

RARY OF MEDIEVAL CIVILIZATION
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Death in the Middle Ages

MORTALITY, JUDGMENT
AND REMEMBRANCE

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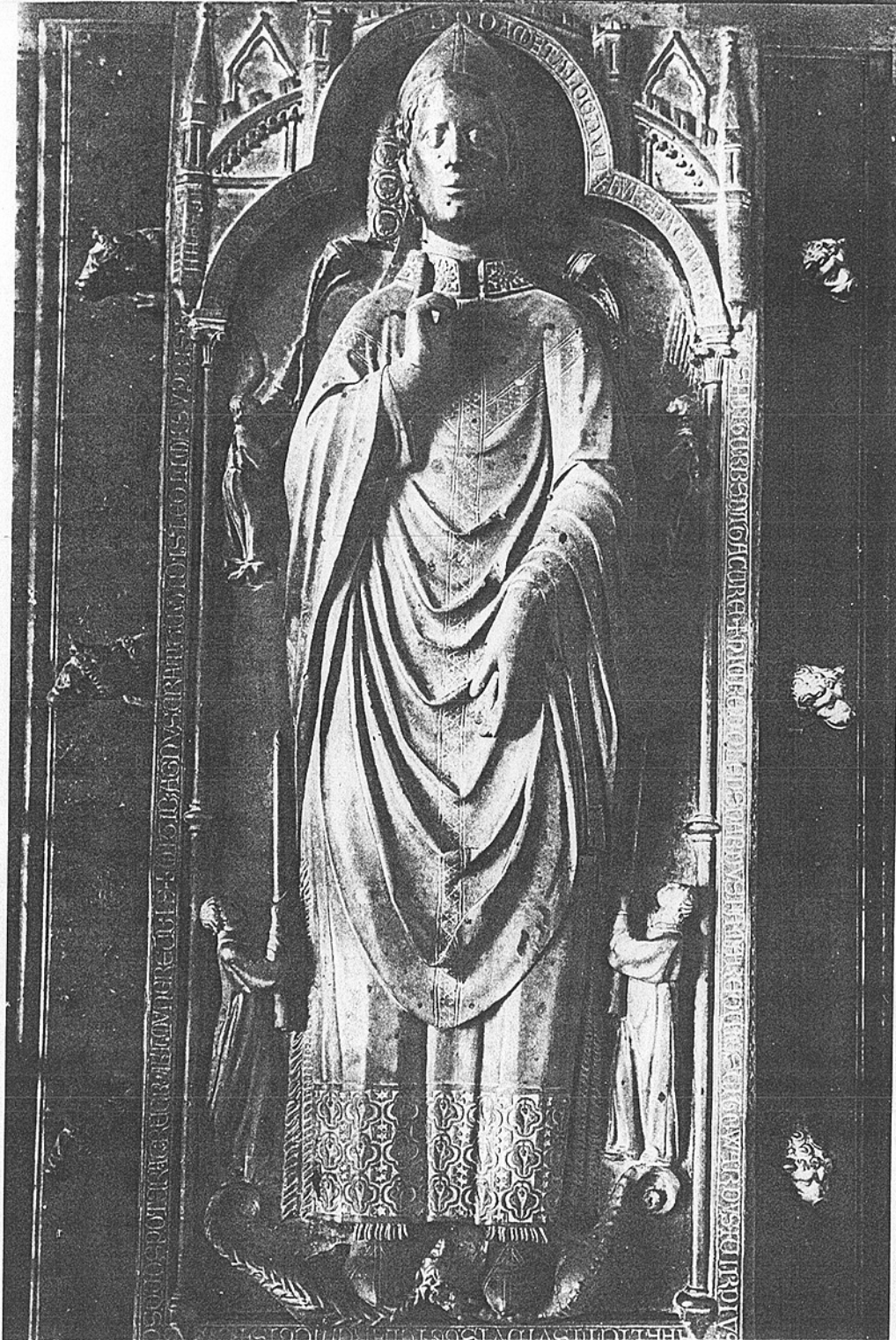
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Memorials to the De

Behind the religious dictates concerning salvation, memorials to the dead had other and more mundane purposes, and in particular the preservation of the deceased's repute and achievements. When in 1560 Elizabeth issued a royal proclamation against the defacing of monuments, it was to prevent the 'extinguishing of the honorable and good memory of sundry vertuous and noble persons deceased', and 'not to nourish any kinde of superstition'. This repeated the safeguarding clause in the act of 1550 against superstitious books and images, by which any 'image or picture set or graven upon any tomb in any church, chapel or churchyard only for a monument of any king, prince, nobleman or other dead person' was specifically excepted from destruction, thereby no doubt doing much to preserve our heritage of tomb sculpture. Here is the great breach in the uses of sepulchral exhortation. The 'phantasing vain opinions of purgatory and masses satisfactory to be done for them departed' had in England been condemned, and even prayers for the dead were viewed with suspicion. Tomb inscriptions no longer invoke orisons for the departed soul, but inscribe and praise mortal fame:

Here lies within death's cold embrace
A lovely darling youth
Replete with every social grace
Of Virtue and of Truth.

The glance is backward now, and does not search 'the undiscovered country'. Such commendations, the cult of fame and the precept of example, were of course fully accepted in the Middle Ages, even if subordinated to more speculative aims. The virtues of great men, William of Malmesbury had written in a dedicatory letter to his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, were not only praiseworthy in themselves, but commendable in that they drew the admiration of others.



Tombs had always set out something of the deeds and functions of the man. The earliest medieval effigies, mainly ecclesiastical, show with some care the vestments that distinguish the office of the deceased. The stone slab of a bishop in Exeter Cathedral, dating almost certainly from the last quarter of the twelfth century, is in very flat relief, set in a niche as though the transposition of a standing figure to a recumbent attitude. The bishop raises his right hand in blessing and holds his crozier with his left; he is shown, that is to say, in his most important living act; but under his feet is a dragon which he treads upon and transfixes with his crozier's point, and in the spandrels of the niche are two censuring angels. The memorial is both symbolic of good triumphing over evil and also, through the angels, expresses a hope of salvation. There may well be in these episcopal effigies the further intention of preserving for their church the blessing of a notable incumbent of the office. In deeper relief and with much more lifelike reality, the funeral slab of Bishop Evrard de Fouilloy (d. 1222) at Amiens shows the same gesture, the same trampled dragon and censuring angels as the Exeter plaque, but adds two small acolytes holding candles. It is cast in bronze, a rare survival of the memorials in metal. Many of them, such as the plaque of Geoffrey of Anjou, were enamelled. This must have been the most splendid form of twelfth-century commemoration, though most vulnerable to the rapacity of the iconoclasts, whose rage in France, unlike England, was particularly directed against royal and aristocratic representations. Evrard de Fouilloy is particularly praised in an inscription as the founder of the new cathedral. Obligations towards benefactors is another and important element in the cult of the dead, and one which opened the churches as places of burial to lay patrons, whereas earlier convention had given something of a monopoly in such sepulture to ecclesiastics.

In the cathedral at Mainz, a wonderful repository of tomb sculpture, Archbishop Siegfried III of Eppstein (d. 1249), a genial, complacent figure, crowns Heinrich of Raspe and William of Holland, neither of them ever securely seated on the Imperial throne. Though engaged in this activity and trampling upon a lion and dragon, the Archbishop still has a cushion behind his head and his staff lies on his body without any contact with the ground; the two emperors, much smaller figures, have consoles

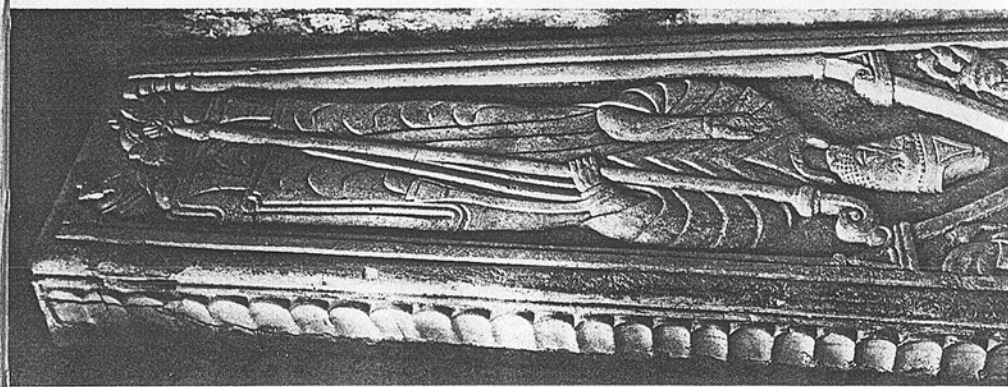
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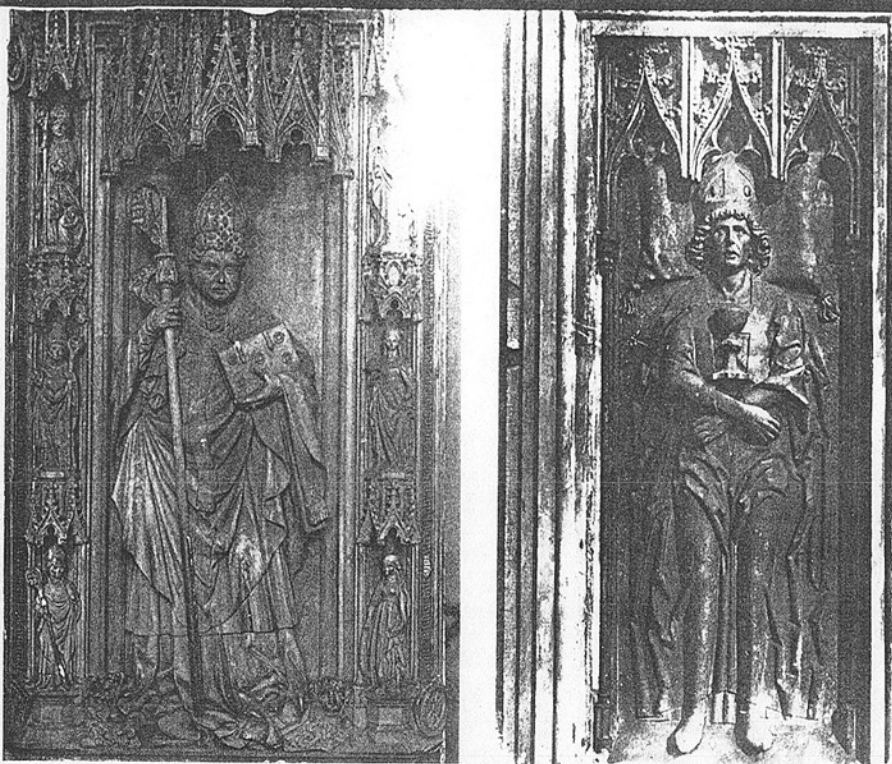
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57 The tomb of Siegfried III of Eppstein (died 1249), Archbishop of Mainz, ensured that the political power he wielded in life should not be forgotten after his death. With a somewhat awkward gesture he crowns two minor emperors who owed their thrones to his influence – Heinrich of Raspe and William of Holland. Beneath his feet, a lion and a dragon

58 Below: tomb of a Bishop of Exeter, perhaps Bartholomew (died 1184). He raises his right hand in blessing and with the other transfixes a dragon with his staff. Both tombs on this page display an uneasy compromise between the upright and the recumbent figure



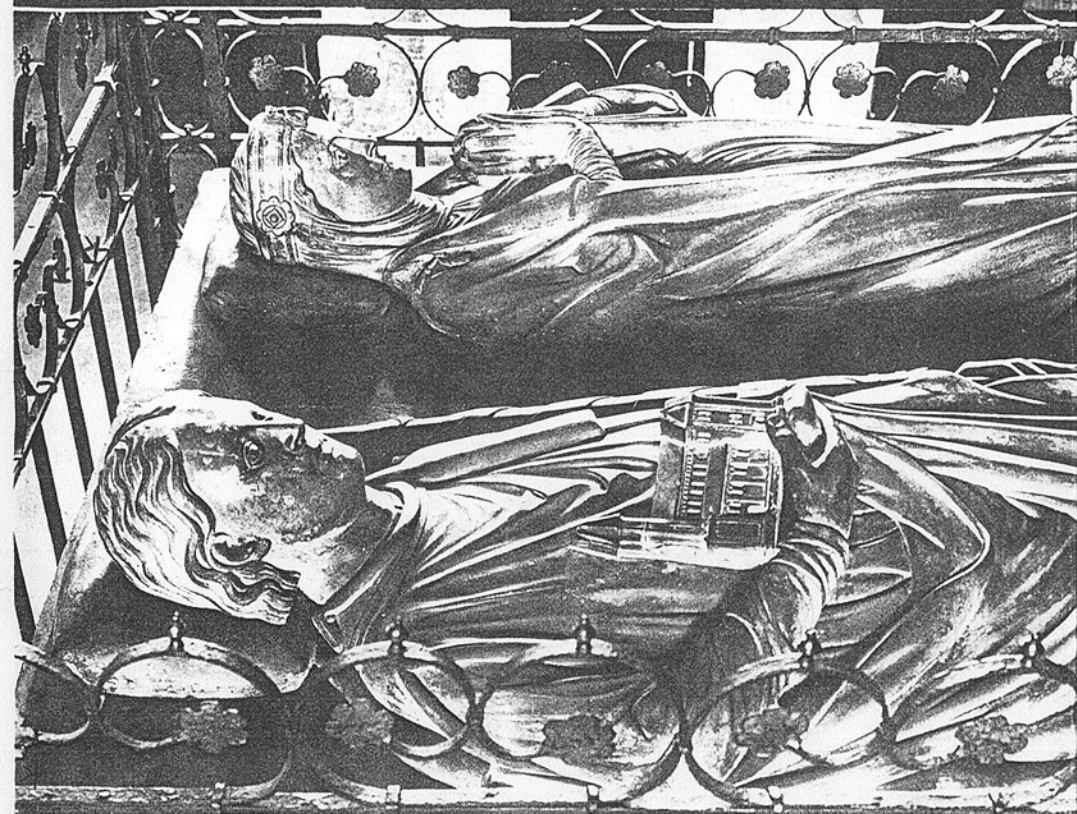


59, 60 Two fifteenth-century tombs at Mainz show alternative conventions – the standing and lying positions: John of Nassau (*left*) in a canopied niche and Bernhard of Breydenbach (*right*) who, though recumbent, has open eyes

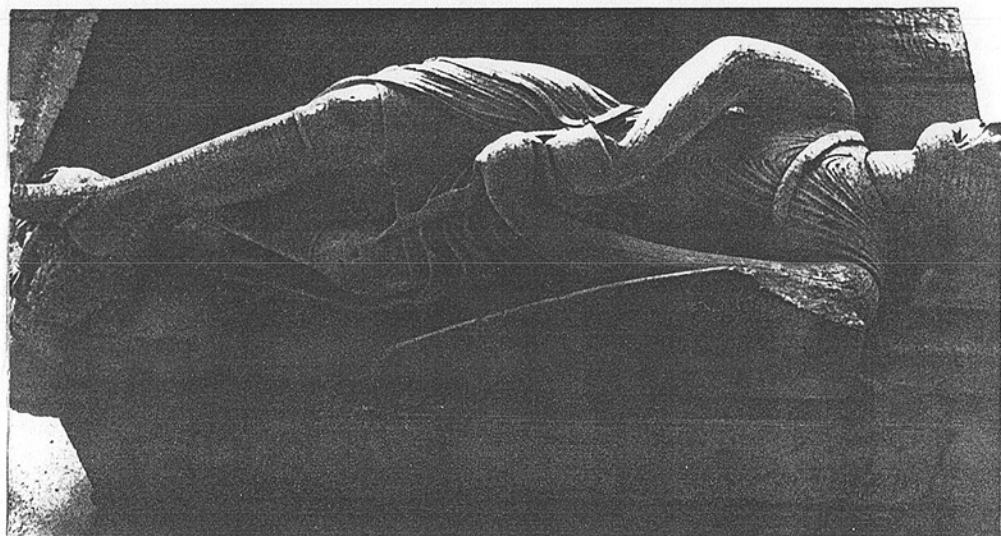
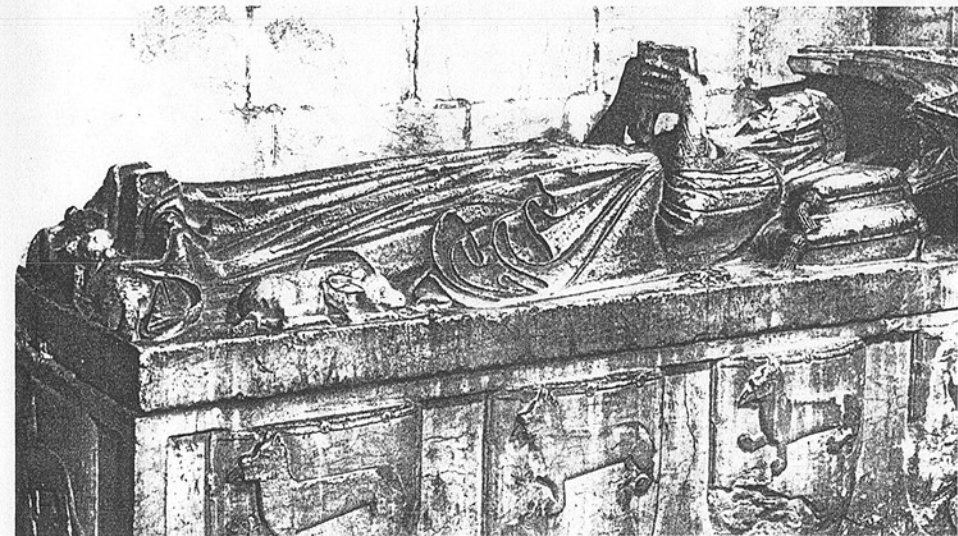


on which to stand. It is an uneasy compromise between recumbency and activity. By the middle of the fifteenth century Archbishop John of Nassau (d. 1439) stands firmly in a niche, and all reference to the prostration of death has gone. In the same cathedral, however, some sixty years later, Bernhard of Breydenbach, whose account of his travels to Jerusalem will always perpetuate his memory, lies with his head on a pillow, though framed in a niche, his alb falling in folds between his legs which are clearly shown beneath the thinness of the stuff, his hands crossed, a chalice upon his breast, realistic in every detail of his prone position, but even here the eyes are open. There was a strange reluctance in the North, as opposed to its full acceptance in Italy, to simulate the complete repose of death.

61 *Right*: William Longespée ('long sword') in Salisbury Cathedral (c. 1230–40) half turns his head, a move away from the strictly frontal pose



62, 63, 64 Above: Henry the Lion, Duke of Brunswick, next to his duchess, Matilda, holds a model of the Cathedral. Maria Vilalobos (below) in Lisbon Cathedral, reads a devotional book, while three small dogs gnaw bones at her feet. At Dorchester, Oxfordshire (below right), an unknown knight lies as if frozen in the act of drawing his sword



For the layman new motifs were needed. The effigy of William Longespée in Salisbury Cathedral (c. 1230–40), the work of the skilled carvers concentrated in the West Country for the façade of Wells Cathedral, holds his shield, on which the heraldic device, originally coloured, must have been highly decorative, over his left side; instead of the frontal glance of the blessing bishops his head is half-turned, giving a new rhythm to the design. It was a rhythm that was to be infinitely developed. By the end of the thirteenth century, the unknown knight at Dorchester, fiercely scowling, draws his sword from its sheath, while his limbs twist in agitation as though struggling to rise from the ground on which he lies. It is a marvellous design, curiously modern in its contrasts of solid and void; it is also a perpetuation of the active life, not an aspiration towards divine peace. There is much imagination in the search for suitable actions for these recumbent figures. At Fontevrault Eleanor of Aquitaine reads from an open book, or so late nineteenth-century restorers interpreted a damaged remnant that in photographs seems less certainly identifiable; and in the cathedral at Lisbon Maria Vilalobos holds a book where the *Ave Maria* is legibly inscribed, while round her feet three small dogs crunch the remains of a mangled chicken. At Brunswick, on a tomb made most probably about 1240, Henry the Lion holds a model of the cathedral in which he is buried. Here, in the disturbed crinkles of the drapery, the strongly marked features, the pressure of the head upon the cushions, there is a new realism, a psychological interpretation of character if not an attempt at actual likeness. Beside

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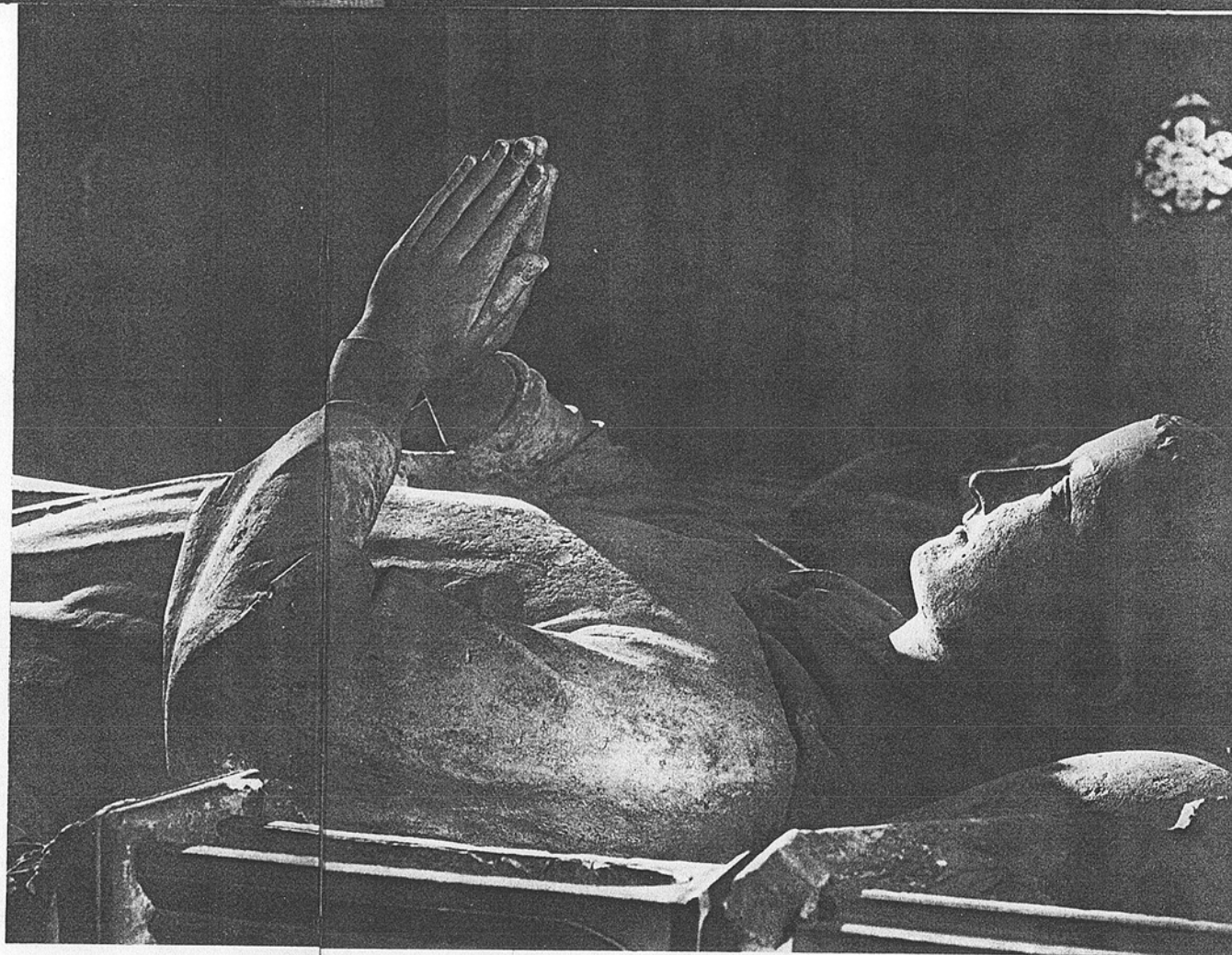
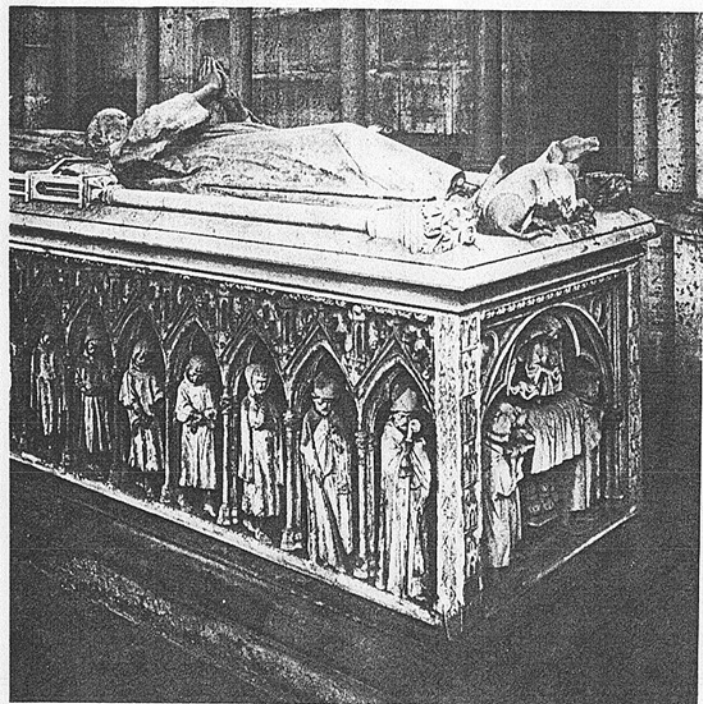
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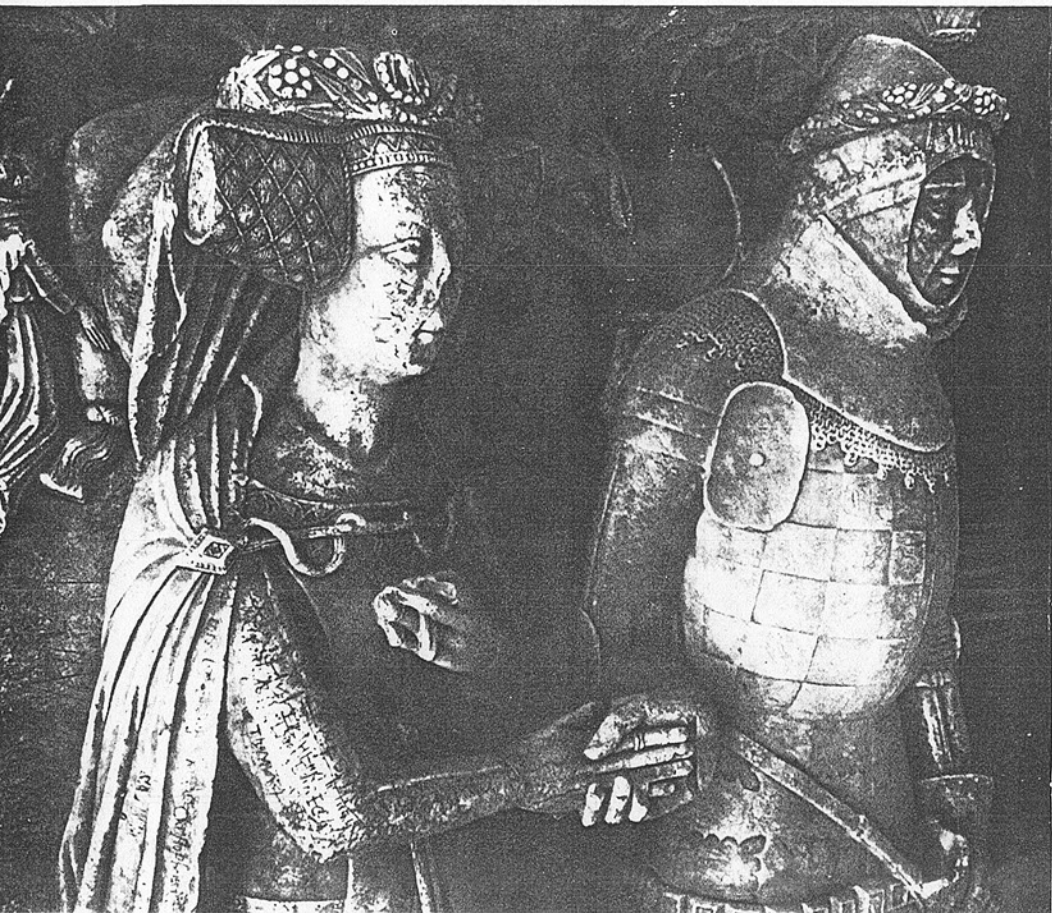
65, 66 Round the tomb of Louis de France (below) moves a cortège of mourners in niches, grieving for the lost heir of Louis IX. The effigy itself (right) is among the masterpieces of medieval art and is probably a realistic portrait



65, 66 him his wife Matilda folds her hands in prayer, a gesture that was gradually to supersede all others as that appropriate for effigies. Almost contemporaneously with the work at Brunswick, Louis IX of France showed on the tomb of his eldest son in the Cistercian abbey of Royaumont (now in Saint-Denis) the young man gazing upwards, one knee slightly raised as though alive, with his hands joined in prayer. At his feet, instead of a dragon, is a small dog possibly heraldic but a companionable beast. Around the sarcophagus is the funeral cortège, carrying the prince's bier, a cortège in which the sons of Henry III of England assisted. Here is perpetuated the

funeral pomp, the mourning for the lost heir, but above all it is the symbol of continuing prayer that is emphasized, the folded hands after the man himself has become inanimate, the permanent example stimulating the prayers of others for the welfare of his soul. A long chain of these praying figures lie on tombs throughout Christendom and survived the Reformation in many Northern countries, a severe and reticent contrast to the dramatic ecstasy and grandiose poses that prevailed with Baroque art. The Earl of Warwick's hands, not quite closed as his eyes gaze on the Virgin in glory, are as fine an interpretation of this motif.

67 *Below*: hand in hand, Sir Ralph Greene (died 1417) and his wife quietly wait for the Last Day. Angels hold the lady's pillow



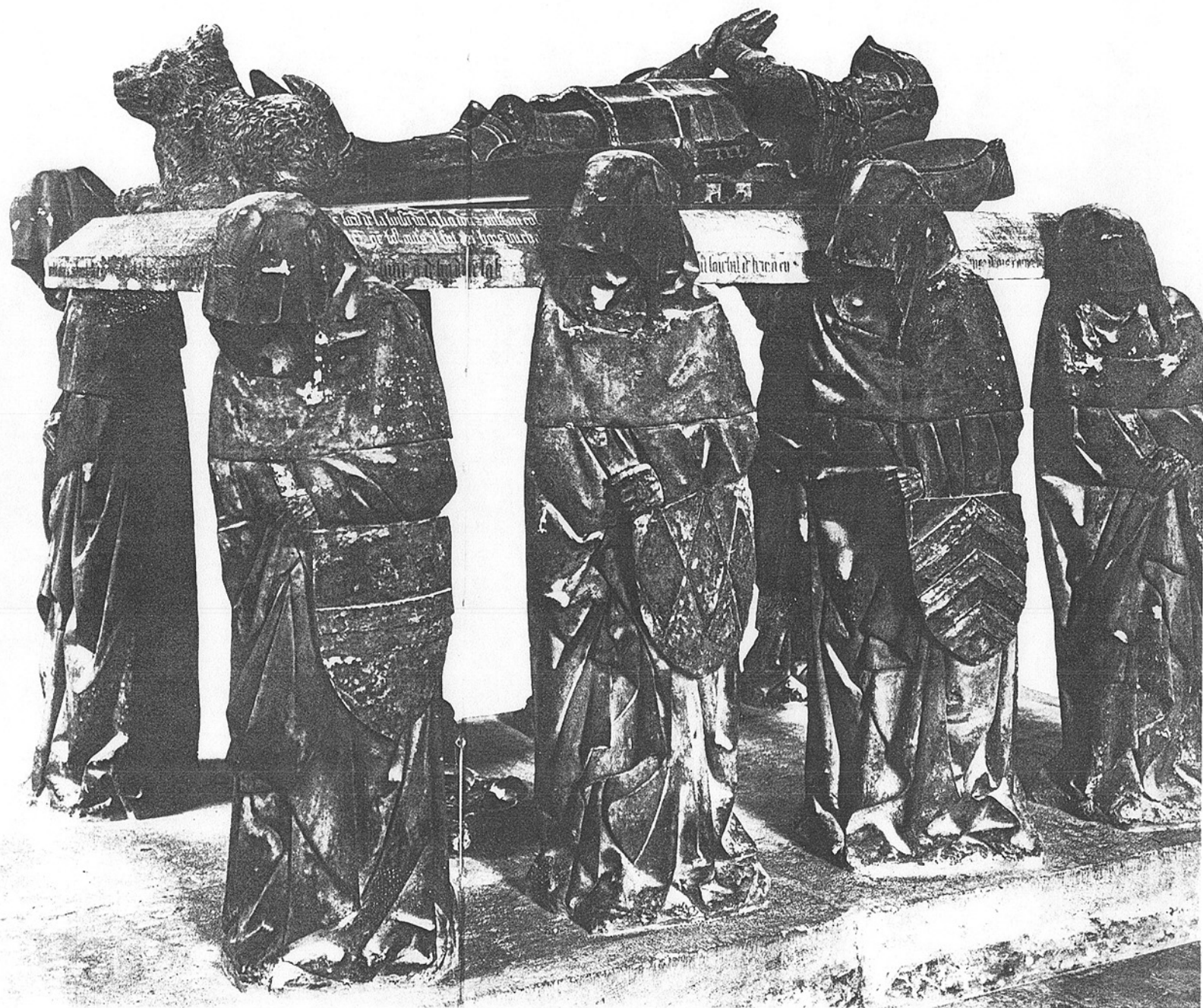
68 *Right*: a mourner, one of the daughters of the deceased, from the tomb of the comtesse de Joigny. Wearing a travelling dress, she gazes sadly down, one hand in the band of her cloak





69 *Above*: mourners from the tomb of Philippe le Hardi, Duke of Burgundy. The heavy drapery is typical of the school of Claus Sluter

70 *Right*: eight hooded figures, heads bent, faces hidden, carry the body of Philippe Pot, Grand Seneschal of Burgundy, to the grave. This over-life-size group is one of the most dramatic of all funerary monuments



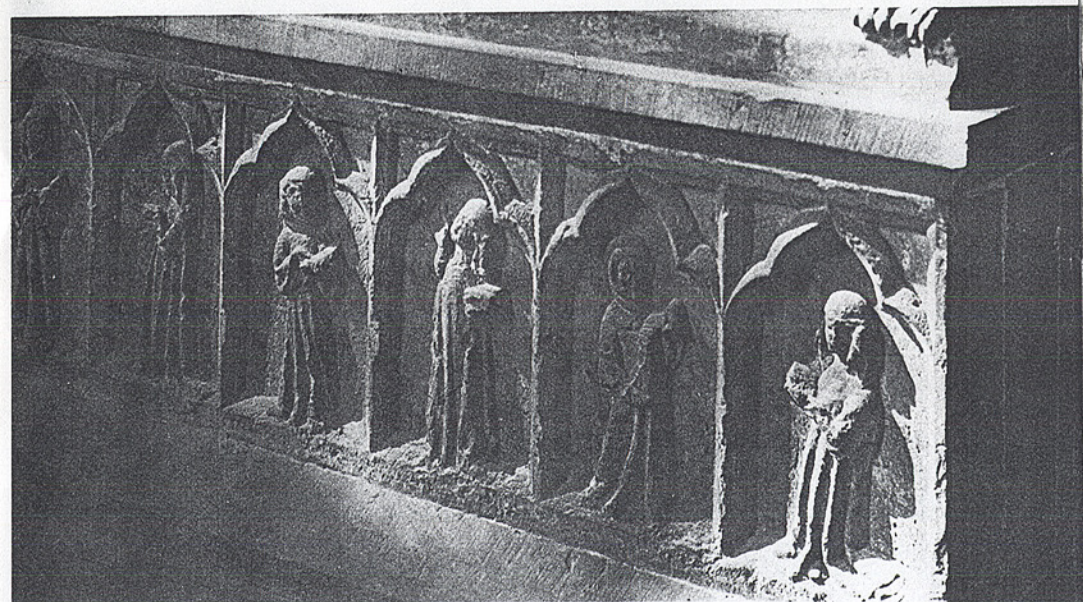
68 The mourners round the tomb of the young Prince Louis were likewise to have many successors. They introduce a human touch, the sense of personal loss, the family bond. The tomb of the comtesse de Joigny at Saint-Jean at Joigny, dating from the end of the thirteenth century, has in the arcades of the sarcophagus her four children, dressed in the fashions of the time. One of the daughters, as she gazes mournfully downwards, links one hand through the band of her cloak and gathers its folds in with the other. On one end of the tomb is a curious carving of a young man clinging to the branches of a tree while two dragons gnaw at the foot of its trunk. It is a scene from the legend, very popular at the time with no awareness of its Eastern Buddhist source, of Barlaam and Joasaph, and here it symbolizes the insecurity of life and the heedlessness with which its dangers are constantly disregarded. It is a new element of fantasy in these carved meditations on mortality. There were to be many variants on these personal touches. At Bodenham in Herefordshire a lady has a child sheltering in the folds of her dress. The tomb at Elford in Staffordshire of the boy, John Stanley, shows him holding the tennis-ball with which in 1470 he was accidentally killed. At Lowick, Northamptonshire, Ralph Greene (d. 1417) and his wife touchingly hold hands; the contract for the

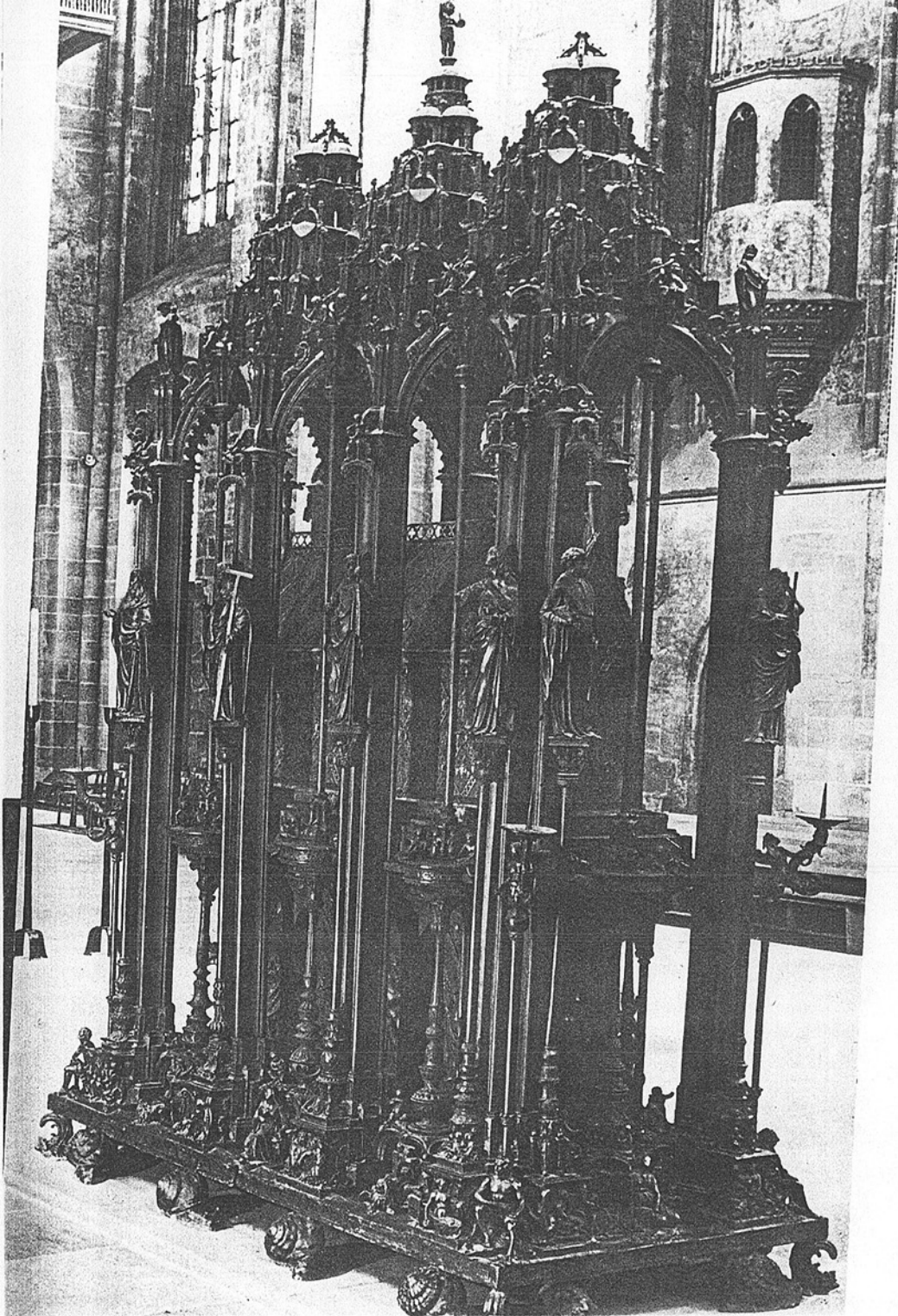
71 Instead of mourners, this knight's tomb at Howden, Yorkshire, is surrounded by minstrels

72 The display of secular pride, characteristic of late medieval tombs, reached a climax in the seventeenth century. The tomb of Count Karl Adam von Lamberg, with its coat of arms, trophy and flags, is also in Mainz Cathedral

tomb, dated two years before Ralph's death, exists and specifically orders that his handclasp should be shown. At Howden in East Yorkshire the niches round the sarcophagus of a recumbent knight are filled with minstrels. But these are relatively unusual details. The noble processions that surround the Warwick tomb and the great sepulchres of the dukes of Burgundy or the free-standing figures that support the bier of Phillippe Pot are mourners, relatives and retainers, not individually differentiated in their cloaks and hoods, but elements in a panoply of grief and departing pomp, testimonies of family and status that with all the accompanying heraldic display establish the lineage and prestige of the defunct, ensuring, as it was phrased in Queen Elizabeth's proclamation, that 'the true understanding of divers Families in this Realme (who have descended of the blood of the same persons deceased)' shall not be 'so darkened, as the true course of their inheritance may be hereafter interrupted'.

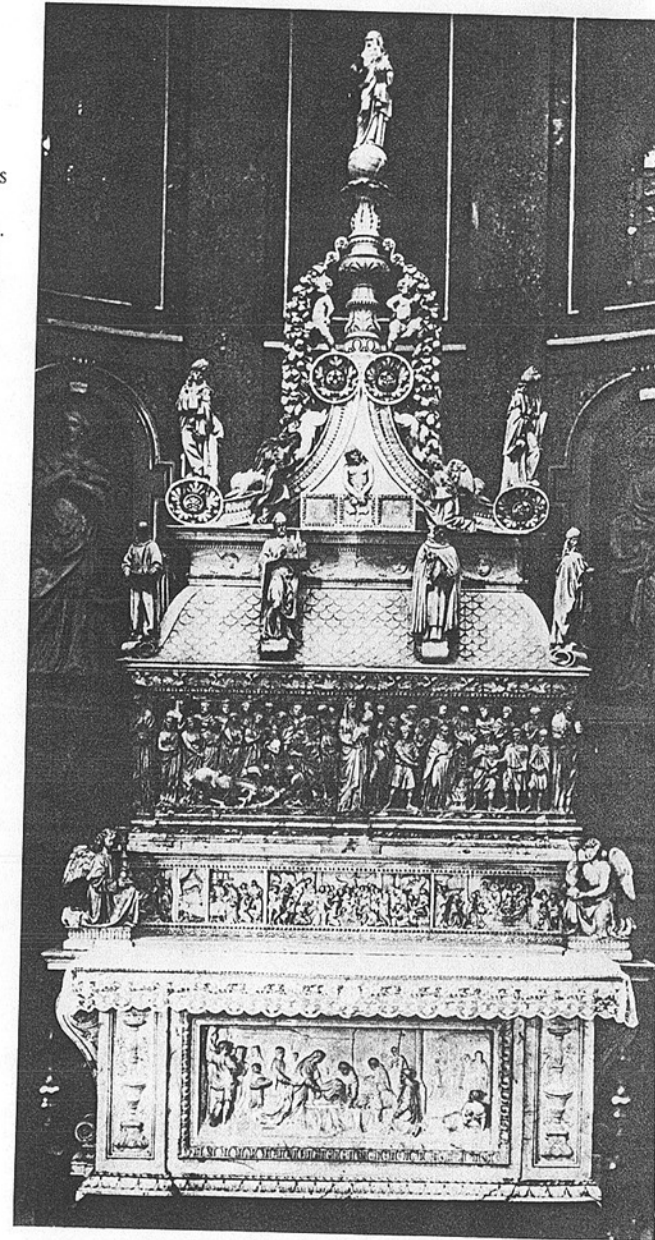
On the tomb of Count Karl Adam von Lamberg (d. 1689) in Mainz Cathedral, a skeleton raises the lid of the coffin, from which the Count, fully periwigged, emerges. Above, an angel, aided by a skeleton, supports the knight's coat of arms: below is a trophy of flags and arms. Secularism could go no further.

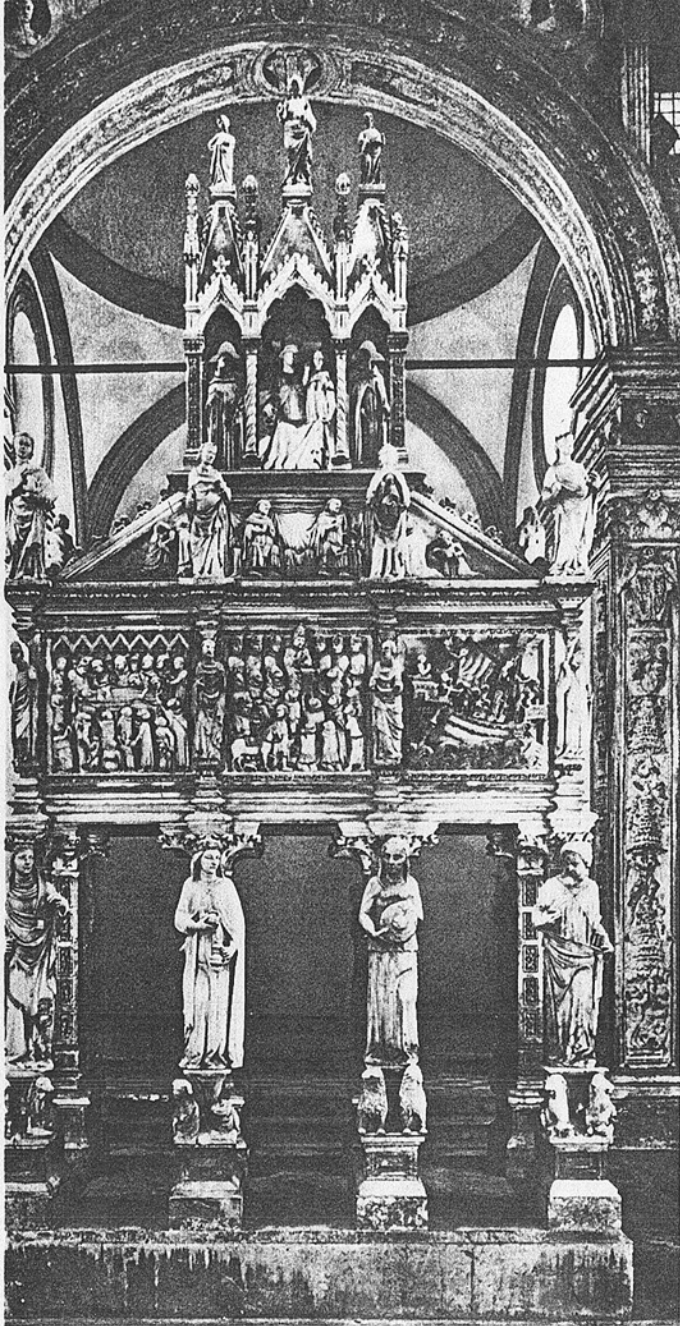




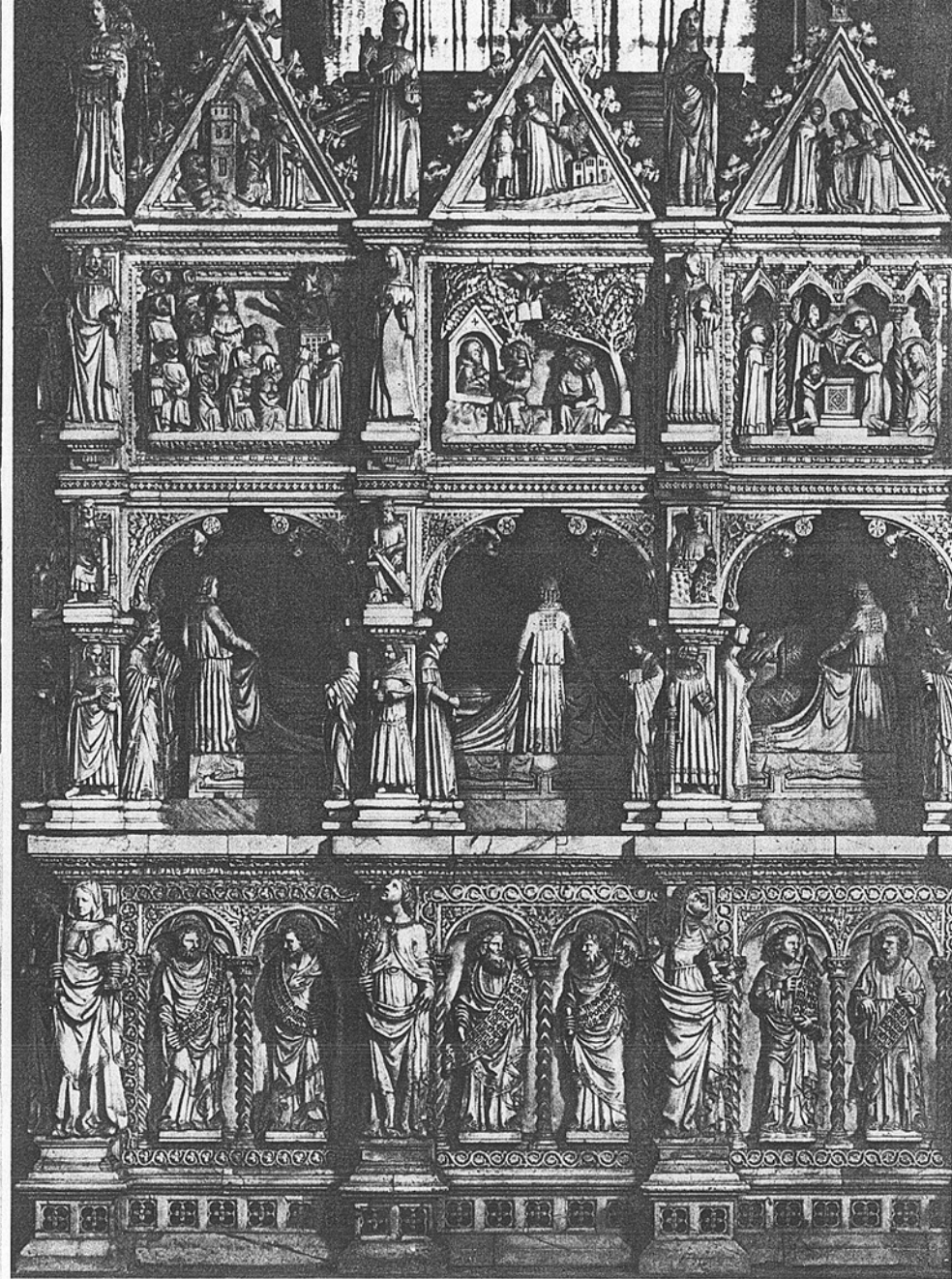
73 The most elaborate of all funerary art was reserved for the shrines of saints. *Left:* the bronze shrine of St Sebaldus 1508–19, by Peter Vischer and his sons. Thoroughly Gothic in overall design, its smaller subsidiary figures often show classical influence. It is carried on snails, symbol of the Resurrection

74 *Right:* the Arca of St Dominic, in S. Domenico, Bologna, the work of several sculptors over a period of several centuries, has been much altered. Originally it resembled the shrine illustrated overleaf. Only the sarcophagus contains work by the school of Nicola Pisano. The Saint's body was placed in it in 1267





75 *Left*: the shrine of St Peter Martyr, in the Church of S. Eustorgio, Milan. Like that of St Dominic on the previous page, it contains vivid relief scenes of the Saint's life. The caryatids represent the virtues; the figures between the panels, Church Fathers



76 *Right*: the Arca of St Augustine, in Pavia Cathedral, 1350–62. Inside the arcade angelic figures hold the Saint's shroud. Above are again scenes from his life. In the niches at the bottom stand the Apostles

Panoply of the Tomb

The finest craftsmanship and the most lavish expenditure were reserved for the shrines that contained relics of the saints. Their costly materials rendered them immediate objects of pillage in the English Reformation and the French Revolution. The 'degarnishing' of the shrine of St Thomas at Canterbury provided several cartloads of jewels and precious metals for Henry VIII. Germany can boast Peter Vischer's superb shrine of St Sebaldus at Nuremberg, completed between 1508 and 1519, but it is in Italy that the most elaborate shrines have survived, and of these the Arca of St Dominic at Bologna set an influential example. The work of Nicola Pisano and his school, it was composed of a sarcophagus supported on caryatids. The body of the Saint was transferred to it in 1267, by which date the sarcophagus must have been completed. In the relationship between the reliefs, corner and central figures, and supporting caryatids it is much influenced by the great Italian pulpits, but in the shrine a pinnacled canopy was probably always intended, though delays in carrying it out were such that the final figures came from the hand of the young Michelangelo, and Renaissance garlands take the place of Gothic ornament. Between 1335 and 1339 Giovanni di Balduccio created the shrine of St Peter Martyr in the church of S. Eustorgio in Milan, where the sarcophagus has a sloping roof surmounted by a three-gabled tabernacle with the Virgin and Child between St Dominic and St Peter Martyr; the commission for the work specifies that it should be 'similar in every respect to that of our father St Dominic'. More elaborate, including a full-scale recumbent effigy, ninety-five statuettes and fifty reliefs, is the Arca of St Augustine at Pavia, made by Lombard carvers probably between 1350 and 1362. These richly carved, free-standing monuments were not without their effect on secular tombs. The tomb of Bernabò Visconti (d. 1385) is composed of a sarcophagus supported on pillars and surmounted by a large equestrian statue by Bonino da Campione, carved from one great block of marble and completed during Bernabò's lifetime. Bonino also was responsible for the tomb of Cansignorio della Scala at Verona with its double tier of pinnacled niches, once more topped by an equestrian figure. The earliest, and certainly the most genial, of these mounted warriors was Cangrande della Scala, whose tomb

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77 The tomb of Bernabò Visconti of Milan (died 1385) represents a new and unusual type, a sarcophagus surmounted by an equestrian statue

