



Saint-Denis narthex chapel

1139

### *The SS Master*

This master's design was set around a paired 'S' arrangement of tendrils. Each end terminates in a bouquet of heart-shaped leaves emerging from both ends. The leaves fill the spaces between the branches, and often turn up at the ends. The branches do not cross one another, but where they meet they are usually tied with a collar. He played endless variations within this compact arrangement. Layouts have a clear symmetrical geometry along both centre-lines and corners [r1].

The elements lie on the conoid core as if a two-dimensional design had been wrapped around it. The narrow spaces between the elements were more deeply cut over time to form shadows that are as important as the leaves and branches. His work is completely different to anything of the Gripple Master, or André, for unlike them, he never has a tendril emerging from a branch, and therefore has no use for sockets. Instead, all foliage emerges from the ends of the vines, which keeps the S-shaped tendrils the dominant structural motif.

In one of his last works in the windows of the ambulatory at Saint-Denis in 1143, the fronds have pointed tips and lightly cross the tendrils and turn back on themselves [r2]. This is one of the most characteristic of his capitals, displayed in his most mature manner. For some time he had been using the *fleur-de-lys* as well as the flat leaf of earlier work, and infused it with an additional energy in the curled-back tips.

Fronds only overlap the vines in the later capitals, and never do they grip them. They remain within their own boundaries, so that the structure of these tendrils is separated from the bouquets of nature. Notice the asymmetry in the upper section where the capital joins the wall. Adjustments at this point are common, and may at times be quite marked. This happens most often on corners where the axis of the column does not coincide with the axis of the impost.

The upper collar has a small triangle where the fronds emerge instead of a simple tie. This motif was not used in earlier work, as can be seen in the capital in the narthex from seven or eight years before [r3]. This triangle has an added-on appearance, and looks as if he could not bear to observe the sharp intersection between the two vines and the collar, and created this to ensure that each side was square to the direction of the vine.



Saint-Denis choir (aw)

1143



Saint-Denis narthex (a)

1135

There are notional *fleur-de-lys* in four SS capitals at Aulnay-sur-Bois. They are all arranged with one pair of fronds pointing upwards and the other curved downwards. The differences between these four capitals are indicative of the fluid way in which these masons worked.

One has the SS Master's characteristic details [r1]. He seems to have established the template for three other capitals that were executed by associates, though in their own manner [b].

In the one on the left the tendrils have become hard-edged metallic straps somewhat in the manner of some earlier work that we will meet in a moment. It lacks the fully rounded curves of the lower half of the vines, and extra emphasis is given to the fronds that emerge from the tendrils in a way that is foreign to the SS Master's own work. There is no upper collar and the gaps between the upper leaves of the *fleur-de-lys* encase little balls. With reservations I would suggest it may have been carved by the Long-Leaf Master using the SS template.

The middle capital may have more of the SS elements, even to the triangle in the upper collar, but is in all other respects 'overdecorated' with twirls and twiddles in all the fronds [b2]. It was not carved by the master, and significantly there are no other capitals in the Paris Basin displaying a similar style of foliage.

The one on the right has followed the template more accurately, but each lobe and frond has been simplified and coarsened to present a more robust appearance [b3].



Aulnay-sur-Bois EN1s(a)

1133



Aulnay-sur-Bois WN3e(a)

1133



Aulnay-sur-Bois WN1e(a)

1133



Aulnay-sur-Bois EN1w(a)

1133

This last carver at Aulnay may have taken the template with him to carve the clerestory capital in Acy-en-Multien with its long fronds [r3]. He recast the template in his own manner and squashed the lower part downwards so that the *fleur-de-lis* was compressed beyond recognition. It creates a swinging motion that imparts a lot more energy into the arrangement at the expense of visual stability. He wrapped a vine all around one leaf (arrow) as the SS Master had done at Aulnay, but enlarged it as in the detail [r3+].



Acy-en-Multien nave WN2s(c) and detail of leaf below arrow

1137



These capitals example how a senior master's template may have been used by other men, who were often equally competent. While following the original template they transformed the details, and in most cases did not continue to use the SS-template on other jobs.

It would seem that this level of individuality was not only acceptable, but encouraged. It suggests that a master may not have believed he had 'ownership' of a design, but would share it among some (though not all) his colleagues. On the other hand, the 'quasi-copy' at Acy is exceptional in being a close yet distorted version, and in being the only example of this carver's work separate from his master.

There are many examples of a master’s prototype being used by students while working with him, and then being continued elsewhere by the student in his own journeys. In each case they can be recognised by the individuality of their work, in being similar to their teacher’s yet different. The Strapper and Apple teams provide clear examples. One feels they encouraged students to work in their own manner once they had fled the coop.

The style of a capital in the Saint-Denis crypt of 1140 fits into this context, though the *fleur-de-lis* arrangement on the right face has a central berry, prefiguring the classic stylised form of the royal lily [r1]. Though this stone has been recarved, the details are consistent with this master’s other work. I would estimate that with the berry replacing the coupled leaves in the *fleur-de-lis*, Aulnay and Acy-en-Multien would have been carved before the crypt.

There is another replaced capital in the crypt that looks like it may have come from his template [r2]. The row of inappropriate *fleur-de-lis* along the bottom was possibly an imaginative redesign for a damaged section.

There is a similarly metallic capital in the chapel of the Senlis royal castle [b1]. It is hard-edged with drilled detailing. The upper bouquet has been split in half with separate fronds on each side that touch at points. The upper and lower tendrils are bound, but not the lower leaves, unlike Saint-Denis.

In the few years prior to the crypt there is an easily recognisable capital in the narthex chapel from 1139 [b2]. Another in the Noël-Saint-Martin apse follows the same format [b3]. All of these I would date to the later 1130s. In them he used the *énchancre* under the impost, but was hardly consistent in this.



Saint-Denis An4s(u) 1140



Saint-Denis AcCa(u) 1140



Senlis royal castle chapel 1137



Saint-Denis narthex chapel 1139



Noël-Saint-Martin apse EN2 1138

They all have the same flattened surface, the same large generous flowing leaves and the same deep cutting between the elements. The gaps between the leaf fronds are a prominent feature.

There are two on the north wall in the Saint-Denis aisle level of the narthex with small variations of fronds and an elementary *fleur-de-lys* on one of them [b1,2]. Since it is in the nature of wall construction to usually took longer to build than piers, these may have been carved just after the large capital on the nearby pier [next page].



Saint-Denis narthex Xn2wsw(a) 1135



Saint-Denis narthex Xn2wnw(a) 1135

In fact, the SS Master spent considerable time at Saint-Denis. He did not work in every campaign, but in at least six of them. The pier capital I mentioned above is a more flowing version of those from the later 30s [r1]. It has leaves and fronds with gashes between them.

There is another nearby that is more voluptuous and even whimsical, and also with a gash up the spine just under the corner and a berry on a stalk in the middle noted with an arrow [r2]. Both of these stones have used the template of the SS Master, but there are subtle differences in the handling of the fronds, especially in the smaller one.

This exemplifies one of the most difficult issues in identifying masters: where the template-maker ended and the carver began. In most of this work the one man would seem to have been responsible for both, but the issue is not so clear in a large job like Saint-Denis or Aulnay with thirty or more masons on the site.

In time we may understand this situation better than we do today, but as a first approximation to an understanding I have opted for the template-maker as the primary master, and that those using his template were under him in some manner or other. The latter can usually be recognised by their detailing. In this case it is the open foliage in [r1] and the upturned leaf tips in the other. If I were to make up a story about this I would suggest that a carver was employed to help the SS Master on the large piece and was responsible for the greater plastic fluidity of the foliage and the gap up the middle of the leaf, and that he was then allowed to recast the template in his own way in the little stone on a nearby pier [r2].

It is probably truer and more respectful to refer to these men, all highly skilled in their own right, as associates rather than pupils.

Continuing with the work at Saint-Denis, and going back some three years there is one SS capital in the embrasure of the south door of the west portal [r3]. It is remarkably like the later one in the crypt, except no berry. It is in such good condition with little surface weathering that it may have had some restoration, though Pam Blum states it is original.<sup>n</sup>

The man who carved one using the SS form in the north doorway may have been an associate [r4]. It has mysterious heads with peaked hats, and long full-height fronds on the corner and on the right where it joins the adjacent capital. There are thick leaves at the bottom with a berry that is more of a fountain than a *fleur-de-lys*. He is more like the master of the Saint-André west front in Chartres [v.4:385-7] or one of the masters on the Angers drip moulds. He seems to have combined his own preferred motifs with the double-S arrangement of the SS Master.

Was he in some way ‘attached’ to the SS Master? There may have been an arrangement about who created the template, or a desire to share ideas from earlier work at Saint-Martin-des-Champs. Or he may just have wanted to try out the SS design to see if he liked it. You will notice the little triangular collar at the top like the one the SS Master had used in the ambulatory window ten years later, and the drilling of the tendrils as in the palace at Senlis and the crypt of Saint-Denis.

There was obviously an enormous sharing of details and decorative ideas in a large workshop. At a superficial level this disguises hands by making them almost interchangeable, although the template itself is clear and unmistakable.

My approach has been to define the master by combining the template with a generalised view of foliage and similar detailing. In this manner I have separated his work from those of associates in all the examples given so far.



Saint-Denis narthex XN1w(a)

1135



Saint-Denis narthex XN3n-e1(a)

1135



Saint-Denis west portal W.sL1

1132



Saint-Denis west portal W.nR2

1132

n. Blum, 1986, 96

Another example of the complexity occurs at Chartres after his work on the Saint-Denis crypt. There is a panel on the entry into the south tower from around 1141. This date is established from the construction order in campaign H [v.4:291 and 314-]. He was working here at the same time as his friends at Saint-Denis were building the walls of the ambulatory.

It is a large stone with the SS Master's design elements as in Saint-Denis: double-S tendrils, collars with little triangular tops and pointed fronds [r1]. Yet there are noticeable differences in the detailing between the corner and the flat face, though the same template was used on both.

The corner was carved with plain tendrils and fairly simple fronds, while the adjacent flat face has very different detailing. The parts that were plain on the corner were heavily decorated, giving this face a somewhat metallic appearance that is crisp and more anchored into the stone itself.

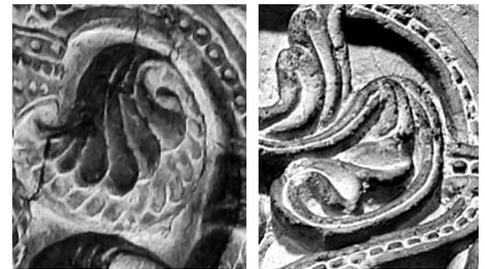
The face may have been by a companion who liked to decorate the tendrils rather than keeping them plain. The approach was, in some respects, like the Acy capital mentioned above, and may have been by the same assistant. In the detail the enfolding plate under the ear-like leaf is more subtle and developed than at Acy, which was some four years earlier [r2].

There is a similar capital on the opening into the opposite north tower from just after the fire [b1]. I am unsure whether this was by the SS Master as it was carved in a relatively rumbustious manner. He may have been influenced by some of the men around him. However, there is an adjacent flat panel, and as on the south side, the two were carved on the same stone [b2]. The panel has a considerable mixture of elements: berries, faceted vines and additional branches that were needed to fill the spaces between the vines. These branches emerge from sockets. None of these elements are found in other capitals, though there is a touch of them in a shaft from the Saint-Denis portal that I will describe in a moment. I would prefer to leave this in doubt.



Chartres WS-n(a-)

1141



Leaf details at Chartres and Acy compared

1141 and



Chartres WN-s(a)

1135

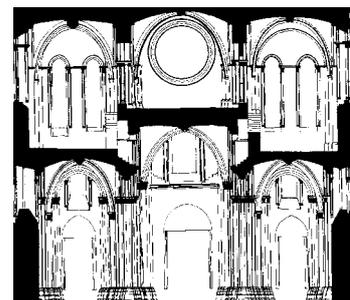


Chartres WN-s(a)

1135

Among the sites we have examined so far, the only ones we can date with any accuracy are the campaigns in Saint-Denis and Chartres. The chronology at Saint-Denis may be surmised by working backwards from the completion of the upper narthex chapel in 1140, and that at Chartres by working forwards from the fire of 1134.

The Chartres analysis is summarised in v.4:291, and in detail in my *In Search of the Unknown in Medieval Architecture*, 2007, Pindar Press, London, 178-198. The construction analysis of the Saint-Denis narthex will be published in volume 6 of *The Ark of God*, and the dates are summarised in v.5:1173- and in the cross-section [r3]. It is based on the time needed for mortar to set on eight levels of arches and vaults, and the delays involved in the complex carving and erection of the portals. On this basis I would hazard that the foundations were dug into the alluvial soil around 1129.

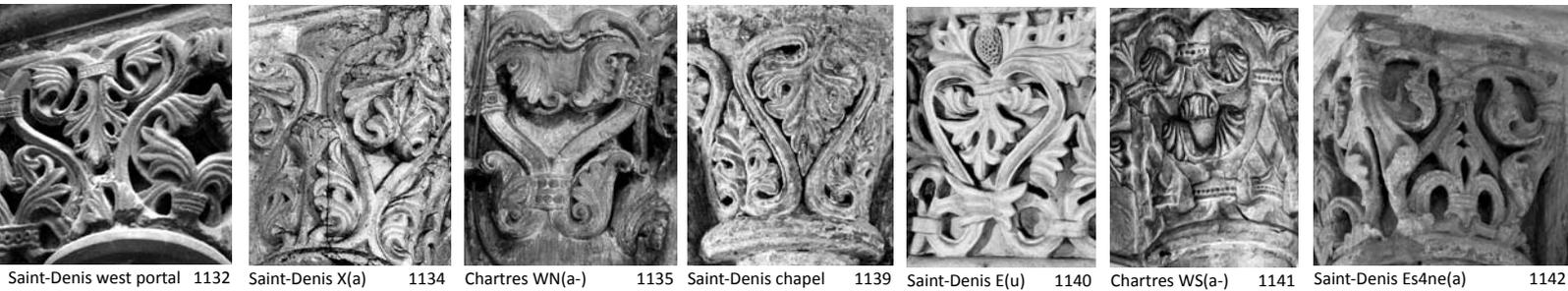


sDef section through narthex

Altogether the SS Master worked on seven campaigns in these two buildings over a ten-year period. The seven more characteristic are arranged below, and may be examined in larger format in earlier volumes.

There has been restoration to some items in the Saint-Denis portal and crypt, in which the detailing has usually been made more flamboyant [b1 and b6]. Making allowances for the changes in detailing there are changes to the corners (be they pointing up or down), to the thick and thin fingered fronds, the berries and in the use of collars and plates. The major development is that from 1135 the edges of the leaves would lap more certainly over the branches, designs become more three-dimensional with leaves curling over themselves and more twisted [b5-]. This tendency became more pronounced over the following years [b7].

We should be able to use this information to place most of the other buildings with work by the SS Master into some chronological relationship with these. They are listed on the last page.



Saint-Denis west portal 1132 Saint-Denis X(a) 1134 Chartres WN(a-) 1135 Saint-Denis chapel 1139 Saint-Denis E(u) 1140 Chartres WS(a-) 1141 Saint-Denis Es4ne(a) 1142

With the above process in mind, the SS Master is easily found in Saint-Martin-des-Champs where he worked twice: Once along the north wall in 1126, and again on the aisles in 1130. The first is represented by four small corner stones [b]. The two on the left are originals, the next two have been recarved onto a single and stone look like they were based on his designs. His style is extraordinarily rich with triple-bouquets, thin acanthus-like leaves, wavy tendrils and long thin fronds.



Saint-Martin-des-Champs Es1e, An4Lw, An4+(a) 1126



Saint-Martin-des-Champs EN2+(a) 1130

The authorship of the Saint-Martin capitals is very confusing. Nearly every capital seems over-decorated as if the carvers were swapping elements between them from a common basket. I have the impression that the master mason ordered the carvers to mix and match, so André may have used SS details, and SS used the Félix leaf and the turned-back frond from Héron.

I feel that only one in the aisle can be definitely ascribed him [r1]. There is another that is unambiguously his in the Musée de Cluny *lapidarium*, number 19511 [r2].

There is another dozen that show his influence, but the design types are so entangled at Saint-Martin that it is taking a considerable effort to



Saint-Martin, Musée de Cluny 19511

disentangle master from assistants or semi-copyists. Though some have more complex foliage the proportions in the template and the spatial weight of the parts came from SS [b]. This intricate matter will be discussed in an later section on site control and the limits to the exchange of ideas.

It is time to examine the possible figurative sculpture by the SS Master. After that we will study his earliest work.



Saint-Martin-des-Champs AS4+L(a) 1131



Saint-Martin-des-Champs En3(a) 1130

n. James, 1986. Most writers argue that the north was first.

**An approach to sculpture.**

While he carving the entry into the south tower at Chartres other craftsmen were completing the carving and erection of the sculpture for the portal. Since the SS Master was working on this capital while the sculpture was being carved, it is likely he did some work there himself.

I can point to one colonnette on the left embrasure of the north door that has undulating vines[r3]. The vines hold birds with long corkscrew tails. Nearly every shaft has tendrils, but these are unique in that they do not cross over each other and there are no side branches coming off the main stem.

The collar has the triangular addition where the vines exit, marked with an arrow. Near the base of the colonnette there is a very worn but still recognisable *fleur-de-lis* [b].

Every colonnette is made from a number of shafts, and forty-three separate lengths still exist out of possibly fifty-six. Each was the work of a different carver, giving some indication of the number of skilled masters engaged on the work of the portal.

Because the portal was assembled from the north to the south, and because the centre was the last part to be put together,<sup>n</sup> not all these men would have been working at the same time. Indeed, the designs fall into a number of groups, and the distribution of these groups suggests that the colonnettes were assembled in three or four campaigns.

This one by the SS Master in the north embrasure would have been in the earlier phase around 1139. The shafts were individually erected with the walls behind the column-figures, a most difficult stage in the construction.

It would seem that he moved between Chartres and Saint-Denis during these critical years. This does suit his work load, as I have not been able to locate any other work in his style in other places during those three or four years.



Chartres W.nR shaft - with *fleur-de-lis* 1139



Chartres W.nR shaft 1139

One of the shafts in the Musée de Cluny has a similar structure and paired birds [r1]. The tendrils do not cross. The birds are less worn and they meet along the wings with their feet on the vine. There is a disjunction where the tails join the vines that weave through the tendrils (arrow). They do not morph into each other as they would in the work of Jérôme, but the joint keeps them quite separate.

The bird at the middle of the shaft is extraordinary in its upstretched posture with contorted arrangement of wings and thigh [b1]. It pecks at a berry. Notice the triangle on the upper collar, marked with an arrow [b2]. The detailing of the foliage with pointed tips and fanned lobes is like those in the nearby portal capitals [r2].



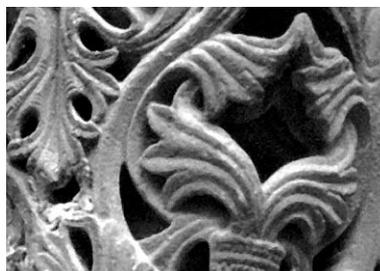
Saint-Denis shaft CC, Musée de Cluny 1132



Saint-Denis shaft CC, Musée de Cluny 1132



Saint-Denis shaft CC, Musée de Cluny 1132



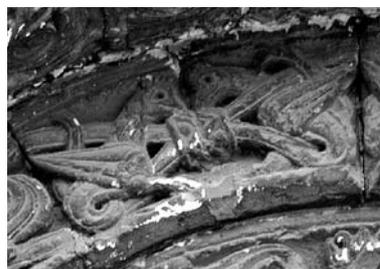
Saint-Denis west portal W.sl1 1132

The date for this shaft would have been around 1132. There are no clear indications that he worked on any figure sculpture, in archivolt or tympani, as there is no indicative foliage. However, it is hard to believe that a carver of his quality would not somewhere have been engaged on larger work.

One thing that this study has shown is that a capital in a portal was like a signature for his presence elsewhere, an indication that he was part of the team for that campaign.

However, we could approach the issue of figurative sculpture from another direction by going back in time: by examining the tympanum in Beauvais, a *bas-relief* in Saint-Denis and the lintel in the south porch at Bourges.

The north door archivolt at Saint-Etienne in Beauvais, probably from the early-1120s, has similar linked vines and somewhat more archaic birds, in the sense of being less naturalistic [r3]. The plate-like wings are recognisable in the Saint-Denis shaft [a1]. The stiffness readily reflects the work of a younger man, carving many years before Saint-Denis. He was in the same team as Félix and Grégoire who were working on the capitals and the tympanum, at the beginning of what was to be a long association.



Beauvais, Etienne Wn3-n archivolt 1123

The second item is two small capitals with the SS layout on the Apostles *bas-relief* discovered by Sumner Crosby in 1947 [r1,2]. They include collars, drooping fronds in pairs and so on. On one there is a pine cone, and on the other an acorn standing erect in the centre. The imposts are carved onto the same stone as the capital.

Two dates have been suggested: 1150 on the assumption it formed part of Suger’s tomb of that date, and 1144 on the belief that it had been left unfinished when Suger received a “wealth of gold” that allowed him to construct a more resplendent tabernacle shortly before the choir was dedicated.<sup>n</sup> Yet the style of work in these, and in the other capitals on the panel suggests a date closes to 1133.

There are similar small capitals on the lintel of the south portal in Bourges. The lintel is made from two stones [b1]. The capital and shaft at the join is split [b2]. On both the altar and the lintel the double-S forms the structure and the fruit is held vertically in the middle, though the terminals, the berries and the acorns have been decorated in different ways.

I have identified six masters who worked as a team on the Bourges portal. They may have stayed together for some years after this for I have found them also on the portals at Chartres and Saint-Denis. The stylistic evidence from these men, taken together, indicates a date for the Bourges south portal close to 1128. Most scholars prefer a much later date,<sup>n</sup> and I will address the dating of all the portals in volume 6.



Saint-Denis Apostles Altar 1133



Saint-Denis Apostles Altar 1133

n. Crosby, 1972; Panofsky, 1946, 172  
n. New-Smith, 1975.



Bourges south portal lintel 1128



Bourges south portal lintel, central capital 1128

With carved figures next to this capital, we have to ask ourselves whether he had anything to do with them? This is where I go out on a limb and make suggestions rather than attempting a deeper analysis. The purpose of these forays into figure sculpture is to tease out the possibility that capitals and figures may be linked. If so we are offered the enormously intriguing possibility that as a large collection of capitals by identifiable individuals may be dated through their stylistic evolution, then any linked sculpture may also be dated from them.

There are no people on his capitals, which makes the connection hazardous, to say the least. Nevertheless, consider the figures adjacent to these capitals [b]. Consider the prominence given to the ears, the sharp-pointed edges to the eye with a slightly larger upper lid, the long moustache that curls downwards, and a mouth with an overturned lower lip. Eyeballs are not drilled, instead there is a soft indent in the centre of the eye of the altar figure that is not present in the lintel. I would not suggest more than this.



Saint-Denis Apostles Altar 1133



Bourges south portal lintel 1128



Bourges south portal lintel 1128

**The early work of the SS Master.**

His beginnings are more easily traced now we can see where the mature man took the ideas of his youth. They are arranged chronologically by the development of skills and artistic coherence. The dates are flexible, though they are becoming firmer as other workers on these sites are identified. At this stage of the investigation I have used an arbitrary timing of approximately one job per year.

The capitals show a man being trained in an unsophisticated milieu in which there were few mentors. From the look of them he was experimenting with little guidance. During the first twenty years he used all manner of leaves, fronds and buds, with the bulkiest being before Auvers. The fronds start off closed and gradually divide into fronds. He relied increasingly on collars to tighten his control over the vines.

The date of 1116/19 for Saint-Aignan on the Ile-de-la-Cité forms a *terminus ante quem* for the earlier designs, following which there was a marked change in his work. The proportions of the foliage and the symmetry improved markedly. He eliminated overlap and made lower leaves rise and



Berneuil-sur-Aisne WS2(a) 1096



Nointel nave 1097



Saint-Martin-de-Brethancourt W.c 1098



Villers-Saint-Paul nave, three capitals



1100



Mogneville north 1102



Ouistraham west wall 1103



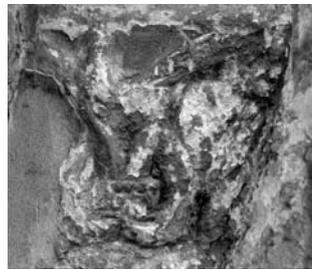
Lesges apse ES1 1104



Auvers-sur-Oise north chapel (aw) 1105



Etampes ND, nave WS2(a) 1107



Bury Ws3-sL1 1109



Vieil-Arcy apse (aw) 1111



Soissons ND 1112



Montmartre EN1(c+) 1113



Foulanges crossing WS1n(a) 1114



Catenoy W.cL 1115



Paris, Saint-Aignan 1116+

upper ones fall. Perhaps he learned from the better carvers who had come north to work on this job [v.3:521-2].

My guess is that he was advised to travel for a couple of years, yet only in Milan did I find anything remotely like his work, in San Eustorgio, which could have been after the earthquake of 1117. It is a long shot, but there he may have learned to use geometry to maintain symmetry, something lacking in earlier work. The tendrils in Milan are more like straps with flat faces, and he continued this idea when he returned home shortly afterwards.

The flattened tendril dominated his next half-dozen jobs. He gradually packed the fronds more closely and filled in the empty spaces, and as he did so the roundness of the one seems to have influenced and softened the other until the tendrils in the double-S became tubular again. Though he returned to the idea from time to time, as in Saint-Denis XN2(a) on page 3.

I am uncertain about attributing some capitals in Léry and Martinvaast in Normandy, yet he is so creative in re-managing his foliage that his long fronds and the sharp points do not unduly surprise me. SS-style designs are not common in that area.



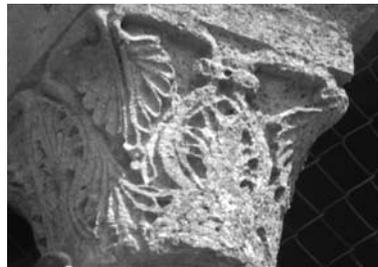
Milan, San Eustorgio nave 1116/1120



Château-Landun choir 1120



Couilly-Pont-aux-Dames crossing 1120



Latilly tower 1121



Léry west front 1121



Martinvaast nave N1s 1122



Etampes choir EN3se(+) 1123



Etampes choir EN1se(+) 1123

To these should be added four archivolts. They have branches enfolding a pineapple-like core with a deep hole between each block. I include them as the enfolding tendrils with collars are typical (though distorted around the curved section of the profile), and the cores are large like the berries in his earliest capitals. The chronological order for the first three comes from the dating for the capitals that support these arches. The firmness and more close-packed fullness of the fourth at Cerseuil suggests it was carved after 1120, possibly in the same campaign as the crossing.



Nouvion tower 2 1101



Colligis-Crandelain west porch 1106



Soissons Notre-Dame window arch 1112



Cerseuil west door arch 1125

Is there the possibility that the outer archivolt in the Bourges north portal could also have been by the SS Master, carved at the same time as he was working on the southern lintel? It follows a similar arrangement with a central hanging berry enfolded in SS-vines [r1]. It would have been three or four years later than Cerseuil, and designed while working with a very sophisticated team. If it is, then these stones would have been the last erected in the north while he was still working on the lintels in the south, and provides a possible completion date for the north around 1128.

I would compare its design with two capitals on the third level of the Vendôme tower [r2] and two in the nearby Châteaudun dado [b]. The layouts have a certain level of uncertainty, as do all those before Saint-Martin-des-Champs. He used various permutations of fronds and bouquets, and different ways of setting out the decoration along the tendrils, but in none do the leaves fully occupy the space between them. The fronds are scooped and some are tri-lobed, not unlike Félix's who was, I presume, the inspiration when they worked together at Beauvais.

Where the centre of the shaft does not coincide with the axes through the corners of the abacus the master had to make adjustments: either ignore the axis and make the elements on the capital line up with the vertical, or treat the geometry as primary and offset the elements. At Châteaudun he went for the latter, for the curves of the tendrils lean a little to the side while the fronds are plumb [b1]. This would have made it easier to use small templates for individual details [discussed in v.3:19-21].



Bourges N outer archivolt (turned sideways) 1128



Vendôme tower level 3 1124



Châteaudun, Madeleine WS(d) 1124



Châteaudun, Madeleine WS(d) 1124



Châteaudun, Madeleine WS(d) 1124

The north wall of the Etampes nave was built after the two-storey inner walls with the piers and clerestory. This was a common method of construction that gave the congregation the greatest height for the least money.<sup>n</sup> The capital would have been a little later than Châteaudun, as the layout had become more regular [r4].

The leaves rest on plates, as in the work of The Duke and Gripple. The use of plates comes and goes over the years, turning up in the Bourges south portal and Aulnay, and on a couple of capitals in the Saint-Denis narthex aisle. The SS Master was not the only sculptor to use plates and, like most minor decoration, its presence is more useful for dating than in making attributions. The motif was eliminated from the work of all masters by the time of the narthex chapel in 1139.

The tiny churches of Cerseuil and Vieil-Arcy are not far from each other to the north-east of Paris. The small capital in the former may have been carved with the pineapple archivolt around 1125 [b]. The designs are quite dense and the tips of the fronds pointed.



Etampes north nave wall Wn1(a) 1123

n. James, 1989, 42-46.



Cerseuil crossing WN1w-L(c)

1125



Vieil-Arcy nave south door W.cL2

1125

His next job was on the walls of Saint-Martin-des-Champs where he would have met up with his friends from Beauvais, as well as The Duke and Faceter, who was by then an old man [b1]. His work moved to a new level of maturity from here on. Fronds are more complex and the extra branches and whorls add richness to the arrangement.

About the same time he produced this capital at Sainte-Geneviève, now in the Musée de Cluny [b2]. It is significant of his methods that he reused the large leaf from Villers-Saint-Paul. The structure remained constant, while he would contentedly borrow designs for the leaves that fill the spaces in between from anyone nearby. The hanging leaf at Saint-Martin came from the Héron Master, the turned-up tips and complexity in the fronds from Grégoire, and so on.

From here he travelled with many of the same carvers to Bourges, and then spent many of the following years in the Saint-Denis and Chartres workshops where his skills in sculpture may have been much in demand.

Over the next fifteen years his work became more stately and complex, as described in the earlier pages. This process is apparent in one carved for the ambulatory walls of Saint-Denis [b3].



Saint-Martin An4Lw(aw)

1126



Sainte-Geneviève, Musée de Cluny WB114-1

1127



Saint-Denis Es4ne(a)

1143

After Aulnay he made a foray back to the north-east to work on the apse of Urcel [r2]. Compare its dense packing and up-pointing fronds with Aulnay to see they were about the same time [b2]. He employed both the curled leaf of earlier work and the pointed leaf of later work.



Aulnay-sur-Bois EN1s(a)

1133

He seems to have stayed on at Urcel to carve the rather flattened big-leafed arrangement on the western crossing piers, a change that is reflected in his later work in the Saint-Denis narthex [top next page].



Urcel AN1(c)

1134



Urcel AS1(c)

1134



Urcel W1n(a)

1134+



Urcel WS1(c)

1134+

He may have left an assistant at Urcel to continue working in his manner, for there is one capital with the SS structure among the wild exuberance of the other capitals in the nave [r1]. Figures are held within the tendrils, and the fronds curl and bend in ways we would not expect from the SS Master himself.

Separating the work of master from associate may be easy as at Aulnay, but then collecting their work into a sequence that can be followed so that other works can be attributed to this fellow-worker is usually very difficult. For example, there is an SS-design in the Etampes north piers that would be around 1137 [r2]. The chiselling is superficial and it lacks the skill in detailing of the master himself. It is probably by one of the relatively unskilled men who had been working with him.

To summarise, the SS Master was trained in the days when there were few skilled carvers in the north. His early work is therefore amateurish, even puerile, in comparison with what was being carved in the south of France at that time. His later story shows his capacity, working on over a hundred capitals in 56 distinguishable campaigns. It shows how, once in the company of men with superior skills, he quickly came to understand the fundamentals of capital design and execution.

If he was 15 years old in his earliest work around 1097, he would have been in his early-40s when he began to really understand his trade.

There is no way to compress the later works, so finishing in the 1143 campaign in Saint-Denis is a fixed date. He would have been over 60 when carving his last stone. Whereas a working life of 47 years is possible, it is not highly likely. So, either the earlier dates should be moved upwards some ten years or some of the earlier work would have been by another master using the same template, possibly his teacher.

We shall face this problem with nearly every carver. Moving earlier work forward has not found an answer. This is an ongoing matter and may resolve itself in time.

If we were to argue that he was twenty around 1110, at say Montmartre, then he would have been in his fifties on his last stone. That is more comfortable, if not necessarily true. We could give the early work including Saint-Aignan to his teacher and selectively give him the 'less rigorous' carvings, though there is not much evidence for such a division. If I had done that then the SS Teacher could have worked from around 1095 to 1130, or thirty-five years, and the SS Master from the early 1110s to 1143. This approach, while 'workable', is unworkable when we examine the steady progression from amateur to master over these forty-five years.

All we can say is that in his maturity the SS Master was solely responsible for a clear body of work between the early years of the century and 1143, and that he had associates who may have carried his ideas to other sites or worked with him and interpreted his templates in their own way - a long and fruitful life.



Urcel nave WS4en(a)

1134+



Etampes ND EN3ne(c)

1137

*The SS Master's jobs by date*

1097	Berneuil-sur-Aisne	nave (a)
1098	Nointel	nave
1099	Saint-Martin-de-Brethancourt	west door
1100	Villers-Saint-Paul	nave (a)
1101	Nouvion	tower II arch
1102	Mogneville	north
1103	Ouistraham	west
1105	Auvers-sur-Oise	north chapel
1106	Colligis-Crandelain	west door arch
1107	Lesges	apse
1108	Etampes ND	nave (a)
1109	Bury	south door
1110	Vieil-Arcy	apse
1111	Soissons Notre-Dame	window (aw)
1112	Soissons Notre-Dame	nave arch
1113	Montmartre	east crossing (c+)
1114	Foulangues	west crossing
1115	Catenoy	west portal
1116	Paris, Saint-Aignan	entry
1118	Italy, Milan, San Eustorgio	nave
1120	Château-Landun	choir
1120	Couilly-Pont-aux-Dames	crossing
1121	Latilly	tower
1122	Léry	west
1122	Martinvast	apse
1123	Beauvais, Saint-Etienne	north door
1123	Etampes Notre-Dame	choir (c+)
1124	Châteaudun	nave (d)
1124	Vendôme	tower III
1125	Cerseuil	west door, crossing
1125	Vieil-Arcy	nave south door
1126	Etampes Notre-Dame	nave north wall
1126	Saint-Martin-des-Champs	choir (aw)
1127	Sainte-Geneviève (Cluny)	cap WB1141-1
1128	Bourges	south portal
1130	Saint-Martin-des-Champs	choir inner piers (a)
1132	Saint-Denis	W-w
1133	Aulnay-sur-Bois	east
1133	Saint-Denis	Apostle's altar
1134	Saint-Denis	narthex (a-)
1134	Urcel	east (a)
1135	Chartres	WN-s(a-)
1135	Saint-Denis	narthex (a)
1136	Acy-en-Multien	nave (c)
1136	Noël-Saint-Martin	apse
1137	Senlis castle	chapel
1138	Saint-Thibout	Soissons museum
1139	Chartres	colonnettes group 1
1139	Saint-Denis	chapel
1140	Chartres	colonnettes group 2
1140	Saint-Denis	choir (u)
1141	Chartres	WS-n(a-)
1142	Saint-Denis	choir (a) walls
1143	Saint-Denis	choir (aw)