Saint-Gabriel Chapel, Provence: A Study of Spolia, Gesture, and Sacred Drama

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> La petite église romane
> De Saint-Gabriel, non loin de là,
> Semble, pauvrette, s'ennuyer,
> Abandonnée par les Chrétiens
> Depuis nombre et nombre d'années…
>
> Mais les plantes du bon Dieu,
> Dans le préau de son parvis,
> Aux trous des murs massifs,
> Entre les pierres de son toit de dalles,
> Ont pris racine et fleurissent:
> Encens agreste que la chaleur du jour…
>
> Et moi, le félibre de Maillane,
> Passant aujourdhui devant le porche
> De ton église veuve et pauvre
> Qui n'a pour orgue que le vent.
>
> O saint Gabriel de Tarascon,
> A mon tour, ému, je t'offre
> Ce petit poème nouveau
> Où ta blancheur apparaît souriante.[2]   (*Frédéric Mistral, July 7, 1883*)

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[2] Epilogue of a poem referring to Saint-Gabriel by Occitan poet, Frédéric Mistral. "E, de ta glèiso véuso e pauro Que pèr ourgueno n'a que l'auro, O sant Gabrié tarascounen, Iéu, lou felibre maianen, Vuei en

INTRODUCTION

In this passage from the poem "Nerte," the Occitan poet Frédéric Mistral (1830–1914) expresses the nostalgia he felt when he encountered the 12th-century chapel of Saint-Gabriel in the outskirts of Tarascon in Bouches-du-Rhône (Provence) **(Fig. 1)**. The poet's lyrical description of this Provençal church remains faithful to its contemporary structure, as, built on a hill, its dramatic triple-arched west façade is reached by a stone

Figure 1 *Saint-Gabriel Chapel, c. 1175 or 1180. View of west façade, Tarascon, Bouches-du Rhône, Provence-Alpes-et-Cote d'Azur, France. Photo: Author.*

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passant davans lou porge, À moun tour, esmougu, te porge Aquest pouèmo nouvelet Ounte blanquejes risoulet." Frédéric Mistral, *Nerte: Nouvello Prouvençalo* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1884), 378–381.

stairway.[3] Mistral's description of the portal deserves to be better known: its rich sculptural program is composed of the biblical narratives of Daniel in the Lions' Den, the Temptation, Fall of Adam and Eve, and the Annunciation and Visitation, all set within an antique pediment comprised of re-used materials (*spolia*) dating from antiquity or *spolia*-like architectural elements citing the past **(Fig. 2)**.[4]

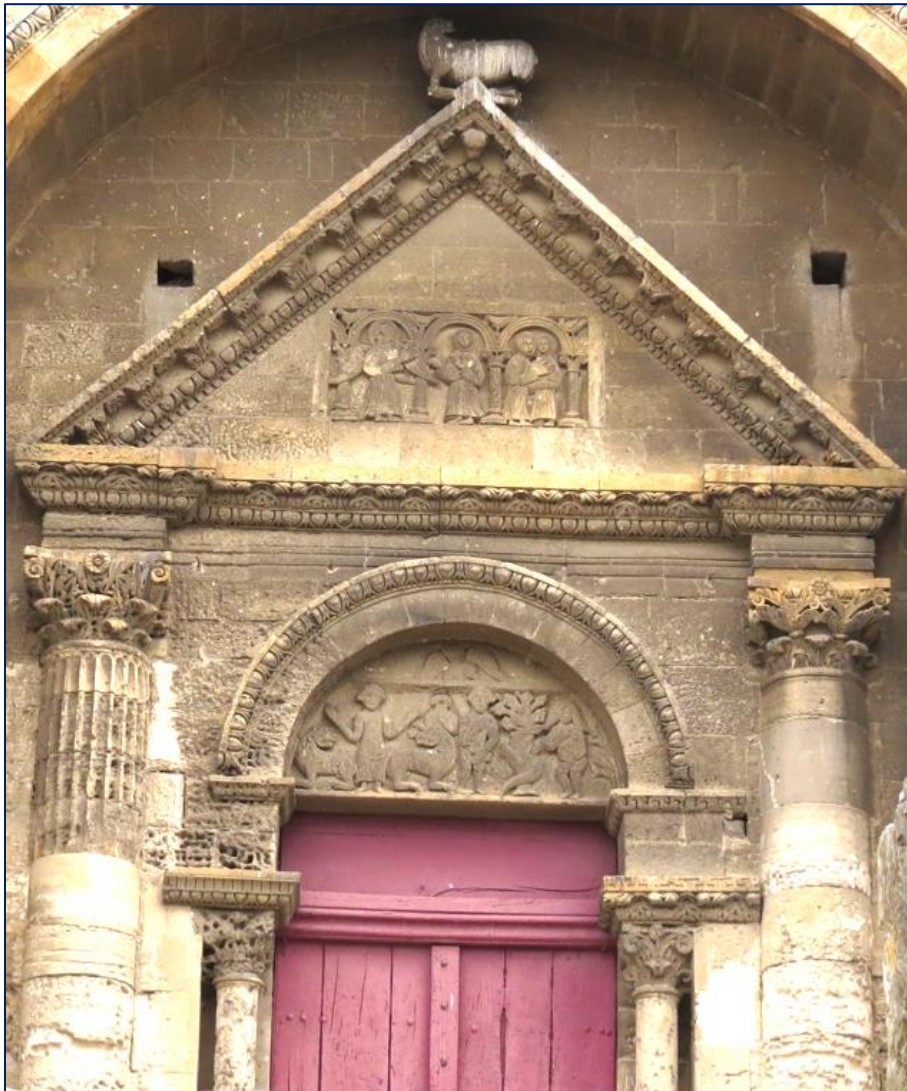**Figure 2** Pediment and *Agnus Dei*; Annunciation and Visitation frieze; and Temptation and Fall, Daniel in the Lion's Den tympanum, detail of west façade, *Saint-Gabriel Chapel*, *c*. 1175 or 1180, near Tarascon, Bouches-du-Rhône, Provence-Alpes-et-Côte d'Azur, France. Photo: Author.

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[3] The stairs were a later 20th-century addition.

[4] *Spolia* are re-used materials from previous art and/or architectural objects.

In this article, I examine the various meanings of the iconographical narrative of Chapelle Saint-Gabriel in relation to its socio-cultural context and liturgical purposes. I also explore the use of *spolia* in the context of *Restauratio formæ primitivis ecclesiae*, a renewed apostolic movement of the Church, referring back to the Apostolic Age. Following an overview of the Romanesque chapel's site and the classical influence Saint-Gabriel imbues, this article offers an iconographical analysis of the sculptural program that complements a discussion of the exegetical meaning of the space. It focuses particularly on the expressive language of gestures stemming from the rich culture of medieval sacred plays.

SAINT-GABRIEL

Designated a historical monument by Prosper Mérimée in 1840, today, as in Mistral's time, Saint-Gabriel stands amidst olive trees and is surrounded by bull farms on a minor road in a Provençal valley, disconnected from its original vibrant context **(Fig. 1)**.[5] To my knowledge, there is no textual evidence that provides the exact date of

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[5] The chapel stands on the grounds of Ernaginum a former 6th -century BCE to late 1st -century CE Roman colony. See Cécile Allinne and Florence Verdin, "Le vicus d'Ernaginum (Saint-Gabriel, Tarascon, Bouches-du-Rhône)," *Revue archéologique de Narbonnaise* 35 (2002): 137. Originally surrounded by the Fosses Mariennes (*fossis Marianis* swamps), Ernaginum was the site of a port, which, together with the main Roman roads, became essential for commercial prosperity and accessibility. See Isidore Gilles, *Les voies romaines et massiliennes dans le département des Bouches-du-Rhône* (Avignon: Séguin et frères, 1884), 75; and Philippe Leveau, "La cité romaine d'Arles et le Rhône: La romanisation d'un espace deltaïque," *American Journal of Archaeology* 108(2004): 349–375. Ernaginum's prosperity produced rich Hellenistic and Gallo-Roman buildings and artifacts. From 480 onwards, the Visigoths sacked and destroyed Ernaginum, forcing many of its inhabitants to flee to Tarascon or Lansac. The town was also raided by the Saracens

the construction of the chapel, or any surviving information about its patronage or

function.[6] In 1867, Henry Révoil dates sculptural program of Saint-Gabriel to around

858, placing its construction in the Carolingian period.[7] However, a comparative

stylistic study conducted by Alan Borg of the west façades of Saint-Gabriel, Saint-Paul-

Trois-Châteaux Cathedral (Drôme) (late 12th century to 13th century) and Saint-Trophime

Cathedral (Bouches-du-Rhône) (*c.* 1150) indicates that the Romanesque chapel was most

likely built around 1175 or 1180 **(Figs. 2–4)**.[8] A recent study by Yves Esquieu and

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throughout the 7th to the 9th centuries. Édouard Baratier, ed., *Histoire de la Provence* (Toulouse: Privat 1990), 102–119. The earliest reference to the town of Saint-Gabriel is found in a 1030 charter from the Abbey of Saint-Victor in Marseille. The passage reads: "montem Sancti-Gabrihelis juxta Durencie." *Le petit carticulaire de l'abbaye de Saint-Victor de Marseille*, MS Latin 10125, Archives et bibliothèques départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône. See: Benjamin Gérard, *Collection des cartulaires de France, tome 8: Carticulaire de l'abbaye de Saint-Victor de Marseille,* vol. 1 (CH. Lahure: Paris, 1857), VII-VIII, 182, 189.

[6] Reported by Ricard Saint-Hilaire in a philosophical essay, a manuscript found in 1815 at Lansac gives us clues about the possible commissioner of Saint-Gabriel, the count of Lansac, a relative to Raymond de Saint-Gilles. Described as an orthodox Catholic (philosopher and poet rejected by the local Roman Catholic clergy), the count of Lansac partook in the First Crusade (1095–1099) with his son Florestan and his fiancée Gabrielle, daughter of a Catholic lord. The count of Lansac died before reaching Jerusalem, but his son and Gabrielle survived. It is reported that the Bishop of Puy, who went on the Crusade with them often said: "Gabrielle a maudit les infidèles… malheur à cette race impie! Mon bras n'épargnera ni la vieillesse, ni l'enfance; les ennemis de Gabrielle sont indignes de pitié." ("Gabrielle cursed the pagans… woe to the impious race! My arm will spare neither old age nor infancy; Gabrielle's enemies are not worthy of pity.") The chapel's peculiar dedication to Saint-Gabriel could be linked to the faithful Gabrielle, who, upon her and Florestan's return from the Crusade, would have built the chapel. This story is most likely a myth and requires further investigation. Ricard Saint-Hilaire, *Le moine et le philosophe, ou la croisade et le bon vieux temps,* vol. 1 (Paris: Le Roi, 1820), 94, 65–109.

[7] The 858 charter mentions that Saint-Gabriel Chapel belonged to Charles' wife, Hermentrude, who donated it to the Church (episcope) of Saint-Maurice de Vienne. For the full Latin transcription, see Honoré Bouche, *La chorographie ou description de Provence et l'histoire chronologique du mesme pays*, vol. 1 (Aix-en-Provence: Charles David, 1664), 737 and Étienne Michel Faillon and Jean-Paul Migne, *Monuments inédits sur l'apostolat de Sainte Marie-Madeleine en Provence,* vol. 2 (Paris: Ateliers catholiques du Petit-Montrouge, 1848), 615–628, (Latin transcription: 625–628). I was not able to locate the original MS.

[8] Alain Borg, *Architectural Sculpture in Romanesque Provence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 104. Other scholars, such as Henry Révoil mention that the church was built before 1030 based on the spelling of Gabriel's name on the frieze corresponding to the one on the charter from Abbey of Saint-Victor in Marseille, (MS. Latin 10125, Archives et bibliothèques départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône), while Noureddine Mezoughi suggests a less precise date, placing the chapel's construction in the 12th century.

Figure 3 *Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux Cathedral*, west façade, late 12th century, Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, Drôme, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, France. Photo: Author.

Andréas Hartmann-Virnich discredits Révoil's argument, positing that Saint-Gabriel is the work of BERTR (Bertrandus), whose signature can be found on the walls of Saint-Gabriel.[9] Agreeing with Borg's conclusion, they, too, situate the chapel's construction in the late 12th century.

Henry Révoil, *Architecture romane du Midi de la France* (Paris: A. Morel, 1867), 9; Noureddine Mezoughi, "Saint-Gabriel en Provence: réflexions sur l'iconographie de la façade et sur la signification symbolique de l'oculus," *Les cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa* 8 (1977): 105.

[9] BERTR was also indexed by Révoil as a mason mark. Yves Esquieu and Andréas Hartmann-Virnich, "Les signes lapidaires dans la construction médiévale: Études de cas et problèmes de méthode," *Bulletin monumental* 165:4 (2007): 351.

Figure 4 *Saint-Trophime Church*, west façade, *c.* 1180–1190, Arles, Bouches-du-Rhône, Provence-Alpes-et-Côte d'Azur, France. Photo: Author.

Figure 5 *Maison carrée*, *c.* 2, Nîmes, Gard, Occitanie, France. Photo: Author.

Figure 6 *Saint-Réstitut Church*, south façade, 12th century, Saint-Réstitut, Drôme, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, France. Photo: Author.

Saint-Gabriel has a longitudinal rectangular plan; its sober interior is composed of a central nave divided into three vaulted bays leading to a pentagonal apse. The main interest of Saint-Gabriel is undoubtedly its west portal, which not only evokes the architecture of antiquity, such as the nearby *Maison carrée* in Nîmes (*c*. 2 CE), but also synthesizes old and new materials through *spolia* **(Fig. 5)**. In this amalgamation

Figure 7 Oculus and tetramorphs, detail of west façade, *Saint-Gabriel Chapel*, *c*. 1175 or 1180, near Tarascon, Bouches-du-Rhône, Provence-Alpes-et-Côte d'Azur, France.

old and new and/or past and present, the chapel stands with a handful of other

Provençal churches, including Saint-Restitut (12th century) **(Fig. 6)**.[10]

The west façade of Saint-Gabriel is composed of a deep, three-arched portal, with

an outer, middle, and inner frame **(Fig. 2)**. The upper-outer frame displays a wide,

slightly pointed arch, and, in its archivolt, an oculus rimmed with a frieze of leaves and

[10] As argued by many art historians, including Victor Lassalle, it was common practice in 12th-century Provence to use fragments from Roman monuments in contemporary constructions. Lassalle discusses the lion from Saint-Gilles-du-Gard Abbey's portal, which includes a re-carved antique column fragment, as an example of Romanesque reemployment of Roman materials. Victor Lassalle, "L'influence antique de l'art provençal," *Revue archéologique de Narbonnaise*, supplément 2 (Paris: Édition E. de Boccard, 1970), 14, 97. For Lassalle's description of Chapelle Saint-Gabriel, Ibid., 87–88. See also Linda Siedel, *Legends in Limestone: Lazarus, Gislebertus, and the Cathedral of Autun* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1999); Dale Kinney, "Roman Architectural *Spolia*," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 145:2(2001): 138–161. The use of a double portal in Romanesque Provençal façades is also typical of Italy. Christine Verzar Bornstein, *Portals and Politics in the Early Italian City-State: The Sculpture of Nicholaus in Context* (Parma: Istitudo di Storia dell'Arte, 1998).

Figure 8 *Saint-Gabriel Chapel*, *c*. 1175 or 1180. View of west façade, Tarascon, Bouches-du-Rhône, Provence-Alpes-et-Côte d'Azur, France. Photo: Author.

carved faces surrounded by sculptures of the tetramorph **(Fig. 7)**. The lower-outer

frame shelters the middle frame, which includes a pediment crowned by a sculpture of

an *Agnus Dei* **(Figs. 2, 8)**. Situated under the pediment are two reused antique

Corinthian columns (*c*. 1st century BCE) supporting a reduced antique cornice decorated

with acanthus leaves (*c*. 1ˢᵗ century BCE). When examined closely, one can see that the pediment is not aligned with the rest of the portal, which contributes to the juxtaposition of the old and the new, thus creating a composite architectural program **(Fig. 1)**. The pediment includes a rectangular low-relief—a *spolium* or *spolium*-like architectural element—representing the Annunciation and Visitation.[11] Finally, the inner frame is composed of a Romanesque tympanum that emulates the composition of a Classical sarcophagus. Supported by two smaller Corinthian columns, the tympanum depicts Daniel in the Lions' Den and the Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve. Situated in the inner frame and divided into three sections, the tympanum of the west façade illustrates an enigmatic juxtaposition of two Old Testament narratives: Daniel in the Lions' Den on the left and Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve on the right. The bust of a winged and haloed Archangel Gabriel can be seen in the upper register **(Fig. 9)**. Wind is shown blowing against the angel's right side, tousling his hair, a Classical sarcophagus. Supported by two smaller Corinthian columns, the tympanum depicts Daniel in the Lions' Den and the Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve.

Situated in the inner frame and divided into three sections, the tympanum of the west façade illustrates an enigmatic juxtaposition of two Old Testament narratives: a Classical sarcophagus. Supported by two smaller Corinthian columns, the tympanum

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[11] The possible origins of this *spolium* will be discussed in the "Iconographical Analysis" section of this article.

Figure 9 Daniel in the Lions' Den and the Temptation and Fall of Adam and
Eve tympanum, detail of west façade, *Saint-Gabriel-de-Tarascon Chapel, c*. 1175
or 1180, near Tarascon, Bouches-du-Rhône, Provence-Alpes-et-Côte d'Azur,
France. Photo: Author.

depicts Daniel in the Lions' Den and the Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve.

Situated in the inner frame and divided into three sections, the tympanum of

the west façade illustrates an enigmatic juxtaposition of two Old Testament narratives:

Daniel in the Lions' Den on the left and Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve on the

right. The bust of a winged and haloed Archangel Gabriel can be seen in the upper

register **(Fig. 10)**. Wind is shown blowing against the angel's right side, tousling his

hair, which perhaps echoes the powerful Mistral wind passing through the chapel's region. The angel wears a cloth with swirl motifs, similar to those found in manuscript illuminations from the period.[12] This swirl motif contributes to the scene's rhythmic dynamism, providing clues to the angel's imminent trajectory on the façade of Saint-Gabriel, which is most likely upwards and to his left. His open left hand is positioned close to his heart, while his right hand breaks away from the frame, behind the head of a standing figure carved below. The figure is Habakkuk, a minor Hebraic prophet, who is holding a bowl/basket of food.

On the tympanum of Saint-Gabriel, Daniel is portrayed standing between two seated lions **(Fig. 10)**. As is customary in Romanesque representations of the prophet, his body and facial features are those of a youthful man, despite his advanced age in the biblical narrative. His hands are open with palms facing the viewers, a gesture representing his prayerful state. Holding a bowl/basket in his right hand, Habakkuk stands behind the lion at Daniel's left side, with the angel's right hand behind his head.[13] His left arm is bent towards his torso, close to his heart, a gesture of devotion

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[12] Such example is found in MS. 132, fol. 2v in Saint Jerome, "Explanatio," *Prophetas et Ecclesiastes*, Cîteaux, Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon (France), *c*. 1100–1135.

[13] The narrative recalls Habakkuk preparing a boiled stew to feed his harvesters in Judea on the same day that Daniel was cast into the pit. As he is carrying the food to his workers, God came to Habakkuk and told him to take the stew to Daniel who was in the den in Chaldea. When Habakkuk inquired about how he would get to the pit as Judea is far from Babylon, God sent an angel to lift Habakkuk by the locks of his hair, flying him to Babylon and into the lions' den where he leaves the bowl of food for Daniel to eat. Once Daniel was fed, the angel flies Habakkuk back to his fields. Daniel praised God, gave him thanks, and assured him of his trust for his salvation, for in this moment of despair, he was shown kindness. "On that same day, and at the same time as Daniel was cast into the den, behold the prophet Habakkuk, in the land of Judah, returned that evening from harvesting, and prepared a large dish to feed the reapers.

Figure 10 Daniel in the Lions' Den and Habbakuk, detail of tympanum, west façade, *Saint-Gabriel, c*. 1175 or 1180, near Tarascon, Bouches-du-Rhône, Provence-Alpes-et-Côte d'Azur, France. Photo: Author.

While he was carrying his burden in his hand to supply the reapers with food, the word of the Lord came to him saying, 'Go thou with this food to my servant Daniel, in the land of the Chaldeans, to the den of the lions, where he is cast.' 'But, O Lord God, who will lead me there,' said he, 'at this time, since the distance is so great for me?' And forthwith an angel of God lifted him by the lock of his hair, together with his food, and placed him in the midst of Daniel's den, where he put down the food. The angel then brought him forth thence, and restored him to his native place, whence he was taken before the reapers had had their meal. And Daniel uttered thanksgiving and praises to his God, in whose salvation he trusted, for whoever supplicates to his God communes with Him as well as one who studies His law, and he need not despair of His kindness." Moses Gaster, *Chronicles of Jerahmeed ben Solomon* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1899), 217.

Figure 11 *Story of Jonah Sarcophagus*, *c*. 340, Carrara marble, lead, ferrous alloy, inv. FAN.92.00.2505, originally from Alyschamps, now Musée départemental Arles antique, Arles, Bouches-du-Rhône, Provence-Alpes-et-Côte d'Azur France. Photo: Author.

and charity.[14] Depictions of Daniel, two lions, and Habakkuk holding a bowl/basket are also found on Early Christian sarcophagi, Merovingian buckles, medieval illuminated manuscripts, and Romanesque church façades and capitals **(Fig. 11)**.[15]

Adam and Eve's Temptation and Fall are carved on the *sinister* side of Daniel in the Lions' Den narrative **(Fig. 12)**. Facing the viewer, Adam is sculpted on the *dexter* side of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. His right leg is slightly bent and turned towards his left, bringing his knees together. He hides his genitals with a tripartite leaf, while his feet are planted on the ground with his right foot turned inward, suggesting a

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[14] Habakkuk's facial expression is difficult to identify as the figure has suffered damage. He is either portrayed in profile, facing towards Daniel, or is frontal, facing up towards the angel.

[15] Such examples are: Merovingian buckle, bronze, *c*. 481–751, Mâcon, Burgundy, France, drawing from Arcisse de Caumont, *Abécédaire ou rudiment d'archéologie*, vol. 1 (Caen: F. Le Blanc-Hardel, 1886), 68; Daniel in the Lions' Den and Habbakuk, capital, north apsidal, *c*. 1120, *Saint-Lazare Cathedral*, Autun, Saône-et-Loire, Burgundy, France; Daniel in the Lions' Den and Habbakuk frieze, detail of east façade, *Armenian Apostolic Cathedral of Sourp Haç (Holy Cross)*, 915–921, patron: King Gagik Artzru, Akdamar, Lake Van, Armenia (now eastern Turkey);

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Figure 12 Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve, detail of tympanum, west façade, *Saint-Gabriel Chapel*, *c*. 1175 or 1180, near Tarascon, Bouches-du-Rhône, Provence-Alpes-et-Côte d'Azur, France. Photo: Author.

trembling body caught in a *flagrant déli*. Adam's facial expression is neutral, and his eyes are raised slightly upwards. To his left, the Tree of Knowledge is depicted with abstract leaves, four circular fruits growing from its branches, and a snake coiled around its trunk. Holding a fruit in its mouth, the reptile's head is turned upward towards Eve's face, as if to tempt her to also taste the forbidden fruit. Confined in the rounded extremity of the tympanum, at the *sinister* side of the tree — the favored side to illustrate Eve in the Temptation and Fall episode — Eve's knees are bent, bringing her

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closer to the ground than Adam.[16] According to Michael Camille, from a clerical and monastic perspective, this gesture is closely linked to sin.[17] The author argues that monks and clericals were committed to "remain fixed and upright in their commitment to God, in contact to the worldly exhibitionists [*jongleurs*/acrobats]," who make sure that they have everyone's attention.[18] Eve's bent gesture, although less exaggerated, denotes her sinful nature, which leads her to look downward to her earthly desires rather than upward to signify her commitment to God.[19] Unlike Adam, Eve looks directly at the viewer entering the church, while her right hand is close to her heart, covering part of her chest. Similar to Adam, her left hand holds a leaf to cover her genitals, a gesture that denotes her fall. Since she has already committed the Original Sin and the serpent is offering her the forbidden fruit, Eve's body on the portal of Saint-Gabriel becomes a visual cue to the audience to identify her as the first sinner, while Adam is carved upright, suggesting his commitment to God. Parted in the middle of her head, Eve's hair is loose and suggests agitation, referring to her earthly and

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[16] For a survey of Eve's iconography in French Romanesque sculpture, see Anna-Maria Moubayed, "Mapping French Romanesque Eve," *Dataverse, Scholars Portal Research Data Platform,* Institute for Quantitative Social Sciences (IQSS), Harvard University and Ontario Council of University Libraries, 2018. http://dx.doi.org/10.5683/SP/2Y5C1X.

[17] Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1992) 57–60. See also: Maximillian Stemberg, *Cistercian Architecture and Medieval Society* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2013), 197. From a monastic perspective this is an act of humiliation achieved to reclaim humility. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, *Epistola* 87:12 (PL182.90); Marinus Burcht Pranger, "Elective Affinities: Love, Hatered, Playfulness, and the Self in Bernard and Abelard," in *Medieval and Renaissance Humanism: Rhetoric, Representation and Reform,* eds. Stephen Gersh and Bert Roest (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2003), 69–70.

[18] Ibid., 57–58.

[19] Ibid., 57, 60.

seductive character. Shuffling her feet in shame, her gestures and position next to the

tree and serpent bring her closer to the source of the Original Sin, thus suggesting her

greater role in the Fall.

Figure 13 Annunciation and Visitation, low-relief frieze, detail of west façade, *Saint-Gabriel Chapel, c.* 1175-1180, near Tarascon, Bouches-du-Rhône, Provence-Alpes-et-Côte d'Azur, France. Photo: Author.

A low-relief frieze illustrating the Annunciation and Visitation is carved on the

west façade's middle frame above the tympanum's iconographical program **(Fig. 13)**.

Divided into two vignettes, the frieze first presents the Annunciation on the left side,

where the winged figure of Gabriel approaches Mary to announce her divine

pregnancy. On the right, the second vignette illustrates the Visitation narrative, where a

pregnant Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, who is also with child, John the Baptist.[20] In

both scenes, Mary stands straight, her body elongated. She wears a robe decorated with

elegant lines denoting movement and weight, while covering her head with a veil

wrapped around her face.

In the Annunciation vignette, Mary's right hand is partially hidden behind a

column and Gabriel's wing, which suggests she is standing inside a building. In the

Visitation scene, the viewer sees that Mary and Elizabeth are shown hugging in an

outdoor setting because the Virgin's shoulder is depicted in front of one of the column's

capitals. Here, Mary is no longer confined to a private/domestic space; pregnant with

Christ, she metaphorically steps forward into a public space, a new realm that

foreshadows her future. The frieze includes inscriptions, which read, "AVE MARIA,

GRACIA PLENA DOMINUS TECUM" (Hail Mary, full of grace the Lord is with thee),

the first words uttered by the patron saint of the church, involving him in the very

origin of the Christian story. Under these words, the artist or patron decided to identify

the individuals with "ANGELUS GABRIHEL SANTA MARIA MATER DOMINI
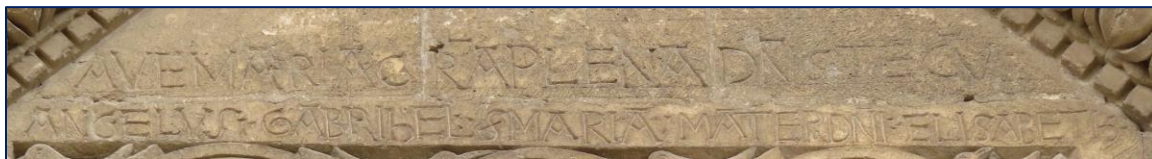

Figure 14 Annunciation and Visitation, low-relief frieze, detail of gloss, *Saint-Gabriel Chapel, c*. 1175-1180, near Tarascon, Bouches-du-Rhône, Provence-Alpes et-Côte d'Azur, France. Photo: Meaghan E. Whitehead.

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[20] Luke 1.

ELIZABETH" (Angel Gabriel / Saint Mary mother of the Lord / Elizabeth) **(Fig. 14)**. As I will argue in the iconographical analysis of this article, the coherence of the imagery suggests that the portal's program must have been imagined with a *spolium* — the reused panel— in mind. This solution emphasizes Gabriel, to whom the chapel is dedicated and who, as the recurring figure, is also the intellectual and visual bridge unifying the Old and New Testament narratives.

In an art historical context, the terminological consistency of "*spolia*" varies slightly from scholar to scholar. The Latin origins of the term are derived from the armor and weapons taken from the defeated, known as spoils of war. Concerned with the history of Roman law in the 4th and 5th centuries, Joseph Alchermes argues that the original term never refers to reuse, but rather appears in the phrases *civitate spoliata* (stripped city), and *spoliatae aedes* (denuded buildings).[21] Thus, in that sense, *spolium* refers to both the object's disjunctions from its original context and its site.

Writing about abandoned and isolated ruins and the reuse of high imperial elements in the construction of the Arch of Constantine in the 16th century, Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) is the first historian to use the word *spoglie* in an art historical context.[22] Since Vasari, the majority of contemporary art historians have come to the

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[21] Joseph Alchermes, "Spolia in Roman Cities of the Late Empire: Legislative Rationales and Architectural Reuse," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 48 (1994): 167–168.

[22] Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori ed architetti scritte da Giorgio Vasari*, annotated by G. Milanesi, I (Florence, 1878), 224.

consensus that the term *spolia* designates the reuse of objects or architectural elements in the construction of new objects or architecture, generally implying and implicating acts of (re)appropriation and (re)interpretation. Spoliation, (re)appropriation, re-use, and ready-mades, have become interchangeable terms when referring to the concept of *spolia*. As argued by Bente Kiilerich, "it is often impossible to arrive at a definite conclusion regarding the meaning of *spolia* … as there is no simple explanation for reuse."[23]

Furthermore, the very designation of the word "*Romanesque*" and its artistic manifestations, or any post-antique movement, must have a *translatio* (translation) of some sort, where the past "lived on into the future," linking it to issues of reemployment, reuse, and *spolia*, in any given culture.[24] According to Dale Kinney, all medieval buildings acknowledge the influence of the Roman past, but not all "actively engage the Roman heritage."[25] Saint-Gabriel chapel is a convincing example of said past-referencing building. From a stylistic perspective, it seems clear that the chapel's

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[23] Bente Kiilerich, "Antiquus et modernus: Spolia in Medieval Art, Western, Byzantine, and Islamic," in *Medioevo: Il tempo degli antichi*, ed. Arturo Carlo Quintavalle (Milan: Electra, 2006), 142.

[24] Maria Hansen Fabricius, *The Eloquence of Appropriation: Prolegomena to an Understanding of Spolia in Early Christian Rome* (Rome: Analecta Romana Instituti Danici, 2003), 245. As appropriations, *spolia* are powerful mnemonic devices. Depending on their context, their meaning is either changed or transposed and would most likely shift over time with to the succession of viewers and cultures, contributing to the fluctuating mnemonic character of *spolia*. Likewise, Michel Foucault describes culture as "a hierarchical organization of values, accessible to everybody, but at the same time the occasion of a mechanism of selection and exclusion." Michel Foucault, *L'hérméneutique du sujet: Cours au Collège de France, 1981-1982* (Paris: Gallimard Seuil, 2001), 173. *Translatio* is also a term used to indicate the movement of a saint's relics from one place to another.

[25] Dale Kinney, "Roman Architectural *Spolia*," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 145:2(2001): 150.

frieze and tympanum were most likely carved by different artists at different time periods. Aside from its stylistic incongruity with the tympanum, there is substantial archaeological evidence to suggest that the frieze is a 10th-to 11th-century *spolium* re-employed on the façade.[26] The frieze's right-hand side has been chiseled to even its surface, and its upper corners were cut diagonally to fit within the triangular area of the upper west façade.[27] On the left-hand side, the presence of two joints suggests that the frieze was originally hinged to another monument, perhaps a baptismal font or a pulpit **(Fig. 15)**.[28] Furthermore, both the wall behind and the panel itself have been re-carved with later inscriptions that noticeably cover the chisel marks, thereby offering a textual gloss for a new context.

Also, as Paolo Liverani argues, the presence of *spolia* in a monument can be

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[26] Robert Favreau, Jean Michaud, and Bernadette Mora, *Corpus des inscriptions de la France médiévale: Alpes-Maritimes, Bouches-du-Rhône, Var,* vol. 14 (Meudon: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1989), 140.

[27] A possible source for the frieze of Saint-Gabriel may be the nearby Carolingian chapel and necropolis of Saint-Philippe, dating from between 8th and 9th centuries, that was destroyed sometime before the chapel was built to make space for the Fontevieille way. Yet, Carolingian historiated sarcophagi are practically non-existent in the area, and when they appear, their formal elements differ from the example from Saint-Gabriel mainly in terms of the level of relief. A recent archaeological report mentions that the sarcophagi found at Saint-Philippe were deprived of any carvings, a norm for the time. The hypothesis of a Carolingian sarcophagus is therefore improbable, but the fragment's provenance from the church is still plausible as it was perhaps part of an early medieval liturgical monument from Saint-Philippe, or from the earlier Carolingian Saint-Gabriel Chapel described in Charles the Bauld's 858 Charter. Fabienne Gateau and Michel Gazenbeek, *Carte archéologique de la Gaule 13/2 — Les Alpilles et la Montagnette* (Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 1999), 144. See also Bouche, *La chorographie ou description de Provence,* 737 and Faillon and Migne, *Monuments inédits sur l'apostolat de Sainte Marie-Madeleine en Provence,* 625–628.

[28] The frieze may be a fragment from a baptismal font, such as the one from Collegiate Church of San Isidoro, *c*. 8th–11th c., León, Spain or a pulpit similar to the one found at Abbey of Charlieu.

Figure 15 Annunciation, low-relief from the reader's pulpit, 12ᵗʰ century, *Abbey of Charlieu*, Charlieu, Loire, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, France. Photo: Author.

regarded as a hypertext since the monument's hyper-textuality transforms the hypo-

texts of the past—the *spolia*— to accommodate a contemporary unified narrative.[29]

Hence, a monument composed of *spolia*, such as the Arch of Constantine (315) or Saint-

Gabriel Chapel, should be read as a whole as opposed to a fragmented narrative.

Liverani suggests that the *spolia* figures of Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius on the

Arch of Constantine are symbols or fixed representations that provide cues for the

function of the arch. These cues are characterized as *phetic* (to call attention) and meta-

linguistic.[30] The Arch's *spolia* convey Constantine's victory by reviving an antique

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[29] Paolo Liverani, "Reimpiego senza ideologia: La lettura antica degli spolia dall'arco di Constantino all'età carolingia," *Römische Mitteilungen* 111(2004): 388.
[30] Ibid., 384.

political reality, which has been perceived as a golden past. In so doing, the Arch

becomes a "panegyric in stone," where Constantine intended to establish himself in the

same path as his predecessors: the "good emperors."[31] Thus, as Liverani argues, *spolia*

are characterized by symbolic and temporal ambiguity through their involvement in

inter-textuality composed of a hypo-text characterized by the an approximate

reconstruction of the object's original meaning, and the hyper-text, where the original

object loses its original meaning in an irreversible manner.[32] The new object (hyper-

text)—the Arch of Constantine, or in the case of this article, the façade of Saint-

Gabriel—relies on the strength of the original models, the prototypes becoming *spolia*,

and their Classical associations (hypo-texts). By 2011, Liverani modified his

understanding of the Arch and posited that for contemporary viewers, 2nd-century *spolia*

had no specific connection to the emperors originally portrayed.[33] This argument is

plausible since, as the objects lose their contextual anchor when displaced in time and

space, their memory will inevitably be distorted, attenuated and, ultimately, forgotten.

Agreeing with Liverani, Siri Sande writes in 2012 that viewers who looked at reliefs of

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[31] Paul Zanker, "Det Konstantinsbogen als Monument des Senates," *Acta ad archaeologian et atrium historiam pertinentia* 11:25(2012): 90. These good emperors are Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius.
[32] Liverani, "Reimpiego senza ideologia," 285, 387.
[33] Paolo Liverani, "Reading *Spolia* in Late Antiquity and Contemporary Perception," in *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 33.

Constantine on the Arch probably never recognized them as re-carved portraits.[34]

Indeed, they were not even aware of the use of *spolia* portraits representing

Constantine's predecessors. The re-carved portraits' original meaning—their hypo-

textuality— becomes futile.[35] Would this loss of meaning also be the case with the *spolia*

or *spolia*-like elements incorporated on the façade of Saint-Gabriel? Like the viewers of

the Arch of Constantine, the contemporary viewers of Saint-Gabriel might not have

recognized the original context of the *spolia* and/or *spolia*-like elements used in the

façade. Nevertheless, these *spolia* were involved in a temporal dialogue between the

past and the present contexts of the re-used objects.

Moreover, Richard Brilliant states that the use of *spolia* results in the

modification or eradication of the original context of the object to make room for a new

context.[36] Through their integration to a new structure, *spolia*, if recognized by the

viewers, may become subjects to a breach between their original context and their

(mis)interpretation, thus creating a cognitive dissonance.[37] In such cases, *spolia* would

therefore always be inevitably anachronistic with respect to their new context. They

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[34] Siri Sande, "The Arch of Constantine – Who Saw What?" in *Patrons and Viewers in Late Antiquity (Aarhus Studies in Mediterranean Antiquity)*, vol. 10, ed. Stine Birk and Brite Poulsen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2012), 281.
[35] Ibid, 280, 282, 287.
[36] Richard Brillant, "Authenticity and Alienation," in *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 175.
[37] Ibid.

would imply contradiction and absurdities, which, strangely, lead to a unified

interpretation.[38]

ICONOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

In the case of Saint-Gabriel, the unified interpretation made possible through the

use of *spolia* and the church's iconographical narrative are linked to the *Restauratio*

formæ primitivis ecclesiae and the *vita apostolica*, a monastic way of life, where monks

could identify themselves with and follow the footsteps of Christ's disciples. This

hypothesis raises an important question: can we be certain of how *spolia* were

understood in 12th-century Provence? I turn to Roland Barthes and Dale Kinney to

provide a more nuanced interpretation. In his famous essay "The Death of the Author,"

Roland Barthes presents the author as essential in decoding the message behind his

work, while the *scriptor*, similar to the art historian or critic, aims to decipher the exact

content of a work without the luxury of the author's input.[39] Therefore, art historians

can only interpret *spolia* as "the authorial persona," Dale Kinney writes, "is a rhetorical

device, however, not the unmediated voice of the author."[40]

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[38] Dale Kinney, "Ancient Gems in the Middle Ages: Riches and Ready-mades," in *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 111–112.

[39] Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. Roland Barthes, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 142–148.

[40] Dale Kinney, "Instances of Appropriation in Late Roman and Early Christian Art," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 28 (2012): 7.

Many scholars disagree on the purpose, interpretations, and objectives

regarding the use of *spolia* in medieval architecture. Some have identified *spolia* as

mnemonic devices, while others perceive them as propagandistic tools used to transfer

and/or establish power. Also, on some occasions, *spolia* can be understood as relics,

emulations, palimpsests of a historical process, and "ready-mades" for their low cost

and practicality.[41] Pagan items could also be modified or reinterpreted to fit an

interpretatio christiana (Christian narrative). The meaning of *spolia* is transferable and

interchangeable. An anachronic temporality exists in all cases of *spolia*, resulting from

the reused object's displacement in time and space. The interaction between the past

and the present, results in the triggering of memory.[42] In the context of Saint-Gabriel,

spolia is intimately linked to memory, which is constantly modified through its

transposition into new periods, space, and context. The memory experienced by the

viewer is constructed with various parts of different memories, which form a new

global memory: the one experienced in the present. *Spolia* are therefore means by which

the palimpsest of memory is visually articulated. Nevertheless, since the interpretations

of the author(s) and original viewers of Saint-Gabriel are absent, the evidence of

meaning is generally lacking; even though all *spolia* are connected to memory, on many

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[41] Kiilerich, "Antiquus et modernus," 260.

[42] Jens Fleischer, "*Spolia* as Architectural Memory: A Ritualized Integration of the Past into the Present," in *Memories of the Middle Ages*, eds. Mette B. Bruun and Stephanie Glaser (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 259. See also Kinney, "Instances of Appropriation," 9.

occasions this memory is inevitably modified or forgotten over time, since we lost the *spolia's* author. It is clear that in the case of a Provençal church such as Saint-Gabriel the engagement with the Roman past is more explicit as the building embraces its authority and/or power. Therefore, even though the author of the *spolia* is lost, the general characteristics of *spolia*—Classical Roman—live on through their transformed incorporation into the Romanesque church of Saint-Gabriel.

In understanding the broader meanings of its sculptures, it is important to fully consider the use of *spolia* on the west façade of Saint-Gabriel. The portal of the chapel is framed by *spolia* not only to reflect an antique legacy, but also, perhaps, to bring the worshipers and the sculpted narratives closer to the time of Christ's Incarnation. As Ilene H. Forsyth has argued, the *vita apostolica* was widely practiced in contemporary monasticism, where monks could more strongly identify with Christ's companions.[43] The influence of *spolia* at Saint-Gabriel can also be experienced in non-monastic contexts, much like how monastic artistic productions influenced non-monastic religious art. As such, the presence of *spolia* on the portal of Saint-Gabriel takes part in a catechization of the faithful, by simultaneously being transposed from a temporal period that is closer to Christ's Incarnation and therefore producing a new

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[43] *Vita apostolica* refers to the concept where members of religious communities would live following the example of the apostles of Christ. SIlene H. Forsyth, "The Vita Apostolica and Romanesque Sculpture: Some Preliminary Observations," *Gesta* 25:1, Essays in Honor of Whitney Snow Stoddard (1986): 75–82.

history through interaction with contemporary worshipers.[44] Like the 12th-century

monks who felt closer to Christ by mirroring themselves in sculptures of His disciples,

the spirit of a *vita apostolica,* the incorporation of *spolia* on the façade of Saint-Gabriel

allows worshipers to feel closer to Christ and His time. In the context of Saint-Gabriel,

the worshipers, as sinners, not only identify themselves with Eve but also, they are

brought closer to Christ's time and salvation, mostly through the figure of Mary, Eve,

and *spolia*.[45]

The subtle difference and opposition between Mary and Eve's figures are found

through their respective bodies and gestures **(Figs. 12, 13)**. Eve's gestures signal the Fall

as her palms face her body, with one pressed to her genitalia and the other resting on

her chest. Kirk Ambrose explores a related example of the *Moutier-Grandval Bible* (*c*. 830

and 840) in his study at Sainte-Marie-Madeline Abbey, Vézelay, Yonne (*c*. 1120–1140)

(Burgundy). In this example, Eve touches her chest to indicate that she takes God's

"message to heart." [46] Describing Adam's hand gesture from one of Temptation and Fall

capitals from Vézelay, Ambrose states that by placing it on his chest (*pectus*) the first

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[44] Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot describe the idea of reuse to make new history as a pastoral
theology. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, *Histoire des femmes en occident: Moyen âge* (Paris: Perrin,
2002), 35. The words faithful and worshippers here apply to monks and clerics. Nevertheless, since there
is no evidence of the original patrons of Saint-Gabriel Chapel (they might or might not have been monks),
the words could refer to the lay people interacting with the chapel.
[45] Ibid., 78.
[46] Kirk Ambrose, *The Nave Sculpture of Vézelay: The Art of Monastic Viewing* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of
Medieval Studies, 2006), 21 (footnote 26).

man "perhaps foregrounds his sinful (*peccatum*) transgressions."[47] At Saint-Gabriel

Chapel, Eve's hand that is on her chest is carved slightly larger – although not as large

as Mary's, – which may indicate that, as she fell into transgression, she takes God's

message to heart **(Fig. 12)**. Therefore, even if Eve fell, she still strove to obey God.

Confined to the south corner of the tympanum, which forms a tight space and forces

her to crouch down towards the ground, Eve's body is closer to the terrestrial realm.

With her hair untied, her figure mirrors the snake's twisting body, contributing to her

bent (or fallen) appearance. In contrast, Mary's body is straight and moves upward **(Fig.**

13). A heavy cloth covers her entire body, while a veil hides her hair, a sign of piety and

decorum. Further, her hands, which are disproportionately larger than the rest of her

body, are open to receive the Word. Her gesture suggests that she is more focused on

the celestial realm of God, rather than on the earthliness of her body. Stylistically, Mary

and Eve's gestures attest to the classical continuity of Saint-Gabriel; together, they form

a narrative where Mary's re-employed figure reflects the sacrality of the past and brings

the worshipers closer to the time of Christ.[48] She also reminds the churchgoers of their

hope for redemption by displaying correct behavior. As such, the representation of

Eve's body mirrors that of the viewers, who physically partake in her fall, but who, like

their first mother, still strive to obey their Creator, God.

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[47] Ambrose also argues that "similar sounding syllables were often drawn into meaningful connections by classical and medieval authors." Ibid., 22.

[48] The word re-employed is used here to refer to a *spolium*.

The body, especially Mary's, functions as a vehicle through which God reveals Himself and through which the soul ascends toward God. In contrast to Eve's body, Mary's figure acts as *cursus virtutum*, a textbook of virtue, because she portrays the correct behavior deemed necessary to conduct a good and virtuous life.[49] It is through Mary's pious posture and her embrace of decorum—much like Adam's upright position—that Eve's body appears even more bent, a reminder that she has disobeyed God. Both figures are an imprint of their individual inner virtue, or in Eve's case, loss of virtue.[50]

Such dramatic oppositions of gesture were central to the visual language of the west façade of Saint-Gabriel. Jean-Claude Schmitt defines gesture as ethical and connected to universal values, such as goodness and truth.[51] For Schmitt, gestures in medieval art convey political, religious, and secular ideas. They are also physical manifestations of the inner expression of the soul. Therefore, the inward motion of Eve hiding her body in shame, as opposed to Mary's elegant outward gesture welcoming God's Words and Will, can be understood in relation to contemporary ethics as a result of the survival (and transformation) of classical concepts in the Romanesque period.

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[49] Thomas Dale, "Romanesque Sculpted Portraits: Conventions, Vision and Real Presence," *Gesta* 46:2 (2007): 103.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Jean-Claude Schmitt, "The Ethics of Gesture," in *Fragment for a History of the Human Body Part 2*, eds. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi (New York: Zone, 1989), 129.

Representations of Eve focused primarily on her flesh, whereas Mary's body functions as a link to the divine realm and a vessel connecting worshipers to the Word of God. Like Schmitt, Stephen Jaeger is interested in the connection between classical and medieval ethical concepts, which he believes are also linked to the representation of gestures in Romanesque art. Writing about Cicero's *De officiis* and its impact on medieval art and thought, he argues, "the controlled body with all its attributes—grace, posture, charm, sensuality, beauty, authority—is the work of art of the 11th century."[52] Also, a pioneer in Christian Neo-Platonic thought and highly influential during the Middle Ages, Origen (*c.* 185 - *c.* 253) wrote extensively on the meaning of the body and its function. For Origen, the body is a sign of the fallen state of the soul: the greater the fall, the more grotesque the body.[53] When examined in relation to the broader paradigms evoked by Origen and Cicero's works, the stylistic differences between the frieze and tympanum **of** Saint-Gabriel are not coincidental. Eve's bent body looks incongruous compared to Mary's figure. Less subtle examples of fallen bodies can be found on the west façade of Saint-Trophime Cathedral, where representations of the female figure are largely associated with sin including vanity, lust, luxury, and pride. Such figures are represented on the façade of Saint-Trophime as women leading the souls of the damned and a naked woman riding a snake. The latter refers to Revelation

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[52] Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 7–8.
[53] Origen, *De Principiis* 2.6.

Figure 16 Prostitute from Babylon on a beast, detail of north bay, west façade, *Saint-Trophime Church, c.* 1180-1190, Arles, Bouches-du-Rhône, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, France. Photo: Author.

souls of the damned and a naked woman riding a snake. The latter refers to Revelation

17, which describes the prostitute of Babylon as riding a beast or dragon **(Fig. 16)**.[54] The

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[54] "There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. The name written on her forehead was a mystery: Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes, and of the abominations of the earth. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus…Then the angel said to me, 'The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.'" Revelation 17: 3–6, 15–16. Priscilla Baumann, "Warnings Against Avarice and Usury on Romanesque Capitals in Auvergne," *Church History* 59:1(1990): 7–18.

Figure 17 Luxury, detail of south porch, south face of west wall, *Abbey Saint-Pierre-de-Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne, c*. 1095-1140, Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne, Corrèze, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. Photo: Author.

figure of Luxury on the Abbey Saint-Pierre-de-Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne, Corrèze (*c*. 1095-17), which describes the prostitute of Babylon as riding a beast or dragon.[55] The

figure of Luxury on the Abbey Saint-Pierre-de-Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne, Corrèze (*c*. 1095-1140) provides another good example of how naked female forms served as signs of sin

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[55] "There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. The name written on her forehead was a mystery: Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes, and of the abominations of the earth. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus…Then the angel said to me, 'The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.'" Revelation 17: 3–6, 15–16. Priscilla Baumann, "Warnings Against Avarice and Usury on Romanesque Capitals in Auvergne," *Church History* 59:1(1990): 7–18.

(Fig. 17). There, a carving of a woman covered with nothing more than her long, loose

hair shows snakes devouring her breasts while a toad bites her genitalia.

The juxtaposition of the unclothed bodies of Eve and Adam with Daniel in the

Lions' Den on the tympanum of Saint-Gabriel is rare in French Romanesque art, but it

can be paralleled in Early Christian sarcophagi, such as the *Story* of *Jonah Sarcophagus* (*c.*

340) which was originally found in the Alyscamps, a large burial site in Arles (now

Musée départemental Arles antique, Arles) **(Fig. 11)**. Their figures are positioned

together more often when they are the subject of liturgical dramas.[56] Adam and Eve's

Temptation and Fall is carved on the bottom right of the sarcophagus, followed by a

scene of Daniel in the Lions' Den and Habakkuk. This suggests that an earlier local

prototype may have informed the later Romanesque tympanum, placing the sculptural

narrative of the tympanum in the context of Romanesque re-employment of elements

from Antiquity not only in a material context, but also in an ideological one.

Through a study of the early Christian adoption of the pagan Good Shepherd

figure as an archetype of piety and learning, Kinney argues that typological *spolia* rely

on pre-existing types for "connotative impact."[57] Not only is the pagan Good Shepherd

prototype (hypo-text) transferred and reinterpreted, but also its typological memory

and power are transposed into a Christian context (hyper-text). Examples of this are

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[56] For an in-depth discussion of liturgical dramas, see the "Sacred Plays" section of this article.
[57] Kinney, "Roman Architectural *Spolia*," 150.

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found on the frieze of Saint-Gabriel in both the Virgin and Daniel's hand gestures, which borrow from Early Christian sarcophagi typology, including the *Story of Jonah Sarcophagus* (*c*. 340) **(Figs. 10, 11, 13, 15)**. On the sarcophagus's bottom left-hand side, an *orans* figure (a praying or pleading female) has both arms raised at a 45-degree angle, with open palms and all the fingers aligned with each other.[58] Adopted by Daniel and Mary's figures, this gesture emphasizes the word, both in the form of speech (prayer) and in the sense of the Word made flesh.[59] Mary is the vessel of the Word made Flesh, while Daniel is God's message bearer and the facilitator of the Word. In this gesture, we witness a double appropriation: the Early Christian translation of the pagan *orans* gesture, then a re-employment in the 10th to 11th-century frieze.

The reference of Saint-Gabriel to Late Antique/Early-Christian sarcophagi can also be seen through the micro-architectural details and *spolia* incorporated into its west façade, as well as through the overall composition of its tympanum. All reminiscent of Early Christian decorative patterns, the frieze's classical arches and fluted/spiral columns with birds carved at the end of each arch frame Mary's body and create a rhythmic sequence in framing both narratives, while also serving as a physical divide between the different grounds of the scene. Andréas Hartmann-Virnich has studied this frieze in the light of *restauratio formae primitivis ecclesiae*, the ideal return to the Church

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[58] Also known as orant or orante in medieval Latin, *orans* refers to a posture of prayer.

[59] Mary's gesture is one of acceptance; however, seen from the angel's perspective, as her body is displayed in both frontal and profile, her gesture could suggest that of an *orans* (to the angel).

from the apostolic period, where the promotion of memory and the celebration of early

Christianity are key.[60] He argues that imitations of antique prototypes in 12th-century

Provençal architecture were a widespread strategy to reaffirm the holy origins of the

Romanesque church. He cites Yann Codou, who, in writing about medieval buildings

on Lérins island, states that these monuments are "a true reconstruction, or

construction, of an 'archaeological' memory of saintly locations, [where the building] is

there to trigger memory, and perpetuate remembrance."[61] Hartmann-Virnich thus

places the Romanesque monumental structures of Provence in the context of the 11th-

and 12th-century promotion and celebration of Early Christian architectural forms. The

latter were heavily influenced by hagiographical literature and by how the Romanesque

mind imagined late-antiquity and early Christianity. In 2011, Hugo Brandenburg states

that *spolia* in early medieval churches were most likely used as ready-mades for

economical and practical reasons. "It is utterly inappropriate," he writes, "to interpret

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[60] Andréas Hartmann-Virnich, "Restauratio formae primitivis ecclesiae: la construction d'une mémoire," *21st-century COE Program International Conference Series* 8 (2007): 15, 17, 18, 37. See also *Rodolfi Glabri Historiarum* 3.4:13, cited in Victor Mortet et Paul Deschamps eds., *Recueil de textes relatifs à l'histoire de l'architecture et à la condition des architectes en France au Moyen* Âge, *XIe - XIIe siècles* (Paris: A. Picard, 1911, reprinted 1995), 4.

[61] "…véritable reconstruction, ou construction d'une mémoire 'archéologique' des lieux saints où le monument est là pour interpeller la mémoire, perpétuer le souvenir." Yann Codou, "Lérins: le paysage monumental," in *Histoire de l'abbaye de Lérins*, eds. R. Bertrand et al. (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 2005), 311.

the acquisition of older buildings and important church foundations as constituting acts

of 'appropriation,' or to attribute to it any ideological significance."[62]

Following Hartmann-Virnich's work, the Annunciation and Visitation frieze of

Saint-Gabriel, as well as its other re-used elements, can be regarded as a conscious

engagement with Early Christian sarcophagi prototypes, which themselves are

similitude or copies of original antique Roman motifs.[63] Encapsulated in the façade of the

chapel and its iconography, the *similitudi* involved in the re-used columns and Roman

sarcophagi are more complex than they appear. They include palimpsests of memories

that contribute to the meaning of the façade and its sculpted narratives.[64] The

provenance of the frieze of Saint-Gabriel and the various *spolia* elements incorporated in

its façade may have been important and meaningful in the Romanesque period and

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[62] Hugo Brandenburg, "The user of Older Elements in the Architecture of Fourth-and Fifth-Century Rome: A Contribution to the Evaluation of *Spolia*," in *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 70.

[63] Richard Krautheimer views *spolia* as similitude and relics in the context of medieval understanding of copies and prototypes. He also points towards the medieval tendency to break an original into its single parts, which would then be reshuffled and included in its copies. On the subject of similitude, Krautheimer writes that, from a modern perspective, copies of the Holy Sepulchre present vague similarities to the original prototype church of the Holy Sepulchre in Holy Jerusalem. "The architect of a medieval copy," Krautheimer writes, "did not intend to imitate the prototype as it looked in reality; he intended to reproduce its *typice* and *figuraliter*, as a *momento* of a venerated site and simultaneously as a synonym of promised salvation. The re-used parts of the original prototype are thus integral to the *similitudo*, a form of the venerated original similar to the image-icon, which enables the association of the copy to its original." See: Richard Krautheimer, "Introduction to an Iconography of Medieval Architecture," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 5–6, 14, 17.

[64] As modern viewers of the façade of Saint-Gabriel, we are aware of their reference to the past through various details, such as the tympanum's structure borrowed from Late Antique and Early Christian sarcophagi, the disparate classical columns, the rhythmic succession of micro-architectural arches on the frieze, etc.

beyond; however, today, their memorial connection has been forgotten, resulting in the modification of the meaning of the west façade of the chapel.

The sculptural program of the chapel has a clear vertical ascension from the terrestrial to the celestial realms. As such, it can be understood as an ensemble, where the creation, transmission, and reestablishment of meaning are played as a sculptural spectacle, similar to sacred plays. As such, the tympanum and frieze of the chapel participate in a multi-directional dialogue of oppositions in terms of virtue and vice, faith and doubtfulness, and ascension and descent. This dialogue is architecturally set in a narrative of light that culminates in the oculus symbolising the Trinity and the tetramorph, with the Eagle (John) occupying the highest point **(Figs. 7, 8)**.[65] As argued by Noureddine Mezoughi, the oculus's presence is a direct reference to the idea of Christ-Sol, a Neo-Platonic concept that was widely spread in the early Christian tradition.[66] Mezoughi quotes Saint-Ambrose who wrote, "The Father is light, the Son is light, and the Holy Ghost is light."[67]

The façade focuses on the worshiper, who is physically anchored to the ground and whose gaze first meets the tympanum. Adam and Eve act as mirrors of the

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[65] The four symbols of the tetramorph correspond to the vision of the prophet Ezekiel: "Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle" (Ezekiel 1:10). Representing John, the eagle occupies the highest point of the tetramorph because it is a symbol of that which comes from above as John's Gospel describes the Incarnation. Also, in the Book of Revelation, John saw beyond the present.
[66] Mezoughi, "Saint-Gabriel en Provence," 116–117.
[67] Saint Ambrose, *De Spiritu Sancto* 1.14. Cited in Mezoughi, "Saint-Gabriel en Provence," 121.

worshipers standing on the ground, a result of their descent from Paradise. Next to

them, Daniel, who is depicted in the den, is in the process of being rescued because his

piety and virtue have saved his body and soul from certain death. Habakkuk also has a

typological purpose for he reached Daniel in the den without breaking its seal, even

though Darius and his entourage guarded it. His passage to Daniel's pit could be read

as a prefiguration of the Annunciation, where Mary became pregnant with the Son of

God while remaining a virgin. Moving up to the frieze, Mary, the new Eve, secures the

passage from the terrestrial to the celestial realms through her virtue and role as Mother

of God. Finally, the façade is crowned by the oculus representing the Trinity, the light of

the Christian faith. In other words, the façade of Saint-Gabriel illustrates the history of

Christian faith in simple and straightforward figures, impregnated with a deep

meaning.

A recurrent theme in the three ascending scenes, *fructus* (food) plays an active

role in articulating the façade of Saint-Gabriel. Eve committed the Original Sin through

the eating of an apple. For Daniel, the lions' den is synonymous with hell because the

site was destined to lead the prophet to his death and a destiny of being food for the

lions. However, as in Jesus's resurrection, it is through Daniel's prayers and complete

faith in God that he would miraculously be saved. Not only was he saved from the

lions, but his prayers brought him nourishment through Habakkuk. Daniel's narrative

foreshadows the coming of the Messiah and, on the tympanum of Saint-Gabriel, he is an

even more convincing type of Christ, given his figurative proximity to Adam on his right.

When they were created, Adam and Eve knew the meaning of everything: God. Eve's desire to acquire meaning through knowledge – by eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge – resulted in her loss of meaning by departing from it and persuading Adam to do the same.[68] Instead of meaning, she chose knowledge, a deconstructed analytical understanding of the world, which needs to be reconstructed to make full sense or full meaning again. On the other hand, Gabriel, like his iconographical predecessors Hermes and Mercury, acts as God's messenger in Judeo-Christian and Islamic scripture. On the tympanum of Saint-Gabriel, his body is turned away from Adam and Eve, accentuating their estrangement. Rather, he looks towards Daniel and Habakkuk, one of his wings and hands even breaking into the frame of the Daniel narrative. Carrying the message, Gabriel is physically closer to Daniel and Habakkuk, thereby highlighting their proximity to God.

Gabriel's words are carved on the Annunciation and Visitation scene, forming the first sentence of the *Hail Mary*. The Marian prayer's second phrase, "Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus" (Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus), which constitutes the first few instances of

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[68] "'You will not certainly die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" Genesis 3:4.

Christ's life and manifestations, is illustrated through the Annunciation and the Visitation scenes.[69] In the prayer, He (Christ) is described as the fruit of Mary's womb. Through His death and resurrection, He cancels the Original Sin that resulted from the consumption of the forbidden fruit. The food/fruit metaphor culminates in the oculus, which, through its openness to light, symbolizes the Resurrection and the Holy Eucharist, the bread that is transfigured into the body of Christ and consumed by worshipers.[70]

It is significant that the closest analogues to the iconography of the façade of Saint-Gabriel are not found in art, but in contemporary drama. Medieval sacred plays did not necessarily influence the sculptural programme of Saint-Gabriel, rather both sacred plays and visual art employed common subject matter, one being ephemeral (theatre), the other long lasting (sculpture). Both share a common interest in engaging the medieval viewers with biblical meaning. Visual art and sacred plays encourage their audience to participate physically through emotions and gesture, and spiritually through internal reflection/meditation.

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[69] "Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum. Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus. Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc, et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen." ("Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen"). The prayer is based on extracts from Luke 1:28–31.

[70] "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 1 Corinthians 11:23–24.

SACRED PLAYS

A part of medieval public worship and liturgy, sacred plays are liturgical dramas

that emerged in the tenth century and developed within the Church itself.[71] According

to Margot Fassler, liturgical dramas were meant to teach their audiences about the

past.[72] They were understood as histories, offering glimpses of the past to worshipers.

Like the liturgy of the Mass, sacred plays involve elements of spectacle and sensations.[73]

In the sculptural program of Saint-Gabriel, as in medieval drama, gestures are

incorporated within the story.[74] The theatrical gestures emphasize specific actions,

emotions, and social interactions. They differ from textual accounts of biblical narratives

in their physical and rhythmic interpretation of the scripture.[75]

Ordo representacionis Adae (*Format for Representing Adam*; commonly known as

The Play of Adam, *Le mystère d'Adam*, and *Jeu d'Adam*) (mid-112th century) tells the story

of Adam and Eve, the fate of Abel and Cain, and a series of Old Testament prophets

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[71] Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, vol.1 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1933), 1–12.

[72] Margot Fassler, "The Liturgical Framework of Time and the Representation of History," in *Representing History, 900—1300: Art, Music*, History, ed. Robert A. Maxwell (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 151.

[73] Carol Symes, trans., "The Play of Adam (Ordo representacionis Ade)," in *The Broadview Anthology of Medieval Drama*, eds. Christina M. Fitzgerald and John T. Sebastian (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2012), 23.

[74] The use of liturgical dramas in the understanding of sculptural programs is not unprecedented. Chiara Frugoni, "Le lastre veterotestamentarie e il programma della facciata," in *Lanfranco e Wiligelmo: Il Duomo di Modena*, ed. Adriano Peroni (Modena: Edizioni Panaini S.P.A., 1984), 422–431.

[75] The most common sacred play is the Liturgy of the Mass, but, on special feast days, plays were performed associated with the Passion, Resurrection, Nativity, and other subjects from the Bible and religious stories.

who foreshadow the coming of Christ.[76] Concerned with the story of Daniel, the *Historia de Daniel representanda (the Story of Daniel for Performance*, also known as the *Play of Daniel*) was written in Latin around 1140 by the French scholar and poet, Hilarius from Orléans or Angers.[77] Both the *Play of Adam* and the *Play of Daniel* provide actors with detailed instructions regarding stage direction, costume, and gestures.

The stage directions for the *Play of Adam* outline that it was to be performed outdoors in front of a church's main portal, where the door symbolises the gate to heaven and the upper steps represent Paradise's realm.[78] The stage where the play is performed refers to the space where the audience would stand: the terrestrial realm. In those parts of the play that take place in Hell, the actors playing devils would interact with the audience, contributing to the interactive educative/catechetic strategy of the performance. The *Play of Adam* features Adam and Eve as both symbolic/unreal and real figures. Their symbolic and realistic character derives from their commemorative function as memories of the past, a past in a time that stretches eternally to the audience's contemporary time.[79] In a commentary about the *Play of Adam*, Carol Symes

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[76] Symes, "The Play of Adam (Ordo representacionis Ade)," 23.

[77] Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, vol. 2 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1933), 211, 276. Pupil of Peter Abelard at the Oratory of the Paraclete near Nogent-sur-Seine and Saint-Aubin in Aube, north-central France, Hilarius is believed to have also possibly traveled to Angers and to other French regions. MS Latin 11331, 12 fol. 12v–16r. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France;*Sacred Folly*, Max Harris set the origins of *The Play of Daniel* at about 1160–1162. Another later version of this play, *Ludus Danielis*, was compiled by students from Beauvais cathedral (early 13th century) and includes music. Max Harris, "The Plays of Daniel and Joseph," in *Sacred Folly: A History of the Feast of Fools* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 113–14.

[78] Symes, "The Play of Adam (Ordo representacionis Ade)," 4.

[79] Fassler, "The Liturgical Framework of Time," 151.

explains that "the play does much more than tell the story of Adam and Eve: it describes the day-to-day moral dilemmas facing every human being in an era of rapid social and cultural change."[80] In the play, the spectators identify themselves with the characters performed by the actors. The dramatization of the biblical figures and their stories are merged to theological concepts, making them more accessible and contemporary/eternal.

In the verse illustrating the Temptation and Fall episode, the Devil is twice unable to convince Adam to eat the forbidden fruit but succeeds in persuading Eve to do so in a single attempt.[81] In this scene, Eve mirrors the spectators' sinful conscience, inherited from her Original Sin. Later in the play, Daniel makes an appearance "young in age, but old in dress."[82] Seated in front of the spectators, he professes the coming of Christ. Right after Daniel's performance, Habakkuk enters the scene and, as the stage directions indicate, he "raise[s] his hand toward the church; imitating wonder and fear."[83] He then proceeds to profess the coming of Christ, whom he describes as being seated between two beasts, with a star that guides shepherds and kings to come

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[80] Symes, "The Play of Adam (Ordo representacionis Ade)," 23.

[81] "Eva, ça sui venuz a toi... Oirras me tu?... Tu es fieblette e tendre chose, E es plus fresche que n'est rose. Tu es plus blanche que cristal, Que neif que chiet sor glace en val... Puis que del fruit avrez mangié Sempres vus iert le cuer changié... Manjue le, n'aiez dutance! / Look, Eve: I'm here to talk with you... You hear me?... You're such a dainty, tender thing; You're fresher than a rose in spring. You're white as crystal, or as snow that falls on icy streams below... The instant that you taste the fruit You'll be transformed; he'll follow suit... Eat it! Right now! Away with doubt!" Symes, "The Play of Adam (Ordo representacionis Ade)," 36–37, 39.

[82] Symes, "The Play of Adam (Ordo representacionis Ade)" (n. 70 above) 63.

[83] Ibid., 64.

venerate Him.[84] Here, the picture that Habakkuk draws refers to Daniel in the Lions'

Den and to Christ in the manger, who are both described surrounded by beasts.[85]

Although impossible to confirm due to a lack of written evidence, given the apparent

popularity of *The Play of Adam* and *The Play of Daniel*, it is possible that both plays

influenced the iconographical narrative of the tympanum on the west façade of Saint

Gabriel. It is also possible that they originated from similar written or oral sources and

that the plays, or their variants, were performed in front of the chapel.

As Fassler argues, "a church is the bones and skin of liturgical action, and just

as the shapes of buildings directly affected liturgical practices, so too did liturgies affect

how buildings were built, enlarged, and remodelled."[86] Arguably, as liturgies

themselves, when juxtaposed with the program of the west façade of Saint-Gabriel, the

narratives, gestures, and theatricality of sacred plays can be understood as a form of

reuse or *similitudo* of older sculptures, which illustrates *varietas* (variation and

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[84] Ibid.

[85] The *Play of Daniel* is a performance of the Septuagint version of the Book of Daniel. The first part of the play is devoted to the feast of Belshazzar, a secular king, while the second is concerned with the Daniel and Habakkuk episode, where Habakkuk is flown to Daniel to offer him food in the lions' den. In this part, Daniel represents Christ, the celestial king. Also, Daniel prefigures Christ by foretelling His birth in the final act of the play. Writing about the Play of Daniel, Stephen K. Wright states that in 12th-century typology, Habakkuk offering food to Daniel prefigures the Magi's gifts to Christ on Epiphany. The second part includes four *loca/loci?* (stations): Darius's throne room, the house where Daniel prays in secret, the lions' den, and Habakkuk's field in Judea. The play could easily have been performed outdoors, in front of a church, or indoors, in a church or sanctuary. It includes a rich poetic language, musical *conductus* (vocal composition), and carefully instructed actions, gestures, and special effects. This allows the audience to be immersed in a multi-sensorial experience, triggering and feeding their devotional affective experience. Stephen K. Wright, "The Twelfth-Century *Story of Daniel for Performance* by Hilarius: An Introduction, Translation, and Commentary," *Early Theater* 17:1(2014): 13, 18–19.

[86] Fassler, "The Liturgical Framework of Time,"166.

variegation) inviting the viewer to identify with the carved figures. This connection with the figures allows the audience to understand their significance not only within the sculpted narrative, but also in the eternal context of the liturgy and history of the Church. The viewer becomes an active participant in the interactive meaning of the chapel's multi-layered narrative, as both the audience, in the form of witness, and the performer, through a daily re-enactment of virtuous and sinful actions. The past lives on through its re-creation in the present. Thus, the façade of Saint Gabriel becomes a place where medieval people learned about the past through the liturgical aspect of the sacred plays that re-enacts an eternal history. In this scenario, tympanum and frieze of Saint-Gabriel gain a new layer of meaning, contributing to the iconographical, theological, temporal, sensorial, and psychological complexity of the chapel.

CONCLUSION

This article provided an exploration of the meanings of the iconographical narrative of Chapelle Saint-Gabriel, its use of *spolia* in the context of *Restauratio formæ primitivis ecclesiae*, and its connection to medieval liturgical drama and theatricality. These were illustrated by its figures' gestures and interconnection on its west façade. I have demonstrated the meaning behind the façade of Saint-Gabriel not only by using iconographical and theological accounts, but also by comparing the façade to contemporary cultural practices that made use of sensorial and psychological strategies.

Discussing the use of *spolia*, I provided new perspectives on the Annunciation and Visitation frieze based on a close archaeological analysis. I have argued that, on the one hand, the reuse of an earlier Annunciation and Visitation panel contributes to a richer comparison between the Mother of humankind and the Mother of God and promotes the memory of Christ's time by connecting the chapel to Early Christianity. On the other hand, the Romanesque tympanum depicting the virtuous narrative of Daniel in the Lions' Den and the sinful story of the Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve provides a multi-layered narrative in which the viewer becomes an active participant as both a witness (audience) and a virtuous and sinful being (performer). The west façade thereby enables the past to survive into the present through *spolia* and sacred plays, revealing a history that was continuously performed and re-enacted by the worshipers.

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