

Facing Medusa: A Thirteenth-Century Reliquary of King David

Beth Fischer

*David Rex manu fortis aspectu desiderabilis ecce / stirps mea et sal(us) mu(n)di
quam divinit(us) P(ro)ph(et)avi.*

*King David, strong of hand and desirable of look, behold / My offspring and the
salvation of the world as was prophesied through God.*

—Inscription on banner held in hands of figural reliquary in Basel Münsterschatz

Viewers of a late medieval reliquary in Basel's cathedral treasury were confronted with a seemingly irreconcilable contradiction: the reliquary is in the shape of the heroic King David, ancestor of Christ, but the face is a cameo of Medusa, the female monster who turned men to stone (Fig. 2.1).¹ In many ways, the reliquary is typical of the other small devotional objects made in the same Upper Rhein region in the late thirteenth century, constructed of gold and silver gilt and accented with gems.² The torso-length figure of David is mounted on a hexagonal base adorned by enamel portraits of prophets. The base, which was not added until the early fifteenth century, has a latched opening for the insertion of a relic.³ There are no records of its original content, but it was most

B. Fischer (✉)

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

Fig. 2.1 *Gold reliquary figure of King David*, late 13th/early 14th century, Historisches Museum Basel, Inv. 1882.80.a



likely used as a container for the Eucharist.⁴ David holds a banner that identifies him as the ancestor of Christ and the Virgin, with a small figurine of the Virgin and Child placed just above atop a cameo of a lion.

While David is a somewhat unusual subject for a reliquary, it is Medusa's presence that is particularly startling. With limited evidence for the reliquary's original setting and function, the gendered identities of David and Medusa must be the starting place to unveil the reliquary's arresting effect. The stark black and white of the late antique cameo interrupts the smooth gold of the reliquary, constructing a material confrontation that underscores a more potent opposition. King David's role as the virile ancestor of Christ is masked by the presence of a female monster. Medusa's monstrosity caused petrification and death, the opposite of the generative ideal represented by David as Christ's ancestor.

David's identity and his primary role as patriarch and ancestor is made clear through the banner in his hands. It declares, "David Rex manu fortis aspectu desiderabilis ecce / stirps mea et sal(us) mu(n)di quam divinit(us) P(ro)ph(et)avi," or roughly, "King David, strong of hand and desirable of

look (or face), behold / my offspring and savior of the world as was prophesied through God.” This identification of David’s “*aspectu desiderabilis*,” or “desirable face/look,” causes confusion, as the viewer is confronted with the face of Medusa. How can a pagan female monster provide the face of the ideal male king, ancestor of Christ and author of the Psalms?⁵ How can the head of Medusa provide an appropriate external form for a relic?

In exploring these questions, the easy answer might be that the medieval viewer saw only an antique cameo, valued for its antiquity and presumed connection to sites like Rome. In this context, the visible prominence of the cameo would give an aura of authenticity and antiquity to the whole work. Dale Kinney has argued that carved gemstones were recognized in medieval cultures as antique, and their origins were often “mythologized” to highlight their connections to important people or moments, so that their use as *spolia* was not just about material value.⁶ The association with authenticity was highlighted by the use of carved gemstones as seals,⁷ and by the claims in medieval lapidaries that certain ancient stones could detect lies or poison.⁸

While the antiquity of the cameo may have been a factor in its use on the reliquary, the antique value could have been acknowledged by setting the cameo into another part of the reliquary. Most antique carved gems and cameos were placed on the backs, bases, or frames of reliquaries, rather than as the replacement for part of a figure.⁹ There is a cameo of Medusa on the *Shrine of the Three Kings* (c. 1225) in Cologne, but the cameo is set at one edge, among other antique carved gems. This highlights its material form and minimizes its specific subject matter. Such placement at the edge of a reliquary would have been appropriate for Medusa, as monsters and the “other” are usually found in manuscript margins and on the boundaries and frontiers of spaces.¹⁰ On the reliquary in Basel, the cameo of Medusa does not just adorn the reliquary in this sort peripheral ornamental role. Instead, the female monster’s face displaces the position occupied by a male king.

Medusa was easily recognizable to medieval viewers, as she figured frequently in text and image, usually with the expectation that the story was already familiar to the audience so that the author or artist did not need to provide much detail.¹¹ Popular tales, literary manuscripts, and moralizing lessons often mentioned Medusa, and her face appeared in well-known illustrated copies of the *Aratea* and other astronomy textbooks, in calendar zodiacs, and a mix of other sources (Fig. 2.2).¹² While these images of Medusa vary considerably in the detail and angle of the head, the conventional iconography includes a disembodied head in frontal or three-quarter view, with



Fig. 2.2 *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, fol. 49r, ca. 10th-mid 11th century, London, British Library, Harley MS 3595. Photo: © British Library Board

loose, wavy locks.¹³ It was not unusual to incorporate pagan characters into Christian contexts, but in these images and texts Medusa was never the protagonist. It is her identity as monster, not her pagan background, that makes her presence in place of David's head shocking.¹⁴

I argue that the female face of Medusa and the masculine identity of David work to enable the reliquary's function as both an object of visual desire and as a warning against desiring things that appear lovely, thus enticing the viewer and then redirecting that desire to the relic rather than the reliquary. The reliquary equates the desire for its gold material with the lust exhibited by David and embodied by Medusa, reminding the viewer of his own sinful thoughts, and then providing a remedy in the form of the relic inside, in this case probably the Eucharist.

Redirecting the viewer from the container to its contents was critical in the functioning of any reliquary. While the Medusa solution seems to

be unique, medieval writers worried about the potential of a reliquary to elicit idolatry. Despite this, the concern was always that the image might become an idol, and the viewer would not make the necessary leap from admiring the visible reliquary to appreciating the relic's invisible spiritual value.¹⁵ Sara Lipton has suggested that twelfth- and thirteenth-century sermons and exempla, used images to teach people to be wary about the visual appearance of artworks in addition to the familiar devotional and didactic roles these works were expected to serve, thus using the image itself to teach the potential pitfalls of imagery.¹⁶ In a similar way, the reliquary uses images that highlight gender oppositions and the threat of monstrosity to direct the viewer's response from desire for worldly things to desire for Christ.

The unusual subject matter, the Old Testament king and the monstrous pagan woman, are not just quirky choices; they are calculated and are central to the reliquary's function. The reliquary has received minimal sustained attention and the role of Medusa has not been discussed, while David's role has been taken at face value as merely an ancestor of Christ.¹⁷ It is critical to understand that, while the viewer would have recognized Medusa, the reliquary does not become Medusa instead of David. The face was not always the seat of identity in the central and late Middle Ages, and attributes and gestures were often more critical in establishing characters.¹⁸ The reliquary goes to great lengths to assure the viewer through the *niello* banner and other attributes that this is indeed David, and despite changes and additions over several centuries, the cameo of Medusa was never moved or removed.¹⁹ David remains the subject, but the face of Medusa draws the viewer's attention to the perils of desire that can entice even the kingly hero, equating the lust for women with the desire for the reliquary.

Both David and Medusa are pivotal in helping the viewer redirect from the visible reliquary to the hidden relic, and the way they play with medieval gender roles is critical in how the viewer would have interacted with the reliquary. In this model, David is not only the ancestor of Christ, but also a moral lesson of a man whose lust turned to repentance and love of God. Medusa forms the entry point to this system of enticement and deflection, as an embodiment of desire who made visible the way *luxuria* transformed a man into a monster, both dehumanized and emasculated. Medusa's face transforms the reliquary into a sort of monstrous monstrosity. That is to say, she makes the power and efficacy of the hidden relic externally visible as a powerful object, while making

the reliquary itself appear undesirable through her form.²⁰ While a mon-strance made its Eucharistic relic clearly visible, this reliquary serves a similar purpose in redirecting the viewer from material body to heavenly body.²¹ Kathleen Biddick has pointed out that monsters and hybridity were a key part of the growing attention to the visible body of Christ as it was enacted in Corpus Christi festivals, which become more common in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These monstrous elements helped signal the Eucharistic host's position as a "relay point between religion and magic" as well as between other opposing pairs, not least purity/pollution and masculine/feminine.²² In this understanding of religious practice surrounding the sacred body, Medusa's presence on the reliquary works with David's presence and the relic to heighten the supernatural effect of the relic and its container.

THE ORIGINS OF THE RELIQUARY

The reliquary of David is now in the Basel Museum, in the collection moved from the Basler Münsterschatz. It was probably made in the region immediately to the east, near Konstanz. The treasury records it coming into the collection as a gift of Johannes, doctor to the dukes of Austria (d. 1386), but there is no evidence yet that links it to a specific initial location.²³ The base addition that made the statue a reliquary, as well as some of the other attachments including the crown, were incorporated after it entered the Treasury.²⁴

The figure of David is much smaller than the other reliquaries in the treasury at Basel, but it is mostly solid gold, suggesting that cost was not the motivation for its small size.²⁵ Instead, the size seems to have been designed precisely to fit the late antique sardonyx cameo of Medusa. Thus, while little is known about the original setting of the object, both David and Medusa were present from its creation.

FACING MEDUSA: DESIRE AND THE MONSTROUS FEMALE

Medusa was well known in medieval Europe, but certain aspects of her classical identity were changed or emphasized to highlight facets of the story that were most congenial to medieval Christian concepts of gender and heroic behavior. The account of Medusa came from Books IV and V of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.²⁶ The beautiful woman was especially noted for her flowing hair. Neptune, overcome by lust, raped her in the

temple of Minerva. Blaming the victim for the desecration of her temple, Minerva punished Medusa by turning her locks into snakes. Medusa then horrified onlookers so much that men were turned to stone if they caught her gaze. By looking at Medusa's reflection in a shield rather than at her face, Perseus managed to cut off her head. At this point, he could use her petrifying gaze at will. This Ovidian text was known to medieval readers and frequently functioned as a source of inspiration for moralizing allegories and courtly romances.²⁷

In medieval versions, themes of the gaze and the dismemberment of the body were common aspects of how Medusa's story was used, as they are now.²⁸ The need for Perseus to gain control of Medusa's body to control her power remained central, but one of the critical changes that medieval authors made was to present Medusa as equally beautiful after Poseidon's transformation, so that she presented the threat of erotic attraction, not just petrification, to Perseus.²⁹ This highlights the role that Medusa played as the embodiment of lust, so that Perseus' victory is not just over the petrifying monster, but also over the erotic woman.³⁰

The popular fourteenth-century *Ovide moralisé* drew on earlier stories and would have colored interpretations of Medusa on the reliquary.³¹ The section on Medusa described her as "charnel delice," or carnal delight.³² This was typical of the *Ovide moralisé*, which, according to Sarah Kay, treats women's bodies as simultaneously "the site of their lust and, given the 'heat' of their 'matter,' the explanation for it."³³ Medusa does not just show lust or elicit it; instead, she embodies it wholly. While the story does not explicitly fault her for enticing men, both her punishment and the petrification of her suitors are shown as appropriate results. Only Perseus escapes, avoiding and neutralizing the temptation by using his shield as a barrier against the desires of the eyes.

While such retellings often emphasize sexual desire, they usually do so in a context that equated the desire for women with the desire for material objects. Presenting Medusa on a golden object, in the form of a precious carved cameo of recognizable antiquity and thus obvious value, elides the distinction between her sexual attractiveness and the object's material value. In presenting Medusa and the female body as a type of temptation not unlike coveting wealth or property, the reliquary speaks particularly to the male audience that probably constituted the primary viewership.³⁴ Medusa's position on the reliquary does not simply remind the viewer of the perils of vice. She is implicitly compared to appropriate desire, which could be directed toward God.

This should not be a surprise, given the tendency for medieval texts to treat women's bodies as tools of procreation, possession, and objects of exchange.³⁵ This was especially true with regard to women's sexual identity, with virgins compared to fragile vessels and rape prosecuted as theft of the female body from its male owner.³⁶ Medusa's body presented the opportunity for a similar message. In the sixth century, Fulgentius wrote a commentary that recounted myths assumed to be already known to his audience.³⁷ Claiming that his readers already knew the versions in Lucan and Ovid, Fulgentius added details attributed to "Theonidus" that he felt required explication. This version identified Medusa and her sisters as the wealthy heiresses of a king. Medusa expanded this wealth through her development of husbandry. In this story, Perseus slays her because he covets her wealth, and her snakes are a metaphor for the "cunning" nature that enabled her to attain that wealth in the first place. While this makes Perseus seem thoroughly rotten to a modern reader, Fulgentius' audience is told that this behavior is appropriate as a result of Perseus' "manly courage." Perseus uses a mirror to conquer Medusa because "terror is reflected not only in the heart but also in the outward appearance."³⁸

Medusa's snaky appearance becomes a sign of her lack of conformity to gender norms and Perseus' victory is a sign that he has properly restored the patriarchal hierarchy. Female power centers on sinful desire, so that when male actors regain control this becomes a victory over sin. Even in Fulgentius' version with its focus on covetousness rather than lust, vision plays a central role. Perseus must use the mirror to avoid being transformed by terror, and Medusa's name is glossed as "not seeing," *mē idousa*.³⁹ The blindness of desire betrays a lack of manly courage. In this case it is the desire for wealth, not sexual lust, which provokes Medusa's trouble.

The flexibility between the lust and covetousness continues in many iterations of the story. In the twelfth century, Bernardus Silvestris saw Perseus as the personification of virtue, who defeats Medusa as the embodiment of *luxuria*.⁴⁰ Arnulf of Orléans, writing a commentary on Lucan's *Pharsalia* provided a similar interpretation,⁴¹ as did Honorius Augustodunensis' sermon for the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, published in the widely circulated *Speculum Ecclesiae*.⁴² *Luxuria*, in medieval interpretations, conflated sexual desire with desire for worldly goods.⁴³ Medusa represented evil and vice generally, but especially lust and covetousness, against which men must fight to save their souls. In

the thirteenth century, a 52-line section probably by Jean de Meun was added to the *Romance of the Rose* about Medusa and was copied in many manuscripts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁴⁴ The narrator recounts the story of Medusa's power to turn onlookers to stone and tells of Perseus' victory. He then compares the female image over the entry of the Tower of Jealousy favorably to the head of Medusa, noting that at least the tower image could heal.⁴⁵ Sylvia Huot underscores the connection this story had to others in which desire led to petrification. Narcissus' desire makes him resemble a marble statue, or as the *Romance of the Rose* puts it, a "piere de mabre."⁴⁶ When Boccaccio wrote the *Genealogia deorum gentilium* in the fourteenth century, he had no difficulty equating Medusa's hair to worrying about material possessions, or "ordents sollicitudines curasque" (10:10–11).

The viewer of the reliquary in the Basel Treasury would also have seen this connection between lust and material desire on the main portal of Basel Cathedral, carved in the late thirteenth century. This portal includes figures of the devil as tempter and one of the foolish virgins, a pairing that had also been used on the façade of Strasbourg Cathedral around the same time. The virgin has begun to unclasp her dress, while the tempter appears—from the front—to be handsome and wealthy, as he holds a bag of money. However, on approaching the portal, the visitor saw snakes crawling along the tempter's back. Desire, once again conflating both material wealth and sexual attraction, is revealed as sin through the exposure of the tempter's monstrous body. Both reliquary and portal sculpture suggest similar transitions where the viewer first sees something desirable, then is warned away from trusting desirable appearances. The reliquary's shining precious metals would have been visible at a distance even in low light, but as with the portal sculpture, the viewer's approach would reveal the warning: in one case, the devil's snakes; in the other, Medusa's snake-framed stare.

As an image on a cameo, Medusa herself resembles the petrification she enacted on others, which was described in the *Metamorphoses* as making them into *simulacra*, an *imago*, or figures of *marmore*. Medusa's victims are not just turned to stone, they are turned to statues or marble images, resembling the reliquary in front of them. However, the viewer can treat Medusa's face on the reliquary as the reflection that allows him to avoid falling into the trap of her gaze. This would be not unlike the common depictions of virtues and vices on medieval portals, where the depiction of vice served not to give that vice power, but

to remind the viewer to be vigilant in resisting vice. By presenting the gleaming reliquary, but then visually connecting it to a story associated in particular with both carnal and pecuniary desire, the viewer is encouraged to redirect his desire for the form and value of the reliquary, to the reliquary's contents.

RELICS AND AMULETS: THE POWER OF PIECES

Medusa was a body that was powerful in pieces, a theme that was familiar to adherents of late medieval relic cults and the expanding feast of Corpus Christi with its focus on the sacrificial body. Before Medusa was controlled by Perseus, the power of her face was destructive, but afterward Perseus could use her head to rescue properly behaving virgins like Andromeda and win victories, reasserting his dominance and Medusa's position as a tool. This made Medusa akin to both a relic, in its fragmentary power, and to an amulet, as a non-Christian weapon that could be wielded to good ends.

Medusa's head bears a startling resemblance to the head reliquaries that were increasingly popular in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, since her head never fully coheres with the rest of the reliquary.⁴⁷ As Paula Gerson and Caroline Walker Bynum have shown, head and other body-part reliquaries emphasized the fragmented body inside, and part of their power came from this clear visual indication that they did not function by the rules of ordinary human bodies.⁴⁸ The fragmentation of bodies was critical to relics' function, as the brokenness of the body communicated that the saint was not solely on earth but was also acting from heaven.⁴⁹ Rather than showing the relic kept inside it, the body-part reliquary attested to the fragment's power by showing it as active through gaze or movement, making heads and arms especially popular.⁵⁰ While arms professed their power through movement or the potential for movement, the liveliness of a head reliquary was communicated through its gaze, like icons.⁵¹ At Basel, head reliquaries seem to have been popular at the time the Medusa reliquary entered the treasury, so medieval viewers there would have easily been able to associate Medusa's head with these similar objects.⁵²

A broken body, however, is not enough to make a relic, and certainly Medusa was not rehabilitated into a saint despite her presence in the same object as the fragmented body of Christ. What made Medusa different was that she was a monster, not a saint, and her decapitation

allowed Perseus to use her fragmented body as a weapon instead of giving her superhuman power.⁵³ Evidence suggests images of her severed head were frequently used as amulets.⁵⁴ The use of Medusa's disembodied head as an amulet emphasized the similarity between her body and relics, as it was the decapitated head that was used as an amulet, not an image of the gorgon as a whole body.⁵⁵ Both amulets and reliquaries evoked protection and miraculous intervention through rituals of prayer and touch, and could be used for protection in a variety of situations, which may have enhanced the popularity of including them on reliquaries.⁵⁶ Medieval viewers may have accepted a functional similarity between amulets and relics, seeing them not as equivalents but rather believing that amulets could help enhance the relic's power.

In this combination of potent relic fragments and amulets into reliquaries, the power of Medusa could be incorporated into Christian contexts. Perseus was able to deploy her power for his own purposes, taking the head that turned men to stone and using it against his enemies, so that the monstrous woman became a tool for good in the hands of a heroic male. The use of Medusa's head on the reliquary is thus in contrast with both the usual use of amulets on the edges of reliquaries, and the depiction of the stories of Perseus and Medusa, where Perseus wields Medusa's head as a weapon. In attaching Medusa's head to David's neck instead of Perseus' hand, the power of Medusa's gaze becomes the reliquary's animating force. While any amulet could give extra force to a reliquary, using a cameo of a head associated with Medusa's powerful female gaze creates an especially evocative reminder of the power of the fragmented body that transcended the gender of the body part. The fragmentation of both the Eucharistic host and Medusa increases the power of the object through its dual gaze.

DAVID'S DESIRE AND REPENTANCE

To see the cameo of Medusa only as a powerful fragment or amulet denies central aspects of how medieval stories described both Medusa and David. Medusa's association with desire suggests that David should also be read this way. While David is usually a model king and type of Christ, he was also associated with *luxuria*. In the context of the emphasis on Medusa's fragmented body, David reads as a figure made monstrous by desire and then saved by heartfelt repentance, both a warning and a model for the viewer. David was, after all, a man who had stolen

another man's "property" when he impregnated Bathsheba.⁵⁷ Augustine connected David's kingliness to his adulterous behavior, writing that David's transgressions showed that sin can reach even the greatest, and that David was at his most sinful when he was most powerful and secure.⁵⁸ For a mostly male audience, David could serve as a model for how a man could learn to resist the desire embodied by Medusa.

The connections between David and Medusa have been recognized, but most scholars have emphasized Perseus and Medusa as a typology for David and Goliath. Geerto Snijder and Arthur Milton Young both argued that such a typology helped Christianize the story's themes.⁵⁹ The stories of David/Goliath and Perseus/Medusa have easily recognizable similarities, and there is a distinct visual correspondence in images, with the young male hero carrying the head of the monster.⁶⁰ However, this association works only when David is presented heroically with his weapon and the enemy's head, as Perseus was shown with Medusa's. In the reliquary, though, Medusa's face replaces David's, creating a resemblance between the monstrous embodiment of desire and the king. This draws attention to David's lustful behavior, which was frequently depicted in popular images.⁶¹ David's uncontrolled desire for Bathsheba and his monstrous behavior to obtain her was a popular moral tale. Depictions showed David spying on Bathsheba as she bathed, focusing on his sin in the moment he gazes with desire at a woman, and not solely his later actions to obtain her. A typical example is the so-called *St. Louis Psalter* from around 1260, which depicts David and Bathsheba in the upper part of the "B" of "Beatus vir," the opening of the first psalm. Bathsheba's naked body is fully exposed to the viewer, while David peeks out of an upper window in the background. Below, in the bottom part of the letter, David prays, already repentant.⁶² Although I have found representations of this subject from as early as the beginning of the ninth century (as, for example, Stuttgart, Landesbibliothek Cod. bibl.fol. 23, fol. 64v), the subject of Bathsheba bathing achieved greater prominence in the thirteenth century and especially in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁶³

Frequently, these images of David spying on Bathsheba were used to introduce the Penitential Psalms in Books of Hours. David was thought to have written the Penitential Psalms in response to his own sins. By placing the scene of David desiring Bathsheba at the opening to the Penitential Psalms, it comes to stand for all of David's sins, but it also implicates the viewer in this sin as well. The psalm illuminations



Fig. 2.3 *Bathsheba Bathing*, fol. 71r, London, British Library, Harley MS 2863. Photo: © British Library Board

position Bathsheba alluringly in front of the viewer, enticing him to the same lustfulness and the same penance as David.⁶⁴ In a fifteenth-century Book of Hours (London, British Library MS Harley 2863), Bathsheba bathes, naked to the tops of her thighs and with her arms framing her torso (Fig. 2.3). She is in the foreground, while David is placed off to the side where his golden hair and crown cause him to blend into his castle, affording the viewer a frontal and unimpeded glimpse of Bathsheba's glowing white body. Some manuscripts place David so far in the background that the viewer is left almost alone with an unobstructed view of the naked woman. While many books of hours were owned by women, this one, which has the arms of Philippe de Commines, and the *St. Louis Psalter*, were created for men. The image in Harley 2863 is even surrounded by shells from Philippe's coat of arms, emphasizing his personal relationship to the scene. As the viewer saw such an image, he would be reciting the Penitential Psalms himself, thus placing him in the position of the lustful and repentant David in both his gaze and his words. In a similar pattern of viewing, the reliquary incites desire and then encourages the viewer to turn away from his lust, reminding him of the consequences of desire through reference to Medusa. Both Medusa as the beautiful woman and the gold reliquary could induce *luxuria*, but only Medusa could be both desire and its punishment together.⁶⁵

The reliquary also implicitly reminds the viewer of Bathsheba by highlighting the lineage that arose from their relationship. The banner on the front of the reliquary refers to David's descendant Christ as "stirps mea," thus highlighting not only Christ as "offspring," as it is often translated, but also emphasizing his lineage by using the term for stem or rootstock. Solomon, the child David and Bathsheba have after David's repentance, begins the lineage that produces both Mary and Christ. Matthew 1:6 emphasizes both parents in this ancestry, and even alludes to the initial sin, proclaiming, "And David the king begot Solomon, of her that had been the wife of Urias." While his virtuous offspring seem to redeem David's initial lust, both the biblical text and the reliquary require penance, keeping the sin at the forefront and reminding the viewer of his own lustful habits. David's visible transformation by lust, and the simultaneous reminder of the reward for his penance, suggest to the viewer both the danger posed by lust/desire and the potential for the relic—especially if it was Eucharistic—to save them from that sin.

Despite similar roles as objects of lust, Medusa and Bathsheba cannot be equated. Medusa is fundamentally monstrous in medieval

conceptions.⁶⁶ While it was expected that all women were an enticement to lust, Medusa is not generative. Lust for her cannot lead to procreation. Bathsheba, on the other hand, is a mostly passive object of lust whose sexuality is dangerous but controlled, and who fulfills her role as the vehicle for Christ's lineage. The slippage between the two in the reliquary works because the focus is on the desire aroused by the male gaze: Neptune's gaze led to Medusa's initial monstrosity, while Perseus was able to resist his own desire to look. David, however, is especially relevant to the medieval viewer because he first sins and then repents. In manuscripts, the reader encountered the image of David's sin and then the words of his repentance. In the reliquary, the viewer embodies David's lust, but when he approaches the reliquary, he sees David's face—and by extension his own—transformed into the monstrous embodiment of desire. The viewer and David both momentarily *become* Medusa, with their sin signaled by the elision of gender.⁶⁷ In showing their desire, they become a monstrous amalgam that is gendered female. The viewer has reason to believe that all will be well in the end because of the Eucharistic sacrifice inside the reliquary, but the focus on this moment underscores the dangerous presence of the object of desire before the viewer and the viewer's own uncertain victory over sin, which can only be accomplished when he turns from the reliquary to the relic within. As Hrabanus Maurus, an influential Carolingian author whose works were copied throughout the Middle Ages, warned, "Let no one be proud of his own state on account of David's fall, and also, let no one despair about his own downfall, on account of David's restoration."⁶⁸

The reliquary does not rely solely on the viewer's familiarity with these stories to drive the viewer's turn away from a desire for earthly things. It calls out the theme of desire directly in the banner held by David. The naming works with the additional attributes like the crown and lion cameo to ensure that Medusa's identity remains subordinate to David's despite her central position. The epithet "*aspectu desiderabilis*" (desirable of look) and his command "*ecce!*" (behold) emphasize the desire and the gaze that are central to both Medusa's power and David's sin.

The phrase on the reliquary, "*manu fortis et aspectu desiderabilis*" (strong of hand and desirable of look), was first used by Augustine to interpret David as a prefiguration of Christ.⁶⁹ When David was presented as a strong and handsome king, there was no difficulty interpreting the phrase to refer to David's attractiveness. However, in this reliquary,

David bears Medusa's monstrous face, an "aspectu horribilis," instead. While the medieval Medusa was beautiful even after her transformation, her appearance cannot be considered "desirable" in the same way that David's handsome face or a gold reliquary could be. The phrase emphasizes that David's kingly appearance was corrupted by his desire for Bathsheba, a desire given form by Medusa's face in place of his. The face that desires cannot be a desirable face, just as Medusa's own horrific appearance arose from the corruption of lust.

David's banner indicates that the way to overcome this lust is through looking as well. "Ecce," he says, "Behold my offspring and the savior of the world!" In commanding the viewer to turn toward Christ, the viewer transfers desire from the reliquary to the relic and the salvation it promises: the Virgin and Child. Mary and Christ are set up as an alternative to David-Medusa, with Mary's proper enactment of her gender opposed to David's failure. Marian Bleeker's essay in this volume examines how the juxtaposition of opposites and the violation of boundaries creates the monstrous other, and the particular roles that women could play in both corporeal flesh and generative ideal. David and Medusa form one such monstrous opposition, but the ideal presented by the Virgin heightens their monstrosity. She presents the evidence of her role as mother as well as showing the route to salvation as the body she holds references the Eucharistic host within the reliquary.

THE RELIQUARY'S *ASPECTU DESIDERABILIS*

While Medusa, David, and the Virgin enhance the process of redirection from reliquary to relic, all reliquaries had to redirect viewers somehow. The reliquary was essential in conveying the life of the relic, but could easily come to replace the same relic it activated: it could fail to function as a signifier of the divine and come to seem powerful in its own right.⁷⁰ Both the danger of idolatry and the danger of covetousness, which figured frequently in discussions of relics and reliquaries, were linked to sexual desire, a desire for physical form and earthly material.⁷¹ However, rather than denying or preventing desire, this reliquary encourages it and then deflects it to Christ.

Connections between bad and good desire found in concerns about reliquaries appears in textual framings of desire. In the Bible, desirable objects and women are opposed to things that are good to desire. Psalm 18 explicitly juxtaposes heavenly and earthly things through the

function of desire, proclaiming that the justice of the Lord is “more to be desired than gold and many precious stones.”⁷² II Chronicles showed how something desirable might appear on the face, recording in the ninth chapter that “all the kings of the earth desired to see the face of Solomon, that they might hear the wisdom which God had given in his heart.”⁷³ This line directly follows the enumeration of the gold and jewels and ivory given as tribute to Solomon, reserving the expression of desire for Solomon’s wisdom and not his wealth, though the one is shown to elicit the other. Solomon’s wisdom, his inner value, shows on his face, which thereby becomes desirable.

The role of precious material as an object of desire is critical for this interpretation, recognizing the allure of gold as akin to the desires of the flesh.⁷⁴ The David/Medusa reliquary would have functioned particularly well given Medusa’s association with both sexual and material desire, but also because of the reliquary’s other features. The reliquary is relatively small, and would not have been seen easily at a distance. In the dim light of the medieval treasury or chapel, the reliquary would glow faintly, an enticing gold shimmer visible at a distance but largely indistinct. As the viewer drew nearer, the white-on-black of the cameo resolved, neatly trapping the viewer by responding to his attraction to gold with the stony gaze of Medusa.⁷⁵ The reliquary provides Medusa with a body and denies the presence of Perseus, but the image maintains its sense of fragmentation as the body and the head never visually cohere.⁷⁶ The black background of the cameo makes the face seem to float within the golden hood, and the insistent differences of color and material refuse reconciliation.⁷⁷ This combination simultaneously emphasizes both the whole and the part, reminding the viewer of the relic through the form of the reliquary.

If allowed close inspection, the viewer had the opportunity to read the banner, take in the enamel portraits of the prophets, and most importantly, distinguish the gold bodies of the Virgin and Christ, who tend to blend into David’s gold chest unless the viewer is very close. Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that the likely response of male viewers encountering the otherness of the holy would be “profound stillness.”⁷⁸ Froma Zeitlin observed that Medusa always worked on males, not females; even when Medusa is around women, her gaze is reserved for men.⁷⁹ This stillness effectively emasculates the male viewer, making Medusa the controller of the gaze, but also showing the face of Medusa in the place where a male face was supposed to appear. According to

Bynum, such gender reversals were often seen as a sign that the man had become more Christlike, as Christ's adoption of human flesh from pure Word made him more feminine.⁸⁰ The viewer's embodiment of the role of David, and then his encounter with Medusa, prepared him for repentance and redemption.

The figures of Christ and the Virgin are closer to the viewer than Medusa's face but do not show up from as far away, so that when Christ becomes visible, this initial encounter with Medusa is already complete. In this third stage of interaction, Christ acts as a shield protecting the viewer from Medusa's gaze, ensuring that the viewer can detach from it.⁸¹ Paul Binski has read the *viaticum*, the Eucharist given as part of the last rites, as both nourishment and shield for the journey to the afterlife, further suggesting the possibility that if the Eucharist was indeed contained in the relic, it too could be seen as a shield against Medusa's temptation.⁸² The reliquary provided controlled temptation and just enough danger to allow the viewer to reject the sin of desire.⁸³

For the reliquary to function correctly in creating this transfer of desire, the right balance had to be achieved between David and Medusa, and between desire and disgust. Additions to the reliquary in the generations after its creation indicate the need to calibrate this balance. The known additions to the reliquary from after its initial creation suggest that Medusa's deflecting role could have been too successful and limited David's function. The later additions, the Virgin and Christ, the lion cameo, and the crown, all emphasize David's eventual salvation. Without these additions, the viewer would have more difficulty seeing David through Medusa and recognizing his eventual salvation in the relic.⁸⁴ Instead, the message would stop with the warning against desire, not the redirection of desire.

The cameo of Medusa, as both amulet and as an image of a monstrous female, is critical in the functioning of the reliquary for a male viewer. 1 Corinthians 11:3 counseled, "The head of every man is Christ and the head of the woman is the man." In the reliquary, this is reversed, and Medusa takes over the head of David. The viewer, seeing David's sin as a model of his own desire, must recognize himself in David's transformed feminine visage. This inversion can only be rectified when the viewer, emulating David, turns away from his desire, renouncing the *luxuria* of both sex and wealth. When he does this, Medusa's face on the cameo functions as an amulet, deflecting the viewer's gaze to Christ. By

once again making Christ his “head,” he can eliminate Medusa’s hold and obtain salvation.

NOTES

1. Historisches Museum Basel, inv. 1882.80.1.
2. See, for example, the other reliquaries in the Basel collection that were made in the region in Eggenberger, *Der Basler Münsterschatz*.
3. Eggenberger, *Die Basler Münsterschatz*, entry for Die goldene David, 41. The other details of the construction of this object and the accretion of additional parts can be found in Historisches Museum Basel, <http://www.hmb.ch/sammlung/goldschmiedekunst/92653-goldenes-koenig-david-bild-aus-dem-basler-muensterschatz.html>. This records that the original object was assembled around 1280, with the Madonna figurine added around 1320, and the enameled base and crown in the fifteenth century.
4. Wentzel, “Mittelalterliche Gemmen am Oberrhein,” 49.
5. While David, of course, was not himself Christian, he was seen as a Christian type, a godly king whose authorship of the Psalms gave him a role in predicting the coming of Christ.
6. Kinney, “Ancient Gems in the Middle Ages: Riches and Ready-Mades.”
7. Henig, “The Re-use and copying of ancient intaglios set in Medieval personal seals mainly found in England: an aspect of the Renaissance of the 12th century.”
8. Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 31.
9. As, for example, on the Shrine of the Three Kings from Cologne, which integrates a cameo of Medusa in just such a peripheral way, or the famous “purse of St. Stephen” that was part of the Holy Roman Empire’s crown jewels. For other examples of similar uses of such gemstones and cameos, see Bagnoli et al., *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*. I know of no other examples where a cameo replaces the face of another figure.
10. Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*, as well as Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” 6–8.
11. Ovid’s stories were widely excerpted and used in variations that assume that their characters were already familiar to audiences. See Clark, “Introduction,” *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, 15 and the examples in Smolak, “Ovid im 13. Jahrhundert: Zwischen Ablehnung und Bewunderung.”
12. The best-known illustrated *Aratea* is the ninth-century manuscript in Leiden (Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek MS VLQ 79), but there are at least ten other extant illuminated manuscripts from the ninth century alone in several different models. A resurgence of interest in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries brought additional manuscript editions

accompanying the influx of astronomical texts newly translated from Arabic (including Madrid Biblioteca Nacional MS 19, which combined multiple astronomy texts). This popularity continued through the early Renaissance. Dolan, *The Role of Illustrated Aratea Manuscripts in the Transmission of Astronomical Knowledge in the Middle Ages* (Ph.D. diss.), University of Pittsburgh, 2007. Other manuscripts depicting Medusa include an 1122 scientific textbook from Peterborough, England, now bound into British Library Cotton MS Tiberius C I (f. 22v), a copy of Lambert of St. Omer's *Liber Floridus* from c. 1460 (The Hague, KB 72 A 24, f. 74r), Raoul Lefèvre's *Recueil des Histoires de Troyes* from c. 1470 (The Hague, KB 78 D 48, f. 56v), and manuscripts of Pseudo-Hyginus' *De Astronomia* like a German manuscript from the first half of the fourteenth century (Lyon Bibliothèque municipale PA ms. 45, 76r). Retellings of her story were widely circulated not just in extracts and commentaries on Ovid, but also by authors like Christine de Pizan.

13. Her appearance is consistent in these; for example, she frequently appears in an apotropaic form on the vaults of early Christian catacombs like those of Apronianus and Domitilla. In all of these, she has the same rounded face and curling hair as the cameo, though the snakes seem to have been optional. Other carved gems, like that now in the Dumbarton Oaks collection as object 54.47, are familiar but hard to track individually in records. One Greek psalter of the end of the tenth century shows Medusa's head as a personification of the Red Sea in an image accompanying Psalm 78 (London, British Library Add. 40731, fol 127r). Even a waterspout from the north tower of the Limburg Cathedral from roughly the time the reliquary was created, shows the head of Medusa, as does a relief on the twelfth century belltower at Modena.
14. Brown, "As Excrement to Sacrament: The Dissimulated Pagan Idol of Ste-Marie d'Oloron," 577. This was similar to how other pagan magical objects could be cleansed and sanctified for Christian use. As Gervase of Tillbury suggested in the late-twelfth-century *Otia Imperialia*, "it is not the stones or their engravings that accomplish these things ... It is God, the supreme author of all that is, who accomplishes all these remedies through the words, the herbs, and the stones. An engraving is a sign of his power and is not powerful in itself." Gervase of Tillbury, *Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, 615–617. In the fourth century, Prudentius explained in *Contra Symmachus* that the images of pagan Rome could be transferred to Christian purposes. Camille, *The Gothic Idol*, 74. Camille adds that in the thirteenth century, it was particularly common to "cleanse" pagan images through "allegorical reclassification." This "allegorical reclassification" allows the cameo's intrinsic power to be diverted to Christian purposes, while the nature of the allegory involved amplifies the message (and warning) of the reliquary.

15. Beginning at least with Augustine, there was a tradition of suggesting that the mind used things which were available to the senses as the source of knowledge, and had to proceed from there to the preferred spiritual sight. Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing*; Soskice, "Sight and Vision in Medieval Christian Thought."
16. Lipton, "The Vulgate of Experience – Preaching, Art, and the Material World."
17. There are few published mentions besides the museum catalog listing. Koeppe mentions it in passing in a discussion of premodern stone carving, where he describes the reliquary as "eccentric," noting that Medusa's "snakehead studded coiffure" can still make a "plausible King David." Koeppe, "Mysterious and Prized: Hardstones in Human History before the Renaissance," 10. One sixteenth century description of the reliquary misidentified the object as representing Saint Anne, suggesting that the cameo was certainly read as female even when not identified as Medusa. Reinhardt, *Der Basler Münsterschatz*: 27.
18. The classic studies on this subject are Belting's "Portrait and Memory" and "St. Luke's Images of the Virgin and the Concept of the Portrait" in *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*. Perkinson's *The Likeness of a King: A Prehistory of Portraiture in Late Medieval France* uses late medieval portraits of the kings of France to argue that portraits focused on making the sitter distinctive and memorable while still making a legible portrait, so that facial mimesis might have mattered less than other modes of conveying identity. Johannes Roll argued that gesture and position mattered more than the face in establishing identity through the end of the fifteenth century in Italian and Spanish tomb sculptures. Roll, "Do we affect fashion in the grave?"
19. We might perhaps speculate that growing interest in portraiture over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries made the face more compelling to viewers, requiring the additions to maintain David's identity, but there is currently no evidence to support this possibility one way or the other.
20. Cohen has pointed out that the root of "monster" is also monstrare, to show, making a monstrance and a monster both something that reveals. Cohen, "Monster Culture," 4.
21. Monstrances grew enormously in popularity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, reflecting a growing interest in visually interacting with the human Christ. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 206–208, 288; Chaganti, *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary*, 108. The Basel Cathedral Treasury itself added five monstrances beginning in the 1330s and continuing through the sixteenth century.
22. Biddick, "Genders, Bodies, Borders," 409.

23. Austria Bundesministerium für Unterricht, *Europäische Kunst um 1400*, 418.
24. Inventory of the Basel Historisches Museum, "Goldenen König David des Basler Münsterschatzes."
25. The other reliquaries in the collection from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries range from 35 to 70 cm tall. Barth, *Erlesenes aus dem Basler Münsterschatz*. With the base, the reliquary measures 21.6 cm, and without it—thus as it would have been for its first two hundred years of existence—it measures 17.7 cm, making it less than half the height of the smallest of the other reliquaries. Many reliquaries were gold or silver gilt around a wooden core, which would have avoided the problem of the cost of the materials, including the famous reliquary of Ste. Foy in Conques and the reliquary of St. Just, as described in Montgomery, "Mittite capud meum."
26. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 4, lines 604–803; Book 5: lines 200–249.
27. Evidence for the continual effect of Ovid in medieval thought is seen in bestiaries, though Medusa also seems to have remained well-known from other sources. See the extensive discussions of such works in Keith and Rupp, *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, especially the editors' introduction and the article by Coulson.
28. Recent writings on Medusa are extensive, but among the most influential on these subjects are Cixious et al., "The Laugh of the Medusa"; Bowers, "Medusa and the Female Gaze"; and of course Freud, "Medusa's Head," originally published in 1922.
29. Leeming, *Medusa: In the Mirror of Time*, 35.
30. Regina James argues that this transformation made Medusa not just a sign of otherness in death, but a direct connection between sexual transgression and death. This "beautiful" Medusa head begins appearing in the fifth century. James, *Losing Our Heads: Beheadings in Literature and Culture*, 31.
31. Rita Copeland describes the additional source material for the Ovide Moralisé, including the editions of the *Roman de la Rose* and other works of Jean de Meun, as well as a variety of vernacular texts. Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, 107–125.
32. Heinrichs, *The Myths of Love*, 169.
33. Kay, "Women's body of knowledge," 214.
34. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 189–192. Bynum notes that miracle stories seem to show that men were more frequently cured at the site of a reliquary or shrine itself, while women were more often cured in or near home, perhaps suggesting that men's greater freedom to travel, especially alone, made them the more typical audience.

35. L'Hermite-Leclercq put this succinctly by saying that "women usually figure as direct objects" in medieval texts. L'Hermite-Leclercq, "The Feudal Order," 214. There were exceptions, and certainly the role of women was contextually variable and there was room for a less binary and bounded treatment of gender identity, but this attitude remained the most consistent. Bynum, "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages," *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 181 et seq.
36. Wogan-Browne, "Chaste bodies: frames and experiences," 25. For the legal situation, see Phillips, "Written on the Body," 129–137; Dunn, *Stolen Women in Medieval England*, 52; Ekholst, *A Punishment for Each Criminal*, 191.
37. Fulgentius, *Fulgentius the Mythographer*, 1.21.
38. Whitbread, *Fulgentius the Mythographer*, 62.
39. Ogden, *Perseus*, 132.
40. Commentary on Aeneid 4.289, Silvestris, *Commentary on the First Six Books of Virgil's "Aeneid,"* 69–70. His writing spread rapidly outside his initial circle, and has been cited as an inspiration for the works of Hildegard of Bingen, Chaucer, Nicholas of Cusa, and other writers well outside his French environment of Tours and Chartres. Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century*, 12.
41. Leeming, *Medusa*, 33.
42. Sanford, "Honorius and the Wheel of Fortune," 252.
43. The vice of luxury in medieval interpretation meant both sexual desire and the desire for worldly goods. Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art*, 58.
44. This addition would follow line 20780 in Félix Lecoy's standard edition of the text. See Langlois, *Le roman de la Rose*, note to lines 20810–20811.
45. Huot, "The Medusa Interpolation in the Romance of the Rose," 870.
46. Huot, "The Medusa Interpolation in the Romance of the Rose," 866.
47. Cynthia Hahn says the largest cluster of head and arm reliquaries is from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Hahn, "The Voices of the Saints," 20.
48. Gerson and Bynum, "Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts in the Middle Ages," 3–7. Body part reliquaries, also called "shaped reliquaries" or "speaking reliquaries," are in the form of body parts, usually arms or heads, but do not necessarily depict the same body part as the relic(s) within.
49. Hahn, "The Voices of the Saints," 28–29.
50. Hahn, "The Voices of the Saints," 20.
51. Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," 631–655, also Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*. The silver head reliquary of Saint Pantalus had

- arrived at Basel in 1270, while the head reliquaries of St. Thekla and St. Ursula were acquired in the fourteenth century. Reinhardt, *Der Basler Münsterschatz*, 18, 20–21.
53. Medieval discussions of the saintly body, especially the female body, focused on this idea of earthly fragmentation and heavenly reincorporation. Biddick, “Genders, Bodies, Borders,” 410. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity*, 221, 224.
 54. Snijder, “Antique and Mediaeval Gems on Bookcovers at Utrecht,” 14–15. In the context of reporting on copies of ancient gems used as a seals, Martin Henig records copies of carved images of Medusa used in this context due to increased international movement of such objects during and after the Crusades. Henig, “The Reuse and Copying of Ancient Intaglios set in Medieval Personal Seals,” 28. Joan Evans cites examples of cameos of Medusa’s head with protective Christian inscriptions added that were used as amulets, though the examples she gives are all before the eighth century. Evans, *Magical Jewels*, 26.
 55. Sütterlin, “Universals in Apotropaic Symbolism,” 70–71. Sütterlin emphasizes that it was the beautiful Medusa who appears in these amulets, not the gorgoneion, as though the return to order created by her decapitation restored her beauty while leaving her powers intact.
 56. Vikan notes that Medusa amulets seem to have been frequently used to protect the womb, at least in eastern contexts, and were sometimes paired with images of the Virgin Theotokos, and Spier claims that many amulets, including ones of Medusa and female demons, were brought from Byzantium in the wake of the Crusades. Vikan, “Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium,” 77. Spier, “Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition,” 33, 38. Magical carved stones were often given to churches in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Evans, *Magical Jewels*, 113.
 57. The story of David’s sin is found in II Kings 11. Bathsheba was the beautiful wife of one of David’s subjects, a soldier named Uriah. While Uriah was away fighting, David saw Bathsheba bathing and slept with her. She became pregnant. To hide his crime from Uriah, and to obtain Bathsheba for himself, David ensured that Uriah would be killed in battle. The prophet Nathan explained to David how he had displeased God, and that his punishment was the loss of his first child by Bathsheba (children, of course, could be property as women could). God rewarded David’s repentance with another child, who became King Solomon and thus created the lineage that led to Christ.
 58. Quoted and explained in Gosselin, *The King’s Progress to Jerusalem*, 16. It is interesting in light of this interpretation that the crown was added to the reliquary at about the same time as the base compartment.

59. Young, *Legend Builders of the West*, 11–12; Snijder, *Antique and Medieval Gems*, 14–15.
60. We can compare illustrations of the constellation of Perseus in the *Aratea* to images of David and Goliath in the Pamplona picture bible (Amiens, Bibliothèque de la Ville 108) made in 1197, for example.
61. John Fleminger notes that both David's sexuality and his fertility are emphasized in books from the Middle Ages into the early modern period. Fleminger, *Behind the Eyes of David*, 5–6.
62. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 300, illustrated in Cockerell, *A Psalter and Hours Executed Before 1270*, plate 7.
63. Delaissé, "The Importance of Books of Hours," 210.
64. Many books of hours were owned by women, and it is intriguing to think about the changes in the interpretation of this scene for women. However, the message would have been as critical for female viewers as male ones, though they might have been more likely to be encouraged to identify with Bathsheba as a model for how a woman might, through negligence, lead men astray. Holly Flora's article in this volume notes the pressure on women to avoid not only carnal behavior, but also the appearance of improper relations with men, and Bathsheba's open stance and the sense that she is not in an entirely hidden place contrast with representations of Susanna. Susanna was depicted less frequently, but images like the Lothar Crystal show her in a private enclosed garden, fully clad. She is also fully clad, but with her hair down, in the same scene in a thirteenth-century German prayer book, Morgan Library M. 739 fol. 18v.
65. Cohen points out that monsters provide both an opportunity for sexual transgression and a warning or control of the boundaries of appropriate behavior. Cohen, "Monster Culture," 16–17.
66. Indeed, while Medusa usually remained visibly human (and female) in illuminations, the illuminated edition of Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othéa* depict her as completely transformed into a monster (as in the c. 1460 manuscript Cologny, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cod. Bodmer 49, f. 84r). Christine's version emphasized that it was Medusa's beauty that transfixed men, redeeming Medusa from personal fault. Rosalind Brown-Grant emphasizes Christine's shift of Medusa from woman into object of abhorrence in such a way that Medusa's terrifying nature is disconnected from her femininity. Such a shift does not happen with the reliquary, or indeed, with most late medieval interpretations of the story, but it shows that Medusa's monstrosity was fundamental, even to those who sought to redeem her. Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defense of Women: Reading Beyond Gender*, 85.
67. This doubling of monstrosity through the addition of gendered identities is comparable to Carlee Bradbury's examination of how the images of the

- Jewish woman prioritized her femininity and elided her religion, enhancing the Jewish man's alterity so that his masculine features become part of the iconography of Jewish otherness. Here, though, it is David's incorporation of feminine attributes that creates the monster.
68. Quoted in Boynton and Reilly, *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 162.
 69. Gosselin, *The King's Progress to Jerusalem*, 14. Gosselin explores Augustine's varied glosses on David's name, all of which are said to point to Christ.
 70. Belting, *The Image and its Public in the Middle Ages*, 82. This fear was expressed both in direct relation to the use of reliquaries, as in Bernard's description of the cult of Sainte Foy and in the approach to idols. Idols were seen as precious statues that pagans mistakenly worshipped for their material value. Idols were never seen as ineffective, rather, they were demonic, able to bewitch the viewer through his eyes. Dahl, "Heavenly Images." Brown, "As Excrement to Sacrament," 577.
 72. Psalm 18:10–11: "The fear of the Lord is holy, enduring forever and ever: the judgments of the Lord are true, justified in themselves. More to be desired than gold and many precious stones: and sweeter than honeycomb." *Timor Domini sanctus, permanens in saeculum saeculi; judicium Domini vera, justificata in semetipsa. Desiderabilia super aurum et lapidem pretiosum multum; et dulciora super mel et favum.*
 73. II Chronicles 9:23: *Omnesque reges terrarum desiderabant videre faciem Salomonis, ut audirent sapientiam, quam dederat Deus in corde ejus.*
 74. Luxuria as a sin was associated both with sexual desire and material greed in both texts and images, especially Prudentius' *Psychomachia*. Not only was Luxuria itself both of these kinds of unrestrained desire, and often shown as a woman holding precious objects or luxury goods, but Luxuria was often paired in images with Avaricia. Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Mediaeval Art*, 1–20.
 75. While I cannot prove that the cameo's material is anything more than a coincidence, an additional meaning might have adhered due to interpretations of sardonyx in influential lapidaries like that of Marbode of Rennes. His *de Lapidus*, like others of the same period, claimed that sardonyx allowed a man to sleep without dreaming and did away with vice. Medusa's form incited lust, but the material of this carving provided a remedy. Riddle, *Marbode of Rennes' 'de lapidus'*, 46–47.
 76. This was very atypical for a medieval reliquary. While they frequently incorporated visually separate elements like carved gems as adornments, when disparate objects were connected to form a figure, they were united with a surface treatment. The reliquary of Ste. Foy at Conques unites her

- late antique face with her medieval body by covering the whole in gold leaf. While the styles are different, the surface treatment ensures that the reliquary reads as a single figure.
77. Cohen points out that monsters are always hybrids that refuse to fit into established categories, thereby destabilizing order. Cohen, "Monster Culture," 6–7.
 78. Caroline Walker Bynum has noted this stillness as a particular function of the medieval male experience of the divine, a gender distinction in which the presence of the sacred "throws the men into a profound stillness" while it is described as heightening women's experience with a "sensuality beyond words." She later notes that males were more often cured by prayer at the site of reliquaries, while female cures tended to happen at a distance, rather than in the visual field of the relic. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 192.
 79. James, "Losing Our Heads," 30.
 80. Bynum has argued that men used this type of role reversal, taking on aspects of femininity, as a sign of their efforts to become more Christlike, as Christ's adoption of flesh made him more like women. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 171.
 81. Christ, of course, could actually be seen as a shield. In the *Ancrene Wisse*, the knight's shield represents Christ's body in a meditation on the passion, leading into a discussion of the superiority of Christ's love over earthly love. Innes-Parker, "The lady and the king," 509–522. In this context, it is interesting to speculate on the likely additional interpretations that might have adhered to this object through now lost popular stories and meditations.
 82. Binski, *Medieval Death*, 147.
 83. Holly Flora makes a similar argument in noting that giving away money to become poor was more virtuous than merely being poor; likewise, resisting temptation provided an opportunity for victory over sin. Holly Flora, "Gender and Poverty in Late Medieval Art," this volume.
 84. While the representation of Medusa is quite typical and recognizable, David is missing his most common attributes, so the viewer must rely on the banner, especially before the crown and lion were added. Most image types representing David, and the types that appear most frequently, included his lyre or harp and his crown, while the lion of Judah occasionally appeared. Hourihane, *King David in the Index of Christian Art*, xix, xxiii. It would have been very difficult, and visually distracting, to provide David with a lyre in this composition.

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