

The Biron Master and His Workshop¹

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HIGH ABOVE THE PLATEAU south of the Dordogne valley in southwestern France stands the château of Biron, rude, warlike, and feudal (Figure 1), the seat of the most ancient and one of the most important baronies of Périgord. This stronghold belonged to the Gontaut family, for whom the sword had always been more than a symbol of rank, and whose stern motto was *PERIT SED IN ARMIS* ("He perishes but only in arms"). Of Gascon origin, fiery in temperament and bold and resourceful in maintaining its rights and privileges in the turbulent world of the times, the family

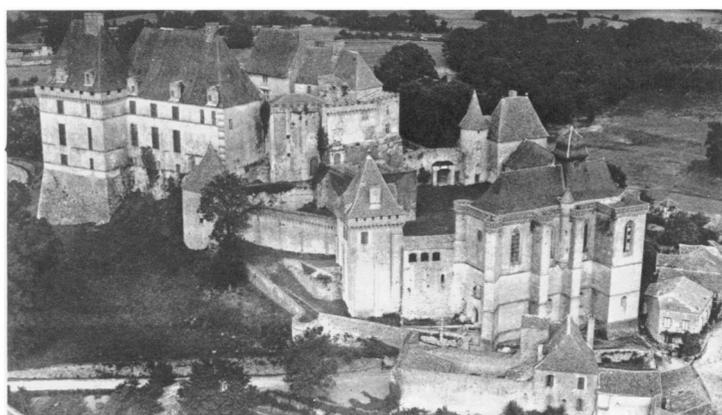
has had its share of famous men. Two of its doughty seigneurs, Armand and Charles de Gontaut, each in succession a marshal of France, were stormy figures in sixteenth-century French history.

It is about Pons de Gontaut, seigneur of Biron and grandfather of the first Maréchal de Biron, and about Pons' younger brother Armand, bishop of Sarlat, that we are here concerned, and in particular about the remarkable series of sculptures that Pons and Armand had made for the seigneurial chapel of the château, a chapel founded by Pons. These sculptures include a Pietà group, showing the Virgin holding the dead Christ in her lap, flanked by kneeling figures of Pons and Armand; a monumental group representing the Entombment of Christ; and the tombs of the two brothers.

Paul Vitry was the first in modern times to recognize the importance of the sculptures and to extol their high quality. His article, modest though it is, set the pace for their subsequent study.² Pierre Pradel, who until recently occupied Vitry's former chair as Curator-in-chief of the European sculpture department at the Louvre, has shown an intuitive understanding of the sources of their style, although he has made no particu-

FIGURE 1

Château of Biron, showing, at right, the seigneurial chapel built upon the village church (photo: Ray-Delvert, Editions Aériennes CIM Combier)



1. Some of this material is presented in abbreviated form in my book *The Entombment of Christ: French Sculptures of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970) pp. 114–122, figs. 160–180.

2. Paul Vitry, "Les Sculptures du château de Biron," *Les Arts* 3 (March, 1904) pp. 8–19.

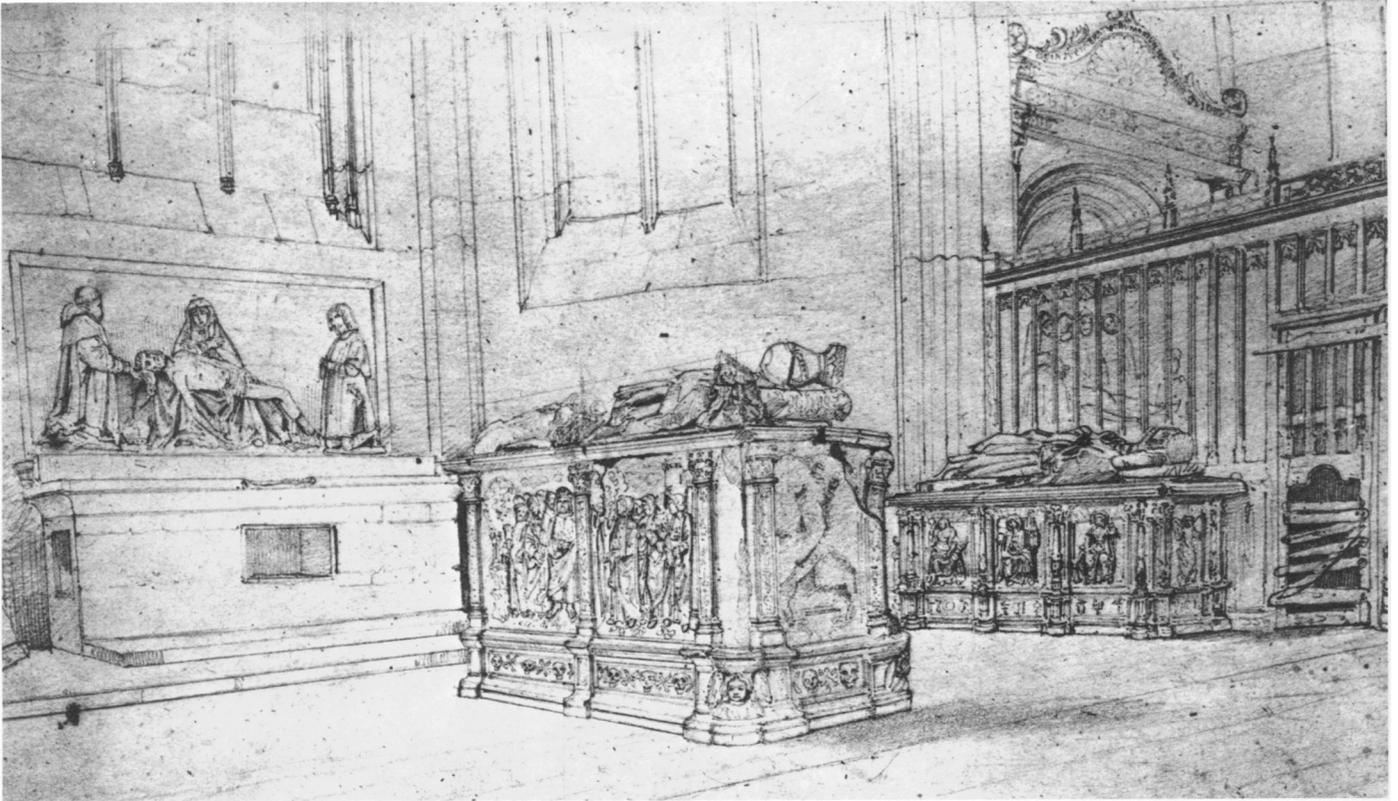


FIGURE 2

Drawing of the interior of the chapel, 1847, by Léo Drouyn (property of the Société Historique et Archéologique du Périgord). The Pietà at the left, above the main altar, the tomb of Pons de Gontaut before it, the tomb of Armand de Gontaut at the right, and the Entombment visible in the side chapel beyond the wood screen (photo: courtesy Jean Secret)

lar study of the sculptures themselves.³ The present study must begin with an acknowledgment of debt to both these writers; it will attempt to sharpen and amplify their observations as they apply to the Biron sculptures.⁴

A drawing of the interior of the chapel made in 1874 shows the four sculptures as they then were (Figure 2). Both the chapel and the sculptures suffered damage

during the Revolution, and by 1839 the building was in such a state that a local art historian predicted its ruin.⁵ Eventually, two of the sculptures, the Pietà and the Entombment, were sold by the proprietor; in 1907 these were acquired by J. Pierpont Morgan, who in that year placed them on loan in the Metropolitan Museum. In 1916 his son J. P. Morgan gave them to the Museum in his father's name as one of a series of

3. Pierre Pradel, *Michel Colombe: Le dernier imagier gothique* (Paris, 1953) p. 105, attributes the Entombment to a Touraine workshop. On the basis of the detail photographs I showed him of our sculptures, he now perceives a more direct connection to Bouronnais.

4. I acknowledge here the many kindnesses of Professor Paul Roudié of Bordeaux in facilitating my investigations.

5. See l'Abbé Audierne, "Notice sur les églises du département de la Dordogne," *Bulletin Monumental* 1 (1834) pp. 197-198, and

"Rapport des monuments du moyen-âge et de la renaissance dans le département de la Dordogne," *Bulletin Monumental* 5 (1839) p. 347; also "Quelques souvenirs sur le château de Biron," *Annales agricoles et archéologiques de la Dordogne* 3 (1842) p. 367; 4 (1843) p. 38. After World War II the French government, through its Service des Monuments Historiques, completed an extensive restoration of the fabric of the chapel. F. Tétard-Anne, "Le château de Biron," *L'Information d'histoire de l'art* 12, no. 5 (1967) pp. 224-227.

great donations that were to form the core of the Medieval Department.⁶ (This Morgan donation is not to be confused with a later acquisition by the Museum of drawings from the collection of the Marquis de Biron, who was apparently the same person who had sold the sculptures.⁷)

The two other sculptures, the tombs, have remained in the chapel. They are later in date than the Pietà and the Entombment, and at first glance they seem to be too different in style to be related to them.⁸ However, a close examination reveals that beneath their differences all the Biron sculptures are interrelated, having similar figural proportions, stylistic motifs, and details of drapery and ornament. Moreover, there is a continuity that can be traced from sculpture to sculpture. In this tracing one sees in miniature the evolution from Gothic to Renaissance in France, reflected in one workshop active in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. "Gothic" did not become "Renaissance" overnight in one sudden transformation; it evolved in a successive number of little changes such as occurred in the Biron workshop. Part of the gap in continuity between the Pietà and the Entombment and the two later tombs is bridged by three other sculptures in southwest France that show that the Biron Master and his workshop were active in the region. These are a Deposition-Pietà, originally from the church of the Cordeliers in Rodez, now reposing above a side altar of the small church at Carcenac near Salmiech; a Pietà at Rodelle near Rodez; and an Entombment at Bordeaux.⁹ All of these will be discussed further on.

Pons de Gontaut, the founder of the chapel, fell heir to the barony of Biron on the death of his father, Gaston. Prisoner of the English for forty years, Gaston is said to have sent word to all his captains not to yield

an inch of land "though the English cut off his head before the portals of one of his places."¹⁰ As a soldier, Pons fought for Charles VIII in Brittany, and in 1495 accompanied him on his Italian expedition where he was wounded at the battle of Fornovo. As a courtier, he served as gentleman-in-waiting to Charles, and then as his councilor, maître d'hôtel, and royal écuyer-tranchant.¹¹ Pons was twice married, first in 1489 to Madeleine de Rochechouart, daughter of Marguerite d'Amboise, and after her death to Marguerite de Faubournet de Montferrand.¹²

In 1495, while in Italy, Pons, accompanied by his brother Armand, obtained a bull from the Borgia pope Alexander VI authorizing him to demolish the old parish church of Saint Michel at Biron "because it was small and inconvenient," and to build a new church as well as a new chapel, the latter to be dedicated to "Notre-Dame de Pitié" and to be served by six vicars.¹³ The church was for the parishioners whose houses clustered at the base of the château, while the chapel, built on top of the church, was included within the precincts of the château and was entered from its lower courtyard. The common outer wall of church and chapel was also the outer wall of the château, and, taken together, the two structures occupied a strategic position in the château's defense works. They were part of the reconstruction program that followed the Hundred Years War, during which the château suffered considerable damage. The chapel's semimilitary aspect is suggested by the openwork coping around the top, serving as a parapet for the sentry walk behind it.

It is uncertain when the chapel was completed.¹⁴ The château's archives were burnt in a fire in 1539 and only secondary sources remain.¹⁵ A summary of titles of the missing archives, made in 1792, contains an

6. Roger E. Fry, "Sculptures from the château de Biron," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (1908) pp. 134-140; Joseph Breck, *The Pierpont Morgan Wing: A Handbook* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1929) pp. 132-136; Joseph Breck, *Catalogue of Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance Sculpture* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1913) nos. 156, 157; James J. Rorimer, "Recent reinstallations of medieval art," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (1948) pp. 199-206.

7. J. Byam Shaw, "The Biron Collection of Venetian Eighteenth-Century Drawings at the Metropolitan Museum," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 3 (1970) p. 237, note 5.

8. Vitry, "Les Sculptures," pp. 8-19, and Paul Vitry and Gaston Brière, *Documents de sculpture française: Renaissance*, première partie (Paris, 1911).

9. These sculptures are briefly discussed by Jacques Bousquet in "Le Problème de l'originalité de l'école de sculpture languedocienne à la fin de l'époque gothique," *L'Information d'histoire de l'art* 13, no. 5 (1968) pp. 208-222.

10. Countless such tales cluster about members of this famous family, some based on fact and some doubtless legendary.

11. F. A. A. De La Chenaye-Desbois and Badier, *Dictionnaire de la noblesse* IX (Paris, 1866) pp. 418-419.

12. Anselme, *Histoire* IV, pp. 124, 125; VI, p. 303.

13. For documents relating to the founding of the chapel, see Appendix.

14. Vitry, "Les Sculptures," p. 13, gives 1524 as the year of the chapel's consecration; this, however, is the year of Pons' death.

15. Tétard-Anne, "Le château," p. 224.

extract taken from a lost procès-verbal of June 20, 1499, which reports that the demolishing and rebuilding of the parish church of Biron then “was done.” Although there is no specific mention here that the chapel had then also been completed, its completion must have at least been expected in the near future since the lost document also recorded the statutes Pons enumerated for the vicars of the chapel to follow. One can be sure that Pons and Armand would have seen to it that work on the chapel was begun and carried out as soon as possible after the completion of the parish church that served as its substructure. Camille Enlart, without quoting his source, gives 1501 as the year of its completion;¹⁶ this date is a plausible one, to judge by the flamboyant architecture of the chapel. When the chanoine Tarde, writing in the seventeenth century,¹⁷ gave 1515 as the year when the canons of the Biron chapel began to hold services in their chapel “newly built and endowed by Pons de Gontaut,” he must have been referring to a bull of Leo X, issued in 1519, authorizing the establishment of a college of canons at Biron, and not to the date of the construction of the chapel. It is likely that the six vicars mentioned in the 1499 document had been replaced by the college of canons authorized by the pope. It is inconceivable that Pons de Gontaut would have allowed twenty years to elapse before finishing his new chapel, since its building was obviously his principal interest. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Leo’s bull for the establishment of the college of canons was issued in the same year that Armand retired from the bishopric of Sarlat and was made titular archbishop of Nazareth. Was the pope’s action both to honor Armand further in his retirement at Biron and to please Pons? And did Armand facilitate matters by supplying extra funds for this new foundation from the revenues of the see of Sarlat, which it is known he reserved for his own use at his retirement?

The bull of 1495 stipulated that Armand and the abbot of Cadouin were to supervise the demolishing and rebuilding of the church. Since the abbot of Cadouin was reported to be old and weak, the supervision must have fallen entirely into Armand’s willing hands. The record shows that Armand took great

pleasure in such building. For example, he rebuilt the church of Issigeac “d’un seul jet” and proudly placed his initials on each of its piers. He also erected the château of Bannes, an imposing structure on a well-chosen site not too far from Biron. Another château, at Rosan, occupied by a niece, apparently bore over its entrance the arms of the Gontauts (now mutilated) topped by episcopal insignia.¹⁸ Further, Armand boldly tore down his cathedral church at Sarlat with the intention of putting up a more worthy edifice. His epitaph, placed near his tomb by Jean de Gontaut, his nephew and heir, calls him “repairer of shrines” and “builder of imperishable temples to God.” Armand’s personal interest in Biron is proven by the fact that he retired there after giving up his bishopric. One cannot, of course, discount the part that Pons must have played as the founder of the chapel, but the place of honor in the Pietà group, which Armand’s statue occupies, where he is represented holding the head of Christ, was probably not merely a courtesy due the episcopal rank of the younger brother but also an acknowledgment of the responsibilities he bore in the construction of the chapel.

Armand was no cloistered churchman but an eager and ambitious prelate who won possession of his episcopal see of Sarlat only after a six years’ struggle. The temper of the man was already manifest in 1485, when Armand seized the church of Capdrot in his future diocese to prevent the election of another man as archpriest, a post Armand coveted for himself. Seven years later, at the death of his uncle Pierre de Salignac, bishop of Sarlat, the king appointed Armand as bishop, but the canons of the cathedral opposed his election and stubbornly sought to maintain their privilege of choosing their own bishop. Armand fought for his office against four other candidates of the cathedral chapter who appealed against him in court after court, ecclesiastical and civil, in Bordeaux, Périgueux, Cahors, and even in Rome and Paris. The contest was also fought out on home ground, the bishop’s residence in Sarlat changing hands several times in the course of the struggle. The matter was finally settled by a royal decree enforcing the rights of Armand, the “aimé et

16. Camille Enlart, *Manuel d’archéologie française. Architecture Civile* II, 1 (Paris, 1929) p. 73, note 1.

17. *Les Chroniques de Jean Tarde, chanoine théologique et vicaire*

général de Sarlat . . . Annotés par le Vicomte G. de Gérard (Paris, 1887). See also *Gallia Christiana* II (Paris, 1720) cols. 1520–1523.

18. Paul Roudié showed me this château.

féal conseiller” of the king. When Armand was at last consecrated bishop in 1498, it was not at Sarlat but at Limoges, after which he took “peaceful possession” of his see, to use the phrase of the chronicler Jean Tarde, who recounts the whole lively story in some detail.

When Armand resigned his see in 1519 and became titular archbishop of Nazareth, the “episcopal fruits” he kept included benefices of the wealthy deanery of Issigeac, whose church he had rebuilt. So complete was Armand’s control of these benefices that the four bishops who succeeded him had no revenues from their office on which to live.

The chapter of Sarlat won a last victory over Armand in 1530 when the Parlement of Bordeaux condemned him to pay an annual fine of 660 livres for the “reparation” of the “degradations under his episcopate” that the cathedral church had suffered. In 1504 Armand had had the old church torn down, and he never finished its rebuilding. The victory of the canons in 1530, turned out to be an empty one, for Armand died a year later.

One suspects that the question of Armand’s candidacy must have been brought to the pope’s attention when the papal bull of 1495 appointed him one of the two commissioners to see to the construction of the chapel at Biron. Since he had no scruples about holding onto his episcopal benefices after his retirement, it hardly seems likely Armand would have hesitated, while bishop, to use such funds for the family chapel. His active interest in the building program of the chapel is indicated by his appointment of the prior Jean de Plamon as overseer of the work. Jean may have been related to Guillaume Planon, dean of the chapter of Sarlat, and perhaps an ally of Armand’s who laid the first stones of the new cathedral begun by Armand in 1505.

THE BIRON PIETÀ

The earliest of the Biron sculptures is the Pietà, whose Italian term for the sorrowing Virgin and dead Christ can be translated into French as Notre-Dame de Pitié and into English as Our Lady of Pity, or sometimes as Our Lady of Sorrows. The group (Figures 3, 4) is of historical interest because of the kneeling figures flanking it. The armed knight at Christ’s feet, his missing hands once held palm to palm in prayer, is obviously

Pons de Gontaut, the founder of the chapel (Figure 6). The sculptor has taken considerable pains to make a convincing image of Pons in his military gear. On top of his coat of mail he wears a tabard; the hilt and part of the scabbard of his sword are visible through the slit of the tabard, which originally must have been painted with his heraldic colors of red and gold. Pons wears elbow and knee cops with lames of armor plate above and below the knee. A cuisse covers his thigh; sollerets cover his feet. His helmet, an armet à rondelle with camail or neck guard of mail, is on the ground beside him; judging by a hole on its top it once bore a crest.¹⁹

Pons must have had a particular devotion to Notre-Dame de Pitié. Not only did he put his family chapel under her patronage, placing her statue as the cult image on the main altar: on his tomb effigy he is represented wearing the image of a Pietà carved on a medallion below the neck.

On the other side of the Pietà, facing Pons, is his brother Armand, his episcopal robes carved with the same attentive care for detail (Figure 5). He seems to be wearing four garments, plus a short, hooded shoulder cape of the sort used by clergy of rank. His outer garment is a rochet, a pleated garment of fine linen worn by bishops and privileged prelates. Beneath is another vestment enriched by decorative borders or fringes at the neck and on the cuffs. Beneath this again is a heavier garment, seen at the neck, wrists, and feet, decorated with a short, thick fringe that appears to belong to the lining of the garment. Yet a fourth garment seems to be implied at the wrists by the bunching of material, thinly pleated, running in an opposite direction from those of the rochet. The different textures of the garments are suggested by their different types of folds. Armand’s heavily jeweled episcopal miter rests at his feet, and on his right hand are three jeweled rings.

On the stone base beneath the two figures were once set their coats of arms; these were evidently removed during the Revolution.

19. The helmet was knocked off the monument during the Revolution. It was recently placed in its present position beside Pons as a more appropriate place than its previous temporary location on the rock of Golgotha between the Virgin and Pons. However, study of the photo of the Pietà while it was still at Biron (Figure 3) shows that there could not have been room for the helmet except in the cut-out area directly upon the rock.

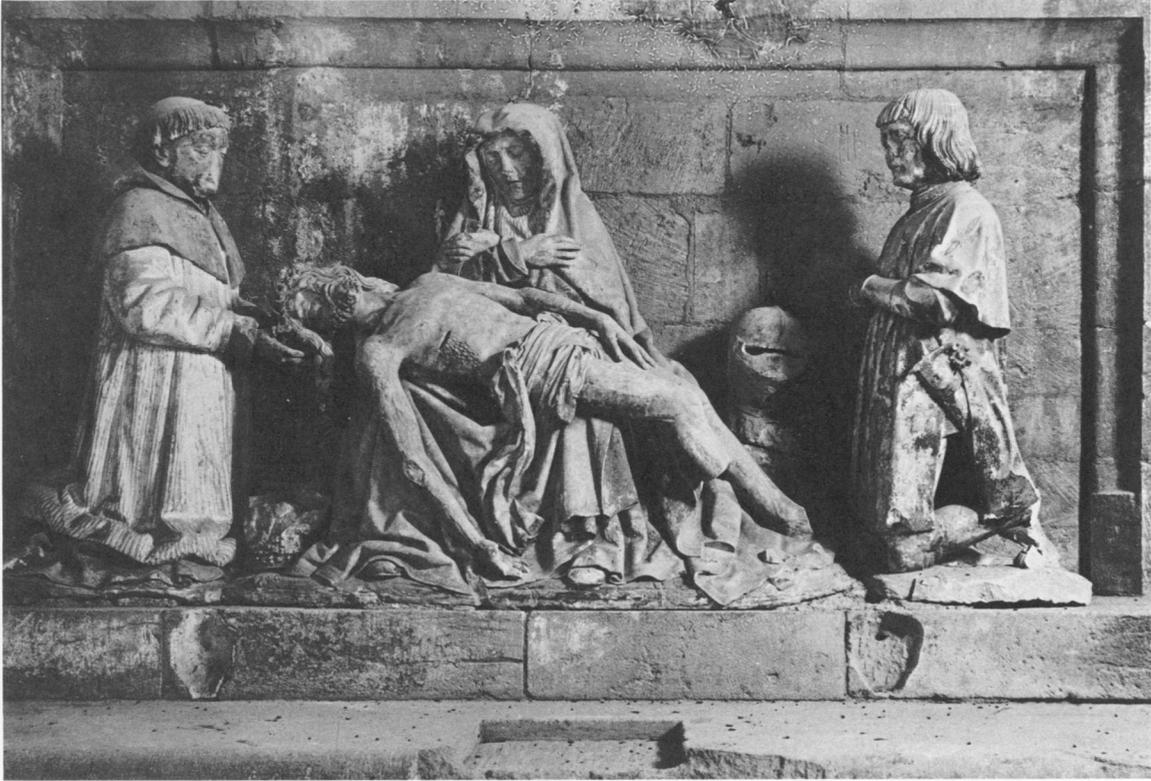


FIGURE 3
The Pietà in situ. The figures are slightly less than life-size (photo: Sauvanaud, courtesy Jean Taralon)

FIGURE 4
The Pietà in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 16.31.1





FIGURE 5
Armand de Gontaut



FIGURE 6
Pons de Gontaut

Although the faces of the kneeling brothers were damaged during the Revolution, photographs taken at Biron before their restoration show enough of the original surface remaining to indicate that they did not have the generalized expressions still common to religious sculptures of the period; on the contrary, they were represented as distinct individuals. Pons is clearly the older man, his flesh gently sagging below the line of his cheekbone and at his jaw. There is also a slight droop to his lower eyelids, and the lids have deeper folds beneath them than do his brother's. His features are consistent with the downward tilt of his head, which may reflect the beginning of a stoop.

The André brothers of Paris, the skilled restorers who took charge of the dismantling of the sculptures,²⁰ probably were the repairers of the faces and may have

been justified in reconstructing Pons' mouth with its melancholy droop at the corners. Here was a man who was possibly still suffering from wounds received at the battle of Fornovo, a few years before the statue was carved, and who was perhaps weary of the active life he had been leading. The firmer flesh of Armand's face, on the other hand, corresponds to his more alert posture and suggests the vigor and resolution he displayed in his stormy career as bishop and builder.

There is nothing too unusual in finding almost full-scale statues of donors kneeling on either side of the Virgin: such had been known for some time. At Vernou in Touraine the archbishop of Tours and his nephew were so portrayed on a relief from an altar retable.²¹ A kneeling effigy figure of Louis XI was made on a relief in 1472 in gratitude to Saint Michael for the

20. For a summary of the damage to the Pietà and the Entombment, see Appendix.

21. Paul Vitry, *Michel Colombe et la sculpture française de son temps* (Paris, 1901) pp. 81–84 and ills.



FIGURE 7
The Virgin

king's escape from death, and another one, probably in full scale and possibly after a design by Jean Fouquet, was planned for his tomb.²² Fouquet also represented the royal treasurer of France, Etienne Chevalier, kneeling near Christ's tomb and also before the Virgin and Child on two pages of an illuminated manuscript now at Chantilly.²³ Closer still is the donor in the Pietà at Varennes-sur-Tèche, who, like Pons, kneels at Christ's feet (Figure 10).

What distinguishes the Biron Pietà from the others is that Armand not only kneels next to the holy group but supports Christ's head with his hands. In more than two dozen other Pietàs, a number of them also in southwest France, Saint John kneels in this position and removes the crown of thorns while the Magdalen kneels

on the other side at Christ's feet.²⁴ The crown has already discreetly been removed in the Biron sculpture, but Armand's position and his action indicate that he is here replacing the saint. How easy it was to make this substitution can be seen in the Avignon Pietà where the donor kneels full-scale in the foreground just below John, who kneels and removes the crown of thorns while he holds Christ's head with a gesture like Armand's. In the Biron Pietà this composition is simplified by combining the figures of donor and saint and eliminating the saint.

In the center of the group, between Pons and Armand, the Virgin supports the body of Christ in her unusually ample lap. She no longer clutches his body convulsively in the agony of grief, as she usually does in the earlier Pietàs of Germany and eastern France, but allows it to rest quietly upon her lap, her arms crossed in an attitude of pious resignation (Figure 7), an attitude she sometimes also assumes in late Gothic scenes of the Crucifixion.²⁵ The crossed arms are rarely found in Pietàs.²⁶ This acquiescent attitude may reflect the teaching of some medieval theologians that Mary alone of the followers of Christ never wavered, through all the hours of the Passion, in her faith in his resurrection.

The Virgin in the Biron Pietà is represented as sitting upon the rock of Golgotha, as in some other Pietàs of central France and Touraine and Languedoc, and not upon the seat or throne she usually occupies in earlier examples. The shelving, shale-like rock is partly seen at the sides of the Pietà, and it is also discreetly visible beneath her feet and around the bottom edges of her cloak. This rock probably recalls the actual stone of Golgotha shown to fifteenth-century pilgrims in Jerusalem, according to a contemporary pilgrim's guide.²⁷

In other Pietàs related to Biron, the Virgin usually holds her hands together in prayer, and one can safely assume from this that the Biron Pietà is a slight variation of the reflective or praying type frequently found

22. Pradel, *Michel Colombe*, pp. 20, 21; p. 118, note 44.

23. Claude Schaefer, *Das Studienbuch des Etienne Chevalier. Einleitung* (Munich, Vienna, Zurich, 1971) p. 22, pl. 20. English and French editions are also published.

24. In earlier Pietàs two angels sometimes flank the Virgin.

25. In the Crucifixion group by Claus Sluter, which once crowned the well of Moses at Champmol, the Virgin apparently crossed her arms. Later Burgundian Virgins followed this iconog-

raphy. See Georg Troescher, *Die burgundische Plastik des ausgehenden Mittelalters II* (Frankfurt, 1940) pl. 76.

26. Another with crossed arms is at Germigny-des-Près, Orléannais.

27. Breydenbach's *Heyliger Reyssen gen Jherusalem*, printed 1486. W. C. Körte, "Deutsche Vesperbilder in Italien," *Kunstgeschichtliches Jahrbuch*, Bibliotheca Hertziana, I (Rome, 1937) pp. 1-138, cites German and Latin texts of this famous guide.

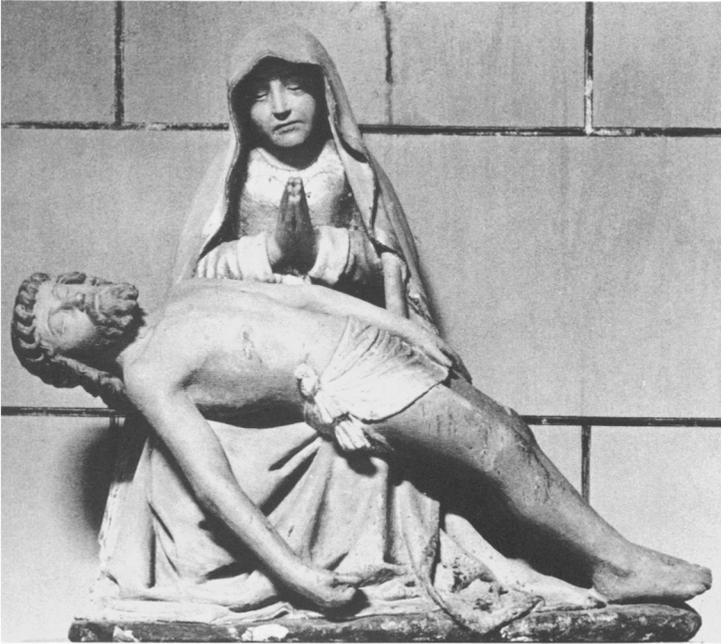


FIGURE 8
Pietà in church at Limeray, Touraine (photo:
Foto Marburg)

FIGURE 9
Pietà in church (former chapel of the château) at
Epoisses, Auxois, Burgundy (photo: Archives
Photographiques)



in central France and the lower Loire valley, a number of these being in Touraine (Figure 8). It has been suggested that the famous painting of the Pietà from Avignon, now in the Louvre, could have been the origin of this type.²⁸ There are doubtless missing or unknown links between paintings and sculptures of Pietàs, but variations in style and posture make these relationships difficult to trace.

The body of Christ, with only a suggestion of rigor mortis, is turned very slightly outward to allow the worshiper a view of the beautifully modeled torso, the limbs slightly flexed to form a subtle composition of parallel lines and arcs. The loincloth is remarkable for its lappet or endpiece, its crumpled creases and swirling curves forming a vivid contrast to the heavier folds of the Virgin's mantle over which it falls. The end of the loincloth had already begun to be a feature of Pietàs in Champagne and Burgundy (Figure 9), but its unusual length on the Biron Pietà is more comparable to the fluttering of loincloths worn by Christ in Flemish paintings of the Crucifixion. The contrasts given by the different folds to the garments of Christ and the Virgin are also seen on the statue of Armand, suggesting the differing materials of his garments. Small but elaborate borders are introduced on the Virgin's cloak and on the lappet of the loincloth. They are even more discreetly used on Armand's sleeves. These touches of elegance become more obvious in the later Entombment group, yet already the characteristics of the Biron Master's style are clear in these and other details as much as they are in the proportions of the figures and the treatment of the drapery.

As a subject, the Pietà seems to have become prevalent in southwest France somewhat later than in the eastern and central parts of the country. Its rising popularity in the southwest may have been facilitated by new contacts with the heart of the old French royal domain whose influence began to be again felt after the end of the Hundred Years War, when closer relations with the north were resumed. The royal province of Touraine, then often the residence of the kings and the seat of government, was an important center for the veneration of Notre-Dame de Pitié. The image was so

28. J. B. Ford and G. S. Vickers, "The Relation of Nuño Gonçalves to the Pietà from Avignon, with consideration of the iconography of the Pietà in France," *Art Bulletin* 21 (1939) pp. 5-43.



FIGURE 10

Pietà in church at Varennes-sur-Tèche, Bourbonnais, with kneeling donor, Hugues de Montjournal, seigneur of Précord, 1494–1508 (photo: La Photothèque)

popular that quite a number of shrines and sculptures were dedicated to Our Lady of Pity, and several monasteries even adopted the Pietà in their coats of arms.²⁹ In the 1470s Louis XI gave funds for a new Carmelite monastery in Tours, “moved by so many miracles which took place in [their old] chapel of our Lady of Pity.” The Carmelites annually gave a medal adorned with a Pietà to a local nobleman, and one can imagine that they must have done the same for Louis XI, their royal patron, who had a penchant for wearing holy badges.³⁰ Georges d’Amboise, first minister of Louis XII and kinsman of Pons’ first wife, also had a seal on which he is shown being presented to our Lady of

Pity.³¹ Pons de Gontaut thus followed illustrious precedents in wearing an image of a Pietà on his tomb effigy and in dedicating his chapel to her.

Strangely enough, the Biron Pietà bears no really close relation to others of southwest France, even to several other praying Pietàs of Toulouse, generally similar to it though these may be in type and even in style. It is completely unlike all the other local sculpture of the Dordogne valley, including the sculpture at Cadouin, a neighboring monastery patronized by the Gontauts, whose abbot was appointed with Armand de Gontaut as a papal commissioner for the building of the chapel at Biron.³² Rather, it can be more directly

29. Chanoine Moussé, *Le Culte de Notre-Dame en Touraine* (Tours, n.d., ca. 1915) gives many instances of this “dévotion si chère aux Tourangeaux”; e.g., pp. 63, 85, 306, 675.

30. Moussé, *Culte*, p. 61.

31. Moussé, *Culte*, p. 306, cites C. J. M. Bonin de la Bonnière, *La Touraine au Petit-Palais: Exposition Internationale de Paris, 1900* (Tours, 1900) as listing this seal. According to Georges Lanfry, Elisabeth Chirol, and Jean Bailly, *Le Tombeau des cardinaux d’Amboise*

(Rouen, 1959) p. 30, note 68, the seal is illustrated in Abbé Toufflet, *Le Millénaire de la Normandie* (Rouen, 1913) p. 4.

32. Paul Roudié, “L’Activité d’un atelier de sculpture dans les vallées de la Dordogne et du Lot,” *La Dordogne et sa région. Fédération historique du Sud-Ouest, Actes du Congrès, 1958* (Bordeaux, 1959) p. 157, fig. 4. I am grateful to M. Roudié for supplying me with offprints of this and other articles.



FIGURE 11

Pietà in church at Jaligny, Bourbonnais, probably given by Guyon de Ravel, seigneur of Jaligny, 1489–1508 (La Photothèque)

associated with a number of Pietàs of the praying type in Touraine and neighboring areas of central France, particularly Bourbonnais. In these, the Virgin sits in an almost vertical position, sometimes on the rock of Golgotha as at Biron, her cloak falling from her head and fanning out on either side of her in long folds reaching to the ground, so that the whole compact composition forms an equilateral triangle. Beneath her mantle the Virgin usually wears a wimple like a nun's. Pietàs of this sort, quite close in style to that of Biron, are found in Touraine at Limeray (Figure 8), Dierre, la Rochère, and Autrèche, and also at Solesmes, a little to the north of Touraine.³³ Still others in central France that are generally similar are at Bourges Cathedral, at Saint Jeanvrin, Chézal-Benoit, and Morlac, all in Berry; at La Chapelle-Rainsouin in Maine; at La Chapelle-Blanche, near Loches in Touraine; two at the Musée

Saint-Jean, Angers, in Anjou; at La Neuville-lès-Decize in Nivernais; at Germigny-des-Près, near Châteauneuf in Orléannais.

A closely related group of Pietàs in the Limousin and in other areas of the southwest show an evolution of this praying type in which Christ is held more diagonally, as he is in the Biron Pietà.

Three Pietàs of the praying type in southern Bourbonnais, at Varennes-sur-Tèche, at Jaligny, and at Montluçon, are extremely close to the Biron Pietà in numerous details of style and in treatment of the drapery and faces (Figures 10–14). However, a few variations in some of the faces and especially in the hands make it advisable not to insist on an attribution directly to the Biron Master before he went south to Biron, but rather to a close colleague of the master.³⁴

33. Vitry, *Michel Colombe et la sculpture*, pp. 64, 65; Moussé, *Culte*, pp. 229, 264, 320.

34. Another Bourbonnais Pietà (in damaged state), so like

the Montluçon Pietà it could have served as its model, is in the Moulins Museum (accession number 885.1.92); see Pradel, *Michel Colombe*, p. 74.

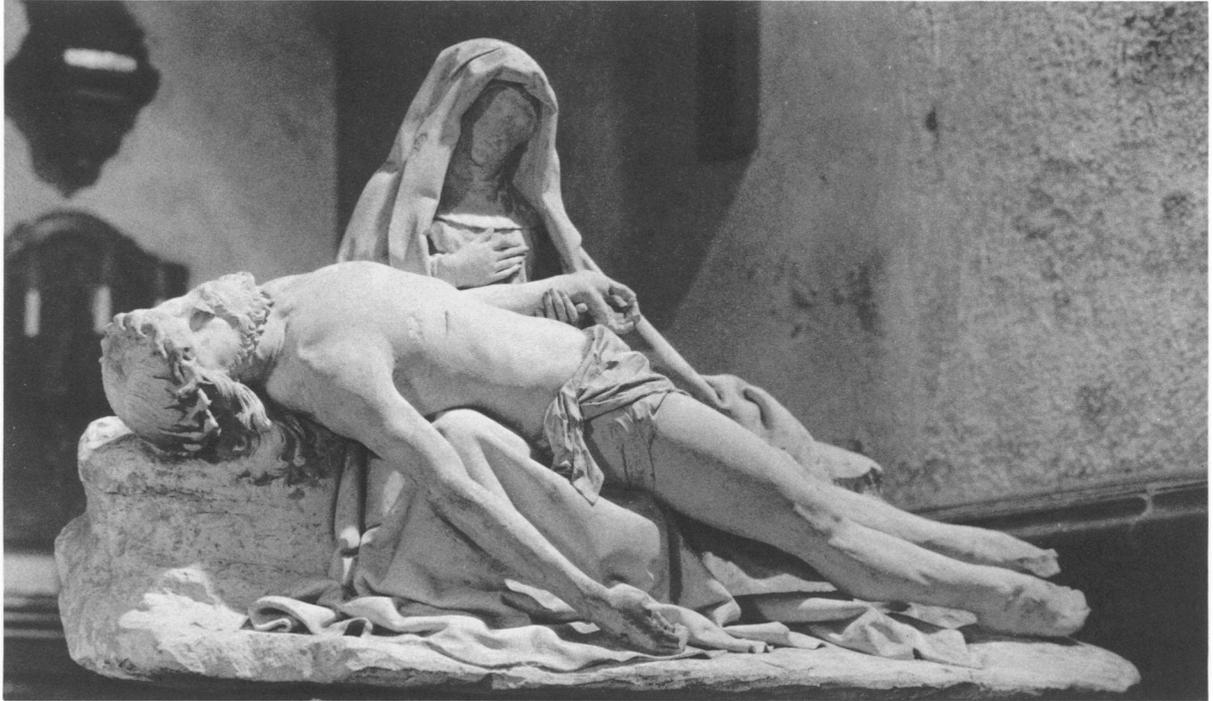
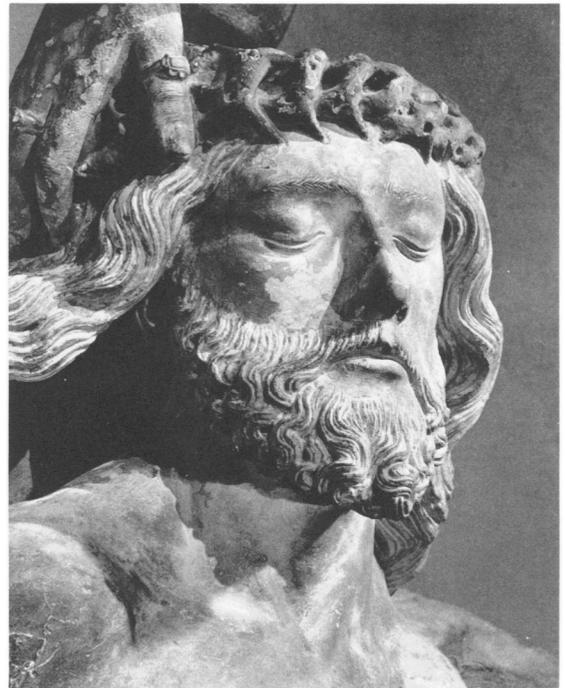


FIGURE 12
Pietà, made about 1500, in church of Saint-Pierre, Montluçon, Bourbonnais (Archives Photographiques)

FIGURE 13
Montluçon Pietà, Christ's head (La Photothèque)



FIGURE 14
Biron Pietà, Christ's head



FIGURES 15, 16

Saints Anne and Peter, by Jehan de Chartres, 1500–03, from château of Chantelle, Berry. Musée du Louvre (La Photothèque)



When one compares the Biron Pietà with two other sculptures from Bourbonnais now in the Louvre, one senses the source that must have inspired the Biron Master's style. These statues of Saint Anne and Saint Peter are from the former château of the dukes of Bourbonnais at Chantelle, and they are the finest sculptures to have survived from the ducal workshops of Pierre II de Bourbon and of his wife, Anne de Beaujeu (Figures 15, 16).³⁵ Anne, the daughter of Louis XI, was with her husband regent of France during the minority of her brother Charles VIII. Pradel

35. See Pradel, *Michel Colombe*, pp. 71–76, pl. 15, and Pierre Pradel, "Le sculpteur Jehan de Chartres et son atelier," *Bulletin Monumental* 104 (1946) pp. 47–62. See also Marcel Aubert and Michèle Beaulieu, *Description raisonnée des sculptures du moyen-âge, de la renaissance et des temps modernes. I Moyen Age*, (Paris, 1950) nos. 405, 406 by Francis Salet; André Michel, "Les Statues de Sainte-Anne, Saint-Paul et Sainte-Suzanne," *Monuments Piot* 6 (1899) pp. 94–105, pls. 8, 9.

has shown that the ducal workshops of Pierre and Anne were presided over by Jean Guilhomet, known as Jean de Chartres, who was the leading sculptor of Bourbonnais after the departure of Michel Colombe, his master, who went to Touraine in the 1480s.

The Biron Pietà is not the equal of the Chantelle sculptures in their quality and masterly execution, but it is remarkably like them in its general drapery style, proportions, and facial type, and especially in the Virgin's soft pudgy hands, which are also found on other sculptures by the master and are not found on the three Bourbonnais Pietàs to which the Biron Pietà is allied. The Virgin of the Biron Pietà wears the same variety of wimple with the same pleated gorget beneath her chin as the Chantelle Saint Anne. These similarities to two of the masterpieces of the Bourbonnais school strongly indicate that the style of the Biron Master must have been formed in Bourbonnais and that it must have evolved from that of Jean de Chartres.

As a "king's man," member of the royal household, and kinsman by marriage of the mighty Amboise family, so close to the crown, Pons de Gontaut must have had easy access to a sculptor who had worked in Bourbonnais, a province closely associated with the royal domain. Another Amboise kinsman of Pons, Guyon de Ravel, was seigneur of Jaligny and may himself have commissioned the Pietà at Jaligny, one of the three in southern Bourbonnais to which the Biron Pietà has already been compared.³⁶

THE BIRON ENTOMBMENT

In contrast to the simpler setting of the Pietà, the Entombment was placed in an *enfeu* or large niche built into the wall of a side chamber beyond a wood screen (Figure 17). The chamber itself forms a small separate chapel where masses for the dead could have been celebrated at an altar directly beneath the *enfeu*. Entombments were usually housed in this way to one side of the main axis of a church. Here the donor and his fam-

ily could be buried if the chapel were large enough.³⁷ It is not that large at Biron, and there was no need for a separate mortuary chamber since the main body of the chapel must have served as a private chapel for the seigneur and his family. Here at the altar of Notre-Dame de Pitié, where the Pietà was placed, masses for the living and the dead could be performed with greater ceremony and space for the participants. Here too was adequate space for burial. Nevertheless, some of the more private funeral masses must have been said at the altar beneath the Entombment.

The use of an Entombment as a mortuary image was almost inevitable in the late Gothic period. To be buried near Christ then seemed to give an assurance of one's own resurrection. The veneration of Christ's tomb, which early had its focus in the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and later also in architectural reproductions of the burial chamber in Jerusalem, came finally in the fifteenth century to be given a new visual form and a new, more personal meaning in the sculptured, almost life-size image of his burial. This new image, an attempt to relate one's own death and burial with Christ's, is well expressed in lines of the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, a popular devotional treatise of the fifteenth century:

O bene Jese, da nobis tuam sepulturam ita venerari,
Ut a te nunquam mereamur in perpetuum separari!
(O good Jesus, help us so to venerate your tomb,
That from you we may never deserve to be separated
through all eternity.)³⁸

In a number of instances Entombments were associated with Pietàs, another image well suited for mortuary purposes, by placing a Pietà immediately above the Entombment niche.³⁹

The niche housing the Biron Entombment was itself enclosed by a richly carved and painted wood frame. Serving to enhance the importance of the sculpture, the frame had another purpose: the support of two large doors, now missing, that could shut off the monument like the wings of an altar retable. The doors must

36. Pradel, *Michel Colombe*, pp. 76, 77, 79.

37. Among Entombments where the donor is recorded as being so interred are those at Langres, Dijon, Chaumont, Tonnerre, Amiens, Folleville (now at Joigny), Bourges, Moissac, Périgueux, Saint-Seine-l'Abbaye, Limoges, Poitiers, Puisieux, Villeneuve-l'Archevêque, Châtillon-sur-Seine, and Le Coudray-Montbault.

38. J. Lutz and P. Perdrizet, *Speculum humanae salvationis. Texte critique. Traduction inédite de Jean Miélot (1448)* I (Mulhouse, 1907) p. 57, cap. XXVII, lines 99–100.

39. Such associations existed at Amiens, Dijon, Doullens, Monestiès-sur-Cérou, Montgé (now at La Treyne), Trier, and Tulle.

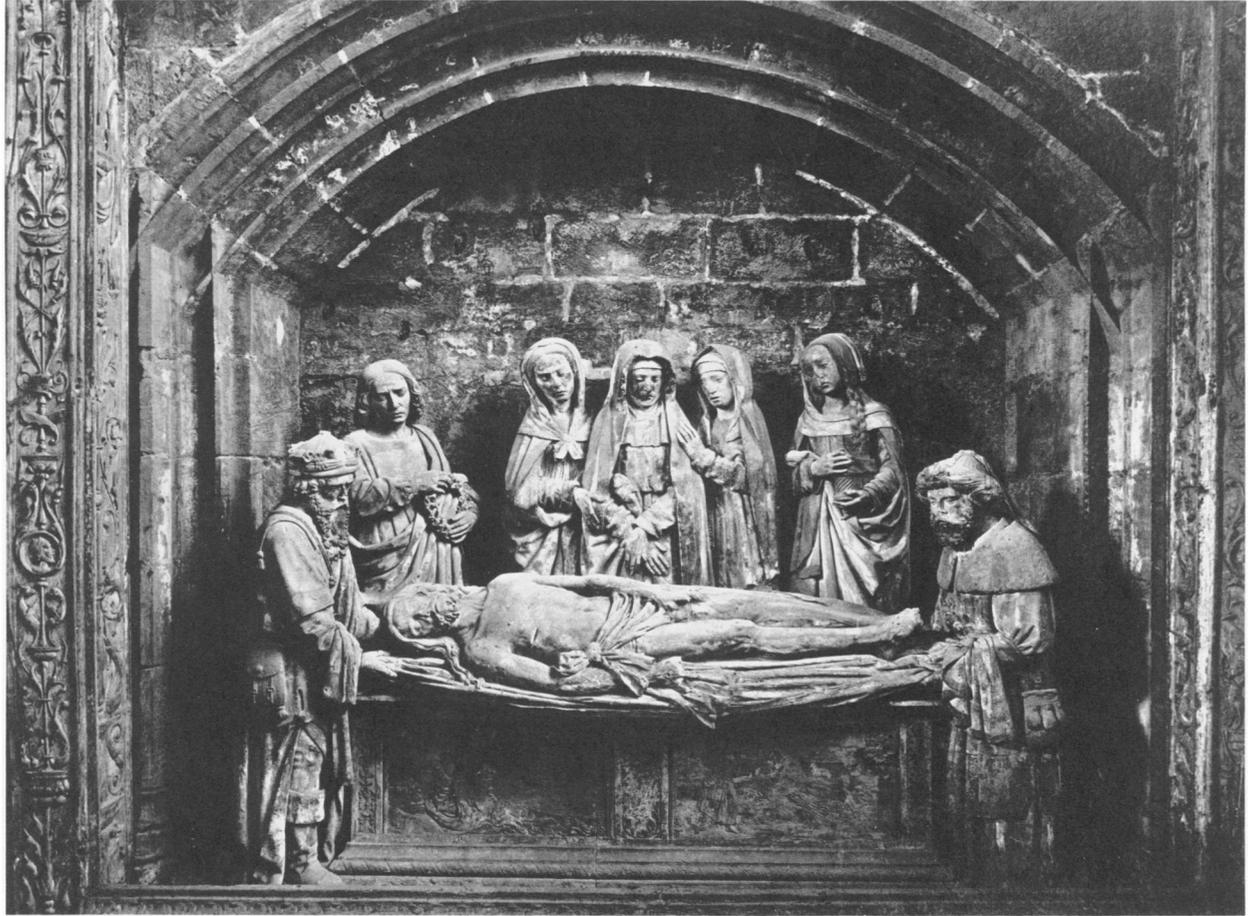


FIGURE 17

The Entombment in situ. The figures are in the same scale as those of the Pietà. Those in the back row, three-quarter length and placed on a stone shelf, are three to three and a half feet high (photo: Sauvnaud, courtesy Jean Taralon)

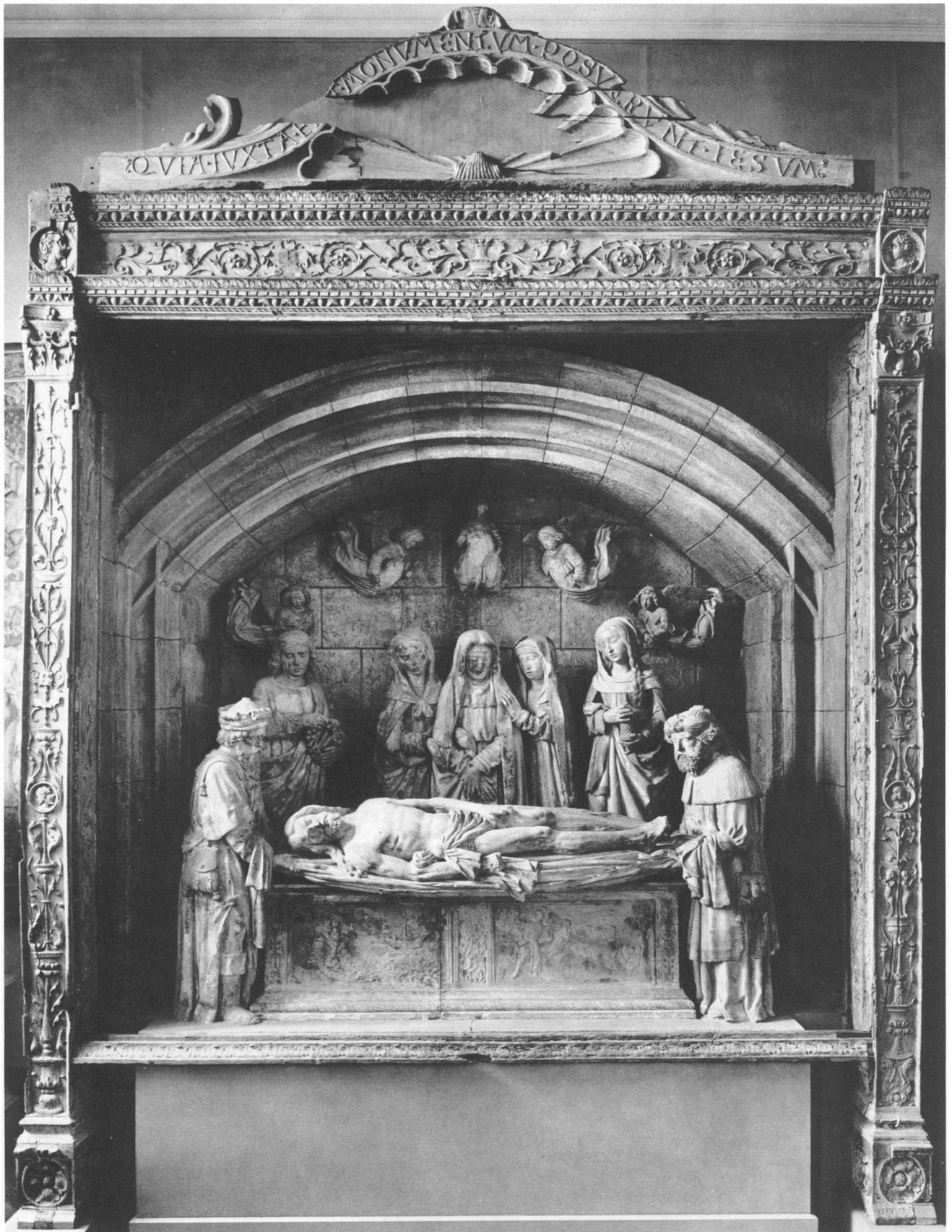
have been as elaborately carved and painted as the frame. Two dowels and four dowel holes remain on the sides of the frame, showing how the doors must have hung, and a slot at the center of the lower horizontal member of the frame and an iron loop in the frame above show how the doors were fastened when closed. The lower beam rested upon the altar, which thus must have borne some of the weight of the doors.

A cast of the original niche was used in the installations of the monument in the Metropolitan Museum (Figures 18, 19),⁴⁰ but lack of space in the present installation made it necessary to omit the graceful pediment that originally crowned the wood frame. The

inscription on the pediment, *QVIA IVXTA MONVMENTVM POSERVNT IESVM* (“[There] they laid Jesus for the sepulcher was nigh at hand”), is from John 19:42.

The niche is contemporary in style with the architecture of the chapel, but the frame was probably added later when the Entombment was installed. Since the figures of Joseph and Nicodemus project beyond the niche onto the back of the altar, and since the two outer angels crowd the space of the back wall, one cannot help feeling that the Entombment group is

40. For data on the original condition of the Entombment, see Appendix.



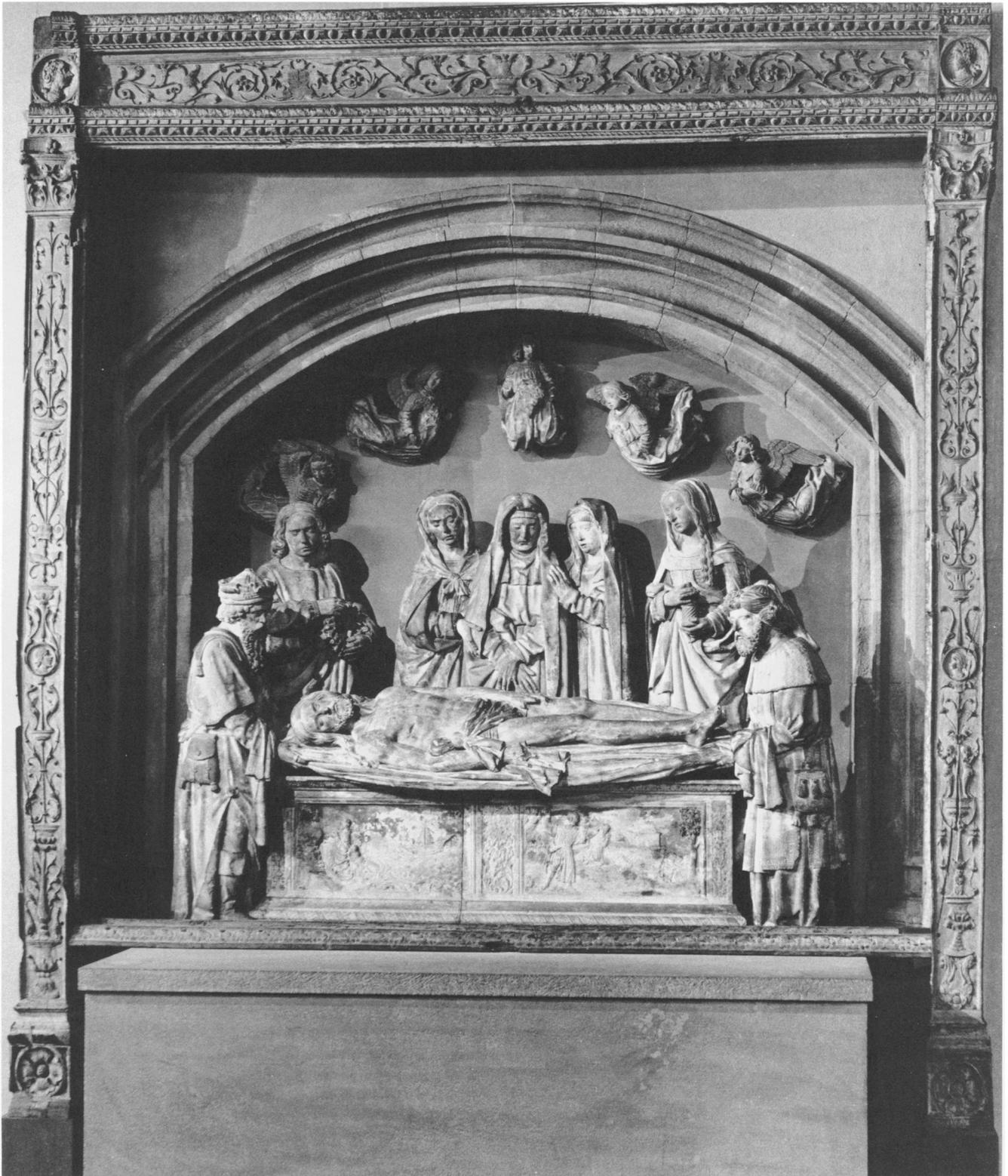
IOVIA IVXTAE

MONUMENTVM POSVIT

ARTISTES VM

FIGURES 18, 19

The Entombment in the Morgan Wing, Metropolitan Museum, 1916, and as installed today. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 16.31.2



bigger than planned when the niche was built. This point is helpful in dating the sculpture after the building of the chapel. Not only were the moldings of the niche partly masked by the frame, some of them actually had to be cut away for the installation of the frame, and a stone block had to be placed at the base of one of the chapel piers to make a base for the frame to rest on.

Surely there could have been no regret in partly hiding the severe Gothic architecture with woodwork richly carved in the new style of the Renaissance. The ornament of the frame is better in style and bigger in scale than any of the other ornament appearing on the sculpture of the chapel. Although probably contemporary with the Entombment itself, and having some of the same kind of decorative motifs used elsewhere on the monument, such as a flaming torch, paired dolphins, and serrated oak leaves, all carried on candelabras, the frame must have been carved by woodworkers who may have had no close contact with the Biron Master or his workshop. Indeed the style of the carving does not suggest such a connection. Accordingly, the woodwork will be discussed only briefly here, although it is well worth comparison with carving then being done elsewhere for châteaux and churches throughout France.⁴¹ Like the ornament on the Biron sculptures, the frame was probably executed by Frenchmen working in “the new Italian manner” rather than by Italians, since all the ornament has the dry, wiry leanness typical of French work and none of the “juicy” fullness of the Italian models that must have been their source.

Undoubtedly many of the decorative elements at Biron came from the rich repertoire of ornament used on the tomb of François II of Brittany at Nantes, on the château of Gaillon, and on the Amboise tomb in Rouen Cathedral.⁴² The Biron sculptures are dependent on such sources for the candelabra type of decoration of the pilasters that appear on the Entombment and also on both of the secular tombs. The large candelabras carved in low relief on the two supporting piers of the wood frame are obviously derived from more elaborate Italianate ornament of the sort used on these



FIGURES 20, 21

Details of the wood frame. An iron dowel and dowel holes are visible in Figure 20

41. For contemporary work, Vitry and Brière, *Documents: Renaissance*, première partie, and Jules Roussel, *La Sculpture française. Époque de la Renaissance* (Paris, n.d.) pls. 21, 28, 36.

42. Lanfry, Chirol, Bailly, *Le Tombeau*, pp. 45, 53.

three monuments. The candelabras on the two inner faces of the piers and on the outer face of the left-hand pier are too wide for the available space. As a result, roughly half of the design on these faces had to be omitted (Figures 20, 21). This proves that the woodworkers did not create new designs for the frame but used other models, perhaps ones of Italian origin.

An even greater simplification is seen on the end pilasters on Christ's sarcophagus. The left-end pilaster has the unusual motif of sheaves of wheat at the top of its candelabra (Figure 22). Wheat sheaves had also been used on a pilaster of the Nantes tomb (Figure 23),

and the same ornament was to reappear at Rouen on the extreme right-hand pier of the Amboise tomb. The Biron pilaster shows its dependence on the Nantes tomb in the central stalk of wheat; it springs from a stem curiously decorated with a nondescript knob that seems to be a misunderstanding of the calyx-like terminal of the Nantes candelabra. At Rouen the candelabra with the wheat stalks terminates in a bowl with flame-like leaf forms. On the right-end pilaster at Biron this basin has assumed the form of a flaming bowl (Figure 24), an apparent simplification of the more elaborate form at Rouen. The large candelabras on the wood



FIGURE 22
The sarcophagus, left-hand pilaster

FIGURE 23
Pilaster, tomb of François II, duke of Brittany, 1502–07, cathedral of Nantes (La Photothèque)

FIGURE 24
The sarcophagus, right-hand pilaster



FIGURE 25
Biron Entombment, Joseph



FIGURE 26
Nicodemus

frame of the Entombment also seem to be simplified versions of the Rouen type. How closely this type of candelabra ornament relates to north Italian sources may be seen by comparing the base of the candelabra of the left-end pilaster with an ornamental vase in a woodcut illustrating the Dream of Poliphilus, printed in Venice in 1499.⁴³ In both cases dolphins are tied to the candelabras in exactly the same way. The candelabras on the frame of the Biron Entombment have the same wheat stalks and flaming bowls, although in different arrangements, as on the pilasters of the sarcophagus.

43. Francesco Colonna, *Hyperotomachia Poliphili* (Aldus Manutius, Venice, 1499); a copy is in the Metropolitan Museum's Department of Prints and Photographs (23.73.1).

Although the figures of the Biron Entombment are in the same scale as those of the Pietà, their greater number and their architectural setting give the Entombment the size and importance of a monument. Indeed, such a group was sometimes called a monument, and it is called such in the inscription on the Entombment itself.

While the Gospels speak only of Joseph and Nicodemus as taking part in Christ's burial, with the Holy Women "looking on from afar," it gradually became the custom to introduce the Virgin, Saint John, and the Holy Women, since they alone of Christ's followers had remained with him throughout the Crucifixion. The monumental Entombments always include these figures.

The Biron monument is still in the late Gothic tradition of most French Entombments in spite of its Renais-

sance frame and of a few other Italian influences. The arrangement of the figures follows a traditional order that evolved in Burgundy and became predominant in France, the Burgundian type spreading from Burgundy into central France and then to the south and north. In this type the Virgin is in the center as the chief mourner, supported usually by two Holy Women, while Saint John and the Magdalen stand at either side, somewhat apart. It is as if the Virgin were a stricken queen-mother surrounded by her mourning court. All of the figures look like sorrowing caryatids as they stand behind the body of her royal son laid out upon his tomb, his shroud held by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, dressed as two worthy men of rank. A cortege of angels flies above this tableau of grief to show that heaven itself joins in the mourning. In all these points the Biron Entombment is close to that at Semur-en-Auxois, one of the finest of the Burgundian Entombments still in existence. Four flying angels that survive from the Semur monument appear to have been prototypes for those at Biron.⁴⁴ These similarities again suggest the influence of Burgundy upon the Biron Master, an influence already noticed in the Pietà and in the iconography of the Entombment.

The two Entombments of the Burgundian type closest in the arrangement of their figures to Biron are both in southwest France, at Salers and at Toulouse.⁴⁵ Less closely related is one at Rodez and two others at Roquelaure and Ceignac, and even more loosely connected are two more at Carennac and Reygades. All these southwest Entombments follow the Burgundian type as it appeared in central France at Souvigny and north of the lower Loire valley at Solesmes, but none of them show a definite stylistic relation to Biron.⁴⁶ The Biron Master, therefore, knew these or similar Entombments of the Burgundian type, perhaps as a young sculptor in Bourbonnais and probably also during his period of activity in the southwest.

With a few exceptions, the Biron Pietà and Entombment could hardly be more alike in their style, in their drapery arrangement, in their figure proportions, in

their faces and their hands. There are the same wrinkles on the hand of Armand in the Pietà group and of Joseph in the Entombment (although it is amusing to note that Armand's hand has more rings than Joseph's). Other minute similarities can be noted. There is, for example, the same dotted line edging the lining of the Virgin's mantle in both groups. The settings of the jewels decorating Armand's miter and on the pin fastening the side opening of Pons' tabard in the Pietà group are the same as those decorating the clothing of Joseph and Nicodemus in the Entombment (Figures 25, 26). The same kind of little bows are used to tie the small slits of Pons' tabard as are found on Joseph's headgear. The treatment of hair is also identical, even to the curious flowerlike rosettes formed by terminal strands, seen on the heads of Christ, Pons, and Armand in the Pietà, and on John (Figure 27) and an angel to the right of the center in the Entombment. Such rosettes are found in the hair of Burgundian sculpture, from which they may have been derived.

The differences between the two sculptures are, all in all, slight. In the Entombment there are traces of Italian influence and ornament not found in the Pietà. The borders of many of the garments are covered with ornament in the "new style" of the Renaissance. The figure of John (Figure 28) is more Italianate than the others: the classical regularity of his face and the arrangement of his mantle evoke the placid expression and the softening of outlines characteristic of Florentine works of the closing decades of the fifteenth century. The headcloth knotted in front below the neckline, worn by one of the Holy Women, becomes a fairly common article of dress in French sculpture; it may also derive from Italy, perhaps from Florence.

The face of Christ is a little more carefully treated in the Entombment than in the Pietà, and his beard and mustache are more elaborate (Figure 29), but strangely enough, the Virgin and particularly the Holy Woman to her left have somewhat weaker faces than in the Pietà (Figure 30). Their drapery is more simply treated in accordance with the new style. The posture of the Holy Woman is unusually cramped, probably because not enough space was allowed for her in the block from which she and the two adjoining figures were carved. Could another, slightly inferior, hand have been at work here, or was the master himself simply careless?

After the Christ the most notable figures of the

44. Aubert and Beaulieu, *Description*, nos. 349, 349 bis; *Congrès archéologique de France à Avallon en 1907*, ill. opp. p. 92; Forsyth, *Entombment*, pp. 76, 77, fig. 103.

45. Forsyth, *Entombment*, figs. 136, 140.

46. Forsyth, *Entombment*, pp. 102-127.

Entombment are the Saint John and the Magdalen. Their subtle balance and ease of posture relieve the stiffness of the central group. John grasps the crown of thorns with manly determination. In an attitude echoing John's, the Magdalen uncovers her jar of precious ointment with pensive hesitation, as if immersed in a dream world of sorrow (Figure 31). The contours of her face melt imperceptibly into each other; all creases and wrinkles have disappeared save those on her eyelids, and these are barely visible. Her mouth has a childlike sweetness that avoids sentimentality. She wears her richly decorated garments with the charming nonchalance of a woman of rank. Whereas the figure of John recalls the new dynamic style of Italy, that of the Magdalen, in the courtly grace of her bearing and face, stems from the ducal workshops of Bourbonnais. A forerunner of the Biron Magdalen may perhaps be found in a Virgin and Child at Villebret, near Montluçon (Figure 32). The features of this distinguished figure—her tilted head and full, rounded face with fleshy lips, tipped-up nose, and heavy-lidded eyes set somewhat apart—as well as the foldings of the kerchief around her head and across the front of the gown bring our Magdalen to mind. The Villebret facial type continues to be found for some years in Bourbonnais, in later statues of Michel Colombe carved for the tomb of François II at Nantes, and in even later Virgins of the lower Loire valley. In fact, Pradel has stressed the importance of the Villebret statue in reconstructing the work of Colombe when he was the head of the Bourbonnais school of sculpture and the master of Jean de Chartres.⁴⁷

A version of this Bourbonnais head more like that of the Biron Magdalen is in the Moulins Museum. It is that of a young girl (Figure 33), believed by Pradel to have come possibly from a statue of the Virgin as a girl, part of a lost group representing the Education of the Virgin made by Jean de Chartres for the Carmelite convent at Moulins. Pradel suggests it was intended as a likeness of Suzanne de Beaujeu, the daughter of Pierre and Anne of France, and the young heiress of Bourbonnais, whose portraits by the Master of Moulins are indeed very similar to this head in their wide foreheads and almond-shaped eyes. One of this master's portraits, of Margaret of Austria, showing the same features, is in the Robert Lehman Collection, now housed in the Metropolitan Museum.



FIGURES 27, 28
Saint John

The head conforms to the regional type that becomes a landmark of Bourbonnais style wherever its influence is found. In Touraine the type reappears, for example, in a head of unknown origin in the Tours Museum, and in another at Limeray where it is part of a statue of the Magdalen (Figure 34) that has much of the same dreamy attitude and wistful charm of the Biron figure. Her garments are quite similar, and strands of hair even fall across her veil in the same way. Pradel has compared this Magdalen to another at Montluçon, in the same church that contains a Pietà already compared to that of Biron.⁴⁸

Nearer yet to the Biron Magdalen is a statue of Saint Agnes (Figure 35) from the château of Montlaur near Jaligny, the same place, it will be remembered, where there is one of the Bourbonnais Pietàs related to the Biron group, probably given by a kinsman of Pons.⁴⁹

47. Pradel, *Michel Colombe*, p. 30, pl. 4.

48. Pradel, *Michel Colombe*, p. 79, pl. 22 (1).

49. Pradel, "Le Sculpteur Jean de Chartres," pp. 56, 57; Pradel, *Michel Colombe*, pp. 76, 77, pl. 18.

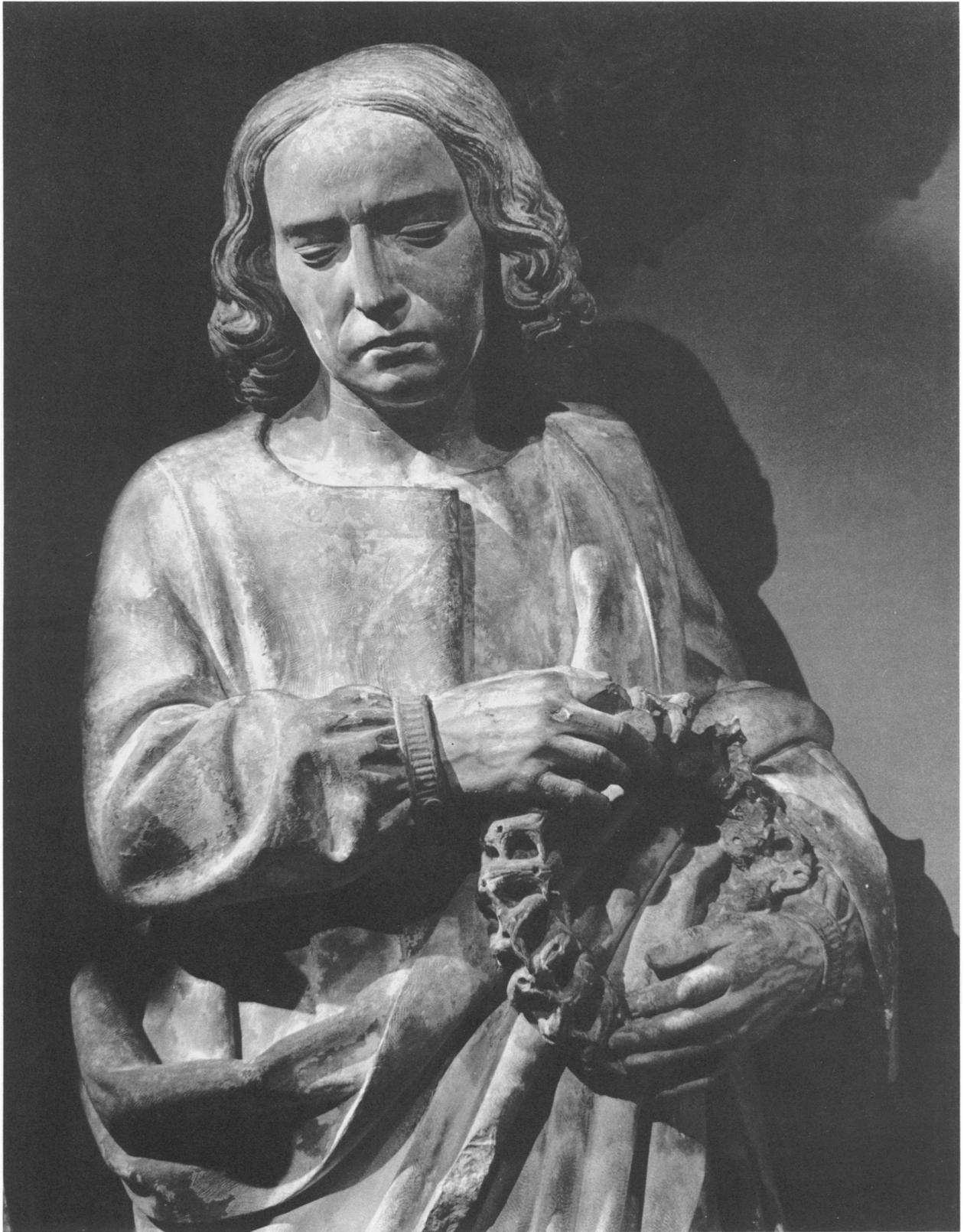




FIGURE 29
Head of Christ



FIGURE 30
The Virgin and Holy Women



FIGURE 31
The Magdalen

FIGURE 32
Virgin and Child, attributed to Michel Colombe,
1430–50, Villebret, Bourbonnais (Archives Pho-
tographiques)

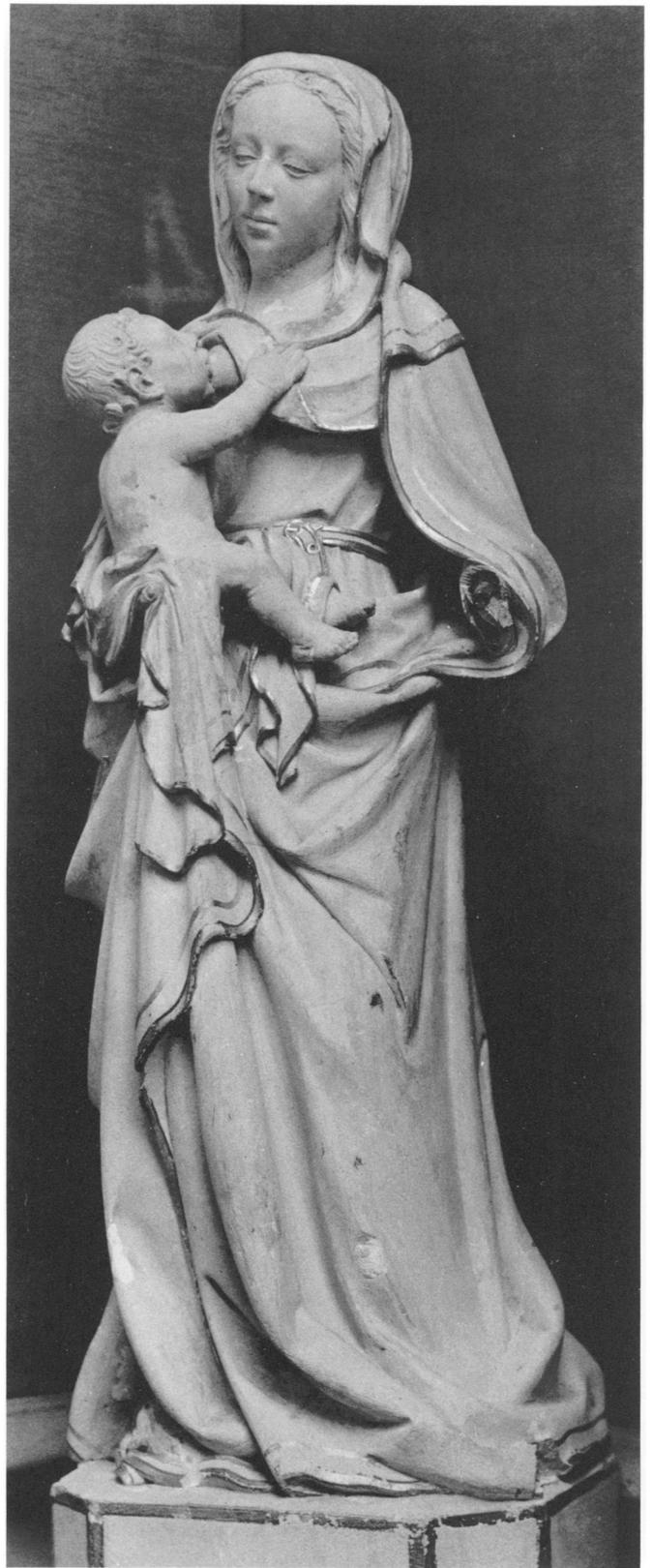




FIGURE 33
Female head, Moulins Museum, Bourbonnais
(La Photothèque)

FIGURE 34
Magdalen, church at Limeray, Touraine (photo:
Giraudon)



A softer version of this face, very close to that of Biron, appears on a statue of a Virgin at l'Hôpital-sous-Rochefort in the Forez, just south of Bourbonnais.⁵⁰ A coarser version of the Bourbonnais head is seen on a Magdalen in a Pietà group at Saint-Pierre-le-Moùtier in Nivernais, north of Bourbonnais. Still other versions appear on Magdalens of the southwest, including those of Entombments at Salers and Toulouse, but nowhere is the Bourbonnais influence so clear as it is in the Biron Magdalen and in the other figures of the Entombment.⁵¹

50. Pradel, *Michel Colombe*, p. 80, pl. 20 (3).

51. Forsyth, *Entombment*, pp. 103, 105, 107, 117.



FIGURE 35
Saint Agnes, château of Montlaur, near Jaligny,
Bourbonnais (La Photothèque)

The five angels of the Entombment do not all show the same unity of style as the larger figures beneath them. They consist of an inner pair and an outer pair, and a single one in the center. The faces and garments of the inner pair (Figures 36, 37) are closest to each other and to the large figures, especially to the Magdalen and the Saint John. The outer pair, on the other hand, are more dramatic, with the more elaborate costumes and fluttering ribbons of a later style (Figures 38, 39). While they also show some similarities to each other in their drapery folds and in the position of their legs, they differ quite markedly in their proportions, in the sizes of their heads, in their wings, and in a number of details of costume. The same sculptor could hardly have made both pairs. The left-hand angel has the stocky build and the toes and wings of the inner pair. He wears a pin to hold his garment together over one thigh, as does Joseph. His dimpled hands are like those of the Magdalen, and his furrowed brow is like those of Saint John and Pons, but slightly exaggerated. The right-hand outer angel is more elongated than his partner or than the inner pair, but he has the same proportions as well as the smaller head and wiglike hair of the central angel (Figure 40). The same hand may have carved these two, while another, possibly that of the master, carved the inner pair and the left

FIGURES 36, 37
Biron Entombment, inner pair of angels, showing remains of armorial shields





FIGURES 38, 39 Outer pair of angels



FIGURE 40

Center angel, showing remains of armorial shield

outer angel. However, the style of this last figure is evolved, and it could have been carved by still a third hand. Thus one senses in the Entombment at least two or three hands, possibly more. Some of the same contrasts between earlier and later styles of angels may be seen in those decorating the choir screen of Albi Cathedral; these angels are in a style generally parallel to that of Biron.⁵²

Two bas-reliefs, carved on the front of the sarcophagus, represent scenes from the Old Testament that were considered prefigurations (types) of Christ's death and resurrection. The relief on the right, portraying Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac (Figure 41), is here a sign of Christ's sacrifice and death. The left-hand relief of Jonah issuing from the whale (Figure 42) was for the medieval mind a sign of Christ's resurrection. These and other parallels between the Old and New Testaments were often illustrated in the *Speculum humanae salvationis*.⁵³ A very similar Jonah scene appears

52. Emile Mâle, *La Cathédrale d'Albi* (Paris, 1940) pls. 92, 93; Gilbert Bou, *Sculpture gothique albigeoise*, Imprimerie Carrère (Albi, 1972) figs. 65–76.

53. Lutz and Perdrizet, *Speculum I*, pp. 46–47, cap. xxii, lines 46–58; p. 57, cap. xxvii, lines 93–98; p. 67, cap. xxxii, lines 57–70; pp. 171–172, 275, 289, 326; II, pls. 43, 54, 110, 133.



FIGURE 41
The sarcophagus, right-hand relief: The Sacrifice of Isaac

FIGURE 42
Left-hand relief: Jonah and the Whale

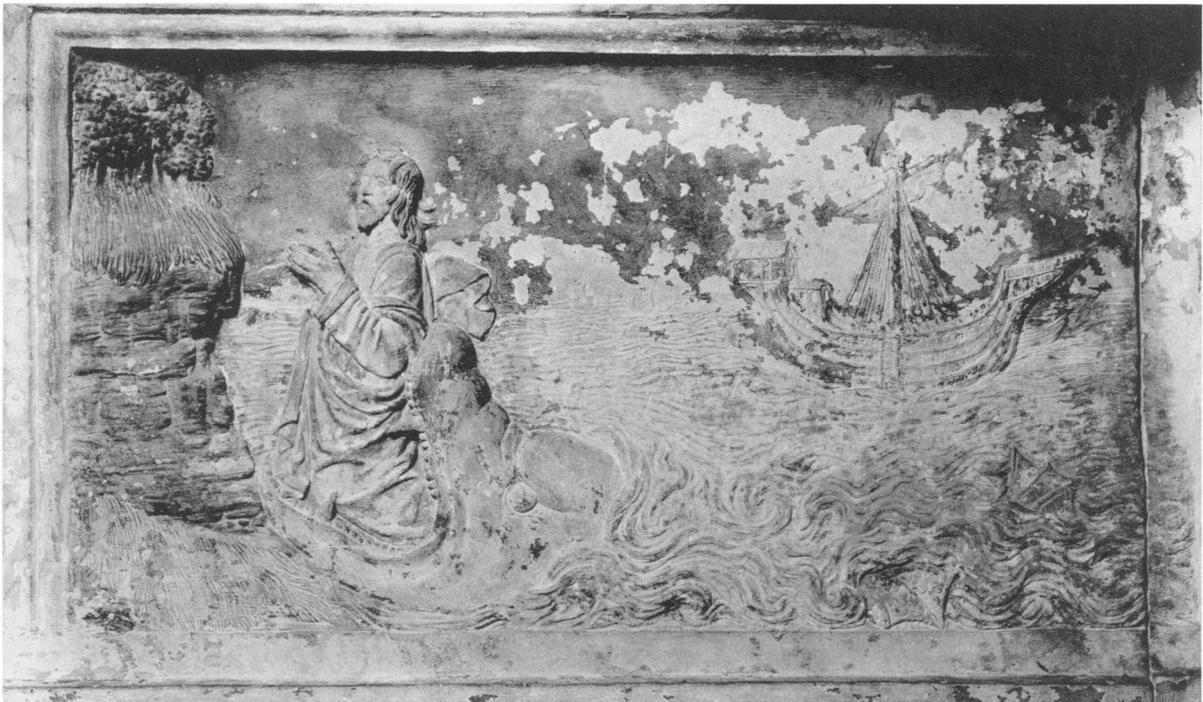




FIGURE 43
Detail of sarcophagus:
the mutilated arms of
Armand de Gontaut,
traces of his miter at
upper right, crozier
upper left

in an illustration for a copy of the *Speculum* printed in Basel in 1476.⁵⁴ There must have been other works of art copied from them that could have served as models for the reliefs.

Armand himself must have given the Entombment to the chapel. His arms had the place of honor at the center of the sarcophagus (Figure 43), and they appeared twice more: borne by the angel just to the left of the central angel, the side of honor in heraldry, and on the sinister collar lapel of the right outer angel, again the side of honor (Figure 44). Only the arms on the angel's collar have survived, probably because they were overlooked when the rest were destroyed during the Revolution; however, traces of Armand's miter and crozier can still be seen on the sarcophagus panel and on the left inner angel. Armand's association with the Entombment can also be surmised by the position of his tomb, which is set as near as possible to the side chapel, so close in fact that the west side of his tomb is concealed by the chapel screen. Reasons for associating an Entombment with the donor's place of burial have already been given. Perhaps Armand had a devotion to Christ's tomb just as Pons had to the

Pietà. Perhaps this devotion was associated with a relic of the Holy Shroud kept at Cadouin, a nearby monastery enjoying the patronage of the Gontaut family, whose abbot was along with Armand, a commissioner to supervise the building of the chapel. This veneration was shared by the diocese of Sarlat, and the Gontaut family later showed its concern for the relic by housing it in one of their châteaux during the Huguenot wars.

The dependence of the Biron Master's style upon Bourbonnais sculpture has already been emphasized. This relationship is clearly apparent in the close ties of the Biron Pietà with others in southern Bourbonnais and in the undeniable affinities of the Biron Magdalen with the Saint Agnes of Jaligny and with the female head in the Moulins Museum. The pivotal influence on our master of Jean de Chartres, the leading sculptor of Bourbonnais after the departure of Michel Colombe for Touraine, is also apparent in the hands, the figure proportions, and the drapery of all the figures of the Biron Pietà and Entombment. Whatever his origin, the Biron Master certainly appears to have been trained in Bourbonnais, perhaps even as an apprentice to Jean de Chartres himself.

Yet our master seems to have worked elsewhere too before he came to Biron. In its softness the style of Biron is one step removed from that of Bourbonnais. The Magdalen of the Entombment, for instance, has already been compared to a Virgin at l'Hôpital-sous-Rochefort in the Forez, where Pradel suggests that Jean de Rouen, a pupil of Jean de Chartres, may have been active.⁵⁵ The Biron sculptures also have parallels to sculptures in Touraine, and the Renaissance ornament gives indications of some dependence upon that of the tomb of François II at Nantes done by Italians working with Colombe. The Biron Entombment's relationship to others in the southwest has been noted. Similar elements of the Biron Master's style are also found at Albi and in the Entombment now at Monestiès-sur-Cérou, both groups of sculptures dependent upon the patronage of the bishop of Albi, an Amboise kinsman of the Gontauts. Their affiliations with the Amboise family may also explain the iconographic similarities of the tomb of Armand to work done at

54. Ernest Kloss, *Speculum humanae salvationis* (Munich, 1925) illustrates the scene on p. 61 of this book, which is now in the Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

55. Pradel, *Michel Colombe*, p. 80, pl. 20 (3).

Gaillon and Rouen, on the château and cathedral of Georges d'Amboise, Cardinal Archbishop of Rouen, just as their connections with the court of France explain similarities in the Biron Master's style to Bourbonnais and Touraine. The Gontauts thus could have found easy means to bring in a sculptor from the north, but one who had worked outside of Bourbonnais before he came to Biron. Yet it must be finally said that, more than any other known contemporary sculpture of the southwest, that at Biron is closer to Bourbonnais, the ultimate source of its inspiration.

If the Biron Master learned his craft as an apprentice or assistant of Jean de Chartres, which seems likely, it is quite possible that Jean's master, the great Michel Colombe, may have also cast his shadow over him,

FIGURE 44

The right outer angel, showing the arms of Armand de Gontaut with miter and crozier on left collar lapel, the Biron family arms on right lapel



although more distantly. A seated figure of Saint Anne, carved in relief on a retable at Baugy, between Bourges and Moulins, and attributed by Pradel to Colombe when a young sculptor, already has some of the soft, thick drapery breaking around her feet in the puffy little folds that were to become characteristic of Bourbonnais sculpture and are reflected in the Biron Pietà. One also finds the gesture of the Biron Virgin, who keeps her cloak in place with her hands as she crosses her forearms, already used by a small figure of Saint John on a high relief on the tomb of Saint Sylvain at La Celle Bruère, south of Bourges, which is done in a style in which the young Colombe may have worked during his earlier sojourn in Berry. Admittedly this gesture had earlier been used in Burgundian sculptures of the Virgin standing at the foot of the cross.⁵⁶ The easy grace of the Virgin and Child at Villebret, which Pradel associates with Colombe's Bourbonnais period, also seems to be reflected in the Magdalen of the Biron Entombment.

It was an exciting discovery for me, more than twenty years ago, in going through the photographs of Louis Balsan, regional inspector of monuments and Curator of the Musée Fenaille in Rodez, to find another work in southwest France by the hand of the Biron Master (Figure 45). An examination of the sculpture itself confirmed and strengthened the evidence of the photographs. Professor Jacques Bousquet, now of the University of Montpellier, made the same identification independently.⁵⁷ The resemblance of this Pietà to the two Biron sculptures is immediately apparent in the general style of the drapery, the proportions and attitudes of the figures, the modeling of the heads, and

56. Pradel, *Michel Colombe*, pp. 17, 18, pl. 2 (1, 5).

57. Jacques Bousquet, *La Vierge dans l'art rouergat, Notre-Dame en Rouergue* (Rodez, 1951) p. 22; Jacques Bousquet, "La Sculpture rouergate et la fin du style gothique," *La Revue du Rouergue* 15 (1961) pp. 394-406, esp. 404, 405; Jacques Bousquet, "La Sculpture rouergate et la fin du style gothique. Positions et propositions," *Bulletin du Musée Ingres* 9 (July, 1961) pp. 9-15, esp. 12-15; Bousquet, "Le Problème," pp. 208-222. I am grateful to M. Bousquet for supplying me with copies of these articles. The sculpture group was shown at Montauban in an exhibition of regional sculpture: Mathieu Méras, *Trésors d'art gothique en Languedoc* (Musée Ingres, Montauban, 1961) cat. no. 113 bis. Marcel Maimpointe has kindly given me several excellent photographs of the group, taken after the cleaning of 1961. See also Gilbert Bou, *La Sculpture en Rouergue à la fin du gothique (XV^e et début du XVI^e siècle)*, Imprimerie Carrère (Rodez, 1971) pp. 116-128.



FIGURE 45

Pietà from church of the Cordeliers, Rodez, Languedoc, about 1510–15, now in church at Carcenac-Salmiech (La Photothèque)

the general mood and sense of quietness. Gilbert Bou has recently published a notice from an old parish register of Carcenac which indicates that this sculpture, together with others in the church, originally came from the former church of the Cordeliers in Rodez. In 1803 the prefect Sainthorent authorized Hippolyte de Barrau (whose family still owns a chapel in the Carcenac-Salmiech church) to take from a storage repository of the former monastery of the Cordeliers “everything that could be useful to his parish.” De Barrau quickly had fourteen wagons loaded with “parts of retables, statues, woodwork, and other decorations”; these were removed before the surprised prefect could stop him. Bou’s richly documented book cites important donations to the Cordeliers in the fifteenth century by the counts of Rodez and Armagnac and later by the bishops of Rodez, who in 1456 gave 240 gold crowns to repair the church and its “magnificent retable,” apparently that of the Passion of Christ. One could

suppose that the Carcenac Pietà came from such a retable or from a shallow niche such as that housing a Baptism of Christ in the chapel of Saint Jean at Ouradou, not too far away.⁵⁸

Close as the Carcenac group is to Biron, the evolution of the master’s style can nonetheless be observed in many of the Carcenac details. The garments are somewhat more loosely worn and the drapery folds a little more turbulent and more deeply undercut than in the two earlier sculptures. There is an increasing tendency to flatten the tops of the heads, with the result that the faces appear somewhat more rectangular and the foreheads somewhat wider and lower.

The Magdalen is the closest of the figures to her Biron counterpart, particularly in her attitude, in her face and her head, in her headdress, and even in the ointment jar she carries (Figure 46). Her garments,

58. Bou, *Sculpture en Rouergue*, pp. 11, 12, 105, 121, 122, 161.

however, are simpler and less aristocratic. Instead of the Biron figure's richly bordered surcoat cut away around the arms, she wears a simple pleated garment with a rope girdle. While this girdle may imply the penitent Magdalen, it may also refer to the knotted rope girdle of the Franciscan order from whose church the statue came, even though it lacks the three knots customary to a true Franciscan girdle. She wears the end of her headcloth across the top of her bodice, as does her sister statue, but with a simpler border and with the end of the cloth no longer dangling coquetishly at the side of her head. The bunch of drapery tucked under her left arm is comparable to the smaller bunch hanging over the right arm of the Biron figure.

The Carcenac Virgin, in face, wimple, and the foldings of the cloak over her head (Figure 47), is nearly identical with the earlier Virgin of the Biron Pietà, although the thicker folds of her garments and her heavy belt are closer to the Burgundian style.

FIGURE 46
Carcenac Pietà, the Magdalen (La Photothèque)



FIGURE 47
Carcenac Pietà, the Virgin (La Photothèque)

The two Saint Johns are nearly as much alike (Figure 48). Similarities in their faces extend to such details as the folds or creases of flesh radiating from the base of their noses, to the folds on their necks, and to the eyebrows scratched into the stone in a herringbone pattern. The modeling of the faces is the same even down to the slight swelling over the cheekbones. The hair has the same rosette terminals. At first glance the swirling folds of the cloak worn by the Carcenac John seem to be entirely different, but the mantle is doubled over and around the right forearm in a way that is really a development from the simpler folds around the arm of the earlier figure. The jeweled morse closing the saint's cloak below the neck shows a relation in setting and form to jewelry on the Biron sculptures.

The biggest change from Biron occurs in the Christ, who is much larger in scale at Carcenac and somewhat more softly modeled. His head shows a definite evolution from the two Biron Christs. Although the mustache



FIGURE 48
Carcenac Pietà, Saint John and Christ (La Photo-
thèque)

and beard are of the same general form, they are more elaborate. The modeling of the eyes shows the same fleshy swellings at the lids. Even the scars on the forehead, where the thorns pierced, are of the same sort. The loincloth of the Carcenac Christ is close to that of the earlier Biron Christ of the Pietà in its foldings, and the shroud under him has a meandering edge like the drapery around the base of the Biron Pietà. The cloth held by the Magdalen has arabesque curves that seem to have evolved from the ends of Christ's loincloth in the Biron Entombment. This mannerism of the master recurs elsewhere in his later work.

The Carcenac sculpture represents a complex variety of Pietà that might be termed a Deposition Pietà in that it combines elements from several different scenes of the Passion. Christ's body has already been taken down from the cross but is no longer suspended in the arms of several people as in a regular Deposition, but only partly supported by Saint John. It has not been

laid either in his mother's lap as in a true Pietà nor flat upon the ground as in a typical Lamentation, where it would be surrounded by a group of mourners. Instead only the Virgin, Saint John, and the Magdalen are present. They are grouped as in a true Pietà with the Virgin in the center, Saint John on the left holding the head and torso of Christ, and the Magdalen on the right wiping his feet before anointing them with oil for burial, as she had done earlier in the house of Simon the Pharisee. John puts his hand on Christ's head as he often does in such Pietà groups and as Armand does in the Biron Pietà.

The Carcenac Pietà is treated more like a relief than a free-standing sculpture in the round. There seems to have been an attempt to carve the figures as if they were all in one plane. To this purpose the figures of John and the Magdalen are twisted rather unnaturally sideways, much as they are in a Pietà relief of the southwest at Lezat-sur-Lèze, which is actually enclosed in a retable frame. One has the impression that the Carcenac sculpture may have had a similar setting. Indeed, the group was probably inspired by reliefs, since there are many with this composition, such as that by Tilman Riemenschneider at Maidbronn, near Würzburg. The composition also appears in a carving at Bonzée in eastern France.⁵⁹ It probably derived from carved retables of the Brussels and Antwerp schools. In these, exported to all parts of Europe, the Deposition or Pietà was frequently shown to one side of or beneath the Crucifixion, as in an Antwerp retable in the Stedelijk Museum, Louvain, dated 1520.⁶⁰ The composition for all these sculptures may ultimately derive from Flemish paintings of the Deposition and Lamentation such as those by Rogier van der Weyden and Quentin Metsys. A panel by Gérard David in the Ryerson collection of the Art Institute, Chicago, is a good instance.

The Carcenac Pietà was unquestionably made after the completion of the two Biron sculptures. While the modification in style is not marked, there is an increased freedom of posture and a greater fullness and complication of drapery, both of which point to an evolution in the style of the master. The type of a combined

59. This sculpture shows the influence of Ligier Richier; it was exhibited at the Petit Palais, Paris, in 1917, as one of the "oeuvres d'art mutilés par l'ennemi."

60. Exhibition catalogue, *Aspekten dan de laatgotiek in Brabant* (Louvain, 1971) no. AB/xiv and plate.

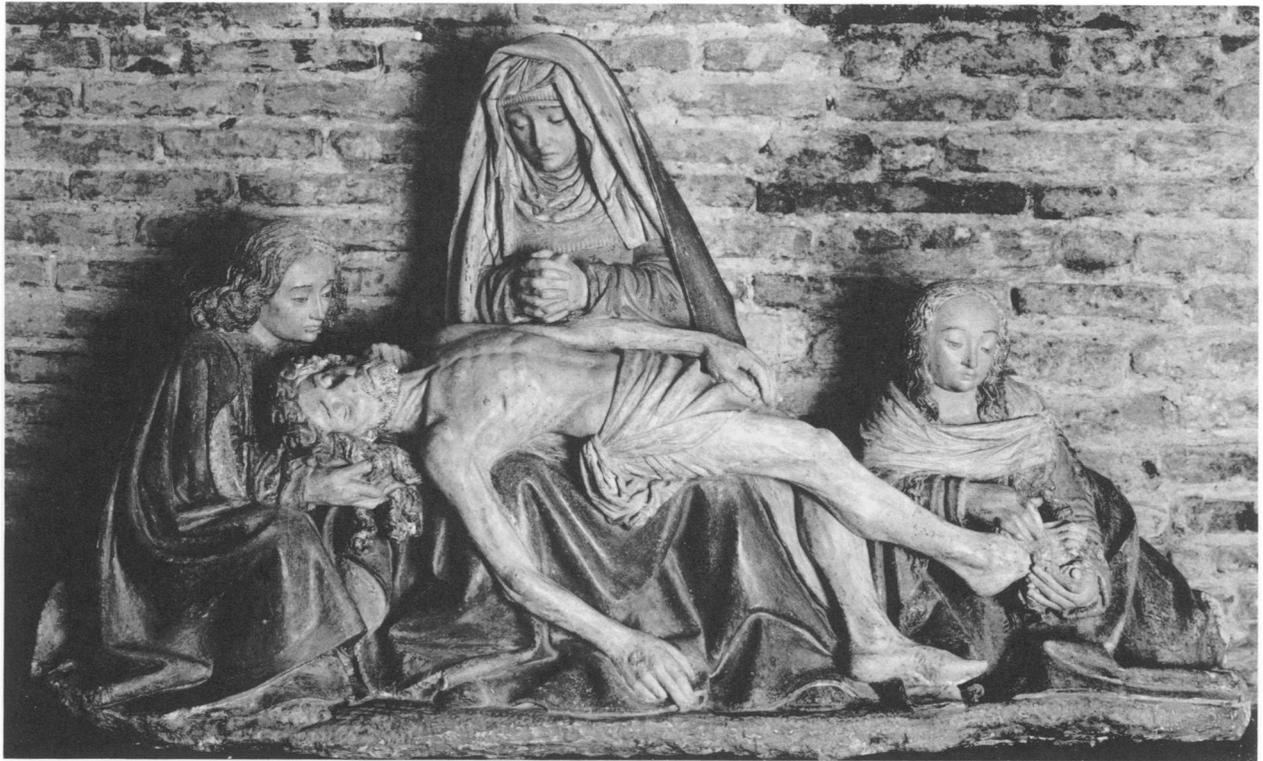


FIGURE 49
Pietà in church at Rodelle, Languedoc, given by Canon Cueyssa of Albi about 1505 (La Photothèque)

Deposition and Pietà is also a later development than the simpler Pietà type of Biron. Although a date around 1520, given in the Montauban exhibition catalogue, may be a little late in comparison with the Biron datings, it suggests the right sequence and cannot be far wrong.

In Rodelle, a few miles northwest of Rodez, not far from whence the Carcenac Pietà came, there is another Pietà that can be associated with the work of the Biron Master (Figure 49). In this group Saint John and the Magdalen kneel as they do at Carcenac, and the Virgin holds the body of Christ in much the same way. The heads of John and the Magdalen show considerable similarities to those of the Carcenac Pietà, yet there are variations: the Rodelle Magdalen's head, generally similar though it is to those of Biron and Carcenac, seems slightly heavier, her features somewhat coarser (Figure 50). Although the Rodelle Magdalen wears her hair as do the Magdalens of the Biron Entombment and the Carcenac Pietà, her kerchief is pulled rather

taut across her front as it is in the two Magdalens at Monestiès-sur-Cérou from Pierre d'Amboise's chapel at Combefa.⁶¹ This idiosyncrasy seems inspired by the Combefa sculptures. The style of the Rodelle Pietà also shows similarity to the muted Burgundian styles of Toulouse, in particular to a Pietà from the church of the Récollets (Figure 51) and to another Pietà at Saint Salvi, Albi.⁶²

Much as one would like to attribute the Rodelle Pietà, as Bousquet and Bou have done, directly to the Biron Master, because of its quality and its resemblance to his work, there are difficulties. The first concerns its dating, the second its degree of closeness to the Biron sculptures. In his searches into the local archives Bousquet discovered that a P. Cueyssa, canon of Albi

61. Forsyth, *Entombment*, pp. 107–108, 120, figs. 144, 146; Bou, *Sculpture gothique*, figs. 80, 81, pp. 171–175.

62. Méras, *Trésors d'art*, no. 88; Bou, *Sculpture gothique*, note 61, fig. 102.

and a native of Rodelle, is mentioned in a document of September 8, 1505, as the founder of the chapel of Sainte-Marie de Pitié at Rodelle; from this he concludes that the statue was made for Canon Cueyssa or for a member of his family. This happy discovery gives at least a general date for the sculpture. If, however, it is a work of the Biron Master it must be contemporary, or nearly so, with the Biron Pietà. The two sculptures, for all their resemblances, do not seem close enough to each other to suggest that they were made by the same hand at the same time, especially when the same person went on to do the Biron Entombment, which is so much closer to the Biron Pietà than is the Rodelle Pietà. On the other hand, if the Rodelle Pietà is slightly earlier than the Biron Pietà, why does it not show as much influence from Bourbonnais and Touraine, an influence which was so crucial in the formation of the master's style? On the contrary, the Rodelle Pietà is much more closely related to others of Languedoc, already mentioned, as Bousquet and others have noted.

Gilbert Bou has suggested that the Biron Master may

FIGURE 50

Rodelle Pietà, the Magdalen (La Photothèque)



be Hughes Viguier, member of a well-known family of sculptors in the Rouergue, or his son-in-law Antony Valens, or possibly the two combined. Both came from Salles-en-Albigeois, near Albi, where there are four statues of the cardinal virtues that show some relation to the work of the Biron Master. But it is hard to see how the same hand or hands could have carved the Salles sculptures and those attributed to the Biron Master. Admittedly the head of the Temperance figure at Salles depends upon that of the Magdalen of the Biron Entombment as well as that of the Carcenac Pietà, and the head of the Salles Prudence depends upon that of the Virgin of the Biron Pietà and Biron Entombment as well as that of the Carcenac Pietà, as Bou points out. The Salles figures, however, are obviously the work of a carver who picked up ideas where he could without being able to coordinate them successfully. His Fortitude is a simplified version of that by Michel Colombe on the tomb of François II at Nantes. (Mathieu Méras has called the Salles Fortitude "a pastiche" of the Nantes figure.) The Salles Justice also shows influence from the Nantes Justice. The Salles Prudence seems to take its cue from a rather clumsy interpretation of drapery formulas seen on the sculpture of Albi Cathedral. Without underestimating their charm, the Salles sculptures are the work of a good craftsman, not a master. Regardless of whether Viguier and/or Valens carved them, it is difficult to imagine that either of them or any of their colleagues in the region should be identified with the Biron Master, whose figures are so much more monumental than theirs.

One can certainly agree that the Biron Master must have had affiliations with Albi and the Rouergue without denying the strong affiliations of his art with Bourbonnais and royal France, where he may have received his training. His later sojourn in Albi and the Rouergue area would explain not only the presence of the Carcenac Pietà in Rodez but also the parallels between his work at Biron and that on the choir screen of Albi Cathedral, as well as that of the Entombment made for Pierre d'Amboise, a cousin of Pons' first wife, for his episcopal château at Combefa, which is now at Monestiès-sur-Cérou. These parallels do not suggest that the master worked on these sculptures but rather that his style was modified and softened by the same tempering influences. Other sculptures in the same region, though

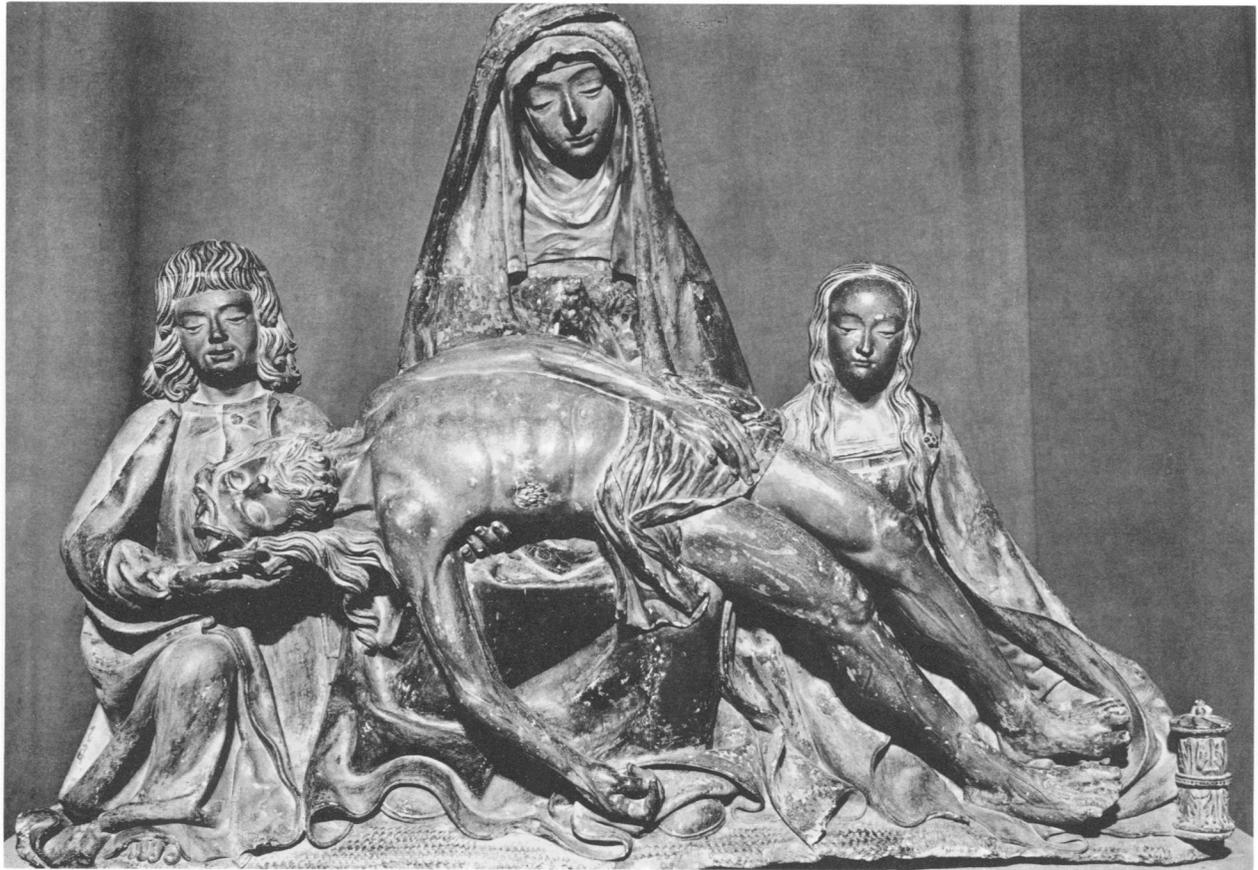


FIGURE 51

Pietà from the church of the Récollets, Toulouse, Languedoc. Musée des Augustins, Toulouse (La Photothèque)

none so clearly as the Rodelle Pietà, suggest that his “monumental” style—to use Bousquet’s word—may in turn have had a reciprocal influence.⁶³ Indeed, two heads in the sacristy of Saint Salvi, Albi (Figures 52, 53), although cruder than the Rodelle Pietà, show more of the master’s monumental style than does Rodelle. They must be at least by a close follower, and if, as has been supposed, they are fragments of a lost Entombment given by Pierre d’Amboise, their relation to the Biron Pietà and Entombment is all the more intriguing.

There are no sculptures in Périgord or other prov-

inces of southwest France around Biron that show such affiliations with the master’s work as the Albi-Rouergue area does. A Magdalen in the Toulouse Museum from the collection of Maurens-Scopont, possibly from Quercy,⁶⁴ has a head with some similarities to that of the Biron Magdalen, and another Entombment at Bordeaux, now to be discussed, has a clearer relationship, but these are isolated sculptures and suggest no regional activity of the master.

The resemblances and the differences between the Biron Master and his followers become more evident

63. See, for instance, other sculptures in the Montauban catalogue; also in Marguerite de Bévoite, “Un Groupe de statues de la fin de la période gothique à la collégiale Saint-Salvi d’Albi,” *Revue du Tarn* 31, 3rd ser. (1963) pp. 32–52, and Victor Allègre, *Les Richesses médiévales du Tarn. Art gothique II* (Toulouse, 1954) fig. 70c; Bou, *Sculpture en Rouergue*, pp. 99–104. For Méras’ “pas-

tiche” assertion, see his “Exposition “Trésors d’art gothique en Languedoc” et ses problèmes archéologiques,” *Bulletin de la Société archéologique de Tarn-et-Garonne* 88 (1962). For differentiation of these sculptures from the style of the Biron Master, see Allègre, *Richesses médiévales I*, p. 247, II, fig. 74.

64. Forsyth, *Entombment*, p. 118, fig. 180.



FIGURES 52, 53
 Heads of the Magdalen and the Virgin, possibly from an Entombment, church of Saint Salvi, Albi, Languedoc (La Photothèque)

in an Entombment at Bordeaux, still in its original location in the church of the Maison de la Miséricorde, formerly a convent of the Annunciads known as Sancta Maria de Annunciata (Figure 54).⁶⁵ Most of the figures of this monument derive from those of the Biron Master in their grouping, their proportions, their general style, and in many details of their costume. The Virgin, almost detail for detail, comes from the Virgins of the Biron and especially of the Carcenac Pietàs. The Joseph and the Nicodemus are as clearly modeled after those of the Biron Entombment in their stance, their figures, including their faces and headgear, and in many of their costume accessories. They hold the shroud in the same attitudes, the ends of the cloth falling down the same way, with its front edge also lapping over the edge of the sarcophagus. The face of the sarcophagus is divided into similar compartments framed by similar pilasters and having a similar leaf molding at the top.

65. Paul Roudié, "Les Mises au tombeau de Bordeaux," *Revue historique de Bordeaux et du département de la Gironde* n.s. 2 (1953) pp. 307–324. Professor Roudié enabled me to visit this cloistered monument.

The Christ is closely dependent upon the Carcenac Christ in his features and his anatomy and head; the head, like others at Bordeaux, is flat on top as at Carcenac. Even the wounds on his forehead repeat those at Carcenac, and the locks of his hair seem modeled after those of John at Carcenac. The trailing end of his loincloth is a coarse rendering of that in the Biron Pietà. The Bordeaux John is a heavy, updated version of the John at Carcenac. His cloak swings around his forearm in a similar motion, but, in imitation of the Italian manner, his head is turned upward and his mouth opened as in a cry of despair.

Countless other details attest to the fact that the Bordeaux Entombment was carved "after" that of Biron. An inscription on the border of a garment of the Holy Woman supporting the Virgin reads *ADMVN* . . ., recalling the inscription on the Biron pediment. One even finds bandings on the tassels of the purse worn by the Biron Nicodemus repeated on the tassels of the pillow under Christ's shroud at Bordeaux and again reappearing on the tassels under Armand's effigy at Biron. The repertoire of ornament used throughout the monument is so similar to that at Biron that the

Bordeaux sculptor must have been associated with the workshop and had access to its “patrons” or models. Another curious costume detail links the monument to the Nantes tomb of François II and so to Colombe’s workshop. The ornamental band that runs across the top of the headdress of the Holy Woman behind Christ’s head is the same as the one so used on the figure of Prudence at Nantes, and is also repeated on the headdress of another Holy Woman in an Entombment at Joigny.⁶⁶ Even the beaded border on the headcloth framing the sides of the face is repeated on the Bordeaux figure, which also wears the knotted kerchief of Nantes and Biron.

For all their swagger, the figures of Joseph and Nicodemus look something like participants in a fancy-dress party whose rented clothing is a little too big and heavy for them. Joseph’s jewelry and hat are borrowed from Biron, as are some of the other costume accessories of the two men. Their postures, too, are deriva-

tive, their outturned legs being almost a caricature of that of the Biron Joseph.

The more one studies the Bordeaux monument the more it appears to be largely if not entirely the work of a follower, and not of the master. Despite the dexterity of much of the carving, most of the figures have a rather lifeless quality that one sometimes finds in even good academic work in French Renaissance sculpture of this time. Delicacy of detail is lacking, the drapery is somewhat formless, and the soft hands and heads are too large and heavy. Only the Virgin and Christ approach the quality of the master. Perhaps he made the patron or model of the monument and carved these figures, leaving the rest to another.

The devotion to the Holy Sepulcher was cultivated by the founder of the order of the Annunciads, Saint Jeanne de Valois, who erected a Holy Sepulcher in the garden of the mother house at Bourges. Although it is not clear whether the “sepulcher” of Bourges consisted

66. Forsyth, *Entombment*, pp. 122, 136, 137, figs. 182, 209–211.

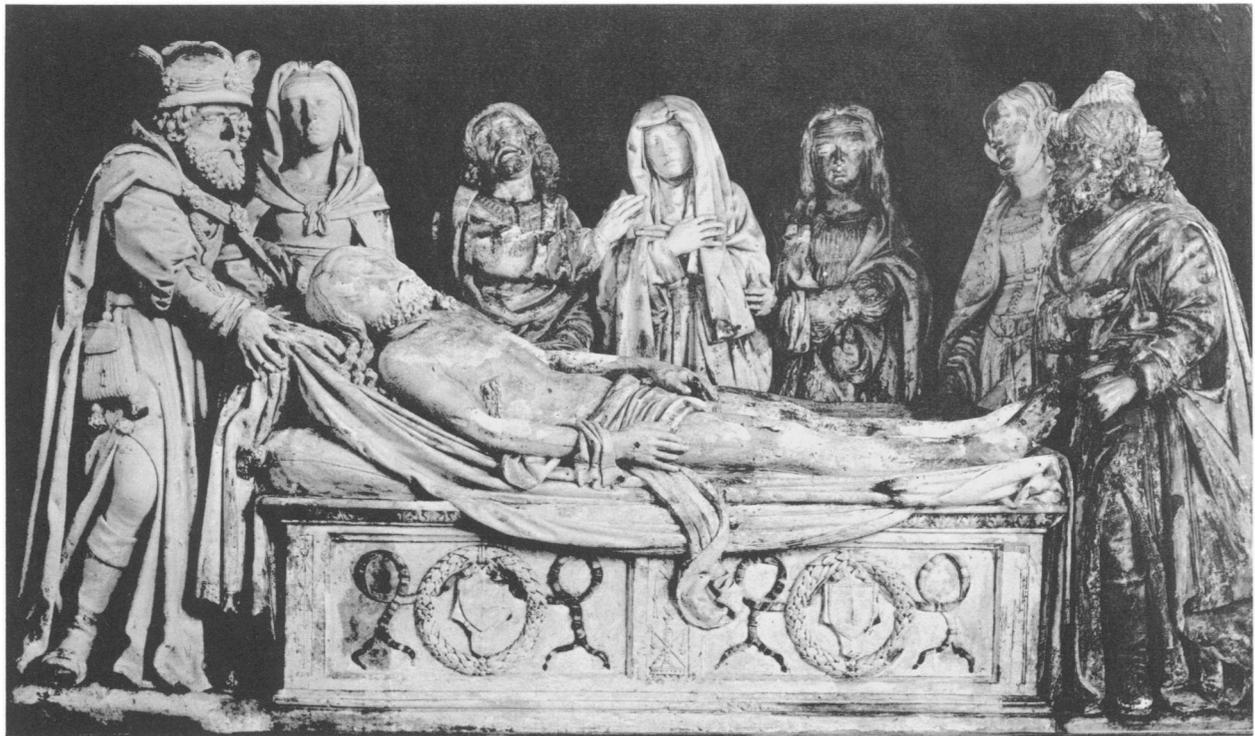


FIGURE 54
Entombment, about 1530, Maison de la Miséricorde, Bordeaux (photo: Puytorac)

of or contained a sculptured group representing the Entombment, one can at least conclude that the devotion instituted by the founder was followed in the sister house at Bordeaux, where there was an altar dedicated to the Holy Sepulcher placed directly below the niche containing the Entombment. Such a devotion would have been sufficient reason for the construction of the monument at Bordeaux, a devotion which was probably intensified in the mind of the donor by the thought of approaching death. It is quite likely that the donor was Jacqueline Andron de Lansac, who gave the funds for the building of the chapel. In 1525 she requested in her will that her heirs finish the building and supply it with chapels, altars, and stained glass. A year later she ordered the altars for the sanctuary. In her will, following a formula typical of other Bordeaux wills, Jacqueline chose her sepulcher in the chapel "en remembrance du Saint-Sépulchre où Notre-Seigneur et Redempteur Jésus-Christ fut mis et ensevelly." In 1526 the donor had ordered the altars from Guillaume Medion, and in 1532 her heirs dealt with Mathurin Galoppian for the construction of her tomb. Galoppian was a master mason of Bordeaux. If either of these men had been directly responsible for the Entombment one might expect to see examples of similar carving in Bordeaux. Paul Roudié, who has made a study of the Bordeaux Entombment and discovered all of the documents mentioned here, was not able to find such parallels. It seems likely from this negative evidence that a workshop was called in from the outside.

Roudié, who was the first to point out the dependence of the Bordeaux Entombment upon that of Biron, has also uncovered documents indicating that there were contacts of the Gontaut family with the Annuciads of Bordeaux, contacts that explain the similarities between the two monuments. Armand de Gontaut founded a mass at the Annuciads, and Catherine de Gontaut, a daughter of Pons and niece of Armand, became a member of the Bordeaux community after the death of her first husband, François de Durfort, in 1524. In 1534 Catherine was remarried to Jacques de Pons, the widower of the donor of the chapel. In conclusion one can agree with Roudié that the founder of the chapel or members of her family probably had the Entombment made at the beginning of the second quarter of the sixteenth century by the workshop of the Biron master.

THE TOMB OF PONS DE GONTAUT

Although the tombs of the Gontaut brothers are Renaissance in style, one has a strong sense of their continuity with the earlier Gothic Pietà and Entombment, and also with the Pietà at Carcenac. Although the effigies of both brothers have been badly mutilated, enough remains, particularly of the relief sculptures on the sides of the tombs, to lead to the somewhat surprising conclusion that, despite the lapse of time and the consequent evolution of style, this later work at Biron seems to have proceeded under the same auspices and even apparently with much of the same équipe as before.⁶⁷

The tomb of Pons dominates the chapel, both by its axial position and its larger size (Figure 55). The richly carved sarcophagus rests upon a podium-like base decorated with skulls and crossed bones tied together with ribbons. Such lugubrious memento mori were typical of the age. They are found, for instance, on the contemporary tombs of Claude Gouffier at Oiron and François de Lannoy at Folleville, and in a representation of a tomb in a breviary in the Bibliothèque Municipale of Châteauroux.⁶⁸ They may refer to the Christian hope of resurrection by an implied reference to Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones which the Lord brings to life (Ezekiel 37:1-5).

The coat of arms of the deceased once appeared on the plinthlike projections of the tomb's base. At the corners of the base are four winged putti of the sort commonly used on Italian tombs, such as that of Medea Colleoni in Bergamo. Above these putti are four small corner niches that once must have contained sculptures, to judge by dowels or empty holes for dowels that remain on the back face of each niche and were obviously used to attach the missing figures to the tomb. The sides of the monument above the base are carved with reliefs framed by pilasters, each pilaster resting directly upon the projections of the base beneath it and supporting the table or coffer of the tomb on which the effigy rests.

67. Paul Vitry published the tombs twice. See note 2 and Vitry and Brière, *Documents: Renaissance*, seconde partie, I, pl. xvi, 1-3. See also Pradel, *Michel Colombe*, p. 105.

68. Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry, the Boucicault Master* (London, 1968) pp. 81, 82, fig. 162; Vitry and Brière, *Documents: Renaissance*, second partie, I, pls. x, xii, 6.

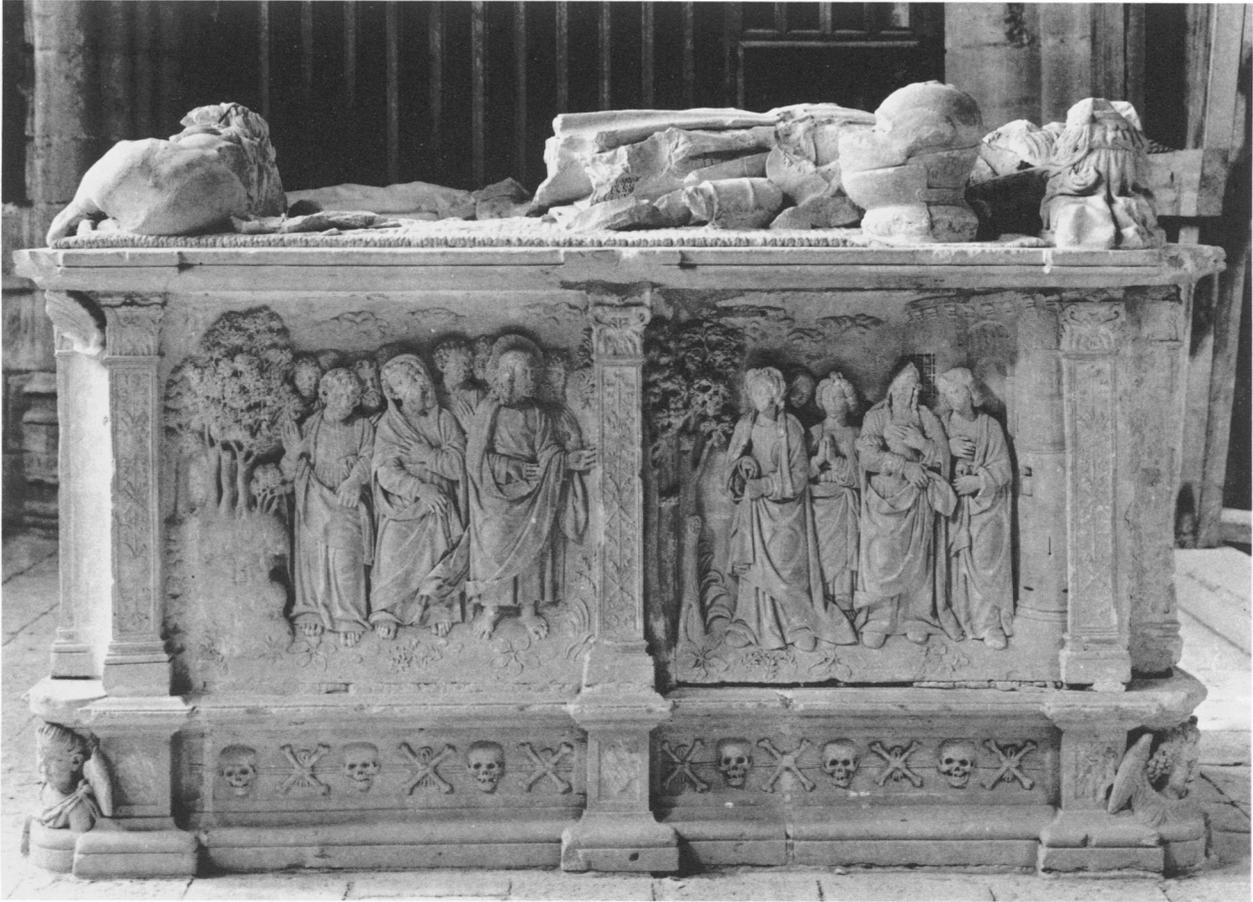


FIGURE 55
Tomb of Pons de Gontaut (Archives Photographiques)

In these reliefs one finds many resemblances to the earlier Pietà and Entombment. Here are the same stocky figures with the same narrow shoulders, large heads, and big, pudgy hands and feet. Here is the same kind of soft, puffy drapery with swirling folds. Here, even, are similar costume accessories, as well as the striated rock formations and bosky trees one finds on the Entombment reliefs.

The reliefs on the two long sides of the tomb represent the story of Lazarus. Most appropriate for a tomb, the subject had been so used since the early Christian period as a sign of the Christian hope in the resurrection⁶⁹ and in accordance with Christ's words when he raised Lazarus: "I am the resurrection and I am life. If a man has faith in me, even tho he die, he shall come to life" (John 11 :25, 26, N.E.T.). A banderole inscribed

with these words in the Latin text of the Vulgate appears above Christ's head in a fifteenth-century Rhenish woodcut of the Resurrection of Lazarus.⁷⁰ In the office for the dead of the Roman Breviary there is the prayer: "Thou who didst call up Lazarus from the grave, do thou, O Lord, grant them rest and a place of forgiveness."⁷¹

The story begins on the east face of the tomb with the arrival of Christ and his disciples at Bethany. In

69. Joseph Wilpert, *I Sarcofagi cristiani antichi. Monumenti di antichità cristiana II* (Rome, 1929-36) pp. 302, 303.

70. Campbell Dodgson, *Catalogue of Early German and Flemish Woodcuts in the British Museum I* (London, 1903) p. 47, no. A, 6.

71. Taken from the translation of the Roman Breviary by John, Marquess of Bute (London, 1908) p. 1176, for the first nocturn, second responsory.

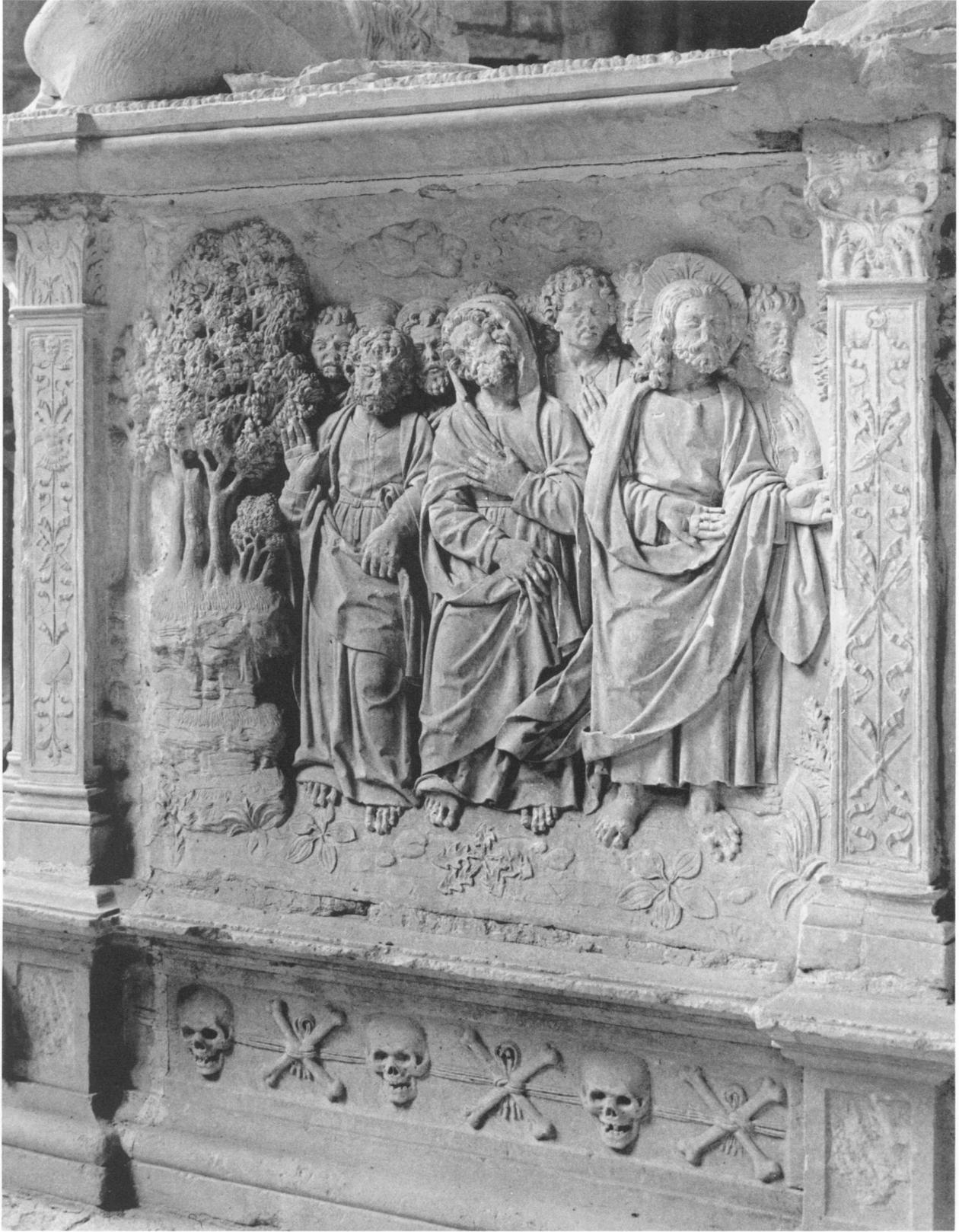


FIGURE 56
Tomb of Pons, east face, left panel (photo: Bernard Biraben)

FIGURE 57
Tomb of Pons, east face, right panel (Biraben)



the left-hand panel, identified by his large cruciform halo, stands Christ (Figure 56). Facing him in the right-hand panel (Figure 57) are five women before the city gate of Bethany, where Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha lived. Martha, who first encountered Christ, is in the forefront at the left with two

mourning women behind her. After this first encounter the gospel says that Martha returned to town to get her sister, Christ remaining where he was. The two figures at the right are Mary and an attendant mourner or possibly Mary and Martha, if the latter is represented here a second time beside her sister whom she

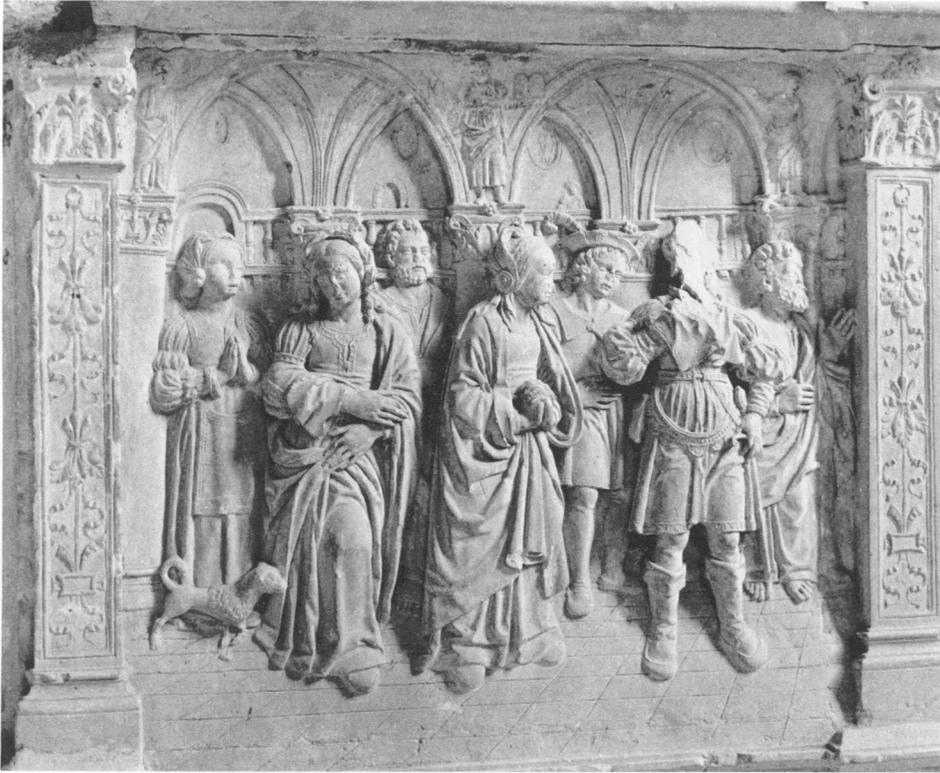


FIGURE 58
Tomb of Pons, west
face, left panel
(Biraben)



FIGURE 59
Tomb of Pons, west
face, right panel
(Biraben)

brought back with her from the town. Two episodes of the story would thus be represented together; a similar conflation occurs in the Rhenish woodcut cited above.

The climax of the story is shown on the west face. In the left-hand panel Mary and Martha stand in the front plane next to a richly clad male figure, now headless (Figure 58). In the back row are two disciples with a male and a female mourner. All these figures face those in the panel to the right where Christ, flanked by the praying Peter and another disciple, stretches out his hand toward Lazarus as he steps out of his tomb, assisted by two turbaned men who have just unbound his hands (Figure 59). The thongs that hang from his wrists are a misinterpretation of Christ's order to loose Lazarus from the winding sheets in which, according to the Eastern burial custom, his body had been wrapped like that of an Egyptian mummy. Lazarus is no longer shown as the thin-chested, emaciated figure who in most medieval representations seems to rise weightless from his grave at Christ's command. Here he comes forth from his tomb with the victorious stride of a conquering hero in much the same way as Christ himself often has been represented in his own resurrection. In sign of triumph Lazarus steps upon the lid of his sarcophagus just as Christ sometimes does. The same type of muscular figure, so typical of Italian Renaissance art, also appears in a number of other contemporary representations of Lazarus north of the Alps.⁷²

The most unusual aspect of the Biron relief is its architectural setting. Instead of showing the miracle as taking place in the open country, where burial tombs were found in Palestine, the sculptor has placed it within a spacious vaulted hall looking like a pagan classical basilica. Here, as for the ornament, one has to turn to Italy. Donatello had already used a similar

interior several times as a background for Christian religious scenes, once in bronze reliefs decorating the high altar of the church of Sant'Antonio in Padua and once again, and more significantly for us, in a series of bronze reliefs on the north pulpit of San Lorenzo in Florence (Figure 60).⁷³ In the Florentine reliefs the basilica setting, reminiscent of the interior of a Roman bath, was employed for the appearance of Christ before Herod and Pilate, and here one finds the same kind of balcony as at Biron, from which spectators look down, and even the same type of classical figures standing on top of columns.⁷³ The round arches of Donatello's reliefs have been retained, but his classical barrel vaults have been transformed into the rib vaults of French Gothic architecture. The figurines standing on the columns at Biron show more effort to modify their pagan origin than did those of Donatello. In the left-hand relief the central figure, while retaining a classical stance, has become Moses holding the tablets of the law. The corresponding figure holding a shield in the right-hand relief may represent a Jewish military hero such as Joshua, Sampson, or David, but on either side of him are two male classical nudes who have obviously nothing to do with the story. At Biron the same kind of perspective was attempted, and even the same criss-cross latticework covers the small oval windows as covered the bigger window openings at San Lorenzo. The pairs of canister-like urns above the columns at San Lorenzo seem to stand for the wine and water of the mass just as do the cruets on Armand's tomb. Whether the Donatello reliefs directly inspired those at Biron or whether there was an intermediary source, perhaps a drawing, cannot be said, but the similarity in composition is so striking one wonders whether the Biron Master could have seen the Donatello reliefs. Such an Italian visit of the Biron Master as this implies

72. For example, on a Limoges enamel plaque in the Metropolitan Museum (41.100.204) and in a painting by Jan Cornelis Vermeyen in the Musée du Cinquantenaire, Brussels.

73. An engraving of The Flagellation of Christ, by the Master of the Vienna Passion (Vienna, Albertina, H. 1, A. 1.28) shows a similarly vaulted room, representing the palace of Pilate, with columns and statuettes, one of them nude, standing on the columns in front of the springing of the arches, as in the Donatello relief at San Lorenzo, Florence. The Master of the Vienna Passion has

been linked to a Florentine source, the Picture Chronicle by Baccio Baldini. Perhaps the architecture is also dependent upon Donatello's relief. See Jay A. Levenson, Konrad Oberhuber, and Jacquelyn L. Sheehan, *Early Italian Engravings from the National Gallery of Art* (Washington, D.C., 1973) pp. 20, 21, fig. 2 (11). Figurines also stand in niches above the springing of arches in Flemish retables, but they have no resemblance to those at Biron. See Raymond Koechlin and J.-J. Marquet de Vasselot, *La Sculpture à Troyes et dans la Champagne méridionale au seizième siècle* (Paris, 1900) p. 113, fig. 44.

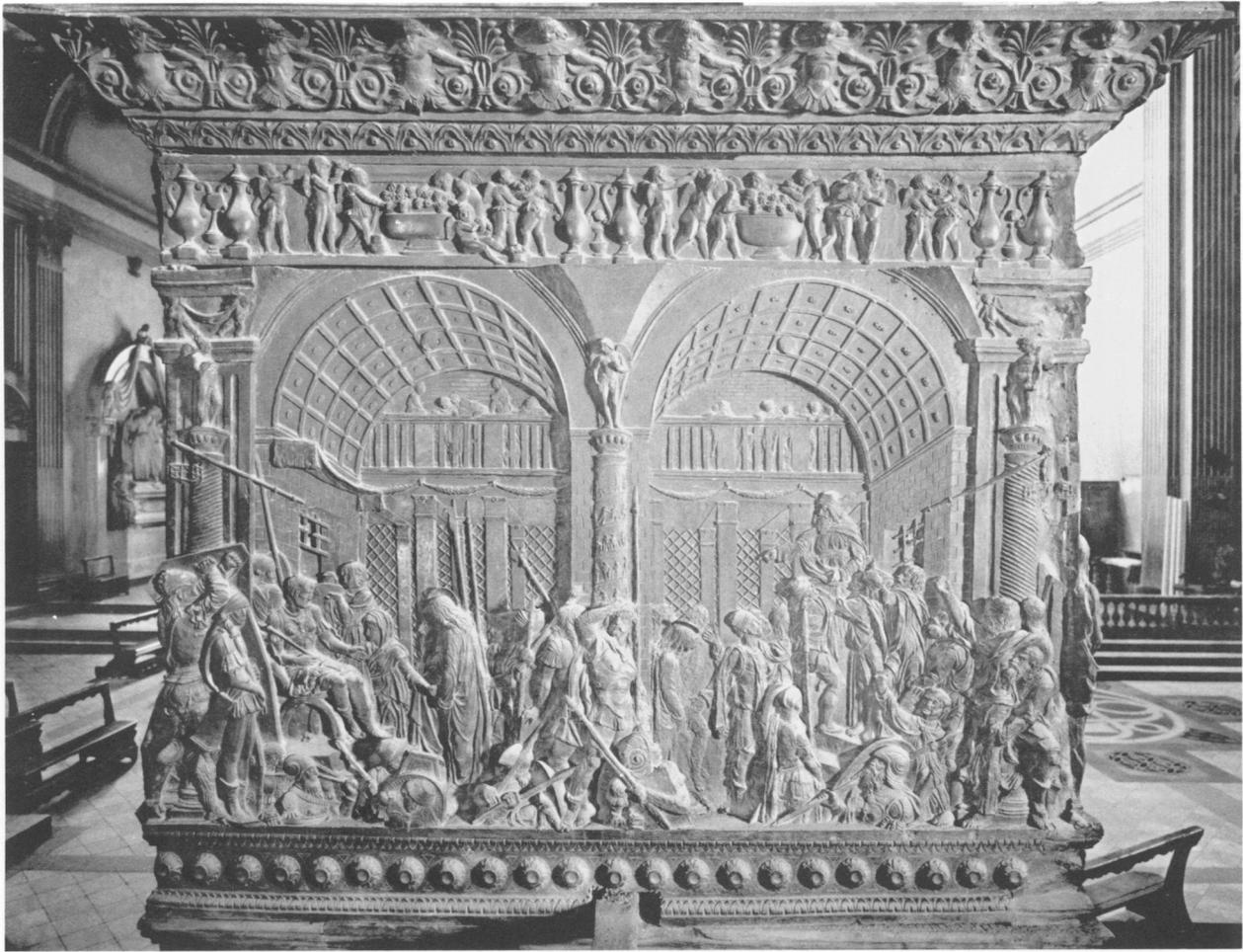


FIGURE 60

Christ before Pilate and before Caiaphas, relief by Donatello, north pulpit, church of San Lorenzo, Florence (photo: Alinari)

would also explain other Florentine influences, such as the similarity of the Biron Saint John to figures of the della Robbias.

Parallel examples for an architectural setting of the Lazarus story are rare indeed. In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century paintings north of the Alps the miracle can take place in the market square of a medieval town, or sometimes within a church or in front of a classical colonnade. In a painting by Dirk Bouts it occurs as at Biron within a completely enclosed building with columns, arches, and vaults, but a building circular in plan like a classical mausoleum and not of the basilica type.⁷⁴

At either end of Pons' sarcophagus is a relief between pilasters. The one beneath the head of the effigy, now mutilated, may once have displayed the Biron coat of arms supported by two dragons. The same arms, also with mantling and crest (and now similarly defaced) were carved above the chapel's entrance door.

At the foot of the tomb, facing the altar, the relief shows a tablet suspended from the winged head of a

74. See Emile Mâle, "La Resurrection de Lazare dans l'art," *La Revue des arts* 1 (1951) pp. 44-52; Phyllis Ackerman, "The Doubtful Status of Albert Outwater," *Art in America* 16 (1926-27) pp. 72-77.

FIGURE 61
Tomb of Pons, epitaph (Biraben)

putto whose face has been partly obliterated (Figure 61). Pons' epitaph appears on the tablet:

Ci gist Messire Pons de Gontault, chevalier baron de Biron, edificatur de la presente chapelle et fondateur du colliege dicelle ou i[1] trespasa le premier jour de Octobre m^vxxiii. Prions Dieu pour son ame.

The missing figures from the tomb's corner niches perhaps represented mourners or heraldic angels bearing coats of arms of the deceased, but it seems more likely that these were female personifications of the four cardinal virtues: Justice, Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance. So named by Saint Augustine and repeated in the sentences of Peter Lombard,⁷⁵ they were known in thirteenth-century French sculpture and were reintroduced in France from Italy two centuries later; in Italy they had frequently been used on secular tombs.⁷⁶ Popularized in the pageantry attending the royal entries of Charles VIII and Louis XII, the theme was given further official sanction when Michel Colombe placed the cardinal virtues like monumental guardians at the four corners of the tomb of François II, which Anne of Brittany erected at Nantes in memory of her parents. The subject was repeated at Saint-Denis on the tombs of Charles VIII, Louis XII and Anne of Brittany, and Henry II and Catherine de Medici, and it was also repeated on a number of other sixteenth-century French tombs.⁷⁷ Emile Mâle has explained the placing of the cardinal virtues at the corners of a tomb with a passage by the now unknown French author of the *Somme le roi*, who likened these virtues to "the four towers of the stronghold of the prudent man."⁷⁸ The tomb presumably represented the dead man's house or stronghold over which the virtues stood guard like



towers at the corners of a building. One can also quote Durandus:

When the sepulcher was being sealed it was signed with four crosses of chrisim for the prudence, fortitude, temperance and justice with which our heart is anointed when it is prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive the mystery of the heavenly secrets.⁷⁹

Pons' effigy has been too badly mutilated to make detailed comparisons possible, but enough of it remains to show the same general type of workmanship as on the Pietà and Entombment, and to relate the effigy closely to the earlier sculptures. The small remnant of Pons' head has an eye and brow similar to earlier ones. The folds on his tabard are also similar to those on his statue in the Pietà group, with the same type of chain mail at the neckline and the same type of plate armor

75. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* CXCII (Paris, 1855) p. 823.

76. See those at Verona discussed by A. G. Mayer, *Lombardische Denkmäler des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1893) pp. 85–87, ills.

77. See Pradel, *Michel Colombe*, p. 47, and Pierre Pradel, "Le Tombeau de Monsieur de la Palice," *Archives de l'art français. Etudes et documents sur l'art français du XII^e au XVI^e siècle* 22 (Paris, 1959) pp. 61–64.

78. Emile Mâle, *L'Art religieux en France à la fin du moyen-âge* (Paris, 1925) p. 309.

79. Guillelmus Durandus (d. 1295), *Rationale divinarum officiorum*, 13 a.

appearing on the arms and at the side below the tabard. His helm is slightly later in type, but, as in the Entombment, it is an *armet à rondelle* with a hole at the back for the missing disk and one on top for the missing crest. The cushion beneath his head has a carved brocade pattern of the same type painted on John's garment in the Entombment. This pattern, made in low relief by cutting out the background, is generally similar to that used on the funerary cushions of the tomb of François II and his wife at Nantes by Michel Colombe. Such carving representing brocade was a specialty of Bourbonnais sculptors. The tassels at the corners of the cushion are like those hanging from Joseph's purse. The small kneeling angels who supported the cushion are too mutilated to compare with those of the Entombment group, but other angels on the tombs do show a relationship. Pons' feet rested against the traditional crouching lion, symbol of knightly prowess, and the effigy is represented upon a plaited straw mat of the sort one traditionally placed a dying man on.

In his will Pons requested Jean, his son and heir, and his brother Armand, administrator of his house, to bury him in the chapel founded by him in honor of Notre-Dame de Pitié, in the choir at the foot of the main altar.⁸⁰ There is good reason to believe that Pons had had his tomb made while he was still alive when one remembers the care with which he built the chapel and founded the college of canons, one of whose main duties was to say memorial masses for his soul. There was plenty of time to carve the tomb after the Entombment was finished about 1510 and before Pons' death in 1524. The costumes of the figures, in particular the headdresses and coiffures of the women in the left-hand relief of the raising of Lazarus, correspond with such a dating.

Although the reliefs of Pons' tomb are generally similar enough to each other to be attributed to the same workshop, there are differences between them that imply two different hands. The most noticeable difference is the lack of coordination between each of the paired reliefs. In the pair portraying Christ, Mary, and Martha before the gates of Bethany, the figures of the men in the left-hand relief stand at a higher level than the women on the right, consequently the rows

of heads in the two reliefs are at different heights. It seems at first that the figures of the right-hand relief are lower to allow space above them for the architecture, but then one realizes that the strange lack of continuity resulted from there being more than one hand at work. If one sculptor did both reliefs, why did he carve the men in a different style from the women and place them at different ground levels?

The differences between the reliefs on the west face of the tomb are in some ways even more evident. The balcony running across the back of both reliefs is meant to be a continuous structure, but it is smaller and higher on the left than on the right, and the balustrades are different in shape and size. There are also the same slight but significant differences between the figures of both reliefs as found in the other pair.

Comparing all four reliefs, one sees that the two depicting Christ and his disciples resemble each other closely in drapery, proportions, and faces, whereas the figures of the Holy Women in the other two reliefs are alike, and they differ from the figures of the men in proportion, scale, and drapery. There are other differences. In the two reliefs with Christ the heights of the figures tend to diminish toward the sides of the reliefs, but there is no such tendency with the women. A number of the gestures and costumes of the women are similar too.

A division of the work between two sculptors in the workshop would explain all these differences and discrepancies, each man doing one of the reliefs on each side of the tomb to speed its completion. A curious mistake in one of the figures seems to confirm this hypothesis. The figure is that of a man who appears on the right edge of the relief showing the women who were present at the raising of Lazarus. His hands are quite different in scale. His outer hand, much too big for the rest of his body, is carved on a separate piece of stone that was added to the relief to make it wider. (Similar additions to the other reliefs suggest that the sarcophagus is longer than originally planned.) This larger hand is almost identical to a hand of an apostle shown at the left side of the relief of Christ before Bethany. One can only conclude that the sculptor who made the two Christ reliefs also made this addition to one of the other reliefs without allowing for the difference in scale of the other work. If one sculptor had made all four reliefs, he would not have been likely to

80. Paris, Archives Nationales, Collection Périgord, Fonds Bosredon, ms. 1760, 70, v. 15.

make such a mistake. A similar error in another of the reliefs reinforces this point. In a piece of stone added to the relief of the women before the gates of Bethany the tree foliage does not match that of the tree to which it has been attached, but instead matches the foliage on the adjacent relief.

The two reliefs with the figures of Christ were perhaps done by the master, who may have assigned a colleague to do the less important ones with the women. The Christ reliefs are closer than the other two to the earlier sculptures of the Biron master in their figure style and in their treatment of trees, striated rocks, and grass as the latter appear on the two reliefs of the Biron Entombment. The figures of the Christ reliefs have the same proportions and heads as the figures of the Pietà and the Entombment. The costume accessories are also quite similar. The Jonah of the Entombment relief and the Christ of the Lazarus relief have the same end of drapery fluttering behind their backs, looking as if it were pressed against the background. The shroud of Lazarus hangs from his body with the same type of folds one finds on the lappet of Christ's loincloth in the Biron Pietà or on the anointing cloth held by the Magdalen in the Carcenac Pietà. The anatomy of Lazarus' body is close to that of Christ's in the Carcenac sculpture, especially in the veined legs. The turbaned heads of the two Jews assisting Lazarus from the grave resemble those worn by Joseph, Nicodemus, and Abraham in the Entombment. One of the Jews also has the characteristic wide collar of the Biron Master, pinned at the throat, seen already on the figures of Nicodemus and Abraham. Joseph's soft boot worn in a sandaled shoe or patten reappears in the Lazarus relief.

The reliefs depicting the women, although not as close to the Biron Master, also show resemblances to the earlier sculptures in the soft folds of their garments, in their hands, and in their clothing. Note, for example, the hands of a woman in the back row of the Bethany relief. Other similarities to the earlier work, including the effigy of Pons, and the prominence of the hands, make it difficult to assume that the tomb was not made by the same workshop that had done the earlier sculptures.

Just as the Italian ornament on the sarcophagus of the Biron Entombment parallels that on the tomb of François II at Nantes, so one can look to Gaillon for

even more direct parallels to the ornament on Pons' tomb. On a pilaster panel from Gaillon (Figure 62) are carved bunches of fruit, their stems tied together by fluttering ribbons, and a military harness and other trophies, all of these elements being fastened to a large ribbon hanging from a ring at the top of the panel. These same elements in simplified form and lacking the finesse of Gaillon are used to decorate the pilasters

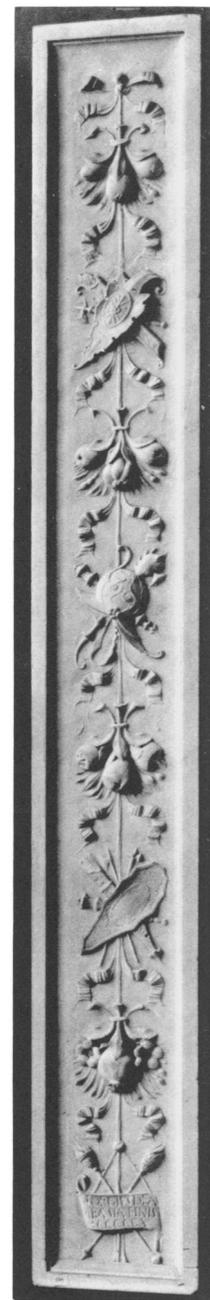


FIGURE 62
Pilaster from château
of Gaillon. Musée du
Louvre (Archives
Photographiques)

of Pons' tomb, different elements of the decoration appearing on the two long faces. One suspects that the workshop at Biron knew the Gaillon pilaster or drawings of it and thus was able to follow a repertoire of ornament derived from the Italians who worked for Gaillon. All of the Italianate ornament of Biron, however, lacks the crisp elegance of the original and was probably carved by French craftsmen.⁸¹

Variations in the ornamental work on Pons' tomb again suggest that several hands were active. The ribbons on the right-hand pilaster of those framing the Lazarus reliefs are different from those on the other two pilasters, but are like those holding the tablet of the epitaph on the end plaque. The left-hand pilaster framing the Lazarus reliefs is slightly different from the other two on the same side. On the opposite side of the tomb there are slight variations in the leaves and in the ornament on the central and right-hand pilasters, and there are also variations in the two pilasters flanking the epitaph at the foot of the tomb. Like variations in handwriting, all these rather minute differences are consistent and numerous enough to suggest two or even three different hands working together under the master and following the same cartoons.

THE TOMB OF ARMAND DE GONTAUT

Armand's tomb, somewhat less elaborate and slightly smaller than his brother's, is of the same general type and workmanship. It has the same high, podium-like base, the same type of carvings in relief framed by pilasters, and the same kind of large, projecting slab carrying the effigy (Figure 63). Because of its placement against the screen of the side chapel, the back or west face of the tomb was left uncarved.

On the east face of the podium base, between the projecting bases of the pilasters, are carved representations of the liturgical objects used by Armand in his priestly office. On the left are an altar cross, chalice and paten, and one of a pair of cruets for the wine and

water of the mass. In the center is an open book flanked by a pair of altar candlesticks, the book inscribed *PIISSIME JESU MISERERE MEI*, possibly taken from a prayer for the dead.⁸² To the right is the other cruet, along with a monstrance and an episcopal cross. On the base at the foot of the tomb are a pair of altar bells flanking a situla or holy-water bucket, and at the head end of the tomb is a censer between a pair of aspergils, and a pax.

Armand's effigy, like his brother's, lies in state. The effigies were obviously made *en suite*. Both were originally attended by kneeling angels who held the cushions beneath the heads of the deceased in the same courtly fashion as on many other medieval tombs of people of rank. Fragments of these angels survive, as do their hands, still represented on the pillows. Unlike that of Pons, Armand's effigy cannot be compared to his earlier kneeling figure in the Pietà group because of the great difference in the garments on the two statues. On his effigy Armand wears full episcopal regalia. Cope, dalmatic, stole, and maniple are visible, if only in part. The voluminous cope envelops his figure like a cloak, its folds being somewhat fuller than those found on Pons' effigy but of the same general character. Only part of the staff of the crozier remains, the rest having been broken off during the Revolution, possibly when the effigy was sawn off from the tomb. The face has been completely destroyed. As with the helm of Pons' effigy the miter once worn by the effigy of Armand seems to have been more evolved in type than the one represented in the Pietà. Both miters are richly jeweled, the jewels similarly set. The miter on the effigy may have been taller and more intricately worked, but both are too badly damaged to allow closer comparisons. The chances are that the Biron master carved Armand's effigy as well as that of Pons, since it shows no new elements of style and even less evolution than do the reliefs on the sides of his tomb.

These reliefs depict the three theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, symbolized by three female figures. They form a fitting adornment to the tomb of an ecclesiastic. In the center is Faith, "the mother of

81. Vitry, *Michel Colombe et la sculpture*, ills. opp. pp. 191, 445 for other instances of hanging trophies not so close to those at Biron. Military harness had been used earlier at Biron, on the pilasters of the Entombment sarcophagus.

82. The inscription was first read by the abbé Goustat, "De la sépulture des Gontauts-Biron à Cadouin, à Biron et à Badefol," *Bulletin de la Société historique et archéologique du Périgord* 9 (1882) pp. 139-162, known to me through an offprint.



FIGURE 63
Tomb of Armand de Gontaut (Biraben)

virtues.”⁸³ In Italy, where the virtues often appeared on fifteenth-century secular and ecclesiastical tombs, the same arrangement of the theological virtues as at Biron had already been used on the tomb of Doge Francesco Foscari in the church of the Frari, Venice.⁸⁴

On Armand’s tomb Faith is portrayed as an elderly

woman wearing a guimp and a heavy mantle. She studies an open book representing the scriptures while at the same time she holds up a church with her left hand to which she originally pointed with her right, now missing. The meaning is clear: Faith, inspired by the scriptures, is the foundation on which the Church

83. “Prima mater virtutem et origo est Fides,” in the words of Peter of Canterbury, *Patrologia Latina* CCV, col. 270. Despite the declaration of Saint Paul (1 Corinthians, 1–13) that Charity was the greatest of the virtues, a number of medieval theologians give the pre-eminent place to Faith. See the affirmations of Gregory the Great and others, *Patrologia Latina*, XI, col. 1090; LXXIV, col. 588; CLXXI, col. 1213; and CLXXIV, col. 342.

84. Charles Seymour, *Sculpture in Italy 1400–1500* (Baltimore, pl. 138, see also pls. 26, 35, 86B, 121. For earlier uses by the Pisani and Giotto, following French precedents, Adolfo Venturi, *Storia dell’arte italiana*. IV, *La Scultura del trecento* (Milan, 1906) pp. 172, 215, 230, 433, 435, 642, 643, 645, 666–668; V, *La Pittura del trecento* (1907) pp. 364, 367, 369. Also Emile Mâle, *L’Art religieux en France au XIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1919) p. 138, figs. 53, 55, 56.



FIGURE 64
Tomb of Armand, head
end (Biraben)

rests.⁸⁵ Such a personification of Faith also illustrates the second article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church."⁸⁶ This article is represented by a pope sitting in a somewhat similar position beside a church in a German sixteenth-century tapestry in the Metropolitan Museum.⁸⁷ The model of the

church on the sarcophagus is obviously based upon the Biron chapel itself, perhaps to suggest Armand's active role in its construction. His epitaph refers to his activity in the building of churches. To the left of Faith is Charity or Love, represented by a young maiden modestly dressed, in striking contrast to her sister virtues. Charity lifts her heart as an offering to God while holding an empty purse in token of her benevolence to the needy.

To the right of Faith is the figure that must represent Hope. However, instead of being shown in her usual guise as a young woman with flowing hair, she appears as elderly and, stranger still, as a pilgrim. At her side on the ground is the fluke of an anchor she once held. (The anchor is the customary symbol of Hope.) Her

85. "Fides compendium veteris et novi Testamenti," in the words of Saint Augustine, *Patrologia Latina* CLXXIV, col. 515. In the words of Peter of Canterbury, "Faith lays the foundations of the spiritual edifice," *Patrologia Latina* CCV, col. 271.

86. Didron, "Iconographie des trois vertus théologiques," *Annales archéologiques* 20 (1860) p. 204.

87. William Forsyth, "The Credo Tapestry: a pictorial interpretation of the Apostles' Creed," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 21 (1963) pp. 240-251, figs. 2, 16.

bare feet are shod with pilgrim's sandals and her other missing hand once supported the top of a pilgrim's staff, the lower part of which is still visible. On the back of her head is the wide-brimmed hat decorated with cockleshells and crossed staves that was the sign of a pilgrim to the shrine of Saint James of Compostella in Spain. As Saint Peter is the apostle of Faith and Saint John of Love, John's brother, Saint James, was called the apostle of Hope in the teaching of Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* III, section 45, question 3) and by Dante in the *Divine Comedy* (*Paradiso*, canto xxv, lines 32, 33).⁸⁸ These three apostles, who were present at the Transfiguration of Christ, where his divine nature was clearly revealed, came to be associated with the three theological or heavenly virtues, of which Christ himself was the leading example. The three apostles themselves appear on Armand's tomb, represented on the dalmatic worn by his effigy.

For the sake of symmetry the two outer virtues balance each other, the posture and gestures of each reflecting those of the other, but in the opposite direction as in a mirror, yet without stiffness or monotony. The central figure maintains her own equilibrium by leaning her body in one direction and bending her head in the other. Hope looks to her left, toward the angel who usually accompanies her, and who here is present on the head end of the tomb, advancing with outstretched wings and with one arm, now partly gone, raised in salutation (Figure 64). Possibly this angel once bore a trumpet, as in *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (fourteenth century) where "Hope blows a horn . . . till all the saints in heaven sang as one" and men "seek for Truth but none is wise enough to find the way . . . till they found a man wearing Saracen dress as pilgrims do. He bore a staff . . . and on his hat were shells of Galicia"—the shells referring to the pilgrimage to Compostella.⁸⁹

The reliefs on Armand's tomb, like his effigy, are en suite with those of Pons. The figure of Charity has sleeves that are a later version of those worn by two of the women on the left-hand relief of the raising of Lazarus. The same tied sleeves are worn by the angel

of Hope. The drapery over Charity's knees and over those of her sister virtue Faith have the same kind of crinkled, wet folds as on Christ's garments in the reliefs on Pons' tomb. Their feet, encased in large heavy shoes with rounded toes and set wide apart, relate to those of the women in the Bethany relief and also to those of the Virgin in the Biron Pietà.

Just as on the tomb of Pons, two hands appear to have worked on these reliefs, one doing the figures of Charity and Faith, another the figure of Hope. Hope's drapery, and that of her angel around the corner of the tomb, is more turbulent and wrinkled than the rest, and the liturgical vessels below her feet are smaller than the others. Here, doubtless, is a second hand at work. Whether these two hands are the same as those that did the reliefs on Pons' tomb is anybody's guess. In any case they certainly belonged to the same workshop.

At the foot of the tomb is a winged putto holding an open scroll (Figure 65). This may once have been painted with Armand's coat of arms or it may have been intended to contain his epitaph, it being in the same position as the epitaph on Pons' tomb. However, Armand's epitaph was too long for the space, and it was inscribed upon a bronze plaque fastened to the wall of the sanctuary nearby.⁹⁰

The presence of numerous putti on the tombs of Pons and Armand reflects still another influence of Italy, where such figures were common on tombs. The putto with the scroll (Figure 66) is a key figure in the relationship of Armand's tomb to the earlier work of the Biron Master, in particular to the Biron Entombment. His collar has almost the same leaf-vine scroll and ribbed background seen on the collar of the outer left-hand angel of the Entombment. It is fastened by an almost identical pin, and it has the same border going around the inner and outer edges. The sleeves are attached at the shoulders by the same thongs passing over identical gatherings of material next to the edges of the collars. The feathered wings are nearly as close in shape and in texture. These specific similarities imply a continuity of workmanship that is also seen in the heads. The wide face, the modeling of the cheeks,

88. Didron, "Iconographie," p. 293.

89. See *Piers the Plowman* by William Langland, trans. Margaret Williams (New York, 1971) *Passus xviii*, lines 515–530. Another figure carrying a pilgrim staff appears on the tomb of Louis de

Poncher (d. 1521) from the church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, Paris; see Aubert and Beaulieu, *Description*, no. 409.

90. For text, see Appendix.



FIGURE 65
Tomb of Armand, foot end (Biraben)

and the soft, dimpled, half-open mouth of the Armand angel show his descent from the Entombment angel almost as clearly as does his clothing. Yet the face has evolved toward a more Renaissance form that bears some similarity to those of Donatello's putti, again suggesting a Florentine contact for the Biron Master. His wiglike hair is a later version of the hair of the outer right-hand Entombment angel. His collar is also fairly similar. The scroll in his hands has the same baluster shape and acanthus decoration found on the top of

91. See Elisabeth Chirol, *Un premier foyer de la Renaissance: Le château de Gaillon* (Rouen and Paris, 1952) pp. 23, 25, 47–49. Also Lanfry, Chirol, Bailly, *Le Tombeau*, pp. 23, 27, 28, 43–50.

92. See Georges Ritter, *Les Vitraux de la cathédrale de Rouen XIII^e, XIV^e, XV^e et XVI^e siècles* (Paris, 1926) p. 19, pls. 40, 41.

Joseph's hat in the Entombment, and it also resembles the balusters in the Lazarus reliefs on Pons' tomb. Furthermore, the putto's wiglike hair and facial type are seen again on the angel of Hope at the other end of the tomb—still another revealing relationship to the right-hand outer angel of the Entombment.

The putto's plaque was copied at some point in the past with only a few modifications in the face and position of the head. Some years ago the owner of this copy, the Paris antiquarian Nicolas E. Landau, informed me that it had come from Auch. The provenance makes one wonder whether there may not have been other copies of the Biron sculptures in the region, some perhaps nearly contemporary with the originals.

Georges d'Amboise seems to have had a particular liking for personifications of the virtues. They appeared on the façade of his château at Gaillon and again on his tomb in Rouen Cathedral, where they are represented seated within niches flanked by pilasters as on Armand's tomb.⁹¹ They also appear in a stained-glass window in the south transept of the cathedral.⁹² The epitaph on his tomb may account for their popularity with Georges d'Amboise and perhaps also with Armand de Gontaut, hinting as it seems to do at Georges' own honors and virtues:

Les Honneurs s'éteignent avec la mort, mais la vertue ne connaît pas la mort et fleurit avec elle.⁹³

What seems to link the theological virtues on Armand's tomb with those used by Georges d'Amboise are the unusual attributes carried by Faith. These may have originally come from an earlier Norman source since they occur in an illuminated manuscript of the Ethics of Aristotle from the library of the Echevins de Rouen, now in the library of Rouen (ms. I, 927).⁹⁴

The unusual representation of Hope as a pilgrim is found in another Norman manuscript from Rouen, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale (ms. fr. 225, folio 8), as well as on the tomb of Louis de Poncher (d. 1521) from the church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, Paris, now in the Louvre.⁹⁵ Perhaps Armand was inspired by the example of his illustrious kinsman, Georges d'Amboise, to adorn his own tomb with similar representa-

93. See Lanfry, Chirol, Bailly, *Le Tombeau*, p. 39.

94. Didron, "Iconographie," pp. 203, 204, 238; Mâle, *L'Art religieux fin du moyen-âge*, pp. 317–319; Ritter, *Vitraux*, p. 19.

95. Mâle, *L'Art religieux fin du moyen-âge*, pp. 326, 327; Aubert and Beaulieu, *Description*, nos. 411, 412.

tions. Such an influence from the Amboise milieu would certainly not run counter to the other strong relations with central France and the lower Loire valley that have already been noted in the formation of the Biron Master. Indeed the Amboise tomb seems to be itself partly evolved from the Nantes tomb of François II by Colombe, even to the coffered niches housing the virtues, which in a flattened form are also used at Biron.

The architectural setting for these virtues on Armand's tomb is ultimately inspired by Italian sources. The same type of exaggerated perspective with arched doorways at each side, steeply sloping tile floors, and coffered ceilings decorated with quatrefoil rosettes is part of a visual vocabulary that again derives from Donatello's compositions at Padua and is frequently found among Italian Donatellesque artists after 1450. Urbano da Cortona's reliefs for the chapel of the Madonna delle Grazie in the Cathedral of Siena, especially the scene of the angel announcing the death of Mary,⁹⁶ can be mentioned as one example among many.

Further relations between the Biron workshop and the central part of France are numerous enough to suggest that they must have continued after the initial training of the Biron Master in the style of Jean de Chartres. There is, for instance, some resemblance between the reliefs on Armand's tomb and those decorating the left jamb of the portal of the Virgin on the west façade of Bourges Cathedral, erected between 1513 and 1515.⁹⁷ In the sculptures on this portal depicting the lives of the Virgin and of Christ by Nicolas Poyson, Pierre Byard, and Marsault Paule are scenes of Christ's arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and his appearance before Pilate. The figures of these sculptures are the closest to those of Armand's tomb in their short proportions, their wide, flat feet, their drapery style; the Italianate architecture is also very close. Well after the period of Jacques Coeur, Bourges obviously continued to be a sculptural center. The carvings on the Hôtel Lallement at Bourges also have ornament and putti similar to those on the foot of Armand's



FIGURE 66
Tomb of Armand, detail of foot end (Biraben)

tomb. There is no reason to believe that the Biron workshop was an isolated one, unaware of such contemporary work.

The dates of the Biron tombs are not known. To judge by their later style, it is fairly certain that they were made between the completion of the Entombment, about 1510, and the deaths of Pons (1524) and Armand (1531). If Armand's tomb was made posthumously, sufficient room for his epitaph would almost surely have been provided. Furthermore, Pons' epitaph is too carelessly carved to have been part of the original work; it must have been added later, after his death. On the other hand, to account for the evolution of style, time must have elapsed between the completion of the Entombment and the beginning of Pons' tomb. During this interval the master must have carved the Deposition Pietà at Carcenac, and some member or members of his workshop the Bordeaux Entombment. The Rodelle Pietà also shows a relation to his style, although it probably is the work of a parallel master. There are probably other related sculptures in the southwest. However, the Biron Master's presence in the region during this time is no indication that he did not move around outside it, for his later work shows a continuing relation to royalist France.

The winged angel carved on top of the tomb at Armand's feet (not to be confused with the putto holding the scroll) closely resembles the winged putto carved

96. P. Schubring, *Urbano da Cortona* (Strasbourg, 1903) p. 29, fig. 5.

97. See Pierre Pradel, *Cathédrale de Bourges* (Paris, n.d.) figs. 37-41, and A. Boinet, *Cathédrale de Bourges*, *Petites monographies des grands églises de la France* (Paris, n.d.) pp. 79-80.

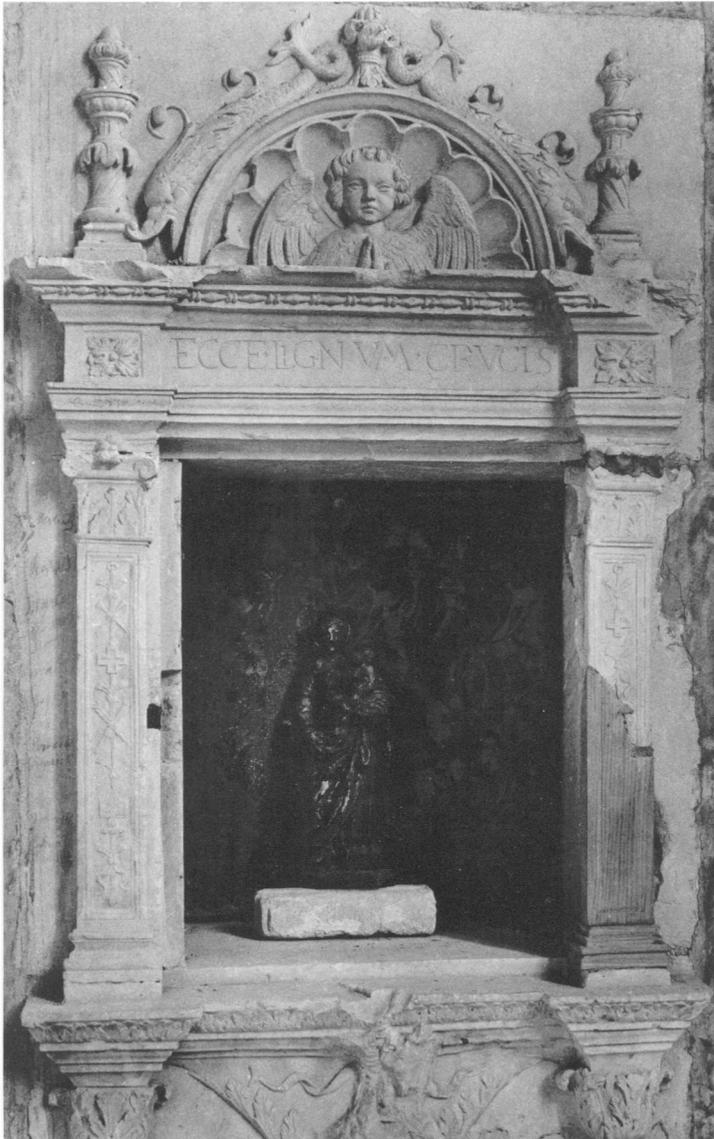


FIGURE 67
Biron, reliquary niche (Biraben)

above a reliquary niche built into the left wall of the sanctuary (Figure 67), and the two figures must be contemporary. Since the wall masonry around it was disturbed and reset, the niche was obviously added after the chapel was built. The inscription on the entablature indicates that the niche was to contain a relic of the true cross: *ECCE LIGNVM CRVCIS*. Armand had given such a relic to his cathedral, and one wonders whether he may not have taken the relic with him to Biron, or at least a fragment of it, when he retired from

Sarlat in 1519.⁹⁸ If so, one could assume that he had the niche built at about the same time as his tomb. Its style fits such a date. Its pediment, decorated with dolphins, while common enough, is close in design to that over a window of the Hôtel Lallement, datable in the second decade of the sixteenth century.⁹⁹ The crudely carved pilasters decorated with symbols of the Passion are echoes of the type used on a relief from the château of Bonnivet in the Poitiers Museum and even on the front of the sarcophagus of the Bordeaux Entombment.¹⁰⁰

Pons's tomb, as that of the elder brother and founder of the chapel, would almost surely have been finished and installed before Armand's. Both, therefore, could well have been made in the second decade of the sixteenth century. Although there is no real proof that Vitry was wrong in dating them in the next decade,¹⁰¹ Pons' tomb is referred to in the will of his son Jean, who ordered his own burial in the same tomb in 1536.¹⁰²

There are no fixed dates for either tomb. Vitry suggested that they were made in the 1530s by one of the successors of Michel Colombe, possibly Martin Cloître or Benoit Bomberault.¹⁰³ Pons' tomb was surely in existence by 1536 when his son Jean ordered his own burial there (for testament of Jean de Gontaut, see Appendix). One can assume that Pons' tomb was the first to be completed, very likely before his death in 1524, and that Armand's was completed before his death in 1531. Both were probably made, therefore, in the 1520s.

Vitry points out that, while French tombs of this period often keep the traditional French Gothic form of a free-standing rectangular structure surmounted by a tomb slab of the usual shape to support the effigy, such tombs are decorated in the Italian manner with

98. *Bulletin de la société historique et archéologique du Périgord* 17 (1890) p. 483.

99. Vitry and Brière, *Documents: Renaissance*, seconde partie, pl. vi; Camille Enlart and Camille Martin, *La Renaissance en France: architecture et sculpture* (Paris, 1911–1921) II, pl. 28.

100. Vitry and Brière, *Documents: Renaissance*, seconde partie, pl. xxx, 3.

101. Vitry, "Les Sculptures," pp. 18–19. For Abbé Audierne's unsupported dating of the tomb to 1520, *Bulletin Monumental* 1, p. 198.

102. For the testament of Jean de Gontaut, see Appendix.

103. Vitry, *Michel Colombe et la sculpture*, pp. 208, 209, 484, 485; Vitry, "Les Sculptures," pp. 8–19.

pilasters and sometimes shell niches. Vitry could be describing the ornament on Pons' tomb when he refers to the ornament on the pilasters of another contemporary tomb as showing "the laborious application of French ornamentalists following Italian models," so different from the facility of some Italian work in France.

The tombs of Pons and of Armand do indeed fit into the general time and category described by Vitry, and their parallels to others in the general region of the lower Loire and in central France are clear and could be in fact elaborated in greater detail than has been done here. What seems equally important, however, is their relationship to earlier work at Biron, Carcenac, and Bordeaux, work we have attributed to the same unknown master and his équipe. It seems reasonable to account for all these resemblances by assuming that we have to do with a single workshop whose style changed and evolved with the times and continued to work at Biron, albeit intermittently. It is less likely that a completely new master and équipe were brought in to do the tombs, one who nonetheless adopted many of the peculiarities of style and minutiae of ornament of the older workshop.

On Armand's tomb the piers framing the reliefs and

supporting the slab and effigy are quite different from those used on the earlier sculptures at Biron. Against the rectangular panels carved on the piers are adorsed colonnettes whose lower parts almost assume the shapes of balusters. Elizabeth Chirol has aptly called these colonnettes candelabra, which they certainly resemble in their elongated shapes and elaborations.¹⁰⁴ Their shafts are sheathed in acanthus leaves and they have rings toward their tapering top. On the podium beneath each of the colonnettes are bases with vertical channelings. All these elements are found in a more extreme form on pilasters in the upper part of the Amboise tomb at Rouen, where they flank figures of apostles, prophets, and sibyls. They also had previously been used on reliefs of the Amboise chapel at Gaillon.¹⁰⁵ Here again the arrow points toward the Amboise workshops as a source of ornament. While the southern Netherlands, particularly Flanders, may have originated these elongated columns, it was probably through Gaillon and Rouen that they came to Biron.

In sum, the work of the unknown Biron Master and his followers is of especial interest as an example of the gradual transformation, in one place and in one workshop, of the late French Gothic style into the new style of the Renaissance "à la manière d'Italie."

Appendix

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO THE FOUNDING OF THE CHAPEL

"1499, 20 juin. Procès-verbal et ordonnance faite par vénérable Jean de Plamon . . . prieur commendataire de Taniès, official de révérend père en Dieu messire Armand de Gontaut, évêque de Sarlat, l'un des commissaires délégués par notre Saint Père le Pape Alexandre VI . . . en vertu de la bulle octroyée par Sadite Sainteté, en datte de l'an 1495, VI des calendes de juin à la réquisition de messire Pons de Gontaut, seigneur baron de Biron, maître d'hôtel du roi Charles VIII; ladite bulle portant permission et faculté audit seigneur de Biron de faire démolir l'ancienne église Saint-Michel à cause qu'elle étoit fort petite et située en un endroit extrêmement incommode et en édifier une autre en un lieu convenable [this new church refers to the one built beneath the sei-

gneurial chapel] ce qui fut fait du consentement de l'évêque, du recteur et des paroissiens.

"Laditte bulle portant encore permission audit seigneur d'édifier une chapelle appelée, Notre-Dame de Pitié, ériger et fonder in icelle six vicairies perpétuelles . . . attribuant Sadite Sainteté audit seigneur de Biron, fondateur et à ses successeurs, le droit de patronat . . ." There follow the statutes and ordinances the founder wishes the vicars of the chapel to follow. The preceding is quoted from a summary, dated January 9, 1792, of titles presented by Monsieur Delpech, archivist, to the directoire of the district of Belvès, including Biron.¹⁰⁶ The extract is obviously based on lost documents that established the rights of the seigneur de Biron

104. Lanfry, Chirol, Bailly, *Le Tombeau*, p. 77, ill. pp. 32, 33.

105. Lanfry, Chirol, Bailly, *Le Tombeau*, p. 55.

106. G. Lavergne, "Chapelle du château de Biron," *Bulletin de la société historique et archéologique du Périgord* 62 (1935) pp. 326-329.

over the chapel of Notre-Dame de Pitié located within the walls of the château.

“1495 Bulle du pape Alexandre VI par laquelle il permet à Pons de Gontaut de faire démolir l’ancienne église de St. Michel de Biron, près du château.”¹⁰⁷ The title is from a table of contents of the château’s archives; the document itself is missing.

“Le jour et fête de Pâques 8 d’avril, 1515. Les Chanoyens de l’église collégiale du dit Biron, commencèrent à faire le service divin, en l’église collégiale dudit Biron de nouveau édifiés et dotée par Pons de Gontaut Seigneur et Baron de Biron.”¹⁰⁸

“Une chapelle sous un autel à l’honneur de N. D. de Pitié. Depuis ériger une église collégiale et chapitre en 1519 id 76 de la bulle de Léon X à la sollicitation du Sr. de Biron.”¹⁰⁹

DAMAGE TO THE PIETÀ AND THE ENTOMBMENT

The damage, prior to the repairs made by the André brothers, is apparent from photographs made while the sculptures were still at Biron. On the Pietà the noses and parts of the mouths of Pons and Armand were broken off. Pons’ hands, most of his left foot, and the hilt of his sword have also gone. His helmet, which may have once been attached to the rock before him, has been reset at his side. The top of Armand’s miter, Christ’s right foot and ankle, and the ends of his fingers on his right hand are also missing. Christ’s right elbow is chipped. The small armorial shields set into the stones beneath Pons and Armand have been removed. There are other minor breaks.

On the Entombment the noses of Christ, of the Magdalen, of Joseph, and of Nicodemus have been knocked off. So have the armorial shields once borne by the three central flying angels, the shield at the center of the sarcophagus, and two on the entablature of the wood frame.

ORIGINAL STATE OF THE ENTOMBMENT

Paint remaining on the group shows that it was once polychromed, along with its niche and frame. A description made in 1834 says that the flying angels were “surrounded by garlands”;¹¹⁰ this must refer to a decorative design painted on the back wall of the niche. Tests by The Metropolitan Museum of the paint still present on the sculpture indicate that all of it is probably old and possibly original. Traces were found of azurite and red lead, neither of which is in use today.¹¹¹ There are also traces of orange lead, now rarely used except as a protective coating for metalwork.¹¹²

Greenish blue, red, and gilding must have been the predominant colors. Stains from the oil of the pigments indicate that John’s tunic and Joseph’s coat originally had brocade designs and that there were elaborate geometric patterns painted in alternating bands of color, on the women’s headcloths. The ends of the shroud were also so painted. These patterns probably corresponded to the “enrichments” of “bands and workings in gold and azure in the Jewish manner” and “bands of polished azure in the fashion of Saracen linen,” mentioned as decorating the coiffures of the women in a document describing a lost Entombment of contemporary date at Jarzé in the lower Loire valley.¹¹³ On an undergarment of the Magdalen gold rosettes were painted on a green background. One of Nicodemus’ garments was painted in horizontal bands of color. All the carved borders must have been painted in variegated colors. The importance of the painting on such a monument can be gauged by the price, 382 livres, paid for painting an Entombment (now lost) at La Rochelle: it was more than half the sum of 630 livres paid for the sculpture itself.¹¹⁴

In 1859 the Virebent brothers of Toulouse made casts of the Entombment, which process must have considerably damaged the paint then remaining. Terracotta copies of the monument, presumably casts, are to be found in the churches at Foix (Ariège), Lansargues (Hérault), Maringues (Puy-de-Dôme), Verdélais (Gironde), and in the Musée des Augustins, Toulouse (where four of the statues were until recently placed at the corners of the balcony of the small cloister).

EPITAPH OF ARMAND DE GONTAUT

Armando de Gontault Sarlatensi vigilantissimo pontifici, pio, frugi, casto, religioso, mentis magnitudine, animi virtute praestanti delubrum dom[ini] immortalium aedificatori, fanorum aut vetustate, aut iniuria collapsorum restutori, homini pietate cum in suos omnes egregia, tum vero maxime in familiam de Biron, ex qua erat, singulari. Qui LXIX aetatis suae anno exacto, XIII calend. Octob. anni m.c.xxxi. diem suum obivit. Haeres ex fratre nepos, virtutis ergo, ac referendae gratiae causa, benemerenti faciendum curavit.

107. Paris, Archives Nationales, Collection Périgord, Fonds Bosredon, Extraits des archives de Biron, tome 51, Papiers Leydet, fol. 143.

108. *Les Chroniques de Jean Tarde*, p. 214.

109. Archives Nationales, Collection Périgord, tome 51, H5.

110. Audierne, *Bulletin Monumental* 1, pp. 197–198.

111. Daniel Varney Thompson, *The Materials of Medieval Painting* (New Haven, 1936) p. 13.

112. I here thank Hubert von Sonnenburg and Pieter Meyers for their assistance in studying the paint.

113. Hubert Sigros, “Eglise de Jarzé,” *Congrès archéologique de France à Anjou en 1964* (Paris, 1964) pp. 243, 244; Forsyth, *Entombment*, p. 194.

114. Forsyth, *Entombment*, pp. 198, 199.

(To Armand de Gontaut twentieth pontiff of Sarlat, pious, frugal, chaste, devout, magnanimous of mind, outstanding in virtue, builder of imperishable temples to God, repairer of shrines ruined by time or by destruction, a man distinguished for his piety in the sight of all, especially so in the family of Biron to which he belonged. Who ended his days in the sixty-ninth year of his life on October 13th, his birthday, in the year 1531. His heir and nephew (through his brother), because of his virtues as well as out of gratitude, has seen to what should be done for this well-merited person.)

TESTAMENT OF JEAN DE GONTAUT

“. . . Item veulx et ordonne que après la susd. séparation [of my soul and body] en quelque lieu qu'elle se fasse, mon corps soit inhumé et ensevely en la chapelle du chasteau de Biron; fondée et hédiffiée par feu mon très honoré seigneur et père en l'honneur et reverence de Nre Dame de Pitié, et ce en sa tumbre et sepulture.

“Item je donne et lègue à mon père spirituel le recteur de Saint-Michel de Biron [the parish church beneath the chapel of the château] vingt cinq livres tournois, une fois paiées, pour et affin que soit tenu de dire et celebrer troys messes en bas et chacune sempmaine durant ung an apres

mon deccez, à scavoir une messe de requiem le lundi, une messe de summa dei misericordia, le jeudi, et l'autre de Nostre-Dame de Pitié, le samedi . . .

“Item je lègue et donne aux chentre, chanoynes et prestres de la chapelle de Notre-Dame de Pytié de Biron quatre vingtz livres tournois pour et affin qu'ilz dient une messe de requiem en chant tous les jours commençans le jour de mon decez et continuant toute l'année et vigilles des mors après Vespres . . .

“Item comme mond. très honoré seigneur et père, par la fondation qu'il a faicte d'icelle chappelle entre autres chouses ayt donné et légué ausd. chantre et chanoynes soixante-quatre livres à payer par un chascun an par le recepveur de Biron, en quoy ilz pourroient estre empeschez et molestez, et non obstant je veulx icelle somme estre payée en la forme et qualité contenue au testament de mond. seigneur et pere.

“Item je lègue et donne ausd. chantre et chanoines la somme de six cens livres tournois pour une foys à la charge de dire perpétuellement et à jamais tous les jours une messe basse de requiem en lad. chappelle et au grand haultier d'icelle.”¹¹⁵

(Jean then orders all obligations of his uncle Armand as well as of his father Pons to be paid and that their wills be executed. One can assume from this request as well as from Armand's obituary that Jean must have been his father's and his uncle's heir.)

115. Sidney Ehrman, *The Letters and Documents of Armand de Gontaut, Marshal of France (1524-1592)* II (Berkeley, 1936) p. 723.