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Gustav Friedrich Waagen

Excerpt

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THE

TREASURES OF ART IN GREAT BRITAIN.

LETTER I.

ADDITIONS TO THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

British Museum — Antiquities — Objects of art belonging to the Middle Ages — Additions to the collection of miniatures — Byzantine — Bedford Missal — Henry VI.'s Psalter — Divina Commedia — Drawings of the Italian, Early Netherlandish, Early German, and later Netherlandish schools — Engravings: Italian, Early German — Block-books.

SINCE the publication of my work 'The Treasures of Art in Great Britain,' the arrangement of the sculpture in the British Museum has been greatly improved. The Egyptian and Assyrian monuments have, in the first place, been disposed in that chronological succession which alone best unites the highest instruction with the greatest enjoyment. With the Assyrian monuments are also seen other antiquities of the same nation and of the same period—the ivory reliefs and the bronze vessels being deposited in glass cases along the centre of the same gallery. The arrangement of the Greek and Roman marbles, though the space did not permit of so strictly chronological an order as with the foregoing, is also much more satisfactory. The chief alteration consists in the fact that the sculptures from the pediments of the Parthenon have been removed from the hall containing the reliefs from the Parthenon, into a neighbouring room, which, though smaller, is also lighted from above. Besides this, room has thus been gained so to place the sculptures from the two pediments—here seen opposite each other—as to leave about the same spaces as the missing portions would have occupied; by which means the relation between what has been preserved and what has perished is shown, as well as the original extent of the pediments. At the same time the reliefs in the great hall have perhaps benefited more than any other objects by this change. Now for the first time are they seen so

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free from all impediment, that the spectator can view them at a proper distance from any part; while the apartment itself, which, with the statues, and the models of the Parthenon and other buildings, looked more like a warehouse than a gallery, now presents a *coup-d'œil* worthy of these universally celebrated works of art. The Greco-Roman and the Roman sculptures are now also more strictly divided, and favourably seen in spaces lighted from above and proportioned to their size. The entrance gallery devoted to the Roman marbles, and which is now being appropriately decorated, is, it is true, not so favourable in point of lighting as might be desired, though sufficiently so for their subordinate value in point of art. All these changes have been executed with great discrimination by Mr. Oldfield. As regards the antiquities also, the Greek, Etruscan, and Roman bronzes and terracottas have greatly gained by the new arrangements. And here I first insert some earlier notices of Greek and Roman antiquities, which, owing to an omission on my part, were not printed in my first volume of the 'Treasures of Art.'

Vol. I. p. 93, line 18 from the top.

By far the greater number of the antiquities are contained in a large apartment lighted from above.

A shallow basin of Parian marble of considerable size is remarkable for elegance of form; a priestess of Bacchus, of great beauty, is treated in flat relief in the centre, and a graceful wreath of vine-leaves surrounds the border.

Next to this may be observed a bronze statuette of the infant Bacchus, seated, placed upon the stove. He is leaning with his right hand on a sceptre, one shoulder covered with the nebris. The softness and animation of the forms correspond with the beauty of the motive.

Among the numerous specimens of small sculptures in metal, especially in bronze, are many of the highest artistic merit. I enumerate a few which struck me as particularly remarkable. Foremost among the Etruscan bronzes are four reliefs from the well-known chariot—a votive offering—found in 1812 between Perugia and Cortona (Case 87). These agree in the whole style of art—namely in the profiles with the sloping lines of forehead and nose—with the vases of the archaic period. The mode of

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LETTER I.

ANTIQUITIES.

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workmanship is very remarkable. The reliefs consist of thin plates of silver, on some parts of which gold plates are fastened with rivets. On the reverse they appear as if beaten out over moulds of some solid material, most probably wood. This kind of work was called by the ancients *Empæstic*.

Next in order, as an excellent example of the developed art of the Etrurians, may be mentioned a statuette of Mars, found in the Lake of Monte Falterona in Tuscany (Case 71).

Among the bronzes of the highest Grecian art the following are particularly distinguished.

Vol. I. p. 94.

An Apollo, drawing his bow, of the greatest elegance and highest finish (Case 78). Two statuettes of Jupiter (Case 77). An hermaphrodite, and the spirited bust of a sea-god. These, with the following and others, were found at Paramythia, in Epirus, in the neighbourhood of the ancient Dodona.

A Venus of animated action, very graceful, of singular softness in the forms, and of the finest surface. The right arm and the lower part of the legs are unfortunately wanting.

Mercury, with a small gold chain round his neck—invention and execution both admirable. (Both these last in Case 84.)

A Minerva, in a striding position, without arms.

A youthful Hercules Bibax, with the cantharus in his hand.

A Hercules in full manhood—the left arm wanting.

The Hercules Farnese. Many a celebrated but now perished work has served as a model for statuettes like this last.

A circular relief.

Hercules reposing, surrounded by Cupids. This is a very attractive composition. The epidermis is unfortunately much injured.

Of the metallic mirrors, of which the British Museum possesses a large and admirable selection (Cases 74 and 75), I may particularly notice one, Bacchus embracing Ariadne, the outlines of which are not, as usually, incised, but in relief, in the ancient Greek style. It is remarkable for the excellent workmanship, and for the already free and noble form of the heads.

In the well-furnished collection of ancient weapons, I must mention a helmet with a gold laurel-wreath (Cases 44 and 45).

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Among the numerous bronze vessels is a circular one of considerable size, on which, above, are the statuettes of two comic actors, with Silenus masks, of great animation.

Also one much smaller, with three bacchanalian figures, and another, on which a corpulent Pan is defending himself from a serpent, deserve favourable notice.

The collection of beautiful candelabra contains one with two bacchanalian figures on the top, of very spirited motive.

Finally, the department of tripods and lamps in bronze is richly represented, and displays some particularly fine examples.

The collection of glass vessels is not large, but offers various choice specimens, including some balsam vases of oriental alabaster.

The number of antique mosaics is small; among them is a Silenus mask of great beauty.

Masks, Tesseræ, and Lamps in terracotta are here in considerable numbers. On the other hand, the collection of figures, reliefs, ornaments, &c., of terracotta, is but moderate in extent when compared with other collections of the kind; some very remarkable statuettes from Athens are, however, to be seen on Shelf 2.

A group of female figures, one of whom is playing the tambourine, the other dancing, is most charming and animated in motive. Athenian Hydriophoræ, or female water-bearers, and the muse Polyhymnia, who corresponds entirely in motive with a marble statue in the Berlin Museum, are admirable. A comic actor also in the character of Hercules is of delightful humour.

Various departments have also, during this lapse of time, received considerable additions, to which I now proceed to call attention.

OBJECTS OF ART BELONGING TO THE MIDDLE AGES, AND TO
MODERN TIMES.

This title applies in the widest sense to those objects which the indefatigable exertions of Mr. Franks—a gentleman who unites in no common degree the qualities of zeal and discrimination—have gathered together, and which have grown from small beginnings into a very important collection. The most important is perhaps a circular disk of rock-crystal, with the history of Susannah engraved on it. According to an inscription this work was executed for

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King Lothaire. Of the three Carovingian princes of this name, the latest, who was King of France from 954 to 986, judging from style of art and excellence of motive, is probably the one referred to. The finished and delicate execution in so hard a material displays the technical skill of that period in a surprisingly favourable light. From the Bernal Collection.

Another engraving on the same material is far ruder. It represents the Crucifixion, with the Virgin and St. John on each side, and the sun and the moon in the sky. Judging from the style of art, it belongs also to the 10th century.

The purchase of Mr. Maskell's collection of carvings in ivory, together with the few but excellent specimens already possessed by the Museum, have combined worthily to represent this important branch of art. I must be satisfied with noticing a few of the most important.

Reliefs.—Four pieces which had belonged to a box.

1. Pilate washing his hands, Christ bearing the Cross, and Peter denying Christ, with the Maid and the Cock. 2. Judas hanging, and the Crucifixion, with the Virgin, St. John, and the Centurion. 3. The two Maries, and the two Guards at the Sepulchre, which is represented as a separate building, with a kind of chapel. 4. Christ teaching in the centre of four Apostles. The whole style of art, motives, expression, and drapery, agree so entirely with the early Christian sarcophagi, that these reliefs, which approach the round in depth, cannot be ascribed to a later period than the 5th or 6th century. From the very short proportions, I believe them to be of the 6th century, and of Italian origin. The colour of the ivory has become a dark brown.

The combat of Perseus with the Chimæra, whom he is piercing with a spear in the back. The motive and drawing are both good. The ground is perforated; the style of flat relief very good. Nevertheless, the two conventional mushroom-shaped trees, and the horseshoe arches of a gallery above, forbid my assigning to it an earlier date than the 9th century.

An ivory tablet—originally, probably, the cover of a book—divided into two compartments,—the upper one containing the Marriage at Cana, with the Virgin telling Christ that the wine is come to an end; and the lower one the giver of the feast, two youths filling six vessels with water, and Christ in the act of per-

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forming the miracle. The motives are speaking, the draperies tasteful, the high relief in good style, and the workmanship careful. The style of art inclines me to believe this a Carlovingian work of the 9th century.

Of the same period and style is the half of a Diptych, with the Annunciation above, the Visitation in the centre, and the Nativity below. The motive and style of the flat relief are good, the proportions short.

The Raising of Lazarus: a very careful but dry Byzantine work, which may belong to the 12th century. This relief was formerly in the possession of Chevalier Bunsen.

The cover of a book, about 4 in. wide, and 6 in. high, with thirty Scriptural events represented in five rows, in perforated work, beginning below from the left, and ending above on the right. This small relief, which belongs to the 14th century, is quite unique. Style and composition are good, and the execution of the little figures, not more than two-thirds of an inch high, of marvellous delicacy and precision.

Some covers of mirrors, of good workmanship, may also be mentioned.

Next in order to these I must notice a complete jewel-casket, the cover of which contains on the top a tournament, with numerous animated female figures in the balcony; a hunting party, three girls bathing, and similar subjects on the sides. This is a good work of the 15th century.

Finally, I beg to call attention to a chef-d'œuvre of ivory carving in the picturesque style that prevailed at a later time. The subject is the Temptation, of indescribable finish and richness of details, especially in the landscape. The head of Christ is also singularly noble for the period.

Ivory objects in the round. The statuette of the Virgin with the Child on her arm, about 5 in. high. The composition is remarkably beautiful, and the execution equally fine. This agrees so entirely with the statue of the Virgin by Neri Pisano, in the little church of the Maria della Spina, at Pisa, that, if not by that sculptor himself, it must have been executed in his time and under his influence, *i. e.* in the 13th century.

Statuette of one of the Wise Virgins—the lamp in her right hand—about 8 in. high. Slender and noble in form, of earnest and

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LETTER I.

MINIATURES.

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dignified head, and the drapery of admirable style. In my opinion a German work of the 13th century.

A painted statuette of the Virgin enthroned, about 4 in. high, with the Child standing at the breast. The style good, and the head of the Virgin very lovely. Most probably French, of the 13th century.

Statuette of the Virgin enthroned, almost a foot high, with the Child undraped, and again standing at the breast. The Child is remarkable for the well-understood and full forms. The drapery is especially excellent, and the execution very careful. This is probably German, of the 14th century.

Among the ivory vessels a circular one with a lid is distinguished for its beautiful and broad decorations in the Romanesque style.

A series of those beautiful medallions, executed by Vittore Pisano and others in the 15th century, with some fine medals and coins of the 16th century, merit a close inspection.

Many fine specimens of the enamels of the middle ages, with which shrines especially were decorated, are to be seen here.

But one of the most imposing portions of this new department of art consists of those tasteful vessels and plates which art has enriched. Of the celebrated Limoges manufactory—metal vessels and plates with enamels—some beautiful specimens are here preserved. The manufacture of majolica is also represented by a series of plates and dishes of the 15th to the 17th century, which, for size, beauty of form, style of decoration, and in many, also, of figures, are very remarkable. Nor are specimens wanting of the fine Palissy ware.

ADDITIONS TO THE COLLECTION OF MINIATURES.

Vol. I. p. 97.

A Byzantine MS., in quarto, purchased at the sale of Mr. Borell's collection, in 1853, containing the psalter and hymns, with the date 1066, displays some of the most interesting miniatures that I have seen of the kind. The subjects of many of these extend the in every way important field of Byzantine art. At the same time they serve to prove that even after the middle of the 11th century

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the Byzantine painter adhered frequently, more or less, to the art of the first Christian centuries, so intimately allied as it was with the purely antique school of painting; while, at the same time, in general character, we observe that ascetic severity of conception, that dryness and elongation in the forms, those mechanical arrangements of the drapery, and that gloominess of colouring, which all bear witness to the local Byzantine school. The laying on of the colours alone is throughout broad, solid, and careful. The text consists of 208 leaves in one column, and is written in a full minuscule letter. Only the three first pages and the superscriptions of all the chapters are in golden capitals; first executed,—as it appears from some portions where the gold has fallen off,—in crimson colour, and afterwards covered with gold. The pretty tendrils which, in eight compartments upon a gold ground, surround the superscription $\Upsilon\text{M}\text{N}\text{O}\text{C}\ \text{T}\text{O}\Upsilon\ \Delta\text{A}\Upsilon\text{I}\Delta\text{O}\Upsilon\ \Pi\text{P}\text{O}\Phi\text{H}\text{T}\text{O}\Upsilon$, give no evidence, as in most Byzantine ornamentation after the year 1000, of Arabian influence, but still point to antique tradition. The same may be said of two gryphons next an altar over the inscription. Unfortunately the numerous miniatures which decorated the borders have greatly suffered; and occasionally we find that, owing to a mutilation of the upper borders, some of them are entirely lost. The importance attached to the pictures is seen by red signs in the text corresponding with others next the pictures referred to. The miniatures of the first page are also much injured: those on the border probably represented the Three Persons of the Trinity, in human figures. This, at least, is deducible from the inscription $\delta\ \text{π}\alpha\lambda\alpha\text{i}\text{o}\varsigma\ \eta\mu\epsilon\rho\omega\text{n}$ near a figure enthroned in a blue mandorla, showing that it is intended for the First Person. The dress is of dark purple, with the forms of the folds in gold, and the mantle vermilion; the head is obliterated. The inscription $\text{I}\hat{\text{C}}$ and $\text{X}\hat{\text{P}}$ shows that the figure below represents the Second Person. All that can be seen of the third figure is that it was also human. Some much ruined representations—for instance, the Nativity and the Annunciation to the Shepherds, Leaf 2a—still serve to show that the conception in every way corresponds with the Byzantine treatment of these subjects. An interesting example of Pagan forms adopted by Christian art is seen in a picture L. 3a, with the inscription $\epsilon\pi\nu\text{o}\varsigma$, where an angel, who is fanning the sleeping David with a

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LETTER I.

BYZANTINE MS.

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circular gold fan, is meant to represent sleep. It is also worthy of remark that the local Byzantine style is especially applied in its complete development to Byzantine saints, the representation of whom, by means of art, necessarily belongs to a somewhat later period. Thus, for example, St. Basil is given standing before a singing-desk, with a burning taper in his right hand, in precisely those dry forms and in that brown colour indicative of pure Byzantine art. In L. 8a, representing Christ enthroned and blessing, with purple robe and blue mantle, the angels on each side are new to me. These have four large wings, folded over each other, above and below, partly in beautiful colour and partly in gold, out of which the heads with golden glories, and the graceful hands and feet, are alone seen. Upon their shoulders are heads of animals vomiting fire from the open jaws. Probably these represent that order of angels called by the Byzantine church the *τετραμορφοι*, as uniting the four attributes of the Evangelists. This accounts for the head of the lion and bull on their shoulders: the eagle's head, which they should bear between their upper wings, may have been obliterated. The head of one of the angels which is preserved is delicate in form and dignified in expression. L. 11a contains the often repeated subject of David prostrate in prayer before the First Person. This is conspicuous for its good preservation and for the very successful expression of adoration in the head of David, a figure in regal attire, with vermilion coat bordered with gold, a purple mantle, and a flat golden crown. Especially remarkable are the pictures of the Apostles and Evangelists, SS. Peter, Paul, John, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Simon, Andrew, James, Philip, Thomas, and Bartholomew, their names inscribed next them, LL. 19b and 20a. Each of these are enthroned, with a number of figures with their right hands raised, before them, to whom they are preaching the Gospel. In the case of St. Thomas these figures are black men, in reference to his conversion of the Moors. St. Peter appears here in the well-known type, only, as in the earlier form, without a bald head, though his hair is already white. St. Paul's is also white. Unfortunately the lower part of the face is obliterated. St. John is also represented as an old man. St. James has a long brown beard. The dress of St. Peter consists here, as later, of a blue tunic and yellow toga, inclining to orange—that of St. Paul

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of a light blue tunic and a toga of dark purple. The subject of Hezekiah appointed by the grace of God king over the Jews, L. 21a, is very peculiarly expressed. Hezekiah is seen held aloft by three men of war upon a steel shield with a golden border, dressed in a purple tunic with broad gold stripes, while an angel flying down from a blue segment of a circle, well known as the symbol of Heaven, places a gold crown with red stones on his head. The king holds a long sceptre in his hand, which terminates in a square with four small circles at the corners. The Ascension, L. 25b, is another remarkable picture. Above, in a large blue circle with red stars, are seen two angels holding sumptuous hangings in gold with bright purple patterns. The inscription, *αἱ πύλαι τοῦ οὐρανοῦ*, informs us that these represent the gates of Heaven. The Saviour, attired in a dark purple tunic, is seen in a blue mandorla, borne upwards by two angels of good action and dressed in the light-coloured drapery of antique art. L. 27b is again one of the most remarkable pictures. Above are two saints, with the inscription *Νικηφόρος ὁ πρῶταρχος* (abbreviation for *πατριάρχος*) and *Σοπῆρος*, holding between them a circle, with the bust-picture of Christ. This latter is severe but dignified in character. Further below are the same saints next an enthroned Byzantine emperor, obviously interceding for the worship of pictures. Near them are three aged priests, somewhat successfully dressed in light-coloured garments, one of whom is striking a similar picture of Christ with his staff. The inscription *ὁ ἐικονομαχοί* informs us that these figures represent the Iconoclasts. This is the only instance I know of such an allusion in Byzantine miniatures. L. 28a exhibits David as a slender youth standing in a short light blue coat and light purple chlamys, with naked thighs and swathed legs and feet, the crook in his right hand, and a lyre of very simple form in his left. Five goats and rams, which compose his flock, are too large in proportion to himself. These, with a wolf which is carrying off a ram, and a dog which is pursuing—both of admirable action—are obviously by another hand, as seen in the heavy and dark tone of colour. L. 31b, the Raising of Lazarus, shows quite the earliest mode of conception as found in the catacombs, only that the proportions are very tall, and the features quite youthful. L. 32a contains Christ and David standing conversing together, twice over.