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Abstract

Medieval artists often blended sacred and secular imagery in their works, though especially stained glass windows. The stained glass windows of Chartres Cathedral, for example, use images of commoners at work and depictions of food to convey religious messages. This paper discusses three such examples and their significance to both the lay community of Chartres and the teachings of the Church.

Keywords

Stained Glass, Chartres Cathedral, Windows of Trade, Food in Art, Medieval Art

Disciplines

Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture | History of Christianity

Comments

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BETWEEN SECULAR AND SACRED:

THE TRADE WINDOWS' DEPICTIONS OF FOOD IN CHARTRES CATHEDRAL

“I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my work and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.”

ZACHARY A. WESLEY

Zachary Wesley

Prof. Else

ARTH 202A

February 22, 2017

Gothic cathedrals are both inspiring and imposing. The towers seem to touch the heavens themselves, watching over the vast stone sanctuaries beneath. Saints and Kings reside in and around the cathedral portals, greeting visitors with their stony, eternal gaze. The cathedrals of Europe have much the same appeal today as they did when knights and peasants filled their corridors. Though parishioners today may freely read from the Bible, the majority of medieval Europe's churchgoers could not read or write, and thus only received the message of scripture from the mouths of the literate clergy. Church authorities looked for ways to present the lessons of the Bible to the common people outside of mass. Stained glass seemed an ideal solution. The power of stained glass figured prominently in medieval theology. Indeed, in the 1140s Abbot Suger of the Abbey Church of St. Denis declared that the light filtering through stained glass provided a divine luminosity, thus bringing the soul nearer to God.¹

Stained glass provided a vibrant, colorful medium through which to convey the stories of the Church. Still, the windows often became so complex that anyone not familiar with the subject of a particular window could become easily lost in the story. Nevertheless, with the proper guidance worshippers easily understood the stories conveyed within the windows. Another drawback to stained glass emerged: the cost to produce and install a completed window was quite expensive. Once again, the Church found a solution. Individuals and groups within the Church and outside it provided the necessary funds for the windows in exchange for a likeness in the window. These people frequently appear at the bottom of stained glass windows in the *donor panels*. More specifically, the windows examined herein are called *Trade Windows*. This blending of the sacred and mundane in medieval art is indeed remarkable.

¹ Marilyn Stokstad and Michael Watt Cothren, *Art History: Medieval Art*, 8th ed. (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2014), 498-499.

There are hundreds of cathedrals dating to the Middle Ages with perhaps thousands of original stained glass windows present within them. However, to limit the scope of a search for trade windows, one need look no further than the Cathedral of Notre Dame at Chartres. Trade windows first appeared in France in both Bourges and Chartres in approximately 1200 CE, but Chartres contains far more trade windows than any cathedral in France. Specifically, the windows in Chartres are dated to the approximately 1205. Forty-two trade windows are present in Chartres. The next highest number, the cathedral in Bourges, contains only eleven.² From this point, the windows examined can be identified even further. Thus, the choice is narrowed down to three based on a particular criterion: the window must depict people working with food. More specifically, the windows must act as a bridge between secular life and important Church teachings, such as the Eucharist or the life of a saint.

Two windows emerge quickly using this guide: *The Apostles' Windows* and *The Life of Saint-Lubin*.³ The first resides in the apsidal chapel located directly behind the apse; the second is along the North aisles near the west portal (Fig. 1). The laborers in *The Apostles' Window* focuses on bread, which is also found in five other windows in Chartres; thus, the Cathedral of Chartres contains more depictions of bread than any other cathedral in France.⁴ Interestingly enough, bread was the primary product of the region around Chartres, with the bishop and chapter of the cathedral being the largest growers of grain in the diocese.⁵ *The Life of Saint-Lubin* deals with wine distribution and consumption. The final window, *The Labors of the Months*, depicts the signs of the zodiac and various labors performed throughout the year.

² Jane Welch Williams, *Bread, Wine & Money: The Windows of the Trades at Chartres Cathedral* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 151.

³ These windows are also known by the names *The Lives of the Apostles* and *The Lubinus Window*

⁴ Williams, 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

Specifically, preparations for the important Feast of Christmas are underway, including the slaughtering of a pig, the barreling of wine, and an image of a feasting noble. This window is found tucked along the south wall, roughly across from the choir (Fig. 1).

To “read” a stained glass window, one must begin with the bottom panels, specifically going left to right and then on to the next scenes. In the case of *The Lives of the Apostles* (see Note 3), the bottom three panels (Fig. 2) contain the information sought herein: images of bakers at work. The first panel (Fig. 3) depicts two bakers preparing dough in a trough, with one individual kneading the dough while another stands to the right of the trough holding a jug, presumably filled with water. The trestle is unusually ornate, appearing to be golden. Additionally, the dough contains what resembles a bearded face. In *Bread, Wine, & Money*, Jane Welch Williams points to a possible explanation for this scene. The ornate trough is representative of an altar, and the face-like form is indeed a face – most likely that of Christ.⁶ Interestingly, Williams notes that the face appears to be a later addition to the scene, added to support the meaning of the scene further.⁷ This information leaves little to question in the meaning of the scene. According to Catholic teachings, the bread becomes the flesh of Christ in the Eucharist, which is depicted quite literally here.

The second panel (Fig. 4) depicts bakers forming loaves from a large mound of dough. Below the trough, two men kneel before a pan containing eleven loaves of bread. These loaves are a very light color compared to the dough above the loaves. A twelfth loaf is about to be added by a baker on the right. The number twelve leaves little doubt that the loaves represent the Twelve Apostles of Christ, a fact confirmed by Williams.⁸ The eleven loaves already on the pan

⁶ Williams, 64.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

are a pale, silvery color. The dough and loaf about to be placed upon the pan are brown. As only eleven of the original disciples remained after Judas Iscariot's suicide, it is possible that the distinct appearance of the eleven loaves on the tray separates these eleven original disciples from the one who joins them.

The third panel (Fig. 5) on the bottom of *The Lives of the Apostles* appears to depict a scene related exclusively to everyday life: a merchant sells bread to a common man (compare the purchaser's clothing with that of the bakers in Figs. 3 and 4). Still, there may still be a religious link in the scene. The bread in the sack of the buyer is the same silvery white color as the eleven loaves in Panel 2 and the dough in Panel 1 (Figs. 2 and 3). Therefore, it is entirely possible that this man serves the Bishop of Chartres or the cathedral chapter in some capacity. If so, the buyer would then take the bread to the cathedral, where priests would serve it during the Eucharist. The merchant appears to extend brown bread to the assumed servant in exchange for a coin, possibly indicating that the buyer intends to consume this loaf himself, thus potentially pointing to a seamless combination of bread's consumption in both the cathedral and the streets of the city.

The Life of Saint-Lubin (Fig. 6) depicts wine criers and the consumption of wine at Eucharist. This disconnect between religion and the everyday consumption of wine is easily understood regarding the St. Lubin's life. St. Lubin served as the Bishop of Chartres during the sixth-century; interestingly, a Benedictine priory dedicated to him lay in the vineyards beyond the city.⁹ Indeed, at the time of the cathedral's construction in the early thirteenth-century, Chartres produced large quantities of wine.¹⁰ With this association, it is little surprise that wine and tavern play a central role in this window. The first panel (Fig. 7) shows a wine crier, a seated

⁹ Gerald B. Guest, "Narrative Cartographies: Mapping the Sacred in Gothic Stained Glass," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 53/54, (2008): 137, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25608813>.

¹⁰ Williams, 75.

man, and perhaps a tavern keeper. The wine crier, that is, one who called out to passerby when a tavern keeper tapped a barrel of wine, is easily identifiable: an individual appears to call out on the left side of the scene. The patron samples the wine from a covered goblet called a *hanap*.¹¹ One facet of this panel that appears out of place is a hoop placed upon a long wooden pole. Williams states that this is, in fact, a barrel hoop on the pole, a standard tavern sign.¹² Subsidiary panels running along the sides of the window from top to bottom share a similar theme: wine criers, tavern keepers, and patrons (Fig. 8).

Wine is not confined to the donor panel in *The Life of Saint-Lubin*. Images of a procession of wine to the cathedral are mixed into the story of St. Lubin throughout the window. Three image clusters (Fig. 5) run from the bottom to the top of the window, showing the life of Saint-Lubin in three distinct phases: shepherd, monk, and bishop. The middle panel of each shows wine on a journey to the cathedral in three steps: a man brings the wine to the cathedral in a horse-drawn cart, a cellarer places the wine into a *cruet*, and priests then bless and serve the wine for Eucharist. Though this connection may still appear arbitrary, Reginal Guest points to a correlation between wine's journey to sanctifications and Lubin's.¹³ Another connection comes into play back in the donor panel itself. Both civil and religious authorities controlled many taverns in and around Chartres, with one under the jurisdiction of a local Benedictine monastery.¹⁴ Thus, just as wine and the St. Lubin's life were connected, so too, Guest asserts, were the commercial and religious spheres of medieval life.¹⁵

¹¹ Williams, 77.

¹² Williams, 82-83.

¹³ Guest, 137.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The final window, *The Labors of the Months/Signs of the Zodiac* (Fig. 9), has donor panels depicting vintners and Count Thibault VI, though this is not the primary focus of this analysis.¹⁶ If one shifts their gaze to the final three panels (Top of Figure 9), a depiction representing the month of December and the signs of Capricorn and Sagittarius are present beneath Christ enthroned. The upper-left hand panel depicts a man with an axe raised over his head, ready to strike a pig or boar. If one follows the angle at which the strike will hit the porcine animal, the axe's blunt edge will make contact with the head, knocking the pig unconscious (Fig. 10). One unlikely possibility is that this scene depicts an English tradition of the period involving the use of a boar's head as a festal centerpiece.¹⁷ Because Chartres is a French city, it is likely that the animal is a domesticated pig to be consumed in a Christmas Feast. In the upper-right corner, a man assumed to be a nobleman sits at a table enjoying an extravagant meal. Bread, wine, and fish appear to be on the table with another, the fish-like animal in a bowl to the figure's right (Figure 11). Christ watches over the festivities from the window's crowning panel, thus tying the feasting into the religious celebration of Christ's birth.

Though the secular and sacred realms are often clearly divided today, the stained glass windows of Chartres paint a distinctly different picture of life in medieval France. Bakers and tavern keepers worked under the jurisdiction of both the Count and Bishop of Chartres. Though evidence points to a conflict between the vassals of both individuals, loyalties disappear in the

¹⁶ "Chartres Cathedral Stained Glass - Bay 28a (Labours of the Months / Signs of the Zodiac)," Chartres Cathedral Stained Glass - Bay 28a (Labours of the Months / Signs of the Zodiac), accessed February 22, 2017, http://www.medievalart.org.uk/Chartres/028a_pages/Chartres_Bay028a_key.htm.

¹⁷ Bradford Lee Eden, "Christmas," in *Medieval Folklore: A Guide to Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs*, eds. Carl Lindahl, John McNamara, and John Lindow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 78.

stained glass of Chartres.¹⁸ Indeed, the laborers of Chartres reside in a curious realm between secular and sacred in the stained glass of the Cathedral of Notre Dame at Chartres.

¹⁸ Williams, 25.

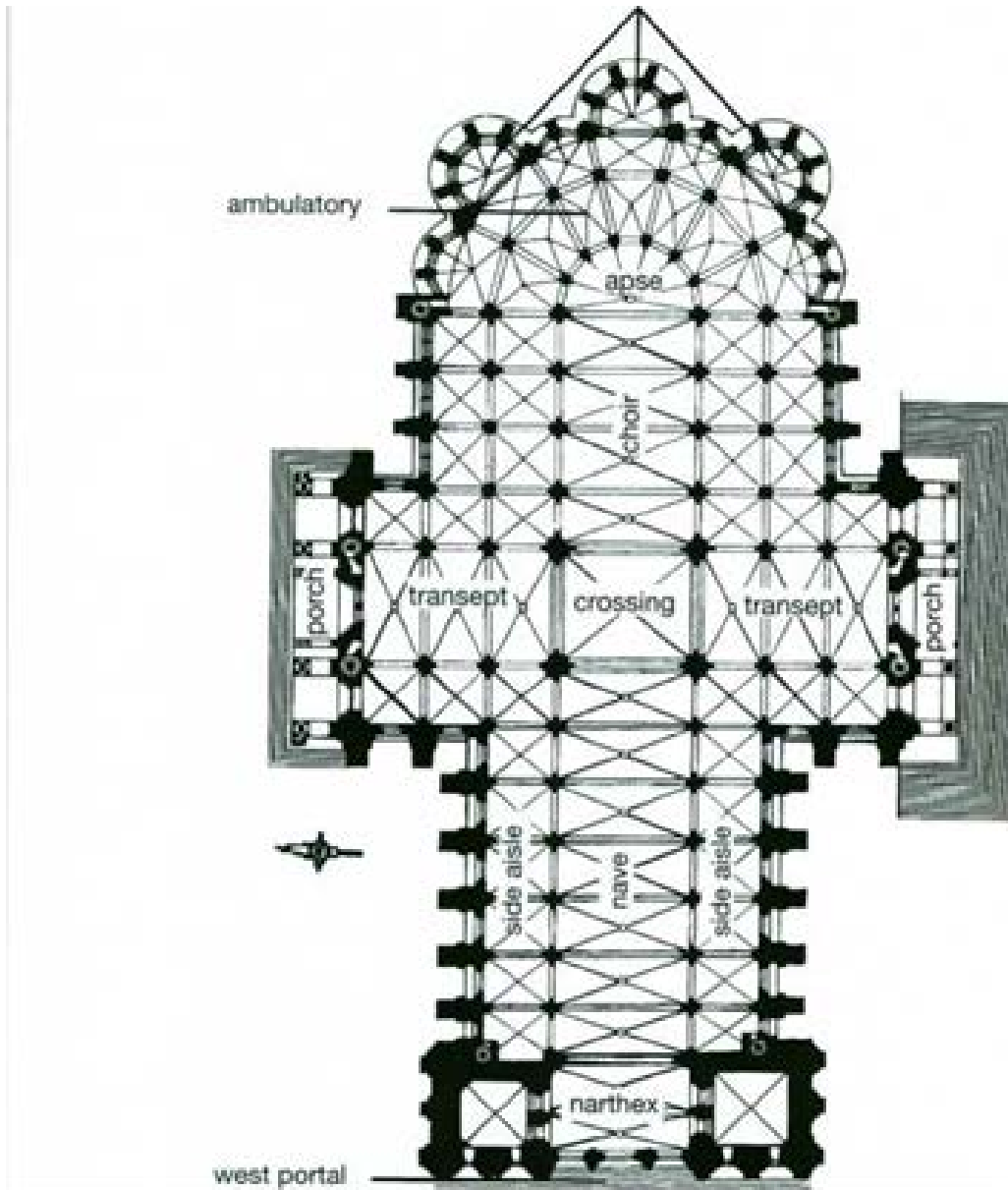


FIGURE 1: A DIAGRAM OF THE INTERIOR OF THE CATHEDRAL OF NOTRE DAME AT CHARTRES. SOURCE: STOKSTAD, 505.

NOTE: ALL FOLLOWING IMAGES ARE CREDITED TO DR. STUART WHATLING, AND CAN BE FOUND ON

MedievalArt.org.uk



FIGURE 2: *THE APOSTLES' WINDOW*



FIGURE 3: FIRST PANEL OF *THE APOSTLES' WINDOW*, "BAKERS PREPARING DOUGH."



FIGURE 4: SECOND PANEL OF *THE APOSTLES' WINDOW*, "BAKERS SHAPING LOAVES."



FIGURE 5: THIRD PANEL OF *THE APOSTLES' WINDOW*, "BAKER/MERCHANT SELLING BREAD."

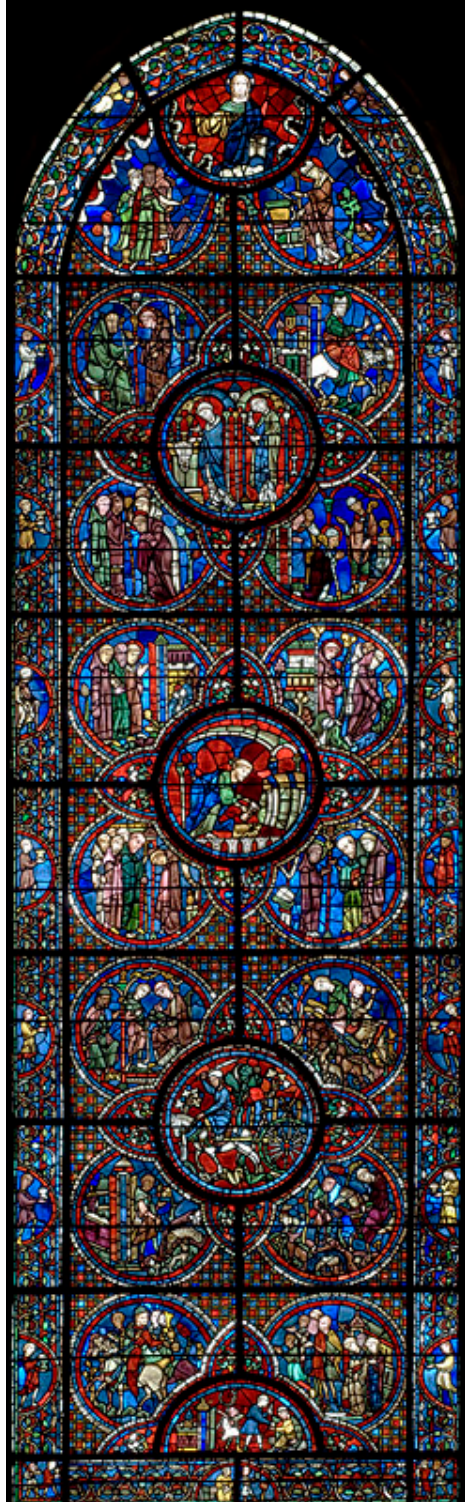


FIGURE 6: *THE LIFE OF SAINT LUBIN*



FIGURE 7: FIRST PANEL OF *THE LIFE OF ST. LUBIN*, “WINE CRIERS.”



FIGURE 8: LOWER LEFT-HAND SUBSIDIARY PANEL OF *THE LIFE OF ST. LUBIN*, “WINE CRIERS.”



FIGURE 9: *THE LABORS OF THE MONTHS/ SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC*



FIGURE 10: UPPER LEFT PANEL, *THE LABORS OF THE MONTHS/ SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC*



FIGURE 11: UPPER RIGHT PANEL, *THE LABORS OF THE MONTHS/ SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC*

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