

The Statuary

My original proposal, you may recall, called for six or more large statues with the setting. Hilary and I determined to make a couple ourselves, rather than wait to see who might volunteer. We enjoyed this aspect of the project more than any other. As the statues neared completion, they began to take on a sentience. Had we not been so pressed for time, we could no doubt have continued adding detail until they exactly resembled the originals. Later in the summer, Rich and Sherry Keller (Andra & Hieronymous) called to volunteer two more figures. As I was not present during their construction, I can recount only the method Hilary and I used (although I understand they used similar techniques).

We began by making a very crude frame using chicken wire, balled up newspapers and coat hangers bent in the proper position for the arms. We used masking tape to build up the rough shape of each figure out of compressed newspaper (including the head). Once we were satisfied with the proportions, we made a mixture of flour and water, with which we soaked strips of newspaper.

Working quickly (with help from Arawn and Fiona) we covered the statues with the wet strips, one side at a time, allowing each side to dry overnight. In hindsight, we should have made the body armatures more sturdy. As the bodies lay on their backs, they tended to compress from the weight of the wet papier mache, so our figures were too thin and flat on the back sides. Because of this, we wasted a lot of time later, adding more newspaper on the back to round out the buttocks, calves, etc.



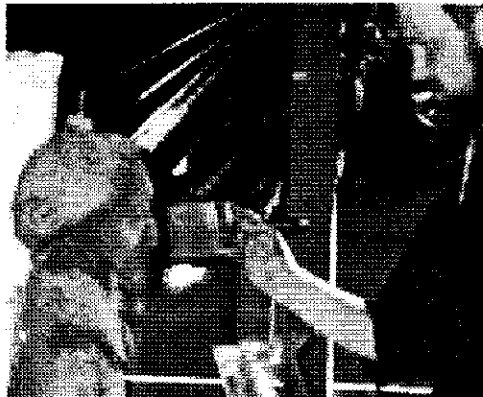
Above: A tale of two Melchisideks: The photo at left shows the original from Chartres. The one at right was our reconstruction.

To create the folds in the tunics/gowns, we laid long, rolled strips of wet newspaper, then covered them with a broad sheet of the same. To replicate the armored limbs and collar of St. Theodore, Fiona used hundreds of rolled strips of paper placed side by side. To make the hands, we filled surgical rubber gloves with Plaster of Paris, and bent the fingers into the proper positions quickly, before the compound could set.

The faces and hands also required a finer working medium. We tried self-hardening clay but it cracked. Plaster was too sticky. We finally discovered a European product called Das Pronto at a hobby store. It worked well and air hardened without shrinking or cracking. The faces were difficult, but also the most fun. Given more time, we would have liked to make the faces of our statues even more "human."

When most of the shape and rough detail had been added by means of the papier maché and Das Pronto,

At left below: Hieronymous puts a final coat of paint on St. Jerome; **Right:** The author applies a coat of nasty resin over the plaster skin of St. Theodore.



Statuary (continued)

we used drywall compound to give the figures a smooth look over their entire surface. By keeping our hands very wet, we were able to work the compound quite effectively. Then, after it dried, we went over each figure with light sandpaper.



Next, we coated both figures with polyester resin, of the type used on boats or automobiles. This is carcinogenic, nasty stuff, but it was the only way we could think of to give the statues the strength and waterproof qualities they would need to stay safe during the trip. The non-toxic version costs about 3 times as much.

To finish, we sprayed each figure with a coat of gray primer, then slapped on a coat of gray exterior flat latex paint. Each statue weighs 35-40 lbs. and is resilient enough to be left out in the rain (we did so). In theory, at least, they should last indefinitely, as the only real enemy to fiberglass is ultraviolet light. In the dim light of the candelabras at

Pennsic, they looked eerie and somber, and added greatly to the atmosphere.



Above: All four statues await the trip home, after serving their time the evening before.

Inset: The woman figure (name unknown)



Far Left: The original St. Theodore stands next to his not-nearly-so-handsome clone.