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Ancient Remedies for New Ideas. Possible Sources of the Cistercian Stained-Glass Technique and Style*

Joanna Utzig

Jagiellonian University, Kraków

Alte Mittel für neue Ideen. Potentielle Quellen der Technik und des Stils zisterziensischer Verglasungen – Zusammenfassung

Eines der wichtigsten Forschungsprobleme bezüglich zisterziensischer Verglasungen des Mittelalters ist deren Genese. Die typische Form der frühen zisterziensischen Glasmalerei (2. Hälfte des 12. bis 13. Jh.) sind einfache, weiße Blankverglasungen mit nicht-figürlicher, ausschließlich mit den Bleinetzen geformter Dekoration. Da die strengen Statuten des Generalkapitels des Zisterzienserordens eindeutig bunte und figürliche Fensterfüllungen untersagten, war dieser Verglasungstypus eine Art Kompromiss zwischen ästhetischer Askese und der Notwendigkeit, Kirchenfenster auszufüllen und zu dekorieren. In der bisherigen Forschung wurde hauptsächlich auf zwei potentielle Quellen der zisterziensischen Glasfenster hingewiesen: auf die östliche Kunst (byzantinische oder islamische; z.B. E. Frodl-Kraft, C. Brisac) sowie – in Bezug auf deren Repertoire – auf die vorromanische oder romanische Bauskulptur (z.B. H. Zakin). Kaum Aufmerksamkeit wurde dabei der Frage geschenkt, inwiefern die abstrakten und monochromen Verglasungen der Zisterzienser der Verzierung und der Technik von früheren europäischen Fensterverglasungen ver-

pflichtet waren. Die Glasmalerei aus der Zeit vor dem 11./12. Jh. ist nur fragmentarisch bekannt, doch die Kenntnis über sie wird ständig durch Ausgrabungen vertieft. Die wichtigsten Fragen des Beitrags lauten deswegen: Waren die zisterziensischen Verglasungen eine Fortsetzung der Tradition oder eine Wiederbelebung von größtenteils vergessenen bzw. nicht mehr verwendeten Formen? Haben die Zisterzienser absichtlich auf „altertümliche“ Verglasungstypen zurückgegriffen, und wenn ja, zu welchem Zweck?

Im Rahmen des Aufsatzes werden ausgewählte frühmittelalterliche Verglasungsbruchstücke und Glasfenster der Zisterzienser aus dem 12. und 13. Jh. verglichen und die technischen und stilistischen Übereinstimmungen hervorgehoben. So repräsentieren u.a. die Glaskonvolute aus Rezé, Sous-le-Scex, Müstair oder Baume-les-Messieurs einen Verglasungstypus, der für die Zisterzienser vorbildhaft hätte sein können.

Die frühe zisterziensische Glasmalerei war ein Ergebnis ästhetisch-religiöser Ansichten und formaler Inspirationen von älteren Kunstwerken. Aus diesem Grund illustriert sie exemplarisch die besondere Spannung zwischen Tradition und Suche nach neuen (auch künstlerischen) Wegen, welche die frühe Kunst und Spiritualität der Zisterzienser prägte.

Ancient remedies for new ideas. Possible sources of the Cistercian stained-glass technique and style – Abstract

One of the most important problems concerning medieval Cistercian glazing is the question of its origin. The most typical form of early Cistercian stained glass (2nd half of the 12th century – 13th century) is simple blank glazing with non-figurative decoration formed only with lead comes. The strict Charters of the General Chapter of the Order unambiguously banned windows with coloured glass as well as glass containing any figurative representations, so glazing was a type of compromise between aesthetic asceticism and a need to fill and decorate church windows. In previous research two possible artistic sources of Cistercian stained glass were taken into consideration: the inspiration of Byzantine or Islamic art, especially as explored by E. Frodl-Kraft and C. Brisac, or the exploitation of patterns characteristic of French Romanesque architectural sculpture, as proposed by H. Zakin. Little attention was paid to the question of whether the abstract and monochrome Cistercian glazing was derived from the decoration and the

technique of earlier European glazing. Although glazing before the 11th/12th century is known only fragmentarily, our knowledge is continuously expanding thanks to archaeological excavations. The most important questions of this paper are following: Was Cistercian stained glass a continuation of tradition or a revival of somewhat forgotten forms? Did the Cistercians deliberately choose to recall ‘ancient’ types of glazing, and if so, for what purpose? Selected early medieval pieces of stained-glass windows will be compared with 12th- and 13th-century Cistercian glazing, and technical and stylistic similarities will be underlined. The glass from Rezé, Sous-le-Scex, Müstair or Baume-les-Messieurs, among others, represents a type of glazing that could have been exemplary for the Cistercians. Medieval Cistercian glazing is an outcome of the ideological guidelines as well as the formal inspirations flowing from earlier works of art. Stained glass illustrates the peculiar tension between the reference to tradition and the search for new artistic paths, which shaped the early art and spirituality of the Cistercians.

* This paper is based on my doctoral thesis, defended in 2020 at the Department of History of the Jagiellonian University, Cracow, *Simplices fenestrae cistercienses. Geneza, treści ideowe i źródła estetyczne przeszkleń witrażowych w kościołach i klasztorach cystersów do połowy wieku XIII (Simplices fenestrae cistercienses. Origin, content and aesthetic sources of stained-glass windows in churches and monasteries of the Cistercians before c.1250)*. An expanded text dealing with the topic, regarding also the sources of ornamental motifs used in Cistercian windows, has been submitted to the *Journal of Glass Studies*.

In the middle of the 12th century the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order expressed the first restrictions on window glazing, establishing that glass should be white and devoid of crosses and painting (“vitreae albae fiant et sine crucibus et picturis”).¹ Such clear specificity about the form of stained-glass windows was an exception in the Middle Ages and makes medieval Cistercian windows a unique phenomenon. This ordinance resulted in the creation of purely decorative glazing, made only with “white” glass and lead comes, without glass paint or any figural representations. Some of the early windows, preserved among others in the abbeys in Aubazine from the last quarter of the 12th century (fig. 1), La Bénisson-Dieu from the end of the 12th century (fig. 2, 3), Eberbach from about 1175–1180 or Marienstatt, dated to the 2nd quarter of the 13th century,² are a result of faithful compliance with these rules.

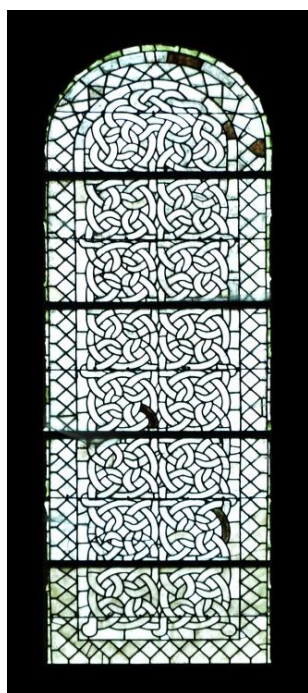


Fig. 1. Aubazine, Cistercian church: stained-glass window, last quarter of the 12th century. © Piotr Pajor.



Fig. 2. La Bénisson-Dieu, Cistercian church: stained-glass window, end of the 12th century. © Piotr Pajor.



Fig. 3. La Bénisson-Dieu, Cistercian church: stained-glass window, end of the 12th century. © Piotr Pajor.

¹ It is not sure how the word “picturis” should be translated. It could mean “images” (which would mainly relate to figural representations), but also “painting”, meaning the technique used. It is also possible that this term combines both ranges of meaning.

² Basic literature about these works: Aubazine – Helen Jackson ZAKIN, *French Cistercian Grisaille Glass*, Garland Pub., New York, 1979, especially pp. 13-23; Catherine BRISAC, “Romanesque Grisailles from the Former Abbey Churches of Obazine and Bonlieu”, in Meredith Parsons LILICH (ed.), *Studies in Cistercian Art and Architecture*, vol. 1, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, 1982, pp. 130-139; Françoise GATOULLAT and Michel HEROLD, with the collaboration of Karine BOULANGER and Jean-François LUNEAU, *Les vitraux d’Auvergne et du Limousin*, PUR, Rennes, 2011 (Corpus Vitrearum France, Recensement des vitraux anciens de la France, IX), pp. 234-236; La Bénisson-Dieu – ZAKIN 1979, especially pp. 23-32; Véronique CHAUSSE et al., *Les vitraux de Bourgogne, Franche-Comté et Rhône-Alpes*, Éditions du NRSCNRS, Paris, 1986 (Corpus Vitrearum France, Recensement des vitraux anciens de la France, III), p. 279-281; Eberbach – Günther KLEINEBERG, “Die Gläser seien weiß, ohne Kreuze und Malereien”. Das Glasfenster aus dem Zisterzienserkloster Eberbach im Rheingau”, in *200 000 Jahre Kultur und Geschichte in Nassau dargestellt an Objekten der Sammlung Nassauischer Altertümer des Museums Wiesbaden*, Verlag des Vereins für Nassauische Altertumskunde und Geschichtsforschung, Wiesbaden, 1993, pp. 159-162; Daniel HESS, *Die mittelalterlichen Glasmalereien in Frankfurt und im Rhein-Main-Gebiet*, Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, Berlin, 1999 (Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi Deutschland III,2), pp. 78-85; Dieter GRIESBACH-MAISANT and Ulrike KUNERT, “Sammelt die übrig gebliebenen Stücke, damit sie nicht (auch noch) verloren gehen. Glasmalerei aus Kloster Eberbach”, in *Der Denkmalpfleger als Vermittler. Gerd Weiß zum 65. Geburtstag*, Theiss, Wiesbaden, 2014 (Arbeitshefte des Landesamtes für Denkmalpflege Hessen 25), pp. 207-222; Marienstatt – Ivo RAUCH, “Die Marienstatter Flechtbandfenster – Bestand und Rekonstruktion”, in *Die Klosterkirche Marienstatt*, Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, Worms, 1999, pp. 76-84; Hartmut SCHOLZ, “Glasmalerei der Zisterzienser am Beispiel Marienstatt” in *Die Klosterkirche Marienstatt* 1999, pp. 85-96.

In previous research, several different hypotheses about the artistic sources of early Cistercian stained glass has been formulated. According to some researchers, simple patterns, often relying on basic geometric figures, were inspired by early Christian, Byzantine or Islamic *transennae* made of hard materials (stone, wood or plaster), decorated with openings which only rarely were glazed. This belief was expressed by Heinrich Oidtmann, although not until Eva Frodl-Kraft's influential article from 1965 did this thesis gain popularity.³ Frodl-Kraft observed, among other things, similarities between the early Cistercian glazing in Aubazine and the *transennae* in the Great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus (706–715). Another leading researcher of Cistercian stained glass, Helen Jackson Zakin, questioned these ideas. Zakin thought that in a geographic, chronologic and cultural sense Cistercian glazing was more likely inspired by earlier French art than remote Islamic works.⁴ According to her, the ornamental stained-glass windows of the White Monks were mainly based on the patterns used in French Pre-Romanesque and Romanesque sculpture. However much some juxtapositions presented by the American researcher demonstrate a close affinity between patterns, like Frodl-Kraft some time earlier, she presented solely sculptural works as comparative material, which can only explain the sources of one aspect of Cistercian stained-glass windows – their pattern. Zakin assumed that it would be impossible to find any prototypes for Cistercian works within the scope of stained-glass windows, due to the poor state of preservation of pre-12th-century glazing. Surprisingly, only a few art historians implied that Cistercians could have decided to use a type of glazing that had been used before. This supposition was presented by Hans Wentzel, however in a very curt and pessimistic statement,⁵ and forty years later by Hartmut Scholz.⁶ This question was also analysed by Richard Marks, although he considered similar ornamental glazing contemporary- to the earliest Cistercian windows, not older than them.⁷

The most popular hypotheses about the sources of Cistercian windows have a significant weakness. They refer only to possible models for the patterns that are mainly found in works of sculpture. These speculations do not take into account the origin of the specific type of glazing – abstract, non-painted and made solely of blank (white) glass. It is unclear whether the White Monks invented a new type of glazing suitable for their needs or reached for some solutions which were in usage before. Therefore, more comprehensive study is needed. Only in-depth research on the sources of Cistercian glazing, taking into consideration their decoration as well as technique, can enable us to answer the question. Fortunately, the progress of archaeological excavation during the last decades has broadened knowledge about early medieval stained glass to a considerable extent. This paper will concentrate on the prototypes of the glazing type in a general sense and the reasons for the use of certain sources of inspiration by the White Monks.

But first, it is worth citing a famous written source to testify to the use of simple, ornamental, unpainted glass before the Cistercian Order was constituted. In the beginning of the 12th century, Theophilus Presbyter mentioned in his treatise *Schedula diversarum artium* a special type of glazing, different from the main type that he discussed more thoroughly. In Chapter 29, he mentioned “simple windows” (*simplices fenestras*).⁸ They were much simpler to make than painted, colourful, figural stained-glass

³ Heinrich OIDTMANN, *Die rheinischen Glasmalereien vom 12. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert*, vol. 1, L. Schwann, Düsseldorf, 1912, p. 128; Eva FRODL-KRAFT, “Das ‘Flechtwerk’ der frühen Zisterzienserfenster”, *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, XX (XXIV), 1965, pp. 7-20. Frodl-Kraft's hypothesis was accepted e.g. by: Louis GRODECKI, Catherine BRISAC, Claudine LAUTIER, *Romanische Glasmalerei*, W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart–Berlin–Köln–Mainz, 1977, p. 40; BRISAC 1982, pp. 134-136.

⁴ ZAKIN 1979, pp. 103-113.

⁵ Hans WENTZEL (“Die Glasmalerei der Zisterzienser in Deutschland”, *Bulletin des relations artistiques France-Allemagne*, May, 1951: *L'Architecture monastique* (Actes et travaux de la rencontre franco-allemande des historiens d'art, 1951), p. [173]) suggested vaguely that the Cistercians could have used “gewisse altertümliche Vorformen” as a model for their glazing.

⁶ SCHOLZ 1999, pp. 89-90.

⁷ Richard MARKS, “Cistercian Window Glass in England and Wales” in Christopher NORTON (ed.), *Cistercian Art and Architecture in the British Isles*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 214.

⁸ “XXIX. Simple Windows. If you want to make simple windows, first mark the dimensions of their length and width on the wooden board, then draw the scrolls or anything else that you want. Having arranged the colours to be inserted, cut the pieces of glass with a groseing iron and fit them together. Affix the nails, surround with lead and solder on each side. Then frame it round with wood secured with nails and fix it where you wish”. (C.R. DODWELL (publ. and transl.), *Theophilus, The Various Arts. De Diversis Artibus*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986, p. 58). The term ‘scroll’

windows, because an artisan only had to choose a pattern that he liked (Theophilus mentions *nodi*, which means interlace), cut the glass and join the pieces with the lead comes. It is not certain if the term *simplices fenestrae* used by the author was common in his era, but as a historical epithet relating to the type of glazing used, among others, by the Cistercians, it seems useful also in contemporary scientific literature. However, Theophilus mentioned coloured pieces of glass in this type of glazing, so this source doesn't settle the question of whether totally white windows were used before the Cistercians.

To present the stained-glass windows of the White Monks in a proper context it is necessary to outline briefly the development of the ornamental simple glazing from Antiquity through the Early and High Middle Ages. Window screens decorated with geometric openings filled by alabaster, selenite or mica used in the Roman Empire can be regarded, to some extent, as a prototype for them. The aforementioned minerals are light-toned, partly translucent and let in only a limited quantity of light. Glass was also used in the screens; however, it did not become popular until the 1st century A.D., which is attested by many archaeological finds from the whole empire. Similarly to the above-mentioned minerals, relatively translucent Roman glass was thick and had a slightly greenish or blueish shade, which is natural for this material. The compositions were usually based on a combination of triangles or rectangles. Gradually, coloured glazing also appeared. It was mentioned for the first time by Aurelius Prudentius Clemens in his work *Liber Peristephanon* at the turn of the 5th century.⁹ Therefore, antique window glass was quite simple, as it had mainly a practical function and can be qualified as a purely utilitarian element of interior furnishing rather than an original, sophisticated work of art. It gained the latter function during the Middle Ages.

The type of window described here was also used in the territory of the former Empire after its fall; for example, it was quite commonly used in the church architecture of Gaul.¹⁰ However, as in Antiquity, glass was usually cut into simple geometric figures. Moreover, there was another technique in use that was based on small, different-shaped pieces of glass, similar to some extent to *opus sectile* mosaics. Among the most important finds in Gaul's churches, is a group of glass fragments found on the site of the former basilica in Sion (Sitten) / Sous-le-Scex in Switzerland.¹¹ A find of c. 400 pieces of glass, dated to the 5th/6th century, come mainly from the eastern part of the church. The original shapes of some pieces are still visible. Most of them have simple geometric shapes, such as triangles, squares, rectangles and rhombuses. One can infer that these pieces were combined within different abstract compositions resembling, to some extent, Ancient Roman examples. Similar remnants of window glass were also found in the 5th-century baptistery in Brioude (Auvergne)¹² or in the basilica of Champs Saint-Martin in Rezé (Normandy) from the beginning of the 6th century.¹³ A characteristic feature of all these works is the use of glass of different hues of natural colour.

doesn't seem to be the most precise translation of Latin term 'nodi'. Cf. a similar version – 'scrollwork' in John G. HAWTHORNE, Cyril Stanley SMITH (transl.), *Theophilus, On Divers Arts. The Foremost Medieval Treatise on Painting, Glassmaking and Metalwork*, Dover Publications, New York, 1979, p. 72.

⁹ Enrico CASTELNUOVO, *Vetrare medievali. Officine tecniche maestri*, Einaudi, Torino, 1994, p. 212; Francesca DELL'ACQUA, *'Illuminando colorat': la vetrata tra l'età tardo imperiale e l'Alto Medioevo: le fonti, l'archeologia*, Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto, 2003 (Studi e ricerche di archeologia e storia dell'arte, 4), p. 101-102; Francesca DELL'ACQUA, "Early History of Stained Glass" in Brigitte KURMANN-SCHWARZ and Elizabeth PASTAN (ed.), *Investigations in Medieval Stained Glass. Materials, Methods and Expressions*, Brill, Leiden–Boston, 2019, p. 24-25.

¹⁰ DELL'ACQUA 2003, p. 29-30. In the second half of the 5th century Sidonius Apollinarius in a vivid description of the interior of the newly built basilica in Lyon mentioned also its window glass; DELL'ACQUA 2003, pp. 103-104.

¹¹ Sophie WOLF, Cordula KESSLER, Willem B. STERN, Yvonne GERBER, "The Composition and Manufacture of Early Medieval Coloured Window Glass from Sion (Valais, Switzerland). A Roman Glass-making Tradition or Innovative Craftsmanship?", *Archaeometry*, XLVII, 2005, pp. 363-382; Cordula M. KESSLER, Sophie WOLF, Stefan TRÜMLER, "Die frühesten Zeugen ornamentaler Glasmalerei aus der Schweiz: die frühmittelalterlichen Fensterglasfunde von Sion, Sous-le-Scex", *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte*, LXII, 2005, 1, pp. 1-30.

¹² Fabrice GAUTHIER, *Vitraux du baptistère de Brioude (Haute-Loire)*, in Sylvie BALCON-BERRY, Françoise PERROT, Christian SAPIN (eds), *Vitraill, verre et archéologie entre le V^e et le XII^e siècle* (Actes de la table ronde réunie au Centre d'études médiévales, Auxerre, 15-16 June 2006), CTHS, Paris, 2009, pp. 85-90.

¹³ Gaëlle DUMONT, Lionel PIRAULT, "Les vitraux de la basilique paléochrétienne de Rezé" in Sophie LAGABRIELLE, Michel PHILIPPE (eds), *Verre et fenêtre de l'Antiquité au XVIII^e siècle. Actes du premier colloque international de l'association 'Verre & Histoire'* (Paris-La Défense / Versailles, 13-15 October 2005), Verre et histoire, Paris, 2009, pp. 55-58; Gaëlle DUMONT and Lionel PIRAULT, "Vitraux de la basilique paléochrétienne des Champs-Saint-Martin à Rezé (Loire-

This type of glazing was also in use in the Carolingian period. This era was at the same time the most prolific and crucial in the history of stained-glass production. The considerable ensemble of window glass remnants found in the Swiss Abbey of Münstair is particularly worth mentioning (fig. 4).¹⁴ Many fragments are triangular, circular, or rectangular- in shape. Numerous circular or arched fragments are particularly interesting, because they could have formed a geometric as well as an interlace composition. Although the reconstruction is purely hypothetical, a later example of a composition built mainly of similarly-shaped glass pieces can be mentioned – a panel from St Elisabeth’s Church in Marburg, now in the local Universitätsmuseum (ca. 1250).¹⁵ There is no certain evidence of using the interlace patterns, so frequently used in Cistercian stained glass and extremely popular in the Early Middle Ages, in pre-Cistercian window glass in any part of Europe. Interlace compositions are much more complicated to create than simple decorations consisting of rhombuses or triangles, so their execution demanded more skill. Therefore, one can assume that they appeared only at a certain stage of the development of medieval stained-glass production. Their use is testified by the already mentioned fragment from *Schedula diversarum artium*. Pieces of glass from Baume-les-Messieurs Abbey from the turn of the 9th century are quite similar to those from Münstair and consist of square, rectangular, trapezoidal and circular fragments. They could have formed different geometric compositions, but interlace decoration is also probable.¹⁶

Simple, decorative, unpainted and mainly uncoloured glazing can be considered as a simple continuation of ancient works, although this technique was only partly developed in the form of glass pieces joined by means of lead comes. Nonetheless, in Carolingian window glass even more conservative, nearly “antiquarian” types were also present. Significant examples are the windows from the Abbey of San Vincenzo al Volturno (9th century), filled with a regular wooden grid and glass in its natural colour, although decorated with a subtle “marmorisation”, made in the flashed glass technique.¹⁷ They resemble rudimentary glass-fillings that were used in the churches of Ravenna, and later in Benevento or Farfa for example.¹⁸ Moreover, in the High Middle Ages, stone or plaster *transennae* were also occasionally used. In the Benedictine Church San Benedetto in Capua such screens, dated to the 11th century, are still partly visible, but the largest part is covered by modern painting imitating their form.¹⁹ Diversified compositions, consisting of combinations of circles and slats, are filled with small circular pieces of glass. The geometric character of the decoration recalls some Cistercian windows, although the technique is appreciably different, and it is hard to resolve whether there could be a direct connection between the plaster screens and stained-glass windows. The church in Capua is credited to the patronage of abbot Desiderius of Monte Cassino; therefore, it must be mentioned that in Leo of Ostia’s chronicle of the latter abbey plaster

Atlantique)” in BALCON-BERRY 2009, pp. 65-76.

¹⁴ Jürg GOLL, “Frühmittelalterliche Fenstergläser aus Münstair und Sion” in Francesca DELL’ACQUA and Romano SILVA (publ.), *Il colore nel Medioevo. Arte, simbolo, tecnica; la vetrata in occidente dal IV all’XI secolo* (Atti delle giornate di studi, Lucca, 23-25 Sept. 1999), Istituto storico lucchese, collana di studi sul colore, 3, Lucca, 2001, pp. 87-98; Sophie WOLF, Cordula M. KESSLER, Jürg GOLL, Stefan TRÜMPER, Patrick DEGRYSE, “The Early Medieval Stained-glass windows from St John, Münstair: Materials, Provenance and Production Technology” in Sophie WOLF and Anne DE PURY-GYSEL (publ.), *Annales du 20e Congrès de l’Association Internationale pour l’histoire du verre* (Fribourg/Romont, 7-11 Sept. 2015), VML Verlag Marie Leidorf, Romont, 2017, pp. 341-345.

¹⁵ Daniel PARELLO unter Verwendung von Vorarbeiten von Daniel HESS, *Die mittelalterlichen Glasmalereien in Marburg und Nordhessen*, Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, Berlin, 2008 (Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi Deutschland, III, 3), p. 403. This panel is considered as an only remnant of the first, provisional glazing of the church’s apse.

¹⁶ Line VAN WERSCH, Claudine LOISEL, François MATHIS, David STRIVAY, Sébastien BULLY, “Analyses of Early Medieval Stained Window Glass From the Monastery of Baume-Les-Messieurs (Jura, France)”, *Archaeometry*, LVIII, 2015, pp. 930-946; Sébastien BULLY, Marie-Laure BASSI, Aurélie BULLY, Laurent FIOCCHI, Morana ČAUSEVIC-BULLY, “Le ‘monastère des reculées’ au Haut Moyen Âge: avancées de la recherche archéologique sur Balma (Baume-Les-Messieurs, Jura)” in *La mémoire des pierres: mélanges d’archéologie, d’art et d’histoire en l’honneur de Christian Sapin*, Sylvie BALCON-BERRY, Brigitte BOISSAVIT-CAMUS, Pascale CHEVALIER (eds), Brepols, Turnhout, 2016 (Bibliothèque de l’Antiquité tardive, 29), pp. 241-254 (see especially the reconstruction – fig. 6).

¹⁷ Francesca DELL’ACQUA, “Ninth-century Window Glass from the Monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno (Molise, Italy)”, *Journal of Glass Studies*, XXXIX, 1997, p. 33-41; Francesca DELL’ACQUA, “Una vetrata ‘all’antica’ di età carolingia”, *Journal of Glass Studies*, XLIV, 2002, pp. 196-199.

¹⁸ DELL’ACQUA 2003, pp. 42-44.

¹⁹ DELL’ACQUA 2003, pp. 72-73; DELL’ACQUA 2019, p. 30.

window screens are also mentioned, but no traces of them have survived.²⁰ Nevertheless, such conservative realisations seem rather isolated in High Middle Ages.

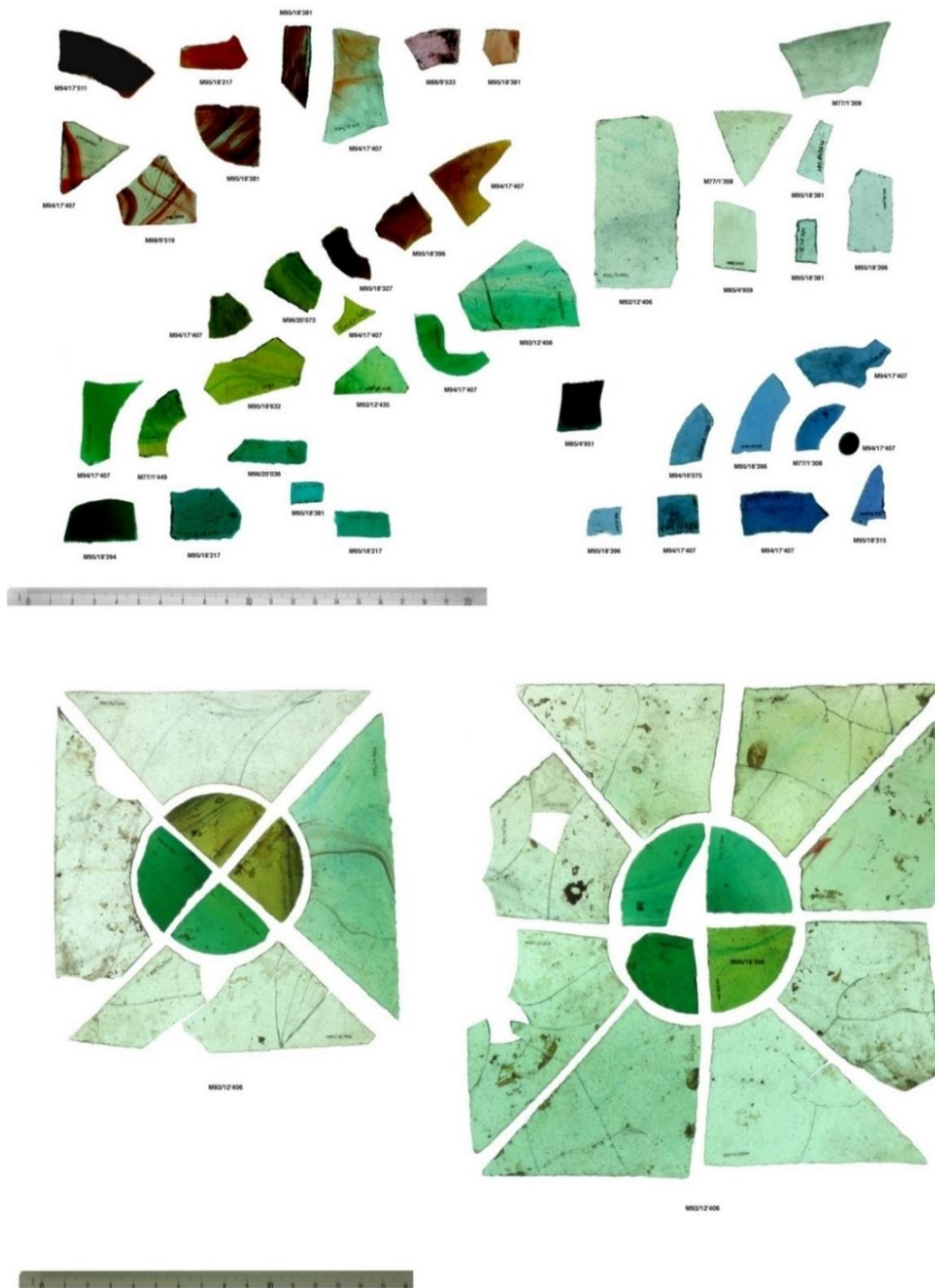


Fig. 4. Münstair, abbey church: window glass fragments, last quarter of the 8th century.
© St John Münstair, Jürg Goll; previously published by Wolf, Kessler, and Stern (see n. 11).

²⁰ Most of the windows were filled with lead-framed glass, but some of them with plaster screens: “fenestras omnes tam navis quam tituli, plumbo simul ac vitro compactis tabulis ferroque connexis includit; eas vero quae in lateribus utriusque porticus sitae sunt, gipseas quidem sed similis fere decoris extruxit”. “In frontispicio porro eiusdem ecclesiae fenestras tres, ac unam in absida distinguens, similis decoris patrari mandavit. Illas autem quae in porticus sunt, gipseas quidem, pari vero decore construxit”; “Chronikon Casinense”, in Jean-Paul MIGNÉ (publ.), *Patrologiae cursus completus*, vol. 173, 1854, col. 749, 765.

Another significant, frequently cited example of Pre-Romanesque stained glass is a reconstructed panel found in the cemetery in Séry-les-Mézières (Picardy), usually dated to the 9th century.²¹ This glazing, excavated at the end of the 19th century, was regrettably destroyed during World War I. According to the reconstruction, which seems disputable, the composition was filled with the Greek cross with the letters *alpha* and *omega*. Moreover, the glass was decorated by subtle painted motifs, and had light, neutral tones despite being coloured. Although the cross presented on the panel obviously contradicts the Cistercian rules brought on three centuries later, the simplicity of the composition, the concise character of the image and the colour scheme all anticipate to some extent the early Cistercian windows.

One of the most characteristic aspects of early medieval window glazing is frequent use of “natural” glass without colourants. Its various hues result from the innate impurities of metal oxides. At that time, the ability to produce glass in various, intense colours was limited. An interesting early medieval practice was the recycling of ancient glass, such as mosaic *tesserae*, which enabled the production of additional colours, such as red. This was witnessed by Theophilus in his famous treatise and also confirmed by archaeological finds – intact antique *tesserae* have been found in some glazing workshops, including Münstair Abbey.²² Even if the “colourless”, blank glass dominated in early medieval times, it was because of technical possibilities constraints, rather than ideological considerations. This type of glazing was surely visually attractive, but undoubtedly its use was also often connected with limited financial resources; however, its essential merit must be emphasised, that is, light-coloured glass pieces, free from glass paint, enabled greater illumination of the interior. It doesn’t seem likely that this kind of glazing was motivated by the aspiration to exaggerated austerity and simplicity in the decoration of church interiors; what is more, it seems that the tendency was quite the opposite. Ascetic motivations for the use of plain white glass didn’t appear before the Cistercians, resulting in the use of such windows at a large scale. It seems that due to technical developments the variety of glass hues became wider and wider and was exploited with relish.

Following the Carolingian era, sophisticated painted and figural window glass was more and more popular. New inventions and tendencies (prevalence of lead came and glass paint, greater ability of producing coloured glass, popularity of figural representations) resulted in new artistic possibilities, which were decisive in the future development of this field of art. In the time closer to the emergence of the Cistercian order, that is, in the 10th and 11th centuries, it is much more difficult to find good examples of the “simple glazing” deriving from as far back as Antiquity. The earliest well-preserved ornamental blank windows date to the 12th and the beginning of the 13th century. They are usually considered as the effects of Cistercian influence; however, their dating is usually disputable. Among these examples are interesting white windows probably from the 1st half of the 13th century in the church of the Benedictine Abbey of Saint-Pierre-et-Saint-Paul in Orbais²³ or in the Cathedral of Châlons-en-Champagne, perhaps from the 12th century, reused in the 13th-century building.²⁴ It is not possible to study this topic profoundly within this paper, but it is worth saying that the crucial influence of the early Cistercian blank glazing does not seem to be apparent. Both Cistercian and non-Cistercian works usually lack precise dating. Furthermore, it is impossible to prove the virtual influence of the preserved stained-glass windows of the White Monks, as most of them come from rather provincial monasteries.

An overview of stained glass before the 12th century leads to the conclusion that early Cistercian window glass is much more similar to early medieval work than to that manufactured in the 10th or 11th century. It seems probable that having to cope with the prohibition against filling the windows with colourful, figural stained-glass compositions, the Cistercians made use of an older tradition, present also

²¹ J[ules] PILLOY and Edmond SOCARD, “Le vitrail carolingien de la Châsse de Séry-les-Mézières”, *Bulletin monumental*, LXXIV, 1910, pp. 5-23; DELL’ACQUA 2003, pp. 60-61.

²² DODWELL 1986, pp. 44-45. This practice was proven also by chemical analysis; sometime this reveals the reuse of different glass pieces coming from distant places, e.g. the Levant (KESSLER 2005, p. 5; WOLF 2017, p. 662).

²³ ZAKIN 1979, pp. 185-188 (see for older literature); Martine CALLIAS BEY, Véronique CHAUSSÉ, Laurence DE FINANCE, Claudine LAUTIER, *Les vitraux de Champagne-Ardenne*, C.N.R.S., Paris, 1992 (“Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi France”, Recensement des vitraux anciens de la France, IV), pp. 377-381; Elizabeth Carson PASTAN, “Process and Patronage in the Decorative Arts of the Early Campaigns of Troyes Cathedral, ca. 1200-1220s”, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, LIII, 1994, 2, pp. 218, 230.

²⁴ Meredith Parsons LILLICH, *Remembrance of Things Past: Stained Glass Spolia at Châlons Cathedral*, “Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte”, LIX, 1996, pp. 461-497.

in France. Undeniably they were inspired by old, non-figural glazing, more ascetic in form, made only of varied tones of glass, which had the design of the lead matrix as a main aesthetic device. Thus, they created a characteristic formula, which could not have been classified as a novelty (*novitates*), which was fervently forbidden by the order. Early Cistercian windows, stepping out of the stained-glass production of the time, appear not so much as innovative and avant-garde, but as knowingly taking inspiration from tradition and effectively using the type known for a long time to fulfill new requirements.²⁵ One could ask why the Cistercians, wanting to allude to their primal Benedictine heritage, did not use the old, even ancient window fillings made of stone or plaster, utilized for instance in the oldest Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino. Perhaps practical considerations prevailed. Windows made of leaded glass were easier to manufacture and more adaptable to filling big window openings than were heavy stone screens. They fulfilled both the demands of utilitarianism and economy, while being far from the luxury criticized by the Cistercians at the same time.

Seeking an explanation for this decision, it must be pointed out that the will to accentuate the consistency and antiquity of the order was extremely important for the Cistercians. It derived from the conviction that the White Monks were the direct successors of the primitive Benedictines. The belief in a distant origin of the congregation is visible, for example, in the Charters of the General Chapter from 1235, where the abbot of Notre-Dame du Gard was penalised for having an ornamental pavement, divergent from the order's legislation – "Pavimentum curiosum [...] penitus evertatur et ad antiquam simplicitatem Ordinis redigatur".²⁶ This and other similar formulations aimed to underline the 'antiquity' of the Cistercian rules, and also their validity at the same time. This phenomenon is analogous to the frequent citation in medieval theology of authorities, especially the Church Fathers, whose words were considered rightful in principle. The aforementioned *antiqua simplicitas* should rather be considered as an allusion to the Order of St Benedict, which actually had ancient origins, not to the Cistercian Order, only c.100 years old at that time. The most evident proof for seeing their order as a direct continuation of the Benedictine monasticism by the Cistercians is obviously adapting the Rule of St Benedict. The observance of the rule, as faithfully as possible, was, in any case, the leading idea of the order. But the rule doesn't give any indication of what the abbey churches should look like; therefore, one could ask how, precisely, the Cistercians strove to mimic old Benedictine art based on such a vague point of reference. At least two potential answers can be formed – first, the Cistercian pioneers undertook the labour of analysing old Benedictine art and modifying it for their needs. Second, having no proper point of reference or being reluctant to copy archaic forms too literally, they tried to create a new quality which nevertheless in their notion would express the spirit of the primitive European monasticism. The current state of research on early medieval glazing makes it impossible to conclude whether in the Benedictine abbeys of this era any specific type of window filling was favoured and could be a source of inspiration for the Cistercians. However, regarding the evidently archaic character of the early Cistercian window, the White Monks succeeded in underlining the 'antique' metrics of their congregation and, in a general way, alluding to the distant past when the first followers of St Benedict were active.



²⁵ Similar viewpoints were expressed also with reference to Cistercian architecture, see e.g. Otto von SIMSON, *The Gothic Cathedral. Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1956, p. 47-48 ("Practically every single element of the early Cistercian church can be found in other types of ecclesiastical architecture. [...] Details of plan and construction that were taken over from older Benedictine architecture were transformed in a way that creates a unique and unmistakable mood").

²⁶ Christopher NORTON, "Table of Cistercian Legislation on Art and Architecture" in NORTON 1986, p. 366.