

The Sainte Chapelle as an Ecclesio-Political Structure

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Establishing a New Jerusalem

King Louis IX began the construction of the Sainte Chapelle in 1239 after purchasing several relics from his cousin Baldwin II, the emperor of Constantinople. The royal chapel, Alyce Jordan argues, was “consciously designed to resemble a monumental reliquary turned outside in” (1). The function as a reliquary placed great significance on the items within the stone walls, dictating that the interior present an atmosphere worthy of the relics. This was achieved with a grand scheme of stained glass, which floods the upper chapel with jewel tones and ethereal light, while the exterior, which is farther removed from the venerated items and less significant in regard to them, remains fairly plain. Louis IX intended to establish a “New Jerusalem” in France and to rival the magnificence of ancient Byzantine architecture (Weiss, “Art” 31). The “Saint King’s” vision, however, involved constructing a chapel of such great design that it would command respect, a structure worthy of its function, and his spiritual understanding of the chapel as a reliquary largely influenced the program of imagery and interior decoration. Just as Solomon built his great Temple to house the Ark of the Covenant, the “material evidence of God’s covenant with the Jews,” the French king conceived of a church to accommodate the physical relics from the New Testament manifestation of that promise: precious items from Christ’s Passion (Weiss, “Architectural”

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309). By the day of its dedication in 1248, the new royal chapel had become the “most important *locus sanctus* in Europe, the quintessential image of a new Holy Land... by virtue of the relics it contained, the comprehensive symbolism of its art and architecture, and the beauty of its decoration” (Weiss, “Art” 215).

The architectural and decorative programs of the high Gothic chapel display a culmination of historical tradition and ideology. The windows illustrate numerous ancient Hebrew narratives from the Old Testament, the medieval understanding of early Christian events, and the thirteenth century concept of kingship. Gothic influences are apparent in the structure’s pointed arches and exterior sculptural decoration, while iconography original to Carolingian¹ manuscripts shaped several of its interior structural elements; for example, the early medieval depiction of Solomon’s throne provided the model for the chapel’s tribune and baldachin. These structures refer to medieval enmeshment of church and state, as the tribune is a throne within the apse, and the baldachin, traditionally a cloth canopy of state hung over a throne or altar, signified secular authority. Familial and political ties to the Holy Land resulted in the installation of the Passion relics, and Byzantine precedents in the original Empire and in Europe (such as the Palatine Chapel at Palermo) affected the architectural plan and pictorial design. These cultural integrations ultimately served to support and further the concept of sacral kingship and dynastic continuity, thereby fulfilling Louis IX’s conviction to promote piety in the French court.

After the sack of Constantinople in 1204, Emperor Baldwin II sought to strengthen the weakened Byzantine Empire by selling some of the relics from Christ’s Passion, or, as he proclaimed, to fulfill his “desire that these precious relics” go to his cousin Louis IX and to the “kingdom of France, homeland of my parents” (Weiss, “Art” 14). King Louis happily agreed that God had chosen France as the new location of the crown’s veneration and he immediately began making the arrangements to secure custody of the items. He paid the Byzantine Empire’s debt to Venice, where the relics had been installed in the treasury of San Marco as debt collateral (Weiss, “Art” 14). Instead of depositing the items in Notre Dame (or another existing cathedral, according to long-established practice in the keeping and veneration of such relics), King Louis and his craftsmen drew upon centuries of

Eastern and European traditions to create a chapel devoted singularly to them.

Prior to the Latin overthrow and occupation of Byzantium, the *Sancta Capella* (“Holy Chapel”) at the Bucoleon Palace housed the relics of the Passion, which included the lance, cross, and nails as well as Christ’s blood, tunic, and Crown of Thorns. According to the resident sacristan, the relics transformed the building into a “second Sinai, a new Bethlehem, a second Jordan, a new Jerusalem” (qtd. in Weiss, “Art” 31). The copious ornamentation of the chapel signified its eminence as a holy space, and it was this model that King Louis IX adapted for his French monument. Instead of the typical Gothic predilection for exposed vaulting, piers, and various other architectural elements, the Sainte Chapelle’s “shrinelike character” demanded extensive surface adornment. Even during the initial stages of construction, Pope Innocent IV, quoting Ovid, described the chapel’s decorative merits as “*opera superante materiam.*” In the *Metamorphoses*, this phrase refers to the quality of the golden doors Vulcan fashioned for Apollo’s palace, and its application to any other structure in the Middle Ages was exceedingly rare and reserved only for the most venerable architecture (Weiss, “Art” 30).

It was this painstaking treatment of each detail which would ensure the realization of the intended status of the Sainte Chapelle as a *locus sanctus* (a holy place), superior “among ecclesiastical foundations” common in medieval Europe (Weiss, “Art” 30). The Byzantine concept of the *locus sanctus* had significant precedents in the Holy Land. Both the chapel dedicated to Saint Mariana of Antioch at St. Catherine’s Monastery in Sinai and the emperor’s private chapel at the Hagia Sophia warranted the term (Folda 337). King Louis sought to establish a New Jerusalem in Paris and to establish links to Solomon’s Temple, and he too aspired to attain the reputation of the *locus sanctus* as established in the Holy Land.

Palatine Chapels and the Throne of Solomon

The spiritual significance of the Sainte Chapelle did not undermine the fact that it also served as a political structure; in fact, its ecclesiastical associations actually bolstered Louis IX’s position as a divinely appointed monarch. The unification of church and

state had its roots in Byzantine caesaropapism² and was adopted in Western Europe, where its architectural representation appeared in several medieval structures. In 792, Charlemagne had constructed an important precedent for royal chapels in Western Europe, asserting his political power and religious influence in the plan for the Aix-la-Chapelle in Aachen, a palace intended as a “Second Rome, a New Jerusalem” which would “rival the imperial court of Byzantium” (Sullivan 33). The Frankish ruler chose two models for his complex in Aachen because they represented secular and spiritual authority: Rome, which had been the “heart of the Roman Empire,” and Ravenna, the “western outpost of Byzantine might and splendor” (Kleiner 252). For six centuries, the coronations of French kings had taken place in the Palatine Chapel, highlighting the interwoven elements of religious and political power and purpose. This tradition, along with the presence of an actual throne in the chapel design, provided a prototype for the display of King Louis’ sacred kingship in the Sainte Chapelle.

The two-story plan of the Carolingian structure, a reflection of **“the traditional Byzantine dedication of palace chapels to the Saviour and the Theotocos,”** modeled an architectural symbolism specific to a Western European royal chapel. The organization of the structure furthered the ruler’s association with Christ, legitimizing his position as a divinely appointed monarch. Only royalty worshipped in the upper floor, which was dedicated to Christ, and the servants attended mass in the lower floor, where the Virgin was exalted. Some scholars view the distinctly divided structure as Carolingian propaganda, intentionally designed to “suggest an architectural parallelism between the role of the Lord and his servant Mary with that of the king and his servants” (Fichtenau 54; Weiss, “Art” 23). By reproducing this arrangement, the designers of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo and the Sainte Chapelle suggested an association with Carolingian heritage and biblical authority (Branner, “Painted” 8).

The thrones in royal chapels were not only structural representations of Solomon’s seat in the Temple in Jerusalem, but also conspicuous signifiers of regal presence. While the king’s marble seat in the chapel in Aachen allowed Charlemagne a view of the altar, and the throne wall in Palermo positioned the king immediately below the image of Christ in majesty, the throne at the Sainte Chapelle placed

the greatest significance on biblical kingship. King Louis IX, instead of incorporating his own grand seat in the upper chapel, chose a niche for his spiritual purposes and oversaw the construction of the reliquary as the thirteenth century structural successor to the ancient Solomonic throne. The original grande châsse (destroyed in 1791) held the Passion relics and, together with the tribune and baldachin, was consistent with previous medieval depictions and biblical accounts (Weiss, "Architectural" 309). The reliquary's design and relics indicated the king's commitment to God by honoring Christ and substantiated Louis IX's kingship by connecting him to the Old Testament ruler.

The Old Testament book of Kings describes Solomon's throne as a structure unequal in grandeur, one without a rival in its time, and the thrones in these medieval palace chapels often took specific elements from the ancient description. The designs in both Aachen and Palermo included six steps to "reinforce biblical parallels" (Weiss, "Art" 22-24), in the same manner that the costly materials of the reliquary at the Sainte Chapelle recalled the ivory and gold overlay which made up the ancient seat (*New International Version*, 1 Kings 10:18-20). The expense of the grande châsse, which consisted "entirely of precious metals and gems," actually exceeded twice the cost of the construction of the chapel itself (Weiss, "Art" 72). This grand expense illustrates Louis IX's determination to honor the Passion relics in a vessel that would not simply rival, but clearly exceed the Ark of the Covenant in both its extravagance and the significance of purpose, to house the artifacts of the fulfillment of God's original promise.

Daniel Weiss focuses particularly on images from manuscripts, such as the San Paolo Bible and *Liber ad honorem Augusti*, as visual precedents for the design of the reliquary at the Sainte Chapelle. However, the presence of sacred and secular kings seated on thrones in the miniatures provides an iconological depth as well, transforming them into intercessors between Solomonic wisdom and Capetian kingship.³ The San Paolo Bible, a Carolingian manuscript from the ninth century, depicts Solomon enthroned in the hall of justice, the scene rendered in accordance with biblical text (1 Kings 3:16-28). Since the coronation of Pepin in 751, Carolingian monarchs had become increasingly comfortable presenting themselves in typological associations with Old Testament kings and, within three centuries

of appearing enthroned in the San Paolo Bible, Solomon had been replaced (Stahl 162). In a miniature from the *Liber ad honorem Augusti*, Solomon's throne is accurately depicted, from the six steps to the lions flanking each side, except in that in the twelfth century image Emperor Henry VI occupies the throne.

The reliquary in the Sainte Chapelle, integrates three elements: the Old Testament "Wisdom incarnate" in its throne design, the New Testament Incarnation (of God as Christ in Mary's womb) in regard to the Passion relics, and the Capetian fulfillment of sacred kingship. By the twelfth century, several medieval theologians, including Guibert of Nogent, considered the ancient ivory throne a typological forerunner for the Virgin (Weiss, "Architectural" 314). Mary had been referred to as the "living... throne of God" from the fourth century through the Middle Ages, and some theologians also described her as "that glorious throne" from the book of Kings.⁴ In the same manner that the Virgin did not possess divinity but was divinely appointed, Louis IX held the reputation of the obedient and anointed king. The reliquary demonstrates the delicate balance between the "royal reign and the holy priesthood" that characterized Louis IX's years of service to Christ as the king of France (Fahlbusch 190).

Promotion of Sacrality and Kingship in the Sculpture, Medallions, and Stained Glass

The medieval Catholic concept of the concurrent powers, the *regnum et sacerdotium*,⁵ saturates the decoration of the king's chapel. Perhaps the greatest influence on Louis IX and his "profoundly pious and moral conception" of Christian kingship was his childhood education (Stahl 163). His mother, Blanche of Castile, supplied knowledgeable tutors and insisted on an inherently Christian perspective. The lessons and spiritual models taught to the heir to the throne focused on biblical precepts and predecessors, and manuscripts were an important didactic source for this material. The temporal and spiritual duties of a thirteenth century king were clearly outlined in the *Bibles moralisées*, which presented scenes from the lives of Old Testament rulers along with text delineating the moral implications of the narratives (Kleiner 369).

These Moralized Bibles functioned as "illustrated mirrors of princes," presenting a sequence of divinely appointed kings for the royal

heir's perusal to establish "a moral foundation... grounded in earlier patterns and images" (Stahl 163). The lavishly illuminated manuscripts were predominantly royal commissions intended for a royal audience; one such example being the Toledo Bible patronized by Blanche of Castile during her regency (Jordan 75). The dedication page depicts Louis IX, then in his teenage years, and his mother crowned and seated on thrones. This text sends a clear message to the rising king concerning the expectations for a monarchy rooted in ecclesiastical *exempla*, while also encouraging a preference for a vocabulary of similar images in his own commissions. It provides an important model for the alternation of royal and divine iconography prevalent in the Sainte Chapelle. The "triple lobed arches and miniature cityscapes" above the two figures are an architectural reference to the canopies which framed jamb statues of saints and biblical characters popular at French cathedrals at the time (Kleiner 356). The image sends a clear message to the rising king concerning the expectations for a monarchy rooted in ecclesiastical *exempla*, while also encouraging a preference for a vocabulary of similar images in his own commissions.

The Biblical themes and ideals which King Louis chose to incorporate in his chapel reflect those he apparently sought to uphold in his life and his rule. In hagiographic language, contemporaries often remarked on his noble character and extolled his humility, piety, justice, and charity (Gaposchkin 26). Notably, these are the Christ-like attributes highlighted in the imagery in the Sainte Chapelle. Through both the fairly exclusive selection of biblical and canonized figures and the emphasis placed on the sacrificial leader, the artistic program presented both the themes and instructive nuances typically found only in a Moralized Bible, as well as an ecclesio-political foundation for the sanctified actions of the devout king. The exterior and interior figural sculpture promote the spiritual rewards of obedience to God; the painted medallions extol the virtues of martyrs; and the stained glass celebrates a tradition of divinely appointed rulers from Old Testament figures, to Christ, and finally to Louis himself.

The portal leading into the lower chapel features the Virgin Mary, whose obedience has earned her favor with God both in life and in death. As devotion to the Virgin increased in the thirteenth century, the popularity of the *Coronation of Mary* as an artistic subject grew as

well. Above the central portal at Reims, the cathedral which served as the site of French coronations from the early eleventh through the nineteenth century, the mother of Christ is crowned as the Queen of Heaven (Kleiner 354), and a similar image appears in a psalter in Paris during the first years of Louis IX's reign (Branner, "Painted" 8). This well-known royal subject was incorporated into the thematic program of the Sainte Chapelle. In the tympanum,⁶ an angel, instead of the more traditional choice of God, reaches out from above to crown Mary (Weiss, "Architectural" 316).

Above the apostles' heads, canopies consisting of three part arches and models of medieval architecture recall those from the Toledo Bible and likely reference the spiritual authority and reward of the obedient disciple. The form and position of each canopy may further the parallel the king's iconography, as the gilding and jewel tones of the polychromy, together with the triangular segments of the outline, present an image not unlike a large crown. The canopy's proximity to the apostle and the strong vertical of the column seem to capture the moment just before a crown is lowered onto his head, as if each figure is engaged in a spiritual coronation. The apostles serve as allegorical figures of "true spiritual pillars" in their roles as the first crusaders for the Christian church (Weiss, "Art" 44), representing the fulfillment of the instruction they receive from Christ: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This link to the Holy Land is underscored by the encircled cross held by each apostle, a symbol which implies their roles as "active participants in the ceremony consecrating the new Holy Land in Paris" (Weiss, "Art" 44).

Near the end of the eleventh century, Urban II preached a sermon at Clermont in which he equated the labor of the early Christians in Rome with the efforts of the crusaders in the Holy Land. He proclaimed that death during a crusade fought against Islamic rule guaranteed eternal life as "the glorious gift of martyrdom" (Cole 31). At the Sainte Chapelle, the inclusion of a martyr's cycle in the painted medallions of the dado arcade⁷ not only documented and promoted this theology in anticipation of Louis IX's own crusade, but also likened the deaths of a number of distinctly French martyrs to Christ's.

The original series of forty-four martyrs was based in the tradition of martyrs' cycles in several palatine chapels, including Theodoric's chapel in Ravenna (known at its construction during the sixth century as the Church of Christ the Savior and later rededicated as Sant' Apollinare) and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo. The inclusion of the martyrs in these chapels served to remind the medieval audience of the virtuous re-enactment of Christ's Passion and the subsequent "rebirth into Heaven" (Branner, "Painted" 5). Between the medallions, sculpted angels, not unlike the cherubim from Solomon's throne, hold out martyrs' crowns. Stylistically, the medallions are less in keeping with the contemporary trends of Gothic art in France than with those more indicative of an ancient shrine, especially as their "shining surfaces and glasslike reflections" recall the enamel plaques found in traditional reliquaries (Branner, "Painted" 9).

The advances in architecture during the Gothic period allowed for a greater emphasis on height and natural illumination, and the builders of the Sainte Chapelle relied on devices such as pointed arches and ribbed vaulting to achieve the intended atmosphere of the *locus sanctus*. These developments in structural design carried the weight of the stone along web-like arrangement of thin piers along the walls, permitting the previous fashion of Romanesque solidity and darkness to give way to large areas of glass. The chapel features over six thousand square feet of stained glass, illuminating the interior of the upper chapel with an ethereal glow (Kleiner 355-56). Even in the midst of cathedrals constructed during the height of Gothic elegance, such as Chartres and the Notre-Dame, the new design of Louis IX's chapel allowed windows of an unprecedented scale. The Rayonnant style, which Branner calls "a refinement of the High Gothic," provided the perfect stylistic catalyst for the king's intended themes ("Painted" 39). The stained glass could illustrate and document the extension of spiritual authority through biblical and temporal rulers, offering a beautiful illumination of scenes pervaded with allusions to past kingship and affirmations of contemporary, sanctified governance.

The thematic organization of the stained glass, sculpture, and painted decorations in Louis IX's chapel follows a traditional layout, which originated in the Holy Land and gained popularity in Western European palatine chapels as kings desired to illustrate the sacrality of

their rule through references to Byzantium and its biblical significance. The mosaic program of the royal chapel at Palermo and the multimedia display in the Sainte Chapelle are based on the “traditional Byzantine longitudinal plan,” with the latter chapel adopting several of the specific nuances from the former (Demus 201). When chosen instead of the more common central plan, or when the central and longitudinal plans were combined, such as at the Capella Palatina, the Byzantine organizational tradition dictated that the apse, which held the foremost position in the structural hierarchy, would feature the “most sacred icon,” the image of Christ. The aisles, as “subsidiary spatial units, called for subsidiary cycles, such as Legends, Miracles, or the Lives of the Apostles” (Demus 202-03). While the Cappella Palatina focuses on Christ as the Pantocrator and the Sainte Chapelle narrates His life and Passion, both present Christ as the fulfillment of God’s ancient promise in the apsidal program. In the side aisles, both also depict the apostles supporting His ministry and continuing his legacy.

In both chapels, references to the Old Testament are highly emphasized as a tie to Jerusalem and New Testament concepts underscore the concept of the “New Jerusalem” in Western Europe. The identification with God’s chosen people, which was ultimately made available through Christ’s death and resurrection, also emphasized the history of divinely appointed rulers characteristic of Old Testament tribes. The aisle walls in the chapel in Palermo contain mosaic cycles depicting scenes from the Old Testament, as well as the Acts of the Apostles. This juxtaposition of the Old and New Testaments may have inspired the program of the side walls in the Sainte Chapelle. Each window of the side wall is dedicated to a book of the Old Testament (except for the notable exception of the one following immediately after the Kings window, which narrates the history of the Passion relics), and the separate books are punctuated with the sculptural Apostles series.

The Program of the Stained Glass: Royal Reign Converging with Holy Priesthood

Prior to the reign of Louis IX, Carolingian authors of both literature and liturgy had established the concept that the nobility of a king’s character would determine his efficacy as a ruler (Gaposchkin 107-08). By the eleventh century, the concept of sacral kingship, that

a monarch had been vested with God's authority was widely accepted in France (Fahlbusch 190). Louis IX's grandfather, Philip Augustus, along with his court poets and historians, devised and shaped many significant elements of Christian kingship. By the time his grandson came to power in 1226, the king's spiritual authority had become a part of his identity, and this allowed him enjoyment of certain religious privileges and required certain actions. The most commonly noted of these were that, after his ordination as the *Rex Christianissimus*, the king was believed to possess the ability to cure "scrofula"⁸ and was permitted to partake of both the bread and wine during Eucharist, a practice otherwise exclusively reserved for members of the clergy (Hedeman 2-3).

Cathedrals such as Chartres and St. Denis display the artistic evidence of the ideology that regarded monarchs as divinely appointed. In this regard both served as precedents for Sainte Chapelle. Royal portals leading into the cathedrals contain figural sculptures of the biblical leaders of the Old Testament, especially those who prefigured Christ and provided a model for French kings (Stahl 162). Association with such "ideal prototypes" helped to bestow the spiritual authority of the monarchs (Stahl 162). As parishioners filed into their cathedral and viewed images of Old Testament leaders such as Moses, Joshua, David, or Solomon, they were implicitly encouraged to give their devotion to their own "saintly king" (Gaposchkin 101). Authenticated by Pope Innocent III as a *regnum benedictum a Deo* (Jordan 22), the secular state gained the spiritual authority as a new chosen people, a new "Israel" led by a divinely appointed ruler (*a deo constitutus rex*) (Gaposchkin 109).

Biblical tradition held that a king's obedience to God would determine his spiritual inheritance and establish his family's right to the throne. In medieval theology and its artistic expression, the biblical understanding of familial extension of royal power was common, and the concept became a source of significant political strength and propaganda for dynastic continuity. Scriptural precepts verified the argument for imperial heritage, such as God's promise to Jehu: "Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation" (2

Kings 10:30). Capitalizing on this concept, the king's supporters drew ceremonial, literary, and artistic parallels between Old Testament and Frankish royal lines. In one particularly flagrant example, the designer of Reims Cathedral positioned sculptures of French monarchs under the kings of Judah, symbolically converging the "two lineages [and making] simultaneous claims to legitimacy, continuity, and sacrality" (Stahl 95).

The context of this assertion of power illuminates the domination of the coronation theme in the imagery of the Sainte Chapelle, as well as the inclusion of the living king in "sacred history" for the first time in Western Europe (Jordan 63). The stained glass windows depict events from the books of Genesis through Kings, followed by an account of the origins and history of the relics housed at the royal chapel, themes underscored by the focus on the Old Testament, Christ's ancestry, and insignia including Capetian symbols, Castilian imagery, and the French *fleur de lys* pattern. Eleven of the fifteen windows focus specifically on Old Testament themes and narratives; within these, over 1,000 panels detail the ancient stories (Stahl 94-5). Uniting forces in these images are the histories of Joshua, including his "coronation," and David, including his anointing, his familial connection to Christ, and his role as "a favorite and long-standing metaphor for the king of France" (Branner, "Painted" 15).

The Joshua window in Sainte Chapelle outlines the transfer of power from Moses, and while the subject matter is clearly based on biblical text, liberties were taken to ensure the explicitly Capetian theme remained prevalent. The first scenes depict the culminating events in Moses' life during his time as the head of God's chosen people, and then the action concentrates on the "coronation" of the new leader. Though the figural arrangement is typical of the imagery in the royal chapel, the portrayal of Joshua kneeling and wearing a crown is an obvious allusion to a coronation ceremony which, as Harvey Stahl points out, has "no justification in the biblical text," as Joshua neither wore a crown nor was a king (97). After this panel, Joshua continues to appear with the royal attribute, which is, as Stahl remarks, appropriate "in the context of the Sainte Chapelle, where crowns function metaphorically as well as literally" (97).

The license taken with the Joshua coronation scene, however,

was not unprecedented in medieval art. Since the time of the “Carolingian propagandists of the eighth century,” artists manipulated and reproduced Old Testament subjects in contemporary terms (with contemporary rulers) to validate the king’s decisions (De Hamel 44). The biblical text provided a convenient source of “politically appropriate themes of the election of kings, maintenance of authority by warfare, the anointing of kings by patriarchs to confer legitimacy on their titles, and the vision of a tribal society invincible under the special protection of God” (De Hamel 44). Instances of the placement of a king in a highly spiritualized setting were prevalent in Byzantine art, especially in the form of imperial portraits, as well as in Carolingian and Ottonian manuscripts, such as the ninth century depiction of Charles the Bald Enthroned and Otto III crowned by Saints Peter and Paul in the Bamberg Apocalypse.⁹ This was an age, after all, when “Christendom was one, a unique body and the royal reign and the holy priesthood... which converged at the top in the person of the king,” when monarchs were crowned (and even anointed) by the pope, and when artistic representations extended these concepts in depictions of Christ crowning the temporal ruler (Fahlbusch 190).

For their coronation liturgies, the Capetians adopted the “ecclesio-political theology” formulated by the Carolingians in the ninth century (Gaposchkin 108). The blessing during the ritual of unction comes directly from the biblical account of Samuel anointing David as king, and not only recalls the Hebrew tradition practiced through centuries of Jewish and European history, but also affirms “a positive, virtually causal, relationship between what David or Constantine had done, and the deeds of the ‘new David’” (Jordan 21). The portrayal of David wearing a crown has several precedents in Carolingian and later medieval iconography before the time of Louis IX, such as in the Ingeborg Psalter from the early thirteenth century, and it was this model that the designer of the Sainte Chapelle expanded to construct both an Old Testament history of coronation rites and the royal heritage of the Capetians (Brenk 202). From the group of seated “princes” venerated by their respective tribes, to scenes of David conversing with the Israelites, the ancestry of Christ thus laid the foundation for the true “King of kings” and the divinely appointed Capetian rulers.

The Tree of Jesse window provides an “unusually extensive” history

of Christ's lineage, atypical in its inclusion of ancestors who preceded Jesse. Alyce Jordan attributes this addition, as well as the presence of the eleven crowned figures in the window, to the Capetian fondness for justifying and amplifying the family's "mythical genealogy" (202). Illuminators of the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, a compilation begun in the thirteenth century, took a similar approach, tracing the Capetian line back past the Carolingians and Merovingians to Classical Troy (Hedeman 22). Since the twelfth century, cathedrals such as St. Denis, Chartres, and Canterbury had included the Tree of Jesse to delineate Christ's ancestry, but at the Sainte Chapelle, the purpose of the window is not solely as a didactic tool or historical record. The inclusion of the figures from the Tree of Jesse in bordering windows, such as the Ruth in the Joshua window, evokes and legitimizes the concept of dynastic continuity by "present[ing] a series of biographies of Israelite leaders" (Jordan 19).

These Old Testament scenes and characters would recall the qualities of godly leaders as examples for Louis IX, as well as implying his identity as "the virtuous descendent of his forebears;" the New Testament connotations in the royal chapel emphasize his status as the "literal and metaphorical heir to the Crown of Christ" (Jordan 28). Even Pope Innocent IV implied that the Frankish crown was on par with Christ's Crown of Thorns when in 1244, he stated in a bull that God had actually crowned the king with His son's holy crown (Brenk 202). Before its nineteenth century restoration, the Relics window explained how the transfer of the relic from the Holy Land and Louis IX's further commitment to his duties as the acting *Rex Christianissimus* validated this association.

The Relics, or "Royal," window depicts the life of the "most Christian king" in panels which fulfill a hagiographic and didactic purpose (Hedeman 63). The window emphasizes dynastic continuity, the king's duty to protect the church and his kingdom, and the *exempla* provided by the histories of kings (Jordan 17, 64). While the purpose of the window is often considered a celebration of the Holy Relics, the interpretation of these events in their entirety reflects a more political agenda. The scenes document the history of King Louis' life, while also underscoring his association with Christ. For example, a birth scene, which bears a strong resemblance to many depictions

of Christ's Nativity, shows Blanche of Castile receiving her newborn son. This panel, intentionally placed adjacent to a scene illustrating the successful military endeavors of Philip Augustus and Prince Louis (Louis IX's grandfather and father, respectively), provides a "historical backdrop" to the scene of the birth and thereby plays directly into the theme of dynastic continuity. Scenes from the king's adult life bolster the "construction of his saintly persona" and portray his role as *defensor et rector ecclesiae*, the defender and ruler of the church (Jordan 65; Fahlbusch 190). These recall scenes from the Joshua window and include his travel to the Holy Land, which depicts his devotion to the defense and reclamation of God's territory, as well as the translation of the relics, which can be interpreted as representing his success in establishing France as the "new" Jerusalem.

The king's obedience and the subsequent continuation of Capetian lineage are emphasized by the contrasting action of Solomon in the Kings narrative immediately preceding the Relics window. Though once the figural height of wisdom, the Old Testament king eventually abandoned God's law and suffered the "that most feared of monarchical punishments... dynastic rupture" (Jordan 25). This disobedience amplifies the necessity of Louis IX's spiritual responsibilities in terms of his impending Crusade; as the Old Testament scenes conclude with the Holy Land under siege and the chosen people subjugated to the rule of "blasphemers," their "liberation depend[s] on the intervention of a new *rex Christianissimus*" (Jordan 25).

The final element of sacral kingship identified in this window is the understanding of Louis IX as the acting "interregnum" for Christ between his life on earth and the Second Coming. At the east end of the chapel, the apse contains stained glass images of John the Baptist making a way for Christ, in essence providing a prophetic "backdrop," of Christ's childhood and His Passion, and then leads into the Old Testament histories so esteemed by the French king (Leniaud and Perrot 118). Louis IX's life appears immediately after the (biblical) "Kings" window, at the far end of the west wall, just before Christ reappears in the large rose window featuring the Apocalypse. The physical location of Louis IX's life history implies his role as not only the ruler of France, but as the temporal regent for Christ.

The Sainte Chapelle provides the authority of visually documented

biblical images, which were regarded during the Middle Ages as valid records of historical events, as well as presenting parallels to the unfolding sacred history of Louis IX's reign (Weiss, "Art" 211). In the context of these images, King Louis IX successfully ruled France as the endorsed regent of Christ. The last canonized monarch of the Middle Ages, Louis IX lived out the humility he viewed in the images of David, the justice portrayed in scenes of Solomon, and the honor and stewardship exemplified in representations of Joshua (Gaposchkin 108). He relied on art for his own instruction and encouragement as well as dedicating it to the exaltation and worship of God. He commissioned works which were reflective of his passion for God and for a unified Christendom, creating glorious, tangible links between his country and the Holy Land (Folda 432). At the Sainte Chapelle, visual references to his Capetian lineage, set within Old Testament events, marries his duties within a dynastic context to those of his role as God's appointed ruler and forge a connection to the original Jerusalem with his newly established *locus sanctus* in Paris.

Notes

¹ The term Carolingian refers to art and architecture produced during the reign of Charlemagne or shortly thereafter, specifically from the late eighth century to the beginning of the tenth.

² Caesaropapism refers to the political system in which the ruler presided over both imperial and ecclesiastic matters.

³ The Capetian dynasty began with the coronation of Hugh Capet in 987 and maintained control of France through 1328. Both King Louis IX and Emperor Baldwin II of Constantinople belonged to the Capetian royal house.

⁴ The "glorious throne" from the Book of Kings refers to Solomon's throne, as suggested in a sermon given by Peter Damian in the eleventh century (Weiss, "Architectural" 314).

⁵ The church and state, which functioned interdependently in the thirteenth century.

⁶ The tympanum is the semi-circular area above the lintel of an arched portal, often containing sculptural decoration in Romanesque and Gothic structures.

⁷ The dado refers to a portion of architectural surface decoration that deviates from the overall pattern. In Gothic architecture, the arcade is the lowest section of the interior wall which supports the triforium and clerestory.

⁸ “Scrofula,” also referred to as the “king’s evil,” is an illness due to an infection of tuberculosis in the lymph nodes of the neck, which commonly presents with inflammation of the overlying skin.

⁹ The Bamberg Apocalypse, commissioned by Otto III during the early eleventh century, is a German manuscript consisting of a Gospel Lectionary and the Book of Revelation.

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