

3

Method of dating

The chronology in this book is based on the notion that in a changing artistic climate only a few carvers will keep to the same manner for a lifetime. Instead, the way they delineate will perceptibly change with time so that the majority at any one moment would be working in the mode of that period. This notion is founded on the evidence from over thirty five buildings with documented dates. From them we may define the characteristics of each decade by examining the style of the majority, and comparing them to the lesser number that appear either more advanced or more old-fashioned.

Thus we seek beyond the individuality of each man to discern the concepts that are common to a decade. I refer to the particular characteristics of a period as its mode or as 'decadics'.

Once we have defined the mode of each decade we may apply these definitions to estimate the dates of undocumented buildings. The range of modes may be used to date these works, and by relying on the community of capitals we avoid the hazards of attempting to date from single examples.

The procedure is simply to examine the mode of every capital to assess its decadic date, and then to count the numbers. Some care is needed, as a leaf may flatten itself against a crocket with an opening

fleshy bud that combines motifs from the 1170s with those of the 1180s (Ø). If the capitals in a compound pier are assembled from a number of stones, each stone should be estimated separately.

At times neither the composition nor the shape of leaf or stalk will lie within the definition of a single decade. In such cases we may either make an



Gonesse ambulatory exterior window

assessment based on the preponderance of modes, or place the capital in two decades to cover each date. I usually exclude plain crocket capitals as they seldom have sufficient distinguishing qualities to denote a decade.

The decadic modes are noted in the following way, instanced in the Puisieux choir. A plaque was found attached to the wall that stated it was occupied in 1212. Examining the capitals in the clerestory, one is in the mode of the 1190s, seven in 1200s mode, and one from each of the next two decades. This is written as 9x1 for the single capital in the mode of the 90s, and 0x7, 1x1, 2x1 for the others. The date would be the mid-1200s as the majority are from that decade. This date for the capitals leaves sufficient time to complete the upper walls, pitch the roof and raise the vaults.

This method is confirmed in three items.

The first is that when every capital in a zone is given a decadic date, the majority will always be in the style of only one decade, and the remainder will be ascribable to the adjacent decades. The latter will almost never exceed the average by more than 20 years. If carvers were working in all modes simultaneously we should expect to find capitals carved in 1170s mode mixed with styles of eighty

years later. This is never the case, not even where there are a large numbers of capitals. For example, the Chartres aisles has over three hundred stones that were carved during the seven years after 1200. The range in the nave is almost the same as in the choir and includes only four decades, the 80s through to the 1210s, with half from the 1200s.

I have taken the view that the drift of flanking decades to either side of the median gives some indication of whether the group was carved before or after the middle of the decade. The more capitals in a zone the more accurate this is likely to be. For example, at Amiens the range in the dado of the choir chapels is 1x2, 2x5, 3x21 and 4x13. There being only six in a mode earlier than the 30s and thirteen in the 40s, the drift is more to the later



Puisieux choir



Amiens cathedral ambulatory chapel dado



Amiens cathedral ambulatory chapel dado

decade than the earlier. This suggests the capitals were carved in the late 1230s.

We cannot be too precise in this matter. The range of modes in each level at Canterbury compared to Gervase's dates, shown on page 42, and the range in each campaign in the Chartres aisles on page 754 shows that even in the most favourable cases where a large number of capitals are involved precision may be no better than ± 2 years.

Yet where there are enough capitals, analysis of the documented buildings shows we should be able to date to the half decade. In the text these are noted as 'the early 80s', 'the mid-80s' or 'the late 80s'.

I refer to each decade with the expectation that the reader will allow some latitude and flexibility, certainly within a couple of years either way. Thus capitals credited to the early 80s, for example, could possibly have been carved between 1178 and 1185.

The second confirmation of the method is that among documented works, larger buildings were not more stylish nor fashionable than smaller. There is little difference in the range of modes whatever their size, be it in the great cathedrals or the small palace chapel at Provins, in the choir of Dammarie or the western choir of Cambronne-lès-Clermont.

It would seem, therefore, that the fashionable way to depict foliage was not necessarily more advanced in the larger buildings nor more retrograde in the smaller. The carving may be more skilled in the larger, and the arrangements more intricate, but those qualities of observation and style that I have used to define the mode of each decade are the same for the cathedrals as for the chapels. It is the form that defines the decade, not the skill nor the artistry. In other words, the attitudes that bred style were affecting carvers of every sort, wherever they worked, and at whatever level of expertise.

This emphasises that we are not dealing with consciously organised design styles that may have stemmed from the hand of a great artist or from political considerations, but with autonomous and unquestioned artistic fashion. It is thus the perfect element for the study of chronology.

The third confirmation is that in every case the range for any level is always later than the range of those underneath, and always earlier than those above. Everywhere the decadic modes reflect the natural building sequence—with the one exception of Saint-Leu-d'Esserent which will be discussed in its place. Otherwise, this is invariable, and is the best demonstration of the efficacy of the method.

At Soissons, for example, 16 percent of the aisle capitals in the south transept have the abstracted forms of the 60s, 55 percent have the small tips,



Dammarie-lès-Lys choir



Provins, palace chapel



Beaumont-sur-Oise west door

gentle attached leaves and early buds of the 70s and in 29 percent the leaf, though idealized, has begun to detach itself from the background. Most belong to the 70s, and as the majority of the others reflect the 80s, these capitals would be allocated to the later part of the decade rather than the middle.

The range in the gallery is 7x10, 8x31 and 9x3 suggesting close to 1182. Higher up in the triforium and clerestory the range is 7x1, 8x11 and 9x4, which indicates just after 1185. This reflects a consistent building sequence.

It needs to be said that not all the capitals on one level will necessarily have been carved in one single campaign. In the nave of Notre-Dame in Paris work proceeded from east to west over three decades in the aisle level alone. In the ambulatory of Saint-Quentin the wall capitals were carved some decades before those in the piers.

The definitions of the decadic modes in the next chapter have been refined through a long-term

process of comparison and feedback. They are as accurate as I can make them. I ask the reader with long-held opinions to assess them in relation to the overall consistency of the modes for each decade, and to make this easier I have grouped all those from the one decade into the same chapter.

Some of the statistics arising from the arrangement of the capitals and which will be examined in Part D are provided on pages 520, 1012 and 1553.



Soissons cathedral south transept aisle



Saint-Quentin ambulatory walls



Saint-Quentin ambulatory piers



4

Decadistic modes

My approach is based on the notion that at any one time and place people would share a similar mode of perception. In whatever way these views may have been communicated or imbibed, there is a commonality that can be defined. This applies as much to sculpture as to fashion, even in those more slow-moving times.

As a result sculptors shared concepts and modes of perception that produced foliage that evolved with each decade. This chapter illustrates the details that marked each of these decades.

In the 1930s Dominique Jalabert wrote that *'la flore gothique apparut vers le milieu du XII^e siècle. Elle évolua par trois états différents qui constituent autant des flores distinctes.'* [1932, 190]

The first period covered the decades prior to the 1170s. He called the leaves from this period *généralisée*, a word that suggests stylised order within variety. [194] As copying nature was not important, geometry and symmetry dominated their creativity. These capitals are the subject of Part B.

Jalabert's second period covers the three decades to 1200. In it carvers replaced forms that had been derived from more ancient sources with *'feuilles et fleurs exactement figurées ... subordonnée à la préoccupation de donner un caractère monumental.'* [190] Carvers were starting on the very different journey to depict what they could see. The formal

was increasingly mingled with the natural, while stereotypes, no matter how beautiful, were used less and less. Outlines were still geometric and repetitive, but with a *'caractère souple et vivant qu'elle n'avait jamais eu.'* [192]

Though we might attempt to identify the individual leaves, perhaps with some success, they are more archetypic than specific. They evoke nature without reproducing its individuality. This gives these capitals an eternal air, incorruptible and certain, within which lies a vibrant yet latent energy.

Jalabert's third period covers the seventy-five years after 1200 that he rightly sees as the apogee of well-observed and varied naturalism. He follows this with a fourth that lasted well over a century, and will not concern us here. It presents an ebullient though often sagging foliage; an *'interprétation a vigoureusement accentué ce caractère et l'a donné systématiquement à toute la flore.'* [227]

This study is more precise than Jalabert's could have been, for the benefits of scale available through modern photography have made it possible to compare such large numbers that we could hope to be accurate to the decade. This holds the promise of providing an all-inclusive chronological base for gothic studies.

It is not the organization nor the size of the foliage that defines a decade, but the form and

arrangement of the individual leaves. That Jalabert recognised this is clearly evidenced in his sketches.

Not all capitals can be placed in one decade or the other. Transitions between decadic modes are naturally complex. One carver may be more curious about the exact shape of a leaf than another, while some may prefer to force newly-observed foliage into some older geometric form. Some may combine an older volute on a crocket with the latest leaf. One carver may have been developing ideas as he worked and using the stone as his laboratory. Another may have been a Leonardo who made the design while others applied the decoration. The capital is their learning process frozen in time.

From looking at thousands of capitals for many years I have developed a 'feel' for the subtleties of the period. It depends, as does so much in sculpture, on an intuitive grasp that is not easy to define. My task here is to turn feeling into cognitive understanding, and to find a way to present all the modes so they may be comprehended by others, and then verified on site.

To achieve this I have placed many small photos across each double page so the evolution in time may be seen at a glance and the differences made visible. The description has been kept to a minimum so the illustrations may themselves provide the main substance.

We speak here only of the majority of sculptors, for not all will conform to the current mode. Were we to take any group of capitals that were carved at the one time, like the 140 stones in the Reims chapels from around 1215, we would find the majority betraying similar characteristics. There will still be some that could have appeared in the Chartres nave of 1200 and others in the Amiens chapels of the 1230s, but the range of modes will be no larger than that. None would be in the austere manner of the 70s, nor would any display the full naturalism of the 1240s. The range is nearly always ± 20 years, a forty-year span that is more or less the working life of an individual.

This is why you will find foliage in this chapter illustrating an idea of, say, the 20s with a capital that may have been carved ten or even twenty years earlier or later.

Where elements on the one capital come from a number of modes, certain compromise is needed. For example, the buds may be in the style of the 20s while the leaf underneath looks decades earlier. I tend to give more weight to the most 'advanced' elements while assessing the overall balance of different modes.

In the end the entire argument depends on the

photographs. They are not always as clear as I would have wished. They have been taken under different lighting conditions, sometimes with flash that bleaches the contrast, or against the glare of a window that blurs the edges, often in the rain and even in the snow. The carvings themselves have been cut in many types of stone, some that have held their detail well while others have simply dissolved in the damp. Many have been damaged and some even whitewashed so the details are lost.

Yet the attempt must be made to present all those that seem important to the chronological analysis. I would have liked to present every leaf and bud with absolute clarity, but that has been beyond the technology of camera, film, printing and graphics management, as well as the conditions on site. I have therefore attempted to clean up the scanned images, though many will still appear a little blurred or indistinct.

I am sure you would realise that, even where not stated in the text, any dates given apply only to those courses that include the capitals. It will not necessarily apply to the vaults they support nor to the plinths they rest on, which could have been placed in different years, if not decades.

Where capitals may have been carved before they were needed and therefore stacked, and a reduction in funds may have kept them in the yard for quite a long time, the capital dates will only show a *terminus ante quem* for the rest of the work.

Throughout this book the first chapter on each decade illustrates the documented buildings to show the range of modes that were employed during that time. It is from these that I have defined the qualities of each decade. These modes will now be described, and will be illustrated by those capitals that most clearly exemplify the forms used in each decade. There is also a two-page chart of the key elements at the end of this first volume.

Transition from formal to natural

In Jalabert's first period foliage has a frozen immutability: it is inert. Branches are exceptional. Stalks or veins emerge from the patterns of the design rather than being realistic supports for the leaf. Symmetry and verticality are almost universal. Leaves are identical. They may be complex, elegant, whimsical or eccentric, but never as seen in the fields. At another time we may have called them studio pieces.

Where there are buds on the ends of crockets, they almost never project beyond the abacus. The decoration is thus contained within the envelope created by the square impost at the top and the

circular astragal below. The initial blocking-out of the stone set the spatial parameters.

During the 70s all this changed. The crocket buds were thrust well beyond the abacus. This not only demanded a different order of skill in setting out the stone, but created a very different impression at the top of the column. Instead of the vertical thrust of the column flowing easily into the curve of the arch, the upward movement is delayed by the newly projecting crockets. Also during the decade the *échancré* just under the abacus entirely disappeared.

For both the formals and the earlier naturals, surface design and foliage was constrained within arcs struck from centres within the capital. Geometry was king. Exceptions are rare, and occur mainly in figurative work and some of the cruder capitals by carvers one would presume had never understood the rules of geometry.

Gradually the overriding authority of compass and square disappeared and its place was taken by the free-flowing form made by the hand finding an outline that gave the greatest pleasure. Nature and natural processes overcame geometry.

Here are two examples of experimentation in the transition.



At Lourps, in left upper picture, the outer curves of the crockets intersect to form the sides of an arrow-like leaf. In the middle picture the tiny lobes that outline the central leaf begin to separate the decoration from the geometry. Then in the bottom the leaf has become more three-dimensional and is embellished with veins so it is virtually free of the crockets step beyond the formal curves that first generated it.

At Soissons in the upper photo on the right the crockets and the three-lobed water-leaf set

between them are formals. They are typical of a host of churches from the 50s and 60s. Many of the buds are spiral, as if a piece of pastry had been



Soissons cathedral, south transept aisle SW2(a)



rolled into a little bun. Also, the decoration under the left crocket is like a series of tiny buckles.

In the second picture from another face of the same capital, a similar three-lobed leaf was placed between the crockets. One lobe has been further decorated with rather mechanical lobes while the others are formal. On the left may be glimpsed a very different kind of leaf.

This leaf is shown in the lower picture. The five-lobed geometric design is not unlike the three-lobed leaf between the crockets, even to the little curved junction between each lobe that is offset to the lower side. But in other respects this is a leaf of the 70s, with a regular and repetitive outline, and with indented channels running from the base to each lobe that spread like a fan across the surface.

In the pages that follow it is not always possible to illustrate every nuance of the text adjacent to it, but examples will be found on nearby pages.

Leaf forms

In the 70s forms are symmetrical and inert. There is a feeling of damp vulnerability, especially where they cling to the underside of the crockets. The thin edges suggest they are not helping the crocket to support the impost, but snuggling up under it with an endearing softness.

They are like young leaves under a cliff, tenderly lying along the surface of the rock, yet with a yearning for the sun. They are seldom bent independently of the cone. One of the hallmarks of the 70s is the delicate fronds that lie along the upper edges of the platen. Though not in themselves vigorous, the energy comes from the arrangement.

80s: leaves are lightly curved and may bend slightly to one side. They no longer lie motionless. Even though symmetry is almost always present, life stirs within. The outline may be accentuated with a ridge that bulges forward slightly along the edges or set back from the spine to emphasise the surface curvature. The spine is often scooped out. Leaves do not overlap one another. Where the format is simple I would allocate it to the 80s

if there is a greater depth of field than in the 70s, and with it some feeling for life.

90s: leaves have greater substance in themselves but no real independence. Above all there is greater vitality and sappiness as they begin to move away from the platen. The surface may be indented, scooped, curved or wavy to impart a certain liveliness, though the double-curve down the spine is rare. Edges are thicker without undercutting, but may be lightly incised to provide a shadow-line. Full independence is only a thought away.

Each leaf still comes from a standard mould. The most popular has a large upper petal that meets a pair of laterals with beautiful re-entrant curves at the join (page 20). This was often drilled, and at times the lip around the edge of the drilling was flattened off. Where there was an overlap at the junction it did not disturb its two-dimensionality.

00s to 40s: A great change happened after 1200. This is the moment of Jalabert's second revolution, when the inertness and repetitiveness of the 90s gave way to a growing aliveness. At the same time some strove to depict the world as it is, for which

1170s

1180s

1190s

1200s



Santeuil nave triforium



Soissons south



Beaumont-sur-Oise aisle



Longpont nave



Mantes-la-Jolie choir gallery



Canterbury choir aisle



Bonneval triforium



Moret-sur-Loing aisle

they had to change how they observed as well as the way they carved. Realistic foliage is usually found only in porches and doorways, and reached an apogee in the upper dado of la Sainte-Chapelle where symmetry had ceased to be a factor.

On the other hand, the majority continued to work with stylised elements that were products of fashion as well as an artistic feeling for outline and arrangement that is extremely satisfying. For them symmetry remained important.

During these forty years complexity and movement increased. It was gradual process that above all gave the impression that greater life and energy was coming from deep within the plants.

To liberate the foliage from the cone, edges were at first sharpened, and then deeply undercut. This accentuated outline at the expense of strength.

Leaves are now almost never flat. The swelling in the petals increases, bulging forward at the top with a strong curves in either section or elevation.

Petals are rounded almost everywhere in 1200, and gradually get serrated with angular endings from 1220 onwards. Some of the later petals are like

flat spades or hexagons with large triangular spaces between each. In the 20s side petals may be given somewhat flattened points. In the 30s the points get sharper, including those on serrated leaves and by the 40s tips are elongated like a pixie's ear.

After the 20s the strong spines are replaced by either a pair of structural grooves or softer edgeless gutters which look as if a thumb had moulded the shape in clay.

Moving towards the 50s, foliage becomes softer and floppier, with some big lounging leaves with major laterals like butterflies. Leaves that are irregular, crumpled or crystalline, are close to 1250.

However, at least from the 20s a mechanical malaise invades most workshops, for men would carve the same arrangements and the same leaves with little variety on an increasing proportion of capitals. An incurious, unimaginative mentality came to inhabit the *chantiers*, so old-style well-tried leaves were used repeatedly. Though often placed alongside more advanced buds, their sheer repetitive bulk can dull the senses.

1210s

Bonneval triforium

1220s

Reims, bishop's chapel

1230s

Taverny nave aisle

1240s

Amiens choir aisle



Etampes nave aisle



Amiens nave



Créteil crypt



Saint-Martin-aux-Bois



Châlons, Notre-Dame choir

1170s



Chartres north porch

1180s



Chartres north doorway

1190s



Soissons, St-Léger triforium

1200s

Three-lobed (upper two rows)

One leaf-form that became increasingly popular after 1180 was a three-fold clover-like arrangement that provided scope for symmetry, generous curves, and over-lapping.

After 1190 they were increasingly bent sideways and twisted in section. After 1200 concavity is increasingly balanced by convexity. The upper part of the leaf projects strongly while the lower parts cling to the cone. Where the leaf replaces the platen the three-dimensionality is powerfully accentuated to maintain the sense of support while at the same time suggesting enormous inner power.

The lobes will occasionally lap over one another where they join. Indeed, it is almost impossible for a creative hand not to follow an overlap here as the curves are so seductive. They are usually rounded until 1200, and become elliptical or serrated later. These qualities became more powerful through the 20s and 30s.

Three-leafed (lower rows)

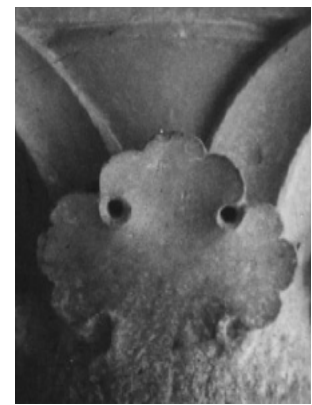
Where a number of leaves in the 70s and 80s may spring from one place they are merged or butt-jointed without any sense of growing out of a common branch, though some leaves will have wide stalks, even half as wide as the leaf and blend into the adjacent forms like a wide haunch.

After 1190 stalks are often thin, though they may still be slightly fan-shaped.

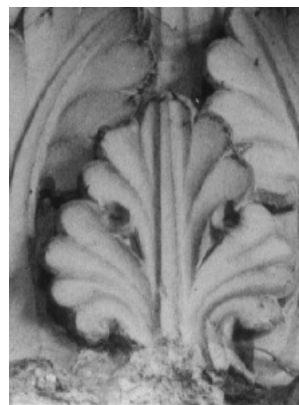
Vigorous modelling in both planes becomes greater to support the growing separation between foliage and cone. By the 20s the leaf stalk often emerges part-way up the cone rather than from the astragal, increasing its independence.



Soissons transept triforium



Braine triforium



Saint-Leu-d'Esserent apse



Soissons south transept



Orbais-l'Abbaye south transept aisle



Amiens nave dado

1210s



Laon north tower door

1220s



Saint-Jean-aux-Bois nave

1230s



La Sainte-Chapelle

1240s



Chenevière apse



Bagneux nave



Limay apse



Gonesse nave triforium



Mantes choir clerestory



Moret choir aisle



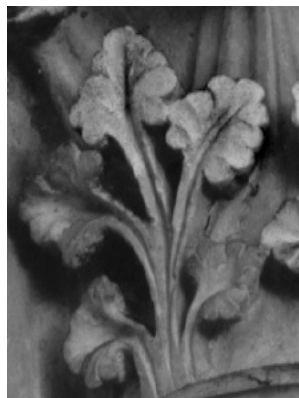
Gonesse nave aisle



Noisy-le-Grand nave



Châlons cathedral south



Reims chapel dado



Reims nave aisle



Gonesse nave aisle



Laon south transept dado

1170s



Beaumont-sur-Oise aisle

1180s



Soissons south gallery

1190s



Moret choir aisle

1200s

Lobes, gashes and veins

70s: Lobes around leaves are uniform and are placed opposite each other. Petals do not overlap until the 90s, as on the previous page. In three-lobed leaves the gap between the lobes may be drilled to enough depth to give some three-dimensionality, and to emphasise the intersection of the curves.

90s: Simplified veins are drawn between the lobes, joining the junctions between the petals to the spine. They are in scale with the leaf and with each other. Those that sit in the centre of the petal are almost always in the more realistic foliage. Lobes now occasionally overlap other lobes and edges may be chamfered inwards.

00s: The three-dimensionality of the lobes becomes more pronounced. Bulges (second row) are stronger and the tips may lean forward. In the larger leaves the lower petals are either strongly concave or pushed outwards with raised bulges. Where the leaf is bent the gaps between the lobes are crunched together on the lower side and opened on the upper. There is a feeling for gravity.

10s to 40s: During these decades the lobes become increasingly scooped along their ribs, which may continue down the spine to the astragal. Leaves grow increasingly large and luscious. Many are highly simplified and rely more on fullness of form than on detailing, combining minimal decoration with flamboyance. Plasticity may be augmented by larger overlaps.

10s: The gaps between lobes may be elongated. After the 20s the gap grows larger and is stretched into a thin slot, especially during the 30s when the lobes are often wide apart.

By the 30s lobes acquire an extra roundedness that in fact comes from extending the sides of the lobe and stretching it outwards from the middle. This was part of a trend to stretch and widen the



Beaumont-sur-Oise aisle



Saint-Leu-d'Esserent nave



Chartres south doorway



Chartres south doorway



Braine choir triforium



Chartres nave aisle



Reims nave aisle

1210s



Champeaux nave

1220s



Saint-Jean-au-Bois nave

1230s



Provins, Sainte-Croix aisle

1240s



Taverny nave



Ferrières-en-Brie nave aisle



Amiens chapel dado



Gonesse nave triforium



Reims choir base



Chartres north porch



Gonesse nave aisle



Paris, St-Jean-le-Pauvre nave

elements that produced a sense of greater surface excitement.

40s: The gap is elongated and the width is exaggerated so it becomes more like an open triangular space that is quite pointed at the bottom. Sometimes, especially in sprigs, the gash has the shape of a drip that is narrow at the top and opens out into a lovely curve.



Saint-Jean-au-Bois nave



La Sainte-Chapelle



Châlons cathedral nave



Paris, Notre-Dame portal



Chartres south doorway



Chartres choir aisle

Variety (above, not by decade)

The 80s was a deeply creative time when carvers were experimenting in many personal ways to display new arrangements. The foliage is somewhat abstracted and forms may be repetitive, yet there is great variety in design and placement. As often happens when new ideas are afoot, a thousand flowers bloomed. Thirty years later there would be less individuality as conformable fashion took over.

90s: Forms are more varied and slightly more realistic as carvers begin to seek the diversity and accept the intricacy of nature.

00s: Real foliage as we would see it in the fields has arrived. All at once oak, acanthus, maple and, most popular of all, vines with grapes are employed. Symmetry is still important.

10s to 40s: Over these four decades there was a continuing trend towards separation, plasticity and confidence. Carvers employed even more varieties.

1170s



Beaumont-sur-Oise aisle

1180s



Chamigny-sur-Marne

1190s



Sens west tower chapel

1200s



Brie-Comte-Robert nave



Braine choir triforium



Soissons south transept



Chartres choir aisle



Lagny choir piscine



Châlons cathedral nave



Chartres south doorway



Taverny nave aisle



Villenaux-la-Grande apse

Foliate corners (below)

It was common in the 70s, and occasionally in the 80s and 90s, for a leaf to replace the crocket. After 1200 the corner crocket, the staple of most capitals, was often replaced by the leaf. These leaves are large, and turn up and over the edge of the astragal as if cupping the corner in a large hand. It created a movement that opened up and spread sideways. Seen from the corner the effect is often

assertive, even imperious. The bulging upper form naturally emphasises the top half of the platen.

Corner foliage is often carved as a sprig of leaves with petals on either side of a common stalk. This idea first appeared in the centre of the cone during the 90s, and was applied under crockets only after 1210 with less attention to symmetry. At first petals would be placed on opposite sides of the branch, while later they were placed irregularly, as in nature. See the variations on the following pages.

1210s



Chapelle-sur-Crécy triforium

1220s



Brie-Comte-Robert triforium

1230s



Villeneuve-le-Comte

1240s



La Sainte-Chapelle



Servon apse



Soissons nave aisle



Mantes west gallery



La Sainte-Chapelle

Giant leaves (upper two rows)

The first capitals covered with enormous leaves that we can date are those in the choir aisles at Chartres from the later 1200s. There are precursors in earlier water-leaf capitals, and to some extent the idea is implied in large leaves that occupy only part of the surface, as in the Soissons ambulatory.

By the 1220s the concept was flourishing. These huge leaves spread their singular form from abacus to astragal. They became immensely popular in the smaller churches of the Paris region during the next three decades, while remaining rare in the northeast.

Gigantism spread across the surface of the cone with an opulent confidence that pulses with energy. These leaves are in stark contrast to the delicate and restrained foliage of twenty years earlier.

The veins have been eliminated, surfaces were simplified and made as large as possible. Petals have deeply scooped centres with one channel-like rib up the middle as the only decoration.

The way the curves are handled suggests that the loveliness of the shape was its own justification. The effect is a combination of fullness and austerity.



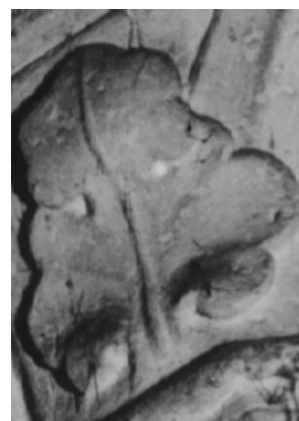
Ambleny nave



Mantes gallery



Soissons ambulatory



Chartres transept aisle

Separation from the cone

After 1200 there is a strengthening desire to free the leaf from its structural metaphor. Where leaves had clung to the surface, they gradually developed the strength to stand in their own right.

The first step was to belly the upper lobe outwards, or to stretch the tips beyond the abacus so the foliage leaned toward the viewer. Gradually the solid section between the outward-leaning leaf and the cone was cut away until there remained

only the most tenuous connection between the cone and the leaf.

This occurred more readily in realistic foliage where, by 1240, deep back-chiselling, extra thinning of the edges and complete rounding of the branches was common nearly everywhere.

Taken together, the degree of bulging, undercutting, simplifying, scooping and stretching are important indicators of the decade.

1170s



Canterbury choir triforium

1180s



Noyon nave aisle

1190s



Chartres choir aisle

1200s



Dourdan triforium



Mareuil-sur-Ourcq



Créteil choir aisle



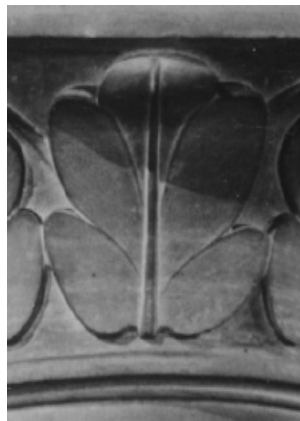
Cambronne choir aisle



Pevy apse



Arceuil nave aisle



Créteil choir aisle



Villenau-la-Grande



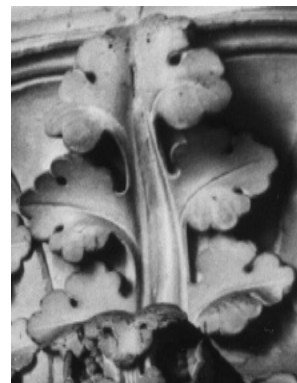
Chapelle-sur-Crécy aisle



Puiseaux nave



Saint-Gobain choir dado



Reims nave aisle



La Sainte-Chapelle

1210s

1220s

1230s

1240s



Chartres south doorway



Noisy-le-Grand nave



Reims chapel dado



Fontenay-en-Parisis choir



Saint-Leu-d'Esserent apse

1170s



Canterbury gallery

1180s



Chartres choir aisle

1190s



Chartres north porch

1200s

Branches and realism

There are no realistic branches before the 90s, though stalks will often thicken at the bottom or spread like a tent. When first used they are unnaturally thick and edges may be emphasised with grooves. They do not cross one another nor do they join, save in rare crude examples. Vines are almost never pruned.

Prior to 1200 sprigs would have identical petals on each side of the rib. Afterwards they may be graded along the leaf with the larger towards the bottom and the smaller at the top.

Afterwards, berries grow out of a stalk rather than being stuck onto the surface. Branches are pruned, and the little amputations play a major role in the design. They curl in grand loops and will increasingly cross over. Stalks are faceted, and through twisting a life-like tension is established.

These details are quite crude at first, but in time lead to the extraordinary diversity of Reims. Clearly men were now actually entering the fields, picking up plants and laying them on the workbench in front of them. After 1230, except in realistic foliage, branches are seldom used.

Fully realistic foliage was first used in 1200 and runs parallel to the more common stylised forms. There are three stages: a tentative beginning for the first 20 years, variety and experiment over the next two decades followed by an exultant confidence. There was a gradual process of change as new species were introduced and old ones depicted in more sophisticated ways.

After 1200 the pruning of vine branches was universal. Crude facets appear on branches from 1200, and with increasing sophistication after 1210. By 1220 they refined the branch to show the local thickening that reinforces the junction with the main stem, and with little buds pushing between



Laon cloister



Chartres north porch

branch and stalk ready for next year's growth.

There is a marked change in certain items around 1220. Before, most leaves came from a template. Later, each leaf was carved to its own pattern, at times damaged by wind or hail. Earlier, leaves are integral with the capital and rest firmly on it, though parts may lean forward or bulge out. Later, the foliage was severed from the cone through deep undercutting.

Leaves may overlap more completely and three-dimensionality increases though the 20s and 30s. Leaves twist so they present an edge rather than a face to the observer. By the 40s they have sharp projecting corners that direct the eye outwards.

In the 30s both leaves and branches are separated from the cone, and by the 40s leaves had become so independent they would at times be at right angles to the plane of the cone. Simultaneously leaves overlap more and spring apart as they do so.

In later years there was a certain tendency to gather leaves into thick bunches to produce a clotting effect, as shown in the west porch foliage at Reims. The more true the sculptor remained to nature the more difficult it is to date their work.



Chartres nave aisle

1210s



Chartres south doorway

1220s



Essômes nave aisle

1230s

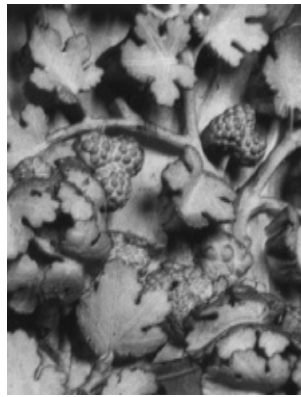


La Sainte-Chapelle

1240s



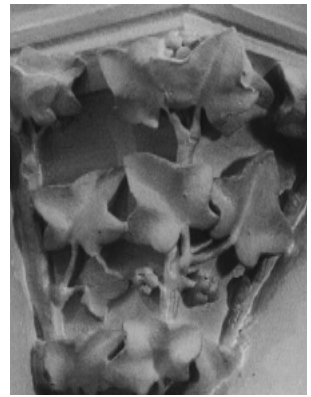
Chartres south doorway



Reims nave aisle



Reims chapel dado



Maison-Alfort nave



Chartres north doorway



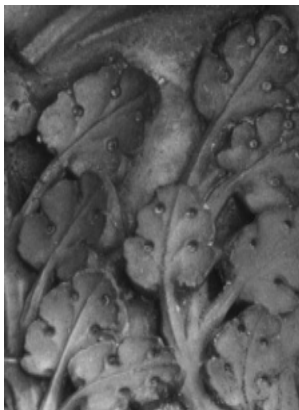
Reims north doorway



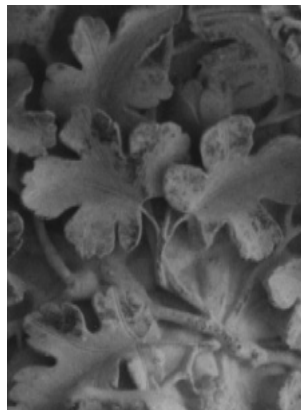
Reims north doorway



Reims west porch after 1250



Chartres north doorway



Reims north doorway



Reims nave aisle



La Sainte-Chapelle



Braine choir triforium

1170s

Braine choir clerestory

1180s

Puiseux choir aisle

1190s

Brie-Comte-Robert aisle

1200s

Soissons south aisle



Senlis, Saint-Frambourg



Moret-sur-Loing aisle



Chaalis refectory

Crocket platens (upper two rows)

From 1220 platens and buds are the best tools for establishing the chronology as the foliage on the cone often returned to earlier modes.

Before this the platen is usually formed of four to seven ribs starting immediately above the astragal and finishing underneath the bud, though they may meet at a point where the bud has been omitted. They normally change little, are utilitarian with little depth and clearly support the corners of the impost.

The charming re-entrant curves at the base of the platen (upper row) that return to meet a wide stalk were used at any time, though after 1230 the curves developed larger projections at the bottom.

From the 1210s some platens became sprigs with leaves coming off each side, usually on twin stalks that are set wider apart in the later years. In capable hands this is a very sophisticated device.

Rare before the 30s, but common afterwards, the stalk is divided to form an inverted 'v', with sharpened edges that bifurcate the platen. In the 40s the platen becomes somewhat metallic and is smoothed into separate panels.

Buds (pages 32 to 34)

Before 1220 buds on the ends of crockets were usually carved with a central leaf that covered a pair of lateral leaves.

No matter how complex the design, all is contained within a spherical or almost spherical shape so that no leaf projects further than another.

Buds may be reduced to a round knob or two leaves separated by a drill hole, especially in the north-east where buds are smaller than in the west and south.

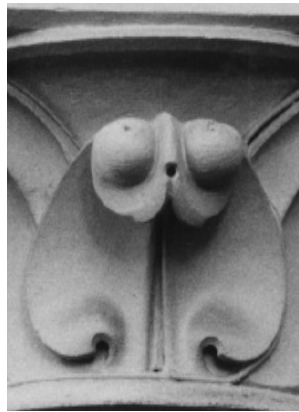
Whatever the combination of leaves or berries used to construct the buds, all remain contained within the sphere (►►c). No leaf seeks disengagement from the ball, but tightly holds the contents. The berries that often lie within the ball may peek out, but they do not migrate. Even in the most extravagant situations the berries are fully cradled.

Unlike nearly every formal capital before 1170, buds now project beyond edge of the abacus. Where earlier capitals without these projections could be carved from a block cut exactly the size of the impost, the setting out is now more complex as the upper corners of the stone have to be larger than



Boissy-l'Allerie

1210s



Maison-Alfort nave

1220s



Puisieux nave aisle

1230s



Amiens chapel dado

1240s



Vallangoujard nave



Vaudoy-en-Brie chapel



Soissons nave triforium



Nogent-les-Vierges

the abacus or the impost over it.

Some are wondrously creative, especially during the 80s and 90s when extremely complex designs were created through the assembly of very simple forms. The buds are fairly tightly packed within a spherical shape (c,d). The three leaves and stalks that frame it are nearly always symmetrical and usually encase berries. The upper leaf turns over the flanking pair, and is only lightly articulated.

They open slightly to reveal the berries within, waiting to burst out. They are growth in potential. The inturning edges to the encircling leaves hold the bud tranquil, yet their concavity suggests parturition. The contrapuntal energy of these two elements produces the tension of immanent release.

In the upper (c) follow the way the petals of the leaf have been eased around the curve of the platen and gradually reduced as the space narrows. In the lower examine the corkscrewing of the leaves around the end of the bud, and how cleverly the various layers add to the mystery of the whole. The berries are allowed to peep out to echo their curves in the adjacent foliage.

After 1220 great changes occurred that altered



Saint-Leu-d'Esserent ambulatory



Saint-Leu-d'Esserent ambulatory



Laon south dado

1170s

Soissons south aisle

1180s

Créteil crypt

1190s

Chartres nave

1200s

Soissons south transept



Sens nave triforium



Beaumont-sur-Oise aisle



Mantes west clerestory



Canterbury aisle triforium



Canterbury choir gallery



Brie-Comte-Robert nave



Paris west portals

the entire nature of the bud. The encasing foliage began a process of expanding laterally beyond the sphere into a horizontal ellipse. Even where leaves may appear to come from an earlier decade the widened bud nearly always indicates the 20s or later.

In the 30s the foliage widened further in two ways. Either 'eyes' were formed that stare as if allowing something within to escape, or the leaves break out on each side to display an empty space within the bud. At times the centre is folded inwards with a deeply indented gutter-like groove. The trend is to thrust the lateral leaves outwards. For emphasis

these leaves are often pointed.

Buds were widened by adding bread-like rolls, or curled leaves that look like the staring eyes of a praying mantis. In others the bud appears to be pushed outwards from the cone by thinning the neck of the crocket and accentuating the bend in the middle. In these various ways the restful form of 1200 was exploded outwards to disintegrate the crocket's supportive function in the capital.

After 1230, as the bud was being accentuated, the other leaves on the capital, or those in adjacent and contemporary capitals, would often use foliage



Paris, Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre

1210s



Reims chapel

1220s



Saint-Denis choir

1230s



La Sainte-Chapelle

1240s



Reims chapel dado



Beauvais sanctuary



Reims choir aisle



Saint-Denis choir



Brie-Comte-Robert aisle



Amiens chapel dado



Essômes choir triforium



Nogent-les-Vierges



Reims, Saint-Jacques



Amiens chapel dado



Reims choir



Lagny choir aisle



Amiens choir aisle



Lagny chapel



Gonesse nave triforium



Nogent-les-Vierges



Saint-Denis choir aisle



Saint-Denis choir aisle

of an earlier mode (top left). The growing authority and thrustingness of the bud was thus tamed by the archaic simplicity in the adjacent leaves. With these it is only the attenuation of the platen and the out-thrusting bud that will fix the date.

In the 40s the disintegration of the sphere is complete as the leaves thrust themselves to each side with great energy. The width of the bud may be more than twice the height. The sharp tips impart an explosive vigour. The earlier function of supporting the vertical load from the corner of the impost is replaced by a horizontal outwards movement.

In some the leaves of the bud are like a full-stop and others look as if soft fruit had been hit by a hard object (centre). They are harbingers of the 50s.

Conclusion

After the 1240s foliage is represented in a new manner, with *'feuilles étroites et allongées, sans découpures, sans tige, s'appliquent contre les cor-beilles dans leur partie inférieure, puis s'en écartent, se bombent et ondulent dans un mouvement de vague.'* [Jalabert, 226] The foundation is still nature, but interpreted in a new way.

Individually few of the above items will, on their own, determine a date. The documented buildings show that in combination they will usually establish the decadic mode of individual capitals with some certainty. Generally, the more dateable capitals there are in a zone the more accurate the final assessment.

I hope that, by gathering together in the chapters that follow large numbers of capitals with similar carving styles from many buildings, their common manner may be, in itself, demonstrative proof of the chronology put forward here.