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**Markus Schlicht**, *La cathédrale de Rouen vers 1300: un chantier majeur de la fin du Moyen âge. Portail des Libraires, portail de la Calende, chapelle de la Vierge*. Mémoires de la Société des antiquaires de Normandie, 41. Caen: Société des antiquaires de Normandie, 2005. 421 pp. Map, plans, computer-generated diagrams, photographs, notes, bibliography, glossary and index. €35 E.U. (pb). ISBN 2-9510558-3-8.

Review by Stephen Murray, Columbia University.

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This monograph on a portion of the late Gothic work at the cathedral of Rouen unfolds in three parts. After a brief historiographical, historical and institutional sketch, part one provides an intensive architectural analysis of the transept façades constructed between 1281 and the 1320s. The axial chapel (*chapelle de la Vierge*), although featured in the book's title, does not receive systematic analysis, the author's main concern being chronology (the construction of the chapel after the north transept but before the south) and the chapel's function in the builders' agenda. The transept of Notre-Dame of Paris is identified as the essential source for the Rouennais transept: Parisian ideas were fully assimilated and developed in the powerful sculptural articulation of the north and particularly of the south transept of Rouen. Such was the success of the Rouennais work that a regional "school" of late Gothic was formed. Part two is devoted to sculpture with an assessment of the iconographic program and descriptive analysis and chronology. Some interesting pages explore gesture and stance. A chronological sequence is proposed with the sculpture of the south transept placed in the 1320s, significantly later than in earlier studies. Part three suggests a distinct ideological agenda for this sumptuous (and expensive) program of architecture, sculpture, stained glass, and tombs.

Let us now proceed to a critical examination of each of these components.

An all-too-brief historical introduction provides some information about city and clergy in the years around 1300. Rouen, having in 1204 lost its status as a capital of a quasi-independent duchy, went on to flourish with a population (over 50,000) second only to Paris. By 1300 the province was largely integrated with France, providing a substantial revenue flow. The cathedral clergy included the archbishop and his *familia* and the chapter of some fifty canons—exceeded by very few other cathedrals including Paris and Laon. This was one of the best-endowed chapters in France with possessions extending as far as the outskirts of Paris. Do we have information from the primary sources about how this income was managed and how the fabric fund was constituted? We are not told. Located on the intersection of the *cardo* and *decumanus*, the cathedral lies at the heart of the Roman city. We get a frustratingly brief introduction to the physical fabric of cathedral as it existed at the beginning of the late Gothic campaigns, with the base of the north-western tower from the mid-twelfth century, the lowest parts of the west façade and the western nave bays from the late-twelfth century, and the bulk of the construction put after a fire that took place in 1200. Lateral nave chapels were added around 1250. The author tells us that the choir, with its lofty three-story elevation, was inspired by French rather than Norman prototypes—this point could have been reinforced with a brief comparison of nave and choir with juxtaposed photographs. This would have been an ideal moment to introduce the characteristic forms of "Norman" architecture.

Part one deals with the first stage of late Gothic transformation of the cathedral with the construction of an elaborately decorated portal between the two early thirteenth-century towers of the north transept. The *portail des Libraires* was known as such from the fifteenth century, presumably in reference to the sale of books in stalls lining the passage to the Rue de Saint Romain. The oldest sources (c. 1300) refer

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to the *portail de la Vierge* on account of the image of the Virgin on the trumeau. The main concern of the author is the definition of the artistic quality of the work through extended formal analysis and computer-generated diagrams. No new archaeological work or measured plans have been undertaken: the primary written sources have not been systematically read, and other than the challenge to the traditional attribution of the work to the master mason Jean Davy, little attention is devoted to the identity of the master mason or production logistics.

The intensely linear decorative form of Gothic of the mid-to-later thirteenth century generally known as “rayonnant” lends itself to verbal representation. Thus, the author explores the range of different tracery motifs applied to the voided gable above the portal; the elements of the horizontal “triforium” (*claire-voïe*) at the middle level; the rose window and upper gable which blend as a powerful unity—unity enhanced by the application of similar tracery motifs to the flanking the buttresses. The interior north transept wall receives similar articulation with five gabled panels topped by quinquefoiled oculi. Archbishop Guillaume de Flavacourt took the initiative, ceding the land for the new construction in 1281. The author finds the source of the critical design elements of the Rouen north transept in the transept façades of Notre-Dame of Paris, the work of Jean de Chelles and Pierre de Montreuil from around thirty to forty years earlier. The links between Paris and Rouen are well known, as is also the dependence of the Rouen north transept upon other works such as the Virgin Chapel of the abbey church of Saint-Germer-de-Fly and the Sainte-Chapelle.

Schlicht’s formal analysis is for the most part well-conceived, leading us to the understanding of a “global composition” made up of gabled portal, horizontal triforium, and vast upper rose as first realized c.1240 at Saint-Denis. Whereas in the earlier monuments the three elements are loosely stacked one atop the other, the Rouennais master has unified the composition by matching the steeply-pitched gable of the portal with the gable capping the upper rose. Such vertical unification was already announced in the Notre-Dame south transept (after 1258). At Rouen, however, the designer takes this unity and homogeneity much further, weaving together the repetitive tracery panels to unify an overall composition boldly articulated with much greater depth than in the Parisian cathedral. The author might have made more extensive use of juxtaposed photographs to make his point clearer. Rendered in Vernon stone so fine-grained that it is sometimes compared with marble, the result at Rouen was a composition of great virtuosity giving an appearance of sumptuousness or preciousness. Yet curiously the author refrains from drawing parallels with any specific example of similar compositions rendered in goldwork as “micro-architecture.” The author finds little connection with earlier rayonnant works in Normandy (at Bayeux, Sées, Evreux, Jumièges and Sainte-Wandrille), returning instead to the well-known link with Notre-Dame of Paris, while at the same time emphasizing the extent of transformation on Norman soil. In the Ile-de-France the author finds little connection with the Meaux transept; while there are connections with the Notre-Dame choir chapels, the architecture of the latter is deemed to be essentially archaic and non-inventive.

The author then presents a similar analysis of the south transept, known from at least the fifteenth century as the *portail de la Calende*—perhaps referring to ecclesiastical meetings taking place at the calends of the month. Although the general composition is similar to that of the north transept, gables are steeper and the buttresses are deeper and more completely integrated with the central panel of the façade. The main buttresses are flanked by little diagonally-turned buttresses or spurs that ascend into statue-containing tabernacles and then, set sharply back, continue upwards. In a rare resort to figurative language, the author compares the effect created by the lateral buttresses to organic growth (*une éclosion organique*). However, he could have provided a much fuller exploration of the implications of these diagonally-turned mini-buttresses, in particular their presence in the interior and the exterior forms of the rebuilt ambulatory of Notre-Dame of Paris.

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Presumably because of the counter opinion of previous scholars, the author takes a great deal of trouble to argue that the south transept followed the north in time, with the Virgin Chapel (after 1302; archbishop buried in 1306) undertaken between the work on the two transept façades. To fix the date of the south transept after the 1320s, the author appeals especially to a gift made by the wealthy bourgeois Jean Gorren (died 1329) and the alleged anteriority of the *portail des Echevins* at Mantes (dated around 1300 in an eighteenth-century document).

Then comes an extended rehearsal of the impact of the two façades upon architecture of Normandy—including the cloister of Saint-Wandrille, Notre-Dame of Vernon, Saint-Jacques of Dieppe, Saint-Pierre of Caen, the south transept of Saint-Ouen of Rouen—all this amounts to a “Rouen School” of late Gothic architecture in Normandy. And beyond the boundaries of Normandy, “influences” extend to Mantes, Saint-Sulpice-de-Favières, Lyon, Avignon, and Bordeaux.

The fourth part of the book provides a comprehensive overview of the program of sculpture carried on the two façades with their interior walls. In the north transept we find images that convey the beginning and end of history—from the Creation to the Fall of Humanity with the Last Judgment depicted in the tympanum. The early name, *portail de la Vierge*, suggests that an image of the Virgin Mary (the means of redemption) was carried on the trumeau. The gable features images of Christ the Savior and the victory of Christ over sin. Saints occupied the lateral niches. The idea of judgment is followed in the upper façade with images of the Judgment of Solomon and the Wise and Foolish Virgins. On the reverse of the façade the Fall of Man is reinforced with an extraordinary image of the temptress in the Tree of Good and Evil and Adam and Eve. Matched figures of Elizabeth and Zachariah and Joachim and Anna bring the miraculous births of John Baptist and Anne the mother of Mary, providing the means to remedy the sinful procreation of the first humans. The sequence continues on the reverse side of the south transept with images of the Virgin Mary and a donor (Jean Gorren?) and a prophetic cortège to announce the birth of Christ. In this way, the program begun on the dark northern side of the cathedral (Creation, Fall of Man, the potential for final judgment) reaches its crescendo on the sunlit southern side with the Virgin Mary, crowned on the gable surmounting the rose. The incarnate Christ occupied the trumeau of the south portal, flanked by apostles in the lateral niches which the tympanum carries with scenes of the Passion of Christ and his victory over death on the cross. The lower lintel emphasizes the triumphal nature of the Easter story with images of the resurrected Christ.

The author then folds the themes of the bas-reliefs that occupy the portal embrasures into the larger sculptural program. On the north come scenes from Creation (top register) while the four lower registers are occupied by hybrid monsters who demonstrate in their deformed shape disobedience to the will of the Creator. The more than 200 scenes on the south portal allow seven stories to unfold—Job on the trumeau; Joseph in the east embrasure; Jacob in the west embrasure; the Bad Rich Man on the front face of the west buttress and Judith on east. The stories of two Rouennais saints are placed on the buttresses. The common theme of these cycles is the triumph of virtue over vice. This was certainly not popular imagery—the dense narratives would have probably been unintelligible to most layfolk.

Then follow some interesting reflections on representational conventions: expressions, attitudes, and gestures. Moral values are expressed through bodily beauty and ugliness: in serene and agitated posture. However, deception is possible—as we see in the beautiful face of traitor/temptress in the tree of good and evil. Psychological tension is realized in the realistic faces of hybrid creatures which look like us, yet are deformed.

The author distinguishes two principal groups in the formal characteristics of the sculpture. The first group (exterior of *Libraires*) is characterized by elegance of forms and youthful appearance with smiling faces and rounded forms. Figures of the second group have more dumpy (*trapu*) proportions and more

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formalist approach to drapery. This group is found in the *Calende* portal ensemble and the interior of *Libraires*. The 1281 document provides clear dating for the first group. Whereas the principal previous study by Hartmut Krohm had proposed 1302 for the start of work on the second group, Schlicht prefers the 1320s because of links with other datable sculpture. The author emphasizes the role of Rouennais rather than Parisian artists—especially in the later work.

In part three the author finally moves beyond the extended display of formal analysis and connoisseurship to consider the role of the patrons and the ideological agenda. The expense and sumptuousness of the work provide a clear index of the architectural ambitions of the clergy. This new construction did not result from fire damage or even from pressing need (although the north portal did provide needed access to the clergy from the direction of the cloister and archiepiscopal palace). The architectural character of the program suggests that the Rouennais clergy wanted not just to emulate, but to trump the Parisian cathedral, making a clear statement of the importance of the former ducal capital. Archbishop Guillaume de Flavacourt was clearly the initiator of work on the north transept (he gave the land) and the new Virgin Chapel was intended principally as a necropolis for the archbishops. Not only was Guillaume buried here in 1306, but a stained glass cycle of images of eminent archbishops was prepared for the windows using a new technique: silver stain.

Some of the most interesting pages are the most speculative. The author points to the need to enhance the status of the cathedral and the office of the archbishop in light of the events of the early fourteenth century when King Louis X, facing serious uprisings on the part of some of his nobles, made important concessions to the former duchy in order to cement the allegiance of the people of Normandy. The ceremonies associated with the grant of the *charte aux Normands* in 1315 took place in the cathedral. The importance of the cathedral as a burying place for eminent men was enhanced through the creation of new gisants for the tombs of Richard Lion Heart and Henri le Jeune. Statues around the upper south transept represented were probably intended to represent dukes of Normandy—the office of duke was re-created in 1332.

The pages describing these events certainly help us to make sense of the sumptuous program in a book otherwise heavily committed to exercises in formal analysis and connoisseurship and to the identification of sources and influences. The reader may find that the text lies close to the doctoral dissertation (finished in 1997) that marked its inception; with proper editing some of the descriptive passages could have been made shorter and more engaging, allowing the author to develop a more critically conscious framing mechanism. However, the specialist or the lover of Rouen Cathedral will find in this book a rich repast.

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Stephen Murray  
Columbia University  
sm42@columbia.edu

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