrated by Jacques Mertens' recent excavation of the monastery, founded in the seventh century, at Nivelles in Belgium. To the best of my knowledge, we have the first indication of a systematized arrangement of the elements of a monastery, foreshadowing the almost geometric symmetry of the medieval abbeys, in the monastery of Manglieu in Auvergne (c. 700). Only some vestiges survive, but a description by a contemporary has come down to us. Excavations made in the last century showed that the first monastery founded (in 763) at Lorsch near Mainz had a plan of an even stricter regularity, with the communal buildings and church aligned round a square court bordered with porticoes. These facts carry all the more weight since they are not the only ones testifying to the part played by the monastic orders in the pre-Carolingian period as promoters of good order and disciplined activity in a still anarchic age. In 754 Chrodegang, bishop of Mainz, enjoined on the prelates of his cathedral the monastic way of life. And soon afterwards Charlemagne sought to impose the new Rule on all the episcopal churches of the kingdom. We have a striking example of the reform of ancient practices in another domain, that of sepulchral inscriptions. In the famous Jouarre crypt, the tomb of the first abbess, St Theodechilde (early eighth century), is noteworthy not only for its decorations (rows of sea shells) but also for a long metrical epitaph, whose characters, while retaining some of the peculiarities of the Merovingian hand, point the way to the fine engraved inscriptions, modelled on the classical script, of the Carolingian renaissance. From the beginning of the eighth century on, similar changes were made in the lettering of the rubrics of manuscripts. Thus antique culture had been resuscitated in the shadow of the cloisters before its 'official' re-integration at the court of Charlemagne.

Building in wood goes back to time immemorial, and it is often assumed that this was the major art of the barbarian epoch. If our readers have found few references to it in the preceding pages, this is because an archaeologist is concerned, strictly speaking, only with what he can see, analyse and measure, and not one of the wooden buildings previous to the Carolingian epoch has survived. But as there are frequent mentions of them in ancient chronicles, we set forth here what has been surmised on the subject, chiefly in the light of what is known today of the wooden buildings of the immediately succeeding period.

The reliefs of Trajan's column include representations of Nordic huts built with large logs or ingeniously assembled planks. During the same period there existed in Roman Gaul, at Strasbourg in particular, buildings of wood and pisé, traces of which have been brought to light by excavations. Excavations have also enabled us to make graphic reconstructions of the wooden buildings erected in various

parts of Europe in the early Middle Ages; holes in the earth reveal the shapes and sizes of the supporting posts. Two points call for mention. These buildings are never large ones. The posts are always relatively close to each other, since the only material used was wood and this ruled out long spans between them. This also applies to the churches in wood and pisé built in the south of the Champagne region at the close of the Middle Ages; such as have survived display the same characteristics. The result is a marked predominance of vertical lines. If the Gothic art of northern France follows suit, have we not here a transposition into stone of the wooden architecture of the earlier age? This view has often been expressed and has, in my opinion, much to commend it. But we must not overlook the fact that between the barbarian and the Gothic period timber architecture was also put to new uses and adapted in the tenth and eleventh centuries to the construction of vast fortified enceintes, strongholds several storeys high, barracks and engines of war. It is certain that nothing of this kind existed in the Europe of the invasions, submerged in the dark tide of an uncharted past, whose intriguing vestiges have never ceased to fire the imagination of succeeding generations.

JEAN HUBERT

## PART FOUR

# General Documentation