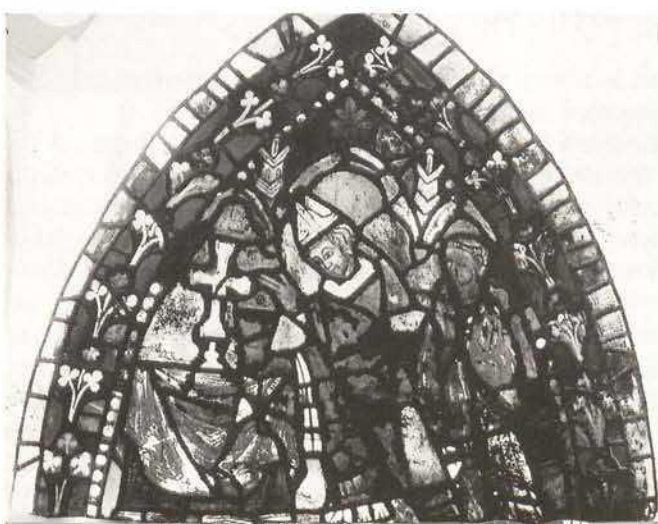


STAINED GLASS – HERITAGE @ RISK!



León (Spain), cathedral, exterior and interior view of a stained glass window: the seriously weathered glass surfaces reduce the transparency of the panes.



In the European cultural area stained glass windows have been an integral part of religious buildings since the early Middle Ages. The painting of glass had its prime especially in Gothic cathedrals in France, England, Spain, Italy, Scandinavia and in Central Europe. It was revived in the 19th century, using traditional designs and it also became very popular in North and South America and in Australia and New Zealand.

Due to their fragility and lack of resistance stained glass windows are among the most endangered works of art. As windows in historic buildings they are threatened by physical destruction as well as by air pollution. On the occasion of the ICOMOS Xth General Assembly in Colombo in 1993 the various aspects of danger were discussed in a comprehensive publication by the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Stained Glass, put together by the Committee's then President, Ernst Bacher. By giving numerous examples possible conservation measures were explained. Since then art historians, natural scientists and restorers have continued to exchange their expertise on possible ways of protecting and maintaining stained glass. The 4th International Forum on Historical Stained Glass Preservation and Technology will be held in Troyes, France in May 2001.

These efforts to save historic stained glass are more urgent than ever as the process of destruction, particularly of medieval glass, has dramatically increased during the last few decades. Even artistically outstanding examples are affected: eg the cathedrals and parish churches of Bourges, Chartres, Rouen, Strasbourg, and Tours in France; Canterbury, York, and Lincoln in England; Augsburg, Erfurt, Freiburg, Cologne, Nuremberg, Stendal, and Regensburg in Germany; León in Spain; and Assisi in Italy.

Unfortunately, very often the necessary outdoor protective glazing of windows – so far the most effective conservation measure – cannot be carried out at all for financial reasons or only much too late. It is also due to a lack of financial resources that windows of the 19th century are not properly maintained. The results are a physical deforming, the breaking of glass and loss of entire panes.

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