



André: Bourges south portal

1128

Distinguishing the Rinceau Carvers

A rinceau design has tendrils or vines or branches lying across the cone. From them, or lodged around or between are leaves and fronds, animals and heads [r1-3]. However these may be disposed, the vine will dominate either by holding the geometric structure or simply by the freedom of its meanders. There is a multitude of these capitals. I find that most were carved by a few identifiable men, though there are some I could not place with any man.

The purpose of this piece is to show how I separated the members of this group from one another. They have been extraordinarily difficult to analyse: Though cutting styles were personal they influenced each other and exchanged ideas and motifs. This has at times made it particularly hard to isolate the characteristics of a single man, and I was tempted to see them as a team and deal with them in a corporate way. However, this would have been a mistake, because I would have missed their individuality.

After spending some nine months with them I finally determined that the template was the most effective identifier for the master. This is obvious in the work of The SS Master, for example, for there were enough capitals with vines arranged in this manner to form a consistent dossier even though there were variations in the fronds and terminals between the tendrils [r4].

In architecture the template was the core of all aspects of design and all communication between the master mason and his men.¹ Medieval construction depended on geometry for site control, engineering expertise and accuracy. Every template was set out by geometry. From many studies of medieval buildings, including Chartres, and through the publications by the masters themselves in the fifteenth century, it is clear that without geometry there would have been no Architecture.²

The master masons were using sophisticated geometry at the end of the eleventh century, evidenced in the chapel for the Tower of London.³ This was well ahead of anything being used by carvers who were at that time only gradually learning how to use templates to lay out designs with the same rigour [v.3:17-]. In areas south of the Loire we find carvers using geometric exactitude of growing refinement from the 1080s, though this did not impact on the training of Paris Basin carvers until some decades later.⁴ By the later 1120s the level of skill found in the north matched anything from any other part of France.

The most important understanding that has come from the analysis of construction geometry in architecture has been the enormous variety of methods and that each method reflected the individuality of the master in charge.⁵ Wherever the building campaigns have been separated it has



Grégoire: Bourges south portal

1128



Héron: Le Mans south portal left jamb

1134



SS Master: Saint-Denis west portals

1132

been clear that each master mason had his own method, and made highly personal choices on how to set out the building and arrange its parts geometrically. There was no common way, little sharing of techniques save with apprentices, and virtually no advice left for an incoming builder from the one who had just left.⁶ Each builder was his own resource and made his own adaptations.

With that happening on every site, and with that attitude built into every job, is it any wonder that the carvers followed their masters in creating their own personal arrangements for the capitals?

Returning to the rinceau capitals, at least two dozen men were responsible for most of them. Some were senior masters and some were associates and some would have been apprentices. This is a large and complex body of men. In order to explain how I have been able to distinguish between them I have selected the more important [r1]. I have chosen names to identify these men as names are more memorable and certainly less confusing than, say, L5d. Some names will reflect an aspect of the design, such as Gripple and Héron.

Before venturing on the analysis I need to explain a few things as there are many factors that have made clear stylistic identification difficult. The complexity has been profoundly daunting. For a long time I believed the rinceau capitals were the work of one man, but later, with more visits and better photography, I felt they could have been the work of a team under the leadership of one man and I felt it would be easier to treat them as a team and deal with them in a corporate way. Thankfully I did not do that, but persevered.

I then theorised that the leading members could be identified from the feel of the workmanship as well as the layouts. As the attributions grew it showed a team may have worked together in the south of France and then stayed together for some fifteen years. Yet the coherence of this simple statement quickly broke down, for one went off to Spain at the same time as another wandered through Normandy, and traces of this group appear as far apart as Burgundy and England until they met up again in the Paris area, perhaps by arrangement, perhaps by accident.

That is when I threw out the single team concept and the super master concept, and began looking more closely at the arrangement as well as the detailing. The more I looked the more rigorous my observations became. Once liberated from these prior conceptions it was obvious that I was dealing with a large number of skilled individuals who had not always identified themselves with the clarity I would have liked. I have done my best to bring order to this situation, and beg your indulgence if some of the attributions seem less convincing than the others.

I first divided the capitals into design groups, listed them all on excel sheets, and noted the characteristics of each in columns. These I sorted, put their photographs and details into InDesign, glared at them until my eyes were glazed, and then often threw them out and started again.

Gradually patterns emerged. Some were easy, such as the SS Master in 'ICMA resource 02', and these capitals could be shunted onto a separate sheet. Some were tentative but still discernible, such as Gripple and The Duke. It was at this stage that the real difficulties began to emerge. The Duke had a number of ways of working, as can be seen on the four sides of the cloister capital at the Nasher Museum [r2,3]. Variations of details within the form of the template did complicate things a little.

Collecting all examples of this pattern I noted enough aesthetic and craft differences to show there was more than carver at work, which gave me The Duchess. Though they were often together, they were as often

Preliminary lineage chart of the rinceau masters, associates and pupils. No attempt has been made to separate apprentices from masters.

Gripple (1090-1139)
 Son of Gripple (1140-1172)
 Long-Leaf (1093-1144)
 Héron (1093-1139)
 André (1113-1157)
 Apple-I (1085-1133)
 Apple-II (1093-1145)
 Apple-III (1095-1145)
 Apple-3 (1104-1133)
 Apple-4 (1100-1141)
 Apple-5 (1102-1144)
 The Old Duke (1080-1102)
 The Duke (1098-1153)
 The Duchess + 2 others (1093-1143)
 Spirex (1080-1118)
 Félix + (1115-1146)
 Spireau (1138-1167)
 Grégoire (1122-1168)
 Pointer (1150s)
 Master ?
 Jérôme + Jeremy (1116-1150)
 SS Master (1097-1143)
 Son of SS Master (1150-1169)
 Winger (1089-1165)
 Willow (1098-1160)



The Duke: Nasher Museum, corner A 1121



The Duke: Nasher Museum, corner C 1121

apart [b1,2].

The longevity of both men concerned me, and I looked for the possibility that they may have been trained under an earlier master and, on completing their apprenticeship, went their separate ways. This earlier master I called the Old Duke, and once I understood his way of carving I was able to follow him into apparent retirement in the monastery of Morienvall.

The next problem came when I tried to assemble a team out of four superb carvers: Grégoire, Héron, André and Félix. These men did work together on occasions, but trying to gather them into one team only increased the confusion. Only by seeing the obvious that was staring me in the face did I recognise that throughout this period teams of carvers moving as a gang were the exception rather than the rule.

Once I had disentangled these men and let them run independently, it all began to fall together. This may not have been true for ordinary masons, but those with the skill to carve a capital would seem to have been solo itinerants. The concept of being contractors that I applied to the large teams that constructed the great buildings did not apply here.

I had had an inkling of this at Chartres where, in a limited way, the carvers in the transept portals were only spasmodically attached to particular masters.⁷ But for this period, three generations earlier, I have not been able to find any permanent linkage between the skilled men who moved from place to place seeking whatever work was available. I will be discussing the documentary confirmation for this in chapter 4 of vol. 6.

Now we can return to disentangling these carvers. It has taken me more than twelve months of careful comparison to understand how to look at them and to recognise what makes each unique. Most of these have now been written up and will be presented on this site as they are completed. I will do my best to extract the essential qualities of each man and to demonstrate the bones of their differences.

When examined from the corner they do look rather similar, so I will be showing them this way when I can to emphasise that though we could easily believe they had been carved under the direction of one person their differences are noticeable.

The first are the Green Men, a group of five masons who have foliage growing out of a head. The most important being The Duke and his Duchess and includes their teacher, the Old Duke, and a couple of associates.

The differences between The Duke and The Duchess are quite subtle, I gather because they worked together from time to time [b1,2]. The major difference lies in the organisation of the tendrils. In the Duke they fly sideways from the mouth and return to meet at the bottom centre, and the spaces between the vines are entirely filled with leaves. The Duchess dropped them vertically before spreading sideways at the astragal, and the foliage is thinner with more space between the fronds.



The Duke: Saint-Denis ambulatory (a) 1142



Duke template



Duchess template



The Duchess: Saint-Denis crypt (u) 1140

The tendrils of the Old Duke also fly down and out, as in Nointel [b1]. There is another much smaller group in which they are set sideways out of the mouth as in Oulchy, and a third in the later 1160s where the vines were twisted, as at Hautvesne [b2,3].



Nointel west door

1115



Oulchy-le-Château crossing

1152



Hautvesne apse

Among the many smaller differences, The Duke used collars to bind tendrils together while The Duchess was more sparing [b1]. Though the leaves are somewhat similar, The Duke's are larger and longer, and arranged more densely leaving less of the basket visible [b2]. Though different, I was not able to rely on them for identification. It is possible that both could have been by the same man with two ways of arranging the structure, and I would be content if this were so, though this would have given The Duke the largest collection of capitals of anyone.

I would explain the vagaries in the fronds from my impression that these men had been colleagues for some time and that they had worked in professional harmony while preserving their personal preferences.



The Duke: Saint-Denis ambulatory (a)

1142



The Duchess: Saint-Denis crypt (u)

1140

Heads were seldom a source of identification. A head was a head no matter who carved it. Some are fuller, some have different hair styles and some flatten the noses as in the four-sided capital in the Nasher Museum. When you look over a number you find that few are the same, even among those that can be attributed to one carver. The two undamaged heads are evidence for that [b1,2]. Though they are less plastic than The Duchess [b3], I could not identify by the heads, for they vary as much by date as by location. I was left with the laying-out geometry of the vines.



The Duke: Nasher Museum

1121



The Duke: Nasher Museum

1121



The Duchess: Boissy-Fresnoy crossing

1134

Though Félix used a similar tendril arrangement to The Duchess, there is no confusing them [r1]. Félix loved well-articulated spirals and wrapped them within the spaces with lots of movement whereas The Duchess formed the tendrils on the face of the block into hearts and such-like designs [r2]. Félix's fronds are stubbier, the head is more finely detailed (though badly worn), and in a characteristic detail the bird's tail morphs into the vine.

Do not be misled by the decorative finishes, for all capitals show that patterns vary from job to job even within the work of the most consistent carvers [v.6:laon**]. Minute repetitive patterning was usually part of the skills training given to apprentices, and the time allocated for such niceties may have depended on many factors.

There is another group with full-height symmetrical tendrils. In the work of the SS Master and Long-Leaf the axes for the hanging bouquets were placed on the corners. They almost never used heads under the corners of the block. The branches do not cross one another, but are tied by collars and carry bouquets where they meet [b1,2]. Both placed the major bouquet under the corner where its bulk could be used to 'carry' the edge of the capital. The leaves in the former do not overlap, but fit within the vine, while in the latter they are long and thin, crossing over the vines. There are additional little fronds lying along the vines that add further richness. Where one master has tightly organised spaces, the other has let his lie loose and floppy.



Félix: Bourges south porch

1128



The Duchess



Félix template



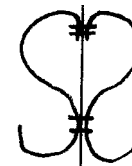
SS Master: Senlis royal castle chapel

1137

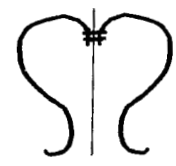


Long-Leaf: Auvers-sur-Oise apse

1116



SS Master's template



Long-Leaf template



Son of SS: Saint-Germer-de-Fly W(g)

1154

The most obvious differences between them lie in the tightness or looseness of the foliage and in the number of collars. There are up to three locations in the SS Master and rarely more than one in Long-leaf.

The forms of the fronds differ, and each man decorated the tendrils in different ways. Altogether the SS arrangement was more rigorously organised whereas the apparently casual qualities of the other are in fact tightly controlled, though they lead to a more festive affect.

Most capitals from this second group were carved before 1147, with the exception of one man who used the SS Master's template from the mid-1150s into the 60s [r4]. There was a break of some ten years during which time nothing was carved by either of them.

I called him Son of SS and believe he may have been a pupil. The Son used the earlier man's templates and similar foliage, but with little variation. He was a competent but artistically stodgy carver, very different from the considerable creativity shown by his mentor. As there were few developments over time, his work has not been much help in dating.

The André template is like SS [r5]. The differences lie in the proportions in the curves of the tendrils, the use of sprays above the



André's template

upper collar instead of continuing the tendril, and the type of foliage. The central bouquet at the bottom is split and has six fronds where the others used three or five [r1].

In this group it is not the template that distinguishes the men, but the handling of the proportions of the template itself and the detailing of the foliage. When placed alongside each other the sculptural qualities are markedly different. It is possible that all three carvers came from the same school, though the earliest work by André being some fifteen years after the earliest by The SS Master suggests an alternative scenario.

Gripple used a similar arrangement, and also centred the vines on the corner [b1]. When compared with Long-Leaf the Gripple fronds are more concise and the side tendrils grow out of the main stem from a socket. Long-Leaf preferred to enrich his design with extra fronds, whereas Gripple added tendrils and set the base onto the astragal with a short trunk (arrow).

A pupil of Gripple, maybe another son, worked only from the mid-1150s and adapted his father's template to new times [b2]. They have the same hanging fronds, collars and long folded leaves with the same spatial sense and deep undercutting. Though the layout is similar, the edges of the elements are sharper and more assertive. These two 'children' illustrate what happened to the master's designs when pupils took over from their teachers and adapted the team's templates to their own ideas.



André: Chars WN4nw(a)

1142



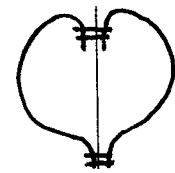
Gripple: Bruyères-sur-Oise

1120



Son of Gripple: Senlis aisles

1157

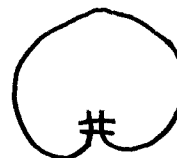


Gripple template

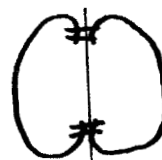


Héron: Saint-Martin-des-Champs

1130



Héron template



Apple II template

Héron, on the other hand, placed his vine on the face of the block leaving an uncomfortably small support for the upper corner, marked with an arrow [r3]. He too used collars and flattish leaves, and a particularly long frond that grew wider towards the tips that turned over the edge of the tendril. These fronds pass under the vine and turn back over once on the other side. Unlike some by Gripple and his Son, the tips do not grip the tendril, but rest over it. This heron-like leaf is characteristic.

The detailing is often confusing, as for example, in comparing Héron with Son of Gripple. The turned-back tips finishing in little balls, the paired double fronds that meet under the tendrils and the simple strands on the collars are similar. On the other hand the surfaces of the fronds differ, as do the way they separate from the vine. The tiny paired fronds at the top in Héron have no connections with the Son. After much of this sort of analysis I came back to the template as the most effective way to identify these men.

The Apple template was used by at least five men. The arrangements are similar to Gripple's, but with a simpler pair of curved Cs with a bouquet filling the central space [r5]. This group of over thirty capitals by Apple

II used a long hanging central frond and like Gripple and Long-Leaf, and unlike The Duke group, had no leaves rising out of the lower ends of the vines [r1]. Gripple and the SS Master both liked to undercut the fronds, whereas many of the others avoided undercutting even where they cut deeply. Once again the inconsistencies that came through comparing details were complicated and not as rewarding as comparing templates.

I have placed less reliance on workmanship because many apprentices and assistants would seem to have been involved on the detailing.

There are three exceptional carvers who used rinceau templates: Félix has already been mentioned, and the others are Willow and Grégoire. None follow any one pattern for the tendrils, though they would at times use heads and would often intersperse their tendrils with figures and animals. Willow turned up first in the Saint-Loup-de-Naud porch, and shortly afterwards in the Sens dado as a very skilled carver [r2]. His tendrils are the most freely organised of them all, his animals are exquisite, and there is a quirky individuality about his best work.

Grégoire used spirals like André, with hanging central fronds like Gripple and highly complex leaves like Félix. There is no mistaking his layouts which are much freer and, in his later work, more coherently designed and less template-driven [r3].

As we shall see in the studies for each man, these three carvers were too individual to be members of permanent teams, but turned up wherever interesting work was to be found. I have found their carvings as far afield as England, Burgundy, Lombardy and southern France.

I have set out the different templates in a single illustration [b]. They are in a slightly different order to the above discussion in order to clarify their characteristics. The templates reflect the core designs of each man. Under each I have listed whether the template was placed on the corner or on the face of the block, and certain key aspects of the details, being the location of the bouquets and the type of foliage.



Apple: Louvres, Saint-Justin

1132



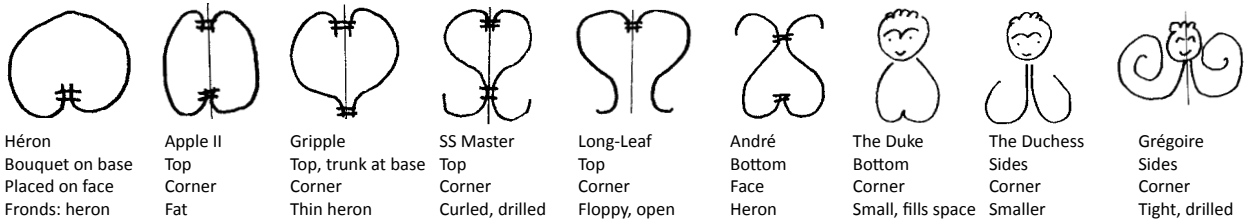
Willow: Sens ambulatory dado An1(d)

1130



Grégoire: Toulouse, La Daurade cloister

1125



This has shown that consistent attributions can be made using primarily the template used for the vines, and its placement on the corner or on the face. The details of foliate chiselling and so on has had less impact on my process than whether the layout was sparse or dense, or the leaves long or short. There has also been the overall ‘feel’ of the work, which offered a more heart-felt than intellectual understanding, and which is almost impossible to describe.

After all, if the minor decoration was done by apprentices spending long days repeating the same little bumps and grooves again and again, they could also have been employed to finish the fronds. This may explain why the general forms of the foliage are consistent for each master, but not always the finer detailing.

Another factor that has made identification difficult is that the masters influenced each other. They shared ideas and motifs which they incorporated

into the forms derived from their own templates. As the composition of the teams fluctuated, so did the detailing. I have already analysed this process for the Laon cathedral gallery and the western portals of Saint-Denis and Chartres [v.6:ch.10 and v.7:***]

Being in one team they shared details, such as the turned-up tips (Gripple and The SS Master) and the heron leaf (Gripple, Héron and André) and the central bract on a plate (Félix and The Duke).

On some sites the master had assistants who worked to his design. The carving of the south portal jambs at Bourges was led by Grégoire with the support of Félix and Héron, each of whom interpreted the Grégoire layout in their own way [r1]. As well each seems to have had at least one assistant [analysed in v.7:****]. There was a similar situation in the jambs of Le Mans and the drip moulds of Angers and Chartres.

There it was possible to separate the work of many men and their assistants because one template was repeated on a large number of stones. This depth of analysis could not be used where each man worked on his own.

You can see that the permutations and combinations of shared ideas is endless, and may help to explain why people have shied away from this level of research. Though what follows is pretty wild, the evidence is too interesting to leave out. There are eight occasions during more than fifteen years when a group of major carvers in the rinceau manner worked together, as set out in the chart [b]. This happened too often for it to have been merely accidental, and suggests that these six or seven leading men may have formed a team. I have no idea at this moment whether there was a hierarchy or whether they were equal.

They were Félix, Grégoire, Gripple, Héron, Jérôme, Willow and The SS



Bourges south portal right jamb

1128

	Duke	Duchess	Andre	Felix	Gregoire	Gripple	Heron	Jerome	SS, son	Willow	
1104 Bury 01						g				pp	1104
1108 Etampes ND 02			A	f			H				1108
1109 Bury 02						g	H				1109
1113 Poissy 01		Ds	A			g	H				1113
1115 Saint-Leu-d'Esserent 02		Ds		f		g					1115
1123 Beauvais, Saint-Etienne 03				f	G				SS		1123
1125 Saint-Loup 01			A	f				J		W	1125
1126 Saint-Martin-des-Champs 01				f	G	g		J			1126
1126 Saint-Martin-des-Champs 02			A		G		H		SS		1126
1127 Sacra di San Michele				f	G	g	H				1127
1129 Bourges 02				f	G	g	H		SS		1129
1129 Til-chatel 01		Ds		f				J		W	1129
1130 Sens 01		Ds		f				J		W	1130
1130 Saint-Martin-des-Champs 03		Ds		f		g	H	J	SS		1130
1131 Saint-Martin-des-Champs 03a		Ds				g					1131
1132 Saint-Denis 01			A	f	G		H	J	SS	W	1132
1133 Saint-Denis 16			A					J	SS	W	1133
1134 Angers cathedral 02				f	G		H				1134
1134 Mans, le 02			A	f					SS		1134
1137 Ferte-Alais 01			A				H	J		W	1137
1139 Chartres 05b		Ds	A	f	G	g	H	J	SS	W	1139
1139 Chartres 05c		Ds			G						1139
1140 Saint-Denis 09		Ds							SS		1140
1141 Chartres 09f			A	f	G		H				
1142 Saint-Denis 10	D	Ds	A	f				J		W	1142
1144 Loches		Ds	A	f							1144
1145 Chalons ND 04		D	A	f				J			1145
1145 Chalons ND 06				f	G			J		W	1145
1153 Trie-Chateau			A	f					ss		1153

Chart showing those campaigns in pink where the group of rinceau-style carvers would often work together between 1126 and 1139.

Master. Jérôme has not been included in this discussion because he did not use rinceau patterns [r1]. Willow and the Duchess blended into the team from time to time, and André also.

The earliest time I can connect three of them was on the north door at Saint-Etienne in Beauvais. The other major places where the group worked together are, in chronological order, Saint-Martin-des-Champs dado and parts of the external walls, a journey to the south that included the Sacra di San Michele. That was followed by the Bourges south porch on their way back, after which Félix, Jérôme, Willow and The Duchess split off to Sens and Til-Châtel around 1130, and then the team met up again on the Saint-Martin aisles followed by the Saint-Denis west portal. A stint at Saint-Maurice d'Angers west portal and later the colonnettes and drip moulds of the Chartres west portal completed their time together.

They may also have been engaged to carve figure sculpture in Saint-Loup, Bourges, Saint-Denis, Angers and Chartres.

All these works have similar templates with exquisite finish and detailing. Taken together as a group of coworkers, the capitals of the rinceau carvers are distinctive, and the choice of foliage and the junctions between the branches were handled in similar ways. I cannot define their relationship any further than this, but just note their propinquity in many places.

Nevertheless these layouts do follow similar principles. Firstly, the branches are organised in circles and spirals with clear beginnings and ends. Secondly adjacent vines are secured with collars. Thirdly, secondary branches usually emerge from grooved sockets that cut across the direction of the spiral so that the movement along the primary branch is interrupted by the minor branch. Fourthly, many fronds are long and emerge from the branch like a trumpet, small at the join and extremely wide at the tips. I call this the heron-frond. Fifthly, buds may be inserted at the centre of the spiral or at the top of sprays. Sixthly, where there are figures of animals or humans they are either paired in symmetry across the axes or individually arranged and entwined into the vines.

This picture could become more complicated as many masters would have had apprentices, perhaps more than one, who in short time became skilled masters in their own right, whereas some would have developed personal styles within the group manner and remained imbued with the approach of their superiors all their lives.

Being an apprentice meant spending many formative years being trained in the ideas of a master, and in repeating his methods again and again until the student was himself ready to be called a master. He would have helped block in and detail his master's work for so long that his student style may have differed little in essence from the manner in which he had been trained. This means that the apprentice was most likely in later life to follow the basic precepts and methodology of the man who trained him, and even were he to introduce his own preferences they would tend to lie within the spirit of his origins.

Thus the vines of this group could continue being used by three or more generations of carvers, as indeed they were by the later generation that worked in Laon and Noyon cathedrals. This brings us back to the importance of the structure of the design, which reflects the geometry underlying the template.

At this stage this is all I have to say about these men, but I hope that a lot will become clearer as I proceed to finalise their identifications over the coming months.

26 November 2010.



Jérôme: Saint-Denis ambulatory An1Cm(a+) 1143

1. Shelby, 1971, 1976, 1979; James, 1979-81, 1989; Wu, 2002.
2. Shelby 1977, 1979; James 1979; Johnson, 1989; Levy 1964; Müller, 1990.
3. James, 1982.
4. v.3:****; Neagley, 1988, 1992.
5. James, 2007, 345-49, Vergnolle, 2000, ch. 2.
6. James, 1979-81, 545 and adjacent text.
7. James, 1989, ch. 16.