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The Gothic Enterprise: A Guide To Understanding The Medieval Cathedral



Synopsis

The great Gothic cathedrals of Europe are among the most astonishing achievements of Western culture. Evoking feelings of awe and humility, they make us want to understand what inspired the people who had the audacity to build them. This engrossing book surveys an era that has fired the historical imagination for centuries. In it Robert A. Scott explores why medieval people built Gothic cathedrals, how they built them, what conception of the divine lay behind their creation, and how religious and secular leaders used cathedrals for social and political purposes. As a traveler's companion or a rich source of knowledge for the armchair enthusiast, *The Gothic Enterprise* helps us understand how ordinary people managed such tremendous feats of physical and creative energy at a time when technology was rudimentary, famine and disease were rampant, the climate was often harsh, and communal life was unstable and incessantly violent. While most books about Gothic cathedrals focus on a particular building or on the cathedrals of a specific region, *The Gothic Enterprise* considers the idea of the cathedral as a humanly created space. Scott discusses why an impoverished people would commit so many social and personal resources to building something so physically stupendous and what this says about their ideas of the sacred, especially the vital role they ascribed to the divine as a protector against the dangers of everyday life. Scott's narrative offers a wealth of fascinating details concerning daily life during medieval times. The author describes the difficulties master-builders faced in scheduling construction that wouldn't be completed during their own lifetimes, how they managed without adequate numeric systems or paper on which to make detailed drawings, and how climate, natural disasters, wars, variations in the hours of daylight throughout the year, and the celebration of holy days affected the pace and timing of work. Scott also explains such things as the role of relics, the quarrying and transporting of stone, and the incessant conflict cathedral-building projects caused within their communities. Finally, by drawing comparisons between Gothic cathedrals and other monumental building projects, such as Stonehenge, Scott expands our understanding of the human impulses that shape our landscape.

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Customer Reviews

I am always in awe when I see the magnificent cathedrals in England and wonder just how did they get built? Robert A. Scott does a wonderful job not only of describing the construction of these cathedrals but also of the times in which they were built. He covers all the aspects of life back in the medieval ages. Knowing all that I know now makes me even more in awe of the majesty of these beautiful cathedrals. Nothing built today will be around in 100 years, let alone 600 years.

A good read before going to Europe and seeing the beautiful architecture

We all have our biases. The author' bias, for me, is a little too evident. If comment on values of a cathedral community are going to be expressed, it could, perhaps, be in the context or comparison to, the "outside" world values and practises.

excellent book with nice balance of history and engineering details.

If you're an art history major or gothic expert, this book may be in the "too obvious to mention" category. However, I am really enjoying it. The author, a sociologist "by trade," shows how academics work at our best, in my opinion: He follows passion and curiosity, using his own

discipline and "crossing over" into other studies to expand his own, and therefore the readers', understanding of Gothic cathedrals. I confess his starting point--Salisbury Cathedral--is one of my own favorites. The approach of the book is sociological, historical, architectural, religious/spiritual, and artistic. None is arcane or overly academic -- yet it is not simplistic in its approach. I am enjoying this book!

A little too heavy on the sociology for my tastes. Also, a little heavy on author self-adulation. Nothing here I haven't found somewhere else.

great

The people who reviewed this book before me did a great job of describing this wonderful book, so I'm not going to repeat their observations. However, one aspect of the work I personally appreciated was the way Scott examined the cathedrals as architectural responses to the cultural context. His analysis is clear and straightforward. Excellent book!

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