

# ICMA Master Carvers Series

These are drafts for vols. 6 and 7 of *The Ark of God*.

*A resource for discussion and information.*

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## 26 *The Nazaire group (1139-1175)*

### John James

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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 professionally edited these draft studies will be published in volumes 6 and 7.

*This is number 26 of an on-going series describing Early Gothic carving masters for discussion and comment*

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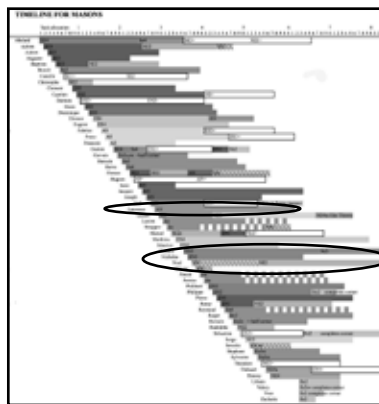


Laon gallery Ne4sw(g) by Nazaire

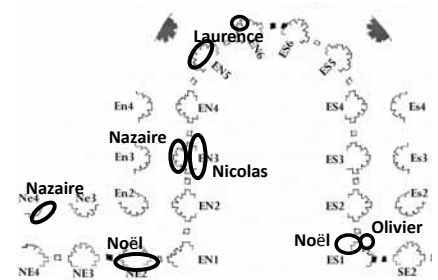
### *The Nazaire Group with Laurence, Nicolaus, Noël and Olivier*

There are five carvers in the Laon Gallery using the same layout, but each in their individual manner.

The relative time frame shows they were present during the middle section of the campaign [r] and the plan shows their locations. I have named this group after Nazaire as his capitals display the template in its simplest and purest form, with the least decoration or embellishment.



Location in space and time for these four carvers



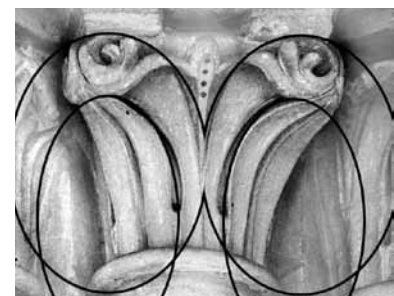
Location of the the Nazaire team's works

### *Nazaire (1139-1175)*

Nazaire worked on two piers. The first was on five capitals on the inside of the EN3 pier while Nicholas was carving the public ones on the outer side. Then afterwards he carved three capitals in the Ne4 corner, probably among the last to be carved. Altogether he spent 46 days on this work.

The beautiful sinuous designs of Nazaire reflect in their simplicity the template used by the others. The nine capitals in this group took 46 days to carve. The supporting masters may have been men who worked on other templates, such as Noël himself, and were therefore available to complete these, or transient carvers.

The tall plates have edges undercut in such a way that they look as if they could be peeled open. Though the ribbons may seem to lie behind the leaves, it was created from a two-dimensional geometry with what looks



Laon gallery, the Nazaire+Nicolaus template

like four parabolic curves rather than circles [r]. They could have been formed using lead rulers or soft timber of variable thickness. Inside the curves the leaves were scooped out and bent forward for greater plasticity.

They have tall pointed plates under the corners with ribbons alongside that extend into the terminals [b]. These turn down and back with long tips that merge into a central element, either a berry or a pair of fronds. The most complex in this group is EN3n with an additional central leaf [b2].



Laon gallery Ne4sw by Nazaire



Laon gallery EN3n by Nazaire

The leaves on the corners are not separate, yet seem peeled off from the corner plate. That corner would have normally supported the crocket, but has been edged open so the terminal is disengaged from its support. Indeed, it hangs on only by the tiniest tip.

The strap under the terminal lies parallel to the corner leaf. It supports, but only by implication as it is too thin to be reliable. With one exception there is no central leaf that would normally add ‘strength’, but instead the central motifs rock gently, attaching to the backward terminals with a gentle undulation that is more like a gentle wave than a thing of stone.

**Laurence**

Laurence carved five capitals over 32 days [r]. The terminals are similar to Nazaire, only the central element and the decoration of the corner leaves are different. The spines are decorated for emphasis, and this counteracts, in a sibtle way, the apparent structural wateriness of the other capitals.

The junctions are kept a similar distances above the astragal. The edges are square and deeply cut to the cone. The indents between the stalks above the astragal are not exceptionally deep.

**Nicolaus, who followed the Nazaire template**

Nicholas carved four capitals on the public side of EN3 over 27 days. He used the same template, but with less plasticity and more decoration. The corner plates are made to look like leaves, for they have repetitive lobes set along the edges with rounded tips, and are fairly flat in section. They also have leaves under the corners, but coarser with less detailing in the lobes. and smaller hanging terminals. The elements have less plasticity, though they scallop the leaves and form the spines and junctions in similar ways.

Two capitals in the triforium are easily recognised We would recognise the central terminal, the large leaf and the plain supports at the corners.

**Olivier**

Carved only one capital next to and on the inside of Noël’s on the south crossing pier [r]. This was the work of four days, and the only piece he carved. His template is a simplified version of Noël’s, more stringently organised than Nazaire’s, and with hanging terminals. The gap between the top of the corner plates and the ribbons expands towards the top.

Laurence	EN5ene EN5ne EN5nw EN5wnw EN6n	32
Nazaire	Ne4ssw Ne4sw Ne4wsw EN3ene EN3ne EN3n EN3nw EN3wnw	46
Nicolas	EN3ese EN3e EN3w EN3wsw	27
Noel	NE2nnw NE2n NE2s NE2ssw ES1e ES1ene	45
Olivier	ES1ese	4



Laon gallery En6n by Laurence



Laon gallery En3w(g) by Nicolaus



Laon triforium ES2c(t)



Laon gallery ES1n(g) by Olivier

*Noël*

Noël carved two public capitals on the east end of the ES1 corner pier, and then four more on the visible side of the NE2 pier. Altogether, he spent 45 days on these two groups [r].

The ribbons have been replaced by branchlets, each with five lobes. This decoration is repetitive with little adjustment in the size to compensate for height. The junctions along the bottom are set at different heights. The terminals hang down, formed from a single frond with five tips.

He seems to have also worked in the southern aisles under the gallery, which, from the tilt in the land, would have been the first part carved [b]. By the time he came to carve the wall pier in the later north transept he modified his design [b2]. This fell in with Nazaire and the others, mainly by making the corner leaf narrower like Nicolaus, and removing the lateral fronds. The corner leaf was still more complex and was simplified before he worked on the gallery.

His capitals are not like Laurence as they do not have central branches, and without an upper middle element his designs are unlike any of the others. In the tumbling terminals he is on his own.



Laon gallery ES1e by Noël



Laon aisle SE4(a)



Laon aisle Ne2se(a)



Laon aisle Ne2s(a) corner detail

*Reasons for not separating these two men*

I cannot separate the work of these three men, Nazaire, Laurence and Nicolaus. Nazaire's design is a foundation for the others, and like so many broadleaf arrangements that create the basis within and on which the details are set out. Until I understand more I have simply gathered them into one collection and arranged them chronologically. The ones that follow show all modes being displayed together in the same church, that emphasises that we seem to be dealing with a team template rather than an individual.

Acy-en-Multien illustrates the problem [b]. In one pier in the clerestory both variations appear on three adjacent capitals. The form belongs to this team, the detailing could have been by any of its members



Acy-en-Multien WN3sw(c)



Acy-en-Multien WN3s and se(c)

DRAFT

There are three others at Acy, all in the later apse [b]. They have been plastered over and the surfaces painted, effacing all the details. Being before the Crusade the forms are more solid than later, and slightly three-D.



Acy-en-Multien ES2n(a+)



Acy-en-Multien EN2s(a+)



Acy-en-Multien EN1(a+)

There are a couple in Oger, a small town south of Reims [b]. Three have the back-turned terminals of Laon, and one has just upward pointing tips. With both foliate and non-foliate fronds they could have been carved by anyone in the team. The split division between the crockets suggests the influence of Gamma that suggests a date close to Isse.



Oger apse window E-e(aw)



Oger S3ne

There are four in the Noisy-le-Grand apse [b]. Probably from the split, just after Laon, and being in the west, close in time to his work on Notre-Dame in Paris.



Noisy-le-Grand east EN1s(c)



Noisy-le-Grand east EN3(c)



Noisy-le-Grand east EN2(c)

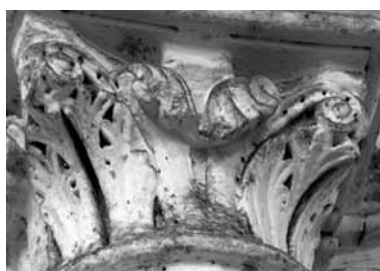


Noisy-le-Grand EN1n(c)

While in the area he worked on the magnificent clerestory at Saint-Germer-de-Fly [b]. This would have been built about the time he went to Laon for the gallery. One is in the manner of Nazaire, the other in that of the other two carvers. Nothing is gained by separating them.



Saint-Germer-de-Fly ES1(c)



Saint-Germer-de-Fly ES1n(c)

DRAFT

As the decade wore on they ‘both’ turn up again, back in the east, on the porch of Hermonville [b]. Though not easy to see in these photos, the one on the left has a plate under the crocket while the other has a leaf. The split between the crockets has all but been eliminated.

Thus we find both versions being carved in six campaigns spread across all the years of his working life. I concluded that they reflected variations by the one carver, though they could have been the work of two very closely aligned men who remained in a permanent working relationship for more than three decades.



Hermonville porch



Hermonville porch

**Other work by the Nazaire+Nicolaus group**

I will set these out in an approximate chronological sequence. Few require any comments, though some attributions may not be as obvious as others. Being a team approach the actual carving may have been the work of other individuals and their pupils. This is the full collection of similar designs from the entire Paris Basin. I will repeat one from each of the buildings already mentioned so you may follow the evolution of his style of detailing.



Aulnay-sous-Bois WS1s



Aulnay-sous-Bpis ES2



Acy-en-Multien WN3s and se(c)



Saint-Denis An3Ca(u)



Acy-en-Multien ES2n(a+)



Vernouillet ES3(a) replaced

**The Nazaire+Nicolaus campaigns**

1132	Aulnay-sous-Bois	east
1136	Acy-en-Multien	nave (c)
1140	Saint-Denis	choir (u)
1145	Acy-en-Multien	east
	<i>second crusade called</i>	
1154	Vernouillet	apse (a)
1155	Laon cathedral	choir (d)
1155	Orbais	choir (d)
1156	Chartres	WS tower (2)
1157	Etavingy	west portal
1158	Hermonville	nave (a)
1159	Saint-Germer-de-Fly	choir (c)
1159	Noisy-le-Grand	east
1160	Isse	east
1160	Oger	east
1161	Laon cathedral	choir (g)
1162	Morsain	apse
1163	Laon cathedral	choir (t)
1163	Nouvion	north chapel
1164	Paris, Notre-Dame	choir piers
1165	Gournay-en-Bray	choir N(a)
1166	Cuis-la-Motte	east
1166	Saint-Remi	choir (d)
1167	Hermonville	porch
1168	Saint-Remi	choir (a)
1169	Chars	nave (c)
1171	Grisy-les-Platres	apse, crossing (a)
1172	Saint-Denis	N-n phase II
1175	Noyon cathedral	choir (t)



Laon Es3(d)



Orbais dado

1



Chartres Ws-s(2)

1156



Etavigny west door



Hermonville WN1(a)



Noisy-le-Grand

1



Saint-Germer-de-Fly ES1(c)



Saint-Germer-de-Fly ES1n(c)



Isse ES3



Oger S3ne



Laon gallery Ne4SW by Nazaire



Laon gallery En3w by Nicolaus



Morsain apse

1



Morsain apse

1



Morsain apse

1



Laon triforium EN2(t)



Nouvion N-nR(aw)



Gournay EN2e(a)

DRAFT



Paris, Notre-Dame choir ES+5(a)



Cuis-la-Motte EN1s



Hermonville porch



Saint-Remi E(d)



Chars WN2sw(c)



Saint-Remi As2e(a)



Saint-Remi ES3(a)



Noyon choir triforium



Grisy-les-Platres AN2



Saint-Denis N-nL3

### *The ambulatory piers of Notre-Dame in Paris*

There is a curious situation in the capitals of the Notre-Dame choir that occurred during the 1160s building campaign. Unlike any other building, most of these capitals are made from an assembly of units that consist of a leaf or plate encased or framed by straps. It is especially in the corners that one is reminded of Nazaire where the tips of the plates push out to the extremity of the terminal, as they do in Laon [next page].

It is as if there had been a competition between carvers for an appropriate design and that Nazaire had won. Of 33 drum pier capitals, 27 have similar designs. It is extraordinary to find this, considering how varied the designs are in other large contemporary buildings, such as Senlis. In both the narthex and the choir of Saint-Denis, Chartres westworks, Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and indeed in any place where there were more than a dozen capitals there is so much variety there are seldom more than two or three carved in similar ways.

Notre-Dame is exceptional, though not the only one. For example, in





Paris, Notre-Dame choir ES+4(a)



Paris, Notre-Dame choir ES+4(a) detail

the aisles of Saint-Martin-des-Champs nearly every capital is a rinceau design. The instruction at Notre-Dame would seem to have been to carve stones in two or three layers decorated with rows of identical leaves or plates framed by large crockets. The Laon capitals illustrate the same layout [r].

These are among the largest capitals ever carved and posed serious problems in organization. Any instruction that would form an effective and appealing template would help, and one that gave a certain level of iteration would create in addition artistic unity.

There is enormous variety in the detailing, I hope enough to enable me later on to identify some of the carvers. In some capitals the alignment of the lower stone does not match the upper, so they were not correctly positioned when erected. In some the designs for the two layers do not match, and would therefore have been by different people.

Only six have leaves between the straps, while the rest have plates. Some of the plates are joined to those alongside them, and some are not. Only three are not joined at either the upper or lower layer, and none have leaves. In eight the fronds are joined in the upper zone but not in the lower, and nearly all of them have leaves rather than plates. Among those where the plates are joined in both layers, only three had plates decorated with lobes like a leaf. In seven the lower zones are joined and not the upper, and of these only one has leaves.

Some have three levels or horizontal zones, whereas most have two. Some are carved onto extremely large blocks so each layer was carved from a single piece of stone. In some there is no overlapping of elements, and a few are three dimensional. The terminals are unique in almost every instance.

Nearly every capital was, I believe, the work of a different carver. I have yet to adequately study this group and intend to analyse them in a similar way to the piece on the Laon gallery. For the moment I would suggest

1. Many wall capitals have the same detailing as those in the piers, and were therefore carved at the same time. Less than half were from 1145±.

2. As most of the capitals use the one format that utilises the same small collation of motifs, unity must have been imposed on the carvers by a senior person, either another carver, the master mason or the client.

3. The variety in the detailing suggests that seldom did any master carve more than one capital.

4. The most likely source of the design was the Nazaire group.



Laon gallery Ne4SW by Nazaire



Laon gallery En3w by Nicolaus