MEDIAEVAL DESIGN[1]

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THE subject of artistic design is comparatively unfamiliar to the general public, and even to many historians. In consequence a number of misconceptions have become commonplaces of controversy in the literature of art, and this is especially true in discussions of the mediaeval period. The student is confronted with uncertainty and with confusing statements at all points. The very meaning of 'design', as applied to works of art, is in dispute; authorities disagree as to the persons who performed the function of designing; and the results of modern research into the technical methods of the Middle Ages have not yet been fully assimilated.

No discussion can be profitable unless it is based upon adequate definition of the terms used, and we have first to consider what the word 'design' actually does mean. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* gives several definitions for the noun, of which the first is '*mental plan*', while particular uses are '*preliminary sketch for a picture, etc.*'; '*delineation, pattern*'; '*artistic or literary groundwork, general idea, construction, plot, faculty of evolving these, invention*'. The verb 'to design', apart from certain irrelevant senses, is said to mean '*to contrive, plan; to make a preliminary sketch of a picture; to draw a plan of a building etc. to be executed by others; to conceive a mental plan for,* or *construct the groundwork or plot of a book or work of art.*'

To simplify: these meanings fall into two groups, abstract, and concrete. The abstract meaning is that of a *mental* plan, idea or invention; the concrete sense centres round a tangible sketch or drawing which supplies the necessary information from which a finished work of art may be produced. That these two stages of design are implicit in the production of a work of art was already a commonplace in the Middle Ages. In discussing poetic composition soon after A.D. 1200, Geoffrey de Vinsauf wrote in Latin to the following effect:—

> 'If a man has to lay the foundations of a house, he does not set rash hand to the work; the inward line of the heart measures forth the work in advance and the inner man prescribes a definite order of action; the hand of imagination designs the whole before that of the body does so; the pattern is first the

[1] This article was originally read before the Ecclesiological Society on 18th February, 1956.

prototype, then the tangible . . . The inner compasses of the mind must encircle the whole quantity of material beforehand.'[1]

Nearly two centuries later this was neatly paraphrased by Chaucer in his *Troilus:*—

> 'For every wight that hath an hous to founde
> Ne renneth nought the werk for to biginne
> With rakel hond, bot he wol byde a stounde,
> And send his hertes lyne out fro with-inne
> Alderfirst his purpos for to winne.'[2]

At this point we have to consider what is actually involved in the making of a given design. The human mind does not work in a vacuum, but requires raw material to be shaped. Whether the work be a poem, a novel, a painting, a piece of music, or a building, there must be some purpose in view or at least some subject matter. We may conveniently call the conglomeration of purpose and or subject matter, materials etc., the 'conditions' of the given work. Even the most abstract of paintings consists of form and colour, and the minimum purpose served by a purely ornamental building is to please or to startle the eye; this is an example where the conditions reach a minimum and the artist has maximum freedom of action. In modern times such abstract works, divorced from any practical end, are relatively common; during the period known to us as the Middle Ages they were exceedingly rare or non-existent. In most cases, then, the essential purposes of a mediaeval work of art are easy to grasp, although they are frequently complex. Thus a church was at the same time the House of God and a shelter for the contained worshippers, and was also a picture-book of religious doctrine. The statuary on the front, the paintings on the walls, and the windows of stained glass, all told their stories in the manner of the strip-cartoon.

The mediaeval period was an age of religious faith, and the arts were to a very large extent in the service of religion. Even objects produced for secular use were not uncommonly decorated with subjects from sacred history, and the leadership in almost all forms of art was taken by artists who spent much of their time upon work of an ecclesiastical character. The great architects of the Court Schools, the master masons at the Royal Households of Europe, were constantly concerned with the planning of cathedrals, chapels and monasteries of royal foundation. It is on this account that a view of mediaeval art has

[1] From *Poetria Nova* of c. 1210, lines 43–8, 55–6; printed in E. Faral: *Les Arts Poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe Siècle* (1924), p. 198.

[2] *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (ed. W. W. Skeat), *Troilus and Criseyde,* Book I, lines 1065–9.

grown up which I may call the *hieratic* or *iconographical*. According to this view, mediaeval art was not the result of design in the sense that it was at other periods, but was the inevitable outcome of adhering to a programme laid down beforehand by ecclesiastical patrons. It is obvious that there is a limited amount of truth in this: the plan of a church in its general outline, the subjects of its wall-paintings or stained glass; such conditions were dictated by the needs and aims of the Christian hierarchy who were in control of the funds to pay for the church's building. This extends also in some degree to the provision of special displays of iconographical series such as the History of Jesse or the Types and Antitypes of the Old and New Testaments, and needs of this kind lay behind the design of the great west front of Wells Cathedral, a hoarding for the display of religious propaganda aimed at a largely illiterate population.[1]

A clear distinction must, however, be drawn between this influence of the conditions, strong and important as it was, and artistic design. The distinction is made abundantly plain if we consider historically the essential requirements of Catholic liturgy as they affect the building of churches. There has been no substantial change in these essential conditions which have to be fulfilled by any and every church and within certain limits it is a matter of indifference, liturgically speaking, in what style the church has been designed. The whole of the *aesthetic* intention involved, whether the church be Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, in some revival style or purely 'functional,' remains entirely distinct from this basic programme or set of conditions. Any and every client who wishes to have a home built lays down certain requirements which have to be fulfilled, such as the size and number of rooms; he may occasionally go much further than this and even produce sketches to indicate what he wants. But, save in the rarest instances, he cannot be said to become thereby the designer of the building.

We also find that religious paintings and sculpture, of different periods but identical iconography, vary in the treatment of, for example, costume and coiffure. Even where it is clear that the artist was taking his iconography ready-made from an old pattern book or possibly from an illuminated MS., he was not copying slavishly but transforming the details into the contemporary mode of his own time. Such adaptation and transformation are a part of all artistic design.

[1] We know that the subjects dealt with at Wells were the 'Old Law' and the 'New Law' from William Worcestre's description made when he was there in 1480 (*Itineraria Symonis Simeonis et Willelmi de Worcestre,* ed. J. Nasmith, 1778, p. 285).

No: neither in the Middle Ages nor at any other time has design been synonymous with or an inevitable result of a particular doctrinal, philosophic or iconographical idea, or of any given set of conditions. Though influenced in certain directions, artistic design is a separate creative function of the artist's imagination, working upon the whole complex of factors which make up the conditions of the given work, and not merely the iconographical factors on one hand or material factors on another. To dispose of this question of conditions, it is worth considering those of an architectural competition. There they include the site and purpose of the building, its approximate size and essential component parts, and possibly the materials of which it is to be built. The nature of materials and the requirements of sound construction and of legal regulations impose further restrictions upon the freedom of the competitors. None the less, even with a maximum of conditions, there is still great variety of treatment in the entries submitted. Such is the individuality of man.

We can take from the Middle Ages an actual example of individuality at work in a case where conditions were unusually stringent. St. Bridget of Sweden, who lived from 1302 to 1373, received a series of revelations as to the religious order she was to found and the precise details of its buildings. The records of these revelations date from a few years before 1350, when Bridget went to Rome to obtain authorisation for the founding of the Order. Her revelations, which were accepted as having divine authority, specified that the church should have three aisles of equal width and height, each of five bays, a projecting choir for the priests at the west, equalling in width and height a bay of the central nave, but longer, and doorways in certain positions. There were to be five openings in the north wall for the confession and communion of the nuns. The relative positions and arrangements of the monastic buildings were also laid down in detail. Yet in spite of this extremely strict series of conditions, claiming divine inspiration, the actual houses of the Order built in Denmark, Finland, Estonia and Germany show wide variations, and their building materials and *architectural* character are in each case those of the region and not imported. This is especially striking in the case of Gnadenburg in Bavaria, where the plan and dispositions were most precisely copied from the mother-house of Vadstena in Sweden; and in that of Pirita in Estonia where at least one of the masons, Stefan Liongasson, had been brought from Vadstena itself.[1]

[1] B. Berthelson: *Studier i Birgittinerordens Byggnadsskick,* I (Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens Handlingar, Del 63, Lund, 1947); richly illustrated, with English summary.

It is sometimes alleged that artistic individuality and personal 'style' did not exist before the Renaissance, that term being used in the specific sense of the revival of interest in the forms of Roman art in 15th-century Italy. It is very hard to find any supporting facts for this view, and it is unusual to find even the most elementary precautions taken in such comparisons as are instituted. We must confine comparison and contrast to works which are truly comparable, for in the first place it must be constantly borne in mind that artistic personality in the fullest sense is the exception at all periods and in all arts, while the majority of artists are relatively undistinguished. Think of the minor dramatists of Elizabethan England, the lesser contrapuntal composers of Bach's Germany or the background of common form of the later 18th century against which the personal styles of Haydn and Mozart stand out, the general run of paintings of the Dutch School, the architecture of Wren's contemporaries. We cannot expect to find *many* artists of highly developed individuality in any one art at the same time, nor to find, for example, that a 13th century parish church or a manor-house of 1450 has the same degree of personality that exists in St. Paul's Cathedral or Blenheim Palace. *But the converse also holds true:* it would be rare indeed to find two mediaeval villages with house fronts resembling one another in quite so stereotyped a fashion as do many Georgian streets, while every one of the important builds of different dates at cathedrals, palaces and castles is marked by its own character, demonstrating the personal style of its designer, known or unknown.

Returning for a moment to the Renaissance, the revival of classical forms did, it is true, lead to the discarding of an existing set of traditional conditions, but only to impose another set of at least equal if not greater rigidity. In the architectural field this new straightjacket consisted of a series of arithmetical rules of proportion given by Vitruvius and interpreted in the light of surviving Roman buildings and fragments. Now it is a somewhat remarkable fact that the text of Vitruvius's books on Architecture had never been lost in the West, and did not have to be rediscovered at the Renaissance. Copies of it existed in a number of the more important monastic libraries and fresh copies were being made up to the 14th century, while there is a considerable body of evidence showing that its *structural* precepts had to a large extent passed into the common body of European technical tradition.[1] Occasionally

[1] See J. H. Harvey: *The Gothic World* (1950), pp. 11, 25-6, 104 note, 139; and W. A. Eden: 'St. Thomas Aquinas and Vitruvius' in *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies,* II, pp. 183-5.

Vitruvius is even cited by name. But until the 15th century Italian revival of interest in the antique, Vitruvius was not used as a manual of *design*, aesthetically considered.

I want to suggest that the reason for this disuse was not ignorance or neglect, as has generally been assumed, but the supersession of the Vitruvian principles of proportion by another and more highly developed set of principles. It was pointed out more than fifty years ago by Enlart that there is a fundamental difference between architectural proportions in the classical world and those of mediaeval times, in that the latter had a constant reference to human scale.[1] If one Greek or Roman temple was built to twice the length of another, every one of its parts was multiplied in the same ratio. But in the works of the Gothic period the designers' appreciation of natural fitness had taken a further step, possibly as a result of making the observation that a large tree has leaves of the same size as those of a small tree of the same kind. Whatever the source may have been, the Gothic architects were in fact in possession of a most elaborate geometrical system which for long remained a carefully guarded secret.

We have three main sources of information as to this system, apart from induction from the monuments themselves and certain hints which appear in the work of Villard de Honnecourt. Of these the first is the well-known account by Cesare Cesariano in his 1521 edition of Vitruvius of the rival systems of proportion discussed at the building of Milan Cathedral c.1385-1400.[2] The second consists of several different treatises by German masters on their traditional methods, the earliest and best known being that published in 1486 by Matthaeus Roritzer on the setting-out of pinnacles.[3] The third, and in some ways the most important, is a Spanish treatise of 1681 which preserves the substance of a much earlier MS. book by the famous architect Rodrigo Gil de Hontañón who died in 1577, the last of a great dynasty of Spanish master masons.[4] He gives the geometrical methods for producing the

[1] C. Enlart: *Manuel d'Archéologie française*, I (Paris, 1902), pp. 56-7.

[2] That Cesariano's account gave the clue to mediaeval systems of proportion was recognised by C. R. Cockerell in his essay 'William of Wykeham' (*Proceedings* of the Archaeological Institute at Winchester in 1845, 1846), pp. 32-41; and it has been much discussed in recent years, notably by P. Frankl in *Art Bulletin* (College Art Association, Providence, R. I.), XXVII (1945), and by G. Lesser: *Gothic Cathedrals and Sacred Geometry* (1957), I, pp. 12, 158-9.

[3] See J. W. Papworth: 'Roriczer on the Construction of Pinnacles' in Architectural Publication Society: *Detached Essays* (1853); O. Kletzl: *Plan-Fragmente aus der deutschen Dombauhütte von Prag* (Veröffentlichungen des Archivs der Stadt Stuttgart, Heft 3, Stuttgart, 1939), p. 18; Roriczer's original treatise was republished by A. Reichensperger: *Das Büchlein von der Fialengerechtigkeit* (Trier, 1845).

[4] Simón García: *Compendio de arquitectura y simetría de los templos*, ed. J. Camón (1941); also J. Camón in *Archivo Español de Arte*, No. 45 (1941), pp. 300-5.

appropriately proportioned plans and sections of each type of church, whether with a single nave, or with three or five aisles, and these constructions have been shown by Lampérez to apply to a number of the most important Gothic buildings of Spain.[1]

Just as several distinct Orders of classical architecture existed, each with its own rules, so there were several Gothic methods of proportion each no doubt distinctive of a particular region at first but later carried abroad by migrant masters. In the end the system as a whole was of very great complexity, and in its entirety was never committed to writing, but had to be learnt by the apprentice from his master by word of mouth and by practical demonstration. Yet we must suspect that a number of the books bequeathed by the master masons of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries did contain a considerable proportion of the geometrical rules they employed, and it may be that more of these manuscript treatises remain to be found.[2] Meanwhile, it becomes easier to understand why the study of the Vitruvian precepts became so popular and had so cataclysmic an effect upon architecture. The Gothic rules were so complicated that no-one who had not served a long apprenticeship and spent years of practice could master them; whereas the rules of Vitruvius were so easy to grasp that even bishops could understand them, and princes could try their hand at design on their own.

That this development had a great deal to do with the later rise of the professional architect with an established social position is highly probable, but I cannot here pursue that aspect of the subject.[3] But we have to consider another of the outstanding changes wrought in art by the Renaissance: the introduction of the particular convention known as 'linear perspective' and the exact rendering of the human form. This meant that in painting and sculpture there was a *scientific* link between the physiological function of the eye as a photographic lens, and the finished work. Just as we have seen that the re-introduction of the tenets of Vitruvius proved a negation of the important element of human scale, here too we have the paradox that the discovery of perspective was not a liberation but a limitation. For while the eye as a lens can observe from one viewpoint only, the mind is able to appreciate

[1] V. Lampérez y Romea: *Historia de la Arquitectura Cristiana Española en la Edad Media* (2nd ed., Madrid, 1930), I, pp. 81-99.

[2] See *The Gothic World* (above, p. 59, note 1), pp. 34, 140.

[3] Some extremely pertinent remarks on this question will be found in W. Willetts: *Chinese Art* (Pelican Books, 1958), II, pp. 513-20, where the established rank and emolument of Chinese artists from remote antiquity is contrasted with the uncertain status of the European artist, striving 'to gain equality with administrators and men of letters.'

simultaneously not only the stereoscopic effect of an object seen with both eyes, but also the successive appearances of the same object viewed from different viewpoints. This faculty of the mind was exploited by the Ancient Egyptians, by the Byzantines and by the artists of Gothic Europe, and after a lapse of some four centuries is once more accepted orthodoxy among most 20th-century painters and sculptors.

It is not my present purpose to compare the values of Gothic and Renaissance aesthetics, but simply to establish the degree of freedom of the Gothic artist to express his personality. I here emphasize the term 'Gothic', for it is certain that a major change did take place in the direction of greater individuality and originality in art, and that this change took place not at the end but at the beginning of the Gothic period. This great change in the 12th century has indeed been termed the 'little Renaissance', but its character is entirely different from that of the 15th and 16th centuries. Whereas the later revival was of Roman forms to the exclusion of national tradition, the earlier revolution had been against the static hand of Roman tradition and in favour of a dynamic art inspired by symbolism and expressing structural forces.

The change can be traced in all art forms: for example in handwriting, which preserved Roman characters but little altered down to 1100, and then rapidly broke away into Lombardic and Black Letter; in painting and illumination, where the copying of earlier exemplars gave place to original designs based on the study of natural models and to pattern of geometrical invention; in architecture, where the round arch and debased versions of the classic order yielded to the pointed arch and fresh canons of proportion harmonising with a new and highly articulated construction, itself based upon a sweeping improvement in technique. Lastly there is music, of special value as evidence, for we have in this case a non-plastic art whose history has been worked out quite independently, and in the main by study of the surviving examples. Several contributors to the *New Oxford History of Music* lay stress upon the great change. We are told, for instance, that all the early Christian hymns were scrupulously modelled on existing hymns and that Gregorian music imposed a uniformity over the whole Western Church to the exclusion of national variants; while on the other hand, the 12th-century troubadours and trouvères 'attached great significance to originality'—a precisely contrary outlook.[1] Two other points of great relevance to the history of other arts are brought out: that the

[1] *The New Oxford History of Music,* II (1954), pp. 16, 105, 241.

words set to some religious music contain extraordinary doctrinal statements, a valuable proof that iconographical censorship was by no means omniscient even in regard to verbal error in doctrine; and that the actual music of the period is far in advance of the theoretical treatises.[1] The theoreticians were academic lecturers frequently as much as a century behind the practice of their own day, yet notes of their lectures would be considered good evidence of contemporary musical practice if it were not for the overwhelming body of actually dateable music which has now been deciphered. We have here a most substantial proof that even in the specialised field, at once ecclesiastical and academic, of church music, the lead had passed from the clerical theorist to the experimental layman before 1200.

The same holds true in the highly technical field of the plastic arts, and especially in the complexities of large-scale architecture. Only individuals with a long training in the technique of building construction could possibly design large churches and castles that would stand and adequately serve their purposes; and for the reasons already given, only a similarly long training would suffice for the mastery of the geometrical systems underlying the aesthetic part of design. The rapid development of Gothic architecture shows that the masters in question were constantly experimenting and that there was a keenly competitive spirit of emulation amongst them.

These are conditions which naturally and normally lead to the production of individual styles exercised by the competing artists, at least by those among them endowed with a high degree of personality. And this element of individual personality in Gothic style is what we do in fact find if we compare buildings of the same date and related purpose. Yet it has often been claimed that in this respect the Middle Ages varied from all other periods in that mediaeval man suffered from a psychological lack of personality sometimes described as 'essential anonymity.'[2] No substantial evidence for this view has so far been produced; yet to prove so remarkable a hypothesis, contrary to the experience of all other times, exceptionally strong proofs would be needed.

The thesis of anonymity has found many distinguished protagonists at various dates within the last hundred years, and they have produced several different schemes of buttressing material in the attempts to

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 313, 274-5, 285.

[2] The phrase is that of Dr. N. Pevsner in *The Architectural Review*, CXVIII (October, 1955), p. 259; but see rejoinder in CXIX (January, 1956), p. 2.

establish their case.[1] These largely, if not entirely, contradict one another; none of them rests securely upon ascertained fact; most of them have already been clearly refuted. The chief schemes of argument (which I describe as such because they are emphatically not bodies of evidence) have been these:

1. That in the Middle Ages there was no such thing as an individual artist; works of art were not other than mere works, produced by spontaneous teams of craftsmen engaged in a common purpose and producing their results directly from the material without any intervening stage of design, either abstract or concrete.[2] This argument in effect reduced mediaeval man to the status of a purely instinctive, gregarious creature comparable to the hive-bee. This is the most startling and indeed by far the most interesting case that has been put forward: it recommends itself to belief by its very impossibility. But history, even artistic history, is not a matter of faith, but of hard facts; and they completely refute this theory. The facts are that, unlike the uniform cells of the honeybee, the productions of mediaeval craftsmen vary almost infinitely in size, shape and every other characteristic; that there is not one jot or tittle of evidence that mediaeval men, or indeed any other men, ever have set to work by mere spontaneous enthusiasm and without either leadership or forethought; and finally that there is an immense body of positive evidence actually available as to the fact of mediaeval design and its methods. With much of this evidence I have dealt elsewhere in my book *The Gothic World;* some of it I propose to recapitulate later.

2. The second scheme of argument was drawn from negative evidence and amounted to this: we do not know the names of mediaeval artists; therefore they did not exist. Though its lack of logic did not prevent this view having a wide currency, it has been disposed of by the discovery of many thousands of names of mediaeval artists of all kinds in all European countries. It is worth noting that the overwhelming majority of these artists were laymen, and not either monastic or secular clerks.[3]

[1] See for example *Cambridge Mediaeval History,* VIII (1936), p. 720; Dr. Pevsner in *Journal* of Warburg Institute, V (1942), p. 232. It is a singular commentary upon English historical scholarship that sweeping statements as to mediaeval 'architectural anonymity' have continued to be made for some generations after the appearance in G. E. Street: *Gothic Architecture in Spain* (1865), of a whole chapter (xxi) devoted to a detailed exposition of this very issue. Lampérez (above, p. 61, note 1), I, pp. 36-8, quite demolishes 'anonymity' in Spain.

[2] This view received support from so eminent an authority as E. S. Prior: *The Cathedral Builders in England* (1905), pp. 21-2.

[3] See R. E. Swartwout: *The Monastic Craftsman* (1932).

3. The third scheme is an attempt to refine upon the second. Inasmuch as modern research has shown that very many names of artists are recoverable, attention is diverted from the fact of their being upon record to the allegation that the Middle Ages were not interested in them. Great play is made of the fact that a large proportion of the names are found in sources of archive character, reflecting no personal interest in the men themselves, such as would be proved by a mention in a standard history or a newspaper of the present day. From this it is further argued that this supposed lack of interest must reflect an actual lack of personality in the artists themselves. Here again the argument is all from negative evidence or mere lack of evidence, and once more the evidence is by no means so totally lacking as has been assumed. Even on the literary level, many references occur in mediaeval writings to artists of all kinds and to outstanding works of art; while further evidence of the esteem in which the greater artists were held is supplied by the use of the then very restricted title 'Master' in referring to them, and in the high fees and perquisites which they obtained. Into these aspects I have entered in some detail elsewhere. Here I propose to quote a few representative examples of the literary interest evinced by mediaeval historians and other writers.

One of the best examples of a detailed interest comes from Spain. The Codex Calixtinus records the great Romanesque rebuilding of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, undertaken in 1071 by Bishop Diego Peláez. Two committees were set up: one administrative, composed of the abbot Gundesindus, the treasurer Sigeridus and one Vicart; the other technical, whose members were the 'marvellous master' Bernard, and Rotbert, described as a stonemason. Bernard is described as 'the Old', apparently to distinguish him from one of the canons of the cathedral, Bernardo Gutiérrez, who a few years later had administrative charge of the works. Some fifty working masons were employed under the direction of Bernard and Rotbert.[1] Santiago is fortunate in preserving not only this detailed notice of its original works committee and architectural staff, but also the names of the later architects Esteban (who worked also at Pamplona) in or before 1101, and a third Bernard in 1109, as well as the later and better-known name of Master Mateo, the designer of the Pórtico de la Gloria at the west end. Master Mateo, a layman with a wife and family, was a bridge-builder in 1161, in 1168 was given a royal grant of the direction and mastership

[1] See Lampérez (above, p. 61, note 1), I, p. 68; II, pp. 157-66; the standard monograph on Santiago Cathedral is A. López Ferreiro: *Historia de la Santa A. M. Iglesia de Santiago de Compostela* (11 vols., 1898-1909).

of the works at Compostela, and 20 years later was allowed to place the great inscription on the lintel of the doors, stating that on 1st April, 1188, it had been set up by Master Mateo, who had directed the work from the start. He is further mentioned in documents up to 1217, and as late as 1435 his houses in the Plaza de la Azabachería were described as the 'Casas del maestro Mateo.'

Much earlier the chronicler of St. Maxentius at Poitiers had thought it worth while to record the name of Walter Coorland, sent by Emma, Queen of England to rebuild the monastery of St. Hilaire-le-Grand about 1025.[1] At the end of the same century at Canterbury the work of Abbot Scotland's new church was built under the direction of Blithere 'the most distinguished master of the craftsmen.'[2] About the same date the St. Albans chronicle boasts that its master Robert 'excelled all the masons of his time,'[3] while in the opening years of the 12th century Croyland Abbey was built by Arnold, 'a most learned master of the mason's craft.'[4] Ordericus Vitalis tells us that the Castle of Ivry was built by an 'architectus' called Lanfred, 'the praise of whose talents outdid all the craftsmen then in Gaul.'[5]

Reginald of Durham, towards the end of the century, referred to the Bishop's engineer Richard de Wolveston as a skilful craftsman and experienced architect, very well known by name and for his skill to all the inhabitants of the region, by which he meant the whole of the present counties of Durham and Northumberland.[6] About 1200 one Master Simon was in charge of the fortifications of Ardres near St.-Omer and was described as 'very learned in geometrical work, setting out the work already conceived in his mind, not so much with his measuring-rod as by the yard-stick of his eyes.'[7] Here, incidentally, we have a remarkable confirmation in a concrete instance of the processes of design.

The plinth of the south porch at Notre-Dame in Paris is inscribed as begun in 1258 by Jean de Chelles then master mason,[8] and there are many other examples of the commemoration of artists in official inscriptions or records of their work. After the fall of part of the south

[1] V. Mortet & P. Deschamps: *Recueil de Textes relatifs á l'histoire de l'architecture . . . au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1911-29), I, p. 141.
[2] *Historia translationis S. Augustini episcopi, auct. Gocelino*, p. 17 (*Acta Sanctorum*, t. vi maii, 414).
[3] *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani* (ed. H. T. Riley, Rolls Series, 1867-9), I, 63.
[4] *Petri Blesensis Continuatio* — (ed. H. T. Riley, 1854), p. 250.
[5] Mortet (above, note 1), I, p. 276.
[6] *Reginaldi Dunelm. Libellus de Admirandis* (Surtees Society, I, 1835), p. 112.
[7] Mortet & Deschamps (above, note 1), II, p. 189.
[8] M. Aubert: *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1929), p. 138.

nave of St. Albans Abbey in 1323 the rebuilding is stated to have been placed under the charge of Henry Wy, master mason, while the same chronicle of the Abbots mentions Master Geoffrey the carpenter, the accomplished author of the choir stalls at the same period.[1] Later in the 14th century the French poetess Christine de Pisan referred to the master mason of Charles V, Raymond du Temple, as 'a learned artist who very well understood geometry, and who showed his knowledge in the designing of his buildings.'[2]

In view of such statements of a clearly expressed and intelligent interest in mediaeval architects and their work, supported as they are by abundant evidence of other kinds as to the high value put upon their services, little more need be said. It is, however, as well to compare mediaeval references with references of a strictly comparable kind in later times. Architects of the 17th and 18th centuries are but seldom mentioned by name in purely literary and historical sources, and it is these alone which are equivalent to those which survive from the Middle Ages.

Considering the lack of printing and of all media of advertisement and general publicity, the degree of mediaeval interest which is upon record is quite remarkable and compares not unfavourably with the neglect met with by many modern artists. But besides the positive literary evidence that an interest in artists was taken by the outside world, we have evidence of another kind that artists enjoyed widespread renown: that of the numerous instances in which they were sent for from great distances and at considerable expense. Such cases would be well-nigh inconceivable had the craftsmen been prized merely for their manual dexterity and not for the aesthetic quality of their work. To quote a few instances:

English glass-painters made the windows for the Abbey of Braine-le-Comte in Hainault in 1153;[3] in a letter of *c.* 1220 Abbot David of Bristol asked the Dean of Wells to lend a certain craftsman, 'L.' by initial, to carve seven columns of the Elder Lady Chapel, a request we can well understand after seeing the extraordinary beauty of the nave capitals at Wells.[4]

From the first half of the thirteenth century we have the album or rather building and art encyclopaedia of Villars d'Honnecourt, a Picard engineer and architect, which proves his extensive travels and his

[1] *Gesta* (above, p. 66, note 3), II, pp. 124, 125.
[2] H. Stein: *Les Architectes des Cathedrales gothiques* (Paris, n.d.), p. 32.
[3] H. Read: *English Stained Glass* (1926), p. 35, note 2.
[4] R. Hill in *Transactions* of the Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, LXV, 152, quoting British Museum, Cotton Charter IV, 58.

knowledge of principles of proportion, and also that he sketched details which he considered beautiful.[1] In 1287 Étienne de Bonneuil went from Paris to Uppsala in northern Sweden to take charge of the work of the cathedral there,[2] and in the same year John son of Tyno went from St.-Dié in Alsace to build the cathedral of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) in Transylvania.[3]

At Winchester Cathedral in 1308 one William Lyngwode was working on the choir-stalls, his employer Bishop Henry Woodlock having to write to the Bishop of Norwich to ask him to excuse Lyngwode from the service which he owed to the manorial court of Blofield in Norfolk.[4] William Hunt, a carver of London, was in 1467 paid for coming to Winchester College to design and draw out the new rood-loft for the Chapel.[5] The extensive travels of many mediaeval painters are already well known, and here I will say only that they fully bear out the estimate of the mediaeval artist's renown which I have given. Thus the third claim also, that there was a lack of mediaeval interest in artists, falls to the ground.

4. While the three schemes of argument which have already been discussed may be regarded as closed, a fourth has appeared in the field in recent years, though not as far as I am aware enunciated as a clear-cut thesis. Here emphasis is placed, not upon the anonymity of mediaeval designers, but upon a supposed want of aesthetic *intention* in their design, so that the appearance of a mediaeval work of art was a kind of happy accident arising from adherence to a merely traditional style, the result of manual training in a given craft such as painting or stone-cutting; and secondly from adherence to iconographical schemes dictated to the artists by the highly literate minority, i.e. for the most part the clergy of the upper ranks. It is the insistence on this latter factor that I called at an earlier stage the hieratic or iconographical approach to mediaeval art.

This aspect of the Middle Ages, important though it was, has become somewhat overworked. That the iconographic approach does provide a most valuable clue to the workings of the mediaeval mind is undoubted, but I am here concerned to show that it is much less relevant to design in the aesthetic sense. A great deal of the

[1] H. R. Hahnloser: *Villard de Honnecourt* (Vienna, 1935); J. Quicherat: *Facsimile of the Sketchbook of Villard d'Honnecourt* (1859).
[2] Mortet & Deschamps (above, p. 66, note 1), II, pp. 305-6.
[3] K. Divald: *Old Hungarian Art* (1931), p. 35; H. Focillon: *Art d'Occident* (1947), p. 207; G. Entz: 'La cathedrale de Gyulafehervar' in *Acta Historiae Artium* (Budapest), V, 1958, pp. 1-40.
[4] A. W. Goodman in *Archaeological Journal,* LXXXIV, p. 125.
[5] '*Pro nova Rodi soler imaginando et excogitando*'; Winchester College Muniments, Compotus for 1467-8; for further particulars of Hunt, and of other English architects, see J. Harvey: *English Mediaeval Architects* (1954).

literature seems to suggest that, once a given subject has been traced to its source in, for example, the Bestiary or a MS. of Types and Antitypes, its interest has been exhausted. But, so far as *design* is concerned, as distinct from choice of subject, it is not so much the resemblances between given works and their prototypes that are revealing, as the differences and discrepancies. The most obvious example of this is the iconography of the Crucifixion, a standard subject produced at least once on a large scale for every church, and a myriad times for lesser fittings and adornments. Yet among these Crucifixions, almost infinite in number, some stand out as individual works of such an intense vitality that their iconographic significance is actually outweighed by their aesthetic appeal.

Even the most rigidly controlled iconographical subject admits of varieties of treatment; and it is in this variety that the creative faculty of the individual artist finds scope. If it were not so, the interest of generations of art connoisseurs and art critics in the output of the primitives and old masters of painting would be unintelligible. But here we are concerned with the extent to which mediaeval people themselves were seriously interested in the aesthetic aspect of works of art, and to which mediaeval artists strove to achieve beauty. This is an aspect of mediaeval studies which has perhaps received less attention than it deserves. Once attention has been focused upon it, it becomes clear that any suggestion that Gothic people were not concerned with beauty is completely refuted by an abundance of documentary evidence. Indeed, if we accept the definition of St. Thomas Aquinas, that 'Beauty is that which pleases on sight',[1] an interest in the beautiful can be traced well back into the Romanesque period. The discussion by Aquinas himself of the nature of beauty, and the work on the same subject by Adam de Belladonna, Witelo and other 13th-century philosophers, is enough to prove aesthetic interests on the highest level at that date. So voluminous is the evidence that de Bruyne's study covers three volumes.[2] But we can learn far more of actual contemporary views as to what constituted beauty by reference to those works of art which drew forth expressions of esteem or for which very high prices were paid. Here I propose to give a number of quotations from sources of the 11th century and onwards, bearing upon beauty in buildings and other works of art.

The historian William of Malmesbury, writing about 1125, had a

[1] *Summa Theologiae,* I, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1: '*id quod visum placet*'; see J. Maritain: *Art and Scholasticism* (translated by J. F. Scanlan, 1930), pp. 23-5.

[2] E. de Bruyne: *Études d'esthétique mediévale* (Rijksuniv. te Gent. Werken, Afl97-99, 3. vols. Bruges, 1946).

considerable preoccupation with artistic questions, and frequently refers to beauty, for example that of the church of Hexham, of his own abbey church of Malmesbury, of the finely carved altar brought to Bruton by Aldhelm.[1] The Ramsey Abbey chronicler tells us that the west front of the church built about 968 offered a beautiful sight from afar.[2] Eadmer, monk of Canterbury, says that Lanfranc's new buildings greatly excelled the old in beauty as well as size.[3] More specific is the instance from the York history given by Mr. Salzman,[4] where the central tower of Beverley Minster, built *c.* 1050, is described as 'of astonishing beauty and size, so that in it were combined the cunning and achievement of mason-craft.' But the craftsmen had not taken sufficient precautions, for 'they were concerned rather with beauty than with strength, rather with effect than with the need for safety' (*magis invigilabant decori, quam fortitudini, magis delectationi quam commodo stabilitatis*).[5]

Even the sober compilers of Domesday Book noted, as Dr. Rose Graham has pointed out to me, that the new church of Bermondsey (c. A.D. 1086) was '*pulchra*' that is 'fine' or 'handsome' or 'fair to look upon.'[6] In the twelfth century occurred the great controversy as to the value or insignificance of material beauty, between Abbot Suger of St.-Denis and St. Bernard of Clairvaux, proving that the foremost minds of the age regarded aesthetics as a vital issue even if only, in the case of Bernard, fiercely to deny their validity.[7] A century later, about 1200, the narrator of the crusade of Richard Coeur-de-Lion refers to a degree of beauty, 'the lineaments of which a painter working very hard could not exactly imitate,' demonstrating at the same time interest in beauty and that painters were then striving to imitate nature.[8] A very similar remark occurs a few years later in the wonderful metrical life of St. Hugh of Lincoln,[9] which includes what is perhaps the finest literary description of architecture ever written in England—alas! in Latin.

About 1215 the chronicle of the Bishops of Auxerre in France

[1] *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis de Gestis Pontificum Anglorum* (ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton, Rolls Series, 1870), pp. 255, 361, 374.
[2] *Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis* (ed. W. D. Macray, R. S., 1886), p. 39.
[3] R. Willis: *The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral* (1845), p. 13, note d, 14.
[4] L. F. Salzman: *Building in England down to* 1540 (1952), p. 377.
[5] *Historians of the Church of York* (ed. J. Raine, R. S., 1879-94), I, p. 345.
[6] Victoria County History, *Surrey*, I (1902), p. 296; the Latin text is printed in *Liber Censualis vocatus Domesday-Book* (4 vols., 1783-1816).
[7] See E. Panofsky: *Abbott Suger* (Princeton, N. J., 1946), especially pp. 10-15.
[8] *Chronicles and Memorials of Richard I* (ed. W. Stubbs, R. S., 1864-5), I, p. 197: '*qualem nec pictor plurimum laborans linealiter imitaretur ad unguem.*'
[9] *Metrical Life of St. Hugh* (ed. J. F. Dimock, Lincoln, 1860), lines 886-8: '*Nam tot ibi pinxit varias fortuna figuras, Ut si picturam similem simulare laboret Ars conata diu, naturam vix imitetur.*'

referred to the supersession of Romanesque work by the new Gothic style: 'The bishop, seeing that his church at Auxerre was of old building suffering from decrepitude and age, and of poorer style than the others everywhere lifting up their heads in a wondrous sort of beauty, determined to adorn it with a new structure and by the keen skill of those versed in the art of masonry, lest it should be in any way unequal to the rest in style or treatment; so he had it totally demolished that, its ancient sloth put aside, it might grow young in a more tasteful form of novelty.[1]

From the early 14th century comes a whole group of mentions of the aesthetic appeal of art. In 1317 Archbishop Walter Reynolds wrote to the Prior of Christchurch, Canterbury, bidding him admonish a certain painter named Jordan for having spread a report that the great 'tabula' or painted reredos of the high altar of the cathedral was to be sold. The Archbishop protests the falsity of the rumour, 'for Christ the patron of our church knows that we have determined that that painting should perpetually be kept there for the adornment of the altar of His Church and ours, on account of its beauty (*propter eius speciositatem*).'[2]

Three years later the Bishop of London was asking his clergy to contribute to the repair of the great bell-tower 'splendid and long famous, . . . which has been wont not only to delight the eyes of onlookers with its beauty (*intuentibus sui decore venustare solebat aspectum*) but also offered increase of pious devotion to the contemplative.'[3] Three years later again, in 1323, two Irish Franciscans on their way to the Holy Land passed through England and France and recorded impressions of some of the buildings they saw: Lichfield with 'its most graceful church of wondrous beauty, excellently adorned and enriched with very high stone towers or steeples, paintings, carvings and other fittings of a church.' In London they saw the great cathedral of St. Paul's 'of amazing size, in the midst of which stands that most famous belfry, crowned with an incomparable nobility,' while at the east end of the church is that 'most imperial chapel of the Blessed Virgin', the new Lady Chapel.[4]

In conclusion I wish to turn once more to the subject of personality and its relation to an authoritative tradition. In Vitruvius architects of the Renaissance found such an authority, and architecture since 1500 has very largely been as it were commentary and case-law on the Vitruvian Code. At times the code itself has been discarded, as by some of the

[1] Mortet & Deschamps (above, p. 66, note 1), II, p. 203.
[2] Canterbury Cathedral Library: Prior Eastry's Correspondence, V. 27.
[3] *Register of Ralph Baldock etc., Bishops of London* (Canterbury & York Society, VII, 1911), p. 217.
[4] *Itineraria* (above, p. 57, note 1), pp. 4, 5.

extremists of the Baroque period in Spain, where even the last vestiges of the classical orders occasionally disappeared.[1] In the Gothic Revival on the other hand, there was a Rennaissance based only upon the study of the monuments and without recovery of the governing code which alone could have justified the movement, a point actually brought out by C. R. Cockerell in 1845.[2] More recently there has been an architectural rebellion against all authority, and the claim of the artist to an absolute, not merely a relative, freedom has never been so loudly trumpeted forth as within the last 50 years. Yet we have seen Le Corbusier, who for a generation has been regarded by the most advanced as the leader of an emancipated architecture, himself produce a proportional system of neo-mediaeval character, described as *Le Modulor*. Even outlaws, pirates and revolutionaries find themselves under the necessity of inventing laws of their own.

Artistic genius is like the wind, blowing whithersoever it listeth; outstanding gifts will burst through all systems and transcend all codes. Yet law and tradition have a real value in the educational field; even the poet, born not made, needs practice in metre and the forms of verse. All but a few philosophic anarchists will concede that this restraining hand of tradition or of some system forms a necessary background to a flourishing art. But in the case of architecture we have seen that there has been a conflict, not between system and no-system, between law and anarchy, but between the written Roman code of Vitruvius and the customary common law of the building masters. Students of legal history will find a remarkable parallel in the twofold development of law in Western Europe, the written civil law of Rome and the traditional law of the northern peoples: precisely those Franks, Burgundians, Lombards, Normans, Saxons and Goths amongst whom Gothic art came to light and flourished for half a millenium. In this conflict of the two kinds of law, the Roman civil code has won almost everywhere except in England and its great offshoots in the Commonwealth, the Irish Republic, and the United States. There has been something consonant with our character, something in harmony with the English spirit and historical experience, in this ancient complexity of an unwritten customary law which has grown up and has been interpreted in the light of ever-changing events. To me it seems that there was something equally fitting in the natural development of Gothic design, where each generation produced organic growth in the body of tradition.

[1] A noteworthy example is the convent of Santa Clara at Santiago de Compostela, illustrated in B. Bevan: *Historia de la Arquitectura Española* (translated by F. Chueca Goitia, Barcelona, 1950), pl. LXXXIX.

[2] See p. 60, note 2 above.