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## Chaucer's *House of Fame* and the French Palais de Justice

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### In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Chaucer's House of Fame and the French Palais de Justice Laura Kendrick Rutgers University In the spring of 1377, Chaucer was in Paris on the king's business. 1At that time, if not on one of his earlier trips to the Continent, Chaucer must have seen the buildings of the French Palais de Justice on the Ile de la Cite. The palace, the seat of the Parlement de Paris and the official residence of the king, was described in the following terms by Jean de Jandun around 1322 in his *Traite des louanges de Paris* (Treatise in Praise of Paris): In this most illustrious seat of the French monarchy, a splendid palace has been built, a superb testimony to royal magnificence .... In honor of their glorious memory, the statues of all the kings of France who have gone before up to today are in this place, shaped to such a perfect individual likeness that, on first inspection, one would judge them very much alive. 2 From later descriptions and engravings (see plate 1), we know that the Great Hall of the Palais, built between 1301 and 1313, was more than seventy-five yards long

and thirty yards wide, with a gilded, doubled-vaulted ceiling supported by a row of eight central columns with additional columns attached to the side walls. The outstanding ornamentation of this room was the series of statues of the kings of France painted in gold and azure in standing postures about fifteen to eighteen feet off the floor atop the central and side

1 Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson, eds., *Chaucer Life-Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 46-53. 2 Translated from Antoine Le Roux de Lincy and L. M. Tisserand, *Paris et ses historiens auxXIVe et XVe sz'ecles* (Paris: Imprimerie imperiale, 1867), p. 48. 121

STUDIES IN THE AGE OF CHAUCER Interior view of the Great Hall of the Palais from a 16th-century engraving by Jacques l'Androuec du Cerceau (Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Estampes, Vx. 15). columns. In 1377, when Chaucer probably saw the Great Hall, there were forty-seven statues of French kings, beginning with the mythical king Pharamond on a pillar attached to the center of the west wall and proceeding, in chronological order, away from the dais toward the east entrance, one statue mounted on the south side of each of the eight central pillars and one on the pillar attached to the east wall—ten kings in all. The series continued east to west with ten more kings positioned on the north side of the eight central and two side pillars. Back at its starting point, the series ran down the side walls with nineteen statues, one atop each pillar, proceeding from east to west along the north wall; in 1377 only eight statues were mounted on the pillars of the south wall, proceeding west to east from Saint Louis through Jean II. Carved in stone beneath the statues of each king were his name and the dates of his reign.

3 Sources for this architectural description are J. H. Shennan, *The Parlement of Pans* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), pp. 103-105; Guerout, "Le Palais de la Cite a Paris des origines a 1417," *Memoires de la Federation des societes hts tonques et archeologiques de Paris et de l'ile-de-France* 2 (1950): 132-37; N. 122

THE PALAIS DE JUSTICE In book 3 of *The House of Fame*, Chaucer mimics this famous series of French kings, which to my knowledge is the only use of such a combination of pillars and sculptured figures inside a secular hall up to Chaucer's time.

4 Like the Great Hall of the Palais, Fame's hall has rows of pillars topped with statues running down the room on both sides from the dais to the doors (3.1419-28): 5 Valois, "Les statues de la grande salle du Palais," *Bulletin de la Sociiitif de l'histoire de Paris et de l'ile-de-France* 30 (1903): 87-90. 4 As J. A. W. Bennett points out in *Chaucer's "Book of Fame"* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 171-72, there are many precedents both in literary description and in the decoration of contemporary buildings for pictorial presentation of the "theme of the famous dead when given the setting of a...

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