
Queries & Responses

Elaine C. Block seeks information on evidences of pagan customs and ceremonies on choir stalls and in marginalia.

Malcolm Jones searches the earliest appearance of the word “misericord” in French and in English.

Kristine Kratze seeks information on any bat or bats on choir stalls and misericords.

Charles Latocha searches for examples of spectacles in medieval works of art.

Judith Neaman seeks special tortures for sinners in the early middle ages — by sin and by geographical area.

A partial response:

Early visions of hell in medieval art were mainly nebulous with punishments rather indiscriminate and hell shown as the mouth of the Leviathan. Hell in Italy was more graphic with devils consuming sinners. A clearer picture of hell and its tortures arrived in France with the Italian Renaissance.

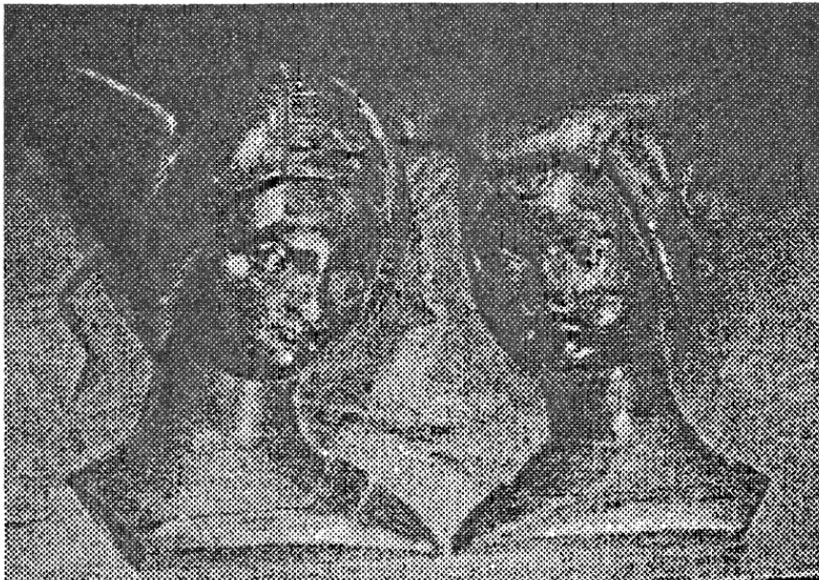
Specifically, Bishop Louis D’Amboise, who had spent a number of years in Italy with the conquering French king Louis XII, commissioned a fresco for the Cathedral of Albi. This view of hell was influenced by the hells of the Baptistry of Florence and the Santo Campo of Pisa. This hell was divided into seven parts, one for each of the capital sins. Six of these panels still exist in the nave of

the cathedral. The seventh was destroyed to make way for another chapel. In this version of hell there is a specific punishment for each of the sins.

Shortly after this fresco was commissioned, Louis' younger brother, Georges D'Amboise, archbishop of Rouen and Papal legate, who had also spent a number of years in Italy governing Lombardy for Lous XII, commissioned choir stalls for his summer palace, the Château of Gaillon. Hell in seven parts, as at Albi, appears on the marquetry panels on the partitions between the stalls. The proud are tortured on wheels and spiked by devils; the envious are immersed to the naval in glacial waters and subject to continuous icy winds.

These images are almost identical with engravings published in a Book of Hours by Verard in 1473. The missing panels on the Gaillon stalls, now at the Basilica Saint-Denis, can easily be reconstructed from these engravings.

(From a forthcoming book by Elaine C. Block on the Choir Stalls of the Château of Gaillon)



Two Women

Rodez Cathedral (Aveyron)