

From Antiquity to Romanesque

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'...in the early Middle Ages, the most novel and original images and conceptions were often presented as continuing an ancient tradition'. (1)

Introduction.

Many authorities on Romanesque architecture and sculpture have pointed out the heritage that the artisans drew upon that came down to them from antiquity. This article will contain an examination of that sculptural heritage, focusing particularly on the period of late antiquity. It will then look at what subject matter might have been available and how it was adapted to serve the iconographic and decorative needs of the very different society of the XI and XII centuries. Although the article will draw on examples from across the Romanesque world, it will focus particularly on the sculptures that are to be seen in France and Northern Spain. Somewhat arbitrarily, the article will not do more than touch on other art media, such as frescos, mosaics and manuscripts. Finally, by way of introduction, this article is intended to complement and not duplicate the article by

Julianna Lees titled 'From Roman to Romanesque' that may be found on this website at http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/from_roman_to_romanesque.pdf .

The Inheritance.

It now over 1600 years since the Roman Empire fell. Yet tens of thousands of tourists visit the extensive remains that survive in so many parts of Italy, France, Northern Spain and the Rhineland. Others examine the smaller artefacts from the Roman Empire that are secured in museums across the Western world including the United States. That the quantity of artefacts and structures must have been many times greater than today and that their condition must also have been significantly better a thousand years ago hardly needs to be said. Only four or five centuries had elapsed since invaders had put an end to that Empire. It is not difficult to imagine how the inhabitants of the towns must have wondered who had created the structures and artefacts that they saw and for what purposes they had been created. They must surely have noted that such works were of a quality that was rarely equalled in their own times. René Crozet, in his study of the antique influences to be found in Poitou and the area to the South, drew a picture of a landscape at the beginning of the Romanesque period that was not so dissimilar to that seen by the inhabitants of that area in the period of the late Roman Empire. There were milestones by the roadsides; there were necropolis with stella and cippa; the many of the farm buildings that dotted the countryside would have had mosaic fragments or Roman foundations. In the towns there were the remains of the great public buildings, such as theatres and arenas, baths and triumphal arches and, perhaps fragments of temples. (2).



Imperial Rome and the pagan times

The military and political collapse of the Empire has been attributed to the invasions of successive hordes of people moving in a generally West and South-west direction out of Eastern Europe in the late III century and early IV century – the Visigoths and Ostrogoths, the Lombards and the Vandals, the Franks and Saxons and other tribal groupings. Although they had their own cultural heritage none had a significant taste for figurative sculpture. As a result, much that existed at that time must have been lost. But some of the invaders may have encouraged the continued production of works using the skilled artisans that remained.

Sculpture had long been a feature of the decoration of Roman monuments. This was a tradition that they inherited or adopted from earlier civilisations such as that of the

Greeks and Etruscans. The sculptures of Imperial Rome in the main were composed to meet the requirements of state power and the state religion. The projection of state power was to be seen in the monumental structures such as the intentionally dramatic triumphal arches that adorned not only Rome but also many provincial cities across the Empire.



Rome – Constantine's arch



Orange – Triumphal arch

The use of sculpture for the cultivation of religious fervour was manifested in many ways: the decoration of temples, the creation of statues and symbols of the gods and the memorials to the dead in the form of mausoleums, stella, cippa, pluteos and sculptured sarcophagi. These last were to be a feature of the latter centuries of the Empire and were an indication that burial custom had changed from cremation to burial. Sculpture was also used to emphasise state power and authority, particularly on monuments to victory or to the grandeur of rulers.



Rome – 'Dionysos' sarcophagus. IIC



Trier – Memorial with sea-monsters

There is evidence that sarcophagi were quarried in large numbers by highly trained teams. Sites in the Eastern Mediterranean were known to export their work across the Empire. (3). There is some disagreement amongst the experts as to whether the sarcophagi were sculptured at the quarry site or whether, to avoid damage in transit, they were sculptured at the point of sale where they were stocked.

Sarcophagi produced in pagan times were sculptured with a variety of scenes and motifs. Frequently used were allegorical scenes from mythology. Sometimes the sculptures were largely decorative, such as having cupids holding garlands. Others might indicate the trade of the deceased by showing a farming scene or a maritime one.



St Victor (crypt), Marseilles



Arles – Tomb of Licina Magna. IIc



Narbonne – Wine lovers (left) and boat (right), both IIc AD

It was in Italy where the greater number of monuments and artefacts were to be found and where, to this day, more have survived. There is evidence that Italian builders and sculptors made greater use of *spolia* and followed the sculptural traditions of their Roman forebears.

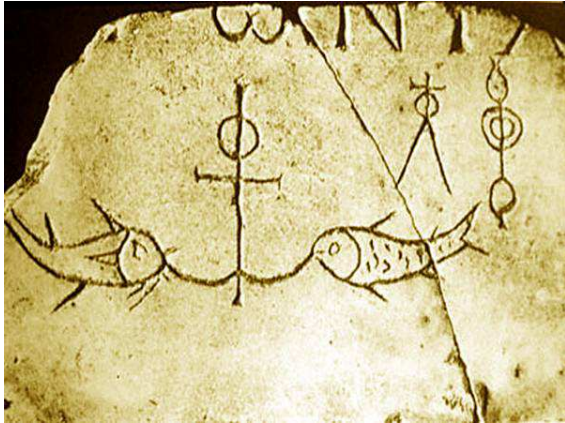
In Haute Garonne near the foot of the Pyrenees there are at least a dozen small churches, as well as larger ones like St Just de Valcabrère, where Gallo-Roman stones have been incorporated into the walls of the church. Some of these, especially at Valcabrère and St Lizier which is in Ariège, the stones are entirely decorative. It is surprising that the local mediaeval sculptors do not seem to have been influenced by these at all. Those from the smaller churches are mostly fragments of Gallo-Roman tombs with the top half of two figures. In the case of these, all are positioned on the South and East walls; they would therefore seem to have been more than just readily available building material. But surprisingly several have been inserted on their sides.



St Lizier – Re-used stone on apse (left) & St Tritus – Re-used tombstone on South wall (Right)

The Transition to Christianity.

As Christianity became the accepted religion of the Empire in the IV century, the motifs on such memorials was adapted. The first Christian sarcophagi began to appear in the late II century. But, inevitably, most of those that survive are from the following centuries when Christianity was the religion of the Empire. Christian symbols first began to appear on memorials and tombs in the late II century, at a time when to be a Christian was not acceptable to the state. It is probable that most Christians conformed to the customs of society as a whole. Some symbols associated with Christianity such as the fish, the dove and the anchor were first to appear; these may have had a symbolism in pre-Christian societies, too. These symbols were to be used for the next three centuries with little change to the style or character. The cross or crucifix were symbols that were used rarely by early Christians. Crucifixion was the punishment meted out to slaves and subjugated peoples; Roman citizens were not allowed to be crucified. The early Christians therefore seem to have seen Christ's crucifixion as a humiliation. The significance of the cross became understood only later, perhaps from the VI century. Early Christians preferred to use the symbol of a fish, an anchor or Chi-Rho. The anchor was a symbol of hope and eternal life, which is probably why it is to be seen on many early graves



Rome – Fragment of tomb from Domitilla catacombs



Louvre, Paris – Detail of sarcophagus of Livia Primitiva, IIIc. (left) & Vienne – Fragment of tomb in cloisters of St André le Bas, Vic (right)

It can be easy to forget the extent of the influences and penetration that originated in Byzantium that were to be found in Western Europe. The presence of a marble basin now in the Musée Lapidaire, Avignon, serves as a reminder. It was found at Tourettes near Apt, which lies to the East of Avignon. The basin, which was probably intended for ritual ablutions, dates from the IV century. Along one side is an inscription in Greek which translates as 'Make your prayer after you have washed'. Greek was still the language used for the liturgy until the late VI century in that area. The importance of washing was a relatively new development brought on by the prevalence of plague. In the middle of that inscription is a small Chi-Rho. The sides have a decoration of lozenges. (4).



Apt, now Musée Lapidaire, Avignon – IVc basin

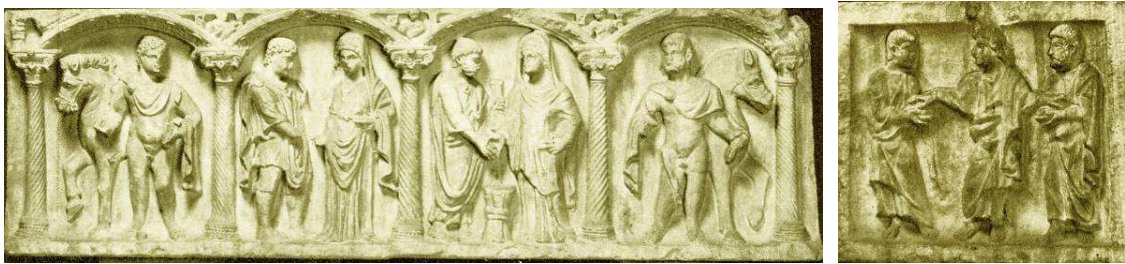
In the same museum is an altar that was found near Vaugine. It has been dated as V or VI century. The front has two converging lines of birds that probably represent Doves. In the centre is a Chi-Rho. The other sides are decorated with vine stems and leaves. Altars from subsequent centuries are not rare; none, however, are decorated with Doves in a similar manner. Converging lines of birds do appear on some Romanesque doorways, for example at Petit Palais and St Christophe des Bardes, both in the Gironde.



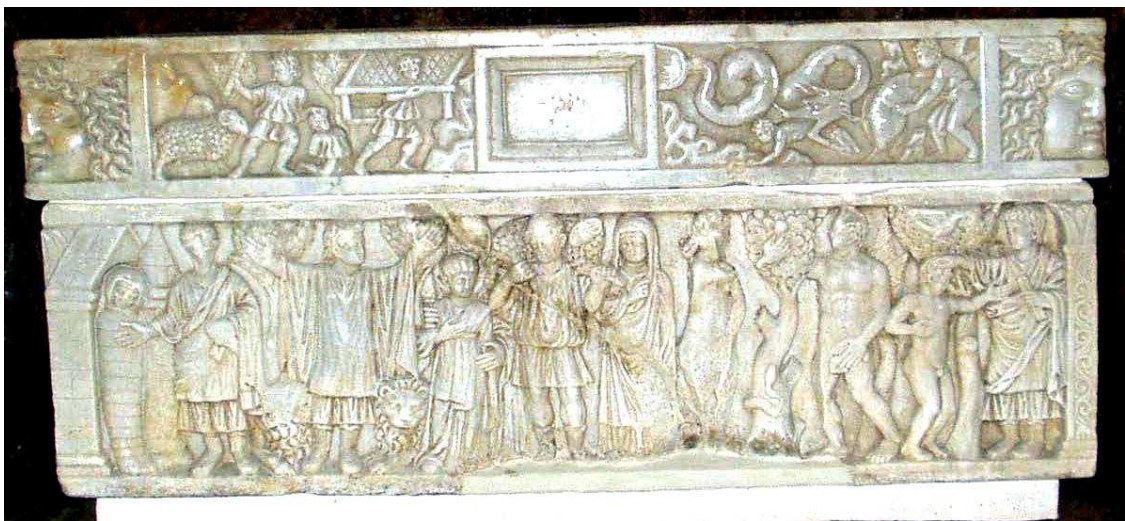
Vaugine, now Musée Lapidaire, Avignon – Vc altar

Sculptures on sarcophagi of the Christian period were modelled on the style but not the content of those of the preceding pagan period; the panels contained a small army of very active figures. This transition from paganism to Christianity is exemplified by a marble sarcophagus found at Arles that is in fact from a later date, namely the late III century. Known as the 'Sarcophagus of the Dioscures', on the front face at the extremities we see the Dioscures with a horse behind them. In the central left panel a young woman bids farewell to her husband; the right central bay has an older couple. Both represent marriage. None of the scenes has any direct Christian symbolism. But the two side panels have New Testament scenes; on the left is the Multiplication of the loaves, whilst at the other end is a scene with St Peter. A similar mixture of Christian and pagan images is seen on the sarcophagus at Aire-sur-Ardour and which is described as the tomb of Ste Quitterie. It is without doubt a sarcophagus from the III or IV centuries that was re-used; furthermore the lid is not the one that was originally cut for the main body; it is wider and longer and appears to be of a different marble. The main body of the sarcophagus has images on the front and the two side panels that are, as we shall see, fairly typical of scenes used on sarcophagi of the Christian period. However, the lid has two scenes. To the left we see a scene from the book of Genesis that is in two parts. The inner scene

shows a figure within a wooden frame. This is probably showing Abraham preparing the wooden altar on which he was planning to sacrifice his son, Isaac. To the left, we see Abraham, knife in hand and holding Isaac, looking towards the sheep. This second part was to be used frequently because it combined an example of obedience to God and an extreme sense of obedience with a reference to Christ's supreme sacrifice. But it was more usual to include God, often in the form of a hand in the scene. The right half of the lid has what seems to be an entirely pagan scene of a writhing snake like monster devouring a figure whilst on the extreme right is a figure holding a large fish. The heads at each corner are of Apollo, certainly pagan. The re-using of pagan sarcophagi was probably quite common. At Torreilles, near Perpignan, is one that was re-employed as an altar.



Arles – IIIc Sarcophagus of Dioscures, front and left side



Aire-sur-Ardour – Tomb of Ste Quitterie



Torreilles – Pagan sarcophagus re-used as altar

In the Christian period the panels were more usually divided into a number of separate and often unconnected scenes taken from both the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible. Many of the scenes were in an allegorical form. The same scenes are repeated on many sarcophagi, indicating that either there were teams of sculptors turning out set-piece sculptures or, less likely, there were some form of pattern books available. For example, at Arles we find three sarcophagi depicting the 'Crossing of the Red Sea'. Also at Arles is a sarcophagus known as 'Chaste Susanne'; in the choir of Sant Feliu, Girona, there is a second one. The theme of 'Traditio legis' is another theme that appears to have been frequently used; it shows Christ handing over responsibility for the Church to Saint Peter and Saint Paul; there are two examples in Rome, two in the Vatican museum, two in the crypt at St Victor, in Marseilles, and one in the Louvre, in Paris. In each of these examples the theme is the same but the execution is entirely different. The example below shows Christ with a halo. The halo was a symbol that was used extensively across from the Mediterranean into Asia. It was also used by the Romans, as may be seen on the II century mosaic depicting Apollo at El Djem, in Tunisia. Christ is shown with long flowing hair; it is improbable that this characteristic was included because the sculptor thought that that was the way the inhabitants of Palestine looked. More probably he saw the model in the Goths, whose presence loomed large across the Northern Mediterranean at the time. It was not until the VI century that Christ was shown bearded.



Arles – 'Chaste Susanne'. IVc



Ravenna – 'Traditio legis'. Late IVc



El Djem, Tunisia – IIC mosaic of Apollo

A sarcophagus, that was found near the Vatican and which dates from the mid IV century, has a more symbolic presentation. The main panel has seven figures, each within a niche formed by columns supporting an arch. The central figure is of Christ who is turned towards a figure that is identified as St Peter. Christ is warning of his imminent betrayal; above him is a cockerel perched in a tree. The other figures are apostles; frequently six were used to represent the twelve.



Vatican – Column sarcophagus, mid IVc

Amongst the Old Testament scenes that are to be found are:

Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden
 The Crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites
 Moses striking the rock in the desert for water
 Abraham and his intended sacrifice of his son, Isaac
 Eli
 Daniel in the lions' den
 Jonah and the whale and asleep
 Wisdom of Solomon

New Testament scenes include:

Birth of Christ in the manger
 Shepherds hearing of Christ's birth
 The Magi presenting their gifts
 Christ teaching as a young man
 Christ healing the blind Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus
 Christ healing the sick or a leper or the paralytic
 Multiplication of loaves
 Parable of the Good Samaritan
 Lazarus
 Feast at Cana
 Raising of the Son of the Widow of Nain
 Christ with the Disciples or Apostles
 Christ's entry to Jerusalem
 Garden of Gethsemane
 Christ before Pilate
 Christ's Passion

Sarcophagi frequently had a combination of scenes from both the Old and New Testaments. Usually the combination of scenes relate to a main theme such as the resurrection of Christ. An example is provided by a sarcophagus found in Rome and now in the Vatican museum. In the centre of the front panel is the 'Anastasis' the symbol of the Resurrection. The cross is decorated with a triumphal standard; below are two crouched soldiers representing those who were appointed to guard the tomb but who 'became as dead men'. The two outer scenes of the panel are taken from the Old Testament, with, to the right, Job sitting on a dung heap before his wife. Job was representing the just whose faith was severely tested but who despite the testing does not abandon his faith just as Christ was to survive the extreme test of his faith; on the left side of the panel we see Cain and Abel presenting their offering to God, anticipating the sacrifice of the 'Lamb of God'. The two inner scenes show the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, who in this context are witnesses for the entire Church. This was a formula that is to be found on several sarcophagi; several biblical scenes were used.



Rome – Tree sarcophagus now in the Vatican, mid IVc



Rome – Domatilla sarcophagus, IVc

There are other scenes that show Christ in allegorical settings. A particular favourite was showing Christ as 'The Good Shepherd', which usually shows a male figure symbolising Christ carrying a lamb (representing the Church) across his shoulders. This scene pre-

dates Christianity and, indeed, it was used on pagan sarcophagi before being used by Christians. (See the article by Julianna Lees 'From Roman to Romanesque').



Louvre, Paris – IIIc pagan sarcophagus from Rome



Rome – VIc grave stone with a symbolic 'Good Shepherd'

A feature of some of the sarcophagi is that scenes that appear on two may not be in the same sequence or context. For example, in the choir at Sant Feliu, Girona there are eight VI century sarcophagi. Of these, one is called 'The Acts of the Apostles' and another is called 'Abraham and Isaac' and a third, 'Chaste Susanne'. All three show a scene of a short figure carrying his bed; probably illustrating the healing by Christ of the cripple.

The surrounding images are entirely different. This raises questions about how these were produced and how the teams of sculptors worked.



Sant Feliu, Girona – Detail from 'The Acts of the Apostles' (top left) and 'Abraham and Isaac' (top right) and 'Chaste Susanne' (below)

Amongst the surviving sarcophagi are several that illustrate the Apostles and, in particular, St Peter and St Paul.



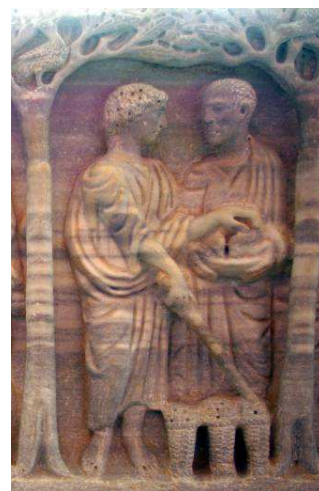
St Victor, Marseilles – ‘Traditio legis’ (detail)

The images in the series titled ‘Traditio legis’ usually show Christ passing a scroll to one or other Apostle. The scroll represents the biblical law. Rarely is St Peter shown with the symbol that was to be intimately linked to him in the sculptures of later centuries - the Keys of Heaven.

Most other scenes are illustrated with clarity. A few examples are shown below. Amongst the examples is one of St Peter above a cockerel, surely a reference to his performance at Christ’s Passion. This is interesting because sculptures of St Peter with a cockerel are uncommon in Romanesque sculpture.



Arles – ‘Trinity’ sarcophagus; detail of Garden of Eden (left) Vatican – IVc sarcophagus; Moses strikes the rock for water (right)



Vatican – ‘Julius Bassus’ sarcophagus; late IVc; detail of Abraham & Isaac (left) and Arles – ‘Trinity’ sarcophagus; Feast at Cana (right)



Marseilles, now Avignon – IVc fragment depicting St Peter & cockerel (left) and S Feliu, Girona – ‘Acts of the Apostles’ sarcophagus; arrest of St Peter in Garden of Gethsemane (right)

At the time of Christ Romans were usually cremated at death. Only in the subsequent two centuries did they use burial as the normal method of disposing of the deceased. Mummification had been the normal method for preparing the upper levels of society for the next world but it was not a practice used either by the Romans or the peoples of Palestine. Yet the dead are shown in a mummified form and even upright.



Aire-sur-Ardour – Detail of tomb of Ste Quiterie, raising of Lazarus (left) Arles – Detail of Romana Celsa, raising of dead child

Many Christian sarcophagi continued to retain decoration on the lids that had no apparent religious significance.



Vatican – 1st half of IVc

In the South transept of St Sernin, Toulouse there are paleo-Christian sarcophagi that were re-used to hold the remains of an XI century Count of Toulouse and his sons.



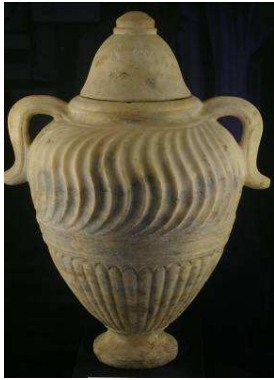
St Sernin, Toulouse – Sarcophagi of Count Guillaume Taillefer & sons

The point to be made concerning this re-employment of the old sarcophagi is that it was done not so much because they were there and available, but because it was a clear demonstration of the value of the paleo-Christian carvings on the front of the sarcophagi were to the XI century masons.

The Decline in the Sculpting of Figures.

As the IV century drew to a close the changes to the style of sarcophagi accelerated. There were fewer sculptures; the spaces between them were filled with wavy lines. These

are referred to as strigils sarcophagi. The pattern was not new; an example is to be seen on a fine Gallo-Roman funerary jar from St Geniès-de Maiguirès (Gard) and now in the museum at Nîmes.



St Geniès-de-Maiguirès, now Nîmes – Gallo-Roman funerary jar



Tarragona – Strigils sarcophagus of ‘Law-giver’; Vc

Some of these had stylised figures that had no special symbolism. Others continued to have a religious signification, as may be seen in the next two illustrations. The third illustration shows that the sculptor of the capital at La Daurade had seen a sarcophagus with the strigils pattern and had copied it for the scene of Christ’s resurrection,



Arles – Late IVc strigilis sarcophagus of Christ, Ss Peter & Paul



Arles – IVc strigilis sarcophagus; detail of Nativity (left) La Daurade, Toulouse (now Musée des Augustins) - Resurrection of Christ (right)

In the Cathedral of St Trophime there is the V century sarcophagus of Geminus, who was from Cologne and was appointed to administer ‘the treasure of the five diocese of Aquitaine’. The interest in the sculpture of this sarcophagus lies in the significance given to the symbol of the Resurrection.



Arles – Vc Geminus sarcophagus

Several authors have discussed the sudden decline of sculptural decoration in the antique tradition from the IV century (5). Three possible causes have been suggested: first, that Christians avoided human representations in sculpture because they feared the association with paganism; secondly, that the invading ‘Barbarians’ were not capable of seeing merit in sculpture and were also unable to create it; thirdly, that skills and techniques coming from the East gave priority to surface quality obtained from marbles and metals. It is our opinion that none of these is entirely satisfactory as an explanation because the human form continued to be represented in other media. The absence of figures was especially evident. Floral patterns and geometric designs were to continue through the Merovingian period with only rare examples of sculptured figures. One example of sculptured figures is in the crypt at Jouarre, East of Paris where the end of the tomb of Bishop Aigilbert (VIIc) has Christ seated within the Tetramorph. An example of decorative sculpture is to be seen on the tomb of Bishop Drausin (died AD 680) that was at Soissons and is now in the Louvre. The design usually included a pattern of vine leaves and bunches of grapes; the design was generally broken up into three parts divided by fluted columns.



Jouarre – Tomb of Bishop Aigilbert (left) Soissons (now Louvre) – Tomb of Bishop Drausin (right)

A new motif in the centre of the front panel was frequently inserted – the chrismon.



Périgueux Museum - VIc

It was outside Italy and France that the tradition of sculpting figures in the context of Christian art continued. The Visigoth kingdom of Spain and the North and Western parts of the British Isles provide evidence of the continued use of stone sculptures. The central core of Europe had to wait for the decades after the Carolingian cultural revival for stone sculpture to return on any significant scale.

Although Christianity was well established throughout the Empire by the IV century non-religious scenes continued to be produced on sarcophagi. Whether the families concerned were agnostic or atheist we do not know. From the Musée St Raymond in Toulouse there are the examples of two IV century sarcophagi. One known as the 'Hunt of Meleager' has a hunting scene on the main panel with swirls of vines on the side panels. The other from the Cimetière des Nobles in Toulouse has a pastoral scene at one end and a man fighting off a lion at the other; this image is remarkably similar to the one of Meleager's hunt. The main panel has biblical scenes.



Musée St Raymond, Toulouse – Hunt of Meleager on IVc sarcophagus



Musée St Raymond, Toulouse – End panels from IVc sarcophagus from Cimetière des Nobles

The Post Carolingian Revival.

Although some sculpture began to appear as part of the Carolingian cultural renaissance this was mostly in the form of capitals that were modelled on the Corinthian capitals of antiquity and simple cornices with foliage patterns.



Grenoble, St Laurent – Capital in crypt, VIIc

By the mid XI century there was a revival of sculpture across Western Europe. Models were to be found in textiles, illuminated manuscripts, ivories and metal work of various kinds, but above all from the remains of sarcophagi and sculptures from antiquity. Many of these objects were portable and, thus, were more readily available to the artisans.



St G  nis-des-Fontaines – Lintel; AD 1120-21



St Mexme, Chinon – Crucifixion on narthex, mid XIc

The revival in Roussillon has been studied by many authorities. There are three churches, in particular, with sculptures on the West façade – St Génis-des-Fontaines, St André de Sorède and Arles sur Tech. The sculptures are of similar date, those at Arles-sur-Tech being a couple of decades later than the other two sites. All the sculptures are in an architectural setting and are executed in a flat relief. The depiction of the figures is somewhat naïve but the actual sculpturing is fine. Durliat was of the opinion that the style of the lintels at St Génis-des-Fontaines and at St André de Sorède was inherited from that used for Carolingian altar retables. (6). The revival was by no means confined to the South-west corner of the French Mediterranean. On the narthex of St Mexme, at Chinon, in the Loire Valley, there are several examples of sculptures that date from the middle of the XI century. All the sculptures are in a low relief; most show flowers, foliage, interlace and other decorative patterns. Only one shows figures; it illustrates the Crucifixion. In Burgundy, too, there were the stirrings of a renaissance. In the crypt of St Bénigne, at Dijon, there are a number of capitals with primitive figures and heads, all done in low relief. Similarly, by the doorway in the upper chapel at St Philbert, at Tournus, there are low relief sculptures illustrating foliage and heads. None of these have any of the characteristics of the sculptures of III and IV century Rome. Two from Dijon are formed out of the shape of the Corinthian capital with foliage visible to the sides of the figures. There is no hint of the vibrant mobility that was present in so many of the scenes of antiquity; the carving and draughtsmanship is crude; the iconography, where there is any, is simple and does not draw on earlier examples, except in the cases of the three churches in Roussillon.



Dijon – Capital in crypt



Tournus – Capital in upper chapel

By the third quarter of the XI century there were the signs of a more general innovation in the execution of sculptured figures. These were to be on capitals mainly on the interiors of churches. Capitals are an architectural feature and they were to be the forerunners of the great sculptured doorways. Amongst the earliest examples in France that have survived are the capitals in the crypt at St Aignan, Orleans. These are from the turn of the X/XI centuries.



St Aignan, Orleans – Capital in crypt

By the last decades of the XI century sculptures were more assured in style. Perhaps the finest examples are to be seen at St Sernin, Toulouse. Here there are a series of large sculptures in the ambulatory depicting Christ, angels or seraphs and apostles. The

individuals are calm but immobile but in proportion, unlike many later reliefs where the figures are elongated and often shown with flowing robes and in somewhat contorted attitudes.



St Sernin, Toulouse – Two sculptures in ambulatory

The posture and setting for the one depicting Christ with the symbols of the Evangelists resembles that at Jouarre (illustrated on page 21 above).



Sant Feliu, Girona – Detail of IVc sarcophagus in choir

The sculptures of the Apostles and seraphs bear some resemblance to the centre panel of a sarcophagus in the choir of Sant Feliu, Girona. The figure is somewhat posed and stiff; the facial features, whilst well defined, are not those of a man with life within him. The robes of the figures on both sculptures hang with convincing style. Another possible model may be found in Gallo-Roman gravestones; these are not uncommon even today.



St Tritous, Louchon – Re-used Gallo-Roman tomb stone

Within a decade there was a veritable explosion of sculptural activity across France. St Benoit-sur-Loire provides early examples of the new style of narrative sculpture. In the porch there is a mix of foliage capitals in Corinthian style, biblical scenes and scenes of figures of historic significance to the Church, such as St Martin and St Benoit. None of the biblical scenes seems to have been modelled on any of the sculptures from the Paleo-Christian period. Furthermore, the figurative style is unlike that used in antiquity.



St Benoît-sur-Loire – Capitals in porch; Visitation and Flight into Egypt

Thus far we have looked briefly at the decline of figure sculptures in late antiquity and at its slow revival at the start of the new millennium. There now followed a great expansion of activity with a proliferation of images and scenes, some sacred, others profane and others decorative.

Models from Antiquity

This next section looks at some of the scenes that were adopted from antiquity by the Romanesque sculptors. Only a few examples of biblical scenes in sculpture are examined to see whether and how they may have served as models for sculptors in the Romanesque period.

The Old Testament.

Adam & Eve, Creation & the Garden of Eden.

This story from Genesis was commonly used in late antiquity. The scenes are presented with only minor variations with one exception. In almost all the scenes we see both Eve and Adam, usually with the apple tree and the snake between them, as in the illustration on page 12 above. The exception to this general setting is when Adam and Eve are shown separated by other scenes. Furthermore, Adam is shown clothed (contrary to the description in Genesis); but Eve is naked.



Arles – Details of the 'Jonah Sarcophagus' (340AD); Adam (left) and Eve (right)

However, a IV century sarcophagus at Arles shows the Creation in a manner that is unlike any later image. Adam and Eve are shown as naked children standing before God, who is seated. Eve has a remarkably well-developed body for a young girl. Somewhat confusingly, there are three other figures; one, a young bearded man holding a short staff, has his other hand on the head of Eve. This is very similar to the posture of Christ when shown on other sarcophagi carrying out a miracle; perhaps this was intentional, symbolising 'God the Father and God the Son who created Heaven and Earth'. There is no sign of either the snake or the apple or the jaw bone from which Eve was created according to the Bible.



Arles – IVc sarcophagus ‘Epoux’, detail of creation

In the Vatican there is a IV century sarcophagus with Old and New Testament scenes. They include Adam and Eve; but the snake has been given an unusual dog-like head.



Vatican – Detail from IVc sarcophagus of biblical scenes

In Romanesque times the scene from the Garden of Eden was one of the most frequently used scenes from the Old Testament, (along with the Sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham and Daniel in the lions’ den).



Elne – Capital in cloisters door



St Sernin, Toulouse – Capital by North



Thuret – Capital in nave

Amongst the most sensuous portrayals of Eve is on the lintel from the North transept door of Autun Cathedral; it is now in the Musée Rolin across the road from the Cathedral. The source of inspiration for such evocative figures is a matter of great interest and erudite research. Gallo-Roman clay figures of the Roman goddess, Venus, were once common place. In the Early Middle Ages no doubt there were still examples to be seen. It is a matter of speculation that one of these might have provided the model for the Eve at Autun.



Musée Rolin, Autun – Eve from the lintel above the Cathedral North door



Two Gallo-Roman clay statuettes of Venus – II or IIIc

Abraham & his Planned Sacrifice of Isaac.

Popular with Romanesque sculptors was the story of Abraham and his intention to sacrifice his only son in accordance with God's instructions. This was frequently used on early Christian sarcophagi. It was seen to represent an example of the ultimate sacrifice, but with faith. Sometimes the scene is produced in full, as at Sant Feliu, Girona. We see Isaac bound and kneeling at his father's feet. Abraham, with knife held aloft, is looking away towards the sound of the voice of God. And below his arm is the lamb that is to be the real sacrifice. This poignant scene is repeated on many sarcophagi with minor variations. It is a configuration that may have its roots in the sculptures and murals of Ancient Egypt.



St Feliu, Girona – Detail of IVc sarcophagus (left) and Abu Simbel, Egypt – Ramses II executes a prisoner; 1275 BC (right)

A sarcophagus in the Vatican museum has a scene with less detail – just the two figures. There are others that show the bush with the sacrificial lamb.



Vatican - Detail of sarcophagus dated 320AD. Arles – Detail of IVc sarcophagus

The Romanesque sculptors adopted the theme and the image with little modification.



Issoire – Re-used plaque on North transept La Sauve Majeure – Capital by transept

The example from Issoire shows a plaque that has been re-employed in the transept wall. Abraham is wielding a knife and is about to sacrifice his young son, who is shown on an altar. To the right an angel is cautioning Abraham, whilst a lamb is shown in the lower right corner. In the example from the ruined abbey of La Sauve Majeure the angel is shown seizing the wrist of Abraham as he prepares to sacrifice his son (who is partly hidden round the side of the capital).

Daniel in the Lion's Den.

Tina Negus has discussed the pre-Christian origins of the theme known to Jews and Christians as 'Daniel in the lions' den' in her article to be seen at http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/index.php?page_id=20 . In the early Christian period the scenes of Adam and Eve (the First Sin) and Daniel in the lions' den were often shown together. The story of Daniel was associated by early Christians with their persecution: they saw in Daniel the figure of the church and the lions symbolised the persecutors that were restrained by Divine power. In the early sculptures the images were usually very similar, with Daniel shown standing naked between two rather benign-looking lions.



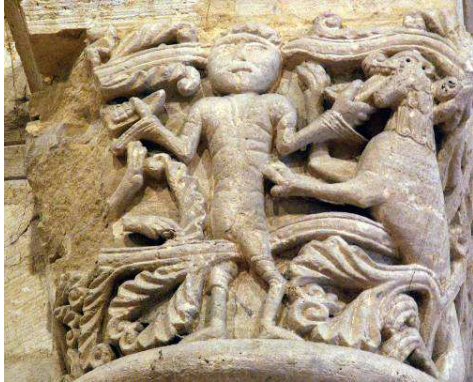
Arles – Detail of ‘Chaste Susanne’ sarcophagus. Vatican – Detail from 320AD sarcophagus

In the Romanesque period it would seem that the scene was used more frequently than any other scene from either the Old or New Testaments. At Moissac there are two capitals in the cloisters with a seated figure between two standing lions. On one the sculptor has made it clear that the scene was Daniel by naming him (and the lion). Unlike those from the early Christian period, Daniel is robed and has the appearance of a king.



Moissac – Capital in cloisters

In the next two examples we see a figure between two lions. The figures are holding the tongues of the lions firmly in the hand, surely a hazardous act that shows mastery over the dangerous beasts. Thus in these examples the sculptor would appear to be using the model of Daniel in the lion’ den as a symbol of the Churches mastery of the threats to it; by the XII century the danger to the Church was less from persecution than from powerful or greedy feudal lords. But the format of the scene has changed little in outline.



Macqueville – Capital in nave



Ydes – Capital on apse

Antique Themes that Rarely Re-appear.

There are a number of scenes that decorate the early Christian sarcophagi that either rarely appear or never reappear in Romanesque sculpture. These include the Crossing of the Red Sea, Moses striking the Rock in the Desert and Jonah and the Whale. In Arles there remain three examples of sarcophagi that illustrate the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites. It would seem that it was a popular theme, possibly because the promised safe passage prefigured the New Testament promise of redemption. Of these three Old Testament scenes two, the Crossing of the Red Sea and Moses Striking the Rock for Water, were associated with Emperor Constantine. The first was a symbol of his victory as being a Christian triumph. The importance of the rod of Moses has been explained by a similar connection with Constantine because the rod was apparently brought to Constantinople as a holy object during his reign. Subsequent generations may not have recalled the connections or not thought them important; so these two scenes were rarely seen in the Romanesque sculpture of later centuries.



Arles (St Trophime) – ‘Crossing of the Red Sea’ sarcophagus



Vatican – Detail of IVc sarcophagus (left)
(right)

Arles – detail of AD 360 sarcophagus

The Illustrations of Jonah on the sarcophagi are usually large, occupying about a quarter of the sculptured surface area, and are full of drama. The scene had special significance to Christians who saw the swallowing of Jonah by the whale as symbolising death; hence its relevance to sarcophagi. The subsequent disgorging symbolised the Resurrection, the hope of every Christian. Instances of it in Romanesque sculpture are few. There are at least two examples in Northern Spain and one at Mozac.



Mozac – Capital in South aisle

The New Testament.

The biblical events from the New Testament that are illustrated on Christian sarcophagi fall into four main groups:

Christ's birth and early years

Christ's miracles and parables, especially the former

Christ's passion and resurrection

Generic scenes such as Christ the teacher, Christ the Good Shepherd, Christ with the Apostles and Traditio Legis

Christ's Birth & Early Years.

Sculptures on early Christian sarcophagi that depict the Nativity are few. At Arles there is a IV century one (that is called 'The Nativity' sarcophagus) that has two scenes on the central panel on the front; one shows the birth in the manger and the other shows the shepherds spreading the news of the birth. The illustration of Mary in the manger has hints of the scene illustrated by the Maître de Cabestany on the lintel over the West door at Le Boulou: the illustration shows both a midwife and the animals in the manger which are not mentioned in the Gospels but are to be found in the New Testament Apocrypha. Another, that has similar layout, is to be seen on the façade of Notre Dame la Grande, at Poitiers.



Arles – Central panel of 'Nativity' sarcophagus, late IVc (Left) & Le Boulou – Detail of lintel over West door (right)



Poitiers, Notre Dame la Grande – Detail of façade

Unlike scenes of the birth of Christ and the manger, illustrations of the three magi are fairly common on the sarcophagi and very common in Romanesque sculpture. Furthermore, the setting is frequently little changed between the two periods.



Arles – Detail of 'Epoux' sarcophagus, IVc sarcophagus



Vatican – Detail of AD 325



Autun – Capital in Chapter House

The symbolism of the dove representing the Holy Spirit at baptism was also to span the two periods, as may be seen on the next two illustrations.



Arles – Cross of Anastasia sarcophagus, detail of end panel (Left) & L'Estany, Catalonia – Capital in cloisters (right)

The subject of the Flight to Egypt of Joseph, Mary and her child was a frequent subject for sculptors in many regions of France and beyond. Mary is usually shown riding side-

saddle on a donkey, whilst holding her child firmly in her arms. It is very possible that this image was taken from the equally widely used image of the Celtic Goddess, Epona. She was a 'Mother-God' of Welsh origin. There are baked clay models of that were found in many parts of France; Most also show her riding side-saddle on a donkey. They mostly date from the first two centuries after the birth of Christ.



Moissac – Detail from South door (left) and Epona statue from St Germain-en-Laye (right)

It was not just sarcophagi that provided models. Altars, arches, cinerary urns were some of the many objects that may have held models for the Italian mediaeval sculptor. One of the panels on the pulpit at the baptistery in Pisa provides an example. It shows the Magi presenting their gifts to the infant Christ. The figure of his mother could have been modelled on any one of a number of objects to be found in the region.



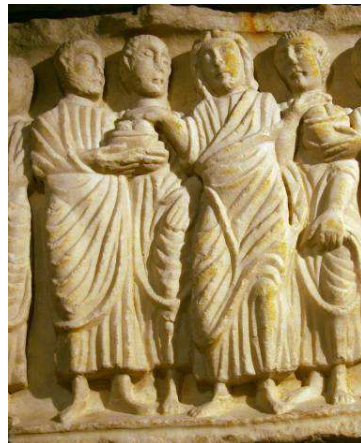
Pisa – Pulpit in baptistery, detail



Roman 2cAD altar to Ariadne, now Met NY (left) & Etruscan 3 or 2c BC funerary monument, now Louvre (right)

Christ's Miracles.

The sarcophagi were sculptured with illustrations that were intended to both decorate and teach the viewer. The same principle was to apply in the Romanesque period. Yet the resulting iconography was very different. Most of the Christian sarcophagi have at least one scene of Christ healing; the most common are of Christ healing a leper or a cripple or the restoration of the sight to Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. As a general observation, it should be noted that those who are the object of a curative miracle are almost always shown as being small in stature, almost as children even when the clothing shows that the person is evidently an adult. As frequently illustrated is the miracle of the turning of water to wine at the Feast of Cana; less frequently we see the multiplication of loaves at the Feeding of the Five thousand. The miracles, especially those of healing, are far less frequently seen on Romanesque sculptures. This would seem to be surprising especially in an age when death from sickness and injury came to many suddenly and early in life.



Girona, Sant Feliu – Details of two IVc sarcophagi (left and centre) Musée St Raymond, Toulouse from Place St Sernin – Detail (right)



Vatican – Detail of ‘Two brothers’ sarcophagus and a mid IVc sarcophagus

Christ’s Passion.

That the death of Christ and his subsequent resurrection and ascension to Heaven are at the core of the Christian faith should need no reiteration here. Yet on the early Christian sarcophagi the final events of Christ’s life were infrequent subjects for sculptors; the actual crucifixion of Christ is not illustrated; his subsequent resurrection and ascension are alluded to on one sarcophagus that is to be seen at Arles. As we will see, it is the events around St Peter’s actions during Christ’s Passion that are featured most frequently. However there is one image of Christ that poses a problem: in the Cathedral there is a sarcophagus with two registers. In the centre of the top register is the figure of Christ with, at his feet, a cockerel. St Peter is shown on Christ’s left. This scene foretells the denial by Peter, but it may hold a larger message which is not so clear.



Sarcophagus in Arles Cathedral – Detail of Christ & St Peter



Arles, St Trophime – Side panel of IVc sarcophagus; Christ's entry to Jerusalem



Vatican – Detail of IVc sarcophagus



Rome – Detail of IVc sarcophagus

The left hand illustration is of one of two illustrations on the same panel showing St Peter at the time of the Passion. It shows him with the symbolic ‘Cock that crowed three times’. The other is replicated on other sarcophagi and shows St Peter being detained by Roman soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane. The number of sarcophagi with images of St Peter’s presence during Christ’s Passion is remarkable. Most of the sarcophagi that have biblical scenes include one or more of these two scenes. It is not evident why St Peter should have been depicted so often, save in the setting of ‘Traditio Legis’ (see page 10 above); in this he inherited the responsibility for leading the Church after Christ’s crucifixion and thus became ‘the head of the church’. This endorsement of the succession by St Peter and, in turn, his successors at Rome was important because of the legitimacy that it provided. It has already been pointed out that Peter is not shown with the symbolic Key of Heaven with which he is associated usually in Romanesque sculpture.



Moissac – Detail of St Peter by South door

After St Peter the next most frequently used theme from Christ's Passion was that of Christ's appearance before Pontius Pilate.



Arles – Detail of 'Chaste Susanne'

At Arles there is one sarcophagus that is devoted to scenes of the Passion. None of the scenes on this sarcophagus are to be found on other sarcophagi. This suggests, that unlike most sarcophagi, which were 'mass produced' and stocked for subsequent sale, this was specifically made to order. It is also one of the first to include the chrism; the chrism was to be the central and sometimes the only Christian symbol on later sarcophagi. From the right, the illustrations are of Pilate washing his hands symbolically, Christ being clothed in the purple robe and crowned with a crown of thorns; the final scene shows him carrying the cross. Whilst Christ crucified was to be a very common subject for Romanesque sculptors, the scenes on this sarcophagus were very infrequently used by them.



Rome – 'Domatilla' sarcophagus, late IVc

‘Generic Scenes’.



Arles – Detail of late IVc sarcophagus



Roman, now Louvre – ‘Christ, the teacher’ IVc

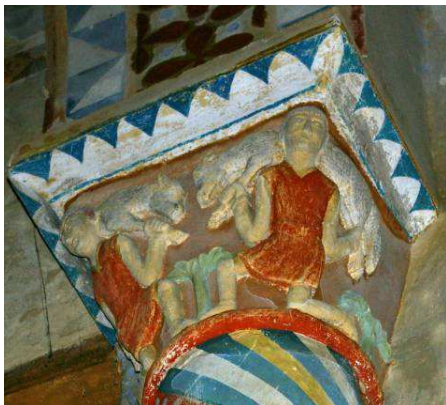
The illustration of ‘Christ the teacher’ shown above (top) is one of the earliest with the head of Christ with a nimbus, although we have seen the nimbus used with the dove symbolising the Holy Spirit. In Romanesque sculpture the nimbus is almost always shown around the head of Christ.

We saw earlier the scene of 'The Good Shepherd' with a shepherd carrying a lamb across his shoulders (see page 11 above). This is the more usual image; but in the Vatican there is another, where Christ is the central figure of a line of men each with a lamb; perhaps this is to remind the viewer that the disciples were also responsible for their 'flock'.



Vatican – 'The Good Shepherd' sarcophagus

There are several sarcophagi that have Christ as the central figure of a line. Most show him standing between the Twelve or amongst his disciples; a small number show him as the young teacher amongst disciples. In Romanesque sculpture images of the single shepherd bearing the lamb are not infrequent, especially in the Auvergne. But the larger settings are rare. Where they exist, the image of Christ identifies him more specifically with the attendant figures acknowledging his special status amongst them. We can see this on the lintel over the door at Anzy-le-Duc. The exception to this general absence of attendant figures is the Last Supper. This is found on both lintels and on capitals. This scene is not found on the sarcophagi. Thus we have another example of a major change in the iconography of the larger settings.



Biozat – Capital in nave



Anzy le Duc – Lintel over West door



St Pons de Thomières – South tympanum on West facade

The 'Traditio Legis' theme is common on sarcophagi. The composition varies. On some we see the figure of Christ with the Apostles Peter and Paul only, one each side. On others we have Christ with all twelve Apostles. On the sarcophagus in the Louvre there are twelve figures on the front with a further five on an end panel; on the other end is an unrelated scene.



Louvre – ‘Traditio Legis’, 390AD

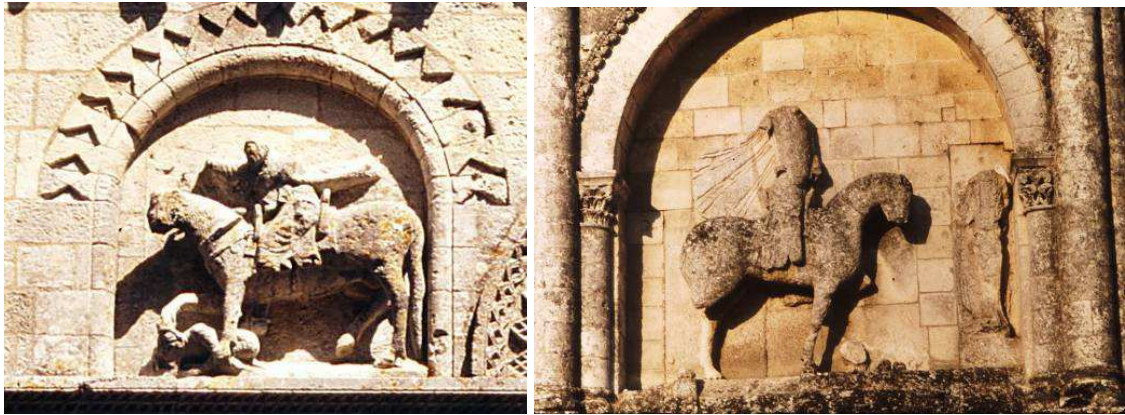
Sculptures of ‘Traditio legis’ in the Romanesque period are less common. However there is a fine example in Barcelona, on the tympanum over the West door to the church of Sant Pau del Campo.



Barcelona, Sant Pau del Campo – Tympanum

Across Aquitaine there at least twelve churches that have, or used to have until they were destroyed, a sculpture of a figure on horseback. The details of the scene differ in several. The majority show a figure on the horse. The horse has a fore-hoof raised over a fallen figure. The significance of the various scenes has been the subject of research and speculation. A common suggestion is that the figure represents Emperor Constantine who was responsible for establishing Christianity as the ‘state’ religion for the Roman Empire. The fallen figure represents the pagan being trampled under-foot by the horse. The whole scene is said, in such circumstances, to be modelled on the Roman equestrian statues of the style of that of Marcus Aurelius that is now in the Capitoline museum, Rome. The

Roman mounted soldier armed with a weapon and wearing a flapping cloak riding down on his conquered foes is to be found on Roman funeral monuments in many parts of the former Empire. It is also to be seen on the VI century Byzantine Barbarini diptych in the Louvre, where the mounted Emperor is seen as a champion of faith, whilst a small figure representing Earth hangs onto his stirrup. There are other interpretations but the models are probably to be found in Roman antiquity.



Châteauneuf sur Charente (left) and Sugères (right) – Statues on façade



Barberini Diptych, now Louvre (detail)

Over the South door to St Sernin, Toulouse is a modillion that would not have looked out of place if seen on a tomb-stone or sarcophagus of the Roman period. It shows a veiled woman with one breast exposed. It has been set beside flowers that are also typically Roman in style.



St Sernin, Toulouse – Modillion



Rome – Detail of Portonaccio Sarcophagus

The West façade of St Sernin, Arles provides another example of how symbolism from Antiquity was adopted by mediaeval sculptors. To the right of the West door is a small panel showing two of the damned plummeting to earth. It bears a remarkable resemblance to a sculpture from the ancient Greek settlement of Selinonte, on Sicily, a sculpture that is now in a Palermo museum.



St Trophime, Arles – Fall of the damned (left) and Selinonte, Sicily – Sculpture now in Palermo (right)

In the Musée St Raymond, Toulouse, there is a Roman capital with a head set in acanthus leaves. This is dated as 1st century BC and is thought to have been part of a funeral monument. Heads set in foliage are frequently found on Romanesque capitals in churches and cloisters in the West and South of France. In most cases the heads are small and of men. The example from Elne cloisters shows a queen.



Musée St Raymond – Roman capital from 1st c BC (left) Elne – Capital in cloisters (right)

Images of a powerful bull's head are frequently to be seen on Gallo-Roman sculptures across France from Provence and Languedoc in the South-east through to the Atlantic coast. The images are of a generally consistent style and are possibly associated with the sacrificial bull in the cult of Mithras; this cult was much favoured in the Roman army; this suggests that the image perhaps 'travelled' with the legions of the army.



Gallo-Roman sculptures at Saintes, Narbonne and Périgueux

The same motif was to appear in Romanesque sculpture particularly on modillions. Whether it was intended to be decorative or to have a symbolic meaning is not certain.



Romanesque sculptures at St-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, Tuarinya, Echebrune and St Cernin

On Romanesque sculpture pine cones frequently appear as part of the decoration. It may well be that for many sculptors it was intended to be purely decorative. But in the early decades it is probable that it was associated with death. In the Gallo-Roman museum at Lyon there are two examples where the pine cone has been employed on funerary monuments.



Paray-le-Monial – Capital in narthex



Lyons - Funeral altar of Primilla. 1c

Decoration

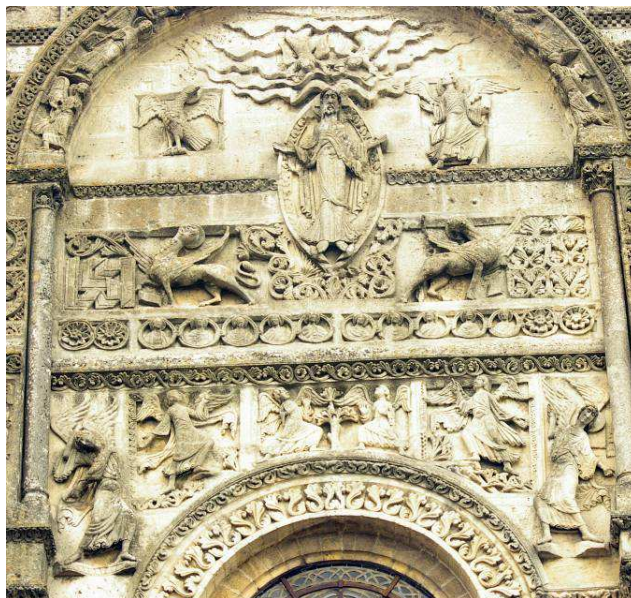
Sarcophagi from the period prior to the adoption of Christianity, in addition to the main allegorical scenes on the front and side panels, usually had a thin line of sculpture along the edges of the lid.



Rome, now in US – Lid of 'Victory Sarcophagus'

The lid of the 'Victory Sarcophagus' shows pairs of winged putti frolicking across the length of the panel. These small figures are a smaller image of the scenes on the main panel below; this has tall, angel-like, scantily veiled young women carrying out similar activities to those of the putti. From the time of the introduction of Christian scenes on the main panel, biblical scenes were sometimes added to the lid faces. But there are examples where the lid was decorated with the pre-Christian putti. This was probably because either the lid of an earlier tomb was re-employed or the lids were given an innocuous scene that could be 'mass-produced'; the repetitive nature of some decoration would suggest that some form of stencil was used to repeat patterns.

Later generations of sculptors were to expand on the use of the angels in the theme of 'Victory'. The façade of the Cathedral of Angouleme provides a clear and unequivocal example of the angels on the façade celebrating the victory of the central figure of Christ who is depicted in the scene of the Ascension. Angels are assisting Christ's ascension while others below are celebrating the event. The 'Victory Sarcophagus' provides clear precedents for this sculptured scene of the Christian notion of victory.



Angouleme – Detail of facade

For example, the IV century sarcophagus known as ‘Les Epoux’, at Arles, has biblical scenes on both the main panel and on the lid.



Arles – Lid of ‘Les Epoux’ sarcophagus

In contrast, the sarcophagus known as the tomb of St Mitre, at Aix-en-Provence, has a line of romping putti along the lid.



Aix-en-Provence - Lid of tomb of St Mitre

This particular lid is interesting because we see a prototype for the sculptures of angels holding the mandorla that is around the Christ in Majesty.

That the Romanesque sculptors copied decorative patterns, particularly flowers and foliage, hardly needs to be re-iterated; the Corinthian capital is the model that was most widely exploited. But there are many hundreds of other examples. Typical are the examples illustrated below; all the decorative items on the stone at Saintes were to be copied by sculptors of subsequent generations in the Middle Ages. The artisans of both periods almost certainly used some form of stencil to aid the rapid reproduction of motifs.



Saintes – Gallo-Roman stone in Musée Lapidaire (II or IIIc) (left) and Tresque, now Avignon – Detail of IXc chancel screen (right)



Abbaye aux Dames, Saintes – Detail from façade (XIIc)



Bourg Argental – Detail of arch over West door (XIIc)

Cavaillon, in Provence, offers an excellent example of the transferring of motifs. There are remains of a Gallo-Roman arch that retains fragments of good sculptured foliage. Along the upper walls of the nave of the Cathedral is a frieze that has very similar foliage patterns.

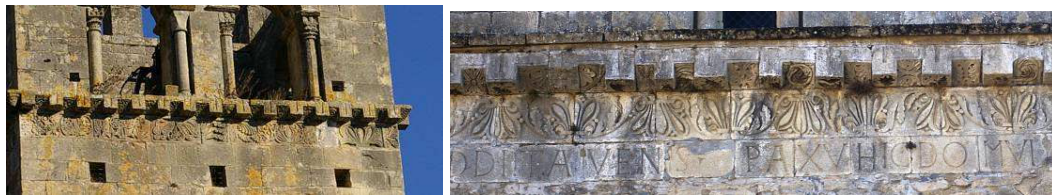


Cavaillon – Gallo-Roman arch (detail) (rotated through 90°)



Cavaillon Cathedral – Detail of frieze on South wall of nave

Christina Weising drew attention to a number of churches in Provence that had on their upper walls a deep cornice of plaques that had sculptured decoration that was modelled on antique tradition (7). Most of this decoration was of vegetation. There are particularly good examples on the outer walls of the nave on both the North and South sides and on the tower of the Cathedral at Vaison-la-Romaine.



Vaison-la-Romaine – Frieze on tower and North of the nave

Other models were transmitted through the decoration of manuscripts. As an example, in the Périgueux museum there is a VI century sarcophagus with foliage decoration. This was a very typical decorative form at the time. The Canon table from the eighth century Gospels of Northumbria shows similar decoration that might have been modelled from a similar ancient artefact. Such manuscripts were models for later sculptors.



Périgueux – VIc sarcophagus

Gospels of Northumbria – Detail of Canon table

At Bourges, in the prefecture garden there is the door from St Ursin church; it is a particularly remarkable example of a secular scene. On the tympanum there is a hunting

scene that was probably intended to be entirely decorative. There is little doubt that the sculptor who was responsible for this tympanum had seen a tomb like that of St Ludre at St Etienne, Déols. The tomb of this saint was a re-used sarcophagus with remarkably similar hunting scenes.



Detail of tympanum of St Ursin, Bourges (top) and detail of tomb of St Ludre, Déols Abbey (lower)

More Models from Antiquity

The Maître de Cabestany or his workshop operated in Languedoc and Roussillon and into Catalonia (and perhaps beyond). The workshop has been the subject of much study. (8). Characteristics of the style associated with the workshop included men who were usually bearded and women that were heavily veiled. Hands were generally disproportionately large. Serafin Maralejo drew attention to the IV century sarcophagi now positioned in the choir walls of Sant Feliu, Girona. He proposed that these might have provided models for the workshop when working both in Sant Pere de Galligans, Girona and at Sant Pere de Rodes.



Sant Feliu, Girona – Details of two IVc sarcophagi in choir

It is noticeable that the sculptors of Provence also followed the custom of dividing up the sculptured portion of the side panels of sarcophagi by framing small scenes between small columns that were sometimes topped by a capital and joined by an arch. The façades of St Trophime, at Arles, St Gabriel in the Bouches du Rhône and Pérignac, in Charente-Maritime provide examples. The arches are no more than background.



St Trophime, Arles – Detail of West façade



St Gabriel – Detail of West façade

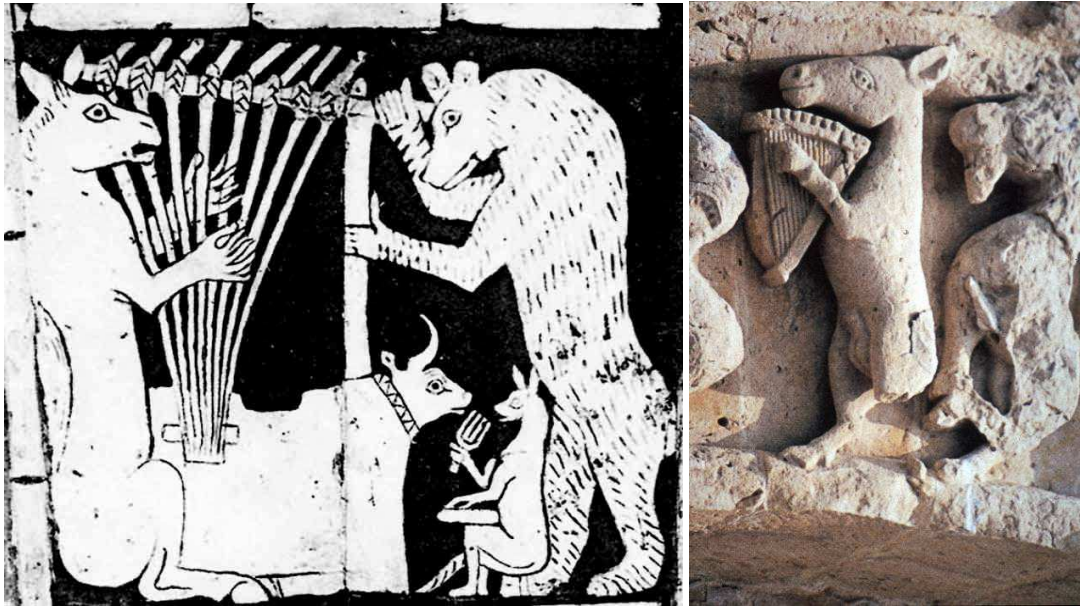


Pérignac – West façade

Many Romanesque churches that have sculptures have supporting decoration that is based on patterns derived from that have their roots in antiquity. Familiar examples are those of interlace and interlaced foliage. The origin and the line of the transmission of the interlace motif from antiquity to the Middle Ages is discussed in more detail elsewhere on this site. (9).

The representation of animals playing musical instruments is not uncommon in mediaeval sculpture. There are many examples on churches in Poitou-Charente.

However, the sculptor of the Middle Ages was following a very long established idea: a shell plaque that dates from about 3000BC was found at Ur, in Southern Iraq. It is of Sumerian art.



Sumerian shell plaque from Ur, 3000 BC (from *The Development of Sumerian Art*, plate 43 (1935), L Woolley (left) St Pierre, Aulnay (right))

The visible influence of the Greeks and Romans is not confined to sculpture. The framework for that sculpture is often also derived from Roman architecture. Take the Gallo-Roman arch on the banks of the river Charente at Saintes.



Saintes – Gallo-Roman arch

This arch, typical of many that were to be seen in mediaeval times, was the entrance way to the town. It symbolised the state's power and authority, indicating that within the gateway there was security.

At St Sernin, Toulouse we can see that the architect used the same concept on the two doors to the transept.



St Sernin, Toulouse – Porte des Comtes (South door to transept)

This entrance was modelled on the Roman examples. It was also a symbol of the authority and protection that lay behind it; but this time it was the authority and protection of God that was within. The two arches provided the frame for decoration in the form of capitals that illustrated themes intended to influence those who were to pass through the arches.

The influence of Roman structures on Romanesque monuments may be found in many parts of France. A particularly clear example is to be seen at Autun, in Burgundy. There the Arroux gateway to the town still survives. It has two levels. The lower level has the familiar large archways to provide entrances for people, their horses and carts to pass through to the safety of the town and away from the hazards of the countryside outside, whilst providing accesses that could be easily and quickly sealed in times of crisis. The upper level comprises narrow arches separated by fluted pillars with Corinthian capitals. This level added a visual dimension of strength. The North transept of the Cathedral shares the same form both on the exterior and interior; the resultant symbolism would have been noticed by all who saw and who passed into the Cathedral by that doorway. (10).



Autun, Porte d'Arroux (left) and Cathedral North transept (right)

Autun provides another example of a form of symbolism that is derived from Roman culture. The tympanum has an inscription that translates as 'Gislebertus (has) made (or built) this'. The name is positioned immediately below the central figure of Christ. Linda Seidel has proposed that in this context the name refers not to the builder but to a noble who, a century before the sculpture was made, ordered the construction of a church dedicated to St Lazare. (10). In this respect the usage of the inscription followed a model such as the one to be found on the Pantheon in Rome, a second century building that replaced an earlier structure built by Agrippa, the Emperor Augustus's most important military leader in Gaul. His name is recorded on the lintel over the portico.



Autun – Inscription on tympanum



Pantheon, Rome – Inscription on portico

Hartmann-Virnich identified that the architectural structures of two churches in Provence seem to draw on the architectural images of antiquity with fluted columns topped by Corinthian capitals and with a triangular tympanum across the top (11). They were the West façade of St Gabriel and the West doorway of St Restitut.



St Restitut – West door



Vienne – Gallo-Roman temple

The transition from Paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire was not an overnight event. It was therefore inevitable that many habits and customs were to continue during the transition and were to be adopted by Christians. One example is provided by funeral monuments. In Charente, Poitou, Limousin and Berry there are more than a dozen slim cylindrical towers that are known as 'Lanternes des Morts'. They are rare outside this area; why this should be is not easily explicable. Most are to be found in a local cemetery and they had explicit funerary functions. The Romans had a not dissimilar funerary monument. A particularly fine example has survived at St Remy-en-Provence on the Gallo-Roman site of Glanum. Linda Seidel drew attention to the suggestion that the lantern towers over the West façade of the church at Aulnay, on the borders of Poitou and

Charente, might also have served as lantern for the dead and that they were thus a further development of the ancient custom. (12). Other fine examples are the churches at St Jouin-de-Marnes and St Hilaire, Melle, both in Deux-Sèvres. These tend to confirm that the custom was deeply rooted in the West of France.



Glanum – Mausoleum of Julii & ‘Lanternes des Morts’ at Fenioux and Cellefrouin



Aulnay – West façade

St Jouin-de-Marnes – West façade

Alan Borg drew attention to the possibility of the ‘scaenae frons’ (the Roman theatre stage) influencing the design of the West façade of St Gilles du Gard, particularly when remembering that there were several large Roman theatres in the Bouches du Rhône area of Provence. (13). These frequently were high with a central doorway and smaller side doors. There would have been niches for figures and there would have been a number of columns. The remains of the theatre at Orange provide a tantalising glimpse of some aspects of this composition.



Orange – Theatre (left)

&



St Gilles du Gard – West façade (right)

In our examination of the roots from which design, form and motif are derived there is a tendency to focus on Roman and Greek sources (and the sources from which they in their turn had derived them). There were, however, other civilisations in Europe that had made a contribution. The example of the Celts is one such. Their use of the interlace motif is well documented (9). Another example is the Iberians who pre-dated the Roman conquest of Spain.



Valencia – Iberian jar, 4 or 5c BC

The interlocked arches motif that is on a 4 or 5 century BC Iberian jar is a motif that was employed by Romanesque masons and sculptors from Soria in Castile to Normandy and Britain. Like the interlace, it had a universal appeal.



San Juan de Duero, Soria – Cloisters (left) & Christchurch, Dorset – North transept, detail (right)

The arches on the transept at Christchurch are set against a background that resembles fish-scales or imbrication. This pattern was frequently used to decorate the sarcophagi of the VI and VII centuries. But the sculptors of that period were copying the pattern from earlier models, such as the marble fragment that was found at Vaison-la-Romaine, a fragment that dates from the I century AD.



Pujols, Gironde – Detail of Merovingian tomb (left) & Vaison-la-Romaine, Provence – Ic marble fragment (right)

Summary

We can be sure that some Romanesque sculptors were influenced by the artefacts from antiquity that had survived, but we are unable to tell by how much they were influenced. The evidence that they were influenced by the sculptures is inconsistent: decorative patterns were undoubtedly adopted; some architectural features that supported sculpture were employed on occasions; figures on antique artefacts provided models; some biblical themes were adopted readily; others were either not accepted into the Romanesque repertoire or rarely accepted. There was certainly a change of emphasis over the passage of time especially with regard to the depiction of Christ's Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection. These were very much more common in the iconography of the

Romanesque period. The Romanesque artisans were not producing mere imitations of the antique; they were giving them a new and richer form that was relevant to and adapted to the spiritual life of the time.

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