Plaque: st luke - St Luke

Object: Plaque: st luke

Place of origin: Meuse (made)

Date: ca. 1160-1180 (made)

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Copper-gilt, with champlevé enamel

Museum number: M.208-1938

Gallery location: Medieval & Renaissance, Room 8, The William and Eileen Ruddock Gallery, case 21

Public access description

The four pin-holes in the corners of this plaque show that it once formed part of a larger object. It would have been one of a group of four, each showing one of the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Images of the four evangelists appeared on a wide range of objects, including book-covers, crosses, reliquaries and portable altars.

The diamond, or lozenge shape of this plaque makes it unusual. Another example with no surviving enamel, showing St Matthew, is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. It is thought to come from the same set as the V&A plaque: it is of similar size, of similar design and has the same horizontal name band and border. It has a letter C engraved on the reverse, while the V&A plaque has an A. These assembly marks would have enabled a goldsmith to assemble the finished object correctly.

It is likely that these plaques came originally from the stem of a standing candlestick. A candlestick at Bamberg has ornamental enamel plaques of this shape, and an example at Brunswick has enamels of the evangelists in the same position, though the plaques are a different shape.

Descriptive line

Lozenge-shaped copper plaque, depicting St Luke

Physical description

Lozenge-shaped copper plaque, with four pin-holes, one in each corner. The face, hands, and foot of the saint, the bull, the inscription band and parts of the seat are gilded. The remainder of the plaque is enamelled: the enamel decoration has a distinctive palette of blues and greens.

The full-length figure of St Luke is shown seated and facing towards the right. He has a green and yellow halo, and a beard, and is wearing a full-length turquoise and white robe and green and yellow cloak. He is seated on a blue and white stool with arch-shaped decoration on its side. The drapery of his robe swirls back over his proper right leg, and his proper right bare foot is visible. He holds a quill in his proper right hand and a gilt knife in his left, and is writing in a book, leant on a sloping writing desk. His symbol, the bull, looks towards him from the right-hand corner of the plaque, out of a blue and white cloud.

A horizontal band, running behind the saint at shoulder-height, reads ‘L/VCA’.

A turquoise enamel border runs around the edge of the plaque. The reverse is plain copper, with traces of gilt around the edge. There is an assembly mark ‘C’ scratched on, and an indent in the copper. A painted inscription ‘W.L.H. 2002’ presumably refers to W.L. Hildburgh. The letters AW are also lightly scratched on.

Dimensions

Height: 5.1 cm, Width: 5.1 cm, Depth: 0.3 cm

Museum number

M.208-1938

Object history note

Bought from Dr W L Hildburgh FSA in 1938

Historical context note

The original function of this plaque is not known for certain. The four pin-holes in its corners indicate that it once formed part of a larger object. It would have been one of a group of four plaques, each showing one of the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Images of the four evangelists were ubiquitous, and appeared on a wide range of objects, including book-covers, crosses, reliquaries and portable altars, (see Nigel Morgan’s essay, Rhein und Maas: Kunst und Kultur 800-1400, vol 2, Cologne, 1973, p.269 ff.). But the lozenge shape of this plaque makes it unusual.

Another lozenge-shaped example with no surviving enamel, showing St Matthew, is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (25.120.449: J. Breck, ‘Notes on some Mosan Enamels’, Metropolitan Museum Studies, 1, 1929, pp.88-9; Verdier 1975). It is thought to come from the same set of evangelists as the V&A plaque: it is of similar size (5.4cm x 5.2 cm, as opposed to 5.1cm x 5.1cm), shows similar areas (eg face/hands/feet) as being reserved, the figure holds a quill and a knife in a similar way, it has the same horizontal name band and enamelled
border, and a similar assembly mark (A rather than C) on the reverse.

A further lozenge-shaped plaque with an evangelist (this time, St Mark), is illustrated in N. Stratford, Catalogue of Medieval Enamels in the British Museum: vol. II, Northern Romanesque Enamel, London, 1993, p.31, fig. 5a). At the time of publication, this was on loan from St Edmund Hall, Oxford to the British Museum. It comes from the same object as two plaques of St Luke and St John, now in the Cathedral Treasury at Troyes (Stratford, 1993, pp.36-7, n.83). The existence of another group of evangelists on lozenge-shaped plaques demonstrates that the type is not unique.

The shrine of St Alban, from Nesle-la-Reposte (restored in the 19th century), now in the treasury at Troyes Cathedral, has lozenge-shaped plaques with half-length figures (Stratford, 1993, plate 134).

But Nigel Morgan (Rhein und Maas, vol. 2, p.270) suggests convincingly that these plaques are most likely to have come originally from a candlestick. He points out that the Bamberg candelstick (ibid., p.265, cat. no. H3) has ornamental enamels of this shape on its knops, and the Brunswick candlestick has enamels of the evangelists in the same position, though not on lozenge-shaped plaques.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O120850/st-luke-plaque-st-luke-unknown/