# INTRODUCTION

The Sainte-Chapelle stands today among a multitude of historic monuments in Paris. In view of all the city has to offer, this relatively small Gothic chapel is easily overlooked; moreover, it stands behind a series of towering eighteenth- and nineteenth-century structures built especially to hide it.[1] Only from a few points in the bustling contemporary city – along the Quai du Louvre, the top of the Boulevard Saint Michel, or along the Rue Monge, for example – can a viewer identify the Sainte-Chapelle's soaring spire and scintillating pinnacles in the distance. Those distinctive forms call attention to and almost insist on the building's former grandeur. For in the thirteenth-century, when it was built, the Sainte-Chapelle dominated the medieval city; forty-two and a half meters from ground to gable, its towering silhouette pierced the urban skyline, making it one of a very few buildings that were visible far beyond the great medieval walls (Plate I).[2]

Within the Palais de Justice, where the Sainte-Chapelle stands, the building still makes a powerful statement. Although compact in its lateral dimensions, its elaborate double porch, great buttresses, and height generate a monumental presence (Plates II and III). Moreover, the interior, a multimedia extravaganza of translucent stained-glass walls, polychrome sculpture, and gilding, creates one of the most memorable experiences of Gothic color and light (Plates IV and V). In its overwhelming resplendence, the contemporary experience of the upper chapel still approaches that described in the fourteenth century by the enraptured Jean de Jandun, who felt as if he ascended "directly into one of the chambers of Paradise."[3]

Louis IX ("Saint Louis," r. 1226–70) built the Sainte-Chapelle within the royal palace of Paris, the Palais de la Cité (Figure I.1), starting in 1239 as a reliquary chapel especially for the crown of thorns, the holy cross, and other relics. Though extant for more than seven hundred fifty years, knowledge of this magnificent building is nevertheless obscured by the patina of its long and tumultuous history.[4] As a classified *monument historique*, the Sainte-

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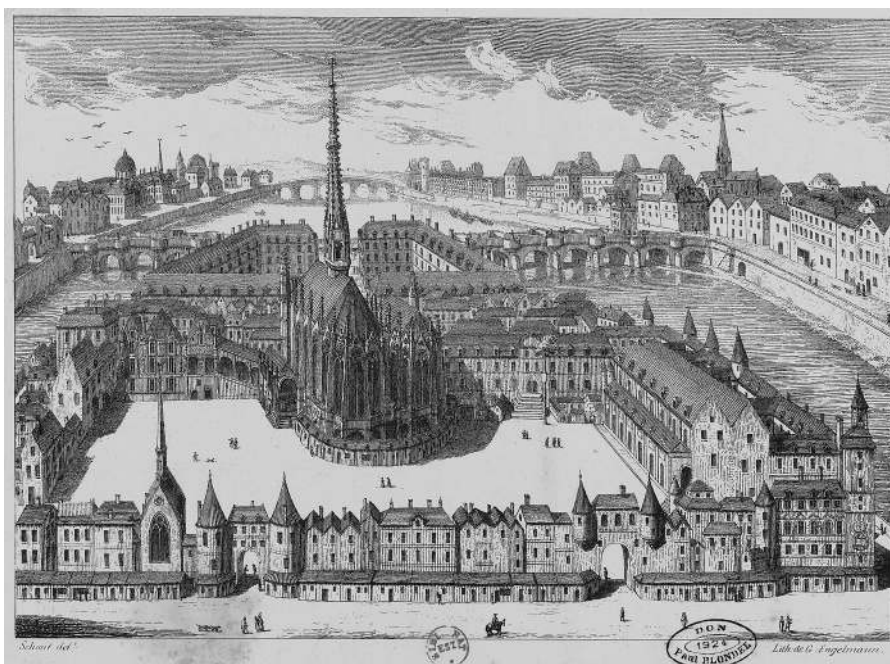
I.1. Palais de la Cité in the 16th century. Engraving by Huyot. © BnF Est. (Va 225 / A20459).

Chapelle exemplifies a Noranian "realm of memory," a reified locus of French cultural and national identity.[5] During the nineteenth century, the chapel sustained a comprehensive ideological restoration under the direction of Félix Duban and Jean-Baptiste Lassus.[6] Their interventions substantially changed the Sainte-Chapelle's structure and decoration. Beyond simply repairing damage effected during the Revolution and from later neglect, the restorers "improved" the building by removing the post-fifteenth-century additions and by creating new parts to make it a rational exemplar of Gothic architecture, mythologized in that period as the origin of French national culture.[7] The new construction rendered the Sainte-Chapelle a retrospective fantasy poised to consolidate the nation in an ideal past. At the same time, in terms of the building's function, it constituted only a subtle transformation, for even in the *Ancien Régime*, the chapel operated as a powerful political symbol.

While the Sainte-Chapelle has served as the subject of numerous studies, our knowledge of its architectural and cultural significance during the thirteenth century remains unclear.[8] A more definitive understanding of the building during this period proves essential for the identification of the many formal, functional, and ideological changes it withstood throughout history. Yet over the past one hundred years, studies of the thirteenth-century chapel have focused almost exclusively on the issues of style and iconography. These subjects were paired in two foundational texts published in the mid-

twentieth century that have shaped the discourse on this monument.[9] Louis Grodecki's *Sainte-Chapelle* (1963) stands as the primary reference for a clear and concise orientation to the chapel's architecture and decorative program.[10] Robert Branner's *Saint Louis and the Court Style in Gothic Architecture* (1965) gave rise to a great debate in the larger field of medieval art history.[11] In short, Branner proposed that in thirteenth-century Paris, royal patronage generated what he termed a "court style," whose prestige explains its popularity in later medieval European architecture. The Sainte-Chapelle was central to this conception. However, in its delineation of the stylistic evolution of architecture, the book fell short of proving what was essentially an iconographical argument.[12] If Branner's *Court Style* was well received, and indeed highly successful, in its day – it inspired museum exhibitions, doctoral dissertations, and books as well as university courses, and extended into other media such as manuscripts – over the past few decades, researchers have substantially revised most of its assertions.[13] Scholars now routinely identify other Parisian buildings of the period, such as Notre-Dame, Saint-Denis, and the lost Lady Chapel of Saint-Germain des Prés, as more avant-garde, finer in quality, and of greater architectural consequence, thus diminishing the Sainte-Chapelle's importance.[14] Because the royal chapel is not deemed to have developed any of the period's most progressive forms, it is generally characterized as a building that perpetuated the style of the day without contributing anything particularly new. Such is the consensus that even Jacques Le Goff summarized the chapel's historiography in the following terms: "whatever boldness and beauty the Sainte-Chapelle may offer, [scholars] have also stressed the fact that it did not present any real innovations. It simply brought the architecture of traditional Gothic apsidal chapels … to completion."[15] Yet, even if those more critical, post-Branner studies developed a range of new methods and offered insights on a larger spectrum of medieval architecture, scholars have been reluctant to examine the Sainte-Chapelle through the same revisionist terms, and even to pursue further research on thirteenth-century Paris.[16] It is worth noting that this phase in the historiography of Gothic architecture coincides with the "theoretical turn" in the humanities, which, among other shifts in art history, corresponded to a reevaluation of the canon, resulting in a concomitant emphasis of the margins over the center.

Moving beyond style, scholars have also examined the iconography of the Sainte-Chapelle's decorative program, with an emphasis on its internal decoration, particularly its stained glass. Early interpretations generally assumed that, given Louis' canonization, the chapel was a material expression of the king's remarkable piety and fervent devotion.[17] While some scholars have identified royal themes in the ensemble, only the more recent publications have gone as far as to qualify the Sainte-Chapelle as a "dual religious and political" monument.[18] These studies elicit a complex array of political themes that position the chapel as a Capetian political program, a *translatio imperii*, a

manifesto for the Crusade of 1248, and a celebration of kingship.[19] Yet the place of the chapel's themes within the broader culture and history that produced them remains unexamined. While scholars have long recognized that the Capetians, particularly during the reign of Louis IX, made prolific use of biblical typology and promoted sacral kingship, they have directed less thorough attention toward the French monarchy's visual expression of these ideas.[20] Indeed, despite the interest in the subject, surprisingly few studies exist of the history of royal representation per se, particularly in medieval architecture.[21]

This book examines the Sainte-Chapelle in relation to royal architecture and the establishment of the French monarchy in Paris. With a contextual approach, it offers new perspectives on a range of important subjects in the fields of history and art history. In the first place, this study illuminates how Louis' chapel permanently transformed habitual modes of Capetian royal representation. Prior to this pivotal monument, French royal architecture largely projected an image of the king as *defensor pacis*. The Sainte-Chapelle's sophisticated employment of meaningful local and international forms crafted a new, at once more subtle and more powerful royal image. With its unrestrained integration of ecclesiastical and royal architectural forms, Louis' monument publicly broadcast the notion of sacral kingship, an idea reinforced by a liturgical program expressly designed to naturalize this exalted status. This was tantamount to an assertion of royal suzerainty, if not outright royal sovereignty. Promulgating these themes from the Palais de la Cité, the Sainte-Chapelle constituted a major turning point in the French monarchy's relentless march toward royal absolutism over the next centuries.

This study also sheds new light on the life and reign of Louis IX, who is still often perceived in retrospect through the gilded lens of his canonization.[22] It proposes that the Sainte-Chapelle constituted an astute response to myriad political problems in the period during which it was constructed, revealing Louis as a shrewd politician who tackled trouble creatively and forcefully. At the same time, the five chapters here illuminate that this king actively constructed his sanctity, with his efforts toward that holy endeavor not only changing, but also becoming increasingly earnest over the *longue durée*.

Finally, this book illustrates the role royal architecture played in the establishment of Paris as the political and cultural capital of France, traits still associated with the city today.[23] During the thirteenth century, the style of Gothic architecture made in Paris was called *opere francigeno* ("French work").[24] The term refers to an architectural period style that during the Middle Ages became associated with the French kingdom through its sheer ubiquity there, particularly in Paris, where many of its most visible and innovative exemplars were built. This process began in the twelfth century with the first experiments in Gothic architecture.[25] Over the next few generations, the architecture of Philip Augustus (1180–1223) and Louis IX significantly transformed

the city.[26] This study credits Philip Augustus's well-known urban projects as engendering a major building boom from which issued this distinctive and important architectural style. I argue that Louis IX's architectural patronage, including not only the Sainte-Chapelle but also his other buildings in Paris, built on this momentum. While those royal structures did not constitute the only great buildings there, the ubiquitous royal patronage imparted a royal *imprimatur* on the city. This book delineates how royal architectural projects acted on and encoded the urban space, redefining Parisian architecture as "French" and definitively establishing Paris as the royal and artistic capital of the kingdom. It was to become an even more complex cultural symbol when this phase of Gothic was later remade to represent the post-Revolutionary reconstruction of *la République française*.

APPROACH AND ORIENTATION

These observations on the meaning and greater significance of the Sainte-Chapelle issue from an approach that situates this monument within its architectural, royal, and urban contexts. The chapel did not exist in isolation in the Palais de la Cité; rather, it was integrated into a network of discourses that both conditioned and contributed to its design and meaning.[27] These interconnected discourses have in turn shaped my approach to this monument.

In the first place, the Sainte-Chapelle was built in the predominant ecclesiastical style of the day, a phase of Gothic, which for clarity in this book is referred to neither as *opere francigeno* nor as the "court style," but rather by its most common contemporary name, Rayonnant.[28] Characterizing this phase are relatively small buildings or parts of buildings that have thin, cage-like supports, large stained-glass windows with complex tracery, delicate stone screens for articulation, and abundant decorative crockets, trefoils, quatrefoils, and rosettes. Germinating in Paris from as early as 1225, this style flourished in French architecture until about 1300.[29] The Sainte-Chapelle shared a number of these forms with other buildings of the period and place. Analysis of the chapel's style illuminates its unique role in this milieu as well as its contributions to Gothic architecture more broadly.

At the same time, the Sainte-Chapelle's form and function as a palatine reliquary chapel aligned it with others of the same type throughout Christendom.[30] With its cache of Christological relics, the royal chapel of Paris evoked distant structures that recalled Christ's sacrifice, beginning with the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. It succeeded the famous but now lost Sacra Capella of the Great Palace or Boukoleon in Constantinople, which held the crown of thorns until Louis acquired the relic.[31] With this most holy, symbolic relic, and the others Louis collected, the Sainte-Chapelle redefined the sacred center of the Christian Empire as Paris.[32] This dialogue with the great

historic capitals of Christendom propelled the Sainte-Chapelle beyond the local into the international sphere, where it could be compared to other great palatine chapels. While its stature drew in part from such analogies, its local resonances with bishops' chapels and within the Palais de la Cité of Paris were equally significant, allowing the chapel to communicate on different levels to a diverse audience. Examination of the Sainte-Chapelle's typological frameworks reveals that its architecture manifested a complex and nuanced program of meaning.

The location of this monument also conditioned its design and meaning. Situated in the heart of the Palais de la Cité of Paris, the Sainte-Chapelle complemented a series of royal chapels already there and in other palaces of the kingdom.[33] Research on palatine chapels in France distinguishes the innovations and significance of the Sainte-Chapelle's design choices.[34]

Moreover, Louis' palatine chapel was deeply integrated into the city of Paris. In addition to its visual prominence, its liturgy brought the building into communication with the urban population and the built environment. Processions extended the chapel beyond the Palais de la Cité into the densest quarters and far beyond the city walls, while indulgences encouraged visitors to worship within the palace *enceinte*. Analysis of the chapel's use and role in the city generates new insights concerning its contribution to the establishment of Paris as both an artistic center and as the royal capital of France.

Finally, the Sainte-Chapelle participated in a discourse on power that was expressed in the physical environment. The representation of power in monumental architecture has its origins in the earliest of cultures, and the Sainte-Chapelle was no exception. In this study, the royal chapel exists as an inherent part of the dynamic power relations within the city of Paris and of the monarchy's development into an authoritative nation-state. It made visual assertions that responded to political problems and offered bold, new solutions for them. Built to the monarchy's needs and specifications, the Sainte-Chapelle merged political ideologies with religious practice in its architecture, decoration, and liturgy.[35] Indeed, the chapel fulfilled a role tailored more to the royal institution than to the person of Louis IX.

While each of these perspectives constitutes a distinct discursive formation, they were integrated in the Sainte-Chapelle. This analysis sees these discourses as constituting those "webs of significance" that create meaning in cultural symbols. My project therefore works toward a "thick description" as defined by Clifford Geertz, with the royal chapel situated as a component of a larger conglomerate of social circumstances, relationships, and practices.[36] Given that the description of "context" proves an ultimately infinite task without a conceivable end, I have chosen to focus on the architectural, sociocultural, and historical factors that shaped the chapel's thirteenth-century production and significance.[37]

By describing "context" in terms of discursive networks and power relations, I am also drawing on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. Two of his concepts have explicitly shaped my approach to and analysis of this monument: "habitus" and "symbolic power." While the concept of the habitus derives from Aristotle, through whom it became a subject for medieval scholastics, Bourdieu defines it as the "practices and dispositions that give rise to an individual or group's attitudes, activities, and decisions."[38] For the purposes of this study, the Sainte-Chapelle's habitus is defined as the royal, political, and architectural histories that contributed to the choices the patron and builders made in the development of the monument. Delineation of this setting (in Chapters 1 through 3) highlights the chapel's unique qualities and provides the material with which to define their significance. The Sainte-Chapelle existed in a relational position by building on knowledge from the past and responding to the present. With this monument, the monarchy of Louis IX drew on the habitual practices of Philip Augustus to assert royal power through visual means, but also modified those practices to serve more effectively the particular circumstances it confronted.

Bourdieu's notion of "symbolic power" also aptly describes how royal architecture, and the Sainte-Chapelle in particular, operated on a sociopolitical level during the Middle Ages.[39] The royal chapel was a highly codified, symbolic monument. Its assertion of sacral kingship was made through visual means when such a concept would have had little positive impact in words, and it was subtly aggressive.[40] Both indirectly through references built into the monument and explicitly with its stained-glass program and liturgy, the chapel naturalized this extension of royal power such that it was not rejected but rather embraced at a time when such status had not been formally confirmed.

BEYOND THE BUILDING: RECEPTION, SPACE, AND HISTORY

While one goal of this project has been to identify, to the extent possible, the ideas inherent to and even built into the Sainte-Chapelle, another primary aim of this work has been to identify the chapel's broader resonances in its social and urban space. The Sainte-Chapelle was not simply a "bearer of meaning"; it also projected, incited, and generated ideas.[41] Insofar as architectural forms function as symbols or signs, buildings also possess agency within their broader cultural systems.[42] They shape thought and experience in individuals and they have an impact on the collective space of their environments.

In her work on memory and rhetoric, Mary Carruthers explained the fundamental role of architecture in medieval cognitive practices.[43] For many of

the great scholars and theologians of the Middle Ages, buildings, both real and imagined, functioned as mnemonic devices for the *machina memorialis*. The structure and decoration of buildings invited and stimulated interpretation; they fashioned thoughts. In his well-known letter to William of Saint-Thierry, Bernard of Clairvaux notoriously decried that "we are more tempted to read in marble than in our books, and to spend the whole day wondering at these things rather than in meditating the law of God."[44] Architecture and its ornaments had the power to direct new ideas.[45]

Indeed, even Bernard would attest that monumental architecture like the Sainte-Chapelle generates thought through the experience of its design. In the practice of the art of memory, this orderly thought process is known as *ductus*, a path that motivates a certain sequence of perception. The path can vary, but it leads to an end point, which is the idea obtained from that journey.[46] And like rhetoric, which crafts language to emphasize certain ideas or embellishes language with similes and metaphors to focus attention on certain subjects, architectural design privileges certain elements over others in the construction of its messages. Buildings do not simply convey the ideas built into them; in their shaping of experience, they function as a kind of visual rhetoric.[47]

In the thirteenth century, at the University of Paris, treatises on the art of memory by John of Garland (active in the 1230s), Albertus Magnus (active in the 1240s), and Thomas Aquinas (active in the 1270s) circulated widely.[48] Their employment of architectural mnemonics in memory and thought exercises enjoyed a surge of popularity among a range of people including students and professors, friars, clerks, merchants, physicians, and notaries.[49] In short, the use of architecture as a means to craft thought was taught and employed in Paris, and people educated there would have been familiar with the practice. These people would have been sensitive to the signifiers in monumental architecture.

While forms and images stimulate cognition, reception is nevertheless conditioned by a variety of factors, particularly the social structures determined by power hierarchies within a designated field.[50] These relationships can enhance the implications of certain signifiers. In other words, sociological factors, such as the habitus and the fields in which messages are made and exist, affect not only the production of architecture, but also the interpretation of it. It is through these practices that the Sainte-Chapelle and more broadly royal architecture generated meaning for its audiences.

Beyond such interactions with individuals, monuments also operate in and act on the environment around them. The recent "spatial turn" in medieval studies has contributed much to our understanding of the way buildings functioned beyond their immediate purpose, highlighting the depth of their greater cultural and historical impact in the Middle Ages.[51] Concerning the church structure, Dominique Iogna-Prat has delineated how Church

dogma manifested in buildings, generating what he termed the process of "monumentalization," or how a church, a once simple locus of worship, became a monument that conveyed theological ideas and commanded territory.[52] Michel Lauwers demonstrated how the physical space around the church structure similarly became encoded as sacred territory.[53] In addition to these studies informed by historical anthropology, archaeological analyses of how great buildings physically impact the land around them have enriched these insights.[54]

Further beyond the monument, historical circumstances also bear on the production and significance of architecture. Town riots and political unrest can halt the construction of a monument for years, sometimes decades.[55] Competition among different institutions can affect the subjects chosen for sculptural or pictorial display as well as the height of a building's vaults and towers.[56] Famines and economic downturns slow development across the board. Foreign visitors or the introduction of foreign objects or methods can also be transformative.[57] In the analysis of art and architecture, such histories are not merely circumstantial; they act on cultural production and are integral to it.

Thus, this study shows how monumental architecture such as the Sainte-Chapelle has both centripetal and centrifugal properties; a great building invites the consideration of makers and spectators, while these elements also develop and convey meaning outward beyond its very foundations.[58] As much as such buildings issue from and are made meaningful from a habitus, they also shape and encode space through their physical presence, constructed meanings, and functions or uses over time.[59]

The goals of this study have necessitated a synthetic approach to the material. My original research builds on, clarifies, and, at times, corrects the historiography in advancing the discourse on these subjects. Along with the more conventional methods of architectural history that I incorporate, other disciplinary practices, such as history, literature, musicology (with its interest in liturgy), as well as anthropology and sociology have contributed much to my analysis. There will still be many more questions to ask and to answer of the Sainte-Chapelle, of royal patronage, of Paris, and of Louis IX. My aim is to reinvigorate these subjects with new perspectives gained by the integration of diverse disciplines.

In this recontextualization effort, there is at once a risk of overdetermination and the possibility of exclusion. I do not aim to recreate all the signifying webs or even most aspects of the chapel's habitus. Interpreting reception is also highly problematic. Yet the subjects selected for discussion here illuminate important, unmistakable aspects of the building's thirteenth-century architecture as well as its social and political status. Over the course of its long existence, this seminal building engendered manifold experiences, ideas, and practices that go far beyond the scope of this book.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

While the Sainte-Chapelle constitutes a grand assertion of royal power, it existed neither as the only point nor as the end point in the larger process of the monarchy's installation in Paris. For this reason, a broad examination of royal architecture in Paris that explains the physical imposition of the monarchy in the city during the reigns of Philip Augustus and Louis IX brackets this study. This framework functions as much to situate the Sainte-Chapelle in an architectural and historical context as to show how royal architecture shifted the balance of power in the city to royal advantage, which in turn imparted new meanings in the urban space and its architecture.[60]

The first chapter thus examines the well-known, pivotal role Philip Augustus played in making Paris a capital city.[61] While scholars routinely cite how the king's administrative efforts contributed to this status, the innovative focus here is on the way his urban-architectural program instilled a royal presence throughout the city and encoded its space.[62] The chapter begins with a brief assessment of the power structures in the city, finding that the episcopal institution dominated it in the late twelfth century. Philip's royal entrenchment in Paris subtly undermined episcopal authority and incited a tacit battle for power that was fought through architecture and the control of urban space.

Two aspects of the royal program receive special attention. The first subject of examination is the image the king generated through his architectural program. From this survey, I propose that Philip Augustus deliberately maintained a "visual division of power," which crafted the monarch as a strictly secular overlord despite his actual status as sacral king. The visual qualities of his architecture were emphatically distinct from ecclesiastical architecture, which flourished in the Gothic idiom. This "visual division of power" conveyed an ostensible parity of authority between the monarchy and the Church, although it actually functioned to subvert the Church's terrestrial authority. Moreover, this division constituted an important dimension of the royal habitus, as it laid the foundation for Louis IX's architectural programs, including the Sainte-Chapelle. Although Philip's architectural image set a precedent, Louis IX went further than his grandfather did to assert his authority on a public scale.

Second, this chapter examines the effects of Philip's program on the city and its architecture. In Paris, the king's building projects had a major impact on urban development. Along with other important economic and cultural factors, Philip's efforts in the city encouraged immigration and urban expansion, which were the catalysts for an important building boom in Paris. A different style of architecture, with easily adaptable forms brought together from other cities but unified in Paris, proliferated among the new churches and extended into domestic architecture.[63] This architectural style, Rayonnant, responded