

Montfort

*History, Early Research and Recent Studies
of the Principal Fortress of the Teutonic Order
in the Latin East*

Edited by

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With the Assistance of

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The Architectural Sculpture of Montfort Castle Revisited

Nurith Kenaan-Kedar¹

This chapter deals with the major pieces of figural and architectural sculpture discovered in 1926, some of which were described in brief and dated by Dean between 1226 and 1271.² These pieces comprise of five keystone bosses, two sculpted heads whose original role or location is not clear, and fragments of sculpted ribs as well as a sculpted capital.

The Keystone Bosses

Keystones mark the intersections of two or more arched ribs. The bosses of the ceiling keystones are each embellished with a round medallion carved with various images. Folda, in his discussion of the architectural complex of the castle, mentions just two of the bosses,³ and describes one of them in a later publication.⁴ Pringle mentions them in his chapter on the castle in volume 2 of *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem*.⁵ It is my intention to examine here the role and meanings of the keystone bosses as individual elements of architectural sculpture, and investigate their motifs in the context of the pictorial language of the bosses that developed in architectural sculpture in contemporary medieval Europe from the end of the twelfth century and throughout the thirteenth.

The Keystone Bosses: Details and Composition

Each of the five keystones presents an individual composition, featuring foliate motifs that reflect different tree branches and leaves arranged in various patterns.

Common to all leaves is their structure as tripartite units, which seems to be symbolic of the Holy Trinity.

Plate 25.1 A round keystone boss, structured with an outer circle of eight oak leaves and three leaves in the centre.⁶ The eight oak leaves are arranged in sequence, turned in one direction to form an outer circle. Such a pattern of leaves in a circular movement is reminiscent of the early Christian type of capital that features acanthus leaves blowing in the wind, in which the leaves, carved in two rows, are presented as if in movement. While the carving of each individual leaf is deep, their surface is flat, not textured, and displays a schematic form. The flat background between the leaves underlines their plasticity. In the centre of the keystone three leaves are carved, each turned in a different direction. Small images of round fruit are dispersed in low relief on all the carved leaves.

Plate 25.2 The carving of the second round keystone was probably halted at an early stage and is incomplete.⁷ However, three branches of clover-like leaves can be discerned, with each branch bearing elongated stems opening toward the three central leaves, each of which is divided into two parts. Each leaf seems to be turned in a different direction.

Plate 25.3 The third keystone presents a schematic round composition.⁸ Six open acanthus leaves are depicted as separate units encircling the round keystone, so that each one has its counterpart within the circle. The leaves are all symmetrical, divided into two equal parts by a middle third part. They emerge from the keystone centre, where six small acanthus leaves are arranged in the same order around a focal image

¹ Regrettably Professor Nurith Kenaan-Kedar passed away prior to the publication of this volume. Nurith was a leading art historian and one of the foremost scholars of medieval sculpture. We are privileged to be able to include this study of the architectural sculpture of Montfort Castle among the studies presented in this volume—the editors.

² Dean, 1927, pp. 5–46 (esp. pp. 28, 32, Fig. 30).

³ Folda, 2005, pp. 184–88, Figs. 91–92.

⁴ Folda, 2008, p. 88, Fig. 59.

⁵ Pringle, 1998, pp. 40–43.

⁶ This piece, originally located in the upper storey of the western wing, was found in 1926 in the basement chamber, chamber K, and is now located in the Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem.

⁷ This keystone was found in chamber G. Its present location is in the grounds of Tel Aviv University.

⁸ This piece which originated in the Great Hall was recovered in chamber K. Because of its large size the boss was sawn off and is now located in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. The keystone remains in chamber K.



PLATE 25.1 *Bossed keystone from the upper storey of the western building.*

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PLATE 25.2 *Bossed keystone found in chamber G.*

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PLATE 25.3 *Bossed keystone from the Great Hall.*

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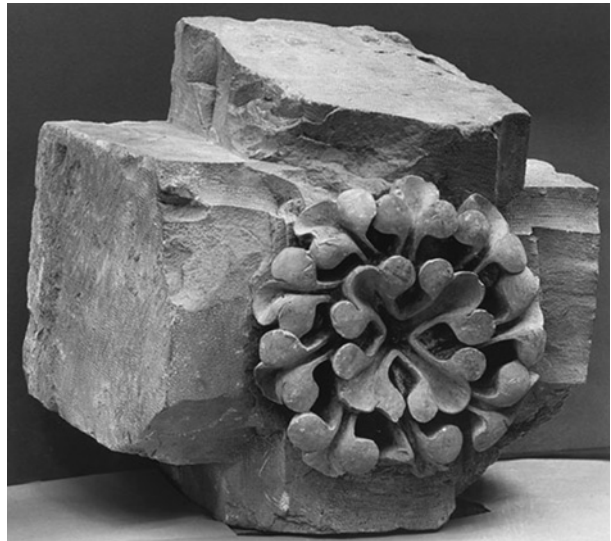


PLATE 25.4 *Keystone found in chamber E.*

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in the form of an artichoke. On this keystone the flat background between the leaves is prominent, creating a significant space for each of the leaves.

Plate 25.4 This keystone is formed by an outer circle of nine clover leaves, with four other clover leaves combined in the centre into one unit in the form of

a cross.⁹ The carving of the outer leaves, and especially of the stems, confers a voluminous appearance. The inner unit loses its foliate character, with the

⁹ Found in chamber E, this piece is now on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



PLATE 25.5 *Decorated rib found in chamber F.*
COURTESY OF IAA ARCHIVES: BRITISH MANDATE
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connecting stems fluted in such a way as to turn them into small channels with a deep middle, presenting the form of a cross.

Plate 25.5 The foliate ornament on a chamfered rib presents very similar leaf types to those of Keystone 4.¹⁰

Plate 25.6 The leaf composition here is complex.¹¹ It is composed of four long and broad outer leaves set widely apart from each other, although turned in the same direction. Between these leaves are clusters of round fruit. The middle of the keystone is occupied by four small leaves carved around a central flower, in the form of a cross, all turned in the same direction.

The Keystone Bosses: Role and Meanings in Late Romanesque and Gothic Art

Keystone bosses at the apex of rib-vaulted ceilings, or marking the intersections of two or more arched

10 This piece was found in chamber F, but its present whereabouts is unknown.

11 This keystone was recovered in chamber D and is now on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



PLATE 25.6 *Bossed Keystone found in chamber D.*
COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF
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OF ART.

ribs, appeared in France from the end of the twelfth century. They were used in ecclesiastical and civic architecture from churches and bishops' palaces to castles and town halls, and spread throughout Europe, remaining in routine use until at least the end of the fifteenth century. Because of their particular installation at the apex of the vault, the bosses expressed, from the beginning, various meanings. On the one hand they reflected the symbolic notions of the church roof or dome as a symbol of heaven. In Catholic thought, the church is perceived as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm or, in other words, as a concrete manifestation of the hierarchical order of the Heavenly Kingdom. The physical structure of the church, the actual building, has been perceived by theologians and historians, from Eusebius in the fourth century to Sugerius in the twelfth century and later, as symbolizing and reflecting a symbolic or allegorical reality alongside the material one. Several church architects have related a symbolic significance beyond that of the church's physical existence: the roof or dome is a symbol of heaven/the sky, and the pillars supporting it represent the apostles and prophets; the apse, the symbol of Christ, symbolizes light, and the facade—the triumph of the Church and of cosmic Christianity.¹² This symbolic architectural hierarchy of the church building appears to have been transferred also to other ecclesiastical and civic buildings. I would like to contend, however, that even in churches the keystones can be considered as belonging

12 See Kanaan-Kedar, 2010, p. 78, note 8.



PLATE 25.7 *Caesarea—console, eastern wall of eastern gate.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY B.Z. KEDAR.

to the category of medieval marginal sculpture, both because they are situated high up on the vaults, and also because they feature various figural sculptures in addition to vegetal motifs, or are integrated within the latter. The boss carvings adopted on the one hand celestial figural images such as angels, while on the other hand they also feature numerous images characteristic of marginal corbel series, such as the figures of jongleurs, images of sculptors and architects, the aged, women, and even demons.¹³ There are several groups of images that appear regularly on the bosses.

Vegetal motifs, mainly tree branches and leaves, feature in great variation. Their compositions appear more schematic at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth century, developing into naturalistic forms at the end of the thirteenth century. Schematic compositions, however, continue to appear also in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The foliate motifs, mainly the leaf compositions, seem to be part of a repertory of forms that emerged during the same period on numerous types of Gothic capitals both inside and outside the cathedrals and churches. These foliate forms, which reflect various sorts of trees, have been regarded by several scholars as a prominent

13 Kenaan-Kedar, 1995, p. 26, Figs. 34–35; p. 27, Figs. 36–38; p. 40 figs. 158–59.



PLATE 25.8 *Caesarea—capital of northern wall gate.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY B.Z. KEDAR./

expression of the new relationship with nature in Gothic art. Eugène Viollet-le-Duc already spoke of them as reflecting the spring of Gothic art,¹⁴ while Emile Mâle saw them as expressing love for the trees of the Ile-de-France and the region of Champagne. He stressed his belief that they did not have any symbolic meanings but reflected the sculptors' admiration for nature as a divine creation.¹⁵

Numerous images of men and women also appear in these leaf bosses. Many of them are designed as a human face in the middle of a leaf, a common form which was also called a "green man." Villard of Honnecourt was an early designer of such a leaf.¹⁶ For example, in the cathedral of Rheims, on a capital of the thirteenth century nave depicting vine leaves, such faces are featured in the middle of the capital. The figures include saints, angels and kings, or coats-of-arms of various noble houses, as well as marginal folk such as jongleurs, and women. In many cases the keystone ribs bear leaf bosses, while the space between each rib features various kinds of human figures, from angels to marginals, surrounding the boss.

The Montfort keystone bosses are no longer *in situ* and therefore it is not possible to know whether they were accompanied by additional figures or whether they were situated in the castle's chapel or some other hall. Their leaf compositions, however, are very similar to the leaf consoles from the city wall gates of Caesarea dated to the time of King Louis IX.¹⁷ The clover leaves of Keystone 4 are very similar to those on a console

14 Mâle, 1958, pp. 52–53.

15 Ibid., pp. 53–54.

16 Bowie, 1959, Pls. 26, 27, pp. 60–61.

17 Kenaan-Kedar, 2006, pp. 95–98.



PLATE 25.9 *Caesarea—console, eastern wall of eastern gate.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY B.Z. KEDAR.

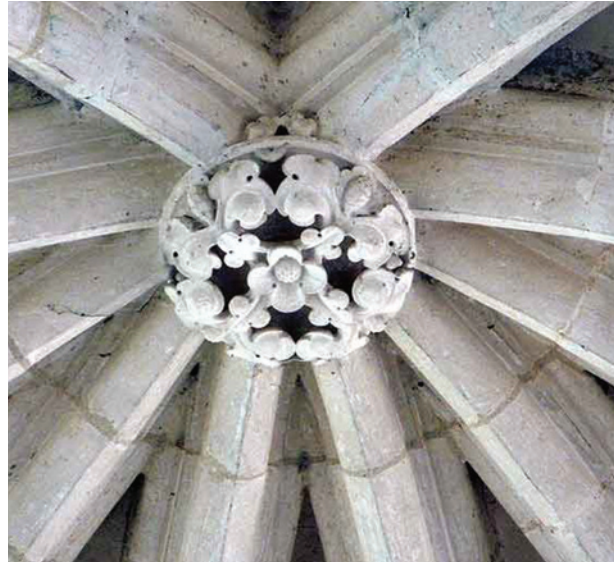


PLATE 25.10 *Abbey of Pontigny, choir vaults, keystone boss (beginning of thirteenth century).*
PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR.

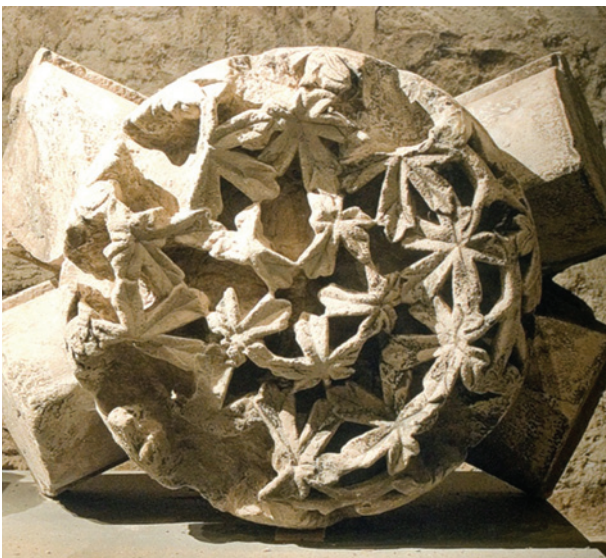


PLATE 25.11 *Abbey of Walkenried, first quarter of the thirteenth century.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY BERND NICOLAI.



PLATE 25.12 *Abbey of Walkenried, first quarter of the thirteenth century.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY BERND NICOLAI.

supporting the ribs of the eastern gate in Caesarea, whose lower part is worked out in the form of a flower, similar to the central part of the said keystone (Plate 25.7). At the same time there is also a great similarity between the clover leaves of Keystone 4 with the deeply carved stems and a capital with the same leaves from the northern gate of Caesarea (Plate 25.8). The boss with the open acanthus leaves displays the same concept as an additional console with open leaves from the eastern gate (Plate 25.9).

Furthermore, numerous keystone bosses in France and Germany dated to the beginning of the thirteenth century show significant similarities to the Montfort Castle bosses. Keystone 2 resembles a keystone from the ambulatory of the choir in the Cistercian abbey of Pontigny, dated to the beginning of the thirteenth century (Plate 25.10).¹⁸ In both keystones the leaves are fashioned as separate units and their central part resembles a flower. A very large number of keystones from the Cistercian abbey of Walkenried in Lower Saxony (Plates 25.11, 12) can also be compared to those of Montfort. The similarities lie in the composition of an outer circle of leaves in movement, the use of a central focus, and the depiction of varied types of leaves. In numerous Gothic cathedrals in France and

¹⁸ Pressouyre and Kinder, 1992, pp. 90–91, 227.



PLATE 25.13 *Early thirteenth century keystone boss with face among leaves, Cathedral Notre Dame de Laon (fifth chapel on the north aisle).*
PHOTOGRAPH BY EMMANUEL CAHEN.



PLATE 25.15 *Combined pillars and capitals at the church of St. John in Sebaste.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY MOSHE MILNER.

Germany, however, the pictorial repertory is richer, with the centre frequently featuring a human face sometimes hidden between the leaves; and the flowers and leaves present much more detail (Plate 25.13).

Leaf Capitals

Three fragments of leaf capitals relating to the same pictorial forms as the keystones deserve mention. The most prominent of these is the remaining upper part of a supporting combined pillar composed of three foliate capitals, each of which consists of a lower row of Corinthian leaves and an upper row of large, smooth leaves (Plate 25.14). This form of combined pillars with leaf capitals appears several times in the Crusader church of St. John in Sebaste. There the combined pillar has undecorated leaves with prominent spirals in its upper part (Plates 25.15, 16).



PLATE 25.14 *Triple capital found in chamber F.*
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PLATE 25.16 *Combined pillars and capitals at the church of St. John in Sebaste.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY MOSHE MILNER.

Another fragment features leaves on a wall pilaster (Plate 25.17).¹⁹ The leaf form can be compared to the leaves of the keystone and to the chamfered rib mentioned above (Plates 25.4, 5).

¹⁹ This piece is still located in chamber F.



PLATE 25.17 *Part of a decorated pilaster found in chamber F.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY ADRIAN BOAS.



PLATE 25.18 *Knight's head found in chamber J.*
COURTESY OF THE ISRAEL MUSEUM,
JERUSALEM.

Conclusion

All keystone bosses from Montfort Castle feature foliate motifs, whose techniques and compositions are not only very similar to those of their contemporaries in Europe but express the same routine. The lack of human figures at Montfort should however be noted.

The Three Sculpted Heads

The three heads found at Montfort Castle do not seem to have been finished. However, the male head, wearing a cap or a helmet, perhaps that of a knight, with long hair and lead inlay for the eyes, seems to have been at a more advanced stage, although the signs of the carver's chisel on the face are still very prominent (Plate 25.18).²⁰ This head has been affiliated by several scholars to "selected small figures of Chartres Cathedral transept facades" from 1210–20, probably the figures on the archivolts, in the north and south transept, or the miniature figures on the south transept depicting cycles of Saints and Virtues.²¹

20 This piece was found in 1926 in chamber J and is now located in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

21 Folda, 2005, pp. 188.

It is very hard to be certain of the pictorial sources of this unfinished image. However, it would seem that the head depicts a different facial type as well as a different gaze to those of the routine sculpted figures of Chartres Cathedral, whose gaze is neither expressive nor displays a fixed focus, but features a wide and unfocused gaze. The Montfort head, in contrast, has an expressive and pointed gaze, and a type of a chin different from the normative round chins found in Chartres. Its chin is incised beneath the deep carving that surrounds the mouth, and so turns both into very active parts of the face. Thus, this head seems to resemble more closely the heads on the choir screen in the Cathedral of Naumburg (Plate 25.19) dated also to between 1220–1230; and in which, when they feature images of Christ and the Apostles or of Jews, the gazes are pointed and expressive.²²

The head with hair tied with a band is also unfinished (Plate 25.20).²³ Although it is difficult to determine whether it was meant to be a male or a female

22 Schubert, 1983, pp. 145–58.

23 This piece, now located in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, was recovered during conservation work carried out in the western wing of the castle by the IAA under the direction of Howard Smithline in 1994.



PLATE 25.19 *Naumburg Cathedral: Christ among the Jews. Western choir screen, beginning of the thirteenth century.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR.

head, its characteristics are legible. The head is elongated, the eyes set close to one another and remnants of the lead inlay of the eyes can still be seen. The eyebrows are close to the eyes, carved in very sharp bold lines. The mouth is large and fleshy but unfinished, and the nose is broken.

The third head (Plate 25.21) is actually an unfinished fragment of a face, where the upper part is missing.²⁴ The left eye is rendered completely while only part of the right eye is seen. The nose is broken, and the areas of the cheeks surrounding nose and mouth have been chiselled in a preliminary way through parallel lines. The mouth is round and open; possibly this form suggests that the head was intended to serve as a water opening.

²⁴ This piece was in the possession of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, but was de-accessioned in 1956 and its present whereabouts is unknown. See above, Chapter 14.



PLATE 25.20 *Head with tied hair found in 1994 in the Great Hall.*
COURTESY OF THE ISRAEL MUSEUM,
JERUSALEM.



PLATE 25.21 *Small head possible from a fountain or drainage spout.*
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Human Images on Capitals

The male figure, depicted on what is probably a medieval Corinthian capital, is shown walking or running, with a disproportionately large head and hands (Plates 25.22, 23). The short legs are covered to the knees, seen in profile. The face is also unfinished, carved only in general lines.

The type of carving and mainly the figure's proportions seem to be much more in line with the Late



PLATE 25.22 *Capital with human figure.*
COURTESY OF IAA ARCHIVES: BRITISH
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PLATE 25.23 *Capital with human figure—detail.*
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PLATE 25.24 *Capital from the church of St Lazare in Autun.*
DRAWING BY ADRIAN BOAS.



PLATE 25.25 *Capital from the church of Notre Dame de Laon.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY EMMANUEL CAHEN.

Romanesque tradition of sculpted capitals where carving of human figures on a first layer of Corinthian leaves is routine and suggests an earlier date for the capital than for the keystones. Comparable examples are twelfth century capitals from St. Lazare in Autun (Plate 25.24),²⁵ Ste. Madeleine in Vézelay or capitals from the early Gothic Cathedral of Notre Dame de Laon (Plate 25.25).

25 Chanoine Denis Grivot, *Autun, Zodiaque*, 1976, Figs. 36, 37, 40.

Conclusion

The architectural sculpture from Montfort Castle reveals a deep knowledge and awareness of French and German Gothic sculpture. As the figural images have remained unfinished, however, any conclusion regarding their interpretation must remain tentative.