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The Fall of Nebuchadnezzar in Romanesque sculpture (Airvault, Moissac, Bourg-Argental, Foussais)

The carvings on a plinth in the porch of Saint-Pierre at Airvault (Poitou, Deux-Sèvres) are unusual in many ways, not the least for the themes they represent (figs. 1 – 3 and 11). Identifying these themes and tracing their history is the main objective of the present paper.

Nothing is known about the date of these carvings, but the porch to which they belong constitutes a later addition to the church, and the latter was consecrated in 1100 and probably completed around that time[1]. On the other hand, the porch still predates the third quarter of the twelfth century, when its façade was reworked with a rather untidy layering of arches[2]. A more precise dating depends on the assessment of style, especially of the capitals inside the porch, and does not come within the scope of the present study.

The plinth in question belongs to a pier on the south side of the ground floor, and is the only one of its kind in the whole church. Other plinths in the porch were replaced during the restoration, at the beginning of this century, and there is no evidence to show whether or not they carried any sculpture[3]. Carved plinths are rare in Poitou, and the idea might have come from the adjacent region of Berry. Examples can be found in the rotunda of Neuvy-Saint-Sepulchre, dating from the eleventh century[4]. Some of the artists who produced sculpture for the nave of Airvault seem indeed to have come from Berry[5], but their work is earlier, and also totally different from the reliefs in the porch.

Each of the four sides of the plinth carries one relief, representing a figure or an animal, and measuring about 35 × 94 cm. Each side is framed by a raised rim, damaged in places and completely missing at the top which appears to have been trimmed. The backs or heads of the figures and animals were shortened by about 4 cm which, together with 3 cm of frame, represent the minimal amount of trimming. The rest of the plinth might have always consisted in a separate stone, and was repaired and partly replaced, perhaps more than once[6]. On the whole, the state of preservation is rather poor.

Former identifications of three of the carved themes do not pose any particular problems. A lion can be made out on the east side (Fig. 1, *cf.* 4); the head (on the left) and back are badly eroded, but the general outline as well as details of the body and the ferocious paws are quite clear. On the west side, an ox is much better preserved (Fig. 3, *cf.* 6). The head, (on the right), had indeed been broken off, but the other details are clear; the characteristic body, the hind thigh with traces of the leg, a tail which ends in a thick brush, both front legs (one in a crouching position) including a complete hoof, and the neck, with a thick fold of skin. On the

[1] On the relations between the porch and the nave see B. W. Stoddard, *The Sculpture from the Abbey of Saint-Pierre at Airvault (Deux-Sèvres)* (New York Univ. Ph. D., 1970), University Microfilm International, Ann Arbor 1981, 17–19. For the dating of the church see A. Tcherikover, ›Some Observations on Sculpture at Airvault‹, *Gesta*, XXIV/2, 1985.

[2] This latter date is suggested by the sculpted capitals of the façade, which are reminiscent of those in the eastern part of Poitiers Cathedral.

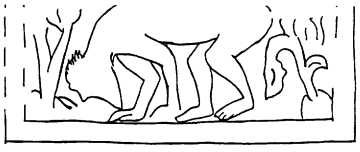
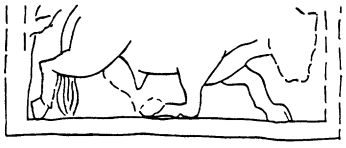
[3] The restoration of the church began about 1886. The relevant documents are preserved in the *Archives des Monuments Historiques* in Paris (Deux-Sèvres, Airvault). For the porch, there is a report and an estimate of costs, by the architect H. Deverin, both dating from 1916. There is no mention of sculpture. Some fragments unearthed in the cloister might have belonged to similar plinths, see Stoddard, *op. cit.*, 60.

[4] J. Favière, *Berry Roman*, Zodiaque series, 1970, fig. 49.

[5] For a summary of the literature on this subject see Tcherikover, *ibid.*

[6] The restorer architect noted (a report of 1916, see note 3) cracks and plaster repairs. He recommended restoration of about half the plinth.

1. Airvault (Deux-Sèvres), porch, carved plinth, lion
2. *Ibid.*, Nebuchadnezzar
3. *Ibid.*, ox

4. *Ibid.*, reconstruction drawing of the lion. – 5. *Ibid.*, reconstruction drawing of Nebuchadnezzar
6. *Ibid.*, reconstruction drawing of the ox

south side there is an angel or a Seraphim[7] (fig. 11, *cf.* 12).

The fourth relief, on the north side, is more problematic. Like two of the other reliefs, it presents some creature moving on all fours and, as in the case of the ox, a part of the back has been lost by trimming (fig. 2, *cf.* 5). The limbs are, however, relatively well preserved, and they are obviously human. Legs, feet, arms and hands can be made out clearly. The near foot and the far hand are particularly well preserved, and the bent at the knees and elbows is characteristic of humans rather than of animals. The head is bowed down and, though badly damaged, it still preserves some disheveled tufts of hair at the front.

This human provides the clue for an identification of three of the reliefs as one iconographical scheme. He is Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon who, according to chapter IV in the Book of Daniel, was cast out of human society and made to eat grass like oxen. The reliefs seem to follow an established pictorial tradition of this story, as represented by a drawing in the Catalan *Roda Bible*, of the eleventh century[8]. If the panels which contain Nebuchadnezzar, the ox and the lion could be seen simultaneously, it would become clear that the general scheme is very close to that in the *Roda Bible*, though reversed from left to right (fig. 7, *cf.* 4 – 6). Such reversals characterize some other transmitted motifs in Romanesque art, and may have something to do with a technique of copying[9]. In both representations, the king is flanked by an ox and a lion[10], and some vegetal motifs complete the composition. Even the bush behind Nebuchadnezzar, which bows a leafy branch, is the same in both works. In both, the king's body is bent low over his thighs so that his behind is thrust far back, and he has a pointed beard. The latter feature lost all surface detail at Airvault, through bad erosion, and the pointed shape could alternatively represent the end of a long strand of hair.

Several problems arise from this comparison; firstly, how to explain the apparent connection between the two works; and secondly, is the Airvault theme simply narrative, as in the manuscript, or does it have other meanings.

The first problem touches on what is known about Romanesque pictorial cycles of the book of Daniel, and in particular of the story which concerns us here. To facilitate further reference, the main points of this story are here set out: Nebuchadnezzar makes an announcement and invites interpretations for a dream (Vulgate, Daniel III:98 – IV:6, English Authorised Version IV: 1–9). In this dream he saw a magnificent tree, which sheltered the whole world and nourished all animals and birds. A Holy One descended from heaven and ordered the tree to be cut down. So it will remain for seven seasons, but a stump of its roots will survive (IV: 7 – 14; AV. 10 – 17). Daniel interprets the dream, identifying the tree with the

[7] On the identification of these three themes – *cf.* Stoddard, *ibid.*

[8] Paris, Bib.Nat. MS Lat. 6, fol 65v. On this manuscript see most recently F. Avril and others, *Manuscrits enluminés de la peninsule ibérique* (Manuscrits enluminés de la Bibliothèque Nationale), Paris 1982, 29–30, and no. 36, 31–43; M. Delcor, ›Le scriptorium de Ripoll et son rayonnement culturel: état de la question‹, *Cahiers de Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa*, V, 1974, 45–64, esp. 53–5; P. K. Klein, ›Date et scriptorium de la Bible de Roda, état des recherches‹, *ibid.*, III, 1972, 91–102.

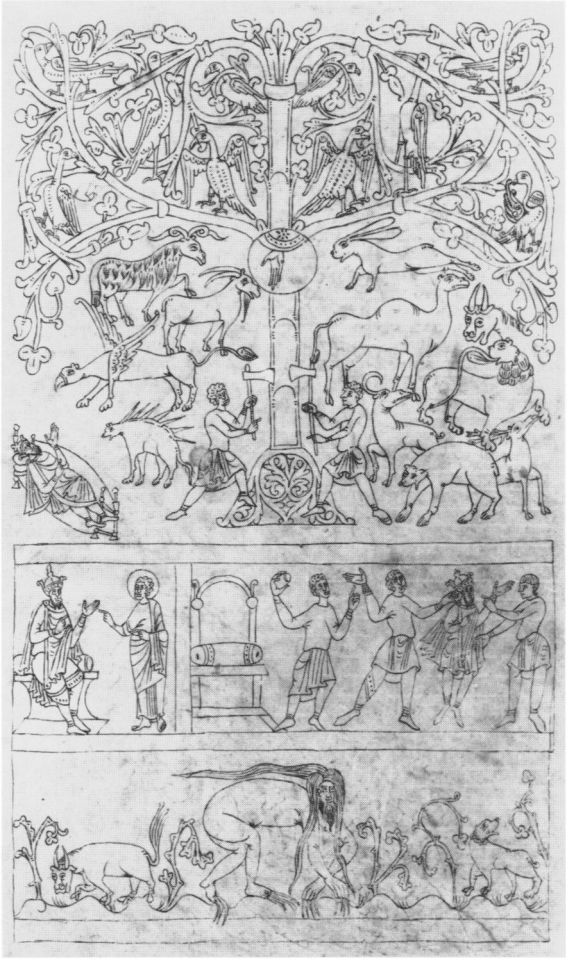
[9] Another example at Airvault itself: the riders depicted on one capital in the nave are a reversed adaptation of the Apocalyptic riders carved on a capital in the porch of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire; see Tcherikover, *ibid.*

[10] In the *Roda Bible* picture, the animal on the king's right is not a dog, as suggested before (see A. Heimann, ›The Master of Gargilesse‹, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XLII, 1979, 47–64, esp. 52–3) but a lion, compare the lions of Daniel's den on fol. 66v of the *Roda Bible*.

king and its destruction with the king's fall. Nebuchadnezzar will be driven from men, live with animals and eat grass as an ox for seven seasons, until he acknowledges God as the supreme King. Then he will be reinstated (IV: 15 – 23; AV. 18 – 26). The punishmend may be averted by showing mercy to the poor (IV: 24; AV. 27), but it eventually catches up with Nebuchadnezzar at the moment he expresses pride in his might as the king of great Babylon. He becomes like a beast, with overgrown hair and nails, but eventually he repents and is reinstated (IV: 25 – 34, AV. 28 – 37). The representation in the *Roda Bible* follows this narrative more or less faithfully, though it does not reach the final repentence and reinstatement. The scenes include the Dream of the Tree, Daniel interprets the dream, Nebuchadnezzar driven from his throne, and Nebuchadnezzar's Fall.

Clearly, three of the Airvault reliefs depict an extract from a cycle like that of the *Roda Bible*. Isolated scenes from the book of Daniel occur in Spain before the *Roda Bible*, examples of the tenth century include a Bible and several manuscripts of the commentary of Beatus on the Apocalypse. The latter contain such scenes in the context of Jerome's commentary on Daniel, which was usually added to the text of Beatus. There was, therefore, a tradition of Daniel illustrations in Spain, and the question arises whether this tradition lies at the background of comparable motifs elsewhere, such as at Airvault[11]. A central issue here is whether the *Roda* picture derives from Spanish precedents, or whether, together with Airvault, it represents a different source.

The problems concerning the sources of the *Roda Bible* are well beyond the subject treated here[12], but some observations may nevertheless be offered on the picture in question. Earlier Spanish examples include a famous picture in the *Morgan Beatus*, which presents a conflation of the dream with the Fall of Nebuchadnezzar. The king, accompanied by an ox, sits under the Tree and eats a plant[13], a composition which has no followers. The situation is different with the *León Bible* of 960, where the Dream is represented by a tree flanked by an ox and a lion[14], and this composition appears



7. Paris, Bib. Nat., MS Lat. 6, *The Roda Bible*, fol. 65v

to have had some impact on future developments. The Tree of the *Roda Bible*, as noted by Neuss, might have derived from a source similar to the *León Bible*[15].

[11] As suggested in E. Mâle, *Religious Art in France, The Twelfth Century*, Princeton 1978 (first published in Paris, 1922), 14–15; *cf.* Heimann, *ibid.*

[12] See note 8, and also W. Neuss, *Die katalanische Bibelillustration um die Wende des ersten Jahrtausends und die altspanische Buchmalerei*, Bonn und Leipzig 1922, esp. 10–15 and 89–94.

[13] New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 644, fol. 252v, see J.Dominguez Bordona, *Spanish Illumination*, New York 1930, Vol. I, Pl. 10.

[14] León, Colegiata de San Isidoro, Cod. 2, fol. 319v, see note 17.

[15] Neuss, *op. cit.*, 91.

The ox and the lion are of particular interest here, since they occur also at Airvault. In the *Roda* picture they appear twice, the first time side by side to the right of the Tree and among other animals, and the second time as Nebuchadnezzar's companions in the wilderness. The first lion lifts one paw in a heraldic manner, as in the ealier *León Bible*, though it was moved to the other side of the Tree and its head turned back. The second lion, and the accompanying ox, could have also derived from something similar to the *León* Scheme, but this possibility gives rise to more problems than it solves. If, for instance, the second pair of animals derives from such source, the occurrence of the first pair seems odd. The same difficulty exists if it is assumed that an older Daniel cycle served as a model for both the *León* and the *Roda* pictures, and that this model was followed closely in the later work but abbreviated in the earlier one by conflating two scenes[16]. Moreover, the *León* picture could not have resulted from such a conflation, because it is, apparently, a precise adaptation of an Early Christian motif[17]. It seems, therefore, more likely, that the animals in Nebuchadnezzar's Fall, and perhaps the whole scene, are an addition to the older Spanish theme.

The *Roda* scheme is not, therefore, tightly connected to Spanish precedents, and additional models might have been used. Here it may be noted that a very extensive Daniel cycle was planned (though never executed) around the year 1000 for the Anglo-Saxon manuscript of ›Caedmon‹ metrical paraphrases on Genesis, Exodus and Daniel, and that cycle was perhaps inspired by some lost north French model[18]. Indeed, some Daniel cycle, similar to that of the *Roda Bible*, was known by the eleventh century in northern France; motifs which must have derived from such a cycle exist in an eleventh century manuscript from Mont-Saint-Michel[19]. It has also been suggested that the style of the *Roda Bible* was inspired by works of north French origin[20]. It may, therefore, be asked whether some of the sources used in the Tree cycle of the *Roda Bible* could not have originated in France, perhaps in Northern France, rather than in Spain.

Airvault, situated not very far south of the Loire, provides additional evidence on this subject. Work of the late eleventh century in this monument, as well as work of the early twelfth century at neighbouring Saint-Jouin-de-Marnes, was subject to influences which originated north of the Loire, and some of the sculpture in the porch of Airvault, on the capitals, betrays awareness of sculpture like that at Saint-Jouin[21]. Paintings in manuscripts of this period also testify to close contacts between Poitou and the regions north of the Loire[22]. There is, therefore, a distinct possibility that also the reliefs on the Airvault plinth reflect a northern model. In other words, Airvault does not necessarily represent the propagation of Spanish sources in France. On the contrary, it contributes to the very fragmentary evidence, which is convincing only when taken as a whole, for the possible northern origins of some sources of the *Roda Bible*.

There are so very few examples of scenes relating

[16] Other reasons led Neuss to assume a common source for the *Roda Bible* and earlier Beatus manuscripts, see *ibid.* 93.

[17] The motif of a tree flanked by an ox and a lion apparently goes back to Early Christian representations of Isaiah's Peaceable Kingdom, adapted, in their turn, from Late Antique calendar pictures; see J. Williams, ›The Beatus Commentaries and Spanish Bible Illustrations‹, *Actas del simposio para el estudio de los codices del ›comentario al apocalipsis‹ de Beato de Liebana*, 1978, 201–19, esp. 211–12.

[18] P. J. Lucas, ›On the Blank Daniel Cycle in MS Junius 11‹, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XLII, 1979, 207–13, esp. 213.

[19] Bordeaux, Bib. Mun. MS 1, fols. 207v and 240v; see J. J. G. Alexander, *Norman Illumination at Mont Saint Michel*, Oxford 1970, 194–97 and Pls. 51d, e; 52a, b. This author assumes, however, a model from Spain or Southern France for the Norman works.

[20] C. R. Dodwell, *Painting in Europe, 800–1200*, Harmondsworth 1971, 116–17.

[21] On the eleventh century work at Airvault see Tcherikover, *op. cit.* On Saint-Jouin see *idem*, ›La façade occidentale de l'église abbatiale de Saint-Jouin-de-Marnes‹, *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, XXVIII, 1985, 361–83. On the capitals of the porch of Airvault see *idem.*, *Saint-Jouin-de-Marnes and the Development of Romanesque Sculpture in Poitou*, Ph. D. thesis, Univ. of London, 1982, 95–7.

[22] E. Burin, ›Réflexions sur quelques aspects de l'enluminure dans l'Ouest de la France au XIIe siècle‹, *Bulletin Monumental*, CXLIII, 1985, 209–25.

to these sources, that their history cannot be traced. Further examination of the *Roda* picture suggests, however, that it was an original creation of the Latin West. A ninth century Byzantine representation of the scene is indeed the earliest known example[23], but it is fundamentally different from that in the *Roda Bible*. In the latter, Nebuchadnezzar's hair floats in long strands, and his body is smooth, whereas in the former, his hair forms a full, but shorter, mane, and his body is covered by very short fur. The variation is probably due to differences between the Vulgate and the Septuagint, the first likening Nebuchadnezzar's hair to that of eagles (i.e. feathers or wings) whereas the second compares it to that of a lion (IV:30; AV.33)[24].

Among the known examples of the scene in Romanesque sculpture, Airvault is unique in belonging to the same lineage as the *Roda Bible*. In order to appreciate its place in the development of French Romanesque iconography, something must be said on other traditions in existence by the twelfth century. One such tradition comes into the fore on a double capital in the cloister of Moissac. It is a narrative tradition, expressed in a cycle of four scenes, but the order of the narrative presents some problems.

There is one scene for each face of the capital, and an abbreviated version of verses 27 – 29 (AV. 30 – 32) runs around the impost. The inscription is continuous, and the sculpted themes do not correspond precisely to the text immediately above them. In the table below, sequence (a) represents the current interpretation of the cycle, based on the assumption that it begins on the same side as the inscription[25]. A possibility that this is not so, or else that the impost is reversed, is expressed in sequence (b).

inscription	*sequence (a)*	*sequence (b)*
1. *Non(n)e haec est babilon magna quam* (Is not this great Babylon that)	City of Babylon	Neb. enthroned
2. *ego hedificavi; tibi dicitur nabuchodonosor* (I have built; To you it is spoken, Nebuchadnezzar)	Neb. Fall	Daniel interprets
3. *rex regnum tuum transit a te* (the king, the kingdom is departed from you.)	Neb. enthroned (reinstated?)	City of Babylon
4. *fenum ut bos comedes et septem tempora mutabuntur super te* (You shall eat grass as an ox, and seven times shall pass over you).	Daniels interprets	Neb. Fall

In both sequences, the correspondence between picture and text is insufficient, and was perhaps never intended. Sequence (b), however, is in itself more logical. At first, the enthroned Nebuchadnezzar announces his dream by presenting a scroll inscribed with his name[26]. In the story, the announcement indeed begins ›Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people...‹ (III:98; AV. IV:1). An enthroned king is here fitting, because the announcement continues: »I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house and flourishing in my palace« (IV:1; AV. 4), and this verse has another version, reading »upon my throne« for »in my palace«[27]. In the next

[23] Paris, Bib. Nat. MS Gr. 923, fol. 259, see K. Weitzmann, *The Miniatures of the Sacra Parallela*, Princeton 1979, 158 and Pl. LXXXV, fig. 390.

[24] A variation on the Byzantine type appears in a Spanish Bible of the twelfth century, Amiens, Bib. Mun. MS Lat. 108, fol. 136, see F. Bucher, *The Pamplona Bibles*, New Haven and London 1970, vol. II, Pl. 317.

[25] The inscription and sequence (a) are taken from R. Favreau and J. Michaud, *Corpus des inscriptions de la France Médiévale* Vol. VIII (Ariège, Haute-Garonne, Hautes-Pyrénées, Tarn-et-Garonne), Paris 1982, no. 15, 141–42.

8. Moissac (Tarn-et-Garonne), cloister capital

scene, Daniel interprets the Dream. Later, Nebuchadnezzar becomes excessively proud of his city, and since this pride was the immediate cause of his fall, the city is represented. Finally, the punishment is shown in conflation with the Dream of the Tree (fig. 8), in order to hint at the fulfilment of Daniel's interpretation, shown on the opposite side of the capital.

The Moissac cycle contains a few ideas, such as the conflation of the Tree with the Fall, which may suggest awareness of Spanish precedents like the *Morgan Beatus*. This can be expected in a monument situated in the south of France[28]. By the date of the Moissac cloister, the end of the eleventh century, Spanish models included the *Roda Bible*, with the representation of the fallen king as a wild man running on all fours, his long strands of hair reaching the ground. This indeed is his appearance at Moissac, but the cycle here is otherwise different. Even the only other scene it shares with the *Roda Bible*, Daniel interprets, reveals important differences. In the Bible, Daniel addresses Nebuchadnezzar directly, whereas at Moissac he turns away, to express his reluctance to inform the king of his fate (IV:16; AV. 19)[29].

Other details are, to my knowledge, peculiar to Moissac, for instance Nebuchadnezzar's Announcement and the representation of the City of Babylon in this context. Moissac differs from the other examples described above also in that the fallen Nebuchadnezzar, though naked, wears a crown, to hint at his future reinstatement. Whether this motif was invented in southern France or whether it derives from some earlier source, cannot be determined; the Moissac capital is the earliest known example, and later ones include Bourg-Argental (Loire) and Gargilesse

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] On the origins and the significance of the two versions see Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, Translated by Gleason L. Archer, Grand Rapids 1958, chapter IV, verse 1 (47); *cf. Patrologia Latina*, vol. XXV, col. 513. See also an illustration in a Beatus manuscript, London, B. L. Add. 11695, fol. 232v, illustrated in J. Williams, *Early Spanish Manuscript Illumination*, London 1977, Pl. 39.

[28] Mâle, *op. cit.*, 10–14.

[29] M. Schapiro explained the gesture of this figure on pure stylistic grounds; see ›The Romanesque Sculpture of Moissac, I‹, in this author's collection of articles under the title *Romanesque Art*, 131–200, esp. 187–8.

(Indre), which were probably inspired by the art of the south[30].

It can be concluded that cycles of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Tree formulated during the eleventh century in Spain and Southern France by combining different sources. Airvault represents a late derivation from one of these sources, apparently northern. Other French examples derive from the mature southern scheme, as represented by Moissac. Both types underwent, however, similar developments in the twelfth century, as will be shown shortly.

At Moissac, towards the end of the eleventh century, the scene occurs within a narrative cycle. On the other hand, at Airvault, Bourg-Argental and Gargilesse, all of the twelfth century, it is extracted from the cycle and presented on its own or in a different context. The question arises whether in the process of being detached from the cycle it was imbued with additional meanings.

The story appears to have evoked in the Medieval mind a whole series of moralisations, allegories and legends. Symbolism concerning the Ages of the World is invited by the identification of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon with the first of the Four Kingdoms in Daniel's prophecy (Daniel VII), and also by speculation on the meaning of the ›seven seasons‹ Nebuchadnezzar lived as beast, and their relevance for computations of the advent of Antichrist[31]. On another level, the story was moralised with reference to Virtues and Vices, we have seen that the author of the Moissac cycle allocated space to the City of Babylon, in order to emphasize Nebuchadnezzar's sin of Pride. The inscription was selected accordingly from the relevant verses, it opens with the king's boastful words, and concludes with the pronouncement of the verdict.

The punishment of Pride is an obvious moralisation of Nebuchadnezzar's Fall. References to the Tree of the Dream as a symbol of Pride can be found from Jerome in the fourth century to Albert the Great in the thirteenth[32]. Virtue, however, is also implied in the story[33], and Jerome opposes Nebuchadnezzar's pride to his virtue in distributing alms:

»... Nebuchadnezzar performed deeds of mercy toward the poor in accordance with Daniel's advice, and for that reason the sentence against him was delayed of execution for twelve months. But because he afterwards said boastingly: ›Is this not the great Babylon which I myself have built as a home for the king by the might of my power and the glory of my name?‹ Therefore he lost the virtue of his charitableness by reason of the wickedness of his pride«[34].

The author of the portal programme at Bourg-Argental (Loire) clearly had this idea in mind when he depicted Nebuchadnezzar's Fall and a personification of *Caritas* side by side on the same capital[35]. The allegorical nature of this composition is enhanced by its context, which includes several motifs associated with the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke XVI: 19–31). The capital with Nebuchadnezzar and *Caritas* is placed on the right hand side of the portal, above a column figure of Abraham with souls in his lap. On the opposite side, the capital carries a personification of *Avaricia* and a banquet scene, perhaps the feast of the Rich Man, whereas the column figure represents *Luxuria*, which appears in the same context also in the porch of Moissac.

A warning against pride and an advice concerning charity, further combined with motifs from the parable of the Rich Man, may be taken as a moralisation aimed at rulers. Other examples of such a moralisation, unrelated to Bourg-Argental, bring us back to western France, a capital at Foussais (Vendée) is a case in point. Here the king is fully

[30] *Cf.* Heimann, *ibid.*

[31] P. C. Mayo, ›The Crusaders Under the Palm, Allegorical Plants and Cosmic Kingship in the Liber Floridus,‹ *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, XXVII, 1973, 29–67, esp. 55–67.

[32] Jerome, *Commentary...*, 49, *cf.* P. L., vol. XXV, col. 514. Albertus Magnus, *Opera Omnia*, Paris 1893, ›Comentaria in librum Danielis‹, 513.

[33] Mayo, *op. cit.*, 56–7.

[34] Jerome, *Commentary...*, 52, *cf.* P. L., vol. XXV, col. 516–17.

[35] For an illustration see A. K. Porter, *Romanesque Sculpture of the Pilgrimage Roads*, Boston 1923, vol. VIII, Pl. 1152. Other details of the same portal are in Pls. 1149–51.

9. Foussais (Vendée), church, west front, capital

dressed and wears a ›belt of strength‹, which has a wide roundel at the back (fig. 9), and usually denotes strong, large of sinful persons[36]. At Foussais, the belt may hint at Nebuchadnezzar's former might as well as at his great sin. The same dual significance of the belt seems to have been intended, though in a different scene, on the façade of Angoulême Cathedral, where a ruler or a rich man is about to be dragged from his seat into the fire of Hell. He too wears a belt of strength (fig. 10). Perhaps no particular Vice is implied at Foussais, but that Sin in general lies at the door of the mighty. Indeed, according to Jerome, the Tree, and consequently Nebuchadnezzar, symbolises all mighty but impious men[37].

Impiety, and especially the abuse of power, are implied at Airvault by the choice of an ox and a lion as animal companions. The ox is, of course, a natural participant in this scene, and both animals might have been suggested by the text ›cum bestiis et feris erit habitatio tua‹ (IV:29). By the twelfth century, however, the addition of a lion to the ox had acquired a moral significance, in line with the moralising approach outlined above, and expressed in the *Historia Scholastica* of the Parisian master Peter Comestor (died ca. 1180). Having told the story, the Comestor concludes:

»From these it appears, as Epiphanius confirms, that [Nebuchadnezzar] did not suffer a physical transformation, but lost his reason... and was given herbs, which are suitable for human consumption. It seemed to him that he was an ox in front and a lion behind, this being a mystery concerning tyrants that at first they are given to pleasures and, being stubborn, they are subjected [as an ox] to the yoke of Belial; indeed, in the end they kill, destroy and oppress [as a lion]«[38].

This passage connects an ox and a lion with a moralisation aimed at rulers, and gives a new meaning to their inclusion in the scene. The king is said to have retained his human shape, and the reference to animal shapes is taken symbolically.

[36] G. Zarnecki, »A Romanesque Bronze Candlestick in Oslo and the Problem of the ›belts of strength‹«, in this author's collection of articles under the title *Studies in Romanesque Sculpture*, London 1979, chapter VI, esp. 54–6.

[37] See note 32.

[38] ›Ex his apparet, et Epiphanius attestatur, quod non corporis mutationem, sed mentis alienationem passus est, et ablatus est usus linguae ad loquendum, et herba data est naturae cibus humanae. Et videbatur ei quod bos esset in interioribus, et in posterioribus leo, secundum mysterium tyrannorum, qui in prima aetate voluptatibus dediti, et cervicosi jugo Belial subduntur; in fine vero interficiunt, diripiunt, et conculcant‹, *P. L.*, vol. CXCVIIII, col. 1452.

The problem indeed arises whether this Paris text, of the third quarter of the twelfth century[39], could be relevant for earlier works of art south of the Loire. The *Roda Bible* is definitely earlier, and perhaps Airvault as well. This problem is, however, less significant than it seems. Firstly, we have seen that there is a good possibility that the cycle used in the *Roda Bible* and at Airvault originated in northern France, and it could relate to literary sources similar to those known to the Comestor. The latter certainly did not invent the story, he himself refers to the fifth century Greek theologian Epiphanius as an authority. Indeed, the Comestor presents a somewhat corrupted version of Epiphanius, who expresses the moralisation much more explicitly and logically:

»In front, his head resembled an ox, but behind, the legs of a lion. In fact, such are the habits of princes in their youth, that like oxen who shook off the yoke they belong to Belial, and are aroused by the pursuit of pleasures. Finally, they turn into wild beasts, and are resolved on plundering, destroying and killing«[40].

Moreover, *the Historia Scholastica* does not represent the only occurrence of the story in the West, a slightly different version is included in a Jewish collection of legends dating from the eleventh or twelfth centuries[41]. The nature of the connections between the different versions should be left to historians of literature, and here it may only be noted that the very existence of more than one version means that the story might have been well known, and that the immediate sources of the Comestor are not all that clear. The pictorial sources may, in fact, be taken as additional evidence material, so that the *Roda Bible* stands as the earliest surviving example for the introduction of this legend in the West. This introduction was literary rather than pictorial, we have seen that the *Roda* picture is essentially Western.

The *Historia Scholastica,* the *Roda Bible* and Airvault are alike in that the animals are represented separately and allegorically, whereas the Jewish source, like Epiphanius, maintains that Nebuchadnezzar actually looked like a hybrid of the two animals. This variation should be understood in the context of Medieval debates on whether Nebuchadnezzar underwent actual metamorphosis (none of the other sources specifies the shape of the animal). Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1075 – 1129) upholds this possibility[42],

10. Angoulême (Charente), cathedral, west front, relief

[39] On the date of the *Historia Scholastica* see S. R. Daly, ›Peter Comestor: Master of Histories‹, *Speculum,* XXXII, 1957, 62–73, esp. 67.

[40] ›Tum enim anteriora illius cum capite bovis erant similia, posteriora cum pedibus leonis. Ejusdem modi quippe sunt principum in juventute mores, ut quasi boves exusso jugo ad Belial pertineant, voluptatum libidinibus perciti; postremo vero in belluas mutati, rapere, perdere, ac ferire instituant‹, *Patrologia Graeca,* Vol. XVIII, col. 403.

[41] ›Nebuchadnezzar was not very much changed in his being from other men, but only in his appearance, in his mind, and in his language. He appeared to men like an ox as far as his navel, and from his navel to his feet like a lion. He ate the herbs first which other men eat, to show that he chewed his food like an ox, and became at last like a lion, in that he killed all the wicked‹, *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel or the Hebrew Bible Historiale* (translated and edited by M. Gaster, 1899), with a prolegomenon by H. Schwarzbaum, New York 1971, 205. On the date and provenance see Prolegomenon, 1–7. For the comparison with the *Historia Scholastica* see also *Jossippon,* ed. D. Flusser, Jerusalem 1978, notes on chapter LXVI.

[42] Rupert of Deutz, ›De Victoria verbi Dei‹, chapter

11. Airvault, porch, carved plinth, angel

whereas the version adopted by the Comestor opposes it and emphasises the allegory instead. The subject seems to have aroused some interest, and it exceeds the scope of Christian writings; a similar debate is apparent in contemporary Jewish sources[43].

This variety of opinion throws light on the delicate balance between popular and scholarly attitudes to a Biblical story. In the pictorial examples mentioned above, the king remains human, and allegorical animals may be added. The other notion, that of a metamorphosised Nebuchadnezzar, would be difficult to trace in the visual arts, simply because it would hardly be possible to recognise the fallen king among other animals and monsters. Between the historical and allegorical on the one hand, and the fabulous on the other hand, a middle course seems to have been chosen by the author of a capital at Gargilesse (Indre), who associated the fallen Nebuchadnezzar with a monster, in the form of a hunting centaur[44]. He had, in fact, a literary excuse in Jerome's commentary for likening Nebuchadnezzar to a centaur. Eager to prove wrong those who claim that the story is too wondrous to have happened in reality, Jerome points out that much more incredible things are accepted by many as historical fact, for instance the existence of Scylla and Chimera, Hydra and Centaurs[45]. Thus the story of Nebuchadnezzar lends itself to combinations with the monstrous and the fabulous, towards which the Romanesque artist is inclined in any case.

In sculpture on small architectural members, such as capitals and bases, space is limited and continuity is difficult to achieve. One can expect the breakdown of a narrative system. In the examples mentioned above, this process was coupled by a penchant towards legendary details and moralisations, and the latter seem to have grown gradually at the expense of the narrative. At Moissac, the moralisation is implicit in the selection of scenes within a cycle, but at Foussais and at Bourg-Argental the cycle no longer exists and the morali-

XXIX, under the title »Nabuchodonosor non mentem tantum, verum et formam amisisse, cum fenum ut bos comederet«, *P. L.* vol. CLXIX, col. 1358.

43 Abraham Ibn-Ezra (1092–1167): ›Do not imagine that Nebuchadnezzar turned into a beast, whether male or female, because it is written only that he will live with beasts and like them eat grass... and that he will lose his reason‹, *Biblia Rabbinica,* Ibn-Ezra on Daniel IV. For the legend suggesting that Nebuchadnezzar looked like a female animal, see *Midrash Shmot Rabba,* VIII:3.

44 Heimann, *ibid.* (see note 10).

45 Jerome, *Commentary...*, 47, *cf. P. L.*, vol. XXV, col. 513.

sation is explicit. Against this background, the reliefs of Airvault also emerge as an extract from a narrative cycle, and the isolated scene was selected and presented so as to emphasize a moralisation.

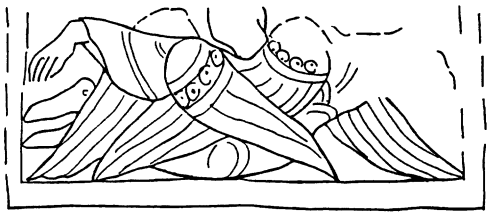
The normal moralisation of the story appears to have been aimed at rulers. This should not be surprising, since Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon is associated with the Four Kingdoms of Daniel's prophecy (Daniel VII). In the twelfth century, he may be mentioned, together with Cyrus, Darius and Alexander as an example of a good monarch[46]. Conversely, he may typify the impious ruler, as in the wall paintings of Santa Maria in Cosmedin at Rome (soon after 1123). Here he is opposed to Charlemagne, the pious ruler[47].

There remains the identification of the angel on the fourth side of the Airvault plinth. It is not clear whether the angel belongs to the same scheme, or whether it is simply a space filler, since the plinth has four sides and the scene only three motifs. There are, however, two possible connections between the scene and the angel. None is certain, and they are presented here in the way of a postscript.

The angel may represent the Holy One who descends to pronounce the doom of the Tree. An angel is represented in this context in the *Ripoll Bible*, a near contemporary and relative of the *Roda Bible*[48]. This angel may also be associated with Nebuchadnezzar's Fall, as at Moissac, where the Dream and the Fall were conflated.

In the case of Airvault, this interpretation is not entirely satisfactory, because the posture of the angel is unusual. Messenger angels always point at the object of their message (Fig. 8), but the Airvault angel bends backwards (Fig. 11, *cf.* 12), its one surviving arm extends against the direction of its flight, nearly touching the feet, and the hand droops impotently.

An alternative explanation of this angel necessitates a brief presentation of two opposing concepts of Nebuchadnezzar, parallel to the two opposing morals mentioned above. He may be viewed as fluctuating between Virtue and Vice, repeatedly sinning and repenting, and in his moments of repentence he achieves religious insight. This concept underlies the Biblical story itself, and is sometimes emphasized in Medieval commentaries[49]. Examples in art include Bourg-Argental, where Nebuchadnezzar is represented next to *Caritas* to indicate a possible course of redemption, and he wears the crown which hints at his eventual restoration through repentence. An emphasis on repentence was probably intended in all examples in which the fallen king is nevertheless crowned, beginning with Moissac at the end of the eleventh century.



12. *Airvailt*, reconstruction drawing of the angel

An opposing concept is that of Nebuchadnezzar as a damned sinner and as a type of Satan. This concept can be traced from Origen and Jerome through Isidore of Seville to Rupert of Deutz and the *Glossa Ordinaria* in the twelfth century[50]. The use of the ›belt of strength‹ at Foussais probably indicates this concept, since the same motif is associated with the damned at Angoulême. At Airvault, it is not clear which of the two concepts underlies the representation, except that Airvault belongs to the type of the *Roda Bible*, where there is no hint at Nebuchadnezzar's restoration.

[46] Orderic Vitalis (1075?–1142): ›If the Norman people would live according to the law of God and be united under the good prince, they would be as invincible as were the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar and the Persians and Medes under Cyrus and Darius and the Macedonians under Alexander...‹ *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, edited and translated by M. Chibnall, 1978, Vol. VI, 456–7.

[47] G. Matthiae, *Pittura Romana de Medioevo*, Rome 1966, vol. II, 40–42.

[48] Rome, Vatican Library, MS Lat. 5729, fol. 227v. For literature on the relations between the Roda and the Ripoll Bibles see notes 8 and 12.

[49] P. B. R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children, Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature*, New Haven and London 1974, 68–76. In this passage, note in particular the numerous references to Richard of Saint-Victor (d. 1173).

[50] *Ibid.*, 63–4, 90.

In line with this latter concept, Nebuchadnezzar is normally likened more specifically to the fallen angel Lucifer, because both fell through pride[51]. The Airvault angel could, therefore, represent the falling Lucifer, and this identification may explain the contorted position and the drooping hand. The falling angel bends over in a similar way in the ›Caedmon‹ Genesis, although here it is appropriately turned upside down[52]. There are, however, contradictory views in the Medieval literature on the association of the Fall of Lucifer with that on Nebuchadnezzar[53], and there are no other examples in art for such an association. Moreover, the Airvault angel has four wings, and this too is unusual. There are some rare representations of archangels with four wings[54], but not of Lucifer. This interpretation of the Airvault angel must, therefore, remain hypothetical.

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] For an illustration see T. H. Ohlgern, ›Visual Language in the Old English Caedmonian Genesis‹, *Visible Language*, VI, 3, Cleveland, Ohio 1972, 253–76, Fig. 5b.

[53] The problem concerns Jerome. He accepts this typology in some places, for instance in a homily on Psalm 82 (83), see *The Homilies of Saint Jerome* (The Fathers of the Church, Catholic University of America) Washington 1964, 111–17, esp. 115. However, in his commentary on the story of Nebuchadnezzar's Fall he mentions the association of Nebuchadnezzar with the falling Lucifer, and strongly objects to it. See Jerome, *Commentary...*, 46, *cf. P. L.* vol. XXV, col. 513.

[54] For the Archangel Michael with four wings see *English Romanesque Art 1066–1200*, Exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery, London 1984, no. 229. On some capitals in the eleventh century porch of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, four-winged angels have one pair crossed over their chests, as at Airvault. One of them struggles with a devil over a soul, and may perhaps be identified as the Archangel Michael.

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