

The Business of Forgery:
Puzzles Posed by a Gothic Diptych

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Table of Contents

	Page
Section I. Introduction.....	4
Section II. A Problematic Diptych.....	7
Section III. History of the Forger.....	14
Section IV. Hans Tietze and the Psychology of the Forger.....	21
Section V. Analysis of the Detroit Diptych.....	27
Section VI. Conclusion.....	45
Bibliography.....	49
Appendix A. Illustrations.....	51
Appendix B. Documents.....	58

Section I. Introduction

In the Detroit Institute of Art (DIA), in a room located to the right of the grand entrance hall, a visitor will find a display case exhibiting some of the museum's famed holdings in gothic ivory carving. Perhaps the most stunning item of this case is a large ivory diptych (24.9cm x 26.4cm) identified as being French and dated to the 14th century, which depicts scenes from the lives of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary (*fig. 1*). It is this diptych that lies at the heart of this thesis. Throughout its time at the DIA, the authenticity of this piece has been called into question, with scholars taking positions on both sides of the debate. Some claim it is a forgery of the 19th century, and others defend it as authentically medieval. It is my intention to evaluate the merits of the varying arguments, and to tease out further evidence. I hope to advance the debate by assessing the diptych in terms of the psychology of forgery, using the object itself as the primary evidence. Hans Tietze's study of 1948, *Genuine and False: Copies, Imitations, and Forgeries*, is instrumental in my quest to penetrate the mystery of this ivory diptych. I place at the center of my inquiry the object itself, investigating the decisions that the artist made in creating it, continually asking whether or not its peculiar traits are the techniques of a forger.

The determination of whether objects are forgeries or not is an activity of great concern to scholars and curators alike. For scholars, it is a test of connoisseurial knowledge and analytical skill, not only testing their art historical knowledge, but furthering it as well. For curators, the uncovering of forgeries represents a litmus test of sorts, and allows them to determine how, and in what capacity, a piece of art is to be

shown to the public. This subject has also proved to fascinate the greater public.

Museums have capitalized on this interest by mounting exhibitions that feature the fraudulent in art.

The Victoria and Albert Museum in London recently held an exhibition titled “Fake Art at the V & A”, which featured works by the forger Shaun Greenlaugh, who, over a period of seventeen years, forged hundreds of pieces and sold them to museums for astronomical amounts. At present, the University of Michigan’s Kelsey Museum of Archaeology has an online exhibition of forged Egyptian artifacts. In 2007, the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut, held an exhibition titled “Fakes and Forgeries: The Art of Deception”, which displayed sixty examples of forged Western paintings and sculptures from many time periods. Next year, in the Fall of 2010, the Detroit Institute of Art will be holding an exhibition on fakes and forgeries in its own collections. Similarly, in Summer 2010, the National Gallery in London will be mounting an exhibition titled “Close Examination: Fakes, Mistakes, and Discoveries”, which will also put before the public forgeries revealed in its own collections. All of these exhibitions, along with other such shows that have been, and doubtless will be, mounted bring together all kinds of forged works as a separate category of art.

There seems to be a grand separation, whereby artworks are either authentic or fake, and if they are the latter, they are rarely looked at in any other capacity. Because of this, there are still objects on display in museums as authentic, which are either inauthentic, or have extremely questionable pasts. Museums have a tendency to show objects with the notion of “innocent until proven guilty”, rarely presenting the full background story to the public. Museums are aware that the public feels that art does not

have worth unless it is “authentic”. This notion does the public a great injustice. It is true that the uncovering and illumination of these objects is a complex and convoluted process, and therefore, such looming question marks are rarely displayed to the public. It is, however, precisely these complexities and controversies which make these objects so fascinating to study. In many ways, the complex stories behind these objects could be more interesting to the public, and to scholars, than the objects themselves.

Forged works of art can be fascinating in their own right. Many of these sorts of works are beautiful and wonderful examples of craftsmanship, and their questionable histories add a new dimension of interest, in the same way that multiple suspects in a murder mystery make for a much more entertaining novel. Not only are these stories entertaining to the public, but they can be extremely important in scholarship. The objects themselves can be viewed as historical documents. They speak greatly to the ever-changing art market; what is popular at what time, and perhaps for what reasons. They might expose important information about the tendencies of particular forgers, which could help to piece together biographies of some of the more prolific forgers. And perhaps most intriguing, they reveal the forgers perceptions of the styles of the time period which he is intending to forge: through the small exaggerations and peculiar mistakes, a forger demonstrates how he views the past. For example, if the Detroit diptych is indeed a forgery of the 20th century, it could reveal to scholars how the 20th century viewed the 14th century – an intriguing glimpse into the past.

Section II. A Problematic Diptych

The massive ivory relief diptych at the focus of this paper is presented as authentic, and looms as a crowning centerpiece over the other ivory works in its case. The label simply reads: “Diptych with Scenes of the Lives of Christ and the Virgin, mid-14th century, Ivory, French (Paris)”, and no further information is given. A visitor to the DIA is left with the impression that this object is simply a beautiful example of Gothic ivory carving. The file for this object, however, presents a more complex story than this: questions of authenticity shroud the diptych in mystery.

The DIA’s object file in the presents a number of documented expert opinions of the diptych, and provides insight into a debate entirely obscured by the diptych’s label. In January 1983, not even a week apart, two separate reports were filed by specialists Neil Stratford and Richard Randall.¹ Stratford states that the diptych is: “doubtful, [and] seems a grand 19th-century imitation”,² whereas Randall exclaims that it is: “super duper! A great piece! ...perfectly genuine”.³ These two divergent opinions are echoed throughout the diptych’s file, with many varying scholars and curators stating opinions on the authenticity of the object. The problem again came up five years later, at the 1988 London Conference on Gothic ivories in American Collections: the ivory was discussed and the final report reads “rejected by most as a fake...a good candidate for carbon-14

¹ It is important to note that these two scholars each have reputations within the scholarly community. Neil Stratford of the British Museum has a reputation for accepting fewer objects as authentic, while Richard Randall of the Walters Art Museum errs in the opposite direction. These apparent predilections are gleaned from conversations with several scholars, including Professor Elizabeth Sears and Professor Emerita Ilene Forsyth, both of the University of Michigan.

² Neil Stratford, Notes on the Detroit ivories, 1983. See Appendix B, Doc. 2.

³ Richard Randall, Notes on the Detroit ivories, 1983. See Appendix B, Doc. 3.

dating”.⁴ This conference was attended by both Stratford and Randall, as well as Charles Little (Metropolitan Museum of Art), Norbert Jopek (V & A), Peter Barnet (then of the DIA), Paul Williamson (V & A), and Danielle Gaborit-Chopin (Louvre); the latter is noted as saying that she was “not sure it is a fake, just a bit awkward”.⁵ This discourse of opinions is registered in letters and reports pertaining to the object beginning in the early 1980s. All conversation seems to stop after 1990.⁶

In July 1989 and November 1990 the diptych was carbon-dated, but the question of its authenticity was left unresolved. The results were interesting, but inconclusive: the ivory tested as being far more “modern” than its counterparts, but in the report the technicians were quick to say that the results of the tests were likely compromised by sample sizes, and by a phenomenon nick-named the “bomb curve”, which rendered the results to be nowhere near definitive. The first problem was that the ivory sample was deemed too small to be accurately tested. This proved to be problematic enough for the laboratory at the University of Toronto, as the report states that the sample was too small to be used at all.⁷ This is a common problem in C-14 testing for art historical objects, particularly ivory, as the samples that conservators and curators are willing to give up are often for smaller than is ideal.⁸

Also problematic were the troublesome atmospheric conditions, manifested in the phenomenon of the “bomb curve”. The technicians of the test conducted by the

⁴ Notes from London Conference on Gothic Ivories in American Collections, 1988. See Appendix B, Doc. 5.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For select documents from the DIA file relating to the diptych’s questionable authenticity, see Appendix B, Doc. 1-7.

⁷ Information from University of Toronto Carbon-14 testing report. See Appendix B, Doc. 7.

⁸ Information from C-14 testing results from the University of Arizona, July 1989, which listed the ivory as “modern” and suggested the “bomb curve” may have been an issue, and from the University of Toledo, November 1990, which insisted that the sample size was too small to be accurately tested. See Appendix B, Doc. 6a-7 for the complete Carbon-14 testing results reports.

University of Arizona on the ivory clearly felt that this was a major issue in their results. The report stated that the ivory was “modern”, with a 2% margin of error, meaning that the ivory dated to be approximately from before the year 1950.⁹ Curators interpreted the results to mean that the diptych was created at some point in the early 20th century, or perhaps in the late 19th, a result that the technicians deem to perhaps be caused by the “bomb curve”.

This concept stems from the fact that there were significant changes in atmospheric carbon-14 levels from the late 1940s through 1963, when the Partial Test Ban Treaty was put into effect in order to counteract the negative repercussions of atmospheric nuclear weapons testing. The idea, as described by Dr. Cathy Selvius DeRoo, a conservation research scientist at the DIA, is that these atmospheric changes could have altered the results of the tests, and possibly caused the object to date as later than it was actually created.¹⁰ Another possibility is that the Detroit diptych was exposed to some form of extreme radiation, which could have altered the rate of decay of C-14 in the ivory, causing it to appear more modern. However, the diptych was already in the collection of the DIA by 1940, well before nuclear testing would have altered its chemical composition. Therefore, the only reason that the diptych could have inaccurately tested modern is if it was exposed to some form of extreme radiation, other than nuclear testing, prior to 1940. While this seems highly unlikely, records of the diptych prior to 1940 do not supply information on this, so it is technically possible.

So the matter seems to have rested until 1997, when the DIA held a major exhibition titled “Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age”, in which the

⁹ Information from University of Arizona Carbon-14 testing report. See Appendix B, Doc. 6a-b.

¹⁰ Thanks again to Dr. Cathy Selvius DeRoo for contributing her knowledge of Carbon-14 dating.

diptych was displayed as authentic, as it is today. Interestingly, the exhibition did include a section specifically devoted to forgeries, so it is evident that the curators of this exhibition were at the time whole-heartedly convinced that the diptych was genuinely medieval. The show was curated by Peter Barnet, with Danielle Gaborit-Chopin as a major contributor to its catalog; both were also present at the 1988 conference in London, at which most of the scholars felt that the diptych was a fake, the noted exception being Gaborit-Chopin. It seems that in the approximately ten years between this conference and the exhibition the status of the diptych changed from being considered most likely forged to being considered most likely authentic. No information is in the file as to why opinion on the diptych shifted so dramatically over that period of time, but as Barnet said, Gaborit-Chopin believed the diptych to be authentic, and that was enough for the question to be considered answered.¹¹ The authenticity has not been called into question since.

Clearly a scientific approach was not successful, and a connoisseurial approach has not gone far enough. The inquiry must be reopened, and a full investigation of the object should be undertaken, with an examination of all of the diptych's facets, beginning with its provenance. In looking into the history of this particular diptych, the first red flag hinting that the ivory could be questionable is the lack of information on its provenance. The DIA repeats the information given by the seller, stating that the diptych was once in the treasury of the Cathedral of Laon, but this is nowhere confirmed. No actual record of this diptych survives from before 1922, when it was sold by Maurice Sulzbach in Paris. The next recorded date is 1929, when it was sold by Arnold Seligman, Rey and Co., in New York City to Robert Tannahill, of Grosse Pointe, Michigan, who,

¹¹ Conversation with Peter Barnet, January 27, 2010.

donated it to the DIA in 1940.¹² This lack of provenance is not necessarily itself troubling. As Peter Barnet suggests, so many ivory pieces lack provenance, or have large holes in their histories that it would be imprudent to use this as evidence of forgery.¹³

Though this may be true, the gaps in the diptych's history appear dubious for a number of other reasons. It seems rather suspicious that a diptych that is considered to be such an exemplary piece of medieval ivory carving has been left out of Raymond Koechlin's seminal work *Les ivoires gothiques français*, the survey catalog published in 1924 that offers a list of approximately 1300 French Gothic ivories.¹⁴ It is unlikely that an ivory diptych of this scale and quality once residing in the treasury of the Cathedral of Laon and by 1922 on the art market would have escaped his attention. This is a fact that even Peter Barnet found to be fairly strange.¹⁵ So the stage is set to begin a new investigation. I propose a strategy of careful study of medieval relief techniques, iconographic and narrative traditions, in conjunction with a study of the forgery business and the concept of the psychology of the forger.

There is an unusual opportunity in this particular situation. Compounding the mystery of the Detroit diptych are two related ivories diptychs, one now in the Louvre in Paris (*fig. 2*), which was also featured in the "Images in Ivory" exhibition, and the other now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lille (*fig. 3*); both of which appear in Koechlin's catalog.¹⁶ The Paris diptych is almost a twin of the Detroit diptych, bearing the same narrative sequence and iconography, including some anomalies. The Lille diptych, while

¹² Information from the DIA object file for the diptych, 40.165.

¹³ Conversation with Peter Barnet, January 27, 2010.

¹⁴ Koechlin created this catalog as a comprehensive index of the most important gothic ivories in France. Interestingly, Professor John Lowden, of the Courtauld Institute of Art, is currently in the process of updating, digitizing, and completely overhauling this catalog.

¹⁵ Conversation with Peter Barnet, January 27, 2010.

¹⁶ Raymond Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, Paris: A. Picard, 1924, Vol. 2, 108-109, figures 250-251.

not a twin, is certainly close to the Detroit diptych in many surprising ways. The similarities between the Paris and the Lille diptychs are briefly touched upon in the catalog for the “Images in Ivory” exhibition, though the catalog focuses more on the Paris diptych, as it was included in the show. The catalog attributes the similarities between the diptychs to either common workshops, or the possible use of a common model.

All three diptychs are here considered as part of the so-called Rosette Group, named for the small rose-shaped designs on the horizontal borders separating the three registers on each panel – a popular motif on ivory carvings of this sort in and around Paris in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. Both the Paris and the Lille diptychs have substantiated provenances. The Louvre diptych is mentioned in the inventory of the Cathedral treasury at Laon, the same treasury in which the Detroit diptych is supposed to have been housed originally.¹⁷ It passed through the private collection of Charles Mège in Paris before arriving at the Louvre in 1958.¹⁸ The Lille diptych, according to Koechlin is authentic.¹⁹ The above noted provenance of the Detroit diptych is remarkably obscure in comparison.

That said, a new question arises: were these three companion pieces produced in the same shop – the shop responsible for the Rosette group – or did one, probably the Paris diptych serve as a source for a forger? In order to provide a larger context in which to pursue this question the practice of forgery must be analyzed with particular attention to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Delving further into the history of forgery, the psychology of forgery, and Hans Tietze’s work, *Genuine and False* must come to the

¹⁷ Information from the DIA object file for the diptych, 40.165.

¹⁸ Francis W. Robinson, “A French Ivory Gothic Diptych”, *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts*, 20.8 (1941), 77.

¹⁹ Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, Vol. 2, 108.

forefront. Understanding the mentality of the forger is central to this study. As Tietze explains, the psychological state of the forger causes patterns to emerge in their forgeries; patterns of emphasis and exaggeration, and specific tendencies become clear. Using Tietze's concepts to analyze the Detroit diptych, particularly in conjunction with the Paris and the Lille diptychs, it may be possible to discover whether a forger has unintentionally revealed himself. Before beginning to analyze the objects themselves, the topic of forgery must be addressed.

Section III. History of Forgery

Wherever art is considered a commodity, there will be forgers. It was during the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century that the forgery business seems to have peaked. Although, for obvious reasons, records of this illicit industry are practically non-existent, and information on precisely how prolific forgers actually were is impossible to obtain. That being said, the number of fakes that have been uncovered to date suggests the great activity of forgers. Gradually, through the discovery and analysis of forgeries, the biographies of forgers begin to surface.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, for instance, bought a cup (*fig. 7*) in 1913 believing it to be by Benvenuto Cellini, but in 1984 discovered it to be a 19th-century forgery by the German artist Reinhold Vasters, the creator of many such objects. Vasters was an extraordinarily skilled goldsmith, who had been hired by Franz Bock, canon of Aachen Cathedral, to both restore and replace damaged liturgical objects.²⁰ It is clear that this experience gave Vasters the intimate knowledge of techniques and styles from many time periods, which, when coupled with his excellent abilities as a craftsman, allowed him to become a master forger. This particular cup, dubbed the Rospigliosi Cup for its originally supposed provenance from the Rospigliosi family in Rome,²¹ so closely resembles authentic works by Cellini that it is possible that it might never have been uncovered, if it were not for the unearthing of preparatory sketches and drawings by

²⁰ Yvonne Hackenbroch, "Reinhold Vasters, Goldsmith", *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 19 (1984-1985), 163.

²¹ *Ibid*, 242.

Vasters himself.²² In fact, once the drawings were revealed, the cup was disassembled, and conservators discovered that the method by which the cup had been constructed was not, in fact, used in Cellini's time, confirming the cup's inauthenticity.²³

One of the more infamous forgers is the man known as the Spanish Forger, who created and sold large numbers of forged, seemingly late medieval miniatures, such as single leaves of 15th-century illuminations²⁴; so far 348 have been identified.²⁵ Not only did the Spanish Forger create these medieval miniatures, but also "completed" many unfinished works, adding miniatures to leaves in Italian choir books that seemed to be lacking images (*fig. 8*). While he was originally thought to be Spanish, it is now the general consensus that he operated out of Paris between the 1890s and 1920s, and that he did not work alone but had an entire studio behind him, turning out near-perfect reproductions of late medieval works, which were then distributed widely across France and Europe as a whole.²⁶ Though his nationality is thought to have been identified, his identity is still a great mystery, perhaps making his works all the more intriguing. Paris, it seems, was very much at the center not only of legitimate art production, but also of the illicit forgery business.

The case of the Spanish Forger is particularly interesting because the fakes that his studio produced are now collected by individuals and museums as originals: they have become original forgeries by a celebrity forger. This introduces an entirely new set of questions. Could the Detroit ivory, if associated with the same sort of celebrity crime

²² Ibid, 176.

²³ John Russell, "As Long as Men Make Art, the Artful Fake Will be with Us", *The New York Times*, 12 February, 1984, H1.

²⁴ William Voelkle, *The Spanish Forger*, New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1978, 11.

²⁵ Martin Bailey, "'Spanish Forger' bought by V&A, Scholars no nearer to finding the faker's identity", *The Art Newspaper*, 24 January, 2009.

²⁶ Voelkle, *The Spanish Forger*, 11.

ring as the Spanish Forger, conceivably become a commodity in its own right? If proven to be inauthentic, could the diptych be viewed as more than just a forgery – perhaps as a piece of history – a way by which to see how a 19th-century forger viewed the 14th century?

The DIA itself fell victim to another of the more successful forgery schemes of the early 20th century when it purchased some of the Botkin Enamels in 1928 and 1939 (*fig. 9a and 9b*). These cloisonné enamels of the 12th-century Byzantine style were acquired after the death of Mikhail Petrovitch Botkin, a prominent member of the Russian upper-class, who was an illustrious art collector. The two enamels, depicting the Transfiguration and the Baptism of Christ, were at the time considered outstanding purchases.²⁷ They were hailed as excellent examples of Byzantine religious art and were valued for their spectacularly good condition. In 1988, to the shock and dismay of museums, including the British Museum in London and the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, a portion of the set of the Botkin enamels was revealed as fake. In time it was determined that well over 100 of these artifacts had been created very specifically to dupe Botkin.²⁸ This case certainly speaks to the intelligence of forgers. This particular forger was able to size-up the targeted patron, M.P. Botkin, and create works that were made to fill specific gaps in the collection.

These two famous cases, along with many others, and others that are sure to emerge in the future, show clearly that the forgery business was booming throughout the 19th and into the early 20th centuries. If the Detroit diptych is indeed a fake, it is likely to have been made at this time, in Paris, somewhere before 1922 when it was sold to

²⁷ A. C. W. “Byzantine Enamels”, *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 9.8 (1928), 90-93.

²⁸ Information from DIA object files for the *Baptism*, 28.57, and *Transfiguration*, 39.647.

Maurice Sulzbach, the Parisian art dealer. Little is known specifically about the ivory forgery business, but it is important to see how these questions have been solved, both scientifically and, more importantly for this study, through the analysis and examination of the objects themselves.

The methods for uncovering forgeries in various media are diverse. In some cases, Carbon-14 testing and other scientific analysis of materials and methods are used successfully, though these techniques clearly were not helpful in the case of the Detroit diptych. Thus, for example, in the case of the Botkin enamels, a combination of scientific testing and art historical analysis proved fruitful; scientific data was able to bring to light some of the iconographic and stylistic issues in the enamels. On closer analysis, many anomalies came to light, including misspellings of religious phrases, as well as the inclusion of some Cyrillic characters on the enamels themselves. Furthermore, stylistic analysis confirmed suspicions that scholars had voiced about the smoothness of the facial features, which was a trait uncharacteristic of the Byzantine enamel style.²⁹ If these features were not damning enough, upon scientific testing of the enamels, traces of both chromium and uranium were discovered in the colorant, both of which are chemicals not present in enamel-work until the 19th century.

The forgeries created by the Spanish Forger were uncovered primarily by art historical analysis, focusing in part, as with the Botkin enamels, on the facial features, which were deemed too emotional to be from the late Middle Ages.³⁰ Additionally, one of the more damning discoveries came with the analysis of a panel depicting the life of King David, executed in a style similar to that of Jorge Ingres, an artist who was active in

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Voelkle, *The Spanish Forger*, 13.

Spain during the 1440s. Art historical analysis revealed that two of the women depicted were wearing headdresses of conflicting time periods – one typical of the 15th century, and one typical of the 16th.³¹ The uncovering of the works by the Spanish Forger was accomplished without the aid of scientific evidence. These two examples begin to demonstrate how art historical evidence can be used to determine forgeries, and how scientific evidence can often prove enlightening.

The use of analysis of stylistic issues is also relevant in the case of the Detroit diptych. The technique of focusing on patterns of anomalies was extremely useful for both the Botkin enamels and the Spanish Forger miniatures. However, this use of art historical analysis was so helpful in part because both cases included a series of forged works, whereas the Detroit diptych represents a singular work. This means that yet another dimension must be added to the analysis. Perhaps this is why the curators present at the London conference felt that the diptych was such a good candidate for Carbon-14 dating, though unfortunately this approach was not successful.

Ivory is very difficult to deal with scientifically, which is why visual analysis is often used as one of the main tools for this medium. In terms of carbon dating, sample sizes are often far too small to be dated accurately, as in the case of the Detroit diptych; even if a sample size is large enough for a date to be obtained, there have been cases of forgeries made from older ivory, which means that the sample would date much earlier than the carving itself. Therefore, ivory forgeries are rarely uncovered through scientific analysis. Despite the difficulties, procedures for determining authenticity in ivories have been established in the use of art historical visual analysis.

³¹ Bailey, “‘Spanish Forger’ Bought by V&A”, 2009.

A small section of the catalog of the DIA exhibition “Images in Ivory” is dedicated specifically to forgeries and questionable pieces. Two ivory pieces from the so-called Master of the Agrafe Forgeries appear in the catalog. It states that the Master worked in France in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and that he likely began his career as a restorer before turning to forgery, meaning that he would already have had extensive knowledge of relief techniques and medieval iconography. Clues that led to the uncovering of these forgeries were found in small stylistic details, as in the carving of halos that would traditionally have been painted, and in the depictions of agrafes (the brooch-like clasps for which the Master is named) that rarely appeared on medieval sculpture, and if they did, only on images of the Virgin Mary.³² By analyzing stylistic issues scholars have ascribed as many as 110 objects to this master. Gaborit-Chopin, however, argues that a clearer set of criteria for definitively separating the authentic from the forged is necessary, and “that one stylistic or iconographic inconsistency alone cannot confirm a modern origin”.³³ I believe that Gaborit-Chopin is quite correct in this, which is why a more explicit procedure must be adopted in the examination of the Detroit diptych – one that combines technical, stylistic, iconographic as well as narratological analysis. Yet, this is not enough, and there is still another factor that must be included in the equation.

There is another aspect of analysis which approaches a work in question through the psychology of the forger. The ivory work titled *Triptych with the Virgin in Glory* (fig. 10), in the Cranbrook Art Museum, was deemed forged due to its peculiarities in style. The triptych was shown in the “Images in Ivory” exhibition, and in the catalog it is stated

³² Peter Barnet (editor), *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age*, Detroit: Detroit Institute of Art, 1997, 291.

³³ *Ibid*, 292.

that “the artist...had a capacity for invention as seen in the liberties taken with conventions of medieval sculpture and in his rather personal interpretation of medieval iconography”.³⁴ This strategy in particular points to an attempt to comprehend the mind of the forger so as to find patterns of peculiarities which are consistent with the mentality of a forger.

The thought is that any forger will be in a very particular mindset that occurs specifically when a human mind is focused on the peculiar task of trying to deceive an audience. This psychological state creates a sort of personality that is consistent throughout forged works. Thus, in some way, all forgers inevitably reveal themselves through their attempts to hide themselves. This technique of identifying forgeries employs a combination of psychological analysis and art historical analysis to recognize specific types of iconographic and stylistic problems as signs of forgery. This strategy adds another component to the study of possible fakes and forgeries, so that, rather than simply identifying anomalies in iconography or style in ivory carvings, one can use the psychological mindset of the forger to see how and why these anomalies occurred. This approach, in my mind adds a crucial dimension to my study. It is my intention to use this strategy to analyze the Detroit diptych.

³⁴ Ibid, 296.

Section IV. Hans Tietze and the Psychology of the Forger

In *Genuine and False: Copies, Imitations, and Forgeries*, a classic work of 1948, Hans Tietze looked extensively at the psychology of the forger. As we will see, his ideas will be helpful in approaching the Detroit diptych. Tietze was born in Prague in 1880, and before emigrating to the United States during the Nazi era in 1938, he studied in Vienna under Franz Wickhoff, one of the major art historians of the early 20th century. His wife, Erica Tietze-Conrat, was an influential art historian in her own right, and the two collaborated on many books. Tietze's most important work is generally considered to be *The Drawings of the Venetian Painters of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, published in New York in 1944. He was an extremely versatile art historian, studying works from many different art movements, from early Austrian medieval monastic manuscripts, to Austrian Gothic and Baroque art, to an important 1928 essay on Albrecht Dürer, *Der junge Dürer*, written with his wife.³⁵

Tietze is known particularly for his non-linear approach to art history.³⁶ He looked at artists less as figures in a timeline of autonomous stylistic progression, and more as figures of culturally separate external influences, with each artists' personal creative development shaped by the world around them. It is thought that he developed this approach from his teacher, Wickhoff, who was also famous for rejecting a linear view of the development of art. It is also likely that Tietze's interest in authenticity and the uncovering of forgeries using a more psychological approach stemmed from his work with Wickhoff, as it is known that Wickhoff had an interest in connoisseurship as a

³⁵ Warren Hearnden, "Tietze, Hans", *Oxford Art Online*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

means of establishing authenticity.³⁷ It is my opinion that Wickhoff's focus on connoisseurship combined with Tietze's view of an artist's work as a sort of cultural by-product created his theories about uncovering forgeries: if an artist, or forger, is always a product of his time and location, then those works that he creates will reflect this circumstance, whether or not it is intended. The intent of the artist or forger is where the psychological aspect becomes relevant.

It was coming from this training that Tietze wrote *Genuine and False*. At the very outset of this book, Tietze states clearly that “the essential feature of art forgery is not imitation...but the intention to deceive either the general public or an individual dupe of – as a rule – prospective buyers”,³⁸ reiterating that forgers are not simply copyists nor imitators. In his mind, though there are professional copyists, copying a work of art is not the same as forging it. In copying, the goal is to create an exact replica of a specific work, but in the case of the forger, this would be counterproductive. The object for the forger, as Tietze states, is to dupe others into believing that a “new” original work has been found, and this cannot be accomplished by copying already existing works. Moreover, imitators, another proposition that Tietze introduces, are not looking to dupe either. The aim of the imitator is to pay homage to a particular style, model or artist.

Though Tietze stresses that counterfeit art has been made at all times, in all places, he is particularly invested in the boom in the forgery business in the 19th and 20th centuries. He states that the increased interest in art in the this particular time period increased the monetary incentive for forgers in that time, and created a much larger demand for authentic art historical objects than the actual supply could feed, leading to an

³⁷ Lee Sorensen, “Wickhoff, Franz”, *Dictionary of Art Historians*, 2000.

³⁸ Hans Tietze, *Genuine and False: Copies, Imitations, and Forgeries*, New York: Chanticleer Press, 1948, 9.

upsurge of forgery production. Though he emphasizes monetary gain as the primary motive for forgers, he makes sure to indicate that there are many others, not all of which are self-serving, for instance forgeries made to “prove the existence of an ancient civilization from a nation that lacked such monuments of a venerable past”.³⁹ By way of example, he cites in particular a series of counterfeited Anglo-Saxon and Gaelic poems, which were meant to arouse pride in English history. So, often forgeries were not necessarily made to deceive people for monetary gain, but for “honorable” or just causes.

Tietze goes on to discuss what he calls the “counterfeiter’s weapons”, emphasizing that forgers will often use old materials, techniques, and tools in order that their works appear authentic.⁴⁰ Though Tietze would not have known it at the time he wrote this book, as radiocarbon dating was not invented until the late 1950s, this explains another issue with the use of Carbon-14 dating on ivory. Tietze unwittingly explains why ivory often tests to be much older, even if it is a more modern forged carving, as forgers will use older ivory materials to create modern forgeries. Therefore, Carbon-14 dating in ivories is shown to be fairly useless in many cases. Tietze even states, later on, that scientific testing and data, though it can be helpful in some ways, is not always reliable and therefore will not be discussed in-depth in his book.⁴¹ He continues to explain how the use of these older materials is often supplemented by detailed and intimate knowledge of the style of the time period.

Yet, Tietze does not focus solely on such material aspects of creating forgeries, but also ventures deep into the psyche of the forger. He suggests that the forgers’ attempts to create works so close to the original style are extraordinarily anxiety-

³⁹ Ibid, 10.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 34.

⁴¹ Ibid, 45.

inducing. He theorizes that this anxiety manifests itself in ways that are often detectable and can give away the forgery. He concludes that in the preparation of many forgeries this anxiousness cannot be overcome, and so a certain timidity is clearly seen in the work. On the other hand, a forger can swing too far to the other end of the spectrum, producing a work that is too freely created, and, as Tietze states, “disrupt[s] the original harmony” of the style.⁴² This occurs in the King David panel by the Spanish Forger, who took too many liberties in the creation of the work, and so incidentally depicted together garments that were popular 100 years apart from each other.

Tietze suggests that to avoid this issue, the most successful forgers constantly looked at multiple sources, rather than just one, and mixed the motifs and features of the models in order to conceal the fact that models were used at all. Forgers, Tietze explains, will often mentally become attached to particular aspects of authentic pieces, isolating specific details, and then attempting to change them slightly, by altering material, size, and technique ever so subtly.⁴³ When these techniques are successfully used, a forgery can become almost impossible to detect. An example is the Rospigliosi Cup at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the definitive counterfeit nature of which was given away not by any fault in the object itself, but by the discovery of sketches by Vasters, who, as a restorer at Aachen would have had plenty of references to use as guidelines.

Tietze delves further into the psychology of forgers, making clear that no matter how good the forger is, the forgery will eventually be found out. It is the level of skill of the forger that determines how long it can remain hidden. Any forgery will ultimately

⁴² Ibid, 35.

⁴³ Ibid, 35.

give itself away as a representation made in a particular era.⁴⁴ This harkens back to Tietze's belief that artists' creativity and abilities develop as a result of outside influences; therefore so too do the forger's. The forger, no matter how skilled, cannot resist the influences of his own time period. Indeed, while the forger may feel he is representing perfectly the style and technique of the era he is forging, he cannot but reflect his own time's interpretation of that era. So, rather than creating an object indistinguishable from the earlier time period, he creates an object that is a reflection of his own time period's conception of the earlier era.

The aspects of objects that the forger chooses to emphasize reveal two things about him. First, what the forger interprets to be important or representative of the earlier style reflects what people in the forger's time period deemed important, which is not always what may have been important originally. And, second, what traits of the original works the forger emphasizes, if a forger is not observing a wide enough range of objects, he can choose traits which may in fact be anomalous, and not at all typical of the specific time period. In both cases, the forger gives himself away. The latter of these two options will be the most important to the analysis of the Detroit diptych alongside the Paris and Lille Diptychs.

Tietze's discussions about the techniques, mindset and mentality of the forger are useful to my study. His idea that in attempting to avoid obviously copying a specific work of art a forger will draw from other works applies perfectly to the Detroit diptych in its complex relationship to the Paris and the Lille diptychs. These two diptychs support the notion that a forger will take motifs from a particular model and then attempt to tweak them slightly so that the work will not appear to be an exact replica. Also significant is

⁴⁴ Ibid, 72.

Tietze's idea that a forger can reveal himself in his interpretation of which aspects of an object are particularly representative of the original object's era, and exaggeration of perhaps anomalous stylistic techniques. By using the ideas from Tietze's book, and conducting an in-depth analysis of the Detroit diptych as it compares with the two similar diptychs, it may be possible to ascertain whether or not Detroit diptych is authentically medieval.

Section V. Analysis of the Detroit Diptych

It is clear that scientific analysis is simply not effective enough; even if a large enough sample size could be obtained and the technicians were able to account for the “bomb curve”, the possibility of a forger using old ivory still lingers. Therefore, we must turn to visual analysis to answer the question of whether or not the Detroit diptych is a forgery. In particular, a comparative analysis with the sister diptych in Paris and the similar diptych in Lille reveals whether one or both could have served as models for a forgery. More explicitly, this comparative visual analysis will question whether the Detroit diptych is a forgery based on the Paris diptych, with the Lille diptych as a secondary source.

In order to answer this, the previously discussed background of concepts of forgery and forgers’ mentality will be applied to the three diptychs through comparative formal analysis in regard to possible narrative, stylistic, and iconographic anomalies. In this way, it will be possible to detect features of the Detroit diptych that are in concert with a forger’s mindset, and ultimately, if it might be a forgery based on one of its two counterparts. We will pay particular attention to the style of the carvings, with consideration given to the representation of figures and draperies, as well as the placing of forms within space. Analysis of the Paris and the Lille diptychs, both with well-attested provenances, will alert us to a pattern of changes, anomalies, or emphases which will give the Detroit diptych away as forged.

The Detroit diptych features a sequence of biblical events, more specifically, stories from the lives of Christ and the Virgin Mary. The viewer sees a series of

important episodes from the lives of the two characters, and a story that is woven by incorporating elements from two stories: an Infancy cycle and a Passion cycle.

The narrative commences in the bottom-left register (*fig. 6a*), flowing to the right across the two leaves and moving upwards through the registers. It begins with the Annunciation in bottom-left corner, as Gabriel informs Mary that she will bear the son of God, and progresses to the Visitation, in which Mary and Elizabeth acknowledge each other's miraculous pregnancies, with Elizabeth pregnant with John the Baptist. The account continues in the bottom-right register, where two scenes of the Adoration of the Shepherds and the Adoration of the Magi flank Mary and the Christ child in his manger in the Nativity scene. The story progresses in the middle register (*fig. 5a*) of the left-hand leaf, with Christ's Presentation at the Temple and Christ among the Doctors, both of which depict Christ as a child with his mother Mary. On the right-hand leaf of the middle register the Wedding at Cana is depicted, the event at which Christ's first miracle of turning water into wine took place: here the table from the Wedding scene merges with the table of the Last Supper, during which Christ announced that one of his Apostles would betray him. The top-most and final register (*fig. 4a*) begins at the left with the Crucifixion of Christ, then features the Resurrection of Christ and the ultimate Ascension forty days later, as Mary and two apostles look up from below. Finally, the story concludes at the upper-right corner with the Pentecost, the event at which the apostles received the Holy Spirit, and the closing episode in the Mary cycle, the Coronation of the Virgin, in which Mary is crowned at the right-hand of Christ, as Queen of Heaven.

In terms of chronology, Raymond Koechlin in 1924 placed the Lille diptych in the late 13th century or early 14th century, and the Paris diptych in the early 14th century;⁴⁵ for this latter work the Louvre website gives a date range of 1330-1350.⁴⁶ The Detroit diptych, which does not appear in Koechlin, in the DIA's "Images in Ivory" catalog is dated to the early-mid 14th century, making it, if authentic, contemporary with the Paris, and slightly later than the Lille. All three diptychs, if the Detroit is supposed authentic, were definitively created in France, in the wider Paris area. In any case, the three diptychs can be considered close enough in time and geographic origination to be comparable.

The three diptychs, as previously mentioned, are all considered a part of the Rosette Group, a group of ivories which all include the rosette motif in the bands separating the registers. The significance of this motif for the classification of extant ivories is debatable. Koechlin considered the group of works to be distinct, defining an explicit style produced in specific place and time, even if the Rosette Group was not the work of one particular atelier,⁴⁷ and in 1918 even published *Les Diptyques à Décors de Roses*, an article in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* dedicated solely to this group of gothic ivories. More recently, others have suggested that the Rosette Group should not necessarily be regarded as a single group at all, and that the feature is so easily copied that it cannot be considered distinctive enough to merit such an explicit classification.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the rosette motif has appeared on ivories produced outside of France where

⁴⁵ Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, Vol. 2, 108-109.

⁴⁶ Louvre Website, http://cartelen.louvre.fr/cartelen/visite?srv=car_not_frame&idNotice=7109.

⁴⁷ Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, Vol. 1, 147.

⁴⁸ Robinson, "A French Ivory Gothic Diptych", 76.

the Paris, Lille, and Detroit diptychs are supposed to have been made; some of these have even turned out to be Italian copies of the popular French motif.⁴⁹

Both the Lille and the Paris diptychs feature the tiny rosettes above each of the three registers, including the top margin above the upper-most register, which is consistent with other diptychs of the Rosette Group in Koechlin.⁵⁰ The Detroit diptych, on the other hand, features the rosettes only on the two separations between registers, and not above the top. This is the first visual suggestion that the Detroit diptych might be a forgery. For, as we have seen, the mentality of a forger often leads to copying a given motif, but with a slight tweak in order to keep the forged object from simply appearing to be a replica, and to make it an “original” work. It is possible that this small alteration was a forger’s way of changing the original design in such a way that it would not appear to be an exact copy of the Paris or Lille Diptychs. However, it is also possible that this was simply another medieval artist’s or studio’s way of presenting the rosette motif, so popular throughout France at the time.

The issue of the rosettes is only the beginning of a much larger set of questions regarding differences between the Detroit diptych and its counterparts. The narrative of the Detroit diptych is remarkably similar to that seen in the two companion diptychs now in Paris and Lille. In all of the three diptychs nearly the same sequence of biblical events unfolds, in nearly the same order, and using nearly the same iconography. The styles of the three works also have comparable traits, but it is here that they differ from each other the most. The style of the Detroit diptych represents a major departure from the other two, and features an almost regimented consistency that hints at the tendencies of a

⁴⁹ Ibid, 76.

⁵⁰ Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, Vol. 2, for examples see No. 237 – No. 250, 101-110.

forger. These small iconographic differences will prove to be essential, and may reveal the diptych's true nature. They will play a key role in subsequent examination of the objects in terms of Tietze's concept of the psychology of the forger.

In terms of narrative, in comparison with the Detroit and Paris diptychs, variations mainly occur in the Lille diptych, which places the stories in slightly different registers. The artist of the Lille diptych, unlike those of the Detroit and Paris works, chose not to depict the Adoration of the Shepherds and the Adoration of the Magi as separate scenes, and therefore, each scene of the story is located one spot earlier than in the Paris or Detroit diptychs (*figs. 6a, b, and c*). This means that the Presentation of Christ in the Temple appears in the bottom-right register, as opposed to the middle-left register. However, there are still major stylistic tendencies that are reminiscent of the Paris and Detroit pieces. For instance, while the Wedding at Cana is on the left, rather than the right (*5a, b and c*), there is a visual continuity in how the Wedding table and the Last Supper table almost seem connected, which echoes the relationship of the tables in the respective scenes of the Paris and Detroit pieces.

The similar representation of the two feast scenes in the diptychs demonstrates a certain continuity of narrative and compositional style that is present between the three. Within all three of the diptychs each panel seems to have been designed as its own individual work of art, and the juxtaposition of the two tables is an important aspect of one of these miniature compositions. It is certainly a narrative feature that catches the eye. It is extremely unusual for the two scenes of the Wedding at Cana and the Last

Supper to be shown together in such a manner.⁵¹ Given that in scripture these two events occur chronologically so far from each other,⁵² it is logical that they rarely appear so close together, and certainly rarer that they appear as connecting tables. Nonetheless, in the Paris diptych the tables are slightly offset, with the Last Supper table slightly lower, which was likely meant as a device to separate the two scenes visually. A similar technique is used in the Detroit diptych, but this time the tables, which are offset in the same manner, also overlap. Although, perhaps this was done again as a technique to separate the two scenes, it seems highly unlikely that such similar and unusual techniques would be used in a combination of scenes that is itself extremely unusual, and appears to serve a very specific narrative stylistic purpose.

This tendency toward the construction of miniature narrative compositions of sorts within the greater diptych is clear in the panel of the tables, in which a careful and elegant symmetry is created. This is a trend which continues to dictate the narrative content of the panels. Throughout the panels of the diptychs, the artists maintain a delicate balance: within each of the panels there is either a clear focal point or central axis. In the Paris diptych, V-shapes define this point, as in the upper-left panel, in which Christ's head as he rises from his tomb is clearly the central focus, and the same cadence is echoed in the Detroit diptych (*figs. 4a and b*). More interesting are the bottom-right panels (*figs. 6a, b, and c*), which, in all of the diptychs, depict at least three scenes, with the Nativity at the center. In each composition Mary's triangular figure hovering over Christ is clearly the central focal point of the composition. In all of the diptychs the

⁵¹ Notably, there are no examples of the Wedding at Cana and the Last Supper pictured side-by-side in Gertrud Schiller's *Iconography of Christian Art*, translated by Janet Seligman, Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1971.

⁵² The miracle of Wedding at Cana is described at John 4:46, and the Last Supper is featured at John 13:21. From *The Holy Douay-Rheims Bible*, DRBO.org, 2004.

serenity of the Nativity scene is juxtaposed with the business of the two scenes on either side, further emphasizing Mary and the Christ child.

It is peculiar that both the Detroit and the Paris diptychs accomplish this focus on the Nativity by presenting the scenes out of chronological order. The Nativity is flanked by the two Adoration scenes, which serves the clear purpose of presenting Mary and Christ as the most important figures in the panel, but is most definitely not biblically accurate. Furthermore, the artist of the Detroit diptych seems to have taken the narrative technique of the Paris artist a step further by carving the Nativity scene in such a way that it fills a greater portion of the space than in the Paris diptych. This has the effect of making the Annunciation scenes on either side appear busier, and so the Nativity appears more simple and serene in comparison, causing it to stand out even further as the focal point of the panel. Unmistakably, the narrative and compositional techniques that appear in the Paris and Lille diptychs appear on the Detroit diptych as well, and in a more exaggerated fashion.

Is this an example of a 20th-century artist rationalizing compositional techniques that he sees and deems to be “medieval”, and therefore not only are included, but are exaggerated? Or, is this a 14th-century artist simply trying to show a sequence and hierarchy of biblical events? In either case, the mutual instances of such unusual arrangements of scenes is quite suspect, especially considering that the Lille diptych also displays a similar narrative technique, with the juxtaposed and aligned tables of the same scenes, as well as the central focus on the Nativity. This supports the idea that the artist was using the Paris diptych as a central model, while using the Lille diptych as a reference point. On the other hand, an occurrence such as this could suggest that the

diptychs were made in the same shop, or even shops located in close proximity to each other.

Stylistically the three betray major differences, especially in their depictions of cloth and draped fabric. Lille, the earlier diptych, is quite close to the Paris diptych, but the Detroit diptych stands apart. If the diptychs had been made in the same shop, or in shops in close vicinity, as the narrative anomalies could suggest, one would expect to see equally similar stylistic tendencies as there were narrative similarities. Indeed, in the DIA's "Images in Ivory" catalog, a common Parisian workshop is the explanation for the remarkable similarities between the pieces.⁵³ Yet, the stylistic differences between the Detroit diptych and its two companions are drastic; perhaps to the point of representing the inescapable tendency of forgers to slightly alter or over-emphasize the stylistic schema of the original works.

The Paris and the Lille diptychs feature distinct stylistic variations, but in general, they are quite similar. The Paris diptych skillfully reproduces falling drapery folds in a fairly angular style. Take the figure of Gabriel on the bottom register on the left (*figs. 6b and c*). One can almost separate out the geometric shapes which, when assembled, create the folds of a cloak. The Lille diptych, possibly the earlier, is even more drastically geometric, though in a different manner. The folds in the fabric of the Lille diptych are less complex than those of the Paris diptych, but are created using a much deeper relief. Compare the clothes Gabriel wears on the Lille diptych with those on the Paris diptych: the Lille garments feature far fewer folds and wider open geometric plains, and the folds that are present are in a much deeper relief. However, the same distinct geometric stiffness can be seen on Christ's loincloth during the Crucifixion

⁵³ Barnet (editor), *Images in Ivory*, 158.

scene: the cloth is formed by geometric shapes, in much the same style as the fabrics in the Paris diptych.

In contrast to the Lille and the Paris diptychs, the fabric on the Detroit diptych is smoother and more curvilinear. Its lines are not geometric and sharp, and there seems to be a deeper relief, which is slightly more akin to the Paris diptych. Look at the figure of Gabriel in the Detroit diptych (*fig. 6a*): his robe is defined by soft flowing lines, without the distinct shapes which create the folds of the garments in the Paris and Lille diptychs. This difference is rather suspicious, and recalls the tendency of forgers to tweak or over-exaggerate the style in the original.

It is when the oddities in the rendering of fabric are coupled with the differences in the way emotions are shown in the depictions of figures, faces, and gestures, that these stylistic discrepancies become more significant. The figures depicted on the Detroit diptych display far more facial and bodily emotions than do the figures of either the Paris or the Lille diptychs. Indeed, in the Paris diptych the expression on Mary's face hardly seems to change from scene to scene – from the Annunciation scene to the Crucifixion scene, her facial expressions are practically identical. The same can be said for the Lille diptych, in which, once again, Mary's face does not register the range of emotions appropriate to each scene.

The Detroit diptych is quite the opposite. Consider the figure of Mary once again: In the corner of the Crucifixion scene she wrings her hands in a very human emotional display that contrasts her expression in the Presentation at the Temple, in which her face clearly expresses joy (*figs. 4a and 5a*). This range of emotions is simply not present in the Paris or the Lille diptychs. Examine the Apostles in the Last Supper in the diptychs

and compare their facial expressions. The Apostles on the Paris diptych are all identical and fairly inexpressive, whereas in the Detroit diptych, each of the men's faces expresses clear and different signs of shock and dismay (*figs. 5b and 5a*). The question must again be asked, is this a forger's stylistic over-alteration of the Paris and Lille diptychs? Or, is this simply an idiosyncrasy of a particular artist in the group?

There are further stylistic discrepancies in the iconographic and narrative aspects of the stories depicted on the diptychs. The first major difference to note is that of spatial organization. The Lille and Paris diptychs both adhere to a very tight, figurally packed, use of space. This quality is nicely obvious in the middle register of the Lille diptych (*fig. 5c*), in which figures fill the space from top to bottom, as well as side to side. It is also quite evident in the Paris diptych in the middle register on the right (*fig. 5b*), in which the tables of the Wedding at Cana and the Last Supper stretch across the entirety of the panel, and the upper bodies of the figures fill the rest. This is a distinct feature of ivory diptychs from this time period, this style of completely filling the space is fairly consistent.⁵⁴

Once again, the Detroit diptych is significantly different than the Paris and the Lille. The figures are arranged so as to create more breathing room. For instance, the same scene as above, in the right middle register of both the Paris and Detroit diptychs, and the entire middle register of the Lille diptych, the Wedding at Cana and the Last Supper are represented. Though the Lille diptych's representation splits the two scenes across the leaves, and so includes on either side the scenes of Christ among the Doctors

⁵⁴ See *Triptych with Arms of John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter, and Diptych with Symbolic Images of the Life of Christ and the Virgin*, from Barnett (editor), *Images in Ivory*, 188, 200. Also see *Diptyque avec Scènes de la Passion*, and *Diptyque, Histoire de la Passion* from Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothique français*, Vol. 2, 308, 310.

and the Crucifixion, the entirety of the space is filled with figures. The Detroit diptych leaves a relatively large amount of space above the heads of the figures, as stated, where the Paris and Lille diptychs fill this register completely.

Thus, although the artist of the Detroit diptych has used the same scenes, and for the most part, the same figures as the artists of the Paris and Lille diptychs, he has stepped outside of the norm for gothic ivories. His use of different figural configurations and spatial relationships is not perfectly in accord with the style of French works of the early to mid 14th century in this medium.⁵⁵ The question is whether this is an example of a forger attempting to create a “medieval” work, who is unable to suppress his own training. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that this particular artist simply worked in a slightly different style than his immediate predecessors. At the same time, it is important to note that the artist of the Detroit diptych seems to have been so obstinately consistent in the implementation of his style of spatial organization that in many cases he compromised the iconographic narrative.

One example of this occurs in the bottom left register (*figs. 6a, b, and c*), where the Annunciation and the Visitation are depicted in all three diptychs. The two scenes are quite clearly separated in the Paris diptych by the slightly larger gap of space between the two scenes, and by the characters close proximity to each other within each. This tactic of separating the Annunciation and the Visitation is also marked by character interaction: Gabriel and Mary gesture toward each other, clearly implying that the two are in the same story, and Mary and Elizabeth are actually touching – an emotional physical contact that is pivotal to this particular scene. The Lille diptych’s version of this register is slightly different, as there is an extra scene included on the far right of the panel, meaning that

⁵⁵ Ibid.

there are now six figures in that space, making it all the more crowded. Nevertheless, the Annunciation and the Visitation are still quite clearly separated, using much the same tactic as in the Paris diptych. In the Detroit diptych, in keeping with the artist's tendency toward open and even spatial relations, the four figures are evenly spaced in a way that creates a greater sense of spaciousness. However, though the artist is stylistically consistent, the vast spaces between the characters detract from the original emotional impact of the biblical stories. This applies in particular to the Visitation scene.

The Visitation is an extremely touching moment in the Bible, one in which Mary and Elizabeth share the news of their pregnancies, and thus the scene is generally depicted with the two women in some sort of physical embrace.⁵⁶ The form of physical contact between the Mary and Elizabeth varies widely; some depictions, like that in the Paris diptych, portray Elizabeth's gentle touch on Mary's shoulder or waist in an acknowledgement of the miracle, others, as in the Lille diptych, portray a warm, friendly, and very personal embrace. Once again, the Detroit diptych is completely different. The artist's desire to maintain open and even spaces led to a widening of the space between Mary and Elizabeth. In this nontraditional representation of the Visitation the emotive personal nature is lost in the wide space between the two women. In this case, the artist has not only stepped outside of medieval stylistic norms, but has done so with the affect of incorrectly representing the Visitation scene.

Even more telling is the rendering of the Crucifixion and Resurrection scenes on the Detroit diptych (*figs. 4a and b*). In the Paris diptych, in accord with tradition, Christ appears on the cross with Mary below to his right, and John the Evangelist below to his

⁵⁶ For the iconography of the Visitation, see Schiller *Iconography of Christian Art*, Vol. I, 55-57, figures 130, 132, and 133.

left. In such small depictions of these scenes, only the most important figures are represented. In the Crucifixion, the figures shown below the cross include Mary and John the Evangelist. The Resurrection usually shows Christ emerging from his tomb, often flanked by the two angels announcing his Resurrection.⁵⁷ In the Detroit diptych these figures do not appear in the traditional fashion. Indeed, it seems that the artist of the Detroit diptych once again allows his desire to maintain spatial openness to supersede iconographic accuracy.

When the depiction of these scenes is compared to the same in the Paris diptych, there appears a very striking, almost startling, iconographic disparity. As usual, the Detroit diptych clearly displays a different sense of spatial organization, again with wider areas of blank space in the background. It seems that because there is such a great amount of activity in the two scenes, and thus clutter, the artist chose to eliminate some of the figures, such as the two angels that are depicted in the Paris diptych atop Christ's tomb during the Resurrection, and the people watching Christ's Ascension at the far right. By making these "minor" eliminations, the artist needed to rearrange ever so slightly some of the figures within the register in order to create the spacious and well-balanced environment that occurs throughout the diptych.

In the Paris diptych, John faces away from the cross, but the curve of his back and his body language show that he is quite obviously part of the Crucifixion scene. Though his head leans away from the cross, his shoulders are squared toward it, and his hands, holding a book, point toward the cross as well. Even the folds of the fabric of his robe flow in a curved diagonal direction from the base of his neck to his feet, showing the

⁵⁷ For the iconography of the Resurrection, see Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, Vol. II, 181-186, figure 525.

torsion of his body, implying that he is still very much involved in the scene of Christ's Crucifixion. It is as if, though he is below Christ's cross, he must turn away, either out of sorrow or respect.

The Detroit diptych also shows John as facing away, but his body language is completely different. His back is hunched at an angle that simply does not imply that his body is still facing the cross. Even more, the folds of his clothes do not fall in a manner befitting a twisting body, and his neck does not hold the same tension that turning it would cause (as compared to the Paris diptych). Furthermore, from under his robe his toes peak out, showing that his feet are pointed to the right, towards the tomb of the Resurrection. If this were not enough, he even seems to be resting his hands on Christ's grave. John's stance and his body language separate him from the Crucifixion scene, and place him squarely in the Resurrection scene, against convention and scripture.⁵⁸

John's inaccurate placement in the Detroit diptych can be seen as congruent with the artist's predilection for more the open spatial relations previously discussed: the artist removed the two small figures from atop Christ's tomb, seen in the Paris diptych, and to make the composition more balanced, moved John out of the Crucifixion scene and into the Resurrection scene. The artist, in attempting to maintain stylistic consistency created an error: John was most certainly present at the Crucifixion, but most definitely not at the Resurrection. This surprising iconographic inconsistency, going against the Bible and

⁵⁸ Different Gospels describe various figures as being present at the Resurrection: The Gospel of Matthew states that an angel, along with Mary Magdalene and "another Mary" were present (Matthew 28:1-10), the Gospel of Luke describes two angels (Luke 24:4), the Gospel of Mark there was a youth and possibly Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:5-9), while the Gospel of John describes two angels and Mary Magdalene as present (John 20:11-18). In any case, the most common features between the four are clearly the two angels and Mary Magdalene, and most definitely not John the Evangelist. DRBO.org.

artistic convention, for me, does bolster the argument against the Detroit ivory being considered authentically medieval.

Other features of the Detroit diptych are inconsistent with biblical narrative representations in ivories of this time period as well. These anomalies stand out because they occur in either two or all three of these diptychs. There are always exceptions to the rules when it comes to standard practices of Gothic religious iconography and representation, but the fact that the same anomalous features appear multiple times in these already suspiciously similar diptychs suggests that the forger's mentality came into play.

In the Detroit diptych, Christ is quite abnormally large (*fig. 4a*). He is depicted as nearly twice the size of the others around him. Even Richard Randall, who was so convinced of the Detroit diptych's authenticity, singled out this detail as odd, stating that "there are some funny details like the over-sized Christ",⁵⁹ though he suggests that this is not a serious concern. Certainly this device serves the narrative function of demonstrating Christ's importance, and in the Paris diptych, he is also oversized, but only slightly (*fig. 4b*). In the Lille diptych the Christ figure is also oversized, perhaps even more exaggeratedly so than in the Paris Diptych (*fig. 4c*). The question that arises once more is if the forger, seeing something odd and what he considered typically "medieval" in the Paris diptych, exaggerated it. Once again, just as with the two tables, a slight exaggeration in scale for effect has been taken to the extreme, and another abnormal feature has made it into the forgery.

At this point it is clear that the Detroit diptych is closer in narrative technique, style, and iconography to the Paris diptych than to the Lille diptych. If the Detroit

⁵⁹ Randall, Notes on the Detroit ivories, 1983. See Appendix B, Doc. 3.

diptych is indeed a forgery, as much of the visual analysis points to, it is necessary to consider the circumstances of its creation. In theory, the Paris diptych was the main model for a forger, while the Lille diptych served as a supplementary model, a practice that Tietze described as often used in the creation of good forgeries. The question then becomes how, and in what capacity, a forger could have seen both of these works?

Another quandary that must be answered is how two such similar diptychs – Paris and Detroit – could both be said to originate from the same location, the treasury of the Cathedral of Laon. There are three possible explanations for this. The first explanation is simply that the rumor that the Detroit diptych was at the Cathedral of Laon is false, and, whether or not the diptych was actually forged, this was still the information that Maurice Sulzbach led people to believe. If this was the case, and the Paris and the Detroit were not both housed in the Cathedral of Laon, then it is far easier to believe that all three diptychs could be authentic.

The second option is more complex: The Detroit diptych could have been a replacement for, or a revivalist replica of the Paris diptych, though unfortunately, records which might have substantiated this claim do not exist to my knowledge. If the Detroit diptych is a replacement for the Paris diptych, it is possible that photographs of the Paris and Lille diptychs would have been used. If, as the “Images in Ivory” catalog suggests, the Paris and the Lille diptychs came from the same workshop, it would make perfect sense for an artist copying or replacing the Paris diptych to use the Lille diptych as a reference. If the Detroit diptych was meant as a revivalist copy of the Paris diptych, perhaps somewhere as it changed hands, messages were mixed, and the diptych went from being listed as a copy of a medieval work from the Cathedral of Laon to being

dubbed an authentically medieval work from the Cathedral of Laon. In either case, Maurice Sulzbach auctioned off the diptych in 1922 as authentically medieval, and sadly there is no record of it before that time. This theory would fit nicely with another idea expressed in “Images in Ivory”: that many of these replicas were made to feed the public’s growing desire for the Gothic style.⁶⁰

The third option, and the one toward which I lean most, is that the diptych is indeed a forgery, and that a forger used the Paris diptych as the central model. In this scenario, the Lille diptych represents the secondary reference work which Tietze describes: a subsidiary model of a medieval diptych. Furthermore, given the iconographic and narrative consistencies between the Paris and the Lille diptychs, it would make sense that a forger would choose two such similar objects from which to work.

If the Detroit diptych is indeed a forgery modeled after the Paris diptych, with stylistic help from the Lille Diptych, an artist/forger would have to have had access either to the diptychs themselves, a photograph of the diptychs, or a cast of the diptychs in order to make such a forgery. It is unlikely that a copyist or forger would have had access to the actual original diptych, and even more unlikely that that he would have access to both the Paris and the Lille diptychs at the same time, as there is no record of them being in the same location. Interestingly, at the time that the Detroit diptych would have been forged the Paris diptych would have been in the private collection of Charles Mège, the Parisian art collector.⁶¹ So, the question that must be answered is when the Charles Mège collection was first photographed. The Charles Mège collection, the Paris diptych

⁶⁰ Barnet (editor), *Images in Ivory*, 290.

⁶¹ Gaston Migeon, “Collection de M. Ch. Mège”, *Les Arts* 86 (1909), 8.

included, was photographed and cataloged in the journal *Les Arts*, in February 1909, so a photograph would have been accessible.⁶² Furthermore, the Lille diptych is cited in the catalog as having been in Koechlin's earlier article from 1918, *les Diptyques à Décor de Roses*,⁶³ and so a photograph would have been in existence, and possibly accessible to a forger.

Unfortunately, records of casts of either the Paris diptych or the Lille Diptych being in existence before the Detroit diptych's 1922 sale have yet to be found. The discovery of the existence of casts of the Paris and/or Lille diptychs would be enough evidence to say with authority that the Detroit diptych was most likely forged. It is also a possibility that a forger used a cast of the Paris diptych alongside a photograph of the Lille diptych, or perhaps vice versa. Perhaps, as was the case with the discovery of the documents proving the inauthenticity of the Rospigliosi Cup, the Detroit diptych will be definitively proven forged if casts of the Paris and the Lille diptychs are ascertained.

⁶² Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, Vol. 2, 109.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 108.

Section VI. Conclusion

It is my view that the use of Tietze's theories along with careful comparative formal analysis is enough to determine an answer and to deem the Detroit diptych a forgery. The carbon-14 testing, though inconclusive, cannot simply be thrown out as irrelevant, as it implies the possible modern origin of the diptych. And while the lack of records with respect to the diptych's provenance before 1922 is not in-itself particularly troubling, its absence from Koechlin's catalog certainly is. These peculiarities are coupled with the artist's evident need to consistently create more open spaces in the registers, often at the expense of biblical accuracy, and the anomalous pattern of over-exaggeration, as with the over-sized Christ, among other problems. These issues all fit perfectly with the profile of the psychology of the forger, and in totality, the results quite clearly suggest that the diptych is a modern forgery.

As it is, if the Detroit diptych is authentically medieval, and it simply was carved by an individually-minded artist, as has been suggested as explanation for the peculiarities and anomalies, why are the changes not consistent? In other words, why is the technical style of the diptych so distinct from both the Lille and the Paris diptychs, while at the same time the narrative follows an identical flow to the Paris diptych – a narrative which includes not only the abnormally juxtaposed feast tables, but also the out of order Nativity scene, both of which, in the Paris diptych, were purposefully placed in an unusual manner for stylistic emphasis.

On the other hand, the Detroit diptych so closely follows the Paris diptych that it could have been a gothic revivalist copy or replica, and not necessarily a forgery specifically meant to dupe anyone into believing it to be authentically medieval. As previously discussed, Tietze defined a forgery to be an original work, created specifically to fool people, and not comparable with a copy of a work. Furthermore, as mentioned in the “Images in Ivory” catalog, not all copies of medieval works were meant to be forgeries, and in the late 18th through the early 20th century, a renewed fascination with Gothic ivories meant that many works were created specifically to evoke the Gothic style, and often used existing objects as models.⁶⁴

It is my opinion, however, that this ivory diptych is indeed a forgery, and not a revivalist copy. The many problematic portions of the diptych fit perfectly with Tietze’s concepts of the psychological workings of the forger: they are representative of a modern artist’s perceptions of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, photographs of both the Paris and the Lille diptychs were in existence prior to 1922, and therefore could have been accessible to a forger as references. Tietze’s theories, in my opinion, hold sound, and the diptych is most likely a forgery based on the Paris diptych, with the Lille diptych acting as a subsidiary reference point.

To say that the only question of this study is whether or not the Detroit diptych is a forgery is to degrade the value of the work, and of the thousands of other forged artworks. Tietze, while he studied forgeries and forgers at length, does not seem to have held his subjects in very high regard. He stated that “the ability to deceive somebody does not rank very high, and the skill of a forger is comparable to that of a parodist of actors or singers...his performance may be entertaining and even contain an element of

⁶⁴ Barnet (editor), *Images in Ivory*, 290.

constructive criticism, but nobody will believe him to be as great an artist as his victims".⁶⁵ He saw the importance of uncovering forgeries, but did not seem to consider the idea that forgeries themselves are art historically significant. He implied that once a forgery is discovered, it no longer has value, as it is no longer connected to personal emotions or feelings about a particular famous artist. The reason that so many museums do not exhibit forged objects, or objects with questionable histories, is in accordance with Tietze's ideas.

I argue that forgeries have real value and interest. It is these complex and often convoluted histories that make these objects fascinating and historically important. Indeed, as Tietze himself discussed, forgeries are themselves reflections of the eras in which they were created. As time goes on, these reflections become more and more apparent, not only allowing curators and scholars to determine authenticity in objects, but also offering interesting insight into the world in which the forgery was made: by looking at a 19th-century forgery of a medieval object, one can see a 19th-century interpretation of medieval art. In this way, forgeries are extremely enlightening, and should not be tossed aside once their inauthenticity has been uncovered.

As Anthony Cutler stated quite aptly in his 1994 book, *The Hand of the Master*, "the suspicion that things are not what they seem, or not what they appear to be, has become an intrinsic part of the modern response to ivories".⁶⁶ He is speaking of the awareness that a great many ivories in today's museums are probably forged, and that now the uncovering of fakes is a large and accepted part of curating. Indeed, the

⁶⁵ Tietze, *Genuine and False*, 73.

⁶⁶ Anthony Cutler, *The Hand of the Master: Craftsmanship, Ivory, and Society in Byzantium*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994, 11.

uncovering of these forgeries and the solving of these mysteries, is, in my opinion, one of the most fascinating parts of art history.

In examining the Detroit diptych, it is evident that authentic or forged, it is still a masterpiece of ivory relief and a skilled work. If it is indeed forged, as I suspect, it is an excellent example of the processes of forgery, and the uncovering of forgeries. It can serve as an instructive example to curators and viewers as to exactly how, where, and ultimately why forgers make their mistakes. Objects such as the Detroit diptych, including both those that are proven forgeries and those still surrounded by questions, should be brought to the public's attention: an object displayed with the evidence for and against its authenticity would make for a fascinating display. And perhaps in the future, the mysteries around potentially forged works can be more easily solved, and these objects can be more thoroughly appreciated.

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Appendix A: Illustrations



Figure 1. Diptych with Scenes from the Lives of Christ and the Virgin. Ivory, early 14th century, DIA 40.165. Photograph: Detroit Institute of Art.

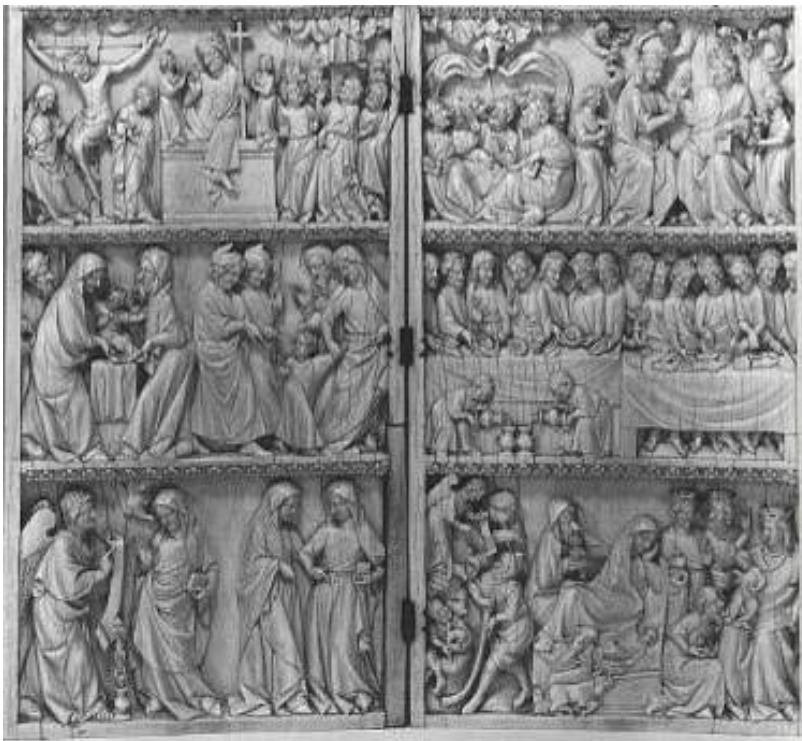


Figure 2. Diptyque avec Scènes de la vie de la Vierge et de la Passion. Ivory, 1330-1350, Louvre OA 9959. Photograph: http://cartelen.louvre.fr/cartelen/visite?srv=car_not_frame&idNotice=7109

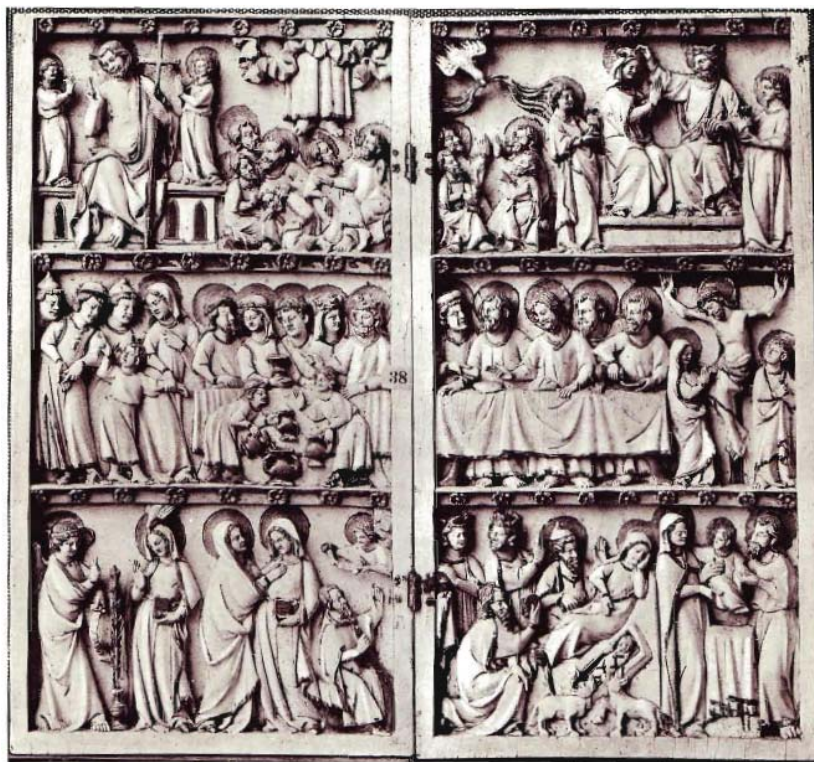
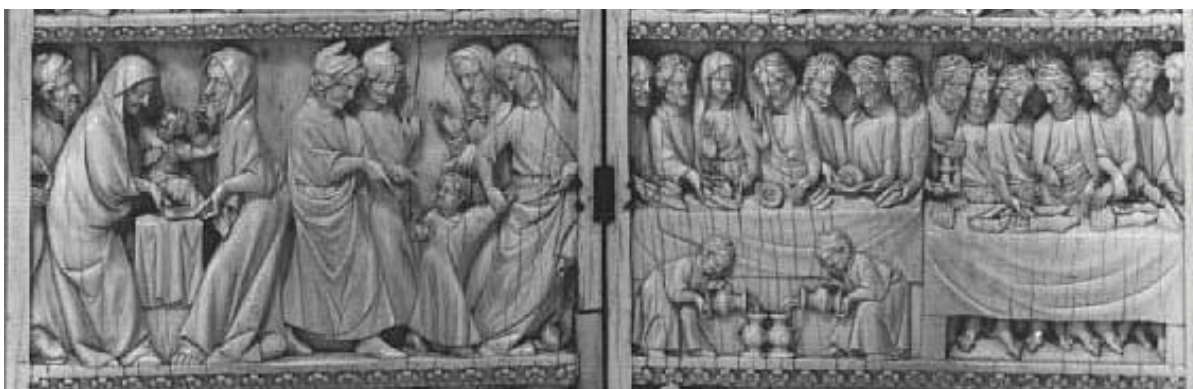


Figure 3. Diptych with Scenes from the Lives of Christ and the Virgin. Ivory, late 13th – early 14th century. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille. Photograph: *Les ivoires gothiques français*, 1924.



Figures 4a, b, and c. Detail: Upper register of the Detroit, Paris and Lille diptychs.



Figures 5a, b, and c. Detail: Middle register of Detroit, Paris and Lille diptychs.



Figures 6a, b, and c. Detail: Lower register of Detroit, Paris and Lille diptychs.



Figure 7. Rospigliosi Cup. Gold and enamel. 1870-90. Metropolitan Museum of Art 14.40.667. Photograph: <http://www.cardcow.com/156563/the-rospigliosi-cup-art/>



Figure 8. Martyrdom of St. Lawrence. Manuscript leaf miniature. Late 18th century. New York, Private Collection. Photograph: *The Spanish Forger*, 1978.



Figures 9a and b. *Transfiguration* and *Baptism*. Cloisonné enamel. Early 19th century. DIA 28.57 and 39.647. Photograph: Detroit Institute of Art.



Figure 10. *Triptych with Virgin in Glory*. Wood, ivory, and iron. Late 19th century. CAM 1922.2. Photograph: *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age*, 1997.

Appendix B: Documents from the file of 40.165, chronologically ordered



The Walters Art Gallery

600 NORTH CHARLES STREET, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201 (301) 547-9000

November 11, 1982

Mr. Peter Barnet
European Sculpture & Decorative Arts Department
The Detroit Institute of Arts
5200 Woodward Avenue
Detroit, MICH 48202

Dear Peter:

Thank you for so quickly supplying photos of the Detroit ivories. It is quite a little cache! A few are superb, like the big diptych, 40.165, and the little 43.156. Others are very interesting, such as the provincial diptych 42.138, the ivory with St. George as donor, the 1/2 murder of Becket, and the one with the quatrefoil enframements. We have a Virgin closely related to 64.71, which is late 13th century. However, have a careful look at the Child's head and right arm which appear to be restorations.

I am in the last moments of finishing our catalogue, and cannot work on your group until after Christmas, but I will certainly do it and send you comparative material. I also want to come out and look at some of them closely, such as the circular battle scene. The only apparent fakes are the two romantic mirror cases with figures around two fountains, (23.127).

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

Richard H. Randall, Jr.
Curator of Medieval Art

RHR:cd

Neil Stratford, Keeper of Medieval and Later Antiquities, The British Museum
January 19, 1983

Ivories:

- 42.140 circular box, definitely French ("there are no Gothic ivories from Italy"), see "flamboyant" style. Someone should be able to identify source of the battle scene, copied from a triumphal arch.
- 43.456 dated c.1340
- 26.284 fake
- 42.136 lovely secular piece
- 40.165 Rosette diptych, doubtful, seems a grand 19th century imitation.
- 23.138 out down from a three tier diptych.
- 24.69 belongs with a group of diptychs with chamfered backs, second $\frac{1}{4}$ of XIV century
- 43.460 Becket scene on a Gothic ivory is very rare.
- 43.459 (filed as German), odd object, see slots in back. Could these be storage for styli?
- 43.458 worrisome piece, peculiar, iconography wrong, no means of attaching to tablet or diptych.
- 70.396 Tannahill virgin, no good. face of Christ and gesture of benediction all wrong.
- 43.454 possibly a fake
- 70.398 Spanish 19th century Madonna?
- 70.397 absolutely XIV century

- 42.137-136 Secular diptych is suspicious. Where is lover's left foot? The pin holes for the hinges are too small, don't make sense. See ill. of fake ivories in Kofler-T. sale catalog.
- 41.2 Two sided game board. Very exciting! This is the only board Randall knows from a workshop which produced many extant chess boxes. The group has been localized all over Europe, but key to origin is a box in Burrell Coll. (Glasgow) which is documented Upper Rhine, 1440. The polychromy here is good original. (Note Randall requests this information not be published until his Walters catalog comes out.
- 25.91 Fax. Dutch from Utrecht. Incredibly rare See Walters 71.84, very close, but broken. DIA piece is best Dutch ivory around. Should be in the Rijksmuseum! See R. Koch article in Princeton Art Museum Record. There is an inscription on back.
- 43.454 Flemish or N. French. Not as interesting as 25.91. Dates 1440-60.
- 70.397 Nice piece, should be cleaned and exhibited. Second quarter of XIV century.
- 40.28 XIV century Spanish? see examples in Koechlin. The right hand of Virgin replaced. It is an odd piece and not certain about it.
- 70.456 Absolutely right. Has had hard use. French mid-XIV century.
- 70.398 Everything wrong.
- 41.107 Chess piece, XVI century German or French. Very rare. Cannot be earlier than late XV century because of back plate (costume). Must be early XVI. Piece should be exhibited with 41.2
- SC70.51 Copy of Trapani Madonna. Could be as late as XVII century.
- 70.455 Compare to Walters 71.97. Not great quality, but genuine. See Charles V exh. cat. King gave a diptych to St.-Denis to be used on book covers. Piece of same group as DIA. Dates 1370's. Quality rough but good enough for king. Series of boxes produced by this group which all have St. Margaret scenes around sides and scenes of life of Christ on top.
- 25.177 XV century. Italian. checkerboard later.
- 66.385 XVII century knife handle.
- 66.128 Falcon hood stand. This piece should be out. Date 1440-60. See Koechlin no. 947. Fleur-de-lis is not necessarily French.
- 26.167 Embriachi panels. Perfectly fine, especially large ones.
- 40.165 Rosette diptych. Super Duper! A great piece! See faint remains of polychromy and gilt. Perfectly genuine. There are some funny details like over-size Christ, but no problem.

40.165



The Walters Art Gallery

600 NORTH CHARLES STREET, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201-5285 (301) 971-9000

2 February 1983

Mr. Peter Barnett
Institute for the Arts
Detroit

Dear Peter:

Two more minor discoveries concerning your ivories are enclosed. The more important is a diptych in the Louvre which is iconographically identical to your big diptych, but slightly earlier in style. Both must be based on the same or a similar model, and you will note that the Resurrection is slightly too large in the Paris example also. The changes in drapery and poses (as Mary and John in the Crucifixion) are good indications of a slightly different interpretation and later hand.

The British Museum secular panel is an example, though a poor one, of the iconography, drapery type, and gestures of half of your questionable secular diptych. I am sure there is a finer quality model somewhere, but have not been able to put my hand on it. However, this makes me more suspicious of the Detroit piece.

With best wishes,

Richard A. Randall, Jr.
Curator of Medieval Art



CONFERENCE ON GOTHIC IVORIES IN AMERICAN COLLECTIONS

London (B.M.) March, 1988

(comments on DIA ivories by Richard Randall, Danielle Gaborit, Charles Little, Paul Williamson, Neil Stratford, Norbert Jopek (Trier), Peter Barnet)

- 70.397 Small Virgin statuette. General agreement that this is a nice piece. The type dates from 2/4 of the XIV c., but this could be a bit later. Cf. statuette in W. Wixom private coll.. Perhaps put this piece out on view. Def. French.
- 64.71 Large seated Virgin statuette. Was in Rothschild coll., then Schevitch coll. (1906). Examine crown for recutting, perhaps top of head with crown is a new slice added. Head of child is def. restoration, but leave it on. French, prob. Paris, c. 1300. It can't be earlier because of the standing child.
- 43.451 St. George plaque. Randall believes it is center of triptych. Examine for traces of hinges on both sides! Most others doubt the authenticity of the piece. Very Romantic.
- 40.165 Rose group diptych. Rejected by most as a fake, a near copy of the Louvre piece (A 9959). D. Gaborit is not sure it is a fake, just a bit awkward. Perhaps a good candidate for carbon-14 dating with use of an accelerator.
- 42.135 Rose and arcade diptych. French, late 3/4 of XIV, probably not Paris
- 24.69 Adoration/Crucifixion diptych. Paris 2/4 of XIV c. See Koechlin #481. Very close to V and A piece and two in the Louvre are in Fastes du Gothique cat.
- 43.458 Tablet with Crucifixion and Entombment. Poor quality, v. late 14 th. c or c. 1400
- 43.456 Beautiful Crucifixion Diptych. Many iconographic peculiarities: serpent under cross, sun and moon carved under the wings of the cross. General agreement that piece is not genuine. Copied from a model like the Cleveland Crucifixion? See also on this piece the little feet under candlesticks, v. peculiar.
- 23.138 Top of plaque with Coronation scene. late and provincial.

40.165



The University of Arizona

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 Faculty of Science
 Department of Physics
 Building #81
 Tucson, Arizona 85721
 (602) 621-6820

621-6216

July 11, 1989

Mr. Peter Barnet,
 Associate Curator,
 Detroit Institute of Arts,
 5200 Woodward Ave.,
 Detroit, MI 48202.

Dear Mr. Barnet,

The summary of the results obtained on the ivory samples is given below. As we have discussed, these values all turned out to be higher than "modern" (1950AD), due to unknown causes. We expect samples from the period 1955-date to have elevated C-14 due to production of C-14 in the atmosphere by atomic weapons tests prior to the 1963 test-ban treaty.

Date no.	Sample	C-14 percent modern
AA-3785	40.165	213.1±2.0%
AA-3786	41.125	113.7±1.1%
AA-3787	42.136	124.9±5.0%
AA-3788	42.138	176.9±3.1%
AA-3789	42.140	150.4±1.2%
AA-3790	43.455	121.0±1.7%
AA-3791	43.456	123.9±1.1%
AA-3792	43.461	157.8±1.8%
AA-3793	66.128	116.1±1.1%
AA-3794	70.396	120.0±1.6%

Some comments can be made on the above results. Firstly, the conventional interpretation of the results on samples 66.128 and 70.396, which the museum acquired recently, is that they date from the late 1950's. The samples which we know were in your museum since the 1940's are a problem. Two of them, 40.165 and 42.138 have very high levels of C-14 at or higher than that at the maximum of the C-14 "bomb" curve in 1963-64AD.

We have discussed the possible production of C-14 in samples due to potential irradiation by thermal neutron screening devices (TNA) at airports. From our discussions with the manufacturer, Science Applications Inc. (SAIC) and the postal inspector in Phoenix, we have established that:

a.) the irradiation of any samples in a TNA device would only generate about one millionth of the "modern" level of C-14 in any sample.

b.) TNA devices are currently installed only in San Francisco and Los Angeles airports for screening of passenger baggage, and regular mail is not screened normally.

Thus, this idea seems an unlikely source of the high C-14 levels. This leaves only the explanation of contamination with artificial tracer C-14, such as used frequently by biomedical laboratories.

As we have also discussed, you indicated that the Founders' Society would probably not be able to pay the full \$4,000 for these measurements, given their ambiguous results. I would like to ask you to decide what would be an appropriate charge for our time on these samples. I suggest perhaps \$1,500 would be appropriate, this would cover some of our costs. Perhaps you could let me know so that we can clear our books on these samples.

Yours sincerely,


Dr. A. J. Jull

40.165

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Radiocarbon Analysis Report

November 29, 1990

Submitter: P. Barnet, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit MI

These results are the average of 2 machine-ready targets (normal precision) and have been corrected for natural and sputtering fractionation to a base of $\delta^{13}\text{C} = -25\text{‰}$. The sample ages are quoted as uncalibrated conventional radiocarbon dates in years before present (BP), using the Libby ^{14}C meanlife of 8033 years. The errors represent 68.3% confidence limits. The yields of these samples was low compared to ivory samples which have been successfully dated in the past. In particular sample TO-1973 was too small to produce an graphite target. It is unlikely that this sample can be successfully dated even if more material would be made available as the very low yield implies a large probability of secondary carbonate contamination. For sample TO-1974 a very thin target was produced but the results of this analysis were unreliable and have therefore not been quoted. If more material would be made available this samples could be successfully dated. There minimum required material is estimated to be 500 mg.

Sample Identification	Description	Weight used (mg)	Carbon extracted (μg)	IsoTrace Lab number	Age (years BP)
23.149	ivory	271	350	TO-1972	360 \pm 140
440.165	ivory	185	50	TO-1973	
66.127	ivory	207	140	TO-1974	

I would like to hear your comments on these results. If these results are used in a publication, I would appreciate it if you could send me a reprint. It is possible that the yield problems we have had with these samples, and other ivory samples recently processed, is related to the ivory type (walrus versus elephant). It has also been suggested that it might be related to the preservation of the ivory. We will be checking this out, starting with the analysis of walrus ivory. In this respect it would be useful if you could give me more information on these artefacts, in particular on the possibility of it being ~~walrus ivory~~.



Dr. R. P. Beukens