

NOTES ON A VIEW OF St. LUCIEN AT BEAUVAIS *

BY

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THE abbey church of St. Lucien at Beauvais has long been recognized as an important monument in the transition from Romanesque to Gothic architecture in northern France.¹ Built between *ca.* 1095 and *ca.* 1140, St. Lucien provided precocious examples of several features which were later to become standard elements in the repertory of Early Gothic architecture, most notably rib vaulting over upper spaces, lateral buttressing through concealed quadrant arches, and apsidal transept terminations.

The building was destroyed between 1791 and 1819, and the attempts of various scholars to reconstruct its appearance have been hampered by what has been thought to be a scarcity of visual evidence. Three views made either before or during the demolition of the church have been published², but only one of them is sufficiently detailed to be of archaeological value: it is a drawing of the north flank of the building by Augustine van der Berghe known today only through a lithographic copy by Laurent Deroy (figs. 1 and 2).³ Since its first publication in 1873 as an illustration in Deladreue and Mathon's definitive history of the monastery, van der Berghe's view has been reproduced so often that it has come to be accepted as primary evidence for the appearance of the building. Scholars such as Gall, de Lasteyrie, Aubert and Branner have considered it a faithful reflection of the lost monument and have relied on its testimony for an understanding of structural and decorative details. But the recent discovery of other evidence for St. Lucien raises questions about the accuracy of the view, and suggests that it might not be as trustworthy as they had thought.

The intention of the following notes is to evaluate van der Berghe's representation critically by comparing it with information furnished by three other sources: the results of excavations at the site in the 1960s,⁴ the evidence of a number of unpublished drawings of the building,⁵ and

three descriptions of the fabric by Jean Hérault, an eighteenth century architect responsible for its restoration.⁶ This correlation of auxiliary data with the evidence of the lithographed view makes it possible to discuss the features represented in the drawing in more precise terms and provides the basis for a more complete understanding of the destroyed church.

The Drawing and the Lithograph

Van der Berghe's original drawing cannot be found today, and it may have been lost as early as 1926 when Gall reported his inability to locate it.⁷ The fidelity of Deroy's lithographic copy is certainly not beyond question since he can be shown to have misinterpreted — or to have "corrected" — the two other drawings that he copied for publication in Deladreue and Mathon's study. The original versions of both of those drawings still survive for comparison with their copies and they suggest that caution should be applied in the study of Deroy's copy of van der Berghe's drawing.⁸

The original drawing cannot be dated precisely although a *terminus post quem* is suggested by the appointment of van der Berghe, a Flemish artist, to the position of drawing instructor at the Ecole centrale of Beauvais in 1796^{8 bis}. A *terminus ante quem* is provided by another view of the site, dated 1819, that shows the demolition of the church to have been almost complete in that year.⁹ Since the demolition, which was begun in 1791, does not appear to have been very far advanced when van der Berghe visited the church, the original drawing should probably be dated *ca.* 1796-1800.¹⁰

Description

The drawing was made from a hill just north of the church, and it accurately reproduces the steep incline of the site, which falls abruptly from

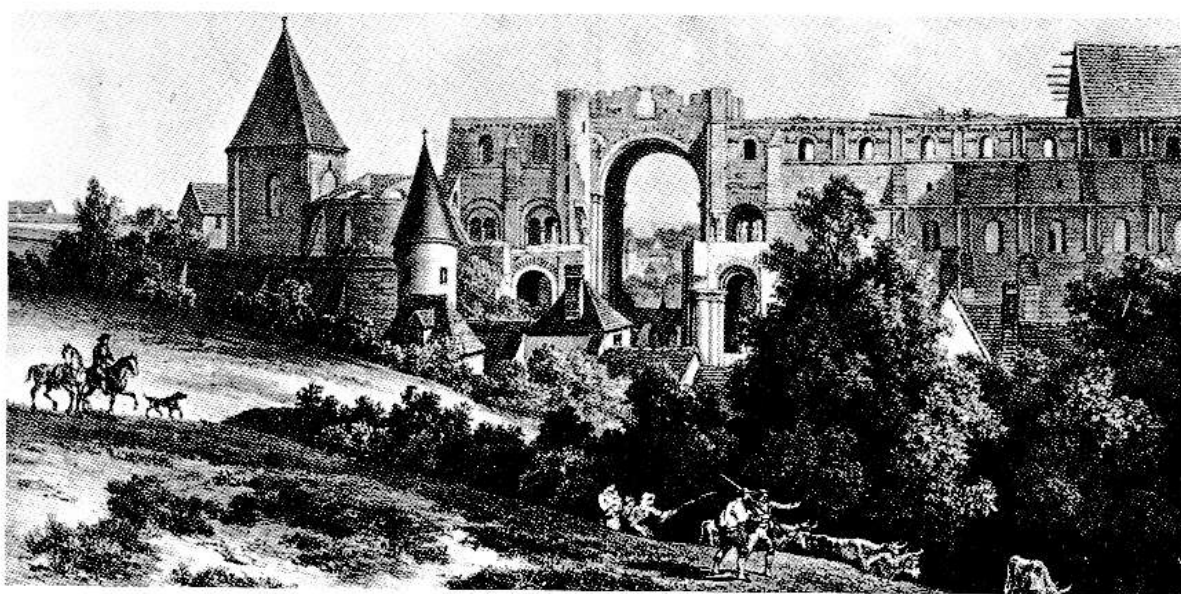


FIG. 1. — View of the north flank of St. Lucien, Beauvais, during demolition, ca. 1796-1800. Lithograph by Laurent Deroy after a lost drawing by Augustine van der Berghe (*Mémoires de la Société Académique de l'Oise*, VIII, 1871-73, p. 685, pl. XXIII). Photograph courtesy of the Courtauld Institute and Jean Bony.

east to west. The north flank of the building is shown in its entirety except for the west facade which was still standing when the view was drawn.¹¹

At the right side of the drawing, the walls of the nave and the nave gallery rise to their full height. The roof of the gallery has been removed completely and the roof of the central vessel remains over only the two western bays.

In the center of the drawing, the crossing is shown intact up to a level just above the cornice of the nave wall. The south transept appears to have been destroyed completely, as has the stair turret that originally stood at the junction of the aisles of the north transept and the nave.¹² The walls of the north transept have been taken down to the level of the aisle vaults on the eastern and western sides and apparently all the way down to the ground on the northern side.

In the chevet at the left, the walls of the central vessel rise to their full height in only the first two bays east of the crossing. The roofs of the central vessel and the gallery are missing, as are the vaults and some of the outer walls of the gallery. At the extreme left, the two-story axial chapel of the Virgin is shown intact and covered by a separate roof.

The Nave

The auxiliary evidence provided by the excavations, descriptions and unpublished drawings does not contradict any of the major features of the nave as they are depicted in the view. These other sources can be used not only to confirm details in the lithograph but also to augment the evidence presented there. This view thus emerges as a reliable visual testimony of the appearance of the nave exterior.

The nave elevation is composed of three major levels — aisle, gallery and clerestory — which are interrupted by an expanse of blank walling between the gallery and the clerestory.

The view shows the aisles (A) to be divided into bays by deep buttresses that project from the wall beneath the level of the gallery windows.¹³ The omission of the aisle windows in those bays where the visibility is not obstructed by trees or buildings must be seen as an error on the part of either van der Berghe or Deroy. This is confirmed by Jean Hérault who referred to the aisle windows of the nave in two of his descriptions, and gave their dimensions as « de cinq pieds de large et dix pieds de haut. »¹⁴ The windows of the gallery are separated by paired

any given bay of the nave, rise almost to the full height of the central vessel and thus produce a *croisée régulière*.¹⁹ The vault is not rendered with enough clarity to permit an analysis of details but its presence is suggested by the shadows that obscure the forms inside the crossing.

The design of the crossing piers is equally difficult to determine from the lithograph, and the complete lack of archaeological evidence in this part of the site further hampers our understanding of their form.²⁰ Although the view may not be wholly reliable in reproducing the specific designs of individual piers, it appears that each shaft of the compound crossing piers fulfilled a separate support function: the westernmost shafts of the eastern piers, for example, seem designed to carry only the crossing arches while the northern shaft of the northeastern pier — shown protruding into the north transept — was intended to support the springing of a vault (H).

Access to the upper portions of the tower was provided by a stair turret (G) attached to the northeastern side of the northeastern crossing pier. The excavations and the eighteenth century descriptions shed no further light on this turret but the forms in the lithograph suggest that it may have risen only from the level of the gallery, following the pattern of the crossing tower stairs at Jumièges.²¹

The North Transept

The north transept can be reconstructed only partially because of the advanced state of its demolition at the time the drawing was made. From the evidence in this view, however, it does not appear that the elevation of the transept differed radically from that of the nave. The same *parti* consisting of aisles, galleries and clerestory — with an intervening zone of blank masonry — is suggested by the lithograph. And the springer visible above the northeastern crossing pier (H) indicates that the central vessel of the transept was covered by a stone vault. Although the drawing does not specify the type of vault that was used, other evidence indicates that it was a rib vault: a large number of simple rib voussoirs were uncovered in the north transept during the excavations of 1959-1962 and a hitherto unpu-

blished description of the building made at the time of its liquidation in 1791 relates that both the transepts and the choir were « voûté en ogives. »²²

The transept aisles are represented as if in cross-section because of the destruction of a total of three turning bays at the northern end of the transept. The transverse arch visible at the left of this gap (I) belonged to a fourth turning bay and the arch at the right (J) belonged to the southernmost of two straight bays that stood on the western side of the transept. The arch at the left is more acutely stilted than the one at the right and it also appears to be more frugally moulded. But it is impossible to determine whether these differences should be seen as evidence for a change in design within the aisle bays or as faults on the part of the copyist.

It is clear, however, that either van der Berghe or Deroy was in error in the representation of the pier (M-K-L) that supports the arch at the right of the aisle gap. At least two mistakes are apparent. First, what appears in the lithograph as a diagonally-planted shaft (L) wedged between two ordinal shafts on the right side of the pier cannot be confirmed by any other evidence. In fact, such a pier design is specifically contradicted by the excavations of 1959-1962 that revealed this pier to have been composed simply of four half-shafts distributed equally around the flat faces of a square core.²³ Second, the excavations also provided no evidence for what appear in the lithograph as engaged shafts that run up the interior elevation on the left side of the same pier (M). It is possible, however, that these errors can be assigned to an attempt by van der Berghe or Deroy at foreshortening. If so, the pattern of halfshafts seen here could have been intended to be read as the elements of *two* piers, the two foremost shafts (K-L) being part of one pier (supporting an arch of two orders) and the most distant shaft being part of a second pier (supporting an arch of only one order). With the same reasoning, it could also be said that the two engaged shafts shown at the left of the pier (M) were not intended to be understood as being attached to that pier but as standing *behind* it. In that case, the engaged shafts would

correspond to the form of the crossing piers as they are represented here, even though they were mistakenly drawn too far to the left. This sort of error, which seems the likeliest explanation for the shafts, is typical of Deroy's misreading of another drawing of the building.²⁴ Whatever the nature of the error in this instance it is clear that the authority of the archaeological evidence must be given precedence over the forms presented in the lithograph.

The Chevet

The most difficult part of the building to interpret from the view is the chevet. The aisle level is obscured completely and the clerestory is mostly destroyed.²⁵ The elevation can be read in only the first two bays east of the crossing where the gutteral wall still stands to its full height (N). To judge from these bays, the elevation of the chevet was similar to that of the nave in its distribution of levels. But variations in details suggest a change in design between the chevet and the nave. The clerestory windows are both wider and longer in the chevet, as attested also by Jean Hérault, and they are devoid of the label mouldings and upper stringcourse that appear in the nave.²⁶ A simple strip buttress (O) with a conical termination separates the clerestory windows in the chevet, whereas paired colonnettes are generally used in the nave. The reappearance of the simple strip buttress in the easternmost bay of the nave (E) raises the possibility that this bay, along with the transept, might have been closer in appearance to the chevet than the nave. Similarly, the denticulated cornice of the clerestory (interspersed in the lithograph of the chevet with elements of a *corniche beauvaisine*²⁷) is continued in the first bay of the nave but then is replaced further west by an arcuated cornice.

The greatest single problem in the drawing is the interpretation of the curving wall section (P) that appears at gallery level between the standing bays of the chevet and the axial tower. Provided with two windows and a salient buttress below and with quadrant arches above (Q), this wall section is represented as the segment of a circle that curves inward toward the chevet walls at both its left and right sides.

There are two possible explanations for this wall section. On the one hand, it can be read as the outer wall of the turning bays of the chevet gallery, an interpretation that is supported by the location of the wall section immediately east of the standing straight bays. But, if this is the case, it is difficult to understand why the wall is shown as curving inward at *both* ends and not just at the left. On the other hand, it is possible that the wall section was meant to represent the upper level of a two-story chapel that existed on the eastern side of the north transept.²⁸ Based on the foundations of this chapel excavated in 1959-62, it could be argued that the double curvature of the wall in the view was intended to indicate an apsidal upper story such as those found later in the transept chapels at Soissons and Cambrai. But two facts speak against this interpretation: the first is that the wall section in the view is located one bay further east than it should be if it is to be understood as part of the transept chapel; the second is that Jean Hérault specifically stated that the upper chapel was square and not apsidal.²⁹

The acceptance of the first interpretation presupposes a single error in draughtsmanship while the acceptance of the second presupposes two. It is therefore more likely that the wall section was intended to represent a portion of the outer gallery wall of the chevet. This interpretation is supported by the appearance of an oblique wall fragment (T) immediately to the right of the turret of the precinct wall, a fragment that may be taken to indicate the westward extension of the gallery wall. And further support is provided by the fact that the quadrant arches (Q) seen above the curving wall section would have been sprung more logically from gallery walls than from upper chapel walls.

The Axial Tower

One of the most unusual features of the building was its double-storied axial chapel (R), of which only the upper level can be seen in the lithograph. The square chapel at ground level was dedicated to the Virgin; the upper chapel, whose original dedication is unknown, had been transformed by the mid-eighteenth century into

the "chartrier."⁸⁰ Roofed separately from the rest of the building, this double-storied chapel was raised in elevation as a low tower. The two faces visible in the view are provided with large central windows, both of which had been blocked when the drawing was made. The northern face is framed by pilasters (S) that appear to be fluted.⁸¹ The pilaster on the right side descends only a few feet from the arcuated cornice while the one on the left side disappears behind the intervening precinct wall. Pilasters are totally absent from the western face of the tower.

Conclusions

Despite errors in rendering and the loss of the original drawing, the van der Berghe/Deroy view remains the most useful single piece of visual evidence for the appearance of St. Lucien at Beauvais. The mistakes that have been noted in the representation of the transept and the chevet do not diminish the testimony of the view since they can be rectified in large measure on the basis of the other sources.

Deroy's misunderstandings were the product of his lack of first-hand knowledge of the building and his inability to confirm a number of elements in the original drawing from the documents he had at hand. The auxiliary evidence of the excavations,

descriptions and unpublished drawings provides a richer fund of data than was available to Deroy. These sources confirm the accuracy of the view on a number of points, especially in its representation of the nave. Such correspondences suggest that in those instances where features appear in the view without confirmation from other sources, a generally reliable reconstruction can be made on the basis of this view alone. This is particularly the case in regard to the indications in the view of changes in design between the chevet and the nave (perhaps through the intermediary of the transepts) and between the eastern bay of the nave and those bays further west. Further evidence from the excavations supports the notion of a break in construction in the vicinity of the crossing, but the discussion of this and other points must be reserved for another study.

While the authority of the excavations and the eighteenth century descriptions must always be given precedence over the testimony of the visual documentation, the van der Berghe/Deroy view can now be used with more confidence for the purposes of reconstruction. Only a complete correlation of all the surviving evidence will permit a final judgment on the issues and, even then, it must be admitted that many of them may never be completely settled.

S.G.

NOTES

* These notes represent part of a broader project of research on the architecture of St. Lucien at Beauvais. Some of the conclusions presented here were delivered in another form at the Fourteenth International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan (1979) and at Columbia University. Funding for this project has been provided by two grants from the Council for Research in the Humanities of Columbia University.

1. The principal art historical discussions are the following: G. DEHIO, *Die Anfänge des gotischen Baus*, in *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, XIX, 1896, pp. 169-85 (esp. p. 173); *idem.* and G. von BEZOLD, *Die kirchliche Baukunst des Abendlandes*, Stuttgart, 1901, II, pp. 43 and 93; E. GALL, *Die gotische Baukunst in Frankreich und Deutschland*, Leipzig, 1925, pp. 28, 65-66; *idem.*, *Die Abteikirche St. Lucien bei Beauvais*, in *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, IV, 1926, pp. 59-71; R. de LASTEYRIE, *L'architecture religieuse en France à l'époque gothique*, Paris, 1926, I,

pp. 12-13; R. BRANNER, *Gothic Architecture 1160-1180 and its Romanesque Sources*, in *Studies in Western Art (Acts of the XXth International Congress of the History of Art)*, Princeton, 1963, I, pp. 92-104 (esp. pp. 93-94); M. AUBERT, *A propos de l'église de Saint-Lucien de Beauvais*, in *Gedenkschrift für Ernst Gall*, Berlin, 1965, pp. 51-57; J. HUBERT, *Les fouilles de Saint-Lucien de Beauvais et les origines du plan treflé*, in *Arte in Europa (Scritti in onore di Edoardo Arslan)*, Pavia, 1966, pp. 229-35; and C. FONS, *L'abbaye de Saint-Lucien de Beauvais. Etude historique et archéologique* (unpublished thesis, Ecole des Chartes, Paris), 1975.

2. All three views were reproduced in lithographic copies by Laurent Deroy in L. DELADREUE and M. MATHON, *Histoire de l'abbaye royale de Saint-Lucien*, in *Mémoires de la Société Académique de l'Oise*, VIII 1871-73, pp. 257-385, 541-704 (and *tirage-à-part*, Beauvais, 1874), pls. VI (p. 257), VII (p. 277) and XXIII (p. 685). Pls. VI and XXIII were published there for the first time. Pl. XII had been published previously

It cannot be determined whether the small openings seen in the fourth and sixth bays west of the crossing corresponded to a decorative scheme on the interior elevation (as theorized by FONS, *op. cit.*, p. 217) or served merely to areate the roof space over the gallery vaults.

16. *Devis of 1767*, pp. 21-22, arts. 74-80 and *Devis of 1770*, pp. 11-13, arts. 24-30. HÉRAULT envisioned the demolition of the quadrant arches, many of which appear to have been in poor repair at the time, and the lengthening of the clerestory windows in all parts of the building. Since the quadrant arches are represented in van der Berghe's later drawing it can be concluded that this was one of the many suggestions put forward by Hérault that was not adopted.

17. Jean HÉRAULT did not comment on this difference. His description of the nave clerestory windows is as follows: « La nef est éclairée par seize petites croisées de quatre pieds de largeur et de trois pieds six pouces de hauteur ce qui fait que cette nef est extraordinairement sombre » (*Devis of 1770*, p. 16, art. 45; see also the *Devis of 1767*, p. 39, art. 130).

Elements of a sawtooth label were uncovered during the excavations of 1959-62 but their original emplacement within the building could not be determined.

18. A new lantern turret was added to the crossing between 1692 (when the original lantern was shown still standing in a view of the church in Gaignière's *Plan de la ville de Beauvais*; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, Va 411 F) and 1733 (when the new lantern was represented for the first time in the background of J.-B. Scotin's view of the abbey of St. Quentin; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, Va 60, IX). DELADREUE and MATHON, *op. cit.*, p. 630, reported that the new lantern was begun in 1702 but they cited no evidence for such a date.

19. For the development of the *croisée régulière*, see further, L. GRODECKI, *L'architecture ottonienne*, Paris, 1958, pp. 81-126.

20. The excavations of 1959-62 revealed that all traces of the four crossing piers had been removed during the demolition of the building (LEMAIRE, *Rapport*, pp. 43-46). Jean HÉRAULT's silence about their form, added to the lack of archaeological evidence, means that it is impossible to reconstruct the design of the crossing piers with accuracy.

21. For the stair turret at Jumièges, see further, L. MUSSET, *Normandie romane*, II (Haute-Normandie), La Pierre-qui-vire, 1975, p. 116 and pl. 25. (Cf. the untenable theory that this turret originally descended to the ground in R. LISS, *Die frühromanische Kirchenbau des 11. Jahrhunderts in der Normandie*, Munich, 1967, pp. 221 and figs 76, 85.)

22. For the rib voussoirs, see AUBERT, *op. cit.*, p. 57 and the *relevés* attached to LEMAIRE's *Rapport*.

For the 1791 description, see Beauvais, Archives départementales de l'Oise, I Q, II, No. 1385, p. 1: « ...le chœur de vingt toises avec un avant corps de chaque côté (sc. the transept arms) formant croisées chacune de dix toises, le tout fait en maçonnerie, vouté en ogives... »

23. See further, LEMAIRE, *Rapport*, pp. 66, 74. The northern half-shaft of the excavated pier was made larger than the other three so that it would match the diameter of the free-standing columnar piers of the transept hemicycle. See also AUBERT, *op. cit.*, p. 56, pl. 33.

24. DELAREUE and MATHON, *op. cit.*, pl. VII (see above, nn. 2 and 8).

25. In a departure from his usual procedure, Jean HÉRAULT did not provide dimensions for the windows of the choir aisle in any of his *Devis*.

26. Jean Hérault stated that the nave clerestory windows were « de quatre pieds de largeur et de trois pieds six pouces de hauteur » (*Devis of 1770*, p. 16, art. 45), whereas he said that « le chœur est éclairé par onze petites croisées de six pieds de large et cinq pieds de haut ce qui fait que le dit chœur est fort peu éclairé » (*Devis of 1767*, p. 40, art. 133).

27. A drawing of the south flank of the church made in 1789 by the Abbé Daniel (Beauvais, Musée départemental de l'Oise) indicates that there was a *corniche beauvaisine* on the south side of the chevet but gives no evidence of the denticulated cornice seen here on the north.

For a definition of the *corniche beauvaisine* and a list of examples, see J. VERGNET-RUIZ, *La corniche beauvaisine*, in *Bulletin Monumentale*, CXXVII, 1969, pp. 307-22.

28. For the discovery of the foundations of the chapel, see LEMAIRE, *Rapport*, pp. 27-29 and 51-56. A brief analysis of the chapel appears in HUBERT, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-31.

29. Jean HÉRAULT, *Devis of 1767*, p. 32, art. 111: « Audessus de la chapelle Saint Donoald est élevé un *quarré de massonerie* de vingt pieds de hauteur sur lequel est une second voute. » Although it is probable that the chapel always had an upper story, the *quarré de massonerie* may have been a later replacement of an originally apsidal chapel at the same level.

30. While Jean Hérault repeatedly referred to the axial chapel as being « *quarré*, » he gave its actual dimensions as « vingt-deux pieds de long et vingt-six de large hors-d'œuvre » (*Devis of 1767*, p. 11, art. 39 and *Devis of 1773*, p. 4, art. 15).

The upper story was discussed in the *Devis of 1767*, pp. 42-43, art. 138: « ...audessus de la voute de la chapelle de la Vierge... est le Chartier qui sont les archives et papiers de la Maison... »

31. The fluting does not appear in any other drawing. No trace of the pilasters was found in the excavations.