

THE MEDIEVAL CATHEDRAL: FOUNDATIONS AND ECHOES
Freshman Seminar 59: Nathaniel Lane Taylor

I. Catalogue Copy

Nathaniel Taylor will offer an interdisciplinary seminar on the medieval cathedral. Works of art and vessels of meaning, cathedrals are at the same time relics of a distant medieval past and vital icons in a changing and continuous present. Using the cathedral as a vantage point, we will explore themes in the culture and society of the High Middle Ages relevant to cathedrals, considering both the social and aesthetic currents surrounding the cathedrals' creation and, hopefully, the ways in which cathedrals (and their parent culture) continue to resonate in the modern world. Topics will include the structure and influence of the medieval Church; cathedrals and their patronage; pilgrimage; liturgy and music; cathedral schools and the origins of universities; basic architectural vocabulary and theological representation. We will also consider modern descendants and revivals of some of these medieval aesthetic fashions and social currents. In addition to providing a concrete overview of these key elements of medieval civilization, this seminar should help us develop our appreciation of the medieval cultural accretions which still surround us.

II. Themes, Goals and Requirements

After a preliminary discussion of period definitions in the first week, succeeding units will be thematically presented, covering several facets of the 'High Middle Ages' (roughly 1000-1400) in which the most lasting medieval cultural achievements were realized. Reading will include introductory primary and secondary material (including portions of some works, such as Adams' *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, which are acknowledged as cultural icons themselves), accompanied normally by some reading focusing on the modern relevance of the topics addressed. In addition, recordings (medieval and neo-medieval music) and visual material (art and architecture) will be used in class discussion; medieval images accessible on the Internet will be integrated into assignments and discussions.

The first two weeks lay the foundation for understanding the cathedral in its medieval social and institutional context. Weeks 3 to 6 focus intensively on interdisciplinary source material and the interplay of the aesthetic and religious experience. Weeks 7, 8 and 9 explore relevant social-historical contexts. The final three weeks are less structured to accommodate student presentations and the shared reading of a novel, Golding's *The Spire*, to explore some of the inner issues accompanying the pursuit of a religious aesthetic.

Independent assignments will include a five-page essay early on in the semester (week 3); a brief oral and visual presentation in week 5; and a more substantial final project involving both an in-class presentation and a formal paper (12-15 pp.). Project ideas will be discussed in class around the eighth week; they will be formally presented (and discussed) during the last two regular class meetings, in addition to continued joint exploration of modern resonances and literary perspectives.

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Freshman Seminar 59

Wednesdays, Memorial Hall 302, 2:00-4:00

Weekly Syllabus

(Books marked with an asterisk [*] are available for purchase at the Coop.)

1. 29 September. *The Middle Ages—Introduction, Definitions.*

What are the 'Middle Ages'? What are they in the 'middle' of? Where does the term come from? 'High' and 'Low' Middle Ages; Early and Late Middle Ages. Henry Adams, Jacques Le Goff, Jean Gimpel: what are the Middle Ages that they evoke? Focus on Henry Adams.

Toby Burrows, "Unmaking 'the middle ages,'" *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981), 127-34.

Fred C. Robinson, "'Medieval', the 'Middle Ages,'" *Speculum* 59 (1984), 745-756.

Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, pp. 18-23: "For an Extended Middle Ages."

*Henry Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, preface, chapters 1-3 and 5.

Jean Gimpel, *The Cathedral Builders*, pp. 1-6.

2. 6 October. *Bishops, Cathedrals and the Medieval Church.*

Structure and growth of the Church as an institution in the early Middle Ages. Who and what is a bishop? What is his role in the society? In the Church?

**Rule of Saint Benedict* (pay attention to the chapter headings; you needn't read it all).

*Richard W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (pp. 15-52, 170-213).

*Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy*, 9-52.

*Georges Duby, *The Age of the Cathedrals*, 3-53.

Medieval Timelines: contribute to a short list of important dates and factual information for reference. My timeline: the compendium of Biblical history of Peter of Poitiers—the oldest surviving visual classroom aid in the Western world (c. 1215).

3. 13 October. *The Church and the World.*

What was the function of the Church (upper-case 'C') as an institution in medieval society? What was the role of the church (lower-case 'c') as an edifice in the medieval community? The church was the scene of dialogue between human and saint. What was the social role of the church in the eyes of those in charge of it? How was salvation to be achieved?

Lorna Price, *The Plan of Saint Gall in Brief* (consider the *plan* itself and its historical context).

Horn & Born. *The Plan of St Gall: a study of the architecture & economy of & life in a paradigmatic Carolingian monastery*, 3 vols. (Berkeley, 1979). [You **must** look at this elaborate, beautiful, award-winning three-volume study of the one-page 'plan of Saint-Gall'. You needn't read it: just look at it.]

*Georges Duby, *The Age of the Cathedrals*, 54-74.

Jean Gimpel, *The Cathedral Builders*, 7-47.

*Suger (Abbot of Saint-Denis), *De administratione sua*, trans. Erwin Panofsky, in *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of Saint-Denis and its art treasures*.

First writing assignment: Abbot Suger's religion (see assignments sheet).

4. 20 October. *Architecture, Theology, Technology.*

Cathedrals epitomize intellectual, technological and aesthetic refinement and considerable cultural pride on the part of their medieval creators. Basic characteristics of style called 'Romanesque' or 'Gothic'. How does the church edifice itself encompass theological concepts central to medieval Christianity? Structural components, floor plans, ornamentation. How is the message presented?

*Henry Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, chs. 6-7.

*Robert G. Calkins, *Monuments of Medieval Art*, chs. 14-17 (Romanesque), 21-23 (Gothic).

*Georges Duby, *The Age of the Cathedrals*, 91-187.

Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France: the Thirteenth Century: a study of medieval iconography and its sources* (Princeton 1984), 'Introduction', pp. 3-23, & 'Conclusion', pp. 395-402.

Walter Horn, "Survival, Revival, Transformation: the Dialectic of Development in Architecture and Other Arts," in *Renaissance and renewal in the twelfth century: Papers presented at a conference marking the 50th anniversary of the publication of Charles Homer Haskins' Renaissance of the twelfth century*, ed. Benson and Constable, 711-727.

5. 27 October. *Religion and Art: Structure, Ornament, Iconography and Scripture.*

The cathedral was decorated with narrative and parabolic art: stone, wood and glass. Images reinforced the basic scriptural examples and pastoral exhortations that were the intended messages of the clergy and preoccupations of the artists. What was the meaning and value of such images as the Temptation of Eve, the Last Judgement, or the Tree of Jesse? What other stock representations crowded the capitals, windows and portals?

*Henry Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, chs. 8-10.

*Robert G. Calkins, *Monuments of Medieval Art*, chs. 14-17 (Romanesque), 21-23 (Gothic).

Images/Plates: James Snyder, *Medieval Art*; Robert G. Calkins, *Medieval Architecture in Western Europe*; Georges Duby, *The Europe of the Cathedrals* [*History of Medieval Art*, part 2].

First presentations: share a facet of a specific cathedral; place it in context (see assignments sheet).

6. 3 November. *Liturgy and Music in the Church (and Outside).*

Music to accompany the liturgy had roots older than Christianity itself. What are the major ritual and liturgical components of Christian worship? What is the importance of music in the life of the clergy? the parishioners? In the Romanesque and Gothic centuries, liturgical music evolved from monophonic (one-voice) plainsong into polyphonic (part-song) style; secular music, which always derived from religious forms, followed suit and flowered into new forms, matching new poetic genres. Examples of medieval and medieval-influenced music from the twelfth to twentieth centuries. Why has chant become so popular again recently? What do you think of it?

Richard Hoppin, *Medieval Music*, pp. 30-56; 116-142.

Handouts (and/or www images):

The liturgical calendar: leaves from the *Très riches heures*.

Liber usualis: Epiphany vespers psalm & antiphon in the standard office book.

Christmas Matins: The Tree of Jesse and the *genealogia Christi*.
Early musical notation in liturgical manuscripts: sample leaves.
Thirteenth-century sacred/secular motet lyrics.

Recordings: representative monophonic and polyphonic liturgical pieces (with handouts).

Note: today we will take a tour of Memorial Hall after a shorter class. Focus: commemorative architecture.

7. 10 November. *Cathedral Schools and the Origins of Universities*.

Cathedral and court schools were actively supported in the Carolingian Renaissance; some evolved by the twelfth-century into complex professional and intellectual centers with international reputations. The first alumni of full-fledged universities (Paris, Bologna) fueled what is called the 'Renaissance of the Twelfth Century'. What were the original goals of 'higher education'? Remember my timeline: Peter of Poitiers' *Compendium of Biblical History* (based on the work of Peter the Eater). Peter was Chancellor of the University of Paris.

David Knowles, *Evolution of Medieval Thought* (chs. 6-7, 10, 13-14).

Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (chs. 2, 3, 12).

Peter Abelard, *Historia calamitatum* ('story of my troubles') in *The Letters of Abelard & Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice.

Jean Gimpel, *The Cathedral Builders*, 89-153.

8. 17 November. *The Laity and the Cathedral: Patronage and Pilgrimage*.

For the aristocracy, the church was a close ally; a career path for younger sons and brothers of rulers, a repository of administrative expertise, and a spiritual militia to save the souls of the lords and the community. Among the general populace, economic improvements and new social freedoms allowed the rise of pilgrimage as a form of personal religious activity. In addition to accomplishing a religious act, pilgrims transmitted artistic and religious ideas and artifacts throughout the paths of their pilgrimages. 'Pilgrimage churches' were the lucky cosmopolitan beneficiaries of this movement.

Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: an image of Mediaeval Religion*, chs. 7,8,10 & 12. (pp. 98-136, 146-167, 211-216).

* *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*, trans. William Melczar, pp. 84-133.

Richard Fletcher, *Saint James's catapult: the life and times of Diego Gelmirez of Santiago de Compostela* (ch. 4, pp. 78-101).

Visit the *El camino de Santiago* www site at UCLA:

(<http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/santiago/iagohome.html>).

Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales* (prologue).

9. 1 December. *The Laity and the Cathedral: the 'Investiture Conflict' and Saint Thomas Becket*

The secular importance of the cathedral was inevitable as bishops were powerful lords in their own right, serving both king and Pope. Becket, by training a royal functionary, was murdered because he chose Pope over king. What are the resonances of Becket's martyrdom? Focus on Eliot's play.

Richard W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages*, pp. 118-134.

* Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy*, pp. 63-117.

Frank Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, chs. 6-12 (long); focus on chs. 11-12.

*T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*.

10. 8 December. *Echoes: Cathedrals and 'Medievalism' in the modern world*.

What is the importance of the cathedral in the modern imagination? Since the nineteenth century, there have been consistent currents of medieval revival in architecture, painting and the decorative arts, literature, and historical scholarship on many levels. What are the goals of these movements to recapture something medieval?

Mark Girouard, *Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman*, 15-128.

Henry James, *A Little Tour in France* (1884), chapters on Tours, Bourges, Le Mans, Toulouse, Avignon.

Visit and examine the websites for the two great American Gothic cathedrals:

Saint John the Divine in New York City

<http://www.stjohndivine.org/title2.html>, and

The National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

<http://www.cathedral.org/cathedral/>

11-12. 15 December, 5 January. *Presentations of Projects in Progress*.

Finally, we return to the permanence of the cathedral as an icon in Western culture. These two novels present the cathedral as a character and explore the actions of individuals in relation to the cathedral. *The Spire* considers the kind of individual who could provide the impetus for the creation of a cathedral (or part of it) and deals with the cost of such an effort. What do we make of the motivations? Of the difficulties? In *Notre-Dame*, individuals operate around, in, and on the cathedral as a stage which is also a player. What do these works share in presenting the cathedral, or criticizing it?

Read:

*William Golding, *The Spire*.

Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, book 3 at least.

Project due in written form on January 12.

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First Writing Assignment

Read Abbot Suger's 'De administratione sua' and the 'Libellus alter de consecratione', translated by Erwin Panofsky in *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of Saint-Denis* (on reserve).

Explore the essence of Suger's work from his own perspective: What are his goals in directing the monastery? What is the purpose of his 'improvements' to his church? How do they further his goals? Does Suger regard his work as a success?

Build your essay (4-5 pp.) with Suger's own words in mind. You may want to photocopy the texts (21 pp. for the 'De administratione', 20 for the 'De consecratione').

Don't be led astray by Panofsky's extensive commentary in the remaining pages of the Suger book. Panofsky was interested in minutely dissecting all the passages that referred to the specific architectural, decorative and artisanal programs that crop up in the text. Focus on the goals and motivations for these projects revealed in Suger's text.



First Oral Presentation

For your first presentation, speak for five minutes on a specific architectural feature or important decorative artwork associated with a medieval cathedral. You should illustrate your presentation with slides from the Fine Arts slide collection, or plates from a book that can be passed around.

It's easier to focus on one detail—a window or group of windows, a facade or sculptural group, an architectural feature or segment of the church representing one building period—than to try to describe an entire edifice and all it contains in five minutes. Find an illustration, either as a plate in a book, or as a slide (from the Fogg collection). Here are some suggested orientation questions that might help you meaningfully share it:

Where is the church?

When was the church built? All at once, or in successive phases (more usual)?

When was the specific detail, portion of the church, or decorative element made? Or, what phase of building or ornamentation (in the history of its church) does it belong to?

Under whose patronage was the church, or feature, or artwork, produced?

If you focus on a piece or a program of figural art (i.e. representing people or animals, etc.), what does it represent? Is it scriptural / liturgical? Is it a saint or a scene from a saint's life?

If it is an architectural element, what is its function, either structurally or liturgically?

How would YOU describe the style in which it is rendered?

What details do you notice that affect your description of it? How has anyone else described it? What have they said about its significance? (You don't have to do an exhaustive search of the historiography around an item, but you might comment on why a picture of it was shown in a book where you found it, etc.)

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Final Project

By now you've explored cathedrals from many different perspectives (not so many specific cathedrals, perhaps, as the *idea* of them). In your first presentations you shared an attractive, intriguing or representative physical feature of a specific cathedral. Use this opportunity to delve into detail about a thematic feature you have found most interesting—not just a specific church. Indeed, it doesn't have to be artistic or involve visual arts at all, though it could. Brainstorm ideas and *email them to me* soon. I don't want someone deciding at the last minute to do something absurdly vast, like 'The cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris' or 'Stained Glass Windows'. Be creative, but come up with a focused questionnaire, drawing on specific sources that can be digested well. Hunt for sources creatively, and ask me for suggestions, too.

In your class presentation, be prepared to talk about (in ten minutes) the main focus of your project, the sources, and what you find most rewarding and most frustrating about it. Ask the group for advice, and troll for suggestions and feedback. When you listen to other presentations, relate them to your own; offer suggestions and ask questions where you think you or the presenter might benefit from it.

Possible topics or topic families: Artistic/architectural focus:

Rose windows: religious significance (choose one or two (at most) windows as examples).

The Sketchbook of the architect Villard de Honnecourt.

Images of the Last Judgement (choose one or two as examples); *or*

The Tympanum (other designs).

Portrait sculpture: famous and beautiful (but very different) ones at Chartres, Naumburg.

Who's is biggest: vault height? spire height? bay width? nave length? most altars? most relics/ patron saints? Most beautiful/hideous?

The Beauvais collapse. What happened? What did people think of it/do about it? Report on the work of Robert Mark, *Experiments in Gothic Structure* (MIT, 1982).

A variant: stress analysis and the utility of buttresses, scissor arches, etc., in the support of added spires. Consider Wells and Salisbury. See Mark, *Experiments in Gothic Structure*.

Gargoyles and grotesques. What is their significance?

Tomb fashions: Flat floor slabs; wall niches; free—standing ones; different types of effigies. How do changing tomb designs reflect attitudes towards the church edifice?

Possible topics or topic families: Social/historical focus:

Murdered medieval bishops other than Thomas Becket: find some (there're a few). Why were they murdered? What does it say about the role of the cathedral in politics?

Saint's cults (Examples: The Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Saint Martin, etc.).

The cult of relics; reliquaries.

Relics and relic theft (read Einhard's account of relic stealing in Rome in the ninth century, in Dutton's *Carolingian Civilization: a Reader*): Why was it done? How does this influence our perception of clerical sincerity?

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Here are some of my favorite medieval URLs:

1. Labyrinth (Georgetown University Medieval Studies Home Page):
<http://www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/labyrinth-home.html>

This is a great starting point because it has many links to lots of other stuff: institutions, text, graphic repositories, discussion lists, etc.

2. Medieval Art & Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh:
<http://www1.pitt.edu/~medart/>

This has many, many scanned images of English and French medieval church architecture. A major resource.

3. Internet Medieval Sourcebook:
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html>

A major source of primary texts in translation, mostly now in the public domain. If you're looking for a famous (or obscure) medieval document—check here.

4. Gregorian Chant Home Page (Princeton):
http://www.music.princeton.edu:80/chant_html/

A basic resource for exploring Gregorian chant and medieval liturgy.

5. The Amiens Project (Columbia):
<http://www.learn.columbia.edu/Mcahweb/Amiens.html>

The most elaborate and complex website devoted to cathedral architecture, accompanying Professor Murray's book on Amiens Cathedral (see also his book on Beauvais). Photographs, plans, computer modeling, and more.

6. El Camino de Santiago (UCLA):
<http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/santiago/iagohome.html>

A very good www introduction to the most important aspect of the medieval pilgrimage scene. Includes quotations from the medieval 'Pilgrim's guide to Santiago' in modern Spanish.

7. A Virtual Tour of Durham Cathedral:
http://www.dur.ac.uk/~dla0www/c_tour/tour1.html

A fine on-line brochure of a remarkable cathedral.