A REAPPRAISAL OF RAYONNANT ARCHITECTURE

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According to one of the oldest general propositions in the historiography of art, modern painting began in fourteenth-century Italy with Giotto. This majestic simplification is still held to be essentially correct, for it is certainly true that from the beginning of the trecento Italian painting shifted its course away from the mediaeval line and toward the Renaissance, and initiated fundamental changes which had direct consequences on the entire future of Western art. The modernity and novelty of Giotto's paintings were fully apparent to his contemporaries, and early testimony to this effect is abundant. The most familiar to all is Dante's acclaim of this painter's art as the dernier cri: "... And now Giotto hath the cry, so that the fame of the other [Cimabue] is obscured." This early enthusiasm was heightened in the middle of the fifteenth century by the addition of a historical element in Ghiberti's assertion that Giotto "introduced the new art." It was on this theme that Vasari elaborated a hundred years later in his famous Lives, in which he hailed Giotto as the one who "threw open the gates of the true way to those who afterwards exalted the art to that perfection and greatness which it displays in our age." 

A critical perspective on the past is claimed as one of the higher virtues of modern historical scholarship, but it appears that it has added nothing to what the early writers had to say about the trecento. This is true not only of the broad lines of the development of painting that they traced, but also for the valuations they placed upon the individual artists. Those masters who were great in the eyes of Ghiberti and Vasari hold much the same places of relative esteem in modern criticism. If anything, such names as Giotto, Duccio, and Simone Martini are more widely and commonly known today than ever before. The work of these artists and the judgment of their contemporaries constitute one of the most indelible marks made by the fourteenth century on all sub-
sequent cultural history, and in the very fact of that historical
self-consciousness which led the early critics to these valid app­
raisals may be read an equally significant tribute to their his­
toriographical modernity. Such attainments are considerable even
though they are limited by being operative only within the geo­
graphically circumscribed sphere of Italy. In their views on the
rest of Europe, these early writers were as insular as any ancient
Greek for whom an unquestionably superior self stood at the
center of the world, while the rest was indiscriminately lumped
together as variously and barbarically foreign.

If the scholarship of the past two centuries has had little to add
to the profound intuitions about Italy of the trecento, it has had
much to say about the wealth and diversity of art north of the
Alps. For the early Renaissance writers there shone only the light
of Italy and ancient Rome. For them Byzantine art of the Greek
East loomed dark and harsh, and the art of the “barbarous Goths”
to the north allegedly stagnated amid the deep shadows of a mil­
nennial eclipse which had brought the “true art” of classical ant­
iquity to a close. It was only with the mediaeval revival of the
eighteenth century that Gothic art was discovered for us as a
positive and benign affair. The recovery first came about in Eng­
land, where architectural historians saw in Gothic their own na­
tional style, and its worth was placed on a par with the long
approved Renaissance and Classical works. The name “Gothic,”
no longer a stigma of opprobrium or defensive apology, became
the badge of enthusiastic nationalism and ubiquitous revivalism.
Even Gothic painting and sculpture, which had lagged behind
architecture in this restoration, became fully reinstated by the
end of the nineteenth century. It was only in our own half­
century, however, that historical studies were freed from na­
tionalistic antiquarianism and pietistic romanticism, and a proper
picture of Gothic art was more clearly and completely formed.
The fourteenth century, of all the phases of Gothic art investi­
gated, remained the last to attract concentrated attention. Now,
however—especially in the field of painting—we have advanced
to a position from which this area of Northern art may be viewed
in a balanced relationship to developments in the rest of Europe.

It is the main purpose of this paper to bring into focus one
major area of fourteenth-century art that is still very much
sighted, and is the subject of serious injustice in criticism. I refer
to the architecture of the North—mainly that in France—which is perhaps the most unfortunate victim of old prejudicial taste. Its neglect may be due to the depleted energies of scholarship, exhausted after the hundred-years war of revival of mediaeval art. Although it would be of interest to examine in their entirety the broader lines of the newly formed picture of the general relationships between the North and the Italian trecento, these may be touched upon only superficially, and only as a setting for the architectural problem proposed.

Although less familiar than the Italian masters of the same period, the North had its major and minor painters and sculptors, the stars and constellations of a brilliant Northern hemisphere of art. The names of Jean Pucelle, Jean Bondol, André Beauneveu, Jacquemart de Hesdin, Melchior Broederlam, and others, suffice to remind us of the high degree of artistic individuality and creativity of this area.

While the Byzantine teachers of the first Italian painters were given some acknowledgment—even if oblique—by Ghiberti and Vasari, the Northern Gothic schools and masters were practically ignored. Today, the Northern element in the Italian trecento is generally recognized. It is clear, for instance, that Giovanni Pisano’s works reveal conscious French Gothic inspiration. His ivory “Virgin and Child” of 1299 (Pisa) must have been indebted directly to such works as the trumeau figure of the Virgin and Child in the portal of the north transept of Notre Dame in Paris (ca. 1260). Even in Giotto, whose break with the inherited tradition is the most significant and impressive fact, there is a recognizable Gothic denominator in his basic concept of the figure as a modeled shell of outer form.

The course followed in the development of painting shows that the dominant currents flowed from Italy to the North. Florentine and Sienese innovations in spatial representation and narrative expression afforded solutions to problems which were also of interest to the Northern artists. This pattern of derivation is already overwhelmingly patent in the work of Jean Pucelle, the dominant artistic personality in French painting of the second quarter of the fourteenth century. The formal and dramatic means by which he was able to transcend even the finest of earlier Gothic painting in his miniatures for the Hours of Jeanne d’Evreux (ca. 1325) were derived from Siena. Similar instances of Italian priority may be traced through the rest of the fourteenth century and into the early
fifteenth. Best known among the examples from the end of this interval is the miniature of the "Presentation of Christ" in the Très riches Heures at Chantilly (ca. 1411), painted by one of the brothers Limbourg. It is thoroughly Italianate and almost a miniature replica of a painting of the same subject by Taddeo Gaddi.\textsuperscript{10}

But if Northern painting developed in the wake of Italian developments during the \textit{trecento}, the painters were far from being docile recipients of new formulas. It is ever apparent that the Northerners absorbed and assimilated their Italian sources, adapting them to their own purposes and traditions. Jean Pucelle's style, for example, for all its indebtedness to Sienese art, could hardly be confused with the latter. Essentially and primarily, Pucelle belongs to the line of Gothic continuity running from the late thirteenth century; and it is that tradition which he transforms, without departing from it. He carries Gothic painting from a style in which silhouetted figures and architecture are set against an opaque background to a phase in which architecturally defined perspective interiors serve to contain or articulate a unified narrative presentation. In the work of Jean Bondol, this line of development may be observed at a later stage, which may be illustrated by the dedication miniature from the Bible of Charles V in The Hague, which was signed and dated by the artist in 1371.\textsuperscript{11} Here, the whole picture area has been integrated in spatial terms which subsume even the more obvious Italianate elements, such as the perspective floor. The total effect is entirely different from the rational Italian system of structured space and sculptured figures, especially when we compare this miniature with contemporary works by the followers of Giotto. In the Bondol miniature, the whole is primarily a factor of light and the way it plays in the illusory spatial unit of the scene. All the elements are bound together in the soft luminosity of a tonal envelope. In place of figures that are sculptured volumes, there are delicately textured gradations of minute light particles. Even the fleur-de-lis backdrop suggests a tonal screen, rather than a delimiting barrier, and implies a potential luminous extension of the space.

By the end of the fourteenth century, there is a remarkable convergence between Italy and the North in the so-called International Style.\textsuperscript{12} (Paintings of that period are still the subject of footnote controversies, in which they are attributed and re-attributed, back and forth, between Italy, Paris, and other places.) However, in the midst of that convergence and exchange, and
out of it, came the famous parting of the ways after about 1400, in which Italy turned, with conscious deliberation, to classical examples and principles, around which her further exploitation of naturalism was oriented. In the North, the now rampant interest in nature reached a climax of another kind, one that was recognizably different from the Italian. Gothic naturalism, founded in the thirteenth-century scholastic discovery of the world of man's surroundings, was sharpened and made more individual in fourteenth-century nominalism and in art. Every single thing and all of its accountable parts that were accessible to the senses were newly fascinating to the painter and sculptor.

Thus by different roads North and South reach what appears to be the same point. It is for this reason that we find such striking affinities between the "Adam and Eve" of the Ghent altarpiece (1432) by the brothers Van Eyck, and those in Masaccio's "Expulsion" in the Brancacci Chapel (1426-28), although Masaccio proceeds from classicizing principle and idealism, and Jan Van Eyck is intent upon the individual and the particular. In this difference lies the profound basis for the divergence in the subsequent history of these two powerful, independent, although at times interacting, artistic movements. From this point on, both North and South share equally as determinants of the future of painting. The same phenomenon may be observed in the sculpture of this period, the development of which parallels what we know of painting, though it has not yet been so thoroughly explored. It may be sufficient, therefore, to turn to that critical point of convergence and divergence at about 1400 for an illustration. Donatello's "St. Mark" of about 1416 arrives at the new ideal naturalism of the Renaissance out of generalizing humanistic principle which is deeply classical in sympathy. The North arrives at an analogous, and equally consequential, modernity in the art of Claus Sluter. His "Isaiah," from the "Well of Moses" (ca. 1400), also shows a startlingly convincing grasp of the whole, which is supported by an authoritative command of the parts. But Sluter's realism is not that of abstract and general humanistic principle. It is rather an achievement of pictorial totality, which is attained by a painstaking record of empirical observations of the surface; he proceeds from the individual particles of visible matter, in an almost microscopic geography, whose sum is the reconstituted whole.

Architecture alone appears to be isolated and exceptional in this larger context, and it is indeed remarkable that it offers
nothing which is recognizably comparable to the phenomenon of convergence in painting and sculpture. Renaissance architecture has been vaguely set against that of the late Gothic of the North, especially that of the Flamboyant style, as a complete antithesis. Brunelleschi's Church of the Santo Spirito (1435 ff.), for example, is rational and mathematical in method, classical in its elements, and humanistic in scale and compositional principle. Man, the observer and participant, provides the key unit of proportion by which the whole is related and harmonized. A fifteenth-century church in France, such as Celles-sur-Belle (Deux-Sèvres) (Plate XVIII), is the opposite in principle and in detail. In that church, man is dwarfed, perhaps lost, in measureless, uninterrupted space, mysterious light, and continuous movement.

The original and distinctive character of fifteenth-century Northern architecture has, by now, been rather generally recognized. But in the historical studies of art, there is a telling void, for most writers, in one way or another, cut or taper off the history of Gothic architecture with the late thirteenth century. At best, they make an apologetic allusion to its decline, or fall, in the fourteenth century before proceeding to an enthusiastic epilogue for the more spectacular monuments of the fifteenth. The only exception is made in the case of England; France is left in limbo. France especially, says Pevsner, "did not wake up to the spatial and ornamental implications of the Late Gothic style until the end of the fifteenth century." Exceptions are admitted, but the great creative drive of the fifteenth century in the North is seen in England and, more especially, in Germany. (The Waldleben style of Germany is well illustrated by the Church of St. Georg in Dinkelsbühl [1448-92], whose richly elaborate vaulting textures the spatial progression, making Celles-sur-Belle seem barren.) Such a general picture is misleading and more than unjust, however, for we are asked to believe that once the great cathedrals of the thirteenth century had been completed, the original creative drive was totally exhausted, and Gothic architecture petered out or degenerated inconsequentially at the very center of its origin in the Île de France. The presumed decline is usually loosely connected, in a causal way, with the Hundred Years' War, the Black Death, and other disasters, which are convenient in time. Without even troubling to invoke catastrophic disruptions, students report that the decline simply continues in the fifteenth century.
The point at which this decline from riches to poverty supposedly occurred falls somewhere in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, at the time when the style shifts from High Gothic to what the French scholars have named *le style rayonnant.* I think we can and should offer a much better explanation of what happened than the mere assertion that Gothic architecture had completed all its purposes in France by the second half of the thirteenth century, and that afterward it merely spread, radiating over the rest of Europe. If proponents of the Rayonnant credit this architecture with a modicum of virtue as a style on the plateau of diffusion, other critics dismiss it without any allowance. Against the outline of what had been sought and attained in the pictorial arts of fourteenth-century France, we have the flat declaration by the authoritative English historian, Francis Bond, that thirteenth-century French architecture "died without an heir." There is nothing inherently impossible in the proposal that an architectural decline occurred during a period when painting and sculpture advanced with conspicuous success, but it does invite thoughtful questioning—questioning that reveals ultimately that this was actually not the case.

In the twelfth century, from its beginning to the attainment of High Gothic with Chartres, Gothic architecture of the Île de France was distinctly experimental, seeking new means by which this marvelous new style might be perfected. The architects of the cathedral at Laon, for example, still tried to combine the tribune galleries of the Romanesque cumulative and additive principle, with the triforium and the newly freed great clerestory (Plate I). But where the simple cylindrical piers of the nave show an even flow of the individual bays from west to east, the vaults treat a double bay as the single unit, by virtue of the use of sexpartite vaults in which three main intersecting ribs are extended over a pair of normal bays. The sexpartite vaults, in other words, are still an imperfect solution from the Gothic point of view. The unvaried sequence of nave piers partly camouflage the difficulty, but, at the same time, they announce the ambition of achieving a continuous and unbroken sweep of the whole nave as a spatial unit. The church at Chars (Seine-et-Oise), (Plate II), like Notre Dame in Paris, uses a circular rose, unglazed, at the triforium level, an overt indication of the experimental efforts to find a suitable treatment of the nave elevation. Like Notre Dame and Laon,
Chars preserves the tribune gallery, which is, from the point of view of Gothic style, an immense and disturbing spatial interval; for the tribune is an inert, dark, and restrictive element in the interior design. That these were crucial problems and of real concern to architects, is revealed not only by the very diversity of such solutions, but also by the consistent efforts made to resolve them. The Cathedral of Bourges is a spectacular instance of the elimination of the tribunes altogether, but it is accomplished by a tour de force. The nave elevation was designed in much the same proportions that it would have had with the tribune gallery, but no tribune was built, and so the nave arcade rises to an inordinate height, as do the adjacent aisles. The calculating ingenuity of the Bourges architect is further visible in his effort to minimize the static effect of the colonettes clustered about the main piers. He has reduced the colonettes to utmost and exceptional slenderness, and carried them consistently on all the piers, from the bases up into the vaults. The solution is not logical, gothically speaking, for the piers do not really tell the truth about the vaults since these are sexpartite. Thus, the vaults span two bays, but the piers and the colonettes make it appear that each individual bay has its own complete vault. The general effect of the Bourges interior is spectacular; but although it is charmingly gangling, it is less than elegant.

The classic type for the Gothic interior is virtually present in the Cathedral of Sens (Yonne), where the tribune has not merely been "excised" from an elevation with the old proportions, but excluded in principle; the triforium and clerestory have been brought down into the zone which the tribune occupied in Laon and Notre Dame. The nave elevation is now formed of nave arcade, triforium, and clerestory, related in normal proportions of height; and a combination has been formulated which announces the future tripartite elevation of the classic Gothic cathedrals. As we see it at Sens, the system is still retrospective in one respect, however; namely, in the sexpartite vaults and the double-bay unit. The piers, at least, indicate the vaulting situation quite logically, in that they show an alternation between simple cylindrical piers of columnar design and compound piers of bundled colonettes and shafts, running from the base to the springing of the vaults.

With the High Gothic cathedrals of the thirteenth century, the basic problems were resolved, and the solution, as seen in the naves of Chartres, Reims, Amiens (Plate V), and elsewhere, con-
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stitutes a classic Gothic architectural style. These cathedrals employ uniform quadripartite vaulting for every individual bay, finally harmonizing the bays of the arcade level with the vaults, in a genuine and consistent uniformity and continuity. They eliminate the tribune gallery once and for all. Moreover, the stone tracery, which is now employed within the frame of the clerestory zone, not only serves to hold and support the glass of the windows, but functions in the articulation of that zone with the whole elevation of the bay. With the classic elevation established, the architects could turn to refinements within the system. One of the important things which needed attention was that the three parts of the elevation constituted three separate zones which were superimposed above one another but not effectively interwoven. They dealt with this problem by subjecting the tripartite elements to a bipartite relationship in proportion, between the nave arcade as one unit, and the clerestory and triforium as the other.

The process of making sophisticated adjustments within the Gothic architectural clockwork brought still another subtle refinement, that of opening a window in the exterior wall behind the triforium. This innovation was instituted with Pierre de Monteneau's design for the nave of Saint-Denis (begun in 1231). The effect of the glazed triforium (Plate III) was to permanently link its aesthetic destiny with that of the clerestory. The idea spread quickly and became standard for both new construction and remodeling. It may be said to have been a pivotal factor in the extraordinary effect of the Cathedral of Beauvais (1247-72, Plate IV). The nave vault at Beauvais is of immense height (about 156 feet), the highest in Gothic building. The slenderness of the piers and the delicacy in the weight balance of the buttressing were achieved with such precarious finesse that the threshold of tolerable strain was passed in 1284, when the vaults collapsed. It was quickly rebuilt with reinforcement, however, and stands as the most spectacular symbol of Gothic architectural ambition, and as a visible expression of the powerful momentum which was driving Gothic further and further.

But it is not in the dazzling feat of Beauvais or in other sensational structures that the real, continuing search of Gothic is to be detected; for even in such works we can see that the architects were aware of still unsolved problems of principle. In the highly developed piers of the Cathedral of Reims, for instance, there persists a deferential allusion to the classical columnar principle in so
far as the piers are accentuated by capitals; their cumulative effect contains an element of static, metrical regularity. Even in the brilliant choir of Beauvais, the distinctness of the divisions between the narrow, successive bays is felt with a certain regularity. The triforium, an elegant screen of tracery, remains subdivided into separable units, each with its own gable, and separated from the next by the wall colonette. These examples are by no means exhaustive, but they will serve to illustrate some of the principal elements of High Gothic architecture which the masters of the Rayonnant period saw as problems and undertook to solve. And these were not problems of mere detail, although the most that has been said for the Rayonnant style is that it did make for changes in secondary detail. They are more than details, and they are hardly secondary: they represent the visible "creaking joints" of a yet imperfect system. In the eyes of the new generation of architects, they were more or less disturbing factors blocking the road ahead. The final solution of Gothic architecture would not have been possible before these aesthetic, technical, and structural problems had been solved.

Precise limits for the duration of the Rayonnant have not been proposed with any serious attempt at an exact definition. Although it has been assigned to an interval as broad as that between 1250 and 1400, we may take the span from about 1270 to 1370 as the one which embraces most of its characteristic manifestations. Already at Saint-Urbain of Troyes (Aube), begun in 1264 and almost finished by 1290, we see the new direction in its positive aspect (Plate VI). The choir, completed by 1266, still employs the triforium, but it is as nearly integral with the window as possible, and it has eliminated any vestige of the column by reducing the stone of the tracery to a veritable web of stone. The windows are glazed from buttress to buttress, and the tracery is so slender that it becomes subordinated to structure and forms a delicate filament against the light. In the nave, which dates from the second building campaign which ended in 1290, the triforium has been eliminated to effect a simple cage of light, which is supported on the arcades. The capitals of the nave piers have been almost entirely suppressed, and those which remain seem vestigial references to the old horizontal accents which marked that level. Furthermore, the mouldings of the nave arcades begin to merge with each other and with the piers. This effect is produced by the deep grooving of the profiles, but it is also a factor of the reduction of
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the capitals. These changes tend toward a pictorial unification of those elements which had, in the past, been articulated in an arithmetic and geometric relationship.

It might be pointed out that Saint-Urbain represents an extension of the principle of the High Gothic small chapel, such as the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris, to a small church. Although this is true, it does not alter the case for the character of the changes which were introduced, or the style in which the older elements were handled at this time. Indeed, it is significant that this period selected the chapel type to be continued and developed. Between the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris and Saint-Urbain of Troyes stands the chapel of the Virgin of Saint-Germer (Oise) of 1259-66, as an intermediate step in a definite progression. Nor is it surprising to find the type further developed in the rest of the thirteenth century and throughout the fourteenth. The idea of the one-cell church lent itself well to a very direct statement of complete spatial unification, and it is this which accounts for the sustained interest in the Sainte-Chapelle type. The Cathedral of Albi (Plate VII), begun in 1282 and completed during the fourteenth century, is the best-known example. It differs in radical essentials from the royal chapel in Paris, however, and the almost unbroken lines of the piers provide one key to the differences. The treatment of light also differs emphatically in spirit, for Albi plays on a sharp contrast between the darker chapels of the lower level and the concentrated lights of the deep clerestory. Kindred in its approach to the single-space-unit principle, is the Jacobin Church at Toulouse, ca. 1260-1305 (Plate VIII), actually a hall-church type, whose supports form a medial subdivision of the whole. That this church belongs to the special architecture of the mendicant orders does not suffice to account for its conscious use of the vaulting ribs as a textural enhancement for the entire upper zone. The sweep of the piers to the very level of the vaults also contributes to the effect of a drive toward total unification of the interior.

The application of the glass house or chapel type to churches represents one of the positive lines of the architectural advance of the fourteenth century in the direction of realizing the ambition to achieve a pictorial effect. In the church of Notre-Dame-des-Menus at Boulogne-Billancourt in Seine (Plate IX), built in a single campaign between 1329 and 1348, we have a small and nearly pure gem of this kind. Here we see how, at every stage, the elements of articulation (which had been accentuated in the High Gothic
of the thirteenth century) have become subordinated within a new concept of total unification. An ingenious and highly original extension of the single-cell system was carried out in the very fine Cathedral of Saint-Pierre (formerly the monastic Church of Saint-Bénédict) at Montpellier (Plate X). This church was conceived, planned, and built in one burst of enthusiastic activity, between 1364 and 1367, under the sponsorship of Pope Urban V, whose devotion to Montpellier stemmed from his years spent there as professor of canon law. Detailed correspondence and records remain to tell us that he was extremely pleased with the result. It is rather bare now, but we know that it had paintings, statues, gold and silver furnishings, and other embellishment, which would have provided those textural accents and the tonal warmth now lacking. The progression toward complete and consistent unity is beautifully achieved in the whole, and is felt at every critical structural juncture. The piers are almost unbroken in their flow from the floors into the vaulting ribs; the nave arcades form “picture frames” for the intervening spatial units of the chapels and the rich furnishings that they originally contained.

In the main line of development of the great cathedrals, the vital continuation and transformation are everywhere apparent; but no façade tells the story more brilliantly and completely than that of Strasbourg (Plate XI). Between 1276, when the new façade was begun, and 1365, when the base of the towers had been reached, was constructed one of the finest west fronts of any Gothic cathedral. It was new, however, and different from any before. The stone masses of the tower foundations and buttresses could hardly be eliminated, but they are beautifully transformed, and are expressed in the spatial and textural terms of that pictorial unification by which the Rayonnant began to carry Gothic architecture to its logical conclusion. We have the impression of penetration throughout, and the actual window openings seem no more than larger accents that are incidental to the perforation of the entire façade. Depth is suggested not so much by the actual volumes, but by the succession of spatial screens and the interplay of light among them. In place of the logic of the articulated façade structure of Amiens, Reims, or other High Gothic cathedrals, we have a pictorial concept of screened surface and depth, in graphic, linearized terms. The openings and solids interpenetrate in a lacework, or harpwork, of fine traceries, spun over the entire structure. But the process did not end with the break in the building campaign.
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in 1365, for it was taken up again in 1399, when the north octagon
of the tower was begun. It was completed in 1419, and the spire
was added between 1420 and 1439.

The interiors of the cathedrals underwent analogous transforma­
tions, which are even more remarkable in some ways because they
entailed the design and manipulation of complex units of extended
space. The Cathedral of Séez (Orne),\(^{42}\) whose choir, ca. 1270-94
(Plate XII), belongs to an early stage of the Rayonnant, points to
one of the solutions found to the problems encountered in achiev­
ing pictorial unity. The triforium and clerestory are united as
glazed areas, and the nave arcades have been ornamented in a
unique way with individual gables. Indeed, the vertical bars of
tracery for the triforium originate from the level of these gables,
announcing the intention of using the three traditional elevation
zones. The whole reads as a controlled progression of light from
plane to depth, just as in painting. The clerestory is a simple
plane; the triforium, screened by the tracery, develops limited
depth; and the main arcades lead to the deeper spatial intervals of
the aisles. Together the aisles comprise a framing zone of cubic
light compartments, thanks to the bold glazing of the outer walls
of the lower story. In a sense, the piers remain old-fashioned, but
they are not without novel subtlety, for the use of a single slender
shaft, carried from base to vault, reduces to a minimum the divi­
sions between the bays. This allows the upper walls to read
with more fluid continuity in a horizontal, as well as a vertical,
direction.

It is clear that we are now in a period in which the newly felt
possibilities of Gothic architecture are pursued in a vital, creative,
and highly original way. But the point may be worth fuller illus­
ration: At Saint-Thibault, in the Côte-d'Or in Burgundy (ca.
1297 to post 1323),\(^{43}\) we are struck by a remarkable reinstatement
of a blind gallery as part of a doubled triforium (Plate XIII). The
blind gallery is related to a unified vertical process, a continuous
tracery web that is formed with incredible gracility. This web
serves as a coloristic accent between the light plane of the clerestory
and the screened lighted space of the glazed triforium. The experi­
ment with this idea at Saint-Thibault shows, as clearly as anything
could, the calculated intent with which plane and depth, dark and
light, structure and texture, were used as the conscious aesthetic
means by which the Rayonnant sought to achieve new effects
related to new purposes. Such departures are most indicative for
a positive interpretation of the more “classical” Rayonnant three-story glass cage, such as Saint-Sulpice-de-Favières in Seine-et-Oise (Plate XIV).44

Constructed at about this same time, the Benedictine Abbey Church of Saint-Ouen at Rouen, the choir of which was built between 1318 and 1339 (Plate XV),45 represents a purer return to the main line of the older French Gothic, but with the addition of such new ideas and elements as we have observed from previous examples. The piers became continuous, all-embracing “moldings,” while the upper elements of the nave elevation were subdivided to such an extent that they became virtually linearized. As at Séez, the outer walls of the aisles are meant to be read in relationship to the whole design of the nave. Between the piers, there is total fenestration (Plate XVI), and a subtly refined development from plane to expansive spatial units. From walls of light in the clerestory, we progress to screens of light in the triforium and in the view through the arcade to the outer wall. The vast unity of the nave is framed by a ring of light, composed of the aisles and the ambulatory—the counterpart in depth of the crowning plane of light in the clerestory.

In making my claims for a positive interpretation of the French Rayonnant, I am well aware of those views which give English architecture exclusive priority in the fourteenth century. Enthusiasm for English architecture needs no new endorsements. However, the historical evaluation of it needs correction and amendment along the lines of a total stylistic analysis rather than excerpted citations of individual elements of the style. For instance, it is said that the English Decorated style, ca. 1250 to 1330 or 1340, is the catalyst which, in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, brought architecture back to life in France with the beginning of the Flamboyant.46 (The Rayonnant, it will be recalled, is considered a dying—if not dead—architecture.) I have tried to show that, to the contrary, French architecture vigorously pursued new aims during this period that is presumed to be a void. How does the French Rayonnant, thus revealed, compare with the contemporary English style?

The Decorated is well represented by Exeter Cathedral, the nave of which was built in 1328-42 (Plate XVII), which has been called “perhaps the most harmonious of all church interiors of the Decorated (or Curvilinear) style.”47 The elaborate lierne vault is no doubt splendid, but to the eye accustomed to “orthodox”
principle in Gothic architecture, the effect of that vault upon the interior is strangely incongruous. Instead of providing a climax toward which the nave moves in its vertical development, the vault overwhelms the interior. One reason for this is that the ratio of the height to the width is "crushingly low," so that the vaults appear to seal the nave space. Another is the curiously evasive way in which Exeter and other English churches of the time deal with the problem of articulation between the ribbed vaulting system and the main piers. Instead of being linked to each other or developing from and into each other, the wall shafts, which are drawn down from the vault ribs, rest on sculptured corbels that are set just above the abaci of the piers. In effect, this original but disruptive device masks the point of expected juncture of the shafts with the piers in so far as continuity and articulation are concerned. The different color of the piers, their abaci, and the number of the capitals of the colonettes accentuate the horizontal division in the design in a way which further militates against balance and harmony in the vertical development. We have but to think of such Rayonnant naves as that of the contemporary Saint-Ouen at Rouen (Plate XV) to appreciate the difference between the English system and the French, which clearly and cogently integrated these same elements.

The "Bishop's Eye" in the south transept of Lincoln Cathedral (ca. 1325) and the great east window of Carlisle (1293-1322) are among the most beautiful expressions of the English Curvilinear style. The system of tracery which they employ anticipates by some fifty years its general use in French Flamboyant. But although they are, in this way, prophetic, their achievement is restricted to those individual parts of the building; the architectural style of the entire edifice is not affected. In the French Rayonnant, however, comparable additions and remodeling were carried out with scrupulous and subtle concern that such changes be at least integrated with the whole of that particular area of the structure. Thus on the interior face of the entrance wall of the north transept of the Cathedral of Meaux (Seine-et-Marne), the added screen of wall tracery is composed in relation to a new triforium, so that the entire wall expresses the newer aesthetic of line, plane, light, and space. The fact that the architectural vocabulary is still that of the Geometric style, which English architects had already outgrown by the turn of the fourteenth century, becomes secondary. At Meaux, as elsewhere in France where similar remodeling was
in progress, the composition follows the original principles and logic of the first Gothic; but, at the same time, it advances it, as a whole architectural system, in the new direction. The English architects relished and exalted the vaulting ribs, adding ridge-ribs, multiplying the tiercerons, and exploiting both the spatial and textural possibilities of ribbing with great ingenuity, as in the aisle vaults of Bristol (ca. 1298-1332) and in the glorious choir of Gloucester (ca. 1331-50). This was obviously not an aspect of church architecture which entranced the French designers, however. The ridge-rib was known in France as early as the twelfth century, and the tiercerons are to be found in the local Angevin style of the thirteenth century. It cannot be an accident, therefore, that these were not adopted more generally, and that the French used the elaborated rib system mainly for domical vaults or in tower vaults. We can only conclude that they were aware of the effect that such ribs had of tending to enclose and delimit space. As we have observed in the English examples, the elaborate ribbed vault created a textured surface whose effect conflicted with the logical relationships within the canonic system of structure, supports, vertical articulation, and continuity in space.

While English architecture of the fourteenth century may, in such respects, have departed emphatically from the fundamental line of Gothic style, it is not to be devalued on that account, nor can anything be detracted from the originality and precocity for which it is adequately recognized. Rather, its deviations—even aberrations—from "true" Gothic provide an important foil against which French architecture of the period may be better understood. To speak of "true" Gothic may seem to prejudge the issue, but Gothic style in architecture must have as its essential condition such principles as we may be able to find in that system which was begun and brought to fruition in France during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Whatever else is found in that interval may be shown to have been borrowed from the Île de France. The revaluation of French Rayonnant architecture proposed in this paper would indicate that in the fourteenth century, too, France remained true to the central principles and the main line of the Gothic development. Far from bringing about decline, Rayonnant architects carried Gothic style forward toward its logical conclusion along the lines of a most authentic principle. They completed the solution of those problems left by the thirteenth century and gave
to the fifteenth its modern architecture.\textsuperscript{54} And this accomplishment did not remain an internal affair, for we can see the diffusion of French Rayonnant beyond national borders in such works as Antwerp Cathedral.\textsuperscript{55}

Celles-sur-Belle (Plate XVIII) is a pure continuation of French fourteenth-century style into the fifteenth century; its Flamboyant detail is practically invisible against the chaste perfection of that Rayonnant framework which is at the foundation of its style. The Church of Saint-Séverin in Paris is a more manifest Flamboyant transformation of the fourteenth-century style (Plate XX).\textsuperscript{56} The continuous and unified Rayonnant piers have been twisted on the axial point in the ambulatory in an expressive response to the complex spatial situation in the eastern portions of the building. Here, however, is an instance in which the Rayonnant has not quite attained a satisfactory resolution of the aesthetic and technical problem of the Gothic church building. That the problem was seen and tackled, however, is perfectly plain when we look at the ambulatory of the Cathedral of Narbonne, whose eastern portions date from 1272 to 1319 (Plate XIX).\textsuperscript{57} Here the attempt to achieve unity and continuity among the irregular bays of the ambulatory has been made by means of a novel treatment of the ribs and their corresponding moldings on the piers; but the "engaged colonettes" contrast awkwardly with the main body of the huge cylindrical piers.\textsuperscript{58} At Saint-Séverin, however, the response of the piers to the rib-system in the vaults has been easily and harmoniously resolved. Indeed, this solution not only expresses the complex curving movements of the ambulatory, but enhances it. Here, then, was attained the final step in achieving total pictorial unity and the spatial equivalent in depth of those characteristics of Flamboyant style which had been superficially connected with tracery alone. Those mouchettes ("bellows") and soufflets ("falchions") of Flamboyant tracery are but the aesthetic keys of a stylistic score which expresses the dramatic, fused continuity in all of the architectural relationships of the whole structure.

The church at Brou, built as late as 1513-32,\textsuperscript{59} may serve to remind us that what the fourteenth century achieved in its Rayonnant architecture made possible the final Gothic of the Flamboyant, the style which could and did survive in the North during that very century when painting and sculpture yielded more and more to the Italian Renaissance. Whichever of them we may prefer, it was Flamboyant which thrived as the strong, almost
impervious compeer of the architecture of revived antique principle in Italy. We might do well to speak of Rayonnant as Late Gothic, and Flamboyant as Last, or Final, Gothic, by way of expressing more adequately the full scope of the essential continuity which connects the entire development of Gothic architecture in France.

5. The most comprehensive presentation of the whole development in this broad sense is to be found in Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), especially in the Introduction and first chapter. There is no comparable treatment of the sculpture of this period, but an extensive index to recent literature may be found in D. Roggen, “Praesluteriaanse, Sluteriaanse, Post-Sluteriaanse Nederlandse Sculptuur,” *Gentse Bijdragen tot de Kunstgeschiedenis*, XVI (1955-56), 181 ff.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 63. Panofsky points out that although the Northern artists had followed Sienese and North Italian inspiration earlier in the century, it was not until the end of it that they were able to grasp the spirit and style of the Florentine school.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 36 ff., and Fig. 23.
17. The architecture of the Midi is the one regional exception. See Raymond Rey, *L'Art gothique du Midi de la France* (Paris, 1934), p. 335: "Le déclin du XIIIe siècle et la première moitié du XIVe furent dans le Midi un printemps architectural." See also Pevsner, *op. cit.*, p. 60: "Only in the midi there exists work of European significance." Rey, however, sees in this architecture the link of continuity between Romanesque and the Renaissance: "Le gothique du Midi est le prolongement du roman" (p. 334), and "Si la Renaissance a retrouvé l'antiquité, elle a aussi amplifié et rajeuni le gothique français du Midi en l'étendant à toute l'Europe" (p. 335).

18. John Harvey, *The Gothic World* (London, 1950), Fig. 177.


21. C. R. Morey, in *Mediaeval Art* (New York, 1942), virtually omits any discussion of fourteenth-century architecture. Jean Bony, in *French Cathedrals* (London, 1951), pp. 12-13, treats the changes brought in with Rayonnant with sympathetic insight, but seems to regard the development as an anticlimax. De Lasteyrie, in *op. cit.*, I, 113, is, at least, well aware of the continuity between fourteenth- and thirteenth-century architecture, and of the character of the changes made in the parts of the structure ("l'art gothique n'avait cessé d'évoluer"). He maintains, furthermore, that the changes made during these two centuries are analogous to those made during the twelfth and thirteenth. However, he does not attach so much importance to the changes in the fourteenth century as to those in the thirteenth. Moreover, he does not view the character of Rayonnant style as a distinct achievement, but as a continuous modification of parts. Indeed, for him the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries represent a single period and style (cf. Vol. II, p. 5 n. I).

22. *Gothic Architecture in England* (London, 1905), p. 128: "French architecture was practically annihilated. Her thirteenth-century style ceased to be; and died without an heir." Although she states it in less blunt terms, this seems also to be the belief of Lefrançois-Pillion, in *op. cit.*, p. 8, who places painting and sculpture on a par with progressive developments in Europe but finds architecture "celui qui reste le plus tributaire du passé et paraît le moins gros d'avenir."


25. Ibid., I, 17; also compare the illustrations on pp. 54, 55 for a similar treatment of the elevation at Notre Dame, which represents an earlier project for the interior.


27. See Bony, op. cit., Plates LXV, LXVI.

28. See Panofsky, Gothic Architecture, passim.

29. Ibid., pp. 78-79. See also Sumner McK. Crosby, L'Abbaye Royale de Saint-Denis (Paris, 1953), Plates LVI-LVIII.

30. Arthur Kingsley Porter, in Mediaeval Architecture (New Haven, 1912), II, 278, says that this change was achieved at the expense of logic and "marked the first falling-off of Gothic architecture from strictly structural principles." In its retrospective orientation, this approach is typical of the view that High Gothic represents the final solution. The argument of the present paper is that Rayonnant architecture represents a pictorial ambition and achievement. Seen in this light, the glazed triforium is a precocious and logical step in the new direction.

31. Compare this view with the usual position that Beauvais marks the final peak of Gothic architectural development in France. See Pevsner, op. cit.: "Rheims, Amiens and Beauvais did nothing more than perfect [the system of Chartres]" (p. 42); and, "Rheims, Amiens and Beauvais are the final achievement of an evolution," and, later, "This balance of high tensions is the classic expression of the Western spirit—as final as the temple of the 5th century B.C. was that of the Greek spirit" (p. 46).

32. "Il n'y aura plus évolution ou progrès que secondaire" (Lefrançois-Pillion, op. cit., p. 18). Joan Evans, in Art in Mediaeval France (London, 1948), p. 94, cites as "the only great innovation of this time," the addition of the side chapels along the nave. De Lasteyrie, op. cit., I, 113 and elsewhere, regards the changes as less important than those of the thirteenth century, although he is most alert to the changes and analyzes them in detail.

33. De Lasteyrie, in op. cit., II, 5 n. 1, calls the period from 1140 to 1200 gothique primitif; it was followed by a single period from 1200 to 1400 which he calls gothique.

34. Porter, in op. cit., II, 322, says: "St. Urbain, perhaps the lightest and most fragile of all Gothic constructions, represents the acme of rayonnant architecture, and were not its dates firmly established might well be assigned to an epoch at least fifty years later."


36. Ibid., I, 115, Fig. 82.

37. See Rey, op. cit., pp. 99 ff., in which there are illustrations and comments about the original appearance of the interior before the addition of the tribunes.

38. Ibid., pp. 55 ff.


42. De Lasteyrie, *op. cit.,* I, 140-41, etc.


46. Cf. Harvey, *op. cit.,* p. 74: "The resulting English Curvilinear Decorated style invaded France, and became by virtue (or vice?) of French logic Flamboyant, when England had abandoned curves for the insular right lines of Perpendicular." Cf. also, Pevsner, *op. cit.,* p. 73. The position is usually supported by evidence that tracery forms in England seem to anticipate the Flamboyant adoption of similar designs in France, but this is not strictly true (cf. Bony, *op cit.,* p. 15). Moreover, the argument implies that Flamboyant style derives from architectural detail, and this is inherently unlikely. For reactions against the thesis of English priority, see Max M. Tamir, "The English Origin of the Flamboyant Style," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* XXIX (1926), 257 ff., and the conclusion: "It is more plausible to consider the curvilinear style and the flamboyant style as parallel in the application of certain decorative elements and of certain peculiarities of construction" (pp. 267-68).


48. Bond, in *op. cit.,* pp. 53-54, includes Gloucester and Tewkesbury in this class.

49. Cf. *ibid.,* pp. 240-41, which contains lengthy comments on the inadequacy, insecurity, and illogical character of the solutions in many of the English churches.


51. Cf. De Lasteyrie, *op. cit.,* I, 306, and II, 264. The principles underlying this system of giving a unified treatment to a wall by extending the tracery designs over solid areas is already announced in the designs of Jean de Chelles for the south transept façade of Notre Dame in Paris, begun in 1258.