

Jana Černocká – Moissac: a Sacred Space on the Borders of Social Groups

Jana Černocká's thesis is an interesting monographic study of the abbey of Saint Peter in Moissac, in particular of the sculptures of the cloister and of the bell tower and the related sculpted portal. Not only does it synthesize and enhance different and complex sets of problems – architectural, archaeological, historical, and decorative – related to it, but it also suggests new hypotheses about aspects that have never been discussed so far by scholars. Beginning with an accurate chapter on the state of the research, Jana Černocká initially puts forward the issues encountered by archaeologists and art historians as well as the different methodologies and instruments used by them. Issues that have received great attention and, on the contrary, the historiographical "holes" are clearly defined in this chapter.

The following two chapters deal respectively with the question of the original appearance of the monastery and the changes occurred within the many restoration or renovation campaigns, as well as problems related to the chronology of the structures examined. From Chapter 5 onwards (there is a problem with the numbering of the chapters in the summary) Jana Černocká's thesis really gets to the heart of the art-historical issues. The reading of the cloister capitals in Chapter 6 is convincing, in which it distances itself from the most widespread theses that, despite the heterogeneity of the motifs and themes depicted, seek an unambiguous reading involving the totality of the sculptures. The hypothesis that the iconographic *varietas* served to constitute "a sophisticated system creating a chain of associations that is activated by the movement of human bodies and the activities associated with the functioning of this space" is an innovative idea that shows all the limits of the application of the concept of programme to medieval artworks. The analysis of the space of Moissac's bell tower and the iconography of the portal in a funerary-eschatological key is also persuasive, even if the idea of an association with a heavenly Jerusalem appears, in my opinion, a little forced; as does the deduction, on a comparative basis, that the chapel was dedicated to the archangel Gabriel. The frequency of such a dedication in other related contexts, near and far, is not an argument strong enough to affirm that it was the same case in Moissac. The absence of Michael in the portal sculptures seems to me to be a decisive proof in this respect. Precisely with regard to the decoration of the portal, I believe that the discussion of the theophany could have been further corroborated by relying more on Krüger's studies on Cluniac galileas: although in Moissac one does not necessarily have to deal with a galilea strictly speaking, the scholar's reflections on the origins of term "galilea" and on the function of the place would have allowed to further deepen the reflection. That said, it is undeniable that Jana Černocká's work is excellent. She succeeds in constructing a persuasive discourse, well structured and clearly expressed. Her analyses and reflexions have been carefully carried out and display remarkable skills and maturity while having a good command of some of the art historian's methodological instruments. This thesis shows engagement and a deep knowledge of the monument, of the specific literature about it and of the historical setting of the abbey of Moissac. Overall, Jana Černocká's thesis is a purposeful work that enable to develop new reflexions about the use of sacred space by different categories of different communities.

Final judgement: A

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