

CARVED on the capitals in the chancel of Carlisle cathedral, among the foliage and grotesques, is a set of Labours of the Months. The carvings are in very good condition although, being high up and quite small, they are not easy to make out unless one knows where to look and what one is looking for. There is a full set of twelve, but four of them are obscured behind the pinnacles of the later choir stalls and so can only be known through photographs. This set is unique in England and unusual in Europe. In Section I this article considers the characteristics of Labours of the Months cycles. In Section II it compares the Carlisle carvings with the other stone carved sets which still exist in Europe, and in Section III it considers the Carlisle set in the context of the sets in all mediums which still exist in England. Section IV considers the significance and possible interpretations of the Carlisle carvings.

I: The characteristics of Labours of the Months cycles

A Labours of the Months cycle is a set of twelve figures, usually men, each one doing an agricultural task appropriate for the month. The activities included are not ones that can be done at any time of year, such as bread-making, but ones that are recognisably seasonal. Sometimes the name of the month is given beside each one, sometimes the zodiac sign is shown as well, but sometimes, as at Carlisle, the figures stand alone.

Stone carved sets of Labours of the Months began to appear in churches at the beginning of the twelfth century. The sets at Vézelay (France), Modena (Italy) and Ripoll (northern Spain) are from this early period. They were common in church ornament in that century and in the following one, but then the subject of Labours seems to have fallen from favour although there are a few sets from the fourteenth century, of which Carlisle is one. The Carlisle set has recently been dated to 1330-1350, putting the replacement of the earlier capitals with those showing Labours as part of the restoration of the chancel after the 1292 fire.¹ This makes the Carlisle set, and that on a capital of the Doge's Palace in Venice, which was possibly carved as late as the mid-fifteenth century, the two latest stone sets surviving.²

Labours cycles at this time were not only carved in stone but also shown in mosaic pavements, carved misericords, stained glass windows, wall paintings and even in tapestry. This article will focus mainly on stone sets however, both because the Carlisle set is in stone, and also because stone sets are the most common form to have survived in Europe, although, as shown in Section III, there are few stone sets in England.

The idea of representing the year with figures had existed since classical times and a sculpted depiction still exists from the second or first century B.C. on a church façade in Athens which, although it is very different from the medieval sets, has clear links to them.³ No other sculpted set exists between the first century B.C. and the

twelfth century, but there do still exist from this intervening time some representations in mosaic pavements and in manuscripts showing the months with figures.⁴ There is a whole parallel tradition of illustrating manuscripts with pictures of Labours of the Months with examples surviving from classical times onwards, from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries when the stone sets were being carved, and many examples from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁵ Labours often illustrated the month by month calendar of saints' days which was included in psalters and Books of Hours. These manuscript illuminations are clearly part of the tradition of Labours of the Months, and, although not the focus here, they will be considered briefly in Section III.

It is not known for certain why sculpted Labours sets began to appear in European churches in the twelfth century. The reason is probably that more complex buildings were being built – because of economic, political and technological factors – and thus there was more scope for, and need of, decoration and embellishment in all mediums.

Nor is it known how many carved stone Labours cycles there originally were: there must have been many more than have survived. Churches have been destroyed, altered and restored; carvings have eroded or been deliberately damaged. Several sets still survive in a damaged state. No comprehensive modern survey of Labours cycles exists, though useful lists and descriptions are available in older works by Fowler, le Senecal and Webster.⁶ From these it can be established that stone carved sets of Labours are only numerous in France, Italy and Spain, with a few examples in England, one in Croatia and one in Jerusalem and none elsewhere.⁷

Almost all the stone Labours cycles which have survived from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries are on churches or separate baptisteries. Almost all are on the outside of the church. Most commonly sets are around the doorway, on the jambs, on the bases of the pillars on either side of the doorway, or decorating the mouldings around the arch.

No two sets of Labours of the Months are identical in the choice of the twelve activities they include and in the month for which they use them. The range of activities included is not very wide however: there are about eighteen commonly included activities from which any one set has some, with usually some less common ones included also, and occasional unique ones. There are some regional differences, but more examples of similarities across the whole area where Labours cycles are found. Additionally, different sets may use the same activity but attach it to a different month.

Although most of any one set of twelve show agricultural tasks being done, every set also has some months represented by occupations which are not strictly "labours", for example warming beside the fire or feasting. Sets also often include representations of the months drawn from the classical tradition, for example the Bearer of New Growth for a spring month, or Janus for January.

II: Carlisle's set of Labours compared with other stone carved sets in Europe

In order to compare the activities included in the Carlisle cycle with those used elsewhere it is necessary to establish a list of good sets in Europe. A large number of European cycles have been inspected by the author in order to establish a group of

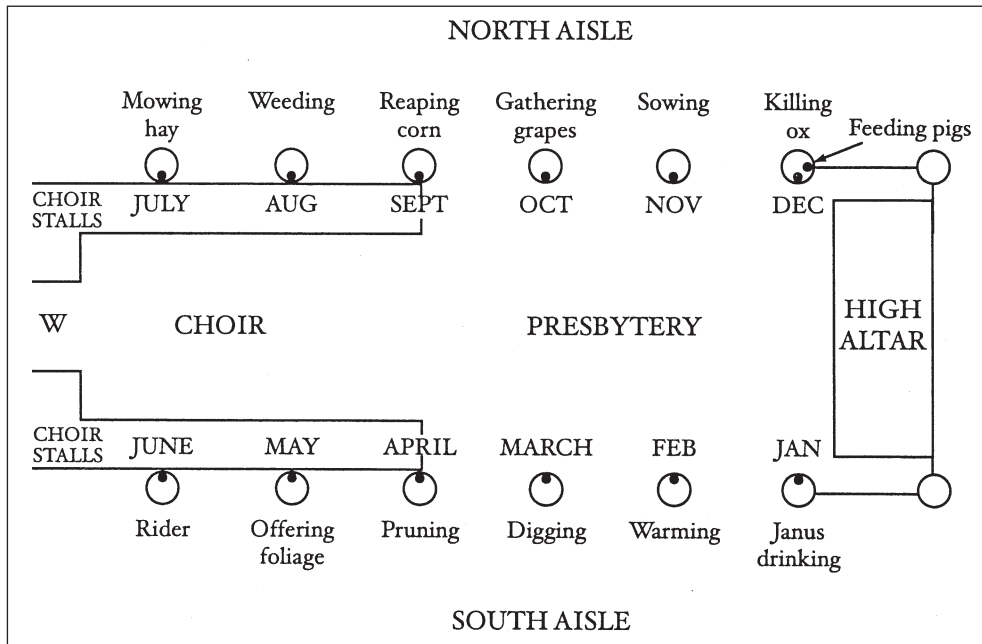


FIG. 1. Diagram of the choir and presbytery of Carlisle Cathedral showing the positions of the Labours on the Months carvings.

good examples, and also develop precise categories to classify the activities shown. The sets selected here are the ones which are most complete and remain generally in good enough condition to make it possible to determine exactly what activity is being shown for each month. The sets selected are also ones for which there is agreement over which month each activity was used to illustrate. They are sets which, in most cases, have been inspected and photographed in the course of research for this article, or of which good quality photographs are available. As far as the author can determine this list includes all, or certainly, almost all, the sets meeting these criteria remaining in Europe. In France, mainly in the north and central areas, eleven good examples have survived;⁸ in Italy, mainly in the north and in Sicily, there are twelve good sets;⁹ and in north and central Spain there are five good sets.¹⁰ Table 1, which shows the activities included in these sets, is the basis for the following discussion.

When looking at the Carlisle set alongside these European sets, an obvious theme for comparison concerns the extent to which the Carlisle cycle depicts the real agricultural activity of the surrounding locality, rather than simply following the traditions of the artistic genre. Exploring this theme requires firstly establishing which of the activities used at Carlisle were included or excluded elsewhere. Also, where particular images appear in both the Carlisle set and in other sets, it is important to know which month they are used for. If certain scenes were used at Carlisle to represent a month later than was generally the case further south in Europe, then this may perhaps be a reflection of the impact of climatic differences on the timing of agricultural practices.

TABLE 1.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
FRANCE												
<i>Amiens</i>	*Janus feast	warm	dig vines	man w hawk & flower	seated man w foliage	mow hay	reap corn	thresh	gather fruit	tread grapes	sow	kill pig
<i>Aulun</i>	feast	warm	prune	pasture sheep	knt w horse	gather fruit	sharpen scythe	thresh	pick & tread grapes	feed pigs	gather wood	kill pig
<i>Bourges</i>	feast	warm	prune	B of NG	?	sharpen scythe	reap	thresh	pick & pour grapes	pour wine to barrel	kill pig	feast
<i>Chartres (w)</i>	Janus feast	warm	prune vines	B of NG	man w hawk & horse	mow	reap	tie sheaves	*pour & tread grapes	feed pigs	kill pig	*feast
<i>Chartres (n)</i>	Janus feast	warm	prune vines	B of NG	man w hawk	sharpen scythe	carry sheaf	reap	tread grapes	sow	feed pigs	kill pig
<i>Paris ND</i>	*1 fig sit, 1 kneel	warm	prune vines	B of NG	man w hawk, flower	carry sheaf (not corn)	sharpen scythe	reap	tread grapes	sow	feed pigs	kill pig
<i>St Denis</i>	Janus, 2 doors	+*warm	*prune/dig vines	B of NG	knt w horse	mow	reap	thresh	*pour wine to barrel	feed pigs	gut pit	+* feast
<i>Semur-en-A</i>	feast	warm	prune vines	B of NG	rider	mow	reap	thresh	collect grapes	pour wine to barrel	kill pig	Janus doors
<i>Strasbourg</i>	Janus feast	warm	prune	B of NG	rider (w hawk?)	mow	reap	thresh	plough?	*pour & tread grapes	feed pigs ?	kill pig
<i>Tour-en-B</i>	drink	warm	cut wood	hawking	+*riders	mow	*reap	thresh	sow	*pour & tread grapes	feed pigs	*kill pig
<i>Vézelay</i>	feast	*warm	prune vines	goatherd	*warrior rests/BofNG?	mow	reap	*thresh/ grain to bin	pick grapes	kill pig	?	drink
ITALY												
<i>Arezzo</i>	Janus drink	cut wood	wind	B of NG	knt w horse	reap	thresh	cooper	pick grapes?	sow	pull turnips	gut pig
<i>Cremona</i>	warm & drink	dig	wind	B of NG	rider w sickle	reap	thresh	cooper	pick grapes	sow	gut pig	cut wood
<i>Lucca</i>	warm	fish	prune	B of NG	rider w flower	reap	thresh	pick fruit	tread grapes	pour wine to barrel	plough	gut pig
<i>Modena</i>	feast?	warm	prune	B of NG	man w horse	man w scythe	reap	thresh	tread grapes	pour wine to barrel	sow	cut wood
<i>Monreale</i>	warm	cut wood? (prune?)	wind	B of NG	man w horse	gather fruit	reap	cooper	tread grapes	sow	feed pig	gut pig
<i>Parma C</i>	Janus warming	fish?	Spinarius	B of NG	knt w horse	sharpen scythe	reap	cooper	pick grapes	taste wine?	gut pig	cut wood

TABLE 1. (*continued*)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<i>Parma B</i>	Janus warming	dig	wind	B of NG	rider w sickle	reap	thresh	cooper	pick grapes	sow	pull turnips	cut wood
<i>Penigia</i>	+*feast	*fish	*Spinarius/ prune	+*B of NG	+*riders w hawk, flower	*reap/?	*thresh/ windows	+*pick fruit	*carry & tread grapes	*cooper/ pour wine to barrel	*plough/sow	*gut pig
<i>Pisa B</i>	sacrificial fire	fish	Spinarius	B of NG	rider w frond	reap	thresh	pick fruit	tread grapes	pour wine to barrel	plough	gut pig
<i>Venice SM</i>	bring in logs	warm	wind	shepherd	B of NG	reap	mow	men resting	carry grapes	dig	catch birds	gut pig
<i>Venice DP</i>	warm	?	wind	?	B of NG?	man w fruit	reap	cooper	pick & tread grapes	thresh?	pull turnips?	gut pig
<i>Verona</i>	warm	prune	wind	B of NG	knt w horse	pick fruit	reap	cooper	tread grapes	feed pigs	gut pig	bring in logs
<i>SPAIN</i>												
<i>Ripoll</i>	cut wood?	warm	prune?	man w animal&grass	*pick fruit	reap	+*carry sheaf	*cooper	*pick grapes	feed pigs	*kill pig	feast & warm
<i>Belena del Sorbe</i>	gut pig	warm	prune	B of NG	rider w hawk weed	reap	reap	thresh	pick grapes	pour wine to barrel	sow	feast
<i>Pamplona</i>	Janus w keys	warm	prune	B of NG	rider w hawk & flower	X	reap	thresh	pour wine to barrel	*plough/sow kill pig	kill pig	*feast
<i>Tarragona</i>	*Janus feast	*warm	*prune/dig	*B of NG?	rider	*reap	*thresh	*men resting	*pick grapes	*pour wine to barrel	plough/sow	*kill pig
<i>S Maria la Real de N</i>	warm	?	prune	rider w flowers	rider w hawk & flower	mow	reap	thresh	plough	pour wine to barrel	kill pig	feast
<i>ENGLAND</i>												
<i>Burnham Deepdale</i>	drink	warm	dig	prune	B of NG?	weed	hoe?	reap	thresh	pour wine to barrel	kill pig	*feast
<i>Ripple</i>	*collect wood	*hedge & ditch	sow	*bird scarring	B of NG	rider w hawk *	*	+*reap or weed?	*sacks of corn	feed pigs	*dress pig	+* warm
<i>Carlisle</i>	Janus drink	warm	dig	prune	+*B of NG	rider w hawk & branch	mow	weed	reap	pick grapes	sow	*kill ox

Notes: Italicised placenames indicate sets inspected by the author; + = female figure shown; * = more than one figure shown; B of NG = Bearer of New Growth; X = missing; ? = activity unusual and unclear; 'kill pig' = axe used; 'gut pig' = knife used.

There has been little written about the Labours cycle in Carlisle Cathedral. It was not mentioned in Fowler's 1873 essay, but he published a paper in 1875 devoted to the Carlisle capitals.¹¹ Carlisle is included in le Senecal's lists,¹² but is of too late a date to be considered in Webster's book. A booklet by Penn and Mallett considering the stained glass and carved capitals of Carlisle Cathedral was published in 1996, but this does not attempt to compare the capitals in Carlisle with other sets in Europe.¹³

The carvings of Labours of the Months in Carlisle Cathedral are in a very unusual position being on the capitals in the chancel.¹⁴ Of all surviving sets of Labours, in good condition and damaged, only six other sets are on capitals of which four show all twelve months on one capital¹⁵ and two show four months on each of three capitals.¹⁶ No other set is on twelve capitals and no other set is on capitals inside the church.

Fig. 1 shows where the Carlisle carvings are placed. There are no Labours carved on the two most easterly capitals in the chancel, presumably because they were behind the altar.¹⁷ The sequence starts on the second pillar on the south side with January then follows westward, with the first three months clearly visible. The next month is unfortunately partially obscured, and the two following months completely obscured behind the choir stalls which are thought to have been installed around 1410 and possibly heightened some years later.¹⁸ On the north side, July and August are similarly obscured; September is partially so; and October, November and December are clearly visible. All these carvings are on the inner faces of the capitals, and there is also an extra scene included on the east side of the December capital.

The carving for January shows a three-faced, seated Janus with a face turned to the left and one to the right, both of which are drinking from dishes, and a third face looking forward. A jug can be seen on the ground beside the figure (Plate 1). A representation of Janus occurs in half the French sets where he is usually seen feasting, with both food and drink shown. Janus is included in Italian sets less often and is shown either warming himself beside a fire or drinking. There are two Spanish depictions of Janus: in Pamplona he has two keys, and in Tarragona he is feasting. These depictions of Janus show more than one face, and some carved sets show a bearded, old face believed to represent the old year, and a clean-shaven face representing the new year. What is unusual in Carlisle is the depiction of Janus with three faces, presumably with the forward face representing the present time, although here all three faces appear to be the same age. This depiction of three faces is unique in stone Labours sets. The inclusion of Janus is a continuation of older references to the seasons drawn from Roman mythology.

February in Carlisle is a warmly dressed man, with his hood up, warming himself. The fireplace is clearly shown with a pot on a chain (Plate 2). He has his left boot off and held upside down over the fire, whilst he holds up his bare foot to warm it. All existing French and Spanish sets also show this activity for this month; but in Italy only two sets show warming for February, the majority showing it for January. Other Italian sets show cutting wood, digging, fishing or pruning for February. As in Carlisle most sets show a man sitting sideways with the fire and fireplace clearly shown, whilst a few depict a figure facing straight out with the fire between his feet. This activity of warming cannot be called a "labour" but it is an appropriate occupation for this month when there is little work to be done on the land.

The March activity is digging (Plate 3). Again the man is warmly dressed with his

hood covering his hair. He seems to be digging around the base of a substantial tree, possibly a fruit tree rather than a vine, although there seems little difference between how it is carved and how the vine is shown in the next month's carving. There are only two examples of digging included in French sets, at St Denis and Amiens, and both of these are also for March. The St Denis carving also includes a man pruning, which is the more usual activity for this month in both France and Spain. Both of these seem to show vines being tended. Digging is also fairly unusual in Italy: there are two examples for February and one for October, but none for March. Most Italian sets show March as a personification of the wind rather than an activity; a figure blowing a horn, often with hair flying out from his head. This is one of the most marked examples of regionalism in Labours cycles with no sets outside Italy including this depiction. This is clearly neither a labour nor an occupation, but rather a personification of the typical weather of this month, and thus different from all the other subjects used.

In Carlisle, for April, a man pruning is shown, and it is a vine on which he is working: the sculptor has carried on the carving of vine leaves and bunches of grapes around the capital and these can be seen more clearly than the figure, which is partly hidden by the choir stalls (Plate 4). The worker is wearing a close-fitting cap and using a long curved knife. Pruning, as already mentioned, is common in French and Spanish sets, but always for March, and more unusual in Italian sets where it appears once in February and twice for March. As will be discussed further later, it is unlikely that the sculptor included the tending of vines so far north because he knew that they were part of the local agricultural cycle, but the fact that he included it for a later month than normal elsewhere suggests that he is not blindly copying another cycle. In France, Spain and Italy the most common depiction for April is the Bearer of New Growth, which is the subject used in Carlisle for May, although in a rather different form.

Carlisle's carving for May is out of sight behind the choir stalls and so it is necessary to rely on photographs of it (Plate 5). This carving is unusual in several ways. It shows a woman in a long gown offering foliage to a man. It has already been pointed out that pruning in Carlisle's set is used for one month later than is normal in France and Italy, and other examples of this delay will follow, so it is likely that this is a form of the Bearer of New Growth usually shown for April. This Bearer of New Growth is regarded as a celebration of Spring and the rebirth in the fields. As in classical depictions of the seasons the figure in medieval sets is usually static: a single figure facing outward and holding a flower or branch. The Carlisle carving is unusual in that it is active, and it is also unusual in including a woman in a set of Labours of the Months, although it is known from other sources that women were very active in agricultural work. Here they seem to be courting, and this is perhaps a development of the idea of "bearing of new growth" to encompass the idea of courting and marriage and bearing children. This carving also includes two figures: this only occurs in one set in Italy and is rare in France and Spain. The subject for French, Italian and Spanish sets for May is usually a rider.

In the Carlisle set, also hidden behind the choir stalls, there is a rider for the following month of June, holding a hawk in his right hand and a rose in his left (Plate 6). As with the vine motif in April, the sculptor has carved the rose motif beside the figure. Whilst a rider is a common depiction in the other sets, there is a

variety about what he is doing – he may be just with his horse; he may hold flowers; he may have a hawk; he may carry a sickle (for reasons unknown) or he may be dressed for war. The only two other depictions of a rider with both hawk and flowers are in Spain; one at Pamplona and the other, very similar to the Carlisle one, at Santa Maria la Real de Nieva. The inclusion of a rider with hawk, or flowers, or dressed for war has not been explained. Peasants, as depicted for most of the other months, may possibly have owned a horse but would not have owned a hawk. Hawking is not a seasonal pursuit although perhaps it was identified with early summer and the opportunities provided by the better weather, and presumably, for the same reason, this would be the time of year when men would leave for war. The figure here with hawk and flower may be an extension of the Bearer of New Growth idea – a further celebration of the new growth in the countryside. The inclusion of a person who is not a peasant may be a reference to the interrelated community of the countryside.

For July, behind the canopies of the choir stalls on the south side, a man swinging a scythe to his right is depicted (Plate 7). The grass he would be cutting for hay is not shown, as is often the case. Some aspect of mowing hay is very common in French sets; some showing a scythe being sharpened or a sheaf being carried, but most showing the swinging of the scythe as here, with most examples used for June and only a few for July (where the later activity of the reaping of corn is usually shown). Mowing hay, although less commonly included in Italian and Spanish sets is almost always used for June also.

In August, also hidden, a man weeds among the corn (Plate 8). He seems to be cutting thistles as there are thistles carved on either side of this scene. He is using two sticks, one ending in a hook to hold the weed steady, and one ending in a curved blade to cut it. Except for one rather unclear carving for June at Belena del Sorbe in Spain, where a man appears to be cutting a weed amongst the corn using a single long handled knife, weeding is an activity only included in English sets. Sets in France and Spain usually show threshing for August, following the reaping of the corn in July, or as early as June in two Spanish examples. In Italy most sets show a cooper for August, making the barrels in preparation for the grape harvest – the reaping of corn having been shown for June, with threshing in July.

It is only in September, visible around the ends of the choir stalls, that the corn is shown being reaped in Carlisle (Plate 9). As usual the man uses a sickle and as usual the corn is shown. This scene is included in almost every cycle in France, Italy and Spain, but always for an earlier month than in Carlisle.

The carving for October can be clearly seen (Plate 10). It shows a man cutting bunches of grapes with a knife, and again the sculptor has continued the vine motif on either side of this scene. In France, Italy and Spain every set includes some activity of the grape harvest although showing either treading grapes in the vat or pouring wine into a barrel is more common than showing picking. The grape harvest is usually used for September in Italy, and September or October in France and Spain.

In November in Carlisle a man with a woven basket on a strap over his shoulder has his right arm flung out with seeds about to be thrown from his hand (Plate 11). This activity is less commonly included in other sets than most of the others in Carlisle's cycle, though figures sowing in very similar poses (though more often from their bunched up skirts) are found in France, Italy and Spain (see Table 1). All these

examples depict autumn sowing, mainly in November or October with one example in September, showing seed being sown before the winter frosts. Such documentary evidence as there is suggests however that cereal growing in the Carlisle area was dominated by the cultivation of spring sown oats, as opposed to winter sown grains, thus indicating that the sculptor in Carlisle was not illustrating local custom.¹⁹

The activity for December is the killing of an animal: animals were killed and salted when fodder for them became scarce as the growing season ended (Plate 12). Almost all sets in France, Italy and Spain include this activity for December or November, and in France and Spain, as here, the animal is shown about to be struck on the head by the blunt side of an axe or a mallet. In Italy the instrument used is a knife and the pig is often shown strung up by its back legs. The Carlisle carving is the only one in a stone carved set of Labours to show an ox not a pig being killed. This carving in Carlisle is the second of the set which shows two figures: the second man, who is bearded, holds the ox steady by its horns.

Finally in Carlisle's set there is an extra activity. Centrally placed on the east face of the December capital there is a scene of similar size and style to the twelve Labours of the Months showing a man with his herd of pigs among oak trees (Plate 13). He carries a stick in his hand to knock down some acorns for them to feed on, to fatten them before the winter killing. In the cycle of activities this scene should appear before the December killing scene, whereas it is placed after it, and surprisingly pigs are shown being fattened when an ox is shown being killed. Feeding the pigs is a scene very commonly included in Labours sets in France for October or November although it only occurs twice in Italian sets and once in Spain. No other set of Labours of the Months has such a clearly related extra scene so close. The sculptor perhaps felt it was too good to omit.

Having looked at each of the Carlisle carvings it becomes clear that the cycle in Carlisle does follow the general tradition of Labours cycles throughout France, Italy and Spain. It includes all the activities most commonly included in sets in these countries; namely warming, pruning, the Bearer of New Growth, a rider, mowing, reaping, the grape harvest and killing an animal. Particularly, as in all other sets, activities to do with the production of bread and wine are included, possibly because of the great importance of these to the Christian Church. The inclusion of tending grapes in Carlisle, shown for April and October, and possibly also for March, does not seem to represent the situation in the local area. No evidence has been found to establish that vines were grown in Cumbria at this time.²⁰ This activity may be included solely for its biblical significance, or because the carvers were experienced in carving vines and enjoyed doing so. As is common in Europe, Carlisle's thirteen scenes encompass peasants' activities in the fields, whilst "warming" is an occupation rather than a labour, and both the Bearer of New Growth and Janus are continuations of a very long tradition. The Carlisle cycle also follows the tradition elsewhere by including the enigmatic rider.

Carlisle also has the less commonly included activities of Janus drinking, digging, weeding and sowing; and of knocking down acorns which, although it is common in France, is not so in Italy and Spain. It seems unlikely that the inclusion of these last four activities is significant in indicating local practice as these activities, though rarely represented amongst Labours elsewhere, and, in the case of weeding, almost exclusively seen in England, must actually have been widespread agricultural



PLATE 1. January: Janus drinking.



PLATE 2. February: Warming.



PLATE 3. March: Digging.



PLATE 4. April: Pruning.



PLATE 5. May: Offering foliage.



PLATE 6. June: Rider.



PLATE 7. July: Mowing hay.



PLATE 8. August: Weeding.



PLATE 9. September: Reaping corn.



PLATE 10. October: Gathering grapes.



PLATE 11. November: Sowing.



PLATE 12. December: Killing Ox.



PLATE 13. Extra activity: feeding pigs.

practice throughout Europe. Activities included commonly elsewhere and not included in the Carlisle set are threshing (common in Spain, France and Italy), feasting (France), ploughing (Spain), and cutting wood or carrying logs (Italy). Again, the exclusion of these activities from the Carlisle cycle does not seem indicative of local practice as each of these must have commonly occurred around Carlisle. These activities included in and excluded from the Carlisle set seem to be examples of the selection of activities by sculptor or patron typical of the genre. It is possibly more significant that the Carlisle cycle shows the killing of an ox rather than the usual pig, although this is unlikely to represent local practice as pigs would be more plentiful than oxen and would be culled each year, whilst oxen would be kept because they were used for haulage.²¹

Overall the activities included in Carlisle are closer to those in French sets than Italian or Spanish ones, and this can probably be explained by the proximity of these two countries.

Carlisle's set is unusual in Europe in that it includes the three-faced Janus; the offering rather than just the display of foliage in the Bearer of New Growth (and the inclusion of a woman in this scene); and the inclusion of an extra scene. These seem to be examples of the typical and attractive individuality of different sets.

The common agricultural activities of pruning, mowing hay, reaping corn and gathering grapes are all used for a later month in Carlisle than is common in France, Italy and Spain, possibly reflecting the climatic conditions. However, if the sculptor wished to reflect the local timing of agrarian tasks when making his carvings it seems surprising that sowing is not shown for a spring month.

III: Carlisle's Labours cycle compared to other English sets in all mediums

How does this set in Carlisle compare with the other sets in England? Do they show the same activities and are they shown for the same months, thus forming a distinct group differing from other European sets? Is there any evidence to suggest that the Carlisle set was copied from another English set? As few cycles have survived in England we can consider all mediums and not just stone carved ones.

Looking first at sets which pre-date Carlisle, one of the earliest English examples, probably from the 12th century, is the stone font of St Mary's Church in Burnham Deepdale, Norfolk, the only other stone carved set remaining in England. The carving here is very shallow, but the subjects can be discerned and include weeding, most unusual outside England. Unlike Carlisle however, here a pig is being killed not an ox. Of similar date is the main doorway of St Margaret's Church in York. The carvings of the Labours of the Months alternating with the signs of the zodiac on the outermost archivolt of the south doorway, which are now so eroded as to be completely lost, can be seen in early engravings, but even if the engraving is accurate this doorway had been moved in 1644 and was moved again in the late nineteenth century and so the order may not be the original.²² Dated about 1130 there is a lead font in the Church of St Augustine at Brookland in Kent which shows Labours and the signs of the zodiac, but this may have been made in France.²³

From about the mid-thirteenth century, amongst wall-paintings in St Agatha's Church in Easby, North Yorkshire, four months of a set of Labours remain; from 1296-9 amongst the carved oak roof bosses in the cloisters of Lincoln Cathedral depictions of September to December of a set remain; and created about the same time as the Carlisle set in the mid-fourteenth century there is another cycle amongst wall-paintings in Longthorpe Tower, near Peterborough, Northants of which five months remain, three of them damaged. None of these sets predating Carlisle's carvings was the model for that cycle.

There remain three sets of wooden misericords which were carved in the century after the Carlisle set. In Worcester Cathedral, amongst their forty-two misericords, there are nine fine Labours ones and in Great Malvern Abbey there are eight Labours ones amongst their set of twenty-two. These Labours misericords are almost certainly not in their original order, but both sets do include weeding and the killing of an ox. In St Mary's Church in the nearby little village of Ripple there is a complete set of twelve misericords which are possibly still in their original positions and are certainly in good condition. Also in wood from about the same period there is a set on the corbels supporting the upper storey of the inner courtyard of St Williams College York, although they are badly eroded and only nine are original.

Apart from a few fifteenth century sets in stained glass (in private homes and thus not easily available for study) these are all the sets that remain in England. The poor condition of the surviving sets and doubts about the preservation of the original ordering of the months means it is almost impossible to determine whether or not there was a distinctive English tradition in Labours of the Months cycles. The Carlisle set can only be compared with the Burnham Deepdale font, and with the Ripple misericords if it is presumed that they are in their original positions. Such a comparison reveals little, although the two stone sets do have the same activities for the first four, and possibly five months.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider all the surviving examples of Labours of the Months in manuscripts, but initial examination of the manuscripts illuminated in the British Isles in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries reveals that the activities used in the Carlisle set are very similar to those used in the manuscripts,²⁴ and that they occur in a similar order.²⁵ Further work may possibly reveal that there is an English tradition in manuscript depictions of Labours of the Months. Having established that the Carlisle set was not copied from any European stone set or other English set, was it perhaps copied from one particular manuscript? To establish this it would be necessary to examine not only manuscripts produced in England, but also those produced abroad which may have been brought to England or may have been seen by the Augustinian canons of Carlisle, or the sculptors they employed whilst they were travelling. Interestingly there is a twelfth century manuscript in the library of St John's College, Cambridge, which shows the same set of activities as in Carlisle, the only difference being its inclusion of carrying sticks and exclusion of Carlisle's rider.²⁶ The order of these activities is not identical, but is very similar. The provenance of this particular manuscript between its making and the time the Carlisle set was carved is not known, but some manuscripts showing Labours were made for Augustinian houses,²⁷ and these sculptors, or their patrons, may have seen such a manuscript.

IV: Significance and possible interpretations of Carlisle's Labours cycle

No documentary evidence remains of who ordered these carvings or who carved them, or the reasons for the choice of a Labours cycle. Being in the chancel, they would only have been visible to the clergy and not to the lay congregation. Although the lay congregation would have had access to the chancel aisles it is thought their view of the capitals would have been obscured from there by screens between the pillars, and even if there were no screens the carvings would be very difficult to make out from the aisles with the naked eye. This makes the Carlisle set different from all those sets on the outside of churches which would be seen by people who had just come from doing those very tasks which they saw represented. It is also clear that by the time the choir stalls were installed in the early fifteenth century, or perhaps not until they were heightened some years later, the set of Labours of the Months was not considered important enough to be kept visible.

These sculptures at Carlisle are given prominence in the chancel in that they occupy the centre, or slightly off centre of the inner faces of the capitals, but they are quite small and difficult to see in detail, although they would almost certainly have been painted and thus more obvious than they are now.²⁸ The rest of the capitals are decorated with a collection of foliage, grotesques and animals which do not seem to constitute an overall programme. Each of the capitals is in four parts and has joins which can be seen from the ground. These different parts were not, it seems, carved to appear seamless, as the four segments which make up each capital are slightly different from each other. On the quarter of the capital centring on the Labour there are only a few grotesques also included: it is as if the sculptor who did this quarter decided to carve only Labours and foliage. Of the other things sculpted perhaps only the Green Men have significance in relation to the Labours cycle as there does seem agreement that they were symbols of renewal and rebirth.²⁹

One theory put forward about the significance or meaning of the Labours of the Months cycles is that Adam was banished from heaven to till the earth and atone for his sins, and the Labours cycles are there to remind men of this duty.³⁰ However this theory is not strongly supported amongst historians as it does not explain why sets include activities like hawking, or depictions of Janus. It certainly does not seem an appropriate explanation when the Labours are in the chancel as here, only being seen by the clergy for whom it was inappropriate to be told to go till the soil.

James Fowler, in his 1875 article about Carlisle capitals, gives a complex mystical explanation of the various elements of the series. He suggests, for example, that "sowing is the sprinkling of the Word preached into the hearts of the faithful; the harvest is the end of the world [. . .]; the sickle is death; the reapers are the angels".³¹ This is not an approach which other historians have followed.

Another theory suggests that Labours of the Months, especially when shown with the zodiac, but also when shown alone, are more about Time than Labour.³² They remind man of his time on earth as different from God's eternal time. They remind him of the necessity of using his time as God has ordered. And they remind him of the reassurance that, as in earthly time the seasons turn and spring returns, so in God's time God has promised Man rebirth to eternal life at the Final Resurrection. The juxtaposition of these carvings at Carlisle with the Doom window of similar date,³³ also showing the Final Judgement, and the inclusion on the capitals of numerous Green Men, also, as has been said, symbols of rebirth, suggest this is the most appropriate explanation here.

It is, of course, possible, that the inclusion of this set on the capitals was just because it was decorative, especially because, unlike, for example, at Vézelay or at Chartres, the Labours are not part of a complex sculptural composition which clearly has an overall meaning.

The anonymous man who carved them may have been told to sculpt twelve, indeed fourteen, capitals ornamented as he wished, but it is more likely that for the capitals in the canons' choir he would have been told what he should carve. The canons, or the carver, may have seen one of the many stone carved sets which would have existed at that time, as the Carlisle set, executed in about 1350, was one of the last of a tradition then 200 years old. There were, perhaps, few carved sets to look at in England (although other stone sets almost certainly existed and have since been lost) but it is possible that canons or sculptors might have worked or been on pilgrimage abroad. The activities included in the Carlisle set are most similar to those shown in French sets, but the Carlisle set is not an exact copy of any other surviving stone carved set in England or abroad. This is to be expected as each surviving set differs from every other. There does however, seem to be a close link between the Carlisle set and at least one Labours manuscript. It is also possible that the sculptors in Carlisle were working from a pattern book which has not survived.

Conclusion

Carlisle Cathedral has a complete and well preserved, albeit small, high, and partially obscured set of stone carved Labours of the Months, carved as the tradition lost popularity elsewhere and possibly the last ecclesiastical stone set carved. It is the most northerly set in existence and is clearly in a tradition which had emerged 200

years before and was used in church decoration from Carlisle in the north, to Sicily in the south, and from central Spain in the west to Venice, and even Trogir and Jerusalem in the east. The sculptor knew the tradition well and used largely typical activities with the more unusual elements of the killing of an ox not a pig; the inclusion of weeding; the three-faced Janus; the use of two figures on the May and December capitals; the depiction of the offering, rather than just display of foliage; and the inclusion of an extra activity on the December capital. It is the only stone set on a building remaining in England and it is the only set which has survived anywhere on capitals inside the church.

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Notes and References

- ¹ Jennifer Alexander, “The Construction of the Gothic Choir of Carlisle Cathedral, and the evidence of the Masons’ Marks” in Mike McCarthy and David Weston (eds.), *Carlisle and Cumbria; Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art and Archaeology* British Archaeological Association Conference Series XXVII (Maney, Leeds, 2004), 118.
- ² The dating of the capital on the Doge’s Palace is discussed in U. Franzoi, *The Doge’s Palace in Venice* (Storti, Venice, 1979), 16-17. The set of roof corbels in the Grand Salle of the Hotel de Ville in Bruges, Belgium, dated about 1385-1402, are, I think, carved in wood.
- ³ Doro Levi, “The Allegories of the Months in Classical Art”, in *Art Bulletin* (June 1940), 176ff.
- ⁴ M. R. Salzmänn, *On Roman Time* (Univ. of California, 1990), Appendix II; James C. Webster, *The Labours of the Months in Antique and Medieval Art, to the end of the 12th Century* (Princeton, 1938; reprinted AMS Press, NY 1970), Chaps 1 and 2.
- ⁵ For British examples see J. J. G. Alexander (Gen. ed.), *A Survey of Manuscripts illuminated in the British Isles* – six volumes (H. Millar, London, 1975-1996).
- ⁶ James Fowler, “On Medieval Representations of the Months and Seasons”, *Archaeologia* Vol. XLIV (1873), 137-224; Julien le Senecal, *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie* Tome XXXV (1924); J. C. Webster, *The Labors of the Months*. See also Teresa Perez-Higuera, *Medieval Calendars* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1998), though this book includes no lists; and Bridget Ann Henisch, *The Medieval Calendar Year* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), which is mainly about manuscript calendars.
- ⁷ For sets in good condition in France, Italy and Spain see n.8-10; for sets in England see Section III; Croatia, Trogir Cathedral – on jambs of portal; Jerusalem, Ste Maria la Grande – on archivolt of W portal.
- ⁸ Amiens Cathedral (c.1230) on pedestals below pillars on N portal of W front; Autun Cathedral (c.1130-5) on archivolt of W portal; Bourges, St Ursin (c.1150-75) on lowest section of tympanum; Chartres Cathedral (c.1150) on archivolt of N door of W front; Chartres Cathedral (c.1210-30) on archivolt of W door of N front; Paris, Notre Dame Cathedral (c.1210) on jambs of N door of W front; St Denis Abbey (c.1137-40) on jambs of S door of W front; Semur-en-Auxois, Collegiate Church of

- Notre-Dame (c.1250) on archivolt of door on N front; Strasbourg Cathedral (c.1275) on panels below statues on S door of W front; Tour-en-Bessin, Normandy, Church of St Pierre (14thC?) above stalls in chancel; Vézelay, Burgundy, Church of Ste Madeleine (c.1125) on archivolt of central door of W portal.
- ⁹ Arezzo, Ste Maria in Gradi (c.1220) over central portal of W front (being restored 2003); Cremona Cathedral (c.1220-30) on frieze over W door; Lucca Cathedral (c.1230) on frieze in porch on W front; Modena Cathedral (c.1120) on jambs of Porta della Pescheria on N front; Monreale Cathedral, Sicily (c.1190) on a capital in cloister; Parma Cathedral (c.1106) on archivolt of W door; Parma Baptistery (c.1196) freestanding slabs in triforium inside; Perugia, Fontana Maggiore (c.1278) on panels around the sides; Pisa Baptistery (c.1153-1200) on left jamb of main door; Venice, St Mark's Cathedral (c.1240-1265) on underside of middle arch of central door of W front; Venice, Doge's Palace (c.1423-57?) on capital of column facing piazzetta; Verona, Church of St Zeno (early 12thC) on portico above W door. The fine free standing slabs in the Museo del Duomo at Ferrara (c.1240?) are excluded from this group because there is no agreement about their original order.
- ¹⁰ Spain: Ripoll Cathedral (c.1130) on jambs of W portal; Belena del Sorbe (date ?) on archivolt of W doorway; Pamplona Cathedral (c.1300-1350) on bosses in cloister; Tarragona Cathedral (about 1200) on a capital in cloister; Sta Maria la Real de Nieva (c.1300?) on three capitals in cloister.
- ¹¹ James Fowler, "On the Sculptured Capitals in the Choir of the Cathedral at Carlisle" in *CWI*, ii, 280-296.
- ¹² le Senecal, 204. Senecal states that the capitals are "très restaurés"! There are no other references to such restoration (although there are references to cleaning – see D. V. Weston, *Carlisle Cathedral History* (Bookcase, Carlisle, 2000), 22-24), and given the inaccessibility of four of the capitals and no difference in the quality of the carving of these and the capitals in full view, this reference is very suspect. Senecal also lists Carlisle's misericords as showing Labours, which they do not.
- ¹³ Arthur Penn and Edna Mallett, *Carlisle Cathedral. The Stained Glass and Carved Capitals* (Smith, Much Wenlock, 1996).
- ¹⁴ The term "chancel" is used here to include both choir and presbytery.
- ¹⁵ Doge's Palace, Venice; an incomplete and unusual capital in Chiesa Madre, Lentini, Sicily; Tarragona Cathedral, Spain; and Montreale Cathedral, Sicily.
- ¹⁶ A set of capitals in Museo Civico Eta Cristiana in Brescia, N Italy which have only eight months remaining; and the capitals in the cloister of Santa Maria la Real de Nieva, Spain.
- ¹⁷ Until 1764 the altar was one bay further west than it is now – see D. V. Weston, *Carlisle Cathedral History*, 12, 21, 50.
- ¹⁸ Weston, *Carlisle Cathedral History*, 17, 44.
- ¹⁹ The only surviving estate accounts before 1350 (1266-71) show that at Birkby (near Maryport) 8% of the land was winter-sown, and 92% spring-sown; at Cockermouth, in the Derwent valley, the proportions were 11% and 89%. H. E. Hallam (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. II, (Cambridge, 1988), 405-7; see also B. M. S. Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture 1250-1450* (Cambridge, 2000), 252-60. The Royal Pipe Roll for 1210-11 shows that in the demesne lands of the barony of Gilsland (North-east Cumbria) 29 skeps of winter-sown grains and 340 skeps of spring-sown were sold. John M. Todd (ed.), *The Lanercost Cartulary* (Surtees Society vol. CCIII, and CWAAS Record series vol. XI, 1997), 22.
- ²⁰ A similar problem of knowing whether artistic representations reflect local circumstances was discussed in respect of the drawings in the Lanercost Cartulary; see John M. Todd (ed.), *The Lanercost Cartulary*, 41-43; *idem*, *A Window onto Late Medieval Cumbria; the Drawings in the Lanercost Cartulary*, CWAAS Tract Series vol. XX (2000), 9-10. In the present case, it is extremely difficult to prove the negative proposition that there was no vine-growing in Cumbria in the fourteenth century. However, there is nothing in the Lanercost, Wetheral or St Bees cartularies to suggest vine-growing in this area. Neither Vol. II (H. E. Hallam ed., Cambridge, 1988) nor Vol. III (E. Miller ed., Cambridge, 1991) of the *Agrarian History of England and Wales* gives any evidence of vine growing in Northern England in the fourteenth century, whilst both volumes give evidence of vine growing in southern counties; see Vol. II, 380 and Vol. III, 261.
- ²¹ See references to pannage in the *The Lanercost Cartulary*, 19.
- ²² J. Carter, *Ancient Sculpture and Painting* (London, 1791), plate civ.
- ²³ Herbert L Smith, "Some Observations of the Leaden Font of Brookland Church, Romney Marsh", *Archaeologia Cantiana* Vol. IV (1861).

- ²⁴ Studying the thirteen complete sets of Labours in manuscripts illuminated in the British Isles 1066-1250 as listed in vols, II and III of J. J. G. Alexander, *A Survey of Manuscripts*, C. M. Kauffman, *Vol. 3: 1066-1190*, (1975), and N. Morgan, *Vol. 4: 1190-1250* (1982), and considering all thirteen activities shown at Carlisle, two manuscripts share six activities with Carlisle; two share seven; four share eight; four share nine and one shares ten activities.
- ²⁵ The Carlisle set is the same as the majority of British manuscripts for Jan-March. Carlisle is unusual in showing pruning for April rather than the Bearer of New Growth. Carlisle is then one month later than the majority of British sets, although the same activities are shown. Carlisle also puts weeding between mowing hay and reaping corn rather than before both as in the majority of British manuscripts.
- ²⁶ Cambridge St John's College MS B.20, f.2v.
- ²⁷ Examples are London British Library MS Lansdowne 431 and Cambridge Trinity College MS B 11.4.
- ²⁸ Weston, *Carlisle Cathedral History*, 67.
- ²⁹ William Anderson, *Green Man: the Archetype of our Oneness with Earth* (Compass, 1990), 14.
- ³⁰ M. J. H. Panadero, *The Labors of the Months and the Signs of the Zodiac in twelfth century French façades*. Unpublished D.Phil dissertation, Univ. of Michigan, 1984, 167-180.
- ³¹ James Fowler, "On the Sculptured Capitals", 294.
- ³² Panadero, "The Labors of the Months", 210-213.
- ³³ Weston, *Carlisle Cathedral History*, 36.