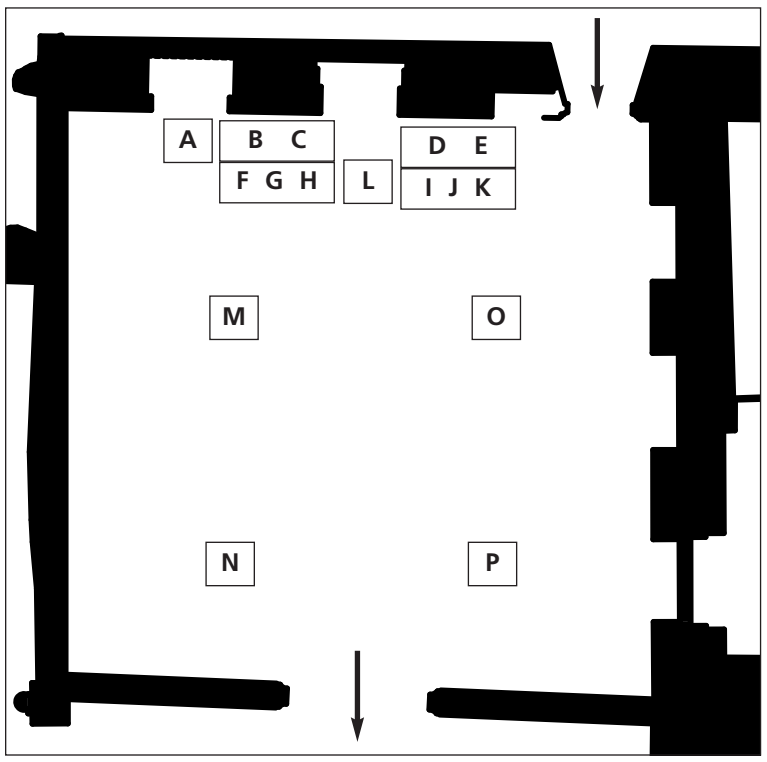


Room 10 *English*

Romanesque sculpture

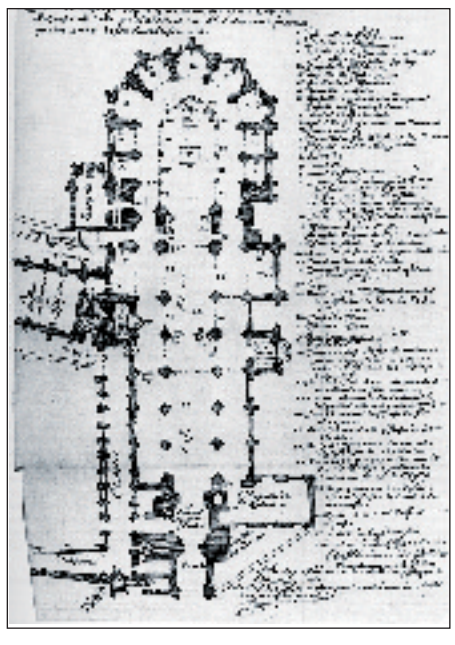
The "High Middle Ages" period did not totally disregard stonework; indeed, it was used for decorative liturgical objects, predominantly with an interlace motif. Figurative sculpture was mostly produced in stucco, bronze or ivory. Between around the year 1000 and the middle of the 12th century, monumental sculpture became more popular again, first being placed on capitals before moving on to grand portals – sculpture that was, in the Middle Ages, always polychrome.

Paris

One of the major features of the National Museum of the Middle Ages is the wealth of its collection of Parisian Romanesque sculpture. Although it is generally considered that sculpture only flourished in Paris from around 1140 onwards, with the *façade* of the abbey-church of Saint-Denis, the variety and diversity of Parisian sculpture from the 11th century to the start of the following century is demonstrated by the museum collection.

The abbey-church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés

The oldest example of this revival in Romanesque sculpture in the Île-de-France region is Saint-Germain-des-Prés. A royal foundation originally dedicated to Saint-Vincent-Sainte-Croix, this abbey played an essential, though intermittent role as a royal necropolis under the Merovingian kings. Although its overall lay-out has been preserved throughout its successive enlargements, the basilica building of the 6th century disappeared completely between the 11th and the 12th centuries. Two construction programmes radically changed the appearance of the building. The first was launched by Abbot Morard (990-1014), who had the bell tower rebuilt. Barely more than a decade after the death of Morard, in 1025, William of Volpiano was appointed Abbot of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and charged with reforming the Abbey; he did not stand down from the post until he had appointed one of his close relations as his successor, Adraud (Abbot from 1030 to 1060), under whose abbotship the abbey's *scriptorium* really rose to prominence. It is obviously tempting to attribute a large share of the modelling and physiognomy of the church and the construction of the nave (**fig. 1**) to the great reformer and builder, William of Volpiano. During the construction of the nave, the sculpture work was shared by three different workshops.



(fig. 1) Plan of the abbey-church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and its modifications in 1656

The first of these workshops really stands out: it produced the foliate capital (**A** to **E**) and was the forerunner for a number of slightly later Parisian workshops, in particular the Saint-Martin-des-Champs' one. The other two workshops were responsible for the figured capitals: one is caracterised by the squat proportions of its figures (**F** and **K**), protruding at the base of the basket, but much narrower at the edge of the plane.

The other workshop (**G** to **J**) gives its figures a very elongated style, the carving is strong and the forms are soft; the iconography of the Eucharist is particularly prominent in these capitals.

On one capital (**L**), the two workshops of figured capitals collaborated with each other, one with squat figures on the narrow sides (**L1**) and the other with elongated figures carved on the principal face (**L2**), artistically applied in the figure of Christ. Close examination of this capital, on which the transition between the work of two sculptors is awkward, reveals that they worked at the same time. It would therefore seem that the two workshops cohabited with one another, at least for a time, and shared the creation of this capital, which occupied the central position in the series. On it, Christ is holding the host, which was a way for the commissioners of the work to reaffirm the principle of transubstantiation (the transformation of bread into Christ's flesh and wine into his blood), in response to attack from certain heterodox clerics (deviating from the true doctrine).

The abbey-church of Sainte-Geneviève

Comparison with the capitals of the Sainte-Geneviève nave (**M** to **P**), produced more than half a century later at the start of the 12th century, shows how the Saint-Germain-des-Prés capitals illustrate a specific moment in the history of Parisian sculpture. Like the Saint-Germain-des-Prés abbey, the church of the monks of Saint Geneviève lay at the heart of one of the capital's main monastic communities.

D. Capital with foliated pattern

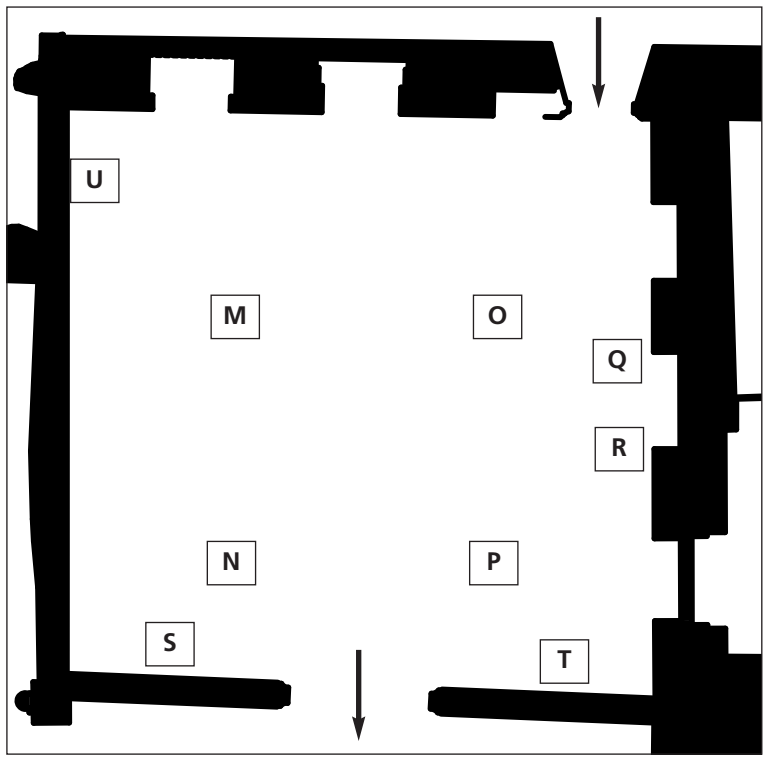
K. Capital with squat figures

I. Capital with elongated figures

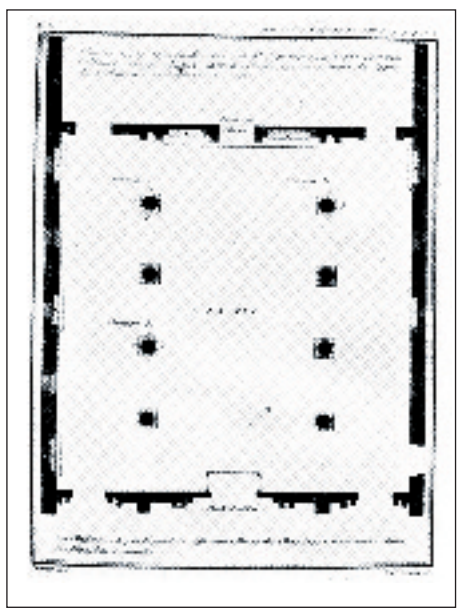
L1. Narrow side of the capital with squats figures

L2. Main façade

950	1014	1025-1030	1088-1099	circa 1100-1110	1115-1153	circa 1130
Bishop Etienne of Clermont had a Golden Virgin made for his cathedral	Death of Abbot Morard	William of Volpiano, Abbot of Saint-Germain-des-Prés	Pope Urban II	Construction of the Sainte-Geneviève nave	Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux	Renovation of the Sainte-Geneviève choir



In the nave (**fig. 2**), which is relatively dark since it is adjoined on one side by the cloister (the current Lycée Henri IV high school), and on the other by the parish church (Saint-Étienne-du-Mont), four very thick columns were topped by powerful capitals over a metre wide. One (**M**) depicts foliage only, two of them (**N** et **O**) show the signs of the zodiac and the last one (**P**) scenes from Genesis.
Here the figures are squat and may sometimes appear slightly crude, but the very high position of these capitals needs to be borne in mind here. Their primary function was architectural and the motifs were probably not very legible. All the capitals appear to be an ode to the Creation, both through its story – Genesis – and its consequences – nature and the passage of time symbolised by the zodiac.



(fig. 2) Plan of the nave in the old church of Sainte-Geneviève

The priory of Saint-Martin-des-Champs
From the Parisian priory of Saint-Martin-des-Champs, probably the cloister, the torso of a prophet (**Q.** Cl. 23604) serves to remind us that, although few examples remain, Parisian sculpture prior to construction of the Saint-Denis façade and column statues, was not restricted to capitals alone but could also take more monumental forms.

Wooden sculpture

Alongside sculpture using monumental stone, designed to be incorporated in architecture, the men of the 11th and 12th centuries also used wooden sculpture, particularly for works intended to be placed inside churches. Much more fragile due to the putrescibility of their material, it is rarer for examples of these to be preserved today.

Madonna and Child sculptures of the Auvergne
The number of works preserved from the Auvergne region is testimony to the wealth of wooden sculpture abounding there in the 12th century. At the time, this was a very prosperous region. Pope Urban II launched his crusade from Clermont. What's more, Clermont cathedral housed a golden Virgin, made in the 10th century, with a miraculous reputation drawing crowds of pilgrims.
In the 12th century, it was copied in many of the region's buildings, giving rise to a particularly rich set of sculptures of the Madonna in majesty, in a frontal pose, the Child seated on her lap, an example of which is housed by the museum (**R.** Cl. 9270). Here sculpted as neither an infant nor a young adult, Jesus is depicted as a child, already imbued with his mission and raising his right hand in blessing. Sometimes incorrectly called *sedes sapientiæ* (or "thrones of wisdom"), these sculptures are one of many signs of the development of the Cult of the Virgin Mary in the 12th century, in which Saint Bernard played a key role.

Christ on the Cross sculptures from the Auvergne
The Auvergne region also produced large sculptures of Christ on the Cross, designed to be placed behind the altar. The museum houses two examples of such works.
The first (**S.** Cl. 23409), sculpted at the very end of the 12th century, belongs to a group from the south of the Auvergne. With the head resting on the right shoulder and the eyes closed, it clearly emphasises the mortal nature of Christ, at a time when certain heterodox or even frankly heretic (against the doctrine) currents were calling into question his dual, simultaneously human and divine nature.
The second (**T.** Cl. 2149), which, in contrast, comes from the north of the region, is older and also more original. Triumphant, with both eyes open, it belongs to the traditional iconography of Christ as it had developed since the Paleochristian era. However, his fine face, with the hair rounded at the top and, above all, the extraordinary *perizonium* (or "loin-cloth") with its sharp folds reminiscent of metalwork, and ample, intricately carved knot, are testimony to the artist's openness to the creative styles of regions other than the Auvergne: neighbouring Burgundy, but also Île-de-France where the first gothic sculpture was beginning to emerge at the time.

Catalonia
Wooden sculpture also developed outside the kingdom of France, especially in Catalonia, where, in the second quarter of the 12th century, one workshop produced several groups of monumental works depicting the Descent from the Cross for the churches of the Boí Valley and its near neighbour, the Aran Valley. One of these groups stood out from the others owing to its slightly different iconography: that of the visit of the holy women to Christ's tomb, which they found empty, the only mention of the Resurrection in the Gospels. Two of the sculptures from this group have been preserved, one of which is housed in the museum (**U.** Cl. 23673) and the other in the Fogg Art Museum of Cambridge (United States). With her hands raised together in front of her body, in a sign of prayer, she is leaning forward slightly to look at the empty tomb. With its symmetrical work and hieratic finesse, it has a fascinating appearance, further accentuated by the loss of the colours, which, as with all mediaeval sculptures made of wood or limestone, would once have covered it.

Xavier Dectot, *curator*

M. Foliage

N. Sign of the zodiac: Aquarius

O. Sign of the zodiac: Aries and Taurus

P. Scene from Genesis: Adam and Eve

Q. Cl. 23604

R. Cl. 9270

S. Cl. 23409 (detail)

T. Cl. 2149 (detail)

U. Cl. 23673 (detail)

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6 place Paul Painlevé, 75005 Paris
Service culturel. Tél. 01 53 73 78 16
www.musee-moyenage.fr

Musée National du Moyen Âge
thermes & hôtel de Cluny