In 1939 the Museum acquired with funds provided by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the late twelfth-century stone relief (length 7 ft. 11 in.) shown above. To judge from its size and shape and the placing of the figures, this architectural piece was originally used as a lintel to support the tympanum of a doorway. Owing to the appropriateness of the scenes for the Easter season, it will be shown for the first time in April in the Entrance Hall at The Cloisters before being permanently installed in the Saint-Guilhem Cloister with other stone carvings of the period.

The episodes represented on the lintel are the Entombment and the Holy Women at the Sepulcher. The story is not very different from that told in the New Testament according to Saint Mark: “[Pilate] gave the body to Joseph. And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock. . . . And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid. And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. . . . And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here.”

In the first scene Christ, with a crossed nimbus, is folded into a shroud and lowered into a sarcophagus by four men, probably includ-
Tobias and the Angel, from the north portal of Chartres Cathedral

Central portal of the Cathedral of Senlis, showing a similar lintel
The Entombment and the Holy Women at the Sepulcher, from a capital at Chartres Cathedral

ing Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. In the second scene, the three Marys are shown at the tomb. Each bears an ointment jar and stands behind the sarcophagus, which is empty save for the grave cloth draped schematically over the side. The knowing angel, wearing a diadem over his curls, is seated on a bench at one side. Although his arms are destroyed he is probably indicating “the place where they laid him.” The decorative trefoils, quatrefoils, and circles are distributed in dissimilar numbers and patterns on the two sarcophagi. A sense of restraint and suspended motion pervades the whole, contrasting with the tenseness and activity in the few other existing sculptures of these subjects. In style and in the arrangement of the scenes, the lintel recalls another (see p. 248) supporting the tympanum of a portal at Notre-Dame-de-Senlis (about 1180-1190). The composition of the Entombment scene closely resembles that on two adjoining capitals at the left of the Royal Portal at Chartres. In addition to this similarity, there is a stylistic relationship with certain later figures also at Chartres; it is particularly noticeable in such a figure as the angel in the

Tobias scene (see p. 248) on the north portal (about 1200-1210), which may be compared with the angel on the Cloisters relief.

Unfortunately, however, none of the available information regarding the original provenance of the lintel has yet been substantiated by investigation. According to tradition, the relief was formerly at the château of Villarnoult, Bussières, Côte-d’Or (Burgundy), and was said to have come from the abbey of Saint-Père-en-Vallée at Chartres. This tradition was repeated by Alfred Scharf in Der Cicenone, 1929, page 477. Following this clue in June 1939, we sent an envelope containing a photograph of the lintel addressed to “le Propriétaire du château de Villarnoult,” hoping for confirmation of the legend. The French post-office officials forwarded and reforwarded the envelope and finally returned it undelivered. We have no evidence, either written or photographic, to prove the Saint-Père hypothesis; and various people who have lived in the neighborhood of Chartres have no recollection of having seen the lintel before its acquisition by the Museum. Paul Muratov illustrated the relief in 1931 in his Sculpture gothique en France (pl. xiii) without discussing its history.

As is frequently the case with pieces of such rarity and interest, doubt has been cast upon the genuineness of the sculpture. The carving has suffered from exposure to the elements; and the paint which would have protected the surface has almost entirely disappeared. An examination of the surface under ultraviolet rays and a comparison of photographs taken in ultraviolet light with photographs taken prior to 1929 show slight modern abrasions and scrapings. But these changes are the result of thoughtless meddling with an encrusted surface rather than the work of anyone attempting to alter a distinguished piece of sculpture.

The lintel has been thought to show the influence of theatrical representations of the period. It will be placed on view on April 17 at the same time as the opening at The Cloisters of the exhibition Mediaeval Theater Arts.