
"It is," Bernard Berenson once wrote, "a thankless task demonstrating the failings of a great man." Thus it is to find fault here with Paul Frankl's last major publication, *Gothic Architecture*, which appeared after his death at the age of 83 (30 January 1962). Paul Frankl was, as Nikolaus Pevsner writes in a preface to this book, "one of the giants of German Kunswissenschaft." Frankl's writings in the mediaeval field are and will remain valuable contributions to art historical literature, especially his monumental study of the Gothic style and various writings on it, *The Gothic, Literary Sources and Interpretations Through Eight Centuries* (Princeton, 1960). Accordingly, scholars of mediaeval architecture have long anticipated this volume of *The Pelican History of Art* series. It is sad to report that, in many ways, *Gothic Architecture* is a disappointing study.

Organized in the normal format of the series (which unfortunately locates text, footnotes, and plates in three separate places), *Gothic Architecture* covers in chronological order the ecclesiastical architecture of western Europe from 1093 (Durham) to 1530 (Halle an der Saale). Frankl himself recognized (p. xvii) his approach to be the "traditional divisions [of] Transitional, Early Gothic, High Gothic, and Late Gothic." Old as it is, no fault can be found with this approach. Until much more is known and assimilated by scholars concerning European architecture of this 400-year period, no single comprehensive picture or exhaustive theory can be presented by any other means. To his great credit, Frankl avoided the major pitfall of the approach, that of isolating concomitant and related developments from one another by the literary expedient of devoting a separate chapter to each country or region. However, he has not given a clearer picture of developments and interrelationships than is already known, and his text often confuses issues which are generally clearly understood.

In this review it seems best to follow the divisions of the author, the better to note what is covered and how, and to raise certain questions where necessary. The foreword (pp. xv-xviii) contains what is proved in chapter 4 to be one of Frankl's main theses, namely, that the "ultimate perfection" of the Gothic style in architecture came in its late period (after 1300). This happily denies the older, untenable idea held by all too many that Gothic architecture after about 1250 was to a greater or lesser degree "decadent" and therefore undeserving of serious study or honest admiration. However, overstatement of this thesis can have unfortunate consequences, as will be pointed out below. The foreword is followed by six clear and useful maps (pp. xix-xxii).

1. For a necrology and complete bibliography of Paul Frankl, see Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch (Westdeutsches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte), xxiv, 1962, pp. 7-14.

In his introduction (pp. 1-14), the author takes up the problem of what the Gothic style actually is, beginning with this statement: "The Gothic style evolved from within Romanesque church architecture when diagonal ribs were added to the groin-vault" (p. 1). In a broad sense this is historically true, but it is here vastly oversimplified and the ensuing discussion does little to clarify it. The reader must understand these first few pages because from them follow the judgments and analyses of the remainder of the book. But such understanding is not easy. The technical descriptions of vaulting surfaces (for example, "three-dimensional double-curved groins . . .") (p. 6) are comprehensible only to the specialist; and only the specialist will be able to distinguish between the highly technical and the highly theoretical since both appear as abstractions. Frankl rightly denies an exclusively functional role to the Gothic rib vault, noting that "the statical and the aesthetic factors [in designing a vault] do not exclude one another" (p. 8). No matter what the actual statical properties of a given vault are, the ogives do have a definite effect on the viewer's aesthetic sense. This leads to the most important part of the introduction: it is not so much structural differences which make Gothic unlike Romanesque as it is aesthetic differences. Romanesque is frontal (seen from 90° angles) and additive (one identical unit after another; Gothic is diagonal (seen from 45° angles) and divisive or partial (one large unit subdivided). This distinction is too limited. Gothic is no less additive than Frankl supposes Romanesque to be (see this reviewer's article, "The Cathedral of Chartres and the Architect of Soissons," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, xxii, 1963, p. 67). And, although Frankl attempts to apply it to towers, pinnacles, buttresses, spires, and so on, the concept of Gothic diagonality (as opposed to Romanesque frontality) obviously relates mainly to rib vault intradoses. It would be difficult if not impossible to analyze properly a Gothic triforium arcade—clearstory tracery complex such as that at Amiens, for example, viewing it only from a diagonal or 45° angle.

Chapter 1 (pp. 15-33) is devoted to Transitional Gothic or the "first Gothic" and rightfully centers around a fine characterization of the new style of Saint-Denis, a distinction being made between the qualities of the west façade and narthex (about 1137-1140) and the chevet (1140-1144), the work of two different architects. Frankl is probably correct in stating, "there never was a moment when a totally Romanesque building was followed by a totally Gothic one" (p. 33), which is ample warning of the difficulty in understanding clearly the developments during the years between Durham and Saint-Denis. However, limiting his discussion largely to the spread of the rib vault from England to Paris via Normandy leads the author to the conclusion, repeated or implied several times in the book (for example, pp. 51, 50, 221), that "the Gothic style originated in vaults and developed downwards" (p. 17). Such an interpretation cannot be altogether denied, but it forces the supposition that all members below the springing of vaults are either Romanesque or Gothic depending on the degree to which they function in accord with the diagonality of the ogives. If this were so, a strong case could be made for the side-aisle bays of the nave of Saint-Étienne at Beauvais (ca. 1120-1140) being the oldest extant Gothic structure since the
plinths and abaci are set diagonally at 45° angles to the main axes of the bays. A discussion of the development of rib profiles is confused by the reverse printing of Fig. 8 (p. 20), and it is no longer accepted that the celebrated ambulatory vaults of Saint-Pierre at Morienvill date as early as 1125, which would make them the oldest ambulatory vaults with ribs in France (p. 22). A date contemporary with Saint-Denis, about 1140, is more likely, although the style may reflect that current about 1125.

The second chapter (pp. 34-78) is concerned with the developments between Saint-Denis and Chartres, that is, between 1144 and 1194. This half-century of French Gothic architecture was "filled with a bewildering number of experiments" (Robert Branner, Gothic Architecture, New York, 1961, p. 24), and it is very difficult to see a coherent pattern in the buildings of this period. However, interest in voiding the wall (Saint-Remi at Reims, south transept arm of Soissons), colossal height (Arras and Cambrai, two buildings not mentioned by Frankl), and plasticity of effect (Noyon and Laon) were distinct areas of experimentation in northern France, and Frankl does not make this clear. Following a strictly chronological survey of monuments, he is forced to see influences which did not exist (for example, between the plans of Paris and Saint-Remi because of triangular vaults in each [p. 48]). On the other hand, his observations on Laon, specifically the use of polygonal apses to facilitate installation of stained glass, and the appearance of true Gothic skeletal construction at Noyon (begun about 1150) are concise and correct.

A subject all too infrequently mentioned by historians of mediaeval architecture is the "Gothicizing" of building exteriors. Frankl considers this problem and concludes that although they were a consequence of the downward development of the rib vault, changes of exteriors took place more slowly than did changes of interiors. This is true: the chevet of Noyon was, before the addition of flying buttresses in the fifteenth century, much more Romanesque outside than inside. The greatest change came with the use of the flying buttress at the nave of Paris about 1180, the most significant single device produced by the structural experimentations of the period 1144-1194. After this time church exteriors no longer appeared as solid masses, a tendency no less important than that of voiding the interior wall. There is a difference between a perforated wall (basically Romanesque) and a voided wall (basically Gothic), not only in the amount of light which comes through each, but in the surface texture of the wall itself. Frankl quite correctly stresses this point (pp. 48-50).

Looking outside France, and passing off developments in Germany, Italy, and Spain as efforts to "imitate and exploit the rib-vault" (p. 70), Frankl concentrates on England. He denotes clearly the most obvious difference between English and French Gothic architecture, namely, horizontal fusion versus vertical fusion (p. 50). In discussing the so-called "crazy" vaults of Saint Hugh's chevet at Lincoln (begun 1192) he anticipates the vaulting complexities which characterize late Gothic architecture in England.

In dating the High Gothic style of architecture to the period 1194-1300, Frankl embarks on new ground in chapter 3 (pp. 79-145). No study known to this reviewer has yet recognized the high or classic phase of Gothic to extend to such a late date. Henri Focillon’s fundamental study of 1938, Art d’Occident, set a limit of two generations, between 1194 and about 1250, using the term Rayonnant for such buildings as Saint-Urbain at Troyes (begun 1262) in which an interest in design or traceried overshadowed construction. In 1950 in Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism Erwin Panofsky suggested that the nave of Saint-Denis (begun 1243) was the “perfect” High Gothic structure. Generally, however, only five buildings are admitted to represent the High Gothic style in France: Chartres, Bourges (begun in 1195), Soissons (chevet const. 1212), Reims (begun in 1210), and the nave of Amiens (begun in 1220). Considering the thousands of Gothic buildings in France, this may seem all too few monuments to include under the rather exclusive term, “classic." This is certainly Frankl’s feeling. But we date the high point of fifth-century Greek art within the reign of Pericles (461-431 B.C) and the High Renaissance in Italy between about 1495 and the death of Raphael in 1519. Should it be otherwise for the Gothic style? I think not. Yet one need not and should not insist that the buildings of the second half of the thirteenth century are inferior to those of the first half of the century, or that they are in some way decadent. Many of them did continue and carry to a logical conclusion the interest in voiding the wall, reducing supports, and developing tracery, the first evidences of which can be seen before 1200. Of many such buildings, Saint-Urbain at Troyes and the chevet of Sézé (about 1270) are convincing cases in point, but it is difficult to accept Frankl’s statement that the architect of Saint-Urbain “far surpassed” the architects of Amiens and Cologne (p. 129), or that “Indeed, about 1300 even Reims and Amiens appeared far too robust and worldly, too full of sap and vitality” (p. 136).

The century between 1200 and 1300 saw the spread of the Gothic style from its area of origin in northern France throughout Europe. Many writers describe this phenomenon as the diffusion of the French style (for example, as early as 1250 the German chronicler Burckhard von Halle wrote that the church at Wimpfen im Tal [begun 1269] had been built opere francigenae). Sometimes French influences were very obvious (for example, Cologne, begun in 1248, and patterned after Amiens and Beauvais, sometimes less so (for example, Burgos, begun in 1222, reflecting Bourges and Le Mans, the latter itself based on Bourges). French architects did travel to other countries. Best known is the eminent Villard de Honnecourt who went to Hungary in the mid-thirteenth century. But he was by no means the only one (as Frankl maintains on p. 125): in 1174 William of Sens went to Canterbury; in 1218 Etienne de Bonneval went to Upsala; in 1344 Matthias of Arras went to Prague; about 1480 Juan Guas, a Frenchman from Lyons, went to Toledo, among many others. Oddly, all these are noted by Frankl, despite his statement to the contrary just cited. In any case, the tendency to explain the Gothic architecture of this period in terms of how “French” it happens to be is traditional and in many ways unavoidable. But so doing belittles or obscures many historically autonomous developments, especially in England and Italy. Frankl has mentioned each of these countries, but he has concentrated on Germany, concluding that the chevet of Cologne "gives [by comparison with Reims and Amiens] ... the impression of being the Gothic choir, the final solution" (p. 137).

This chapter contains many errors of fact as well as some contradictions (for example, saying on p. 86 that Jean d’Orbais, Gaucher de Reims, Jean le Loup, and Bernard de Soissons were the architects of Reims “in that order,” then saying on p. 115 that Le Loup took over direction of the work in 1231 or 1235 and dating Gaucher’s tenure 1247-1255). In general, the reader’s impression of this chapter is one of uncertainty on the author’s part. One feels he did not really wish to take up the problem of just what the High Gothic style is, for he makes no attempt to define or to characterize it while pleading for open-mindedness. In essence, he has lumped a century of experiments and developments under the handiest available title.

In making his chapter on "The Late Gothic Style" (pp. 146-216) the longest in the book, Frankl betrays his special love of Gothic architecture in its more advanced stages after about 1300. In retrospect, this particular interest may explain why the author was content to extend the High Gothic period up to 1300. In other words, by avoiding any intermediate period such as Rayonnant, he is able to make Late Gothic the immediate and direct successor to High Gothic, a scheme comparable to linking the Baroque directly with the High Renaissance and ignoring Mannerism.

In this fourth chapter Frankl has noted several of the most com-
plex problems of the Late Gothic style (for example, just how "Gothic" is Gothic architecture after 1500, remembering that the façade of Saint-Maclou at Rouen is contemporary with Bramante's Tempietto di S. Pietro in Montorio), and he has stated some inescapable truisms (for example, with reference to the elaborate vaulting rib patterns of German architecture of the period about 1450-1550, "Gothic architects had by this time drawn every possible conclusion from the premises which had been laid down when the first rib-vault was built at Durham," p. 212). This statement is acceptably obvious, but others are questionably oversimplified: one cannot say, "... the aim of the [Late Gothic] architect was to correct the High Gothic style with the unbelievably complicated forms of his own geometrical fantasy, to turn his work into pure texture, and thus to make it completely Gothic" (p. 202). That the Late Gothic style was a continuation of the High Gothic style—regardless of the restrictions placed on the latter—is a truism. It indeed was a fulfillment in the sense that it was more elaborate, more conscious of decoration. But it was not more "Gothic" as such, and it is dangerous to say Late Gothic was a "correction" of High Gothic, implying as this does that something was missing from or wrong with the high or classic phase of the style.

Frankl surveys chronologically the monuments of the Late Gothic period, concentrating on German and French buildings of the late fourteenth, the fifteenth, and the early sixteenth centuries, covering the styles normally termed Sondergotik and Flamboyant. However, any attempt to group under one general heading buildings so widely separated in time, place, and effect as Saint-Ouen at Rouen (begun in 1318) and Saint Barbara at Kuttenberg (vaulted in 1512) can only result in a catalogue. The author's thesis that the Late Gothic period dates from 1319, when the chapter house at Wells was in use and the structural function of the rib completely ignored (p. 146), results in the conclusion that the main characteristic of the Late Gothic style is decoration rather than construction. As Frankl expresses it, it is a style in which texture replaced structure. Accordingly, this chapter notes many of the main features of this period which would have been inconceivable (and, if known, presumably unacceptable) to earlier Gothic architects: spiral piers (for example, chevet aisles, Brunswick, 1469), layers of elaborate tracery (for example, façade, Saint-Maclou at Rouen), rib patterns or tracery screens forming a "net pattern" capable of continuous repetition (for example, vaults, Saint Anne at Annaberg, begun in 1499; south transept arm, Gloucester, 1531), three-dimensional, double-curved arches and ribs (for example, the Simpertus Arch, nave of Saint Ulrich and Afra, Augsburg, 1480), hanging keystones or pendant bosses (for example, Chapel of Saint Catherine, Vienna Cathedral [Steinhofcm], begun in 1540 or 1559), and vaults with ribs but perforated web severities (for example, Capilla del Condestable, Burgos Cathedral, 1482-1494). By and large, it would seem that Frankl abandoned the concept of "diagonality" in favor of a concept of "continuous recession" as the characteristic of Late Gothic architecture. But as he himself notes with reference to the triforium and clearstory of Prague (the part of the cathedral begun by Peter Parler in 1374), a construction in which the terminal opening of each triforium bay and clearstory window is angled inward from the main plane of the elevation, "The essentially Gothic emphasis on the diagonal has perhaps never been so intensely and tangibly expressed" (p. 163). One can only wonder if this construction, despite its date, does not belong in the author's chapter on the High Gothic.

Frankl concludes Gothic Architecture with a separate section (Part Two, pp. 217-270) entitled "The General Problems of the Gothic Style." Much of the material contained here, especially that on the history of the term "Gothic" and various interpretations of the style, is contained in greater detail in The Gothic Literary Sources... , but the summary given here is general enough to satisfy the student, yet accurate enough not to alarm the specialist. The author's section on the symbolism of Gothic architecture in which "form becomes the symbol of meaning" is particularly interesting and valid (pp. 229-240). Discussions of Gothic secular architecture (pp. 242-251) and Gothic sculpture and painting (pp. 251-260) are too brief to be more than introductions, but they indicate clearly that an understanding of each cannot be reached without a knowledge of Gothic ecclesiastical architecture. For example, the Porte Saint-André at Villeneuve-lès-Avignon (about 1300) obviously falls within the Gothic period, but just how "Gothic" can a massive fortress without windows actually be? This question is posed by Frankl, and he admits what is readily apparent: much secular architecture and almost all military architecture of the period 1200-1300 defies the normal "Gothic" classification and needs much study.

In summary, one is at a loss for an accurate and fair one or two-word description of Frankl's Gothic Architecture. While it contains certain errors of fact, several blatant contradictions, and many questionable interpretations—some of which have been noted above—this is not a "bad" book. Nor is it useless or superficial, for if the nonspecialist will find much of the text difficult to comprehend, he likewise will find that the great number of buildings mentioned and dated, together with the generally well-reproduced plates, constitute a valuable handbook of Gothic architecture, especially for the Late Gothic period. The specialized discussions are considerably less useful: the theory of Gothic diagonality is neither new nor completely convincing, the monuments covered are the standard examples known to most scholars, and the bibliography (both in the footnotes and in the list on pp. 297-309) appears to have been largely closed at the time the German text was completed (apparently by 1956, according to a reference on p. 298).

Perhaps the most fitting adjective to describe Gothic Architecture is "curious." This work contains much more theory than most of the volumes in The Pelican History of Art series. And it is, in this reviewer's opinion, no less amazing than disconcerting that Frankl can be so detailed in technical descriptions and still manage to term churches "homely" (Saint-Germain des Prés), "warlike" (Tournai), "gloomy" (Paris), or "festive and friendly" (Laon). However, this is but a personal impression which well may not be shared by other readers. On a much more serious level, throughout the book Frankl insists on the importance of the rib vault in determining and characterizing the Gothic style of architecture. To his credit, he maintains it is more a question of aesthetics than of pure construction. But none the less, one gets the unsatisfied feeling that we suddenly are no farther along in our understanding of Gothic than we were a century ago, that the tyranny of the rib as the key element in Gothic architecture still reigns supreme. Replacing one blindspot with another does little to advance understanding and knowledge.

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There is nothing quite like reviewing a book for the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians after its author has been awarded the Alice Davis Hitchcock Book Award for the most distinguished work of scholarship in the history of architecture published by an American scholar in the year 1963. The Book Award Committee met, pondered, corresponded, deliberated, and decided. To complicate matters, Robert Branner has just started his term as editor of the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. Thus, the