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The following papers were edited by the coordinator and represent the research presented at the Experts’ Meeting on Enamel on Metal Conservation, at the National Museum in Warsaw, 19-20th May 2016. The papers are listed by programme session topic and in order of presentation, except for the posters, presented at the end of the book. In the table of contents only the name of the authors present during the meeting are listed, whereas in the abstract all authors are cited.

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The Saint Valerie and Saint Stephen Limoges enamelled reliquary caskets in Ourense Cathedral

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Introduction
In June 1998 three small enamelled caskets were found in the altar of Ourense Cathedral. These were found inside a large chest devoted to Saint Euphemia, along with some other carved and embossed boxes that were of different sizes and materials (copper, wood and bone). Their existence was hitherto unknown.

In this extended abstract I will focus on two documented Limoges enamelled reliquary caskets devoted to Saint Stephen and Saint Valerie. These objects are currently kept in the Ourense Cathedral museum. They are small, rectangular reliquary caskets that contain a number of bundles with numerous small relics of saints who so far have not been identified, with the exception of some small remains belonging to Saint Adrian, Saint Eulalia and Saint Sebastian.

We do not know how these objects came to be inside the casket. The first references to enamelled objects in the Ourense Cathedral date from the 16th century and come from the chronicle of King Felipe II, Ambrosio de Morales, who was sent to check on and make an inventory of the historical and artistic heritage of the kingdoms of León and Galicie. His visit to the Ourense Cathedral has left us evidence that it housed "many small relics placed into most ancient well-crafted enamel caskets, though everything is mixed up because the titles that were in tiny scrolls have fallen out of the bundles." (Morales 1576). It is possible that this description corresponds to the Limoges enamel caskets found in the high altar of the Ourense Cathedral, one of which shows the martyrdom of Saint Valerie and the other the stoning of Saint Stephen.

The reliquary casket of Saint Valerie
This casket is small, rectangular (13.5 x 12.5 x 6 cm), with a wooden core, covered with champlèvé enamelled and gilt copper plaques and appliqué heads (Fig. 1 and 2). It is engraved, chiselled and gilded, with a two-sided top. It is mounted on four prismatic supports. The original cresting has not survived. The casket has a door on the lower back side, on which the drilled holes of a lock can be seen.

Figure 1
Reliquary casket of Saint Valerie. Obverse.
Museo Catedral de Ourense, Spain
It is in fairly good condition, though there are gaps in the enamelling on the reverse and repainting work on the bordering along the side gables. The colour palette used is blue (dark, medium and light) for the backgrounds, turquoise for the strips and green, yellow, red and white for the ornamentation.

The larger side of the casket presents the most traditional and dramatic scene of the martyrdom of Saint Valérie. This is the episode that was most commonly represented and disseminated by Limoges artisans from the first half of the 12th century (François 1999). Valérie is considered to be the protomartyr of Aquitaine and her life appears linked to that of Saint Martial, the first bishop of Limoges.

The scene of the martyrdom appears on the front part of the casket on two levels. It is intended to be read from left to right and from top to bottom. The legend has it that Valérie, daughter of the Governor of Aquitaine, was sentenced to death after rejecting marriage to Duke Esteban de Tève. The upper part depicts her beheading and the moment when the executioner cuts her head off with a sword in the presence of an unknown character, who observes the scene with a gesture of pain, his left hand brought to his head and his right pointing to the act. To the right is a flowering tree and a mound, reminding us that the scene occurred outside according to the legend (Fig. 1).

The episode of the cephalophore miracle is shown in the lower part. Saint Valérie, having been decapitated, kneels in front of Saint Martial, who was officiating at the altar of Limoges Cathedral, and gives him her head before the astonished face of the executioner who tries to keep his sword in its sheath. The hand of God emerges from a cloud, blessing the scene.

On the back of the piece a folding door opens up. The decoration is geometric on an orthogonal frame, enclosed by thick bands of turquoise that frame four-leaf clovers with red stamens, the petals of which alternate between yellow and blue-white. There are two plates on both sides of the door, decorated with a wavy decoration and a continuation of the bordering of crosses that frames the entire piece (Fig. 2).

The side gables show two haloed figures standing under an arcade. They are dressed in tunics and capes, each holding a book. They stand out against a paradiseical background that is ornamented with rosettes.

The graphics of the figures etched and in reserve display a simple but elegant implementation that contrasts with the fluidity of the folding of the clothing of some of the characters who are moving in a dance-like way. This type of piece responds to a type of Limousin style of production series, which was based in Limoges during the first quarter of the 13th century and spread widely.

The reliquary casket of Saint Stephen

This reliquary casket has a prismatic structure with gable roof (Fig. 3). It is topped with a cresting of openwork horseshoe arches and three spherical appendages. It contains many small bundles that house small relics of saints, some of them with the saint’s name, a testament to their holiness.

The wooden interior that forms the structure of the casket is covered by eight copper plaques (one is missing) with champlévé enamelling. There are chiselled and gilt figures in reserve, with applique heads. The colour palette...
of Limoges, with Bishop Saint Martial, evangéliser of Aquitaine and the first bishop of Limoges, and on the other Saint Stephen, another Limousin saint.

What we have here is therefore Limousin work intended for a local clientele. This testifies to the spread of devotion along the pilgrimage routes and highlights the importance of the relationships maintained between the Ourense and Limoges prelates in around the first third of the 13th century.

Similar pieces with the same iconography can be found in Germany, Austria, Spain, France, Italy, Poland and the United States.

References