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Île-de-France or Normandy (France)
Second quarter of the 13th century

Stained Glass

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Colored glass, cut and leaded
60 × 64 cm

Provenance: William Hearst (1862–1951), California, USA
Paula de Koenigsberg, active since 1941, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Luis Aquino (1895–1968), Buenos Aires, Argentina
Alberto Cruz Eyzaguirre (1909–1968), Santiago de Chile
Carlos Alberto Cruz (1930–2022), Santiago de Chile

Alejandro Villa del Castillo
Art Historian

The Light of the Divine: Symbolism and Mastery in Thirteenth-Century French Gothic Stained Glass

On this occasion, we present a historiated panel belonging to a thirteenth-century stained-glass window from the Île-de-France region, the cradle and birthplace of the Gothic style. With important parallels to the most significant stained-glass ensembles of the period (the cathedrals of Chartres, Soissons, Rouen, and Le Mans, as well as the Parisian Sainte-Chapelle), this piece stands as an excellent and representative example of the French linear Gothic style.

The panel is rectangular in format and contains a circular medallion depicting a biblical scene. On the left appears a bearded figure with long hair, characterized by a cruciform nimbus and dressed in tunic and mantle. Holding a book in his left hand and blessing with his right arm raised, he is undoubtedly Christ. Facing him is the figure who receives the blessing: younger in appearance, beardless, with shorter hair, dressed in a brown garment that reveals his hose, and leaning on a staff topped by an element that is difficult to identify. The scene is set within a bucolic environment, in which the only spatial reference is the small tree that closes the composition on the left.

The scene is framed by a double circle, red on the inside and pearled on the outside. Beyond this, in the four triangular spaces formed to complete the square, there appears a pattern of blue squares with rosettes painted in black brushstrokes, divided by red bands with white crosslets at the intersections.

From a stylistic point of view, the panel displays features characteristic of the first phase of Gothic painting (the so-called linear Gothic of the first half of the thirteenth century). Particularly notable are the thick outlines that define each figure (undoubtedly conditioned by the lead comes of the stained glass) and the black lines applied with a brush that complete the details of the scene and give the style its name. The stylized elegance of the figures and their incipient naturalism—moving away from the frontal rigidity and hieratic character of the immediately preceding Romanesque period—together with expressive gestures such as Christ placing one foot outside the frame (thus breaking the third dimension), help to situate the work within the proposed period.

The predominant colors are blue and red (background, rosettes, mantle, nimbus, circular molding, and bands), followed to a lesser extent by brown (garments), green (tunic and ground), and yellow (tree and hose of the figure on the left). The flesh tones are rendered in a modulated white. With the exception of the monochrome blue background, the remaining glass fragments that make up the panel bear brush-applied details used to define facial features, folds of the drapery, leaves of the tree, and other decorative elements present in the diamond-patterned framework surrounding the scene.

The medallion undoubtedly belonged to a larger stained-glass window, as evidenced by the yellow rosettes positioned at the sides of the circle, which would have served as transitions to other similar medallions in which the iconographic narrative continued.

Overall, the state of preservation of the stained glass is good. It retains the integrity of most of its original pieces, which display a patina of calcareous concretions, are largely free of fractures, and include only a small number of well-integrated restorations.

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From the Spiritual Premise

Thirteenth-century Gothic art represents the pinnacle of an aesthetic and spiritual revolution that transformed medieval architecture. At the heart of this transformation lies stained glass, which ceased to be a mere enclosure and became the defining element of the new style. This metamorphosis was driven primarily by the theological and architectural vision of Abbot Suger (c. 1081–1151) at the royal abbey of Saint-Denis, near Paris. Suger—advisor to kings and regent of France—sought not only magnificence in the rebuilding of his abbey church, but also pursued a mystical ideal: the “metaphysics of light.” Inspired by the Neoplatonic philosophy of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Suger believed that the physical light flooding the sanctuary was a direct reflection of the uncreated Light of God.

To realize this vision, Suger and his master craftsmen developed pioneering architectural solutions, such as flying buttresses and ribbed vaults, which made it possible to replace massive Romanesque walls with immense windows. Saint-Denis thus became the prototype of Gothic architecture, a model that all the great French cathedrals—Chartres, Reims, and Amiens—would emulate and perfect. Moreover, Gothic stained glass functioned as “Sacred Scripture” in images for a largely illiterate population, filtering natural light to create an atmosphere of mystical ecstasy and divine revelation.

To Material Sophistication

From a technical standpoint, the principal material used in thirteenth-century Gothic stained glass was blown glass, whose basic composition included sand (silica), a flux (such as vegetal potash), and lime. The true secret, however, lay in the addition of metallic oxides to achieve the vibrant color palette that characterizes Gothic stained glass. These included ruby red (obtained from copper oxide), sapphire blue (produced with cobalt oxide, responsible for the iconic deep blue that dominates many cathedrals such as Chartres), green (achieved with copper or iron oxide), and yellow (derived from antimony oxide), all of which are present in the piece presented here.

The process of creation followed a series of meticulous steps. First, the master glazier began with a full-scale design drawn on a whitewashed board or parchment. This “cartoon” marked the cutting lines of the glass and the placement of the lead comes. Next, large sheets of blown glass were cut according to the cartoon, using a heated iron tool or, later, a rudimentary diamond. The colored glass was *pot metal glass*—that is, the color was present throughout the entire thickness of the material.

Fine details—faces, folds of garments, architectural elements—were not painted with enamels, but with *grisaille* (from the French *grisaille*, a technique clearly visible in the previously noted details of our piece). This consisted of a mixture of iron or copper oxide, ground glass powder, and a medium (such as wine or vinegar). Applied to the glass and fired in a kiln at a lower temperature, the *grisaille* fused permanently to the surface, creating opaque lines and shading that controlled the passage of light. Once all the fragments had been painted and fired, they were assembled following the lines of the cartoon using flexible lead comes. Lead not only joined the pieces together but also served as an integral design element, providing the bold black lines that define the composition. Finally, the individual panels were joined and anchored to the stone structure of the cathedral by means of horizontal iron bars (*vergettes*), which supported the weight of the ensemble.

In Thirteenth-Century France

Thirteenth-century Gothic stained glass was the result of the intervention of multiple artisans; consequently, the concept of individual authorship dissolves into the broader and more ambiguous notion of the workshop. The closest parallels for our stained glass are found in the work of glazing workshops active in the French region of Île-de-France around the second quarter of the thirteenth century. Here are the finest exponents of the style, in cathedrals such as Chartres, Soissons, and Le Mans, as well as in the slightly later Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. These stained-glass windows share a

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series of characteristics with the piece presented here: a preference for large narrative panels in which numerous scenes belonging to a single story are multiplied; the framing and formats they present, frequently circular and doubly framed by a smooth molding and an outer pearly one; the presence of shared stylistic traits (stylized figures with strong contours and interior brushwork, neutral backgrounds, and few spatial references—trees or architecture); the use of the same palette of primary colors, with blue and red predominant, followed by yellow and green; the arrangement of filler patterns between each medallion (forming geometric fields of blue and red lozenges); and a taste for sophisticated details, such as the custom of extending the feet or hands of one of the figures beyond the frame.

The ensemble closest to our stained glass is that of the Cathedral of Saint Mary of Chartres. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Chartres Cathedral houses the most complete and best-preserved corpus of medieval stained glass in the world, with approximately 2,500 m² of glazed surface. Most of the Chartres glazing was produced within a relatively short period following the devastating fire of 1194, from which only the three windows of the west façade (the Royal Portal), dated approximately 1145–1155, survived. Nevertheless, the vast majority of its 167 windows were executed between 1205 and 1225. This rapid production resulted in remarkable stylistic unity.

The most celebrated feature is the predominant use of an intense, deep cobalt blue known as “Chartres blue,” followed by red as the principal color, with green and yellow used more sparingly. Narrative windows, composed of numerous small panels (often grouped into geometric shapes such as squares, circles, or quadrilobes), recount biblical stories as well as the lives of saints and prophets. The reading of these narratives generally progresses from bottom to top and from left to right.

Within the vast Chartres corpus, several panels stand out for their extraordinary similarity to our piece. In addition to the general characteristics noted above, one finds the shared use of red and pearly frames and of geometric filler patterns in the spaces between scenes (window no. 36, dedicated to scenes from the life of Saint Apollinaris, fig. 1; no. 18, the life of Saint Thomas Becket, fig. 2; no. 12, the story of Saint Rémy, fig. 3); the presence of the same type of trees (window no. 44, from the Adam and Eve cycle, medallion with the Creation of Adam, figs. 4a and 4b); the detail of extending a limb beyond the frame, breaking the third dimension (the aforementioned no. 12, fig. 3; also perceptible in no. 12, fig. 6); or the convergence of all these features (the window dedicated to Saints Jude and Simon, which also employs a circular scene format, fig. 5).

Another important building with which our stained glass bears a very close relationship is the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. Built by order of Louis IX to house the relics of the Passion, the Sainte-Chapelle was constructed and glazed in record time, between 1242 and 1248. Most of the original ensemble—comprising fifteen windows measuring fifteen meters in height with 1,113 scenes—remains in situ. Barely two decades later than Chartres, it represents the quintessence of Rayonnant Gothic. The architecture is almost entirely subordinated to the glass, creating walls of light. Iconographically, it is distinguished by its exhaustive narrative program recounting the history of the biblical world, from Genesis to the arrival of the relics in Paris. A palette of intense colors dominates here, akin to “Chartres blue,” but with a more pronounced balance between reds and blues, and with the use of small medallions set within stone tracery (fig. 7, in an arrangement similar to that of the panel to which our stained glass once belonged). The panels themselves are narrower and taller than those of Classic Gothic, accentuating verticality and a sense of transparency, making the structure appear weightless.

Of particular relevance to our stained glass are panel no. 11, from the cycles of Judith and Holofernes and the History of Job (scenes set within circles with red borders, with geometric filler patterns between them, fig. 7), and panel no. 1, depicting Saint John toppling the Temple of Diana through his prayers (in this case almond-shaped in format, but with a geometric pattern of squares and rosettes identical to ours, fig. 8; very similar to that found in a lozenge-shaped scene dedicated to the Second Plague of Egypt, fig. 9).

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Figure 1. Chartres, Cathedral of Our Lady, window no. 36, scenes from the life of Saint Apollinaris.



Figure 2. Chartres, Cathedral of Our Lady, window no. 18, life of Saint Thomas Becket



Figure 3. Chartres, Cathedral of Our Lady, window no. 12, history of Saint Rémy

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Figure 4a-b. Chartres, Cathedral of Our Lady, window no. 44, Adam and Eve cycle; detail of the Creation of Adam



Figure 5. Chartres, Cathedral of Our Lady, window depicting the life of Saints Jude and Simon

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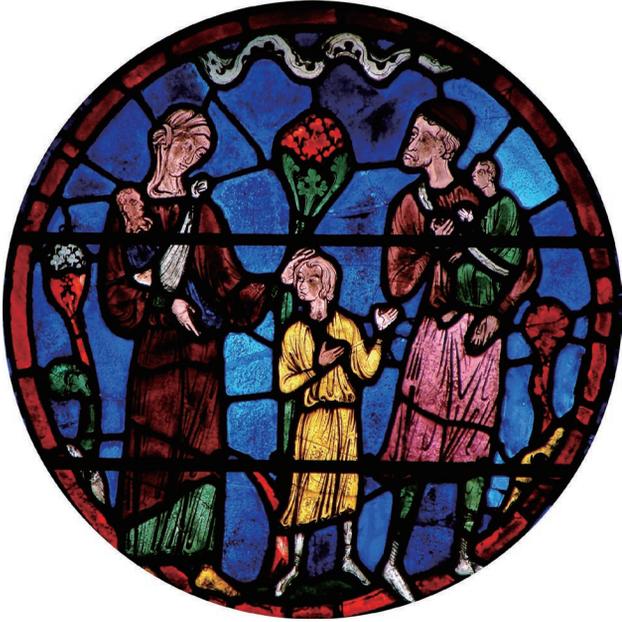


Figure 6. Chartres, Cathedral of Our Lady, window no. 21.



Figure 8. Paris, Sainte-Chapelle, window no. 1, Saint John toppling the Temple of Diana through his prayers.



Figure 7. Paris, Sainte-Chapelle, window no. 11, cycle of Judith and Holofernes and the History of Job.

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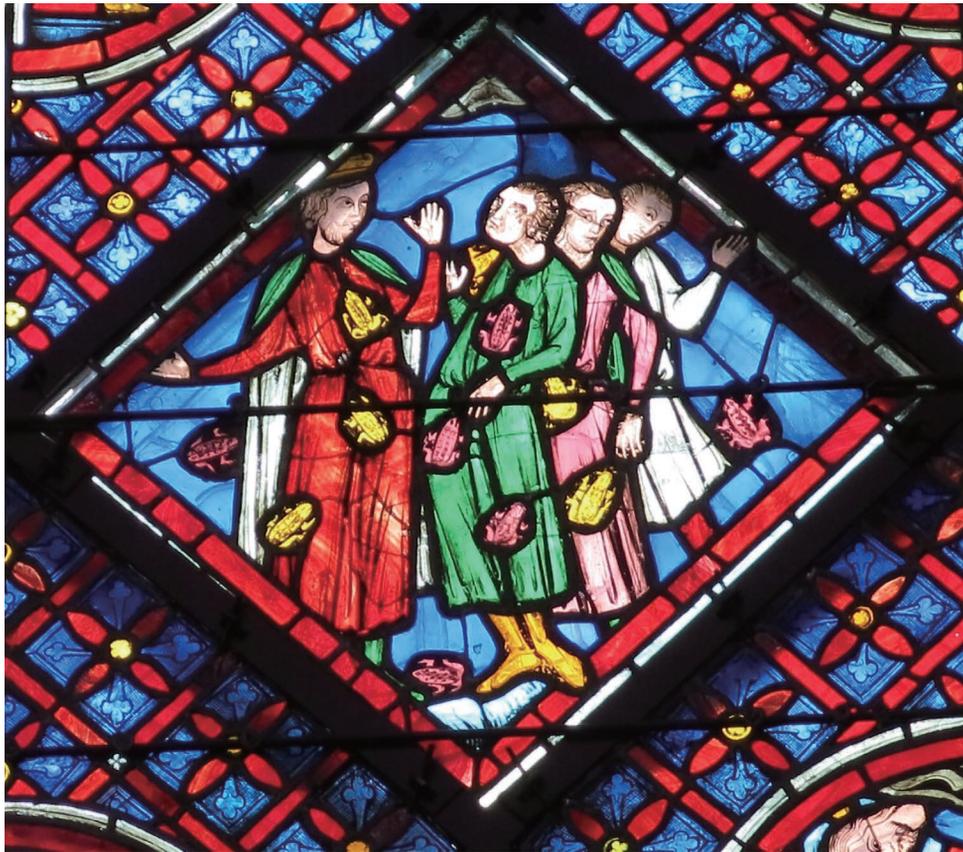


Figure 9. Paris, Sainte-Chapelle, scene of the Second Plague of Egypt

Especially close parallels are also found in stained glass from the Cathedral of Saint-Gervais-et-Saint-Protais in Soissons, today dispersed among various museums. Construction of the choir at Soissons began at the end of the twelfth century (c. 1180), with the transept and nave extending through the thirteenth century. The figures are elongated, and the narrative—while present in lower medallions—gives way to large figurative compositions at upper levels. It is precisely to this lower register that two panels belong: one now in Washington, D.C., Corcoran Gallery of Art (no. 26793), and another in Paris, the Louvre Museum (no. OAR504), depicting Saint Blaise disputing with the Roman governor (figs. 10a, 10b, 10c, and 11). In the former case, one finds the familiar *clipei* finished with red and pearled circles, as well as the exterior lozenge-and-rosette pattern in red, blue, and white—an element that also links the latter panel to our stained glass, where the decorative pattern is virtually identical.

A similar style to the cases already mentioned is found in the stained glass of Rouen Cathedral (Normandy), some of whose windows are especially close in their use of geometric patterns of lozenges and rosettes (window no. 23, dedicated to Saint Julian the Hospitaller, fig. 12). After a fire in 1200, the cathedral was rebuilt



Figure 10a. Soissons, Cathedral of Saints Gervasius and Protasius, fragment of a historiated stained-glass window; Washington, D.C., Corcoran Gallery of Art, no. 26793, with details.

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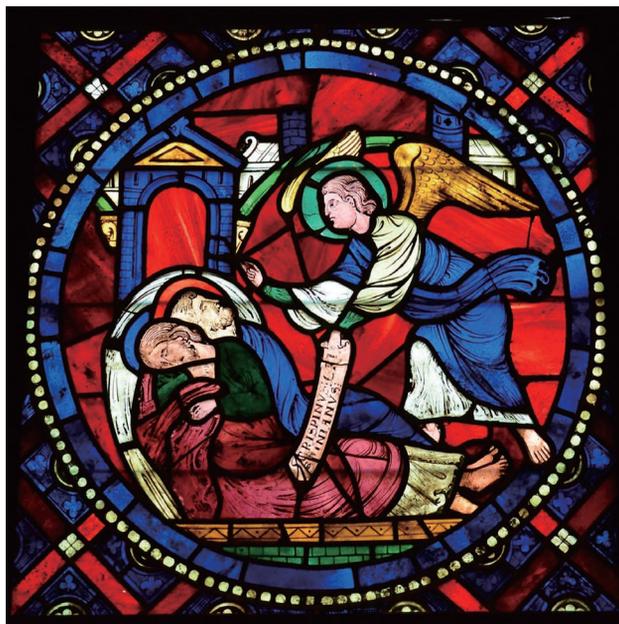


Figure 10b–c. Soissons, Cathedral of Saints Gervasius and Protasius, fragment of a historiated stained-glass window; Washington, D.C., Corcoran Gallery of Art, no. 26793, with details.



Figure 11. Soissons, Cathedral of Saints Gervasius and Protasius, Saint Blaise disputing with the Roman governor; Paris, Musée du Louvre, no. OAR504.

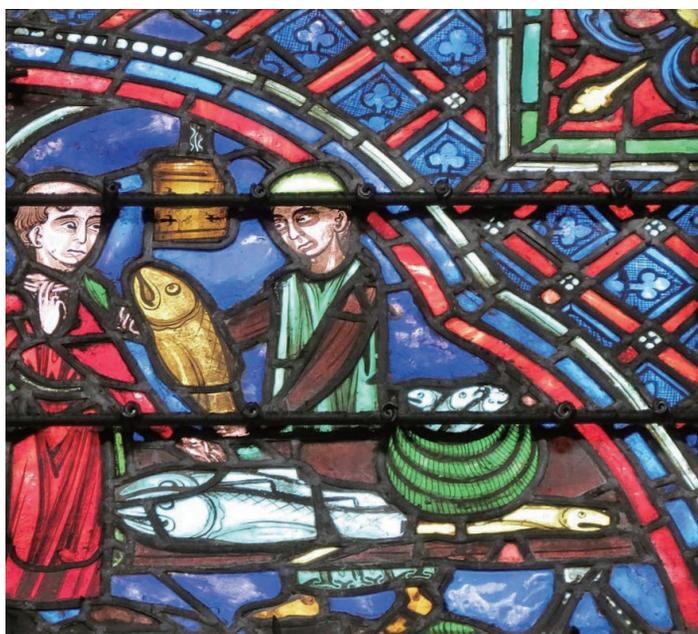


Figure 12. Rouen, Cathedral of Our Lady, window no. 23, story of Saint Julian the Hospitaller.

during the thirteenth century in the Norman Gothic style. Many of its windows date to the first half and mid-century, maintaining a preference for the deep colors of Classic Gothic. Iconographically, the windows often depict scenes from the lives of local saints and craft guilds, reflecting the city's economic life.

Beyond the examples cited, our stained glass also finds interesting—though somewhat more distant—parallels in the Cathedral of Saint Julian of Le Mans. Thirteenth-century stained glass at Le Mans aligns with the already characterized linear Gothic tradition, employing narrative medallions and

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rich chromaticism. However, a transition is observable toward greater modeling and detail in the figures, with a palette that begins to incorporate pale greens and yellows alongside the ever-present blue and red. At Le Mans, in the upper zone of the ambulatory, two complete windows may be cited (no. 19, with scenes from the life of Christ and the martyrs, fig. 13; and no. 111, with scenes of Saints Peter and Denis, fig. 14), composed—like the piece presented here—of circular medallions surrounded by red and pearly moldings, which are frequently traversed by the figures, thereby breaking the third dimension.



Figure 13. Le Mans, Cathedral of Saint Julian, window no. 109 (upper ambulatory), scenes from the life of Christ and the martyrs.

A Survivor of the Passage of Time

Few objects endure the passage of time with greater difficulty than those made of glass. The most destructive episode for the French stained-glass heritage was undoubtedly the French Revolution (1789), when anticlerical fervor and iconoclasm led to the massive destruction of religious art. Stained glass, regarded as a symbol of the Ancien Régime and of the opulence of the Church and the monarchy, became the target of systematic attacks. Many windows were smashed with stones, torn down, or replaced with plain white glass to allow greater illumination of churches converted into “Temples of Reason” or warehouses.

Later, the world wars of the twentieth century also caused severe damage, although in some cases foresight made it possible to save certain windows by dismantling and storing them. In earlier periods as well, the need for materials—especially the valuable lead from the comes—led to the reuse and melting down of entire windows.

It is within this context of destruction and recovery that an individual fragment acquires incalculable value. The existence of an original thirteenth-century piece in private hands is not merely the result of chance, but the testimony of a precarious survival. Each fragment is a historical relic that escaped revolutionary destruction and the ravages of time, offering a direct and tangible connection to the mastery and spiritual vision of the Middle Ages.

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Figure 14. Le Mans, Cathedral of Saint Julian, window no. 111 (upper ambulatory), scenes from the lives of Saints Peter and Denis and other martyrs.

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Photographs documenting the stained-glass was installed in the private home of the Alberto Cruz Eyzaguirre, Santiago.



Photographs documenting the stained-glass was installed in the private home of the Carlos Alberto Cruz Claro, Santiago.

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