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Collecting (and Display)

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The history of collecting in the Middle Ages has only rarely been the subject of sustained research. There are of course publications on the history of museums and the original, though isolated, works of Kryzsztof Pomian. Generally speaking, however, the subject has remained a *terra incognita* where one may find a few discreet and repetitive hints about collections but without any critical basis to their study. One of the subjects regularly brought up is the collection of Antique statues which the bishop of Winchester, Henry of Blois, assembled on his journey to Rome between 1149 and 1150;[1] another case is the clever display of some of the items belonging to the treasure of St.-Denis, after the abbey was reconstructed by Abbot Suger; also often mentioned are the Crusaders in Constantinople, their greed mingled with wonder when they discovered the riches of the city and its churches, true *emporia* of relics.[2] The secondary literature is full of similar accounts, dispersed within a multitude of monographs which should without any doubt be part of that history. Yet much material still remains to be analyzed and, above all, synthesized. This chapter endeavors to suggest the initial steps toward this, and hopes to bring out new topics to investigate and to deal with.

Introduction

Is it correct to talk of "collecting" in the Middle Ages? Admittedly, if we define the collection as an assembly of *chosen* objects (for their beauty, rarity, curious

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character, documentary value, or expense), no such thing existed during that period. Assembling a body of objects presupposes the presence of an individual, a collector. It is he or she who makes a deliberate choice. However, between the private collections to be found in Antique Rome (which also survive in Constantinople after the fall of the Roman Empire[3]) and the emergence of the lay collector in the fourteenth century, one of the signs of early humanism,[4] we may consider treasures as the only medieval collections of which we have documentary evidence, which are commonly considered as collections without collectors (though this view should be finely shaded, as will be shown below).[5] Be they princely or royal, or assembled by ecclesiastical institutions, these treasures are not considered the product of single individuals, but of an institution. However, some scholars suggest that the medieval treasury should, all the same, be included in the history of collections because it contains objects which no longer take part in an economic exchange, which have lost their utilitarian function, and which are subjected to definite regulations in order to be displayed in well-defined sites.[6] Since not every medieval treasure fulfills these conditions, we should not speak of collections in all cases. Until at least the eleventh century, both church and lay treasuries were accumulations of objects whose value lies precisely in the fact that they were made up of a mass.[7] From the twelfth century onwards, the arrangement of treasures began to change. This development allows us to infer that, instead of being simply accumulated, these objects became subject to a reorganization according to certain principles of symbolic order, often because they were now on view. It is precisely this reorganization that indicates the intervention of ambitious patrons (though this word tends to reduce the complex nature of their role as such), who must be considered as personalities demonstrating a high cultural consciousness through their commissions and gifts.[8] These "patrons" may pride themselves on a sound aesthetic judgment and some, who are known, behave accordingly as true collectors, shaping memory and the past through the objects they commissioned such as Suger in St.-Denis or Wibald in Stavelot. The reuse around 1200 of a mid-twelfth-century tympanum for the portal of Sainte-Anne at Notre-Dame of Paris, or the setting of two Romanesque portals in the Gothic cathedral of Bourges, are clues not only of economic concerns, but also of a real interest in the art of the past at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Does the display of statues of different dates at Rheims western façade, which moreover do not match any iconographic program, pertain to museum display, according to the principle of *varietas*?[9]

The terminology for our modern concept of collection hardly existed in the Middle Ages: the term *collectio* means assembly, or congregation, and, more specifically, the collection of money in church or some form of feudal dues. A *collector* is the person who collects taxes or tithes. As a medical term, *collection* was used in French at the beginning of the fourteenth century to mean the collection of some material (e.g. collection of pus) – in this case, it seems certain that a more general meaning is intended, that of an amassment (*collection* from the Latin *collectio (colligere)*, the action of assembling, gathering, or collecting). *Collection*

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in the sense of the gathering or collection of objects does not appear until the eighteenth century. In medieval Latin the word used is either *corpus*, to indicate a collection of art or scientific objects, in particular literary collections, or *thesaurus* for books and artworks, though the latter term is often applied to the place where precious objects are kept. We find the word *thesaurus* for an assembly of precious objects, for the first time ever, in the Capitulary of Nijmegen in 806, but we must wait until the thirteenth century to find it again with the same meaning. Romanesque sources talk of treasure as a body of material goods belonging to a church. In the thirteenth century, however, the term indicates with greater precision the portable yet inalienable goods of a single church, such as sacred vessels, liturgical ornaments, and precious objects, particularly reliquaries. From the thirteenth century on, and throughout the following century, *thesaurus* meant, above all, a special room – the treasury – usually separated from the sanctuary, where precious objects were kept.

To gather diverse objects to form a whole is variously referred to as *colligere*, *conquirere*, even sometimes *comparare* in classical Latin. Over time, however, these words take on a more precise definition: in the Middle Ages *colligere* still meant to assemble (men and things), but *conquirere* meant to acquire and then to conquer, while *comparare* meant to buy. A more productive direction seems to lie in the study of the vocabulary of the conservation of things, e.g., *thesaurus*, *thesaurarium*, *gazophylacium*, *gaza*, *sacrestia*, *sacrarium*, *scrinium*, *armarium*, *theca*, *loculus*, etc. for some of which Isidore of Sevilla already suggests definitions, and their lexical field. Though the word *thesaurus* clearly reflects the accumulative character of medieval treasures, Anita Guerreau-Jalabert and Bruno Bon have shown that it does not have a tangible value as first meaning in the Middle Ages, with the consequence that metaphorical or figurative meanings would derive from it.[10] On the contrary, *thesaurus* equally applies to anything pertaining to the immaterial as to the material, and the contexts in which it is used show that it is mobile, since "treasure" is permanently seized as something *circulating*. It seems that the opposition *spiritus/caro,* which maps the social representations in the medieval West according to Anita Guerreau,[11] operates here again as a referential instrument. The hierarchy between the spiritual and the carnal plays a central role in the way we understand "treasure," which does not strictly cover the pair of opposites tangible/intangible. Treasure appears in the opposition between heaven and earth, where one naturally has to prefer the treasure that is formed in heaven against the one formed on earth, which remains perishable; in the opposition of gift/circulation (positive) to accumulation/immobilization (negative), since treasures are constituted through *caritas*, gift or alms that are performed in this world for the world to come; lastly in the opposition of what is concealed to what is revealed (that is, the visible as opposed to the invisible). Eventually, treasure is valued because of its inscription within the spiritual realm, which imposes the continuous circulation of goods, be it on earth or between heaven and earth.

Rather than talk of collecting in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, we speak with Caroline W. Bynum of an "impulse to collect," which can also be detected

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in the expansion of the Cult of Relics,[12] for the phenomenon is not limited to treasure in the narrow sense of the term. Medieval collecting comprises several activities, one of the most remarkable being the reuse of objects.[13] Others include the special use of *spolia* for remembrance, the enthusiastic gathering of miraculous objects (particularly relics), and acquisition of natural curiosities. These activities are all meant to create multiple connections with the past, with the collective memory of the community that possesses the treasure and, above all, with the invisible.[14] Any treasure leads back to the past through the use of names that act as elements of a legendary heritage of myths and events. We may therefore wonder if collecting in the Middle Ages does not do very much the same thing, on a metonymic mode: more than a mere physical action, the gathering of these objects is the invocation of the memory of individual people, be they kings, saints, or heroes, through the collecting of objects that help shape the past and organize knowledge.[15]

Collecting in the Middle Ages: The Treasury

Previous scholarship commonly assumes that medieval treasuries, particularly church treasuries, are the origin of the *Wunderkammer*, the cabinet of curiosities, and museums in the modern sense, which flourished from the eighteenth century onwards.[16] Yet we are forced to admit that it is impossible to establish a typology that could include the medieval collection.[17] To consider the medieval treasury as a chapter in the history of museums gives the false impression that this history is linear, implying a continuous progression, while instead it is irregular. In fact, there are a number of ruptures, for example after the fall of Constantinople in 1204, which resulted in the amassing of precious bounties and of their expedition to the West. Previous scholarship also does not entirely take into account the polymorphic character of the medieval collection. Treasuries, especially church treasuries, are in fact more than the bringing together of precious objects to be preserved, as most of these maintain their original function. They do possess a value of exchange, but at the same time they retain their usefulness.[18] Without taking into account its sacred dimension, medieval treasure is nothing more than the immobilization of capital in the form of artifacts. It is under constant threat of being melted down; furthermore it becomes the expression of value and possession that may inspire wonder and admiration.

As far as church treasures are concerned, primary sources tell us they can be categorized into *ornamenta* (or *ornamentum*), that is to say a collection of objects destined to ornament the church, or as *apparata* (or *ministerium*), that is, all the necessary furnishings to ensure the smooth running of the liturgical ceremony. The treasury can also be used as a place to deposit *regalia*.[19] We therefore find an assembly of very diverse objects, such as *antependia*, portable altars, sacred vessels, relics in diverse forms and sizes, liturgical vestments, objects of devotion like images and statues, chandeliers, crowns, processional crosses, illuminated

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manuscripts with gold bindings, etc. There are also rare fabrics, gold or silver objects (sometimes decorated in enamel), antique gems and precious stones, and ivory. To these, secular artworks may be added, whose function may or not be converted to religious purposes, and objects of curiosity. The main body of church treasure is therefore made up of precious objects (*clenodia* and *utensilia*), which continue or not to play a role in religious practice. But the true treasure remains the relics of the saints' bodies, around which the collection is organized.[20] What enables a treasury to be built up are the economic and religious fluctuations of a spiritual center; its wealth is in fact linked to the prosperity and the reputation of the center: the success of a pilgrimage favors the prestige and opulence of the place. If imperial, princely, or ecclesiastic patronage play a major role in the formation of a church's treasury, private gifts must certainly not be forgotten. All gifts offered to the church – at the tomb of the saint, at the altar, to the clergy, or to the monks who officiate in the sanctuary – add to its patrimony. A gift constitutes both a homage of the faithful to God, through His saints, and the financial capital of the church.

Thus defined, a medieval treasury fulfills various functions. First, it is the visible expression of the temporal or spiritual power of the authority that assembles it: from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, similar objects are collected for the same reasons; collections are created for prestige, to conserve financial resources, to establish status, and probably also, though less frequently, for study. A second function continues a strong tradition that exists between the creation of a treasury in an Antique temple and that of a medieval church, even if the conditions of collecting and the situation in which the treasure is displayed differ: both institutions preserve the memory of noteworthy or heroic times. For example, Orpheus' lyre, Helen's sandal, and Leda's eggs all herald, in a certain way, Virgil's mirror and the pitcher of Cana in the treasure of St.-Denis. Medieval treasuries are, furthermore, monetary reserves that can be delved into; this again is a sign of continuity. However, what is different is the fact that certain objects can be transformed, as the faithful do not make a gift of the object itself but of the matter of which it is made. Other items, due to their sumptuous aspect (for example ivory leaves) or the finesse of the workmanship (engraved precious stones), are kept in order to be used again. The medieval treasury is, finally, a place of conservation.

Because of these different uses, scholars must ask questions about the function of assembled objects as well as of the collections they form. For if certain objects are understood by their cultures as rising above the ordinary, it becomes necessary to define clearly what is sacred and what is profane, as well as to categorize the wonderful, the monstrous, the miraculous, and the curious, so as to be able to apply these concepts to the Middle Ages. The first instinct of a collector is to hoard goods, especially rare and precious artworks, and to amass *unica* (that is, whatever is unique). The symbolic value of the collected pieces then determines their destiny as "potential museum pieces," transforms them into museological objects, and suggests a display status. The treasury – with liturgical instruments, *curiosa*, and *pretiosa* as centerpieces – attracts crowds of pilgrims, the curious, and

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even thieves. The criteria of choice for both sacred and secular treasures seem to be the same: their rarity and degree of preciousness, as much as their mercantile value, which transform relics, the marvelous, or manufactured objects into items with a price which can be offered, exchanged, lost, or stolen.

State of Research and Prospects

With the studies of Jules Antoine Dumesnil, Clément de Ris, Edmond Bonnafé, Eugène Müntz, Adolfo Venturi, Otto Hirschfeld, Ludwig Friedländer, and Jacob Burckhardt,[21] among many others, the nineteenth century showed a consistent interest in the idea of the collection as a general phenomenon. These scholars concentrated their research on important collections as well as on amateurs and collectors since the Renaissance, yet they were little interested in the Middle Ages. Only the analytical presentations of the catalogs and the bibliographies of inventories published by Fernand de Mély and Edmund Bishop, and to a lesser degree by Guiseppe Campori, give importance to medieval documents.[22] Yet since David Murray and Julius von Schlosser's interesting contributions to the study of medieval collections, both published at the beginning of the twentieth century, no other complete analysis of the phenomenon has been made.

The most recent studies of church treasure have mostly come from historians of heritage, who have the dual aim of conserving precious objects as well as displaying them in modern settings. Therefore, historical research is fundamentally interested in the transformation of the ecclesiastic treasury into a diocesan museum or a museum of sacred art, since the study of inventories makes it possible for the vicissitudes of a treasure to be traced and for displaced objects to be tracked. For a better understanding of the phenomenon of collecting in the Middle Ages, a certain number of inquiries must be undertaken.[23] The field of study concerned with the content of medieval treasuries is by far the most generally pursued line. But we must insist on the fact that the objects are generally considered in themselves, independently from their context, to establish the history of decorative arts. These studies very rarely concentrate on the notion of the treasury as a whole. It is only since the early 1990s that this tendency has been reversed: recent exhibitions have shown the interest in starting from the sources and in studying the treasury diachronically.[24] First of all, the analysis of inventories that began in the nineteenth century should be continued, following the founding studies of Fernand de Mély and Edmund Bishop. This work was halted after the publication of an initial volume by Bernhard Bischoff which deals with inventories of treasuries north of the Alps up to the end of the thirteenth century.[25] Regrouping inventories in one corpus would make it feasible to study their typology – whether they are inventories of cathedrals, monasteries, or royal chapels, etc. – so as to establish the most specific characteristics of each.[26] In this way, it would be possible to establish the existence or non-existence of symbolic relationships between the objects according to their place in the inventory, their physical position vis-à-vis

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other objects, or their display during particular liturgical ceremonies. Typological analysis is necessary to establish the general history of the medieval treasury; in fact, it enables us to understand a set of recurrent facts and to operate horizontal crosschecking between treasuries, countries, and types of objects collected, by donors presumed or proven. In his study of the 1534 inventory of St.-Denis treasury, Erik Inglis has brilliantly demonstrated how surprisefull the reading of these inventories could be.[27] But an inquiry into these documents would be incomplete without a search for narrative sources: annals, chronicles, lives of saints and abbots, *gesta episcoporum*, travel accounts, wills, donations, the financial accounts of the cathedral workshop, etc. without forgetting the *descriptiones*, legal deeds, accounts of the circumstances of invention, translation, or exposure of relics, and liturgical sources.

Architectural analysis of the buildings should also be undertaken with the aid of archeology and the history of architecture to determine the position of the treasury, the sacristy, and, if applicable, the archive room which held precious objects. Then the architectural layout should be reconstructed, showing the physical and visual access to the treasure. Clemens Kosch's detailed studies of the relationships between architecture and liturgy of different Romanesque and Gothic edifices of Germany should be emphasized as exemplary in this perspective.[28] Since the specific furniture in which objects were kept (cup-boards, recesses, relic cupboards, chests, shrines, and reredos for relics, etc.) (fig. 13-1) is also concerned, an analysis of the links between space, performance, and materiality would be of a great profit.[29] Supplementing visual evidence with documentary sources will help in compensating for monuments that have disappeared and in establishing a specific vocabulary.

From Medieval Treasures to Cabinets of Curiosity

Both David Murray and Julius von Schlosser agree that the first traces of collections of art objects and curiosities in the Middle Ages are to be found in royal residences and in church treasuries, as each contain both works of nature and works of art. The church, where miracles might be a daily event, keeps *mirabilia* for display and in order to stage them to draw in the faithful. Since the thirteenth century there has been written evidence to this effect; for example, Durandus of Mende, who talks about ostrich eggs: "In certain churches, ostrich eggs and other such items which cause admiration and which are seldom seen are hung up in order to attract the people to church and to touch them [through the sight of these objects]."[30] The church conserves what is rare, marvelous, or monstrous, and in some churches we may find, side by side, embalmed crocodiles, flints, meteorites, antelope and unicorn horns, griffon claws, huge teeth and bones, etc. Most of these *mirabilia* seem to have been placed in a conspicuous position in certain late medieval churches, as they would be later in encyclopedic museums; others were kept in the treasury cupboards. Yet can it be said that medieval treasures prepare

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FIGURE 13-1 Cupboard, Saxony, c.1230. Halberstadt, cathedral treasure, inv. Nr. 42. Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt. Source: photo courtesy of Gunar Preuss.

the way for the *Wunderkammer*, the curiosity cabinet, and the modern museum, as is assumed by a major part of current research?[31]

Murray sees the church as a conservatory of the Creation, while von Schlosser finds in medieval treasures the justification for people's taste for things strange and curious. Indeed, in his attempt to determine the historical foundations of the *Wunderkammer*, von Schlosser evokes the medieval treasury as an example of the collecting curiosity of humankind. However, to see in church treasuries the

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ancestor of the cabinet of curiosities is the result of too narrow an interpretation, though "early and formative collections of art often display similar tendencies to the cabinet, and many of the key visual 'tropes' of the cabinet may also be found in earlier practices and contexts."[32] The fact that the objects are similar is certainly an indication, as von Schlosser notes, that the cabinet of curiosities partly takes over the representative function of medieval treasuries, while adding the taste for the marvelous. However, the *Wunderkammer* is not situated halfway between the medieval treasury and the modern museum. The origin of the museum is in the collections of Italian amateurs, who maintain a clear distinction between objects of art and objects of nature in order to build a coherent image of the world. Adalgisa Lugli quite rightly sees the cabinet of curiosities as a place of experimentation clearly situated outside the historical evolution of museums.[33] The medieval treasury has nothing to do with either.

It is true that sacristies preserve all sorts of objects in their cupboards (straw wisps, clumps of earth, stones, knives, pieces of cloth, etc.). These objects have an obvious judicial function: they signify a gift. As a matter of fact, the great number of such gifts provoked the anger of the bishop of Rodez in the thirteenth century. He threatened to excommunicate any giver of old rags, hay, or straw. These objects are not kept for themselves but rather as pieces of evidence, *testimonia*. The same is true for most objects which seem "bizarre" to the modern eye and which could fit in the *Wunderkammer*.[34] As treasuries in the twelfth century were still made up of many miscellaneous objects, it is difficult to decide on the connection between these "improbable relics" or curiosities and the nature of the treasury. For example, a unicorn horn was apparently kept in the abbey church of St.-Denis, fixed to a column of gilded copper and placed near Suger's great crucifix, but there is no written confirmation before the sixteenth century.[35] A griffon claw that was part of the same treasury and very likely one of the abbey's liquid measures was mounted as a drinking cup in the thirteenth century and so excluded from display.[36] Another griffon claw hanging from the vault of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris in the sixteenth century is not mentioned before 1433.[37]

Medieval *Curiositas* and Curiosities

The existence of rare objects (as well as others) in treasuries is attested from the beginning of the fifteenth century onwards. At this time, *curiositas*, again intellectually acceptable, starts taking on the meaning of "curiosity, curious thing." In the twelfth century, the Latin word *curiositas* was associated with an excessive desire of knowledge and exaggerated preoccupation or worry. Its negative connotation was stressed by moralists, who labeled it as "vain," but from the middle of the following century it included the meaning of wanting to acquire new knowledge.[38] In calling *curiositas* the origin of pride, St. Bernard[39] and the monastic tradition follow in Augustine's footsteps, who defines it as *concupiscentia oculorum* (1 John 2: 15–16).[40] This is still the meaning that Odo of Deuil ascribes to it in 1148.

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When describing the behavior of the Crusaders on entering the churches of Constantinople, he paraphrases a passage from the Book of Numbers: "alii curiositate videndi, alii veneratione fideli."[41] Odo distinguishes between viewers (or even *voyeurs*) and the faithful. The latter approach the shrine to venerate; the former are not necessarily "curious" in the meaning given to the word since the eighteenth century, but it is already a first sign of a positive appreciation which announces the changes to come in the Gothic period.

The assembling of *naturalia* and monstrosities is also linked to an archeological inclination nourished by biblical stories. Preserving a rib of a whale signals a desire to display a bone of the monster that swallowed Jonah (Jonah 2: 1). But if the interest for things strange and marvelous is constant in the course of the Middle Ages, conditions change as time goes by: from the twelfth century onwards, the interest in natural curiosities increases.[42] Natural rarities and curiosities in medieval treasuries – like the tooth of a narwhale (or unicorn horn), the nautilus, or the ostrich egg – are meant to show divine wisdom and power made manifest through the Creation.[43] But once the ontological distinction between *miracula* and *mirabilia* is established in about 1200, as Caroline W. Bynum has shown, natural curiosities function as *exempla*, seen henceforth through the moralizing filter of lapidaries and bestiaries. The ostrich egg is a perfect example in this respect. Looking through the table of inventories compiled by Bernhard Bischoff, we see that they existed in several churches north of the Alps. They were described either as *struthio* or as *ovum struthionis*.[44] In most cases they seem to have been receptacles (pyxes or reliquaries) (fig. 13-2). Most sources are not explicit about how they were displayed. Durandus of Mende, however, tells us that the common practice was to suspend them. In his presentation of church ornaments, he gives precise reasons why a treasury is shown to the people on certain feast days: for security reasons, because of the solemnity of the occasion, and above all for the sake of memory, to remember past donations, and to celebrate the *memoria* of the donors. The role of ostrich eggs (and other rare objects, *huiusmodi*) is to attract the faithful and to incite admiration, yet with a moral intent. An ostrich has a forgetful nature, but when a certain star appears it is recalled to its duty to return and sit on its eggs while they are hatching; likewise man, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, enjoins God to remember him by performing *bona opera*. The eggs are there to admonish the wandering spirit, just like a picture – *qua imago* – and to cause good works.[45]

Objects of a treasury lose their earthly function and are kept because they are signs that refer to something invisible, to which they give access. They have the capacity to "pass on to" somewhere above, like the good deeds that follow their makers; in other words, they are "convertible."[46] To acquire a treasure in heaven (Luke 12: 33; Matt. 6: 2) – that is, to arrive in paradise – was one of the desires of the medieval person. One means of attaining this celestial treasure was to begin on earth by making a series of donations to the altar, because through them pilgrims could prepare the salvation of their souls. Before ending up in the ecclesiastical treasure trove, these gifts passed through the hands of the mediators of the sacred, the priests, and, like the eucharistic species, they were transformed,

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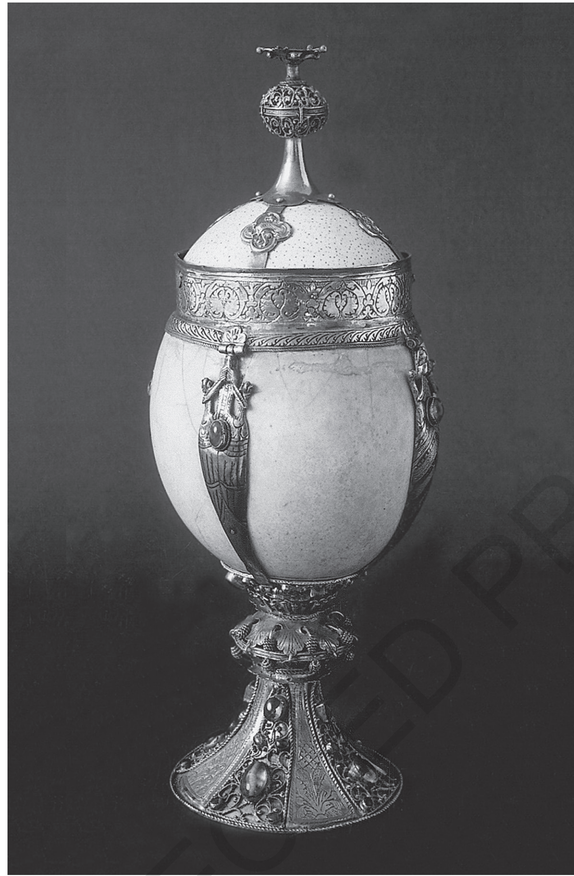

FIGURE 13-2 Egg-reliquary, Saxony, c.1210–1220. Halberstadt, cathedral treasure, inv. Nr. 47. Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt. Source: photo courtesy of Gunar Preuss.

increasing their value. One of the essential functions of the treasure was precisely to ensure good communication between the terrestrial below and the celestial above, between the material church and the heavenly Jerusalem.[47] The treasury thus stands at the threshold between the visible and the invisible, between the human being's temporal life and life beyond. As a sacred repository, it mediates between this world and the one to come, the accumulation of earthly treasures matching spiritual ones, since both seem to be indissolubly mixed together.[48]

It seems that there is a correlation between the development of acts of mercy – for which the theology is slowly put in place in the course of the eleventh century before attaining a tremendous development in the following[49] – and the phenomenon of rearranging ecclesiastic treasures in the twelfth century. A look at Abbot Suger's activities in overseeing and building St.-Denis seems to confirm this theory. One of the aims of his *good* deeds was to establish a reciprocal link between the saint and Suger himself.[50]

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Manipulating the Objects: Memory Made Visible

The history of architecture tells us that, from the end of the twelfth century onwards, the choirs of numerous churches have been rearranged. (One of the consequences of this phenomenon was the progressive disappearance of crypts, many of which were filled in, as in the cathedral of Troyes.) There is no doubt that this architectural rearrangement brought about a change in the location and exhibition of a certain number of objects of the treasury, though we must be very careful to distinguish these objects clearly from those that were never taken out of their cupboards. Furthermore, vaulted and closed treasure chambers were now being built inside the sanctuaries themselves (for instance in the cathedral of Trier, c.1200), or near the choirs (as in Notre-Dame of Noyon, c.1170, placed against the northern arm of the transept); at Saints-Pierre-et-Paul of Troyes, the first radiating chapel to the south served as a treasury from the beginning of the thirteenth century – and sometimes it is the sanctuary itself which becomes the treasure chamber, as in the case of the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris (1239–1248).[51] The end of the twelfth century heralds a new age of visibility, as can be seen from the new perception of the body of Christ, exemplified by the raising of the consecrated host, and by the progressive transformation of reliquaries into monstrances. There is a desire to recognize the divine or saintly presence, and this implies actually seeing the relic, which in turn leads to a multiplication of monstrances and phylacteries in the thirteenth century. The precious remains are exhibited in their shrines, visible through a crystal window.[52] This interest in visibility results in a reorganization of treasures. In the history of their formation, the twelfth century is a turning point: we notice everywhere an effort to restore objects and to make the past attractive, the emphasis being on remembrance. The phenomenon concerns objects and consequently the ways of exhibiting them. We may consider one singular example. Nantelm, abbot of St.-Maurice d'Agaune, is famous for a shrine he had made and into which he laid the saint's body, in 1225. But he also redistributes the other Theban relics in older reliquaries that he marks, or better, authenticates, with small enamel plates. Since the economic situation of the abbey was but unstable at the beginning of the thirteenth century, reuse appeared to be the ideal solution. It did not pejorate already low finances, while responding to heritage concerns. But in so doing, Nantelm consciously gathered head, arm, and corpse, forming a true *corpus*, that is a true *collection*.[53]

Treasuries portray "History" or the past through objects and images staged as relics of that past. A striking example is Suger's restoration of Dagobert's throne that he found in the St.-Denis treasury. He restored it both for the excellence of its function and its value (*tum pro tanti excellentia officii, tum pro operis ipsium precio*), and also because it was supposed to be a gift made by the legendary founder of St.-Denis.[54] Legend seems to turn into flesh: the most precious symbols of the past become objects that can be touched, admired, or traded. These heroic relics are still perceived through the filter of the marvelous and the legendary,[55] but, by recalling immemorial times, they possess the faculty of connecting the community

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with History. Moreover, forging a prestigious past in order to inscribe an object in the collective memory, a process that Amy G. Remensnyder has termed as the "imaginative memory," is an activity that might involve any object. In this way, an object is transformed into a memorial which is then given a name, generally a prestigious one.[56] For example, the sardonyx vessel that St. Martin supposedly entrusted to St. Maurice Abbey, according to a twelfth-century legend, was given to him by an angel. The precious gemstone material and the rarity of such a reliquary certainly helped the monks to assume that its origin was celestial and its provenance holy.[57] But the process may also have been an "operative action": in the 1160s, the oval reliquary casket of St. Viktor in Xanten was purposely fashioned in Antique style in order to make it look older than it was (fig. 13-3). There were also imitations of Roman triumphs. The holy relics that Bishop Konrad von Krosigk (1201–1208) brought back from Constantinople in 1205 were carried

Figure 13-3 Reliquary shrine of Nantelme, 1225, gable showing Christ in Majesty, detail: enamel plates. Abbey of Saint-Maurice d'Agaune, Treasure, inv. 3. Source: photo courtesy of Jean-Yves Glassey and Michel Martinez.

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on a *feretrum* (or bier) and then exposed in Halberstadt Cathedral so that everyone would recognize the bishop's exploit. The *publicatio* of these *spolia opima* had several functions: to serve as commemoration, and to maintain or support the *religio*, that is the care for the churches and worship, as well as to incite donations.[58] The impact of such proceedings – *adventus*, *publicatio* – on medieval religious practice should also be assessed when it comes to collecting and display.

At St.-Denis, Abbot Suger moved the major relics from the crypt to the choir, where there was more light. He restored or transformed some pieces in the treasury and also enriched it with new ones. He then placed some of the items at strategic points in the church. Suger's description resembles an imaginary journey through the abbey, and it is the liturgy that ensures the spatial unity of the unfinished building and the display of chosen objects. This makes the church the theater of an experience of the senses, sometimes to saturation point, as Conrad Rudolph has shown.[59] Through the mediation of the objects which it possesses, the community is linked to history and claims the continuity that this implies. Consequently, "visual points of memory" are created and displayed, which also serve as so many liturgical stations. It is my belief that liturgy motivated the rearranging of church treasuries in the twelfth century, though it seems that its impact on medieval collecting has been greatly neglected. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, the distinction was made between objects considered as liturgical instruments, as curiosities, and as marvels within the treasure. It is only from then on that we may truly speak of "collecting" in the Middle Ages.

Notes

1 John of Salisbury, *Historia pontificalis* IV, p. 79: "… veteres statuas emit Rome, quas Wintoniam deferri fecit."
2 Recent studies about medieval collections and collectors mainly repeat anecdotes: see for example Rheims, *Les collectionneurs* and Cabanne, *Les Grands Collectionneurs.* Pearce and Bournia (eds.) seem to validate the same approach in *The Collector's Voice*, where medieval sources are practically absent.
3 For Roman collections, see Stähli, "Sammlungen ohne Sammler" (with the preceding bibliography), and Bruneau, "Les Collections d'art"; for the Greek temple as community's museum, see Shaya, "Greek Temple"; for Byzantine collections, in particular the collection of Lausos, see Bassett, "Excellent Offerings."
4 For the "reinvention" of private collections in the fourteenth century, see Pomian, *Des saintes reliques*, pp. 35ff.
5 Pomian, "Collezionismo," p. 157. Cumming ("Collecting") mentions the Middle Ages in the context of accumulations only.
6 Pomian, *Collectionneurs*, p. 18: a collection is an "ensemble d'objets naturels ou artificiels, maintenus temporairement ou définitivement hors du circuit d'activités économiques, soumis à une protection spéciale dans un lieu clos aménagé à cet effet, et exposés au regard."
7 See the studies in Tyler, ed., *Treasure* and in Gelichi and La Rocca, eds., *Tesori.*

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8 Consider Hourihane, ed., *Patronage*, p. xxiii: "We have to see patronage as a multi-stepped process or agency involving commissioning, conceiving, executing, receiving, and bequeathing," and also Buettner, "Testament," p. 10, who demonstrates that Blanche of Navarre transforms "la distribution des biens en un acte de mécénat."
9 See Wirth, *Sur le statut,* p. 21–27.
10 Guerreau-Jalabert and Bon, "Le trésor."
11 Guerreau-Jalabert, "*Spiritus et caritas.*"
12 Bynum, "Wonder," p. 18. On relics in general, see Geary, *Furta sacra* and "Sacred Commodities"; Legner, ed., *Reliquien* and *Reliquien in Kunst*; Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien*; Bozóky and Helvétius, eds., *Les Relique;* and Toussaint, *Kreuz.*
13 [On reuse and the concept of spolia, see Chapter 14 by Kinney in this volume (ed.).]
14 Pearce speaks of collecting as a "spiritual pilgrimage" (*On Collecting*, p. 108), whereas Pomian sees in the history of collecting the history of the relationships that we entertain with the invisible (*Collectionneurs*, p. 126); Shaya ("Greek Temple," p. 423) speaks of a sacred-historical space that both legitimated and interpreted material traces of the past.
15 On collecting as a metonymic exercise in the pursuit of knowledge, see Brüning, "Sammlung und Synthese"; see also Bauer, "Collections."
16 On this "genetic lineage," see the henceforth classical studies by Murray (*Museums*) and von Schlosser (*Kunst- und Wunderkammern*), and, to a lesser extent, Lesne (*Histoire de la propriété ecclésiastique*) and Taylor (*The Taste of Angels*). See also Pearce, *On Collecting*, pp. 405–406. [On the modern medieval museum, see Chapter 39 by Brown in this volume (ed.).]
17 Olmi, "Die Sammlung."
18 *Contra*, see Pomian, *Collectionneurs*, p. 19: "les objets de collection possèdent une valeur d'échange sans valeur d'usage."
19 *Regalia* refers to an ensemble of objects symbolizing royalty, formed by royal garments, and liturgical and coronation instruments.
20 Gauthier, *Routes*, p. 94: "La muséologie débute par les collections de reliques." On collections of relics as instruments of representation, see for instance Elsner, "Replicating" and Wagner, "Les collections."
21 For a complete bibliography before 1900, see Lugli, *Naturalia et Mirabilia.*
22 De Mély and Bishop, *Bibliographie*; Campori, *Raccolta di cataloghi.* See also Klemm, *Zur Geschichte*, and Furtwängler, *Über Kunstsammlungen.*
23 See Caillet, "Le Trésor," and Sire, "Les Trésors des cathédrales."
24 In particular Gaborit-Chopin, ed., *Le Trésor de Saint-Denis*, and Durand, ed., *Le Trésor de la Sainte-Chapelle*; see also Ehlers, ed., *Der Welfenschatz*, *Der Basler Münsterschatz* and Antoine-König and Mariaux, eds., *Le Trésor de l'abbaye de Saint-Maurice d'Agaune.*
25 See Bischoff, *Mittelalterliche Schatzverzeichnisse,* and Ackley, "Re-approaching."
26 Palazzo, "Le Livre." On collections of books, see for instance Stirnemann, "Les Bibliothèques," and Tesnière, "Medieval Collections."
27 Inglis, "Expertise."
28 Many titles, among which Kosch, *Kölns romanischen Kirchen.* See also Bräm, "Schatzräume."
29 On furniture for conservation, see among others Polonovski and Perrault, "Le Trésor," and Krause, "Zur Geschichte." Other famous pieces include the painted cupboard in the Cathedral of Bayeux and the sacristy chest in the Cistercian Abbey of Aubazine (Corrèze).

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30 Durandus of Mende, *Rationale divinorum officiorum* I, III, 43: "In nonnullis ecclesiis ova structionum et huiusmodi, quæ admirationem inducunt et quæ raro videntur, consueverunt suspendi, ut per hoc populus ad ecclesiam trahatur et magis afficiatur" (p. 49).
31 Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park come to the same conclusion: "Medieval collections bore little resemblance to early modern or modern museums. They functioned as repositories of wealth and of magical and symbolic power rather than as microcosms, sites of study, or places where the wonders of art and nature were displayed for the enjoyment of their proprietors and the edification of scholars and amateurs" (*Wonders and the Order of Nature*, p. 68; cf. p. 383, n. 3).
32 Bowry, *Rethinking the Curiosity Cabinet*, pp. 147–148.
33 See Greitschuhs, "Bemerkungen"; Lugli, *Naturalia et Mirabilia*.
34 For many years a pear was seen to be hanging from the narthex wall at St.-Denis, as Hincmar reports in his compilation of the miracles of the saint (Hincmar of Rheims, *Miracula sancti Dionysii* I, 18; see also I, 7 (oats sheaf in the narthex), I, 8 (ram's horn hanging from the abbey door), etc.).
35 Gaborit-Chopin, *Le trésor de Saint-Denis*, pp. 310–311.
36 Ibid., pp. 223–225.
37 Durand, *Le trésor de la Sainte-Chapelle*, pp. 182–183.
38 On the *curiositas* in the Middle Ages, beside Oberman, *Contra vanam curiositatem*, see Cabassut, "Curiosité," II, 2: cols. 2654–2661; Labhardt, "Curiositas"; Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage*, pp. 18–41; Newhauser, "Towards a History of Human Curiosity"; Peters, "*Libertas Inquirendi*"; Kenny, *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 33–49; Peters, "The Desire to Know"; Krüger (ed.), *Curiositas*.
39 Bernard, *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, X, 28: "primus itaque superbiæ gradus est. curiositas." Cf. idem, III, 14, 2–3: "Curiositas, cum oculis ceterisque sensibus vagatur in ea quæ ad se non attinent," and therefore anything that draws a monk from himself can but remove him from God. On St. Bernard and curiosity, see Leclercq, "Curiositas."
40 Oberman, *Contra vanam curiositatem*, p. 23.
41 Numbers 4: 20: "Alii nulla curiositate videant quæ sunt in sanctuario priusquam involvantur, alioquin morientur." Odo of Deuil, *De profectione*, pp. 64–66.
42 In the period between 1180 and 1320 there are more and more stories of marvels, monsters, miracles, and ghosts: Bynum, "Wonder." See Kenseth, ed., *The Age of the Marvelous* and Findlen, *Possessing Nature*.
43 Daston, "Marvelous Facts."
44 Bischoff, *Mittelalterliche Schatzverzeichnisse*, ad v. *struthio, ovum struthionis*. Sometimes these eggs are supposed to be griffon eggs.
45 This parallelism is mentioned in certain bestiaries at the end of the thirteenth century, in particular in the *Libro della natura degli animali*, XXXVIII; see Morini, ed., *Bestiari medievali*, pp. 460–461.
46 Buc, "Conversion of Objects."
47 As evidence, there is the chalice Emperor Henry II offered to St. Laurent of Merseburg: see Scheller, *Die Seelenwägung*.
48 Pearce, *On Collecting*, p. 99.
49 The cause of this correlation may be found in the teaching of Christ (Matt. 25: 31ff.) which shows the transitive character of acts of charity (good deeds) and divine mercy: "… quamdiu fecistis uni de his fratribus meis minimis mihi fecistis" (ibid., 25: 40).

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50 Maines, "Good Works"; see also Gasparri, "L'Abbé Suger." On art as similar to almsgiving, see Rudolph, *Things of Greater Importance*, pp. 97–103.
51 On the display of objects, see Bandmann, "Über Pastophorien," and "Früh- und hochmittelalterliche," Vol. I, pp. 371–411; Ronig, "Die Schatz- und Heiltumskammern," Vol. I, pp. 134–135; Kosch, "Zur spätromanischen."
52 Examples by Gauthier, *Routes.*
53 Mariaux, "Trésor, mémoire, collection."
54 The discovery of Arthur's tomb at Glastonbury Abbey in 1191 is another example that testifies to the investigation into the space of memory. See Albrecht, *Die Inszenierung*, pp. 93–102 (Arthur's tomb) and pp. 161–164 (Dagobert's throne). From around 1300 at least, we have testimonies of sovereigns paying visits to church treasuries to see the "antiquities" and, indeed, learn history, guided by the prior or the treasurer who appear to be true "*periegetes.*"
55 Schnapp, *La conquête*, p. 98. The manipulation of objects, mostly reliquaries, is only one sign of the general investigation into the remote *loci* of memory. It becomes stronger and more effective from the twelfth century on, and prepares for the rediscovery of Antiquity in the next.
56 Remensnyder, "Legendary Treasure," esp. pp. 884–885: "Memorial or monument is a physical object to which a commemorative meaning is attached; it is inherently instable and fluid, as memory itself." See also idem, *Remembering Kings Past.*
57 Mariaux, "Objet de trésor."
58 *Gesta episcoporum Halberstadensium, ad a. 1205* (MGH, SS, XXIII, pp. 120–121); see Andrea, *Contemporary*, pp. 239–264. On art to attract donations, see Rudolph, *Things of Greater Importance*, pp. 20ff.
59 Rudolph, *Things of Greater Importance*, pp. 63ff.

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