

# Three Berry Mourners

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THE ICONOGRAPHY of French medieval tombs progressed from the simple tomb slabs of the early Middle Ages to the complex symbolic monuments of the Renaissance. Along with the evolution of funeral rites and feudal society, the traditional formula was greatly enriched by the fifteenth-century artists. On top of the sarcophagus was represented a realistic effigy of the dead, life-size. On the sides, in high relief and on a smaller scale, appeared figures under a series of arches. Because of their costume—a large coat similar to the cowl—they were believed to be monks. Actually, the width of the mourning dress and the shape of the hood differ from that of the monastic gown.

Only a few, in fact, are ecclesiastics placed there for their part in performing the funeral rites of the church. The other figures can be identified as relatives and allies of the deceased. Because of the system of medieval society, one of political and economic dependence

among families, it was natural for the deceased to be surrounded not only by members of the clergy but also by his family and allies. The mourners so carved around the base of the tomb represent the most important personages who participate in the funeral procession.

Not until the beginning of the fifteenth century, with Sluter and his followers, was such an iconography with gisant and procession of mourners in an architectural setting definitely established with the two famous monuments ordered by the dukes of Burgundy, Philip the Bold and John the Fearless (Figure 1). Charles I of Bourbon, son-in-law of the latter, immediately adopted the formula for his own tomb in Souvigny, as did Jean de France, Duke of Berry, in Bourges, to be followed afterward by nobility, clergy, and bourgeoisie. The older type of tomb slab did not disappear entirely because not everybody could afford such a monument with an elaborate cortège.



FIGURE 1  
Tomb of John the Fearless  
and Marguerite de Bavière,  
1371–1419, by Jean de la  
Huerta and Antoine le  
Moiturier. From the  
Chartreuse de Champmol.  
Musée des Beaux-Arts,  
Dijon



FIGURE 2  
Mourner from Berry, xv century. Limestone. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 16.32.173

The Metropolitan Museum of Art owns a French sculpture of a limestone mourner from a similar tomb (Figure 2) datable about the middle of the fifteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The piece, formerly in the Georges Hoentschel collection, was lent to the Museum by J. Pierpont Morgan in 1907 and given in 1916. This mourner is represented as a standing, middle-aged man with crossed arms. His head, covered by a hood, is slightly inclined to the left. Over his dress he wears a coat fastened with one button.

In comparing this sculpture to the statues of Claus de Werve for Philip the Bold's tomb (1342–1404) or of those of Jean de la Huerta and Antoine le Moiturier for the tomb of John the Fearless (1371–1419), both now in the Dijon museum, Joseph Breck<sup>2</sup> concluded that in its style it belonged to the Burgundian school. However, the typical characteristics of this style, a powerful and energetic realism in the expression of the features and in the abundant, deeply carved folds of the robe, are not found in our mourner. Yet the wide shoulders and the heavy fall of the coat reveal a Burgundian influence.

All French art at the time was more or less affected by the school of Sluter, but nearly everywhere there developed variations on his major innovations. Jean, Duke of Berry, vied with the Burgundian dukes for political and artistic domination. Although the iconography and architecture of his tomb<sup>3</sup> were inspired by the ones in Dijon, the style of the recumbent effigy and of the mourners is quite different. Even during the second period of construction, under King Charles VIII, when Burgundian influence is most evident in iconography and style, this influence is nevertheless softened by the Berry tradition. Instead of a dramatic effect, the emphasis is now upon individual features and on sober treatment of the drapery. It is these very

1. Acc. no. 16.32.173; H. 15 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (39 cm.) limestone.

2. Joseph Breck, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Catalogue of Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance sculpture* (New York, 1933) p. 132; André Peraté and Gaston Brière, *Collections Georges Hoentschel* (Paris, 1918) I, p. 4.

3. Recumbent effigy, sculptor Jean de Cambrai, Cathedral of Bourges; mourners, first campaign, 1405–1416, Jean de Cambrai, marble, second campaign, 1453–1457, Étienne Bobillet and Paul Mosselman, alabaster; these mourners are dispersed among museums (two in The Metropolitan Museum of Art) and private collections; see Alfred de Champeaux and Paul Gauchery, *Les travaux d'art exécutés pour Jean de France duc de Berry* (Paris, 1894).

FIGURE 4

Detail of a mourner from the tomb of Jean, Duke of Berry, 1405–1416. Marble. H. (total) 15 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (39 cm.). Collection of Denys Cochin, Paris (photo: Marc Vaux)



FIGURE 3

Mourner from the tomb of Jean, Duke of Berry, 1405–1416. Marble. H. 15 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (39 cm.). Collection of Denys Cochin, Paris (photo: Marc Vaux)

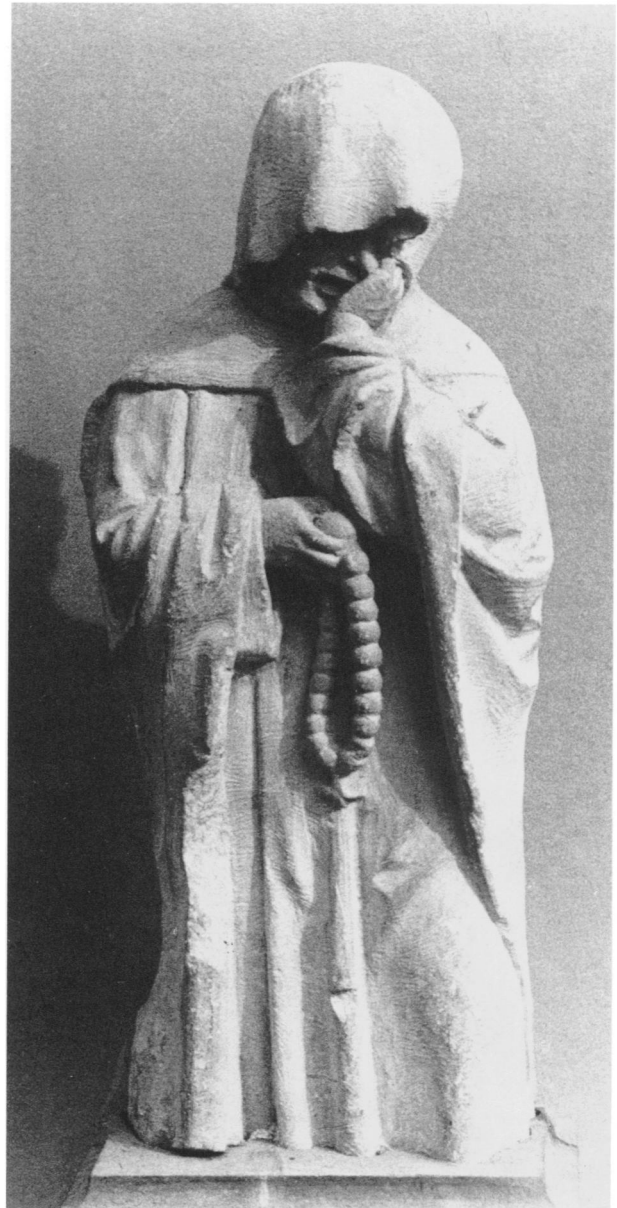


elements that we find in our mourner, although executed by a less skilled hand.

Without any doubt, the sculptor of the Metropolitan Museum's figure was familiar with the work of the artistic center of Bourges. The mourners of the tomb of the Duke of Berry<sup>4</sup> and our statue are the same size, and they have common stylistic details (Figures 2, 3, 4). The large faces with prominent cheekbones, the shape of the half-closed eyes with their detailed crow's-feet, the downward curve of the mouth, and the square chin are very closely related. The backs of the sculptures are carved similarly. Though still of a thick cloth, the drapery now falls in graceful and even masses, and the hood is less bulky than in the Dijon mourners. Again the effect of the Burgundian influence, apparent in our statue in the heavy folds around the arms and the base, is lessened by the flatter and less voluminous drapery of the central areas of the coat. Quite evidently, the serenity of the Berry style predominates here rather than the amplitude of the Burgundian.

In Berry few examples of tombs with mourners are left intact. Two statues of mourners, however, still exist

4. Pierre Pradel, "Nouveaux documents sur le tombeau de Jean de Berry, frère de Charles V," *Fondation Eugène Piot, Monuments et Mémoires* 49 (1957) pp. 14 ff.



FIGURES 5, 6  
Mourners from Pruniers (Indre), xv century. Limestone (photo: Musées de Bourges)

in the church of Pruniers<sup>5</sup> about thirty-four miles southwest of Bourges (Figures 5, 6). Their attribution to the Berry school, considering their location and style, is obvious. The similarities between our mourner and those of the Bourges tomb are equally true of those at Pruniers. In addition, there is the harsh vertical modeling of their folds, which is typical of Berry drapery. The two mourners of Pruniers hold a rosary in their right hands. One of them is exactly in the same position as one of the mourners from the tomb of the Duke of Berry (Figures 6, 7).<sup>6</sup> With his left hand, in a gesture of sorrow, he supports his head, partially covered by a hood. The other mourner shows his whole face and places his left hand on his heart.

These two limestone mourners are most likely companion pieces to our mourner. Even though the lower parts of the statues at Pruniers are missing, their original height can be calculated easily. They had the same dimensions as our piece. Their similarity is borne out by closer examination of individual details, which are uniform in scale on all three figures. The rough carving is scored with chisel marks cut along parallel lines. Moreover the resemblances in quality and style between the figures are obvious. The three short-necked men have rounded shoulders and the same corpulence. The folds of their coats, gathered at the elbows, fall in an equal distribution of folds and planes before ending in a large hem.

The same treatment of the faces is even more convincing. The modeling of the noses and the deep-set eyes underlined by pouches are identical. In our sculpture, and in that at Pruniers of the mourner holding a rosary on his hip, deep wrinkles in the hollow cheeks indicate advanced age, and the large curved lips, slightly opened, an expression of grief. The numerous points of similarity, both in style and in technique, among these sculptures virtually prove their execution to be by a single artist, and suggest as well

5. Pruniers (Indre), near Issoudun; mourner holding a rosary at his side, H. 13 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (35 cm.), W. 5 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (14 cm.); mourner holding a rosary directly in front of him, H. 13 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (34 cm.), W. 5 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (14.5 cm.); see Solange Pajot, "La sculpture en Berry à la fin du Moyen Age et au début de la Renaissance," *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires du Centre* 48 (1938-1941) pp. 88 ff.

6. Museum of Bourges; see Paul Gauchery, "Renseignements complémentaires sur la vie et les travaux de Jean de France duc de Berry d'après des documents nouveaux," *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires du Centre* 40 (1921) pp. 195 ff.

that they are from the same tomb. Their relation to the mourners of the tomb of the Duke of Berry, which was completed in 1457 by Étienne Bobillet and Paul Mosselman, allows us to place them after this date.

The two mourners at Pruniers were not originally in the church but were brought there by their former owner, the late Abbé Rabier. Unlike our sculpture, both their backs and bases are crudely cut from the original background. In explaining this mutilation, it would help us to know if the Abbé Rabier was the first



FIGURE 7  
Mourner from the tomb of Jean, Duke of Berry, 1453-1457, by Étienne Bobillet and Paul Mosselman. Alabaster. H. 15 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (39 cm.). Palais Jacques Coeur, Bourges (photo: Giraudon)



person to acquire them after the destruction of the monument and if these pieces were given to him or purchased from a nearby secularized church. According to tradition, they came from a tomb at Neuvy-Saint-Sépulcre (Indre) about thirty-three miles southwest of Pruniers. But the inventory of the area established by Miss Solange Pajot in 1938 shows that no tombs existed there. On the other hand, notes by Jules Dumoutet, an architect of the nineteenth century famous for the drawings he left of the monuments of Berry, mentions a tomb with mourners in the church of Les Aix-d'Angillon (Cher)<sup>7</sup> about eight miles northeast of Bourges. He said: "In the pavement . . . [are left] remains of the front face of a fifteenth century tomb, this monument is pierced with small niches which contain mourners very richly (skillfully) draped."<sup>8</sup> Miss Pajot, who checked Dumoutet's writings, adds that the dimensions of these mourners were identical with the ones at Pruniers and their appearance little different from the latter. Moreover the width of the niches, according to Dumoutet, was 8<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches (22 cm.), just the right size for these mourners. Thus, it may well be that our mourner and the two now in the church at Pruniers came from this tomb.

During the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, the signiory of Les Aix-d'Angillon belonged first to the Sully family and then to the Albret family.<sup>9</sup> Their home was in La Chapelle-d'Angillon, northeast of Les Aix in the castle of Bethune, which they renovated, and their sepulchre was in the nearby Cistercian monastery of Loroy. Considering the quality of our sculpture, it is in fact easy to surmise that the original tomb was not ordered by a wealthy family. More likely, our mourner and the two at Pruniers were part of a tomb ordered by a canon or a prior, since the church of Les Aix was a collegiate church. No traces of the tomb are now left in

the church. The authorized guide of the region by Buhot de Kersers, published in 1875,<sup>10</sup> makes no mention of these sculptures, and it is therefore presumable that they disappeared between the time of Dumoutet's notations and this book. Dumoutet was in charge of restoring historical monuments in Berry and collected numerous medieval objects of art. Possibly, the three mourners figured among the works he himself acquired before they became part of the collections of the Abbé Rabier and of Hoentschel.

No further information could be obtained from the archives of Bourges where the notes and the drawings of Dumoutet are deposited. And from the papers of the Abbé Rabier, which are partly kept in the church of Pruniers, nothing was learned concerning the acquisition of the two mourners. It is hoped that more evidence will appear in the future to establish as a fact the suggested provenance of Les Aix-d'Angillon for the three mourners. If three pieces were left from a funeral monument, others may have been saved from destruction as well. We might then be able to imagine this tomb more completely. Yet the discovery of a secondary workshop around Bourges under the influence of the master artists of the Duke of Berry is an important step toward this aim.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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7. François Deshoulières, "Les Aix-d'Angillon," *Congrès Archéologique de France* 94 (1931) pp. 291 ff.

8. "Dans le dallage . . . les restes de la face d'un tombeau du XV<sup>ème</sup> siècle, ce monument est percé de petits habitacles qui

abritent des pleureurs très richement (savamment) drapés." Bibliothèque de la ville de Bourges, mss. 444 and 445.

9. Gaspard de la Thaumassière, *Histoire du Berry* (Paris, 1689).

10. Alphonse Buhot de Kersers, *Statistique Monumentale du département du Cher*, Canton des Aix-d'Angillon (Paris, 1875).