



UNIVERSE OF STONE PART 2

ARCHITECTURE AND ABBOT SUGER

- The initial reconstruction of Saint-Denis proceeded at an extraordinary pace, for which again Suger must take much credit.
- Work spanned the years from 1137 to 1144, which was still extremely fast for such a monumental undertaking.
- Windows reach almost to the floor, creating what Suger called a 'crown of light'.
- Floor plan need to accommodate the circulation of pilgrims
- 'Suger employed an architect of genius'.
- Suger's desire to express a link between the French kings and those of ancient times.
- For Bernard of Clairvaux it must have bordered on the profane, a throwback to the excesses that he condemned in the abbeys of the Cluniacs.



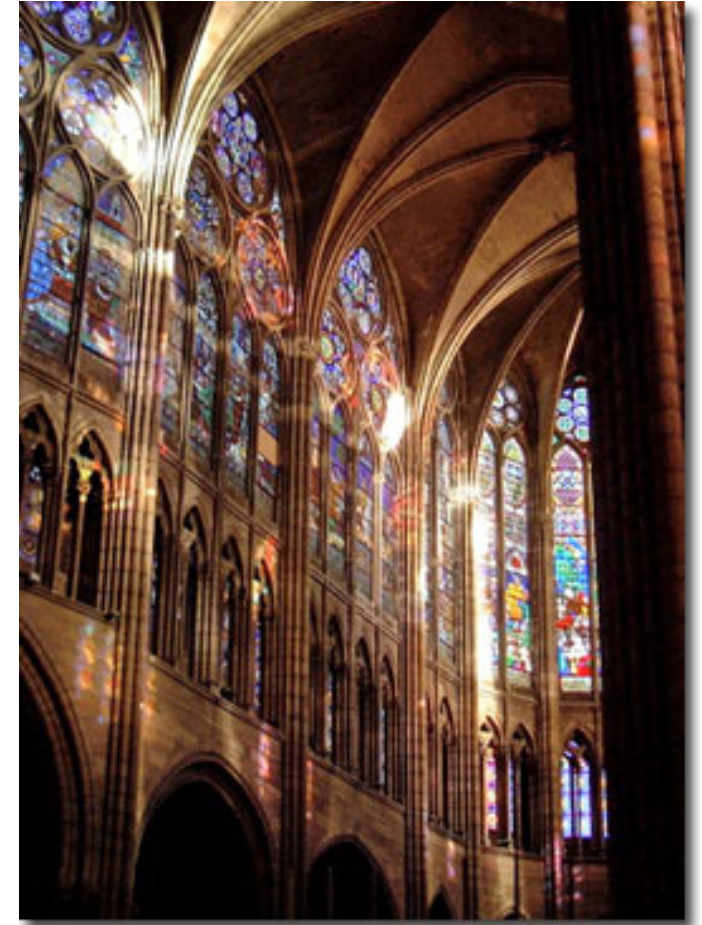
MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE CATHEDRALS

- Suger took immense pride in his creation.
- He pressed visitors to admit that it was the most wonderful church in the world.
- Gothic did not crystallize in a single building, but was already by the 1140s starting to percolate through the kingdom of France.



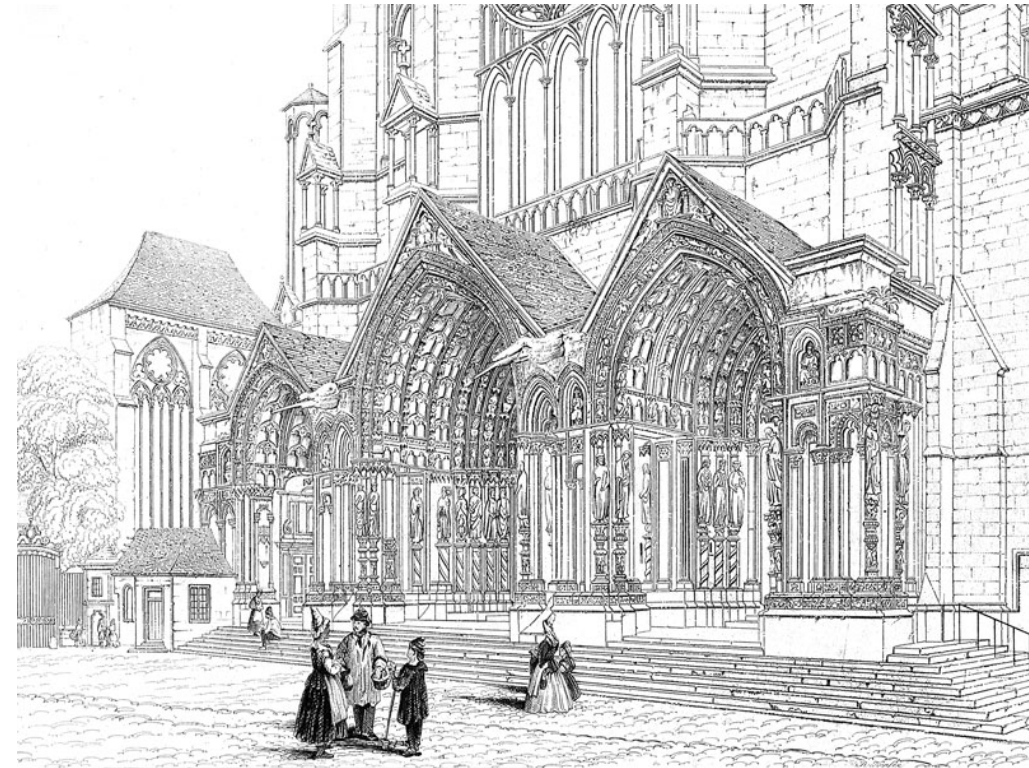
ARCHITECTURE OF THE GOTHIC

- Gothic builders wage an incessant war against weight
- Key features of the gothic
 - The **pointed arch**
 - **Rib vaulting** in ceiling structures
 - External **flying buttresses**
 - The rib vault, the **pointed arch**, the insistence on height, and the thinning - out and 'skeletonization' of the structural masonry
 - A style based on elevation and upward motion
- **Light and the Gothic**
 - Walls are reduced to transparent membranes
 - Or is light itself the central concept of Gothic architecture?
- **Verticality and weightlessness**
 - No hint of load bearing
 - All its characteristics are essentially vertical
 - Vault - lines of upward thrust converge
 - Called an 'Icarus flight'.
 - Vertical ecstasy.
 - underpinning in a metaphysics of light
- Not actually a wall at all, but a fence of struts that hold membranes of colored glass



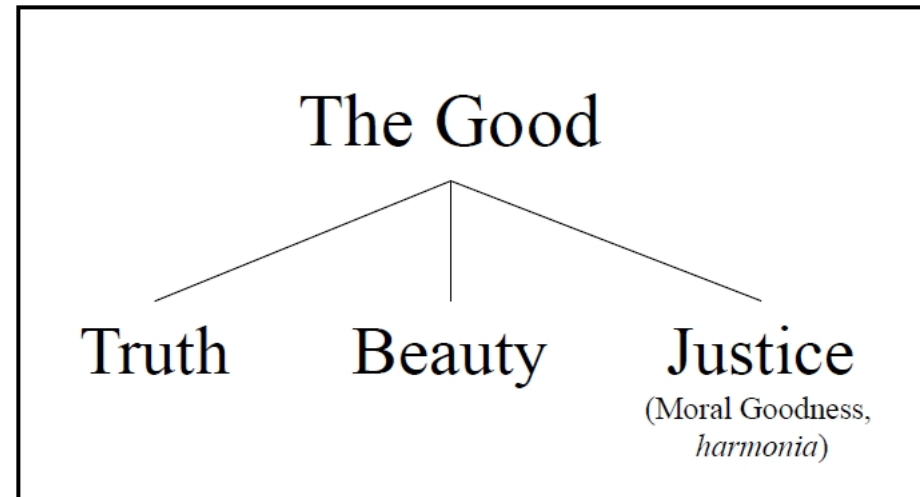
ART AND THE GOTHIC

- Gothic in any event means different things in different places.
- Gothic is **primarily a French movement**
- Paintwork is not mere decoration but is deliberately architectural, both reinforcing and sensitively elaborating the order and logic of the masonry
- Art was performing a function that science aims to fulfil today: to simplify the world, to strip away what is contingent from what is essential, to reveal the framework. **Art existed to reveal the deep design of God's creation.**



BEAUTY AND NEO-PLATONISM

- Feeling for intelligible beauty which the neo-Platonists and the Medievals possessed
- **Intelligible beauty** that the builders of the cathedrals sought to convey was not an aesthetic but a moral reality.
- Such symbolism was a kind of invocation, a way of summoning heavenly truths into the world of humankind.
- This is why the Gothic cathedrals are almost terrifying in their beauty: they encode a renunciation of our poor, drab and degenerate world and an exhortation to seek only knowledge of God.
- The world was, according to Umberto Eco, 'God's discourse to man, and the cathedrals sought to reiterate this discourse : they 'actualized a synthetic vision of man, of his history, of his relation to the universe.



RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND ORDERS

- The Role of Monasticism
 - Division of labor: the monks' self-sacrifice and piety bought redemption for all
 - The community considered monasteries to be engaged in a vital task
- Religious leaders sought to restore the original monastic ideals of purity and devotion laid down by St Benedict (480–543), founder of the first Christian monastery at Monte Cassino.
- St Odilo (962–1048), 5th abbot of Cluny, developed the Order into a monastic empire
- Close in spirit to the Benedictines, the Cluniac Order was in some degree anti-humanist: while the monks of the cathedral schools studied the liberal arts, many monasteries turned their backs on the learning of the classical world, worrying that it would pollute their sanctuary. The Order was an austere bastion against the encroachment of profane scholarship.



CISTERCIANS AND BERNARD DE CLAIRVAUX

- The **Order of the Cistercians** wore habits made of undyed cloth (later bleached a more emphatic white). The Cistercians did not observe penitence for society as a whole; they sought their own salvation through imitation of the humility and poverty of Christ.
- The white monks were, like the Cluniacs, wary of classical learning.
- In 1113 a devout and energetic young nobleman of Burgundy named Bernard arrived at the abbey of Cîteaux with a group of companions. Seeing promise in this initiate, Harding **sent Bernard two years later to establish a new Cistercian centre at Clairvaux.**
- St Bernard, as he later became, was a complex and difficult man.
- By the end of the 12th c. Cistercian abbeys too had turned into manors, as grand and profane as the Cluniac abbeys they sought to replace.



alamy stock photo

C1YDCY
www.alamy.com

BISHOPS AND THE EMERGENCE OF GOTHIC CATHEDRALS

- The bishops' churches – the cathedrals, from the Latin word for the bishop's throne, *cathedra*, which was placed at the end of the church's apse.
- During the early Gothic period, images of the Virgin began to proliferate as the Marian cult burgeoned.
- But simple geometrical forms were the natural language of builders
- Medieval art is an attempt to reveal the 'intelligible beauty' of creation. We cannot hope to understand Gothic buildings unless we appreciate something about what this **notion of beauty** means and where it came from.
- Enlightenment idea of progress – technological, intellectual, spiritual and moral – has become second nature to us.



THE MENTALITY OF THE MIDDLE AGES AND REVERENCE FOR THE CLASSICS

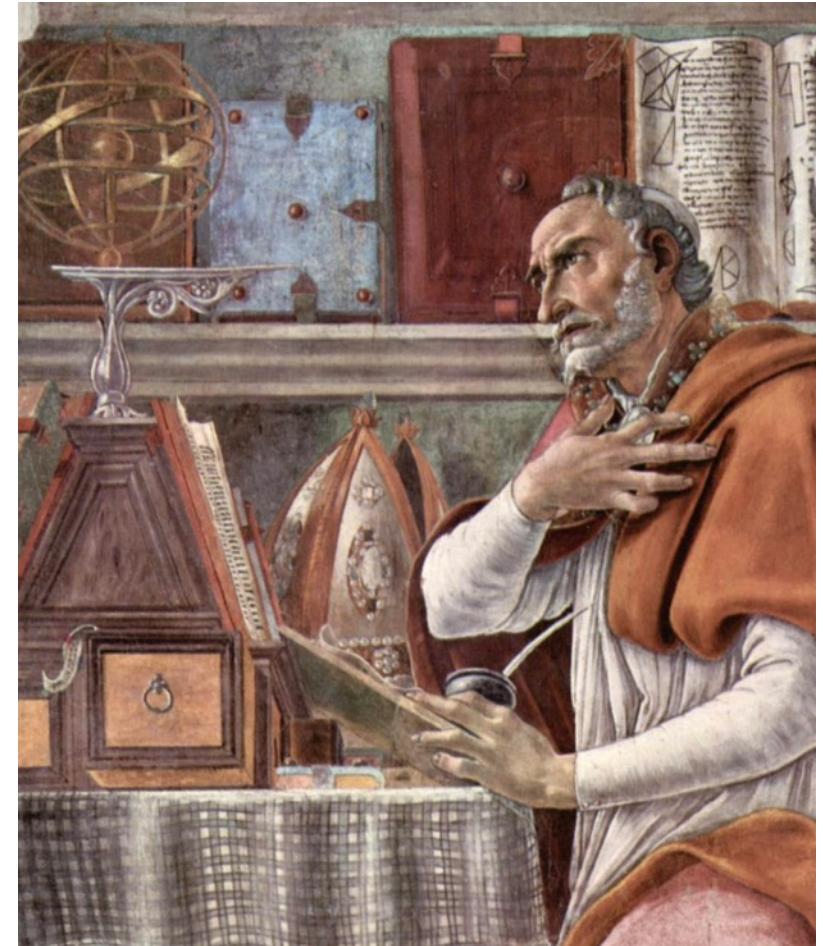
- But the Middle Ages shared none of our hubris. People then did not believe that the questions they faced were any different from those that confronted their dimly perceived forebears, who were considered to have been far better equipped to find answers.
- Truth was timeless
- Reverence for the classical heritage pervaded political and institutional structures
- To Alcuin, the liberal arts were the columns that propped up the temple of Christian wisdom.
- John Scotus (810 - 877), known as Eriugena, was an important interpreter of St Augustine and Boethius. He has been called the only truly significant thinker in the western world between the seventh and the tenth centuries.
- But many medieval scholars found instruction and inspiration also in the pre-Christian writers of Rome and Greece.

ARISTOTLE AND PLATO AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON MEDIEVAL THOUGHT

- Aristotle's world is that of *physis*, or what we might call nature. For Plato, the cosmos comes into being as a kind of creative expression or interpretation of transcendental, archetypal forms, and thus it is more a matter of *techne*, of art.
- In the twelfth century Aristotle's oeuvre was only just being rediscovered by Christian scholars translating his texts from Arabic transcriptions.
- Albertus Magnus, a Dominican cleric from Swabia, and his Neapolitan pupil Thomas Aquinas presented the case for congruence of Aristotle's views with Christian belief.
- But **during the springtime of the Gothic revolution, Plato was the dominant authority in natural philosophy.**
- All that was really known in the early twelfth century were fragments of his *Timaeus*.
- Plato was a force 'continuously stimulating scientific thought, aesthetic feeling and religious consciousness', from antiquity until the High Middle Ages.
- *Timaeus* came to be seen as the most profound description of the physical universe.

AUGUSTINE AND PLATONIC THOUGHT

- Augustine was drawn into the Persian cult of Manichaeism, based on the beliefs of the third-century sage Manes or Mani – a strange blend of Babylonian folklore and cosmogony welded opportunistically to elements of Christianity.
- Physical world accessible to sense perceptions is a mere shadow of an immaterial realm of true reality, where all things are intelligible and perfect. For Augustine this transcendental world of Plato seems to have been a pagan version of the kingdom of God, which was unchanging, flawless and infinitely reasonable.



REASON, AUGUSTINE, AND THE LIBERAL ARTS

- Reason is a tool that may be honed and wielded by means of the intellectual disciplines cultivated by the ancient scholars, enshrined in the tidy conceit of the liberal art.
- 'liberal' – from liber, 'book': the liberal arts were subjects to be learnt by reading
- The Liberal Arts: Trivium + Quadrivium - The trivium of grammar, dialectic and rhetoric, and the quadrivium of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music.
- As God's reason has rendered the world intelligible, this order can be discovered by the use of mathematic, geometry and astronomy, as well as through literature and poetry
- Uncover new demonstrations of the moral order and divine wisdom inherent in all creation.
- Having sown the seeds of Platonism in the Christian West, Augustine ended his days bolstering those who would condemn the enquiring spirit of its rationalistic supporters.
- Aristotle's ideas, on the other hand, were widely deemed incompatible with the doctrines of the Creation, divine providence and the immortality of the soul, and they were often resisted and suppressed.

BOETHIUS AND ARISTOTLE

- Aristotle had a Patristic champion in the person of the Roman statesman Boethius.
- Brought rational analysis to bear on the theology of the Christian schools
- His untimely execution for alleged treason against the Ostrogoth king Theodoric, deprived the medieval world of an opportunity of access to the whole heritage of Plato'.
- At the twelfth-century cathedral school of Chartres there was no **mathematical authority** who surpassed Boethius, and his **writings on number and proportion were at the core of the canon**.
- The Nestorians, fleeing from Byzantium to Persia in the 6th and 7th centuries, helped to export Greek scholarship to the Islamic world, but the Muslims also had a great deal of direct contact with the remnants of Hellenic culture in Byzantium itself.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENTS AND BERNARD DE CLAIRVAUX

- Adelard of Bath studied at Chartres and provided the most elegant and dignified defence of science ever uttered.
- Out of the subsequent clash of ideologies came the age of the cathedrals.
- Ever since Augustine, there was **opposition to the notion of trying to understand the world. Leading that attack in the early twelfth century was one of the most powerful men in Europe: Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux.**
- He seems to us now to have been possessed of an ascetic severity that borders on misanthropy.
 - There seems to be no space for joy in his world
 - Disgust at the decorative excesses of the Cluniac churches
- But a man every bit as argumentative and contrary as Bernard of Clairvaux achieved fame and notoriety from his defence of the merits of rationality. His name was **Peter Abelard.**

ENTER PETER ABELARD

(1079 – 1142)

- To prove himself in battle Abelard was naturally drawn to Paris, the intellectual centre of France since the early 11th century.
- Heloise fell pregnant from an affair with Abelard and gave birth to a son named Astrolabe. She resisted the role of wife for fear that such domestic banality would impair Abelard's reputation and abilities.
- One night they burst in on Abelard and castrated him.
- Abelard's unorthodoxy and his passion for cross - **examining the Scriptures under the spotlight of reason** were bound to draw condemnation from Bernard of Clairvaux.
- Abelard did not deny that people could be sinful, but he did not consider this to be the fundamental human condition, and he felt it should be remedied not with punishment but with sincere contrition.