



Chartres cathedral Royal Portal capitals and decorated imposts

The portal impost study - Classicist or Romantic?

Masonry architecture is built up layer by layer and row by row with stones carved from templates. Under normal circumstances such as frames around windows or plinths under a column we cannot distinguish between the carver and the template-maker as there is little individuality. However, on some mouldings, such as the decoration on imposts, may help us to better understand the contractual procedures of the twelfth century.

I had earlier considered the degree of control and freedom permitted within templates among four men in the Bourges jambs in #17 and sixty in the capitals of the Laon gallery cathedral in #20 *et seq.* At Bourges the rinceau pattern was included on the template and personal idiosyncrasies permitted only in the detailing. At Laon the template was no more than the dimensions of the block within which each man was allowed to decide his own design, with the only restriction being that the finish on those visible from below would be detailed. Where designs were shared the carver was permitted to retain enough initiative to allow me to distinguish most of the carvers from one another.

The impost are plain profiles in a dozen portals from the Paris Basin before 1170 [r1,2]. In them the imposts were placed level with the underside of the lintel, with the exception of the Senlis cathedral west portal where the column-figures are set higher so the impost is level with the top of the lintel, rather than underneath to support it [r3]. This curious feature was a portent for the future, for it was taken up in the northern region after the Second Crusade at Laon, Braine, Nesles-la-Reposte, Reims north and elsewhere. That schema had already been a feature of central France a generation earlier in Jonzy, Anzy-le-Duc, Semur, La Charité, Bourges and Charlieu.

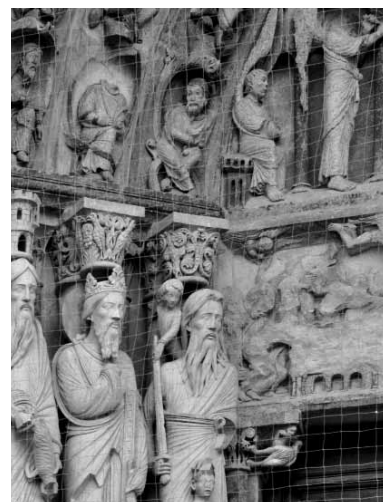
The imposts are decorated in ten portals, and will be discussed here. They fall into three types. One group of six have continuous repetitions of the same foliage, and though we can distinguish many individuals their input was disciplined within a single design. In the other four, one is completely individual and undisciplined with nearly every stone being carved in a different manner, while in three the arrangement is consistent on each side of the doorway but inconsistent across the portal. The level of control is different. The first group has a Classical orderliness that was applied to everybody, while the others celebrate a more Romantic individualism.



Ivry-la-Bataille portal impost

Portals with plain profiles (1120-1158)

Beauvais, Saint-Etienne north
Ivry-la-Bataille
Châteaudun, La Madeleine south
Etampes, Saint-Basile west
Saint Denis west lateral portals
Saint-Germain-des-Prés west
Provins, Saint-Ayoul west, central
Compiègne, Saint-Pierre west
Châlons, Notre-Dame west
Mantes-la-Jolie west, north
Saint-Vaast-les-Mello south and west
Senlis cathedral west



Senlis cathedral west portal

THE CLASSICISTS

The Royal Portal of the cathedral of Chartres

The impostos are assembled from 22 stones. Those that have not been replaced are illustrated on the next page. The template was the same throughout, being a central leaf encased in large flanking leaves divided into three or five fronds. The arrangement was interpreted differently on each stone, and the manner of handling does suggest that most were sculpted by different men, though a few may have been variations produced by one carver.

The erection of the impostos occurred after most of the column-statues, colonnettes and jamb statues below the capitals had been completed and were presumably waiting in the shed.

In the analysis of the discrepancies in the upper sculpture I concluded "analysis shows that the shape of certain stones was skilfully adjusted to compensate for earlier discrepancies, and that these same stones were subsequently reworked to suit later changes in construction and design. The sequence of adaptations shows that the architectural design was altered a number of times while the portal was being erected. The changes are truly 'drastic' and suggest that, rather than being the work of one team which could not make up its collective mind on the design, the portal was erected in a series of small campaigns by independent workshops ... The adjustments were not made at one time during erection, but at different times in response to layout changes that were **occurring during the process of erection**. The design was therefore not finalized before erection began, and many stones were not carved until the erection was well advanced." Pindar

The bases of the north embrasure are not aligned to the other three. This may be deduced from the junction of the lowest courses with the earlier north tower that created misalignments that were not noticed until above the impost. The north tower buttress that projected into the space now occupied by the portal was cut back so the embrasure could be inserted into it.

The threshold under the plinths has upstands at each end to support and mould into the plinths. The plinth was laid exactly over the upstands, and therefore the origin of the misplacement lay in the threshold. The next courses were set out from it and the errors left for those who came later to resolve as best they could. The north tower had been checked out accurately, but the plinth misplaced and the gap filled [arrow r2]. At first the error was not noticed until the lintels were being placed. I would guess that the scaffolding obscured the misalignment during erection.

I would imagine that the north plinths and embrasure were laid first as the north tower was in place while the south was still being erected and covered in scaffolding. Having a small tilt to one side was good construction policy, as discussed in #20:16-18. We can draw each of the stones as they were being erected one after another to show the logic in proceeding from one side to the other, for then the strain on the available men and resources would have been less intense. It follows that not all 22 impost stones would have been required at the same time and could be completed piecemeal as they were needed or stored in a nearby shed.

In most of the impostos the foliage rises as if it was emerging from behind the impost and bending out of the wall without a bottom roll or similar moulding for the fronds to 'stand' on [arrow r3]. This device denies the frame that was usual in non-foliate designs.

The small variations in the designs for these 22 stones could be discussed forever. To take a few examples, there is one in the central doorway where a



Chartres north embrasure, west portal



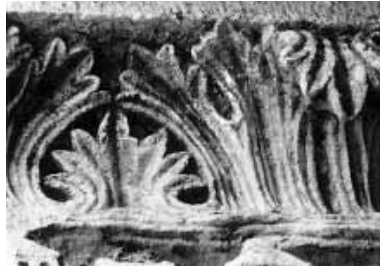
Chartres, plinths in left embrasure



Chartres west portal impost



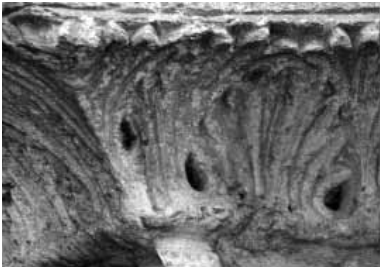
Chartres W.nL3



Chartres W.nL1,2



Chartres W.nR1



Chartres W.nR2



Chartres W.cL1



Chartres W.cL2



Chartres W.cL3



Chartres W.cL4



Chartres W.cL2



Chartres W.cR1 left face



Chartres W.cR1 front facet



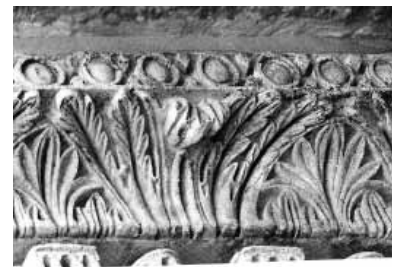
Chartres W.cR2



Chartres W.cR3



Chartres W.sL2



Chartres W.sL1



Chartres W.sL3



Chartres W.sR1



Chartres W.sR2, 3

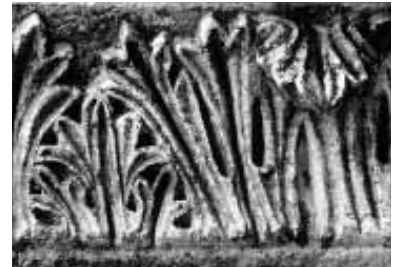
wavelike formation horizontally joins the leaves along the bottom [b1] and there are four with splits that divide the leaf into three parts whereas most have a single central leaf [b2]. In most cases the flanking fronds are wide and appear to be just like the leaves themselves, but in some these have been arranged into narrow fernlike forms, with gaps between them that stretch almost the full height of the impost [b3]. In some the junction between the flanking leaves and the centre is a large round drill hole, in others a slot. These differences show the variety in the detailing that clearly indicates the limits the capo-master had set for any personal interpretation of the template. Towards the south the designs stray further from the original.



Chartres W.cR1 waves along the bottom



Chartres W.cL2 central leaf split into three



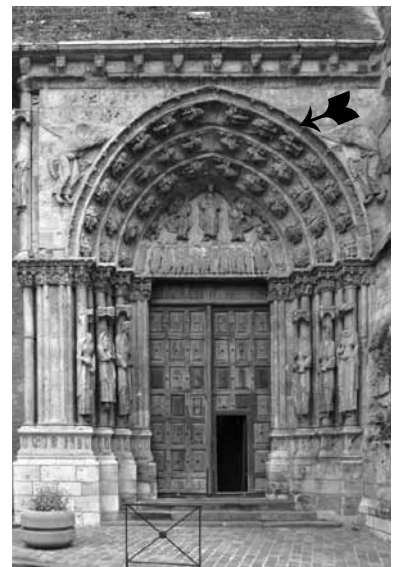
Chartres W.cL1 long slots

When I compared the Chartres imposts in detail it was almost impossible to identify the individuals involved. All I can say with any certainty is that one design determined the shape of the stone and the outline of the foliage and was accepted and applied by each person, and that within those limits the interpretation was personal. *In conclusion, in repetitive items we maybe able to identify the creator of the template though we may never know who actually carried out the work.*

Etampes: the imposts in the south portal of Notre-Dame

The concept for the decorative imposts over the historiated capitals in the Etampes portal is the same as Chartres, though the details are not as there was a greater level of control [b]. Besides the imposts, the same design was used in two other elements: the drip mould over the archivolts and the cornice under the consoles that support the small roof [r1]. The carver/designer is recognizable in one capital on the west projection of the portal that has palm trees, who I have identified as Palmier [r2]. One hallmark detail in Palmier's dossier is the gash up the middle of the central leaf [b].

There is little or no individuality in the stones of these three friezes. In this they are unlike the Chartres imposts where no two stones are the same. These look as if they had all been pressed out of the one mould. As there is no personal variation between the stones, either one man carved them all or the master mason insisted on total uniformity. The forty-nine stones on the three levels were all either the personal work of Palmier or assistants who were directed to exactly follow his detailing. The execution is, like the enthroned figures in the archivolts, repetitive.



Etampes south portal



Etampes, Notre-Dame W-s L-



Etampes, Notre-Dame portal cornice detail



Etampes, Notre-Dame portal cornice detail



Etampes, Notre-Dame portal left capitals and imposts

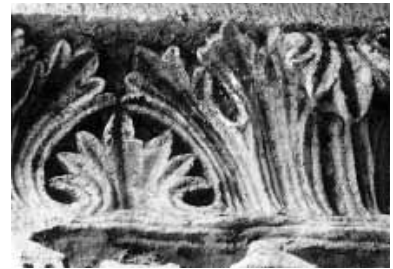
The Etampes imposts were not repeated exactly at Chartres, only in the general outline of the template. The closest are on the left side of the north portal [r1]. One with long slots between the flanking fronds and a gap down the centre of the middle leaf may have been by Palmier himself. The changes to the manner of carving over the four or five years between Etampes and Chartres may simply reflect personal developments in style over four or five years.

By the chronology discussed in #07:2-7 I concluded that the Etampes south portal was earlier than Chartres. I gave a date of 1135 to 1136 for it and from the analysis of a dozen individual sculptors suggested 1141 for most of the imposts at Chartres, with the possibility of 1140 for the very first ones over the column statues on the north embrasure [#07:19-20].

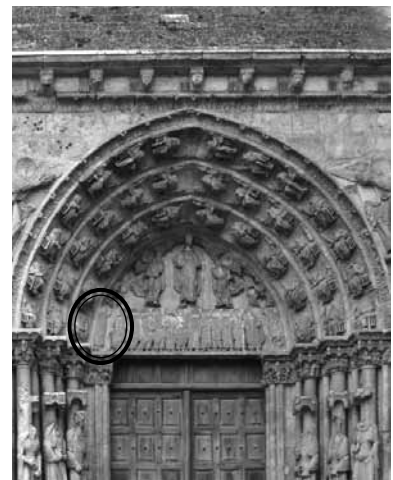
Etampes: a word on the lintels

Charles Grosset pointed out that the two end figures in the lintel had been added [r1]. The Apostles in the central lintel lean inwards in alignment to the curves at each end. The end figures of Elijah and Enoch are not the same height as the Apostles, and the halo on the left pushes into the underside of the tympanum [b1]. I have marked where the edge of the stone would have been were Elijah to have had a comfortable fit [b2]. These two stones were clearly not designed to be part of the lintel.

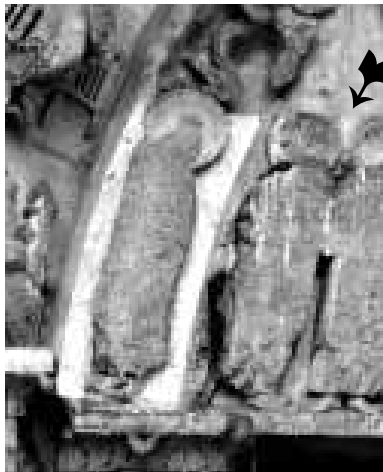
If figures of the same size as the original Elijah and Enoch were to be repeated there is space for three of these tall stones on each side [b3]. They may have intended a four-archivolt scheme. It would have been logical to reflect each of the shafts, though it would not have left much support for the lintel that normally required more space. Not having it suggests



Chartres west portal north embrasure W.nL1,2



Etampes south portal



Etampes south portal Elijah in lintel



Etampes south portal original size of Elijah



Etampes south portal with four rows of archivolts

1135

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there had been an earlier plan for a smaller doorway, and that they later considered it too narrow.

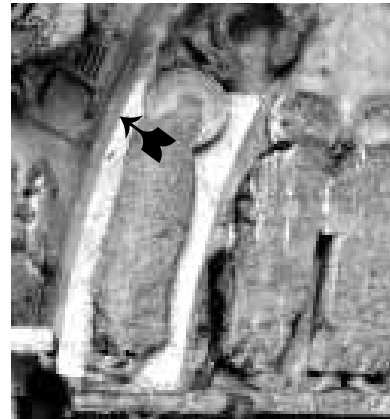
However, there is another explanation. Grosset thought they may have meant to build a portal with a round-arched tympanum. The curves on the sides of the lateral figures are slightly different to those of the present-day archivolts [r1]. If these curves are extended geometrically they seem to reflect a less pointed or round arch and a smaller tympanum.^{Stoddard, 170}

Etampes would then have had a portal not unlike the west portal at Anzy-le-Duc [r2]. I have suggested that one of Palmier's earlier works may have been the capitals to this portal [#07:32]. They have palm trees with figures, both very badly mutilated by gunfire [b]. Though there is no lower band of foliage the collar is distinctive with little fronds along the top, the volutes are simple and the remnants of the leaves along the ferns are divided as in other Palmier capitals.

If this had been his intention, then he may also have suggested that, as at Anzy, the capitals at Etampes be raised so they were level with the top of the lintel rather than the underside, as became the norm in the Paris Basin before the Second Crusade. One then asks why were the Apostles leaning inwards when the sides of the lintel in Anzy are vertical? Was the tympanum intended to have been smaller? Or were they leaning to accommodate the shape of an adjacent capital?

It looks as if the lintel was one of the first stones to have been carved, before the bases were designed or placed for a wider door. At Chartres the lowest lintel of the Incarnation Portal was also carved first. Was it a way to raise money by having a significant part carved and on display?

I had also suggested that Palmier worked on the Monceaux-l'Etoile



Etampes south portal Elijah in lintel



Anzy-le-Duc, west portal



Anzy-le-Duc, west portal left capital



Anzy-le-Duc, west portal right capital



Anzy-le-Duc, west portal tympanum



Monceaux portal tympanum



Monceaux portal right capital

portal, from his designs in the capitals [r4]. As at Etampes it has the unusual detail of omitting the division between the top of the lintel and the tympanum [b]. This unifies the celestial spaces. There is another parallel in the subject of the Ascension for all three tympani, here, at Anzy and in Etampes. This is also the subject of the northern portal at Chartres, which I will discuss in a moment. Palmier's apparent presence in all four locations may be the link that connects not only the sculptor, but the selected topic as well. *Was he chosen because he was famous for carving that subject, or was that topic selected by his clients on his recommendation?*

Etampes: quarries for the sculpture

The stone for all the figures at Etampes, including the gigantic flanking angels, came from the *bancs de liais* in Paris.^{Olsen} It is now being increasingly understood that the stones would have been reduced in the quarry and the finer work and detailing completed on the site.^{Snyder} There were three stages in the creation of any stone - incision of the design onto the surface, the blocking in and detailing. The first two could most easily have been completed at the quarry. That is, the mason or carver would have sent instructions to the quarry for their men to reduce the unwanted material in every piece they sent. As units of measurement changed radically between masters and places, instructions were probably sent as full-size templates,

Cartage would have been by water, and may have taken a considerable time.^{Snyder; Murray Troyes} This may explain an anomaly at Chartres that became apparent as I was studying the movements of the master carvers. The first group of colonnettes were carved in 1137/38, but there was then a pause for about a year in which almost nothing was done before the tympanum and other large stones were carved. The gap of approximately a year during 1139/40 may have been the time needed for the stone to be cut out of the quarry, reduced and carted to the site by road and river.

The same may have happened at Etampes. Whereas Paris stone was not used for the carving of all the portal work at Chartres, it was selected for the whole of the south portal at Etampes.^{Blanc} This involved a considerable amount of stone and many visits to the quarry by the carver in charge to supervise its selection and boasting.

As I believe that Palmier was this master, the need for him to journey to the quarry while working at Etampes may explain his presence in Saint-Denis for the Palmier-like capital in the narthex clerestory [#07:18]. Were he on a visit to the quarry and had time on his hands while waiting for information or for access to a bank of stone, where better to spend that time than to carve a couple of capitals for the new narthex while he was in the area?

Both the Etampes stone and that for Saint-Denis seem to have come from the Carrières-Saint-Denis, which is on the north side of the river not far from the latter. The timing fits perfectly for the carvers working at both buildings.

This particular scenario may have been common in which master carvers attended personally to the cutting and blocking out of the stones at the quarry prior to shipment, and during the same period filled in time at a nearby projects.

I will now present, in as logical steps as I am able, the lithic data that may illuminate the relationship between Etampes and Chartres, and the carvers that seem to have been involved.

Chartres and Etampes: the plinths

The plinths in both buildings consist of a base course, and above that a tall stone decorated with vertical lozenges that supports the torus moulds that carry the columns [r1,2]. The latter is one of the largest stones on either portal, and is unusual for the amount of decoration concentrated on the one course. Chartres is more intricate with continuous toothed decoration in the scotia and small drilling around the lozenges, and on the north was added onto the face of the tower while in the south every course in the tower matches and is tied into those of the plinths.

Other plinths that follow this arrangement lie in the porches at Saint-Germain-des-Prés and Notre-Dame-en-Vaux in Châlons-en-Champagne. In them the detailing is handled a little differently as the lozenges are scooped, while the toothed decoration has been continued [b1,2]. The even later plinths on the left of the Mantes central portal that have scooped lozenges have in addition a second row of panels above that are more in keeping with other post-Crusade portals, such as Senlis [b3].

For discussion of the impact of the crusades see forthcoming article in *Avista Forum* "Boundaries that delineate periods in art-history, 1070-1180".



Etampes, Notre-Dame south portal plinths



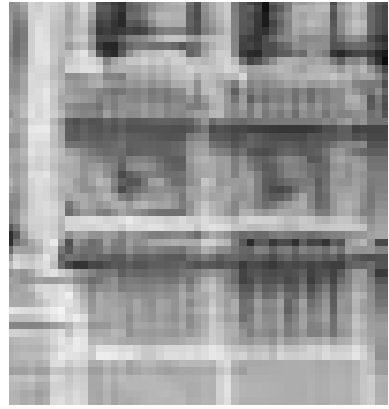
Chartres west portal plinths



Saint-Germain-des-Prés porch plinths



Châlons Notre-Dame south porch plinths

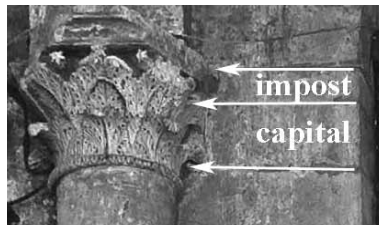


Mantes-la-Jolie W.c.L plinths

Chartres: two carvers in the capitals on the interior of the portal

At Chartres the wall behind the portals was erected with and was integral with the sculpture [r4]. The coursing is continuous around the embrasures and across the wall. All was built out of very large stones. On the interior face are two large columns surmounted by massive capitals [next page]. The courses of these capitals coincide with the historiated capitals and imposts in the portal, as marked [r].

The capital on the south was by Palmier, discussed in #07:20-21. I have assigned the one at the north to master Florentin, which means 'flourishing', for that is how his full and compact foliage appears [r5]. The designs of both capitals with large leaves on either side of a small central one may seem similar, but the differences in the handling of the details are marked. Where Palmier's forms are flat, Florentin's are deeply scooped. Palmier splits and sunders the spines, whereas Florentin does not. One leaves deep spaces between the tips of the fronds, the other keeps them shallow to emphasise the continuity of the surface. Neither overlap the leaves, both have projecting tips.



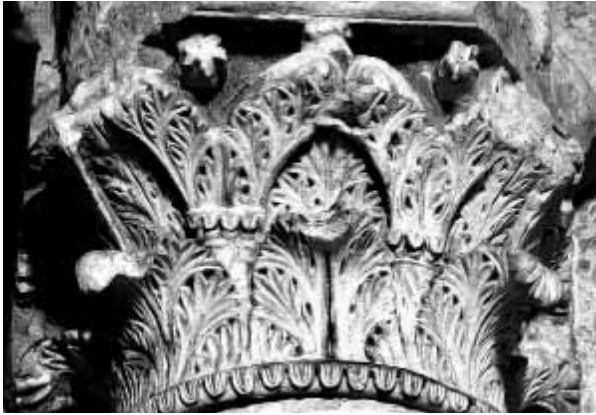
Relation between Palmier capital and portal



Chartres interior wall of portal



Chartres interior Xn1(a-) by Florentin.



Chartres interior Xs1(a-) by Palmier



Chartres interior Xn1(a-) by Florentin

I would suggest that their authorship in the creation of the lower zone of the portal, and perhaps in the carving of major elements, was acknowledged in these two internal capitals. Certainly, the outer works could not have been erected without these capitals being carved and installed at the same time.

Florentin himself may have carved at least one impost on the left side of the north doorway [r1]. Compare the scooped ribs in the fronds, the waisting where the fronds meet the body of the leaf and the hanging terminals with tips that turn in towards one another. The veins are grooves rather than protruding ribs. In the capital the bottom leaf is tiny, and this impost has the smallest leaf of all.

Four years ago when I began the *Master Carvers* study I decided to isolate as best I could the most easily defined template-makers. These are the ones studied in the earlier submissions to this series. Now that I have come to understand more even their stories have become more complex.

However, in my seventh study I had concluded that as so many items at Etampes were repeated at Chartres (though richer in decorative niceties), I could credit one master, Palmier, with the elements under his control, which were the plinths and the spaces allowed for the column-statues, and the decision to have historiated capitals and decorated imposts. Also that he was not the designer of what lay above. With Palmier making a major contribution in the embrasures it was natural to consider him the initial designer, but not the designer of the entire portal: There are too many discrepancies, too many changes to the design to believe that one man was responsible for the overall concept.

I do credit him with having a major influence over the Etampes portal. The repetitive small seated figures in the archivolt, the design of the tympanum, and the lateral panels are so unlike the archivolt or tympani at Chartres that it is highly unlikely that as designer of Etampes he had any significant influence over the upper half of Chartres. However, the erection sequence does mean that all the column figures would have been carved and erected before the imposts could be completed, and that the three tympani were not carved until afterwards. I will present this argument in more detail in a later study on the erection of the Chartres portals.

At this stage I would hazard that the two men who carved the interior capitals were the men who made the initial layout for the portal. The more I considered the issues the more simplistic the notion that Palmier was the sole master became, and the more I asked whether this could have been the work of a partnership? Was there a Palmier-Florentin partnership at this stage of the work. This raises crucial and difficult questions on the nature of portal design for which there are no ready answers at this stage.



Chartres W.nL3 by Florentin

Having written this I have since made a deeper study of the embrasures. The 48 figures carved into the jambs and outer faces show that there were two, perhaps three, distinct periods of carving. The earliest include the bottom row of figures (but not that next to the south tower) and those on the left to the top of Sheba. The last are those in the upper or two that include these capitals. It would seem there is no necessary connection between the master of the capitals and the imposts and the bases. The Palmier-Florentin team may have been limited to this zone of five or so courses.

One alternative is that there had been two masters who came at different times, with the a possibility that Florentin laid out the bases and erected the embrasures to the level that allowed him to set up his capital on the north, and then left, and that Palmier came afterwards, continued with the embrasures and his capital on the south, and continued upwards to the historiated capitals and imposts.

I am going to argue that this alternative was not the case. To do this we need to sift through a number of pieces of evidence; firstly the historiated capitals in both buildings, secondly seeking the designers at Etampes from further works and then at Chartres, and thirdly fitting this into the probable construction history at Chartres. This is the argument that follows:

Etampes and Chartres: the historiated capitals

The frieze has a long and precious history from ancient times in which related events are placed in some sort of sequence, as either *bas-reliefs* or more or less in the round. The frieze was adapted for capitals with figures and monsters that tell individual stories though seldom arranged to form a continuous story-line with no interruptions. Those at Etampes are unusual as they continue the narrative across the space between the capitals, thus turning them into a continuous frieze. Continuity meant that the capital had to be carved onto a larger stone so it would include the top of the minor shaft. It was altogether a more complex operation than if the intermediate pieces had been left out, and Etampes may have been the first attempt.

I am pondering whether the idea came from Palmier or Florentin. The former may have worked in Montceaux-l'Etoile that has a pair of capitals with figures set among possible Palmier trees [b1,2]. Both men were at Vermenton where Palmier carved a foliate capital on the left and Florentin a narrative capital on the right [r1]. However, in neither building were the capitals connected so the story in one was not continued across the space in between. I estimate that both portals were finished during Palmier and Félix's travels in the south, and before either Etampes or Chartres.



Monceaux portal left capital



Monceaux portal right capital



Vermenton, capitals right jamb



Etampes Notre-Dame filler between portal caps



Etampes Notre-Dame filler between portal caps

At Etampes the narratives were connected [r2]. In one place the connection was omitted, and a triangular foliate block was placed between the capitals instead of figures [r3]. The leaf has turned-over upper tips and deeply formed grooves and spines. This is not at all like the flatter and less moulded forms of Palmier, but much closer to Florentin. From his figurative capitals in Vermenton and this infill stone I suggest that the capitals were from the subtly creative mind of Florentin while the design of the repetitive imposts probably came from the more regular hand of Palmier. Alternatively, if they were partners, from discussion between them.

Is it possible that when Palmier and Florentin were working together at Vermenton they discussed these two approaches to capitals, and then a little later at Etampes extended the frieze concept to include the spaces between the capitals, and thus made it continuous? It turned out so well

that they took the idea to Chartres where the concept of continuity between the capitals was followed on all twenty-two stones [r1].

Some students of the Chartres capitals suggest that two masters were involved in the execution of these capitals.^{Grozet, Heimann.} Stoddard more reasonably suggests that the capitals were the work of five men. He allowed 4-5 weeks for each one,^{Stod, 158} which gives some idea of the complexity of the carving. The few with figures that have been protected from weathering in the small cave-like recess where one capital meets another, show the extraordinary individuality and detail that was expected [r2, 3].

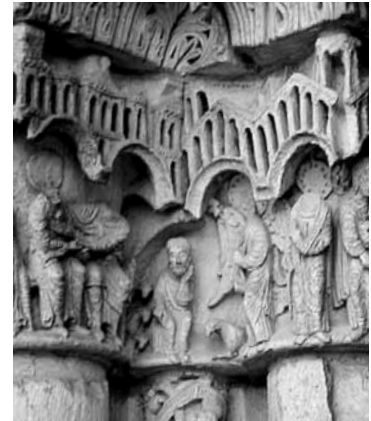
However, it is the canopies that sit over the figures that is most perplexing. The junctions between the capitals, and above all the relationship between the structures depicted in the canopies, show a most disturbing ignorance. The masters did not talk to one another. Almost nowhere did one master look over the shoulder of another and suggest some way to integrate the canopies so they melded comfortably into one another. Even in those that Stoddard assigns to the same carver there are enormous and unsightly discrepancies [r1]. Single storey designs meet those on two levels, tall lancets meet short and the corners touch uncomfortably [r4].

The Etampes capitals, on the other hand, have been most carefully coordinated [b]. The same designs for the canopies have been used throughout and the corners at the junctions line up. If this were possible at Etampes, why not at Chartres?

I have to conclude that more men were involved at Chartres than at Etampes. I would have to go further, and argue that they did not necessarily work together or at the same time, because only under these conditions would such malpractices occur. When a capital was carved it would have been put away in the store and protected. To prevent damage none would be encouraged to fuss around getting measurements. The template was there to give the overall measurements and one could argue that no more information was needed. *We are therefore looking at a situation in which the capitals were carved by gifted yet unconnected individuals over quite a long period.* This point will become important in the analysis of the erection history of the portal [in preparation].

Stoddard thought the continuous capital was a Burgundian idea, but is that right? Is this no more than noting that somewhat similar ideas appeared there, and were we to align them with individuals could we not argue that identifiable carvers produced analogous ideas in the central east before travelling north with them? At least one of these men may have travelled further from Paris than Burgundy, for I consider that Palmier had worked on the Italian border before moving north. I have not found anything of Florentin before Vermenton, so have no idea of his possible antecedents.

To take this argument further we need to examine the north door out of the Etampes transept.



Chartres, portal capitals with canopy



Chartres, portal capitals, 2 individuals



Chartres, portal capitals woman in recess



Etampes Notre-Dame canopies between capitals



Chartres, portal capitals with canopy



Etampes, Notre-Dame N-nL3-1



Etampes, Notre-Dame N-nR1-3

Etampes: three carvers in the north door

The door exits from the transept on the north side [r]. It is framed by the earliest capitals or decorative carving in the choir. I exclude, of course, the central vessel that had been built to the clerestory capitals some time before 1120. There are six capitals around this door. The inner two were by Palmier, the next pair were by Lapwing and the outer pair by Florentin [b]. The Palmier and Lapwing manner of design was discussed on #07:10-11, and Florentin's small leaves and projecting tips on page 11. The differences between them are most simply defined this way: Palmier is two-dimensional with flat forms following the shape of the cone and with smallish central leaves and spines split or sundered. Lapwing has a dominant central leaf that is flattish with widespread fronds and large drilled junctions between them. The central fronds lap over those in the corners and are thus three-dimensional. Florentin has a very small central leaf and close-packed fronds. In spite of the differences there is a feeling of unity in these six capitals as the individual qualities that were more strongly expressed when they were apart were here drawn together to create a more unified appearance.

Palmier and Florentin seem to have stayed together for many years, perhaps as long as a decade, while Lapwing quickly left to spend many years carving at Saint-Denis.



Etampes, door out of north transept



Etampes, Notre-Dame N-nR1 by Palmier



Etampes, Notre-Dame N-nR2 by Lapwing



Etampes, Notre-Dame N-nR3 by Florentin

The construction sequence in #07:6 was worked out downwards from the order in the vaults and capitals. The zone-by-zone analysis plus the stylistic changes in the work of Palmier show that the capitals would have been carved about the same time as the lowest courses of the south portal. These capitals and the one he carved on the west face of the south portal were the first he carved here [r]. They led to a long engagement during which he carved stones in nearly every stage of construction, and most especially in the period during and immediately following the portal.

One is so used to seeing foliate capitals in the Paris Basin that it is



Etampes, Notre-Dame W-s L-

surprising to find how rare they are further south. An overwhelming proportion in the west, a large proportion in the east and most in the south are non-foliate, one might even say anti-foliate in favour of complex and often bizarre arrangements. The evidence from the Thesaurus is that even in the Paris Basin fewer carvers worked with foliage than other arrangements.

There were not so many ways to treat leaves and fronds that individual template-makers cannot be distinguished. Any of these three could have designed the bases, capitals and imposts to the south porch. They may have each contributed an element to the design, or enhanced the ideas presented by others. The possibilities are endless, though I am hoping that this analysis may clarify some of the issues to some extent.

Chartres: who were the designers?

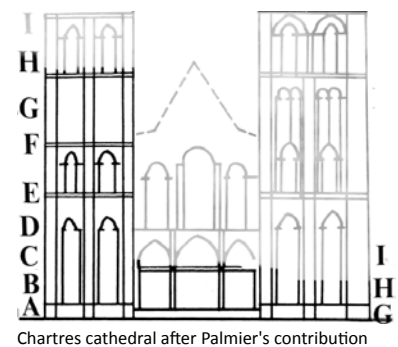
Of the three possible masters from Etampes, which one may have been responsible for the design of the lower part of the portal at Chartres? Were they the creation of one man, or did they determine the forms for a single course each, one creating the plinths, another the capitals and a third the imposts? This may mean that the well-known 'Master of Etampes' may turn out to have been more than one man, perhaps three.

The use of the same arrangement in both buildings strongly suggests that Palmier or Florentin was responsible for instituting the Chartres template also, but not Lapwing as in the meantime he had moved on to Saint-Denis and I can find no evidence for him at Chartres.

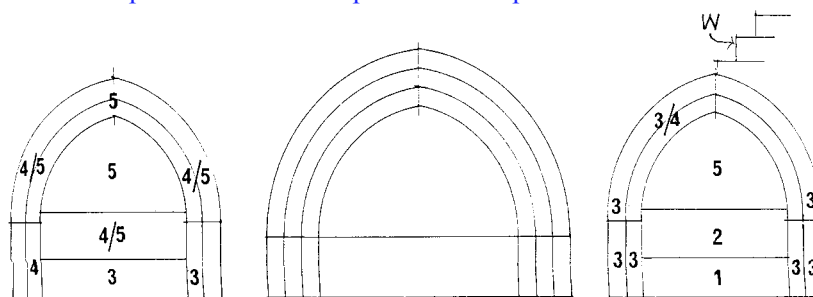
Either Palmier laid out both portals but did not proceed more than a few courses at Chartres, or the lower courses of both Chartres and Etampes were designed by another crew. Whichever way we take it, this means that there was more than one campaign involved in the Chartres portals, and that the control over design and detailing passed from one hand to another with numerous and consequential changes to the templates.

If we can credit the Palmier-Florentin team with the design of the Chartres bases and imposts and the two capitals on the interior, then their input into the early stage of the portal design becomes more important. This corresponds to phase 2 or 3 (out of five phases) in my 1986 analysis of the anomalies in the sculpture [b].^{Gesta} The installation of the portal was in step with the south tower, with the bases tied in with campaigns G and H [r].^{Narthex.SAEL} The completion of the stonework over the Incarnation portal coincided with campaign I, and the connecting masonry is marked W in [b]. This refers to the erection timetable, not to the actual carving that would have to have been in train for some time before that.

I would think that this team's work would have stopped somewhere above the interior capitals. As already mentioned, they are larger than the historiated capitals on the outside and their imposts are level with the portal imposts. Unless they had carved the interior capitals earlier on the expectation that they would be placed when the erecting teams had reached that level, the Palmier-Florentin team had control over the design of the external capitals as well as the plinths and imposts.



Chartres cathedral after Palmier's contribution



Chartres west portal carving sequence ex *Gesta*

To summarise this discussion of the embrasures of both portals, it is hard not to credit the design of the imposts to Palmier and the continuous historiated capitals to Florentin, while the bases could have been the work of both or either.

Though the clergy were undoubtedly involved in these choices, there were degrees of stimulation, even initiation, that came from the men on the job. The Ascension scheme that these two men had been associated with at Etampes and elsewhere may have been discussed in meetings of the Chartres Chapter while the embrasures were being carved or erected, and the sculptors may have influenced their choice for the iconography of the left tympanum, even though it was carved later by another. As you can see, *I am hinting here that the workmen could have had some influence over the iconography.*

Etampes and Chartres: chronology and conclusions

The lithic evidence in buildings of the Paris Basin in the twelfth century shows that master masons were employed on short-term contracts to prepare the templates for specific tasks. When their period of work ended that would also have been the end of their personal influence on any further stage in the design. As much as each man was able to build during his tenure became the foundation for whatever designs the next man proposed for the following stage of construction, and for which he would prepare his own unique templates.

At Chartres, the Palmier-Florentin team would have been responsible for establishing the design, the height, and encasing details for the embrasures that would be supporting the statue columns. It was a specific task, bounded in space and time. Whoever was employed to take over was a different master, with different attitudes, different templates, and it was this later man (or men) who were responsible for the layout above the imposts. That included altering the shape and height of the three tympani and reducing the size of those archivolts that had already been carved so they would fit a different arrangement.

It is generally recognised that the men from Etampes were involved at Chartres in the two left-hand column statues on the left embrasure, and logically could also have been responsible for the layout of the embrasures that have the same design as Etampes. Against that consider the irrelevant and disconnected figures inserted under these column-statues [r]. It is hard to believe they were meant to be placed here for both figures and statues had to be adjusted to make them fit into the embrasures.

It would seem there was a change in the design (and therefore a change of masters) between the carving of Sheba and her erection. Therefore these three column-figures were carved before the plinths and embrasures. It would have taken many months for the capitals and imposts to be carved, especially considering the number of carvers involved. The fact that there was time for this slow work to evolve tells us that erection did not happen all at once, but over a period.

Further, in each embrasure all the column figures had to have been completed before the capitals or imposts could be erected. Among the colonnettes many on the northern embrasures were carved for a different overall height, as these exquisitely carved stones had to be butchered and their heights adjusted when they were installed. Most of those flanking the central and right doorways were carved more or less for the right height and were therefore made to suit the Palmier-Florentin plan. From this I presume that the carvers who worked on the former (Aileron, Grégoire,



Chartres figures inserted under W.C. statues

Héron, Willow and the SS Master) were in a team that was on site before Palmier arrived, and that those who worked on the latter (André, Félix, Interlock, Rameau, Spirex and the two Dukes) were part of the Palmier team. They may also have helped to carve the capitals and imposts, and the small figures that flank each jamb. These too had to be completed before the imposts could be placed.

This suggests that the Queen Sheba statue was carved at the same time as the first group of colonnettes. I will make the wild suggestion that she was the work of Grégoire. Here is one of his heads in the colonnette just behind Sheba compared with the queen's head [b1,2]. The little head on the colonnette is only a couple of centimetres high, nevertheless there are strong similarities in the unusual realism of the rounded and subtle forms, the heavy jowls, the thick lips, large nostrils, gently formed eyes and the hair parted in the middle. Both pieces could have been carved in the same campaign. It is an intriguing possibility, especially as Grégoire was one of the most remarkable sculptors in the period. During his travels some years before Chartres he had carved a small head in a drip mould in the south door of the entry to the Abbaye-aux-Dames in Saintes with very similar characteristics [b3].



Chartres head of Sheba, W.nL1



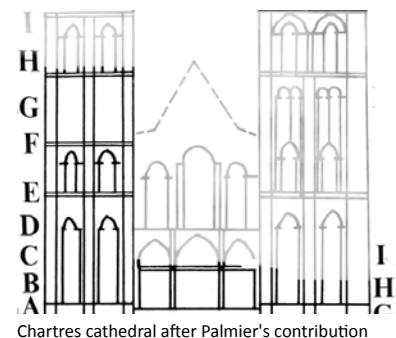
Chartres head of woman in W.nL1 colonnette



Saintes, Abbaye-aux-Dames W.s drip

One support for this timing comes from four capitals on the first level on the outside of the north tower that can be fairly precisely dated to campaign E in 1138 [r]. One has a palm-tree by Palmier [b1]. One would be Lapwing [b2]. Another has the overlapping leaves of Lapwing with the flattish surface, the gash and curled-over tips of Palmier, while the fourth is Palmier-like but thick-edged and coarsely detailed [b3,4]. Both the latter could have been by men who had imbibed the Palmier manner while under his direction. If the bases and lintels were started in this campaign, then that determined the height of the doorways. The northern colonnettes by Grégoire *et al.* would therefore have been carved earlier, say in 1137.

At this time no work had yet been commenced on the south tower, except perhaps in the footings. Erection of the pre-cut stones could not be started until the south tower had been raised in campaign H, about 1141. The portal sculpture was therefore being prepared many years beforehand and



Chartres cathedral after Palmier's contribution



Chartres WN-wRs(1), WN-nLeR(1), WN-wRnL(1) and WN-wLsR(1) from campaign E in 1138

stored in the shed ready for erection. The five years between Sheba and the first colonnettes leaves ample time for the carving of the rest of the portal.

The misalignment between the northern embrasure and the others that led to the adjustments described in *Gesta* suggests that the north side with its column-statues was erected on their own, possibly while the south tower was only just being begun in campaign G. If there were any other 'unwanted' or leftover carvings lying around the master of the next campaign was not inclined to insert them under the other statue-columns.

The evidence throughout the period shows that the nature of medieval contracting and design processes ensured that a senior designer could have a significant input over a part of a project without affecting the whole. In this case the team under the leadership of Palmier-Florentin designed the bases, some middle colonnettes, the concept for the historiated capitals, the imposts and possibly some of the figures, but after that did not continue to influence the overall form of the design. I presume they had left the site and other masters were employed during the next campaigns, F and G. This is what is meant by discontinuous contracting, and forms a foundation for all these studies.

My reasoning does not go further than that at this moment. It is my sense that a master/partnership created all the templates for the part the team was engaged in. As we proceed with this investigation into decorated imposts it will become clearer that this was the situation in every portal: that though one designer set the templates for whatever element he was working on (that others thereafter may or may not have followed), after he had finished with his portion the next master was able to impose different templates of his own fashioning on the next phase. Every master would have had an intention for the whole portal, and may on rare occasions have been able to complete it. However, in most cases he was offered only a part, and whatever he may have intended for the rest was replaced by the scheme of the next man.

The fact that the masters we can identify at Etampes had an important though restricted influence at Chartres is one key to their contractual methods.

I intend in a later study on the erectional procedure of the Chartres portals to examine the possibility that the sculptors did not work in other parts of the building. This had been the case at Saint-Loup-de-Naud [#15]. Further, that though under the control of the Master of the Works, *they were not beholden to a capo-sculptor, but independent, separate men travelling on their own, and that the multiplicity of designs came from their individual input rather than any long-term proposal that extended beyond the term of each group.* This later examination may help to illuminate the site organisation for sculptors where there were many men as has been published earlier for the Laon cathedral gallery, see items 3 and 4 in #20:2 and #20:22.

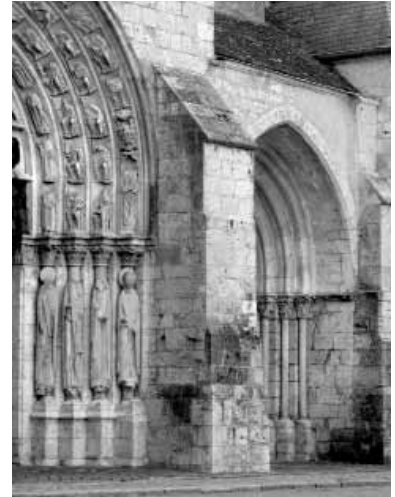
The chronology that is emerging from these studies is that the *Maistas* scheme came to Chartres as a well-tested arrangement, the ultimate step in a long evolutionary line, as it had already been employed at Saint-Loup, Vermenton, Bourges, Le Mans and Angers.

When I have gathered these studies together and presented the individuals who make up the argument I hope to set out this argument in a coherent manner, and to address the work of other scholars.

1137



Provins Saint-Ayoul three western portals



Provins, Saint-Ayoul right centre buttress

We can now return to the study of decorated imposts in other portals and see what else we can discover.

The two lateral portals at Saint-Ayoul in Provins

These have imposts cut to the same design, which is a refined and most probably a slightly later version of the one at Etampes [b]. Palmier was a major contributor to the capitals of all three portals with palm trees, sundered leaves, sharp-pointed tips and square-cut edges to the gash along the spine [r].

The sharpness of the foliage seems closest to the capitals at Saint-Denis and Etampes from the mid-1130s, which is why I would date it to around that time. The details at Oulchy, his only sculpture after the Crusade, are not as open and none of the leaves are sundered, so this work would have been some time before that.

The toichological history is complex and was lightly discussed in #07:25. All three portals have Palmier capitals over the jambs or over the outer buttresses. Only the two lateral portals have his continuous imposts while those over the central portal are undecorated. The other capitals are foliate in the centre over the column figures and fantastical in the others. The toichological evidence is amiss and, just as in the rest of this church, the construction history is extremely untidy with multiple campaigns that I may be able to resolve when I revisit in June 2013.



Provins, Saint-Ayoul WnR1 phase I



Provins Saint-Ayoul south impost



Provins Saint-Ayoul north impost

In the evolution of Palmier's detailing, the gash up the centre of the middle leaf developed in a measurable way. The phase of splitting the leaf at the bottom, and then joining the tips while keeping the bases apart and the sides leaning inwards that is particular to Saint-Ayoul also occurs in the narthex of Saint-Denis [r]. This capital is in the aisles, and could be dated to around 1134. It is the inwards lean that locates these capitals in time among the other split leaves in Palmier's *œuvre*.



Saint-Denis narthex XS2e-s(a)

The south portal at Vermenton

As has been mentioned before, Vermenton has one capital by Palmier almost certainly before he started on Etampes, from his journeyship days [b1]. The adjacent capital is in the manner of Félix employing the elements used earlier at Saint-Loup-de-Naud and that would appear again in the choir dado of Sens cathedral and at Notre-Dame-en-Vaux [b2].



Vermenton portal Palmier capital



Vermenton portal Félix capital

The imposts over the column-figures are in the Florentin manner [b], and the carving manner lies closest to the imposts at Angers [r]. They have the same foliate format, the central leaf that is small and unsplit, and veins and outline of the fronds that are scooped and sculpted. This is not Palmier's manner that is flatter, as seen in Etampes and most clearly in Saint-Ayoul,



Angers cathedral west portal impost



Vermenton impost over Palmier cap



Vermenton right impost over Florentin caps

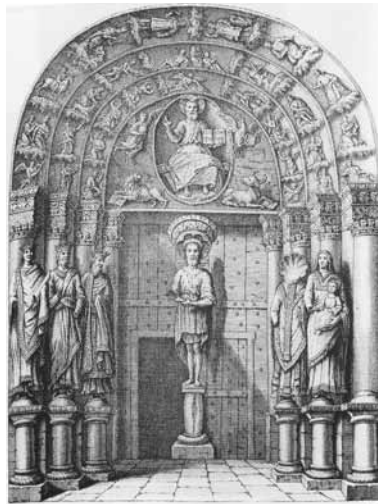
The use of continuous foliage in imposts does not appear in the Palmier dossier before Vermenton, but was only a few years later introduced by him at Etampes and Chartres. Thus, I presume he may have been inspired to use this design by the carver of the imposts at Vermenton, Florentin.

In the general arrangement of the portal there are many correspondences to Saint-Denis (column-figures), Vezelay (historiated capitals) and Saint-Loup (socles) that a team of men from those or similar sites may have joined with Palmier at Vermenton.

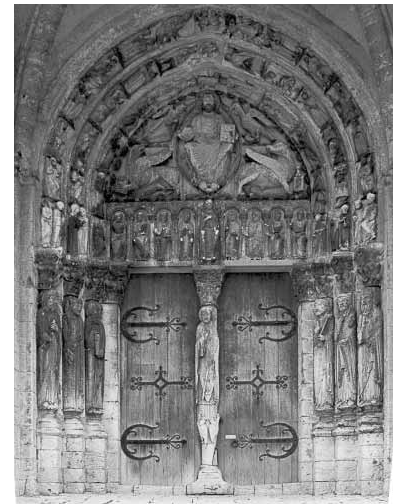
I have placed this around 1131. Apart from the studies on Palmier and Félix the items that support such a date are the round arch like Saint-Denis, the similarities with Saint-Loup-de-Naud and the simplicity of the socles. The original tympanum was virtually the same as Saint-Loup and the archivolt figures follow a similar schema. The absence of a lintel is found in other local portals at that time [next page].



Vermenton portal with Palmier capital on the left



Vermenton from a drawing of 1739 (Snyder)



Saint-Loup-de-Naud west portal

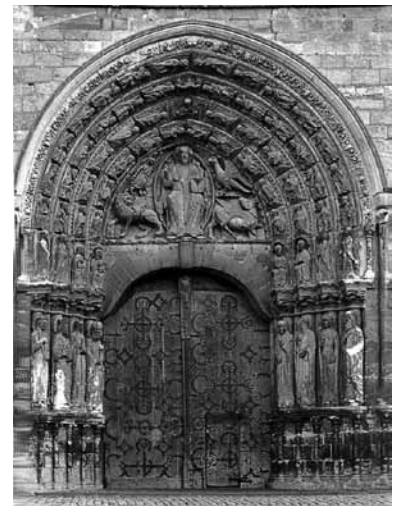
There is a drawing from Dom Ubain Planchette, published in Dijon in 1739 [above].^{Snyder 90.} Few details match what remains, especially in the archivolts. Either the drawing is grossly in error in these particulars or the archivolts were reorganised when the opening was enlarged.

1138

Angers cathedral west portal

The drip mould around the portal was carved in extraordinary detail. It seems to have been of a different quality to the rest of the portal in its compact intricacy. Four of the major carvers involved there were Florentin, Félix, Rameau and Grégoire. All had worked on the Chartres portals in the later 1130s, three on the first phase of colonnettes and some of the archivolts, and Florentin himself as part of the Palmier-Florentin team in the next phase on the embrasures and the imposts.

The imposts were carved by a number of people from a different layout to any of those discussed earlier [b]. Compare these to a typical impost at Chartres where the central leaf is large and occupies nearly the entire height of the stone [r2]. Instead, the middle leaflet is miniscule and the flanking leaves made wider and the upper projections more dominant. Between the fronds the junctions have drill holes that have been left round and not



Angers cathedral west portal



Angers cathedral west portal impost



Angers cathedral west portal impost



Chartres W.sl2 impost

teased into the usual tear-drop shape. As in Chartres, the leaves roll out at the bottom from behind the stone, as if their roots ran back into the wall of the cathedral.

The sculptor closest to the Angers manner is Florentin who worked with Palmier on the interior narthex capitals at Chartres [r]. This is especially noticeable in the the three-dimensionality, the scooped spine of the lower leaflet, the the strong outward thrust at the top of the leaf, the inward-leaning curves of the flanking fronds and their spines.



Chartres interior Xn1(a-) by Florentin.

The remains of the portal at Corbeil-Notre-Dame

Corbeil has continuous capitals and foliate imposts in the Etampes-Chartres manner [r1]. The junctions between the capitals over the minor shafts lies over the centre of the shaft [r2]. This is different to the arrangement at Etampes where the entire intermediate capital was attached to the adjacent.

The imposts were also by a number of men [b]. The central leaf has been omitted and the lateral fronds bent sideways so they overlap and create a tight arrangement. Along the bottom of the stone the leaves continue to emerge as if coming from underneath and behind the impost. This interesting detail, unique to the Classical group, shows a certain continuity, and considering the design changes I would surmise that one of the sculptors who had worked under Palmier or Florentin had taken these details with him to Corbeil.

Assuming this master came from the Etampes crew, the overlapping fronds look more like Lapwing than Florentin, except for some details such as the touching tips in the upper overhang. But that's a guess at this moment.



Corbeil-Notre-Dame portal



Corbeil-Notre-Dame portal capitals



Corbeil-Notre-Dame portal impost



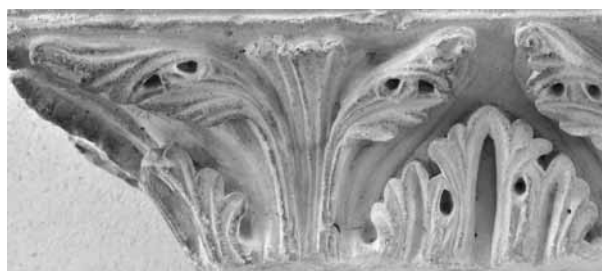
Corbeil-Notre-Dame portal impost

The cloister of Saint-Denis

These few remains are variations of the classical model, but with less control and more individuality. The central leaf is partially hidden by the flanking in a powerful three-dimensional arrangement that do not belong to the Palmier-Florentin manner.



Saint-Denis (Louvres Museum) probably from the cloister



Saint-Denis (Louvres Museum) probably from the cloister



Saint-Denis (Louvres Museum) probably from the cloister

THE ROMANTICS

The Saint-Denis narthex

In #08:9-10 I followed Crosby's suggestion that the westworks at Saint-Denis were designed and the portals begun around 1130.ⁿ Were we to use the same course-laying rate as found in the choir it offered a minimal construction period. I am now more persuaded by Panofsky's suggestion that work may have begun even earlier,ⁿ especially in view of Suger's comment that at first work proceeded slowly.ⁿ A date after 1125 makes political and ideological sense,^{Grant,Clark'11} and there is documentary support for a large injection of funds at that time.ⁿ Considering the complexity of erecting a large sculptural program with builders who had not yet acquired experience in such matters, fourteen years to build the narthex may not be too long. The demands on the abbey finances were high at that time as it included wide-ranging work on conventual buildings and the cloister.



Saint-Denis narthex central portal



Saint-Denis narthex central portal left capitals



Saint-Denis narthex central portal right capitals

The imposts in the two side portals are unadorned profiles. Only the imposts of the central portal are decorated. Those on each side follow a single template: those on the left have birds whose wings overhang a pair of fronds [b1] and those on the right consist of woven tendrils that encase in a most loving manner small inclined heads that look to one side [b2].



Saint-Denis narthex central portal left impost by Aviateur



Saint-Denis narthex central portal right impost by Félix

On this scenario the imposts would date from 1128/1130. They appear to have been lightly restored. The design for the birds is closest to those at Le Mans by Aviateur a few years later [r].

The heads on the right embrasure recall the sensitive work on the outer left impost at Le Mans by Félix and later at Châlons Notre-Dame. Below are six similar heads already collected in the Félix dossier in #04 [b].

There is evidence for some three separate campaigns in the portal sculpture. That at the level of the imposts involves a major change to the



Le Mans south portal capital by Aviateur



Saint-Denis W.cR impost



Le Mans south portal W-sL5 impost



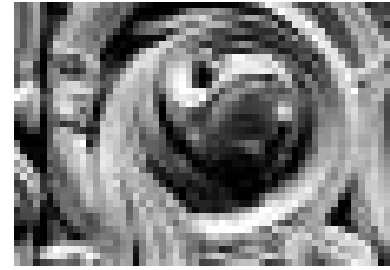
Angers drip mould, detail W.c^R3



Chartres portal drip W.cL^ (replaced)



Saint-Denis ambulatory capital As2nw(a)



Châlons, Notre-Dame south portal W-sR5

design. Where the imposts meet the jambs they return across the top of the uppermost jamb *bas-reliefs* [b]. In the panels underneath there are canopies over the figures. In the uppermost panel the canopy is missing [r]. There had at one time been a hood, for the capital and the start of the arch are still in place, arrow. In addition, the uppermost bouquets in the foliate panel



Saint-Denis narthex central portal left jamb



Saint-Denis narthex central portal right jamb



Saint-Denis narthex central portal left jamb detail

on the left jamb has been truncated [r1]. The bouquets underneath have two hanging fronds over two that rise. In the upper stone, marked with the arrow, half has been removed and the petals cut back in an irregular way so the upper tips are lost. The situation is similar in the panel on the right [r2].

Was the porch rebuilt when the floor was raised in Napoleonic times? There is nothing in the research of Crosby or Blum to suggest this. Therefore it must be said that the *bas-reliefs* were designed for a taller portal and that after they were carved there was a change of direction and it was decided to lower the head of the doorway.

There are other discrepancies in the upper parts of the jambs, listed [r3]. There are no signs that the lateral doors were reduced in height. It looks as if the previous intention had been to make the height of the central portal somewhat taller than those on each side. This would have given the narthex entry a more centralised appearance, more in keeping with contemporary triple portals in France and Italy.

These details indicate a serious change in the design undertaken while construction was in progress. The modification was, in fact, exactly where one should expect it to be, on the same level as the pause caused while the archivolts were being placed over the lateral doors. I have discussed this in the section on Rameau #18:28-29 and illustrated how the erection of the capitals and tympanum of the middle portal would have been held up until the archivolts over the lateral doors had been placed.

The stages in the construction of the three portals have an impact on the order in which the many stones were carved. Seeing it completed one has the impression that it is a singular thing, whereas during construction it was a process involving many discrete steps each of which relied on the prior completion of other steps.

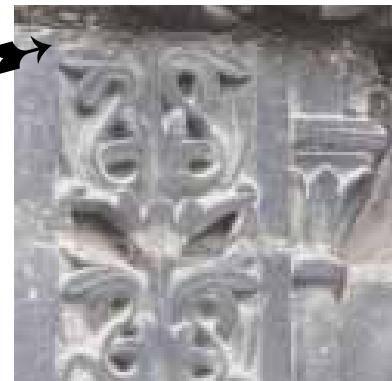
This is how the pier between the central and north portals may have looked at the time the impost were being placed [r4]. Those on the side portals are two courses lower than those of the centre, marked by the line 'a' that lies above the impost of the north portal and below the capitals of the centre. The course above that line, marked 'c' butts against the north archivolts. The tympanum on that side, the many small stones that made up both rows of archivolts and the drip mould, would have been in place before the capitals on the right were placed.

To estimate the date of this decision we must take into account the placement of the upper two *bas-reliefs*. The height of each would not have been reduced in place, but with great care and delicacy on a bench before erection. Therefore the decision to lower the head of the central doorway was taken some time between carving the jamb panels and placing them. It could have been taken when the plinths were laid if the *bas-reliefs* had been carved while the footings were being built. It is more likely to have happened partway during erection, but before the column-statues of the central portal were installed. This is the more likely moment because the statues were held in place by capitals that were placed higher up than the bottom of the uppermost *bas-relief* panels.

To put this another way, the courses around the portals that are level with the underside of the upper *bas-reliefs* are lower than any of the capitals. Complex as this may sound, it is marked by the arrow on the right. It dates this important decision to 1128/30, by my present calculation.



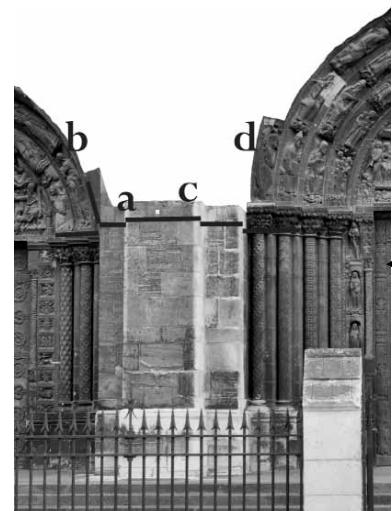
Saint-Denis narthex central portal left detail



Saint-Denis narthex central portal right detail

Discrepancies in the upper jambs

The capitals over the shafts between the jamb panels and the doorway are of different heights. The stone with the capital on the left has a band of decoration along the top. The one on the right has been cut back with ragged edges so it is noticeably smaller. On the left side of the panels on the left jamb there is a ribbon of decoration that continues to the top. On the right jamb there is no matching decoration, but instead the edge is plain. The uppermost figures have lost their canopies. The impost are set lower on the left with an infill under the lintel to make up the difference. The left vertical foliate scroll alongside the *bas-relief* figure is shorter than the right, and both stones have been truncated.



Saint-Denis portal construction detail

Saint-Loup-de-Naud portal

This portal was probably carved just after those at Saint-Denis. As in Saint-Denis the imposts over the two embrasures were carved to different templates. Clark Maines showed that the lowest stones in the portal connect to the lowest courses of the staircase, but not with the bases and socle of the portal, marked by the vertical line [r].ⁿ Thus the staircase was begun before the portal. Above that every course in the pier is bonded into the embrasure, indicated by the horizontal lines. The upper four courses with the capital under the porch and its impost were laid against and after the archivolt. The porch impost continues around the pier until it butts against the adjacent archivolt. Thus the upper course of the porch pier were built with or after the archivolt sculpture.

It is similar on the inside of the building where the masonry coursing confirms the unity between the courses of the western entry and the stairs on the north, and therefore with the aisle capitals.

The outermost framing over the archivolt begins against the side of the rib over the porch at some distance above the impost. Rib and framing were therefore erected together, arrow. Yet the pier was not designed to support ribs. The large capital shows that a porch was intended, and I conclude that it was initially designed for a groin vault or timber desk. Either way the frame around the portal sculpture could not have been completed until the ribs had been begun. The relationship between the stones of the outer archivolt and the supports for the porch that flank them show that the vault of the porch was later.

I have struggled with the chronology for this portal because certain elements incline me to support Maines in suggesting a later date. However the portal sculpture is built into the wall of the nave and before the vault of the porch. I have discussed this in the analysis of carving styles in vol. 3 of *The Ark* and in the study on Palmier #07:29-30. I argued that the portal capitals were in the manner of the 1120s, and would have been completely out of sync with the archaism of that period if the portal had been carved much later.

There is nothing in the design of the sculpture, the way the clothes are handled,^{snyder} and the arrangement of the tympanum that contradicts this date, particularly when we compare it with work from the south of the country, such as Moissac and Beaulieu.

Returning to the imposts, there are seven stones in the portal, with different designs over each embrasure. Those on the left by Félix use an entwined rinceau with delicate heads on the corners [b1]. I have already discussed the intriguing arrangement between him and Jérôme in the large double capitals next to the jamb where the older carver Félix encouraged the younger Jérôme to try his hand on one face of the stone, in #4:27-28 [b2].



Saint-Loup-de-Naud connections between left embrasure and staircase



Saint-Loup-de-Naud W.cR1 impost by Félix



Saint-Loup-de-Naud W.cR1 impost by Jérôme

Most of those on the right embrasure have large leaves that overlap and are joined along the bottom with a wavy line as if they were emerging out of the sea [r]. The leaves are connected horizontally rather than emerging from behind the face of the stone as at Chartres. I believe three hands were involved in these three stones, as can be seen in the small changes to the details [b].



Saint-Loup-de-Naud W.cR1 impost



Saint-Loup-de-Naud W.cR2 impost



Saint-Loup-de-Naud W.cR4 impost



Saint-Loup-de-Naud W.cR3 impost

There is also an impost over the trumeau. The three decorated sides have a pattern of centralised bouquets that are connected by a tendril from the bottom of one to the top of the next [r3]. This motif is in the manner of Jeremy discussed in #04:2 who carved similar arrangements in the Saint-Denis ambulatory and the Notre-Dame-en-Vaux south porch [r4].

The *Maistas Domini* tympanum at Saint-Loup is one of a series that includes Angers, Bourges, Le Mans and Chartres. The concept evolved from a long lineage that includes Moissac, while the Saint-Denis tympanum of the Last Judgement comes from a different pedigree that includes Beaulieu.^{Vergnolle} At the time that Saint-Loup and Saint-Denis were begun they reflected the most up-to-date manner and details of the times.



Saint-Loup-de-Naud W.cR1 impost by Jeremy



Saint-Loup-de-Naud W.cR1 impost Jérôme

Among the upper right archivolts there is a lengthwise figure carved onto a long stone [b2]. It is the only one with leaves. These lie under the figure's feet [b1]. Though hard to read under the grime they have the same long tips and pointed ends and backward turned positions as on that part of the impost carved by Jérôme [left]. Both may have been by the same carver.



Châlons-en-Champagne Notre-Dame W-s5,6 impost



Saint-Loup-de-Naud W.cR^5 architrave detail by Jérôme



Saint-Loup-de-Naud W.cR^5 architrave Jérôme

The south portal of Le Mans

Le Mans has the most complicated collection of imposts of any. Only in one pair was the same design employed. Some have berries, some are freely arranged rinceau arrangements, some have wandering tendrils, and one has a collection of birds sitting among the leaves. I believe that Polk is correct in dating the porch after the fire of 1134,¹ for when I consider the evolution of the sculptural style of each of the five recognisable masters I am comfortable with a date in the middle of the 1130s. These five masters are André, Arum, Félix, Gripple and the SS Master, and their details and the arguments for the stylistic progression of their works may be followed in earlier studies in the *Master Carvers Series*.

The outermost impost on the left is an extraordinary *tour-de-force* with a pair of dragons on the corner [b]. The details on the next page show a man with knees akimbo who holds on to their necks. The dragon's tails morph into spiral vines on each side. On the outer face a little running bearded figure is being attacked by a head hanging onto the end of the tail. On the other face the tail terminates in a tenderly held head. The arrangement of the parts is exquisitely balanced, the dragons' heads bearing backwards over perfectly sized wings. The minute rendition of the scales on the dragons, the folds of cloth and the six heads is extraordinary in a work of this size.

On such a very small stone only 11 centimetres tall the mastership is consummate. I have previously identified it as the work of the carver Félix [#10: 27-28]. The detailing is the minute and concentrated work of a craftsman with marvellous eyesight. I see him as a young man, flexing his skills and preparing this piece as a demonstration of his ability. The lack of 'copies' shows it is not a Recognition, but perhaps a proof to his mates of his professional competency [see #23].



Le Mans W-sL5 and 6, imposts by Félix and the SS Master.



le Mans W-sL5 left face by Félix



le Mans W-sL5 corner and below right face



In the adjacent impost a serpentine tendril, bound with straps, supports a pair of fronds between which hangs a berry [b1]. This fits into the dossier of the SS Master and is clearly placed in time through the dates of his other works. The twin fronds and central berry naturally adapt themselves to form a *fleur-de-lis*, like the one on the corner [b2]. It is too worn to show the details clearly enough in a photo.



le Mans W-sL4 left face by SS Master



le Mans W-sL4 corner fleur-de-lis



Le Mans W-sL4 right face SS Master

The next two stones on the left are badly worn, especially on the outer faces. This says something about the choice of stone from the quarry, and the varying skills of carvers in choosing pieces that would weather best. Worn as they are, these two display a generous tendril with various-sized fronds.



Le Mans W-sL2



le Mans W-sL3

The first impost on the left over the jambs has large leaves that emerge from underneath, with drilling in the manner of the Angers imposts, and from that similarity may have been by one of the men who worked there under Florentin [b]. Notice the small insertion on the left.



le Mans W-sL1 front face by Angers capital master



le Mans W-sL1 right face by Angers capital master

Over the right embrasure the first impost is a row of bouquets. They are crammed on the inner left face but connected with a ribbon where there was more room on the front [b].



le Mans W-sR1 impost left inner face



Le Mans W-sR1 impost right face

The next two imposts are birds with outstretched wings resting on sprigs of leaves [b]. The arrangement is matched on the left side of the Saint-Denis central portal from a few years earlier. I have called this carver Aviateur.



Le Mans W-sR2 and 3 by Aviateur



Le Mans W-sR2 and 3 by Aviateur



Le Mans W-sR2 and 3 by Aviateur

The fourth impost has large separate leaves and on the corner a massive head of a pug-like dog, carved with care and attention to the hair [b]. The fifth has entwined tendrils and overlapping fronds tied together with a ring that has an upward-facing point in the middle [b+]. The design and this motif are characteristically Gripple, and the design is very similar to a small capital he carved in the Bougival crossing [b], described in #06.



le Mans W-sR4



Le Mans W-sR5 left face by Gripple



Le Mans W-sR5 right face by Gripple

The extraordinary individuality may be compounded by major discrepancies in the jamb panels, in the heights of the capitals and in the placement of archivolt that indicate a broken chain of command. I believe a lot of people did a lot of carving without supervision, and will analyse this portal in a separate study. It seems the portal was not carved in one operation by a single team, as in Saint-Loup [Victoire #15], but over a longer period by a number of independent teams or travelling individuals without the same level of control. The situation in the Chartres west portals was different only because there was supervision. Le Mans may have taken some years to complete, though I consider that some of the imposts were carved at the time of installation with adjustments to make up for the confusion apparent elsewhere.

It seems to illustrate that without control the carvers would please themselves. Independence is a powerful force when permitted, and Le Mans may illustrate what happened when a number of men did small amounts of work, together or at random, but without clear direction.

South porch in Notre-Dame-en-Vaux, Châlons-en-Champagne

The capitals follow contrary design concepts on each side of the portal. On the left nearly all the capitals are foliate (the outermost one has been replaced); On the right all are individual creations. Similarly in the next course the imposts are different on each side. Those on the left with rinceaux and on the right with bouquets.

Where such diversity may have represented a minor aberration when it occurred in the imposts, it was a major aesthetic conflict when applied on such a scale to both capitals and imposts, at least to our more classically-trained perceptions.

If different teams were involved, was there a capo-master, and how limited was his role? If different masters were involved, how do we consider their relationship if the carving teams were working at the same time, or at different times? Was the master mason in charge of the building work also in control of the carvers, or were they independent?

The template for the imposts on the left was by the carver I have called Félix [b1]. That on the right has the same arrangement as the impost over the trumeau of Saint-Loup that I believe was by Jeremy [b2].

The same people keep turning up in many places, among the Classical group as well among the Romantics, so their personal participation was not necessarily decisive.

The capitals under the imposts in the right embrasure are so detailed that when seen together the impression is a blur [b2]. Yet when we approach closely we are drawn into a world of incredible verve and intelligence. It is a creative whirlpool with forms and movements of outrageous strength and confidence. Not being narrative they survived the hatchet-men of the Revolution. For that we may be grateful.



Châlons Notre-Dame south porch



Châlons Notre-Dame left embrasure capitals and imposts



Châlons Notre-Dame right embrasure capitals and imposts

In the next course the imposts over the left embrasure are similar in design and detailing and therefore were probably created and carved by the one man, Félix. Only one stone has a head on the corner, the first over the jamb [b3]. You may gauge the work of this extraordinary man in my earlier study on "Master Félix the traveller" in #10.



Châlons Notre-Dame W-sR1 impost



Châlons Notre-Dame W-sl4 impost south face



Châlons Notre-Dame W-sl2 impost



Châlons Notre-Dame W-sl1 impost

The imposts over the right embrasure are also variations of one motif, a bouquet in the manner of the Jérôme/Jeremy team that I have discussed in #04. All six stones in this side were carved to the same pattern [r]. As in one of the decorative colonnettes he/they carved at Chartres, the orientation of the bouquets flips from the vertical as the plant would have grown, to upside-down [b]. They are joined to one another by a ribbon.



Châlons Notre-Dame W-sR5,6 impost

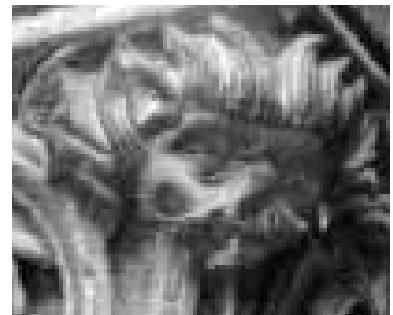
On the corner of the capital on the right-hand edge of the outer pilaster Félix carved a head, W-sR6 [b1]. The head has a broad face, beetling eyebrows, wild spiky hair and a handlebar moustache. It lies underneath this long impost. I have already noted the head with the same design on the impost over the jamb on the left [b1,2]. It is also in the manner of Félix. If Félix worked on the imposts on the left side of the portal and also on the capitals on the right, this may reflect the order of carving and/or erection. In this case the left hand capitals would have been a little earlier than those on the right.



Châlons Notre-Dame W-sR6 impost



Châlons Notre-Dame W-sL1 impost



Châlons Notre-Dame W-sL1 impost

Did the master of the foliate capitals on the left carve no more than these six stones and then leave the site, or was he transferred to another task so that the Félix crew could complete that embrasure? Was there a gap of time between the ending of one engagement and the employment of another? Were these moves in any way affected by the rate of erection?

Does this mean they were separate teams who came at different times, or were they members of the one team who divided the work between them, or were they under the control of a senior master who apportioned the work?

I would assess that four or five days would have been needed to carve each impost, or about a month for all of one side. The amount of detailing in the capitals suggests they took somewhat longer. The Félix crew may have taken up to three months for their tasks in just the capitals and imposts.

There is no sign among the foliated left side capitals of any of the animal figures carved on the right [r]. If we presume they were employed



Châlons Notre-Dame left capitals

at the same time this means that the foliate team concentrated on six capitals while the Félix mob worked on the same number of capitals and in addition a dozen imposts.

Not at Angers nor Chartres, but elsewhere there is enormous variety from one side to the other. The plinths were controlled and the jambs, but not the capitals and only to some extent the imposts. Differences were normal. Were these signature stones, offering recognition of a carver's presence?

As an aside, the junctions between the right-side capitals are unusual and extraordinary. They are a foliate equivalent to the continuous capitals at Etampes and Chartres. Normally the minor shafts between the column-figure shafts were capped with a leaf or fern, as over the left embrasure. But on the right embrasure the capping was a continuation of the adjacent capital on its right [b].

They have highly original and lavish fronds designed to extend the design of the capital to the right. At the same time they marry comfortably into the adjacent stone on the left. Different carvers were involved, so in this project they worked as a team to integrate each other's designs to create a composite unity. This work is most original and worth more than a cursory glance. Unlike the capitals at Saint-Denis and Chartres where they did not talk to each other, and though the minor capital extended the design on the major there was no attempt to integrate adjacent designs.



Châlons Notre-Dame W-sR2-3 junction



Châlons Notre-Dame W-sR3-4 junction



Châlons Notre-Dame W-sR4-5 junction

In portal imposts from after the crusade there are two with the leaf-emerging detail at the bottom of the stone, but with variations in the foliage that owe more to Angers than to Etampes. One set comes from the Porte de Valois on the north transept at Saint-Denis (begun in the 40s but not completed until the 50s or 60s) and the other is the central portal at Mantes-la-Jolie. A number of carvers were involved in each place,



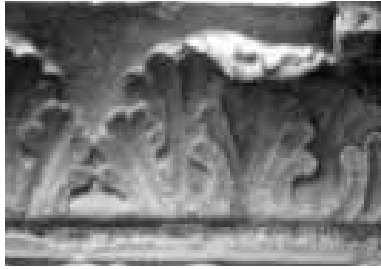
Saint-Denis north Valois portal impost



Saint-Denis north Valois portal impost



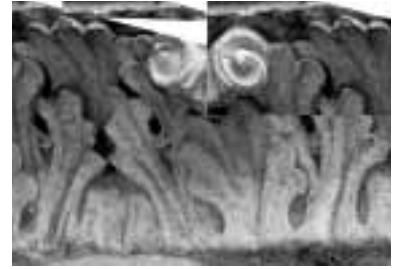
Saint-Denis north Valois portal impost



Mantes-la-Jolie west left portal impost



Mantes-la-Jolie west left portal impost



Mantes-la-Jolie west left portal impost

Another two decorative imposts carved in the post-crusade period were the little destroyed abbey of Montron, now sequestered to the Glasgow Museum, and the west portal of Vailly. Both are from the 1160s and their imposts have no connection with any others discussed here.



Montron right door impost (Glasgow Museum)



Montron left door impost (Glasgow Museum)



Vailly west portal impost



Vailly west portal impost



Vailly west portal impost

A discussion on working methods

It was my intention to illustrate the relationship between templates and carvers on the small item of decorative imposts in the hope of drawing wider conclusions. None of the carvers mentioned were involved in every portal. Some were clearly absent in some places. They therefore did not form fixed teams. They appear more like a collection of men assembled for each occasion or collected from wandering craftsmen, as in the Laon gallery #20:18. Unbroken continuity of work and direction was rare. Disconnection between the contributions of individual carvers was common.

The picture that is emerging is of skilled men travelling as itinerants from place to place, assembling where there was work, dispersing by whatever dictated the moment, and doing so in groups or individually as circumstance offered. In short, free men without permanent attachment, peripatetic in their travels, tenacious in following their own designs when allowed and willing to follow the templates of others where so constrained.

This opens the question that was not answered in earlier studies: how was it possible for a template, such as that used by the SS Master, to vary



Aulnay-sur-Bois EN15(a)



Saint-Denis narthex chapel

in quality across different buildings. One exquisite capital was completed at Aulnay-sous-Bois and within a year or two a coarser version was carved in the Saint-Denis narthex chapel [r]. I tried to explain this in #02:2-3 as variations in the work of one man, I now believe unsuccessfully. As there is generally only one example from each campaign I wonder why would the template maker who carved the first not also carve the second and instead give the task to a less competent person. Was he an assistant or a pupil? Or merely a thief?

The borrowing of the template by another may be seen in the work of three 'copy-cat' carvers at Aulnay [b]. This may have been a Recognition in which a group of men used the template of a younger in a ritualised act, an introduction into the freemasonry discussed in #23. In the cases in that study the carver being honoured is clearly recognisable from the continuity of his designs before and after. The 'elders' used the young man's template, but not the detailing, mode of work, nor the level of personal craftsmanship. The Recognition examples show similar varieties of carving techniques as we find in the imposts, all very personal.



Aulnay-sur-Bois WN3e(a)



Aulnay-sur-Bois WN1e(a)



Aulnay-sur-Bois EN1w(a)

If the master provided the design and left it to an associate to carve, and if there was only one example in the campaign and one presumes the master was also on the site at that time, was he engaged in other more demanding tasks such as complex profiles for windows or ribs? Was the design of the capital just the acknowledgement that he was present on the job?

If he carved it himself did he have different levels of finishing, depending on factors such as the available time, the amount of money the client may have wanted to spend on decorative finishes, and so on? This study does not answer that question, but only that when a template was followed by many men it is possible to distinguish the varieties of approach and thus the number of carvers involved.

It is not going to be possible within current understanding of twelfth century carving techniques to extract every individual sculptor, though the personal handling of unusual and relatively rare details may be followable, I believe more success will be achieved by matching templates.

In the instance of the decorated imposts there was generally a hierarchy of authority. Except at Le Mans where every stone is a personal creation, the control of the template-maker was paramount. This reflects a natural order implicit in mediaeval society in which authority and respect were expressed as a pyramidal form. One has the impression there was a social gap, possibly a considerable gap, between the maker of the template and the man who did the carving. It feels a little like the space between a professional and a craftsman in more recent times. However, one also has the impression that the individuals on each side of the gap varied from place to place, with one master being the *chef* on one location, and another being the *chef* in the next.