

Paris, Notre-Dame

Notre-Dame is one of the most reconstructed buildings in northern France. For a long time it was believed that the choir had been started by Bishop Sully in 1163, whereas in fact the outer walls are definitively earlier. Recent excavations show that the western end of the nave had been built in the 1140s with a portal, part of which is now integrated with the north western portal of 1200. About the same time, work was begun in the choir, with the walls being constructed to near the level of the capitals. Presumably this was built around the earlier choir that lay within it. The choir was at a higher level than the nave.

The style of the capitals indicates that the north side of the choir was somewhat ahead of the south, and these capitals are in the manner of the 1140s, while the rest are in the post-Crusade manner of the 60s. I presume that work stopped suddenly with the royal call to arms, which does give us a fairly precise date for these capitals.

The nave may have been sufficiently far advanced by the 60s for services to be moved there so that the older choir could be demolished in preparation for the interior choir piers, in 1163 according to verbal testimony. The choir gallery was constructed slowly in four or more campaigns in a complex process that explains the many changes in profiles and details that remain in spite of extensive renovations.

By the time they were working on the bases to the south side of the gallery the western crossing piers were begun to the same template.

The area alongside the clerestory windows has been heavily restored, and many capitals replaced. Those few that seem original, from weathering and appearance, are reproduced. The upper capitals were carved in the 70s, and the lower at the time the windows were altered in the 1220s.

From the Canterbury analysis I would date these between 1177 and 1178, just the time that Torigny was visiting the site and remarked "The apse is about finished except for the great roof." The lower row of capitals coincides with the start of the tracery, and were inserted when the windows were enlarged in the 1220s by lowering the older openings into the space that had been occupied by the triforium oculi, and by replacing the sloping gallery roof with a virtually level one. The top of the earlier sloping roof would have been close to the bases of the 1170s *en délit* shafts. Sens was another example of this procedure.

The clerestory vault capitals lie six or seven courses below the window capitals of the 70s. From the state of the stone surface some seem original, while others may have been restored when Viollet-le-Duc replaced the imposts. In either case, the foliage in all upper window capitals is typical of the period, their elements, their leaves and the buds provide just the right range of modes for this period.

Some evidence that suggests the rib vaults of the choir were not erected at this time. The bosses have large and realistic foliage more reminiscent of the aisles at Chartres from around 1200 than the 70s. Also, the top of the roof cornices in the nave and choir are at the same level and have the same detailing, but around the choir the cornice is three courses high, whereas the nave is only one. This suggests that the choir walls were completed and roofed (as at Chartres) but the vaults were left out and not completed until the 20s while they got on with the work in the nave. This would have made it much easier for the builders to enlarge the clerestory windows, as there were no vaults in the way. They may have been built at the same time as the eastern bays of the nave, and to the same height, which made it necessary to raise the cornice in the choir to the same height as the nave.

The piers in the eastern nave bays 1-6 would have been next, and these intricate capitals are all natural in manner, indicating a date in the 1180s and extended to the west over the next 20 years,

including the *pilier cantonne* piers in bay 8.

The coursing around the three western portals shows that capitals over the south door were installed when jambs of the central portal were half up and the northern plinths just started. It is a complex history, though details and replacements indicate the same epoch.

The rest of the building was erected in regular stages well into the next century.