

Article

A Polysemic Interpretation of the West Façade of Saint-Martin-de-Besse: Time, Space, and Chiasmus Carved in Stone

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Abstract: This article explores the sculptural programme of the west portal of Saint-Martin-de-Besse, which places Penance and the Eucharist sacraments at the centre of its polysemic narratives, forming chiasmic sequences. Concerned with the fall of humankind and the history of redemption, the portal of Besse presents a series of enigmatic figures from the Old and New Testaments, along with an early Christian figure, Saint Eustace. In this article, I first present a brief historical overview of the church and its surroundings and then proceed with an iconographical survey of its portal. I argue that the series of sculpted narrative vignettes forming the west façade of Besse are polysemic as they carry multiple meanings. Focusing on salvation through (re)conversion, where the liturgical sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist are fundamental, these polysemic narratives form and perform four distinct chiasmus interchanges involving the Garden of Eden, where time and space are in constant dialogue.

Keywords: Eve; Romanesque sculpture; time; space; liturgy; original sin; iconography; Genesis; semiotic; sacred drama



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We are separated from God on both sides: The Tree of Knowledge separates us from Him, and the Tree of Life separates Him from us.¹

(Kafka 1953)

1. Introduction

Situated in a charming village in the Périgord, the French Romanesque church of Saint-Martin-de-Besse presents a fascinating west façade, a rarity in the region (Figures 1 and 2). The west façade of Besse includes a portal composed of a variety of isolated narratives from the Old and New Testaments, along with a scene from the story of an Early Christian figure, Saint Eustace. Saint-Martin-de-Besse has received little scholarly attention to date, with five publications mentioning its architectural and sculptural programme and the iconographical meaning of its portal (Brugière 1882, pp. 3–8; Secret 1968, pp. 227–32; Dubourg-Noves 1982; Saxon 2006, pp. 79–86 and Palazzo 2017). Archival materials on its architecture are rather modest as the rural church's documents and archives, its surrounding monuments, and other associated buildings have not survived the test of time, numerous wars over the centuries, nor the French Revolution.² As a result, retracing the building's history is challenging, and proposing an exact date for its construction is difficult.



Figure 1. *Saint-Martin Church, west façade, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France.* ©Author.

The earliest account of the church is found in a hand-written document from 1882 by Chanoine Hippolyte Brugière ([Brugière 1882](#), pp. 3–8). It relates an unconfirmed history of Saint-Martin-de-Besse and the geography and complex history of its region. Published in 1968 as a book chapter in the *Zodiaque* series, Jean Secret offers the first overview of Besse, with a concise interpretation of its portal ([Secret 1968](#), pp. 227–32). In 1979, Pierre Dubourg-Noves provided the most complete study with an overview of the church as an ensemble ([Dubourg-Noves 1982](#), pp. 245–54). His article includes details of Saint-Martin’s interior and exterior decorations, together with a concise introduction to its history. In 2006, Elizabeth Saxon proposed a brief discussion of the penitential-Eucharistic iconographical programme of Besse, in a chapter devoted to similarly themed portals in Romanesque France from *The Eucharist in Romanesque France: Iconography and Theology* ([Saxon 2006](#), pp. 79–86). Most recently, in 2014, Eric Palazzo suggested a compelling interpretation of the historiated, sculptural programme of Besse, focused on a well-articulated study of the sensorial references of its narratives, mostly orbiting around the Apocalypse and the Eucharistic sacrament ([Palazzo 2017](#), pp. 127–49). These five publications serve as a starting point for this comprehensive study of the iconographical programme of the west façade of Saint-Martin-de-Besse.

Adding to previous scholarship, I propose a new approach to the reading of its west façade that considers polysemy, a term used in philology to designate a word that encapsulates multiple meanings, making it lexically ambiguous. Applying polysemy to the iconographical vocabulary of Besse, I argue that its various narratives carry multiple meanings.³ Treated as unstable texts carved in stone, and with a focus on time and space—both

the terrestrial and the liturgical—I also argue that the narrative vignettes of Besse offer a more global and stable narrative plot, made possible through a series of overarching chiastic interchanges. Often used in the Bible, these literary devices allow different narratives to mirror each other to focus on a central idea. I propose that the central idea of the chiastic narratives of Besse is concerned with salvation through (re)conversion, where the liturgical sacrament of the Eucharist is fundamental.

Central Top-Bottom Axis

Eternal

- (A) Christ in Majesty
- (E) Trinity

Old Testament

- (B) Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve and Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

New Testament

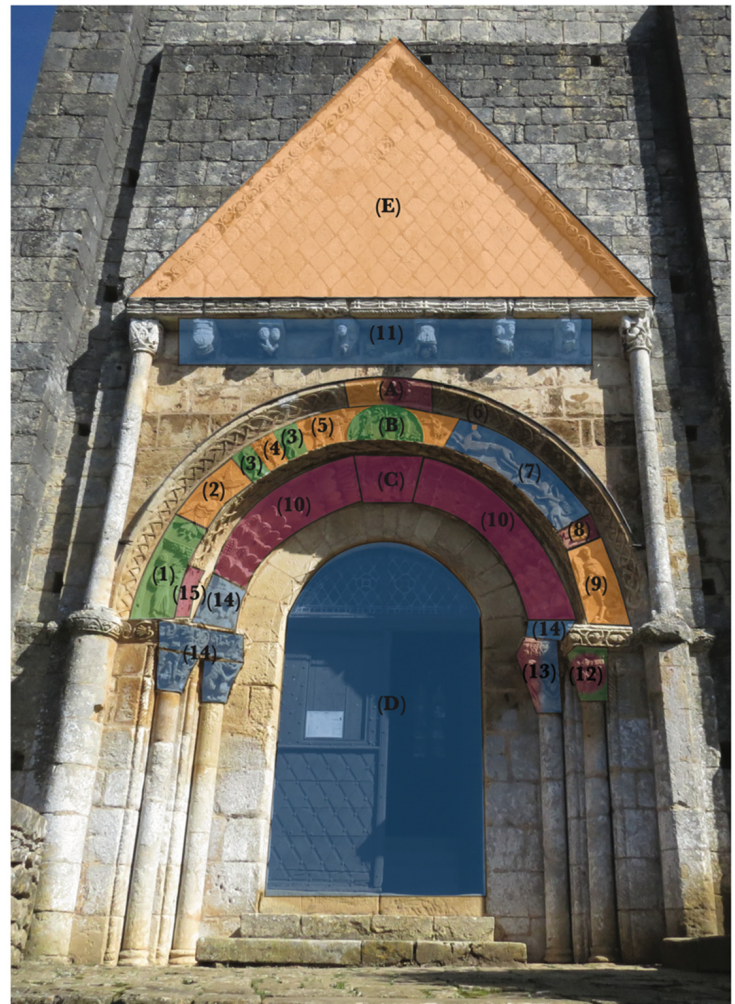
- (A) Saint Peter the Apostle
- (C) Agnus Dei

Christian Time

- (A) Saint Peter the Exorcist
- (D) Worshipers

Right - Centre - Left Axis

- (1) Isaiah and Jesse's stump
- (2) Seraphim
- (3) Naked Adam and Eve
- (4) Tree of Life
- (5) Christ Logos & angels
- (6) Floating Christ
- (7) Saint Eustace
- (8) Virgin and Child / Abraham and Lazarus / Rachel and an Innocent Child / Raising of Lazarus
- (9) Saint Michael, Archangel
- (10) Palm tree motif - Passion
- (11) Six corbels: smiling animal head, man and ape eating, musician, acrobat, two figures embracing, and tambourine player
- (12) Dives and Lazarus / Herod, Rachel and the Massacre of the Innocents
- (13) Eucharistic symbols
- (14) Animals and Psychomachia
- (15) Saint Peter the Apostle / Saint Peter the Exorcist



Legend: Eternal Old Testament New Testament Christianity

Figure 2. Saint-Martin Church, colour-coded chart. ©Author.

In this article, I first survey the historical and iconographical context of Besse, as well as the narratives forming its west façade. Then, I present an iconographical analysis of its narratives carved in stone, with a particular emphasis on their polysemic interpretations and correspondence with Penance and the liturgy of the Eucharist. This analysis is particularly concerned with two representations of Eve and Adam from the story of their Temptation and Fall, and their connection to apocryphal texts and sacred drama. It also addresses the church's inner archivolt, *opus reticulatum* (reticulated work), corbels, and historiated capitals.⁴ The third section of this article offers a discussion of the issues of space, narratives, and time, with a focus on the Garden of Eden as a stage, chiastic narratives, and time according to Saint Augustine and Paul Ricœur.

2. The Church, its Context, and its Portal

Saint-Martin-de-Besse is a palimpsest of different building phases (Higounet-Nadal 1983, p. 49 and Comte de Clermont de Touchebœuf 1878).⁵ The church was most likely dedicated in the fifth century, as its name reflects the dedication trend of the region and of that period. Most of the Périgord churches were named after Saint Martin, Saint Étienne, or Saint Pierre/Saint Peter the Exorcist (Saint Pierre-ès-Liens) (Higounet-Nadal 1983, p. 58).⁶ As it stands today, Saint-Martin was built on the foundations of an earlier Benedictine building (Secret 1968, p. 227).⁷ The Benedictine monks left Besse sometime in the thirteenth century and were succeeded by a regular Augustinian clerical order (Secret 1968, p. 227).⁸ With the absence of documents providing firm or approximate dates, dating the church's west façade is, to some degree, arbitrary and must focus on its stylistic and regional qualities. Secret dates the construction of the church's portal to the end of the eleventh century, while Dubourg-Noves and Palazzo believe that it was built no earlier than the mid-twelfth century (Secret 1968, p. 227; Dubourg-Noves 1982, p. 248 and Palazzo 2017, p. 141).⁹ The latter's hypothesis is the most credible on stylistic grounds.¹⁰ I argue that the portal was conceived at some point in the mid-twelfth century, thus placing the construction of the church in its Benedictine period. The presence of Benedictine monks at Saint-Martin may justify the integration of decorative elements on the church's archivolt as a monastic product. Its proximity to Saint-Pierre-de-Moissac Abbey, Tarn-et-Garonne (1115–1130), and Saint-Marie-de-Souillac Abbey, Lot (1075–1150), two prominent Benedictine abbey churches, may be regarded as a plausible influence on the portal of Besse.

Like many, if not all, of the surviving Romanesque churches in the Périgord region, Besse lacks a tympanum, and sculptural ornament consists of a red-ochre limestone tripartite archivolt, corbels, and capitals. The outer archivolt is decorated with two braided patterns, each starting at both of its extremities (Figure 3). The braids meet at the middle, where two carved angels lift a man seated on a cushion, enacting an apotheosis scene (Figure 2(A) and Figure 4). Two representations of the Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve are carved below the apotheosis scene on the archivolt's outer fold (Figure 2(B, 3, 4) and Figure 5). Surrounding Adam and Eve, from left to right, are images of the prophet Isaiah, Saint Eustace, an adult holding a smaller figure wrapped in a shroud, and Saint Michael the Archangel fighting a dragon (Figure 2(1, 7, 8, 9) and Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8, Figure 9). The outer archivolt's lower edge features a rope motif linking the narrative vignettes together (Figure 8).¹¹ A series of geometric pretzel-knot ropes are also carved on the outer archivolt's inner fold, with a seated man lifted by an angel from the wrist on the bottom left corner, adjacent to Isaiah on the outer fold (Figure 2(1, 15), Figures 3 and 6).



Figure 3. Archivolt, detail of west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.



Figure 4. Braided patterns and apotheosis, detail of archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.



Figure 5. Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve, detail of archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.



Figure 6. Prophet Isaiah and seraph, detail of archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.



Figure 7. Saint-Eustace and the stag, detail of archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.



Figure 8. Virgin and Child or Abraham and Lazarus, and rope pattern detail of archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.



Figure 9. Saint Michael the Archangel defeating the dragon, detail of archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.

The inner archivolt is also rich in foliate imagery, depicting a series of palm tree fronds arranged into two ribbons. They represent *varietas* (variation and variegation), as every frond is unique (Figure 2(10) and Figure 10) (Carruthers 2009). The two palm-tree ribbons meet in the centre, flanking an Agnus Dei (also known as the Lamb of the Apocalypse) carved directly below the clothed Adam and Eve under the dome (Figure 2(C) and Figure 11). Two sets of fighting lions are carved at the extremities of the inner archivolts (Figure 2(14), Figures 12 and 13). The surface under the inner archivolt and around the door is left uncarved, except for a continuous chain of x-crossings decorating its lower edge (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Palm-tree ribbons and door frame, detail of archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.



Figure 11. Apotheosis, Adam and Eve, and Agnus Dei, detail of archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.

Two pairs of engaged colonettes flank the church's entrance (Figure 3). They are separated from the archivolt by a frieze, on which are carved foliage and battles between men and animals (Figure 2(14), Figures 12 and 13). From left to right, the capitals on the left-hand side depict foliage and two lions fighting (Figure 2(14) and Figure 12). The capital closest to the church's entrance, on the right-hand side, is adorned with grapes and vines (Figure 2(13) and Figure 14). The adjacent column presents an enigmatic scene on each of its two faces: a demon holding a kneeling figure by its hair and a larger man standing with an outsized circular medallion as a necklace, holding the hand of a smaller child-like figure; and a woman carrying a bag on her head, holding a wreath-like object above a child-like figure's head (Figure 2(12) and Figure 14). Six corbels are carved above the archivolts to support the triangular opus reticulatum representing the Trinity (Figure 2(E, 11) and Figure 15). The corbels represent, from left to right, a smiling animal head, a man and an ape eating, a musician, an acrobat, two figures embracing, and a tambourine player (Figure 2(11) and Figure 16, Figure 17, Figure 18). Two engaged colonettes with capitals, depicting foliage and humans fighting animals, support the opus reticulatum (Figures 15, 16 and 18).



Figure 12. Lions, foliage, capitals, and psychomachia frieze, detail of left-hand side, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.



Figure 13. Lions, foliage, and frieze, detail of right-hand side, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.



Figure 14. Vines and historiated capital, detail of right-hand side, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.



Figure 15. *Saint-Martin Church, west façade, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France.* ©Author.



Figure 16. *Corbels, detail, west façade, Saint-Martin Church, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France.* ©Author.



Figure 17. Corbels, detail, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.



Figure 18. Corbels, detail, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.

3. Iconographical Analysis

Considering the Romanesque portal as a performative text, Manuel Antonio Castiñeiras González discusses two issues related to its ontology. Relying on Meyer Schapiro's work, he identifies the first as the Romanesque portal being the "speaking face of the Church" (Castiñeiras González 2015). The second issue is concerned with the portal acting as a stage or backdrop to both liturgical and daily life. "The Romanesque portal", he writes, "together with the sermon and the liturgical drama, was a genre that could be developed by the reformed Church to attract the attention of the public, and thereby make the Christian faith more attractive" (Castiñeiras González 2015, p. 4; and Moralejo 1985, pp. 61–70). Additionally, in a postscript note following his "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Medieval Architecture'", Richard Krautheimer puts forward the concept of *multi-think*, thus promoting a more flexible approach to the study of forms, symbols, and meaning in medieval architecture (Krautheimer 1969, p. 122). Relying on the ninth-century neoplatonic philosopher Johannes Scotus Erigena's discourse on the symbolism of the number eight and its many simultaneous connotations that resound in him whenever he thinks of the number, Krautheimer argues that the meaning connected to medieval patterns, sculptures, and architectural forms was not always fixed; instead, the meaning was unstable and permitted a multi-layered interpretation.¹² From a semiotic approach, Krautheimer's *multi-think* concept is the outcome of a polysemic sculptural programme, wherein a single ambiguous iconographical sequence is associated with two or several related senses, in a similar manner to exegesis.¹³ Addressing the sculptural programme of Besse as a text comprising a series of sub-texts formed by narrative vignettes, I argue that polysemy is inherently part of the church's visual vocabulary, involving the concept of *multi-think*, thus offering a more comprehensive and nuanced study of its historiated portal. Relying on Castiñeiras González and Krautheimer's semiotic contributions to the understanding of Romanesque sculptures, I argue that the sculpted narrative vignettes forming the portal of Besse not only need to be read and understood as polysemic narratives, allowing fluidity in meaning which results in a *multi-think* interpretation, but they are also connected to each other in complex ways to form stable chiasmic interchanges.

The portal of Saint-Martin-de-Besse is an excellent example of Krautheimer's *multi-think* concept, which speaks about the Church's Truth, while demanding public attention by engaging its churchgoers in fluid polysemic narratives that keep revealing new facets. The ambiguity of its visual programme lies in the connection of its multi-layered narratives with the story of Eve and Adam: the triggering moment of the history of humanity, defined by their fall from grace because of the Original Sin and their redemption through the Son of God's sacrifice. As I will explore in the following paragraphs, the visual motifs, and narratives of the portal of Besse may have been selected as a deliberate artistic choice to allow a dynamic polysemic reading of its west portal, which message stabilizes in a series of four chiasmic sequences concerned with salvation through (re)conversion via the Eucharistic sacrament, which is at the heart of the liturgy.

3.1. Figure in Apotheosis

Situated in the middle of the outer archivolt, directly above the central image of Eve, two angels lift a seated figure by the wrists in an apotheosis (Figure 2(A, B), Figures 4 and 11). The angels have holes carved in their wings and clothes, which were possibly holding (semi-)precious stones or to create varietas if pigments were applied. Given the presence of the Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve and the Agnus Dei vignettes on the axis, the central figure in apotheosis, carved on the archivolt's keystone, benefits from a *multi-think* approach by which to understand its meaning (Figure 2(A, B, C) and Figure 11). Promoting a more flexible interpretation, I propose that the figure in apotheosis supports a polysemic iconographical interpretation; it could fluidly represent the ascended Christ, *Maiestas Domini* (Christ in Majesty), and/or Saint Peter the Exorcist and/or Saint Peter the Apostle, Christ's representative on earth, upon whom he has built his Church.¹⁴

The figure in apotheosis could represent the ascended Christ when, as described in Luke 24:50–53 and Acts 1:9–11, Christ physically departs from Earth by rising up to Heaven, forty days after His resurrection (Palazzo 2017, p. 144).¹⁵ Although, in these examples, the angels do not lift Christ by his wrist, there are a few instances in Romanesque sculpture where Christ is carved in ascension, lifted by two angels (Hearn 1981, pp. 119–38; Vergnolle 2008, pp. 179–99; Poilpré 2005; Mathews 1999; Réau 1955 and van der Meer 1938).¹⁶ Additionally, as Secret suggests, the seated male figure could represent a *Maiestas Domini*—Christ seated on a throne as the ruler of the world, from the Book of Revelation—an interpretation shared by Palazzo, who connects the scene to Isaiah’s vision from Isaiah 6:1–7 (Secret 1967, p. 20 and Palazzo 2017, p. 144).¹⁷ Not only could the polysemic apotheosis figure from Besse be interpreted as the ascended Christ, but it is also depicting a variation of the standardized Christ in Majesty iconography, frequently found on tympana and frescoes adorning numerous Romanesque portals and apses.¹⁸ Moreover, in his study of the portal, while retaining the hypothesis that the figure in apotheosis is indeed Christ in Majesty, Secret mentions that it is accompanied by the words *PETRUS* and ten other illegible letters (Secret 1968, p. 229). Dubourg-Noves is later able to decipher other parts of the missing gloss *[A]NGELUS DOMIN[I] ... AN ... S..N..EL ... PETRUS O ... E* (Figures 19 and 20).¹⁹ Dubourg-Noves concludes that the figure does not portray Christ in Majesty, as was previously suggested by Secret; instead, he maintains that the figure represents Saint Peter the Exorcist (also known as Saint Peter in chains/Saint Pierre-ès-Liens), a third-century martyr (Dubourg-Noves 1982, p. 250).²⁰ Dubourg-Noves suggests that the braided pattern carved around the outer archivolt, which frames the figure in apotheosis and the angels, creates a stylized reference to Saint Peter the Exorcist’s double-chains (Figure 2(A, 6) and Figure 4) (Dubourg-Noves 1982, p. 250).



Figure 19. *[A]NGELUS DOMIN[I]*, detail of archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.



Figure 20. *AN ... S..N..EL ... PETRUS O ... E*, detail archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.

While Dubourg-Noves’s suggestion of Saint Peter the Exorcist is compelling, it does not accurately reflect the original narrative because Saint Marcellinus is missing from the scene. Additionally, besides his cult being popular in the region, neither the church’s dedication nor its sculpted narratives seem to be connected to Saint Peter the Exorcist. Instead, I propose the possibility that the artist(s) or patron(s) of Besse made a conscious decision to include the gloss, linking the sculpted narrative not to Saint-Peter the Exorcist,

as suggested by Dubourg-Noves, but instead to Christ in Ascension, Christ in Majesty and Saint Peter the Apostle. The latter identification is made possible through the gloss's connection to a passage from the New Testament.²¹ Although fragmentary, the Latin inscription—principally the words PETRUS and [A]NGELUS DOMIN[I] in the middle of the outer archivolt—could refer to Acts 12:1–24, which narrates Saint Peter the Apostle's miraculous escape from prison.²² Excerpts from this passage are listed below, with the church's Latin gloss included between brackets, next to the corresponding words.

Et Petrus (PETRUS) quidem servabatur in carcere oratio (O..) autem fiebat sine intermissione ab ecclesia ad Deum pro eo (.E) Cum autem producturus eum esset Herodes in ipsa nocte (N..E) erat Petrus dormiens inter duos milites vinctus catenis duabus et custodes ante ostium custodiebant carcerem . . .

Et ecce angelus Domini ([A]NGELUS DOMIN[II]) adstitit et lumen (L . . .) refulsit in habitaculo percussoque latere Petri suscitavit eum dicens surge velociter et ceciderunt catenae de manibus (.. AN . . . S) eius.²³

Following Jesus's death, King Herod arrested Saint Peter (Petrus) and put him in prison. While awaiting trial, Saint Peter was bound with two chains and the Church prayed (oratio) to God for him (pro eo). The night (nocte) before his trial, an angel of the Lord (angelus domini) came to him, and a light (lumen) shone in his cell. Peter woke up and his chains fell off his hands (manibus). The angel led Peter out of the prison, so he could join the other disciples hiding in the house of Mary, the mother of God.

The outer archivolt's keystone, representing the man in apotheosis, plays a significant role in the liturgical character of the portal of Besse through its polysemic meaning, as it invites its viewers to decode and discover its multi-layered narrative through time and space. The figure in apotheosis is a liturgical synthesis that narrates the (hi)story of the Church. Simultaneously, it could also refer to the ascended Christ returning to Heaven, an event that occurred in the past; Christ in Majesty, as ruler of the world from the Last Judgment narrative in the Book of Revelation, in which Saint John describes as an event in the future; and Saint Peter the Apostle, the rock upon whom Christ built his Church, the universal congregation to which the churchgoers of Besse belong in the Church's present. Similarly, the apotheosis keystone creates a vertical liturgical dialogue with the Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve on the outer archivolt carved directly under it, which necessitates God's Incarnation, whereby he takes away the sins of the world through his sacrifice, symbolized by the Agnus Dei—the Lamb of the Apocalypse—carved on the axis on the inner archivolt (Figure 14). This sacrifice is re-enacted within the church building in the apse situated on the opposite side of the portal, beyond which, through the liturgy of the Eucharistic sacrament, the bread and wine are transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ, which are then consumed by the worshippers, the faithful community forming the Church.

3.2. *Isaiah and the Man Seated on a Throne*

The Latin gloss surrounding the figure in apotheosis is also linked to the narrative sequence formed by an angel lifting by the wrists a male figure seated on a throne, which is carved on the outer archivolt's inner left-hand side fold, adjacent to the figure of Isaiah (Figure 2(15) and Figure 19, Figure 20, Figure 21).²⁴ While Dubourg-Noves once again associated the figure with Saint Peter the Exorcist, who, he argues, is seated on a bed, I propose instead that this sculpted narrative is polysemic and allows a *multi-think* interpretation (Dubourg-Noves 1982, p. 250). If read alongside the gloss on the outer archivolt, it would represent Saint Peter the Apostle's escape from prison, after the chains fell from his wrists (Acts 12:7–11):

Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals”. And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me”, the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”



Figure 21. Angel lifting a seated man, detail of the inner fold of the archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.

This biblical excerpt portrays Saint Peter passing two guards and an iron gate leading to the city of Jerusalem. Then, after walking the length of a street, the excerpt culminates in his recognition of God as his saviour. Read alongside the portal of Besse, this passage creates a contrast between vision and reality when it comes to Saint Peter’s presence on the portal.

The apostle's movement in time and space involves two guards (exegetically referring to the Old and New Testaments), the iron gate allowing him entrance to Jerusalem, and a walk on a street culminating in his experience of God's salvatory nature. As Christians, the churchgoers of Besse must also pass through a gate, the portal of Besse, to gain access to the house of God, the terrestrial Holy Jerusalem. Then, as they walk the length of the nave to receive the Eucharistic sacrament, they will know God through transubstantiation, which takes place on the church's high altar.²⁵

Moreover, the escape scene emphasizes Peter's wrists, which also associates the narrative with the carved chains forming the Gallo-Roman decorative pattern that frames the outer archivolt; in turn, the carved chains visually lead the viewer's gaze toward the central apotheosis scene (Figure 2(A) and Figure 4). On the narrative vignette carved next to Isaiah, the figure—Saint Peter the Apostle—could be seated on a cathedra (the bishop's throne or seat) instead of a bed, as previously argued by Dubourg-Noves, thus foreshadowing his apostolic role as the first Bishop of Rome.²⁶

On the left-hand side of the archivolt's outer face, next to the seated man, the prophet Isaiah is shown as being about to receive the touch of a burning coal to his lips; the scene is situated below a seraph with six wings and opened palms facing inward (Figure 2(1) and Figure 6) (Secret 1968, pp. 271–72).²⁷ Isaiah gazes upward, toward the archivolt's apex, at the figure in apotheosis. This narrative sequence refers to Isaiah 6:6–7:

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

This passage from the Old Testament foreshadows the institution of the Eucharist at Christ's Last Supper, and the sacrament of Penance, which is accomplished liturgically by the absolution of the faithful from the sins committed after baptism, as described by Jesus to his Apostles in John 20:22–23.²⁸

Resembling a censer, the coal is held using tongs by a hand in the clouds (Figures 6 and 22). Looking toward Isaiah, a head, presumably belonging to the seraph holding the tongs, also breaks out from the cloud. The prophet is haloed and holds in his right hand an open codex, which was most likely used to quote, in paint, an original passage linking his figure to the rest of the portal's sculptural programme. Isaiah also holds in his left hand a partially visible object that shows signs of damage (Figure 22). Resembling the tip of a branch, the fragmented object is most likely connected to the Tree of Jesse described in the Book of Isaiah, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit" (Isaiah 11:1).²⁹ This Old Testament passage—which could have been written in paint on the figure of Isaiah's codex—promises a messianic king who would be born from King David's line. Recounting a future hopeful and fruitful event, it foreshadows the incarnation of Christ—the New Testament—where the New Adam reopens the doors of Paradise, closed to Eve and Adam when they were banished.³⁰

The presence of Isaiah in the sculptural narrative of Besse sheds light on the polysemic identity of the seated man carved next to him, not only through his physical proximity to the prophet but also through his iconography, which echoes Isaiah's Commission (Isaiah 6). In his Commission, the prophet writes: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying" (Isaiah 6:1–2).



Figure 22. The prophet Isaiah and a seraph, detail of archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.

With this passage and Krautheimer's *multi-think* concept in mind, I propose a poly-semantic interpretation of the seated figure on Isaiah's left; not only does it represent Saint Paul the Apostle being rescued from prison by an angel, as I have previously stated, but it could also illustrate God in terms of the above-cited passage, with the fully rendered seraph positioned above him.³¹ As Saint Peter forms the basis of the apostolic succession, the head of the Church of Earth, with God being its heavenly head, the seated figure next to Isaiah could concurrently benefit from a *multi-think* interpretation referring to both Saint Peter and God.³² With the figure of Isaiah receiving the burning coal—which will burn his

tongue, thus foreshadowing the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist—this polysemic figure of Saint Peter/God visually connects the narrative to the liturgy of the Mass. The latter is the most sacred of dramas, performed within the walls of Besse by the priests, who, like the Apostles of Christ—including Saint Peter—are the representatives of Christ on Earth.

3.3. Eve and Adam

The Fall of Adam and Eve is carved twice on the outer archivolt of the portal of Besse, with no obvious attempt at respecting the chronology of the biblical story (Figure 2(B, 3, 4) and Figure 5). In the first scene, the first man and woman are carved in the middle of the archivolt, on an axis with the figure in apotheosis and the Agnus Dei (Figure 2(C) and Figure 11). They are dressed in garments contemporary to the construction of the west portal of Besse. They stand under a dome on either side of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil planted between them, framed by two angels outside the dome who point at them (Figure 2(B, 5) and Figure 23). A snake wraps around the tree and a few round fruits hang from its branches. In this rather unusual scene, Adam and Eve's clothed state is indicative of their expulsion from Eden, for they are only described as wearing clothes in their life on earth (Genesis 3:21–23):

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the Tree of Life and eat, and live forever". So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.



Figure 23. The Temptation and Fall of (clothed) Adam and Eve under the dome, detail of archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.

Dubourg-Noves has identified Eve as the figure wearing the hood, but this is unlikely given the specific gestures associated with her and Adam (Dubourg-Noves 1982, p. 250). Therefore, I propose that Adam is carved on the *sinister* (left) of the tree and Eve on its *dexter* (right).³³ Picking the fruit from the tree with her left hand, Eve also touches the serpent's head, while she holds another fruit close to her mouth in her right hand. Eve's head is uncovered, and her face is turned towards one of the two angels flanking the dome. Wearing a hooded tunic, Adam places his left hand on his Adam's apple as his right hand points toward Eve, blaming her for the Fall. Adam's back is turned to the angel behind him, who also points at him and Eve.

Adam and Eve are once more represented to the left of the dome; however, this time they are carved in an episode from the Fall and Accusation, which portrays them naked in the Garden of Eden (Figure 2(3–5) and Figure 24). They stand on either side of a tree, with God carved to Adam's left. Eve's hair is unbound and falls over her shoulders. Her legs and head are rendered in profile, while her chest, breasts, and hands are front-facing, visually confronting the viewer. Attempting to conceal her nakedness, Eve's right hand holds foliage over her genitals, while her left hand rests with her palm turned inward toward

her body, right under her breast and over her belly. Not only does this gesture emphasise her nakedness but it also highlights her painful fate, doomed to suffer in childbirth as punishment for the Original Sin, as explained in Genesis 3:16:

To the woman He said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labour you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you”.



Figure 24. The Fall and Accusation of Adam and Eve (naked), detail from archivolt, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.

Eve’s legs are depicted walking toward Adam and God. She gazes up to the tip of the tree, which is illustrated in an unusual, intricate pattern mimicking braided ropes. I suggest that this highly stylised tree is the Tree of Life, mentioned in the Book of Genesis as being in the middle of the Garden of Eden, where the Fall took place:

The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.³⁴

As argued by Christopher Heard, although the Tree of Life appears only briefly in Genesis, it “casts a long shadow from Genesis” to the New Testament, creating fascination and confusion (Heard 2020, p. 74). To my knowledge, the intricate form of the Tree of Life of Besse is rare in Romanesque sculptures, at least in French examples.³⁵ As argued by Pippa Saloni in her study of the Tree of Life in medieval iconography, medieval artists represented the tree in a variety of forms and species, or as a combination of many species (Saloni 2020, p. 315).³⁶ The Tree of Life on the portal of Besse seems to represent such a combination. Resembling the vine’s intricate branches, its design was most likely influenced by refined medieval gardening techniques that were practiced by Benedictine monks, perhaps in an attempt to mimic the harmony of divine creation through symmetry, sophistication, and daily manual labour.³⁷

Presented in profile on the *sinister* side of the Tree of Life, Adam wears his hair short and makes eye contact with God, while holding his Adam’s apple and covering his genitals with a leaf. Wearing a heavy robe, God is illustrated as the Christ-Logos: God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. He stands at Adam’s left, with a halo around His head. With His right arm, He points toward Adam and Eve in an accusatory way. Furthermore, the figure holds a codex, the Bible, which was a common way to depict Christ-Logos during this period.³⁸

Carved between the tree, Adam, and Christ-Logos, is an inscription that states, ADA[M] VBI ES (Adam, where are you?), God's first words after the Original Sin (Figure 24). To this, Adam answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid" (Genesis 3:9-10). Adam's response is made visible through his gesture. One of his feet does not touch the ground, accentuating his surprise and fright after hearing God's voice. The letters XI RIN[I]US are carved between God and the angel pointing at Eve within the dome (Figure 25). Secret identifies this fragmented gloss as Quirinius, governor of Syria, to which Judea was added during the census ordered by Caesar Augustus when Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Secret 1968, p. 229).³⁹



Figure 25. XI RIN[I]US and God as Christ-Logos, detail of archivolt, west façade, 12th c., *Saint-Martin Church*, Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.

Covering her genitals with a leaf, a natural element from the harmonious Garden of Eden, Eve hides her body in shame, for it distorts the unity that exists between her soul and God. Eve's flesh grounds her body and soul; since her conscience failed her, all she has left is her flesh, through which she will experience pain in childbirth; this is underlined visually by her placement of one hand under her breasts and the other over her genitals (Figure 24). Aware and ashamed of his nakedness, Adam too covers his genitals with one hand and his throat with the other. As he faces God's accusations, his gesture signals the forbidden fruit stuck in his throat, a physiological feature that he passes on to his male descendants. His gesture may also denote that he is keeping silent because his mouth was the means by which he transgressed (Flood 2011, p. 96). On the church's outer archivolt, Eve is also shown as being about to walk past the sophisticated Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. Seduced by empty words and the idea of power through knowledge, Eve encouraged Adam to follow in her footsteps. In the Temptation and Fall of Eve, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil "manifests itself as the Tree of Death" (Dercks 2014, p. 144 and Goetz 1965, pp. 20–21). Together, Adam and Eve left the Tree of Life, which God planted to give them eternal life through Beauty, Goodness, Truth, and Order.

This leads to the problem of the Temptation and Fall of the clothed Adam and Eve in the centre of the inner archivolt of Besse (Figure 2(B) and Figure 23). I propose that this scene highlights their fallen state through their relapse on earth in a similar manner to that in the apocryphal text *Vita Adae et Evae* (Life of Adam and Eve) (9th to 12th c.), and the sacred dramas of the *Ordo representationis Adae* (commonly known as *The Play of Adam*, *Jeu d'Adam*, and *le mystère d'Adam*) (mid-12th c.), or *The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan* (also called the *Book of Adam and Eve*) (5th–7th c.), to mirror the churchgoers' inherited fallen state.⁴⁰ Filling in a few gaps and addressing questions related to the Book of Genesis, apocryphal texts and sacred plays, liturgical and vernacular dramas concerned with Genesis are important for the understanding of medieval depictions of the Original Sin, along with the female gender construct through Eve's figure. As Vita Daphna Arbel points out, they too were "shaped by everyday life situations and by fluid communication between living people who . . . express[ed] and negotiate[ed] diverse theological and ideological notions" (Arbel 2012, p. 9). In that sense, although it is not certain how often apocryphal texts were employed in the creation of Romanesque art, they can be studied in parallel to Eve's and Adam's sculptural bodies, which, as text carved in stone, were shaped within the same medieval sociological context.

The *Vita Adae et Evae* describes a repentance scene followed by a second temptation, where Eve falls again, and Adam remains in penitence. This apocryphal account highlights Eve's permanent sinful nature by presenting her as the main and primeval protagonist of several falls.⁴¹ In a similar manner to apocryphal texts such as the *Vita Adae et Evae*, sacred plays, liturgical and vernacular dramas performed as part of medieval public worship and liturgy, also accounted for gaps in the Genesis narrative. *The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, a sacred drama, sheds light on the earthly dome under which are carved the clothed Adam and Eve on the portal of Besse. Concerned with the life of Adam and Eve from the day they left Eden to Adam's sorrow and death, Book I describes the first humans' dwelling in the Cave of Treasures, their trials and temptations, Satan's apparitions before them, and Christ-Logos coming to comfort and bring them hope. Situated on the side of a mountain below Eden, and containing gold, frankincense, and myrrh, according to the *Cave of Treasures*, an apocryphal text inspired by *The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, this cave was where Adam and Eve would live their earthly life.⁴²

[Exiting the Garden of Eden] . . . they went gently down into the Cave of Treasures. And as they came to it, Adam wept over himself and said to Eve, "Look at this cave that is to be our prison in this world, and a place of punishment! What is it compared with the garden? What is its narrowness compared with the space of the other? What is this rock, by the side of those groves? What is the gloom of this cavern, compared with the light of the garden?" (The Book of Adam and Eve, p. 5).

Although, to my knowledge, there is neither written nor visual evidence to support my claim that *The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan* was a direct influence for the artist of Besse to sculpt Adam and Eve under a dome, the latter is indeed indicative of a location and could have been influenced by similar artistic strategies.⁴³ For instance, in a panel devoted to scenes from the infancy of Christ, the lower right-hand side of the tympanum forming the south doorway of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine Abbey, Vézelay (ca. 1120–1150) includes the Nativity narrative carved under a dome (Figure 26). There, Mary lies on a bed with Joseph by her side, displaying a gesture that refers to his sleeping state. Wrapped in swaddling clothes, the baby Jesus sleeps behind Joseph; he is attended by a female figure, probably also Mary. The dome here refers to the Christian tradition that identifies a cave around Bethlehem as the birth site of Christ.⁴⁴ In this example from Vézelay, the dome separates the synthesized narrative of the Nativity from the rest of the tympanum. Not only does it create a visual vignette but it is also indicative of the spatial plane of the narrative, within which are displayed various temporal contexts.⁴⁵



Figure 26. Incarnation and Nativity of Christ, detail of tympanum, right narthex portal, ca. 1140–1150., *Abbey Church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine, Vézelay, Yonne, Bourgogne, France.* ©Author.

Similarly to the dome at Vézelay referring to the tradition of the Nativity cave, it is plausible that the dome from Besse could represent the Cave of Treasures, which physically separates Adam and Eve from Eden and the light of God. In some ways, this narrative under the dome becomes a metaphor for the earthly existence of the churchgoers of Besse: separated physically from God by original sin, until the Apocalypse. The church building allows the worshippers direct access to God in their earthly lives, not only because the church is the House of God—the Holy Jerusalem—but also because it is within its walls that the Transubstantiation takes place within the liturgy of the Eucharist, where they may experience the real presence of God (his body and blood).

Just as Adam and Eve under the dome were kept in darkness after their expulsion from Paradise and then committed further transgressions, the churchgoers also succumb to the tempting, deceitful Devil, the symbol of power and knowledge. The figures of Adam and Eve function as a warning by mirroring the conscience of the churchgoers who walk through the portal of Besse. In turn, under God's omnipotent gaze, worshippers constantly re-enact what occurred in Eden, as the Adam and Eve figures of Besse constantly remind them of their fallen state and daily sins, which require constant penance and (re)conversion.

3.4. The Hunting Scene

Along with the themes of penance and conversion, an energetic hunting scene of a man riding a horse while wearing a helmet and a flowing cape is carved on the right-hand side of the Fall of Adam and Eve, under the apotheosis figure (Figure 2(7) and Figure 7).

A running stag stares back at the hunter, while he holds his bow at the ready. A small, haloed figure dressed in a loose robe is illustrated floating between the animal's antlers (Figure 27). This narrative vignette recounts the story of Saint Eustace (Eustathius) (who died ca. 118 CE).⁴⁶ According to a widespread medieval legend later recounted in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* (1275), Eustace, a Roman soldier in Trajan's army who was formerly named Placidus, was hunting a stag when he saw Christ on a crucifix between the animal's antlers. Christ spoke to him:

I am Jesus Christ that formed heaven and earth, which made the light to increase, and divided it from darkness, and established time, days, and hours. Which formed men of the slime of the earth, which appeared on earth in flesh for the health of the lineage human, which was crucified, dead, buried, and arose the third day (de Voragine 1914, p. 40).



Figure 27. Christ between the stag's antlers, Saint Eustace and the stag, detail of archivolt, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.

Eustace converted to Christianity upon hearing these words.⁴⁷ An exemplar of conversion to Christianity through repentance from past sins, Saint Eustace's presence on the portal of Besse is a clear reference to the sacrament of Penance, which requires the faithful to perform a constant (re)conversion to Christ when they commit an offense against God and break the communion with him and the Church through sin. This narrative could also be understood in terms of the deer as a metaphor for thirst and agility, in light of a few Old Testament passages. In one of his psalmodies, King David writes, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God" (Psalms 42:1). The deer here is a metaphor for the thirst of the human soul, longing for God; a thirst that could be sated through the liturgy of the Eucharist. King David's song in Psalm 18—which is also mentioned in 2 Samuel 22 as "David's Song of Praise"—vividly describes the soul's love for God and the strength it obtains from and through him. "It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he causes me to stand on the heights. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze" (Psalms 18:33–34; 2 Samuel 22:34–35). Isolated from the hunter, the deer on the portal of Besse could be read as both the soul's thirst for God, who is depicted as a haloed Christ floating between the animal's antlers, and the soul's strength and agility when it moves closer to God. The hunter could also find a polysemic meaning as being both Saint Eustace and the soul that has enough strength and agility, acquired through its love and proximity

to God, that it can bend a bow of bronze.⁴⁸ In both cases, the soul is healed through the Eucharist and Penance; in other words, by one's presence close to God.

3.5. The Framed Narrative

Adjacent to Saint Eustace, toward the bottom right extremity of the outer archivolt, a figure is carved holding a smaller one tightly wrapped in fabric (Figure 2(8) and Figure 8). Both figures are haloed, making them saints or of biblical origin.⁴⁹ This narrative sequence is the only one on the archivolt to be entirely framed by the braided rope pattern, which leads me to question its marginalized position on the portal and its significance within the narrative of the west portal of Besse. I wish to argue that the framed duo carries a polysemic meaning; it could be read as the Virgin and Child, Abraham and Lazarus, or Christ and Lazarus.⁵⁰ Secret, followed by Dubourg-Noves, have identified the figures as the Virgin and Child, the new Eve and Adam (Secret 1968, p. 273 and Dubourg-Noves 1982, p. 251). Highlighted through its frame, and with an iconography echoing a mother and a child, I somewhat agree with Secret and Dubourg-Noves's interpretation; however, to my knowledge, this iconography is unprecedented in Romanesque sculpture as, usually, the Romanesque virgin and child are represented in a *sedes sapientiae* (throne of wisdom) composition. I propose a nuanced interpretation, where, perhaps, the framed narrative refers to the iconography of the birth of Christ as depicted in Romanesque illuminations, mosaics, and frescoes.⁵¹

Furthermore, Dubourg-Noves mentions later that the taller figure is bearded, which leads him to propose another hypothesis by suggesting that the figure could represent Abraham rather than the Virgin, and the child, Lazarus instead of Christ (Dubourg-Noves 1982, p. 252). He then connects the scene to the parable of Dives and Lazarus. His interpretation is plausible as, in this biblical story, Abraham is represented in Heaven, with Lazarus by his side (Luke 16: 22–23).

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

This passage is part of the sculptural programme of Saint-Pierre-de-Moissac Abbey, where Abraham holds Lazarus wrapped in a shroud, a sculpted narrative that shares similarities with the framed narrative on the portal of Besse (Figure 28). Moreover, Palazzo proposes that, instead, the narrative vignette refers to the Raising of Lazarus, with Christ standing and his friend Lazarus wrapped in a shroud, as a prefiguration of Christ's Resurrection (Palazzo 2017, p. 145). If this were indeed Lazarus, the shrouded figure would present a typology of Christ, who is also depicted as the *Agnus Dei* and the figure in apotheosis as Christ in Majesty on the portal of Besse.

From a polysemic perspective, revolving around the theme of salvation through Christ, it is plausible that the two framed figures of the portal of Besse form a *multi-think* narrative, interpreted as the Virgin and Child, and/or Abraham and Lazarus, as well as the Raising of Lazarus. Nevertheless, I remain careful with my polysemic interpretation as the ambiguous framed narrative shows signs of damage and, upon close in situ examination, it is difficult to perceive any facial hair on the larger figure, as previously observed by Dubourg-Noves.



Figure 28. Abraham and Lazarus, detail of west wall, south portal, *Saint-Pierre-de-Moissac Abbey*, 1115–1130, Moissac, Tarn-et-Garonne, Occitanie, France. ©Author.

3.6. Saint Michael the Archangel

Concluding the outer archivolt's narrative sequence, Saint Michael the Archangel is portrayed holding a shield and throwing his lance in the serpent/dragon's mouth (Figure 2(9) and Figure 9). His presence adds apocalyptic overtones to the sculptural programme of the portal of Besse, which leads back to the fundamental triggering event of the Apocalypse: the Fall of Adam and Eve. Representing a scene from the Book of Revelation, Saint Michael is the commander of God's army in the war between good and evil (Revelation 12:7–9):

Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.⁵²

The Archangel reminds worshippers to repent, seek holiness and a sinless life through (re)conversion, while he remains the defender of the Church against all evil, personified by the serpent/dragon.⁵³ Offering physical and spiritual safety for the faithful, he will lead the virtuous souls back to Adam and Eve's lost Paradise at the end of time, while sinful souls will be condemned indefinitely to Hell.⁵⁴ Ultimately, Saint Michael is concerned with the life of humans, their character and connectedness to their community, in their terrestrial past and present, as well as future in the heavenly Kingdom of God. Operating on temporal and spatial planes, Saint Michael is the bridge between humankind's history and "the future promise of God's eternity" (Johnson 2005, p. 10). He also serves as the intermediary between the terrestrial and the transcendent, heavenly realms.

3.7. Inner Archivolt, Opus Reticulatum, and Colonette Capitals

Displaying *varietas*, the inner archivolt is decorated with an ornate palm tree motif, which starts from its lower extremities, and includes two sets of fighting lions (Figure 2(10, 14), Figures 10, 12 and 13). Its diverse palm leaves meet in the middle where the Agnus Dei is carved (Figure 2(C) and Figure 11). Framing the portal's entrance, a plain arch may have originally been painted with additional narratives or geometric patterns, which would have

further contributed to the reading of the façade (Figure 10).⁵⁵ The archivolt is crowned with a triangular structure unusual for a Romanesque church, vaguely resembling a pediment, which is perhaps a reference to the Holy Trinity (Figure 2(E)). Made of white limestone and plaster, this opus reticulatum is supported by two engaged colonnettes with historiated capitals (Figure 15).

The left-hand side capitals are decorated with intricate foliage on the left and a psychomachia (contest of the soul) on the right, with two lions fighting, topped by a frieze depicting a series of battles and physical and spiritual distortions between men (Figure 2(14) and Figure 12).⁵⁶ These misshapen bodies could also refer to the monastic understanding of bodies that bend—like those of jongleurs and acrobats—as sinful, much like Eve from Saint-Lazare Cathedral, Autun (1120) (Figure 29) (Camille 1992, pp. 57–60). The right-hand side colonette capital displays grapes and vines, a reference to the liturgy of the Eucharist performed at Mass within the church, with the grapes and vines being associated with the Blood of Christ (Figure 2(13) and Figure 14). The left-hand side capital depicts a demon holding a kneeling figure by his/her hair, and a larger standing man wearing a necklace with an outsized circular medallion, holding the hand of a smaller child-like figure with a wreath-like object held above his/her head by a woman carrying a rectangular bag on her head, supported with her left hand (Figure 2(12), Figures 14 and 30). Identifying this scene poses quite a challenge, but when comparing it to those on other churches in the area, especially the larger ones such as Saint-Pierre-de-Moissac Abbey, I am able to propose a plausible polysemic interpretation involving the story of Dives and Lazarus and/or Rachel and the Massacre of the Innocents (Luke 16:19–31); (Matthew 2:16–18); and (Jeremiah 31:15).



Figure 29. Gislbertus(?), *Lintel Fragment of Eve*, ca. 1120, Musée Rolin (originally from Saint-Lazare Cathedral), Autun, Saône-et-Loire, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, France. ©Author.



Figure 30. Historiated capital, detail of right-hand side, west façade, *Saint-Martin Church*, 12th c., Besse, Dordogne, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. ©Author.

As seen on the upper right-hand side frieze of the south portal of Moissac, the sculpted narrative of Dives and Lazarus is composed of a large male figure, Dives, wearing a smaller medallion similar to the one worn by the figure on the left-hand side colonette capital of Besse (Figure 28). Eating at a table brimming with food, Dives is seated to the right of his wife, whom Ilene H. Forsyth has described as greedy (Forsyth 2002, p. 78). The panel below depicts the rich man's soul and the heavy bag of money that he carries around his neck, as it is being pulled away from him by demon figures (Figure 31). Additionally, diagonal to the frieze segment representing Dives at Moissac, a figure of Avarice is portrayed with a medallion-like bag of money carried around its neck, another attribute associated with Dives's extreme greed for wealth (Figure 32). This iconography of greed, proper to Dives's character, is echoed in the narrative carved on the enigmatic capital of Besse, with both the figure with its hair pulled by a demon and the larger figure wearing a medallion, a bag of money, around its neck (Figure 2(12), Figures 14 and 30). The woman carrying a bag on her head and the figure being wreathed remain challenging to identify. Its iconographical Roman precedent is linked to victory and triumph; it was adapted in early Christian art in representations of Christ's resurrection and is often associated with martyrs.⁵⁷ Perhaps the sculptor of Besse was inspired by the syncretized wreath to depict either an unidentified martyr or the resurrection of Lazarus?



Figure 31. Dives, detail of west wall, south portal, Saint-Pierre-de-Moissac Abbey, 1115–1130, Moissac, Tarn-et-Garonne, Occitanie, France. ©Author.

Another possible interpretation for this enigmatic female figure could be related to the iconography of Rachel and the Massacre of the Innocents, the smaller figure representing an Innocent, and the male figure with the medallion equating to Herod, as described in Matthew 2:16–18:

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

This New Testament passage makes direct reference to a prophecy from the Book of Jeremiah, “This is what the Lord says: ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more’” (Jeremiah 31:15). Rachel and the Innocents also appear in sacred plays, including the *Ordo Rachelis* (Play of Rachel, also known as the Fleury playbook) (ca. late 12th c.).⁵⁸ The play opens with a lamb holding a cross, the Agnus Dei, followed by an angel appearing to Saint Joseph advising him to flee to Egypt with the Virgin and Child, and Herod’s slaughter of the Innocents, the first-born baby boys (Young 1933, p. 113). After the massacre, Rachel enters the scene and sings a succession of four laments, the *Lamentatio Rachelis*, over the young martyrs’ lifeless bodies (Young 1933, p. 114). Frequently appearing in Romanesque representations of the massacre of the Innocents, Rachel, an Old Testament figure, is associated with the slaughter of the Innocents, a New Testament account, as she

represents the mothers, who like her, have lost their children.⁵⁹ This polysemic capital permits a *multi-think* interpretation that revolves around sacrifice and salvation in both Lazarus and Rachel, which also takes part in a complex, interconnected network of different spatial and temporal contexts, echoing one and another, forming chiasmic narratives.



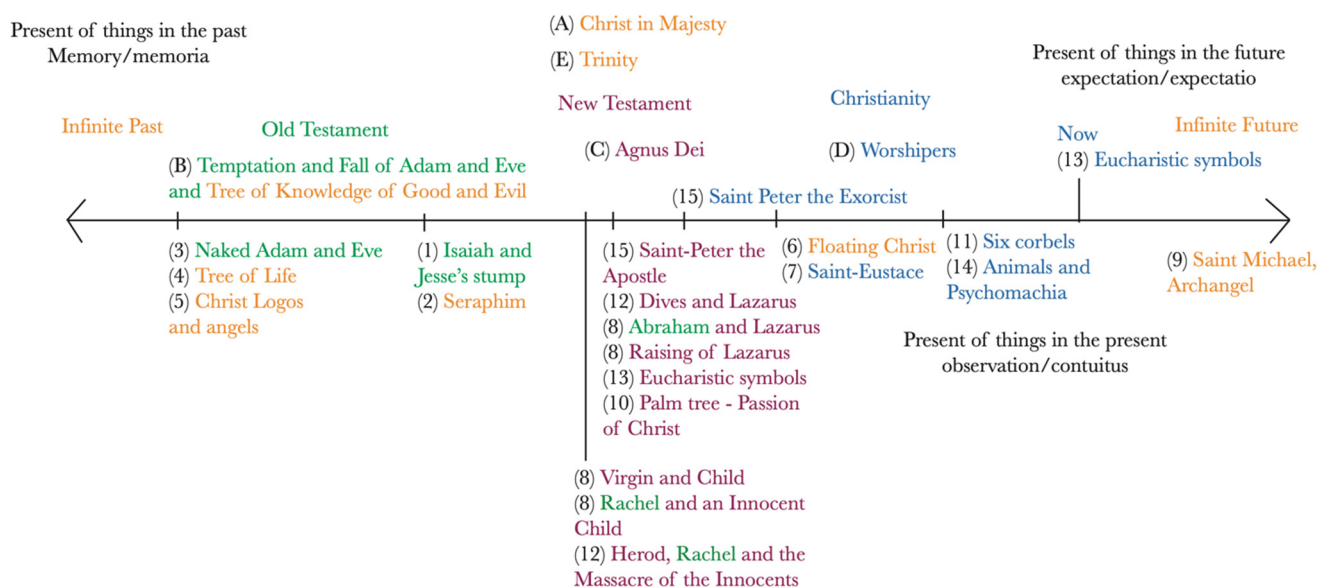
Figure 32. Avarice and Luxury, detail of west wall, south portal, Saint-Pierre-de-Moissac Abbey, 1115–1130, Moissac, Tarn-et-Garonne, Occitanie, France. ©Author.

4. Space, Narrative, and Time

Now that I have provided an iconographical overview composed of a series of polysemic narratives forming the west façade of Besse, I am left with one question: how are all these narratives connected? One cannot be certain of the true iconographical logic and interconnectivity, if any, behind its sculpted façade, for the creator(s), archival materials, and the church's original context have been lost. Regardless of these analytical challenges, relying on previous scholarship, I propose plausible new avenues of interpretation that fo-

cus on stable chiastic readings of the portal based on its series of fluid polysemic narratives, staged on/in spatiotemporal planes, which highlight a liturgical agenda.

The historiated portal of Besse can be divided into four biblical temporal sections (Figures 2 and 33). The first, in yellow, belongs to the eternal/timeless realm—the sacred touching the terrestrial.⁶⁰ To borrow Margot Fassler’s words, this section acts as a “static backdrop of an assumed eternity” (Fassler 2010, p. 151). The second, in green, includes narratives from the Old Testament. The third segment in purple depicts scenes related to the New Testament. The last section, in blue, belongs to Christianity or the Church, and secular narratives. Similar to the trumeau at Sainte-Marie-de-Souillac Abbey (ca. 1120–1135), the portal of Saint-Martin-de-Besse illustrates an apparent ordered and harmonious pattern of God’s creation (Figures 3 and 34). However, when examined carefully, Souillac’s trumeau exhibits chaos, conflict, and death, while the portal of Besse displays various seemingly disconnected narratives, with a few secular elements. In a study of the trumeau, Michael Camille focuses on its multiple, polysemic meanings and the purpose of its naked subject matter, while acknowledging its audience, which was composed of literate Benedictine monks and semi-literate and illiterate locals and pilgrims. “One of the most powerful aspects of sculpture,” he writes, “is its three-dimensionality: it enacts the substantiality of flesh, which, on one hand, is enhanced by being formed from clay, by God as the first artist, but, on the other, is corrupted by the sin of the fall” (Camille 1990, p. 49).



Chiastic Narratives

- (B) (3) (1) (10) (C) (13) Institution of the Eucharistic sacrifice
- (4) (B) (1) (10) (C) (D) The Trees as temporal and spatial markers
- (1) (7) (B) (3) (15) (13) (D) (8) (8) (15) (9) Acquisition of knowledge
- (1) (B) (3) (9) (8) (13) (15) (D) (Re)conversion through the Eucharist and the Mystical Body of Christ

Figure 33. Saint-Martin Church, timeline and chiastic narratives. ©Author.



Figure 34. Trumeau, inner west wall, *Sainte-Marie-de-Souillac Abbey*, ca. 1120–1135, Souillac, Lot, Occitanie, France. ©Author.

Camille also suggests that the trumeau mirrors the monk's everyday mental and physical struggles; like Eve's fallen body, Dives's greed, evil in the form of a dragon,

Herod's murdering innocent children, or the psychomachia on the portal of Besse, the trumeau becomes the flesh to be avoided (Camille 1990, p. 53).

Perhaps the iconographical and stylistic motifs of the portal of Besse intentionally reflect the Fall of humanity and its lack of perfection, which was initiated by Eve and Adam's Temptation and Fall, while simultaneously promoting redemption through the liturgical power of the Eucharist. This interpretation further develops in the foliage and vegetation symbolism, revolving around Eden and its two most important trees. Addressing the archivolt's narrative as being prophetic in nature—in the style of the Book of Isaiah—I wish to argue that the latter mixes analogies to articulate the history of humankind, its fall and its redemption, as staged in and around the Garden of Eden. The overarching narrative focuses on the internal battle of vice and virtue, on an ascending timeline, with polysemic sub-narratives situated in different temporal spaces that cross-reference each other in a series of chiasmi. The portal's complex semiotic structure is counterbalanced by the sacred drama of the liturgy of the Eucharist, performed within the church building, the stage of God's heavenly Jerusalem on earth, involving a series of interconnected spatial and temporal planes.

4.1. *The Garden of Eden as a Stage*

As understood in Abrahamic thought, the first dichotomist relationships—Adam–Eve, man–woman, humanity–deity, and humanity–nature—are staged in the Garden (Morris and Sawyer 1992, p. 21). Through the Genesis narrative, the concept of perfection and imperfection have been defined, understood, explained, and tested. In a study of the role of gardens in medieval romance literature, Helen Phillips argues that the garden is an image of transformation (Phillips 1992, p. 205). The Garden of Eden was lost through original sin and this loss was inherited by all who now succeed in living in the Garden of the Fall, Earth. This earthly garden, where the creations of God's fallen state are now living, could be transformed once more with the coming of the Word made Flesh (Christ, the second Adam). The second Adam restores God's order, as it is described in Revelation 2:7:

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

I wish to argue that the west portal of Besse was meant to be read as the depiction of these initial series of relationships, unfolding in chronological order in real time and space.

As people attempt to organise and tame nature, on a theological level, gardens become a ready symbol for the divine order (Phillips 1992, p. 205). If the west portal of Besse was regarded as an orchestrated sculptural spectacle set in a garden, the divine order could be articulated through the sacred drama of the liturgy taking place within the church building. The lush, varied palm-tree motif, foliage, trees, as well as the geometrical and woven designs forming the sculptural programme of Besse, express an almost perfect harmonious order that celebrates the work of the Creator (Figure 3). It is perfect-like because the hand of the artist who produced it alters the rendering of its motifs. Although the decorative natural elements represent Eden and the divine order, they are imagined and depicted by a fallen creature of God. Nature's harmony is highlighted but it is also made defective, perhaps purposely, to reflect Eve's Original Sin, followed by Adam's and that of their descendants. The imperfect harmony reflected in the natural elements of the west façade of Besse mirrors Eve's beauty and body, which were also made defective.

Both the Temptation and Fall vignettes from the façade of Besse reference manual labour: one, through the intricate design of the Tree of Life, echoing monastic gardening, and the other through the inclusion of clothes, a result of manual labour and the fallen body. Both sculptural narratives suggest the suffering state that Eve's body would endure when in labour.⁶¹ Given the likelihood that Saint-Martin-de-Besse was a Benedictine product, the emphasis of labour on its west façade is even more meaningful. Due to a lack of evidence, I cannot be certain that Benedictine monks were responsible for the Romanesque construction and establishment of Saint-Martin-de-Besse. Nevertheless, given the complexity of its west

portal programme, it was surely shaped by a local, intellectual culture that was heavily influenced by the Benedictines, if not the Benedictines themselves. The following argument relies on the church's proximity to prominent Benedictine monasteries, whereby their ideologies may have influenced the church's visual programme.⁶²

A central component of the Benedictine religious way of life, the Holy Rule of Saint Benedict consists of seventy-three chapters that describe and organize the monastic life. Setting Christ as the model and prototype of monks, the Rule transmits a biblical spirituality that is closely connected to the Beatitudes (Holzherr 2010, p. 30). The Rule refers to Christ as the Labourer—"May the Lord be pleased to manifest all this by His Holy Spirit in His labourer now cleansed from vice and sin"—and encourages monks to perform manual labour in the image of Christ as a way to get closer to God (Saint Benedict 1931, p. 8). Devoted to the necessity of daily manual labour, the Rule's Chapter XLVIII states:

Idleness is the enemy of the soul; and therefore the brethren ought to be employed in manual labour at certain times, at others, in devout reading . . . If, however, the needs of the place, or poverty should require that they do the work of gathering the harvest themselves, let them not be downcast, for then are they monks in truth, if they live by the work of their hands, as did also our forefathers and the Apostles . . . But if anyone should be so careless and slothful that he will not or cannot meditate or read, let some work be given him to do, that he may not be idle (Saint Benedict 1931, pp. 22–23).⁶³

As Saint-Martin-de-Besse is not a monastery, perhaps the artist(s) or patron(s), presumably Benedictine monks, designed the portal with a polysemic historiated sculptural programme and gloss to be read and meditated upon. The portal, thus, offered different possibilities of interpretation to both a literate (most likely Benedictine), semi-literate and illiterate group of worshippers, in a similar way to that of the trumeau at Souillac. Like Saint Michael the Archangel, guarding the Church against Evil, the monks and lay faithful who gazed upon the church's sculptural narrative would fight the desires of the flesh, especially Eve's temptingly naked body. Their souls—like Saint Eustace hunting the stag—are in a constant search for God, whom they will find in the Eucharist.

This form of meditation mimics the same devotional practice performed by the Benedictine monks who would walk around the cloister and its *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden) in the middle of the cloister that symbolises Paradise or the lost Eden. There, as Adam, whom God put in the Garden of Eden to work and take care of it, the monks performed their manual labour, often while meditating, committing themselves to the "path of life" with humility (Hindsley 1998, p. 8).

The first degree of humility, then, is that a man always has the fear of God before his eyes, shunning all forgetfulness and that he be ever mindful of all that God has commanded, that he always considered in his mind how those who despise God will burn in hell for their sins, and that life everlasting is prepared for those who fear God. And whilst he guarded himself evermore against sin and vices of thought, word, deed, and self-will, let him also hasten to cut off the desires of the flesh (Saint Benedict 1931, p. 8.).

Through their daily manual labour and reading of the portal of Besse, the monk and the lay faithful would, perhaps, learn from Eve's mistakes and protect their souls against idleness, remaining "mindful of all that God has commended" (Saint Benedict 1931, p. 8). In this perspective, the narrative of the portal would create the time and space whereby its audience could get closer to God.

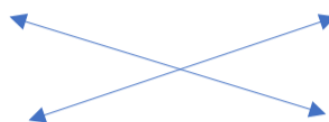
4.2. Time and Chiastic Narratives

Although the various narrative vignettes of the portal of Besse may appear random and ambiguous if addressed individually, when examined closely and considered in relation to their textual references, they form chiastic narratives. They are rhetorical, mnemonic devices that help readers to focus their attention on a central idea (Assis 2002). Their diverse

typological messages display both opposition and symmetry, as articulated through analogies between the Old and the New Testaments. Once unlocked, their chiasmic narrative, composed of polysemic sub-narratives, outlines the history of (Christian) humankind, starting from the Fall in the middle of the archivolt, diffused through a message of conversion and redemption where, in a comparable manner to medieval world maps, time and space, as we conceive them, are approximated. They also take part in a cosmic liturgical sequence, providing a prelude to the liturgy of the Eucharist taking place within the church.

As an ensemble, the west façade of Besse exemplifies complex chiasmi concerned with salvation through conversion, formed by and relying upon interconnected polysemic sub-narratives (Figures 2 and 33). Frequently appearing in the Bible, a chiasmus takes the form of an “X” (Bailey and Broek 1992, p. 178). Sharing a symbolic meaning with the cross, the term itself derives from the Greek letter χ (chi), a letter used by the early Christians to designate Christ.⁶⁴ As a single verse, a chiasmus is easy to recognise, such as this passage from (Mark 2:27):

The *Sabbath* (A) was made for *humankind* (B),



and not *humankind* (B) for the *Sabbath* (A).

Although the connections between the different narrative scenes of the sculptural programme of Besse at first seem arbitrary, they were most likely carefully and strategically planned to reveal a theological, liturgical agenda. The archivolt’s viewers would read the skillful composition in the hopes of understanding its interconnected narrative vignettes, thus, unlocking a more global meaning or narrative plot. With its storylines situated on two axes (right-centre-left and central top-bottom), the archivolt articulates temporality: it is both of the past and of the future, while existing in the present with an eternal backdrop.⁶⁵ In other words, the archivolt’s narrative represents the eternal today, as Saint Augustine articulates in Book XI of his *Confessions* (Saint Augustine of Hippo 1992, pp. 13, 14, 20),

In eternity nothing moves into the past: all is present (totum esse praesens). Time, on the other hand, is never all present at once . . . What then is time? If no one asks me, I know. If I wish to explain it to someone that asks, I do not know . . . It is now plain and evident that neither future nor past things exist. Nor can we properly say, “there are three times: past, present, and future”. Instead, we might properly say: “there are three times: a present-of-things-past, a present-of-things-present, and a present-of-things-future.”

The archivolt simultaneously re-enacts and narrates the history of humanity as created by God, where time, as Saint Augustine explains, has neither understandable boundaries nor measure. Eternal time belongs to God’s Knowledge, which was lost by Eve and her descendants when she ate the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The three times—past (memory/memoria), present (observation/contuitus), future (expectation/expectatio)—are defined by the presence of things in an eternal setting, where the past, present, and future alone do not exist, yet their presence does (Saint Augustine of Hippo 1992, pp. 20, 26).

French philosopher Paul Ricœur presents an extensive study of the relationship between temporality and narrativity to explain Saint Augustine’s understanding of time and his complicated attempt to effectively explain its nature. Ricœur’s analysis of Augustine’s Book XI focuses on the pairing between *distentio animi*, which is the distention of the soul by time: the soul’s passive subjectivity of time, and *intentio* or the intention: the soul’s ability to act freely in time, with which Saint Augustine struggles to measure time

(Ricœur 1984, p. 7; Saint Augustine of Hippo 1992, pp. 28, 38). The philosopher's main argument is that time and narrative are interdependent.

Ultimately at stake in the case of the structural identity of the narrative function as well as in that of the truth claim of every narrative work, is the temporal character of human experience. The world unfolded by every narrative is always a temporal world . . . between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience there exists a correlation that is not merely accidental but that presents a transcultural form of necessity (Ricœur 1984, p. 152).

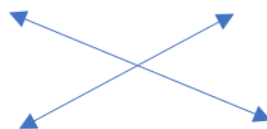
Ricœur also states that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (Ricœur 1984, p. 52). Time, as we perceive it, is thus measured in terms of the memory and expectations and memory of the past things and the future (Ricœur 1984, p. 21). The history of humanity and its three temporal intentions—past, present, future—as well as God's eternal time, are commemorated on the façade of Besse through four chiastic narratives to serve the memory and expectations of medieval Christians, who understood the measurement of time as a human construct (Wilcox 1987, p. 137).

The first chiastic narrative starts with the unifying presence of Isaiah's figure on the left-hand side of the outer archivolt. It takes its source from the Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve and culminates in the sacrificial lamb and Christ in Majesty (Figure 2). Writing about Isaiah, Saint Jerome states,

He was more an evangelist than a prophet, because he described all of the mysteries of the Church of Christ so vividly that you would assume he was not prophesying about the future, but rather was composing a history of past events.⁶⁶

To borrow Saint Augustine's words, Isaiah discusses the present of things in the past (memory), present (observation), and future (expectation). As he receives a coal to his lips on the archivolt of Besse, Isaiah foreshadows Christ's Last Supper, which is commemorated with the liturgy of the Eucharistic, as the transubstantiation takes place at the main altar (in the apse, at the opposite side of the church's west portal) (Figure 26). The coal, which is about to purify Isaiah by burning his sinful tongue, acts as a dichotomic symbol of the forbidden fruit that harmed Eve and her descendants. Here, we experience a chiastic sacred drama, involving a fusion of time and space, where the New Testament (Christ's Passion), prophesized by Isaiah in the Old Testament and made possible through Eve and Adam's Original Sin, is re-enacted in the present by the worshipper receiving the Eucharistic sacrament (Figure 33).⁶⁷

Isaiah *eats* the burning coal (A), foreshadowing *Christ's* Last Supper (B);



Christ, the Sacrificial Lamb, takes away the sins of the world (B) initiated by Eve and Adam *eating* the forbidden fruit (A).

In this light, the second chiastic narrative takes roots in the trees—the Tree of Life, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the palm tree, and the Tree of Jesse—taking part, both directly and indirectly, in the iconographical discourse of the portal of Besse bridging different temporal and spatial locations, through a continuous, prophetic narrative. The artist(s) or patron(s)'s choice of iconographical references becomes more clearly united when examined alongside Isaiah's prophecies, especially the prophet's poem, entitled "Suffering Servant", which starts in Book LII and continues through Book LIII. Written

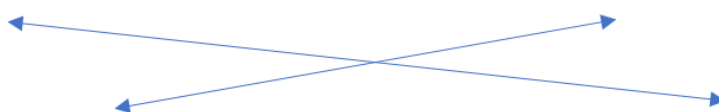
around 700 BCE, Isaiah's poem is an analogy to Christ's own Passion, for it describes a hero, a man of sorrows, who bears the sins of many:

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a *root* out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted (Isaiah 53: 2–4).

The literary reference is not only to an Old Testament description of Christ's Passion that is yet to come but also to the root that is possibly held by the figure of Isaiah, and that is exegetically referring to the iconography of the stylized Tree of Life on the portal of Besse (Figure 2(4) and Figure 5). In fact, the plot of the history of salvation and its central events of losing (the Temptation and Fall), and winning (God made man, his Sacrifice, and Resurrection, which takes away the sins of the world) are articulated around the Tree of Life in Eden and the Cross on Golgotha. The wood that once gave life is now—because of Eve and Adam's curiosity, vanity, and disobedience—the site of the most violent of deaths, symbolized in the Agnus Dei at the centre of the inner archivolt.

The palm tree motif supporting the narratives on the outer archivolt represents Christ's Passion, which begins with his entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and ends with his ultimate sacrifice, articulated through the Agnus Dei. The sacrificial lamb erases the Original Sin, a consequence of Eve and Adam eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Prophesized by Isaiah as a shoot growing out from the Tree of Jesse, Christ is symbolized through the root held by Isaiah and the Agnus Dei, carved on the portal of Besse. Through his sacrifice on the Holy Cross—the True Life foreshadowed by the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden from a typological perspective—Christ reopens the doors of Paradise. He erases the sins of the world; not only those of the fallen Eve and Adam carved upwards on the outer archivolt but also those of their descendants passing below the portal of Besse. Accessing the church through the portal, the churchgoers experience Holy Jerusalem through the liturgy of the Mass, and God through the Eucharistic sacrament (Figure 33). The vertical, central axis of the church's portal not only links the different temporal narratives together but also connects them spatially through an arboreal theme.

The Tree of Life in Eden gives *life* (A) while the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil brings *death* (B);



the palm tree initiates the Passion of Christ who will *die* on the Cross on Golgotha (A) as Christ is the True *Life*, the shoot growing from the Tree of Jesse, bringing eternal life through his Resurrection (B).

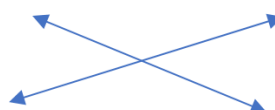
The third chiastic narrative is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge. Before receiving the burning coal, Isaiah experienced an epiphany, a moment of sudden revelation, wherein he received divine knowledge (Isaiah 6:5):

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

Forming a chiasmus, Isaiah's divine experience, resulting in his conversion, is mirrored on the outer archivolt of Besse with the figure of Saint Eustace. The third-century saint experienced the Son of God as a vision between a stag's antlers, a deer like the one that King David used as a symbol of the soul's longing for God: "As the deer pants for streams

of water, so my soul pants for you, my God” (Psalm 42:1). For the worshippers of Besse, Isaiah’s divine experience was illustrated in a post-New Testament narrative, taking place in a present full of things in the present history of the Church, making it more accessible to the contemporary congregation. In turn, at every liturgy of the Eucharistic sacrament, the faithful would also experience the very same divine presence as did their predecessors, Adam and Eve—the first humans to know God—Abraham, Isaiah, Lazarus, Saint Peter, Saint Peter the Exorcist, the Virgin Mary, Saint Michael, Rachel, and Saint Eustace. This cross-spatial-temporal chiasmic narrative inevitably results in their (re)conversion, through their recognition of sin and ultimate atonement, which would secure them entrance into the Kingdom of God at the end of time.

Isaiah experienced an epiphany, a moment of sudden *revelation*, (A), which made him *know* God (B);



the faithful and their predecessors experience a conversion; they *know* God (B), after God *reveals* himself to them (A).

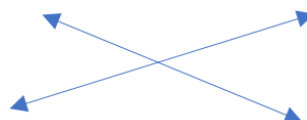
The fourth chiasmic narrative is concerned with the theme of (re)conversion through the liturgy of the Eucharist and the Mystical Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16–17; 12:12–31; Romans 12:4–8). In this narrative, the figures of Isaiah, Adam and Eve, and Saint Michael the Archangel blur time and space (Figure 33). While, in Genesis, the actions of Eve, followed by Adam, trigger the Incarnation, Isaiah’s prophecies foreshadow the coming of Christ and the New Testament as he is the first to announce his coming: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). Isaiah’s figure and his prophetic words—which were most likely painted on the book he is holding—are connected to his prophecy becoming reality through the framed Virgin and Child sculpted on the right-hand side of the archivolt and the letters XI RIN[I]US carved next to God’s head on the outer archivolt of Besse, referring to the temporal and spatial setting of God’s Incarnation through the birth of Christ (Secret 1968, p. 229).

In addition, the Apocalypse (or Paradise regained)—the last chapter of humanity on Earth (future/expectation)—is not only premeditated in Eden, which is the stage of humanity’s first chapter (past/memory), but also starts in Eden with Eve’s temptation, followed by Adam’s Original Sin (Paradise lost, present/observation).⁶⁸ Acting as the antithesis of the tempting devil who brought evil upon the world through the weakness of Eve, Saint Michael the Archangel fighting the dragon is the messenger of God and protector of the Church. In Saint John’s apocalyptic revelation, at the end of time, Saint Michael defeats Satan, the serpent that tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden (Revelation 12:7–9). Saint Michael is also the archangel who escorts the souls of the redeemed faithful back to their lost heaven at the end of time. As the coal burning the sinful tongue of Isaiah (present of things past), the Holy Host and the Consecrated Wine—the Body and Blood of Christ—consumed by the faithful in remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice (present of things present), Saint Michael ensures the protection of the Church, guiding the faithful at the hour of their death and at the end of time (present of things future).

Moreover, this chiasmic sequence involves the sacrament of the Eucharist, which demands constant reconversion through its transubstantial nature as the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, as well as through the Church members partaking in the Eucharist, which makes them united to Christ, the head of the Church. This mystical union between the Church and Christ is a reality referred to as the Mystical Body of Christ. Understood as a sacred liturgical drama, taking place during Mass within the church building, the Eucharist is foreshadowed on the portal of Besse by the figure of

Isaiah receiving a coal that burns his tongue. This union is also made possible through the embodiment of the Church; built upon its rock, Saint Peter, the Church is awaiting Christ's Second Coming at the Last Judgement (the Apocalypse), illustrated on the Besse portal by Saint Michael the Archangel slaying the dragon and the Agnus Dei as the lamb of the Apocalypse. The fallen Adam and Eve and their descendants, including Saint Eustace and the churchgoers of Besse, have the chance of redemption through their (re)conversion through Christ's sacrifice and the Holy Sacraments, which create a mystical union between themselves and Christ (Figure 33).

The mystical union between *Christ* (A) and his *Church* (B)



is *humankind's* (re)conversion (A) through *Christ's* (B) sacrifice and the Holy Sacraments.

5. Conclusions

Finally, as experienced by humankind, time is measured in terms of memory and expectations; while memories are rooted in the past, expectations are imagined representations of the future. The present remains the only time that could be enacted. Experienced in the present, the portal of Besse is a memory of the early events of humanity that write its end, its expectations, and hope of redemption. Taking as its root the Original Sin, it is this clear, and yet complex, idea that is skilfully articulated on the portal of Besse. Eve's acquisition of power through knowledge, her display of flesh, and the emphasis it places on sexuality generated a domino effect, leading Adam to sin, which culminated in their loss of the Garden of Eden. Our human condition, from the perspective of the Western tradition, has been portrayed in terms of our understanding of Eden. The idea of Eden, or Paradise, fuels our imagination and creativity, as it did for the churchgoers who gazed upon the portal of Besse in their quest for perfection or sanctity. It is from this primeval story, featuring a mysterious tree and the talking snake that once made Eve and then Adam drift away toward sorrow, pain, and the flesh's earthliness, that our human condition is constructed. Within this story, the garden is the space where our morality, sexuality, status, and gender roles, as well as our artistic and literary traditions, are defined. In that light, through the poetic technique of a series of chiasmi that spatially and temporally interweave successions of polysemic narratives, the sculptural programme of Saint-Martin-de-Besse reflects human identity, (re)conversion, and the quest for perfection through Messianic redemption. Like the cyclicity of liturgy, encompassing rites, gestures, texts, sacraments, and temporal successions, the performative sculptural program of Besse involves memory, the experience of the present, and the hope of a redemptive future in which its viewers become active protagonists in the history, time, and space of the Church.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ “Wir sind von Gott beiderseitig getrennt: Der Sündenfall trennt uns von ihm, der Baum des Lebens trennt ihn von uns”. (Kafka 1953, p. 44). In addition, all the biblical sources cited in this article are from the latest New International Version (NIV) of the Bible, unless otherwise specified.
- ² Elizabeth Saxon mentions a chateau that was adjacent to the church and, later, “pillage for stones to repair the church”. However, she does not mention the source of this information. See (Saxon 2006, p. 79). I have not, as yet, been able to locate any earlier documents focusing on the architecture of the church.
- ³ The word *polyvalent*—an image with more than one interpretation—could also be used here; however, I prefer *polysemy* for its more concrete semiotic connotation when it comes to understanding the ambiguity of Romanesque sculptures, which I consider as dynamic text carved in stone. I am also using *polysemy* instead of *multistable image* to avoid any ambiguity in the understanding of the term itself and Richard Krautheimer’s *multi-think* concept. Coined by W.T.J. Mitchell, the phrase *multistable image* designates images that allow more than one valid visualization; it defines the rhetorical footing of the metapicture. Metapictures are “pictures about pictures—that is, pictures that refer to themselves or to other pictures, pictures that are used to show what a picture is”. See (Mitchell 1994, pp. 45–51). See also (Camille 1992); (Krautheimer 1969, pp. 149–50).
- ⁴ An opus reticulatum is a form of brick, stone, or blockwork reminiscent of Roman architecture, made of white limestone and plaster. It is left unpainted.
- ⁵ Situated near the Dordogne River and its many Roman villas, Besse was a busy site of settlements, conquests, and conflicts involving the Celts, Romans, Gauls, Visigoths, Abd el Rahman’s Saracens (8th century), and the English wars. In 406, the Goths conquered the Périgord, where Besse is situated. In 1878, the Count of Clermont de Touchebœuf mentions the presence of a druid circle (cromlech) around Besse. The Count also mentions that Besse was looted and destroyed by the Normans around 600 CE.
- ⁶ Although the church is dedicated to Saint-Martin, its sculptural programme does not provide any references to the saint.
- ⁷ There is no available document (MS) or archaeological report identifying the monastic order responsible for the Romanesque version of the church. It is also unknown if the church served as a parish church in the twelfth century.
- ⁸ Secret does not mention who the Benedictine monks were and if they were responsible for the building of Saint-Martin.
- ⁹ Saxon proposes a date of the late eleventh to early twelfth century but does not explain her dating, as the focus of her note on Besse is on its penitential Eucharistic message. See Saxon, “The penitential-Eucharistic Focus”, p. 79.
- ¹⁰ The details of his study will be examined later in this article.
- ¹¹ Besse’s sculptural programme displays motifs from the area’s Classical past. This motif is comparable to the ones commonly found on mosaics, such as examples from the Gallo-Roman Montcaret Villa in the Dordogne region (3rd or 4th century), where a decorative rope also frames image.
- ¹² “Haec sunt quae tacite nostris in cordibus intus, Octoni numeri modulatur nabra sonorum, Spiritus interior clamat nec desinit unquam, Semper concrepitans, quicquid semel intonate annus, Haec scriptura docet cui rerum concinit ordo”. See (Traube 1896, pp. 45–49). Cited in (Krautheimer 1969, p. 122). See also Ibid., pp. 149–50.
- ¹³ For sources related to ambiguity in medieval art, see (Ambrose 2005); (Tammen 2010, pp. 53–72); and (Camille 1992).
- ¹⁴ Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you lose on earth will be loosed in heaven”. Matthew 16:17–19.
- ¹⁵ “When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God”. Luke 24:50–53; “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’” Acts 1:9–11. Palazzo connects the scene to Isaiah’s vision of Christ in Majesty from Isaiah 6:1–7.
- ¹⁶ Christ in Ascension is found in examples such as the lintel from the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Genis-des-Fontaines, Pyrénées-Orientales (1019–1020) and Abbey of Charlieu, Loire (Auvergne-Rhône—Alpes) (ca. 1094), as well as the tympanum adorning the Miègeville door and the marble altar at the Basilica Saint-Sernin-de-Toulouse, Haute-Garonne (late 11th to early 12th century). Saint-Sernin was consecrated 1096 by which time the marble altar would have been ready.
- ¹⁷ Christ in Majesty is found in books IV and V in the Book of Revelation. The passage referring to Christ in Majesty from Isaiah 6: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.” Isaiah 6:1–2. Palazzo also suggests in a footnote that the angels’ gesture mirrors that of the two figures arresting Christ from the archivolt of the church of San Giovanni in Tumba, Italy (12th c.); (Palazzo 2017, p. 143). See also (Trivellone 2002, pp. 141–64).

- 18 See the Last Judgment portal, Saint-Lazare Cathedral, Autun, ca. 1120 and Last Judgment fresco, Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe, Poitou ca. 1095–1115.
- 19 Following restoration and the addition of a pipe surrounding the archivolt, parts of the inscription became even more illegible and are lost under its shadow.
- 20 Usually represented with Saint Marcellinus, Saint Peter the Exorcist was martyred under Emperor Diocletian's rule after God delivered him from a set of doubled chains to assist him in the exorcism of a young girl tormented by the devil. Following this divine intervention, several Romans from the girl and her father's entourage converted to Christianity. Upon hearing about the conversions, the emperor's soldiers seized Saint Peter, imprisoned him with Saint Marcellinus before executing them both. On the day of Saint Peter's martyrdom, his executioner saw angels clothed in robes adorned with precious stones lifting the martyr to heaven. See (de Voragine 1914, Translated by William Caxton, p. 97).
- 21 The Latin gloss could also be connected to a medieval chant related to the feast of Paul and Peter, Peter, Marcellinus and Peter, and Vincula Petri, which I have not been able to identify with certainty. More extensive research is needed here. The following entries from *Cantus* may be explored as possible sources for the Latin gloss: Cantus ID 004286, Cantus ID 602611R, Cantus ID 00778129, Cantus ID 001411. See Debra Lacoste (2011–), Terence Bailey (1997–2010), and Ruth Steiner (1987–1996), dir., *Cantus: A Database for Latin Ecclesiastical Chant – Inventories of Chant Sources*, web developer Jan Kolářček (2011–), <<https://cantus.uwaterloo.ca/>>, accessed on 24 December 2021.
- 22 The passage mentions one angel instead of the two described in Saint Peter the Exorcist's narrative.
- 23 "Peter was thus kept in prison. But the Church continued to pray to God [to intercede] for him . . . And behold an angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shined in the room. And striking Peter on the side, he [the angel] raised him up, saying: Arise quickly. And the chains fell off from his hands". See Acts 12: 5, 7 (Vulgate).
- 24 Secret does not make mention of this scene in his study of Saint-Martin-de-Besse.
- 25 See pages 28 and 42 for more details regarding transubstantiation.
- 26 "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it". Matthew 16:18.
- 27 Jean Secret argues that the seraph's palms are facing the viewers; however, this seems impossible as the thumbs are both facing away from the body (Figure 6).
- 28 "And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven'." John 20:22–23. See also James 5:16 and Ephesians 4:32.
- 29 As an Old Testament prophet, Isaiah is traditionally illustrated holding a scroll instead of a codex, which is commonly associated with New Testament figures. In this light, it becomes tempting to argue that this figure could have a polysemic meaning; it could be both Saint Peter the Apostle and Isaiah; the damaged object held by the figure may, instead of the shoot from the Tree of Jesse, be the key to heaven, another attribute of Saint Peter the Apostle. "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). Additionally, instead of holding a coal with tongs, the seraph could be an angel censuring the apostle, the first Bishop of Rome. However, it is not unprecedented in French Romanesque sculpture that an Old Testament figure is illustrated with a halo and a book, such as the figures of Moses, Aaron, Jeremiah and Ezekiel on the Last Judgement portal of Abbey Church of Sainte-Foy, Conques, Aveyron (Occitanie) (early 11th c.). Moreover, a haloed Isaiah appears holding a book on which is carved a passage, alongside the prophets Jeremiah, Daniel, and Moses, on the west façade of Notre-Dame-la-Grande Church, Poitiers (early 11th c.). The inscription carved on Isaiah's book—E[GR] DIET [VR] VIR GA DE | [RA]ADI [C]E IE [SSE] ET [FL] OS—refers to Isaiah 11:1, as cited above. See (Favreau and Michaud 1974, p. 23). See also (Colletta 1979). For these reasons, I remain convinced—as Secret, Dubourg-Noves, Saxon, and Palazzo were before me—that the haloed figure holding a book on Saint-Martin's archivolt has a single identity, that of the prophet Isaiah.
- 30 See Matthew 1:1–17, Luke 3:23–38, Romans 15:8–13, Acts 13:22–23; and Revelation 22:16.
- 31 Although the passage describes two seraphim covering God's face with two others covering his feet and two flying with him, the artist or patron seems to have synthesized the story for technical reasons, aiming toward a simplified representation of the narrative. This alteration/simplification is also found in Isaiah's sequence, where only the hand, which we assume belongs to the seraph from the story, breaks out from the cloud.
- 32 See John 21:15–17 and Matthew 16:18.
- 33 My statistical research has led me to the conclusion that, in the context of the Temptation and Fall, when a figure touches its throat while pointing at another figure on the other side of a tree, the former always represents Adam. Additionally, the serpent's head usually faces Eve. Although my statistical study resulted in the conclusion that most depictions of the Temptation and Fall of Eve in Romanesque art situate her at the *sinister* side of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, it is still possible to find Eve on the *dexter* side of the tree. See (Moubayed forthcoming).
- 34 Genesis 2:9. See also Genesis 3:22–23, where the Tree of Life is described as permitting eternal life: "And the Lord God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the Tree of Life and eat, and live forever'. Douglas Estes writes that in the Bible, the Tree of Life is explicitly mentioned only eleven times and is occasionally mentioned as allusions. It is mentioned as a direct reference in Genesis 2:9, 3:22, 3:24;

Revelation 2:7, 22:2, 22:14, 22:19; as an image in Proverbs 3:18, 11:30, 13:12, 15:4; as an allusion in Ezekiel 47:7, 42:12 and in Proverbs. (Estes 2020, p. 184).

One example is found on an early-Romanesque rose window from the Abbey of Pomposa, ca.1063. For a survey of the Tree of Life iconography in medieval art, see (Salonius 2020, pp. 280–343).

This includes the vine, acanthus, fig, olive, or date palm.

Benedictine monks follow the Holy Rule of Saint Benedict, which will be discussed in greater depth in the “The Garden of Eden as a Stage” section of this article. The garden occupied an important place in their communities and daily manual work. See Saint Benedict 1931, Translated by A. Pax Book, pp. 22–23. Palazzo identifies this tree as a fruit tree. See (Palazzo 2017, p. 143).

This iconography is also found in other Romanesque sculptures, such as a capital from Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, Loiret (ca. 1026–1108), and in Gothic examples, such as the tympanum of the Virgin, north portal of Saint-Thibault Priory, Côte-d’Or (ca. 1240).

Quirinius is mentioned in Luke 2:1–4: “In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David”.

A fusion of different episodes from the Temptation and Fall is also seen on a lintel fragment of Eve from Saint-Lazare Cathedral, Autun (ca. 1120). The Life of Adam and Eve is found in Latin, Armenian, Gregorian, and Greek versions. The Latin version includes a compilation of ninth- to twelfth-century medieval manuscripts available in Munich. It was first published in (Meyer 1878, pp. 185–250). The Latin version was translated by Berlie Custis and Gary A. Anderson. To date, there are 73 known surviving versions of the *Vita Adae et Evae*. See also *The Book of Adam and Eve (also Called Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan)*, originally written in Arabic from the 5th through 7th c., trans into Ethiopian at an unknown date, translated from Ethiopian by S.C. Malan (London, 1882), 19f. See also (Murdoch 2003, p. 42).

After their expulsion from Eden, as they were living their sinful lives on earth, Eve informs Adam of her hunger, and they both start looking for food with no great success. Adam then suggests performing penitence so God would have mercy on them and bring them back to Eden. He instructs Eve to fast by standing on a stone, in silence, in the Tigris River for thirty-seven days, while he would do the same in the Jordan River, for forty days. They kept silent because their mouths were the “instruments of their transgressions”. On the eighteenth day of Adam and Eve’s penance, the Devil became angry; disguised as an angel, he tempted Eve once again with food he left on the banks of the Tigris. Coming out of the river, she fell to the ground but remained unaware of her spiritual relapse. The Devil took her to the Jordan River where Adam cried: “O Eve, O Eve, where is the work of your penitence? How have you again been seduced by our adversary, through whom we were alienated from the dwelling of paradise and spiritual happiness?” Falling again on the ground with grief, Eve becomes aware of her fault. Not only did she disobey God through her Original Sin but also, she disobeyed Adam. Then, the Devil tried to torment Adam, who instead of falling for his ruse, turns to God for help and “immediately the Devil no longer appeared to him”. Adam remains in penitence in the Jordan for forty days. See *Vita Adae et Evae* 4.3. “Sed iuste et digne plangimus ante conspectum dei, qui fecit nos. peniteamus penitentiam magnam; forsitan indulgeat et miserebitur nostri dominus deus et disponet nobis, unde vivamus”. (But justly and worthily do we lament before the face of God who made us. Let us perform a great penitence. Perhaps the Lord God will yield and have mercy on us and give us something by which we might live.) *Greek Life of Adam and Eve* 19.3; *Vita Adae et Evae* 5.3–8.3; Flood, *Representations of Eve*, 96; “Cum autem vidisset eam Adam et diabolum cum ea, exclamavit cum fletu dicens: O Eva, O Eva, ubi est opus penitentiae tuae? quomodo iterum seducta es ab adversario nostro, per quem alienati sumus de habitatione paradisi et laetitia spiritali”. *Vita Adae et Evae*, 10.3; “Et statim non apparuit diabolus ei”. *Vita Adae et Evae*, 17.2; “Adam vero perseveravit XL diebus stans in poenitentia in aqua Jordanis”. *Vita Adae et Evae*, 17.3. For an in-depth discussion of Eve in the *Life of Adam and Eve (Vita Adae et Evae)*, see (Flood 2011). Other (later) apocryphal texts were circulating in the Middle Ages. These versions include Robert de Blois, *La création du monde* poem (ca. 1250–ca. 1299), MS français 24301 fol. 520–527a, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France; Andrius, *La pénitence d’Adam* (late 13th century), MS français 95 folios, 380r–396v. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France; and (Jean d’Outremeuse 1864), Edited by Ad Borgnet). See (Murdoch 2003, 2009); and (Casier Quinn 1980).

The *Cave of Treasures* was probably written in or after the 6th century in Syriac, by an author belonging to the school of Ephrem the Syrian (306–373).

In her study of the Romanesque church of Saint-Martin de Nohant-Vicq (Indre, France), Marcia Kupfer also suggests *The Conflict of Adam and Eve* as a possible inspiration for a fresco depicting the figure of Satan violently grabbing Eve’s arm and pulling her hair. See (Kupfer 1986).

See Justin the martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapters 70, 78 ANCL; Origen, *Contra Celsus*, I:51 ANCL.

The dome and its location on the archivolt are reminiscent of medieval maps, such as the Hereford *Mappa Mundi* (ca. 1300), where Adam and Eve in Eden are most often illustrated at the top, under an image of Christ in Majesty.

It may also be Saint Hubertus (Saint Hubert) as his hagiography is entangled with Saint Eustace. However, Saint Hubertus’s legend developed in Germany in the fifteenth century.

Instead of the crucifix lodged between the stag’s antlers, Besse’s portal displays a haloed, small floating figure of Christ.

- Other similar passages are found in Habakkuk 3:19: “The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights;” and Isaiah 35:6: “Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert”.
- The larger figure’s right arm is unrealistically elongated.
- It could also refer to Rachel holding one of the Holy Innocents from Matthew 2:16–18 and Jeremiah 31:15; and/or the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, similarly to the example from Saint-Pierre-de-Moissac Abbey. See Luke 2:22–39.
- We see a somewhat similar iconography on the tympanum forming the south doorway of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine Abbey, Vézelay (ca. 1120–1150). The scene that depicts the Nativity narrative, carved under a dome, presents a horizontal infant Jesus wrapped in a shroud, next to his mother laying on a bed (Figure 26).
- Saint Michael appears five times in the Bible: Daniel 10:13, 21 and 12:1, Revelation 12:7–9, and the Epistle of Jude 9.
- For more on the subject, see (Denoux 2019, p. 154).
- “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt”. Daniel 12:1–2. Saint Michael is represented weighing the souls of the deceased on the Last Judgment tympanum of Saint-Lazare Cathedral, Autun (ca. 1130–1135).
- For a study on frescoes in Romanesque architecture, see (Kupfer 1986, pp. 38, 41, 52).
- This scene could represent Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (348–ca.410), a Roman Christian poet, who wrote *Psychomachia*, a poem describing a spiritual battle between virtues and vices, and which was highly influential in the Middle Ages; however, it is difficult to confirm Prudentius as the main figure due to the lack of evidence. For more details about Prudentius’s *Psychomachia*, see (O’Sullivan 2004); (Norman 1988); (Snider 1938).
- Isaiah 28: 5 “At that time the Lord will be a glorious crown over the armies, and an honorable wreath to the rest of His people”.
- Karl Young gives as his source the Bibliothèque de la Ville d’Orléans, MS 201(0/im 178), Miscellanea Floriacensia Sæc. xiii, 214–220. See (Young 1933, pp. 112–24).
- For example, she appears on a capital from the Miègeville door at the Basilica of Saint-Sernin, Toulouse (ca. 1115).
- Eternity here refers to the space and time of God. According to Christian belief, God exists in eternity—He has no beginning and no end. Eden and the tree have a beginning, but no end. Saint Michael the Archangel has a beginning but exists in eternity. Finally, the possible Abraham and Lazarus are carved in Paradise, in God’s eternal realm. Writing about time, Stephen Gould differentiates two ways of understanding time: “time’s arrow”, and “time’s cycle”. In the time’s arrow mode, “history is an irreversible sequence of unrepeatable events . . . and each moment occupies its own distinct position in a temporal series”. In time’s cycle, “events have no meaning as distinct episodes . . . fundamental states are immanent in time, always present and never changing”. See (Gould 1988, pp. 10–11). Additionally, in *City of God*, Saint Augustine presents a model of time where time is “neither lineal or cyclical, but both, and various units move in different ways—forward, backward, some simultaneously, some synchronized, some neither . . . There are places where time will be unraveled and where structures will be open-ended”. His model was translated in the Middle Ages and gained a higher level of complexity. See (Fassler 2010); Saint Augustine, *City of God*, 22.30. See also (Colish 1978). Paul Ricœur explains eternity as “forever still (*semper stans*)” in contrast to things that are “never still”. See (Ricœur 1984).
- Saint Michael the Archangel, protecting the Church against evil, performs another form of labour, experienced both physically and spiritually. Saint-Eustace the hunter is, in fact, a metaphor for the soul’s search for God. See (Palazzo 2017, p. 145).
- Saint-Pierre-de-Moissac Abbey and Sainte-Marie-de-Souillac Abbey.
- See also Genesis 2:15 “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”
- The Chi-Rho Christogram, such as the one in the Book of Kells, takes roots in the first two letters of Christ (*Christos* in Greek). (McDermott 2016, p. 194).
- The central top-bottom axis consists of Christ in Majesty, the Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve under the dome, and the Agnus Dei. The right-centre-left axis is composed of all the other narratives forming the archivolt. See Figures 2 and 33.
- “Deiunde etiam hoc adjiciendum, quod non tam propheta, quam evangelista dicendus sit. Ita enim universa Christi Ecclesiaeque mysteria ad liquidum prosecutus est, ut non eum putes de futuro vaticinari, sed de praeteritis historiam texere”. Saint Jerome, *Praefatio in librum Isaiae*, 28. (PL 28.772).
- For a thorough study of temporal spheres in the prophetic character of Sacred Scripture, see (Herrero forthcoming).
- God is *omniscient* (all-knowing). See Job 37:16; Psalms 139:2–4, 147:5; Proverbs 5:21; Isaiah 46:9–10; John 3:19–20. However, it does not mean that God is the author of sin or that He encouraged or tempted Adam and Eve to sin.

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