

Gili Shalom

Triple Martyrdom at Notre Dame de Mouzon

The tympanum of the Abbey Church of Notre Dame de Mouzon offers an intriguing case study in its deviation from traditional iconography of both the martyrdom scene and the combination of subjects. The martyrdoms of no less than three saints adorn the first register and present a variety of executions and a gallery of weapons used on the saints' bodies. Moreover, in contrast to other representations, the martyrs in Mouzon are depicted physically responding to the pain – whether that directly inflicted on their own bodies, or that seen being inflicted on others. As such they would have aroused a somatic response in the beholders. Finally, as the tympanum is also unique in its depiction of the first female martyr in French Gothic art, it is in the context of the female recluses who are recorded as having lived in Mouzon, that the sculptural program should be understood. The juxtaposition of the martyrdom of Ste. Suzanne with the Death of the Virgin, was thus intended to refer to the inclusion ceremony of the recluses, who awaited in their cell (that was also described as a womb and a tomb) their future resurrection.