

The Parisian Confraternity of the Pilgrims of Saint James: A Report on Research

ROBERT L.A. CLARK

Introductory Note

The following is a report on research first undertaken in the mid-1980s when I was in Paris researching my doctoral dissertation on confraternity drama. I was able to continue my work on the Saint-Jacques archive in 1995 within the context of an NEH Summer Seminar, "Gothic in the Ile-de-France," under the direction of Stephen Murray of Columbia University. This research is far from complete. Indeed, I will not be able to continue research on this massive archive until I secure further funding. Comments, inquiries, and suggestions are welcome, including suggestions regarding possible sources for project funding. I am also open to proposals for collaborative projects (interpretative or editorial) on the archive. Since my area of expertise is medieval French literature, the collaboration of art historians and/or historians would be especially welcome.

The Archive and the State of Scholarship

The archive of the confraternity of Saint-Jacques-aux-Pèlerins (also known as Saint-Jacques-de-l'Hôpital) is conserved in the Archives de l'Assistance Publique, located in the Marais district in Paris. A survey and presentation of the archive was published by Henri Bordier in 1875–76.¹ The archive is divided into two *fonds*, the one containing various documents of a legal nature (charters, donations, real estate transactions, etc.), the other consisting of the accounts. In my research, I chose to concentrate on the account rolls, which are virtually complete for the years 1319 to 1708 and which provide minute detail about practically every aspect of the group's activities.

Despite this rich source of documentation, relatively few scholars have exploited the Saint-Jacques archive. Françoise Baron has carried out an exhaustive program of research on the art commissioned by the confraternity and the artists hired to execute it, publishing the results in two articles.² Bronislaw Geremek makes abundant use of

1 Henri Bordier, "La confrérie des Pèlerins de Saint-Jacques et ses archives", *Mémoires de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris et de l'Ile-de-France* 1 (1875), 186–228; 2 (1876), 330–397; subsequently republished in Henri Bordier and Léon Brièle, *Les archives hospitalières de Paris* (Paris: Champion, 1877).

2 Françoise Baron, "Le décor sculpté et peint de l'Hôpital Saint-Jacques-aux-Pèlerins", *Bulletin monumental* 133.1 (1975), 29–72; and "Enlumineurs, peintres et sculpteurs parisiens des XIVe et XVe siècles d'après les archives de l'Hôpital Saint-Jacques-aux-Pèlerins", *Bulletin archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques*,

the accounts in his monograph on Parisian laborers.³ Catherine Vincent cites a number of details from the work of Bordier and Baron in her *Confréries médiévales dans le royaume de France*.⁴ Finally, Henry Kraus devotes a few pages to the confraternity in his *Gold Was the Mortar*.⁵

The Saint-Jacques archive has thus been used primarily as a source for work in art history. Geremek's work demonstrates how valuable these records are for understanding the social fabric of medieval Paris, although he concentrates solely on the workers who were hired for the construction of the confraternity's church and hospice. We shall see that the Saint-Jacques archive gives a remarkably broad view of the urban culture of medieval Paris.

The Establishment Of The Saint-jacques Confraternity: Who Is Patronizing Whom?

The confraternity Saint-Jacques-aux-Pèlerins had been in existence since the end of the thirteenth century but entered into a new phase of expansion after the death of Philip the Fair in 1314.⁶ In the course of a few years the confraternity built, under royal patronage, a new chapel and hospice for poor pilgrims passing through Paris on their way to the shrine of Saint James at Compostela.⁷ Philip's successor, Louis X, le Hutin, was anxious to show himself to be more a more conciliatory ruler and, in 1315, he granted (or, in fact, renewed) the right of Saint-Jacques-aux-Pèlerins to assemble and conduct all business necessary to the running of the confraternity and to their own salvation. Two years later the confraternity embarked on an ambitious plan to acquire a large plot of land for the construction of the new buildings. This land, situated just inside the wall of Philip Augustus on the corner of the rue Saint-Denis and the rue Mauconseil, was prime real estate, already covered with a number of houses which the confraternity bought at considerable expense, lot by lot.

n.s. 6 (1971), 77–115.

3 Bronislaw Geremek, *Le salariat dans l'artisanat parisien aux XIIIe–XVe siècles: Etude sur le marché de la main-d'oeuvre au Moyen Age*, trans. Anna Posner et Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (Paris: Mouton, 1968).

4 Catherine Vincent, *Les confréries médiévales dans le royaume de France: XIIIe–XIVe siècle* (Paris: Michel, 1994).

5 Henry Kraus, *Gold Was the Mortar: The Economics of Cathedral Building* (London, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 34–38. Kraus's account is highly readable, especially his relation of how five of the apostle statues escaped destruction and found their way into the collection of the Cluny museum. His work is, however, not as useful as it might be as he does not support it with adequate documentation.

6 The earliest document in the archive would seem to be a donation to the confraternity made in 1298 (Bordier 1, 190).

7 The buildings were pulled down in 1824. Other than the archives, the only vestiges of Saint-Jacques-de-l'Hôpital which have been positively identified are the above-mentioned five statues of apostles in the Cluny museum.

It is of interest that this neighborhood at the Porte Saint-Denis was, if you will, the “Soho” of medieval Paris.⁸ Several artists who would execute important commands for the confraternity sold houses to it which were subsequently demolished to make way for the new buildings. Indeed, it seems likely that this arrangement, along with the attractive location, explains the choice of the site. Thus, Robert de Lannoy, who would sculpt ten of the figures of the apostolic college for the chapel’s interior, had occupied the corner house where the chapel was erected. He had sold the house to another sculptor who would do work for the confraternity, Martin Maalot, and it was Martin who sold the house to the confraternity in 1319. Guillaume de Nooriche (or Nourriche), the sculptor who executed the other two apostles for the interior, also sold his house to the confraternity, as did another *ymagier*, Robert de Heudicourt.⁹ The acquiring of the land, which included paying the onerous rights of *amortissement*, was defrayed in part by pledges from 85 Parisian notables and by gifts from several members of the royal family.¹⁰ Philip V the Tall made a gift of 500 pounds, which was paid posthumously by his Jewish banker, Croissant de Corbueil, in 1324; his uncle, Charles de Valois, made a gift of 300 pounds; and his mother-in-law, Mahaut d’Artois, gave 80 pounds.

Once the necessary land had been acquired, construction progressed quickly. The complex of buildings, none of which has survived, consisted of three parallel, longitudinal spaces. The southernmost of these spaces was the “hospital” proper, in which the poor pilgrims were lodged. The middle structure was a sort of low chapel, separated from the hospital only by an arcade, in which religious services were held. Thus, the pilgrims could attend services from the adjoining hospital. The northernmost structure was the high chapel, or church, as it came to be called, doubtless reserved for religious services attended by the confraternity members themselves. The church was clearly a Gothic structure of some ambition, both by its size and by its decorative program. It had eight bays and measured approximately 35 by 12 meters. An enormous team of workers was engaged, either as journeymen or under contract for piecework, and the accounts lay out the expenditures for labor, from the clearing of the preexisting structures and the laying of the foundations to the raising of the walls and the vaulting and covering of the structure.

The bulk of the work seems to have been carried out within a period of five years under a master mason named Courat (or Conrat) Toussac, also referred to as Conrat de Saint-Germain.¹¹ The stone, both for the structure and for the statuary, was brought from limestone quarries situated near Paris, at Vitry, Saint-Cloud, and Vernon. (The

8 According to Bordier, the Porte Saint-Denis was known as the “Porte aux Peintres” (Bordier 2, 331).

9 Bordier 2, 332; cf. index of names in Baron, “Enlumineurs.”

10 According to the *Grand Robert de la langue française*, *amortissement* was paid by the Church (or other persons of mainmorte) to the local lord to indemnify the latter for loss of the rights he would normally receive when a property holder died. In the case of an incorporated body like a confraternity, there was little chance that the “person” would die. Hence the loss of rights and the requirement of an indemnity.

11 The building accounts are contained in the first roll, which covers the years 1319 to 1324 and which, unrolled, measures some 17 meters in length!

Saint-Cloud quarry was said to belong to the king.) The stone was brought both by cart and by boat, in the latter case unloaded at the port by the Louvre. The decorative program required the engaging of a number of sculptor-painters, most notably the previously mentioned two sculptors who were given the task of carving the statues of Christ and the apostolic college, doubtless inspired by the treatment of the same program at the Sainte-Chapelle (and hence one of the many royal associations to be found in the ambitious decorative program). Unfortunately, all that remains of the rich decoration of Saint-Jacques-de-l'Hôpital are the five apostles, carved by the same Guillaume de Nourriche and Robert de Lannoy, which are now in the Cluny museum in Paris. The considerable gifts from the royal family were not the full extent of the its association with the confraternity. Philip the Tall's wife, Joan of Burgundy, laid the foundation stone on February 18, 1319, and the accounts record the paying of four pounds to Guillaume de Nourriche for the carving of a stone, presumably a sculpted relief, which represented the "manner in which the queen placed the first stone, with the brothers alongside." This relief was placed next to the great portal of the structure, which gave access to both the chapel and the hospice. This representation of the laying of the cornerstone was not the only part of the sculptural program which represented contemporary personages. The accounts state that Raoul de Heudicourt and his aides were paid ninety-eight pounds ten sous for sculpting the figures for the main portal, specifically: a Saint James for the *trumeau*; then, to one side and kneeling before him, a figure of the queen; and, to the other side, figures of her four daughters and of her mother, the Countess of Artois, who was also a benefactress of the confraternity and whose own *hôtel* was, incidentally, situated across the street from the portal.¹² These figures, which are simultaneously *priants* and donor portraits, are, according to Françoise Baron, perhaps the first to be so represented in monumental church sculpture.

What, one may ask, was the topical import of this unusual grouping of three generations of royal women on the chapel and hospice of a bourgeois confraternity? As Henry Kraus has suggested, the reference was, in all likelihood, to what is not depicted in the referent: a male heir. The queen's munificence and her active presence in the artistic program was doubtless a response to the desperate situation of the Capetian monarchy at this juncture, which ultimately would fail to produce a male heir.¹³ But, as already mentioned, the confraternity also had excellent relations with the Valois branch which would ultimately inherit the throne: Charles de Valois was not only a protector but, apparently, a member. His name heads the list of notables who pledged gifts to the confraternity, and, furthermore, he actually made the pilgrimage to Compostela and was received with great pomp by the confraternity upon his return in 1323 or 1324.¹⁴

12 Françoise Baron has suggested that this sculpture of the royal women was on the lintel above the *trumeau* on the authority of an engraving from the early nineteenth century, itself based on a seventeenth-century drawing, although she admits that this evidence is unreliable ("Décor", 35).

13 A male child had died in February of 1317, a month after Philip had ascended the throne.

14 Bordier 1, 198.

What, one may well ask, did the various members of the royal family hope to gain by their active association in the life of the confraternity? Besides the prayers of the *confrères* and of the pilgrims in the hospice—for a male heir, for their health and well-being, or, failing that, for their salvation—there was the not inconsiderable satisfaction of seeing themselves represented on a church portal, which is to say within a highly charged symbolic register of visual representation. Furthermore, this portal was on the rue Saint-Denis, the most royal of all Parisian streets, the route of processions and royal entries, such as the procession from the Abbey of Saint-Denis to the Royal Palace on the Ile-de-la-Cité after the kings' coronation. Thus, the immutable figures on the Saint-Jacques portal occupied a liminal position between the civic rituals of the rue Saint-Denis and the religious rituals observed inside the chapel, between public and semi-public, or semi-private, spaces. On a somewhat more subtle level, politically speaking, royal patronage was doubtless a means to win the favor of the Parisian bourgeois elites, not a small factor in times of political turmoil and uncertain monarchic successions. These donor strategies, to use Corine Schleif's term, would not, unfortunately for the monarchy, withstand the trials of the Hundred Years War.¹⁵ Etienne Marcel, the powerful provost of Paris who was to lead an urban insurrection in the 1350s against the monarchy and who would seek unsuccessfully to turn the city over to the enemies of the crown, was also one of the governors of the Saint Jacques confraternity.

What, in turn, did the confraternity members gain from royal patronage? The gifts already mentioned, although quite generous by any standard, still account for only approximately 14% of the total receipts from the five-year period during which the chapel and hospice were built, which total some 4800 pounds. To answer this question, we must return to questions involving the difficulties of inserting a religious institution into an already crowded urban landscape. While the *confrères* seem to have encountered no serious obstacles in their acquisition of the land needed for their foundation, there was stiff opposition from the curate of Saint-Eustache, in whose parish the new church was to be situated, and from the chapter of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, which was the mother parish of Saint-Eustache and the other new parishes which had sprung up in the eleventh century around the new marketplace (the site of Les Halles until it was bulldozed in the 1970s to make way for tacky commercial development). It took two years of negotiations, which included securing the approval of the papal see at Avignon, to settle this conflict. In this matter the pope named two commissioners whose job it was to ascertain the financial ability of the confraternity to maintain a clergy of four chaplains, at a total cost of 170 pounds a year. The two commissioners were the bishop of Beauvais, Jean de Marigny, and the papal notary Geoffroy du Plessis. This was, in fact, the same team which had earlier served as examiners in the adultery trial which had been brought against Joan of Burgundy in 1314. Cleared of the charges against her, she returned to her husband, the future Philip the Tall... and gave him the four daughters represented with her on

15 Corine Schleif, "Hands That Appoint, Anoint and Ally: Late Medieval Donor Strategies for Appropriating Approbation through Painting", *Art History* 16 (1993), 1–32.

the chapel's façade. Both Jean de Marigny and Geoffroy du Plessis became important protectors of the confraternity: the bishop of Beauvais celebrated the first mass in the new chapel (and was portrayed there in at least two sculptures) and Geoffroi du Plessis made gifts for portal statues. In short, the confraternity needed powerful protectors in order to counter the hostility of the ecclesiastical establishment. Thus, we see that the founding of Saint-Jacques-de-l'Hôpital is, in fact, but another chapter in the clash of spheres of interest on the Right Bank between the Church, on the one hand, and the monarch and his bourgeois subjects, on the other.

The resolution of the conflict resulted in the construction of the confraternity's chapel and hospice. Through the building project, the bourgeois members of the confraternity effectively established themselves as important patrons in their own right, not to mention as the retainers of a considerable work force. At its height, it numbered at least seventy journeymen, to which one must add those workers who were engaged to do piecework. This work resulted in a tremendous flow of funds: in the five-year period under consideration, a total expenditure in excess of 5700 pounds. According to Henri Bordier, the three governors each advanced 300 pounds, probably to cover the approximate 900 pound deficit outstanding at the end of their term.¹⁶ But against the monetary outlay, one must weigh the tremendous cultural capital that accrued to the confraternity and to its distinguished members. I do not mean to suggest that their spiritual concerns were not sincere but rather that so large an undertaking must result in political benefits—in prestige, power and influence—which were gained from the enterprise. The burghers of Paris were big players in the affairs of the city and of the realm, and, in Saint-Jacques-de-l'Hôpital, they endowed themselves with an institution through which they inscribed themselves in the urban landscape, in the political field, and in the economics of medieval Paris. Thus, we see that the Gothic could become a vehicle for the self-promotion of urban elites with a political agenda which both Church and monarchy sought, not without reason, to counter or control. The benefits of patronage clearly flowed in both directions, and it is an open question whether the confraternity members or their royal patrons benefited more from what was a mutually satisfying and overtly political arrangement.

The Festive Life of the Saint-Jacques Confraternity

The annual banquet, or *siège*, was, of course, the high point of the group's collective life and was a lavish affair, requiring the outlay of significant funds and considerable effort. The account rolls provide abundant evidence of this; indeed, in each fiscal year, a separate account was kept for the banquet. Unlike other confraternities, the Saint-Jacques confraternity did not need to worry about securing a suitable locale for its banquet: it was held in a structure attached to the church and hospital, referred to in the accounts as the *logeis*. The *confrères* also rented this space, for twenty to sixty sous, to confraternities with no hall of their own.¹⁷ We learn from the accounts that

16 Bordier 2, 342.

17 Among the confraternities renting the *logeis* were the Confrérie Notre Dame de Boulogne,

the *siège* called for a general house-cleaning: the church, *logeis*, and court were cleaned, the reliquaries burnished, the vestments refurbished. Then the *logeis* was decorated. Every year, *pavillons* or *courtines* were put up. This was a major operation: in 1332 a certain Jehan Dilibart did the work in six days, using some 1500 nails. The same year a long pole was acquired to hold a fine cloth above the head table. The *luminaire*, chaplets and painted rods (*verges*) were made ready; grass was spread over the floor; tables, chairs and crockery were rented.¹⁸ It was also necessary to prepare the *méreaux*, or tokens, which allowed admission to the banquet. In 1326 the confraternity paid 25 sous for 1536 tin *méreaux*, for in these years before the Black Death, more than a thousand people sat for dinner at the banquet. In 1340, 1080 members paid 2 sous each to sit for dinner at the banquet; in 1341, 1308 members; in 1342, 1044 members.¹⁹ After the Black Death, in 1352, only 700 were served, 163 of whom were new members.

The amount of food prepared was commensurate with the number of people to be fed. For the 1080 revellers in 1340, the *doyens* of the confraternity, who oversaw all the expenditures for the banquet, paid for five cows, twenty pigs, three thousand eggs, two large barrels of white wine, and three of red. (The entrance to the wine cellar was blocked off every year before the banquet as a precautionary measure.) As noted above, the banquet accounts were kept separately from the day-to-day accounts of the confraternity, and the money from entrance fees and alms collected throughout the city was supposed to cover the expense. Still, the deficit or balance from the banquet was figured into total expenditures and revenues, and one can calculate that the banquet represented as much as 30 or 35% of total yearly expenditures.

Entertainment and edification were, of course, important aspects of the banquet, and the Saint-Jacques confraternity sold tokens for their banquet that allowed entry but did not include the meal. The accounts show that a *frère* was paid to preach a sermon and also that *jongleurs* were paid to provide entertainment. On at least one occasion, a play was presented. Unfortunately, this would seem to be the unique mention in the accounts of the staging of a play, but it contains valuable information about confraternity drama at a relatively early date. The entry in the account roll for 1324-25 reads: "Treize l. par. que les pelerins qui firent le jeu au jour du siege queuillirent par les tables au diner."²⁰ The Confrères themselves, then (who are

the Confrérie des Trois Rois de Cologne, the Confrérie de la Madeleine, the Confrérie saint Julien aux Jongleurs, the Puy Gyeffroy de Flouri, the Confrérie Notre Dame de Liesse, etc.

18 The chaplets and *verges* were probably carried by the members and officers during a public procession.

19 Here it should be noted that at this time 2 *sous* was roughly the equivalent of a journeyman's daily wage. An entry in the Saint-Jacques account rolls for 1331-32 records that a *couvreur* and his *valet* were paid 3 s. 8 d. for one day's work. In the account rolls for 1341-42, a master *couvreur* is recorded as having earned 4 lb. 14 s. 6 d. for 27 days' work, which makes for a per diem of 3 s. 6 d.

20 "Thirteen pounds *parisis* which the pilgrims who performed the play collected from the tables at the dinner."

referred to in the accounts as *pèlerins*), staged the play, possibly a Saint Jacques play, on the day of the banquet and then took up a collection to further the work of the confraternity and defray its expenses.

The accounts of the same confraternity also show that charity was an integral part of the banquet. Those paying to attend were expected to give alms. (One could, of course, give alms without attending.) These alms were distributed on the day of the feast, when each pauper who came to the hospital door was to receive one *denier*. In 1332, for example, a sum of over eleven *livres* is recorded as “argent donné le jour du siège”—thus, to a staggering total of over 2500 paupers. The other form of charity practised was the distribution of the left-over food (*relief*), which took place at the Halles. In 1328, for example, ten sous were paid “pour porter le relief et le pain de l’aumosne en la halle.”²¹ The charitable works and convivial celebrations of the confraternity complete the picture of its social and economic participation in the life of the city.

Conclusion

This cursory presentation of the Saint-Jacques confraternity and its archive can give only an indication of the tremendous interest they hold for a broad range of scholars—urban, institutional and social historians and art historians—working on an array of issues, including cultural and material history, labor relations, issues of patronage, the practice of charity, and, of course, confraternities. The Saint-Jacques confraternity was clearly a space within which the different groups (Capetians and Valois, urban elites, clergy, artisans and journeymen, the poor and the transient) came together in pursuit of what were, for the most part, distinctly divergent interests. This material is, indeed, ideally suited for studies that would seek to show, in a specific context, the intersection and interplay of factors which are most often studied from a more narrow disciplinary perspective. It is my hope that this presentation will encourage others to visit and study the archive of Saint-Jacques-aux-Pèlerins.

Robert L.A. Clark
Department of Modern Languages
Kansas State University

21 We know from the archives of other confraternities that such acts of charity, usually in conjunction with the banquet, were commonplace. The Parisian goldsmiths were required by their statutes to provide a meal on Easter for the paupers in the Hôtel-Dieu. The drapers' guild, on the day of its banquet, was required to feed not only the poor in the Hôtel-Dieu, but also the prisoners in the Châtelet. All Franciscans and Dominicans were entitled to receive a *denier*'s worth of bread at the drapers' banquet, and all paupers who requested alms were to receive bread or a small coin if the bread ran out. Finally, the left-over food was to be distributed to the leper houses.