

Linda Seidel, *Songs of Glory: The Romanesque Façades of Aquitaine*. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1981. 220 pp., 63 illus., \$33.75 (cloth)

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LINDA SEIDEL *Songs of Glory: The Romanesque Façades of Aquitaine*. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1981. 220 pp., 63 illus., \$33.75 (cloth).

The Romanesque façades of Aquitaine are best-known for their large-scale equestrian statues, traditionally identified as Constantine, which have been frequently discussed in isolation from their architectural setting. It was indeed this equestrian motif that first attracted Seidel to these façades, but her focus broadened to a study of the richly decorated programmes as a whole. Here she 'moved into the acknowledged backwaters of twelfth-century art' (p. ix), but in doing so she has succeeded in producing a text which makes an interesting contribution to the mainstream of scholarship on the Romanesque period.

The literature on western French Romanesque façades is quite extensive. René Crozet has given us *L'art roman en Poitou* (Paris, 1948) and *L'art roman en Saintonge* (Paris, 1971), plus numerous articles on the subject. In English we have Elizabeth L. Mendell, *Romanesque Sculpture in Saintonge* (New Haven, Conn., 1940). The well-known Zodiaque series includes six relevant volumes (listed on p. 86, n. 17); the *Congrès Archéologique de France*, five volumes; and many pertinent articles are in *Bulletin Monumental*, *Bulletin de la Société des antiquaires de l'ouest*, and *Bulletin de la société archéologique de l'ouest*, all listed along with a wealth of other references in the comprehensive bibliography. Seidel's book is not intended to take the place of much of the material in these works. She does not include a detailed discussion of the iconography of individual figures or scenes, nor does she deal with tradi-

tional art-historical questions like the influence of one programme on another, the relative chronology of the façades, or the movement of individual sculptors or workshops from one monument to another. She acknowledges that isolated iconographic studies have dealt with specific content with reasonable accuracy but observes that they have not examined 'the interactions and implications of the diverse themes' (p. 13). Her aim is to define the 'mural program in terms of its function and form, not simply to identify its content' (pp. 12-13); to move beyond programme analysis to programme synthesis.

The freely acknowledged inspiration for Seidel's study are the essays on Romanesque sculpture by Meyer Schapiro, now happily available in a single volume: *Romanesque Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1977), with their references to the secular realm, contemporary vernacular literature and songs, and the influence of Islam. Such an approach offers an alternative to the encyclopaedic explanation of Mâle, the formal analysis of Focillon, or the pilgrimage concept of Porter. She challenges our obsession with major monuments, monumental tympana and monastic patronage in the period, and sets out to account for the remarkable uniformity of the façades under consideration which were built for the local warrior aristocracy.

The architectural framework of the screen façades is derived primarily from Carolingian exemplars, an appropriate source given the Carolingian connections of the ruling classes in the area which have been emphasised in the recent literature (p. 14). Three specific objects are cited as examples of Carolingian liturgical 'utensils': the Arch of Einhard which

is paralleled with the single broad-arched entries such as Fenioux, the *Escrein* of Charlemagne represents the multiple layered arcading type (e.g. Chartres), and the Golden Altar given to Saint-Denis Abbey by Charles the Bald provides the analogue for the lower storeyed tripartite arch type as represented by Civray. In each case the Romanesque designer takes over motifs which the Carolingians had transformed from Roman imperial triumphal and commemorative iconography to Christian use. Further he accompanies this monumentalization of liturgical utensils with eucharistic themes in the sculpture and thereby gives plastic expression to the mysteries of the interior of the church. The architectural expression of Christian triumph over death is supplemented with direct reference to Imperial Roman and additional Carolingian sources. Funerary pyres, as represented on commemorative coins, are paralleled with the multiple arcaded façades, and funerary turrets like the Mausoleum of the Julii at Saint-Remy, a form that had already been transformed into the Christian eucharistic turrets such as Begon's Lantern in the Treasury of Sainte-Foi at Conques, are adapted to the façade turret at Aquitaine. The programme at Angoulême is centred around a Christian adaptation of the Roman trophy as a tree trunk with a crosspiece draped with enemy armour. The hieratic depiction of virtues overcoming vices on the archivolts of many of the doorways is convincingly similar to the Christ trampling the beasts on the back cover of the Lorsch Gospels in the Vatican Library and victorious figures on the Carolingian ivory plaque in the Museo nazionale, Florence. Prudentius' *Psychomachia* text is also seen as a source for other reliefs de-

picting the struggle of good and evil on the façades. The ubiquitous equestrian statue is also interpreted at more than one level having Roman, Carolingian and contemporary connotations. It is equated with the rider on the monumental triumphal arch as seen on Augustan coins, a victory iconography that is adapted for Christian expression with the inclusion of the riders as soldiers of Christ on the inside of Einhard's Arch. It is then as a soldier of Christ that the rider takes on contemporary meaning on the Aquitainian façades in commemorating and glorifying the local patron knight of Christian virtue fighting against the Muslim vice, an interpretation for which Seidel cites analogues in *The Song of Roland*, *Chansons de Geste*, and the *Pseudo-Turpin*. In the case of the rider, such multiple meaning may be taken even further. Seidel takes up Zarnecki's parallel between the rider at Parthenay-le-Vieux and the St. George tympanum at Brinsop (Herefordshire) which, incidentally, she wrongly attributes to the patronage of Oliver de Merlimond, founder of Shobdon. The stilted arch and flying cloak of the rider in both works are common to scenes of Mithras Killing the Bull in which the stilted arch forms the entrance to the cave, while the Brinsop dragon is closely akin to the snake of the cult image in the Mithreum at S. Maria Capua Vetere. When read in connection with the many similarities between Mithraism and Christianity such parallels may suggest a link between Mithras Killing the Bull and the Christian equestrian statue. Such multiple interpretation should not make us lose sight of what seems to me to be a prime source for the rider which is not sufficiently stressed by Seidel, namely the bronze equestrian statue of Constantine alias Marcus Aurelius in Rome. In his twelfth-century description of Rome Master Gregory tells us that the Romans refer to the statue as Constantine, that the horse's hoof tramples on a dwarf and that a bird is set between the horse's ears; the tramples foe and bird are motifs that appear regularly in the riders of Aquitaine.

For the lion-killer, paired with the rider at Parthenay-le-Vieux and other façades, Seidel is less open with her multiple interpretation, opting for identification with David rather than Samson; but reference to the two long-haired Herefordshire derivatives at Stretton Sugwas and Leominster suggests a possible dual meaning of the French figures.

The themes of Christian triumph are embellished with a network of small-scale sculpture reflecting images found on contemporary luxury objects representing 'the pleasurable pastimes to which Muslim princes aspired both in this world and the next.' These reflect at once the relatively high social status of the patron knight and his wordly struggle for morality.

Seidel's contribution to scholarship on Romanesque sculpture goes well beyond the immediate reference to the façades of Aquitaine. Her careful integration of Roman and Carolingian iconographic traditions, secular references, contemporary literature and Islam may serve as a model for studies in other regions. Seidel herself hints at the possibility of this for Tuscan monuments (p. 19), to which I would add many in England which are closely allied to western France not least in their 'decorative' programmes and the west portals of Saint-Denis where certain decorative motifs belong to the tradition of lavish Carolingian church treasures exemplified by the patronage of Charles the Bald. Her references to Roman and Carolingian imperial and triumphal iconography may also be applied in a more strictly architectural sense, for example, in the use of the giant order and the great west arches following Charlemagne's Palace Chapel at Aachen.

While she does not go in for precise dating, opting for 'approximately 1090 until the close of the twelfth century' (p. 3), she does state that 'the emphasis on spiritual perfection in both life and art may provide support for dating much of the sculpture in the 1140s and 1150s, the years immediately surrounding the Second Crusade.' If that is the case then how are we to explain the western French influence at Old Sarum and Herefordshire in the 1130s? Thus while Seidel's approach enriches our understanding of the Romanesque period we must not lose sight of the traditional questions of chronology, archaeology, inter-school and inter-workshop relationships.

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CHRISTOPHER BROWN *Van Dyck*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982. 240 pp., 234 plates (including 37 in colour), \$66.00 (cloth).

Sir Anthony Van Dyck has not been accorded a serious, comprehensive book in English since 1900. In that year Sir Lionel Cust published his noble folio, which is still a pleasure to read and a mine of information. Inevitably, some of the latter has been made obsolete by later research, or the change of location of works. The volume under review, by the Curator of the Flemish and Dutch collections at the National Gallery, London, is designed to provide an up-to-date replacement for Cust's work.

It is stated on the dust-jacket that this work 'throws new light on Van Dyck's early career, particularly on his relationship with Rubens.' There is indeed a substantial survey of Rubens' early career and works. Brown observes that Rubens had brought back the first version of the Chiesa Nuova altarpiece with him to Antwerp and had set it above his mother's tomb in the Abbey of St. Michael. 'This altarpiece', he says, 'was one of the first of Rubens's works to be shown in a prominent position in Antwerp and it must have been studied with the greatest interest by the young Van Dyck.' (p. 15).

Continuing his discussion of the first Chiesa Nuova altarpiece Brown writes:

'Rubens had employed the familiar High Renaissance formula of the *sacra conversazione* ... in this particular case Rubens' model was Titian's *Virgin and Child in Glory with Six Saints* which he had seen in the Church of the Frari in Venice ... Rubens' profound debt to the Antique is also clear – the figure of St. Papianus, the second from the left, is based on the famous statue of *Mars Ultor*, now in the Capitoline Museum in Rome.' (p. 15).

Brown's first sentence in the preceding passage is a paraphrase of Hans Vlieghe (*Corpus Rubenianum, Saints*, II, p. 44): 'Rubens's composition would not be imaginable without the example of the *Sacra Conversazioni* of the Italian High Renaissance' – a statement which does not contain the misleading implication of Brown's, that the *sacra conversazione* was a High Renaissance invention. Both Vlieghe and Brown are imprecise about the original location of Titian's altarpiece. The former says it was 'in the Frari Church in Venice', which in Brown's version becomes 'in the Frari Church