

**Room 20
Room 19
Room 18
English**

Saint Stephen's Tapestry from Auxerre and the Saint-Lucien of Beauvais stalls

Room 18 contains two prestigious sets of work, evoking the décor and furnishings of the choir of major ecclesiastical buildings at the end of the Middle Ages: Saint Stephen's Tapestry, which comes from Auxerre Cathedral, and the stalls of the Abbey of Saint-Lucien in Beauvais.

Located at the end of the nave and leading to the altar, the choir is reserved for priests in charge, monks or cloistered nuns in monasteries, brothers or sisters in convents, canons in cathedrals and collegiate churches, and holds specific pieces of furniture destined for clerics: stalls. During the Gothic period, it gradually became the custom to enclose the choir. The section separating the nave from the choir, named the roodscreen or jube (from the first word of the Jube Domine benedicere prayer..., "Lord, grant me your blessing"), was placed against the arches, and allowed worshippers to see the celebrant. The surround could hold either a fixed or moveable décor inside it. In the 15th century, the expansion of art to tapestry thus led to the commissioning of epic series of tapestries relating episodes from the story of the building's patron saint, placed above the stalls during festivals or important ceremonies.

Saint Stephen's tapestry

From the cathedral to the museum

Auxerre Cathedral, under the invocation of Saint Stephen, housed a wall-hanging dedicated to this saint first mentioned in an inventory drawn up in 1569. In 1726, it was specified that these tapestries were displayed "during major festivals". Sold to the city's Hôtel-Dieu (hospital) in 1777, it was given up by the hospital in the 19th century. In 1880, the Cluny museum acquired 10 pieces of this wall-hanging, which were subsequently joined, in 1897, by two further pieces which had been purchased by the Louvre museum in 1838.

The coats of arms

There are two types of heraldry shields on the tapestry. The first, simple ones bear "azure with a band of gules accompanied by two golden amphisteres (type of dragon)" (fig. 1), the arms of the Baillet family, well-known Parisian financiers then parliamentarians from the 14th to 16th centuries. The others, party (divided) (fig. 2) or quartered (fig. 3), combine with these arms those "in sable (black) with a silver cross, cantoned with sixteen golden fleur de lys", belonging to the Fresnes family. All are surmounted by a crozier scroll, an Episcopal insignia. This heraldic motif indicates the tapestry's commissioner, since they are the coats of arms of the father and mother of John III Baillet, Bishop of Auxerre from 1477 to 1513.

Stephen, the life and legend of the Saint

Stephen holds a very specific position amongst the Saints venerated in the Middle Ages. Mentioned in the *Acts of the Apostles* (book 5 of the New Testament), he was one of the first seven deacons and the first martyr, which explains the exceptional number of churches, especially cathedrals, dedicated to him, along with the early emergence and development of his worship. The Auxerre tapestry is one of the most spectacular examples of this. The twenty-three

episodes of the life and legend of the Saint form a very complete cycle, now divided into 12 pieces, 45 metres long, placed on the walls of three consecutive rooms. The story, inspired mainly by the *Golden Legend* written by Jacques de Voragine, starts in the chapel (room 20), and then continues in rooms 19 and 18. Using a narrative method common in the Middle Ages and not dissimilar in design to today's cartoon strips, each scene has a short text in French at the bottom, describing the episode depicted, and often has one or more inscriptions in Latin naming the characters or transcribing a quote attributed to one of them. To make it easier to follow the story, a number has been placed under each of the episodes.



(fig. 1)



(fig. 2)



(fig. 3)

A story in twenty-three commented scenes

In the chapel

1. The Council of the Apostles decides to appoint seven deacons to bring an end the disharmony between the Grecians and the Hebrews.
2. Stephen and the other six deacons are consecrated.
3. Stephen's speech in the synagogue.
4. Stephen is led before the court of the high priest and accused of blasphemy.
5. The Jews stopped their ears with their hands upon hearing Stephen state that he could see Christ in heaven.
6. Stephen is led out of the city.
7. Stoning of Saint Stephen.

Room 19

8. The body of Saint Stephen is displayed to the beasts and his soul rises to heaven.
9. Gamaliel collects Saint Stephen's body and buries him in his own tomb.
10. 417 later, Gamaliel appears three times to the priest Lucian and marks the tombs of Stephen, Gamaliel, Nicodemus and Abibas with a panier of roses.
11. Lucian describes his vision to the Bishop of Jerusalem.
12. The Bishop of Jerusalem looks for the body of Saint Stephen in vain.
13. The monk Migetus reveals the real location of Saint Stephen's body.
14. Moving of Saint Stephen's body and healing of the sick on the way.

Room 18

15. The widow of the Senator of Constantinople requests permission from the Bishop of Jerusalem to move her husband's body.
16. The body of Saint Stephen is moved in error; the Saint appears during a tempest and saves the passengers.
17. On its arrival in Constantinople where the reliquary of Saint Stephen is received by Bishop Eusebus.
18. The Emperor orders that the reliquary be taken to his place, but the mules refuse to move.
19. Eudoxia, the daughter of the Roman Emperor, possessed by a demon, states that the body of Saint Stephen must be taken to Rome and exchanged with that of Saint Laurence.
20. Ceremonious receipt of Saint Stephen's body in Rome.
21. Through the mouth of Eudoxia, the demon states that Saint Stephen's body must be laid to rest close to Saint Laurence's body.
22. The men sent from Constantinople are unable to take Saint Laurence's body.
23. The body of Saint Laurence is replaced by that of Saint Stephen and Eudoxia is healed; the angels sing *Felix Roma* ("O happy Rome").

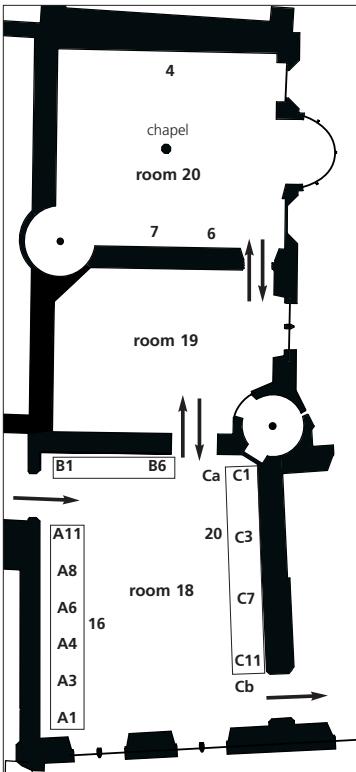
From 1215
Construction of Auxerre
Cathedral

1228-1298
Jacques de Voragine author
of the *Golden Legend*

1477-1513
John III Baillet, Bishop of
Auxerre

1483-1498
Reign of Charles VIII

1498-1515
Reign of Louis XII



The style and ornament

The style, ornament and costumes are characteristic of art circa 1500. Numerous formal or decorative elements still hark back to Gothic art, along with, for example, the sections of the coats, broken up with folds with interlocked ends, the trilobe openings on the towers and crenellated walls. The laymen's clothing, for example the garments of the male characters in scenes 4, 6, 7, 16 and 20, with their tight-fitting hoods or their slashed over-trousers (fig. 4), their hairstyles, their short caps with raised edges (fig. 5), or their hats put on the slant (fig. 6), are typical of the very end of the 15th and of the early 16th centuries.

The creative stages

Art historians are in agreement that the "small patterns" or "small-scale models" for the tapestry were probably the work of an artist trained in Northern Europe, probably Brussels, close to the painter Colyn de Coter. More recently, specific comparisons have been made with a group of choir tapes- tries, such as that of the *Life of Saint Remy* in Reims, and stained glass windows, particularly one at the Church of Saint Martin in Montmorency, the life-size models or "cartoons" of which are believed to have been the work of the same artist working in the Île-de-France region around 1500-1530. The latter is believed to be identifiable with Gautier de Campes, known primarily to have supplied the cartoons of two tapestries dedicated to the history of Saint Stephen: the oldest of these – used as a model for the second one, destined for Sens Cathedral and for which two pieces had already been woven in 1503 – may be the one commissioned by Jean Baillet for his cathedral in Auxerre.

As with the majority of tapestries from this period, the weaving location is not accurately known. Several suggestions have been made, with no definitive argument. What is certain, however, is that the main weaving centres of the time were located in the Southern Lowlands, in particular Brussels.

Saint-Lucien of Beauvais stalls

The arrival of the stalls in the museum

The stalls from the Abbey of Saint-Lucien in Beauvais, destroyed during the French Revolution, were successively collected at the start of the 19th century by two of the first collectors of Mediaeval objects: Lucien Cambry, *préfet* of the Oise *département* (†1807), then the Count of Saint-Morys (†1817). They were then placed in Saint-Denis, before being given to the Cluny museum in 1889-1890. Their re-assembly, which also incorporates additional parts acquired in 1970, combines the old elements with modern platforms, backs and armrests.

The commissioner

These stalls had been commissioned by Antoine Du Bois, appointed the commendatory (i.e. lay) abbot of Saint-Lucien in Beauvais in 1492, at the age of only 21 years. A history of the abbey written in the 17th century specifies that they were completed in 1500.

The sculptures on the outside arms

The two outside arms (panels placed at the ends of a row of seats) **Ca** and **Cb** refer to the recipient building and the commissioner (**Ca**), Saint Peter sending Saints Lucian, Julian and Maximian to evangelize the land of Beauvais; on the other (**Cb**), Antoine du Bois is on his knees before his patron saint, the hermit Anthony.

The misericords (or "mercy seats")

Apart from these two panels, the most significant sculpted elements are the misericords, small horizontal shelves resting on a sculpted console, attached to the underneath of folding seats, to provide monks with some support when standing during services and ceremonies.

What is particularly interesting about these misericords is the variety of sculpted objects on the consoles. Religious and pagan scenes are depicted side by side, including trades, monks' occupations, feast scenes, from novels or fables. Hence, on the first row (**A1** to **A11**), can be seen a roast cook (**A6**), a cooper (**A8**), Reynard the fox preaching to the hens (**A4**), a preaching monk (**A3**). On a second row (**B1** to **B6**), the misericords depict genre scenes, perhaps inspired by books or folklore; the last depicts Saint Eustatius in the raging torrent (**B6**). On the third row (**C1** to **C11**), the theatrical world is depicted: a dancer, an acrobat, a juggler; some scenes are more surprising: a man rolling a globe before him (**C3**), another one blowing to turn the sails of a windmill (**C7**).

Should we see in them simply a relaxation of the eyes and spirit, in parallel with the physical relaxation offered by these misericords? Or should we look for a second meaning? A taste for derision is, to say the very least, present: *Reynard's sermon to the hens* (**A4**) is probably an ironic allusion to the sermon of the mendicant orders, which "competed" with regular monks.

What is certain, furthermore, is that these subjects sculpted in wood for the Picardy abbot, like the episodes of Saint Stephen's legend woven for the Burgundy cathedral, reflect the absence in Mediaeval thinking of any clear-cut separation between the real world, often trivial and violent, and the imaginary world, in which the fantastic and sacred abound: the second is just as much a part of day-to-day life as the first, for which it is an outlet.

Elisabeth Taburet-Delahaye, museum director



(fig. 4) Tight-fitting hoods and slashed over-trousers (scene 6)



(fig. 5) Short caps with raised edges (scene 16)



(fig. 6) Hats put on the slant (scene 4)



Ca. Saint Peter sends out three saints to evangelize the land of Beauvais



Cb. Antoine du Bois on his knees before his patron saint



A4. Reynard the fox preaching to the hens



B6. Saint Eustatius in the raging torrent



C7. A man blowing to turn the sails of a windmill

From 1089
Construction of the Abbey-Church
of Saint-Lucien in Beauvais

End of 11th century-end of
13th century
Composition of the *Roman de Renart* (*Story of Reynard the Fox*)

1483-1498
Reign of Charles VIII

1492-1507
Antoine Du Bois, commendatory
abbot of the Abbey of Saint-Lucien
in Beauvais

1498-1515
Reign of Louis XII

After you use it, please put this document back in its place.
This text is available on the museum website or on request at the reception desk.

6 place Paul Painlevé, 75005 Paris
Service culturel. Tél. 01 53 73 78 16
www.musee-moyen-age.fr

Musée National
des Arts et Traditions
du Moyen Age

