

Lift-Top Chest, ca. 1500

France
Walnut

Purchase, 1929 (2815)

FLEMISH SCHOOL

Early 16th century

Madonna with the Nursing Child

Oil on wood panel

Gift of the Charles M. and Anna C. Cooke Trust
in memory of Marie Nobriga, 1953 (1800.1)

Attributed to the MASTER OF 1518

Flanders

Adoration of the Magi, early 16th century
Oil on wood panel

Purchase, Acquisition Fund, funds given in memory of Mrs. Richard A. Cooke, Alyce Hoogs, Wilhelmina Tenney, and Douglas Damon, the bequest of Alyce Hoogs, and contributions by the Charles M. and Anna C. Cooke Trust, Mrs. Robert P. Griffing, Jr., Robert Allerton, and John Gregg Allerton, 1963 (3103.1)

Although many 16th-century paintings have survived the passage of time, the specific identity of the artists responsible for them often remains obscure. A body of recognizable works, which includes this richly detailed biblical subject, is given to the hand of the Master of 1518, a date inscribed on his large retable in Lübeck. Like many of his contemporaries, the Master of 1518 was concerned with recreating the physical appearance of the natural world. Here, he constructed a scene of high surface finish and invisible brushwork, rich with color, texture, and detail. Note the luxuriant costumes of exquisite brocade and other fabrics with elaborate gold and gemstone borders, reflecting the Flemish skill in the manufacture of beautiful textiles.

Queen Semiramis with Attendants,
ca. 1480

Flanders, Tournai
Wool, silk; tapestry weave

Gift of the Charles M. and Anna C. Cooke Trust,
1946 (325.1)

Millefleurs (literally “a thousand flowers”) tapestries in which the whole background is a dense mass of flowering plants-were popular in Flanders and France in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This notable example is probably from a series of tapestries representing legendary heroines. It shows Samiramis, Queen of Assyria and Babylon, combing her hair in front of a mirror held up by an attendant while receiving a message from another. Famous for her beauty and courage, Semiramis, according to legend, was the daughter of a mortal and a goddess and disappeared into heaven at the end of her life in the shape of a dove.

Inscription at top of tapestry and translation:

Je fus Semiramis Royne de babilone
barbariens conquis idoïs et suriens
jusques en septentrion ale et mis mon trosne
et sy occis le roy des ethiopiens

(I was Semiramis, Queen of Babylon.
I conquered barbarian Indians and Syrians.
I went up into the North and set my throne there
and slew the King of the Ethiopians.)

***Madonna and Child with Saints Barbara
and Catherine of Alexandria with Donor,***
ca. 1525–50

Germany, upper Rhine region from St.
Jean de Choud, town of Zabern (present-
day Saverne, France)
Linen and wool; tapestry weave

Purchase, Robert Allerton Fund, 1976 (4390.1)

This medieval church tapestry is a devotional picture showing the Madonna holding the infant Christ standing between Saint Barbara at the left and St. Catherine of alexandria at the right. The figures are placed in a garden setting in front of a trellis entwined with flowers and on which are perched a variety of birds, providing it with a rich symbolic as well as decorative appeal. It is likely that the composition was taken from a German print of the period. The small figure of a nun, who represents the donor of the tapestry, kneels beside the coat of arms of the von Oberkirch family to the left of the Madonna's feet and has been tentatively identified as Amelie von Oberkirsh, who served as abbess in the church of St. John at Zabern from 1527-1568. This tapestry was probably woven by Benedictine nuns in the abbey of the church, where another version of it, longer and including the figure of the patron saint, is still preserved. This piece functioned as an antependium decorating the front of an altar only a few times a year (a practice which has allowed the rich, dominant shades of red, blue, yellow and white to remain clear and relatively unfaded to this day).

FLEMISH SCHOOL

Antwerp, early 16th century

Adoration of the Magi

Oil on wood panel

Gift of the Honorable Clare Boothe Luce, 1971
(3915.1)

A popular subject at the time, the Adoration of the Magi derives from the biblical account of wise men who journeyed from the east to find the child born king of the Jews. Embellished over time, the story assumed symbolic and narrative details. The magi—including a Moor or African—are here depicted as kings, and their unspecified number has become three. According to a popular pictorial convention, they find the Christ Child in the ruins of a fine classical structure. Sprigs of young plants rising from the ancient stone symbolize the beginning of the new era signaled by his birth.

AELBRECHT BOUTS

Belgium, active in Louvain, ca. 1470–1548

The Holy Family

Oil on wood panel

Gift of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin in memory of
Frank C. Atherton, 1946 (379.1)

As the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception became part of the Christian liturgy during the late 15th century, devotion to St. Anne, Mary's mother, increased, and depictions of the Holy Family proliferated in northern Renaissance art. In this depiction, the infant Christ stands in Mary's lap and reaches to take from St. Anne an apple, a symbol of original sin. With this simple gesture, Bouts alludes to Christ's acceptance of his role as redeemer and his understanding that mankind will find salvation through his sacrifice. Two angels draw aside the canopy's curtains to reveal the dove symbolizing the Holy Ghost, the vehicle through which Mary divinely conceived Christ. Working in the Flemish tradition of naturalism, Bouts created an image of strong color, rich texture, and minute detail.

St. George Slaying the Dragon,
11th–12th century

France, Charente
Limestone

Gift of Anna Rice Cooke, 1929 (2818)

This carved block is probably from Angoulême
Cathedral.

Chasuble (back), late 15th century
Attributed to Spain

Silk, voided velvet weave, cut pile,
appliquéd linen orphrey embroidered with
multi-colored silk, gilt, and silver yarns

Gift of Anna Rice Cooke, 1930 (2929)

The deep red velvet in this chasuble is of a type and design that is usually attributed to Spain. The abstract pattern of swirls, palmettes, and tiny flowers is established by contrasting areas of dark red velvet pile with outlines in the lighter red base fabric (voided velvet technique). The appliquéd linen orphrey (band of embroidery), which may also be of Spanish workmanship, shows St. Catherine of Alexandria (top) and St. James the Great in architectural frames, heavily embroidered in blue, green, yellow, and orange silk with extensive use of gilt and silver yarns.

Chest, early 16th century
England
Oak