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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# Contents

Acknowledgements  xi  
List of Plates  xii  
List of Tables  xxiii  
Note on Names  xxiv  
List of Contributors  xxv  

Introduction  1  
  *Adrian J. Boas*

## Section 1  
*The History of Montfort Castle*

1 Montfort Castle and the Order of the Teutonic Knights in the Latin East  15  
  *Kristjan Toomaspoeg*

2 The Region of Montfort and Land Ownership in the Frankish Period  24  
  *Rabei G. Khamisy*

3 Montfort Castle (Qal‘at Al-Qurayn) in Mamluk Sources  28  
  *Rabei G. Khamisy*

4 Archaeological Evidence for the Mamluk Sieges and Dismantling of Montfort: A Preliminary Discussion  41  
  *Adrian J. Boas*

## Section 2  
*Montfort Castle after the Crusader Period*

5 Montfort Castle in Travellers’ Descriptions and Illustrations  59  
  *Rabei G. Khamisy*

6 The Survey of Western Palestine Report on Montfort (1877)  73  
  *Adrian J. Boas*

7 The Metropolitan Museum of Art Expedition to Montfort (1926)  75  
  *Adrian J. Boas*
### Section 3

*Architecture, Function, Design and Construction of Montfort Castle*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Initial Thoughts on the Architectural Development of the Castle</td>
<td>Adrian J. Boas and Rabei G. Khamisy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Interpretation of the Parts</td>
<td>Adrian J. Boas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The Building Below the Castle</td>
<td>Laura Aiello and Cecilia Luschi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>History and Archaeology of the Frankish Village of Taphile</td>
<td>Rabei G. Khamisy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The Stones of Montfort: Sources of Stone for Montfort Castle</td>
<td>Vardit Shotten-Hallel, Dorit Korngreen and Lydia Perelis Grossowicz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Masonry and Masons’ Marks</td>
<td>Rabei G. Khamisy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 4

*Finds from the 1926 Metropolitan Museum of New York Expedition to Montfort*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Introduction to the Finds</td>
<td>Adrian J. Boas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ceramic Finds</td>
<td>Adrian J. Boas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Winepress at Montfort</td>
<td>Rafael Frankel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Glass Finds in the Metropolitan Museum of Art from the 1926 Expedition</td>
<td>David Whitehouse†, Timothy B. Husband, Lisa Pilosi, Mary B. Shepard and Mark T. Wypyski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Stone, Metal, Wood and Worked Bone Finds from the 1926 Expedition</td>
<td>Adrian J. Boas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>A Roman Imperial Wine Vessel?</td>
<td>Tamar Backner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 5

New Research

Adrian J. Boas

21 Coin Finds (1926–2012) and the Use of Money at Montfort 242
Robert Kool

22 Dendroarchaeological Investigations of Finds from Montfort Castle: Analysis of Finds from 1926 and 2011–2012 256
Nili Liphschitz

23 Tree Wormwood (Artemisia Arborescens) at Montfort Castle: The Possible Introduction of a Medicinal Plant from Western Europe to the Latin East in the Crusader Period 258
Nativ Dudai and Zohar Amar

24 The Stone Matrices from Montfort: About Moulds, Tin Relief and the Polychromy of Shields in the Thirteenth Century 266
Andrea Wähning

25 The Architectural Sculpture of Montfort Castle Revisited 273
Nurith Kenaan-Kedar

26 How Strong was Strong Mountain? Preliminary Remarks on the Possible Location of the Mamluk Siege Position at Montfort Castle 282
Rafael Lewis

27 Two Board Games and Some Graffiti from Montfort 287
Adrian J. Boas

28 Brief Preliminary Remarks on the Sampling and Analysis of Mortars Used in the Construction and Conservation of Montfort Castle 289
Jonathan J. Gottlieb

Summary and Conclusions 302
Adrian J. Boas
Appendix I

Find Lists and the Division of Finds 305
  Adrian J. Boas

Appendix II

Compositional Analyses of Vessels and Window Glasses from Montfort (Weight Percent) 309
  David Whitehouse†, Timothy B. Husband, Lisa Pilosi, Mary B. Shepard and Mark T. Wypyski

Bibliography
  Abbreviations 311
  Primary Sources 311
  Secondary Sources 313
Index 327
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 to between 1226 and 1271. 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, and describes one of them in a later publication. Pringle mentions them in his chapter on the castle in volume 2 of *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem*. 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. 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. 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. 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.

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1 Regretfully 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).


4 Folda, 2008, p. 88, Fig. 59.


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.
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. 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.
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. 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

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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.
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. 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 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, while Emile Mâle saw them as expressing love for the trees of the Île-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.

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. 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. The clover leaves of Keystone 4 are very similar to those on a console.

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14 Mâle, 1958, pp. 52–53.
15 Ibid., pp. 53–54.
17 Kenaan-Kedar, 2006, pp. 95–98.
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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). 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

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

\textsuperscript{19} This piece is still located in chamber F.
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

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20 This piece was found in 1926 in chamber J and is now located in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
21 Folda, 2005, pp. 188.
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.
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

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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.
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.