THE STATUE OF ST. JAMES
RECENTLY CLEANED

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At a time when masterpieces of Gothic art are being destroyed in Europe the Museum is showing in the front hall one of the handsomest of all thirteenth-century statues, the monumental wood figure of Saint James the Less (?). Last winter when great works of art were being sent to the country for safekeeping it was decided that it would be advisable to remove the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century battleship-gray paint from the garments of the statue at the same time that the flecks of loose paint were being fastened preparatory to shipping.

In wartime the gray color, which had pleased someone a century or so ago, seemed more incongruous than ever. Before the statue was acquired by the museum the head had already been cleaned. The gold of the hair and beard was originally even more effective when the cap too was gilded. Since the recent cleaning the red dress and the blue mantle bordered with gold have added immeasurably to the character of this noble statue, and it now requires very little imagination to visualize how it looked when in place high up on a column in some great hall or church nave.

Although this statue has been frequently discussed by art historians since its publication in 1929 in Metropolitan Museum Studies, volume I, part ii, there have been no new conjectures or proofs offered as to its origin. A statue of Saint Simon in the Hospital at Tonnerre (founded in 1293) is the only related figure not previously mentioned, and although it is an interesting sculpture, it too has apparently not been recorded in the annals of art. The Saint James can now euphemistically be called Rhenish (rather than German) and dated between 1260 and 1280; its relationship to the sculpture of the cathedrals of Freiburg and Strassburg may be reiterated.
Head of a monumental wood statue of Saint James the Less. Rhenish, 1260-1280