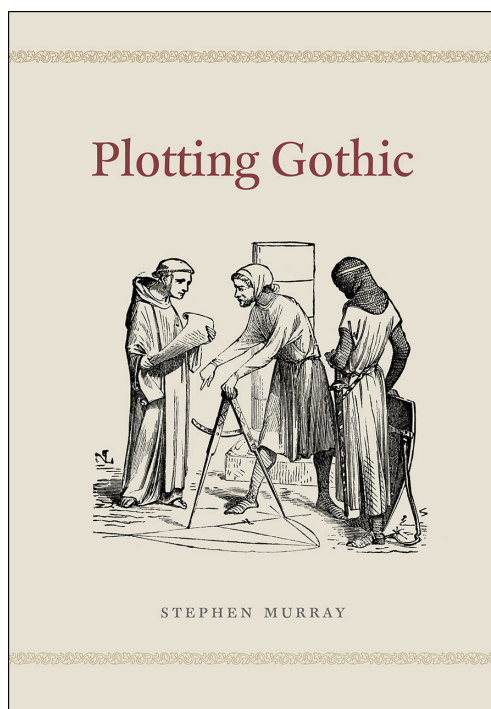


Plotting Gothic

by Stephen Murray. University of Chicago Press, March 2015. 290 p. ill. ISBN 9780226191805 (cl.), \$45.00.

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An historian of medieval art and Gothic architecture, Stephen Murray is the Lisa and Bernard Selz Professor of Medieval Art History and Director of Art Humanities at Columbia University. While Murray's early scholarly work focused on case studies of Gothic cathedrals, including Troyes, Beauvais, Amiens, and Notre-Dame de Paris, his intention with *Plotting Gothic* is to tell the story of Gothic through three "interlocutors," or witnesses. These interlocutors are Villard de Honnecourt—creator of a small portfolio that serves as a graphic record of Gothic; Gervase of Canterbury—monk, sacristan, and chronicler of Gothic construction with the *Treatise on the Fire and Reconstruction of Canterbury Cathedral*; and Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis, instrumental in the rebuilding of the abbey church of Saint-Denis. In a fourteen page introduction, Murray outlines his strategy for utilizing these interlocutors to plot a narrative of Gothic. He concludes his introduction by stating the hope that the reader goes "forward with a kind of compulsion

to look systematically, to think critically, and to read with pleasure."

Plotting Gothic is organized into three sections: "Three Eyewitnesses of Gothic," "Staking out the Plot," and "Animating the Plot," each with three chapters. The publication offers over forty pages of notes, an almost twenty page bibliography, an eight page index, and thirty-five black and white figures, including a small number of photographs of Gothic cathedrals, such as Amiens, Soissons, Saint-Denis, and Notre-Dame de Paris. Of particular interest are photographs of Villard's drawings, as Villard seems to have been a contemporary eyewitness to the production of Gothic architecture, providing a unique viewpoint.

More than twenty years ago, Murray embraced multimedia for pedagogical purposes with the Amiens Project (1993). He continues to employ digital media by creating websites on medieval and gothic art and architecture that are rich with images and scholarly resources. But with *Plotting Gothic*, Murray relies instead on rhetoric rather than imagery to illustrate Gothic cathedrals as objects of desire, communicating the "human dimensions of Gothic." Readers disappointed by the dearth of pictures and the surfeit of rhetoric are invited by Murray to visit www.mappinggothic.org, which provides "an experience of three dimensions of Gothic architectural production: space, time, and narrative."

In *Plotting Gothic*, Murray expertly intertwines his interlocutors' narrative with a wealth of scholarly information, and while his overall narrative is linear, as each chapter builds on the previous, he tells many interconnected stories that demonstrate his own love affair with the subject, providing a window into the motives and feelings of the people who lived Gothic.