

## **Noyon cathedral, Notre-Dame**

There is no documentary evidence for dates, and I prefer to use the evidence in the capitals. 1160s for the ambulatory capitals is better for Palmier, Igor and Dominique one of the Cog Masters, Thierry, and the Strapper team most of whom were working about this time on the Laon gallery, which is the major anchor for the dates of Noyon. This is a decade later than Seymour suggested for the choir, and a little later than Bony and Polk, though all would agree with the nave being primarily the work of the 70s.

To understand the history one has to consider a major anomaly in the construction schedule of the aisle and the gallery. The capitals of the gallery arcade are from the mid-70s, while those from the wall opposite seem at least 5 years earlier. There are four different plans for the piers on the ground floor and four quite different plans in the gallery and many differences in the profiles. Among the aisle capitals four different teams were involved: in the arcade drums, the crossing piers, the ambulatory and the adjacent chapels.<sup>2</sup>

The ambulatory walls were built first with their chapels, and over that the exterior wall of the gallery with the adjacent towers. The simplest construction sequence that satisfies all these anomalies is that the ambulatory chapels and their vaults were built first, followed by the gallery wall above that braced by the flyers set over the chapel vaults. This formed a free-standing bracelet shown in the section of only the outer walls and chapels. It was presumably built around an earlier choir that was kept in use while the outer parts were being built. The interior piers, the aisle vaults, and the inner wall of the gallery were all left until the encasing walls had been completed. One presumes that this was to allow services to continue in an earlier choir, which continued to be used for about a decade.

The capitals tell the story very clearly because all those in the walls are formal, and from the 1160s, and all those in the piers and gallery arcade are foliate and therefore well into the 70s.

The upper walls of the choir, the blind triforium and the clerestory are after the transepts and first bays of the nave had been raised to the same level, and from the mix of designs would have been in the mid- to late-70s, with the choir clerestory with their flyers about 1177. This meant a moderate construction rate of four or five courses per year, presumably with small teams of masons.

In the first four bays of the nave aisle the situation was a bit complex as some capitals are from 1170, and some from the next decade. There is also a similar mix in the walls, and some connections with the transept dado arcades and bases all round. This area definitely needs further study. The consoles in the crossing piers also appear to have been carved about this time.

The upper stories of the transepts and the first bays of the nave followed the choir, as did the intermediate bays of the nave aisles, though a little later. From here on work proceeded westwards in many small campaigns for the next six decades.

### ***Noyon cathedral choir***

(from <https://www.creationofgothic.org/COGA/files/articles/08-Construction-Timetables.pdf> page 8)

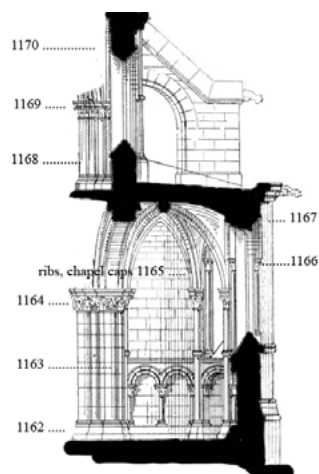
The timetable was constructed by working back from the calculations for the capitals of the 70s in vol. 1. Working backwards in time suggests the footings were commenced in 1159/60, with an assumption of 4 or 5 courses per year. The foundations would have been laid just after the translation of the relics that may have been moved out of the way so that builders could have a clear access to the site. Noted in error as 1167 instead of 1157 in v.5:972.

The dates in vol 5 are somewhat confused because I had not at the time of printing composed this timetable.

This is a decade later than Seymour suggested for the choir,<sup>23</sup> and a little later than Bony<sup>24</sup> and Polk,<sup>25</sup> though all would agree with the nave being primarily the work of the 70s.

To understand the history one has to consider a major anomaly in the construction schedule of the aisle and the gallery. The capitals of the gallery arcade are from the mid-70s, while those from the wall opposite seem at least 5 years earlier. There are four different plans for the piers on the ground floor and four quite different plans in the gallery and many differences in the profiles.

Among the aisle capitals four different teams were involved: in the arcade drums, the crossing piers, the ambulatory and the adjacent chapels.<sup>26</sup> The simplest construction sequence that satisfies all these anomalies is that the ambulatory chapels and their vaults were built first, followed by the gallery wall above that braced by the flyers set over the chapel vaults.



This formed a free-standing bracelet shown in the section of only the outer walls and chapels. It was presumably built around an earlier choir that was kept in use while the outer parts were being built. The suggested chronology for each level, working from the dates originating from the carvers of the capitals, are noted on the section.

After some ten years while the outer parts were being built, the old choir could be demolished around 1171. There was then a flurry of activity to complete the hemicycle arcade and its vaults, as quickly as possible, and over that to build the arcade of the gallery and its vaults. These campaigns included the pair of piers on the ground floor nearest the crossing and the adjacent bays of both transepts.

The style of the gallery capitals establishes the date for this zone, and by working backwards using the same rate of construction as elsewhere,

and allowing for the eccentricities of the construction program, the extraordinary capitals around the ambulatory walls should be dated within a year or so of 1164.

This meant a moderate construction rate of four or five courses per year, presumably with small teams of masons. In this case the footings may have been commenced in 1159/60, and the high vault built around 1183. Considering the progress in the nave, and the lithic evidence where the masonry of the choir is bonded into the transepts, the completion of the choir is unlikely to have been later.

In all respects the choir was a slow and complex structure to build, made more so by the need to work around the old apsidiole. By contrast the rest of the building was relatively straightforward and its construction followed the normal sequence adopted elsewhere.

Being one of the last works of the period, coming after Laon and the Soissons south transept, after Paris and Senlis, it is relatively old-fashioned, even some might say cumbersome, and would not have justified the ink expended on it but for the mistaken belief that it had been conceived ten years earlier.

#### **Noyon cathedral choir schedule**

completion  
1183 vaults  
1182 roof  
1181 cornice  
1180  
1179  
1178 flyers  
1177  
1176 blind triforium, clerestory  
1175  
1174 gallery vaults  
1173 gallery piers  
1172 aisle vaults, ambulatory piers  
1171 remove old apsidiole  
1170 gallery wall, flyers  
1168  
1169 gallery piers bays 1-2,  
1167 aisle piers bays 1-2. remove part of old choir. chapel vaults  
1166 chapel windows  
1165 chapel caps, ribs  
1164 ambulatory wall caps  
1163 dado  
1162  
1161  
1160 footings