A Trickster Fox and a Sheela-na-gig: On the Lost Frieze of Marienhafe (East Frisia, 13th Century)

Stephanie Luther

"Concerning the church itself, this is very sumptuously built, vaulted through and through, now roofed with lead but earlier with copper, and decorated on the exterior with many quite irritating images and figures carved from sandstone," wrote the pastors Anton Christian Bolenio and Adrian Reershemio of the church of Marienhafe in a special report prepared in 1725.[1] Situated about 5 kilometres from the North Sea, Marienhafe was the only three-aisled cruciform church in East Frisia when it was built in the mid-thirteenth century.[2] Perhaps even more unusual were its many thirteenth-century sculptures. Niches in the transept arms displayed large freestanding sculptures of saints and other holy figures, and a frieze lined the nave, side aisles, and transept arms just below the roof (opposite page). This frieze included animal fables, fantastic creatures, knights in battle, architectural motifs, scenes of daily life, and much more—numbering over 120 reliefs in total. Carved in a region with few stone resources—and therefore virtually no tradition of architectural sculpture—how did such an extensive frieze come to be?

1 Anton Christian Bolenio and Adriano Reershemio, *Nachricht von denen Kirchen-Antiquitaeten zu Marienhave*, 17 September 1725. Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv Standort Aurich, Rep. 135, No. 110, fols. 33–38, here fol. 34: "Was anlanget die Kirche selbst; so ist dieselbe sehr kostbahr gebauet, durch und durch gewölbet, vorhin mit kupfer, jetzo aber mit bleÿ gedecket, und von außen herum mit vielen in Sarck-Steinen ausgehauenen, wiewohl recht ärgerlichen, bildern und figuren geziert."

2 On the dating, see Justin Kroesen and Regnerus Steensma, *Kirchen in Ostfriesland und ihre mittelalterliche Ausstattung*, Petersburg 2011, pp. 18–21. For a summary of other suggestions on the dating, see Harm Bents, Uwe Boumann, Albert Janssen, and Peter Seidel, *Chronik der Gemeinde Upgant-Schott mit Siegelsum*, Norden 2009, p. 326. Though the Marienhafe's name suggests that it was a harbour, the village was not at sea. For a reconstruction of the coastline near Marienhafe in 1300, see Hans Homeier, "Ein Jahrtausend ostfriesischer Deichgeschichte," in Jannes Ohling (ed.), *Ostfriesland im Schutze des Deiches*, 12 vol., Pewsum / Leer 1969–2003, vol. 2, Hans Homeier, *Der Gestaltwandel der ostfriesischen Küste im Laufe der Jahrhunderte*, Leer 1969, pp. 3–75, map 4.

Stephanie Luther, « A Trickster Fox and a Sheela-na-gig: On the Lost Frieze of Marienhafe (East Frisia, 13th Century) », dans Philippe Cordez (dir.), *Art médiéval et médiévalisme,* Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net, 2024, p. 95–113, https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.732.c19039

This is a broad and challenging question, not least because much of the frieze does not survive. By the ninteenth century, the Marienhafe church was aging poorly, and repairs were too expensive for the community.[3] The demolition of its choir, side aisles, nave vaults, and the top two levels of the west tower began in 1829, and as part of this project the church's many mid-thirteenth-century sculptures were also removed. Most of the detritus from the demolition was dispersed, destroyed, or reused as building material, though East Frisian locals gathered roughly forty of the church's sculptures at the beginning of the twentieth century.[4] These sculptures are now on view in the church museum in a large room in the west tower, known as the Störtebekerkammer for its association with the German pirate Klaus Störtebeker. The Ostfriesisches Landesmuseum in Emden also houses sculptures from Marienhafe, namely two reliefs from the frieze and a standing figure of a knight from a scene of the Massacre of Innocents.[5] In addition, the frieze and niche figures were recorded in drawings and descriptions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most importantly, Martin Heinrich Martens, the architect who oversaw the demolition, created an entire sketchbook of the church and its architectural sculptures.[6] Martens seems to have worked quickly, however. His sketches of the frieze show them in a fragmentary state, after they had already been removed, and a comparison of these sketches with surviving reliefs prove that he made errors.[7] His sketchbook nonetheless provides the most complete record of the church and its works. In addition, Hemmo Suur, a local official, worked with Martens to publish an account of the church and some of its sculptures sixteen years after the demolition, but memory fades with time, of course, and Suur's descriptions sometimes contradict Martens's sketches.[8]

Adding to the confusion is the possibility that at least some of the Marienhafe sculptures were not originally sculpted for this particular church. A document dated 1387 records that material from the nearby church of Westeel, which had been ruined in the devastating floods of the previous decade, was given to the church of Marienhafe, which itself had suffered a fire.[9] If any sculpture was in fact brought from the flooded area to

3 On the condition of the church in the nineteenth century and the demolition, see Bents, Boumann, Janssen, and Seidel 2009 (note 2), pp. 327–333.

4 Ibid, pp. 333–335.

5 Ostfriesisches Landemuseum, Emden, pl. 4, 5, and 15.

6 On the sketchbook, see Johann Gerhard Schomerus, *Das Marienhafer Skizzenbuch des Baumeisters Martens aus dem Jahre 1829*, Aurich 1968.

7 One surviving relief, for example, portrays a craftsman holding an ax, but Martens misunderstood the ax and drew an unidentifiable object that might be interpreted as fabric. See Stephanie Luther, *Gifts and Giving in Architectural Sculpture in the Holy Roman Empire, ca. 1150–1235*, PhD thesis, Yale University, 2015, p. 263. For Martens's drawing of the sculpture, see Schomerus 1968 (note 6), p. 33.

8 Hemmo Suur, *Die Kirche zu Marienhafe*, Emden 1845. On contradictions between Martens and Suur, see Schomerus 1968 (note 6), pp. 15–16.

9 See Georg-Friedrich Schaaf, "Die Tagebucheintragungen des Emder Stadtbaumeisters Martin Heinrich Martens beim Abbruch eines Teils der Marienhafer Kirche im Jahre 1829 und sein Manuskript eines Vortrages vor der Emder Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst und vaterländische

Marienhafe, it did not travel a great distance. Westeel, which was completely wiped out by the flood, was only 10 kilometres from Marienhafe. While the sculptures found in Marienhafe in the nineteenth century might not all have been there in the thirteenth century, they are nevertheless all East Frisian.

Perhaps because of these challenges, the Marienhafe sculptures are little known outside the region. Marienhafe's most dedicated student was perhaps Johann Gerhard Schomerus, a pastor. In his book *Das Marienhafer Skizzenbuch des Baumeisters Martens aus dem Jahre 1829*, published in 1968, Schomerus offered a reconstruction of the frieze as well as his thoughts on Martens's working process.[10] The church and its sculptures were also included in an ambitious but unfinished study of East Frisian monuments, *Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler Ostfrieslands*, written by art historian Jan Fastenau between 1930 and 1938.[11] Fastenau's manuscript is essentially a detailed, paginated notebook, with blank pages yet to be filled and lists and short notes yet to be fully fleshed out, but it has been digitized and made available online by the Ostfriesische Landesbibliothek.[12]

Though publications on the Marienhafe church rarely circulate outside of the region, the sculptures' character itself is decidedly transregional. Without a sculptural tradition in East Frisia, everything needed for them—materials, sculptors, even some image concepts—must have been brought to the area. André Gustav detected Westphalian influence in some works from Marienhafe and elsewhere in East Frisia, noting, among stylistic affinities, that the stone for the niche figures of the nearby church of Norden was likely quarried in Westphalia.[13] Gustav's argument is reasonable, not least because much of East Frisia, including Marienhafe, was situated in the diocese of Münster, and because the two regions are connected via the river Ems. Some of the models or inspiration for the sculptures, however, came from much farther afield, as Gustav and others have noted. This essay argues that the subject matter for certain works at Marienhafe must have been drawn from the Upper Rhine, western France, or the British Isles. Because a single essay cannot possibly discuss all the reliefs in the frieze, the following focuses on a few of the more spectacular reliefs, namely scenes from the funeral of Renart the Fox and a Sheela-na-gig figure. These reliefs were perhaps the very sculptures that irritated our eighteenth-century pastors.

Even just these few works demonstrate not only how connected the region of East Frisia was to the wider world but also how ambitious the East Frisians were in their sudden embrace of architectural sculpture. The region was hardly a mere consumer of ideas produced elsewhere, for the sculptures in question exceeded their predecessors in the detail

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Altertümer im Jahre 1835," in *Emder Jahrbuch für historische Landeskunde Ostfrieslands* 80, 2000, pp. 137–159, here pp. 141–142.

10 Schomerus 1968 (note 6).

11 Jan Fastenau, *Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler Ostfrieslands*, 8 vol., unpublished manuscript, 1930–1938, vol. 3, *Brokmerland, Norderland, Auricherland. Marienhafe (Nachtrag)*.

12 URL: http://www.ostfriesischelandschaft.de/757.html [accessed: 30.04.2023].

13 André Gustav, "Die frühgotischen Skulpturen in Norden/Ostfriesland," in *Niederdeutsche Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte 7*, 1968, pp. 95–152, here pp. 95 and 118–127.

of their narrative and the quality of their carving. In addition, given the sheer amount of work left to do on the Marienhafe sculptures, this essay offers possible leads for further research and points out dead ends. Most importantly, surviving sculptures from Marienhafe might have been purchased and transported out of East Frisia after the demolition. They could now be held in private collections—without accurate details of their provenance—or otherwise be hiding in plain sight. It is therefore also the goal of the essay simply to draw attention to these works, so that more of the Marienhafe frieze might one day be located.

The Fox at Marienhafe

In their report, Reershemio and Bolenio do not explain which sculptures they find 'irritating,' but there are a number of scenes that might have been considered distasteful to the eighteenth-century viewer. Particularly repellent might have been the series of reliefs with animals participating in a funeral procession, mass, and burial. These scenes are collectively known as the *Spottbilder*, as they were believed to be a critique of Catholic practices in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[14] Only one relief from this part of the frieze—a robed animal standing before an altar—has survived and is now in the Störtebekerkammer (fig. 1). The *Spottbilder*, however, were the most recorded part of the Marienhafe frieze. One sketch of the entire group of *Spottbilder*, completed by Hinrich Adolf von Lengen around 1825, has also been lost, but copies of it were produced, including one by Jan Fastenau in the 1930s.[15] Fastenau included the sketch in his manuscript of *Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler* (fig. 2).[16] While its details are rough, this sketch provides the precise order of the animal procession.

Martens also sketched the procession, although he recorded it only in fragments, likely because sculptures had already been removed.[17] Martens therefore had the advantage of proximity, which must have allowed him to see details, but he could not record the procession's order. Neither reproduction is reliable on its own, but when consulted together they offer a reliable picture of the procession's original form—von Lengen/Fastenau providing the order and Martens the details. Moreover, Johann Friedrich Bertram, who saw the animal procession in 1733 and found it "indecent" (*unanständig*), noted its location on the southwestern side of the church crossing.[18]

14 Suur 1845 (note 8), pp. 21–23.

15 On the lost sketch, see Johann Gehard Schomerus, "Die Kirchen in Marienhafe und Osteel nach zwei bisher unbekannten Aquarellen aus dem Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Ostfriesland. Zeitschrift für Kultur, Wirtschaft und Verkehr* 1, 1976, pp. 18–24, here p. 23.

16 Fastenau 1934 (note 11), sketch inserted between pp. 496 and 497.

17 Schomerus 1968 (note 6), p. 15.

18 Johann Friedrich Bertram, *Muthmasung von denen an der Kirche zu Marienhave in Ostfrießland, befindlichen steinern Bildern*, Aurich 1733, pp. 11–12: "Die Denckwürdigste sind diejenige, welche an der Südwestlichen

1 Marienhafe, St Mary (Störtebekerkammer), robed animal at an altar, mid-13th century

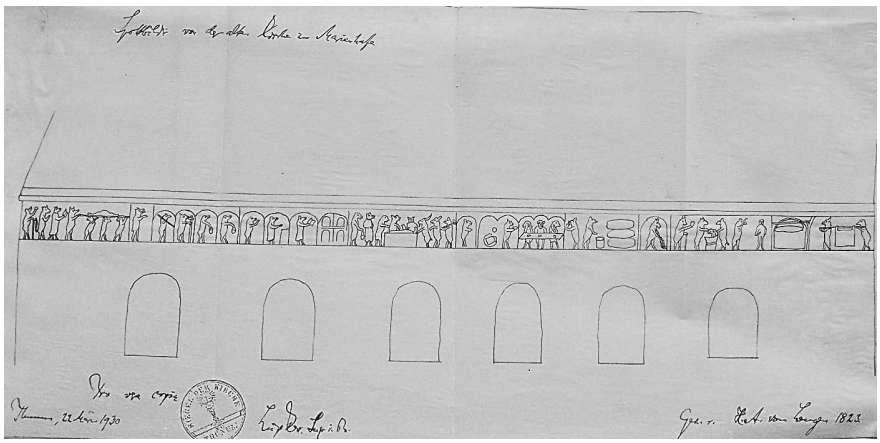
As recorded in the sketches, the animal procession moves from left to right. First in the relief and last in line in the procession are three creatures bearing objects and following the funeral bier. The funeral bier is led by animals carrying liturgical instruments, including incense burners and a cross. At this point, the procession has evidently reached the church for the funeral mass, for the animals now appear beneath an arcade. One animal raises its arms to ring a bell, which is not included in the sketch by von Lengen/Fastenau but was recorded by Martens.[19] Before the bell-ringing animal is another creature standing before an altar, presumably performing the mass, while another animal does a reading. The scene terminates in further architectural elements. Following the mass is the burial, in which the animals, some of whom bear shovels, gather around the grave of the departed. A feast completes the funeral. Three animals dine at a long table and are served

Seite, des Kirchenkreutzes, so ins Westen siehet, zu oberst unter dem Dach in folgender Ordnung sich zeigen." More specifically, Bertram notes that the *Spottbilder* were on the southwestern side of the transept and that they proceeded toward the west, which is impossible—the procession would have to have moved either north or south. Schomerus understood this inconsistency to mean that the procession began on the southwestern side of the transept and then turned the corner to continue and end on the south side. See Schomerus 1968 (note 6), p. 117. Suur also believed that the procession turned the corner from the southwest to the south, although he was less certain. Suur, 1845 (note 8), unpaginated "Bemerkungen zu den Zeichnungen." The drawing by von Lengen/Fastenau, however, suggests that the procession is on a single side of the church and does not turn a corner. While the exact location remains unclear, because both Bertram and Suur noted that it was on the southern side of the crossing, we can at least be sure of this general location.

19 For Martens's sketch, see Schomerus 1968 (note 6), p. 19.

by other creatures, who pour drinks from barrels and sweep up afterward. Another animal fable—the Lion's Bath—begins after the feast and will be discussed below.

A number of scholars recognized early on that this elaborate funeral represents the burial of Renart, the trickster fox and protagonist of the French *Roman de Renart*, known in German as Reinecke or Reinhart Fuchs.[20] In a branch (18) of the *Roman de Renart* composed in French at the beginning of the thirteenth century, Renart suffers a serious wound after losing a chess game to Isengrin the Wolf.[21] He subsequently falls into a deep depression and becomes unresponsive. Convinced that Renart is dead, the other animals perform



2 Jan Fastenau, sketch of the Marienhafe Spottbilder (after Hinrich Adolf von Lengen, ca. 1825), in id., *Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler Ostfrieslands*, unpublished manuscript, 8 vol., 1930–1938, vol. 3, ca. 1934, inserted between pp. 496 and 497

an elaborate funeral service. The narrative describes in great detail all the animals that give a reading. Afterward, they enjoy a great feast and play a game. The following morning, the church bells are rung for Renart and the animals proceed with their musical and liturgical instruments toward the burial site. Just as they begin to bury him, Renart recovers and escapes, much to everyone's surprise. Angry at having been fooled, the animals chase Renart but cannot catch him. At the end, Renart manages to fake his death intentionally.

Though Renart ultimately escapes his burial in the literary tradition, medieval images of this narrative focus on the elaborate funeral rather than the dramatic escape.[22] In

20 Even Suur, writing shortly after the demolition, recognized the tale. See Suur 1845 (note 8), p. 25.

21 *Le Roman de Renart*, Armand Strubel (ed.), Paris 1998, p. 687–731 and, on the dating and the surviving manuscripts, pp. XIX and 1299–1301.

22 One image that does depict his escape, albeit from the bier and not from the burial, is the frontispiece of a fourteenth-century French manuscript of the *Roman de Renart*, ms. f. fr. 12583 at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. See Kenneth Varty, *Reynard, Renart, Reinaert and Other Foxes in Medieval England. The Iconographic Evidence*, Amsterdam 1999, pp. 139–140.

an early fourteenth-century English Book of Hours, now in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, for example, Renart's procession marches across the lower margins of seventeen sides of folios.[23] When just a single—if detailed—scene from a lengthy narrative is represented, of course, the rest of the tale is called to mind. At Marienhafe, the omission of the escape combined with four other scenes (procession, funeral mass, feast, and burial) makes Renart appear very much dead and buried. Moreover, the progression of these scenes in the frieze has been altered in order to emphasize the finality of Renart's death. In the literary tradition, the animals first process the body and do readings before they enjoy their feast in the evening, and the burial and subsequent pursuit continue in the morning. In the frieze, however, the procession and readings are immediately followed by the burial, and the feast concludes the episode. Renart never leaps from his grave. Rather, the single animal sweeping up after the feast lends a sense of finality to the narrative—and therefore to Renart's life. Whether the Marienhafe frieze was drawn from a lost version of the *Roman* or the sculptures deviated from the text for a specific reason remains an open question.

Immediately following the feast in the Marienhafe frieze is the tale of the Lion's Bath. This episode appears in only one surviving version of the fox legends, namely *Reinhart Fuchs*, written by a man named Heinrich, sometimes called Heinrich Gleißner or Heinrich Glichesaere.[24] Writing in Middle High German between 1162 and 1192, Heinrich composed his tale of the trickster fox for an Alsatian audience, drawing from the *Roman de Renart* but also including new narratives, such as the Lion's Bath.[25] In this narrative, King Noble the Lion becomes ill, which he believes is God's punishment for his neglect of his duty to hold court and dispense judgment. The real reason for the lion's torment, however, is that an ant has crawled into his ear, which the fox, here called Reinhart, himself witnessed. The lion nonetheless seeks relief by calling court, and all the animals gather, except Reinhart. Several animals issue complaints against Reinhart, who is eventually forced to come forward. Instead of accepting judgment, Reinhart tells the lion he knows how to cure him, and the lion forgets all about the charges. Reinhart then informs his sovereign that the cure requires the pelts, skins, or whole bodies of his various enemies, who are subsequently sacrificed. A bath is also required, which is immediately prepared. After his bath, the lion lies in bed, covered by the animal skins. Reinhart then cures him by commanding the ant to depart and convinces the healed and grateful lion to reward Reinhart's own friends with land or an abbey. His enemies vanquished, Reinhart poisons the lion and ultimately triumphs over all.

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23 Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, Maryland, Ms. W.102. See Varty 1999 (note 22), pp. 139–148.

24 See Heinrich der Glichesaere, *Fuchs Reinhart*, Wolfgang Spiewok (ed.), Leipzig 1977 and *Der Reinhart Fuchs des Elsässers Heinrich*, Klaus Düwel (ed.), Tübingen 1984.

25 On the dating, see Klaus Düwel, "Heinrich, Verfasser des 'Reinhart Fuchs'," in Gundolf Keil et al. (eds.), *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, 14 vol., Berlin / New York 1978–2008, vol. 3, Ger–Hil, 1981, cols. 666–677, here col. 667.

At Marienhafe, the narrative of the Lion's Bath progresses from right to left, beginning at the far right side of the drawing by von Lengen/Fastenau. The first figures prepare the bath by bringing a bucket full of water to be heated in a cauldron. Two other animals then appear, and though their actions and identities are unclear in the sketches by von Lengen/Fastenau and Martens, it is possible they represent the removal of one of Reinhart's enemy's skins. In the following and final scene, the lion appears in the bath, joined by attendants. As mentioned above, the *Roman de Renart* does not include the Lion's Bath, and Heinrich Gleißner's tale does not include Renart's funeral, which first appeared—in French—somewhat later, at the beginning of the thirteenth century.[26] Thus the Marienhafe frieze depends on two distinct yet related literary traditions from the late late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

Helene Stückelberg-Riggenbach noted the connection to the tales of Renart, especially to Heinrich Gleißner's version, already in 1932, further pointing out that the Lion's Bath was also carved into a frieze in the crypt of Basel Cathedral (fig. 3).[27] In Basel, the narrative likewise progresses from right to left and includes scenes highly similar to those at Marienhafe. Beginning at the far right and framed by a curling vine, animals carry water toward a large cauldron, which is set above a fire stoked by a crouching figure. In the next scene, Noble the Lion attacks an animal, likely Isengrin the Wolf, for his pelt. The lion then bathes under the supervision of Reinhart, who whispers in his ear, presumably to command the ant to leave. In the final scene, Noble lies in his sick bed, covered by his fur blanket and still accompanied by Reinhart.

Given their similarity, the Basel frieze offers solid support for an interpretation of the indecipherable scene at Marienhafe—between cauldron and bath—as the skinning of one of Reinhart's enemies. While Stückelberg-Riggenbach emphasized the brevity of both the Basel and the Marienhafe friezes, noting that each omitted key scenes from the narrative, even more curious is that the preparation of the bath was rendered with such care and detail in both friezes.[28] Heinrich devotes a mere seven of the tale's thousand lines to the bath's preparation, noting only that the leopard was in charge and that the water was properly

26 In Branch 15 of the *Roman de Renart*, Renart acts as the lion's doctor and manages to get his enemies skinned in the process, but this narrative does not include the pivotal scene of the bath or the heating of the water. See *Le Roman de Renart* 1998 (note 21), pp. 513–561. For an analysis of Heinrich's adaptation of the *Roman de Renart*, see John Flinn, *Le Roman de Renart dans la littérature française et dans les littératures étrangères au Moyen Âge*, Toronto 1963, pp. 549–597.

27 H. Stückelberg-Riggenbach, "Zwei Darstellungen aus der Tierfabel in der ehemaligen Kirche zu Marienhafe," in *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst und vaterländische Altertümer zu Emden* 32, 1932, pp. 103–118. See also Jan Fastenau, "Die Kirche von Marienhafe," in *Niedersachsen* 38, 1933, pp. 234–244 and 345–365, here p. 364; Dora Lämke, *Mittelalterliche Tierfabeln und ihre Beziehung zur bildenden Kunst in Deutschland*, Greifswald, 1937, pp. 39–40. For the Lion's Bath in Basel, see Dorothea Schwinn Schürmann, Hans-Rudolf Meier, and Erik Schmidt, *Das Basler Münster*, Basel, 2006, p. 97.

28 Stückelberg-Riggenbach 1932 (note 27), pp. 110–111.

heated.[29] Hauling the water is only implied as a necessary part of preparing a bath; it is not described in Heinrich's text. Because Basel and Marienhafe both portray the unusual scenes of the cauldron and the hauling of the water, it can be reasonably argued that Basel, which dates to the end of the twelfth century, served as the model for Marienhafe.

But why, exactly, did the hauling and heating of the water appear at Basel? The answer lies to the far right of the animals carrying the water. Here, more animals frolic through and pluck grapes from the grapevine that frames the Reinhart narrative. These figures have

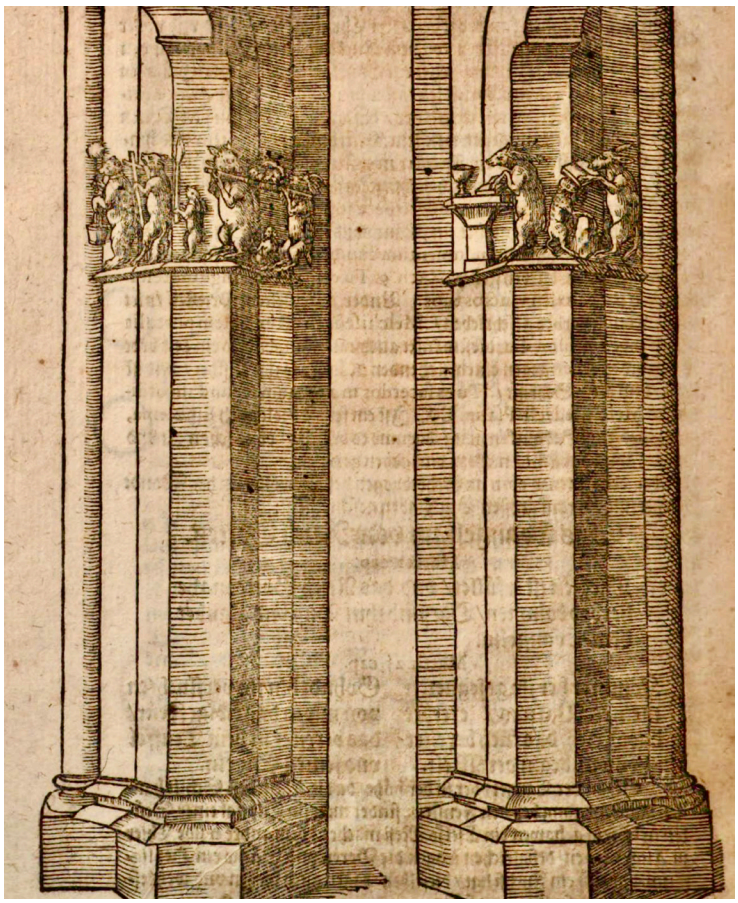
3 Basel, Minster, crypt, Lion's Bath frieze, late 12th century

nothing to do with the Lion's Bath narrative, but they do fill the remaining space in the frieze, which continues through to the edge of the pillar masonry, in a way that makes sense for a frieze framed by vines. In another frieze in the Basel crypt, for example, men are similarly engaged with grapes, namely by pressing them to produce wine or pouring the liquid into barrels. And on the apse exterior, a similar foliated frieze shows animals partaking of the grapes while men carry them in a basket or a bundle, crush them in a barrel, or send them through the wine press. In the crypt, scenes of animals picking grapes flow into scenes of animals carrying and heating water in the tale of the Lion's Bath. As a result, the frieze transitions effortlessly between two entirely different themes, both of which are largely based on the preparation of a liquid. Without this context, two whole scenes devoted to the preparation of the bath makes less sense at Marienhafe, but they were included there nonetheless.

Stückelberg-Riggenbach was not the last to associate the Marienhafe *Spottbilder* with Upper Rhenish sculpture. Johannes Stracke and, to a lesser extent, Jan Fastenau believed that the twelfth-century frieze at the abbey of Andlau in Alsace was a possible model for the East Frisian frieze, as it also includes a feast scene with three (human) figures, who, like the animals of the Marienhafe frieze, dine at a long table and are served a number of dishes by other figures.[30] Moreover, a pillar on the cathedral of Strasbourg, probably

29 der Glichesaere 1977 (note 24), pp. 104–105, lines 2003–2009.

30 Fastenau 1933 (note 27), pp. 362–363 and Johannes Stracke, "Der Bilderfries an der ehemaligen Kirche zu Marienhafe," in *Friesisches Jahrbuch* 6, 1970, pp. 52–66. On Andlau, see Christian Forster, *Die Vorhalle als Paradies: Ikonographische Studien zur Bauskulptur der ehemaligen Frauenstiftskirche in Andlau*, Weimar 2010, especially pp. 220–222.



4 Strasbourg, cathedral, funeral of Renart, engraving in Oseas Schadaeus, *Summum Argentoratensium Templum*, Strasbourg, 1617, p. 58

sculpted in the later thirteenth century, once also featured sculptures of Renart's funeral procession and mass.[31] These figures were destroyed in the late seventeenth century, but not before they were copied and their image used in satirical broadsheets, as well as in Oseas Schadaeus's illustrated book on Strasbourg (fig. 4).[32] In the Strasbourg iteration, Renart's funeral procession included a bear with an aspergillum, a wolf with a cross, and a hare with a candle, followed by two animals carrying Renart on his funeral bier and a third marching along beneath the bier. On the other side of the same column, a stag performs the funeral mass at an altar while another animal does a reading.

31 Varty, 1999 (note 22), pp. 159–162. See also Kenneth Varty, "Les funérailles de Renart le Goupil," in Kenneth Varty (ed.), *À la Recherche du Roman de Renart*, 2 vol., New Alyth, 1991, pp. 361–390, especially pp. 369–370.

32 Oseas Schadaeus, *Summum Argentoratensium Templum*, Strasbourg 1617, p. 58. For the satirical broadsheets, see Walter L. Strauss, *The German Single-Leaf Woodcut 1550–1600*, 3 vol., New York 1975, vol. 1, *A–J*, p. 183 and vol. 3 *S–Z*, p. 991.

Scenes from the *Roman de Renart* were not the only animal fables that appear at both Marienhafe and in the Upper Rhine region. A relief portraying the fable of the wolf at school (*Wolfschule*), now in the Ostfriesisches Landesmuseum of Emden, likewise has a southern counterpart. This narrative of a wolf who is unsuccessfully taught how to read appears in architectural sculpture at the minster of Freiburg im Breisgau, though it also appears elsewhere in Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and France.[33] Finally, a further connection between Marienhafe and the Upper Rhine—not yet noted in the scholarship—is the representation of the fable of the Fox and the Stork at the Upper Rhenish monastery of All Saints in Schaffhausen, Switzerland.[34] At this monastery, two sculpted lunettes portray the fox and the stork taking turns hosting a meal for each other. At each dinner, the host serves the meal in a dish from which it is impossible for his guest to eat—the lesson here is that the trickster should also expect to be tricked. While this particular fable does not appear in the drawings or surviving fragments of Marienhafe, lunettes were a favored way of framing reliefs of animals at the East Frisian church.[35] Moreover, the Schaffhausen lunettes were part of a larger frieze, which included hunting dogs and the beheading of John the Baptist, amongst other scenes. This frieze likely lined the exterior of a chapel on the west side of the cloister.[36]

Given these many resonances between the Marienhafe frieze and works from the Upper Rhine, especially the frieze from Basel, a person or persons in East Frisia must have known Alsace and the Upper Rhine well. Because the unusual details of the Basel frieze also appear at Marienhafe— even though in the latter context these details lost their significance in the absence of images of vines and viticulture—it is possible, even probable, that the Basel frieze was sketched and then copied in Marienhafe. At the same time, Marienhafe is hardly derivative. As described above, its frieze departed from the narrative structure of the literary tradition in striking ways. And by sheer numbers, the Marienhafe frieze of the funeral procession and mass included thirty-four animal figures, while the Strasbourg iteration had just nine. In length and complexity, then, the Marienhafe Renart frieze far surpassed any other visual representation of the Renart funeral narrative at the time.[37]

33 Stracke 1970 (note 30), p. 57 and Fastenau 1933 (note 27), p. 364.

34 Kurt Bänteli, "Gebaut für Mönche und Adelige – Eine neue Baugeschichte des Klosters Allerheiligen," in Kurt Bänteli, Rudolf Gamper, and Peter Lehmann (eds.), *Das Kloster Allerheiligen in Schaffhausen. Zum 950. Jahr seiner Gründung am 22. November 1049*, Schaffhausen 1999 (Schaffhauser Archäologie 4), pp. 13–108, here pp. 82–87.

35 See examples in Martens's sketchbook in Schomerus 1968 (note 6), pp. 46–49 and 65–70.

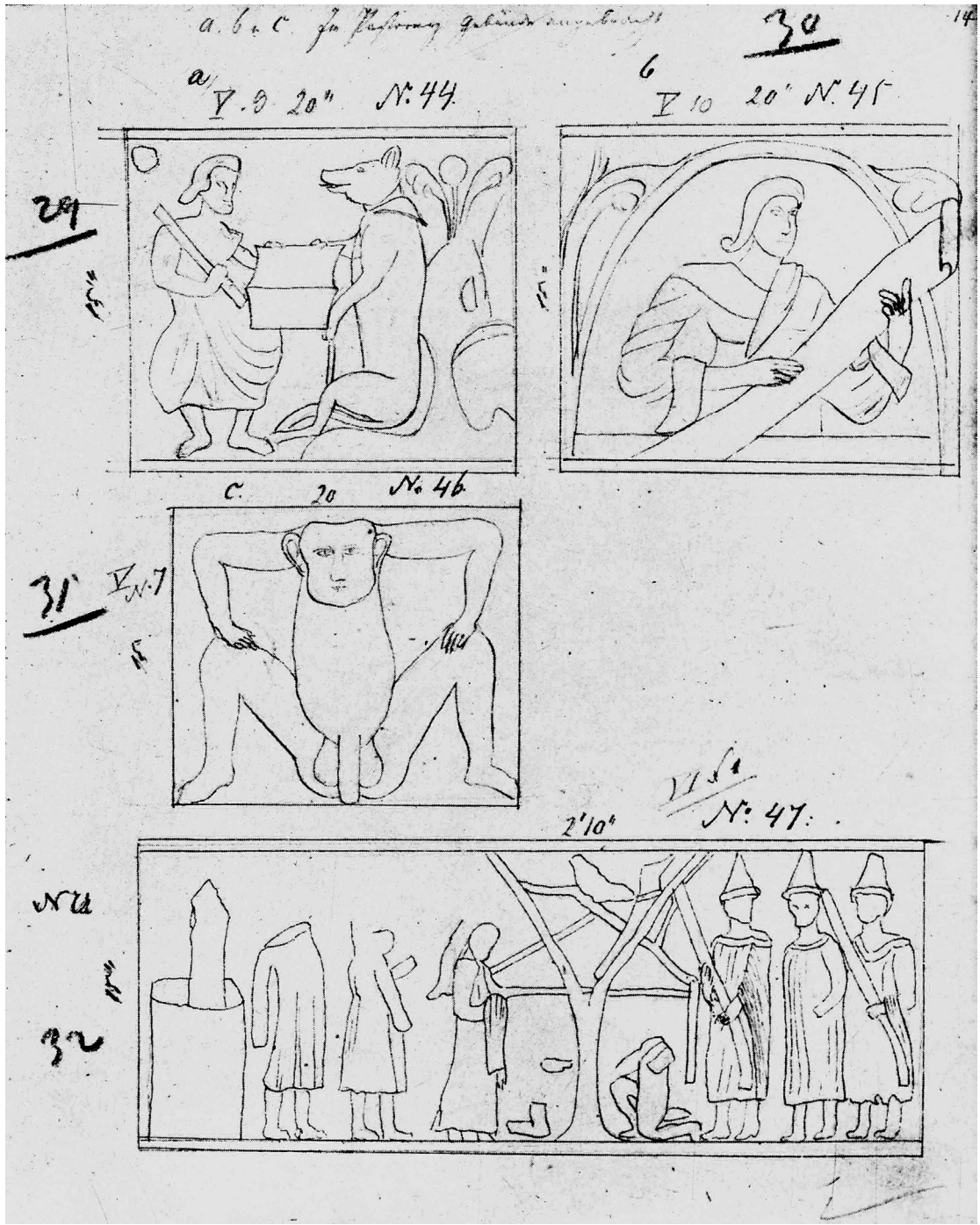
36 Bänteli 1999 (note 34), p. 83.

37 For a list of other, far less complex examples and a rather late dating of the Marienhafe frieze, see Varty 1999 (note 22), p. 162. See also J. F. Flinn, "L'iconographie du Roman de Renart," in Andries Welkenhuysen and Edward Rombauts (eds.), *Aspects of the Medieval Animal Epic*, Leuven 1975, pp. 257–264.

5 Marienhafe, St Mary (Störtebekerkammer), Sheela-na-gig, mid-13th century

An East Frisian Sheela-na-gig

While the Renart reliefs show that Marienhafe has a demonstrable connection to French and German literary traditions as well as to the Upper Rhine region, the sculptures of Marienhafe also reveal East Frisia's engagement with other areas. The East Frisian frieze contained monstrous creatures with no connection to Alsace or the surrounding area—and which may also have vexed the eighteenth-century viewers. These include explicitly naked human figures, in particular a Sheela-na-gig (fig. 5). Sheela-na-gigs are naked female figures with grotesque or monstrous features that overtly display their genitalia. The Marienhafe Sheela-na-gig, for example, is completely nude and sits with her legs open and vulva exposed. Her hands are on her knees, elbows jutting outward. Her oversized and bald head thrusts downwards towards her breasts, completely obscuring her neck, and her enormous ears protrude from her head. Though Sheela-na-gigs are specifically



6 Martin Heinrich Martens, sketch of a male Sheela-na-gig and other figures at Marienhafe, 1829

female, Martens sketched a male figure with similar features and in the same position—legs splayed and genitalia exposed—at Marienhafe (fig. 6). He also recorded two megaphallic males, who have bodies similar to this figure's but wield clubs and are portrayed in a crawling position.[38] The architect was scandalized by these figures, noting in a lecture that the Marienhafe frieze included "dirty pictures, individual figures of the male and female sex in a highly obscene position."[39] It was not until the 1970s that scholars began to study Sheela-na-gigs seriously and make arguments regarding their significance and function, for example as apotropaic symbols, warnings against sexual immorality, or folk symbols of fertility.[40] The significance of the Sheela-na-gig in general is not at issue here. Rather, the following discussion explores the possible heritage of the Marienhafe Sheela in order to demonstrate the frieze's connections to the wider world and make plain the achievements of its sculptors.

With the possible exception of a single figure in Barkhausen (Porta Westfalica), which was carved into a rock face in the Wiehen Hills in the thirteenth century and resembles a standing woman gesturing toward her genitalia, there are no other Sheela-na-gigs in modern Germany.[41] However, they are widespread in the British Isles, especially in Ireland, as well as on the Continent, especially in Spain and western France. The origins of the Marienhafe Sheela are imprecise, and both western France and the British Isles have Sheela-na-gigs that could have been models. It is in France, for example, that Sheela-na-gigs appear alongside male exhibitionists most frequently.[42] In their 1986 study of Sheela-na-gigs and similar figures, Anthony Weir and James Jerman counted at least thirteen pairs of male and female exhibiting figures in France, as well as so many exhibitionist males in general that they stopped counting.[43] Among the pairs that they discovered are the reliefs at Saint-Hilaire in Poitiers, in which the male and female figures, roughly hewn around 1080, appear in flat relief with large heads, prominent ears, and postures similar to the figures at Marienhafe, namely seated and splay-legged.[44] And in the capitals on the church of Saint-Front-sur-Nizonne, also in southwestern France, a

38 For images, see Schomerus 1968 (note 6), pp. 22–23.

39 Schaaf 2000 (note 9), p. 157: "[…] schmutzige Bilder, einzelne Figuren männlichen und weiblichen Geschlechtes in höchst unzüchtiger Stellung."

40 The literature on Sheela-na-gigs is large and growing. Major voices include Jørgen Andersen, *The Witch on the Wall. Medieval Erotic Sculpture in the British Isles*, Copenhagen 1977; Anthony Weir and James Jerman, *Images of Lust. Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches*, London 1986; Barbara Freitag, *Sheela-na-gigs. Unravelling an Enigma*, London 2004; Theresa C. Oakley, *Lifting the Veil. A New Study of Sheela-na-gigs of Britain and Ireland*, Oxford 2009.

41 This figure has been highly damaged; it is impossible to tell if genitalia were ever carved here. See Daniel Bérenger, "Sheela-na-gig in Barkhausen an der Porta Westfalica? Ein rätselhaftes Felsrelief," in *Archäologie in Westfalen-Lippe*, 2012, pp. 125–128.

42 See maps in Weir and Jerman 1986 (note 40), especially map VI, pp. 134–135.

43 Ibid., p. 17.

44 Ibid., pp. 21 and 86–87, pl. 39.

nude man and woman are likewise squatting and splay-legged, the female resting her hands on her knees.[45]

In the British Isles, Sheelas are often isolated figures and almost never appear with an exhibiting male counterpart.[46] In general, the gestures made by Sheela-na-gigs on the British Isles also differentiate them from the Marienhafe Sheela. While the Marienhafe exemplar rests her hands on her knees, the Sheelas of the British Isles almost always have at least one hand, if not both, pulling at or somehow engaged with the vulva.[47] In comparison, while some French Sheelas pull at the vulva, most of them do not.[48] At the same time, the details of the Marienhafe Sheela's grotesque face, especially her long nose, slit mouth, and protruding ears, do indeed resemble Sheelas from the British Isles.[49] Her distended belly with a visible naval also has its counterpart in the British Isles, especially in Ireland.[50]

Even in her grotesqueness, the Marienhafe Sheela is exceptionally beautiful. Unlike many Sheelas on the British Isles, the Marienhafe Sheela was carved by a skilled sculptor. While the Sheelas of the British Isles tend to be roughly hewn, with little regard for the modelling of the body, the ears of the Marienhafe Sheela are carefully articulated, as are her fingers, the curve of her calves, and her rounded belly. Whatever its source, the Sheela at Marienhafe must have represented a cosmopolitanism that only the well travelled could have recognized. Unusual, grotesque, and yet beautifully carved, the Sheela-na-gig and her male counterparts lent their church an air of distant lands. In their very existence, the Marienhafe Sheela-na-gig and her male counterpart are superlative—the first and only in the region. They, too, testify to the ambition of the Marienhafe frieze.

Circulation

Like the animal procession reliefs, then, the Sheela-na-gig offers visual confirmation that East Frisia was engaged with the wider world. The Sheela-na-gig is particularly important in this respect, for, to my knowledge, Sheela-na-gigs are a strictly sculptural phenomenon. They do not feature in manuscripts, metalwork, or other mobile objects, nor are they

45 Ibid., p. 86, pl. 38.

46 See maps I and II in ibid., pp. 126–128 and Freitag, 2004 (note 40), p. 1. One exception of an English Sheela-na-gig with a male figure is found in the reliefs at the church of Whittlesford near Cambridge. See Weir and Jerman 1986 (note 40), p. 23.

47 Weir and Jerman even organized Sheelas according to how their hands engaged with their vulvas. See Weir and Jerman, 1986 (note 40), pp. 12–13. For a catalogue complete with images of British and Irish Sheela-na-gigs, see also Oakley 2009 (note 40), pp. 89–186.

48 See the list in Weir and Jerman 1986 (note 40), p. 20.

49 Weir and Jerman made a similar comparison, although they also argued that the gesture of the Marienhafe Sheela is like those of the British Isles, which is not supported by the visual evidence. See Weir and Jerman 1986 (note 40), p. 125.

50 Oakley 2009 (note 40), p. 8.

7 Marienhafe, St Mary (Störtebekerkammer), donor figure, mid-13th century

described in literature. And like the animal procession, it is unclear how the Marienhafe Sheela-na-gig arrived in East Frisia. The narrative of the Lion's Bath seems to have been copied quite precisely. Did other scenes travel by model book or sketchbook, or rather by someone highly familiar with them? East Frisians did indeed travel. They were active traders, for example. Westphalia, easily accessible through the river Ems, was an important region for East Frisian trade, as were Bremen and Hamburg, but the East Frisians also travelled farther afield, including to the British Isles.[51] A trader from Emden was recorded in

51 Harm Wiemann, "Niedersächsische Wirtschafts-und Sozialgeschichte Ostfrieslands," in Jannes Ohling (ed.), *Ostfriesland im Schutze des Deiches*, 12 vol., Pewsum / Leer 1969-2003, vol. 1, Karl-Heinz

London in 1224,[52] and a late thirteenth-century hoard of English, Scottish, and Irish sterling, as well as Westphalian coins, was found in the early twentieth century in Norden, just 10 kilometres from Marienhafe.[53] East Frisian traders were also present in the harbour of Bruges in the mid-thirteenth century.[54] Furthermore, products from the Upper Rhine made their way northward on the Rhine. While there is no record of it in East Frisia, Alsatian wine was shipped as far away as Denmark and England, right in the area of East Frisia.[55]

Trade indicates that East Frisia was not completely isolated, but it does not, of course, explain how sculptures similar to works located in the crypt of the Basel Minster appeared so far north. For such elaborate church decoration, one would expect the intervention of a wealthy patron, whether ecclesiastic or lay. Lay patronage seems particularly likely, given that Marienhafe's surviving fragments include a lay female donor figure (fig. 7). Although her head is missing, a long braid on her back identifies her as female and lay, while her profile posture and the architectural model she holds mark her as a donor. Who she is, however, remains a mystery. Neither monastery nor cathedral, Marienhafe has little historical record. For the time being, then, the greatest evidence for East Frisia's connection with Alsace as well as with western France or the British Isles remains the sculptures themselves.

Avenues and Dead Ends

As part of his effort to study the monuments of East Frisia, Fastenau pasted newspaper clippings and other texts into his manuscript *Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler*, including newspaper articles on the Marienhafe church and notes on where some of the lost sculptures may be. Fastenau does not seem to have followed up on all of the questions or leads that arose from these clippings, as he does not describe if or how they were resolved. I have

Sindowski, *Beiträge zur Kultur- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte des ostfriesischen Küstenklandes*, Leer 1969, pp. 379–500, here pp. 382–386.

52 See Carl-Hans Hauptmeyer, "Niedersächsische Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte im hohen und späten Mittelalter (1000–1500)," in Ernst Schubert (ed.), *Geschichte Niedersachsens*, 4 vol., vol. 2, part 1: *Politik, Verfassung, Wirtschaft vom 9. bis zum ausgehenden 15. Jahrhundert*, Hanover, 1997, pp. 1041–1279, here pp. 1205 and 1210; Hajo van Lengen, "Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des Mittelalters," in Jannes Ohling (ed.), *Ostfriesland im Schutze des Deiches*, 12 vol., Pewsum / Leer 1969-2003, Klaus Brandt et al., *Geschichte der Stadt Emden von den Anfängen bis 1611*, Leer 1994, pp. 61–159, here p. 68. Hermann Bächtold, *Der norddeutsche Handel im 12. und beginnenden 13. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1910, p. 232.

53 Anton Kappelhoff, "Friesische 'Schuppen'? Zum Geldumlauf Frieslands im 14. Jahrhundert," in *Hamburger Beiträge zur Numismatik* 20, 1966, pp. 433–446, especially pp. 443–444. Wiemann 1969 (note 51), p. 386.

54 Wiemann 1969 (note 51), p. 385.

55 Médard Barth, *Der Rebbau des Elsass und die Absatzgebiete seiner Weine*, 2 vol., Strasbourg 1958, vol. 1, pp. 354–407, here especially pp. 355–356, no. 24. Gottfried of Viterbo, who travelled with Frederick Barbarossa, wrote that Alsatian wines reached England and Denmark.

8 Crépy (near Laon), Notre Dame, nave pillar with animal battles, 13th century

been able to pursue a few of these avenues and am sharing the results here, including the dead ends, so that other researchers interested in Marienhafe might focus their efforts on avenues unexplored.

One of the newspaper articles affixed to the manuscript's pages was written by Fastenau himself, in which he recounts in considerable detail a lecture on the church and its sculptures, given by Pastor Dr. Reimers.[56] Towards the end of his talk, Reimers remarked that he had seen sculptures similar to Marienhafe's in the church of Crépy near Laon in France. It is unclear what Fastenau made of the comparison, and he otherwise makes no mention of Crépy in his manuscript. The village of Crépy has two medieval churches, but Reimers must have meant the church of Notre-Dame, which dates to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This church has fallen into extreme disrepair and has only few sculptures, but Reimers seems to have been referring to sculptures on the capital level of a pillar on the northwestern end of the nave (fig. 8). These include a series of animals and fantastic creatures in the heat of battle, bearing swords and shields. Yet there is little more than a general resemblance to the Marienhafe frieze, where animals and fantastic creatures likewise engage in battle. A connection to Crépy does not need further pursuit.

56 Fastenau 1930–1938 (note 11), pp. 424–426, here p. 426.

Research on the Marienhafe sculptures not only entails examining their origins or influences but also their present locations. As described above, East Frisian residents gathered a number of the sculptures a century ago, but there may be more. Though eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attitudes toward the Marienhafe frieze are largely marked by disdain or disregard, some sculptures were evidently valued enough to be displayed immediately after the church was dismantled. A swan relief from the frieze was discovered on a carpenter's house in nearby Norden and purchased by the Marienhafe pastor at the beginning of the twentieth century, while other families also returned sculptures that were in their possession.[57] A short message that a pastor by the name of Lüpkes wrote to Jan Fastenau in 1932 also describes some of these works and others, including sculpture possibly from Marienhafe in the home of the Aurich magistrate Conring.[58] Fastenau does not clarify if he contacted the Conring family or if they ever returned a sculpture to the Marienhafe church. The home in question is still owned by the Conring family today, and one of the family members told me that nothing resembling the Marienhafe sculptures is currently in the house.[59]

Lüpkes's message suggests that some Marienhafe sculptures may still be found, for he notes that a public auction of sculptures was held in 1834. He is not the only person to report that the sculptures were sold. In an epilogue to a pamphlet on the history of the Marienhafe church, published in 1932, H. Backer wrote, "As far as the figurative decoration was still in good condition, it is said to have been sold, namely to the Dutch."[60] Neither text gives further details on the sale or on any document that attests to it. Yet both suggest that fragments of the Marienhafe frieze may be found again, especially since Backer implies that the reliefs were valued specifically for their images. Even without any future recovery, the surviving fragments and drawings of the Marienhafe frieze testify to the ambitious nature of East Frisian sculpture, especially the Renart reliefs and the Sheela-na-gig, which would scandalize some future viewers and leave others, myself included, with lingering questions.

57 Bents, Boumann, Janssen, and Seidel 2009 (note 2), p. 334.

58 Fastenau 1930–1938 (note 11), p. 462.

59 Private correspondence with Werner Conring, Aurich, 14 February 2015.

60 H. Backer, *Die alte Kirche von Marienhafe*, Norden 1932, p. 16: "So weit der berühmte Figuren-Schmuck noch gut erhalten war, soll er verkauft worden sein, namentlich an Holländer."

Image p. 94: August von Halem, *View of the church of Marienhafe during the destruction of 1829*, lithography, before 1842, 45 cm × 63 cm, detail)