

# *Framing the Middle Ages: concepts of the frame in medieval art and architecture*

Monday 23 November 2009  
14.00 - 18.00, Research Forum South Room

**Anne Moignet-Gaultier (Université Paris 10)**

*Line and the emergence of frame in Medieval Architecture*

Usually, it is sculpture that has to adapt to the framework of architecture, which remains fixed. Here, it serves to deform architecture, forcing it to become a frame, when initially there were simply parallel lines. Admittedly, the architecture frames the tympanum, but now the "curieux" himself is an active element in the framing of the architectural lines of the archivolt.



The "curieux" (an interested onlooker): a sculptural motif in the external voussoir of the tympanum, Sainte-Foy abbey-church, Conques (beginning of the XIIth century)

A carved "curieux" appears in the profile of the voussoir. He peeps through the curved lines of the archivolt and, in order to get a better view, he uses one hand to hold up the string course and the other to bend it. Thus, he forms a frame. In French, frame is *cadre*, from *quadrus*: square. The representation of this square, a closed framework, implies the principle of four framing elements at each side of the composition, without these elements necessarily losing their specific identity. Normally, the architecture constitutes the framework and the sculpture adapts to it. Here, the sculpture creates the frame. It moulds it and brings it into being: it gives it a new meaning and makes it visible. By introducing a deformation into the lines of architecture, it attracts one's attention and provides a frame. The "curieux" challenges the viewer and teaches him to go beyond the conventions of a fixed and two-dimensional "frame". The frame here becomes a fluid construction of interrelated independent elements. These constitute shifting focuses, renewed by changes in viewpoint and perspective. This principle of a free framework in space and time presents a challenge

to the eye of an art historian and to our perception of Gothic art: the eye of the beholder thus creates the frame. In the "curieux" of Conques as in Gothic rose-windows, the analysis of a frame and its representation in architecture and sculpture, offers new tools for a methodology of art history.

[moignetgaultier@hotmail.com](mailto:moignetgaultier@hotmail.com)

### **Cynthia Johnston (Keble College, Oxford)**

*The Emerging Frame: Some Thoughts on the Development of Non-Figurative Penwork in Early Thirteenth-Century French and English Manuscripts*

The concept of the frame as applied to thirteenth century French and English medieval manuscripts can be discussed as a developmental aspect of the *mise-en-page*. The margins which surround the text provide an implicit visual frame for the folio. The development of fleuronee penwork in the first half of the thirteenth century which extended into the margins of the folio suggests a supra-frame to the text. This suggested frame develops throughout the thirteenth century and by the fourteenth century, it can surround the text and provide a space for figurative, interactive marginalia.

The genesis of the large decorative penwork structures which are found in both French and English MSS of the first half of the thirteenth century can be found in Paris. The Lewis Psalter (Philadelphia, Lewis E 185), c. 1225, demonstrates early use of the penwork techniques which suggest the visual frame for the object. Although these large penwork structures can be found in all four margins of the page, the *bas-de-page* is the most frequent site for their occurrence.

The influence of Parisian penwork techniques can be found in the work of William de Brailes in Oxford. These decorative techniques contrast sharply with those of the generation which preceded de Brailes in Oxford. Both the Huntingfield Psalter (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 43) and the Lothian Bible (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 791) demonstrate the conservative character of *mise-en-page* design in the first decades of the thirteenth century in Oxford. De Brailes' elaborate penwork structures show Parisian influence in both their formation and placement on the folio. De Brailes' 'Book of Hours' (London, BL 49999), shows clear adaptation of the Parisian technique.

The genesis of the supra-frame is essential to the development of Gothic marginal decoration. The lift and curve of the penwork will not only provide a platform for the inhabitants of the margin but a frame in which to examine them. It is a palaeographic commonplace that the broken bows and compressed verticality of Gothic script reflects the sharp angles and complex decorative motifs of Gothic architecture. The penwork structures too in their contrasting compartmental organization and sharply extending scrolls and vertebrae-like extensions signal the rise of the Gothic in the realm of the codex, with the frame as its stylistic conduit.

### **Peter Bokody (Central European University, Budapest)**

*The Frame of Life – The Allegories of Justice and Injustice in the Arena Chapel*

The aim of the paper is to discuss one specific frame created by Giotto in the Arena chapel: the frame of the predella scene under the allegory of *Justice* (and the absence of such a frame under *Injustice*). The difference between these two representations has already been remarked upon, but no comprehensive interpretation has yet been proposed. As a first step, I try to show that the insertion and omission of the frame on the two allegories is inscribed into a wider network of deliberate contrasts between the two works, including colors, gestures, poses, sex and architecture. Having established that the presence and the absence of frame should be regarded as meaningful, I address the question of what might have been Giotto's intention in introducing this distinction. Revising the various interpretations of the allegories, I argue that the contrast of "framed" and "frameless" may denote the difference between the just and the unjust society, and perhaps can be linked to the opposition of the cheerful life and the violent rape scenes under the allegories. Ultimately, this may show how Giotto was able to use the basic pictorial process of framing, differences between various media, and various visual idioms to express iconographic implications, once again testifying to his ability to turn pictorial concerns into iconographic ones and vice versa.

[bokody.peter@gmail.com](mailto:bokody.peter@gmail.com)

### **John Renner (Courtauld Institute)**

*Framing the Incarnation: the Annunciation in late medieval Tuscany*

This paper examines some significant ways in which representations of the Annunciation were framed in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Tuscany. It argues that the framing structures could carry important elements of the meaning to be conveyed to the viewer. Examples are considered where the two figures of Mary and Gabriel themselves frame another image or architectural feature, such as Arnolfo di Cambio's relief in the Victoria & Albert Museum, which includes a central ciborium-like structure, and Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Annunciation* fresco at Montesiepi which is centred around a window whose frame becomes a porch into the Virgin's chamber, filled with light. In Nicola Pisano's pulpit in Siena cathedral the *Annunciation* group breaks out of its framework and, as Seidel demonstrated, the Angel was originally situated at the other end of a gangway to the staircase. In such cases, it is argued, the framing devices can be understood in part as visual figures of the central mystery of the Annunciation story, the Incarnation of the Word. A consideration of frames and their functions in late medieval *Annunciations* thus offers an insight into how painters and sculptors attempted to portray the deeper theological meaning of the narrative, and how viewers might have responded to these images.

[john.renner@courtauld.ac.uk](mailto:john.renner@courtauld.ac.uk)

### **Meredith Cohen (University of Oxford)**

*The Sainte-Chapelle and the Uses of the Rayonnant Frame*

This paper examines the integration of Rayonnant architectural forms into other artistic media in thirteenth-century French art. After about 1250, the distinct combination of

gables, pinnacles, roses, crockets and trefoils or quatrefoils that characterise Rayonnant were brought together and employed as framing devices in manuscripts, ivories, and reliquaries. This phenomenon is considered in relation to the built environment in thirteenth-century Paris, where an architectural boom contributed to the development of the style and its ubiquity in the city. Among a handful of important buildings, the Sainte-Chapelle, built by Louis IX and Blanche of Castile between 1239 and 1248, participated in this architectural vogue. The chapel served as a giant frame for the relic of the holy crown of thorns, and also employed Old Testament typologies throughout its visual program. The similar modes of application observed in the other arts of Paris starting about a decade or so later demonstrate not only formal but also iconographic appropriations.

[M.Cohen@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:M.Cohen@leeds.ac.uk)

### **David Humphrey (Royal College of Art)**

#### *Agent of boundary and transition: the 'frame' and late medieval European jewellery*

The concept of the frame is deployed in two principal ways in late medieval European jewellery design: as a three-dimensional space frame in which gemstones and other decorative elements are located, and as a device defining the physical and visual boundaries of jewellery objects. In this latter role the frame itself defines, and is defined by, the edges of an object resulting from what, today, we would consider to be 'the design process'. The frame, considered in this situation, is not only the boundary of an object's form, but also an area of transition between the object itself and the landscape of the garment on which it is sited.

This paper outlines how the boundary of jewellery objects, as an agent of transition, was controlled and exploited by late medieval European goldsmiths and the constructional and visual devices they employed: from the use of pearls to soften the visual transition from object to garment, to decorative metalworking techniques and geometric figures acting to visually animate boundaries and mediate between objects and their location of wear.

[david.humphrey@rca.ac.uk](mailto:david.humphrey@rca.ac.uk)

### **Hanna Wimmer (University of Hamburg)**

#### *Imperial Frames for Holy Words*

In four Ottonian Gospel books, the illuminated incipit-pages or the initial-pages of the Gospel of St. Matthew have painted frames each of which is set with four painted gold coins or gold-ground medallions depicting busts of Ottonian rulers and their family. The schematic composition of these pages creates complex relationships between the painted frame with images of Ottonian rulers and dignitaries (often themselves surrounded by inscriptions) and the framed word of the Bible, presenting them as two elements that are separate and inextricably linked, the interpretation of each informing and determining that of the other. The difference between the frame and the framed, furthermore, lies not only in the difference in content, but also in the play with the border between 'image' and 'reality', the inside and the

outside, demarcated by the frame which in these cases has itself become a place of images, while it surrounds not a pictorial image, but elaborately visualised words.

Taking the complex visual configurations of texts and images, of formal and interpretive frameworks, as a point of departure, this paper explores how Frame Analysis, as developed by modern sociologists and literary theorists, can provide a way of reconsidering old artefacts. Furthermore, it seeks to demonstrate that considering historical artefacts in terms of modern theory can in turn lead to a better understanding, and possibly a reconsideration, of the methodological instruments of our own discipline.

[Hanna.wimmer@sas.ac.uk](mailto:Hanna.wimmer@sas.ac.uk)