What was the degree of separation between the spectators and the performers of French mystery plays in the late medieval era? Theater theorists since the 1970s have described these performances in terms that emphasized their inclusiveness: as communal events, as acts of contrition or rejuvenation, as remembrance or commemoration. From this perspective, Elie Konigson argued, for instance, that a medieval play was the literal expression of a collectivity. More recently, Alan E. Knight reminded us that plays that referenced “reputedly historical events” reinforced culturally-relevant rituals. Reception theorists since the 1980s have underlined instead the plays’ social focus within a highly stratified society. By this account, urban leaders of the period sponsored the performances in order to exhibit their own authority in the everyday lives of spectators, thereby inserting themselves into the space between aristocratic rights and municipal allegiance. Thus, Robert L.A. Clark’s examination of confraternity drama shows how the plays “served as vehicles for the self-definition and social promotion of the groups in question.”


social authority, of course, are connected. While maintaining that “religion was the cement binding together medieval French society,” Konigson acknowledged that particular groups used their faith to express themselves differently. Religions, in Margaret Miles’ analysis, “seek to be inclusive by using language in comprehensible systems” precisely because these systems are reassuring. This does not preclude groups from exploiting such systems in order to reach particular ends. A municipal performance such as the Mystère de saint Martin in Seurre (Burgundy) in 1496 was not only sponsored by the city’s bourgeois and church leaders who financed the play’s composition, but these same groups led the monstre through the city streets and played most of the parts in the performance. Their stated intention, public edification for the common good, must have also had domestic and particular implications for performers and spectators alike.

As social contracts made by and for a community, medieval mystery plays expressed both the tensions and the desired inclusiveness of populations that lived and functioned in a complex society. While we will never reproduce any single performance event from the distant past because the spoken words no longer live on the page, because myriad gestures and grimaces lasted but a moment long lost, and because we cannot rewind the clock historically in order to place ourselves on the wooden benches of a theatrical space that has been transformed by modern urgings, the surviving plays – through their stated intentions and their particular style – still have much to tell us. Furthermore, because the texts that survive, whether as working

---

4 Konigson, p. 24.

copies or commemorative souvenirs, are performance remnants, French mystery plays record not only their sponsors’ intended message and the particularities of the sponsoring group, but to varying degrees the meneur du jeu’s spatial representation of the performance. The plays’ spoken prologues or epilogues might inform the spectators of the performance’s religious or social intentions but they can also itemize the décors. Likewise, the players’ speeches and the staging directions that accompany them reveal some aspects of how the performance was to be represented visually and spatially, in direct support of the narrative. It is into the dynamic space between collective intention, particular agency, and textual evidence that the present study proposes to venture. Three hagiographic mystery plays from late medieval France will serve as the study-set for this analysis. The first, the **Mystère de saint Laurent**, survives in an early sixteenth-century edition that reproduces one very long performance session. The **Jeu de saint Estienne pape et martire** is a sixteenth-century manuscript copy of a three-session play that was performed in Saint-Mihiel (Belgium) in 1548. Finally, the **Mystère de saint Christofle** survives in two early editions that were published in Paris in the sixteenth century. It is a

---

6 The meneur du jeu supervised performance events that required coordination between staging décors, groups of performers, musical interludes and simulations.


8 The **Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire** is in the Bibliothèque nationale de France manuscript collection: Rothschild I-7-22A (Réserve). It has not been edited in modern times.

9 The **Mystère de saint Christofle** in question is not the play written by Antoine Chevalet and published in Grenoble in 1527. Instead, it is the earlier of two Parisian editions that are also in the Bibliothèque nationale de France rare
shorter play that would have been performed in a single session and that may have been
associated with the parish church of Saint Christopher in Paris. None of these plays has been
the object of extensive research, except for modern editions of the two edited plays and a
handful of references in articles dating from the past three decades. Information about all
three productions is nonetheless accessible either directly from the texts or from secondary
references to performance. Taken individually and collectively, these plays distinguish
themselves as three unique productions, delineating space and designating people differently.

Each of the surviving early editions post-dates the performance of a play by a number of years.
In the case of the Mystère de saint Laurent, Graham Runnalls argued that the sixteenth-century
edition was based on an original; that is, on a manuscript copy of the play that would have
been used during a performance. The performance venue and date of that performance,
however, remain unknown. Because the edition itself dates from 1530 to 1534 and is a reprint
of a version published a generation earlier, the performance itself would have probably taken

---


et conventions de l’ancien théâtre; Actes de la troisième rencontre sur l’ancien théâtre européen, ed. Jean-Pierre

place at the end of the fifteenth century or in the early years of the sixteenth century. The *Jeu de saint Estienne pape et martire* is also based on an original that has been recopied with all of the author’s staging notes, the appended prologues, and the authorial signatures. It constitutes a souvenir copy of a singular performance in the community of Saint-Mihiel in 1548. As for the *Mystère de saint Christofle*, Runnalls determined that this sixteenth-century edition was a revision of a play that dated from the second half of the fourteenth century. Unlike the *Saint Laurent* source, which was clearly rich in staging detail, the manuscript used for the *Saint Christofle* edition was most likely a copy passed down from generation to generation for any number of performances, each time adapting the staging to changing circumstances, much like the Parisian *Mystère de saint Crépin et saint Crépinien*. The two surviving copies are related, but different, as Runnalls has demonstrated. Clearly then, these three mystery plays are the remnants of three distinct traditions: a performance text that was marketed as a print volume; a traditional text that was modernized before being printed in two versions; and a performance souvenir recorded for posterity rather than for profit.

---

13 Elisabeth Lalou ("Les cordonniers metteurs en scène des mystères de saint Crépin et saint Crépinien,” *Bibliothèque de l'école des Chartes* 143 (1985), p. 101) has shown that the episodic *Mystère de saint Crépin et saint Crépinien* was performed by a shoemakers’ confraternity annually in the mid-fifteenth century.


16 Graham A. Runnalls ("Le théâtre à Paris et dans les Provinces à la fin du Moyen Age," *Moyen âge* 82 (1976), p. 525) describes the manuscript copy of the Parisian *Mystère de saint Crépin et saint Crépinien* as having been composed in the mid-fifteenth century then recopied and updated for a subsequent performance.
In addition to issuing from distinct traditions, these three plays are organized internally in different ways. There are several fundamental features which are common to French mystery plays and which illustrate degrees of distinctiveness among various productions. Three of those features will be used in this comparative analysis: the prologues and epilogues that generally accompanied a performance but did not necessarily accompany the surviving copy; marginal staging notations that served to choreograph the performance; and embedded cues about staging that were spoken instead by the performers themselves. Because the Saint Estienne manuscript copy is a commemorative souvenir of a singular event, it appears to be a nearly-complete textual record, although, unlike two more celebrated productions, the Seurre performance mentioned earlier and the Trois Doms performance in Mons in 1509, it does not include a list of roles and performers. However, each of the three sessions begins and ends with a sermon-like speech that is read aloud by the meneur du jeu. Directed to read “comme preco” (like a preacher), the meneur du jeu engages the spectators by outlining what they will see, repeating the importance of this reenactment, and invoking God’s largesse:

Affin qu’ilz puissent exemple retenir

Pour en la gloire lassus pervenir

De paradis en joie perpetuelle.

(So that they remember this illustration

17 Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire, BnF Roth. I-22 –A, fol. 84r. These short speeches end with either “Finis” or “Amen.” NB: I am reproducing the text as it appears in the manuscript; that is, without modern diacritical marks or punctuation.)
And thereby earn the glory

Of perpetual joy in heaven.)$^{18}$

Very little in these extra-narrative readings, however, speaks to the players or the staging space. At the onset of the play, the *meneur du jeu* asks spectators to take their seats, “chascun selon sa qualité,” (each according to his rank).$^{19}$ In another instance, he addresses them as “seigneurs et dames” (ladies and gentlemen), confirming that the performance was attended by both sexes. Aside from these few details, however, the prologues and epilogues in the *Saint Estienne* text fulfill instead the traditional role of reminding those present of the moral lesson to be learned from the theatrical demonstration at hand.

The staging information to be gleaned from the *Saint Laurent* text better contextualizes the more traditional approach taken by Nicolas Loupvent. First, a single session nearly 9,000 lines long constitutes the surviving text of the *Saint Laurent* play. A list of the fifty-six roles to be played precedes an incipit announcing the prologue. In this case, the *prologueur*, who is not identified, invokes the Virgin Mary then reminds the spectators of the illustrations they are about to see. He does so without providing much detail because, he says, “le livre est grant” (the narrative is extensive).$^{20}$ Instead, the *prologueur* points out, in 100 lines, the many staging

---

$^{18}$ *Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire*, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 172v.


décors that the spectators see around them. The information provided there is one of the most complete descriptions of medieval staging to have survived and, as Runnalls observed, is of exceptional value for theater historians.\textsuperscript{21} Having examined the prologue’s description in an earlier study, I concluded that it progresses from the raised Paradise décor, where God and his angels are seated, to each of four scaffolds in the order in which the play’s action begins, and from noble palaces on the higher level of each scaffold to more humble lieu on the lower or ground level, before finally pointing out Hell and its devils.\textsuperscript{22} For the present purpose, the fact that the prologue visually scans eleven separate lieu, identifying the characters who occupy them as well as their relationship to the narrative and to each other, is of singular importance. Four emperors or kings occupy the upper level of each of four scaffolds, surrounded by their military leaders and families. In front of each sovereign a messenger sits at a place where he might descend more quickly to the parc (ground-level staging space) on his way to another scaffold. To that end, the prologueur points out Passevent (Go-Ahead), the emperor’s messenger, as the performer who will make the first move once the play begins.\textsuperscript{23} Below each of the sovereigns, on the lower level of each scaffold, are four other groupings: a number of henchmen, Hippolyte the prison warden, Sixtus of Rome with his entourage, as well as the good

\textsuperscript{21} Runnalls, “Langage de la parole,” p. 123.

\textsuperscript{22} Vicki L. Hamblin, “Striking a Pose: Performance Cues in Four French Hagiographic Mystery Plays,” \textit{Comparative Drama} 44.2 (Summer 2010), p. 147.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Mystère de saint Laurent}, ed. W. Söderhjelm and A. Wallenskold p. 124. The prologue states: "La est Passevent, leur herault, / Qui tantost aura faict ung sault" (There you see Go-Ahead, who will soon have made a move).
widow’s home where three beggars lie about on the ground. Below the Hell tower there is a silversmith. Opposite the Hell tower is a second tower inhabited by divine beings.

It appears from this description that the prologueur speaks to the spectators, who must be located among or between the four scaffolds, from the parc itself, turning as he points out the various lieux and their functions in the play while setting the stage for the multiple actions that will crisscross the spot on which he stands. A number of observations can be made from the visual image conjured up by this description of Saint Laurent’s theater space. First, Paradise is contrasted with Hell both within the landscape and within the inventory of lieux. Next, the authority and superiority of aristocratic lords, behind the fiction of the early Christian era, are intact in this visualization. Directly below the lords, city dwellers, Church leaders, prison guards and henchmen are on equal ground, quite literally. Finally, beggars occupy that undefined space through which messengers and armies will pass as the play’s narrative unfolds. In other words, the medieval social paradigm is recreated by the visual representation of the Saint Laurent’s staging scheme.

Unlike Saint Estienne, then, the Saint Laurent prologue is recited not as a sermon, but as an introduction to the play’s many moving parts. And, unlike Saint Estienne, Saint Laurent’s prologue is preceded by a list of roles which appear more or less in the order in which they are pointed out orally by the latter’s prologueur.\textsuperscript{24} The case of the Saint Christofle edition is

\textsuperscript{24} The only exception is that the rulers on the second scaffold are presented in the list of roles before those who are on the third scaffold, while the action – and the prologue – list the occupants of the third scaffold before those in the second.
different again, in that while it does include a list of roles in the order in which they speak in the text, it includes no prologue at all. This characteristic is typical of sixteenth-century editions for which performance-related details were generally irrelevant, but it may also be an indication that the *Saint Christofle* text that was used for the edition constituted a template for performance rather than a souvenir text from a singular production. In this, it is unlike the performance-conscious edition of *Saint Laurent*. This detail also brings us to the second organizing feature of mystery plays: the presence of marginal stage directions, or didascalias, in the surviving copies.

In the introduction to his modern edition of the *Mystère de saint Christofle*, Runnalls compared the play to the fourteenth-century *Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages* because it shares a number of internal features with these short and fairly restrained productions.\(^\text{25}\) One of those features is the play’s relative paucity of stage directions, which describe but a few actions, such as angels descending, a priest baptizing Reprobus, or Christians singing, in addition to identifying two of the production’s *lieux*: the hermit’s house and the pastor’s house. Again, the lack of performance-specific details is not unusual in an edited version of a medieval play. Fortunately, Runnalls uncovered performance contracts from 1539-1540 that appear to correspond to the dimensions and the narrative of the two Parisian editions of the *Saint Christofle* play.\(^\text{26}\) From those contracts it is clear that a confraternity of Parisian masons staged a *Saint Christofle* play and hired minstrels to provide the music. More importantly, for our purposes, the contracts describe with some precision the intended performance space for that


\(^{26}\) Runnalls, ed., *Le Mystère de saint Christofle*, p. xxvii.
production. Unlike the *Saint Laurent* production which, like Jean Fouquet’s miniature depicting a Saint Apollinia reenactment, took place among scaffolds on two levels, and in which spectators were seated or stood among the performers, the *Saint Christofle* performance required two separate raised platforms which faced each other. The first platform, some twenty meters long and five meters wide, was reserved for the performers and their mansions. I have described this performance model elsewhere as lateral staging because the actors move quite simply among separate décors that are presented laterally across a single platform.\(^{27}\) The contracts mention the following staging lieu: a decorated backdrop six feet high that hung the length of the platform, a 12-foot tall Paradise tower covered in wooden planks with a door at the base, two eighteen-foot long planks that formed a gallows for the torture scenes, and a masonry Hell mouth.\(^{28}\) Since the Paradise tower was to be placed at one end of the platform, we can assume that Hell was at the opposite end, as tradition would have dictated. The slightly raised planks that formed the gallows may have been placed center stage, especially given that it dominates the most dramatic parts of the reenactment. Such a placement would also locate it close enough to the Paradise tower to allow angels to make the trip back and forth as they comfort saints and converts in their torment. In addition, though they are not cited in the contracts, the play’s action calls for a number of other décors. A king’s castle, with a raised throne and benches for at least 10 soldiers and counselors, could have been placed behind the gallows against the painted backdrop. To one side of the castle, most likely closer to the Hell

\(^{27}\) Hamblin, *Saints at Play*, p. 169.

\(^{28}\) Runnalls, ed., *Le Mystère de sain Christofle*, p. xxvii.
tower, a door opened into a prison into which spectators could see. In addition, the staging
would have included a city with several inhabitants, an open field, a small chapel with an altar,
a river, and a hermit’s abode. Any of these décors could have been indicated on the backdrop
or constituted using simple props on either side of the gallows. The road or path referred to
several times early in the play could easily be represented by the open space between the
décors and the front of platform itself.

A second platform, thirty meters long, faced the staging platform and was provided for the
spectators. It was closed on three sides by curtains in order to allow the spectators to focus on
the performance taking place in front of them. In addition, a wooden railing at the entrance to
the staging space limited access from outside. This frontal model implies a strict separation
between the performers and the spectators and, unlike the Saint Laurent prologue’s
visualization, no stratification of either group except for those in Paradise. That is, because the
Saint Christofle was most likely performed by confraternity members for the membership and
its families, the performance was necessarily regulated by the particular intentions of that
group. So, too, was its spatial organization. Saint Laurent, on the other hand, may have been
performed for a mixed audience as a complexly-orchestrated production. In addition to its long,
descriptive prologue, the Saint Laurent play contains 257 stage directions. On average, a
didascalia occurs then every thirty-three lines of spoken text, directing the action as it takes
place. A relatively high number of these directions helps define the performance arena spatially,

29 This barrier is referenced more vividly as a “garde-fol” in the contract. See Graham A. Runnalls, ed., Le Mystère
seconding our findings from the prologue. For example, numerous stage directions refer to performers moving to (in front of or to the foot of) the “estaige” (raised stage) occupied by sovereigns, where they either sit or wait. In other instances, the sovereigns themselves move down to join their troops or, alternatively, other performers climb up to where the sovereign is seated. In one instance, a fake corpse is taken from under the horizontal supports of the scaffold where the prison is located in order to simulate a death.\textsuperscript{30} Accordingly, unlike the lateral staging of the \textit{Saint Christofle} production, \textit{Saint Laurent’s} performers are moving up and down as well as among four two-level scaffolds in the commission of their duty. In the \textit{Saint Christofle} text, on the other hand, two angels descend from their wooden tower to the stage platform while all other action takes place laterally. Even Dagus apparently remains seated on his throne throughout the play. All other action occurs as a set of performers moves across the staging platform among décors. The \textit{Saint Laurent}, on the other hand, required a multitude of stage directions in order to coordinate a series of parallel actions that crossed and climbed four scaffolds multiple times over a period of eight to twelve hours.

Like \textit{Saint Laurent}, the \textit{Saint Estienne} text contains many stage directions that are interspersed regularly among the performers’ speeches. In fact, with 359 stage directions in a three-session production, the \textit{Saint Estienne} text comes very close to reflecting what we must assume was \textit{fatiste} Nicolas Loupvent’s vision for the performance.\textsuperscript{31} While numerous marginal directions

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Mystère de saint Laurent}, ed. Söderhjelm and Wallensköld, p. 273.

\textsuperscript{31} The \textit{Jeu et mister de Monseigneur saïnt Estienne pape et martir} contains approximately 8,800 spoken lines, broken into three daily sessions. The stage directions included in the commemorative copy include notes by the
often concern the movement, gestures, costumes, and props required, many others directly address the performance space itself. Like *Saint Laurent*, the *Saint Estienne* text uses the plural form “escharfaulx” to define the theatrical configuration of this performance, but it is not clear that these were multi-level scaffolds intended for both the performers and the spectators.\(^{32}\) In a previous analysis I postulated that these constructions may instead have been separate, raised platforms. In one didascalia, for instance, the cardinals and Christians come out of their chapel to “faire ung tour sur les escharfaulx,” (walk about on the platforms). The use of the preposition ‘on’ would be misplaced with regard to the kind of multi-level scaffolds that we know were used for some performance venues in the medieval era. In a similar usage, Lucifer throws the keys to Hell “sur les escharfaulx” (onto the platforms) from his seat above.\(^{33}\) When *Saint Estienne*’s stage directions announce that Nemesius comes “jusque au moytant des eschaufalx du jeu” (right to the middle of the staging platforms), he is presumably moving onto an open space between or in front of the theatrical space, however it may have been construed.\(^{34}\) Is this the same general location referred to in a staging notation that directs the messenger to leave the country bumpkin “emmy le parcque” (in the middle of the staging

---

compiler (*fatiste*) about how to stage the performance, but he sometimes defers to the *meneur du jeu*, Estienne Buffelot, to do as he sees best.

\(^{32}\) It should be remembered that both the *Saint Christofle* contracts and the *Saint Laurent* prologue use the term “échafaud” to refer to different types of construction models. It is common in medieval theater texts for construction terms to be generic rather than specialized in nature.

\(^{33}\) Le Hir, p. 662.

\(^{34}\) *Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire*, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 107r. On fol. 159r, performers move “au moyntant du parc” (to the middle of the staging space) before speaking.
In yet another instance, when the devils are directed to “faire ung tour sur le houx” (walk around the staging space), the reference is equally generic. However, nowhere in the text do the staging directions state that anyone other than the angels will descend or ascend from their lieu. The angels descend and climb “subitement” (suddenly) while singing part of a hymn and carrying dolls to represent recovered souls, implying a brief simulation. Devils, on the other hand, go into and come out of Hell much like the Christians who enter and leave their chapel. In retreating to their assigned seat or lieu, these individuals are literally on hold until called on again to participate in the visualized narrative. They speak only after first leaving their lieu. This is not the case for the Saint Laurent and Saint Christofle productions. In the latter performance, the evil king remains on his throne to speak. In Saint Laurent, performers move up or down the scaffolds, speaking from a variety of places. When Saint Estienne’s performers activate their roles, they move from an assigned lieu or décor toward the public or into a central space (“parc” or “houx”) to speak. Unlike the players in Saint Christofle, Saint Estienne’s performers do not simply move laterally; instead, they move on ground level or across platforms about the staging space when they are directed to process or search for someone. Furthermore, the fatiste’s marginal notations repeat that if a cavity cannot be created below the platforms, the Christians can be hidden behind a tapestry (hung vertically, presumably).

35 [Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 148v.]
36 [Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 25v.]
37 [Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 72v and 76r.]
38 [Le Hir, p. 664]
cripte” (over or on top of the crypt) where the latter are hiding. This could easily be achieved by placing a ladder or steps behind the tapestry. Thus, it does not appear that there are necessarily multiple levels as in a scaffold arrangement. Instead, a few décors are higher than others. The chapel, for example, is located under Paradise (where God and the angels are seated) and is large enough to accommodate an altar as well as 7 or 8 people. Lucifer too sits chained to his throne above Hell, which is a locked door opening into a dark enclosure. In these cases, a simple tower like the one built to represent Paradise in the Saint Christofle text would have sufficed. The remaining décors that can be identified in Saint Estienne include: a prison, a throne/palace, houses, woods, and a temple. The last of these décors, a temple to the god Mars, must topple late in the action; this is achieved by having someone pull away one of the posts used to support it, implying that it was either a décor on a platform or a stand-alone prop. In either case, the platforms or décors must have been relatively small in size. Thus, performers either come forward or stand in front of a décor, as in the case of the messenger Trotemenu who arrives at Nemesius’ home, where he “dict devant la maison” (speaks from in front of the house). Thrones in this production are only a step or two above the platforms themselves, as in this description of one character’s position:

Le premier chancellier nomme Nemesius estant assis

empres de lempereur voir une marche de degres plus bas a la destre...

---

39 Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 45r.

40 Le Hir, p. 662.

41 Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 216v.

42 Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 111r.
(The first chancellor, named Nemesius, seated next to The Emperor; that is, one step below to the right, ...).43

His counterparts are, naturally, seated to the left of the emperor in question. Reinforcing this evidence is a stage direction at the end of one of the daily prologues in which trumpets and clarions are directed to play “jusques a tant que lempereur soit dispose de parler” (until such time as the emperor is prepared to speak).44 From this detail it is apparent that after the meneur du jeu finishes his own speech the individual playing the emperor leaves his lieu to come to a designated spot in order to speak. For dramatic or spatial reasons, or perhaps both, this transition required a musical interlude. Thus, a spatial arrangement composed of décors of various dimensions placed around or on platforms in front of an open space, would allow performers to move among the platforms/décors as if they were traveling, searching for someone, or participating in the play’s processions, as the stage directions dictate.45

Furthermore, when the evil emperor Nemesius pronounces an anti-Christian speech, a stage direction tells him to turn toward “le populaire assistant” (the people present in the audience).46 Similarly, in other sequences, cardinals line up “devant le peuple” (facing the

43 Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 5r.

44 Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 172v.

45 Yves Le Hir, ("Les indications scéniques dans le Mystère de St Etienne de Nicolas Louvent," Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance 42.3 (1980), p. 664) interpreted this and other stage directions as evidence that the play was performed in a theater in the round.

46 Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 163r.
people)\textsuperscript{47} and the Christians too turn “devers les auditeurs” (toward the listening public).\textsuperscript{48} Pope Stephen I does likewise when he preaches. Finally, it appears that in some instances the performers actually disappear from view. Henchmen enlisted in the emperor’s service retire to a site unseen:

\begin{quote}
pour eulx acoustrer mignonnement quand temps et heure sera
de comparoir devant la majesté impériale pour plus en grande bravité
venir.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}(in order to put themselves together gracefully for when the time comes to appear before his royal majesty and to do so with much more gallantry.)\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

At one point, Pope Stephen himself is located “en quelque petit lieu arier de paradis” (to a small place behind Paradise) where he readies himself to greet the cardinals.\textsuperscript{50} Were the staging arena enclosed, and were the audience members seated among the performers, these directions would be misplaced. Another cue adds yet another dimension to the proposed arrangement: at one point in the action, the devils “s’an vont par my le monde” (go out among the people) on their way to recuperate the slain emperor’s body, implying, for Yves Le Hir, that

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire}, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 39v.

\textsuperscript{48} Le Hir, p. 664.

\textsuperscript{49} Le Hir, p. 663.

\textsuperscript{50} Le Hir, p. 662.
they may have roamed among the spectators themselves.\textsuperscript{51} Not only is this good theater, but it might mean that there was a distinction to be made between the space where spectators were seated and the staging space per se. Again, these clues would seem to point to a staging arrangement in which the spectators were located together in an area that was somewhat separate, at least, from the players.

Given that the \textit{Saint Christofle} text as edited contains no prologue and only a very few didascalias, it might appear that the play itself is bereft of staging cues. In fact, as Runnalls noted, like the other two texts in the present analysis, \textit{Saint Christofle} contains numerous staging directives within the performers’ speeches.\textsuperscript{52} These embedded staging cues are one of the features that distinguish theater texts from their literary cousins, in that the visual or gestural act predicted in the text is necessary in order to complete the narrative.\textsuperscript{53} In mystery plays, this ‘speech then action’ convention moves the narrative forward and helps the spectators to identify décors representing places, performers representing persons, and movement representing both time and space. In shorter productions, such as \textit{Saint Christofle}, embedded cues may have been all that was necessary to fill out the narrative’s intention. For example, Rebrebe approaches a house décor with these words:

\begin{quote}
Je ne voy qu’une maison seule

En ce pays cy entour ;
\end{quote}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{51} Le Hir, p. 675.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{52} Runnalls, ed., \textit{Le Mystère de saint Christofle}, p. xiv.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{53} Hamblin, “Striking a Pose,” p. 131.}
Je ne sçay s’ame y fait demour.

Je m’y en voys cy par ceste estre.

(I only see one house

In this whole countrysiide;

I don’t know if anyone lives there.

That’s where I’ll go from here.)

The number of demonstrative adjectives used in this short passage provides the time and space for the performer to gesture appropriately, pointing out what he and the spectators should look at next as the spoken narrative progresses. Similar examples abound in Saint Christofle, as in the narrative thread in which the hermit points out a river that was likely no more than a painted backdrop: “Vois tu celle riviere grant?” (Do you see that wide river?). During the torture scenes that dominate the last half of the performance, the king’s henchmen also perform their gestures after having first announced them aloud. When, for example, Dagus orders them to cut out the tongue of Avicene, a woman converted by Christopher, Malferas responds by saying that he intends to cut out her tongue. After the simulated act, which takes place in the space between two lines of dialogue, Agrippart reacts accordingly: “Tu l’as bien couppee, pour voir” (You cut it out, for sure!). Characters in Saint Laurent must point out the

54 Le Mystère de saint Christofle, ed. Runnalls (http://www.uhb.fr/alc/medieval/christof/chritxt1.htm), vv. 159-162.

55 Le Mystère de saint Christofle, v. 321.

56 Le Mystère de saint Christofle, v. 1580.
individuals to whom they will speak ("Je le voy emmy ce palays" (I see him in this palace)) and must anticipate action for those watching ("Voicy nos ennemys venir" (Here come our enemies)). In the middle of a speech, Saint Estienne's emperor notices the arrival of his messenger, remarking:

Cest le gentil trotemenu

Or sa que tu il advienne

Depuis ton dernier partement

(If it isn’t good Trotemenu.

So, what’s become of you

Since we last saw you?)

Because the Saint Estienne manuscript is a performance souvenir, its embedded cues are also accompanied by a number of symbols and signs that helped to organize the play’s staging. For instance, short horizontal lines or ‘strings’ have been placed between spoken lines of text in order to interject a staging instruction at particular moments in the performance. When Nemesius focuses his words on the spectators in a previously-cited example, a directive string

57 Mystère de saint Laurent, ed. Söderhjelm and Wallensköld, p. 128.

58 Mystère de saint Laurent, ed. Söderhjelm and Wallensköld, p. 158.

59 Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 85r.

placed mid-speech tells him exactly when to turn away from his interlocutor on stage and
toward those who are watching the performance from beyond the staging space. This
codicological evidence differentiates this recorded copy from both of the early editions of Saint
Laurent and Saint Christofle, since the latter plays have been edited for publication purposes
rather than annotated for performance. However, the use of embedded cues, spoken by the
players who are in fact directing themselves through the performance, is a standard feature of
theater texts of the late medieval era. All three of the productions, from Saint Christofle’s
simple lateral staging, to the multiple platforms of Saint Estienne, and to the complex, two-level,
staging of Saint Laurent, make use of that convention.

From the analysis of three internal features, and with the evidence provided from relevant
performance contracts, several propositions can be made with regard to how these three
French hagiographic mystery plays crafted theatrical spaces and how they put people in their
places. First, all three plays use embedded cues to move the players and their audience through
the narrative visually. This convention is seconded in two of the productions by marginal stage
directions that speak to specific performance mandates, despite the fact that one of the two,
the Mystère de saint Laurent, survives as an edited version. Marginal notations are
supplemented by signs and symbols in the lone manuscript copy of the Jeu et mister de
Monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire. Only the Mystère de saint Christofle, which may
have evolved as part of a ritualized reenactment, relies almost exclusively on embedded cues to
move its narrative forward. Whether this is the case because performance-specific staging
notations were removed by the plays’ editors, or whether the surviving copy or copies were not
performances-specific when they were edited for publication in the sixteenth century, we cannot presume to know.

Next, the plays seem to offer at least two different staging venues. The Saint Laurent evidence is textual, in that it is provided both by its lengthy prologue and its numerous inter-textual staging directions, despite the fact that these features are not common to most early sixteenth-century editions of post-performance texts. From that evidence, however, it is clear that the staging arena was separated from the surrounding community by four two-story scaffolds that faced each other in an unknown pattern. The scaffolds would have been occupied by both performers and spectators on both levels. If the Saint Apollinia miniature is indeed what it appears to be, then the spectators would have been seated or standing on or under the scaffolds according to their status in the community. In addition, they would have seen each other from across the parc and they would have followed the action as ‘passive’ participants.

All of these hypotheses underscore both a notion of inclusiveness with regard to the entire community of players and spectators who participate in this communal act as well as the notion of a socially-conscious separation imposed by a traditional hierarchy that is reinforced visually.

---

and physically. With regard to the *Saint Christofle* plays, and assuming that the 1539-1540 contracts do indeed pertain to a performance of the surviving texts, two raised platforms would have faced each other. The degree of separation between the two platforms is unknown, but the space in which they stood had to accommodate a platform nearly ninety feet long! In addition, the theatrical space had an entrance/exit that limited access, so that it must have been enclosed. The relevant contracts name the Hôtel d’Orléans as the location for the cited performance.\(^{62}\) If performed in a courtyard, for instance, access could have been controlled, the backdrop hung against one wall, and the surrounding windows, in addition to the spectators’ box, would have provided excellent positions from which to watch the performance. The minstrels who were hired to play on the summer feast days and Sundays on which the play was performed not only accompanied the *monstre* that made its way through “les rues et carrefours de Paris” (through the streets and intersections of Paris) but played at the entrance to and exit from the performance venue.\(^{63}\) If these contracts do indeed pertain to the *Mystère de Saint Christofle* that survives in two Parisian editions, this production was ceremonial in nature. Its sponsors and performers advertised their celebration publicly with music and a parade of costumed players, but moved to a more enclosed setting for the performances themselves.

The *Saint Estienne* play was written by the prior of Saint Mihiel’s monastery in celebration of the patron saint’s life and martyrdom. It was recopied after the fact and signed by its *fatiste*. It contains spoken and extra-narrative clues about its staging. Nevertheless, despite its many

\(^{62}\) This detail is not included in Runnalls’ analysis of an apparent link between Jehan Trepperel, a printer of mystery plays, the parish church of Saint Christopher, and the mystery play of the same name.

\(^{63}\) Runnalls, ed., *Le Mystère de saint Christofle*, p. xxviii.
tantalizing stage directions, its references to music, and the many notes taken directly from the
fatiste’s playbook, the staging venue itself remains difficult to define. The performance may
have taken place in St. Mihiel’s parish church, in a rectory, or in a public square. The
unidentified players may have been performing for a mixed audience of city and church leaders
within a confined space or in a more public venue. Among the other staging hints provided by
the text are: details which seem to preclude a performance on multi-level scaffolds where
performers and spectators comingle; multiple constructions of different heights as well as
curtains to hide some performers; and an open space around which performers might walk or
process. In addition, it appears that the scale of the constructions was fairly restrained, and,
secondly, that speakers turned from their interlocutors on a regular basis to address the
audience. From this myriad of gossamer clues, we can only be sure of two things: the audience
was separated from the performers spatially and the décors were arranged either laterally on
separate platforms or disparately at ground level and on small décors/platforms.

Finally, for both Saint Estienne and Saint Laurent, the spectators, like the players, were seated
by their social and professional status. How these distinctions were made in the Saint Mihiel
production remains unclear because no clues link the spectators to positions within a staging
arena. We only know that the usual suspects, divine and authoritarian characters, are given the
privilege of modest height and that the spectators are lauded as “nobles gens” (gentle
people). Saint Laurent’s staging configuration, carefully described by its prologueur, implies
that the spectators either sat or stood on the scaffolds according to their status in life, but that

\[64\] Jeu et mister de monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire, BnF Roth. I-22-A, fol. 246r.
they were not separated from the players. *Saint Christofle*, on the other hand, by placing players and spectators on their own platforms, delineates a separation between the fiction being reenacted and the spectators who observe that fiction. Furthermore, the relevant contracts confirm that access to the play would have been limited. In this case, then, the edited text makes no social distinction among its spectators. Similarly, its lateral staging configuration placed God and two angels in a tower some six feet above the raised platform on which it stood. The remaining décors stood directly on the platform or were slightly raised, as in the case of the castle/throne and the planks that constituted the gallows.

The sponsors, spectators and players of these three French mystery play texts were obviously engaged in different performance settings, both spatially and socially. The masons who sponsored performances of the Parisian *Mystère de saint Christofle* in the mid-sixteenth century did so in a celebration that wound its way through city streets before moving into a private “logis et lieu” (abode and place).65 Once inside, players and spectators moved to their respective platforms. There is no evidence that any further divisions, other than the railing described in the presumably relevant contracts, were imposed on them. On either side of the space between the two platforms, however, players and spectators were on more or less equal ground. The *Jeu et mistere de Monseigneur saint Estienne pape et martire* announces in its prologues that spectators will be seated according to their station in life. It also appears that they were separated from the players and the décors by an open space. Performers too were seated according to the status of the personages they represented in the play, if only by a few inches or a few feet. The strictest visual manifestation of an idealized hierarchy occurs in the

Mystère de saint Laurent. With his opening words, the prologueur reminds spectators and players of the place in life that they either occupy or represent, pointing from the higher level on the scaffolds to the lower level and finally to the Hell tower. Throughout the performance, players move up and down the scaffolds by way of ladders or steps as often as they crisscross the ground-level arena, physically demonstrating time and again the social paradigm of the era. Although we have not identified the performance venue, the sponsoring community, or even the provenance of this text, this production clearly aimed at demonstrating order and authority in ways that neither of the other two plays in the study-set did. In all three plays, of course, particular groups constructed their message spatially for particular audiences. And in all three productions, the supposed universality of a common religion spoke to those populations differently.