



PAINTED STATUARY



ARCHITECTURE AND FUNCTION



The Portail peint was built between 1225/30 and 1235 by the architect Jean Cotereel, responsible for completing the west end of the nave and the westwork. He replaced a simple door on the already completed south side of the cathedral. It was converted into a portal integrated into the projecting porch, which adheres to the module of the bay of the side aisle, in plan and in elevation. This type of extraneous construction was inspired by an Italian Romanesque model transposed into Northern Gothic. This vaulted annex with its square ground plan is open on three sides, with triple lancets on the east and west and a large arcade on the south. The statuary was installed at the same time as the masonry. Thus the statue columns are formed from a single large monolithic block comprising the column, the statue with its figured bracket and its floral crocket serving as a dais.

The Portail peint was used as a main entrance by the parishioners and the pilgrims to Our Lady, coming from near or far; the "grand entrance" in the westwork fulfilled many functions and formed an open porch-vestibule until the Montfalcon portal was built around 1515/17. The creation of a richly decorated entrance on the south side may have been linked to the development of the nearby Lady Chapel (at the bottom of the tower at the south end of the transept) around 1230; at the time that area, which still stands out today because of its later polychrome decoration, housed a miraculous statue of Our Lady that drew flocks of pilgrims to Lausanne.

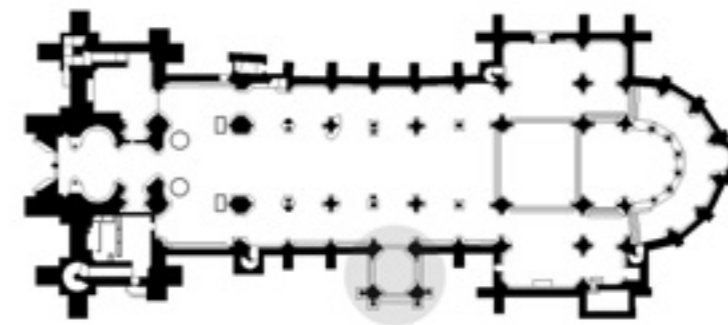
AN ORIGINAL WORK

The Portail Peint, or painted portal, is an example of an original conception, both in its architecture and the iconography and polychromy of its sculpted ornamentation which extends over its four internal walls. It is part of the story of the pilgrimage to Our Lady of Lausanne. The statuary illustrates a complex programme, possibly inspired by the Marian homilies written in the mid-12th century by Saint Amadeus, bishop of Lausanne.

Through the large figures from the Old and New Covenant – the statue columns – on the reveals, the ancestors of Christ adorning the archivolts, and the scenes of the Dormition, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin on the lintel and tympanum, it conjures up the mystery of the Incarnation and foretells eternal salvation, which will be obtained through the intercession of Mary.



LAUSANNE CATHEDRAL PORTAIL PEINT



> LINTEL, DETAIL OF THE DORMITION.
Photo: Louise Decoppet. ACV, cathedral archives.

GLASS SCREENS

The building of the portal in the 13th century caused static problems; attempts were immediately made to remedy them by filling in the side arcades. In 1879-80, these were reopened, following Viollet-le-Duc's guidance, to restore natural lighting and the original layout of the place. From the early 20th century it became apparent that this intervention was endangering the stability of the porch and the sculpture, which was exposed to the weather. The present solution, the outcome of thinking started in the 1980s, dissociated the static problems from the questions of closure. First of all, metal tie rods and props were put in place.

Then where the mediaeval in-fills used to be, large sheets of glass fitted with shading screens were inserted, held together by a structure made of stainless steel. This arrangement has the advantage of retaining natural lighting, conserving the polychromy by allowing the light to enter only indirectly, without its radiation. Because it is watertight, it makes it possible to create a space that is protected from external pollution, and through exchanges of air with the interior of the cathedral it provides climatic conditions favourable to the conservation of the statues. Installed in the south wall, the door now functions only as an emergency exit.

Attested from 1318, the name "Portail peint" (portale depictum) was used until the Reformation (1536); it indicates the importance attached to the polychromy. It was touched up in 1445-46 by the Fribourg painter Pierre Maggenberg, before being covered from the second half of the 16th century with two consecutive layers of whitewash, then a layer of even grey silicate, in the classical taste. The polychromy, partly visible under the flaking whitewash in the 19th century, was uncovered in places in 1881 and studied. But it was only between 1974 and 1991 that it was subjected to analyses and conservation and restoration work, so that today we can appreciate the richness of the original palette and the variety of the decoration.

Just as the statuary is linked to the architecture, the polychromy, indissociable from the sculpture, was planned right from the start. The sculptors forwent all ornaments and many anatomical details, leaving it to the painters to deal in particular with the eyelids, the pupils of the eyes, and the inscriptions in the books and phylacteries. While the construction materials are the usual ones, namely limestone, soft sandstone (mollasse) and tuff, as throughout the building, the pigments used indicate great sophistication. Thus blue, the dominant colour, is made from lapis-lazuli; it is combined primarily with white, gold, which is especially abundant (crowns and hair, details of clothing), and touches of red (often turned black). This range corresponds to the harmony of stained glass and illuminations in the first half of the 13th century.

ERASME RITTER, THE CATHEDRAL VIEWED FROM THE SOUTH, 1763.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Berne.

ARCHIVOLT, OLD TESTAMENT KING
Photo: Louise Decoppet. ACV, cathedral archives.

LINTEL, DETAIL OF THE ASSUMPTION.
Photo: Louise Decoppet. ACV, cathedral archives.

WEST SIDE

1 2 3



Prophets and precursors of Christ, people who announced the coming of Christ, standing on brackets decorated with evil monsters, symbolising the victory of good over evil through their relative positions.

1 Isaiah, a prophet, holding a disk featuring seven doves representing the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit foretold in his prophecy (Isaiah XI, 2). This attribute appears in sculpted form only at Lausanne.

2 David, the second king of Israel, crowned, the only figure on the portal wearing shoes. On the pages of the book, a verse from Psalm 131 (One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne).

3 Jeremiah, the prophet of the Passion, holding a cauldron in his left hand with flames emerging from it, an image of evil that matches his visions and prophecies.

4 5 6

4 Moses, with the tablets of the Law and horns. This attribute was still rare in 13th-century sculpture; it illustrates the radiance of Moses' face on his return from Mount Sinai.

5 John the Baptist, a precursor of Christ, wearing the camelhair coat of the ascetic, holding the disk stamped with the Lamb of God, evoking the baptism of Christ in the River Jordan.

6 Simeon and the Christ Child with a cruciform nimbus, grasping the old man's beard with his right hand. Like John the Baptist, Simeon is a link between the Old Covenant and the New.

ARCHIVOLTS: near the tympanum, two old men from the Apocalypse. Individuals from the genealogy of Christ, seldom identifiable: bearded men, some crowned, sometimes holding a book or a phylactery; at the top, a woman. In the centre, a medallion adorned with a mask.



NORTH SIDE

NORTH SIDE

The portal itself is decorated with three scenes glorifying the Virgin. This composition is in the tradition of portals inspired by Senlis (west entrance circa 1185), following a formula destined to be very successful: Coronation on the tympanum, Dormition and Assumption on the lintel, statue columns in the embrasures. However, it has several distinctive features.

1 **CENTRAL PIER:** the Archangel Michael rather than Gabriel, but bereft of the attribute that could make his identification certain; at his feet, crenellated architecture evoking celestial Jerusalem.

1 **LINTEL:** divided into two, following the classic model of Senlis.

> DORMITION

The body of the Virgin, borne in a shroud, is laid in a sarcophagus by two apostles. Around her ten other disciples, one leaning towards her and another two swinging a censer. Apostles very expressive.

> ASSUMPTION

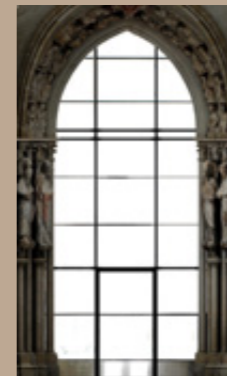
The resuscitated Virgin is supported and welcomed by nine angels.

3 **TYMPANUM:** features a Coronation of the Virgin which is unique in mediaeval iconography.

In the centre, Christ crowned is enthroned in a mandorla borne by two angels. From the hands of an angel climbing a mount on his left he takes the crown which he is about to place on the head of the Virgin, standing on his right. This type of coronation, with the Virgin standing, showing the action as it takes place, is special to Lausanne. Christ is the main protagonist, as evidenced by the difference in scale between the persons portrayed.

ARCHIVOLTS: twenty of the twenty-four old men of the Apocalypse, bearded, crowned figures most of them holding a cup and a musical instrument. In the centre, a medallion with the Lamb of God.

SOUTH SIDE



ARCHIVOLTS: ancestors of Christ including a bearded king with a severed head between his knees, two veiled women, some bearded men with the Jews' pointed bonnet on their heads, a mitred Jewish High Priest. In the centre, a medallion adorned with a mask.

SOUTH SIDE

EAST SIDE

7 8 9



Individuals from the New Covenant, spreading Christ's message throughout the world by their spoken and written testimony. They are standing on figured brackets, symbolising the dominance of good over evil.

7 Peter, a prince of apostles, holding a key to the Kingdom of Heaven in each of his hands. Depicted with his usual short, white, curly beard.

8 Paul, a prince of apostles, presenting his epistles in his left hand. An elderly figure recognizable by his receding hairline, and impressive beard and stature.

9 John, the youngest apostle and an evangelist, pressing his gospel close to his chest with both hands. A youthful, beardless figure in keeping with iconographic tradition.

10 11 12

10 Matthew, an apostle and an evangelist, holding an open book on whose pages we read the beginning of his gospel, Liber generationis Jesu Christi.

11 Luke, an evangelist, with a thick, curly beard, raising his right hand in benediction. Bereft of attributes, but long recognized as St Luke.

12 Mark, an evangelist, unrolling a phylactery, today empty of any inscription. Uncertain attribution, but accepted by tradition.

ARCHIVOLTS: near the tympanum, two old men from the Apocalypse. Individuals from the genealogy of Christ, seldom identifiable: bearded men, sometimes crowned, most of them holding a phylactery, a veiled woman and two young beardless men. In the centre, a medallion adorned with a mask.