

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

13 September

In guiding our visit to the medieval and renaissance furniture galleries at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, curator Monique Blanc set a fine example for the week, generously combining (in English) intimate familiarity with her own collection with wide-ranging knowledge of the field. Her book, *Le Mobilier Français: Moyen Age - Renaissance* (Paris, 1999) provides a good, well-illustrated introduction to the MdAD collection, to be read alongside the more ambitious *Le Mobilier du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance en France* (Dijon, 1998) by Jacques Thirion, and the growing literature of ground-breaking technical investigation.

The museum's collection is founded on the extensive bequest of early woodwork by the Parisian collector Emile Peyre (1824-1904), who also sold over 300 pieces to the South Kensington Museum (later the V&A) in 1895. On display is an important ensemble of late 15th century screens, panelling and moveable furniture from the château de Villeneuve-Lembron (Auvergne) bought by Peyre in 1889 (he is said to have purchased the entire contents). This provided a good introduction to the mixed condition of surviving early furniture, typical mouldings in

One of the trestle frames from the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris



use, and the character and importance of metalwork. Two landmark pieces discussed were the 'clamp-fronted' chest (PE 982) with wrought iron scrolls (described as 13th century), and the 14th century sacristy armoire doors from the Somme, with original paint and superb ironwork with oak and vine leaves.

Monique's latest acquisition, already on display, is an exceptional pair of trestles with associated top, formerly in the collection of influential dealer Bruno Perrier, and soon to be published by her in a Louvre journal. She pointed out that the oak trestle frames were of oak, while the pierced tracery panels were carved from chestnut (the two woods very difficult to distinguish by eye), and described how dendrochronological analysis by Christine Locatelli and Didier Pousset on the oak trestle frame suggests a construction date 1473-8, vindicating her stylistic analysis and judgement. It was very instructive to be able to examine freely the wedged tenon construction at the back (the diners' side) of the trestles, and the massive single-piece chestnut tops which are too worn to allow dendro analysis, but must be of considerable age if not original. Many more pieces of early furniture are on display at MdAD, overlapping the collections of Cluny and Écouen, providing great resources for future visits.

Nick Humphrey