

II. NOTRE-DAME, CATHEDRAL OF AMIENS (1220-1269)

Historical and background information

1. The Gothic cathedral of Amiens was constructed between 1220-1269, following the destruction of the old cathedral in 1218; nave chapels, west towers and central steeple are later. Bishop Evrard de Fouilloy initiated the work. The master masons were Robert de Luzarches, Thomas de Cormont and his son Renaud de Cormont. Built of chalk; measures 470' in length and 213' in overall width; crown of interior vaulting rises to a height of 137' (144 royal feet).
2. Position of the cathedral in the town. Amiens, acquired by the French monarchy in the 1180s, was governed by a commune. Notre-Dame was the seat (cathedra) of the bishop and was served by a chapter of forty canons.
3. The Gothic cathedral as civic and religious monument.
4. Plan: cruciform; orientation. Parts of plan: nave, aisles, transept, crossing, choir, apse, ambulatory, radiating chapels. The plan involves a combination of arithmetic and geometric proportions. The nave bays are modular (squares and double-squares); the overall dimensions are derived from the great square placed in the center of the edifice.
5. Symbolic role of numbers in measurements
 - a. Height of interior vault of 144 royal feet: 144 cubits is measurement of heavenly city of Jerusalem (see Book of Revelation)
 - b. Central crossing square measures 50 feet: 50 cubits is measurement of width of Noah's ark (nave from the Latin *navus*, meaning boat: the cathedral as a vehicle for salvation).
6. Construction: arch and vault; pointed arch and ribbed quadripartite vaults, piers with colonnettes (piliers cantonnés), uprights and flying buttresses.
7. Interior elevation: nave arcade, triforium, clerestory. Compare elevations of nave to choir.
8. Stained glass: lancets, oculi, rose window; space and light; directionality. (The stained glass at Amiens was lost to storms and other destruction before the French Revolution; for a cathedral with its original windows, see the comparative material on Chartres.)
9. Sculptural program: Design and style; location and relation to architecture.
 - a. West façade: Last Judgment in tympanum of central portal. Trumeau figures: St. Firmin (patron saint of Amiens) on north portal, *Beau Dieu* (Christ) on central portal, Virgin Mary on south portal. Quatrefoils: Labors of the Months, Signs of the Zodiac, Virtues and Vices.
 - b. South transept portal: *Vierge Dorée*—Gothic style of the 1250s.

Readings and web resources

Primary Source Reader

Renaud de Cormont, Inscription in the labyrinth
Selections from the Bible: Gospel of St. John, Gospel of St. Matthew, Revelation
of St. John the Divine
Abbot Suger, "On the Abbey Church of Saint-Denis"
Jacobus de Voragine, from the *Golden Legend*: "Assumption of the Blessed
Virgin Mary"
Pope Gregory the Great, "On the Proper Use of Images"

Readings on Butler Reserve

Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*
(New York, 1972), especially chapter 1: "General Characteristics of Medieval
Iconography" (also available as an E-Book through CLIO)
Stephen Murray, *Notre-Dame, Cathedral of Amiens: the Power of Change in
Gothic* (Cambridge, 1996)
Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (New York, 1976) (also
available as an E-Book through CLIO)
Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the
Medieval Concept of Order* (Princeton, 1988), especially chapter 1: "Gothic
Form," and chapter 2: "Measure and Light"

Other readings

Michael Camille, "Gothic Signs and the Surplus: The Kiss on the Cathedral." *Yale
French Studies* 80 (1991): 151-70. (available as .pdf and through JSTOR)

Web resources

The "Amiens Trilogy," a series of short films narrated by Professor Stephen
Murray, available as downloads or streaming video; QuickTime VR 360
degree views of the exterior and interior of Amiens; and ground plan and
elevation available as .pdf document from the Amiens page of the Art
Humanities website.
Interactive Animated Glossary at http://www.learn.columbia.edu/amiens_flash
Amiens 360 at http://www.learn.columbia.edu/amiens_360
Digital 3-D model of Amiens available at
<http://www.mcah.columbia.edu/Amiens.html>

Local museum resources

The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, located on Amsterdam Avenue at
111th Street: <http://www.stjohndivine.org/>