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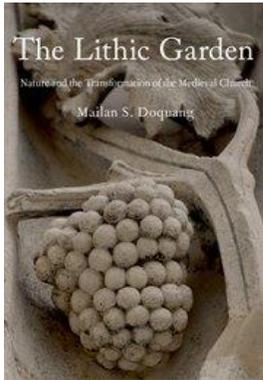
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Book Review: Mailan S. Doquang. *The Lithic Garden. Nature and the Transformation of the Medieval Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

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Mailan S. Doquang's *The Lithic Garden. Nature and the Transformation of the Medieval Church* is an important book that focuses on foliate friezes and their various functions in French church design from the early twelfth to the fifteenth century. This unique study seeks to understand these functions through the system of values and practices of the Middle Ages, rather than through those of the nineteenth and early-twentieth-century, as has been the common approach.

Following the Introduction, the book is divided into four interrelated chapters. In Chapter 1, *The Foliate Frieze as Architectonic Framing Device*, Doquang discusses the dual role of the foliate frieze as a delineator and indicator of the sacred space, using the foliate frieze in Amiens Cathedral as an exemplar.

Accordingly, the grapevines outside Amiens had a double function: it primed

visitors for the frieze inside the building and at the same time to the liturgical actions staged in the choir thus, functioning as a signpost. The author then presents a large corpus of friezes in France (both exterior and interior), which emphasizes their versatile character. This section reveals Doquang's proficiency and deep acquaintance with the material. The chapter ends with the suggestion that the abbey church of Cluny III played a central role in the inception and spread of the foliate frieze phenomenon.

Grapevine Lintel Frieze, central portal, west façade, Amiens Cathedral. Photo: After Mailan S. Doquang, *The Lithic Garden* fig. 3.11.



Chapter 2, *Paradise Found*, reconsiders the connection between architectural flora and paradise. Based on textual and visual evidence, Doquang addresses the allegorical and formal connections between the Church and both the earthly and celestial paradise that were understood in the Middle Ages as the *loci* of the Divine. This reading of the Church in paradisiacal terms, reconsiders the religious significances of the *Astwerk*, which according to the author: “while it

was a phenomenon that manifested itself across a broad spectrum of building types (...), its use in secular architecture in no way negates its possible religious significance in a sacred setting.” Doquang thus contends that foliate bands could evoke the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, and the *Hortus Conclusus*, as well as the Garden of Joseph of Arimathea. Nevertheless, as she also shows, there were negative connotations too of the organic motifs in a church setting – especially that related to the Fall of humanity and Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

**Detail of trumeau, central portal, west façade, Amiens Cathedral.
Photo: After Mailan S. Doquang, *The Lithic Garden* fig. 14.1**



In Chapter 3, *The True Vine*, Doquang investigates the Messianic and Eucharistic aspects of the foliate friezes, as expressed in the form of grapevines or plants with reference to Christ’s discourse on the true vine (John 15:1). Next, the author returns to several Gothic cathedrals (Chartres, Amiens, and Rouen), in order to demonstrate how the organic and the figural were calibrated to stress

Christocentric and Eucharistic themes. This is among the most valuable arguments in the book, I would argue, as it stresses not only the connections between the vegetal and the figural, but also, and no less importantly, between the exterior and interior design. She presents the illuminating case studies of the St. Firmin portal (north portal of the west façade) and St. Honoré portal (south transept) at Amiens Cathedral, which manifest the dynamic interaction that takes place between sculpture, architecture, and the viewer. While the author demonstrates an awareness of the connection between the sculpture and the liturgy, one can only regret that this connection for each specific monument is not further elaborated.

Lintel, North portal (St. Firmin Portal), West façade, Amiens Cathedral. Photo: After Mailan S. Doquang, *The Lithic Garden* fig. 3.15.



The last chapter, *The Golden Vine*, suggests a relationship between foliate friezes and the golden vine of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. After presenting the widespread Roman-Jewish textual sources that described the Temple Vine – Flavius Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* and *Jewish War*, Doquang argues that the French builders drew on these textual descriptions as well on the images of the golden vines inside the Umayyad Dome of the Rock, when they came to design their edifices in the French kingdom. Further connections between East and West are suggested not only in the written records but, as the author shows, by comparing the vines inside Hagia Sophia with the Temple of Solomon and studying of its proportions. The author contends that the proliferation of foliate friezes in France is to be understood in the specific context of the Crusades.



**Amiens Cathedral,
South Transept Portal,
dado. After Mailan S.
Doquang, *The Lithic
Garden* fig. 3.22**



The Green Man, Upper Register of the North Portal (St. Firmin Portal), West façade, Amiens Cathedral. Photo: Gili Shalom.

Following these chapters comes the Afterword, *The Garden*, which sheds additional light on the essential power of nature in medieval life, which was also transferred through the incorporation of real plants in the church that “not only heightened the presence of the organic in a sacred architectural context, but also engaged different sensory modalities.”

The illustrations that accompany the text comprise of architectural plans, illuminations and high quality black-and-white and color photographs. As the author consistently reminds the readers, the foliate friezes were once colored and gilded – an important factor in the sensorial experience of the beholders. This is a useful book for both students and scholars, as it demonstrates not only how an in-depth study of one component can lead to important discoveries in other aspects, but also that the medieval work of art had mutable meanings. 🐉