The Gargoyle Book: 572 Examples from Gothic Architecture (Dover Architecture)

Lester Burbank Bridaham

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Amid the soaring grandeur of arches and spires lurks a more down-to-earth architectural flourish: the grinning head of a gargoyle. Singly and clustered, these intriguing creatures form as distinctive an element of Gothic architecture as the flying buttress. Nowhere are they more prominent than along the walls of French cathedrals, and this magnificently illustrated volume prowls the ramparts of those medieval buildings to discover hundreds of authentic gargoyle carvings.

According to tradition, the gargoyles were posted as sentries, to ward off malevolent spirits and to remind parishioners of the evil beyond the church doors. Author Lester Burbank Bridaham takes a more optimistic view. Noting the stone guardians' whimsical nature, he discusses the artisanal ingenuity involved in their creation. He also points out how they represented a rare sense of freedom in the Middle Ages, in terms of public satire and unbridled artistic enthusiasm. As this book reveals, the timeless appeal of the gargoyle—whether symbolic, spiritual, decorative, or fanciful—continues to captivate the imagination.

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