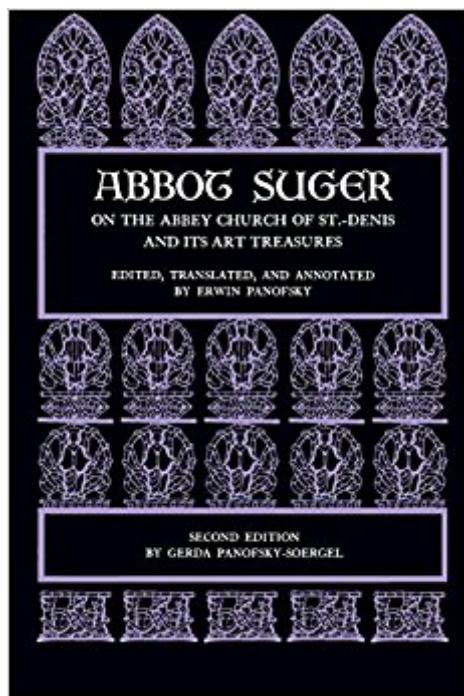


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# Abbot Suger On The Abbey Church Of St. Denis And Its Art Treasures



## Synopsis

This revised edition incorporates the additions and corrections recorded by Erwin Panofsky until the time of his death in 1968. Gerda Panofsky-Soergel has updated the commentary in the light of new material, and the bibliography that she has prepared reflects the scholarship on St.-Denis in the last three decades. She has obtained some additional and more recent photographs, and the illustrations include a new ground plan and a new section of the chevet of the Abbey Church, both drawn under the supervision of Sumner McKnight Crosby.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Dr. Panofsky is to be congratulated on producing, for the first time in any modern language, the whole of Suger's writing on St.-Denis, an unparalleled historical, archaeological, and ecclesiological text, and one of the world's literary treasures, a central pillar of the twelfth-century renaissance. . . . This is a work of first-class importance, and destined to remain the standard edition for a long time to come."--The Burlington Magazine

Text: English, Latin (translation) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Panofsky's translation of Abbot Suger's account of his administration of the Abbey of St. Denis in Paris is a classic, and gives you a good introduction to a side of the medieval world view you may not be familiar with. As Panofsky points out in his introduction, Suger likely wrote his account of the treasures he collected for St. Denis as a ripost to criticisms of excessive worldliness by his

contemporary, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who voiced what one might think was a more typical medieval Christian rejection of such adoration of material beauty. And yet Suger is very much a medieval man, his view that the beauty of the materials used in the abbey mirror the beauty of heaven largely agreeing with the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius. Suger's account along with his other writings portray a man who completely identified himself with the Church, his abbey, and the kingdom of France, and was more than a bit proud of all three. (My favorite part of the text is when he confesses his joy that certain travellers have told him that his abbey contained greater material beauty than the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople--quite a compliment in the twelfth century!)

A document for those who need to search for the origins of gothic art. Not a book for all.

Great book - in English and Latin side by side.

Note that half the book is in Latin.

Good.

more history

If you are interested in Gothic architecture and have been fortunate enough to be able to visit the northern outskirts of Paris where the grand St Denis basilica resides, you'll understand why this building has held such interest for both those who study the gothic architectural form and also those who simply admire the beauty and power of the style. St Denis looks a little old and, perhaps, decrepit, from a cursory front (western facade) view, but once one steps through the portal with the Seven Liberal Arts above and proceeds into the nave, the amazing beauty and emotionally powerful impact of the building becomes apparent. Go further eastward into the building to the choir and ambulatory, and you find yourself in a glass kaleidoscope of color and light which is matched perhaps nowhere except on the second floor of the Ste Chapelle in Paris. It's an experience not easily described in words, but one that countless of visitors and architectural historians have attempted with varying success. This 12th century Gothic masterpiece is simply one of the most stunning of a collection that already contains a star-studded list of entries (including Reims Cathedral, Amiens Cathedral, Notre Dame Cathedral, Ste Chapelle in Paris, and many others). If you are visiting in Paris, note, too, that reaching St. Denis is easy: you simply hop on the Metro line

13 and take north all the way to its second-to-last stop (station Basilique St Denis), walk two blocks, and you're there. But there's something that the casual visitor might not be able to know, and that is that the St. Denis basilica is actually one of the starting points of what was later to become known as "Gothic" architecture. In the 12th century, the abbot there, Suger, wanted to rebuild part of the existing structure and bathe it in intense colored light, making the inside like a massive reliquary, and having the sun's movement keeping the inside in a constant state of illuminated change. Suger had a number of requirements for such a reconstruction effort. The stained glass windows had to be large, had to be separated by as little space as possible, the ceilings had to be high, and a general sense of openness had to be present. This was all aimed at the east-most end of the building (the choir, apse, and ambulatory) but the requirements were enough that a new style had to almost be organically developed to support it. The end result was in what we now call the "Gothic" style, which distinguishes itself via three architectural forms: ribbed vaulting, flying buttresses, and pointed arches. All of these mechanisms had been previously and/or simultaneously used in other places (Sens Cathedral, for example, was being constructed at roughly the same time, and the Notre Dame of Paris was perhaps the first to employ flying buttresses), but used as a unifying concept and pulled together for effect, Suger's St Denis is sometimes heralded (not without controversy or detractors) as a "birth place" and archetypical form that was later copied all over France, and eventually, Europe. Which explains this book. Suger's kept meticulous writings on this 12th century project, and because of its importance as both an architectural and artistic expression, his writings play a key role in the history of both. Panofsky, an American scholar who helped re-introduce medieval studies to American academia, took time in the early 1900's to meticulously translate these works, and his translations are considered some of the most important in the entire field of art history. Panofsky, like many academics, promoted a number of views which have not always been sustained over years of subsequent scholarly work, but have without question pushed the subject forward in a way that forever changed how academia would look at these things. This book contains the most updated and corrected version of his landmark translation work, updated in the 1960's with more recent scholarship finds and a variety of technical edits, and is therefore of great importance to anyone studying in the field. There are no color photos, few black and white photos (and are not to today's standards) and even less sketch drawings, but that is not the purpose of this book. If, however, you want to read what Suger himself said about the building of the choir of St Denis, this is the place to find it. Five stars. Make sure you go to visit the structure (Paris, Metro line 13, station "Basilique de St-Denis", second to the last station on the north end of the line) if you have any chance at all to do so. And, if you wish to see a great drama that has a dramatic point of inclusion of

Suger and St Denis' construction, get The Pillars of the Earth [Blu-ray] if you have a Blu-Ray player. It's made up drama, but if you want to get a feel for a medieval cathedral building project, as well as St. Denis' role in it, it's a great drama. For a more direct (and also recent) documentary on the subject by PBS, I highly recommend Nova: Building the Great Cathedrals. Compare with ...Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism Medieval Architecture, Medieval Learning: Builders and Masters in the Age of Romanesque and Gothic Artistic Change at St-Denis: Abbot Suger's Program and the Early Twelfth-Century Controversy over Art (Princeton Essays on the Arts)

"This was precisely...what St. Bernard had thundered against...No figure painting or sculpture..., gems, pearls, gold and silk were forbidden...Suger, however, was frankly in love with splendor and beauty in every conceivable form." [On the Abbey Church of St. Denis] One of the few early accounts on the gothic cathedral building. Introduction itself is worth the money. Mr. Panofsky is explaining political, social and personal influences that together with Suger's psychological traits led to the construction of what is supposed to be the first Gothic cathedral - St. Denis. The keyword here is "influences" - do not expect to learn the construction process or anything of that kind. Account itself does not contain many construction details, but deserves your attention indeed. Kind regards, Mario.

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