

Westminster Abbey and the French Court Style

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Westminster Abbey and the French Court Style

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SCHOLARS have long found Westminster Abbey an unusual monument. This opinion is based not only upon the imported features of the Gothic building, but also upon the particular use that was made of English elements and especially upon the finish of the work. Finely polished marble was extensively employed in the lower stories; most of the visible surfaces of ashlar masonry were encrusted with diaperwork and the few plain ones were once painted with falsework containing elegant little rosettes; gilding was profuse on the ribs and bosses, and perhaps also on the diaper of the spandrels, and as Webb has aptly put it, 'foliage and figure sculpture [were] employed with a freedom unequalled before that time.'¹ Many, perhaps all, of these features can be found in English Gothic architecture of the decades preceding 1245, but the scale and the elaborateness of Westminster surpass any single earlier building and confer upon the Abbey a character that can only be called royal.

Royalness is of course exactly what one would expect at Westminster. It was the shrine of a king and the traditional site of the coronation ceremony in England. Moreover the Gothic work was begun and largely completed by King Henry III. It was Henry, according to the *Flores Historiarum*, who was responsible for starting the demolition of Edward the Confessor's church in order to put up the present larger and more beautiful one.² The king also supplied money, materials and masons. He established a special exchequer for the work, and the rolls abound with orders to constables and sheriffs to deliver to the Abbey stone, mortar, timber and the like.³ Master Henry de Raynes, the king's mason, was in charge, and Edward, son of Odo, a goldsmith and King Henry's advisor and agent in a wide variety of matters, many of them personal,

was a keeper of the works. The demolition was begun on 6 July 1245, and was in full swing by the fall of that year. By 1258 the chevet and transepts were largely finished and eleven years later King Henry himself translated the relics of Saint Edward to their new shrine, signifying the end of the decoration and of the furnishing of the eastern portions of the new church.

There has of late years been some question as to who was the original patron of the Gothic work, especially since Canon Westlake brought to light Pope Innocent IV's bull concerning the finances.⁴ By this document, which is dated 26 July 1245, the Pope granted an indulgence to the faithful of the dioceses of London, Lincoln and Winchester who contributed to the work. Why, one might ask, would recourse to a public method of raising funds be necessary, if the king were undertaking the work himself? Does not the proximity of the dates, 6 and 26 July, suggest that the indulgence may have been requested from the curia before the start of operations and therefore that the project was originally the monks'? In reply to such questions, it must be pointed out that the king surely did not assume direction of the work without some warning. Preparations must have been going on during the spring of 1245, even though no document can explicitly be connected with the project,⁵ and it would have been then, if not indeed in 1244, that Henry became interested in the reconstruction. There would also, perhaps, just have been time in the three weeks between 6 and 26 July to get a messenger from London to Lyon, where the Pope had come for the great council of that year. Then, too, the

1. G. Webb, *Architecture in Britain. The Middle Ages* (Baltimore, 1956), p. 107. The bibliography of Westminster Abbey is so extensive that only directly pertinent works will be noted here. The substance of this paper was read to the Courtauld Institute of Art in May 1963.

2. *Flores Historiarum*, Luard (ed.), *Chronicles and Memorials* 95, II, 289.

3. J. G. Noppen, 'Building by King Henry III and Edward son of Odo', *Antiquaries Journal* xxviii (1948), 138-148 and xxix (1949), 13-25.

4. H. F. Westlake, *Westminster Abbey* (London, 1923), I, 68; see also Noppen, 'Westminster Chapter House', *Country Life* cv (1949), 841-844; J. Harvey, 'The Masons of Westminster Abbey', *Archaeological Journal* cxiii (1956), 82-101. I am not familiar with the source used by Webb, *Architecture in Britain*, p. 110, but it does not seem to be Westminster Abbey Muniments, Domesday Chart., f. 406, of which Lawrence E. Tanner, Keeper of the Muniments, has kindly provided me with a copy.

5. E.g., the charter cited by W. R. Lethaby, *Westminster Abbey and the King's Craftsmen* (New York-London, 1906), p. 150, from H. Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting* I, *Works* III (London, 1789), p. 16, dated between 28 October 1243 and 27 October 1244, does not necessarily refer to the Abbey. Cf. E. F. Jacobs, 'The Reign of Henry III. Some Suggestions', *Transactions, Royal Historical Society*, ser. 4, x (1927), 21-53, esp. 40.

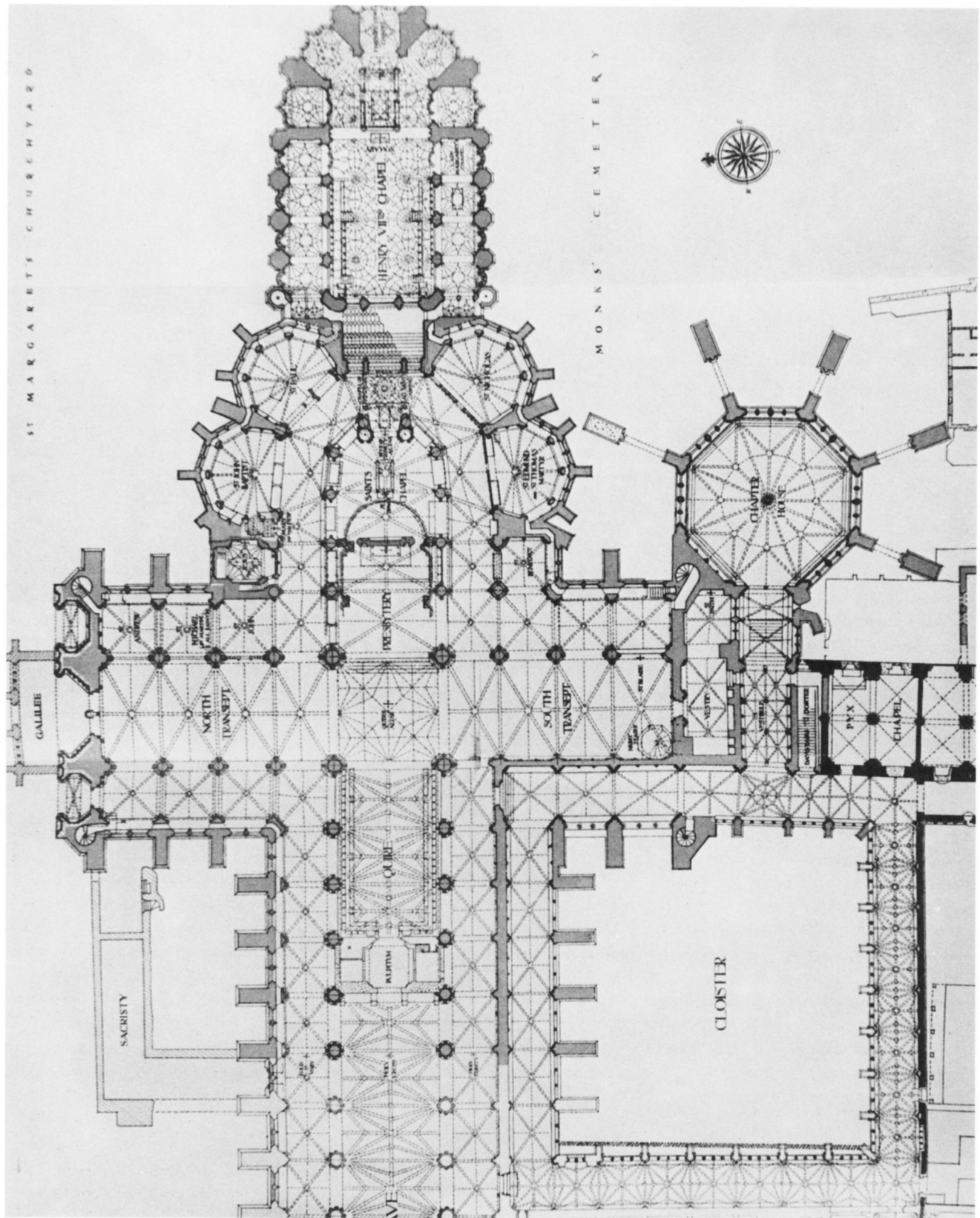


Fig. 1. Plan, Westminster Abbey (Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, England. *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in London 1, Westminster Abbey*, London, 1924. By permission of the Controller of Her Britannic Majesty's Stationery Office).

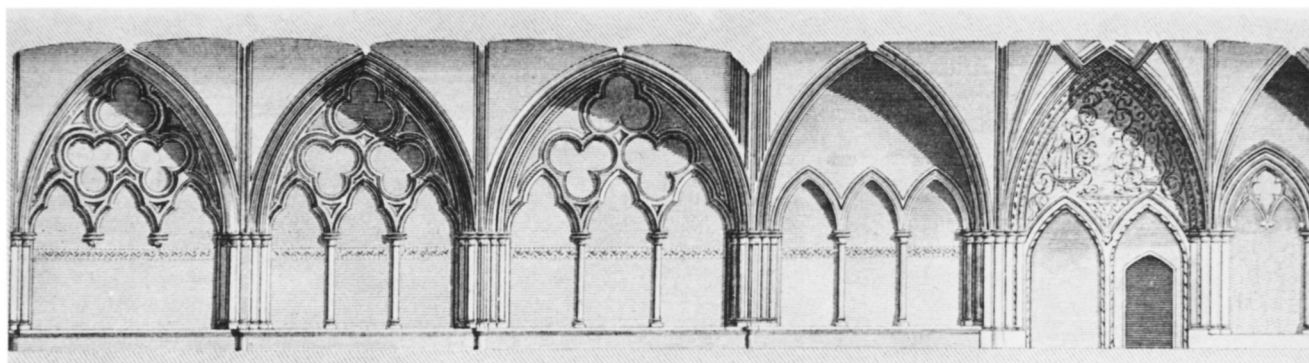


Fig. 2. Elevation of the east cloister, Westminster Abbey (from Brayley, *Abbey Church of St. Peter* II, 1823).

monks may have worried whether Henry would really undertake what he had promised, and after it had been begun, they probably worried whether he would continue to support it. In either case, the request for an indulgence would have been all but automatic, if they wanted a fund to fall back on, in the event that royal interest should wane and their sanctuary be left half-finished. Wealthy as they were, the scale and lavishness of the proposed work —*opus plurimum sumptuoso* in the words of the bull, which are somewhat traditional—must have given them pause. Such thoughts as these were in fact clearly stated by Matthew Paris, and although he wrote them down with reference to the election of Archdeacon Richard de Crokesley to the abbacy in December 1246, they may well apply to the situation of eighteen months earlier. Matthew described Crokesley as ‘an elegant man, skilled in law and a particular friend of the king’s . . .; for the monks feared, if it should turn out otherwise [namely, than to elect him abbot], that the king, their especial patron, would leave unfinished their half-destroyed church, which he had begun to rebuild in a glorious manner.’⁶

It also seems unnecessary, in this regard, to invoke the Lady Chapel of 1220 as the start of a campaign to rebuild the whole church, which would inexplicably have lagged until Henry took it up in 1244 or 1245. Even if this had been the case, it still would not be necessary to date the present plan with its radiating chapels to 1220; quite the contrary, the peculiar planning of the present radiating chapels and hemicycle bears witness to the presence of a foreign body in their midst, so to say, one that could only have been the older Lady Chapel.⁷ Hence the present plan

was unquestionably a new one, very likely devised for the building of 1245. In sum, it would seem as if there were some justification for the old view that the idea of Gothic Westminster was Henry III’s and a royal project in the fullest sense of the word.

A certain unity of conception seems to have pervaded the design of the various parts of the Abbey that were erected during the tenure of Master Henry the mason, from 1245 to 1253. They seem to have formed part of an over-all plan, despite their evident and sometimes glaring differences (figs. 1, 2). The increasing length of the bays of the east cloister, for example, far from revealing the adjustment of one work upon another of different date, proves rather that both cloister and transept were laid out together: the cloister piers are aligned with those of the transept and the unusual width of the third cloister bay is undoubtedly due to the location of one of the piers opposite the thick end-wall of the transept. Differences between the window tracery and the dado arcading of the church and the chapter house probably also were not due to the presence of two designers, Master Henry for the church and Master Alberic for the chapter, where the latter is known to have been working in 1253.⁸ It seems preferable to see the whole sets of forms being reserved for separate units of the new Abbey complex, of which church, chapter and cloister were obviously the most important. Such considerations as stability, scale and the proximity of the parts to the viewer may well have determined the variety and distribution of the forms.

Even granting such unity of conception, however, which undoubtedly was not as absolute as I have made it

6. M. Paris, *Chronica Major*, Luard (ed.), *Chronicles and Memorials* 57, iv, 589.

7. It is probably unnecessary to imagine the eastern end of the Lady Chapel lying as far to the east as the apses of the Henry VII Chapel, as did Westlake, ‘Westminster Abbey: the old Lady Chapel and its Relation to the Romanesque and Gothic Churches’, *Archaeologia* LXIX (1917–1918), 31–46. W. R. Lethaby in *Westminster Abbey Re-examined* (London, 1925), pp. 38–39, published a verbal report

of G. E. Wright, who was present at the late nineteenth-century excavations, to the effect that Norman work was found in the sixteenth-century apse foundations, but that it was probably reused. The implication is also that it was displaced from its original site, although not necessarily in 1220. Another assumption is made by Harvey, ‘The Masons . . .’, p. 83.

8. As is implied by John Harvey, *English Medieval Architects* (London, 1954), p. 17.

seem, an important question remains to be answered. Are royal direction and royal financing alone sufficient to explain the unusual character of Westminster? King Henry seems to have built few churches before the Abbey, but the latter 'does show on a grander and more consistent scale certain characteristics which can only be found occasionally and fragmentarily before it was built . . .'.⁹ The unusual nature of Westminster among English buildings is certainly due in part to the quantity of foreign features that it embodies. These are in fact so numerous and far-reaching that some former students of the Abbey founded on them, coming to the conclusion that Westminster was primarily an imported work. From that point it was of course but a step to identifying Master Henry, the king's mason, as a Frenchman, and his birthplace, Raynes, with the city of Reims in northern Champagne. Lethaby showed how incorrect this suggestion was by pointing out that many of the technical features of the Abbey, such as the manner of constructing the vault crowns, were English, and it has also been noted that others of undeniable French provenance, such as the flying buttresses, are handled somewhat hesitantly, as if by a man unaccustomed to using them.¹⁰ Finally, when he published Master Henry's surname, Canon Westlake inadvertently indicated that he might have come from a place such as Rayne in Essex, a perfectly English town.¹¹

When Lethaby reviewed Francis Bond's book on Westminster in 1909, he emphasized that any consideration of the foreign influences on the Abbey ought to be placed in the general context of cross-Channel relationships, particularly in the early years of the thirteenth century.¹² These relationships constitute what should perhaps be called the 'norm of transmissions' between England and France, and they are important to keep in mind because what occurred at Westminster seems to have been rather abnormal and did not fit into the usual pattern. As a rule a mason would move about, taking on new work in different places, often adopting local traditions to his own and so providing a kind of stylistic mixture that was always changing. Masons were also constantly crossing the Channel, in both directions, during the Middle Ages. For the twelfth century, one need only recall Professor Bony's two exemplary studies, one concerning French influences on the origins of English Gothic, particularly the sources of Canterbury, and the other concerning the impact of Canterbury on the Continental movement he dubbed the 'resistance to Chartres'.¹³ Both studies reveal that the Channel still func-

tioned as a bridge in the early thirteenth century, even as it had for centuries before. Architects still passed from the Continent to England, like Baudouin, Master of the Works of Arras Cathedral in 1235, who was very likely the same Baldwin Daraz that worked for King Henry in 1241.¹⁴ They also passed from England to the Continent, probably more often than has been supposed. But does such a pattern as this explain the presence of the foreign elements at Westminster? Had Master Henry worked abroad prior to 1243, when he is first mentioned in the texts? Or was there a foreign advisor at the Abbey, like the French sculptors whom Scott identified in the early part of the work?¹⁵ These are perfectly natural suggestions in respect of the present context. But if one examines the foreign features in detail, with an eye to establishing their sources as precisely as possible, the problem takes on a different dimension and quite a different explanation must be provided.

Four French buildings have always been cited as among the major sources for the Abbey: the cathedrals of Reims and Amiens, the abbey church of St.-Nicaise at Reims and the Ste.-Chapelle in Paris. But the first three buildings seem to have had little direct impact on Westminster. Indeed, the relations between Reims Cathedral and the Abbey seem largely to be fortuitous when they exist at all, and of Lethaby's list of twenty items, no more than two still seem to merit discussion.¹⁶ One is the passage in the side-aisle wall, which is often called the Champenois or Rémois passage. Bony has already shown that this type of passage existed in the twelfth century, both in northern France and in England, and there is a distinct possibility, as was suggested by Westlake and Lethaby, that one was to be found in the 1220 Lady Chapel at Westminster, of which the design of the present chapel walls may simply be a repetition. If one must search out a French prototype, however, it is certainly not Reims Cathedral, for there the passage is deeper than the one at Westminster and the responds are characterized by a frieze of crockets that runs from the capital to the window wall. The frieze serves to distinguish those thirteenth-century French examples of the Rémois passage that did derive from Reims Cathedral, such as the south transept tower of Châlons-sur-Marne Cathedral or the little church at Rieux, from those that did not, such as Auxerre Cathedral or St.-Denis. The

9. Webb, *Architecture in Britain*, p. 109.

10. *Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, England*, 1, *Westminster Abbey* (London, 1924), 19.

11. Westlake, 'Westminster Abbey . . .', p. 41.

12. W. R. Lethaby in *Journal, RIBA*, ser. 3, xvii (1909), 78–81, reviewing F. Bond, *Westminster Abbey* (Oxford, 1909).

13. J. Bony, 'French Influences on the Origin of English Gothic Architecture', *Journal, Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* xii (1949),

1–15; and 'The Resistance to Chartres in early thirteenth-century Architecture', *Journal, British Archaeological Association* xx–xxi (1957–1958), 35–52.

14. P. Héliot, 'Les anciennes cathédrales d'Arras', *Bulletin, Commission royale des Monuments et des Sites* iv (1953), 14, and Harvey, *English Medieval Architects*, p. 21.

15. Sir G. G. Scott, *Gleanings from Westminster Abbey* (London, 1863), p. 33, and Lethaby, *Westminster Abbey Re-examined*, pp. 92–93.

16. Lethaby, *Westminster Abbey and the King's Craftsmen*, pp. 117–121; also Lethaby, *Westminster Abbey Re-examined*, pp. 46–49.

frieze is noticeably absent from Westminster also, and thus Reims does not seem to have been the source for the wall-passage at the Abbey.

The second point is of considerably greater consequence, for it concerns window tracery, perhaps the most expressive medium for the Gothic architect in 1250 and one which was particularly important for Westminster. Westlake suggested that the bar-and-mullion tracery of the Abbey church was 'almost a copy' of that of Reims, and many other scholars have pointed out the general resemblance between the two (fig. 3). But upon closer examination, this point proves to be quite as misleading as the previous one. Tracery was indeed 'invented' at Reims in the second decade of the century, but striking advances in both technique and design had been made by the 1240s. Westminster tracery is just as advanced as anything from that decade on the Continent, and it is far beyond the primitive Reims design of 1210, as a single point will make clear. At Reims, the oculus is independent of the framing arch, and except for the lancet arches and the lower half of the oculus, the forms are still made from many small, separate stones;¹⁷ whereas at Westminster, the rolls join one another and the longer, articulated sticks of true bar tracery are present. This feature must therefore also be dropped from Lethaby's list and there is nothing of consequence left to link Reims with Westminster.

Binham and Netley must be mentioned in any question of the origins of tracery in England, for both have large, multiple windows that have sometimes been given dates in the period under discussion. Francis Bond also wanted to include the eastern light in the presbytery of Old St. Paul's in this group, which he dated before Westminster, but Lethaby pointed out that the latter could not be placed before 1256–1258 at the very earliest.¹⁸ As for the window at Netley, it is almost certainly a reinsertion and can therefore be eliminated here.¹⁹ As for Binham, Matthew Paris wrote that the front of the church was built under Prior Richard, who died in 1244, and Lethaby has suggested that this statement referred to a typically English rectangular eastern front rather than to the west front that contains the window. This window has eight lancets, a design not found on the Continent before the late 1250s, and unless one is willing to argue that it is the very first example of the form in western Europe—a difficult choice in view of Binham's position as a minor priory—it can perhaps be placed later in time.

At Amiens the problem becomes a bit more complex than it was at Reims, since Amiens was the immediate source for many of the designs of the 1230s and 1240s in Paris, and one must distinguish, as it were, between the

17. See Branner, 'Paris and the Origins of Rayonnant Gothic Architecture', *Art Bulletin* XLIV (1962), 39–51, esp. fig. 1A.

18. Lethaby, *Westminster Abbey and the King's Craftsmen*, pp. 359–360.

19. Professor Bony has confirmed this to me *in litteris*.

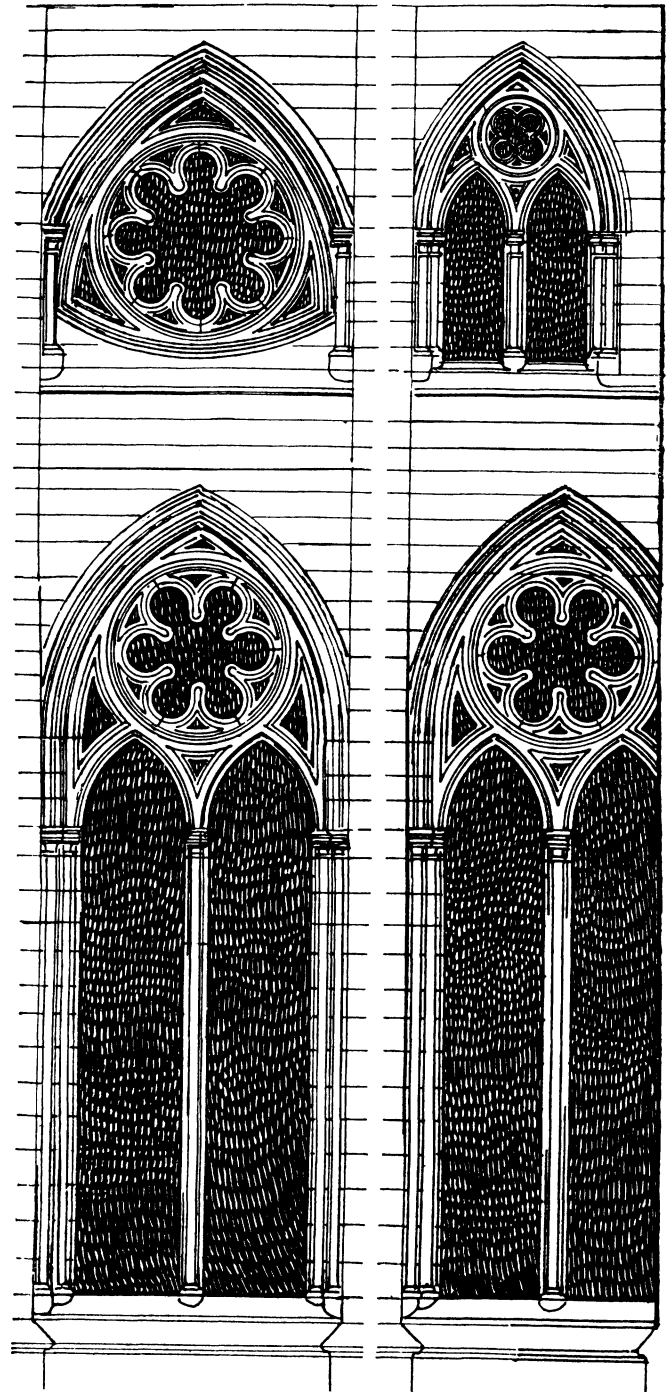


Fig. 3. Elevation of two radiating chapels. Westminster Abbey (from Lethaby, *Westminster Abbey*, 1906).

mother and the daughters. Among the major elements that suggest the Abbey are the tall elevation with the clerestory windows descending well below the vault springers, that is, the High Gothic elevation, and the general proportions: in both Abbey and Cathedral, the main arcades are as tall as the triforium and clerestory combined, a distinct modification of the older proportion used at Chartres

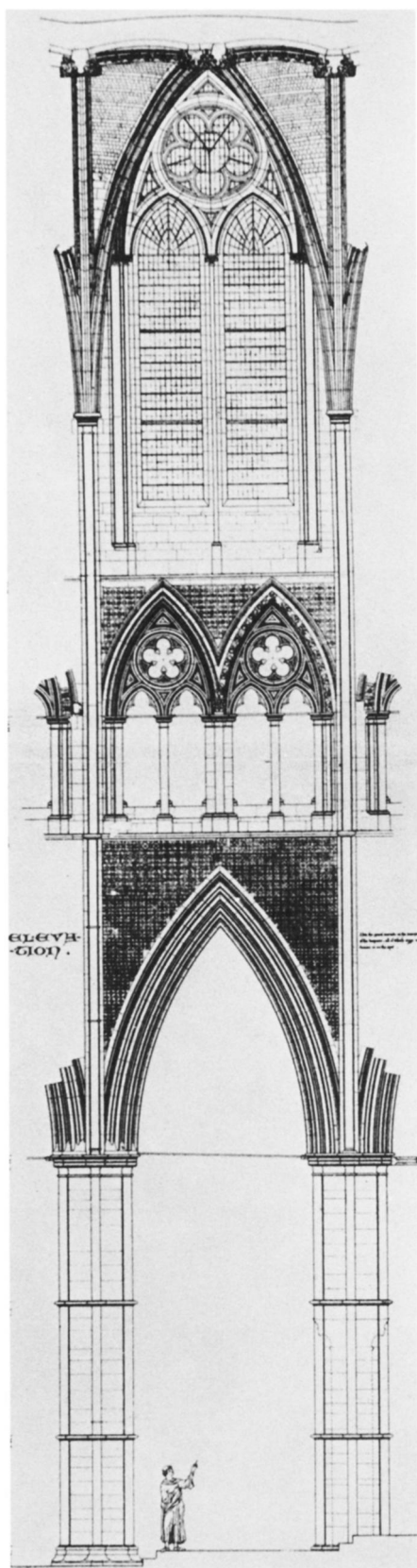


Fig. 4. Elevation of choir, Westminster Abbey (from *The Builder* 48, 1885).



Fig. 5. Brie-Comte-Robert (photo: author).

and Reims (fig. 4). But the 1:1 ratio became rather common after Amiens—it is to be found, for example, at Châlons-sur-Marne and at St.-Denis—and by itself it is insufficient to connect Westminster to Amiens.

The triforium of Amiens has also been listed as a source for Westminster, since in both monuments the story contains twin units in each bay. But there is a subtle yet fundamental difference between them, for at Amiens the triforium is linked to the clerestory by three shafts, one in the center and one at either side; whereas at Westminster each story is treated independently. This design is nearly identical with a group of regressive Ile-de-France churches of the 1220s and 1230s—St.-Severin in Paris, Royaumont, Brie-Comte-Robert (fig. 5) and so on—and this connection would seem to take precedence over the more obvious but less exact one with Amiens.²⁰

As for the twin lancet windows, those of the Abbey cannot derive from the aisle of Amiens since the technique differs. And the four-lancet windows of the chapter house (fig. 6) are equally distant from the nave clerestory and choir aisle windows at Amiens: the Picard pattern once again is too primitive, for the rolls of the smaller arches rest on the splays of the mullions, whereas in post-Amiénois tracery, including that at Westminster, each roll has its own supporting order.

20. Branner, 'Paris and the Origins . . .', pp. 43–44.

Finally, the window in the form of a curved triangle, from the galleries at the Abbey, is like the ones at the ends of the aisles at Amiens. But there it is an exceptional design, a happy solution to a difficult problem caused by the differing heights of the inner and outer faces of the façade. At the Ste.-Chapelle, however, the form is generalized (fig. 7), and even if it is geometrically unlike the one at Westminster, Paris would seem to have at least as good a claim as Amiens to be the source for Master Henry's design.

The west façades designed by Robert de Luzarches at Amiens and by his protégé, Hugh Libergier, at St.-Nicaise at Reims, have both been cited as prototypes for the north transept façade at the Abbey. In the latter, one of the major questions is whether there were originally four or five elements in the story below the rose.²¹ The four elements of course are to be found at Amiens, but that is not proof that they existed at Westminster. Moreover Wren's preference for five elements cannot simply be ignored, since in his time considerably greater evidence of the original disposition was still extant.²² Five elements also characterize a group of Parisian façades such as St.-Severin, Royaumont, Brie-Comte-Robert and the north transept of St.-Quirace at Provins, which we have just seen was related in another way to Westminster (fig. 5). Of course the mere existence of this French group does not prove there were five elements at the Abbey, but it does show that such a design can be justified on the comparative basis and that the four-element Amiénois design is not the only choice.

As for the design of the ground stories, the mere presence of porches does not seem sufficient to establish a connection between either Amiens or St.-Nicaise and Westminster. The outstanding characteristic of St.-Nicaise, the screen and gables which do not fall neatly into the bay divisions but lap over them, are not to be found in any of the proposed reconstructions at Westminster. Another of Lethaby's points of comparison, the central tympanum at the Abbey, which had a sculpted figure in a quatrefoil, is no better founded, for St.-Nicaise was not the first Gothic church to have decorated patterns on the tympanum. Cistercian Longpont, dedicated in 1227, has a trefoil above two trefoil arches, and the blind trefoil arch on a tympanum was practically a hallmark of Royaumont, where three examples can still be seen. Royaumont was begun in 1228 or 1229, two to three years before St.-Nicaise. The St.-Nicaise pattern was simply taken from the tracery of the windows, and the same design is also found in the dado of the upper chapel of the Ste.-Chapelle in Paris, where the

21. Lethaby, *Westminster Abbey Re-examined*, pp. 65–67. The article referred to is S. H. Seager, 'Westminster Abbey. An endeavor to read the story of the North Transept façade from an examination of ancient prints', *Journal, RIBA*, ser. 3, xxviii (1920–1921), 93–97; it is difficult not to share Lethaby's anger at this distressing study.

22. *Wren Society* xi (1934), pl. 2.

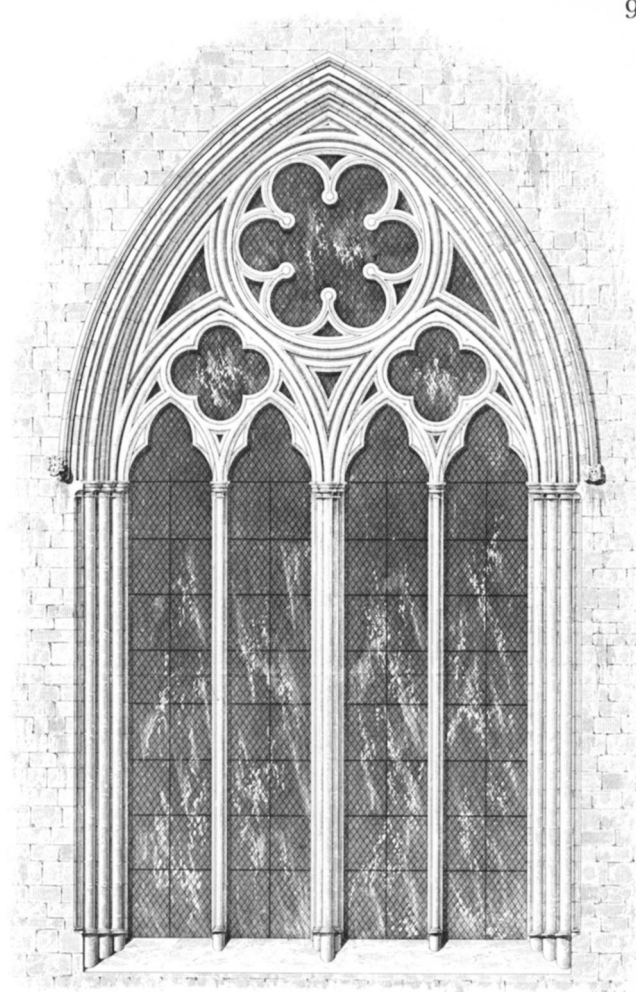


Fig. 6. Chapter house window, Westminster Abbey (from Sharpe, *Decorated Windows*, 1849).

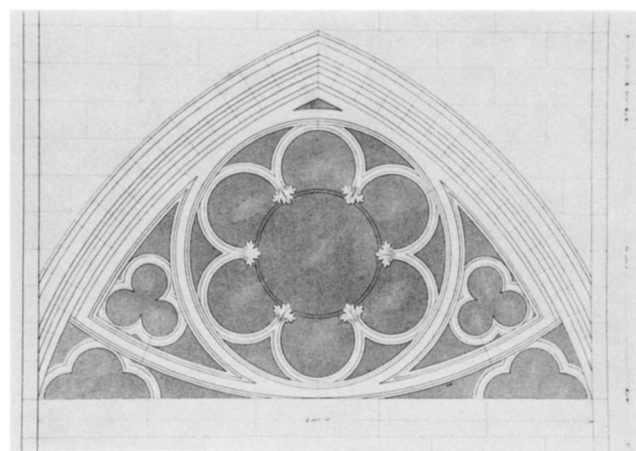


Fig. 7. Lower chapel window, Ste.-Chapelle, Paris (from *Encyclopédie d'architecture*, 1857).

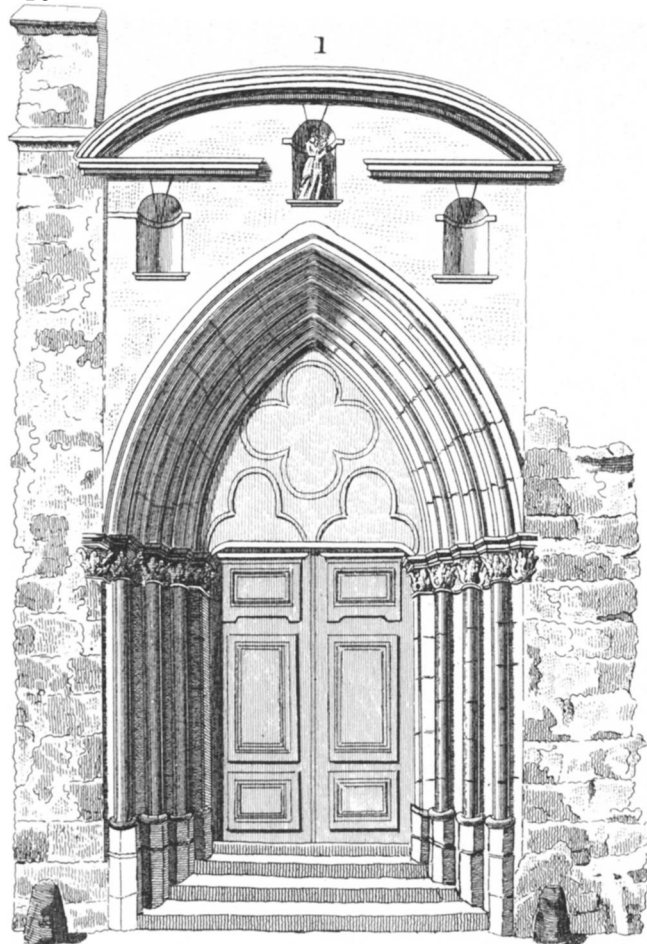


Fig. 8. Portal, SS.-Côme-et-Damien, Paris (from Millin, *Antiquités nationales* III, 1791).

quatrefoils contain painted figures. Finally, the tympanum of the destroyed parish church of SS. Côme-et-Damien in Paris, built about 1220–1230 (fig. 8), is evidence that the same pattern was perhaps just as Parisian as it was Rémois, suggesting that St.-Nicaise is merely better known.²³

In sum, then, there seems to be relatively little to connect Westminster with northern and eastern France, and the notion that the English coronation church was somehow modeled on the French one, attractive as it may seem, must be abandoned. All the indices in fact point to Paris.

23. For SS. Côme-et-Damien in Paris, see Millin, *Antiquités nationales* III (Paris, 1791), no xxxv, pl. 1; F. A. Pernot copied a drawing of the façade of the destroyed church of the Madeleine de la Cité in Paris, which has the same design with a statue in the quatrefoil (Paris, Bibl. Nat. Est. Ve 55). Similarly, Vacquer's copy of both ground-story bays of the Tour Bichat, part of the Commandery of St. John Latran in Paris (now also destroyed), shows painted scrollwork on the tympana, not unlike the painted work on the door to the chapter vestibule at Westminster (Paris, Bibl. Ville, ms 232, f. 34). A Parisian origin for this design was first suggested to me by Professor Bony.

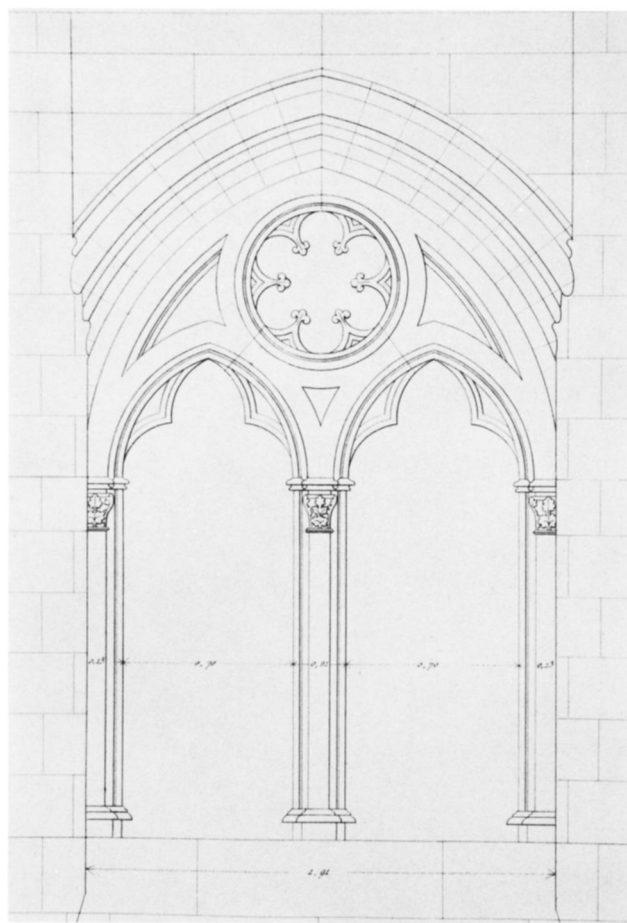


Fig. 9. Lower chapel window, Ste.-Chapelle, Paris (from *Encyclopédie d'architecture*, 1857).

The lower story of the Ste.-Chapelle has already provided a major comparison with Westminster in the triangular window. But there is still another, perhaps even more significant one to be made with the small two-lancet-and-oculus window found in the narrow apse bays of the lower chapel (fig. 9). Precisely the same form was used in the tribunes of Westminster, in those bays which were not broad enough to accommodate the curved triangle. Thus at the Abbey, also, the two kinds of window were associated. The French arches are less pointed, and the cusping of the oculus differs, but these are very minor points. The fact of the matter is, the same pattern was used for the tracery of the triforium of the Abbey, and it may also have provided the general format for the windows in both the side-aisles and the clerestory.

Another point of contact with the Ste.-Chapelle may have been the pattern of the north transept rose at the Abbey, although this cannot be proven: the St.-Chapelle rose was replaced in the Flamboyant period and, as a matter of fact, the precise form of the original rose at Westminster is not entirely certain. But Lethaby's preferred

pattern, which seems best to explain Hollar's engravings and which incidentally is very much like the south rose at the Abbey, is virtually identical with the north transept rose at Notre-Dame, and there are grounds for believing that the latter was in turn based upon the Ste.-Chapelle. Since the architecture of the chapel was almost certainly finished by January of 1246, the date would not be a problem.

Westminster shares other features with buildings in Paris and the immediate vicinity. The design of the chapter house windows, for instance, is almost identical with the pattern used in one of the south chapels of the nave of Notre-Dame, including the six-cusped oculus, the unframed quatrefoils and the technical design as well (fig. 10). Old photographs indicate that Viollet-le-Duc did nothing more than put this tracery into new masonry in the nineteenth century, although he placed a new and different gable above the window. The particular window illustrated here was probably erected about 1236.²⁴

The same part of the Abbey, the vestibule to the chapter house, contains a very beautiful design, with three quatrefoils fitted into the tympanum above three pointed arches (fig. 11). The triplet was originally from north-eastern France, from the region of Amiens, Reims and Cambrai, but perhaps the closest parallel to Westminster is the choir of the priory of Nogent-les-Vierges, on the Oise River about twenty miles from Paris (fig. 12). Saint Louis was present at an exhibition of relics there in 1241

24. M. Aubert, *Notre-Dame de Paris* (Paris, 1929), p. 140.

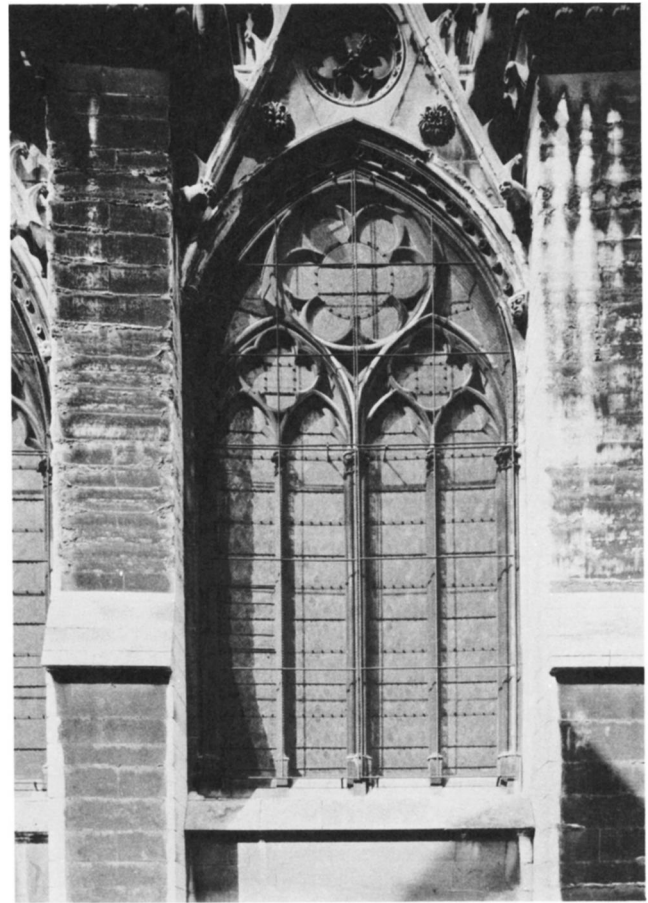


Fig. 10. South chapel, nave, Notre-Dame, Paris (photo: author).

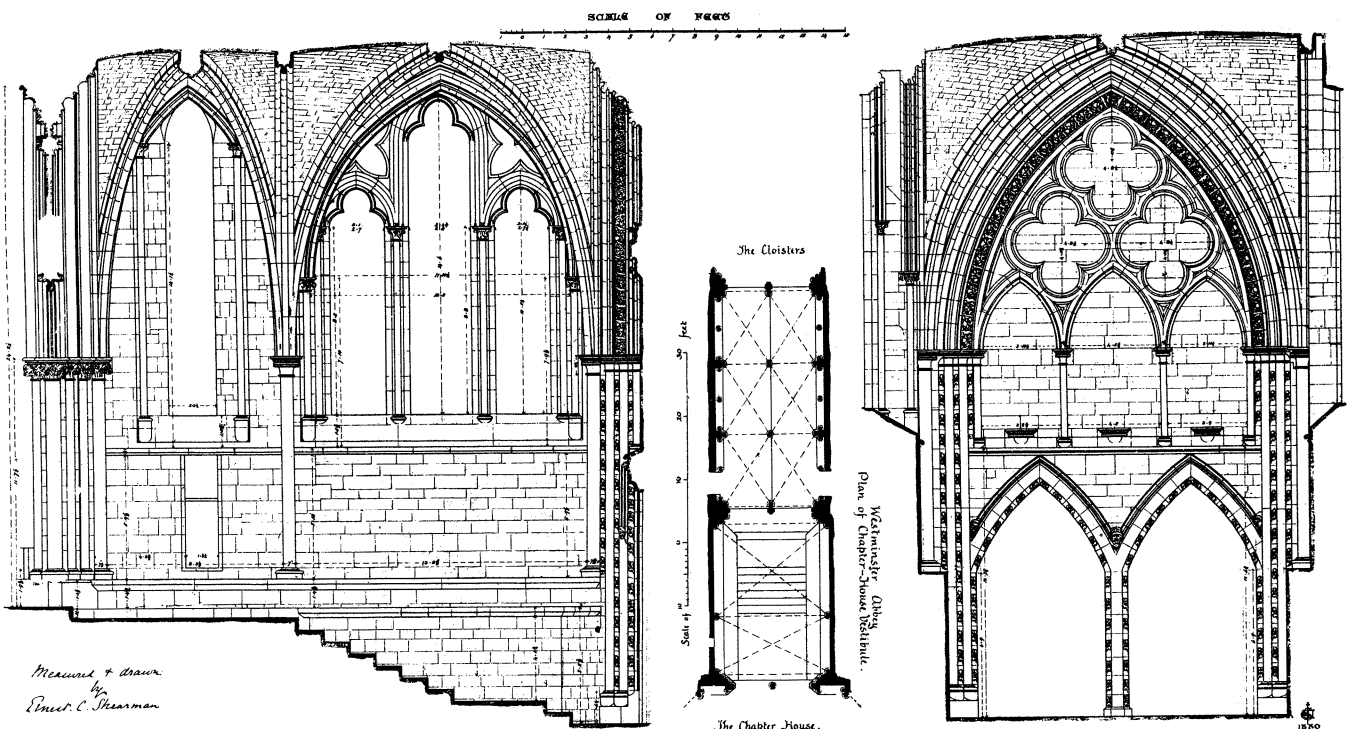


Fig. 11. Chapter house vestibule, Westminster Abbey (from *The Builder* 48, 1885).



Fig. 12. Chevet, Nogent-les-Vierges (photo: author).

and promised to rebuild the church, and the present chevet was unquestionably the result of his pious vow.²⁵ Louis may even have sent out some masons, for the window pattern is a cousin of the one used in the apse of the Ste.-Chapelle. And this in turn suggests one other connection, indirect though it may seem at first. The Ste.-Chapelle was the immediate source for most of the tracery in the upper stories of the chevet of the Cathedral of Tours (fig. 13), in which Louis also had a personal interest, and if the forms there are not identical with those in the east cloister of Westminster, they are at least brothers.²⁶ In both there are trefoil arches with three trefoils above, and in both there is a framing arch that is too large for the filling, leaving gaps to the sides. Of course at Westminster this is produced by the lengthening of the bay, as was noted above. But at Tours no such explanation can be provided, and the form probably should have a place as a normal variant in the contemporary repertory of designs.

Nogent suggests two other points. The rib has a bulging central torus with a fillet, precisely the profile of the ogives in the Abbey. And the windows, like those in the clere-

25. Abbot Delettire, *Histoire du diocèse de Beauvais* (Beauvais, 1842), II, 295–296.

26. F. Salet, *La cathédrale de Tours* (Paris, 1949).

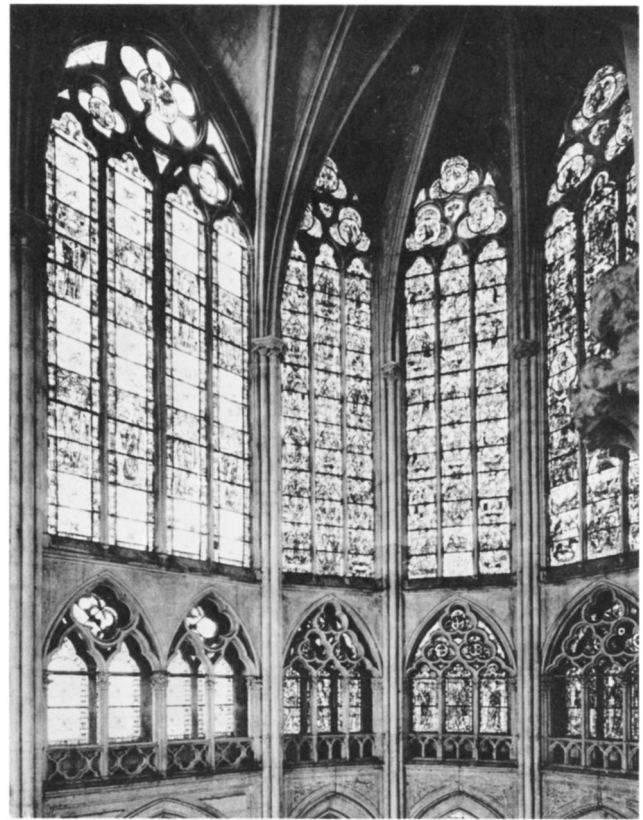


Fig. 13. Hemicycle, Cathedral, Tours (photo: author).

story at Westminster, are framed by panels of wall and are recessed, with a noticeable gap between the forward and the rear colonnettes at the sides. The panel of wall was also to be found at Royaumont and it may be that the design was originally Cistercian, since the restricted window is somewhat austere in feeling (fig. 14).²⁷ Moreover the Royaumont window was also recessed, as if to confirm the Parisian provenance of the Abbey forms.

From the remains of Royaumont and from the pre-Revolutionary descriptions, it is possible to reconstitute the elevation of Saint Louis' abbey. This had three stories, with a triforium of two units and a clerestory window with twin lancets and an oculus. The stories seem to have been in the approximate ratio of 1:1, arcades to triforium and clerestory, but the over-all proportions of the bay were considerably broader than those of Westminster.²⁸ In the hemicycle of Royaumont, however, the bays were narrower and there must have been only one triforium unit there, according to Gaignières' count of the

27. But see the windows in the aisles of Beauvais and the clerestory at Notre-Dame in Paris, where similar panels exist. For Royaumont, see H. Gouin, *L'abbaye de Royaumont* (Paris, 1958).

28. Royaumont, h. 84 ft., w. 18 ft.; Westminster, h. 100 ft., w. 19 ft.

arches.²⁹ This compression of the elevation in the turning bays of the hemicycle was an old Continental feature and, in view of the similarities of the designs, serves to link Westminster even more closely to Royaumont. But there is still another point, for the nave aisle windows were similar to those in the clerestory, with twin lancets surmounted by an oculus, just as at Westminster. Even the flying buttresses of the two abbeys may have had some common features, for at Royaumont they were pulled in well between the chapels in a manner most unusual for France (fig. 15). The plan of Royaumont is also comparable to the one at Westminster on the general level. Although there are many differences between them, particularly in the eastern ends, the choirs in both are short, and single, square bays are to be found between the chapels and the transepts. This requires us to alter the often-repeated point that the Abbey plan resembles the plans of Reims and Amiens, for in the Cathedrals these square bays clearly form the terminations of aisles. Finally, at both abbeys the southwestern transept aisle is replaced by a wing of the cloister. All in all, therefore, it would seem as if Royaumont played a leading role among the Continental sources of the Abbey.

In sum, the outstanding foreign elements at Westminster, which are to be found in the plan, the elevation and tall proportions and the tracery patterns, seem to have been derived from Parisian architecture of the 1230s and early 1240s. There can be little question that these very buildings—St. Denis, Royaumont, the chapels of Notre-Dame, the Ste.-Chapelle and perhaps even Nogent—were the specific ones imitated at Westminster.

Such a list calls for several comments. First, all the French monuments had direct connections with the Crown. Saint Louis was asked for permission to rebuild St.-Denis and he probably contributed funds to the work; he also employed the same architect for his private chapel at St.-Germain en Laye, about 1237. He founded Royaumont in execution of his father's will, and may for a time even have looked upon it as his own mausoleum; he certainly considered it as the family necropolis as long as he lived.³⁰ Nogent he is said to have inaugurated and financed, and the Ste.-Chapelle was of course intimately his. As for the chapels of Notre-Dame, they were erected under Bishop Guillaume d'Auvergne, a leading member of Saint Louis' court for nearly twenty years. Second, while it would be incorrect to claim that these buildings were all designed by the same workshop, or even by closely related shops, they did form a style which can be identified as Parisian, in contrast to Burgundian or Norman, for ex-

29. As cited in H. Duclos, *Histoire de Royaumont* (Paris, 1867), I, 168.

30. All Louis's children who died before he did were buried at Royaumont, including Jean Tristan, Count of Nevers (d. 1270 at Tunis). Cf. Duclos, *Histoire* . . . , p. 313, and A. Dimier, *Saint Louis et Cîteaux* (Paris, 1954), p. 80.



Fig. 14. Remains of the abbey church, Royaumont (with the kind permission of M. Henri Gouin) (photo: author).

ample, and which may properly be called the French court style. And lastly, all the buildings were completed, or largely so, by the spring of 1245. Royaumont was dedicated in 1236, St.-Denis was begun in 1231 and was largely terminated a decade later, the Notre-Dame chapels date from the mid-1230s and the tiny chevet of Nogent was probably ready in 1242 or 1243. The Ste.-Chapelle might seem to be more of a problem, since it was inaugurated only in 1248. But that date refers to a dedication, which frequently followed the termination of the monument by some years. The date of January 1246, when Saint Louis instituted the first chaplains and the guardians, would seem to indicate the end of the major work, when the body of the building was terminated.

Webb has already suggested that the master-mason of Westminster was sent to look at the more recent buildings in France,³¹ and this idea can now be made more precise. The unusual geographical and chronological convergences sketched out above point strongly to the conclusion that Master Henry de Raynes went directly to Paris, specifically to look at the newest buildings put up for Saint Louis and the members of his immediate circle. There would seem to be little or no evidence that Master Henry 'toured' through northern France and visited such

31. Webb, *Architecture in Britain*, p. 115.

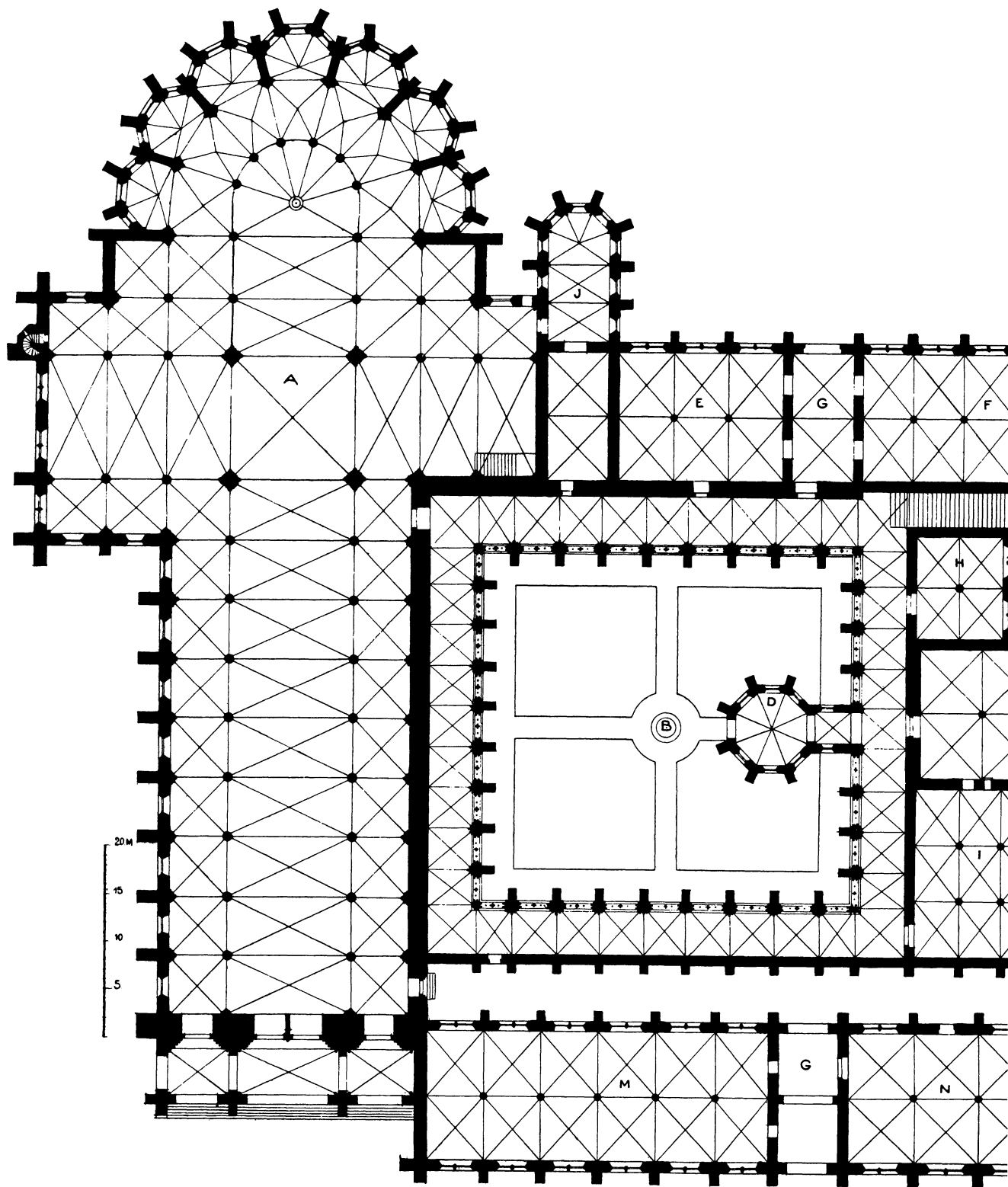


Fig. 15. Plan, Royaumont (from *Bulletin monumental* 72, 1908).

shops as Amiens, Reims Cathedral or St.-Nicaise, although obviously he did not travel from the coast to Paris and back again with his eyes shut. The focus of his interest, however, was certainly the capital. Moreover such a voyage was not unique. About 1240 Abbot Wigbold, of the Cistercian monastery of Aduard in Holland, sent a knowledgeable lay-brother with his son, to Clairvaux, to study Saint Bernard's century-old abbey, with an eye to copying it in Frisia; about 1325 an architect seems to have been sent from Strasbourg to examine the eastern ends of Notre-Dame in Paris and Ste.-Croix in Orléans, probably with a view to replacing the Romanesque chevet of the Alsatian Cathedral; and only a little more than a century ago, in 1856, Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montréal sent his architect, Victor Bourgeau, to Rome to study St. Peter's as a model for the projected Cathedral of St.-Jacques in Montréal.³² Master Henry de Raynes' trip would therefore belong to a small but well-established group of similar events, which transcend the normal mediaeval pattern of transmissions mentioned at the start of this paper. And it is not difficult to see how the character of the buildings which resulted from such 'directed' voyages, and their historic positions as well, might also differ from those of buildings designed by normal, migrant masons. At Westminster, for example, the kind of trip Master Henry made should undoubtedly be associated with the sudden appearance in England of many French elements which otherwise probably would have been transmitted only sporadically and over a period of time, if at all.

The question of motives still remains to be answered, and the remainder of this paper must be devoted to this aspect of the Abbey. Three factors must be mentioned: the meaning of the Abbey to King Henry, his infatuation with things French and the conception that underlay the reconstruction.

Westminster was Edward the Confessor's church in several senses, both as his creation and as his resting place. Edward represented legitimacy for the Plantagenets, and if at first his cult was poor and intermittent, by the early thirteenth century he had achieved unquestioned national status as a saint.³³ The reconstruction of his

church must in some ways then have seemed to be an expression of national feeling. The Abbey was also the coronation church, intimately related to the concept of kingship—Henry himself, at first hurriedly crowned at Gloucester in 1216, had to be recrowned at the Abbey in 1220—and its proximity to the royal palace must have made it seem like an image of the king's prestige. Henry, moreover, was personally devoted to Edward. On at least four occasions he ordered a picture of the saint to be painted in one of his various chapels, and in 1241 he had a new shrine for Edward started, which is said ultimately to have cost 100,000 marks.³⁴ The presence of the tribune in the south transept of the Abbey, while a feature commonly associated with the princely patronage of a church, nonetheless indicates that Henry was not content to remain a bystander at the Abbey but wanted to witness the services himself and to look down upon Edward's tomb from the privacy of his own loge. Perhaps the most complete, and certainly the most complex, summation of this attitude is contained in Henry's change of will, in 1253, when he elected to be buried at Westminster rather than at New Temple.³⁵ Henry thereby conferred upon the Abbey whatever prestige he may have inherited or ultimately acquired, but far more important, he must have thought he was to receive in return an almost magical protection from his patron: he was laid to rest in the very same tomb from which Edward had been evacuated. It is also quite possible that Henry at that time intended to establish the Abbey as a dynastic necropolis, like St.-Denis. Thus Westminster held a unique position, with political, philosophical and indeed psychical overtones for its patron. It is little wonder no expense was spared in the reconstruction.

King Henry was also a devotee of things foreign, and in particular of his brother-in-law, King Louis. Mrs. Tudor-Craig has shown how his painted chamber in Westminster Palace may have been based upon what he saw in Paris while visiting the French king in 1254.³⁶ This would not, however, have been the first manifestation of such an atti-

century, see C. Gîteau, 'Les sculptures de l'abbaye de Ste.-Geneviève de Paris. Moyen âge', *Paris et l'Île-de-France* xii (1961), 7–55. The 'Charles cult' of Philip Augustus may have had a similar effect, see P. E. Schramm, *Der König von Frankreich* (Weimar, 1960), I, 178–184.

34. E. Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Schriftquellen zur Kunst in England*, no. 2713; cf. W. R. Lethaby, 'The Confessor's Shrine in Westminster Abbey Church', *Archaeological Journal* lxxviii (1911), 361–364. For the frescoes, see Walpole, *Anecdotes*, pp. 13, 14 and 17; and L. E. Tanner, 'Some representations of St. Edward the Confessor . . .', *Journal, British Archaeological Association*, ser. 3, xv (1952), 1–12, esp. 3; L. F. Salzman, *Building in England down to 1540* (Oxford, 1952), p. 161. On Henry's piety, see Jacobs, 'The Reign of Henry III . . .', and E. Kantorowicz, *Laudes regiae*, University of California Publications in History 33 (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1946), pp. 175–177.

35. Reprinted in G. Wolf, *Florilegium Testamentorum* (Heidelberg, 1956), no. 15.

36. P. Tudor-Craig, 'The Painted Chamber at Westminster', *Archaeological Journal* cxiv (1957), 92–105.

32. For Aduard, see F. A. J. Vermeulen, *Handboek tot de Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Bouwkunst* (The Hague, 1928), I, 162–163; for Strasbourg, O. Kletzl, 'Ein Werkreis des Frauenhauses zu Strassburg', *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* xi (1939), 103–158, where, however, this hypothesis is not emphasized; for Montréal, A. Gowans, *Looking at Architecture in Canada* (Toronto, 1958), pp. 133–141. I am indebted to Professor Gowans for calling Montréal to my attention.

33. F. M. Powicke, *King Henry III and the Lord Edward* (Oxford, 1947), II, 569–572. For the early cult, see F. Barlow (ed. and tr.), *The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster*, Medieval Texts series (London, 1962), appendix. It is also likely, as Bony has suggested, that the recent French emphasis on their King Clovis had the effect of bolstering Edward's position; Clovis was given a new tomb in the abbey of Ste.-Geneviève in Paris in the early thirteenth

tude on Henry's part. In 1250, for example, he ordered the chapel of St. Stephen's, in one sense an exact counterpart to the Ste.-Chapelle in Paris, to be painted with pictures of the twelve Apostles, very likely in imitation of the twelve statues that adorn the interior of Louis's church.³⁷ Even more telling is the famous ceremony of 1247, which he asked Matthew Paris to write down, with which he marked the reception of the relic of the Holy Blood in England. Like Louis and the True Cross, Henry, amid a conclave of nobles and prelates, received the relic personally, at St. Paul's, and carried it to Westminster, where the Bishop of Norwich pronounced the sermon, saying, 'England takes joy and glories in the possession of such a treasure no less than France in obtaining the Holy Cross, which my lord the King of France rightly esteems'; Matthew added that Henry had taken for his model on this occasion 'the king of the Franks, who in his own person did honor to the Cross at Paris'.³⁸ This is certainly part of the explanation as to why Master Henry de Raynes was sent to Paris. Not any French church or group of churches, such as Amiens and Reims, would do. It had to be ones directly connected with the French king. It is probably not too far-fetched to suppose that there was even thought to be something royal about the major French elements that were employed at the Abbey. Height, for example, had distinctly royal overtones in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Matthew Paris blamed the Mendicant Orders for erecting buildings of royal tallness—'altitudo regalis'—and Westminster must have seemed inordinately tall, especially to people accustomed to the dimensions of most English Romanesque and Gothic monuments.³⁹ There may also have been some desire to imitate the height of Edward the Confessor's church, which was described in an anonymous thirteenth-century poem by the phrase, 'the work rises grand and royal'.⁴⁰ But this was probably no more than a coincidence, for the tallness of Gothic Westminster was French and undoubtedly had overtones of royalness for contemporaries. There is also a possibility that some of the other French elements, such as window tracery, were thought to convey the royal character of the Parisian court style. Then, too, King Henry by his action perhaps conferred royalness on some of the forms simply by using them in England. The ambulatory and radiating chapels of the plan, for example, which in the France of 1245 probably signified nothing more than a monument of some pretensions, were still virtually un-

known in England and unquestionably had very special connotations.

Royalness alone, however, was only a part of the concept that lay behind the reconstruction of Westminster, and perhaps not the most important part at that. The rest of the answer is to be found at the Ste.-Chapelle in Paris. Architecturally this building was not a striking innovation. But its decoration was unusual and was widely admired by contemporaries. Matthew Paris called it 'capellam mirifici decoris', for example.⁴¹ One of its salient features is of course the stained glass, but the brilliance of these luminous walls has tended to blind us to other equally important features, particularly the painting of the architectural members and the treatment of the dado (fig. 16). The backgrounds for the frescoes in the medallions and the angels of the spandrels are studded with stamped, gilt designs or set with pieces of colored glass painted with filigree gold patterns, that give close approximations of chased gold and of enamels. As for the paint, one must not overlook the following facts. Decorative painting of the Romanesque variety gave way to Gothic whitewash and falsework in a century-long development of increasingly 'purified' religious architecture, and the process was already completed at Chartres and Bourges at the end of the twelfth century. Secondly, in the midst of this tradition, the Ste.-Chapelle was planned to be fully painted from top to bottom, with lavish use of gold. In itself this may not have been unique, for too little still is known about the specific uses of painting in Gothic religious architecture to be categoric,⁴² and the texts inform us that much Gothic secular architecture was painted. But the profusion and richness of the paint in the Ste.-Chapelle certainly were exceptional in a Gothic church in northern France at the time, and the completeness of the program, covering all the inner surfaces of the building with bright colors, can only have been meant to enhance the conception of the chapel as a precious object. In one sense every church was of course a reliquary housing the Host, but that sense was metaphoric. I am proposing here that the Ste.-Chapelle was *literally* construed as a reliquary, an enormous mock-metal shrine complete with imitation *repoussé* Apostles along the sides and with effects of enamels and chased gold, the whole turned outside-in.

There is some confirmation that this was the original concept of the chapel. It is to be found in a phrase from the bull of 24 May 1244, by which Pope Innocent IV took the chapel under his protection: '... you [Louis] have considered building a chapel in Paris at your own expense, within the court of the royal palace, the workmanship surpassing the material ...'.⁴³ These last words,

37. Walpole, *Anecdotes*, p. 18.

38. *Chronicon Major*, IV, 640–644.

39. *Chronicon Major*, pp. 279–280. Cf. the same phrase used by Guy de Bazoches, ca. 1175, in R. de Lasteyrie, *Cartulaire général de Paris*, no. 535, I, p. 439, cited in L. Olschki, *Paris nach den alt-französischen nationalen Epen* (Heidelberg, 1913), p. 29.

40. In J. T. Micklethwaite, 'Notes on the Abbey Buildings at Westminster', *Archaeological Journal* II (1894), 8–9.

41. *Chronicon Major*, IV, 92.

42. Cf. Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire*, VII, art, 'Peinture'.

43. 'Cum igitur, sicut ex parte tua fuit propositum coram nobis, capellam Parisius infra septa domus regiae, opere superante mater-

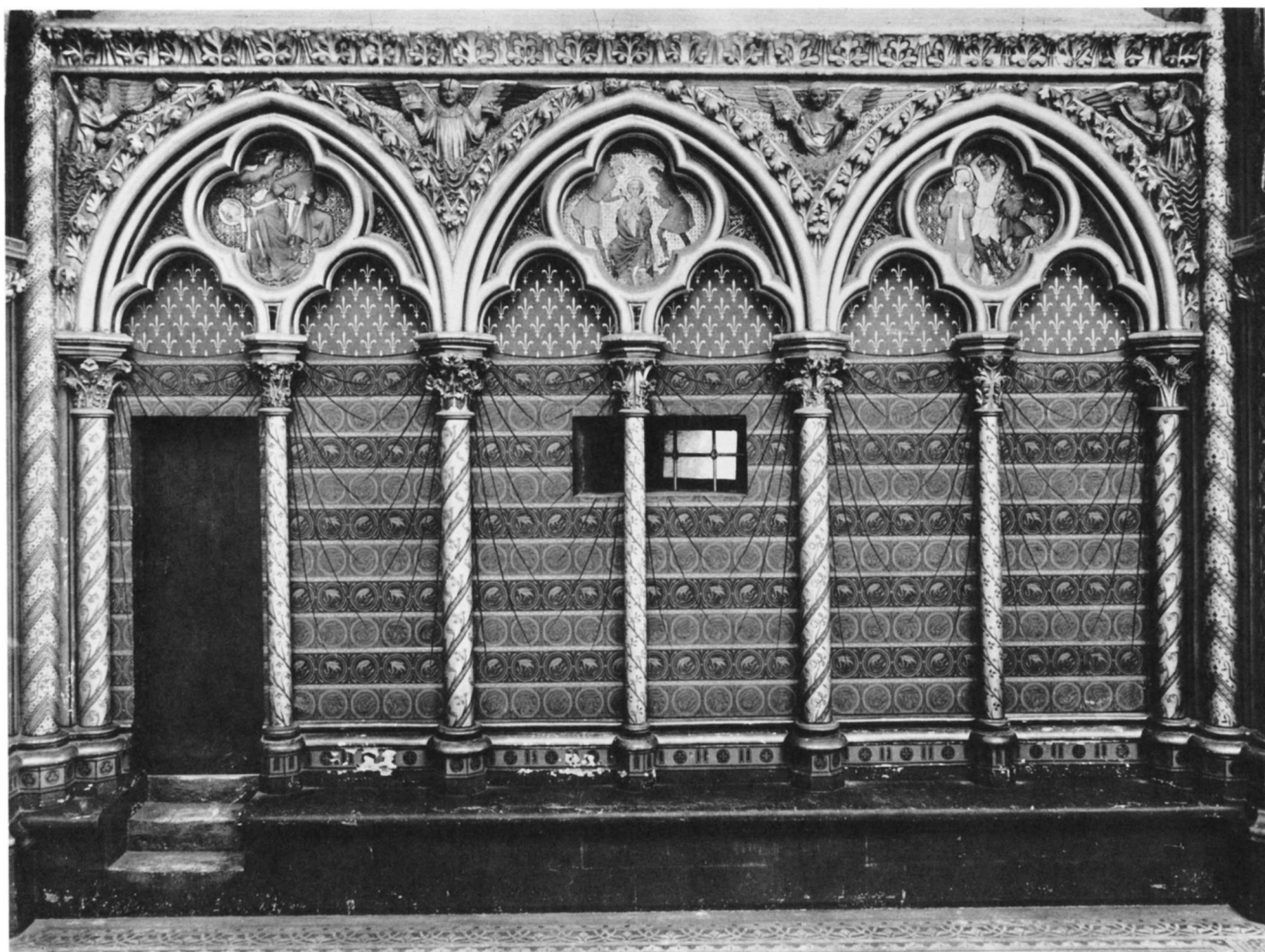


Fig. 16. Upper chapel dado, Ste.-Chapelle, Paris (courtesy Archives photographiques).

opere superante materiam, are quoted from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* II.5, from the description of Vulcan's brilliantly worked metal doors for the Palace of the Sun. The phrase was very well known in the Middle Ages—Suger used it, only half seriously, it is true, with reference to the rear of his golden altar at St.-Denis, and it occurs several times in the writings of Matthew Paris, who in one place even indicates that he knew the source as well.⁴⁴ Matthew, incidentally, cites precisely this phrase when he tells of Henry's new shrine for Saint Edward, and it was almost invariably

iam . . . tuis sumptibus duxeris construendam . . .', in S.-J. Morand, *Histoire de la Sainte-Chapelle royale de Paris* (Paris, 1790), p. j., pp. 2–3 (incorrectly dated 24 May 1243). 'Duxeris' is a subjunctive tense and therefore cannot be read to mean simple past time, as some scholars have done. None of this information is included in I. Hacker-Sück, 'La Sainte-Chapelle de Paris et les chapelles palatines du moyen age in France', *Cahiers archéologiques* XIII (1962), 217–257.

44. See E. Panofsky, *Abbot Suger on the Art Treasures of St.-Denis* (Princeton, 1946), pp. 26 and 62; Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Schriftquellen* . . . , no. 2714.

used in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with reference to metalwork and to precious materials.⁴⁵ The example at hand, to the best of my knowledge, is the only instance where Ovid's phrase was applied to architecture.

The idea of an enormous reliquary, a 'supershrine' for Edward the Confessor, and one to dwarf completely the chapel in Paris, must have appealed tremendously to King Henry.⁴⁶ In one way, of course, it was only the logical extension of the shrine that was already in the making for Edward. But we must also not forget that Henry was taken with the Ste.-Chapelle long before he had actually seen it, as seems to be indicated by the 1250 order to place images of the Apostles in St. Stephen's, mentioned above; Matthew Paris specifically names the chapel and its relics among the things that the king wished to see when he

45. Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, *passim*.

46. And to his advisor, the goldsmith Edward Fitzodo. On the latter's putative role, see G. Webb, 'The decorative Character of Westminster Abbey', *Journal, Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XII (1949), 16–20.

passed through France in 1254, and the same interest is conveyed by the naughty French poem of ca. 1255 that attributed to Henry the words, 'By the five wounds of God this same Paris is great | There's a chapel I covet and must alienate . . .'.⁴⁷ Henry had indeed already begun the 'alienation'.

There remains a small problem of dates. The Ste.-Chapelle was undoubtedly started not long after Louis received the relic of the True Cross, in September 1241. Henry, on the other hand, could scarcely have had the idea for Westminster as early as this, for it was only in 1241 that he ordered the new shrine for Saint Edward and the rebuilding of the church normally would have preceded, not followed, the refection of the reliquary. If the French chapel was in fact construed as a reliquary, then how is it Henry did not learn of this at once? Probably because the program of the chapel was not divulged until 1244. That the program was deeply involved with the French theory of kingship, as Grodecki has pointed out, is implied by Innocent's statement, 'the Lord has crowned you [Louis] with His Crown of Thorns'.⁴⁸ This coincided with and strengthened the current French idea which likened the King to an image of God.⁴⁹ The program

therefore was probably worked out on the very highest levels, by diplomats as well as theologians, as we would put it today, and deliberations of this sort were considered state secrets in France, the participants having sworn not to reveal them.⁵⁰ Thus if Henry did learn, in the fall of 1241 or in 1242–1243, when he was in Aquitania, that Louis was building a new chapel, he probably was not also informed about its intended meaning. In 1244, however, upon the publication of the bull, the program was made amply clear to everyone and it would have been only at this moment that Henry and his advisors conceived the idea of rebuilding Westminster.

The Ste.-Chapelle may thus have supplied the specific impetus for Westminster. This is not to say one was a model and the other a copy, however, for the chapel could scarcely have been more than something to rival in richness. And if some of its forms were adopted at the Abbey, so were forms from other contemporary French buildings of the court group. The manner in which these designs seem to have been collected was unusual but by no means unique, and if anything, it seems to express Henry III's vigor and directness of approach to certain kinds of problems. But no amount of Channel-crossing on our part can make the Abbey French. The English tradition provided counterparts to many French ideas at Westminster itself, and in succeeding years it had no difficulty in subsuming the imported elements. Contact with the French court style was principally intended for the greater glorification of England's royal saint.

47. *Chronica Major*, v, 475; A. Howgrave-Graham, 'Westminster Abbey. The Sequence and Dates of the Transepts and Nave', *Journal, British Archaeological Association*, ser. 3, xi (1948), 60–78.

48. L. Grodecki in *Les Vitraux de Notre-Dame et de la Sainte-Chapelle de Paris*, *Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi*, France, 1 (Paris, 1959), p. 83.

49. Schramm, *Der König von Frankreich*, pp. 189–192; cf. W. Berger, *Die Fürstenspiegel des hohen und späten Mittelalters*, *Mon. Ger. Hist., Schriften des Reichsinstituts* 2 (Stuttgart, 1938), pp. 78–80.

50. R. Fawtier, *The Capetian Kings of France* (London, 1960), pp. 5–6.