

**Tir-y-Don Enameled Coffer**  
**Inter-Baronial Champion's Competition 2010**  
 presented by Doña Mariana Francisco (Michelle Munger)



Precious emblems of recognition require a special vessel to hold them until they are awarded. This coffer is intended to do just that. There will be no question that it represents the Barony of Tir-y-Don, Atlantia. It is decorated with roundels of champlevé enamel depicting the awards and motifs of the Barony.

Champlevé is an enameling technique where recesses within copper are filled with powdered glass and melted in a kiln. It was a technique perfected and made famous in Limoges, France from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> While there are

many ways to create that recess, this project was done by engraving with hand tools.

This coffer was inspired by a number of extant examples created between 1100 and 1350.(appendix 1) <sup>2</sup> Each extant example is made of a wood core, usually oak or beech, decorated with roundels of enamel and created to house reliquaries. Four of five examples have bosses that completely surround each of the roundels and decorate the sides randomly. I surmise that the bosses had the important duty of protecting the enameled pieces from impact.

The coffret of Saint Louis, Blessed John of Montmirail and another are especially inspiring to this project. John of Montmirail's coffer has many varied roundels. Tir-y-Don's roundels are each unique depicting baronial awards. Motifs of "Finn" representing the barony and "Spike" representing the Kingdom of Atlantia are also present. The unnamed coffret is a smaller box with larger roundels filling up the space. My coffer will eventually present the legacy of its landed Baronage as those arms are interpreted into enameled shields in the spirit of the shields presented here along the rim of the lid of the Saint Louis Coffret.



**Coffret of Saint Louis**  
**Limoges, 1234-1237**



**Coffret of Blessed John of Montmirail**  
**Limoges, ca 1270**



**Coffret, Limoges, 1200-1210**

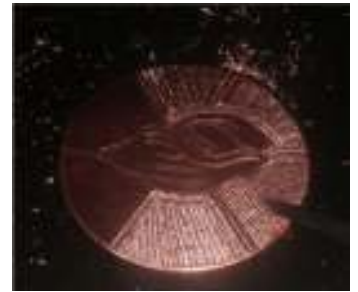
This project evolved from being very ambitious and quite unrealistic to much more practical.

**Step one. Figure out how to make recesses in copper.**

1. Original research suggested that in order to decorate a box in the spirit of true Limoges champlevé enameling, the copper had to be very thick. I spent far too long trying to find such a thick copper only to discover that it does not exist in the United States and it would cost a very large fortune to obtain it from Europe.
2. Enamellers today are using an 18 gauge copper with a thickness of .040 inches and creating recesses using an acid etching solution. I have not found mention of a chemical etch used in period and so I set out to find a way to create the recesses I needed, using the copper available to me, with as close to period methods as possible.
3. In searching for information on carving into copper I found how-to's surrounding "engraving." This technique was chosen as it not only would create the shallow recesses needed, but also leave a bumpy surface for the enameling powders to grab hold of during the firing process. Engraving is actually the most time consuming part of this project.

**Step two. Interpret the designs onto the copper.**

1. Simple line drawings weren't good enough. Each design had to be turned into a stencil of sorts that would allow for creating small chambers that would hold the enameling.



**Step three. Engraving**

1. Engraving using tools called "gravers." The copper is removed using a wriggling action combined with pressure at a 45degree angle.
2. The engraving continued until a satisfactory depth was achieved.

**Step four. Enameling - the moment of truth.**

1. Each piece was washed to remove any oils and dirt from handling.
2. The enameling powders were prepared as directed and laid into the recesses. Darker colors were placed and fired first as they can (usually) withstand the firing better than lighter colors.
3. Multiple layers of enameling powder were needed to build up the color sufficiently. The desired height is just barely above the copper level once it is finished with the firing stage.
4. Special stones were then used to grind the enameling slowly and carefully down to the same level as the copper. It was then polished brightly.

**Step five. Assembling the coffer.**

1. A wooden box was acquired from a local distributor. This is an acceptable substitute for the actual box that is to be created for the completed project. The final box will be constructed in the manner of a 6-board box which was a popular design in period.
2. The box was stained and sealed to resemble the painted or coverings of leather that were used in period to protect the wood core from wear and tear.
3. Each available roundel and motif was placed and surrounded by brass bosses just as found in period examples.

## Bibliography

1. Cherry, John. Medieval Craftsmen: Goldsmiths. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo. 1992. pgs 31-32.
2. Enamels of Limoges, 1100-1350. 1996. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. pgs 81, 155, 159, 283, 336, 361, 377.
3. Theophilus. On Diverse Arts. Dover Publications, Inc. New York. pgs 126-128.

## Appendix 1. Other extant examples



**Coffret of Cardinal Bicchieri,**  
Limoges, before 1227  
part of a Private Collection  
notice the empty roundel spaces...



**Coffret, Limoges, ca 1190**  
housed at the Metropolitan Museum  
of Art, New York