

FILM 2- ROMANESQUE ART

Focus : The church of Saint Eutrope in Saintes : innovative sculpture

Attested to as early as the 6th century, the church of Saint Eutrope at Saintes, in the Charente-Maritime region, was built around the tomb of Saint Eutropius. According to legend, this saint was the first bishop of Saintes, and the evangelizer of Saintonge. In the late 11th century, the monks from the Abbey of Cluny rebuilt a bigger church on an atypical design : with a long nave, a transept and a deep choir built on a vast crypt that took in the relics of the saint in 1096. This Romanesque church was often rebuilt and mutilated during the following centuries. In the areas that remain today (the crypt, the choir and the transept), remarkable sculpted capitals bear testimony to the developments in Romanesque sculpture in the late 11th and early 12th century.

The capitals in the crypt and the choir were created in the late 11th century. Those in the crypt, numbering 53, are decorated with plant motifs. The Romanesque artists sculpted small palm trees, acanthi and foliage. Foliage often embellishes the corners and spreads out symmetrically over the corbel. These motifs originate from the decorative repertory of Antiquity. Some bring to mind the sculptures of the Roman buildings that were preserved in Saintes. The old choir displays capitals similar to those in the crypt, except for the three capitals decorated with sirens, lions and griffins, whose style is linked to the sculptures of Poitou.

The transept was created a few years after the crypt and the choir was built in the early 12th century. The sculptors were very innovative here, creating new figures that appeared at this time in other art forms, notably in the

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illuminations of manuscripts. They adorned the capitals with figures of men, animals and plants, mixing them together and juxtaposing them. Two capitals illustrate religious scenes : the Weighing of the Souls and Daniel in the Lions' Pit. This was a great novelty in Saintonge. The capitals of the transept were the basis of an artistic development - also on display nearby, at the Abbey of the Ladies in Saintes – that spread throughout Saintonge and beyond. It illustrates the important developments that Romanesque sculpture underwent in the early 12th century.



Illustration 1 : *The crypt.*

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Illustration 2 : *Pillar of the crypt. Capital decorated with foliage. .*

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Illustration 3 : *Foliage. Capital of the crypt.*

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Illustration 4 : *Foliage. Capital of the choir.*

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Illustration 5 : *Sirens. Capital of the choir.*

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Illustration 6 : *Sirens similar to those at Saint-Eutrope. Capital of the church of Saint-Pierre at Parthenay-le-Vieux.*

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Illustration 7 : *Man and foliage. Capital of the transept.*

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Illustration 8 : *Birds perched on lions and foliage. Capital of the transept.*

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Illustration 9 : *Kneeling figures, lions, birds and Daniel in the Lions' Pit. Capital of the transept.* © Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine, inventaire général du patrimoine culturel / G. Beauvarlet, 2010.



Illustration 10 : *The Weighing of Souls. Capital of the transept.*
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