

The Origins of Interlace in Romanesque Sculpture

Introduction

Across France, but particularly in the West and in the South-east of France, many hundreds of mediaeval churches feature sculptures of interlace. The interlace is similarly frequently used in sculpture in parts of Northern Spain. These sculptures show a remarkable variety of design and style. The following notes contain thoughts on the origins of the decorative motif and its spread across Western Europe. No consideration is being given to sculptures after the late XII century and the end of the Romanesque period.

Definition

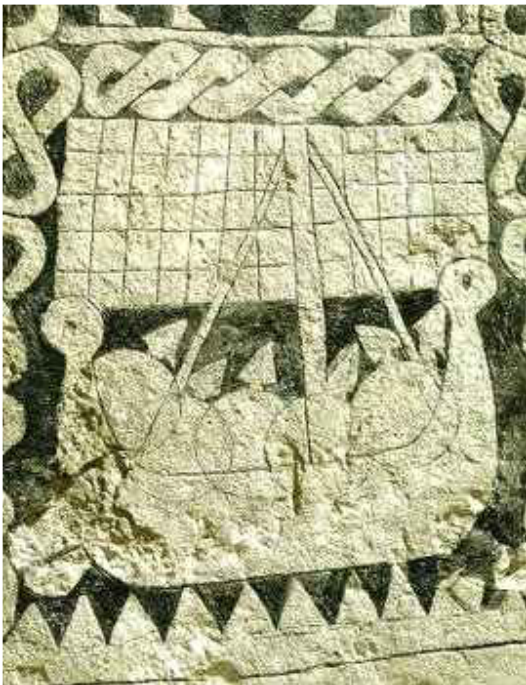
The interlace is a decorative motif or pattern consisting of threads or ribbons that pass over and under each other like the threads in lace. The threads or ribbons may end in a stylised leaf.

Origins

In Britain, there is a tendency to associate its origins with Celtic art. The Celts probably learned about the interlace from marauding Vikings; the motif was present in Scandinavia before the VI century and it was certainly introduced to the British Isles from there by invading Vikings. The Lewis chess men, found buried in the island of that name and now in the British Museum, are thought to have been made in Norway between 1150 and 1200. The thrones of the king and queen are decorated with an interlace motif. The interlace motif was in continued use as decoration in Scandinavia for as long as it was in countries to the South-west.



Jelling Stone, Jutland – Inscriptions from AD 900 (left) & Lewis Chessmen (Queen & King), now BM



Viking ship & interlace, Sweden IXc



Axe head, Mammen, Danmark Xc

Interlace was widely used by the Romans as a decorative form; but it is usually seen in mosaics, often along the border. It is almost unknown in Roman sculpture. The surviving mosaics may well have provided early models for the sculptors in the centuries after the end of the Roman era.



Albacete - IIIc mosaic from Villa Hellin (left) & Vienne, St Pierre – IIc mosaic of theatre mask (right)

The motif was widely used in Anglo-Saxon art from the VII century onwards for secular items such as a gold buckle found in the Sutton Hoo treasure and on a helmet found at Coppergate, in Yorkshire.



Sutton Hoo – Gold buckle



Coppergate, Yorkshire – VIIIc Helmet & detail

The motif was certainly well known in the scriptoria of Northern Britain and it was to be used to embellish many of the pages of manuscripts both in the full-page illustrations and to decorate initial letters. Carpet pages from two late VII century manuscripts provide striking examples: Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Durrow. The case that manuscripts provided models of motifs for sculptors has been made on innumerable occasions and it is repeated here.



Lindisfarne Gospels (left) & Book of Durrow (right)



Lenningrad Gospels, St Matthew 'L' (left) & Bede's Ecclesiastical History, 'B' (right)

In turn, it is probable that the interlace pattern came to Scandinavia through trade with tribes from the South in what is now Germany. The motif was to be re-introduced into Britain by Scandanavian settlers in the IX century. A particularly fine example is to be seen on one of the panels on the cross from Gosforth in Cumbria. It is described as being in the Borre style (named after a ship burial from the site of that name in South-east Norway). The style was imitated and was to be used on a pendant that was part of a necklace found at Saffron Walden, in Essex; the pendant has been dated to the last quarter of the IX century.



Gosforth Cross, Cumbria – Detail (left) & Viking brooch in Borre style, Xc, now Oslo



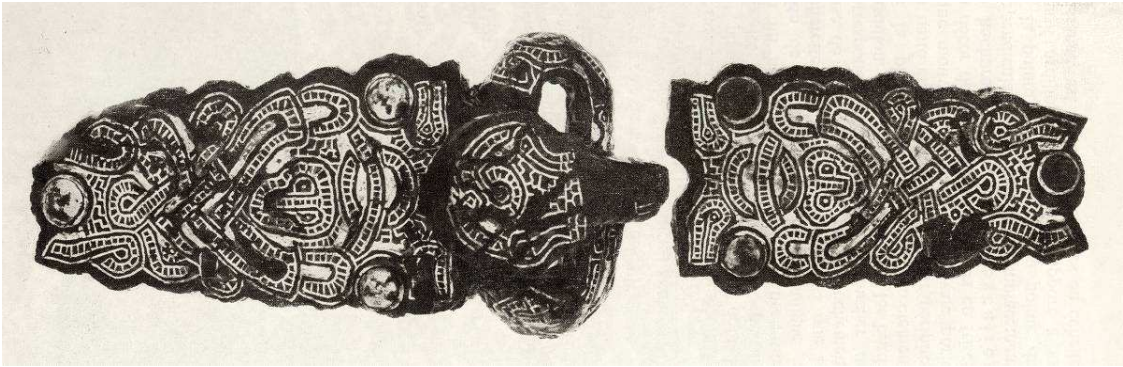
Saffron Walden – late IXc pendant

The Byzantine Empire was certainly familiar with the motif which was introduced to them by nomadic peoples from the East, around the Caspian Region. Nomads were probably also responsible for taking the designs North to the Germanic tribes. It may be that the 'Barbarian' tribes moving into Western Europe in the years following the end of the Roman Empire brought the motif with them only to find that it was already in use. Around the Southern littoral of the Mediterranean it has long been a familiar motif. Here the roots come from the Copts of Egypt who had acquired them from the Levant. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans used the interlace much in their sculptures. For these human figures, animals and various forms of foliage and fruit were the norm. The motif does, however, appear frequently in the borders of Roman mosaics. In Roman art the Knot Of Solomon, constituted by two intertwined rings, is generally considered as a positive and

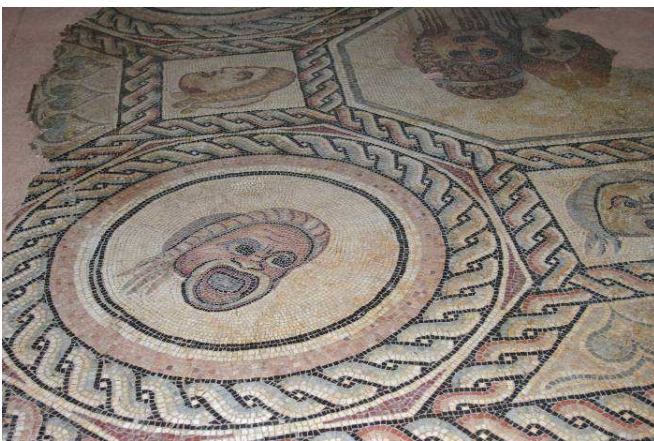
auspicious symbol. In none of these examples does the pattern seem to have any significant symbolism; its use was decorative.



Islamic incense burner. XIc



St Germain des Prés, Paris - VIIc Merovingian iron belt buckle and clasp



Vienne (38) - Mosaic in St Pierre



Autun (71) Roman belt buckle

It was not until the period following the fall of the Roman Empire that the use of interlace in sculpture was resumed in Western Europe, particularly in the North of Italy. For example, the basilica of San Vitale, built in the VI century, has capitals of interlaced foliage.



San Vitale, Ravenna

The practice of depicting figures and animals that had been so frequently used by the Romans diminished greatly in the Merovingian period; it was replaced by an increased use of geometric designs. However, in Paris fragments of sculpture from the VIII century have been found. An example, from excavations at the Hôtel-Dieu, is on three sides of a column from the period. Artefacts from that period are to be seen in the West of France, in the Poitou-Charente. The interlace was probably more common than might be supposed when looking at what has survived to today. That it was employed by them is evidenced by the enamel found at Limons (63). At Pujols (33) there is a fine Merovingian sarcophagus that has a pattern across the lid and a thin border of interlace.



Paris (from Hôtel-Dieu) – Fragment of a VIIIc column (left) & Limons (63) - VIIc enamel disc (right)



Pujols (33) – Merovingian sarcophagus, detail of top (left) and St Sernin, Bordeaux (33) – Fragment of VIIc sarcophagus

In the South of France, the Visigoth kingdom in Spain spread North over the Pyrenees and along the coastal plain towards the Rhone estuary in the VII and VIII centuries. In their wake came the use of the interlace pattern as a decorative form. A fine example was found on the chancel screen from Pezilla-la-Rivière (66) (which we shall see on page 18).

Meanwhile in the British Isles parallel developments were occurring. It is often supposed that Celtic 'knot-work' had early origins; but it was really only in the VII century that the interlace motif was commonplace. It was frequently used to enhance the decoration of manuscripts. It was only after its use in manuscript illustration was well established that it was used in stone and metal work. In stonework one must look to the stone crosses in Ireland, Scotland, the Isle of Man and in the North-east of England around Wearmouth and Jarrow. This last area was significant because the Northumbrian church was an Anglo-Celtic church and it owed its allegiance not to Rome but to Iona. Thus, the interlace was a decorative motif that was frequently employed by manuscript artists working in the scriptorium of the Northumbrian monasteries. The use of interlace on stones first appeared in the British Isles in the late VII century and seems to have been a feature that was particular to the British Isles. It is most unlikely that they were adopted from origins lie in the Roman Empire because neither Ireland nor Scotland were ever conquered by the Romans. Initially, the patterns used in illuminated manuscripts were transferred to stone with little modification. The Irish and Scots used the symbol of the cross on tomb slabs (known as 'Cross-slabs'); the cross on such slabs was frequently decorated with interlace patterns, whilst the surrounds to the cross had a variety of decorative motifs including figures, animals and more interlace. In Ireland, the stones were laid in the horizontal, whilst in Scotland they were erect. In the context of these stones, Derek Bryce linked the interlace, plait-work and knot work patterns to Celtic culture with symbolism derived from the great cosmic loom of the universe. (Note 1).



Book of Kells, VIIc



Lindesfarne Gospels, VIIc



Nigg stone – Ross-shire (early IXc)



High cross of Muredach at Monasterboice



Farr Stone

The earliest cross-slabs date from 806 AD. The Irish high crosses with interlace patterns appeared in the early decades of the X century

Over the next three centuries within the British Isles the use of interlace appears to have been confined to a restricted area. Its use on crosses and cross-slabs has already been mentioned and we have seen that it was confined in the main to Scotland, Ireland and the North of England. Interlace for more general sculptural use was more restricted. It was common in the North-east of England: Northumbria and West Yorkshire. There are a few examples in Cheshire, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire. J Lang identifies sites in Northumbria and provides illustrations of their use in churches, for example on the base of a lectern at Jarrow. (Note 2). In the South it is rare. There are two fonts in Sussex that were probably from the same workshop and are very similar and one or two other examples on capitals. Elsewhere small fragments dating from the X century have been found at Faversham, Kent and St Albans, Herts. (Note 2). At Peterborough Cathedral there are two items of interlace. One is the base of a cross that probably dates from the IX century; the other is a small fragment that has been inserted into the pillar in the south east corner of the nave. It probably comes from one of the three Saxon churches that preceded the present Norman Cathedral and is thought to be part of a string course. What is of particular interest is that there is no sign of interlace decoration in this last building. The pattern obviously was no longer favoured.



Peterborough Cathedral – Base of IXc cross and re-used IX or Xc stone in nave



Sinnington, Yorks (picture from Durham University) – Fragment of cross (left) & Lewes (St Anne's), East Sussex – Font (right)



Selham, Sussex - Capital in nave

From the Eastern Mediterranean a Coptic stone capital the dates from between 490 and 650 AD has an interlace pattern but in the mind of the sculptor there was clearly an image of interlaced palm fronds. The parallel veins on the fronds are carefully drawn.



Coptic sculpture from AD 490-650 now Turin

Carolingian Period

The renaissance generated by the Carolingian Imperial court has been well documented. It impacted across a wide range of the arts practised at that time, in particular on the production of manuscripts and on sculpture. A substantial number of new religious buildings were constructed. Artisans and artists were brought in from across the Empire and beyond to design and embellish such works. The styles of Carolingian sculptures owe little directly to the sculptures of antiquity. Scribes and illuminators came from the British Isles and sculptors from Lombardy (which lay outside the Empire). Both brought with them the motif of the interlace. Examples of manuscripts from the period are to be found in several of the great modern libraries. Sculptures from that period are fewer and most of these are but fragments that are no longer in their original setting. In the Aude (11) there are several examples of both small fragments and significant complete items. At the church of St Polycarpe two altars have Carolingian sculptured reliefs that have interlace; in all there are five panels with the decoration; on two there are clear traces of polychrome that was added to enhance the patterns. At the church of Ouveilan, a XII century church, there are several sculptured stones from an earlier Carolingian church that have either been reused or that have been incorporated into the North wall of the nave. Three such stones depict interlace. Similar reused stones are to be seen at St Hilaire (near St Polycarpe) on the South wall of the church.



St Polycarpe (11) -Panels from two altars



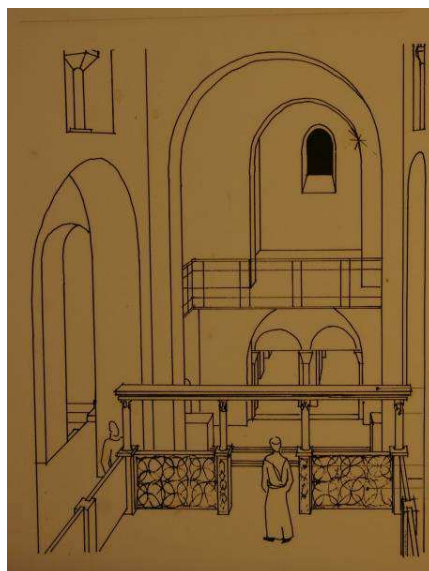
Ouveilan (11) - Fragment in nave wall St Hilaire (11) - Fragment in cloister

The Cathedral at Apt (84) has two crypts. Part of the roof vault of the upper one is formed using a stone from the Carolingian chancel screen. This stone has as the main motif a cross; Along the top of the stone is a band of interlace.



Apt – Carolingian chancel screen now in crypt

The former abbey church of St Guilhem-le-Désert has one of the finer collections of XI century interlace sculpture in France; it is in the Languedoc. On each side of the South door from the cloisters to the church is a fine band of interlace. More important is the large collection of fragments from the former IX century chancel of the pre-Romanesque church that is to be seen in the Musée Lapidaire in the Refectory. On these fragments we see a variety of patterns of interlace some of which are illustrated below. Also to be seen in the Musée are small capitals that have an interlace element to their decoration. These were probably also from the pre-Romanesque church.

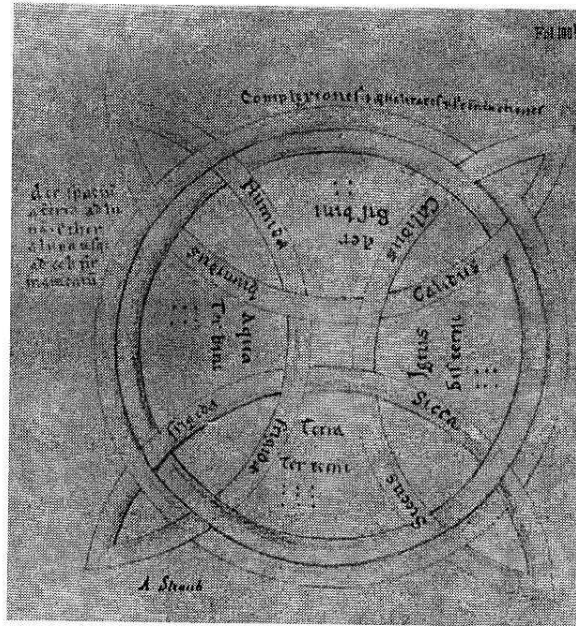


Artist's impression of St Guilhem Abbey chancel



St Guilhem-le-Désert – Five fragments from IXc chancel

Mary Webb Curtis related the pattern of interlace that has four points held by a circle to the cosmological diagram from Abbess Herrad's 'Hortus Deliciarum', but it was written in about 1167. (Note 3). It shows the cyclical interaction of the qualities of the four elements as described by Plato in 'Timaeus'. Though the pattern was used from at least the VI century, it was in the XII century that its presence in Romanesque sculpture was to be especially common.



Cosmological diagram from Abbess Herrad's 'Hortus Deliciarum'

The use of interlace decoration on chancel screens pre-dates this example at St Guilhem-le-Désert. From the little church of Pezilla-la-Rivière, in Roussillon, comes an example from the VII/VIII century and the Visigoth period.



Pezilla-la-Rivière – VIIIc Chancel screen

JC Fau described the distribution of Carolingian stones with interlace in South-east France. (Note 4). He identified two dozen sites in that part of France bounded by the Rhone to the East, the Pyrenees to the South and a general line running North from the Pyrenees through Luchon and Moissac to Souillac in the Lot just South of the Dordogne River. He argued that these sculptures were developments that resulted from influences that flowed from the Lombardy region west through Provence to the Bouches-du-Rhône

and thence both further West along the coast towards Spain and also North up the Rhone valley towards what is now Lyons. At Cividale, Friuli in the extreme North-east of Italy, we can see VIII century examples of interlace that are often combined with simple bas-relief motifs of vegetation, birds and beasts. It is thought that these were the works not of local nor Lombard artists but of craftsmen from the Levant. These sculptures are very similar to the examples that we saw at Pezilla-la-Rivière and which were widely created in Spain both under the rule of the Moors and subsequently under Catholic rule who employed both Mudejar and Mozarab craftsmen. In the Aljafería palace in Zaragoza there are examples of interlace being employed by the Moorish decorators and, under the Catholic monarch, Mudejar craftsmen. An further example from Spain is provided at San Miguel de Escalada, a church that is considered to be one of the finer examples of Mozarab architectural and sculptural style; it is near Leon; there the chancel screen has been re-employed over a door.



Cividale, Friuli – Two VIIIc slabs in Oratorio of Sta Maria in Valle and altar fragment now in museum



Aljafería, Zaragoza – Detail of IXc arch in Islamic palace and XIVc arch in Catholic palace



San Miguel de Escalada, Leon – Re-employed chancel screen

Fau also noted that the Aude had a particularly significant number of surviving examples (including some of those illustrated above). The Musée Lapidaire in the Castle of La Cité, Carcassonne (11) has a particularly fine example of a Carolingian chancel screen that is covered with an elaborate interlace. It was originally in the church of St Nazaire at La Cité. There are two fine examples in the museum in the cloisters at St Trophime, Arles (13), which have between them three forms of interlace pattern. The main pattern on the fragment from Montmajour (13) was probably widely used; there is another example on a IX century sarcophagus in the Arles museum. And finally, we have another pre-Romanesque example of interlace being used to decorate a chancel screen at St Pierre, Vienne, (a little South of Lyon); this example along with two fragments from the abbey at Montmajour, near Arles that are illustrated below serve to confirm the popularity of the pattern for chancel screens at that time. It is perhaps worthy of note that the use of the

interlace motif in the chancel screens extended from Northern Spain to the mouth of the Rhone and North to Vienne.



Chateau museum, Carcassonne (11) – Chancel screen from St Nazaire



Montmajour (13) (now at Arles) - Fragments of the Xc chancel screen



Arles (13) – End of IXc sarcophagus in museum. St Trophime, Arles (13) - Fragment



St Pierre, Vienne (now in cloisters of St André-le-Bas) (38) – Fragments of IXc chancel screen



Sant Pere de Rodes, Catalonia – Capital in nave

Before leaving the Mediterranean it should be noted that the coastal areas of Languedoc and Roussillon up to the Bouches-du-Rhône were once part of the Visigoth Kingdom of Spain and that four-lobed interlace pattern set in a circle was a motif that was well known to the sculptors serving the Visigoth church on both sides of the Pyrenees in the VII and VIII centuries. This is a pattern that we have seen was still to be very much in vogue in the region in the Romanesque period.



Narbonne (11) – VIc sarcophagus

J Bousquet identified interlace sculptures from the Carolingian period across France from the Saintonge in the West, through Conques, the Auvergne, to Provence. (Note 5) He alludes to possible Viking origins but warns against attributing the motif to any particular area of origin. In the same paper, he lists sculptures from the same period to be found across Northern Italy and in the Balkans.

On the North-west extremities of Europe, the monasteries of Scotland, Ireland and in the North of England developed artistic skills that were displayed in the illustration of both manuscripts and in stone during the late VI and VII centuries. Their skills were sought by courts on the Continent. There is evidence that artists and artisans travelled from Ireland to Tours and Limoges and to Northern Spain. Alas, this flourishing of arts was brought to a sudden and brutal end by the ravages of the Vikings. The monastic institutions were sacked and their inhabitants were dispersed as they sought safety. It was only with the return of some semblance of stability in the XI century that the artistic skills were to come alive again. Similarly, the Viking incursions had a detrimental effect all down the Atlantic side of France, where monasteries were sacked and the monks dispersed to places of safety further inland. As had been the case in Southern France, the evidence that has survived for us to see today is scant and fragmentary. Pre-Romanesque interlace sculptures are rare along the Northern coastal region of France East from Brittany and through Normandy. It is possible that this is because of the greater periodic destruction endured by the region both in early Mediaeval times and in the XX century.



Saintes (17) – Fragment of sarcophagus



Cravant (37) - Capital



St Jean Baptiste (37) – IXc frieze on South wall of choir

One of the finest examples of interlace that is probably from the Carolingian period is to be seen on a cross that is from the top of the West façade of the church at Saint Maur de Glanfeuil, near Angers. The church, sadly, has been destroyed but the top of the façade is now secured and protected from the elements. The cross has two patterns of interlace on the vertical and horizontal arms and a third pattern at the centre and, as a whole, it makes for a dramatic effect.



St Maur de Glanfeuil (49) – Top of West façade with IXc Cross

In Northern Spain, there was greater stability and security despite the expanding presence of the Moors. The Visigoth Kingdom knew of the interlace motif, which possibly it had acquired from manuscripts from North Africa or the South-eastern corner of the Mediterranean. Certainly it was incorporated into their liturgical documents: at Silos is a 1052 copy of a V or VI century Visigoth manuscript known as the ‘Liber ordinum’ that contains the motif as decoration and it was added to the decoration of a window on the church of San Juan de Baños, in Palencia, a church that dates from the mid VII century.



1052 copy of V or VI c Liber ordinum (detail) (left) & San Juan de Baños, Palencia – Detail of window (right)

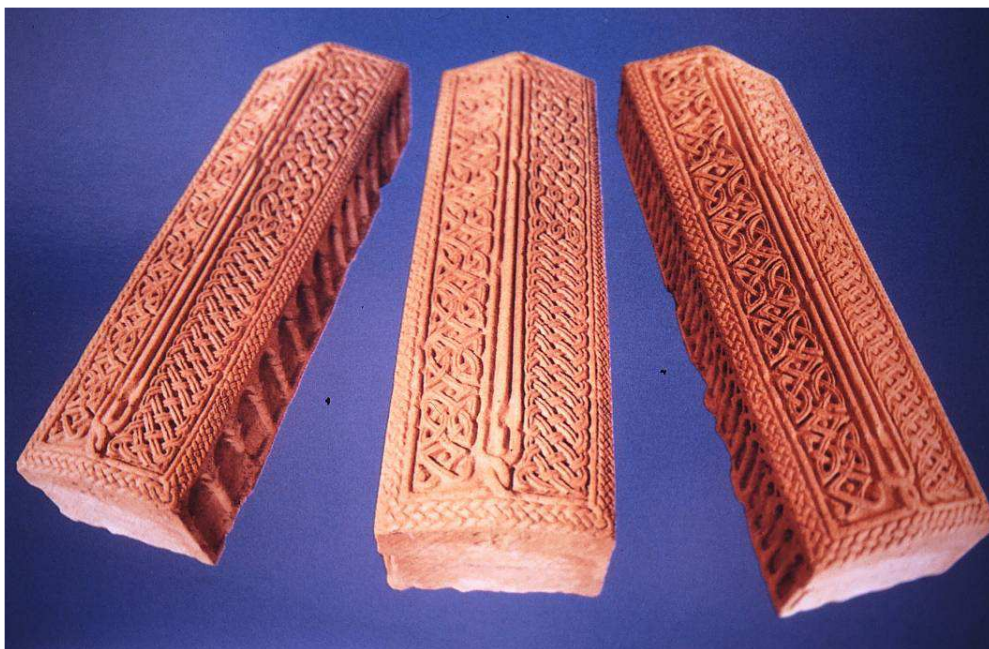
The Visigoth Kingdom had survived in most of Spain from early in the VI century through until the invasion of the Moors in the early VIII century. For the next two hundred years the Moors tolerated the Christians in their lands before compelling them either to convert or leave. Those that did leave brought with them the Mozarab styles that they had developed. We saw an example of this at San Miguel de Escalada (on page 20). But it is far from conclusive that the interlace sculptures of the X and XI centuries found

in Northern Spain necessarily have their origins in Visigoth culture. The monastery of San Suso at San Millan de la Cogolla, La Rioja, was famed for its X century scriptorium. One of the better known works is the Beatus Liebaña that is now in the Escorial. The scriptorium was probably influenced by monks who had come from Ireland bringing with them the interlace motif that was so extensively used to decorate the Irish manuscripts. That manuscripts provided models for the sculptors of the period has been authenticated. Thus the interlace seen at say San Miguel de Escalada or on a capital at San Millan may have as easily come from Irish roots as from Visigoth roots.



Beatus San Millan (now in Escorial) – Two illuminated letters

At the former abbey of San Martin de Elines, North-west of Burgos, are three very similar sarcophagi; all have a top decorated with fine interlace of two distinct patterns. One sarcophagus is Mozarab; one is Romanesque and the third is from the Gothic period.



San Martin de Elines, Cantabria – Mozarab, Romanesque, Gothic

At Riudesperes, in Catalonia, there is a re-used sculptured plaque that is probably from a VII or VIII century sarcophagus; it, too, has two distinct interlace designs decorating the outer edges. All these examples from Spain have their origins in the Visigoth culture that preceded the Moorish invasion.



Riudesperes, Catalonia – Reused sarcophagus in cloisters

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the interlace patterns were introduced in three separate areas at broadly similar time but that these introductions were unrelated except as insofar as they came about to fill a need to decorate the increasing number of churches that were being built. They were intended to be decorative and without symbolism.

Romanesque Period (XI and XII centuries)

The beginning of the XI century coincided with a huge building programme that has been described as being like a white blanket (of churches) spreading over France. Most sculptural decoration was confined to elaborate geometric patterns or the use of stylized foliage patterns usually based on those of antiquity. The traditional interlace motif seen in the Carolingian period continued to be used and developed. Interlace and strapwork are found in some groups of Romanesque churches in France; in some of these areas, such as the Auvergne and Languedoc there was a continuation of the Carolingian tradition. It was also to be seen in new areas of France. Examples include Le Puy en Velay (42), Moingt (48) and, on the lower slopes of the eastern Pyrenees, L'Ecluse Haute (66). In the North

the interlace patterns are to be found in many of the manuscripts from scriptoria such as that at Mont St Michel (50). It was to this abbey that monks from Ireland probably travelled, bringing not only their artistic skills but also their traditional ideas, including that of the interlace. The interlace was undoubtedly well established as an art form in the North of France, so it is surprising that it does not feature more frequently in sculptural forms in the region. Maylis Baylé has carried out a detailed study of the interlace sculptures of Normandy. (Note 5). One of the earliest examples from the XI century that she discusses is to be found in the former abbey church of Bernay (27).



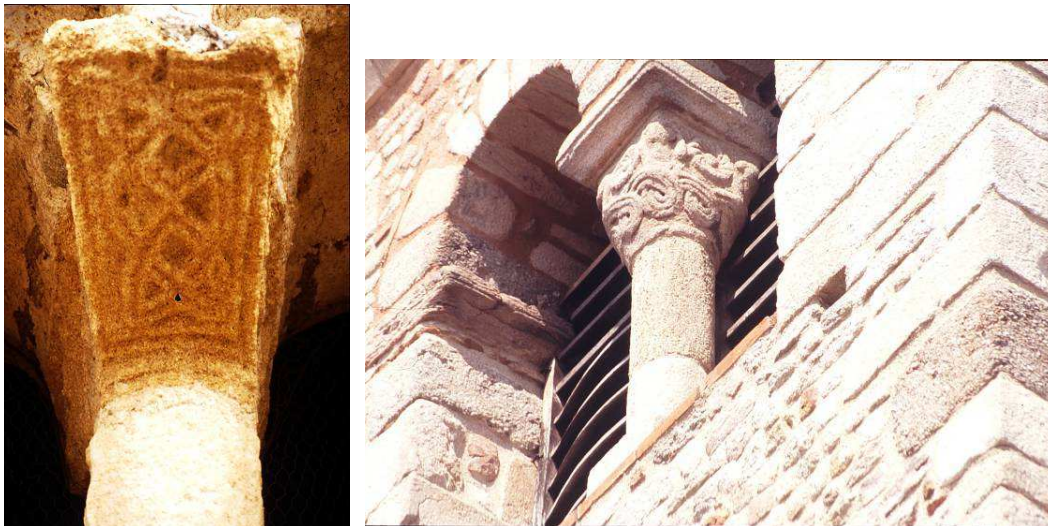
Bernay (27) – Column base with interlace

Maylis Baylé notes that there are contemporaneous and similar examples to be seen in the Rhone valley and Forèz. These latter may have Italian (Lombard) influences. There has also been the suggestion that a capital with interlace that is from the abbey at Jumièges (27) also has Italian influences. However, as probable is the proposal that it was Anglo-Saxon styles that are the source of inspiration for the sculptures; these would have become more marked following the Norman conquest of England and the subsequent extensive feudal links between England and Normandy. A third source of influence for these is from the Viking heritage; not only was the Norman Duchy born from Viking invasions, there were further influxes of settlers of Viking origin in the XI and XII centuries, especially in the Cotentin peninsula. Across Normandy there are some 30 churches with Romanesque period interlace sculptures. But the interlace patterns were never developed to any great extent by the Normandy sculptors. Following the conquest of England by the Normans there was a revival of church building on a large scale. The patrons, who sponsored these new churches, introduced to the decoration of their churches styles and motifs that were already in use on the Continent. But inspiration from Anglo-Saxon and Celtic traditions were not abandoned. In the West of England, at Kilpeck, the West window and two modillions on the south of the nave are decorated

with fine interlace patterns. The nearby ‘Shobdon Arches’, part of the same ‘school’, has pillars with related interlace decoration.



‘Sauve Majeure Bible’ from Mont St Michel circa AD 1070 & Le Puy en Velay (43) - XIc fragments (picture from Juliana Lees)



La Cluse Haute (66) – Capital on West façade (left) & Moingt (42) – Capital in tower (right)



Kilpeck, Herefordshire – West window

Across England, but particularly in Eastern England, fine sculptured baptismal fonts have survived that include many of the traditional interlace designs that were used in the illustration of manuscripts. These designs were intended to be more than mere decoration; they had meaning in their symbolism.



Hampstead Norreys, Berks – Baptismal font





Sculthorpe, Norfolk – Three sides of the baptismal font



Toftrees, Norfolk – Two sides of the baptismal font

The great abbey church of Conques (12) is the centre of a significant group of churches with XI century sculptures of interlace. This group stretches from Souillac and Carennac (46) in the North-west, south to the Tarn valley, East to Nant (12) and North-west into the Haute Auvergne around Aurillac (15) and it numbers around 30 churches and centres on the Rouegue and Aurillac region; some of these churches have six or more sculptures with interlace. Fau, in his paper, focuses on this region as being a hub from which the motif was to be disseminated. (Note 4).

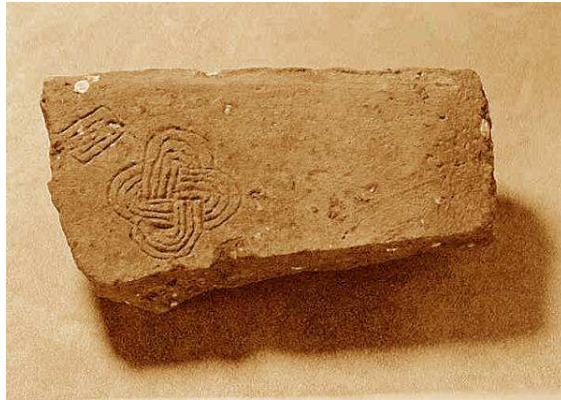


Conques (12) & Nant (12) - Capitals in nave

Conques was soon to become one of the famed great pilgrimage churches on the way to Santiago. It is probable that itinerate sculptors, passing through the church, would have seen and noted the designs and, because of the status of the abbey, would have made use of those observations and thus spread the use of the motif.

King Solomon's Knot

At the crossing of the church of Jou sous Montjou, in the Haute Auvergne (15), there is an unusual form of interlace that is sometimes known as King Solomon's Knot. It is a Jewish symbol and for the Jews is a symbol of wisdom. It is far from certain that the same symbolism pertained in the Middle Ages in Christian Europe. Mary Curtis Webb identified it as 'the symbol of Cosmic Harmony in the World Soul'. (Note 3) An early example of the 'knot' is to be seen on a small piece of terracotta tile that dates from II century AD; it is to be found in the Museu d'Historia de la Ciutat, Barcelona. This tile has a small rectangular gaming board inscribed on one top corner. Below the game board is an inscribed King Solomon's Knot. Its signification in this context is unclear, but it is probably graffiti.



Barcelona Museu d'Historia de la Ciutat – Ic game board & graffiti knot

There are several such knots in two corners of a I century AD mosaic (known as the 'Peacock Mosaic') that was found at Vaison-la-Romaine, in Provence.



Vaison-la-Romaine (84) – Peacock mosaic, detail. Ic AD.

Still in the Haute Auvergne, the small hill-top chapel of Roc Vignonet has a capital at the entrance to the choir that has a single knot. It may also be seen on the East face of the bell tower at Moingt (42). It is in graffiti form in at least three churches. The best example is at the pilgrim church of Echebrune, in the Saintonge (17). Here on the South wall are at least eight such knots of two slightly different patterns. At Vignonet (33), a little to the South-west, there is a sculptured capital, and at Audigon (40) and in the abbey church at Montmajour (13) the same knot is to be seen. The link between these, if there is one, would be interesting to know. The church at Echebrune has a number of other graffiti that are certainly the works of mediaeval pilgrims; the knots there probably are, too, as is the one at Audigon. It was the mark for some mediaeval Italian builders. It could have been

adopted by individuals on the pilgrimage. In the crypt at Maurienne, in Savoie (73) is one that dates from the early XI century; this cannot easily be linked to pilgrimage. In Catalonia the motif is to be seen on several churches, for example at Sant Vicenc, Besalú and on two different capitals in the splendid cloisters at L'Estany. Further South near Tarragona it is present as a sculpture on the doorway to Santa Colomba de Queralt, whilst a little to the East the church of El Pla de Santa Maria has a graffiti example on the South transept. At none of these is there an evident link with pilgrimage.



Jou sous Monjou (15) - Capital south of crossing (left) Vignonet (33) – Capital on nave (right)



L'Estany, Catalonia - Capital in South aisle of cloisters (left) Maurienne (73) – Capital in crypt (right)



Sta Coloma de Queralt, Catalonia - Detail right of door



Echebrune (17) - Graffiti on South of nave (left) & El Pla de Sta Maria, Catalonia – Graffiti on South transept (right)

These are by no means the only examples of graffiti interlace on Romanesque churches. On the church of Rou, Anjou there are two very similar examples of graffiti, one in a clearer state than the other. There are two more very similar examples, also graffiti, on the South wall of the church at Noyers (37).



Rou (49) – Graffiti on South wall

Variants of this pattern are to be found in sculpture; for example the capitals at Les Arques, in the Quercy (46) and at St Paul d'Arnavé in the Ariège (09).



Les Arques (46) – Capital on apse



St Paul d'Arnavé (09) – XIc capital

In Poitou-Charente a similar increased pace in building activity was taking place in the XI century as the region recovered from the earlier depredations of the Vikings and Normans. Churches were rebuilt and ambitious campaigns of decoration were initiated. The pilgrim church of St Eutrope, Saintes (17) had a crypt that held the relics of St Eutrope, relics that were greatly revered. The crypt has a remarkable collection of large sculptured capitals that were in most cases modeled on motifs from antiquity that were (and are) to be seen in profusion nearby. In turn, the sculptures were to provide the patterns that were replicated across the Saintonge over the next century and a half.



St Eutrope crypt, Saintes (17)

As a result, the interlace motif was familiar across the region and into nearby Poitou and Angoumois.



Cellefrouin (16) - Capital in nave



Charroux (86) - Capital on remains of rotunda



St Thomas de Conac (17) - Apse window

The sculpture of the bearded man in the cloisters of the Cathedral of St Lizier (09) shows a most inventive form for interlace – it is the man's jerkin. There is a similarly inventive use of interlace on a modillion that is now in the Museum of Art, Girona.



St Lizier (09) – Sculpture in cloister



Girona, Museum of Art – Late XIIc modillion

The capital of the lion at Charroux (86), where the interlace is on the mane, reminds one of how the interlace may be but a small but essential feature in the decoration. Another example is at Besalú, Catalonia, on the South door of the church of Sant Vicenc. Here,

there is a capital where the interlace is almost an after-thought. This small element of interlace is in the form of a knot of a pattern that we have already discussed.



Besalu, Sant Vicenc – Detail of capital on South door

The addition of a small element of interlace decoration above the main motif on a capital is not uncommon. There are several examples at St Sernin, Bordeaux (33).



St Sernin, Bordeaux – Capital on left side of porch

The application of human figures to capital decoration pre-dates the Carolingian and Romanesque periods by many centuries. It did not survive the Roman period in Western Europe except in rare instances such as in Visigothic Spain; at San Pedro de la Nave there are sculptured capitals with figures; these date from the late VII century. It was only in the early XI century that figures, animals and beasts were tentatively reintroduced into the repertoire of church sculptors. By the end of the century they were common place. The use of geometric patterns and foliate designs continued but these were often

relegated to the margins of main sculptures or to parts of the structure that were of secondary interest. Nonetheless, the interlace is to be seen in many churches and in most regions of France. But they are infrequently used as a major component of a capital to be placed in a prime position in the church. This, however, is not the case in Spain, as will be discussed later. An example is the key-stone at Cruas; this has a pattern that we saw on the side panel of a Carolingian-period sarcophagus at Arles (13) and which we will see again at Sant Pere de Galligants, Girona..



Cruas (07) - Key stone in tribune

A Catalan example

There was, however, one region that proved an exception to this trend. The region that is now known as Roussillon was and remains culturally part of Northern Catalonia. The region has several sources of marble of top quality and of colours that made it highly suitable for decoration and for sculpture. There are several churches that retain doorways of very similar style. All use marble, though of several different colours. Most have doors that are set between fine sculptured capitals. Several have a blank tympanum over the door. Around the top of the tympanum is at least one arch in the form of a thick bent marble bar or arc. This arc has a delicately carved pattern of interlace along its length. At Thuir, where the church has been rebuilt several times since the XII century, a small band of interlace has been re-used in the South wall. It has not only the same interlace pattern as that is to be found on several churches in the region, it also has the same small flower-heads between the interlace. It enables us to date that early church to the mid XII century.



Serrabone (66) - North door Left) & Thuir (66) – Re-employed stone on South wall



Brouilla (66) - South door



Corneilla de Conflent (66) - West door



Corneilla de Conflent (66) - Window on apse (detail)

At Corneilla de Conflent the sculptor has added variations to the basic pattern that is to be seen on the West door; these are on the three apse windows. It is at Elne Cathedral (66), both in the choir of the church, on the apse and in the cloisters that there are the greatest numbers of variations of interlace patterns.

Some way South of the Pyrenees, near Vic, is the village church of Espinelves, a church with two naves; one dates from the XI century whilst the South one is XII century. Between the two, at the West end is an arch leading into the Northern nave that was probably part of the original entrance and is therefore also XI century. It is decorated with an interlace pattern, but one that is different from those seen in Roussillon. But the Roussillon pattern is to be found at four other churches away from the mountains – Santa Maria, in Besalú, where there is a surviving fragment that is now in Peralada museum and Sant Pere, also in Besalú, where it is on the arch over the window on the West façade, and on the rose window of Sant Pere de Galligants, in Girona. This is a church that has interlace of several patterns around the West door, both on the arches and on the door jambs. These sculptures date from the first half of the XII century and are therefore roughly contemporary with those to the North, in Catalonia and in Roussillon, except that at Espinelves. Further in land and just South of the town of Vic stands the Romanesque church of Santa Eugenia de Breda, the doorway of which is XI century. It, too, has the familiar interlace pattern on an arch over the door. This suggests a rapid adoption of the motif in several forms.



Espinelves, Catalonia – Detail of nave arch (left) & Sta Mariá, Besalú – fragment of door arch (right)



Sant Pere de Galligants, Girona, Catalonia – detail of rose window



Sta Eugenia de Berga, Catalonia – West door

The Romanesque Cathedral at Vic was destroyed, to be replaced by a Baroque structure. Fragments of the sculptures are preserved in the nearby Episcopal Museum. These include several pieces of an arch decorated with interlace. Such a building would have provided an example for the decoration for many smaller churches in the surrounding region such as Espinelves (see picture above).



Vic Cathedral, now in Episcopal museum – Two fragments from a doorway

The Romanesque Cathedral in Barcelona was also replaced by a new building, built in Gothic style. The National Museum of Art has two fragments of interlace from the door arch. The pattern of interlace does not resemble the patterns that we have been looking at in Northern Catalonia; but it is a pattern that was common in Northern Europe.



Barcelona – Fragment from Cathedral now in the National Museum of Art



Sant Pere de Galligants, Girona – Detail of door arch

This pattern of interlace on the arch of the door at Sant Pere de Galligants, Gerona, is unlike patterns of interlace to be found elsewhere.

The examples from Catalonia that have been mentioned above are all in the Northern part, which was never conquered by the Moors. The area of Catalonia lying to the South of Barcelona was subject to the rule of the Moors until the second half of the XII century. It was to take a further two decades before Christian churches were built or rebuilt. The Romanesque style was used until the second quarter of the XIII century. With the architectural style came the decorative style. Capitals with biblical scenes and the use of

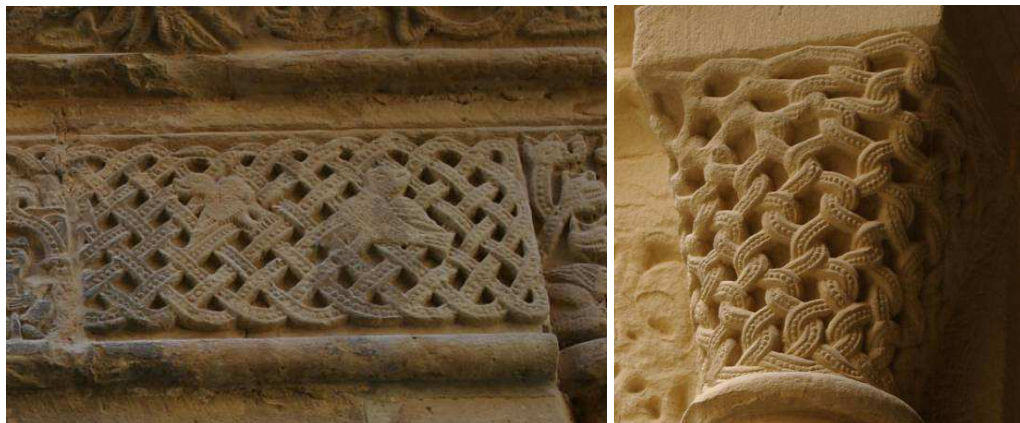
animals, birds and mythical beasts in symbolic sculptures were widely used across the area known as 'New Catalonia'. But so, too, were the earlier motifs of foliage and interlace. Examples are numerous: Tarragona Cathedral, Poblet, Seu Vella at Lleida (the Old Cathedral), Verdú and Gandesa and L'Estany amongst others. Some 10 kilometres South of L'Estany is another monastery with Romanesque cloisters. Most of the capitals date from the late XII century and they include several patterns of interlace; but strangely none resembles the patterns seen at L'Estany. That they should be numerous at Poblet is unsurprising: it was a Cistercian monastery; thus the use of foliage and interlace, rather than the contents of Noah's Ark, is to be expected; but at nearby Santa Creus, also a Cistercian foundation, interlace is restricted to the top of one tomb but the capitals are alive with birds and animals. The real surprise is that small churches such as that at Gandesa, on the extreme Southern limits of Catalonia, and Verdú, which is a little to the North, should use the interlace motif so extensively. That the interlace motif was well known at an early date in Spain has already been mentioned. This heritage is emphasized by a Mozarab screen to be seen in the museum of the cloisters at Tarragona. This has a line of interlace along the top. And, as if to give emphasis to the shared artistic heritage of Muslim and Christian Spain, there is the sand-stone XIII century sculpture from Granada (now in private hands).



Tarragona Cathedral Museum, Catalonia – Mozarab screen



Granada, Andalusia (now in private hands) – XIIIc sand stone



Gandesa, Catalonia – Frieze on façade (left) & Poblet, Catalonia – Capital by lavabo

We have seen that Islam used the interlace motif and that they knew of it from an early date (see page 7 above). The Byzantine Empire created little stone sculpture but one of two door jambs shows the use of interlace that recalls its use on the stone crosses and

slabs of Scotland and the North of England (see pages 10 and 11 above). This same style was used on a tomb stone in Armenia that dates from 1225. On this stone we see several different variations of the basic interlace. These examples serve to emphasise the universality of the motif in the Middle Ages.



Byzantine door jamb (detail)



Khatchkar of Aputayli, Armenia 1225

The variety of patterns

An examination of the numerous interlace designs that were in use in the late XI and XII centuries reveals similarities of designs that were produced in regions that were widely separated from each other. We know that sculptors moved about from church to church and from diocese to diocese; but the distribution of similar designs is so wide as to lead one to believe that the designs must have been circulated by other means such as by some form of 'pattern-book'. It is very possible that the 'pattern-book' was one of the liturgical or biblical manuscripts that were held by large monasteries and which were copied and re-copied in their scriptoria. Neil Stratford discussed this in respect of the interlace amongst other motifs. (Note 7). Durham University has 'hosted' a major project to develop the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture. As part of this project a 'Grammar of Anglo-Saxon Ornament' was developed. (Note 8). It contains a brief descriptive system that is capable of dealing with the complex and varied shapes and forms of interlace. An example of the wide distribution is that of the interlace on the key stone at Cruas (illustrated above) is to be seen on the door jamb at Sant Pere de Galligants, Girona in Catalonia. It was this pattern that Mary Webb Curtis linked to the representation of the four elements. (Note 3).



Sant Pere, Girona, Catalonia – Detail of door jamb (left) & Mauriac (15) - Font



Antezant (17) - Frieze on apse (left) & Elne (66) – Pillar of cloister (right)



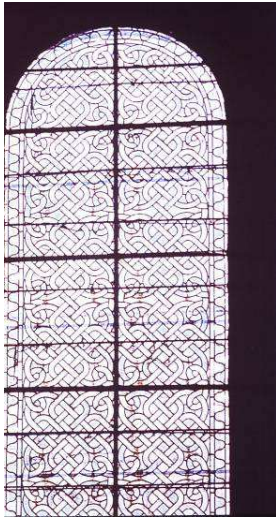
St Martin de Cantalès (15) - Frieze by door

The XII century cloisters at St Lizier (09) have more than a dozen capitals with the interlace as the main motif. To the sides of the two side chapels to the church are capitals with more interlace; these are earlier in date, perhaps XI century. Why so many? Given that almost all sculpture of the period had a Christian message to convey and that it was not just decorative one has to wonder what that message was.



St Lizier (09) – Capital from the South chapel and five from the cloisters

The use of interlace as a decorative motif was by no means confined to sculpture in the mediaeval period. In this article we have already seen that it was a feature of manuscript decoration from the VII century, especially in the schools that worked in the British Isles. The motif was also to be seen in early glazing of church windows. A fine example is to be seen in the Cistercian abbey of Obazine, in the Limousin.



Obazine (19) – Transept window

The transition to Gothic

By the second half of the XII century the use of the interlace motif was marginal except in Northern Spain, where it was to remain a popular motif for another half century. In the last three decades of that century the theories that had guided the concepts and styles of Romanesque sculpture were overturned. The structural changes that came about in architecture in what is known as the Gothic period required different decorative solutions. At the same time decoration was added to buildings to fill the needs of new religious thinking. These changes led to the extinction of the interlace motif as part of that décor.

Notes :

1. 'Symbolism of the Celtic Cross'. Derek Bryce. Llanerch Press, 2006.
2. 'Studies in Medieval Sculpture'. Ed FH Thompson. Society of Antiquaries, paper III. 1983.
3. 'Ideas and Images in Twelfth Century Sculpture'. Mary Webb Curtis. 2010, revised 2012.
4. 'Les Origines du Chapiteau Roman à Entrelacs et la Zone de Diffusion du Thème dans le Sud-Ouest de la France'. J-C Fau. Toulouse, 1971.

5. 'Les Origines de la Sculpture Romane sont elles Lointaines ou Proches'. J Bousquet. Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa No 9 pp 51-71. 1978.
6. 'Interlace Patterns in Norman Romanesque Sculpture'. Maylis Baylé. Anglo- Norman Studies. 1982.
7. 'La Problème de Modèles à l'Epoque Romane'. Neil Stratford. Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa No XXXVII pp 7-21. 2006.
8. 'Grammar of Anglo-Saxon Ornament'. Rosemary Cramp. OUP, 1991.

Other references consulted:

- 'Anglo-Saxon Art'. David M Wilson. Thames & Hudson 1984.
- 'Celtic Art in Pagan and Christian Times'. J Romilly Allen. Senate (reprint) 1997.
- 'English Romanesque Sculpture 1066-1140'. George Zarnecki. Alec Tiranti, 1951.
- 'Guia del Prerromanico en España'. Jaime Correrros. Guia Total 2005.
- 'L'Art Wisigothique et ses survivances'. J Puig i Cadalfach. F de Nobele, Paris 1961.
- 'Scandanavian Mythology'. HR Ellis Davidson. Hamlyn 1969.
- 'Symbolism of the Celtic Cross'. Derek Bryce. Llanerch Press (reprint) 2006.
- 'Un décor original: l'entrelac épanoui en palmette sur les chapiteaux romans de l'ancienne septimanie'. J-C Fau. Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa No 9 pp 129-140. 1978.

23.03.2014