

Robert de Lannoy (attributed, fl. Paris, 1292-1356)

John the Baptist

France, Paris

c. 1325



79 x 26 x 12 cm; Carrara marble; the surface of the stone retains its original finish. The lamb, book, right index finger, left thumb and the top of the head are missing, the latter has been sensitively re-carved in the same material. A narrow horizontal incision exists on the proper left shoulder, the presence and function of which is difficult to explain.

An extremely important marble standing figure of Saint John the Baptist, representing the pinnacle of Parisian marble sculpture created during the early years of the fourteenth century. Both the material and the execution of this figure are of the highest quality, the whole having been carved from a single block of virtually flawless white marble, most likely imported from the quarries at Carrara. The saint, identifiable by the shaggy camel hair coat that hangs in a simple U-neck arrangement and reaches down to his feet, stands with eyes directed straight out at the viewer, with his raised right hand pointing towards a book held in his left at the level of his stomach. Though having suffered from a zealous program of restoration during which the upper portion of the book and the thumb of the hand that held it were removed, it is clearly identifiable from the traces of its shape visible in the saint's drapery, as well as by the surviving section, which is carefully incised to suggest individual pages. Over his shoulders he wears a plain mantle which hangs at his sides in rippling swirls and tight curls of drapery, and which he draws across his body by pinching a swag of the material between his right arm and his chest. His hair cascades in a series of large serpentine

locks that frame the face and extend to the level of his shoulders, and his mid-length beard hangs around the jaw in finer curls. The sculptor has taken great pains to make the flesh of the figure as naturalistic as possible, carving the veins, bones, and toenails of the exposed right foot, and delicately individuating the digits and knuckles of both hands. Along the front of the thin base are fragments of foliage and the small head of a tiny mammal, probably a mouse due to its size.

Context of creation

The 1737 fire which destroyed most of the documents and archival records held by the Chambre des comptes in Paris, has led to a severe paucity of knowledge concerning the movements, careers, and scale, of the artistic milieu active in the capital during the first half of the 14th century. To concatenate this further, as François Baron has discussed at length, the roles of these early court artists were not often well demarcated, and many were in loose or undefined employment for periods of their career.¹ As so little is known, many attributions have been made to the foremost sculptors on the basis of stylistic similarities alone. Nevertheless, the links between the present figure and surviving examples of stone statuary which are firmly attributable to Parisian sculptors of the first half of the 14th century are vivid, and indicate its creation by one of the foremost artists active in that city. Immediate comparison, both in terms of treatment and quality, can be drawn to the surviving figures of the destroyed church of Saint Louis at Poissy, which we know were in place by the death of Philip the Fair in 1304 (Fig. 1a-d). The Poissy figures, most of which now reside in the musée du Louvre, Paris, arguably exerted a key influence on our sculptor, although the comparative differences in the depth of the materials and the degree to which they are worked in the round, the more papery aspect of the Poissy angels' draperies, and smaller details such as the more schematic approach to the delineation of Saint John's belt and the delicate decoration of his base, would suggest that the two are not directly linked, temporally or geographically.

A parallel to our figure has recently been drawn with the work of Evrard d'Orléans (active 1292-1357), a master sculptor patronised by Philippe IV (r. 1285-1314), and later the Valois king Philip VI (r. 1328-1350), and who became the first court artist to hold the position *peintre du roi*.² He is credited with the altarpiece of the abbey of Maubuisson, carved around 1330-40 (See Figs. 2-4), based on stylistic comparison with a documented work made for Guy Baudet, advisor to Philip VI and Chancellor, Bishop of Langres in 1341 (Fig. 5).³ The Maubuisson altarpiece, much of which was destroyed during the French Revolution, was commissioned by Queen Jeanne d'Evreux. Of the fragments that survive, there are certainly links to our figure, not least in the delicacy of the draperies, although the hair and broad, stern

¹ See F. Baron, 'Enlumineurs, peintres et sculpteurs parisiens des XIII^e et XIV^e siècles d'après les rôles de la taille', in *Bulletin archéologique*, Vol. 4, Paris, 1969

² Charles T. Little, written communication, 16/09/2014. See F. Baron et al., *les Fastes du Gothique; le siècle de Charles V*, Exh. Cat., Paris, 1981, p. 430.

³ See also F. Baron, 'Le maître-autel de l'abbaye de Maubuisson au xiv^e siècle' in *Fondation Eugène Piot. Monuments et mémoires*, 57 (1971), pp. 129-151

facial features of Evrard's figures are of divergent treatment, and it is doubtful the two sculptors were closely associated.

Attribution – a newly rediscovered masterpiece by Robert de Lannoy

Within the tight orbit of the Parisian royal sculptors working in the early 14th century, a single documented figure emerges with certainty as the hand responsible for our *John the Baptist*. The detail of the hem of John's robe as it buckles in a displaced fold over the exposed right foot, and the wonderfully naturalistic pear-drop shaped droop of the sleeves are of exquisitely refined treatment, and although these motifs are common to the sculpture of the period, such delicately rendered deployment is visible on only a handful of the best survivals. The gisants of Jean de Bourgogne (Fig. 6) and Robert d'Artois (1300-1317, Fig. 7) both carved by Jean Pépin de Huy exhibit comparable details⁴, but more closely even than these are a group of three documented standing figures carved by Robert de Lannoy (fl. 1292-1356) for the church of Saint-Jacques-l'Hôpital, Paris, and now in the musée de Cluny (Figs. 8-10).⁵ A number of focused and discreet details evince this relationship clearly: The saint's articulated toes, with their carefully rendered toenails, the wide, trough-shaped fold patterns across the front of the body, the deeply carved columnar channels gouged out between falling pleats of fabric below the knees, and the idiosyncratic curls of the beard, indicates not only a direct working knowledge of the Saint-Jacques-l'Hôpital figures but also a shared artistic outlook (see Figs. 11). It is perhaps the saint's beard that gives de Lannoy's involvement away most emphatically – his Saint-Jacques-l'Hôpital figures are the only surviving examples of Parisian stone sculpture from this date or at any point in the surrounding decades which exhibit the same treatment of the beard's two main locks of hair, which extend downwards from the jawline in a bifid arrangement before one lock delicately overlaps the other (fig. 12). Such a detail, not present on any other known works from the corpus of this milieu of sculptors, is an autograph trait of de Lannoy's approach. The fact that we find it utilised on our figure in an identical manner surely proves beyond reasonable doubt that it is the product of his hand.

Robert de Lannoy was active alongside Jean Pépin de Huy as both court painter and sculptor to Mahaut d'Artois from 1317 onwards, creating multiple commissions in marble and alabaster of which few now survive.⁶ Pépin de Huy is mentioned as a *tombier* (tomb sculptor) and citizen of Paris in 1312, when he was in the service of Mahaut of Artois. Most of his work is documented but untraced⁷: the sculpture for Mahaut of 1312 and a slab supported by lions for the tomb of Mahaut's father Robert II, Count of Artois (d. 1302), for Maubuisson Abbey, near Pontoise; a marble canopy for a statue for the convent of Saint Claire near Saint-Omer (1322); two alabaster (?) works (1322); and two further works for the

⁴ S. Perkinson, *The Likeness of the King: A Prehistory of Portraiture in Late Medieval France*, p. 102

⁵ L. Lambeau, 'Des statues provenant de Saint-Jacques-de-l'Hôpital et, subsidiairement, de deux inscriptions ayant appartenu à cet hôpital', Commission municipale du vieux Paris, Procès-Verbaux, 1900, pp. 42-44

⁶ For a discussion of the use of marble and/or alabaster in de Huy's workshop, see C. T. Little, ed., *Set in Stone: the Face in Medieval Sculpture*, Exh. Cat., New Haven and London, 2006, p. 95

⁷ A. Erlande-Brandenburg, *Dictionnaire des Sculpteurs Français du Moyen Age*, Paris, 1992, pp. 81-82

nuns of La Thieulloye, near Arras (1326). Also in 1326 Louis, Comte de Clermont, commissioned a tomb for his sister Marguerite de Bourbon (d. 1309), first wife of Jean, Comte de Flandres, for the Jacobite church in Paris, and in 1329 Jean Pépin de Huy made statues of the Virgin and Child and Saint James for the Dominican church at Poligny, in the Jura.

Pépin de Huy and de Lannoy worked closely together on the funerary monument and chapel to Robert d'Artois. The short-lived king's recumbent effigy, which was primarily carved by de Huy, is one of the masterpieces of early 14th-century Parisian marble carving to have survived destruction, and is marked by a new and subtle naturalism of the highest sensitivity. It incorporates a parallel approach to surface texture and the delineation of contrasting materials – chainmail and fabric – the former of which is expressed as a thick and ribboning surface not unlike Saint John's camel hair cloak. The mastery of our sculptor lies in part in this contrast – we know from his treatment of the two fabrics that the fine mantle which covers John's shoulders and is gathered in sinuous fluid folds across his front would fold and feel completely different to the rough, unforgiving nature of the cloak beneath, were we to don them ourselves. This sense of an acute skill and care exerted over the evocation of the various properties of differing materials extends also to the smoothness of the stone, which is worked up in varying states of refinement and polish from coarse material to soft flesh, a finish that (remarkably for sculpture of this date) has remained undiminished over the course of time. The similarity with the effigy of Robert d'Artois extends also to the facial features, with a subtly curving upper lip, and the hair, which is formed of similar locks curled back on themselves into small spherical nubs.

We know that the workshop of Jean Pépin de Huy and his foremost collaborator Robert de Lannoy was well equipped to create works of this nature. Their access to high quality marble, evinced by the effigy of Robert d'Artois, as well as by the number of documented works in this material that are known to have existed, would have made them extremely well placed to carry out such a commission. Perhaps of no less importance for our understanding of the figure is the nature of its departure from earlier sculptural forms and prototypes. Few figures of Saint John survive – it was a subject far rarer than the standing Virgin and Child topos that dominates our understanding of the period – of which an example from Mussy-sur-Seine shows just how radical the break from these established norms is. Such a specific commission, at a far remove from a generic Virgin and Child that could be reproduced with ease, and the attendant quality and uniqueness of its treatment, not to mention the expense of the material, would surely have demanded the finest sculptor of the day.

A further indication of the figure's material significance are the remnants of an ochre ground layer and fine traces of gilding on the hair and camel hair cloak, which are entirely consistent with the practice of polychroming high-quality marble statuary in Paris during the period. Of close comparison in this respect is a marble figure of the Virgin and Child carved by Pépin de Huy in 1329, for the Chartreuse de Mont-Sainte-Marie à Gosnay, and now in the Musée des Beaux Arts, Arras (Fig. 13), as well as a Virgin and Child of marginally later date

than our figure now in New York (Fig. 14), and another in Washington (Fig. 15).⁸ Also of note is a figure of Saint Paul in the church of Hondainville (Oise), which, although of a more rigid treatment closer in style to Evrard d'Orléans, particularly in relation to the hair, is of a comparable size to Saint John, and shares certain of its characteristics; the triangulated folds of the mantle over the upper thighs, the fine eyes and mouth, and the delicate delineation of the hands (Fig. 16). Indeed, the emergence of the present figure might serve to draw the Hondainville Saint Paul, as well as its counterpart, a badly damaged Saint Peter, into a close Parisian orbit in a way that has so far been only tentatively attempted in the surrounding scholarship.⁹

We can be confident, then, that our figure of John the Baptist was carved by Robert de Lannoy at around the same time he was working with Jean Pépin de Huy, and its material richness and refinement mean that it must without doubt have been produced for the French court. Moreover, through its subtle blending of Parisian and earlier Mosan¹⁰ elements, and its scale, refinement, and ambition, it is of fundamental significance to our understanding of the highest quality Parisian carving of the 1320s, a field where little survives.¹¹

Reconstruction

The likely function of a figure of this type would have been as part of an altar setting (as opposed to an altarpiece *per se*), in which it may have accompanied a central Virgin and Child group or else have been a standalone devotional focus in a chapel dedicated to Saint John.¹² Figures of this type found great currency within convents, where they could be endowed by a wealthy aristocratic patron. Such a site was presumably one of importance and wealth, perhaps in Paris itself or in a foundation in the immediate vicinity of the Île-de-France.

The presence of a small calcified peg at the base of the proper right leg, and a corresponding chiselled facet running behind the foot at 45 degrees to the back of the figure, suggests that the Saint was accompanied by an object nestled behind his foot and fixed to his leg. This was most likely a separate block of marble carved in the form of the lamb with which the saint is commonly identified, with its head filling the void created by the slim profile of the right leg above the ankle, and offering a visual anchor point for what has become a marginally imbalanced composition. This reading is strengthened by the upright positioning of the book to which he points, which would have made the incorporation of a

⁸ F. Baron et.al., *Les fastes du gothique; le siècle de Charles V*, Exh. Cat., Paris, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1981, Cat. 36, pp. 91-92

⁹ F. Baron et.al., *Les fastes du gothique; le siècle de Charles V*, Exh. Cat., Paris, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1981, Cat. 30, p. 87

¹⁰ W. H. Forsyth, 'A Group of Fourteenth-Century Mosan Sculptures', in *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, Vol. 1, (1968), pp. 41-59. See also R. Didier, *Sculptures mosanes et marbres blancs au XIV^e siècle*, Brussels, 1991.

¹¹ We are grateful to Robert Didier for his support of a date range of 1325 – 1330 and an attribution to Robert de Lannoy. Written communication with the author, 22/12/2014.

¹² F. Baron et.al., *Les premiers retables (XII^e – début du XV^e siècle); Une mise en scène du sacré*. Exh. Cat., Paris, musée du Louvre, 2009

lamb on top of the book on his left hand - a position it more commonly takes on sculptures of the saint - extremely difficult. This decision may have been in part based on the limitations of the material, which is a thin slab not wholly conducive to a horizontally placed book and a lamb seated atop it. In this context, the relocation of the lamb to his feet would be an entirely plausible decision.



Fig. 1a (above left)
Isabelle, from the priory of Saint-Louis at
Poissy
Before 1304
Paris, Musée du Louvre



Fig. 1b-d (above and right)
Three angels, from the priory of Saint-
Louis at Poissy
Before 1304
Paris, Musée du Louvre

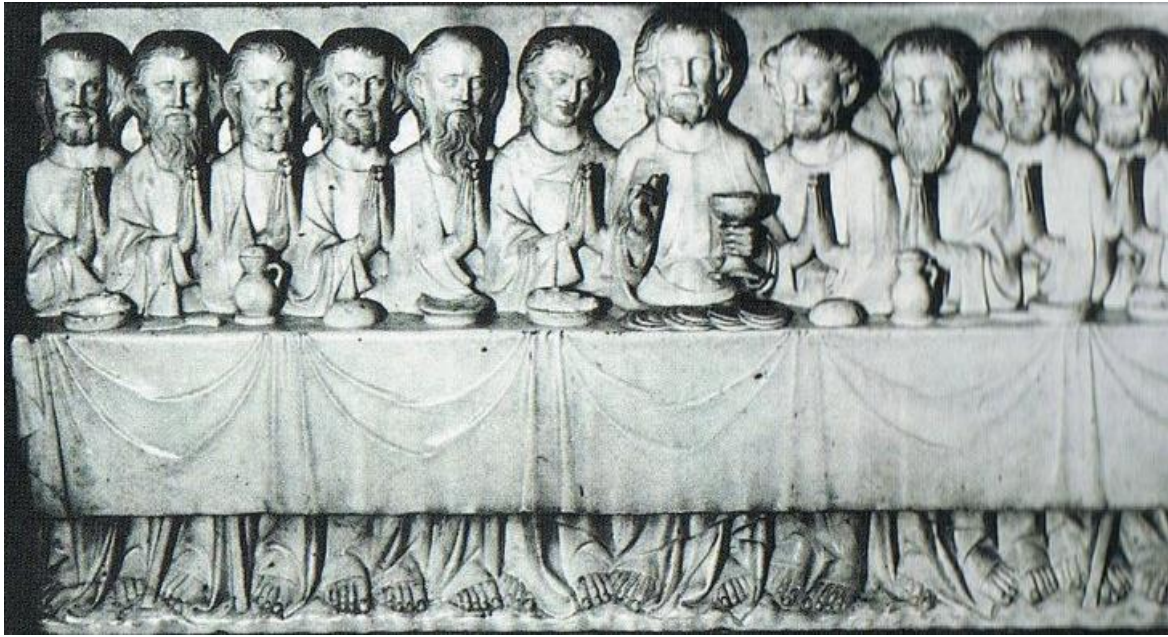


Fig. 2
Evrard d'Orléans
The Last Supper, from the altarpiece of the Cistercian abbey church, Maubuisson
c. 1340
Paris, Church of Saint-Joseph-des-Carmes



Fig. 3a
Evrard d'Orléans
Three prophets, from the altarpiece of the Cistercian abbey church, Maubuisson
c. 1340
37 x 53 x 9 cm; marble with traces of polychromy
Paris, Musée du Louvre

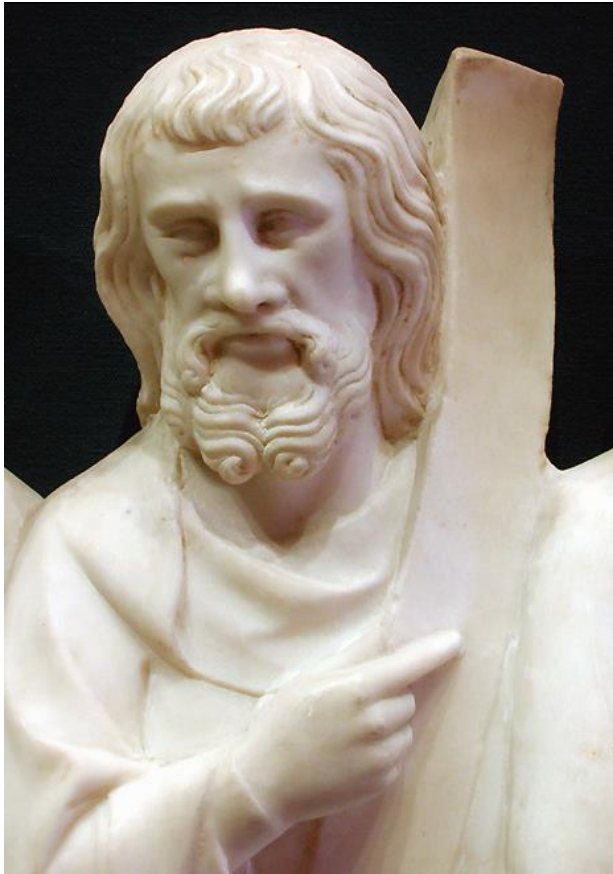


Fig. 3b
Evrard d'Orléans
Three prophets, from the altarpiece of the
Cistercian abbey church, Maubuisson,
detail



Fig. 4
Evrard d'Orléans
An Angel carrying two cruets, from the
altarpiece of the Cistercian abbey church,
Maubuisson
c. 1340
Saint-Ouen-l'Aumône (Val-d'Oise)
Paris, Musée du Louvre, Inv. No. RF 1438



Fig. 5
Evrard d'Orléans
The Virgin and Child accompanied by Guy Baudet in prayer and Saint Mammès
1341
Langres, Cathedral



Fig. 6a-b
Jean Pépin de Huy
Jean de Bourgogne, son of Mahaut d'Artois
c. 1315
61 x 20.5 x 15 cm; marble
Besançon, musée des Beaux-Arts, Inv. B. 994.8.1



Fig. 7a
Jean Pépin de Huy
Tomb effigy of Robert d'Artois (1300-1317)
1317 - 1320
Paris, Abbey of Saint-Denis

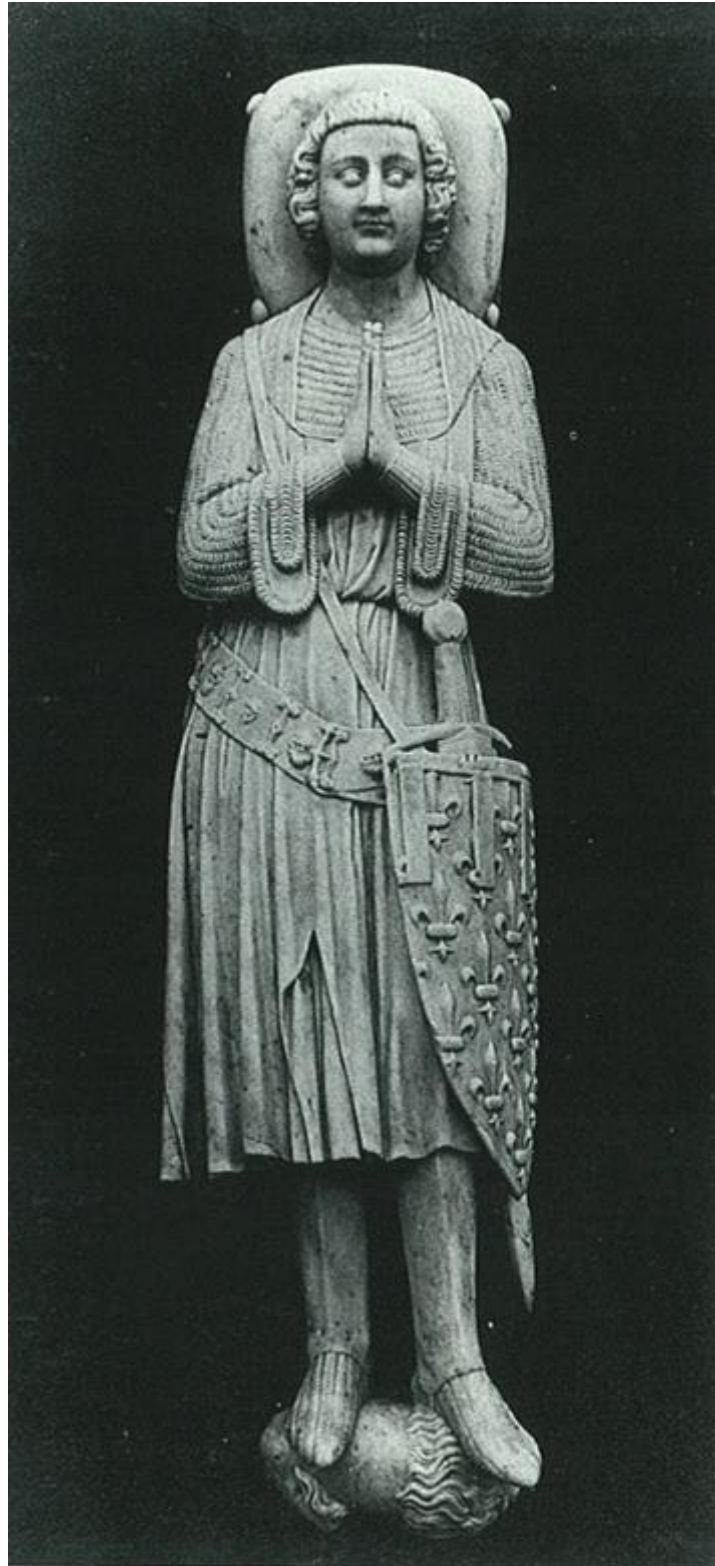


Fig. 7b
Jean Pépin de Huy
Tomb effigy of Robert d'Artois (1300-1317) seen from above



Fig. 8
Robert de Lannoy (fl. 1292-1356)
A standing apostle, from Saint-Jacques-de-
l'Hôpital, Paris
c. 1326 -1327
170 cm; limestone
Paris, musée de Cluny, Inv. No. CL18757



Fig. 9
Robert de Lannoy (fl. 1292-1356)
A standing apostle, from Saint-Jacques-de-
l'Hôpital, Paris
c. 1326 -1327
175 cm; limestone
Paris, musée de Cluny, Inv. No. CL18758



Fig. 10
Robert de Lannoy (fl. 1292-1356)
Saint James the Greater, from Saint-Jacques-de-l'Hôpital, Paris
c. 1326 -1327
175 cm; limestone
Paris, musee de Cluny, Inv. No. CL18756

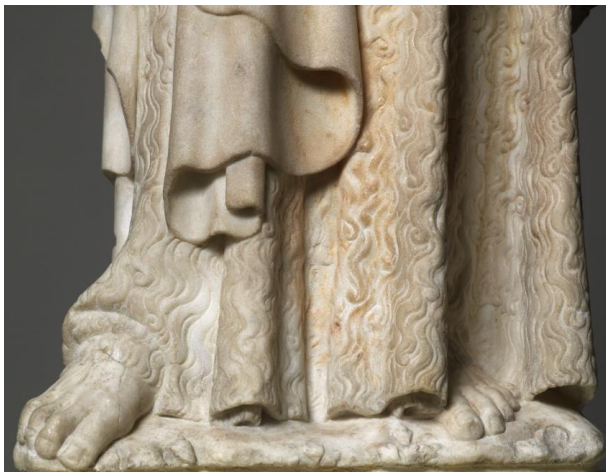
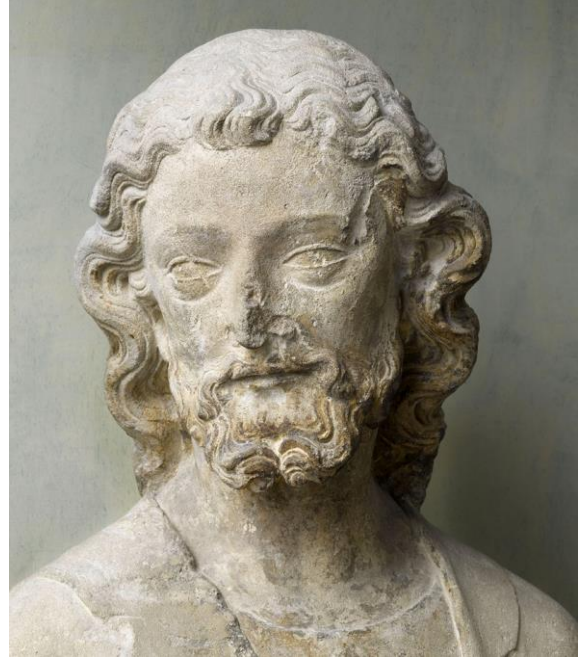
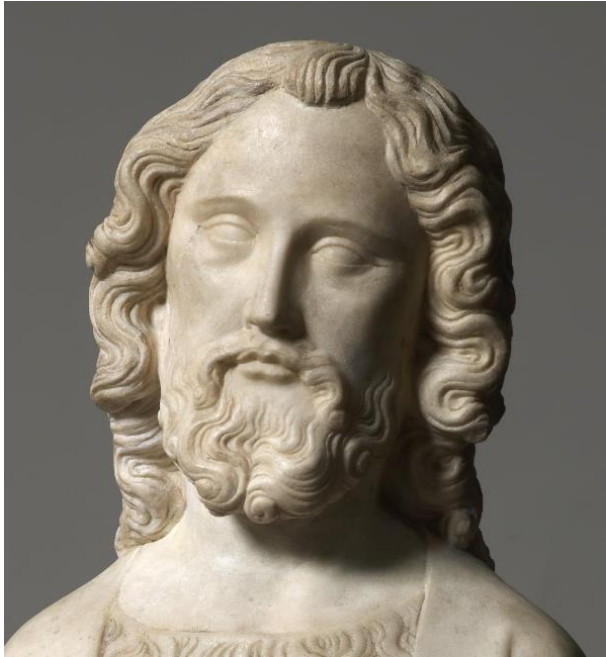


Fig. 11a (top) a comparison of the beard, hair, and facial shape between Saint John and the de Lannoy Saint James the Greater

Fig. 11b (above) a comparison of the articulated foot and the fold of material above, between Saint John and the de Lannoy Saint James the Greater



Fig. 12

A comparison of the motif of the locks of hair on our figure's beard, the one on the left overlapping the one on the right slightly, and the same detail used on the de Lannoy Saint James the Greater



Fig. 13a-b
Jean Pépin de Huy
Virgin and Child
Carved for the Chartreuse de Mont-Sainte-Marie, Gosnay
1329
Arras, Musée des Beaux Arts



Fig. 14
Virgin and Child
Ile-de-France
c. 1340
81 cm; marble with gilding
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Inv. No. 17.190.721



Fig. 15
Virgin and Child
France, Ile-de-France
c. 1325-1350
Washington, National Gallery of Art

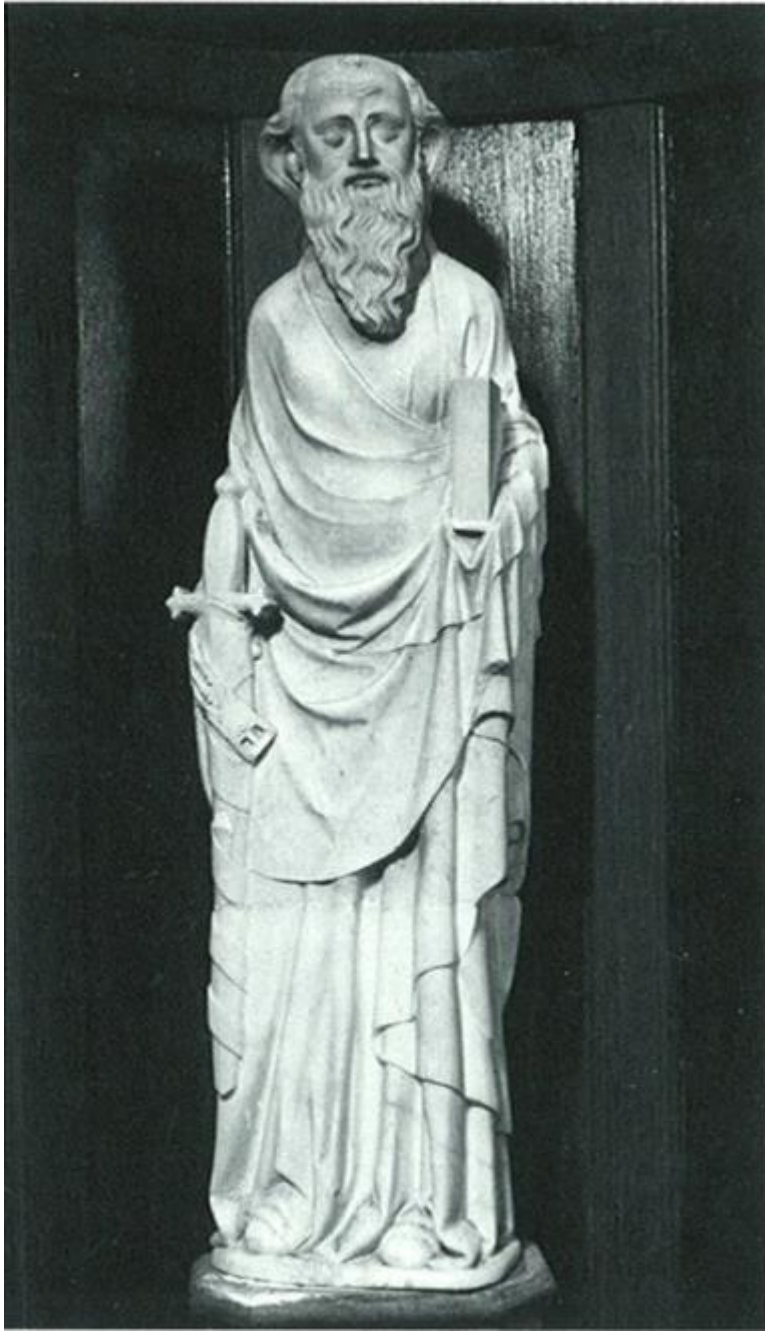


Fig. 16
Saint Paul
France, Paris or Ile-de-France
c. 1340
Oise, Hondainville, Parish Church