

THE BREVIARY OF SAINT LOUIS (ARSENAL MS. 1186)
AND THE CENTRAL PORTAL OF THE CATHE-
DRAL OF BOURGES

THE central portal of the west façade of the cathedral of Bourges presents two characteristics which so far as I know are unique in the history of French Christian iconography. The tympanum represents the story of the Last Judgment and of the Resurrection of the Dead, and is enclosed by six rows of cherubim, seraphim, angels and prophets in the courses. The lower lintel is devoted to the Resurrection, and as on the portal of Paris, Amiens, Reims, Bordeaux and Poitiers, the moment is that in which the souls, at the sound of the archangel's trumpet, rise from the tombs in which they have been awaiting the last day. The second lintel represents the weighing of souls, the division of the damned from the elect, and the reception into paradise and hell. On the right hand of Saint Michael, standing inscrutable but sympathetic, with strong wings widely outstretched and holding in his right hand the unevenly balanced scales, are ranged the elect in double row, and angels bearing souls to paradise. At the end of this double row, occupying the entire height of the lintel, is a gabled canopy supported on two columns, beneath which Abraham is seated upon a cushioned bench, receiving in his bosom the souls which the angels bear to him. On the other side of Saint Michael are arranged the damned, interspersed with fiends who drive them with forks, to a huge kettle boiling over the flames in the mouth of Leviathan, representing hell.¹ A fiend, on each side, is blowing the fire beneath the pot with a huge bellows.

In the center of the tympanum above, Christ is seated with arms outstretched, between two twisted sculptured columns which support over his head a canopy in the form of a trifoiled gable decorated with crockets. Beside him, to right and left, standing with wings outspread, are four angels bearing the instruments of the Passion, while in the far corners of the tympanum, to the right,

¹ Job, XLI.

kneels Mary and to his left Saint John. Above his head two kneeling angels bear the sun and moon.

This beautiful portal presents the most completely developed example of the story of the Last Judgment to be found in monumental art before the beginning of the decadence of Gothic. In the romanesque portals of the twelfth century representing the Christ of the Apocalypse, the Saviour is invariably represented completely clothed, as at Le Mans, Bourges, Chartres, St. Loup de Naud, Angers and St. Ayoul de Provins. In the early Gothic scenes of the Last Judgment he is shown with the right arm and right side exposed, showing the wound in his side, as at Paris, the portal of the south transept of Chartres, at Amiens, Bordeaux, Poitiers, and the north portal of Reims. In this tympanum of Bourges Christ is unclothed to the waist, and the nude torso is modelled with much skill and with evident desire to follow the model exactly. While the attitude of the statue as a whole indicates clearly its descent from the hieratic masterpieces of Chartres and Paris, it is possessed of a spirit of movement, even of unrest, which was entirely foreign to the spirit of the first half of the thirteenth century, and is one of the signs of the extent to which technical perfection was already perverting the appropriate expression of idea. The angels standing on each side of Christ mark another technical advance on the prototypes of Chartres, Paris, Angers and Reims, since on these portals there are but two angels bearing the instruments of the Passion, while here there are four. More than this, these angels, as well as the Virgin and St. John kneeling beyond them, are posed and carved exclusively with thought of their artistic values as objects, and with a skill and fine sense of proportions and of the æsthetic meaning of form which would make us look in vain for a finer result in monumental sculpture. The sun and moon, held by kneeling angels above Christ's head, appear here I believe for the first time.

In the lower lintel the figures of the Resurrection are with one exception nude, and with few exceptions represent beings in the prime of life, according to the doctrine that all men should be equal before God, and at their resurrection should represent their divine master in the perfection of his manhood. But if the "œuvre" imposed upon the artist the condition that these statues should be

cut in the nude, the condition fell upon a man whose eye and hand had long before mastered the mysteries of the human form and who possessed the skill to portray them in terms of beauty. They seem to be inspired from the figures at Reims, but they indicate much more intimate and analytic acquaintance with nature.

The upper lintel marks the greatest originality in treatment and in the handling of masses. It is divided into five nearly equal groups, of which that of Saint Michael forms the central part. His wings, which must have been copied from life from those of a large bird, are stretched forth to their full length, and with their tips mark the limit of the central group, including the scales of the angel's right, and to his left a little soul standing by his side and upon whose head his left hand falls protectingly, and then, close behind, a fiend holding a pitchfork, waiting impatiently for his prey. Beyond the groups of the damned and of the elect, at one end Abraham, at the other, Leviathan.

These two subjects present points of great interest, absolutely without precedent or parallel in monumental sculpture, so far as I have been able to ascertain, and of such a nature as to make me curious to know their origin. In all other representations of the Last Judgment in which Leviathan represents the entrance into hell, he is pictured in profile, with jaws widely extended, as at Chartres, Amiens, Poitiers, and also at Paris, though slightly different in treatment. Here at Bourges Leviathan is shown with the top of his head turned squarely to the front, so that both ears and eyes and the nose show in full, with the flaming jaws supporting the boiling kettle above. The two fiends who blow the fire stand one on each side of the head, and that one at the extreme end of the lintel stands with one foot in the jaws of the monster, and the right foot close to its ear. These two demons, the great head between them, one soul standing behind, and the mass of demons and spirits they are casting into the pot above form an artistic group, compact, closely studied and wrought with wonderful freedom and skill. As an artistic element this head of Leviathan is incomparably more decorative, and lends itself to more sculptural treatment than its predecessor in open profile. The modelling of the whole tympanum evinces an artist sufficiently preoccupied with questions of aesthetic effect and decorative significance to have chosen this

attitude of the monster's head for purely artistic reasons. But it was not at the end of the thirteenth century, or even the beginning of the fourteenth, that artists were left to their own discretion in so important a matter, and we must look higher, to the "Œuvre," to the direction of the canons, to the inspiration of the bishop, to find a solution of the problem.

Unfortunately there remain no documents which make any mention of such influence, or indeed refer directly or indirectly to the sculptures in question. Until such time therefore as written evidence may be found bearing on the subject of this unique treatment of a common theme, all hope completely to solve the problem must be vain. In the meantime, however, certain historical facts and a circumstance of great interest permit us to form a hypothesis which is both sufficient and plausible.

Manuscript 1186 of the library of the Arsenal, in Paris, is the famous Breviary of Saint Louis, belonging originally to his mother, Blanche de Castille, daughter of Alphonse VIII of Castille and Alienor of England. This breviary contains many miniatures, among which the scene of the last judgment figures several times. In all of these scenes, whether complete or in detail, Leviathan is invariably represented with the head reversed, both eyes looking straight at the spectator, and the nose and both ears shown entire. In fact the pose and treatment are identical with those of the portal of Bourges, and the imitation is carried out with such regard for minute detail that it would seem that a careful study of the manuscript must have been made for the preparation of the cartoons of the tympanum. The ears sculptured on the stone at Bourges are as faithful a copy of those painted in the miniature as it would be possible to make in the different medium and with the different technique of the art. They consist simply of an oval projection, hollowed upon the side toward the front of the face, and correspondingly rounded on that part of the back which stands free from the background of stone. In the miniature as in the sculpture they are attached to the head with a slight turn to the edge toward the jaws. In appearance those of the manuscript and of the sculpture are of the same relative size: in reality, as measured from exact photographs, those of the miniature are one twelfth the total width of the head, while those of the sculpture are one seventh. This

change was rendered necessary by the fact that the detail was meant to be seen from a considerable distance.

Two other points of similarity help to make the hypothesis of imitation almost a certainty. At Bourges, as in the Breviary, the boiling pot is held within the flaming jaws of Leviathan, and into this pot demons are hurling lost souls and crushing them down with sharp forks. Some of these demons are standing within the jaws of the monster. This arrangement is unique, so far as I know, in monumental sculpture anterior to this period. At Paris, where both the pot and the jaws of Leviathan occur, they are placed in the first course, not on the tympanum; and by a genial touch of the artist the jaws are placed above and made to lead down to the pot. This arrangement, however, we may safely attribute to the necessity of containing the group within the narrow limits of the course, and at the same time of filling, in this, a space corresponding in height with the height of the two lintels. At Chartres and at Amiens Leviathan alone is seen, and the verse of Job referring to the boiling pot has been left entirely without illustration. The last point of similarity which seems to show a direct influence of manuscript 1186 of the library of the Arsenal is found at the opposite extremity of the lintel. Here, as I have said, Abraham is seated upon a cushioned bench beneath a canopy supported upon four columns, of which two are seen. He receives *in grembo* the souls that angels are bearing to him from St. Michael. Five little heads of souls are seen looking over the edge of the ample white napkin he holds on outstretched arms to contain them. At Chartres, at Paris, at Amiens the number of these souls is three. There are five in the miniature of the Breviary, and these are held in precisely the same attitude as at Bourges.

I believe I have shown enough similarity between the portraying of the scene of the Last Judgment in the miniatures of the Breviary of Saint Louis and that of the sculptures of the tympanum of Bourges for us to accept as highly probable the theory of direct influence from one to the other. How that influence was brought to bear must remain wholly conjectural, in the absence of documents capable of shedding some light upon the question. In this case, however, as in so many others, facts of history make it possible for us to form a hypothesis. From 1218 to 1232 Simon II de

Sully was archbishop of Bourges. During his administration work was actively progressing upon the cathedral, and he was not the man to be indifferent to the direction work of such importance was taking. To be sure, the façade was still in the far future, but there is no reason for doubting that plans for it had been conceived simultaneously with the foundation of the edifice in 1192; and the archbishop may very well be supposed to have caused the modification of parts to suit his desires, embodying in the whole details which possibly for purely personal reasons he wished to see included in the work. Even these drawings which I am now supposing Simon to have determined upon could not be accepted as being those finally utilized for the execution of the existing sculptures, for these bear every mark of the extreme end of the thirteenth century. However, the details we have credited Simon de Sully with having introduced into the design were evidently, for their artistic value, or through respect for the memory of so powerful a prelate, or both, finally incorporated in the cartoons which served for the execution of the great work.

About the last point in question, as to whether Simon de Sully was familiar with the miniatures of the Breviary, there can of course be no doubt. He was an intimate of Louis VIII and of Blanche de Castille his wife. He was a faithful councillor and trusted ambassador to the court of Honorius III in the delicate questions arising from the projected crusade in Albigeois. He was in Paris for the general assembly convoked there the 26th of January, 1226, to consider problems in connection with the crusade into the South,² and he was one of those to whom Louis, on his dying bed, confided the fortunes and the coronation of his youthful son Louis IX. During the able administration of Blanche this intimacy remained unbroken, and the Breviary of the queen regent, a most remarkable book and probably famous even at that time, must have been many times in the hands of the archbishop of Bourges. Its vivid pictures undoubtedly made a deep impression upon him, and so lasting that when political calls upon him were sufficiently infrequent to permit him to consider the interests and the administration of his primacy, he returned to them

² Chas. Petit-Dutaillis, *Etude sur la vie et le règne de Louis VIII*, 491, 492; *ibid.*, 506.

with a predilection and authority to which we may be grateful for the presence in the sculptured tympanum of the portal of Bourges of details which render it unique in the history of French art.

If the preceding study presents nothing more certain than a hypothesis, it still shows the way in which I believe the truth is to be found, and possibly some day a fortunate explorer will bring to light a document proving the exactness of my supposition.

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