

The Green Man of Cercles

STRANGE FLOPPY LEAVES at UJUE and SWINE

Floppy leaves are often referred to as “water leaves”. They may represent the leaves of the Arum Lily :



Fig 1 : Arum lilies

A Green Man with leaves issuing from his mouth on a carved misericord in the former nunnery church of Swine, East Yorkshire



I thought the form of leaf most unusual, and was at once reminded of the Green Men (and possibly women) of Ujue, a hilltop village not far from Olite, in Spain.

(Source : short article from <http://medievalwriting.50megs.com/word/romance2.htm>)

Fig 2 : Floppy leaves of Swine

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Fig 3 : Floppy leaves of Ujue

Are both these images derived from another source or is one a re-working of the other?

Finally, here is another Green Man, a Romanesque mask with large, floppy leaves from Agen Museum :



Fig 4 : Floppy leaves Green Man of Agen

His leaves are more like water lily leaves and he has rather an Oriental appearance.

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I consulted Dr Kenaan-Kedar of the University of Tel Aviv, who has also worked at the University of Poitiers. She is the author of a huge work : “Marginal Sculpture in Medieval France”.

Professor Kenaan-Kedar wrote :

I have not worked specifically on the Green Man, or Masque Feuillu, I have however my thoughts about the image. It seems to me that what we are missing is a catalogue of all categories of these Masks, or heads if you want. There are all kind of leaves , as they are various forms in which the scrolls are emerging from its mouth. It is also important to see that the form is present strongly in Gothic sculpture. Thus it would be important to compare the "heads feuillus" from Metz Cathedral to a head from St. Pierre in Aulnay. Only when we will have the several categories will it be possible to speak of meanings of any kind. Furthermore there are various forms of stylisation of the leaves which must also be taken in account. In short, an Iconographic study must be done first within the group.

So, has anyone catalogued LEAF TYPES among the Green Man images?

In the two images above, the leaves may be those of the arum lily. For Cercles, I would suggest : Fig, Vine, Acanthus, Oak and maybe Beech. Images derived from Classical sources frequently imitate Mediterranean foliage. Later, Gothic images usually have more Nordic leaves like Oak or Hawthorn.

Professor Kenaan-Kedar has kindly given permission to reproduce some extracts from her book, “Marginal Sculpture in Medieval France” and this forms the next section of “Notes & Queries”.

(To be continued)

Julianna Lees – Montagrier 2008