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# Gothic/Italian “Gothic”: Toward a Redefinition

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THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED for a session entitled “Gothic Architecture, the Italian Contribution,” at the 1990 annual meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians.<sup>1</sup> Having considered this issue for some time, I inverted the premise of the session and addressed the problem in terms of “Italian Architecture, the Gothic Contribution.” I approached the subject from the standpoint of Florence or Siena rather than Paris, for I have come to believe that, working in this way, one might hope to free late medieval Italy from the chronic suffering of its tortured historiography. Complicated though it may be, this historiography is simple enough to summarize.<sup>2</sup> Whereas the Renaissance condemned Italy for having been too Gothic, modern scholarship has tended to fault it for not having been Gothic enough (compare Figs. 2 and 3). My premise is that Italy was never really “Gothic” at all, never a colony of a Parisian architectural empire—the way it is commonly regarded—but an independent culture with an individual architecture that used Gothic for its own purposes. It is concerning this architectural culture and its relationship to the north that I offer a number of observations.

From my viewpoint, the difference between Italian and northern European architecture in the period is not to be understood at the usual levels of style or iconography but in terms of deeper structures, involving context, method, and, above all, the differing historical orientations of the two areas. This view hinges on a redefinition of the Gothic and, consequently, also of the Romanesque. Without such a redefinition I find it difficult to attempt to set matters straight for late medieval Italian archi-

tecture—indeed, for medieval Italy in general. The question, What is Gothic? is of course one of the most problematic in the history of architecture (on close scrutiny, none of the many established theories of Gothic architecture works as a consistent or, as Louis Grodecki aptly put it, a “firm, rigorous” definition), and I have no wish to join the numerous scholars who have lost their bearings on the Grail-like quest of answering it definitively.<sup>3</sup> Having made this talismanic disclaimer, I will nevertheless make some sweeping generalizations about this enigmatic architecture.

First, I ask why we persist in the curious usage of calling European architecture of the twelfth through fifteenth centuries after a barbarian tribe of late antiquity (Fig. 1). Is it merely meaningless, ingrained habit, or does the word *Gothic* contain a truth of which we are subconsciously aware? I suggest that the word does involve a key to understanding the period, in terms of the Renaissance usage of the word—that is, the usage of the period that first made the connection between the word *Gothic* and the architecture in question, and that first gave a descriptive name to medieval architecture at all. This connection is simple. In the eyes of the Renaissance, the Goths were the destroyers of Rome. In other words, they were the very embodiment of the spirit of anticlassicism. This, of course, tied in with the Renaissance view of medieval architecture: its essence was its anticlassicism. But the Renaissance also used another descriptive term for the style, *lavori moderni*.<sup>4</sup> If we put this term together with *Gothic*—that is, put together the two earliest descriptive terms for the style (the Gothic period itself, so far as we know, having only qualified its architecture geographically, as *opus francigenum*)<sup>5</sup>—we have an architecture that is both

1. The session was conceived and chaired by Gary Radke, whom I thank for providing a public forum for ideas still in the developmental stage. I also would like to thank those numerous colleagues who encouraged me to publish this paper substantially as delivered at the meeting; only minor changes have been made, principally those necessary in converting it from lecture to published form. This task was much facilitated by Carol Krinsky, who scrutinized the lecture manuscript with this purpose in mind. Several modifications were made in response to the critical comments of David Gillerman, Richard Pommer, and Joanna Ziegler. Apart from necessary citations and a few points of information, I have abjured the footnotes that, given the breadth of the subject, could easily have been as long as the text. This paper is offered as a speculative essay; its subject is part of a larger study currently in preparation on medieval design theory.

2. For a fast tour through this literature, see my discussion in regard to a single major monument in *The Campanile of Florence Cathedral*, New York, 1971, chap. 1.

3. L. Grodecki, *Gothic Architecture*, New York, 1977, 24. See P. Frankl, *The Gothic*, Princeton, 1960, for the definitive account of all theories of the Gothic (including exhaustive etymological discussion of the word itself) through the 1950s; although more recent treatments of the Gothic offer valuable new techniques of analysis, virtually without exception their lines of attack and underlying conceptual frameworks have remained within traditional parameters, whether structural, formal, iconographic, or otherwise.

4. Filarete (cf. Frankl, *The Gothic*, 256f., 858f.). This should not be confused with later Renaissance use of the term *modern* for Renaissance itself (for example, by the Pseudo-Raphael and Vasari).

5. The famous phrase was used by Burchard von Hall around 1280 in reference to the German abbey church of St. Peter at Wimpfen im Tahl (Frankl, *The Gothic*, 55). As Frankl points out (*ibid.*), Gervase of

"modern" and "anticlassical," or going a step further, "modernist" and "antihistoricist," which are two ways of saying nearly the same thing. I suggest that these early sources were closer to the essence of the matter than most later, scientific scholarship preoccupied with rib vaulting, skeletal structure, scholasticism, diaphaneity, geometry, diagonality, and so forth. In fact, I would propose that, were it possible to give late medieval architecture a new name more descriptively accurate than *Gothic* (while at the same time revealing the hidden meaning of that term), the name would be *medieval modernism*.

This notion, by which I refer to something far more concrete and intentional than any Focillonian "spirit of modernism" in the Gothic, becomes clearer if we go back another step, to the period called the Romanesque.<sup>6</sup> As with the word *Gothic*, we tend to use the term either unthinkingly or disparagingly—that is, with the idea that it represents a rather naive understanding of the pre-Gothic. I believe, however, that the core meaning of the word *Romanesque* remains closer to the truth about the period it denotes than all the later academic analysis in terms of square-schematism, bay systems, radiating chapels, and the like. In other words, the early nineteenth-century term *Romanesque* was on the mark, or nearly so. Pre-Gothic medieval architecture was, quite simply, Roman-esque. That is, it was deeply historicizing. That it embodied "modernist" tendencies as well is also true. In fact, perhaps the fairest characterization of the Romanesque period would be in terms of a conflict—often moving and poignant—between the two opposing currents of historicism and modernism. In this view, the turn to Gothic would amount to the resolution of the conflict through the rejection of historicism in favor of a purist modernism (a *volte-face* that would, in a Panofskian way, closely parallel developments in literary-intellectual circles centered in France, in the shift that occurred around 1150 from a strong proto-humanistic revival of antique material to self-consciously new methods and interests emphasizing novelty, promoted by scholars who sometimes were prone to calling themselves "moderns").<sup>7</sup>

Canterbury was similarly aware that the Gothic choir of Canterbury Cathedral that he chronicled derived from France. In late medieval Italy, there is no reason to believe that the Gothic would not have been seen as something French, although it also may already have become associated with Germany in the trecento (H. Klotz, "Deutsche und italienische Baukunst im Trecento," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz*, xi, 1966, 173ff.). By the cinquecento the geographical locus of the Gothic had completely shifted to Germany in the eyes of the Italians (who often called it the *maniera tedesca*); but for Philibert de L'Orme, presumably reflecting current French notions, the Gothic remained French, as well as being "modern" (Frankl, *The Gothic*, 297).

6. On the term Romanesque, see Frankl, *The Gothic*, passim; and, more recently, the perceptive analysis of L. Seidel, *Songs of Glory: The Romanesque Façades of Aquitaine*, Chicago, 1981, 4ff.

7. "The first generations of students to flock to the expanding urban schools found their inspiration in the learning and the achievements of



Fig. 1. "The Goths Crossing into Italy" (anonymous nineteenth-century lithograph).

The components of historicism and modernism varied widely in strength throughout Romanesque Europe. Some areas were nearly purist in stressing one tendency over the other. For example, the medieval churches of Rome, such as the nave of S. Lorenzo fuori le mura (Fig. 4), are so faithful to Early Christian models that they are hardly Romanesque at all. Normandy, on the other hand, in interiors like St.-Etienne at Caen (Fig. 5), was nearly pure modernist in spirit and thus for good reason was included by Ernst Gall in his admirable book on early Gothic.<sup>8</sup> Another example of this precocious strain of modernism is St. Gertrude in Nivelles, which eschews virtually all references to the antique except for a basilican layout. More

the past. The known past, both classical and patristic, initially provided the new ideas and models for action, and these were for a time studied assiduously and imitated enthusiastically. Then, by about the middle of the twelfth century, the rediscovery of the past appeared to be complete. The 'moderns,' as the scholars of the time began to describe themselves, had assimilated the available learning of Antiquity and were now confident of their mastery of it. More importantly, they were aware that they could and should learn more and advance beyond what had been known before. . . . After 1150 the culture depended less on classical sources and was more open to other inspirations and to newer ideas. . . ." (S. C. Ferruolo, "The Twelfth-Century Renaissance," in W. Treadgold, ed., *Renaissances before the Renaissance*, Stanford, 1984, 139f., 144).

8. E. Gall, *Die gotische Baukunst in Frankreich und Deutschland*, Leipzig, 1925.



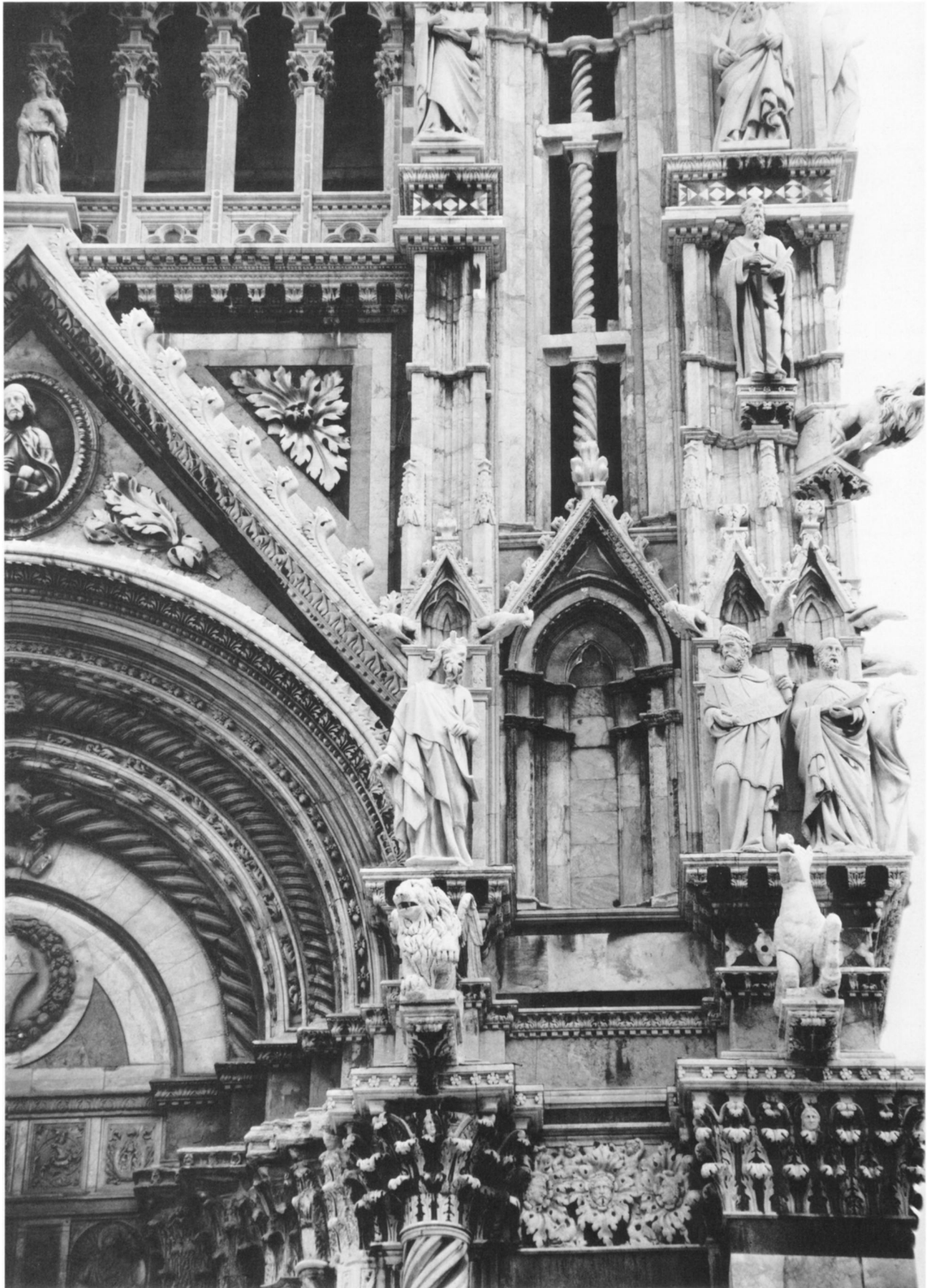


Fig. 2. Siena Cathedral. West façade detail (author).



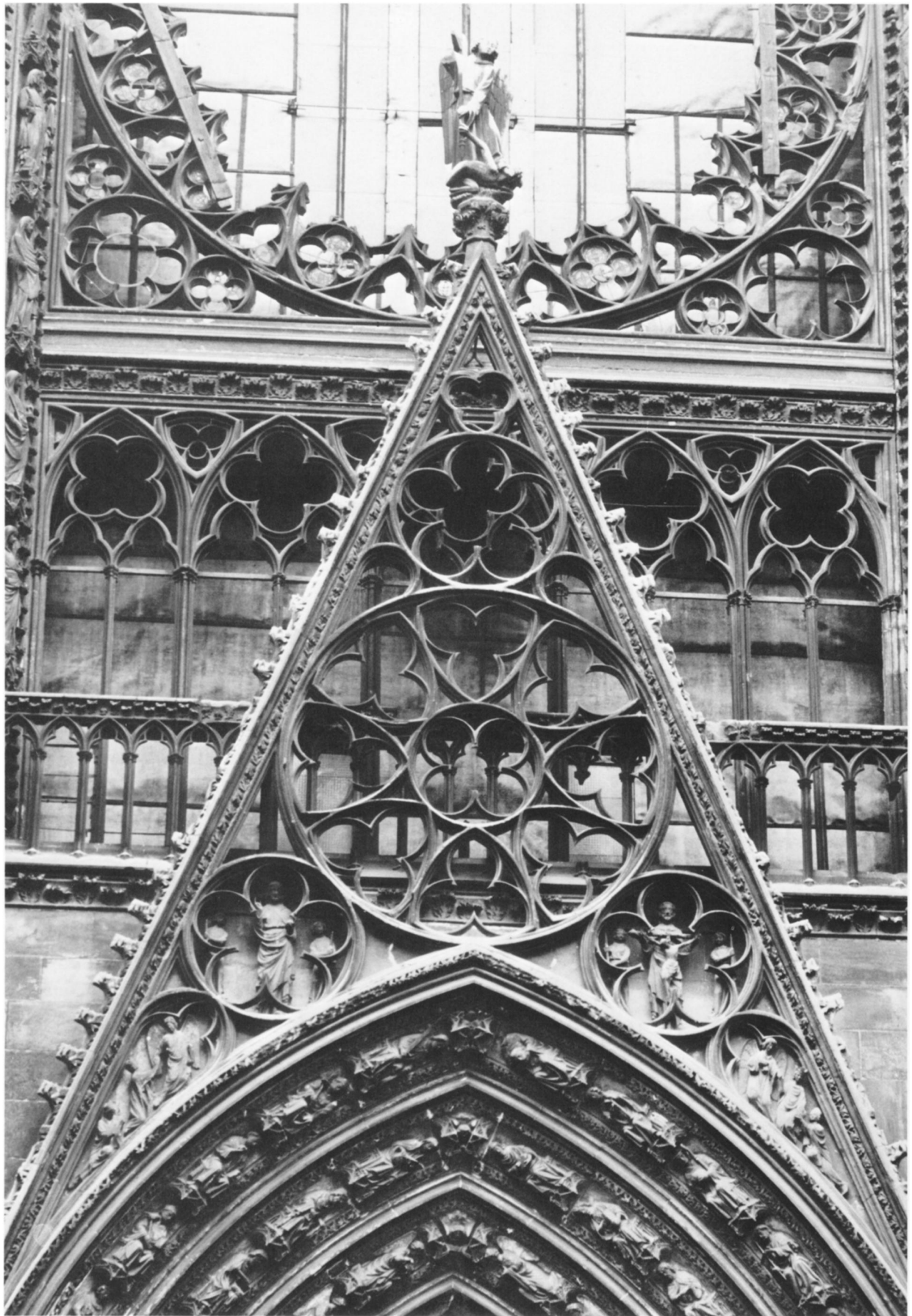


Fig. 3. Rouen Cathedral. Portail des Libraires (author).

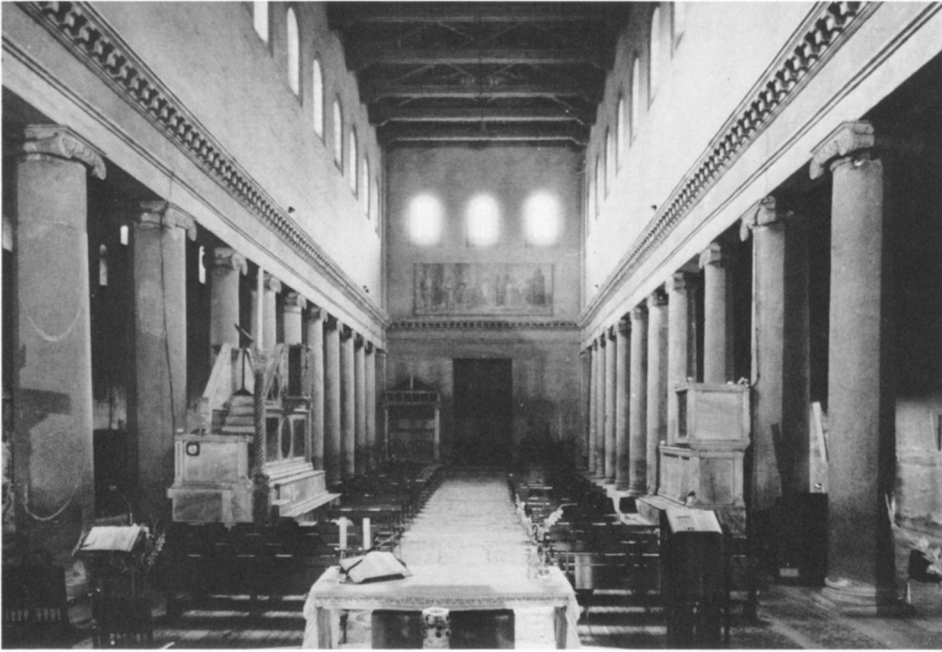


Fig. 4. S. Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome. Nave (author).



Fig. 5. St.-Etienne, Caen. Nave (author).

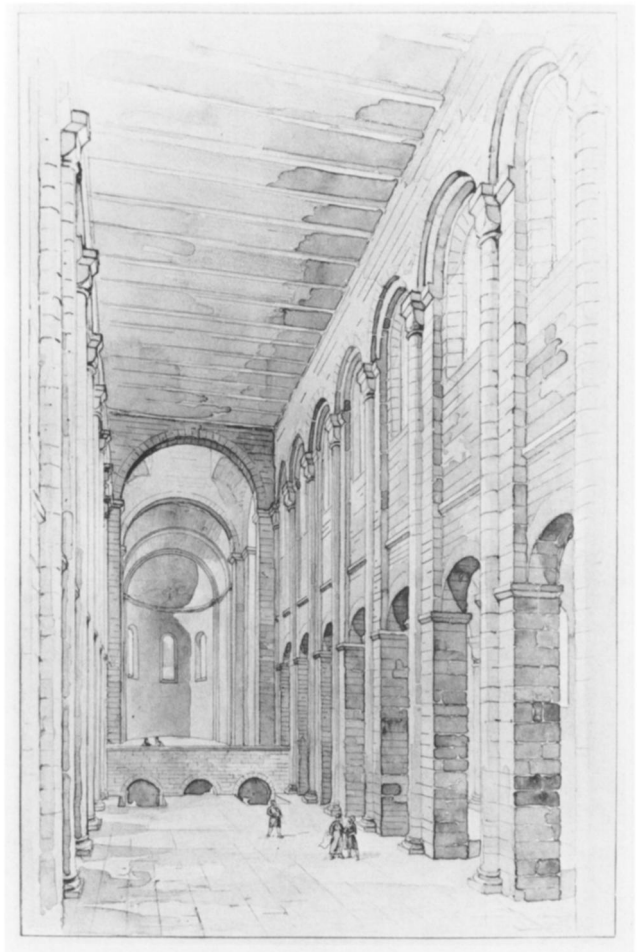


Fig. 6. Speyer Cathedral, reconstruction of early eleventh-century nave (Wenzel Hollar).



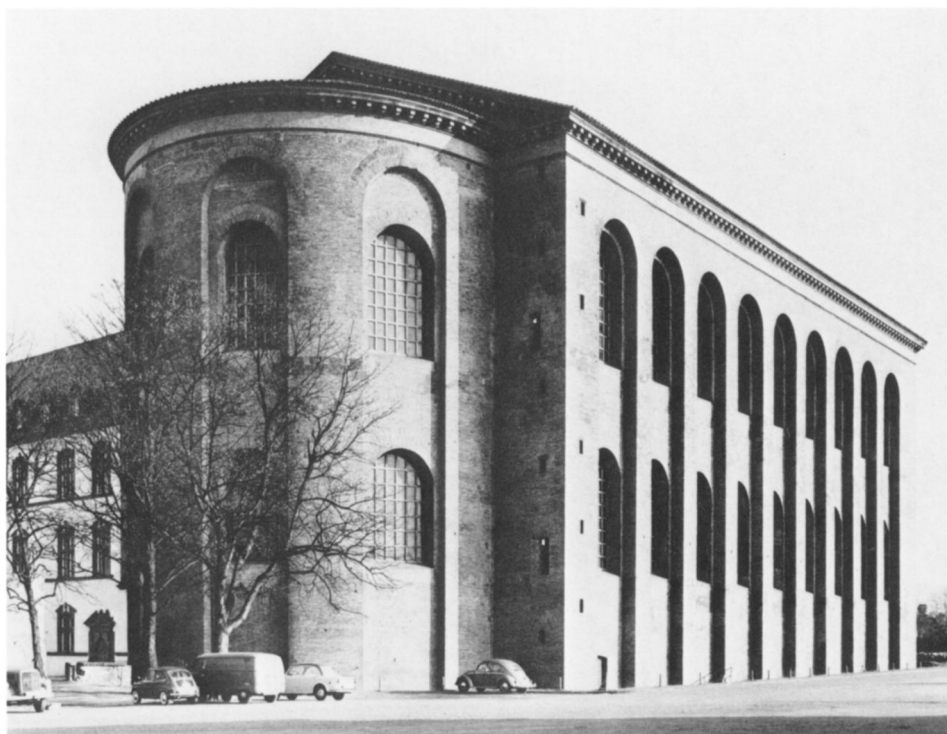
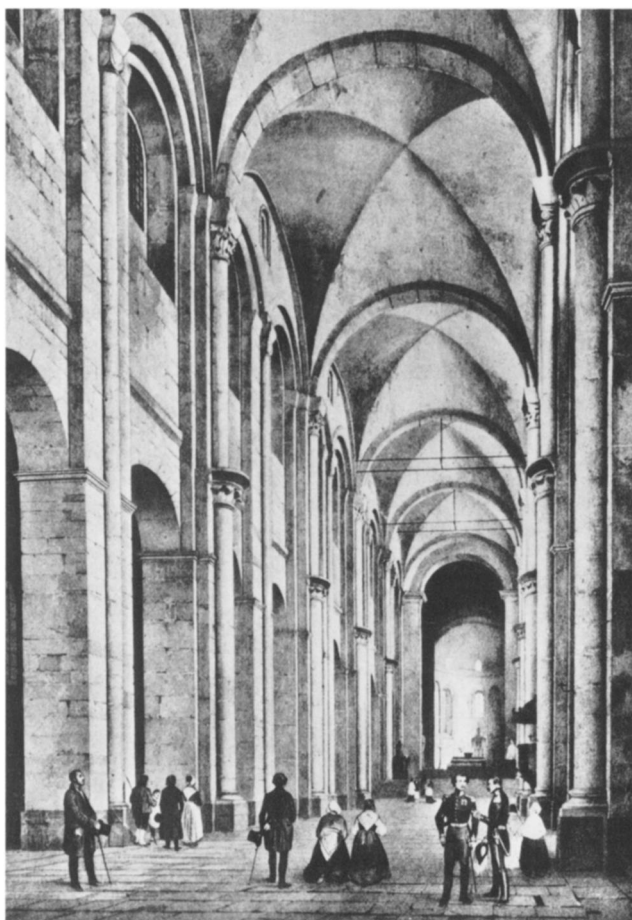


Fig. 7. Basilica, Trier (Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Trier).



characteristic of the period, however, and true to the Romanesque method, are works embodying a conflict between historicizing elements like classical columns, ornament, proportions, and massive substantiality on the one hand and, on the other hand, modernist tendencies toward the bay system, schematization, structural rationalism, and attenuated proportions. The cathedrals at Autun and Périgueux are good examples of this fusion, in which the historicizing element is strong but not overwhelming: the former building takes up the heavily classicizing detail of the Roman city gates of the town, such as the *Porte St.-André*, and the latter clearly derives from Byzantine models, perhaps via Venice and S. Marco. But the great imperial Cathedral at Speyer is the paradigm of this interaction. The first Speyer of the early eleventh century took up the nearby Constantinian basilica at Trier, turned it outside in, and added an attenuated columnar layer of bay-dividing elements (Figs. 6, 7). What is particularly telling is that the second Speyer as rebuilt a half century later is more rather than less historicizing (Fig. 8). Not only are huge Roman-style groin vaults erected above the nave, but also the main piers receive a double order of massive columns that—regardless of their simultaneous inten-

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Fig. 8. Speyer Cathedral. Nave as altered in 1080 (nineteenth-century lithograph, before restoration).



Fig. 9. St.-Denis. Ambulatory (Joel Herschman).



Fig. 10. Notre-Dame, Paris. Nave (H. Abrams).

sification of the “bay system”—are far more antique in proportions than the original attenuated forms. In other words, Speyer tells us (and Cluny III manifests analogous transformations of Cluny II) that the Romanesque was never an inexorable transitional movement toward the Gothic (a misinterpretation that never has been quite put to rest despite generations



Fig. 11. Amiens Cathedral. Nave (Archives Photographiques).

of Wölfflinian analysis). It was not driven by an unconscious process of stylistic evolution but controlled by a strongly self-conscious view of history, of the present in its relationship to the past, in which the latter was not to be relinquished in architecture but instead strongly emphasized. It did not want vainly to be “Gothic” but—not unlike present-day postmodernism (as well as much of the nineteenth century)—attempted to be both modernist and historicist at the same time.

In the period of medieval modernism—or what we usually call the Gothic—the historicizing elements disappear or, rather, are *made* to disappear. The massive substantiality and structural ponderation taken from Rome are rejected, mainly by excluding or dissolving the meaning-laden classicizing forms that conveyed these effects—that is, the visually heavy groin and barrel vaults and solid columns, pilasters, and load-bearing walls. In their place architectural modernism takes hold: a new system of schematic, linear forms that are inherently anticlassical in effect and, I believe, in self-conscious intent. This does not happen instantaneously, of course, but in a century-long process that sometimes is paradoxical in its development. Thus at Suger’s St.-Denis, as Jean Bony has noted, the conceptually point-like support system of the linear, skeletal rib vaulting takes the form of a revival of classicizing columns (Fig. 9).<sup>9</sup> Such columns

9. J. Bony, “What Possible Sources for the Chevet of Saint-Denis?” in P. Gerson, ed., *Abbot Suger and Saint-Denis: A Symposium*, New York, 1986, 136ff.



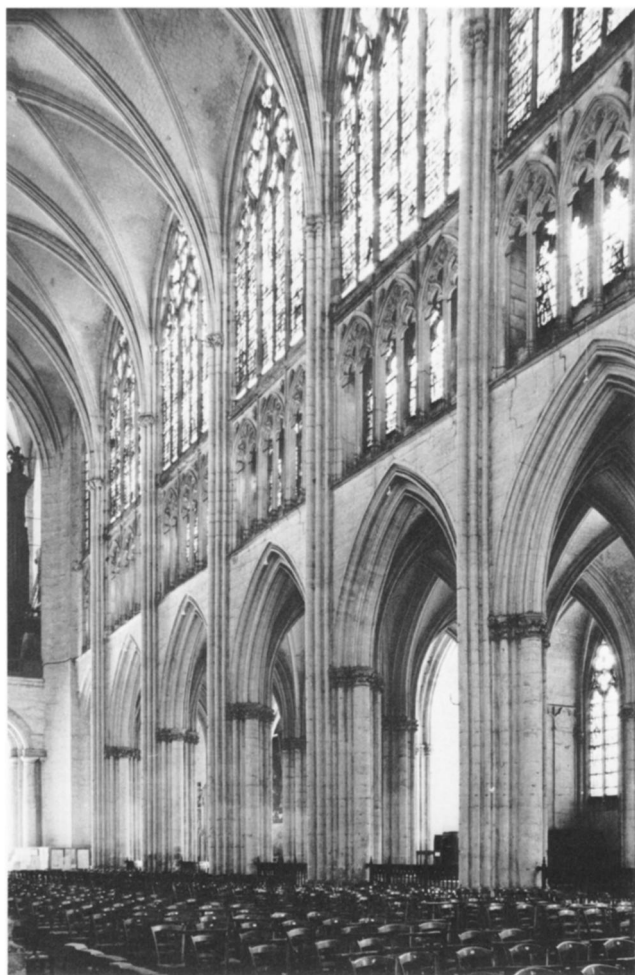


Fig. 12. Troyes Cathedral. Choir (author).

(signs, perhaps, of a still-active “Romanesque” conflict despite the great modernist advances—indeed, perhaps appearing in reaction to the advances and the radical vision driving them) become prominent in the main elevations of early Gothic cathedrals, including those at Laon and Paris (Fig. 10). Highly indicative of the full takeover of the building by the modernist vision is the manner in which these prominent historicist forms subsequently are gradually subverted, transformed, and ultimately eliminated. First, the High Gothic *pilier cantonné*, invented at Chartres, literally imprisons them in a cage of attenuated colonnettes (Fig. 11). A generation later, for example at St.-Denis or Troyes Cathedral, bundles of such colonnettes dominate the pier completely (Fig. 12). And all along, progressively these colonnettes are thinned down and stretched out to the point that all connection with the gravitational substance and iconic presence of their antique columnar origins is negated (Fig. 13). Similarly, the capital, that crucial sign of the orders, is abstracted into crocket form and shrivels to a mere speck in the gigantic elevation, and eventually, in many cases, it disappears altogether—as does, in the more radical late Gothic, the attic base and, indeed, the independent colonnette itself. Nor



Fig. 13. St.-Ouen, Rouen. Nave (author).

was the exterior of the cathedral neglected. The signal event here was the dramatic appearance of the flying buttress in the late twelfth century, which destroyed the closed, contained, antique integrity of volumes and replaced classical decorum of structure, which had persisted until that moment, with modernist structural exhibitionism (Fig. 14).<sup>10</sup>

Insofar as it first developed in and around the Ile-de-France, medieval modernism was attended by another factor of critical importance. To the eye of the specialist, each of the French cathedrals has a unique personality; but, seen against the panorama of most of architectural history, including the rest of the medieval period, they form a closely linked series in a chain of development in which possibilities of variation are rather narrowly circumscribed (with Bourges, to be sure, offering an important typological variant). The main energy of most French Gothic architects went not into conceiving fresh architectural programs, but into the development and perfection of a long-

10. Compare Panofsky's analysis of Gothic sculpture, in which “the classical element is so completely absorbed as to become indiscernible,” and his characterization of analogous trends in philosophy, historiography, and poetry (*Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, New York, 1965, 102f.).

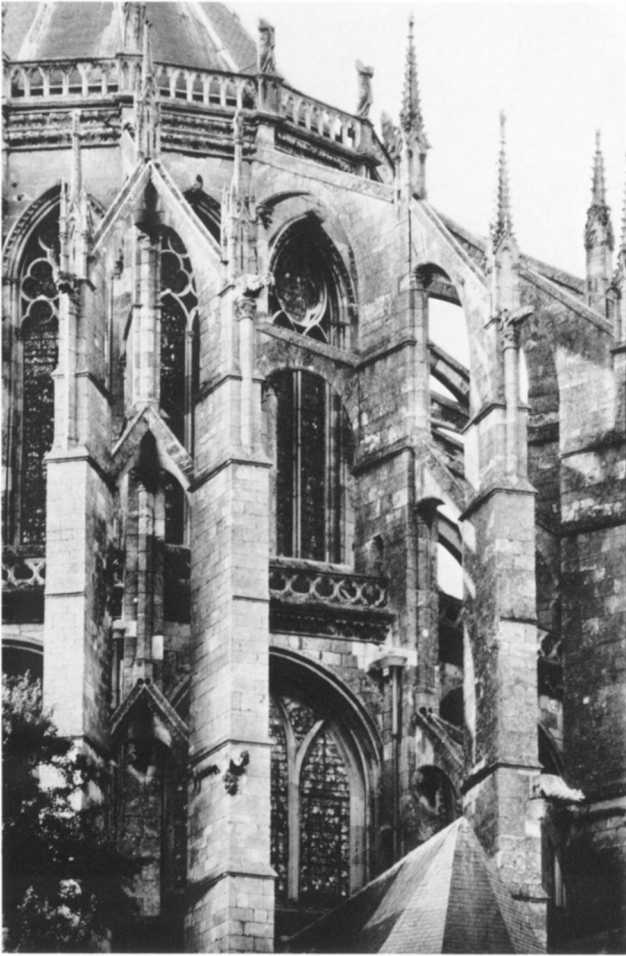


Fig. 14. Le Mans Cathedral. Choir buttressing (author).

established type—a type that takes form in the twelfth century, if not earlier, and continues at least through the fourteenth century in such examples as St.-Ouen at Rouen. Although this ideal cathedral type was bound up closely with the modernist spirit as a whole, it was distinct from it.

This distinction is useful because it allows us to analyze more precisely the variations in the spread of the new architecture beyond the Ile-de-France. Thus it enables us to see, for example, that Jean Bony's celebrated article about the "resistance" to Chartres concerned a resistance to the building type—to the *parti* of Chartres—but, as seen at Notre-Dame at Dijon (Figs. 15, 16), not to modernism as such.<sup>11</sup> With exceptions such as Cologne Cathedral (designed by a Frenchman) or Westminster Abbey (a rather awkward imitation of Reims), most areas throughout Europe followed this pattern. That is, the "ideal" *parti* was much less influential than the medieval modernist architectural method of the French (although Spain appeared, at least initially, to grasp the alternative *parti* of Bourges perhaps

11. J. Bony, "The Resistance to Chartres in Early Thirteenth Century Architecture," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 20/21, 1957/1958, 35–52.

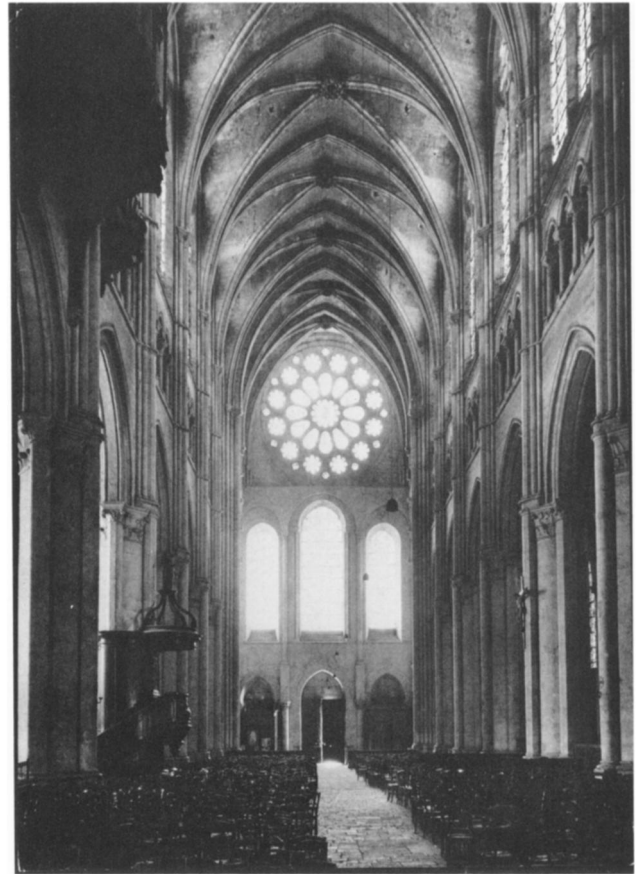


Fig. 15. Chartres Cathedral. Nave (H. Abrams).

better than its intrinsic methodology). This is true whether one looks at extraordinary fantasies of the Decorated style such as Ely and Bristol cathedrals (Fig. 17), at German hall churches like the Lorenzkirche in Nuremberg (Fig. 18), or at other regional Gothic schools. Throughout these developments the liberation from historicism and the design possibilities inherent in the modernist vocabulary and compositional method seized the architectural imagination. The French format could be resisted, but not French modernism, which was warmly welcomed nearly everywhere in Europe.

The great exception to this pattern was Italy. Italy did not follow the developmental stages of the north. For the most part its Romanesque did not embody a sustained conflict between historicist and modernist tendencies (the vaulted Lombard style being rather an exception), and its architecture during the Gothic period was concerned with neither the resolution of such a conflict into architectural modernism nor the mastery of an exclusivistic, French modernist methodology. Italy was never antihistoricist but, to the contrary, always deeply historicist—deeply and irrevocably bound to its vast ancient heritage that was so much richer, more pervasive and culturally omnipresent, than anywhere else in Europe. This well-known attachment was not always—indeed was probably not typically—a matter



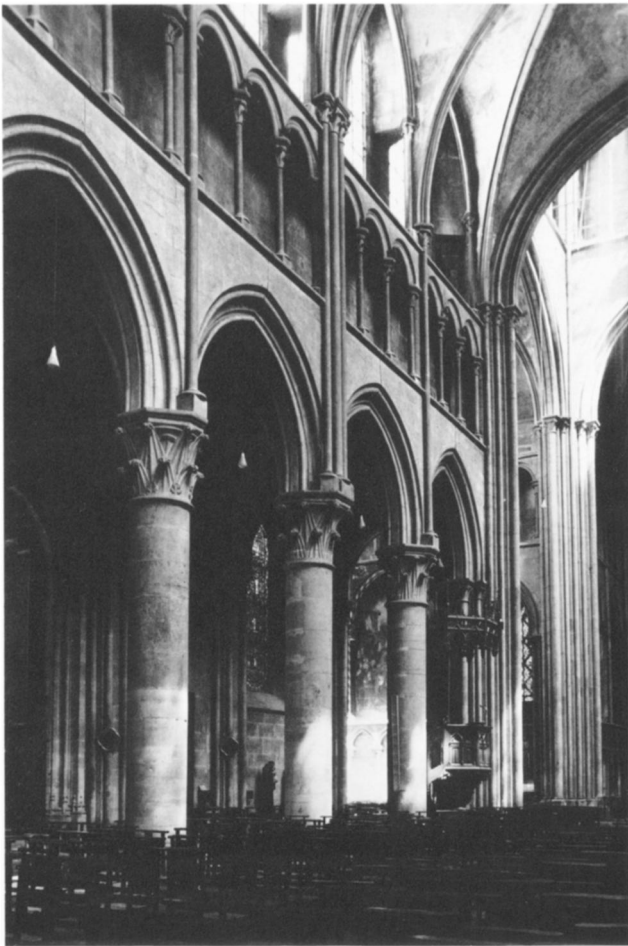


Fig. 16. Notre-Dame, Dijon. Nave (author).

of passive bondage, but rather one of active choice (as demonstrated by the ability of Italian architects to reinterpret and to play with antique forms, and even to disregard them on occasion at will).

But the key to Italian architecture, to my mind, was not its historicism, crucial a factor as it was, but rather eclecticism, which I believe was the core of its architectural outlook and method. This eclectic approach was one of accommodation and diversity, of the tolerance of complexity and contradiction in architecture, and the encouragement of—indeed the demand for—purposeful originality in design, be it in structure, iconography, or style, rather than conformity to any preordained architectural model or morphological system. The source material of its monumental works was open to virtually all directions: the classical past, the wider Mediterranean world of Byzantium and Islam, and vernacular types, as well as the inventions of northern medieval architecture. In other words, Italian architecture in the Gothic period was in method the very antithesis of purist, idealizing French modernism.

The eclectic method of medieval Italy, self-evident in most monuments to some degree and strongest in the most important

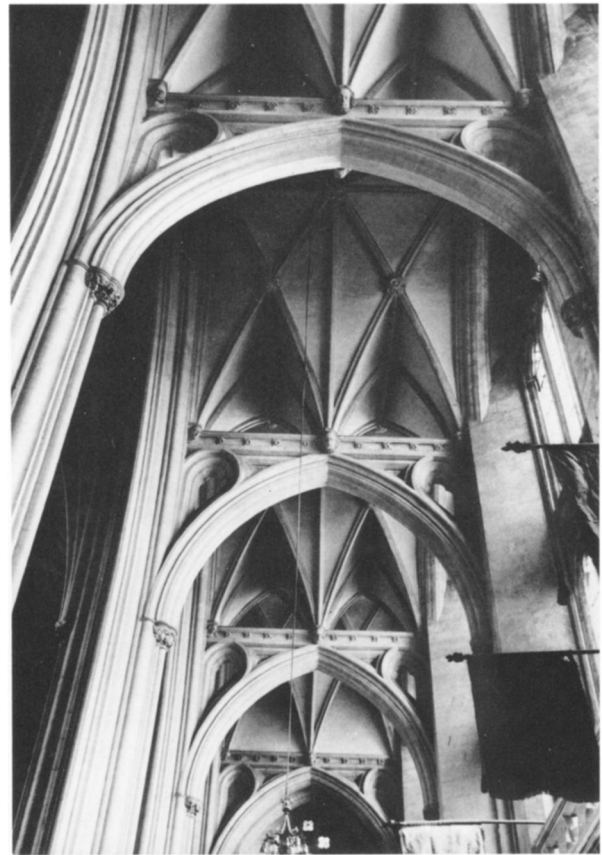


Fig. 17. Bristol Cathedral. Choir aisle (author).

and ambitious buildings, surely did not arise fortuitously. For one thing, it was not an invention of medieval Italy but one that went back to its ancient roots, perhaps to the Etruscans and certainly to the Romans, who were eclectic not only in their basic, omnipresent combination of the Greek orders with indigenous arcuated structure but in a far broader manner. A building like the Pantheon, for example—to take a work by the epitome of eclectic patronage, the emperor Hadrian—is a model of the eclectic method with its temple front and rotunda and, within the rotunda, its great coffered vault hovering over almost miniature trabeated zones, not to mention its extreme range of building materials and structural techniques (Fig. 19). If one wanted to be clever, one might suggest that the reappearance of the eclectic method in the Italian Middle Ages was also a kind of historicism, of method rather than substance; but of course this would not adequately explain why the practice was revived. To imitate the methodological implications of surviving Roman buildings was, to be sure, a thing of value in itself, but it is important to realize that many of the factors that first led the Romans to eclecticism seem to have led the Italian Middle Ages back to it. These factors surely involved more than such imponderables as a perennially accommodating and permissive Italian character. Nor can the more determinative factors of climate and geography fully explain Italian eclecticism, al-



Fig. 18. Lorenzkirche, Nuremberg (author).

though certainly the exposure of the peninsula to all the varied, powerful cultures of the Mediterranean and the concomitant Alpine distancing of Italy from the architectural atmosphere of northern Europe were important. But I suggest that the crucial determinants were, first, the predominantly urban life-style of both periods and, second, the political and social diversity and fluidity that in different ways characterized Italy in both antiquity and the later Middle Ages. In ancient Rome this dynamic complexity flourished within a single, immense sociopolitical structure; in the politically fragmented Middle Ages, it flourished within the collective complexity of the dozens of significant urban centers and, within those centers, in an urban society that was rapidly evolving and increasingly multilayered. In both cases, what was demanded of architects was not conformity to some absolute architectural model or style, as tended to be the case in the north, where typically a single, relatively uniform class of patrons demanded relatively uniform monuments for relatively uniform purposes; rather, the opposite was required. In medieval Italy, each major city tended to demand architectural monuments unlike those of other centers, while within them each evolving institution generally sought some manner of architectural differentiation (as between, for example, three Florentine loggia-buildings: Orsanmichele, the Bigallo, and the Loggia della Signoria).<sup>12</sup> These purposes required an architecture of diverse solutions that were both functionally and symbolically

12. A striking example of eclectic variation according to institution occurs in three highly diverse structures built in Todi around 1300: the purist Gothic hall church of S. Fortunato; the virtually Romanesque Duomo (with a Gothic crypt); and a town hall complex of vernacular design with Gothic window detailing and a rib-vaulted loggia.



Fig. 19. Pantheon, Rome (author).

original. To the extent that such sociopolitical diversity existed also in the north (to a far lesser extent, to be sure, with the glaring exception of the Low Countries, as precociously advanced urbanistically and socially as was Italy), it is all the more telling that the architectural style there remained within the confines of modernism, demonstrating its hold over society at large (even in the Low Countries, the sociopolitical exception that proves the aesthetic rule). But for the south, it may, I believe, be fairly stated that a free-wheeling eclecticism was adopted as the perfect architectural method for the eclectic urban societies of both Roman antiquity and the Italian Middle Ages.

At this level of discourse, I find no basic difference between Romanesque and Gothic Italy. Both were essentially, if not equally, eclectic in architectural outlook and method, and in many areas it is difficult to draw any hard line between them. Nevertheless there are some crucial points to be made about the relationship of Italy to the north in the two periods. In the Italian Romanesque, eclecticism generally meant the coexistence of various currents rather than the state of conflict of the north. The paradigmatic building here is surely Modena Cathedral, whose brick interior closely copies that of Jumièges in





Fig. 20. Pisa Cathedral (author).

a state of happy coexistence with a stone exterior that relates closely to Imperial works like the apse of Speyer. Pisa Cathedral is equally instructive (Fig. 20). Its eclecticism is more complicated and interwoven than Modena's, embodying a scheme that appears to combine the great five-aisled basilicas of Rome, the continuous side aisles of the French pilgrimage churches, the centralized scheme of Qalat Siman, Byzantine screened effects seen at Salonika and Hagia Sophia, Islamic pointed arches, a north Italian–Imperial crossing tower, and other forms. At Pisa the burning scholarly issue has always been not the sources as such, problematic as that topic is, but whether the complexity resulted from a single, grand initial scheme or from a process of accretion. From my point of view it makes little difference, for the eclectic method is much the same whether working synchronically or diachronically—a fact that helps us to deal critically with the numerous important Italian buildings that took shape slowly and in changing form, in response to changing contextual and cultural pressures.

As for the Gothic period, although Italian architects rejected French modernism as a system—and for good sociopolitical reasons, as we have seen—they nevertheless responded to it with deep interest, energy, and intelligence, and not, as often is imagined, with uncomprehending, naive, and resistant provincialism.

The Gothic did make a powerful contribution to late medieval Italy, in essence becoming part of that ever-fluid eclectic melting pot of the peninsula, to which it added considerable substance as well as spice. But since French modernism, with its inherent antihistoricism, was so antithetical to the prevailing Italian outlook, the critical questions are, How and why did the Italians take it up? I believe that they adopted the Gothic at various levels for varied purposes. Gothic had become the prestige architecture of the rest of Europe, emblematic of *haut monde* modernity, and the Italians, great international presence that they were, could hardly be expected to ignore it, if only for the sake of fashion. Thus throughout Italy appear the stigmata of modernity in the form of traceried windows, gables, pinnacles, and other Gothic forms attached to otherwise traditional buildings. But the Italians evidently also appreciated the intense visual complexity and energy of the Gothic and found ways to incorporate these effects, this modernist *frisson*, into their buildings. Finally, at a deeper level, they perceived what can only be called the inherent spirituality of the Gothic as it took form in the great French cathedrals—that is, the spiritual content created by the medieval modernist method (coextensive with the connotations of sheer modernity, from which it was not easily separated). Being in its culture as spiritual as it was secular,



Fig. 21. Papal Palace, Viterbo (author).

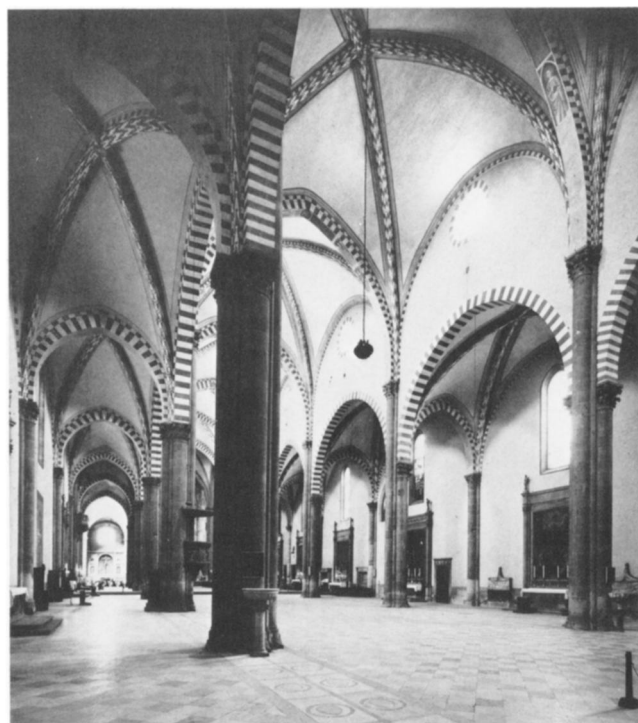


Fig. 22. S. Maria Novella, Florence (author).

Italy sought to use Gothic also to convey spiritual meaning (along with other, typically historicizing, iconographic means to that end), whether by using it as a semiotic system of signs whose essential referent was “spirituality” or through the more creative formal expression of that idea. In practice, often these categories of reuse and reinterpretation blurred and overlapped;

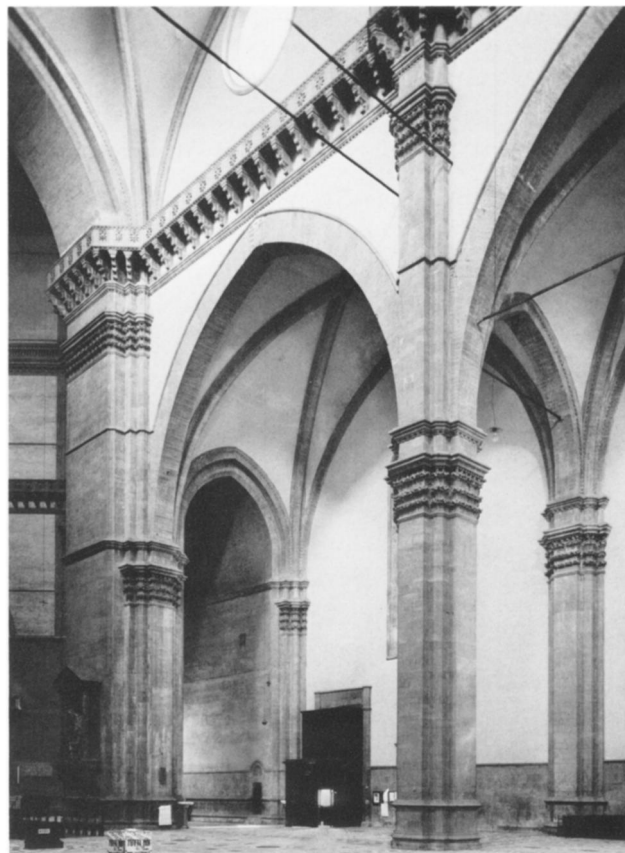


Fig. 23. Florence Duomo (author).



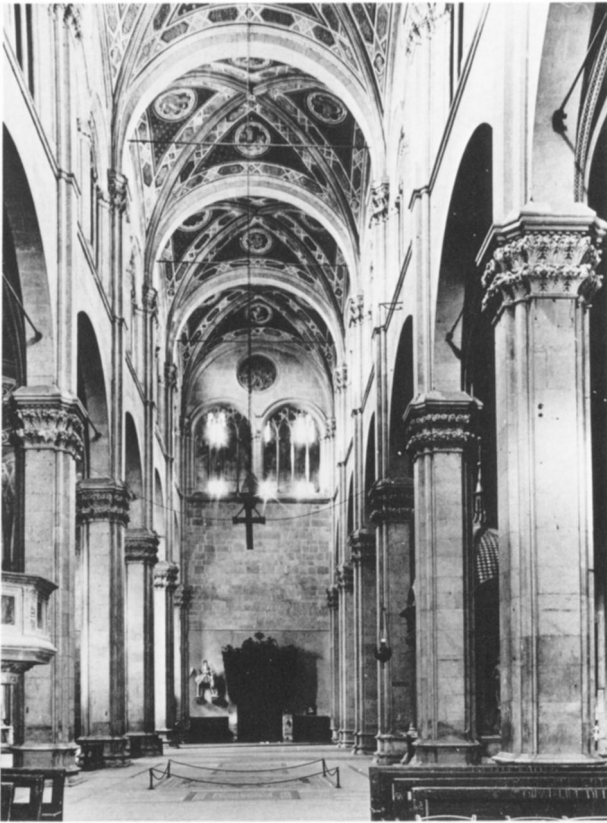


Fig. 24. Lucca Cathedral (author).

and the referential thrust of Gothic forms (fashion? modernity? spirituality?) is not always entirely clear, being in many cases evidently largely determined by context (for example, as when Gothic elements appear on town halls as opposed to churches). Yet what particularly manifests the self-possessed intelligence of the Italians in their treatment of the Gothic is the telling manner in which the three levels of their reception of the style tended to be distributed among various building types. As seen, for example, in the Papal Palace at Viterbo (Fig. 21), secular architecture (and, papal or not, the palace was essentially a secular power structure) tended to imitate Gothic in the most superficial manner. Conversely, as seen, for example, in S. Fortunato in Todi or S. Maria Novella (Fig. 22), the “deep” spiritual mode was taken up most widely and intensely by the spiritual leaders of Italy, the Mendicants, who, moreover, were part of an international movement that was a major force in late Gothic architecture in general (despite their initial antagonism toward monumental construction). The architecture of cathedrals and important non-Mendicant churches—that is, monuments that were spiritual as well as civic and local, such as Florence Duomo (Fig. 23)—was prone to occupy the middle ground, incorporating Gothic complexity, energy, and meaning in integrated and inventive as well as flashy ways. These correspondences were not fixed or universal: the Palazzo Vecchio, for example, manages to endow its rough masonry walls with intense Gothic

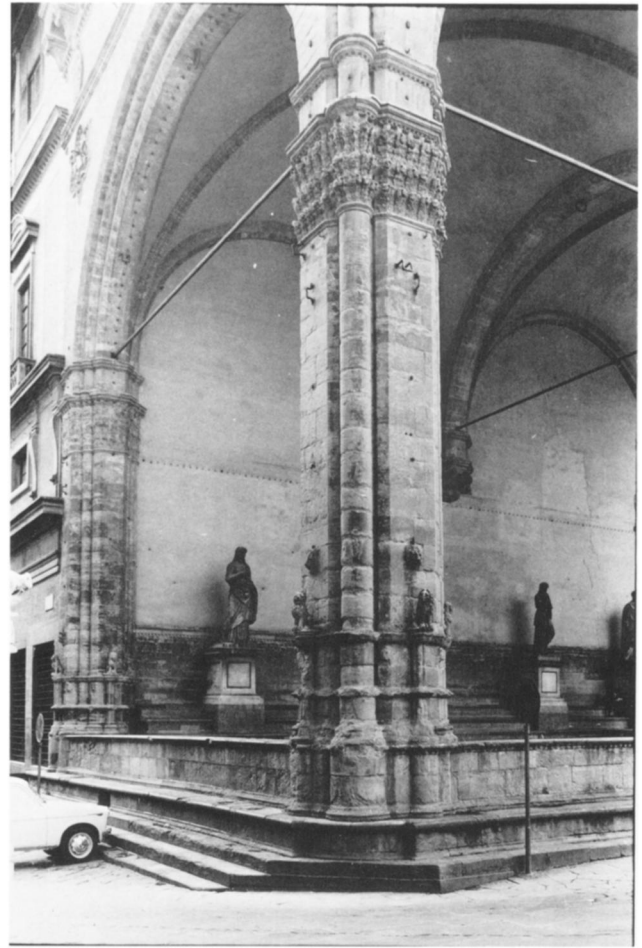


Fig. 25. Loggia della Signoria, Florence (author).

energy. But in general it may, I believe, be said that the Gothic tended by and large to be strongest and purest (in both form and meaning) in Mendicant buildings, less so in cathedrals, and least intrinsically and most superficially manifest in overtly civic buildings. In other words, there tended to be a direct correlation between the degree of spirituality inherent in an Italian project and the degree to which Gothic was used.

Most of my observations have concentrated on differentiating the Italian architectural scene from that of the north, especially France, and there is one further difference to be discussed. In the history of art—largely to have something coherent to add to it, that is, to make historical narrative possible—we tend to privilege works that form part of a developmental series, works with clear sources and, above all, strong influence. A building like Chartres, amazing as it is intrinsically, would be seen as far less important did it not have a string of imposing followers. Italian buildings of the period, particularly the most important ones, for the most part cannot be understood as parts of such linear series and thus cannot be readily woven into narrative structure; and this, I believe, is another major reason for their devalorization. True enough, serial developments do exist in



Fig. 26. S. Petronio, Bologna (author).

medieval Italy—such as the Lombard screen façade, the Modena school, the central Italian timber-roofed Mendicant church, and so forth. Mainly, however, where important developmental series exist, they take the form of complex chains of eclecticism. For example, the Florentine Cathedral nave of the 1350s combines elements of Orsanmichele (the pier), S. Croce (the *ballatoio* and the tripartite proportions of the elevation), and S. Maria Novella (structure, vaulting, bay proportions, and oculi); then Lucca Cathedral of the 1370s combines the pier of Florence Cathedral with the galleried elevation of Pisa (Fig. 24); and later S. Petronio in Bologna of the 1390s recombines the Florentine pier as developed in the Loggia de Lanzi (Fig. 25) with the elevation of S. Maria Novella, the plan of the Duomo, and north Italian detailing (Fig. 26). While such eclectic chains conceivably could be collected into a single account, such a text would not form a history, except at a very schematic level (it might best appear in the form of a diagram), and it would grossly underplay the critical reconstruction of the individual event of eclectic reinterpretation and recombination, which formed the core of the creative process at the buildings in question. If one accepts my theory of eclecticism as being the basic architectural method of the Italians, it follows that any linear history of Italian medieval architecture is theoretically impossible, except by forcing it into some kind of procrustean bed that would mutilate each monument in turn, especially each important one, which



Fig. 27. Old Sacristy, S. Lorenzo, Florence. Detail of chancel entrance (author).

tended to realize a singular, ad hoc, eclectic program that was highly site- and context-specific. Given our narratological privileging of linear developments over others, the Italian medieval scene, even if understood on its own terms of eclecticism, would thus seem forever doomed to marginalization.

There are, however, other kinds of history. One is the Annales school centered on phenomena of *longue durée*, which has to some extent inspired this paper in its reassessment of the long centuries of medieval *Italie* in terms of a massive, glacially evolving system. Perhaps more relevant as a solution to the dilemma just posed is a historical approach that concerns not horizontal, diachronic movement (however slow), but vertical, synchronic relationships between highly particular, individuated phenomena and their context. A form of microhistory, this approach, in the present case, would stress major architectural events rather than the fate of ordinary individuals that is the main subject of the microhistorical school, our common ground being the side-stepping of the narratological demands of the historical “grand manner.” Such an adaptation of the microhistorical method, I believe, applied within a framework of critical analysis of the eclectic design process, would result not only in a much higher,



and fairer, revalorization of the Italian monuments but also in a far clearer understanding of what they are all about. (Conversely, it would be difficult to apply this approach to the French cathedrals, hard to link the differences among Chartres, Reims, Amiens, and Beauvais with contextual factors in any massive and convincing way.)

I have emphasized the Roman origins of Italian medieval architecture, and for symmetry's sake I would like to offer one sentence on the Renaissance, for which my argument would

appear to force a much-needed redefinition. Quite simply, in the terms of this paper, the shift to the Renaissance should not be viewed as a replacement of "Gothic" by "classical," but rather as the opposition of a newly purified historicist taste (Fig. 27), admitting only the classical, to a long medieval era in Italy of voracious eclecticism that omnivorously had consumed everything needed by its complex metabolism, Gothic and classical alike (Fig. 2).