Book Reviews

Canterbury Cathedral and its Romanesque Sculpture. By Deborah Kahn. 230 pp. + 278 b. & w. ills. (Harvey Miller, London, 1991), £38. ISBN 0-905203-18-6.

Our present understanding of English romanesque sculpture has been shaped very largely by the writings, over some four decades, of George Zarnecki. His will remain the great work of synthesis. It falls to his followers either to elaborate on his model, with perhaps a little fine-tuning, or to try to approach the material in some radically different way, always at the risk of destabilising the edifice and possibly of reducing it yet again to fragments. In her book on the romanesque sculpture of Canterbury Cathedral, Deborah Kahn pursues the former course; its lavish format notwithstanding, this is a careful, unpretentious and conventional study of one of the major ensembles of English romanesque sculpture.

After a brief introduction, the author embarks on an account of the surviving romanesque architectural sculpture of Christ Church Canterbury from c.1070 to 1180, dealing in three successive chapters with the major building campaigns of the period: the first post-Conquest cathedral, the new crypt and choir of Archbishop Anselm, and the enlargement of the monastic complex under Prior Wibert. In a fourth chapter, she discusses the building and furnishing of the revolutionary gothic choir begun after the conflagration of 1174. Finally there are short appendices on the Infirmary complex and on the twelfth-century reliefs of Thomas Becket. A succinct outline of the relevant political and ecclesiastical history is provided throughout the book, which is generously illustrated (although there is, surprisingly, only one plan) and fully annotated.

Chapter I, covering the sculpture of the time of Archbishop Lanfranc, is inevitably short for the material remains of the Norman Kingdom's first cathedral are few. Roughly one quarter of the total text, on the other hand, is devoted to an examination of the design and decoration of the crypt, the eastern extension of Lanfranc's church begun by his successor, Anselm, after 1093. This section makes extensive use of material first studied and published forty years ago; those familiar with Zarnecki's work will find the parallels between capital sculpture and broadly contemporary, sometimes locally executed, manuscript decoration as striking as ever. Such is the similarity between motifs in the two media that Kahn is led to suggest both were produced by one and the same group of people. She insists, too, on the dependence of capital sculpture on manuscript illumination. In these views she is far from alone, but one wonders if the truth of the matter is not more elusive and complex. Kahn brings us up to date by summarising recent scholarship on the architectural iconography of the crypt, the date of its sculpture, and the Imperial pedigree of the cushion capital. The subject of the remainder of this chapter is less well-trodden ground, namely the surviving capital sculpture of the external blank arcading of Anselm's choir. This is interesting and little-known material and it could well have been treated in greater detail, given the author's particularly close association with it.

The principal contribution which Deborah Kahn has already made to our knowledge of the cathedral and monastic complex concerns the architectural sculpture produced during the priorate of Wibert (1152/3-67). The third chapter of the book, in which the pace and density of the text markedly increase, covers this period. Kahn brings to the fore and clarifies the extent, character and chronology of the sculpture of church and precinct in the 1150s and 60s. In so doing, she identifies an undeniable and hitherto unremarked filiation between capital sculpture at Christ Church and that of the nave vault responds of La Trinité, Caen. This is no mean achievement in two such well-studied monuments. It exemplifies, too, the author's unerring visual acuity (witness also her stunning comparison of capitals on the Great Gate at Canterbury with one from the Rhineland, ills.222-23).

This book inevitably invites comparison with the last major monograph on the Cathedral, Frank Woodman's *The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral* (1981). In many respects, the two could hardly differ more. Woodman's is a provocative and engaging book, wider in scope and usefully reckless in some of its pronouncements. Kahn deftly deals with various points of contention between them (e.g. the date of the reinforcement of the radial chapels in the crypt). However, one such issue remains unresolved, namely the provenance of a group of finely carved fragments, most of which came to light during repairs to the present cloister some twenty years ago. A discussion of this question constitutes the final section of the book.

The proposition that the fragments come from the *pulpitum* of the documented choir screen of 1180 is not a new one but is argued here in detail for the first time, and supported by some interesting comparative material. For this assertion to be plausible, it must be unequivocally demonstrated that the twelfth-century pulpitum survived *in situ* until the rebuilding of the cloister, incorporating the fragments, began under Prior Chillenden (1390-1411). The superstructure of the side walls of the 1180 screen was replaced by Prior Eastry at the beginning of the fourteenth century. That Eastry retained the western wall, the *pulpitum*, in his new scheme seems to be a matter of deduction rather than record. In fact the account rolls explicitly state that Eastry's refurbishment included a new *pulpitum* and its inner western opening is still in place.

The alternative suggestion, favoured by Woodman and others, that the fragments formed part of the twelfth-century cloister superseded by the one in whose structure they were re-used, is rather summarily dismissed by Kahn. There are, after all, healthy precedents for the redeployment of dismantled twelfth-century cloister parts in whatever structure replaced them on the same site, be it a new cloister (Norwich in the fourteenth century) or domestic buildings (Châlons-sur-Marne in the eighteenth). In the twelfth century, ornate sculpture was often lavished on the conventual cloister or its furnishings. If not from the arcades of a cloister, might not the fragments have come from a *lavatorium*, perhaps that depicted in the main cloister in the famous Water Works drawing of c.1165?

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The Gothic Cathedral. The Architecture of the Great Church 1130-1530. By Christopher Wilson. 340 pp. + 221 line drawings and b. & w. ills. (Thames and Hudson, London, 1990), £20. ISBN 0-500-34105-2.

'To generalise' said Blake 'is to be an idiot'. This important book avoids all the pitfalls of the synoptic survey by meticulous scholarship and exceptional grasp of detail. The result is a personal, at times idiosyncratic, revision of the whole picture of gothic architecture in Europe.

Right from the start, Wilson shakes up the conventional divisions and periodisations. His account of the origins of French gothic does not begin with St-Denis, and his analysis of early gothic in England ends, instead of starting, with the choir of Canterbury. He redresses the old bias towards the 'high middle ages' by his long section on late gothic, including a searching account of French Flamboyant, and the best short analysis – in any language – of that *terra incognita*, the late gothic of the Low Countries. Most drastically, he demotes French high gothic to the status of a transitional episode, and elevates rayonnant as the pivotal epoch, the normative style, in the history of gothic.

Wilson's revisionism also includes a general reluctance, against the current of much recent scholarship, to explain the great church in terms of the concerns of the patron. This does not mean that the book ignores historical and cultural contexts; on the contrary, architectural de-

cisions are firmly anchored to urban politics (Barcelona cathedral), mercantile independence (St Mary Lübeck), and episcopal wealth (the English dioceses). Nor does it mean that Wilson ignores the patron's influence; in exceptional cases (Bernard of Castelnau, Alan of Walsingham) he shows that patrons actually determined style. Wilson has little to say about ritual and devotional use – apart from such obvious usages as the placing of the choir east of the crossing in England, and a long way west of it in Spain – simply because he sees little interaction between form and function. Thus the recent liturgical interpretations for the odd piers in the eastern nave bays at Laon, for the regularities of Salisbury, or for the small size of the Wells west portals are all dismissed in favour, respectively, of stylistic, economic and symbolic explanations.

Symbolic interpretations present their own challenges because medieval forms shift their meanings, and the iconographic programmes of sculpture and furnishings do not necessarily impinge on the meaning of the architecture (an illuminating analysis here of the choir of Cologne cathedral). Wilson picks his way through this semiotic quagmire by distinguishing between 'local' symbols (the dome as instrument of municipal rivalry at Siena and Florence; the cream and pink stones of the Trinity chapel in Canterbury as symbols of Becket's virginity, martyrdom, brains and blood!), and 'universal' symbols, which include Salomonic columns (Senlis transept), tall towers as 'many-towered Sion' (e.g. Laon), and large clerestories, which he discovers to have been called 'lanterns' in the later middle ages, a term suggesting beacons and visions. Wilson also rehabilitates number symbolism as a central concept informing the proportions, columns and window grouping of buildings as diverse as St-Remi at Reims, Beverley minster, and St George's chapel Windsor. And he is the first to suggest that the popularity of Perpendicular may lie in the celestial symbolism of its prolific arch-panel motifs, derived from canopies over altars and shrines. He draws the equally suggestive conclusion that the forms of metalwork were seen as specifically Christian and Western, and their use in buttresses and portals was symptomatic of the increasing resistance to alien cultures in the early thirteenth century.

For Wilson, however, the decisive rôle in the shaping of the great church was played by the architect. In the face of much recent argument about the nature of the medieval mason, Wilson convincingly reaffirms the creative intelligence of the individual architect, whose expertise and professionalism gave him a tactical advantage over his clients. Indeed, the central aim of the book is to retrieve, even if only approximately, the architect's creative processes. To do this Wilson has to re-evaluate the architect's practice and status. In one of the most interesting sections of the book, the author rejects the current conviction that drawings were a novelty of the mid-thirteenth century, and that they were the cause, not the effect, of rayonnant linearity. The social promotion of the high medieval architect he shows to be into the ranks of the bourgeoisie, not the intelligentsia. On matters of technique and construction Wilson's sharp eye for detail comes into its own. How many architectural historians have spotted the remains of original wooden planking under the cells of a vault in Lincoln? or the existence of the tufa vaults mentioned by Gervase in the Canterbury choir? or the rainwater disposal system at Bayeux? And his set-piece analysis of the geometrical ratios (largely the square root of two) informing the choir of Beverley minster is an original contribution to our knowledge of English proportional systems.

Such devices are seen as part of the creative friction between technical solutions and formal invention. Wilson is an empiricist. Design is not a matter of realising an already-formed artistic vision, but of solving practical and aesthetic problems. The creative process can be recaptured 'by reconstructing the situations of choice and constraint in which they (the architects) worked'. Not surprisingly, Wilson is wary of the usual pre-occupation of general surveys with large-scale evolutionary patterns. He is at his most penetrating when dealing with classes of structure where empirical constraints are always strong – for example, French gothic façades (see his ingenious analysis of Laon's), and that most empirical of styles, English fourteenth-century architecture. The Ely octagon, the south transept and choir at Gloucester, the east parts of Wells, and St Stephen's chapel are analysed brilliantly as 'one-off' responses to specific briefs. Indeed, Wilson explains not just individual buildings, but whole national attitudes to style, as the responses of gothic architects to the older romanesque buildings which they had to accommodate.

Wilson's appreciation of the great church as a visual and technical totality is evidenced, for example, in his long analysis of the choir of St-Rémi at Reims. He extends Paul Frankl's concept of gothic 'partiality' by recognising that the unity of the gothic interior depends on the quality of the pointed arch to increase the number of constituent elements, while reducing their autonomy. But the author's sharp eye for the particular, and his taste for styles that value precision, delicacy and elegance, ensures that his best analysis centres on detail and decoration – on Perpendicular and rayonnant tracery, or the micro-architectural textures of Flamboyant façades. It is no coincidence that he is the first to recognise that the starting point of English Decorated was not tracery or the ogee arch, but the adoption of the miniature canopies found on French rayonnant portals and buttresses. This command of detail brings with it a wealth of new insights. Toledo cathedral, for example, assumes a new importance for later Spanish gothic; and by convincingly re-dating the south transept façade of s'Hertogenbosch to c.1430-40, and for the first time establishing its debt to German late gothic, Wilson can secure it as a source for Netherlandish late gothic, and trace the influence of those Netherlandish designs in later fifteenth-century great churches in France and Spain, an influence until now recognised only in sculpture and painting.

Behind Wilson's elegant and polished narrative runs a sharp polemical current which is bound to provoke disagreement. His predilection for rayonnant may explain why he locates the 'visionary quality' of French gothic in tracery windows, and not, as Robert Branner argued, in the scale and massiveness of high gothic. But the thirteenth-century author of the *Metrical Life of St Hugh* obviously saw space as a sign of transcendence when he described the height of the new choir at Lincoln as 'rushing towards the clouds, the roof towards the stars'. Wilson runs against the present trend to down-grade the importance of Chartres and promote that of Soissons in the creation of high gothic, but to suggest that Chartres may also have inspired the three-storey elevation of Bourges is to press the chartrain claim too far, especially when (despite Branner's efforts) the chronology of Bourges is still an open question. If anything, Bourges seems the earlier of the two cathedrals. Wilson argues that Master Gerhard, the architect of Cologne choir, was really 'Gérard', a Frenchman. But 'Gerhardus' or 'Gerardus' was a common enough name in thirteenth-century Cologne, and the fact that Cologne closely follows the design of Amiens, but not its new stone-cutting techniques, suggests that Gerhard was a German observer at the French shop, not a native participant. Although stone cutting was probably the responsibility of the German warden at Cologne, it is likely that Gerard, if French, would have insisted on all the advantages of Amiens's new production methods.

Wilson's audacious reconstructions of flying buttresses around Suger's choir at St-Denis, and the original choir of Laon, may raise sceptical eyebrows. It is a pleasure to see Wilson drive the last, and sharpest, nail into the coffin of the old myth asserting that exposed flyers first appeared in the nave of Notre-Dame in Paris. I am certainly persuaded by most of his arguments for the existence of flyers right from the start at Laon, but question marks hover over his conjectural reconstruction of flyers at St-Denis. He must have entertained, and rejected, the possibility that the present buttresses rose above the wall head to support nothing more than buttress walls, their tops protruding above the gallery roofs. And the odd alignments of the inter-apsidal buttresses would have meant that five of the eight flyers would have been bent in order to hit the clerestorey at the bay divisions – a dangerous procedure, though it occurs at St-Germain-des-Prés.

The question of decorative vaults, and the wider issue of English influence on the formation of German late gothic seem to me to be one of the more problematic areas of Wilson's work, for they also raise questions about the book's restriction to 'great church' architecture. Wilson argues for the importance of English centralised chapter house vaults in the creation of decorative vaulting, but I find it difficult to see the source for the 'crazy' vaults at Lincoln in the tri-radial vaults of a putative chapter house, planned at Lincoln c.1192

but never realised, when a more likely inspiration was the ambulatory of the original choir, which probably had to use tri-radials to negotiate awkward points of support, and in a 'back-to-back' manner that may have clearly prefigured the choir high vaults. Nor am I convinced that the chapter houses of Cistercian Dore and Margam were the sources for Villard's drawing of a chapter house (although Villard was *au fait* with Cistercian ideas), since isolated tri-radials had already appeared in French chapter houses of the early thirteenth century (Hambye c.1230). Wilson's long analysis of Prague cathedral is brim-full of his usual insights and felicities, but by underestimating the importance of cross-rib units in the vaults he fails to see the sources for the high choir vault in Bohemian gothic before Peter Parler, and in Parler's own earlier buildings. Its 'split' bosses do indeed resemble those in the vault of the Wells choir, but also echo those in the old wooden barrel vault of the 'Rittersaal' of the Cologne town hall. I have argued elsewhere that many of the 'English' features in Prague come about fortuitously through an internal process of ingenious problem-solving. Indeed Peter Parler in Prague and Michael of Canterbury at St Stephen's chapel started out with the same problem of having to alter the conventional rayonnant elevation by incorporating interior sculpture. But whereas Michael of Canterbury is praised by Wilson for his radical and exploratory achievements, Parler's similarly empirical approach tends to be submerged, despite Wilson's recognition of his 'brilliantly original' elevations, in a long account of his eclectic borrowings from England, Spain, and Germany itself.

Part of the problem in this case may lie in Wilson's decision to restrict himself to the 'great church'. There is no doubt that late gothic Germany, where creativity flowered largely outside great churches, has suffered most from this exclusion. For Wilson, Prague cathedral is a 'one-off', looking to England over the head of local German traditions as a member of a kind of elite club of international great churches. I would prefer to trace much of the vitality of Prague to a thriving class of smaller-scale church building in Germany and Bohemia, which, by definition, lies outside the scope of this book.

But general surveys are bound to tempt their reviewers into mounting old hobby-horses. Quite simply, Wilson's book is the most original and important general account of gothic architecture to appear in English since Paul Frankl's *Gothic Architecture* of 1960, and will certainly have a much larger following than that eccentric text. The book reads exceptionally well, though its density of detail, and the intricacy and compactness of Wilson's writing, suggest a much larger work pushing up against the limits of its small-scale format. Thames and Hudson have served the author handsomely with a reasonably-priced, beautifully-designed product. Most of the drawings and photographs are new (a large number of both by the author), and the carefully-chosen illustrations are sharply reproduced.

Each age builds its own gothic cathedral. Frankl and his contemporaries venerated the great churches as the sublime embodiments of an avant-garde *Kunstwollen*, as symbols of transcendence from the limitations of present and past. Wilson's more circumspect vision of the cathedrals as ingenious solutions by imaginative individuals to a diversity of problems will surely be welcomed by a post-modern generation eager to revalue human achievement within the constraints of tradition.

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Early Gothic Manuscripts [II] 1250-1285. By Nigel Morgan. (A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles: General Editor, J.J.G. Alexander.) 374 pp. + 8 col. pls. + 454 b. & w. ills. (Harvey Miller, London, 1988), £78. ISBN 0-905203-53-4.

The volumes of the invaluable *Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles* could never have been entirely consistent in their coverage, even if such series did not have an in-built tendency to grow.[1] The surviving manuscripts (and other evidence) become progressively more abundant through the middle ages, and the catalogues of manuscripts in the later volumes have had to be increasingly selective. Nigel Morgan's volume on the early gothic manuscripts has been subdivided into two very substantial Parts, covering the years 1190 to 1250 and 1250 to 1285 respectively.

Morgan's book, with its generous text and illustrations, is not only valuable as an up-to-date survey of the best known manuscripts of the period, such as the illustrated apocalypses, the Oscott Psalter, the Life of Edward the Confessor or the work of the 'Sarum Master'; it is also able to set these against an extensive exploration of many of their less well known contemporaries. The bringing together of so much familiar and unfamiliar material makes the study of manuscript illumination of this period much easier for both the beginner and the specialist.

The beginning and end of the period are not marked by any obvious breaks or major changes in style. The works with which the Catalogue opens, for example the drawings added to the Westminster Psalter or the painting of the 'Sarum Master', are the culmination of the early gothic style of the first volume. Nor has the cut-off point of 1250 between Parts I and II been rigidly adhered to. It has sensibly decided to group Matthew Paris's work in Part I and the apocalypses in Part II, although they overlap the division. The terminal year, 1285, seems to have been chosen as it is the approximate date of the Alphonso Psalter and the Ashridge Comestor, which Lucy Sandler, author of the next volume of the *Survey*, regards as the beginning of a new phase of illumination. They would have fitted equally well with the later manuscripts in this volume. In fact many features characteristic of the three and a half decades under discussion simply carry on into the period of the next volume, for example the French-influenced figure style or types of border decoration, as well as the book of hours or the illustrated apocalypse.

Morgan's wide-ranging Introduction is provided with full references, and the thorough catalogue entries are followed by rich bibliographies. The tables of apocalypse illustrations and of apocalypse texts and commentaries are very valuable, as are the extensive indices, especially those of manuscripts and of iconography. Morgan has also made a point of extending the book's scope by mentioning and indexing a considerable number of other manuscripts of the period in addition to those selected for the Catalogue.

One of the reasons for the volume's size is that Morgan takes a commendably broad view of the interest of these manuscripts. Both Introduction and Catalogue include many valuable observations on texts and on iconography. The illuminated manuscripts are seen as a mirror reflecting to various degrees developments in cultural and intellectual life, and are interpreted in the light of such phenomena as changing devotional practices, the greater influence of the laity, and anti-semitism. The limited evidence for patronage is carefully examined, not only for its own sake but also as a possible explanation for variations in content (for example of the apocalypses), or in style or quantity of decoration, as well as in the language of the texts. Full and expert account is taken of the evidence for dating, localisation and patronage of liturgical texts and especially of calendars and litanies. (The reader will share Morgan's hope that he will publish his research on English thirteenth-century calendars.)

There are full discussions of the dating evidence for individual manuscripts. In Part I Morgan maintained that it was normally posible to date a manuscript by using all types of textual and art historical information to 'within a period of about twenty years (i.e. ± 10 years from a *circa* date)'. Although there is only one precisely dated or dateable book in Part II (the Bible of William of Hales), this is probably about right providing that the '*circa* date' selected is in the middle of the probable date range, which in this book it usually is. The discussion of chronology is refreshingly undogmatic and the Introduction concludes with the expectation that it will need revision in the light of further research.

Morgan also carefully weighs the evidence for attributing books to a particular centre and often wisely leaves the question open at the end. Only 15 of the 74 references in the index of Places of Origin appear without a question mark. This is as it should be, given that the evidence is often no more than circumstantial. This caution does not, however, imply agnosticism: half of the attributions are to just two centres, London (15) and Oxford (22), although