



Part 4b of the Royal Portal Series

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Chartres Royal Portal - the designs for the colonnettes

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There are forty-four shafts, and some are among the most spectacular miniatures in France. This would be more obvious if they were not concealed behind the more public column-statues. Thirty-eight shafts can be divided into eleven teams from their templates, and a further six were solo products.

Part B has the basic data, with excellent images of the shafts, their division into carving gangs, and a short description for each. This is not builders work, but the most highly skilled work by the most treasured men on the site, the specialist carvers. The men who really knew how to work the stone. These shafts were stored in the shed until the site was ready for them. Because the shafts could not be erected straight away (unlike the embrasures) and because the architects were continuously replaced, confusion descended. This will be explained in Part 4a.

Most of the teams have been named to make it easier to discuss, and to give them an apparent verisimilitude.

For more about these *imagier* refer to COGA - <https://creationofgothic.org>. Try this page first [/COGA/capitalsubphases.php?id=CHARTRES&phase=7](https://creationofgothic.org/COGA/capitalsubphases.php?id=CHARTRES&phase=7). Also, see draft studies under “Master Carvers Series” in the left column in <https://www.creationofgothic.org/COGA/articles.php>.

Links to the Series

In bold those that have been completed.

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Centre right cR3t **CUT**



North right nR2t+ **CUT**

Fleurette team, 3 shafts

nR2t, cR3t, cL4b

The design consists of an anti-clockwise spiral filled with rosettes and in the space between thick tendrils looping like a lasso inhabited by lively figures [left]. The thick generous vines are in the manner of the Montron portal [r1].

Both shafts have been truncated, and the short section in nR2t may have come from the bottom of the longer shaft cR3t.

The cL4b shaft is a most intricately carved version, though in restoration it seems to have lost a little of its original panache.

He may have worked on one of the Saint-Denis shafts a few years earlier [r2].



Montron portal (Glasgow museum)



St-Denis west portal shaft (Cluny)

Aileron team, 5 shafts

cL4b, cL2t, cL1b, nL2b

A wide ribbon runs clockwise around the shaft [r1]. The slope was twice the diameter of the shaft, so it was set out to a double square. A vine snakes between ribbons and enfolds fronds and figures within a generous curve. The figures are thin, movements a little angular. The birds are sharp-edged. Was this man trained in the Grégoire school? The double structure holds the design together, for the ribbons contain the vines and the vines locate the details. This was probably among the first shafts to be erected in the left embrasure. cL1m is so firmly hidden behind the column figures it is hard to reproduce. cL3t may have been the left-over end from cL2t.



North left nL2b



Centre left cL1b



Centre left cL3t

CUT**CUT**

Centre left cL2t



Centre left cL1m



Greg, one shaft

sR2m

Vines of varying lengths encasing birds and figures, not discontinuous [left]. They form vertical pairs like an hourglass and with rosettes where they join in the centre. The vines appear to hold and support the creatures, some animal, some mythological.

It is impossible to see some of the details as much is concealed behind the statue-columns. From the scaffolding I was able to photograph behind the statues to disclose some of the detailing.



cR1t mirror-segs

In particular, as you may just see, to the left of this paragraph, a centaur with a boy on his back pulling on his beard. This unusual motif is also found in the second shaft in the Gregoire team. The carver of that shaft is rigid in detailing, compared to the fluidity of Gregoire. His presence here raises a number of questions about foremen and staff.



Dowager, one shaft

cL4t

The paired vines issue from the mouth of the staring heads, pass across the shaft and disappear into the projecting ears of the head below [r]. Smaller vines enclose the figures that hold onto them, with a modesty frond over the genitals. A neat repetitive design.



cR4t segments

CUT



Xavier team, 4 shafts

cL3t, cR2m, nL1t and nR1t

A clever design that gives a sense of variation without straying from the central vertical axis. A densely packed arrangement with vines that alternate between woven and tied, one above the other. This leaves little room for any but the smallest fronds or any inserted creatures [b1]. He deliberately broke up the regularity of the patterns that everyone else was using and contrived a high level of intricacy. The vines cross in alternating ways to combine overlapping tendrils with entwined and tied. Detailing more mechanical than organic.

CUT

Centre left cL3t cut at top



nR2m tied+woven



North right nR2m

CUT

North left nL1t top cut



North right nR1t

CUT**CUT**

CUT

Spirex team, 2 shafts

Spirex has a vine that spirals around the shaft [r1]. From it emerges smaller coils to support a loose three-frond bouquet that may be either clockwise or anti-clockwise. The start of the bouquet is tied with a string that floats off to the side. The lateral fronds do not touch the vine, while the central may or may not lap over the vine above it. The main vine ascends through the whole shaft, and the coils emerge from it so that there are three lengths of vine between each bouquet. The vine is decorated with twin grooves and little balls.

The other member of the team used the same structure [r2], though the centres have been filled with a rosette rather than a bouquet. These have four irregular petals separated by drill holes, and a nut-like centre made of four overlapping fronds. The vines have parallel grooves and heavy sockets that cut across the main vine.



Spirex template



North left nL2m



South right cR2t

CUT



north door right side nR1b

Gripple, one shaft

This could be Gripple adapting the way he carved capitals [r] to the circularity of the shaft. Unlike capitals, which have a static axial order for each unit, these flow [left]. But the elements in the design are the same, and relate in the same way.

Gripple could have been a member of the Spirex team, with a freer way with hit layout.

Flowing spiral vines end in his characteristic heron-fronds that lightly pass over the vine and others that grip from underneath.

At the junction there is no socket, but one tendril merges into the other. The fronds are little curled buds and often finished at the top with a berry. Each spiral emerges from the previous one without cutting across the originating vine. The ribs along the vine are chamfered using a curved chisel.



Laon, Saint-Martin, north nave door



Centre left cL3m



Centre left cL3b

Heron team, 3 shafts

W.cL3m, W.cL3b and W.nL2t

Rosettes within a vine that weaves around the shaft. The fronds are sculpted three-dimensionally so they pass under the vine and turn back at the top to grip it. The foliage is more sculptural, more three-dimensional and more exciting than the others.

These rosettes are similar to those in the Spirex team, suggesting a very different team structure.



nL2t link-bouquet

CUT



North left nL2t base and top cut off



Paris, Saint-Martin-des-Champs, apse

CUT

Centre left cL2b



Rameau team, 4 shafts

cL2b, nR3b and sL2t, possibly sR2x.

The vines are woven in many strips with either people or animals crowding the spaces. The figures are small yet robust, and simplified. The postures are strong, either hanging or gripping the vines for support. The flag-like foliage is found in all three shafts.

The short stone W.sL2t is shown missing in Houvet, and therefore this is a replacement. Possibly removed for repairs at that time and replaced later. The crouching naked woman talking to the bird is meticulously carved.

The shorter damaged piece sR2x may also have been from the same template.



North right nR3b



South left sL2t



cL2b woven

CUT



CUT

South right topmost sR2x **CUT**

Willow team, 4 shafts

nL1b, nR2b, sR2t and possibly sR2b

Paired undulating vines form a clearly defined structure, held with collars where they meet. No vines cross over one another. In nL1b the vines hold large standing birds with long curled tails, paired to face each other [left]. These are also found in the Saint-Loup-de-Naud trumeau and in Saint-Denis a few years earlier.

The adjoining nR2b has the same woven vines plus collars, but with worn foliage rather than birds. The pointed leaves are symmetrical.

There are figures in the short sR2t left and pendulous fronds..

In sR2b every second crossing is held by a collar. There is a second set of vines that cross over, and set out with the same regularity, If he was a member of this team, and not on his own, he did not want to comply with the master's simpler template, but insinuated contrary elements that disturb. An interesting man!



North left nL1b



North right nR2b



nL1b wav+tied



CUT tie+lap woven



South right sR2t



South right sR2b



Centre left cL2m

Arum team, 1 shaft

cL2m

Vertically symmetrical with tendrils ending in bouquets that enclose a berry on a stalk, somewhat in the manner of a *fleur-de-lis*. They are tied with collars where they meet, and finish with paired undercut fronds and strongly pointed tips.

The pattern alternates between using berries and downward pointing leaves. The effect of alternations within the restricted space of a colonnette is to disturb the direction and slender tallness of the figures and concentrate one's gaze into the depth of the delicate patterns.

Fabian team, 2 shafts

sL1b and cR3b

These are not by the same carver and they used stone of different quality, but are placed in the same team as the layout is for segments with paired vines that return to the collars.

This is the closest any carver at this time came to using a *fleur-de-lis*. Considering his other work and his continuous use of this motif elsewhere [b], it may well have been a Fabian invention.



cL2m segmental



sL1b long-segs



South left sL1b



Centre right cR3b



North left nL1m



North right nR1m

Grégoire team, 4 shafts

nL1m, nR1m, cL1t and sR1t

The major vine is an elongated meander rather than being wrapped as a spiral around the column. Inside that the figures are contained within tendrils arranged the opposite way. Grégoire was, I believe, one of the finest carvers from this era who delighted in exquisitely observed nudes entangled in and climbing through the vines.

The second shaft with the boy pulling on the centaur's beard appears in another colonnette, suggesting he worked under at least two foremen.

This team has been thoroughly described in MCS#11, and so I won't describe them in detail here.



nL1m undulate

CUT



Centre left cL1t



South right sR1t

Centre left cL4m



Jérôme team, 2 shafts

cL4t and nR2t

The very subtle design in cL4t is based on two elongated spiral axes set anticlockwise [left]. Along them lie the centres of paired undulating tendrils, as marked in red [b], from which emerge four-frond bouquets with buds, one pair pointing up, the other down. They are fixed with collars set at right angles to the spiral's axis and cleverly alternate in placement and direction. They give the impression that the design runs the opposite way, or clockwise.

This shaft is one of the most complex and satisfying arrangements in the portal, and is worth some study. I suggest you draw the arrangement without the foliage, and be intrigued.

He used the same form in other places at this time, including Bourges south portal [b2].

An incoherently organised shaft nR2t seems a poor attempt to copy this design [r], perhaps by a very young pupil. It was chopped off at the top and as the elements were too deeply undercut much has been broken.



Centre left cL4m
spirals highlit in red



Bourges, south porch, column



North door, right side nR2t

CUT

CUT

Panneau, one shaft

sL2b [left]. Ribbons fold and touch along the vertical axis. Scenes with figures inhabit the spaces. A different style altogether from any of the others and probably not under the same direction as the earlier work. Perhaps an itinerant passing through.

Saisons, one shaft

sL1t [b]. Could have had a dozen panels depicting the Labours of the months with January at the bottom. Were we to add the lost months the full length would have been some 30cm less than the present door height, and so it may have been carved before the height was raised in campaign-H. Like Panneau, he may have arrived after the other teams had departed as the design is out of character with the other shafts.

CUT

South left sL1t top cut Saisons

Interlock, 4 shafts

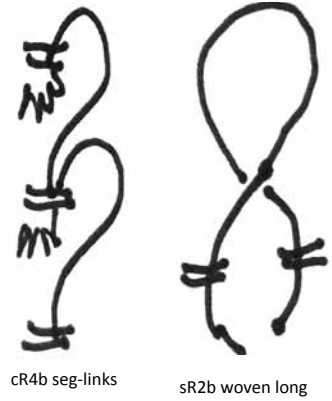
cR1t, cR1b, cR2b and cR4b

Strictly symmetrical along the axis of the shaft, the vines undulate in pairs [r1]. Each pair is separate with tendrils turning over the figures and bouquets. At the ends the vines do not continue, but return back to close the arrangement. Some have weathered badly.

The junctions are covered by collars of tiny fronds with pointed tips. Where there is foliage it is elongated. Figures and animals are exactly paired and woven through the vines.

These shafts were planned to fit under the capitals at the adjusted height. They were the work of campaign-I when it was discovered that they had used up all the earlier shafts filling spaces under the capitals and needed more to complete the works. These four were measured to exactly fit their location, and were therefore carved after the height of the doorways had been determined in campaign-H.

c2b does not follow the template [r2], but as it is one of the four with “perfect” height it is included here as part of campaign-I.



cR4b seg-links

sR2b woven long



Centre right cR1b



Centre right cR1t



Centre right cR4b



Centre right cR2b