



WALKING TO HEAVEN IN GOTHIC SCULPTURE

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In September 2019, not long before people's movement through the world came to a halt, a session at the *Forum Kunst des Mittelalters* conference in Bern explored medieval artworks as "Bridges to Transcendence". Covering a wide range of topics – prayers inscribed on the frames of Georgian icons, spatial dynamics in a two-story German chapel, depictions of sacred mountains in Byzantine cosmological diagrams, and the rendering of divine revelation in manuscript illuminations and engravings – the speakers explored the manifold ways that medieval Christian art could be an instrument in the "process of transfer between earthly and heavenly spheres."¹

The question I posed there, and explore in the present paper, was more pedestrian. How did Europeans in the age of Gothic cathedrals, so preoccupied with preparing themselves for a happy afterlife, imagine that their newly reassembled and re-ensouled bodies would get from earth to heaven? Classic rock fans today know that you take a stairway to heaven and a highway to hell, and that is indeed what late Gothic painters such as Stefan Lochner (Figure 1), Hans Memling, and Rogier van der Weyden tended to picture – though in their images the way to hell is often less a road than just a rupture in the ground. Thirteenth-century stone sculptors had a different answer, one bound to the distinctive character of their medium, the pre-established formatting of their designs, and the site of installation for their works. How did people get to heaven? In some of the grandest portals of Gothic cathedrals, they simply walked.

¹ "Brücken zum Jenseits: Mittelalterliche Kunstwerke in Transferprozessen zwischen irdischer und himmlischer Sphäre," organized by David Ganz, Sophie Schweinfurth, and Katharina Theil. I am grateful to the organizers and participants at that event, especially Gregory Bryda, Lukas Huppertz, Holger Kempkens, Christopher Lakey, and Barbara Schellewald, and, more recently, Michelle Keefe, Elizabeth Marlowe, and Mitchell Merback, who have helped me think through this material afresh.

This seems to be an exceedingly banal observation, so obvious as to hardly merit comment. Indeed, while the literature on sculpted Last Judgments refers frequently to the processions of the Elect and the Damned, few scholars have questioned why these groups should be collectively walking on solid ground at all.² To adopt the terms deployed in a recent study by Stefan Bürger, we can see the pioneering carvers at Chartres, Paris, Amiens, and elsewhere exploiting the architectonic frame (*Bildrahmen*) of the tympanum's horizontal band as both a pictorial space (*Bildraum*) and pictorial motif (*Bildmotiv*), and drawing on the beholder's position as an embodied, physically mobile agent to build a bridge between present and future times and earthly and heavenly places.³ Even if the motif of aligned bodies anticipating their final entrance to heaven may be found in smaller-scale arts such as manuscripts, it assumes a distinctive meaning when placed at the physical threshold between world and church and rendered in the medium of stone sculpture – much like the images of heavenly portals carved in portal tympana, which Stephan Albrecht and his students have so wonderfully illuminated.⁴

² The processions were noted by Émile Mâle, *Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century* (1898), ed. by Harry Bober, Princeton 1984, pp. 381–84. Willibald Sauerländer, *Gothic Sculpture in France, 1140–1270*, photographs by Max Hirmer, translated by Janet Sondheimer, New York 1972, pp. 30–31 mentions "resurrected souls" in Last Judgment tympana but does not discuss the processions as such. The present paper takes up issues I explored in *Eloquent Bodies: Movement, Expression, and the Human Figure in Gothic Sculpture*, New Haven 2020, expanding the discussion of Judgment imagery at pp. 48–58.

³ Stefan Bürger, *Portale als Raumbilder und Bildräume: Ikonische Betrachtungen zu Portalarchitekturen in Regensburg, Prag und Bern*, in: Stephan Albrecht, Stefan Breitling, und Rainer Drewello, eds., *Das Kirchenportal im Mittelalter*, Petersberg 2019, pp. 112–121.

⁴ Stephan Albrecht, Imke Bösch, Clara Forcht, Elisabeth Schmidt, and Lena M. Ulrich, *Da müssen wir durch! Bilder des Ein- und Ausgehens am Kirchenportal des 12. Jahrhunderts*, in: Albrecht/Breitling/Drewello (eds.) 2019, as in n. 3, pp. 8–33.

The idea that we should see the glorified bodies of the Elect at all, let alone that they should plod along a flat groundline, is not at all self-evident. Theologians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries emphasized that, after the bodies and souls were reconnected upon Christ's Second Coming, the Final Judgment and resulting translocation of people to heaven and hell would take place *in ictu oculi* (as per Paul, I Cor. 52) – “in the twinkling of an eye”, an instantaneous, indivisible moment.⁵ According to Peter Lombard, angels would fly the Elect straight up into heaven where they would enjoy the vision of God forever, while the Damned would sink from the earth's surface into an infernal abyss.⁶ The bodies of both groups would rise in their ideal age (around 33 years) and corresponding height – thus, there would be neither children nor old people in the afterworld – and without physical flaws.⁷ Whereas the Damned would retain the fleshly solidity that would enable them to experience an endless cycle of injury and repair in hell, the Elect would be endowed with the special *dotes* (gifts) of *claritas* (transparency, glow), *agilitas* (quickness), *subtilitas* (weightlessness), and *impassibilitas* (imperviousness to outside forces).⁸

5 Gilbert Dahan, *Le Jugement dernier vu par les commentateurs des Sentences*, in: Yves Christe, ed., *De l'art comme mystagogie. Iconographie du Jugement dernier et des fins dernières à l'époque gothique*, Poitiers 1996, pp. 19–35 (32). The connection between sculptors and Schoolmen will be explored further in Jennifer Feltman, *Moral Theology and the Cathedral: Sculptural Programs of the Last Judgment in France, ca. 1200–1240*, Turnhout, forthcoming.

6 Dahan 1996, as in n. 5, p. 32.

7 Ibid., pp. 21–26.

8 Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336*, New York 1995, p. 235. See also Nikolaus Wicki, *Die Lehre von der himmlischen Seligkeit in der mittelalterlichen Scholastik von Petrus Lombardus bis Thomas von Aquin*, Freiburg 1954. On the sensorially aware bodies of the Damned in Romanesque sculpture, see Kirk Ambrose, *Attunement to the Damned of the Conques Tympanum*, in: *Gesta* 50 (2011), pp. 1–17. The question of the nature and representability of the soul is central to Jérôme Baschet, *Corps et âmes: Une histoire de la personne au Moyen Âge*, Paris 2016, pp. 123–227, a source I laid hands on late in the formulation of this paper, and for which I am grateful to Prof. emer. Linda Olson. Much of Baschet's visual evidence comes from manuscript paintings and murals, and testifies to the very different representational means artists in those media could employ in their depictions of Resurrection and the journey to heaven than their counterparts in stone.



Figure 1: Stefan Lochner, Last Judgment Altarpiece, ca. 1435, in Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum



Freed from the vulnerability and heaviness of the ordinary body, the glorified body is hard to visualize and even harder to render in stone sculpture, a medium that relies on weight, mass, and volume to communicate. One of the motifs that developed in monumental sculpture concurrently with Last Judgment iconography, the Death and Assumption of the Virgin prior to her Coronation in heaven, thematizes precisely the human body's condition as a heavy load.⁹ For all her exceptionality as a child-bearing virgin, Mary lived and died as a human being – though the Golden Legend relates that, on her deathbed, she was surrounded not only by the Apostles but also by Christ and the legions of angels and saints who already dwelt spiritually in heaven.¹⁰ After her soul passed straight into her Son's hands, her body was washed and lay buried for three days before Christ revived it and drew his Mother bodily into the heavens.¹¹

The earliest renditions of the narrative in Gothic sculpture, from Senlis and Mantes, tell a more succinct story.¹² Here the Virgin's Dormition and Assumption are juxtaposed directly, as if occurring in the same room. In the first scene Christ, standing among the Apostles, receives her soul directly upon her expiration, and in the second a group of angels prepares to transport her body into heaven. The body is really dead: the angels struggle to coax it out of its prone position, and the way they hover over it leaves little room for its further ascent. The sculptors of the center tympanum of the Chartres north transept found an ingenious way to render both Mary's deadness and the promise of her reanimation (Figure 2).¹³ Here the angels have literally rolled up their sleeves to hoist the shroud on which the corpse reposes, and the visible tension of their forearms and fists, along with the tautness of the cloth as they grasp it, registers the weight of the Virgin's limp body.¹⁴ Just over the lead angel's shoulder another pair of angels, emerging from a cloudy background, balance Mary's soul in a sling, hinting at the reunion of body and soul that will occur when the corpse is lifted from its bed. Positioned under a micro-architectural canopy, this glimpse of heaven is available only to people who stand close to the portal threshold and tilt their heads back. A century later, the early fourteenth-century tympanum made for the newly enclosed north transept of Magdeburg Cathedral reconfigured the entire *Bildfläche* into a single *Bildraum*: the angels carry Mary's entire bier away from the earth where the Apostles remain, and toward her soul, which patiently waits in the hands of Christ at the apex.¹⁵

Christ, of course, was the only other person to reside in heaven as a psychosomatic unity; before the general Resurrection, the prophets, saints, and people who had completed their time in purgatory would be present in heaven only as souls.¹⁶ In sculpted Last Judgment images, his mandorla above all defined his otherwise human-looking body's extraordinary status, and the characteristic placement of his throne in the pinnacle of the tympanum – or, as at Bamberg, lifted well above the ground-line where the other figures stand – suggested his residence in a higher realm.¹⁷ His Ascension, as the ultimate scene of movement between worlds, would seem to be supremely well-suited for the *Bildflächen* above church doors, but proved a challenge to depict without ambiguity.

⁹ For this theme in Gothic sculpture, see Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculptural Programs of Chartres Cathedral: Christ, Mary, Ecclesia*, New York 1964, pp. 56–59; Sauerländer 1972, as n. 2, p. 33. For broader considerations, see Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L'exception corporelle: À propos de l'Assomption de Marie*, in: Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché, eds., *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, Princeton 2006, pp. 151–85.

¹⁰ The Assumption of the Virgin Mary, in: Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. by William Granger Ryan, Princeton 1993, vol. 2, pp. 77–97.

¹¹ The rendition on the main portal of Regensburg Cathedral of ca. 1405, with its emphasis on the transport of Mary's funeral bier by the Apostles and then her embodied flight into heaven, hews close to this narrative; see Achim Hubel, *Das Hauptportal des Regensburger Doms: Bauplanung – Planungsänderungen in Architektur, Ikonographie und Stil – Ergebnis*, in: Albrecht/Breitling/Drewello (eds.) 2019, as in n. 3, pp. 94–111 (101–2).

¹² Sauerländer 1972, as in n. 2, Senlis: plates 42–43, pp. 406–8; Mantes, plate 47, pp. 408–9.

¹³ Katzenellenbogen 1964, as in n. 9, pp. 58–59; Sauerländer 1972, as in n. 2, pp. 430–31.

¹⁴ The tympanum with these scenes at the former Cluniac monastery church in Longpont-sur-Orgue, which I was able to examine from scaffolding during conservation work in June 2022, employs the motif of the strenuous cloth-lift for the depiction of Mary's Dormition; here, the Apostles seem to be lowering her body onto its bier, while in the adjacent scene angels just begin to lift the cloth back up at the head and feet of the cadaver. I am grateful to Jennifer Feldman and Iliana Kasarska for coordinating that visit. For the Longpont tympanum's chronology and manufacture, see Kasarska, *Entre Notre-Dame de Paris et Chartres: Le portail de Longpont-sur-Orgue (vers 1235)*, in: *Bulletin Monumental* 160-IV (2002) pp. 31–44.

¹⁵ Jacqueline E. Jung, *Dynamic Bodies and the Beholder's Share: The Wise and Foolish Virgins of Magdeburg Cathedral*, in: *Bild und Körper im Spätmittelalter*, eds. Kristin Marek, Raphaële Preisinger, Marius Rimmel and Katrin Kärcher, Munich 2006, pp. 121–46 (142–45).

¹⁶ Bynum 1995, as in n. 8, pp. 280–83. This holds true for the people Christ rescued from limbo during his own body's sojourn in the tomb; for the representational complexity of the “harrowing of hell” scene, see Baschet 2016, as in n. 8, pp. 143–47.

¹⁷ Stephan Albrecht, *Das Portal als Ort der Transformation: Ein neuer Blick auf das Bamberger Fürstenportal*, in: *Der Bamberger Dom im europäischen Kontext*, ed. Stephan Albrecht, Bamberg 2015, pp. 243–90 (269–73).

On the left:

Figure 2: Chartres Cathedral, north transept, center portal, tympanum with Dormition, Assumption, and Coronation of the Virgin, ca. 1205; below, detail of the Assumption



Figure 3: Church of Saint-Sernin, Toulouse, Porte Miègeville, tympanum with Ascension of Christ, 1100-10

On the Romanesque tympanum of the Porte Miègeville in Toulouse, so beautifully analyzed by Albrecht and his students, the gazes and gestures of Christ and his angels in the upper zone suggest the idea of upward motion, and the obstruction of the earthbound Apostles' gazes by the foliate frieze enables us to see that Christ has evaded their view (Figure 3).¹⁸ Yet the medium and placement of the relief renders the scene more complex; despite their exuberant open gestures, all the figures in the upper zone are contained, and their sense of ascent halted, by the framing arch. Between that heavy frame and the lumpy ground beneath their feet – surely meant to represent clouds, but barely different in appearance from the uneven terrain on which the Apostles stand – the figures retain a remarkable physical presence, with the angels accentuating Christ's weight by grappling with his arms. Presumably the lighting effects here would have contributed to the sense of the figures' upward motion, with the bodies of the top group emerging from shadow into illumination, and then becoming obscured again over the course of the day. In keeping with theological precepts, the sculptors treat Christ's body as a paradoxical thing: weighty and transcendent at the same time, and occupying a strange liminal space. The sculptors at the little church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Montceaux-sur-Loire, by contrast, made Christ's ascent unambiguous by setting him into a mandorla borne by angels whose lifted feet and billowing draperies suggest their weightlessness and movement through the air (Figure 4).

Working in the 1140s, the sculptors of the west portals at Chartres Cathedral made Christ's liberation from the earth more evident by having him hover in a wavy cloth borne, without visible effort, by angels. But is this really a depiction of the Ascension, as so many scholars have assumed?¹⁹ Drawing on the language of liturgy, Margot Fassler has made a compelling case that the tympanum is showing us Christ in the era *ante legem* (before the Law), when, veiled from view, he was sensed but not yet visible to the prophets who eagerly awaited him.²⁰ If the sculptural medium gives equal visibility and presence to the pre-incarnated God, the Resurrected bodies of Christ and Mary, the ethereal presences of angels (who, by definition, had no bodies), and ordinary people, how were carvers to render the subtle, impassible, clear, and weightless bodies of the Elect as they journeyed to heaven?

¹⁸ Albrecht et al. 2019, as in n. 4, pp. 20–22.

¹⁹ Katzenellenbogen 1964, as in n. 9, p. 24; Sauerländer 1972, as in n. 2, 384.

²⁰ Margot Fassler, *Liturgy and Sacred History in the Twelfth-Century Tympana at Chartres*, in: *Art Bulletin* 75 (1993), pp. 499–520.

In Romanesque sculpture, they generally didn't. Why, after all, should a journey be depicted when the transition happened instantaneously, *in actu oculi*? To be sure, in some churches that employed sculptural friezes, such as Saint-Trophime in Arles, we find a long row of the Elect, well dressed and divided by gender, directing themselves toward the central portal where Christ sits in Majesty, and a row of the naked Damned facing away from that portal, their legs already licked by flames.²¹ The uniform rightward orientation of the bodies positions the door to the church as the goal of the Elect, and associates movement away from it with the road to hell. But in the tympana that brought the Last Things to view, this liminal state was typically left unseen.

At Autun, the figures on the lintel seem – despite the cumbersome process of soul-weighing pictured on the *sinister* side – to be responding to their Judgment even as they rise from their tombs; rather than a sign of predestination, as Mâle suggested, this may simply portray the temporal collapse that characterized the End of Time.²² On the tympanum's proper right side, the people who strive upward from the groundline are maneuvered by angels into the gates and windows of the heavenly city, where they disappear from our view. Other Elect surge together toward Christ's right side, enjoying the heavenly vision that will fill their eternity. This end-result of the Judgment – at least for the Elect, whose trek to heaven has ceased at Christ's throne – is what we also see in the *Fürstenportal* at Bamberg.²³

21 This portal lends itself well to the kind of analysis undertaken by Albrecht et al 2019, as in n. 4, 2019. For remarks on its manufacture, see Andreas Hartmann-Virnich and Heike Hansen, *Die Portalanlagen von Saint-Gilles-du-Gard und Saint-Trophime in Arles: Bauarchäologische Untersuchungen zur Planung und arbeitsteiligen Ausführung spätromanischer Bauplastik in Südfrankreich*, in: Albrecht/Breitling/Drewello (eds.) 2019, as in n. 3, pp. 46–57. For the distinctive visual semantics of friezes, see Deborah Kahn, ed., *The Romanesque Frieze and Its Spectator*, London 1992.

22 For the most thorough reading of this problematic motif, see Otto Karl Werckmeister, *Die Auferstehung der Toten am Westportal von St. Lazare in Autun*, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 16 (1982), pp. 208–36.

23 Albrecht 2015, as in n. 15.



Figure 4: Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, Monteaux-sur-Loire, west portal tympanum with Ascension of Christ, ca. 1130; plaster cast in Cité de l'Architecture, Paris

As different as the tympanum at Conques is in its overall design, here too the Elect have gotten a fast-track into heaven (Figure 5).²⁴ Whereas the saintly elite walk from the outer edge to stop at the central Christ, other Blessed people stand serenely within architectural niches just below; the lack of transition between their emergence from sarcophagi and their residence within the heavenly palace here makes visible – precisely by making invisible! – the preternatural swiftness with which that movement took place. Only at the very center of the lintel do we find a hint of ordinary time and space as an angel, ushering a small group of Elect into the portal of heaven, turns back to lock eyes with a wild-haired demon across a vertical support. That support is aligned with the real trumeau of the portal; it is that architectural parallel, more than any of the bodily behaviors of the Elect and the Damned, that connects beholders to the imagery of Last Things.²⁵

24 See Silke Büttner, *Die Körper verweben: Sinnproduktion in der französischen Bildhauerei des 12. Jahrhunderts*, Bielefeld 2010, pp. 227–42.

25 This is an obvious fit with the materials discussed by Albrecht et al. 2019, as in n. 4.

This approach changed during the first decade of the thirteenth century, when a team of sculptors employed at Chartres turned their attention from the cathedral's recently completed north transept to the south side. As Mâle and Katzenellenbogen showed long ago, the two portal ensembles were conceived as a complementary set, to highlight the correspondences between biblical history on the north side, particularly focused on the role of Mary and her royal Jewish predecessors (the eras *ante legem* and *sub lege*, before and under the Law), and, on the south, the continuation of that narrative into the time of the holy people who expanded the Christian church (the era *sub gratia*, under Grace) and, finally, the future (the Last Judgment and the timeless eternity it would initiate).²⁶ Sauerländer has noted the formal and stylistic correspondences between the north transept's central tympanum (with the Dormition, Assumption, and Coronation of the Virgin; see Figure 2) and that of the south transept, which featured the first instantiation of what would become a standard format for Last Judgment tympana in Gothic France (Figure 6).²⁷

26 For the iconography, Mâle 1984, as in n. 2; Katzenellenbogen 1964, as in n. 9. For style, Sauerländer 1972, as in n. 2, pp. 430–34. 27 Sauerländer 1972, as in n. 2, p. 432.



Figure 5: Abbey church of St. Foy, Conques, west tympanum with Last Judgment, ca. 1130, proper right side with the Elect



Figure 6: Chartres Cathedral, south transept, center portal, tympanum with Last Judgment, ca. 1205-10; below, detail of Procession of the Elect

Here the lintel, which in the Coronation portal had featured the groups of standing Apostles and angels gathered around Mary's deathbed – thus, as we observed, a place suggestive of her soul's upward ascent – becomes the *Bildraum* for the newly resurrected people's lateral movement toward their eternal destinations: they walk, en masse, toward the outer ends of the *Bildrahmen*. There the entrances to heaven and hell are visible (a small door on the proper right side, a gaping animal mouth on the proper left) but their interiors are left to the imagination. This is a marked change from the Conques tympanum, where we were provided with clear views of the Elect enjoying peace and the Damned suffering an impressive variety of punishments in their respective domains. The Chartres tympanum thus replaces a visual description of people's *eternal states of being* with their *anticipation* of what awaits them. Although, in keeping with the theology of the Resurrection, they appear all approximately the same age and height, and wear clothing and hairstyles indicative of their social stations during life, these figures show none of the hallmarks of the glorified "spiritual bodies" that theologians assigned to the Elect.²⁸ Insistently corporeal in their physical bulk, and with their feet planted on the ground, these men and women exist not in the timeless eternity of the afterlife but in a suspended present.

Suggestions of movement among both the Elect and the Damned appear only at the two ends of their groups: at the center of the lintel, where St. Michael weighs the souls, an angel and a demon pushes the nearest person forward across the lintel, while at the outer end demons thrust the unfortunate into a gaping hell-mouth and another angel gently escorts a man by the hand toward the edge of the tympanum's arched frame. Beyond this, in the nearest archivolt, an angel bears a smaller Elect figure toward the seated Abraham, who will gather the happy company onto his lap. Behind the first man in the procession, another male figure, wearing a circlet of flowers on his head, angles his feet and face in the same direction – but the strict frontality of his body and the symmetry of his arms and hands, pressed in prayer position in front of his chest, neutralizes any sense of directional flow. The five other people who occupy the front row – a lay man and woman, a deacon, a bishop, and a king – all stand still and direct their attention back toward the giant Christ in the upper register. There's an interesting tension here between their wish to see, evident in the orientation of their heads and the firm placement of their feet, and their need to move along, demonstrated by the angel's gentle pressure on the king's shoulder. Each of the Elect, like the Damned across from them, is wrapped up in their own contemplation; the bodies are discrete from each other and hands clasp together tightly against the chests. Because these bodies are so solid, cohesive, and stable, the only thing that signals their difference from ordinary ones is the series of swirling lines that form the background of the relief, just over their heads, and the groundline for the Deesis Group above. Gone is the micro-architectural canopy that framed the Dormition and Assumption scenes on the north tympanum, which pinned those scenes in the earthly sphere (see Figure 2). The upper frame for these post-Judgment processions is the undulant line of the ether, and the angels who emerge from the heavens to swing their censers over the heads of the Elect and their swords over those of the Damned.

There was a similar split between gazers and walkers in what Sauerländer called "the second great Judgment portal of the thirteenth century," that at Notre-Dame in Paris (Figure 7).²⁹ The excision and later restoration of the tympanum's lower registers left enough of the procession intact to see that the Elect displayed two orientations, with six figures turned toward the center to gaze up at the enthroned Christ, and the outermost four moving toward the outer edge of the *Bildrahmen*. The latter group all face outward, toward the world beyond the *Bildraum*, and their body-language breaks out of the pious self-containment that characterizes their static companions (and all the Elect at Chartres). The first three in line grasp the edges of their cloaks, a gesture resonant with the reality of moving through the world in a long outer garment³⁰; all their upper bodies are pressed together, and the third person in line, a married woman, touches her companion's elbow with one hand. Behind her, a man clasps the fingers of another woman, a transitional figure who gathers her cloak in preparation for walking but remains transfixed in her vision of Christ. Bodies with the gift of *impassibilitas* cannot touch, and they certainly don't need to worry about tripping over their garments. The glorification of these men and women is apparent in the crowns that they all wear, and their contrast both with the suffering Damned across from them and the naked bodies emerging from their tombs below – but their slow walk to heaven lets their continued humanity shine through.

"Should I stay or should I go?" The question posed by the split groups of Elect at Chartres and Notre-Dame reverberated to the teams of sculptors who took those tympana as models. Should the Elect be shown enjoying their vision of God or moving into the space of heaven? At many sites, the opted for the latter. The designers of the Judgment tympana at Poitiers and Bazas, for example, turned all the Elect away from the center and had them walk toward the outer edge; their slung cloak edges and unevenly spaced feet suggest consistent, if slow, forward progress.³¹

28 For the uniform age and height of the Elect, see Dahan 1996, as in n. 5, pp. 21–22. For the continuity of social identities in the afterlife, see Bruno Boerner, *Réflexions sur les rapports entre la scolastique naissante et les programmes sculptés du XIII^e siècle*, in: Christe (ed.) 1996, as in n. 5, pp. 55–69 (64–65); Peter Dinzelsbacher, *Reflexionen irdischer Sozialstrukturen in mittelalterlichen Jenseitsschilderungen*, in: *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 61 (1979), pp. 16–34.

29 Sauerländer 1972, as in n. 2, p. 450; Fabienne Joubert, *La sculpture gothique en France, XII^e–XIII^e siècles*, Paris 2008, pp. 110–14.

30 The cloak-grasp often signifies walking in Gothic sculpture, as in the lintel of the south transept portal at Amiens and the fragmentary lintel from the cathedral of Metz.

31 Sauerländer 1972, as in n. 2, plate 297, pp. 506–8 (Poitiers), plate 307, p. 511 (Bazas).

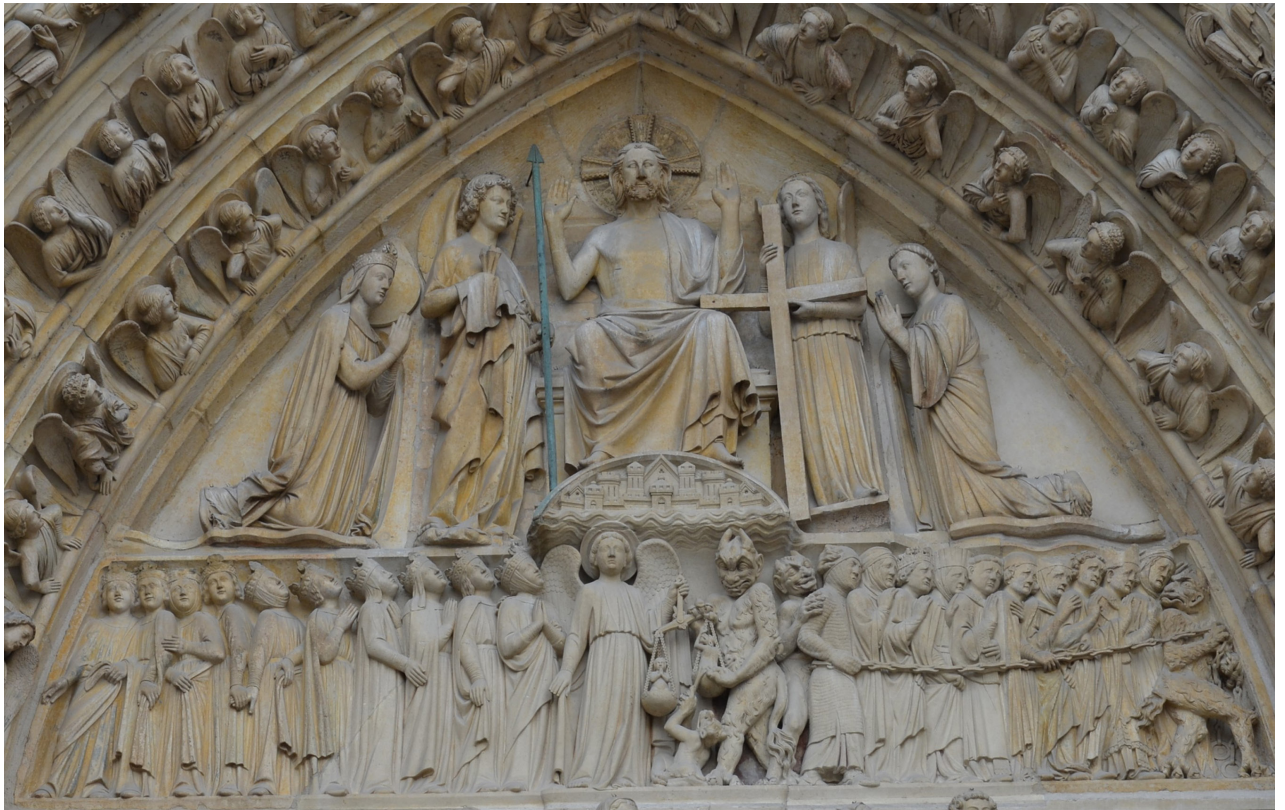


Figure 7: Cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris, west façade, center portal, tympanum with Last Judgment, ca. 1220-25, minus the restored lintel

This is the format we see in what remains of the beautiful reliefs from the former choir screens at Mainz (Figure 8) and Chartres. At Mainz, however, the directional motion of the figures on the frontal plane is punctuated, and visually halted, by the frontal faces of the occluded figures on the back plane, while at Chartres, the figure on the far right-hand side holds his torso in a frontal position, suggesting that this procession too included a pause to acknowledge the living.³² In both cases, where the Judgment played out at an important threshold deep inside the church, the Elect's anticipation of heaven did not preclude a remembrance of the world they would soon leave behind.

The walk to heaven received special emphasis on the central tympanum of the west façade of Amiens Cathedral; its progress is clear despite the gaps (marking the seams between individual relief blocks) that divide the Elect into little clusters (Figure 9).³³ An angel sets the march into motion, cheerfully cupping the backside of a well-dressed man who has already gathered up his cloak. This fellow in turn presses his free hand against his companion's shoulder, and we find in the larger group ahead of them a similar form of haptic engagement: hands press against elbows, shoulders, and backs of neighbors to urge them forward or simply show companionship. The figures' active hands thus form a chain of connection – a happy contrast to those of the Damned, which either clasp each other in fear or grasp the bodies of neighbors as if to halt them from further movement. Interestingly, whereas the feet and legs of the Damned are uniformly directed toward the right-hand side of the *Bildraum* where the hellmouth awaits – a positioning made evident by their total nudity – those of the Elect in the central group are in fact oriented outward, in a position of stasis. The sense of progress comes from their upper bodies alone, with their common, leftward positioning of torsos and faces and their gestures of solidarity. In a separate block at the end of the register, St. Peter faces the Elect while ushering St. Francis into the portal of heaven, his hands sheathed under long sleeves and his right foot already inside the threshold; the carvers have angled his left just slightly off the edge of the *Bildrahmen* so that we can see his bare heel and sense the pressure he's placing on the front of his foot as he strides.³⁴ Enhancing the sense of movement across the whole register are the angels who, as at Chartres north, hover above the procession, holding crowns over the Elects' heads. Two hold their crowns flat, as if they're about to set them onto the heads of the persons below; two others tilt them upright against their chests, showing us their circular shape.³⁵ There is no clear logic to their organization – the two who seem most prepared to crown their subjects are toward the back of the procession, while another angel at the very front has missed his chance to bedeck St. Francis, who is already receiving a crown from an angel in the heavenly gateway.³⁶ But their purpose seems less to perform a purposeful action than to sustain, and even heighten, the sense of anticipation intrinsic to the procession. The final glorification of the Elect, when they disappear from our earthly view, is forever *about to happen*. And in the meantime, they share with beholders a groundedness, a tangibility, and an awareness of each other. In this way they elevated the form of sensual experience of attentive visitors as they walked together into church.



Figure 8: Mainz Cathedral, relief of the Elect from the former west choir screen, ca. 1235, now in the Dom- und Diözesanmuseum, Mainz

32 See Jacqueline E. Jung, *The Gothic Screen: Space, Sculpture, and Community in the Cathedrals of France and Germany*, ca. 1200–1400, Cambridge 2013, pp. 132–34, 194–95.

33 See Joubert, *La sculpture gothique*, as in n. 27, pp. 170–172; Sauerländer 1972, as in n. 2, pp. 462–63. For the iconography in relation to the overall program, see Stephen Murray, *Notre-Dame of Amiens: Life of the Gothic Cathedral*, New York 2020, pp. 131–39.

34 The lifted-heel motif recurs in the Payment of Caiaphas relief on the Naumburg Westlletner, where it underscores the torsion of a figure toward the back plane; see Jung 2013, as in n. 30, pp. 158–59.

35 For a closer view of these figures and their crowns, see Denis Verret and Delphine Steyaert, eds., *La couleur et la pierre: Polychromie des portails gothiques*, Paris 2002, p. 232.

36 For the role of this and other angelic “bouncers,” see Stephan Albrecht, *Das Bildprogramm am Stephanusportal der Kathedrale von Paris: ‘Der Weg ist das Ziel?’* in: Stephan Albrecht, Stefan Breitling, and Rainer Drewello, eds., *Die Querhausportale der Kathedrale Notre-Dame in Paris: Architektur, Skulptur, Farbigkeit*, Petersberg 2021, pp. 98–153 (139–40).



Figure 9: Amiens Cathedral, west façade, center portal, tympanum with Last Judgment, ca. 1235; below, detail of Procession of the Elect

Of course, not all Judgment tympana showed resurrected people in procession. While the Damned at Reims plod sadly toward the cauldron of hell, the Elect wait at the boundaries of the lintel for angels with veiled hands to scoop them up and deposit them, in newly miniature form, into the lap of Abraham (Figure 10).³⁷ At Bourges, the Elect linger with angels outside the heavenly chamber in a kind of cheerful stasis; at Léon, the mood of a similar scene is heightened by organ-playing angels, and the Elect chat together like, if I may say so, old colleagues reuniting at a conference reception (Figure 11).³⁸ Such diverse stagings of the time between Judgment and the final entrance of the Elect into heaven make clear that processions were not the only option – programmers at certain places *chose* to have them walk.

It would take a separate paper or even a book to explore the specific kinds of liturgical processions that led people into or out of the respective portals at the cathedrals in Paris, Chartres, Amiens, and elsewhere, and the socially binding functions they performed in these towns.³⁹ One promising path would lead to funerary rites for bishops and other high-ranking prelates, whose journey from the cathedral to the churchyard would be accompanied by the antiphon *In paradisum deducant angeli, in tuo adventu suscipiant te martyres, et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem* (May the angels lead you into paradise; may the martyrs receive you when you arrive, and lead you into the holy city Jerusalem).⁴⁰ But for now I'd like to close with an example that circles us back to the birthplace of this paper, and to a much later point in the Middle Ages: the great tympanum at Bern Münster, made by Erhard Küng and his workshop in the 1470s (Figure 12).⁴¹

37 For Reims, see Sauerländer 1972, as in n. 2, p. 482; Jung 2020, as in n. 2, pp. 50–53.

38 For Bourges, Sauerländer 1972, as in n. 2, pp. 504–5; for Léon, Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras, *The Faces of the Words: Aesthetic Notions and Artistic Practice in the Thirteenth Century*, in: Colum Hourihane, ed., *Gothic Art and Thought in the Later Medieval Period: Essays in Honor of Willibald Sauerländer*, Princeton 2011, pp. 90–118.

39 For especially insightful considerations of the interaction of processional activities and texts with the imagery of sculpted portals, see Fassler 1993, as in n. 37; M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, *Portals, Processions, Pilgrimage, and Piety: Saints Firmin and Honoré at Amiens*, in: Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe, eds., *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles*, Leiden/Boston 2005, vol. 1, pp. 217–42. For a range of perspectives on such rites, see Kathleen Ashley and Wim Hüskens, eds., *Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Amsterdam 2001.

40 Jürgen Bärsch, *Suscipe pro anima famuli tui episcopi precis nostras: Grundzüge der Liturgie des Bischofsbegräbnisses im Spätmittelalter*, in: Gerhard Lutz und Rebecca Müller, eds., *Die Bronze, der Tod und die Erinnerung. Das Grabmal des Wolfhard von Roth im Augsburger Dom*, Passau 2020, p. 22.

41 See Verein zur Förderung des Bernischen Historischen Museums, ed., *Das Jüngste Gericht: Das Berner Münster und sein Hauptportal*, Bern 1982.



Figure 10: Reims Cathedral, north transept, tympanum with Last Judgment, ca. 1230; detail of lintel with angels carrying the Elect to Abraham's Bosom



Figure 11: Top: Bourges Cathedral, west façade, center portal, tympanum with Last Judgment, 1255-60, detail of the Elect; bottom: Léon Cathedral, west façade, center portal, tympanum with Last Judgment, ca. 1250, detail of the Elect



Figure 12: Bern Münster, west façade portal, tympanum with Last Judgment, ca. 1470, proper right side with the Elect

In contrast to the thirteenth-century examples, Christ and his attendants hover high above this tympanum's *Bildrahmen*, bringing the upper archivolts into an expanded *Bildraum*; we beholders can see the divine cohort, at least from certain standpoints, but the occupants of the tympanum do not. Whereas, on the tympanum's *sinister* side, the Damned are yanked up and swallowed down in an endless circle of physical torment, the Elect on the *dexter* side await their chance to enter the heavenly gate. The flow of people here is ongoing, though here, thanks to the overlapping of bodies and diminution of their size, the crowd appears to move back into a simulated *Bildraum* rather than proceeding, as a single row of figures, laterally across the surface. Closest to us are laypeople – men, women, and even small children (a welcome break from theological precepts!) – who wait their turn as the social elites – kings and emperors, bishops and Church Fathers, knights and members of religious orders – press toward the heavenly gate. In contrast to the doorways included at Amiens and elsewhere, which were typically positioned obliquely (see Figure 9), this one opens out toward us: angels escort a pope into the threshold while another stands nearby, balancing in his arms eight crowns to be bestowed upon the next batch of entrants.

By the late fifteenth century, the motif of the open door with crowds flowing in was a familiar one in northern painting: it appears in Rogier van der Weyden's Beune Altarpiece; again in Hans Memling, where the Elect receive clothes as well as crowns; and in the beautiful, sensorily rich version by Stefan Lochner (see

Figure 1). But Küng's rendition at Bern assumes additional meaning through its physical presence on the church. As Bürger has noted, its distinctive design echoes that of the *Schultheissenpforte* on the north side of the building, near the choir.⁴²

This visual reference itself creates a link between two major entrances to the church, integrating the full expanse of the building in the picture of salvation. Like the portals studied by Albrecht et al., it also resonates with the physical space of *this* portal zone, being aligned with the real doors leading into the nave. Just as the Wise and Foolish Virgins in the jambs below call attention to the portal as a place of entry or exclusion, and summon onlookers to be players in their drama, so too does the gateway in the tympanum invite beholders to see and feel their own longitudinal passage into the real space of the threshold as a parallel to the upward journey of the Elect.⁴³ The time, space, and movement suggested in this and the other processional scenes find their completion in the embodied experience of beholders. By showing that ethereal place to be accessible through the movement of feet on the ground, Gothic sculptors made heaven a place on earth.⁴⁴

⁴² Bürger 2019, as in n. 3, pp. 117–19.

⁴³ For the Virgins at Bern, see Jung 2020, as in n. 2, pp. 177–81.

⁴⁴ For wonderful reflections on walking in and around art, see Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Man Who Walked in Color*, trans. Drew S. Burke, Minneapolis 2017.