

# DUMBARTON OAKS

---

Byzantine Art in the West

Author(s): Wilhelm Koehler

Source: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 1, Dumbarton Oaks Inaugural Lectures, November 2nd and 3rd, 1940 (1941), pp. 61+63-87

Published by: [Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1291040>

Accessed: 28/10/2013 05:45

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# BYZANTINE ART IN THE WEST

WILHELM KOEHLER

Written down not long after the lecture had been delivered, the text of the address is probably fairly accurately reproduced in the following pages. It should be considered as a preliminary sketch for a chapter in a comprehensive study devoted to the changes which the concept of the human figure underwent during the Middle Ages. The illustrations are identical with the slides of the lecture; a few references to earlier literature have been added in footnotes.



1. BERZÉ-LA-VILLE, LE CHÂTEAU DES MOINES

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

INVITE you to follow me to one of the loveliest regions in France, to Burgundy. On the screen (Fig. 1) you see a little group of white buildings in rolling country, the hamlet of Berzé-la-Ville, a few miles from Mâcon. It looks like hundreds of other villages in Burgundy, but one of the buildings, called the *Château des Moines* by the peasants, contains in a chapel of modest size the most beautiful Romanesque wall paintings in France (Fig. 2).<sup>1</sup>

Above, in the center of the half-dome, appears as a heavenly vision Christ in majesty, approached on each side by six Apostles; below, near the floor, half-figures of saints are gazing at the beholder from behind the frame of a painted drapery. The zone in between is divided into five recesses by a system of columns and arches which surround windows in the three central compartments, while wall paintings adorn the two flanking recesses: on the left the martyrdom of St. Blaise, on the right that of St. Lawrence. These two scenes we may view a little more closely in order to get an idea of the character of the wall paintings.

In the compartment on the left (Fig. 3) a painted arch separates two pairs of figures. Above, St. Blaise is seated in his prison. To him the poor widow offers substantial comfort in the shape of head and legs of the piglet which the saint before his arrest had miraculously saved from the jaws of a wolf. Below, under the arch suggesting the basement of

<sup>1</sup> Discovered in 1887, the wall paintings were made the object of a careful study only much later, in Fernand Mercier's *Les Primitifs français. La Peinture clunysienne en Bourgogne à l'époque romane, son histoire et sa technique* (Paris, 1932); the same in *Congrès archéologique de France: Lyon et Mâcon, 1935* (Paris, 1936), pp. 485-502. The best reproductions are in Henri Focillon, *Peintures romanes des églises de France* (Paris, 1938).

the prison as the locality of the execution, the very act of the beheading of the saint is shown, in striking contrast to the touching illustration of intrepid gratitude and devotion above.

It is not my intention to attempt an analysis of the style of the painting. For the present I restrict myself to a brief comment on one feature of the composition. The arch dividing the prison into two stories separates the two scenes, as we have observed. But the same arch, as an element of the composition, also connects them with each other. Placed asymmetrically to the central axis, the long sweep of the curve on the left accompanies and supports the movement of the widow; the steeper curve on the right, on the other hand, imparts to the contrasting action of the executioner its horrible fierceness. Two things we can conclude from this first observation: the composition of the twin picture is achieved with the most skillful economy of means; secondly, movement is apparently of prime importance in the art of the painter.

Since St. Blaise is the local patron of the village, the representation of his martyrdom near the altar of the chapel needs no explanation. Not so self-evident is the reason for choosing the story of the piglet to enlarge the scene of the martyrdom proper. We are probably not far from the truth when we interpret it as revealing a remarkable sense of actuality on the part of the painter. At the time when the frescoes were made, the hamlet of Berzé-la-Ville was one of the dairy farms belonging to near-by Cluny. It supplied the great abbey with provisions, and the villagers who came to say their prayers in the chapel could be expected to draw a parallel between the offering of the poor widow in the painting and their own contributions to the saintly establishment in the neighborhood, to which many a pig like that brought to St. Blaise was sent year by year.<sup>2</sup> Nor would it be too far-fetched to see the same sense of actuality, as well as an appeal to the peasant's comprehension, in the careful way in which the parts of the animal, neatly arranged on the huge dish, are depicted by the artist, who thus has created one of the earliest still-lives in European painting.

Turning now to the opposite compartment at the extreme right of the apse (Fig. 4) we are confronted with the representation of the martyrdom of St. Lawrence. His hands fettered, the saint is outstretched on the grid-iron, from under which flames are licking upward. By means of long iron rods two executioners with might and main press his naked body down,

<sup>2</sup> Relevant to this interpretation are parallels in the contemporary sculpture of southern France: see Meyer Schapiro, "The Sculptures of Souillac," *Medieval Studies in Memory of A. Kingsley Porter* (Cambridge, 1939), II, 375-387.



2. BERZÉ-LA-VILLE, INTERIOR OF THE CHAPEL



3. BERZÉ-LA-VILLE, MARTYRDOM OF  
ST. BLAISE

under the command of the seated Decius, whose figure fills more than half of the upper part of the composition.

It is this figure which arrests our attention first, not only because it exceeds all the others in size by far, but also because the whole composition plainly has its center there, or, more exactly, in Decius' pointing left hand. Decius, precariously perched on his jeweled throne, as though he could barely refrain from jumping to his feet, is seized with a fit of wild fury. His

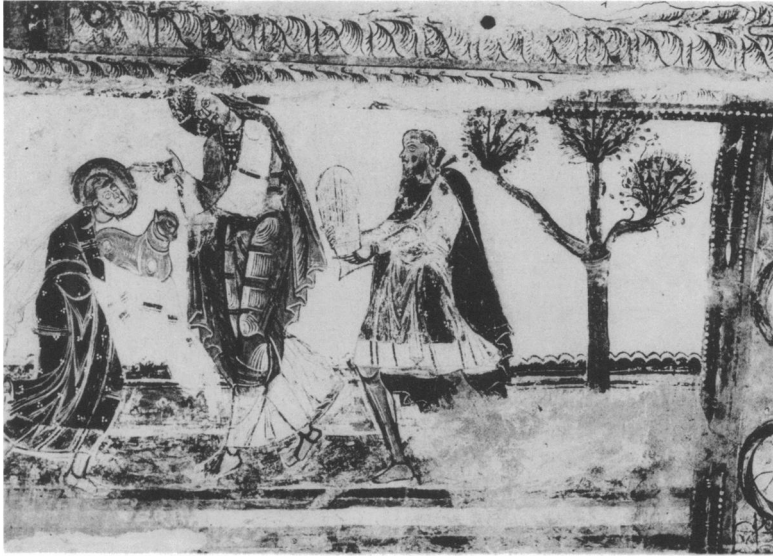


4. BERZÉ-LA-VILLE, MARTYRDOM OF  
ST. LAWRENCE

knees are pulled upwards and backwards, while his head and chest are bent downwards and forwards, so that a current of vehement motion runs all through his body, ending in the commanding gesture of the left hand. How the sweep of the huge fold crossing his thigh, just under the left hand, contributes to project this concentrated energy across the oblique gap separating him from the executioners, and how, by means of a masterly counterpoint of related forms in the hands, arms, legs, and rods of the executioners, the energy is turned in a downward direction and translated into physical action, reveals a tremendous power in representation and composition. Again, movement is the primary means of relating the figures to

each other and of drawing the beholder into the spell of the dramatic action. That an intense sense of actuality is at the very core of this art is now confirmed by the second fresco. In order to grasp fully the import of this trend we may compare with these frescoes two examples of French wall painting which are a little earlier than those in Berzé-la-Ville.

From a cycle of Old Testament scenes in the church of Saint-Savin, about thirty miles east of Poitiers, I select the scene illustrating the offer-



5. SAINT-SAVIN, CAIN AND ABEL

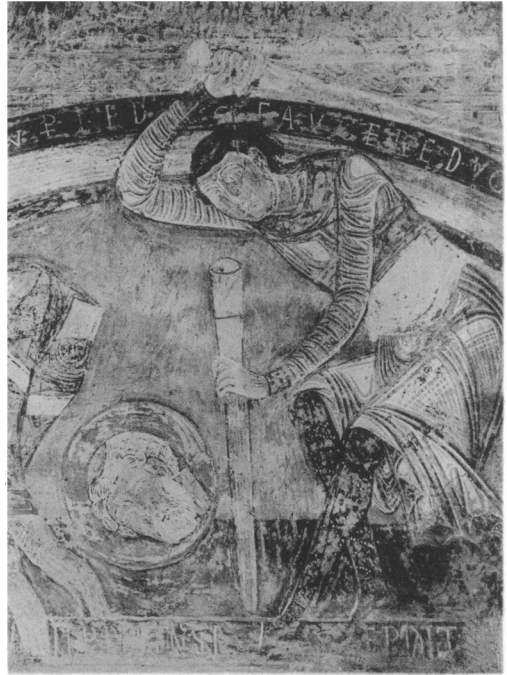
ings of Cain and Abel (Fig. 5). The figures are arranged in one plane and are very flat. Each form is confined by a heavy contour, and only in the figure of God do we find a rather weak attempt to suggest the roundness of the body. To hold the group together, to suggest movement and the content of the individual figure, and to illustrate drastically the relationship between them, the painter relies entirely on the rhythm of expressive lines, and this explains why the actors of his play, in spite of all their liveliness, remain in a sphere of abstract remoteness as compared with those who act on the walls of Berzé-la-Ville. **In Saint-Savin, figures like Chinese shades, very suggestive, but unreal; in Berzé, players with round, solid, articulated bodies, bursting with life and energy – that is the most significant difference between the two.**

The other example, in the church of Ébreuil in the Auvergne, shows the beheading of St. Pancras. The fact that the action is the same makes the comparison of the executioner with the one in the martyrdom of St. Blaise instructive (Figs. 6 and 7). Again, in the earlier work an almost

abstract pattern of lines, suggestive of the content and action of the figure; in Berzé, an articulated body, supple and elegant, through which, like a current, a continuous movement runs, resulting in the action of the right arm. While in Ébreuil action is suggested, it is concretely represented in Berzé, and this achievement has been made possible through a new concept of the human body. **The master of Berzé conceives the body as a self-contained organism, governed by psychic impulses.** By



6. ÉBREUIL, MARTYRDOM OF ST. PANCRAS



7. BERZÉ-LA-VILLE, EXECUTIONER

virtue of this revolutionary notion, reflecting a new relation to reality, the human body in representational art can be made a vehicle of movement, action, and the content of the figure. **The wall paintings of Berzé-la-Ville are manifestations of new tendencies for which no antecedents can be found in earlier French art.**

You have been kind enough to follow me to Burgundy. Now, trying to lure you into further adventures, I ask you to look with me for an answer to the following questions: Do the wall paintings of Berzé-la-Ville with their – as seen against the background of earlier French art – revolutionary character stand alone, or are there other monuments to which they can be related? And secondly: Where are the sources from which the new tendencies have sprung?



The answer to the first question must be in the negative as long as we confine our search to French wall paintings. But if we include illumination and — recalling that Berzé was a dependency of Cluny — turn to Romanesque manuscripts written at the abbey, we come across a lectionary whose miniatures represent the closest stylistic parallel to the wall paintings.<sup>3</sup>

A systematic comparison would take too much time.<sup>4</sup> I must be sat-



8. PARIS, BIBL. NAT., NOUV. ACQ. LAT. 2246,  
CHRIST APPEARING TO THE APOSTLES (DETAIL)



9. BERZÉ-LA-VILLE, CHRIST  
IN MAJESTY

ified with calling to your attention a few details of the design which recommend themselves in our context as being striking and easy to recognize, and which on the other hand may be expected to occur in other works, irrespective of subject matter. Characteristic motifs in the rendering of garments usually offer the best chances for comparison.

One of the miniatures of the lectionary shows Christ appearing to the Apostles (Fig. 8). The central figure in its frontal position is particularly suitable for comparison with the Christ figure at Berzé (Fig. 9). In the fresco Christ's purple mantle falls down in two vertical folds, one between the legs, the other on the right side of the left leg, each ending in a very regular zigzag pattern; over the right leg are two horizontal groups of parallel folds, one drop-shaped, corresponding to the knee, the other triangular. While the zigzag folds separate and frame the legs, the

<sup>3</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Nouv. acq. Latin 2246. Mercier, *Les Primitifs français*, pls. XCII–CVII, has reproduced all the miniatures of the manuscript.

<sup>4</sup> I refer to Mercier's book, in which he gives a painstaking technical analysis of both the miniatures of the lectionary and the wall paintings.

horizontal folds reflect to a certain extent the shape of the leg. Comparing with this the central figure in the miniature, we recognize the two systems of vertical and horizontal folds, each arranged as in the wall painting, each forming the same regular patterns and used to fulfill the same function as there. If the comparison is extended to other parts, the majority of motifs in both figures turn out to be variations of those mentioned. Others which have no parallel in the Christ figure occur elsewhere in the wall painting.



10. BERZÉ-LA-VILLE, DECIUS

I have already mentioned the striking big fold which runs across Decius' left thigh like a gush of water and ends in a zigzag pattern (Fig. 10). An exact analogy to it in the miniature is the fold crossing the right thigh of the Apostle near the right border (Fig. 8). Another very significant parallel, as we shall see presently, is the peculiar system of folds on the left calf of both the central figure in the lectionary and Decius in the fresco. It looks as though the garment had been dampened and was clinging in places to the leg beneath it, thus piling up in angles of parallel folds. For brevity's sake we may call this motif the "damp fold."

Here, then, in the Cluny manuscript, we have found miniatures which in characteristic details of the design agree with the wall paintings. In fact, the whole treatment of the garments is the same: groups of angular parallel folds are contrasted with long, sweeping folds, which frame and relate the groups with each other, and if we extend the comparison to more fundamental aspects we shall not fail to see that this treatment of the garments in the miniatures serves the same purpose as in the frescoes: it is the means of showing the articulated body beneath and through the garments and of producing the effect of round, solid figures, full of life and energy. The similarity is close enough to justify the conclusion that the wall paintings and the Cluny lectionary not only reflect the same stylistic tendencies but are contemporary. This enables us to point out at least approximately at what time the new art appears at Cluny. The manuscript, it is true, gives no clue to establish its date with any precision beyond the vague statement that it belongs to the end of the eleventh or the beginning of the twelfth century,<sup>5</sup> and to date the wall paintings we must rely on rather circumstantial evidence which seems to indicate the first or the second decade of the twelfth century.<sup>6</sup> However, we are probably safe in assuming that the date of both wall paintings and miniatures is about the year 1110, and may leave it to further studies to find out whether or not a slightly earlier date could be proved. Furthermore, another conclusion from the similarity between frescoes and miniatures is very tempting: Should we not be entitled to speak of a specific Cluny style on the basis of this evidence?

This would be a rash conclusion. The style which distinguishes both from earlier works is restricted neither to Cluny nor to its sphere of influence, but extends its reaches over a much larger area, as a few examples which I pick out more or less at random may show.

We may first turn to Cluny's great rival, Cîteaux. While among the Romanesque manuscripts from Cluny the lectionary is the only one which has illuminations of any importance, we possess a number of most beautiful illuminated manuscripts written and painted at Cîteaux during the first two decades of the twelfth century. A remarkable and characteristic specimen is the large, colored pen drawing of the Madonna in a Dijon manuscript (Fig. 11).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> L. Delisle, *Inventaire des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Fonds de Cluny, Paris, 1884, no. 15). Mercier, *Les Primitifs français*, p. 128.

<sup>6</sup> Mercier, *Congrès archéologique de France, 1935* (Paris, 1936), pp. 485-502.

<sup>7</sup> Dijon, Bibliothèque de la ville 129 (96). See Ch. Oursel, "Les Manuscrits à miniatures de la Bibliothèque de Dijon," *Bulletin de la Société pour la reproduction des manuscrits à peintures*, VII (1923), 5-33; the same, *La Miniature du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle à l'Abbaye de Cîteaux* (Dijon, 1926).

I point at the hems of the heavy vertical folds arranged in zigzag patterns, at the groups of folds on the left thigh, at the triangular folds resulting from the tightening of the garment over the lower right leg of the Madonna. All these motifs, though more elaborate and more calligraphic here, correspond to features in the treatment of the garments which we have noticed in the works of the Cluny painters, and I do not need to waste words to describe how powerfully the articulated body is shown



11. DIJON, BIBL. NO. 129 (96),  
MADONNA

by means of the systems of folds in the Cîteaux miniature. This is, if anything, in spite of a different technique and the differences between individual artists, the same break with the earlier, flat rendering of the figure and a manifestation of the same new tendencies. A consideration of other examples of Cîteaux miniatures would confirm this conclusion and illustrate the similarity between the works of the two schools.

Now, since both Cîteaux and Cluny belong to Burgundy, would it not be proper to comprehend under the name of the Burgundian style the characteristics of the paintings which we have surveyed so far? Cautioned by previous experience, we may continue our search.

Our next example brings us to the north of France. From the eleventh century onward we can follow closely the stylistic development in the very productive and important scriptorium of St. Amand near Valenciennes. There a flat linear style which we know from many illustrations is superseded in the second quarter of the twelfth century by another in which the emphasis is not on the contours but on the gradual modeling of the surfaces between the contours.



12. VALENCIENNES, BIBL. NO. 108 (101),  
CRUCIFIXION

The crucifixion (Fig. 12)<sup>8</sup> represents a rather advanced phase of this development. The folds are not so deeply cut in as in the Burgundian works, so that the general cylindrical shape of the figure dominates, and the triangular folds appear like a ripple of waves on the surface of water. But in spite of these differences it is easy to recognize that the same systems of folds are being used to show the body beneath and through the garments, and it is particularly instructive to notice that in both standing figures the “damp folds” occur not less than three times on the calves,

<sup>8</sup> Valenciennes, Bibliothèque Municipale, no. 108 (101), probably written under Abbot Hugh (1150–1158).

though the triangles are less pointed and more curvilinear than in the Cluny and Cîteaux works.

If it is admitted that the artists of the St. Amand group employ motifs to illustrate the relation between garments and body similar to those in Burgundy, it cannot be denied that the wall painting representing St. Paul's adventure with the viper on the Island of Melita (Fig. 13) belongs



13. CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL, ST. PAUL ON MELITA

to the same stylistic category. This, however, decorates a wall in St. Anselm's chapel of Canterbury Cathedral,<sup>9</sup> and, since it is closely related to the most representative group of English miniatures dating from the middle of the twelfth century,<sup>10</sup> we must conclude that the new tendencies by this time have crossed the Channel and profoundly influenced the work of English artists.

Turning back to the Continent and surveying German illumination dur-

<sup>9</sup> *Archaeologia*, vol. 52, pt. 2, p. 389. T. Borenius and E. W. Tristram, *Englische Male-rei des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1916), Taf. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Among them: Brit. Mus., Nero CIV, Psalter of Henry of Blois (1129-1171); the Bibles in the Lambeth Palace Library and in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 32; the Psalter in the Hunterian Museum at Glasgow (about 1170). See Eric G. Millar, *English Illuminated Manuscripts from the X to the XIII Century* (Brussels, 1926).

ing the twelfth century, we do well to concentrate on the school of Salzburg, since it is not only the leading artistic center of the period in Germany but also the one we know best. When we examine the group of the Apostles in the Salzburg Antiphony (Fig. 14),<sup>11</sup> which was written about 1150, we realize that the treatment of the garments is based on the same elements and motifs as in all other examples and purports in the same way to reflect the body beneath them. Perhaps the most striking parallel is



14. SALZBURG, ST. PETER COD. A. XII. 7, PENTECOST (DETAIL)

again represented by the “damp folds” on both calves of one of the Apostles, which should be compared with those of the Dijon miniature (Fig. 11) and of Decius at Berzé (Fig. 10). Even the fold which comes across the thigh of Decius recurs in the Salzburg Apostle.

Many examples of the style are to be found in contemporary Italian art. It may suffice to show the miniature of St. Matthew in a Bible<sup>12</sup> probably written in Rome in the beginning of the twelfth century (Fig. 15) in order to illustrate the fact that the vast geographical region throughout which the various Romanesque schools of painting were affected by the new stylistic tendencies includes Italy as well.

To sum up the results of this necessarily rapid and superficial survey: the artists of the leading schools of painting, breaking away from the tradition of the earlier Romanesque style, turn during the first half of the

<sup>11</sup> Salzburg, Stiftsbibliothek St. Peter, Cod. a XII. 7. See Georg Swarzenski, *Die Salzburger Malerei* (Leipzig, 1913); pp. 108–120 deal with the Antiphony and its date.

<sup>12</sup> Pietro Toesca, “Miniature romane dei secoli XI e XII,” *Revista del R. Istituto d’archeologia e storia dell’arte*, I (1929), p. 76.

twelfth century to a definite and on the whole uniform system of characteristic motifs which tend to show the articulated body beneath and through its garments.

Our search for related monuments has led us far away from our starting point, the wall paintings at Berzé-la-Ville, but our wanderings have not been entirely fruitless: we now know that they represent but one mani-



15. ROME, VAT. LAT. 12958, ST. MATTHEW

festation — and that a most remarkable one — of tendencies which seem to have spread over most of the European countries, so that we should be entirely justified in speaking of an international style of the twelfth century. This ascertained to our satisfaction, we must look for an answer to the other question which we raised before we started on our journey: Where are the sources from which the international style sprang?

You may have followed me on our path with some surprise, wondering at being invited to go to Burgundy and points beyond in a lecture which ostensibly is devoted to the discussion of Byzantine art in the West. We have now reached the bend of the road where your patience is going to be rewarded. Ahead of us is Byzantium. **Byzantine art of the eleventh century is the source from which the international style which so profoundly influenced European Romanesque painting was derived.**

Again you must be satisfied with a few remarks and one or two ex-



amples illustrating connections which to prove conclusively would require much more extensive comparative material.

Our last example of the international style was the picture of St. Matthew in a Roman Bible (Fig. 15). It shows the closest analogies with the picture of the Evangelist in a gospel book written in Constantinople during the third quarter of the eleventh century (Fig. 16).<sup>13</sup>



16. ISTANBUL, PHANAR SCHOOL GOSPELS,  
ST. MATTHEW

If it were possible to look over what we possess of contemporary Byzantine manuscripts, conclusive evidence could easily be produced to prove that the systems of folds which are one of the characteristics of the international style of the twelfth century were taken over from Byzantine models. Often the motifs are regularized and schematized in the occidental imitations, sometimes exaggerated and overemphasized, but the derivation from the Byzantine source is evident. Nor would it be difficult to prove that western artists became acquainted with the problem

<sup>13</sup> See Charles Diehl, "Monuments byzantins inédits du onzième siècle," *Art Studies*, V (Cambridge, 1927), 9; "damp folds" occur in the pictures of Mark and Luke (Diehl, figs. 4, 5). About the date: Lasareff in *Art Bulletin*, XVII (1935), 209, note 47.

of the articulated body through Byzantine works and learned from them how to show the body beneath the garments.

Any figure from the wall paintings in Saint-Savin (Fig. 17), which represent the style preceding the international style, illustrates, when compared with contemporary Byzantine figures (Fig. 18),<sup>14</sup> to what extent the Byzantine artist of the eleventh century was superior in rendering the



17. SAINT-SAVIN, GOD BLESSING NOAH



18. DAPHNI, PROPHET

physical aspects of the human figure: The garments clearly show the limbs, the essential joints, the whole articulation of the body, which as a self-contained, solid, and round substance determines the motifs of the folds. One strikes upon the essential difference when one realizes that everything has been done to lend a definitely statuesque character to the Byzantine figure. Having traced back the interest in the problem of the articulated body to this point, we have no difficulty in finding out where the ultimate sources are, both of the concept of the human figure from which the interest in the articulated body results, and of the means to materialize it in the work of art. They are a legacy from classical antiquity

<sup>14</sup> Prophet from the Katholikon of Daphni. See Gabriel Millet, *Le Monastère de Daphni* (Paris, 1899). Diez-Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece* (1931), p. 109 (about 1080).

which survived in Byzantine art. From classic models have been derived not only the general notion underlying the statuesque interpretation of the figure but also all the individual motifs which are used to show the articulated body through the garments; they are nothing but derivations, variations, schematizations of motifs developed as early as the Hellenistic period of Greek sculpture.

The task of following up the vicissitudes of this legacy through the history of earlier Byzantine art is too complex to be attempted in a brief sketch, nor is it possible to discuss through what channels the currents springing from this source began to invade first Italian and a little later the art of the other European countries. For our purpose it is enough to have pointed out the essential character of the new tendencies which radically changed the aspect of Romanesque painting in the beginning of the twelfth century, to have shown that the international style represents a wave of Byzantine influence which swept over most of western Europe, and to have traced its ultimate source back to classical antiquity.

To illustrate the connections I selected a category of features which are easy to isolate and to compare: the motifs used by the artists to articulate and model garments. How fundamental the changes are which result from the impact of the Byzantine influence would become evident in its full extent only if we included in our considerations other aspects of pictorial representation. We should see that the manner in which figures are seated, in which they stand and walk, changes; that the aim and end of their actions reflect a vitality and clarity of purpose unknown in earlier art. It is, in fact, a new type of human being which Byzantine art has helped to create in occidental painting.

However, the immense importance which the wave of Byzantine influence had for the development of western mediaeval art cannot be fully apprehended if we restrict ourselves to wall paintings and miniatures in tracing its spread and impact. Romanesque sculpture was not less affected by it than painting, as at least one example may illustrate.

The Christ figure from the Vézelay tympanum (Fig. 19) brings us back to Burgundy. Its date is probably about 1130; it is later than the wall paintings of Berzé-la-Ville. Here in certain parts of the portal an audacious and imaginative sculptor has worked systematically and on a grand scale on a task which before him had been tried out only in sporadic experiments. He renders the solidity and roundness of the human figure by cutting the modeling into the three faces of the huge square blocks of stone. What begins to emerge in Romanesque sculpture is the emancipation of monumental statuary from the supremacy of the plane of relief. In

his composition the Vézelay sculptor takes care not to destroy entirely the imaginary plane which prevents the figures from breaking away from the ground. But they seem to struggle against the time-honored principle acknowledged and respected by Romanesque sculpture from its beginnings. How strange, for instance, the position of Christ: precariously perched upon the edge of his throne, his head and chest are in frontal view, while



19. VÉZELAY, CHRIST

his legs are turned to one side in an almost vehement turn which tightens the wide garment around the legs and makes the hems whirl in zigzag waves as though blown up by a sudden blast of wind.

Have we not seen a similar figure before? A similar turn of the body into an oblique position, the zigzag folds, even the heavy fold which comes across the thigh like a gush of water? It is the figure type to which the Decius in Berzé-la-Ville belongs (Fig. 10). The sculptured figure has not the same degree of bodily existence as the painted one, and among the motifs of the garment are some belonging to a category which the painter had already outgrown. Painting is ahead of sculpture, it would seem, but the sculptor, working ten to twenty years later, is seized by the same wave of a new art which has carried the painter away from the paths of tradition. To materialize the new ideas was more difficult in

sculpture than in painting. It was the great master of Chartres who, about 1145, was the first to create in sculpture figures which clearly show the articulated body under and through the garments (Fig. 20).

The contribution of Byzantine art to the formation of the new style which manifests itself in the great west portals of Saint-Denis and Chartres is a subject which never has been studied, though it promises to shed an



20. CHARTRES, CHRIST

unsuspected light on one of the great mysteries in the history of mediaeval art. It is among the earliest efforts — at Saint-Denis, at the Porte Ste. Anne in Paris, and in the periphery of the head master of Chartres, among his collaborators and pupils — that we find the clearest evidence of the importance of the international style for the formation of a new style in sculpture.

To give one example (Figs. 21, 22, and 23): The angel from the portal of the Virgin at Chartres, not the work of the head master but of one of his collaborators, is almost identical with figures in manuscripts of the Salzburg school and in Byzantine miniatures. The Chartres sculptor, here and in other instances, is using a figure type furnished to him by the international style. The influence upon the head master himself is less obvious, more subtle, and, where his contact with earlier models is traceable, his originality and

independence in making use of them shine the more splendidly. As dough begins to rise when yeast has been added to it, so the iconographical formulas and the handling of forms derived from the international style appear to be imbued with a new vigor and a new meaning resulting from what appears to be the contribution of one great, creative individual. So far as his relation to the art of the past is concerned, his great achievement results



21. ROME, VAT. GRAEC.  
1162, ANGEL



22. ADMONT, SALZBURG  
BIBLE, GOD



23. CHARTRES, ANGEL

from the deliberation with which he concentrates upon the problem of the articulated figure. This being his primary intent, he submits the international Byzantine style to a radical simplification and intensification announcing the growth of a new human ideal. He embodies and he overcomes the tradition of the international style.

But Byzantine art has been more to the occidental artist than just a repertory of devices to show the articulated body beneath its garments. There is a more essential, more fundamental quality in Byzantine art which began to be discerned, admired, and assimilated in the West during the first half of the twelfth century.

Let us turn back to Saint-Savin once more.

The figures in Saint-Savin have faces (Fig. 24) which are like masks, like shells, suggestive of some vague, undefined, unarticulated inner life, a group of bodiless ghosts. In Berzé (Fig. 25) the main parts of the face are modeled in gradual transitions; each head has volume, is rounded, represents an individual unit. Physical forms and animation are a good deal more intimately connected with each other, and thus a spark of a new life begins to illuminate the features.

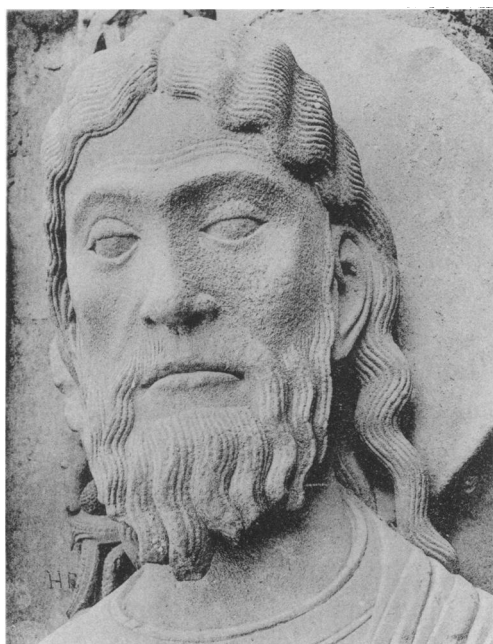
The head of Christ in Vézelay (Fig. 27) represents in sculpture the same phase as Berzé: indication and modeling of the facial parts are similar and result in the same vague expression of animation; as in Berzé,



24. SAINT-SAVIN, HEADS



25. BERZÉ-LA-VILLE, HEADS



26. CHARTRES, HEAD



27. VÉZELAY, HEAD OF CHRIST

however, the dualism of physical shell and animating force prevails. Only when we turn to a head by the great master of Chartres (Fig. 26) are we confronted with a face in which inner life, animation, actually permeates the countenance. Christ in Vézelay seems to be gazing into an indefinite

distance; there is no bridge between him and the world of the beholder; the cleavage between the physical and the spiritual world is too wide to allow an approach. But in Chartres it is different. Here an individual is staring at you, with a slight twist of the face, a little superciliously apparently – with a very personal expression at all events, flesh and blood like ourselves and somebody to be talked to.

Again Byzantine art has been instrumental in working this change. The



28. ISTANBUL, ST. SOPHIA, HEAD OF CHRIST

concept of the animated figure – in addition to that of the articulated body – is the other and the more fundamental contribution which the western world received from Byzantine art, which in turn had inherited it as another legacy from classical antiquity.

The mosaic head of Christ in St. Sophia at Constantinople (Fig. 28), dating from about 900,<sup>15</sup> may show that in the center of Byzantine culture, at least, the concept of the human figure as an integration of body and spirit was alive at a time when in northern Europe a dualistic interpretation was all-powerful and dominant.

Thus, about the middle of the twelfth century two revolutionary ideas – that of the articulated body and that of the animated figure – are carried by the crest of the Byzantine tidal wave to northern France, where a

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Whittemore, *The Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul. Preliminary report* (1933).



great creative genius makes them the cornerstones of a new style, the Gothic.

It is interesting to relate these developments in the Fine Arts to the adventures in thought of the period. Again I must be satisfied with giving you mere hints at considerations which to expound here would take too much time. Prospecting for analogies in contemporary writings, one is struck by the fact that towards the middle of the twelfth century, all of a sudden, some of the best minds in France become interested in problems of psychology. What elements of classical psychology could be incorporated in Early Christian philosophy had been transmitted to the Middle Ages by Augustine and Boethius. The writers of the centuries which followed contributed little, if anything, to this fundamental stock of ideas. The last monograph on psychology had thus been written almost three hundred years before,<sup>16</sup> when in the beginning of the twelfth century William of Conches confesses himself puzzled by the mystery of the relation between body and spirit, and in his *Dragmaticon Philosophiae* heralds the awakening of a new interest in psychological problems.

Soon the body-spirit problem becomes a central issue in the speculations and writings of the time, as a chronological list of the books in which the topic is discussed separately may show:

- Before 1136 Hugh of St. Victor: About the union of body and spirit
- Before 1148 William of St. Thierry: Two books about the nature of body and soul
- About 1162 Isaac of Stella: About the soul
- About 1162 Alcher of Clairvaux: About spirit and soul

This is not the place to discuss the differences between these authors and to point out the development in their thought. For our purpose it is more important to emphasize what they have in common: it is the effort to get beyond the radical dualism and antagonism of body and spirit in Augustine's psychology. They speculate on a system of gradations which would connect the two with each other. Isaac of Stella, for instance, distinguishes three grades in the nature of the soul, the lowest of which is almost corporeal, without being actually body, and thus has the property of uniting with the body.

The close parallel between the development of thought and of art is obvious and would become more evident if we could extend our considerations and comparisons to the beginning of the following century. In Alfredus Anglicus' physio-psychological treatise "On the movement of the heart," the Augustinian dualism has been all but superseded by a philo-

<sup>16</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *De Anima*, written in 855 or 856.

sophical monism which corresponds in time and concept to the statuary of the earlier thirteenth century, when the animation restricted in Chartres to the countenance permeates the whole figure.<sup>17</sup>

The parallel can be pushed still further. At the bottom of the speculations about psychological problems which led to such fundamental changes in mediaeval thought is an agent which had been unknown before. An essential part of classic knowledge which had not been accepted by the earlier Latin thinkers began to be accessible to western Europe only at the end of the eleventh century, when, coincident with the revival of Aristotelian studies in Byzantium,<sup>18</sup> Greek and Arabian writings on science, on natural history, on the human being, were translated into Latin. Their influence results in new ideas, new approaches, new methods, and accounts for the concentration on psychological problems towards the middle of the twelfth century.

From these facts, with which any student of the history of mediaeval philosophy and science is familiar, we conclude not only that the lines of progress in psychological studies and in the rendering of animation in art are parallel, but that they originate from the same source: Byzantium, the guardian of legacies from classical antiquity which had not survived in the Occident.

In this sketch I have attempted to show how essential the Byzantine contribution to the genesis of Gothic art and philosophy was. In the rapid process of growth that follows, however, the last traces of the Byzantine influence very soon disappear in France, so complete is its assimilation and integration in both the scholastic system in philosophy and the Gothic style in art.

In other countries it is different. There the Byzantine element remains a ferment that contributes to the forces of resistance which for a long time prevent the spreading of Gothic forms beyond the region of northern France. Italy, in closest contact with eastern Europe, proves to be particularly susceptible to Byzantine influence, and in the second half of the thirteenth century new achievements in Byzantine art are embraced by Italian artists with such eagerness that we are justified in speaking of another tidal wave of Byzantine influence which this time affects only Italy. And once more an evolutionary process takes place, similar to that

<sup>17</sup> Alfred wrote his book about the year 1210, as Clemens Baeumker points out in the preface to his new edition (*Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, XXIII, 1-2, Münster, 1923).

<sup>18</sup> See M. Grabmann, *Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode*, II (Freiburg, 1911), 73-76.

from which Gothic art had sprung in the middle of the twelfth century. As the flood threatens to submerge what is left of an independent Italian art, the foundations of a new national style are created by Cavallini, Duccio, and Giotto. Essential elements of this art, the new sense of monumentality, of actuality, and of rhythm, seem to be of Byzantine origin.<sup>19</sup> Resulting in a revival of fundamental classic principles in art as well as thought, this last impact of Byzantine influence on the West set free forces which eventually were to disintegrate and to destroy the structure of the mediaeval world.

<sup>19</sup> An attempt to coördinate our views of Italian art with the results of recent research on Byzantine art has been made by Paul Muratoff: *La Peinture byzantine* (Paris, 1935).