

Morierval, Saint-Denis

The whole church would seem to have been built before the First Crusade, including the three towers and the rib-vaulted apse between them.

The usually accepted date of the 1120s for the apse is based on the belief/meme (totally without foundation) that the earliest rib vaults in the Paris Basin date from around this time. Also on a document concerning the transfer of relics that may or may not have had anything to do with the construction. No analysis has been more precise than this, and cannot be relied on in the absence of other evidence. The date given here comes from the capitals and the other 23 rib-vaulted works built in the Paris Basin before the crusade. These are mainly in the little churches to the north of Paris.

The capitals were restored/replaced a long time ago, more or less mimicking forms that we can date to this period, with the exception of three capitals in the northern corner. These are original, in the modes of Aviateur and Comet. For the former this would be one of his earliest, no matter which side of the crusade he was on. For Comet the 1110s is among later works as most of the carving in this manner was in the 1090s. Both fit into a date just after or just before the crusade, but certainly not twenty years later.

The replacement capitals offer an interesting insight, for some are remarkably like genuine C11th carving in other buildings. Some were replaced in the C19th, and we know about them. These replacements do not have matches in any other church in the Paris Basin. They stand unique.

However, the others are more curious. Nowhere else do we find a group of some 50 capitals without visual connections to those in other churches. Having spent the past 40 years studying the capitals from this period, I would suggest that they were restored and/or re-carved to look a little like the originals, possibly around 1700, and together they indicate that we are dealing with simulacra.

The possible carving modes are Banniere, Chains, Duchess, Fathead, Multiplate, Oda, Old Duke just before his last work in Auvers, Olivier, Pillow, Rameau and Yves. These works elsewhere confirm a date very close to the First Crusade, with most pointing to a date just before 1095.

I shall provide visual comparisons for these works. Taking all these carving manners into account, I am inclined to push the work at the eastern end of Morierval to before the crusade.

A small chapel was added onto the north in the 1160s, and much later vaults over the crossing and nave.