

2016

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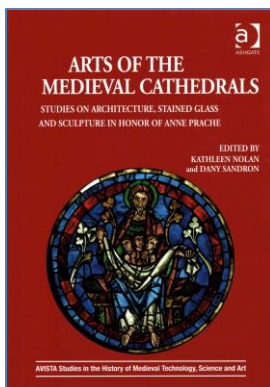


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Recommended Citation

Boivin, Katherine M.. "Book Review: Arts of the Medieval Cathedrals: Studies on Architecture, Stained Glass and Sculpture in Honor of Anne Prache, eds Kathleen Nolan and Dany Sandron (Ashgate, 2015)." *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 5, 4 (2016): 160-169. <https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol5/iss4/8>

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Book Review: *Arts of the Medieval Cathedrals: Studies on Architecture, Stained Glass and Sculpture in Honor of Anne Prache*, eds Kathleen Nolan and Dany Sandron (Ashgate, 2015)

By Katherine M. Boivin, Bard College

Arts of the Medieval Cathedrals: Studies on Architecture, Stained Glass and Sculpture in Honor of Anne Prache is a fitting tribute to Anne Paillard Prache (1931-2009), one of the seminal scholars of early Gothic art and architecture. From 1958 to 2008, Prache worked on subjects as varied as the “project management” of building campaigns, flying buttresses, stained glass programs, and tomb sculpture, focusing particularly on the Champagne region of France.

The thirteen chapters of *Arts of the Medieval Cathedrals* — contributed by eminent French and American scholars from both museums and academic institutions — showcase a range of technical and interpretive approaches to the study of French Gothic monuments inspired by Prache and demonstrate her tremendous impact as both a scholar and a teacher.



Prache's long and productive career began with a thesis defended in 1963 on Notre-Dame-en-Vaux in Châlons-en-Champagne. She wrote her dissertation on Saint-Remi of Reims under the guidance of Louis Grodecki, whom she succeeded at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1977. From 1980 to 1999, Prache served as director of the French contingent of the *Corpus Vitrearum*. In 1987 the first volume of the Picard series, *Les Monuments de la France Gothique*, appeared under her direction. Throughout her scholarship, she adeptly navigated historical documents, archeological evidence, and scientific data to contribute rigorous studies to on-going debates. On several occasions, her arguments, backed by dendrochronological testing and close archaeological investigation, provided the definitive dating for medieval building campaigns. At the same time, Prache also possessed an engaging ability to write for a broad audience and to situate monuments within their liturgical, symbolic, and historical contexts. As Kathleen Nolan observes in her lucid introduction to the volume, Prache was "always a meticulous observer of the nuts and bolts of construction history" but she "embraced as well broad questions of meaning and message."

Prache is most famous for her work on Saint-Remi in Reims and on the Cathedrals of Chartres and Reims, so it is fitting that these monuments make key appearances in the volume in her honor. The Cathedral of Bourges, too, features in two chapters, reminding of Prache's 1962 translation into French of Branner's influential study of the building. The titular reference of *Arts of the Medieval Cathedrals* thus points to the strong focus on the cathedral trio Reims, Chartres, and Bourges, but true to Prache's own oeuvre, the volume also reaches beyond cathedrals to include monuments such as Saint-Remi in Reims, Saint-Denis in Paris, Notre-Dame-en-Vaux in Châlons-en-

Champagne, and Saint-Quentin in Aisne, Picardy. While the scope of the project thus exceeds the technical denotation “cathedrals,” it evokes the conceptual idea “Cathedral” that has so long — since the days of Sedlmayr and von Simson — remained synonymous with the multi-media Gothic church.

Here again, the volume, edited by Kathleen Nolan and Dany Sandron as part of *AVISTA Studies in the History of Medieval Technology, Science and Art*, models well Prache’s contributions to the field. Anne Prache moved with ease from studies of architecture to stained glass to sculpture, and it is this trio of monumental arts that divides the chapters into three balanced parts. This conservative division by medium, however, is productively confounded at various points throughout the volume by essays that incorporate multiple media. For instance, Sylvie Balcon-Berry uses stained glass to contribute to the architectural chronology of Reims Cathedral. Her contribution is particularly exciting since it relies on Autochromes and recently digitalized watercolors made by the Simon-Marq workshop in Reims, (**Fig. 1**) which was responsible for the restoration of glass in the cathedral since the eighteenth century. The broader implications of her argument are significant since they demonstrate that stained glass production was underway at the time of the cathedral’s construction, rather than commencing once the architecture was in place. This is a conclusion also shared by Claudine Lautier’s close analysis of the west rose window of Chartres Cathedral. She argues that by the 1210 revolt, the nave of the cathedral was complete and included its complement of stained glass windows.

Similarly-compelling because of its presentation of new evidence, is the chapter by Nicolas Reveyron that ends out the volume. In it, Reveyron offers initial conclusions



Figure 1 Assemblage of drawings KAROLVS Window 128, Reims, Cathedral of Notre-Dame, Simon-Marq workshop, Reims. Photo: after *Arts of the Medieval Cathedrals: Studies on Architecture, Stained Glass and Sculpture in Honor of Anne Prache*, eds Kathleen Nolan and Dany Sandron (Ashgate, 2015), colorplate 12.

from his study of the recent restoration of the façade of the Cathedral of Lyons. (**Fig. 2**)

He confirms Bégule's earlier work on the portal chronology and offer a contextual

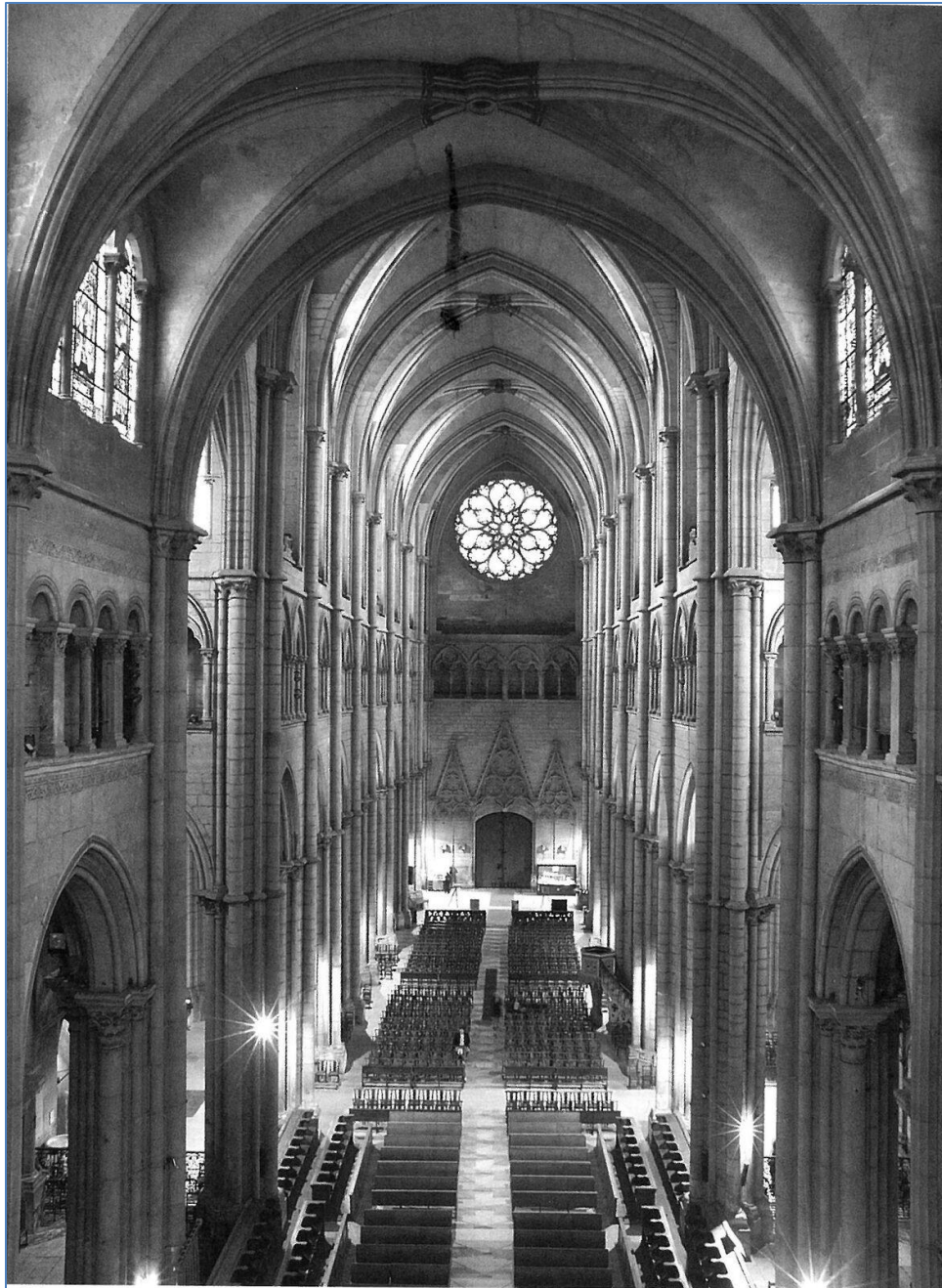


Figure 2
Lyons,
Cathedral of
Sainte-Jean-
Baptiste, view
of the nave
from the east.
Photo: after
*Arts of the
Medieval
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Nolan and
Dany Sandron
(Ashgate,
2015), figure
13.2.

reading of the sculptural program that takes into account theological and political messages. In connecting part of the program to the tenure of Pierre de Savoie, his approach reminds of Prache's work on the Abbot Peter of Celle at Saint-Remi in Reims.

The core of the volume is formed by the many technical studies that present new arguments for the dating of building campaigns and the programing of stained glass and sculpture, work befitting both Prache's scholarship and AVISTA's mission. To begin *Part I: Architecture*, Walter Berry presents new evidence for the construction history of Reims Cathedral, establishing a sequence of building campaigns based on a close examination of the foundations. **(Fig. 3)** Ellen Shortell makes the architectural space of Saint-Quentin's ambulatory and radiating chapels easily legible on the page. She argues that the builders worked with the design problems posed in the building of Saint-Remi in Reims, and that they were aware of the contemporary work on the chevet of Soissons Cathedral.

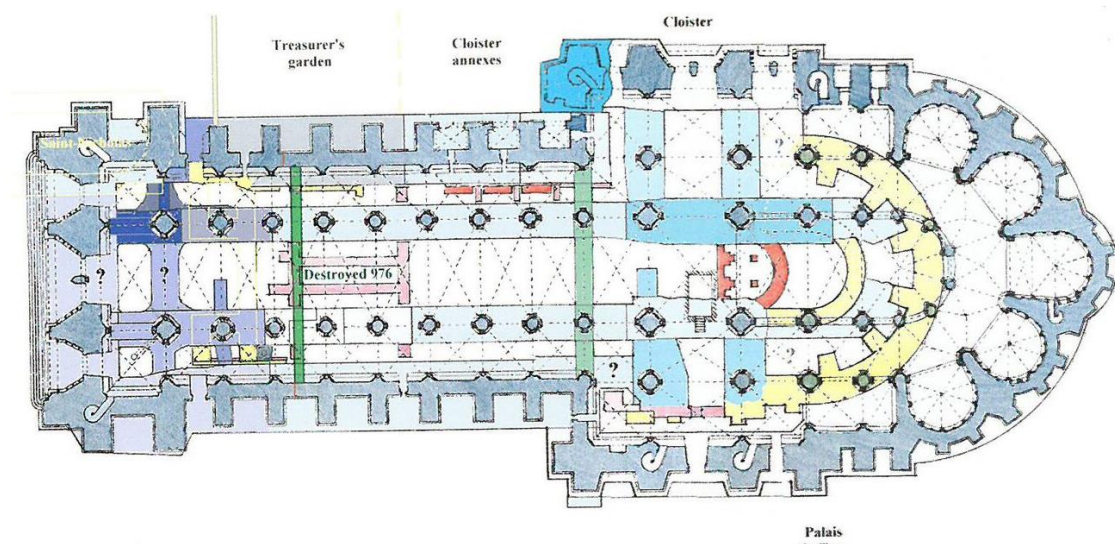


Figure 3 Reims, Cathedral of Notre Dame, drawing by Walter Berry of 1944 Deneux Plan corrected and modified to illustrate features described in the text. Photo: after *Arts of the Medieval Cathedrals: Studies on Architecture, Stained Glass and Sculpture in Honor of Anne Prache*, eds Kathleen Nolan and Dany Sandron (Ashgate, 2015), colorplate 2.

Nancy Wu pays homage to Prache not through the dating of monuments, but through an examination of the use of basic geometric modules and their manipulation in late-Gothic design. Her close analysis of the geometry of two late-gothic doors, now

housed in The Cloisters Museum in New York, alongside two booklets on the design of pinnacles and gablets connects the particulars of individual designs to a broader architectural theory. This process has been demonstrated in large-scale architectural planning, but Wu applies it to the “comparatively minor designs” of doorways and so shows its pervasiveness in design practices of the time.

In *Part II: Stained Glass*, Michael Cothren tackles the interesting enigma of the existence of two panels of glass depicting Joseph’s Dream from the Infancy of Christ window of Saint-Denis in Paris. Revising, yet also confirming, the basic reconstruction proposed in his 1986 article, Cothren argues that the panel in the Thomson Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario is most like a nineteenth-century copy of the original twelfth-century panel from Saint-Denis. He convincingly argues that the Thomson panel is no forgery but rather “a precious and faithful copy of a dismantled original.”

Philippe Lorentz narrates the history of a unique window commissioned by Jacques Coeur for his funerary chapel on the north side of Bourges Cathedral. Unlike earlier and later glazing projects in the building, in which figures were relegated to individually framed lancets, the Coeur window depicts the Annunciation scene and complement of saints within a unified architectural space spanning its four lancets. Lorentz argues that the inspiration for this innovative composition came from the artist’s direct connection to the painting workshop of Jan van Eyck. **(Fig. 4)**

Both Fabienne Joubert and Charles Little’s contributions to *Part III: Sculpture* present close analytical studies of important sculptural programs. Joubert uses evidence from the archivolt of the central portal of Bourges Cathedral to demonstrate that

Figure 4 Bourges, Saint Étienne Cathedral, Saint Ursin Chapel, Jacques Couer, Annunciation Window, 1451. Photo: after *Arts of the Medieval Cathedrals: Studies on Architecture, Stained Glass and Sculpture in Honor of Anne Prache*, eds Kathleen Nolan and Dany Sandron (Ashgate, 2015), colorplate 23.





Figure 5 Bourges, Saint Étienne Cathedral, central portal, inner-right archivolt, fifth seraph from the archivolt base. Photo: after *Arts of the Medieval Cathedrals: Studies on Architecture, Stained Glass and Sculpture in Honor of Anne Prache*, eds Kathleen Nolan and Dany Sandron (Ashgate, 2015), colorplate 27.

sculptors likely worked from general, rather than specific, drawings of the sculptural program, leaving a “large margin of discretion in their interpretation.” (**Fig. 5**) Little, by contrast, works from fragments now in museum collections to tell an engaging story of how “orphaned sculpture” can be reconnected to its original program and contextual significance.

Interspersed among the many rigorous technical studies of the volume are refreshing interpretive essays that pay tribute to Prache’s symbolic reading of monuments. Michael Davis’s elegant study, for instance, proposes that the three buildings on which Guillebert de Mets’ dwells in his “Description of the City of Paris...” function as “urban icons” representing Paris “as the locus of a society of faith, justice and prosperity.” William Clark’s sophisticated expansion on an

earlier essay draws on liturgical sources, historical events, and the built fabric of the church to argue that the sculptures of Christ and eleven angels on the exterior of the chevet's radiating chapels form a heavenly procession. One level of this procession's multivalent message is its reference to the archbishop and eleven suffragan bishops who claimed seats within its space. In still another essay, Kathleen Nolan and Susan Leibacher Ward recontextualize sculptural fragments from Notre-Dame-en-Vaux in Châlons-en-Champagne by musing on the roles of female column figures in the different architectural settings of public portal and canon's cloister.

Ultimately, the volume edited by Nolan and Sandron provides an excellent sense of Anne Prache's lasting contribution to the field, which extends beyond the work she left in print to her advocacy for technological tools like dendrochronology, her welcoming of international scholars, and her mentorship of budding art historians. At times the essays in *Arts of the Medieval Cathedrals* present exciting new research gathered from on-going restoration or digitalization projects; at others, they offer persuasive interpretive proposals, revisionist readings, or thought-provoking musings on important Gothic monuments. Together, they form a rigorous corpus of work that succeeds in making fresh contributions to well-trodden territory. 🐼