TEACHER'S GUIDE

for use with the video

LIGHT ON THE STONES

THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH OF VÉZELAY

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Contents

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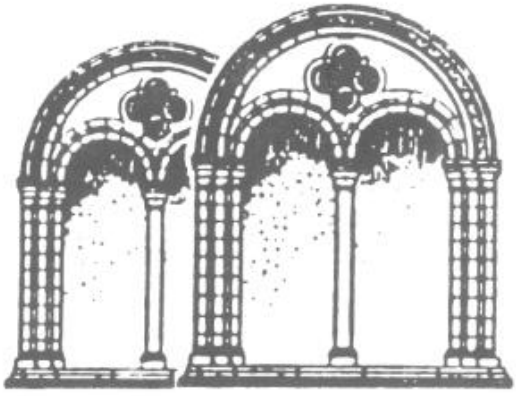

THE CHURCH

This video is intended to give students the experience of visiting a medieval church and of hearing music contemporary with the church. Vézelay was chosen and the script written to emphasize the difference between Romanesque and Gothic architecture, and to suggest how a rather typical cathedral functioned and was modified. The history of the abbey serves to shed light on the sculpture and on the sources of wealth that made possible the building and its decoration. The suggested exercises will permit students to relate their understanding of Romanesque and Gothic architecture to modern buildings and will encourage them to look at the design and narrative methods of Romanesque sculpture. The excerpted Chronicle of Vézelay might be assigned before the video is shown. What follows expands upon what is presented in the video.

History of the Abbey

From its foundation in the year 858 or 859, the abbey of Vézelay has had a turbulent history. Girart de Roussillon, a powerful lord with lands in Burgundy and Provence, established a community of nuns in what is now the town of St-Père-sous-Vézelay. Fifteen years later Vikings destroyed the nunnery, and Girart replaced it with a community of Benedictine monks on the top of the steep hill nearby, hoping that men in a more defensible site might not suffer the same fate. The charter of foundation made Vézelay exceptional in that it was accountable only to the Pope in Rome and freed of obligations to the local lord and local bishop. Unfortunately, this meant that those who would normally have been its defenders and overseers became its enemies, especially the counts of Nevers and the bishops of Autun.

Sometime in the eleventh century pilgrims began to flock to Vézelay in the belief that the body of Mary Magdalene was kept there. While other abbeys and churches also had the remains, or relics, of saints, few in France could boast of having those of a direct follower of Christ. The church of Santiago in Compostela, Spain, claimed the body of the Apostle James the Greater, and his relics attracted pilgrims from all over Western Europe. Vézelay, then, could be considered almost as important as Santiago. Indeed, it became the gathering place for pilgrims going to Santiago along the central route through France. As such it was coveted by the Cluniacs, the order that was reforming or taking charge of monasteries all over

France. Cluny provided abbots for Vézelay in the twelfth century, but it lost its hold on Vézelay in the 1160s.

The monks of Vézelay did not at first say how the relics of Mary Magdalene came to Burgundy, but by the late eleventh century, the answer "because God can do wonders" was no longer acceptable. The monks knew the legend that Mary Magdalene and her brother Lazarus and their sister escaped pagan persecution by sailing to Marseille, and that, after spending years in the wilderness, Mary Magdalene died at Aix. Vézelay claimed to have taken the body from the abbey of St-Maximin after Aix had been devastated by Vikings and the abbey abandoned. Around 1240 St-Maximin in turn took advantage of this story and dug up a body it claimed to be the saint's. Without local supporters, the abbey at Vézelay lost out, and pilgrims went elsewhere, with the result that the town and the abbey grew poorer.

Mary Magdalene was important not only because she was a follower of Christ but one easily identified and remembered. There were several women, other than the Virgin, named Mary in the New Testament accounts of Christ's life; they were easily confused and accepted as one. The woman who washed Christ's feet with perfume and dried them with her hair *should* have been the same woman who brought perfume to his tomb and encountered the resurrected Christ, as we saw in the capital, from Saulieu, in the video. The woman who listened to Christ while her sister Martha worked in the kitchen, the woman who was the sister of Lazarus, whom Christ raised from the dead, and the harlot whom Christ forgave all became Mary Magdalene. With the exception of St. Peter and the Virgin, no follower of Christ played a role in so many stories about him. The fact that the Magdalene was a sinner, indeed a harlot, who had been forgiven by Christ was a promise of redemption for all sinners.

Pilgrimages to visit churches with famous relics were popular for several reasons. The Church encouraged pilgrimages by granting indulgences—so many days released from purgatory—to those who visited certain places. People believed, moreover, that prayers made to a saint near the saint's bones were very powerful; the saint might cure the sick or intercede with Christ for the sinner. Sometimes people pledged a pilgrimage in return for a favor from a saint: this may have been the case with prisoners, who brought their chains to Vézelay when the Magdalene had freed them from prison. Finally, we should not discount the attraction of an adventurous journey, of meeting new and strange people, and of seeing something beyond the limits of one's own town or fields. The routes must have been rather well marked. Along their lengths abbeys provided beds and meals for pilgrims; astonishing buildings, carvings, and rich reliquaries to admire; offices of mass to attend; and impressive processions to watch on feast days.

Girart de Roussillon and his wife established both a monastery (at Pothières) and a nunnery at St-Père-sous-Vézelay, of which their daughter was mother superior. They endowed these foundations with enough lands to support their religious communities. In return the monks and nuns were to pray not only for Girart and his family but for the soul of the emperor and his family. Nobles and kings were cautioned by clerics that because of their power and responsibilities, they were in more danger of sin and damnation than were the poor or the peasants, who had little control over their fates. Gifts to the Church as well as the prayers of the religious might lead to forgiveness of sins.

Monastic Life

By the twelfth century wealthy individuals were paying for private masses to be said for their souls. This meant that increasing numbers of monks were ordained as priests, but this demand meant that nuns, who could not say mass, found it difficult to retain patrons or find new ones. The number of nunneries diminished even as more women sought to take vows.

The religious houses served a social purpose. They provided a place and an occupation for the landless younger sons and undowered daughters of the nobility. Families might place their children in a monastery or nunnery at the age of seven or eight, a practice that was frowned upon and generally discontinued in the twelfth century. Nonetheless, the *Chronicle of Vézelay*, written about 1167, refers to children of the choir, so we know that Vézelay was still receiving some children. The abbey would teach the noble children to read, so that they could participate in the offices, singing the psalms (all 150 of which were sung during the course of a week), and following the Mass. The physical work of the abbey, however, was done by lay brothers, non-nobles who took the same vows as the monks (poverty, chastity, and obedience), but who were not taught to read or sing the offices—merely to say the Lord's Prayer. Their services might even be conducted in a building separate from the church. The divisions of society, then, were perpetuated in the abbeys.

But life in an abbey was attractive enough so that many people, rich and poor, took vows during the twelfth century. The rich forsook their way of life to lead a simpler one, in the hopes of saving their souls. The poor, in return for their labors, received food and shelter and a good chance at salvation.

Building the Abbey

The Romanesque Church: The numbers of pilgrims and monks attracted to Vézelay grew to a point where the ninth century buildings became too small. Around 1100, the Abbot Artaud began to rebuild the church, beginning with the east end or the choir, where services were held. This part of the church was dedicated in 1104 and thus was likely completed at this date. In 1106 a mob of townspeople, probably angered by the rise in taxes needed to build the church, attacked the monastery and murdered Artaud.

In 1120 a terrible fire destroyed the nave of the church but not the new choir. The abbey built a new nave, unusually long, with stone vaults which were desired for their fire resistance as well as acoustical qualities. (We use "nave" to mean the west end of a church or the central volume of this end.) The central vessel is divided into ten bays by the striped transverse arches and the supporting half-columns on pilasters. These projecting verticals link the nave arcade and clerestory [Fig. 5]. The resulting compartments are crowned with groin vaults, which can be visualized as the crossing of two barrel vaults. In the case of the original groin vault of Vézelay, however, the lateral sections do not meet. [In Fig. 1, note the broken *x*'s of the three bays closest to the porch, and see Fig. 12.]

Unlike a simple barrel vault, which presses down and out evenly along the wall upon which it rests, these groin vaults concentrate pressure along the groin lines and direct it into the wall behind the striped arches. The wall beneath the arches is reinforced with the pilaster and half-column. Windows can be cut high in the wall between these arches [Fig. 2; the windows appear as white breaks in the shaded portion of the wall above the aisle roofs]. While groin vaults are normal in aisles, they are unusual over a wide nave. The architect of Vézelay may have risked this construction in order to illuminate the colorful stone, decorated moldings, and the rich program of figured capitals.

Autun, a nearby cathedral, which was also begun around 1120, has a pointed barrel vault. This exerts less pressure than a fully semicircular barrel vault, but that pressure occurs evenly all along the wall [Fig. 3]. Therefore Autun does not have thick bay dividers as Vézelay has, and its windows open below the springing, or bottom, of the vault. Autun is taller than Vézelay, so that these small windows barely illuminate the vaults or the lower parts. The differences between the two churches suggest how much Romanesque building style varied, even in the same region.

The particular contribution of Romanesque architecture lies in the invention of the bay, the division of the wall into vertical sections framed by elements that link

stories and counteract the long horizontal lines of arches and windows marching toward the choir. The volumes of the church are also subdivided into spatial bays. In this processional space, where people also stand or sit for services, the viewer is invited to proceed slowly, pausing to examine capitals and admire designs. The bays establish a rhythm.

These Romanesque dividers reinforce the wall, and they appear to do this work. The design of pilaster and half-column is repeated all the way around the pier. Two half-columns support the arcade arches while the other two support the nave and aisle transverse arches. The diagram of a pier shows how it was constructed and how its plan is a cross with half-circles, the core filled with rubble [Fig. 4].

The aisles reinforce the high walls of the central vessel and serve as corridors leading to the transept and across it into the curving aisle or ambulatory from which one reaches the chapels. When a service is in progress in the sanctuary and the congregation is in the nave, an individual may still reach a chapel for a private service or devotion without disturbing the priest or the people.

The aisle vaults are almost half the height of the nave, almost as high as the floral molding which is exactly at mid-height. The aisle is like a small version of the nave space, with its cross vaults, half-columns, and prominent transverse arches. The rhythm of the bays seems more rapid because of the more restricted space.

Romanesque Sculpture: The central portal sculpture [Fig. 6] represents Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). The main figures on the tympanum (so called because it is like a drum skin stretched across the arch) represent Christ and the Twelve Apostles. With their wind-blown garments, the Apostles seem to dance, even though seated, as they receive the power to speak in tongues, convert, heal, and cast out devils. The centralized arrangement and hierarchical scale of the figures help one recognize their relative importance within each field. Christ is the largest figure in the largest field and the Apostles are next in importance; St. Peter with his keys is on the right hand of Christ, in the place of honor. Because the tympanum curves and the figures are fit within the frame, some of the apostles are “less equal” than others.

Standing on the lintel or horizontal relief zone under the tympanum, the figures of St. Peter and St. Paul (almost hidden behind him) are so tall that they overlap the tympanum next to Christ's feet. Obviously they are much more important than the odd figures who come toward them. This overlapping, a peculiarity of Vézelay's tympanum, occurs consistently from one field or frame to another. The

figure of John the Baptist on the center post extends into the lintel, while Christ's head breaks into the area of the curved compartments.

These compartments contain representations of those who will be converted, exorcised or healed by the Apostles—foreign peoples, those possessed by the devil (who have flame-like hair) and the lame. On the left of the lintel are figures representing fishermen, farmers, and hunters, who bring their gifts to Peter and Paul. These are now thought to be the tenants or vassals of Vézelay, offering their tithes or taxes to the old patron saints of the abbey. On the right are figures who may represent the pilgrims whom the townspeople were expected to house for the abbey, for free, during the great feasts. The revolt of 1106 had been kindled by raises in taxes and the burden of such hospitality. The image of Pentecost represents the mission of the church, while Christ and the Apostles are the model for a community of monks. Here, then, was a lesson for the town.

The capitals of the interior represent stories from the Old Testament as well as legends of the saints, particularly monk-saints, and examples of virtues and vices, such as Lust, commonly represented in monastic churches, which were devoted to the ideal of chastity [Fig. 7]. The story of Moses and the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:19), a story of disobedience to God's will, shows Moses with the Ten Commandments and the pagan image of the calf, which the backsliding Hebrews were worshipping [Fig.8]. The narrative moves from the two sides of the capital to the front, where Moses confronts the calf and the devil issuing from his mouth. The heads of Moses and the Israelite with the ram are placed at the corners, like supports, while the devil's head is somewhat off the central axis. This design, with emphatic comers and center, stresses the structural function of the capital, which gathers the load from a larger rectangular part and channels it into a narrower column or half-column. Although the center may not always be emphasized, the comers are usually reinforced by figures who seem animated by the forces channeled through them.

The Gothic Choir: The choir, which had not been destroyed by the fire, was rebuilt around 1180 in the new Gothic style that had been created in the Paris region at St-Denis [Figs.9, 10, 11]. It was probably designed by an architect from that region. This structure provides a dramatic contrast to the nave. The walls, in white or cream limestone, are decorated with thin, detached shafts, unlike the nave with its projections carved from the wall blocks. Ribs continue the linear design across the vaults, which are now so reduced in weight that they are supported on slender colonettes, on bundles of shafts, and on thin walls opened with large windows or arches. Where strong bay divisions in the nave and its aisles invite one

to pause in each compartment and examine the capitals, the choir is lightly subdivided so that sanctuary, ambulatory, and chapels all flow together.

The upper porch was built around 1150, after the nave and before the choir. There are a few rib vaults in the upper porch, but these are so heavy that, like the adjoining groin vaults, they had to be supported by heavy walls. The porch also has some pointed arches, (and there are pointed arches at Autun, even earlier), but clearly rib vaults and pointed arches do not make this porch Gothic, for the richly carved masonry has not given way to panel and shaft.

The choir was built with flying buttresses that help stabilize the walls between the windows, while the gallery (the middle story), with its vaults and big rectangular piers, strengthens this middle part of the wall above the thin columns. The choir seems miraculously weightless and unsupported. Detached shafts do not reinforce the walls but stand before them. The working parts are often hidden, as is the case with the flying buttresses on the exterior or the reinforcing masses of masonry in the second story gallery. These piers lie behind the bundles of shafts that descend from the vaults. They continue above the gallery roof on the exterior where they meet the heads of the flying buttresses [Fig.10].

Off of the ambulatory are nine chapels. The five rounded ones are called radiating chapels because they are oriented to the radii from the semicircle of the sanctuary. This was a very efficient solution to the problem caused by the growing demand for private services and masses for the dead. Mass could only be celebrated at a single altar once a day. The choir with ambulatory and radiating chapels is called a pilgrimage choir, because many of the churches along the pilgrimage roads were built with such a plan.

While this new choir could handle the private services and could provide a beautiful, bright site for the main altar and probably for a new reliquary shrine for Mary Magdalene, it was not big enough for the sixty or seventy monks and their choir stalls. The solution was to place the stalls in the transept as well as in the nearest bays of the nave, which were rebuilt with rib vaults to distinguish this part from the part reserved for the congregation. The sanctuary and monks' choir were probably surrounded by a choir screen in the Gothic period. In the last scene of the video, the congregation sits in the nave where some the monks' stalls would have been, and the modem altar is actually in the transept.

The Cloister: Of the original cloister—the enclosed garden and the buildings surrounding it—only the chapter house, where the community met to conduct business, remains. Originally, there would also have been a dormitory, refectory and kitchen, as well as the abbot's house and a hospice for sick pilgrims. The cloister was on the south (the right as we look at the facade), and the monks could enter the church from the cloister through the south transept door for the singing of the canonical hours, some eight times a day, and for the other offices, such as that for the dead, for Mary Magdalene, or for the feasts of the church year.

The Liturgical Music

The music for the video includes selections from several different kinds of medieval music. The oldest kind is ritual chant in Latin ("Gregorian Chant"), developed in Rome during the fifth to eighth centuries for use in Roman Catholic church services in cathedrals and monasteries there. This kind of chant consists of a single line of melody without accompaniment, sung by choirs of men and boys, or, in convents, by women, who sang solos or in chorus. This kind of chant was brought north by the Franks—the French and Germans—during the ninth and tenth centuries. The Franks developed the repertory by composing many new chants in a similar style, and also in new styles of their own.

The chant for Pentecost, "Loquebantur," a Roman chant, is heard in the porch. The chants for Mary Magdalene "Quoniam" and "Celsi meriti," which are heard as one sees the capitals of Lust and of Moses, are Frankish, as is the "Kyrie eleison," part of the Mass, heard in the last scene of the video. As the Frankish chant developed during the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, it became increasingly popular in style, partly due to the more frequent use of verse rhythms and of rhyme as in the Pilgrim Hymn.

Meanwhile, the French developed a new kind of music, polyphony, in which more than one melody was sung at once, either at the same speed, or faster and slower. Polyphony could take many forms, and during the eleventh and twelfth centuries the French experimented with the new medium, as in "Cuncti potens," heard in the video as the couple enter the aisle and in several other places.

Around 1200 at Notre-Dame-de-Paris, at the cathedral under construction in the new Gothic style of architecture, two composers named Leonin and Perotin developed a style of polyphony characterized by very regular rhythms that went on for a long time, with a great contrast between the slow part lower

in pitch and the several faster, higher voices. The regular rhythms are an audio analog of the “modular” treatment of the architectural units. This is the music heard over the beginning shots and behind most of the scenes in the choir. (The choir was being built at about the time this music was composed.)

We have chosen a version of Perotin's “Sederunt principes” that includes instrumental accompaniment, which would not have been used in the twelfth century. ;. The Pilgrim song and the earlier polyphony of “Cuncti potens” are from the “Liber Sancti Jacobi,” a manuscript containing music especially for the cathedral dedicated to Sanctus Jacobus (St. James) in Compostela, Spain—a favorite summer pilgrimage for northerners. Vézelay was on one of the main pilgrim routes for Compostela, and according to recent research the Liber Sancti Jacobi and its chant and polyphony may have been composed at Vézelay, to be taken south to Compostela.

THE CHRONICLE OF VÉZELAY

Translated by Georgia Wright and Edward Markee

A manuscript from Vézelay, written by the monk Hugues de Poitiers, secretary to Abbot Ponce (1138-1160) and notary under Abbot Guillaume de Mellò (1161-1171), covers the history of the abbey's relations with the Bishop of Autun and then with the counts of Nevers, Guillaume III and IV, and the burghers of Vézelay, between 1140 and 1167. The abbey quarreled with the bishop and struggled with the counts over the rights given Vézelay by its founder, Girart de Roussillon. His charter of 858 declared that the monastery should be free from all jurisdiction save that of the pope. Pope Nicholas I (858-867) confirmed this: "Neither prelate, nor king, nor any of the faithful may intervene either directly or through third persons in the ordination of the abbot, priests or clerics, or in the distribution of holy chrism, or in the consecration of [Vézelay's] churches. We forbid the bishop of the diocese [of Autun] to celebrate mass in the monastery save at the abbot's request...or to demand the right of hospitality." (See Francois Guizot, *Chronique de Vézelay*, Charité-sur-Loire, 1969, p. 220. The following citations are to this recent reprint.)

These privileges were staunchly defended by Vézelay at enormous cost. They aroused the jealousy of the counts of Nevers, who fomented rebellions among the townspeople against their lord abbot. In 1106 a mob invaded the monastery and killed Abbot Artaud. It is likely that the abbey had raised taxes and fees around 1100 to sustain the building of a new choir (replaced by the present Gothic one in 1180). In 1137 the townspeople formed "an execrable commune," according to the chronicle, and the leaders demanded that certain new duties and taxes be rolled back and certain rights be restored. The dispute was heard and judged by a panel of secular and religious lords, who, not surprisingly, found in most instances for the abbey. The document reveals the extent of the contested rights, though not the uncontested ones, such as the tithe, *cens* (tax), or *taille* (head tax). The abbey taxed houses and furnishings, construction and reconstruction, sales and transfers of property. It sold licenses for businesses and stalls. It requisitioned rooms from townspeople for its overflow guests on feast days, when they could have rented them to visitors (the figures on left hand side of the cathedral's lintel may have represented the pilgrims whom the town was to house). It charged a fee for entering a profession. Its subjects had to use its wine press, mill, and oven. No one could sell wine until the abbot had sold his. "[The abbey agreed that it] would not levy a tax on girls who marry provided that the abbot or his officers, the dean or

provost, are informed of the marriage, for fear that the women, by fraud, should fall into the power of husbands belonging to another *seigneurie*, which one has seen to be a rather frequent cause of scandal." (209)

Pasture, forest, and river were under the abbot's control. Part of every harvest was owed the abbey. One out of four sheep belonged to him. If a man who belonged to the abbey, that is, a vassal, had no son or daughter, or if his children were not living with him, his property "reverted" to the church at his death. Free men could leave their goods to their close relative as long as the latter lived in Vézelay and the abbey acted as executor of the will.

The abbot was a medieval lord, with the powers of a secular lord. The lands and villages that were given to the abbey at its foundation or willed to it later, along with the people on them, were under the abbot's fiscal and judicial control. The abbot of Vézelay advertised the fact that he had the right of high justice—the right to try important civil and criminal cases—by displaying twelve gibbets on the hill below the church and placing one near the well and the other near the marketplace. The abbot also owned serfs, who supplied the labor in his fields and the unskilled labor for building projects. The burghers were always told that matters concerning serfs were none of their business.

In the twelfth century a few French towns managed to free themselves from certain obligations to their lords by forming communes and asking the king to sanction their chartered rights and to protect them. The burghers of Vézelay, too far from the crown lands to be able to ask the king to do this, turned to the count of Nevers, or, as Hugues has it, the count's attacks forced them to beg protection from him and to turn against the abbot. The abbot's protectors, the pope and king, could not offer protection very effectively. This chronicle covers only a part of the period in which the counts were demanding the right to exercise high justice, to receive an annual payment from the abbot (protection or the *droit de garde*), and to be paid when they stayed at the abbey hostel (*droit de gîte*). Cluny, which had interfered in the affairs of Vézelay, probably at the instigation of Count Guillaume I, had given the counts these two rights. Hugues de Poitiers recounts twenty-seven years of struggles to re-establish the freedoms of Vézelay.

Hugues de Poitiers is a lively storyteller although thoroughly biased. He seldom introduces people, most especially monks and bishops, without telling us whether they are for or against Vézelay. The machinations of the abbey of Cluny punctuate the story. In 1131, Cluny, with the blessing of the pope, had put one of its own men in as abbot and sent most of the brothers away in chains, unless the chronicler exaggerates. One should know, however, that Vézelay had had abbots from Cluny well before this. Even when Vézelay and Cluny were simultaneously headed by

blood brothers, Ponce and Peter the Venerable, the Cluniac is depicted as jealous, irrational, and mean-spirited with respect to his much persecuted brother.

The three parts of the chronicle are told very differently. Part one, the struggle with the Bishop of Autun, is filled with excerpts of the depositions of witnesses to incidents which might have undermined the privileges of Vézelay. Rather dry reading, but the outcome was favorable to Vézelay, and the pope confirmed its privileges. Part two covers the period 1140-1150 and the struggles with Count Guillaume III, brought to an end in an uneasy truce (1150-1155). In this chapter the chronicler rarely mentions anything other than events immediately touching upon this subject. When thousands of nobles and knights joined Louis VII and Eleanor of Aquitaine to hear St. Bernard preach the Second Crusade at Vézelay in 1146, Hugues mentions this event only because Abbot Ponce seized the occasion to ask the king to intervene with the count. In part three, however, written around 1167, Hugues broadens his view of events to take in the papal schism, a meeting between King Louis VII of France and the German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa having to do with the schism, and a campaign of Louis against the count of Châlon, who had murdered some Cluniacs. The schism plays a part in this chapter, because Cluny, when it sided with the wrong pope, lost all power over Vézelay. When Louis gathered an army to fight the count of Châlon, the count of Nevers may have been frightened into making peace with Vézelay. Hugues mentions this event in such a way that the reader will reach that conclusion.

A few excerpts will give the flavor of the chronicle and its characters. Many episodes are repetitive because the same sort of attacks was perpetrated again and again. The episode below occurred around 1150.

> "When the tyrant learned that the abbot had sent deputies to Rome [to get the help of the Pope], he immediately sent an expedition against the goods and property of the monastery of Vézelay; and wherever the church exercised some right, whether in the country around Nevers or that of Auxerre, the count invaded, ravaged, carried away or pillaged everything. As for the overseers of the various interests of the abbey, he made them take an oath and swear not to obey the monks on any point and not to render any accounts either to the abbot or his men....
>
> "Returning from his expedition of devastation, the count peremptorily summoned the abbot to appear before him on a certain day and submit to the jurisdiction of his high court on the issues on which he would be challenged. But on such an occasion as this the abbot, as the bearer of St. Peter's pastoral staff, could not entirely lack Peter's firmness and strength of mind, and paid no heed to the orders of the tyrannical count. The count at once published an edict

prohibiting anyone from going to Vézelay on the pretext of business or on a journey, or for a religious exercise, or from leaving Vézelay to go to public fairs or markets, declaring that anyone who dared disobey the edict would be at the mercy of all who met him."

Then the townspeople thought that "'they would be happy and blessed if, shaking off the yoke of the church, they put themselves in the hands of the count, that then they would no longer have to worry about external enemies and they could chase away their internal oppressors like so many flies; and that, if necessary, they could even oppose the abbot in court on equal terms because being more numerous and having the support of the stronger party, they could shake off the domination of a minority.'

"The count knew that the villagers were talking like this, as Hugues [de St-Pierre, a recent arrival and trouble-maker] had informed him of these impious proposals." (54-55)

This same Hugues persuaded the count to go to his rooms in the hostel, one of the monastic buildings next to the almoner's, which in turn was next to the entrance, at the west of the cloister. The count was able to come and go without always being noticed by the monks, as in this case, when he called in the rebellious inhabitants and promised them his protection. He declared that the abbot had wrested from him his right of jurisdiction over them. And then he told them that the monks' prayers were of little avail in helping the townspeople (against him, presumably). If they would support him, he would protect them and they would be free to go where they liked. In effect he blamed the blockade on the abbot.

"To protect himself against these perfidious insinuations, the abbot assembled the monks and called upon them to prostrate themselves before the count and beg him to have pity on them and spare the church. The children of the church responded by throwing themselves at the count's feet and imploring him to spare them and the church, for the love of God and through respect for Mary Magdalene, and not to corrupt their men, or, rather, the men of the church or lead them astray. But the count, who had the body of a serpent but certainly not the heart of a dove, answered them mildly that all he was asking was that in taking back their own right, they should allow third parties to enforce their rights against the monks through his intermediary.

"'And,' he added, 'I am astonished at what you call the equity you urge so arrogantly. You recognize me as advocate and judge in prosecuting others, but not when others proceed against you. I certainly do not try to lead your men astray or turn them away from you; but I declare that those whom I protect and defend anywhere and against anybody, as is the custom and my right, must be

cleared or justify themselves through a public and legitimate judgment of my court; for anyone who claims his rights must also submit to the rights of others.'" (56-57)

As usual the count had blockaded the town just before the feast of Mary Magdalene (July 22), because the abbey and town depended for a good part of their income on the pilgrim traffic for that event. The monks asked for a few days' truce, which the count granted, again as he usually did. The count was nothing if not consistently erratic! Then the abbot came and asked the count to protect his domain while he went to Rome for the hearing of the case against the Bishop of Autun. He reminded the count that he, Ponce, had protected the count's lands when the count was away on crusade in 1147. Probably fearing that the count was unlikely to reciprocate, Ponce thought of a way to hold him at bay.

"He promised to ask the pope to permit the church of Vézelay to submit to the jurisdiction of the count of Nevers, adding that, if by chance he should obtain this, he would at once cease to resist him. And to make the truce firm and unimpaired, the abbot offered the count sixty pounds cash down.

"Swayed by these prayers, tempted by these promises, and won over by these presents, this great noble agreed to the truce and promised to be a faithful friend in future if the abbot kept his promises. And as to a corrupt heart nothing is easier than a lie, the count made many promises and kept few of them. But as 'charity believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things' the abbot, in his generous simplicity, trusted in his good faith." (58)

Ponce won his case against the Bishop of Autun, and then he told the pope, Anastasius IV, "of the insults, which the count of Nevers was inflicting on him and the monastery of Vézelay, which until then had been entirely free, and under the direct jurisdiction of the blessed Peter and the Church of Rome.

"'Let the Pope in his apostolic wisdom say what must be done, and whether the apostolic liberties are to bow to the insolence of a secular noble. Perhaps, when the blind rage of this enemy is assuaged, he may see to it that we are left in peace, and keep us safe under his protection.'

"To this the Holy Father answered, 'No, no, if the Superior of Vézelay were to submit to external jurisdiction, or to the populace, not only would the monastery be deprived of its peace, but all ecclesiastical order would be thrown into the greatest confusion. We will therefore censure the count, whom we have already warned, and will invite him, as we have done already, to renounce this insolent enterprise of his, warning him that if he lays claim to any rights over your monastery, he will be punished as the judges to be appointed shall decide. Tell him to keep off other people's property. If he

scorns our holy admonition we have the means and the power to restrain him; we have Peter's sword to humble the proud.'" (59)

And the pope told Ponce to cede nothing to the count that might hurt the monastery.

"After receiving these instructions and bidding farewell to the papal court, the abbot returned in triumph to his monastery. He delivered the pope's warning to the count, who treated it with contempt, brushing it aside disdainfully and saying that he owed the pope no more than he received from him, which was nothing. Then he asked the abbot if he had kept his promise to get this Pope to recognize the right of the court of Nevers to hold its proceedings and execute its judgments.

"'I accomplished the promises of my mouth,' said the abbot, 'but I was forbidden to do as I wished.'

"Then the count, struck with astonishment and filled with bitterness, again forbad convoys to leave or enter the town, and he encouraged his local vassals to attack the men of Vézelay wherever they found them, to take their goods, and not to spare the monastery..." (60)

The count and his men pillaged, stole the herds and serfs of the church, struck and killed the monks, stole from pilgrims or captured them and raped their wives. Ponce was patient and generous under these attacks, but finally put his case to Louis VII. The rebellion of the town continued. The townspeople invaded the church and set guards on the towers, robbed and insulted the monks and kept them locked up. Ponce escaped to Cluny, where he persuaded the assembled cardinals to excommunicate the rebels. In this he got no help from his brother, Abbot Peter the Venerable, with whom he was rarely on good terms.

The cardinals' edict named the rebels but also placed the whole domain of Vézelay under interdict so that no one could receive mass or hear offices, except infants, who could be baptized, and the dying, who could be confessed. So angry were the townspeople that they attacked the priest who read the edict and stamped on the church vessels. Then some said that, as they were unjustly excommunicated, they would refuse to pay the tithe, *cens*, and other taxes.

They went to the count and complained that now they could not mill their wheat or bake their bread. He encouraged them to seize the mill and oven. Then the abbot of Cluny intervened, persuading the count to come to him for justice, saying that he would make sure that a peace with Vézelay would not be unfavorable to the count. Ponce, however, became aware that his brother wanted him to give away Vézelay's freedoms and privileges. Cluny had played this role before, when it was

in control of Vézelay, and thus had set a precedent for some of the count's claims. Nothing could come of this conference, so Ponce again went to the king. At last the count was pressed into appearing before the king where he behaved so badly that the king ordered him to round up the men who had devastated the abbey and bring them to the king in irons.

The count managed to warn them all to escape, but this time he had pushed Ponce too far. The abbot assembled an army of mercenaries who patrolled the town and destroyed the houses, the fortifications, and illegal wine presses erected by the ringleader and several cronies. This was not the end of the disagreements with the count, of course, but there was an uneasy peace for five years.

When Alexander III (1159-81) was elected to the papacy only to face an antipope, Victor IV, the candidate of the German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, he had to flee Rome and seek the support of rulers and prelates in France and England. Louis VII and Abbot Ponce were quick to support him, but some of the monks of Cluny sided with Victor, so that Alexander put the powerful abbey under interdict and convened a meeting to determine what to do with it.

> "Our father of holy memory, Ponce, well deserving his title of abbot, was called to this conference on the advice of several men who, wanted, after having expelled Hugues from Cluny [abbot from 1156], wanted to place Ponce at its head. But the blessed and glorious friend of Christ, Mary Magdalene, would not let him be wrenched away from her candles on her altar, whose bright rays surrounded him with splendor; she kept him for herself, by the ties of the body, he whom she had raised since infancy, whom the Archangel Michael had given to her, whom she had entirely appropriated and consecrated to her service. She did not permit the enemy of the freedom of her tomb to rejoice for a single moment over the abbot, for fear that Ponce might contradict himself, that having fought for his country he might in some way side against his country, leaving wickedness to triumph over strength through strength, and baseness to prevail in wisdom, over wisdom itself. And so the abbot was struck down by an unexpected illness and went the way of all flesh in the twenty-fourth year of his ordination. Bewept and mourned by his people, he was buried before the tomb of the servant of the tomb of Christ, being taken from the world, as I believe, lest the vanity of human wisdom should change his heart." (96f)
> [Mary Magdalene went to Christ's tomb to anoint his body, and encountered the risen Christ in the garden. John 20:14-17 and see the capital, from Saulieu, in the video.]

What a curious and confused epitaph for the hero of the greater part of the chronicle! So powerful was Cluny and so great the chronicler's suspicion of the old enemy, that he believed Ponce might turn against Vézelay once he were made abbot of Cluny!

Hugues reserves his strongest characterizations for Mary Magdalene here and for the Countess Ida, wife of Guillaume III, who plays an important role only after her husband follows Ponce to his death, eight days later (October, 1161). She is her son's evil genius. "That old Herodias and new daughter of Jezebel of the race of Amalech, Ida the mother of Count Guillaume of Nevers, never ceased to breathe from her malodorous mouth the poison of hate into the heart of her son. She was the enemy of all honorable feelings. There was no goodness in her. Hotly espousing her son's cause, she constantly incited her followers to persecute the monastery of Vézelay." (132)

In 1165 the count and his mother so intimidated the monks while the new abbot, Guillaume de Mello, was away, that some sixty monks and twenty servants left the abbey and journeyed to Paris to the king.

At the sight of so many monks prostrate at his feet, Louis VII was moved to call the count to judgment. The count, maneuvering like his father before him, postponed meetings and refused to promise anything: Finally the king said angrily:

> "'The abbot is under no obligation to me, yet he makes submission for his own rights and promises to abide completely by my decision. But you are bound to me by direct homage. How dare you defy me, your liege lord, and refuse to submit to what I decide? Until now I have made allowances for your youth and have borne with your injustices. Until now I have committed a great sin in tolerating the destruction of the sepulcher of the blessed Mary Magdalene. From now on, and on the other points, the abbey will not lack justice from me, if the abbot comes to complain and ask for it.'" (189f)

The count continued to harass the abbey, and was about to be excommunicated for a second time when, rather surprisingly, he decided to make peace with the abbot. He was made to swear on relics to keep the peace. His mother, however, did not want to swear such a frightening oath she probably had no intention of keeping. She called her son out of the sanctuary where he had sworn the oath and asked him not to make her swear.

> "The count said to her, 'If you want me to break my oath, do not swear.'" (The manuscript is missing some lines, including the oath. He must have sworn that his mother would also swear an oath.)

"And she said, 'Whether I want to or not, I consent, on my word, to all that you have sworn according to your will.' And the count answered, 'If that is good enough for the abbot, it is good enough for me.'

"'Ask him, ask the abbot not to make me take the oath.'

"And the count went to the abbot and said, 'It would be shameful for a woman to swear, particularly my mother, who comes of a noble and powerful house but who is a widow. I pray you spare her, and do not make her swear an oath; let her just give her word, and I will be responsible for seeing that she keeps faith.'

"The abbot answered, 'See that you do not break the peace, for I know that your mother has been the principal cause of all your enmity, and that she promises much and keeps few promises. But for love of you, if as you say, she undertakes by a promise binding in law, to observe the articles of our agreement I will agree that a knight duly appointed by law, shall present himself in her place before the holy relics and take the oath.'" (197f)

Ida was not worried about mere promises, but relics might take a dreadful revenge. There is one such story in this chronicle. Some relics of the Virgin and other saints, which had been carried about in an effort to raise funds to build a church, were laid on the altar of another church and then proved impossible to move. A monk had the insane audacity to beat the litter bearing the relics with a birch, as if to drive the saints from the church. He was struck with paralysis and died a few days later. (125f)

The count shielded his mother by invoking the custom of having a man stand surety for a woman in a law case. The abbot accepted that but insisted on a knight standing surety instead of the count because he trusted neither mother nor son. Nevertheless, says the chronicler, "a great friendship and closeness developed between the abbot and the count and there was no more division between them, and each of them felt what the other felt. All those who had been the authors and creators of the quarrels came to throw themselves at the feet of the abbot and asked him humbly to reconcile them to the count whom they had offended." (199)

The count then went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, so giving the story of these struggles a happy ending, but the chronicle closes with two short episodes. One concerns the outrageous pride of the abbot of Cluny, Etienne, who insisted on a more elaborate ceremony of greeting on arrival at Vézelay than did the king himself. The king and his court overheard the demands of the abbot's messenger and exclaimed, "What insolence! This man disdains all the honors offered him and insists on our lord the king and all of us going to meet him!" (201) This seems a rather satisfying last word on the subject of that particular enemy of Vézelay.

The last few paragraphs describe the interrogation and trial by ordeal of some heretics. When the verdict of the judges was inconclusive, the ordeal by water was repeated. “[Seven of the men] were then condemned to the fire by the public and burned in the valley of Ecouan.” So ends the chronicle.

DISCUSSION AND EXERCISES

The Chronicle of Vézelay

Students might discuss the nature of power in this period, and the part that faith played in the balance of power. What "weapons" did the abbot have with which to defend himself or his tenants from the count? What allies does he call on? What was the contract or the relation between count and king? (Actually, the Count of Nevers was most immediately a vassal of the Duke of Burgundy, but Louis VII said that the count had done homage to him directly, and thus owed him obedience as well as military service.) Why was interdict such a powerful weapon? How did the count behave after he took the oath on relics?

History

Why did the count rebuild the nunnery as an abbey on top of the hill? Why did the abbey build towers if they were so expensive that only one west tower was finished (and only one of two next to the transept)? Why did people from wealthy families join monasteries and nunneries? Can students think of any modern counterparts? What might be different?

Building campaign

Students might be asked to think about what an abbot would have to do when planning to construct a church. How would funds be raised? What kinds of workmen, skilled and unskilled, would he need, and what materials? Who would choose the sculptural themes?

Quarrymen, masons, sculptors, carpenters to make scaffolds and forms for the vaults—all would have to be hired. Five quarries may have been used for the various stones at Vézelay. The abbey owned some, and it owned the woods which were searched for wood for roof beams, scaffolds, and forms. The square holes in the exterior walls, now used by nesting pigeons, are scaffold holes. Lay brothers were evidently competent to burn limestone (to make quicklime, a constituent of mortar) and mix mortar. Serfs might load and unload stones onto the carts drawn by horses or oxen owned by the abbey. The abbot probably found teams of skilled workmen at other churches. While the abbot would probably settle on the main themes of the program, the sculptors had large repertories of images from previous jobs, which they contributed.

Students might be asked to design a Romanesque tympanum for the school, once they have discussed the axial pattern and hierarchical form. They will find that this pattern limits their choice of themes, but they can try narrative scenes in the lintel or in the compartments or in the roundels of the border (at Vézelay, the little roundels contain Labors of the Months and zodiacal signs).

They might try to design two capitals, one with vices, and a more challenging problem, a story told on three sides but leading to the center front.

Romanesque and Gothic

Students should discuss the differences between the Romanesque and Gothic parts. The Romanesque bay divisions, the half-columns and pilasters, are part of the wall and strengthen it at critical places. The shafts of the Gothic wall at Vézelay are emphatically separate. They correspond to the ribs above them and they still act as bay dividers, but they do no actual work. The rectangular masses of masonry in the second story passage and the flying buttresses stiffen the wall and allow the wall to be extraordinarily thin and open looking. We may call this illusionistic.

Modem glass wall buildings are also illusionistic, but the working structure is inside (steel beams hidden in floors, ceilings, and walls) while much of the reinforcing parts of the Gothic are outside or hidden away. Still, the Gothic shafts indicate bays or subdivisions of the space. The shafts on the inner wall of the sanctuary not only correspond to the ribs above them but lead down to the columns and piers below, and these in turn are lined up with the divisions of the ambulatory vaults and the adjoining chapels. These divisions are much less emphatic than those of the nave.

Turning again to modem buildings, students might be asked to look for those that have strong bay divisions and a vertical emphasis, those on which the floors are stressed and the verticals less so, and those in which the whole building is a simple glass box, with a thin grid work.

Students should be encouraged to think about the functions or uses of tall buildings and their parts, what occurs vertically, what horizontally, and what the design stresses. They should try to gauge their feeling about the size of the building, asking how they measure this—by the individual windows which we assume to be “normal” in size, by nearby buildings, by some other feature, or has it no scale?) They might also see if apartment buildings are treated differently than office buildings and ask themselves why, if so.

Perhaps they can find a building with load-bearing walls—probably brick—and then see whether the interior structure is stressed on the exterior in Romanesque fashion (again we have to compare exteriors of modem buildings with interiors of medieval buildings).

We do not define the Gothic by a set of easily identified elements like rib vaults or pointed arches. Why? (Note pointed arches in the porch at Vézelay, and then round arches in the choir. The Gothic architects first exploited the pointed arch as a way of bringing to the same level all the keystones of the arches comprising a vault compartment [Fig. 13]).

Vaults

The stresses of a vault can be explained by drawing an arch with its wedge-shaped voussoirs and keystone on the board. The keystone locks the arch. Press on it and it will force the vault apart, outward [Fig.12]. Vézelay's cross vaults and their framing striped arches become deformed in this way but did not break apart because the mortar was strong.

The Gothic vaults were built with thinner stones so the thrusts and the weight were much diminished. The high vaults of the choir are stabilized by hefty flying buttresses, and these permitted the architect to extend the windows below the place where the vaults meet the wall [Fig.11]. If he had had to stiffen the wall at that point with a tall gallery vault, obviously he could not have had such long windows.

Functions

Students should review the functions of the parts of Vézelay—porch, nave and aisles, transept, sanctuary, ambulatory, and chapels, while understanding how each part is designed to serve its function or to differentiate that part. (The second story of the porch housed a chapel dedicated to the Archangel Michael.)

Then students might look at the school building and try to see how the designs of different parts—auditorium, lunchroom, gym, classroom, office, main hall, main entrance, minor halls—serve the different functions or even announce the different functions. They should be encouraged to think of circulation, privacy, light and air, sightlines, acoustics, and so on.

Advanced Students

The Gothic choir contains anomalies of plan and elevation, which have puzzled scholars for generations. A pair of columns faces a single column across the straight bays of the choir. Ribs of the high vaults have an odd pattern with a very

narrow four-part vault next to the vaults of the hemicycle, and under the meeting place of these two vaults and their bundles of three ribs, there is a single respond that terminates below the gallery; there is no column at the arcade level. The explanations so far, change of architect or change of model, raise more questions than they answer; nonetheless, thinking through their implications may lead to better ideas.

Students might find it interesting to look at the choir of St-Denis (1140-1144) and the choir of Canterbury (1175-1178) as models for Vézelay; all three choirs were planned as modem additions to older naves that were to be preserved for at least a while. Their Gothic choirs, then, may have been intended as monumental reliquary spaces for the very important relics of St. Denis and his companions, the patron saints of France, for St. Thomas of Canterbury, newly canonized, and for the companion of Christ, Mary Magdalene.

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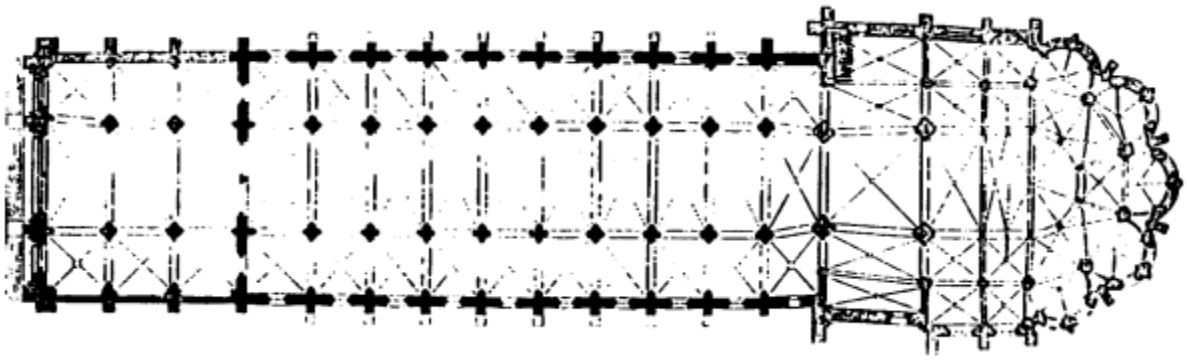
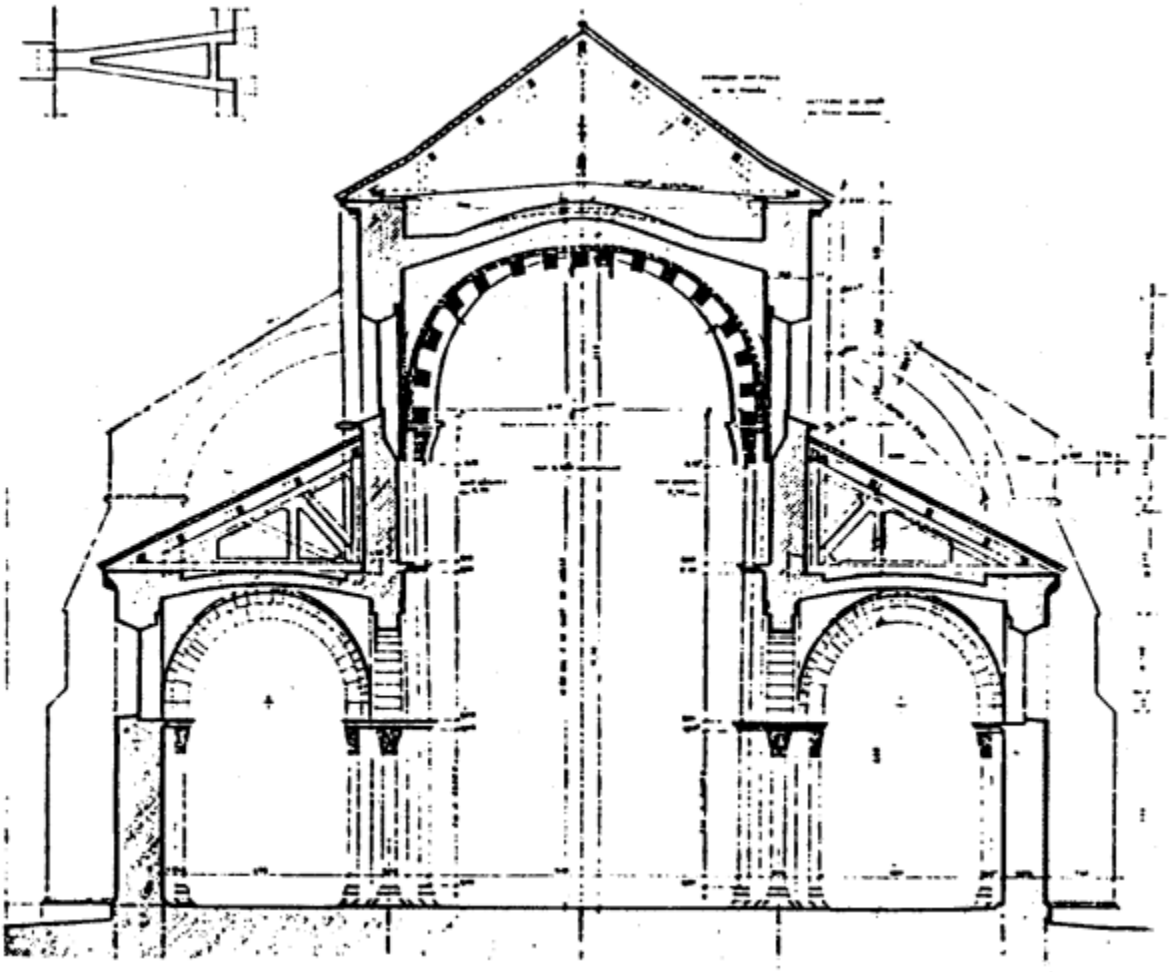
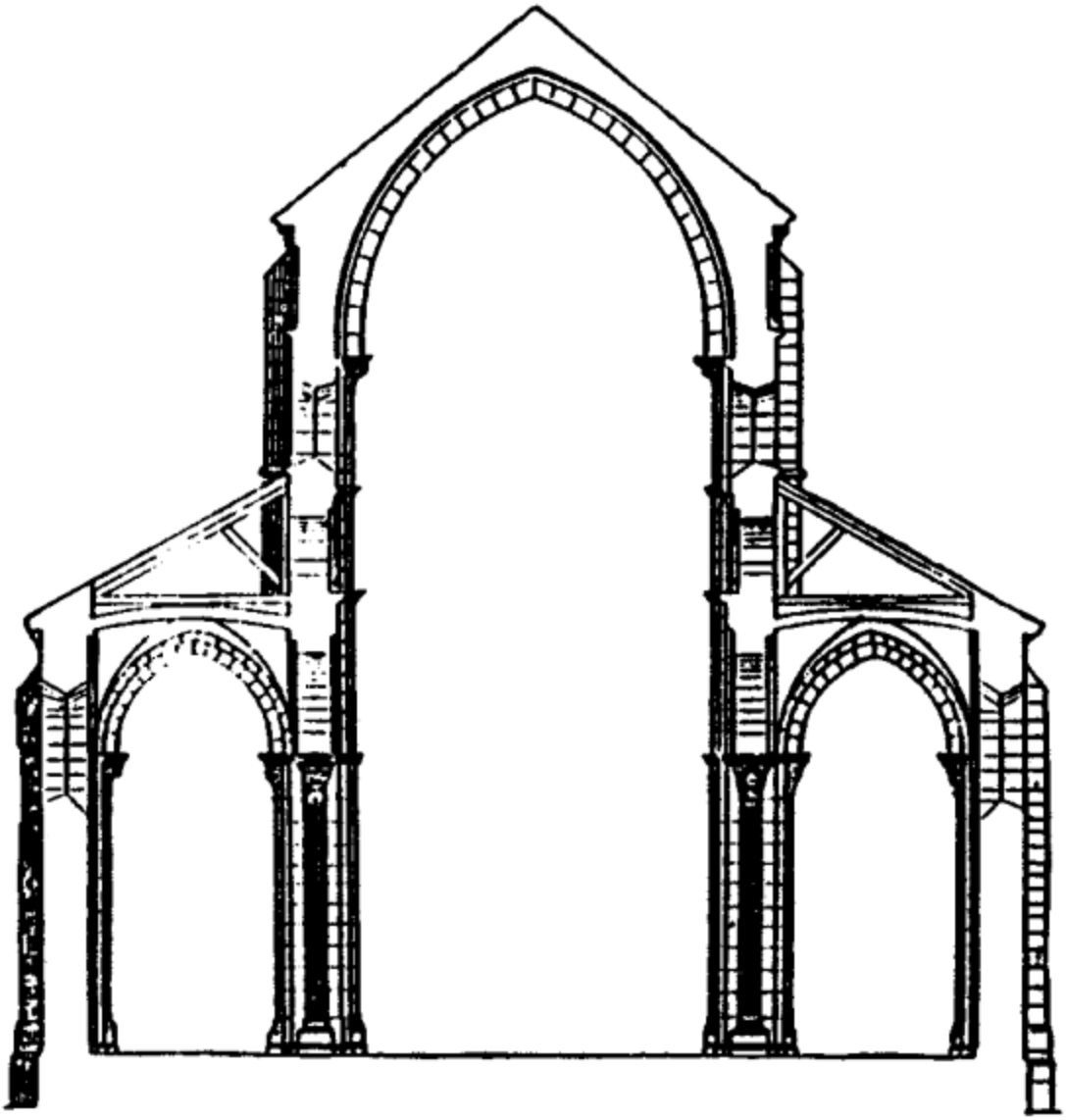


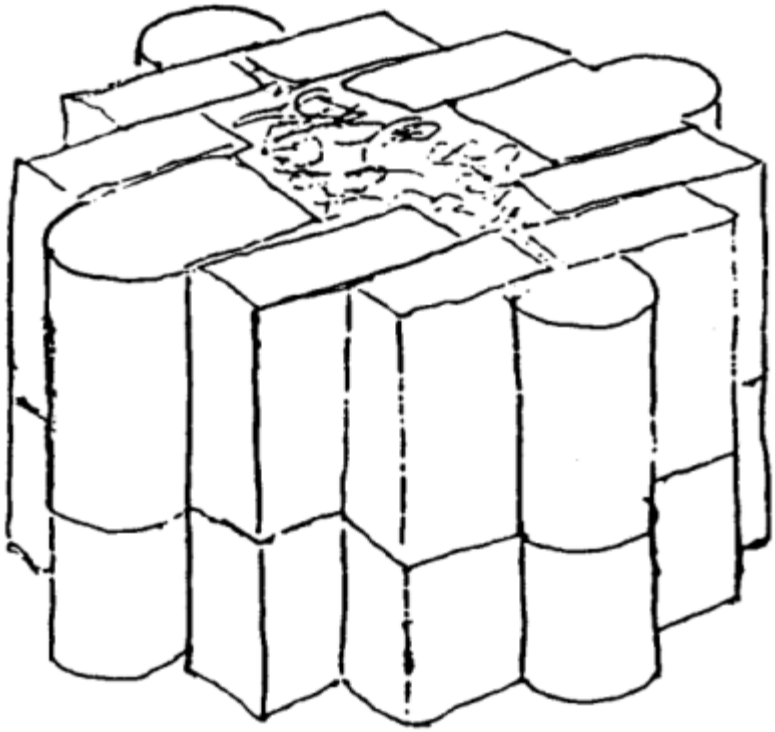
1. Plan of Vézelay (after Dehio)



2. Section of Vézelay (Viollet-le-Duc)

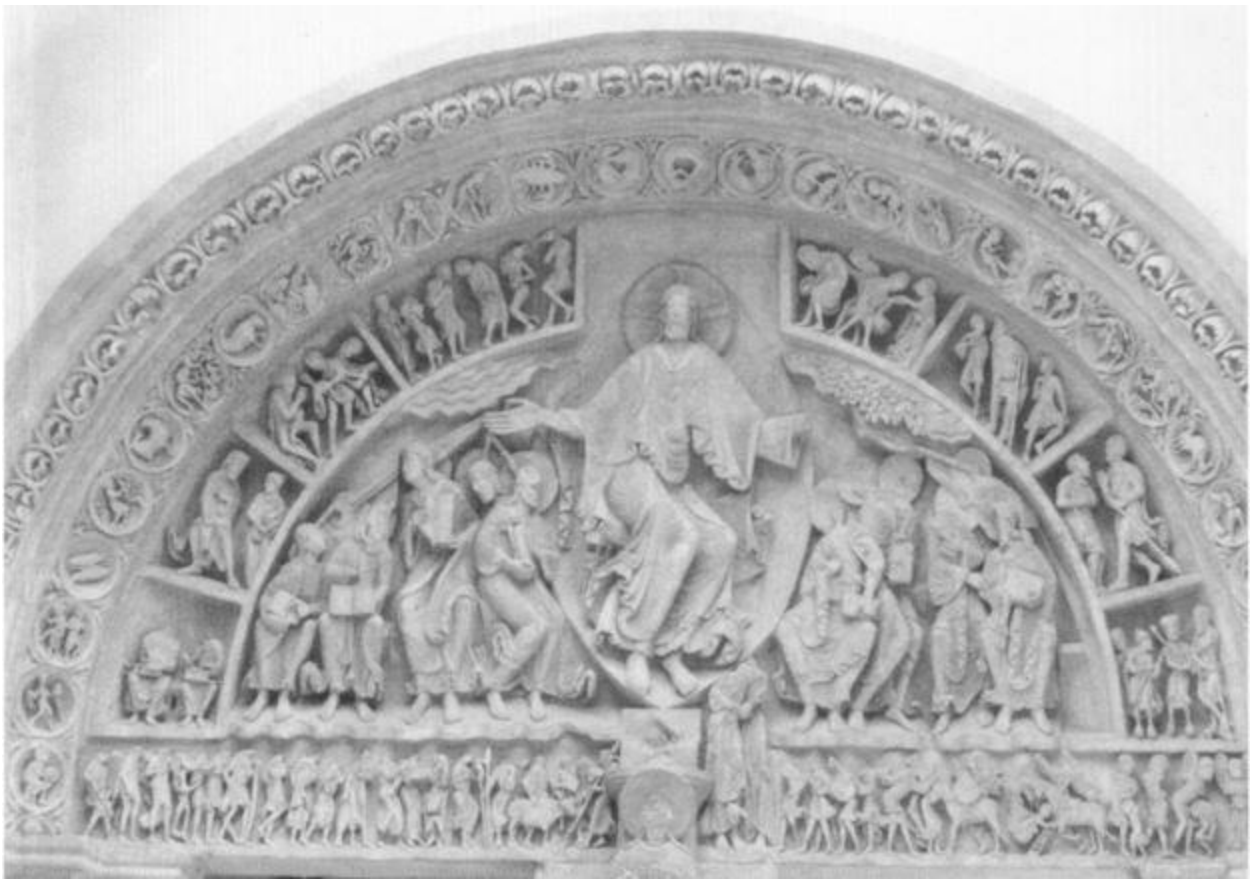


3. Section of Autun (Viollet-le-Duc)



4. Masonry of a pier (after Conant)

5. Nave of Vézelay

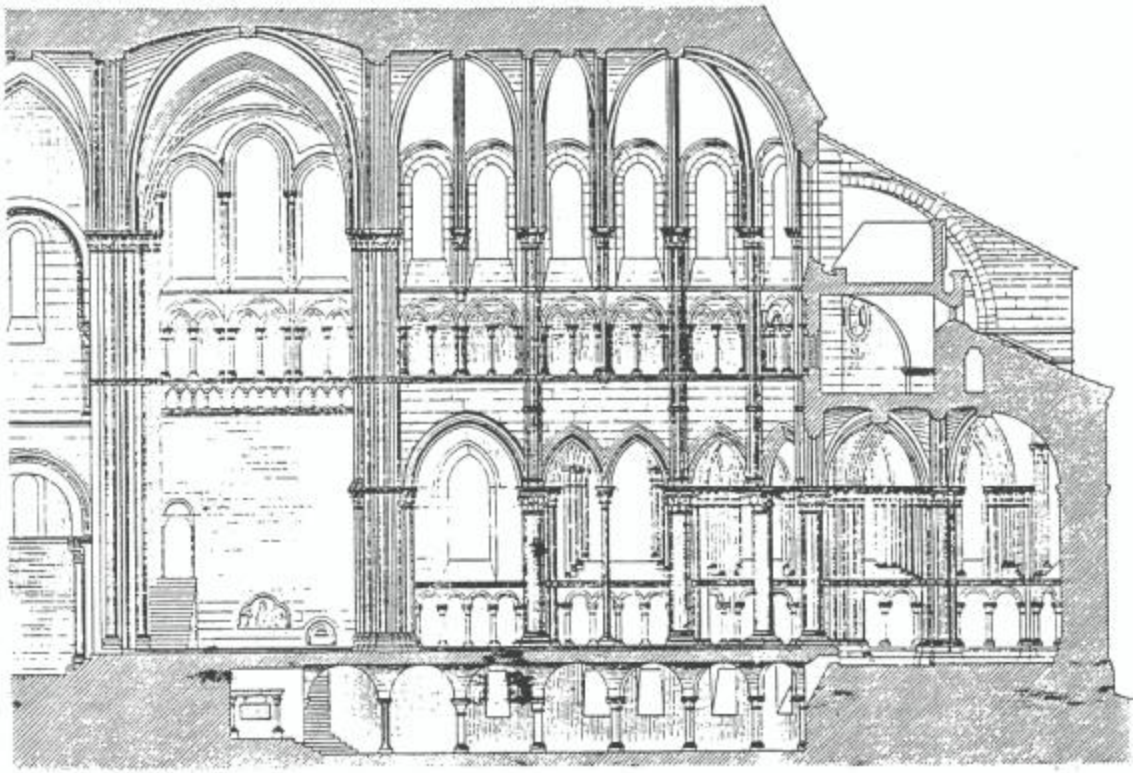


6. Tympanum of the porch: Pentacost

7. Capital: Lust and Despair

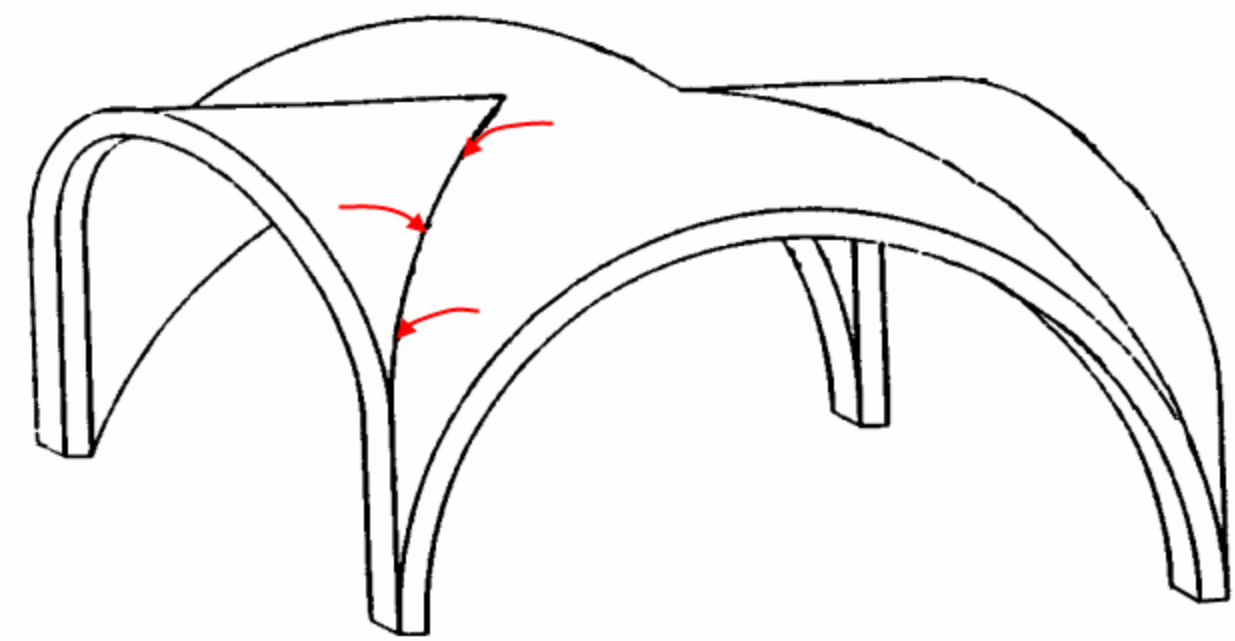
8. Capital: Moses and the Golden Calf
[Wikimedia.org - File:Vézelay Nef Chapiteau 230608 17.jpg]

9. Choir and Sanctuary

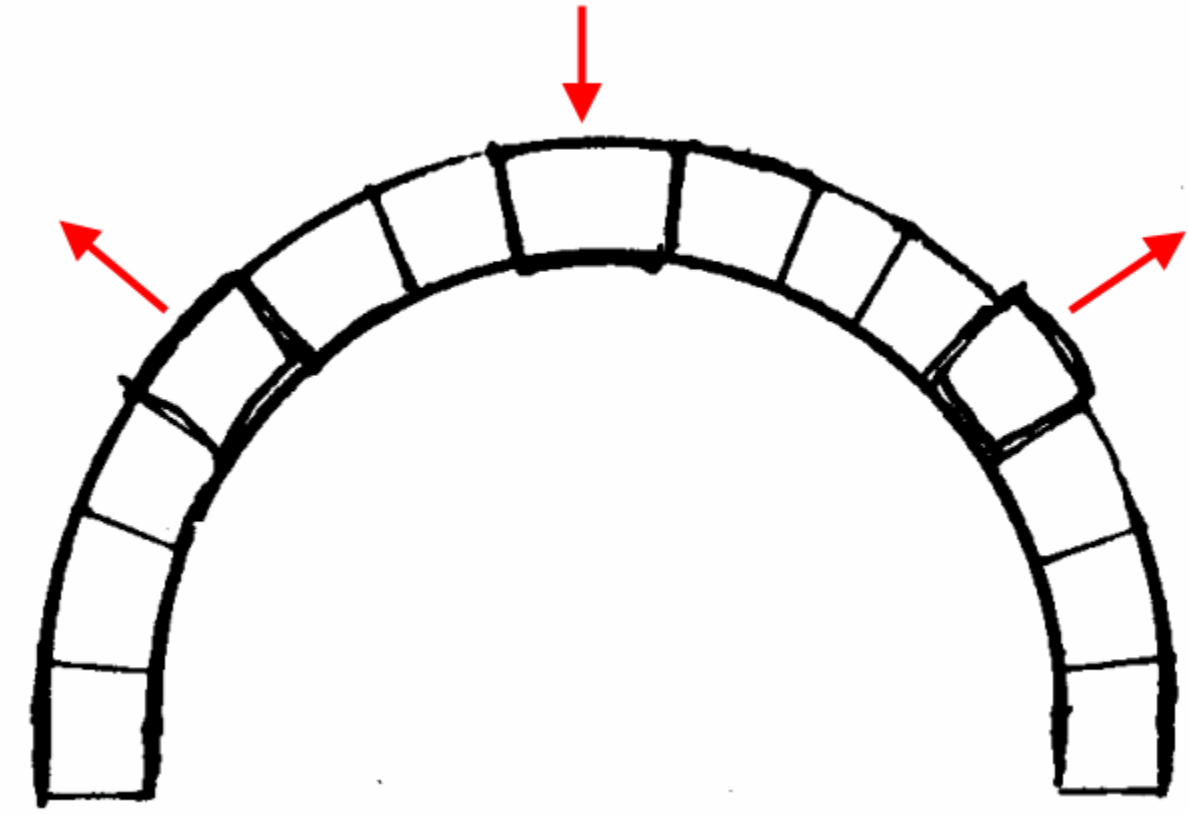


10. Longitudinal section of the choir (Dehio)

11. Choir exterior



12. Diagram of the original groin vault design of Vézelay, showing forces



13. Diagram of an arch, showing forces