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A Time and a Place for Suffering: Picturing the *Vie de Saint Denis* in Paris

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Placed on *grande reserve* in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France at Richelieu, small scarlet books contain what remains of the most lavish account of the Life of Saint Denis (*Vie de Saint Denis*), the patron saint of France and, as we are told, the most fervent imitator of the Passion of the Lord. The feast day of Denis is celebrated along with that of his companions Rusticus and Eleutherius on 9 October and the extant historical records suggest that this was one of the first acts of Christian martyrdom in Lutetia, the Roman metropolis once located on Île-de-la-Cité, during the reign of the Emperor Decius in the third century. Our lavish manuscript, however, tells a very different story. Spreading across over four hundred folios and narrated in two languages on the finest vellum I've ever touched, the *Vie de Saint Denis* is an enthralling account of an extraordinary saint, his gruesome martyrdom, and many legendary miracles.

Made by the monks who guarded the body (and the head) of Saint Denis as a personal devotional book for the King of France, this particular manuscript has received a great deal of attention from scholars because of its vivid representation of bustling urban life. When Denis finally enters Paris, the city of his suffering and the location of his relics, the imaginative frame enveloping the hagiographic narrative bursts to life with peripheral action. Between the illustration of the Grand Pont to the left and the Petit Pont to the right, the viewer observes the drama of the *Vie* on the Cité, where the Capetian palace of the present-day would have been situated. Looking through an isometric representation of the crenellated palatial walls, we bear witness to the martyr's heroism while observing the quotidian activities of dozens of Parisian denizens. The present consensus concerning the purpose and function of figures peregrinating around the bridges of medieval Paris is that they embody an

energetic example of marginal art. In this paper, I challenge the assumption that the Parisian people constitute a merely marginal addition to the central genre scenes. Instead, I hope to put forth evidence for an integral and meaningful iconological relationship between the saint's life and the lives of those who populate his city. After a brief introduction to the history and context of this illuminated manuscript, I will attempt to defend this hypothesis via a careful look at the integrated iconography of its illustrations.

Patronage

The portion of the *Vie de Saint Denis* preserved today (Paris, BnF Mss Fr. 2090-2092, Lat. 13836) is an incomplete version of the original manuscript.¹ Fortunately for any art historian, it is assumed that a diligent copy of the entire *Vie* was produced in the early fourteenth century; a colourist apparently never had the opportunity to decorate it. Consequently, this grisaille 'copy', currently catalogued as Lat. 5286, should enable us to see what was lost.² However, for both Léopold Delise and Henry Martin, two erudite librarians and art historians, the illustrations of the grisaille manuscript are a reliable but a mediocre imitation of the luxuriant and vibrant masterpiece.³ The history of the *Vie's* patronage is not nearly as complicated as its codicology. In the dedicatory letter, penned by Abbot Gilles of Saint-Denis for King Philippe V and followed by a full-page illustration of the author as donor (fig. 1), it is clear that the request to make this book originated with his father, Philippe IV.⁴

¹ Paris, BnF Mss. Fr. 2090-2092 contains three separately bound manuscripts in which we find the first two volumes of the tripartite story designed by the author Yves de Saint-Denis. An additional manuscript has a fragmentary part of the final volume of the *Vie*. This portion of the text is referred to as the 'Royal chronicle' (*Gesta regum Francorum*) and catalogued at Paris, BnF Lat. 13836.

² For the discussion of Lat. 5286 as a copy of the colour *Vie*, see L. Delisle, 'Notice sur un recueil historique présenté à Philippe le Long par Gilles de Pontoise, abbé de Saint-Denis', *Notices et Extraits*, tome XXI, pt. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1865), pp. 249-265 at 257 and H. Martin, *Légende de Saint Denis*, Paris 1908), pp. 5 and 10.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Fr. 2090 f. 2v. See also the transcription and translation offered by Ch. Lacaze, *The 'Vie de St. Denis' Manuscript: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. fr. 2090-2092* (Ph.D., New York University, 1978), p. 342.

According to Gilles' prefatory text, Phillippe IV had requested the production of a manuscript from the abbey detailing the life of Denis, a beloved 'athlete in Christ.' The abbot clarifies that the king's request occurred when he fell gravely ill. Gilles reports that 'in his devoted soul' Philippe IV had 'hoped to find relief and solace in the heroic deeds of his spiritual patron' (*instans ejus et devota insinuavit petitio, qua librum de istius gloriosi athlete Domini gestis et miraculis sibi scribi voluit, in quo spei materiam mentisque levamen et solatium inveniret*).⁵ For its creators, the production of this *Vie* would satisfy the devotional needs of its royal viewer. In text and image, this book represents the unparalleled glory of the ministry, martyrdom, and miracles of Denis, who was sent to Gaul and died in Paris. In this way, the entire Capetian kingdom and its bustling capital are blessed by the sacrifices and perpetual spiritual presence of their patron.

Since the Merovingian epoch, Frankish kings maintained a special relationship to Denis and, with the rise of the Carolingian rulers, the Benedictine monks at Saint-Denis became increasingly assertive of their authority over the cult of the Gallic protomartyr. The abbey tirelessly sought to define the power of Denis' relics by emphasising his essential role in the formation of Christian Gaul. From the initial act of translation of the martyrs' relics by Catulla to the ensuing foundation by Geneviève and the consecration of a new Gothic basilica by Suger, the edification of Saint-Denis functioned as an aspect of controlling the symbolic meaning of its special cult. Over time, it also became a privileged space for the performance of royal ritual. For example, to wage a war or depart for crusade, a king would beseech permission of Denis at his altar with the deposit of his *Oriflamme*.⁶ And starting with the death of King Dagobert in 639, most royal families were buried and celebrated in Saint-Denis *ad sanctus*, forever protected by their patron. In the 1260s, the saint-king

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hugh Capet, the patriarch of the Capetian kings, is believed to be the first to place his royal standard, the *Oriflamme*, before the relics of Saint Denis. Here, its presence would signify the king's perpetual call for support and reflect his gratitude for his heavenly intercessor. See G. Spiegel, 'The Cult of Saint Denis and Capetian Kingship,' in *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*, ed. Stephen Wilson, Cambridge 1983, p. 153.

Louis IX initiated a monumental sepulchral re-arrangement project. Sixteen royal bodies in the basilica's necropolis were exhumed and placed into new Gothic tombs.⁷ Each stylised *gisant* was designed with homogenous physical features. United both by their ancestry and their shared love for the same patron saint, the kings at Saint-Denis lie side-by-side, awaiting Resurrection together.

Although the devotional relationship between Denis and the kings of France was formed long ago,⁸ the most extraordinary dimensions of this royal saint's cult were fabricated in the ninth century, particularly during the leadership of abbots Hilduin and Hincmar, when these men and their monks essentially invented a myriad of incredulous new hagiographic layers to the cult of their patron. In the *Vita* composed in 843, Denis of Paris is presumed to be the Dionysius mentioned in Acts 17:34.⁹ Then, the cognitive leap is made that Dionysius, the primary convert of Paul in Athens, is the man who had erected the altar to the unknown God on the Areopagus. Thus, this Denis was sent to Gaul via Rome from Athens in the first century as disciple of Saint Paul and a missionary of Saint Clement. It is also assumed that this same Denis is the author of the *Celestial Hierarchy* and other fifth-century Greek-Syriac neo-platonic texts, attributed presently to the work of the Pseudo-Dionysius. Moreover, when he was finally beheaded with an axe after a litany of tortures, Denis became an animated 'cephalophore,' miraculously moving whilst decapitated, bearing his own head in hands. Although his soul had departed from his body, he

⁷ E. A. R. Brown, 'The Oxford Collection of the Drawings of Roger de Gaignières and the Royal Tombs at Saint-Denis', *The American Philosophical Society*, 78, 1988, p. 8.

⁸ The conflation of Denis the bishop of Paris with the identity of Dionysius the Areopagite first occurred in in a text composed at the basilica at Saint-Denis: The c. 490s *Passio sanctorum, martyrum Dionysii episcopi, Rustici et Eleutherii* is the earliest surviving *vita* that references an Athenian heritage. Elsewhere in late sixth-century France, Gregory of Tours wrote in his *Historia Francorum* that Bishop Denis died in Paris under the auspices of the consuls Decius and Gratis, who ruled in the middle of the third-century; he made no mention of an Athenian point of origin. On the early conflation of the identity of Denis at the site of his cult, see H. Moretus-Plantin, 'Les Passions de Saint-Denis', in *Mélanges offerts au R. P. Ferdinand Cavallera*, Toulouse 1948, pp. 215-231.

⁹ For an elucidation of the myriad inventions in Dionysian hagiography compiled at Saint-Denis, see Spiegel (as in n. 6), pp. 142-147.

walked, headless and guided by angels, to his chosen final resting place: the Basilique Saint-Denis. Here, his relics would continue to work numerous miracles, culminating in the divine protection of King Dagobert and the ensuing lives of every Frankish ruler.

Before the making of the colourful *Vie* in question, a vernacular manuscript produced in the mid thirteenth century had already combined these hagiographic details into one book. It is certain that this book, catalogued at n.a.f. 1098, was used by the makers of the fourteenth-century *Vie*. However, when the two *Vies* are compared, there are substantial differences from the earlier iconographic types and the overall scale of the narrative and its images.¹⁰ The royal *Vie* project began sometime around the spring of 1314, but its original patron for whom it was intended, Philippe IV, died on 29 November of that same year. At the end of his opening epistle, Abbot Gilles wrote that in death, he knew that Philippe IV could finally meet Denis ‘face to face, whose deeds and miracles he had so desired to see written’ (*facie ad faciem, cuius gesta et miracula videre dilexerat per scripturam*).¹¹ Gilles continues by addressing the current, living king, saying that the Lord wishes him to worship ‘the aforesaid martyr, the Areopagite Dionysius, whose spirit follows God in the footsteps of your fathers, the preceding kings, especially your most pious progenitor’ (*in prefati martyris gloriosi beatissimi ariopagite Dyonisiim quem partum vestrorum ac regum precendentium piissimi precipue progenitoris vestry*).¹² Philippe IV’s eldest son, Louis X, first ascended to the throne but he reigned for only two years, dying after an exhausting game of real tennis on 5 June 1316. So it was then that his younger brother, Philippe served as a regent until the pregnant Queen Clementia gave birth to his posthumous child, Jean, who lived only 5 days. Philippe V was crowned the king of France on 20 January 1316 and ruled until his death on 3 January 1322; this *Vie* probably fell into his hands near the end of his life.

¹⁰ A starting point for the study of the style, composition, and iconography of this manuscript can be found in L. Delisle, ‘Notice sur un livre à peintures exécuté en 1250 dans l’abbaye de Saint-Denis,’ *Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des Chartes*, 38, 1877.

¹¹ Fr. 2090, f. 2v.

¹² Fr. 2090, f. 3r.

Language

As it appears today, the *Vie de Saint Denis* is a bilingual text, classified by the Bibliothèque Nationale as a ‘manuscrit français.’ Written in Latin by a Benedictine monk at Saint-Denis named Yves, the author ambitiously set out to write a complete account of the saint’s life using all of the available hagiographic sources in the abbey’s formidable library. Again, Yves’ template for his narrative seems to be the vernacular text found in n.a.f. 1098, which focused extensively on the history of the saints’ relics.¹³ Adding historical sources from various *Gestae* of monarchs and the *Grandes Chroniques*, he aligned the saint’s legends with the history of French kingship. By interweaving the cult of Saint Denis with royal history, Gabrielle Spiegel claimed that Yves had written one of the ‘most pointed’ examples of Capetian propaganda.¹⁴ In form and content, the entire oeuvre was symbolic: Yves went so far as to divide his *Vie* into three parts, overtly echoing the Trinitarian nature of the divine as well as the sacrifice of the three Parisian protomartyrs.¹⁵ Each component of this trinitarian story would have a series of chapters of text, in both Latin and French, followed by a full-page miniature. The significance of these images is brought to the king’s attention immediately: In the inscription for the first image in the book (fig. 1: Fr. 2090, f. 4v & Lat. 5286, f. 1r), there is a command to read the text and then ‘perceive the care of the painter’ (*et post scripturam pictoris percipe curam versus subiuncti uideantur in ordine cuncti*). The makers of the *Vie* instructed their royal reader to also act as a thoughtful viewer while handling the book. This clear instruction indicates both the importance of the paintings as well as their devotional potential.

Throughout the *Vie*, inscriptions (*tituli*) in lionine couplets appear beneath each miniature while Latin banderoles elegantly unravel from the mouths and right hands of the figures indicating speech with an engrossing sense of graphic immediacy. These literary effects caused Erwin Panofsky to call the book ‘the talkatively circumstantial

¹³ Delisle (as in n. 10), p. 444.

¹⁴ Spiegel (as in n. 6), p. 150.

¹⁵ Stated in the prologue to the *Vie* on Fr. 2090, f. 17r, noted previously by Delisle (as in n. 10), p. 251.

Légende de St. Denis.¹⁶ After every Latin chapter, a French translation follows. The French was probably composed by someone named Boitbien, whose signature remains on folio 3v in Fr. 2092. In this way, the Latin and French never share the same folio.¹⁷ The French text is a word-for-word (and, at times, an awkward) translation of Yves' Latin. On the first folio of 2090, however, the first phrase of the book, complete with a lavish historiated initial, identifies the entire book for the reader in French script (and, notably, not in Latin): *En ce volume est contenu la vie de monseigneur saint Denis glorieux apostre de France*.¹⁸ I should mention that in Lat. 5286, the so-called grisaille copy, the introductory note on the first folio has a different title written in Latin: *Epistola Abbis Egidio ad regem francorum Philippum directa super vita et passione sanctissimi ariopagite dyonisius tocius gallieu apostoli*.¹⁹ While the presentation manuscript employs a simple vernacular heading about the subject matter of the book, the opening line in Lat. 5286 first identifies the project overseer, names the patron, and then references the contents of the text.

While a number of medieval manuscripts contain multilingual texts, it is rare to find one where the same text repeats itself again and again in two literary voices. During her doctoral research in the 1970s, Charlotte Lacaze confirmed that this *Vie* was not originally intended to be bilingual. Instead, the binding of the book reveals that the vernacular text is completely interpolated into the book: The Latin sheets were removed, cut, and then the bevels were 'glued' back in place, allowing ample space for the French to follow, essentially doubling the length of the entire codex.²⁰ In the end, Lacaze found that 206 sheets of vellum were added in this process. This act of interpolation was executed exhaustively but it must have been incredibly difficult and time-consuming to accomplish. Following Léopold Delisle's initial suggestion, the seamless addition of the French text implies that this cautious and calculated act

¹⁶ Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character*, Cambridge 1953, p. 29.

¹⁷ Lacaze (as in n. 4), p. 22.

¹⁸ Fr. 2090, f. 1r.

¹⁹ Lat. 5286, f. 1r.

²⁰ Lacaze (as in n. 4), pp. 34-55

of insertion was prepared sometime after the death of Philippe IV, in anticipation of a new and perhaps less literate patron. Historians are certain of Philippe IV's Latin literacy. For both Louis X and Philippe V, however, some scholars are doubtful of their linguistic prowess. The abbot of Saint-Denis could not give something to the king that his majesty could not read, especially a book that was intended to influence royal favour and cultivate a deep relationship with a beloved saint. The desire to translate, to transcribe, and, therefore, to interpolate the text and images appears to be motivated by political purposes, namely to ensure that the ruling king could use his devotional book.

Iconography as Typology

Now I would like to take you briefly through the incredible life of Saint Denis. While reading the text of this paper, you can access all of the discussed images, which are in the public domain, via the BnF website at both Gallica (<http://gallica.bnf.fr>) and Mandragore (<http://mandragore.bnf.fr>). Let us begin in Athens (Fr. 2090, f. 26v & Lat. 5286, f. 5r), where we find a pagan polis festooned with golden idols: the gilded figurines of Saturn, Neptune, Mercury, Silvanus, and Mars stand proudly erect on their altars. Meanwhile, in Hieropolis (Fr. 2090, f. 32r & Lat. 5286, f. 7r), the intellectually curious Denis pursues his study of astronomy. On that fateful day when Christ was crucified, our saint observed the solar eclipse and senses the presence of a suffering God (fig. 2: Fr. 2090, f. 34r & Lat. 5286, f. 8r & 9r). He returns to Greence to teach and he also starts to preach (Fr. 2090, f. 35v & Lat. 5286, f. 10r); he is called the 'light of Athens' (*Athenarum lux*) in the *titulus*. Compelled by the Lord, he fashions an altar to an unknown God: In this image, Denis uses a paintbrush to inscribe the words *DEO INGONOTO* onto a banderole attached to the altar (fig. 3: Fr. 2090, f. 37v & Lat. 5286, f. 11r). At this point in the narrative, the pagan idols suddenly seem alarmed by the presence of this new altar. Their demonstrative twists and turns exhibit bewilderment: The statue of Mercury seems to turn to Silvanus in shock. Saint Paul comes to Athens to convert and baptise the pagans. Upon his arrival (Fr. 2090, f. 41v & Lat. 5286, f. 12r), the idols seem repelled by the physical body of the Apostle as well as the undressed altar to the unknown God. When Paul defeats

a group of philosophers in a battle of wits (Fr. 2090, f. 45r & Lat. 5286, f. 13r), the idols lift up their hands in disbelief and fear. Paul first meets Denis at the altar to the unknown god (Fr. 2090, f. 46v & Lat. 5286, f. 14r), whereupon Denis agrees to keep the Christian faith. At this stage, the idols begin to show more lively anxious movement: One idol crouches in agony away from Denis. Denis and his wife Damaris convert (Fr. 2090, f. 48v & Lat. 5286, f. 15r), and Paul cures a man born blind (Fr. 2090, f. 50v & Lat. 5286, f. 16r); the people who witness this miracle are amazed and rejoice in the name of Christ while the idols continue to wither in potency. When the blind man tells Denis of this news (Fr. 2090, f. 52v & Lat. 5286, f. 17r), three idols seem to throw themselves off their pedestals. Denis is baptised (Fr. 2090, f. 54v & Lat. 5286, f. 18r), the hand of God appears, and he is anointed the bishop of Athens (fig. 4: Fr. 2090, f. 78v & Lat. 5286, f. 23r). Look at how the idols have become horizontal as they hurl themselves from their altars. Finally, with Denis at the episcopal helm, their day of reckoning has come (fig. 5: Fr. 2090, f. 85v & Lat. 5286, f. 24r) as he commands their destruction. Here, for the first time in the book, the primary actors engage directly with the background figurines, breaking the imaginary boundary between centre and periphery, between the sacred and the civic spectacle. As the idols are pulled from the altars, Denis delivers a sermon and tells the people to ‘Tear down the idols and follow the doctrine of life!’ (*Ydola destruite sectate vite dogmata*). The first section of the *Vie* closes with a discussion and representation of Denis writing the *Celestial Hierarchy* (Fr. 2090, f. 107v & Lat. 5286, f. 32r). I would like to emphasise one particular observation about the Athenian portion of the legend: The pagan idols are not merely a form of decoration that fills the space behind the central hagiographic illustrations. In fact, the idols react dramatically to the presence of God, Paul, and Denis. Their changing posture is indicative of the shift in narrative. As we watch them deteriorate, their position within the composition has direct but negative correlation with the almighty ministry of Denis. Thus, the figures in the background are related directly to the actors in the foreground, reacting, and in this case crumbling, before the presence of the sacred. As the *Vie* begins, the waning of the idols in Athens corresponds with the rise of the power of Saint Denis.

After preaching and working miracles in Rome and Arles, Denis reaches the city of Paris; in the centre of the page, a large inscription hovering over the stylised gates reads *PARISIUS*. With a cruciform staff in his hand, Denis, his companions, and his followers, walk with gilded haloes across the Grand Pont, where the people respond fortuitously to his arrival as if it were an *adventus* (fig. 6: Fr. 2091, f. 97r & Lat. 5286, f. 58r). Of all the towns previously encountered in this narrative, only the Parisians appear to *see* Denis. In fact, there are no other figures in any of the other cityscapes. To the right of the Entry scene, we find street pavers ‘preparing the way’ into the city. Their presence also might refer to a present-day reality; one of Philippe IV’s greatest civic legacies was his mandate to pave the streets of Paris. This urban renewal programme was continued throughout the reigns of his sons. Moreover, the fourteenth-century Capetian kings had directed a great deal of the royal finances to making the Seine more navigable. We also see fishermen successfully catching a net full of fish. This gesture is reminiscent of the passage in Matthew 4:18, when Christ tells the fishermen Peter and Andrew to ‘come follow me and I will send you out to fish other people.’ As such, the symbolism of the fishermen is an auspicious indication of Denis’ imminent conversion of the Parisians. As soon as the protomartyr enters this city, the engagements of its people reflect both political prosperity and spiritual typology. The role and relationship of the peripheral activity seems to have shifted. After watching the Athenian idols crumble, the people of Paris appear to flourish in the presence of Denis.

Prototype and Archetype: From Lat. 5286 to Fr. 2090-2092, Lat. 13836

If we continue to compare the composition of the arrival scene of the colourful *Vie* with the full-page miniature of the same narrative moment in the grisaille manuscript, the parallels in iconography and composition are instantly apparent. The entire scene, from the shape of the Cité to the positions of the martyr and his entourage and even the monumental folds in their drapery, is manifest in this manuscript. We recall that most scholars assume that Lat. 5286 is an exact copy; a cheaper version of a royal book. The only iconological difference I can see in this particular example

appears on the right side of the page: Here, there are no street pavers. Instead, another fisherman successfully reels in his singular catch, a conspicuous detail that also suits the evocative typological nature of the hagiographic narrative discussed above.

After close consideration of both manuscript sets, I seek to overturn a long-standing assumption about the purpose of Lat. 5286. Following the initial intuition of Charlotte Lacaze, I too submit that this grisaille manuscript was not a copy but a model book for the king's *Vie*.²¹ There are number of reasons for this assertion. First of all, there is no significant scribal error in the folios that comprise the book given to the king. It would seem that the creators of the *Vie* benefitted from the use of a calculated 'draft.' Comparing Fr. 2090-2092 with that of Lat. 5286, the illustrated *tituli* are lengthier and riddled with mistakes, including the scribbled out labels (edited notably by a different scribal hand, who is perhaps a proofreader) and the squeezed text of the banderoles (in which the text does not conform appropriately to the amount of space provided).²² If the makers of the grisaille *Vie* had copied the royal book, how do we account for these types of mistakes when they easily could be accurately reproduced from the original? Lacaze is correct in suggesting 'it is impossible that Lat. 5286 copied the royal book.'²³ The designers of the colour *Vie* profited from the use of an experimental monochromatic model, avoiding errors and relishing in the ability to embellish the well-planned material.

The producers of the king's manuscript deviated from the pre-conceived drafts of iconographic compositions and poetic *tituli* only in a handful of cases. In the dedication image, below Abbot Gilles and pour Benedictine author Yves, the designer, and scribe, the equestrian burgers entering the city (perhaps returning from a hunt?) have been adapted from the grisaille image of men grooming and shoeing an alert horse (comparing fig. 1, Fr. 2090, f. 4v, with Lat. 5286, f. 1r). Meanwhile, to the right, one man rows his boat alone and another guides a monkey on a leash into the city. The

²¹ Lacaze (as in. 4), at 328-355.

²² Ibid., p. 331.

²³ Ibid. I should note that most recently, Lacaze's claim that Lat. 5286 is a model was rejected in A. D. Hedeman, *The Royal Image: Illustrations of the 'Grandes Chroniques de France', 1274-1422*, Berkeley 1991, pp. 55-60.

reason for this augmentation remains unknown. Occasionally, there are slight differences in the treatment of space. If we contrast the images of the erection of the altar to an unknown God there are a number of modifications present (comparing fig. 3, Fr. 2090, f. 37v with Lat. 5286, f. 11r). The royal *Vie* has extended and centralised the altar's banderole, making it more visible.

Only on one occasion did the final team of painters significantly alter the imagery from the earlier format and, in this instance, there seems to be a devotional motivation behind the impulse to deviate from the model. In the image for Denis' recognition of the eclipse at the time of Christ's death, the saint and his colleague point to the solar phenomenon while a small representation of Christ on the Cross appears in the spherical sky (comparing fig. 2, Fr. 2090, f. 34r with Lat. 5286 f. 8r & 9r). In Lat. 5286, however, the Crucifixion and the observation are depicted as separate instances in the legend. This partitioning allows the depiction of Christ's death to have a full-page of space for the viewer, enabling a direct connection to the Passion of Christ within the narrative of a saint's life. Turning the page, we then see Denis observing the eclipse without the small Crucifixion beyond the celestial terminus. While the unification of these narrative moments inhibits the reader's ability to embrace a full-page Crucifixion image, the unification of Christ's death with the saint's observation underscores the simultaneity of the event, reinforcing the divine foresight of the French patron. While the original conception of imagining this narrative moment was compartmentalised into two distinct events, it appears that a discussion took place in which an entirely new composition was envisioned: In the picture for the king, the artists combined two images into one coherent revelation of Saint Denis witnessing the Crucifixion.

Throughout the dozens of scenes of Paris, which we will soon examine, the makers of the royal *Vie* elected to reproduce the majority of the Parisian figures in the grisaille draft—right down to the swings of hammering blacksmiths, the gait of a limping one-legged man, and even front crawl position of a naked swimmer. Various characters from the diverse and enormous Parisian populous make a cameo in the *Vie* and the remarkable degree of detailed visual organisation brings me to my final

hypothesis in this paper: That the iconographers of the *Vie*, first in grisaille and later in colour, had carefully orchestrated an inter-related pictorial programme to convey the significance of Saint Denis to the king, his people, and Paris.

Michael Camille and the margins

Because of the liminal location of the figures moving along the bridges of medieval Paris, many scholars have focused on the ‘marginality’ of these images. In the case of Virginia Wylie Egbert, she dedicated an entire book on the painted people perambulating these representations of these fourteenth-century urban pedestrian zones.²⁴ Michael Camille, the late and great art historian who often wrote about the men and women who lived in the margins of medieval society in Europe, also examined these figures and their purported social function. In his 1998 study of the peasants depicted in the Luttrell Psalter, he claims that it is in the margins of the page that we find *A Mirror in Parchment*.²⁵ This theory develops from ideas first outlined in his 1992 book, *Image on the Edge*, in which he structures the fifth chapter, called ‘In the Margins of the City’, around the depiction of the Parisian people in the *Vie*.²⁶ For Camille, these figures in the *Vie*’s cityscape create a space of ‘horizontal multiplicity rather than vertical hierarchy’ where we have ‘a mingling of rich, poor, free, unfree, peasants, knights, and clergy as well as the rising bourgeoisie, all rubbing shoulders together within the same walls.’²⁷ In Camille’s section on the ‘Panhandlers and Prostitutes in medieval Paris’ (pp. 131–143), he claims that the *Vie* imagines ‘beggars and their bowls who are depicted as much a part of the social fabric as the moneychanger and shoemaker.’²⁸ I should mention that for all of his discussion of beggars, of the

²⁴ V. W. Egbert, *On the Bridges of Mediaeval Paris: A Record of Early Fourteenth-Century Life*, Princeton 1974, esp. pp. ix, 21, 44.

²⁵ M. Camille, *Mirror in Parchment: The Luttrell Psalter and the Making of Medieval England*, Chicago 1998.

²⁶ M. Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*, London 1992, pp. 128–142. See also the review of Camille’s book in K. A. Smith, ‘Liminal Limning,’ *Oxford Art Journal* 17, no. 1.

²⁷ Camille (as in n. 26), p. 129.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

217 people I've counted who appear walking around Paris, I see only three beggars! Moreover, the section title is misleading; unless I am mistaken, I see no prostitutes on any of these pages.

In the imagery of the royal *Vie*, Camille claims 'the larger hagiographical narrative squeezes the contemporary bustle of the city to the bottom of the page', where we find 'a new vernacular world of things and commodities.'²⁹ Camille's investigation rests primarily on upon his critique of early mercantilism. For the author, these painted people are subordinated to the flux of monetary power, embodied and dominated by the Church and Crown. With all due respect to the outstanding work of Camille, whose legacy I am deeply indebted to, I do not believe that a nascent capitalism is the dominant force of meaning for these images of a 'backward-looking ideal vision.'³⁰ In the first place, I do not agree that we should refer to the *bas-de-page* figures as *marginalia*. In fact, the people, like the idols before them, are fully integrated within the micro-architectural setting of the border. The figures never stray into the margins; instead, they are united and contained within the gilded frame as a coherent part of the sacred landscape of Paris.

The denoted civic space in the *Vie's* Parisian sequence is not a site for the Bakhtian carnivalesque; nor is it a visual space for the indulgence of immoral behaviour or satirical critique, epitomised elsewhere in Paris by the Goliards and perfected in the guise of the contemporary *Roman de Fauvel*. These Parisians are not *drôlleries*; they are not placed beyond the borders and squeezed into a saint's life. Camille's popular and populist socio-economic examination of the manuscript is as enticing as it is enjoyable. However, it is appropriate for us to reconsider other aspects of the significance of this manuscript and its illustrations, which demands a method of modern reading beyond the binary created by the dichotomous potential of marginal art.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 129.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 132.

Seeing the people of Paris

When we last left our story, Denis had only just entered Paris. Unsurprisingly, his first public action is a miracle in the form of the destruction of pagan idols. Like before, these gilded figures fall from their pedestals. In this instance, his voice alone causes their demise as he delivers his offering of Heavenly Life through faith (*Per fidei merita prebetur celice vita*). His words have convinced a man called Lisbius (fig. 7: Fr. 2091, f. 99r & Lat. 5286, f. 60r), who kneels before Denis saying, ‘Now, I believe in Christ and give myself over to his teachings’ (*Iam Christo credo iam disciplinae suae me do*). Directly below the martyr, a falconer rides into the city with an assistant. The bird, not unlike an eagle, a common symbol of the divine, is positioned on axis with the preacher. Two people at the gates point with interest to the falconer’s coming. It seems that he is an emblem for the divine teachings of Denis and his followers, recalling the eagle sent to scatter the seed of the Lord’s teachings in Ezekiel, throughout chapter 17. Immediately behind the riding falconer is a goldsmith, preparing golden chalices, an overt reference to the celebration of Mass. In the first stall to the left, we see exotic ivory traders. To the right, beneath the recently converted Lisbius, a man carries a heavy sack and to the far right, we see a woman buying golden jewellery; are these men and women allegories for Lisbius’s acceptance of the Christian faith, the impending burden of martyrdom, and the eternal acquisition of ‘treasures in Heaven’? On the Seine below, a choir of five men reading sheet music sings while rowing their boat; is this a typological connection to the celebration of Christian ‘mass’ in Paris? The sheet music is an augmentation from the original composition (compare to Lat. 5286, f. 60r), in which we see a set of pipes. Again, the readjustment of the iconography appears to support a more united narratological function. The central hagiographic schema appears to activate the surrounding civic scenes; with Denis’ promise of Paradise, redemption is offered for the first time in Paris. A playful jeu-de-mots, *Parisius/Paradisus*, a colloquialism employed by Parisian scholars at the time, encompasses this observation.³¹

³¹ This pun also appears in the *titulus* for the ‘Decapitation of Lisbius’: *Quondam Parisii concivis nunc paradysi* (Fr. 2092, f. 8v & Lat. 5286, f. 77r). On this theme, see also Ch. Lacaze, ‘Parisius-Paradisus: An Aspect of the Vie de Saint Denis Manuscript of 1317’, *Marsyas* 16, 1973, pp. 60-66; C. Serchuk, ‘Paris

When Denis commands his disciples to leave Paris (Fr. 209I, f. 105v & Lat. 5286, f. 63r) and spread the gospel further afield, verdant fruit-bearing vine leaves rise as if growing above the departing Apostles of Gaul. Among the myriad of potential biblical exegeses, in this case, I am particularly struck by the passage about the eagle and the wine from Ezekiel 17, in which the Lord, again through his eagle, plants a seed in the fertile soil of a city located by water and full of traders; the seed begets a beautiful vine with many branches. If Denis is associated with the allegory of the eagle, does this passage find form on this page? Below them, a pair of fishermen attempts to lure and hook fish from the river. Beneath Denis and his companions, a baker makes a multitude of bread, waiting for people to come by; a blacksmith is about to strike, and a muleteer prepares to leave for a long journey. The actions that frame the apostolic departure allude to the spread and success of the missionaries.

Soon, Denis, Eleutherius, and Rusticus are captured by Sisinnius and his army of dark-skinned exotic tormentors begin their acts of torture. This image (fig. 8: Fr. 2092, f. 10v & Lat. 5286, f. 78r), showing the three martyrs stripped and lashed, marks the first in a long list of brutal tortures. Before his death, Denis is subjected to fifteen different heinous torments, each of which the artists have painstakingly imagined. I can only show you a few images of Denis suffering in Paris in the remaining time. Nude and bound by their wrists to poles, in this first image, they endure flagellation with barbed whips, not unlike the early stages of the Passion of Christ. Below and to the left, a one-legged man with crutches crosses the Grand Pont and an apothecary sells medicine to a hooded figure. To the right, a burgher walks his two greyhounds, just as Denis leads his two friends. And below, perhaps most significantly, men in various stages of disrobing are playfully bathing in the Seine. As they remove their garments, before plugging their noses and jumping in the river,

and the rhetoric of town praise in the *Vie de St. Denis* manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Fr. 2090-2092', *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 57, 1999, pp. 35-47; E. A. R. Brown, 'Paris and Paradise: The view from Saint-Denis', in *The Four Modes of Seeing: Approaches to Medieval Imagery in Honor of Madeline Harrison Caviness*, eds E. Staudinger Lane, E. Carson Patsan, and E. M. Shortell, Farham 2009, pp. 419-464; E. Inglis, 'Gothic Architecture and a Scholastic: Jean de Jandun's *Tractatus de Laudibus Parisius* (1323)', *Gesta* 42, no. 1, 2003, pp. 63-85.

perhaps we as the viewers are to remind ourselves of the disrobing of the Parisian martyrs at the start of their lengthy passion. The *titulus* reads: 'Enduring the painful lashes patiently, they are strengthened by Christ [and] they are unwavering in suffering these cruelties' (*Verbera perpessi virtute Jhesu roborati Sunt indefessi cetera dura pati*). With the one legged man and the apothecary nearby, these words resonate in the presence of the afflicted who seek to alleviate pain.

Denis and his companions are lashed again (Fr. 2092, f. 16v & Lat. 5286, f. 81r) this time, they are racked, attached to angled wooden beams- note that while Rusticus and Eleutherius are struck, they look to their steadfast leader, Denis. Below their bodies, which are covered meticulously in dots of red blood, three wine merchants wheel in a large barrel of wine, which is tilts on a diagonal axis not unlike the saints above. To the right, a groom leads a white horse into the city while a ferryman rows with his conversing passenger along the river. Skipping ahead to one of the final moments in the life of Denis (fig. 9: Fr. 2092, f. 33v & Lat. 5286, f. 91r), Christ miraculously appears in the martyr's prison cell to offer him the Eucharistic sacrament on the night before his death. This illustration contains the highest number of Parisians (15) within the visual frame. To the left, below the representation of Larcia observing the miracle, we see an entertaining bear-tamer (I must admit that I have no idea what the presence of the bear tamer means). To the right is a baker, burdened by a heavy load of fresh bread; this too, I believe, is instantly evocative of the body of Christ above. And on the river, is a happy and all too familiar scene – a Parisian wine party. But take note of the extraordinary effort of the designer to place the vessel in the boat party upon the same vertical axis as the golden chalice above, held by Christ and offered to Denis- the intrusion of the sacred into the real is herein literally aligned. This image is unique also because it is the only representation of a fish swimming in the Seine against its current; the third fish from the left has oddly changed direction to investigate the surface, gravitating towards a lively boat party. Four men are sharing a drink from a golden chalice in the boat. Their hands are raised towards their mouths gesticulating a lively conversation. The astute viewer would catch the fish that breaks from its typical formation. There is a didactic and devotional purpose behind the vertical orientation of the Parisian imagery. Tracing a line down from

the location of the Christ's chalice reveals a geometric positioning of symbolism: the boat party's chalice is placed on a perfect axis with the cup in Christ's hand. In fact, a linear reading is overtly emphasised because the people's chalice is placed beside a long black outline of the right gate tower, pulling the eye upwards to Christ and his cup. This formal axial composition compels the viewer to recognise future visual encounters with chalices as reflective of the moment when Christ and Denis shared Mass and the celebration in Paris is an imaginative echo of the sublime event above. If we compare this page to its counterpart in Lat. 5286 f. 91r, the man with the chalice is the only component missing; the decision to insert this figure into the final composition is all the more fascinating as it post-dates the production of the draft.

Denis and his friends are then escorted across the bridge (Fr. 2092, f. 37v & Lat. 5286, f. 93r), where Sinsinnius shows them the dismembered corpses of Christians. Below the bridge is a series of crushing water mills, where the wheat is separated from the chaff (Matt. 3:12) Denis is then whipped again on the morning of his beheading (fig. 10: Fr. 2092, f. 42r & Lat. 5286, f. 94r) and I want to bring to your attention yet another remarkable detail: To the right of bakers and more barrels of wine is a barber with his blade lifted for a shave. The very last Parisian scene before the departure and death of Denis is a figure with a knife to his neck. Sentenced to death on Montmartre (Fr. 2092, f. 45v & Lat. 5286 f. 96r), the executioners bury their axes through the martyrs' necks, who breathe their final word, *IHESUS*. Three souls are delivered to Heaven but Denis remains on Earth as an animated cephalophore, guided towards the site of his future basilica by a pair of angels (fig. 11: Fr. 2092, f. 48v & Lat. 5286, f. 97r). And when Saint Denis becomes headless, the imaginative frame is also severed. The following pages are bisected into two horizontal figural scenes, which subsequently disintegrates further by dividing into four sections. When Denis dies and his body is finally torn apart, the frame of his *Vie* fragments.

The presence of Denis constantly 'activates' the motions of the world that surrounds him throughout his *Vie*. This hypothesis falls in line with the recent work of Cornelia Logemann, who has published a book and an article on the *Vie*. Logemann also argues that the full-page miniatures possess an interrelated iconographic programme and she goes so far as to suggest that the peripheral people serve as visual

commentary for the hagiographic narrative.³² In this paper, the increasing impotence of pagan idols, who display animated reflexes to the saint's holy actions, is presented as an iconological aspect of pictorial cause and effect: With the strength of Denis comes the weakness of idolatry. The inverse is true in the city of Paris, where the lively local people, who engage in a multitude of sophisticated iconological typologies that range in form and meaning. From their echoes in mechanical gestures to biblical exegeses and reflections of a present-day *speculum urbis*,³³ these excitable figures respond directly and positively to the ministry, miracles, and sacrifice of their saint.

Conclusions

Designed by the guardians of the relics of Denis, this *Vie* explicates in figural imagery the superiority of their own spiritual patron. The illuminations place a strong and unique emphasis on the Parisian part of this legend. And I believe too that a French translation of this text was inserted when the patronage shifted. I also have put forth evidence for the use of Lat. 5286 as a prototype for the concomitant planning of the text and image, suggesting a new and meaningful symbolic relationship for the people who appear in Paris. In essence, the deliverance of the book to Philippe V had prevailed in its ultimate mission of connecting the lifeblood of the kings of France to the relics of the Parisian protomartyr. And in the actions of Capetian Paris, we are constantly reminded of the suffering of its first saint. According to one of his chroniclers, Philippe's dying words imply his intimate spiritual connection to Denis: 'I know that I have been healed through the merits and prayers of the Blessed Dionysius' (*Scio me meritis et precibus beati Dionysii curatum fuisse*).³⁴ While the king

³² C. Logemann, 'Heilsräume-Lebensräume. Vom Martyrium des heiligen Dionysius und einem paradiesischen Paris (Paris, BN, Ms. Fr. 2090-92, Ms. Lat. 13936)', *Mährburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 30, 2003, pp. 53-91; C. Logemann, *Helige Ordnungen: Die Bild-Räume der 'Vie de Saint Denis' (1317) und die französische Buchmalerei des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Cologne 2009.

³³ This notion, that the Parisian sequences are an aspect of a *speculum urbis* and/or an early pictorial manifestation of *buon governo*, is addressed in Lacaze (as in n. 31), p. 64.

³⁴ See the account of Guillaume de Nangis in the section entitled in 'Guillelmi de Nangiaco Chronicon', ed. Martin Bouquet, *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules de la France*, 20, Paris 1840, p. 630.

suffered and approached his own death, Philippe continued to place his faith in his patron saint. And although the martyr could not heal the king's body, the Philippe believed that Denis had healed his soul. The *Vie* had succeeded in its crucial objective, which was to assure the king of his vital and eternal tie to his patron, Saint Denis.

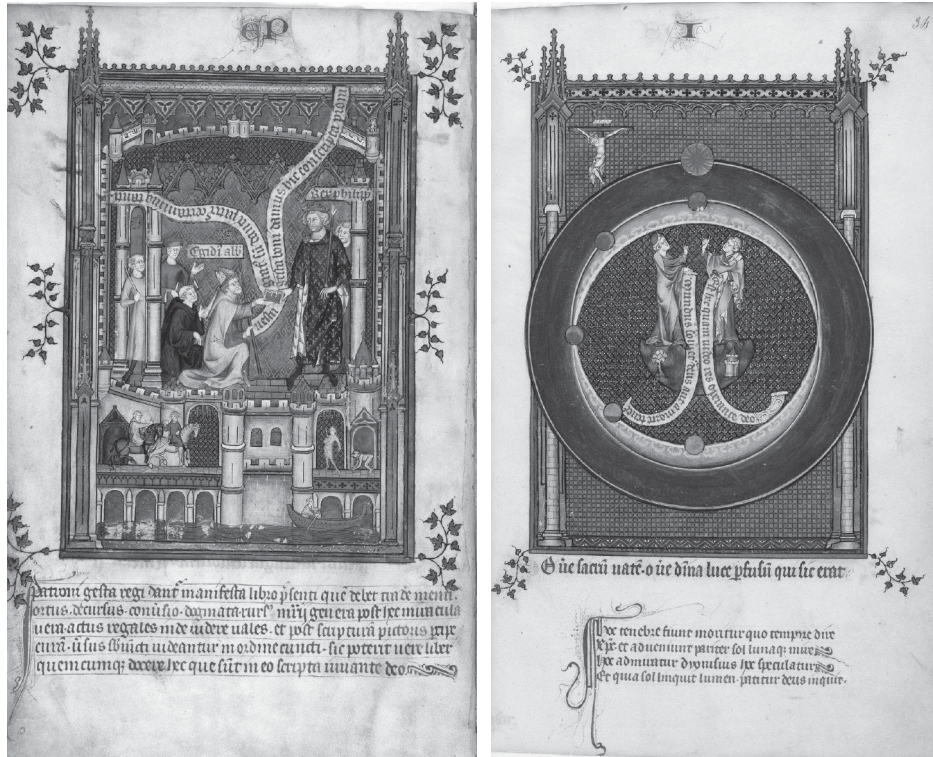


Fig. 1. The presentation of the *Vie*, Fr. 2090, f. 4v; compare to Lat. 5286, f. 1r.

The inscription reads: *Patroni gesta dantur regi manifesta libro presenti quem debet tradere menti / Ortus, decursus, conversio, dogmata rursus martirii genera post hec miracula / Vera actus regales inde vigere vales et post scripturam pictoris percipe / Curam versus subijuncti videantur in ordine cuncti sic poterit vere liber / Quemcumque docere hec que sunt in eo scripta iuvante deo* / Gilles says: *Vestri gesta boni damus hic conscripta patroni* / Philippe replies: *Gratus sum danti patris certamina tanti*

Fig. 2. Denis observes the eclipse at the time of the death of Christ, Fr. 2090, f. 34r; compare to Lat. 5296, f. 8r & 9r. The *titulus* reads: *Hoc tenebre fiunt mortu quo tempore dire / Christus et adveniunt pariter sol lunaque mire / Hoc admiratur Dionysius hoc speculatur / Et quia sol linquit lumen patitur deus, inquit* / Dionysius says: *Mundus solvetur deus aut a morte tenet* and his disciple replies: *Est hec quam video res operante deo*



Fig. 3. Denis makes an altar to the unknown god, Fr. 2090, f. 37v; compare to Lat. 5286, f. 11r.

The *titulus* reads: *Diis pater iste deum iubet ignotum numerari | Ut veneretur eum concio mente pari*

Fig. 4. Paul ordains Denis, Fr. 2090, f. 78v; compare to Lat. 5286, f. 23r.

The *titulus* reads: *Sanctus Paulus ei dat athenis pontificatum | Nomen ut ipse Dei doceat finemque beatum*

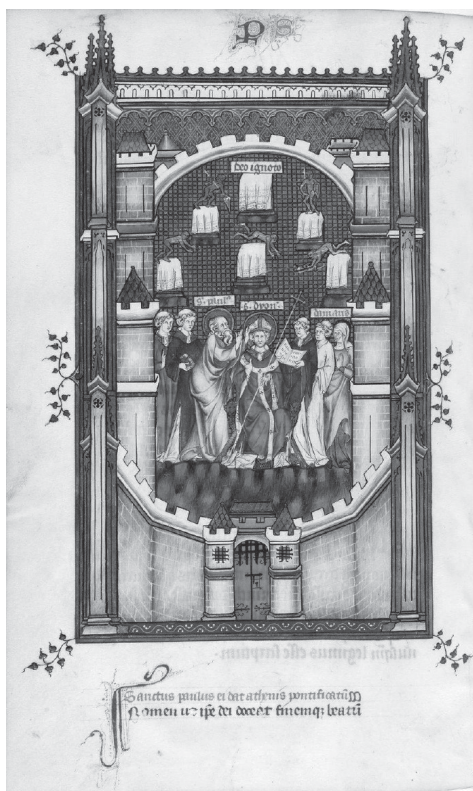




Fig. 5. Denis commands the idols to be destroyed, Fr. 2090, f. 85v; compare to Lat. 5286, f. 24r. The *titulus* reads: *Claro sermone cum factis et ratione / Attrahit ad Christum populum Dyonisium istum / Denis says: Ydola destruite sectate vite dogmata*

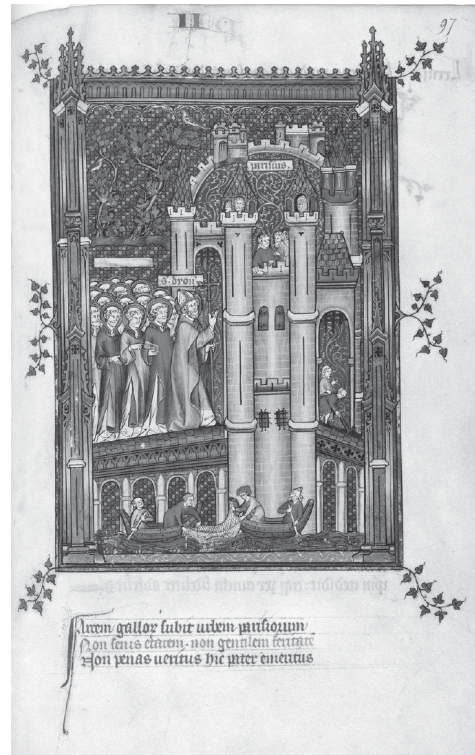


Fig. 6. Denis enters Paris, Fr. 2091, f. 97r; compare to Lat. 5826, f. 58r. The inscription reads: *Arecem Gallorum subit urbem Parisiorum / Non senis etatem non gentilem fertilitatem / Non penas veritus hic pater emeritus*

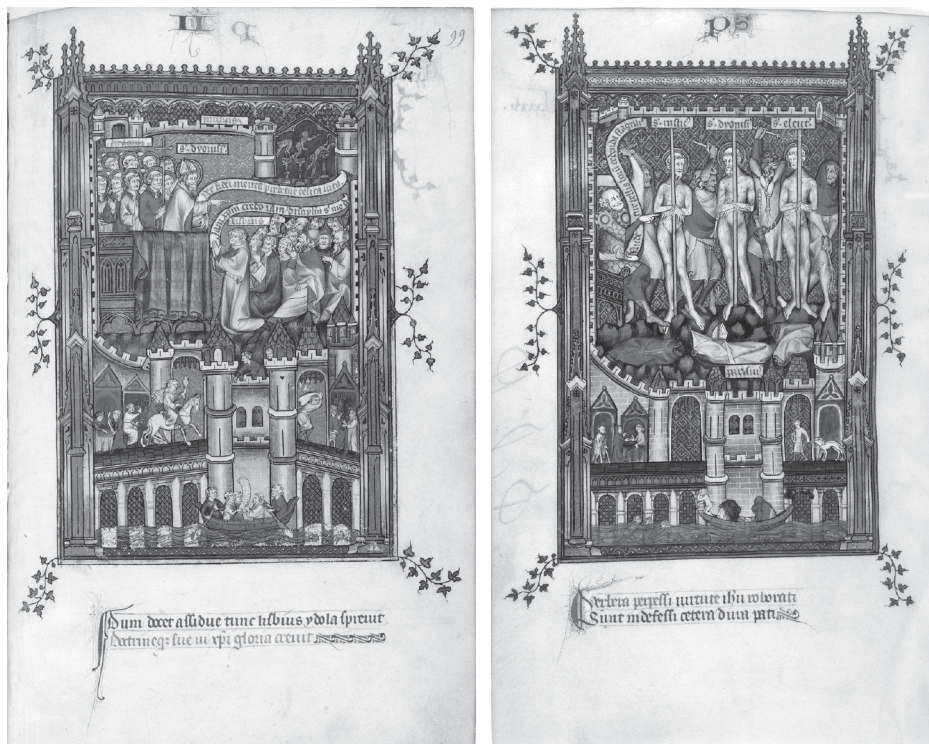


Fig. 7. Denis preaches in Paris and converts Lisbius, Fr. 2091, f. 99r; compare to Lat. 5286, f. 60r. The *titulus* reads: *Dum docet assidue, tunc Lisbius ydola spreuit / Doctrinæque sue vi Christi gloria crevit / Denis says: Per fidei merita prebetur celice vita / Lisbius says: Iam Christo credo iam disciplinae suae me do*

Fig. 8. Denis and his companions are whipped as their martyrdom begins, Fr. 2092, f. 10v; compare to Lat. 5286, f. 78r. The *titulus* reads: *Verbera perpassi, virtute Ihesu roborati / Sunt indefessi cetera dura pati / Sinsinnius says: Nudetur pellis horum cedenda flagellis*

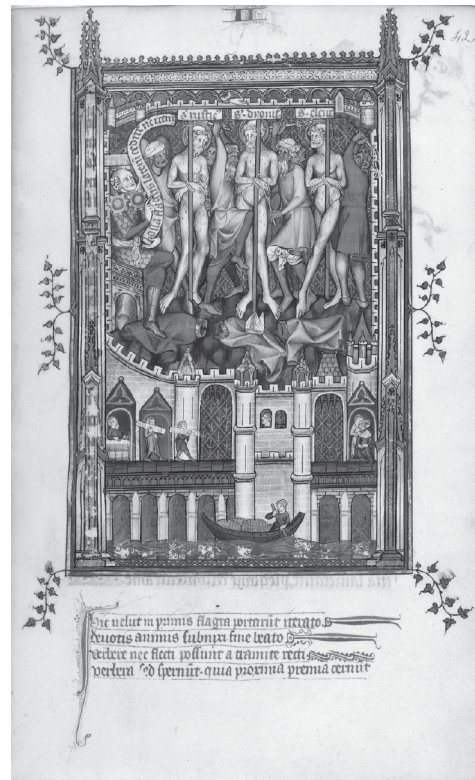


Fig. 9. Christ offers Denis Communion in prison, Fr. 2092 f. 33v; compare to Lat. 5286, f. 91r. The *titulus* reads: *Dum, velut in celis degens, athleta fidelis / Missarum cara mysteria tracet in ara, / Tunc Jhesus, absque mora, panis qua frangitur hora, / Illuc advenit, et eum solamine lenit, / Escam seque dedit, et sic super astra recedit / Christ says: Quod cum patre dare tibi spondeo et suscipe care. Regnabis mecum et qui credent tibi tecum poscenti que dabo per te tibi nilque negabo*

Fig. 10. Denis and his companions are lashed for the last time, Fr. 2092, f. 42r; compare to Lat. 5286, f. 94r. The *titulus* reads: *Hic velut in primis flagra portarunt iterato / Devotis animis subnixi sine beato / Verbere nec flecti possunt a tramite recti / Verebera sed spernunt, quia proxima premia cernunt / Sisinnius says: Ossa flagellatis laterum cedite nunc iterum*



Figure 11: The cephalophoric miracle, Fr. 2092 f. 48v; compare to Lat. 5286 f. 97r. The *titulus* reads: *Larcia miratur corpus quasi uiuificatur / Insuſper et p̄ter celos anime p̄terire / Auditis odis celi cum uoce melodis / Credit tortor pars. pars discessit eorum*