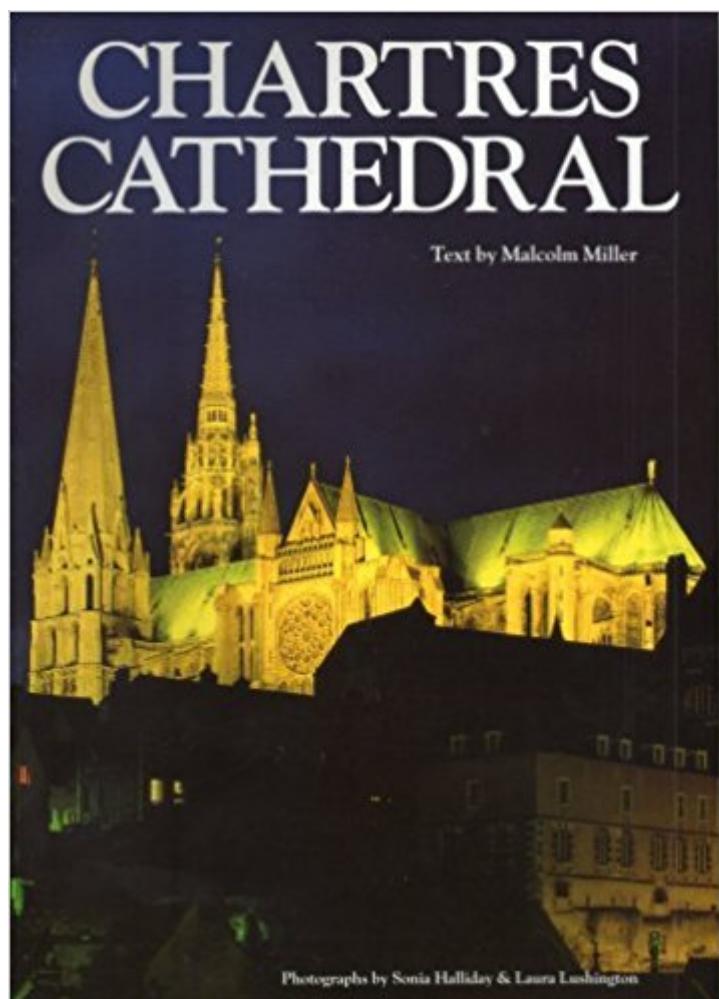


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# Chartres Cathedral



## **Synopsis**

The author is the world's foremost authority on Chartres, and is in residence there most of the year. He shows us the history of the cathedral and teaches us how to "read" the world-famous stained glass and sculpture, explaining the references to Scripture and the teachings of the Church. Chartres alone, of all the great medieval churches, has survived into the 20th century almost intact, not only architecturally but with its vast iconographic program in 12th-and 13th-century stained glass and sculpture. Medieval art was intended not just to embellish the church but to instruct the people, for there was no printing. Scholars could therefore teach their students, the clergy preach sermons and parents read the lives of the saints to their children using the 'texts' in stained glass and sculpture. The sister churches of Chartres have been sadly vandalized to varying degrees by Reform, revolution, war or natural disaster. Here in Chartres the 'text' is virtually complete. A concise glossary of symbolic images has been included as well as a complete plan of all the windows in the cathedral, and an index.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

This is a superbly executed book on the famous Chartres cathedral, a gothic masterpiece which sits some 50 miles to the south west of Paris. Chartres' reputation (and its geographic proximity to Paris) assure its place as a frequent "day trip" for visitors and tourists to Paris who wish to see one of the apogees of gothic development. If you have the opportunity to visit Chartres, you most certainly will find Miller's text right in Chartres' own bookstore, as the book is truly a work worthy to

be sold "on site." That fact alone speaks to the quality of this volume. Miller's text provides a short introduction to the gothic movement, as well as the background of Chartres cathedral itself. But the focus of this book is the stained glass found in the cathedral, with a window-by-window detail of the glass, its date, and the allusions each window makes to the outside world. As such, this makes the book a valuable reference work, because one can follow the story from window to window in a way that would be difficult on-site without many days of time to do so (and using binoculars to help out!). The choice of focusing on the stained glass, rather than other features present in gothic cathedrals is justified: Chartres has some of the oldest and most-intact original stained glass of any cathedral in France, and is perhaps the single item among many others for which the structure is famous. Chartres is what is called a "dark cathedral," meaning that the available light inside the edifice is relatively low, making the interior a difficult place to see the architectural elements. But in such a setting, the stained glass takes on a "glowing" characteristic that is visually dramatic. To have a book so carefully lay out the windows for review is quite an achievement.

When driving out from Paris, on Autoroute 11, through the wheat fields of La Beauce, with occasional glimpses of the TGV (the French high speed-train) passing you at twice your speed, suddenly it appears, first the brown sign indicating its imminent arrival, and then the reality itself: the asymmetric towers of the cathedral at Chartres. It dominates the landscape today; imagine what it must have been like in the Middle Ages when it was built? I've rented a gite on several occasions in nearby La Bazoche-Gouet, some 40 minutes away, which has afforded me the opportunity to visit this cathedral on several occasions also. Malcolm Miller has adopted the cathedral as his passion, and he routinely conducts tours if it there in English. His passion makes the cathedral visiting experience qualitatively different than any other in France (at least for the native English speaker). We took the tour with him, and he autographed my copy on July 03, 1996. I'd hardly recommend the tour AND the book, in order to gain a basic appreciation for this astounding human creation, for better or worse, when the peasants were sleeping with their animals for warmth. Much of the book is pictures of the cathedral, but there is also a solid narrative account written by Miller. Throughout most of human history, fire has been the most effective tool for "urban renewal." This was true in the case of Chartres, when a fire in 1194 destroyed most of the town, including the previous cathedral, Fulbert's. Soon thereafter, work on the present structure commenced, and it took almost seven decades, until 1260, for the cathedral to be consecrated. The asymmetrical towers are the result of two architects competing views over time of how they should look.

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