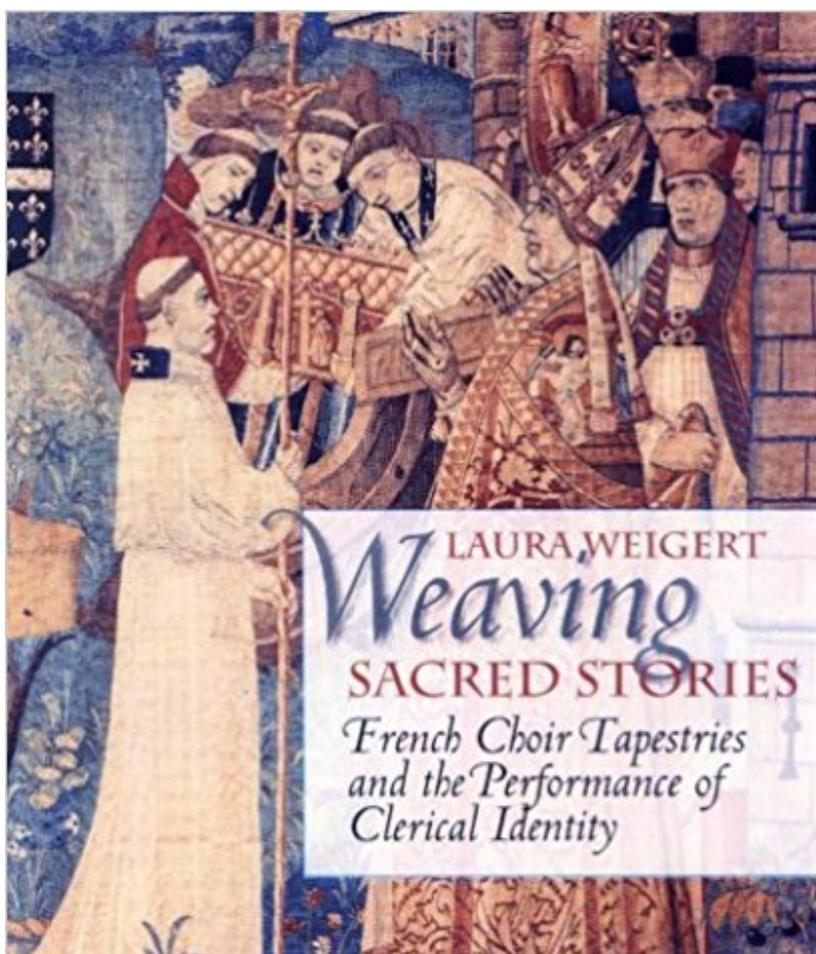


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# Weaving Sacred Stories: French Choir Tapestries And The Performance Of Clerical Identity (Conjunctions Of Religion And Power In The Medieval Past)



## Synopsis

Spanning the backs of choir stalls above the heads of the canons and their officials, large-scale tapestries of saints' lives functioned as both architectural elements and pictorial narratives in the late Middle Ages. In an extensively illustrated book that features sixteen color plates, Laura Weigert examines the role of these tapestries in ritual performances. She situates individual tapestries within their architectural and ceremonial settings, arguing that the tapestries contributed to a process of storytelling in which the clerical elite of late medieval cities legitimated and defended their position in the social sphere. Weigert focuses on three of the most spectacular and little-studied tapestry series preserved from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries: Lives of Saints Piat and Eleutherius (Notre-Dame, Tournai), Life of Saint Steven (Saint-Steven, Auxerre [now Musée du Moyen Age, Paris]), and Life of Saints Gervasius and Protasius (Saint-Julien, Le Mans). Each of these tapestries, measuring over forty meters in length, included elements that have traditionally been defined as either lay or clerical. On the prescribed days when the tapestries were displayed, the liturgical performance for which they were the setting sought to merge the history and patron saint of the local community with the universal history of the Christian church. Weigert combines a detailed analysis of the narrative structure of individual images with a discussion of the particular social circumstances in which they were produced and perceived. Weaving Sacred Stories is thereby significant not only to the history of medieval art but also to art history and cultural studies in general.

## Book Information

Series: Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past

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## Customer Reviews

"Thanks to Laura Weigert, the interior of medieval cathedrals is no longer the large bare space—empty, cold, and silent—that it has become today. During the polyphony of feast days, the sanctuary and above all the choir are arrayed with immense tapestries that streak the walls with bright colors and express through their inscriptions the holy history that resonates in the voices of the cantors. The canons, situated in the choir stalls, are entirely enveloped by these images and by the stories of miracle and martyrdom in which they find the justification for their privileges. The warp and woof of the fabric do more than weave together the wool threads of the tapestry: at the same time they embrace, in a unique performance, the clerics dressed in their heavy vestments embroidered with gold, the sacred vessels, and the slow processions that wend their way around the choir. This book sets forth a total social history that reevaluates in a decisive manner objects that are too important to be left solely to historians of art or technology."—Jean-Claude Schmitt, Directeur d'Études, l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris

Laura Weigert's well-researched and clearly written book sets out interesting claims about how art served to bridge the sacred past to the present and to affirm contemporary ecclesiastic institutions. In so doing, it offers important new evidence of the ways words and material images supported the liturgy and how gift-giving realized individual donors' hopes for salvation."—Herbert Kessler, Department of the History of Art, The Johns Hopkins University, and author of *The Poetry and Paintings of the First Bible of Charles the Bald (Recentiores: Later Latin Texts and Contexts)* and *Seeing Medieval Art: Reading tapestries*

is more than just gleaning stories from them. In this book, it is reading the performance of reading the tapestries as well. Thus, reading becomes a historically specific performance, a response to the woven stories' performativity. Weigert demonstrates how much can be gained from approaches that remain historical without shunning the concepts and methods of a new, vital cultural analysis."—Mieke Bal, Professor of Theory of Literature, University of Amsterdam and Andrew D. White Professor, Cornell University

In *Weaving Sacred Stories*, Laura Weigert goes far to redress the lack of attention granted the fabrics and especially the tapestries that were a featured and highly valued adornment of churches in the later Middle Ages. Exploiting precious surviving evidence identifying patrons, narrators, and audiences as well as other circumstances of manufacture and reception, Weigert is able both to explicate narratives with wonderful precision and to give a vivid sense of the environment of the Gothic cathedral choirs in which the tapestries were

Laura Weigert is Assistant Professor of Art History and Humanities at Reed College. She is coauthor of *Histoire de Saint Etienne* and *Judith et Holopherne*.

The illustrations are worth buying the book. Added to that, the descriptions and insight about the weavings and their history shared by Laura Weigert make this book an interesting and thought provoking book.

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