

FRONTISPIECE

FRAGMENTS OF TEXTILES FOUND IN THE EXCAVATIONS AT ORLEANS.

TEXTILES FROM THE EXCAVATIONS IN THE ORLÉANS CATHEDRAL

by

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MANY a reader of current news, not necessarily of archæological bent, will remember the interest caused in 1938 by the excavations made in France, in the cathedral of Orléans, that revealed under the floor of the cathedral not only the remains of three earlier buildings but also the tombs of three bishops of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that were discovered intact.

An excavation of this kind had been the dream of archæologists for more than half a century, ever since 1890 when workmen, digging a pit under the transept for the installation of a heating apparatus, had come upon the remains of columns, still more than three meters high, which dated from the tenth and eleventh centuries (Plate I). These truncated columns, in the opinion of those qualified to judge, were nothing less than the remains of a great basilica that had been built at the end of the tenth century by Bishop Arnoul, who was bishop at that time of the cathedral, and of which only written accounts remained.

Great traditions attached to Bishop Arnoul's church. With Saint Martin of Tours, it was one of the first of the great pilgrims' churches, such as Saint Sernin of Toulouse, San Foy of Conques and Santiago of Compostela today. Here the devout would have come in throngs to worship the remains of the Holy Cross, the body of Saint Mamert and the chalice of Saint Euverte.¹ The size of the columns showed how monumental this church must have been, and more than this, it was thought that it might have had a deambulatory,² which, in such case, would have been

¹ Two early bishops: Saint Mamert, from Vienne in Dauphigny, whose body was brought to the church in the seventh century, and Saint Euverte, a bishop of the fourth century, who is believed to have built the first church.

² An ambulatory, or choir aisle, that is carried around the apse of the choir.



PLATE I
ONE OF THE CRUCIFORM PILLARS OF BISHOP ARNOUL'S CHURCH,
END OF THE TENTH CENTURY.

one of the earliest known. The greatest interest, naturally, was aroused by the discovery of these architectural fragments, but nothing more was done in the way of excavating, and the flagstones were replaced. For years these ruins were the subject of discussion and for years archæologists worked on plans to determine the original architecture. But the most important points came to no more than theory, since the necessary evidence lay further along in the church—in the choir and nave.

The occasion for settling all these questions presented itself a few years ago when preparations were being made to replace in the cathedral a set of choir stalls of superb quality which had been removed from the church during the Revolution.³ Once restored to their original position there would have been small prospect of any excavation on account of the damage that would have been done to this beautiful and delicate work (Plate II). The Department of Historical Monuments took these circumstances into consideration and believed that under such conditions it was justified in authorizing the work, though great difficulties, it was realized, lay in the way. The ruins of Bishop Arnoul's cathedral were situated more than three meters below the level of the present building; this would necessitate the removal of an enormous amount of earth (it proved to be twelve hundred cubic meters). Again, nothing was known of what might be the condition of the choir when it should be found, how much demolition had taken place there in centuries past, and how radical had been the methods used. With this in mind the Administration ordered only an exploratory survey. But when the first stages of the work revealed objects of the greatest interest and value, it was decided without delay to push the excavations to the farthest possible extent. The story of this work and the treasures that were thereby disclosed has been ably told by Canon Chenesseau, resident member of the National Society of Antiquarians of France and historian of the cathedral, who directed the work.⁴

The annals of the cathedral of Orléans considerably antedate any building that may be seen. The beginnings were early and churches

³Originally this set had consisted of twenty-four stalls with a bishop's throne and a set of panellings that showed, alternately, scenes from the life of Christ, and a series of religious trophies. Cardinal de Coislin, bishop of Orleans and Grand Almoner of France, had financed this work by means of credits set aside by Louis XIV for the completion of the cathedral, and its accomplishment had been under the direction of J. H. Mansard, the sculptor having been Jules Degoullons, one of the principal artists of the reign. During the revolution these incomparable carvings had been removed from the church by what the scholarly Canon Chenesseau, canon of the cathedral, calls "impresarios of revolutionary fêtes," and piled up in a storehouse, where some even were burned to furnish heat for the guards' lodgings.

⁴Les Fouilles de la Cathédral d'Orléans, Monuments historique de la France : 1937, p. 217.

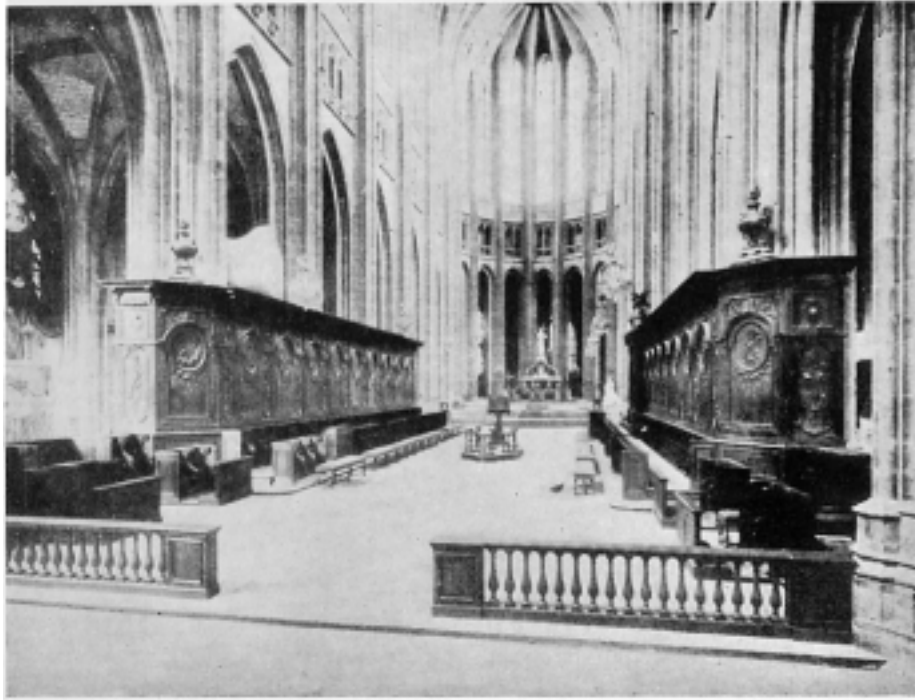


PLATE II
THE CHOIR WITH STALLS AND PANELLING REPLACED.

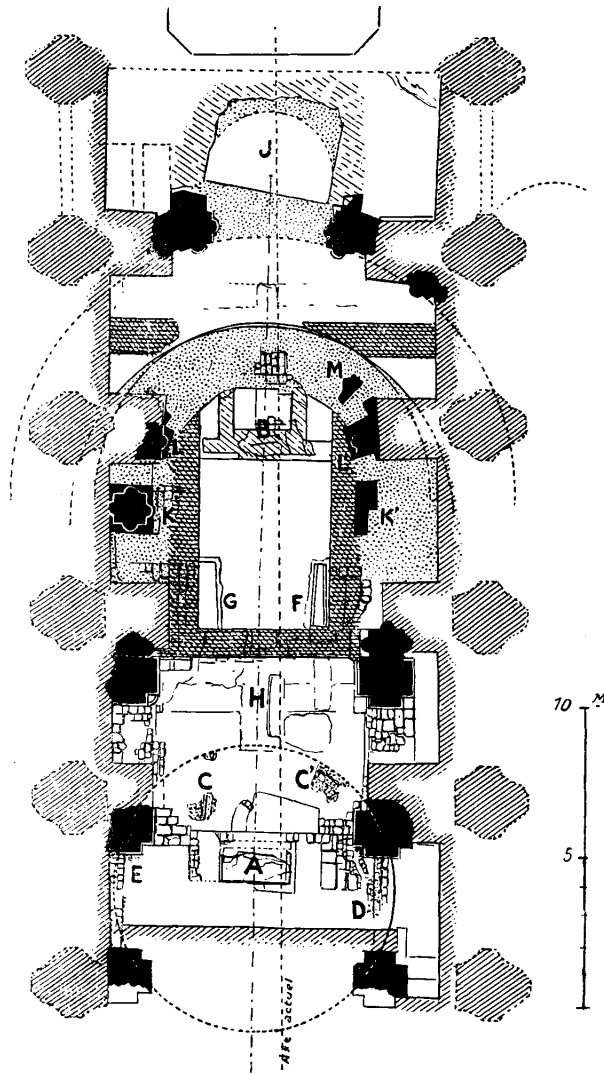







PLATE III
DETAIL PLAN OF CHURCH CHOIR.

-  BASES AND FOUNDATIONS OF THE PRESENT CATHEDRAL.
-  PILLARS OF THE X-XI CENTURIES.
-  REMAINS OF THE XI CENTURY.
-  ROMANESQUE FOUNDATIONS.
-  GALLO-ROMAN FOUNDATIONS.

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| A | HIGH ALTAR. | F G | SARCOPHAGI. |
| B | ALTAR OF SAINT MAMERT. | H | REMAINS OF A FUNERAL VAULT. |
| C C' | REMAINS OF CARLOVINGIAN MOSAICS. | J | CHAPEL OF THE AXIS. |
| D | REMAINS OF MOSAICS OF XITH CENTURY. | K K' | PILLARS WITH FOUR ENGAGED COLUMNS. |
| E | REMAINS OF MOSAICS OF XIITH CENTURY. | L L' | PILLARS WITH TWO ENGAGED COLUMNS. |

built successively throughout the centuries suffered great vicissitudes. Though it is uncertain when Christianity was established in Orléans, an Episcopal see was instituted there in the first half of the fourth century and a church was built, traditionally by Saint Euverte, who died in 391. This early bishop did not live to see his work finished, and it was completed by his successor, Saint Aignan, who held the office during the first years of the fourth century and who was the occupant of the see at the time of Attila's invasion. Nothing is known of the constructions that may have been undertaken between the fourth and tenth centuries, but the church was destroyed by a great fire that took place before 987 and that almost ruined the city itself. At once, at the end of the tenth century, it was rebuilt by Bishop Arnoul, who cherished great ambitions regarding his cathedral, and who crowned, in 987, Robert the Pious in the church of his own creating.

Nearly three hundred years later, in 1297, a new church was begun, but in 1562, after centuries of labor and before it was completed, it was burned by the Protestants (who are also termed Calvinists, or Huguenots), in one of the religious wars of the period. A new foundation thereupon was laid by Henry IV in the early years of the seventeenth century, and building went on until well into the first half of the nineteenth. Nothing, therefore, as can easily be understood, remains outwardly to be seen of Bishop Arnoul's basilica, built under the early Capets, in which such interest now was centered.

The work of excavation began in 1937, in September, and as it progressed it revealed an architecture that was plain but that had been enriched to some extent at the end of the eleventh century by additional building.⁵ Almost immediately a point was decided that had been under discussion when fourteen pillars were found that had formed the support for the central part of the choir and—as had been hopefully anticipated—a deambulatory. The remains of two altars were discovered, one at the entrance of the choir and the other at the apse. This second altar had been designed to hold the remains of Saint Mamert and still visible was the plan that permitted pilgrims to enter from the deambulatory. Near the other, which was the principal altar, on either side were mosaics still in place, and which dated from the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. On one side they were made up of small yellow and black cubes, with touches of red, framing a field in which figures still may be seen. This

⁵ The first blows of the pick brought to light a double pillar, part of which was of the tenth and part of the eleventh century, showing where two different constructions had joined.

was a style of pavements made in the eleventh century (Plate IV). On the other side, there were again these same mosaics but in this case, in addition, were pieces of a different pattern made of marble and porphyry, like work that was done in Italy, particularly in the twelfth century. Undoubtedly these latter pieces were replacements for original designs that were worn and they may even have been executed in the cathedral itself by traveling workmen who had come from Italy.

Digging further down, for these constructions of Bishop Arnoul's had been so comprehensive that they covered all traces of anything underneath, the workers came upon fragments of a second mosaic pavement which would have filled a circle more than nine meters in diameter, and which was of an older type than the one found above. All that remained was part of a circular border with an inscription that was too fragmentary to decipher and that framed a ground that was ornamented with interlaced designs (Plate V). The pattern itself, together with the character of the mosaics and the letters, which were of an archaic type, pointed to an origin that was not later than the eighth century. Could it not have been, it was asked, and with no little assurance, that these mosaics were part of a pavement for a rotunda that had been added to the primitive church at the time of Charlemagne, when rotundas were very much the fashion. This theory was the more feasible since the bishop, Théodulfe, was a contemporary of Charlemagne's and is credited with the plan, somewhat the same, of the church of Germigny-des-Prés. Bishop Théodulfe, who was born in Spain about 760, was one of the many remarkable men who occupied the see of Orléans. His talents were many and of a high order. He not only was a learned theologian but he was a Latin scholar and a Latin poet of taste; he was also a member of Charlemagne's court. It was Charlemagne who granted him, about 798, the bishopric of Orléans and several abbeys besides.

Not far away from these Carlovingian relics lay the remains of a foundation wall of ancient brick work that extended in the form of a large rectangle half-way between the two altars. These old bricks, bound together with indestructible cement and going down four meters into the ground, may well have been the very genesis of all other church constructions, the walls of the ancient church built in the middle of the fourth century by Bishop Saint Euverte, with the aid of the Emperor Constance, and endowed with the name of The Holy Cross, held in such high reverence by the imperial house (Plate VI).

The archæological phase of these excavations is a fascinating tale, even

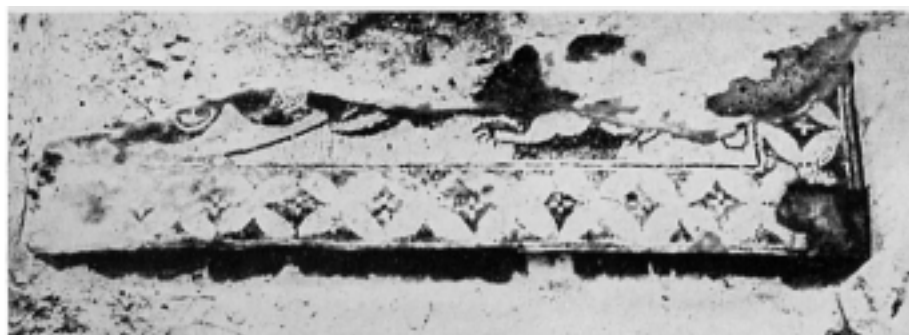


PLATE IV
PART OF A MOSAIC PAVEMENT OF THE ELEVENTH CENTURY.



PLATE V
FRAGMENTS OF MOSAICS OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY.



PLATE VI

VIEWS OF THE EXCAVATIONS SHOWING AT THE LEFT ONE OF THE CRUCIFORM
PILLARS OF THE TENTH CENTURY CHURCH, AT THE RIGHT THE ROUND COL-
UMNS OF THE ELEVENTH CENTURY CONSTRUCTIONS. THE EXCAVATIONS
WITHIN THE FOURTH CENTURY WALLS ARE SHOWN IN THE FOREGROUND.

to a layman, but still more arresting to a student or collector of textiles is the matter of the silks in which the three princes of the church were buried. Half way between the two altars of the choir, enclosed in the old gallo-roman brickwork of the wall, lay the three sarcophagi. The attention of the workers had been drawn by these to the remains of a vault. In raising it the cover broke and revealed within a gleam of church jewels and what once had been rare and costly silks. Due to its long interment the body itself was reduced to ashes, but clearly to be seen was the pontifical dress with the liturgical sandals on the feet. Across the body lay the staff of a crozier of engraved and gilded copper, of the finest workmanship, of the second half of the thirteenth century (Plate VII). "Between the hands," in dramatic phrase, "shone the gold of the cup of a chalice," and with this was a paten, both of these pieces of silver, partly gilded, and with the elegance of line that characterized French goldsmiths' work of the same period (Plate VIII). There were two medallions for gloves embroidered in gold and silver, of some glints still may be seen, *caligues* or hose worn by a bishop upon occasions of high ceremony, and finally, in this rich tomb, a ring that was set with an emerald.

The removal of the textiles, which were in a fragmentary condition, required the greatest care. The pieces that were the best preserved were the hose. They were of fine silk, ornamented, as it is said, with a pattern of eagles and medallions, and attributed on account of this pattern to Byzantine workmanship. Silks of this period would certainly have come within the high period of Byzantine silk weaving when these weaves were so highly valued that they constituted the gifts of popes and emperors. Though the design is a type that was used throughout the middle ages, it still was a pattern employed in Byzantine silks at this time. As they appear in the illustration (Plate IX) these *caligues* were represented as an object rather than from any point of view of pattern. The faint traces of the design that may be dimly discerned, however, attest to the accuracy of the description. The sandals which accompany the hose in this illustration were also of silk. They were cut on a bias angle, joined and covered with embroidery.

As to the chasuble, conditions are rather more favorable. As soon as the excavations were made known, the late H. A. Elsborg, whose name is known to all collectors of textiles, and who himself, had he lived, would have gone to France to see them, sent abroad for the photographs. The plate that is here shown, together with the detail drawings of the pattern, were preserved among his papers. It is through the kindness of Miss



PLATE VII AND VIII

PLATE VII (RIGHT) A CROZIER OF COPPER, ENGRAVED AND GILDED, SECOND HALF OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY. PLATE VIII (LEFT) CHALICE AND PATEN OF SILVER, SECOND HALF OF THIRTEENTH CENTURY.

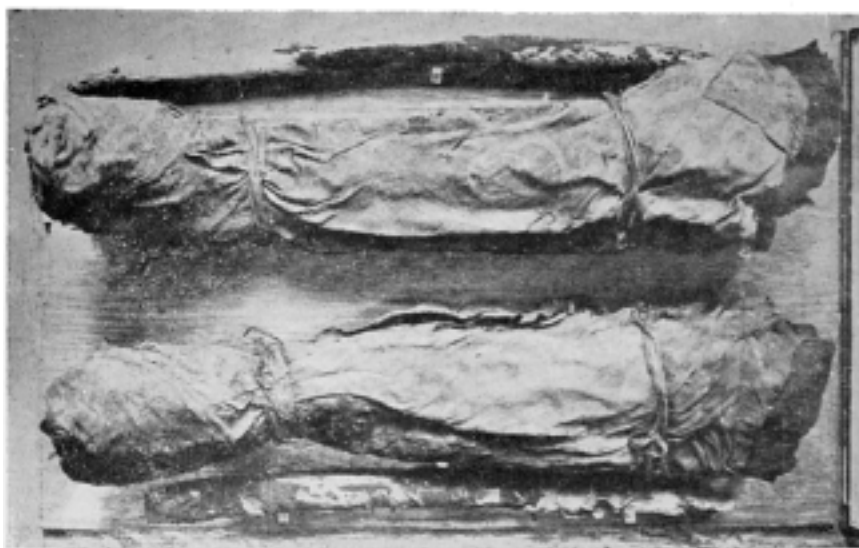
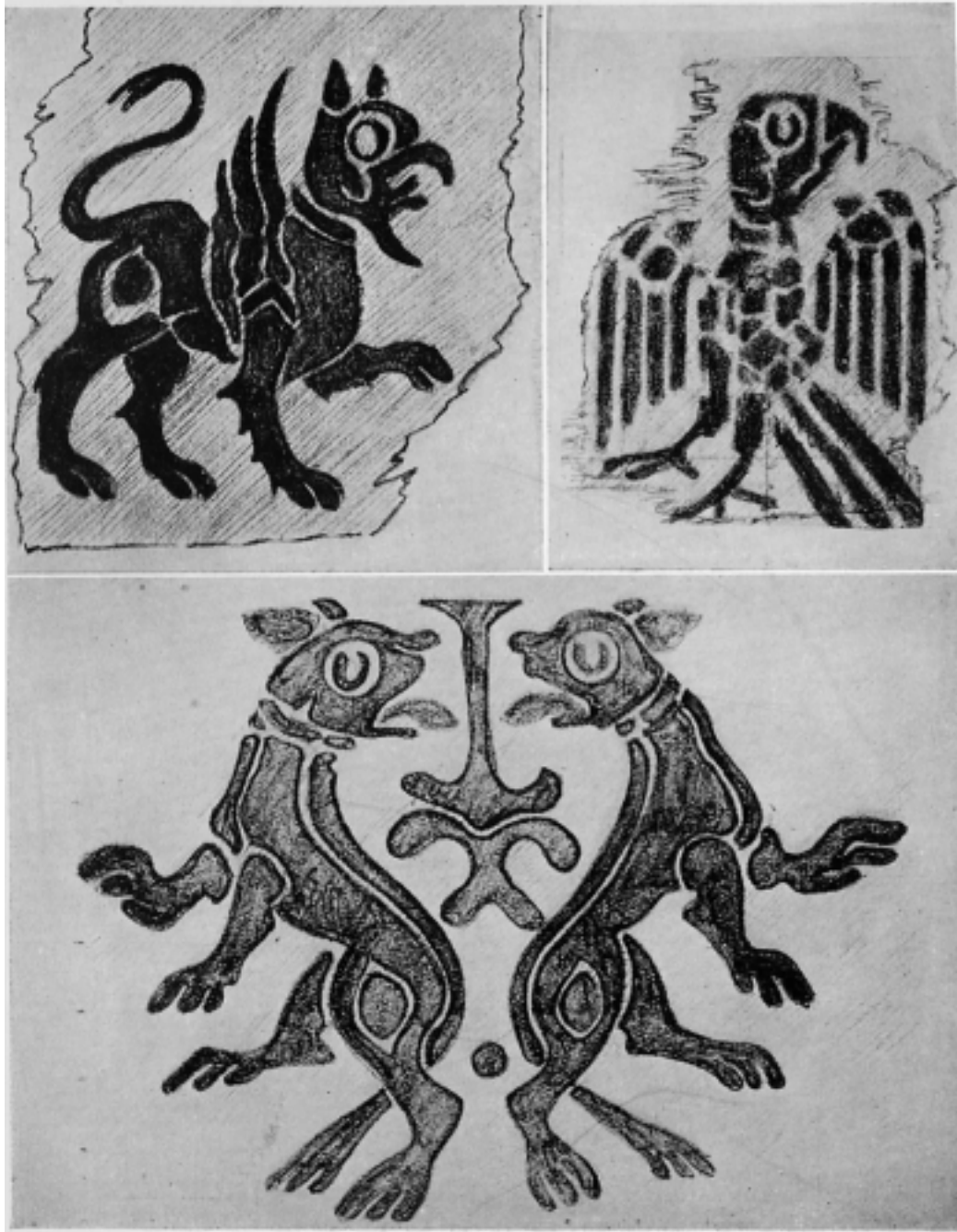


PLATE IX

HOSE AND LITURGICAL SANDALS OF A BISHOP OF THE END OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY.



PLATES Xa, Xb, Xc

PLATE Xa (TOP, LEFT), DETAIL OF CHASUBLE SHOWING WINGED GRIFFIN MOTIF IN NATURAL SIZE. PLATE Xb (TOP, RIGHT), DETAIL OF CHASUBLE SHOWING EAGLE MOTIF IN NATURAL SIZE. PLATE Xc (BOTTOM), DETAIL OF CHASUBLE SHOWING ADORSED LION MOTIFS IN NATURAL SIZE.

Dorothy Lardner, for years his able assistant, that the reproductions may be seen. The chasuble, also of silk, had a pattern of griffins, addorsed lions, and wide-winged eagles. In this case, there are no medallions; instead, the motives are arranged alternately in parallel rows between each of which is a line of triple points. In the photograph which was taken directly from the fabric is shown one of the fierce, winged creatures and above is faintly delineated one of the eagles (Frontispiece). The detail drawings which were made in France, show these figures in their natural size (Plates Xa, Xb, Xc), and the reconstruction of the pattern in the same way presents the design as it originally appeared (Plate XI). Byzantine textiles as a rule were rather sombre in color; dark blue, violet, or purple-red were shades that were often used. But in this piece, owing to its long burial in the ground, the original colors cannot be distinguished. It is now a light brown, one shade for the ground and a deeper one, in which a dark peacock blue may be distinguished, for the design.⁶ Even in the photograph it can be seen that the fabric was woven in a twill technique.

Of another piece, possibly an alb, only few pieces remain and of these it is merely said that it had an all-over design of small lozenge forms and that on two of the pieces is a pretty, decorative band, probably Oriental in origin; this may have formed the lower edge of the vestment (Plate XII). Sewed to these was a band of which only small pieces remain, ornamented with a raised pattern of gold and silver thread like one, it is stated, that is in the Cluny Museum (see frontispiece).

A burial tomb as valuable as this could only have been that of a prelate of note. Although there is nothing that serves as a precise identification, it has been suggested, particularly since the dates coincide, that it might be that of Robert de Courtenay,* grandson of Louis le Gros, cousin of the emperors of Constantinople, who was bishop of Orléans from 1250 to 1279.

The second tomb had no cover and was buried in earth. Originally this also had contained vestments, but, as readily can be understood, they were now only indistinguishable bits. Here there were only fragments of a pewter chalice, but there was also one rare and beautiful object, a crozier with a floral scroll of champleve enamel (Plate XIII). This was not the work of Limoges, rather it was Rhenish in character and has been

⁶ For this description of the colors, we are indebted to Mr. Richard C. Greenleaf, who went to Orleans at the time of the excavations to see the pieces.

* Through the marriage, about 1150, of a daughter of Renaud de Courtenay to Pierre, youngest son of Louis VI, the Fat, whose son, Pierre II, founded a short-lived dynasty of emperors of Constantinople.

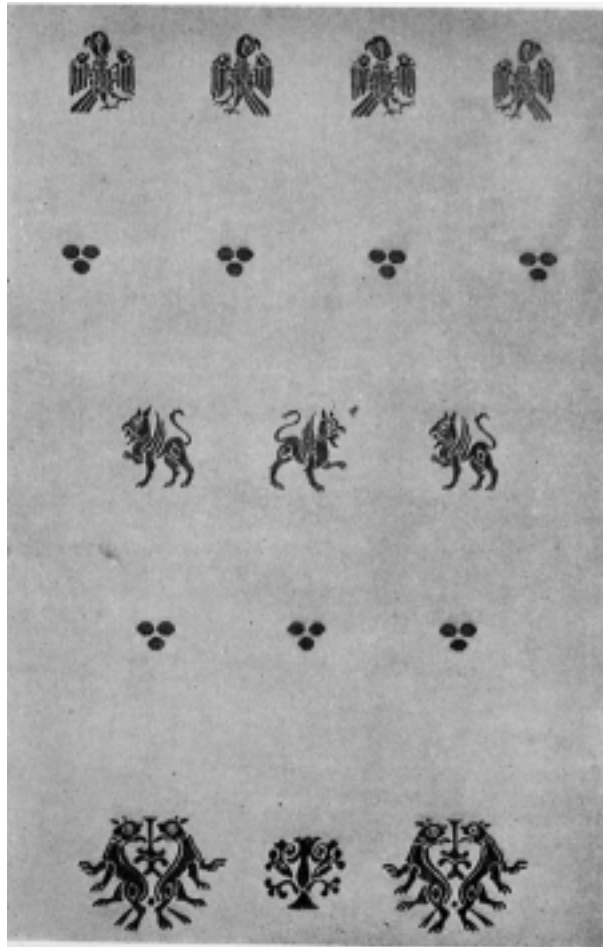


PLATE XI

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PATTERN OF THE CHASUBLE.



PLATE XII
RECONSTRUCTION OF DESIGN OF THE ALB INCLUDING A BORDER BAND,
A FRAGMENT OF WHICH IS SHOWN IN THE FRONTISPIECE.



PLATE XIII
CROZIER OF CHAMPLEVÉ
ENAMEL, END OF THE
TWELFTH CENTURY.



PLATE XIV
MEDALLIONS FOR GLOVES CLOISONNÉ ENAMEL ON GOLD,
BYZANTINE, ELEVENTH CENTURY.

attributed to the end of the twelfth century. In any case, it would seem to be the only example that exists, complete, of the work done in the ateliers of the east. It is thought that the owner of this fine piece may have been Masassès de Seignelay, who died in 1221, and who was the first bishop to be buried in the cathedral.

The third tomb was found between the two others. Here again there was no crozier, but a pewter chalice, a copper ring with a stone and a few remains of silks and *galons*. This sepulchre would have proved to be of very modest character in comparison with the two others were it not for one remarkable exception; mixed with the bones of the hands were two small gold disks decorated with cloisonné enamel, with representations of Christ and the Virgin. These were Byzantine jewels of rare quality, designed to be worn as medallions for gloves (Plate XIV).⁷ Unlike the sarcophagi previously found, this one was not anonymous, for it contained a lead plaque that bore the name of Raoul Grosparm, who was bishop of the cathedral in the years 1306-1311.

At the time when the material on these excavations was published this remarkable collection had been sent to Paris, to the Louvre, where it was to be displayed. Later it was to be returned to Orléans where it was to be added to the treasure of the cathedral. It was the intention also to make of these excavations a little archæological museum. With a roofing of iron and cement they were to be kept in the same state as when they were discovered so that visitors might be able to see the various strata of church constructions just as they had succeeded the primitive edifice built in the fourth century.

⁷ In the Metropolitan Museum, in the Morgan collection, is a set of medallions of this same type Byzantine work of the XI century, representing Christ, the Virgin and saints, that came from an old monastery in Jumati, Georgia, where they once ornamented an icon.