THE FANCIFUL, THE GROTESQUE AND THE DEMONIC: THE SUPERNATURAL IN ROMANESQUE ART

by

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INTRODUCTION

The Romanesque style predominated in Western art for a period of approximately one hundred years: from the mid-eleventh to the mid-twelfth centuries. Romanesque was the first true Western art style. The terms "Carolingian" and "Ottonian" are applied to a kind of architecture popular in the early Middle Ages, but those terms can only be understood properly as references to certain historic eras, not artistic eras. Early medieval Europe lacked both the aesthetic sensibility and the basic building skills necessary to produce high art. Whatever fragments of Roman art were available were worked into medieval structures without any attempt to integrate the Roman and the barbarian styles. The results were vaguely disturbing, often beautiful in their individual elements but seldom appealing as a whole. One could infer from the Carolingian and Ottonian architecture that the German people really were barbarians who had to resort entirely to imitating the Greeks and Romans to produce anything even vaguely acceptable as art.

The German people were centuries behind the Greeks and Romans, culturally, and when, in the fifth century, they engulfed the Western Roman Empire, they found themselves heirs to much more than a vast new farming area. They also inherited a culture so much further advanced than their own that they were able neither to eliminate it or be wholly assimilated by it. The Germanic culture ceased to develop

on its own at that point. The Germans could not avoid seeing their own backwardness and feeling the inevitable inferiority of a people who seem somehow to have conquered their betters.

These points are significant to the development of Romanesque and its peculiar iconography. The Graeco-Roman heritage is a major element in the Romanesque style. The feeling of cultural inferiority had never really disappeared from Europe. (It can be argued that it has not disappeared yet. Certainly the dialectic based on the conflict between Classic and Germanic art styles is one of the major and consistent themes in Western art.) Romanesque succeeds where earlier styles fail not because Western Europe had consciously come to terms with its culture, but because centuries of cultural mingling had ameliorated some of the more violent disparities between Classic and German styles and, by the eleventh century, the two could successfully be merged into a powerful and unique style.

Romanesque is massive, solid, and brooding. It seems remote and somehow inaccessible to modern man. There is no element of Romanesque more peculiar and mysterious than its obsession with the grotesque and the monstrous. One wonders what elements of Christianity could inspire this fascination with violence and terror. Monsters are not reserved for scenes that would rationally lend themselves to frightening interpretations such as Last Judgments, but

rather, the creatures are everywhere. Frequently they are not part of any scene but are carved on capitals and beneath tympana with no rationale whatever. There are two key points which must be understood if there is to be any understanding of the meaning and origin of these fancies. The first, referred to above, is the combined Classic, Celtic, and German history of Romanesque. The devils and monsters fit into three basic types. There are gods, mythical beasts, and decorative types from the Classic and Eastern heritage. There are also gods and decorative types from the combined German and Celtic tradition and, finally, horrors with no cultural roots and no apparent purpose save the inspiration of terror. The first two types can be explained as the result of cultural blending. The majority of people were ignorant as to what these creatures were, at least in the case of the Classic or Eastern types. These carvings were part of a centuries old tradition and their presence is not difficult to explain. The medieval artist was viewed as just another craftsman. He was not encouraged to be individualistic and many of the themes he used were just copied from manuscripts and bestiaries. The third type of monster is more difficult to explain. Although a few of them do have roots in ancient types, most of them are too bizarre to have been a part of any previous decorative style. They are not explicable in terms of cultural roots and in order to understand them one must explore the second key factor in medieval art--the medieval

mind.

The mind of medieval man was significantly different from that of modern man. His fears and obsessions were different. It is generally accepted that the devils decorating churches were placed there to terrify people. It seems likely though, that the devils were less a cause of fear than a result of it. Medieval man accepted the supernatural as a part of life. He seems to have been constantly unclear as to where reality ended and fantasy began. The harshness of medieval life encouraged a negative outlook. Demons were everywhere, taking an active role in everyone's life, but it is rare that one hears of an angel or saint involving himself in earthly problems. It may be difficult to accept the idea of an entire society of men and women who could be classified as functional schizophrenics and paranoids, by modern standards, but it is easier to understand if one can appreciate the realities of medieval life.

Life for most medieval men and women offered little stimulation. Each day was the same as the one before, travel was minimal to nonexistant as was communication with anyone outside the insulated manorial community. Despite the uniform quality of life, there was little real security. Warfare, disease, and famine were common and, since there was no way to predict calamities until it was too late, it is reasonable to assume that most people spent their lives in fear of sudden and unexpected disaster. By the time

Romanesque had its start, Western Europe was thoroughly Christianized, at least on the surface, but the fine points of religious philosophy went over the heads of most people. Even local pastors were usually illiterate and had only a vague understanding of their religion. Consequently, simple and dramatic ideas like guilt and damnation were much more real to people than the sophisticated scholastic philosophy of the universities. Firm belief in demons is easy to understand in this frame of reference. While it may be troublesome to believe oneself always prey to demonic suggestion, at least it helps when one does sin to have someone or something else to blame. Finally, one simple fact, often ignored, can help to explain the medieval belief in tne fantastic. Medieval man consumed tremendous amounts of alcohol. Even if one accepts their greater toleration for liquor, it is still likely that they were frequently drunk, and this may have had an effect on their ability to see their world rationally.

One other element helps to explain the frequency of monsters in Romanesque art. In order for the sculpture to accomodate itself to the irregular spaces of tympana and archivolts, figures had to be distorted. Since monsters never need conform to any physiological necessity, they are more flexible than human shapes in decoration. This factor is comparatively minimal in importance, however. The Germanic peoples of Europe had a rich heritage of absract decoration. Abstract forms could certainly have been used

if aesthetic balance had been the prime consideration.

The three different types of Romanesque monsters each have their own significance quite independent of the other two. Therefore, each of the three will be studied separately. The gods and mythical creatures from the Classical heritage were used either for purely decorative purposes or as allegorical symbols of Christ, Satan, and other Christian figures. The Germano-Celtic types, most common in Britain, are a remainder of Western Europe's pagan past. These the Church ignored because it had no choice. Celtic gods remained real to the people as evidenced by the frequent complaints by bishops of rural backsliding into pagan ways and witchcraft. Sometimes the old gods were changed into devils and sometimes into saints. Most often they were not changed at all, but were carved randomly, and with no explanation, through Romanesque and, later, Gothic churches. The third type, the demons and devils who are stylistically peculiar to Romanesque, are the only ones that are strictly medieval. From these we can get some understanding of the fears, drives, and obsessions of the time. These monsters are the only ones that were designed by Christians. Consequently, they are the most significant for an understanding of the medieval view of man, morality, and destiny.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FANCIFUL: CLASSICAL AND EASTERN INFLUENCES IN ROMANESQUE ICONOGRAPHY

It is a well known fact that Christian philosophy is taken almost entirely from the ancients. The two major Christian philosophical streams, Augustinianism and Thomism, are developed mainly from a Christianization of Plato and Aristotle. What is less well known is the great extent to which the Christian mythos is also dependent on ancient beliefs. Most of the legends surrounding Christ's birth, including the date of December 25 for Christmas, are borrowed from the mystery cult of Mithras. Saints and devils are transformations of ancient gods from both the Classic and Celtic pantheons. Christianity was sufficient in its basic form as long as it remained one of the subcults of Imperial Rome. It was a persecuted cult and its simple doctrines were sufficient as a means to hold together its small and dedicated following. Under Constantine and Theodosius Christians attained toleration and, later, the position of the official church of the Roman Empire. The religion had to develop a sophisticated orthodoxy. It had to decide how it would deal with a vast new membership, many of whom were recalcitrant followers at best. Since Christianity had its birth in the more sophisticated Eastern half of the empire, it was not at a loss for either myths or philosophies from which to borrow. This borrowing was more than a calculated measure to flesh out a simple creed to the proportion of a major and an imposed state

religion. To some degree the borrowing was not even deliberate but resulted from the basic desire of the people to hold on to their old beliefs. Rather than embark on persecutions on a massive scale, it was easier for the Church to accomodate and transform some of the old beliefs and old gods into part of Christianity. It is interesting that the orthodox Jewish faith contributed less in the way of mythology and legend to Christianity than did the various pagan cults of Rome since Judaism was supposedly the base on which Christianity was built. There were problems between the Jews and the Christians. The Jewish faith, at least in its mainstream, was an intellectual, monotheistic one without a great deal of transferable folklore. Also, the two religions were mutually hostile. To the Christians, the Jews were not unenlightened pagans but willfully blind non-believers who refused the message of Christ when they were offered it. Only the Gnostic sidelines of Judaism had a real effect on the Christian mythos.

As Christianity spread west, it was passed to a comparatively barbaric people. The Germans were not prepared intellectually for a complex philosophical system, but the Eastern legends and myths took root. Legends were an integral part of the old Germanic religions so the Eastern myths were more intelligible to the German people than were the fine points of theology and heresy, both of which remained somewhat obscure to the average European for the whole of

the Middle Ages.

The bulk of ancient mythology to find its way into Christianity, and from there to Christian art, was Graeco-Roman. Romanesque art is a highly decorative style and many of the figures which it incorporated were used for purely decorative purposes. Others, however, acquired a deep religious significance, mostly as allegorical types. The actual Graeco-Roman pantheon was much less significant to Christianity than the lower level demi-gods and the fantasy creatures of the Greek and Roman bestiaries. Nonetheless, the gods and goddesses do play a part. The Greek and Roman goddesses are depicted more frequently than the gods, in Romanesque art. These goddesses are almost always negative figures. Venus became the archetype of lust. Her mirror became the symbol of vanity so Venus figured as two of the vices in depictions of the Psychomachia. Only one of her attributes was a positive symbol in Christianity. The dove, once associated with Venus, and, consequently, with lust, became the symbol of the purity of Christ.[1] Diana, the virgin goddess of the hunt, was also a common figure in iconography and, like Venus, her image was debased. She came to be associated with Hecate, the three-faced goddess of Hell. Hecate was believed to be the mother of the lamias. These latter were mythical winged women, somewhere

[1]Louis Reau, Iconographie de l'Art Chretien, 3 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), 1:81.

between harpies and vampires, who sucked blood from their victims as well as stealing babies and causing nightmares by resting on a sleeper's chest. The myths surrounding Diana-Hecate were very popular by the eleventh century. The real or imaginary cult of women who worshipped Diana-Hecate began, at this time, to take on the trappings of a classic witch cult.[2]

The male Graeco-Roman gods seldom figure in Romanesque with the exception of Mars who was used occasionally as a symbol of war and, less frequently, Apollo, who was sometimes pictured in the company of Venus as a figure of lust. The gods are much more significant as prototypes of Christian saints and devils. Hermes, for example, gives his position as judge of the psychostasis to the archangel Michael, and Satan inherits his pitchfork from Neptune with his trident.[3]

One of the most common figures in Romanesque art, inherited from the Classical world is the figure of death, the grim reaper. The medieval symbol of death is not the Greek Thanatos however, but Larva, the evil man's ghost.[4] The figure of Thanatos was always a poignant and beautiful one and, consequently, not appealing to the somewhat

[2]Jeffrey Burton Russel, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 48.

[3]Ibid., p. 80.

[4]Reau, Iconographie Chretien, 1: 642.

gruesome tastes of the medieval Church. Death's scythe is not from Thanatos either but from Kronos, the Greek god of time.

Cereberus, the three-headed guard dog of Hades lends an evil interpretation to dogs in iconography.[5] One of the capitals of Saint-Benoit-sur-Loire is typical of the demonic representation of dogs in Romanesque. Three grinning dogs with protruding tongues, human noses and large squat tails stare out at nothing. They are part of no larger scene but form a vignette unto themselves.

Far more important than the official pantheon of gods were the half-imaginary creatures of the classic bestiaries. The bestiaries were a series of fantastic studies of natural history based much more on the authors' imaginations than on their actual experience. They were really not intended as scientific studies, but as allegorical treatises on the nature of man. In the hands of the Christians, the bestiaries became a series of allegories on the Christian mythos. Megasthenes, Aristotle, and Pliny were the major contributors to the classic bestiaries. Isidore of Seville popularized the Christian interpretation of their works in Western Europe.

Men like Pliny and Isidore were not conspicuous for the accuracy, or even the plausibility of their "findings." Consequently, the descriptions of real animals in the

[5]Ibid., p. 109.

bestiaries are no less fantastic than those of imaginary creatures. For example, the bear was said to give birth to shapeless blobs which she would then lick into the shape of cubs and the stork, the symbol of familial loyalty, was said to pierce her breast and feed her young of her own blood. Despite the apparent nonsense of the bestiaries, they did provide the Romanesque sculptors with a rich variety of decorative types. They were the source for the centaur, the griffin, the phoenix, the hippocamp, the mantichore, and the mermaid. These beasts was given an often as not, their functformal.

depicted of the bestiary taur, and the mermaid. lust. Egyptian anchorcentaurs who found their with women. The siren as depicted two ways. body of a bird, like mermaid. Two of these door lintel at Mont-Saint-Michel. Another siren or mermaid appears on the archivolt at Vezelay among the "circle men." This latter is a clear use of the form as decorative with no religious significance. The mermaid is the perfect solution to the

problem of the disc-like sculptural surface, which required figures to make circles of their bodies. Both the mermaid and the centaur are found on a column at the abbey church of Saint-Pierre, as part of a series of designs illustrating natural history. Again, the religious significance is minimal to non-existent. At Cunault-sur-Loire, a mermaid is part of a vignette. She gives two fish to a pair of fishermen. This scene appears to be secular but may have some obscure symbolism as an allegory on lust. Another mermaid is found on a capital at Saint-Caprais in Ager.

The bird-bodied sirens are less naturally pleasing and, consequently, appear less frequently than the mermaids although they are by no means rare. One of the nave capitals at Saint-Benoit-sur-Loire features a pair of bird sirens. These two are fat quadrupeds and their significance as symbols of lust is less understandable than that of their mermaid sisters. The Benoit-sur-Loire scene is repeated on a capital at the cloister of Santo Domingo.

The siren is always female but the mermaid has a male version. The triton, a son of Neptune in classical mythology, has the upper portions of a man and the tail of a fish. The triton has no real significance in Christian mythology and is not a part of the bestiary but the figure is not uncommon in iconography. One appears at the cloister at Roussillon. He is double-tailed and he holds up one tail with each of his hands. He is a decorative symbol and not a part of the vignette. An interesting subject is

carved on a capital at Saint-Nectaire. Here two tritons are counterposed on either side of a foliate head. The tritons are Greek, the formal composition is Chaldean, and the central object of the composition is a druid symbol. This odd mingling of cultural types was probably not deliberate, and seems meaningless in terms of religious significance.

This combination of classical and Celtic imagery is repeated on the Saint-Remy candlestick. A horned Celtic mask is abutted on either side by a centaur. There is one male and one female centaur. One capital at Arles features a pair of centaur-like creatures although this particular pair have bodies more closely similar to bulls than horses. They are not formally counterposed. The male is bearded and the style of the hair and beard is very reminiscent of the Assyrian lion man.

The centaurs, sirens, and mermaids are not the only bestiary creatures commonly represented in Romanesque art. Another frequent threesome is the basilisk, the griffin, and the dragon. All three are symbols of evil. The basilisk is a real animal but the stories surrounding it are so fantastic as to place it, functionally, among the ranks of the mythical. The basilisk was believed to be a serpent with the head of a cock. It was hatched from a spherical membranous egg laid by a cock and hatched by a toad. The eye of the basilisk was deadly, as was the breath. The only way to protect oneself from the eye of the basilisk

was to look at the creature through a piece of glass. Sometimes the basilisk was depicted as a simple lizard but most often he had a lizard's body and a bird's head and wings. It was considered a symbol of Satan and was one of the four beasts "sacred" to him. The four beasts, the other three being the asp, the lion, and the dragon, corresponded to the four beasts of the Apocalypse.[6]

One of the capitals at Vezelay depicts a basilisk, although this particular one has an ox-like head rather than one of a lizard or a bird. He is mounted on a man and the two fight a female sphinx. The sphinx' body is ox-like rather than leonine, and she holds a piece of crystal through which she can view her opponent. A second Vezelay capital uses the basilisk in an intricate scene. Here a man fights the basilisk. He holds a crystal up to his eye for protection. On his right is a huge creature amalgamated from a variety of different animals. It has the head of a bearded man with horns, the body of a locust, the tail of a fish, and the wings of a bird. The basilisk is the usual lizard with a cock's head. These two scenes of the basilisk are more narrative than those above, involving the sirens and the centaurs. The basilisk is hardly identifiable outside of the scenes which specifically show an opponent gazing at him through the crystal, since his physical attributes

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[6]Ibid., p. 113.

varied widely.

The griffin was a majestic beast, popular in art no less for his beauty than for his religious significance. The griffin has the head, wings, and foreparts of an eagle and the backparts of a lion. His religious significance is confusing in that, like the phoenix, he is the symbol of both Christ and Satan. He represents Christ in his power and majesty, but the griffin was also savage and fierce. In the latter traits he represents Satan. The griffin was most frequently used as an ornamental device. He usually stands alone and forms no part of a narrative scene. He is shown this way on the porch of Saint-Zeno's, on the natural history column at the abbey church of Saint-Pierre, and in the Ghent manuscript of the Liber Floridus of Lamber of Saint-Omer's. The other common depictions of the griffin are as a savage beast of prey. Thus, he is shown on a capital at Autun attacking a mail clad knight who stabs him ineffectually in the stomach with a broad-sword. This same scene is repeated at Beverly Minster, Durham, and Gloucester. On a capital at Kent, a griffin is shown attacking and devouring a serpent. The religious significance of these scenes is ambivalent. They can either represent the power of Christ over sin and vice, or the power of Satan crushing the human spirit.

The dragon is the symbol of sin and another of the four beasts of Satan. Myths concerning the dragon are countless and they are a part of almost every Eastern and

European culture. The dragon is not as popular as an ornamental device in Romanesque as it is in Eastern art. The best Romanesque art is sculptural and the long, sinewy, winged dragon does not lend itself to stone work. The dragon is out of place as a "guard" animal in the Romanesque style, a position commonly held by the lion and the griffin. The most common dragon scenes in Romanesque are those of Saint Michael, the dragon slayer. Of these, the best are painted rather than carved. One of these is taken from the missal of Henry de Midel, illustrated around the mid-twelfth century. This dragon is long and coiled with a fishlike tail, long hair, and large ears. A sculpted scene of Saint Michael and the dragon is found on the West apse tympanum of Saint-Michael-d'Entraiques. This dragon is small and winged with a long coiled tail. He has a small head with long teeth. The scenes from Revelations in the Liber Floridus show a dragon from whose mouth issues a flood which is swallowed up by the personified earth. The dragon is not always easy to distinguish outside of scenes which make his identity narratively clear. Like the basilisk, he takes a number of specific forms and becomes confused with a variety of uncategorizable lizard-like animals. These animals are generally referred to as dragons but they are not really the symbolic dragon of the bestiaries.

It was not just mythical beasts that took on strange characteristics in the bestiaries but real animals as well. Various peculiar physical traits were attributed to animals

by authors who had no more first-hand experience of lions and elephants than they had of basilisks and dragons. The most interesting legends surround the lion who is represented innumerable times in Romanesque sculpture. The lion shares with the griffin and the phoenix the strange trait of being the type of both Satan and Christ. Like the griffin, he is associated with Satan because of his ferocity. He is one of Satan's mythical beasts as well as being one of the beasts of the Apocalypse. The association of the lion with Christ developed from a particularly strange story. Lion cubs were thought to be born dead. After three days their mother would breath life into them. Thus, they represent the Resurrection of Christ after three days. Artistic versions of this colorful if far-fetched story can be found at Kremsmunster Abbey and in the Gospel of Averboden. The artists' innocence of any first-hand knowledge of the lion is evident in these vignettes. The lioness, in both cases is depicted with the long full mane of the lion. The lion was very popular as a guard animal, (that is, a stone lion would be placed on either side of the front church entrance.) for a number of reasons. Primarily lions were used because they work, artistically. Not surprisingly though, there is another myth connected with the lion that makes him an ideal guardian. The lion either never slept or he slept with his eyes open.

Closely related to the bestiaries are other natural histories which purported to be anthropological as well as

zoological. Once again, Pliny and Isidore of Seville made major contributions to these studies. It is surprising to discover that Saint Augustine, a generally more sober intellect than Isidore or Pliny, also had a hand in perpetrating the ludicrous tales of the natural histories. Among the "species" of men described by the natural histories are: cynocephali, or dog-headed men, the hippopods, or horse-footed men, the pygmies, the "large-eared" men, the anthropophagi, who had no body and whose limbs emerged directly from their heads, as well as a number of unnamed headless tribes with faces on their chests or stomachs.[7] Most of these concepts are comical, none more so than the skiapods, a race of one-legged men whose single large foot could not only move them about with great speed but could be pulled over the head and used as an umbrella in bad weather. These bizarre creatures were supposed to be inhabitants of Ethiopia or India. Possibly because these areas were so remote, at least by contemporary standards, the existence or non-existance of the species could never be proven. The large-eared people were called Fanesians and were fifteen feet tall with ears twice the size of their heads. These ears could be wrapped around their bodies. Despite the wierd idiosyncracies of of these creatures, they were still considered human and, as such, possessing of immortal souls.

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[7] C.J.S. Thompson, The Mystery and Lore of Monsters, (New York: University, 1968), p. 19.

They usually appear in iconography in scenes depicting the apostles spreading the message of Christ abroad. The archivolt at Vezelay consists of a series of these vignettes. The cynocephali and the large-eared people are both shown as well as a wild-haired man who represents a barbarian. This last is ironic since the sculptors of the Romanesque churches were themselves barbarians. The large-eared people are not depicted here as being abnormally tall. They are normal people in every way save the fantastic size of their ears.

Generally speaking, the creatures of the bestiaries and natural histories were more significant to Romanesque art as decorative types than as deeply religious symbols. Many of the mythical beasts and people are beautiful or comical, and one tends to think that their religious significance just lent an air of legitimacy to their presence in the church. Since the church was something of a cultural center in medieval society, the creatures were often displayed as a kind of natural history lesson. Other figures, like the personified tonal scale, had minimal religious import but were very popular Romanesque themes. Because the beasts were meant to be instructive they are frequently shown all together on natural history columns. There is one of these instructive columns at the abbey church at Saint Pierre featuring a unicorn, a griffin, a manticore, a siren and a variety of other bestiary creatures. A similar column is found at Souvigny. At Saint-Pierre-de-la-Tour

in Aulnay the upside-down crucifixion of Saint Peter is depicted with a group of bestiary creatures clustered around the foot of the cross. The church functioned as kind of a natural history museum.[8] Relics of monsters were preserved alongside relics of the saints. Unicorn horns were particularly popular as were ostrich eggs and jewels removed from the heads of toads.

Although the major Greek influence on Romanesque was the bestiaries, there are other Greek figures that were also important. The Greek fauns and satyrs were the formal prototypes for the Romanesque demons.[9] In Greek mythology, the faun and satyr, like the centaur, are conspicuous for their sensual, half-bestial natures. They are depicted as horned with the lower parts of a goat. The goat became the archetypal symbol of Satan, especially the Satan of the witch cults. It was an Eastern concept of the devil that later prevailed in Romanesque art. The original Western devil was not a monster but an ugly man.[10] The early Greek Christians also began the tradition of peopling religious art with supernatural creatures extraneous to the narrative scene. Of course there is a vast difference between the

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[8]Emile Male, Religious Art in France, the Twelfth Century: A Study of the Origins of Medieval Iconography, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 326.

[9]Reau, Iconographie Chretien, p. 53.

[10]Adolphe Napoleon Didron, Christian Iconography: The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages, 2 vols. (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965), 2: 125.

ent Greek art and what develops from it in later Romanesque. The Greek Christians painted pastoral, idyllic scenes of a young Christ surrounded by a variety of nymphs, fauns, and minor gods. These mythical figures were not meant to signify anything at all. They were decorative and intended to add to the innocent grace of the scenes. Later, the Romanesque sculptors developed the style, but in a strange direction. The mythical creatures became more and more demonic and terrifying and, rather than adding innocent charm to the scene, they fill it with a sense of foreboding and gathering dread.

The very idea of demons is Greek not Jewish. The Jewish culture tends to think of evil more in terms of man's early behavior and his relationship with God. Demons were not significant in mainstream Judaism. Greek intellectuals accepted demons much more readily. Porphyry believed himself beset by demons as did, to a lesser extent, Plotinus. These two thinkers had a profound effect on Christianity especially through the writings of Augustine and Gregory the Great.[11]

The Greek Sibyls were preserved in Western art. These wise women became Christian prophets and were a popular theme in Old Testament sculpture. The prototype Graeco-Roman Earth Mother underwent a harsher transformation than

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[11]Henry Osborn Taylor, The Medieval Mind: A History of the Development of Thought and Emotion in the Middle Ages, 2 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1928), 1: 65.

the sibyls. The earth was the nourisher and she was depicted suckling either two small children or two animals. In Romanesque iconography, the Earth Mother becomes, like Venus-Aphrodite, the type of lust.[12] She maintained her human form but the children she suckles become snakes biting her breasts and her genitals are covered with toads. Toads were a symbol of uncleanliness. This traditional depiction of lust can be found at Moissac. Another classic figure of lust was carved on the portal of Charlieu although in this particular version the snakes and toads are climbing the woman's body, not placed at her breasts and genitals as is usually the case. The motif is developed at Vezelay and resembles the prototype Earth Mother less. Lust, at Vezelay, is shown pulling her breast down to offer it to the snake who crawls up her leg. The significance of this vignette is slightly different from the more usual style, in that the snakes and toads usually represent the punishment for lust. The Vezelay figure is an active and willing participant in the act. The sculpture of Vezelay, like that of Autun, veers sharply from the formal stylization of most Romanesque art. Both churches are "artists" churches and, consequently, their styles are individualistic and their types are seldom classical.

Romanesque does use personified earth symbols but they have nothing to do with the Greek nourishing mother except

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[12]Reau, Iconographie Chretien, 1: 166.

in rare cases. One of these is found in the sacramentary of Saint-Denis in Reims. Here the classic Greek mother is reproduced. She suckles two children who appear, physiologically, as small men. The earth was depicted in Romanesque manuscripts as swallowing the flood in Apocalypse. A Reims manuscript and the Ghent manuscript of Liber Floridus personify the earth in the Apocalyptic vision as a creature of indeterminate sex. The Liber Floridus shows only a curly-haired head with its mouth open to swallow the flood.

One final Greek influence on the Romanesque style is the use of Greek dramatic masks as possible models for the many "Mouth of Hell" scenes. Frequently the Mouth of Hell is only the top half of a face with no lower jaw, but on the Last Judgment on the south tympanum of the abbey church of Saint-Pierre, the Mouth of Hell is full-faced. Here the style is very similar to the Greek comic mask, although the resemblance may not have been intentional. The Nazareth Cathedral of the Assumption has one vignette of a woman and a devil. The devil's face, especially the mouth, seem to be modelled on a Greek mask.

Christianity, at least in the eyes of the Christians, was the fulfillment of the promise of Judaism. Judaism contributes little to Romanesque art, however, for reasons suggested above. The Gnostic cult, which had a large Hebrew following, did contribute quite a bit in the way of demonology. Gnosticism is rooted in Babylon but it contains

elements of Egyptian, Persian, and Judaic mysticism.[13] The major Christian devils are Gnostic and Judaic figures: Abraxas, Belial, Asmodeus, Leviathon, Mammon, and Beelzebub. Minor devils and demons tend to be nameless and are based on Graeco-Roman and Germano-Celtic myths.

Gnosticism is founded on an extreme Platonic kind of dualism. Matter is evil and spirit is good. One can arrive at the spiritual through mystical knowledge. Abraxas was one of the high gods of Gnosticism and he embodied in himself both good and evil. In the Gnostic sect, Jesus Christ figured as a wizard.[14] Gnostic symbolism found its way into Christian art through the Church's anti-Gnostic literature. An illustration in the Silos manuscript of the demon Aqinos is typical of mystic occultism although the manuscript is Christian. The bodies and names of the devils form a magic circle. Aqinos is based on the usual illustration of Abraxas on Gnostis secret gems. He is one-legged with the head of a bird. The Babylonian basis of Gnosticism lends a significance to the common practice of placing horns on the heads of demons. In Babylonian mythology, the more horns a deity had, the greater his power.[15] This tradition seems not to have passed on to the Christians since, in art,

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[13]Thomas Witton Davies, Magic, Divination and Demonology Among the Hebrews and Their Neighbors (New York: Ktau Publishing House, 1969), p. 60.

[14]Russel, Witchcraft, p. 45.

[15]Margaret Murray, The God of the Witches (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 16.

the number of horns is arbitrary an a devil seldom has more than one or two.

The Assyrians and, to a much greater extent, the Chaldeans contributed to the Romanesque style. One of the most characteristic of Assyrian ornaments was the man-headed lion, These differ from the Egyptian sphinx in that they are a rigidly stylized type. They are nearly always winged bearded males, usually crowned. They were not accepted as legendary figures in Romanesque narrative art, but they served as a model for decorative vignettes, such as the two winged "centaurs" on the capital at Arles.

Little, if any, Chaldean mythology found its way into the Christian mythos but the Chaldeans did contribute some of the most constantly reoccuring themes in Romanesque art. The Chaldean tree of life pattern is frequently found in both religious and secular art of the Middle Ages. the tree or fountain of life is placed in the center of the painting or sculpture and two animals are rigidly counterposed, one on either side of it. A variation on this theme is that of the two counterposed birds whose extremely long necks are wound one around the other. The "several bodies beneath one head" that Saint Bernard complained about are also part of the Chaldean heritage.[16] One of these peculiar figures can be found on the tympanum of Saint-Gilles in Beauvais. Like many of the multi-bodied head designs, this one is carved on a corner with the head in the center. The

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[16]Male, Religious Art in France, p. 358.

Saint-Gilles monster has a grinning face, faintly reminiscent of a hippopotamus. He has two winged bodies and, at the point where the wings converge above the head, another small head is visible. The small head is not connected to either body. Another of these creatures appears on a capital at Chauvigny. The Chauvigny head is a smiling, bearded, human one. The two bodies are horse-like quadrupeds with wings. The bodies each have a long tail from the end of which emerges a human hand. Another Chauvigny capital depicts a more human version of the double-bodied head. Here the two bodies blend into one so that there is one head and two arms but four legs. Each of the bodies fights a separate quadruped monster. Although the earliest versions of this design are Chaldean, the double-bodied head can also be found in Celtic art. It is uncertain from which heritage the theme found its way into Christian art.

A final Chaldean theme common in Romanesque art is the mounted animal fight. Like other Chaldean patterns, this one is more decorative than narrative. A classic example of this scene can be found on a transept capital at Saint-Eutrope. Two hawk-like birds are mounted on a pair of indeterminate quadrupeds. As the quadrupeds turn their heads around to bite the bird's tails, the birds lean forward and pierce their mount's necks. A column at the abbey church of Sainte-Marie is composed entirely of a series of mounted animals biting one another. A Norman ivory carving dating from around 1140 depicts a huge-eyed lion mounting a bear

and biting the back of his neck. The bear is also very wide-eyed and long-haired. These scenes are violent but they are not visually unpleasant. Like most of the Chaldean themes, they are formal and stylized and the cruelty of the themes is not emotionally effective. They were not designed as intentional allegorical commentaries.and, though such an interpretation was often given to them in the Middle Ages, both the original designs and the Romanesque copies are formal studies in balance.

Egyptian art, with its intense funerary quality, is a natural, if indirect, inspiration for Romanesque sculpture. Although Hermes weighs dead souls in Greek art and legend, the archetypal judge of the psychostasis is the Egyptian jackal-headed god, Anubis. The Christian psychostasis is usually depicted on Last Judgment tympana but in a few cases it is a vignette unto itself. These cases are closer to the Egyptian prototype, as the Egyptian illustrations were not concerned with full-scale depictions of the fate of damned souls. One of the capitals at Saint-Eutrope is a simple psychostasis. The devil appears fairly human although, of course, he is naked, in contrast to the robed Saint Michael. A similar scene is found on a capital at Chauvigny. Here the devil is more grotesque, with a reptilian body and clawed feet. His face is bestial, his jaw protuberant, and his teeth huge and jagged. The presence of the devil lends a different meaning to the Christian, as opposed to the Egyptian, psychostasis. Anubis is a

disinterested judge who handles the soul-weighing alone. The devil and Saint Michael are partisan figures, hoping for the damnation or salvation of the souls, respectively.

Another Egyptian figure used heavily in Romanesque sculpture is the devil with serpents or animals coming from his ears.[17] One example of this is the "Lions of Hell" motif on the Freckenhorst baptismal font. The lions have human eyes and their mouths are pulled open by tails that they swallow. The tails re-emerge from their ears. The stretched open mouths are a Celtic pattern but the use of the lion's tails is Egyptian.

Other ancient cultures made minor contributions to Romanesque imagery. Persian Zoroastrianism offered little in the way of actual design, but its dualism between the equal forces of good and evil (Ormazd vs. Ahriman), is an underlying theme in most Romanesque art. Although the Christians believed in a good and omnipotent God, as opposed to a comparatively weak Satan, this idea is not brought to light in their art. A survey of Romanesque art would suggest the Persian idea of a constant battle between two equally powerful adversaries.

A few paintings of the medieval period suggest Indian roots. One of these, the Genesis scene from Alcuin's Bible, predates Romanesque by several centuries. Another, the head of David from the west wall of Saint-Martin-de-Vicq is e twelfth century. This illustration bears a sharp resemblance

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[17]Didron, Christian Iconography, p. 122.

to the art of the Tantric sect of Hinduism.

Eastern and classic art provided a wealth of material to inspire the Romanesque artist. Most of the figures borrowed from this heritage are either beautiful or comic. The religious significance of the figures was minimal, despite Church attempts to assign them allegorical meanings. The classic and Eastern designs had very little emotional importance to medieval man either. They provided, instead, a formal aesthetic which balanced some of the excesses of demonic art. Only fantasy figures are discussed here, but there is a great deal more of the Greek, Roman, and Oriental style in Romanesque sculpture. The designs take on a distinctly Western character in the translation from woven or painted patterns to carved stone work. The translations work, strangely enough, and Romanesque achieves the goal for which Carolingian and Ottonian art reached. It successfully integrates Eastern design into Western architecture.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GROTESQUE: THE PAGAN EUROPEAN INFLUENCE ON ROMANESQUE ART

The barbarian art of pre-Christian Europe contributed as much to Romanesque as did Graeco-Roman culture. There is a difference between the two heritages, however, both in terms of figurative styles and emotional impact. As has been stated, the use of classical mythological beasts in decoration was usually formal. What meaning the creatures did have was largely obscure to the average European. The case of barbarian art, whether Celtic, Germanic, or Scandinavian, was quite different. First of all, the aesthetic effect was neither as charming nor as important. Mermaids, sirens, centaurs, and griffins may be bizarre in the natural order, but they are appealing in their form and not inherently frightening. The European gods and fantasy figures are seldom beautiful and usually frightening. Some have a grotesqueness that is so extreme they move into areas of, on the one side, near abstraction and, on the other, low comedy. This is not to say that the European sculpture is inferior to the Graeco-Roman. On the contrary, barbarian grotesquerie seems to have particular appropriateness in the Romanesque setting. Like the Romanesque style itself, the barbarian figures have solidity and strength. They fulfill the aesthetic requirement that the subject matter of sculpture accomodate itself to the nature of the material used; in this case stone which is, itself, a heavy, solid substance.

Perhaps more significant than artistic considerations are the emotional and mythical meanings of the pagan European figures. These figures were not imported Eastern images as were the Graeco-Roman and, in an ultimate sense, even the basic Christian types. These were the images of the European mythological base and they were still important to the people. The Christian Church would like to have believed that the old myths had been permanently put aside in favor of the new vision of the gospel, but it was no simple matter to transform the beliefs of a vast illiterate population. It was easier, in the long run, for the Church to meet the pagan creeds half-way. The pagan gods could be transformed into Christian saints or devils and their imagery could thus find its way, justifiably into Christian churches. Most of the pagan figures have no religious significance in Christian terms, however. They are usually left unexplained but, unlike the Graeco-Roman decorations, the meaning of the pagan figures was more than clear to the average European.

There is no real mystery as to why the old mythology did not disappear. The pagan religion satisfied a basic need of the people--a need for security and stability. The moral ethic of Christianity, as well as its monotheism, was unnatural to an unsophisticated people. It is true that Christianity offered its adherents a chance for salvation but it may not have always been clear what the people were being offered salvation <u>from</u>. The old religion was, on the

other hand, a clear, amoral give and take: the individual more or less knew what to expect from the gods. If one made the proper sacrifices one could expect the desired returns in terms of immediately useful services and commodities. The new religion offered nothing so concrete and even the eternal joy promised as a reward for a moral life must have seemed tame in comparison with the rough and ready spirit of Valhalla.

The Church and the State were both aware of the tendency of the population to backslide into paganism and witchcraft. To some rulers, the Merovingians for example, this issue was immaterial. Their interest in Christianity was limited to its perceived superiority as a system of magic.[1] Charlemagne strengthened the relationship between the Frankish Reich and the Church and consequently felt obliged to make some effort to keep witchcraft and paganism under control. He had only a limited success. England, with her great distance from Rome, was extremely slack in controlling paganism, especially during the Anglo-Saxon period. Here religion was little more than a competitve struggle for the role of master magician, at least until the Norman Conquest imposed a certain minimal order on life. Still, all through the Romanesque and Gothic periods England remained the wealthiest source of pagan church sculpture.

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[1]Henry Osborn Taylor, The Medieval Mind: A History of the Development of Thought and Emotion in the Middle Ages, 2 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1928), 1: 195.

It would be a mistake to overemphasize the strength of paganism in Europe in the twelfth century. There is no doubt that by this time the vast majority of Europeans were definitely Christian. Still, they had accepted Christianity on their own terms, to a certain extent. The old gods who had become saints and devils could still be respected and feared. Other mythical creatures such as fairies, brownies, and trolls fell outside the Christian pale but were generally believed in, nonetheless. It is safest to say that the old religion was eclipsed by the new but it was never completely replaced.

Without a doubt, the richest of the pagan European heritages was the Celtic culture of France and Britain. The Celtic druids, as the priestly class, worshipped the oak and performed human sacrifices. According to Pliny, they were also cannibals but this is unsubstatiated. In fact, given Pliny's general unreliability, it seems unlikely. The druids did have a practice of decapitating enemies in warfare and this theme, as well as the oak symbolism, is very predominant in Romanesque art, especially in Britain.

The most common of the Celtic themes in Romanesque is the foliate head. These are generally mask-like faces surrounded by greenery. The greenery is almost invariably oak leaves. Foliate heads were common in all Celtic art particularly in Ireland where the heads can be found dating as far back as the La Tene period. The foliate head, or

Jack of the Green as it was known in Britain, was a Celtic fertility symbol.[2] Since druids always performed their rituals in oak groves, it has been theorized that the face represents the druid priest. It has also been suggested that the face is the oak tree spirit. The actual interpretation may be unclear, but it is certain that the foliate head represents nothing in Christian mythology.

The foliate heads vary from place to place. Usually the face is depicted with vines of oak growing from its mouth. This is, very likely, an adaptation of the regular Celtic depictions of their god, Cernunnos, who is usually seen with a pair of snakes coming from his mouth. The other trait common to most foliate heads is the facial expression. Either the face stares vacantly or they are given a stylistic savagery around the mouth. In either case the eyes are blank and staring, giving the impression that the faces are meant to represent masks. A typical foliate head may be found on a porch capital at Saint-Benoit-sur-Loire. The face here is bearded and somewhat elongated. It has the typically vacant eyes and the two vines emerging from the mouth. An almost identical design is carved on a choir capital at Morienval. The foliate head theme has an interesting development at Creny-en-Laonnais. Here two heads emerge from the vine, one bearded and the other clean-shaven

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[2]Ronald Sheridan and Anne Ross, Gargoyles and Grotesques: Paganism in the Medieval Church (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), p. 32.

ears, and a generally demonic aspect. The horns are adopted from Cenunnos and the generally inhuman cast to this particular face would seem to indicate that it was meant to represent a supernatural creature like the oak tree god rather than a druid.

As mentioned above, some of the conventions of design in the foliate head are developed from the common Celtic depictions of Cernunnos. It is possible to find more direct representations of Cernunnos in his original type. One of these can be found on the south doorway of Saint Mary and Saint David in Kilpeck. Here the face is semi-abstract but deliberately frightening with a large screaming mouth. Interestingly, another of these more classic illustrations of Cernunnos can be found at Schwabisch Gmund in Germany. The Germanic people had their own religion, distinct from the Celts, so this god was not even part of their natural heritage. The Schwabisch Cernunnos has bull's horns, as he always had in Celtic art, pointy teeth, and a pair of snakes emerging from his mouth. Cernunnos had a slightly different aspect on the Gundestrup caldron where he is shown as basically human, but with stag's ears.[3] The stag's ears were not common in art but they had great religious significance, at least to the British Celts. Twice, in 668 and again in 690, Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury, tried to restrict the pagan practice of wearing

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[3]Heinz Mode, Fabulous Beasts and Demons (London: Phaidon Press, 1975), p. 32.

stag's heads.[4] Whether the stag itself had religious significance is not certain but horns were considered a sign of power and dignity.

More important than these portrayals of Cernunnos is the fact that the horned god became one of the primary types of Satan. He is perhaps the clearset example of a pagan god transformed into a devil. Dis Pater, a fellow Celtic god, was also identified with Satan, so much so that Dante refers to the devil as "Dis" in his Inferno. It is not surprising that these two Celtic gods were transformed into symbols of evil. The Celtic religion was not very centralized, despite the fact that the druids did meet yearly at Chartres and were free to cross intertribal lines. Dis and Cernunnos were two of the very few gods to have general acceptance among all Celts in both Gaul and Britain. It is understandable that the Church would choose these two potent rivals as types of pure evil.

It is more difficult to trace the motifs of the Celtic and German cultures than those of the Graeco-Romans. The European population was illiterate and hence there is very little available information as to the meaning of their symbols. Also, many of the themes are very similar and it is difficult to determine whether they are all part of one

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[4]Margaret Murray, The God of the Witches (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960), p.22.

[5]T. Tindall Wildridge, The Grotesque in Church Art (London: William Andrew, 1899), p. 71.

pattern or if they each have their own individual significance. For example, there are many Celtic mask faces which lack the oak foliage. Since the oak was so important to Celtic religion probably the masks without the oak do have a separate meaning though it is doubtful that their significance was secular. It is possible that they were lower religious symbols of the nature of protective totems. A capital at Saone-et-Loire displays a series of these staring masks with no vine leaves. These faces are bearded with pointy ears and faces considerably more bestial than the norm.

Another druidical symbol popular in Romanesque art was the decapitated head. These are distinct from the disembodied foliate heads both in their lack of greenery and in their formal pattern which repeats the display pattern of real decapitated heads on ancient Celtic sanctuaries. Roquepertuse sanctuary is the classic surviving example of this bizarre type of decoration. Human skulls are embedded side by side above the door in a triangular pattern resembling a set of bowling pins. The Catholic Church may have been fairly tolerant of pagan symbolism in churches and cathedrals but it is likely that it would have drawn the line at the use of human skulls in church decoration. The pattern is used, however, although the skulls are carved, not real. The most obvious use of this theme is Saint Brendan's Cathedral in Glonfert. Fifteen heads are lined up in the triangular manner from the door to the eaves. This can be nothing but a copy of the druid style as there is no

other religious or aesthetic explanation. The case is particularly peculiar because the design lacks any stylistic charm that could possibly justify its use. The appearance of the cathedral is striking for its barbaric harshness, not its beauty. A more modified version of the decapitated head theme can be found on a choir capital at San Salvador. Here only three faces are shown, ghastly and expressionless. It is possible that these should be included with the non-foliate mask themes but their positioning, their lack of any superhuman traits, and the lack of any further decorative symbolism in the motif seem to indicate that it is more closely connected with the decapitated heads.

The theme of decapitated heads turns up in another context in Christian art. There was an obsession in the early Western Chuch with beheaded saints. These saints were generally shown carrying their heads.[6] This was particularly popular in France where the headless Saint Denis was elevated to the position of national patron saint. A great many of the saints reverred in France were of a highly dubious origin. Saint Valeria and Saint Maurinus were both headless and were surrounded by fantastic legend.[7] They may well have been old gods turned into saints by popular demand. The early church was not organized to any degree

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[6]Emile Male, Religious Art in France: The Twelfth Century, a Study of the Origins of Medieval Iconography (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 138.

[7]Ibid., p. 197.

comparable to the modern church. She had minimal control over who would be elevated to sainthood in the popular imagination. By the time Rome could reasonably expect to get wind of a saint, he or she was too firmly established at the local level to be routed. The very idea of saints as understood by the average medieval man owes a great deal to pagan ideas. Each saint acquired a series of specialties and one could appeal to the proper saint for help with virtually any problem. This is remarkably similar to the pagan idea of a pantheon with specialized gods. Likewise, the habit of dedicating a church to a particular saint derives from the ancient concept of a different temple for each god.[8]

One very peculiar artistic design developed from the Celtic heritage was the crouched figure with exposed tongue. There are several possible interpretations for this theme. The sculptures could have been carved simply to frighten people or to frighten evil spirits from sanctuaries. This would explain their presence in Christian churches since a great many of the simple gargoyles on church exteriors were meant to frighten evil spirits or demons. An old familiar theme would be a reasonable choice. The other possible interpretation is closely related. The exposed tongue could have been used as a replacement for the exposed genitals which was an accepted Celtic method of averting evil. The difficulty with both of these explanations

[8]Sheridan and Ross, Gargoyles and Grotesques, p. 14.

is that these sculptures were as often placed inside the church as on the exterior.

Aside from the exposed tongue and generally crouched posture, there is no strict pattern of design for this particular Celtic theme. Like most other Celtic designs, it can be found most frequently in England. A typical example of this type can be found on a roof boss at Canterbury. This figure is more demonic than human in form and, being carved of wood, its skin is painted black. The mouth is wide open and the tongue protrudes. Another of this type is found at San Salvador de Leire. The face on this figure calls to mind the mask-like appearance of the foliate heads. He is bearded with the usual vacant stare. His mouth is pulled open with his two hands and a long tongue protrudes. A variation on this theme can be found in the depictions of similar creatures who also pull their mouths open though they expose only their teeth rather than tongues. A Winchester roof boss exemplifies this type. Here the figure is generally human in appearance. This particular carving is not a direct copy of Celtic work as the figure is clothed in the mail vest of a later period. He is bearded and he pulls his mouth open to expose short, square teeth. Another of this type can be found at Retaud. This one is bald and round-headed and, though he bares his teeth savagely, he does not pull his mouth open with his hands. This head is part of a series of three. On his right is another fairly human, grimacing face. On his left, the face is much more

demonic and resembles a temple guard dog of Ming Chinese sculpture. A capital at Dorchester displays another common example of this type. The figure here is that of a peasant with a hood and a sack on his back. He crouches down and stetches his mouth open wide to expose his teeth.

If it is correct that the exposed tongues of the former examples were meant to replace the exposed genitals. and thus avert evil, a more direct descendent of this Celtic superstition can be found at Saone-et-Loire. Here a man is found carved into an unlikely posture. He bends forward at the waist and with his two hands spreads his buttocks apart, exposing his anus and his genitals which are evident between his slightly spread legs. It is difficult to imagine how such a subject found its way to prominent display in a Christian church unless the exposure of the genitals still retained a superstitious significance as late as the twelfth century. It is true that some rather vulgar themes were carved in churches but these were almost always placed in more obscure positions than the Saone-et-Loire piece. Also, these other designs were usually satiric, displaying drunken priests and lusty nuns. The sculpture in question is neither satiric nor even particularly comic.

The Celtic heritage gave a peculiar column style to Romanesque although this style was used only infrequently. A monstrous head would surround the column in the place of, or directly beneath, the capital and appear to be swallowing

the column whole. One of these can be found at Canterbury. Here a devilish face, painted black, with a large nose, swallows the column. Another of these is at Autun. This is peculiar given the generally individualistic style of Gislebertus' work. He only infrequently uses common themes except in the sense of narrative themes. The Autun devil is pointy-eared with long, flame-like hair and, like the Canterbury monster, his mouth totally surrounds the column. The meaning of this particular theme is not clear but, again, it seems logical to conclude that it must have had some significance outside of the whim of the particular artist. It represents a very singular approach to column structure and one that naturally destroys the aesthetic balance in a row of columns by calling attention to its own uniqueness. It does not seem likely that it would be randomly used, especially in a well thought out and artistically integrated church like Autun.

Another Celtic, or possibly Germanic, approach to column sculpture can be found at Millstadt in Austria. The column is carved with a spiral pattern. Between two lines of the spiral a face appears. Only the eyes and the nose are visible, giving the bizarre impression of a creature trapped within the column, somehow wound up among the spirals. This strange motif may be a distant relative of the foliate heads in that both have the same vacant, staring expression and both seem to represent a face meant to be half hidden, and contain an element of something ancient

and unfathomable.

Among the strangest of the Celtic designs are the janiforms and the tricephalics. There is no particular pattern governing these creatures and the amount of shared features of the two or three heads varies. A roof boss at Canterbury shows a common janiform. This one has only one distinct head but two faces. He is bearded and has two noses and two mouths. He has three eyes, the middle one forming a pair with both the left and the right. Another even more peculiar janiform can be found on another roof boss at Canterbury. This creature is circular and it is a matter of judgment whether he has one head or two as the two faces connect at the point of the jaw line, thus vertically rather than side to side as is much more common. Both faces have two eyes and a nose and it is the mouth that they take in common so that the upper jaw of each becomes the lower jaw of the other. A tricephalic grouping can be found at Chichester. Here two trinities of faces are carved in a circle with six eyes to be shared among the six heads. This particular group is interlaced with oak vines. Another at Saint Mary's of Faversham shows the more regular tricephalic characteristics. The three faces are connected at the cheeks but each is quite distinct with individual noses and mouths. The three bearded faces share four eyes.

Tricephalic and janiform creatures are common in all ancient art and in the demonic aspect of medieval art but

this particular method of representation, that is, not two or three distinct heads but one head with two or three faces sharing the features, is Celtic. This style may be connected with British superstitions regarding siamese twins, who were regarded not only as freaks but, in some way, supernatural.[9] The Church did frown on this particular style, at least when it was used for illustrations of the Trinity.[10] Early tricephalic trinities were drawn so as to show three conjoined faces with three noses, three mouths, and four eyes. The more regular three-headed creatures remained a common element in fantastic art and myth. Dante's Satan, for example, was three-headed but in the more common manner of three distinct heads. Satan was frequently depicted in this manner.[11]

Some Celtic mythology which finds its way into Romanesque art is of a very local character. A classic example of this is the Cerne giant of the village of Cerne-Abbas. The giant himself is a mysterious figure drawn on the ground on the outskirts of the town. He is a huge, primitively depicted man, hairless, and with only nebulous facial features. He holds a large club aloft over his head. He probably was a symbol of strength to the ancient Celts of the

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[9]C.J.S. Thompson, The Mystery and Lore of Monsters, (New York: University books, 1968), p. 32.

[10]Sheridan and Ross, Gargoyles and Grotesques, p. 14.

[11]Adolphe Napoleon Didron, Christian Iconography: The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages, 2 vols, (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965), 1; 112.

area but he does not appear to have been a god with a geographically large following. The Cerne giant appears on several carvings in the Cerne-Abbas church. Within the Christian Church he took on a malignant character. In one vignette he is shown devouring a human victim. In another he is given a pair of wings and is meant to represent Satan.[12] This transformation of an old god into a devil was common but with creatures of only local importance, like the Cerne giant, the Church probably had little success in controlling the local feelings. The old deities seem to have maintained their original significance for the people.

One can find examples of the influence of Celtic religion on Christianity not only in the art of the Romanesque period but in some of the rituals surrounding the art. Reliquary statues were surrounded with ceremony and generally treated as pagan idols. Interestingly, when these statues were carried abroad they would be housed overnight in tents under an arbor of greenery. These arbors were essential, of course, to Celtic religious practices as well. The reliquaries were generally believed to contain the head of the saint they were carved for.[13]

Neither the Germans nor the Scandinavians contributed nearly as much as the Celts to Romanesque art. This is strange since the majority of people in Europe were German. The Germans did contribute to the religion itself, adapting

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[12]Sheridan and Ross, Gargoyles and Grotesques, p. 30.

[13]Male, Religious Art, p. 200.

Christianity to their own culture. As usual, most of the German contributions can be seen as negative in that they represent more of the Church tendency to reduce old gods to devils. Teutonic and Celtic gods never really conveyed the same sense of terror as the Church's own fallen angels, however.[14] There are other Teutonic remnants in the Christian Church. The popular habit of depicting Satan as holding a hammer or thunderbolt derives from a demonization of Thor. Hel, the Teutonic queen of the world of the dead, lends her name to the Christian underworld.

A Norman form, limited almost completely to England, is the beak head. These demonic creatures may represent either birds, men, or some supernatural creature. They are used decoratively in much the same way as the decapitated heads of Requepertuse. They could be abstractions of human heads with beards. A series of beak heads form the arch over the door of Saint Ebbs at Oxford. They have the usual staring eyes but appear generally more bird-like than human. Another interesting group of beak heads arch over the door at Iffley. The individuals of this particular series are each unique.

One aspect of Celtic and German paganism that had surprisingly little effect on church art was witchcraft. Witchcraft was popular in Europe, particularly France, during the entire medieval period but very little of the

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[14]Jeffrey Burton Russel, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 111.

symbolism of witchcraft found its way into religious art until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There is no question that the Church felt threatened by witchcraft. "Nightflying" had to be made illegal in France in 900 and, after that a series of laws were enacted forbidding not only witchcraft but the belief that witches did exist. These laws reached a point of absurdity in the eleventh century when people were forbidden to believe that there were people who believed that they could fly.[15] Witchcraft posed a much greater threat than paganism, in the eyes of the Church, since paganism had proved itself at least somewhat capable of adapting itself to Christianity. Because witchcraft, black witchcraft at least, was the antithesis of Christianity it could not be tolerated in the Church's art. It was the Church itself which decided what themes would be used in church sculpture since the Council of Nice, in 787, had forbidden sculptors to use their own imaginations. It seems evident that the Church did not always exercise this privilege but it very likely would have found it worthwhile in eliminating art inspired by witches from churches.

Given the Church's control over art, one must ask why so much pagan art was tolerated. The themes, particularly the druid ones, are so frequent that the Church's acceptance is necessarily implied. There are two likely explanations. It is commonly assumed that pagan art was tolerated because pagan beliefs were too deep for the Church to uproot. She

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[15] Ibid., p. 81.

risked a total loss of the people if she did not compromise. Undoubtedly this motive did influence the heads of the Church. The explanation is not, however, sufficient. When the Church wanted to impose her will she was able to do so as evidenced by the Inquisition of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Circumstances had not changed that much over a century that the Church could hold life and death control over the vagaries of belief in the thirteenth century and yet in the twelfth be so insecure as to be unable to insist on artistic control over churches. The crucial factor would seem to be the religious community itself, particularly the religious community of Britain. Most of the clergy were illiterate, untutored men and women without a significantly more sophisticated religious outlook than the rest of the population. Pagan deities were a source of comfort to the people and there is no reason to suppose that they were any less so to the mass of the religious community. Local priests and even bishops may have been aware that they were not allowed to believe in Cernunnos or druidical magic but, on the other hand, it could not hurt to maintain an element of respect, to preserve the protective images, just in case. These ideas may not have been consciously articulated--very likely they were not--but they still may have acted as subconscious motivation causing the religious community to overlook again and again a phenomena that is startlingly obvious to a person removed from the situation. There is no allegorical justification for the presence of

these designs, and no real aesthetic necessity. Furthermore, when Churchmen felt that a certain motif, for example the tricephalic trinities, was somehow too self-consciously pagan, the motif was not repeated. Thus, one must conclude a strong element of religious approval, as opposed to simple tolerance, for the strange and mysterious hangovers of Europe's racial past.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DEMONIC: AUTUN, VEZELAY, AND THE MEDIEVAL IMAGINATION IN ROMANESQUE ART

The mystery of the Graeco-Roman and Celtic symbolism in Romanesque is one of motivation. One asks why the Christian churches allowed and encouraged these styles. The figures themselves are not that mysterious. Most of them are immediately recognizable once placed in their proper cultural context. There is another whole species of fantastic symbolism in Romanesque art that defies the historic-cultural explanation of the pagan art. The demonic symbolism of Romanesque art is, as opposed to pagan art, purely medieval. The forms and themes explored arise from the anxieties of the age. One can find nothing comparable in any prior or later artistic style. There was, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a certain fascination with witchcraft themes in art and these pieces were heavily peopled with demons. This art was not in the cultural mainstream, however, in terms of being the accepted artistic style of the day. Romanesque, on the other hand, was the definitive art of the twelfth century and, thus, its demonic obsession is more significant. Furthermore, the witchcraft art is thematically congruous. Given an acceptance of witchcraft as it was understood at the time, the devils and demons form a logical part of the narrative. The Romanesque devils are present in all kinds of vignettes whether their presence seems reasonable or not. They do not appear as creatures "summoned up" but as a natural and

unavoidable part of day-to-day life.

How did Christianity develop from a rather simple code of ethics to a system of terror apparently more potent than Zoroastrianism, Gnosticism, or any number of other religious movements that present, on the face of it, a much bleaker attitude towards life both on earth and in the hereafter? Partly, the answer to this question has already been discussed. The Church had to impose its system on an unenthusiastic populace and a certain amount of threat was necessary if the Church had any hope of spreading its religion. This explanation only partly explains the problem, however. It does not explain why the emphasis on the demonic only became so overwhelming in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries rather than in the early centuries of conversion. Nor does it explain why Christianity encouraged this type of fear while other imposed religions are relatively free from it. One cannot find a complete answer to these questions without examining both the Church and medieval society.

The medieval Church was not a deliberate machine producing terrorist propaganda to keep people in line. There is no question that this type of motivation sometimes showed itself, but the real motivation is more complex. It was not a decision on the part of Churchmen to use fear as a weapon. Rather, it was an integral part of the relationships between medieval monasticism, emotionalism, and social instability that gave rise to an obsession with devils

and Hell. The monastic ideal explains more about this feeling for the demonic than any other single factor. Hallucinations were so common among medieval monks that they became a norm and were no longer recognized as hallucinations. The problem with the monks was not strictly a psychological one. Bodily abuse was much admired both in terms of extreme self-denial and actual self-abuse.[1] The tendency towards self-denial was probably more significant in the induction of hallucinations than bodily abuse and flagellation. When the body is denied its normal requirements for food, rest, and a certain degree of sensual stimulation it tends to create a sensual response in the vacuum. This is particularly likely to occur when the mind is susceptible to the fantasy in question. Medieval monks believed in devils. They expected them to appear. Consequently, when their minds were in a susceptible state, devils did appear. The monks believed the devils were real. This is not strange given the fact that the whole idea has an internal logic once one accepts the initial premise--that demons are real. The monks were punishing themselves, ultimately, to bring themselves closer to God. It was the duty of demons to prevent man from being close to God, to keep him somehow tied to the earthly order. Thus, when a demon saw a monk sacrificing his normal bodily pleasures and needs in order to be closer to God, he felt an obligation to torment and

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[1] Henry Osborn Taylor, The Medieval Mind: A History of the Development of Thought and Emotion in the Middle Ages, 2 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1928), 1:373.

tempt him. He had to try to prevent the monk from gaining the moral end of his sacrifice. There is nothing fantastic in this theory once one accepts the active interference of supernatural beings in the natural order.

There were further problems in the monastic life which could lead, if not directly to hallucinations of evil, at least to a generally negative world view. Although the medieval priest had a comparitively easy role in society, the monk's role was very psychologically demanding. His society, (that is, the monastic one) was wildly misogynistic and totally anti-sensual, at least in the ideal. It is true that this ideal was often not lived up to and monks were frequently accused of lust, sensuality, and an addiction to luxurious living. A great many monks did try to live up to the ascetic norm but it is questionable how many were successful. The significant point here is the spiritual agony which must have been endured by any monk who fell short of the ascetic goals he had set for himself. He had failed some sort of ultimate test and he felt confident that whole squads of demons, probably the devil himself, took personal pleasure in his fall.

According to some of the extremist monastic preachers like Peter Damian, happiness itself was sinful. This idea contains an internal contradiction. One was not even allowed to feel satisfaction in one's own self-denial. If the ethical wrong of a deed is judged as directly proportional to the pleasure taken in it, then one is open to a

radical sort of negative subjectivism. Whatever is being done is, necessarily, wrong. Aquinas would later define the end of all man's choices as happiness. What he suggests has a certain truth to it and, consequently, the extreme monastic goal was a hopeless and unreachable one.

Not all the monks ascribed to such an extremely masochistic ethical system, but there was at least a relative masochism at the heart of most medieval ethics. It was generally accepted that a moral life was a life led in imitation of Christ. Christ was presented as so profoundly perfect, however, that he could not, practically, be imitated. Even if one were able to follow Christ, one would be opening oneself up to the sin of pride. Therefore, those people most concerned with ethical purity would be those most subject to fears about their own ethical impurity. It was impossible for medieval man to defeat this logic and he was plagued by guilt as a result. Even a more radically negative religion like Calvinism contains a sort of escape hatch. If one is predestined then one's behavior will have no ultimate effect on one's fate. While obviously this never led to a liberal ethic among Calvinists, it did at least remove the anxiety of a self-dependent damnation.

Not only the Christian religion itself, but certain other elements of medieval society helped further the feelings of guilt and helplessness. Life for the medieval aristocrat was not easy. He lacked both comfort and security. This was all the more true for the medieval peasantry.

Hardly able to call their lives their own, they were still totally responsible for their misdeeds. Their lifestyle mirrored the monastic life in some ways. They were offered only the barest minimum of stimulation. Seldom would a serf leave the village of his birth and, even when rarely he did, it was to go to another place essentially the same. He had little say as to where or how his life would be led. He had little or no opportunity for intellectual or aesthetic stimulation since he was illiterate and geographically removed from the few areas where art flourished. All that remained for him were the basic animal desires for food, sex, and a degree of comfort. The food and shelter available to him were wretched and sexuality was seen as, if not exactly sinful, at least somehow wrong even within marriage.[2]

This utter predictable dullness where the circumstances of birth presupposed the conditions of life was difficult enough, but the serf also lacked security. Warfare was common even at the local level and, though the warring knights probably made no effort to harm the peasantry, it is unlikely that they made any particular effort to avoid harming them either. The fear of warfare or invasion was only exacerbated by the knowledge that any attack would come as a complete surprise since there were no lines of communication between serfs and lords to allow for preparation. Finally, whatever ill fortune befell the community

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[2]Ibid., 2:561.

could be blamed on the sinfulness of the population. The weight of guilt and anxiety had no counterbalance.

Another element of medieval culture that made it prey to paranoia of the demonic was the strong precedence of emotionalism over rationalism.[3] There was no clear-cut line between fantasy and reality. Once demons were accepted as fact they became inescapable. They were responsible for every temptation whether major or minor. There may have even been a comfort in this idea as it removed some of the burden of guilt from the shoulders of the individual. Revelation was indistinguishable from experience. This included more than Biblical Revelation. It also included the truths "revealed" to hysterical monks and nuns in dreams or visions. Medieval preaching was a confused amalgam of these visions, actual Biblical Revelation, and the obscure personal theorizing of the particular preacher.[4] There is no doubt that some medieval religious beliefs had a solid base but it was impossible for the average man to separate the wheat from the chaff.

The Church itself made some effort to curb demonic fixation. The Cistercians, the Dominicans, and the Franciscans were all empowered to remove the "curiositates" from churches.[5] They seldom used this power, however, and

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[3]Ibid., 1:17.

[4]Joseph Gantner and Marcel Pobe, The Glory of Romanesque Art (New York: Vanguard Press, 1956), p. 38.

[5]Meyer Schapiro, Romanesque Art (New York: George Braziller, 1977), p. 7.

when they did raise objections (such as Saint Bernard's famous diatribe) it was usually against the pagan based works. Though the Churchmen may have wanted the demonic de-emphasized in churches, they were themselves too caught up in the religious emotionalism of the age to really effect its removal. Bernard was violent in his criticism of artistic excesses, but his own writing could be seen as excessive too in the fervid, almost erotic, tone it adopts in describing love of God.

The anti-individualism of medieval society was a final element in its susceptibility to suggestion. The personal experience was not nearly as important as the perceived group experience. It was unlikely that any individual would demand empirical proof of what was generally accepted as fact. This lack of individualism led to a desire to turn the abstract concepts of religion into objective realities. Evil was not sufficient as a concept. It had to be made into a living force.[6]

Romanesque art is a showplace for the conflicts and anxieties of medieval life. The sculpture of the churches shows the guilt, the fear, and the confusion of the real and the unreal. Even simple narrative scenes are often peopled with irrelevant demons. The world, as depicted in Romanesque art, is one where the elements of the earthly, the angelic, and the demonic are in constant regular

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[6]Paul Carus, A History of the Devil and the Idea of Evil (New York: Crown, 1969), p. 287.

intercourse.[7] This sort of art was not common until this time. Early depictions of the devil show him not as a huge figure of terror, but as a tiny old man being crushed beneath the feet of Christ.[8] The Romanesque view is closer to Persian Zoroastrianism. Even when old vignettes were copied in Romanesque art, superfluous devils were added to the scene.

It is interesting that the finest demonic art of the Romanesque period can be found at the cathedral of Saint Lazarus at Autun. In a sense, this cathedral shows a pure medievalism in that it minimalizes the use of pagan themes. Gislebertus, the sculptor, was not typically medieval, however. He was an individualist, whether consciously or not. He did not use the common patterns to illustrate the narratives. The nightmare vision of Romanesque culminates at Autun because of the pure, yet unique, medievalism of the artist's vision. Ironically, side-by-side with some of the most hideous and bizarre of medieval sculpture are works of fresh, almost naive, beauty.

Most of Gislebertus' demonic art is found on the capitals at Autun. (With the exception of the magnificent west tympanum Last Judgment which will be discussed in the next chapter.) A capital on the south wall of the nave depicts the suicide of Judas. Here two winged devils hold

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[7]Gantner and Pobe, Glory of Romanesque, p. 38.

[8]Emile Male, Religious Art in France, the Twelfth Century: A Study of the Origins of Medieval Iconography (Princeton: University Press, 1978), p. 110.

either end of the rope by which the central figure hangs. These devils are typical both of Gislebertus and of Romanesque demonic art. They have no aesthetic roots outside of the minds of the men and the society that created them. The two devils here stand on either side of Judas. Both are crouched and winged but there is no formal counterposition. The devil on the left appears somewhat monkey-like in his facial features. His body, though disproportionately long in the legs, is basically human except that it has a tail. The musculature of the body is extremely pronounced, making the body appear striated. This sort of musculature can be found on nearly all of Gislebertus' demons. The devil's ears are rounded and his hair is tightly curled. His mouth is open and wailing. The devil on the right is similar in basic form although he stands taller and lacks the simian features of his companion. He also appears to lack a tail but the sculpture is damaged and it appears likely that a tail was originally attached. This devil also has his mouth open in a scream. His ears are pointy and his hair is carved in the flame-like style common both at Autun and at Vezelay and based on the Roman depictions of barbarians. The immediate effect of this work, and others at Autun, is a sort of visual chaos owing to the violence of the scene. The chaotic imagery was, however, under the control of the artist. Gislebertus does follow aesthetic rules in the demons. The demon on the left is rounded in his posture, in his hair, and in the shape of his ears. The one on the right is angular and pointed in posture,

hair and ears. The central figure of Judas is not made demonic although his open mouth repeats the pattern of the demons.

On the same series of capitals is one of the virtues of Generosity and Patience mounted on the heads of Greed and Anger. This vignette lacks the power of the Judas scene not because the work is inferior but because the figures of the two virtues dominate the scene. These two have the graceful beauty of the Autun Eve while the vices are small and almost comic. Avarice is a small crouching man clutching a money bag in either hand. He is very unusual in that he is clothed in a loose sort of toga or robe. By far the majority of devils at Autun and elsewhere are naked. Perhaps he is clothed because his direct frontal position would have exposed his genitals were he naked. The devil's face is human but distorted because of the great open mouth. His hair is long and straight. Ira, or Anger, crouches beneath the feet of Patience in a sideways position. He has what appears to be the vestige of a wing on his back, but this sculpture too is damaged and it is hard to determine. Apart from the possible wing, Anger's body is human. The mouth is extended in an expression of rage and a straight row of teeth is exposed. The hair is curled tightly in the manner of the devil from the Judas vignette.

A north nave capital features one of the temptations of Christ in the desert. This is a complex and highly

carved vignette, depicting Satan himself rather than a minor devil. Satan's depiction is not in any special way distinct from the minor devils. he is winged and human in form but quite disproportionate. His arms and his legs are elongated and his torso is quite small. He has the usual striated musculature of the Autun devils and his feet are bird-like claws. The tradition of depicting Satan with cloven hooves was not yet firmly established but this Satan differs in other ways from the usual representations. He has no horns and, as he bends at a right angle from the waist, he appears small and hunched rather than tall and terrifying. Satan's right hand is clenched in a fist. and is so disproportionately large that it is nearly the size of Christ's head although if the Christ and Satan figures were made to stand erect, Christ would be considerably the larger. Satan has short, curly hair, huge eyes, and a bestial, snarling mouth. Although he is comparatively diminutive, the intense rage on his face lends a potency to the figure. He stands on the top of a tower that is modelled on the style of the Italian Romanesque. Although the piece is meant to represent Christ's temptation in the desert, the free areas are filled with a stylized greenery. Of course, Satan is naked in this scene while the other figures are robed.

A second Temptation of Christ scene can be found on a choir capital. In contrast to the former scene, here Satan absolutely dominates. Christ and the angel are minute next to the devil who is very tall and entirely covered with hair.

His feet are claws but more reptilian than bird-like. A snake twists between his legs and its head rests on his genitals in the manner commonly used to typify Lust in the vice-virtue scenes. Satan's head is large here and very intricately carved. His mouth is very wide with savage-looking teeth, his ears are pointy, and his hair is flame-like. Like the other temptation scene, Satan is shown without horns and the desert is full of greenery.

The concept of these two temptation scenes is interesting. The Biblical story that they illustrate does not describe a fierce Satan but, rather, shows him as a somewhat seductive character inducing Christ to worship him with offers of rewards. These carvings project nothing of this attitude and seem to be prototypes for the later spate of Temptation of Saint Anthonys where monsters were used to symbolically represent the evils of the temptation rather than the physical appearance of the temptor.

One particularly interesting Autun vignette is found on a south aisle capital. This scene depicts the destruction of the golden calf by Moses and is a typical example of the use of demons in scenes where they are not narratively necessary. The demon here is just a personification of evil as represented by the golden calf. The carving of this scene is simple in that the three figures, (Moses, the devil, and the calf) are placed against a blank background. All three stand on stones which are carved with the same pattern as Moses' tunic. This devil is different from most Autun creatures and stylistically

calls to mind the art of Vezelay. He is tall, erect winged and, although he and Moses stand about the same height, the head of the devil is nearly three times that of Moses. The devil's body is smoothly carved with no evident muscles and he lacks the disproportionately long limbs of the other Autun monsters. His belly is very distended and his face is hideous. The mouth is open in a scream displaying two full rows of teeth. The nose is small and pig-like and the eyes staring. He has flame-like hair tied with a ribbon. This sort of hair was common both at Autun and Vezelay but this devil's hair is quite long which was more the Vezelay style, as was the very large head.

The Fall of Simon Magus is found on an east transept capital. Here the central figure of the magician is surrounded by Saints Peter and Paul on the left and a singularly bestial demon on the right. This devil's body is typically Autun in the features noted in the above descriptions. He is seated and hunched over with his hands open, presumably to receive the soul of the fallen Simon. The devil's face is broad and pear-shaped with a huge, slathering, idiot's grin from the left side of which protrudes a pointed tongue. His nose is flattened and his eyes slightly crossed. He has short hair, long pointy ears, and a pair of very long horns. Gislebertus carved his most brutish demon here but it is one of his least frightening because of its generally moronic appearance. This was probably the deliberate intention of the artist. The main figure is Simon Magus himself and he is

carved so grotesquely that a more threatening looking devil would have tended to minimalize the strength of the focal point. The magician is shown upside-down at the split second before he hits the ground. His mouth is open in a desperate scream and a long tongue emerges. His eyes bulge like a hanged man's. Two sets of wings are attached to him, one at his elbows, the other at his knees. This particular sculpture, especially the face of the fallen magician, is the strongest evocation of terror and despair in the whole Romanesque tradition.

Gislebertus' vice and virtue scenes were atypical. He did not use the conventional types for the vices. His capital depicting Lust is an entire little vignette not just a simple self-contained figure fighting her opposing virtue. In the Autun scene, a young man stares at a naked woman. The woman is given the same flame-like hair as many of the Autun demons but there is nothing grotesque in her make-up. Her face and form are human and, in fact, she is made to appear quite attractive. The young man is grabbed by the hair by a demon whose position is almost a counterpose to the naked woman. The demon carries an axe in his hand. He is human-bodied but his face is very animalistic with a fish-like mouth and pointy ears. His hair is a modified version of the flame style but it is much shorter than usual. Whether the demon is meant to wear some primitive clothing or whether the carving between his upper thighs represents some bizarre genitalia is uncertain. The shape carved is somewhat phallic but it has a ridged texture. If it is meant to be some sort of clothing,

it is attached to the devil by mysterious means.

One north doorway capital represents a demon so large that he fills all the available space. All that intrudes is the leg of a naked man which is grabbed by the demon. The man's body is around the corner of the capital. This devil is very similar to the Satan on the second Temptation of Christ described above except that he has the usual striated Autun body and no fur. He has a very long tail which repeats the flame pattern of the hair. The teeth he displays are pointy and the skin around his eyes is heavily creased giving him a rather reptilian appearance.

These are the best of the Autun demonic sculptures and, possibly, the best of the whole Romanesque period. Gislebertus was more than a sculptor of terror. His works have such strength because he combines a lack of restraint in the creatures themselves with a restraint in composition. In all but the final example and the Death of Judas, the monsters are counterbalanced with saints or virtues or Christ. There is such a grace to these structurally human figures that they raise Gislebertus above the average medieval artist. The two greatest of Gislebertus' sculptures were the Eve and the Last Judgment. His Eve is a graceful, innocent figure. She has a sexual appeal but there is nothing of the grossly sensual in her. The sculptor could certainly have taken advantage of the theme of Eve's temptation to create a scene rich with devils. Instead, he wisely chose to keep his theme simple and in so doing, created one of the masterpieces of

medieval sculpture.

The other major church for Romanesque devils is the abbey church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine at Vezelay. Vezelay, like Autun seems to have been sculpted by one man. It has been suggested that Gislebertus was also the sculptor of Vezelay.[9] This may be true, especially if one looks at the similarities between the Vezelay work and the golden calf vignette at Autun. There are some stylistic differences though, as will be seen below. Vezelay shares with Autun the strange position of being at once typically medieval and beyond medieval. The designs of Vezelay are purely medieval and, in being so, move away from the medieval dependence on past works for inspiration. Like Autun, its works are a clear study of the anxieties and preoccupations of an age. Like Autun also, the Vezelay sculptures are always potent, often harsh, and sometimes terrifying.

One Vezelay capital depicts the temptation of Saint Benedict. Traditional legend had ascribed the saint's temptation to centaurs because of their significance as a symbol of lust. The Vezelay sculptor rejected this interpretation and instead chose a devil as the temptor. The devil is skinny and long-limbed. He is human in shape and resembles the Autun devils. He has the usual flame-like hair but it is drawn in the longer style typical of Vezelay. The devil's mouth is wide open and his teeth are pointed. He is unusual

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[9]Denis Grivot and George Zarnecki, Gislebertus, Sculptor of Autun (New York: Orion Press, 1963), passim.

in that he is bearded. The devil tempts the saint with a woman. The carving of the woman would argue against the possibility of Gislebertus as the sculpture since the figure lacks the beauty of the Autun people. The Vezelay sculpture does not use the devil as a symbol of temptation as did the later Temptation of Saint Anthony art mentioned above. This is significant since the presence of the demon and the woman turn the scene into a narrative rather than a symbolic one. The devil is not a symbolic rendering of the concept of evil but a concrete presence.

One of the most potent of the Vezelay capitals is the one which depicts Despair and Lust. The lust symbol is a variation on the conventional depiction. A naked woman pulls her breast down, seeming to offer it to a snake. The snake twines himself around the woman's leg. This, as noted in chapter one, was a derivation of the classic Mother Earth symbol from Greek art and was nearly always the medieval symbol of Lust. The Vezelay Lust differs from the usual rendition structurally. That is, she was not physically designed according to the pattern but she has the pattern's attributes. The second figure on the vignette is Despair and this figure bears no resemblance to any traditional archetype of the vice. Despair was not a common vice in medieval sculpture except in cases where all the vices were lined up with their respective virtues. The Vezelay Despair has an elf-like appearance to his body which is small in comparison to his oversized head. He has the flame hair and a large open mouth which

exposes both his teeth and tongue. He stands with his head facing backwards and stabs himself in the front with a knife. The mouth, eyes, and ears are very large even in proportion to the head and add a graphic horror to the face of the creature, who seems to be caught at precisely the instant before death.

One capital at Vezelay portrays an angel taking a demon prisoner. The angel leans over to manacle the wrists of the devil. Although this devil is not unlike the figure of Despair in the scene described above, he tends to appear more comic than terrifying. His face is wide-mouthed and toothy. He is winged and has what may be an unintentionally peculiar physiognomy. His body is bent and curled in such a way as to make it appear that either his arms or his legs are attached backwards. He has outsized buttocks which protrude at an impossible angle. His feet are human except for the presence of a small claw in the back, and he has a short tail. The angel is structurally sound within the limits of pre-perspective art.

The golden calf theme is found on a Vezelay capital. The animal is not really a calf but an adult with bull's horns and cow's udders and is carved so as to appear alive rather than a golden idol. The bull-cow is mounted by an exultant demon who is facially closer to human than most of the Vezelay devils. His hair is still flame-like and his body is disproportionately small with a protruding stomach. His legs are normal down to the feet which are clawed and reptilian. Whether the effect is intentional or not, is

debatable, but the bull-cow seems to be swallowing the right leg of the demon. Moses stands in front of the pair holding up the tablets of the law.

Vezelay is similar to Autun in that it combines the hideous with the beautiful. One forgets in looking at the nightmare of the Vezelay Despair that the Vezelay sculptor was also responsible for the fanciful "circle men" and the charming scenes of the apostles preaching to the cynocephali and the large-eared people. Though these creatures sound grotesque, they were not depicted that way at the cathedral. They were done with an appealing originality and style.

It has been necessary to discuss Vezelay and Autun at length because they are such consumate projections of the medieval spirit. The sculpture of both churches is terrifying perhaps because common themes are used throughout. Thus, the demons appear to be some consciously recognized species with constant physical traits. The devils are given a veneer of reality that is very effective. The most significant fact about the bulk of this sculpture is that it was carved on capitals. Since the capitals were out of the sight of the church congregation the presence of demons on them would argue against the theory that the demons were used primarily to inspire fear. This latter may be true of the Last Judgment tympana but the capitals could only be perceived vaguely, if at all. The other popular theory is that the devils were carved to frighten evil spirits from the churches. This theory is more properly relevant to the grimacing vine men of the Celtic tradition. The demons of

Autun, Vezelay, and other Romanesque churches were almost always part of narrative scenes. Narrative art seldom has this protective totem function.

Once removed from the two major cathedrals, Autun and Vezelay, demonic art becomes very chaotic and it is difficult to find any repeating themes. The creatures are combinations of ancient archetypes and the often wild imaginations of the sculptors.

A scene from the legend of Saint Theophile at the church of Sainte-Marie at Soulliac exemplifies the extreme bizarreness of some of the medieval devils. Here two devils fight two men against a background of chaotic destruction. Perhaps one of the men was meant to be the saint but neither have the nimbus so it is not certain. Both devils are human height with somewhat human bodies except the bodies are extremely skinny so that the leg, arm, and especially the rib bones protrude. One devil has two clawed reptilian feet while the other has a bird's claw for one foot and a goat's or horse's hoof for the other. These devils are not naked but wear jagged edged loincloths of pebbly texture, from the back of which emerge short tails. It is the heads of these monsters which really draw attention. They are carved, one vaguely like a fish and the other vaguely like a dog, but the faces are covered with sagging limp flesh. Both of these creatures are winged and the fish-like one has a head of curly hair.

One can find a classic rendering of the legend of

Lazarus and Dives on the porch of the abbey church of Saint-Pierre at Moissac. The devils here are of a very bestial sort. They cluster around the rich man's death bed clutching money sacks and waiting to snatch his soul. These are small, skinny, winged devils whose heads are neither human nor similar to any particular animal. They are chinless with huge mouths and slender snake's tongues. Their noses are snouts and their long eyes are deep set. Flame-like tufts project from the backs of their legs and their feet are reptiles claws. There is much detail work evident in this piece but, unfortunately, much of it is broken or worn away.

The theme of the death of the rich man can also be found on a capital at Saint-Andre at Besse-en-Chandesse. The motif is interesting because of the very archaic style employed. Here three devils steal the soul of the rich man. The soul is depicted vague and ghostly and more in the Carolingian than the Romanesque style. The devils are all horned with human bodies. Their faces are very long and bestial - with pig-like snouts.

The legend of Lazarus and Dives was a very popular one in medieval art. The theme of glorified poverty was probably a deliberate choice of the Church. Romanesque was dominant in the period when urban life first started to develop on at least a moderate scale in the West. The Church was nervous about the new avarice which seemed to be developing. The Lazarus and Dives sculptures served as a potent reminder to the people of the wages of earthly greed in the afterlife.

stands on his tail beside Satan. The body and tail of this reptile make up one half of the throne on which Christ is seated. This version of the temptation of Christ is more in keeping with the spirit of the Bible story than the same scene at Autun. Although the devil is monstrous in appearance, he does not seem to be trying to terrorize Christ as on the Autun capitals. One could imagine here that the devil is offering a subtler temptation.

Another version of this scene can be found on a capital at Saulieu. The devil is winged, with three long toes on his feet and a human body. He has some of the traits of Satan that would gradually become archetypal He is horned with a goat's head. The goat did become the symbol of Satan by the seventeenth century when witchcraft art was popular. In the Middle Ages, however, the goat was just one of a series of animals that represented Satan.

A capital at Chauvigny also depicts Christ's temptation. This is an unusual Satan in that he is clothed. Like minor demons and devils, Satan was nearly always carved naked. At Chauvigny he wears an odd sort of feathered or furry tunic. He is winged with claws for feet, pointy ears, and a variation on the flame hair of Autun and Vezelay. His face is very bestial with a huge protuberant jaw displaying sharp teeth. Only the Plampied version avoids showing the devil in an attempt to terrify Christ.

On the altarpiece at Saint Martin of Tours, Satan is shown waiting to snatch the soul of a dying man. This piece

is painted and Satan is painted black. He is bald and has long sharp teeth. He has some of the attributes of the usual Satans of later art such as the two horns and the cloven feet. He is holding a snake in his hands. An 1140 Flemish manuscript shows Satan in a scene of Job scraping the boils, inflicted by Satan, from his body. This is a primitive Satan. He is pictured very small. He is painted black and his general appearance is comic. He has clawed feet, a short lamb's tail, and a large, pointy, hooked nose. Another of these Satan and Job scenes can be found in the twelfth century Saint Omer's manuscript. Again Satan is small and black, but he is closer to his later form with the goat's face and the cloven hooves.

The devil craze did not end with Romanesque art. Gothic art employed them heavily too, especially later Gothic.[10] There is a difference, however. Gothic art moved significantly closer to realism in form if not in theme. The devils were still carved grotesquely but there is something calculated about them that makes them essentially less frightening. They are no longer the raw emotional creatures of the earlier period. Partly, this is due to the artistic refinements of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but it seems, to a great extent, it was also due to emotional and social refinements.

The character of the late Middle Ages was profoundly

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[10]Henri Focillon, The Art of the West, 2 vols. (London: Phaidon Press, 1963), 1:135.

different from that of the earlier period. If Europe did not exactly become cosmopolitan, she at least emerged from the stultifying provincialism of the early Middle Ages. Likewise, if Europe did not become peaceful, the character of warfare lost some of its local, unpredictable nature. The last centuries of the Middle Ages were no longer so different from the early modern world. The twelfth century was the beginning of the later period but it was a time of flux. Many of the elements that led to the anxieties evident in Romanesque art were present for centuries before but it needed a social advancement before these elements could be felt with their full force. Monks had been having visions since the days of the desert anchorites. Demons were mentioned in the Bible and so had been theologically acceptable since the ancient world. Warfare and invasions were more common in the early Middle Ages than in the twelfth century. Still, these elements did not combine into the anxious and guilty demon fascination until the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

There are some practical reasons why this is so. The very localism of the early Middle Ages was too intense to allow for any sort of mass feelings. No one on any individual manor had any way of knowing what was happening elsewhere. Many people had no idea who their king was so they hardly could be expected to get wind of the fantasies of a hysterical monk or nun. Literacy was extremely low and those few people who were able to read were not likely to be in communication with the peasantry. This illiteracy

included the priests who were usually unable to understand the words of the Latin Mass let alone the Greek or Latin Bible. This is not to say that the early medieval population was not superstitious. It was they who carried on the pagan traditions of ancient times. Also, their society was probably a very anxious, neurotic one, being, on the whole, worse than the twelfth century society. Still, some social progress was necessary before the group anxiety and fear of demons could take hold.

Of course, twelfth century society was neither literate nor cosmopolitan, but it was a society on the brink of change. The first Crusades had finished. Though this did not make a particularly deep change in the Western world, it did at least present people with a knowledge of the world outside the village or fief. There were no really large cities, but at least there were cities and towns of a size to warrant the building of cathedrals. A small educated class was emerging from the universities while artisan, merchant, and professional classes were beginning to form in the towns.

Of course, once these various new elements of society had matured, they acted as a discouragement to superstition. Only at the crucial point when the society began to change did the sense of cultural displacement seem to create the extreme anxiety of the twelfth century. Romanesque itself is evidence of this. Given the slower moving trends of the times, it enjoyed only a short ascendency before it was replaced by the more conventionally appealing Gothic. One can

compare the extreme phase of demon paranoia with the later witchcraft hysteria. The basic concept had been accepted all along, in both cases, but when the anxieties of a changing society needed an outlet, they took the form of a hysterical fear of those elements which had been most strange and difficult to understand all along.

CHAPTER FOUR

MEDIEVAL INTERPRETATIONS OF DEATH, JUDGMENT, AND HELL

The medieval obsession with devils is closely related to the extreme concern of the time with damnation and judgment. Romanesque artists seem to have been obsessed with morbid themes. The feeling about damnation was not the same as the devil fixation, however. The frequent use of themes dealing with Hell, damnation and judgment were more a matter of Church policy. The Church never whole-heartedly supported the pagan or demonic art but it did support the use of damnation themes and here we have a case where the art was deliberately used to terrify people. Unlike the themes discussed in the first three chapters, the damnation and sin scenes were readily obvious to the people entering the churches. These scenes continued to be employed throughout the Gothic period. Of course, many of the creatures from pagan mythology, and even more from demon art, were integrated into the damnation scenes. There was very little objection by the Church, however, to the "curiositates" when they were used in this frame of reference.

The medieval idea of Hell was very vivid. Hell was depicted in art and legend as the place of eternal, usually physical torment. There was a fascination with the proper ordering of punishments to sins. Hell had to be terrifying in an immediate, physical way in order to be a useful concept. One cannot effectively threaten people with the loss of the Beatific Vision. While this idea of "seeing God" is the central experience of many religions, it only seems to

work as an encouragement to those whose behavior was already morally correct. The threat of the vision of God being withheld is too abstract to act as a sanction against sin. Therefore, punishments had to be physical, and they had to be gruesome enough to terrify people away from sin.

Common medieval ethics appear, on the face, much stricter than our own. Vices like gluttony, pride, and anger might be seen today as disagreeable personal idiosyncracies, but in the Middle Ages, these were all serious sins. On the other hand, many of what we would consider the most serious wrongs, while still sinful in the Middle Ages, did not occupy the same position on the hierarchy of sins. This is most notably the case with sins of violence. One must understand the medieval notion of sin. The duty of each man was to attain his own salvation. The worst sins one could commit were those which made one less than what one was created to be. Thus, gluttony becomes sinful because rather than living for God and placing him above all desires, one is virtually living for food and allowing food to take the place of God. This is to reduce one's humanity to the animal level. For this same reason, lust was a serious sin because one is replacing God with the man or woman who is the love object. Even lust within marriage can be seen as sinful if carried to an extreme. In this hierarchy then, gluttony is a worse sin than lust because gluttony is a deeper debasement of one's humanity. Heresy is a worse sin than murder since the latter only kills the body while the former prevents salvation. (Later, Dante

would use this same sort of hierarchy in his Inferno, although lust would be described as the most minor sin. Dante would contiue the medieval tradition of making betrayal the most serious sin.) This medieval idea of sin led people to be more concerned with the seven vices than with sins like murder or robbery. These latter were never personified in churches. The vices constantly were.

Medieval man was terrified both of death and of judgment.[1] The fear of judgment usually took the form of fear of the Last Judgment. Personal judgments were never depicted in Romanesque, except in the broad sense, when, for example, a devil was shown waiting to snatch the soul of a dying man. The end of the world represented a real threat, especially to those people who were familiar with the terrible vision of the Apocalypse. The positive side of judgment, that is, salvation for the elect, was not discussed or thought about nearly as much. Perhaps the average medieval man did not expect to be saved. His earthly life was bleak and there seemed no reason to assume that the afterlife would be an improvement.[2] Again, it may just be that damnation is a more interesting topic than salvation. Punishment has to be worried about while rewards tend to take care of themselves. The concept of Heaven is a vague one anyway, and only appealing

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1J.J.M. Timmers, A Handbook of Romanesque Art (New York: MacMillan, 1969), p. 81.

2Richard McLanathan, The Pageant of Medieval Art and Life (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 66.

in the abstract. Perfect joy was promised but people could not understand a perfect joy that did not involve their bodies, or anything that had been integral to any previous experience of joy. One could believe on faith that one would be happy, but the specifics were vague. Eternal physical torture requires far less imagination to understand.

Because the Church functioned as a political institution in the Middle Ages, she needed some threat to hold over people's heads. In the fourteenth century, Marsilius of Padua would deny the Church the right to earthly power because her laws lacked "coerciveness." Hell became the instrument of coercion though, and the Church was less concerned with her nonenforceable laws, such as charity, than her enforceable ones, particularly obedience. Much of this coercion was necessary if the Church wanted to maintain its position of power. Most medieval monarchs were more concerned with furtherance of their own power than with staying in the Pope's good graces. The Pope needed some threat of punishment since punishment was all these men would understand. Excommunications were sometimes overused which mitigated their effectiveness somewhat. It seemed only logical for the Church to keep the picture of Hell present to people. It somehow made the threat of excommunication seem more frightening.

Prior to the twelfth century, the Church did not need to exercise coercion on a large scale. The Pope only had to maintain authority over a small group of Western kings and a few high aristocrats. The mass of people were no threat

to the Church's authority. Not only were the people politically powerless, but they were also far too ignorant to argue against Church supremacy. Even if they did feel that there was something wrong with Church policy, they were unable to articulate their objection. As towns grew in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries this situation began to change. Townspeople were more sophisticated than peasants. The universities had only just begun but they were already centers of religious controversy. If the people were able to articulate their discontent then the Church would be threatened. The Romanesque churches were often used as visual propaganda with their constant visions of Hell and destruction.

No theme was more popular in Romanesque sculpture than the Last Judgment. Versions od this scene appear in virtually every church and cathedral of the Romanesque period. Usually the Last Judgment appeared on the tympanum above the west door. These sculptures served three basic purposes. Primarily they were used for terrorism. Their second purpose was related but more subtle. The massive Christs of these Last Judgment scenes were warriors. They served as a subtle encouragement to men to offer assistance in the fight for the Holy Land. Finally, the sculptures had a symbolic meaning. The Romanesque churches were seen as the fortresses of God.[3] They were the only bastian against the constant

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[3]Arnold Hauser, The Social History of Art, 2 vols. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), 1:188.

oppression of demons. The Last Judgment tympana, riddled as they were with demons, were placed over the doors as symbolic dividing lines between the world of God and the world of the demonic.

A typical Last Judgment tympanum can be found at the abbey church of Saint-Pierre at Beaulieu, on the south door. Christ sits at the center with his arms outstretched. He is massive in proportion to the other figures. On either side of Christ's throne is an angel blowing a horn. This scene has no body of the elect. The saved souls usually sit at the right hand of Christ but at Beaulieu both sides have doors to Hell. The good and evil influences are not divided in the usual left-right manner here but top to bottom instead. The good figures are very large and have nimbuses. They would seem to represent saints rather than redeemed souls. The damned souls are clothed on this tympanum, which is very unusual. They are very small in comparison to the other figures, being about one third the size of the angels and not even up to the knee of Christ. Hell itself is depicted in a double frieze, just below the main section of the tympanum. The damned reach Hell by means of trap-doors which are placed one on either side of Christ. Interestingly, the damned seem to enter Hell freely as there are no demons present on the upper part of the tympanum and the angels, saints, and Christ seem totally aloof to the damned soul's presence.

The first frieze beneath the tympanum begins, at the extreme left, with the mouth of Hell. The face of the mouth

of Hell is very broad and placed sideways in the frieze. His mouth is more than twice as wide as his face is long and his hair is thick and snake-like. A series of monsters come from the mouth and they clutch the bodies of the damned in their mouths. All four beasts have elongated quadruped bodies and two of them are winged. The first has a lion's tail and an indeterminate animal's head. The second has an eagle's head, wings, and claws. His tail ends in an arabesque. The third one has wing's and a dog's head. His tail is very thick and trumpet-shaped at the end where another dog head emerges with a damned soul in his mouth. The fourth beast is also indeterminate in species. His tail also ends in another head. The smaller back head appears to blow a trumpet.

Three other monsters occupy the lower frieze and these are even more grotesque than those in the frieze above. The first one is a simple boar with no supra-natural attachments. Next to him is a clawed quadruped with five front heads. His thick tail forks so that two more heads can appear in the rear. The third creature is the most hideous of all. He has a bearded human head on a huge, coiled, serpent's body. From holes on the coils emerge the heads, arms, and chests of two other monsters. These two have human bodies. One head is a dog and the other a bird. The two creatures fight one another with clubs. This creature's tail turns into a head from the mouth of which emerges a long forked tongue. There are no damned souls present on this part of the frieze and the background consists of a series of palmettes.

This Beaulieu Last Judgment does not conform to the usual pattern. There is little attention paid to the fate of the damned and much more to the creation of imaginative beasts. Also, there is no psychostasis pictured.

The tympanum of Laon Cathedral uses the Last Judgment theme too, but the Laon sculpture is comparitively non-violent. The tympanum here is a small one and fewer figures are used. As usual, Christ sits in the center of the scene and he is more than twice the size of any of the other figures. Four fairly large figures are seated to either side of him. These figures include Saint Peter, the Virgin, Saint John and a few of the other apostles who do not have any of the usual attributes which identify them specifically. Four angels, two of whom carry a cross, float around the head of Christ. There is no psychostasis in this scene. The damned are beneath the feet of the saints. They are naked and very tiny, each being only around the length of one of Christ's hands. Like the Beaulieu sculpture, the Laon Judgment shows the damned reaching Hell by means of little trap-doors. They seem to enter the doors of their own volition as there are no demons at all in the scene. There is no Hell pictured either as the trap-doors make up the very bottom of the tympanum.

The tympanum at Sainte-Foy, Conques is huge and features a very complex Last Judgment. Christ is seated in majesty at the center of the scene, but he is not nearly so disproportionately large here as at Beaulieu and Laon. This Judgment

scene is divided from left to right rather than from top to bottom, as are the two mentioned above. The elect are on the left, (Christ's right) and the damned are on the right. Only Saint Peter and the Virgin are identifiable among the saints. Immediately to Christ's right are the four evangelists, in human form, and, beyond them, the damnation scene unfolds. A hairy, beaked monster grabs the damned souls, all of whom are naked. These souls appear to actually be awaiting judgment since they are not yet in Hell proper which is below. The psychostasis takes place on the lower level of the scene, directly beneath the feet of Christ. Heaven and Hell are strictly divided in this scene and the devil and angel remain on their separate sides. The souls are weighed in a balance which the devil tries to tip in his favor. This devil is a particularly repulsive one. He has a brutish, semi-human head attached to a tailed, reptilian body. Beneath the chamber where the psychostasis takes place a devil waits to drive the damned into the mouth of Hell. He is human-shaped, and his face is distortedly human with extremely thick lips and a very large nose. He herds three souls into Hell but his face is turned away and he stares into heaven. The mouth of Hell is large and serpentine and the damned disappear in head first. Once inside, they are tortured by herds of monkey-like demons. At the center of Hell is a crowned figure who probably represents Satan. He is basically human in appearance, with very prominent ribs and a grim, snarling face. Satan's eyes are blank and staring. Snakes crawl up both of

his legs and a damned soul is crushed beneath his feet. The Hell depicted at Conques is a very chaotic one. Figures fill all the available space in any convenient position. One gets no concept of any special punishments for particular sins.

Once again, the finest Last Judgment was carved by Gislebertus, above the west door of Autun. Like the Conques tympanum, this one is huge and allows for a very complicated design. The majestic, impassive Christ dominates the scene. He is impossibly elongated as are the angels and the redeemed souls. An exception to this is the Virgin who, being placed in a small area near the top of the tympanum, retains fairly normal proportions. The angels and the elect are clothed in long robes. This, along with their exaggerated heighth gives them an ethereal grace and beauty. The psychostasis takes place directly beneath the left hand of Christ. A small screeching devil sits in the balance as a counterweight to the soul who sits on Saint Michael's side of the balance. The good soul outweighs the much larger devil and is saved. Two monstrous devils weigh the souls on the evil side. The one who holds the balance is in a semi-sitting position and rests against his taller companion's knees. Both have very prominent ribs and the striated appearance common at Autun. They have open, toothy grimaces, pig's snouts, pointy ears, and long, thick hair growing low on the forehead. The taller devil has furry legs and both are tailed. The devil holding the balance grasps another soul with his free hand. The taller

devil holds a frog in his hand, the symbol of impurity.[4] A snake curls his way up between the two devils. Once damned, the souls are passed on to a similar demon who sends them down to Hell via a funnel. He uses his left leg as a chute. Other damned souls are simply dragged into Hell by a small demon who leans out of the serpentine mouth of Hell. All the damned souls are tiny and naked.

Beneath the major section of the tympanum is a frieze which consists of a series of souls waiting to be judged. A few angels and devils mingle with the group. A huge pair of hands reaches down to pull the next soul up. A pillar capital directly beneath the tympanum shows Death, on his horse, presumably seeking more victims for the judgment.

Although Gislebertus gave more space on his tympanum to the elect than the damned, it is the damned who command the viewer's attention. Partly, this is due to the horror of the scene. More important, however, is a subtler factor. Gislebertus has succeeded in creating really human figures here whose expressions of terror and despair are believable. Particularly effective are the souls waiting to be judged. Despite the simple style of facial depiction, the artist has captured a feeling of nervous apprehension in both facial expression and bodily posture. Gislebertus seems to have been aware of the strength of the damnation aspects of the scene and between the main portion of the tympanum and the

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[4]Louis Reau, Iconographie de l'Art Chretien, 2 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), 1:119.

frieze, he carved the words, "Gislebertus Hoc Fecit. Terreat Hic Terror Quos Terreus Alligat Error." (Gislebertus made this. Let this horror appall all those bound by earthly sin.)[5] The first part of this message is one of the only "signatures" of Romanesque sculptors. The practice of sculptors identifying themselves became much more common in Gothic art.

The Last Judgment theme was extremely popular and was also used at Angouleme, Arles, and Burgfelden on the tympana. Many minor judgment scenes were used on capitals such as at Chauvigny, Saint-Pierre, and Saint-Eutrope. These were just scenes of the psychostasis since the entire scene required the large space of a tympanum.

The mouth of Hell was an interesting concept and appears on nearly every illustration of Hell or Judgment. The gaping mouth added to the already acceptable notion of a Hell eager for victims. This idea served to make Hell more terrifying by making it appear as an actual living being, much like its agents, the demons, were shown as living creatures. This sort of thinking was in direct opposition to mainstream Christian philosophy which always spoke of evil as the simple absence of right action. The art was probably very effective propaganda, encouraging people to be extra vigilant about their own salvation in the face of such powerful opposition. There was one hopeful element in Last Judgment art. When a demon and Saint Michael were weighing a soul, the judgment

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5Charles R. Morey, Medieval Art (New York: W.W. Norton, 1942), p. 274

was always in favor of the soul being weighed.

Last Judgment art encouraged the kind of latent polytheism evident in the frequent use of pagan themes in art. Though, according to the Bible, God, in the person of Jesus, judges souls, in Romanesque art the judging process is carried out by Saint Michael and a demon. Christ takes no part in the process and, in fact, shows very little concern with either the elect or the damned. This is particularly evident in a judgment scene like that at Conques where the weighing of souls is not even done within Christ's range of vision. The angel and the devil appear hunched over conspiratorially like two lawyers in a back room, bargaining with one another over the soul's fate.

The Psychomachia, an allegorical book by Aurelius Prudentius Clemens, was a basis for a great many scenes in medieval art. The book describes the great war between the virtues and the vices. Scenes of the virtues lined up with their respective vices were particularly common in Gothic sculpture. Romanesque was less inclined to this interpretation and usually showed the vices just as archetypes with no warring virtues. The two vices most often depicted were lust and avarice. These two were supposed to be the prime vices of females and male, respectively. They were also the vices that were becoming more common in the twelfth century. As towns developed, so did a measure of sophistication which made sexual behavior, if not sexual attitudes, somewhat more liberal. It was possible for a man and a woman to enjoy an

"illicit" sexual connection without it becoming the common knowledge of the community. Greed, of course, increased in towns not only within the developing merchant class and the gilds, but among people newly arrived from rural areas with expectations (not always well-founded) of a better life.

A naked woman depicting lust can be found on the portal at Charlieu. She is done in the usual style. Snakes climb up her body and her breasts. Toads, like frogs, a sign of impurity, cluster around her genitals. This same version of lust can be found at Lincoln Cathedral and on the south portal of Moissac.

Lincoln Cathedral also shows an archetypal greed. He is a small man being strangled by the money bags around his neck. A capital at Ennezat used this theme too but expanded it. The same little man with his money bags is carved but this time he is held by either arm by a devil. These two devils are just primitive looking men. The one on the left wears the same sort of fringed loincloth as the devils on the Liber Vitae mouth of Hell drawing.

These illustrations of the punishments of the vices were typically medieval, not only in the fascination with punishment but in the logical choice of a fitting punishment for each sin. Many of these punishments originated in the visions of supposed mystics. Hildegarde of Bingen, for example, saw visions of the whole psychomachia. She had visions of the archetype of each vice and these archetypes would develop into imagined punishments for the vice involved. Vices like

greed and lust were easy to imagine punishments for but Hildegarde also included visions of more esoteric vices. She saw Ignavia as the archetype of cowardly sloth. He had a human head, rabbit's ears, and the boneless body and limbs of a worm. One of the ears was so large it covered his head.[6] Other vices commonly depicted were gluttony, anger and pride although the latter was more common in Gothic than in Romanesque.

Perhaps the reason the actual psychomachia was not common in Romanesque was the still unrefined quality of the facial expressions of the sculptures. It is much easier to depict vices, with their attendant attributes, than to capture and differentiate the spirits of patience, purity, and generosity. An artist like Gislebertus, whose style was sophisticated in advance of his time, was able to portray the virtues effectively, as in his scene of Patience and Generosity with Anger and Greed. At any rate, the fascination with depictions of appropriate punishments for sins persisted well after the Romanesque period. Dante goes into great detail on this theme in his Inferno and Bosch perfected the Hell nightmare on the right panel of his "Garden of Earthly Delights." The Romanesque depictions of the vices themselves are rather peculiar. Lust, as the naked woman with the snakes and toads, represented not only the punishment for the vice but the vice itself. Later art would at least

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[6]Henry Osborn Taylor, The Medieval Mind: A History of the Development of Thought and Emotion in the Middle Ages, 2 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1928), 1:469.

attempt to make the figure of lust attractive, as Gislebertus had done. The snake and toad archetype would be replaced by the Apocalyptic Whore of Babylon in many Gothic churches.

The most popular Romanesque themes, those of judgment, Hell, and the vices did not end with the Romanesque period. They maintained themselves into the Gothic and Renaissance periods. Michelangelo used the Last Judgment for his Sistine altar. This factor separates these themes from the pagan and demonic art discussed in the first three chapters. Of course, pagan and demonic art did not disappear from churches with the introduction of Gothic but they did lose their strength as they became more formal and less emotional. The famous gargoyles of Notre Dame are miles away in spirit from the violent art of Autun and Vezelay. An increasingly rational world demanded increasingly rational art.

The persistence of judgment and Hell themes indicate the active Church participation in the choice of subject matter. It would become increasingly important to the Church to keep the people in fear, as it's hold on them lessened. The position of the Church was very secure in the early Middle Ages when it represented the only unifying force in the society. In those early days, the average man did not have to be threatened with damnation on such a regular basis. As long as the Church was willing to endure the elements of paganism in the people, it could be fairly certain of exercising control. When this secure position was threatened, it had to resort to other means.

Hell is certainly a terrifying concept and the threat of it was successful in binding people to the Church, and, ultimately, to the supremacy of papal rule, for quite a long time. Why did this terrorism finally fail? It failed not only because people in developing towns were more tempted to fall away from Church rules in pursuit of pleasure, but also because the doctrine itself is flawed. Once people became more educated, (and it was the educated sector of the society that the Church had cause to fear) certain contradictions in the Christian Hell became obvious. All the physical torment, so common in the art of the time, becomes less threatening when one realizes that Church doctrine, itself, talks of souls, not bodies, being damned. The torture of a soul is as difficult to grasp as the ecstacy of a soul when the soul itself is removed from a bodily context. This idea of the soul, not the body, being condemned seems easy enough to understand in a modern context and so the paintings and sculpture of the Middle Ages are generally understood to be metaphorical. They were not designed as metaphors, however, and they were not appreciated as such by contemporaries. This was Hell as the twelfth century understood it. When it could no longer be understood in such crude terms, the art lost a great deal of its power to frighten people.

On a deeper level, the very idea of a Hell was subject to scrutiny. Philosophers had to come to terms with the issue of predestination. Could a merciful God create a man knowing that, ultimately, the man would be damned? Why

would God allow a Hell or even allow evil in the world if he was all good? Ultimately, they had to ask what the nature of evil was, apart from its human, material context. This context would no longer be relevant in the non-material world for which all men were supposedly destined. Thus, a soul would be punished for the evils of a body with which it was no longer associated. These were, of course, intellectual issues not dealt with by the mass of the people. The Church had to deal with them, however, and even her own theologians were left with no better answer than that the issues were not understandable and had to be accepted on faith.

Th Church did use Hell to coerce people into obedience but she was not cold-bloodedly encouraging superstition and fear just to gain her own ends. When the doctrine could no longer be accepted on simple terms, (and could no longer be accepted at all by many) the Church itself ceased to stress Hell as the major theme of Christian life.

CONCLUSION

The massive illiteracy of medieval society separates the Middle Ages from the present more effectively than the barrier of time. Any medieval person whose character can be grasped as an individual is, by definition, an exception. Even had the medieval society been literate, it is doubtful that it would have left the kind of records that could afford an insight into the character of the people themselves. The lack of individualism, the submersion of the one in the group, and the facile acceptance of observable falsehood as truth were all factors of medieval life destined to keep the people enigmas to all future investigators. What little can be learned about medieval life, outside the bald facts of history, must be learned inferentially.

Art, in particular the anonymous craftsman's art of the Romanesque period, is one of the best sources for inferential knowledge of a society. The less the art deliberately tries to say about the society, the more it often does say, because one can see in it the prejudices and concerns of an age not just of an individual artist.

Romanesque art is totally apolitical. It makes no deliberate comment on the society, except in a vague way, in the criticism of prevailing vices. The art, in fact, so far from intentionally describing its society, does not even use twelfth century figures except in anachronistic portraits of long dead saints. This lack of social comment or criticism makes Romanesque an ideal indicator of what <u>did</u> concern

medieval man. Since the art is all religious it would indicate that individualism and the hunger for personal glory did not seem important to the average person. The supernatural, however, was important. It was part of day-to-day life in both a positive and a negative way. Angels and devils both appear in sculpture in constant communion with man. The devils appear more often and more dramatically. This would indicate that the prevailing attitude towards the supernatural was the negative, fearful one. Man's concern with the next life was very strong, as evidenced by the fascination with Heaven and Hell in art. Again, Hell takes precedence over Heaven (that is, Heaven shown in the context of man's salvation) showing either a lack of confidence in salvation or, perhaps, a morbid preoccupation with the imagined sufferings of others. The choice of the vices depicted indicates which flaws of character were most condemned, and the facts of the society explain why.

The Romanesque art shows more about medieval man than just his religious concerns. There is a practical streak evidenced by the presence of Celtic and Germanic gods in the churches. One gets the impression that medieval man tried to protect himself on all sides whenever possible. He might no longer believe in the old gods but he was not quite ready to eliminate them entirely. The preservation of these figures also indicates at least some concern with the past and with ancestors. The preservation of ancient forms from the classical heritage shows a concern for beauty--beauty for its

own sake. These Graeco-Roman figures were usually mysteries to the average person, even to the artists who faithfully copied them. This concern for beauty among medieval men is often overlooked. It is generally assumed that the only beautiful structures of the society were the churches because only God was considered worthy of beauty. Perhaps, however, medieval man enjoyed beauty himself and, in building magnificent churches, he was able to have this beauty without being accused of sensuality. It seems obvious that there was an understanding of beauty and an appreciation of it because without that understanding and appreciation such beauty could not have been created.

Much of what can be inferred from Romanesque art can be backed up by other sources. The confusion of fantasy and reality is evident even in medieval science. Many accepted "facts" of medieval medicine were demonstrably untrue. People, nonetheless, accepted them as facts. It was so unthinkable to question medical authorities of the past that experimentation seemed almost heretical. This same blind acceptance of myth in the place of reality is evident in the credibility given to the bestiaries, mentioned in chapter one. The stories in these books are so far-fetched it seems incredible that anyone ever accepted them as real. This is particularly true in the tales of real animals, some of which were familiar creatures to Western Europeans. Despite the fact that the animals could easily be proven to behave in no way like the stories indicated, the reliability of the stories

was not undercut. It is not hard to imagine the ready acceptance of demons by medieval man when one realizes that the most incredible tales of the bestiaries were accepted by the intellectuals. At least demons could not be proven not to exist and the sources for most of the demon lore, the monks, were accepted, at the time, as unimpeachable.

It is not that medieval man was stupid or dull-witted. He simply looked at reality differently. It was possible for him to separate the evidence of his senses from his vision of the world. He could even carry two contrary views in his mind at the same time and accept both. Thus, the medieval medical student could hear one version of how an organ functioned and see that, in fact, the actual function was different. Both truths were accepted at the same time. Medieval philosophy gave birth to the fantasic "double truth" theory, based on Averroism. Here, the "truths" of philosophy and theology were described as mutually contradictory. Again, both were accepted. It is not so peculiar that a medieval peasant could find his own life remarkably free of demonic interference yet still accept demons as a fact of life with which his potential for involvement was unlimited.

The emotionalism of the Middle Ages has been stressed. Again, this is not only evident in art, but elsewhere as well. The religious writing of the time is perhaps the best indication of this emotionalism. Members of the religious community, particularly nuns, were subject to religious ecstacies and wrote in very erotic tones of their love of God,

usually in the person of Christ.[1] This vital, personal connection with God substituted for all other sensual and emotional needs.

The guilt felt by medieval man shows itself time and again in his art. What was he so guilty for? Nothing concrete, of course, but it is not difficult to accept an entire society obsessed with guilt when the other elements of the society are understood--the religious terrorism, the emotional excesses, and the confusion of fantasy and reality. The greatest guilt of all was for the suffering of Christ and the fact that man would always be unworthy of this tremendous sacrifice. This became the central truth of medieval life and, consequently, the smallest sin became a valid cause for tremendous feelings of unworthiness. Great guilt brings on a belief in the inevitability of punishment.[2] Punishment even becomes, to a certain extent, sought after. The devils provided this release for the guilts of medieval society. There is no doubt that some people actually saw devils, their belief in them being so strong as to create the illusion of reality. Thus, the people who told the stories of the demons did not actually lie, at least not consciously. An untruth is harder to discern when the source

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[1]Henry Osborn Taylor, The Medieval Mind: A History of the Development of Thought and Emotion in the Middle Ages, 2 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1928), 1:495.

[2]Jeffrey Burton Russel, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 274.

is completely convinced of the veracity of his tale.

The assertion that medieval man was fearful hardly needs to be defended. The facts of medieval life were rugged and brutal. Not only was warfare common but justice was harsh and often arbitrary. Most people's lives were virtually controlled by a liege lord who had a great deal of potential for making life unpleasant. Also, little was known about the causes of disease or famine and, when these calamities struck, they must have seemed like the wrath of an angry God. The results of this fear and anxiety are readily apparent in the art.

The lack of documentation for much of medieval life is not rectifiable. There will never be the sources available that are available to modern historians. Medieval History must look to new kinds of records to fill the void. Art seems to be one of the most valid records to look to, as it springs directly from the society. This may not be the case for other periods when art reflects the narrow interests of a small minority, but medieval art is a reflection of the concerns and attitudes of the society as a whole. The men who created it were no more exalted than ordinary workers and its public nature made it available to all who lived near it. Romanesque art seems dark and forbidding, but it is a clear reflection of the time and of the people that created it.

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