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TOKUNAGA, Yuki. The Thirteenth-century Reconstruction of the Abbey Church of St-Denis: The Transept's Reference to Heavenly Jerusalem

This article considers the thirteenth-century reconstruction of the Abbey Church of St-Denis (1231–81). Employing the iconography of architecture, I will interpret the significance of the expansive transept with its square plan. While the twelfth-century reconstruction of the abbey church directed by the Abbot Suger (c. 1081–1151) is renowned as the birth of Gothic architecture, the thirteenth-century reconstruction is considered to be the first example of rayonnant gothic style which flourished in thirteenth-century Paris. However, this reconstruction has been the subject of formalistic analysis rather than iconographic study. For example, recent studies of Sainte-Chapelle have elucidated the influence of the political intention of Louis IX on art and architecture in thirteenth-century Paris. In the studies of St-Denis, the royal tomb program installed in the transept of St-Denis during the thirteenth-century has been examined in light of the relationship between the royal kingship and the abbey. These studies have asserted that the function of the vast transept was to provide sufficient space for the royal tomb program.

However, this article affirms that the plan of the transept refers to the dimension of Heavenly Jerusalem as described in the Apocalypse of John; as a walled city with a square plan of 12,000-furlongs. As Sumner McKnight Crosby has pointed out, “*pieu royal*” (1 *pieu* \approx 0.325m), the unit of measurement used throughout the royal domain at that time, was also used at St-Denis. Starting with the crossing bay which measures 13m square, bays in the transept and nave were designed with a module of 13m (40 *pieu*) or its half, 6.5m (20 *pieu*). As a result, the immense plan of the square transept in the center of the church came into being. It was created not only through use of the standardized measuring units, but also through its unprecedented twin aisles. Considering the distorted bays where the chevet and nave intersect, it is likely that the architect employed the square plan and the vast dimensions in order to reference Heavenly Jerusalem in the Apocalypse of John.

Illustrated manuscripts of the Commentary on the Apocalypse by Beatus of Liébana (written c. 775) makes reference to Heavenly Jerusalem with a square plan. I argue that certain manuscripts made in Castilla in the early thirteenth-century provided the inspiration for the plan of the transept of St-Denis. Blanche de Castille, mother of Louis IX, who came to France from the royal family of Castilla, must have known the tradition of making Beatus manuscripts.

The reference to Heavenly Jerusalem was also important for the St-Denis Abbey; in his writings, Abbot Suger frequently cited the description of this realm to describe his ideal church. Thus the thirteenth-century reconstruction realized the Abbot's own desire.

Lastly, I discuss the meaning of Heavenly Jerusalem in the context of Louis IX's propaganda to politically and religiously justify the Capetian dynasty as a Christian kingdom.

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