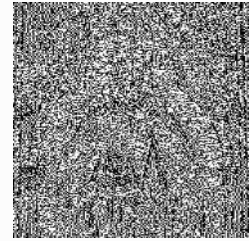## Imagining Invention: The Character of the "Gothic architect" and England, 1200–1400

Article by **James Hillson**
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Abstract

For over four centuries, scholars of Gothic architecture in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries have continuously reimagined their designers by conflating them into an abstracted and generalized historical character. The resulting "Gothic architect" forms an internal and self-referential discourse within scholarship, focused on longstanding debates regarding the social, intellectual, technical, and professional status of this homogenized, fictive individual. By analyzing the English tradition of formulating the "Gothic architect", this article proposes that its origins in the early denigration and defence of Gothic had a formative influence on the architect's characterization, with continuing effects in the present day. By exposing the long-term patterns which have fixed the progress and process of debate, this article aims to demonstrate the limitations of the "Gothic architect" as a tool for imagining and analyzing medieval architectural designers and suggest a potential means of stepping beyond the established framework of discussion.

Between the tonsured cleric and the chivalric knight stands the architect, his dividers outstretched and marking out geometry on the ground (fig. 1). Behind him is an unfinished column, indicating a work in progress. The architect points to his designs, levelling a commanding gaze at his monastic counterpart who clutches paperwork close to his chest whilst the knight inspects the drawing. The frontispiece to Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc's *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* (1854–68) presents an unparalleled distillation of his characterization of the medieval architect. Here we see no architect in particular, but the architect in the abstract. Just as Viollet-le-Duc wrote of the liberal art of architecture as a man or woman bearing a square and/or compass, here the architect's tools place him within an independent social group with distinctive attributes.[1] Next to the aristocratic and clerical estates, the patronal classes in nineteenth-century visions of the Middle Ages, the architect represents a third estate, *the* third estate with all its rhetorical implications.[2] He is neither the monastic architect nor the post-Renaissance educated aristocratic amateur, but the emancipated layman of the thirteenth century, the apogee of French national architecture.[3] This

Gothic architect is a theatrically staged character, an abstracted individual emblematic of social revolution.
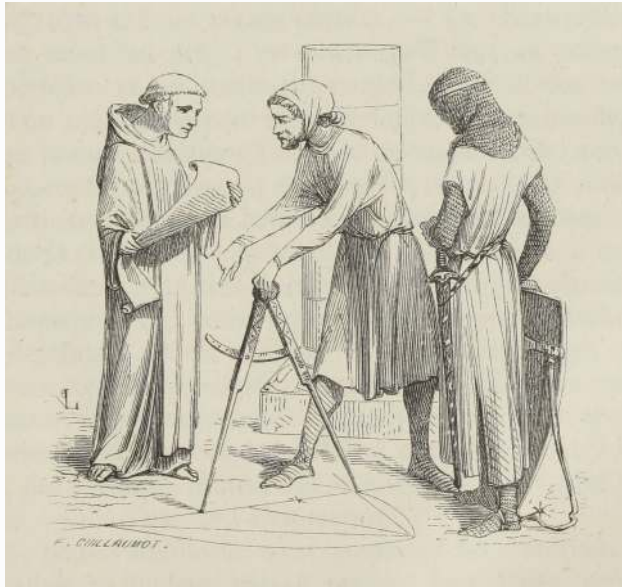

Figure 1

Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, Frontispiece, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* (detail) (Paris: Bance and Morel, 1854–68). Digital image courtesy of Getty Research Institute.

The frontispiece of an encyclopedic treatise focused on a canonical period of French architecture might seem a strange place to begin a discussion of the architect in thirteenth- to fourteenth-century England, but no image is more illustrative of the historiographical problem at hand. The character which it displays was not entirely Viollet-le-Duc's creation, but was instead a pivotal actor in the drama of Gothic architecture's development from the earliest days of its codification. Over the last four centuries this figure's motives, social position, driving principles, and personal identity have undergone numerous reinterpretations,[4] much like the endless adaptations of plays and novels or rebooting of films have produced countless iterations of the same characters. In an age with comparatively little information about the life and personality of individual artists, speculation about the Gothic architect as a homogenized historical type has provided the primary means of scholarly analysis for this class of professionals. Relying heavily on fragmentary glimpses gained through wills, financial accounts, tomb inscriptions, and surviving drawings, scholars have dressed their actor in numerous robes: clerical amateur, practical craftsman, professional, modernist, prototypical Renaissance man, academic, and, more recently, Aristotelian efficient cause and inventor. Focusing on the intellectual, social, and technical attributes of the designers of Gothic architecture, architects, architectural historians, and art historians alike have continually reimagined this lost class of individuals through abstraction into a generalized figure.

It is this character and his history within the discourse of Gothic architecture which is the focus of this article.[5] By analyzing the intellectual genealogy of the Gothic architect (fig. 2), it contends that the pattern for imagining medieval architectural designers was fixed relatively early in its development, specifically by the apologetic defence of Gothic over the course of the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Moreover, it will demonstrate how the early formulation of this historical character has continued to delimit the framework within which medieval architectural practitioners have been discussed, with a particular emphasis on English architecture. Focusing on the Gothic architect in England has a number of advantages, the principal being its capacity to show that even within a specific geographical area this character has been largely treated as a pan-European and chronologically uniform phenomenon between 1200 and 1400. From its polemical roots in the eighteenth century to the present day, the Gothic architect's English variant has repeatedly been constructed in terms of external archetypes, be they Renaissance men, modern professionals or their French contemporaries, and in the process the study of individual master masons has been subordinated to the discussion of the attributes of an imagined Gothic protagonist. Consequently, contemporary scholarship has continued to operate within inherited boundaries, generating a discourse which remains profoundly self-referential. Through examining these developments in detail, this article aims to establish the limitations of analyzing Gothic architects in terms of a homogenized fictional character, and in so doing to propose a possible new direction for future research.

Figure 2

Table of References, 1900–present. Digital image courtesy of James Hillson.

The Birth of Gothic: Apologia and the Gothic Architect

Like most terms of stylistic classification, "Gothic" had its origins in the pejorative. Its genesis is traditionally attributed to the technical preface of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1568), wherein all Italian architecture outside the five Vitruvian orders was explicitly condemned as the product of fourth- to fifth-century Germanic invasions of Italy.[6] Vasari followed longstanding Florentine opinions regarding the medieval past, linking its architecture directly to the barbarism of its supposed creators in accordance with a cyclical model of societal decay.[7] Medieval architecture was considered symptomatic of a collapse in civilization, necessitating an aggressive rebirth of culture. Treated as a sixth brief aside in his preface's chapter on the five classical orders, the "*maniera tedesca*" ("German manner") was framed in aesthetic opposition to the systems of ordered arrangement and proportion which he associated with the reimagined classical world:

> *We come at last to another sort of work called German, which both in ornament and in proportion is very different from the ancient and the modern. Nor is it adopted now by the best architects but is avoided by them as monstrous and barbarous, and lacking everything that can be called order. Nay it should rather be called confusion and disorder. . . . This manner was the invention of the Goths, for, after they had ruined the ancient buildings, and killed the architects in the wars, those who were left constructed the buildings in this style.*[8]

Though never explicitly identified as "architects", the designers of "German" architecture were implicit within this rhetoric of rejection. The true architects were killed, their buildings torn down, and the survivors were brought up with an inferior manner of architecture, the invention of a barbaric people inviting divine and earthly censure.[9] No Goth is ever named "architect", a deliberate withholding of nomenclature which drove a wedge between perceptions of medieval and post-medieval architectural practice in subsequent centuries. However, it must be noted that at no point in Vasari's discussion was the term "Gothic" employed, nor in any other fifteenth- or sixteenth-century Italian texts.[10] In the 1460s the architectural theorist Filarete identified the German manner as produced by the "*gente Barbara*", opposing it to Brunelleschi's "*modo antico*", and the c. 1480 *Life of Brunelleschi* attributed to Antonio Manetti repeated the sentiment.[11] It was not until the architecture of "arches with pointed segments" became firmly associated with the Goths in adjectival form that a "Gothic" architect could emerge, a development occurring not in Italy, but in seventeenth-century England.

The term's first recorded use is found in 1641 in the diaries of John Evelyn, a writer who was close friends with Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel (1586–1646) and the architect Inigo Jones (1573–1652) who were instrumental in the popularization of imported Renaissance classicism.[12] Though the first edition of Evelyn's influential *Account of Architects and Architecture* (1664) contains little explicit hostility towards the style, by his second, posthumously published edition (1707) Gothic had become "a certain Fantastical and Licentious style of building . . . [a] congestion of Heavy, Dark and *Monkish Piles*, without any just Proportion, Use or Beauty compar'd with the truly *Antient*."[13] This turn against the Gothic style, like many other early eighteenth-century treatments,[14] demonstrated close reading of Vasari's preface which had emphasized its disorder, the weight-bearing insecurity of its structural

members, its piling up of ornamentation, and the consequent lack of proper proportions. Architects were rarely discussed in the context of its manufacture, but this is scarcely surprising. The piling congestion of Gothic, utterly lacking the proportional systems of antiquity, was anathema to the conduct of a liberally educated practitioner of the architectural arts, and thus a Gothic architect was a contradiction in terms.

However, this process of systematic defamation soon generated a counter-culture. From the early eighteenth century more positive attitudes towards Gothic emerged. Some, like Horace Walpole, embraced the apparent disorder and variety of medieval architecture whilst freely admitting its inadequacies.[15] Others defended Gothic by opposing its detractors on their own theoretical grounds. It was in these texts that the Gothic architect first emerged in England as an abstracted historical figure with distinct characteristics. The earliest published example was by the gardener and ardent Freemason Batty Langley, whose 1742 treatise *Ancient Architecture Restored and Improved by a Great Variety of Grand and useful Designs* purported to "restore the Rules of the Ancient Saxon Architecture (vulgarly, but mistakenly called Gothic)" whilst rearranging them for use by modern architects.[16] Langley lamented the "supposition that their principal parts have been put together, without Rules or Proportion", including plates analyzing the geometrical construction of the piers at Westminster Abbey (fig. 3).[17] In particular he identified John Islip, Abbot of Westminster from 1500 to 1532, as the architect of Henry VII's Lady Chapel, stating "it is a great pity that the Architect . . . did not communicate to posterity the Rules by which it was erected and adorned."[18] Though Langley's conflation of clerical patron with designer was a misapprehension, the Gothic architect was beginning to emerge. Possessing geometrical knowledge and employing unique proportional systems, this was an architect who applied recognizable, albeit different, intellectual principles. Langley's treatise was widely ridiculed for his reimagining of those principles, even by Gothic's supporters.[19] The five orders of Gothic architecture he generated were essentially classical in conception with an arbitrary Gothic skin, and thus seemed abstracted from the style he claimed to recapture (fig. 4). Yet despite his eccentricity, Langley's fundamental point regarding the architect's nature was reflected by other contemporaries. The architect James Essex, closely associated with the earliest phase of the Gothic Revival, addressed the issue directly in his unpublished draft treatise on architecture, stating that there were several orders of Gothic "regulated by just proportions founded upon Geometrical principles" and equating the "principal views" of Gothic, Greek, and Roman "Architects".[20]

Figure 3

Plate B, from from *Ancient Architecture Restored and Improved* by Batty Langley and Thomas Langley (London, 1742). Digital image courtesy of Getty Research Institute.
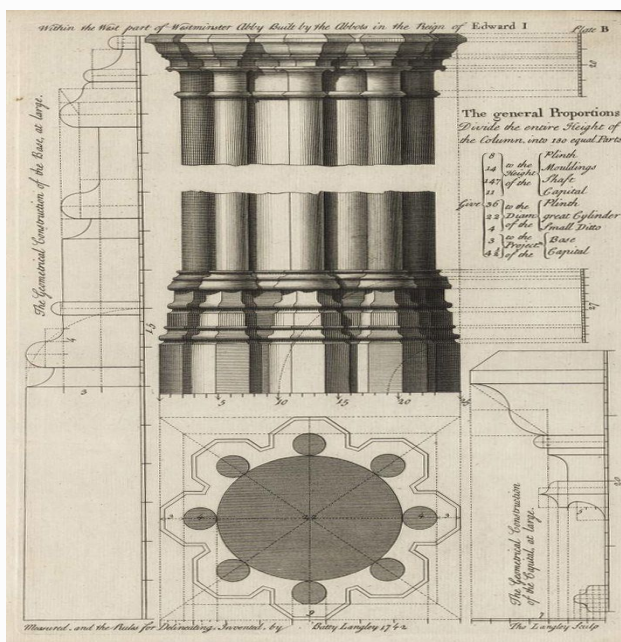
Figure 4

Plate II, from *Ancient Architecture Restored and Improved* by Batty Langley and Thomas Langley (London, 1742). Digital image courtesy of Getty Research Institute.
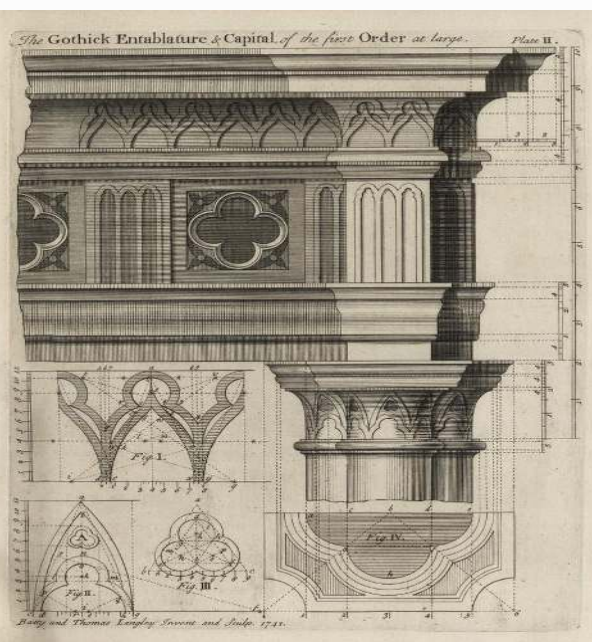
The Gothic architect, then, was a tool shaped by the condemnation he was created to escape. In countering Vasarian aesthetic criticism, the Gothic apologists struggled to make Gothic fit classicism's prevailing models of architectural excellence. Gothic had to become an order, its architects consequently ordered and analogous to their Renaissance and ancient counterparts. This tendency was equally expressed in the frequent misidentification of leading clerical patrons as architectural designers over the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As Gothic slowly grew in popularity in England it was increasingly associated with amateur monastic and clerical intellectuals. Past and present architectural practices were merged in a human reflection of Langley's hybridized Gothic which defied Vasarian condemnation by subverting its principles.

The Emergence of the Master Mason

Change came in the nineteenth century, but it began on the continent. The French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars had radically shaken the foundations of western European scholarship, its notions of *égalité*, *fraternité* and, most importantly, *liberté* contributing much to the intellectual toolbox of architectural history. Though initially condemned by the Revolution, Gothic was salvaged as a form of national expression and enshrined as such in the Musée des Monuments Français (1795–1816).[21] The contemporaneous discovery of architectural drawings in Germany, notably Sulpiz Boisserée's reassembly of the plans for Cologne Cathedral's west front (1814) and the fifteenth-century "Lodge book" of Mathes Roriczer (published 1840), seemingly confirmed the geometrical basis of medieval architects' methods (figs 5 and 6).[22] In France the rediscovery and publication of Villard de Honnecourt's manuscript during the 1850s revolutionized the study of Gothic.[23] An eclectic thirteenth-century collection of architectural drawings, figures,

geometrical design techniques, and ingenious devices (some accompanied by French and Latin explanatory texts), the manuscript appeared to present the architect as an itinerant intellectual: literate, well-travelled, well-versed in geometry, and a teacher of future masons (fig. 7).[24]
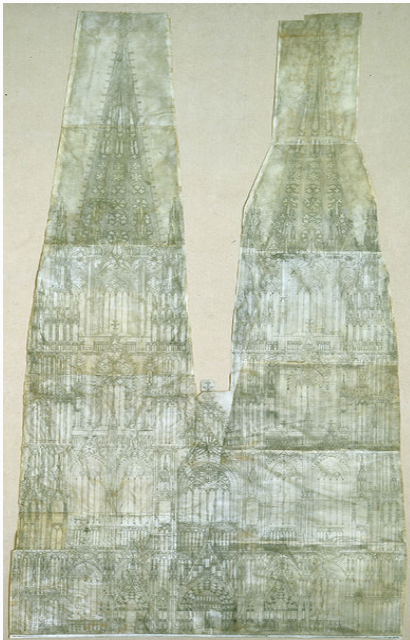

Figure 5

Cologne Cathedral West Front Design, mid-13th century. Sulpiz Boisserée's reassembly of the plans for Cologne Cathedral's west front (1814), in *The Geometry of Creation: Architectural Drawing and the Dynamics of Gothic Design* by Robert Bork (London and New York, 2011). Digital image courtesy of Cologne Cathedral, Germany / Photo: Matz und Schenk.
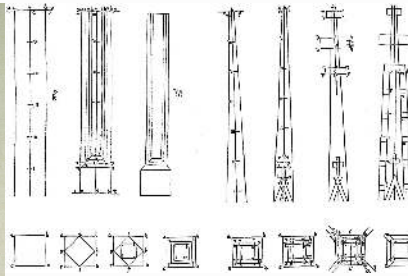

Figure 6

Mathes Roriczer, *Pinnacle design*, 1486–90, in *Büchlein von der Fialen Gerechtigkeit* (Regensberg, 1486)…

Figure 7

Villard de Honnecourt, *Rose window of Lausanne Cathedral south transept and figure holding foot*, early 13th century. Collection Bibliothèque nationale de France, (19093, fol. 16r). Digital image courtesy of BnF 2017.

It was Viollet-le-Duc who took this new evidence and synthesized it into a narrative model of the architect's transformation. As outlined above, to him the Gothic "*architecte*" embodied the *liberté* of the third estate. Viollet-le-Duc's definition of *Architecte* in the first volume of his *Dictionnaire* (1854) identified the "*maître d'oeuvre*" as the Gothic building's designer, describing his emergence from the twelfth-century monastic schools and the resulting laicization and emancipation of architecture.[25] Taking after the historians François Guizot and Augustin Thierry, who sought to identify the Revolution's roots in France's imagined national past, it was the city (in particular in northern France, the supposed heartland of Gothic invention) and its capacity for communal, municipal action which catalyzed this change, a development which peaked in the thirteenth century when "the artist appears at last."[26] Possessing taste ("*goût*") and designing liberated architecture which expressed individuality ("*individualité*") through skilled draughtsmanship founded in the liberal art of geometry, the architect emerged as part of a separate professional class with modern, nationally oriented attributes.[27]

However, despite this, Viollet-le-Duc carefully distinguished between the modern and medieval architect, extolling the latter's superiority as a liberated individual possessing independent national genius which was eroded gradually over time.[28] According to the architectural restorer, the Renaissance was the final nail in the medieval architect's coffin, the aristocratic amateur replacing the *maître d'oeuvre* and generating a style expressing not the national imagination, but the typological rearrangement and restatement of another culture's architecture. In his *Entretiens sur l'Architecture* (1858–72), Viollet-le-Duc expanded on this point, expounding the virtues of Ancient Greek and Gothic architecture whilst denigrating Roman and Renaissance copyists in a polemical call for architectural reform.[29]

Figure 8

Tomb Slab of Hughes Libergier, Reims Cathedral, circa 1263. Digital image courtesy of James Hillson.

English scholarship was responsive to Viollet-le-Duc's ideas, but its dissemination was protracted. A single article from his *Dictionnaire* was translated into English in 1875, and his *Entretiens* was published in translation by Benjamin Bucknall between 1877 and 1882, decades after its initial publication.[30] Whereas in France the visual evidence for named masters in the tombs of architects Pierre de Montreuil or Hughes Libergier (fig. 8), the labyrinth of Reims Cathedral, or Villard de Honnecourt's manuscript presented physically compelling arguments for the architect's status as an emancipated layman, in England the persistent identification of ecclesiastics as Gothic architects hampered these ideas' acceptance.[31] One field in which they gained early traction was Freemasonry. Following the Freemasons' rapid expansion from the early eighteenth century onwards, the "speculative masonry" of their newfound amateur membership had already found an outlet in the academic study of masonry practice.[32] However, the new discoveries on the continent fuelled a renewed, more rigorous branch of masonic history, the most internationally influential example being Joseph Findel's *Geschichte der Freimalerei* (1861) which was translated into English in 1865.[33] Findel provided a major conduit for Viollet-le-Duc's ideas, rejecting the legendary roots of Freemasonry and instead introducing a familiar narrative of clerical craftsmen in monastic schools gradually giving way to the emancipated layman mason in secular lodges.

English scholars, meanwhile, had a more direct problem in assessing their Gothic architect: attribution. In 1860, the architect and antiquary Wyatt Papworth gave a paper at the Royal Institute of British Architects on the "Superintendents of English Buildings in the Middle Ages".[34] Papworth's paper (published 1887) examined closely the individuals involved in orchestrating medieval building, and contested directly the notion of the clerical architect. Figures such as William Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester (1366–1404) were stripped of their architectural credentials and declared to be supporting administrators, replaced by the unequivocal declaration that "the Master Masons were generally the Architects during the Mediaeval period in England."[35] Names were extracted from the records of cathedrals and the

Chancery and Exchequer, and with them a project was born to reunite buildings with the personalities who designed them.

Whereas eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century approaches to the English Gothic architect had been characterized by aesthetic opposition, Papworth's article catalyzed a tonal shift towards reclamation. The earliest respondent was the architect William Lethaby, whose *Westminster Abbey and the King's Craftsmen* of 1906 strove "to give an account of the artists—the masons, carpenters, sculptors, painters, and other craftsmen—who built and decorated [the Abbey]".[36] Lethaby was the first to compare this programme intentionally to the Renaissance cult of personality fostered by Vasari's *Lives*, stating that "as in Florence, so at Westminster, a personal human interest must add to our reverence for an otherwise abstract art."[37] Such an approach was not universal, however. The previous year had seen the publication of Edward Prior's *The Cathedral Builders of England*, which considered the "power of designing art" to be "a common property . . . existent in masses of people" and stated unequivocally that "behind the Renaissance in the history of mediaeval art personality vanishes entirely."[38] Whilst he argued in favour of the twelfth- to thirteenth-century development of a lay school of masons with the "best claim to the honour of 'architects'", Prior still considered plans and dimensions to be the province of the clergy and affirmed William Wykeham's role as a "professional architect"—"the official who was between ecclesiastic and mason".[39]

Despite these setbacks, the process of recovering master masons' names and associating them firmly with their works gradually displaced attributions to ecclesiastical "architects" in mainstream scholarship. From the mid-1920s, Papworth's criticisms were reiterated by Francis Andrews (1925), Alexander Thompson (1925), and Martin Briggs (1927).[40] Briggs systematically deconstructed a set of commonly accepted "fallacies": that there was no "architect", that the "master mason" was not an "educated professional man", that working drawings were not used, that masons worked for the glory of God alone, that the architect learned his trade at the bench not the school, that he was a monk and that he "gloried in his anonymity", among others.[41] For Briggs "the modern architect was represented in the Middle Ages by the master-mason"—a literate, educated "professional architect"—who on occasion even operated like a modern architectural practice.[42] This interpretation was extended further by the Freemason economists Douglas Knoop and Gwilym Jones, whose book *The Mediæval Mason* (1933) was the culmination of a series of publications which elaborated on the master mason's education, practices, and social position.[43] The "mason-architect" they proposed was literate and numerate, tasked "to determine the number of workmen and the quantity and the kind of materials necessary, to make plans, decide the order of operations and what individuals, or groups, should carry them out".[44] At the same time, Knoop and Jones pursued the careers of individual master masons, publishing on the royal master mason Henry Yevele in 1935.[45]

This latter project was picked up by John Harvey. His 1944 biography of Yevele was the first book detailing the life of a medieval architect, drawing heavily on the work of his predecessors and their documentary discoveries and stylistic attributions.[46] Divided into "Early Life and Surrounding Influences", "Success", "Fame", and "The Grand Old Man", Harvey's structure reflected Vasari's *Lives* in recording the progress and achievements of this "principal architectural figure" with the polemical aim of bringing "to our remembrance the great life of one of the truest sons of England . . . who deserves our interest and affection, as well as the title of our greatest architect."[47] However, the biography has seen virtually no parallels since, partly due to the project's inherent limitations.[48] Though Harvey returned to compiling documentary evidence for lost lives in his *English Mediæval Architects* (1954), this project was not

biographical, but encyclopedic.[49] Unlike Vasari, whose *Lives* he explicitly compared to this later work,[50] Harvey was aware that his documentary sources recorded none of the personality traits required to analyze closely an architect's intentions, methods, or activity.

Like many before him, Harvey turned to the abstracted "Gothic architect" as a tool for exploring these problems. His article on the "Education of the Mediæval Architect" (1945) laid out the profile for a layman architect equipped with "an educational background superior to that of a stonecutter".[51] This character was set apart from the regular mason, either through recruitment from their ranks for displaying exceptional talent or special training running in families, their "greater masters" being gentlemen and trusted officials close to people of high rank, owning large estates and considerable wealth.[52] This was developed further in *The Gothic World* (1950) where he proclaimed architects as the leading artists of the Middle Ages, producing works with "innate genius and superb, fully trained craftsmanship", reading and applying copies of Vitruvius's *Ten Books on Architecture* and echoing the university system's relationship of master to student.[53] For Harvey, the Gothic architect possessed all the fundamental faculties and social position of his Renaissance counterpart, albeit without the "attitudinizing individuality of the untrained dilettante".[54] Though they were "not members of a distinct professional class, divorced by birth from craftsmen generally", they did form a "superior caste" within them.[55] Educated, socially mobile, and possessing the "genius" necessary for architectural invention, it was "a stupidity to deny these masters the title of 'architect'".[56]

This model, however, reveals an important tendency within scholarship of this period: continuing anxiety over the title of "architect". As Nikolaus Pevsner demonstrated, its Latin root *architectus* was rarely employed in the Middle Ages and thus its deployment was open to accusations of anachronism.[57] Though this was widely admitted by scholars, Viollet-le-Duc, Papworth, Lethaby, Prior, Thompson, Briggs, and Harvey all expressed a polemical desire to attach the word to master masons as a badge of honour, a sign of recognition for their acceptance as architectural practitioners. Tacit acceptance of the modern architect's superiority to the mere craftsman predicated justification of this along certain lines—the Gothic architect had to be educated and possess social status, demonstrating all the credentials of the modern practitioner. Yet simultaneously, all strove to differentiate sharply between modern and medieval practice. They stressed that architecture in England was not a separate profession from masonry, emphasizing the distinction between them arising in Renaissance Italy and often hesitating to identify the medieval architect as a "professional" in consequence. For Viollet-le-Duc and Harvey, their division reflected the creative bankruptcy of modern architectural practice, the medieval architect providing the exemplary model for architectural reform. Knoop and Jones drew particular attention to the "Two Centuries of Transition" between 1500 and 1700, arguing the mason-architect lost his social status and gave way to "a different kind of architect, quite untrained at the bench, possessing a wider acquaintance with classical and continental styles and more or less erudite in sciences".[58] The master mason was an architect, but not as we know him.

Professional Architect or Renascence Man?

Over the second half of the twentieth century, however, the gap between medieval master mason and modern professional gradually collapsed. The catalyst for this change was a remarkably thin volume published in 1951 by the art historian Erwin Panofsky. Based on his 1948 Wimmer Lecture, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* reimagined the architect in the context of growing "urban professionalism" centred on Paris.[59] In this model, "the professional, town-dwelling architect" was one of a number of professions appearing during the twelfth and

thirteenth centuries, opposed to what Panofsky called "the monastic equivalent of . . . the gentleman architect".[60] Though its indebtedness to Viollet-le-Duc's school of interpretation is clear, the book also reframed the architect intellectually. Perceiving consonances between Gothic design procedures and developments in Scholastic thought, Panofsky argued for a shared "mental habit" between architecture and academia facilitated by urbanized intermingling of "the architect" and "the learned".[61] In this environment, by the mid-thirteenth century the architect had become "a kind of scholastic": wearing "something like academic garb", "widely travelled, often well read, and enjoying a social prestige unparalleled before and unsurpassed since".[62] This intellectualization of the architect reflected Panofsky's wider intellectualization of artistic practices which privileged the role of scholars. His 1944 article "Renaissance and Renascences" (later extended as a book in 1960), equated directly the driving forces behind periods of high-quality artistic production with the intellectual achievements of scholarship and the reappearance of classical influences.[63] Responding to a school of thought which rejected the unique status of the Italian Renaissance in light of Carolingian and twelfth-century "Renaissances", Panofsky proposed a typological model of history which differentiated between preceding "Renascences" and the "most effective" Renaissance which "succeeded" in a full resurrection of Antiquity's soul.[64] The birth and growth of the Gothic style from the twelfth to thirteenth centuries was thus one of a number of sinusoidal peaks and troughs of cultural productivity judged in relation to the fifteenth century's permanently established triumph. Panofsky's Gothic architect might thus be termed a Renascence man, analogous to Renaissance man in the academic roots of his mental habits, but intrinsically limited by the intellectual environment of his age.

Though this proposition attracted hostility and support in equal measure following its publication, Panofsky's "mental habit" has been systematically deconstructed in recent decades.[65] However, its effect on the study of the homogenized Gothic architect has been a more general reorientation of scholarly interest towards thirteenth-century France as the defining moment of his character. From the 1950s onwards, the discourse of the English Gothic architect remained largely static, the fictional character being already stabilized into the role of a professional layman. Louis Salzman's book *Building in England* (1952) contributed greatly to the understanding of building processes and worksite organization, but did little to advance the master mason beyond his existing characterization.[66] Lon Shelby's articles of 1964, 1970, and 1972, while masterful summaries, were little more than a further elaboration of the models of the previous generation of scholarship.[67] Even Harvey's *The Mediaeval Architect* (1972), an extended restatement of his established position, shifted away from English examples:

> The evidence does not come all from one country or from one period, but covers the whole of western Europe and the five centuries after . . . 1000.[68]

This new trend has resulted in the establishment of the French Gothic architect of the early thirteenth century as the defining character of Gothic architects more generally. With the Gothic architect increasingly treated as an interchangeable character across space, time, and individual identities, the framework of interpretation for French Gothic architects consequently became of critical significance for their English counterparts. During the 1980s, interest in the latter as an abstract problem started to wane, whereas the former continued to be the object of speculation. One of the most influential formulations was that of Dieter Kimpel, whose work has provided a more technical foundation for the architect's sociogenesis in thirteenth-century France by analyzing working conditions and construction techniques.[69] Through this the "Gothic architect" emerges as a distinct character, starkly differentiated from his predecessors as a specialized class of professional practitioner. The development of new organizational techniques and the use of

draughtsmanship to plan designs meticulously, meant that an architect was no longer required to be on site at all times, but was an independent agent who could move between multiple projects, a phenomenon more recently dubbed "remote control" by Franklin Toker.[70] Though he does not endorse Panofsky's claim that an architect was akin to a scholastic, he too proclaims him to be a form of Renascence man, analogous to Leonardo da Vinci through his inventive prowess in employing devices and machinery.[71]

This technical focus sparked a renewal of interest in the problem among more recent scholars. Christopher Wilson established his own position regarding the Gothic architect in a dedicated section of his book *The Gothic Cathedral* (1990). Reacting against Panofsky's intellectual armature, Wilson dismissed the architect's "quasi-academic status", considering tomb inscriptions and other evidence to be "a piece of poetic licence" by patrons aimed at self-flattery rather than an admission of scholarly status.[72] Yet one aspect of Panofsky's architect was retained: his professional status. Carrying dividers as "a kind of professional badge",[73] the medieval architect was like his modern counterpart in both his professional standing and his design methods. Departing from conventional assessments of the thirteenth century as a point of radical change in the architect's character, Wilson proposed that the use of precise working drawings was a pan-historic process of architectural design.[74] Instead he followed Kimpel by suggesting that the codification of building processes at this time liberated architects "from the need to be constantly present at a single site", significantly altering the relationship between the architect and his works.[75] This model, largely constructed around French evidence, was subsequently applied when dealing with English and French architects alike, most notably his work on the relationship between St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster, and St Augustine's Abbey, Bristol, from the 1290s onwards, and Canterbury Cathedral and Lausanne in the twelfth century.[76] In both cases, working drawings and the early fixing of a design were considered critical to interpreting stylistic transmission and construction sequence, and in the process the architect is firmly established as a quasi-modern professional cast in the French mould.

Paul Binski, by contrast, has self-consciously attempted to rehabilitate aspects of Panofsky's work. His 2010 article, "Working by Words alone", returned to the fictional character of the Gothic architect by reversing Panofsky's assumptions. Whereas Panofsky argued scholastic discussions of master masons indicated an increasingly scholarly character, Binski asserted that the same evidence was a response to social and intellectual changes which had already occurred.[77] Their significance for the Gothic architect lay not in revealed scholarly pretensions, but in the architect's utility as a suitable metaphor for a new Aristotelian relationship between authors, works, and artifice being explored in contemporary scholastic thought.[78] In this Binski's architect predates and prefigures Renaissance notions of authorial identity: "Paris, in this regard at least, had anticipated Florence."[79] Panofsky's identification of a new professionalism born of an urban environment was reaffirmed, resulting in a Gothic architect who was defined by the wider birth of the "age of the expert":

> By 1300 in northern France, his position was clearer: the architect, in theory at least, possessed science (i.e., knowledge of fixed abstract principles or causes) and hence the capacity to teach; he possessed authorial responsibility; he did not get his hands dirty; and he was understood as an appropriate analogue for other aspirant professions, whether academic or lucrative.[80]

Binski's book *Gothic Wonder* (2014) has expanded this model through a wider discussion of Gothic invention, and its implications applied to English architects.[81] Though he was openly reticent to equate French Aristotelian "theories of professional agency" with those in England,

his character study of the French Gothic architect was ultimately used to provide the framework for his English counterpart, primarily through introducing and exploring the Kimpel–Toker concept of "remote control".[82] A remote-controlling architect was one socially and professionally removed from the average mason, adopting the same kind of logistics, authorial status, and technical hierarchies of expertise as the pioneers of northern France. Yet in engaging with the theoretical and historiographical underpinnings of the architect, Binski's emphasis remains not on individual architects, but on the fictional, generalized architect, the architect in the abstract. It is this emblematic figure who remains the primary subject of analysis, his characterization as the representation of a professional class being the principal aim of scholarly enquiry.

Conclusions

By making this homogenized and abstract character the locus of discussion, the discourse surrounding the social, intellectual, and technical attributes of the designers of Gothic edifices in England and beyond has limited itself to a long-established framework of interpretation. As has been demonstrated above, analysis of the "Gothic architect" has revolved around a discrete set of types and tropes which often render this figure the prototype for future groups of individuals, be they Renaissance men or modern professionals. The roots of this are in the Gothic style's initial formulation as a defensive position, and since the eighteenth century its architects have been an object of apologia, their interpretation coloured by an emphasis on rehabilitation and positive comparison that their achievements might be established and reclaimed. Though the rhetoric and nuances of this framework have changed considerably over time, the fundamental issues addressed have not significantly shifted since the writings of Viollet-le-Duc. The notion of the "professional architect", his place in a new social class, his relationship with the urban environment, the relationship between abstract intellectual knowledge, technical expertise and design practice—all these remain core defining elements of this universalizing character right up to the most recent scholarship.

Consequently, in attempting to answer the question "Who was the Gothic architect?", this field of discussion has become a debate more about past iterations of a fictive character than the actual individuals involved in making up the social class he purportedly represents. Throughout all the aforementioned texts, a canon of specific examples culled from written sources, drawings, tombs, and other material evidence regarding specific individuals is regularly reproduced (and, occasionally, added to), but the current working process is to sift these sources for evidence of similarity, and for the use of those similarities to confirm or deny the nature of existing homogenized models. This is invited by the fictional person of the "architect" himself, who acquires validity as a subject of debate only through agreement between the often nameless individuals he represents.

Though this observation does not invalidate the conclusions of existing scholarship, it does underline the necessity for re-evaluating how we frame and discuss the designers of Gothic architecture more generally. One means of pursuing such a reassessment would be to invert the conventional methodology, turning from establishing similarities between master masons towards differentiation. English Gothic architects present an ideal field in which to apply this approach. With copious documentary sources and a large body of evidence for the lives and working practices of individual English masons, the extreme variety in workshop organization, status, and personal practice between master masons quickly becomes apparent, both among contemporaries and across time.[83] This is not to advocate biography and extreme individuation

as the only means of analyzing the problem, an approach which has already been explored to great effect by scholars in specific cases.[84] Instead, it is to promote a different comparative approach, placing the emphasis on the range of diversity within a class, rather than simplification into a shared set of characteristics. By treating master masons as a uniform, pan-historic and/or pan-European class of individuals, and further reducing that class to a singular abstracted character, scholarship creates a self-limiting, self-regulating system of analysis which minimizes appreciation of the potential breadth and variety of artistic practices and social or intellectual positions that master masons may have enjoyed. By turning away from external models and towards internal points of comparison in the discourse of the Gothic architect, it may be possible to generate a more nuanced account of Gothic master masons as a whole.

Acknowledgements

About the author

James Hillson is a Research Fellow at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, specializing in Gothic architecture of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. He completed his PhD in 2015 at the University of York, working on St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster (1227–1363) and the relationship between architecture and politics in royal patronage, and is currently embarking on a new project on international stylistic transmission.

Footnotes

1. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Bance and Morel, 1854–68), 107.
2. Barry Bergdoll, *The Foundations of Architecture: Selections from the Dictionnaire Raisonné* (New York: G. Braziller, 1990), 9–10.
3. Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire*, 107–14.
4. For past attempts at summarizing these, see Franklin Toker, "Gothic Architecture by Remote Control: An Illustrated Building Contract of 1340", *The Art Bulletin* 67 (1985): 67–95; Nicola Coldstream, "The Architect, History and Architectural History", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (2003): 219–26.
5. Male pronouns will be used throughout this article to refer to the "Gothic architect" as this figure is universally coded male within the literature.
6. Giorgio Vasari, *Vasari on Technique*, ed. G. Baldwin Brown, trans. Louisa S. Maclehose (London: Dent, 1907), 65–84.
7. Patricia Lee Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 164–65; Paul Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations Through Eight Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 237–95.
8. Vasari, *On Technique*, 83–84.

9. Vasari, *On Technique*, 83–84. For a nuanced discussion of German and Italian attitudes, see Paul Crossley, "The Return to the Forest: Natural Architecture and the German Past in the Age of Dürer", in *Künstlerischer Austausch: Artistic Exchange*, ed. T. W. Gaehtgens, 3 vols (Akademie Verlag: Berlin, 1993), 2: 71–80.

10. E. S. de Beer, "Gothic: Origin and Diffusion of the Term; The Idea of Style in Architecture", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 11 (1948): 143–50.

11. De Beer, "Gothic", 145–46; Frankl, *The Gothic*, 252–57.

12. De Beer, "Gothic", 155; Frankl, *The Gothic*, 350–60; Susan Lang, "The Principles of the Gothic Revival in England", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 25 (1966): 245–46.

13. Lang, "Principles", 245; John Evelyn, "An Account of Architects and Architecture", in R. Fréart de Chambray, *Parallel of the Antient Architecture with the Modern*, trans. Evelyn (London: Brown, 1707), 9; Frankl, *The Gothic*, 358–59.

14. Frankl, *The Gothic*, 370–414.

15. Lang, "Principles", 251–53; Frankl, *The Gothic*, 390–95.

16. Batty Langley and Thomas Langley, *Ancient Architecture Restored and Improved* (London: John Millan, 1742), unpaginated.

17. Langley and Langley, *Ancient Architecture*), unpaginated.

18. Langley and Langley, *Ancient Architecture*, unpaginated.

19. Eileen Harris, "Batty Langley: A Tutor to Freemasons (1696–1751)", *The Burlington Magazine* 119, no. 890 (1977): 332.

20. Lang, "Principles", 256–58; British Library Add. MS 6761, f. 70r, 71r; British Library Add. MS 6771, f. 34r.

21. Christopher M. Greene, "Alexandre Lenoir and the Musée des Monuments Français during the French Revolution", *French Historical Studies* 12 (1981): 200–22; Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley, CA, and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 155–97.

22. M. J. Lewis, *The Politics of the German Gothic Revival: August Reichensperger* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 31–32; Lon R. Shelby, *Gothic Design Techniques: The Fifteenth-Century Design Booklets of Mathes Roriczer and Hanns Schmuttermayer* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977).

23. Carl F. Barnes, *The Portfolio of Villard de Honnecourt (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Fr 19093)* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), xxii.

24. Barnes, *Portfolio*, 27—213.

25. Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire*, 107–14.

26. "*l'artiste apparaît enfin au XIIIe siècle.*" Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire*, 107–9; Bergdoll, *Foundations*, 9–10; Martin Bressani, *Architecture and the Historical Imagination: Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, 1814–1979* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 459; François Guizot, *Histoire de la Civilisation en France* (Paris: Didier, 1846); Augustin Thierry, "Considérations sur l'histoire de France", in *Récits des Temps Mérovingiens*, ed. Thierry (Paris: Furne, 1846).

27. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Discourses on Architecture*, trans. Benjamin Bucknall, 2 vols (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959).

28. Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire*, 114.

29. Viollet-le-Duc, *Discourses*.

30. M. F. Hearn, *The Architectural Theory of Viollet-le-Duc: Readings and Commentary* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 16–17.

31. Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (Latrobe, PA: Archabbey, 1951), 26; Paul Binski, "'Working by words alone': The Architect, Scholasticism and Rhetoric in Thirteenth-century France", in *Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Carruthers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 28–34; Robert Branner, "The Labyrinth of Reims Cathedral", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 21, no. 4 (1962): 18–25.

32. Douglas Knoop and Gwilym Jones, *The Genesis of Freemasonry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1947), 295–96.

33. Joseph Gabriel Findel, *Geschichte der Freimalerei von der Zeit ihres Entstehens bis auf die Gegenheit* (Leipzig: Findel, 1861); Findel, *A History of Freemasonry from its Rise to the Present Day* (London: Asher & Co., 1869).

34. Wyatt Angelicus van Sandau Papworth, "Notes on the Superintendents of English Buildings in the Middle Ages", *Transactions of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 3 (1887): 185–234.

35. Papworth, "Superintendents", 202–6.

36. William R. Lethaby, *Westminster Abbey and the King's Craftsmen* (London: Duckworth, 1906), vii.

37. Lethaby, *Westminster Abbey*, vii.

38. Edward S. Prior, *The Cathedral Builders of England* (London: Seeley, 1905), 21, 23.

39. Prior, *Cathedral Builders*, 58, 85–86.

40. Francis B. Andrews, *The Mediaeval Builder and his Methods* (1925; Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield/ EP Publishing, 1974); Alexander Hamilton Thompson, *The Cathedral Churches of England* (London: SPCK 1925); Martin S. Briggs, *The Architect in History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927).

41. Briggs, *Architect*, 53–54.

42. Briggs, *Architect*, 56, 65, 112.

43. Douglas Knoop and Gwilym Jones, "Masons and Apprenticeship in Mediaeval England", *Economic History Review* 3 (1932): 346–66; Knoop and Jones, "Masons' Wages in Mediaeval England", *Economics Journal Economic History Supplement* 2 (1933): 473–99; Knoop and Jones, *The Mediæval Mason* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1933).

44. Knoop and Jones, *Mediæval Mason*, 21. This conception was developed further in subsequent publications. Knoop and Jones, "The Rise of the Mason Contractor", *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 43 (1936): 106–71; Knoop and Jones, "The Decline of the Mason-Architect in England", *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 44 (1937): 1004–1007; Knoop and Jones, "The Impressment of Masons in the Middle Ages", *Economic History Review* 8 (1937): 57–67; Knoop and Jones, *An Introduction to Freemasonry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1937); Knoop and Jones, "The English Medieval Quarry", *Economic History Review* 9 (1938): 17–37; Knoop and Jones, *Genesis*.

45. Douglas Knoop and Gwilym Jones, "Henry Yevele and his Associates", *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* (ser. 3) 42 (1935): 801–9.

46. John Harvey, *Henry Yevele, c. 1320 to 1400: The Life of an English Architect* (London: Batsford, 1944), vii–viii.

47. Harvey, *Henry Yevele*, vii.

48. The principal exception is Christopher Wilson, who is presently compiling a monograph on the master mason Michael of Canterbury.

49. John Harvey, *English Mediæval Architects: A Biographical Dictionary down to 1550* (London: Batsford, 1954).

50. Harvey, *English Mediæval Architects*, 1–4.

51. John Harvey, "The Education of the Mediæval Architect", *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 52 (1945): 230–33.

52. Harvey, "Education", 231–33.

53. John Harvey, *The Gothic World, 1100–1600: A Survey of Gothic Architecture and Art* (London: Batsford, 1950), vi–viii, 7, 25–26.

54. Harvey, *Gothic World*, vii.

55. Harvey, *Gothic World*, 41.

56. Harvey, *Gothic World*, 26.

57. Nikolaus Pevsner, "The Term 'Architect' in the Middle Ages", *Speculum* 17 (1942): 549–62.

58. Knoop and Jones, *Mediæval Mason*, 197–201; Knoop and Jones, *Genesis*, 108–28.

59. Panofsky, *Gothic*, 21–26.

60. Panofsky, *Gothic*, 25–26.

61. Panofsky, *Gothic*, 1–21.

62. Panofsky, *Gothic*, 25–26.

63. Erwin Panofsky, "Renaissance and Renascences", *The Kenyon Review* 6, no. 2 (1944): 201–36; Panofksy, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

64. Panofsky, "Renaissance", 201–2, 227–28. Carl Landauer, "Erwin Panofsky and the Renascence of the Renaissance", *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (1994): 255–81.

65. Jean Bony, "Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism: By Professor Erwin Panofsky", *The Burlington Magazine* 95, no. 600 (1953): 111–12; Harry Bober, "Erwin Panofsky, Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism", *The Art Bulletin* 35, no. 4 (1953): 310–12; Robert Branner, "A Note on Gothic Architects and Scholars", *The Burlington Magazine* 99, no. 656 (1957): 372–75; Lon R. Shelby, "The Role of the Master Mason in Mediaeval English Building", *Speculum* 39 (1964): 389; Erik Inglis, "Gothic Architecture and a Scholastic: Jean de Jandun's 'Tractatus de laudibus Parisius' (1323)", *Gesta* 42 (2003): 63–85.

66. Louis F. Salzman, *Building in England down to 1540: A Documentary History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

67. Shelby, "Role", 387–403; Lon R. Shelby, "The Education of Medieval English Master Masons", *Mediaeval Studies* 32 (1970): 1–26; Shelby, "The Geometrical Knowledge of Mediaeval Master Masons", *Speculum* 47 (1972): 395–421.

68. John Harvey, *The Mediaeval Architect* (London: Wayland, 1972), 10.

69. Dieter Kimpel and Robert Suckale, *Die Gotische Architektur in Frankreich, 1130–1270* (Munich: Hirmer, 1985), 34–56; Kimpel, "La Sociogenèse de l'architecte moderne", in *Aristes, artisans et production artistique au Moyen Âge: Actes du Colloque International CNRS, Université de Rennes, 1983*, 1: *Les Hommes*, ed. Xavier Barral I Altet (Paris: Editions Picard, 1986), 135–61.

70. Kimpel and Suckale, *Gotische Architektur*, 35–37; Toker, "Remote Control", 67–95. Similar ideas had previously been expressed in Knoop and Jones, "Mason Contractor", 1067.

71. Kimpel and Suckale, *Gotische Architektur*, 45.

72. Christopher Wilson, *The Gothic Cathedral* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 143.

73. Wilson, *Gothic Cathedral*, 142.
74. Wilson, *Gothic Cathedral*, 140–42.
75. Wilson, *Gothic Cathedral*, 140.
76. Christopher Wilson, "Lausanne and Canterbury: A Special Relationship Re-Examined", in *Die Kathedrale zu Lausanne im Kontext der europäischen Gotik*, ed. Peter Kurman (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2004), 157–89; Wilson, "Gothic Metamorphosed: The Choir of St Augustine's Abbey in Bristol and the Renewal of European Architecture around 1300", in *The Medieval Art, Architecture and History of Bristol Cathedral: An Enigma Explored*, ed. Jon Cannon and Beth Williamson (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011), 69–147.
77. Binski, "Working", 19–20, 27–36.
78. Binski, "Working", 20–28.
79. Binski, "Working", 40–41; Binski, *Gothic Wonder*, 63.
80. Binski, "Working", 19.
81. Binski, *Gothic Wonder*, 49–80.
82. Binski, *Gothic Wonder*, 57–63.
83. See, for example, Shelby, "Role"; Salzman, *Building in England*; Harvey, *English Mediaeval Architects*; Arnold Pacey, *Medieval Architectural Drawing* (Stroud: Tempus, 2008); Wilson, "Gothic Metamorphosed". These issues have also been approached in James Hillson, "St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster: Architecture, Decoration and Politics in the Reigns of Henry III and the three Edwards (1227–1363)" (Ph.D. thesis, University of York, 2015), and will be addressed at greater length in a forthcoming monograph on St Stephen's Chapel.
84. See, for example, Karl M. Swoboda, *Peter Parler: der Baukünstler und Bildhauer*, 4th edn (Vienna: Anton Schroll, 1943); Harvey, *Henry Yevele*; Christopher Wilson, "The Origins of the Perpendicular Style and its Development to circa 1360" (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1980); and Marc Carel Schurr, *Die Baukunst Peter Parlers: der Prager Veitsdom, das Heiligkreuzmünster in Schwäbisch Gmünd und die Bartholomäuskirche in Kolin im Spannungsfeld von Kunst und Geschichte* (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2003).

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