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To cite this article: Matthew M. Reeve (2022): An Epithalamium in Stone: The West Façade of Wells Cathedral, Journal of the British Archaeological Association, DOI: [10.1080/00681288.2022.2082732](https://doi.org/10.1080/00681288.2022.2082732)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00681288.2022.2082732>



Published online: 27 Sep 2022.



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# An Epithalamium in Stone: The West Façade of Wells Cathedral

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*Although the west façade of Wells Cathedral has been carefully studied, a series of problems concerning its date, original form and meaning remain. This paper focuses on the archaeology of its central portal, featuring the Coronation of the Virgin. Working from the archaeological evidence, it offers a reconstruction of the portal which leads to a broader consideration of the place of the imagery in British and European medieval art. This informs an exploration of the meanings of the façade as a whole within the context of then current commentaries on the Song of Songs in France and England.*

**KEYWORDS:** Wells Cathedral, Gothic sculpture, Song of Songs, The Coronation of the Virgin, Marian devotion, theology, William of Newburgh

The central place of the west façade of Wells Cathedral in the history of art is hardly in doubt (Fig. 1). Conceived as a monumental mural surface to be populated with some four hundred sculptures set within projecting canopies or diorama-like scenes from the Old and New Testament and placed within deep quatrefoils, it is rightly understood to be *sui generis*: a radical experiment in 13th-century Gothic art. The façade would be influential upon the subsequent façades at Salisbury, Lichfield and Exeter, and aspects of its design — the complex niches framed by trefoil-headed canopies — would be rethought and reused in later medieval designs in different contexts.<sup>1</sup> Like other high medieval façades, its sculpture was once richly painted; our current knowledge of its colouration endorses William St John Hope and William Lethaby's view that 'the front in its first freshness must have looked like a colossal ivory triptych, the general surface washed with yellow, and the mouldings and sculptures brightly coloured, and here and there touched with gold'.<sup>2</sup> Like many other structures from the building boom now called 'High Gothic', the façade at Wells was left incomplete. The south corner of the façade was never filled with statuary and the central gable was, seemingly, not populated with sculpture until the 15th century. Also in the 15th century, two towers were added to the façade which were not part of its original design (Fig. 2). The 17th century witnessed the destruction of much of the lower tier of statuary by iconoclasts, and the 18th and 19th centuries saw the beginning of a tradition of studying the façade and its sculpture, including discussions by Charles Cockerell and John Flaxman.<sup>3</sup> In the 20th century new attempts were made to protect, conserve and interpret the façade and its sculpture, notably Jerry Sampson's remarkable book of 1998.<sup>4</sup>



FIG. 1. Wells Cathedral, west façade  
*Diliff/Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 3.0*

That the façade continues to be a vital subject for art historians and artists alike is suggested by the contemporary sculptor Antony Gormley's installation of one of his own sculptures within a niche beneath the north tower in 2020 (Fig. 3). Commenting on the installation, Gormley stated,

I have chosen this niche for its position and its visibility: the book at the end of the bookshelf. The work attempts to invoke the feeling of being isolated and exposed on this corner of a Gothic masterpiece. My purpose is to engage the eye and body of the viewer in empathic projection, to consider our time in the shelter of other times.<sup>5</sup>

Gormley's stated intention to create an affective connection between the viewer and a work of art, and to locate the viewer's present within the patterns of the past, would have been well understood by the 13th-century makers of the façade.<sup>6</sup> Although the Wells west façade has been the subject of a number of scholarly interventions in recent

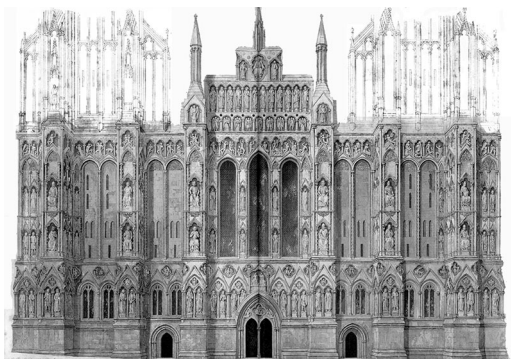


FIG. 2. Wells Cathedral, west façade as it existed in the 13th century before the addition of the west towers

*From C. R. Cockerell, Iconography of the West Front of Wells Cathedral (Oxford and London 1851)*



FIG. 3. Anthony Gormley, *Doubt*, sculpture installed on the Wells west façade, 2021  
*Tom Hull*



years — with three important studies appearing in 2004 — questions remain about its archaeology, form and meaning.<sup>7</sup> This essay focuses in particular on the central portal. Although it now lacks parts of its original imagery and almost all of its polychromy, the archaeological evidence allows for a reliable reconstruction. Featuring the Coronation of the Virgin, the portal was once an extraordinary, and perhaps unprecedented, multimedia composition with a glittering embellishment of metalwork and paint. Precocious in its iconography and materiality, the façade program might well have been influential for not only English, but also later Continental, art. As argued here, its imagery and material elaboration relate to the broader genre of the epithalamium or marital song in the Middle Ages, and particularly to the commentaries on the Song of Songs which allegorized Solomon's union with the Queen of Sheba or a concubine as the mystical marriage of Christ and the Virgin Mary, the Queen of Heaven. Rereading the central portal of the façade leads to a reconsideration of the meanings of the façade as a whole.

#### DESCRIPTION

The complexity and sheer extent of the façade sculpture warrants an initial exposition of its form and composition.<sup>8</sup> The façade was likely begun around 1219/20 and was essentially complete by c. 1250, with the notable exceptions of the upper gable and the east face of south tower. Most commentators have placed emphasis on Bishop Jocelyn of Wells (episcopate 1206–42) as the figure behind the erection of the west façade. A local man who was raised as canon in the Diocese of Bath and Wells before taking the bishopric, a royal servant and close associate of the reform-minded bishop Richard Poor of Salisbury, Jocelyn was a leading figure within the *familia* of Archbishop Stephen Langton.<sup>9</sup> As Jerry Sampson has shown, however, the mensuration of the façade was based upon that of the nave, raising the possibility that the geometry of the footprint of the façade at least, if not perhaps its overall conception, may have originated with the rest of the building in the 1170s and 1180s.<sup>10</sup> As it stood around 1250, the façade was a monumental screen with imagery on five horizontal registers, which was ordered upon two main axes: the vertical axis in the centre of the façade defined by the central door, and the horizontal axis of imagery that populated the niches and quatrefoils of the façade that wraps around it (Fig. 4).

The vertical axis began at the bottom centre of the façade with the image of the Virgin and child enthroned representing the Incarnation: the Virgin and Christ are set within a shallow quatrefoil flanked by censing angels in the spandrels around the main door (Fig. 6). Around the voussoirs of the central door are ten female white-lia-voussoir figures holding crowns and other implements, which have generally been understood to represent the Virtues. Moving upward is the Coronation of the Virgin (explored in detail below) (Fig. 5). The upward movement from the Incarnation (the earthly union of Christ and the Virgin) to the Coronation (the Heavenly union of Christ and the Virgin) suggests a particularly Marian emphasis in the story of Christian redemption: the Virgin's role as bearer of Christ and her womb as the historical *commercium*, to the creation of the Church as the place of the sacramental *commercium*.<sup>11</sup> Regrettably, we know nothing about what imagery in stained glass, if any, the three central lancets once held. Intersecting the main lancet is the imagery of the Resurrection atop the crest of the façade block, featuring eighty-four sculptures with naked figures rising in wonderment from their graves; the status of these figures is indicated by their crowns, mitres and tonsures (Fig. 7).<sup>12</sup> Unlike many previous examples in Romanesque and Gothic art, these



FIG. 4. Francis Bedford, Wells Cathedral, north-west corner of the west façade, c. 1860s  
*Victor von Gegerfelt Collection/Wikimedia Commons*



FIG. 5. Wells Cathedral, west façade, Coronation of the Virgin showing dowel holes in background  
*Author*

figures represent the blessed but not the damned: there is no indication of torment by devils, the weighing of souls and so on. These figures thus appear to represent the First Resurrection of the saints in Revelation 20: 1–6, in which the saints are resurrected to reign with Christ in Heaven for a thousand-year interval.<sup>13</sup> Atop the façade is a three-



FIG. 6. Wells Cathedral, west façade, central portal, Virgin and Child/Incarnation  
*Author*



FIG. 7. Andrew Dickson White, Wells Cathedral, west façade, sculptures from 'resurrection tier', c. 1867–95.  
*Cornell University/Wikimedia Commons*

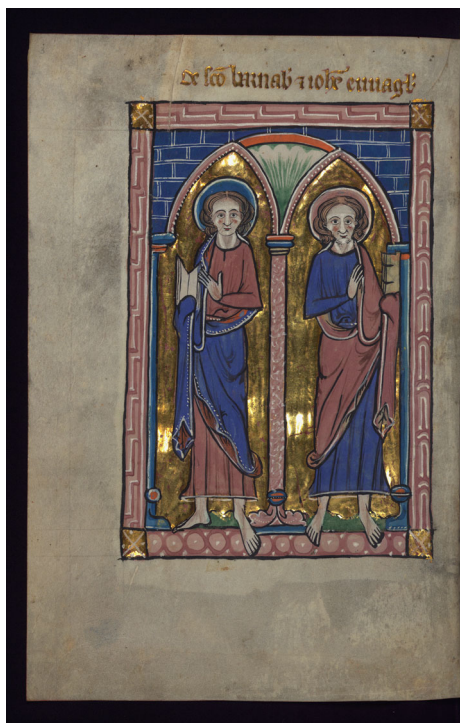


FIG. 8. Carrow Psalter, mid-13th century. Walters Art Museum W. 34, fol. 3v. Suffrages: Sts Barnabus and John the Evangelist  
*Walters Art Museum CC BY 3.0*



tiered gable that, as noted, was filled with sculpture in the 15th century.<sup>14</sup> It is not clear to what extent the later sculpture followed the intentions of the 13th-century designers or if it was rethought in the later Middle Ages.<sup>15</sup> As far as can now be determined, the main axis does not indicate the progression through Christian time which was typical of many great Gothic programmes, including the contemporary vault paintings at Salisbury Cathedral, and nor does it offer a phased version of salvation history such as the portals on the west façade at Chartres, which respectively represent the time of anticipation (Old Testament), the Incarnation and the end of time at the Last Judgment.<sup>16</sup> Focusing on the Coronation of the Virgin surrounded by the resurrected saints praising Christ and the Virgin in Heaven, the imagery of the façade offered a view of the Heavenly Jerusalem located temporally in the viewer's present.

The lateral axis comprises two main registers of imagery. The lowest register is defined by micro-architectural canopied niches that each held two life-sized statues beneath projecting gables (Fig. 4). Housing saints from the Old Testament, the New Testament and post-biblical period, many of which hold or once held identifying attributes, the paired niches have analogues with contemporary suffrages cycles such as that in the mid-13th-century Carrow Psalter (Walters Art Museum W.34) (Fig. 8).<sup>17</sup> Between the west-facing canopies on the lowest register is a series of hollow quatrefoils that originally held a host of angel acolytes who each held liturgical emblems (books, sudaries, etc.) and crowns (Fig. 9), which can be readily paralleled with the acolyte angels on the contemporary choir screen and the vault paintings in the transepts of Salisbury Cathedral. Behind the angels was a series of apertures that were clearly used for song during the liturgy — the 'singer's gallery' ran behind the façade and was accessed from the north and south stair turrets.<sup>18</sup> Unlike the apertures in the west façade of Peterborough, for instance, those at Wells were positioned low enough to allow human voices to resonate with the liturgy taking place below.<sup>19</sup> Scholars have connected this space to the singing of the *Gloria laus* during the Palm Sunday procession when the bishop entered the cathedral, simulating Christ's entry into Jerusalem.

Atop the lower register was a larger series of hollow quatrefoils featuring biblical imagery that progressed outward from the central image of the Coronation of the Virgin: to the north was the image of St John as a winged evangelist (rather than St Matthew as has recently been suggested), who gazes northward where the story of the New Testament unfolds with the story of Christ's Passion in eighteen scenes (Fig. 10). To the south was the story of Genesis, including Adam and Eve and leading up to Jacob Blessing Manasseh and Ephraim, although the cycle is incomplete.<sup>20</sup> Remarkable though they are, the arrangement and disposition of the Old and New Testament quatrefoils had a precedent in the Romanesque reliefs on the west façade of Lincoln, which likewise began at the centre of the façade and continued with Old Testament images to the south and New Testament images to the north.<sup>21</sup> St John's presence as the opening image to the New Testament imagery, which was certainly paired with God's Creation of the Universe from Genesis on the south side of the portal, was based on his reception as an angelic evangelist whose Gospel represented a typological fulfilment of the Book of Genesis: both began with the words 'In Principio'.<sup>22</sup> As such, God's first two self-revelations — the Creation and the Incarnation — progress outward from the imagery of the Coronation of the Virgin.<sup>23</sup> John is one sign of a dual meaning for the façade programme: while presenting the heavenly court witnessing the Coronation of the Virgin to the viewer in his/her present, it also anticipates the future narrative of Revelation 21:2–3, in which John describes,



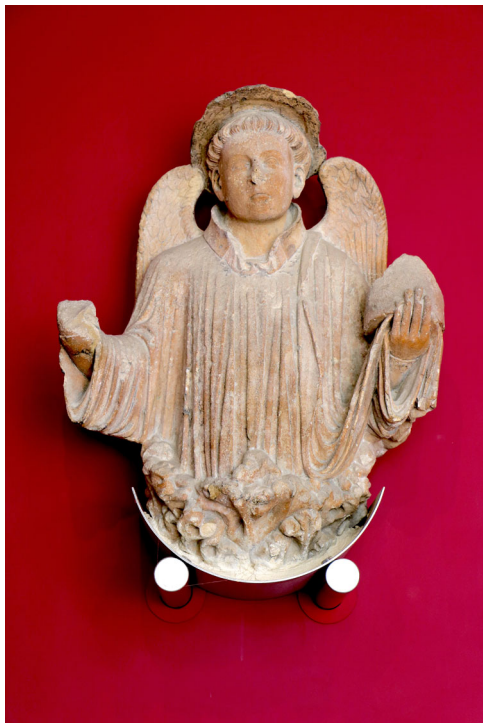


FIG. 9. Wells Cathedral, west façade, angel formerly from a quatrefoil on the lowest register, now in the Wells Museum  
*Author*



FIG. 10. Wells Cathedral, west façade, St John the Evangelist quatrefoil that begins the New Testament quatrefoil series, just north of the Coronation of the Virgin  
*Society of Antiquaries*



FIG. 11 a, b. Wells Cathedral, west façade, montage of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon  
*Author*



FIG. 12. Wells Cathedral, west façade, St Eustace

*Author*

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.’

The life-sized sculptures on the lower register are mostly lost, but it is assumed, based on the surviving figures, the 1480 description by William of Worcestre and the biblical quatrefoils themselves, that the figures bore the same historical divisions. Those to the north represent figures from the New Testament, probably including the Four Marys, while to the south were the prophets and patriarchs of the Old Testament.<sup>24</sup>

The upper register contains two continuous rows of sculptures that populate the façade, creating an undulating wall inhabited by saints. Each figure is framed by slender blue lias shafting between which is nestled rich, if restrained, clusters of foliage.<sup>25</sup> Although the upper register has a far greater number of sculptures than the lower tier, there are still only a handful of secure identifications. As I will discuss below, the two Old Testament figures of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon who are positioned in the centre of the façade directly above the Coronation, are better considered along with the central axis and the imagery of the Coronation of the Virgin in particular (Fig. 11 a, b). With this exception, there do appear to be informal groupings of figures into specific categories of sainthood. Lethaby’s view that the façade was divided into choirs of confessors on the south side, martyrs to the north and Virgins in the centre, has

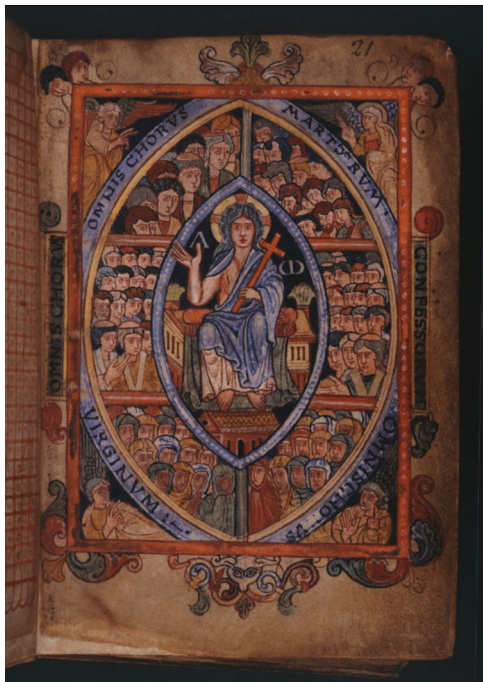


FIG. 13. The Galba Psalter, first half of the 9th century. Christ surrounded by choirs of saints. London, British Library, Cotton MS Galba A.xviii, fol. 21r  
British Library Board, Cotton MS Galba A.xviii



FIG. 14. Benedictional of St Aethelwold, Choir of Virgins. London, British Library, Add. MS 49598, fol. 1v  
British Library Board, Add. MS 49598

been recently restated.<sup>26</sup> The royal martyrs on the north tower are identified as such by their crowns and by the figures beneath their feet that they trample. This grouping appears to contain Sts Ethelbert of Hereford, Oswald, Edward (king and martyr), Kenelm, Eustace (Fig. 12) and his wife Theopistis, and perhaps Edwin, Wistan, Ethelred, Oswin and Edmund.<sup>27</sup> A case for the presence of Sts Alban, Maurice and Olav among the martyrs has been recently made.<sup>28</sup> Also within the choir of martyrs is the recently canonized Thomas Becket, a figure whose hagiography puts him squarely within the tradition of martyr saints. It is likely that figures who were not formally canonized but were locally venerated were also included on the façade. The two kings who sit atop the central buttresses looking westward each bear charters unfurled upon their knees: assuming that these represent royal grants of land to the cathedral, they likely represent King Ine, who features in the institutional history of Wells as an Anglo-Saxon founder, and St Edward.<sup>29</sup> Their display here served as much to populate the court of heaven as to reflect Wells' own specific history and to emphasize its traditional prerogatives. These loose groupings on the façade into angels, choirs of saints and divisions of Old and New Testament figures are grounded in Anglo-Saxon practice.<sup>30</sup> The 10th-century English additions to the Galba Psalter pictorialize this very separation between





FIG. 15. Reconstruction of Coronation of the Virgin above the central portal, Wells Cathedral,  
west façade  
*Matilde Grimaldi*





FIG. 16. Seal of Eynsham Abbey, 13th century. Westminster Abbey Muniments 2403  
Dean and chapter, Westminster Abbey

virgins, martyrs and confessors in a single image of the *chorus angelorum*, *chorus prophetarum*, *chorus martyrum* and so on around a central image of Christ as the keystone, evoking Ephesians II:19–22 (Fig. 13).<sup>31</sup> The imagery of the Anglo-Saxon Benedictional of Aethelwold likewise represents these choral groups within architectural frameworks — completed by angels in the heads of the arches — that compare closely with the niche figures at Wells, thus suggesting that the arrangement of the façade drew upon well-established English ideas (Fig. 14).<sup>32</sup>

There is some evidence that the statues on the west façade were not only painted but may have been interpreted by textual notation. The recent polychromy survey has confirmed that one or two of the Old and New Testament quatrefoils had painted inscriptions around their frames.<sup>33</sup> But it is more difficult to understand how the figures on the upper registers may have been identified by texts, for the simple reason that there is no obvious place where the texts could have appeared where they would have been legible from the ground. It is perhaps more likely that understanding of the figures was mediated by either a human interlocutor, or by a textual guide. Tradition suggests that a key to the façade — perhaps like the nearby Glastonbury Tabula — once existed but was consigned to the flames in the time of Polydore Vergil (1502–46).<sup>34</sup> Whatever its original form, it would have functioned as part of what Conrad Rudolph has recently called the ‘guide culture’ of medieval art.<sup>35</sup>

Modern attempts to identify each sculpture through iconographic methods, while rigorous and valuable, are considerably different from medieval modes of looking at images. Rather than representing a scholarly compendium of the saints — as it might

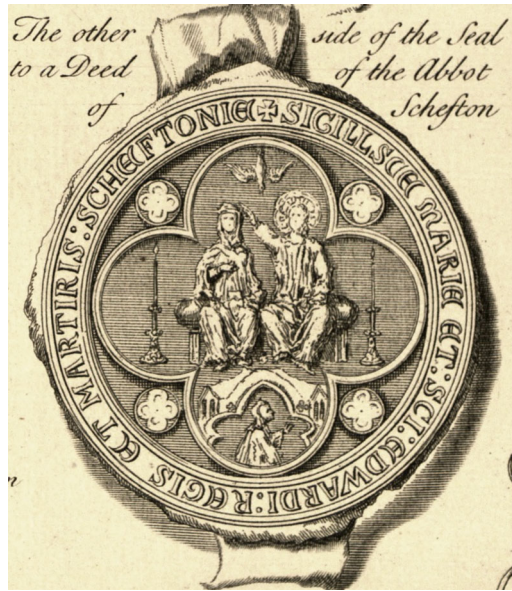


FIG. 17. Seal of Shaftesbury Abbey, c. 1230. From *Vetusta Monumenta* (London 1747), I, pl. 60  
Author

well have for elite viewers able to, or interested in, identifying them — for most medieval viewers (and for many modern ones) the effect of the façade was not principally edificatory. Whether in the style of the images (their affect) or their arrangement, the façade offered little if any pedagogical instruction in doctrine. Rather, the façade enticed the viewer with kinaesthetic engagement. As a public art form, the façade offered an arresting spectacle — a ‘courtly’ image of the saints in heaven surrounding the Coronation of the Virgin — that could be viewed as a totality from a single vantage point (as in a liturgical procession, for instance) but that then demanded careful investigation from various angles, thus moving the viewer around the façade to gain new sightlines.<sup>36</sup> In her discussion of medieval wonder, Carolyn Walker Bynum articulates the distinction between *admiratio* — the speculation of the majestic or grand — and *imitatio* — approaching, appropriating and then analysing the object. At Wells, one surely led to the other in the Middle Ages, just as it does now. The façade’s imposing height (*altitudo*) and width (*magnitudo*), and the material and formal complexity of its play of marble, stone and polychromy arranged over interlocking positive and negative spaces (*varietas*), offered a singular vision of heaven in the high style much in keeping with recent formulations of the Gothic sublime.<sup>37</sup>

#### ARCHAEOLOGY AND MARIOLOGY IN THE CENTRAL PORTAL

Few commentators have doubted that the thematic centre of the west façade is the Coronation of the Virgin, located above the central door. Although the heads and hands of Christ and the Virgin were lost in the 16th or 17th century and most of its



FIG. 18. Coronation of the Virgin portal, Cathedral of Notre Dame, Senlis, 1170  
*De Agostini Editore/ Age of Stock*

polychromy is now invisible from the ground, much of the original appearance of the sculptures can still be understood: [Figure 15](#) offers a reconstruction of the portal based upon the archaeological evidence.<sup>38</sup> The Virgin, wearing a short veil that falls upon her shoulders and a mantle beneath that gathers upon her dexter arm, is seated upright with her head slightly inclined toward her son. Her forearms have mostly been lost, but it is clear from the surviving sculpture that her dexter arm is bent at the elbow and crosses her body, while her sinister hand appears to have fallen by her side. The Virgin's pose can be closely compared to contemporary imagery of the Coronation of the Virgin in south and south-western England, including the early-13th-century seal of Eynsham Abbey ([Fig. 16](#)), the closely related seal of Shaftesbury Abbey ([Fig. 17](#)), as well as the earlier portal at Senlis ([Fig. 18](#)) and the font at Lyngsjö, Sweden (c. 1180).<sup>39</sup>

It is no longer clear whether the Virgin held any attributes such as the bible, as she does on the Shaftesbury seal and the Lyngsjö font.<sup>40</sup> She wears a sharply pointed shoe and is trampling a dragon with her dexter foot. Christ leans toward his mother and extends his dexter arm while his dexter foot tramples a lion. The imagery of the dragon and lion derive from Psalm 91:13, 'You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young





FIG. 19. Coronation of the Virgin sculpture from Thornford, Dorset, *c.* 1240. Now in the Dorset Museum, Dorchester  
*Jonathan Foyle*

lion and the serpent you will trample under foot', and are conventional in Marian iconography but possibly unique in Coronation of the Virgin iconography, where they suggest a remarkable equality between Christ and the Virgin.<sup>41</sup> But the creatures also reference Genesis 3:15, in which God says to the serpent, 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel'. The Virgin is represented as the new Eve: she tramples the serpent that tempted her Old Testament predecessor, a role celebrated in Sarum Use.<sup>42</sup> Christ's right arm has been lost just below the shoulder and its original form cannot be known with certainty. Although recent commentators have suggested that Christ's pose follows Chartres and Senlis in blessing the Virgin, the clear bend in Christ's waist toward the Virgin and the position of his dexter arm suggests that he is in fact crowning her.<sup>43</sup> Notably, all of the previous English examples follow this iconography, including the Coronation of the Virgin panel from Thornford, Dorset, carved in Ham Hill stone from Somerset of *c.* 1240 (Fig. 19).<sup>44</sup> As Nigel Morgan has noted, the gesture of Christ blessing (rather than crowning) the Virgin does not appear to enter English art until after *c.* 1275.<sup>45</sup> In light of this, the archaeology of Christ's dexter arm is significant: the joint reveals that, distinct from all of the other west façade sculptures which were drilled for round dowels, Christ's arm was set in a heavy squared dowel which can only have been intended to sustain a piece of considerable weight and to prevent the arm from rotating.<sup>46</sup> The large expanse of stone at the break on Christ's sinister hand suggests that it very possibly held the bible, as in the examples at Reading and Dorchester and elsewhere in the iconographic tradition.<sup>47</sup> As such, the evidence indicates that we witness the moment in which the Virgin has been crowned the Queen of Heaven and the mystical union of Christ and his Bride has been achieved.



The archaeology of the central Coronation portal warrants still more careful analysis. In 2005 the late Pamela Tudor-Craig restated her long-held view that the Coronation sculptures were insertions, reflecting a mid-century rethinking of the façade program. This, she suggests, is evidenced by the seemingly advanced nature of its style and its apparently awkward position within its niche.<sup>48</sup> Although the Coronation is indeed a technically masterful composition conceived in two pieces of almost seamlessly connected Douling stone, its style can be compared directly to contemporary English art in the 1230s and 1240s, which suggests nothing more than that the thematic focus of the façade was executed by the most advanced sculptors available.<sup>49</sup> More significant still, the archaeology of the portal indicates that the sculpture was carefully positioned within an elaborate multi-media framework of metal fittings and paint which amplified its visual effect. The background of the Coronation contains dowelling holes that once supported metalwork fixings: there are three rows of roughly symmetrical dowel holes running vertically up the sides of the throne and two rows that hug the trefoil-headed arch of the canopy. Oak plugs were removed from these holes in 1971.<sup>50</sup> It has recently been suggested that they may have held an inscription in metal letters — perhaps like the 12th-century west façade of St Denis near Paris — although unlike the dowelling holes at St Denis, which are staggered to hold irregularly set metal fixings attached to the back of entire words, the dowels at Wells form a consistent symmetrical pattern.<sup>51</sup> In keeping with contemporary Coronation iconography, it might be suggested that the three rows of dowels on the sides of the main sculpture could have held metal censuring angels, which would compare closely with Chartres or Senlis, or perhaps tapers as on the c. 1230 seal of Shaftesbury Abbey (Fig. 17). But the regular disposition of the dowels argues against this, and indeed, such a solution begs the question of why such expense and care was lavished on peripheral imagery rather than on the Coronation itself.

The most likely explanation is that the holes were filled with metal stars attached to wooden plugs, thus creating a celestial setting for the central image on the façade.<sup>52</sup> High and late medieval sculpture — and particularly cult statuary — was defined by its multi-media character, including the addition of metal fixings to hold crowns or clothing which could be donned in specific liturgical contexts, or coloured glass inlays that replicated jewels (as some of the west façade figures also once had).<sup>53</sup> Although I know of no parallels in Gothic façade sculpture for the elaborate use of stars, metal stars were employed in a number of contemporary English buildings, including gilded lead stars in the Antioch Chamber at Clarendon Palace under the patronage of Henry III, in the Guardian Angel chapel at Winchester Cathedral c. 1230, where stars accentuated the painted vault, and in the dormitory and probably also the Lady Chapel at Glastonbury Abbey where gorgeous metal stars were discovered in excavation (Fig. 20).<sup>54</sup> The use of stars was informed by an established tradition of Marian representation in art and liturgy: stars were frequently employed in the Use of Sarum, such as the Lauds hymn *O gloriosa domina* which begins ‘O gloriosa femina, excelsa supra sidera’, and the Vespers hymn *Ave maris stella* (of which more below).<sup>55</sup> The stars were part of a glittering embellishment of the façade’s central imagery that also included a metal nimbus behind the heads of the Virgin and Christ respectively, as evidenced by four dowel holes behind the head of Christ that are unrelated to the holes around the canopy, and two further holes behind the head of the Virgin.<sup>56</sup> The loss of the heads of the Virgin and of Christ means that we cannot know whether her crown was also metal, but this is likely. Studies of the polychromy indicate that the background of the Coronation was originally blue and the trefoil-headed mouldings above were striped black and white.<sup>57</sup> The material



FIG. 20. Gilt stars found in excavation at Glastonbury Abbey  
*Jerry Sampson*



FIG. 21. Jacopo Torriti, Apse mosaic at Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, completed 1296  
*Deb Nystrum*

elaboration of the central portal served to translate the majesty of the Queen of Heaven and her Coronation as it was manifest in liturgy and theology into Gothic sculpture. Decorated with stars against a blue background, the Coronation portal anticipates Jacopo Torriti's apse mosaic of the Coronation of the Virgin at Santa Maria Maggiore, commissioned by Pope Nicholas IV (1288–92) but likely completed 1296, which features the text: 'MARIA VIRGO ASSVMPTA EST AD ETHEREVM THALAMVM IN QUO REX REGVM STELLATO SEDET SOLIO' ('Mary Virgin was assumed to the heavenly bed-chamber in which the King of Kings sits on a starry throne') (Fig. 21).<sup>58</sup>

The gable above the Coronation of the Virgin also bore metalwork fixings: in the centre is a hole with a series of eleven others on lines radiating out from the centre, forming a continuous semi-circle below it (Fig. 22).<sup>59</sup> Because the holes are more tightly spaced than those in the Coronation background, they could not accommodate the same stars employed there and must have had a different composition. There is also evidence of painting in this space due to an iron hydroxide-enhanced surface forming a crescent within the curvature of the dowels. The latest interpretation of the imagery in the gable proposes that it held a sun and moon, in keeping with Revelation 12:1–3: 'A great



FIG. 22. Wells Cathedral, west façade, gable above the Coronation of the Virgin showing former dowel holes now filled with masonry

*Jerry Sampson*

portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars', which is typically understood as a reference to Mary and features commonly in Marian iconography.<sup>60</sup> Although the sun and moon were conventional in contemporary and later Coronation iconography, following Revelation 12 they are always located *below* the Coronation, as in the apse mosaic at Santa Maria Maggiore (Fig. 21) or in Paolo and Giovanni Veneziano's Coronation altarpiece at the Frick Museum, New York, where the Virgin's foot rests upon the moon and Christ's upon the sun.<sup>61</sup> A more likely possibility is that the central dowel held the Holy Spirit in the form of a metal dove projecting from the façade, and the line of dowels held a metal starburst, thus heightening the drama of the Coronation of the Virgin. If this was the case, this would closely accord with the immediate iconographical context at Senlis, Laon, Mantes, Chartres, the seal of Shaftesbury Abbey (Fig. 17), and a long list of later examples. If the sun and moon ever featured on the façade, they may have appeared in paint in the spandrels of the platform on which the bench that Christ and the Virgin sit upon now rests.

Below the Coronation in the Incarnation quatrefoil over the main door, the Virgin is framed by two series of holes that likely also held stars as well as a metal halo behind the Virgin (Figs 6, 23).<sup>62</sup> Although now damaged, the angels that flank the Virgin are clearly in the act of censuring the scene: no censers were ever carved and it is clear from the surviving pricket on the sinister side and the symmetrically placed hole for one on the dexter side (now filled) that they held metal censers. A useful parallel for stone angels holding metal censers is found in the accounts for St Stephen's chapel.<sup>63</sup> Additional fittings were present on the same axis immediately below, on the springer block above the trumeau which bears six dowel holes and a central pricket that must have held an image or object (Fig. 24). What this originally held is no longer clear, although we can point to a similar arrangement in the north porch which must have originally held an image of Christ in Majesty above the main trumeau as part of a Christ in Majesty comparable to that at Malmesbury.<sup>64</sup> More broadly, small sculptures in this position — generally supported on corbels — can be found in an analogous position on the west façades of Peterborough and Llandaff, and above the chapter-house door at Lichfield.<sup>65</sup>



FIG. 23. Reconstruction of Virgin and Child/Incarnation, central portal, Wells Cathedral west façade  
*Matilde Grimaldi*



FIG. 24. Wells Cathedral west façade, springer block from central portal showing dowel holes and central pricket  
*Jerry Sampson*

#### THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN

The Wells façade was, as far as is now known, the first large-scale representation of the Coronation of the Virgin in England. As T. A. Heslop has recently discussed, the



Coronation of the Virgin emerged as a radical new iconography in Romanesque England around 1100 in the paintings of the chapter-house at Worcester, in the cloister sculpture and perhaps the tympanum of Reading Abbey, the tympanum at Quenington, Gloucestershire, around 1130–40 and the now badly damaged tympanum at Worth Matravers, Dorset, around 1140.<sup>66</sup> George Zarnecki speculated that the central tympanum of the Romanesque façade of Lincoln Cathedral may have featured the Coronation but quite certainly held a Tree of Jesse.<sup>67</sup> Although its English origins are not in doubt, the material record of the Coronation of the Virgin in English medieval art has suffered significant losses and we have no comparable representations of it in wall-painting, manuscript illumination or panel painting. The 13th-century painted roundel at Black Bourton (Oxon.) and the Marian cycle at Sutton Bingham (Somerset) feature the Coronation alone without the court of Heaven. We know of other examples from documentation alone: for example, in April 1237 Henry III ordered five portable panels including a Christ in Majesty, the Virgin Mary, a Crucifixion with Mary and John, a Transfiguration and Coronation of the Virgin. These may have functioned similarly to processional icons of Christ and the Virgin in contemporary Roman civic ritual for the Feast of the Assumption, but we know nothing more about them.<sup>68</sup>

The lack of material exemplars may go some way toward justifying the fact that in the historiography of medieval art the lion's share of attention has been focused on French examples, where we can chart a history of the iconography in a range of sculptural programs — smaller and humbler though they manifestly were — from Senlis (1170) (Fig. 18), to Laon (1195–1205), Chartres (c. 1210), Moutiers St Jean (c. 1250) (now Cloisters Museum, NY) and elsewhere into the Gothic period.<sup>69</sup> Following the influential model of Senlis, these French examples locate the Coronation in the tympanum amidst broader accounts of Marian imagery, notably the Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin on the lintel below, which cannot be paralleled at Wells. In these French examples, the life and Coronation of the Virgin are framed by attendant angels and a Tree of Jesse in the archivolt, based upon Isaiah 11:1 that recounts the Virgin's and Christ's shared ancestry in the Old Testament kings, patriarchs and prophets.<sup>70</sup> Again, this finds no parallels at Wells. While historiographical trends in medievalist scholarship might privilege a French source for Wells, the fact remains that nothing that we are now aware of in France prepares us for the iconography of the Wells west façade. In Johannes Tripp's words, the façade contains 'the entire populace of the Heavenly City'.<sup>71</sup> Featuring the Coronation of the Virgin at its centre, flanked with the court of heaven comprising Old and New Testament figures and more contemporary saints of both local and international interest, the west façade represents a related but distinct iconographical tradition. Indeed, it is not until Giotto's Baroncelli polyptych, painted 1328–34 for Sta Croce in Florence and thus more than a century after the genesis of the Wells façade, that we have an elaborate representation of the Coronation of the Virgin with the entire court of Heaven, including saints of local and institutional relevance (Fig. 25). While Giotto's panel was influential upon subsequent Coronation of the Virgin imagery and has often been understood as the first of its type in Italian art, its iconographical formula had an English precedent.<sup>72</sup>

#### THE INFLUENCE OF THE SONG OF SONGS COMMENTARIES

The Coronation of the Virgin was a new iconography grounded in the shift of medieval devotion of the 11th and 12th centuries that placed a new emphasis on the Virgin Mary.

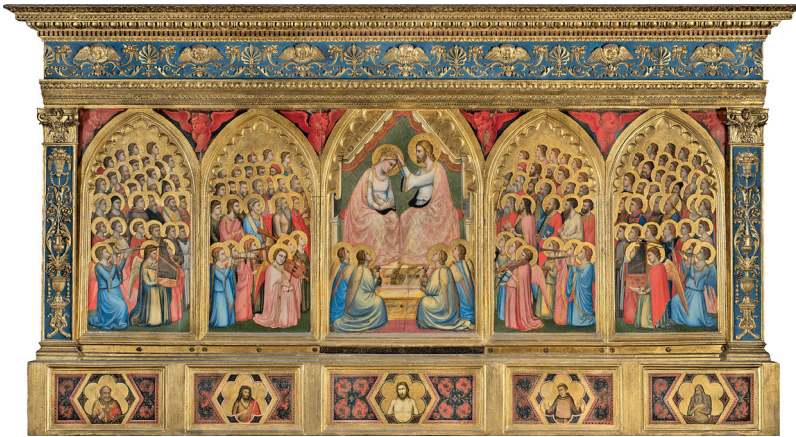


FIG. 25. Giotto di Bondone, Baroncelli Polyptych, c. 1334. Baroncelli Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence  
 Wikipedia Commons

Transformed from a distant, imperious figure, the Virgin Mary became the subject of intense personal devotion as the loving mother of Christ, the mistress of the quadrivium, the elegant mediatrix between the medieval worshipper and God.<sup>73</sup> Scholars such as William of Malmesbury, Domenic of Evesham and John of Garland recorded, collected, compiled and expounded upon her miracles.<sup>74</sup> Although Wells was dedicated to St Andrew, devotion to the Virgin there was manifest from an early date: the Lady Chapel *juxta claustrum* was built by 1196 and extended and redecorated in the middle of the 13th century, and a second Lady Chapel was located east of the high altar by 1284.<sup>75</sup> A mass for the Virgin was instituted by Bishop Savaric (1192–1205) and augmented by Bishop Jocelyn 1215.<sup>76</sup> Jocelyn's own episcopal seal of 1206 shows the bishop in prayer to a *Virgo lactans*, thus leaving no doubt of the bishop's devotion to the Virgin Mary.<sup>77</sup>

But the Coronation of the Virgin in particular was indebted to a specific manifestation of the new devotion to the Virgin: the flourishing of interest in the Old Testament Song of Songs. This erotic poem recounts the love between King Solomon and his beloved, typically the Queen of Sheba, which medieval viewers understood to relate typologically to the mystical marriage of the Virgin and Christ. This was expounded in a series of allegorical commentaries on the Song of Songs written after 1100 by Honorius Augustodunensis, Rupert of Deutz, Philip of Harvengt, Alan of Lille and the sermons by Bernard of Clairvaux. These commentaries offered chapter-by-chapter allegorical exegesis of the text, thus exploring and heightening its meaning for devotees. England was a fertile locus for these developments in Mariology: Honorius Augustodunensis' early-12th-century *Sigillum beatae mariae* was the first significant interpretation of the Song of Songs based solely upon the Virgin Mary.<sup>78</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux's remarkable sermons on the Song of Songs (which terminated at 3:1) would be continued in England by the Cistericans Gilbert of Hoyland (of Swinehead, Lincolnshire) up to 5:9 and then completed by John of Ford, abbot of Ford Abbey, Dorset. New commentaries on the Song of Songs were written in England around 1200, including William of Newburgh's *Explanatio Sacri Epithalamii in Matrem Sponsi* and Alexander Neckham's *Expositio*

*super cantica canticorum in laudem gloriose ac perpetue virginis Mariae* composed in the same years at Cirencester.<sup>79</sup>

Many of these scholars transformed the Song into a literal or 'historical' account of the life of the Virgin Mary as the bride or as the Church (*sponsa*) with Christ (*sponsus*). The Coronation of the Virgin was the culminating episode of the commentaries as she became simultaneously Queen of Heaven and Bride of Christ. From Origen onwards, many commentators defined the Song of Songs as an epithalamium, the antique literary genre of the marital song, and many commentaries on the Song of Songs afterward — including that of William of Newburgh — were likewise in the epithalamium tradition.<sup>80</sup> The typological relationship between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and Christ and the Virgin at Wells is suggested by the appearance of these figures — the only Old Testament figures on the façade — directly above the Coronation on either side of the central lancet window (Fig. 11 a, b). Indeed, the Queen of Sheba's face and slight tilt of her head echoes that of the Virgin, and Solomon's gaze across at his beloved echoes that of Christ, thus inviting the viewer to compare them. The imagery of the Old and New Testament quatrefoils that abut the Coronation are likewise implicated in this reading. A hymn attributed to Adam of St Victor (d. 1146) for the feast of St John the Evangelist (27 December) comments upon his angelic nature and figures him gazing upon Christ and the Virgin, exclaiming, 'Let us see the bridegroom's face. To the bridegroom, endless praise!'<sup>81</sup> This Marian interpretation of the Song of Songs was not principally dependent on patristic exegesis, but on the use of the Song of Songs in the liturgy of the Assumption and the Nativity of the Virgin.<sup>82</sup> As spiritual exercises in and of themselves, such commentaries helped to expand imagery of the Song of Songs and the mystical marriage of Christ and the Virgin Mary in particular. These commentaries were widely known in the high and later Middle Ages and they had a major influence on the development of Marian imagery in England and on the Continent.<sup>83</sup>

Significant for the history of art and architecture, the Song of Songs commentary tradition is, like the Song itself, populated by buildings, cities, gardens and landforms. As Ann Astell has noted, these buildings, such as the king's palace and pleasure garden, which were typically read as *figurae* of the Church, became *figurae* of Mary herself: 'her body is the pattern of their construction as the womb-like home of Christ'.<sup>84</sup> Song of Songs 2:14, 'O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely', was to be richly interpreted by 12th- and 13th-century commentators and, as we will see, was a guiding influence on the Wells façade. In 4:1–5 the beloved's neck is likened to the Tower of David, with coursed stone that is hung round with one thousand shields of warriors, thus simulating a necklace. In 4:12 the beloved is compared to a lush, fragrant enclosed garden with orchards and a fountain ('A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed'). In 7:4–5 the neck of the beloved is an ivory tower and her eyes compared to the pools of Heshbon. In 8:10 a simile is employed in which the beloved is a fortified wall, while her breasts are towers; a younger sister of the beloved is then a wall upon which buttresses are built, and so on.<sup>85</sup> Reading the beloved as the Virgin Mary, medieval exegetes put these metaphors to flight with allegorizations of these sites as Christ, the Virgin Mary or as symbols of their mystical union.

Although not unique in high medieval thought, these commentaries may have solidified a tradition of gendering architectural form as female or as embodying or personifying the Virgin.<sup>86</sup> Germane to façade architecture, for Honorius Augustodunensis the Virgin is the portal through which Christ entered the world and the bolt that locked the door was human sin which she removed; elsewhere, Mary would be allegorized as a

gate through which Christ entered the world and through which the multitude of the faithful will enter heaven.<sup>87</sup> These passages are significant in offering a female version of some of the central tropes of medieval architecture, such as John 10:9, 'I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved', which demonstrably informed an entire tradition of Christian building.<sup>88</sup> In the 13th century, the same wisdom was employed by Robert Grosseteste in his extensive architectural allegory *Château d'amour* (c. 1230) in which the Virgin Mary is a beautiful castle at whose gates the faithful plead to enter.<sup>89</sup> Mary's many possible architectural allegories, including the Tabernacle of God, the Temple, the entry hall, the gate of Ezekiel, the city of God and others, were expounded in an extended catalogue of Marian tropes in early-13th-century sermons on the antiphon *Salve regina*.<sup>90</sup>

Although the possible significance of the Song of Song commentaries and sermons had been hinted at in scholarship,<sup>91</sup> Paul Binski was the first to pay serious attention to them as ideas that may have informed the design and the interpretation of the west façade, drawing particular attention to Bernard of Clairvaux's 62nd sermon from his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*.<sup>92</sup> The central trope explored by Bernard here is Song of Songs 2:14, 'my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the nooks of the wall' (*columba mea in foraminibus petrae in caverna maceriae*).<sup>93</sup> Here, the dove is the bride or Virgin Mary (*sponsa*), and the groom is Christ (*sponsus*), call to her. Binski also drew attention to Jean Bony's view of the façade as a cliff face (the francophone scholar was perhaps playing upon the dual use of *massif* in French as façade and cliff face), and he noted that the wall or cliff (*macerie*) and its clefts or apertures readily translated to the highly unusual architecture of the Wells west façade.<sup>94</sup> As will be clear from what follows, I am in agreement with this view but will expand upon it. Bernard's commentary on 2:14 in fact begins at the beginning of his 61st sermon, which forms a pendant with the 62nd. The 61st sermon is the first time the bridegroom directly addresses the bride, saying 'Arise my love, my bride, and come' (Song of Songs 2:10), signalling the mystical union.<sup>95</sup> This leads Bernard to explore the meanings of the dominant figure of the clefts in the wall. The wall and its clefts or nooks may signify the body and wounds of Christ: 'there is no lack of clefts by which they are poured out. They pierced his hands and his feet, they gored his side with a lance, and through these fissures I can suck honey from the rock and oil from the flinty stone'.<sup>96</sup> Bernard's source here is Deuteronomy 32:13, which was notably employed in the 13th century by Durandus of Mende to describe the liturgical arts of the church in the Gothic period and the method of looking at and learning from it:

All things associated with the services, furnishings, and vestments of the church are full of signs and symbols of the divine, and they overflow with a celestial sweetness when they are studied by a diligent observer who can extract honey from rock and oil from even the stoniest ground.<sup>97</sup>

If the body of Christ is one level of meaning for the wall and its niches, Bernard's dominant interpretation is that it represents heaven itself, and it is via the niches that the faithful may enter and ultimately remain. Bernard figures heaven as a city with great walls that contain the entirety of the blessed. In a remarkable passage in 61:6, Bernard states,

I shall leave the cities and dwell in the rock. I shall be as the dove nesting in the highest point of the cleft, so that like Moses in his cleft of the rock I may



be able to see at least the back of the Lord as he passes by. For who can look on his face as he stands, on the glory of the unchangeable God, but he who is introduced not only to the holy place but to the holy of holies.<sup>98</sup>

Here Bernard constructs the wall as something akin to the antique *scenae frons* which it and the Wells façade palpably resemble. This leads into Bernard's expanded commentary in Sermon 62 in which Bernard 'interpret[s] "wall" not as a conglomeration of stones but as a communion of saints' that exists in and through time. The holes in the wall are the holes of angels who fell through pride, thus leaving openings to be filled by new men 'like ruins repaired by living stones'. Bernard's exegesis then turns upon the wall as a physical place in heaven and a mnemonic space within the mind of the devotee who may explore it as a devotional exercise, moving in and out of the sweet crannies of the wall before they can be inhabited in body and mind. Bernard is clear that the wall will not be perfected or entirely filled until the end of time at the Last Judgment when the blessed will take their place within their own niches.

He comes closest to the conception of the Wells façade when he described the wall as a space that is accessible to the devotee through prayer; hollowing out a place for oneself is done through meditation, much as the act of prayer is akin to slow and patient chiseling and excavating:

It is therefore within the power of each of us, even during the time of our mortal life, to hollow out a place anywhere we will in the heavenly wall: at our pleasure to visit the patriarchs now, to salute the prophets now, to mingle with the assembly of apostles now, to slip into the choirs of martyrs now, even to run with all the swiftness of mind that devotion can inspire through the orders and dwellings of the blessed spirits, from the smallest angel to the Cherubim and Seraphim. And if we stand and knock there where our attraction has drawn us, inwardly moved as the Spirit wills, the door will at once be opened to us, a cranny will be made amid the holy mountains, or rather the holy minds, who will spontaneously and lovingly enfold us that we may rest with them for a while. The face and voice of every soul who acts like this are pleasing to God: the face for its candor, the voice for its praise. For praise and beauty are in his sight. And he says to one thus endowed, 'Show me your face, let your voice sound in my ears.' This voice is the wonder in the mind of the contemplative, this voice is the giving of thanks. God finds his delight in these crannies. From them resounds the voice of gratitude, the voice of wonder and adoration.<sup>99</sup>

His conception of the 'living stones' (1 Peter 2:5), which is shared by other commentators on the Song of Songs, including William of Newburgh, provides a useful gloss on the evident play on art and nature on the west façade.<sup>100</sup> Aside from its allusions to geology, the individual apertures or hollows are framed by rich buds of foliage like shrub and grasses sprouting from a cliff face. In its physical and figurative senses, Bernard's construction of the wall very possibly served as the underlying trope of the façade. Deviating significantly from the large portals, rose windows, column figures and twin towers of façades in the French tradition — as many commentators have noted — the west façade at Wells would appear to reflect the very wall from the Song of Songs, with the Coronation of the Virgin at the centre.

Of course, Bernard's English followers who completed his *Sermons*, namely Gilbert of Hoyland and John of Forde, had no opportunity to write on Song of Songs 2:14 as Bernard had already done so. But it is significant that the next English commentary on the Song of Songs, William of Newburgh's *Explanatio Sacri Epithalamii in Matrem Sponsi* (begun before 1196) did just that.<sup>101</sup> Written at the request of Roger, abbot of Byland (d. 1199), the *Explanatio* is a verse-by-verse commentary. Although William's text has often been understood to have been written independently of Bernard's, William and Bernard are the only two commentators, as far as I am aware, who focus upon the passage to this extent, and the similarities between them suggests that William was indeed inspired by Bernard's influential text. William offers a commentary on Song of Songs 2:13 and 2:14 under a single heading, thus beginning with the loving invocation of Christ to the Virgin: 'Arise, my lady-love, my beauty, and come forth, my dove in the hollows of the rock and the hole in the wall'.<sup>102</sup> William expands upon the meaning of the rock and offers a more fulsome account than his predecessor:

The rock has an abundance of hollows into which it receives all who wish to enter, where it holds them, and in holding fills them. Moreover, the rock is not full, because if all who *are earth-born and sons of men, together as one, rich and poor* [Psalm 49], wanted to enter, there would be no lack of hollows to receive them; on the contrary, there would be plenty [...] The rock is full of such hollows and he enfolds all who come to him in mercy and compassion. [...] It is true that the hollows of the rock seem narrow when one enters through them, so the rock itself tells those who come to it, *Strive to enter through the narrow door* [Luke 13:24]. Yet once one has entered into the rock, those same hollows hold a vast space within, where one can live safely and pleasantly, as if in a bedchamber [...] One enters into the rock by believing and loving, and the more one progresses in faith and love, the deeper one enters and the safer and sweeter is one's sojourn inside.<sup>103</sup>

William's text expands at length on the disparity between narrow openings and substantial chambers within, another trope which may well explain the small openings punched into the façade filled by human bodies that stand looking out. I have noted already that William, like Bernard, is clear that the apertures in the wall were not intended to be entirely filled until the Last Judgment. In light of this, the financial circumstances that are normally cited as the reason why the figures on the south side were not completed may not fully address the problem: it is possible that some façade niches may have been intentionally left unfilled, awaiting newly canonized members of the court of heaven to fill them.<sup>104</sup>

William then turns to recount other creatures, including sparrows and turtle doves who find safe dwellings within the rock (1 Cor. 10:4), which leads to the Marian interpretation of the space:

One dove stands out from among all the doves residing in the hollows of the rock, it is truly the dove of doves, the mother of this same rock. I say, this dove, which bore the rock, lived higher and deeper in the rock, through special faith and love. For she, though dead in Adam (1 Cor. 15:22) like the rest, found there, beyond doubt, salvation in the hollows of the rock, as did others too. It is proper that, having borne the rock, she should be allowed to enter deeper into the rock than others, through believing and loving ...<sup>105</sup>

William also glosses the wall as the enclosing wall which guards the garden and vineyard in the Song of Songs. God made ‘an enclosure wall with living stones of the heavenly edifice (1 Peter 2:5), that is to say, he arranged an angelic guard to surround them’,<sup>106</sup> a reading that may help to explain the row of angels in quatrefoils on the first register of the west façade (Fig. 9). In order to prevent the vineyard from being besieged by wickedness, ‘the Lord picked a few from the vineyard itself and, according to their superior grace, placed them in these breaches, and thus the wall around the *vineyard of the Lord of hosts* [Isaiah 5:7] is built of both angels and humans by way of carefully selected stones ...’. Again, William turns to the Virgin,

by privilege of her virtues and by the abundance of her merits, it is she that fills the holes in the wall and sets herself more willingly against the enemies of the vineyard, never stopping a single day in her fight for it. It is good therefore that after saying to her, ‘my dove in the hollows of the rock’, ‘in the hole of the wall’ is added. The Holy Mother resided in the hollows of the rock for her own sake, and in the hole of the wall for the sake of others, living not only for herself but also for others and providing gifts both in the sight of God and of men.<sup>107</sup>

Although Bernard of Clairvaux and William of Newburgh offer compelling analogies for the overtly geological appearance of the west façade populated by the saints, I am not suggesting that either were necessarily singular sources for it. I have spent time on them because these commentaries offer an account of the imagery of the wall from the Song of Songs as elite 13th-century patrons and viewers would have understood it, and there is, in turn, every reason to suspect that they influenced the patrons and designers as well. It is not difficult to connect the creators of the façade with the imagery of the commentary tradition. Bernard’s *Sermons* had a wide influence in England and were clearly part of a continuing tradition of commentary explored by English writers.<sup>108</sup> Although we know little of Wells Cathedral library’s holdings in the Middle Ages, versions of Bernard’s *Sermons* were held at all the major centres including Salisbury, Canterbury, Durham, Reading and elsewhere.<sup>109</sup> Bernard’s text was, of course, based ultimately upon the hallowed precedent of Augustine’s *City of God*, which has long been understood as a dominant source for the west façade program.<sup>110</sup> While Augustine was surely the ultimate source for the iconography of the heavenly city during the Middle Ages, his vision was not, significantly, focused upon the Virgin, much less the Coronation of the Virgin, which must thus call his direct influence into question. This gives us cause to question other readings of the façade, including Carolyn Malone’s recent comparison between the façade and a dream vision by Adam of Eynsham, or Lethaby’s view that the Death of the Virgin recounted in the (later) *Golden Legend* informed the façade. All of these sources are rooted in an Augustinian vision of heaven, but none of them, crucially, focus on the Virgin Mary or her Coronation, which is surely vital in thinking of a possible ‘source’ for the façade program.<sup>111</sup>

We may now step back and contextualize these observations by noting that the new centrality of the Virgin Mary on the Wells west façade or even *as* the façade had significant parallels in English art, and particularly in the micro-architectural imagery of contemporary seals. The seal of Shaftesbury Abbey features on its verso a church façade that recalls Wells and Salisbury (Fig. 26). Its inscription states, ‘SALVE STELLA MARIS TV AVXILLIARIS GEMMA PVELLARIS REGIA DONA PARIS’, which may be rendered, ‘Hail star of the sea, you, helper to us, jewel among maidens, bring forth royal

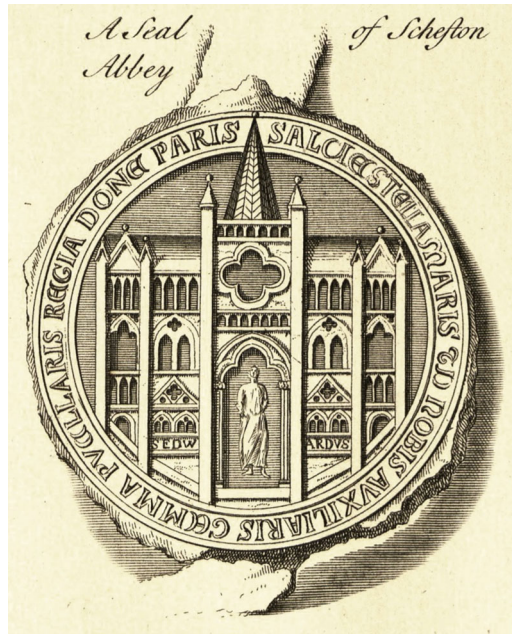


FIG. 26. Seal of Shaftesbury Abbey, *Vetusta Monumenta* (London 1747), I, pl. 60  
Author

gifts'.<sup>112</sup> This is particularly notable as the verso bears no figural representations of the Virgin: the figure in the door is Edward king and martyr, the patron saint of Shaftesbury. Here, the trope of the wall or the fortified gate as the Virgin is clear. The *Stella maris* was a commonly employed Marian trope that was well established by the 13th century. As noted above, it featured in the Use of Sarum and it was also invoked widely in contemporary commentaries, including Thomas the Cistercian's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*.<sup>113</sup> It was employed as a specifically architectural image in the contemporary monophonic song sequence *Stella maris singularis*, which opens, 'Matchless star of the sea, you are defended with shining gates' ('*Stella maris singularis/claustris Claris castillaribus*').<sup>114</sup> The Shaftesbury seal forms part of a new tradition of architectural representation on English monastic seals: in general, these images are not 'portraits' of their institutions in a modern sense, since they tend to only distantly resemble their referents.<sup>115</sup> Rather, these seals represent the church as *ecclesia*, as idealized architectures of the Heavenly Jerusalem with its many mansions inhabited by Christ and the saints. Understood in terms of its Latin legend, the façade on the seal represents an architectural personification of the Virgin Mary. It is notable that other 13th-century British seals also explore the trope of the Virgin Mary as the gate, door or tower, based ultimately on the imagery of the Song of Songs. As Eva Maschke has shown, the seals of Arbroath and Milton abbeys bore the conductus 'PORTA SALVATIS AVE PER TE PATET EXITUS AVE VENIT AB EVA VE VE QUIA TOLLIS AVE' ('Hail, thou Gateway of Salvation! The Ave is the door to salvation through which there lies open escape from woe. Woe comes from Eve, which you, the Ave, have taken away'). Accompanying elaborate façades, the legend informs our understanding of them as Marian architectures: at Milton, the Virgin



is seated within a deep Gothic niche, literally the *porta saluatis*.<sup>116</sup> The clever inscription is characterized by word play through contrasts, and it puns on *porta* and *exitus* (entrance and exit), and *Ave* and *Eva*, thus invoking the Virgin Mary as the second Eve. The same tropes featured in the late-13th-century Spanish *Cantigas de Santa Maria* which features side-by-side images of Eve and the Mary: Eve and Adam stand shamefully in front of a closed gate while Mary and the Angel Gabriel stand in front of an open gate and the inscription reads ‘How Eve closed the gates of Heaven to us, and through Ave Holy Mary opened them’.<sup>117</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Although the façade presented the medieval viewer with an awesome image of the Coronation of the Virgin surrounded by the court of heaven, the composition of its imagery and its central message, if we can speak in such terms, was quite simple. Its theme is the universality of the redemption of mankind in the Old and New Testaments, brought to fulfilment with the marriage of Christ and the Virgin Mary, which could be read allegorically as Christ’s marriage with the Church. But it also had a deeper, subjective meaning for the medieval viewer, since current meditations on the Song of Songs, including those discussed above, advocated that the devotee himself become the bride of Christ. Like the Virgin, the devotee — in this case the secular canons of Wells or the laity of the medieval city — seek union with Christ, thus feminizing what was a broadly male viewership.<sup>118</sup> This wisdom was based upon the hallowed precedent of Gregory the Great, who considered all humans to represent the Bride of Christ:

the whole human race, from the origins of the world to its end, we now represent as one single Bride who in the Law received a pledge of the spiritual gift; but now she seeks the presence of the Bridegroom himself and says, *May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth* [Song of Songs 1:2].<sup>119</sup>

In this, the thinking behind the façade reflects the position on church art of the reform-minded bishops in the circle of Stephen Langton who, responding to and enacting the reforms of the third and fourth Lateran Councils, distilled much of the learning of the 12th century and transformed it into a new, effective and accessible art for the laity and clergy alike that we now call ‘high Gothic’.<sup>120</sup>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is part of a larger study of sculptural production at Wells Cathedral c. 1170–1270 now underway. At Wells, I am indebted to Dr Jerry Sampson for years of correspondence and collaboration on various aspects of the cathedral (including but not limited to the façade), and to Mr Jez Fry (Clerk of Works). Versions of this paper were presented to the Canadian Conference of Medieval Art Historians in Toronto, Ontario, and at the Kalamazoo sessions sponsored by the Index for Medieval Art at Princeton. I am also grateful to Caroline Bruzelius, James Bugslag, Lloyd de Beer, Lindsay Shepherd Cook, Helen Deeming, Jonathan Foyle, Matilde Grimaldi, Sandy Heslop, James Hillson, Julian Luxford, Michael Michael, Stephen Murray, Marion Roberts, Neil Rushton, Malcolm Thurlby, Laura Whatley, Beth Williamson and Paul Williamson and for various kindnesses along the way. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own. Biblical citations in English are to the NRSV.

NOTES

1. For the relationship between the Wells façade and the Lady Chapel at Ely, see P. Binski, *Gothic Wonder: Art, Artifice and the Decorated Style 1290–1350* (New Haven and London 2014), 200–01.

2. W. H. St John Hope and W. R. Lethaby, ‘The Imagery and Sculptures on the West Front of Wells Cathedral Church with some Suggestions as to the Identifications of the Wells Sculpture and Imagery’, *Archaeologia*, 59 (1904), 1–41, at 39. The most recent commentary is Jerry Sampson’s unpublished survey, *Wells Cathedral: The West Front Polychromy. Part I: The Architectural Decoration* (Wells, Somerset 2018).

3. J. Flaxman, *Lectures on Sculpture* (London 1829), 13–16; C. R. Cockerell, *The Iconography of the West Front of Wells Cathedral* (Oxford and London 1851). The earliest representation of the façade is William Dugdale’s *Monasticon Anglicanum* (London 1655), I, 186, which shows the bottom tier of statues complete.

4. J. Sampson, *Wells Cathedral West Front: Construction, Sculpture, and Conservation* (Stroud, Glos. 1998), and subsequently, ‘Wells et Salisbury: le décor figuré de la façade occidentale’, in *Mise en oeuvres des portails gothiques*, ed. I. Kasarska (Paris 2011), 129–55.

5. G. Harris, ‘Antony Gormley lends sculpture to fill an empty spot on the medieval façade of Wells Cathedral in England’, *Art Newspaper* (4 March 2021): <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/03/04/antony-gormley-lends-sculpture-to-fill-an-empty-spot-on-the-medieval-facade-of-wells-cathedral-in-england> (accessed 4 March 2022).

6. On these issues in Gothic sculpture, see most recently J. Jung, *Eloquent Bodies: Movement, Expression, and the Human Figure in Gothic Sculpture* (New Haven and London 2020).

7. P. Binski, *Becket’s Crown: Art and Imagination in Gothic England 1170–1300* (New Haven and London 2004), 106–21; C. M. Malone, *Façade as Spectacle: Ritual and Ideology at Wells Cathedral* (Leiden and Boston 2004); P. Tudor-Craig, ‘Wells Cathedral West Front and the City of God’, in *Prophesy, Apocalypse and the Day of Doom: Proceedings of the 2000 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. N. Morgan (Donnington 2004), 356–76.

8. For a full description of the sculpture, see Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 182–270.

9. For example, Malone, *Façade as Spectacle*, esp. 30–41. For Jocelyn’s career, see recently R. Dunning ed., *Jocelin of Wells: Bishop, Builder, Courtier* (Woodbridge 2010). It is significant that Wells held a number of scholars during Jocelyn’s episcopate, including William of Bardenay, who was *magister* at Paris and likely came to his post as archdeacon of Wells (before 1215–31) via the *familia* of Stephen Langton. Marian devotion was common among the Parisian masters for whom the Virgin Mary was the embodiment of wisdom and the patron of scholars and scholarship: W. J. Courtenay, ‘Magisterial Authority, Philosophical Identity, and the Growth of Marian Devotion: the seals of Parisian Masters, 1190–1308’, *Speculum*, 91 (2016), 63–114, at 73–77.

10. Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 136–42.

11. C. R. Cavadini, ‘The *commercium* of the kiss who saves: a study of Thomas the Cistercian’s Commentary on the Song of Songs’ (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Notre Dame, 2010).

12. Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 189.

13. Tudor-Craig, ‘Wells Cathedral West Front’, 369. Cf. Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 189.

14. For the possibility that the central figure of Christ in the gable is in fact from the 13th century, see Tudor-Craig, ‘Wells Cathedral West Front’, 364.

15. Hope and Lethaby, ‘The Imagery and Sculptures’, 10.

16. M. M. Reeve, *Thirteenth-Century Wall Painting at Salisbury Cathedral: Art, Liturgy, Reform* (Woodbridge 2008); M. Fassler, ‘Liturgy and Sacred History in the Twelfth-Century Tympana at Chartres’, *Art Bulletin*, 75 (1993), 499–520; and subsequently, *Eadem*, *The Virgin of Chartres: Making History through Liturgy and the Arts* (New Haven and London 2010).

17. N. Morgan, *Early Gothic Manuscripts 1250–85* (London 1988), no. 118.

18. In the historiography of the façade, the focus has been on the Palm Sunday procession as described in the Sarum rite, but the liturgical dimensions must have extended to various festivals of the liturgical year. For a liturgical reading of the façade, see Malone, *Façade as Spectacle*, 131–56. For a contrary argument, see M. Spurrell, ‘The Procession of Palms and West-Front Galleries’, *Downside Review*, 119 (2001), 125–44. This argument is problematic because it does not allow for the inherent malleability of the Sarum rite to adapt to various buildings and their topographies.

19. J. Luxford, ‘The figure sculpture of the west front of Peterborough Cathedral and its setting’, in *Peterborough and the Soke: Art, Architecture and Archaeology*, ed. R. Baxter, J. Hall and C. Marx., *BAA Trans.* xli (London 2020), 213–42, at 221.

20. For a recent interpretation of this figure as St Matthew, see Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 246. Malone, *Façade as Spectacle*, 55 and 56 n.36 hesitantly identifies this figure as '[St] John?'. The quatrefoils are perhaps the least studied sculptures on the west façade. See, for instance, M. Roberts, 'Noah's Ark', *The Friends of Wells Cathedral Report* (1973), 10–14. The style and iconography of the sculptures is closely related to contemporary biblical genealogies in Peter of Poitiers' *Compendium*, such as Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase from the J. H. Wade fund, 1954. 388, which has the Sacrifice of Isaac framed by a deeply set quatrefoil. Other parallels with the Peter of Poitiers manuscript tradition are suggested by Liverpool, Walker Art Museum, M12017, which has the closest parallels I am aware of with the idiosyncratic architecture of the west façade. The author is now preparing an extended discussion of the quatrefoils and their sources.

21. G. Zarnecki, *Romanesque Lincoln: The Sculpture of the Cathedral* (Lincoln 1988); D. Kahn ed., *The Romanesque Frieze and its Spectator: the Lincoln Symposium Papers* (London 1992).

22. J. Hamburger, *St John the Divine: The Deified Evangelist in Medieval Art and Theology* (Berkeley 2002).

23. O. Von Simpson, *The Gothic Cathedral* (New York 1956), 35–36.

24. Tudor-Craig, 'Wells Cathedral West Front', 367–68. For William Worcestre's account, see William Worcestre, *Itineraries*, ed. J. H. Harvey (Oxford 1969), 228–29.

25. The foliage sculpture on the west façade has recently been discussed in I. S. Cataldo, 'Living Stones: Sculpted Foliage in Gothic Architecture c. 1140–1300' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 2021), 168–70.

26. Hope and Lethaby, 'The Imagery and Sculptures'; Malone, *Façade as Spectacle*, 62; Binski, *Becket's Crown*, 116–18.

27. Hope and Lethaby, 'The Imagery and Sculptures', 158, 171–72. Notably, the hagiography of St Edward King and Martyr is to be found on the capital sculpture of the Wells north porch. For the capital sculpture, see M. M. Reeve, 'The Capital Sculpture of Wells Cathedral: Masons, Patrons, and the Margins of English Gothic Architecture', *JBAA*, 163 (2010), 72–109.

28. Tudor-Craig, 'Wells Cathedral West Front', 358–63.

29. Binski, *Becket's Crown*, 118. On Ine, see most recently T. Davenport, 'Chronicle and Romance: The Story of Ine and Aethelburgh', in *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval England*, ed. C. Saunders (Cambridge 2005), 27–40.

30. The most useful account remains J. Hennig, 'Die Chöre der Heiligen', *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft*, 8 (1963), 436–56; and idem, 'Studies in Early Western Devotion to the Choirs of the Saints', *Studia Patristica*, 8 (1963), 239–47.

31. R. Deshman, 'The Galba Psalter: pictures, text and context in an early medieval prayerbook', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 26 (1997), 109–38; K. Openshaw, 'The Symbolic Illustration of the Psalter: An Insular Tradition', *Arte Medievale*, 2/6 (1992), 41–60.

32. Binski, *Becket's Crown*, 117–18; R. Deshman, *The Benedictional of Aethelwold* (Princeton NJ, 1995), 121–24, 146–57, 181–83, col. pls 1–7.

33. Sampson, *West Front Polychromy*, 12, 13; Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 123–24.

34. L. S. Colchester, *The West Front of Wells Cathedral*, 5th edn (Wells 1976), 4. For the Glastonbury tabula, see J. Krochalis, 'Magna tabula: the Glastonbury tablets', in *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian tradition*, ed. J. Carley (Cambridge, UK, and Rochester, NY 2001), 435–567.

35. C. Rudolph, 'The Tour Guide in the Middle Ages: Guide Culture and the Mediation of Public Art', *Art Bulletin*, 100 (2018), 37–67.

36. On the Gothic façade as 'public art', see C. Rudolph, 'Inventing the Gothic Portal: Suger, Hugh of St Victor, and the Construction of a New Public Art at St Denis', *Art History*, 33 (2010), 568–95.

37. C. W. Bynum, 'Wonder', in eadem, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York 2001), 37–75, and see the critique by P. Binski, 'Reflections on the "Wonderful Height and Size" of Gothic Great Churches and the Medieval Sublime', in *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics: Art, Architecture, Literature, Music*, ed. C. S. Jaeger (New York 2010), 129–56, and M. Carruthers, 'Becoming Like an Angel: The Concept of Sublimis in Monastic Contemplation and in Alchemy', in *Tributes to Paul Binski: Medieval Gothic, Art, Architecture and Ideas*, ed. J. Luxford (New York 2021), 324–31.

38. The Coronation of the Virgin in fact constitutes two individual Dundry stone blocks joined in the middle of the bench. For a 1973 clay maquette reconstruction of the heads and hands of the figures, see Sampson, *Wells Cathedral West Front*, 5.

39. Hope and Lethaby, 'The Imagery and Sculptures', 11, and Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 252–53, do not offer a reconstruction of the Virgin's hand position. Malone, *Façade as Spectacle*, 48, considers that the Virgin once held a book and a sceptre and compares her to Senlis, although no justification is given. The Eynsham seal is Westminster Abbey Muniment 2403, a charter from Abbot Adam dated 1213–14, illustrated in *The Cartulary of Eynsham Abbey*, ed. H. E. Salter, 2 vols (Oxford 1907), I, unpaginated. For the Shaftesbury seal, see *Victoria County History of Dorset*, ed. W. Page (London 1908), 2, and Laura Whatley's commentary on its representation in *Vetusta Monumenta* (London 1747), I, pl. 1.60 at <https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol1plates58-60-lancaster-duchy-office-seals-b> (accessed 4 March 2022). For the Lyngsjö font, see L. de Beer and N. Speakman, *Thomas Becket: the murder and making of a saint* (London 2021), 105–07 and C. S. Drake, *The Romanesque Fonts of North Europe and Scandinavia* (Woodbridge 2002), 145–47.
40. The attributes of the Virgin have been studied in T. A. Heslop, 'The Virgin Mary's Regalia and Twelfth-Century English Seals', in *The Vanishing Past: Studies of Medieval Art, Liturgy and Metrology presented to Christopher Hohler*, ed. A. Borg and A. Martindale (Oxford 1981), 53–62.
41. N. Morgan, 'Texts and Images of Marian Devotion in Thirteenth-Century England', in *England in the Thirteenth Century*, ed. M. Ormrod (Stamford 1993), 69–103, at 91–93. Bernard of Clairvaux considered Mary the 'conqueror of dragons', and she was often shown crushing a snake underfoot, also a reference to her title as the 'New Eve': G. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, 2 vols (New York 1971–72), I, 108.
42. Morgan, 'Texts and Images', 91.
43. Cockerell's reconstruction indicates that he came to the same conclusion: Cockerell, *The Iconography*, unpaginated plate.
44. See C. H. Mayo, 'Ancient Carving, Thornford', *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*, 4 (1895), 240–41.
45. N. Morgan, 'Some iconographic aspects of Opus Anglicanum', in *The Age of Opus Anglicanum*, ed. M. Michael (Turnhout 2016), 91–115, at 106. For a contemporary comparison, see the De Brailles Hours (London, British Library, MS Add. 49999, fol. 61r) of c. 1240. Later examples such as painted nave pier at St Albans and the Ramsay Psalter, both c. 1300, show Christ raising his hand in benediction: M. Michael, *St Albans Cathedral Wall Paintings* (London 2019), 34–35.
46. Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 252–53. Hope and Lethaby, 'The Imagery and Sculptures', 11: 'The right arm [of Christ] was outstretched toward the Blessed Virgin, but the part below the elbow, which was carved out of the same block as Our Lady's figure, has broken away'. It would appear that the authors are in error — they surely mean *above* the elbow. I am grateful to Jerry Sampson for confirming that none of Christ's body was in fact carved from the stone block of the Virgin Mary.
47. For Reading, see T. A. Heslop, 'The English origins of the Coronation of the Virgin', *Burlington Magazine*, 147 (2005), 790–97.
48. Tudor-Craig, 'Wells Cathedral West Front', 363. This view was advanced in the author's previous publications, in eadem, *One Half of our Noblest Art: a study of the sculptures of Wells West Front* (Wells 1976), 11, and eadem, 'Wells Sculpture', *Wells Cathedral: a celebration*, ed. L. Colchester (Shepton Mallet 1982), 115.
49. Reeve, *Thirteenth-Century Wall Painting*, 70. Cf. Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 58–59, 84–85 for a refutation of this theory with which I am in agreement.
50. Sampson, *West Front Polychromy*, 13; idem, *Wells Cathedral*, 253; Hope and Lethaby, 'The Imagery and Sculptures', 8, 11.
51. Sampson, 'Wells et Salisbury', 148, following idem, *Wells Cathedral*, 253. For St Denis, see J. Moulin, 'Notes sur le massif occidental de Saint-Denis', *Bulletin Monumental*, 178/3 (2020), 323–84, at 338, fig. 20.
52. The possibility of stars in the background of the Coronation of the Virgin was first suggested by Hope and Lethaby, 'The Imagery and Sculptures', 39. See also Malone, *Façade as Spectacle*, 86.
53. For example, Hope and Lethaby, 'The Imagery and Sculptures', 14. R. Lightbown, *Mediaeval European Jewellery* (London 1992), 12, noted that the jewellery on the sculptures antedates the earliest known examples of table-cut gems.
54. R. Gilchrist and C. Green, *Glastonbury Abbey, archaeological investigations 1904–79*, (London 2015), 301–02. T. Borenius, 'The Cycle of Images in the Palaces and Castles of Henry III', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 6 (1943), 40–50, at 45, fig. 13b. Although we have no evidence of where these stars were manufactured, it is notable that Wells had artists capable of working in metal: a well-known 1257 document requests that Simon of Wells go to Westminster Abbey to execute a gilt-bronze effigy for Princess Katherine: Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 46.



55. Morgan, 'Texts and Images', 88–89.
56. Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 253.
57. Sampson, *West Front Polychromy*, 13. Cockerell, *The Iconography*, 52: 'traces of painting and gilding' were still visible on the background of the Coronation in 1825.
58. See most recently D. Kinney, 'Communication in a Visual Mode: Papal Apse mosaics', *Journal of Medieval History*, 44 (2018), 311–32, at 331–32.
59. Hope and Lethaby, 'The Imagery and Sculptures', 11.
60. Sampson, *West Front Polychromy*, 14; Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 124, col. pl. 3; Tudor-Craig, 'Wells Cathedral West Front', 363.
61. C. Ryskamp, *Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts* (New York 1996), 14–15; Kinney, 'Communication in a Visual Mode'. Allegorizing the moon as the Church triumphant which is subordinate to the Virgin herself, Richard of St Victor places it decisively below the Virgin's feet: M. H. Infusino, 'The Virgin Mary and the Song of Songs in Medieval English Literature' (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California Los Angeles, 1988), 153.
62. Also noted by Cockerell, *Iconography*, 29.
63. T. Ayers and M. Jurkowski, *The Fabric Accounts of St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster* (Woodbridge 2020), 1198–99.
64. Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 77; Reeve, 'The Capital Sculpture', 93–94.
65. C. Oakes, 'What is the subject carved on the socle on the west doorway of Peterborough Abbey?', in *Peterborough and the Soke*, 243–60; M. Thurlby, 'The Romanesque Fabric of Llandaff Cathedral', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 170 (2021), 159–91, at 185, fig. 42.
66. For Reading and Quenington, see Heslop, 'The English origins', 790–97, and R. Baxter, *The Royal Abbey of Reading* (Woodbridge 2016), 276–80. For Worth Maltravers, see D. Givens, 'English Romanesque Tympana: A Study of Architectural Sculpture in Church Portals' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, 2001), 181–84, and S. Alford, 'Romanesque Architectural Sculpture in Dorset', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society*, 106 (1984), 1–22, at 5–7 and 19.
67. G. Zarnecki, *Romanesque Lincoln: The Sculpture of the Cathedral* (Lincoln 1988), 77.
68. *Calendar of Liberate Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office*, 6 vols (London 1916–64), I (1226–40), 261; Binski, *Becket's Crown*, 163.
69. See especially P. Verdier, *Le Couronnement de la Vierge. Les origines et les premiers développements d'un thème iconographique* (Montreal and Paris 1980); W. H. Forsyth, 'A Gothic Doorway from Moutiers-Saint-Jean', *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 13 (1978), 33–74.
70. C. D. Brouillette, 'The Early Gothic Sculpture of Senlis Cathedral' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1981).
71. J. Tripps, 'From Singing Saints to Descending Angels: Medieval Ceremonies and Cathedral Façades as Representations of the Heavenly Jerusalem', *Arte Christiana*, 93 (2005), 1–13, at 4–5.
72. J. Gardner, 'Painters, Inquisitors, and Novices: Giotto, Taddeo Gaffi, and Filippo Lippi at Santa Croce', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 60 (2018), 223–54; J. M. Salvador-González, 'The Iconography of the Coronation of the Virgin in Late Medieval Italian Painting. A Case Study', *Eikon/Imago*, 1 (2013), 1–48; P. Rubin, 'Hierarchies of Vision: Fra Angelico's *Coronation of the Virgin* from San Domenico, Fiesole', *Oxford Art Journal*, 27 (2004), 137–51, at 147.
73. See in general R. Fulton-Brown, *Mary and the Art of Prayer: The Hours of the Virgin in Medieval Christian Life and Thought* (New York 2017); eadem, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York 2002); M. Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (London 2009); M. Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge 2003); K. Ihnat, *Mother of Mercy, Bane of the Jews: Devotion to the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Norman England* (Princeton and Oxford 2016).
74. E. F. Wilson, *The Stella Maris of John of Garland: Edited Together with a Study of Certain Collections of Mary Legends Made in Northern France in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA, 1947).
75. M. M. Reeve, 'Fragments from Wisdom's House: The Lady chapel *Juxta Claustrum* at Wells Cathedral', in *Tributes to Paul Binski*, 186–97.
76. C. M. Church, *Chapters in the Early History of Wells AD 1136–1333* (Taunton 1894), 123, 173, 230–31; see also 193, 220, for the Marian service at Wells' diocesan churches.
77. Binski, *Becket's Crown*, 113, fig. 93.
78. *Sigillum beatae mariae*, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 172 (Paris 1895), 495–518. For a translation, see A. Carr, *The Seal of Blessed Mary* (Toronto 1991).

79. C. J. Holdsworth, 'Two Commentators on the "Song of Songs": John of Forde and Alexander Nequam', in *A Gathering of Friends: The Learning and Spirituality of John of Forde*, ed. H. Costello and C. J. Holdsworth (Kalamazoo, MI 1996), 153–87.
80. D. Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs* (Collegeville, MN 1995), 84. See, in general, E. F. Wilson, 'Pastoral and Epithalamium in Latin Literature', *Speculum*, 23 (1948), 35–57; eadem, 'A Study of the Epithalamium in the Middle Ages: an Introduction to the *Epithalamium beate Mariae virginis* of John of Garland' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1930); V. J. Tufte, *The Poetry of Marriage: the Epithalamium in Europe and its Development in England* (Los Angeles 1970).
81. L. Gauthier and D. S. Wrangham, *The Liturgical Poetry of Adam of St Victor* (London 1881), 207.
82. R. Fulton, 'Mimetic Devotion, Marian Exegesis, and the Historical Sense of the Song of Songs', *Viator*, 27 (1996), 85–116.
83. M. Curschmann, 'Imagined Exegesis: Text and Picture in the Exegetical Works of Rupert of Deutz, Honorius Augustodunensis, and Gerhoch of Reichersberg', *Traditio*, 44 (1988), 145–69; D. Reilly, 'Picturing the Monastic Drama: Romanesque Bible Illustrations of the Song of Songs', *Word and Image*, 17 (2001), 389–400; E. Kitzinger, 'A Virgin's Face: Antiquarianism in Twelfth-Century Art', *Art Bulletin*, 62 (1980), 6–19; Ihnat, *Mother of Mercy*, 88; A. Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia 1990), 65–69.
84. A. W. Astell, *The Song of Song in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY 1990), 46.
85. E. James, *Landscapes of the Song of Songs: Poetry and Place* (Oxford 2017); C. Myers, 'Gender Imagery in the Song of Songs', *Hebrew Annual Review*, 10 (1986), 209–23.
86. For example, Luke 10:38, 'ipse intravit in quoddam castellum', describes Jesus's entry into the *castellum* of Bethany which was understood figuratively as Christ's entry into the body of the Virgin at the Incarnation. This was logically developed in a range of contexts by scholars such as Aelred of Rievaulx who identified the Virgin or her womb as a fortified castle. See A. Wheatley, *The Idea of the Castle in Medieval England* (Woodbridge 2004), 28–29, 37, 42, 78–83, 100–04. On Marian symbolism in medieval art and architecture generally, see H. Kessler, 'Faithful Attraction', *Codex Aquilarensis*, 35 (2019), 59–84.
87. Carr, *Seal of Blessed Mary*, 17, 20.
88. See, for example, C. B. Kendall, *The Allegory of the Church: Romanesque Portals and their Verse Inscriptions* (Toronto 1998), 80–91.
89. E. A. Mackie, 'Robert Grosseteste's *Chasteu d'amur*: A Text in Context' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 2002); eadem, 'Robert Grosseteste's Anglo-Norman treatise *On the Loss and Restoration of Creation* commonly known as *Le Château d'amour*: An English Prose Translation', in *Robert Grosseteste and the Beginnings of a British Theological Tradition*, ed. M. O'Carroll (Rome 2003), 152–79.
90. C. Walker Bynum, *Dissimilar Similitudes: Devotional Objects in Late Medieval Europe* (New York 2020), 21, 27, citing Fulton Brown, *Mary and the Art of Prayer*, 76.
91. Malone, *Façade as Spectacle*, 45.
92. Binski, *Becket's Crown*, 120. See subsequently idem, *Gothic Sculpture* (New Haven and London 2019), 33, 35. The translation is from K. Walsh and I. M. Edmonds, *Bernard of Clairvaux on the Song of Songs*, 4 vols (Kalamazoo, MI, 1979), III, 140–48.
93. On Song of Songs 2.14 in particular, see B. Trınca, 'The Bride and the Wounds — "columba mea in foraminibus petrae", (Ct. 2.14)', *Interfaces*, 5 (2018), 16–30.
94. J. Bony, *The English Decorated Style: Gothic Architecture Transformed 1250–1350* (Oxford 1979), 43.
95. Walsh, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 140.
96. Ibid., 143.
97. T. M. Thibodeau, *The Rationale divinorum officiorum of William Durand of Mende: a new translation of the prologue and book one* (New York 2010), 1. For discussion, see Reeve, *Thirteenth-Century Wall Painting*, 106.
98. Walsh, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 145.
99. Ibid., 151–52.
100. In this, it can be compared to the play of art and nature in the fabric of Lincoln Cathedral described contemporaneously by the poet Henry of Avranches: T. A. Heslop, 'Art, Nature and St

Hugh's Choir at Lincoln', in *England and the Continent in the Middle Ages: Studies in Memory of Andrew Martindale*, ed. J. Mitchell (Stamford 2000), 60–74.

101. For the full Latin text, see J. Gorman, *Explanatio Sacri Epithalamii in Matrem Sponsi: A commentary on the Canticle of Canticles* (Muenster 1960).

102. Gorman, *Explanatio Sacri Epithalamii*, 133–38.

103. 'Adundat enim foraminibus, quibus omnes in se intrare volentes suscipit, continent et continendo implet. Porro ipsa non impletur, quia, si omne terrigene et filii hominum simul in unum dives et pauper vellent intrare, non deessent foramina, quibus reciperentur, immo etiam superabundarent [...] Plena est petra huiusmodi foraminibus atque omnes ad se venientes recipiet in misericordia et miserationibus [...] Angusta quidem videntur esse foramina petre, cum intraturn per ea; unde ipse petra ad se venientibus dicit: "Contendite intrate per angustam portam". At, cum intratum fuerit in petram, eadem foramina magnam intus amplitudinem habent, et non tantum secure, sed etiam suavitur quasi in thalamis habitatur in eis [...] Credendo et amando intraturn in petram, et quanto magis in fide et dilectione quis proficit, tanto altius intrat in petram, tantoque secure atque suavius habitat in ea. Nam et ipsa in Adam, cum ceteris mortua ibi procul dubio salute invenit, ubi et ceteri, hoc est in foraminibus petre. Verum, cum gignat petram, datum est si credendo et amando altius ceteris intrare in petram.'

104. Sampson, *Wells Cathedral*, 56–57.

105. 'Sane inter omnes columbas habitants in foraminibus petre eminet columba illa, que vere columba columbarum, mater scilicet eiusdem petre. Ipsa inquam, que genuit petram, specialii quadam fide et dilectione sublimius profundiusque habitavit in petra.'

106. 'His nimirum ex vivis lapidibus celestis edificii fecit maceriam, id est angelicam circa eas ordinavit custodiam': Gorman, *Explanatio Sacri Epithalamii*, 136. L, 28–29.

107. Gorman, *Explanatio Sacri Epithalamii*, 137–38: 'Ipsa proinde suarum prerogativa virtutum atque ubertate meritorum specialiter implevit cavernas macerie et propensius se opposuit hostibus vinee, nec desinit se pro vinea opponere per singulos dies. Bene ergo, cum ei dictum esset, "Columba mea in foraminibus petre", additum est "in caverna macerie". Plane habitabat in foraminibus petre propter se, in caverna macerie propter alios vivens utique pia mater non tantum sibi sed etiam aliis, et providens bona, non tantum coram deo, sed etiam coram hominibus'.

108. C. Holdsworth, 'The Reception of St Bernard in England', in *Bernhard von Clairvaux: Rezeption und Wirkung im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit*, ed. K. Elm (Wiesbaden 1994), 161–77.

109. R. Birley, 'The Cathedral Library', in Colchester, *Wells Cathedral*, 204–11, and J. P. Carley, 'John Leland at Somerset Libraries', *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History*, 129 (1985), 141–54.

110. Tudor-Craig, 'Wells Cathedral West Front'.

111. Malone, *Façade as Spectacle*, 67–69, citing the translation in G. G. Couton, *Life in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols (Cambridge 1967), I, 47–51 of Salter, *The Cartulary of Eynsham Abbey*, II, 366.

112. My translation follows Laura Whatley's commentary at <https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol1plates58-60-lancaster-duchy-office-seals-b> (accessed 4 March 2022).

113. Cavadini, 'The commercium of the kiss who saves', 182. Bernard of Clairvaux devotes a chapter to the *Stella maris* in his *Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, trans. M.-B. Said (Kalamazoo, MI, 1993), Homily 2:17. See also A. G. Remensnyder, 'Mary, Star of the Multi-Confessional Mediterranean: Ships, Shrines and Sailors', in *Ein Meer und seine Heiligen: Hagiographie im mittelalterlichen Mittelmeer*, ed. N. Jaspert and M. di Branco (Paderborn 2018), 299–326.

114. G. L. Gower, 'The Iconography of Queenship: Sacred Music and Female Exemplarity in Late Medieval Britain' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 2016), 95–97. For the Latin text and translation, see H. Deeming, *Songs in British Sources c. 1150–1300* (London 2013), 81–83.

115. M. Späth, 'Architectural Representation and Monastic Identity: The Medieval Seal Images of Christchurch, Canterbury', in *Image, Memory and Devotion: Liber Amicorum Paul Crossley*, ed. Z. Opacic and A. Timmermann (Turnhout 2011), 257–66; idem, 'Memorializing the Glorious Past. Thirteenth-century seals from English cathedral priories and their artistic contexts', in *Seals and their Context in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. R. Schofield (Oxford and Philadelphia 2015), 161–71.

116. E. M. Maschke, "'Porta Saluatis Ave": Manuscript Culture, Material Culture, and Music', *Musica Disciplina*, 58 (2013), 167–229, esp. 169–72.

117. Kessler, 'Faithful attraction', 75–76.

118. L. C. Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's 'Sermons on the Song of Songs'* (Turnhout 2014).

119. Turner, *Eros and Allegory*, 85–86.

120. Reeve, *Thirteenth-Century Wall Painting*.