

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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22 *Strap-X (1086-1127)*

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 22 of an on-going series describing Early Gothic carving masters for discussion and comment

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Avrechy east

Strap-X (1086-1127)

One tangent leads to another, and in this case the men in the Laon gallery have required me to follow each separately. The Cog Masters have turned out to be a relatively easy journey, but Strapper has proved far more difficult. In assembling his work I have been led along a wild chase of one of the more popular genres, and was compelled to see that through to completion. It has involved a study of the earliest Strap capitals straddling either side of the First Crusade. To give this work justice I have had to separate it from the medley of other carvers who created straps before and after Laon.

There is a group with single threads that are crossed as an X between the astragal and the crockets. They give the impression of having been by one carver, but this could easily be mistaken. The earliest may be before 1096 and the First Crusade.

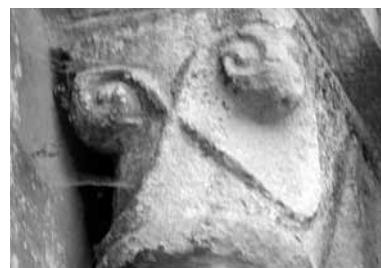
1086 Parnes, with one of the first rib vaults in the region, has thin thread-like straps that do not quite meet the astragal [r1]. They intersect in the most unassuming manner. The crockets have clearly defined whorls, especially on the corner.

1087 The Rhuis apse may be another early work, for the threads are thin, thinner than any others, a sequence in which I assume that the wider and decorated straps would have been later [r2]. The curves are a little irregular, and the crockets delicate, hardly projecting at all.

1088 The next are difficult to arrange chronologically, but all seem before the Crusade. The large capital in the crossing of Arthies has intersecting strands with fans placed between them and a central cartouche [r3]. The curled crockets are robust and designed with exceptional care for this period. The tower over the crossing has capitals by the Comet Master that fit into one of his earliest campaigns.^{ICMA#12.}

From the feeling and the type of crockets this master may have also been responsible for at least one of the other capitals in the crossing. It has long straps falling down from the crocket, but they do not cross, and has accidentally-placed elements in the spaces [r4].

One other carver placed a geometric field along the bottom, and the other cut the cone into facets and incised parallel lines across them. The X Master was the most inspired of this group.



Parnes apse window



Rhuis apse



Arthies crossing



Arthies crossing

1086

1087

1088

DRAFT

The western door of Saint-Martin-de-Bréthencourt has pairs of capitals on either side, one on each side having crossed strands incised with crude lines as on a rope. On the left carefully outlined leaves occupy the spaces between the strands [b1]. The similar design on the right is less well carved and more geometric in its detailing [b2]. Next to each are capitals I have already ascribed to the SS Master, carved some time before similar work on the Villers-Saint-Paul nave and Mogneville north chapel. More recent investigation of the capitals in these two churches situated Villers just after the Crusade around 1102 and Mogneville into the campaign of phase 4 around 1113. To place Saint-Martin before the Crusade would therefore be reasonable.



Saint-Martin-de-Bréthencourt west wall

1090



Saint-Martin-de-Bréthencourt W.cL



Saint-Martin-de-Bréthencourt W.cR

One capital on the western pier of the crossing at Fleury-en-Bière has double lines that intersect. These two piers were erected after the apse had been completed, and before the nave drums that had to wait a few years more. On the left face one thread is decorated with hatching, whereas both are hatched on the right face [b]. The lines are not straight and there is a little bracelet under the abacus. The other capitals have a similarly bare quality.

They seem more like ties to hold the building down than supports for the massive weight of stone they bear. The strap was always attached to the top of the crocket.

1091



Fleury-en-Bière crossing, left face



Fleury-en-Bière crossing, right

1092

At Auvers-sur-Oise the lower courses of the apse and the north chapel were laid down together. The chapel was completed, but as with Santeuil the rest of the apse had to wait until the Crusaders returned.

The plan of the apse is polygonal, being one of a series of little churches with straight-walled sides from this time. In some the pilasters were placed in the centre of the walls, not on the corners.

The idea of doubling the strands and weaving them through each other may have first appears in the Auvers north chapel, and a little later in the tower of Deuil-le-Barre. Santeuil is only 15 kilometres from Auvers, and Deuil another 15 further on. The edges are irregular, the decoration is varied as are the terminals. Are the upper stories of the tower at Deuil before or after the nave? There are no constructional reasons for either, but the capital is more sophisticated and exact in its outlines. There is no clear evolutionary line, though an improvement in finish and precision.



Auvers-sur-Oise north chapel window

1093



Deuil-le-Barre tower(Musée de Cluny)

DRAFT

11095 The hatching across the rope-like X was repeated in a small capital of the piscine at Santeuil. The spaces between the strands are filled with a fan-like leaf. The complexity was increased by having a pair of ribbons descending from the crocket and passing behind the strands.

The stonework of the lower wall in the apse is different in quality to the upper ashlar. This suggests that the wall had been constructed up to a certain height when work stopped. The Crusade could have been the cause by stripping the region of surplus funds. The continuation after this pause is discussed below.

11094 From the study of Master Bannière the external apse dado at Saint-Martin-de-Boscherville would have been before the Crusade, probably immediately before, in 1095.^{ICMA #14:14-16} The double strands were used again, thin as in Fleury, leading to tiny crockets as in Aulnay. They finish with fan-like fronds, which are like those in Santeuil turned sideways. Altogether a more competent work than any of the others from this period, and therefore probably the last.

I am coming to notice many anomalies in the dating of these earlier works in previous studies, especially the SS and Comet Masters. Now that I understand from the Laon gallery the complex situations that can arise, I will attempt to reassess this earlier work in a different way when I come to revise these pieces.

After the First Crusade

The capitals in the Caen transept triforium has been vaguely dated to around 1100 [b1]. It has a simple X arrangement, with a central head as in Boscherville. The strands are decorated, as were the Vert-la-Gravelle apse and the nearby Courtisols-Saint-Martin nave [b2,3]. The latter has curved straps, not straight like all the others, and introduced a stylised leaf quite unlike any others. I would think this was by a different carver.



Santeuil ES Piscine



Saint-Martin-de-Boscherville E(d)

1095



Caen, Trinite N(t)



Vert-la-Gravelle E-e(aw)



Courtisols-Saint-Memmie WS pier

1104 The room under the tower at Saint-Reuil in the little town of Louvres not far from Paris has a small capital with no room for an X on the face, so it was placed under the corner [b1]. Dating can be established only because an adjacent capital was by the Facet Master around 1104 [b2].^{ICMA #13.}

The south wall of Bury has a similar capital that was dated in a previous analysis to 1107 [b3].^{ICMA #03.} Both of these also have paired threads.



Louvres, Saint-Reuil tower base



Louvres, Saint-Reuil tower base



Bury nave aisle Ws4

11095
11094
1100
1104
1107
DRAFT

There is a gap of some five or six years between Bury and Montmartre. Where did he go during those years? Into Normandy?

Two in the north aisle at Montmartre are simple in design, being just straps and crockets without any foliate decoration [b1,2]. The presence of one by Faceter at this level helps set a date around 1113 [b3], as does the undecorated cartouche in the centre at the top of the larger stone and the simplicity of the other capitals in the aisle. Taking into account those in the crossing, these northern piers could have been built well before Queen Adelaide took up residence in the abbey.^{ref} It has been an easy assumption that the abbey was rebuilt for her arrival, but there is no need to exclude work earlier than this in one of the oldest abbeys in France.

1113



Montmartre WN2n



Montmartre WN3w



Montmartre WN3w

1114

Santeuil (the one in Val-d'Oise, not in the Eure-et-Loir) is a pivotal work for the chronology of the 1110 decade. It has a piscine which I would date to before the Crusade for the one remaining capital has hatched chords like those on the Arthies crossing, as mentioned above [r1]. The walling in the lower section of the apse is constructed from smaller stones, more like rubble than ashlar, whereas the rest of the building is constructed from beautiful large ashlar blocks [b1].

The transept has a door on the west face of the south transept [r2]. It is surmounted with a zig-zag arch that would not have been carved before 1100, and a capital, now restored, which has a simple Strap-X design and which may reflect the original in some way [b2].

Above that over a very tall interior the clerestory capitals in both the apse and the transepts seem from the one campaign. Some are like the Auvers-sur-Oise apse carved before 1120, and one capital in particular was by Victoire that I have placed in a sequence which locates it close to 1115 [b3].

The apse and transepts are barrel-vaulted. The crossing is rib vaulted and is much higher than the other vaults. It has four densely carved foliate



Santeuil ES Piscine



Santeuil (Val-d'Oise) west door south transept



Santeuil apse, north



Santeuil (Val-d'Oise)



Santeuil (Val-d'Oise) NE2(c)

capitals that one might want to put into the next decade but for the two stories of towers that rest over them [next page].

The tower capitals are somewhat old fashioned, as one is wont to find in towers, and closer in style to those in towers of the previous decade, as in the Morienvall upper west tower.



Santeuil (Val-d'Oise) crossing



Santeuil (Val-d'Oise) crossing

In general it appears that crews working on towers tended to be a little old fashioned compared to those on the public spaces underneath. The average difference in fashions was around ten years.

So an up-to-date crew carved the four capitals under the crossing arch with overtones of Hardricourt and Gaillon, and a specialised tower crew with less adventurous workmen erected the towers. These crews may have worked exclusively on towers, and little else.

This building spans the Crusade from 1090s to just before 1120. Subject to the caveat on crews that built towers, the building illustrates the changes occurring in a number of sophisticated teams over these two decades.

After 1115 the severity of Montmartre changes, and the X-capitals were enriched with foliage as the fans turn into fronds and berries. The band remains the primary design element, and the spaces between them was filled with more care and virtuosity. No two follow the same template.

The one in the Luzarches north chapel has straps turned into branches with little fronds on short stalks hanging from them [b1]. Nicely organised, if a little rough in the execution, this suggests a new direction.

One in Cambronne at the junction between the north transept and the aisle may also fit into this group, though the crossed straps are tied with a collar [b2]. It is a little worn and the details do not display, yet very like one in Châteaudun from a few years later.

The use of hanging berries in the Atrechy apse follows a similar path, with an increasing complexity in the way the straps are paired and weave through each other [b3]. Each pair continues in a clever way into the coil of the crocket. There is an additional strap hanging across the basket that intersects the others exactly under the corner berries.



Santeuil (Val-d'Oise) crossing from the south



Luzarches north chapel

1115



Cambronne Wn1



Avrechy east

1105

The south-east chapel alongside the apse at Rhuis may belong to this period, for the stonework suggests that the chapel with its early-style rib vault was added onto the rest of the church at a later date [r]. The use of a sprig of leaves suggests a time in the 20s.



Rhuis south chapel window capital, and vault



1115= DRATO

1122

The straps in the Château-Landun nave have more varied curves with decorative leaves added. The two arrangements are variations of earlier ones, such as Châteaudun and Boscherville, with the leaves turned upwards [b1,2]. From the beginning his fronds are mainly fan-shaped.

1124

Gradually the quality of the carving improved, especially after 1125. The dado in the Sainte-Madeleine nave at Châteaudun has straps like Montmartres and upturned ends terminating in fronds like Cambronne. They are under the crocket [b3].



Château-Landun choir



Château-Landun choir



Châteaudun, Sainte-Madeleine dado

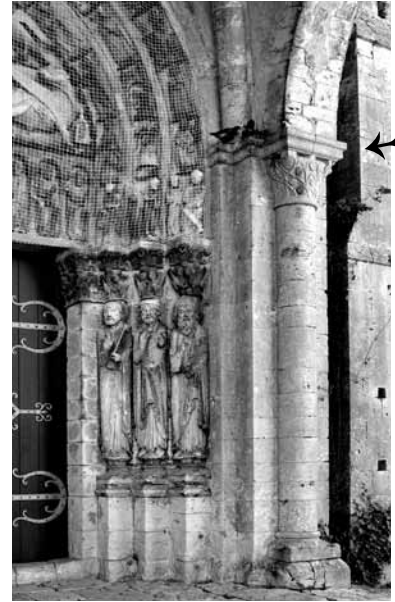
1125

In the porch of Saint-Loup-de-Naud he used similar fronds on thin vine-like tendrils [b]. This is not like the earlier simple X-forms, yet they do cross over each other, have short stalks to the fronds and are reminiscent of much earlier work. Here and in Château-Landun there is an increase in variations and complexity. He was working alongside the very competent crew that created the sculpture of the portal and may have learned new ideas from them, just as Victoire had.

The photo of the porch shows that the capital was placed just after the final completion of the porch sculpture, and before the erection of the chamber above it [$> r$]. It was not intended to have rib vaults, as can be seen in the junction above the impost on the left. In the study of Victoire this capital was dated to 1126. ICMA #15:12-13



Saint-Loup-de-Naud west porch



Saint-Loup-de-Naud west porch

1127

The capital in the remains of the tall west wall at Lagny-sur-Marne seems to belong to this group, and may be the last. The hatching has been turned into tiny leaves covering the whole length of the straps [b]. It is the most complex of all the strap designs in this group, and may have been in the later 1120s. It is on an extremely tall wall [$> r$]. The adjacent capitals reflect work in the Saint-Denis narthex from this time, and the carver seems to have been influenced by the richly decorated designs being employed in many places at that time.



Lagny-sur-Marne west wall of choir



Lagny-sur-Marne west wall of choir



Lagny west wall of choir

I would say that most of these capitals were by the same master. I will call him Strap-X. The formula is simple, the execution uneven until the latest, and the sequence of work follows a reasonable evolutionary line that culminates in some exceptional and unique designs. There is a clear process of evolution of ideas that form a continuum through which a fairly consistent and believable chronology has emerged.

These are the only strap-like designs in the Paris Basin until the mid-1130s. There is a gap in time that appears as a complete break in continuity. The next generation of strap designs are more complex with many levels of intersecting bands. The use of foliage to add to the interest on the surface was rejected, and instead men pursued cleverness in the arrangements [r].



Blois, Saint-Laumer from the 1140s

Approximate chronology

As usual, I have given precise dates to (especially in this case) very imprecise information. There are only certain very general indications of chronology, and no absolute dates. I have indicated whatever small hints there are to bring some sense of order in the text. However, no matter how uncertain precision has the advantage that some sense of order emerges and can be used in conjunction with more valid ordering in other masters to create a sustainable chronology.

1086	Parnes	apse window
1087	Rhuis	east window
1088	Arthies	tower base
1089	Arthies	tower
1090	Saint-Martin-de-Brethèncourt	west door
1091	Fleury-en-Bière	west crossing pier
1092	Auvers-sur-Oise	north chapel
1093	Deuil-le-Barre	tower
1094	Saint-Martin-de-Boscherville	east (d)
1095	Santeuil	apse piscine
1096	<i>First Crusade called</i>	
1103	Caen, La Trinité	transept triforium
1104	Louvres, Saint-Rieul	tower base
1105	Vert-la-Gravelle	west
1106	Courtisols-Saint-Memmie	nave
1107	Bury	south wall campaign 1
1113	Montmartre	north nave aisle
1114	Santeuil	S-w door
1115	Luzarches	north chapel
1116	Cambronne	north wall
1119	Avrechy	apse
1120	Rhuis	soputh chapel
1122	Château-Landun	choir
1124	Châteaudun, Madeleine	nave dado
1125	Saint-Loup-de-Naud	porch
1127	Lagny-sur-Marne	west wall