The role of individual sculptors in creating the ambulatory capitals in the largest basilica in Christendom at Cluny remains a mystery. The unresolved issue of individual creativity leaves open three important questions about this powerful abbey which controlled hundreds of monasteries throughout Europe in the eleventh century: What was the specific artistic context—the origin, training and career path of the major sculptors who worked at the mother church at the start of construction? What was the relationship, in time and influence, between the focal ambulatory capitals and similar sculptures at numerous local sites? And what role did artists play in determining the form and meaning of Cluny sculptures and related monuments?

This book traces the career of a sculptor who worked on the earliest capitals in the abbey church at Cluny. It documents his artistic preferences at previous Burgundian projects, gathering a variety of evidence intended to be on the one hand precise, complex and subtle, and on the other convincingly repetitious. He treated gesture, pose, anatomy, drapery, foliage, architecture, background and space not only consistently but also in a complementary fashion. Plainly put, he blurred the traditional distinction between sculpture and architecture, displaying a rich and unique combination of artistic preferences even as he worked with different kinds of patrons on various subjects at numerous and diverse monuments. These findings are supported with high-resolution photographs taken at telling angles from high ladders and scaffolding.

This version of the creative process at the mother church, in which the Cluniac brothers picked a local talent to carry out one of the most important sculptural commissions in Europe, differs markedly from the standard one based largely on presumed but undocumented artistic priorities of the monks. Prevailing theory assumes the monks had an international perspective when it came to art as they tried to establish at Cluny a “new Rome” as the centerpiece of their monastic empire. Rather than tap an experienced sculptor who worked in the indigenous masonry tradition, they would have looked toward foreign lands to find suitable artists who based their designs on “high” forms of art such as ivory, painting, and metalwork.

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CLUNY AND THE ORIGINS OF BURGUNDIAN ROMANESQUE SCULPTURE

THE ARCHITECTURE, SCULPTURE AND NARRATIVE OF THE AVENAS MASTER
C. Edson Armi

Cluny and the Origins of Burgundian Romanesque Sculpture

On the cover: Angel from the portal of the priory church at Perrecy-les-Forges

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To Jemma

“When I see a bird that walks like a duck and swims like a duck
and quacks like a duck, I call that bird a duck.”
– attributed to American poet James Whitcomb Riley (1849-1916)
INTRODUCTION

It is difficult enough to identify various sculptures at many buildings as being by one artist – especially when the person in question lived a thousand years ago and no documents verify his existence. Taking the next step, to establish constants in these works in the hope of discovering his artistic priorities, verges on clairvoyance – particularly where the person in question remains anonymous and, according to some, may never have existed. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, I am intrigued by the challenge, not least because it concerns some of the most beautiful and important art in the world.1

The goal is to discover the artistic preferences of the sculptor who created ambulatory capitals for the largest basilica in Christendom, the abbey church at Cluny.

To expose the consistent greatness of his accomplishments (a corny-sounding but worthwhile goal) I utilize a targeted approach. It combines a minute description of a limited number of sculptures observed from tall ladders and scaffolding and documented with a large quantity of detailed photographs taken from multiple angles at a range of distances using a camera with prime lenses and the highest digital resolution currently available. The expository technique by its very nature is repetitious because if successful does demonstrate through words and pictures the same artist exhibited similar preferences at many sites.

So, if you find yourself saying, “I have already heard and seen in other contexts this evidence,” before nodding off please keep in mind the purpose is to convince you that the artist while adjusting his approach maintained throughout his career surprisingly consistent priorities.

Almost forty years ago I proposed a novel and radical, but to me logical and practical, idea. Monks in preparing to build the mother church at Cluny did not overlook or reject local talent; instead, they availed themselves of sculptors who had established their reputations in important nearby projects. To prove this point I isolated the work of two sculptors at the abbey and showed they produced, before construction at the church was begun in 1088, monumental sculpture in the Burgundian churches at Avenas, Mâcon, Anzy-le-Duc, Charlieu, Perrecy-les-Forges, Vézelay, and Montceaux-l’Étoile. References to the evidence for these conclusions can be found in footnotes.

In “controlling” the “problem” of Cluniac sculpture, I kept in mind two methodological objectives: first, to ensure comparisons were made between works by the same persons (apples to apples) and not between works by different sculptors or by later “provincial” copiers (apples to oranges); and, second, to position the ambulatory capitals at Cluny in relative time by locating them within the sequence of creation of each artist. I based authorship on many details of anatomy, folds and fronds, and on the complex and intricate relationships among these small parts. Once I verified that sculptures at separate sites were done by the same individuals, I set about to determine their relative chronology based on changes in the drapery of figures as well as in the decoration, masonry and articulation of the architecture.

These conclusions differed substantially from the accepted theories about the origins of sculpture at Cluny. Up to that time, the same scholars who feverishly haggled over the dates of the ambulatory capitals agreed on two points: (1) The high quality of the Cluny capitals could be explained by the importation to Burgundy of foreign artists who worked in a style derived from minor arts in distant lands; (2) in Burgundy any sculptures looking like the ambulatory capitals must have been carved later by artists who

1 A challenge of a different kind is the ruinous state of some of the monuments, in particular the dilapidated tympanum of the cathedral at Mâcon, the eroded and unprotected portal of the parish church at Montceaux-l’Étoile, and the fragmentary capitals from the destroyed ambulatory of the abbey church at Cluny.

2 I thank my daughter Jemma for her gentle patience, invaluable insights, penetrating criticisms and visual acuity in editing the text.

based their designs ("trickle-down" art history) on the prestigious model at the mother church. The new proposals, then, went beyond a narrow exercise in "hand analysis" because they turned upside-down prevailing ideas about the origins, artistic context and relative chronology of sculpture at Cluny; moreover, given the mother church’s seminal position in art-historical theory, they undermined the broad storyline of Romanesque art in Burgundy. Professor Jean Wirth of the Université de Genève described both the discomfort these novel ideas caused and the reluctance to entertain them: “[T]hese theses have been considered with distrust rather than re-futed”. Alain Guerreau, Directeur de Recherche, CNRS, elaborated further on the stony reception. Citing the “strange and unusual reception reserved” for the theories by established authorities, he concluded “the corporation could not support them, with those who could have and should have discussed them remaining mute; the book was ostracized behind a wall of silence”.

4 Jean Wirth, La datation de la sculpture médiévale (Geneva, 2004), 62: "Ses thèses ont été considérées avec méfiance plutôt que réfutées, ce qui se produisait souvent."


6 For research on Romanesque sculpture in America, see Robert A. Maxwell and Kirk Ambrose, eds., Current Directions in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Sculpture Studies (Turnhout, 2010). For an overview of the historiography on Cluny sculpture, see Sébastien Biay, Les chapiteaux du rond-point de la troisième église abbatiale de Cluny (fin XIIe – début XIIe siècle). Étude iconographique, Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Poitiers, 2011, 25-86. Neil Stratford is one of the few art historians who has comprehensively studied the Cluny ambulatory capitals and related sculptures (Neil Stratford, ed., Corpus de la sculpture de Cluny. Les parties orientales de la Grande Église Cluny III (Paris, 2010). He did not analyze the architectural and architectural contexts of the ambulatory capitals or the role individual artists in Burgundy played in the creation of the style and content of these sculptures. He cited the lack of information about the creative context of the capitals among the reasons for not attempting to distinguish “hands” (pp. 560-1): “Nous ne connaissons pas le processus de création d’un chapiteau roman: ses étapes depuis la carrière, le transport de la pierre, la commande jusqu’à l’épanelage du bloc, ses phases d’exécution successives, sa mise en place et sa peinture.” Despite these reservations and offering little evidence to support his position, he maintained any variations in the styles of individual artists on the capitals owe more to the imagination than to reality (his reservations about attributing sculptures to individual artists resemble those raised by Peter Diemer, Stil und Iconographie der Kapitelle von Ste.-Madeleine, Vézelay (Heidelberg, 1975), 76). Rather than explore the contributions of individual local sculptors, he relied on the traditional theory of generalized origins in foreign minor arts to explain “the” Cluny style. Arguing for indirect rather than direct sources (“nous ne voulons pas proposer de voir dans ces sculptures les antécédents directs des chapiteaux de Cluny”), he pointed to the broad Ottonian “héritage” of “métal repoussé”: “Quant aux origines de cette équipe de sculpteurs, on peut suggérer, à titre d’hypothèse, qu’elles pourraient se trouver dans les arts du métal.” For further analysis of this position, see chapter eight.

After 1983, an international group of young scholars - a Japanese, two Americans and one German - wrote dissertations focusing on southern Burgundian sculptures relating to the ambulatory capitals at Cluny. Masayo T. Darling, The Romanesque Architecture and Sculpture of Perrecy-les-Forges, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1994, recognized an important local sculptural tradition preceding the creation of the ambulatory capitals at Cluny, placing before the beginning of construction at the mother church the western portal at Anzy-le-Duc, the Avenas altar, and the western portal at Mâcon. She distinguished the portal on the portal at Perrecy-les-Forges the work of more artists than 1 did and also dated the portals at Perrecy-les-Forges, Vézelay and Monteaux-l’Étoile after the ambulatory capitals at Cluny. Leslie Joan Cavel, Social and Symbolic Functions of the Romanesque Facade: The Example of Mâcon’s Last Judgment Galilee, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1997, 54-66, identified the work of the Aachen Master at Anzy-le-Duc, Avenas, Cluny, Mâcon (which she dated 1095-1110), Monteaux-l’Étoile, and Vézelay. She focused on the social content and symbolism of the portal at Mâcon, and also took the unusual step of exploring the compositional tendencies, figural types, and emotional expression of the artist.

William J. Travis studied the sculptures at Monteaux-l’Étoile and Matthias Hamann studied the sculptures at Anzy-le-Duc. Both argued against a strong local sculptural tradition preceding the mother church and in favor of the standard Cluny “impact” theory, which maintains all sculptures relating to the ambulatory capitals at Cluny date to the twelfth century and reflect the style and iconography of sculpture at Cluny. Travis, The Romanesque Sculpture of Monteaux-l’Étoile: Crossroads of Cluny and the Brionnais, Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1994, 161-2, concentrated on iconography rather than style and architecture. He avoided distinguishing “hands” on the portal sculpture at Monteaux-l’Étoile and specifically rejected the value of making comparisons between works by different artists based on drapery details.

Hamann, Die burgundische Prioretkirche von Anzy-le-Duc und die romanische Plastik im Brionnais (Würzburg, 2000), 1: 30-3, 293-9, produced a well-researched and carefully argued study of Romanesque sculpture in the Brionnais region near the mother church. I am grateful to him for seriously analyzing and criticizing my research. As a starting point he doubted the possibility of being able to identify, based on an analysis of anatomy and drapery details, meaningful changes in the work of individual artists: “Doch ist es wenig überzeugend, winzige Details der Faltenbildung als Indikatoren einer Entwicklung anzusehen.”

Since then, the possibility local artists played an important role in the creation of sculpture at Cluny has barely stirred a ripple of interest. The methods, theories and practicalities involved may in part explain this disinterest. In America prevailing methods of medieval art history have focused on iconography, patronage, meaning and cultural context, often interpreted from texts, rather than on connoisseurship, issues of form, and the relationship between sculpture and architecture. In Europe, established theories of Cluny’s origins have on the whole become more, not less, entrenched, opening little room for a set of ideas that replaces accepted dates with substantially earlier ones, reattributes later copies by followers as early works by the same artist, pinpoints local sites as the proving grounds for the principal artists hired by an international order, and documents a direct line from ma-sonry craft in small churches to “high” art at a larger and more important level.
Practical hurdles on the ground discouraged taking a different approach to this art. To think holistically about sculpture and architecture requires visiting many times dozens of churches in order to compare their construction, structure, and design. The art presents physical challenges, including the necessity to set up high viewing positions to make up-close observations, the fortitude to mount these platforms, and the patience, training and resources to examine and photograph minutely and from various angles – the carving, decoration, articulation, and masonry.

So, why write another book on the same subject? The purpose is not to hammer home a message that found few customers the first time around, but instead to enlarge the earlier method of connoisseurship – to rethink, revise and broaden positions almost four decades old. This time I take a step back. I explore one sculptor’s treatment of the gesture, pose and placement of figures in the context of the architecture and space around them. The narrow goal is to pinpoint with precise language the consistencies in his works in order to understand his artistic priorities. The broad goal is to establish his worth and position as an artist.

I tried as much as possible to keep these two objectives in mind, showing he expressed a high degree of individuality in form, composition, and content. He exhibited specific consistencies in the handling of the figure – in the ways he displayed the body, movement and position of the figure in the narrative – and also in the handling of the architecture – in the ways he integrated figural carving with the complexities of the surroundings. By architecture I mean the frame, background and space immediately around the figure, in addition to elements of the capital such as the abacus, bell and astragal, and large parts of the portal such as the archivolt, impost, and colonnette.

He executed these formal preferences so the effect of one often reinforces the effects of others, contributing to an overarching artistic expression. Put more matter-of-factly, he blurred the traditional distinction between sculpture and architecture. And he did so by treating it as a single-minded process, and not as a series of discrete events.
demonstrating subtlety, complexity and power of observation in numerous commissions near Cluny. He showed before being chosen to carve the focal capitals for the ambulatory in the mother church that he was capable of performing consistently at a high level. In short, the monks at Cluny, with all the money in the world, picked a known quantity, a seasoned local artist who was nothing short of a genius.

It is hard to say, after almost a millennium, whether the Avenes Master purposely chose or even consciousness recognized the formal preferences he expressed in his work. More difficult to determine is the degree to which these artistic tendencies correlated to his core beliefs, personality traits, working situation, and broad cultural environment. Despite uncertainties about the causes and impulses that led the sculptor to prefer certain artistic expressions, one element in his creative context, with special significance for clarifying his contribution to the art at Cluny, can be pinned down. He exhibited the same artistic preferences in the ambulatory capitals at Cluny as in other sculptures at churches with little or no connection with the Cluniac Order at Avenas, Mâcon, Anzy-le-Duc, and Montceaux-l’Étoile. In other words, he formulated a distinct and consistent artistic expression in numerous commissions of varying size and program paid for by different kinds of patrons. These patrons ranged in type from cathedral canons to monks from competing monastic orders—with little or no input or supervision from Cluniac monks. This evidence from a variety of largely unrelated projects, dating from all stages of his career, indicates he acted almost as a free agent in developing an artistic direction and reputation.

There is something else about the consistency of his artistic preferences that sheds light on the conditions under which he worked and the amount of input he had on his art. He repeated the same preferences in diverse iconographic contexts. These contexts range from the depiction of an isolated musician playing a monochord at Vézelay and the interaction of the angel Gabriel and Mary in the Annunciation at Avenas to the complex Ascension scene with Christ, angels, and His followers at Montceaux-l’Étoile. This overlap of a consistent personal expression with a variety of iconographic programs raises a seldom-addressed question, which looms like the elephant in the room: To what extent did Romanesque artists, and especially a distinguished one, determine the specific and broad meaning of the shapes and compositions they created?

In the eleventh century, the canons of Saint-Vincent at Mâcon controlled not only the cathedral (Cavell, Social and Symbolic Functions, 77-86) but also the parish church at Avenas [Raymond Oursel, “Une énigme romane: l’autel d’Avenas,” Cahiers d’histoire 4 (1959), 97-101]. The monks at Saint-Martin at Autun, at least in the early tenth century, controlled the priory church at Anzy-le-Duc (Carol S. Pendergast, The Romanesque Sculptures of Anzy-le-Duc, Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1974, 20-30, and Hamann, Anzy-le-Duc, 58, 70-5); and the priory at Anzy-le-Duc, probably from the beginning of its existence, owned the parish church at Montceaux-l’Étoile (Travis, Montceaux-l’Étoile, 32-6).

For a subtle discussion of the functioning of work sites at the turn of the twelfth century, see Robert A. Maxwell, “Romanesque Construction and the Urban Context: Parthenay-le-Vieux in Aquitaine,” Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 66/1 (2007), 24-59. He argued (p. 51) that in the Aquitaine “individual stone carvers, each with a preferred set of specialties and or motifs, apparently moved about and reproduced their set repertoire at one site after another.”

The idea that an artist could play an important role in determining the meaning expressed in his sculpture, according to my limited knowledge of this area of research, seems an uncommon position to take. I thank Herbert Brokerick for his help in understanding the subject of iconographic “sources” for Romanesque sculpture. Herbert L. Kessler, “On the State of Medieval Art History,” The Art Bulletin 70/2 (1988), 179, 181-2, maintained a widely accepted view that early medieval artists were limited by a “dependent” imagination, resulting in a separation in their art between conception and execution: “[I] was only very late that the idea of an individual ‘artist’ with an independent, determining imagination emerged, and then only as part of the process leading to the Renaissance . . . . [I]n the circumstances that obtained through most of the Middle Ages, conceptualization and execution of works of art were largely independent. . . . The urge toward continuity rather than innovation was inherent in Christianity itself.” Lawrence Nees, “The Originality of Early Medieval Artists,” in Celia M. Chazelle, ed., Literacy, Politics, and Artistic Innovation in the Early Medieval West (Lanham, 1992), 77-109, offered a less categorical interpretation of the creativity of early medieval artists who produced “minor” arts. He argued “no dialectical necessity forces us to choose between either copying or originality as the driving force,” allowing for a healthy amount of self-expression: “When we turn to the realm of subject

matter, it is immediately clear that medieval artists invented a host of new images . . . [including] new interpretations of images having long traditions.”

Peter Diemer “[What Does Prudentia Advise? On the Subject of the Cluny Choir Capitals],” Gesta 27 (1988), 155, 168 concluded from studying the iconography of the ambulatory capitals at Cluny that the monks showed lackadaisical ownership (“fairly moderate pride which they invested in their conception”), minimal administrative discipline (“chaotic situation”), and feeble control (“failure to supervise the workshop adequately”). In unravelling the intent of the Cluniac monks, he interpreted their lack of “desire to incorporate all of the elements into a comprehensive theme” and the “fact that an undeniably profane dancer was included in the cycle as a representation of the second Gregorian Mode” as “an indication of the more modest place of the choir capitals in the larger scheme of things . . . . It is possible that this renunciation on the part of those responsible for the program did not weigh very heavily on them.”

It is a long-distance jump from recognizing iconographic inconsistencies in the capitals, explained by numerous debatable motivations on the part of the monks, to perceiving the role of the artists as confused and ill-informed. For the “puzzling images” on the capitals he mostly blamed the sculptors, who he assumed were probably “illiterate,” “with hardly any knowledge of the subject,” and “when faced with the task of translating” “fleeting and undifferentiated drawings into stone” produced results with a “lack of clarity” and “errors and absurdities” (p. 155). See also Peter Diemer and Wolfgang Augustyn, “Neues zur Romanik in Burgund: Cluny 910-2010, Ausstellungen und Publikationen,” Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte 75/3 (2012), 302-4. Neil Stratford, “Cluny and the Past,” in John McNeill and Richard Plant, eds., Romanesque and the Past. Retrospection in the Art and Architecture of Romanesque Europe (Leeds, 2013), 109, proposed that a similar “intellectual gap” existed between the commission of the ambulatory capitals by the monks at Cluny and the execution of the works by ill-informed artists, resulting in the sculptors “presumably not always understanding the inscriptions” and committing “an extraordinary set of mistakes.”

Sébastien Bay, Les chapiteaux du rond-point, 451, skillfully identified the difficulties involved in distinguishing the contributions of artists and patrons as well as the methodological problems these challenges pose for understanding the distinctions between form and meaning in the Cluny ambulatory capitals. Less convincing is his interpretation of the meaning, in particular his belief that the representation of the fig-
Multiple signs – that he reproduced almost identical poses, gestures and figural arrangements in closely similar architectural contexts on many different iconographic programs for patrons with diverse affiliations – point in the same direction. He was an artistic star with an established repertoire and a strong point of view, whose reputation allowed him surprising freedom to work independently.

CHAPTER 1

Avenas

The Avenas Master is named after a village on a Roman road south of Cluny, perched on top of a pass bordering the Beaujolais. At an early stage in his career, well before the first phase of construction beginning in 1088 at the mother church, he carved an altar for this small parish church (Fig. 1).

Altar and Later Comparisons

One way to establish preferences the Avenas Master consistently exhibited in his art is to contrast them with features he changed over time. The oval frame provides a basis to compare changes he made between the altar at Avenas (Fig. 2) and the tone capital at Cluny (Figs. 79, 85). Over the course of his career he thinned, sharpened, angled and attenuated the edges of the frame, while increasing the volume of space compared with the size of the figures within it. He also elongated the limbs, made the extremities of the body – hands and feet – proportionately smaller, and rendered diminutive parts of the anatomy, such as fingers, with more detail (Figs. 3, 4, 5).

Over time he emphasized certain types of drapery folds at the expense of others. At the beginning of his career he often de-

Fig. 1. Avenas, parish church, altar.

1 For bibliography and questions involving the dating and representation of figures on the altar at Avenas, see Stratford, Corpus, 583-6, and Oursel, “Une énigme romane,” 97-101.
Fig. 2. Avenas, parish church, altar, west face, Christ.
picted bold individual folds, carving them as isolated, projecting and narrow strips, as seen in the folds draped across the knees and around the wrists of the seated apostles at Avenas (Fig. 3). Later, at Cluny he reduced the number of these folds (Fig. 87). At Avenas he also arranged many of these raised narrow folds in parallel bunches; laid them in a nested pattern between the legs; and ended them with bulbous isolated hem pleats at the margins of the garment (Fig. 4).

At Avenas the sculptor carved only a few isolated folds as incised, barely raised edges with attenuated points which curve around the body, as seen on the right shoulder of an apostle at Avenas (Fig. 4); in later works he vastly increased the number of these hook folds, as seen on the chest of the figure in the fourth tone capital from the ambulatory at Cluny (Fig. 81). Over time he also refined his carving technique. At Avenas he left rough edges and traces of chisel lines and cuts on the body and drapery of figures, visible on the hands of an apostle (Fig. 3) and the raised arm seen through the garment of the archangel (Fig. 5), as well as on parts of architecture, visible on the colonnette and base on the side and the rectangular bar below the archangel (Figs. 6, 7). Later in his career, he often smoothed the surface and in certain locations even polished it, as seen in the face, drapery and frame in the capital of the first tone at Cluny (Figs. 85, 87), and thinned, sharpened and delicately rolled the margins of folds, as on the chest of the musician in the capital of the fourth tone at Cluny (Fig. 80). Over time he took advantage of the increased number of thin, attenuated, curved and pointed folds to emphasize the drape of cloth over the body by highlighting the tight pull of fabric over pivotal, projecting, and moving parts of anatomy. He utilized them especially to reveal the rounded joints of the shoulder, elbow and knee, the bulging muscles of the arm, calf and thigh, and the fleshy mounds of the stomach and buttocks.

As helpful as it is to separate the constants in the Avenas Master’s work by contrasting them with the changes he made over time, it would be a mistake to overemphasize these differences by insisting on black-and-white or before-and-after distinctions. In his early
saw technique on which he relied throughout his career. He suspended loosely from the wrists, between the legs, and around the neck narrow sashes with raised edges and depressed upper surface.

**Charlieu Tympanum**

Another way to tease out the Avenas Master’s preferences is to contrast them with those of a leading contemporary artist. This artist worked on a major commission, the tympanum on the façade portal of Saint-Fortunat in the Cluniac priory at Charlieu, as the Avenas Master was making a name for himself in the same region (Fig. 8). A document shows the church was consecrated in 1094, and given that the central portal with the tympanum courses directly with masonry on the ground floor, and not with later construction in the clerestory, it is likely the sculptor finished the sculpture before the mother church at Cluny was begun in 1088.

Fig. 6. Avenas, parish church, altar, north face, Annunciation, Gabriel and Mary.

Technique on which he relied throughout his career. He suspended loosely from the wrists, between the legs, and around the neck narrow sashes with raised edges and depressed upper surface.

another drapery technique he depicted features that would become more pronounced in his later sculpture. From the start, and throughout his career, he revealed himself to be a careful observer. He relished, for example, showing fabric reacting differently depending on how it falls in relation to the movement, torsion, and projection of the body. At Avenas, in representing the archangel stepping forward, he distinguished drapery wrapping tightly around the left shin from drapery hanging loosely in massive, projecting vertical folds in the space left between the legs (Figs. 5, 6). He rendered drapery similarly adhering to the right leg, as the archangel pivots toward Mary, and accented the tautness of the garment with isolated thin folds ending in curved elongated points revealing the twisted profile of the calf, buttock, and thigh. He represented fabric also pulling tightly around the elbow of a seated apostle, as he raises his right hand over the bible (Fig. 4). He contrasted this treatment of fabric, exposing rounded and pivotal parts of the body, with another drapery

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2 The sculptor also carved capitals in the crossing and chevet of the priory churches at Anzy-le-Duc and Commagny and in the nave at Saint-Pierre-le-Moûtier.

3 For discussion of the construction and sculpture in the nave and clerestory of Saint-Fortunat at Charlieu, and for references to documents dating the church,
How this artist rendered figures, and particularly the way he related architecture to them, establishes a benchmark against which to measure the Avenas Master’s approach. To be clear, this comparison to one of the earliest large-scale tympana at one of the most important Cluniac abbeys intends no disrespect to the pioneering artist. The point to be made is that while daring to super-scale sculpture, he maintained a conservative outlook, relying more heavily than the Avenas Master, who came from a similar background, on the tradition of ashlar masonry and decorative carving in the adjacent Loire Valley. The archivolt – the large architectural member around the tympanum sculpture – reflects this northern French masonry tradition, employing two orders of square-cut ashlar voussoirs (visible on the upper right in Fig. 8) of the kind seen in the nave arcade of the church at Charlieu and in many eleventh-century churches in northern France. The sculptor made the frame around the tympanum also a simple, square-edged enclosure. He carved the frame as little more than a border embellishment, elevating it only a few inches from the front of the tympanum and extending its flat and wide (relative to the depth) face without interruption all around the figures. He made the internal frame around the mandorla analogous with the external frame and continued its flat face, squared corner and short straight side flush with the horizontal frame at the bottom of the tympanum.

In relating the architecture to the figures he treated both the outer and inner frames as boundaries, in the sense that he aligned parts of the body within the thinly projecting inside edge of the frames. The circumference of the halos and the pointed tips of the wings and the outside edges of the feet of the angels either touch or parallel the square-edged border of the exterior frame, and the toes, nimbus, hem tips and throne of Christ nestle within the square edge of the mandorla.

Fig. 7. Avenas, parish church, altar, north face, Nativity.

see Armi, "The Charlieu Clerestory," 47-60; idem, Masons, 77-81, 81n. 1. A similar turnover of artists occurred at Anzy-le-Duc as at Charlieu. In both churches the Avenas Master and a distinctive team of masons completed the western clerestory, replacing the workshop who worked in the nave. At Anzy-le-Duc a pronounced diagonal suture divides the western bay of the nave, running from the clerestory window through the top of the jamb on the façade portal (see Fig. 21 and chapter three).