

Cover page

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Text on following pages....

HOLY TOLEDO: ART-HISTORICAL TAXONOMY AND THE MORPHOLOGY OF TOLEDO CATHEDRAL

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IN ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY as in biology, the act of classification constrains and informs interpretation. As Darwin developed his theory of biological evolution, he relied on a taxonomic system inherited from his predecessor Linneas.¹ Like many art-historical taxonomies, Linneas's was based on the examination of formal similarities. However, while modern biologists have been able to confirm and refine Linneas' classification scheme using DNA analysis, architectural historians have no such tool to endorse their choice of taxonomies. This proves all the more true when studying the Middle Ages, a period from which all too few explicit statements of artistic intentionality survive.

The story of medieval architecture has been constructed on an armature of taxonomic categories that—hopefully—reflect the perceptions and intentions of that era. Historical plausibility of this kind has often been sought in the close analysis of details. In the case of Gothic architecture, tracery patterns, molding profiles, and stone-cutting techniques have all been seen as clues to the links between workshops. Because of their direct association with the day-to-day details of workshop prac-

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"Holy Toledo: Art-Historical Taxonomy And The Mc
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tice, these indices provide insight into the creative processes of architecture at the "genetic" level.

A very different taxonomy results when the symbolic resonance and programmatic intention behind medieval buildings are taken into account. Indeed, it is precisely this quality of human intentionality that breaks down the analogy between biology and art. As Krautheimer demonstrated decades ago, medieval builders might emulate a prototype of which they had only limited direct knowledge.² Numerous "copies" of Saint Peter's basilica in Rome and the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem attest to this fact. The design of Westminster Abbey evokes that of Reims, not because Henry III's masons were trained in France, but because Reims provided the most prestigious model for a coronation church. Such formally imprecise references reveal the limitations of the quasi-genetic taxonomies described above. Conversely, however, taxonomies based on symbolic meaning alone cannot explain the detailed process of artistic creativity that makes each building a unique work in its own right.

In an effort to find a fruitful middle path between these methodological extremes, historians of medieval architecture have postulated the existence of "schools" or "families" of buildings related to each other in the broader outlines of their design. The three "classic" Cathedrals of Chartres, Reims, and Amiens, for example, have often been grouped together because of their generally similar features of plan and elevation, even though their "genetic" details differ significantly.³ Expanding this taxonomy into an historical narrative, Jean Bony saw these buildings as representative of a Chartrain school whose dramatic innovations were accepted or resisted to varying degrees by builders outside this tradition. Both Bony and Robert Branner saw the Cathedral of Bourges as the most outstanding alternative to Chartres, an alternative that eventually produced a school or filiation of its own.⁴

The neatness of this classification scheme breaks down in cases of complex artistic synthesis, as the example of Beauvais Cathedral demonstrates. Bony saw Beauvais as a member of the Chartres series, in large part because of its tall clerestory and crisp bay articulation. Branner, however, insisted on the resemblance between Beauvais and Bourges, and although he admitted that Beauvais did not belong to the immediate "family" of Bourges, he saw Bourges as an important precedent for the dramatic pyramidal organization of space seen at Beauvais.⁵ More recently, Stephen Murray has attempted to liberate the first master of Beauvais from the Procrustean bed of the Chartres-Bourges classification scheme, arguing for a more inclusive picture that takes account of both his bold originality and his knowledge of older sources such as Notre-Dame in Paris and Cluny III.⁶

A rather different challenge to the traditional view of the Bourges-vs-Chartres taxonomy has been raised by Jürgen Michler.⁷ Bony, Branner, and most subsequent scholars have seen Chartres as the more influential of the two buildings, noting that the large clerestories, four-part vaults, and simple basilican elevation of Chartres appears in many later churches, while the six-part vaults, pyramidal massing, and smooth exterior silhouette of Bourges remained relatively rare. Michler, however, argues that the cantonated piers of Chartres, Reims, and Amiens are residually Romanesque in conception, and that

Bourges should be seen as more influential than Chartres because its rounded piers and vertically integrated articulation system herald Rayonnant and later Gothic developments. This disagreement clearly shows that our choice of taxonomic criteria can shape the perception of artistic influence in the Middle Ages.

On this basis, the question of how medieval artists themselves constructed their classification schemes becomes an important one. Were they concerned primarily with symbolic references like those discussed by Krautheimer, or did they recognize typologies based on more purely formal qualities as well? Christopher Wilson has recently argued that the "great church" was recognized as a category by medieval builders. The great church type was characterized, he believes, by certain morphological features such as a basilican elevation, a complex east end, and the consistent use of vaulting in the context of a fully articulated bay system. Wilson groups together cathedrals, abbeys, and parish churches sharing these features, arguing that, "since the buildings which form this uppermost stratum of Gothic architecture include hardly any features specific to their different institutional functions, and since influences passed freely between them, it is logical and appropriate that they be considered as a single category, namely the 'great church.'"⁸ If Wilson is correct in claiming a historical reality for

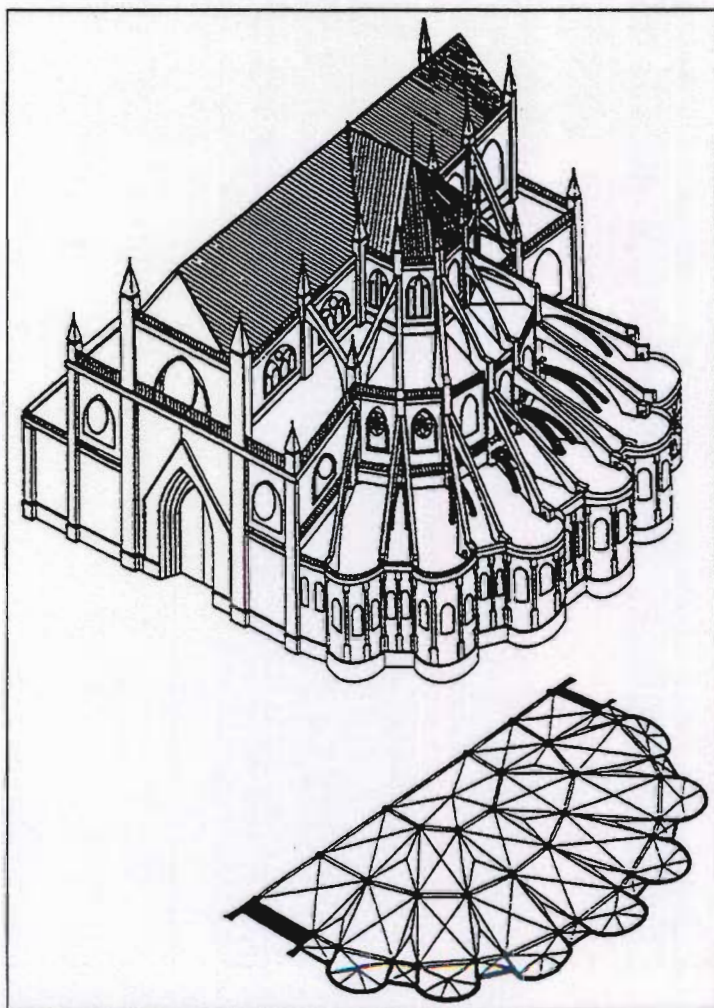


Fig 1. Toledo Cathedral, plan and bird's eye view of chevet (after J.M. Azcarte, *Arte Gótico en España*, Madrid, 1990, frontispiece)

the great church category, perhaps medieval builders and their patrons recognized other, more precise morphological categories. Were five-aisled basilicas, for instance, recognized as a type?

Based on consideration of Toledo Cathedral's thirteenth-century choir, the present paper argues that precise morphological categories of this kind did indeed play a role in medieval design and planning. This analysis helps to explain the mixture of formal influences seen at Toledo, and it also sheds light on the way the great cathedral projects of northern France were perceived by their contemporaries. In particular, the case of Toledo offers an interesting gloss on the debate about Beauvais Cathedral and its relationship to the "families" of Chartres and Bourges. Toledo Cathedral has long been recognized as a member of the "family of Bourges." Because the construction of Toledo represented one of the first intrusions of the French Gothic style onto Spanish soil, however, the building must have appeared revolutionary in its local context.

The self-consciously revolutionary and even polemical character of Toledo Cathedral emerges clearly in light of the city's history. Toledo had been a great cultural center under the Muslims. The capture of the city by Christian armies in 1085 was one of the key events of the Reconquista, culturally as well as militarily. The magnificence of the Muslim achievement greatly enriched Christian perspectives, and may even have contributed to the development of the ribbed vault.⁹ The mosque of Toledo was consecrated and converted into a cathedral, despite initial promises of religious tolerance by King Alphonso VI.¹⁰ By the beginning of the thirteenth century, however, this mosque-cathedral had fallen into disrepair. Especially by comparison to the great new cathedrals of France, this building must have been seen as unworthy of the metropolitan church of Spain. It hardly seems coincidental, therefore, that the Gothic cathedral of Toledo was begun in the episcopate of an archbishop, Rodrigo Jimenez de Rada, who had been educated in Paris.¹¹ With its great width, the Gothic cathedral obliterated all trace of the former mosque (Fig.1). Altogether, it is difficult to escape the impression that the archbishop intended the new building as a manifesto of Christian cultural sophistication.

The early campaigns at Toledo Cathedral are only sparsely documented, but several fragments permit the establishment of a chronology. According to a papal bull of 1222, the archbishop could divert fully a third of the funds from churches within his diocese toward construction. Work on the site had already been undertaken by 1224, but King Ferdinand III could not participate in the ceremony of laying the first stone until 1226. Building began at the east perimeter of the structure, probably under the direction of one Martin, named as "masterworkman of the construction" between 1227 and 1234.¹² His successor Petrus Petri died in 1291, having completed the body of the church east of the crossing.

The exact contribution of each master remains a matter of some dispute. Chueca Goitia argued that Martin was a Frenchman by birth, but he saw Petrus Petri as a Spaniard, whose "Spanish nature" found expression in the building's sprawling proportions and peculiar detailing. More recently, it has been proposed that Martin was Spanish by birth but trained in France.¹³ It is not the purpose of this paper to resolve this

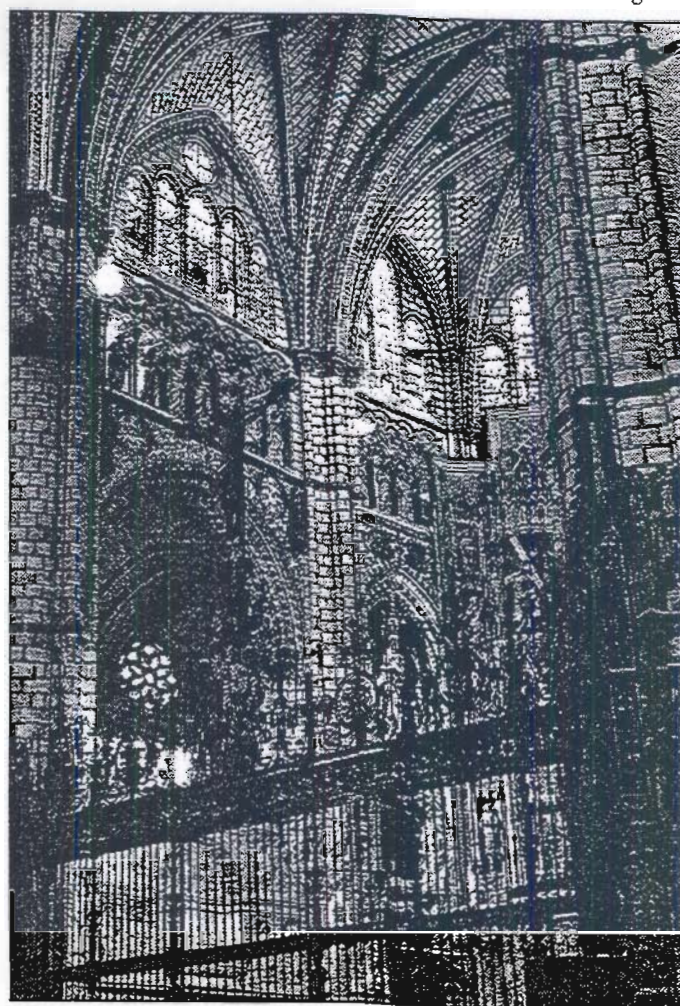


Fig. 2. Toledo Cathedral, view into choir (photo: London, Courtauld Institute, Conway Library)

debate, or to propose a new and detailed chronology for work on the cathedral. Instead, it will explore the ways in which the Toledo workshop drew upon French Gothic forms for inspiration. The relatively minor permutations added to the cathedral's essentially French design may have been introduced by one of the masters or by his local contractors. These modifications will be discussed further after a more detailed consideration of Toledo's forms and their relationship to French prototypes.

The east end of Toledo Cathedral creates a powerful impression through its tremendous width. Even the choir vessel itself is low and broad, and two aisles nearly as wide flank each side (Figs.1-3). These are staggered in height, so that the overall section of the east end is pyramidal. The transepts do not protrude beyond the aisles, giving the building a compact plan. However, the bays flanking the transept all reach the height of the tall inner aisle, so that a continuous corridor of space wraps around the main vessel, transepts and choir alike. As a result, the fullness of the center space is emphasized, and the transepts are integrated with the eastern arm of the church. This rich piling up of spaces remained nearly unique in Gothic architecture, since it required the presence of both an aisled transept and a pyramidal five-aisle section. To my knowledge, no plausible prototype has yet been proposed for this elaborate configuration. Although perhaps Martin or Petrus Petri devised the scheme entirely on

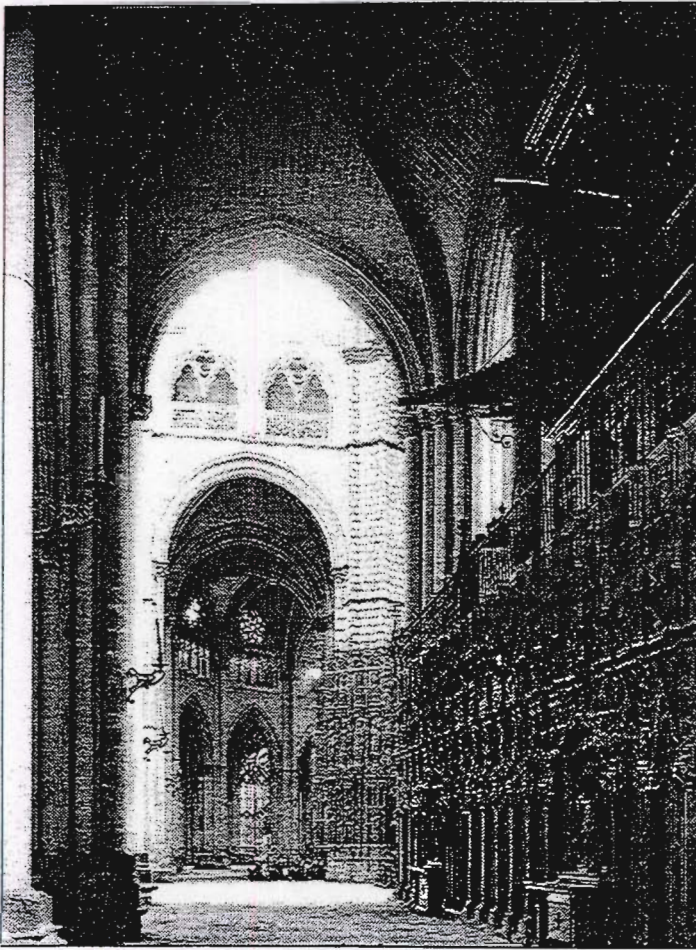


Fig. 3. Toledo Cathedral, view from north aisle nave into choir ambulatory (photo: London, Courtauld Institute, Conway Library)

his own, the reliance of the Toledo workshop on French architectural models strongly suggests otherwise.

Toledo Cathedral has long been recognized as belonging to what Robert Branner has called the “following of Bourges.”¹⁴ The pyramidal elevation, many-shafted cylindrical piers, and main clerestory design of Toledo all suggest the influence of that great French cathedral (Figs.2,3). The plan of Toledo also resembles that of Bourges, with double ambulatories and small chapels on the perimeter.¹⁵ Toledo has been located within the “following of Bourges” not only because of its apparent indebtedness to Bourges, but because of its relationship to Le Mans, itself a speculation on themes introduced at Bourges. Most strikingly, Toledo emulates Le Mans in adopting bifurcated flying buttresses, which were not used in any other High Gothic building (Fig.1).¹⁶ The designer of Toledo’s buttressing system went beyond his predecessor at Le Mans in employing the motif over both sets of aisles, so that the number of bays increases from five in the hemicycle to seventeen on the perimeter.

Significantly, Toledo appears to have been conceived as a self-conscious synthesis of elements from both Bourges and Le Mans. Bourges alone does not suffice to explain the idiosyncratic buttressing scheme of Toledo. Meanwhile, however, the main clerestory elevation and plan of Toledo derive directly from the older forms of Bourges. The same might be said of the main triforium, despite its Mujédar detailing. To a large extent, therefore, Toledo Cathedral may be seen as a peculiarly

Spanish synthesis of influences from Bourges and Le Mans. From this perspective, Toledo does indeed appear to be member of the “family of Bourges.”

Although this model suffices to explain many features Toledo design, the rich spatial morphology of its high-aisled transepts departs decisively from these precedents. Bourges, of course, has no transept at all, while the transept of Le Mans remains spatially disconnected from the eastern vessel. Seen from the exterior at least, the transept of Toledo more closely resembles that of Notre-Dame in Paris (Fig.4). At Notre-Dame the galleries of the transept and choir form “L-shaped corridors of space” that rise above the outer aisles in much the same fashion that the inner aisles of Toledo rise above their shorter neighbors on the periphery of the building.¹⁷ Jean Bony has argued, moreover, that the tiered arrangement of the flying buttresses at Toledo derives from the original buttress geometry of Notre-Dame of Paris.¹⁸

A connection between Toledo and Paris should not be seen as surprising, since Notre-Dame itself appears to have been an important source for Bourges. Describing both Bourges and Toledo as members of the “school of Paris,” expands the idea of a “school of Bourges” rather than fundamentally challenging its legitimacy.¹⁹ Toledo, then, begins to emerge as a building in which three successive versions of the same basic theme are welded into one composition. As Bony has observed, “These superimpositions of designs of different dates, coming from two or three chronological layers, reveal a specifically ‘peripheral’ mode of thinking: as a result of the simultaneous transmission of the heritage of several generations of Gothic traditions, the perspective of history becomes flattened and time

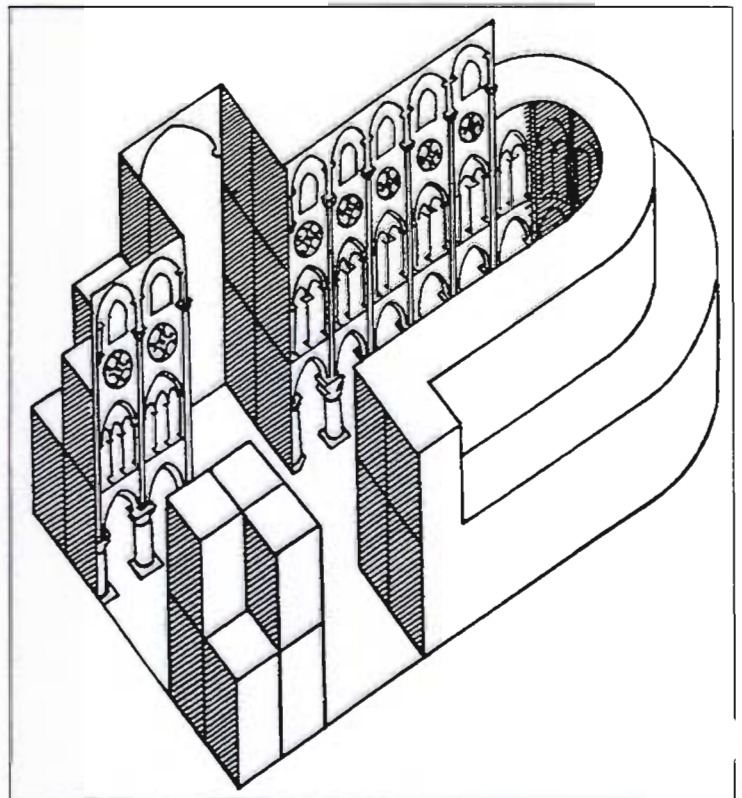


Fig. 4. Paris, Cathedral of Notre-Dame, diagram of spatial structure of choir (after J. Bony, *French Gothic Architecture of the 12th and 13th Centuries*, Berkeley, 1983: 141, fig. 133)

loses its normal depth."²⁰ The designers of the Toledo choir may have been "peripheral," but they clearly remained au courant, since the bifurcated flying buttress design of Le Mans was less than a decade old when work started at Toledo in the 1220s.

The details of Toledo's tall inner aisle, together with its overall spatial complexity, suggest that the Toledo workshop may have been even more up-to-date than previously suspected. In the area where these inner aisles rise above the outer ones, each bay is pierced by a single rosette surmounting a small arcade that resembles a miniature triforium, its Mujédar-style articulation notwithstanding (Fig. 3). Nothing of this kind is to be seen in the aisles of Bourges or Le Mans, nor in the galleries of Notre-Dame. The complex vertical and diagonal vistas opened up through the tall transept and choir aisles of Toledo, moreover, cannot be explained easily in terms of influence from Notre-Dame, Paris, an Early Gothic building in which the corresponding volumes are treated as two stacked stories rather than one tall one. Where, then, did these forms come from?

One possibility, of course, is that the complex spatial morphology and unusual aisle elevation of Toledo were entirely original, invented within that building's own workshop. Certainly the incorporation of Mujédar details shows a degree of originality, as does the adaptation of French forms to suit a tremendously wide site. As we have seen, Chueca Goitia sees evidence for an original "Spanish character" in the work of Petrus Petri, so perhaps no further explanation proves necessary for these departures from the Bourges-Le Mans-Paris model.²¹

On the other hand, Toledo Cathedral represents the assertive and self-conscious importation of the new French architecture into Spain. With no local tradition of Gothic craftsmanship in Toledo, its builders would have been prudent in adhering closely to proven models. The ambitious transept format, in particular, seems unlikely to have emerged in Toledo without some viable prototype. Also, despite the veneer of Mujédar-style decoration, the architectural forms of Toledo Cathedral generally remain quite close to French precedent. Since the designer of Toledo was clearly familiar with at least Bourges, Le Mans and Paris, the possibility that he knew other less obvious prototypes also deserves to be considered.

The Cathedral of Beauvais seems at first glance to be a particularly unlikely source for that of Toledo. The legendary height of Beauvais contrasts with the equally emphatic width of Toledo. The vast expanses of glass and staccato rhythms of the northern building could hardly be further removed from the languorous darkness of its southern cousin. The contrasts prove equally pronounced on the exterior. Moreover, while Toledo employs round, many-shafted piers derived from Bourges, the unusual quartered piers of Beauvais seem more closely related to those of Chartres or Reims. Numerous other stylistic details could be adduced to argue that Toledo and Beauvais bear no relation to one another.

Nevertheless, if one is willing to accept the evidence of morphological generalities as well as stylistic details, the original conceptions of Toledo and Beauvais no longer appear so opposed. In fact, Beauvais alone of major French churches adopts the same ambitious combination of high-aisled transept and pyramidal five-aisle choir as Toledo.²² Also, the aisle

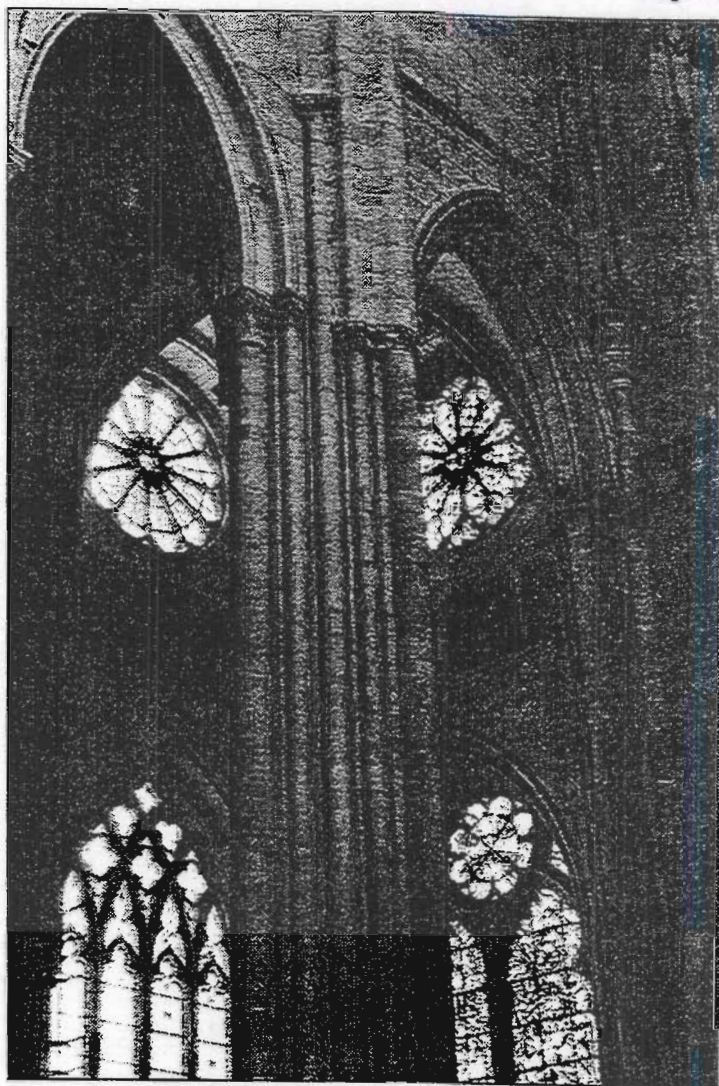


Fig. 5. Beauvais, Cathedral of Saint-Pierre, south transept aisle elevation (photo: M. Davis)

clerestory of Beauvais, composed of a single rosette over a small triforium, closely resembles that of Toledo, if allowances are made for the Mujédar detailing of the latter (Figs. 3, 5).²³ The occurrence of both of these unusual Toledan features in one French building seems unlikely to have been a coincidence.

As Stephen Murray has demonstrated, construction at Beauvais was begun in the lower stories of the transept. Thus, by 1225 or so, the spatial morphology of the transept had been established. In this section of the building, a large rosette and shallow triforium articulate the outer wall of the inner aisle. Already this format resembles that of Toledo. The match is comparably close in the straight bays of the choir, where the triforia are more delicate and the rosettes are smaller, although these cusped rosettes lack the emphatic tracery petals seen at Toledo. Murray dates this campaign to roughly 1240.²⁴

Because of the rough simultaneity of work at Beauvais and Toledo, at least two different scenarios may be imagined to explain the linkage of the two buildings. If one believes that Master Martin set all the important parameters for the design of Toledo by 1227 or so, then only the transept campaigns of Beauvais could have been known to him. In fact, these campaigns would have begun only two years earlier. Such a rapid

transmission of design information may well have depended on drawings, which could have shown the entire aisle elevation of Beauvais long before its construction was complete. For those who prefer to credit Petrus Petri with the design of Toledo's entire east end, the peripheral chapels excepted, both the transepts and the straight aisle bays of Beauvais would have been possible precedents. Based on chronology alone, there is no reason to deny the possibility of a Beauvais-Toledo connection. The lower stories of Beauvais, after all, were under construction at roughly the same time as the flying buttresses of Le Mans, which have long been recognized as influences on those of Toledo.

Recognition of Beauvais as an important source for Toledo complicates and enriches the taxonomic framework within which each building has been understood. In particular, it suggests that medieval masons and their patrons categorized buildings based on spatial morphology. When construction of Toledo Cathedral was begun in the mid-to-late 1220's, Bourges, Le Mans and Beauvais were the only French churches with pyramidal five-aisle choirs.²⁵ The designers of Toledo appear to have synthesized elements of all three. In fact, with the exception of the Mujédar decoration, every significant element of Toledo's east end may be traced to one of these three buildings, or, as noted above, to Notre-Dame of Paris. Meanwhile, there are no elements of Toledo that seem to depend on the precedents offered by Chartres, Reims, or Amiens, or other great French cathedrals of the day. Perhaps this is because they lacked the pyramidal elevation that constitutes such an important part of the Toledo scheme. Toledo appears to have been designed as a self-conscious synthesis of all those French cathedrals with pyramidal elevations, and no others. This implies both that five-aisled pyramidal churches were recognized as a type and that Beauvais was seen as a member of that group.

Although necessarily hypothetical, it is possible to construct a reasonable historical narrative explaining why this typology made sense in thirteenth-century Toledo. To start with, the Gothic Cathedral was designed, as matter of pride, to extend over the full site of the former mosque. This practically dictated a five-aisle plan. Archbishop Rodrigo Jimenez de Rada, having been trained in France, no doubt wanted his building to reflect up-to-date Gothic practice. Such ambitions would tend to exclude the galleried format of Notre-Dame, leaving two basic options for the treatment of the five-aisle plan: that of the Chartres choir, with twin aisles of equal height flanking the main vessel, or that of Bourges, with taller inner aisles creating a pyramidal sequence of volumes. The selection of the latter option may reflect concerns about lighting, structural stability, or simply the experience of a mason trained in the tradition of Bourges. Bony suggested that "when the Toledo master visited Bourges ca. 1220, [he] was interested not only in the building itself but in the whole collection of workshop records, which must have included drawings of older buildings used as sources, as well as of recent works belonging to the Bourges filiation."²⁶ If Beauvais is accepted as a source for the Toledo choir, then this description must be broadened somewhat. Even Branner never argued that Beauvais belonged to the Bourges filiation per se, but the Toledo master seems to have grouped it together with the Bourges family because of its pyramidal ele-

vation. Toledo Cathedral thus appears to have been self-consciously situated within the tradition of French pyramidal churches, all of which find themselves reflected in its design. For purposes of the present argument, it matters little whether Master Martin or Petrus Petri is credited with this imaginative synthesis. More important is the recognition of the underlying spatial typology which informed his choice of precedents.

Clearly such spatial typologies were not the only taxonomies in use in the Middle Ages, nor should they be the principal component of modern scholarship. It may well be reasonable to speak of Toledo as a member of the "Bourges family" even if it incorporates influences from Beauvais, a building that differs from Bourges in many respects. However, just as Wilson has found it useful, in his construction of the "Great Church" category, to temporarily set aside the distinction between abbeys, cathedrals, and large parish churches, so too it can be instructive, at least in the case of Toledo, to treat the pyramidal section as the most essential quality of its prototypes. After all, Gothic builders were not simply slaves to their training. They often demonstrated an impressive ability to synthesize influences from a wide variety of sources. Therefore, while biologists can rest content with a single classification system, historians of medieval architecture must be prepared to entertain several. In this spirit, it is hoped that the present paper, by grouping Beauvais and Toledo along with Bourges, Le Mans, and Paris, will contribute to an enriched discussion of High Gothic typology and masonic self-consciousness.

NOTES

1. See for instance, S. J. Gould, *The First Unmasking of Nature, Natural History* (April, 1993): 14-21.
2. Richard Krautheimer, *An Introduction to the Iconography of Medieval Architecture*, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 1-33.
3. See, for example, H. Jantzen, *High Gothic: The Classic Cathedrals of Chartres, Reims, and Amiens*, trans. J. Palmes (New York, 1962).
4. Bony's views concerning the relationship of Chartres to other design currents were expressed already in J. Bony, *The Resistance to Chartres in Early Thirteenth Century Architecture*, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 3rd ser, 20-21 (1957-1958): 35-52. These ideas were presented in updated form in J. Bony, *French Gothic Architecture of the 12th and 13th Centuries* (Berkeley, 1983): 328-341. The importance of Chartres and Bourges as prototypes is discussed at length by Bony in *12th and 13th*: 245-295. Branner argued for the existence of a Bourges School in *The Cathedral of Bourges and Its Place in Gothic Architecture*, (Cambridge, MA, 1989) originally published in French in 1962): 177-203. He concedes, however, that Chartres was far more influential (*Bourges*: 161).
5. R. Branner, *Le Maître de la cathédrale de Beauvais*, *Art de France* 2 (1962): 77-92; also Branner, *Bourges*: 203. Bony, in *12th and 13th*: explains the characteristics of Chartres and its

following (224-5) and counts Beauvais as a member of that group (255) before going on to discuss Beauvais on its own terms (288-295).

6. S. Murray, **Beauvais Cathedral: Architecture of Transcendence** (Princeton, 1989): 150.

7. J. Michler, *Stellung von Bourges in der gotischen Baukunst*, **Wallraf-Richartz Jahrbuch** 41 (1979): 27-86.

8. C. Wilson, **The Gothic Cathedral: The Architecture of the Great Church 1130-1530** (London, 1990): 3.

9. This suggestion is made in Bony, **12th and 13th**: 13.

10. For information on the Visigothic and Muslim structures on the site of the present cathedral, see D. Peris Sánchez, ed., **Arquitecturas de Toledo: Del Romano al Gotico** (Toledo, 1991): 421-422. Another valuable source dedicated entirely to the cathedral itself is F. Chueca Goitia, **La Catedral de Toledo** (Madrid, 1978).

11. Peris Sánchez, **Arquitecturas**: 426.

12. Chueca Goitia, **Toledo**: 35.

13. See Chueca Goitia, **Toledo**: 36; and Peris Sánchez, **Arquitecturas**: 427.

14. Branner, **Bourges**: 177-201.

15. Branner points out the diminutive, square-planned chapels of Saint-Martin at Etampes, a relatively small building that itself served as a source for Bourges. See Branner, **Bourges**: 192. As noted below, this observation does not challenge the idea that Toledo belongs to the "following of Bourges."

16. This bifurcated format does however reappear in certain Late Gothic churches, such as the fifteenth-century choir of the minster in Freiburg-im-Breisgau.

17. The phrase is borrowed from Murray, **Beauvais**: 150. The spatial configuration of Notre-Dame is eloquently discussed by Bony, in **12th and 13th**: 140-142.

18. Bony, **12th and 13th**: 252. This reading, in turn depends on the reconstruction of Notre-Dame's original flying buttresses developed in W. Clark and R. Mark, *The First Flying Buttresses: A New Reconstruction of the Nave of Notre-Dame de Paris*, **Art Bulletin** 66 (1984): 47-65.

19. The same logic explains why the relationship between the chapels of Toledo and Etampes leaves the "school of Bourges" concept unchallenged.

20. Bony, **12th and 13th**: 252.

21. Chueca Goitia, **Toledo**: 36.

22. Murray, **Beauvais**: 150.

23. This observation is made briefly by Wilson, **Gothic Cathedral**: 110, 158, who sees both buildings as part of the "family of Bourges."

24. Murray, **Beauvais**: 60.

25. The double-aisled choir of Coutances, another structure belonging to the "following of Bourges" as conceived by Branner, was not under construction until the 1230s. See Branner, **Bourges**: 196-201.

26. Bony, **12th and 13th**: 252. ❖

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