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Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art & Architecture

Vol. V, No. 3 (Spring 2016)



Welcome

Current Issue

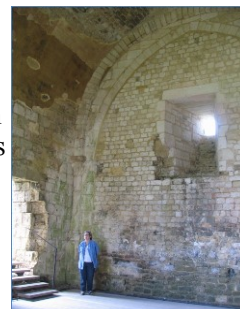
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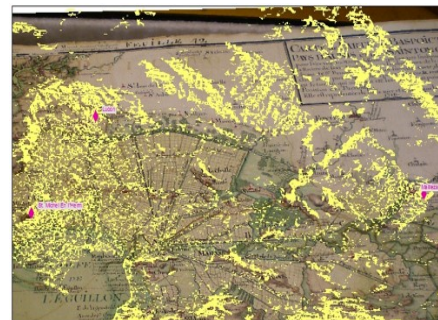
Organizations

Discoveries

Welcome to the Spring 2016 issue of *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art & Architecture*. This issue is devoted to a series of interdisciplinary articles – half of them written by geographers and half by art historians – which explore the Maillezais Abbey in western France. Under the guidance (and editing) of Mickey Abel, the scholars mixed several methodologies including visual analysis, document analysis, field data, and geographic surveying. The result is a fascinating example of how different approaches can yield new and thought-provoking results, as discussed in the first article by Mickey Abel. This is followed by an example of Abel applying the mixed methodology to her own research in “Reconstruction of Maillezais Abbey’s Hydraulic Drainage Program and the Coastline it Created.” Dory Deines and Owen Wilson-Chavez then explore “Mapping Technologies to Understand Canal Development in the Vendée” and how Maillezais Abbey was a significant contributor in the canal systems’ construction, enhancing its power in the area. Shana Thompson views the watery landscape of the area through literary fable as applied to landscape and political power in “Coudrette’s Mélusine: Mapping a Symbol of Regional Identity in Late Medieval Poitou.” Following this, LauraLee Brott, in “Reading Between the Lions: Mapping Meaning in a Surviving Capital at Maillezais Abbey,” investigates how the iconographic concept of man versus beast and landscape reflected the Church’s relationship with its natural surroundings. The art and architecture in medieval Poitou reflected the political and social struggle for control.



This issue also contains an in-depth book review of Janet T. Marquardt’s, *Zodiaque: Making Medieval Modern, 1951-2001* by Lindsay Cook, and the Discoveries section includes accounts of the findings of an early-Byzantine mosaic map, an underground 5th-century church with brilliant frescoes, the recreated sounds of Byzantine Thessaloniki, Anglo-Saxon jewelry, a lost 12th-century castle, 13th-century insults and fresco paintings on church walls, dog prints, and submerged churches.



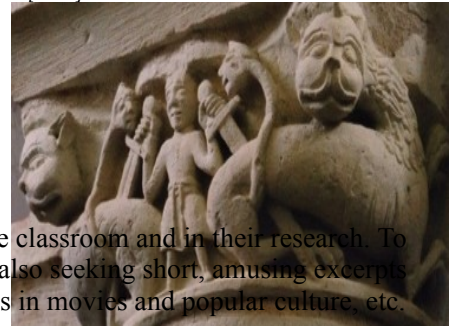
Photobank

The Photobank database continues to serve as a resource for scholars and teachers. Recent uploads include details of English parish churches. Please note that our Photobank has undergone considerable renovation and is now part of Digital Kenyon at Kenyon College. You can search by typing in a key word or name in the search box (e.g. Canterbury). The Photobank continues to grow with copyright-free images all downloadable for use in research and teaching.

The Future

For future issues we are actively seeking articles on any aspect of medieval art and architecture, including: long and short scholarly articles, scholarly book reviews, review articles on issues facing the field of medieval art history, interesting notes and announcements, useful

website recommendations, new archeological discoveries, and recent museum acquisitions. We are interested in publishing articles that will undergo double-blind review as well as those which are subject only to regular editing processes, including articles that are the result of preliminary research. We are also looking for images to add to our photobank, to be shared and used by anyone in the classroom and in their research. To round out the scholarly portion of the journal, we are also seeking short, amusing excerpts from medieval sources, comments on the Middle Ages in movies and popular culture, etc.



Again, welcome to *Peregrinations*. Any suggestions or comments you have concerning the journal would be most welcome. Please feel free to e-mail us at: [Sarah Blick \(editor\)](#).

Our grateful appreciation and thanks for partial funding provided by [Kenyon College](#). Assistant editor: **Katherine Werwie**. Programming and copy-editing: **John Pepple**. Artistic Advising: **Karen Gerhart**.

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Vol. 1, Issue 3 (2003) **Vol. 1, Issue 2 (July 2002)**

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FABRICATI DIEM, PVNC

-- The motto of the Ankh-Morpork City Watch (Terry Pratchett, *Guards! Guards!*)

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Relevant Interdisciplinarity: Taking the Art History Classroom to the Field

By Mickey Abel, University of North Texas

Many of us in the academy find ourselves confronted with the constant refrain of “relevance.” This “Age of Relevance” has developed out of a reaction to the ever-evolving variety of educational movements, theoretical positions, and administrative mandates given slightly obscure acronyms or futuristic titles such as: “QEP-Quality Enhancement Programs” “Learning in Zeros and Ones,” “Big Data,” “MOOCs-Massive open online courses,” or maybe least threatening, the now almost-ubiquitous status of the “Digital Humanities.”¹

The question for those of us in Medieval Studies is, where do we stand in this changing environment? How can we help our students in this era when, by all accounts, they are swimming upstream. Knowing what we are up against is a start. The public rhetoric of the academy—at least at the state level—seems now to be linked to the business model of Clayton Christensen, in a book co-written with Henry Eyring, entitled *The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out*.² Critics note that the line of

¹ For “Quality Enhancement Plans,” see <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?search=Quality+Enhancement+programs&title=Special%3ASearch&go=Go>. For Learning in Zeros and Ones, see “Unary Coding,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unary_coding#Unary_code_in_use_today. For “Big Data,” see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_data. For MOOCs, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massive_open_online_course. Digital Humanities is an area of research and teaching at the intersection of computing and the disciplines of the humanities that embraces a variety of topics to include curating online collections to data mining. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_humanities.

² Clayton Christensen and Henry Eyring, *The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out* (San Francisco: Wiley, 2011).

thought conveyed in Christiansen's theories features the language of "panic, fear, asymmetry, and disorder," and professes among its highest goals an emphasis on community engagement, tangible solutions to "real world" problems, and quantifiable/measurable results that produce not just change and progress, but what is known as "Disruptive Innovation."³ Described as "progress stripped of aspiration" or "innovation with a hope for salvation,"⁴ the drive for the "disruptive new" highlights the value of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) research, with its seemingly expansive pools of external funding.⁵ We in the humanities are being asked to get on this bandwagon and "establish new rules of engagement-- blow things up!"⁶ — or at the very least, consider the creative potential and lucrative benefits of interdisciplinary research clusters and cross-campus collaborative partnerships.

The suggestion just under the surface of this none-too-subtle rhetoric is of course that the humanities in general, but Medieval Studies in particular, is less-relevant than our STEM sisters because we do not on the surface contribute to the new over-arching public mission of "job-force ready" graduates. Addressing this aspect of the problem, Jonathan Rothwell's article "Skills, Success, and Why your Choice of College Matters," suggests that there is a direct correlation between "skills" learned in college and future earnings potential.⁷ While giving some tacit lip-service to the social value of the work of educators, humanists, and social scientists, Rothwell

³ Jill Lepore, "The Disruption Machine: What the Gospel of Innovation gets Wrong," *New Yorker Magazine*, June 23, 2014: (<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/06/23/the-disruption-machine>). "Disruptive Innovation" describes a process by which a product or service takes root initially in simple applications at the bottom of a market and the relentlessly moves up market, eventually displacing established competitors. See <http://www.christenseninstitute.org/key-concepts/>.

⁴ Lepore, "Disruption," 5, links this to the Enlightenment.

⁵ "STEM" is traced to "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform," a 1983 report of American President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education. See, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Nation_at_Risk.

⁶ Lepore, "Disruption," 4.

⁷ Jonathan Rothwell, "Skills, Success, and Why your Choice of College Matters," Brookings Institute, July 8, 2015. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2015/07/08-skills-success-college-choice-rothwell>.

clearly falls in the “job-force ready” camp, highlighting 9Matlab, Python, C++, and algorithms as the valuable skills a student needs to master in order to find financial success with their STEM or business education. Moreover, his message is that those schools that stress these skills are what we need in order to counter the broad critique of American universities, as is suggested in Richard Arum’s popular book, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*.⁸

Scholars like Geoffrey Harpham, Director and President of the National Humanities Research Center, however, are not fazed by this hard-edged assessment. In a recent lecture at the University of North Texas, Harpham stated that in fact, it is the “rarified, pure oxygen” of traditional humanities research and teaching that not only sets American universities apart from those of the rest of the world, but actually makes our system the most innovative and productive, far surpassing those that are driven by strictly economic or scientific principles.⁹ He argues that because humanities research is philosophically open-ended, it is where new interpretive insights arise.

Co-opting this line of thought, a more recent strategy is the incorporation of the arts into STEM to produce STEAM. Proponents here seeks to demonstrate that the true value of the humanities or arts within the American system is not Harpham’s “pure oxygen,” but rather the strengths the study of the arts contributes *in service* to STEM—in other words using the arts to open the sciences to the imaginative, creative methodologies. In this service mode, innovation is highlighted as the “lifeblood” that feeds scientific and technical advancement.¹⁰ Thus using the ‘arts to augment STEM education’ argument, advocates cite humanities research as being able

⁸ Richard Arum, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁹ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, “Valuing and Evaluating the Humanities,” public lecture, University of North Texas, April 28, 2015.

¹⁰ Eric Swedlund, “Gaining STEAM: Science and Technology Educators add Arts Component to Spark Imaginative Leaps,” *ASU Magazine*, 18/3 (2015): 26-31.

“to generate multiple ideas around the same topic,” to productively incorporate “improvisation,” to embrace “abductive reasoning,” and importantly, its inherent ability to be “tolerant of ambiguity.”¹¹

That these “competencies,” rather than the specific “skills” of the sciences, are the productive results of a humanities program is, of course, not new news. As Christie McDonald of Harvard University noted in the Plenary Lecture she delivered in 2015 at the *Society for French Studies* conference in Cardiff Wales,¹² the competencies learned in a humanities program, particularly “tolerance,” are classical in origin. She, however, finds them to be most profoundly debated in Voltaire’s 1763, “Treatise on Tolerance.”¹³ Noting the resurgence in popularity of this text in France after the recent shooting at the headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo*,¹⁴ Dr. McDonald suggested that “tolerance” should actually be the number one quantified learning outcome we should all be tracking and assessing on our annual reports. She sees it as the necessary balance to our STEM colleagues’ “hard data” and “measurable skills.”

The STEAM proponents would neutralize this divide, by arguing that the greatest “competency” is the problem-solving and ability to “synthesize complexity” that can only grow out of interdisciplinarity.¹⁵ With this in mind, it can, however, be argued that the various disciplines comprising Medieval Studies are already inherently interdisciplinary. English, History, Music/Liturgy, Philosophy/Religion, Archaeology, Art History, and Language

¹¹ Steven Tepper, Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts; Evan Tobias, School of Music; Darren Petrucci, The Design School; Ed Finn, Center for Science and the Imagination; and Grisha Coleman, School of Arts, Media and Engineering, as quoted in Swedlund, “Gaining STEAM,” 28-31.

¹² Christie McDonald, “Failure and Change: Measuring Transformation in the Arts and Humanities,” Plenary Lecture, *Society of French Studies*, Annual Conference, Cardiff, Wales, 29 June-1 July, 2015,

¹³ Voltaire, *Tolerance and Other Essays*, Joseph McCabe, trans. and ed. (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1912).

¹⁴ The shooting took place on January 7, 2015 in Paris, France. McDonald was referencing *NPR* news story, Eleanor Beardsley, “After Paris Attacks, Voltaire’s “Tolerance” is back in Vogue,” *National Public Radio*, February 15, 2015. <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/02/15/385422239/after-paris-attacks-voltaires-tolerance-is-back-in-vogue>.

¹⁵ Swedlund, “Gaining STEAM,” 30.

Studies—are all in some sense inseparable and interchangeable at their medieval core. Unlike the medievalists in universities of the last century, our work would not pass the peer review system of any of the major journals if we disregarded the advancements in our sister disciplines.

Moreover, it is quite often the theoretical stance of those sister disciplines that serves to inspire new ways of looking at long-neglected problems. Sadly, however, this sort of “inter-” or “intra-disciplinarity” does not necessarily make our work ‘relevant’ in the real-world sense of the “disruption” proponents. So the question remains: how can we do what medievalists have always said we do best—that is, teach our students to think creatively and to be critically tolerant--while at the same time helping them develop collaborative skills that will translate into “work-force ready” jobs?

Looking to my own research agenda, I have even asked myself whether there is anything particularly relevant about a tenth-century monastery in Western France that lies mostly in ruin. While the expanded study of Maillezais abbey has served me well in opening new collaborative lines of funding, new venues for publication, and new collegial avenues of teaching, for my students, it has indeed led to new sources of support, and importantly new and unforeseen connections between humanist research and ‘real world’ problems. I present the papers of this volume in hopes of illustrating how even the seemingly least relevant historical problems can be used to teach research skills that feature creative innovation, collaborative tolerance, and relevant solutions. By way of an introduction to these essays, I will begin with a brief history of how I came to my own little bit of “disruptive innovation” – much of it published here in

Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art & Architecture.

I can trace my interest in spatial interactions to my colleagues in Cultural Geography, who have become my “interdisciplinary” partners; they introduced me to the wonders of

GPS/G.I.S.—or the basic technology of geography. I admit, however, that my first employment of this technology was driven by my perception that the reviewers of the grant proposals would be more impressed by a scientific sounding project than those with more esoteric (read irrelevant) titles, methodologies, or outcome. It was, however, only after engaging geography students in my “spatial” questions that I realized that the addition of technology would serve to turn my own research questions in on themselves, essentially shifting the research model from one where the research question drives the search for data, with analysis coming at the end of the process, to one where the generation of data and its analysis serves to identify the appropriate research questions to be asked.

The subject matter for this line of inquiry grew out of broader dissertation research, where a particular geographical region of Soria, in northern Spain, with a distinct set of Romanesque buildings and a unique place in the history of the Spanish Reconquest stood out as requiring its own study. Initially, the recognition of the geographical anomaly, both on a map and within the historical documents, caused me to question the difference between these documented types of historical perceptions and those which would have been perceived on the ground, across the landscape.¹⁶ In other words—at this stage, the underlying question driving the research was how were the sacred buildings of this distinct region perceived and understood by the people who used them?

The empirical identification of the prominent features that distinguished the ecclesiastical buildings of the region -- the distinctive north or south positioning of their portal openings, and their highly visible siting on the top of isolated hills or rocky outcroppings suggested a significant relationship between the two features that, in turn, signaled the need for what

¹⁶ Mickey Abel, “Strategic Domain: Reconquest Romanesque along the Duero River,” *Peregrinations*, Vol. II/2 (2007):1-57 (<http://peregrinations.kenyon.edu/vol2-2>).

archaeologists call a “settlement study.”¹⁷ In this case, this meant a contextual mapping of the Sorian province, illustrating the relationship of these buildings to one another and to the geographical/ historical environment. Important in this mapping exercise was capturing the “cognitive features” of the visual landscape, those socially or culturally constructed perceptions that are recorded in the mind or memory without reference to factual data such road names or cardinal directions.

The result of this now embarrassingly ‘low-tech’ study was the understanding that building a map up historically-- that is moving from the natural topographic features to the addition of Roman buildings and infrastructure, to the adaptations made by the Visigoths, and finally adding the defensive sites of the Reconquest along with the small ermita associated with them — served in the end to illustrate the differentiation between the perceptions of the people who inhabited the valley floor and those who ruled from the mountain-tops. Incorporating this difference into our understanding of the historical documents, the study supported a long-held archaeological hypothesis that the Duero plain was never completely abandoned. In terms of my own insight, this project served to validate the productivity of ‘mapping’ as a tool of art-historical research.

Bringing this research methodology to the classroom, a group of inquisitive and technology-savvy grad students asked if the geo-political orientation observed in the pre-conquest landscape continued in buildings of the Post-conquest era. These students purposed a new study that combined their Geography and Art History backgrounds and featured the

¹⁷ C. Renfrew and P. Bahn, “What Did They Think?: Cognitive Archaeology, Art, and Religion” *Archaeology Theories, Methods, and Practice* (New York, 2004), 393-397, 406-408; Kevin Walsh, “A Sense of Place: A Rule for Cognitive Mapping in the ‘Postmodern’ World?” *Interpreting Archaeology: Finding Meaning in the Past*, Hodder, *et al* (eds.), (London, 1995), 131-140.

employment of a more sophisticated use of technology.¹⁸ In an attempt to move beyond the empirical “connoisseur’s eye,” and the reliance on an individual’s visual memory, which were the hallmark of the earlier study, these students understood that qualifying their observations, quantifying them in the form of data, would shift the weight of their conclusions from the positivistic to the challengeable, and in the end elevate the status of their findings to the rank of a scientific conclusion.

For my purposes, the more tangible results of this new field project were not so much the conclusions drawn from the mapping project, but rather the insights gained from the interactions between the geographers and the art historians, as their methodological approaches to the collection and visualization of data were quite different. For instance, the art historians wanted to create a period-specific perspective of the landscape—all the while acknowledging the multivalency of the creative act of map-making. They were therefore mindful of what they chose to exclude from the study as well as what was to be examined.

The art historian’s need for visual scrutiny was, however, balanced by the geographer’s more-scientific qualifications. In addition to the visually perceptible elements such as topographical features, spatial relationships, the building’s stylistic criteria, as well as building phases, the geographers insisted on quantifiable information obtained in the field, such as cardinal orientation, elevation, and building measurements. For statistical purposes, they also stressed the importance of establishing and limiting the scope of the project. This confirmed the necessity for locational accuracy – obviously my hand-drawn maps would not do!! And thus the

¹⁸ Mickey Abel, Kim McCarty, and Brittney Gregory, “Geography, Archaeology, Art History: A Case Study for a Multidisciplinary Approach to Mapping Architectural Heritage,” Special Theme Issue, “Placing the Middle Ages: Contextualizing A Geography of Material Culture,” Mickey Abel and Jennifer Way, eds, *Peregrinations*, Vol. II/3 (2009). (<http://peregrinations.kenyon.edu/vol2-3>).

introduction to the technology of Geography—specifically a Geographic Positioning System (GPS), which would facilitate a more detailed accounting of what was going to be a large quantity and variety of data. Triangulating each site’s exact position to assign it a geographic coordinate, a map was created for the accurate recording of the associated data. The use of a Geographic Information System (GIS) allowed the students to automatically link the variety of information they gathered and compiled as database categories to each GPS generated point on their electronic map, which facilitated a system of data analysis that satisfied their need for control. At the same time, the geographical display of this data presented interesting and important possibilities for the visually-oriented art historians. While it allowed them to visualize quantifiable information in terms of its spatial relationship to the geographical locale, it also facilitated the linking of an extensive photographic record of each building, as well as the footprint plan of each church, both meant to indicate significant and relevant details not otherwise captured in the field notes.

In the end I was convinced that the cross-disciplinary affiliation had opened new avenues for exploration and analysis for all involved. Significantly different from the focused analysis of a monograph, as is typical of art-historical research, this less discriminating type of examination, i.e. “tolerant of ambiguity,” signaled where the more singularly focused analysis would be warranted and served to clarify which questions were relevant to ask. Importantly, it also highlighted areas of evenly distributed consistency that suggested a different set of conclusions than one would come to with the analysis of only a few examples. The most-relevant conclusion was that the availability of detail provided by a visually-oriented data bank changed the complexion of the analysis. We found that the inclusion of the less-phenomenal sites alongside those previously documented for their unique spaces or elaborate ornamentation helped us check

the subjectivity of our personal observations and provided a balance that enhanced the quantitative value of these experiential and aesthetic impressions.

Stealing shamelessly from this student-driven project, I proposed a GPS/GIS approach to the cultural history of Maillezais Abbey in western France, where I had been working for some years, to a new mixed group of art history and geography graduate students. This time I insisted that while the students would be helping with the collection of data associated with my own project on the hydraulic system surrounding the abbey, they were to develop their own research project in which could either share the data set gathered for the Hydraulics Project or gather, employ, and assess a different set of data, as long as it was related to Maillezais abbey in some manner. Thus in addition to my article, "Defining a New Coast: G.I.S. Reconstruction of Maillezais Abbey's Hydraulic Drainage Program and the Coastline it Created," geographer Dory Deines explored the distribution of vineyards in relation to soil types and various aspects of the hydraulic system, and Owen Wilson used his training in transportation systems to analyze the commercial possibilities of the development of canals and locks. Both of these articles are to be published elsewhere; here these students have provided an explanation of the technology used in our joint work ("Using Mapping Technologies to Understand Canal Development in the Vendée"). Art-historian Shana Thompson, intrigued by illustrations and descriptions of Maillezais abbey in several editions of the *Roman de Mélusine*, developed her inquiry around the geographical sites mentioned in these texts and their relation to the region's water features ("The Lady of the Marshes: Place, Identity, and Coudrette's *Mélusine* in Late-Medieval Poitou"). LauraLee Brott found her inspiration in the lone sculpted capital extant in the nave at Maillezais ("Reading Between the Lions: Mapping Meaning for a Surviving Capital at Maillezais Abbey."). Seeking to understand its iconographical significance within the marshy context of Maillezais'

island setting, she catalogued and mapped similar types of sculpted imagery in the region in order to draw some conclusions on the scope, configuration, and understanding of Maillezais' missing sculptural program.

While none of the student's papers were explicitly reliant on the "hydraulic" data set we developed as a group, it was interesting how our collaborative analysis of this data influenced and colored their very different projects, both methodologically and theoretically. All would agree that it was the field work—the intimate exploration of the details of the landscape that shaped their understanding of their particular projects. The collaborative sharing of the geographer's technical skills and the art historian's visual scrutiny served to both deepen the methodological approach and clarify the results of the final studies. Acknowledging that these synergetic interactions were facilitated by the close quarters of the field situation, it is important to recognize is the level of tolerant insight was brought about through the interdisciplinarity of the collaboration. And although the mastery of this "competency" may not lead directly to a significant paycheck, it will no doubt serve these students well as they move into the workforce. The takeaway is this: we humanists should not jettison the importance of the library, the archive, or the museum. We do, however, have to acknowledge that the model of "relevance" that probably has resonance for our students is the lab, the courtroom, and/or the marketplace. Interesting is where the two come together. 🐼



Defining a New Coast: G.I.S. Reconstruction of Maillezais Abbey's Hydraulic Drainage Program and the Coastline It Created

By Mickey Abel, University of North Texas

Maillezais abbey was founded by Duke William IV of Aquitaine and his wife, Emma of Blois, on the island of Maillezais in 970.¹

(fig. 1) This island, measuring approximately 8 by 6 kilometers, was one of three located in the ancient Golfe des Pictons—a gulf that extended some 70 kilometers inland from the modern western coast of France, approximately mid-way between Brittany and Bordeaux.² **(fig. 2)**

Documents tell us that in 1003 and 1005 when Duke William V, the founding couple's son, came to power, he donated to the abbey what amounted to the entire island.³ This included the large plot of land that had been the site of his grandfather's, Duke William III, Tête d'Étoupe (r. 935-963) hunting lodge. It was also where his parents had built their primary residence, part of which is still visible under the extant abbey's south wall.⁴ **(fig. 3)** This generous donation, offered in his

¹ C. Treffort and M. Tranchant, "Maillezais, lieu de mémoire, lieu de pouvoir," in *L'abbaye de Maillezais: Des moines de marais aux soldats huguenots*, C. Treffort and M. Tranchant, eds. (Rennes, 2005), p. 9.

² N. Delahaye, *Histoire de la Vendée: des origins à nos jours* (Choley: Éditions Pays & Terroirs, 2003), p. 7. For the island's paleo-environmental history, see L. Visset and Y. Gruet, *Étude paléoenvironnementale réalisée sur une tranche perpendiculaire à l'hôtellerie côté marais* (Nantes, 1997), and Y. Gruet and P. Sauriau, "Paléoenvironnements holocènes du marais poitevin (Littoral atlantique, France): Reconstitution d'après les peuplements malacologiques," *Quaternaire* 5/2 (1994), pp. 85-94, who illustrate that the gulf was the result of the sea rising from 6830 BCE to 1160 BCE.

³ G. Pon and Y. Chauvin, eds. and trans., *La fondation de l'abbaye de Maillezais: Récit de moine Pierre* (LaRoche-sur-Yon: Centre vendéen de recherches historiques, 2001), p. 34.

⁴ E. Barbier, "Maillezais, du palais ducal au réduit bastionné," in Treffort and Tranchant, *L'abbaye de Maillezais*, p. 202-203. J. Bord, *Maillezais: Histoire d'une abbaye et d'un évêché* (Paris, 2007), pp. 13-15, states that this hunting lodge was built as an *aula* or hall, and that William IV and Emma transformed it into a fortified *oppidum*. Bord, pp. 71-2, lists all the donations the abbey received in the eleventh century and where they are recorded.



Figure 1 Maillezais Abbey, western façade. Photo: author.

mother's name, came with the stipulation that the abbey be relocated to this superior site.⁵ It can be said that this action represents an early form of 'urban planning' in that it signals that both the duke, on the giving end of the gift, and the monks in receiving it, would have understood the strategic, i.e. commercial, political, and social implications of a relocation of this magnitude.

For purposes of this paper, the significant factor of this particular point in the abbey's history comes in the recognition that, while the relocated abbey was completed circa 1070,

⁵ Peter of Maillezais, *La fondation de l'abbaye de Maillezais*, Liber II [fol. 252 a], in Pon and Chauvin, *La fondation*, pp. 138-139. The issue of strategic site location in relation to water and other factors such as defense and commerce is addressed in J. Leguay, *L'eau dans la ville au Moyen Âge* (Rennes, 2006), pp. 15-48. Leguay, p. 79, sees this as an early form of urban planning in that the process entails stages of thought and analysis that engage administrative, financial, and execution problems.

almost immediately the monks embarked on an impressive expansion program, most particularly an extensive addition to the church's western façade, finished c. 1080/82.⁶ (fig. 4) This more-



Figure 2 Medieval Golfe des Pictons, after public map, Musée de Chateau Niort, Niort, France. Photo: author.

prominent entry consisted of a massive 10 x 10 meter enclosed porch and narthex tower (*avant nef/narthex*), flanked by two multi-story stair turrets giving access to the tribune level and upper reaches of the tower.⁷ Today, as a result of the employment of the abbey as a stone quarry

⁶ Bord, *Maillezais*, pp. 67-68, illustrates these building phases and points to a fire in the nave in 1082 as the impetus for the later building campaign, this time expanding the chevet with radiating chapels. The dates for each of the phases are contested. See T. Cornec, "L'abbaye Saint-Pierre de Maillezais: L'architecture de l'abbatiale en partie rélevée par l'archéologie," *Bulletin de la Société Historique et Archéologique des Deux-Sèvres* VII/1 (1999), pp. 85-103; and M. Camus, "L'abbatiale de Maillezais," p. 165, 172, who notes the narthex tower, with its impressive stair turrets, appears to have been appended rather abruptly to a simple single story écran (flat)-wall façade that is still visible from the interior of the narthex. For an example of the use of these two types of architectural features, see M. Camus, "De la façade à tour(s) à la façade-écran dans les pays de l'Ouest: L'exemple de Saint-Jean-de Montierneuf de Poitiers," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 34 (1991), pp. 237-253. This suggests to me that either the decorative elements on the older façade were still in favor and considered appropriate for the interior of the new porch, or it was more efficient and timely to abut the two components rather than demolish the old façade prior to building the new.

⁷ M. Camus, "Tours-Porches et fonction d'accueil dans les églises de Poitou au XIe siècle," in *Avant-Nefs & Espaces d'Accueil dans l'Église: entre le IVe et le XIIe siècle*, C. Sapin, ed. (Bourgogne, 2002), pp. 260-280; C. Heitz, "Rôle de l'église-porche dans la formation des façades occidentales de nos églises romanes," *Cahier de*



Figure 3 Maillezais Abbey, Remnants of South Enclosure Wall. Photo: author.

between 1725 and 1785, all that remains of this imposing façade are the first two stories.⁸ I have argued previously that archeological evidence and architectural comparanda suggest that the configuration of this porch and tower would have been consistent with similar structures of Maillezais' caliber and monastic standing within the greater Poitou region.⁹ Importantly, this dramatic, new façade would have been appropriate to the new site, not only because the abbey

Civilisation Médiévale 34 (1991), pp329-334. For a reconstruction of Maillezais' narthex and tower, see M. Abel, "To Sea and be Seen: Reconstruction of the Strategic Building program at Maillezais Abbey," *Avista Forum Journal* 10 1/2 (2010), pp. 12-24.

⁸ Bord, *Maillezais*, p. 187.

⁹ Abel, "To Sea and be Seen," p. 16.

would then have been situated on the highest point of the island, but also because from this new location on the western side of the island, the abbey would have faced directly out to the open

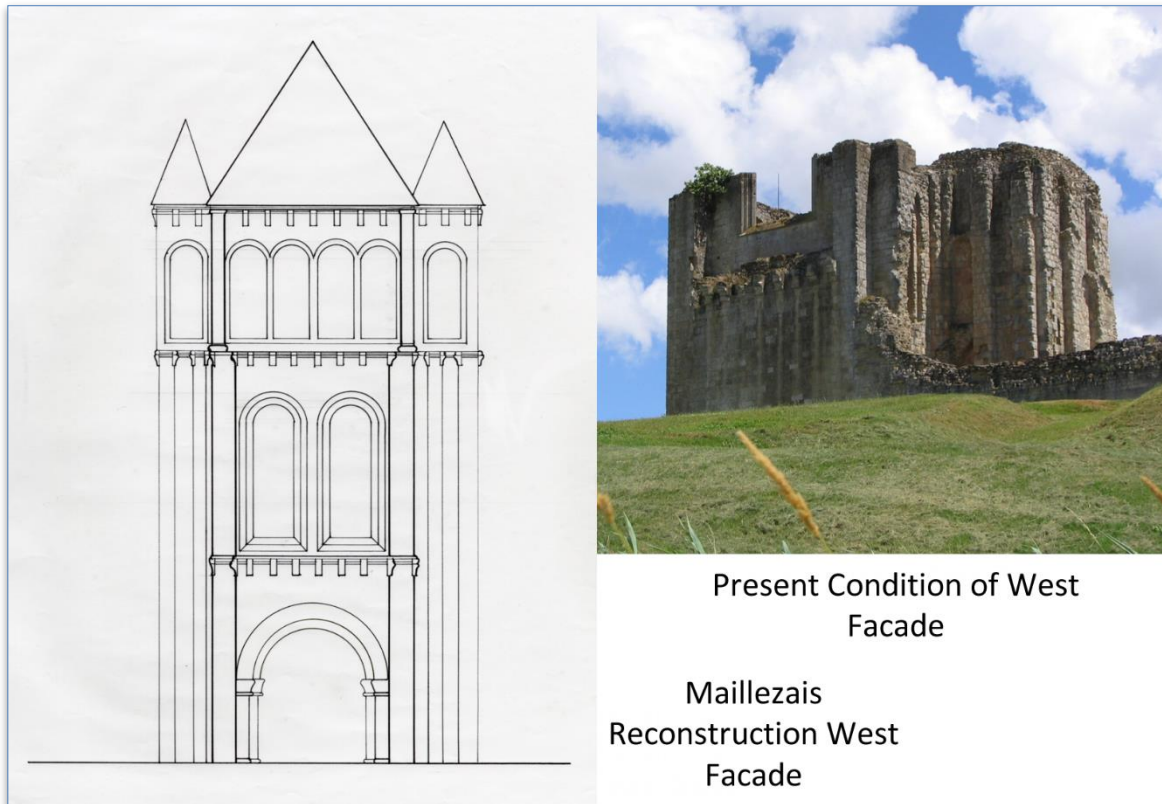


Figure 4 Maillezais Abbey, Reconstruction Drawing of West Façade. Drawing by Mary Stone Lamb.

waters of the gulf. While this new location accommodated the ubiquitous east/west orientation of Christian churches, it would also have provided the monks a spiritual view that simulated the vision of sequestered seclusion associated with Saint John writing on the island of Patmos or Saint Hillary expelling the snakes from the paradisiacal island of Gallinara.¹⁰ Conversely — and more strategically -- this new siting would also have served to place the abbey's new tower so that it would have been visible well out to sea, in essence facilitating the visual broadcasting of

¹⁰ R. Dessi, "Images médiévales d'une île sainte: Patmos," pp. 281-300; C. Treffort, "Îsles et moines du littoral atlantique entre Loire et Gironde au Moyen Âge," pp. 319-334, both in *Lérins, une île sainte de l'antiquité au Moyen Âge* (Turnhout, 2009).

the monastic community's physical, and specifically Christian, presence in an area continuously under the threat of invasion and attack.¹¹

While hundreds of the documents cataloged as being housed at Maillezais in the twelfth century, particularly those archived in the Chambre des comptes in Paris (1737), at the Séminarie de La Rochelle (1772), and finally in the departmental archives for the Deux-Sèvres (1815), have been lost to fires, we know by way of those associated with other monasteries in the region that the abbey played a significant role in Aquitainian politics by way of its patron affiliation with various members of the ducal family.¹² Primary documentation for the multi-phase building program at Maillezais, however, is found in an extant chronicle commissioned in 1067 by the contemporary abbot, Goderan,¹³ and written by Peter of Maillezais, one of the resident monks.¹⁴ Peter's telling of the monastery's history gives us a distinctly retrospective

¹¹ Because the gulf extended well inland, the area was vulnerable to maritime incursions by Breton, Vikings, Normans, and Muslims, from the seventh to the ninth centuries. See Y. Le Quellec, *Petite histoire du marais poitevin* (La Crèche, 1998), pp. 17-20; N. Delahaye, *Histoire de la Vendée des origines à nos jours* (Cholet, 2003), pp. 26-31. R Magnusson, *Water Technology in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore, 2001), p. 5, notes that these invasions destroyed much of what was left of the Roman water systems. Pon and Chauvin, *La fondation*, p. 47, note that, by the 11th century, the monasteries of the region were in their second wave of invasion, instigating an era of "castrum" mentality, with fortified chateaux built in Niort, Mareuil, Luçon, Mervent, Vouvent, as well as Maillezais.

¹² Notable sources are the chronicle of Saint-Maixent, a chronicle written by Ademar de Chabannes, a cartulary of Saint-Cyprien de Poitiers, and the *Gallia Christiana*. See R. Crozet, "Maillezais," *Congrès Archéologique de France, La Rochelle* (Orleans, 1956), pp. 80-96; Treffort and Tranchant, "Maillezais," pp. 7-16; and J. Sarrazin, "Maillezais et la mise en valeur des marais au Moyen Âge," in Treffort and Tranchant, eds., *L'abbaye de Maillezais*, pp. 365-366. As noted by the various authors contributing to Treffort and Tranchant's anthology, *L'abbaye de Maillezais*, the archival search for surviving documents pertaining to the abbey and its history in the Vendée has been exhaustive. Compiled results are found in Y. Suire, *L'Homme et l'environnement dans le Marais Poitevin, seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle-début du XX^e siècle* (Paris, 2002); É. Clouzet, *Les marais de la Sèvre niortaise et du Lay Xe au XVI^e siècle* (Paris-Niort, 1904); and L. Delhomme, *Notes et documents pour servir à l'histoire de l'abbaye Saint-Pierre de Maillezais au diocèse de Luçon depuis sa fondation (976) jusqu'à son érection en évêché par le Pape Jean XXII (13 août 1317)* (Paris, 1961).

¹³ Goderan, a Cluniac monk, was brought to Maillezais in 1060 by Guy-Geoffroi-Guillaume VIII, Duke of Aquitaine, to oversee the abbey's reform, a process that was begun under Pope Stephen IX, in 1057, who made Maillezais a dependent of Cluny. See, Pon and Chauvin, *La fondation*, p. 45; A. Richard, *Histoire des Comtes de Poitou, 778-1204* (Paris, 1903); and Michel Dillange, *Les Comtes de Poitou Ducs d'Aquitaine (778-1204)* (Paris: Geste Éditions, 1995), pp. 153-161.

¹⁴ Peter of Maillezais (Petru Malleacensis), *De antiquitate et commutation in melius Malleacensis insulae et translatione corporis sancti Rigomeri*, 1.2 ed. Migne, *PL*, 146, 1247-1272. See also the translations by C. Arnould, *Histoire de Maillezais* (Niort, 1840); and L. Lacurie, *Histoire de l'abbaye de Maillezais depuis sa fondation jusqu'à nos jours* (Fontenay-le-Comte, 1852).

point of view, in that it goes to great lengths to provide the abbey with a miraculous foundation story in order to set the stage for the abbey's close political alliance with successive generations of nobility from both Poitou and the Touraine.¹⁵ Importantly, it also serves to corroborate the geographic significance of the abbey's relocation. Analysis of this document, in association with the physical and visual evidence of the building itself, points to a propagandistic program of self-promotion, carried out jointly by the politically-astute abbot and the continuing line of Dukes and their wives supporting the monastic community.¹⁶

Searching more deeply, however, for the justification underlying the extravagant expenditure required for such an expensive new building program following so closely on the heels of the completed relocation project, it is intriguing that this same chronicle mentions the existence of the elements of an hydraulic system, specifically the "port d Maillé."¹⁷ This is reiterated in the documents recording William V's donations to the abbey, which give the monks the rights to the locks on the Sèvre River, along with the rights to mills and circulation on certain levees, as well as mercantile exemptions at certain ports.¹⁸ Moreover, Peter speaks of the contributions to the construction of these water features on the part of an indigenous people

¹⁵ É. Bozóky, "La légende de fondation de Maillezais," in Treffort and Tranchant, *L'abbaye de Maillezais*, pp. 17-29. For the significance of foundation stories, see A. Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past: Monastic Foundation Legends in Medieval Southern France* (Ithaca, NY, 1995). For the history of ducal patronage, see S. Rafalo, "Les ducs d'Aquitaine et l'abbaye de Maillezais (vers 970-vers 1100)," in Treffort and Tranchant, *L'abbaye de Maillezais*, pp. 326-333.

¹⁶ L. Halphen, "L'histoire de Maillezais du moine Pierre," *Revue historique*, XCLX [sic] 1908, pp. 292-297; G. Oury, "La reconstruction monastique dans l'ouest: L'abbé Gausbert de Saint-Julien de Tours (v. 990-1007)," *Revue Mabillon* 54 (1964), pp. 69-124. For female patronage at Maillezais and the Poitou, see M. Abel, "Emma of Blois as Arbiter of Peace and the Politics of Patronage," in *Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 823-861.

¹⁷ Peter of Maillezais, Livre II [fol.255 v^o a], in Pon and Chauvin, *La fondation*, p. 167.

¹⁸ Bord, *Maillezais*, p. 71; and Arnould, *Histoire*, pp. 22-24. These citations are found in Père Louis Étienne Arcère, *Histoire de la Ville de La Rochelle et du pays d'Aunis*, II, (Paris, 1756), pp. 663-665; *Gallia christiana*, II, *Instrumenta ecclesiae Malleacensis sue Rupellensis*, col. 379-381. For commerce and exemptions, see O. Jeanne-Rose, "Ports, Marchands et Marchandises aspects économiques du Littoral poitevin (IXe – XIIe siècles)," *Les sociétés littorales de Centre-Ouest atlantique: de la préhistoire à nos jours: actes de colloque*, Centre international de la mer, Rochefort 5/4 (1996), pp. 131-137.

referred to as the “*colliberti*” or Pictons.¹⁹ It is these native fishing people, who are credited as having shared their inherent knowledge of hydraulics with the monks at Maillezais. The combination of these references suggests that even before the monastery was rebuilt in its new location there was some level of hydraulic engineering taking place on or around the island of Maillezais.²⁰ Given the date of the chronicle (1067), it therefore seems likely that monks active in the abbey’s relocation and subsequent architectural enhancement were not only aware of the development of a system of dykes, levies, and canals within the parameters of the monastery’s domain, but were perhaps even participants in its on-going expansion and management. The question of how the two construction projects—the expansion of the abbey on its new site and the creation of hydraulic infrastructure—were linked seems relevant, if not foundational to our understanding of the monastic community’s economic status and political standing in the history of the Poitou region.

Frustratingly, archaeological and architectural scholarship on Maillezais has been focused rather myopically on the building chronology of the monastic structures, highlighting the Gothic and later stages when the monastery attained cathedral status as it became the Bishop’s seat (1317), thus slighting the more foundational question of the abbey’s socio-economic stature within the region in its early stages.²¹ The problem here appears to be grounded in the self-

¹⁹ For a discussion on the disputed nature of these fishing people, see Lucien-Jean Bord, *Maillezais Histoire d’une abbaye et d’un évêché* (Paris, 2007), pp. 10-12; and M. Bloch, “Les ‘Colliberti’: Étude de la formation de la classe servile”, in *Revue historique* CLVII (1928), pp. 1-48, 225-263. The use of “Picton” refers more generally to these people’s status as native to the gulf region. They lived in the area around the port village of Marans until they were expelled in the 13th century. See L. Richemond, “Cartulaire de l’abbaye de las Grâce-Notre-Dame ou de Charon en Aunis,” *Archives historiques de la Saintonge et de l’Aunis* (Saintes, 1883), pp. 25-26.

²⁰ The citation is found in the chronicle of Peter of Maillezais, *La fondation*, Livre I[fol. 246 v^o a]. See Pon and Chavin, *La fondation*, p. 94, “Etenim collibertus a cultu imbrium descendere putatur ab aliquibus. Progenies autem istorum collibertorum, hinc forte istud ore vulgi, multa interdum ex usibus rerum vera dicentis, contraxit vocabulum, quoniam ubi inundantia pliviarum Separis excrescere fecisset fluvium, relictis quibus incolebant locis, --hinc enim procul habitabant nonnulli—properabant illo, cause piscium.”

²¹ For a summary of the archaeological work accomplished at Maillezais, see J. Martineau, “Maillezais: Deux cents ans d’archéologie d’une abbaye fortifiée,” in Treffort and Tranchant, *L’abbaye de Maillezais*, pp. 445-460. For the standing structure, see M. Camus, “Imaginer l’abbatiale romane de Maillezais,” and Y. Bloome, “La reconstruction

limiting questions that are the result of silo-like disciplinary interests, where standing stone structures, such as the relics of the monastery of Maillezais, fall generally to the purview of art or architectural historians, while archaeologists, who are all too happy to dig and provide us with the details of foundations, destroyed walls, buried layers, and bits and pieces of material culture, seem somewhat less interested in the material history of extant structures.²² The stonework of infrastructure or hydraulic systems, on the other hand falls more definitively in the camp of archaeology, but is generally overlooked by architectural historians, and is found to be completely irrelevant by art historians. Compounding this dilemma, neither extant structures nor hydraulic infrastructure are of much interest to political or economic historians.²³

I would argue, however, that we need to think more holistically.²⁴ If we are to understand the abbey's multi-phased building program in a more contextually rich manner, particularly in the exploration of the reasons compelling this institution to spend so lavishly on a grand new façade so soon after the completion of a rather extensive relocation project, we need to pursue a more inclusive, interdisciplinary approach. More specifically, if we are to understand at what point in the abbey's movement towards becoming the dominant monastic community in the region it realized the economic value inherent in a broad-based program of land management,

en style gothique," both in Treffort and Tranchant, *L'abbaye de Maillezais*, pp. 253-289; as well as older scholarship of M. Camus and Y. Bloome, "L'abbatiale Saint-Pierre de Maillezais," *Congrès archéologique de France. 151^e session. Vendée*, (1993), pp. 161-181; and "L'abbaye Saint-Pierre de Maillezais (Vendée: l'architecture de l'abbatiale en partie révélée par l'archéologie), *Société historique et scientifique des Deux-Sèvres* (1990), pp. 85-103.

²² There are of course prominent exceptions to this generalization, for instance, C. Maines and S. Bonde, "Saint-Jean-des-Vignes in Context: Urban Water Management System in Medieval Soissons," *Wasser 4* (Regensburg, 1997), pp. 15-36. Making the argument for more integrated studies is, X. Barral I Altet, "930-1030: L'aube des temps nouveaux? histoire et archéologie monumentale," *La France de l'an Mil*, X. Barral I Altet, ed. (Paris, 1987), pp. 9-61.

²³ The prominent exception here is the work being done with English water systems. See for instance, J. Blair, *Waterways and Canal-Building in Medieval England* (Oxford, 2007); and S. Rippon, "Water and wetlands in medieval estate management: Glastonbury Abbey, Meare and the Somerset Levels in South West England," *Water management in medieval rural economy*, Rulia V (Lyon, 2003), pp. 93-112.

²⁴ Although dealing with material of a later era, C. Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering: Technology and Territoriality on the Canal du Midi* (Princeton, 2009), is exemplary of the model I am suggesting.

what we need is a more precise knowledge of the date and location of the earliest development of the hydraulic system. This holistic understanding will only come when we connect the various pieces of visual, material and documentary evidence.

From this broader point of view, I would suggest that the coincidence of the timing of the relocation of the abbey (1010), this new building's completion (1070), and the subsequent building of the western Narthex/tower (1080), with the mention of the hydraulic system in the abbey's chronicle (1067), is our first significant clue. It leads to the underlying supposition that Maillezais' elaborate and publically prominent building program was a reflection of more than the simple acknowledgement of the Duke of Aquitaine's largesse and political support. It seems likely that it was rather the prosperity of the abbey, sanctioned by the duke, but significantly sustained by the growing revenues provided by the early stages of the hydraulic system, that spurred the abbey to undertake such a dramatic and expensive remodeling program. As such, I would argue that the earliest segments of the canal system preceded the relocation and redevelopment of the abbey's buildings, and that the abbey's multi-phase building program was, more than likely, a direct response to the early economic success of the canal system. From this angle, first the relocation, but then, more dramatically, the re-modeling of the abbey church can be seen as political maneuvers meant to strategically situate the abbey in a position of physical and philosophical control over the lucrative infrastructure created in the early canal system.

The problem, of course, is how to demonstrate that by the time of the re-building and addition of the narthex tower, *c.* 1080, a system of dykes, levies, and canals around the abbey was not only well-established, but was providing the abbey with substantial revenues, so much

so that it had become a source of contention among the neighboring abbeys,²⁵ compelling the abbey to assert its ideological self-importance by way of the new monumental western facade.

As demonstrated in the Carolingian plan of the monastery of St. Gall and that of Canterbury, we know of the intimate correlation between monastic life and water.²⁶ Based on other better documented monastic communities known to have built hydraulic systems in the Middle Ages, we can reason that the community of monks at Maillezais would have benefited economically from the drainage of marsh land by way of dykes and levees.²⁷ This “hydraulic” approach to land management would have held the potential to create arable pasture and fields and to support the development of fish ponds, and salt beds — all of which would have contributed to the general health and well-being of the community. Importantly, a hydraulic management system with these components would also have held the potential to generate substantial revenue.²⁸ Similarly lucrative, the control facilitated by way of the diversion of river

²⁵ P. Benoit and J. Rouillard, “Medieval Hydraulics in France,” in *Working with Water in Medieval Europe: Technology and Resource-Use*, P. Squatriti ed. (Lieden, 2000), pp. 161-215, esp. 169-173.

²⁶ W. Horn and E. Born, *The Plan of St. Gall: A Study of the Architecture and Economy of, and Life in, a Paradigmatic Carolingian Monastery*, 3 vol. (Berkeley, 1979); K. Grewe, “Le Monastère de Christchurch à Cantorbéry (Kent, Grande-Bretagne): Interprétation et signification du plan du réseau hydraulique (XIIe siècle), *L’hydraulique monastique: Milieux, réseaux, usages*, L. Pressuyre and P. Benoit eds. (Grâne, 1996), pp. 123-133 ; and K. Berthier, “Les aménagements hydrauliques de l’abbaye” in *Pour une histoire monumentale de l’abbaye de Cîteaux, 1098-1998*, M. Plouvier, ed. (Vitreaux, 1998), pp. 66-75, (*Cîteaux, Commentarii cistercienses. Studia et documenta*, 8). See also, M. Lillich, “Cleaniness with Godliness: A Discussion of Medieval Monastic Plumbing,” *Mélanges Anselme Dimer* 3/5 (Arbois, 1982), pp. 123-149.

²⁷ I refer the reader to the abundant bibliography in C. Maines, “Inside the Blackbox: The Technology of Medieval Water Management at the Charterhouse of Bourgfontaine,” *Technology and Culture* 53 (2012), pp. 625-670; and C. Maines “Saint-Jean-des-Vignes in Context: The Urban Water Management Systems of Soissons,” in *Wasser: Lebensquelle und Bedeutungsträger: Wasserversorgung in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, H. Paulus, H. Reidel and P. Winkler eds. (Regensburg, 1999), pp. 15-36.

²⁸ For saltbeds and salt marshes, see M. Gardiner, “Archaeological Evidence for the Exploitation, Reclamation, and Flooding of Salt Marshes,” *Ruralia* 5 (2005), pp. 73-83; and J. Sarrazin, “Le sel et l’aménagement du littoral Poitevin (XIIIe s.-début XVIe s.), *Les sociétés littorales de Centre-Ouest atlantique: de la préhistoire à nos jours: actes de colloque, Centre international de la mer, Rochefort* 5/5-6 (1998), pp. 143-161. For monastic appropriation of these features, see C. Treffort, “Moines, monastères et prieurés charentais au Moyen Âge: Quelques réflexions autour d’un projet collectif en cours,” *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l’Ouest* 113/3 (2006), p. 172 ; K. Berthier and J. Rouillard, “Nouvelles recherches sur l’hydraulique Cistercienne en Bourgogne, Champagne et Franche-Comté,” *Archéologie Médiévale* 28 (1998), pp. 121-147. R. Crozet, “Souterrains et caves voûtées à Maillezais (Vendée) et à Charrous (Vienne).” *Bulletin Monumental* 126 (1968), pp. 155-160, suggests that the vaulted underground rooms on the south side of Maillezais’ cloister were used for salt storage and opened directly onto Maillezais’ harbor.

water into canals, which would have held the potential to provide a perpetual flow of revenue through the taxes placed on the ubiquitous need for water-driven grain mills, as well as the tariffs placed on the commercial movement of goods, materials, and people.²⁹ It follows, therefore, that once in place, a hydraulic system would have been economically sustaining.

Economic historians highlight that this type of concerted growth in infrastructure came about most rapidly in situations where there was fragmented authority or a reduction in the territorial extent of the lord's jurisdiction, thereby creating a level of competition between numerous landlords.³⁰ This was indeed the political situation in the Poitevin marshlands at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Despite the broad-based nature of the Duke of Aquitaine's donations in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, to include his known extension of the ban to the various monastic communities in Poitou, records indicate that the community at Maillezais held a significant advantage over other monasteries and landholders in the region as a result of their particularly symbiotic relationship with their ducal patrons.³¹ One could argue that this was because several generations of Dukes and their wives, from the founding by William IV and Emma in 987 through William III and his three wives in the late twelfth century, were intimately associated with the abbey and with the ducal palace at Maillezais.³² In fact several family members are buried there.³³

²⁹ L. White, *Technology and Invention in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1940), pp. 141-159, shows that watermills represent one of the most "significant investments physical capital" in the Middle Ages. See also Benoit and Rouillard, "Medieval Hydraulics," pp. 178-180.

³⁰ K. van der Beek, "The Effects of Political Fragmentation on Investments: A Case Study of Watermill Construction in Medieval Ponthieu, France," *Explorations in Economic History* 47 (2010), pp. 369-380.

³¹ C. Treffort, "Le comte de Poitiers, duc d'Aquitaine, et l'Église aux alentours de l'an mil (970-1030)," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 43/172 (2000), pp. 395-445, esp. 417-428; and D. Callahan, William the Great and the Monasteries of Aquitaine," *Studia monastica* 19 (1977), pp. 321-342. For the extension of the *bannum*, see M. Bloch, *Land and Work in Medieval Europe*, J. Anderson trans. (Berkeley, 1967), pp. 136-168.

³² See Abel, "Emma of Blois," pp. 823-861.

³³ See S. Refalo, "Les ducs d'Aquitaine et l'abbaye de Maillezais (vers 970-vers 1100)," in Treffort and Tranchant, *L'abbaye*, pp. 319-342.

More revealing of the nature of this relationship between the abbey, its abbot and the dukes of Aquitaine is, however, the original strategic siting of Maillezais and its importance to ongoing defensive of the gulf region. As I will argue, the earliest manipulation of the natural aquatic features or “river management,”³⁴ was no doubt beneficial to the monastery, but there is every reason to believe the Duke supported these projects because they specifically served his defensive program, securing the river access to inland sites as far away as the city of Poitiers. The need for defensive control of these waterways is chronicled throughout the region, illustrating the long history of incursions by Vikings, Normans, and Muslims who are known to have looted and destroyed many of the coastal monasteries from the seventh to the tenth century.³⁵ For Maillezais, the wild and unpopulated nature of the island within the open waters of the ancient gulf is the basis of the foundation legend told retrospectively in Peter of Maillezais’ 1067 chronicle.³⁶

In addition to this narrative, Peter specifically describes the island’s topography and placement between the “l’Autise à l’est, et la Sèvre au sud,” and more specifically the two branches of the Autise River-- the Vieille Autise and the Jeune Autise, which serve to define the eastern and western boundaries of Maillezais Island.³⁷ Importantly, these two rivers give direct access to the mainland, making it clear that, even in the middle of the eleventh century, there continued to be a keen awareness of the island’s defensive possibilities. This is particularly significant as by that date the abbey had been moved from the eastern-most tip of the island, closest to the mainland, to the western side where it stood directly facing the open gulf.

³⁴ See Sarrazin, “Maillezais,” in Treffort and Tranchant, *L’abbaye*, pp. 365-376.

³⁵ Treffort, “Le compte de Poitiers,” pp. 417-418 ; and J. Renaud, *Les îles de Vendée face aux Vikings* (Verrières, 2008).

³⁶ Peter of Maillezais, Livre I [fol. 246a]-[fol. 247 b], in Pon and Chauvin, *La fondation*, pp. 90-101.

³⁷ Peter of Maillezais, Livre I [fol. 246 b], Pon and Chauvin, *La fondation*, p. 93 and “Présentation,” p. 30.



Figure 5 Golfe de L'Aguillon, Claude Masse. Photo: author.

While Maillezais' chronicle, like many self-referential historical documents, is not without suspicion of fraudulent or "enhanced" authorship, it can be said to reflect accurately the monastery's building chronology, as evidenced in the analysis of the extant structure.³⁸ This indication of historical accuracy lends some degree of confidence in the credibility of the chronicle's reference to the existence of some level of hydraulic development. Unfortunately, this document does not go on to provide us with the detail that would help locate the earliest

³⁸ Remensnyder, *Remembering*, p. 13.

phases of Maillezais' hydraulic project, nor does it signal what was hoped to be the project's desired outcome. We do, however, have two other significant sources of information that help in

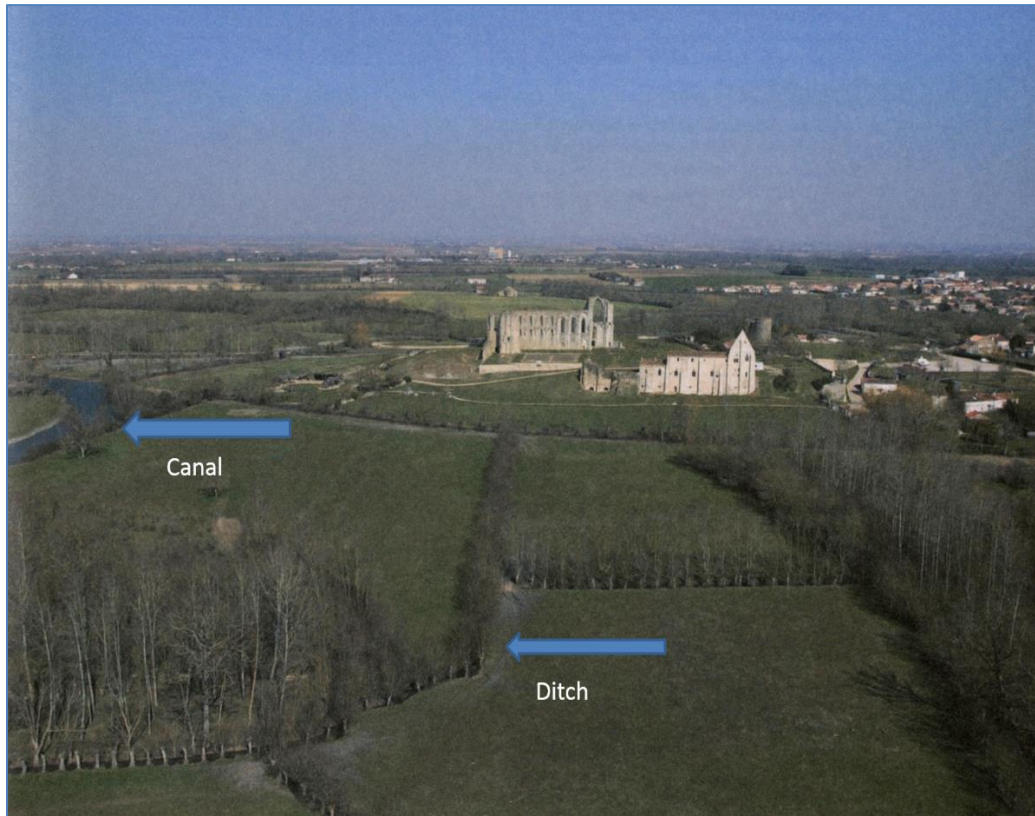


Figure 6 View of Hydraulic features around Maillezais Abbey. Photo: author.

the tracking of this information. The first is the modern and significantly extensive hydraulic system in place today, which covers the entirety of the former marshlands known collectively as the Golfe des Pictons. The second source is the impressively detailed set of maps for the region, drawn in the late seventeenth century by a cartographer employed by the king's corps of engineers, Claude Masse.³⁹ (**fig. 5**) At first glance, using these two sources as historical documentation for the medieval development might seem anachronistic. But as I hope to

³⁹ Y. Suire, *Cartes et mémoires de Claude Masse, Ingénieur du roi : La côte et les marais du Bas-Poitou vers 1700* (La Roche-sur-Yon, 2011).

demonstrate, both sources preserve glimpses into the distant past that should not be dismissed or overlooked.

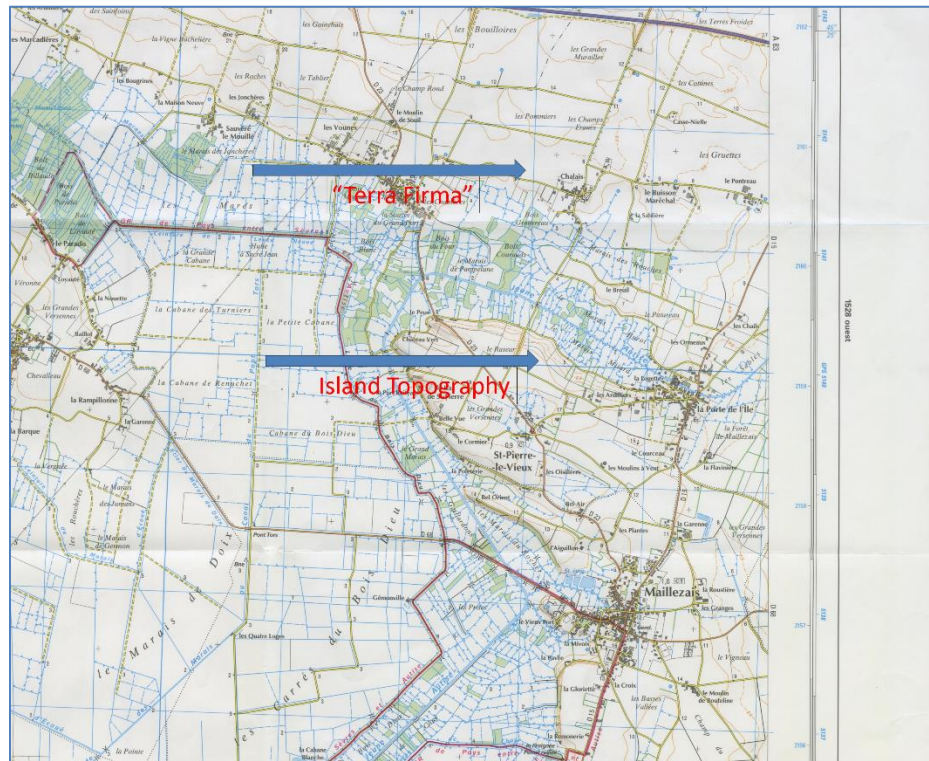


Figure 7 IGN# 1528 Ouest ,Topographic Map, Maillezais Island. Photo: author.

Beginning therefore, with a visual analysis of the landscape of the region as it stands today, one would hardly suspect in the vast expanse of farm and pasture, which stretches as far as can be seen to the north, west, and south of Maillezais abbey, that this land was once an inundated marsh. (fig. 6) A detailed topographic map recording the change in elevation levels, however, confirms the existence of elevated limestone outcroppings —or islands—rising a mere 10 to 12 meters above the low-lying alluvial basin. (fig.7) This type of map also serves in the identification of what would have been the ancient boundaries of the coastline of the Golfe des Pictons—the “terra firma” of the mainland to Maillezais’ east. Similarly, an elevated aerial view

like that possible from the open top of Maillezais' now-truncated stair turrets, illustrates that this once marshy basin is now sectioned-off in individual fields or pasture-sized units, the individual sections identified by an intricate pattern of small ditches and larger canals, each lined



Figure 8 Pollarded trees along the canal “contrabot.” Photo: author.

by centuries-old, pollarded Ash trees to protect their banks from erosion.⁴⁰ (**fig. 8**) The purpose of these tree-lined waterways, as it was in the late Middle Ages, is to drain the water away from those sections of land and, ultimately, move it into one of the six canalized rivers—the Sèvre, the Autize, the Vendée, the Lay, the Mignon, and the Curé, all of which drain into what remains of

⁴⁰ Y. Quéllec, *Le Marais poitevin des Deux-Sèvres* (Fontenay, 1998), pp. 61-62.

the Golfe des Pictons, now referred to as the Baie d'Aiguillon. Even the very smallest arteries of this complex aquatic system are navigable by small, flat-bottomed boats, and, as in the past, larger watercraft can move easily from the Atlantic Ocean into the open gulf, through harbors at Saint-Michel-en l'Herm, Esnandes, and Marans, Maillé, or Maillezais, moving upriver through ports at Fontenay, Luçon, or Niort, with elevation changes along these routes accommodated by mechanized locks and diversion canals.

Also visible from an elevated viewpoint is the corollary system of surface roads, which continue to facilitate the movement of pedestrians, farm equipment, and commercial goods, even as they accommodate the hydraulic system with an equally complex system of bridges and overpasses. In some cases, these overland routes replicate the path of ancient Roman roads, like that linking the Roman coastal cities of *Lucionum* (Luçon), *Fontneiacum* (Fontenay), and *Niortum* (Niort), or that which crossed the marshlands between Fontenay to the port village of Marans, following the path of the Vendée river.⁴¹ This visual analysis illustrates that water is essentially everywhere, and yet it is managed in such a way as to sustain the production of cereal grains and livestock on the lower levels, to support vineyards on the slightly higher ground, and to move people and goods between ports and dry land.

Environmentalists and landscape conservationists alert us to the sophisticated engineering built into this modern hydraulic system, noting that both the sustaining benefits of fresh river water and the detrimental effects of salinized farmland are acknowledged by the same hydraulic system that manages the destructive potential of seasonal flooding from the mountain-fed rivers, while accommodating the cyclical tidal patterns of the ocean. This planning can be seen most dramatically in the aqueduct located just outside of the village of Maillé, (**fig. 9**) which is

⁴¹ Y. Suire. "Les Marais avant les Dessèchements modernes, XVIe-début XVIIe siècle," in Treffort and Tranchant, *L'abbaye de Maillezais*, pp. 381-393 ; and Delahaye, *Histoire*, p. 19.

designed to take the fresh water of the Sèvre River over the top of the saltwater drainage canal, thus maintaining the separation of the two types of water, even as it anticipates the ebb and flow of both. Reiterating this aquatic differentiation, modern geographers label the land associated

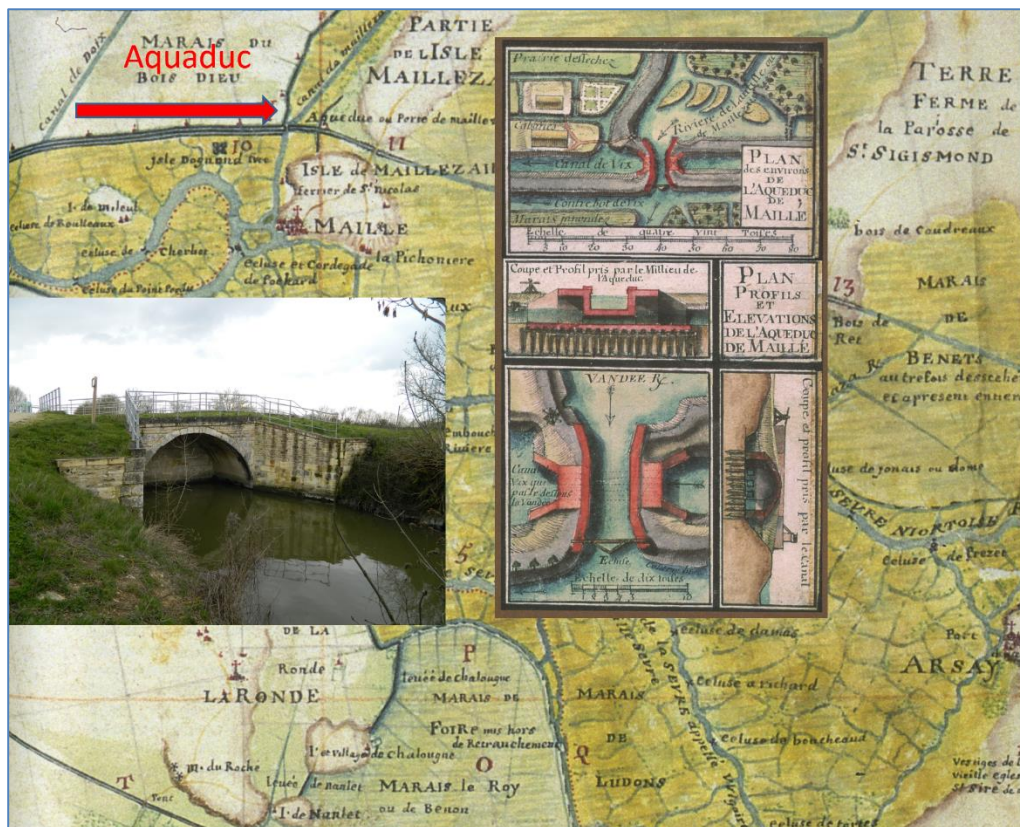


Figure 9 Aqueduct at Maillé with detail, after Claude Masse. Photo: author.

with these two types of water differently—the dry marsh (*Marais desséché*) referring to that land drained of its salty marsh water, and the wet marsh (*Marais mouillé*) referring to the more fertile land seasonally inundated by mountain-fed rivers.

Based on the complexity of this system, one could make the assumption that it is a wholly modern innovation. Historians and geographers studying the Early Modern era tell us

otherwise.⁴² While it is clear by way of the modern materials used in construction, as well as the use of electric and computerized mechanisms, that there are indeed components of the system that date to the post World War era. What is perhaps more revealing with regard to the historical



**Figure 10 Locks on Sèvre River between Marans and Niort, after Claude Masse.
Photo: author.**

questions at hand, is the recording of periods of the destruction and subsequent rebuilding of the hydraulic system, significantly in the Renaissance and early modern eras after the 100 Years War (1337-1453) and the Wars of Religion (1562-1598).⁴³ This historical documentation is important

⁴² Delahaye, *Histoire*, pp. 6-13.

⁴³ Suire. "Les Marais," pp. 381-393, lists various battles fought in the region in the 16th century, citing the commercial importance of the port village at Marans and religious significance of Maillezais as the seat of the

to the current project because it brings us to our second source of information, the 17th-century maps drawn by Claude Masse.

The sophisticated and innovative surveying undertaken by Masse allows us to compare the modern hydraulic system with what was in place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is in this comparison that we see that what Masse recorded was a reflection of what was actually on the ground--not a hypothetical or idealized rendition of what a hydraulic system might have looked like. In fact, much of what Masse recorded can be shown to still be in use today. For instance, we know from Masse's map that there were eight locks and seven diversion canals between the port at Marans and the inland harbor at Niort in operation in the seventeenth century.⁴⁴(**fig. 10**) The modern employment of these same features in the same locations illustrates not only the enduring functionality of the system, but also the reliability of this important map. I will come back to Claude Masse and his maps shortly, but with these basic revelations, it is possible to make a few further suppositions about the medieval and pre-modern parameters of the hydraulic system. If indeed the rudiments of the hydraulic system were built in the eleventh century, then by the time of the recorded destructions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, we can assume that the economic livelihoods of the local inhabitants would likely have been dependent on that hydraulic system. This suggests further that rebuilding after a period of disrepair would no doubt have been a priority. However, while improvement to the system after a period of destruction would have been inherently reasonable, from a practical stand point there is no compelling reason why local residents would have sought to "reinvent the wheel," building a completely new system. Rather more proficiently, they would more likely have proceeded with

bishop, making both sites particularly attractive. François I is known to have organized a re-building of the hydraulic system in 1599, which had been partially rebuilt in 1560.

⁴⁴ Suire, *Cartes et mémoires*, pp.280-291. For the development of ports and harbors in the region, see Jeanne-Rose, "Ports," pp. 115-142.

a program of reconstruction that included the patching and reuse of old stone where feasible in order to make the system once again functional as quickly and economically as possible.⁴⁵ It does not follow, therefore, that all evidence of the early system would have been obliterated or carted away, even as we know there were periods of substantial destruction. In other words, if approached archaeologically, there ought to be evidence of the oldest parts of the hydraulic system at the foundation levels of some of its major features. Identifying these sites where this older stone has been preserved would serve to locate some of the oldest sections of the early-medieval hydraulic system.

These assumptions are supported by research undertaken in relation to the arrival of the Cistercians of the thirteenth century, who are known to have taken up residence on the islands that lie midway between the island of Maillezais and the present day coast of the Baie d'Aguillon.⁴⁶ (**fig. 11**) In a manner familiar to other Cistercian monasteries, the monks at six area monasteries brought their renowned expertise in hydraulics to the region and were instrumental in organizing a collaborative effort, linking their resources to execute a more substantial drainage program designed to manage the large central plain to the south and west of Maillezais.⁴⁷ Highlighting that much of this Cistercian organized system is still in place and functioning, this

⁴⁵ For this type of reuse, see C. Maines, Saint-Jean-des-Vignes de Soissons: Utilisation, reutilisation et non-utilisation de la pierre lors de la période Gothique,” in *Pierres du Patrimoine Européen: Économie de la Pierre de l'Antiquité à la fin des temps Modernes*, F. Blary, J. Gély, and J. Lorenz eds. (Paris, 2008), pp. 131-142.

⁴⁶ Sarrazin, “Maillezais,” pp. 365-379; J. Sarrazin, “Les Cisterciens et la genèse du marais poitevin (France) (vers 1180-vers 1250),” in *L'hydraulique monastique: milieu, réseaux, usages*, L. Pressouyre and P. Benoît, eds. (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1996).

⁴⁷ For Cistercian hydraulics, see K. Berthier and J. Rouillard, “Nouvelles Recherches sur l'hydraulique Cistercienne en Bourgogne, Champagne et Franche-Comté,” *Archéologie Médiévale* 28 (1999), pp. 121-147. N. Faucherre, “Topographie médiévale de l'île de Maillezais, La capture de l'Autize,” in Treffort and Tranchant, *L'abbaye*, pp. 197-198, dates the Cistercian work in the Vendée to the period between 1180 and 1283. The six Cistercian abbeys responsible for this later work were La Grâce-Dieu, Notre-Dame de Charron, Saint-Léonard-de-la-Chaume, Moreilles and Trizay. Slightly later (1217), four Benedictine abbeys—Saint-Michel-en-l'Herm, l'Absie, Saint-Maixent, Nieul-sur-l'Autize—join forces with Maillezais to construct the “L'Achenal des Cinq-Abbés.”

scholarship tends to downplay the fact that when the Cistercians arrived, the foundations of a hydraulic system were already in place.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, what is important in this



Figure 11 Islands (in pink) within the ancient Golfe des Pictons, after Claude Masse.
Photo: author.

scholarship is the validation it brings to the credibility of our second piece of evidence—Claude Masse’s seventeenth-century map. This is because the specific sections of the system attributed to the thirteenth-century Cisterians are indeed recorded on Masse’s map and appear to have been in working order, as suggested above, indicates that if they were damaged in either of the

⁴⁸ Faucherre, “Topographie,” pp. 197-198, on the other hand, suggests that the earlier canal work along the Jeune Autise preceded the drainage of the southwestern section of the Golfe des Pictons initiated by the Cistercians. Sarrazin, “Maillezais,” p. 368, discounts the earlier hydraulic work referenced in Peter’s chronicle, calling it river management, rather than the work of drainage.

fifteenth- or sixteenth-century wars, they were rebuilt in the same place and served the same function that they were designed to do in the thirteenth century. Moreover, because the



Figure 12 Hydraulic System iGolfe des Pictons, after Jaillot Map, 1707. Photo: author.

Cistercians are known to have been unconcerned with the area around Maillezais Island, suggests that whatever the Maillezais monks built in relation to their island domain, like that built later by the Cistercians, might similarly be recorded by Masse.

To corroborate the detail of Masse's maps, we do have early eighteenth- and nineteenth-century maps, like those drawn by Nicolas de Fer (1646-1720) and M. PrévotEAU in 1879.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ M. Vannereau, "Evolution des cartes du Poitou et de la Saintonge du XVe au XVIII siècle," *Actes du quatre-vingt-septième congrès national des sociétés Savante* (Poitiers, 1962), pp. 265-292. Other cartographer families of note from the 17th century leading up to the time of Claude Masse are the Siettes, the Sansons (1600-1667), and after Masse, the Cassinis and the Roberts.

Unlike Masse's renderings, however, and reflecting a different mapping objective, these maps depict the coast of the gulf as stable and the land behind it as uniformly inhabited, with little suggestion that the Baie d'Aiguillon was once a much larger body of water. Some, like that drawn by Alexis Jaillot (1632-1712) (**fig. 12**) do, at least suggestively, illustrate a "hatch" pattern in the area once covered by water, which at first glance could be misunderstood as shorthand for furrowed fields. Here, it is only with knowledge of the actual landscape that one would recognize these markings as representing a complex system of ditches or channels. The generalization of these water features on these more-modern maps serves for my purposes to highlight the detailed accuracy found in Masse's earlier rendition.

Historians of cartography would point out that while the mapmakers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were commissioned to address different agendas, the maps they produced are revealing of both the shifting administrative philosophy at the highest levels of French government as well as the technical advances within the field of geographic science and cartography.⁵⁰ They suggest that Masse's careful recording of the French coast, to include the Poitevin hydraulic system, was not only a foundational part of King Louis XIV's defensive program, but indicative of the detailed, all-inclusive vision he demanded. As such Masse's maps provide a particular vantage point onto the king's social and political agenda—an agenda that was at once innovative and progressive, while cognizant of historical precedents. Retrospectively, it is interesting that Louis had much the same vision that the dukes of Aquitaine had in terms of the value of hydraulic infrastructure as an element of security and defense, as well as a philosophy of land management. For this point of view, we need to understand the program within which Masse was working.

⁵⁰ P. Even, "Claude Masse, Les cartes de l'ingénieur du roi," in *Adventures Scientifiques: Savants en Poitou-Charentes du XVIe au XXe siècle* (Poitou-Charantes, 1995), pp. 148-159.

Claude Masse was employed as part of the Louis IV's corps of engineers, but more specifically his work evolved from a plan developed under Jean-Baptiste Colbert in the 1660s, who held many titles, among them, Minister of Finance, Secretary of State, Navy, and Lands of the King.⁵¹ Colbert and his successor, Vauban, carried out these duties as if the king's vast territory was one great estate—one where infrastructure was important to the health and well-being of the inhabitants. Chanda Mukerji calls Colbert's approach to this enormous task "land stewardship," stating that he employed an administrative philosophy of "mesnagement" politics, wherein the estate, "sanctioned by God," should be "developed for the well-being of the people through rational assessment of its virtues and vices, and the proper allocation of activities to appropriate sites around the countryside."⁵² While veiled as a "dream of Eden," this approach was aligned with Colbert's founding of the French Academy of Sciences in 1666 and the French Observatory in 1667, where the new emphasis on astronomy facilitated the calculation of longitudes and what geographers have called a "cartographic revolution."⁵³

The other side of Colbert's interests in social engineering and the forward-looking advances in science were his responsibilities as Minister of the Navy, where he was charged with the king's vision of empire. It is here that we see Colbert looking to the Classical past—not only the preserved relics of Roman infrastructure, so pervasive on the French countryside, but also the classical literature studied in the schools. Both were the material of the astronomer-geographers, military engineers, and civil surveyors like Claude Masse, employed by the King.⁵⁴ As Mukerji

⁵¹ Even, "Claude Masse," pp. 148-159. Masse's career actually began in 1679 under François de Ferry and eventually Vauban, successor of Colbert. He passed on his expertise to his sons, dying in 1737. See, R. Faille and N. Lacrocq, *Les Ingénieurs Géographes, Claude, François et Claude-Félix Masse* (La Rochelle, 1979), pp. 33-37.

⁵² Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering*, pp. 7, 17-22, places Colbert's outlook in the post-Wars of Religion era, where the king's Catholicism was meant to be seen in contrast to the remnants of Huguenot presence. As such, his actions were signaled as having a virtuous and moral imperative.

⁵³ Even, "Claude Masse," p. 152.

⁵⁴ Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering*, pp. 8-14, 23, 28-30, states that each type of engineer had their area of expertise, those from the Royal Academy were mathematically based and interested in longitudes and altitudes; the military

suggests, the accomplishment of both social and military goals was dependent on precise knowledge of the land, “relying above all on geography and engineering,” as well as distinctive way of drawing maps developed by the civil surveyors, known as “arpenteurs/géomètres.”⁵⁵ Rather than the academic grid or topographic survey, this new type of map “referred to property markers set on the ground and mental maps of the landscape around them.”⁵⁶

What is important to recognize here is that Colbert’s management program incorporated this new theoretical geography in order to address the king’s political goals.⁵⁷ In this endeavor, one might say that Louis XIV’s interest in the France’s defense system was obsessive. His desire to be able to “visualize” his entire kingdom and its defensive structures all at one time, inspired the creation of an enormous room where he could literally be surrounded by the display of large scale maps and three-dimensional models.⁵⁸ The surveyed detail of Masse’s maps, with their inset drawings of castles, towers, harbors and other fortified structures, was part of this vision.⁵⁹ The largest of Masse’s maps, which were created between 1688 and 1735, measure approximately 6 x 4 ft. Hundreds of smaller sectional maps of the 2 x 4 ft size accompany a

engineers were focused on constructing of fortresses, ports, planning sieges and measuring frontiers, while the civil surveyors marked property lines and made maps of land parcels.

⁵⁵ Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering*, pp. 27-28, 32. The well-known Cassini maps and the cadastral program developed out of Colbert’s over-arching program of land management. Arpenteurs got their name from the standard lengths of chain (arpents) they carried for measurement.

⁵⁶ Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering*, pp. 32-33. C. Duffart, “La Carte manuscrite de Claude Masse (fin du XVIIe siècle), sa valeur scientifique, principales modifications du sol landais qu’elle révèle,” *Bulletin du Comité des travaux historique et scientifiques* (Paris, 1902), pp. 274-284, makes the case that Masse’s maps recorded environmental shifts not found elsewhere.

⁵⁷ Suire, *Cartes et memories*, p. 9.

⁵⁸ Many of the three-dimensional models can still be seen in the Musée des Plans-Reliefs, housed in the Hôtel des Invalides in Paris. They were originally installed in the Louvre. See I. Warmoes, *Le Musée des plans-reliefs* (Paris, 1997).

⁵⁹ Cornec, “L’abbaye Saint-Pierre,” p. 88, suggests that the western façade and enclosure walls at Maillezais were fortified in the fourteenth century and again in the sixteenth century.

detailed, hand-written journal, now archived in Paris at the Bibliothèque du Génie, Chateau de Vincennes and at various regional archives, like that for the Vendée, at La Rochelle.⁶⁰ (fig.13)

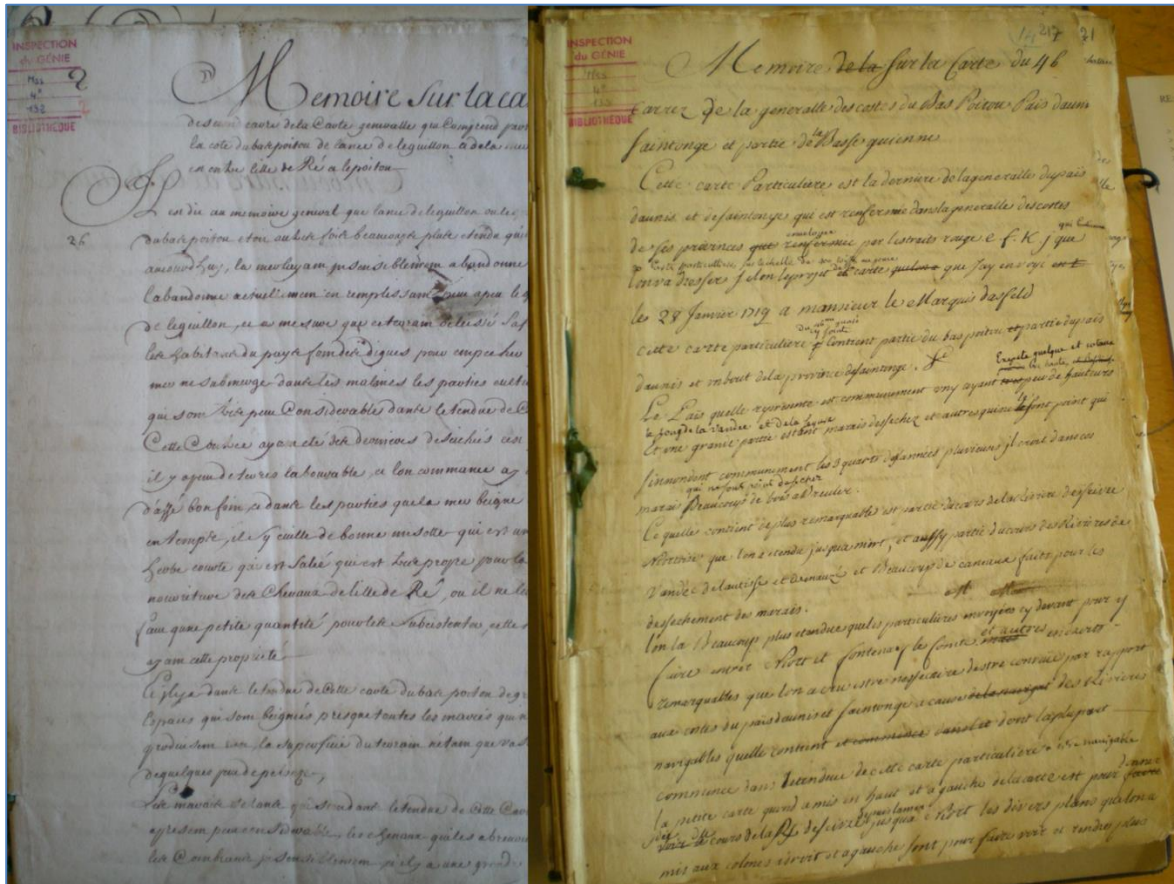


Figure 13 Claude Masse, Journal Pages, Bibliothèque du Génie, Chateau de Vincennes. Photo: author.

For the purposes of understanding Maillezais' role in the development of the early hydraulic system, it is fortuitous that the king was not only interested in defensive structures like Maillezais abbey, which was fortified in the fourteenth century, but also these defensive sites' supportive infrastructure, to include bridges, levees, and canals--all of which could be breached

⁶⁰ Y. Sire, *La Côte et les Marais du Bas-Poitou vers 1700: Cartes et Mémoires de Claude Masse Ingénieur du Roi* (La-Roche-sur-Yon, 2011).

as a mechanism to cause the dysfunction and chaos that lead to security breakdowns.⁶¹

Providing Colbert with the details the king required, Masse spent the majority of his adult life surveying and recording the northern and western coastlines of France, his work continued after his death by his sons.⁶² The result of this long project is a set of maps of incredible surveyed accuracy, which include details of everything from minute depth readings in the water to multifaceted drawings of the operation of sluices and locks. (**fig. 14a**) It is this detail, particularly in the recording of the hydraulic system, that these maps become useful in our search for the origins of Maillezais' early hydraulic system.



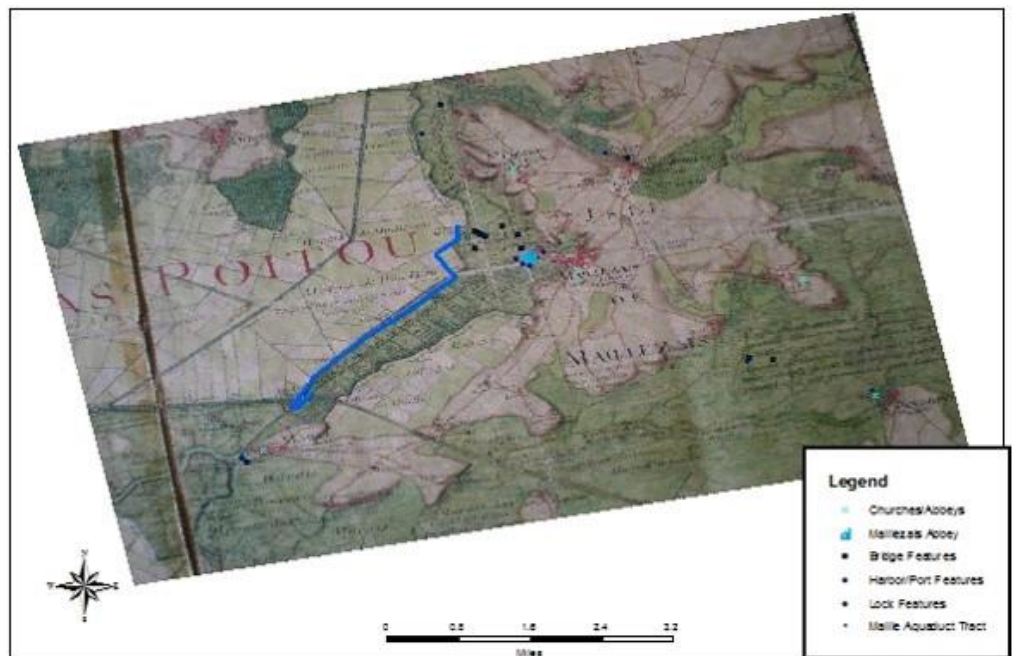
Figure 14a Details of Locks/ Modern Infrastructure, after Claude Masse. Photo: author.

⁶¹ Mukerji, *Impossible*, pp. 30-31, explains that this line of thought was developed under Colbert, who employed astronomer-geographers, military geographers, and civil surveyors in the service to the King to produce maps of extant defensive features, “especially waterways and rock outcroppings” and “counter-topographies of tunnels, landslides” that “were at the heart of war and military cartography.”

⁶² R. Faille and N. Lacrocq, *Les Ingénieurs Géographes: Claude, François et Claude-Félix Masse* (La Rochelle, 1979).

Thus as a way to situate and visualize the matrix of social and political factors that make up the correlation between the abbey's economic status and its physical environment, an interdisciplinary program of electronic mapping was devised. Employing a team comprised of two geography and two art history graduate students, this program was meant to bring the scientific accuracy of Geography, through the employment of a Geographical Information System (G.I.S.), to the visual analysis inherent in the study of architectural history. The basic goal was to expand not only the range of data to be considered, but also the depth of analysis, and thus facilitate the visualization of nuanced layers of criterion and intricate relationships of data not otherwise possible through traditional art historical methods. At the basis of this mapping program--tracking these somewhat nebulous factors through time and space--was the tangible and enduring evidence of stone, witnessed today in the way it was cut, laid, and built upon.

Figure 14b G.I.S. Image of Maillezais Levee with G.P.S. tracking along canal, after Claude Masse. Photo: author.



As suggested above, the first step in this program was to verify the accuracy of Masse's recordings. This was accomplished by way of several G.P.S. trackings of the team's movements along waterways and levies that we found to be recorded both on a modern topographic map and on Masse's seventeenth-century map. (fig. 14b) We

discovered that once Masse's maps were ortho-rectified and geo-referenced, the features Masse recorded were indeed measured and drawn to modern levels of accuracy.⁶³

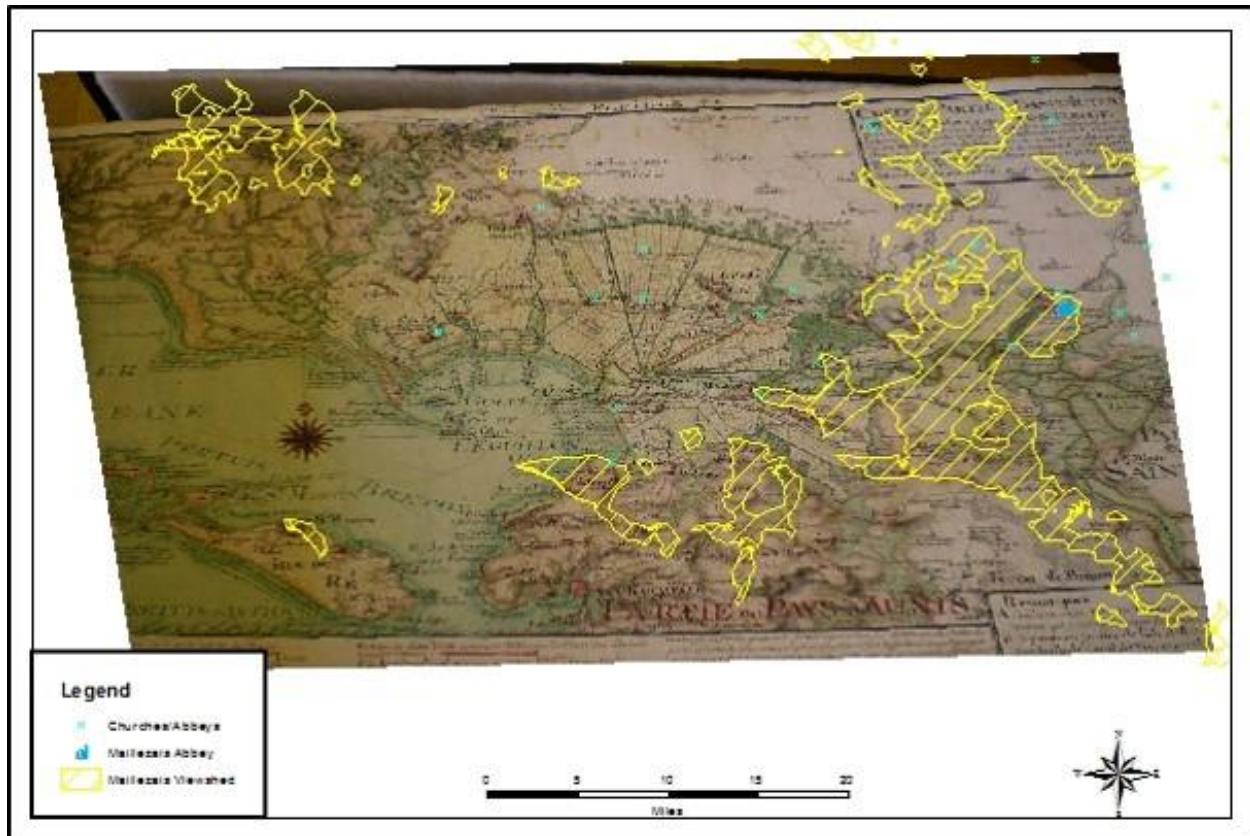


Figure 15 G.I.S. generated Maillezais Viewshed (in yellow) with medieval sites indicated as G.P.S. points (in blue), after Claude Masse. Photo: author.

With this knowledge, we added other “known” sites in the region relevant to the history of Maillezais, such as the other two monastic foundations referenced in the Maillezais chronicle— St. Michel de l’Herm, founded in the 682, which is located to the west of Maillezais at the entrance to the gulf,⁶⁴ and Notre-Dame de Luçon, on the gulf’s northern edge—as well as Maillezais’ parish churches and other ecclesiastical foundations dating to the early medieval period. Categorizing these buildings by date facilitated a “phased” mapping of other data.

⁶³ See Dienes article in this volume.

⁶⁴ Renaud, *Les îles*, p. 10.

Thus employing this geo-referenced version of Masse's map as our "terra firma," the team of geographer/art historians set out on a program of surveillance, combing the region for visual evidence of medieval stone, entering each siting as a G.P.S. generated point on our G.I.S. map. Following the logic described above, we assumed that even as there might well have been multiple periods of destruction and rebuilding at any given site of infrastructure, we might hope to find evidence of medieval stone at the lower foundational levels. And indeed wide-spread evidence of medieval stone was discovered to have been employed in parts of many different hydraulic features. (**fig. 15**)

As exciting as these discoveries were, they do not necessarily help pinpoint the parts of the system built by Maillezais in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In order to refine the chronology of our findings, we had to formulate a system of visual criteria for the dating of medieval stone in order that each site could be "phased" according to date. Geographers call this "age-referenced." Given the knowledge that the "islands," of the gulf, including Maillezais Island, were nothing more than limestone outcroppings rising at the most only 10 meters above the marsh at sea level, and that there were known quarries directly up the Sèvre river from the abbey towards the town of Niort, the assumption was made that, like other medieval structures of the region, construction of infrastructure would also be of limestone. In many instances, however, the differentiation between the stratification and erosion patterns of the limestone bedrock and the slightly irregular coursing of natural or uncut limestone construction were difficult to discern. This problem is particularly clear on Maillezais' eastern enclosure wall, where the stone coursing melds almost imperceptibly with the stratified bedrock. (**fig. 16**) This type of transition from bedrock to natural stone coursing is even more elusive when under even a few inches of water.



Figure 16 Maillezais, Wall built on top of natural “Island” strata. Photo: author.

More clearly differentiated, however, were the various techniques for cutting limestone found within the abbey itself, which in a general sense can be said to become ever-more refined and precise over time. As these variations are associated with the dated expansions and remodelings of the architecture, they provided a suitable template for not only the visual training of the team, but importantly the dating of the stone employed in the region’s infrastructure. Without the benefit of more scientific methods of dating stone, the field program relied on the architecturally phased dating of the abbey’s stone to refine our skills as visual connoisseurs of limestone, and in so doing developed a visual methodology for chronologically categorizing the



Figure 17 Maillezais Abbey, Interior, West Narthex. Photo: author.

cutting technique and general size of the stones.⁶⁵ Here the dating chronology was correlated with a general progression from roughly cut stones to those cut with skilled precision, and from relatively large ashlar blocks to smaller individual stones. Within the abbey itself there are many examples where there is evidence of these visual criteria that can be dated by

documentary evidence. For instance, in the interior of the western narthex (**fig. 17**) with its large ashlar blocks laid in regularized coursing, the portal opening of the eleventh-century western entry can be seen to have been filled with a very different style of stonework, here much smaller stones laid in irregular courses with ample mortar. We have documents telling us that this juxtaposition of two styles of masonry was the result of a fortification project in the fourteenth

⁶⁵ This connoisseurial approach uses what E. Woillez, *Archéologie des monuments religieux de l'Ancien Beauvoisis pendant métamorphose romane* (Paris, 1839-49) calls “des principes d’une école de rigoureuse observation.” The method was, however, complicated somewhat by the work of modern restoration programs, where the craftsman has quite successfully replicated the stonecutting techniques of a previous era, as in the abbey’s eastern entrance bridge, which was restored in 2008.

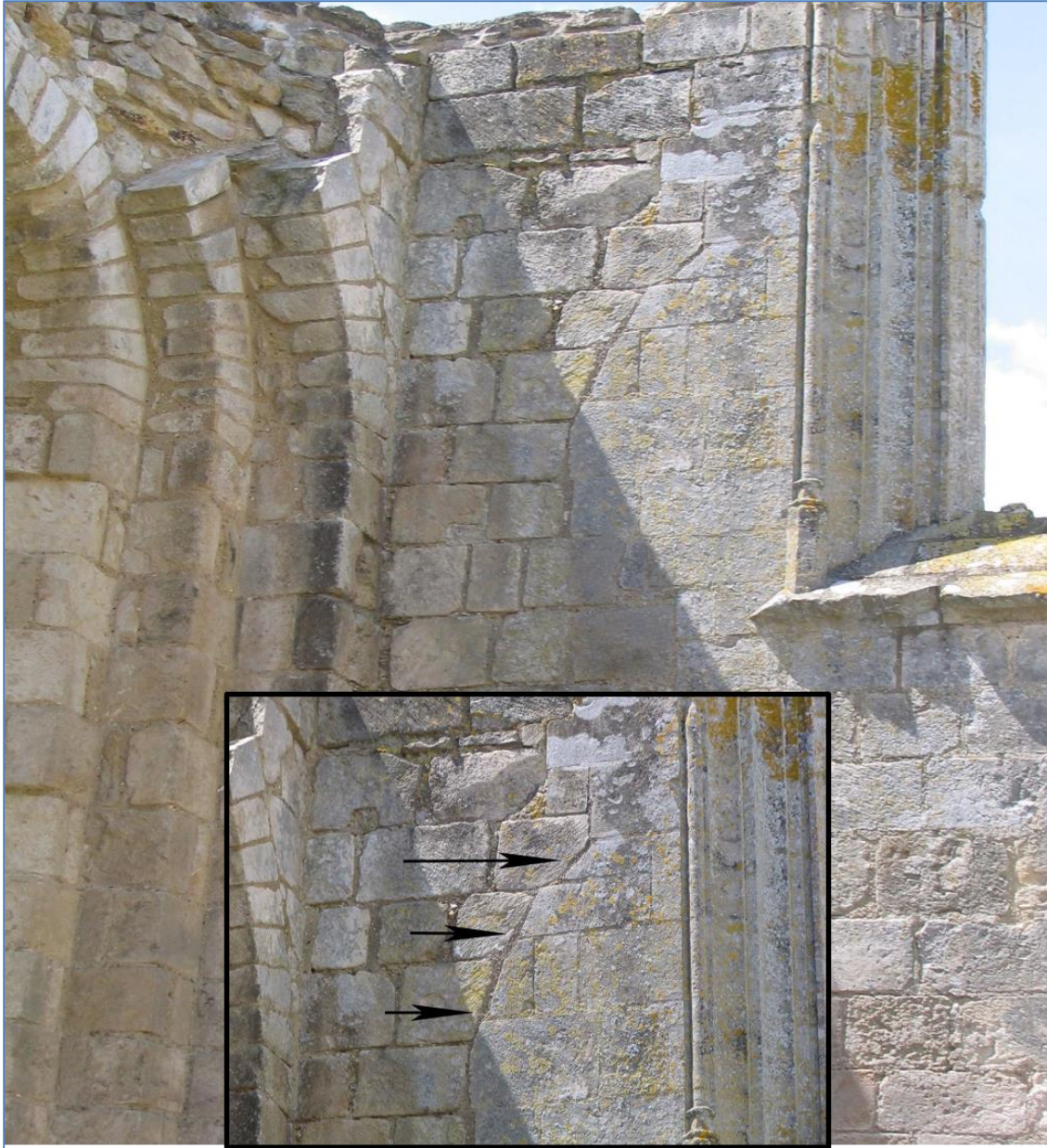


Figure 18 Maillezais Abbey, upper narthex window replacement scar. Photo: author.

century that eliminated the western entry. While the crude patchwork used to fill the space of the portal opening was probably plastered over to provide a smooth surface for painting, its current revealed state provides a clear example of two very different methods of stone construction. Similarly, in the upper floor of the narthex, (**fig. 18**) the eleventh-century, two round-headed



Figure 19 Maillezais Abbey, conversi kitchen. Photo: author.

windows were replaced in the late thirteenth century with a singular Gothic window with sophisticated moldings and a pointed arch, thus illustrating vividly the refinement in stone cutting techniques that developed in this time period. Even more intricate and precise stonework can be found in the conversi's domed kitchen (c. 1400), (**fig. 19**) which is juxtaposed with the rougher work of an earlier fireplace. Defining the chronology, each of these examples were used to refine and hone the team's visual skills.

In the end, the final process of chronological analysis of each point on our map suggested some preliminary revelations that have served to confirm our original hypothesis and define the next stages of inquiry. Areas on the map with dense coalescence of sites with early (10th and 11th

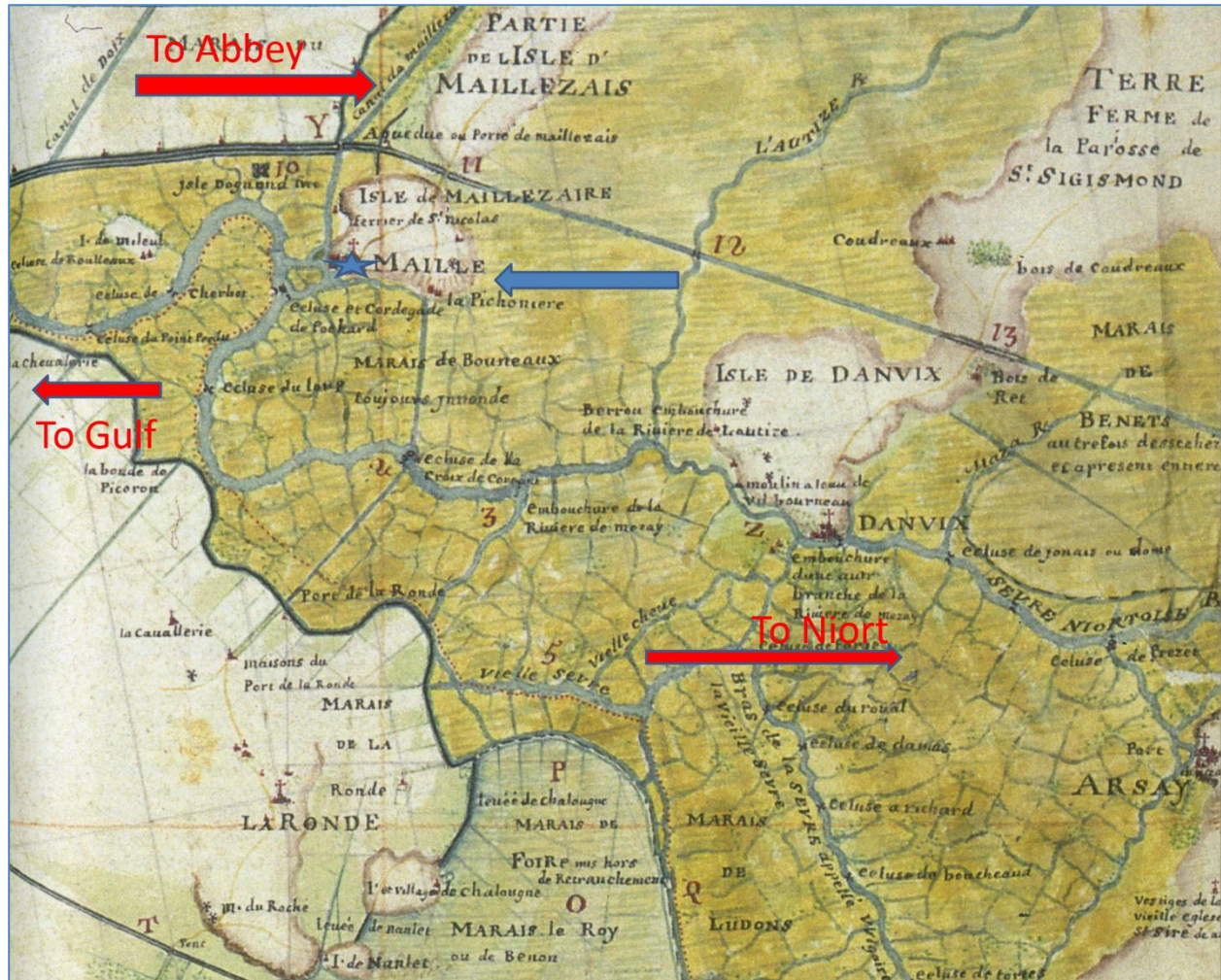


Figure 20 Sèvre River, after Claude Masse. Photo: author.

century) stonework highlight four sites with particular stone infrastructure that stand out as important to our understanding of Maillezais' original hydraulic system. The first, and maybe the most fundamental, was in the city of Niort, to the southeast of Maillezais on the Sèvre River. (fig. 20) Close to the site of the quarry for the majority of the limestone in the region,⁶⁶ Niort had the most developed inland port and harbor system, much of it still extant. While it cannot be said that Maillezais was directly responsible for the development of these features, it can most

⁶⁶ For the relation between the site of the quarry and the site of the building project, see P. Piboule, "Les carrières de Nord de l'Aquitaine au moyen age," *Revue Aquitania* 3 (1985), pp. 173-186.

certainly be argued that maintaining the river passage between Niort and Maillezais would have been essential for the movement of building materials—most particularly limestone and lumber from the nearby quarry and forests necessary for the early construction projects both at the abbey and at Niort’s prominent castle complex. Opening this length of the river would have required the building of channels in some places where the water level was low in order to maintain an appropriate depth for navigation, and the installation of locks in other places to deal with the changes in elevation. Several have been modernized and are still in use, but many more of these locks are indicated on Masse’s map.

Corroborating the importance of this waterway to construction projects at Maillezais is the port/canal/lock system built close to Maillezais’ first parish, at Maillé, which has a foundation date of *c.* 1010.⁶⁷ (see **fig. 9**) This village and hydraulic complex lies at the southwestern tip of Maillezais island where the Sèvre, coming from Niort, joins the westward flowing Autize River and may well be the site of *Confluvium*, a Roman settlement mentioned in the chronicle as where “the rivers come together.”⁶⁸ In addition to its port function, regulating the entry of goods moving between Niort and the open waters of the Golfe des Pictons, the hydraulic system at Maillé would also have served as an important security gate for boats moving up the Autize to Maillezais’ own harbor located just to the north of its prominently situated western façade. Much of this system has been updated and modernized as described above in the sophisticated accommodation of both salt and fresh water, maintained as separate by way of an aqueduct crossing. Tellingly, medieval stone is quite visible in the arched underpasses of this elaborate system.

⁶⁷ L. Brochet, “Maille,” in *Les Environs de Maillezais* (Paris, 1989), pp. 83-91, states that there was a “Pictonnière” port at Maille as early as 540, as well as an ancient chapel dedicated to St. Pient, which was in ruins in the eleventh century when it was replaced by the extant church dedicated to Saint Nicolas.

⁶⁸ This is listed as *Confluentium* on a map in Pon and Chauvin, *La fondation*, p. 31.

The third site of importance was located at the head, or eastern end of Maillezais Island. (fig. 21) The village of Porte de l'île marks the point where the island is connected by a causeway to the “terra ferme” of the mainland, and where the Autise river flowing from the eastern forests meets the marshland, splitting to become the Jeune Autise and the Vieille Autise and therein defining the east and west sides of the island. Here, strategically at this “gateway,” and not too far from the original site of the abbey at St. Pierre le Vieux, there is significant evidence of an early medieval mill, which would have benefited from a diversion of the Autise river’s water. Even today, an enormous modern mill, just meters downstream from the medieval site, takes advantage of this same flow of water.

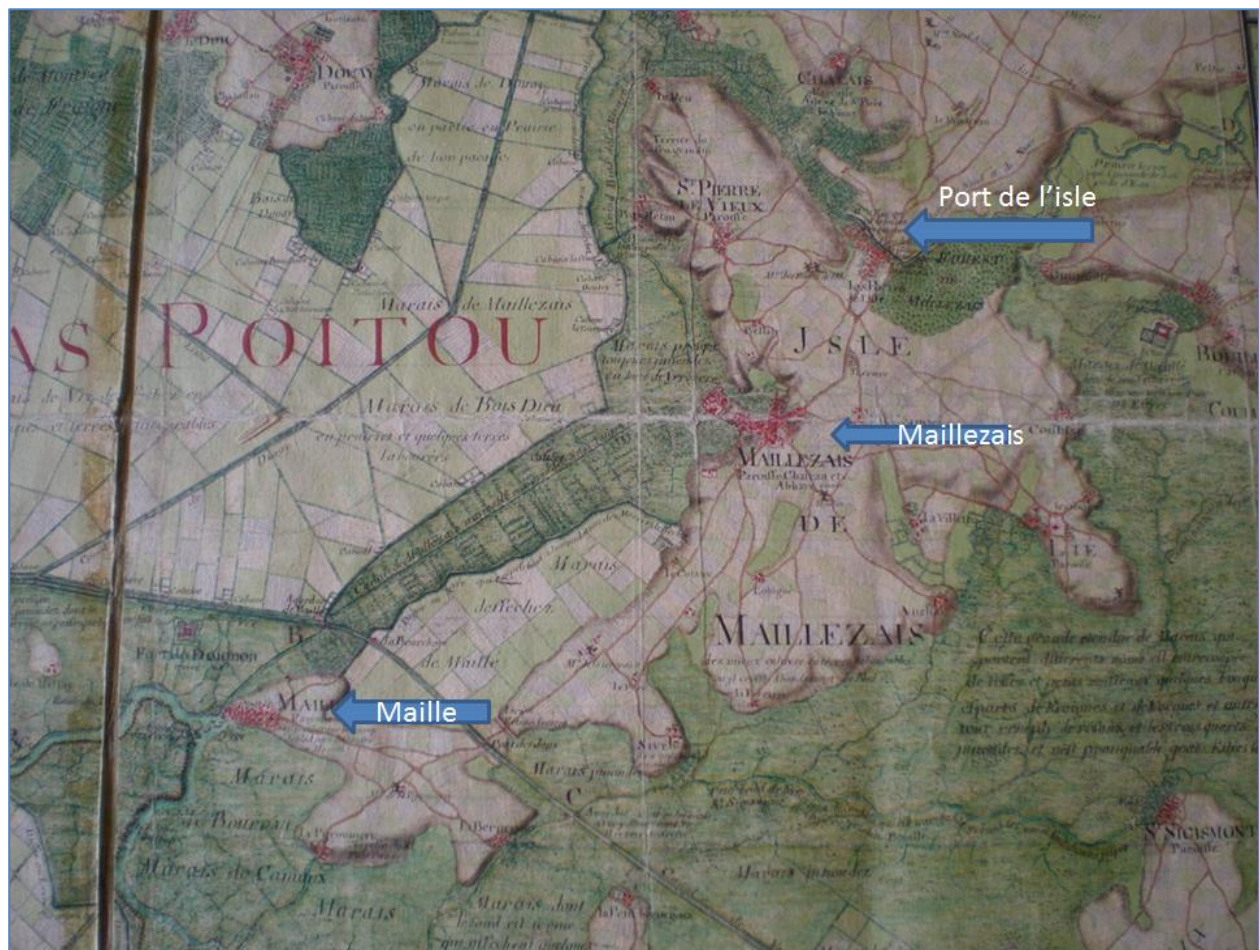


Figure 21 Maillezais Island, after Claude Masse. Photo: author.

The last important feature that completes our estimation of Maillezais' original hydraulic system is the levee—or Bot/countrabot-- that runs parallel to the canalized Autize on the north side of the abbey.⁶⁹ (**fig. 22**) This feature would have served to hold back the marsh waters to the north and west, diverting their tidal flow to a lower part of the Autize, thereby creating what we feel would have been the first expansion of the abbey's arable land, while ensuring the abbey a consistent source of fresh water for both irrigation and drinking.



Figure 22 Bot/ Counterbot. Photo: author.

⁶⁹ Sarrazin, "Les Cisterciens," p. 115, explains the process of "abbotamentum" where parallel drainage features—a larger one, generally called a "clausura" or "achenal," canal, and a smaller channel called a "contrabotum" are divided by a "botum" or levee, which has "cois" or sluices which can be opened and closed allowing excess water to flow from the contrabot into the achenal, which in turn moves the water into the river. The clausura and contrabot also function to preserve the bot from the destruction of people and animals.

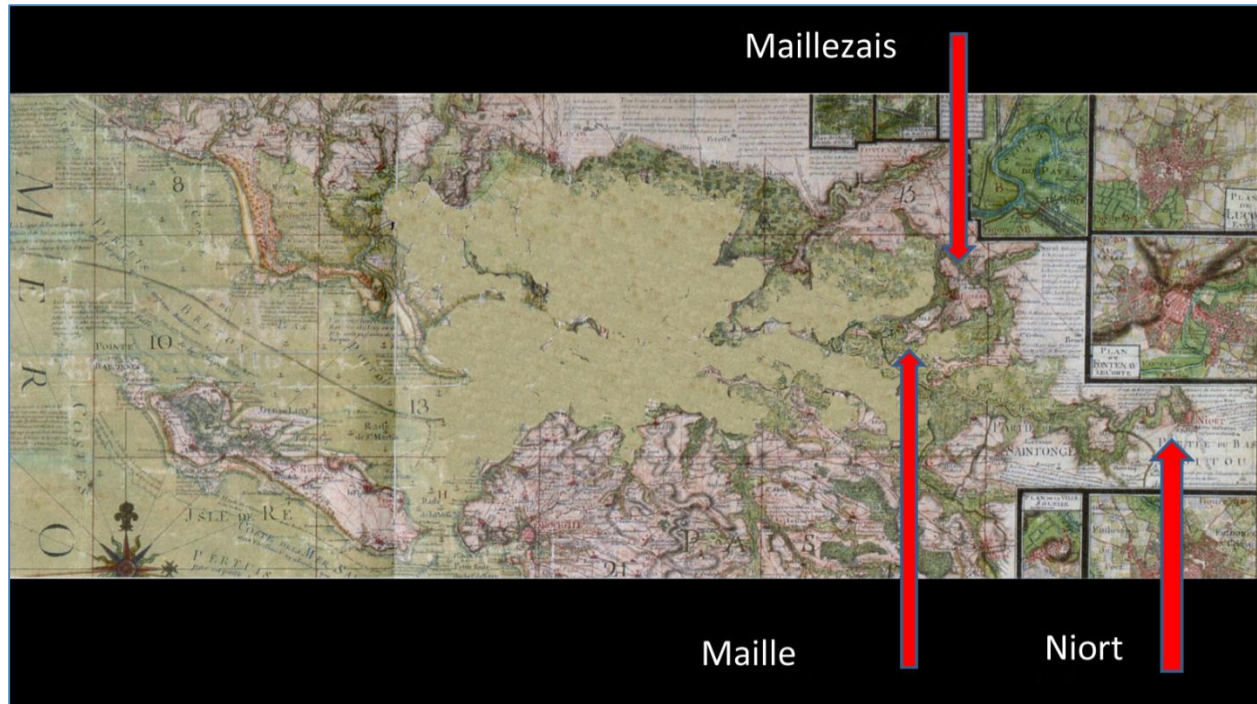


Figure 23 A Manipulated Map of Medieval Golfe des Pictons, after Claude Masse. Photo: author.

Manipulating Masse's map in relation to our GIS generated viewsheds, erasing everything other than these four sites of medieval infrastructure, allowed us to approximate a view of the eleventh-century coastline, and thus imagine what would have been visible from Maillezais' new narthex tower. (**fig. 23**) Combined with the information garnered from the analysis of the stone used in hydraulic infrastructure, such as dykes, levies, bridges, canals, wells, irrigation systems, laundries, and mills, this mapping enhances our understanding of the political, social, and economic issues underlying the multi-faceted development of a large monastic community in ways that corroborate our reading of written documents and the extant structure itself. Given the paucity of supporting documents, the environmental evidence supporting this reconstruction is quite revealing—that is, examining the architectural development from the basis of local geology, relative topography, and the inherent benefits of hydraulic engineering in a region defined by water, allows us to paint a picture of the economic avenues of supply and demand. This information

informs our understanding of the abbey's integral position within the dynamic relations of Aquitainian politics, and thus state more definitively that Maillezais' innovative control of their physical environment was responsible for making them both rich and powerful, such that the impressive western narthex tower would have been seen to be an appropriate and timely statement of the monastery's prominent social position. (fig. 24) 🏰



Figure 24 Manipulated Image, hypothetical view from Maillezais Abbey tower before hydraulic projects. Photo: author.



Visibility & Control in the Vendee

By Dory Deines and Owen Wilson-Chavez, University of North Texas

A large system of canals exists within the Vendee region of western France --without these canals this area would contain more extensive marshland than currently exists. The flow of several rivers is controlled by this network, most particularly the Autise and the Sevre, that traverse the region as they exit into the Atlantic Ocean, and serves to drain the saltwater from the marshy plains between these rivers. The creation of this canal network in the Middle Ages is generally assigned to the monastic orders of the region during the 13th century.¹ We argue, however, through fieldwork and the concept of relative aging that the canal system was begun in the tenth and eleventh centuries when Maillezais Abbey was first built and in conjunction with its subsequent relocation and rebuilding.²

This supposition is supported by several aspects of the design and location of the Abbey, such as the care taken with the design of the western façade overlooking the marshlands, as well as the potential economic benefits of a drainage system in these marshlands.³ Given the location,

¹ G. Pon and Y. Chauvin, eds. and trans., *La fondation de l'abbaye de Maillezais: Récit de moine Pierre*, (LaRoche-sur-Yon: Centre vendéen de recherches historiques, 2001), p. 34 ; and N. Faucherre, "Topographie médiévale de l'île de Maillezais, La capture de l'Autize," in *L'abbaye De Maillezais: Des Moines Du Marais Aux Soldats Huguenots*, edited by C. Treffort, and M. Tranchant, Rennes, 2005.

Treffort and Tranchant, *L'abbaye*, pp. 197-198.

² M. Abel, "To Sea and be Seen: Reconstruction of the Strategic Building program at Maillezais Abbey," *Avista Forum Journal*, 10, 1/2 (2010), pp. 12-24.

³ Abel, "To Sea and be Seen," pp. 12-24.

elevation, and historical timing of these factors in relation to other political and social events, it appears that it would have been unlikely that the monastic community at Maillezais would not have participated in the early design and construction of the canal system. In terms of financial gain, it is also unlikely that the monastery would have ceded the authority to build and manage the canals in their vicinity to other political or ecclesiastical powers. It is in this light that the field work undertaken in summer 2013 was designed to allow the research team to substantiate an earlier origination of the canal system, which previously had been presented as a hypothesis. Importantly, this fieldwork also served to validate the details and accuracy of a set of maps drawn between 1690 and 1715 by the French cartographer Claude Masse.⁴

The primary purpose of this paper is to delineate the research plan and the specific procedures used in its execution during the field season of Summer 2013. Secondly, this paper will introduce a new layer of analysis that presented itself as part of the field experience: the visual awareness of the importance of elevation within a generally low-lying, marshy gulf.

In June of 2013 our research team, consisting of Dr. Mickey Abel, two art history graduate students and two geography graduate students, traveled to the Vendée region of western France, and Maillezais abbey in particular, to survey the marshy area surrounding the modern Golf d'Aguillon, known in the Middle Ages as the Golfe des Pictons, in order to gather data in support of a building chronology for the extensive hydraulic program still visible today. Our goal was to identify and record whatever medieval portions of the extant system remained visible. In this field program, a hand-held Garmin 78S GPS was used to gather location data for several

⁴ See M. Abel, "Defining a New Coast: G.I.S. Reconstruction of Maillezais Abbey's Hydraulic Drainage Program and the Coastline it Created," in *The Interdisciplinary Field Experience: Maillezais Abbey, Water, Technology, and Team Research*, this issue.

categories including churches, canal ports, windmills, and other structures constructed of stone that had been shaped or cut in the Middle Ages. Documented medieval structures with previously established building phases, most particularly Maillezais abbey itself, were used to establish a template for a chronology of medieval stone. This system of “relative dating” facilitated the identification of those sections of the canal that were constructed during the early Middle Ages consistent with the building phases documented at the abbey.

The data was collected over a period of days, first identifying locations previously dated to the Middle Ages through earlier literature. These sites were each assigned a unique point with the GPS system. When collecting these points, we also noted the type of structure so that the data could be grouped and/or sorted by pre-determined categories. The data was then processed using ArcGIS Desktop 10.1 (ESRI, 2011) with the DNR Garmin application provided by the Department of Natural Resources. This processing transferred the collected data points from the GPS unit to a computer in a file format compatible with the ArcGIS Desktop software.⁵

After processing the data, the points collected at churches and abbeys dating to the Middle Ages were used to geo-reference 17th-century maps made by Claude Masse. **(fig. 1)** Geographic referencing uses points of known locations to map the image onto the earth. By geo-referencing the Claude Masse maps, we were able to bring them into the Geographic Information System (G.I.S.) and compare the locations of the features from the map against the point features we had collected as part of our field research. At specific sites within the Vendée, we collected GPS data as we physically traversed a portion of a canal system, such as

⁵ ESRI. (2010). ArcGIS Desktop: Release 10. Redlands, CA: Environmental Systems Research Institute and ESRI. (2011). ArcGIS Desktop: Release 10. Redlands, CA: Environmental Systems Research Institute.



Figure 1: Geo-referenced image of a Claude Masse map showing the three early Middle Ages Benedictine monasteries in the Vendée region of France. Photo: authors.

when we followed the three-kilometer route of the aqueduct from the village of Maillé north and east towards Maillezais Abbey. Visual comparison showed that the points the team collected along this aqueduct aligned perfectly with these same features on Claude Masse's maps, verifying the detail and accuracy of these earliest-known surveyed maps of the region. (**fig. 2**) This knowledge allowed us to reference other data points in relation to the features illustrated on the Claude Masse maps, filling out a more detailed picture of the canal system within the greater Vendée region.

While collecting data for this project, a question of interest was how the physical location of the various abbeys in the region affected their control over the canals and local communities. As confirmed by traditional topographic maps, the landscape in this area is predominantly flat



Figure 2: This image shows the locations of the aqueduct and a portion of the canal system overlaying a portion of the geo-referenced Claude Masse map.
Photo: authors.

low-lying marshland with scattered islands of limestone standing above the marshland. These limestone islands were the favored sites for two of the three early-medieval Benedictine monasteries: Saint-Pierre-de-Maillezais, Saint-Michel-en-Herm, while Saint-Maixent-de-Luçon was located on the northern coast of the ancient gulf at the medieval mouth of the Sevre Niortaise River. The visual experience of these particular locations, as well as the impressive monastic structures associated with them, suggests that, before the gulf was fully drained as we find it today, these sites would have been the dominant features of the pre-eleventh-century landscape. Based on this observation, we argue that this also would have allowed these sites to serve as “watch towers” over an extended area of the surrounding marshland and well out into the bay. When considered in conjunction with the idea of control, visibility becomes a significant factor--the premise being, if an area was visible from the monastery or if the monastery was

visible from a particular site, then this visibility would increase the likelihood of that site being influenced or controlled by the monastery. In this sense, the visibility factor allows us to imagine the visual relationship between the monastic communities and the general population. Quite literally, the population would look to the monastery as much as the monastery could watch over them.

The technology appropriate for the exploration of this question of visibility is the ArcGIS Desktop Viewshed tool. It facilitates the determination of what portions of the landscape are visible from a particular point of the map. The viewshed tool requires two inputs--a point or set of points and a digital elevation model. Provided these two inputs, the tool will return a dataset called a viewshed, which is similar to a digital photograph where the image is stored as a grid of pixels. The viewshed's pixels can be either a '1' for 'visible' or '0' for 'not-visible.' A pixel is assigned the value 1 when that area is visible from the input point(s). The SRTM 90m digital elevation model can be thought of as an image where each pixel's value is the elevation above sea-level of the land in that pixel.

For this analysis, viewsheds were created for the three early medieval Benedictine monasteries individually, with a fourth viewshed created for the three monasteries together. This work used ArcGIS Desktop 10.0 (ESRI, 2010) and ArcGIS Desktop 10.1 (ESRI, 2011) software with SRTM 90m digital elevation model data and GPS data points for the three Benedictine monasteries collected using a Garmin 78S handheld GPS. To create the viewsheds for the three abbeys, Shuttle radar topographic missions digital elevation data was downloaded from the DEM Explorer (<http://ws.csiss.gmu.edu/DEMExplorer/>) hosted by the Center for Spatial Information



Figure 3: Digital elevation model using a green light-to-dark color scheme. Lighter greens correspond to lower elevations. Photo: authors.

Science and Systems at George Mason University (Han et al., 2012).⁶ This dataset has an approximately 90-meter resolution at the equator. For this project, it was downloaded in the Universal Transverse Mercator zone 30 projection. The unit for this projection is the meter. This projected coordinate system was selected over a geographic coordinate system so that the horizontal units were the same as the elevation unit provided in the dataset. **(fig. 3)** The elevation in this area ranges from sea level up to over 100 meters above sea level; the highest elevations are in the northeast as indicated by the darker shading.

The next step in the analysis used the Viewshed tool in the Spatial Analyst toolbox of ArcMap 10.0 to create viewsheds for Saint-Pierre-de-Maillezais, Saint-Michel-en-Herm, and

⁶ W. Han, L. Di, P Zhao and Y. Shao. (2012) DEM Explorer: An online interoperable DEM data sharing and analysis system, *Environmental Modeling & Software*, 38, 101-107. <http://ws.csiss.gmu.edu/DEMExplorer/>. Accessed 14 December 2013.

Saint-Maixent-Luçon separately and then all together as one large viewshed. ArcMap creates the viewsheds as raster datasets. These rasters were then converted to polygon feature layers which allow finer control over their display. After creating these viewshed polygons, the different data were displayed in a variety of ways to enable a visual comparison of the viewsheds of the three Benedictine monasteries. The viewsheds were displayed separately and together using the SRTM DEM as a background, and again using the geo-referenced map by Claude Masse as a background.

Reviewing the digital elevation model of the area between Maillezais and the Atlantic Ocean shows that the three Benedictine monasteries are located in a generally low-lying area with very gentle relief. **(fig. 3)** This image also shows the large numbers of streams and rivers that pass through this area as they drain into the ocean. Before the building of some type of drainage system, the water in this low-relief area, especially during high tides, rather than remaining channelized, would spread out and create a large marshland. The drainage system not only drained the land, allowing for increased human occupation and use for pasture or agriculture, it dictated those who controlled the construction and maintenance of navigable water routes connecting the mainland to the ocean. These routes would not be dependent on the tide, nor would they have shifted over time, thus ensuring consistency in that control.

At an elevation of approximately 25 meters above sea level, Saint-Pierre-de-Maillezais was situated on the highest point on the western side of a limestone outcropping, measuring approximately 6 by 10 kilometers. It provided the Abbey with an unimpeded view in all directions and this elevated site made the abbey the dominant feature in the landscape. In earlier works, Mickey Abel, has discussed the importance of Maillezais' narthex/tower and western

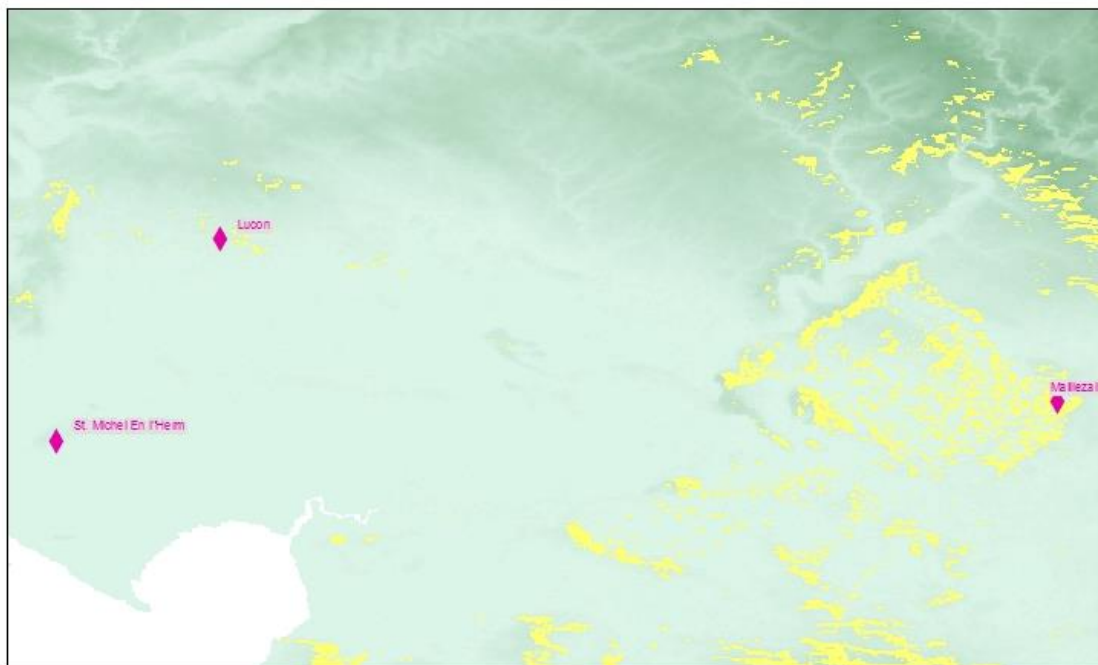


Figure 4: The yellow in the two images above indicate the areas visible from Maillezais Abbey. Photo: authors.

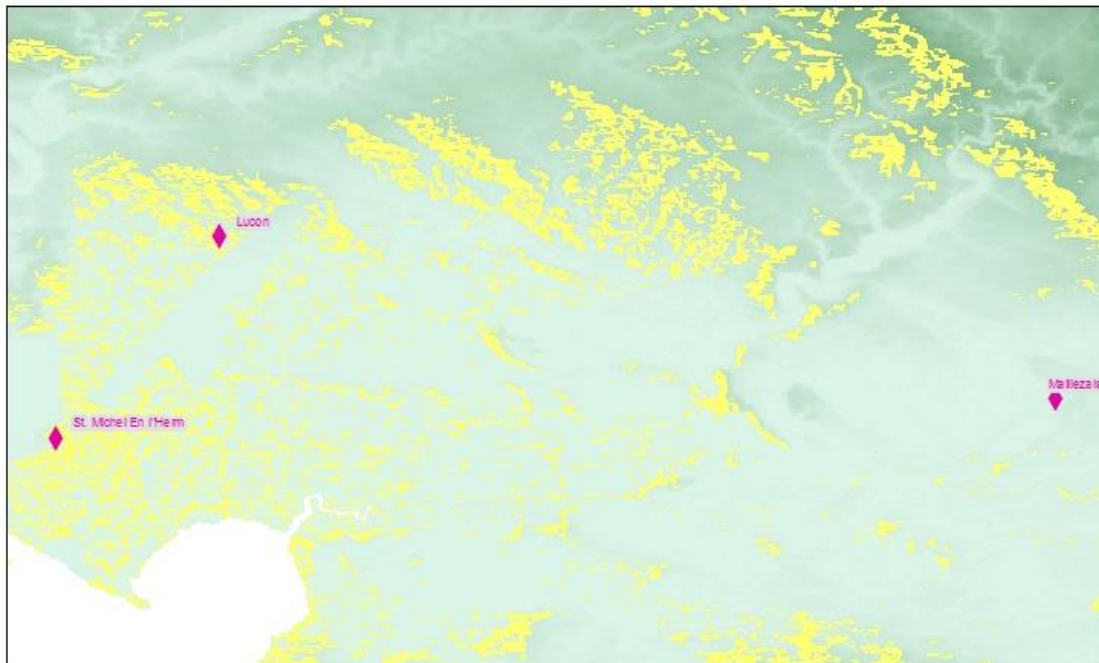


Figure 5: The yellow on the above two images indicates the areas visible from St. Michel En l'Herm. Photo: authors.



Figure 6: The yellow in the above two images shows the areas visible from Luçon. Photo: authors.

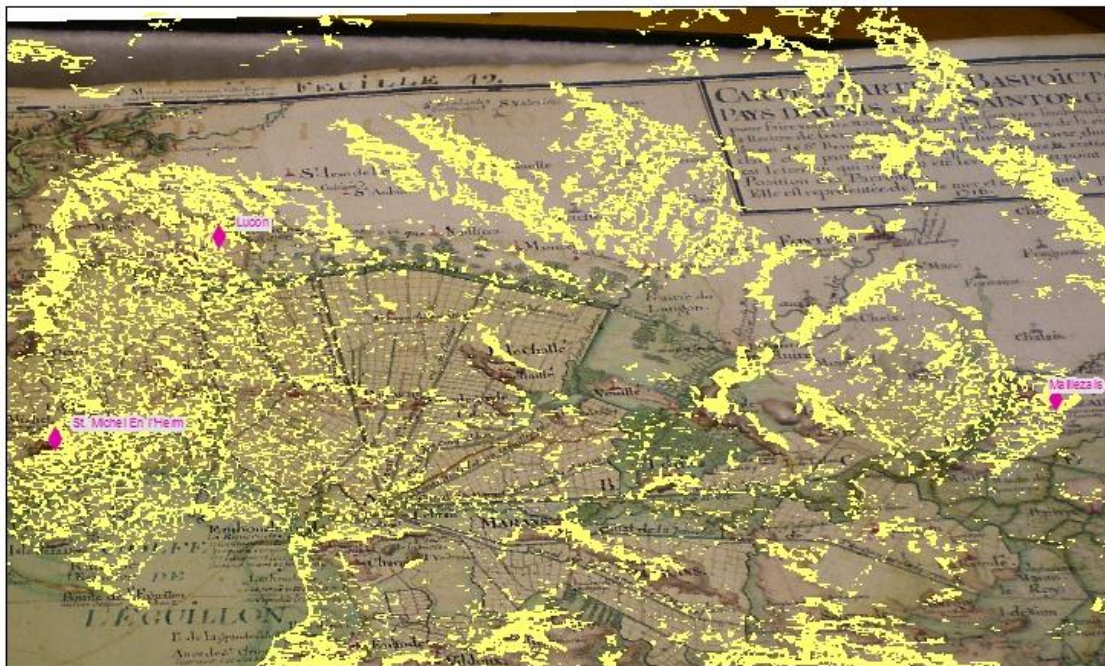


Figure 7: The yellow in the two above images shows the areas that are visible from at least one of the three Benedictine monasteries. Photo: authors.

façade in the geo-politics of the region.⁷ The evidence of what was, at least, a skeleton structure for the extensive canal system seen in Claude Masse's map (**fig. 1**) lends credence to the importance and visual impact of the Abbey's western façade. An examination of the viewshed for the abbey also suggests that there was a direct line of sight between it and the open ocean. (**fig. 4**) The viewshed overlaying the Claude Masse map shows that this line of sight followed water routes connecting Maillezais to the Atlantic.

While both Saint-Michel-en-Herm and Saint-Maixent-Luçon had sight lines to the Atlantic Ocean, also acting as guard outposts, it was the orientation of Saint-Pierre-de-Maillezais's view out to the open gulf that would have facilitated its function as a gate and controlled passage between the ocean and the mainland. (**fig. 4**) Thus while Maillezais' viewshed does not appear to have been as extensive as that of Saint-Michel-en-Herm, it was better situated to control access across the region.

The field program of data collection for early Middle Age landmarks and the geographic analysis of these landmarks not only validates the accuracy of Claude Masse's late seventeenth-century map, it supports the assumption that, the while area of the drainage system provided water routes connecting the ocean to the internal river systems of mainland France and could be seen as acting specifically as water routes, these early canals were meant to drain the land so that it could be converted to farmland and pasture. The field work which facilitated the identification of an early chronology for this hydraulic system with the addition of the viewsheds allowed us to state more definitively that this canal network would have increased both the political and economic power of the people as well as the organizations that controlled its creation and use.



⁷ Abel, "To Sea and be Seen," pp. 12-24.

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The Lady of the Marshes: Place, Identity, and Coudrette's Mélusine in Late-Medieval Poitou

By Shana Thompson, University of North Texas

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, much of Europe was in a state of turmoil. The plague of 1348 killed at least one third of the population; peasants revolted in France, England, and Flanders, and the Great Schism undermined religious stability — with one pope in Rome and another in Avignon from 1378 to 1415.¹ Meanwhile, the French monarchy was having difficulty producing male heirs for the first time since Hugh Capet (c. 940-996).² In 1316, both Louis X and his infant son died, leaving only a four-year-old daughter, Joan, to succeed.³ Only 12 years later, Charles IV died childless, ending the senior branch of the Capetian line. His closest male relative was King Edward III of England, the son of Charles' sister, Isabella, creating a pretext for the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), which would ravage much of the countryside of Western France for the next 116 years.⁴

¹ For a brief account focusing on France, see Colette Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late-Medieval France* (*Naissance de la nation France*), trans. Susan Ross Huston, ed. Fredric L. Cheyette, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 6-7. For a narrative primary source, see Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*, trans. & ed. Geoffrey Brereton, (London: Penguin, 1978), 111-113 (on the plague), 151-155 (on the Jacquerie, or French peasant's revolt), 201-210 (on the Great Schism), 211-230 (on the Peasant's Revolt in England), and 231-251 (on the uprising of Ghent). On the plague, see Norman F. Cantor, *In the Wake of the Plague: The Black Death and the World it Made* (New York: The Free Press, 2001). On the Great Schism, see Marzieh Gail, *The Three Popes: An Account of the Great Schism – When Rival Popes in Rome, Avignon, and Pisa Vied for the Rule of Christendom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969).

² Judith Bennet, *Medieval Europe: A Short History*, 11th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 258.

³ Joan's right to France was usurped by her uncle, but she became queen of Navarre. See Andrew W. Lewis, *Royal Succession in Capetian France: Studies on Familial Order and the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 189.

⁴ Christopher Allmand, *The Hundred Years War: England and France at War c. 1300-1450* (Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1988), 10, suggests that it is likely, however, that Edward was not interested in ruling France, but simply wanted to retain the traditional English holdings in France without doing homage to the French king. Many authors have written about the Hundred Years War. A good primary source is Jean Froissart's *Chronicles*. Other secondary sources discussing the war as a whole include Anne Curry, *The*

In response to this climate filled with disorder and death, there arose in France — according to Colette Beaune — a feeling of nationhood⁵ and “amour du pays” (love of country), and a corresponding national mythology to fill the vacuum of powerful ideologies, and to create a sense of stability.⁶ In particular, the French “nationalists” situated themselves as the most faithful kingdom within Latin Christendom, used symbols to represent the idea of France, such as the three lilies, the winged deer, and the Tree in the Garden of Paradise (representing French territory), and studied their origins in the laws of the Salian Franks.⁷

It was within this early-fifteenth-century context of identity-formation and the creation of national mythology and symbolism that the poetic romance, *Mélusine* or *Le Roman de Parthenay*, was written by Coudrette for Guillaume l’Archevêque, lord of Parthenay.⁸ L’Archevêque traced his ancestry to the Lusignans, an aristocratic family with landholdings in western Poitou, but whose cadet branches ruled in such far-ranging places as Cyprus, Jerusalem, and Armenia. This genealogical romance purports to be a historical account and describes the founding of the Lusignan family by the titular character, Mélusine, a watery, matriarchal serpent-fairy who builds many towns and castles in the region.⁹

Hundred Years War 1337–1453 (Oxford: Osprey, 2002); Robin Neillands, *The Hundred Years War*, Revised ed., (London: Routledge, 1990); and Jean Favier *La Guerre de Cent Ans*, (Paris: Fayard, 1980). For the war and its effects in Poitou, see R. Favreau, “De la guerre de Cent Ans aux Temps modernes,” in *Histoire du Poitou du Limousin et des pays charentais: Vendée, Aunis, Saintonge, Angoumois*, ed. Edmond-René Labande, *Histoire des Provinces* (Toulouse : Edouard Privat, 1976), esp. 203-216.

⁵ The use of the term “nation” is, of course, somewhat anachronistic, talk would be rather of “France” and of “country” (*pays*). For a discussion of terminology, see Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology*, 4-5.

⁶ Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology*, 5-8.

⁷ Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology*, 9.

⁸ There is some disagreement about the spelling of this author’s name; I have used Coudrette for consistency. For critical editions of this text, see Coudrette, *Le Roman de Melusine ou Histoire de Lusignan par Coudrette*, ed. Eleanor Roach (Paris: Klincksieck, 1982); Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition of Coudrette’s Mélusine or Le Roman de Parthenay*, *Medieval Studies* Vol. 20, ed. Matthew W. Morris (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2003); and Coudrette, *Le Roman de Mélusine*, ed. Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris: Flammarion, 1993).

⁹ Genealogical narratives are histories (true or fictional) that are structured around the lineage of a particular family; they became a common genre of historiography in France at about the time that agnatic succession became the norm, and represented a consciousness of the idea of one’s lineage and the importance of lineage in the creation and maintenance of power. See Gabrielle M. Spiegel, “Genealogy: Form and Function in Medieval Historical Narrative,” *History and Theory* 22, No. 1 (1983): 43-53. On the characterization of Mélusine as a genealogical

Scholars of literature have been the most prolific researchers of the Mélusine romance. They have tended to focus on the earlier prose version of the tale by Jean d'Arras (1393), and on comparative analysis between Mélusine and other analogues in literature, religion, and mythology.¹⁰ When viewed in its wider social context of late-medieval France and the Hundred Years' War, *Mélusine* has been interpreted as a celebratory heritage of the Lusignans, constructed in order to increase the power and prestige of their l'Archevêque descendants.¹¹

While not discounting this important work, my paper will expand the line of inquiry to show that *Mélusine*'s social function was broader. More than propaganda speaking to the powerful, male family, it is the basic premise of my thesis that *Mélusine* was a tale of identity, place, and the foundational role of women in the creation of dynastic, land-based legacies. Importantly, however, I argue that Mélusine represented a metaphor for the particular physical landscape of the Poitevin marshland through her repeated association with water and the imposition of man-made order upon the land. Moreover, parallels between Coudrette's

romance, see, among others, Laurence Harf-Lancner, "La Serpente et le sanglier: Les Manuscrits enluminés de deux romans français de Mélusine," *Le Moyen Âge: Bulletin mensuel d'histoire et de philologie* 101, No. 1 (1995): 66; Tania M. Colwell, "Patronage of the Poetic Mélusine Romance: Guillaume l'Archevêque's Confrontation with Dynastic Crisis," *Journal of Medieval History* 37, No. 2 (2011): 223-28; Christopher Lucken, "*Roman de Mélusine* ou *Histoire de Lusignan*? La Fable de l'histoire," in *Mélines continentales et insulaires: Actes du Colloque international tenu les 27 et 28 mars 1997 à l'Université Paris XII et au Collège des irlandais*, ed. Jeanne-Marien Boivin & Proinsias MacCana (Paris: Champion, 1999), 144.

¹⁰ Donald Maddox and Sara Strum-Maddox, eds., *Mélusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1996); Jeanne-Marien Boivin and Proinsias MacCana, eds., *Mélines Continentales et Insulaires: Actes du Colloque International Tenu les 27 et 28 Mars 1997 à l'Université Paris XII et au Collège des Irlandais* (Paris: Champion, 1999); Françoise Clier-Colombani, *La Fée Mélusine au Moyen Âge: Images, Mythes et Symbole* (Paris: Léopard d'Or, 1991); Arlette Bouloumié and Henri Béhar, eds., *Mélusine: Moderne et contemporaine*, Bibliothèque Mélusine (Paris: L'Age d'Homme, 2001); Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge : Morgane et Mélusine : la naissance des fées* (Chavannes-de-Bogis: Slatkine, 1984); Philippe Walter, *La Fée Mélusine: le Serpent et l'Oiseau* (Paris: Imago, 2008).

¹¹ Colwell, "Patronage of the Poetic Mélusine," 228-229; Colwell, "Reading Mélusine: romance manuscripts and their audiences c.1380-c.1530," (PhD diss, Australian National University, 2008), 118; Matthew W. Morris, "The Romance of Melusine and the Sacralization of Secular Power," *Postscript: Publication of the Philological Association of the Carolinas* 14 (1997): 63-65; Morris, "Jean d'Arras and Coudrette: Political Expediency and Censorship in Fifteenth-century France," *Postscript: Publication of the Philological Association of the Carolinas* 18 (2002): 35-44; Morris' introduction to *A Bilingual Edition of Coudrette's Mélusine*, 27. For a thorough examination of the reception of the manuscripts of both Coudrette's and Jean d'Arras' tales among the nobility of France and Flanders, see Colwell's dissertation, "Reading Mélusine."

characterization of Mélusine with certain local historical women suggest the author's intentional association of the fairy with these women. As such, Mélusine, as a strong female matriarch, embodied not only the history, but most particularly the physical landscape of the Vendée region of Poitou, in western France, with its predominance of marshy wetlands. This argument is supported primarily through an analysis of the visual imagery of two documents, emphasizing theoretical models arising from cultural geography, most particularly that of "landscape" and "place."

Coudrette was commissioned to write the poetic romance in 1400, shortly before the death of his patron, Guillaume l'Archevêque; the work was completed around 1401 for the patron's son and heir, Jean l'Archevêque.¹² It is generally agreed that Coudrette's poem was based on a prose version of the tale written by Jean d'Arras in 1393 for l'Archevêque's feudal overlord, Jean de France, Duke of Berry.¹³ Both seem to have been loosely inspired by the popular Poitevin legend of "Mère Lusine," the leader of a roving band of fairies, responsible for building the Roman edifices that dotted the countryside.¹⁴

The manuscripts of Coudrette's romance that survive today (twenty copies of the poetic version and fifteen of the prose) are known to have circulated widely in the French and Flemish courts.¹⁵ The legend became quite popular, and both the prose and poetic versions were

¹² Colwell, "Patronage of the Poetic Mélusine," 215, 225; Harf-Lancner, "La serpente et le sanglier," 65.

¹³ For critical editions of Jean d'Arras' prose *Mélusine*, see Jean d'Arras, *Mélusine, roman du XIV siècle publié pour la première fois d'après le manuscrit de la Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal avec les variantes de la Bibliothèque nationale*, ed. Louis Stouff (Dijon: Bernigaud et Privat, 1932); Jean d'Arras, *Mélusine ou La Noble Histoire de Lusignan, Nouvelle édition critique d'après le manuscrit de la bibliothèque de l'Arsenal avec les variantes de tous les manuscrits, présentation et notes*, ed. Jean-Jacques Vincensini (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2003); and Jean d'Arras, *A Bilingual Edition of Jean d'Arras's Melusine or L'Histoire de Lusignan*, ed. Matthew W. Morris, 2 vols., (New York: Edwin Mellen, 2007).

¹⁴ Morris, "Introduction," in *A Bilingual Edition of Coudrette's Mélusine*, 15.

¹⁵ Colwell, "Patronage of the Poetic Mélusine," 216.

translated into English, German, and Spanish.¹⁶ It is likely — particularly in consideration of the practice of oral readings at court events in late-medieval France — that the popularity of *Mélusine* would have facilitated a “trickling down” of these official versions of the story to the common people of the region, making Mélusine an important and enduring figure in the popular culture of the Vendée.¹⁷ Indeed, as Tania Colwell notes, the narratives in both of Coudrette’s and Jean d’Arras’ versions of the romance were meant to act as “expressions of social memory,” which “sought to ‘impose their consciousness of [a] social reality’ upon contemporary audiences.”¹⁸ In fact, the popular, oral version may continue to have some importance in the common images of Mélusine still seen throughout the Vendée.

Today, Mélusine permeates the popular culture of this region. One can drink Mélusine-brand beer and eat Mélusine-style baguettes. There are Rues Mélusine in the towns of Maillezais and Jazeneuil. In Vouvant, kitschy paintings of the fairy and her sons decorate the “Tour Mélusine,” the ruins of a Lusignan castle guarding the banks of the River Mère, and visitors of the tower can lunch at Café Mélusine nearby. Images of serpents, sirens, and hybrid creatures, which would arguably be associated with Mélusine by viewers familiar with the story, abound on the Romanesque churches of the region, such as the serpent-carved corbels at Saint-Martin in Esnandes, the *Siren Capital* at Saint-Pierre in Parthenay, and the winged, crowned, female

¹⁶ Coudrette’s romance was adapted into German in 1456 by the Swiss author, Thüring von Ringoltingen, and into Middle English, evidenced by the manuscript transcribed in Coudrette, *The Romans of Parthenay or of Lusignan*, trans. Walter W. Skeat (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1866). Jean d’Arras’ version was translated into Old Spanish in 1489, and printed in Toulouse by Johann Paris and Etienne Clebat. For the Spanish edition, see Ivy A. Corfis, “Empire and Romance: Historia de la Linda Melosina,” *Neophilologus* 82 (1998): 571. See also, Ana Pairet, “Métamorphoses de l’Imprimé: Traductions et Réception de *Mélusine*,” in *Écriture et Réécriture du Merveilleux Féerique: Autour de Mélusine*, ed. Matthew Morris and Jean-Jacques Vincensini (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012), 211-222. For a brief discussion of the dissemination of these manuscripts, see Morris’ introduction to *A Bilingual Edition*, 3-5.

¹⁷ On the oral reading of stories at courtly events, see Joyce Coleman, “Reading the Evidence in Text and Image: How History was Read in Late Medieval France,” in *Imagining the Past in France: History in Manuscript Painting, 1250-1500*, ed. Elizabeth Morrison and Anne D. Hedeman (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2010), 53-68.

¹⁸ Colwell, “Reading Mélusine,” 133; Spiegel “Genealogy,” 47, quoted in Colwell, “Reading Mélusine,” 133.

sphinxes on a capital at the parish church at Saint-Martin-des-Fontaines.¹⁹ Additionally, a nineteenth-century image of the fairy can be found in the Angevin castle in Niort, which the romance gives her credit for building. Similarly, a large, broken sculpture depicting her son, Geoffroy le Grand Dent, as a giant lies on the grounds of Maillezais Abbey. Throughout this region of Poitou, the sight of Mélusine and the sound of her name have become part of the milieu of daily life.

Of the twenty surviving manuscripts of Coudrette's work, only two French manuscripts are illustrated: MS français 12575 and MS français 24383. Created in the fifteenth century, both are now held in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.²⁰ These will be the focus of my analysis. It is possible that MS français 12575 was owned by Philippe de Clèves (1459-1528) at some point after its creation, based on the coat of arms painted below the table of contents,²¹ or, less likely, his aunt, Marie de Clèves, and her husband, Charles d'Orléans.²² Although many members of the French nobility are known to have owned copies of *Mélusine*, the exact details of the patronage and provenance of both of these manuscripts is unknown, seemingly making it difficult for literary scholars to determine the meaning and function of the text and imagery of these manuscripts for their original owners in their local contexts. Aspects of the decorative programs of these manuscripts do, however, facilitate a reading of the purposeful use of

¹⁹ For an examination of this imagery see Anne Blanc and Robert Blanc, *Monstres, Sirènes et Centaures: Symboles de l'Art Roman* (Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 2006); and Robert Maxwell, *The Art of Medieval Urbanism: Parthenay in Romanesque Aquitaine*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), esp. 92-96, 107-11.

²⁰ For an examination of the iconography of the text and images of Mélusine created in fifteenth century France, England, and Switzerland and their relation to and biblical and mythological narratives, see Françoise Clier-Colombani, *La Fée Mélusine au Moyen Age: Images, Mythes et Symboles* (Paris: Léopard d'Or, 1991). For an analysis of all extant manuscripts of Coudrette's text, see Appendix D, in Colwell, *Reading Mélusine*, 419-447.

²¹ See Colwell, "Reading Mélusine," 479; A. Korteweg, "La bibliothèque de Philippe de Clèves: inventaire et manuscrits parvenu jusqu'à nous," in *Entre la ville, la noblesse et l'état: Philippe de Clèves (1456-1528)*; and *Homme politique et bibliophile*, ed. J. Haemers, C. van Hoorebeeck, and H. Wijsman (Brepols: Turnhout, 2007), 191-92. For a list of known medieval owners of *Mélusine* manuscripts, see Colwell, "Reading Mélusine," 476-480.

²² Morris argues this in "Jean d'Arras and Coudrette," 38-39. For Colwell's argument as to why this is unlikely, see "Reading Mélusine," 479.

Mélusine as a representation of the Poitevin Marais, and suggest that the region and its unique topography held significance for the manuscripts' patrons.²³

MS français 12575 was made in the 1420s or '30s, and is the earliest surviving copy of Coudrette's narrative.²⁴ The text is written in gothic script with large, decorated capitals beginning certain sections, while the pages are ornamented with delicate, gold and multi-colored vegetal motifs in the margins. Sixteen images, attributed to the Master of Guillebert de Metz, illustrate the narrative. Throughout the manuscript, the illuminator employed geometric patterned backgrounds, and created highly stylized buildings and landscapes. Several of these present a confusing space that is difficult to read, appearing to be indoors and outdoors at the same time, and seeming to convey an ambiguous topography.

MS français 24383 was created in the second half of the fifteenth century using a quite different aesthetic, with little page ornamentation and fewer, but more-naturalistic illustrations. The anonymous artist worked in the modern, Renaissance style, employing linear and atmospheric perspective to create a clear sense of spatial depth, providing more detailed landscapes and architectural spaces.²⁵ Although it has fewer total images, Mélusine herself is depicted more often in this manuscript than in the earlier MS fr. 12575. As there are thirty images between these two manuscripts, it is beyond the scope of this project to examine all of them.²⁶ The majority of these images — nineteen — do, I will argue, clearly illustrate ideas of place, identity, and the significance of women in shaping the landscape.²⁷

²³ An explanation of this terminology (Poitevin Marias, Vendée, etc), can be found further along in this paper.

²⁴ Coudrette, *Mélusine*, Ms. français 12575, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

²⁵ Coudrette, *Mélusine*, Ms. français 24383, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

²⁶ For a full list of images contained in these two manuscripts, see Appendix A.

²⁷ Not all of these images, however, will relate directly to the argument that I put forth here regarding Mélusine's role as a symbol of identity; for a brief discussion of images more tangentially related to my argument, see Appendix B.

Before continuing, a short summary of the tale will be helpful. One day, a young man named Raymondin, went out boar hunting with his father's cousin, Aymeri, Count of Poitiers. In a tragic accident, he killed his uncle instead of the boar.²⁸ In a haze of despair, he wanders through the forest, where he comes upon three beautiful ladies at The Fountain of Soif Jolie.²⁹ One of them, Mélusine, calls out to him. She claims to be "an instrument of God," as she knows his name, what has transpired, and what he has to do given the tragic situation.³⁰ She persuades Raymondin to marry her, but as a condition of their marriage, he must agree never to seek her out on Saturdays.³¹

A key to understanding this set of events is the back-story of Mélusine's own lineage.³² Mélusine is a fairy princess, the daughter of King Helinas of Albany (Scotland), and the fairy, Prèsine. In a mode similar to that of Raymondin and Mélusine's marriage, Helinas breaks a promise to his wife, causing Prèsine to flee with her daughters to Avalon. Mélusine and her sisters decide to punish their father for his transgression by locking him in a mountain, for which action Prèsine, in turn, punishes each of her daughters with a curse.³³ Mélusine's curse stipulates that she will become a serpent on Saturdays, and that in order for her to be able to live as a mortal on the other six days, her husband must not discover her serpent form or tell anyone else of it.

²⁸ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, lines 262-425; all English and Middle French quotations in this paper come from this edition.

²⁹ Literally, "pretty thirst," this could also be translated as "pretty desire;" Coudrette *A Bilingual Edition*, 427-499. I was, unfortunately, unable to visit Lusignan while in France, so I am unsure whether there is a spring or fountain located there, but springs are quite common in the region, as will be discussed further below.

³⁰ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 503-645.

³¹ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 650-667.

³² Geoffroy discovers his mother's lineage and curse in an inscription written by Prèsine within the giant-guarded tomb of Helinas in Northumberland (Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 4910 – 5043)

³³ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 4971-5041.

Living within the parameters of this curse, and locking herself in her room on Saturdays to avoid Raymondin, Mélusine bears ten sons: Urien, Eudes, Guion, Antoine, Renaud, Geoffroy le Grand Dent, Fromont, Horrible, Thierry, and finally, Raymonnet. All but Thierry, from whom Guillaume l'Archevêque, the patron of the text, claimed to descend, and Raymonnet, the youngest, have some sort of physical deformity, suggesting their mother's hybrid lineage. Significantly, Thierry is named the heir of castle Lusignan and the local, Poitevin territory, according to Mélusine's instructions, despite being the second-youngest son. As a baby for much of the story, he is not a major figure in the narrative. There is no hint in the text as to why her youngest sons lack the deformities of their siblings, but it could suggest the patron's interest in descending from a "normal" human as well as a fairy.

Several of these sons become knights and perform great feats of chivalry in foreign lands,³⁴ with the exception of Fromont, who becomes a monk at the important, local abbey of Maillezais.³⁵ Unfortunately, his brother, Geoffroy le Grand Dent, believes that the monks of Maillezais must have bewitched Fromont to make him want to join the monastery. In a fit of terrible anger, Geoffroy burns down Maillezais with all of the monks inside, including his brother, though he immediately repents his horrible crime.³⁶

³⁴ As this paper is focused on the Poitevin aspects of the tale and its illuminations, most of the stories of Mélusine's sons will not be examined here; however, certain scenes from these tales which relate to the expansion of empire are discussed in Appendix A.

³⁵ Maillezais Abbey was founded in Western France in the tenth century by Emma, Countess of Blois (950-1005), and her husband, William IV, Duke of Aquitaine (937-994); the only surviving document of its foundation is the chronicle written by Peter of Maillezais in 1067 (Petrus Malleacensis, *De antiquitate et commutatione in melius Malleacensis insulae et translatione corporis sancti Rogomeri* in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 146, columns 1247-1272C). For an introduction to the monastery and its history, see the proceedings of the 2002 multidisciplinary colloquium held in Poitiers, Cecile Treffort & Matthias Tranchant, eds., *L'Abbaye de Maillezais: Des moins du marais aux soldats Huguenots* (Rennes, 2005).

³⁶ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 3429-3652, Geoffroy does later redeem himself by rebuilding the monastery, and is later buried there, 3543-3634, 5550-64, 5733-40, 6640-47.

After significant successes, the family's fortunes change for the worse as a result of the visit of Raymondin's brother, Bertrand, Count of Forez, to Castle Lusignan. He convinces Raymondin that Mélusine's Saturday disappearances indicate a lack of fidelity.³⁷ Thus spurred to spy on her through the keyhole, he discovers Mélusine in the bath with the long tail of a serpent.³⁸ In "seeking her out on a Saturday," Raymondin broke his promise to his wife, and set in motion a series of unfortunate events.

Significantly, one of the events that takes place not long after Raymondin's transgressive discovery is Geoffroy's murder of his brother, Fromont, and destruction of Maillezais Abbey. When Raymondin learns of his son's horrible crime, he publicly blames Mélusine's serpent-nature. Due to the stipulations of the curse that changed her into a serpent, Mélusine is then forced to leave her husband forever, but swears to watch over Castle Lusignan in perpetuity, returning secretly by night to nurse her infant sons, Thierry and Raimonnet.³⁹

As a genealogical romance, Coudrette's tale employs medieval notions of time and truth, by situating the present in dialogue with the past.⁴⁰ The story traces the family tree of the Lusignans, from Mélusine through multiple generations and seeks to define the family as powerful and violent, but tied to Christian spirituality.⁴¹ As such, the text is deeply concerned with notions of family identity. What is interesting, however, is that the author and illustrators define the identity of the family in terms of the Poitevin marshland, and moreover, define the identity of this marshland by closely intertwining its history, geography, and current rulers with the mystical builder, Mélusine.

³⁷ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 2981-2950

³⁸ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 3051-3074.

³⁹ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 3705-4205, 4365-4391, 4051-4353.

⁴⁰ Maxwell, *Medieval Urbanism*, 186.

⁴¹ Morris, "Sacralization," 63-65; and "Introduction" in *A Bilingual Edition*, 6-11. Colwell, however, argues in "Reading Mélusine," 193-207, that Mélusine's Christianization is more problematized in Coudrette's narrative than in the earlier version by Jean d'Arras.

As mentioned previously, concepts coming out of the discipline of cultural geography will illuminate the ways in which the text and images functioned in tandem within the manuscripts' historical and geographical context: their place. Place, as I am employing it, is understood as "a distinctive (and bounded) location" that is "created through acts of naming," as opposed to space, a more general, abstracted area, lacking a name and identity from the perspective of a particular viewer.⁴² As Edward Casey argues, places are not just locations; they are made up of people, ideas, and memories.⁴³ The human element is, therefore, as critical in defining place as its location and topography. "Place" figures prominently in the romance, not only in the genealogical relationships of the family, but, importantly, in how these places are imagined and illustrated. Throughout the text, we see that locations are named and ruled; structures are built and destroyed. The persistent use of place names not only creates a sense of verity in the narrative, it encourages the reader to create a mental "list map," or "associative diagram" relating the named places, as he or she moves through the text.⁴⁴ And although folktales resembling this legend existed in several parts of Europe, details added by the late-

⁴² Phil Hubbard, "Space/Place," in *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*, ed. David Atkinson, et al. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2005), 41-42.

⁴³ Edward S. Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in *Senses of Place*, Steven Feld & Keith Basso, eds. (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1997), 24-25. See also, Yi Fu Tuan's writings, particularly, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). For an application of this theory to medieval architecture, literature, urban spaces, and other topics, see Barbara Hanawalt, et al., eds., *Medieval Practices of Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); and Clare A. Lees, and Gillian R. Overing, eds., *A Place to Believe in: Locating Medieval Landscapes* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

⁴⁴ In the famous type of medieval map, the T-O map, the world was divided into sections: Europe, Asia, and Africa. List maps, a subgenre of the T-O map, functioned as sort of associative diagrams, listing places, such as cities, within their respective continents. For more on this, see Evelyn Edson, *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed Their World*, The British Library Studies in Map History, Vol. 1 (London: British Library Board, 1998); and J. B. Harley, and David Woodward, eds., *The History of Cartography, Vol. I: Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

medieval authors and illuminators situate these events within the contexts of Poitou, “emplacing” them in its marshy topography.⁴⁵

The underlying key to this reading lies in that, in medieval Europe, possession of land bestowed equally both power and identity.⁴⁶ Scholars of French history have shown that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when a sense of national identity was growing in France,⁴⁷ parts of Aquitaine and Poitou repeatedly switched hands between the French and English kings as each gained and lost ground in the Hundred Years’ War (1337 – 1453); armies marched back and forth over their fields, altering both the physical and political landscapes.⁴⁸ The patron of the manuscripts, Guillaume l’Archevêque, lord of Parthenay, was himself wrapped up in this change, fighting at one time as a loyal vassal of Edward, the Black Prince, and later as a loyal vassal of Jean de France, Duke of Berry.⁴⁹ When the region changed hands via treaty, his allegiance was expected to change as well. As a microcosm of the whole, we can gain from l’Archevêque’s example a sense of the implications resulting from a shifting borders and lack of consistent power relationships, which caused the notions of place and identity in late-medieval Poitou to be

⁴⁵ For more on *Mélusine*’s connections to other fairy legends, see Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les Fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Mélusine. La Naissance des fées* (Paris: Champion, 1984), 57, which includes a translation of the first written account of the Poitevin legend by court scholar and translator; and Pierre Bersuire, “Prologue,” in *Reductorium morale*, Book 14 (Paris: Claude Chevallon, 1521). See also Jeanne-Marien Boivin and Proinsias MacCana, eds. *Mélusines continentales et insulaires: Actes du Colloque international tenu les 27 et 28 mars 1997 à l’Université Paris XII et au Collège des irlandais* (Paris: Champion, 1999); Clier-Colombani, *La Fée Mélusine*, 91-150; Jacques Le Goff, “Mélusina: Mother and Pioneer,” in *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages (Pour un autre Moyen Âge: Temps, travail et culture en Occident, 18 essais)*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 205-222; and Gillian M. E. Alban, *Melusine the Serpent Goddess in A. S. Byatt’s Possession and in Mythology* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), among others.

⁴⁶ Georges Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 134-48; Howard Kaminsky, “Estate, Nobility, and the Exhibition of Estate in the Later Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 68, No. 3 (1993): 698.

⁴⁷ For an introduction to the beginnings of a national identity in France, see Elizabeth Morrison & Anne D. Hedeman, “Introduction,” in *Imagining the Past in France*, 2. For a more detailed analysis, see Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology*.

⁴⁸ Favreau, “De la guerre,” 203-216. Indeed, as Maxwell, *Medieval Urbanism*, 43-44, shows, Poitou had not maintained steady allegiance for much of its history, as its lords switched allegiance frequently between the Dukes of Aquitaine and Counts of Anjou in the eleventh century, and between the Plantagenets and Capetians in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

⁴⁹ Colwell, “Patronage of the poetic,” 218-220.

confused and in constant a state of flux. I would argue that one of the key issues addressed in the text and images of *Mélusine* is the notion of defining the Poitevin marshlands and the Poitevins themselves through reference to the region's specific geography and history.

The historic county of Poitou, which now makes up part of the administrative region of Poitou-Charentes, lies along the Atlantic coast of France. It was once a northern county of the Duchy of Aquitaine, whose dukes were also the Counts of Poitou until the first half of the thirteenth century, when Poitou became an independent county.⁵⁰ The eastern part of the province — Haut Poitou — is elevated and rocky, and within it lies the capital city of Poitiers. The land falls off steeply towards Bas Poitou, or the Vendée, where lie many tilled fields, the forest of Mervent, and most prominently, the Poitevin Marais (or marsh) leading to the rocky coastline.

In this low country, springs bubble out from the rocks, and many rivers flow through the region down to the sea. Windmills dot fields crisscrossed by canals, marking that much of the Vendée was once submerged as part of the ancient Gulf of Picton, whose coasts extended nearly 25 miles inland from the present shore.⁵¹ Before the tenth century, most of western Poitou, where it was not submerged under the gulf, was a sparsely populated wilderness.⁵² Benedictine monks at Maillezais Abbey played a major role in draining the gulf in the tenth and eleventh centuries, moving the coastline many miles westward through a complicated system of canals, levies, locks, and dykes.⁵³ Cistercian monks (in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) and Netherlandish

⁵⁰ R. Favreau, "Du temps des ducs au temps du roi," in *Histoire du Poitou*, 186.

⁵¹ Yannis Suire, "Les Marais Avant les Dessèchements Modernes, XVIe – Début de XVIIe Siècle," in *L'Abbaye de Maillezais: Des moins du marais aux soldats Huguenots*, ed. Cecile Treffort & Matthias Tranchant (Rennes, France: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005), 381-400; and Mickey Abel, "To Sea and Be Seen: Reconstruction of the Strategic Building Program at Maillezais Abbey," *AVISTA Forum Journal* 20, No. 1 (2010): 12. The Abbey of Maillezais (see map: Figure 7) was once on an island near the coast.

⁵² Maxwell, *Medieval Urbanism*, 17, 38-39.

⁵³ Abel, "To Sea and Be Seen," 12, 20.

engineers (in the seventeenth century) are also well-known for their work in draining the remaining marshes and moving the coastline further west to its current location, greatly expanding the quantity of arable land.⁵⁴ The draining of the gulf and the marshes and the related water infrastructure led to important economic gains for the region, both through the creation of farmland, resulting in increased food production, and in the development of fish ponds, water mills for grinding grain, and the production of salt.⁵⁵ Conversely, the remaining marshes were quite valuable in times of conflict (such as the Hundred Years' War) as they created a natural defensive barrier.⁵⁶ Because of this history, the land in lower Poitou is uniquely intermingled with both water and the human activity involved in water's removal.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, during the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Dukes of Aquitaine faced significant obstacles to their control of the region in the form of incursions by the Counts of Anjou, insurgency among their vassals, and Norse invasions from the coast.⁵⁸ This led to an explosion of building throughout Poitou in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, and a related deforestation of the region, encouraged by the economic development created by the draining of the marsh. Many towns and churches were built within a relatively short period of time.⁵⁹ Important strategic fortifications at Lusignan, Niort, and Melle, all of which were attributed to Mélusine by Coudrette,⁶⁰ were established before 950, and towns developed around such castles

⁵⁴ On the Cistercians, see Edmond René Labande, "Dans l'Empire Plantagenet," in *Histoire du Poitou*, 143-144; and Abel, "To Sea and Be Seen," 21, n. 14. On the work of Netherlandish engineers, see J. Tarade, "Les Temps des Troubles (1560-1660)," in *Histoire du Poitou*, 262-264.

⁵⁵ Abel, "To Sea and Be Seen," 20.

⁵⁶ Suire discusses this in relation to the French Wars of Religion in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, "Les Marais," 206-207.

⁵⁷ Suire, "Les Marais," 204 also notes the region's continued "caractère aquatique" due to the pervasive humidity, "muddy furrows," (my translation), natural ditches, and sinkholes.

⁵⁸ Maxwell, *Medieval Urbanism*, 38-39.

⁵⁹ Maxwell, *Medieval Urbanism*, 39-40. Roland Sanfaçon, *Défrichements, Peuplement et Institutions Seigneuriales en Haut-Poitou du Xe au XIIIe Siècle* (Quebec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1967), Appendix VI, indicates that fifty-five towns and villages were established in Haut Poitou alone between the years 988 and 1200.

⁶⁰ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 1305-1387 (Lusignan), 1439-1440 (Niort), 1394 (Melle).

and around rural monasteries, such as Maillezais and Saint-Maixent (the latter is also attributed to Mélusine), as settlers flocked to the region.⁶¹ In fact, the clearing of forests and construction of urban spaces came to be intertwined with, as Maxwell puts it, the “expression of personal prestige and rank in the social order” for lesser nobles, such as the lords of Parthenay and Lusignan.⁶² Thus, over the course of about 250 years, the people of Poitou transformed the landscape from a wild, and largely uninhabited region surrounding a large body of water to a relatively urbanized and prosperous place, dotted by many villages and churches, each within, at most, a day’s walk of each other. Mélusine’s magical building campaign, which, significantly, takes place almost entirely within Poitou, and is focused on the wet, western landscape, mimics the relatively rapid civilization of this once-wild land.⁶³

Importantly, the ancient gulf and the navigable rivers that drained into it (namely, the Sèvre Niortaise, and the Vendée) represented significant routes of transportation and trade in the region.⁶⁴ Thus control over the water and people moving along it was key to the rulers of the region for both economic and defensive reasons,⁶⁵ such that political power was defined as much by the control of water as by the control of the land. This is exemplified by the numerous defensive structures located along the major waterways in the region. For example, Lusignan castles at Vouvant and Mervent, attributed to Mélusine in the story, stand above the River

⁶¹ Maxwell, *Medieval Urbanism*, 39; Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 1396-1398.

⁶² Maxwell, *Medieval Urbanism*, 49.

⁶³ See Figure 7. Yannis Suire, “Les Marais,” 205, argues that Mélusine is also credited with the actual draining of the gulf. Unfortunately, he does not cite his source, and I have been unable to confirm this in other texts.

⁶⁴ Abel, “To Sea and Be Seen,” 12; Labande, “Essor et Déceptions des Temps Féodaux,” in *Histoire du Poitou*, 116.

⁶⁵ The importance of control over the water can also be seen at the Angevin castle which guards the Sèvre and several canals in Niort — also attributed to Mélusine (Coudrette, 2830-2832) — and in the defensive relocation of Maillezais Abbey to a point which guarded the entrance to the Sèvre Niortaise and the Autise. See Abel, “To See and Be Seen,” 20; and Mickey Abel, “Emma of Blois as Arbiter of Peace and the Politics of Patronage” in *Reassessing the Roles of Women as Makers of Medieval Art and Architecture*, Vol. II, ed. Therese Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 841.

Mère.⁶⁶ Vouvant is the highest point in the region, and “Mélusine Tower,” the Lusignan castle, is well situated, standing atop a hill with clear views of the river and the surrounding countryside below. (**fig. 1**) Similarly, Chateau Mervent (**fig. 2**) was built at the edge of a cliff, which towers over the Mère and the surrounding forest below.⁶⁷ These castles provided the lords of Lusignan with significant power over their domain, overlooking the land and controlling the movement of people on the river ways.



Figure 1 View of the River Mère from “Mélusine Tower.”13th-century Lusignan stronghold in Vouvant. Photo: Owen Wilson Chavez.

⁶⁶ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 1395.

⁶⁷ The name of the town and the chateau, Mervent (which could signify “sea wind”), is another indication the region’s watery history, and ties rather conveniently to Mélusine, as a watery serpent who flies through the air.

This intermingling of water, land, and power can be read in the text and imagery of these two *Mélusine* manuscripts. For instance, though Mélusine is described as a serpent, she is associated with water from her first introduction in Coudrette's version of the tale, when Raymondin comes upon her at a fountain.⁶⁸ (**fig. 3**) In his illustration of this scene, the artist of MS fr. 24383 depicted the fairy as a noblewoman, sitting with her two sisters in a wide and mostly-empty landscape. Prominently displayed beside them, life-giving water springs from the face of a cliff into the fountain, spilling out to become a little stream. Such springs are quite common in the Vendée, and can still be found in places such as Saint-Martin-des-Fontaines,



Figure 2 Castle Mervent: Late 12th or early 13th century Lusignan fortress. Photo: Owen Wilson Chavez.

⁶⁸ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 427-499.

L'Hermenault, and Nieul-sur-l'Autise. Notably, it is Mélusine who sits closest to both the fountain and the stream, and her dress — the only article of clothing in the picture to be rendered with deep folds — nearly touches it. The wavering pattern of creases in her skirt, bordered in foamy white ermine, mimics the ripples of water, while the golden-brown color of her dress replicates that of the hilly topography of the land, connecting Mélusine to the flowing water and the surrounding landscape of Poitou. Additionally, as Maxwell argues, there may be precedents in the artwork of the region for the depiction of the landscape and its claiming by human effort in



Figure 3 *Raymondin Passes the Fountain of Thirst and is Greeted by Mélusine* (MS fr. 24383 fol. 5v), Coudrette, *Mélusine*, Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105258709/f14.image.r=melusine>.

the sculptural decoration of Romanesque Poitevin churches, such as an image of a knight riding into foliage on a tomb slab from Javarzay, now located in the Musée du Donjon at Niort,⁶⁹ and the vegetal decoration of Maillezais Abbey.⁷⁰



Figure 4 *Raymondin Discovers Mélusine's Secret* (MS fr. 24383 fol. 19). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105258709/f41.image.r=melusine>.

The visual relationship between Mélusine and water is reinforced in a later illustration where Raymondin spies her in her true form in the bath.⁷¹ (**fig. 4**) Here she is shown enclosed in

⁶⁹ Maxwell, *Medieval Urbanism*, 200-201.

⁷⁰ See Laura Lee Brott's article in this volume, "Reading Between the Lions: A Surviving Capital at Maillezais Abbey."

⁷¹ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 3051-3074.

a small, blue-gray room, where she bathes in a round, wooden tub.⁷² Her curling, green and yellow tail fades to a pale, watery blue before joining with her torso, making it appear almost as if her body were made of the same substance as her bath. Rather than simply being in or near the water, she appears to be a part of it.



Figure 5 *Mélusine Nurses Thierry*, (MS fr.12575, fol. 89), Coudrette, *Mélusine*. Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Photo: : After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10525469d/f183.image.r=melusine>.

⁷² Interestingly, this image seems to have been censored by a later owner, who scraped off the paint that illustrated her breasts and navel; in doing so he or she has — deliberately or not — removed the characteristics that make Mélusine a woman and a mother, and indicate her natural birth.

Mélusine's association with water in the text is so strong that it seems to have inspired the illuminator of MS fr.12575 to depict her with the bifurcated tail of a fish, rather than that of a serpent, in the image of her nightly return to nurse her infant sons.⁷³ (fig. 5) Here, her tender, maternal gesture is juxtaposed with her otherworldly, siren's form, emphasizing both aspects of



Figure 6 *Raymondin and Bertrand of Poitiers, Raymondin Defines his Territory*, (MS fr. 24383 fol.7). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105258709/f17.image.r=melusine>.

⁷³ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 4051-4053.

her nature. In showing her as half-fish rather than half-serpent, this image links both of these concepts with the water makes up much of the Vendée's landscape.

Mélusine is also strongly tied to the land, however, particularly to the civilization of the wilderness. For example, in the image of Raymondin's first encounter with his fairy wife at the fountain, (**fig. 3**) Françoise Clier-Colombani noted that the emptiness of the landscape suggests that the wilderness is waiting to be tamed by Mélusine.⁷⁴ Moreover, Coudrette's text tells us that after this meeting, Raymondin is able to acquire land near the fountain by following her instructions, as seen in Figure 6. On the left side of the image, Raymondin adheres to Mélusine's plan by asking his cousin, Bertrand, the new Count of Poitiers, to give him the amount of land that he could enclose within strips of the deer-hide to which he gestures with his left hand. On the right, the walls of Poitiers surround the scene of boundary marking, blurring the physical and metaphorical boundaries of the city of Poitiers and the future Lusignan holdings, while visually moving the reader forward to the time when Mélusine builds the stronghold and town of Lusignan.

The space is significantly contracted, as Lusignan is, in reality, nearly seventeen miles away from Poitiers.

Significantly, Mélusine's help and instruction are instrumental in Raymondin's acquisition of land and power. Not only does her advice win him the rights to his own land, which, as the youngest son, he would not have been in line to inherit, but it is she who builds their castle and the town of Lusignan, and the many landmarks and strongholds in the region (see **fig. 7** and also Table 1 in Appendix C). So while Raymondin claims the power and rulership over

⁷⁴ Clier-Colombani, *La Fée Mélusine au Moyen Age*, 30.

this domain, it is Mélusine who takes the foundational role in shaping the Poitevin landscape, both metaphorically and topographically.

These images, especially the depiction of the fairies at the fountain, (**fig. 3**) are illustrative of the connection of the Mélusine legend with the Mère Lusine, or Mère Lugine (consort of the Celtic fire god, Lug) of Poitou's ancient past, as noted by Louis Charpentier and Matthew Morris.⁷⁵ The identification of a magical female with a particular fountain, as described in the narrative and depicted here, reflects the ancient Gaulish tradition of regional, nature goddesses, who often appeared in threes, like the three fairies in the illumination.⁷⁶ Such



⁷⁵ Louis Charpentier, *Les Géants et le Mystère des Origines* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1969), 65; and Morris, "Sacralization," 62-63.

⁷⁶ Walter, *Le Serpent et l'Oïsea*, 184, also notes this connection to the Celtic triple goddess.

Figure 7 Map of Mélusine's foundations in Poitou. Photo: Adapted from Edmond-René Labande, ed., *Histoire du Poitou*.

goddesses were often connected with certain rivers or springs and served as “ancestral mothers” for their people.⁷⁷ In parts of Germany and Britain, they were often simply called “Mother.”⁷⁸ In light of this, the name of the river that flows through the Forest of Mervent, the Mère (or mother) is significant, indicating an arguable connection between the legends from which Mélusine originated and an important place in the Poitevin landscape. Moreover, according to Pronsias MacCana, these Gaulish divinities served to represent a particular place and its sovereignty, as well as the fecundity of its land and people.⁷⁹ While the society and religion of fifteenth-century Poitou were vastly different from those of the fifth century, when shrines to pagan goddesses were still worshipped in rural France,⁸⁰ the belief in fairies, like Mélusine, which persisted in the late Middle Ages, originates in the mythology of that earlier age.⁸¹ Additionally, the connection of springs and fountains with the spiritual was maintained in Christian belief, as exemplified by the miracle of Clothilde described below.⁸² I argue, therefore, that associations of Mélusine, in her various forms, with the notions of the fecundity and sovereignty of the land and, especially, with the flowing water, would have persisted in the minds and oral traditions of its local people,

⁷⁷ Lisa M. Bitel, *Landscape with Two Saints: How Genovefa of Paris and Brigit of Kildare Built Christianity in Barbarian Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 27-8; and Pronsias MacCana, *Celtic Mythology* (London: Hamlyn, 1970), 49-50.

⁷⁸ Bitel, *Landscape with Two Saints*, 27.

⁷⁹ MacCana, *Celtic Mythology*, 49-50.

⁸⁰ Bitel, *Landscape with Two Saints*, 53.

⁸¹ Morris, “Sacralization,” 64-65; and Walter, *Le Serpent et l'Oisea*, 182-186.

⁸² Bitel, *Landscape with Two Saints*, 47, 68, 182, 207-10, also describes several events in which springs are involved in Christian miracles ranging from the early Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. Additionally, see Dieter Gerten, “How Water Transcends Religions and Epochs: Hydrolaty in Early European Religions and Christian Syncretism,” in *A History of Water Series II, Vol. 1: Ideas of Water from Ancient Societies to the Modern World*, ed. Terje Tvedt & Terje Oestigaard (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 323-342, esp. 333.

allowing the fairy to serve as an embodiment of place, much as the goddesses of ancient Gaul once did.

Mélusine also reflects the topography of the Vendée where the intermingling of land and water in a fuzzy borderland between the ocean to the west and the dry land to the east marked this region as “liminal.” Liminal space is a borderland, literally, a threshold, neither here nor there.⁸³ The liminality of the Poitevin Marais is visualized in a seventeenth-century map of the region created by Claude Masse for Louis XIV,⁸⁴ where bright green and yellow represent the fertile land of the drained marshes which lay between the dryer high grounds further inland (in white) and the ocean to the west. The tiny gridlines that cover this land indicate its entwinement with water, as they depict the myriad canals used to drain and irrigate the soil.

Liminal figures are described by Victor Turner as “betwixt-and-between,” they are “both this *and* that,” they “are often composites or monsters.”⁸⁵ Additionally, liminal figures are often separated from their usual place in society, or “structurally invisible” to the group, and may have to undergo “humbling and submission to ordeal.”⁸⁶ Mélusine’s spiritual nature is evidenced by her function as a liminal figure: she is neither and both human and beast; she is a magical figure in the physical realm, and she is subjected to punishment through a curse that twice separates her from her family. In constructing her as a liminal figure, the author and illustrators employ Mélusine’s character to tie the Lusignan family to the spiritual realm, raising their prestige and

⁸³ Victor Turner, “Variations on a Theme of Liminality,” in *Secular Ritual*, ed. Sally Falk Moore & Barbara G. Myerhoff (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977), 36-52.

⁸⁴ On the accuracy of this map, see Mickey Abel’s, “Defining a New Coastline: G.I.S. Reconstruction of Maillezais Abbey’s Hydraulic Drainage Program and the Coastline it Created” in this volume. For more on Claude Masse, see Yannis Suire, *et al.*, *La Côte et les Marais du Bas-Poitou vers 1700: Cartes et Mémoires de Claude Masse, Ingénieur du Roi* (La Roche-sur-Yon, France: Centre Vendéen de Recherches Historiques, 2011).

⁸⁵ Turner, “Liminality,” 37-38.

⁸⁶ Turner, “Liminality,” 36-37, 39.

the power of the dynasty.⁸⁷ I would argue, however, that her liminal status also allows her to stand as a quasi-spiritual symbol of this marshy borderland within Poitou.

Cultural anthropologists have demonstrated that liminality is a key idea for understanding medieval, Christian spirituality.⁸⁸ As Barbara Newman noted, “enclosure, the marking and sealing of boundaries, was... a vital symbolic practice in religious life,” making liminality a “rich metaphor” for medieval religious practice.⁸⁹ In MS fr. 12575, the Master of Guillaume de Metz depicted Mélusine’s liminality in two images. After she transforms into a dragon, in both text and image, she is separated from her home, her family, and the human world, and yet continues to play a part in it. In her dragon form (**fig. 8**), with a green, long-necked and bat-winged body, a bestial face, and a long, blue tail, she hovers in a sky of silver-leaf, visually divided from the physical world of land, home, and family by the dark outlines that delineate these worldly spaces and through the differences in color and media that convey the transitionally liminal space separating land and sky.

Similarly, “betwixt and between,” she returns as a siren to nurse her sons (**fig. 5**), floating above the floor in a room within the castle that seems transformed into an otherworldly space due to the confusing overlapping of furniture and columns, and the depiction of inner and outer walls within the same image. Though she is returned, she does not seem to be entirely in the rational, physical world, but rather, between the physical and spiritual realms. It is telling that both artists chose to depict the transformed Mélusine’s nightly visits to nurse her infant sons,

⁸⁷ Morris, “Sacralization,” 64. On sacral kingship and rights to the land in Celtic cultures, from which Poitevin culture is, in part, derived, see MacCana, *Celtic Mythology*, 117-121, especially 120, on the marriage of the king to the goddess who personifies the land. There are also parallels in this need to find a sacred origin in monastic foundation myths, as described by Amy Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past: Monastic Foundation Legends in Medieval Southern France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

⁸⁸ Barbara Newman, “Liminalities: Literate Women in the Long Twelfth Century,” in *European Transformations: The Long Twelfth Century*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble & John Van Engen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 354-402.

⁸⁹ Newman, “Liminalities,” 355.

reminding the viewer of her otherworldly, transitional nature, while reinforcing her role as mother, wife and protector of the Lusignans.



Figure 8 *Mélusine Leaves Lusignan* (MS fr.12575, fol. 86). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10525469d/f177.image.r=melusine>.

Thus, while her liminal status and her connection to land and water tie Mélusine to the physical geography of the Poitevin Marais, these human elements serve an equally important role in defining place according to familial origins. Mélusine exemplifies this aspect of her place through her similarity to important women in the history of the region, namely Saint Clothilde (475–545), wife of Clovis I, the first Christian king of the Franks, Saint Radegund (c. 520–586), a Merovingian queen who founded Saint-Croix, a monastery in Poitiers, and Emma of Blois (950–1105), who, as wife of Duke William IV of Aquitaine, built Maillezais Abbey. The similarities seen between the identity constructions of these four female figures by their contemporary biographers suggest the possibility that Mélusine’s character was inspired in part by or modeled after these historical women. In this sense, it could be argued that Mélusine’s identity was purposefully constructed to reflect the region’s heritage, through its history of female founders. Additionally, the notion of typology (the belief that figures and events in the Old Testament prefigured those in the New) which was popular in the Middle Ages, would have facilitated this reading for contemporary audiences, as it encouraged a mental connection or relationship between people and events that existed in different times and places.⁹⁰

This is significant because, although Mélusine is understood to be a serpent, Coudrette made great efforts to Christianize and sanctify her through his portrayal of the fairy as a good wife and mother, as a religious patron, and as a pious believer through her long profession of

⁹⁰ For a discussion of typology in relation to medieval genealogies and notions of time, see Maxwell, *Medieval Urbanism*, 186. For an introduction to the role of typology in medieval art, see William J. Diebold, *Word and Image: An Introduction to Early Medieval Art* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 75–84. Also see Christopher G. Hughes, “Art and Exegesis,” in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. Conrad Rudolph (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 173–192.

faith at her first meeting with Raymondin.⁹¹ In this portrayal, one of the most important traits that Clothilde, Radegund, and Emma have in common with Mélusine is their sanctity, and their related ability to “see” the spiritual meaning in events and places.

When we first encounter Mélusine in the narrative, she must convince both the reader and Raymondin of her goodness. She, therefore, makes the following speech, which appears to be based on the Nicene Creed:

I am, after God, your best support;
 You will be blessed with great fortune
 If you believe me truly,
 And do not in any way doubt
 That I am an instrument of God,
 And that I believe in his virtues.
 I affirm to you that I believe in
 The holy Catholic faith,
 And know and believe each article
 Of the holy Catholic faith
 That God was born of the Virgin
 Without blemishing her, to save us,
 And that for us he endured death,
 And on the third day he arose,
 And then afterward, ascended into heaven
 Where he is a true man and true God,
 And sits at the right hand of the Father.
 Raymond, now listen, my dear brother;
 I believe in all of these fervently.
 Without doubting them in any way.⁹²

⁹¹ As Daniel O’Sullivan, “L’Amplification du Discours Religieux Orthodoxe dans *Mélusine* de Coudrette,” in *Écriture et Réécriture*, 121-132, notes, Coudrette emphasizes religious orthodoxy in his interpretation of Jean d’Arras’ tale. Mélusine’s Christianization has also been noted by Clier-Colombani in “Mélusine christianisée: Sainte Venice et Sainte Mélusine,” *Mythologie française: Bulletin de la Société de mythologie française* 177 (1995): 39-52; and Matthew Morris in his introduction to *A Bilingual Edition of Coudrette’s Mélusine*, esp. 6-11. For the “sanitization” of Mélusine through bath imagery, see Clier-Colombani, “Le bain et ses représentations,” in *La Fée Mélusine au Moyen Age*, 153-181, esp. 158-161.

⁹² Je suys, apres Dieu, tes confors/ Tu auras du bien assez fors/ Se tu me croies vrayement,/ Et ne doubte nullement/
 Que de par Dieu je ne soye,/ Et que ces vertuz je ne croye./ Jete [proMetz] bien que je croy/ La saincte catholique
 foy,/ Et sçays et croy checun article/ De la sainte foy catholique./ Que Dieu naquit pour nous sauver,/ De la Vierge
 sans l’entamer,/ Et que pour nous mort endura,/ Et au tiers jour resuscita,/ Et puy apres monta es cieulx,/ Ou il est

Despite what we later learn about her physiognomy, Coudrette uses this speech to convince the reader that Mélusine is a good Christian and that she has a special connection to God. This makes it clear that her ties to the spiritual realm, as a liminal figure, are ties to the *heavenly* realm, and not to Hell. Later, when Raymondin proceeds to follow Mélusine's advice, he becomes a successful lord, and, tellingly, remains so only until he breaks his vow; thus illustrating the notion introduced in the beginning that she is trustworthy and a good counselor. This inherent sanctity described in the text is emphasized in the decorative program of MS fr. 24383 through the depiction of Mélusine in prayer. Looking at **Figure 9**, in the scene to the left, she receives a message stating that five of her sons have achieved high rank: four as kings and dukes of foreign lands, and one — Fromont — as a monk of Maillezais.⁹³ We can see that the Poitevin landscape in the background is no longer as empty as it was when first we met the fairy at the fountain (in **Figure 4**), but rather, populated with small towns, showing evidence of Mélusine's civilization of the land through her magical building program. Having received this good news, on the right side of the image, she kneels before an altar to thank Christ, the Virgin, and another saint for her sons' successes. That the patron or illustrator of this manuscript chose to depict a scene that demonstrates her piety and orthodoxy, rather than a more exciting subject, such as the other battles, weddings, and far-off places depicted in the earlier manuscript,⁹⁴ and rather than the feasting described in the text,⁹⁵ emphasizes the social

vray homs et vray Dieulx./ Et siet a la destre du Pere./ Raymond, or enten, mon cher frere;/ Je les croy toutes fernement,/ Sans y doubter aucunement (Coudrette, 615-629).

⁹³ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 2933-2955. Mélusine and Raymondin received the letter while visiting Vouvant, where the real Lusignans had a castle, which will be discussed further below.

⁹⁴ See Appendix A for a list of the images contained in the two manuscripts.

⁹⁵ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 2949-2974. Mélusine is not described as kneeling in prayer in the text; she simply states that "For all of this I thank our Lord," ("J'en regracie nostre Seigneur") and describes *her son*, *Fromont*, praying daily for his family's good fortune, and puts forth her hopes that her other four sons will also gain high stature "[s]hould God and Saint Mary will it thus" ("Dieu le veille et Sainte Marie!"). The narrative then goes on to say that the couple shared their good news and feasted with their friends for 15 days in celebration.



Figure 9 *Mélusine Receives News of Fromont, Mélusine Thanks God*, (MS fr. 24383 fol. 16). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105258709/f35.image.r=melusine>.

significance of this aspect of her character for the medieval patron, and the viewing audience.⁹⁶

Additionally, there are some similarities between this depiction of Mélusine kneeling before an altar draped in fabric of red, white, blue, and gold. The same colors border a depiction of Clothilde kneeling in prayer at the tomb of St. Martin in the *Grandes Chroniques de France*

⁹⁶ While the specific patrons and audience of this manuscript are not known, Mélusine manuscripts were known to have circulated widely among the French and Flemish nobility, and made their way to England, Germany, and Spain, as described in the text and footnotes above.

possibly suggesting that the artist was familiar with the imagery of this famous manuscript.⁹⁷

Moreover, the altar is draped in red, white, and blue fabric, and decorated with gold arabesques topped by tiny fleur-de-lys. As the gold fleur-de-lys on a blue field was a long-standing symbol of the French monarchy, this could arguably signify the *French* character of Mélusine's household.

Mélusine's abilities as a visionary and advisor due to her ties to the heavenly realm seem to mirror her predecessors in that all share a connection to God, and therefore, have certain abilities to know his plan and to provide good counsel. As saints, Clothilde and Radegund are both endowed with these qualities in their hagiographic narratives.⁹⁸ The clearest example of this similarity is found in Peter of Maillezais' depiction of Emma of Blois when describing the discovery of the site where Maillezais Abbey was to be founded.⁹⁹ A knight in the hunting party that she and her husband William were leading on the island of Maillezais was struck blind after he saw a wild boar run into an abandoned church. As a woman, Emma is depicted as having special spiritual abilities that allowed her to read this event as a message from God to build an abbey on the site of the old church. Notably, her biographer described her as a "wise woman" who had "intuition" and "managed by God's mercy to reveal [the sign] to us."¹⁰⁰ Her visionary

⁹⁷*Grandes Chroniques de France* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS fr. 2606, fol.23r). There are also similarities between certain images within this manuscript and several Northern Renaissance paintings, suggesting the illuminator's visual literacy, a subject which warrants research in a subsequent project.

⁹⁸ On the necessity of a clear connection to God in hagiographies, see Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg, "Introduction," in *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg, eds. and trans. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 4.

⁹⁹ The full chronicle can be found in Migne's *Patrologia Latina* cited above. There are also several edited versions. See Charles Arnould, *Histoire de Maillezais* (Niort, France: Hachette Livre, 1840); Joseph-Louis Lacurie, *Histoire de L'abbaye de Maillezais depuis sa fondation jusqu'à nos jours* (Fontenay-le-Comte, France: Edm. Fillon, 1852); Louis Brochet, *Histoire de Maillezais* (Paris: Res Universis, 1989); and Louis Delhommeau, ed., *Notes et documents pour servir à l'histoire de L'abbaye Saint-Pierre de Maillezais, au diocèse de Luçon (Vendée) depuis sa fondation (v. CMLXXVI) jusqu'à son érection en évêché par le Pape Jean XII* (Paris: Delhommeau, 1961). Phillipe Walter, *Le Serpent et l'Oisea*, 122-123, also briefly notes similarities between Peter of Maillezais' description of this event and *Mélusine*.

¹⁰⁰ Peter of Maillezais, *De antiquitate* 1 [fol. 247 b], as quoted in Abel, "Emma of Blois," 836-837.

ability, or “feminine intuition,” allowed her to advise her husband of God’s plan, just as Mélusine does in the later tale.¹⁰¹

In addition to their roles as intercessors, there are specific details in the ways that Clothilde, Radegund, and Emma perform their spirituality in course of their secular lives that are later paralleled in certain aspects of Mélusine’s story. For example, all three women act as good counselors: Clothilde when she, through active and concerted effort, converts her husband, King Clovis, to Christianity and convinces him to build many churches,¹⁰² Radegund when she acts as a “peace-weaver” on behalf of her husband,¹⁰³ and Emma when she negotiates a peace settlement between her husband and her father and brothers that facilitates the development of the monasteries of Maillezais and Bourgueil.¹⁰⁴

Another shared theme between the stories of these women is seen in their marital strife; like Mélusine, these women, barring Clothilde,¹⁰⁵ also had to separate from their husbands to enhance their spiritual nature. Radegund, Emma, and Mélusine all leave their husbands. Radegund’s marriage was unhappy from the beginning; she was kidnapped by Clothar after the destruction of her family, and was raised in his court to be one of his wives.¹⁰⁶ After ten years of

¹⁰¹ For a discussion on commemoration and the construction of a common past in monastic foundation legends, which are in many ways similar in function to *Mélusine*, see Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*.

¹⁰² Anonymous, “The Life of Saint Chrothildis,” in McNamara & Halborg, *Sainted Women*, 45; Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Piety, ca. 500-1100* (180-187); and the original c. 9th or 10th century Latin, in Bruno Krusch, ed. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum merovingicarum*, 2:341-348.

¹⁰³ Baudonivia, “Life of Radegund” in McNamara & Halborg, *Sainted Women*, 93 (from *MGH, SRM* 2:358-405); and Jason Glenn, “Two Lives of Saint Radegund,” in *The Middle Ages in Texts and Texture: Reflections on Medieval Sources*, ed. Jason Glenn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 63.

¹⁰⁴ Abel, “Emma of Blois,” 842-846.

¹⁰⁵ Unlike Radegund’s and Emma of Blois’ marriages, the description of Clothilde’s marriage in her biography (Anonymous, “The Life of Saint Chrothildis,” 40-50) implies that it was reasonably successful. Whether this reflects reality or is the result of a desire by the author to preserve the reputation of Clovis as the first Christian king of the Franks remains to be said. For a discussion of Clothilde’s agency in her marriage and influence over her husband, see Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*, 181-186.

¹⁰⁶ Glenn, 57; Marie Anne Mayeski, “Baudonivia’s Life of Radegunde: A Theology of Power” in *Women at the Table: Three Medieval Theologians* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 107.

marriage, in which she is said to have slept on the floor, she finally snuck away from her husband, at first to pray in the privy in the middle of the night.¹⁰⁷ This secretive spirituality is seen in *Mélusine* when she sequesters herself in the bath for her weekly transformation. While Radegund eventually left for good to live a cloistered life, she continued to play an active role in politics, attempting to make peace among the constantly warring Frankish royalty.¹⁰⁸

Following the model of Radegund, Mélusine continues to protect her family members after being permanently transformed and separated from courtly life.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Emma's husband, Duke William IV of Aquitaine betrayed his wife when he had an illicit affair with the wife of the Viscount of Thouars, causing her to separate from him, leaving Emma free to continue her worldly patronage work.¹¹⁰ His penance for this act was his retirement to a monastery.¹¹¹ Raymondin's betrayal and his penance, joining Montserrat Abbey, seem to mirror this pattern.¹¹²

Most revealing in terms of modeling, all three literary women were described as having performed spiritual acts linked to water. When the builders of the monastery of Notre-Dame des Andelys near Rouen asked their queen and founder, Clothilde, for wine, a spring appeared next to the partially-built abbey, providing them with water instead.¹¹³ She is also connected to water through her role in convincing her husband to be baptized.¹¹⁴ St. Radegund is even more closely tied to the water, to bathing specifically, having performed miracles involving healing baths and

¹⁰⁷ Venantius Fortunatus, "The Life of Holy Radegund," in McNamara & Halborg, *Sainted Women*, 73 (original text from *MGH: Auctores Antiquiores*, 1:271-75); Glenn, "Two Lives," 60.

¹⁰⁸ Fortunatus, "Holy Radegund," 63-64; and Glenn, "Two Lives," 60.

¹⁰⁹ Baudonivia, "Life of Radegund," 93.

¹¹⁰ Abel, "Emma of Blois," 845.

¹¹¹ Abel, "Emma of Blois," 850.

¹¹² Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 5596-5605.

¹¹³ Anonymous, "Saint Chrothildis," 48.

¹¹⁴ For a discussion of Mélusine's bath imagery as a metaphor for baptism, see Clier-Colombani, *La Fée Mélusine au Moyen Age*, 160-161.

saving sailors from being shipwrecked.¹¹⁵ She is also said to have emulated Christ by bathing the heads and faces of the poor and leprous.¹¹⁶ Finally, tying the notions of place and water, Emma of Blois was the only woman on an island surrounded by water when she read the sign from God to build Maillezais Abbey. This spiritual association with water, and particularly with bath imagery, would arguably facilitate a connection in the mind of the medieval reader, viewer, or listener between Mélusine's tale and these female figures.

Importantly, these traits also link the four women to the foundation of important sites within Aquitaine and Poitou. With her husband, St. Clothilde founded the Church of the Holy Apostles in Paris (later known as St. Genevieve), she also founded many monasteries, particularly St. Peter's in Tours, with which she became closely associated.¹¹⁷ Slightly more conniving, Radegund convinced her estranged husband, Clothar, to fund the building of the monastery where she would live the rest of her life, St. Croix in Poitiers. With this foundation, she was able to shape the "spiritual and emotional" space of the community through her works, such as the acquisition of holy relics.¹¹⁸ Likewise, Emma of Blois was described as playing an active, integral role in the foundation of both the powerful abbey of Maillezais in the marshlands of the Vendée and that of Bourgueil in her homeland of the Touraine.¹¹⁹ As such, each of these women helped to shape the architectural landscape of this region of Western France, a role taken up by the mythical, fairy builder.

The ideas of dynasty and blood, key in the genealogical romance of *Mélusine*, also play a part in the similarities between these real women and the fictional Mélusine, who founded the

¹¹⁵ Baudonivia, "Life of Radegund," 82-84.

¹¹⁶ Baudonivia, "Life of Radegund," 77-78.

¹¹⁷ Anonymous, "Saint Chrothildis," 43, 48; McNamara & Halborg, *Sainted Women*, 40.

¹¹⁸ Baudonivia, "Life of Radegund," 88-89; Glenn, "Two Lives," 66.

¹¹⁹ See Abel's article, "Emma of Blois" for a thorough explanation of Emma's role in the foundation of Maillezais.

Lusignan dynasty (named for her rather than her husband) and who bore a bevy of sons from whom contemporary rulers of the Vendée — both the l'Archevêques of Parthenay and their feudal overlord, Jean de France, duke of Berry — claimed to descend.¹²⁰ Many today, as I suspect was the case in the fifteenth century, see Mélusine as the mother of the Vendée, as evidenced by her ubiquity within both tourist and popular culture,¹²¹ and, significantly, in that people from the town of Lusignan call themselves Mélusins and Mélusines.¹²² This follows the role of Clothilde, who, as the wife of the first King of the all Franks, is the mother of the French monarchy, described by the Carolingian author of her vita as the mother of Roman Emperors and the Kings of the Franks.¹²³ It also mimics Emma, whose descendants were the Dukes of Aquitaine for at least five generations.¹²⁴

Among these correlated stories is the inherent problem of family violence. Mélusine's tale mirrors the family histories in the hagiographies of Saints Radegund and Clothilde, which depict both women as daughters of foreign kings whose fathers were killed violently by family members. Clothilde's father, king Chilperic of Burgundy, was assassinated by his brother, Gundobad, while Radegund's father was a Thuringian king who, like Chilperic, was murdered by his brother.¹²⁵ Similarly, we have already seen that fratricide was a prominent part of Mélusine's family story. Likewise, in Clothilde's hagiography, two of her younger sons (Kings Childebert and Clothar) conspired to kill the sons of her eldest, King Chlodomir, in order to gain

¹²⁰ For a comparison of Mélusine as mother in Coudrette and Jean d'Arras' versions of the story, see Catherine Léglu, "Nourishing Lineage in the Earliest French Versions of the *Roman de Melusine*," *Medium Aevum* 74, No. 1 (2005): 71-85.

¹²¹ See footnote 19.

¹²² Commune de Lusignan tourist office brochure, 2.

¹²³ Anonymous, "Saint Chrothildis," 50.

¹²⁴ See the genealogical tree of the Dukes of Aquitaine in Abel, "Emma of Blois," 859.

¹²⁵ Anonymous, "Saint Chrothildis," 41, and McNamara & Halborg, *Sainted Women*, 60.

Chlodomir's kingdom.¹²⁶ This sort of brutality also appears in Radegund's story, when her husband, Clothar, burned his son, Chramn, "alive in a cottage with his wife and children after an



Figure 10 *Geoffroy Burns Maillezais, Mélusine is Insulted by Raymondin*, (MS fr. 24383 fol. 24v). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105258709/f52.image.r=melusine>.

unsuccessful rebellion,” and had to do penance for his crime.¹²⁷ Additionally, when Emma's son, William V died in 1030, his third wife, Agnes of Burgundy, married Geoffroy Martel, count of Anjou. Hostilities soon arose in 1033 between Martel and William VI, Emma's grandson.¹²⁸ William VI was captured by his step-father and imprisoned in several monasteries near Saint-

¹²⁶ Anonymous, “Saint Chrothildis,” 47.

¹²⁷ McNamara & Halborg, *Sainted Women*, 62. Additionally, Radegund herself burns a pagan shrine. See Baudonivia, “Life of Radegund,” 87.

¹²⁸ The son of William V and his first wife, Aumode of Gauvedon. Labande, “Temps Féodaux,” 111.

Jouin-de-Marnes, dying in 1038 unable to summon a ransom.¹²⁹ Coudrette and Jean d'Arras used fratricide and the burning of Maillezais Abbey, pictured in **Figure 10**, not only to tell the tale of the real Geoffroy le Grand Dent's raids on the monastery, but also to reference the region's history of arson and family violence.¹³⁰

Two images, one from each of the two illustrated manuscripts, demonstrate this idea. Folio 58 of MS 12575 (**fig. 11**) depicts a man, richly robed in blue and ermine, enthroned before a group of young men or boys. To the right of his throne, a monk enters the elongated doorway of a church. Inscriptions label the enthroned man as Raymon (for Raymondin), and the monk, Fromont, one of his sons. The image seems to depict two related scenes from the legend, almost as if they were happening simultaneously. On the left, Fromont, in laymen's clothes, takes his father's hand and begs for permission to become a monk: "I wish to be/ a Monk of Maillezais, I say truly;/ I want to have nothing else/ Ever during my lifetime."¹³¹ Just to the right of Raimondin's throne, Fromont, having received his parents' permission, bears the habit and tonsure of a monk as he enters the Abbey of Maillezais (here spelled Mailleres). Through his choice to collapse narrative time and space, the medieval illuminator has placed the family, including the enthroned lord of Lusignan, in close proximity with Maillezais, visually associating the important, Poitevin monastery with Mélusine's family.

¹²⁹ Labande, "Temps Féodaux," 111.

¹³⁰ I would argue that another important way that the historical women have influenced the text and imagery of the tale is in the growth and development of empire as it is linked to the female sex. In all three cases, Clothilde, Rade Gund, and Emma can be shown to have been the means to acquiring land. This influence can be seen in MS fr. 12575, as the Master of Guillebert de Metz illustrated three scenes related to the marriages of Mélusine's sons to foreign heiresses (see Appendix B), growing the Lusignan empire by way of the accumulation of wealth, power, and fecundity provided by bringing these women into the family and the replication of Mélusine's pattern of patronage. This is particularly clear in the depiction of Guyon's arrival at Korykos (fol. 39v), where his wife-to-be, Florie, is identified in the *titulus* by the name of her realm rather than by her given name, as Guyon is, conceptually linking the ideas of "woman" and "land" (Appendix B, Figure 16).

¹³¹ Coudrette, *A Bilingual Edition*, 2890-2893, "[J]e veil estre moine/ De Maillezais; je vous dy bien;/ Je ne veil avoir aultre rien/ Jamais a nul jour de ma vie."

Like his predecessor earlier in the century, the anonymous Renaissance artist, in his depiction of Maillezais' destruction, (**fig. 10**), has visually associated the monastery with the family through proximity. On the left side of the frame, Geoffroy le Grand Dent thrusts a burning



Figure 11 *Fromont Enters Maillezais* (MS fr.12575, fol. 58). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10525469d/f121.image.r=melusine>.

brand through the window of one of the towers protecting the abbey's walls. Yellow tongues of flame lick up the sides of the fortifications as the monks inside cry out. An interior wall of Castle Lusignan divides the frame. To the right, Mélusine wilts under the insults of her husband. The composition places Raymondin and his fairy wife in close proximity with the abbey, while reminding the viewer of the parents' innocence in its destruction. At the same time, the walls of the monastery stand strong, despite the flames, arguably also reminding the viewer that Geoffroy, in penance, would rebuild the abbey to be even stronger and better than it had been. Further linking the romance with the history and aristocracy of the region, this episode in the tale seems to be based loosely on the historical figure Geoffroy "le Grand Dent," lord of Vouvant and Mervent, who raided Maillezais Abbey several times in the mid-thirteenth century.¹³² Given Maillezais' geographical and topographical setting on an island in the marshy land of the Gulf of Picton, the image creates a strong connection between the line of Mélusine and the important Poitevin institution, further enmeshing the family into the history of the marshy landscape.

The numerous and distinct similarities between the stories of the parentage, marital relations, and family violence in *Mélusine* and those in the histories of the local nobility, as described here, would likely facilitate the creation of an association between the fairy and the noblewomen in the minds of the story's late-medieval audience. Like the authors' use of local place-names, this association would serve two functions: it would both create a sense of verity in the narrative, through the audience's familiarity with and (likely) belief in the history and

¹³² Like the fictional Geoffroy, the real Geoffroy le Grand Dent later became a friend of the abbey: they erected a cenotaph in his honor. See Charles Arnould, *Petite Histoire de Maillezais: depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'au XIXe siècle* (Monein, France: Pyr  monde/Princi Negue, 2006), 93-95; and S. Roblin, "Le sanglier et la serpente: Geoffroy la Grant'Dent dans l'histoire des Lusignan," in *M  tamorphose et bestiaire fantastique au Moyen Age*, ed. Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris: l'  cole Normale Sup  rieure de Jeunes Filles, 1985), 247-286.

hagiographies of these women, and emplace Mélusine within Poitou's history of female founders.

In summary, the images and text of the two surviving French illuminated manuscripts of the poetic *Mélusine* epic illustrate that the figure of Mélusine, as a female founder with ties to the spiritual realm, as well as to the realities of the physical landscape with its predominance of water, serves to represent a particular place: a country of mountains, forests, rivers, ocean, and drained marshland. Within the manuscripts created by Coudrette, the Master of Guillebert de Metz, and the anonymous fifteenth-century artist, Mélusine embodies both the history and physical landscape of the Vendée. Because land and lineage together endowed their possessor with both power and a particular identity, a figure that personified both the land and the protective, watery marsh, while creating a sense of continuity with the past would serve as an especially effective symbol, and would be particularly relevant to the wider populace who inhabited this geography. As such a figure, Mélusine functioned as a symbol of identity and stability in a war-torn land whose place in the international landscape was in flux. 🍀

Appendix A: List of Images in the Manuscripts

MS français 12575

- Fol. 5r: *Coudrette Presents the Manuscript to Guillaume l'Archevêque.*
Fol. 8r: *Aymeri of Poitiers Consulting Astronomical Charts.*
Fol. 13r: *Death of Aymeri of Poitiers.*
Fol. 26v: *Marriage of Mélusine and Raymondin.*
Fol. 36r: *Urien Inherits Cyprus.*
Fol. 39v: *Guion Disembarks at Korykos.*
Fol. 42v: *The King of Alsace Surrenders to Antoine at Luxembourg.*
Fol. 49r: *Antoine and Christienne.*
Fol. 53r: *The Death of the King of Cracow*, leader of the “Saracens” at Prague.
Fol. 58r: *Fromont Enters Maillezais.*
Fol. 69r: *Geoffroy Fights the Giant Guedon in Guerandais.*
Fol. 79r: *Raymondin Insults Mélusine.*
Fol. 86r: *Mélusine Leaves Lusignan.*
Fol. 89r: *Mélusine Nurses Thierry.*
Fol. 116v: *Armenian King Approaches Châteaude l'épervier*, the castle in Armenia where Mélusine's sister, Mélior, is locked away.
Fol. 123v: *A Knight Approaches Mount Canigou* in Aragon, where Mélusine's other sister, Palestine, guards treasure.

MS français 24383

- Fol. 2r: *Coudrette Presents the Manuscript to Guillaume l'Archevêque.*
Fol. 4r: *Raymondin and Aymeri Hunting, Death of Aymeri of Poitiers.*
Fol. 5v: *Raymondin Passes the Fountain of Thirst and is Greeted by Mélusine.*
Fol. 7r: *Raymondin and Bertrand of Poitiers, Raymondin Defines his Territory.*
Fol. 10r: *Marriage of Mélusine and Raymondin.*
Fol. 13r: *Battle of Famagousta* in Cyprus.
Fol. 14r: *Marriage of Urien and Hermine.*
Fol. 16r: *Mélusine Receives News of Fromont, Mélusine Thanks God.*
Fol. 19r: *Raymondin Discovers Mélusine's Secret.*
Fol. 23r: *Raymondin Attacks his Brother, Mélusine Comforts Raymondin.*
Fol. 24v: *Geoffroy le Grand Dent Burns Maillezais, Raymondin Insults Mélusine.*
Fol. 30r: *Mélusine Leaves Lusignan, Mélusine Nurses Thierry*
Fol. 33v: *Geoffroy follows the Giant Grimault into a Mountain* in Northumberland.
Fol. 36r: *Geoffroy Slays Grimault and Transports his Corpse.*

Appendix B: Other Illuminations Depicting Place, Identity and the Role of Women in the Creation & Expansion of Domain within the Manuscripts

While the following images do not relate directly to the discussion of *Mélusine*'s function within Poitou, they demonstrate the predominance of the themes of place and identity, and the significance of women in shaping the landscape in the decorative programs of MS Fr. 12575 and MS Fr. 24383. Thus, they help to shape the audience's experience of text and image in ways that facilitate the reading of *Mélusine* as a symbol of regional identity.



Figure 12 *Marriage of Mélusine and Raymondin* (MS fr.12575, fol. 26v). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10525469d/f58.image.r=melusine>,

The first marriage scene in the text depicts Mélusine and Raymondin's wedding before a bishop in front of the church door, which ensures the legitimacy of their heirs.¹³³ This legitimacy was, of course, important for Coudrette's patron, Guillaume l'Archevêque, who claimed to be descended from Mélusine's second youngest son, Thierry. The fruit tree just behind the bride suggests her fecundity.

¹³³ In English law, this is described in the Statutes of Salisbury, c. 1217-1219, #85: marriages "shall be made in public in front of the church, in the presence of a priest who has been called for this purpose." Conor McCarthy, ed., *Love, Sex, and Marriage in the Middle Ages: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2004), 75.



Figure 13 *Marriage of Mélusine and Raymondin* (MS fr. 24383, fol. 10). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105258709/f23.image.r=melusine>.

In the later depiction of this scene, the wedding has moved inside, showing changes in marriage ceremonies in the later Middle Ages as described George Homans.¹³⁴ Like the earlier image of the marriage, this illumination demonstrates the legitimacy of the couple's heirs. The town in the background that is relatively close to the church could represent Poitiers — reflecting the connection between Poitiers and Lusignan emphasized in the scene of Raymondin marking off his territory (**fig. 6**) — or the various towns shown could prefigure Mélusine's building campaign.

¹³⁴ George Caspar Homans, *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Norton & Co., 1975, orig. 1941), 170.



Figure 14 *Guion Disembarks at Korykos* (MS fr. 12575, fol. 39v.). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10525469d/f84.image.r=melusine>

The image of Guion's arrival at Korykos in Armenia supports the narrative's conceptual linking of women with land through the artist's use of *tituli*, or labels. While Guion is identified by his name, which is written next to his feet, his bride-to-be, Florie, whose large, blonde head gazes out above the castle walls across the landscape, is identified by her realm, "Armenie." Her identity is defined by her geographical place.



Figure 15 *Urien Inherits Cyprus*, (MS fr. 12575, fol. 36). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10525469d/f77.image.r=melusine>.

In this image, the dying King of Cyprus holds out both of his hands to Mélusine's eldest son, Urien: with his right hand, he offers the young knight his daughter, Hermine, and with his left, he offers a crown.¹³⁵ The artist, again, creates a visual association between a woman and a

¹³⁵ This may illustrate the primacy of the bride's father in officiating marriages in earlier medieval marriages as described by Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, trans. Jane Dunnett, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 19. If so, it would arguably reflect the artist's intent to convey the historical setting to the viewer.

realm. Although Urien's prowess in battle, saving the besieged city of Famagusta from "Saracens," placed him in the King's favor, creating this opportunity, it is specifically through his marriage to Hermine that he is able to acquire his kingdom.



Figure 16 *Marriage of Urien & Hermine* (MS fr. 24383, fol. 14). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105258709/f31.image.r=melusine>.

As in the scenes of Mélusine's marriage, the presence of the bishop and witnesses in this depiction of the marriage of Urien and Hermine emphasize the legitimacy of their marriage rather than the father's role in passing on his land, privileged by the Master of Guillaume de Metz in the earlier depiction of this scene. Interestingly, the arabesques on Urien's robe are strikingly similar to those on the altar cloth in the image of Mélusine praying (**fig. 6**), while Hermine wears the gold fleur-de-lis on blue of the French monarchy, reinforcing the French character of this foreign territory (Cyprus), and thus, the power of both the French nation and the Lusignans who ruled there.



Figure 17 *Antoine and Christienne*, (MS fr. 12575, fol. 49). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10525469d/f103.image.r=melusine>.

This illustration depicts Mélusine's fourth son, Antoine, and his bride, Christienne of Luxembourg, standing together on what appears to be a balcony before a field of gold, blue, and red lozenges. He raises his hand in a gesture of speech, or perhaps oath-taking, and both figures gesture towards the blank shields that lay at their feet. It appears that this image was unfinished, as the shields bear neither paint nor evidence of its removal. It is reasonable, however, to assume that the shields would have borne the arms of the Lusignans and the Dukes of Luxembourg, visualizing the joining of the families and their respective lands through the juxtaposition of their heraldry, reemphasizing the importance of marriage, and of women, since Antoine gains the

ducal title of Luxembourg through marrying the heiress, Christienne, in the growth of empire and domain.



Figure 18 *Coudrette Presents the Manuscript to Guillaume l'Archevêque* (MS fr. 12575, fol. 5). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10525469d/f15.image.r=melusine>.

The presentation scene in this manuscript shows an interest in the patron's identity. The image glorifies Guillaume l'Archevêque through his depiction in ornate robes painted with expensive lapis blue, and through the creation of the most ornate margins found in the entire



Figure 19 Coudrette Presents the Manuscript to Guillaume l'Archevêque (MS fr. 24383, fol. 2). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105258709/f7.image.r=melusine>.

manuscript. Additionally, this image shows the Lord of Parthenay's role in the creation of the text (in lending sources to Coudrette) in the form of the book that he trades with the author in

exchange for the manuscript. In this image, place and identity both come into focus. Parthenay is depicted as a grand city with soaring towers, while Guillaume l'Archevêque is depicted as a noble and a scholar through the artist's addition of a blue canopy above the patron's chair and the multiple books lying on the shelf to his right.



Figure 20 *Death of Aymeri of Poitiers*, (MS fr. 12575, fol. 13). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale,
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10525469d/f31.image.r=melusine>.

Place is also visible in the image of Aymeri's accidental death at the hands of Raymondin. This image features the wild, untamed landscape of Poitou near the future town of Lusignan. The empty forest and wild beast are reminiscent of the boar in the forest on Maillezais Island described by Peter of Maillezais in the story of the abbey's foundation by Emma of Blois.



Figure 21 *Raymondin and Aymeri Hunting, Death of Aymeri of Poitiers*, (MS fr.24383, fol. 4).

Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale,

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105258709/f11.image.r=melusine>.

The wilderness of the forest is similarly emphasized in this image by the densely drawn trees, and the savage-looking boar running through the forest at the right. The cut trees in the scene to the right arguably prefigure the civilization of this area in the near future through the process of deforestation and building described above.



Figure 22 *Geoffroy le Grand Dent Slays Grimault and Transports his Corpse*, (MS fr. 24383, fol. 36). Photo: After Bibliothèque Nationale, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105258709/f75.image.r=melusine>.

Though it is not immediately visible, this image deals with notions of identity and genealogy through its depiction of a key event within the text. Here, Geoffroy-le-Grand-Dent slays the giant, Grimault, who has been ravaging the countryside in Northumberland. Significantly, the giant-guarded the tomb of Elinas, Geoffroy's grandfather. Within the tomb, Geoffroy discovers the story of his mother's birth and subsequent curse, and therefore, the secret to Mélusine's identity and lineage.

Appendix C: Places in Mélusine Legend

The different uses of place names used throughout the narrative serve multiple functions, reflecting the multivalent nature of the text. While the sites of Mélusine's building projects help to emplace the major narrative within Poitou, the broad range of places mentioned in the text serve to contextualize the Lusignan's Poitevin domain, first within France, and — especially through the brothers' crusading — within the larger Eurasian region. They, therefore, demonstrate the family's power and vast domain. Additionally, the long list of French wines served at Mélusine and Raymondin's wedding not only illustrates her magical wealth, but also the social significance of this agricultural product for the fifteenth-century audience.

Table 1 - Places Ruled by the Lusignans & their Descendants	
Ardennes (in Luxembourg)	Antoine's son builds castles here (2710-2728)
Armenia	Guy marries the crown princess (1812-1855)
Austria	Conquered by Antoine's son (2732)
Bohemia	Brothers free capital from siege, & Renaud marries the crown princess (2168-2680)
Brittany	Conquered by Raymondin (2757-2759), Thierry marries here (5531)
<i>Châtelailon</i>	Ruled by Thierry (5438)
Cyprus	Urien marries the crown princess (1670-1765)
Denmark	Conquered by Renaud (2696)
Forez	Raymondin's father, then elder brother—who convinces him Mélusine is unfaithful—are counts here (205-234, 2982-); taken by Geoffroy when he kills his uncle (3121-3130, 5278-5367)
Famagusta	Besieged capital of Cyprus (1497-1499)
Fribourg	Conquered by Antoine's son (2729-2731)
Guérande (in Brittany)	Geoffroy wages war here (2763), then defeats a giant & is made the lord (3219-3412)
Jaffa, Port of (Israel)	Conquered by Urien's son (1793)
La Marche	Eudes marries the count's daughter (1902-1904)
<i>La Rochelle</i>	Founded by Mélusine (1412); Ruled by Thierry (5441)
<i>Lusignan</i>	Castle and town of House Lusignan, built by Mélusine (1305-1387)
Luxembourg	Brothers free city from siege, and Antoine marries duchess Chrétienne (1912-2155)
Mathelfelon	Jean de Parthenay-l'Archeveque is also lord of Mathefelon (6801)
<i>Melle</i>	Town and castle built by Mélusine (1394)
<i>Mervent</i>	Built by Mélusine (1395); Ruled by Thierry (5438)
Mezieres (in Ardennes)	Antoine's son builds a bridge here (2725-2726)
Morea (Principality of Peloponnesus)	Conquered by Urien's son (1791-1792)
Norway	All kings of Norway descend from Mélusine (6844-6846)
<i>Niort</i>	Mélusine builds a castle here (2830-2832).
<i>Parthenay</i>	City and castle built by Mélusine (1439-1440).
Pembroke	Count of Pembroke descends from Mélusine (5819-5822).
<i>Pons</i>	Built by Mélusine (1413).
[Saint-Cyr-en-]Talmondaïs	Mélusine "did works" here (1417).
<i>Saintes</i>	Mélusine built a bridge here (1415).
<i>Saint-Maixent</i>	Tower, town, and abbey built by Mélusine (1396-1398).
Tripoli	Conquered by Urien's son (1795-1799).
<i>Vouvant</i>	Built by Mélusine (1395); Ruled by Thierry (5437).

Table 2 - Other Important Places in the Narrative

Avalon	Mélusine's mother flees here with her three daughters when their father breaks his oath (4925-4937).
Canigou (in Aragon)	Mountain on which Mélusine's sister guards treasure, "Promised Land" (5015-5031, 6215-6608).
Forez	County where Raymondin's father and (later) elder brother rule (205-242; 2982-2984).
<i>Maillezais Abbey</i>	Fromont becomes a monk here (2792-2908), Geoffroy burns it down, then rebuilds it and is buried there (3543-3634, 5550-5564, 5733-5740, 6640-6647).
Montserrat Abbey (in Catalonia)	Raymondin becomes a hermit and later is buried here, & Geoffroy endows it (5596-5605, 5755-5759).
Northumberland	Geoffroy defeats a giant here & discovers the treasure & story of his grandparents (33660-3676 4399-5120).
<i>Poitiers</i>	Raymondin's uncle—who adopts him, and whom he accidentally kills— and cousin are Counts of Poitou (147-423).
Rome	Raymondin (5383-5385, 5510) & Geoffroy (5657-5705) make pilgrimage to Rome in Penance & confess to Pope Leo.

Table 3- Other Places Mentioned in the Narrative

Albany (Scotland)	Home of Mélusine's father (4762).
Alsace	Brothers fight and then befriend king of Alsace (1915-2130).
Anjou	Wine from here was had at Mélusine & Raymondin's wedding (1168).
Arras	Fromont could be bishop here (2888).
Aunis	Wine from here was had at Mélusine & Raymondin's wedding (1161).
Bavaria	Brothers travel through this region (2293).
Beaune	Wine from here was had at Mélusine & Raymondin's wedding (1163).
Beauvais	Fromont could be bishop here (2888).
Bordeaux	Wine from here was had at Mélusine & Raymondin's wedding (1175).
Bourg-Dieu	Fromont could become a monk here (2870).
Chartres (Notre-Dame de Chartres)	Fromont could become a canon here (2880).
Colchis (in Georgia)	Urien's brother frees passage to this country (1771).
Columbiers	Forest between Poitiers and Lusignan (179-180, 1293).
Cuq	Port in Armenia (6175).

Cracow	King of Cracow besieges Prague with “Slavs” & “Saracens” (2295-2520).
Damascus	Uriens defeats the Sultan of Damascus (1691-1692).
Dijon	Wine from here was had at Mélusine & Raymondin’s wedding (1167).
Estables	Wine from here was had at Mélusine & Raymondin’s wedding (1171).
Frisia	Renaud wages war here (2694).
Germany	Brothers travel travel through (2293).
Guyenne	Conquered by Charlemagne (6931-6933).
Hungary	A knight from that country tries to get HHelinas’ treasure (6527-6528).
Iberia	Wine from here was had at Mélusine & Raymondin’s wedding (1172).
Liart	Wine from here was had at Mélusine & Raymondin’s wedding (1171).
Marmoutier	Fromont could become a monk here (2867-2868).
Paris (Notre-Dame de Paris)	Fromont could be a canon or bishop here (2881, 2888).
Perigord	Jean de Parthenay-l’ Archeveque’s wife is daughter of the count of Perigord (6920-6925).
Rhodes	Urien assists Rhodes (5781).
Ris	Wine from here was had at Mélusine & Raymondin’s wedding (1173).
Saint-Jangon	Wine from here was had at Mélusine & Raymondin’s wedding (1168).
Saint-Jean d’Angely	Wine from here was had at Mélusine & Raymondin’s wedding (1169).
Saint-Pourçaint	Wine from here was had at Mélusine & Raymondin’s wedding (1173).
Thouars	Wine from here was had at Mélusine & Raymondin’s wedding (1167).
Toledo, Spain	Seer who knew about the treasure on Canigou was here (6507-6525).
Toulouse	Raymondin’s men arrive disembark here from Rome (5649-5650).
Tours (Saint-Martin) in Touraine	Fromont could become a monk here (2876-2877).



Reading Between the Lions: Mapping Meaning in a Surviving Capital at Maillezais Abbey

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In the tenth century, when Maillezais abbey was constructed, it sat on the highest point of an island in the Golfe des Pictons in southwestern France. The monastic church underwent three periods of construction and reconstruction, before it was eventually fortified during the French wars of religion in 1562–1598. The structure stands today half-destroyed. Elements of the narthex and nave, with a Gothic window, survive. **(fig 1)** Within the abbey, a lone figural capital known as the “Victory Capital,” caps a column. **(fig. 2)** The column is one of six still-extant on the north wall of the nave. The frontal face of this capital is comprised of four registers, the center dominated by a male human figure. (The figure’s gender is indicated by his beard and linear torso.) Two rounded beasts on the edge of the sculpture curve inward and frame the center. The beasts grasp the figure’s arms and attempt to pull him apart. They gain leverage by arching their backs and pressing their legs onto the figure’s hips that disappear into the repetitive triangular shapes that ornamentally fill the two bottom registers.

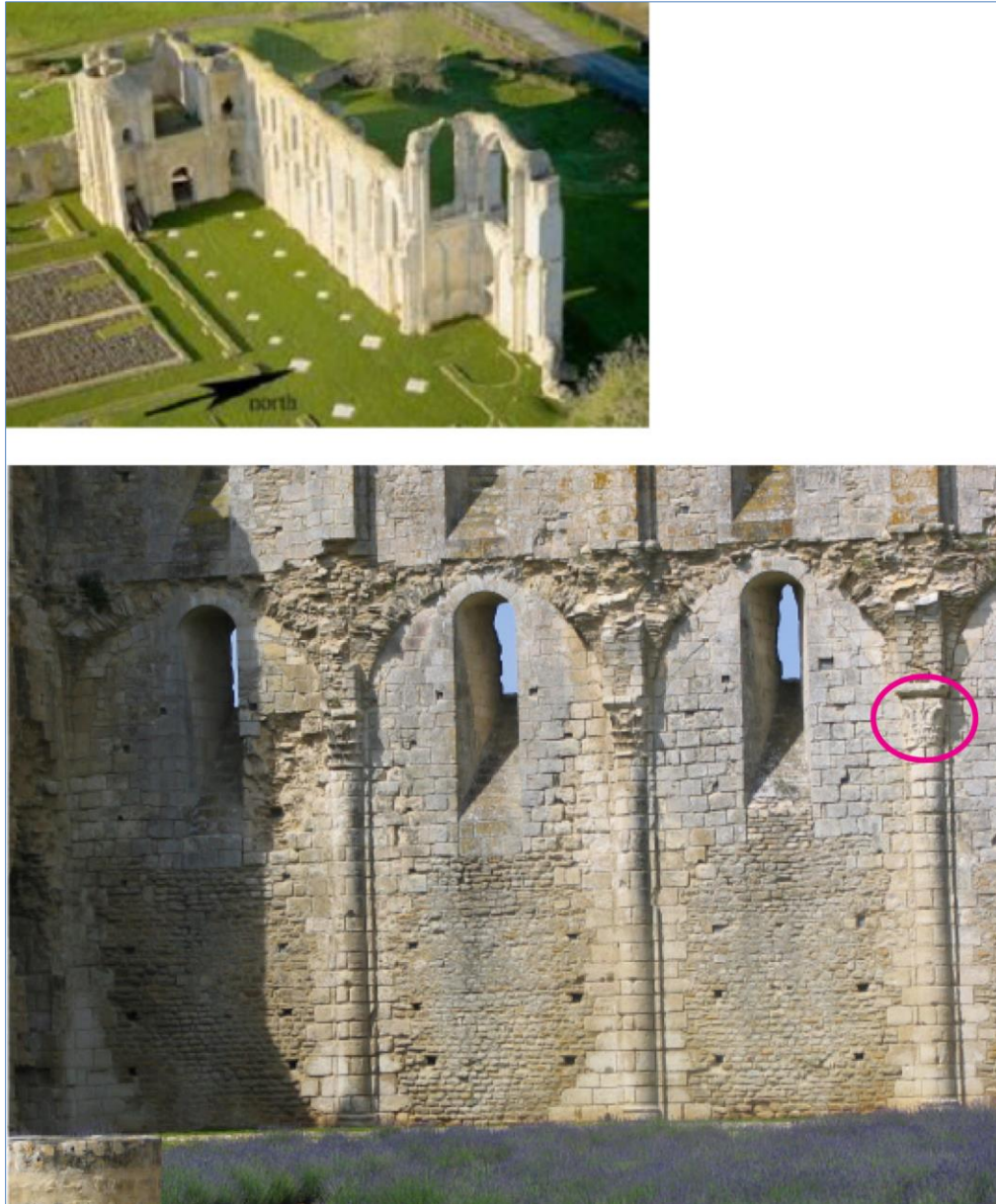


Figure 1 Maillezais Abbey. Photo: Mickey Abel.

The frontal scene is repeated onto the two other sides of the capital, although they appear to be incomplete. The human figure on each side, matching the one on the frontal face, is laterally bifurcated. Close inspection of the stone reveals that the full scene was initially depicted on both sides, repeating that on the front, but was then later cut in half to fit the engaged column at Maillezais. It is possible that the Victory Capital was re-used

Figure 2 Victory Capital, Maillezais Abbey, nave.
Photo: author.



Figure 3 Maillezais Abbey, narthex capitals.
Photo: Owen Wilson Chavez.

from the earliest church at Maillezais or that it was transported from another site, before it was altered to fit the column at Maillezais in the late eleventh century. The Victory Capital is among the few sculptural objects that remain at the site.¹ Similar in style, two engaged and also reused capitals in the narthex depict symmetrical peacocks. (**fig. 3**) The

¹ A repository room at Maillezais Abbey holds fallen sculptural elements including corbels, capitals and pieces of the archivolt.

scenes appear to repeat on the other two sides of the capital, with a full reading of the imagery obscured because these two capitals were embedded in the later wall of the narthex, added to the building in c. 1080.²

Unlike these two narthex capitals, the Victory Capital is the only remaining architectural element that depicts a human figure. The beasts that frame the corners or edges of the nave capital create an omega (Ω)-like shape. The beasts' tails twist up towards the corners, ending in shapes that resemble fish. These fish shapes rest just below the curve of the omega shape created by the beasts. They have drilled holes near where the eyes would be on the fish. Originally, the capital most likely was fully painted with rich and vivid colors – the deep royal blue of the background would contrast with the bright reds and yellows of the foreground.³

Scholars cataloging of sculpture from the general Poitevin region of Aquitaine suggest that the Victory Capital belongs to a particular “type” of subject matter based on its “man versus beast” or “man versus the wild elements” iconography.⁴ The identity of the “beasts” on the Victory capital have been determined through a comparative analysis to similar compositions found within the region: the capitals at Saint-Saturnin in Couppes (**fig. 4**) and at Saint-Pierre in Airvault (**fig. 5**), both of which depict beasts that are clearly lions with their rounded bellies and short, thin legs.

² Mickey Abel, “To Sea and Be Seen: Reconstruction of the Strategic Building Program at Maillezais Abbey.” *Avista Forum Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 1 / 2 (2010), 13.

³ Sites such as Sainte-Radegonde and Notre-Dame la Grande in Poitiers (see appendix) show interiors that are still vividly painted. The capitals in the choir at Sainte-Radegonde show dark blue backgrounds. The foreground relief is painted in reds and yellows to make their respective scenes stand out.

⁴ Anat Tcherikover, *High Romanesque Sculpture in the Duchy of Aquitaine c. 1090–1140* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 50; Michael D. Costen, and Catherine Oaks, *Romanesque Churches of the Loire and Western France* (Gloucestershire UK: Tempus, 2000), 117-122; and Robert Maxwell, *The Art of Medieval Urbanism: Parthenay in Romanesque Aquitaine* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 77.

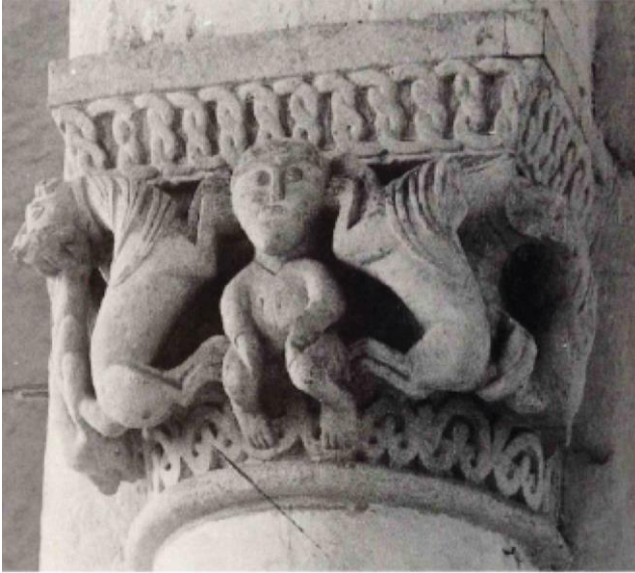


Figure 4 Chouppes, Saint-Saturnin, nave. Photo: After Source 300, “Non-narrative Figural Chart Source Bibliography”: Camus, Marie-Thérèse, Elisabeth Carpentier, and Jean-François Amelot, *Sculpture Romane du Poitou: Le Temps des Chefs-de-‘œuvre*, p. 450, fig. 280.



Figure 5 Airvault, Saint-Pierre, nave, south arcade. Photo: After Source 298, “Non-narrative Figural Chart Source Bibliography”: Camus, Marie-Thérèse, Elisabeth Carpentier, and Jean-François Amelot, *Sculpture Romane du Poitou: Le Temps des Chefs-de-‘œuvre*, p. 363, fig. 398.

While it has been noted previously that this iconography of “man versus beast” is rooted in the Sumerian origin myth of Gilgamesh or in Biblical narrative,⁵ or even attributed to a Eucharistic tradition,⁶ recent scholarship seeks to situate a more-specific iconographical analyses within a particular socio-political context.⁷ This methodology avoids an isolating, silo-like focus, which separates out singular types of imagery from the whole of a particular site’s larger sculptural program, as this would have been inconsistent with medieval patterns of interpretation.⁸ The goal of the contextualized approach is to determine a programmatic reading based on a holistic understanding of the specific site or a particular site’s relationship to a larger regional context.⁹ The overriding implication is that the understanding of an individual’s place within the context is paramount.

For the Victory Capital at Maillezais, I want to argue that it is geography — specifically the geo-physical topography of the marshy, island setting of the abbey itself — as much as the socio-political issues, that defined the parameters of the context, and thus structured the individual’s perceptual understanding of his or her place within that setting. Therefore while images of the “Man vs. Wild Elements” type can indeed be

⁵ Renè Crozet, “Maillezais,” *Congrès Archéologique de France* (La Rochelle: Société Française d’archéologie, 1956), 85; Costen and Oaks, *Romanesque Churches of the Loire and Western France*, 117; and Maxwell, *The Art of Medieval Urbanism*, 108.

⁶ Linda Seidel, *Songs of Glory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 47.

⁷ Tcherikover, *High Romanesque Sculpture*, 9; Seidel, *Songs of Glory*, ix; and Thomas E. A. Dale, “The Monstrous,” in *A Medieval Companion*, edited by Conrad Rudolph (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 260-261.

⁸ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Seidel, *Songs of Glory*, 3-12. Maxwell, *The Art of Medieval Urbanism*, xv-xvii, 215, argues that the repetition of isolated subjects depicted in imagery can be read through locally based systems of production.

⁹ For instance, see Maxwell, *The Art of Medieval Urbanism*, xv-xix, who states that stylistic studies are “ill-suited” for churches without a clear iconographical programs or large-scale workshops with easily identified masters. He suggests rather that iconographical studies should also consider the conditions of urban settings.

shown, by way of a straight-forward iconographical analysis to have biblical origins linked to the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, an examination of the imagery in relation to the specific environmental circumstances of the abbey's physical setting, as well as the sculpture's production within the era of monastic land expansion that characterized the social-political landscape of the Poitou region in the eleventh century, will demonstrate that the capital could well have been read as a statement on localized urbanization and the concerted harnessing of the physical dimensions of the marshy wetlands surrounding the abbey's island setting.

Employing the methodologies of Cultural Geography and implementing a program of spatial mapping within the micro environment of the monastic foundation of Maillezais Abbey in relation to the macro landscape of the Poitou region, I will argue that the "Man vs. Wild Elements" type of sculptural imagery was particularly relevant and meaningful for the community at Maillezais because the monks, who were key players in the region's political and economic activities, were tasked with the conquering of the wild and unclaimed territory of not only their small island within the ancient Golfe des Pictons, but also the physical landscape of the surrounding marshy wetlands, where they are said to have worked laboriously to build a complicated hydraulic system.

The call for addressing eleventh-century architectural sculptural imagery within a broader contextual approach is not new. Setting the stage for this historiography, scholars Henri Focillon in the 1930's and Meyer Schapiro in the 1970's explored the social and political implications of Romanesque sculpture's production and programmatic themes. Focillon's notion of the "dialectic of the ornamental" suggested the symmetry of ornamental sculpture invoked neo-Platonic attitudes such as the concept of "True

Form.”¹⁰ Similarly, Schapiro’s various articles, collected in the volume entitled *Selected Papers*, argued that “style” was indicative of socio-political atmosphere, and that the juxtaposition between formal qualities signaled the Christian dualities of spirit and matter or God and man.¹¹ For Schapiro, however, it was secular interests that ultimately modified this spiritual view, allowing images of non-descript human figures to signal the secular atmosphere.¹² Arguing along the same lines as Schapiro and Focillion, Anat Tcherikover (1997) followed by clarifying that for the sculpture of Aquitaine, this “secular atmosphere” was shaped and colored by the era of church reform.¹³

Each of these scholars would agree, however, that in order to address meaning within a particular contextual setting, one must first identify and understand the standard, underlying reading of the iconography. It was Tcherikover’s work that set this stage, as her catalog sought to classify and categorize much of the figural imagery found within the Poitou region.¹⁴ She states that, while the sculpture existed mostly for ornamentation of the interior of the church spaces, two general types of sculpture proliferated through the eleventh century: scenes with symmetrical lions or other beastly animals with “twisted necks” and foliate or “corinthianesque” imagery.¹⁵ Characteristically, the more-figural scenes repeat and wrap around the sides of the capital.

Complicating the cataloging efforts of Tcherikover and others is that much of the sculptural imagery in Aquitaine in general, and Poitou specifically, was commonly non-

¹⁰ Henri Focillon, *L’Art d’occident: Le Moyen Age roman et gothique* (Paris, 1938), 104-105.

¹¹ Meyer Schapiro, *Selected Papers: Romanesque Art* (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1977).

¹² Meyer Schapiro, “From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos,” in *Selected Papers*, 28-101, particularly 35.

¹³ Tcherikover, *High Romanesque Sculpture*, 8-9.

¹⁴ Tcherikover, *High Romanesque Sculpture*, pls.1-397.

¹⁵ Tcherikover, *High Romanesque Sculpture*, 10.

figural; few images of the full human figure survive from this early period.¹⁶ Even those hybridized with lions and other beasts have been understood to be ornamental and thus inherently meaningless. These scholars do agree that the more repetitive images — the geometricized ornamentation or the scrolling foliage — served to fill, link or frame objects, and acting as intermediaries between representational motifs.¹⁷ Moreover, it has been suggested that it was the repetitive nature of this sculpture that inspired contemplation.¹⁸ In this way, the imagery worked in a manner similar to the devotional comprehension gained through the liturgy and other textually based materials including music and poetry.¹⁹ For instance, where vegetal capitals were used to punctuate a series of capitals composed to tell stories: their lack of narrative created what Kirk Ambrose calls a “pause.”²⁰ This pause within the imagery could be used to link diverse themes, where the intent was for the viewer to fill in the gaps indicated by foliage.²¹ Referring to

¹⁶ Marie-Thérèse Camus, *Sculpture Romane du Poitou: Les Grands Chantiers du XI Siècle* (Paris: Picard, 1992); Marie-Thérèse Camus, Elisabeth Carpentier and Jean-François Amelot, *Sculpture Romane du Poitou: Le Temps des Chefs-de'œuvre* (Paris: Picard, 2009); Jean-Renè Gaborit, *La Sculpture Romane* (Paris: Hazan, 2010); Eliane Vergnolle, *L'Art Roman en France* (Flammarion, 2005); and Yvonne Labande-Mailfert, *Poitou Roman* (La Pierre-qui-Vire (Yonne): Zodiaque, 1962).

¹⁷ Tcherikover, *High Romanesque Sculpture*; Seidel, *Songs of Glory*; and Kirk Ambrose, *The Nave Sculpture of Vezelay: The Art of Monastic Viewing* (Toronto, Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2006); Maxwell, *The Art of Urbanism*; and Grabar, *The Meditation of Ornament*.

¹⁸ Kirk Ambrose, *The Nave Sculpture of Vezelay: The Art of Monastic Viewing* (Toronto, Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2006), 61; Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 137, states that repetition and omission were rhetorical strategies used for selective emphasis. Dale, *The Monstrous*, 266, points to the inclusion of a chimaera hybrid, within in *versus rapportati* – “versus we all say.” The verses utilized omission and repetition in order to enhance cognitive pattern formulation, which is an effective method for artists to communicate divine invention.

¹⁹ Oleg Grabar, *The Meditation of Ornament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 23-26. Seidel, *Songs of Glory*, 12, opened the doors to this line of analysis, exploring the various ways in which non-narrative imagery was read within the context of poetry, to be followed by the work of Mickey Abel, *Open Access: Contextualizing the Archivolted Portals of Northern Spain and Western France within the Theology and Politics of Entry* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2012), 260, who also correlates poetry with architecture.

²⁰ Ambrose, *The Nave Sculpture of Vezelay*, 61 and 71.

²¹ Maxwell, *The Art of Medieval Urbanism*, 109-111, explains that the absence of clear unifying message was an opportunity for a spectator to draw out selective meanings.

the *Antiquiores consuetudines Cluniacensis monasterii*,²² which describes how a monk would have understood the connection between meditation and ornamentation, Ambrose suggests that this type of ornamental imagery inspired or aided meditation.²³ The monks were meant to gather abundant meaning from these non-narrative scenes. With this in mind we can begin to imagine how the monastic viewer of the Victory Capital at Maillezais might have incorporated this type of imagery within the meaning of their daily rituals.

Corroborating and building on the multivalency possible in the reading of non-figural imagery, the importance of particular spatial and relational understandings becomes relevant. Following a theoretical position espoused by Robert Maxwell, it has been argued that the non-figural, mostly foliate or geometric imagery of Poitou was equally as important to the contextual understanding as the figural because it served both to link the figures and to create a spatial dimension that reflected the qualities of the prevailing local landscape.²⁴ Following this line of thought, the contextualization process for figural imagery, such as that on the Victory Capital, should be seen as a matter of situating or mapping particular elements within the matrix of the predominantly non-figural, and then considering not only the spatial relationship between the two within the architectural space, but also within the external visual connections across geographical

²² Udalrich of Cluny, *Antiquiores consuetudines Cluniacensis monasterii*, Migne, PL, 149, coll. 635-778. See also, S. Boynton, "The Customaries of Bernard and Ulrich as Liturgical Sources," in *From Dead of Night to End of Day: The Medieval Customs of Cluny*, S. Boynton and I. Cochelin eds. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 109-130.

²³ Ambrose, *The Nave Sculpture of Vezelay*, 64.

²⁴ Maxwell, *The Art of Medieval Urbanism*, suggests that an awareness of a town's history and sites construction could have provided one means for viewers to fill in spaces between iconographic subjects. The monks would have filled their own experience within the images that represent gaps in narrative or liturgy – which specifically strengthens and enhances their relationship and place within the spiritualized landscape.

confines. In order to begin this mapping process, one must take into consideration the various iconographic readings of the non-narrative imagery.

As stated above, when we look at the catalogs of architectural sculpture for Poitou, we see that while these scholars tended to emphasize that eleventh-century sculpture was primarily decorative and ornamental with the lack of figural representations; they also note that the few human figures that were sculpted appear in marginal areas of the architecture and thus do not easily support larger narrative schemes.²⁵ Nonetheless, employing traditional iconographical approaches in those cases where there were identifiable characters from biblical narratives or significant historical events, the analysis of sculpture with figures has facilitated my identification of the corpus of comparable imagery by specific site, thus allowing these comparable types to be mapped spatially in relation to each other in both the micro sense of the space of the church interior and the macro sense of the larger geographical region.

Building my own catalog, I have categorized the non-narrative figural imagery of eleventh- and twelfth-century sculpture of southwestern France, specifically that of Poitou and the north Aquitaine regions, using seven key sources (The Non-Narrative

²⁵ Camus, *Sculpture Romane du Poitou*, 18, 84, 86, 104, 109, 133; Camus, Carpentier and Amelot, *Sculpture Romane du Poitou*, 228; and Tcherikover, *High Romanesque Sculpture*, pls. 19, 21, 31, 62, 158. As a side note, it is also interesting to consider the suggestion made by many scholars that the decorative quality and use of line in Romanesque sculpture has been attributed Islamic influences. Dale, *The Monstrous*, 259, states that the ornamental repertoire “ranged from ancient Mesopotamian and Sassanian art to more recent byzantine textiles which made their way to France as objects of gift exchange, as imported for liturgical vestments or wrappings for relics. Andreas Petzold, *Romanesque Art* (New York: Calmann and King, Ltd, 1995), 12-15, states that the Romanesque sculpture resembles Islamic art through the “sense of human under garment, limited repertoire for emotion, use of mosaic and painted arches. He attributes the rise of narratives in historical, lives and liturgical traditions to relationship with Islamic themes. Seidel, *Songs of Glory*, 78, connects the resemblance of Islamic metalwork and ceramics to capitals and vegetal friezes from the Poitou. She states that the relationship with Islamic themes signals continuity with the past, spiritual struggle and the concept of victorious faith.

Figural Chart in the appendix).²⁶ Also included in this catalog are images gathered by the Maillezais Hydraulics Field School, led by Mickey Abel in the summer of 2013.²⁷ The date range encompasses the earliest building phase at Maillezais (around 987) through the construction of the parish churches throughout the region affiliated with Maillezais, built in the twelfth century. This two-hundred-year time period allows this chart to incorporate a broader basis of sites than any one of the base sources. The chart indicates where each element of sculpture came from geographically within the region, as well as where it was located within the actual space of the church.

For the macro view of these elements' relationship to one another, I have utilized ArcGIS software to map these sites, indicating churches that include non-narrative figural imagery, which are listed in the Non-Narrative Figural Chart. **Maps 1-15** use church symbols to indicate precise locations of churches or abbeys, while the black circles indicate city centers near churches. The different types of imagery at each site has been singled out in **Maps 4-15** according to a color-coded system. The images are categorized into four main types: "Beasts," "Hybrids," "Man vs. Wild Elements," and "Labor." While each type includes various subtypes that are described in the appendix, "Beasts" are generally identified by their resemblance to creatures found in nature; "Hybrids" include mythical and composite figures such as a Lamassu, which is a human, bird, and lion or bull combination.²⁸ The "Man vs. Wild Elements" category includes images that have a compositional resemblance to the Victory Capital -- a centralized human figure flanked

²⁶ Tcherikover, *High Romanesque Sculpture*; Camus, *Sculpture Romane du Poitou*; Camus, *Sculpture Romane du Poitou*; Gaborit, *La Sculpture Romane*; Vergnolle, *L'Art Roman en France*; and Labande-Mailfert, *Poitou Roman*.

²⁷ Maillezais Hydraulics Field School Summer 2013 lead by Dr. Mickey Abel: LauraLee Brott, Owen Wilson-Chavez, Dory Deines, and Shana Thompson.

²⁸ Marilyn Stokstad, *Art History*. Vol. 1, ed. 3. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 24-25.

by beasts or hybrids. The “Labor” category separates out images of men holding church construction elements.²⁹

Categorizing the imagery in this fashion is insightful because it demonstrates the frequency of particular types of imagery prevalent in the Poitou region. Importantly, it also facilitates our understanding of how any one image would have been read in isolation, what iconographic meaning did the image suggest within its own frame. This is significant because, as suggested above, the minimal, three-character compositional format of the Victory Capital has led it to be identified as Gilgamesh, thus tying it to a visual trope rooted in Sumerian art.³⁰ Gilgamesh was a historical figure, the sixth king of Uruk from 2600 BCE.³¹ The *Epic of Gilgamesh* was written in Akkadian onto eleven tablets. Described as half-man, half-god,³² Gilgamesh travels to the spiritual realm after the gods vanquished his companion, Enkidu, who was also a hybrid creature, half-man, half-beast. As he navigates through the divine world, he defeats a pair of lions on a mountain pass with his axe.³³ We also know that narrative elements from Mesopotamian legends such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* are found in Biblical narrative.³⁴ The story of Noah and the flood retells the legend of Utnapishtim, whom Gilgamesh meets in in tablet X of the *Epic* in the realm of the Gods.³⁵

²⁹ Camus, *Sculpture Romane du Poitou*, 218-219, 338, labels the figures as “Atlas,” a Roman God who is known to have beyond human strength.

³⁰ Costen and Oaks, *Romanesque Churches of the Loire and Western France*, 117, attribute the scene to Eucharistic ideas “by consuming one, will not be consumed.”

³¹ A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 103. The Sumerian King lists him as ruler for 126 years; David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in The Growth of Biblical Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1991), 89.

³² Tablet I, 1.48; See George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 541, 545.

³³ Tablet IX 1.8-21 describes Gilgamesh’s battle with the lions. See George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 667-669.

³⁴ See Damrosch, “Gilgamesh and Genesis” in *The Narrative Covenant*, 88-143.

³⁵ The Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet X, 1.109, Gilgamesh first speaks to Utnapishtim. See George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 685.



Figure 6 Bull Lyre, Ur, Sumerian, 2500-2400 BCE. Photo: public domain



Figure 7 Lion Gate, Mycenae, 1250 BCE. Photo: public domain.



Figure 8 Ring, Mycenae, 1500 BCE. Photo: public domain.



In this story, Gilgamesh is both man and God, which allows him to play intercessor to the divine world. And thus the visual similarities between the images of Gilgamesh and the Victory Capital warrant consideration, particularly if we consider, as

some have suggested that images of symmetrical lions represent a type of Christ, Lion of Judah or other kingly guardian.³⁹

Gilgamesh is typically pictured in the center of a three-figure composition, surrounded by bulls or lions that symmetrically frame him. The famous Bull Lyre from 3500 BCE depicts the scene on the top register on the front panel.⁴⁰(**fig. 6**) The composition of the Lion Gate into Mycenae, where two lions stand on their hind legs and frame the central keystone, is similar, but here the lions symbolically guard the gates into the city and stand as a monumental symbol of power and strength.⁴¹(**fig. 7**) Likewise, a Mycenaean ring from 1500 BCE shows Gilgamesh grabbing a pair of lions by their legs and neck.⁴²(**fig. 8**) The 2000 years between these objects speaks to the extended propagation of this visual trope.

While it has been shown that these iconic images of Gilgamesh do not explicitly relate to the *Epic*,⁴³ they do serve to reinforce, rather more generally, the tense interplay

³⁹ Maxwell, *The Art of Medieval Urbanism*, 108.

⁴⁰ Stokstad, *Art History*, 35; The Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet I l. 30, 64, 212 refers to Gilgamesh as a bull because of his strength. See George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 539, 543, 551. The Bull Lyre does not depict a scene directly from the narrative. Gilgamesh simply hugs a pair of bulls. The cedar forest, or his hybrid companion Enkidu who assists him in this fight are not incorporated within the imagery. The scorpion man on the bottom register, who in the *Epic* guards the entrance to the world of the Gods, stands with a goat and takes part in what reads as preparations for a feast. The bulls on the top register of the lyre have human faces, enhancing the metaphorical connection humans, the wild elements, and the divine. These animals take on attributes of men. A bull plays a lyre shaped like the actual instrument, while a lion prepares libations. A jackal carries a tray of animal heads.

⁴¹ Stokstad, *Art History*, 100.

⁴² The Mycenaean ring could reference Gilgamesh's battles with the lions described in Tablet IX. The image however does not show his axe, or the mountain-pass on which the scene occurs. For this explanation, see "The Mycenaean World: Five Centuries of Early Greek Culture 1600-1100BC," National Archaeological Museum, December 15, 1988-March 31, 1989 (Athens: Ministry of Culture, The Natural Hellenic Committee, 1988), 200; and ARTSTOR_103_41822000442085, <http://libproxy.library.unt.edu:2325/library/secure/ViewImages?id=8CJGczI9NzldLS1WEDhzTnkrX3kvfVt%2BcSs%3D&userId=gDJEzkt&zoomparams=>.

⁴³ For other images of Gilgamesh, see Beatrice Laura Goff, *Symbols of Prehistoric Mesopotamia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 83-85; Giovanni Curatola, Jean-Daniel Forest, Nathalie Gallois, Carlo Lippolis and Roberta Venco Ricciardi, ed. Giovanni Curatola, *The Art and Architecture of Mesopotamia* (New York and London: Abbeville Press Publicshers, 2006), 43-50; and Eva Strommenger, *5000 Years of the Art of Mesopotamia* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1964), 30, who states

between humans and the wild elements of nature or the landscape. More importantly, they act as signifiers for the divine.⁴⁴ The relationship between the *Epic* and visual representations of Gilgamesh is similar to how the Victory Capital might correlate to biblical narratives; both figures on the Victory Capital and Gilgamesh have super human capabilities, and vanquish animals that are typically associated with strength.

This trope, which can be seen on **Maps 12-13** to proliferate throughout eleventh- and twelfth-century Poitou, is frequently placed within the context of capitals that illustrate biblical stories of the Old Testament. **Figure 9** depicts an image of the choir at Sainte-Radegonde. Here, the six-capital choir is arranged in a horseshoe arch around the altar. Reading the images as if one was to approach the altar space from the western end of the church, the farthest capital on the left side of the arch depicts an image that fits within the Men vs. Beast category. Jackals surround a central male figure. Two foliate capitals follow this image.

The fourth capital from the left is the only narrative capital, and additionally, is the only capital that depicts a different image on each of its sides. (**fig. 13**) These scenes depict narratives from the Old Testament--an image of Daniel in the Lion's Den faces the choir; an enthroned Nebuchadnezzar sits to Daniel's left; and an image of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Paradise faces the ambulatory. To their left, a dynamic scene a man being eaten by lions, presumably from the den, takes the last face of the capital. The final capital in the choir arch depicts an image of symmetrical fanged lions or beasts on all

that images of "heroes" such as those on another Bull Lyre from Ur, are broken into episodes with "no binding scheme in composition;"

⁴⁴ Maxwell, *The Art of Urbanism*, 239, states that images of David as the lion wrestler served as an archetype of "the desirable king," which is relevant within an urban context. Gilgamesh is the only actual human figure in the scene -- his genitals are exposed to emphasize his earthly origin, yet he exhibits god-like strength.

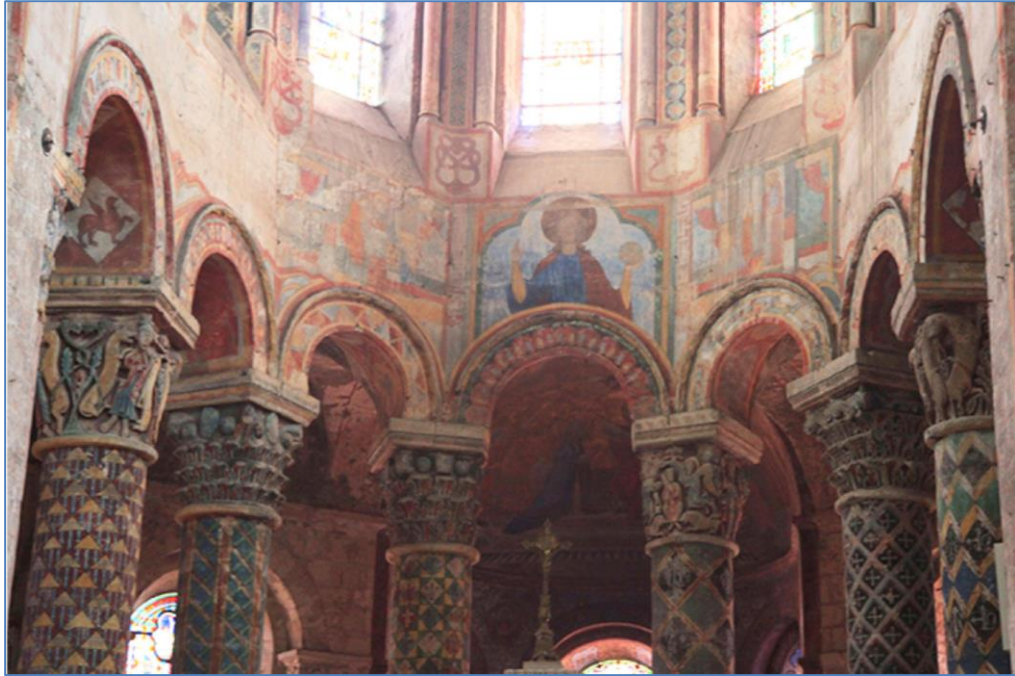


Figure 9 Sainte Radegonde, Poitiers, choir. Left to right: Man vs. Beasts, foliate, foliate, Daniel and the Lions' Den, foliate, Beasts. Photo: author.

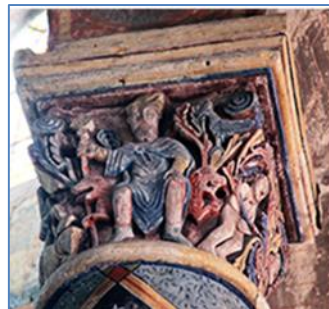


Figure 10 Sainte-Ragonde, Poitiers, ambulatory view of the capitals; Nebuchadnezzar; facing ambulatory, Adam and Eve

four sides. If we look at this quantitatively, within the total program there is a 1 to 3 split between the Narrative, Man vs Beast and Beast categories of images, with over half of the figural imagery in the choir being non-narrative.

Given the proximal and spatial relationships between these types of categories, the question thus becomes, whether it was possible for the viewer to have considered imagery such as the Man vs. Beasts type in relation to neighboring scenes, specifically those of biblical narratives that relate to man and his relationship with lions and other wild elements of the landscape, and thus to define or create a general overarching context. For instance, what is that context, if we consider the capital at Sainte-Radegonde, which depicts a central human form engaged with two lions or jackals on either side, and is thus categorized within the “Man vs. Beast” type,⁴⁵ in relation to an image of Daniel in the Lion’s Den, which faces it across the choir. The first, Man vs. Beasts capital, resembling the Victory Capital at Maillezais, (see **fig. 9**), has figures on each face of the capital that serve to establish a counterbalance with their left arm, which extends outward to grasp a limb from one of the beasts who playfully lick the central figure’s feet. Reflecting this composition, Daniel on the capital across the choir, sits with his legs crossed, peacefully in the center of the composition (see **fig. 12**), while two tamed lions similarly lick his feet and a pair angels hover beside him, providing provisions for his stay in the den.⁴⁶ It can be argued that both capitals at Sainte-Radegonde existed as a type of mnemonic device that served to link the inter-textual components of Daniel’s story. While Daniel’s interactions with the lions is not

Figure 11 St. Pierre de Chauvigny, choir, Babylonia. Photo: author.

⁴⁵ Tcherikover, *High Romanesque Sculpture*, 15, argues that this scene has no known narrative and it is obscure in an iconographical context.

⁴⁶ Tcherikover, *High Romanesque Sculpture*, 15.

Figure 11 St. Pierre de Chauvigny, choir, Babylonia. Photo: author.



specifically described on either capital,⁴⁷ the similarity of the references to man's interactions with wild animals signal the manifestation of a scene outside of the actual story, allowing the reading viewer to create a deeper, more personal connection with the Biblical narrative where the figure on the capital could represent Daniel, or a character that mimics the divine attributes of Daniel.⁴⁸ It is these types of visual similarities and the spatial relationships between the repeating images of the "Man vs. Beast" type that can thus be said to facilitate a narratological connection between the various subjects within the programmatic whole, as well as within the individual images. Importantly it is the individual viewer who has to make the connections.

It is within this type of programmatic and spatial relationships that we should consider the Victory Capital at Maillezais. With an iconographical basis established, the

⁴⁷ Book of Daniel, in *The Holy Bible* (New Revised Standard Version) (Burlingame: Thomas Nelson Publishers for Cokesbury, 1990), 827.

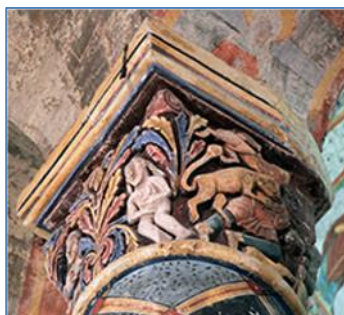
⁴⁸ Ambrose, *The Nave Sculpture of Vezelay*, pl. 34, labels an image that resembles this type at Airvault as "Daniel in the Lions Den."

task at hand shifts to imagining the possible configuration of Maillezais' program. This can be done through supposition based on a statistical analysis of Sainte-Radegonde and Saint Porchaire, which are similar in size and date to Maillezais, but which have a fuller set of extant capitals in the nave and choir and western portal. The early choir at Maillezais has the same number of columns in the choir as Saint Radegonde and has a portal that has been proposed as the model for that at Maillezais.⁴⁹ In both Saint Radegonde and Saint Porchaire, images of foliage unevenly divide the narrative and non-narrative figural scenes. (**fig. 11**) Quantitative analysis of the frequency of the non-

Figure 12 Sainte-Radegonde, Poitiers, Daniel and the Lions' Den, scene to Daniel's left; facing the choir. Photo: author.



(Left) Scene to Daniel's right (Enthroned Nebuchadnezzar); (Right) Adam and Eve



⁴⁹ Abel, "To Sea and Be Seen," 13.

narrative figural type in the choir in Saint Radegonde shows that there is a 1/3 split between narrative scenes, Man vs. Wild Elements, and Beast types. Precisely 17% of the Man vs. Wild Elements category was represented in choir, 17% of beasts, and 17% direct narrative. The remaining 50% consists of foliate imagery. At Saint-Porchaire, the extant four, three sided capitals show 1 / 4 divide between narrative and non-narrative imagery. **(fig. 13)** 25% of the narrative imagery illustrates scenes from the Old Testament story of Daniel and the Lion's Den. The remaining 75% depicts beasts, 58% of which depict lions and 17% birds. These sites show a trend in sculptural ornamentation where most of the imagery was made of up foliage or non-narrative figural motifs, and a smaller percentage was directly figural.

I would argue that the program at Maillezais would have followed a similar formula as that at Sainte-Radegonde and Saint-Porchaire, where 50-75% of the imagery in the choir would have been filled with foliate or non-narrative imagery, and then 17-25% direct narrative imagery. Originally, the nave at Maillezais would have had 16 columns. Each column has four shafts. Following the formula at Sainte-Radegonde and Saint-Prochaire, the non-narrative and narrative scenes would likely have taken up to three sides, with foliate in between each figural scene. This ratio reflects what we can see in the six extant capitals within the nave at Maillezais, where the Victory Capital sits between a set of two and a set of three capitals, all foliate. **(fig. 14)**

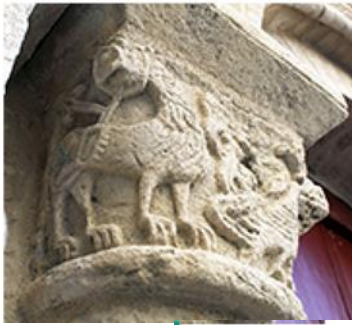
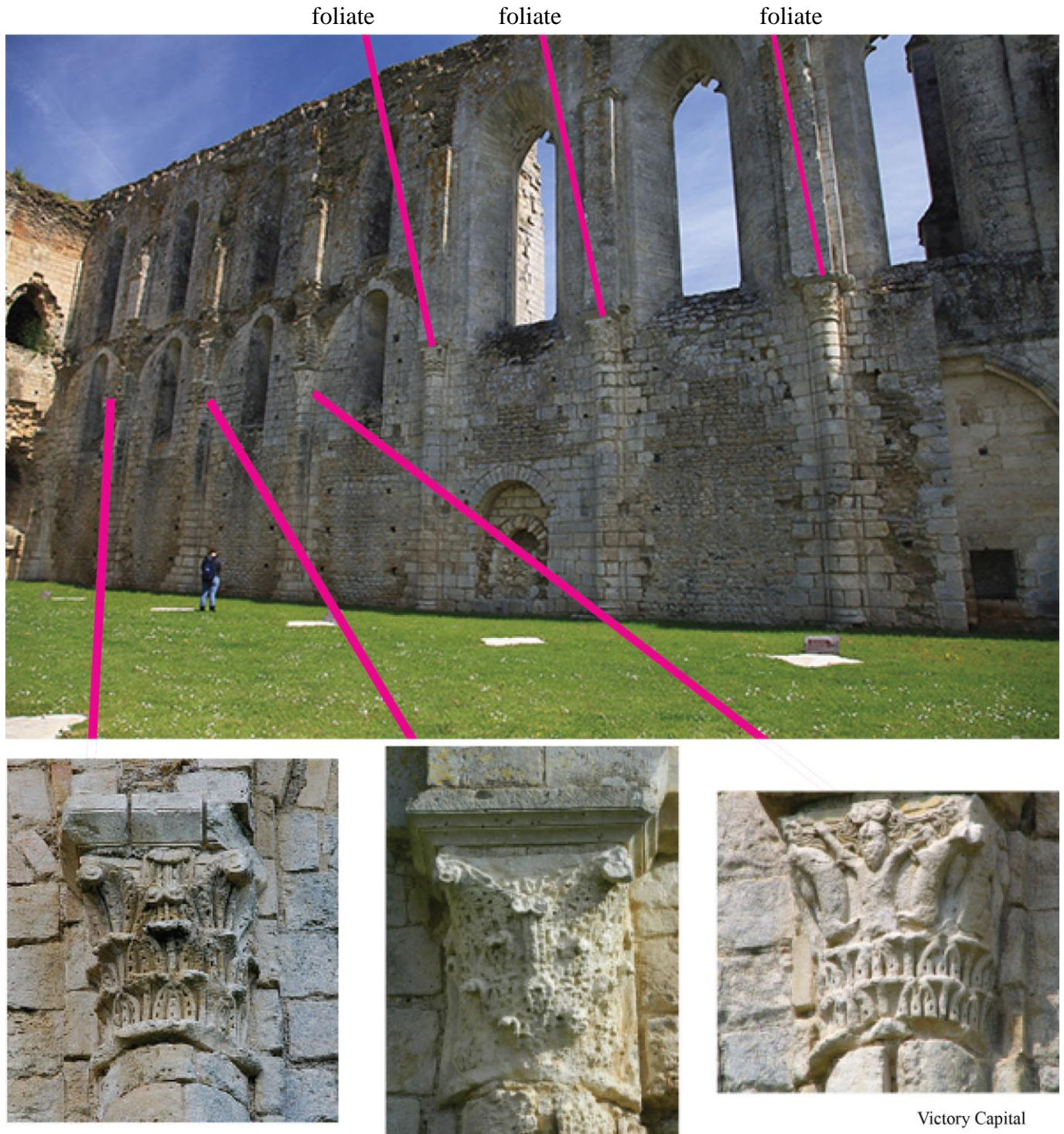


Figure 13 St. Prochaire, Poitiers, porch capitals details. Top left: lions, birds; top right: lions; bottom left: lions; bottom right: Daniel in the lions' den. Photo: author.



Figure 14 Foliate Capitals, Maillezais Abbey. Photo: author.



For the fuller configuration of imagery within the abbey's nave, we can also look at St. Nicolas de Maillezais, one of Maillezais' parish churches constructed circa 1073.⁵¹ Like Sainte-Radegonde, Saint-Porchaire, St. Nicolas included images representative of all four main categories and even sub-categories within the non-narrative figural types accounted for in my catalog. Given this continued and enduring precedence, it seems likely that the nave program at Maillezais abbey would also have included images of all of the non-narrative figural types described in the appendix, and that these figural types would have been interspersed throughout the church interior and western facade.

With this hypothetical assemblage of imagery in mind, we can begin to consider how the monastic audience might have perceived this imagery within its particular architectural setting. The sculptural programs in these early eleventh-century sites were commonly linked with the architectural layout of the structures.⁵² For instance, façade sculpture differs from that in the cloister, nave, or ambulatory arcade because each of these spaces addressed a different audience and thus differed in their intended programmatic message. Façade sculpture was viewable by the public, while the enclosed area of the cloisters and many monastic naves were accessible only to the monks and church officials. It is commonly understood that these architectural spaces were reserved for the monastic audience and frequently used as a tool for the monks' contemplation.⁵³

⁵¹ Renè Crozet, *L'Art Roman en Poitou*, edited by Henri Laurens (Paris, 1948), 92; Abel, "To Sea and Be Seen," 18.

⁵² Bruno Boerner, "Sculptural Programs," in *A Companion to Medieval Art*, edited by Conrad Rudolph (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 569, states that there is "no consistent principle according to which the sculptures are arranged in the architectural layout of the buildings. Instead, you can find a wide range of architectural frames for the sculptural cycles."

⁵³ Wolfgang Braunfels, *Monasteries of Western Europe: The Architecture of the Orders* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd, 1972), 11-12. Ambrose, *The Nave Sculpture of Vezelay*, 4, states that eleventh-century abbey spaces were conceived for monastic rituals, since the churches in this region were initially built before the pilgrimage era.

For instance, architectural space could be understood to be a manifestation of the liturgy with spiritual truths communicated through physical movement, philosophical concepts and mathematical principles.⁵⁴ This is based on the understanding that the monastic viewer was educated and more familiar with biblical imagery and thus did not require explicit visual narrative. The monks were expected rather to seek deeper meaning than the literal or allegorical, to reach an anagogical level of reading and gain a spiritual understanding of the imagery in a way that connects all the individual components together.⁵⁵

The sculptural programs that used non-narrative figural imagery in a contemplative manner to “fill in the gaps” within the narratives and liturgy, as suggested above, employed figural images to punctuate and illustrate key moments in the biblical stories.⁵⁶ The monastic viewer at Maillezais, steeped in the life of liturgical practice, with its specific reading and interpretive patterns,⁵⁷ would have considered the iconography on the Victory Capital within the larger program of imagery in this manner, taking into consideration the whole program created by the sixteen columns.

Scholars have shown that in the eleventh century, images of the monstrous or hybrid creatures were seen to be particularly useful as an aid in the participation of a

⁵⁴ Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka. *Medieval Practices of Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 136. Abel, *Open Access*, 63-90, 425-429, argues that the archivolt reflects an awareness of mathematics, geometry, music, and astronomy. Ambrose, *The Nave Sculpture at Vezelay*, 65, also relates the sculpture to calendric tables developed by Bede from as early as the 8th century to the “systematic disposition of foliate bands provides an ordered structure for the multiplicity of forms.”

⁵⁵ Henri de Lubec, *Medieval Exegesis, Volume 2, The Four Senses of Scripture* (Edinburgh, Erdmans Publishing, 1959/2000).

⁵⁶ Ambrose, *The Nave Sculpture of Vezelay*, 19-20, 34, 61, 70, shows that at Vezelay, the images on the capitals in the nave incorporate familiar hand signals used for delivering liturgy during prescribed periods of silence. The monastic viewer was required to incorporate the imagery within their comprehension of the liturgy. He cites Hugh of St. Victor as who describes a “collecting” signs for high truths. As the viewer moves through nave of Vezelay, he was “gathering biblical episodes, elaborated with rich foliate ornamentation upon which he can meditate.”

⁵⁷ Hanawalt and Kobialka, *Medieval Practices of Space*, 144.

more emotional, affective liturgy.⁵⁸ While Saint Bernard of Clairvaux in his *Apologia* saw monstrous images as distracting and frivolous,⁵⁹ it can also be said that distraction from the sacred was performed and ritualized in the architectural context.⁶⁰ Images of hybrid beasts caused the monk to contemplate malevolent spirits, and it was understood that the act of viewing this type of image neutralized the dichotomy between sin and virtue.⁶¹

Considering the Victory Capital in this diametrical context, the centralized figure can be read as the virtuous protagonist in this scene because he is the only human in the image. **(fig. 2)** The notion of who the victor might be, the man or the wild elements is, however, unclear. The human figure in the center displays super-human strength by fighting off two lions, while the beasts seem prepared to tear off the man's limbs. At first glance of the image, it might seem that the human figure is taming these creatures, but if the viewer were to pause at the scene, the image also suggests that the figure is soon to be overpowered; his only stability is obtained by grasping the organic tendrils in the upper register. The conflict displayed in the image is only resolved through the monk's meditative emotional response to the imagery.⁶² His mental participation in the

⁵⁸ Eric Palazzo, "Visions and Liturgical Experience in the Early Middle Ages," in *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art History*, Colum Hourihane, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 16, suggests that this type of devotion was developed during the eleventh century.

⁵⁹ Conrad Rudolph, "The 'Things of Greater Importance:' Bernard of Clairvaux's 'Apologia' and The Controversy over Monastic Art" (PhD diss. University of California, Los Angeles, 1985), 282-283.

⁶⁰ Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 140-142, states that images of monsters in margins generate anxiety as a prelude to meditation. Some of the images are amusing, used in didactic contexts to stimulate productive thinking. Dale, *The Monstrous*, 267, states that "these images suggest a deeper reality within monastic thought in which the body and its verbal and visual representations functioned as an image of the spiritual, inner man and externalized its conflicts and anxieties." Man could still be influenced by the lower "animal power" of sensations associated with the imagination.

⁶¹ Grabar, 193, states that true conversion to the religious life could be achieved only by first recalling past vices and sins. Also see Grabar, 37; Dale, *The Monstrous*, 269; and Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 272-276.

⁶² Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 54, suggests that

contemplation of the scene could have been internalized as a triumph over evil foes — the type of triumph that offers celestial rewards for the arming against wrongdoing.⁶³

The notion of movement also plays a role in this type of affective devotion in relation to architectural sculpture. Compositional symmetry and repetition within a program of sculpture served to push the viewer forward or around a spatial configuration.⁶⁴ The symmetry of the types of images cataloged on the Non-Narrative Figural Chart inspired movement. In many cases, the compositions are directed toward the edges of the capitals, which require the viewer to physically move to view entire set of images (see **figs. 15-17**, which illustrate capitals from the nave at Saint Jean de

Figures 15, 16, 17 Saint Jean de Montierneuf, Poitiers, nave capitals. Photo: author.



emotional responses inspired the audience to imitate the saints and contemplate their place within the narratives. She argues that this emotional reaction is an inherent component within the medieval viewer's processes of intellectual comprehension.

⁶³ Seidel, *Songs of Glory*, 56.

⁶⁴ Grabar, *The Meditation of Ornament*, 207.



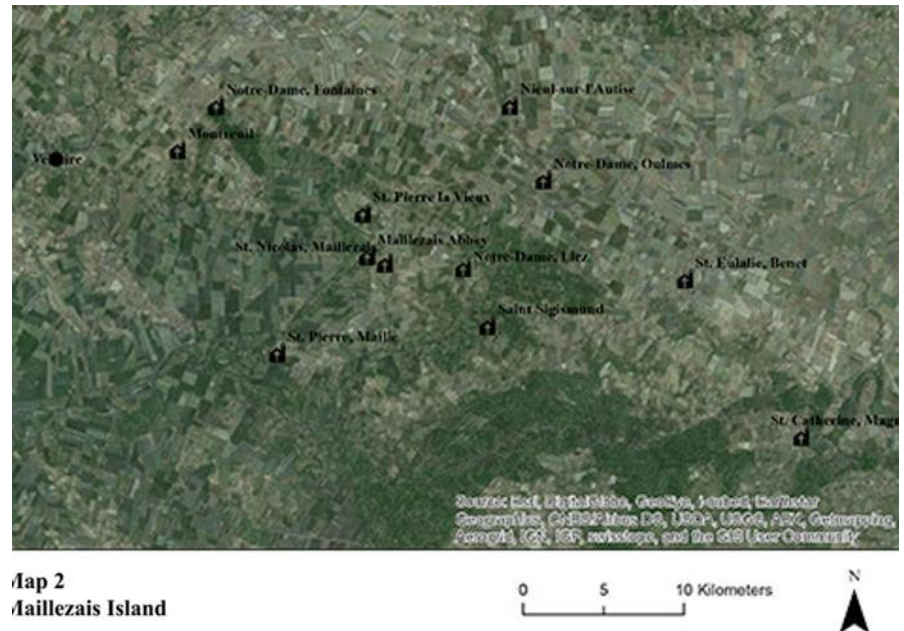
Figure 18 Maillé, west façade. Photo: author.

Montierneuf). The viewer's moving journey is ultimately concludes at the altar space at the end of the nave.

Outside of the church, the repetitive nature of friezes carry the viewers around the exterior of the structure, as seen at Maillé. **(fig. 18)** Foliage scrolls horizontally across the portals, connecting the architectural elements. Understanding that Maillezais probably had portals resembling those at Maillé, with its characteristically Romanesque radiating archivolts as ornamentation to the western church exterior, it is possible that the monastic viewer at Maillezais would have been aware of the metaphorical implications of the liminal transition between the exterior and interior of the church space.⁶⁵ The archivolts enhanced the notion of transition from earthly to heavenly spheres, which is aided by the sculpture in the interior. In similar manner to the way images on capitals within the interior of a nave or choir encouraged a forward momentum toward the altar space, the archivolts on the exterior portals were used to move the viewer inward from the exterior, earthly realm.

⁶⁵ Abel, *Open Access*, 125.

Map 2 Maillezais Island.
Photo: author.



Map 2
Maillezais Island



Map 3 Claude Masse, 17th
century. Photo: author.

Key to this programmatic reading is the correlation between the spirituality of the altar region and the untamed nature of the exterior world. I would argue that the larger geographic context facilitated a multivalent reading of imagery such as the Victory Capital and inspired a comprehension reflective of the natural world and of the prevailing

geographical topography. At Maillezais this is particularly significant because of Maillezais abbey's topographical setting on an island in the ancient Golfe des Pictons. Now a part of the mainland, Maillezais was once surrounded by a canal system constructed contemporaneously with the monastic church in the early eleventh century.⁶⁶ The ancient island is still visible from an aerial view of the site on **Map 2** and the abbey sat on the western most point of the island, seen in a detail on **Map 3**.

Given this setting, Maillezais was naturally and metaphorically correlated with the island of Patmos on which St. John recorded the events of the apocalypse.⁶⁷ The rivers that flanked the abbey existed as a metaphor for the four rivers of Paradise so vividly described by Augustine.⁶⁸ Scholarship from the early sixth century, such as Cosmas Indicopleustes's *Christian Topography* and the tenth-century *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* explicitly discuss how one approaches such an earthly paradise from the ocean.⁶⁹ These authors situate Eden on an island. They describe Eden as fruitful and abundant, a "heavenly land of bliss and eternal light." Eden is the source of four rivers, an "island of singing monks," and a place where beasts, monsters and large fish reside."⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Abel, "To Sea and Be Seen," 12.

⁶⁷ Revelation to John, 1:9 in the The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (Nashville, Burlingame: Thomas Nelson Publishers for Cokesbury, 1990), 245; Cécile Treffort, "Îles et Moines du Littoral Atlantique entre Loire et Gironne au Moyen Âge," in *Lérins, une île sainte de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge* (Brepols, Turnhout, 2009), 319-334.

⁶⁸ Alessandro Scafi, *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 44.

⁶⁹ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography*, Constantinople, ninth century (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana) MS Vat. Gr. 699. For translations see Scafi, "Where Is Nowhere?" in *Mapping Paradise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 160-182; *Navigatio Sancti Brendani abbatis: De reis van Sint Brandaan: Een reisver hall uit de twaalfde eeuw*, Willem Wilmink, ed. (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Prometheus—Bert Baker, 1994).

⁷⁰ *Navigatio Sancti Brendani abbatis*, I. 38-9, 42, 60 in Scafi, *Mapping Paradise*, 52-53.

in the twelfth century, Strabo went so far as to place Eden “in the sunrise,” and thus in the East.⁷¹

Connecting this description to the geographic and topographic siting of Maillezais’ abbey church, one could project that after entering the western narthex, a monastic viewer would have been aware that if he turned around and looked in the direction from which he had just entered, he would have seen a stretch of water leading out into the ocean directly beyond the monastic grounds. The view would have transported him miles out beyond the bountiful landscape due to the abbey’s elevated position on a hill.

Reflecting this topographic setting, nature itself is depicted within the church in various ways, from the explicit to the implied. The many Corinthian capitals, with large triangular shapes that curl outward, line the inner and outer walls of the churches in the Aquitaine. These capitals, which flank the Victory Capital on the northern wall, feature shapes that repeat in multiple registers in a busy composition, similar to a leafy plant. **(fig. 14)** The bottom two registers of the Victory capital, while abstract in nature, originally depicted a similar leafy, vegetal motif. The ornamental nature of this type of sculpture, indicated on the Non-Narrative Figural Chart by the symmetrical compositions and use of repetition, evoke the notion of Eden because of the inclusion of wild beasts and fertile, and fanciful foliage.⁷²

⁷¹ Strabo is cited in *Glossa ordinaria*, which was either written by Strabo or compilers from the twelfth-century monastic school in Laon, France. See Scafi, *Mapping Paradise*, 49-50; *Biblia latina cum Glossa ordinaria* (1480/1; 1992), I, 21.

⁷² Oleg Grabar, *The Meditation of Ornament*, 191-192, 205, 207, states that “images with architecture and landscape evoke the notion of paradise rather than explicitly representing.” He goes on to say that the myth of Paradise was depicted as a mountainous garden with animals romping in a setting of real or imagined vegetation. The myth is rooted in ancient Mesopotamian sources, and may have affected Roman art. He stipulates, however, that the images of nature in Romanesque were uncharged and served to help the viewer move through the space.

Similar capitals were in the nave at Saint-Jean de Montierneuf in Poitiers, but there the vines originate in the gaping mouths of lions. **(fig. 15)** These vines curl out and extend onto the other sides of the sculpture. These somewhat grotesque scenes are coupled with images of animals sharing water and eating fruits. **(figs 16, 17)** These “naturalistic” scenes that depict everyday activities of animals, are juxtaposed with the hybridized beasts. This relationship emphasized the inherent good and evil in nature,⁷³ but could also have alluded to the real perils (robbers, beasts) within the medieval forest.⁷⁴

It has been noted that the monk’s interaction with the landscape solidified their place within a sacred geography.⁷⁵ In this sense, a monastery existed as the site where the monks placed themselves within an earthly Jerusalem,⁷⁶ where they imagined themselves existing as “angels” within their sacred topography, working together as a community to guarantee their position in the heavenly realm. The types of ornamental images organized in the Non-Narrative Figural chart, on both the interior and exterior of churches, aided in this notion of a spiritual landscape. The images of paradise, which include fundamentally earthly elements, created both tension and harmony between the divine and themes that would be relevant to the local population of monks.⁷⁷ With Maillezais’ particular island

⁷³ Maxwell, *The Art of Medieval Urbanism*, 239; Seidel, *Songs of Glory*, 41; Dale, “The Monstrous,” 269.

⁷⁴ Ambrose, *The Nave Sculpture at Vezelay*, 64.

⁷⁵ Amy G. Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past: Monastic Foundation Legends in Medieval Southern France* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), 21.

⁷⁶ Maxwell, *The Art of Medieval Urbanism*, 239, and 61-62. He states that the Parthenay can be read through a palimpsestual framework where the layers “came to achieve a kind of ideological sublime.” The foundation of the St. Sepulcher demonstrates how an interest in the Holy Land could be co-opted for strategic urban aims.

⁷⁷ Ann Marie Yasin, “Making Use of Paradise: Church Benefactors, Heavenly Visions, and the Late Antique Commemorative Imagination” in *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 44, states that in images of paradise on sixth-century apse programs, the world between spatial and celestial is broken by incorporation of historical mortal donor figures and local saints. The church programs give local expression to the theological hierarchy. The images “invite the beholders and teach them not to participate in that world as well.”

setting, this type of imagery had the potential to evoke a unique comprehension of the relation between the natural setting and the sacred enclosure.

One way to grasp how this relationship between the earthly realm and the spiritual confines was understood is to look at the imagery from a macro point of view, that is to situate the imagery geographically. **Maps 1-16** place the images to be considered with in their geographical context, providing insight on how the eleventh-century viewer might have read the imagery in relation to the physical topography that surrounded them in their day-to-day reality. These maps also provide a resource for calculating the geographical distance between eleventh- and twelfth-century church sites in the Poitou region, contextualizing how the monastic audience would have perceived their position within the region's topography.

There are a number of variables to consider, though, before factoring the maps within a quantitative context. First, there are likely additional church sites that exist, but are not indicated on the map because the sites were either not included in the catalogs employed or are no longer extant. Second, the data accounted for two hundred years of church construction, but it does not differentiate between eleventh- and twelfth-century sites. So the eleventh-century viewer would have been privy to a smaller percentage of this imagery than the twelfth-century viewer. While the date range considered includes the earliest building phase at Maillezais through the later building of the parish churches throughout the region, it is important to recognize that each of these sites, at the time of their construction, likely incorporated a wider scope of imagery than indicated on **Maps 1-15** and in the Non-Narrative Figural Chart, which specifies where these images are found in the church because neither accounts for imagery no longer extant.

With these factors in mind, and orienting ourselves to the ancient Golfe des Pictons, we see that Maillezais Island is indicated by the darker green of its lush vegetation. From this vantage point, the church sites seem to fan outward from the gulf, the epicenter of the hydraulic canal system. Beyond this, what can immediately be ascertained from the maps of sites included in the catalogs, is that the churches were primarily situated on the edges of the light brown lowlands; the gap between the ancient gulf and the lowlands to the east was less-sparsely populated with church sites.

Interestingly, the geography of the church layout in the city of Poitiers can be compared to how the sites on and around Maillezais Island were situated. Poitiers was densely populated with sites erected in the eleventh century. **Map 16** locates six of these church sites, situated less than one kilometer apart, making it possible to visit each of these sites, multiple times in one day. **Map 2** shows that while the churches near Maillezais were built to accommodate the island topography and are spread farther apart than those within Poitiers, travel to multiple sites on the island and mainland would also have been possible in one day. The overriding implications of this geographical context is that a traveling viewer would have had the opportunity to engage with the four types of imagery cataloged at multiple sites in relative close proximity.

This is interesting because we know that the typical monastic viewer was frequently engaged in activities that aided in the construction of mental and sacred geographies.⁷⁸ Sacred processions that established the borders of a town are one example

⁷⁸ Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, 72, states that the inclusion of church spaces creates topographic points that define undefined space, giving it significance by indication of name. The relationship between one's conception of their own physical geography and map-making, whether mental or material, has been discussed by cultural geographers that investigate the terms landscape, space/place and boundaries. See also, Geoff King, *Mapping Reality: An Exploration of Cultural Geographies* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1996), 15-17; and Denis Cosgrove, "Mapping/Cartography," in *Cultural Geography: A Critical Definition of Key Concepts*, David Atkinson, Peter Jackson, David Sibley and Neil

of this type of geographical engagement.⁷⁹ Architectural imagery was factored within that experience and the repetition of themes and archetypes aided in the thematic composition.⁸⁰ Sites that repeat isolated subjects throughout a specified region thus served to construct one's mental geography of place. In this way, the monastic viewer at Maillezais could have connected the sculptural imagery both on the exterior portal and the churches' interior with regard to their unique relationship with the watery landscape that surrounded the abbey. This becomes particularly relevant when we consider the specific social and political climate at Maillezais.

Maillezais was established in 987 by Emma of Blois and her husband, Duke William IV of Aquitaine.⁸¹ William IV was also known as "Iron Arm" because of his military accomplishments.⁸² In light of local property disputes, William, along with the regional bishops, convened at the Peace Council of Charroux in 989 to discuss the "criminal actions" of the region's nobility.⁸³ This Council marked the beginning of the Peace of God movement in the Aquitaine region. The construction of Maillezais was relevant to the Peace of God in that it reified William IV's sacred patronage as well as his secular legitimacy.⁸⁴

Washbourne, eds. (London: I.B. Taurus, 2005), 27-28. These scholars explore the use of mapping to visualize the spatial relationships between social, cultural and political developments.

⁷⁹ Abel, "Inclusive Circles of Peace: The Politics of Entry," in *Open Access*, 122-157, particularly 130-133, addresses the issue of inter-church processions.

⁸⁰ Maxwell, *The Art of Medieval Urbanism*, 3-13, states that sculptural imagery constructs the notion of a community through their placement within existing city structures that mobilize the *polis* (community). The proliferation of a "type" of sculpture within a limited context was a conscious approach to constructing an urban or regional identity.

⁸¹ Thomas Head, "The Development of the Peace of God in Aquitaine (970-1005)," *Speculum*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (1999), 670.

⁸² Head, "The Development of the Peace of God in Aquitaine," 659.

⁸³ Head, "The Development of the Peace of God in Aquitaine," 666.

⁸⁴ Head, "The Development of the Peace of God in Aquitaine," 667; and Abel, *Open Access*, 133. Archbishop Gunabldus met with William IV after the council in Poitiers. The Archbishop recognized William IV's economic power and social influence, and sought his aid in retaining the efforts of the Charroux council. This evidences William IV's position of privilege, despite his actions in the previous

The key component to maintaining the Peace was the expansion of sacred territory. This movement sought to reclaim and spiritualize the wild territories that surrounded the cities. This untamed countryside was thought to be a haven for both marauding invaders and land-grabbing independent warriors seeking to build their own fiefdoms.⁸⁵ The monastic communities, particularly those along the coastline of western France, had a particularly vivid conception of the inherent dangers of the wild and unclaimed territory, as they were frequently the targets of the violent destruction inherent in both groups of people. They were therefore instrumental, beginning in the year 1000, in the active promotion of land reclamation and resettlement. The monks worked to multiply arable acreage by chopping down forests, cleaning brush and thickets, and draining marshy soil.⁸⁶ Maillezais, for instance, was transformed from the Duke's remote hunting lodge into a site for sacred patronage.⁸⁷

The spiritual component of this land reclaiming can be seen in Maillezais' foundation legend.⁸⁸ Maillezais was established at the site of a miraculous event involving a wild boar witnessed by Emma of Blois, William IV's wife.⁸⁹ This legend follows a trope found in many French monastic foundation stories,⁹⁰ where it was the

years. The fact that Maillezais was established before the Council of Charroux is telling of William IV's involvement in the regional politics, both sacred and secular.

⁸⁵ Maxwell, *The Art of Medieval Urbanism*, 49, 60, 69.

⁸⁶ Mickey Abel, "Recontextualizing the Context: The Dispute Capital from Saint-Hilaire in Poitiers and Storytelling in the Poitou around the Time of the Peace of God Movement," *Gesta*, 71/1 (2008), 55-57.

⁸⁷ Mickey Abel, "Emma of Blois as Arbiter of Peace and the Politics of Patronage," in *Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 851-852.

⁸⁸ Petrus Malleacensis, *De antiquitate et Commutatione in Melius Mallaecensis Insulae et Translatione Corporis Sancti Rigomeri*, 1.2, J. Migne, ed. *Patrologia Latina* 146 (Paris: Vayet, 1851), 1 (fol. 247 b).

⁸⁹ Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, 45 and 75, states that the couple and their hunting party came upon "church ruins" with three altarpieces. A member of the hunting party touched one altar and was blinded. See also Abel, "Emma of Blois as Arbiter of Peace and the Politics of Patronage," 838.

⁹⁰ Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, 1-21, states that monastic foundation legends are part of an "imaginative memory" and were a reflection upon the past. Charters also manifest sacred nature of site. In the 10th century there was increased attention to foundation legends, which helped in the establishment of communal identities by 1000.

elements of the landscape acted as the signifier of the divine, rather than the presence of a holy saint or relic.⁹¹ In the case of Maillezais,⁹² it is possible that in an effort to legitimize the sacredness of the site, the founders of the abbey not only considered the possible metaphorical relationship between the creatures that existed in the Garden of Eden, but those found in the real landscape as a means to spiritualize the process of land reclamation.

When considered in relation to these spiritualized foundations, the sculptural imagery captured and reflected the land that surrounded their sacred sanctuary. In this sense, the Victory Capital's imagery can be said to have heightened the viewers' perception of the process of land claiming, particularly in light of the abbey's ongoing and contemporaneous construction of the complicated new hydraulic program. This ancient canal system can, seen on **Map 3**, was drawn by Claude Masse, a seventeenth-century cartographer.⁹³ It shows how the canals radiate outward from the monastery site. The monks, clerical officials and political leaders in Maillezais controlled this canal system to increase the amount of arable land and provide additional economic capital.⁹⁴ This control of the water enhanced the abbey's regional political and religious prestige.

Given the predominance of water surrounding the abbey, the leafy shapes depicted on corinthianesque capitals in the area, as well as the bottom two registers on the Victory Capital, itself could well have been imagined as representative of the marshy landscape. In this context the male figure's presence in the nave would have inspired the

⁹¹ Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, 65; Abel, "Emma of Blois," 837.

⁹² Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, 77.

⁹³ See Mickey Abel, "Defining a New Coast: G.I.S. Reconstruction of Maillezais Abbey's Hydraulic Drainage Program and the Coastline it Created," in this volume.

⁹⁴ Abel, "To Sea and Be Seen," 13, 20.



Figure 19 Saint Nicholas, Maillezais, portal frieze. Photo: author.

monks to contemplate their own place within the environment, which at the time was consistently changing and expanding outward into unknown regions. The many images of men working with these marshy elements can be seen at Saint-Eutrope in Saintes (**fig. 19**) and Saint Nicolas in the village of Maillezais (**fig. 20**), where repetitive figures holding the western portals. Similar imagery adorns the outer apse wall in Saint-Pierre in Aulnay. Images of men hold up the weight of the stone above them at both Saint-Hilaire-des-Loges (**fig. 21**) and Saint Nicolas in Maillezais. These images suggest that the medieval audience was perhaps intended to contemplate the physical labor necessary to conquer the landscapes in the region.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Abel, "Recontextualizing the Context," 51, similarly argues that audience of the Dispute Capital on the façade of Saint-Hilaire was intended to recognize the relationship between man and the processes land claiming during the Peace of God movement.



Figure 20 Aulnay, Saint-Pierre, apse window. Top left: central window; top right: slab relief detail. Photo: author.

Figure 21 Saint Nicholas, Maillezais, portal. Photo: author. (top right)

Figure 22 Saint-Hilaire-des-Loges, nave. Photo: author.



Placing this type of imagery within the greater geographical context of Poitou, as well as within the spatial context of the church architecture, allows us to better understand both its broad social-political implications and its site-specific meanings. In it, we can see that the rise in church construction in the early eleventh century led to the proliferation of sculptural tropes that emphasized man's relationship with the wild elements. The constant reminding of the populous of their triumph and ingenuity in the construction of such sites that in many controlled the water, gave the illusion that the giving of life was initiated from within the church. The imagery on the Victory Capital, although now seen as a lone capital remaining within a vast two-aisled basilica, was likely part of a program that featured other imagery of the type linked to the "Man vs. Wild Elements" theme and perhaps all of the categories of imagery described in the

appendix. With this as their visual backdrop, the monastic viewer at Maillezais would have understood these images within the context of their practices of landscape claiming. Read in relation to ideas of Eden and the spiritualized land reclamation of the landscape, we come to understand the context where landscape was mythologized, tamed, and ultimately controlled by man to their spiritual, economic and political benefit. 🐉

II. A. Visual Catalog

This section defines the image type categories listed on the Non-Narrative Figural Chart. The images are labeled by site, followed by a number in parentheses that corresponds to the chart source document.

Beasts

The wider category of beasts includes animals that are recognizable in nature such as lions, birds, elephants and jackals.

Lions

Images of lions are defined by the shape of their large, round torso and paws. Curvilinear lines on the neck region defines the mane on these creatures. The lions often share a face on the edge of the capital.



Thouras, Saint-Laon
Nave or Transept, (164)



Sainte-Radegonde, Poitiers, Choir, (140)
Image credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez



Parthenay-le-Vieux, Saint-Pierre
Apse, (153)



Saint-Nicholas, Maillezais, Transept
Image credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez

Lions often appear without a mane (left image). The face also has human characteristics, which can be seen through the elongated shape of the nose and shape of the lips.

Birds



Maillezais Abbey, Narthex
Image credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez

A surviving capital in the narthex at Maillezais includes images of symmetrical birds. The birds are defined by the inclusion of wings and pointed beak. Their bodies are faced forward while their necks are contorted backward toward the edge of the capital. Their claws rest on a rabbit or other rodent that sits on the center of the bottom register. Large round circles on the heads define their eyes, which appear to be open widely.

At Saint Pierre in Aulnay-de Saintogne, images of birds are carved onto three faces of a four shaft freestanding column. The birds stand in the center of the composition. The birds are peacocks, identified by repetitive lines shapes near the neck and tail, which define the opposing feather textures that are found on the actual creature. Their long tail features are tucked down toward their legs. Like the capital at Maillezais, their necks bend backward, toward the outer edges of the capital. They stand on a large leaf that dominates the bottom register. The leaf curves upward on its front edges, creating a shape that resembles a boat. The ends of the boat extend upward onto the edges of the capital and terminate into a leaf shapes. The peacocks dip their beaks toward the leaf shapes, indicating that they are eating the plant.



Aulnay-de-Saintogne, Saint-Pierre
Nave, (102)

Birds

Images of symmetrical birds are also seen converging towards a water vessel or fruit. Alike the birds at Aulnay de Saintogne, their beaks either touch or disappear into the vessels. Birds that resemble egrets at Chivaux prop one of their legs onto the vessel, which creates more lines that guide the viewers eye toward the center. A metopede in the crypt at Charroux shows a similar composition, but in this image the birds' beaks are connected. Four lines extend outward from the bottom portion of the drinking vessel, and encase the birds in leafy tendrils that complete in fleur-de-lis shapes in the corners.



Civaux, Saint-Gervais, Saint-Protais
Nave, (105)



Charroux,
Crypt, (104)

Birds in a similar composition adorn the archivolt on the exterior portal at Aulnay-de-Saintogne (top right). The birds' bodies are faced outward, while the neck faces inward toward the centralized vessel. The tips of their beaks dip into the vessel. Their eyes are open wide out toward the viewer.

On the register to their left, birds that resemble peacocks perch on top of jackals. The jackals and birds create a "ying-yang" effect: the birds eat bugs out of the jackals' hinds, while the jackals bite the birds rear. Their mouths are open wide and are placed just under the birds' long feathers. The scene could represent a symbiotic relationship between the two creatures.

Similar imagery adorns double capitals in Notre Dame at Soudan (bottom right), except here birds stand on lions. The peacocks stand on their hinds and eat out of the lion's ears. Their necks bow outward and converge on the corners while their long features extend inward toward the beasts neck.



Soudan, Notre-Dame, (177)



Aulnay-de-Saintonge, Saint-Pierre, (227)

Elephants

Images are identified as elephants in Saint Martin in Doussay and at Saint Pierre in Aulnay. The elephant's large tusks are frequently adorned with a decorative harness, indicating that humans tamed the creatures. At Aulnay, their long thin tails end in a circular shape, which resembles the tail on an elephant. The difference between these images and an actual elephant is their shape of their ears, which are depicted as short, stubby pointed triangles. Text over the image indicates that the creature is an elephant. Similar creatures can be seen at Saint-Jean de Montierneuf in Poitiers. The creatures are facing the edges of the capital. Their trunks meet in the center and are connected by a harness, similar to those at Aulnay.



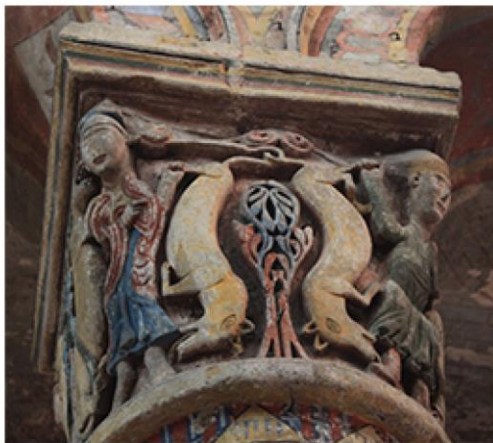
Aulnay-de-Santonge, Saint-Pierre, Collatéral Sud, (123)



Saint Jean de Montierneuf, Poitiers, Nave, (128)
Image credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez



Doussay, Saint-Martin
Cross Transept, (129)



Jackals are identified by the shape of their long snout, legs and ears. An example of this type of creature lies in the choir at Sainte-Radegonde (left image). The creatures have long torsos. The scene is playful. Their legs are bent and rest delicately against the figure's hips and forearms. The jackals lick the figure's feet. Their eyes are shaped like almonds, which might show an attempt to represent the angular nature of a jackals face.

Sainte-Radegonde, Poitiers, (285)
Image credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez

Beast Hybrids

This category is defined composite creatures, created from combining two or more beasts.

Dragons

Dragons are composited from multiple beasts, including birds, lizards, snakes. Thick scales, created by triangular shapes, line the necks of the creatures. The faces resemble jackals. Their tails disappear into leafy tendrils on the capitals at Maillezais and Saint-Nicholas de Maillezais.



Maillezais, deposit room , (45)
Photo credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez



Saint-Nicholas, Maillezais, West facade (14)
Photo credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez



Soudan, Notre-Dame, Nave, (17)



Vouvant, Notre-Dame
Portal, (229)
Photo credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez

Griffons

Images of griffons also proliferate throughout the region. Griffons are large, four legged birds with the body of a lion. Their large wings protrude from the lion's torso. At Saint-Pierre in Parthenay-le-Vieux, griffons sit on the upper choir in the south side of the church. Their bodies face the center of the capital. Their necks are bent backward toward their wings. This flexibility allows the creatures to clean their bodies of bugs. The composition resembles the many of birds that perform the same cleansing activity.



Nieul-sur-l'Autise, (221)
Image credit: Owen Wilson-
Chavez



Parthenay-le-Vieux, Saint-Pierre Apse, (29)

Winged Lions

Images of winged lions also fit within the hybrid category. The lions at Saint-Hilaire in Melle share a face that sits at the edge of the capital. Their front paws are joined just below their head. Their wings seem connected to their mane and dominate the upper register of the image. These creatures resemble a black-figure pitcher from Corinth made around 600 BC (right image). The bottom register shows an image of symmetrical winged lions that share one face. The creature is bipedal.



Melle,
Saint-Hilaire,
Nave, Portal on the
south wall, (46)



Corinth, 600 BC

Beast/Human Hybrids

Lamassu

The Lamassu is an ancient Mesopotamian mythological protective diety. The creature has a winged body of a bull or lion, with a human face. In some cases, the faces have beards. This character is on a capital in the ambulatory at Saint Nicolas de Maillezais and Notre-Dame in Fontaines. The figures at these church sites do not have a beard.

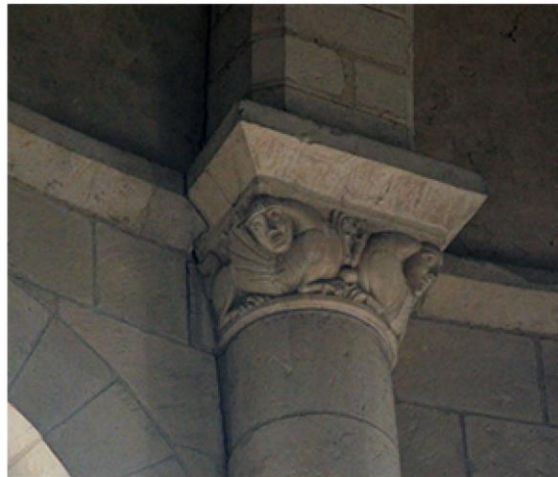


Fontaines, Notre-Dame, Nave, (75)
Image credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez



Assyrian, , 883–859 BC

Saint Nicholas, Maillezais, Ambulatory
Image credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez



Centaurs

The centaur is half human, half horse. At Nieul-sur-l'Autize in the cloister portal, two full centaur figures meet on the edge of the capital. At Saint Nicolas de Maillezais, a west portal capital shows a similar composition. The centaur is engulfed in organic tendrils. He seems to shoot a human figure in the mouth.



Marans Saint-Etienne, (98)
Image credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez



Maillezais, Saint-Nicolas, Portal (6)
Image credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez

Mermaids



Mermaids are composite creatures. The figures are typically female, indicated by their breasts and long hair. The human figure's shape ends at the torso and completes as a fish. The figure holds either their own hair, the ends of their fish tails, or just hold their hands up, palms facing outward. This is the case of the mermaid or "sirene" on a capital in the apse in Parthenay-le-Vieux.

Parthenay-le-Vieux, Saint-Pierre, Apse (29)

Foliage Hybrids

Beasts / Foliage Hybrid



Saint Jean de Montierneuf, Poitiers, (left 65, right 52)
Photo credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez

At Saint-Jean de Montierneuf (left image), capitals in the nave show foliage spilling out of the gaping mouths of lions. Ornamental foliage sculpted in high relief dominates the bottom and middle registers of the capital. The necks and manes of two lions come out of this foliage and onto the upper register. Their necks are angled toward the edge of the capital and share one face. Two groups of five tendrils spill out and curve upward and around the faces of the capital. Today these capitals sit at eye level. Hybrid jackal and foliate creatures sit close by (right image). The jackals converge toward the edge of the capital, and share a bowl of water. A leafy vine shape occupies the jackal's body from their waist down.

In the nave at Saint-Hilaire-des-Loges, full-bodied lions frame the center face of a capital. Their necks curve inward while vines expel from their mouths and wrap around their torsos. The vine also serves as the creature's tail. Each creature's plant creates lines that carry the viewer's eye through the whole composition. The vines twirl and twist around and meet in the center. They scroll upward and then wrap around the bodies of each lion.



Saint-Hilaire-des-Loges, Nave, (239)
Image credit: Owen-Wilson-Chavez

Man / Foliage Hybrid

This category is defined by images of men that are hybridized with foliage. The male's mustache is hybridized with vine stems at Clussais-la-Pommeraye and Maillezais. Small jackals are carved just above the figure at Clussais-la-Pommeraye's head. These jackals sit in the upper register, where ornamental volutes normally occupy, and pick as his hair.



Clussais-la-Pommeraye,
Notre-Dame, (98)



Saint-Nicholas, Maillezais,
West façade, (194)



At Saint-Pierre in Airvault, multiple heads human faces are encased in foliage. Of the six faces seen on two sides of the capital, one of the faces is an elderly man, indicated by his beard. The heads peer out from the background of the image. This indicates that the rest of their bodies are entangled in the thick and dense foliage that wraps around each of their necks.

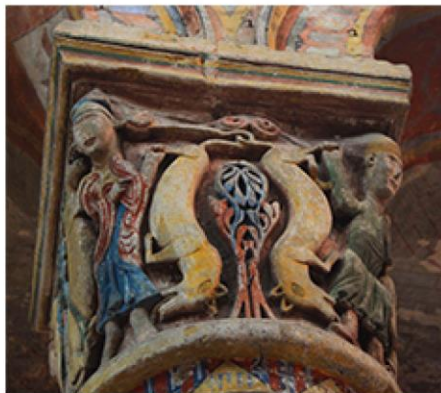
Airvault, Saint-Pierre,
Nave (196)

Man vs. Wild Elements

These images are defined by their compositional elements – a centralized full male figure extends his limbs outward toward elements of the landscape, beasts and hybrids.

Man vs. Beasts

In the ambulatory arcade in Saint-Radegonde, the beasts that flank the humans resemble jackals. The composition can also be seen on the well-known purse cover from the Sutton Hoo burial ship (below). The purse cover was retrieved from Suffolk, England and is dated to the first half of the 7th century.



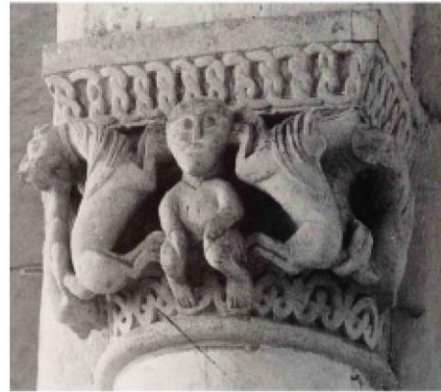
Maillezais, Saint-Nicolas, Façade, (253)
Image credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez

Man vs. Lions

The Victory Capital fits within this specific category because of the lions that surround the central figure. The human figures uniquely interact with their surroundings. A capital from Saint-Pierre in Chauvigny is split into two from his hips down, while in Saint-Saturnin and in Saint-Pierre in Correze the figures have actual weapons. The figure at Correze notably holds the reins of the beasts to his right, suggesting that he has tamed the creature. The bottom registers on the capitals Saint-Pierre in Correze and Saint-Pierre in Airvault show curvilinear vines, which the central figures hover over.



Victory Capital, Maillezais Abbey, Nave (297)
Image Cedit: Mickey Abel



Airvault, Saint-Pierre, Nave, south arcade, (298)



Chouppes, Saint-Saturnin, Nave, (300)



Saint-Pierre, Chauvigny, Choir, (294)

Men vs. Hybrids

On west façade portal at Saint-Pierre at Aulnay images of symmetrical beasts and hybrids dominate the embedded capitals. The center capital on the right side of the portal shows an image of a man flanked by two dragons. His arms are stretched outward and grasp the creature's necks, which bow outward. Their tails curl underneath their bodies.



Aulnay, Saint-Pierre, Portal capital, (272)

Men are entangled with dragons on a capital in La-Chaize-le-Vicomte. Three men are engulfed in the composition. One of the figures has mounted the creature. His left arm extends back and attempts to pry a creature that caps the dragon's tail.



La-Chaize-le-Vicomte,
Saint-Nicholas, (269)

Man vs. Landscape



This category includes images of men fighting with foliage. At Saint Pierre in Melle, the nave includes an image of a man fighting off thick organic vine shapes with all of his limbs. The vines have round shapes that resemble seeds or beans. The male figure stands on the edge of the capital. His arms grasp the tendrils that surround him. His right foot stays planted on the ground, while his left is bent sharply upward. This sharp angle suggests that he figure was attempting to walk over the foliage, but the force of the tendril pushed against his foot and hoisted his knee upward.

Saint-Pierre, Melle, Nave (290)



In the choir at Saint-Pierre in Airvault, a scene shows male figure taming two large vines, the bases of which are thicker than his legs. He bends his knee and lunges forward. The vines bend and sway against his weight. His arms are extended outward. Vertical lines create the illusion of fabric on his skirt, which help indicate the figure's movements.

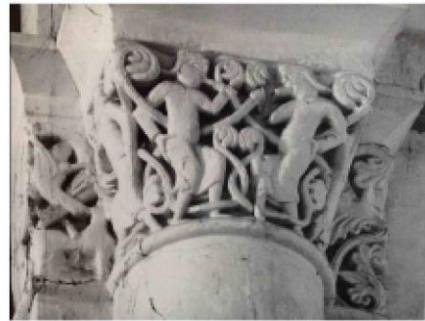
Airvault, Siant-Pierre, Choir (281)

Labor

This category is defined by images of men working with or taming the wild elements. Two capitals in the choir at Saint-Pierre in Airvault would fit within this category. A centralized male figure holds a scythe as a beast figure approaches. At Saint Nicolas de Maillezais, images of men run along the frieze of structure the carrying a continual vine shapes. The repetitive nature of the image on the frieze carries the eye horizontally across the portals of the façade.



Saint-Hilaire-des-Loges, Nave, (238)



Saintes, Saint-Eutrope, (249)



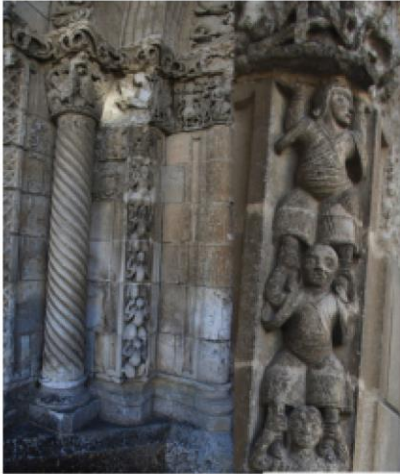
Aulnay, Saint-Pierre, Apse Window. Left: central window, Right: slab relief detail, (234)



Saint Nicholas, Maillezais, Portal Frieze, (241),
Image credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez

Labor

Also included within this category are images that allude to church construction. At Saint Nicolas images of men stacked on top one another makes a jam in the portal.



Saint Nicholas, Maillezais, Portal Jamb, (240)
Image credit: Owen Wilson-Chavez



Saint-Hilaire-des-Loges, Nave, (238)



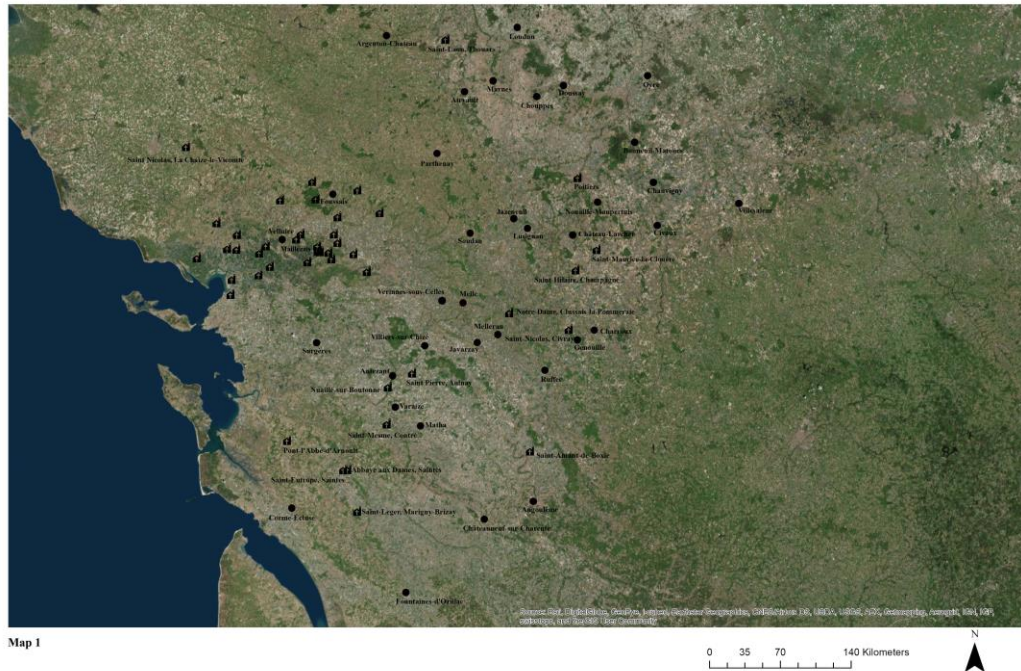
Saint-Pierre, Aulnay, South portal (100)

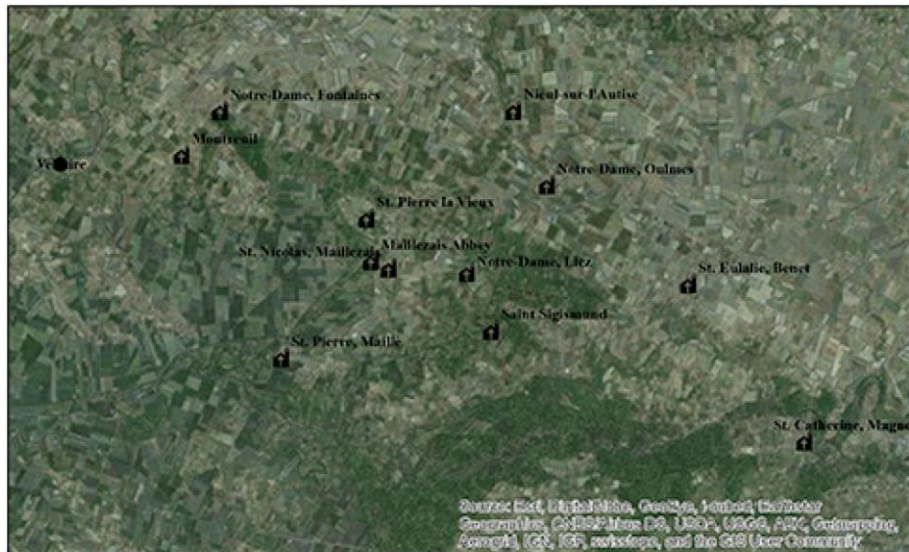


Velluire, Saint-eau Bapistry (232)

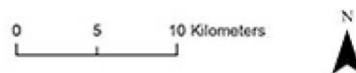
III. Maps

This section geographically locates the sites listed in the Non-Narrative Figural Chart. Each wide view map is followed by a map that zooms in closer to Maillezais Abbey.

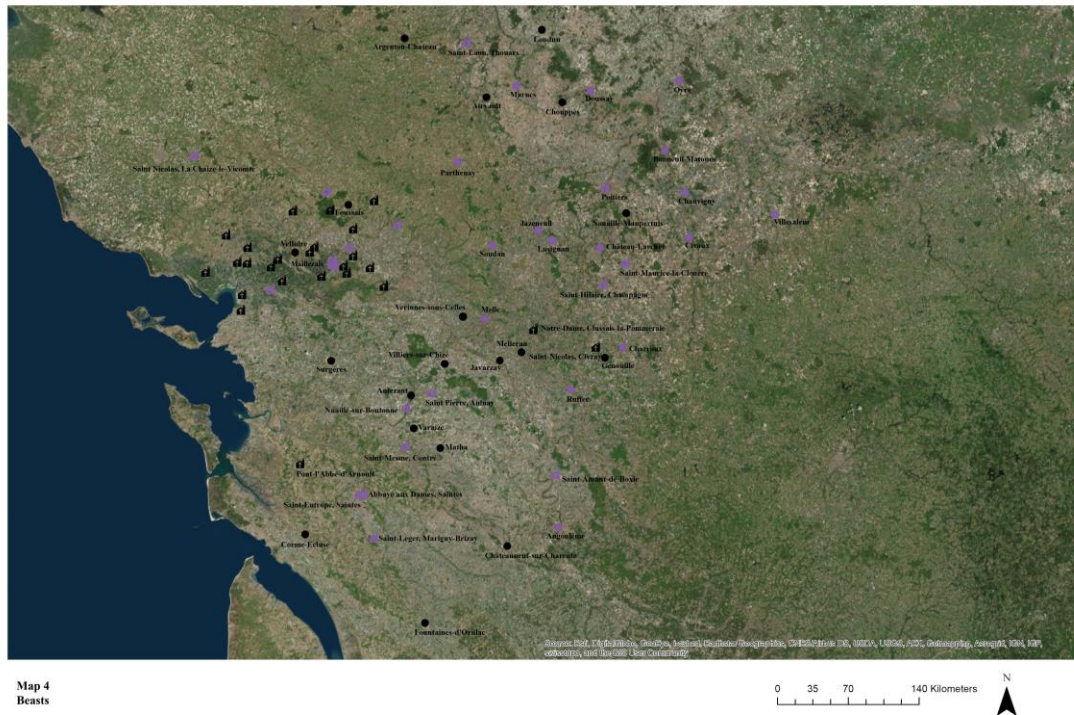


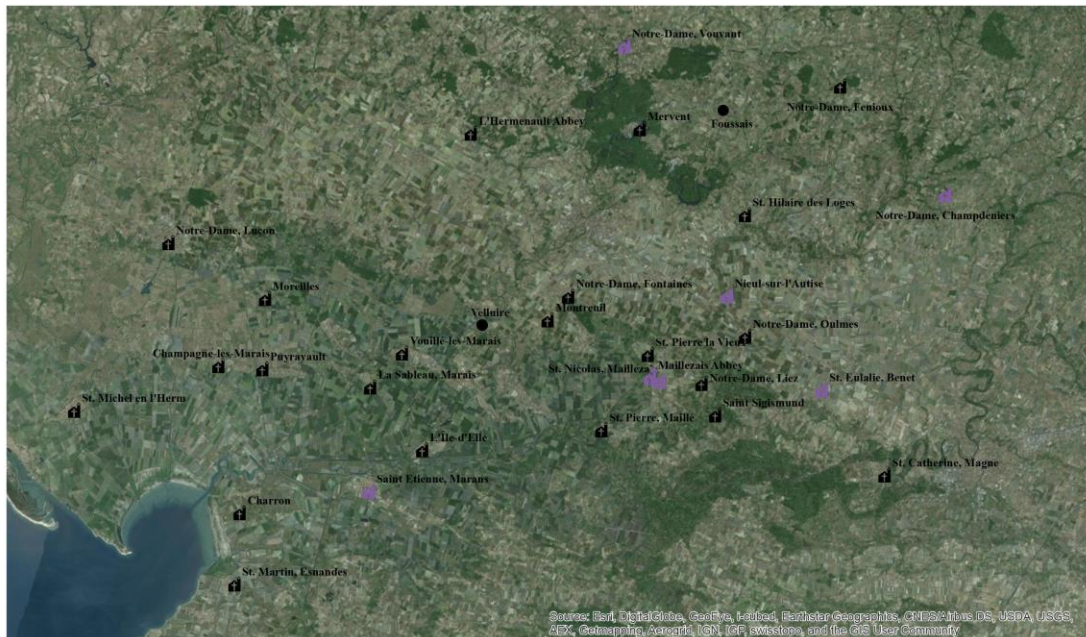


Map 2
Maillezais Island

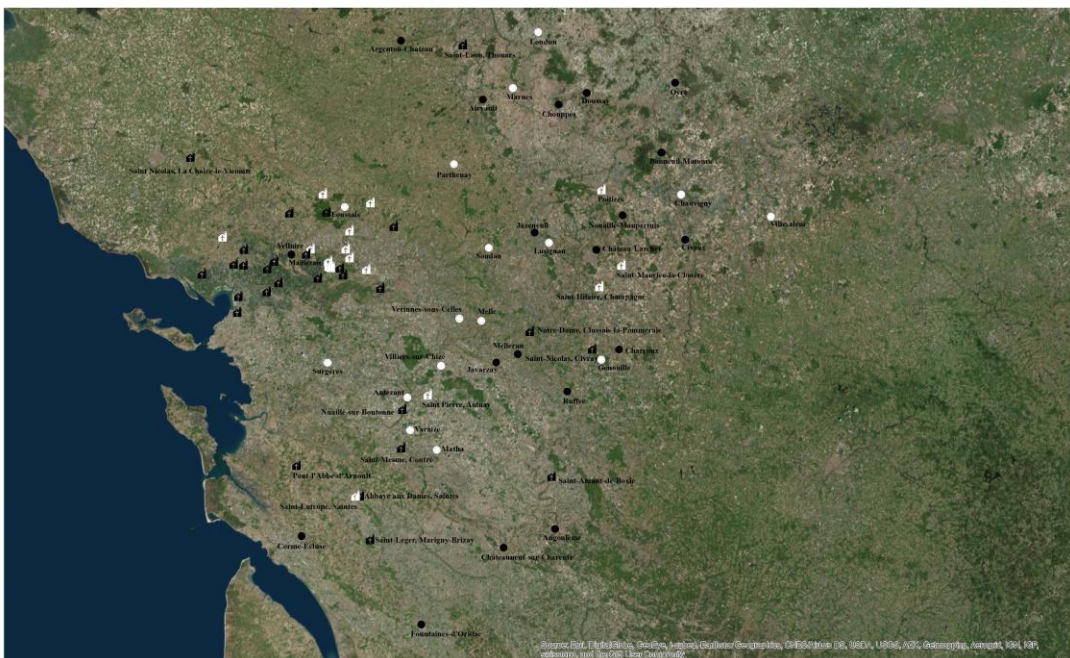


Map 3
Claude Masse, 17th C.



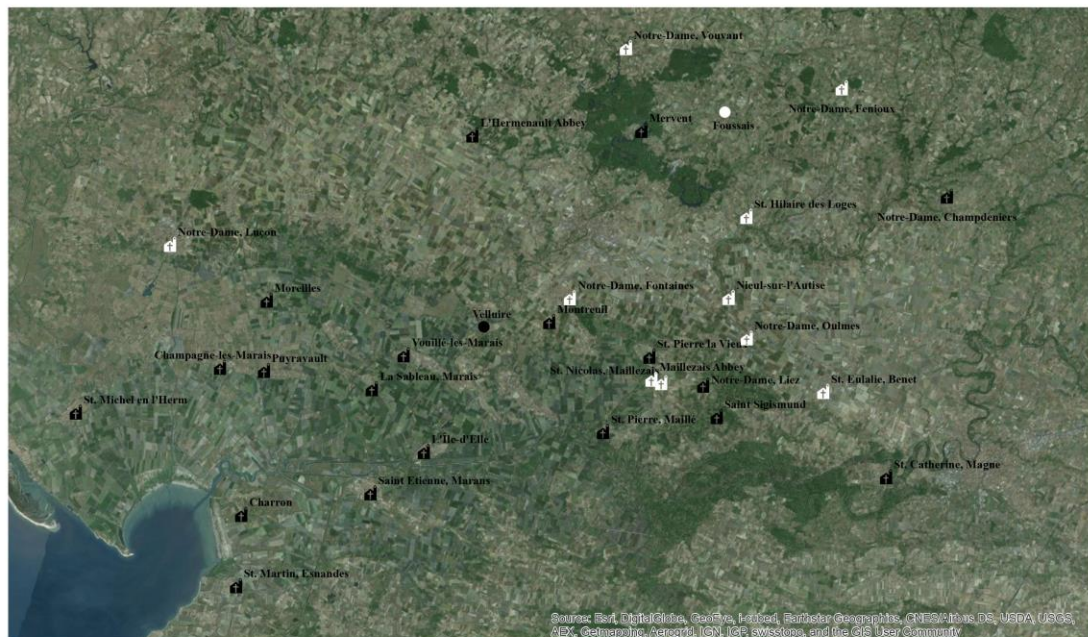


Map 5 Beasts

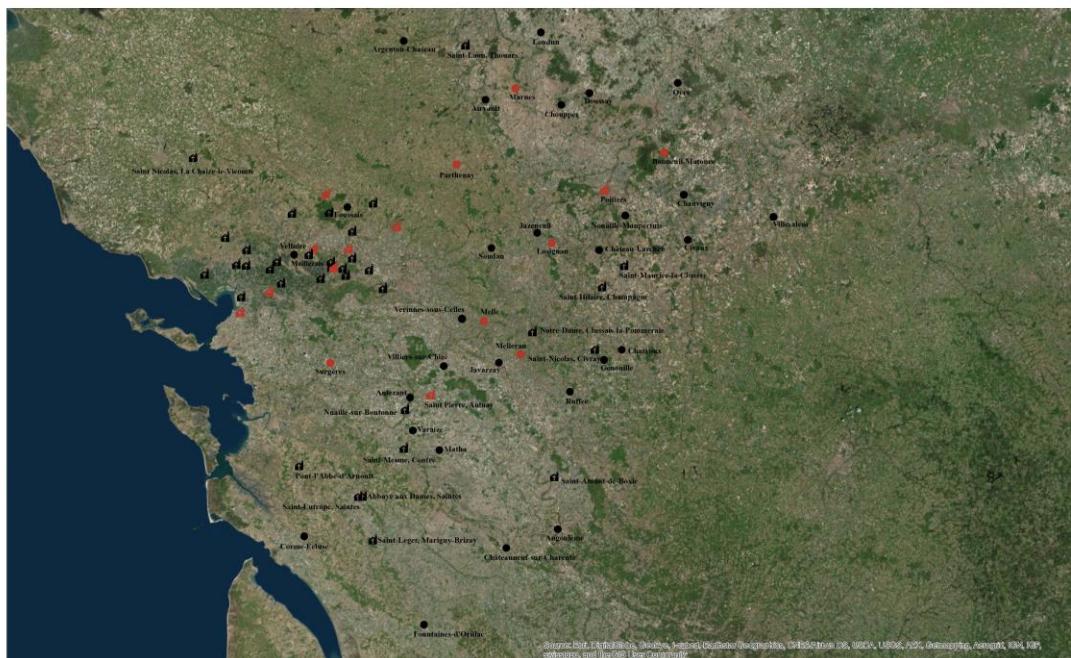


Map 6 Beast Hybrids



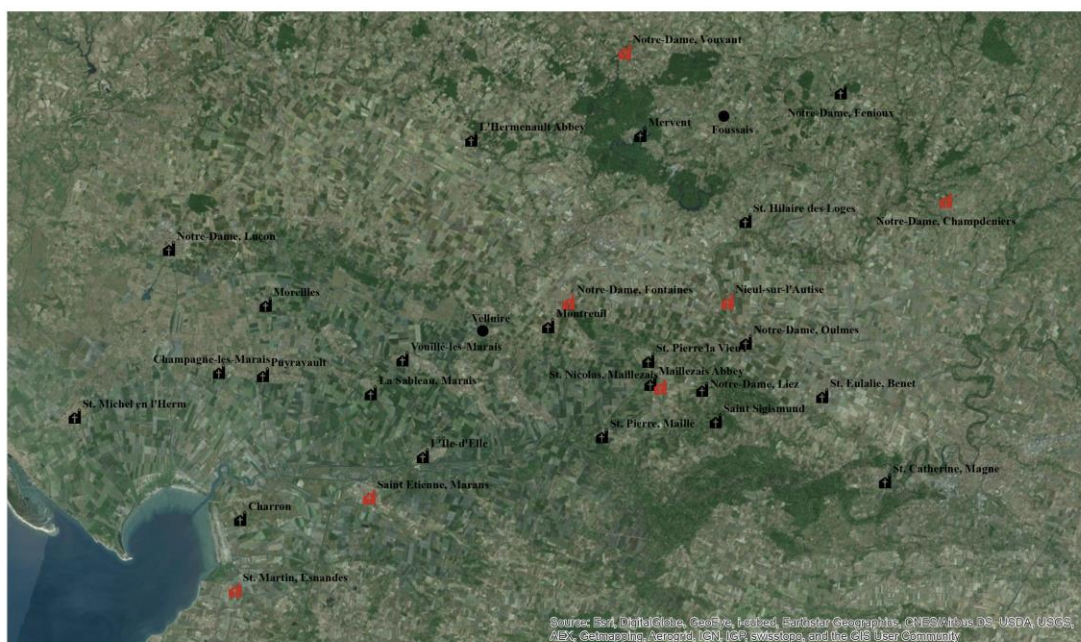


Map 7 Beast Hybrids



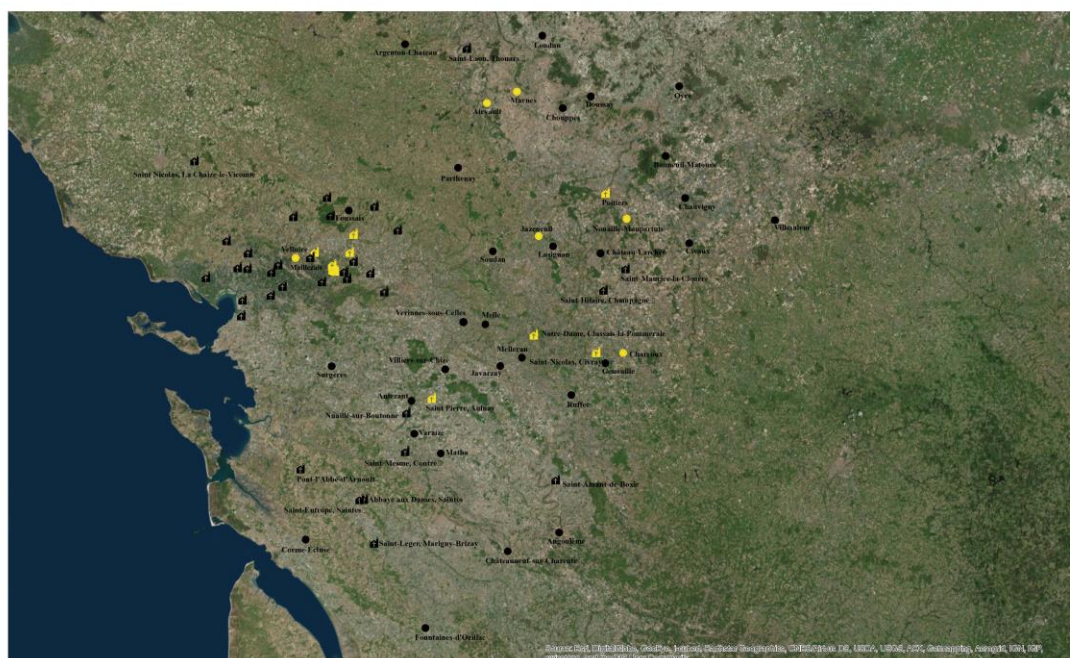
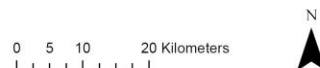
Map 8
Beast/Human Hybrid





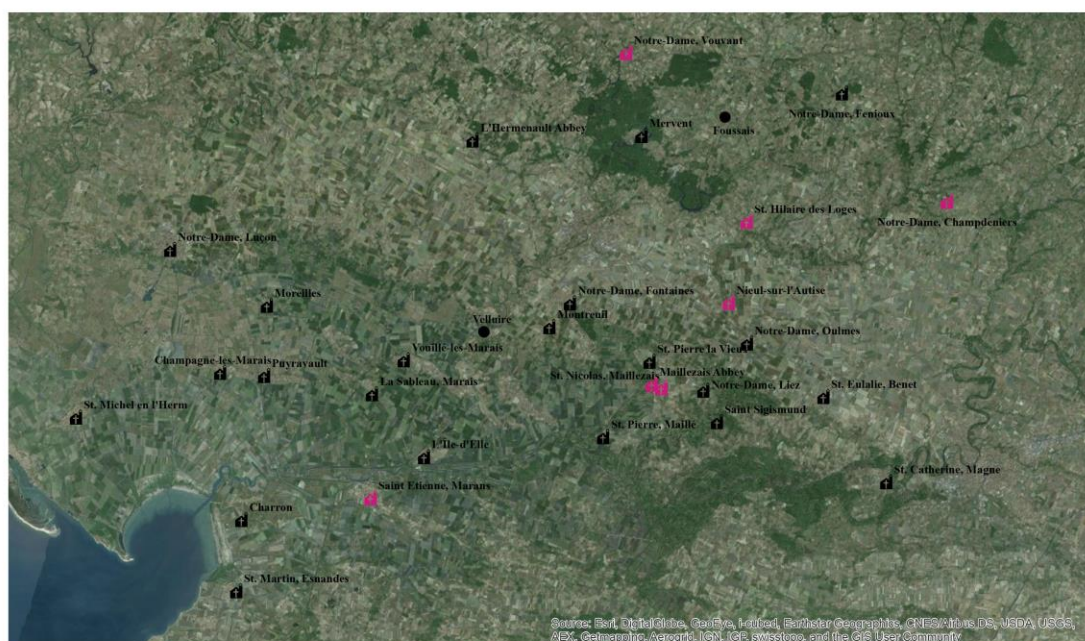
Map 9

Beast/Human Hybrids



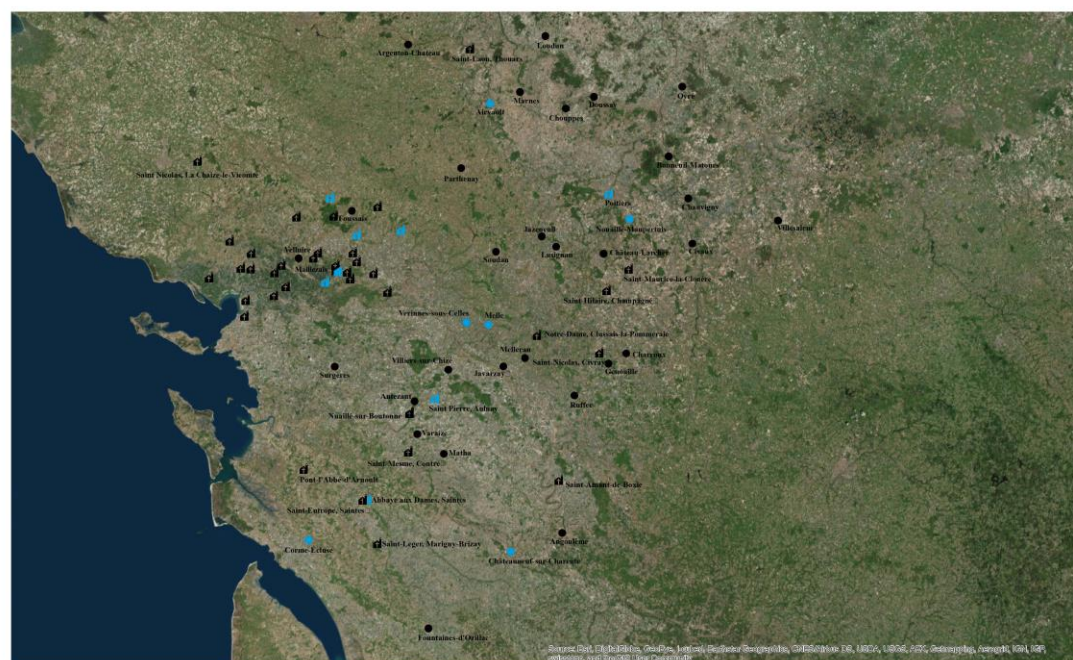
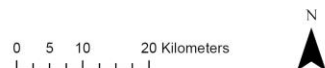
Map 10
Foliage Hybrid





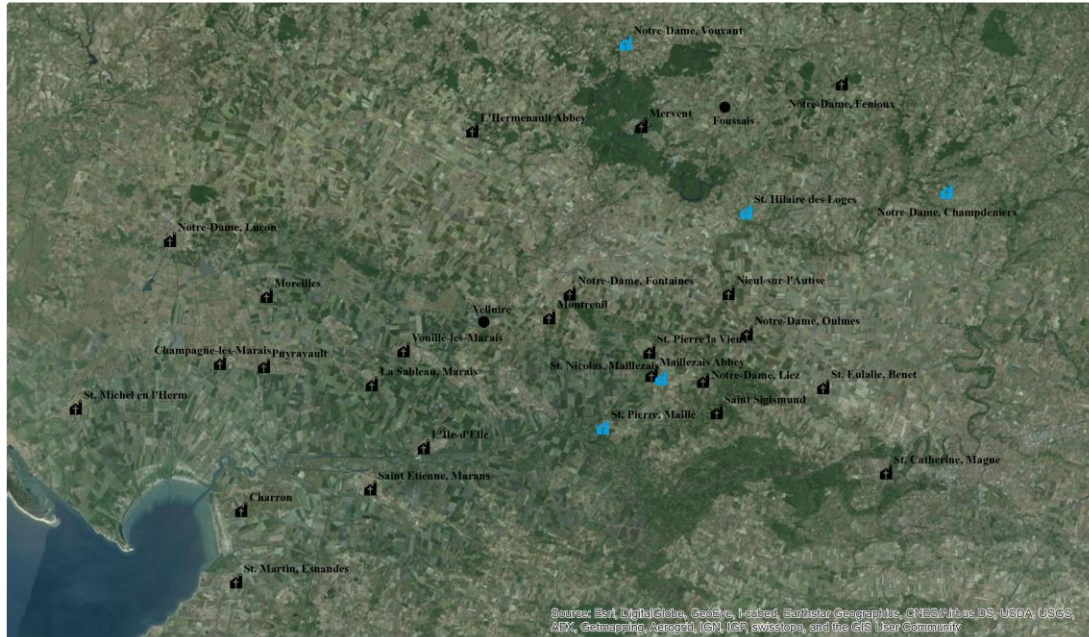
Map 13

Man vs. Wild Elements



Map 14
Labor





Map 15
Labor





Map 16
Poitiers, France

0 0.5 1 2 Kilometers



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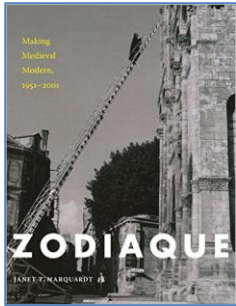
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Book Review: Janet T. Marquardt, *Zodiaque: Making Medieval Modern, 1951-2001* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2015), 224 pages, 16 color and 71 black-and-white illustrations (ISBN# 978-0-271-06506-9)

By Lindsay Cook, Columbia University

Presenting the books published by éditions Zodiaque as *lieux de mémoire* for a generation of art historians, Janet T. Marquardt explores the underpinnings and impact of the French imprint established in the middle of the twentieth century and known chiefly for its lavishly illustrated monographs of Romanesque churches. Created and operated out of the Benedictine abbey Sainte Marie de la Pierre-qui-Vire, Zodiaque was the brainchild of the monk Dom Angelico Surchamp, whose own artistic training had a profound impact in shaping the “Zodiaque aesthetic,” which, according to Marquardt, distinguishes the series from both scholarly and coffee-table books of the same era. The author relates the photographs, which often depict unusual views of medieval monuments, to abstract painting, and she situates Surchamp as the “curator” of the images, which were then offered up to and consumed by a large audience that eventually included medieval art historians. While scholars have tended to ascribe a documentary status to Zodiaque illustrations, Marquardt reveals the extent to which the images could also operate on artistic and affective levels, the high-quality photogravures of medieval Christian art and architecture serving a contemplative function.

The first chapter places the Zodiaque publications in the historical context of the debates surrounding Catholic art in the modern era. Marquardt presents the Zodiaque enterprise as part of a revival of interest in Romanesque art after a period of relative neglect, during which the Gothic predominated as a model for new religious art and architecture. Intended to appeal to a public increasingly enamored with modernist aesthetics and decreasingly invested in Catholicism, the Benedictine monks of La Pierre-qui-Vire presented the historical forms of Romanesque with a modernist overlay to stimulate a *Renouveau catholique*. Whereas the French Dominicans commissioned radically modern sacred works from the likes of Matisse and Le Corbusier, the French Benedictines attempted to modernize Catholic art by building upon history rather than rejecting it.

The second chapter, the most compelling of all, examines the creation of the Zodiaque project in light of the artistic and spiritual ambitions of its founder. Marquardt is especially attentive to the physical backdrop of the monastery of La Pierre-qui-Vire as a testing ground that encouraged Surchamp and his collaborators to exercise their passion and creativity in the production of books and journals as a form of *opus dei*. It considers the place of the monastery's journals *Témoignages* and *Zodiaque* and especially the Zodiaque book series within the intellectual landscape of postwar France. Marquardt surveys the range of subject matter covered by the Zodiaque publications, and she observes that the most lavishly produced volumes focused on Romanesque monuments and were marketed to a wider audience than the Christian journals, which contained articles on a broader range of subjects. Surchamp championed the Romanesque mode as a worthy alternative to the representational status quo for Catholic art at the time, which tended toward the saccharine and naturalistic.

The third chapter analyzes the texts that accompanied the *Zodiaque* publications, using Françoise Henry and Raymond Oursel, two key authors for the *Nuit des temps* series, as case studies to explore the role of the texts in relation to other aspects of the *Zodiaque* publishing venture. Marquardt notes a general improvement in the quality of the writing over time, due in large part to the contributions of reliable professional writers, a key factor in bringing the series to the attention of an academic audience. While integral to Marquardt's central argument, this chapter interrupts the flow of the book. The previous sections consistently emphasized the visual impact of the *Zodiaque* publications and signaled the importance of the photogravures in "making medieval modern," and by the third chapter the reader longs to understand the function



of the photographs in the *Zodiaque* publications. Instead, she must wait until the penultimate chapter, well into the second half of the book, for the visual analysis of the photographs to appear.

Figure 1 (fig. 37) Phéliphot studio, crossing pier at Paray-le-Monial from above, in *Bourgogne romane* (*La Nuit des temps* 1)

The fourth chapter considers, at long last, the role of photography in the *Zodiaque* series. Marquardt contends that the photographs

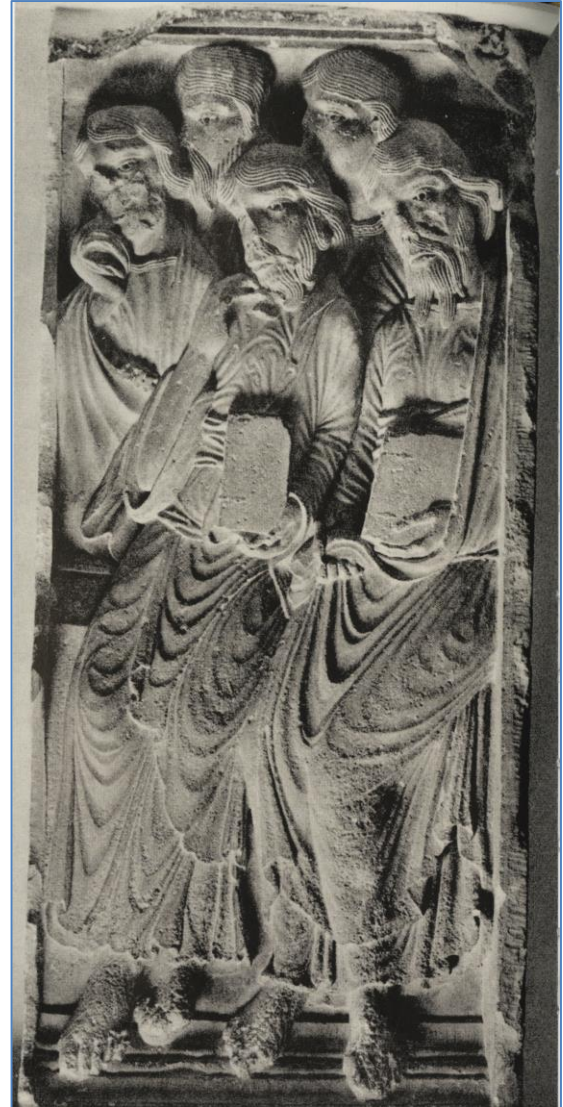
expressed Henri Focillon's concept of the "life of forms." Moreover, she reveals various

manipulations that took place when producing and editing the photographs and demonstrates that Surchamp and the professional photographers employed by *Zodiaque* favored abstraction over more traditional modes of architectural documentary photography. After diminishing or entirely eliminating signs of contemporary liturgical use, the photographers further abstracted the monuments by using unusual angles, close-ups, cropping, and airbrushing, thereby creating the aesthetic now synonymous with *Zodiaque* (**figure 1**). Marquardt claims that the photogravures shared many of the aesthetic ambitions of twentieth-century abstract paintings, particularly works by Gleizes, Picasso, and Braque. Since abstraction is a relative value, however, some of Marquardt's juxtapositions amplify the representational content of the *Zodiaque* photographs rather than revealing its absence. For instance, the apostles in the relief from the cloister of Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert (**figure 2**) have never appeared more anatomically accurate than they do in relation to Picasso's *Le guitariste*, an analytic cubist work of 1910. That said, many of the specific formal parallels Marquardt establishes are striking enough to convince the reader that the modernist aesthetic of the *Zodiaque* publications resulted primarily from photographic manipulations related to painterly abstraction.

The final chapter draws upon the author's written correspondence with her colleagues, primarily American and French, to estimate *Zodiaque*'s impact on art historical pedagogy. Once the quality of the texts improved, scholars began to use the books for the purposes of research and teaching. Marquardt contends that the aesthetic qualities of the photogravures shaped a generation of art historians' understanding of the past. The idea that a fixed set of images could have such a profound and lasting impact on scholars may come as a surprise to later generations of researchers, who take for granted the vast quantities of digital images available from a variety

of sources, including the intramural image catalogues available at some universities, scholarly subscription-based or open-access digital databases, and commercial image search tools.

Figure 2 (fig. 53) Cloister relief of apostles from Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert, now at Musée de la Société archéologique, Montpellier, in *Languedoc roman* (La Nuit des temps 43), plate 132.



Marquardt's study represents a significant contribution to medieval art historiography, but it comes with some minor flaws. The book turns on the erroneous premise that Romanesque monuments were lesser-known than Gothic ones. The churches that appeared in the *Nuit des temps* series were hardly obscure by the time the first book in the series appeared in 1954, and, in fact, the earliest *Zodiaque* monographs treated many of the same Romanesque monuments that Prosper Mérimée, in his capacity as Inspector General of Historic Monuments, had praised in his letter to the French Minister of the Interior, which appeared in 1840 as the introduction to the first inventory ever published by the Commission des Monuments historiques. While Gothic did become the dominant stylistic model for new church construction in the nineteenth century, many Romanesque churches—especially in Burgundy—were widely known in both popular and

academic circles long before *Zodiaque* was founded. *Zodiaque* may well have brought Romanesque monuments and the term “Romanesque” to the attention of a broader public, but the series neither coined the stylistic term nor invented the Romanesque canon of monuments.

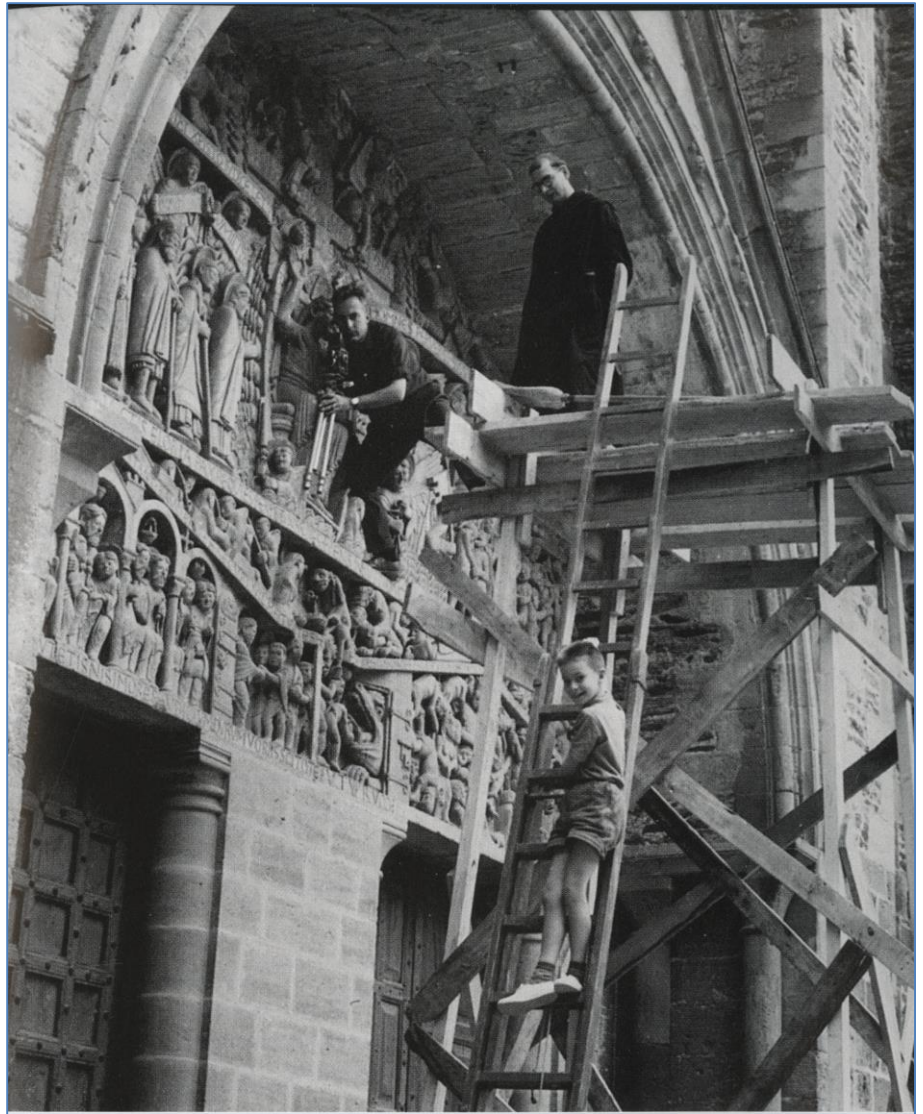
Furthermore, while Marquardt laments the limited scope of the *Zodiaque* publications, which likely resulted from prejudices linked to contemporary European geographic boundaries and political chasms, she is insufficiently critical of *Zodiaque*’s treatment of non-European subject matter. The author skirts the issue of the chronological intersection of the foundation of the *Zodiaque* enterprise and the missions established by La-Pierre-qui-Vire monks after World War II in French Indochina, Madagascar, and Congo. In a similar vein, Marquardt does not contextualize *Zodiaque*’s frequent, unqualified use of the term “primitive” to describe colonial subjects and their cultural production in *Zodiaque* books and journals. These issues are inextricably linked to the book’s central argument. In an early issue of the journal *Zodiaque*, following an article about Dogon sculpture by Sorbonne anthropology professor Marcel Griaule, Surchamp penned an essay that focused on the difficulty of reconciling “modern, primitive, and Christian values.”¹ Marquardt convinces the reader that *Zodiaque*’s *Nuit des temps* series used modernist photography of Romanesque churches to synthesize these three values, but the reader is left wondering whether Surchamp’s fascination with non-European art—a frequent topic of *Zodiaque* journal articles, but not the luxurious book series—resulted, at least in part, from the monastery’s colonial missionary activities, and may have contributed to the *Zodiaque* aesthetic.

Finally, while Marquardt establishes the connection between the aesthetic of the *Zodiaque* photogavures and modernist paintings, she explores only perfunctorily *Zodiaque*’s place in the history of photography, in general, and the history of architectural photography

¹ Surchamp, “Sens de *Zodiaque*,” *Zodiaque* 5 (October 1951): 34.

Figure 3 (fig. 30) Louis Balsan, view of Jean Dieuzaide and Dom Angelico Surchamp (with young Michel Dieuzaide) working on west tympanum of Sainte-Foi, Conques, in 1960.

in particular. Marquardt does consider some photographic precedents for *Zodiaque*, but she dismisses their impact, even though the *Voyages pittoresques*, the *Mission héliographique*, and the sumptuously illustrated nineteenth-century monographs of select Gothic cathedrals must have loomed large in the minds of the



Zodiaque producers. Although Marquardt downplays the similarities between *Zodiaque* and the *Mission héliographique*, the “*Zodiaque* aesthetic” appears to my eye at least as indebted to Gustave Le Gray’s photographs as to Gleizes’ or Picasso’s paintings. In the early years of *Zodiaque*, before Surchamp started taking most of the photographs himself, professional photographers produced the book illustrations, and their work receives the most attention in Marquardt’s study. Some of the professionals, including Pierre Belzeaux and Jean Dieuzaide (**figure 3**), were quite well known beyond the confines of *Zodiaque*, and a discussion of their work for *Zodiaque* in the context of their *oeuvres* would have enhanced the book. Contemporary

pictorialist photography is yet another aesthetic touchstone with which the professional photographers *Zodiaque* employed might have been in dialogue, especially after Paul Strand, known for his high-contrast abstractions of architectural forms, relocated to France after World War II and published *La France de profil* in 1952.

Overall, Marquardt's book succeeds in situating the *Zodiaque* enterprise in the context of postwar French Catholicism and demonstrates the series' impact on art-historical pedagogy. Scholars familiar with the *Zodiaque* books as well as art historians invested in critically evaluating their own visual pedagogical tools will find this study particularly enlightening. 🐼



1500-Year-Old Mosaic Map Found



A rare 1,500-year-old mosaic discovered in Israel that unusually depicts a map with streets and buildings. Painstakingly restored, the mosaic measures about 3.5 meters (11.4 feet) by 3.5 meters and was found two years ago in an industrial park in the southern Israeli town of Kiryat Gat. According to the Israel Antiquities Authority, it adorned the floor of a church dating to the Byzantine period. The church did not survive, but the mosaic was excavated and moved for restoration.

The mosaic, done with 17 different colors of tesserae, depicts buildings arranged along a main colonnaded street of a city. Buildings are portrayed in detail and in three dimensions, and have two–three stories, balconies and galleries, roof tiles and windows. 🐼

Re-written from: <http://thenanoneews.com/news/1500-year-old-mosaic-map-found>

Fifth-century church with beautiful frescoes discovered in Turkey's Nevşehir



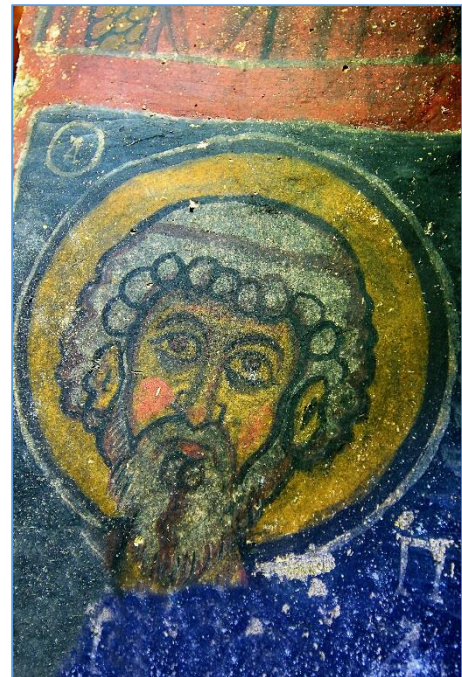
Another historical church has been unearthed in the Cappadocia region of Central Anatolia and experts are excited about its frescoes, which depict scenes hitherto unseen. The church was uncovered by archeologists during excavation and cleaning work in an underground city discovered as part of the Nevşehir Castle Urban Transformation Project, implemented by the Nevşehir Municipality and Turkey's Housing Development Administration (TOKI).

The rock-carved underground church is located within a castle in the center of Nevşehir that spreads over an area of 360,000 square meters, within a third-degree archaeological site that includes 11 neighborhoods in the city center. Built underground, the church might date back to the 5th century.

Archaeologist Semih İstanbulluoğlu said the thin walls of the church collapsed because of snow and rain but they would be fixed during restorations. İstanbulluoğlu said the church was filled with earth and the pieces of frescoes had to be collected one by one.

"The structure was found a short time ago. The frescoes on the walls will return to their original look after restoration and cleaning work," he added.

Fellow archaeologist Ali Aydın added that the side walls of the church were still underground and the frescoes there may still be intact. "Only a few of the paintings have been revealed. Others will emerge when the earth is removed. There are important paintings in the front part of the church showing the crucifixion of Jesus and his

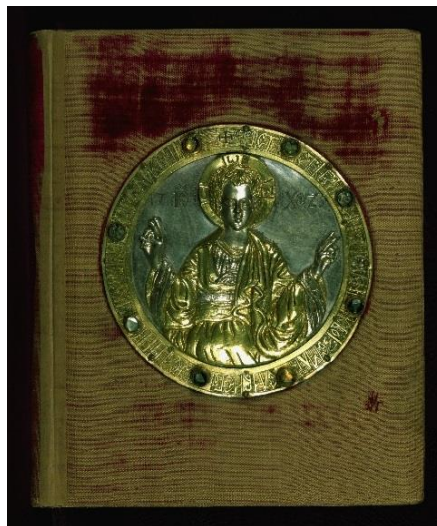
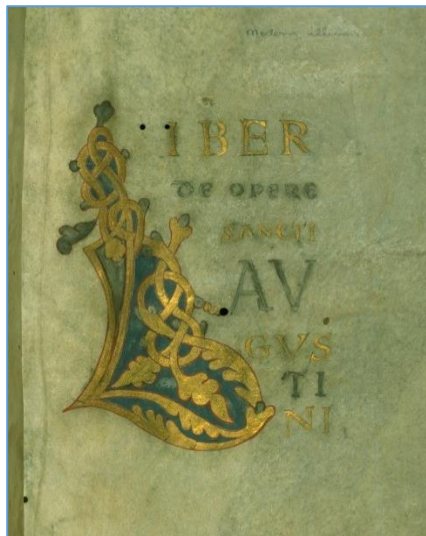


ascension to heaven. There are also frescoes showing the apostles, the saints and other prophets Moses and Elyesa,” he said, adding that they had also found the real entrance of the church used in the past but had yet to expose it. 🐞

From: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/historic-church-discovered-in-turkeys-nevsehir-could-change-history-of-orthodoxy.aspx?pageID=238&nID=94309&NewsCatID=375>

Great list of on-going medieval manuscript digitization projects

The Medieval Manuscript Project has a very helpful list of on-going digitization projects categorized by country, city, library or provenance. This marvelous list was assembled by Albrecht Diem, History Department, Syracuse University. 🐞



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From: <http://www.earlymedievalmonasticism.org/listoflinks.html#Digital>

The Sound of Byzantine Thessaloniki recreated

Technicians bring high-end microphones, speakers, and recording equipment to a particularly resonant space— and they capture what are called “impulse responses,” signals that contain the acoustic characteristics of the location. The technique produces a three dimensional audio imprint—enabling us to recreate what it would sound like to sing and play instruments in that space. Since 2014, Sharon Gerstel, Professor of Byzantine Art History and Archeology at UCLA, and Chris Kyriakakis, director of the Immersive Audio Laboratory at the University of Southern California, have worked to capture the sound of Byzantine churches in Greece. Using video and audio recording, they had chanters in a studio recreating the sounds that filled the spaces in the early Christian centuries. As another member of the team, James Donahue, Professor of Music Production and Engineering at Berklee College of Music, noted that the

churches had been acoustically designed to produce specific sound effects. “It wasn’t just about the architecture, they had these big jugs that were put up there to sip certain frequencies out of the air... They built diffusion, a way to break up the sound waves... They were actively trying to tune the space.” In addition, the researchers discovered slap echo, which in the Middle Ages was described it as the sound of angels’ wings. 🐦



For recordings and video, see <http://www.openculture.com/2016/03/mapping-the-sounds-of-greek-byzantine-churches-how-researchers-are-creating-museums-of-lost-sound.html>

Re-written from <http://www.openculture.com/2016/03/mapping-the-sounds-of-greek-byzantine-churches-how-researchers-are-creating-museums-of-lost-sound.html>

See also <http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/measuring-the-sound-of-angels-singing>

Seventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Burial discovered in Norfolk

Tom Lucking, a 23-year-old undergraduate student of Landscape History at the University of East Anglia, stumbled upon the find of a lifetime this past December in Norfolk. While combing over a farmer's field with a metal detector, Lucking and a friend were surprised when the metal detector picked up a strong signal which turned out to be from a bronze bowl buried underground. After uncovering the bowl, Lucking knew he had found something extraordinary, and immediately stopped to call in the Suffolk



Archaeological Field Group (of which he is a member), and Norfolk County Council's Heritage Environment Service to begin a professional excavation. The archaeologists at the site have uncovered a seventh-century burial of a woman with jewelry and other valuable metal grave goods in the area that once was the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of East Anglia, a find nearly priceless to scholars of Anglo-Saxon history, archaeology, and material culture.

The tomb contained a string of artifacts dating to the mid-seventh century, including several pendants, two gold beads, a knife, an iron buckle, and a ceramic

pot. Within the grave deposit, archaeologists uncovered two pendants made out of Merovingian coins, one of which enabled them to assign an approximate date to the burial. This coin was minted under the Merovingian king Sigebert III during the period c. 630–656, providing the *terminus post quem* and other grave goods the possible latest date, c. 720–30.

The most spectacular find from the dig, however, was a garnet pendant, measuring approximately seven centimeters in diameter and inlaid with more than four hundred pieces of garnet. While the future of the site is uncertain, more archaeological fieldwork may be conducted. According to Lucking, “there's clearly a cemetery on the site, as other early Saxon metalwork has been found in the plough-soil from other burials being disturbed by ploughing. Interestingly, the other finds have all been slightly earlier, fifth to sixth century, so it would appear the site was in use over a long period of time.” Lucking also indicated that the site has undergone a geophysics survey, but a more in-depth geophysics analysis could happen later as part of a full-scale excavation. 🐾

Re-written from <http://arc-humanities.com/blog/>

Gloucester Archaeologists discover remains of a 12th-century castle on the site of a former prison

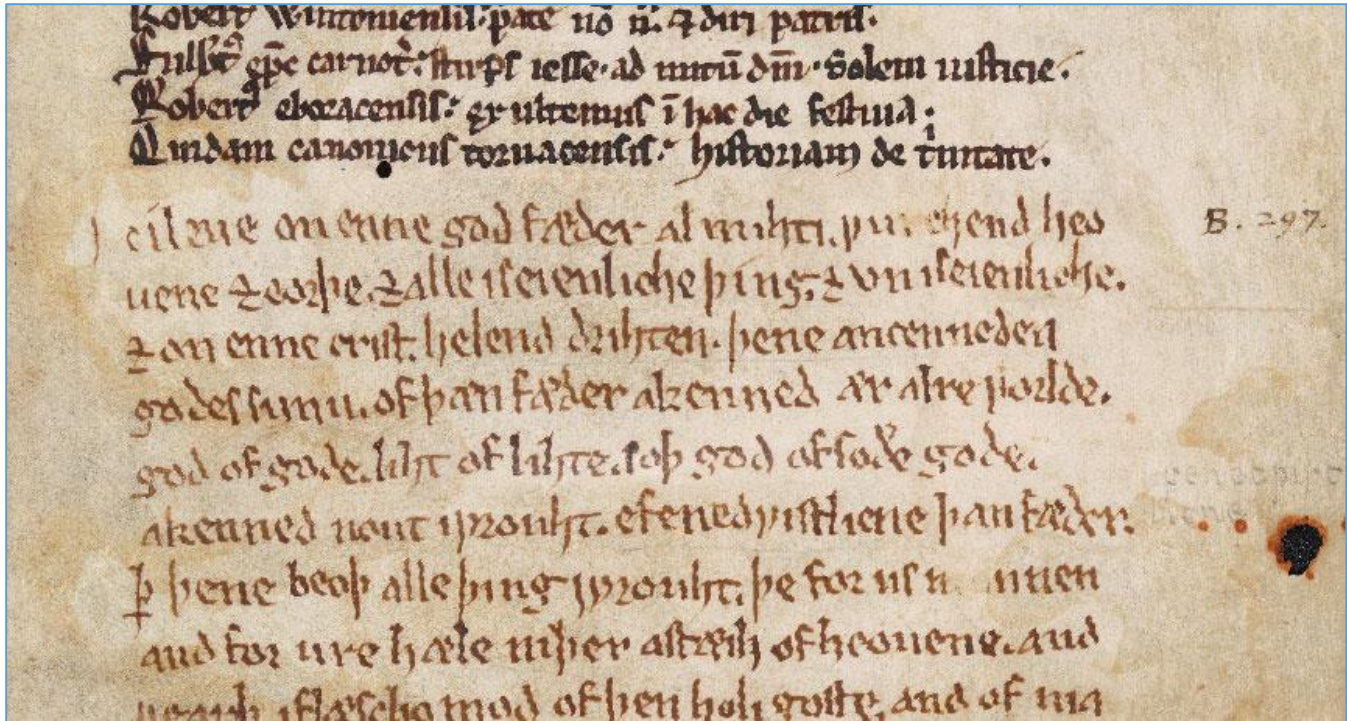


Cotswold Archaeology announced the discovery of the castle, probably built between 1110 and 1120, with a keep, an inner bailey, and stables. The keep was surrounded by a series of concentric defenses comprised of curtain walls and ditches, with the drawbridge and gatehouse lying outside the current site to the north.

The keep, which measures approximately 30 x 20 meters, featured walls as thick as 12 feet, comparable to the Tower of London. The castle was likely destroyed in the 18th century to make way for a jail, which was in use until 2013. Archaeologists have also discovered nearly 900 objects at the site, including medieval pottery and a six-sided die made of bone. 🐞

Re-written from: <http://www.medievalists.net/2015/12/09/12th-century-castle-discovered-in-england/>

Manuscript analysis suggests 13th century writer had essential tremor



Professional scribes in the Middle Ages usually had excellent handwriting. That's not the case for one prolific 13th century writer known to scholars only as the Tremulous Hand of Worcester. Now scientists suggest the writer suffered from a neurological condition called essential tremor. Neurologist Jane Alty and historical handwriting researcher Deborah Thorpe, both of the University of York in England, wrote that the spidery wiggles that pervade the scribe's writing reflected an essential tremor, that caused shaking hands, head and voice. 🐞

Summarized from <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/neurological-condition-probably-caused-medieval-scribe%E2%80%99s-shaky-handwriting>

Restoration work commences on newly discovered 13th-century Paintings at Poitiers Cathedral

Perched on staggered scaffolding and concealed behind an immaculate canvas, a restoration team is ready to start work on Poitiers Cathedral's southern transept. Scalpel in hand, the team is operating meticulously on a true rebirth: that of extraordinary decorative paintings that have fallen into oblivion. Surveys have revealed the presence of a monumental group of

mural paintings hidden by a whitewash from the 18th century and covered by work done on the vault to repair water leaks.

Across the vaults and interior elevations, there are 900 square meters (roughly 9,700 square feet) of decorative work: angels, saints, foliage, trompe l'oeil architecture. Everywhere, reds, pinks, purples, oranges and greens. Having been analyzed, the pigments are rare and precious (azurite, cinnabar). The divisions of the vault alternate deep blues and vibrant reds, enameled in a "rain" of stars. Each was created nearly 700 years ago by superimposing leafs of pewter and leafs of gold or silver.

"It's an almost unique example of complete Gothic decorative work in a cathedral," clarifies Anne Embs, Assistant Regional Historic Monuments Conservator. "These paintings, completed between 1260-1300, are contemporaries of the stained glass alongside which they function. The restoration will dramatically change the perception of the space."

The challenges of detaching these paintings are significant: "It's an irreversible gesture," admits Anne Embs. "In the entirely whitewashed cathedral, we could reproach ourselves for breaking the (artificial) homogeneity of the building." 🐼

From: <http://theglobalgrid.org/in-france-discovery-of-13th-century-murals-spur-poitiers-cathedrals-restoration/>



13th-century insult discovered etched in the walls of Nidaros Cathedral, Trondheim, Norway



Local historian Terje Bratberg, discovered the Latin inscription *LAURENSIUS CELVI ANUS PETRI* along the southern wall of the medieval church. Translated into English, it means “Lars is Peter’s butt.” Bratberg believes that the inscription was made around the year 1290, during a dispute between the local clergy at the cathedral and Jorund, who was the Archbishop of Nidaros from 1288 to 1309. The archbishop had sent one of his followers, a man named Lars Kalvssøn to Nidaros, to deliver a message excommunicating the local clergy. The locals responded by attacking Lars, stripping him naked, whipping him and throwing snowballs at him until he was rescued by soldiers loyal the archbishop. Bratberg adds that “the message is clear, but whether it is a reference to a love affair between two men – or it was meant to publicly ridicule them. I choose to believe that it’s about love.” 🍷

From: <http://www.medievalists.net/2015/08/27/13th-century-insult-discovered-etched-into-the-walls-of-nidaros-cathedral/>

500-Year-Old image of Wild Man found

Metal detectorists found a 15th-century spoon handle in the shape of a Wild Man near Woodbridge in Suffolk. Declared treasure just recently, it is believed to be one of the earlier depictions of the subject matter in three dimensions. The silver-gilt piece shows a jaunty, hairy figure



brandishing a club. It is currently being studied at the British Museum. 🐾

Re-written from <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-suffolk-35050026>



Vibrant late-medieval panel painting survived the Reformation by being turned around

A rare medieval panel showing Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Christ survived the Reformation due to a remarkable instance of 16th-century recycling. Someone turned it around and used the back for another purpose – most likely to display the Ten Commandments and so it was saved from Puritan iconoclasts in the English civil war, who destroyed a lot of art that had survived the earlier purge in the Reformation, escaping the systematic destruction of thousands of church paintings.

Lucy Wrapson, the conservator who made the discovery at the Fitzwilliam Museum's Hamilton Kerr Institute, notes "This was basically repurposed and that's how it made it through. I can't stress how rare this is. I can think of one other image of Judas that survives from an English church of the period." The panel was bought by the Fitzwilliam in 2012 from the Church of St. Mary, Grafton Regis, Northamptonshire which could not afford to conserve it and used the purchase funds to fix the church roof.

The panel arrived in Wrapson's lab in a sorry state, covered in discolored varnish, bat feces, dust and cobwebs. Wrapson removed the plywood on its reverse and discovered faint traces of writing. Infra-red photography revealed that the painting must have been turned around in the 16th century, whitewashed and used as a board almost certainly listing the Ten Commandments.

The painting, dated to around 1460, shows Judas betraying Christ with a kiss accompanied by snarling soldiers and St Peter. In the background, birds sweep dramatically through the glowering sky. The panel, which would have been

part of a Passion of Christ cycle, was even more unusual, Wrapson said, because it was unscratched by devout Catholics who were known to attack images of Judas. The painting is now on display in its Rothschild gallery of medieval works and a replica will also be displayed at the Church of St Mary in due course. 🐾

From: <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/nov/24/judas-iscariot-painting-reformation-fitzwilliam-museum>

Mid-16th-Century Dog Prints at Chained Library in Zutphen

The discovery of inky cat paws left by a cat that walked across a manuscript in the 15th century became something of a media sensation. Since then, other animal missteps have been discovered. Erik Kwakkel noticed the imprints of a large dog in the tiles of 16th-century chained library of Zutphen. As he writes, “Remarkably, throughout the library there are tiles with a dog’s paw prints. These 450-year-old traces of a large dog come with a local legend. One night, a monk called Jaromir was reading in the library while enjoying a meal of chicken, delivered to



him by some nuns. He was not supposed to do this: not only does one not eat in a library, but he was also going through a period of fasting. Then suddenly the devil appeared in the form of a dog, scaring the living daylight out of the monk. The devil ate the

chicken and locked the monk inside as a punishment - as devils do. Knowing the story, it’s hard to ignore the prints when admiring the books.” 🐾

http://peregrinations.kenyon.edu/vol4_1/DISCOVERIESCatsPawsManuscript.pdf

<http://erikkwakkel.tumblr.com/post/97506480156/dog-prints-in-medieval-chained-library-i-made>

<http://erikkwakkel.tumblr.com/post/49509415868/the-chained-library-of-zutphen-i-took-these>

Drought exposes mid-16th century Church in Mexican Reservoir

The church in the Quechula locality in Mexico was built by a group of monks headed by Friar Bartolome de la Casas, who arrived in the region inhabited by the Zoque people in the mid-16th century. Measuring 183 x 42 feet with a bell tower that reaches 48 feet, it was abandoned during the



18th century in response to terrible plagues in the area. It was submerged in 1966 when the Nezahualcoyotl dam was built. A drought this year has hit the watershed of the Grijalva river, dropping the water level in the Nezahualcoyotl reservoir by 82 feet. It is the second time a drop in the reservoir has revealed the church since it was flooded when the dam was completed in 1966.

In 2002, the water was so low visitors could walk inside the church. 🐸

Re-written from: <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/article39555465.html#storylink=cpy>