

## The Treasury of the Sainte Chapelle

***st* June 27<sup>th</sup> August 2001**

Richelieu Wing, Ground Level

The exhibition is organized with the support of *The Florence Gould Foundation*



Internal part of the Great Shrine, towards 1500 © Stonyhurst College, GB.

Exhibition from the Department of Decorative Arts of the Louvre Museum, with the help of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

**Curators :** Jannic Durand, Chief Curator from the Department of Decorative Arts, and Marie-Pierre Laffitte, Chief Curator from the Manuscripts Department at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

**Location :** Richelieu wing, Ground Level

**Opening hours :** everyday, except Tuesday, from 9.00 am to 5.45 pm and until 21.30 pm on Wednesday

**Access :** free with the Museum ticket.

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Parisian breviary « Ostention of the Holy Relics », XV<sup>th</sup>, © Châteauroux, bibliothèque municipale.

The exhibition recalls the history of the treasury of the Sainte Chapelle in Paris, one of the most prestigious from the mediaeval West, which was assembled by Saint Louis around the Crown of Thorns and important relics relative to Christ's Passion from the Imperial treasury of Constantinople.

This exhibition, which deals at the same time with history and art, tries to enlighten concretely, through this unique collection from Saint Louis, and for which he constructed the Sainte Chapelle in 1248, an exemplary episode of the relics' cult in the middle of the XIIIth century. The exhibition tries also to follow the fate of this royal and liturgical treasury from the XIIIth century to the French Revolution.

Through the exhibition, and beyond the relics' history and their parisian remains, people should be able to discover or to rediscover some of the great masterpieces from the mediaeval and the Renaissance Art, which are brought together for the first time.

### Round the exhibition :

- The exhibition's catalogue was written by the exhibition curators , Jannic Durand and Marie-Pierre Laffitte, with the help of many collaborators. 304 p., 190 ill. bl. & wh. and 80 color ill., 22x28 cm, appro. 290 F, édition RMN.
- A children booklet by Dorota Giovannoni, 20 F. Editions Musée du Louvre.
- On 13th June 2001 at 12.30 am, a "**Musée-musées conference**", at the Auditorium du Louvre : « Saintes Chapelles and their treasuries : particularities, fate and future » by F. Baron, Chief Honorary Curator.
- The exhibition, moreover, is in keeping with all the planned events of the **XXth International Congress of Byzantine Studies** in Paris which will take place from 19<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> August 2001 and which includes :
  - An exhibition of *the fifty most beautiful greek manuscripts from the Byzantine period which are preserved* at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (French National Library). The exhibition takes place at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Richelieu Building, from 20<sup>th</sup> August to 10<sup>th</sup> September 2001.
  - An exhibition called "*Byzantium rediscovered* » explaining, through documents and pictures, the part travellers and erudites played in the developement of the Byzantine studies in France since the XVIIIth century in the Chapelle de la Sorbonne, from 20<sup>th</sup> August to 10<sup>th</sup> September 2001.
- Exceptionally on the occasion of the exhibition, the Christ's Crown and a fragment of the Holy Cross will be shown to the public in Notre-Dame, every Friday afternoon.
- A conference will take place on 1st June in **Notre-Dame**. One will deal with the theme of the Passion's relics, in a theological, cultural and historical way.



*Binding of the Gospels, end of XIIIth , © BNF.*

When Saint Louis receives the relics and leaves them in the Sainte Chapelle that he founded, he repeats what so many eastern emperors had already done before him : he shows his piety towards Christ, obtains holy objects which appear being substitutes and early beginnings of holy places he dreams of conquering and, for Christendom, he asserts how eminent his Kingdom is within whole Europe.

For the Holy Relics' arrival in Paris, Saint Louis decides to raise a new palatine chapelle for, and surrounding, the Relics.



*Virgin with a child from the Sainte Chapelle (detail), XIII<sup>th</sup> Musée du Louvre, © RMN – Beck / Coppola*



*Cantoral stick from the Sainte Chapelle, IVth and XIVth cent., © BNF.*

### **The Passion's Relics from Constantinople to Paris.**

Everything begins with the account of the invention of the Holy Cross found by Saint Helena, who then gave it to her son, Emperor Constantin, at the beginning of the IVth century. Ever since then, Byzantine Emperors have tried to reassemble many dominical relics (the Crown of Thorns, the Holy Cross, the Holy Spear, the Christ's funeral linens...) invented – found – on the Holy Lands.

The collection of the Imperial Palace in Constantinople fills out little by little especially thanks to important relics' translations (Saint John the Baptist's Chief, the miraculous blood...). This collection attracts lots of travellers in the capital of the Byzantine Empire and raised up occidental interest and covetousness.

In 1204, during the fourth crusade, Constantinople is captured ; the relics fall into the latin Emperors hands, until Beaudoin II, ruined, is forced to give them up to the King of France, Louis IX, who is to become Saint Louis, between 1239 and 1242.

Thus, if the relics' process from Jerusalem to Constantinople, and then from Constantinople to Paris, by means of the crusades' movement, is specific to the mediaeval reality, it is too the result of exceptional historical circumstances : the act of conquest from the Fourth Crusade Knights in 1204, of the Byzantine Empire, and the expansion of the French Kingdom and at last the part played by the personality of Saint Louis.

### **The constitution of a treasury around the Relics**

Saint Louis' twenty two relics are apparently brought into France in their Byzantine reliquaries. Only two elements of the Sepulchre Stone reliquary, remaining today at the Louvre, enable us to understand how beautiful it must have appeared at that time to the people in Constantinople, not to mention the enigmatic reliquary which surrounded the Great Cameo of France, the largest and most extraordinary cameo that Antiquity ever bequeathed to us. Since their arrival, most of the relics have been transfered in new crystal reliquaries in order to make them visible when one opens "the Great Shrine", which is a colossal 3-meters reliquary, placed in the higher chapelle of the Sainte Chapelle.

At the same time, Saint Louis adds reliquaries and liturgical objects to his foundation. A few pieces from the Sainte Chapelle symbolize it in a most emblematic way through the preciosity of the materials and the quality of the work. For instance, the three evangelistaries from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, with their golden, gilt silver and precious stones bindings or moreover the famous large ivory Virgin of the Louvre. The exhibition should then enable the public to understand better what art was in Paris under Saint Louis, more precisely between 1240 and 1270, which coincides with the arrival of a new gothic art.

### **The treasury of the Sainte Chapelle until the Revolution**

From XIIIth century to the French Revolution, kings kept enriching Saint Louis' Foundation. Evangelistaries and liturgical manuscripts, silk mitres, ivories, carved or enamelled retables came thus to complete it. One can mention among others the cantoral stick made out of gilt silver, upon which there is an antic bust of Constantin and the evangelistary with the golden binding, also called the Apocalypse, offered by Charles V.

This treasury also has personal keepsakes from the King, like the psalm book, today at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, with which he is said to have learn how to read.

### **After the Sainte Chapelle**

From Saint Louis' relics, only the Crown of Thorns and a piece of the Holy Cross still remain today – they were kept since 1804-1805 in the Treasury of Notre-Dame de Paris. All the others have disappeared under the Revolution or during the 1830 Revolution when the archbishop's palace was sacked.

Since Byzantium, the mystic surrounding Christ's Crown thus survives. The procession of Pope John-Paul II which brought the relics to the Sainte Chapelle, during the World Youth Days, have shown it one more time.

