

Religion and Human Creativity: The Middle Door of the West Straight Gate “Portal of the Doctors” of Cologne Cathedral

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Abstract:

The “*Portal of the Doctors*” is located in Cologne Cathedral, whose construction began in 1248 in Germany and is the third highest Catholic cathedral in the world and the largest in northern Europe. The main purpose of the research is to start from the sculpture art and architectural style, and emphasize its fine and special craft and expression, to emphasize the influence of religious belief, pilgrimage, and social and political background on the construction of “*Portal of the Doctors* “. At the same time, accompanied by the description of the “*Portal of the Doctors* “ can highlight the character’s performance. In particular, the spire structure and the semi-domed sculpture area show the narrative space of religious themes. The second part is to divide the different positions of the “*Portal of the Doctors* “ both beautiful and important functional structure analysis. This solid construction and sculptural detail enhance the sacred atmosphere of harmony. The structural features encourage the middle gate of the Lower Cimen to serve not only as the main entrance and exit for believers and visitors but also as a symbolic gateway to spiritual experience. The last part analyzes the relationship between the West Gate of Columbia Cathedral and Central Asian culture and the vulnerability of cultural heritage. Through a multifaceted analysis of the “*Portal of the Doctors* “, the article reveals the complex relationship between religion, art, and culture, and emphasizes the importance of Gothic sculpture art architecture in any period.

Keywords: Portal of the Doctors; Religion and Society; Gothic Architecture and Architectural Style; Spiritual Experience; Central Asian Cultures.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the analysis and understanding of the religious and social importance of the “*Portal of the Doctors*”, as well as its symbolic significance in the evolution of the architectural style, because the period was not completed until 1880 under Kaiser Wilhelm, and it took more than 600 years to complete and is still being repaired. This study has important academic and cultural value in understanding the interaction between Gothic architecture and Christian art, and how they reflected and influenced German society and culture for centuries at the time. This study mainly focuses on the architectural and sculptural styles of “*Portal of the Doctors*”, the symbols of religious structures, and the different social and cultural influences of contrast methods.

In the research method, this research uses a variety of ways. First of all, literature analysis is to find and read relevant materials and literature. The strength of this approach lies in the ability to dig deep and analyze the descriptions of the “*Portal of the Doctors*” in historical documents, as well as comparative studies of the understandings it has generated in the context of different cultural regions, thereby revealing its unique position in art and religion. Secondly, the comparison method is used

to compare and communicate with ancient architectural sculptures of the same period or the same style and content of Central Asian culture. Finally, the structural problems are analyzed in detail by the shooting and analysis of the field building pictures, which is conducive to the conduct of this study and ensures the depth and breadth of the study.

The ultimate goal of this study is to fully reveal the value and historical significance of the architectural sculpture art of “*Portal of the Doctors*” in different aspects, as well as its communication and influence among different cultures. To achieve this goal, this study not only provides an in-depth analysis of the architectural style of the “*Portal of the Doctors*”, but also explores its symbolic significance in religion and society, and how it conveys the core beliefs of Christianity through the work of art. In addition, by comparing the characteristics of Gothic architecture with those of other cultures (such as the Buddhist art of Central and South Asia), this study aims to reveal the similarities and mutual influences between different cultures, provide more understanding of the “*Portal of the Doctors*” and this type of sculpture architecture, and improve the understanding of predecessors’ beliefs and the language people put into architectural sculpture art during that period.



Fig. 1 Panoramic view of the entire “*Portal of the Doctors*” [1].

2. Background

Cologne Cathedral is one of the most outstanding church buildings in the whole of Christendom. As the seat of a significant Roman Catholic archbishop, it is the spiritual center of the religious life of Catholics in Germany [2].

The “*Portal of the Doctors*” in Cologne Cathedral is an outstanding example of Gothic art, with elaborate carvings that are deeply rooted in the religious and cultural context of the Middle Ages. The gate was built at an important

stage in the cathedral’s long construction timeline, beginning in 1248 and continuing into the 19th century, while the gate specifically dates back to the end of the 13th century, sometime between 1280-1320. In this period, the details of the sculpture and the expression of the figures are prominent characteristics, reflecting the theological transmission of God and the Pope’s extensive dissemination of faith.

The early construction of the cathedral (1248-1322) was concentrated in the eastern sector, influenced by the high

Gothic style, which emphasized verticality and light. As construction progressed, decorative elements, including doors, became increasingly important. The “*Portal of the Doctors*” shows these decorative elements through its intricate carvings, in keeping with the wider stages of the cathedral’s development.

The cathedral houses the relics of the “Three Holy Kings”, symbolizing the pagan acceptance of Christianity. Because the origin of the “*Portal of the Doctors*” is closely related to the three holy Kings of Christianity, because the carved decoration is associated with these wise men of the East who presented the Holy Child at the birth of Jesus. The story holds great significance in the Christian tradition, symbolizing reverence for Jesus and acceptance of the faith from around the world. The unique costumes and gestures of the three holy Kings in the sculptures reflect the cultural backgrounds of different countries, demonstrating not only religious significance but also society’s respect for the wise and knowledgeable. The location of the “*Portal of the Doctors*” is therefore closely related to the preservation and veneration of this important relic, making it an important pilgrimage destination for all believers to express their reverence for God when they enter the door. At the same time, the construction of the church was supported by the German royal family and local nobility during most of the German period, so the location of the “*Portal of the Doctors*” took into account the religious beliefs and social and political structures of the time. In particular, the stone support of the gate sculpture expresses the combination of sacred and secular power, highlighting

The “*Portal of the Doctors*” of Cologne Cathedral is not only a testimony to the architectural and artistic achievements of the Gothic period, but also a profound expression of the religious beliefs, cultural identity, and social values of the time. This gate serves as a bridge between the earthly and the divine and gives people a place of hope and faith.

3. Sculpture

The hundreds of sculptures on the “*Portal of the Doctors*” are notable for their delicate craftsmanship, with figures wearing flowing robes, complicated hairstyles, and expressive gestures. Each figure conveys a personality and character, often with symbolic attributes, to express the special significance that they uniquely bring to the believer and the sculpture also combines the spirit of Pope John XXII, who maintained an unorthodox view of theological thought, with the cultural beliefs of Frederick II, who transformed the sculpture during his reign.

3.1 Spire Structure Sculpture

The spire structure refers to a typical architectural element of Gothic design. In the context of “*Portal of the Doctors*”, this is expressed as a sculptural form that rises sharply into the sky, reflecting the verticality of Gothic architecture. Figures included in pointed arch niches or arches emphasize upward movement and the spiritual longing characteristic of the Gothic style. There are nine of them, including angels and Christian guardians, standing and sitting in different ways. Among them, the head of the sculpture on the left side of the penultimate row fell because of war and weathering factors, which is a pity but does not lack charm, and still inspires awe.



Fig. 2 Panoramic view of spire structure sculpture [3]

3.2 Half Dome Sculpture

When receiving the paper, we assume that the corresponding authors grant us the copyright to use the paper for the book or journal in question. When receiving the paper, we assume that the corresponding authors grant us the copyright to use. The half-dome above the door is usually decorated with figure sculptures of situational categories of great religious significance. This area serves as a visual narrative space depicting salvation, worship, and divinity, allowing visitors and believers to understand or revere the main stories and characters of Christian culture before they enter.

Thus, in Christian theology, the “*Portal of the Doctors*”

half-dome was the first to produce the concept of the Trinity, the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It forms a linear perspective corresponding to the relics of the “Holy Trinity” in the house, and the role of worship and appreciation at the same time reflects the multiple attributes and indivisibility of God. This core of faith emphasizes the complex Christian understanding of God, showing the different roles of God in creating, redeeming, and guiding the lives of believers.

Second, it describes multiple saints as individuals recognized by the Church as holy. It is easier to think of St. Francis as eccentric than as lacking in individuality. The saints are not bland. Many have been offended at them for being very, very truthful instead of very, very nice [4]. Therefore, it can be found on the sculpture that it is the smoothest line, the smoothest cloth pleats, and the mildest description of the charm of the eyes.

In addition, there were prophets and martyrs of different priesthoods. Prophets played an important role in the Old

Testament as God’s spokesmen, communicating God’s will and prophecies [5]. Therefore, book records are partially held up in the depiction to present a state of talking with other idols, while adding body movements. For example, the second-to-last row on the right has a touch on the arm. Martyrs, on the other hand, represent the ultimate devotion to faith and are highly revered for their sacrifice for faith [6]. It is the cleanest and strongest line in the Half Dome sculpture story, symbolizing faith and perseverance through the cloth folds of the clothes, the firm expression, and the sense of strength manifested by the muscles according to the change of movement.

Finally, archangels such as Michael and Gabriel symbolize divine power and mystical revelation [7]. Therefore, it can be observed that the expression of the sculpture is somewhat different, giving people a state of being unable to see the mystery but having carved with very sacred lines.

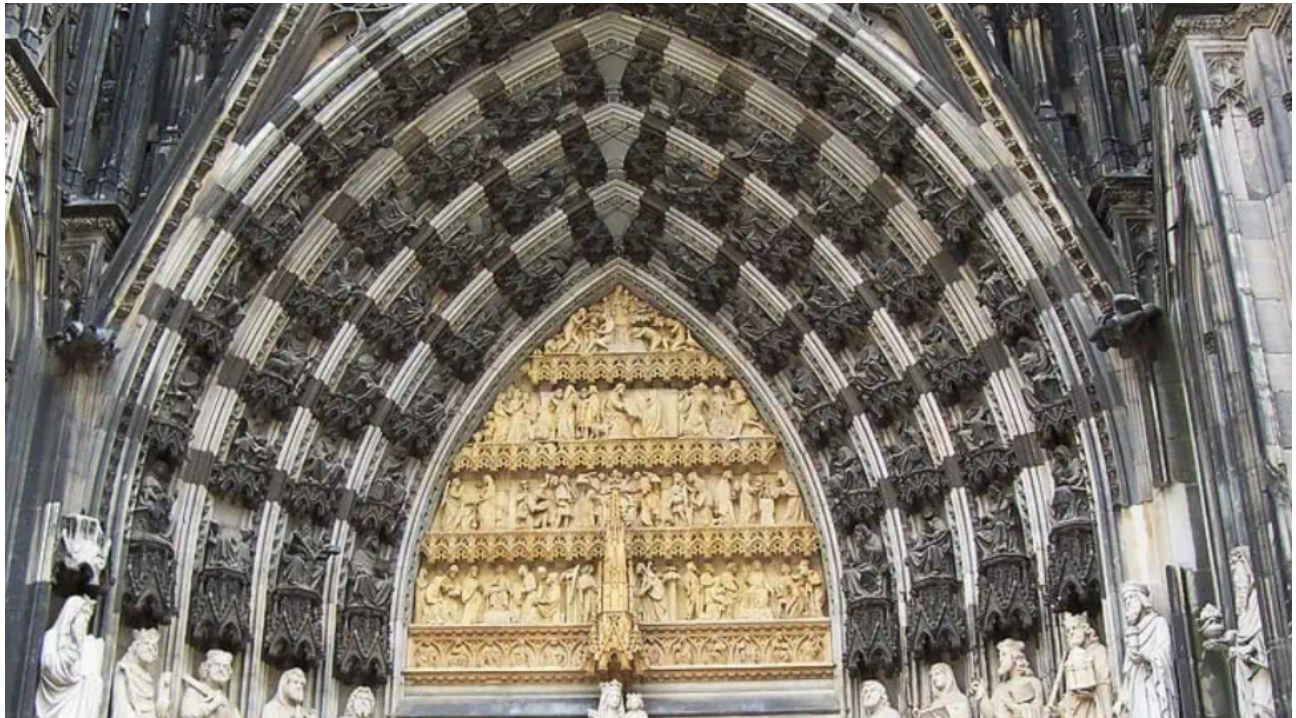


Fig. 3 Panoramic view of Half Dome Sculpture [8]

3.3 Artistic Representation of the Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus and the Twelve Apostles

The depiction of the Virgin Mary with the infant Jesus is a central theme in Christian art, representing motherhood,

compassion, and divine grace [9]. The position of the statue shows that the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus are surrounded by the twelve apostles, symbolizing the foundation of the church and the spread of Christianity.



Fig. 4 Panoramic view of statues of Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus [10]

These twelve apostles, each with its characteristics, together form the sculptural cornerstone of early Christianity. Their images and stories reflect not only their personalities but also the teaching and mission of Jesus.

First, Simon Peter is widely regarded as the leader of the early German church, and his strong physique and bushy beard make him stand out among the apostles [11]. As one of Jesus' closest disciples, he was carved with firm, embodied leadership that laid the foundation for the growth

of the Church. The sculpture of Peter's brother, Andre, appears as a young and slender figure, the first disciple to follow Jesus, and the shrewd eyes of the sculpture show a keen insight into Jesus' mission.

James and John in the twelve standing sculptures are Peter's companions, the former with a strong and serious expression presented to the incoming believers, the latter with a young and gentle temperament, and soft lines to distinguish and contrast people.

Philip, on the other hand, was a smiling disciple of medium stature, easily recognized among the twelve, and always able at first sight. Bartholomew (Nathanael), like Philip, is particularly recognizable in the twelve sculptures, because he uses the largest carved stone to present a tall, peaceful image.

Next, Matthew is the most well-dressed of the twelve, looking smart and capable. The image of Jacob the Younger is relatively ordinary because there are few stories about him in the Bible at that time.

The carvings of Judas Iscariot, however, are presented to the masses as melancholy and cunning. "Notorious for betraying Jesus, so this vicious expression was at that time because of the sculptor and the emperor", the religion and the masses hated him, but at that time some people from some renegade parties went back to pay homage to show that the overthrow struggle was smooth [8]. In stark contrast to this are Simon the Zealots and Datia (Judas), the first to be sculpted with enthusiasm. The second is presented as a young and gentle image, giving people a warm heart and a gentle spring breeze.



Fig. 5 The six apostles in the right hemisphere [12]



Fig. 6 The six apostles in the left hemisphere [13]

4. Structural Analysis

4.1 Location and Functions

The “*Portal of the Doctors*” is one of the main entrances to the magnificent Cologne Cathedral. The central position, facing the West, symbolizes the hope and light of Christianity and is associated with Christian eschatology, as believers firmly believe that Jesus will return from the West. The cathedral’s west front measures almost 7,000 square meters in area, making it the largest church façade ever built. It also has a completely uniform design, because it adheres very closely to the surviving parchment plan (‘Fassadenplan F’), which is 4.05 meters in height and was probably drawn around 1280 by the then cathedral architect, Arnold, or his son and successor, Johannes (72) [14]. This door not only provides a gateway for worshippers and visitors but also symbolizes a gateway to spiritual experiences and collective gatherings within this iconic building.

The scale of the “*Portal of the Doctors*” is consistent with the vertical and grand emphasis of Gothic architecture, impressing visitors and symbolizing the majesty and mystery of entering a sacred space. The sculpture on the Doctor’s gate depicts three wise men, or “Three Holy Kings,” echoing the “Three Holy Kings” in the church, who came to worship at the time of Christ’s birth, suggesting worshippers who came to express their faith. These sculptures have a deep religious significance, expressing reverence for faith, reflecting the society’s emphasis on education and knowledge at the time, and symbolizing wisdom and

enlightenment.

4.2 Architectural Style

Cologne Cathedral is a typical example of high Gothic architecture. This is characterized by its grand scale, pointed arches, ribbed vaults, and complex flying buttresses, which are particularly distinctive in the minaret and semicircle structures. These not only add to the beauty of the building but also have key structural functions. The verticality and light-filled interior of the “*Portal of the Doctors*” reflects the Gothic period’s desire to direct the eye upwards and create a sense of the sacred.

4.3 Structural Elements

The frame of the “*Portal of the Doctors*” is made of solid stone, using local limestone. In general, Obernkirchner sandstone is a very deterioration resistant stone material [15]. The top of the door is often set with an arch structure, which not only has aesthetic value but also effectively distributes the weight of the upper wall and enhances the stability of the overall building.

Decorations on the inside of the door may include detailed reliefs depicting saints, angels, or other religious figures, reflecting the religious beliefs and social culture of the time. The level of detail and expression of the relief reflects the high skill of the craftsmen at that time.

In addition, the sides of the door are often equipped with exquisite columns, which not only play a supporting role but may also be inlaid with stained glass Windows, which create a mysterious and solemn atmosphere through the refraction of light. The decoration of the pillars may in-

clude plant motifs, geometric shapes, or religious symbols, further enriching the visual effect.

Taken as a whole, these structural elements and decorative details together constitute a striking entrance, symbolizing a gateway to the sacred and to knowledge, encouraging believers and visitors to stay, meditate, and pray, and to experience the religious atmosphere and cultural heritage of the cathedral.

5. “Portal of the Doctor’s” Relationship with Central Asian Cultures

Every building is an expression of the language of its time, and in the great world, they also have a common language with another one in someplace. It has friends across the continent or nearby who have never met, and it connects them to resonate.

5.1 Architectural Style and Sculpture Art

The “*Portal of the Doctors*” is known for its Gothic architectural features of Latin cross-plan, soaring vaults, and flying buttresses. It is surprisingly similar to the mortise and tenon structure of Tang Dynasty China and the spire design of Ming Dynasty pagodas. The architecture of the Tang Dynasty also pursued the harmonious aesthetic sense of space, and paid attention to the stability of structure and the elegance of form, showing the common pursuit of different cultures in architectural art.

At the same time, the sculpture art of the “*Portal of the Doctors*” is rich and diverse, showing exquisite craftsmanship and profound religious themes. “The carvings on the door not only depict religious stories but also convey the values and beliefs of the society at the time,” and bear a striking resemblance to Buddhist carvings in Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar [16]. These sculptures are exquisitely detailed and vividly express the emotions and expressions of the characters, reflecting the artist’s ultimate pursuit of detail. This art of sculpture is not only decorative but also narrative, telling the story of faith and humanity.

5.2 Historical Context and Vulnerability under Fire

The construction of Cologne Cathedral began in 1248 and was completed in 1880 after several centuries of hardships. This long construction period reflects an era of persistent pursuit of faith and architectural art. The builders of the cathedral were deeply influenced by the religious beliefs of the time and have always remained faithful to the original design, a spirit that echoes the great temples of Burma in Central Asia. These temples are not only reli-

gious symbols but also cultural and historical testimonies of human resilience in the face of challenges.

However, the history of Cologne Cathedral has not been smooth. During the Second World War, this magnificent building was heavily bombed and many of the sculptures and structures of the “*Portal of the Doctors*” were destroyed, with the damage to the sculptures in the pointed structure being particularly distressing. This situation is similar to the experience of the destruction of the Old Summer Palace in China, both of which represent the fragility and irreplaceability of historical and cultural heritage. Whether it is the destruction of Cologne Cathedral or the disappearance of Yuanmingyuan, it is a major destruction of the cultural architecture left by human war. Human beings cannot withstand war, and the “language” of architecture needs to be inherited.

6. Conclusion

In short, Cologne Cathedral’s “*Portal of the Doctors*” is an outstanding example of Gothic art, weaving together complex sculpture, architectural innovation, and profound religious significance. In a period marked by spiritual aspirations and artistic endeavors, this entrance not only enhances the grandeur of the cathedral but also serves as a visual narrative that connects the faithful to their faith and traditions.

The fine craftsmanship of the sculptures reflects the personality and character of the saints and scholars depicted, each of which conveys an important theological message. Architectural features, including spire structures and half-dome sculptures, reinforce the Gothic design’s verticality and light-filled interior character, inviting visitors into a sacred space where both celebration and reverence are celebrated.

In addition, the importance of a portal goes beyond its physical properties. It symbolizes the intersection of faith and knowledge, reflecting medieval society’s respect for education and its commitment to preserving religious monuments, such as the bones of the “Three Holy Kings.” This connection to the broader religious and cultural themes of the time highlighted the role of Cologne Cathedral as an important pilgrimage destination and center of ecclesiastical authority within the Holy Roman Empire.

Furthermore, the architectural and artistic elements of the “*Portal of the Doctors*” resonate with influences from various cultures, including Central Asia. The similarities between structural styles and sculptural art reveal a common human quest for holiness across cultures and eras, enriching the understanding of the place of Gothic architecture in a global context.

In the end, the “*Portal of the Doctors*” became a lasting

testimony to the artistic and spiritual pursuits of that era. It prompts reflections on the enduring power of faith, the importance of knowledge, and the complex connections between art, architecture, and cultural identity. Through this entrance, viewers are led to a sacred space that transcends time, encouraging a deeper appreciation of the stories and beliefs that shape the sacred landscape of Cologne Cathedral.

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