

⁸¹ Maximus of Turin, *Sermons of St. Maximus of Turin*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Long Prairie, MN: Neumann Press, 1989), 107.
⁸² Martin of Braga, *On the Castigation of Rustics*, 183–203.

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Monstrous Races on the Central Tympanum at Vézelay: Constructing “the Other” in Medieval Society

Caitlin Green

Beginning in 1095, the Crusaders made it their mission to reach the “monstrous” groups of people and restore Christian faith to holy places in and near Jerusalem. The notion of “the other,” a barbaric, deformed, un-Christian group of people, swept across Europe. Pope Urban II initiated the first Crusade at the council of Clermont in 1095 with a powerful speech urging all to go forth and recover Palestine from the hands of the Muslims. In an account provided by Robert the monk, Urban vehemently stated that “a race from the kingdom of the Persians, an accursed race, a race utterly alienated from God, a generation forsooth which has not directed its heart and has not entrusted its spirit to God, has invaded the lands of those Christians and has depopulated them by the sword, pillage and fire.”¹ This retelling from Robert the Monk reveals that there was a considerable degree of animosity toward the Muslims. They were not Christian, so were therefore “the other.”

A popular pilgrimage church en route for crusader missions was Vézelay Abbey in northern Burgundy, France. Vézelay’s intricate iconographic program on the tympanum and lintel sets it apart as one of the great masterpieces of Romanesque art and architecture (Figure 1). In comparison to other tympana erected at the time of the Vézelay tympanum, it is clear that there is a unique depiction at Vézelay not to be found elsewhere — the Pentecost. Even more fascinating are the depictions of the “monstrous races” encompassing the central scene of the Pentecost that Pope Urban II and other medieval figures outcast as “the other.” By studying the iconography of the Vézelay tympanum, an understanding of the monstrous races, or “the other,” in medieval society can be constructed.

In eleventh century France, there was a revival of monumental sculpture that had been neglected since the end of the classical period.² The central tympanum at Vézelay is an early example of the reemergence of monumental sculpture in France constructed between the



Figure 1: Central tympanum. Vézelay Abbey, Burgundy, France, 1130.



Figure 2: Tympanum, Autun, France, 1130.

years 1120–1132. Scholars have often compared the Vézelay tympanum to other contemporary tympana to exemplify the advancement in skill present on the Vézelay tympanum.³ In comparison to other tympana erected at the same time as the Vézelay tympanum, there is a unique depiction, a scene depicting the Pentecost, also known as the Descent of the Holy Ghost. Many tympana scenes present the Day of Judgment, such as the tympanum contemporary with Vézelay at Autun, France (Figure 2). Not only is the subject at Vézelay distinct from its contemporary at Autun, but the artistic quality is as well. Whereas the neighboring Autun tympanum is static and rigid, the Vézelay tympanum seems to move and breathe. At Autun, Christ’s knees point in opposite directions to keep him frontal; however, at Vézelay, the sculptor has twisted Christ’s body into an eloquent contrapposto

position, keeping him frontal, but even more dynamic. Each individual scene in the Autun tympanum stays contained within its designated space. However, the figures at Vézelay are not restricted to a confined space; the figures move and interact with the entire scene. Even the smaller figures in the arc compartments interact with the central scene, as if no compartment barrier blocks them from interaction with the rest of the program. The sculptor behind the Vézelay tympanum produced a masterpiece in monumental sculpture that would have demanded attention from anyone who passed through the portal.

Scholars who study Vézelay have related the church closely with events associated with the Crusades. The Vézelay church was an important pilgrimage site in northern Burgundy and housed the relics of Mary Magdalene. Because it was en route for crusader missions, the church had an important role in the Crusades. In brief, Pope Urban II intended to launch the First Crusade at Vézelay before doing it instead at Clermont in 1095, St. Bernard of Clairvaux launched the Second Crusade at Vézelay in 1146, and King Louis VII of France took up the cross there. Finally, in 1190, King Richard the Lionheart of England and King Philip Augustus of France launched the Third Crusade at Vézelay. The church has a rich history with these early crusades and has become inextricably linked with the missions.

Vézelay's intricate program of imagery sets it apart as one of the great masterpieces of Romanesque art and architecture. Constructed after the First Crusade, but just before the Second, the tympanum encapsulates a medieval attitude toward “the other.” The proximity of these monstrous races to the Pentecost scene suggests that these outsider races have the potential to be saved. The central image of Christ and the Apostles rest on a lintel depicting a hierarchy of medieval peoples with the soldiers, priests, and Greeks most near Christ at the center, followed by the lower orders and monstrous races. The four compartments of eight scenes surround Christ and represent scenes of moral or spiritual imperfection through monstrous race imagery. It is clear that the tympanum is a form of propaganda. It exploits the monstrous races and sends a message for the crusaders and those who visit the church that these people who they see on the tympanum are indeed monsters to be seized. At the same time, pilgrims would see these monstrous races on the tympanum. Out of fear, they would regard them as enemies because they are not Christian. The central tympanum at Vézelay contributes to the ongoing concern of monstrous races, or “the other,” being explored in many levels of medieval society.

Perceptions of “the other” are deeply rooted in the earliest accounts of history beginning with Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE). Pliny's *Natural History*, dating to the first century of the Roman Empire, is one of the earliest encyclopedic accounts on race. Scholars have credited Pliny as one of the central motivations for the exploration of race in medieval society. John Block Friedman dedicated an entire chapter in his book *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* to the vast knowledge of the races Pliny compiled in his *Natural History*. When studying the iconography of the Vézelay tympanum, scholars including Véronique Rouchon-Mouilleron ascribe the depictions of monstrous races on the tympanum to Pliny's encyclopedic accounts of race. The “Plinian” races are a fundamental resource in understanding the iconography of the monstrous races on the Vézelay tympanum.

Another important figure is the early Christian theologian and philosopher, Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) who explored the wonder and amazement of the monstrous races. Whereas Pliny's encyclopedic account of the races concentrates on the physical and cultural oddities observed of people from distant lands, Augustine of Hippo begins to question them in light of God's creation. Augustine dedicated a chapter to this question in his book *City of God* entitled, “Whether Certain Monstrous Races of Men are Derived from the Stock of Adam or Noah's Sons.” He wrote,

But supposing they are men of whom these marvels are recorded, what if God has seen fit to create some races in this way, that we might not suppose that the monstrous births which appear among ourselves are the failures of that wisdom whereby He fashions the human nature, as we speak of the failure of a less perfect workman? Accordingly, it ought not to seem absurd to us, that as in individual races there are monstrous births, so in the whole race there are monstrous races. Wherefore, to conclude this question cautiously and guardedly, either these things which have been told of some races have no existence at all; or if they do exist, they are not human races; or if they are human, they are descended from Adam.⁴

Here, Augustine raises important questions regarding the monstrous races. His concluding remarks suggest his disbelief in the existence of the monstrous races. Perhaps these accounts are just part of man's wild imagination and are exaggerations of the differences encountered. But then, Augustine proposes that, yet, if they do exist, the way they

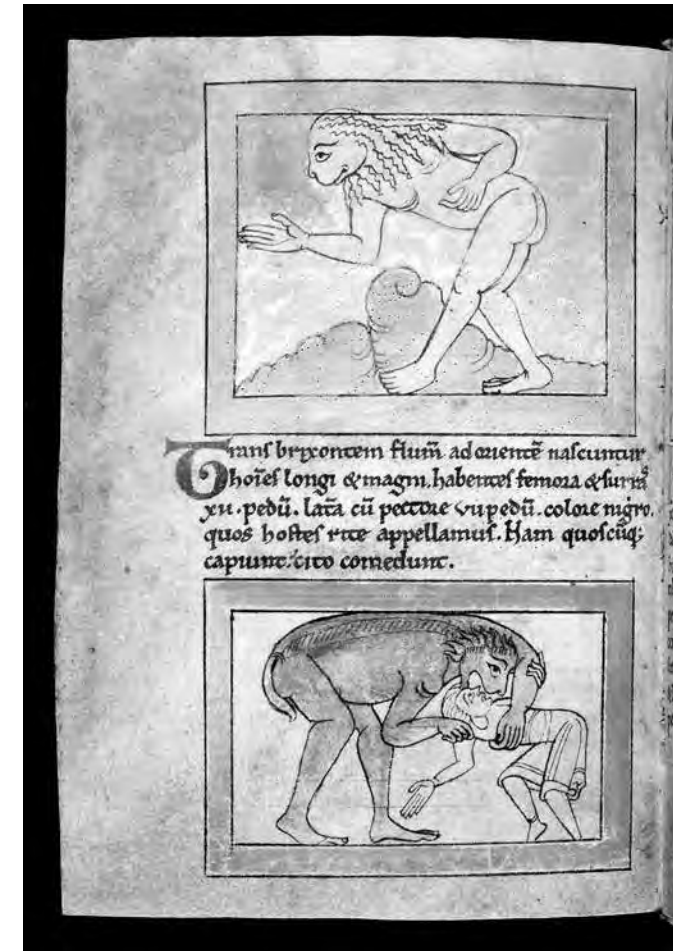


Figure 3: Page from *Wonders of the East*, ca. 1000.

are described is not of human likeness. Then again, he poses the question that if these races are indeed human, do they descend from Adam? He is essentially questioning whether these races are worthy of God's salvation. This is a question that will continue to be pondered by those who encounter the races, those who write and depict the races, and those who interpret the information secondhand, such as visitors to the Vézelay tympanum.

Others are not so gentle concerning the monstrous races, but rather exploit them, inspiring great fear and even loathing. The Clerk of Enghien's poem “De Monstruosis Hominibus,” written in about 1290, is believed to have been written for a secular and aristocratic audience given its publication in a manuscript and its elaborate moralizing nature.⁵ This fearsome tone can be found in the following lines from the poem:

There are yet other men here...
Who have the soles of the feet transposed,
Who are terrifyingly ugly to see
As you can imagine.

Thus I wish to describe them to you.
A vile, low people they are
And vile and evil their law and customs,
For there is no accord between them,
And there are battles between them every day
And thus one kills the other
Without one crying to the other “merci”!⁶

Not only does the Clerk of Enghien inspire fear of the monstrous races, but also clearly dehumanizes them as a group of uncivilized people, and cast them to the role of “the other.” He does this by exposing their physical differences to scare the reader, creating a false idea of what the race looks like. He projects the races as evil and disregards their humanity by describing them as merciless and showing no remorse for killing their own kind. Although the audience would have read this as entertainment, the tone is still fearful and interpreted as unwelcoming toward the monstrous races.

These three authors offered three distinct interpretations toward monstrous races. The interpretations of monstrous races ranged from encyclopedic by Pliny, to religious inquiry by Augustine, and finally fearsome exploitation by the Clerk of Enghien. All of the interpretations circulated in medieval Europe, contributing to the ongoing debate of whether these races are deserving of God's salvation as proposed by Augustine.

Not only do textual sources reveal the interest in monstrous races, but also visual sources. In tenth-century England, imagery of the monstrous races appeared in the book *Wonders of the East* for people to observe in awe the deformities of outsider regions (Figure 3). Because the monstrous races were often depicted or described in this book harming and even eating people, it demonstrates that there was a certain degree of distrust between men and the monstrous. Another from a psalter dating to about 1260 in England contains a detailed map of the world with monstrous race imagery encompassing the outer most edge, farthest away from the central image of Jerusalem (Figure 4). On this map, the monstrous are positioned as far away as possible from the central placement of Jerusalem in an effort to distance the non-Christian race from those who are Christian. There is a hierarchy insinuated that also appears on the lintel at Vézelay. The monstrous are pushed away from Christ, just as the monstrous are pushed to the outer most edges of the world on this map, away from Jerusalem. It is clear that there was a curiosity concerning races from distant lands beginning in the first century of the Roman Empire and through the Middle Ages that formed distrust and even

suppression of the monstrous races to a lower rank in the social hierarchy.

A close examination of the iconographical program on the central tympanum at Vézelay reveals representations of the monstrous races encompassing the scene of the Pentecost, or otherwise known as the Descent of the Holy Ghost. This scene is when the Apostles return to Jerusalem after witnessing the Ascension of Christ. Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Apostles sit together in the upper room.⁷ According to the Acts of the Apostles, “suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, and the Spirit gave them utterance.”⁸ There has been dissention between scholars on the central scene of the tympanum because Christ does not usually appear in the iconographic representations of the Pentecost. Whereas Emile Mâle is certain that the scene depicts the Descent of Christ on the day of Pentecost, others such as Fabre disagree because the presence of Christ is not part of Pentecost iconography. Fabre attributes the scene to the Mission of the Apostles found in Matthew 28:16–20 and Mark 16:14–18, when Christ gave each of these apostles their mission. Other scholars have created a hybrid of these two theories. Fred S. Kleiner explains, “The Vézelay tympanum depicts the Pentecost and the Mission of the Apostles.”⁹ Another source explains that when grouped as a whole image, the monstrous races are actually “the converted races” and represents “the preaching of the Apostles to the various races.”¹⁰ Given the historical circumstances at the time the tympanum was erected, any of the theories would support the medieval mentality of spreading Christianity to the distant lands represented by the monstrous on the lintel and outer compartments of the tympanum. For the purpose of this paper, the central image in the tympanum will be referred to the Pentecost and Mission of the Apostles.

Scholars have opened discussion on the meaning of the tympanum in relation to monstrous races. One study, Adolf Katzenellenbogen’s groundbreaking article on the influence of the Crusades on the tympanum, seeks to analyze the program and relate it to historical events at the time it was constructed. Katzenellenbogen is aware that the tympanum was erected at a critical moment in church history and relates the subject of the Pentecost to the mission of the crusaders. He notes that the inclusion of the monstrous races forms “an encyclopedia in themselves” and represents the lost parts



Figure 4: Psalter world map, ca. 1260, British Library, London.

of the world to be conquered by the crusaders.¹¹ In another study, John Block Freidman concludes that the iconography lends itself to being interpreted as a representation of the monstrous races waiting on the edges of the world to receive the word of God. However, Freidman notes that the scene of the Pentecost on this tympanum “is profoundly different in intention and attitude. . . . For one thing, the monstrous races are outside, enclosing the Apostles rather than enclosed by them, and for another, the Dog-Head of the Pentecosts is not but one of several unusual beings who receive the Word, presenting a far more embracing view of the cosmos for the edification of the pilgrim.”¹² Freidman has expanded beyond Katzenbogellen’s discovery; his notion that there was an “embracing view” toward the monstrous is important to consider because, as previously mentioned in Augustine’s inquiry of the monstrous races, not all of society was severe in the treatment of those from distant lands.

Surrounding the central scene of the Pentecost are representations of monstrous races that the Apostles will preach the Gospel to in order to convert these groups to Christians. Beginning with the lintel, a procession of people makes up the space below the feet of Christ and the Apostles. On the outer most edges, farthest away from the central figure of Christ, are the barbaric and mythical people.

On the right are the barefoot archers, either the Scythians or the Parthians who are known to be archers. Then, on the opposite side to the far right are depictions of what seem to be dwarfs, or mythical beings with elephant sized ears from India.¹³ According to Pliny, these are the Panotti, which he describes in *Natural History*: “there are others called the All-ears Islands in which the natives have very large ears covering the whole of their bodies, which are otherwise left naked.”¹⁴ With their animal-like characteristics and near nudity, the tympanum presents them as savages and even questions their humanity by casting them as “the other.”

Next to the Panotti, there is a grouping of figures on horseback; however, one is so small that he must use a ladder to mount his horse. The figures represented here are African Pygmies from Pliny’s *Natural History*.¹⁵ Pliny describes this race, stating, “Beyond these in the most outlying mountain region we are told of the Three-span men and Pygmies, who do not exceed three spans, *i.e.* twenty-seven inches, in height.”¹⁶ Next to the Pygmies are thought to be the Macrobian from India.¹⁷

Still on the lintel, but moving closer to the center where Christ is located, the processional depicts people of higher status than the monstrous from the outer edges. These are the “civilized” people of the earth from antiquity and are placed near Christ to place them higher in the social hierarchy. On the right side are a grouping of soldiers who stand at the feet of St. Peter and St. Paul making offerings. On the left side near Christ is a sacrificial procession of Greeks and Romans. The men bring with them a variety of offerings including, a bull, a fish, bread, and fruits.¹⁸ “Thus, gathered upon the lintel are representations of every continent, every degree of civilization, and every level of ancient society,” notes Véronique Rouchon-Mouilleron.¹⁹

The arc that surrounds the Pentecost scene provides eight scenes broken up into four compartments. Within these compartments are scenes that display physical and mental ills in the upper four scenes and moral and spiritual behaviors in the lower four scenes. For a medieval viewer, the numbers four and eight would have significant meaning tying back to the theme of the Pentecost and mission of the Apostles. The number four refers to the four points of the compass and the number eight refers to regeneration and baptism.²⁰ Given the content within the scenes, these numbers provide meaning that symbolizes the distant lands in the four directions and the mission to baptize those who are not yet Christian. The monks present at Vézelay would have understood the significance of these numbers contributing to the meaning of the tympanum.

Immediately to the left of the central axis at the top of the arc is a representation of Pliny’s dog-headed people, who live in Cynocephalia, a region in India. The dog-headed figures are mutes who only bark.²¹ In the same grouping of figures are also representations of the deaf and the blind who will also be cured by the teachings from the gospel. To the immediate right of the central axis at the top of the arc are the bent-over hunchbacks and men depicted with pig snouts for noses. The characterization of pig-snouted men comes from the ancient thought that the Ethiopians had flat noses, which here has been represented in the extreme version of the pig snout.²² The next scene to the right features deformed men suffering from the loss of limbs. Rouchon-Mouilleron has suggested that these figures represent people from Hellenic Asia due to their Phrygian cap and the crutch held by one of the figures.²³ The physical deformities that the monstrous experience are all symptoms that could be cured by the salvation of God. Their deformities are a visual tool to suggest that those who have not yet heard the word of God will all suffer from these physical pains.

In addition to the physical ills previously mentioned, mental ills are also represented in the arc of the tympanum. Below the scene with dog-headed people is a scene featuring two figures on the right who are Siamese twins from Cappadocia, from medieval accounts representing people from Asia Minor.²⁴ A demon is also depicted in the scene and is characterized by hair standing straight up from his head while he grasps his leg tormented by pain. Once this group of people with physical and mental ills are transformed by the conversion of Christianity, through the teachings from the gospel, their defects will be cured. These four upper scenes in the upper two compartments depict the pain and madness people thought to be “the other” suffer from in the distant lands that the apostles were to confront and convert.

The two lower compartments on the arc provide four scenes of moral and spiritual behaviors. On the right side at the bottom of the arc presents two men dressed in platform boots, characteristic of the Assyrians, as described by Greek geographer, Strabo. The pagan Assyrian men are trying to convert two men, but the men have already been won over by the Holy Spirit.²⁵ This is shown by the figure to the left of the scene who leans toward the image of Christ, as if aware of the presence of Christ beyond the compartment dividing them. Above this scene is a confrontation between a Byzantine soldier and another man who is attempting to bribe the soldier.²⁶ The soldier, like the Assyrian below, gazes toward Christ with his eyes wide and head held high. He pays no attention to the bribe, as if led by God’s divine

will, not betray by forfeiting his military secrets. Both of these scenes are important to consider in light of Friedman’s research that discusses the more embracing view of the monstrous on this tympanum. Because these monstrous beings are not cut off from the central scene of the Pentecost, but actually are aware and interact with it, shows that the line drawn between Christians and the monstrous is still there, yet can be penetrated if willing to seek salvation.

The two lower scenes on the left side correspond with each other. The lower of the two depicts two scribes, which suggests they are apostles writing the Gospel that will be read to the monstrous races encompassing Christ in the tympanum. Above the scribes is thought to be a scene of Jeroboam, who worshiped idols, and is punished by God. The Jewish prophet to the right of Jeroboam invites him to follow the path of Christ, and Jeroboam falsely repents and invites the Jewish prophet to eat and drink. However, the prophet rejects the offer. Rouchon-Mouilleron makes note that the scene mirrors the biblical story; however, its presence on the tympanum has a new meaning. According to Rouchon-Mouilleron, “The prophet points his finger toward the figure of Christ, and with his other hand turns away. Jeroboam, meanwhile, seems to be taking a step back and turning the opposite direction. Interpreted in respect to the mission of the apostles, a choice is being offered to the Jewish people: retreat into idolatry or follow Christ.”²⁷ For these scenes, the people within them are pushed to the outer edges with the monstrous not because of any physical deformity, but because they are Jews, and in a Christian’s mind, monstrous. Jews were monstrous not only because they were non-Christian, but also because they deliberately rejected Christianity. In an effort to discredit the Jewish religion, Christians depicted the Jews as part of the monstrous races as shown on the Vézelay tympanum.

With this iconographical examination of the tympanum, it can be affirmed that the sculptor who designed and executed this program was familiar with medieval accounts of monstrous races and presents them as “the other” on this tympanum. There were many ways to view the monstrous: cataloging them, questioning their humanity for God’s salvation, and subjecting them to harsh ridicule. But as noted by Friedman, this particular depiction of the monstrous follows a more embracing view than what has been previously established for their races.²⁸ The audience of this tympanum would have consisted of monks, merchants, town people, crusaders, and pilgrims who would stand below this monumental sculpture and an impression of the monstrous would be constructed. There was a vast intended audience

and, according to Debra Higgs Strickland, “This means that the tympanum would have been viewed by many whose minds were turned toward the Holy Land, whether for spoils, violence, spreading the word of God, or some combination of these. Therefore, there is good reason to believe that, gazing at these images of the Monstrous Races, crusaders may have interpreted these as the contemporary Muslims they would encounter in the East.”²⁹ This tympanum had a profound role in determining the visitor’s mentality toward “the other.” The pilgrim, on a religious journey, would see these monstrous races as people who have yet to receive the word of God. For the crusaders, these images might be interpreted as the Muslims they would soon encounter in the east in an act of violence to reclaim the Holy Land and the infidels they were fighting against. For each of these types of visitors, the common theme is that no matter their intentions, they were once again reminded of the Holy Land and that there was a need to protect it against the infidel for the sake of Christianity.

It is clear that the artist looked to the past for accounts of monstrous races, but it is also important to consider contemporary events, notably the Crusades, that affected the interpretation of the tympanum on a day-to-day basis. Multiple crusades were launched at this site. St. Bernard’s speech and the Third Crusade launched in 1190 were clearly tools of propaganda for the purpose of converting outsider societies to Christianity.

In 1095, Pope Urban II delivered a speech at the Council of Clermont — originally intended to be delivered at Vézelay — that launched the First Crusade. There are five accounts of the speech given. The following is an excerpt from an account provided by Fulcher of Chartres who was present and heard the speech:

On this account I, or rather the Lord, beseech you as Christ’s heralds to publish this everywhere and to persuade all people of whatever rank, foot-soldiers and knights, poor and rich, to carry aid promptly to those Christians and to destroy that vile race from the lands of our friends. I say this to those who are present, it meant also for those who are absent. Moreover, Christ commands it.³⁰

There is a violent tone toward the un-Christian groups when Pope Urban II prompts the Crusaders to “destroy that vile race from the lands of our friends.” Here, “the other” is treated as an inferior group who must be destroyed. The violent tone of Urban’s speech was carried out into acts of

violence committed by the crusaders who fought in the Holy war. To carry out the mission of restoring Christianity in the Holy Land, crusaders had to take means of violent action. Chroniclers of the First Crusade make this violence clear, all for the purpose of God’s will.

Educated as a clerk in the monastery of Vézelay, Raymond D’Aguilers was one of the chroniclers of the First Crusade. In his account of the Frankish victory, D’Aguilers makes it known that the victory of the crusaders also fulfilled the mission of the church, to restore Christian faith in the Holy Land. When describing the battle at the Temple of Solomon, he states, “Indeed, it was a just and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of the unbelievers, since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies.”³¹ He makes it clear that because these people whom the crusaders defeated were not Christian and deserved to be slaughtered. He concludes this account with the statement, “This day, I say, will be famous in all future ages, for it turned our labors and sorrows into joy and exultation; this day, I say, marks the justification of all Christianity, the humiliation of paganism, and the renewal of our faith.”³² According to this account, Christianity triumphed over the monstrous races and their pagan beliefs. “The other” was simply eliminated to assert that Christians are right and anyone who is pagan is therefore wrong. This mentality, of the “vile” races in which Urban speaks of was carried over into the following Crusades and was expressed in visual terms on monumental sculpture.

With the First Crusade ending in 1099, there was a brief hiatus until 1145, when St. Bernard of Clairvaux launched the Second Crusade at the Vézelay Abbey. At this point, the Vézelay tympanum and lintel were fully constructed. In fact, St. Bernard disapproved of the richness of church sculptural programs, and that at Vézelay Abbey was no exception. He wrote a complaint in a letter to William, Abbot of Saint-Thierry, on the decoration of Romanesque churches, stating,

...in the cloisters, before the eyes of the brothers while they read — what ... are the filthy apes doing there? The fierce lions? The monstrous centaurs? The creatures part man and part beast?... Everywhere so plentiful and astonishing a variety of contradictory forms is seen that one would rather read in the marble than in books, and spend the whole day wondering at every single one of them than in meditating the law of God. Good God!³³

In this statement from St. Bernard, there is a glimpse at the prospect that some believed these monstrous races not even worth time contemplating. Scholar Thomas E. A. Dale insists that even though St. Bernard deplores the use of monsters on decorative elements on the church, “it remains to be understood what purpose monstrous images served for the iconophile Benedictine monks.... The monstrous capitals served both moralizing and cathartic functions.”³⁴

Regardless of how St. Bernard thought about church decoration, the message was still communicated to monks and anyone else who looked up to contemplate the monsters. St. Bernard was an advocate for taking action and, like the apostles on the lintel, spreading the word of God to those who have not been saved. Even if St. Bernard did not support the decoration of Vézelay, his message when preaching the Second Crusade could not be any more fitting with the tympanum program finished just fourteen years prior to the speech. As suggested by the iconographical interpretation of the tympanum and lintel, the monumental sculpture provides an image of the Pentecost, which carries a strong message of spreading the word of God. St. Bernard calls for the Second Crusade exclaiming, “Behold, brethren, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” Just like the apostles who are about to go forth to the distant lands and teach the Gospel in all languages in the Pentecost scene, the message of St. Bernard was to gather crusaders who would terminate pagan beliefs and restore Christianity to the distant lands.

Unlike the First Crusade speech given by Pope Urban II and the violent accounts from Raymond D’Aguilers, St. Bernard rejects violence in this crusade speech and instead urges the crusaders to convert the Jews, not slaughter them. The Jews would have been considered “the other” to St. Bernard. His feelings toward “the other” are still derogatory, though much less violent and like the Vézelay tympanum suggests, perhaps even embracing toward these non-Christian races in an effort to spread the word of God like the apostles in the tympanum. In a letter to Eastern France and Bavaria in 1146, St. Bernard promotes a non-violent Second Crusade, stating,

Let not your former warlike skill cease, but only that spirit of hatred in which you are accustomed to strike down and kill one another and in turn be overcome yourselves. How dire a madness goads those wretched men, when kinsmen strike each other’s bodies with the sword, perchance causing the soul also to perish! But he does not escape who triumphs; the sword shall go through his own soul also, when

he thinks to have slain his enemy only.To enter such a combat is madness, not valor: it is not to be ascribed to bravery, but rather to foolishness.³⁵

And here, St. Bernard more specifically states that the Jews should not be taken with violence,

The Jews must not be persecuted, slaughtered, nor even driven out. Inquire of the pages of Holy Writ. I know what is written in the Psalms as prophecy about the Jews. “God hath commanded me,” says the Church, “Slay them not, lest my people forget.”³⁶

The setting ofVézelay enhanced the message given by St. Bernard.The scene of the Pentecost served as a form of propaganda that reinforced the message given by St. Bernard and his call for the Second Crusade. Just as the apostles disperse to the monstrous races, or “the other,” portrayed in the arcs of the tympanum, the crusaders follow a similar mission given by St. Bernard to conquer the Holy Land. Like the observation given by Freidman suggests, there was an embracing view toward the monstrous races in the tympanum. Similarly, there was also a more embracing view in the speech provided by St. Bernard.

Whereas there have been a variety of interpretations of the monstrous races throughout antiquity and the middle ages, most of these accounts say more about Christians than the monstrous races they try to dehumanize. Christian men in medieval society with wild imaginations have over-exaggerated monstrous race imagery.The main reason for this was fear; the monstrous races were different in appearance and not Christian, and therefore a threat. With its long-standing record of the monstrous races in medieval history, the central tympanum atVézelay constructs an important interpretation of“the other.”With the scene of the Pentecost, pilgrims, monks, townspeople, and crusaders could witness a scene that encouraged the spread of God’s word, even to the monstrous who encompass the central scene. The monstrous were still pushed farthest away from Christ, but because they interact with the Pentecost scene, the message suggests that these races are indeed worthy of salvation.

Endnotes

¹ Robert the Monk, “Urban II (1088-1099): Speech at Council of Clermont, 1095,” *Fordham University: Medieval Sourcebook*, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/urban2a.asp>.

² Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France, The Twelfth Century: A Study of the Origins of Medieval Iconography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 3.

³ Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner’s Art Through the Ages: The Western Perspective* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2010), 319.

⁴ Augustine of Hippo, “The City of God and Christian Doctrine: Whether Certain Monstrous Races of Men are Derived from the Stock of Adam or Noah’s Sons,” trans. Philip Schaff, *The Medieval Bestiary*, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://bestiary.ca/prisources/pstexts1757.htm>.

⁵ John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 127.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (Philadelphia: Westview Press, 2008), 104.

⁸ Acts 2:1–4.

⁹ Kleiner, *Gardner’s Art Through the Ages*, 320.

¹⁰ Hugues Delautre and Jacqueline Greal, *La Madeleine de Vézelay: Guide Book and Plans* (Lyon: Lescuyer for Editions Franciscaines, 1985), 10.

¹¹ Adolf Katzenellenbogen, “The Central Tymanum atVézelay: Its Encyclopedic Meaning and Its Relation to the First Crusade,” *The Art Bulletin*, 26, no. 3 (1944): 146–47.

¹² Freidman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 79.

¹³ Véronique Rouchon-Mouilleron, *Vézelay: The Great Romanesque Church*, trans. Laurel Hirsch (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 62–63.

¹⁴ Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham, W. H. S. Jones, and D. E. Eichholz, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.masseiana.org/pliny.htm#BOOK%20VII>.

¹⁵ Rouchon-Mouilleron, *Vézelay*, 62–63.

¹⁶ Pliny, *Natural History*.

¹⁷ Rouchon-Mouilleron, *Vézelay*, 62–63.

¹⁸ Ibid., 68–69.

¹⁹ Ibid., 14.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 44–45.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 46–47.

²⁵ Ibid., 52–53.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 58–59.

²⁸ Freidman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 79.

²⁹ Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 159.

³⁰ Fulcher of Chartres, “Urban II (1088-1099): Speech at Council of Clermont, 1095,” *Fordham University: Medieval Sourcebook*, accessed November 28, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/urban2-5vers.asp>.

³¹ Raymond D’Aguilers, “The Frankish Victory,” *Fordham University: Medieval Sourcebook*, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/cde-jlem.asp>.

³² Ibid.

³³ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia 12.28-29*, trans. Conrad Rudolph, in *The “Things of Greater Importance”: Bernard of Clairvaux’s Apologia and the Medieval Attitude toward Art* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1990), 279, 283.

³⁴ Thomas E. A. Dale, “The Monstrous,” in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. Conrad Rudolph (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 267.

³⁵ St. Bernard of Clairvaux, “Letter to Eastern France and Bavaria Promoting the Second Crusade, 1146,” trans. Bruno Scott James, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/primary-texts-from-the-history-of-the-relationship/258-bernard-of-clairvaux>.

³⁶ Ibid.

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