Plaque - Plaque of an angel

Object: Plaque

Place of origin: Cologne (possibly, made)

Date: ca. 1160-1170 (made)

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Copper gilt with champlevé enamel, and cloisonné details

Museum number: 6816-1860

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

Public access description

This is one of two similar half-length figures of angels holding texts from the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. The same subject occurs in various other enamels (eg on the Alexander head reliquary from Stavelot (now in Brussels), dated 1145, and on the Mosan-influenced candelabrum at Aachen cathedral).

The plaque (with 6817-1860) was probably originally placed between the arcades on the sides of a shrine. There is a Mosan-Rhenish tradition of such decoration, which flanks the major figures of a shrine with supporting allegorical subject matter (eg the St Albinus shrine, in the Treasury of St. Pantaleon, Cologne (c. 1166), which has spandrel angels, with Virtues and with the doves of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit).

Descriptive line

Plaque depicting the half-length figure of an angel

Physical description

Concave copper plaque with a circular top, and curved arcs cut out from the bottom on both sides, to make a point. The upper edge has a beaded edge, above a flat border with an inscription: ‘BEATI.MITES Q.I.P.TERRA’. The angel is shown half-length, with a halo (green and yellow enamel) and wings (blue, grey white and black enamel) either side of his head. His face is pale enamel while his hair is dark blue and gold. He wears a blue robe and a lilac-brown cloak. In his proper left hand, he holds an orb(?). His proper right hand is raised in front of him. At the bottom of the plaque is a schematic cloud, represented by blue-white enamel overlapping semi-circles, edged in gold. The background of the plaque is copper-gilt. There are four pin-holes spaced along the underside of the inscribed border.

Dimensions

Height: 7.4 cm, Width: 8.8 cm, Depth: 1.2 cm, Weight: 0.1 kg

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Historical context note

The half-length figure of an angel is accompanied by a text from the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Blessed are the meek’ (Matthew 5:5). The same subject occurs in various other enamels (eg on the Alexander head reliquary from Stavelot (now in Brussels), dated 1145, and on the Mosan-influenced candelabrum at Aachen cathedral. There are plaques of similar shape and scale (though with a flattened base, rather than a point), showing personifications of Religion and Faith, in the British Museum (M&LA 78, 11-1, 15-16). They also differ in the detail of their beaded upper border. They are catalogued in Stratford 1993 as being Mosan, c. 1160-70. Falke 1904 also refers to a similar angel plaque in the Berlin Kunstgewerbemuseum, but gives no further details.

The plaque (with 6817-1860) was almost certainly originally placed between the arcades on the sides of a shrine. There is a Mosan-Rhenish tradition of such decoration, which flanks the major figures of a shrine with supporting allegorical subject matter. There are two main types of enamelled spandrel plaques on the surviving shrines. Either they are acting as background behind separately-cast half-length figures (eg St Anna shrine, at Siegburg (c.1183) (Ornamenta Ecclesiae 1972, cat. no. F90). Or they can be figured enamels of this type (eg the St Albinus shrine, in the Treasury of St. Pantaleon, Cologne (perhaps dating to c. 1196) (Ornamenta Ecclesiae 1972, cat. no. E80). This shrine has spandrel angels, with Virtues and with the doves of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. The plaques with doves illustrated in this catalogue have similar upper borders, with inscriptions, and go down to points at the bottom in the same way as the V&A plaques.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O120838/plaque-of-an-angel-plaque-unknown/