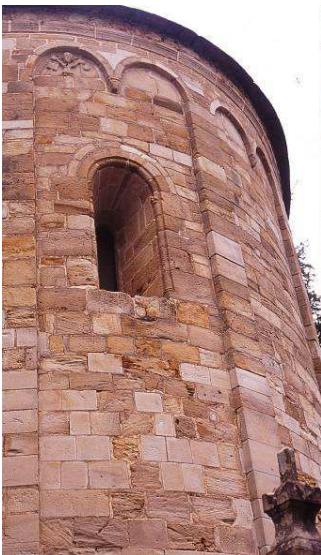


The Developments of Lombard Bands

The widely acclaimed series of books on Romanesque art and architecture that was published in French by Zodiaque under the heading 'La Nuit des Temps' comprises over a hundred volumes. Most examine the subjects on a regional basis, each region in isolation from its neighbours. Most deal with France and Northern Spain. But there are volumes on other countries from Ireland and England in the Northwest to Italy in the South. This structure was not new and it has been replicated in subsequent studies. It is a structure that has many practical advantages when examining such a big subject over such a large geographical area. The structure has tended to create the myth that there were a lot of separate regional schools that neatly fitted the political divisions that came into existence in subsequent centuries. This structure has been sustained by annual meetings and reports such as those of the 'Congrès Archéologique de France'. Barral I Altet has pointed out that this neat division leads to all sorts of anomalies (1).

From Italy to Spain through the coastal region of Southern France, from Switzerland and Austria north to the Rhine valley and across to Burgundy there are hundreds of churches that have a common form of decoration. This form is known as the 'Lombard Band'. The Lombard Band has been described as a decorative blind arcade, usually found on the exterior of buildings and used in the Romanesque and Gothic periods of architecture.



Lombard Bands, St Pierre de Rhodes, Languedoc. Fr

The skills of the architects, masons and other artisans from Lombardy had been noted and exploited by Charlemagne's court. It is reported that Charlemagne summoned artisans from Lombardy to go north to the Rhineland to work in his court workshops and on imperial buildings. In the IX century the Lombard builders were active in the

reinvigoration of architectural developments that were founded on designs from Roman antiquity (2). This new vitality was to make a significant contribution to the Romanesque revival.

The Lombard Band of Western Europe is thought to have originated in the early IX century in the region of lakes in Lombardy: the lakes Orta, Como and Maggiore. If it was there that they were first used, the form spread very rapidly: by the end of the XI century it was to be found on churches in Catalonia and Aragon in the South West of Europe and in Burgundy North of Lyon and in the Ardèche. The V century Galla Placida Mausoleum at Ravenna has been proposed as an earlier model for the form. Probably the earliest surviving example of Lombard Bands is to be seen at the basilica of San Vincenzo in Prato near Milan; this dates from AD 833.



Galla Placidia Mausoleum, Ravenna. It (left) San Vincenzo in Prato, nr Milan. It (right)

How and why did the decorative form spread so rapidly? Was it because of a huge migration of skilled workers moving out of Lombardy? If this was the reason for the spread, what was the catalyst for this irruption? The Catalan authority on Romanesque art in his homeland, Puig I Cadafalch, proposed that the form was representative of 'Early Southern Romanesque Art'. However, the Lombard Band is to be found in regions far from the Mediterranean. Further, across the range of regions where the Bands were used, it is frequently the only decorative characteristic that the churches have in common. Puig I Cadafalch noted that, during the X century, Mozarab designs in Spain were being rapidly replaced, almost detail for detail, by styles from the Italian lakes region. This observation has been questioned; it has been suggested that the observation arises from a desire to create a national Romanesque style for Catalonia (1). Nonetheless, a document from 1175 records that four 'Lombardes' and their 'colleganti' were working on the building of the cathedral of La Seu D'Urgell in the Catalan Pyrenees, South of Andorra. Furthermore, in the XIV century the Catalan term 'Lambert' designated architects and

builders (3). So the possibility that there was a significant movement from Lombardy cannot be excluded. It had been proposed that the terms ‘comacine’ and ‘comacini’, terms first recorded in AD 643 be associated with Lombard builders and that they might be the successors of guilds or fraternities from the Roman period. Their geographical centre originated in Lombardy, Como and Pavia. Their presence was to be indicated by Builders’ marks (or Tacherons) (see http://www.green-man-of-cercles.org/articles/builders_marks.pdf). However, today it is generally accepted that the terms simply mean ‘masons’. Churches in the area described provide evidence of the use of ‘Lombard Bands’; San Michele Maggiore in Pavia is evidence for this.



La Seu D'Urgell, Catalonia. – North door



Pavia – San Michele Maggiore

‘Invention de l’Architecture Romane’ (2) has a short section that provides a possible explanation for the dissemination of the Lombard Band to other regions. It speculates on the various trans-alpine routes that lead through to Switzerland and over the French Alps towards Grenoble and Lyon. Such routes were long established as economic and cultural links as well as routes for invaders. It is therefore very possible that these same routes were used by those who were to take the styles and forms of Lombard architecture and decoration to new areas. Certainly there are fine examples of the use of Lombard Bands to decorate the external stonework of churches in Switzerland along likely routes that lead towards Lyon. Romainmôtier and Amsoldingen provide X century examples.



Romainmôtier, Sw – Narthex from South



Amsoldingen Sw – Apse & North chapel

The Lombard Band was widely adopted in the Catalan region (including the French part, Roussillon). But it is relatively scarce in the Languedoc, with the notable exception of St Guilhem le Désert, and in Provence. The Zodiaque books suggest that this was because of the depredations of Arab raiders. However, the Spanish coast was not spared and the Arabs penetrated the South of France as far inland as the region around Grenoble; that would have effectively severed the links from Lombardy to the Rhone valley; yet there are churches with Lombard Bands down almost to the delta area. The church at Cruas, in the South of the Ardèche, is evidence that the link was not cut. We should, therefore look for other reasons for their absence.



Cruas, Ardèche. Fr - Tower from NW

The Lombard Band was widely used in Northern Spain, but especially in Catalonia and Aragon. Indeed, in Catalonia, where there are probably over 3,000 churches that are in whole or in part Romanesque, the greater part retain Lombard bands, mainly on apses and bell towers. Early examples are to be seen at Sta Cecilia de Montserrat (AD 957) and St Martin de Canigou (around AD 1000). In Burgundy, North of Lyon, they were an equally popular form for decorating the apse of churches both great and small. A Kingsley Porter was of the opinion that the motif's appearance in North-west Spain was a result of the

pilgrimage to Compostella, with pilgrim/masons taking the motif with them (4). However, one has to wonder why, in which case, it is not more evident in the West and South-West of France in areas through which three of the four main routes passed. There is a remarkable consistency of pattern across those parts of Europe where the bands are used, with almost no local styles developing.



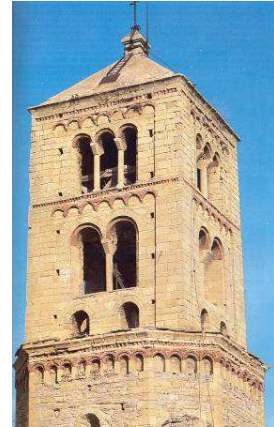
St Maurice des Champs, Burgundy, Fr – South wall (left) Santa Cruz de la Seros, Aragon. Sp (right)

At the start of this article the Lombard Band was described as a decorative feature. Most commentators put forward that view. However, C Edson Arni put forward the proposition that the bands were an architectural feature that provided increased stability to walls. (5). The walls were inherently unstable, being constructed using massive and heavy walls with only small openings for windows and doors. The construction of the ‘cul-de-four’ vaults over the East end of the choir added to the overall instability of the walls. Stability was enhanced with the blocks at the lower tip of each arch. These blocks were substantially longer than the usual stones and were set deep into the wall. In many instances the Lombard Bands were integrated into the buttresses. The small ruined church of St Hippolyte in Burgundy provides an example on the bell wall; on this a long block that, on the exterior of the wall protrudes as the point at the base of one of the arcs, extends across half of the width of the wall, supporting the more usual small stones above it. An additional line of blocks is set across the top of the arches; these also penetrate well into the wall to add further stability.



St Hippolyte, Burgundy, Fr – Bell wall from North-west

The Lombard Bands are found in several forms. The early ones comprised a tall blind arch that had two or three small lobes at the top. Occasionally a small window might be set within the bay. Such churches are to be seen in the Cerdagne region of the Pyrenees. More common is the shorter arcading that is frequently seen on the apse; less frequently it was used on the façade and more rarely still on the upper level of the nave walls. It was infrequent for them to be used on the interior; when they were it was usually in the choir as if to replicate the bands on the exterior of the apse. For most early examples the builders used small, roughly shaped stones that were set proud of the surface of the wall. Later the style was refined and the pattern was picked out using larger shaped stones that were fitted to give a smooth line of arcading. On a small number of churches the pattern was picked out using stones of a different colour. There are half-a-dozen examples in Languedoc including one at Pouzals-Minervois, where black basalt has been used; (it has been further ‘enhanced’ with black paint); at Santa Colomba de Queralt, in Catalonia, the bands on the bell tower are picked out in pink stone. The use of a reddish stone to this effect is not uncommon in Catalonia especially around the town of Vic.



Cameilles, Roussillon, Fr – Apse (left) Pouzols-Minervois, Languedoc. Fr – Apse (centre) Sta Coloma de Queralt, Catalonia (right)

Rather more churches throughout the area where Lombard Bands are found have a small motif or a head on the tip of the lobes. At Esplinelves, in Catalonia near Vic, this has been taken a step further by combining the use of heads on the lobes with the wider use of a red stone to pick out the detail of the Lombard bands.



Pieve di Secundo, Piedmont. It – South chapel (left) Mollo, Catalonia. – Bands above south door (right)



Espinelves, Catalonia – Detail of bell-tower

There are a few churches where the Lombard Bands have been employed on the interior; in almost all cases it is in the choir that they are to be found. Lyon cathedral is an example; there are several small, rural Burgundian churches that have them, including the ruined church of Le Pauley (71). Here too, it was the opinion of C Edson Arni that they were there not so much as a decorative feature as an architectural one to provide added stability to the supports for a dome or cupola especially at the point of the squinches. (5).



Le Pauley (71) - crossing

An architectural feature of the Lombard revival was the development of tall, usually slim, square bell towers or campaniles. The Lombard Band proved to be an attractive form of decoration for these towers, particularly for lightening and breaking up the upper surfaces of these towers. One of the earliest examples in Italy is to be found at San Satiro, Milan. The votive chapel next to the tower dates from AD 875; but the tower was built in 1043. By the XII century the tall decorated towers were widespread. Fine examples are to be seen at Chapaize, in Burgundy, and at Taull, in the Catalan Pyrenees South West of Andorra. The church of Sant Climent, Taull is one of two XI century churches in the village and is part of a small group in the same isolated valley that all display distinctive Lombard characteristics. These include the distinctive Lombard towers with their

decoration of bands and 'teeth', the rounded apses often with adjacent side chapels also with Lombard Bands. In the case of Sant Climent, the tops of the columns that divide the nave from the side aisles are decorated with a line of 'teeth'; this feature is almost unique.



San Satiro, Milan. It



Chapaize, Burgundy. Fr



Sant Climent, Taull, Catalonia



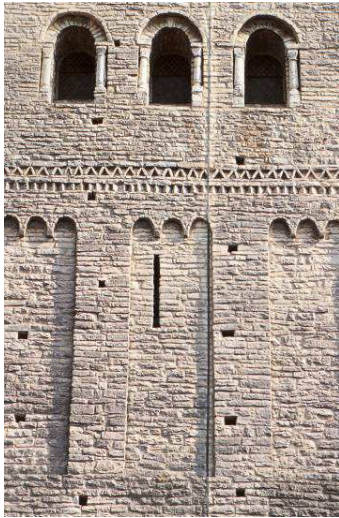
Sant Climent, Taull – Top of nave column

Around the South edge of Andorra and within Andorra itself is a small group of small, pre-Romanesque churches with circular bell towers. These have a rim of Lombard Bands, but lack the 'teeth' that are found on the more conventional square or rectangular Lombard style towers such as that on the Cathedral at La Seu D'Urgell, a short distance to the South of Andorra. The small church at Ars, in Catalonia, provides one example. A more elaborately decorated tower with two lines of Lombard Bands is at Santa Coloma, in Andorra.



Ars, Catalonia – Bell tower (left) and Sta Coloma, Andorra – Bell tower (right)

The façade of the abbey church at Tournus has two more decorative features that are associated with the use of Lombard Bands. The more common of these may be described as a line of teeth that is normally set at the top of the wall above the Lombard Bands; in the example at Tournus the line is part of the way up the wall. These teeth are quite frequently used around the top and sides of window arches. The pattern is created by using a line of horizontal blocks that are placed flat, side by side; the two outside corners of each block are removed to leave an exposed corner, the 'tooth'. The other pattern is a line of small chevrons; the chevron is made up using two thin flat stones set into the wall at right angles to the vertical wall and in such a way that they form a triangle within a small channel. This pattern is infrequently seen.

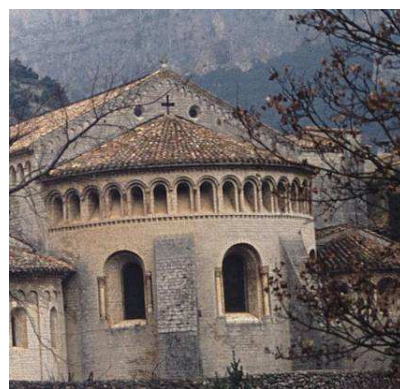


Tournus Abbey, Burgundy. Fr (left) Beget, Catalonia – top of apse (right)

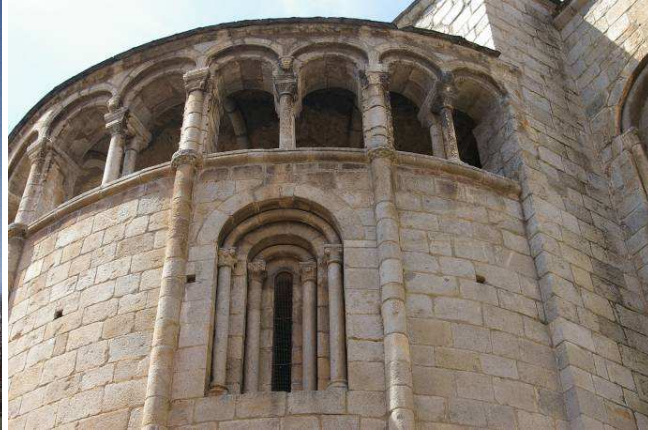
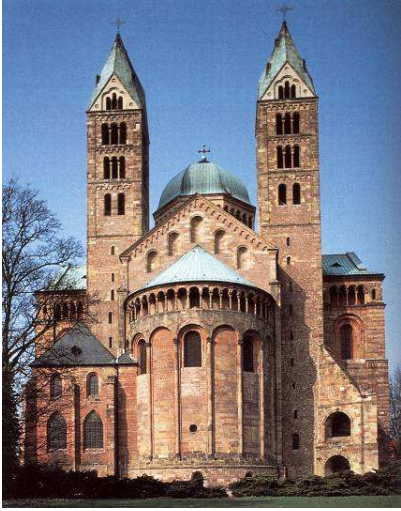
The last development from the Lombard Band is that of a line of small niches. These are also usually on the apse, though on the small church of Sant Marti Sescorts they are on the south wall of the nave. Fine examples of them are to be seen on the apse at St Guilhem le Désert, La Seu D’Urgell, (both with the tops of the arches picked out in basalt), Cardona in Catalonia and Speyer Cathedral in Germany. There is an unusual example in a small church of Santa Mariá de Vilarmilà, now isolated in vineyards outside the village of Llupia. Although these niches seem to have been used as a late development in most of Europe, they had already been employed in the X century in Switzerland at Amsoldingen, South of Berne. These, too, were built to provide increased stability to the walls at the point where they supported the roof vaults. (5).



Amsoldingen, Switzerland



St Guilhem le Désert, Languedoc. Fr



Speyer Cathedral, Germany (left) La Seu D'Urgell, Catalonia (right)



Sta Maria de Vilarmilà, Roussillon

The decorative features associated with the Lombard bands were transferred into other media. From Sant Climent de Taüll, in Catalonia, and now in the MNAC, Barcelona is a fine, well-preserved wooden priests' stall. Along the top and bottom are lines of Lombard bands. On the border of frescos from La Seu d'Urgell, in Catalonia, are zig-zag patterns that are surely meant to be Lombard 'teeth'.



MNAC, Barcelona – XIIc priests' stall from S Climent de Taüll (left) and detail of fresco from La Seu d'Urgell

The Lombard band was to remain a decorative feature for several more centuries, as exemplified by the Torre Guinigi, Lucca (with its remarkable 'roof garden'). The tower, which dates from the XV century, also has a line of decorative teeth about half way up.



Torre Guinigi, Lucca, It

The Lombard masons can surely never have imagined that so many memorials to their inspiration and skills would have survived a thousand years and be present across such a wide area of Western Europe. It is small wonder that the word 'Lombardus' should

become the word for a mason at a very early period. That so many have survived for us to admire is testament to their skill in perfecting the employment of key elements of the attractive form to give additional stability to the buildings.

Notes:

1. 'Contre l'art roman?' X. Barral I Altet. Fayard 2006
2. 'Invention de l'Art Roman' R. Oursal. Zodiaque 1996
3. 'Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture 800-1200' KJ Conant. Penguin 1959
4. 'Romanesque Sculpture of the Pilgrimage Roads' Vol 1. A Kingsley Porter. Boston 1923
5. 'The Corbel Table', C Edison Armi. Gesta Vol 39, No 2, 2000.

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