INTRODUCTION

Ivory Palaces

The discovery of a "venus" statuette at Hohle Fels (near Ulm, Germany) in September 2008 makes this small figure made of mammoth ivory the earliest known representational object fashioned by human hands (Figure I.1).[1] Carved between forty and thirty-five thousand years ago, and therefore coeval with the first wind instruments and the charcoal paintings of the Chauvet caves, the ivory from Hohle Fels is an appropriate if idiosyncratic conceptual and methodological starting point for the consideration of ivories carved in Gothic France. This miniature woman with exaggerated breasts and swollen pudenda reveals the long history of humans crafting female forms from ivory and the centrality of ivory statuettes to symbol formation. The figure also highlights the importance of materials in understanding the mechanics of representation. Moving beyond what has been called an iconology of material, paleoanthropologists have posited material presentation as among the first, fundamental symbolic acts, synecdoche being the simplest form of metaphor.[2]

Take, for example, one of the flutes found next to the "Venus" in the Hohle Fels caves.[3] The physical remains of a bird – its bones – were transformed through artisanal techniques into a tool capable of producing signs (varying acoustic tones)

[1] Nicholas J. Conard, "A Female Figurine from the Basal Aurignacian of Hohle Fels Cave in Southwestern Germany," *Nature* 459 (May 2009): 248–52; see also Jill Cook, ed., *Ice Age Art: Arrival of the Modern Mind* (London, 2013), 28–57.

[2] Randall White, "Beyond Art: Toward an Understanding of the Origins of Material Representation in Europe," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992): 537–64.

[3] Nicholas J. Conard, Maria Malina, and Susanne C. Münzel, "New Flutes Document the Earliest Musical Tradition in Southwestern Germany," *Nature* 460 (2009): 737–40. Other bird-bone flutes have been found at later sites; see Dominique Buisson, "Les flûtes paléolithiques d'Isturitz (Pyrénées-Atlantiques)," *Bulletin de la Société préhistorique française* 87 (1990): 420–33.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009039987.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure I.1 Hohle Fels Venus. Swabia, 40,000 years BP. Mammoth ivory, H 5.97 × 3.46 × 3.13 cm. Blaubeuren, Urgeschichtliches Museum Blaubeuren. Photo: Hannes Wiedmann, courtesy of museum

analogous to bird cries. The concatenation of (re) presentational modes is key. An art historian might describe this as a symbiotic relationship between material and iconography, an object in which the craftsmanship does not surpass the material but works together with it to produce a more complex representational object. Furthermore, the natural hollowness of the bird's wing bones (*ulnae*) may have facilitated the discovery of the tonal possibilities of blowing on a hollow tube. It is fascinating that the *Homo sapiens* of Hohle Fels replicated the hollow bird-bone shape in other flutes, hewn from solid ivory, found at the same site. The morphological possibilities inherent in the natural material may have engendered a whole art. If the mammoth ivory and the sexually exaggerated feminine form indicated a similar correlation of material, form, and function, it will remain shrouded in mystery.[4]

Fortunately, the relationship between elephant ivory and representations of the Virgin Mary or the Crucified Christ in the Gothic period (second quarter of the thirteenth century to the mid-fourteenth century) is somewhat easier to reconstruct.

MATERIALITY AND METHOD

The Paleolithic provides an example from a less complex representational system that helps suggest a methodological approach to Gothic ivories. This corpus comprises the variety of objects carved in elephant ivory in western Europe, predominantly but not exclusively from northern France, especially Paris. In this book, I argue that the urge toward material (re)-presentation remains a powerful force behind works produced in the symbolic systems of medieval Europe. I see material presentation not simply as a synecdoche, in which part of the animal stands for the whole (tusks representing the elephant), nor only as a metaphor, where elephantine dentine points to something outside of itself, but in terms of true presence, where the ivory substrate bears real, effective powers for medieval users.

In this study, I contribute to the "material turn" that has decisively shaped medieval art history in the past decades.[5] For the study of Gothic ivories, foregrounding the historical understanding of the

[4] Peter J. Ucko, "The Interpretation of Prehistoric Anthropomorphic Figurines," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 92 (1962): 38–54, was a path-breaking article that shifted the discourse away from tired "Mother Goddess" interpretations. For a more recent proposal, see Douglass Bailey, "Figurines, Corporeality and the Origin of the Gendered Body," in *A Companion to Gender Prehistory*, ed. Diane Bolger (Oxford, 2013), 244–64.

[5] For me, indications of this include Herbert L. Kessler, "Function of *Vitrum Vestitum* and the Use of *Materia Saphirorum* in Suger's St.-Denis," in *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia, 2000), 190–205; Herbert L. Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art* (Peterborough, ON, 2004), 19–42; Michael Cole, "The Cult of Materials," in *Revival and Invention: Sculpture through Its Material Histories*, ed. Sébastien Clerbois and Martina Droth (Oxford, 2010), 1–15; Marina Bagnoli, Holger A. Klein, C. Griffith Mann, and James Robinson, eds., *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT, 2010); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2011); Martha Rosler, Caroline Walker Bynum, Natasha Eaton, et al., "Notes from the Field: Materiality," *Art Bulletin*

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009039987.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

organic material provides a firm hermeneutical foundation for assessing the different forms and iconographies fashioned from that material. A historically informed conception of the material establishes the theme, and the diverse formats and iconographies found in the Gothic ivory corpus provide variations on this theme. Moving beyond accounts offered by theologians to incorporate evidence from new literary forms and from the burgeoning fields of science and medicine permits a holistic picture of what materials meant, and, more importantly, *how* they communicated meaning in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Scholarship produced since the material turn responds to long-standing art historical concerns, but it has also benefitted from theoretical developments in the social sciences and humanities more broadly. First, and more traditional in its approach, a semiotics of materials construes matter as a sign or symbol of some truth or virtue that stands apart from itself.[6] The relationship between material and concept is generally thought of as abstract, not based on a physical or natural link between the two entities; indeed, semioticians tend to define the relationship between signifier and signified as arbitrary. An iconology of materials requires that the medieval exegete and the bookish historian alike delve into biblical commentaries, lapidaries, and bestiaries to uncover what symbolic associations a material might have held at a particular point in time. Rock crystal, for instance, might symbolize the purifying waters of baptism, the spotlessness of angelic natures, or the uncorrupted body of Christ.[7]

Materials can therefore be used iconographically. The walls of the Heavenly Jerusalem were composed of precious and semiprecious stones (Rev. 21:19–21), so an assemblage of similar precious materials may point to this biblical referent, entirely appropriate in an ecclesiastical setting.[8] If material is treated as sign, it generates a process of semiosis and encourages a viewer to associate a signifier with its appropriate ideational signified. Abbot Suger of the royal abbey of Saint-Denis was perhaps the most famous iconographer of medieval stones. In an oft-cited passage on the gems of the Éscrain de Charlemagne (Figure I.2) and other treasures, he wrote:

> Often we contemplate . . . that wonderful cross of St. Eloy . . . and that incomparable ornament commonly called "the Crest" [crista] are placed upon the golden altar, then I say, sighing deeply in my heart: *Every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, the topaz, and the jasper, the chrysolite, and the onyx, and the beryl, the sapphire, and the carbuncle and the emerald* [Ezek. 28:13]. To those who know the properties of precious stones it becomes evident, to their utter astonishment, that none is absent from the number of these (with the only exception of the carbuncle), but that they abound most copiously. Thus, when – out of my delight in the beauty of the house of God – the loveliness of the many-colored gems has called me

95 (2013): 10–37; and Christy Anderson, Anne Dunlop, and Pamela H. Smith, eds., *The Matter of Art: Materials, Practices, Cultural Logics, c. 1250–1750* (Manchester, 2014). For a historiographic overview, see Aden Kumler, "Materials, Materia, 'Materiality,'" in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. Conrad Rudolph, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ, 2019), 95–117.

[6] Günther Bandmann, "Bemerkungen zu einer Ikonologie des Materials," *Städel-Jahrbuch*, n.s., 2 (1969): 75–100; Thomas Raff, *Die Sprache der Materialien: Anleitung zu einer Ikonologie der Werkstoffe* (Munich, 1994); and, based on Frederick Ohly's more pluralistic understanding of medieval signification, Aden Kumler and Christopher R. Lakey, "*Res et significatio*: The Material Sense of Things in the Middle Ages," *Gesta* 51 (2012): 1–17.

[7] Jacqueline E. Jung, "Crystalline Wombs and Pregnant Hearts: The Exuberant Bodies of the Katharinenthal Visitation Group," in *History in the Comic Mode*, ed. Rachel Fulton and Bruce W. Holsinger (New York, 2007), 223–37; Beate Fricke, "Matter and Meaning of Mother-of-Pearl: The Origins of Allegory in the Spheres of Things," *Gesta* 51 (2012): 35–53; Stefania Gerevini, "*Christus crystallus*: Rock Crystal, Theology and Materiality in the Medieval West," in *Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relics and Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period*, ed. James Robinson and Lloyd de Beer with Anna Harnden (London, 2014), 92–9; and Patrick R. Crowley, "Crystalline Aesthetics and the Classical Concept of the Medium," *West 86th* 23 (2016): 220–51.

[8] E.g., Bianca Kühnel, *From the Earthly to the Heavenly Jerusalem: Representations of the Holy City in Christian Art of the First Millennium* (Rome, 1987); and Erik Thunø, "'Living Stones' of Jerusalem: The Triumphal Arch Mosaic of Santa Prassede in Rome," in *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem*, ed. Bianca Kühnel, Galit Noga-Banai, and Hanna Vorholt (Turnhout, 2014), 223–30.

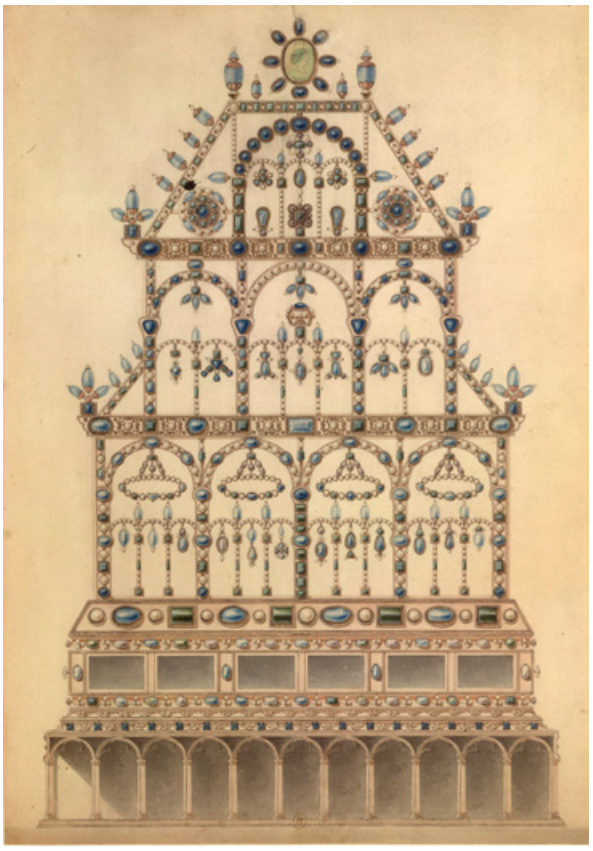

Figure I.2 Étienne-Éloi Labarre, watercolour of the Éscrain de Charlemagne (ca. 875), 1791. BnF, Estampes et Photographie, Le 38-C-Fol. Photo: BnF Images

> away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect [honesta meditatio insistere persuaderet], transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, on the diversity of the sacred virtues [sanctarum etiam diversitatem virtutum]: then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling, as it were, in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime [fece] of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven; and that, by the grace of God, I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner.[9]

"Transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial": Suger's attempt to decode the sacred virtues encoded in and represented by the 2 aquamarines, 8 rubies, 11 amethysts, 22 garnets, 135 emeralds, 209 sapphires, and more than 700 pearls on the Éscrain led to his famous mystical experience.[10] Suger's intellectual engagement with the symbolic meaning of the stones opened an inner, spiritual world. It was the process of semiosis, the cognitive work required, that transported him from the material to the immaterial, not a purely aesthetic experience of the gleaming gems of the bejewelled screen, which was melted down during the French Revolution.

While Suger describes his mystical experience as the result of cognitive interiority, the phrase that indicates the object of his intellectual inquiry – "the diversity of sacred virtues" – points us in another direction, one more closely aligned to recent interest in the "power of things."[11] Beyond an abstract semiotic link or a metaphorical similitude between, say, victory and diamonds (the Greek word *adamas* literally meaning unconquerable or invincible),[12] the concept of *virtus* drew on a widespread understanding that materials themselves had the power to achieve effects in the world. Observable natural phenomena made this clear – the magnetism of iron, for instance, or the fluorescence of certain stones – as Brigitte Buettner explored in an evocative study of materiality and relics.[13] These materials are certainly effective, as

[9] Abbot Suger, "De Administratione (excerpts)," in Erwin Panofsky, ed. and trans., *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St. Denis and Its Art Treasures* (Princeton, NJ, 1948), 40–81, at 62–4. For the full text, see Suger, *Oeuvres*, ed. and trans. Françoise Gasparri, 2 vols. (Paris, 1996), 1:53–155, at 134–5 (II.13).

[10] Blaise de Montesquiou-Fezensac and Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *Le trésor de Saint-Denis* (Paris, 1973), 1: no. 4

[11] See, e.g., G. Ulrich Großmann and Petra Kruitsch, eds., *The Challenge of the Object: 33rd Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art, Nuremberg, 15th–20th July 2012 = Die Herausforderung des Objekts* (Nuremberg, 2013). For cautionary notes on over-rampant materiality in anthropology and art history, see Timothy Ingold, "Materials against Materiality," *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (2007): 1–16; James Elkins, "On Some Limits of Materiality in Art History," *31: Das Magazin des Instituts für Theorie* 12 (2008): 25–30; Paul Binski, *Gothic Sculpture* (London, 2019), esp. 125–43; and Kumler, "Materials, Materia, 'Materiality,'" 108–10.

[12] Joan Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Particularly in England* (Oxford, 1922), 22, citing a Hellenistic lapidary ascribed to Damigeron, one of Marbode of Reims's principal sources; and Jack Ogden, *Diamonds: An Early History of the King of Gems* (New Haven, CT, 2018).

[13] Lynn Thorndike, "John of St. Amand on the Magnet," *Isis* 36 (1946): 156–7; Brigitte Buettner, "From Bones to Stones: Reflections on Jeweled Reliquaries," in *Reliquiare im Mittelalter*, ed. Bruno Reudenbach and Gia Toussaint (Berlin, 2005), 43–59; and Ittai Weinryb, "Beyond

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they produce force and light, respectively. And if this is observable and true for these materials, why should we doubt similar qualities, albeit less immediately observable, in others? No one today doubts the efficacy of penicillin, uranium, or chlorine bleach even if few of us understand the mechanics of antibiotics, radiation, or basic solutions. In the epistemological framework of the European Middle Ages, many materials, including ivory, were understood to be similarly potent. Although paradigms have shifted (e.g., from Galenic to empirical medicine), historical individuals' lived experience of materials is not entirely dissimilar to our own.

As André Vauchez argued, *virtus* also describes the particular power or agency of relics, a special subset of materials intimately tied to the sacred.[14] The power of a relic (whether a finger bone or a shoe) arises from its inspiritedness, the true presence of a divine or sacred spirit embodied within it. This ethnographic understanding of special subsets of medieval objects – not only relics but also the Eucharist species and miraculous images – has propelled the study of medieval art for several decades now, and these beliefs were held by many writers in the Middle Ages, from theologians to legislators.[15] Decades before the anthropologically inflected writings of David Freedberg, Michael Camille, or Hans Belting, and before the greatly influential work of anthropologist Alfred Gell, Ilene Forsyth had already noted in her magisterial *The Throne of Wisdom* that embedding relics activated certain wooden statuettes of the Virgin Mary.[16] In the Middle Ages, a belief in such spiritual powers dwelling in special objects was very real, and it shaped the user's experience of an object as well as the maker's role. These were powerful motivating factors in the production of certain objects and works of art – even though they were not the sole factors at play. The distinction between potent and inspirited materials is key: for medieval Christians, only the latter were truly sacred.

Rethinking matter and materials more generally has had a significant impact on medieval art history. Since the 1980s, a "New Materialism" has grown out of the work of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.[17] They challenged the opposition between form (*morphe*) and matter (*hyle*) that ruled Western thought for much of the past two thousand years. Reflecting on organic and inorganic chemistry, Deleuze and Guattari deconstructed the hylomorphic dichotomy, arguing that form arises from matter rather than being externally imposed, like amino acids determining the macrostructure of a protein. The potential for morphogenesis lies within matter rather than being imposed from outside.

Yet matter does not determine all form. Manuel DeLanda, an interlocutor of Deleuze and Guattari, calls the potential variety of forms available within a material its "virtual capacities," derived from the same Latin term for power cited by Suger, *virtus*.[18]

Representation: Things – Human and Nonhuman," in *Cultural Histories of the Material World*, ed. Peter N. Miller (Ann Arbor, MI, 2013), 172–86.

[14] André Vauchez, *La sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge: Recherches sur les mentalités religieuses médiévales* (Rome, 1981), 499; and Cynthia Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Medieval Reliquaries, 400–circa 1204* (University Park, PA, 2012), 8–9.

[15] Herbert Kessler, "Medieval Art As Argument," in *Iconography at the Crossroads*, ed. Brendan Cassidy (Princeton, NJ, 1993), 59–73; Michael Camille, "The Gregorian Definition Revisited: Writing and the Medieval Image," in *L'image: Fonctions et usages des images dans l'occident médiéval*, ed. Jérôme Baschet and Jean-Claude Schmitt (Paris, 1996), 89–107; Herbert Kessler, "Gregory the Great and Image Theory in Northern Europe during the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. Conrad Rudolph (Malden, MA, 2006), 151–72; Beate Fricke, *Fallen Idols, Risen Saints: Sainte Foy of Conques and the Revival of Monumental Sculpture in Medieval Art* (Turnhout, 2015). The rich literature on icon theory also wrestles with these problems. See, e.g., Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton, NJ, 2002); and Glenn Peers, *Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 2004).

[16] Ilene H. Forsyth, *The Throne of Wisdom: Wood Sculptures of the Madonna in Romanesque France* (Princeton, NJ, 1972), 37–8 and *passim*; David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, 1989); Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge, 1989); Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago, 1994) [original German ed. 1990]; and Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, 1998).

[17] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris, 1980), esp. 54–8.

[18] Manuel DeLanda, "The New Materiality," in "Material Synthesis: Fusing the Physical and the Computational," special issue, *Architectural Design* 85 (2015): 16–21; see also Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (London, 2002), 75–7.

In contrast with the actual properties of a material – its hardness, texture, colour, temperature (what Aristotle called its accidents) – DeLanda speaks about a material's virtual capacities, or its intrinsic power (*virtus*) to realize certain characteristics or produce certain effects in particular environments. Capacities are virtual because they are not (yet) actualized. For example, molecules have the ability, under specific conditions, to produce different crystalline structures (e.g., in the case of carbon, diamond or graphite). The fixed molecular structure of carbon tends toward a number of fixed steady states (low-energy configurations), but all states are potentially real for any mass of carbon. Form arises from matter's intrinsic capacities and has many (albeit not infinite) potential outcomes.

Anthropologist Timothy Ingold emphasizes the implications that challenges to hylomorphism have for human fabrications and creativity, focusing not on chemistry or biology but on the realm of material culture. Rather than return to a dichotomous model, wherein an image or idea is imposed by the artisan onto the material substrate – a model with deep roots in the history of art – Ingold sketches out an understanding of creation in which the artisan participates in the "unfolding morphogenetic field" of the material (such as grasses for basket weaving).[19] Form results from the interface between the material and the artist's skill (I use *artisan* and *artist* interchangeably in this book). Although the morphogenetic interface between maker and material necessarily shifts toward the maker in the case of iconographic art rather than the abstract forms of baskets, bricks, or pottery, Ingold's notions resonate strongly with those of Michael Baxandall. Baxandall described the limewood sculptors of Germany as chiromancers, able to read the capacities of limewood (its elasticity, its tendency to shrink and split) and to plan their interventions accordingly. Notably, the qualities of the specific wood, limewood versus oak, permitted more or less ambitious fold styles to be rendered.[20] The limewood sculptor let the material dictate the formal qualities of his work, even though he determined whether it would represent the Virgin Mary or Saint Christopher. Borrowing a term from psychologist James J. Gibson, scholars have termed such capacities of artistic materials "affordances."[21] In a similar vein, Paul Binski discussed the practicalities of a material as its tendencies, its *intentio*: "This tending or *intentio* was useful because it pointed to and affirmed a representational and metaphorical ordering that started in, but went beyond, a material's inherent character that skilled craftsmen could read and respect."[22]

Elephant tusks offer a particular set of material affordances or tendencies that are simultaneously representational, metaphorical, and, in specific circumstances, powerfully effectual. Medieval artisans rejoiced in the exceptionally fine carving that dentine made possible even with the peculiarities of the awkwardly shaped tusk. Yet they first had to learn how to work with the specific tendencies of ivory, and sometimes they failed. Later, as their mastery of the material increased, they came to resist ivory's material affordances. The resulting objects, some of the most astonishing Gothic ivories, were the products of negotiation between the capacities of the material

[19] Timothy Ingold, "On Weaving a Basket," in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London, 2000), 340–8; Timothy Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London, 2013), esp. 17–31; Timothy Ingold, "Bringing Things to Life: Material Flux and Creative Entanglements," in *State of Flux: Aesthetics of Fluid Materials*, ed. Marcel Finke and Friedrich Weltzien (Berlin, 2017), 21–37.

[20] Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven, CT, 1980).

[21] E.g., Carl Knappett, "The Affordances of Things: A Post-Gibsonian Perspective on the Relationality of Mind and Matter," in *Rethinking Materiality: The Engagement of Mind with the Material World*, ed. Elizabeth DeMarrais, Chris Gosden, and Colin Renfrew (Cambridge, 2004), 43–51; Ann-Sophie Lehmann, "The Matter of Medium: Some Tools for an Art-Theoretical Interpretation of Materials," in Anderson, Dunlop, and Smith, *Matter of Art*, 21–41. See also Charles T. Little, "Ivoires et art gothique," *Revue de l'art* 46 (1979): 58–67, esp. 63–5.

[22] Paul Binski, "The Rhetorical Occasions of Gothic Sculpture," *Collegium Medievale* 30 (2017): 7–31, making important reference to Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2013), 167–72; see also Binski, *Gothic Sculpture*, 172–3.

and the ambitions of the artist, instances when the work transcended the material (*materiam superabat opus*).[23] The tension in the process of creation signalled by Ingold is evident: the material of ivory does not dictate specific outcomes over others, but prefers, accommodates, or even resists them.

Materials signify, they may be efficacious, they may be inspirited, and they certainly possess their own specific affordances. These possibilities shape the overall narrative and recur throughout this book, but they are complemented by traditional art historical inquiries into iconography, style, provenance, and patronage. Iconography and especially style have dominated the scholarly literature on Gothic ivories, which, since Raymond Koechlin's foundational publication in 1924, has largely focused on description and classification.[24] Especially in the past thirty years, a number of excellent catalogues by eagle-eyed curators responsible for specific collections has advanced the state of knowledge about when, where, and by whom Gothic ivories were produced. The work of Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, Paul Williamson, and Charles T. Little deserves particular mention as instrumental in modernizing the field, and their studies are referenced abundantly in what follows. In 1997, the landmark exhibition *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age* presented the fruit of a decades-long reexamination of the corpus, answering many questions about dating and attribution. The contextual essays in the accompanying catalogue addressed issues of concern to medieval art historians at the time, including affective devotional trends, narrativity, and intermedial artistic practices.[25] More recently, the Courtauld Institute of Art's Gothic Ivories Project, an online database nicknamed "Koechlin for the twenty-first century," catalogues more than five thousand objects and synthesizes much of the specialist knowledge in the field. Yet without a synthetic study of Gothic ivories in their historical context, the corpus risks dissolving into particulars.

For an art historian, situating objects in their social contexts and firmly anchoring them in the milieus that desired, made, and used them is a first, foundational step. The corpus of Gothic ivories is especially frustrating in this regard because so much contextual information has been lost due to the cataclysms of the French Revolution and the consequent entropy of the art market; even earlier, the Wars of Religion profoundly disrupted French religious foundations. Much of the work undergirding the current book consists of attempts, often futile, to extend the biographies of specific ivories further into the past, beyond their first appearance in nineteenth-century sale catalogues. In many cases, exploring the provenance of an object demonstrates the ties it might have had to a particular foundation and helps the modern reader understand the uncertainty that underlies many of the previously proposed chronologies and contexts for these thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century objects.

In addition to moving provenance chains backward in time whenever possible, I have delved into the medieval sources to enrich our textual and contextual knowledge of Gothic ivories. These fresh documents and texts enhance our understanding of the facture, use, and initial response to these

[23] The Ovidian phrase was used to describe the magnificent Glorification of the Virgin group that is the subject of Chapter 4. Germain Millet, *Le trésor sacré, ou inventaire des sainctes reliques et autres précieux joyaux qui se voyent en l'église, & au trésor de l'Abbaye Royale de S. Denis en France*, 4th ed. (Paris, 1645), 93. See also Binski, *Gothic Sculpture*, 130 and *passim*.

[24] Raymond Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1924).

[25] Peter Barnet, ed., *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age* (Princeton, NJ, 1997). For a more detailed recent historiography of Gothic ivories, see Glyn Davies and Sarah M. Guérin, "Introduction," in "New Work on Old Bones: Recent Studies on Gothic Ivories; Papers from the Conference 'Gothic Ivory Sculpture: Old Questions, New Directions' at the Courtauld Institute of Art and Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 23–24 March 2012," special issue, *Sculpture Journal* 23 (2014): 7–12.

objects. Despite these efforts to uncover additional information, the fact remains that, for many Gothic ivories, the only evidence for their medieval existence is the objects themselves. The objects are as important as any text in the narration of their own history.

A DEEP HISTORY OF IVORY

Modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, have always appreciated elephantine ivory's silky texture, fine grain, and unique ability to be carved with delicacy and virtuosity. The Hohle Fels "Venus" statuette was carved from the tusk of *Mammuthus meridionalis*, a relative of the modern Asian elephant on the *Elephantidae* family tree. The mammoth became extinct in western Europe in the last Ice Age, around thirteen thousand years ago, although some survived on remote Siberian islands until as recently as 2000 BCE.[26] As the mammoth exited the world stage, trade in the tusks of modern elephants filled the void, carrying the material abroad – in raw or worked form – from regions in Asia and Africa where modern elephant species thrived.

There are three such species. The African savannah elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) is prized for its large tusks with diameters of solid ivory (i.e., above the nerve cavity) greater than 11 cm. This measurement helps distinguish savannah elephant tusks from others.[27] Closely related to this species, and only distinguished genetically in recent years, is the more diminutive elephant of the African forest zones (*Loxodonta cyclotis*).[28] Finally, the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is generally smaller than its African cousins. Only the males of this species grow tusks.

In antiquity, the elephant thrived in many more regions than it does today. Like other species of megafauna, it inhabited much of Asia and Africa, including parts of the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahara.[29] Elephant and other types of ivory were frequent trade goods among early societies. The Nahal Mishmar treasure, for example, found in a Judean Desert cave, has been dated circa 4000 BCE.[30] Not only does it contain remarkable copper-alloy ritual objects and weapons but also five "wands" of hippopotamus ivory and a vessel fashioned from a large elephant tusk. Ivory artifacts, and even ivory carving workshops, have been excavated at other Chalcolithic sites around the Levant.[31] The Uluburun shipwreck (ca. 1400 BCE) carried tonnes of copper ingots and other goods in commercial quantities and smaller amounts of luxury goods, including fourteen hippopotamus teeth and a large section of elephant tusk.[32] Ivory from elephants and other large mammals was a frequent commodity in Bronze Age trade, one that circulated over long distances.

[26] Adrian Lister and Paul Bahn, *Mammoths: Giants of the Ice Age*, rev. ed. (Berkeley, CA, 2007), 141–63, esp. 163 for Wrangel Island.

[27] Anthony Cutler, "The Making of the Justinian Diptychs," *Byzantion* 54 (1984): 75–115, esp. 81–2; Anthony Cutler, "Of First Principles and Second Thoughts" in Cutler, *Late Antique and Byzantine Ivory Carving* (Aldershot, 1998), 1–8, at 4; and Anthony Cutler and Anders Götherström, "African or Asian? DNA Analysis of Byzantine and Western Medieval Ivories," in *Elfenbein und Artenschutz: Ivory and Species Conservation; Proceedings of INCENTIVS – Meetings (2004–2007), =BfN–Skripten* 228 (2008): 73–80, esp. 73 for this rule of thumb (DNA analysis inconclusive).

[28] For the savannah versus the forest elephant, see Peter Grubb, Colin P. Groves, Joseph P. Dudley, and Jeheskel Shoshani, "Living African Elephants Belong to Two Species: *Loxodonta africana* (Blumenbach, 1797) and *Loxodonta cyclotis* (Matschie, 1900)," *Elephant* 2 (2000): 1–4; for the genetic evidence, see Alfred L. Roca, Nicholas Georgiadis, Jill Pecon-Slattery, and Stephen J. O'Brien, "Genetic Evidence for Two Species of Elephant in Africa," *Science* 293 (2001): 1473–7; and Lori S. Eggert, Caylor A. Rasner, and David S. Woodruff, "The Evolution and Phylogeography of the African Elephant Inferred from Mitochondrial DNA Sequence and Nuclear Microsatellite Markers," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Biological Sciences* 269 (2002): 1993–2006.

[29] For East Asia, see Mark Elvin, *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China* (New Haven, CT, 2004); for the Indian subcontinent, see Thomas R. Trautmann, *Elephants and Kings: An Environmental History* (Chicago, 2015).

[30] P. R. S. Moorey, "The Chalcolithic Hoard from Nahal Mishmar, Israel, in Context," *World Archaeology* 20 (1988): 171–89; and Pesaḥ Bar-Adon, *The Cave of the Treasure: The Finds from the Caves in Nahal Mishmar* (Jerusalem, 1980).

[31] Richard D. Barnett, *Ancient Ivories in the Middle East* (Jerusalem, 1982), 23, and 80n1 for full bibliography.

[32] Joan Aruz, Kim Benzel, and Jean M. Evans, eds., *Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.* (New York, 2008), 289–310.

The infrastructure of the Roman Empire at its height, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Caspian Sea and from Hadrian's Wall to Aswan on the first cataract of the Nile, facilitated a wide range of interregional trade. Imperial elites enjoyed ready access to African elephants in Egypt, North Africa, and Nubia as well as Asian elephants from farther east. Yet confusion regarding the origin of ivory was pervasive. Juvenal (fl. ca. 100 CE), mocking the luxuries of Roman banqueting, imagines possible places of origin for elephant ivory when he notes that a snobby dinner guest loses his appetite "unless the great round tabletop is held up by a massive ivory pillar, a rampant snarling leopard made of tusks imported from the Gate of Syene [Aswan] by the swift Moors (*Mauri*) or the even darker-skinned Moors of India, tusks that the elephants drop in the glades of Nabataea when they prove too large to carry."[33] The passage references Roman North Africa (the province of Mauritania), Nubia (Aswan), and the northern Arabian peninsula (the Nabataean kingdom) alongside "India," which could mean Ethiopia, Arabia, or the Indian subcontinent; it was a capacious and nonspecific term indicating southerly territories east of the Nile.[34] "*Mauri celeres*" has been dismissed as poetic invention, but current scholarship on the Garamantes, the ancient inhabitants of Libya, argues for Amazigh (Berber) participation in interregional, trans-Saharan trade. Excavations of Roman-era desert sites demonstrate that trade across the then more verdant Sahara was frequent and likely provided Carthage, Rome's traditional enemy, with gold bullion.[35]

By the late Roman period, overhunting and climate change annihilated the North African elephant population. In the fourth century, the rhetorician Themistius warned that the beast was on the verge of disappearing, juxtaposing the extinction of megafauna with post-conquest racial cleansing:

> [We] feel pain when elephants are wiped out from Libya, lions from Thessaly and hippopotami from the Nile marshes; in the case of a race of men – even if one could by all means say barbarian, yet still men – impoverished, downtrodden and consenting to submit to our rule, shall we not admire him who does not wipe them out completely but cares for and spares them?[36]

Themistius suggests that the emotions stirred by the extinction of charismatic beasts should also be moved by the suffering of conquered people. This intertwining of extinction, environmental resource management, and ethics resonates today, as international organizations like the United Nations struggle to stop elephant poaching in postcolonial nations destabilized by insurgent terrorists.[37]

As the North African elephant was becoming extinct, Roman trade relations with the Horn of Africa were solidifying, securing access to elephant-derived materials farther afield and allowing the carving of ivory to flourish throughout the empire. The kingdom of Aksum (modern Eritrea and the highlands of northern Ethiopia), which minted gold coins in the third century and

[33] Susanna Morton Braund, ed. and trans., *Juvenal and Persius* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), XI.122–7, 410–11; my translation.

[34] Pierre Schneider, "The So-Called Confusion between India and Ethiopia: The Eastern and Southern Edges of the Inhabited World from the Greco-Roman Perspective," in *Brill's Companion to Ancient Geography: The Inhabited World in Greek and Roman Tradition*, ed. Serena Bianchetti, Michele Cataudella, and Hans-Joachim Gehrke (Leiden, 2015), 184–202; and see also Grant Parker, *The Making of Roman India* (Cambridge, 2008).

[35] David J. Mattingly, ed., *The Archaeology of Fazzān*, 4 vols. (London, 2003), 1:346–62 for Garamantes, 1:355–62 for trade in particular.

[36] Themistius, "Orations 8, 10: Goths and Romans in the Fourth Century," in *The Goths in the Fourth Century*, ed. and trans. Peter Heather and John Matthews (Liverpool, 1991), 13–50, at 44; and Themistius, *Themistii Orationes ex codici mediolanensi*, ed. Wilhelm Dindorf (Leipzig, 1832), 166. Cited in Anthony Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory: Sources, Techniques, and Uses in the Mediterranean World, A.D. 200–1400* (Washington, DC, 1985), 24.

[37] UNEP, CITES, IUCN, TRAFFIC, *Elephants in the Dust: The African Elephant Crisis: A Rapid Response Assessment*, ed. Christian Nellemann, Rannveig Knutsdatter Formo, Julian Blanc, Diane Skinner, Tom Milliken, and Tom De Meulenaer (Birkeland, Norway, 2013), https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2013-002.pdf; and Sarah M. Guérin, "Ivory and the Ties That Bind," in *Whose Middle Ages? Teachable Moments for an Ill-Used Past*, ed. Andrew Albin, Mary C. Erler, Thomas O'Donnell, et al. (New York, 2019), 140–53.

Figure I.3 Consular diptych of Anastasius from the treasury of Bourges Cathedral. Constantinople, 517. Ivory, H 36, L 13.5 cm (each leaf). BnF, Cabinet des Médailles, inv. 55.296bis. Photo: gallica.bnf.fr / BnF

was Christian by the mid-fourth, controlled the Horn.[38] As Aksum rose to importance in the late antique period, Romans began to carve some of their most lavish ivories: the consular diptychs. These paired panels, such as the Anastasius diptych now in Paris (BnF, Cabinet des Médailles, inv. 55.296bis; Figure I.3), are made from the large tusks of savannah elephants, yielding panels well over 11 cm wide.[39] The Theodosian Code first mentions ivory diptychs (*diptycha ex ebore*) in 384, when the distribution of such items, together with gifts of gold, was limited to consuls alone.[40] The first evidence for consular diptychs is thus a sumptuary law that attempts to limit overuse of ivory.

Consular diptychs were among the objects that passed into ecclesiastical collections with the decentralization of the former Roman Empire in the Middle Ages, becoming aspirational objects for future leaders of church and state. These antique models fed the continued demand for elephant ivory, even after the North African supply disappeared and Aksum's ties to the Mediterranean attenuated in the seventh century. The courts of Charlemagne and his successors in the eighth and ninth centuries provide compelling examples of demand for ivory exceeding supply. The carvers of Carolingian ivories not only revived Roman formats and styles but also reused Late Roman ivories: the reverses of many objects reveal planed-down Roman carvings. Ivory was recycled.[41] Even if early medieval Europe lacked the vast trading networks of the Roman world, models from the height of the Roman Empire continued to fuel a desire for elephant ivory.

This period of scarcity was followed by the so-called ivory century, when the craft of ivory carving flourished around the Mediterranean in Andalusia, Ottonian lands in central Europe, Byzantine Constantinople, and the Fatimid Caliphate. The abundance of elephant ivory in the tenth-century Mediterranean was linked to the Swahili corridor's increased imbrication with

[38] David W. Phillipson, "Aksum: An African Civilisation in Its World Contexts," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 111 (2001): 23–59; David W. Phillipson, "Aksum, the Entrepot, and Highland Ethiopia, 3rd–12th Centuries," in *Byzantine Trade, 4th–12th Centuries: The Archaeology of Local, Regional and International Exchange: Papers of the Thirty-Eighth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St John's College, University of Oxford, March 2004*, ed. Marlia Mundell Mango (Burlington, VT, 2009), 353–68; and David W. Phillipson, "Foreign Contacts of the Aksumite State," in Phillipson, *Foundations of an African Civilisation: Aksum and the Northern Horn, 1000 BC–AD 1300* (Woodbridge, UK, 2012), 195–208, esp. 196–7.

[39] Cutler, "Making of the Justinian Diptychs," 77–85. For a catalogue of extant consular diptychs, see Richard Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler* (Berlin, 1929).

[40] Clyde Pharr, ed. and trans., *The Theodosian Code and Novels, and the Sirmondian Constitutions* (Princeton, NJ, 1952), 435 (15.9.1). Cited in Alan Cameron, "The Origin, Context and Function of Consular Diptychs," *Journal of Roman Studies* 103 (2013): 174–207, at 181.

[41] Melanie Elaine Holcomb, "The Function and Status of Carved Ivory in Carolingian Culture" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1999), 78–149; and Anthony Cutler, "Reuse or Use? Theoretical and Practical Attitudes towards Objects in the Early Middle Ages," *Settimane di studi del Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo* 46 (1999): 1055–79.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009039987.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Red Sea trade and thus access to Egyptian markets.[42] The period also coincides with the growing involvement of Umayyad Iberia and Fatimid North Africa in caravan trade across the Sahara.[43] Trans-Saharan trade provided these polities with West African gold, funding their military campaigns and ornamenting their courts, and with savannah elephant ivory.[44] Sicily and southern Italy's close relationship with Ifriqiya (modern Tunisia) and trans-Saharan trade explains the continued carving of elephant ivory there in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, while northern Europe mostly used walrus ivory, acquired from as far afield as North America.[45]

The question of the demand for elephant ivory in Gothic Europe is thus somewhat moot. Desire for this remarkable sculptural material across the European Middle Ages was consistent and was especially strong at moments when evoking the Roman Empire was politically useful. As I examine further in Chapter 1, trade relations with North African states in the first third of the thirteenth century transformed European access to sub-Saharan commodities, including elephant ivory, and this material was quickly reintegrated into sculptural production. Yet what did elephant ivory mean to the communities of northern Europe who purchased, carved, and used ivory and ivory objects? I return to this question throughout the book, and while I examine a panoply of sources, one recurs frequently: the imagery of the Hebrew scriptures, the Christians' Old Testament. The Psalms, the Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon), and stories of King Solomon furnish the most prevalent metaphors for understanding the significance of elephant ivory in western Europe in the Middle Ages.

PALACE WITHOUT A RIVAL

Psalm 44:7–10 reads:

> Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a sceptre of uprightness. Thou hast loved justice, and hated iniquity: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. Myrrh and stacte and cassia perfume thy garments, from the ivory houses [a domibus eburneis]: out of which the daughters of kings have delighted thee in thy glory. The queen stood on thy right hand, in gilded clothing; surrounded with variety.

This is a marriage hymn, praising the royal bride and bridegroom of Israel and providing the dominant metaphor for this book. The exegetical traditions of the ninth through thirteenth centuries on this and other passages animate my interpretation of medieval ivory, but the biblical texts emerged from specific contexts in the ancient Middle East and reflected their own literary milieu. Although biblical scholars still debate the absolute dating of individual psalms, the book seems to have coalesced largely in the post-exilic period (586 BCE – 1 CE). The so-called Royal Psalms, including Psalm 44, have often been linked to pre-exilic or even Davidic courtly ideologies and Temple rituals.[46]

[42] Mark Horton, "The Swahili Corridor," *Scientific American* 257 (1987): 86–93.

[43] Avinoam Shalem, "Trade in and the Availability of Ivory: The Picture Given by the Medieval Sources," in "The Ivories of Muslim Spain," ed. Kjeld von Folsach and Joachim Meyer, special issue, *Journal of the David Collection* 2 (2005): 25–36; and Sarah M. Guérin, "Forgotten Routes? Italy, Ifrīqiya and the Trans-Saharan Ivory Trade," *Al-Masaq* 25 (2013): 70–91.

[44] Kathleen Bickford Berzock, ed., *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa* (Princeton, NJ, 2019).

[45] Bastiaan Star, James H. Barrett, Agata T. Gondek, and Sanne Boessenkool, "Ancient DNA Reveals the Chronology of Walrus Ivory Trade from Norse Greenland," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 285 (2018): 1–9; and Robyn Barrow, "Gunhild's Cross and the North Atlantic Trade Sphere," in "The Global North," edited by Carol Symes, special issue, *Medieval Globe* 7(1) (2021): 53–75.

[46] See, e.g., S. E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford, 1994), 251 and 184–6; the author leans more strongly to a post-exilic date for all the Psalms in S. E. Gillingham, "Postexilic Poetic Traditions in the Writings," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Writings of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Donn F. Morgan (Oxford, 2018), 132–48, esp. 135–6 for problems of dating.

Literal or historically oriented scholarship associates the royal marriage celebrated in Psalm 44, specifically the mention of the ivory palace, with Achab (Ahab), the fallen king of the northern territory of Israel (r. ca. 870–850 BCE): "Achab the son of Amri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him" (3 Kgs 16:30). He disastrously rejected the God of Israel and turned instead to Baal, the deity of his foreign wife, Jezebel. Achab is said to have built his palace of ivory (3 Kgs 22:39), and the prophet Amos takes the ivory palace in Samaria, Achab's capital, as a metonym for the corrupt house of Israel that the Lord will punish:

> Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob, saith the Lord the God of hosts: That in the day when I shall begin to visit the transgressions of Israel, I will visit upon him, and upon the altars of Bethel: and the horns of the altars shall be cut off, and shall fall to the ground. And I will strike the winter house with the summer house: and the houses of ivory shall perish, and many houses shall be destroyed, saith the Lord. (Amos 3:13–15)

When identified with the apostate king Achab and his ivory palace mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew scriptures, the specific materiality of the palace in Psalm 44 assumes pejorative connotations of decadent luxury, excess, and idolatry.[47]

Although probably not associated with the reign of King Achab, archaeologists have found ivories at Samaria as well as elsewhere in the Levant (Figure I.4).[48] The shared appeal of luxury elephant ivories across court cultures in the Near East is better illustrated by the palace of the Assyrian king Sargon II (r. 722–705 BCE) at Dur-Sharrukin (modern Khorsabad, Iraq).[49] On apotropaic *lamassu*, on the interior walls of the palace, and on secret tablets hidden in the palace walls themselves, Sargon lauded his new palace in terms shared with the psalm text:

> Palaces of ivory, maple, boxwood, *musukkani*-wood [mulberry?], cedar, cypress, juniper, pine and pistachio, the "Palace Without a Rival," for my royal abode I built therein. Upon dedicatory tablets of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, jasper, alabaster, bronze, lead, iron, *abar* [magnesite], boughs of evergreens, I laid their foundation platform, I built their brickwork, with great beams of cedars I roofed them.[50]

These precious foundation tablets were excavated by the French expedition in 1852–4 (Figure I.5). While the materials Sargon deployed in his sumptuous palace include many exotic woods, in every inscription the first descriptor of the building campaign is "palace of ivory." The notion of a magnificent edifice of ivory clearly held great rhetorical power across the ancient world, and this topos has endured across millennia.

Sargon's palace was abandoned soon after it was finished, but the idea of an ivory palace was indelibly associated with seats of past empires well into the early Christian period. Augustine, writing in Carthage in the early fifth century, is a fulcrum in the interpretation of the trope, a Janus-faced exegete who looked back toward the traditions of the ancient world but also set the tone for future, explicitly Christian commentaries. Augustine's expositions on the Psalms (*Enarrationes in*

[47] Scott R. A. Starbuck, *Court Oracles in the Psalms: The So-Called Royal Psalms in Their Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Atlanta, 1999), 19–66 for historiography. For this reading in particular, see James L. Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2001), 26–7; and Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah* (Sheffield, 1982), 130.

[48] Complicated stratigraphy does not permit these ivories, many of which were burnt before deposition, to be identified with an ivory-panelled palatial room. Ron E. Tappy, "The Archaeo-historical Context of the Samaria Ivories: A Case Study in Theory, Method and Outcome," in *The Archaeology of Israelite Samaria*, vol. 2, *The Eighth Century BCE* (Atlanta, 2001), 443–95.

[49] Marian H. Feldman, *Communities of Style: Portable Luxury Arts, Identity, and Collective Memory in the Iron Age Levant* (Chicago, 2014).

[50] Daniel David Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, vol. 2, *Historical Records of Assyria from Sargon to the End* (Chicago, 1927), 37 (interior display inscription); see also similar wording at 49–55 (pavement inscriptions), 56 (reverse of sculptural slabs), and 56–60 (foundation tablets). See also Annie Caubet, ed., *Khorsabad: Le palais de Sargon II, roi d'Assyrie: Actes du colloque organisé au musée du Louvre par le Services culturel les 21 et 22 janvier 1994* (Paris, 1995), esp. 27–9.

Figure I.4 Furniture element with crouching lion. Samaria, ninth–eighth century BCE. Ivory, 3.7 × 6.4 cm. Jerusalem, The Israel Museum, Israel Antiquities Authority, 1933–2557. Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY

Psalmos) reinforce the historical interpretation of ivory palaces as royal dwellings but transform the historical understanding of the Psalms into a metaphorical one: ivory palaces are the bodies of saints, perfected receptacles for the spirit of God. The metaphor of ivory palace is merged with the notion of containment within a body, specifically the chastised body of saints:

> Whichever ivory palaces, whichever great houses or regal mansions you care to name, there have been kings' daughters from there who have been pleasing to Christ. Would you like me to suggest to you a spiritual interpretation of these ivory palaces? The great houses, the mighty tabernacles of God are the hearts of the saints, and the kings who live there are royal because they rule their flesh, subordinate their crowding human affections to their will, chastise their bodies and bring them into submission. This is how you should understand the palaces, and from there come the kings' daughters in whom Christ finds his joy. (10.23)[51]

[51] Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms, 33–50*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY, 2000), 300; and Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos I–L* (Turnhout, 1956), 510–11.

With Augustine, then, we move from imagining a literal edifice lavishly ornamented with elephant ivory, an emblem of interregional power across the ancient world, to a malleable Christian metaphor. The rich interpretive implications of this shift underpin the current study.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

In the first chapter, I examine the international trade and local commerce in ivory in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, establishing the economic conditions for the investigations that follow. I address the relatively sudden appearance of large-scale elephant tusks on the northern European market in the mid-thirteenth century, a phenomenon driven by changing relationships within the medieval economic system, especially the increasing connectivity between the termini of trans-Saharan trade routes in North Africa and ocean-going Italian merchant ships that called at the ports of Flanders, Normandy, and England.

This chapter also surveys the slim documentary evidence surrounding the production of Gothic ivories, which can be supplemented by

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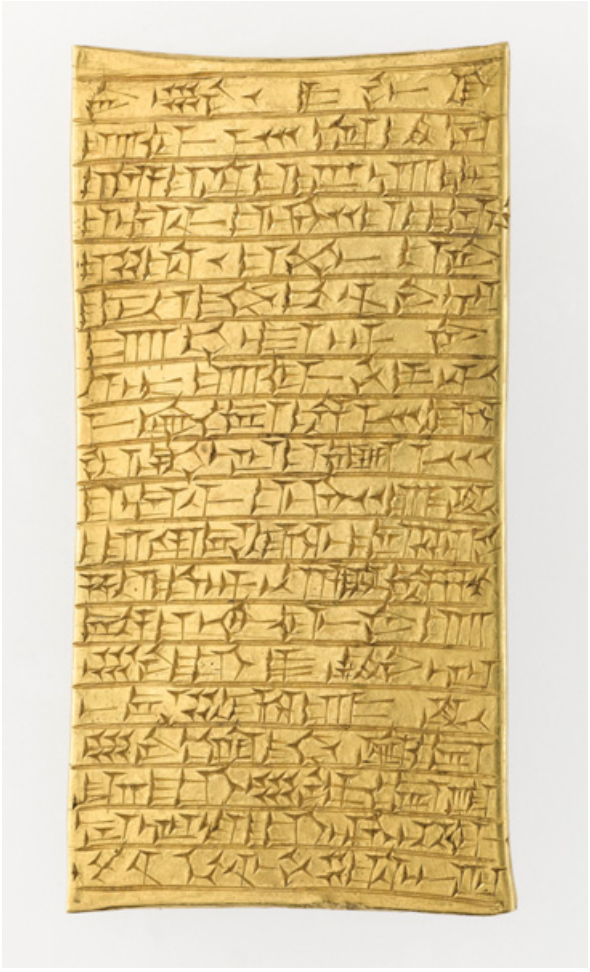

Figure I.5 Gold foundation tablet from the "Palace of Ivory" of Sargon II. Dur-Sharrukin (modern Khorsabad, Iraq), ca. 713 BCE. Gold, 8 × 4.2 cm. Louvre, AO 19933. Photo: © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

new findings. A variety of textual sources help us discern which skilled artisans were called upon to sculpt the first Gothic ivories, how patrons interacted with them, and how initial stand-alone commissions grew into a veritable industry over time. I look at household accounts, inventories, contracts, tax registers, guild regulations, legal cases, and a burgeoning vernacular literature engaged with the commercial milieu of Gothic Paris to answer questions about production, establishing the groundwork for the predominantly reception-oriented chapters that follow. A variety of protagonists – image makers (*ymagiers*), tablet makers (*tabletiers*), and ivory specialists (*ivoiriers*) – are named in the sources, and I lay out their differing roles over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The *tabletiers*, I argue, took a leading role not only in controlling the supply of raw material but also as the craftsmen or women who invested large amounts of capital in the new art form, resulting in Paris's transformation into the European centre of Gothic ivory production. Literary sources, notably the vastly popular *Roman de la Rose*, one of the thirteenth century's most profound meditations on the tension between nature and human artifice, allow us to probe a contemporary valuation of the "lifelike" works of the ivory carvers of Gothic Paris.

Chapters 2 through 6 proceed roughly chronologically, each considering a prominent type of Gothic ivory, the context of its use, and the construction of its specific meaning. Given the paucity of evidence, distinguishing artistic intention from the stipulations of the patron is challenging.[52] The first objects fashioned after the renewed availability of elephant tusks in northern Europe in the 1230s were almost exclusively Virgin and Child statuettes, the subject of Chapter 2. Artists and/or patrons seized the opportunity to create or possess Marian iconography in the form of King Solomon's throne (3 Kgs 10), a biblical paradigm that supplemented the ivory palace of Psalm 44. Mary's relationship to her son, wisdom incarnate, was understood typologically through the figure of the wise king's throne, which was made of ivory and adorned with the finest gold. In bearing Christ in her womb, Mary enfolded wisdom, just as the throne had supported Solomon. When tusks of ivory large enough to furnish sculptures in

[52] A question broached explicitly in Sarah M. Guérin, "Meaningful Spectacles: Gothic Ivories Staging the Divine," *Art Bulletin* 95 (2013): 53–77.

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the round became available for carving, seated images of the *Sedes sapientiae* (Throne of Wisdom) were fashioned to express the throne typology. Ivory was thus considered an appropriate receptacle for Christ, and cylindrical eucharistic pyxes furthered the Throne of Solomon metaphor. These items are exceptionally rare today, but the documentary record reveals their prevalence as powerful liturgical objects.

Almost coeval with the earliest ivory *Sedes sapientiae* were the first Gothic ivory diptychs, hitherto known as the "Soissons group," that I consider in Chapter 3. These inward-facing devotional diptychs were adorned with dense narratives of the Passion of Christ carved in low relief. The format was unknown in other media in the thirteenth century, and its advent in western Europe coincided with the availability of large elephant tusks. The key inspiration for the form of Gothic ivory diptychs seems to have been representations of the Tablets of the Law described in the book of Exodus, tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments of what Christians considered the Old Law. The iconography of the Passion on private diptychs was also used in the public liturgical space of the altar, likewise adorned with ivory in the form of composite altarpieces. Some of the earliest extant retables in France were made of ivory, so the locus of the commemoration and re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice was evidently an appropriate venue for the medium of ivory carving. The exceptional Deposition group at the Louvre, which mobilizes an anti-Jewish rhetoric via the personifications of Synagoga and Ecclesia, encourages reflection on the marriage of form and content.

I argue in Chapter 4 that large-scale statuettes of the Virgin and Child addressed a wider public and were used in liturgical celebrations. The Glorification of the Virgin group from Saint-Denis offers an exceptional opportunity to reconstruct the use of Gothic ivories in their original liturgical context. By consulting surviving *ordines* from Saint-Denis, I reconstruct the festivities for the Assumption and, with the aid of corroborating documentary evidence, suggest the ivory group's role during that important celebration. Peripatetic processions, soaring architectural spaces, and surrounding liturgical ornaments struck rich chords of symbolic resonance with the ivory ensemble. Psalm 44 was recited throughout the feast of the Assumption, and the relevant exegetical traditions exalt the Virgin's chaste flesh. Delving into the medical and scientific sources that informed the various exegetes, I explore late medieval understanding of the presence of chastity within cold ivory. I show that chastity was a physically verifiable presence that stood in for the Virgin's missing body on the feast celebrating her corporeal exit from the world. Accordingly, ivory played the role of a substitutional relic.

Chapter 5 exits the vast spaces of royal basilicas and enters the intimate surroundings of aristocratic household chapels. As suggested by their petite proportions, many ivory statuettes were fashioned for use in private devotional practice. Prosopographic analysis of the documentary record helps expose the social life of many vanished or unidentifiable Gothic ivories, and a close-knit spiritual community assembled around the erudite Michel de Neuvireuil, prior of the Dominican house at Lille, comes to the fore. Located at the interface of the intellectual world of the universities and the secular world of the court, he was perfectly positioned to act as a "translator of truth."[53] Furthermore, the Hours of the Virgin, a devotional text gaining popularity among laypeople in those years, establishes a foundation for understanding the meaning of

[53] Aden Kumler, *Translating Truth: Ambitious Images and Religious Knowledge in Late Medieval France and England* (New Haven, CT, 2011).

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devotional statuettes in spiritual exercises. The close kinship between the newly popular Hours and the liturgy of the Assumption provides a mechanism for adapting the hermeneutics of liturgical ivories to private devotional use.

The private devotional sphere allowed significant space for creativity, diversity, and play. Aristocratic users may have interacted with their ivory statuettes at arm's length following the guidance of their spiritual advisors, but there were other possibilities, inspired by literary models like Pygmalion. Both the *Roman de la Rose* and the vernacular *Ovide moralisé* provide contemporary alternatives to the pious exegetical models that have governed our understanding of ivory. As with commentaries on the Song of Songs, those titillating narratives do not overturn the paradigm of ivory as chastity so much as reinforce it via irreverent inversion. Such an admixture of sensual and sacred is advanced by the anonymous author of the *Ovide moralisé*, who likens Pygmalion's fondling caresses to God's generative love for humankind.

Bookending the documentary evidence advanced in the first chapter, Chapter 6 merges considerations of production, technique, and meaning. I demonstrate that an outstanding group of diverse Gothic ivories was made by a single large ivory-carving enterprise active in Paris between about 1280 and 1320. The artisans gathered around a single master created impressive large folding works (triptychs and polyptych tabernacles), small devotional diptychs, and free-standing statuettes. Adorned with scenes from the Infancy of Christ, the Passion, and the apocryphal tale of the Death of the Virgin, this prominent group of ivories lets us observe an evolving approach to creating both elite and mass-market objects for private devotion. Technically innovative in their use of a distinctive constructive method, these ivories deploy the skills of the *tabletier* to their full potential. The products of this Saint-Sulpice workshop show great technical as well as theological complexity, bringing the material understanding of ivory as Marian chastity to its fullest expression. Provenance research identified the workshop's eponymous object, the Saint-Sulpice triptych, in the sumptuous collection of Pope Boniface VIII, which encourages us to reflect on the avenues by which such an exceptional work might have arrived in the papal collections.

The book concludes with an epilogue. The understudied inventories of the Clarissan convent at Longchamp reveal a religious community closely allied to the Capetian royal house as a key consumer of devotional and liturgical ivories. The height of Gothic ivory carving covered the reigns of the Capetian kings Louis IX, his son Philippe le Hardi (the Bold), and his grandson Philippe le Bel (the Fair). The direct Capetian line ended with the ill-fated sons of Philippe le Bel, the so-called *rois maudits*, corresponding with a decline in royal and aristocratic interest in Gothic ivories in the mid-fourteenth century; at the same time, this allowed centres outside of Paris to flourish. French royal and aristocratic patrons apparently enjoyed ivories less in the central decades of the fourteenth century. Yet the famously art-loving sons of the Valois king Jean le Bon (the Good) had a taste for artworks redolent of the Capetian past, and they demonstrated through their lavish collecting habits a real appreciation for Gothic ivories – some already a century old, others new works that emulated mid-thirteenth-century formats. By 1400, however, the socioeconomic picture of western Europe was beginning to change radically, and the fifteenth century witnessed sweeping shifts in global power structures that brought the era of the Gothic ivory to an end.