

2014

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Recommended Citation

Lester, Anne E.. "The Coffret of John of Montmirail: The Sacred Politics of Reuse in Thirteenth-Century Northern France." *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 4, 4 (2014): 50-86.
<https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol4/iss4/4>

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The Coffret of John of Montmirail: The Sacred Politics of Reuse in Thirteenth-Century Northern France¹



By Anne E. Lester, University of Colorado, Boulder

Closed in a coffer so cunningly wrought
As this same garden green and gay,
And here forever in joy to stay
Where lack nor loss can never come near;
Here were a casket fit to display
A prize for a proper jeweler.

Pearl Poet, *Pearl*, V. 2: 259-264.²

So happy be the issue, brother England,
Of this good day, and of this gracious meeting,
As we are now glad to behold your eyes –
Your eyes which hitherto have borne in them,
Against the French that met them in their bent,
The fatal balls of murdering basilisks.
The venom of such looks, we fairly hope,
Have lost their quality, and that this day
Shall change all griefs and quarrels into love.

William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, v. 2: 12-20.

¹ I thank Scott G. Bruce, M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, William Chester Jordan, and Liesbeth Van Houts for their comments on earlier drafts of this article. Their close readings have shaped my thinking and saved me from errors. I also thank Patrick Geary, Yves Airiau, Anne Harris, and especially Audrey Jacobs for sharing their thoughts, photographs and unpublished work with me. Finally, I owe a great debt to Richard Leson and Elizabeth Hunt whose expertise I have benefited from enormously as well as Sarah Blick whose guidance, especially with the images, has been invaluable. Any errors that remain are mine alone.

² *The Gawain Poet Complete Works*, verse trans. Marie Borroff (New York and London: Norton, rept 2011), 132.

Sometime in the second half of the thirteenth century an oblong coffret or casket (15 x 78.7 x 17.5 cm) came to the Cistercian abbey of Longpont (Aisne) in Picardy.

(Figure 1) The elongated box was beautifully wrought, made of a wood core covered in red and brown leather and emblazoned with fifty-three copper-gilt enameled heraldic medallions encircled by gilt-copper bosses applied to a parchment skin and edged with



Figure 1 Coffret of the Blessed John of Montmirail or the Longpont Coffret, Limoges, c. 1270 (or 1242?). Copper, engraved, stippled, and gilt champlevé enamel: sky blue, gray, green, dark red, and white, red and brown leather over wood core. 15 x 78.7 x 17.5 cm. Treasury of the Abbey of Longpont (Aisne), France. Photo: Thierry Lefébure, Ministère de la culture, Inventaire général, Département de l’Aisne, AGIR-Picardie.

strips of stamped gilt-copper.³ Alain-Charles Dionnet, who has done the most extensive study of the extant coffret, argued that the medallions include the arms of Saint Louis, his brother Alphonse of Poitiers, the arms of Castile and those of Provence, which belonged respectively to the queen mother, Blanche of Castile, and the queen Marguerite of Provence and which the crown appropriated. The royal heraldry, especially medallions with the triple fleur-de-lis, are repeated twice on the front, three times on the rear, once

³ For the most recent description of the coffret see the catalog entry by Barbara Drake Boehm, “The Coffret of the Blessed John of Montmirail” in *The Enamels of Limoges, 1100-1350*, ed. John P. O’Neill (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), no. 133, 376-378. See her article for an up-to-date bibliography on previous short studies of the coffret. See also the exhibition catalog, *Saint Louis*, ed. Pierre-Yves Le Pogam, et al. (Paris: Editions du Patrimoine Centre des monuments nationaux, 2014), 257, cat. no. 109.

on the right side panel and three times on the cover. The heraldry of the royal family thus provides a kind of visual field into which are embedded other medallions belonging to the Limousin and northern French nobility including: the lords of the north, that is, the families of Burgundy, Dreux, and Coucy; and the barons of Poitou and Aquitaine with the families of the Limousin on the reverse, namely Turenne, Lusignan-La Marche, Lusignan-Counts d'Eu, Aubusson, Rochechouart, and possibly Berry.⁴ (Figures 1a-1k)



Figure 1a Longpont Coffret, details, left front, displaying arms. Photo: Audrey Jacobs.



⁴ See Alain-Charles Dionnet, "La Casette reliquaire du bienheureux Jean de Montmirail," *Revue française d'héraldique et de sigillographie* 65 (1995): 89-107, see the annex for the identification and description of the heraldry, 101-102; also Boehm, "The Coffret," 376, which lists the identified heraldic medallions.

Figure 1b Right end displaying arms (from left to right): La Marche-Lusignan, France, and possibly Provence. Photo: Audrey Jacobs.



Figure 1c Longpont Coffret, detail of lid, right side displaying arms. Photo: Audrey Jacobs.

A looped handle is affixed to the center of the lid and beneath it the elongated decorative hasp of a lock stretches in the form of an enameled serpent or basilisk. Lying flat along its belly the creature's tongue protrudes over the side to form the locking mechanism, which at one time was secured by a key fitted into another champlevé enamel roundel encircled by a wavy-serpentine design. **(Figures 1j-1k)** Lying in wait, the basilisk appears as a warning to any who might tamper with the lock or misuse the coffret's contents. While scholars have speculated about the coffret's origins and initial purpose, in



Figure 1d Longpont Coffret, detail, arms of Lusignan (left). Photo: Audrey Jacobs.
Figure 1e Longpont Coffret, detail, arms of Brittany (right). Photo: Audrey Jacobs.

the later thirteenth century it was reused to house the holy bones of the knight turned Cistercian monk, John of Montmirail (d. 1217), who had taken vows and lived out his days and was buried at the abbey of Longpont, where miracles later occurred at his



Figure 1f Longpont Coffret, detail, arms of France (left). Photo: Audrey Jacobs.
Figure 1g Longpont Coffret, detail, arms of Coucy (right). Photo: Audrey Jacobs.



Figure 1h Longpont Coffret, detail (above left), arms of Guy II Vicomte d'Aubusson. Photo: Audrey Jacobs.

Figure 1i Longpont Coffret, detail (above right), central lock frame in enamel and champlevé. Photo: Audrey Jacobs.



Figure 1j Longpont Coffret, detail, top showing basilisk body (left). Arms of France and Castile on either side. Photo: Audrey Jacobs.

Figure 1k Longpont Coffret, detail, top showing basilisk head and enameled eyes of lock (right). Photo: Audrey Jacobs.



tomb.⁵ The coffret has come to be known as the Coffret of Blessed John of Montmirail or the Coffret of Longpont.

Preserved today in the treasury of the former

Cistercian abbey of Longpont, the coffret is in remarkably good condition, having escaped the systematic destruction of religious objects, relics, and reliquaries, and the dismantling of the abbey church, cloister precinct and tombs during the 1790s. Indeed, during the French Revolution the lay sacristan of Longpont, Lebeau, who was also mayor, hid the coffret as the abbey church and its contents were quarried and dispersed.

⁵ John of Montmirail (1165-29 September 1217), the son of Andrew of Montmirail and Ferté-Gaucher and Hildiarde d'Oisy, married Helvide of Dampierre with whom he had ten children. He was a noted friend of Philip Augustus, king of France and fought alongside the king, possibly on the Third Crusade. Soon thereafter he turned to a life of charity and devotion and founded a leper hospital, where he served with his daughter Elisabeth. He then renounced the world and became a monk at Longpont, where he died in 1217. Miracles were reported at his tomb in Longpont by the 1230s at which point he was venerated locally as a saint. He was beatified in 1891, see *Acta Sanctorum*, September, vol. 8 (Antwerp, 1762), 186-235; also A.-C. Boitel, *Histoire du bienheureux Jean surnommé l'Humble, seigneur de Montmirail-en-Brie, d'Oisy, de Tersmes* (Paris: H. Vrayet de Surcy, 1859); G. Larigaldie, *Chevalier et moine, ou Jean de Montmirail, connétable de France, 1165-1217* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1909); M. R. Mathieu, *Montmirail en Brie: Sa seigneurie et son canton* (Paris: Librairie A. Deruelle, 1975), 60-82; Anselme Dimier, "Le bienheureux Jean de Montmirail, moine de Longpont" in *Mémoires de la Fédération des sociétés savantes de l'Aisne* 7 (1960-61): 182-191, reprinted in *Mélange à la mémoire du Père Anselme Dimier*, ed. Benoît Chauvin, I.2: 693-98; and Nicholas Vincent, "Isabella of Angoulême: John's Jezebel" in *King John: New Interpretations*, ed. S. D. Church (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1999), 165-219, for the political context of the Montmirail family during the early thirteenth century.

The object was restored once between 1845 and 1859, at which time it appears to have lost one or more of its medallions. At the time of World War I (1914-1919) the lid became separated from the coffret, but was subsequently reattached. Several of the border strips have also been replaced and there is wear to the gilding. Today, the central locking mechanism is missing, as are five of the heraldic medallions.⁶

The Coffret of Longpont is an example of a type of coffret or casket produced during the first decades of the thirteenth century for the preservation and possible transportation of a wide variety of materials, including documents and charters, as well as personal effects, and possibly the contents of a personal chapel, comprising liturgical ornaments as well as relics and devotional books.⁷ Dionnet proposed that the Coffret of Longpont was created in the later part of 1242, following the process of peace-making between King Louis IX and the nobles of the Limousin, who had sided with the English and briefly rebelled against Louis during the early period of the king's reign.⁸ He suggests that it was created to hold the peace agreements and charters of submission on the part of the barons drawn up in the aftermath of the battle of Taillebourg (21 July 1242).⁹ There is still debate about the dating of the coffret. Barbara Drake Boehm has suggested on stylistic grounds that the enamel medallions should be dated to the later part

⁶ The coffret was opened several times between the thirteenth and twentieth centuries and various inventories of its contents were recorded (more on this below), see Mathieu, *Montmirail en Brie*, 79-81; for the repairs, also Boehm, "The Coffret," 376.

⁷ For an example of the contents of such a chapel, see the items Philip of Flanders donated to the monks of Clairvaux before his departure on crusade in 1190, in *Recueil des chartes de l'abbaye de Clairvaux au XIIIe siècle*, ed. Jean Waquet and Jean-Marc Roger and Laurent Veyssière (Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France, vol. 32) (Paris: C.T.H.S., 2004), 358-9, no. 288.

⁸ For this context, see William Chester Jordan, *Louis IX and the Challenge of the Crusade: A Study in Rulership* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 14-22; Jean Richard, *Saint Louis, roi d'une France féodale, soutien de la Terre sainte* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), 171-75 and in English as *Saint Louis: Crusader King of France*, trans. Jean Birrel, ed. and abridged by Simon Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 41-61; Régine Pernoud, *Blanche of Castile*, trans. Henry Noel (London: Collins, 1975), 197-206; and Vincent, "Isabelle of Angoulême," 211-216.

⁹ Dionnet, "La cassette reliquaire," 99-100.

of the thirteenth century, possibly during the 1270s.¹⁰ The issue of the coffret's date may never be fully resolved, however, an analysis of it as an object that was created and then reused can tell us a great deal about how and why material possessions like the coffret were important during the thirteenth century, specifically regarding how they functioned in the combined arenas of politics and devotion. In what follows, I analyze the Longpont Coffret in the context of similar objects by considering three key themes: portability, commemoration, and enshrinement. The use of the Longpont Coffret in an abbey in Picardy, not far from the Franco-Flemish border, is suggestive of how such objects would have resonated and been employed – precisely because they were portable – to work in similar ways across political boundaries.

By the middle of the thirteenth century the use and display of heraldry had many purposes ranging from the personal and commemorative to the public and political.¹¹ The display of multiple heraldic medallions, moreover, served as a visual expression of an argument of unity and peace among families. In the case of the Coffret of Longpont, as I will argue, that visual display was repurposed in the later thirteenth century, perhaps even as early as 1261, to reinforce the familial bonds between the crown and upper nobility of France and to emphasize the king's connection to and control over the sacred landscape of his realm. In what follows I begin by analyzing the Coffret of Longpont in the context

¹⁰ Boehm, "The Coffret," 376. I am more persuaded by Dionnet's thesis in part because several of the heraldic medallions correspond to the heraldry of baronial family members who were deceased by the 1270s. Boehm's observations that several medallions are repeated, moreover, seems to conform stylistically with the patterns employed on the Coffret of Saint Louis, which would further align with an earlier dating scheme for the Longpont Coffret.

¹¹ See Michel Pastoureau, *Heraldry: Its Origins and Meaning*, trans. Francisca Garvie (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997); idem, *Traité d'héraldique* (Paris: Picard, 1997); and *Marqueurs d'identité dans la littérature médiévale: mettre en signe l'individu et la famille (XIIe-XVe siècles): actes du colloque tenu à Poitiers les 17 et 18 novembre 2011*, eds. Catalina Girbea, Laurent Hablot and Raluca Radulescu (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

of other portable objects, namely coffrets, alms purses, and devotional books. I then explore the meaning of heraldic display in the visual context (leaving aside here the representation of such displays often found in contemporary literature and chronicle sources) by framing the coffret in relation to glass panels from the same period, notably those at Chartres Cathedral. Finally, the essay culminates by arguing that the Coffret of Longpont was a gift from Louis IX to the monks of Longpont to be repurposed as a casket for the bones of John of Montmirail. The timing of this gift, the sum of the visual details in the heraldry, and the use of the coffret in the Cistercian context all reinforce this interpretation. The gift was used in part to reaffirm the religious association between Louis and Longpont specifically, and Louis and the Cistercians more broadly, for by the 1260s the French king had emerged as an arbiter of saintly re-appropriation. The gift also solidified Louis's political claims to the surrounding territories and over baronial ambitions in contested regions like Picardy, Brittany and the Limousin. It was then a political and personal re-appropriation of an object that was at once charged with political meaning and newly made sacred. This reading of the Coffret of Longpont demonstrates how profoundly intertwined political authority and religious devotion had become, especially in northern France and around the region of Flanders.

The Power of the Portable

It may be impossible to know what the Longpont Coffret originally held or was intended to hold. The inner lining of the coffret is now missing, but Dionnet has suggested that the long box – much larger than the size of a typical charter, even a peace charter of great significance – had been divided into compartments to hold charters and

documents pertaining to different baronial families and land-holdings. Removing these divisions for reuse would allow the coffret to be re-appropriated as a case for carrying all manner of items including the accouterments of a personal chapel (something we know Louis IX and Alphonse of Poitou carried as they traveled their domains and while on crusade from 1248-1254), and later to accommodate relics.

The portability of caskets made them objects that could both convey and display multiple meanings in different places at different times. The heraldic medallions on the Longpont Coffret could initially have served to communicate the submission and renewed loyalty of the northern and Limousin barons to Louis IX, Alphonse of Poitou and Capetian rule. Displayed in a court or in a church or chapel, the heraldic medallions that adorn the coffret functioned as an expression of the power of those who possessed the box, while also announcing the political importance of its contents. The medallions provided a visual key to the documentary details within. The basilisk who guards the lock ensured that any peace remained unbroken, the charters sealed and safe inside. It is not, I think, a whim or coincidence that the lock takes the form of a basilisk, but rather meant precisely to evoke both the deterring power of that mythical serpent, which it was believed could turn an enemy to stone with its gaze, as well as the ameliorating power to preserve hard-won peace.¹²

¹² Medieval intellectuals thought about and theorized with basilisks frequently, see for example, Roger Bacon, *De secretis operibus artis et naturae, et de nullitate magia* in Fr. Rogeri Bacon *Opera quaedam hactenus inedita*, Vol. 1, ed. J. S. Brewer (London: Longman, 1859), 523-51, c. 3, p. 529; William of Auvergne, *De universo*, in Guilielmi Alverni, *Opera omnia*, 2 Vols., (Orleans-Paris, 1674; repr. Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1963), Vol. 1, II.3.16, p. 1046; and Nicole Oresme, *De configurationibus*, in *Nicole Oresme and the Medieval Geometry of Qualities and Motions: A Treatise on the Uniformity and Difformity of Intensities known as Tractatus de configurationibus qualitatum et motuum*, ed. and trans. Marshall Clagett (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 2.38, pp. 380-84; also Thomas Bradwardine, *De causa Dei*, in *De causa Dei, contra Pelagium, et De virtute Causarum, ad suos Mertonenses, libri tres*, ed. Sir Henry Savile (Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1964, facsimile reprint of 1618 edition), 1.1.32, p. 46. I thank Michelle Karnes for these references. On the broader intellectual context for such treatises, see her

The Longpont Coffret has its closest analog in the so-called Casket of Saint Louis, now in the Louvre Museum (Paris, Musée du Louvre: Départements des Objets d'art, MS 253). Smaller in size, the Casket of Saint Louis (14 x 36.5 x 19 cm or 5 1/2 x 14 1/8 x 7 1/2 in.) (**Figure 2**), is a beautifully worked coffret adorned with an array of heraldic medallions and a basilisk lock, nearly identical to that of the Longpont Coffret. The Casket of Saint Louis has been more extensively studied, although it has still not received the attention it deserves, partly because so many questions remain regarding its dating and use. Like the Longpont Coffret, the casket is made of a beech-wood core covered in tin and ornamented with four small crystal cabochons (four originally, only two remain at the corners of the cover) and Limousin enamel medallions. Unlike the Longpont Coffret, which displays only heraldic medallions, the Saint Louis Casket alternates and interworks gilt-copper medallions depicting human figures and animals in repoussé and champlevé medallions and shields bearing blazons. Forty-six escutcheons bearing twenty-three different arms remain. Here, as in the Longpont case, the blue fleur-de-lis of France and the yellow or golden castles of Castile are repeated most frequently, again creating a visual field into which the other arms are embedded. The tin covering has been painted green and, like the Longpont Coffret, the Casket is abundantly ornamented with decorative round-headed copper-studs that encircle each medallion in a near identical pattern, albeit on a smaller-scaled space. A looped handle also adorns this casket and “the elongated body of a basilisk stretches across the top of the lid; a thin

article, "Marvels in the Medieval Imagination," *Speculum* 90 (2015): 327-365.



Figure 2 Casket or Coffret of Saint Louis, Paris, Louvre Museum, *Départments des Objets d’art: Moyen Age*. Limoges, c. 1234-1236. Wood, medallions of champlevé enamel. Provenance of Notre-Dame-du-Lys. Acquisition, 1853. MS 253. Photo: 1995 RMN/Daniel Amaudet.

metal strip with a latch at the end issues from a hinge in the monster’s mouth and locks securely on the left side of the central medallion of the upper register.” As Barbara Drake Boehm and Michel Pastoureau describe, “the opening for the keyhole appears in the center of this medallion, between the intertwined bodies of two other basilisks.”¹³ The details of the open-work medallions range from depictions of animals including birds, lions, griffins and more basilisks, to humans playing instruments, men hunting or slaying monsters, and two flowers. These images are reminiscent of other extant Limoges caskets that often portray secular and romance themes, such as the so-called Troubadour Casket in the British Museum.¹⁴

¹³ See the description by Barbara Drake Boehm and Michel Pastoureau, “The Coffret of Saint Louis” in *Enamels of Limoges*, 360-363, no. 123. Other examples with basilisks include the Casket of Richard of Cornwall and the Casket in the Metropolitan Museum collection, see n. 13 below.

¹⁴ British Museum, Casket with troubadours, M&EM 1859, 1-10.1. From the court of Aquitaine, Limoges, France, c. 1180 (21 x 15.6 x 11 cm). Anne F. Harris has a paper on this casket entitled, “‘Farai un vers de dreit rien’: Guillaume IX, Troubadour Caskets, and the Apophasis of Courtly Love” which she presented at the International Congress of Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, May, 2014. I thank her for sharing that

The Casket of Saint Louis, like that of Longpont, was also re-appropriated to serve as a reliquary. Sometime after Louis IX's death (25 August 1270), but possibly before his canonization (1297), Philip IV the Fair (r.1285-1314), the saintly king's grandson, gave the casket to the Cistercian nunnery of Le Lys, as the convent inventory states, to hold the holy relics of the king, namely "four bones of this king [and] his hairshirt given by this same king [Philip IV] with the casket."¹⁵ Blanche of Castile and Louis IX founded Le Lys together in 1244 and it remained one of several royal Cistercian abbeys that enjoyed the sustained patronage of the Capetian family.¹⁶ Upon her death in 1252, Blanche's body was laid to rest in a tomb at the Cistercian nunnery of Maubuisson. Her heart, however, was given to the nuns of Le Lys, whose abbess at the time was Blanche's cousin. William of Saint-Pathus, the Dominican confessor to Marguerite of Provence, who wrote an initial collection of Saint Louis's miracles, recorded that as early as 1278 a nun of Le Lys prayed before the king's hairshirt to receive a cure for a malady of the eye. Only later – in conformity with the developing cult – did she receive a cure at

piece with me before its publication. For other examples of extent caskets, see also the Casket of Richard of Cornwall, ca. 1258 now in the Aachen Cathedral Treasury and discussed by Elisabeth Taburet-Delahaye, "Beginnings and Evolution of the *Oeuvre de Limoges*" in *Enamels of Limoges*, 33-39, at 38; the Casket in the Metropolitan Museum collection ca. 1190, Limoges, France, Accession no. 17.190.511 and online at <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/464480?rpp=30&pg=1&ft=enamels%2BLimoges&deptids=17&pos=15&imgNo=6&tabName=label>; and the Coffret of Cardinal Bicchieri, before 1227, Limoges, France, which is in a private collection, but discussed in *Enamels of Limoges*, cat. no. 88. This Coffret was used, like the others discussed here, to hold the bones of Cardinal Guala Bicchieri after his death in 1227.

¹⁵ Audrey Jacobs, "The Heraldic *Casket of Saint Louis* in the Louvre" (MA Thesis: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014), 5. I thank Audrey Jacobs and Richard Leson for sharing this unpublished work with me. Edmond Ganneron, *La cassette de Saint Louis roi de France donnée par Philippe le Bel à l'Abbaye du Lis* (Paris: J. Claye et Cie, 1855), 1-2; and Eugène Grévy, "Cassette de Saint Louis dans l'église de Dammarie (Seine-et-Marne)," *Revue archéologique* 10e. no. 2 (1853-54): 637-647. Both cite the earliest inventory of Le Lys, from 1678.

¹⁶ See Anne E. Lester, "Saint Louis and Cîteaux Revisited: Cistercian Commemoration and Devotion during the Capetian Century, 1214-1314," to appear in a collection tentatively titled *The Capetian Century*, eds. Hagar Barak, William Chester Jordan, and Jenna Philips.

the king's tomb at Saint-Denis.¹⁷ Thus, the casket was either a gift to the nuns from Louis's son, Philip III or they later acquired the casket to hold relics they already possessed. From the last decade of the thirteenth century the casket containing relics of the venerated king was with the nuns of Le Lys and there it appears to have remained until 1793, when the nunnery was pillaged and formally suppressed. In 1858, the French government purchased the casket for 25,000 francs and placed it in the Musée des Souverains until that museum was closed in 1872. The Louvre then acquired the casket later that year.¹⁸

A remarkable number of escutcheons appear in common on both coffrets, including the arms of the king of France, the castles of Castile -- the heraldry of the queen mother Blanche -- as well as the arms of Dreux-Brittany, Bar, Coucy, Burgundy, La Marche-Lusignan, and Toulouse.¹⁹ But the Saint Louis Casket also displays the arms of a host of other prominent barons not expressed on the Longpont Coffret including: the Count of Bar, Count of Champagne-Navarre, arms of Jerusalem, England, Burgundy, Dreux, Courtenay, Champagne, Flanders, Montmorency, Montfort-l'Aumary, Beaumont-en-Gâtinais (and with cadency), Roze, Harcourt, Malet, and Corneuil (cadet branch of Courtenay), all of whom were counted as vassals of the king of France. Hervé Pinoteau identified the forty-six extant heraldic arms and suggested from this identification a date

¹⁷ “[E]lle li aportast un escrinet la ou les heres et les deceplines du benoiet Saint Loys estoient secreement garder.” Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, Confesseur de la Reine Marguerite, *Les miracles de Saint Louis*, ed. Percival B. Fey (Paris: H. Champion, 1931), 70-75. The quote here implies that the nuns held relics of the king's hair and what may have been his whip for personal flagellation or his hairshirt, that is, relics that were amassed possibly before his death and were thus distinct from the bones they later received. On the miracles performed at the tomb, see Sharon Farmer, “Down and Out and Female in Thirteenth-Century Paris,” *The American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 345-372.

¹⁸ Jacobs, “The Heraldic Casket,” 7.

¹⁹ Jacobs has produced a very useful chart of all the heraldic devices on the Saint Louis Casket, in “The Heraldic Casket,” 10-12.

for the casket between 1234 and 1237, possibly, given the marriages and death of the families whose arms are depicted, a date as precise as the summer of 1236.²⁰ Recently, however, Audrey Jacobs has proposed two other earlier possibilities: 1229 and 1234, both of which relate the casket more specifically to the period of Blanche of Castile's rule as regent for the young Louis IX due to the prominence of the Castilian and Navarre-Champagne arms (associated with Blanche of Navarre (d. 1229), regent-countess of Champagne). Jacobs argues persuasively for a date of 1234, the year that Blanche and Louis consolidated an initial peace among many of the rebellious barons of France (especially those of Burgundy, Dreux-Brittany, and Coucy) and the year the king was married (27 May 1234) to Marguerite of Provence.²¹ Indeed, as Jacobs suggests, the casket may have been a wedding gift from Blanche to the king and his new bride.²² It may have also served to hold the peace agreements forced upon the rebellious Duke of Brittany, Peter of Dreux.²³ In both capacities, the coffret embedded the emblems of the upper nobility within the iconographic field of Franco-Castilian power, reiterating the dominance of the king of France over his barons as a keeper of the peace and a respected ruler. If charters of feudal loyalty (even submission in the case of Peter of Dreux) were kept inside the casket, such a peace would have been further affirmed under the watchful

²⁰ Hervé Pinoteau, "La date de la cassette de saint Louis: été 1236?" in *Cinq études d'héraldique et de symbolique étatique* (Paris: Le Léopard d'Or, 2006), 115-160.

²¹ For the rebellions of these nobles, especially that of Peter of Dreux, see Elie Berger, *Historie de Blanche de Castille, reine de France* (Paris, 1895), 195-99, 237; and Sidney Painter, *The Scourge of the Clergy: Peter of Dreux, Duke of Brittany* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1937). The peace agreements, submissions really, that Peter was forced to adhere to as well as the investigations conducted in the duchy of Brittany in 1235 at the command of the king are printed in *Layette du trésor des chartres*, ed. Alexandre Teulet 5 vols. (Paris: Henri Plon, 1863-1909), vol. I, nos. 601, 1026 and 1027; and II, nos. 2128, 2135, 2136, 2141, 2144, 2302, 2319, 2320, 2417, 2418, 2419. See also Arthur de la Borderie, "Nouveau recueil d'actes inédits des ducs de Bretagne et de leur gouvernement," *Mémoires de la société archéologique du département d'Ille-et-Vilaine* 21 (1892): 97-134.

²² Jacobs, "The Heraldic Casket," 50-59.

²³ See above, n. 21; and Sidney Painter, "Documents on the History of Brittany in the Time of St. Louis," *Speculum* 11 (1936): 470-472.

gaze of the basilisk as well as through the display of the casket itself. Its portability made it likewise capable of conveying this message again and again in multiple locations, wherever it was carried and deployed.²⁴

Both caskets can be placed into a broader framework of portable and heraldic objects that were created to display simultaneously familial and feudal loyalties within a devotional context and to render this display on or within a deliberately moveable medium. One such group of objects quite similar to the caskets were alms purses and crusader scrips, small wallets or purses that those who took the vow to crusade assumed as a sign of their holy status as a penitent pilgrim. Although very few examples of alms purses survive given their material – most were made of fabric, often silk, and elaborately embroidered – some purses have been preserved in museum and treasury collections and a number of others were recorded in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century drawings.²⁵ The “Bourse des croisades” of Peter of Dreux (d. 1250), (**Figures 3a-b**) although no longer extant, was drawn on parchment and colored in gauche and is now included in

²⁴ See William Chester Jordan, “A Border Policy? Louis IX and the Spanish Connection,” paper given at the Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, 4 January 2015, which will appear in a planned Festschrift for Professor Téofilo F. Ruiz. I thank him for sharing this piece with me before its publication. See also Jenny Benham, *Peacemaking in the Middle Ages: Principles and Practices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

²⁵ Peter’s bourse bears comparison with that of Thibaut IV, count of Champagne and king of Navarre, who participated on the Baron’s Crusade in 1239 and the crusade of Louis IX. Thibaut’s bourse, or reliquary purse as it is known, is preserved in the cathedral treasury of Troyes. Made of embroidered silk, with a similar closure and three hanging silk tassels, it displays a repeating pattern of the arms of Champagne and rosettes and thus does not perform the unifying iconographic work that Peter’s does for no other noble families are referred to on the purse. See Pernoud, *Blanche of Castile*, 161. Other examples of purses survive especially in Belgium and Germany and have been cataloged in Belgium and are accessible through the site: <http://balat.kikirpa.be/intro.php>. Another example survives in Nurnberg, “Germanisches Nationalmuseum” inv. Nr. T 518, c. 1301-1400.



Figure 3 Bourse of Peter of Dreux. Front closed. Gouache on parchment. Collection Roger de Gaignières. Photo: BnF. Reserve Pc-18-fol.

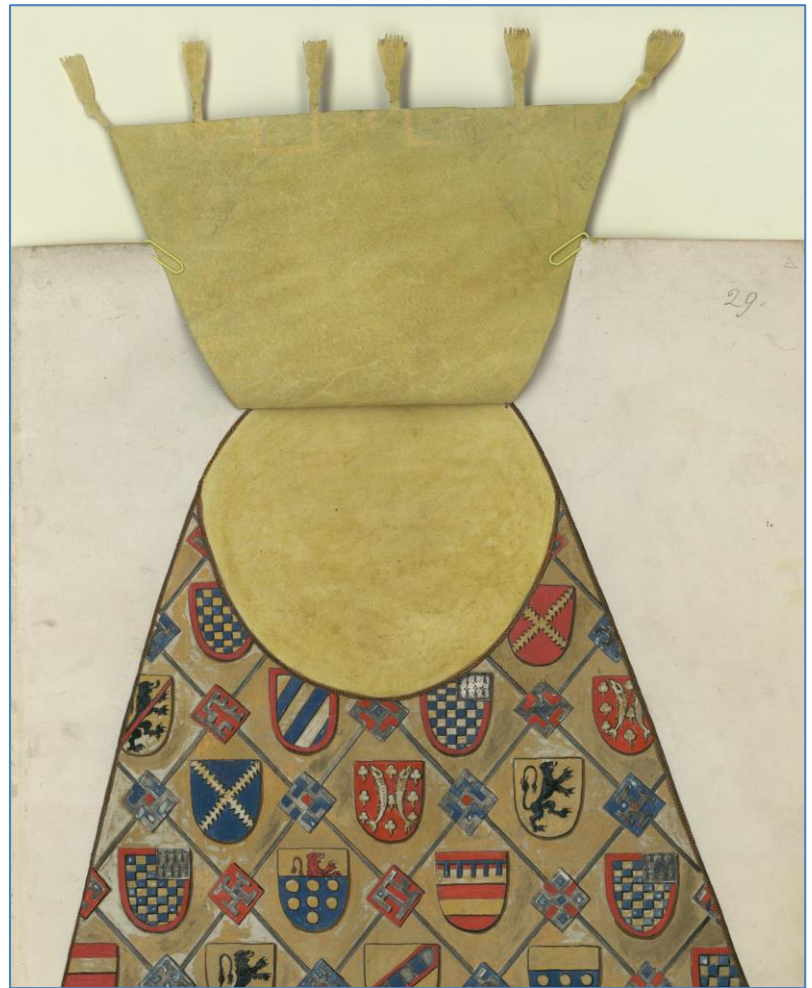


Figure 3a-b Bourse of Peter of Dreux. Front open. Gouache on parchment. Collection Roger de Gaignières. Photo: BnF. Reserve Pc-18-fol.

collection of Roger de Gaignière in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (1747, BnF).²⁶

The purse itself was uncovered from the tomb of Peter of Dreux, who was buried in the Dreux family abbey, the Premonstratensian house of St.-Yved at Braine (diocese of Soissons). The pilgrim's purse or scrip must have become ubiquitous during the period of the crusades. Indeed, taking up the objects of crusading, including the pilgrim's purse and

²⁶ See "Bourse dite des croisade avec les armes des familles ayant alliance des Dreux-Bretagne," gauche on parchement, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Reserve Pc-18-Fol. Gaignières, 1747. Accessible online at: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69376977/f1.item.r=Gaignières%20bourse>.

staff were part of the fundamental rituals of departure that all crusaders, and certainly all noble crusaders, indulged.²⁷ The first half of the thirteenth century witnessed the launch of no fewer than five major crusade expeditions: four to the east conventionally numbered as the Fourth Crusade, 1202-1204; the Fifth Crusade 1219-1221; the Barons' Crusade of 1239-1241, and the Seventh Crusade or the first expedition of Louis IX, from 1248-51; and the campaigns in southern France between 1209-1229, referred to collectively as the Albigensian Crusade. All of these expeditions drew the northern French and Flemish nobility together through sworn agreements and vows. The crusade campaigns were in many instances, especially in 1248, deliberately conceived of as collective undertakings used to unify the nobility on peaceful terms to fight against a common enemy of the faith, whether Muslims or heretics.²⁸ In this sense a double solidarity was created that tied feudal loyalty to an act of profound and often self-sacrificing Christian devotion.

The heraldic embellishment of a devotional object like a pilgrim's purse or crusader bourse made portable an entire narrative of noble familial and feudal bonds and linked these to the devotional practices of relic veneration (should the purse return with relics collected in the east or be re-appropriated for that use) and familial commemoration, often within a familial chapel or monastic foundation, such as St.-Yved at Braine. The bourse of Peter of Dreux (also known as Peter Mauclerc) is particularly intriguing in this way, especially as Peter had been one of the French crown's most

²⁷ See William Chester Jordan, "Crusader Prologues: Preparing for War in the Gothic Age," *The Christian Culture Lecture* (Notre Dame, IN: St. Mary's College, 2009); and M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, "From Pilgrimage to Crusade: The Liturgy of Departure, 1095-1300," *Speculum* 88 (2013): 44-91.

²⁸ In the case of Louis IX's crusade several nobles, including Peter of Dreux and Enguerrand of Coucy, were induced to accompany the king on crusade. See Jordan, *Louis IX*, 21; Richard, *Saint Louis*, 99-112.

prominent antagonists in the years before Louis's consolidation of power and departure on crusade in 1248. Peter's bourse was decorated with the heraldry of the major barons of the north interspersed with his own escutcheon, which depicted alternating gold and azure checks with a quarter ermine at the top right (see **Figures 3a-b**). The same device is found on the glass panels that he patronized at Chartres Cathedral (more on that below). The bourse displayed a familiar set of heraldry including the arms of the counts of Brittany, Dreux-Brittany, Flanders, Flanders-Dampierre, Bar, Lusignan, Burgundy, Clérmont-Nesle, Harcourt-Avrilly, Soissons-Coeuvres, and Melun, among others.²⁹

The origins of Peter's bourse may never be known, but the context for its use can be reconstructed. Peter harbored a contentious relationship with the royal family for most of his reign as count of Brittany. An overly ambitious second son of the count of Dreux, when he became the count of Brittany through his marriage (on 27 January 1213) to Alix of Thouars, he tirelessly pursued his ambitions to rule a greater territory and to rekindle the Breton claims to certain lands in England, which predated the severing of the Angevin domain in 1214 following the Battle of Bouvines. Indeed, through much of the early 1230s Peter plotted with other nobles, notably Enguerrand III of Coucy, to challenge the Capetian claims to the throne, especially during the period of Louis IX's minority.³⁰ Peter's role, as John of Joinville noted, was closely tied to other baronial

²⁹ See the forthcoming study by Yves Airiau, "Une aumônière armoriée du XIIIe siècle: La <<Bourse des croisades>> de Pierre de Dreux," *Centre généalogique de Loire-Atlantique: Revue* 158 (2015): 35-43; and 59 (2015), 160 (2016), still to appear. I thank Patrick Geary and the author for sharing this detailed article with me before its publication.

³⁰ Painter, *The Scourge of the Clergy*, although dated, still remains the most thorough treatment of these events directly focused on Peter of Dreux. See also, Dominique Barthélemy, *Les deux âges de la seigneurie banale: Pouvoir et société dans la terre des sire de Coucy (milieu XIe siècle-milieu XIIIe siècle)*, (Série Histoire ancienne et médiévale 12) (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1984), 426-432; Richard, *Saint Louis*, 12-16; Pernoud, *Blanche of Castile*, 123-162. Concerning commentary, both historical and clerical on such issues, see Alexis Charansonnet, "La révolte des barons de Louis IX: réactions de l'opinion et

rebellions and challenges implicating the barons in Champagne, notably the ambitious counts of Brienne and the barons of the Aquitaine, especially the Counts of La Marche and Angoulême, and the counts of Flanders.³¹ It took decisive measures on the part of the king and his mother to quell their resistance. The proliferation of heraldry finds its roots in this context.³² Peter Mauclerc's challenges were finally put to rest in 1234, as noted above, when he was forced – in a negotiated moment of peace-making – to go on crusade, departing for the east with the Barons' Crusade in 1239. After spending nearly three years in the Levant in the company of Thibaut IV of Champagne, Peter remained on good terms with the French king and accompanied him to Egypt in 1248. One could imagine that the bourse was a gift from Louis IX to the newly cowed duke of Brittany. Perhaps, but one would assume the royal arms would be present on the scrip. More likely, Peter Mauclerc carried a purse that projected the necessary peace alliances forged among the territorial lords nearest to his duchy and with whom he was joined on crusade. As such, it was both an emblem of political unity as well as a commitment for commemoration should members of those families not return. And Peter did not. As Joinville related in gripping detail, he died in Egypt following the failed siege of Mansourah in 1251.³³ In the mid-twentieth century, Peter's sword pommel surfaced and was given as a diplomatic gift to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.³⁴ It

silence des historiens en 1246-1247" in *Une histoire pour un royaume (XIIe-XVe siècle)* (Paris: Perrin, 2010), 218-239.

³¹ Jean de Joinville, *Vie de saint Louis*, ed. and trans. Jacques Monfrin (Paris: Garnier, 1995), trans. into English in *Joinville and Villehardouin: Chronicles of the Crusades*, trans. Caroline Smith (New York: Penguin, 2008), para. 74-75, 79-82.

³² Pastoureau notes that heraldry was employed by the baronage decades before its wide-scale adoption by the crown. See Pastoureau, *Heraldry*, 20.

³³ Joinville, *Vie de saint Louis*, para. 237-247, 335-336, 344, 356-357, and 379.

³⁴ Stephen V. Grancsay, "A French Crusader's Sword Pommel," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 34 (1939): 211-213.

bears, we should not be surprised, Peter's arms on the obverse and a crusader's cross on the reverse, both executed exquisitely in enamel, near mirror images of the heraldic medallions that adorn the coffrets treated above. (Figure 4)



Figure 4 Sword pommel, obverse, (top) with the arms of Peter of Dreux (c. 1190-1250), Duke of Brittany and Earl of Richmond, reverse; (bottom), c. 1240-1250. Copper, gold, enamel, iron. 6 x 6.1 cm. Gift of Louis J. Cartier, 1938. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accession no. 38.60. Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art.



The dual function of commemoration and devotion communicated by the use of heraldry on a portable medium is further reinforced when set in the context of other portable devotional objects, namely Psalters, Books of Hours, and illuminated Romance manuscripts. I only want to suggest this resonance here, as this is an enormous field of study. Framing a reading of caskets in relation to the heraldry found in such manuscripts reminds us that all of these objects were seen and used by men as well as women. In the aristocratic circles of northern France and Flanders the role of women in forming peace

alliances, which were, it should be recalled, typically solidified as marriage agreements, cannot be underestimated. As Nicholas Paul and Jochen Schenk have shown, women were also crucial for transmitting crusading ideals and ambitions from their natal families to their married families, connecting fathers and sons as well as grandfathers and uncles with their kin.³⁵ Heraldry in this context enacted a profound commemorative function. Women prayed for their crusader kin, for their husbands and sons in rebellion, for the return of peace and for their kin after death. Such ideas were amply demonstrated on the margins of Psalter-Hours, such as the Psalter-Hours of Jeanne of Flanders, wife of Enguerrand IV of Coucy and that of Yolande of Soissons, and in other devotional books that used heraldic devices as line-fillers and to frame illuminated pages.³⁶ **(Figures 5 and 6)**

As Richard Leson, Karen Gould and Elizabeth Hunt, among others, have shown, heraldry communicated multiple messages to a book's reader.³⁷ As Leson states, "heraldry [could] operate as a means to commemorate the deceased, to highlight extended social networks and political alliances, or even to structure an authentic

³⁵ See Nicholas Paul, *To Follow in Their Footsteps: The Crusades and Family Memory in the High Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012); Jochen Schenk, *Templar Families: Landowning Families and the Order of the Temple in France, c. 1120-1307* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

³⁶ In both of these Psalter-Hours basilisks, strikingly like those on the coffret and casket discussed above, play a prominent role as framing devices, directing the reader's gaze to the center of the page and cautioning them lest they look elsewhere.

³⁷ See Richard A. Leson, "Heraldry and Identity in the Psalter-Hours of Jeanne of Flanders (Manchester, John Rylands Library, Ms. Lat. 117)," *Studies in Iconography* 32 (2011): 155-198; Karen Gould, *The Psalter and Hours of Yolande of Soissons* (Speculum Anniversary Monographs, 4) (Cambridge, MA.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1978); and Elizabeth Moore Hunt, *Illuminating the Borders of Northern French and Flemish Manuscripts, 1270-1310* (New York: Routledge, 2007). See also Mark Cruse, "Costuming the Past: Heraldry in Illustrations of the *Roman d'Alexandre* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264)," *Gesta* 45 (2006): 43-59; Michael Michael, "The Privilege of Proximity: Towards a Re-definition of the Function of Armorial," *Journal of Medieval History* 23 (1997): 55-74. More generally, see Michel Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique* (Paris: Picard, 1997).



Figure 5 *Psalter Hours of Jeanne of Flanders*, northern France, c. 1288-1305. University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS lat. 117, fol. 230r. Prime of the Hours of the Holy Spirit: Peter Preaches to the People. Line fillers display the arms of Coucy and Flanders among others. Photo: Reproduced by courtesy of the University Librarian and Director, The John Rylands University Library, The University of Manchester.

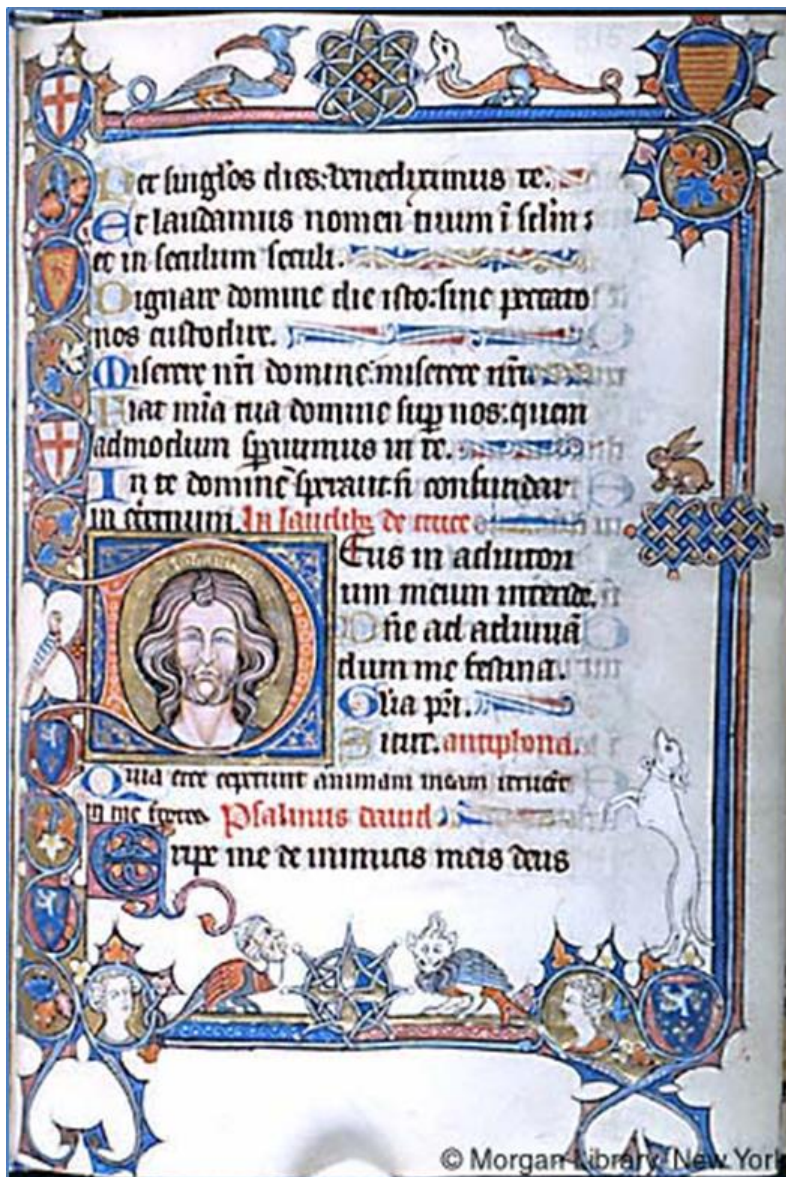


Figure 6 *Psalter Hours of Yolande of Soissons* (donor family in heraldic frame), Amiens, France, c. 1280-99. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 729, folio 315r. Initial D with bust of St. John the Evangelist. Marginal frames display heraldry of counts of Soissons, Grandpré, Moreuil, and Hangest. Photo: The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

chivalric past in order to legitimate the courtly lifestyles of the present.”³⁸ Moreover, much devotional reading would have taken place in or with reference to familial chapels, relic caskets and containers and with the use of other similarly decorated and portable devotional objects.

Commemoration and Remembrance

The notion of embedding baronial and aristocratic relationships, even relationships of political dominance (as I have argued here was the case with the Capetian-owned casket and coffret), found expression as well on less portable although still powerfully evocative media. Indeed, one is hard-pressed not to consider the role of heraldry as it appears on these objects separate from its depiction and function on a more monumental scale. One of the most powerful examples of such display is at Chartres Cathedral, namely in the glazing program of the north and south transept windows. There is not the space here (and the existing bibliography is far too vast) to detail the glass program at Chartres, however, several important points relate to the themes raised above.³⁹ Chartres represents one of the most important and perhaps earliest examples of aristocratic heraldry portrayed in stained glass.⁴⁰ The cathedral, especially as it was

³⁸ Leson, “Heraldry and Identity,” 155.

³⁹ Yves Delaporte’s magisterial study of the glass at Chartres remains the most helpful guide to reading the heraldry in the glazing program. See Yves Delaporte, *Les vitraux de la cathédrale de Chartres. Histoire et description*, 4 vols. (Chartres: É. Houvet, 1926). To view the full program see the online site compiled through The Medieval Stained Glass Photographic Archive:

<http://www.therosewindow.com/pilot/Chartres/table.htm>, which uses the same numbering system for each panel that Delaporte first devised. For bibliography on Chartres before 1981, see *Les vitraux du centre et des pays de la Loire, Corpus vitrearum France, series complémentaire, Recensement des vitraux anciens de la France*, 2 vols. (Paris: CNRS, 1981), 25-45, compiled by Claudine Lautier. More recently, for an overview of the phasing of the glazing and the mid-thirteenth-century sculptural campaign, see Anne McGee Morgenstern, *High Gothic Sculpture at Chartres Cathedral, the Tomb of the Count of Joigny, and the Master of the Warrior Saints* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 73-103.

⁴⁰ See Delaporte, *Les vitraux*, esp. 3: 458-60; also Françoise Perrot, “Le vitrail, la croisade, et la Champagne: réflexion sur les fenêtres hautes du choeur à la cathédrale de Chartres” in *Les champenois et la*

rebuilt after the 1194 fire, became a monument that commemorated its royal and baronial patrons alike. In the transept glass, glazed sometime between ca. 1217 and 1226, the Capetians (to the north) (**Figure 7**) vie for visual dominance with the Beaumont, Montfort and especially Dreux baronial arms that adorn the south transept. (**Figure 8**) Much like the visual field of the coffrets discussed above, here too the heraldry of the barons is set in relation to the royal arms, both the Capetian fleur-de-lis as well as the Castilian golden castles, which form the borders and determine the dominate color palate of the glass.⁴¹ The message, as with the portable examples described above, was one of simultaneous competition and alliance. Unified by the iconography of commemoration that honors each family in relation the veneration of the relics of the Virgin Mary and Saint Anne -- for which Chartres was famed, especially after 1204 -- the images of the barons in their full armorial dress, mounted on horseback or receiving the crusader scrip

croisade: actes des quatrièmes journées rémoises 27-28 novembre 1987, eds. Yvonne Bellenger and Danielle Quérueil (Paris: Aux amateurs des livres, 1989), 109-130; James Bugslag, "Ideology and Iconography in Chartres Cathedral: Jean Clément and the Oriflamme," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 61 (1998): 491-508; and idem, "St Eustace and St George: Crusading Saints in the Sculpture and Stained Glass of Chartres Cathedral," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 66 (2003): 441-464. The glazing program at Chartres had powerful analogs in other familial chapels and smaller foundations. Traces of heraldic glass within the château de Coucy as well as on other sculptural programs suggest this. See: Meredith Parsons Lillich, "The Arms of Coucy in Thirteenth-Century Stained Glass," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 19/20 (1984/1985): 17-24; Dorothy Gillerman, "The Portal of St.-Thibault-en-Auxois: A Problem of Thirteenth-Century Burgundian Patronage and Founder Imagery," *The Art Bulletin* 68 (1986): 567-580; and Stephen Murray, "The Choir of the Church of St.-Pierre, Cathedral of Beauvais: A Study of Gothic Architectural Planning and Constructional Chronology in Its Historical Context," *The Art Bulletin* 62 (1980): 533-551.

⁴¹ For an extremely careful and balanced argument about the patronage of the glazing program and the competition among and between the barons and the Capetian family, see Brigitte Kurmann-Schwarz, "Récits, programme, commanditaires, concepteurs, donateurs: publications récentes sur l'iconographie des vitraux de la cathédrale de Chartres," *Bulletin Monumental* 154 (1996): 55-71, in which she argues that the canons of the cathedral exercised the greatest influence over the program. As a consequence the canons used the glass to offer an argument for the role of the church – and Christian devotion – in the guidance of kings. This sentiment is reiterated in the glazing program at the Ste.-Chapelle. See Daniel H. Weiss, "Architectural Symbolism and the Decoration of the Ste-Chapelle," *The Art Bulletin* 77 (1995): 308-320; idem, *Art and Crusade in the Age of Saint Louis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); also Alyce A. Jordan, *Visualizing Kingship in the Windows of the Sainte-Chapelle* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002). Kurmann-Schwarz's conclusion fits well with the argument I propose here.

and staff remain purposefully combative.⁴² They are memorialized as warriors, mirror images of the martyred saints that surround them. The program at Chartres depicts on a monumental scale the contested identities and hard-won solidarities that are communicated on the casket and coffret.

Echoes of heraldic commemoration and remembrance that were meant to unify families in devotion to God and their dead kin appear for the first time at this moment in gothic tomb sculpture as well.⁴³ Carved sculpture reliefs often bore the shields or arms of the deceased. But a new fashion for enameled and thus brightly colored tombs gave new brilliance to the multiple heraldic devices they displayed, echoing in three dimensions both the framing of a manuscript page with elaborate borders as well as other devotional objects like the alms purses and caskets that drew together the heraldry of the shared lineage of the deceased.⁴⁴ **(Figure 9)** When one begins to look for it, the animated imagery of familial heraldry proliferates within the visual commemorative landscape, reaffirming and reiterating connections forged by blood with the intention of engendering a prolonged peace.

⁴² See Claudine Lautier, “Les vitraux de la cathédrale de Chartres: reliques et images,” *Bulletin Monumental* 161 (2003): 3-97; and Anne E. Lester, “What Remains: Women, Relics and Remembrance in the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade,” *The Journal of Medieval History* 40 (2014): 311-328.

⁴³ On this development, see the magisterial study of Anne McGee Morganstern, *Gothic Tombs of Kinship in France, the Low Countries, and England* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000). For examples of the tombs of barons discussed here, see Lillich, “The Arms of Coucy,” 18-19; Madeline H. Caviness, “Saint-Yved of Braine: The Primary Sources for Dating the Gothic Church,” *Speculum* 59 (1984): 524-548; Xavier Dectot, “Les tombeaux des comtes de Champagne (1151-1284). Un manifeste politique,” *Bulletin Monumental* 162 (2004): 3-62; and Lester, “Saint Louis and Cîteaux Revisited,” forthcoming.

⁴⁴ See the examples discussed in *Enamels of Limoges*, 397-450; and Dectot, “Les tombeaux des comtes,” 25-34. Royal tombs also displayed a great deal of heraldry. See for example, Philippe Dagobert’s tomb, which was a three-dimensional chest or sarcophagus and is briefly described in Morganstern, *Gothic Tombs of Kinship*, 35-36. The fragments of the tomb are still extant and held in Paris at the Musée du Louvre and Musée national du Moyen Age-Thermes de Cluny. On the enamels of the tombs of John and Blanche of France, see Béatrice de Chancel-Bardelot, “Tomb Effigies of John and Blanche of France” in *Enamels of Limoges*, no. 146, 402-405.



Figure 7
Chartres Cathedral,
North
Transept
Lancets
and Rose
Window
with arms
of France
above
lancets,
framing the
rose, arms
of France
and
Castile.
Photo:
Henry
Stewart
Rosenberg.

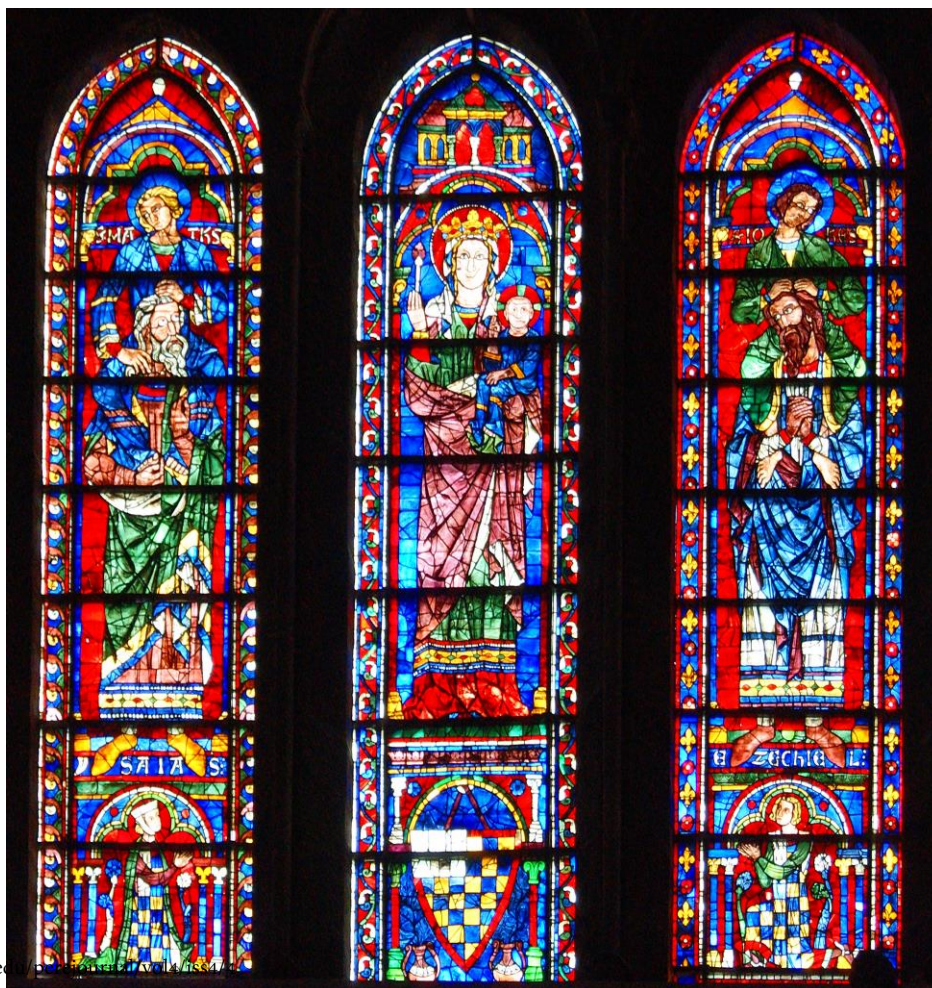


Figure 8
Chartres Cathedral,
South
Transept
Lancets with
arms of
Dreux-
Brittany.
Peter of
Dreux and
family.
Photo:
Henry
Stewart
Rosenberg.



Figure 9 Tombs of Blanche and John of France, Abbey, St. Denis, France. Photo: Henry Stewart Rosenberg.

Enshrinement

It is in the context of portability, commemoration, and the politics of peace making that we should return to the Longpont Coffret and its place in the political landscape of the mid and later thirteenth century. Although heraldic markers used on the battlefield served to distinguish otherwise indistinguishable members of the warrior elite, in other contexts, particularly in the diplomatic arena of politics and the commemorative

framework of devotion, heraldry underlay a much more powerful narrative about familial descent and peaceful, even administrative, rule. The reuse of certain decorative objects to enshrine these principles thus should not seem surprising.⁴⁵ As I want to suggest here the Longpont Coffret was reused to house relics, like the Saint Louis Casket and the casket of Richard of Cornwall, among other examples, to communicate Louis IX's political and devotional ideals, which after 1254 emphasized the king's commitment to a spiritually charged practice of administrative rule and political realignment.⁴⁶



Figure 10 Écu d'or, gold coin minted by Louis IX, c. 1266-1270. Latin inscription: + XPC.VINCIT.XPC.REGNAT.XPC.IMPERAT. 24 mm 4 g. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁴⁵ On the concepts of portability and reuse in the context of relics, reliquaries and veneration, see Cynthia Hahn, "What Do Reliquaries do for Relics?" *Numen* 57 (2010): 284-361; idem, "Portable Altars (and the *Rationale*): Liturgical Objects and Personal Devotion" in *Image and Altar, 800-1300: Papers from an International Conference in Copenhagen 24 October – 27 October 2007*, ed. Poul Grønder-Hansen, *Studies in Archaeology & History* vol. 23 (Copenhagen: Publications from the National Museum, 2014), 45-64; and more broadly Cynthia Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400-1204* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012); also Julia M. H. Smith, "Portable Christianity: Relics in the Medieval West (c. 700-1200)," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 181 (2012): 143-167. On the concept of enshrinement, see the framing discussion in Seeta Chaganti, *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary: Enshrinement, Inscription, Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁴⁶ It was at this time, in 1266, that Louis IX introduced the long-planned gold écu coin that displayed the royal arms on obverse and the cross with fleur-de-lis on the reverse, with the legend *Christus Vincit, Christus Regnat, Christus Imperat*. (**Figure 10**) This is the first instance of the use of royal heraldry on coinage. On the coin and Louis's sense of Christian kingship and a broader notion of European peace and unity, see Jordan, *Louis IX*, 210-213.

As William Chester Jordan has argued, after Louis IX's captivity in 1251 and return from a failed crusade expedition in 1254, the king harbored a renewed commitment "to maintaining peace among the Catholic powers of Europe," and perhaps especially among the barons of France.⁴⁷ In pursuit of this goal he privileged a process of peace-making that was deeply informed "by the highest sense of Christian obligation." In short, to make true peace, one needed to act as a Christian king and ensure that Christian principles underlay the foundation of any treaty, pact or set of agreements. This was part of Louis's broader framework to live and rule as the most Christian king, *rex Christianissimus*.⁴⁸ His was not an agenda of fundamentalism, even if it may have felt that way to some, but rather that of a chastened and penitent king who seemed to have believed that spiritual comportment could powerfully inform the practice of good governance.⁴⁹ To maintain peace within his domains, he needed to administer them effectively; to effect political dominance anchored in personal devotion.

In 1259 Louis used the feudal misstep of his vassal, the obdurate Enguerrand IV of Coucy, to display his ideal of political devotion. The case is well-known for it provoked the fury of many of the king's barons who saw their monarch as treading on the prerogatives of traditional baronial lordship.⁵⁰ In 1258 Enguerrand IV found three young

⁴⁷ Jordan, "A Border Policy?" forthcoming; and idem, *Louis IX*, 127; and, idem, "Etiam reges: Even Kings," *Speculum* 90 (2015): 613-634.

⁴⁸ Jordan, *Louis IX*, 182-213; and Joseph Strayer, "France, The Holy Land, the Chosen People, and the Most Christian King" in *Medieval Statecraft and the Perspectives of History*, eds. John Benton and Thomas Bisson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 300-314.

⁴⁹ On this, see William Chester Jordan, *Men at the Center: Redemptive Governance under Louis IX* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012).

⁵⁰ See the brief discussion in Jordan, *Louis IX*, 209-210, esp. n. 156; and Richard, *Saint Louis*, 212-214. Concerning Enguerrand's case and the attitudes of the barons, see E. Faral, "Le Procès d'Enguerran IV de Coucy," *Revue historique de droit français et étranger*, ser. 4, 26 (1948): 213- 258.

men, the sons of the Flemish nobility, one of whom was a relative of the constable of France, Giles le Brun, hunting rabbits in his baronial woods. The boys were staying in the nearby abbey of St.-Nicholas-aux-Bois. Enraged, Enguerrand had his servants seize the boys and hanged them without trial, for which Louis IX had the count arrested and imprisoned in the Louvre.⁵¹ In this case, Louis did not allow a trial by the count's peers, but rather condemned Enguerrand and imposed a penance: seizing his woods, he fined the baron 10,000 *livres*, forced him to build and endow three chapels to commemorate the three noble youths, and commended him to three years' service in the Holy Land.⁵² Louis IX's actions in this case were clearly meant as a display of royal power. It underscored the king's commitment to Christian kingship and to upholding Christian laws and comportment within his realm. It also affirmed – in the clearest possible terms – the complete power of the sovereign. By 1259 Louis would no longer tolerate upstart or overly ambitious barons, especially with the kinds of familial alliances Enguerrand of Coucy pursued.

Not only was the lord of Coucy related to previously troublesome lords like Peter of Dreux, but he also had familial connections, as Nicholas Vincent has shown, to the count of La Marche and his wife, Countess Isabelle of Angoulême.⁵³ Indeed, their common ancestor was none other than Enguerrand's grandfather, John of Montmirail. In the years previous to Enguerrand's abuse of power, his mother, Maire of Montmirail and

⁵¹ On the context for this kind of high stakes baronial justice and the royal response, see William Chester Jordan, "Count Robert's 'Pet' Wolf," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 155 (2011): 404-417; and Robert Bartlett, "The Impact of Royal Government in the French Ardennes: Evidence of the 1247 *Enquête*," *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981): 83-96.

⁵² Enguerrand did not go to the east for in 1261 he obtained a dispensation from Pope Urban IV by sending 12,000 *livres* to the crusade cause. As Richard notes, some of the funds from the initial fine were diverted to pay for mendicant foundations in Paris, see Richard, *Saint Louis*, 213, and 228-229.

⁵³ Vincent, "Isabella of Angoulême," 211-213.

his uncle Matthew had commissioned a monumental tomb to house their father's body, a corpse that was increasingly seen as holy and capable of effecting miracles. In 1253 the Cistercian General chapter gave the monks of Longpont a special dispensation to build the new tomb within their abbey church.⁵⁴ In the following years Louis IX had various interactions with Longpont and confirmed the holdings and privileges of the abbey. He may have returned to the abbey in 1261 to meet with the abbot.⁵⁵ Although there is no surviving documentation informing us of the content of that meeting, it is possible that Louis gave the Coffret to the monks and may even have taken part in the translation of John's bones at that meeting. While this hypothesis is speculative, it is grounded in corroborating events. Beginning in 1259 and reaching a crescendo in 1261-1262, Louis IX took part in a series of relic translations at Cistercian houses in his northern domains. His role in these ceremonies was intimate and personal: he orchestrated the advent and arrival of new relics and transferred the holy bones of martyrs, virgins, and confessors himself – with his own hands, as the texts often state – from their portable châsses to the new altars and coffrets that would house them.⁵⁶ It is entirely possible that Louis engaged in just such a translation in the case of John of Montmirail.

⁵⁴ Joseph-Maria Canivez, *Statuta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis ab anno 1116 ad annum 1786*, 8 vols. (Louvain: Bureaux de la Revue, 1933-41), 2: 394 (1253: 25): “Propter multa miracula quae Dominus dignatus est facere meritis fratris Ioannis monachi Longipontis, quondam domini Montismirabilis, conceditur a Capitulo generali ut in ecclesia ipsius abbatiae corpus dicti Ioannis honorifice sepeliatur.” On the tombs of the Coucy-Montmirail family, among others at Longpont, see Louis Duval-Arnould, “Quelques inscriptions funéraires de l’abbaye de Longpont” in *Mélange à la mémoire du Père Anselme Dimier*, 661-691.

⁵⁵ See Anselme Dimier, *Saint Louis et Cîteaux* (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1954), 187, no. 330.

⁵⁶ See Louis Carlos-Barré, “Saint Louis et la translation des corps saints,” *Études d’histoire du droit canonique dédiées à Gabriel Le Bras*, 2 vols. (Paris: Sirey, 1965), 2: 1087-1112; Jordan, *Louis IX*, 191-198. I have discussed the meaning of Louis’s actions in greater depth in Anne E. Lester, “Confessor King, Martyr Saint: Praying to Saint Maurice in Senlis” in *Center and Periphery: Studies on Power in the Medieval World in Honor of William Chester Jordan*, eds. Guy Geltner, Katherine L. Jansen, and Anne E. Lester (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 195-210.

The coffret described above (**see Figure 1**) was an ideal and highly communicative receptacle for the saintly knight's bones. Indeed, Vincent and Dionnet suggest the Longpont Coffret was first created to hold the peace treaties, really charters of submission, drawn up at the end of the Angoulême-La Marche revolt that concluded in the battle of Taillebourg in 1242.⁵⁷ The submission of the Limousin barons, some of whom had been aided by the Duke of Brittany and the Count of Coucy, initiated the final process of peace-making between the French and the English over the latter's Poitevin claims that would eventually culminate in the Peace of Paris in 1259. A coffret that contained the submission of the barons related to the Coucy then served to reinscribe further Louis's dominance over the family in 1261, after Enguerrand IV's condemnation. Reusing the coffret to hold the newly translated bones of Enguerrand's saintly grandfather made it clear as well that Louis was the final arbiter of both the political and spiritual legacy of that too-often-rebellious family. Although Maire of Montmirail and her son, Enguerrand IV, would come to be buried at Longpont in lavish tombs beside their kin, it was the king who exercised dominion over the sacred topography of the abbey by placing John of Montmirail's holy Coucy bones into a coffret redolent with Capetian heraldry. By exercising his power to render the sacred portable, Louis controlled an aspect of the Coucy legacy. The king came to govern in this way through the practice of a studied and careful politics of devotion.

The Longpont Coffret has been opened several times since John of Montmirail's remains were first translated inside. In the mid-seventeenth century, however, on the

⁵⁷ Vincent, "Isabella of Angoulême," 213; for an overview of the campaign in 1241-42, see Charles Bémont, "La Campagne de Poitou 1242-1243," *Annales de Midi* 5 (1893): 289-314.

occasion of one of the initial viewings, those in attendance noted that “the bones of John were still in the casket, which itself also contained different parchments, unfortunately which had become unreadable because of humidity, but which still had appended to them the seals of bishops and other great persons who had attested to different translations.”⁵⁸ One can only wonder if among those parchments were documents relating the submission and punishment of Enguerrand of Coucy. In the complex context of Longpont and the emergent political order of later Capetian France, the Coffret of John of Montmirail served to enshrine an ideal of sacred dominion and made the power of the king over his nobles portable and visually impressive to behold. It enshrined the principles and practices of an uncontested spiritual governance. 🖱️

⁵⁸ Mathieu, *Montmirail en Brie*, 80.