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## *On the Angevin Patronage of Arnolfo's De Braye Monument*

By Matthew Collins, Harvard University

Arnolfo di Cambio's funerary monument to the French Cardinal Guillaume De Braye in Orvieto's church of San Domenico, finished in 1282, is a masterpiece of later medieval Italian art (**Fig. (1)**).<sup>1</sup> "[S]et[ting] a precedent for the design of later Tuscan monuments," its history and study has been complicated.<sup>2</sup> It was removed from its original position in San Domenico in 1680, returning only in 1934 with less-than-accurate restorations and reconstructions.<sup>3</sup> Further investigations and restorations, undertaken in the 1990s, led to the discovery by Angiola Maria Romanini that at the peak of the monument was a late-antique sculpture only slightly reworked by the hand of

<sup>1</sup> This is an adapted version of a paper I wrote as an undergraduate at the University of Texas at Austin in 2008 for a class taught by Joan Holladay. Regular conversations with and suggestions from her as I worked through this paper while an undergraduate, as well as her extensive comments on the earlier version of the paper, were invaluable helpful. The argument of this present paper remains quite fundamentally the same, though at the time of the original writing only Cassidy's brief suggestion had been made regarding the De Braye Monument's Angevin patronage. I would also like to thank my wife Anastasiya, a historian by training, for carefully reading and commenting on this "2.0 version" of the piece. Similarly, thanks are owed to the two blind peer reviewers for doing the same.

<sup>2</sup> Ames-Lewis, *Tuscan Marble Carving: 1250-1350: Sculpture and Civic Pride*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 179. Noteworthy studies that address this monument include Angiola Maria Romanini, *Arnolfo di Cambio e lo 'stil nuovo' del gotico italiano* (Milano: Casa Editrice Ceschina, 1969); Kurt Bauch, "Anfänge des figürlichen Grabmals in Italien," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* (1971), 227-258; Julian Gardner, "Arnolfo di Cambio and Roman Tomb Design" *The Burlington Magazine* (July 1973), 420-439; Valentino Pace, "Questioni arnolfiane": L'antico e la Francia" *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* (January, 1991), 335-373; Anita Moscovitz, *Italian Gothic Sculpture c. 1250-1400*. (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2001.

<sup>3</sup> John Pope-Hennessy, *Italian Gothic Sculpture* (London: Phaidon, 1972), 240.



**Figure 1** The De Braye Monument (1282), Arnolfo di Cambio, Orvieto, Italy. Photo: author.

Arnolfo.<sup>4</sup> When recently cleaned, more was discovered and published in a full issue of the *Bolletino d'Arte* in 2010. In spite of the de- and re-construction of this work, we know on a fundamental level that the De Braye Monument has always consisted of a grouping of sculptures that sit within a tiered architectural structure extensively adorned by cosmatesque columns and inlays. Further, we know that the Virgil and Child sat atop the structure as they still do today. Other specific details remain uncertain to varying degrees, due to the rather tempestuous life of the monument. The work was not only a trendsetter in Tuscany in regards to monumental tomb design, specifically because of the elaboration of the sculptural program — a degree of elaboration that could not be seen in Rome, amidst the “curial control” imposed upon its monuments.<sup>5</sup> It was also a masterful continuation of the Dugento sculptural renaissance spearheaded by Nicola Pisano, under whom Arnolfo worked as an assistant.<sup>6</sup> The acolytes on De Braye monument, for example, perpetually frozen in the motion of closing a curtain to respectfully hide Guillaume De Braye’s sculpted body from view, are convincing in both their actions and their physical likenesses (**Fig. 2**). Their garments show delicate indications of their bodies’ movements and shapes beneath the cloth.

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<sup>4</sup> Angiola Maria Romanini, “La sconfitta della morte: Arnolfo e l’antico in una nuova lettura del monumento De Braye” *Arte Medievale* (1998-1999), 1-47.

<sup>5</sup> Ames-Lewis, *Tuscan Marble Carving*, 179.

<sup>6</sup> To cite an admittedly traditional and problematic yet still influential source, Erwin Panofsky suggested: “As major Italian poetry, first flowering in the ‘Sicilian school’ under Frederick II, was brought to perfection by the great Florentines from Guido Guinicelli to Dante and Petrarch, so did the South Italian Proto-Renaissance culminate in the works produced by Nicolo Pisano after his transmigration to Tuscany.” *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 67. Interestingly, Panofsky fails to acknowledge Arnolfo as anything but an architect, following Vasari (*Renaissance and Renascences*, 31). For Giorgio Vasari’s life of Arnolfo, see the second edition of *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* (Venezia: Giunti, 1568), 88-96. In contrast to Vasari and Panofsky, John White acknowledged Arnolfo’s known work with Nicola, referring to the “easy naturalism and classical economy” of the De Braye Monument in particular as “a new chapter in the story of Italian sculpture.” *Art and Architecture in Italy: 1250-1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 66.



**Figure 2** Detail, De Braye Monument, Acolytes. Photo: author.

Indeed, Arnolfo's sculptural handiwork impressively evokes a balanced sense of gravity, material, motion and corporeality (**Fig. 3**).

Despite the significance of this monument, there remains uncertainty regarding who its patron was. This article proposes Charles of Anjou (1227-1285), the brother of the sainted Louis IX (1214-1270), who became a southern Italian potentate and the founder of the centuries-long Angevin rule in the Kingdom of Naples. This proposal is based upon two major clues along with not-yet-considered historical circumstances surrounding the monument.





**Figure 3** Detail, The De Braye Monument, Right Acolyte. Photo: author.

The first clue was noted by Brendan Cassidy who, upon describing the Angevin shields on the base of the monument, (**Figs. 4-5**) briefly suggested the possibility of Charles's patronage. Yet he noted that Charles wrote a scathing letter to De Braye in 1277 because the Cardinal had not supported a Frenchman as Pope, instead being complicit in the election of the Italian Giangaetano Orsini,<sup>7</sup> and thus Cassidy questioned the likelihood of Angevin patronage, writing: "all we can do for the moment is take the evidence at face value."<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, this heraldic evidence is potentially telling and calls for further inquiry.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, De Braye's will exists only in fragments and the Angevin Registers have been destroyed, so documentary evidence is sparse.<sup>10</sup>

Julian Gardner has suggested that, at some point before De Braye's death, the cardinal reached a "probable reconciliation with Charles d'Anjou" which "explains the employment of the Angevin court sculptor Arnolfo, and the presence of the royal arms on the base of the Orvieto tomb."<sup>11</sup> There is no documentary evidence for or against this explanation. Elsewhere Gardner surmised that the Angevin shields' presence may be due Gardner's latter explanation may be a bit less feasible than the former; the familial affiliation of an executor seems an inadequate reason to instead to the role of Guillaume

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<sup>7</sup> Brendan Cassidy, *Politics, Civic Ideals and Sculpture in Italy c. 1240-1400* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2007), 51.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Cassidy was the first, as far as I am aware, to even note the presence of the Angevin shield and suggest the idea of Angevin patronage in light of it, even if he held strong reservations. His passing observation alone was significant in calling attention to the possibility, thus opening the door to further inquiry.

<sup>10</sup> Julian Gardner, "*Sepulchrum...permagnificum et sumptuosum inter Omnia sepulcra vicina*: a note on Cardinal Guillaume de Braye and his tomb in Oriveto by Arnolfo di Cambio," in *Opere e giorni. Studi su mille anni di arte europea dedicati a Max Seidel*, Eds. K. Bergdolt and G. Bonsanti (Venice: 2001), 85-90; Caroline Bruzelius, "Ad Modum Franciae: Charles of Anjou and Gothic Architecture in the Kingdom of Sicily," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (1991), 404.

<sup>11</sup> Julian Gardner, "French Patrons Abroad and at Home: 1260-1300," *Rome Across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas c. 500-1400*, Eds., Claudia Bolgia et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 266.



**Figures 4-5** (Left) Detail, De Braye Monument, left-hand Angevin shield. (Right) Detail, De Braye Monument, right-hand Angevin shield. Photos: author

d'Essai, who was related to the Angevins and one of the executors of the cardinal's will.<sup>12</sup> Gardner's latter explanation may be a bit less feasible than the former; the familial affiliation of an executor seems an inadequate reason to prominently furnish the Angevin coat of arms on the monument. Without a reconciliation or a good reason to feign a reconciliation, Charles would likely not have been particularly keen on featuring his coat of arms on the monument celebrating a man with whom he had a rather severe falling out.

The second major clue, which Cassidy and Gardner both briefly mention, is that Arnolfo worked for Charles from at least as early as 1277 when he sculpted him in a senatorial toga, celebrating his establishment that year as Senator of Rome.<sup>13</sup> In 1281, just

<sup>12</sup> Julian Gardner, "The Tomb of Cardinal Guillaume De Braye in its European Context," *Bollettino d'Arte* (2010): 52-66.

<sup>13</sup> Julia Bolton Holloway, *Twice-told Tales: Brunetto Latino and Dante Alighieri* (New York: P. Lang, 1993), 107.



one year prior to his work on the monument in Orvieto, Arnolfo specifically requested Charles' permission to travel to Perugia, bringing stones from Rome with him, so that he could complete his work on a fountain.<sup>14</sup> Such a detail strongly suggests the degree of influence which Charles held over Arnolfo leading directly up to the moment he began to work on the monument in Orvieto. It is likely that Arnolfo was still under the direction of Charles, as he was in 1281, when he made his way to Orvieto to erect the funerary monument to Cardinal De Braye.

Left with these two clues, suggestive as they may be, one remains in the same uncertain state as expressed by Cassidy and Gardner. But perhaps clues lie elsewhere, namely amidst the highly contested French-Italian relations on the Italian peninsula. If we briefly look from this angle at key events leading up to the 1277 letter and then consider what transpired between the time of the letter and the moment of De Braye's death, another possible explanation emerges that has little to do with any need for true reconciliation between these two influential men.

The notable rise of French influence on the Italian peninsula under Charles's reign began with the election of Pope Urban IV (1195-1264) in 1261, the first French Pope in 137 years. Urban worked toward an arrangement with Louis IX to send Charles with an army to overthrow the Hohenstaufen reign in the Kingdom of Sicily.<sup>15</sup> Charles wrested power from Manfred (1232-1266), the son of Frederick II, in the battle of Benevento in

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<sup>14</sup> Cassidy, *Politics*, 51.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Dunbabin, *Charles I of Anjou: Power, Kingship and State-Making in Thirteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Longman, 1998), 130. The original letter by Urban IV, written from Orvieto on May 3, 1264, is in the Vatican Library and can also be read in printed form: *Les reistres d'Urbain IV (1261-1264): recueil des bulles de ce pape publiées ou analysées d'après les manuscrits originaux du Vatican*. Ed. Jean Guiraud. Vol. 2. (Paris: A. Fontemoing, 1901), 395-396.

1266; Urban's successor Clement IV (1195-1268), also a Frenchman, declared the victory "a great exaltation of the whole French nation."<sup>16</sup> As King of Sicily, Charles also controlled Naples. Additionally, he was influential in Rome through the French papacy and enjoyed the favor of the Tuscan Guelfs, including the likes of the Florentine banker-turned chronicler, Giovanni Villani (1276-1348), who saw Charles as a potential aid in permanently defeating the city's Ghibelline faction.<sup>17</sup>

The first signs of trouble for Charles came with the death of Urban IV. The struggle for and against the intertwined ecclesiastical and secular French power on the Italian peninsula resulted in the longest deadlock in papal election history. The eventual choice in 1271 was essentially neutral: Gregory X (1210-1276), an Italian who had been living for years in the Low Countries and was thus detached from the current political divisions. Things remain apparently steady for Charles—he was even granted the symbolically significant office of Senator of Rome in 1277, reflecting his continued influence there. This same year, however, was also the beginning of his significant decline.

Nicholas III (c.1225-1280), from the powerful Roman Orsini family, was elected Pope after Gregory X despite Charles' hard-fought attempts to resist this. And, to Charles' great frustration—expressed in writing—the French Cardinal De Braye had allowed for the rise of Orsini power, or at least he had not sufficiently attempted to resist it to the mind of the Angevin king. Nicholas was egregiously anti-French, and so self-serving and dynastically driven that he was condemned to Hell in Dante Alighieri's

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<sup>16</sup> Norman Housley, *The Italian Crusades: The Papal-Angevin Alliance and the Crusades against Christian Lay Powers, 1254-1343* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 152.

<sup>17</sup> Villani embodies the Guelf sentiments toward Charles. He praised the Angevin king as a great lord and as a Roman god at his best, with Christianized twists; *Villani's Chronicle: Selections From the First Nine Books* (London: Archibald Constable and Co, 1906), 199-200.

*Commedia*. Dante specifically wrote that he acted “contra Carlo.”<sup>18</sup> Charles’ sway in Rome was immediately lost. In 1278 Nicholas demanded that Charles give up his senate position and instituted a law prohibiting non-Romans from obtaining this status.<sup>19</sup> Though Nicholas died only three years after he was crowned, and the next chosen Pope Martin IV (1210-1285) was a Frenchman, he managed during his reign to establish two additional Orsinis as cardinals and to change the atmosphere in Rome to such an extent that Martin, who wished to hold a ceremony in Rome in order to restore peace, was refused by the Romans and forced instead to go to Orvieto.<sup>20</sup> Even there, a faction of the city opposed the presence of French influence, shouting “death to the Frenchmen.”<sup>21</sup> A similar cry soon followed during what came to be called the Sicilian Vespers, the insurrection of March 1282 that forced Charles to move and rename himself the King of Naples; “Death to the French” resounded in Palermo, as Villani and others have recounted it.<sup>22</sup>

When Cardinal De Braye died one month after the Sicilian Vespers, Charles’s territorial control in the south had shrunk significantly. He no longer had any sway in Rome, and sentiments toward the French in central Italy north of Rome were quite mixed. Reconciled or not, De Braye may have suddenly become a very useful symbol for

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<sup>18</sup> *Inf.* XIX, 99. Villani also mentioned Nicholas’ personal opposition to Charles “secretly in all things” (*Chronicles*, 262). In *Inferno* Nicholas is made to acknowledge that his simony was “per avanzar li orsatti,” (71) that is, to advance the cubs, i.e. his lineage—a play on his family name, *degli Orsini*, which literally means *of the little bears*.

<sup>19</sup> Dunbabin, *Charles of Anjou*, 87.

<sup>20</sup> Horace K. Mann, *The Lives of the Popes in the Middle Ages*, Vol. XVI (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1932), 206.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Waley, *Medieval Orvieto: The Political History of an Italian City-State*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 49.

<sup>22</sup> Villani, *Chronicles*, 267. Saba Malaspina’s chronicle *Rerum Sicularum historia* corroborates the claim: “Adunatur tumultuosa multitudo dicentium: Moriantur Gallaci, moriantur.” Malaspina, *Cronisti e scrittori sincroni napoletani editi e inediti*. Vol. 2. Ed. Giuseppe del Re. (Napoli: Stampiera Dell’Iride, 1868), 335.

Charles. By funding the Cardinal's funerary monument and by sending his masterful Italian court artist Arnolfo di Cambio to carry out the task, he could celebrate the very man who supported the Orsini papacy, detrimental as it was to Angevin interests. At a time when forces were successfully combatting French power, Charles may have taken De Braye's death as an opportunity to praise the French Cardinal's actions of transcending clannish interests and thus call for transnationality when it was unfavorable to be a Frenchman in Italy. In a sense, Charles may have been asking the Italians—quite hypocritically—that they adhere to certain Christian values, as De Braye had seemingly done when going against the interests of his fellow Frenchmen: “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” This proudly French king, now losing ground on the Italian peninsula, may have used this opportunity to ask that Italians set aside their national sentiments, as Guillaume De Braye had done.

Notably, Caroline Bruzelius observed that following the Sicilian Vespers the works funded by Charles, whose “conscious exploitation of the symbolic and political significance of architecture” was salient, adhered far less to French style and took on a significantly more classicizing appearance.<sup>23</sup> Having formerly expressed strong preference for French aesthetics, resulting in a manifest presence of “cultural imperialism” as Bruzelius referred to Charles' practice, an observable shift took place in the later Angevin projects toward “an attitude of cultural adaptation.”<sup>24</sup> This was almost certainly a calculated choice. The De Braye Monument, with its prominently displayed Angevin shields, may have been the first instance under Charles' patronage to represent

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<sup>23</sup> Bruzelius, “Ad Modum Franciae,” 402, 405.

<sup>24</sup> Bruzelius, 420.



this shift. Chronologically, this would make perfect sense, as it was realized almost immediately following Charles's overthrow in Sicily.

Given the lack of definitive evidence, the question of the monument's patron can probably never be resolved with full certainty. Yet clues that Charles of Anjou was the patron of the De Braye Monument remain un-ignorable. The Angevin shield is displayed prominently on the work, and its sculptor was none other than Arnolfo di Cambio, who had been working at the service of Charles leading directly up to the moment of the De Braye Monument's realization. The historical circumstances discussed here may reflect that the aesthetically conscious and calculating Angevin king would have good reason to celebrate the transnationality of his former French adversary, leading toward an increased likelihood that certain already suggestive clues indeed do point in the right direction. 🐉