

GOTHIC ART

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Why is “Gothic art” called Gothic art?

1. Giorgio Vasari – “The father of art history”

- Renaissance artist and art historian
- Used the term “Gothic” to ridicule late medieval art and architecture
- For him, “Gothic art and architecture were “monstrous and barbarous” because they were invented by the Goths.
- Vasari and other Renaissance artists and critics admired Greco-Roman styles

2. What did the builders of “Gothic” cathedrals call their style?

- Opus Modernum – Modern work
- Opus Francigenum – French work

B. Abbot Suger (1081 – 1151) and the Gothic Style

1. Abbot Suger of St. Denis

- St. Denis had the relics of St. Denis the Apostle of Gaul
- St. Denis was also the burial place of the French kings

2. Friend and advisor to Louis VI (1108 – 1137) and Louis VII (1137 – 1180)

3. A new vision

- Great height – reaching up toward heaven (soaring verticality)
- Suffused with light – “the light Divine”
- A visible manifestation of God’s presence – you can see it and feel it, but you can’t touch it.
- Metaphor for Jesus as the light of the world
- Brilliant colors with stain glass windows – to prefigure (symbolically foreshadow) the Heavenly Jerusalem
- Abbot Suger wrote treatises about how he thought new architecture should look

- **Wanted architecture that would lift people's mind and spirit above the muck of this world**

C. Rebuilding of St. Denis

1. **He presided over the rebuilding of St. Denis' ambulatory and incorporated his new ideas.**

D. The Gothic Period

1. **From 1150 – 1400**
2. **80 cathedrals built in France from 1150 – 1250**
3. **Spread throughout Europe**

II. Chartres – Queen of Cathedrals

A. Introduction – On the road to Chartres

1. **Waiting in line with the pilgrims**
2. **Story of Chartres and the Virgin's Veil**
 - **The Virgin's Veil was worn by the Virgin Mary the night Christ was born – considered one of the greatest relics of all Christendom**
 - **It was stolen from Constantinople**
 - **Gift from King Charles the Bald (876)**
 - **Chartres had a huge fire that destroyed most of the Romanesque cathedral in 1194**
 - **The Virgin's Veil was saved which was perceived by the townspeople as a miracle**
 - **Rebuilding of Chartres took place 1194 – 1220**

B. The West Façade

1. **Two towers (Gardner's 483)**
 - **One is Romanesque – heavier and more solid looking**
 - **One is Gothic – (north or to the left) – more ornate**
2. **A rose window**
 - **Stain glass window with an oval shape and many panes which mimic the petals of a rose**
 - **One of 176 stained glass windows in Chartres**

3. Three tall lancet windows

- Lancet windows are long and slender like lances used in jousting

4. Three portals on the western façade known COLLECTIVELY as the ROYAL PORTAL

- Called the Royal Portal because the figures on the jamb columns are kings and queens from the Old Testament
 - Central Portal – Christ as Judge
 - TYMPANUM – Christ enthroned as judge and ruler of the universe. Christ is surrounded by a MANDORLA
 - TETRAMORPHS – the symbols of the four Gospel writers
 - LINTEL – 12 standing apostles plus two Old Testament prophets (Elijah and Enoch). Figures are arranged in groups of three
 - ARCHIVOLTS – an ARCHIVOLT is an ornamental band surrounding the TYMPANUM. The outer two archivolts contain 24 elders and the inner archivolt contains 12 angels
 - Southern Portal – scenes of Christ's nativity and childhood
 - TYMPANUM – Mary and Christ enthroned between two angels
 - Upper lintel – Presentation of Christ in the Temple 8 days after his birth
 - Lower lintel – Combination of Annunciation scene, Visitation (When pregnant Mary, goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth who is also pregnant with John the Baptist), and Nativity
 - Northern portal – scenes of the Ascension
 - TYMPANUM – timeless Heavenly Christ ascendant in a cloud held by two angels
 - Lintel – 12 seated apostles

C. Nave and Transept (Gardner 489)

1. Amazing facts and figures

- The nave is 427 feet long or 142 yards long!
- The nave is 123 feet high from floor to ceiling!
- As many as 100 priests can conduct mass in the transept

- The nave and transept can hold 6,000 worshippers!
- 2. **Three parts of the NAVE ELEVATION – from floor to ceiling**
 - Nave arcade – the series of arches supported by compound piers
 - Triforium – the intermediate story above the nave arcade, a walkway with a slanted ceiling
 - Clerestory – the row of windows below the vaults
 - **NOTICE THE EXTENSIVE USE OF POINTED ARCHES**

D. The Key Elements of Gothic Architecture

1. Pointed arches

- The returning Crusaders admired the pointed arches of Islamic architecture that they had seen in the Holy Land
- Pointed arches open up more space than do rounded arches (See diagram in Gardner's) which fit with Abbot Suger's goals of greater height
- Pointed arches also direct the eye upwards to heaven – give a greater sense of height

2. Ribbed vaults

- Vaults in Gothic churches are different from the barrel vaults which were most common in Romanesque churches
- Ribbed vaults used pointed arches for the vaulting.
- The ribs are the stones that extend from the ceiling
- There are two diagonal ribs that make an X-shape
- There are two transverse ribs

3. Piers

- Large compound piers extend to the rib vaults and help support them

4. Flying buttresses – external support arms that hold up the walls from the outside

- With the greater nave height and vaulting, there is great outward thrust on the walls meaning that the walls would fall outward and away from the center

- Flying buttresses hold them up
- Called “flying” because there is space between the vertical part of the support and the horizontal arm that extends to the wall

5. Large stained glass windows

- Fulfills Abbot Suger’s vision that the church should be suffused with the light of heaven
- The new support methods – POINTED ARCHES, RIBBED VAULTS, and FLYING BUTTRESSES allowed for more space in the walls for larger windows

E. Stained-glass windows

1. 176 windows in Chartres
2. 22,000 square feet
3. Examples:

- Notre Dame de la Belle Verriere (Our Lady of the Beautiful Window) Also known as the Blue Virgin (Gardner 490)
- Life of Christ – depicts 15 scenes from the Christ’s birth
- The Dormition (Death of Mary)
- The North Rose Window see Gardner 491
 - 42 feet in diameter
 - A gift from the Queen of France (Queen Blanche of Castile)
 - Note the yellow fleur-de-lis (three-petaled iris flowers) the symbol of the French royal family as well as the gold castles – symbol of Queen Blanche’s homeland of Castile (in Spain)
 - In the center sits a crowned Mary holding the Christ Child
 - The first circle around her contains 4 doves and 8 angels – doves symbolize the Holy Spirit
 - The second circle depicts 12 kings of Judah, Precursors to Christ – the prophets foretold how the Messiah would come from the family line of King David – Notice the window for King David and King Solomon (David’s son and successor)

- The final circle depicts 12 minor prophets who prefigure Christ and his Apostles

4. Five Lancet windows

- a. Five Lancets represent the triumph of divine law
- b. The priest-king Melchizedek towers over the idolatrous Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon
- c. Beneath King David, King Saul, David's disobedient predecessor kills himself with a sword
- d. St. Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary, holds her daughter above the arms of France
- e. King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, stands above Jeroboam, a king who worshipped idols
- f. Aaron, brother of Moses, triumphs over pharaoh whose armies drowned in the Red Sea

5. KEY POINT

- Let's compare the Gothic stained glass Virgin and Child with the Byzantine mosaic of the Theotokos (bearer of God) and Child in Hagia Sophia (Gardner 432)
- The Byzantine mosaic is designed to REFLECT light
- The Chartres window is designed to FILTER light

F. Chartres' sculptural masterpieces

- 1. Over 2,000 figures are depicted**
- 2. Statue Columns on the west portal - Royal Portal (Gardner's 484)**
 - Statues of Old Testament kings and queens decorate the jambs flanking each doorway of the Royal Portal
 - They are the royal ancestors of Christ. They support the New Testament scenes both figuratively and literally.
 - Note that the figures stand rigidly upright. The linear folds of their garments generally echo the vertical lines of the columns behind them.
 - Gothic jamb statues compared to Classical caryatids – The Gothic figures are attached to columns. The classical statues are the columns.
- 3. South portal**

Compare these statues with the ones of page 484. What are the differences?

- Statues are more independent from the architectural framework.
- The three saints appear to quietly communicate with each other
- Note the treatment of the faces. The sculptor gave the figures individualized features and distinctive personalities.
- Saint Martin is a tall intense priest. Saint Jerome appears as a kindly, practical administrator-scholar holding his copy of the Scriptures. At the right, the introspective Gregory seems lost in thought as he listens to the dove of the Holy Spirit on his shoulder.

III. OTHER FRENCH GOTHIC MASTERPIECES

A. Notre Dame de Paris (1163 – 1250) (Gardner's 486)

- 1. Flying Buttresses**
- 2. Rib Vaults**
- 3. Piers**
- 4. Pointed Arches**
- 5. Stained-Glass Windows**
- 6. Gargoyles**
- 7. Nave elevation**
 - Nave arcade
 - Triforium
 - Clerestory

B. Reims

- 1. Background**
 - Site of Clovis' conversion to Christianity in 496
 - The Romanesque cathedral burned down in 1210. The fire was allegedly set by Alberic de Humbert. The archbishop wanted a new and grander cathedral in the Gothic style.
 - Cathedral where the French kings were coronated.
 - Sacred relics include a piece of the True Cross worn by Charlemagne
- 2. An incredible west façade (Gardner's 496)**
 - Five archivolts
 - Stained-glass windows replace carved tympanums
- 3. A spectacular nave**
 - 124 feet high
 - Shows all key Gothic elements

C. Sainte-Chapelle (Gardner's 498)

- 1. A RELIQUARY chapel – Saint Chapelle is not a church in its own right but a chapel with important relics**
 - Louis IX (1226 – 1270) was the ideal Christian king. He was revered for his piety, justice, truthfulness, and charity

- He led the Seventh (1248 – 1254) and Eighth (1270) Crusades
 - Pope Boniface VIII declared Louis a saint in 1297
 - Louis IX purchased the Crown of Thorns, lance, sponge, part of the True Cross, and a nail from the True Cross
2. Saint-Chapelle functioned as a repository for these precious relics
 3. The upper floor of the chapel was accessible only the king and the clergy
 4. Stained-glass
 - 6,450 square feet of stained-glass make up more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the structure
 - Sainte-Chapelle's enormous windows filter the light and fill the interior with unearthly rose-violet light
 5. Sainte-Chapelle is an example of the RAYONNANT or RADIANT style of the Gothic style which dominated the second half of the 13th century (ie. 1250 – 1300)

D. House of Jacques Coeur, Bourges, France

1. Jacques Coeur was a successful French merchant
 - An example of the success of the *bourgeoisie* or middle-class
 - Banking houses in every city of France and many other cities abroad
 - More than 300 agents employed in Europe
 - His own trading ships in the Mediterranean
 - Permission from pope to trade with Muslims in Egypt and the Middle East
 - Advisor to King Charles VII of France and friend of Pope Nicholas V
2. A beautiful home
 - Let's take a look
 - Late Gothic domestic architecture
 - Arranged around an open court yard
 - Service areas (maintenance shops and storage, servants' quarters, baths) occupy ground level

- Upper stories have a great hall, auxiliary rooms used for offices and family living rooms
- Focal point is the steep pyramidal roof
- A spire or pointed tower with Flamboyant style tracery
- A great window with a pointed arch
- A canopied niche below the great window contained a royal equestrian statue
- A matching equestrian statue of Jacques Coeur decorated the façade opening onto the interior courtyard
- False windows by the sides of the canopied niche with life-size reliefs of a male and female servant who look down on passersby

3. What happened to Jacques Coeur?

- Jacques Coeur had enemies – jealous nobles, debtors
- Framed for the murder of the king's mistress, Agnes Sorel, and imprisoned
- His property and wealth were confiscated and distributed among the king's supporters
- Coeur escaped from prison and fled to Rome, where he was welcomed by the pope
- Coeur died of fever while leading the papal fleet in the eastern Mediterranean

IV. THE EVOLUTION OF GOTHIC SCULPTURE

A. Early Gothic Statue-Columns at Chartres (West Portal a.k.a Royal Portal)

- 1. Let's look – Gardner's 484**
- 2. What do we see?**
 - **Old Testament kings and queens**
 - **Wearing 12th century clothes**
 - **Figures stand rigidly upright**
 - **They are all the same height**
 - **The figures are attached to the columns**
- 3. What don't we see?**
 - **The figures lack naturalism**
 - **The figures do not stand in contrapposto**
 - **Absence of personality and individuality**

B. High Gothic sculptures

- 1. Let's look – Gardner's 493**
- 2. What do we see?**
 - **Figures are still attached to the columns BUT**
 - **They are far more individualized and distinctive**
 - **Saint Martin is a tall, intense priest with gaunt features**
 - **Saint Jerome appears as a kindly scholar holding his copy of the scriptures**
 - **Saint Gregory seems lost in thought as he listens to the Holy Ghost dove on his shoulder**
 - **Saint Theodore is an ideal Christian knight. The handsome long-haired youth holds his spear firmly in his right hand and rests his left hand on his shield. Note the slight sway in his right hip.**

C. Christ, the Beautiful God – Central doorway at Amiens Cathedral

- 1. Let's look – Gardner's 495**
- 2. What do we see?**
 - **A bearded benevolent (kindly) image of Christ**

- A teacher holding his Gospels
- Statue stands freely and is independent of its architectural setting
- And oh yes – Note that Christ is standing on a lion and a dragon. The lion symbolizes Satan and the dragon symbolizes the ANTICHRIST
- The ANTICHRIST? The Antichrist is not Satan, but an incarnation of evil, a “Final Enemy” who takes over from Satan at the end of the world and presides over killing, torture, and destruction. The Antichrist has huge blood-shot eyes, white eyelashes, pointed hair, gigantic teeth and a double skull. When he walked, he left green footprints!

D. Statues begin to converse – West Portal at Reims Cathedral

1. Let’s look – Gardner’s 497

2. What do we see?

- Four statues and two scenes
- First, an Annunciation scene – Angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary
- The archangel announces to Mary that she will bear Jesus
- Mary is quiet, graceful, with a slender body, restrained gestures, and refined features
- Now look at Gabriel! The artist who created this statue is known as the Master of Smiling Angels
- The graceful poses of Gabriel and Mary classify these two statues as examples of the FRENCH COURT STYLE
- Second scene – a Visitation scene – Mary and Elizabeth
- Shortly after Mary became pregnant she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was also with pregnant with the John the Baptist
- According to the Bible, when Mary first entered the room, John the Baptist leapt in Elizabeth’s womb, sensing that he was in the room with Jesus
- Note that the figures are nearly free-standing
- Note the contrapposto in the Visitation Mary
- The Visitation group shows a strong Roman influence. The sculptor may have had exposure to Roman portrait busts
- The two groups do not appear to have been carved by the same sculptor. The differences in style confirm the fact that several workshops were involved.

E. Two statues of the Virgin and Child

1. Let's look

- **Virgin of Paris – Gardner's 498**
- **Virgin of Jeanne d'Evreux – Gardner's 505**

2. What do we see?

- **Mary as the Queen of Heaven – Note the crown in the Virgin of Paris statue.**
- **Note that the sculptor gave the Virgin of Paris a sway to her body. It is not true contrapposto. Why do you think the artist gave the statue a sway?**
- **Mary was originally wearing a crown in the Virgin of Jeanne d'Evreux statuette and the scepter she holds is in the form of the fleur-de-lis, the floral emblem of the French monarchy. The statuette also served as a reliquary. The Virgin's scepter contained hairs believed to come from Mary's head.**
- **The Gothic S-curve – The swaying curve of Mary's pose is called the Gothic S-curve**

3. Making comparisons

- **Virgin of Paris (Gardner's 498) and Hermes and infant Dionysus by Praxiteles (Gardner's 146)**
- **Is the Gothic S-curve of the Virgin of Paris the same as the shallow S-curve used by Praxiteles?**
- **Virgin of Jeanne d'Evreux (Gardner's 505) and Venus de Milo (Gardner's 159)**
- **Compare the poses and the treatment of drapery in the 14th century French Madonna on the left and the Hellenistic Venus on the right**
- **Poses**
- **Contrapposto**
- **Gothic-S**
- **Treatment of drapery –**
- **Venus is the goddess of love. The sculptor intentionally designed the work to explore the eroticism of the nude female form. The sculpture intentionally designed the work to tease the spectator.**
- **Mary is the Queen of Heaven. The heavy drapery folds intentionally hide Mary's figure. The emphasis is on the relationship between the holy figures.**

F. Gothic German Sculptures

1. Death of the Virgin – Gardner’s 512

- What do we see?
- A sculptural group in a tympanum
- The Twelve Apostles gather around Mary, forming an arc of mourners
- At the center, Christ receives his mother’s soul (the doll-like figure in his right hand!)
- Mary Magdalene, wringing her hands in grief, crouches beside the deathbed
- The sculptor’s objective was to imbue the sacred figures with human emotions and to stir and emotional response in observers
- Key points – In Gothic France, art became increasingly humanized and natural
- In Gothic Germany, artists carried this humanizing trend even further by emphasizing passionate drama

2. Pieta – Virgin with the Dead Christ – Gardner’s 514

- What do we see?
- Mary grieving over the dead Christ – Pieta
- Carved of wood and vividly painted
- Meant to be placed on an altar
- The faces convey unbearable pain and grief
- Key points – The purpose of the work is to arouse so overwhelming a sense of horror and pity that the faithful will share in Christ’s suffering and identify with the grief-stricken Mother of God
- Here the artist forcibly confronts the devout with a poignant image of agony, death and sorrow

3. Ekkehard and Uta – Gardner’s 513

- Striking statues of real people – the German military governor, Ekkehard II and his wife Uta
- Two of the 12 benefactors of the original church
- Carved by the Naumburg master
- Notice how the sculptures are more independent of the architectural framework

4. Bamberg Rider

- A Gothic equestrian statue
- How can you tell it’s Gothic? The clothing looks medieval. The sculpture is further evidence of how

sculpture became more independent of the architectural framework

V.