

ICMA Master Carvers Series

A resource for discussion and information.

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16 The Old Duke (1080-1108)

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The capitals discussed here may be examined in larger format in vols. 3-5 of *The Ark of God*, and when completed and updated these studies will be published in volume 7.

This is number 16 of an on-going series describing Early Gothic carving masters for discussion and comments

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Morienval choir chapels

The Old Duke (1082-1108)

This is not the Duke, but another whose main body of work was carved before the Duke's earliest. The elements are similar, though the entire arrangement and detailing is primitive. He used heads in the upper corners, long tendrils emerging from the heads and simple fan-like fronds that for a while became almost recognisable as leaves.

Confusion would be very easy at this point, for there are four masters who fit this description. One I have already described is the Duke Master whose tendrils emerge from the sides of the mouth and loop under the head to meet underneath [b1]. I have also described Félix whose tendrils flow the opposite way to each side where they scroll and loop in complex ways [b3]. The third I have only mentioned so far, is the Duchess whose arrangements are like Félix yet different in handling and artistry [b2]. Their templates are drawn schematically underneath.



Nasher Museum, Duke University by The Duke



Poissy north aisle by The Duchess



Bourges south portal by Félix



Duke template



Duchess template



Félix template



Old Duke template

The Old Duke is like both the last two. The Old Duke was more than a decade older than the Duchess, who was another ten years older than either the Duke or Félix. I sense that he may have trained the Duke and his Duchess, and that when he retired they continued to expand on and develop the manner he had taught them.

Phase 1 is, as with all these studies, necessarily uncertain. Working backwards to the original means looking for the immature man, heavily influenced by his teachers, and full of awkward attempts to create his own method. Also, there were few skilled mentors in the 1080s, so it was not easy for a young man to find the experienced and stimulating guidance that became common fifty years later.

1082

In these three buildings the vertical dropper out of the head lies along the full extent of the corner before turning upwards on each side. He experimented with different types of fronds, some small, some long, some like a fist, and different blocks in the corners from skull-like heads to spiral crockets.



Seraincourt crossing

1083



St-Vaast-de-Longmont chapel



St-Vaast-de-Longmont chapel



Bonneuil-en-Valois nave entry W.cR

1

1085

In Phase 2 the vertical tendrils opened outwards before swinging in arcs to each side [b]. Some have leaves filling the lateral spaces that were carved as slabs with grooved gaps between the lobes. Carving a groove along the lobe was a simple approach and was a stage in developing more realistic foliage after Berneuil. In the tower of Oulchy-le-Château he worked on both the lower two levels. The impostes and the decoration on the shafts are different, though the square arching is the same on both lower floors [r].



Oulchy-le-Château tower levels 1-3

1087



Oulchy-le-Château tower level 1



Oulchy-le-Château tower level 2

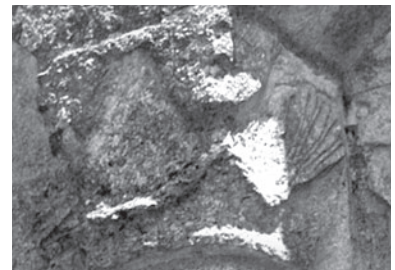
1088



Oulchy-le-Château tower level 2



Oulchy-le-Château tower level 2



Oulchy-le-Château tower level 2

1089

This phase continued on a larger capital in the nave of Berneuil-sur-Aisne. The design is the most complex so far, with collars, a crocket and a free wandering quality in the rincau. The leaves are cut just like those at Oulchy. He avoided any contact between the decoration and the astragal, so there is a gap between the two. As it was a big stone he had to devise a design that would fill the entire space in a satisfying way. He never had this opportunity again, all his other surviving work being on small stones.



Berneuil-sur-Aisne nave

IDIR AOF T

In Phase 3 the leaf was placed vertically and the lobes scooped, unlike earlier leaves. The vines often retain a little collar. Heads and scrolled crockets are interchangeable. The Retheuil tower is proportionately very like Oulchy, and the upper storey at Allonnes was not much taller [b].

In one small four-sided capital at Saint-Vaast-de-Longmont the members are more flexible, and the leaf seems to have been replaced by a looped vine emerging from the ears of the corner head [b1].

At Montlevon [b+1] he was in the company of the Comet Master who carved some very complex capitals at the same time [b+2]. One wonders at their way of thinking when a skilled carver would allow a man with a much simpler approach to execute such a rudimentary design. In our view this would be downgrading the quality of the whole nave, but apparently not in theirs. They do not seem to have cared about the mis-matching in style and quality. Or did the fact that the Old Duke was an older man influence their choices?



Saint-Vaast-de-Longmont tower (1)



Retheuil tower (2)



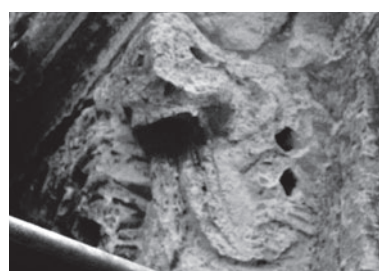
Retheuil tower (2)



Montlevon nave by the Old Duke



Montlevon nave by the Comet Master



Allonnes tower

In Phase 4 the leaves are wilder than Saint-Vaast, with something of the quality of Bannière. In one the tendrils have been doubled, and in another the leaves are balanced above and below the vine like dumbbells. The lower two levels of the Morienvall west tower were built shortly after the nave, which included work by the Comet Master around 1087 [b].

There is more decoration in the capitals of the third level than those below. I have already identified Rameau and Faceter in this upper storey; for them the date should be after the Crusade. Yet for the Old Duke I would have preferred a date in the 1090s. I hope this uncertainty will be resolved in time.



Morienvall west tower (3)



Morienvall west tower (3)



Morienvall west tower (3)

The capitals in the Morienvall choir have both heads and helmet-like corner blocks. From them vines descend before turning sideways and then upwards. Vines also emerge from where the ears would be in the manner of Félix or the Duke. The tendrils became more abstract in the clerestory [b3]. They all have collars. One has a bound pair of vertical stalks as was used in his earliest work [b1]. All three have lightly incised *énchanrés*, his first anywhere. Here in his mature work are the basic characteristics found in all earlier work.

Working at the level of both the aisle and the clerestory implies that he could have spent some years here. Maybe this is where he retired to, and as a skilled master, helped the monks contribute to the construction of the choir.

1104



Morienvall apse chapels (a)



Morienvall apse chapels (a)



Morienvall apse clerestory (c)

1106

Micheli states “there is nothing in Normandy or of this period that are *tributaire*” (74) and that Morienvall repeats work done three centuries earlier (81). She seems nonplussed, as I was at first, by the lack of connections between the Morienvall capitals and those at other sites. For some time I have suspected that many of these capitals have been replaced, most likely around 1700. Few have matches in any other church I have visited, yet they do have vague similarities to the more common types to be found elsewhere, as I have mentioned before.^{ICMA 05:6-8; 12:14; 14:23.}

My estimate at this moment is that most of the Morienvall ambulatory capitals are replacements, and that their designs were based on worn originals, most of which have contemporaries that can be found elsewhere. If this was so, we can understand why so many scholars have been searching fruitlessly for matches that do not exist. This would be why, in the case of the Old Duke, the designs look familiar but the detailing does not.

Much the same soft detailing is found in one capital in the window of the Auvers-sur-Oise north chapel where, sadly, the corner head was broken off [b1]. With it we should include the windows in the apse of Maule on the south side of the Seine River. In this phase the tendrils loop more and interconnect, and the whole arrangement is softer.

1107



Auvers-sur-Oise north chapel window



Maule apse window

1108

The Old Duke in date order

1082	Seraincourt	crossing
1083	Saint-Vaast-de-Longmont	chapels
1085	Bonneuil-en-Valois	west door
1087	Oulchy-le-Château	tower 1
1088	Oulchy-le-Château	tower 2
1090	Berneuil-sur-Aisne	nave (a)
1090	Saint-Vaast-de-Longmont	tower 1
1091	Retheuil	tower 2
1092	Montlevon	nave (a)
1093	Allonnes	tower
1103	Morienvall	west tower 3
1104	Morienvall	east chapels
1106	Morienvall	east (c)
1107	Auvers-sur-Oise	north chapel
1108	Maule	apse (aw)

This is a short piece because the Old Duke worked on only fifteen campaigns over some twenty-five years. As far as I can see, he employed one manner without using additional templates, and never attempted figurative sculpture. A very straightforward if unimaginative approach.