

FILM 2- ROMANESQUE ART

Another example of the skill of the sculptors is manifest at Aulnay, where Romanesque sculpture reached its peak. The Church of Saint-Pierre at Aulnay is one of the monuments where the artists expressed the greatest degree of creativity and inventiveness. We will see that with **Rémy Prin**.

There is a mystery surrounding Aulnay. Why is this jewel of Romanesque art located here ?

The only thing we know about this site is that the property was transferred to the Canon of Poitiers around 1120AD. We know nothing about its construction, nor about the people who worked here. But the people of Poitiers who commissioned the church invested a tremendous amount of resources. They called on the best artisans of the time. And it is a big church for a village like this one, especially since the actual village is 1 kilometer away. In fact, the Viscount of Aulnay had his church in the village, so why is this one on the outskirts ? There is no abbey here, there never was one, nor were there any relics that would have drawn the crowds. So we suppose that it is linked to the Gallo-Roman world, since steles of Roman soldiers were found in the pavings of the church in the 19th century.

Tell us about the sculptures which were Aulnay's claim to fame. They were a real bolt from the blue.

Yes, the imagery at Aulnay marks a revolution. We can see it elsewhere, too, at Poitiers and on the facade at Angoulême, created around the same time. But at Aulnay we clearly see a marked change in sculpture, from one mode of sculpture to another, through 3 styles that we have in fact identified. There seems to have been 3 teams of sculptors.

So tell us about the first team ?

The first team was charged with sculpting the apse, the south portal and a number of capitals on the transept crossing. The sculpture is very fine, very minimal. It has a great power of expression and few features, few details, few reliefs.

And the second team ?

The second team took care of the capitals of the nave. They invented a type of stone relief that is more marked. And this leads to the third team, who dealt with the western facade twenty years or so after construction began. That is what we think. And this marks a true change, since sculpture then freed itself and took off. It freed itself from architecture, in fact. They did not sculpt monsters, as in the beginning, but human forms, female bodies and angels with extremely fine drapings. There is a great elegance to these figures. Some say they bring to mind the songs of the Troubadours.

Would you share with us what your favorite sculpture or image is here ?

I have many ! But if I had to choose one, then that of Charadrius. He is a bestial monster, with a bird's body and a man's face, as is often the case with bestial monsters. He has the neck and beak of a bird. Beside him stands a sickly looking figure. It is his patient, for Charadrius can be a healer. If he looks at his patient, he draws in all the miasms of illness, flies off and the patient is healed. If, on the contrary, he looks elsewhere, then the patient is finished, he will certainly die. That is the story of Charadrius. The figure of Charadrius was recorded in the early 2nd century AD, in the ancient bestiary that came back into vogue during the Middle Ages.

Romanesque treasures of Poitou-Charentes, Poitou-Charentes region, 2014.
www.romanesquetreasures.com www.tresorsromans.poitou-charentes.fr