

The financial impact of the crusades on church building

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The 1146 crusade

One would expect the cost of the second crusade to have had some impact on construction during the later 1140s.ⁱ The crusade began when King Louis decided to visit the Holy Land in December 1145 followed by Bernard of Clairvaux's exuberant call to arms four months later.

We can presume that during the next year every magnate, every knight and foot soldier who had sworn to join, would have been saving money and preparing. This may be one reason departure was delayed for a further year. Two years later the defeated and demoralized army returned home in small contingents. How was this disaster paid for? How were the taxes raised? Were precious possessions sold or pawned? The initial cost of the venture and the continuing expense of maintaining the troops, the ongoing payment of ransoms and so on may have bled France dry for some years afterwards,ⁱⁱ while the evidence from the *Master Carvers Series* suggests that almost nothing was being spent on religious architecture.

Between the completion of the Saint-Denis choir and the start of Senlis only a few small works can be inserted, such as the choir of May-en-Multien, the tiny north door at Saint-Martin in Laon and a tad in Bazoches. There is very little else to choose from. It was an empty time.ⁱⁱⁱ

The financial impact on building construction has not been noted by historians because the story of architecture has been written through the uncertain dates of the major buildings in which a six- or seven-year hiatus does not register strongly enough to be picked up. Not enough is known of the costs of a crusade, nor for its economic impact. Research has, on the whole, concentrated on the political, military and dynastic aspects. However, extracting cash from the community meant that little would have been left over for construction, for "Louis levied a substantial and deeply unpopular tax, all the more unpopular in view of the wide-spread famine of 1145-46."^{iv}

Construction usually had to be paid for at the time, in cash.^v The crusaders needed enormous sums for the high costs of war and ransoms, and when that is combined with famine it is no wonder that the quantity of architecture and sculpture was affected.

There is one documented example in which Count Galeran promised before joining the crusade that he would build 17 towers and, though he had returned home early, put off complying until after 1156.^{vi} This was more than ten years afterwards, and may have been typical for many who went east.

It is hard to imagine a major war without some social consequences. Wars in modern times have left not only scars, but have changed attitudes and left an impact on art. Though rigorous proof is not possible, it seems that for a period that cannot be closely defined there was less work after 1146 than in adjoining decades. The crusade seems to have stopped the boom of the 40s in its tracks and ended a period of prodigious construction. We only have to think of Saint-Denis, Saint-Martin-des-Champs and Saint-Germain-des-Prés, of Chartres and Sens and fifty other great buildings to bring focus onto this period. As the army tramped east, the workshops fell silent.

It seems significant that Senlis, begun shortly after the crusaders returned home, was the smallest cathedral of the period.^{vii} When started in 1153 it was not conceived as a great monument in either size or grandeur. Its modesty exactly reflected a time of scarcity when funds were only starting to return to what they had been before the crusade. When I compiled the adjacent list of major works under construction after the crusade there was little until Senlis.^{viii} The precision in the dates is misleading, and has been derived from the studies of individual carvers and its many assumptions.^{ix}

The major source for the proposed recession after the crusade lies in *The Ark* and the studies on individual carvers derived from that collection. It was through the following that I recognized the

baleful impact of the crusade: Cyprian, GrippleSon, the Nazaire group, Palmier, Strapper and the Victoire team.^x The chronologies for each person show there was a dearth of capitals after 1146, perhaps for as long as seven years.

The evidence (including subtle changes to the design and execution of capitals) suggests that the following seven buildings that had been started before the crusade were stalled and left incomplete until long after.^{xi}

- The ambulatory walls of Notre-Dame in Paris were begun in the 1140s.^{xii} Some wall capitals were carved at that time and some belong to the 60s: compare one that is typical of the 40s in Fig. 21 with a nearby foliate that is closer in manner to the piers of twenty years later, Fig. 22. Tools may have been downed in the midst of the carving program, possibly coinciding with the need to sequester all available funds for the crusade. Can we therefore date the earlier capitals to a precise time in April 1146?
- Construction of the Saint-Denis choir stopped in 1144 and was not resumed for over a century.^{xiii} The crusade may have prevented its completion, and Suger's death five years later ended his dreams for the abbey as a political centre.
- The aisles of the Chars nave would have been carved around 1140, but its clerestory had to wait for another thirty years before it could be completed.^{xiv}
- The Châlons-en-Champagne Notre-Dame nave rose no further than the floor of the gallery in the 40s, and additional work had to wait until the 70s.^{xv} Maybe funds were still short in 1157, for people may have had to haul the carts themselves to get the work started.
- In the ambulatory of Saint-Leu-d'Esserent the circlet of chapels have the same sills and curiously oriented plinths as the Saint-Denis ambulatory from which could be dated to about the same time, 1142±.^{xvi} But none of the capitals was carved by any of the men who worked at Saint-Denis or elsewhere in the 40s. They are similar to work in the Senlis gallery that we can date to just before 1160. The fact that the drum piers had to wait until the 80s suggests that funds continued to be short for some time to come.^{xvii}
- The lower storey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés is the work of the 1140s, but the clerestory and its flying buttresses had to wait until the later 50s and were not completed until the 60s, as shown by the design on the bosses of the high vault. The consecration of 1163 may have marked a tardy completion.
- In the choir of Sens the capitals in the dado are similar to others from the 1130s and 40s, as are those in the northern baptismal chapel.^{xviii} But the capitals under the ambulatory vaults and in the gallery are closer to the choir aisles of Senlis and Laon cathedrals, all from the later 1150s, Fig. 23 and Fig. 24. This suggests that the choir was built to some level above the sills of the aisle windows in the 30s and early 40s, and that the rest was not completed for more than a decade. To allow services to continue a roof would have been erected above the window sills. This provided a usable part of the building where the stalls were placed and Bishop Henry interred in 1144.

Elsewhere the story seems to be the same. Wherever we look, buildings were stalled about the time the crusade was called and did not start up again for years, if not decades. For a long time France would have been awash with temporary roofs over unfinished works, decaying scaffolding and cranes, and workshops grown silent with waiting. One of the consequences was that "Paris and its region lost their exclusive leadership in the development of the new style, which was more and more attracted toward the north and northeast margins of the Royal Domain."^{xix}

What then happened to the great men who had created the rich carving of Chartres and Saint-Denis? Some would have accompanied the crusaders, especially as there was little available work at home. One may have been working at Etampes around 1134, and possibly on the south portal sculpture over the next few years.^{xx} But the rest would have had little choice but to pack up their tools and tend their gardens.

To take account of the crusader recessions the cash-flow was modified to show the loss of funds for many years, Fig. 25. The rupture affected not only funding, but also the numbers. The count of

churches, both large and small, with anything from the period, Fig. 26. At the peak of the 1140s (marked 2) Chartres and Saint-Denis are represented as only two units, and similarly in the 1190s the four great cathedrals of Chartres, Laon, Paris and Soissons are each represented by only one unit (5). Comparing the two charts shows that after 1200 the amount being donated for each place was declining though the number of sites under scaffolding was still considerable. The impact of the first two crusades is quite clear (1 and 3).

The commencement of work on the cathedral of Senlis may mark the moment when most of the crusader's debts had been paid. In a sense the cathedral may have given a kick-start to the construction industry after so many years of inactivity. It was followed in the next decade by a rash of major projects.

Aesthetic consequences

There were subtle changes to carving and portal design. As most of the changes came from a new crop of carvers they illustrate rather than prove. Nevertheless, after looking over thousands of capitals I sense a transition over these years. Compare these examples chosen because they have similar layouts and detailing, Fig. 27. The upper row is from around 1140, and below are similar designs but differently handled from around 1160. The foliage in the later capitals is more realistic and less fantastical, the straps are thicker. They are more refined and elegant, stronger and often more flamboyant, and the elements tend to disengage from the cone as if applied later rather than being part of the structural form.

More compelling evidence lies among the portals. There was a dramatic change in attitude between the styles of Chartres and Senlis. Where earlier work is more austere with Christ in regal Majesty enthroned as a frontal and awesome deity, later work is more feminine, more intimate, and more emotional in a different way. At Senlis there is a psychological interaction between the figures on the tympanum. They are more concerned with their personal relationship in a heavenly space rather than with the observer, and the gestural language is more informative.

In the northern pre-crusade archivolt, whether the individual voussoirs are adoring angels and elders as at Chartres, Provins and Etampes, or narrative scenes as at St-Loup and Le Mans, each was designed as separate cartoons within a broader christological or saintly narrative, or eschatological vision.^{xxi}

In post-crusade archivolt the clear linear-organic Jesse-tree-like framing at Senlis, Mantes and Braine departs radically from earlier voussoirs. The device of the stem of Jesse that connected every element with the central theme linked figures that had earlier been isolated by their baldachins and clouds.

Clear responses to powerful events are not uncommon. Jethro Lyne suggested we compare the confidence of the Fauvist subject matter before the First World War in their pure delight in the expressive potential of color with the work of the German and Austrian Expressionists after the war, many of whom had directly experienced the horror of the trenches and the breakdown of civil order. And flanking the sack of Rome in 1527, compare the natural confidence of Bramante and Raphael to the Mannerism of the elder Michelangelo and the younger Bronzino.

Impact on continuity

I find that almost none of the capitals at Senlis were carved by masters from the 30s or 40s. The crusade interrupted the continuity of training between master and pupil, and led inevitably to the subtle changes we find in the sculpture. When the working lives of each of the carvers being studied for the *Master Carvers Series* is graphed it is clear there was a rupture after 1145, Fig. 28. Those masters for whom I find no examples after the crusade are marked with an X, being half those in the study.

With only fourteen years between the Saint-Denis ambulatory and the first capitals in Senlis there should have been many instances where the same designs were used in both, as there was between

Saint-Denis and Châteaudun or Saint-Martin-des-Champs after a similar fourteen-year gap. This is not the case.

Unless men toiled past their sixtieth year some of the old-timers would have retired by the time Senlis was begun as their eyesight or physical strength failed. All the masters who were most influential in the earlier period seem to have moved away at the same time, and their pupils did not start working until the end of the next decade when times had changed in significant ways.^{xxiii} The continuity of ideas that came with the medieval manner of training was interrupted, and some threads lost.

The 1095 crusade

Moving backwards to the first crusade, it is noticeable that much of the carving produced afterwards was primitive compared to what had gone before. Earlier capitals in the naves of Morienvall and Deuil-le-Barre, and in the Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire narthex show a markedly different character to most post-crusade work. The earlier ones are larger and heavier and more confident.^{xxiii} Rarely do later capitals match the earlier ones in size, organization or craftsmanship, for which compare the two rows in Fig. 29.

The carvers who worked in the Paris Basin before the crusade had packed their bags and traveled to more lucrative climes (if there were any) and did not return when prospects improved. As after the second crusade, once funds returned few of the older men were available, and the new generation of carvers had to start learning the basic skills of their profession without the mentors needed to train them properly.^{xxiv}

For example, the north chapel and the apse foundations at Auvers-sur-Oise belong to the 1090s, which date is supported by the chronologies for Strap-X and the Old Duke, while the upper parts of the apse were around 1115 from the work of Grippelle and Victoire.^{xxv} The naves of Bury, Villers-Saint-Paul and Berneuil-sur-Aisne, and a group of Lilliputian towers at Oulchy, Nouvion and Rethueil show the post-1090 situation clearly, for buildings in the Paris Basin for at least a decade after 1100 lacked exactly those qualities of skill and confidence so apparent in the work before 1095.

The later crusades of 1189 and 1202

Can we presume similar situations during other crusades? The Saladin tax of 1189 for the third crusade may have had a similar impact on construction as the taxes for the previous two but for the fact that it occurred in the middle of a strong growth in temperature. Good crops and the staggering growth of royal territory under Philippe Auguste, may have made it possible to pay the expenses of war without cutting funds.

It looks like there may have been some reduction among the parish churches, but construction, and the continuity of transmission hardly faltered. Again, I speak here of northern France, and not of any other area.

However, the fourth crusade of 1204 is another story. It coincided with the decline in construction initiated by lowered harvests, and may have made the collapse worse. By then the drought had had an impact, and temperatures were falling, as was rainfall. Construction, especially in the northeast, the Soissonais and Laonnais and along the Marne, was already in rapid decline and the funds required for the crusade would have done much to hasten that collapse.^{xxvi}

Climate plus crusade made for difficult funding during these years. Indeed, three of the crusades were initiated at the peak growing seasons when times were good and there was enough money to fund any dream of bravado and knightly derring-do. It is just sad that these adventures were followed by declining temperature that made it more difficult to repay debts so impetuously incurred.

i MCS #6, 9-14.

ii Riley-Smith, 1998, 129-135.

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- iii MCS #6, and, yet to be published, on Son of the SS Master and the later Rinceau carvers.
- iv Grant, 1998, 157.
- v Borrowing was seldom permitted, Kraus, 1979.
- vi James and Gardner, 1996-7; towers illustrated in *The Ark*, 5:1758-1760.
- vii James, 1987; Erlande-Brandenburg, 2006.
- viii MCS #6, 9-14. These 26 were selected from 380 campaigns in the ten years after 1153.
- ix See note 64. In arranging the work of a carver it is useful to give a date. These do not pretend to be either accurate or final. They are part of the procedure of this research project. However, as more men are integrated through their places of work and meetings with companions I trust the dates will firm up.
- x MCS #24, #6, #29, #7, #27 and #29.
- xi An exception may have been the aisles of Saint-Germain-en-Laye where the style of Lazare and Fabrice suggest they may have been working on its extraordinarily distorted capitals during the later 40s, MCS #25. Work on other buildings may have progressed slowly while the crusaders were away.
- xii See note 60; MCS #9.
- xiii James, 1998. Bruzelius, 1985.
- xiv See foliage of the 30s in the aisle capitals and of the 70s in the clerestory capitals, compare in *The Ark*, 4:274- with 4:288-.
- xv The nave capitals, though replaced, are flamboyant versions of masters from the 40s, compare *The Ark*, 4: 211- and 252. Both south and west portals are often dated to the 50s, but the work by Grégoire, Félix and Jérôme in the capitals bring them firmly into the 1140s: MCS #4 and 10.
- xvi See list and discussion of other work by this master in James, 1993.
- xvii *The Ark*, 1:468.
- xviii *The Ark*, 5:1543-1605. As the bases, plinths and torus molds are the same across most of the cathedral, Bishop Henry seems to have laid out all the pier bases and the external walls as far as the last bay in the west, and in the east built the walls to at least the window sills. In the north this campaign continued to the capitals and vault of the chapel. It was designed for groin vaults. Construction was paused here and was covered by a roof, under which were erected the stalls and the bishop's tomb.
- The largest buildings like Sens and Chartres were erected at 4-6 courses per year: MCS #8, 5-7. If this were the case at Sens, 6-8 years would be needed to raise the walls, plus say a year for the roof and another for the stalls. If this had been completed by say 1140, then the foundations were begun in the early 1130s. Construction would have resumed after the crusade with capitals of the later 50s and with corbels for rib vaults, with fairly slow building leading to the middle gallery of the nave around 1170, probably by William of Sens, and the most westerly bay and portals a decade later, *The Ark*, 1:263-67. See Salet, 1955; Henriot, 1982; Severens, 1970.
- xix Bony, 1983, 119.
- xx Convincingly illustrated in Jacoby, 1986; For Etampes MCS #7, 5-7.
- xxi Williamson, 1995, 27-28. Jethro Lyne, letter to author.
- xxii The individual pupils involved, like the 'sons' of Gripple, the SS Master and Strapper III, illustrate how different the next generation was. They are discussed in the MCS #2 and #6 and in forthcoming masters Willow and Strapper #27.
- xxiii The difference in size is marked, and applies to other areas such as the Saintogne where the capitals in Sainte-Radegond in Poitiers, Sainte-Geneviève-l'Exempt and the crypt of Saint-Eutrope in Saintes are particularly large. The latter is before the 1093 dedication of the upper church, the former probably a decade or more earlier.
- xxiv The evidence is in the carvers whose *oeuvre* can be traced from the naves of Bury, Villers-Saint-Paul, Etampes *et al*, to Chartres, Saint-Denis, Saint-Germain-de-Prés *et al*. They could only have completed such a body of work in a reasonable lifetime if the earliest campaigns were after 1105: See James, MCS #2 and #9; and #12 and #13 on Comet and Faceter, and yet to be published on Apple I.
- xxv MCS #29 and #15.
- xxvi *The Ark*, 2:1487.