Antoine Chrysostôme Quatremère de Quincy (1755-1849) and the Rediscovery of Polychromy in Grecian Architecture: Colour Techniques and Archaeological Research in the Pages of "Olympian Zeus."

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It was the *grand tour* or, rather, the classical pilgrimage undertaken in Italy for study and discovery purposes in 1776, by Antoine-Chrysostôme Quatremère de Quincy at the age of twenty-one, which gave that logical meaning to the cult for antiquity – especially in ancient Greece – for which he is famous. Very shortly after his reconnoitring of Sicily (in 1779-1780 and 1783-1784), Quatremère de Quincy made a preparatory draft for his study on the Temple of Olympian Zeus at Agrigento (1805). Quatremère's book is proof of the arrival of a new method in historiography, where the marriage between the analysis of source texts and archaeological research becomes the best, most modern method for rebuilding the ancient world.

Many years later, in the preface to a later, more refined work (1814) – although it was to suffer the same fate as his "Olympian Zeus" – Quatremère states his ambitions as wishing to redeem himself after the years of exile in Germany, and the retirement from academia which had been forced upon him by Napoleon. He also says that those were the most fertile years of his youth, especially in terms of the references that the places he had visited gave him. Surrounded by the ruins of such a glorious past, he saw history come to life when he brought all his finds together: "one single fragment could show us both the makeup of a chef d'oeuvre and the ideals and style of the man who fashioned it" (Quatremère de Quincy 1814, p. i). The enthusiasm for such finds was to echo through the depths of *this* scholar's soul, and to leave behind deep impressions and stimuli.

Quatremère de Quincy's reflections during those years found an immediate outpouring in the first volume of the *Encyclopédie Méthodique. Architecture*, published in 1788 (Quatremère de Quincy 1788). The publishing enterprise directed by Charles Panckoucke gave the same importance to architecture as it did to other sciences. The entry on Agrigento gives a detailed analysis of the buildings that Quatremère saw, but the first draft concentrated on the Temple of Zeus (popularly known as the "Temple of the Giants"). The discovery of the telamones was yet to happen (this would follow in 1804), and Quatremère thought the name was due to the gigantic blocks used to build the temple, or perhaps the subject of a bas-relief on one of the pediments (which depicts a primordial battle between the gods or gigantomachia). When Politi and Cockerell made their discoveries, the information in the 1832 *Dictionnaire* (Quatremère de Quincy 1832) was updated, and the temple is used as a symbol for the city.

While examining the discoveries, Quatremère could only see a pile of enormous stones: "When I first saw Agrigento in 1779, I had no difficulty in identifying the ruined building; a simple inspection of the area was most moving, even when merely measuring the length thereof" (Quatremère de Quincy 1815 b, p. 288). He only needed to look at a capital and a triglyph to check the measurements given by the Greek writer Diodorus Siculus. Quatremère chose to start with these texts as a gamble – to use the term coined by Vivant Denon – and as a way of finding the overall measurements of the building. In this way, he hoped to find the connections between the temples at Agrigento and Paestum and those at Athens.

Quatremère read the findings of his research to the Classics course at a public session of the Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres on 1 March 1805. His pamphlet, "On the Discovery of the Temple of Olympian Zeus at Agrigento" (Quatremère de Quincy, 1805) was a foretaste of his final report, published ten years later in the Academy's *Proceedings* (Quatremère de Quincy 1815 b). This later edition also contained an illustration showing the layout of the temple, the front, a perspective view, and the capital with a fragment of the trabeation, and a table comparing the columns in the Temples of Zeus and Concord at Agrigento with those at the Parthenon.

In 1825, when printing began on the third volume of the *Encyclopédie*, the reconstruction of one of the telamones allowed Quatremère to update the Telamon entry and to insert an interesting note on these sculptures. He stated that they were surely covered with stucco and "probably painted using the same colours as used on the building" (Quatremère, 1825, p. 446). The mention of colour being used to decorate the Atlantes – as indeed the whole Temple – is a return to the image of polychrome Greek art which first appeared in Quatremère's "Olympian Zeus, or the Art of Ancient Sculpture considered from a new viewpoint," which, at the 13 March 1903 sitting, was to be described by his successor at the Académie, Henri Wallon, as a "monument erected by Greek archaeology to Greek genius" (Wallon 1903, p. 31). In 1814, this work revolutionised the popular consideration of antiquity, and placed the Sicilian Temples on the same level as those in classical Greece.

In this work on the history of Greek sculpture from the period immediately before Pericles until the century of Constantine, most of Quatremère's studies (from his first explorations until the early 1800s) come together. In a series of public lectures held at the Académie from 1804 to 1810 the scholar had already expounded some of his main theories, before unifying them for the final volume (Guigniaut 1866, p. 68). In the years to come, Quatremère went on to develop his early postulates,

> and to breathe life into [...] all those buildings and works of art which the Romans and Greeks had written about with a fair amount of accuracy and detail. He was able to do this by searching for all the information he needed and comparing sources, and by means of his critical faculties and the details he required, he could return the ancient world to his readers. (Quatremè de Quincy 1829, p. i)

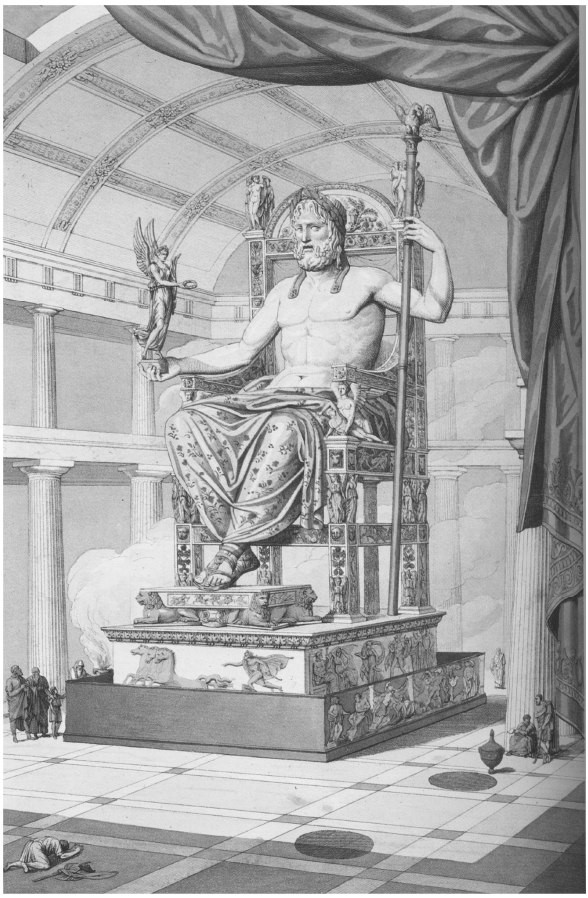

Figure 1. Olympian Zeus on his throne in the Temple (Quatremère de Quincy 1814, fig. 1)

The ideals according to which Quatremère decided which works he wished to bring out of the fog of time were those of the science of archaeology and didactics. For "Olympian Zeus," he did not wish to speak of the beauty, proportions, harmony, or precision of the sculpture or the objects around the Temple. Rather, he hoped to provide a new context for the ancient world, in other words, he wanted to create an atmosphere which would sweep away all the criteria that had been in use until then. The author entrusts the images of these works with the task of rediscovering the past, insisting especially upon their technical skills. He says:

> Such a re-discovery, far from treating of the intrinsic beauty of the building, has no other purpose than to enable the reader to understand how it was built, and the effect it has on the senses, and to eliminate the prejudices of modern taste towards this type of sculpture.
>
> (Quatremère de Quincy 1829, p. iv)

It is evident that his main preoccupation was to change the tastes of his contemporaries, and to shatter their prejudices about the ancient world.

As happened with "savages," the early Greeks made their idols and statues of wood. They were painted and dressed like mannequins, and a very similar thing had happened with architecture: the first stone buildings were merely a copy of their wooden precedents, and wooden statues were gradually replaced with stone ones (or some other, precious material). So it was that Quatremère was the first to use the term "polychrome," and in 1806 he overturned the world of historiography with his information about the colours used on ancient sculptures. He did it in an extremely sensitive and far-sighted way, and would involve generations of architects in this debate.

However, often the thinking of this lucid theoretician has been interpreted as “academic” or “standardising,” and he has been accused of being mainly interested in polychrome statuary, with architecture taking only second place. This is an understanding from which the figure of Quatremère emerges as the dogged defender of the dogmatic rules of architecture only in so far as they can be identified in the chilly marble model used during the classical revival.

Actually, the appearance of Quatremère's "Olympian Zeus" was a turning point for the understanding of ancient art as it had been since the first discoveries by such archaeological pioneers as Spon and Wheeler (1676), or the sketches by Le Roy (1755) and Stuart and Revett (1751-1753), and was to be seen in the first use of colour in the studios of neo-classical architects, archaeologists, and painters from the 1820's onwards. One needs only think of the studies at the Temples of Paestum carried out by Labrouste in 1828, where colour is not yet particularly strong, or those by Thomas in 1849. The intensity and emotion of colour then reaches a crescendo with the reconstructions on paper of entire parts of ancient cities, as seen during the second half of the century (such as the Prix de Rome in Greece of 1845-1863), and the restoration work undertaken in the same places.

Quatremère had to wait until 1814 for the right time to publish a work that, as can be deduced from the foreword, had been conceived a long time beforehand, perhaps even before the Revolution. A few months after the first edition, the second one came out bearing the date 1815, and a royal warrant was followed by a solemn epistle dedicatory to Louis XVIII (which had already appeared in the first edition). With the return of a liberal monarchy to France, Quatremère hoped to find a market for a particularly beautiful and ambitious book, with all the attention given to the typesetting, rather than for the acceptance of a work that was the result of his dealings with Johann Joachim Winckelmann. The book, and even its title, was very audacious. It seemed like a monograph, but was in fact a treatise on ancient sculpture and introduced many innovations. The time seemed right for the publication of a book with complex language and metaphors about architecture, such as "Olympian Zeus."

Figure 2. Sketch of gold and ivory Minerva, the Parthenon (Quatremère de Quincy 1814, fig. 9)

It was certainly no accident that references to works of art which were spoken of but which no longer existed, except in ancient literary texts (such as the statues of Zeus and Minerva by Pheidias, the shield of Achilles as described by Homer, or the ivory chest of Cypselus as described by Pausanias) were preparing the terrain for a more ambitious project, i.e. giving readers a new outlook on these works. Indeed, on the one hand, he eliminated the limitations that were inherent in the old, fragmentary classification system for works and styles. On the other, he provided a wealth of detail about the environs, climate, habits, and customs as Goethe had started doing in his Diaries, and worked up to information about society in general, religion, and the evolution of working techniques and the materials used.

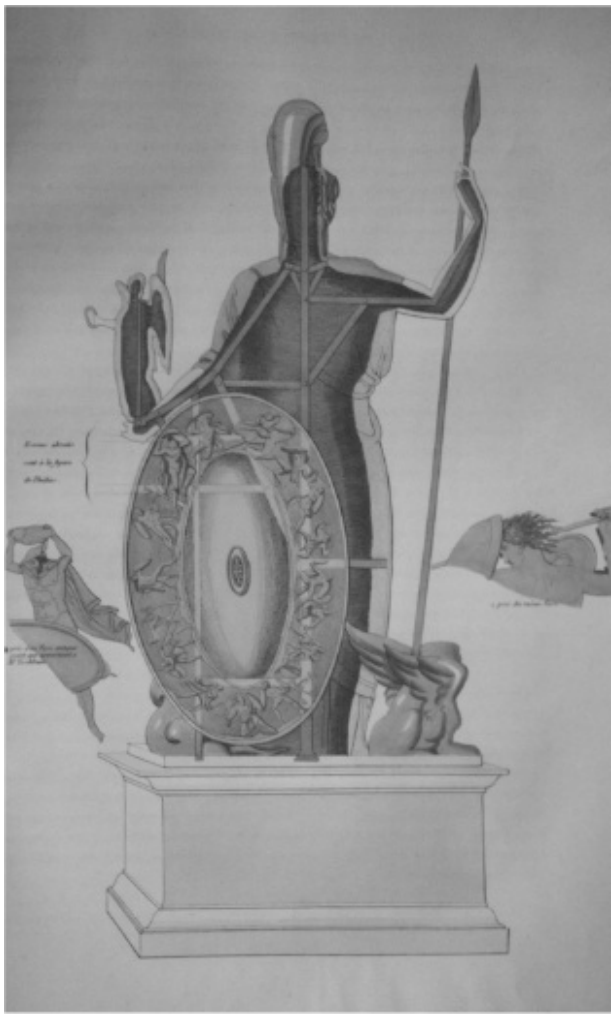

Figure 3. Cross-section of the Parthenon Minerva, with inner framework (Quatremère de Quincy 1814, fig. 11)

Quatremère's work as an historian, which involved him returning works to their proper (historical) contexts, meant that he had to sever all ties with the antiquarian and the past, and to play according to Winckelmann's rules. The scientific artifice of reconstructing works of art that were no longer in existence, was largely dependent upon the historical and interpretative work of recognising the references to them in literature. Furthermore, many technical aspects such as putting together different materials (e.g. ivory, gold, and other precious metals) were merely a metaphor for his wider intention of opening people's eyes to "existence by means of the imagination" (Quatremère de Quincy 1814, p. xvi). The illustrations to the text were drawn by the author himself, and coloured by hand in every individual copy.

Figure 4. The Shield of Achilles, as described by Homer (Quatremère de Quincy 1814, fig. 3)

Figure 5. Throne of Asclepius at Epidaurus (Quatremère de Quincy 1814, fig. 24)

Discussions on polychromy in the ancient world were sparked off throughout France and then the rest of Europe, thanks to the importance of "Olympian Zeus." These were mainly based on the speeches and opinions published by the *Journal des Savants*, the monthly magazine of the newly-reinstated Institut Royal de France (reorganised in 1816), which had printed a review of a work by the lifelong secretary of one of its branches, the Académie des Beaux-Arts. The importance of Quatremère is particularly noticeable in the work of many contemporary architects, such as Jakob Ignaz Hittorff or Leo Von Klenze, but even they could do nothing to save his book from its unfortunate publishing and historical fate.

Quatremère's investigations into cryselephantine sculpture did not merely concentrate upon the secrets of ancient statues or upon the techniques used in making and assembling such ingenious artefacts: they also showed their importance for the buildings for which they had been made, and brought to light an architecture which had been unknown until then. It is of no importance that the Romans had used monochrome materials such as marble or bronze for their sculptures, whereas the Greeks preferred ivory, gold, and precious stones. According to Quatremère, all classical statues, with their polychrome colourings, produced the same colour effects upon classical architecture. To prove this point his "Olympian Zeus" placed an amazing array of thirty-one pictures before his readers' eyes, and showed not just the important deities but also their attributes, the thrones upon which they sat, their triumphal carriages, and much more besides.

Within the text are many references to the buildings that housed these objects. Such is the case for the temples at Olympia, Athens, or Antioch, where the same attitude to polychromy is to be found. However, possibly because of the wealth of detail in a work so full of linguistic metaphors, as "Olympian Zeus" is, Quatremère's polychromy comes closer to an idea of polymaterial, i.e. a "natural" variety brought about by the use of so many different materials, rather than any multiplicity of the colours of paints applied to the surface of marble or stone. A careful reading of the work shows many passages where the use of painting in architecture had already been envisaged and accepted as incontrovertible proof:

> Elsewhere, I shall examine – after examining all the relative proofs – how widespread was the use of paints and colours in classical architecture. By this means, with an art form so closely connected to sculpture, I hope to prove how mistaken we have been about classical art.
>
> (Quatremère de Quincy 1815 a, pp. 30-1)

The importance which Quatremère gives to the *crustatio* of precious materials such as metals, enamels, and stones (used not only for statues and applied arts but also to a wide range of architectural components such as chests, stylobates, metopes, triglyphs, acroteria, palmettes, and many more besides) strengthened the general feeling that it was a definite choice made by the artist, in an attempt at limiting as far as possible the spreading of colour on the outside to the buildings.

But Quatremère believed that it was sculpture that had been brought into line with architecture, and not vice versa. When architecture "is tricked out with precious materials and sundry substances, it is because it wants its attendants to follow its example, and brings itself down to their level, so to speak." (Quatremère de Quincy 1815 a, pp. 32-3).

When cross-referencing the passages on colour and architecture in Quatremère's "Olympian Zeus" and his monumental works on construction theory (in the *Encyclopédie* and the *Dictionnaire*), one can see that his position is anything but reactionary. Most assuredly, he does not consider colour to be essential for the purposes of beauty; and yet, in spite of this, he does not exclude it. Indeed Quatremère admits that the practice of painting the outsides of buildings was very widespread in Greece, where it was even used to soften the harsh lines of the Doric style – the first, unparalleled example of absolute perfection among the three orders of classical architecture. In fact, it was so widespread that Quatremère stigmatised those who refused to see it:

> For a long time, the very idea of painting the outside of large buildings did not occur to anyone. The only buildings anyone had studied were at Rome, where this practice was completely unknown. It was only after the range of examples had been expanded – and visits made to those regions where the Greeks had lived – that new information was brought to light and it was discovered that in ancient times the use of colour in temples had been very widespread.
>
> (Quatremère de Quincy 1832, p. 465)

Polychromy was a feature of all the parts of the temple, both inside and outside. It was, therefore, the case for the architecture as well, including the smallest details, and thus the outer walls were painted.

> In the same way as the use of colour has been admitted inside buildings, so also must they have been used on the outside, according to the diversity of materials, and in the same way in which different coloured marbles were used for columns, friezes, cornices, and other parts of buildings.
>
> (Quatremère de Quincy 1832, p. 465)

In "Olympian Zeus" mention is also made of the methods used, whether painting or patinating stone surfaces, and whether paint or plaster was involved.

> Perhaps we shall never know (because proof is continually coming to light) how much ancient marble has lost its pastel colours, and how the various paints were originally prepared, either to cover material imperfections or to cover up the frigid monotony of white stone, or to protect it against the weather, or to provide some sort of trompe l'oeil without trespassing into actual painting. Every time we catch a glimpse of some trace of

> this art – either on a building, or reading about it in a book – it almost seems as though we wish to cancel it, to insult these ancient geniuses, to disguise its existence, and almost always to look elsewhere.
>
> ((Quatremère de Quincy Paris 1815 a, p. 29)

A few vital points emerge from the reading of these extracts. First, Quatremère links the use of colour to the type of material used for a building. He tells us that the greater or lesser poverty of a particular stone would have required a more or less evident amount of colouring work, according to the type of imperfections that could be seen, and the level of workmanship desired. A compact, noble stone such as marble would therefore have required only one coat, in which colour and wax were applied together. Other types of stone, more difficult to polish (such as limestone), would have required plastering and then painting. This was the most common experience in the temples of Magna Graecia.

> Having examined these temples ourselves, we must state that, whether in Paestum or the many cities of Sicily, stone was used which was difficult to polish, and which had to be covered with a layer of stucco. However, the ancients were not satisfied with providing a uniform colour to their materials.
>
> (Quatremère de Quincy 1832, p. 465)

Figure 6. Throne of Olympian Zeus (Quatremère de Quincy 1814, fig. 14)

Figure 7. Poseidon's triumphal chariot, gold and ivory, Corinth (Quatremère de Quincy 1814, fig. 26)

In any case paints and other colours were used to simulate some other material than the ones actually used, and therefore to make them seem more precious.

> Nowadays it is widely known from the wealth of ancient temples in Sicily and elsewhere in Italy that all the outer columns and other parts were coated with a thin layer of plaster. This was to give the stone a smoother appearance, and to take the paint which would make it look like marble. All the Doric temples in Sicily were decorated in this way. Different colours of paint were applied to the bases of the metope, mouldings, and details on a profile.
>
> (Quatremère de Quincy 1832, p. 298)

The colours of which Quatremère speaks are never clearly specified, but he always stresses the range of tones used:

> The countless remnants of colour which have come down to us are proof that the stucco was painted in a range of colours, that the various parts and divisions in an entablature were painted different colours, and that the triglyph and metopes, the capitals and their astragal collars, and even the soffits on the architrave were always coloured.
>
> (Quatremère de Quincy 1832, p. 465)

Sometimes Quatremère includes decorative painting in his discussions on polychromy. Colouring may therefore be due to the matching up of different-coloured panels and figurative, so to speak, i.e. made "in the same way in which the colouring of many marble statues is a borrowing from fabrics, armour, and accessories" (Quatremère de Quincy 1832, p. 465).

The influence of these assertions on Hittorff is very clear: Hittorff says that colour was used by the Greeks, both for aesthetic purposes (to make something more majestic, richer, and more beautiful) and for practical considerations (painting an object gave it greater protection against the elements). It is clear that Quatremère's insistence on the use of many materials is because he also considered coloured pigments in terms of their appearance. Whatever is the reality, the effect of paints, waxes, and coloured plasters is to make one think of some other material (such as marble) or type of finish. Stone may therefore be coloured, provided it is clear that this has been done.

> Actually, the use of marble by the ancients was so widespread that to leave it unadorned would have struck anyone who saw it as something rather cheap, especially in a temple. Colours were not merely used to make other materials look like marble, but to change the appearance of marble too.
>
> (Quatremère de Quincy 1832, p. 298)

Figure 8. Hera of Argos, Polycletus (Quatremère de Quincy 1814, fig. 21)

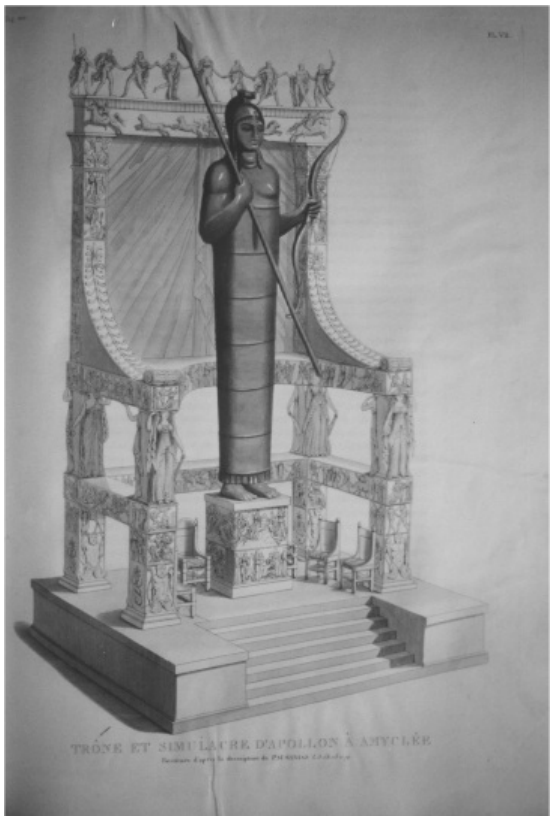

Figure 9. Throne and statue of Apollo at Amyclae, according to the description by Pausanias (Quatremère de Quincy 1814, fig. 8)

From 1830 onwards, Quatremère's authority began to decline, and his life moved towards its end. Until then, the seventy-seven year old theoretician had been extremely rigorous in his personal and intellectual life. He certainly could not move towards the extremist positions of total polychromy (the time was not yet right), and yet the road he had opened with moderation and balance – and sometimes with clear reticence, although he was always ready to listen to the latest discoveries in archaeology – even today seems wise and intellectually illuminating. Nor is this all: Quatremère's invitations to explore and understand the various periods of his beloved ancient world were to prepare the way for historicism later in the nineteenth century.

The freedom of expression given to him to design a pulpit for the church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris (1827-1829, famous for its use of polychromy) casts doubt upon an interpretation that is too common even today, and which can be summed up in the words of René Schneider (the first Quatremère scholar, from the early twentieth century): "the archaeologist is more liberal than the teacher of doctrine" (Schneider 1910, p. 33).

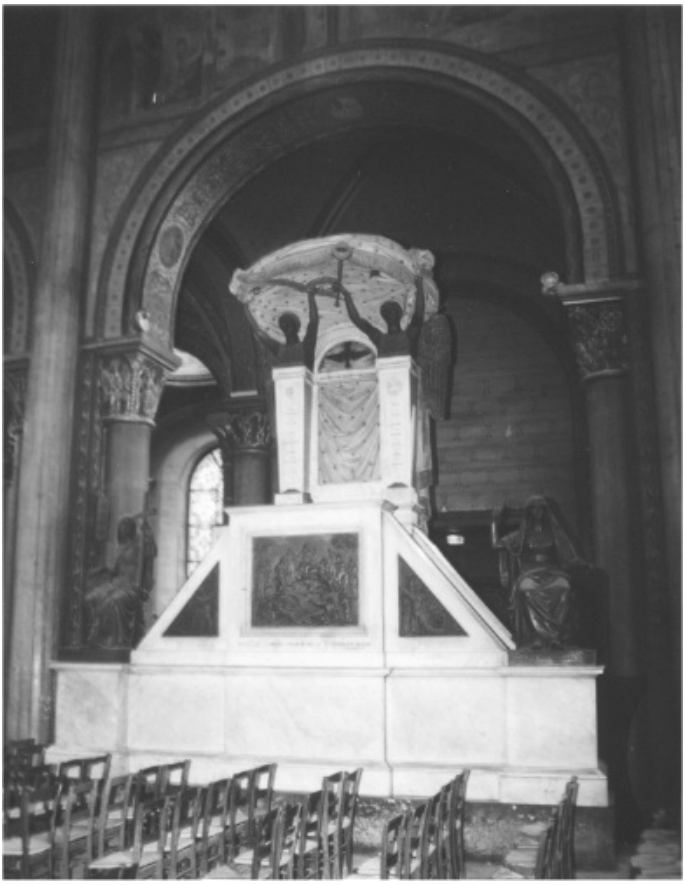

Figure 10. Pulpit, Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Paris, 1827-1829

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