CHAPTER 2

Memory and Histories

The preservation, over hundreds of years, of objects relating to the memory of people or events is one of the distinguishing facets of European material culture. It is contingent upon the continuing existence of institutions over a long period, as was the case with medieval churches, as well as upon particular terms closely linked to the notion of 'treasure'. Indeed, memory (*memoria*) appears to have been one of the driving social forces behind the formation of medieval church treasuries. My main focus here will be 'relics', or the physical remains of and other objects associated with Christ and the saints. Along with relics, and beyond the various criteria for sainthood, objects that owed their status to a link with the past must also be considered—for instance, objects with a primarily liturgical function that were linked to the memory of founders or important benefactors who were not necessarily saints.[1] Many of these memorial objects were not particularly imposing, and could consist of fragments of bone or stone, pieces of fabric, or liquids collected in ampoules. They thus acquired meaning only from their material framework, or from performance, text, and words. This provides an excellent starting point for a study of how objects were fashioned by society and how they functioned within it: the social existence of objects, constantly renewed and sometimes enduring even beyond their physical existence, is only visible to the historian in the form of what surrounded these objects, what allowed them to exist in society, and what has itself been preserved.

These memorial objects will be approached from three perspectives. A study of documents in which relics are identified and inventoried, drawing representative examples from the whole of the Middle Ages, reveals the role of writing and text in the development of Christian memorial objects, in how they were administered within specific ecclesiastical communities, in their establishment as ordered collections, and in how they were staged. I then analyze the creation of new memorial objects, a phenomenon that has both a material and a narrative dimension, for the period spanning the eighth and thirteenth centuries through two cases central to Christian culture: the staff 'of Saint Peter', representing the authority of the Roman Church, and the 'foreskin of Christ', historically linked to debates concerning the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Finally, a detailed analysis of the presence of chess pieces and chessboards in churches shows how, especially between the tenth and twelfth centuries, the objects and images associated with a game structured around the workings of feudal society were employed within religious institutions to represent the social order itself, namely by preserving the memory of important events.

Relics and Writing

The written documents that were the closest to memorial objects in material terms, and by far the most widespread, were small labels (*cedulae*), generally made from parchment. In the case of relics, these labels played a decisive role. Relaying and reinforcing oral memory, or compensating for its defects, they enabled the identification of the relics and ultimately proved their existence. Here writing served as a technology for representing and materializing the sacred in a way that echoed the ancient tradition of funerary inscriptions.[2] Alongside these relic labels, inventories made it possible to grasp entire series of objects. Through the variety of their modes of production, the media employed, their presentation, and their usages, both relic labels and inventories attest to the active role that writing played in the invention, the treatment, and the mediation of relics—from their enclosure within altars, to the establishment of the first systematic collections during the Carolingian era, to the large-scale ostentations of the late Middle Ages.

The very possibility of accumulating memorial objects depended upon their materiality, and particularly upon the conditions under which such objects originated. Renewing older pagan practices, the devotion to martyrs that spread from the second century on soon led to the circulation of relics.[3] At first, the faithful sought out stones, dust, oil, or pieces of fabric that had touched the saints or their tombs, but once the Roman interdiction on opening tombs was lifted, they began to also collect corporal remains. Though it emerged in the Byzantine world from the fourth century on, the practice of dividing the bodies of saints and dispersing the pieces was established more slowly among Latin Christians, for whom it only seems to have become common practice in the seventh or eighth century.[4] It was also in the fourth century that pilgrims traveling to the 'Holy Land' began to collect stones from sacred sites where the life of Christ, as it was recounted in the gospels, materialized. It was in this way that the first coherent ensembles of relics were established.[5] A notable increase in transactions involving relics of all kinds occurred in the sixth century, as evidenced by the texts of the pope Gregory the Great and the bishop Gregory of Tours[6] as well as by the oldest relic labels to have been preserved. Particularly prestigious relics were exchanged among the powerful, and the first attempts to bring together numbers of relics date from the same period, as shown in the groupings established by the queens Radegund of Poitiers (*c.* 519–87) and Theodelinda of Bavaria (*c.* 573–627). Some of these ensembles ended up in churches where they still survive today—as at the two queens' respective foundations, the abbey of the Holy Cross at Poitiers and the cathedral of Saint John the Baptist at Monza.[7] The systematic collection and ordering of relics represented a new development that first manifested itself at the chapel of Charlemagne's palace around the year 800.

The First Collections: Inventories

One winter's day, around the middle of the fourth century, a young Roman officer named Martin was struck with pity for a man, numb with cold, at the gate of the city of Amiens. Using his sword, Martin cut in two his *chlamys*—the only garment he had and the symbol of his military rank and his allegiance to the empire—giving one half to the beggar. The following night, the charitable soldier dreamed that he saw Christ himself wearing the severed piece of clothing: by giving to the poor he had served the Lord (Matthew 25:40). Soon after, Martin had himself baptized and left the army, ultimately becoming bishop of Tours in 371. When he died in 397, Sulpicius Severus, a jurist who had recently converted to Christianity, recounted the episode in his *Life of Saint Martin*.[8] For a Christian king, 'Saint Martin's cloak' was the ideal emblem of power. It is mentioned for the first time in the *Books of the Miracles of Saint Martin*, composed shortly after 573 by Gregory of Tours, the bishop of the city where the saint's body lay housed in the basilica.[9] Around 650–60, it reappears at the opening of a list of relics possessed by the Merovingian kings, who had placed their power under Martin's protection.[10] The *chlamyda* mentioned by Sulpicius Severus and Gregory of Tours was by this time known as the *capella*, or 'little cloak', in an affectionate diminutive that confirmed its renown.[11] In 710, the *capella* was in the custody of the Carolingian mayors of the palace, who entrusted it to the clerics in their oratory. These clerics soon came to be known by its name: the term *capellanus* is first attested in 741 and, by 765 or more likely 775, *capella* had come to designate the 'chapel' of the royal court as a space. Though the Merovingian kings had themselves already had a private oratory, it was the Carolingian kings and in particular Pepin the Short, crowned in 751, who instrumentalized the relic to the benefit of this institution. By the end of the eighth century, the word 'chapel' designated any oratory or its furnishings, dissolving the link with Saint Martin's cloak. But Pepin's son, Charlemagne, continued and even amplified the practice of his forebears by building, and giving an exceptional significance to, his church at Aachen, in the direct vicinity of the palace that he had made his principal residence. Constructed on a circular plan modeled after the imperial churches of Hagia Sophia at Constantinople and San Vitale at Ravenna, and decorated with mosaics,[12] this collegiate church emphasized the idea of the *sacrum palatium*—analogous to that of *thesaurus ecclesiae*, developed in the same years. With the establishment of the royal 'chapel' at Aachen, relics played a new role, far beyond that of Martin's cloak under the Merovingian and the early Carolingian kings. Indeed, all evidence suggests that the ensemble of relics that Charlemagne gathered in his church marks a turning point in the history of collections. While the documents that have come down to us only allow us to approach the question indirectly, the information they provide points to something spectacular.

Two late twelfth-century manuscripts from the imperial church at Aachen appear to contain incomplete copies of an inventory of relics dating back to the time of Charlemagne (fig. 13). This copied text lists ninety-eight names and the corresponding relics, classed hierarchically. Martin is included, but his name no longer appears in the place of honor. The list concentrates on a shrine dedicated to the Virgin, and does not mention the relics enclosed in the altars. Despite some incoherencies, possibly due to changes made already in the original document, the grouping that it describes seems to have remained relatively unchanged since the time of Charlemagne, and none of the relics is attributed to a saint who lived after him.[13] The emperor acquired some of the relics in his possession as gifts, of which a number, including an important donation from the patriarch of Jerusalem, are concentrated around the year 799, suggesting that he may have solicited them. Others were probably passed down by his father, Pepin the Short, who may himself have inherited them from previous kings—meaning that they could possibly

Inventory of the relics of Saint Mary at Aachen, copy in a cartulary, end of the 12th century. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Handschriftenabteilung, Codex latinus qu324, fol. 69v

be traced back to the Merovingian rulers. Indeed, there is substantial evidence for an ensemble of relics predating Charlemagne. Excavations at the church of Aachen have brought to light the remains of a pre-Carolingian palace chapel, whose altar, integrated into the new building, was positioned over a relatively large relic niche.[14] Most significantly, a fragment of linen dating from the ninth century, probably housed in the shrine of the Virgin until 1238, still bears an inscription in ink indicating that the relics wrapped therein came from a 'shrine commissioned by Pepin'.[15] Finally, the inventory mentions the relics of a number of Gallic saints—very probably assembled before Charlemagne, who himself preferred Roman saints.[16] Charlemagne would thus have expanded and systematized an already existing practice of accumulation, eventually presenting it in the innovative form of an organized inventory.

This undertaking seems to have made a lasting impression. Charlemagne's grandson, the emperor Charles the Bald, explicitly cited the model of the church at Aachen and its 'numerous relics' in a donation charter drawn up in 877 for the royal monastery he founded at Compiègne.[17] Likewise, in 1165 the clerics of Aachen used the favorable context of Charlemagne's canonization to present the emperor Frederick Barbarossa with a forged document claiming that his Carolingian predecessor had granted them certain freedoms that they were seeking to recover. In it, Charlemagne supposedly explained: 'I gathered the relics of apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins from diverse lands and kingdoms, especially those of the Greeks, and I brought them to this holy place so that the empire would be protected through their intercession and through the forgiveness of sin'.[18] The memory of Charlemagne's collection had thus remained very present, as is also indicated by the inclusion, around 1170, of the Carolingian relic inventory in a manuscript compiled to emphasize the preeminence of the collegiate church of Aachen over all other churches of the Holy Roman Empire.[19] The original collection still retained a special status 1238: when the shrine of the Virgin was replaced, it was claimed that it had not been opened since the time of Charlemagne.[20]

To begin to get a sense of the full scope of the relic collection gathered by Charlemagne at Aachen, it is useful to identify the relics that he himself offered to other churches. The monastery at Chelles, where his sister Gisela held the role of abbess from around 770 until her death in 810, has preserved an important set of parchment labels identifying relics that appear to have been amassed between the late eighth and early ninth centuries.[21] At least some of them must have been offered by Charlemagne, but paleographical analysis shows that the collection was built up over a long period, making it difficult to reliably trace its history. Inventories, on the other hand, present series of objects at particular moments in time and arranged in a specific order, and they can be compared. At the abbey of Centula (today Saint-Riquier in Picardy), Charlemagne's son-in-law, the lay abbot Angilbert, included a particularly important example in an account of his renovation projects, written between 800 and his death in 814.[22] In this text, Angilbert first explains how he gathered the 173 relics from 'all parts of Christendom'—apparently the first use of the word *christianitas* in a spatial sense.[23] He then lists the donors, demonstrating his good relations with a range of powerful figures, cited in hierarchical order: the pope in Rome, the imperial legates in Constantinople and Jerusalem, and numerous prelates from Italy, Germany, Aquitaine, Burgundy, and Gaul. But the principal source was Charlemagne's church at Aachen, where Angilbert—like many abbots of major houses—had been the chaplain[24]: he claims to have received a fragment of each of the relics held in the *sacrum palatium*. A comparison of the

lists supports this, as the Saint-Riquier collection seems to be, at least in part, a duplication of that at Aachen[25]—just as the Marian church consecrated at Saint-Riquier in 799 was a smaller version of that constructed by Charlemagne during the same period.[26] The abbot presents the relics according to two different systems. His first list reflects their distribution among the numerous altars of the abbey. As the relics were placed to correspond as closely as possible to the dedications of the altars, which were themselves chosen to create a spatial representation of the heavenly hierarchy,[27] they were materially integrated into an elaborately arranged framework.[28] Faced with the task of assigning the relics newly assembled at Centula to different altars and reliquaries, Angilbert ensured that their placements were carefully documented, and included this information in his *libellus*. But the relics were far too numerous for all of them to be situated in a meaningful manner: this is likely why he includes in his account a second list, whose organization is independent from the spatial distribution of the relics.[29]

Angilbert seems to have taken from the church at Aachen, along with many of the relics themselves, the ordering logic for this second list. It adopts the same hierarchical arrangement of saints found in the later copies of the inventory of the shrine to the Virgin established by Charlemagne. The relics of Christ and Mary are followed by those of apostles, martyrs, confessors, and finally virgins, a structure that emphasized the representation of each type of saint and thereby highlighted the universality of the collection. This mode of hierarchically presenting saints was also found in the *communicantes* prayer at the beginning of the Canon of the Mass, which associated them with the celebration of the Eucharist.[30] But here it was likely drawn in a more concrete way from litanies. This form of intercessory prayer probably emerged within fourth-century Byzantine Christianity and spread to Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England before being disseminated by missionaries throughout the Frankish kingdoms and adopted more widely in the mid-eighth century. Like Alcuin, his master at the palace school of Aachen, Angilbert seems to have actively participated in this process of diffusion.[31] Litanies and relic lists were above all long enumerations of saints' names, which naturally meant that these two sorts of texts were likely to be considered alongside one another. A third kind of text may even have served as an intermediary: the *Laudes Regiae*, which called on a long list of saints to intercede for the sovereign. These royal laudations, developing precisely from monastic litanies, emerged in the Frankish world during the second half of the eighth century.[32] Just a few years later, the assemblage and donation of unprecedented numbers of relics, along with their organized presentation in the form of universalistic collections set out in long inventories, would likewise constitute a sort of materialized form of imperial laudation.

If collections can be defined as the application of a logical structure to organize an already existing ensemble of objects and to determine future acquisitions, three elements seem to have prompted their emergence: one or more initiatives aiming to gather together specific objects, a network enabling the realization of this project, and above all the structuring use of a logical order, borrowed from an already existing textual genre. A phenomenon comparable to that of relic collections and developed at the same time concerned books: the systematic construction of monastic libraries followed the logic of bibliographical manuals. Stretching back to the anti-heretical measures of late antiquity, this genre of text defined a Christian cultural canon.[33] The practice of collecting thus appears to be a dynamic process, stemming from a methodic political enterprise and from a systematization effected through the act of writing. Finally, it is significant that this process was set in motion following the imperial commissioning of inventories intended to verify and monitor the property of churches—texts that also contributed to the development of the new notion of 'church treasure'.

Inventorying: Objects, Techniques, Relevance

An inventory of relics presents their accumulation according to a graphic order and, from the moment it organizes them into a coherent and open-ended structure, constitutes them as a collection. Its compilation is always determined by material and social circumstances, and two types of situations in particular can be distinguished: the enclosing of relics within altars and within reliquary vessels. As soon as it became common practice to place not just individual relics but series of them—some very long—within altars, it also became necessary to establish a list. Indeed, such lists would soon be mandated by prescriptive texts. This was the case with the *Roman-Germanic Pontifical*, a compilation of rites for use by bishops that was drawn up in Mainz around the middle of the tenth century and circulated widely during the Ottonian *renovatio imperii*. As stipulated in the pontifical, a bishop consecrating an altar was to 'announce to the clergy and to the people' the list of relics that he placed within it.[34] The recording of such lists in writing is attested as early as the ninth century,[35] but only in the eleventh century do we find an *ordo*, from Vic in Catalonia, that prescribes placing in the altar a *carta* specifying the date of the consecration, the name of the consecrating bishop, and the names of the saints whose relics were enclosed there.[36] Another pontifical, established in the twelfth century at the Roman Curia, was very widely used in the thirteenth century. It does not prescribe a *carta*, but does assume the existence of written documents in connection with relics removed in order to be transferred another church, stating that the bishop was to look at these *diligenter*.[37] In his pontifical—which from the late thirteenth century would gradually supplant that of Rome—the bishop of Mende William Durand adopted the injunction to read publicly the lists of relics being deposited in altars, and added that on the eve of the consecration the bishop should place in the container a 'small charter on parchment, written in large letters'. This document was to indicate the names of the saints to whom the altar and the church were dedicated, the name of the consecrating bishop who sealed the vessel, the date of the consecration, and the indulgence that would be granted each year on the anniversary of the event.[38] Written records were therefore an integral part of the ritual of consecration, and subsequently of the altar as a sacred site. Such instructions can also be found in fifteenth-century pontificals, and consecration notices themselves testify that they were put into practice: the document belonging to an altar in the cathedral of Girona consecrated in 1341 to the eleven-thousand virgins, for example, mentions seven relics.[39]

The inventories included in these consecration notices preserved the memory of the relics that were enclosed in altars. Once an altar was sealed, the relics remained in place until it was opened, which in turn necessitated its reconsecration and meant that a new document would have to be drawn up. The same thoroughness and solemnity also seem to have been applied to reliquaries. Reports of relic translations follow the same model, providing the date, the person who carried out the translation, and the identity of the relics involved. A *Titulus capitis beati Alexandri* thus recounts that on Good Friday 1145, the abbot Wibald of Stavelot deposited two relics of Pope Alexander I into the head reliquary devoted to this saint, together with other relics

'found alongside them': five relics of Christ, plus those of Saints Peter, Agapet, and Crispin, of the Theban Legion, and of the eleven-thousand virgins. The base of the reliquary in fact takes the form of a portable altar. Today, however, the report it contains is actually a thirteenth-century copy, indicating that the reliquary was opened at that time. The record of Abbot Wibald's translation henceforth formed part of the institutional memory of the abbey, and between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries it was copied into several cartularies, volumes into which were copied documents considered to be important.[40]

Relics housed in reliquaries that could be easily opened were particularly at risk of becoming lost. One reliable way of avoiding this was to present a list of its contents on the container itself. The reverses of three mid-thirteenth-century reliquaries probably from the Cistercian abbey of Grandselve (in Tarn-et-Garonne) were thus engraved with particularly long lists, each enumerating over thirty relics. When one of them, said to be 'of the True Cross', was opened in 1895, the relics were found to be contained in small silk pouches to which were attached thirty-one strips of parchment, inscribed in the thirteenth century with the names of the relics[41]—a comparison with the thirty-four names listed on the inventory indicated that only three of the labels were missing. Starting in the High Middle Ages, certain kinds of reliquaries responded to the specific need to contain and display series of relics while also preventing their separation and dispersal. A fifteenth-century reliquary from the abbey of Ronceray in Angers took the form of a quadrangular plate made up of twenty-four individual receptacles, each one containing relics under a window of crystal. In 1903 it still held seventeen labels, of which two dated respectively to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[42] The other fifteen were contemporary with the reliquary itself: apparently by the same hand, they were written in blue, gold, and red ink, the colors varying from letter to letter. Clearly intended to be seen, these labels constituted a sort of ornamental inventory integral to the object; devotional readers could let their gaze move from one inscription and one relic to another.

Reliquaries that announced their contents through an inscription or through their form were nevertheless in the minority. Relics were sometimes fixed in resin or wax to prevent their loss inside reliquaries, a technique noted in 1472 in an inventory from the Cistercian abbey of Kamp[43] and evidenced by remnants found in several reliquaries from the collegiate church of Brunswick.[44] To get a view of the entire contents, however, it was necessary to open the reliquary,[45] find the labels, read them, and compile them in the form of an inventory. Where the labels once used to produce an inventory have been preserved, it is possible to reconstruct this process. This is the case for the shrine of Saint Simètre at the parish church of Lierneux, a filial church of the abbey of Stavelot-Malmedy in the province of Liège. The abbot Erlebald opened the shrine on May 26, 1185: the inventory drawn up on a piece of parchment on this occasion has remained in the shrine along with a series of labels dating from between the ninth or tenth century and the twelfth century.[46] Of the thirty-eight relics listed in the inventory, thirty-two in sum are mentioned across twenty of the twenty-six labels. The labels do not seem to have been copied out in any particular order, apart from the fact that the local saint, Simètre, comes at the head of the list, preceded only by Mary and Peter. Two relics that had been transferred into a different reliquary forty years earlier are naturally not mentioned in the inventory, despite being still referred to on one of the labels. But several inconsistencies suggest that the author of the inventory synthesized certain details while ignoring others—that is, unless new labels

have since found their way into the shrine. Another instance in which it is possible to follow the construction of an inventory is that of a 'small four-sided vessel' at the abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel, whose contents were recorded along with those of other reliquaries in 1396.[47] Several labels could be found in this reliquary, and six of these, probably dating from the thirteenth century, have been preserved. Together they list twenty-two of the twenty-four relics recorded in the inventory as actually being in the box. A comparison reveals that the author copied the labels into the inventory in order of length, starting with the longest and ending with the shortest. Though the first two concern homogeneous ensembles from the Holy Land and from the abbey of Saint-Denis respectively, the labels that follow do not have the same coherence. In one case, however, relics of both distant and local origin (Christ, the Virgin, and Saint Margaret, plus three Norman saints) were grouped together and placed in the reliquary: as in the label for the relics from the Holy Land, the use of the word *continentur* here indicates that this list reflects the contents of a preexisting reliquary that was transferred into the box inventoried in 1396. In the 1967 edition of the text, the inventory of the relics found in the 'small four-sided vessel' is laid out in five paragraphs, a format that probably follows a fifteenth-century copy. This suggests that the page layout of handwritten inventories, where the word *item* ('likewise') is followed by a group of relics, can correspond to labels of various origins, thus making it possible to reconstruct part of the history of a given collection.

Reading such documents often proved difficult. The person who drew up the inventory of relics at Mont-Saint-Michel admits on several occasions that he was unable to read labels that were too old (*propter vetustatem*) or darkened (*perobscure traditur*), or that had been lost. He also mentions anonymous relics. The authors of inventories often indicate their sources, referring to *scripturae, cedulae* for labels, or *sculpturae* for inscriptions. They relay their disappointment about illegible labels, or ones not corresponding anymore to the relics within the reliquaries. Occasionally they use metaphorical formulae, concluding their work by invoking other relics whose 'names God alone knows', or whose attributions 'are inscribed in the Book of Life' or 'in the heavens'. At the same time, admitting these failures shored up the claim that all the names actually recorded were based upon a scrupulous reading of the documents. Far from rendering less valuable those relics that remained anonymous, these formulae hinted at further riches: a mid-twelfth-century inventory from the Benedictine abbey of Muri in present-day Switzerland even states that relics without labels should be stored especially carefully, since there was no way of knowing which saint they belonged to.[48]

Various circumstances could spur the creation of such comprehensive inventories of a church's relics. The authors could, for instance, be driven by a desire to fix in writing the memory of recent acquisitions through the compilation of up-to-date documents: this was the aim of Abbot Angilbert of Centula in the early ninth century, when, as we have seen, he included his inventory in a work recounting his activities related to restoration and renovation.[49] Likewise, an inventory of 242 relics recorded on four pages of a cartulary drawn up at the Cluniac abbey of Reading in the 1190s, about seventy years after its foundation in 1121, can be interpreted as a first reckoning after a period of rapid accumulation.[50] Many copies of consecration notices for altars can be similarly linked to memorial concerns.

The making of an inventory could also be prompted by a desire to secure an ensemble of relics considered to be in danger—or at least could serve as a declaration of intent to manage

the collection in a rigorous way. Around 1135–37 at the Benedictine abbey of Zwiefalten (located between Stuttgart and Lake Constance), the librarian Ortlieb denounced, in his chronicle of the monastery, the treasurer Berthold's inadequate supervision of the relics, supporting his point with biblical citations.[51] Probably on the basis of existing lists and memory, Ortlieb himself drew up an inventory of the relics contained in the abbey's reliquaries and monstrances. But his text breaks off before he gets to the loose relics, despite having already announced that he would name them, that the relics that could be placed in new reliquaries should be underlined in red, and that these reliquaries should be described. Everything seems to suggest that Berthold the treasurer did not allow Ortlieb to study these stray relics at close proximity. Moreover, from 1137 Berthold began compiling his own chronicle, into which he inserted an inventory of the objects under his care. He emphasized the acquisitions he had made as treasurer, and likewise employed biblical citations but avoided giving any details concerning the relics in question. At the Cistercian abbey of Kamp near Düsseldorf, the inventory drawn up under Abbot Heinrich von Ray in April 1472 was the product of a different kind of conflictual situation.[52] In 1469–70, the relics and ornaments of the monastery had been evacuated for almost eighteen months due to the threat of a siege some ten kilometers away. The abbot also ordered the reorganization of the archives, probably as a reaction to this extreme situation. A short time later, a series of Cistercian monasteries in the region were implicated in the selling of relics. Though Kamp does not seem to have been affected, it was probably this episode that drove von Ray's successor Heinrich von der Heyden to combine the inventory with five excerpts from prescriptive texts compiled under the title *Inhibitio de reliquiis sanctorum non distrahendis*. The addition of these texts, warning against the alienation of relics, bolsters the impression that the inventory served as a means of securing the collection.

In certain cases, compiling a new inventory could be a way of bringing forgotten riches to light. Such an approach does not always seem to have been self-evident: reliquaries that had been unopened sometimes for several centuries were probably opened only under particular circumstances. A number of texts describe or stage the strong emotional reactions aroused by such occasions,[53] and the exceptional nature of these events probably explains why truly comprehensive inventories appear to be relatively rare, at least until the end of the Middle Ages. One project of this kind was undertaken at the abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel in 1396, during the term of Abbot Pierre le Roy and in the context of an administrative and liturgical reorganization following the first phase of the Hundred Years' War. Two hundred relics were found at the abbey, in forty or so reliquaries.[54] Some housed a single relic, while others contained much larger quantities, including over forty-five in a single chest. In instances such as the latter, it is likely that these were relics acquired a long time ago and left in a certain disorder. Inventorying them served as a reminder of their existence, the first step in the process of their valorization, precisely what the librarian Ortlieb had sought to do at Zwiefalten. Similarly, the word *nota*, entered numerous times in the margin of an inventory made at Brunswick in 1482 that lists no fewer than 1,220 relics, probably indicates the intention to create new reliquaries for relics deemed particularly important.[55] The multiplication of monstrance-shaped reliquaries of relatively low value during the late Middle Ages may well have followed the establishment of inventories, making certain relics within ever-expanding collections available for devotion while also ensuring their preservation.

The relevance of an inventory also lay in the knowledge that it transmitted and in the sequence in which that information was presented. Relic labels, essential material for the construction of any inventory, could be supplemented by other sources. The hierarchy of saints, at the origin of the first systematically ordered collections in the Carolingian period, continued to be regularly employed as an organizational device, though not necessarily at the expense of other methods. This hierarchy was in fact a roughly sketched historical typology, determined by the different modes of living and dying by which individuals, from martyrs to confessors, achieved sainthood, both before and after the establishment of Christianity as an official religion. It could also be nuanced in order to describe ensembles of relics in a more specific way. The inventory drawn up at Mont-Saint-Michel in 1396 therefore begins with the oldest donation, a miracle-performing portable altar reputedly offered by the 'apostolic see' on the occasion of the church's foundation. It concludes with the donation of relics, including a fragment of the Cross, made the previous year by King Charles VI and thus still very much present in memory. This provides a broad framework for the collection, stretching from the pope to the king of France and from an object linked to the Eucharistic sacrament to a relic of the Passion. Such an order takes the histories of the objects themselves into account, rather than simply those of the holy figures represented by the relics. Other local histories are summoned in the body of the inventory. The author refers back to earlier texts, recalling in the discussion of his relics the legend of the monastery's founder Saint Aubert,[56] and invoking the account written between 1112 and 1130 by Archbishop Baldric of Dol concerning the sword and shield supposedly used by the archangel Michael to overcome the dragon.[57] When no such reference is available it seems that the inventory draws upon oral tradition, as in its account of a fragment of a veil said to have been brought by Saint Michael from paradise and placed on an altar as a sign of its consecration.[58] This combined use of information from textual and oral sources is not limited to the oldest objects and plays a strategic role with respect to more recent ones. The text indicates that relics originating from Guingamp had been offered in 1388 by Count Henry of Brittany, who still held the same office in 1396. This claim is supported with references to a charter ratified by the bishop of Tréguier and to various letters issued by a Franciscan friar.[59] But the following entry, relating to a reliquary offered by the same count's father, omits any mention of the donor by name, despite an explicit and clearly visible inscription cited in another inventory drawn up in 1647: 'This is the rib of Saint Yves, given by Charles of Blois'. This reliquary was important in the region, as Charles of Blois had campaigned for the canonization of Saint Yves, which took place in 1347. However, up to his death in 1364, Charles had also regularly tried to seize the duchy of Brittany, a claim that his son Henry would renounce in 1365: the disproportionate level of detail given about the donations of the two men probably reflects discussions within the monastery concerning this situation.

Another inventory, drawn up between 1489 and 1499 at the abbey of Zwiefalten, is presented as a purely administrative tool, written in an approximate Latin and based almost exclusively on relic labels and a few preexisting lists.[60] Certain philological clues suggest that the notice of the church's consecration may well be a clumsy transcription of knowledge transmitted orally. In such a case, the rare historical elements take on a particular significance, as they reflect fundamental knowledge that was very likely shared by all members of the community. This makes it possible, for example, to evaluate the impact of the competing strategies employed

three hundred years earlier by the librarian Ortlieb and the treasurer Berthold, as discussed above. The late fifteenth-century author at Zwiefalten does not seem to have been aware of his predecessors' respective chronicles, but he clearly privileges Berthold by mentioning the translation of relics that he had brought to the abbey, while another comparable translation conducted by Ortlieb appears to have been forgotten.

Finally, it was also possible to order inventories according to the reliquaries themselves rather than the relics contained therein. A combined approach was sometimes adopted, as at the abbey of Kamp in 1472, where the hierarchy of the saints was applied to the contents of each of the thirty-four reliquaries—a total of around eight hundred items relating to 292 individuals.[61] Renouncing an overarching and homogeneous organization meant that it was no longer possible to present the entire ensemble of relics as an abstractly ordered collection. But taking the containers and vessels into account led to an increased correspondence between object and text, a result that could meet other needs. The 1482 inventory of the church of Saint Blaise in Brunswick thus began by describing the contents of six reliquaries that were evidently considered to be particularly important, and then classed the others according to their form, with discrete sections treating the twenty-six chests, the twenty-two monstrances, the ten arm reliquaries, and so on. Judging by those that have been preserved, the monstrances were even dealt with according to size, and with great precision.[62] In many instances, the order in which the containers were listed probably reflected the order in which they were stored. In any case, if they were really to be used as tools for managing a collection, inventories had to facilitate the identification of the objects listed. As their users were familiar with the objects in question, however, a few indicators would suffice. Listing the fourteen monstrances, the author of the 1472 Kamp inventory describes some of them in a fairly cursory way, for example as 'silvered with a round crystal' (*argentea cum rotundo cristallo*), 'with three turrets' (*cum tribus turribus*), or by calling the smallest ones *monstranciola*. As his descriptive vocabulary sometimes seems to have been lacking, he also used a system of signs: a monstrance said to be *signata cum craticula* was marked with a small grid, while two others were referred to as *signata cum tali signo*, with corresponding signs being drawn in the margin of the text—for instance, an eight-pointed star surmounted with a chalice.[63] When taken to an extreme, this kind of system could result in drawings of the objects themselves, as at Brunswick in 1482. This practice opened the way for the illustrated inventories that became spectacular manuscripts in their own right, such as that compiled at the cathedral of Bamberg in Franconia in 1508–09[64] or especially that made at Halle in Saxony at the end of the 1520s, listing the reliquaries amassed by Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg (fig. 14).[65]

Forms and Uses of Inventories: The Mediation of Collections

The material supports used for inventories of relics were varied. Many inventories likely existed in a unique copy on a single leaf or quire and never circulated. Those that survive today must represent only a small fraction of the original corpus, as obsolete documents of this type were not preserved. However, three inventories from the Benedictine abbey of Engelberg in Switzerland, founded in the early twelfth century, are written on sheets of parchment and appear to register a process of revision corresponding to a rapid accumulation of relics: while

14 Relic inventory of Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg, end of the 1520s. Hofbibliothek Aschaffenburg, Codex Ms. 14, fol. 421v: Byzantine ivory casket, 10th–11th century

the first contains around ninety names, the second and third, which also date from the twelfth century, respectively cite over one hundred and fifty and then nearly two hundred relics.[66] Another inventory with an administrative function was drawn up in 1482 at the collegiate church at Brunswick: a note on its cover stipulated that it was to be kept with the relics within the high altar.[67]

Most inventories, however, have been retained because they served other functions beyond the administrative, which resulted in them being written on other kinds of supports. Many thus figure among documents collected together mainly for their historical value. This was a practical solution in the case of consecration notices that had been enclosed in altars and as a result remained inaccessible until a deconsecration rendered them obsolete: to preserve the memory of their contents, these notices could be recopied onto other supports exterior to the altars. An inventory of the relics enshrined in five altars at the Benedictine abbey of Pfäfers, near St. Gallen, was probably excerpted from this kind of notice. It was compiled and inscribed around 870 on a flyleaf added to a lectionary, a book of liturgical readings.[68] More often, the entire text of these notices seems to have been transcribed: they were either inserted into various manuscripts as stand-alone texts or integrated into chronicles or other similar works,[69] especially when the consecration event had a particular significance beyond the church concerned. This was the case for the consecration of the cathedral at Halberstadt in 992, which was attended by a dozen bishops, princes, and Holy Roman Emperor Otto III along with his court. It was also true of the consecration of Basel Cathedral in the presence of Emperor Henry II in 1019, or that of the church at the monastery of Saint Servatius in Quedlinburg in 1021. The choice of a particular bishop for the consecration of an altar could assume a special importance within these rituals, the descriptions of which were copied and recopied in various chronicles, sometimes even several centuries after the events.[70] Beyond these consecration notices, even a general inventory such as that drawn up at Mont-Saint-Michel in 1396 could be reproduced in a fifteenth-century manuscript grouping together many historical texts.[71]

Certain consecration notices were reproduced as monumental inscriptions, either on the altar itself or on a nearby wall. In these instances, the quality and visibility of the writing expressed the importance of the text. In Rome, the oldest consecration inscriptions including lists of relics date back to the seventh century. Some seem to have been composed in the seventh and eighth centuries to be directly inscribed onto marble—that is, without drawing on any preexisting model on parchment or papyrus—but the majority date from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[72] Early inscriptions have also been preserved in Spain, particularly from the seventh century on.[73] Of the 274 known inscriptions recording the consecration of altars across the territory of modern-day France, dating from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries, thirty-four mention the enclosure of relics—on average fewer than six relics in any one altar.[74] At the entrance to the church of Saint Stephen at Worms, an inscription in gilt brass letters once recalled the consecration of 1055, citing the list of relics associated with the altar.[75] At Hildesheim, another inscription in gold letters, also lost, referred to eighty-three relics and was affixed to the back of the cathedral's high altar when the building was renewed by Bishop Hezilo and consecrated in 1061.[76] In the church of the Benedictine monastery of Saint George at Prüfening, to the west of Regensburg in Bavaria, a notice commemorating the consecration of 1109 and listing thirty relics in hierarchical order was reproduced in 1119 on a panel affixed

Consecration notice at the abbey church Saint George at Prüfening, 1119, fired clay

to the southwest pillar of the transept crossing. The letters and the decorated border of this panel were created by pressing molds into bands of red and white clay that were then fired, giving the whole a striking visual presence (fig. 15).[77] The same list of relics was reproduced during the second half of the twelfth century in a volume in which the monastery's traditions were compiled.[78] In the choir of the church at the Cistercian abbey of Veruela, near Zaragoza in Aragon, a consecration inscription dating from 1248 and listing twenty relics stretches across the four pillars in the round end of the choir (figs. 16–17).[79]

There was also an oral dimension to how relic inventories were used. At the start of the twelfth century, the abbot Thiofrid of Echternach laid out a typology of relics in his *Flowers Strewn over the Tombs of the Saints*, including a category of non-bodily remains, with a chapter dedicated to the names of the saints. In it, he affirmed that when proclaimed aloud, these names had a power equivalent to that of relics—and even superior, since the names could be activated anywhere and were not materially constrained.[80] Thiofrid does not mention written names, but it is evident that inventories of relics could serve as a vehicle for such practices, as indicated by

16–17   Consecration notice at the abbey church at Veruela (Aragon), 1248, painted on the pillars in the round end of the choir, general view and detail of the four panels

17.1

M:CC:XL:VIII:XVII
BEROLE ⁊ MARE MA
BE:SEMPR:VIRGIS:MARE
:PANE ⁊NED:LIGNO:ST
⁊:RELIG⁊:BT:IOHANNIS:
PHLIPP:⁊:SANCT:MARTRM
CELEDNI:⁊:SANCT:CONE
LVCIE:PRENT:DNO:GARTA
⁊:DNO:BERNARDO:ABB

17.2

KL:DE CEMBRIS:
IIS:CONSCRATM:A:DNO
⁊:CONTINENTR:IN:⁊
:CRVCIS:DE LACTE ⁊
BBE ⁊:BATRM:APOST:
STEPHANI:LAVRENTII:
SOVM:MARTIN:NICOLAI
DEI:GRATIA:TRASNENS
BEROLE:ET:OCTO:

17.3

17.4

an injunction articulated at the end of an inventory drawn up in 1003 at the Benedictine abbey of Prüm: 'Read the names of the saints in order to obtain eternal life through their prayers'.[81] This is a reminder that litanies probably played a role in the appearance of the first major inventories of relics. At the end of the thirteenth century, William Durand clearly pointed in his pontifical to the close relationship between litanies and inventories, indicating that litanies of saints should be sung during the consecration of altars, including those saints whose relics were being enclosed.[82] As a result, collections of relics must have seemed to take the form of materialized prayer. Certain inventories were moreover explicitly designed to be read in public. At Exeter Cathedral around 1010, the preface to an inventory written in Old English and listing 138 relics was addressed to an audience of listeners: 'Now, without any fabrication, we shall tell you what the relic-collection (*haligdom*) contains which is here in this holy minster, and tell you forthwith the writing which reveals without any duplicity what each one of the relics in the collection is'. The text goes on to introduce, in a didactic manner, some of the saints.[83] The oral usage of inventory texts could even extend to their integration into the liturgy, as during the annual celebration at the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris commemorating the arrival of the Passion relics acquired by Saint Louis from the Latin emperor of Constantinople between 1239 and 1241 (fig. 18). A book of sequences or sung liturgical pieces, probably assembled around 1250–60 for the king's private chapel, contains about ten such texts entitled *De Sanctis Reliquiis*. They enumerate just over twenty relics, corresponding to those that appear in the surviving historical and administrative texts, namely the translation account and the act ceding the relics, both from the 1240s, as well as four inventories made between 1534 and 1791. But the sequences are more than simple lists: they cite the relics in a carefully chosen order that traces the events of the Passion. What is more, they offer a commentary that relates the relics to various Christian virtues, all the while emphasizing the theme of divine royalty.[84]

An inventory from the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Pierre-le-Vif at Sens, compiled at the end of the thirteenth century by the monk Geoffroy of Courlon, shows that a collection of relics could also be used to communicate a repertory of stories. Geoffroy was working on a chronicle of the abbey, probably well underway when the prior asked him to prepare a book on the relics. The aim, as he recounts in his prologue, was to familiarize the sacristan with the history of the monastery's relics so that he could relay it to others in turn.[85] The book begins with a regular inventory. Next, more than eighty respective chapters return to each of the relics, inscribing them both within a wider sacred history and within that of the abbey itself. Geoffroy used information collected for the chronicle that he was compiling in parallel, and drew additionally upon diverse sources: the Bible, the apocryphal gospels of John and of Nicodemus, the writings of Jerome, Augustine, and John Chrysostom, and the *Golden Legend*. The text opens with the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation, before moving from one Passion relic to the next. In each case, the relevant episode is related and followed by information such as who brought the relic to the monastery and at what date, when and how it was usually exhibited, and even who commissioned its reliquary. The subsequent chapters deal with the Nativity and the Assumption of the Virgin, presenting her clothes, her hair, and her milk. Geoffrey then recounts the miracles that had taken place at the abbey, before addressing the saints in hierarchical order. The copy that has been preserved, dating from 1293 and in use over five centuries, seems to have belonged to the sacristans.[86] These individuals could probably refer to the text when

they had to explain one of the objects, but the collection does not seem to have been employed overall—that is, in its entirety—in the routine contexts of the liturgy and preaching.

Could accumulated relics be presented in ways that were not simply textual but that also involved speech, performance, and the organized display of objects? In the late medieval Holy Roman Empire, grand ostentations were staged in which relics were presented as veritable collections, rather than as isolated items or in small groups like those exhibited on altars or carried in processions on certain feast days. Presenting collections in this way implied the use of inventories, and had to take into account the reliquaries themselves rather than only their contents so as to guide the ostentation ceremonies. These inventories could take various forms.[87] *Ordines* of ostentations described the unfolding of the ceremony and were intended for use by the clerics responsible for its organization, giving a list of the objects to be shown. More rarely preserved are the documents used directly by those who presented the relics to the assembled crowds. An example drawn up in Nuremberg sometime after 1437 and kept updated until 1459 consists of a long slip of parchment attached to a baton that enabled it to be held and rolled up.[88] Compiled at the Premonstratensian abbey of Saint Vincent in Wrocław, two rolls dating from between 1401 and 1404 are furnished with wooden rods at both ends, and each contains the same list of eighty relics together with a bull of indulgence granted for an ostentation. That these are written in a very large script[89] suggests that they were either displayed for all to see or were used by the individual—shown perched on a scaffold, baton and quire in hand, in a Nuremberg engraving of 1487 (fig. 19)—who verbally announced the relics during the course of the ceremony.[90]

When a church's relics were particularly famous, inventories could circulate beyond the context of the church itself and its clerical milieu. This was the case for the relics in many churches in Rome, although they were generally enclosed in altars. Many monumental consecration inscriptions, sometimes located within the chevets of churches and therefore inaccessible to pilgrims, were nevertheless diffused and found additional resonance in the descriptions of churches that were integrated into pilgrimage narratives. These circulated widely and in multiple languages at the end of the Middle Ages, first as manuscripts and then in the form of printed pamphlets.[91] Multiplied and replicated in this way, some relic inventories could serve in private devotion. From the 1460s on, large-scale ostentations of relics were regularly announced as well as amplified in inventories printed either as broadsheets or in small booklets and designed to be sold, often including woodcuts showing the reliquaries (fig. 20).[92]

Object Histories:
The Construction of Memory

Stories of discoveries, translations from one church to another, or even thefts frequently accompanied the acquisition of memorial objects such as relics.[93] These different kinds of texts effectively served as an extension of a saint's *vita* and record of miracles.[94] Often rewritten to suit

Breviary for use of Paris, Paris, *c*. 1410–15. Châteauroux, Médiathèque, ms. 2, fol. 350r, detail: the relic feast at the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris

Wie das hochwirdigist Auch kaiserlich heiligthum […] Alle Jaer außgeruefft vnd geweist wirdt (Nuremberg: Vischer, 1487), fol. 4r: relic ostension at Nuremberg, fol. 4v: illustrated relic inventory

Wie das hochwirdigist Auch kaiserlich heiligthum […] Alle Jaer außgeruefft vnd geweist wirdt (Nuremberg: Vischer, 1487), fol. 4r: relic ostension at Nuremberg, fol. 4v: illustrated relic inventory

the needs of a particular moment, these object histories enabled communities to conceive and sustain the memory of their own origins, emphasizing their importance not only to outsiders but also to themselves.[95] The recurrence of a number of narrative motifs nevertheless suggests that these memorial traditions should also be considered in terms of the dynamics among individual institutions. In cases where contradictory claims arose, the borrowing and adaptation of such narratives from one church to another could determine the outcome of a conflict or encourage the parties to seek a narrative consensus. The history of a memorial object must therefore be understood beyond the object's individual materialization, by examining the implications of each local account as well as how these were taken up in other, more widely circulated texts, which in turn gave rise to further adaptations. We must also consider the role played by the objects themselves as these different narratives were instrumentalized within churches.[96] The following sections will focus on two of the most significant objects for medieval culture between the eighth and twelfth centuries: the pastoral staff of Saint Peter (a materialization of the power of the church) and the foreskin of Christ (evidence of the Savior's humanity).

Saint Peter's Staff

The first claim to possess a real staff that had belonged to Saint Peter, the disciple who became the first archbishop of Rome, can be found in the *vita* of Archbishop Bruno of Cologne (953–65), composed by a monk named Ruotger around 967–69. According to this account, Bruno acquired the staff at Metz. The described event probably occurred at the moment Bruno took control of the town in late autumn 953, shortly after being named duke of Lotharingia by his brother, Otto I, Holy Roman Emperor. This position effectively gave him political power over Metz, a bishopric dependent on the archbishopric of Trier rather than that of Cologne.[97] Ruotger adds that Bruno also obtained the chain of Saint Peter, brought to Cologne from Rome, and that on the same occasion he enlarged his cathedral.[98] The building campaign may have involved the addition of two naves, bringing the total number to five, in resonance with Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome: this demonstration of a singular connection with Peter and with Rome, expressed through objects and through architecture, underscored the importance of the archbishop of Cologne and renewed the cathedral's link to its patron saint, a dedication dating back to the seventh century.[99]

The staff itself is still retained at Cologne Cathedral (fig. 21). Its upper section has a gilt cuff, dated to between the sixth and the eighth centuries, that is decorated with a frieze of alternating hearts, some of which still contain filigree work.[100] In the eighth century, Metz played an important role in the Carolingian policy of introducing the Roman liturgy into Frankish churches. Bishop Chrodegang was Pepin the Short's main agent in this reform, and traveled to Rome at his behest in 753. Around 755, he compiled a rule for the use of canons, which was soon adopted widely.[101] Chrodegang's successor, Angelram, to whom Charlemagne entrusted the ecclesiastical affairs of his realm in 780, continued in the same vein, using history to justify Metz's claim to a close link with Rome. In 784, he commissioned Paul the Deacon, a Lombard man of letters with ties to the court, to write a *Liber de episcopis Mettensibus*, emphasizing the bishopric's decisive contribution to the reform of the Frankish church and thereby proclaiming its central place in the Carolingian kingdom. Indeed, Charlemagne seems to have wanted to

'Staff of Saint Peter', ivory upper tip late antique (?), mount partly Metz, 780s. Cologne, Domschatzkammer

SEPTRES.
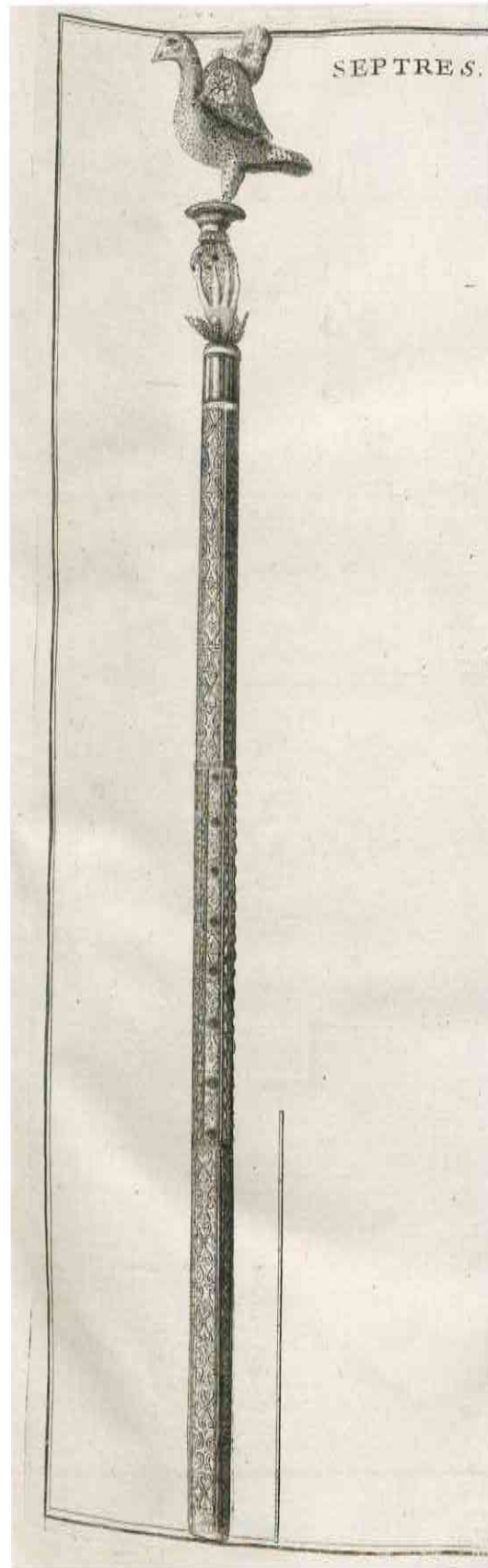
make Metz a metropolitan see.[102] At a time when the court, which would only become fixed at Aachen in 794, still regularly moved from one location to another, all this could have proven decisive. Paul the Deacon's chronicle maintained that the bishopric of Metz had been founded by Saint Clement, an emissary sent directly by Saint Peter.[103] Here, the Lombard author adapted a motif developed in the south of France, notably at the cathedral of Saint-Trophime at Arles in the early fifth century and at Saintes in the sixth century,[104] and echoed, perhaps independently, at Ravenna in the mid-seventh century and at Grado in the eighth century.[105] The political and narrative context at Metz Cathedral thus seems to have been particularly conducive to a claim to possess the 'staff of Saint Peter', which would have materialized the bishop's authority to act in favor of the Roman liturgical model and consequently also the Carolingian sovereign's interest in supporting him in that effort. It may have been there, in the 780s, that this relic was conceived. As it is preserved today, the staff differs from the long-handled cross that appeared as an attribute of the apostle in images from the mid-fourth century on.[106] Its tip is formed from a ball of turned ivory, recalling the scepters of late antique Roman consuls.[107] It may in fact be a piece from a real consular scepter offered to the cathedral at some point in the distant past, seeing as Metz was one of the most important cities of Roman Gaul and became Christianized from the late third century on. If this is so, the ivory ball would be the only surviving component of any consular scepter, though mention should be made of the scepter 'of Dagobert' that, recorded at the abbey of Saint-Denis before disappearing in 1795, may have similarly reemployed such fragments (fig. 22).[108] Whatever the case, this ivory ball established a link with Roman antiquity and once again served to underscore the ambition of Metz to reform the liturgy according to the Roman model.

The history of Saint Peter's staff did not end with its transfer from Metz to Cologne in 953. In 980, Archbishop Egbert of Trier (977–93) commissioned a number of spectacular objects, including a reliquary said to contain part of the staff.[109] This new staff seems to represent an attempt to outdo that at Cologne, not only in its material and iconographic richness but also in the narrative construction into which it was integrated. The object is covered almost entirely in gold, and around its upper extremity are wrapped four rows of figural busts, in cloisonné enamel and set among elaborate filigree and gemstones (fig. 23). Two rows occupy the knob that crowns the staff, with the four evangelists shown in the upper row and Saint Peter and the first three bishops of Trier in the lower. The two other rows of busts, running around the top of the shaft of the staff, represent the apostles. Two series of bust portraits embossed into the gold descend along either side of the staff: one consisting of ten popes, from Peter's successor to the reigning pontiff, and the other of ten archbishops of Trier, including Egbert himself, with the selection of archbishops privileging those considered to be saints. Reinforcing the message of the relic itself, these two parallel lines reflect the uninterrupted continuity of the Roman Church as well as the status of the archbishopric of Trier from the time of the apostles. The decoration is supplemented by two inscriptions. The first, using juridical language to position the staff at the nexus of the community of believers, the universal church, and the cathedral at Trier, threatens with anathema anyone who should attempt to remove the object. The other inscription extends along the length of the staff and describes its history. As stated therein, Peter gave his staff to the founder of the diocese of Trier, Saint Eucharius, so that he could use it to bring his fellow missionary Saint Maternus back to life. The text goes on to relate that the relic was subsequently

22 'Scepter of Dagobert', late antique (?) and early medieval elements. Abbey of Saint-Denis, lost 1795. Bernard de Montfaucon, *Les monumens de la monarchie françoise* […], 5 vols (Paris: Gandouin et Giffart, 1729–33), I, pl. 3, detail

'Staff of Saint Peter', c. 980. From the cathedral at Trier. Limburg an der Lahn, Diözesanmuseum

removed from Trier as a precaution in the face of the advancing Huns, and was transferred to safety at Metz, a bishopric dependent on the archbishopric of Trier. Later it was seized from Metz by the archbishop Bruno of Cologne. Bruno's successor, Warin, finally restored the upper portion of the relic to Egbert of Trier at the request of the emperor Otto II himself.

This story likely took concrete shape at the same moment as the new reliquary, under Archbishop Egbert. At the time, Egbert was competing with his powerful counterparts at Mainz and Cologne for the position of primate, the first among the empire's archbishops.[110] That Egbert was not given the entirety of the staff represents a significant concession to Cologne, yet the possession of its upper section still appears to have been sufficient for him to stake a claim to the Roman apostolic investiture. In fact, the most recent material analysis of the wooden fragment at Trier reveals no link to that at Cologne, confirming that this account of the division of the staff was invented.[111] However, this does not mean that the maneuver was not also taken seriously in Cologne. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the staff was respectively invoked in the *vita* of the saint and archbishop Heribert of Cologne and on his shrine at Deutz Abbey.[112] In 1281, a canon at Cologne Cathedral named Alexander of Roes took up the idea of its partition as a means of strengthening his own church's declaration of preeminence—now arguing that Cologne possessed the more prestigious upper section, he nevertheless conceded that the lower part's superior length signified the rival see of Trier's claim to an earlier foundation.[113]

To affirm their higher status while also recognizing that the Cologne relic came from Metz, the individuals who shaped the history of the Trier staff made judicious use of two passages from Paul the Deacon's *Deeds of the Bishops of Metz* of 784, the main historiographical text concerning the bishopric. As recounted there, the fourth-century bishop of Tongeren, Saint Servais, was warned in a vision that Gaul would be destroyed by the invading Huns. He embarked on a pilgrimage to Rome, where he learned that only the oratory of Saint Stephen of Metz—that is, the future cathedral—would be saved through the intervention of Saints Peter and Paul.[114] This enabled the clergy of Trier to argue plausibly that their predecessors, forewarned of the approaching catastrophe and the singular destiny of the church at Metz, had placed the staff of Saint Peter there for safety: the relic would thus have been present at Trier well before it was present at Metz and then Cologne. Another passage in the *Deeds of the Bishops* explained that Saint Peter had sent Saint Clement to found the bishopric of Metz. The Trier version introduced the staff at this point, maintaining that Peter gave it not to Saint Clement but to Saint Eucharius, founder of the archbishopric of Trier, adding that Eucharius used the object to bring a fellow missionary back to life.

For this new development, the authors at Trier were also able to draw on accounts that originated in other towns, and that were analogous yet more explicit. The concise narrative that appears on the reliquary of 980 is recounted at greater length in the late ninth- or early tenth-century biographies of the first three bishops of Trier, Saints Eucharius, Valerius, and Maternus. This text borrows directly from the *vita* of Saint Memmius of Châlons (written *c.* 677) and from that of Saint Martial of Limoges (written before 846), both of which also deal with objects that were offered by Saint Peter and were instrumental in the performance of a resurrection miracle.[115] In the *vita* of Saint Memmius, the object in question is an item of clothing given to the saint by the apostle. But the Limoges text invokes the staff itself. Was this account already inspired by the claims formulated at Metz just sixty years before? Or did this relic, which was

later claimed not only by Limoges[116] but also by the basilica of Saint-Seurin in Bordeaux[117] and the cathedral of Saint-Front in Périgueux,[118] emerge and evolve independently at these churches in the south of France? Whatever the case, it was by means of a complex material and narrative construction—mobilizing artists and precious materials, synthesizing preexisting traditions, and even fabricating false papal privileges[119]—that Egbert of Trier created a prestigious emblem capable of furnishing concrete and visible proof of the apostolic origins of his see as well as of the legitimacy of his entitlement to primacy.

After Trier, other episcopal sees took up the motif of Saint Peter giving his pastoral staff to a founding saint. From the eleventh century, Metz explicitly held that Saint Clement, the founder of the archbishopric, had not simply been sent by Saint Peter, as Paul the Deacon had related in the late eighth century, but had in fact directly received the staff from the apostle's hand. This was most likely a later appropriation of the argument that, while it certainly fit with the claims made during the Carolingian era, was actually a reaction to the evolutions unfolding at Cologne and then at Trier between the 950s and the 980s. The claim to materially possess such a staff relic is attested at Metz in the sixteenth century.[120] Another account of a staff 'of Saint Peter' appears in the early twelfth-century *Deeds of the Bishops of Toul*, another suffragan diocese of Trier. This text made the case that the staff was brought back from Rome by Saint Mansuetus, the first bishop of Toul and founder of the see. To this end, it drew upon the *Life of Saint Mansuetus*, written *c.* 974, which already recounted that the saint had been sent as a missionary by Saint Paul, though without mentioning the staff. The author of the twelfth-century text nevertheless contended that this object had been ceded to the bishop of Metz in exchange for lands around 935.[121] That such an exchange actually occurred is highly unlikely, however: while the gift of a scepter could certainly symbolize the transmission of rights, the gift of the emblem of the first bishop of Rome would have symbolized much more than that. It is perhaps the case that this assertion was in fact designed to identify Toul as the earliest point in the record of Saint Peter's staff within the Lotharingian region.[122]

The pastoral staff of Saint Peter was thus first devised as a relic at Metz in the context of the Carolingian liturgical reform, before being transferred to Cologne as part of a rivalry between archbishoprics. It was subsequently imitated at Trier using a new and more developed material and narrative framework, then was reclaimed once again by Metz and, via a projection into the past, by Toul. And this is only a view of the Lotharingian region between the eighth and the twelfth centuries. Other churches also declared that they possessed fragments of the staff, though apparently without developing the same kind of accompanying narrative: the abbeys of Rastede near Oldenburg in 1091,[123] of Weingarten in Württemberg in 1183,[124] of Glastonbury in England between 1240 and 1247,[125] of Neufmoustier near Huy between the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries,[126] along with the cathedral in Magdeburg at the end of the fifteenth century.[127] In 1354, the emperor Charles IV himself sawed off a fragment from the Trier staff to offer to the cathedral in Prague.[128] This list is surely far from exhaustive, and it is certain that not all these relics held equal importance for the communities that possessed them. But this is enough to show that in order to fully understand the nature of Saint Peter's staff, its function, and its success as an emblem of the apostolic investiture it must be considered in relation to all of the local claims that were made to it and about it across the centuries. The same is true of many other major relics of the Middle Ages, which for the most part remain little studied.

Christ's Foreskin

Preserved in two copies dating from the fifteenth century, the cartulary of the abbey of Saint-Sauveur at Charroux in western France contains a number of texts[129] relating to an uncommon relic whose history is particularly intertwined with the concept of the Eucharist, the sacrament at the heart of the Christian notion of *memoria*. The first two texts were most likely composed shortly after 1045 with the aim of winning certain rights for the monastery in the context of a conflict, the details of which have been lost. As was often the case in the eleventh century, they attribute to the emperor Charlemagne a major role in the founding of the monastery, along with donations of liturgical instruments and relics, including a fragment of the Cross. Another group of texts in the cartulary concerns a relic referred to as *sancta virtus*. One reproduces exactly a miracle story included by Adhémar of Chabannes, a monk from Limoges, in his early eleventh-century chronicle, except that this earlier text ascribed the miracle to the 'True Cross'. This *sancta virtus* thus seems to have replaced a piece of the Cross as the main relic at Charroux Abbey.[130] According to another narrative, it was discovered during the consecration of an altar, most likely in 1082: the opening of a first reliquary revealed a second, which in turn contained this relic together with a small amount of fresh blood.[131] The phrase *sancta virtus* designates a sort of 'holy power', and the mention of the blood evokes bodily presence, though curiously not attributed to any particular subject. A third account, composed before 1130, provides a few more details, recounting that after attending the consecration of the monastery at Charroux, Charlemagne set off for Jerusalem in search of relics. This motif develops the earlier claims concerning Charlemagne's role as a founder and donor, and does so in a very concrete way, given that it was integrated directly into one of the already existing accounts. As the emperor was attending Mass in the church of the Holy Sepulcher, the hand of Christ is said to have appeared over the sacred vessels and marked them with the sign of the cross, before placing the *sancta virtus* on the altar. The infant Jesus then appeared to the right of the altar, announcing, 'Most noble prince, receive this small gift from my true flesh and my true blood'. Charlemagne is thus positioned as the first witness to the identification of the *sancta virtus* as the body of Christ, and to its association with the Eucharistic rite. The text even relates that, during his return voyage, Charlemagne brought one of his companions back to life by placing this *signaculum Christi* on his mouth.[132]

The reliquary itself, still preserved at Charroux, fits with the main elements of this narrative (fig. 24). Its core is a Byzantine gold medallion dating from the tenth or eleventh century (fig. 25), showing niello images of the Virgin and two saints, accompanied by an inscription in Greek. The origin of this first reliquary was certainly, and visibly, Eastern, although it is possible that the inscription remained unintelligible to contemporaries at Charroux. At the end of the eleventh century, the medallion was enclosed in a silver-gilt case featuring an image of Christ in blessing, flanked by the alpha and the omega (fig. 26). A Latin inscription around the case, *hic caro et sanguis christi continentur*, takes up the words spoken to Charlemagne by the infant Christ in the story.[133] This object seems to have been the impetus for a rapid expansion of the abbey, for 1096 saw the inauguration of a new church, whose very distinctive architecture combined the typical form of a basilica, with a centralized plan invoking the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem (fig. 27). Over the crypt, the crossing of the transept swelled into a monumental

CHARROUX (Vienne)
Reliquaire. (Sept. 881. J. c. 9.
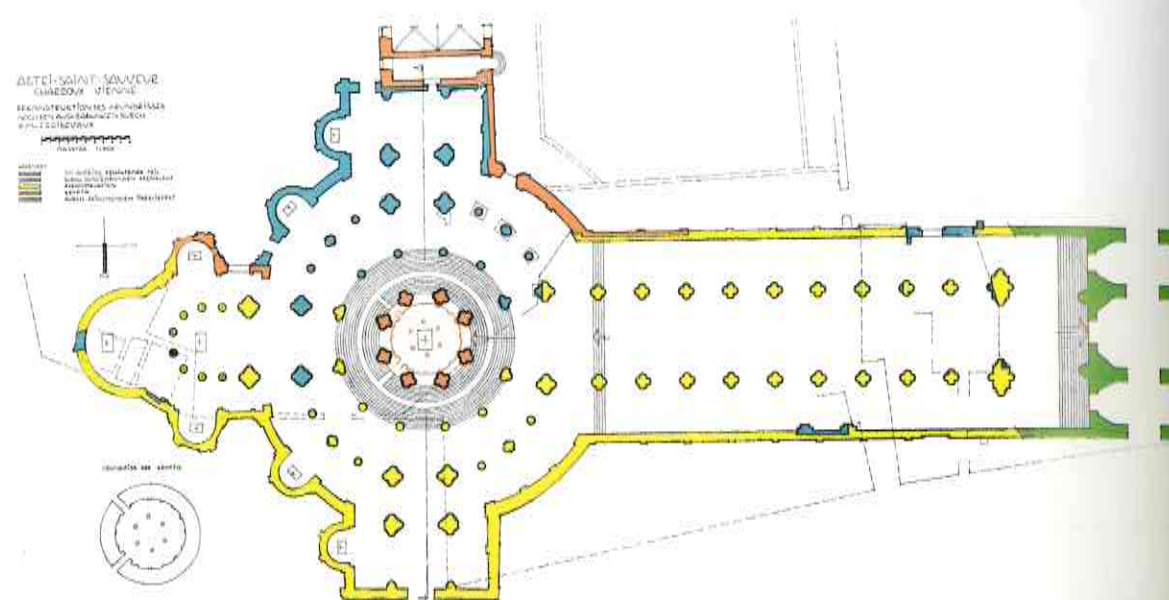

25

26

24–26   Reliquary of the 'foreskin of Christ' in its 13th-century mount. Byzantine pectoral reliquary, 10th or 11th century.
Case containing the pectoral, end of the 11th century. Charroux, former abbey of Saint-Sauveur

27   Charroux, abbey of Saint-Sauveur, plan of the church consecrated in 1096

28   Charroux, abbey of Saint-Sauveur, ruins of the lantern tower and the cloister

rotunda surmounted by a lantern tower (fig. 28), crowning as it were the *sancta virtus*.[134] The fact that the edifice was consecrated by Pope Urban II as he traveled across France calling for a crusade to the Holy Land[135] can only have amplified even further the relic's renown.

Indeed, the story of the Charroux relic circulated widely. From around 1130 it can be found in a number of accounts of pilgrimages to Jerusalem, which had fallen into the hands of the crusaders in 1099. Several modifications were made to the earlier versions. First, in their reports the pilgrims recall that Jesus was circumcised in the temple rather than the Holy Sepulcher, which is no longer mentioned. Second, and above all, these travelers no longer speak of a *sancta virtus*, but of Christ's prepuce, or foreskin, said to have been offered to Charlemagne by an angel rather than by Christ himself. In this version, the emperor initially brought the relic to Aachen; it was his grandson Charles the Bald who subsequently offered it to Charroux.[136] This version would reappear at the end of the twelfth century in a frequently copied *glossa* to the *Historia scolastica*, a paraphrasing of the Bible composed around 1168 by Petrus Comestor and widely used for teaching. From there, it can be found in several large compilations of historical materials and in other popular thirteenth-century texts.[137] These transformations of the narrative call for an explanation. The introduction of a detour via Aachen in fact made it possible to accommodate another text, most likely originating in 1080 within the entourage of the French king, which recounted that Charlemagne had brought relics back from Jerusalem to Aachen and that these were subsequently given by Charles the Bald to the abbeys of Saint-Cornelius at Compiègne and of Saint-Denis. Since this account had circulated extensively from the early twelfth century,[138] that of Charroux had to be compatible with it if it was to find an audience beyond the abbey. The most significant transformation, however, concerns the nature of the relic. Between 1380 and 1426, four papal bulls authorized indulgences for an ostentation every seven years at Charroux, invoking as the principal relic the 'foreskin of our Savior Jesus Christ,

known as the Holy Virtue' (*prepucium Domini nostri Jhesu Christi Sancta Virtus nuncupatum*). This confirms that the two relics were one and the same. The transition from one term to the other must have taken place at Charroux itself, in the context of the Eucharistic debates that assumed an increasing importance starting in the second half of the eleventh century.

From the 1040s, Berengar (*c.* 999–1088), a former student at the cathedral school at Chartres and head of school at Saint-Martin Abbey in Tours, had affirmed that consecrated bread and wine only became the flesh and blood of Christ in a symbolic sense and not through a true conversion of their substance, that is, not through transubstantiation. In so doing he revived questions that had already preoccupied certain monks in the Carolingian era, and sparked a polemic on a grand scale. Berengar's position clashed with both the commonly held opinion and with the Church's claim over the reality and efficacy of the sacraments. He was thus criticized at multiple synods from 1050 on, and was obliged to pronounce an oath stipulated by Rome in 1059, and again in 1079 and 1080 because he continued to produce writings on the subject.[139] As this controversy and its unexpected course escalated, with Berengar's opponents finding themselves obliged to engage seriously with certain of his arguments, it ultimately provoked an unprecedented refinement in the discourse on the Eucharist and even came to bear on the question of relics. Between 1098 and 1104/05, the abbot Thiofrid of Echternach, in

modern-day Luxembourg, composed a treatise entitled *Flowers Strewn on the Tombs of the Saints*, prompted by a new feast day celebrating the monastery's relics. In it, he explicitly cited the *berengariana heresys*, and at several points compared relics to the bread and wine of the Eucharist in a consideration of the ways in which God intervenes, through the material substance of relics, in the perceptible world.[140]

Thiofrid does not address the question of the bodily relics of Christ, which was intimately related to the controversy over the Eucharist. But these relics would soon find themselves at the center of another treatise, *On the Saints and their Relics*, composed between 1114 and 1120 by the monk Guibert of Nogent. This was Guibert's reaction to a claim by the monks of Saint-Médard Abbey in Soissons to possess one of Christ's baby teeth. He argued that only in the Eucharist was Christ materially present on earth. He therefore rejected the very possibility of a corporal relic of the Savior—including those parts of his body that might have remained after his ascension, such as a tooth lost during childhood—and scathingly denounced churches and relic-hunters who professed to hold them. Guibert reports that he himself had observed how a relic-hunter from a 'famous church'—probably the cathedral of Laon, in 1112 or 1114—presented the faithful with a box supposedly containing a fragment of bread chewed by the Savior during the Last Supper; the author then turns his ire on claims by 'others' to possess the umbilical cord or the foreskin of Christ.[141] If the history of Christ's umbilical cord remains uncertain, this mention of Christ's foreskin is very likely a reference to the relic kept at Charroux.

The discovery or 'invention' of the milk tooth at Soissons (probably during the second half of the eleventh century)—like that of the *sancta virtus* at Charroux, which would soon become the foreskin (probably in 1082)—took place while Berengar of Tours was active. When he discussed these relics of Christ *c.* 1114–20, Guibert was thus revisiting the intense debates of a period marked by a lack of consensus concerning the nature of the Eucharist. This situation had encouraged the emergence and the success of unusual phenomena that appealed to the imagination, such as miracles, relics, and visions,[142] as well as new kinds of images.[143] For example, the regular veneration of miraculous hosts or of liturgical fabric stained by an outpouring of blood does not seem to predate the polemic instigated by Berengar of Tours, although the first accounts of miracles involving the transformation of the Host into actual flesh and blood appeared already in the early Middle Ages.[144] The emerging tendency was to believe that Christ, considered to be present in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, could also manifest himself in other perceptible forms.[145] In this context, the *sancta virtus* that became a foreskin is an early and complex case. The miraculous appearance of the relic in the presence of Charlemagne and during a Mass at the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem—in other words, at the very site of the Resurrection—fueled its prestige. The foreskin clarified what was already evoked by Charlemagne's vision: as a relic of the Circumcision, it recalled the Incarnation of Christ that lay at the origin of the Eucharistic ritual.

Another foreskin relic is attested a few years later at the chapel of the *Sancta Sanctorum* of the Lateran Palace, the residence of the pope in Rome. Between 1130 and 1143, Benedict, a canon at Saint Peter's, wrote that a relic of the *circumcisio* was carried in procession during the feast of the Elevation of the Cross.[146] Writing between 1159 and 1181, John the Deacon refers to this relic in his *Description of the Lateran*. Giving it pride of place among the relics of the chapel, he describes it as being placed at the center of a cross that was anointed once a year, also on

the feast of the Elevation.[147] According to these accounts, then, the foreskin was here too a prominent relic associated with the sacrifice of Christ. But the Charroux relic was so famous that Rome could not ignore it. Contemplating whether the resurrected Christ had regained the foreskin removed from his body as a child, Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) thus invoked the Lateran and the Charroux relics in succession; without reaching a conclusion as to their authenticity, he ultimately referred the matter to God.[148] In a collection of the lives of the saints composed around 1245, Bartholomew of Trent likewise mentions the two relics.[149] Basing his account on this text, the great hagiographical compiler Jacobus de Voragine, another north Italian Dominican, combined these two elements in his *Golden Legend*, implying that the relic once at Charroux could now be found in the *Sancta Sanctorum*.[150] This idea of a translation from Poitou to Rome ultimately demonstrates the broad impact of the late eleventh-century invention at Charroux, an impressive operation that would, in the space of only a few years, bring together ancient claims concerning the involvement of Charlemagne, the story of the emperor's voyage to Jerusalem, contemporary debates surrounding the Eucharist, the reappropriation of a reliquary, and the realization of a spectacular architectural project. The relic quickly found its detractors, but for the most part was met with wide success, reaching as far as Rome and even beyond.[151]

Chess and the Imaginary of Power

The chess pieces and chessboards found within churches represented situations that directly concerned medieval society and those who played an active role in it.[152] Originating in the East, specifically in India, and disseminated with the expansion of Islam, the game of chess was introduced to Europe in the tenth century. Although the pieces generally retained their rather schematic form, their nomenclature was adapted to local social realities. What had been the shah became the king, the former giving us *scachus* in Latin, *esches* in Old French, and then 'chess' in English. The vizier was transformed into a queen, while at either end of the board crowded the *comites*, *equites*, *marchiones*, and *pedones*—counts (formerly war elephants), knights (formerly horsemen), marquises (formerly chariots), and a troop of foot soldiers that held the front line. Together the pieces made up two 'peoples' or *populi* that competed against one another following established rules, as attested in the *Versus de scachis*, a Latin poem copied around the turn of the first millennium in the Benedictine monastery of Einsiedeln in Switzerland, which names the pieces and describes their moves.[153] The chess pieces stood for the different agents of the feudal system, which organized society according to relations of domination and obligation between lords and their vassals: free men pledged their loyalty and their military assistance in return for lands held in 'fief' (*feodum*).[154] Chess players could imagine themselves operating in these kinds of social and military configurations, as each game enacted the individual twists and turns of a conflict before finally reaching a fatal end.[155] The Einsiedeln poem specifically praises the game as mental recreation, without physical danger and without the risk of making a false oath. As a game of images, then, chess was intimately linked to the imaginary of feudalism.

The codified society of its figures recalled the codes of social life, in which sovereigns and their entourages effectively staged gestures and objects that one needed to know how to interpret. Historians have endeavored to understand the 'rules of play' of medieval political life, their nuances, and their development based on texts and images that themselves made use of these conventions as a means of recounting events or displaying allegiance.[156] But how did the game of chess, which by representing the social game artificially reduced its complexity, participate in the same social dynamics?

The numerous objects in bone, wood, or antler found on archaeological sites indicate the progressive spread of the game of chess from the tenth and above all the eleventh century, especially among the lower ranks of the aristocracy.[157] The success of this practice was very likely linked to the transformations that were taking place in society, with the construction of castles and the reorganization and agriculturalization of lands resulting in a shift in military realities. In what follows, a study of donations of chess pieces and chessboards to churches and of their repurposing in sometimes highly complex objects will make possible an exploration of the relations among the game of chess, its players, and the Church, the latter having a central role in the feudal social system. Such donations appear to have been common between the tenth century and the first decades of the twelfth century, and all evidence suggests that they were symbolic and carefully planned acts meant to establish and exhibit relationships between ecclesiastical institutions and holders of secular and military power.[158] These acts thus represent one of the most spectacular expressions of the social implications of chess during the first period of its history in Latin Christendom—from the Holy Roman Empire around the year 1000 to the kingdom of France in the 1120s and 1130s via Spain, Saxony, the Ardennes, and the young duchy of Normandy. The final pages of this section will focus on the transformation of a chessboard into a binding for a gospel book offered to the collegiate church of Brunswick in 1339. This relates to a later conception of the game of chess that developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in connection with courtly culture and moral discourse.

Imperial Positions and Military Conflicts

A particularly important ensemble of chess pieces can be found on the pulpit offered by the emperor Henry II (1014–24) to the collegiate church at Aachen (fig. 29).[159] The pulpit is made up of three curved panels. The central and largest one is divided into nine square, recessed fields, while the two side panels are respectively divided into three rectangular fields, set one on top of the other. The borders between the fields are all decorated with ornate goldwork and precious stones. The fields at the four corners of the main panel contain images of the four evangelists, while the five central ones, distinguished by the insertion of a precious object at the middle of each of these fields, together form the Cross. Its center seems to have originally contained a large antique cameo featuring an eagle,[160] while the other four—the arms of the Cross—still contain vessels made from rock crystal, agate, and glass designed to imitate agate,[161] with the mouths of the vessels facing inward. The core of the pulpit is made from wood, and is pierced to allow light to shine through these vessels, thus giving them the appearance of large gemstones. Twenty-seven chess pieces are set all across the arms of the Cross, with between six and eight pieces occupying each of these four fields (fig. 30). They are carved from two types of stone, a

29

Pulpit, between 1002 and 1014, general view. Aachen, church of Saint Mary

30   Pulpit, between 1002 and 1014, dismounted metal plate (central panel, left middle field) with crystal cup and chess figures.
      Aachen, church of Saint Mary

banded agate and a milky grey chalcedony, presumably once distinguishing the pieces of each of the two players. The sixteen main pieces are positioned at the corners of the four fields, and eleven foot soldiers are otherwise arrayed. The poem preserved at Einsiedeln, a monastery that also benefited from Henry II's favor,[162] dates from the same period. Applying the identification of the pieces from the poem reveals that the upper and lower ends of the vertical axis of the Cross are occupied by kings and queens, while the center of this axis is occupied by counts; across the horizontal axis, four marquises are placed above four knights.[163] This arrangement may vary from the original, as the pulpit has been modified and restored several times over the centuries.[164] But the distinction between the chess pieces and the other stones, the latter relegated entirely to the borders of the square fields, must be an original part of the design. The pieces are standing on the vertical surface of the pulpit: they are positioned on the motif of the Cross as they would be on a chessboard. What might the meaning of such an arrangement be in the context of a gift from Henry II?

An inscription running along the upper and lower edges of the pulpit indicates that Henry II offered this to the Virgin from his own wealth. It describes him as *rex*—that is, as king rather than emperor. Henry II was crowned king of East Francia at Mainz in July 1002, shortly after

the sudden death of the young Otto III in Italy. The succession was complicated, as nothing had been prepared. Henry seized the imperial regalia from the funeral march carrying Otto's body back to Aachen, and faced a lack of support from the aristocracy as he defended his legitimacy. He traveled throughout the kingdom gathering allegiances, before finally arriving at Aachen, where his second coronation took place on September 8, the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin. The donation of the pulpit may have been conceived on this occasion, mobilizing the riches inherited from Otto III in order to mark Henry II's accession to the throne.[165] In this context, the arrangement of the chess pieces appears to affirm a particular notion of sovereignty: Henry II used the chess pieces to represent the nobles in a position of subordination to the triumphal symbol of the gemmed cross, on a structure that functionally supported the proclamation of the gospels. Such a composition associated the royalty of the sovereign with that of Christ, the king of kings, an association likewise made in the *ordo* of the coronation.[166] It also bolstered the institution of royalty by mobilizing a knowledge of the longstanding metaphor of the ecclesial organization as Christ's body, a knowledge that Henry had certainly mastered during his time studying at the cathedral schools of Hildesheim and Regensburg[167]—his reign was characterized by the presentation of sovereignty as an ecclesial duty,[168] regularly expressed through images and objects.[169] Above all, the signification of the chess pieces distributed on the Cross must have been readily understandable to the members of the aristocracy to whom the message was addressed, as they were very likely familiar with the game. Henry would once again draw upon the idea of the human body as a hierarchical model in the preamble to a charter directed to the bishop of Strasbourg in 1013 or 1014, during his reorganization of the relations among ecclesiastical institutions:

> Because the form of the human body was created from the rational order of the omnipotent God, in such a way that whatever lesser members are subject to the head and are governed by it just as if under some military commander, we do not think that it is incongruous to this model to place certain smaller churches in our realm beneath the greater ones, and we have judged that it in no way counters the will of the king of kings, who knew how to set apart the celestial and earthly domain with a miraculous ordering.[170]

Other churches may too have received chess pieces from the Ottonian and Salian emperors, although this is not attested directly. A king piece in crystal, preserved at the cathedral of Halberstadt and probably made in Egypt during the tenth century,[171] may have been offered by Otto III on the occasion of the consecration of the cathedral in 992, together with a scepter symbolizing the confirmation of the properties of the diocese.[172] Another king piece, possibly of the same origin, is likewise linked to the memory of Otto III at the cathedral of Münster (fig. 31).[173] Inventories drawn up in 1051 and 1127 at the cathedrals of Spire and Bamberg, respectively, refer to *alea* in ivory and in crystal.[174] Here, the word designates chess pieces and not dice, which at the time were often used in chess, thus encouraging a slippage in the meaning of the term—the Einsiedeln monastery *Versus de scachis* is, for instance, entitled *De alea ratione* in a copy dating from the early eleventh century.[175] During this period, Bamberg and Spire had

particularly close links with imperial power: the bishopric of Bamberg was founded in 1007 by Henry II, who attended the consecration of its church in 1012, while the cathedral of Spire was privileged by his successor, Conrad II, who oversaw its rebuilding (which probably began in 1025) and was probably buried there. At the cathedral at Trier, a chess set in crystal recorded in a 1238 inventory alongside other small pieces of crystal and precious stones[176] can perhaps be linked to the term of Archbishop Egbert (977–93), chancellor to Otto II. There is also a possible connection between Hildesheim Cathedral's acquisition of another chess piece, mounted on a reliquary dating from the second half of the tenth century (fig. 32),[177] and Otto III's preceptor, the bishop Bernward (993–1022). Finally, a series of crystal figures, attested at the cathedral of Osnabrück since 1615 and allegedly given by Charlemagne (fig. 33),[178] is more likely linked to a bishop and close advisor of Henry IV, Benno II (1068–88), whose term saw the forgery of two acts attributing the church's foundation to the Carolingian emperor.[179]

It was not only emperors, however, that exploited the symbolic capacities of chess in their relations with churches. Take, for instance, Bouchard, count of Vendôme and of Paris, a member of the inner circle of the king of the Franks Hugh Capet, who died in 1005, having entered the abbey of Saint-Maur. Writing in or shortly before 1058, his biographer Odo of Saint-Maur stated that Bouchard had offered a number of precious objects to the abbey, including a game in crystal 'habitually played by soldiers'. This donation must have signaled his renouncement of secular and military life.[180] In a testament dated 1008, Ermengol I, count of Urgell in Catalonia, bequeathed a chess set to a monastery dedicated to Saint Giles, most likely the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Gilles near Nîmes. The simplified form of this text suggests that it was written in haste, perhaps on the eve of an expedition against the Moors that would end in 1010 with a rout of the Christian troops outside Córdoba and the death of Ermengol.[181] The promise of this offering seems to have been formulated in preparation for an imminent conflict, and its realization made dependent upon a fatal outcome. A potentially dangerous situation thus apparently led the count to make a salvific arrangement with the recipient church, with the chess set representing the military confrontation itself. It is possible that this chess set did indeed find its way to the abbey of Saint-Gilles: around 1139, the *Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela* mentioned objects 'in the form of chess pieces' set among other *lapides cristallini* along the top of the shrine of Saint Giles,[182] and in 1363 an inventory recorded *estaquis de cristallo*, integrated into a reliquary.[183] However, these may also relate to another chess set bequeathed to the same abbey by Ermengol's sister-in-law, the countess Ermesinde of Barcelona, in her testament of 1058.[184]

At the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Foy at Conques in Rouergue, a chessboard was used to symbolize the resolution of a feudal conflict. The object appears in a narrative contained in the *Book of Miracles of Saint Foy*, composed by a local monk *c.* 1030–40 in continuation of the work begun between 1013 and 1020 by Bernard of Angers. It is an independent narrative in which the chessboard is at once a material object—said to have been given to Saint Foy, and probably on view in the church—and a literary object that comes to play a central role in the narrative. The story is that of Raymond, son of the lord of Montpezat near Cahors, who was imprisoned in a tower of the castle of a rival lord named Gauzbert, most likely around 1025–30. After Raymond had appealed unceasingly to Saint Foy for five weeks, she finally appeared to him and freed him from his chains. He then leapt over the barrier formed by the men guarding him and ran down the stairs, past a group of sleeping soldiers, and finally into the great hall of the castle:

Reliquary with chess figure, 10th–13th century. Münster, Domkammer

33   Chess figures 'of Charlemagne', rock crystal, 10th–12th century. Osnabrück, Diözesanmuseum

While he was standing there in great agitation and uncertainty at last it occurred to him that, although he couldn't convey his chains to the holy virgin's basilica because of their great weight, at least he could carry off the chessboard hanging there as evidence of his escape. After he had grabbed it he threw himself headlong over the wall, which was higher than he was tall, landed without injury, and sped away on bare feet.[185]

Raymond's escape, the crucial moment in this miracle story, coincides with the first appearance of the chessboard. This object is invoked as the equivalent of the chains that former prisoners regularly brought as ex-votos to the church of Saint Foy, who was seen as a specialist in this kind of escape.[186] At the very moment when he should take flight, Raymond is effectively paralyzed by a symbolic problem. He is concerned with how to carry his chains away with him, despite the fact that they are too numerous and too heavy: though broken by the miracle, they continue to hold him, for he must offer them to the saint in order to be completely delivered from them. It is at this instant that, noticing a chessboard on the wall, Raymond is able to free himself by recognizing it as a fitting substitute. The story goes on to relate that after his escape, too weak to travel directly to Conques, Raymond returned to Cahors and to his life as a clerk at the cathedral of Saint-Étienne, and settled for dedicating a very large candle to Saint Foy. As time went on and

still he had not fulfilled his promise, the saint did not forget. Finally, on the anniversary of the betrayal of Christ by Judas, she appeared to him and summoned him to Conques at Easter.[187] Indeed, the story as a whole follows the cycle of the liturgy, from the imprisonment during Lent, to the physical liberation on Palm Sunday, to the true deliverance on Easter. With the symbolic function of the chessboard confirmed by the appearance of Saint Foy, the former prisoner sets off for the monastery, where the denouement of the story takes place:

> Completing the journey he had undertaken, he arrived at the oft-mentioned place carrying the chessboard with him and prostrated himself in prayer, offering what he had thought out in a humble murmur. When he had finished [...] he addressed the people there and told them what had been done for him miraculously through the holy virgin while he was wrapped in chains. The small crowd of people, both men and women, listened in silence. Among them was the son of the abovementioned Gauzbert, who by chance was with a group of his fellow warriors who had come there to pray. He was absolutely dazed by the sight of Raymond in the center of the crowd, wondering how he could have been freed from the bondage of so many chains. And equal amazement gripped Gozfred at this sight: he saw his own chessboard which Raymond had carried off to Conques offered to the holy virgin as evidence of the miracle! Then all recognized that divine power had been at work and they turned to declarations of praise, glorifying the power of the holy martyr Foy bestowed upon her by the Lord, Who grants every kind of miracle because of her holy merits.[188]

By introducing not the oppressor Gauzbert himself but rather his son and his fellow soldiers, the narrative brings together adversaries of equal status, for Raymond is himself the son of a lord. Their meeting follows the precise moment when, having presented the chessboard to Saint Foy, Raymond relates his story before the crowd, obliging the enemy soldiers to recognize the unjust captivity and the intervention of Saint Foy in his liberation.[189] Before the eyes of all present, this situation renders the chessboard both a trophy and a symbol of the conflict and its resolution: in keeping with its function as a game, it materializes a confrontation between two parties, with Saint Foy intervening as if to decide the outcome of the match. If the imaginative act of placing the chessboard at the heart of this affair testifies to a subtle and shared awareness of the symbolic stakes of the game of chess, the fact that the story was written down between five and fifteen years after the events underscores the impression it had made at Conques.

A number of churches in the north of Spain possessed chess pieces, most likely of Islamic origin. The circumstances in which they were acquired are not entirely clear, but may be linked to conflicts with the Moors along what would soon become the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela. Not far from Urgell in Catalonia, a series of figures in crystal, apparently dating from the eleventh century, were long kept at the collegiate church of Saint Peter at Àger. This church was founded on the site of a Moorish fortress conquered by the nobleman Arnau Mir de Tost (c. 1000–72), who may have offered the chess pieces to commemorate this victory.[190] In Rioja, the Benedictine monastery of San-Millán de la Cogolla was rebuilt by order of the king of Navarre García Sánchez III (1035–54) after being destroyed in 1001 during the final campaign

of the vizier Almanzor, warlord and ruler of Arab al-Andalus. Here, sometime between 1030 and 1090, two pawns and a knight, all in crystal, appear to have been incorporated into an ivory reliquary that has since been broken up.[191] Farther to the west, four ivory chess pieces dating to the ninth or early tenth century have been preserved at the monastery of Santiago de Peñalba, founded by Gennadius, the bishop of Astorga who became a hermit and died there in 936, and built during the reign of King Ramiro II of León, who defeated the caliph Abd al-Rahman III at Simancas in 939.[192] Finally, in Galicia, thirteen rock crystal chess pieces, probably from early tenth-century Fatimid Egypt, were kept at the monastery founded at Celanova in Ourense in 938 by Saint Rudesind, a propagator of Benedictine monasticism along the margins of the Christian kingdom.[193] Much farther north, donations of chess pieces are also attested in Normandy, possibly because during this era the region represented another frontier of Christianity. At the Benedictine abbey of the Trinity at Fécamp, a 1362 inventory mentions some *eschez* and attributes them along with some other objects to a 'duke'—no doubt Richard I (942–96) or his successor Richard II (996–1026), the dukes of Normandy who refounded the abbey.[194] At the cathedral of Rouen, the capital of the duchy, some chess pieces in crystal are cited in an inventory drawn up between 1184 and 1192.[195] In Norman Italy, chess pieces are either referenced or actually preserved at the cathedrals of Capua[196] and Salerno,[197] suggesting that they may likewise have benefited from such offerings.

The association of such objects with churches and with military undertakings appears again at several locations at the end of the eleventh century. The *Annales* of Saint James at Pegau near Leipzig in Saxony, written around 1155, record one such case from 1096, in connection with the consecration of this Benedictine church. On his return from a pilgrimage to Rome and Compostela to atone for violent acts of war, the count Wiprecht of Groitzsch (c. 1050–1124) founded the monastery, and is said to have offered a number of ivory and crystal chess pieces to 'adorn the pulpit'. This recalls the pulpit of Aachen, testifying to its fame yet adapting it to a new situation. By associating the chess pieces with the structure from which the gospels were read, Wiprecht demonstrated his desire to detach himself from his military past as well as to place himself under the protection of Christ, the king of kings, who spoke through the holy book. It is possible that he had acquired the chess pieces through his father-in-law, King Vratislav II of Bohemia (1085–92), who was involved in the new foundation.[198] Also in 1096 but this time in the Ardennes, the duke Godfrey of Bouillon is said to have given a chess set to the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Hubert just before departing on a crusade to Jerusalem. A chronicle written between 1098 and 1106 recounts that 'shortly afterwards the duke set off for Jerusalem, having sent us a chess set in crystal; he took with him a large number of nobles and clergy'.[199] Within a single sentence, the reference to the offering is inserted between the announcement of the duke's departure on crusade and the details about those who accompanied him. The gift of the chess set thus signaled the departure of the group, whose members correlated to the chess pieces—as *populus*, in the terminology of the Einsiedeln poem, or as a *mesnie* (household, family) gathered around a military chief, according to a French term known to have been used in reference to chess pieces starting in the thirteenth century.[200] This act may even have been carried out publicly in the context of ritual preparations for the crusade: at the moment he was to lead his men into a dangerous conflict against the infidels, the play-combat giving way to a real battle in the name of the Church, Godfrey thus marked a moment of transition, showing

that the time for play was over and that the group entrusted itself to God. When the chronicle was composed, several years after the crusaders' departure but most likely before their return, the signification of these objects still remained clear to the author and the audience. The six pawns found at the abbey of Saint-Maurice d'Agaune, one in rock crystal, the others in agate, may have been offered under comparable circumstances. Today they are affixed to the shrine of Saint Maurice, assembled in 1230 from older elements.[201] At the Benedictine abbey at Mozac in Auvergne, an 1197 account recognizing the authenticity of the relics of Saint Austremonius notes the presence of chess pieces in crystal fixed to the saint's shrine, and describes them as a gift from the king Pepin the Short (751–68). With the assertion that the king had donated the relics, the monastery sought to counter a rival claim by the abbey of Issoire. The involvement of Mozac in a number of conflicts pitting the counts of Auvergne against the kings of France during the first half of the twelfth century may, however, have provided the real occasion for the acquisition of these figures.[202]

The King of France, Saint-Denis, and Reims

Until the French Revolution, a series of chess pieces in ivory, exceptional in their size and form, were preserved at the abbey of Saint-Denis near Paris (fig. 34). They were made in southern Italy at the end of the eleventh century, but are only mentioned for the first time in an inventory of 1505: 'A complete game of chess in ivory, which belonged to Charles Maigne'.[203] To understand the reasons for their presence at Saint-Denis and for their attribution to Charlemagne, here I will explore the possibility of a memorial initiative by the abbot Suger.[204] Born in 1081 and educated at Saint-Denis at the same time as the future king Louis VI (1108–37), to whom he would become an advisor, Suger grew familiar from an early stage not only with the chancery of the kings of France and the nature of the Anglo-Norman administration but also with the diplomatic customs of the Holy See. While still a simple monk, he embarked on a grand project to officially transform Saint-Denis into a royal abbey and necropolis.[205] This was equally a matter of working toward the consolidation of the kingdom of France, then politically weak and limited to the royal estate, the Île-de-France. In 1124, when he had been abbot for two years, Suger drew up a deed that gave audacious expression to his political thought: the king figured, in his role as the count of Vexin, as the vassal of the martyred saints of the abbey. In this, French royal power was presented as stemming from the saints and from God. At the same time, the abbey's position was strengthened as it was placed at the head of the Church in France and thus in direct contact with the papacy. Suger further reinforced his ideas in a fake charter of Charlemagne, probably created between 1124 or 1127 and 1129, and supposedly marking the foundation of the king's position as a vassal to the abbey. In it, the Carolingian emperor was said to have placed the 'regalia and ornaments of the kingdom of France' on the altar of the martyrs,[206] then proclaiming before the most important figures of his realm that he himself was merely the defender of the *regnum franciae*, which he hereby entrusted to the saints, as its guardians and masters under God. Charlemagne was also said, among other measures, to have forbidden his successors to have themselves crowned anywhere except at Saint-Denis. This was addressed in particular to the abbey of Saint-Rémi at Reims: in 1108, Louis VI had been crowned in extremis at the cathedral at Orléans, but the coronation of the two preceding kings, Henry I

and Philippe I, had taken place at Reims in 1027 and 1059, respectively. This competition between Saint-Denis and Reims also explains why the archbishop of Reims figured in the fake charter at the head of the list of twenty witnesses, just after the emperor.[207]

Chess pieces with a truly imperial appearance, said to have been solemnly placed by Charlemagne on the altar of the martyrs at Saint-Denis, may have represented the notion that he had commended his realm to the abbey: the chess set 'of Charlemagne' was perhaps among the 'regalia and ornaments of the kingdom' evoked in the false charter. It is therefore probable that Suger attributed these chess pieces to the emperor at the same moment, that is, between 1124 and 1129. In his *Life of Louis VI*, written around 1144, Suger claimed that in the preceding years he himself had made two voyages to Norman Italy. He could have acquired the chess pieces on one of these, either in January 1121, when he met with the pope in Puglia to settle 'various business of the kingdom' before assuming the abbacy upon his return in March 1122 or, scarcely a year later, when he spent six months in the region, visiting its principal shrines, after participating in the Lateran Council of March 1123.[208] The abbot must have deemed this supposed offering of chess pieces by Charlemagne to be both plausible and believable, which makes sense given that these kinds of objects are regularly attested at churches throughout the eleventh century. In coming up with this account, he projected the donation into a prestigious past while taking the initiative himself, just as he did with other objects or architectural elements representing the historical claims of the abbey.[209] But the false charter and the chess pieces did not have the desired effect: in 1129 and again in 1131, it was the abbey of Saint-Rémi in Reims that was chosen for the successive coronations of the two sons of Louis VI: Philippe, who died early, and then Louis. This disappointment catalyzed a change in Suger's strategy, as he turned from the king to the pope[210] and began to concentrate his efforts on the reconstruction of his abbey church—though the chess pieces nevertheless remained among the riches of the abbey.

These themes surrounding royalty and the Church as an institution are elaborated upon in an intricate ensemble of images on an ivory object with the stylized form of a king piece, which according to nineteenth-century authors came from the cathedral at Reims (figs. 35–38). Various components suggest that the piece was never used in a game: its relatively large size, with a height of almost nine centimeters (3.5 inches), the opening on the underside that would have allowed it to serve as a container, and the fact that it is very finely carved from the point of an elephant's tusk.[211] Under a pediment that indicates the façade of a building, the Virgin sits enthroned, holding Christ. Depicted almost in profile, they are turned towards their right, where the Three Kings present their gifts. On the other side of the Virgin and Child stands a bearded man, dressed in the style of antiquity, holding a scroll. In the next scene, King Herod is shown seated with his shoulders slouched, his head resting on his left hand, and his scepter held at an oblique angle between his legs, parallel to the lance of the guard at his side. After the Three Kings, following the star, have just asked him for directions, he listens to a figure announcing the prophecy of the birth of a king of Israel at Bethlehem. The next scene shows the Massacre of the Innocents ordered by Herod in his fear of the new king (Matthew 2:1–18). Lastly, the rear of the object is occupied by the baptism of the adult Christ in the Jordan. An inscription on a vertical band identifies the dove that descends towards his forehead: *spiritum ecce dei*, 'here is the spirit of God'. Above, within three arches, are scenes that seem to be drawn from the legend of Saint Peter: at left, a baptism that may be that of the Roman centurion Cornelius, the first non-Jew

34   Chess figures 'of Charlemagne', ivory, south Italy, end of the 11th century. From the abbey of Saint-Denis.
      Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Monnaies, médailles et antiques

35   Chess figure, ivory, 1129 or 1131 (?). From the cathedral at Reims. Paris, Musée de Cluny – Musée national du Moyen Âge.
Left: Adoration of the Kings.

36   Chess figure, ivory, 1129 or 1131 (?). From the cathedral at Reims. Paris, Musée de Cluny – Musée national du Moyen Âge.
Front: Virgin and Child.

Chess figure, ivory, 1129 or 1131 (?). From the cathedral at Reims. Paris, Musée de Cluny – Musée national du Moyen Âge.
Right: Massacre of the Innocents.

Chess figure, ivory, 1129 or 1131 (?). From the cathedral at Reims. Paris, Musée de Cluny – Musée national du Moyen Âge.
Back: Baptism of Jesus and scenes from the legend of Saint Peter.

Chess figure, ivory, 1129 or 1131 (?). From the cathedral at Reims. Paris, Musée de Cluny – Musée national du Moyen Âge.
Right: Massacre of the Innocents.

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