A CORONATION DRAWING

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Two unimportant-looking scraps of paper acquired by the Museum in 1949 show, when placed together, what appears to be a partial plan of a medieval cathedral. One would pass them by as just another sixteenth-century doodle on the theme of Gothic floor plans except for the puzzling deviations from the usual Gothic cathedral plan: the main altar is in the transept and the choir seems to be in the nave. There are several scribbled explanations, one of which says: “Lautel ou le Roy fut Sacrez.” Even after its recent hearty diet of coronation pictures the mind is startled into curiosity. What cathedral is this and who is the king that was crowned?

Since the drawing is labeled in French in a sixteenth-century hand, a good starting point is a look at French sixteenth-century kings and at the floor plan of Rheims cathedral, where French kings were crowned from the days of Joan of Arc onward. Unfortunately, Rheims cathedral was very badly damaged in 1914-1918, and comparing its present interior arrangement (as restored with the help of Mr. Rockefeller and reconsecrated in 1937) with the drawing is slightly misleading. Even a comparison of the plan as it was in 1861 leaves one wondering whether our drawing could possibly be of Rheims, for although the two plans agree in the number, relative size, and spacing of the piers, the architecturally elaborate termination of the choir with two stair towers and two altars as shown in the drawing is not in the 1861 plan.

On the other side of the paper scraps are two separate drawings. On the left is the elevation of an altar, labeled A, with an alternate design, labeled B. A is obviously the main altar in the transept; B is not shown on the plan, unless it is the secondary altar in the apse, not labeled. The drawing on the right shows the choir stalls and the entrance to the choir through the jubé, or choir screen (known in England as the rood screen), labeled C. Beside the entrance is a stairway to a platform on top of the screen, on which is written “Les Pairs de France.” In the center of the platform sits a little figure, labeled “Le Roy,” on a canopied throne. Towering behind, on top of the nave side of the jubé, is the crucifix (or holy rood) flanked by statues of the Virgin and Saint John, which face the main part of the nave, not shown in our plan.

According to descriptions of the French coronation ceremony, after the king was crowned at the altar he was led up a stairway and enthroned on the jubé. Two contemporary engravings of the coronation of Louis XIV in Rheims cathedral in 1654 (pp. 170, 171) show these two parts of the ceremony. In the second we see the crucifix behind the king as in our drawing. The engraving also shows part of the crocketed support as well as the lancet-shaped openings behind the six religious and six secular peers of France who are seated on the jubé to the left and right of the throne. A railing on the choir side of the platform (not shown in our drawing) has been breached in two places for the temporary coronation stairways. On the occasion of the great festival the cathedral has been hung with its famous tapestries, which partly obscure the jubé but do not cover the stair towers—the same stair towers shown in our plan. A special box has been erected for the king’s mother in the transept, and the equivalent of this grandstand is visible in the same position in our drawing (D).

The inscription on the queen’s box in the plan (with a few letters supplied, for there is a sliver of paper missing at this point) reads: “La Royne et les Pr[în]cesses.” Opposite is a second grandstand labeled “Les Princ[es] et Gentilhomm[es].” A similar arrangement of boxes is shown on page 173, in an engraving of Rheims at the time of the coronation of Louis XV (1722). In this print the architectural details of the jubé are hidden, and only the crucifix shows above the hanging behind the king’s throne.

The engraving on page 172, Louis XV’s coronation from a different point of view, shows
Plan of the sanctuary of a medieval cathedral. The main altar, A, is in the transept, and the choir stalls are in the nave. The jubé, or choir screen, below, has two stair towers, which are entered through a passage between the two faces of the screen. The drawing is inscribed in a French xvi century hand. Whittelsey Fund, 1949
Reverse of the drawing shown opposite. ABOVE: Elevation of the main altar, A, with an alternate design, B. BELOW: The choir side of the jubé showing the entrance, the stalls, and a stair to a platform. The top of the nave side of the screen, on which is a crucifix, appears above. A king is enthroned on the platform.
ON THESE TWO PAGES: The coronation of Louis XIV in Rheims cathedral in 1654, engravings by Jean Le Pautre. ABOVE: View from the jubé, showing the main altar, at which the king kneels to be crowned by the bishop. He is surrounded by the dukes and peers, who later follow him to the platform on the jubé. Dick Fund, 1933
View toward the jubé, on which the king is enthroned. About to proceed up the stair are Cardinal Grimaldi and the Bishop of Amiens bearing the pax and four seigneurs with symbolical presents. At the left is a box for the king’s mother and the Queen of England. From the clerestory birds are being released, following an old tradition.
ON THESE TWO PAGES: The coronation of Louis XV in Rheims cathedral in 1722, engravings after Pierre Dulin, from “Le Sacre de Louis XV . . .”

ABOVE: View from the south side of the sanctuary, showing the anointing of the king before he is crowned. At the right is the main altar. Dick Fund, 1930
View toward the jubé, where the king is enthroned. Boxes completely fill the sides of the transept. In the one on the left are the king’s family and princes of the blood. In the one on the right are ambassadors and the papal nuncio, with an armed guard. The jubé and the stair towers are covered with hangings.
the interior of the whole sanctuary earlier in the ceremony, with the twelve-year-old king seated in front of the altar, before the actual coronation and the later enthronment on the jubé. And here is a clear picture of the altar itself, almost exactly as it is shown in elevation A in our drawing. Here is the same free-standing Corinthian canopy behind the altar table, the same smaller canopy ending in a strange domed sort of tempietto over a statue of the Virgin and Child. Here is the same obelisk behind the Virgin, the same globe or sphere serving as base for the cross. Beside the Virgin’s canopy are the same rectangular reliquaries and great candlesticks.

Further proof that our drawing is of Rheims cathedral is given by the dimensions. Our plan has “Cinquante piedz,” with two limiting arrows, written near the jubé. For the other dimension the drawing says: “Deux cents cinquante piedz,” with one arrow ending at the jubé and the other going right off the paper at the obviously trimmed apse end. The scaled plan of 1861 shows that the nave is fifty feet wide and that from the corresponding pier to the altar in the apse is exactly two hundred and fifty feet.

Guidebooks and histories of Rheims cathedral describe the unusual placing, done at least as early as the thirteenth century, of the main altar in the transept with only a secondary altar in the more usual location in the apse. They describe the enclosed choir extending west of the transept as in our plan instead of the customary position east of the transept or toward the apse. They describe the beautiful stone jubé, which was built by Collart de Givry in 1417 and stood until 1744. At this time Canon Jean Godinot, deciding to embellish the cathedral, demolished the screen as old-fashioned and replaced it in 1747 by iron grills. The stair towers, described as being twenty-five feet high and containing thirty steps, left scars on the abutting piers visible still in the 1880’s. Godinot also removed the two small altars in front of the jubé (shown in our plan by rectangles with crosses). He evidently wanted to do away with what he considered superfluous and obscuring decorative cake icing and expose the skeleton of the cathedral, at the same time moving the altar back toward the apse and restoring the medieval feeling for space.

Aside from our drawing the jubé is known only from descriptions, the prints illustrated, and from a drawing of the side toward the congregation made in the sixteenth century by one Jacques Cellier, which is shown here as redrawn in the nineteenth century. The only known representation of the choir side of the jubé, with its lancet-shaped openings, and of the passage behind it leading to the stair towers is given in our drawing. There are certain discrepancies, notably one of scale, between all of these pictures of the jubé, but they seem minor when one considers the differences in purpose, technique, time, and artist.

Even though the jubé had been torn down by

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**West face of the jubé in the xvi century, by Jacques Cellier, redrawn in the xix century. From L. Paris, “Le Jubé... de la cathedrale de Reims,” Rheims, 1884**

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*Plan of Rheims cathedral, from Cerf, “Histoire et Description de Nûtre-Dame de Reims,” Rheims, 1861*
The coronation of Louis XVI in Rheims cathedral in 1775. Engraving by J. M. Moreau le jeune showing the south side of the sanctuary, with a corner of the new altar designed by Servandoni. The old altar and the jubé built in 1417 had been removed by 1747, and for this coronation an elaborate temporary structure of jubé and grandstand was erected. The Gothic character of the cathedral is completely obscured by this classical camouflag. Dick Fund, 1930
1747, the tradition of the coronation ceremony was strong enough to require the erection of a temporary jubé for the enthronement of Louis XVI in 1775. Moreau le jeune’s engraving of that event shows part of the brand-new altar designed by Servandoni (architect of the portal of Saint-Sulpice) and the enlarged and elegantly classical grandstand, which is joined with the temporary jubé by its entablature (p. 175).

The question of whose coronation our drawing refers to still remains. The French kings crowned during the sixteenth century were Francis I (1515), Henry II (1547), Francis II (1559), Charles IX (1561), Henry III (1575), and Henry IV (1589). The last can be eliminated since his coronation took place, exceptionally, not at Rheims but at Chartres. If we can believe in our artist’s knowledge of the royal family we must look for a king who at the time of his coronation had in his family princesses and princes and only one queen, as listed in the boxes for spectators. This requirement rules out Francis I (queen mother and queen) and Henry II (one princess, one infant prince); they are also unlikely from the style of the drawing, which seems to be later. It also rules out Francis II (queen mother and queen) and probably Henry III, since his mother was still alive and his bride, whom he married a day or so after the coronation, would surely have been at the ceremony.

A drawing thought to be of Henry III’s coronation does, in fact, exist, and it shows three royal boxes, with women as central figures in two of them. This drawing (shortly to be published by M. Jean Adhémar of the Bibliothèque Nationale) has numerous other differences from ours and the prints illustrated here. But if one can assume that the detail of the boxes is accurate one can only conclude that the drawings are for two different coronations. This would leave Charles IX as the only king who fulfills the conditions of our drawing.

The only detail of our drawing that gives any impression of the actual ceremony that took place in the sanctuary is the small sketch of the king enthroned on the jubé. Although no conclusions can be drawn from such a tiny picture, it is tempting to see in “Le Roy” the youthful figure of Charles, who began his unhappy reign at the age of ten.

Another clue may be given by the altar labeled B in our drawing. It would be nice to think that this is the secondary altar in the apse and has had its designation cut off from the plan.

Francis II in his coronation robes and Charles IX at the age of fifteen. Woodcuts from “Les Effigies des roys de France,” Paris, [1565]. In the Spencer Collection, the New York Public Library

The only other altars shown on our plan are the two less important ones which form a pair against the jubé outside the sanctuary. Our drawing shows a female figure holding a jar, one of the traditional ways of representing Saint Mary Magdalen. Actually, the altar in the apse of Rheims cathedral before the eighteenth century was known as the Magdalen Altar, and it had a statue of that saint holding a reliquary with a little of her hair. This statue and some other treasures were sold by the Cardinal of Lorraine, as head of the chapter, in 1562 and replaced by a reliquary cross in 1568. If altar B is the Magdalen altar, and if this is indeed the statue of the Magdalen, then our drawing was made before 1562. Charles IX was crowned in 1561.