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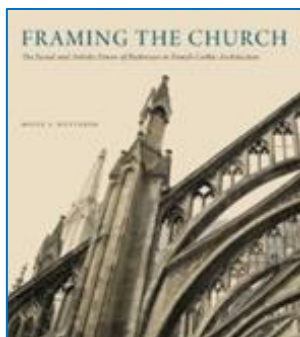
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Review of Maile S. Hutterer, *Framing the Church: The Social and Artistic Power of Buttresses in French Gothic Architecture*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019. Pp. 224, 105 b/w ills. \$99.95. ISBN: 9780271083445

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Together with the pointed arch and ribbed vault, flying buttresses are typically considered one of the three essential structural components of Gothic cathedrals in western Europe. Many studies over the last several decades have focused on understanding the technical aspects of Gothic structure. Most recently, new digital scanning and virtual modeling technologies have allowed architectural historians to investigate and visualize the structure of Gothic churches in exciting ways never before possible with stunning results. In a clear and notable departure from these approaches to the study of Gothic forms, Maile S. Hutterer's new book offers virtually no structural analysis, which, as she explains in the introduction, would detract from her focus on "the aesthetic and social significances of Gothic buttresses" (11). Hutterer's pathbreaking exploration of these understudied aspects of buttress systems elevates current discourse on Gothic architecture to new realms as she introduces readers to new interpretive criteria, such as ornament and decoration, representation, and perception, while investigating the urban and social experience of cathedrals and great churches through the solids and voids of their iconic supports.

The book is divided into four chapters preceded by an introduction that outlines the scope of her study of "buttressing-frame systems" — Hutterer's phrase that encompasses the buttress pier, *culée* (or upright), and flyer — in the French royal domain as well as the socio-cultural lens through which she analyzes their myriad forms. Proceeding thematically, the four chapters draw on a variety of case studies, primarily from the 13th century, such as Paris Cathedral; Chartres Cathedral; Reims Cathedral; the collegiate church of Saint-Urbain, Troyes; Amiens Cathedral; the collegiate church of



Figure 1 Troyes, Saint-Urbain, view of porch buttresses and flyers. Photo: author.

Saint-Quentin; and Notre-Dame, L'Épine. The volume is stunning in terms of its production and features over 100 high-quality black and white images. It is especially worth noting that many images provide detailed views of flying buttress systems and their associated sculptures that are not only challenging to photograph, but sometimes impossible to view from ground level.

The first chapter focuses on the aesthetics of flying buttress systems, the “optical effects” of their monumental forms, the use of buttresses in fashioning images of churches, and their suitability as compositional framing devices in contemporary manuscript painting. Driving the chapter is a key argument that patrons and/or masons

clearly valued the aesthetics and ornamental possibilities of flying buttresses. Hutterer highlights a handful of examples where a particular aesthetic of a structurally deficient, yet decorative openwork flying buttress was copied from one prominent church and then reused at a new site, replicating the structural deficiencies in the process. Such aesthetics and their connotations, she maintains, were privileged over structural concerns in these cases. Eventually, the overall shapes, forms, and structure of the buttress systems themselves became the desired aesthetic, as demonstrated at the collegiate church of Saint-Urbain, Troyes, where the buttresses of the porches project conspicuously into the space of the city and the viewer (**Fig. 1**). These buttresses, as Hutterer observes, occur at ground level and are virtually undecorated. This bold design may have been the result of the diminishing bequest of Pope Urban IV, though Hutterer's argument that the Gothic buttress system itself had been transformed into an aesthetic by the last phase of construction of Saint-Urbain is compelling. The appearance and further aestheticization of Gothic "buttressing-frame systems" is evident in other contemporary media, such as stained glass and manuscript painting, which Hutterer surveys briefly in the last third of the chapter.

Chapter two situates Gothic cathedrals and churches in their urban context through an examination of their buttress interstices—the often-overlooked void between two buttress piers (**Fig. 2**). The chapter investigates what the functions of buttress interstices can reveal about the customs of a particular urban center and its inhabitants' commercial relationships with their cathedral and its clergy. Drawing on a range of primary source documents, late-medieval manuscript illuminations, and later graphic sources, Hutterer shows how these ephemeral "spaces in between" could fulfill mercantile functions—often to the exclusive benefit of the church. Still, while buttress interstices became increasingly valued and controlled by the clergy (a move contested by seignorial rulers), the potential for economic gain seemed to play a key factor in determining if these spaces remained open to the town for commercial activity, as at Reims and Chartres, or enclosed as chantry chapels and integrated into the sacred interior space of the church, as at Paris Cathedral. Indeed, whereas the cathedrals of Reims and Chartres enjoyed sustainable and lucrative public markets that unfolded in and around the exterior buttress interstices, the local topographic, political, and economic circumstances of Paris Cathedral did not foster a similar arrangement. Instead, the absence of a clear use for the exterior buttress interstices at Paris Cathedral may have promoted "architectural experimentation" and, ultimately, the construction of lateral chapels by the wealthiest members of the laity (81). These chapels housed private Masses, for which the cathedral charged a fee. The different outcomes—open interstices with markets versus enclosed interior chapels—speak volumes about the relationship between the cathedral and the city at a specific moment in time. As Hutterer explains in captivating detail, control over these contested spaces varied and can reveal tensions between local church jurisdictions, papal legates and Church



Figure 2 Chartres Cathedral, south nave elevation with buttress interstices.
Photo: author.

reformers from Rome, political structures, and economic matters involving the interactions between laity and clergy. Beyond Reims, Chartres, Paris, and Laon, Hutterer's methodology could be extended easily and used as a tool in assessing the social and architectural landscapes of other cities with Gothic cathedrals or great churches. Indeed, as Hutterer cleverly points out, it is important to remember that while a church may ultimately have received chantry chapels, this does not preclude the possibility that its once-open buttress interstices may have played an active role in negotiating urban space in the years preceding their completion.

Chapter three presents monumental buttress sculpture within the context of Church reforms that aimed to strengthen the power of the Church by differentiating it from the spaces and customs of the secular world. Focusing on the north side of the nave of Chartres Cathedral, Reims Cathedral, and the chevet of Saint-Quentin, Hutterer shows how the buttress sculptures may have been viewed as "metaphors of apostolic support" (95), as visual proof of episcopal rights and duties, and as permanent representations of liturgical and extra liturgical rituals "that sustain the church," respectively (111). Hutterer's analysis of these sculptural programs and others allowed her to develop a series of interpretive "rules" related to the forms, attributes, and iconography of buttress sculptures that may be applicable to other sites. However, as the chapter makes clear, there tends to be very little remaining physical evidence of these 13th-century sculptures. Indeed, due to their placement, lack of preservation, and outright destruction, the sculptures on flying buttresses are difficult to study. To supplement the limited physical evidence, Hutterer refers to primary source descriptions when available and incorporates historical photographs that reveal details about the sculptures which are difficult to see today or no longer extant. Because of the challenges posed by the physical evidence, a great deal of Hutterer's interpretation and analysis of the varied iconographic programs is based on her reading of roughly contemporary ecclesiological and theological manuals and texts. Although her investigation of the symbols, metaphors, texts, and iconographic programs is compelling, in each case a deep understanding of local circumstances also seems absolutely essential. Still, Hutterer is able to overcome the challenges posed by the often-poor condition of monumental buttress sculptures and the scarcity of other forms of direct evidence and offers new insights into the iconography, meaning, and significance of these sculptural programs.

Hutterer adds an additional layer of meaning to "buttressing-frame systems" in the last chapter, which explores how buttresses distinguished consecrated church grounds as sites of spiritual protection. The chapter begins with a discussion of the conceptual and visual similarities between defensive architecture (e.g. curtain walls, mural towers, etc.) and flying buttress systems in the 12th and 13th centuries. Hutterer explains how masons did not specialize in building types at this time as opposed to the cathedral workshops of later centuries. There were enough practices and elements in



Figure 3 L'Épine, Notre-Dame, chevet gargoyle. Photo: author.

common to allow masons to move between castle and cathedral workshops, which explains in part why some defensive structures (e.g. crenellations) appear on Gothic churches and why the laity may have conflated such massive worksites while construction was underway. In addition, the symbolic, “extra-military” fortifications adorning Gothic churches also spoke to their function as places of spiritual refuge that evoked images of the Heavenly Jerusalem (133-135). In a related vein, Hutterer notes that sculptures of chimeras and gargoyles most frequently associated with flying buttress systems often had salvific or apotropaic functions. In her case study of the chevet of Notre-Dame, L'Épine, she highlights how its iconographic program of gargoyles was linked to this church's particular function as a respite—a place where stillborn babies were brought by their parents in hopes of being revived in order to receive baptism. As Hutterer observes, one gargoyle (**Fig. 3**) depicts a demon with prominent breasts carrying away a figure of a small nude human—perhaps a representation of an infant (156). She suggests this type of imagery would have “resonated powerfully with distraught mothers,” further underscoring the significant role of Notre-Dame, L'Épine, as a respite and emphasizing the salvation offered through the ritual of baptism that could be performed only on its holy grounds (158).

Through their symbolic defensive features and gargoyles, the protective, sacred precincts of cathedrals and churches were distinguished from their dense urban surroundings.

Hutterer's study of "buttressing-frame systems" largely focuses on the 13th century—the so-called "golden age" of French High Gothic cathedrals that has long dominated scholarship in the field. While she incorporates seamlessly some later material, such as the striking 16th-century gargoyles of Notre-Dame, L'Épine, the chronological framework of the volume forced the omission of some particularly interesting monuments and significant works of art in other media that may have further enriched the author's arguments and underscored the significance of her conclusions. One might think of the flying buttresses of the nave of Notre-Dame d'Alençon, which boast dramatic openwork flyers that appear to sag; the papier-mâché *maquette* of the parish church of Saint-Maclou, Rouen, with its incredibly slender, fragile flyers; or the recently "discovered" Late Gothic show drawing depicting an enormous spire for Rouen Cathedral that features a complex assemblage of flying buttresses, grotesques, and figural sculptures now on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Yet because *Framing the Church* so readily inspires one to think of later works or works beyond northern France that complement, contribute to, and/or test the case studies presented in the volume speaks to its strengths: namely, that Hutterer has developed an original theoretical framework and a fruitful interpretive approach to the study of flying buttresses that pushes beyond structural analysis and into new areas of inquiry that advance the study of Gothic architecture. Indeed, *Framing the Church* will appeal to a broad range of art, architectural, and urban historians. A stimulating volume on a vast topic, it seems likely to incite new studies of churches not only in France, but the rest of Europe, the Latin East, and perhaps the earliest permanent European settlements in the Americas. 🐼