

Dormouse Dining
Carte de Jure:

[Google Translate](#)

Lookingglass Primer:
[Architectural Elements](#)
[Church Parts & Forms](#)
[CATHEDRAL](#)

Mont Saint Michel
[Website](#)
[World Site Guide](#)
[History of the Monument](#)

#1. The Archangel Michael finial
capping the crossing tower,
looking down on the Mont, 530
feet above the sea, by Emmanuel
Frémiet, 1896

Photo: traditioninaction.org

The Hatter's Magic Lantern:
[AirPano](#)
[Freeway vue par Drone](#)
[Construction](#)
[Ambiance](#)
[MStM Above the Clouds par Drone](#)

The Raven's Desk:
[Wikipedia](#)
[UNESCO WHS](#)
[Mapping Gothic](#)
[French Monuments](#)
[Structurae](#)

[MStM Floor Plan](#)

[MStM Timeline](#)

[Normans](#)

#2. Ariel view from the southeast
at high tide displaying the Village
and the fortified Abbey Church

Photo © OT du Mont Saint-Michel/
tourismebretagne.com

The Hare's March:
[An Island Again](#)
[BBC NEWS Europe](#)
[Smithsonian](#)
[Restoration of the Archangel](#)
[Official Restoration Website](#)

The uncle talks: --

CHAPTER I

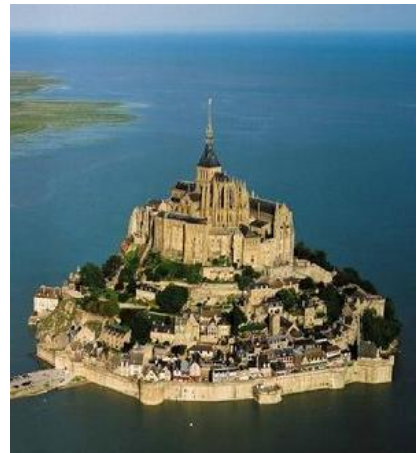
SAINT MICHIEL DE LA MER DEL PERIL



The Archangel loved heights. Standing on the summit of the tower that crowned his church, wings upspread, sword uplifted, the devil crawling beneath, and the cock, symbol of eternal vigilance, perched on his mailed foot, Saint Michael held a place of his own in heaven and on earth which seems, in the eleventh century, to leave hardly room for the Virgin of the Crypt at Chartres, still less for the Beau Christ of the thirteenth century at Amiens. The Archangel stands for Church and State, and both militant.

He is the conqueror of Satan, the mightiest of all created spirits, the nearest to God. His place was where the danger was greatest; therefore you find him here. For the same reason he was, while the pagan danger lasted, the patron saint of France. So the Normans, when they were converted to Christianity, put themselves under his powerful protection. So he stood for centuries on his Mount in Peril of the Sea, watching across the tremor of the immense ocean, *-immensi tremor oceani*, -as Louis XI, inspired for once to poetry, inscribed on the collar of the Order of Saint Michael which he created. So soldiers, nobles, and monarchs went on pilgrimage to his shrine; so the common people followed, and still follow, like ourselves.

The church stands high on the summit of this granite rock, and on its west front is the platform, to which the tourist ought first to climb. From the edge of this platform, the eye plunges down, two hundred and thirty-five feet, to the wide sands or the wider ocean, as the tides recede or advance, under an infinite sky, over a restless sea, which even we tourists can understand and feel without books or guides; but when we turn from the western view, and look at the church door, thirty or forty yards from the parapet where we stand, one needs to be eight centuries old to know what this mass of encrusted architecture meant to its builders, and even then one must still learn to feel it. The man who wanders into the twelfth century is lost, unless he can grow prematurely young.



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#3. Map of Mont-Saint-Michel, located on the borders of Normandy and Brittany Watercolor engraving by Nicolas de Fer, 1705. Department Archives of the Channel: *Thirteen stories of the Mont* (cl. A. Poirier, 1 Fi Mont-Saint-Michel 53)

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

One can do it, as one can play with children. Wordsworth, whose practical sense equalled his intuitive genius, carefully limited us to "a season of calm weather," which is certainly best; but granting a fair frame of mind, one can still "have sight of that immortal sea" which brought us hither from the twelfth century; one can even travel thither and see the children sporting on the shore. Our sense is partially atrophied from disuse, but it is still alive, at least in old people, who alone, as a class, have the time to be young.

One needs only to be old enough in order to be as young as one will. From the top of this Abbey Church one looks across the bay to Avranches, and towards Coutances and the Cotentin, -- the *Constantinus pagus*, -- whose shore,



facing us, recalls the coast of New England. The relation between the granite of one coast and that of the other may be fanciful, but the relation between the people who live on each is as hard and practical a fact as the granite itself. When one enters the church, one notes first the four great triumphal piers or columns, at the intersection of the nave and transepts, and on looking into *M. Corroyer's* architectural

Edouard Corroyer:
[Wikipedia](#)
[MStM Guidebook](#)



#4. The Abbey Church:
Romanesque Nave, and 15th
century Gothic Choir beyond

Photo by Author

study which is the chief source of all one's acquaintance with the Mount, one learns that these piers were constructed in 1058. Four out of five American tourists will instantly recall the only date of mediaeval history they ever knew, the date of the Norman Conquest. Eight years after these piers were built, in 1066, Duke William of Normandy raised an army of forty thousand men in these parts, and in northern France, whom he took to England,

where they mostly stayed. For a hundred and fifty years, until 1204, Normandy and England were united; the Norman peasant went freely to England with his lord, spiritual or temporal; the Norman woman, a very capable person, followed her husband or her parents; Normans held nearly all the English fiefs; filled the English Church; crowded the English Court; created the English law; and we know that French was still currently spoken in England as late as 1400, or thereabouts, "After the scold of *Stratford atte bowe*."

[Stratford atte bowe](#)

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#5. Mont-Saint-Michel aerial view from the east of the 15th c. Flamboyant Gothic Choir and flying buttresses above the Belle-Chaise, below center.

Photo: AFP PHOTO/KENZO TRIBOUILLARD

The aristocratic Norman names still survive in part, and if we look up their origin here we shall generally find them in villages so remote and insignificant that their place can hardly be found on any ordinary map; but the common people had no surnames, and cannot be traced, although for every noble whose name or blood survived in England or in Normandy, we must reckon hundreds of peasants. Since the generation which followed William to England in 1066, we can reckon twenty-eight or thirty from father to son, and, if you care to figure up the sum, you will find that you had about two hundred and fifty million arithmetical ancestors living in the middle of the eleventh century. The whole population of England and northern France may then have numbered five million, but if it were fifty it would not much affect the certainty that, if you have any English blood at all, you have also Norman. If we could go back and live again in all our two hundred and fifty million arithmetical ancestors of the eleventh century, we should find ourselves doing many surprising things, but



among the rest we should pretty certainly be ploughing most of the fields of the Cotentin and Calvados; going to mass in every parish church in Normandy; rendering military service to every lord, spiritual or temporal, in all this region; and helping to build the Abbey Church at Mont-Saint-Michel. From the roof of the Cathedral of Coutances over yonder, one may look away over the hills and woods, the farms and fields of Normandy, and so familiar, so homelike are they, one can almost take oath that in this, or the other, or in all, one knew life once and has never so fully known it since.

Never so fully known it since! For we of the eleventh century, hard-headed, close-fisted, grasping, shrewd, as we were, and as Normans are still said to be, stood more fully in the centre of the world's movement than our English descendants ever did. We were a part, and a great part, of the Church, of France, and of Europe. The Leos and Gregories of the tenth and eleventh centuries leaned on us in their great struggle for reform. Our Duke Richard-Sans-Peur, in 966, turned the old canons out of the Mount in order to bring here the highest influence of the time, the *Benedictine monks* of Monte Cassino. Richard II, grandfather of William the Conqueror, began this Abbey Church in 1020, and helped Abbot Hildebert to build it.

Benedictine Order:
[History](#)

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#6. 12th c. Bayeux Tapestry - Scene 36: William the Conqueror, holding the banner of papal sanction, receives word that King Harold's forces are on the march.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Tancred of Hauteville:

[Tancred](#)
[Robert](#)
[Roger](#)
[Prince of Galilee](#)

Cefalu Cathedral:

[Wikipedia](#)
[The Wonders of Sicily](#)
[Mosaics](#)
[Video](#)

Palermo Chapel Royal:

[Wikipedia](#)
[The Wonders of Sicily](#)
[Video](#)

Monreale Cathedral:

[Wikipedia](#)
[The Wonders of Sicily](#)
[Video](#)

#7. The Grand Degré: The internal open staircase rising from the fortress village to the Saut-Gautier terrace at the portal entry to the Abbey Church. The Infirmary is left.

Photo by Author

Roncesvalles:

[Battle of Roncevaux](#)



When William the Conqueror in 1066 set out to conquer England, Pope Alexander II stood behind him and blessed his banner. From that moment our Norman Dukes cast the Kings of France into the shade. Our activity was not limited to northern Europe, or even confined by Anjou and Gascony. When we stop at Coutances, we will drive out to Hauteville to see where *Tancred* came from, whose sons Robert and Roger

were conquering Naples and Sicily at the time when the Abbey Church was building on the Mount. Normans were everywhere in 1066, and everywhere in the lead of their age. We were a serious race. If you want other proof of it, besides our record in war and in politics, you have only to look at our art. Religious art is the measure of human depth and sincerity; any triviality, any weakness, cries aloud. If this church on the Mount is not proof enough of Norman character, we will stop at Coutances for a wider view. Then we will go to Caen and Bayeux. From there, it would almost be worth our while to leap at once to Palermo. It was in the year 1131 or thereabouts that Roger began the *Cathedral at Cefalu* and the *Chapel Royal at Palermo*; it was about the year 1174 that his grandson William began the *Cathedral of Monreale*. No art--either Greek or Byzantine, Italian or Arab--has ever created two religious types so beautiful, so serious, so impressive, and yet so different, as Mont-Saint-Michel watching over its northern ocean, and Monreale, looking down over its forests of orange and lemon, on Palermo and the Sicilian seas.

Down nearly to the end of the twelfth century the Norman was fairly master of the world in architecture as in arms, although the thirteenth century belonged to France, and we must look for its glories on the Seine and Marne and Loire; but for the present we



are in the eleventh century,--tenants of the Duke or of the Church or of small feudal lords who take their names from the neighbourhood,--Beaumont, Carteret, Gréville, Percy, Pierpont,--who, at the Duke's bidding, will each call out his tenants, perhaps ten men-at-arms with their attendants, to fight in Brittany, or in the Vexin toward Paris, or on the great campaign for the conquest of England which is to come within ten years,--the greatest military effort that has been made in western Europe since Charlemagne and Roland were defeated at *Roncesvalles* three hundred years ago. For the moment, we are helping to quarry granite for the Abbey Church, and to haul it to the Mount, or load it on our boat.

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Lookingglass Primer:
[Parvis](#)

#8. View from the parvis toward the northeast, the English Channel and England. To the right are the 13th c. tripartite arches of the Cloister, over the great window of the Salle des Chevaliers, with the promontory Chartier House.

Photo © Lolo French Antiques et More

Saint-Benoit-sur-Loire:
[Fleury Abbey Website](#)
[Wikipedia](#)
[Via Lucis](#)
[Video](#)

Abbaye Saint-Trinite:
[Abbaye-aux-Dames](#)
[Wikipedia](#)
[Mapping Gothic](#)
[Via Lucis](#)
[Video](#)

Saint Sernin at Toulouse:
[Wikipedia](#)
[Mapping Gothic](#)
[Via Lucis](#)
[Saint Sernin vue par Drone](#)

Notre-Dame-du-Port at Clermont:
[Wikipedia](#)
[Mapping Gothic](#)
[Via Lucis](#)
[Video](#)

Vezelay Abbey:
[Wikipedia](#)
[Mapping Gothic](#)
[UNESCO WHS](#)
[Via Lucis](#)
4/19/15
3/2/13
11/15/11
9/12/11
[Video](#)

San Marco Basilica:
[Website](#)
[UNESCO WHS](#)
[Video](#)

We never fail to make our annual pilgrimage to the Mount on the Archangel's Day, October 16. We expect to be called out for a new campaign which Duke William threatens against Brittany, and we hear stories that Harold the Saxon, the powerful Earl of Wessex in England, is a guest, or, as some say, a prisoner or a hostage, at the Duke's Court, and will go with us on the campaign. The year is 1058.

All this time we have been standing on the parvis, looking out over the sea and sands which are as good eleventh-century landscape as they ever were; or turning at times towards the church door which is the *pons seclorum*, the bridge of ages, between us and our ancestors. Now



that we have made an attempt, such as it is, to get our minds into a condition to cross the bridge without breaking down in the effort, we enter the church and stand face to face with eleventh-century architecture; a ground-plan which dates from 1020; a central tower, or its piers, dating from 1058; and a church completed in 1135. France can offer few buildings of this importance equally old, with dates so exact. Perhaps the closest parallel to Mont-Saint-Michel is *Saint-Benoit-sur-Loire*, above Orleans, which seems to have been a shrine almost



#9. Mont-Saint-Michel



#10. Fleury Abbey

as popular as the Mount, at the same time. Chartres was also a famous shrine, but of the Virgin, and the west porch of Chartres, which is to be our peculiar pilgrimage, was a hundred years later than the ground-plan of Mont-Saint-Michel, although Chartres porch is the usual starting-point of northern French art. Queen Matilda's *Abbaye-aux-Dames*, now the Church of the Trinity, at Caen, dates from 1066. *Saint Sernin at Toulouse*, the porch of the Abbey Church at Moissac, *Notre-Dame-du-Port at Clermont*, the *Abbey Church at Vezelay*, are all said to be twelfth-century. Even *San Marco at Venice* was new in 1020.

Yet in 1020 Norman art was already too ambitious. Certainly nine hundred years leave their traces on granite as well as on other material, but the granite of Abbot Hildebert would have stood securely enough, if the Abbot had not asked too much from it.