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Arts of the Medieval Cathedrals: Studies on Architecture, Stained Glass, and Sculpture in Honor of Anne Prache

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Chapter 12

Filiae Hierusalem: Female Statue Columns from Notre-Dame-en-Vaux

Kathleen Nolan and Susan Leibacher Ward

The second half of the twelfth century in Champagne witnessed a flourishing of the monumental arts. Nowhere was this truer than in Châlons-en-Champagne (Marne), where the collegiate church of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux rivaled the local cathedral in its architecture, sculpture, and stained glass.¹ We are attracted to Notre-Dame-en-Vaux because of our project on statue columns, that fusion between figure sculpture and architectural supports that is typically thought of as a hallmark of “Gothic” sculpture. Notre-Dame-en-Vaux is an ideal case for our project because statue columns appear in multiple settings, most notably flanking the entrance portal and supporting the arcades of the cloister at this site. The column figures at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux demonstrate one reason for their rapid and widespread adoption: their symbolic mutability, that is, their ability to express multivalent meanings. In this chapter we will consider in particular the multiple roles played by the female column figures at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, where in the entrance portal they witness theophany, while in the cloister they enact Gospel narratives and parables, personify theological values, or recount hagiography, and sometimes perform several of these roles at once. Our contribution to the long and rich history of the interpretation of statue columns is to consider them in multiple architectural settings, and indeed at multiple institutions, in order to understand the messages that they relayed to their original viewers.²

1 The authors are grateful to have been among the Americans who, as graduate students and junior scholars, benefitted from Professor Prache’s warm reception of art historians from the United States.

2 The statue column and its meaning has been a backbone of the study of medieval sculpture since the eighteenth century. A recent example of the tradition, stretching back to Jean Mabillon and Bernard de Montfaucon, that assigns specific individual identities to the figures may be found in Margot Fassler’s *The Virgin of Chartres: Making History through Liturgy and the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), especially 242–81. Out of the huge bibliography on this subject, we have benefitted in particular from Janet Snyder’s studies of the contemporary attire of statue columns, as well as her work on limestone practice: *Early Gothic Column-Figure Sculpture in France: Appearance, Materials and Significance* (Farnham, UK and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2011), and her articles “On the Road Again, Limestone Sculpture in Twelfth-Century France,” in *Working with Limestone: The Science, Technology and Art of Medieval Limestone Monuments*, ed. Vibeke Olson (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011); “A Good Head for Business: Evidence for Standardization



12.1 Châlons-en-Champagne, cloister of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux: Ecclesia. Musée du cloître de Notre-Dame-en-Vaux (photo: Ward)

Notre-Dame-en-Vaux also links us to the scholarship of Anne Prache because of her early interest in the architecture and sculpture of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux. The famous and still enigmatic cloister ultimately became the focus of extensive examination by the late Léon Pressouyre, but in 1962 Anne Prache published an important early study in which she associated scattered sculptures with the cloister.³ Among these were two statue columns which were then reinstalled in the porch of the thirteenth-century church of Saint-Julien, at Sarry, 5 kilometers from Châlons. Prache was writing before the excavations of the site of the cloister which Léon Pressouyre would shortly undertake. The first experimental digging occurred in 1963, and systematic excavations were launched in 1970. Prache, in 1962, was working on the sculptures then above ground in Châlons, on pieces in the Louvre, and on the Sarry sculptures, whose existence had been noted in 1946 by Marcel Aubert, but only linked to the cloister of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux by Prache.⁴

Based on this partial information, Prache assembled what could be known of the iconographic program of the Châlons cloister and correctly deduced its symbolic and typological character. Prache in particular discussed the female figure at Sarry whom she identified as Ecclesia (Figure 12.1); the statue was

returned to Châlons in 1976 and is housed in the Musée du cloître de Notre-Dame-en-Vaux.⁵ Prache thus established the symbolic character of the cloister at Châlons and the role that female protagonists played in the working out of the meaning of the cloister. The subsequent analysis of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux by Léon and Sylvia Pressouyre affirmed the complexity of the program delivered by the sculptures, with the interweaving of apostolic, typological, and moral messages relayed by the column figures, in combination with more straightforward narratives, especially in the capitals that surmounted the columns.⁶

in Medieval Stone Sculpture," *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation* 20/2–3 (2004), published online at <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/0197372.asp>.

3 Notre-Dame-en-Vaux was the subject of Prache's 1963 *troisième cycle* thesis for the Sorbonne: "Notre-Dame-en-Vaux de Châlons-sur-Marne. Campagnes de construction." In 1962 Prache had published her most lengthy discussion of the cloister of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, "Le cloître de Notre-Dame-en-Vaux de Châlons-sur-Marne (fin du XIIe siècle)," *Mémoires de la Société d'agriculture, commerce, sciences et arts du département de la Marne* 78 (1962): 61–72. Several subsequent studies were devoted to Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, principally: "Notre-Dame-en-Vaux de Châlons-sur-Marne, campagnes de construction," *Mémoires de la Société d'agriculture, commerce, sciences et arts du département de la Marne* 81 (1966): 29–92; "L'église de Notre-Dame-en-Vaux de Châlons-sur-Marne," *Congrès archéologique de France* 135, Champagne 1977 (1980): 279–97.

4 Marcel Aubert, *La sculpture française au Moyen Age* (Paris: Flammarion, 1946), 199, as cited in Prache, "Le cloître," 70.

5 Prache, "Le cloître," 71.

6 The narrative of the Pressouyres' excavation and reinstallation of the famous cloister is scattered throughout multiple publications. Of direct relevance to this study are:

The church in question, Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, in Châlons-en-Champagne, had its origins as a dependency of the cathedral of Châlons, the cathedral of Saint-Étienne. Notre-Dame-en-Vaux began as a chapel dedicated to the Virgin in a valley outside of the city walls; it was in existence no later than 850. By 1107 it had become a church with a parish function and, at least by 1114, a college of six canons was established. By that date the canons of Notre-Dame were struggling with the chapter of the cathedral for greater independence.⁷ Both communities were composed of secular canons, who did not observe a common life.⁸ The chapter of the cathedral was much larger, composed of about 40 canons, while the number of canons at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux appears to have remained much

Léon Pressouyre, "Les fouilles du cloître de Notre-Dame-en-Vaux à Châlons-sur-Marne," *Bulletin de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France* (1964): 23–8; Léon Pressouyre, "Une tête du Louvre prétendue dionysienne," *Bulletin de la Société des antiquaires de France* (1967): 242–50; "Église Notre-Dame-en-Vaux," in *Dictionnaire des Églises de France, VB, Champagne, Flandre, Artois, Picardie* (Paris: Laffont, 1969), VB36–VB37; Léon Pressouyre, "Réflexions sur la sculpture du XIIe siècle en Champagne," *Gesta* 8 (1970): 16–31; Léon Pressouyre, "Saint Bernard to Saint Francis. Monastic Ideals and Iconographic Programs in the Cloister," *Gesta* 12 (1973): 71–92; Sylvia Pressouyre, *Images d'un cloître disparu* (Paris: Cuénot, 1976); Sylvia and Léon Pressouyre, "Le Cloître de Notre-Dame-en-Vaux," *Monuments historiques* 3 (1978): 1–16; Léon Pressouyre, "Les matériaux de construction du cloître de Notre-Dame-en-Vaux," in *Mines, carrières et métallurgie dans la France médiévale. Actes du colloque de Paris, 19–21 juin 1980*, ed. Paul Benoit and Philippe Braunstein (Paris: CNRS, 1983), 363–81; and Léon Pressouyre, "Did Suger Build the Cloister at Saint-Denis?," in *Abbot Suger and Saint-Denis*, ed. Paula Lieber Gerson (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 228–44.

7 The cartulary for Notre-Dame-en-Vaux does not survive; nor do any liturgical manuscripts. There is scattered information in the Archives Départementales de la Marne, in Châlons, much of which was assembled by Louis Grignon, *Description et historiques de l'église Notre-Dame-en-Vaux de Châlons, collégiale et paroissiale* (Châlons-en-Champagne: Thouille, 1884–85), 2 vols. Three twentieth-century scholars combed the archives: first, Anne Prache, as cited in note 3; then Léon Pressouyre, as referenced in note 6; and, most recently, Katharina Corsepius, for her monograph that deals very little with the cloister, *Notre-Dame-en-Vaux: Studien zur Baugeschichte des 12. Jahrhunderts in Châlons-sur-Marn* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997). For the early history of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, see Prache, "Le cloître," 61–6, and "Campagnes de construction," 33–8; Pressouyre "Église Notre-Dame-en-Vaux," VB36–VB37; and Sylvia Pressouyre, *Images*, 11–12. A recent study is that of Alain Villes, "La concurrence entre la cathédrale Saint-Etienne et la collégiale Notre-Dame-en-Vaux de Châlons-en-Champagne, son intérêt pour l'archéologie et l'histoire de l'art," in *Architektur und Monumentalskulptur des 12.–14. Jahrhunderts. Produktion und Rezeption. Festschrift für Peter Kurmann zu 65. Geburtstag* (Bern: Lang, 2006): 97–127.

8 Most literature on canons is devoted to regular canons, as summarized by Hene H. Forsyth, "The *Vita Apostolica* and Romanesque Sculpture: Some Preliminary Observations," *Gesta* 25 (1986): 81, n. 2 (75–92); one should note the classic study by Charles Dereine, "Chanoines des origines au XIIIe siècles," *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique*, ed. Alfred Baudrillart (Paris: Le Touzey et Ané, 1953) 12: cols. 353–405, and the important work done in the 1970s and 1980s by Caroline Walker Bynum, most notably *Docere verbo et exemplo: An Aspect of Twelfth-Century Spirituality* (Missoula, MA: Scholars, 1979).

smaller.⁹ But the college of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux became wealthy, at least in part because of an active Marian pilgrimage spurred by accounts of miracles worked by the Virgin of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux during the rebuilding of the church after its collapse in 1157.¹⁰

The canons commissioned, between the years 1170 and 1180, a spectacular statue-column cloister, as well as a south portal with column figures.¹¹ Between the years 1181 and 1187, they were locked in litigation over privileges and revenues with the chapter of the cathedral of Châlons. The canons were reproached for using their considerable income from offerings for “paintings and other useless expenditures.” Ultimately the archbishop of Reims and Pope Lucius III were both involved in restoring order.¹² During these same years, the church of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux experienced multiple building campaigns; the final configuration of the church, not completed until the early thirteenth century, emulated the great Benedictine abbey of Saint-Remi, in Reims, probably, as Anne Prache argued, through the participation of the master builder who had worked at Saint-Remi.¹³ The cloister was not altered during these successive campaigns, and stood until it was dismantled in the eighteenth century, well before the French Revolution.¹⁴

The south portal that was constructed during the period of great prosperity faced, as it still does, onto a public square. The portal sculpture was all but obliterated during the revolutionary frenzy of 1793 (Figure 12.2).¹⁵

9 Cartularies and an ordinal survive for the cathedral of Châlons; Étienne Hurault, *La Cathédrale de Châlons et son clergé à la fin du XIIIe siècle* (Châlons-en-Champagne: Martin, 1907), 32, for the size of the cathedral chapter. The number of canons at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux was increased around 1160–76, but the ultimate size of the college is not clear; Prache, “Campagnes,” 39–40.

10 The miracles worked by the Virgin and the zeal of the faithful to participate in the rebuilding are known from a ca. 1165 letter that a canon of the cathedral of Châlons, Gui de Bazoches, wrote to his sister, Aélis de Château-Porcien, as well as from the *Livre de miracles de Notre-Dame-en-Vaux*, a miracles text from a later period; Prache, “Campagnes,” 38–40; Léon Pressouyre, “Les matériaux,” 374–5; and Corsepisus, *Notre-Dame-en-Vaux*, 214–16.

11 For the dating of the cloister see Sylvia Pressouyre, *Images*, 11–12; Léon Pressouyre, “Le cloître,” *Monuments historiques*, 3. Willibald Sauerländer dated the cloister slightly later, to ca. 1180, *Gothic Sculpture in France, 1140–1270*, trans. Janet Sondheimer (New York: Abrams, 1972), 93. The 1170–80 date was accepted by Xavier Dectot, *Sculptures des XIe–XIIe siècles, roman et premier art gothique* (Paris: Réunion des Musées nationaux, 2005), 142.

12 Prache, “Campagnes,” 41–2; and Sylvia Pressouyre, *Images*, 12, for discussions of the conflict.

13 Prache, “Campagnes,” 85–91.

14 The history of destruction of the cloister is recounted by Sylvia Pressouyre, *Images*, 13–14; and Léon Pressouyre, “Le cloître,” *Monuments historiques*, 3–4.

15 Sylvia Pressouyre, *Images*, 5. Fragments from the south portal may be found at the Musée du Louvre; see Françoise Baron, *Sculpture Française. I. Moyen Âge* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1996): 61, for a head (R.F. 1101); 62–3, for eight fragments from a set of voussoirs (R.F. 1092, R.F. 1093, R.F. 2210, R.F. 2211, R.F. 2212, R.F. 2213, R.F. 2214 and Ent. 1969.01); and 61, for an additional capital that may be from the portal (R.F. 1107). There is an unfinished head at the Indiana University Art Museum (62.19)



12.2 Châlons-en-Champagne, Notre-Dame-en-Vaux: south portal (photo: Nolan)

Attempts began in the nineteenth century to identify the all but obliterated themes of the portal, which seems to have followed the familiar twelfth-century formula of *Majestas Domini* tympanum surmounting jamb figures.¹⁶ At Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, the jamb statues include a single female figure, which serves as one of our points of comparison with the female statue columns in the cloister.

Scholars have long noted that the battered doorway was closely related thematically and probably stylistically to the west portal of the great abbey church of Saint-Bénigne in Dijon (Côte-d'Or), now known through sculptural fragments and the eighteenth-century engraving made for Urbain Plancher (Figure 12.3).¹⁷ One can discern, in the mutilated tympanum of the south door of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, traces of the same disposition of elements as in the lost portal of Saint-Bénigne, including angels, in the upper zone, who separate Christ from the symbols of Matthew and John (Figure 12.4). The lintel likewise seems to draw its narrative of the birth of Christ from Dijon, although several of the scenes at Châlons are virtually effaced, and the contents of the lower lintel at Dijon are unknown.¹⁸ The archivolts at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux are also very battered, but seem to have shown angels in the innermost rank and some combination of multi-figured narrative scenes and Apocalyptic Elders in the outer courses.

that may also be associated with the south portal at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux; Dorothy Gillerman, *Gothic Sculpture in America. II: The Museums of the Midwest* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 79–80, no. 62.

16 Early attempts at interpreting the portal's iconography were made by Ferdinand de Guilhermy, *Notes sur diverses localités de la France*, Paris, BnF nouv. acq. fr. 6098, f. 5v; Louis Grignon, *Description historique*, vol. 2, 11–13; Wilhelm Vöge, *Die Anfänge der monumentalen Stiles im Mittelalter. Eine Untersuchung über die erste Blütezeit französischer Plastik* (Strassburg: Heitz, 1894), 335–6; and L. Hubert, *Notre-Dame-en-Vaux de Châlons-sur-Marne: Étude historique et archéologique* (Epernay: Choque, 1941), 38–43, 130–33.

17 Urbain Plancher, *Histoire générale et particulière de Bourgogne* (Dijon: de Fay, 1739–81), 4 vols, vol. 1, pl. 503. The association was first made by Geneviève Louise Marsh-Micheli in a thesis for the École du Louvre; Louise Micheli, "La sculpture de Notre-Dame-en-Vaux et des églises châlonnaises à la fin du XIIe siècle," *Bulletin des musées de France* 10 (1932): 127–8. Her point was taken up by André Lapeyre, *Des façades occidentales de Saint-Denis et de Chartres aux portails de Laon. Études sur la sculpture monumentale dans l'Ile-de-France et les régions voisines au XIIe siècle* (Macon: Protat, 1960), 128–9, and echoed by most later scholars: Willibald Sauerländer, "Twelfth-Century Sculpture at Châlons-sur-Marne," in *Studies in Western Art: Acts of the twentieth International Congress of the History of Art*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), vol. 1, 121 (119–28); Prache, "Campagnes," 80; Pressouyre, "Réflexions," 2. For the lost portal of Saint-Bénigne in its own right, see Lapeyre, *Des façades*, 101–7; Sauerländer, *Gothic Sculpture*, 389–91, ill. 8; and Monique Jannet-Vallat and Fabienne Joubert, *Sculpture médiévale en Bourgogne: Collection lapidaire du Musée archéologique de Dijon* (Dijon: Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2000), 110–14, Figures 33–6.

18 For the lintel at Saint-Bénigne, Sauerländer, *Gothic Sculpture*, 389–90, and Jannet-Vallat and Joubert, *Sculpture médiévale*, 110–14; Lapeyre, *Des façades*, 128, summarized attempts at decoding the ruined lintel sculpture at Châlons.

This configuration of the archivolt again appears to follow Saint-Bénigne.¹⁹ It is difficult to speak about the bludgeoned trumeau at Châlons, but, like Saint-Bénigne, it contained a figure, apparently male, as a possible corollary for St. Benignus that occupied the trumeau in Dijon.²⁰

Parallels also exist between the column figures of the two imperfectly known portals. These parallels illustrate a key theme in our larger project: the ability of statue columns to convey meaning in ways that transcend literal identification. Judging from their specificity of dress and attribute, the Saint-Bénigne statue columns, as we know them from the engraving made for Plancher, may have been intended to bear individual identity, perhaps to a greater extent than in the earliest statue-column portals.²¹ At Châlons one can at most determine gender from the battered silhouettes that remain, but even this partial information can bear meaning.²² Significantly, the single female figure at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux is in the same position as the female figure at Saint-Bénigne seen in the Plancher engraving. At Saint-Bénigne a webbed foot identified the statue as the Queen of Sheba, as part of an ensemble that included Old and New Testament figures.²³ At Châlons the queen is so damaged that it is quite impossible to speak of what her feet may have been like. Regardless of the exact identity of the lone female figure at Châlons, her presence at the far right of the doorway reinforced the portal's

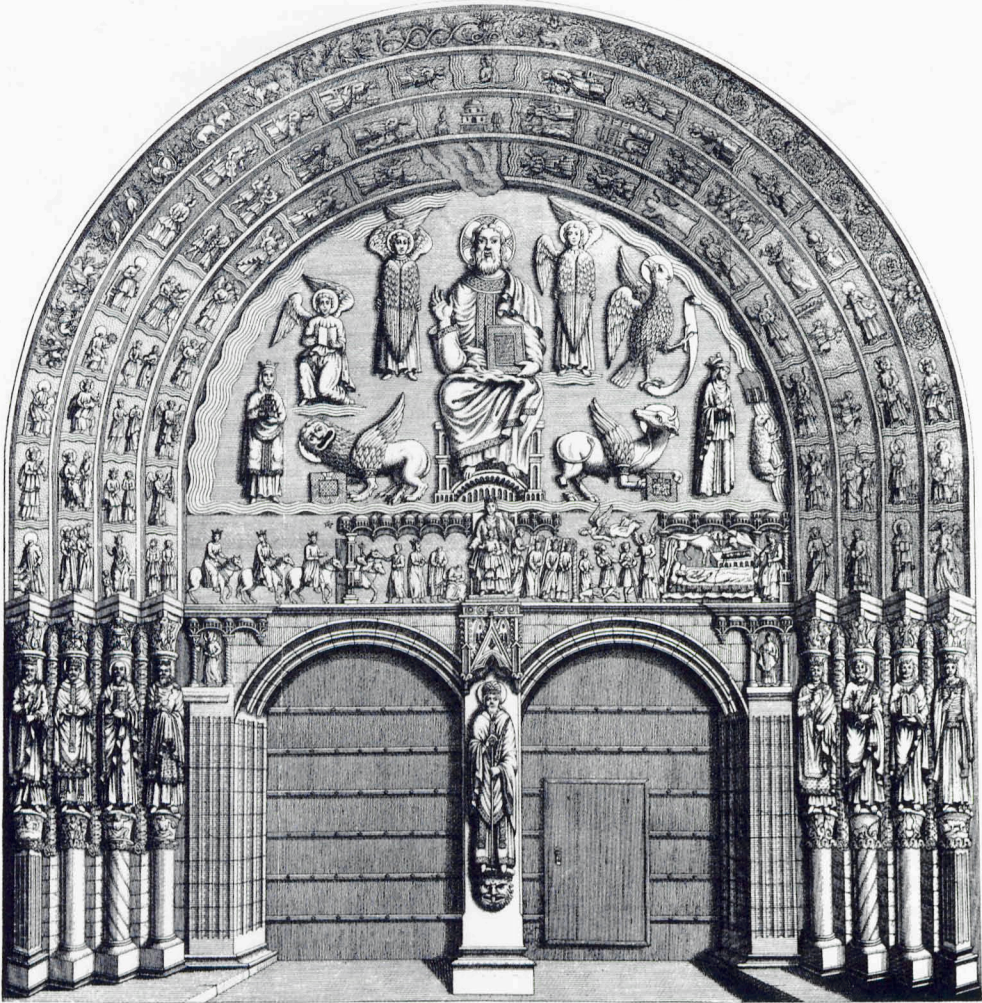
19 Lapeyre, *Des façades*, 101, for the archivolt of Saint-Bénigne, 128–30, for those of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux; Jannet-Vallat and Joubert, *Sculpture médiévale*, 114, for the archivolt of Saint-Bénigne.

20 Examination of the sculpture today does not confirm the comment made by Grignon, *Description*, 12, that the trumeau figure was said to be (“dit-on”) a young woman with long hair; his remark was repeated by Vöge, *Die Anfänge*, 336.

21 Jannet-Vallat and Joubert, *Sculpture médiévale*, 112–14, in addition to the Queen of Sheba, Peter and Moses are clearly identified by attribute; the other figures they interpret as Paul, Aaron, Solomon, David, and perhaps Josiah.

22 Grignon, *Description*, wrote that the statue columns were said to be the five ancestors of the Virgin on one side, and the five fathers of the church on the other. Sauerländer repeated this rather unlikely assertion, *Gothic Sculpture*, 411.

23 The Queen of Sheba appears with a webbed foot at Saint-Bénigne, and also at Nesle-la-Reposte (Marne), Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule (Allier), and the church of Saint-Pierre or Saint-Père in Nevers (Nièvre). The web-footed queens were not always interpreted as the Queen from the South. Because there were several goose-footed queens in France's historic past, Bernard de Montfaucon concluded that a queen with a webbed foot represented a specific historical personage; at Saint-Bénigne, she was Clotilde, the wife of Clovis; see *Les monumens de la monarchie française* (Paris, Michel et Giffart, 1729), 5 vols, vol. 1, 192. A Visigothic queen from Toulouse with a webbed foot is also mentioned; she was discussed by Paula Gerson, “The West Façade of St.-Denis: An Iconographic Study,” PhD diss., Columbia University, 1970, 153–8; and by Kathryn Horste; *Cloister Design and Monastic Reform in Toulouse: The Romanesque Sculpture of La Daurade* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 49–50, 210–11. In 1756 Abbé Lebeuf corrected Montfaucon's assumption that statue columns represented the kings and queens of France, and argued that the queen with the goose foot, *la reine Pédauque*, should be identified with the Queen of Sheba; “Conjectures sur la Reine Pédauque, où l'on recherche quelle pouvoit être cette Reine,” *Mémoires de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 23 (1756): 230–32.



Portail principal de l'Église S. Bénigne de Dijon par ou l'on entre du porche ou vestibule d'auant de la même Église du côté d'occident

12.3 Dijon, Saint-Bénigne: engraving of west portal, from Urbain Plancher, *Histoire générale et particulière de Bourgogne*, 1739, vol. 1, pl. 503 (photo: Nolan)

reference to the great monastic house. Thus the canons of Notre-Dame chose for this public entrance to the church a conservative, monastic iconography that would ally them to those who led a truly communal religious life. In addition to the themes in the tympanum and lintel, the statue columns suggested institutional relationships by means of the gender and position of figures, in a manner that went beyond their specific identity.²⁴

²⁴ If the head in the Louvre (RF 1101) indeed belonged to the Châlons south portal, then the carvers of the portal were closely referencing Saint-Bénigne, given the similarities in physiognomy and headgear. See Pressouyre, "Un tête," 242–9; Baron, *Sculpture française*, 61; and the discussion in Jannet-Vallat and Joubert, *Sculpture médiévale*, 123–4.



As Anne Prache observed, the carvers of the portal sculpture included one of the sculptors of the cloister of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, Pressouyre's Master of the King, indicating that there was chronological overlap between the projects.²⁵ In striking contrast to the conventional iconography of the public entrance to Notre-Dame-en-Vaux—with its combination of *Majestas Domini* and Nativity scenes in the tympanum and lintel, and familiar biblical figures in the doorway embrasures—the imagery of the cloister is rarified in the extreme. In the ensemble we are struck by the strong presence of female figures, notably the *Ecclesia* that Prache originally saw at Sarry (Figure 12.1). She observed that the pole that the figure grasps with her right hand was a standard, and that the object that she held was a lidded box, presumably a pyxis. Prache concluded that the figure represented *Ecclesia*, although a more familiar image is her striking characterization at the cathedral of Strasbourg, with her chalice and veiled cross.²⁶ While Prache suggested that an accompanying *Synagoga* might be found in one of the torsos that were known at the time from the cloister, the 50-some known column figures from Châlons prove not to include a *synagogue*.²⁷ Therefore the lone *Ecclesia*

12.4 Châlons-en-Champagne, Notre-Dame-en-Vaux: south portal, tympanum and lintel (photo: Nolan)

25 Prache, "Le cloître," 67.

26 Sauerländer, *Gothic Sculpture*, pl. 133; Nina Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral and the Medieval City: Synagoga and Ecclesia in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), figs. 121, 122, 126, 128, 145, 148.

27 Prache, "Le cloître," 71, pl. XXII.



12.5 Châlons-en-Champagne, cloister of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux: Wise Virgin. Musée du cloître de Notre-Dame-en-Vaux (photo: Nolan)



12.6 Châlons-en-Champagne, cloister of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux: Foolish Virgin. Musée du cloître de Notre-Dame-en-Vaux (photo: Nolan)

figure seems to emphasize the personification of the Church in a way consistent with other messages of the cloister, as Pressouyre had suggested.

In addition to Ecclesia, there are women who instruct us on moral behavior: wise and foolish virgins. Corollaries to the striking male figures of the Cardinal Virtues located on a pier, a Wise Virgin and a Foolish Virgin each occupies her own column (Figures 12.5 and 12.6). The Foolish Virgin has a capital with additional small-scale virgins.²⁸ As characters in a parable told by Christ (Matthew 25:1–13), the Wise and Foolish Virgins are not personifications of abstract qualities like the four Virtues pier, but they are closely related to this complex

²⁸ Léon Pressouyre, "Fouilles," 32–3; Sylvia Pressouyre, *Images*, 76–8.



12.7 (left) Châlons-en-Champagne, cloister of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux: bride from the Wedding at Cana. Musée du cloître de Notre-Dame-en-Vaux (photo: G. Garitan/wikicommons). See also Plate 31

12.8 (right) Châlons-en-Champagne, cloister of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux: bride from the Wedding at Cana, detail, head. Musée du cloître de Notre-Dame-en-Vaux (photo: Nolan)

of ideas and representations. According to Linda Seidel, the Wise and Foolish Virgins represent “another metaphoric illustration of the reward for virtue.”²⁹ Undoubtedly for this thematic similarity representations of the Virgins are often paired with representations of the Vices and Virtues, especially in the sculpted façades of southwestern France.³⁰

One of the most remarkable figures in the entire cloister is a young woman, another virgin, whom the Pressouyres associated with the Wedding at Cana capital (Figure 12.7 = Plate 31).³¹ This figure, the only surviving figure to be grouped with the scene, wears very specific contemporary dress and no veil, so that her long hair

29 Linda Seidel, *Songs of Glory: The Romanesque Façades of Aquitaine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 51.

30 Examples include the churches of Aulnay, Chadenac, Corme-Royal, Fenioux, Pont-l'Abbé, and Pérignac; see Seidel, *Songs of Glory*, 51.

31 Sylvia Pressouyre, *Images*, 58.



12.9 Châlons-en-Champagne, cloister of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux: mourning woman (photo: Hartill Archive of Architecture and Allied Arts)

of the western church. The sympathy and beauty with which even the Foolish Virgins are portrayed calls to mind Linda Seidel's discussion of Salome in the cloister of another college of male clerics, at Saint-Étienne in Toulouse, a canonical environment that also featured Wise and Foolish Virgins.³³ The novelty

flows down her back (Figure 12.8). She is presumably the Bride at the wedding, who figures not at all in John's narrative but who was interpreted by theologians as the Church as the Bride of Christ.³² As we have seen, Prache's statue of Ecclesia herself was part of the cloister complex. The emphasis on the Church as Bride of Christ floats through the extant statue columns of the cloister. She is personified as Ecclesia, represented as the bride from the Wedding at Cana, and is also a major focus of the Wise and Foolish Virgins story, where the culmination of the story is the arrival of the bridegroom.

In addition to these symbolic representations of the bride, in the Notre-Dame-en-Vaux cloister statue columns of women operate in a more mimetic way. Beyond the examples of wise virgins in large scale, weeping holy women demonstrate for us what to feel at the death of Christ (Figure 12.9). It does seem fair to mention the abundance offered by the mother of St. Nicholas, as well as the precocious proto-saint who rejects it. We are struck in the Châlons cloister, as scholars of medieval art and thought often are, by the important symbolic role of women within the deeply misogynistic world

32 The idea of Ecclesia and her conflation with the bride from the Song of Songs, the Virgin Mary, the Virtues, and the Wise Virgins of the parable have been the subject of many art historical studies, including the classic, Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculptural Programs of Chartres Cathedral: Christ Mary Ecclesia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959), Otto Von Simson, "Le programme sculptural du transept méridional de la cathédrale de Strasbourg," *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de la Cathédrale de Strasbourg* 10 (1982), 33–50; E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 123–50.

33 Linda Seidel, "Salome and the Canons," *Women Studies* 11 (1984): 29–66; also see Horste, *Cloister Design*, 151–2, for the portrayal of Salome, Wise and Foolish Virgin, and Ecclesia at La Daurade.

of Châlons is the large scale in which these exemplars or models are depicted. While the relationship between the visual arts and the growth in the emotive spirituality of such writers as Bernard of Clairvaux is complex, one wonders if the increase in identification fostered by such writers was also enhanced for the Châlons canons by the scale of the nearly life-sized figures.³⁴

We do wonder, given the importance of the Marian cult at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, why there is not more overt emphasis on the Life of the Virgin. There are multiple bases and capitals that lack columns, and there are fragmentary female figures, and so it is easy to imagine that the cloister originally gave the prominence that we would expect to the Virgin. Moreover, an entire gallery of the cloister is missing, the south gallery, closest to the church. Even though this south gallery was dismantled after the destruction of the rest of the cloister, all of its sculpture appears to be missing.³⁵ Extrapolating from Peter Klein's argument that the cloister gallery nearest the church carried the greatest spiritual significance, we might wonder if the lost arcades represented the Virgin more directly, perhaps in the manner of the Burgundian churches where an early metamorphosis in the identity and role of statue columns took place.³⁶ At Notre-Dame in Vermenton (Yonne) a statue column bearing the Virgin and Child formed part of an Adoration of the Magi vignette (Figure 12.10), and at Saint-Lazare in Avallon (Yonne) a Virgin Annunciate on one column was hailed by the angel Gabriel on another.³⁷ It is tempting to speculate that at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux images of the Virgin were among those figures that were not broken up and buried in foundation walls at the time of the destruction of the cloister. Perhaps, like Ecclesia, who spent 200 years as a porch figure in the local church of Sarry, a statue column of the Virgin survived intact and will someday be identified.

There are many questions still to be answered about the exceptional range of themes at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, our most complete statue-column cloister. Léon Pressouyre's work on the cloister was broken off after the death of his first wife and close collaborator. Plans to write a longer monograph with the participation of Danielle Johnson never came to fruition.³⁸ Certainly there remains the question of the overall message of the cloister in a community of canons who did not share a common life. No ordinal or customary for Notre-Dame-en-Vaux survives that might tell us about the worship practices of the canons and the role that the cloister played in them. From the scant evidence that does survive in the

34 Recent discussions of this include Ann Astell, *Eating Beauty: The Eucharist and the Spiritual Arts of the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 64–6; and for the *Apologia* in general, the earlier study by Conrad Rudolph, *The "Things of Greater Importance": Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Towards Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

35 Pressouyre, "Le cloître," *Monuments historiques*, 4.

36 Peter K. Klein, "Topographie, fonctions, et programmes iconographiques de cloîtres: la galerie attenante à l'église," in *Der mittelalterliche Kreuzgang*, ed. Peter K. Klein (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner: 2004), 105–56.

37 Lapeyre, *Des façades*, 108–9, 144–5; Sauerländer, *Gothic Sculpture*, 401.

38 We are extremely grateful to Danielle Johnson for allowing us access to the unpublished notes for this project.

12.10
Vermenton, Notre-
Dame: west portal
(photo: Nolan)



archives, Léon Pressouyre discovered that the canons continued to observe the Maundy Thursday ritual in the cloister into the eighteenth century.³⁹ We should note that the canons of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux were by no means unique in having commissioned a cloister, relatively late in their history and for no compelling devotional reason. A research group attached to the French Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) assembled, in the 1990s, the evidence of canonical complexes in some 22 French cities.⁴⁰ As Yves Esquieu noted in an essay based upon the findings of the project, many of the communities of secular canons erected cloisters in the second half of the twelfth and during the thirteenth centuries. These cloisters varied in their configuration and proximity to the

³⁹ Léon Pressouyre, "Monastic Ideals," 75–7. One should note by contrast that Sylvia Pressouyre stressed the lack of spiritual function of the cloister; *Images*, 12.

⁴⁰ Jean-Charles Picard, ed., *Les chanoines dans la ville. Recherches sur la topographie des quartiers canoniques en France* (Paris: De Boccard, 1994).

church; some were in the traditional Benedictine position, and others not directly attached to the church.⁴¹ Scant evidence of the decoration of the cloisters in this study survive, although we do have fragmentary remains of perhaps half a dozen statue-column cloisters from diverse institutions that, like Châlons, exemplify the expansion of monumental sculpture in the twelfth century.⁴²

Ultimately our best source for the meaning of the cloister is the sculpture itself, where the contrast between its intricate symbolic program and the formulaic iconography of the public portal suggests that its primary audience was the educated clergy of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux. The themes of the cloister at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux are unusually allegorical and learned, but they find parallels in statue columns that survive from two monastic cloisters. At the abbey of Saint-Pierre-le-Vif, in Sens (Yonne), the column statues from the destroyed cloister included personifications of the Liberal Arts, Geometry, Dialectic, and Music, recalling the presence of those themes in twelfth-century portals at Chartres and Déols (Indres). Sculpture from the vanished cloister of the Benedictine house of Saint-Géry au Mont-des-Boeufs, in Cambrai (Nord), includes enigmatic figures—a male with a falcon and a female holding flowers—which may indicate months of the year, May and April.⁴³ These themes may evoke the cycle of sacred time in Benedictine life, while a third figure, a dancing female, may represent Salome.⁴⁴ Perhaps because of accidents of survival, the level of complexity and sophistication in the cloister of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux surpasses that of the two Benedictine examples.

We may assume that the primary purpose of the cloister was to emphasize the spirituality of canonical life through role models and symbols of virtue, including the Cardinal Virtues, whose quadrilateral pier suggests that it stood at one of the corners of the cloister, and thus in a prime location. Remembering the bitter disputes with the chapter of the cathedral of Châlons, we can conclude that in the cloister the canons of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, secular or not, wanted to put forth messages that upheld the validity of canonical life. Within this theme we find

41 Yves Esquieu, "La place du cloître dans l'organisation du quartier cathedral," in *Kreuzgang*, ed. Klein, 80–88.

42 Sylvia Pressouyre, writing in 1976, listed five other statue-column cloisters in France: Saint-Denis, Saint-Maur-des-Fosses, Saint-Pierre-le-Vif, in Sens, Saint-Quentin, in Beauvais, and Saint-Géry au Mont-des-Boeufs (*Images*, 15–16).

43 For the column figures from Saint-Pierre-le-Vif, in Sens, now in the Sens Musée municipal, see Sauerländer, *Gothic Sculpture*, 92–3, Figure 29. For the sculptures from Saint-Géry au Mont-des-Boeufs, now in the Musée municipal, in Cambrai, see William Wixom, *Treasures from Medieval France* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1967), 90–91; and *Sculptures romanes et gothiques du Nord de la France* (Lille: Musée des Beaux Arts, 1978), 97–102, Figures 31, 32; and Françoise Magny, *Le Musée de Cambrai* (Paris: Fondation Paribas, 1997), 30–35. In Champagne itself, the learned theme of a disputation appeared in a tympanum, now in the Musée Saint-Remi, in Reims, that originally came from a house in the canonical quarter of Reims Cathedral; Michael Camille, "'Seeing and Lecturing': Disputation in a Twelfth-Century Tympanum from Reims," in *Reading Medieval Images: The Art Historian and the Object*, ed. Elizabeth Sears and Thelma K. Thomas (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 75–87.

44 Magny, *Musée*, 34–5.

multiple examples of female figures being used to embody values that guided a college of clerics, as well as the exceptional allegories of the cloister whose sophistication attests to the high intellectual level of the community.

Prache, in her 1962 essay on the Châlons column figures then at Sarry, laid the path for modern scholarship into the sculpture of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux. It is fitting that she focused on a female figure, since the women, the *Filiae Hierusalem* of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, demonstrate that remarkable range of narrative and symbol that the statue column is able to convey. We have noted that the sole female figure among the statues of the south portal functioned, like her counterparts, as a biblical witness to the theophany in the tympanum, at the same time as she helps to signal a filiation with mainstream monasticism by means of affinities with Saint-Bénigne.

The same multivalence is at work in the female figures within the cloister, where they are essential to the virtuosic iconography that the canons used to express their values. Female column figures in the cloister fulfill their long-established roles as personifications of abstractions, but they also bring to life parables, thus serving as moral models and anti-models; they intensify Gospel narratives and they relate saints' lives. Together the sculptures of the portal and cloister at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux demonstrate the astonishing range of themes that the column figure was uniquely equipped to convey. These near life-sized figures are stand-ins for the viewer; occupying space in the same three-dimensional way that we do, especially in the case of cloister figures, they supply concreteness to distant religious characters and intangible ideals. In order to appreciate the versatility that the column figure lent to the monumental art of the second half of the twelfth century, it is important to consider these sculptures in multiple architectural settings, as we have done at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, as well as at a range of institutions.⁴⁵

45 Our argument echoes a point made by Léon Pressouyre in 1986 with regard to whether or not the cloister at Saint-Denis was the first statue-column cloister, that the question could not "be disassociated from an overall study of the multiple architectural functions of the statue-column in the twelfth century," in "Cloister at Saint-Denis," in *Abbot Suger*, ed. Gerson, 244, n. 39. Our work on Châlons forms part of a larger study of the statue column in its multiple settings. This project draws upon long engagement with statue-column portals: Susan Leibacher Ward, "The Sculpture of the South Porch at Le Mans Cathedral," PhD diss., Brown University, 1984; and "The South Porch of Le Mans Cathedral and the Concept of the 'Follower Portal,'" in *Mittelalterliche Bauskulptur in Frankreich und Spanien*, ed. Claudia Rückert and Jochen Staebel (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2010), 51–63; Kathleen Nolan, "The Early Gothic Portal of Notre-Dame in Étampes," PhD diss., Columbia University, 1985, "Narrative in the Capital Frieze of Notre-Dame in Étampes," *Art Bulletin* 71 (1989): 166–84; "Ritual and Visual Experience in the Capital Frieze of the Cathedral of Chartres," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 123 (1994): 53–72; and "'Ploratus et ululatus': The Mothers in the Massacre of the Innocents at the Cathedral of Chartres," *Studies in Iconography* 17 (1996): 95–141.