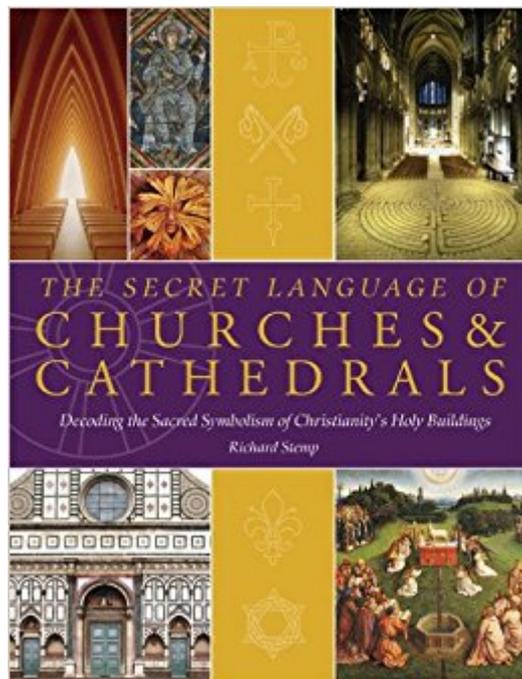


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The Secret Language Of Churches & Cathedrals: Decoding The Sacred Symbolism Of Christianity's Holy Buildings



Synopsis

Thanks to books and films like *The Da Vinci Code* and its sequel, *Angels and Demons*, interest in secret religious symbols has never been greater. This carefully researched guide takes the reader into some of the world's most famous churches, decoding messages that are hidden in plain sight—in stained-glass windows, statuary, patterned flooring, ornamentation, and even the buildings' architectural design: Why do fierce beasts and grotesque faces peer from the walls? Who chose to depict one particular saint and not another? What's the significance of an eagle? A dragon? A pelican? No one who reads this book will ever again experience a visit to a cathedral in quite the same way.

Book Information

Hardcover: 224 pages

Publisher: Duncan Baird; First Edition edition (September 7, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1844839168

ISBN-13: 978-1844839162

Product Dimensions: 9.5 x 1.1 x 12.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (15 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #221,494 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #37 in [Books > Arts &](#)

[Photography > Architecture > Buildings > Religious Buildings](#) #1148 in [Books > Christian Books](#)

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Customer Reviews

First of all, let's clear up a misnomer in the title of this fabulous book: there aren't many things that are **secret** in the church architecture and art, but there are many things that are **unknown.** It's these little-known aspects of the theology and scripture, built into church walls, ceilings and art that are often obscure to those unfamiliar with church stories. "Secret Language" is a Richard Stemp's gorgeous, very well-researched and exquisitely photographed study of the theological themes that pervade church art and architecture. Better still, it is written by a person who is at once sympathetic to the stories and knowledgeable about them. We begin to understand obvious aspects of churches - like their mass, height and upward direction as suggesting the solidity of church and their desire to direct our inner gaze upward to God. Sounding boards above pulpits not only focus the preacher's words to the congregation, but signal that the word itself is worth listening to. Accompanying the

descriptions are photos of some of the most beautiful churches to be found. Because of the flourishing of church decorating during these periods, there is a fuller focus on the Romanesque, medieval and baroque periods. But there are a few modern churches in the book as well, including and the Crystal Cathedral in LA and my beloved Trinity Church in Boston. Stemp also probes the meanings of many of the world's famous paintings and altarpieces. These include Grunewald's gruesome Isenheim altarpiece, with its greenish, poxed Christ presiding over a hospital chapel. The Van Eyck's Ghent altarpiece is also beautifully rendered and its main details parsed out.

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