A seated wooden image of the Virgin and Child, recently acquired for The Cloisters, is for the first time on display this month in the exhibition of Spanish Medieval Art. It is an imposing statue, four feet eleven inches tall, hieratically posed, and enlivened by the rich contrasts of its original polychrome. It represents a very popular type of medieval image and is closely related to a number of wooden statues from northern Spain.

The Virgin is seated on a throne with the Child in her lap and holding a flower in her right hand. Her costume consists of a tall gold crown, studded with gesso jewels; a rippling blue hood with an orange lining; a cotte, or gown, of dark blue material ornamented with squares and paired, transverse lines in gold; and a silver cape which falls in deep folds in her lap. The cape is fastened with cords, represented as an elongated and flattened triangle, banded with red and gold. The costume is further embellished with a gold brooch at the throat, a long-tabbed belt of silver and black, and a pair of black shoes decorated with quatrefoils in orange and white.

The Christ Child blesses the spectator with his right hand and holds the Gospels in his left. His position is somewhat unusual, as his body reflects the frontality of his mother but his legs are turned sideways into her lap, the right foot higher than the left. He is similarly dressed, but his cotte is white and his cape a dark red, with a blue and white pattern on the inside.

The features of both figures seem at first glance to be oversimplified. This impression is caused by the symmetry of the faces, the red heightening in the cheeks, and the high arched eyebrows. The noses are long, delicate, and slightly upturned, the mouths short and well formed with emphasis on the planes of the upper lips. Both the upper and lower lids of the eyes protrude slightly, and the eyes are blue with immense, staring black pupils. The Virgin’s golden hair is parted in the middle, only a narrow band on each side of her face revealed by her hood, while that of the Child, also gold, is rendered as a single, curly mass.

The throne is a tall block with simple, projecting moldings forming the top and base. It is painted white with quatrefoils and keyhole openings in black and is crowned with a red cushion, gaily cross-hatched with black and white lines.

The fresh colors were revealed in a recent cleaning of the statue, which presented a muddy red and gray appearance when it was acquired. The silver cape of the Virgin was coated with gray, and the orange lining and the Child’s dark red mantle were repainted, perhaps in the seventeenth century, a harsh baroque red. The other colors, blue, white, and gold, were thoroughly incrusted with accumulated dirt. Now the original pigments reveal a strong and direct choice of color. Everywhere light plays against dark to clarify the sculptural form and make it effective at a distance. A nearer view reveals smaller patterns on the garments, crown, and throne, as well as a tiny frieze across the face of the plinth.

The slightly frozen frontality of the statue betrays its Byzantine antecedents and its strong provincial character, and gives it a certain noblesse. The form can be traced back in Spain to such distinctly Byzantine types as the Virgin of Sahagún, now in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid, and through a long series of seated Virgins in stone and wood of the Romanesque period. The majority of these separate images follow the types set by the Virgins of Adoration groups such as that of Cerezo de Riotirón, about 1188, at The Cloisters.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries closely related statues in wood were made en masse in Spain as devotional images for shrines, hermitages, chapels, or cathedrals. One writer of the period noted that “... some make images of our saints and sculptures of other things in many figures and sell them for money.” And it is because of their numbers, their varying qual-
Wooden statue of the Virgin and Child, with original paint. Spanish, late XIII century. The Virgin's right fingers and the flower are restored. At The Cloisters city, and their continual repetition that many of these images are difficult to date exactly.

Our statue was called French and dated in the thirteenth century when it appeared in the Exposition Universelle in 1900 in Paris. Five years later, when it was sold with the Boy collection, it was called Spanish, fourteenth-century. Most of the related statues have been dated either in the latter part of the thirteenth century or the first years of the fourteenth.

There are several datable works that shed light on the Cloisters Virgin. One is the tomb of the Infanta Doña Berenguela at Las Huelgas, Burgos, which can be dated shortly after her death in 1279. The Virgin of the Adoration on this tomb is modeled with similar deep drapery folds in her lap, contrasting with the less agitated folds over the left knee. Her hair serves as the same rippling accent around the face as the veil in the Cloisters image, and the Child's position and his drapery are roughly similar. There are, of course, major differences, regional and otherwise, and the most that can be said is that the two have some details and a general similarity of drapery style in common.

The portal of the church of Agramunt of 1283 depends largely on Romanesque antecedents but does illustrate similar frontality and costume. Tall crowns of the type worn here by the Three Kings appear rarely in Spanish art of this period, except in Virgins closely related to ours. Another tall crown is found in the painted altar frontal from Mosoll in Barcelona, which Chandler Post dates after 1225.

The costume is unfortunately of no help for an exact dating as it was current throughout Europe in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. It appears in Spain as early as the late twelfth century at Benevente and continues into the fourteenth century, as seen at Vitoria cathedral. Perhaps the best-known examples are worn by the four kings of the Burgos cloister, who loop their thumbs through their mantle cords. The figures of the female saints on the Vitoria portal display the same stylization of the cords of their capes. The brooch and flowing veil of Saint Catherine and others on this façade are very close indeed to our Virgin.

The date of Vitoria is disputed, but Weise placed it very logically in the first decade of the fourteenth century. The drapery of several of the archivolt figures shows similar deep folds in the lap, echoed in diagonals over the right leg. The simple handling of the drapery over the
shoulders and chest also recalls our Virgin. The figures themselves are more realistic and turn and twist in space with greater naturalism, which would indicate a date later than the Cloisters statue.

The miraculous stone Virgin of Villalcazar de Sirga gives undoubtedly the most fruitful comparison. This statue was already famous in the late thirteenth century for performing various miracles, and it is actually shown in a manuscript of the period. This manuscript, the version of Las Cantigas in Madrid, is a series of verses praising the Virgin, written for Alfonso X in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The “Villa Sirga” image, as it was then called, is shown in two of the six miniatures illustrating verse 31. It tells the story of a peasant who prayed to the Villa Sirga Virgin to cure his sick ox. The ox recovered, went to the church, and knelt before the Virgin in thanks, later attaching itself to the church herd. The peasant then went about telling the story. A comparison of the salient features of the image in the manuscript with the now damaged statue reveals the likeness. Since

above: A saint and a prophet from the early xiv century portal of Vitoria cathedral. The treatment of the drapery indicates that the Cloisters Virgin must have been made at a slightly earlier date.

left and below: A statue of the Virgin at Villalcazar de Sirga and an illustration of it from the manuscript Las Cantigas dating it before 1284. The Cloisters statue, with its more mannered pose and stylized drapery, is a later example of this type.
A group of six statues closely related to the Cloisters Virgin, all of which are from a small area in northeastern Spain. The Cloisters Virgin must likewise have been made in this region.

Aside from the general affinities of pose and costume the Villalcazar de Sirga and Cloisters Virgins bear closer comparison. The drapery between the knees in both statues is rendered as deep, rectilinear folds, from which smaller, diagonal folds run toward the right foot. The folds are more numerous in the Cloisters statue and echo one another in a more patterned way. The upper body drapery, the Child’s robes, and the folds over the left knee of the Virgin are also analogous in both works. Some of the gusto of the Villalcazar de Sirga Virgin does not appear in the Cloisters statue, which suggests that ours is later. It seems to fall stylistically between the Villalcazar de Sirga Virgin, of the late thirteenth century, and the archivolt figures of Vitoria cathedral, of the early fourteenth. Most probably it should be dated in the last two decades of the thirteenth century.

This date is further borne out by an interesting stylistic contrast in the statue. Across the upper level of the plinth, just beneath the Virgin’s feet, is a small painted frieze. It consists of a sequence of monsters, directly painted in white outline against a blue ground. Each is framed in an oval cartouche, like the monsters in the borders of many Spanish Romanesque altar frontals of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. However, these monsters persist only until the late thirteenth century and disappear almost completely with the advent of the Gothic style in Spain. One of the latest examples of such monster borders is on the altar frontal dated 1250 in the Walters Art Gallery.

Inserted into the frieze among the eagles, lions, and griffins are two monks, with hands folded in prayer and eyes raised, adoring the statue. They wear brown habits, their hoods thrown back, revealing their tonsures and...
beards. Their presence reminds one of the lovely drawing by Matthew Paris, about 1250, showing him as a monk kneeling in adoration of a seated Virgin and Child. The figures on the base of the statue would be hard to date exactly by themselves, but the contrast of their realism with the Romanesque animals indicates a period of transition from Romanesque to Gothic, or again the late thirteenth century.

The many statues of identical type in Spain give no better clues to dating ours, but they do allow us to ascertain where it was made. I have divided the related works into three groups. The first group of nine exhibits all the important features of our statue, especially its peculiarities: the tall crown, the stylized mantle cords, the brooch, the position of the Child, and the drapery folds. The second group follows the type closely but is weaker in execution and is probably of later production, and the third is a variant but closely related group.

It is the first group that is the most interesting, as the statues bear an unusual similarity to one another. The first example is the Virgin of Miranda de Arga, which is so similar to the Cloisters statue that it immediately suggests the same sculptor. The only difference is a small variation in the drapery over the left knee. The pendant cross on the breast of the Miranda de Arga figure is a later addition, due to the misinterpretation of the mantle cords as a necklace.

The second related piece has, like our Virgin, found its way from Spain to an American museum. It is the fine Virgin of the De Young Museum in San Francisco, which has a more elongated head shape and a lower crown. This statue shows that the first group of related Virgins originally held stylized branches or blossoms in their right hands. The blossom is lacking in five statues of the group and is restored, together with the fingers, in the Cloisters example. In some cases the blossom may have been purposely removed so that real flowers could be substituted in the hand. This arrangement is seen in the famous seated statue of Saint Foy at Conques and reflects a taste, prevalent
in Spain, for decorating statues on festival occasions.

The other statues of the first group are those of Treviana, Los Arcos, Sajazarra, Tuesta, Angostina, San Antonio in Vitoria, and one formerly in the Schevitch collection. Each of these repeats the basic form of the Cloisters statue. There are varying details, such as the elongated faces of the Los Arcos group, which might indicate a slightly later date, and the slight change in the position of the Child in the Sajazarra and Vitoria sculptures. The major obvious difference is that of the crowns. All the statues originally had wooden crowns like the Cloisters or San Francisco examples, but owing to the Spanish taste for dressing statues in real garments and crowning them with jewel-studded metal crowns, the original wood crowns and even the veils on some of the examples have been carved away. This alteration can be clearly seen on examining the head of the Schevitch Virgin.

The seven statues of this first group that remain in Spain are all in small chapels or parish churches. Their geographical concentration is such that it places our statue and the San Francisco example without doubt in northeastern Spain at the junction of the provinces of Alava, Logrono, and Navarre. The seven statues are found in villages concentrated within a radius of seventy-six miles in an area which includes the towns of Estella, Vitoria, and Logrono.

The poorer statues of the second group are distributed both in- and outside this compact area, some being fifty miles to the north on the seacoast. The group comprises the Virgins of Andagoya, Ermita San Martin in Vitoria, Ermita San Cristobal in Busturia, Ermita Santa Cruz in Astiesu, one in the Barcelona cathedral, and one in the Museo Episcopal at Vich.

The third group is also more widely spread, though still centering on the same area. Two are in Estella, at San Pedro and Ermita del Puy, and the others are in San Andres de Arroyo, Berbegal, Igriés, and the Diocesan Museum in Lerida. The fine Virgin of Igriés shows the general similarity and also the differences of this group. The drapery over her knees has a different pattern; the Child's legs hang out of her lap, and the feet are nearly parallel; the cords of the capes are rendered double or triple and hang in a more normal curve; and the Child holds an open book and the Virgin an apple, which is lacking in this example but present in three of the others. Yet the form, the style, and such details as the crown, brooch, and cords show the proximity of the third group to the Cloisters image.
This brings up the question of the origin of such a large group of nearly identical statues concentrated in a tiny area. It is possible that they descend from a single, much revered, and now lost original. The silver mantles and other features suggest perhaps a silver original. Silver Virgins were extremely popular in Navarre, and more than a dozen exist today, such as the Virgins of Irache, Ujué, and Pamplona. But no famous statue of the Virgin is known to have disappeared from the area, and none of the existing silver Virgins bear enough resemblance to have served as the original.

There is also the interesting fact that the statues of the first group are all of similar size. The Cloisters example is about average at 1.32 meters, the San Francisco example is 1.27, Tuesta 1.35, Sajazarra 1.46, Vitoria (San Antonio) 1.15, and Schevitch 1.05. The last two have had their crowns carved away, so that they would have been about the average height. However, aside from these clues, there is not enough evidence to substantiate a theory of an “original,” and there is ample evidence in Spain, where religious tradition has always been strong, that copying images was a common practice.

The thirteenth-century poet priest Berceo wrote, “The image was placed on her throne, with her Son in her arms, as is customary.” The myriad surviving Virgin statues of Spain attest the truth of his statement, for nearly all of these Virgins are seated on low thrones with the Child in their laps. From Nuestra Señora of Iguacel of 1072 up to the fifteenth century the same form was generally current in Spain. There were regional differences, of course, but within the given pose there was little but detail that differed. The manuscript Las Cantigas shows 134 different statues of the Virgin on altars, and of them 125 are of the type noted by Berceo. Only four other types of Virgin statues appear in the manuscript, showing the overwhelming preference for the seated type.

For statues mentioned in the article but not illustrated see the following:
- Arco, R. del, *Catalogo monumental de España, Provincia de Huesca* (Madrid, 1942), fig. 470: Berbegal.
- Castro, C. de, *Catalogo monumental de España, Provincia de Alava* (Madrid, 1915), figs. 40, 41: Andagoya and Angostina (Bernerdo).
- Weise, G., *Spanische Plastik aus sieben Jahrhunderten* (Reutlingen, 1925), figs. 42, 44c, 44b, 44d, 43: San Antonio in Vitoria, Asteasu, Busturia, San Martin in Vitoria, and Tuesta (Valdegovia).

*Detail of the frieze painted around the base of the Cloisters statue directly beneath the Virgin’s feet, showing a sequence of eagles, lions, and griffins framed in ovals and two monks looking upwards in adoration of the Virgin.*