

La Cathedrale Notre Dame d'Amiens

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Amiens Cathedral serves as a testament to the beauty and grace of the French Gothic movement in the Middle Ages. This stunning cathedral stands in the once thriving and bustling town of Amiens, France, roughly 140 kilometers north of Paris. The cathedral was built to replace the previous church, which was destroyed in a fire in 1218. Work on the cathedral was started in 1222 and ended in 1269. The cathedral survived a fire during construction, in 1258, which damaged the walls of the fledgling church, setting construction back. The bishop who broke ground on this tremendous undertaking was Bishop Evrard de Fouillois (1211-1222). The construction was completed under Bishop Bernard d'Abbeville (1259-1278). There were four bishops in between these two who saw the Cathedral's humble beginnings and its glorious completion. The original master builder, Robert de Luzarches, died two years into construction of the church, according to local legend, and it is not clear who oversaw the subsequent design and construction of this masterpiece of High Gothic.

The plan of Amiens is very typical of the Classical Gothic buildings in France. The transept is pulled down the body of the nave, instead of copying earlier models that have a transept more towards the east end of the building. The transept is not the focal point of this church, but instead is very short and truncated. The nave and the two side aisles are the center of attention, leading to the apse and ambulatory. Coming away from the ambulatory there are seven radiating chapels (see Figure 1). This plan is very similar to the plans of cathedrals of Chartres, Reims, and Notre Dame de Paris.

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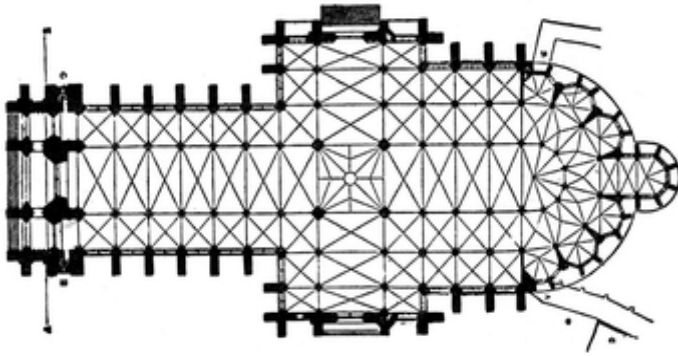


Figure 1. The plan of Amiens. *Courtesy Sacred Destinations, <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/france/amiens-cathedral>.*

The Cathedral does not stand apart from the crush of the city; instead, it rises from the squat buildings of Amiens very forcefully and abruptly (see Figure 2). Because of this, the towers on the west façade demand the eye's attention (see Figure 4). Built out of white stone, the Cathedral almost seems to glow in the sunlight. The portals are intricately carved and are dedicated to different holy figures. The center portal is dedicated to the *Beau-Dieu*, or Handsome Christ, while the left portal is dedicated to St. Firmin, Amiens's first bishop, who was martyred in the beginning of the second century. The right is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The eye is soon pulled away from the entrances, first by the large, beautiful rose window nestled between the two towers, and then to the vertical thrust of the towers flanking the rose window. The façade has a very strong horizontal pull caused by the gallery level with its profusion of capitals and statues, while the portals and the large rose window strongly demand the eye's concentration. This façade is dominated by the *Beau-Dieu* portal, not surprisingly because of its central location. The roof's gable pulls the eye upwards, but the width of the space also pulls the eye to the outer boundaries of the portal. The doors of the Cathedral are very passive within the portals, their height and simplicity are overwhelmed by the profusion of statuary above and around them. In each portal, the gable interior is articulated with a myriad of smaller carved figures surrounding the tympanum. These do not hold the viewer's attention, but merely serve to draw the eye towards the tympanum, central statue, and the doors. The jamb



Figure 2. Street view. Courtesy “Amiens Cathedral,” *Sacred Destinations*, <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/france/amiens-cathedral>.

statues, however, stand apart from the profusion of the gable interior and draw the eye.

Within the *Beau-Dieu* portal, the statues themselves grab the viewer’s attention. The jamb statues on either side of the central figure include St. Peter and St. Andrew, as well as Wise and Foolish Virgins. The viewer’s attention is pulled away from the jamb statues to the tympanum, where Christ sits in the Judgment Seat and is the undisputed center of focus. In the free standing statue of Christ between the doors, his right hand is raised in blessing, and he seems almost to confront the viewer, looking down upon them in benediction. This juxtaposition reminds the worshipper of the dual nature of Christ. The Virgin portal’s central sculpture is of the Madonna and Christ Child; both are naturalistically sculpted. The main theme in this portal’s jamb statues is of the Annunciation, when Gabriel came to Mary to tell her of God’s wish that she be the mother of Jesus.

The tympanum articulates the story of Mary’s death and her role as the Queen of Heaven. She is seated on the left side of Christ, wearing a crown and holding a scepter. This portal is less central than the *Beau-Dieu* portal; the tympanum is fragmented and does not have a central dominating figure. The portal of St. Firmin is ded-



Figure 3. The south façade. *Courtesy Amiens Cathedral Exterior Photos, <http://www.learn.columbia.edu/Mcahweb/Photo/Exterior/index.html>.*

icated to Firmin Martyr. He is the focus of the viewer's attention as the central sculpture. He is standing in full ecclesiastical garb and is treading upon Sebastianus, the Roman official who caused his death. The archivolts of this portal are articulated with angels. The jambs are made up of statues of local saints, and the tympanum depicts the translation of relics into the city (see Figure 4).



Figure 5. The west façade. *Courtesy Amiens Cathedral Exterior Photos, <http://www.learn.columbia.edu/Mcahweb/Photo/Exterior/index.html>.*

Moving from the west end to the south, the eye is pulled upward by the extreme vertical lines of the nave and south transept. The buttresses and high clerestory windows are the main factors that create this sense of verticality. The horizontal lines of the roof and the first story are heavy but do not outweigh the verticality. The portal on the south façade focuses around the central statue of Mary. The Madonna is situated between the two doors and is high over the viewer's head. The tympanum draws the eye up, and it looks to be slimmer than the west façade portals. The tympanum is highly fragmented and tells the story of a local saint, Honoré. The south façade portal also has a large rose window, and the flying buttresses are visible on both sides. These buttresses add the feeling of symmetry to this south façade. The symmetry draws the eye in, towards the middle where it rests on the rose window. Instead of portals flanking the central portal, the south façade has first floor windows on either side. This side view gives the impression of strong vertical lines, as well as the enormity of the Cathedral due to its length. The emphasis is not on the length of the building but the height (see Figure 3).

The ambulatory also has a strong vertical thrust, mainly due to the buttresses and the steep roofs of the radiating chapels. The ambulatory also has gables for each clerestory window, drawing the eye even further up. There is also a strong billowing effect of these chapels, as each one comes farther away from the main body of the Cathedral, until the chapel that corresponds with the apse completes this trend. Moving northward from the radiating chapels, the north side of the building mirrors the south side in verticality and portal structure.

The effect of the exterior is one of an overabundance of visual interest; it almost overwhelms the viewer. The statues that populate the tympanums and archivolts of the west façade give the building a soft and very textured look on the ground level. The rose windows over the façades intensify this feeling of texture of the exterior with the play of stone and glass within them.

Entering from the west façade, the eye is immediately drawn up by the massive segregated columns that rise from the floor to different destinations. The large columnar piers stop halfway up the wall and spring into tall, pointed Gothic arches. The smaller secondary columns rise all the way to the ceiling as reinforcements for the rib vaults that cross the ceiling or to create the arches for the clerestory windows. For every column that creates a rib vault, there is also an intermediate transverse vault that crosses the entire length of the ceiling, segregating space on the Cathedral floor and creating the

impression of a sturdy barrel vault underneath the Gothic rib vaults. Created of white stone, the impression is soothing and radiant. The crispness of design and organic feel of the interior is directly related to this grouping of columns (see Figure 5). Looking up past the columns, the eye is drawn by the repetitive harmony of the gallery's columns. For each two tall columns that go up to the ceiling, there are two sets of gallery columns. These are beautiful triforiums that are repeated down the length of the nave, as a way to counteract the verticality that dominates this space.

After looking up at the columns, the eye is almost forced back to the floor by an overwhelming floor design. Geometric designs in stark black and white stone draw the eye into a plethora of sharp turns and angles. There are many different designs, but the largest is the labyrinth, placed in the center aisle of the nave. The impression is one of ordered chaos, with each design competing with another of the viewer's attention (See Figure 6).



Figure 5. View of the ceiling nave. *Courtesy Amiens Cathedral interior Photos, <http://www.learn.columbia.edu/Mcahweb/Photo/interior/index.html>.*



Figure 6. Labyrinth. Courtesy <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intdept/pnp/labyrinth.html>.

After the shock of the dichromatic floor, the viewer's eye is drawn upward again by the enormous windows of the nave and clerestory. All of the windows have mostly clear glass, with stained glass around the edges. These windows flood the nave with light and give the nave an illumination that seems to reflect off the white stone and fill it with an unearthly radiance. The strong lateral pull of the nave and triforium draws the viewer's eye and body toward the apse, where the arches become smaller and narrower. The transverse ribs are no longer used, instead rib vaults from the hemicycle all come to the same point and focus the eye not on the walls,

but on this point. From that point, the viewer's eye drops from the ceiling to the altar. This gives an impression of divine immanence and presence within the cathedral (See Figure 7).

Amiens Cathedral is a space that dwarfs the humans that come and worship here. This enormity creates the sense of otherworldliness and transcendence. From the very ornate detail of the exterior, the interior is simplicity and elegance itself. The repetitive columns and triforium create a soothing atmosphere that promotes silent reflection and adoration. The white stone reflects the light let in by the nave and high clerestory windows, which creates a space, that during the day, is flooded with radiant light. While the sun starts to set, the shadows that advance over the building intensify the height of the vaults and the creates a dim light within the outer aisles of the nave. Amiens Cathedral is not the typical church, with an exterior more ornate than the interior, but this cathedral is one of spectacular beauty, inside and out.

The Cathedral looks to the untrained eye to be a cohesive whole, but this is not the case. The chronology of Amiens Cathedral spans decades, and, within that time, technology improved and the architecture became more daring. In this next section, I will discuss the intricacies of the chronology of this stunning achievement of Gothic architecture.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF AMIENS CATHEDRAL

The town of Amiens has a long and turbulent history. The first mention of what is now Amiens, France came from the writings of Julius Caesar, in *The Gallic Wars and Other Commentaries*.¹ He mentioned the people, the *Ambiani*, as well as the town, *Samarobriva*. For over a millennia, the town of Amiens has stood the test of time, through periods of peace, revolutions, and wars. Churches have become an integral part of the landscape of Amiens; the first recorded Christian buildings appear in Amiens in the fifth century. Although there have been smaller shrines and churches, such as the Sanctuary of Firmin the Martyr and Saint-Martin-aux-Jumeaux, the cathedrals of Amiens have always stood on the site of the current edifice.

The site of the cathedral in Amiens has been home to at least three churches before the current building. There are several rea-

¹Stephen Murray, *Notre-Dame, Cathedral of Amiens: The Power of Change in Gothic* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996), 17.



Figure 7. View of the alter from the nave. *Courtesy http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nef_et_choeur.jpg.*

sons why these building no longer stand. The earliest churches were likely destroyed by Norsemen during the ninth century. Numerous fires were also to blame for destruction of churches, as well as the town itself. The first churches that are recorded probably date to the fifth century. Within a parallel twin church complex, the northern church was dedicated at first to Saints Peter and Paul. This church was later was renamed for St. Firmin the Confessor, the third bishop of Amiens, whose relics were housed there. The southern church was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and to Firmin the Martyr, a bishop of Amiens who was beheaded in the second century (not Firmin the Confessor). The southern church was used by the bishop, and, over time, the name of the building was changed to Notre-Dame.² From all evidence, these churches lay side by side, with ends facing the city wall. Some unknown incident caused these buildings' destruction, for there was a building on the same site that was destroyed in 1137. After the destruction of that edifice, another was raised and consecrated in 1152. This cathedral was destroyed in the fire of 1218. No description of this building has survived, although it is generally believed to be a formidably large building.³ In 1220, work began on what is the current cathedral of Amiens (see Figures 1 and 3).

Much debate surrounds the chronology of the construction of Amiens Cathedral. Many architectural historians, such as Jean Nicholas Louis Durand, believe that the construction was west-to-east and composed of two separate campaigns of building. This accepted narrative has come under fire recently because of close scrutiny of the primary sources, such as charters issued by the monastic and episcopal groups present at Amiens. The contention springs from demolition of two buildings that were standing on the site of the Cathedral prior to construction, the Hotel Dieu and the church of St. Firmin. The charters written by the clergy do not give specific dates for their demolition and so modern historians are uncertain of the timeline of construction of the current edifice.⁴ In the case of Amiens Cathedral, there were four masters, Robert de Luzarches, Thomas de Cormont and his son, Renaud de Cormont. Also within this time, there were six bishops who patronized the monumental project: Evrard de Fouilloy (1211-1222), Geoffroy d'Eu (1222-1236),

²Columbia University, *Amiens Cathedral Project*, <http://www.learn.columbia.edu/Mcahweb/index-frame.html> (accessed April 12, 2010).

³Stephen Murray, "Looking for Robert de Luzarches: The Early Work at Amiens Cathedral," *Gesta* 29 (no. 1, 1990): 111-112.

⁴*Ibid.*, 117.

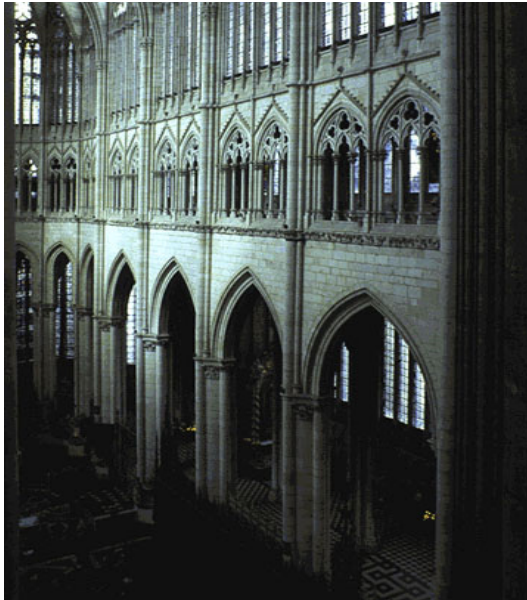
Arnoul de la Pierre (1236-1247), Gérard de Conchy (1247-1257), Aleume de Neuilly (1258-1259) and Bernard d' Abbeville (1259-1278).⁵ These were the men that planned, funded, and cared for the gorgeous monument that we see standing in Amiens today.

Stephen Murray, a leading architectural historian of Amiens, has a new approach to the construction of the Cathedral. He suggests that building began in the middle of the church, with construction spreading in the nave from east to west and in the lower apse from west to east. The process of dating the Cathedral is made more complicated by the demolition of nave walls as part of a restoration in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which were likely built soon after construction began. The Cathedral was built continuously from 1220 to 1269, with new innovations being added in the upper levels as well as the choir and transepts, such as openwork flyers and bar tracery in the triforiums.⁶ This is partly because of the length of time the Cathedral was in construction, as well as the changes in master builders.

Exact timelines are difficult to create, but extant documents record the death of Robert de Luzarches shortly after the death of Bishop Evrard de Fouilloy in 1222. De Luzarches was probably responsible for the plan, foundation and the lower portions of the nave. The nave consists of seven bays, two of different length and the middle five are of the same length (see Figure 1). This allows for visitors to feel the difference within the processional route from door to choir as well as draw them farther into the nave. The hemicycle of the building, the ambulatory, radiating chapels, and the altar have a slightly different "articulation" that points to new ideas being added to the existing plan. The difference is the use of a triangular arch and beaked capitals. Amiens Cathedral spans two different styles, Classic and Rayonnant. This change is articulated within the building, in the drastic change from the heavy and bulky façade to the light and void middle and upper levels (see Figures 9 and 10). The main architectural difference in Amiens is the split between the lower level and the upper level. The lower level was completed in the 1220s, while the work on the upper nave was complete in the 1230s, and the upper choir was under construction from the 1240s to 1260s. The lower level of the nave is characterized by the dado arcade that runs the length of the nave (see Figure 10). The upper levels of the Cathedral are much lighter, with a glazed triforiums and

⁵Columbia University, *Amiens Cathedral Project*.

⁶Murray, "Looking for Robert de Luzarches," 73, 76-77, 126-127.



Figures 8 and 9. Courtesy Amiens Cathedral interior Photos, <http://www.learn.columbia.edu/Mcahweb/Photo/interior/index.html>.

openwork flyers. The western façade was most likely under construction around the same time that the upper nave, apse aisle vaults and ambulatory were being completed, in the 1230s. The western façade chronology has been a source of contention between architectural historians, with early historians such as Eugene Viollet-le-Duc leaning towards a later date, around 1240s. However, similarities between the capitals in the upper nave and the façade suggest an earlier date of construction, between 1220 and 1230. From the 1240s to completion, the upper transept and choir were subject to an “architectural revolution,” with the new technologies implemented by Renaud de Cormont.⁷



Figure 10. The dado arcade. *Courtesy Amiens Cathedral interior Photos, <http://www.learn.columbia.edu/Mcahweb/Photo/interior/index.html>.*

In 1258, almost forty years after work began, a fire consumed much of the construction site, damaging the crossing pier on south-eastern side and leaving the capitals of the clerestory and the high capitals under the crossing arch badly scorched (see Fig-

⁷Ibid., 143-146.

ure 12). In the choir bay that lies adjacent to this, the capitals, enclosing arch of the triforium and the gable, were also scorched. Due to the lack of damage to the stones on the inside of the triforium, we can only surmise that these were replaced after the fire. The choir vaults survived unscathed, but the upper choir was at least scorched because of the red hue of the masonry. With the reddened stones still part of the fabric, the construction of the Cathedral is shown to have progressed to the enclosing arches of the clerestory windows on the south side of the choir and the high capitals on the north side as well.

While the fire was raging in the Cathedral, a chest holding the seals and titles of the bishops was stolen. The theft raises suspicion that the fire was arson and may have been a result of increasing tension between the clergy and the community. The clergy brought a suit against a few powerful members of the bourgeoisie of Amiens as a result. The outcome of this case has been lost, but evidence suggests that the social tensions centered upon the construction of the Cathedral.⁸

The first phase construction of the Cathedral was completed around 1269. The building stood without major reconstruction for almost two hundred and fifty years. Then, in 1497, chapter records from the clergy reveal structural weaknesses in the crossing piers. This problem was remedied by the use of "Spanish iron" to anchor the piers at the height of the triforium. These ties are not in the current Cathedral, but their purpose was to counteract the thrust of the vaults, which were causing the capitals to lean out at the springing of the vaults. In 1503, another chapter deliberation reveals that pillars next to the piers (that were already anchored) were in need of repair. The master mason, Pierre Tarissel, suggested that the force of the ringing of the bells was the cause of the damage, and it was decided that the bell will not be struck at each hour. Other structural problems were solved by adding more flying buttresses in the choir, repair of the capitals around the window tracery, and demolition of some of the "pinnacles of the openwork of the flyers."⁹

These were not the only changes that occurred during this period. In the fourteenth century, the lower nave walls were taken

⁸Stephen Murray and James Addiss, "Plan and Space at Amiens Cathedral: With a New Plan Drawn by James Addiss," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 49 (no. 1, 1990): 48.

⁹Holly Haynes, *Amiens Cathedral, Amiens*, <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/france/amiens-cathedral> (accessed April 12, 2010).

down and in their place lateral chapels were constructed (see Figure 1). New buttresses were extended outward, and new walls, windows, and vaults were constructed because of this change.¹⁰ Other later additions to the Cathedral were the towers of the west façade, the south tower being completed in 1366 and the north tower complete in 1402. After these additions, little else was added to the Cathedral until the nineteenth century.¹¹

The Cathedral was subject to many wars, natural disasters, and political shifts. In the Huguenot iconoclasm of 1561, some of the artwork in the Cathedral was destroyed by fundamentalist Calvinists. In both 1627 and 1705, hurricane winds ravaged the upper levels of Amiens. In 1675, between the two natural disasters, a power mill exploded, causing the loss of some of the original stained glass. The renowned nineteenth-century architect Eugene Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879) came to Amiens in 1849 with the aim to reconstruct and add to this already impressive structure. In this campaign, an exact copy of the original labyrinth, created in 1288, was installed. The original had been destroyed during the French Revolution (see Figure 6). The world wars took a massive toll on the Cathedral. Most of the stained glass was destroyed; the town of Amiens was the site of a major battle in World War I. In 1981, UNESCO declared Amiens Cathedral a World Heritage Site, citing the coherence of plan, the sculptures of the western façade and the beauty of the three tiered elevation. In 2000, the three portals of the west façade were cleaned and revealed a rare hint of the original polychrome paint.¹²

In conclusion, Amiens Cathedral was built in a relatively short span of time in comparison to contemporary cathedrals, such as Notre Dame and Reims Cathedrals, and, despite numerous structural problems, she stands with the same grace Robert de Luzarches envisioned when he first put quill to paper, or chisel to stone. With the relatively short construction chronology, Amiens affords the architectural historian a rare example of the genius two generations of architects was able to accomplish. Notre-Dame d'Amiens has persevered through the centuries, as a testament to the ingenuity and innovation of Gothic architects.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Hanz Jantzen, *High Gothic* (Hertfordshire: Garden City Press, 1962), 4-24, 71, 76.

¹²Ibid., 156-157.

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF AMIENS CATHEDRAL

Amiens Cathedral has inspired and awed generations since its completion in the 1260s. Every successive generation has taken a slightly different view of this monument as well as Gothic architecture as a whole. Within these different views, each new perspective brings new evidence and information to light. Generational differences create fascination with different facets of the style and Amiens, in particular, and inspire the devotion of much effort to the research and study of this particular facet. Every article written changes the perception of the Gothic period of architecture, as well the individual buildings that create typify the style.

The historiography of Gothic architecture in the second half of twentieth century was primarily focused on the structural properties and their relation to the dramatic shift from the Romanesque style into the Gothic style. Hans Jantzen (1881-1967), an art historian, was a forerunner in this movement to place structural motives before the aesthetic in relation to Gothic architecture. In his book, *High Gothic*, published in 1962, Jantzen writes in support of the theory of formalism, a style of architecture that placed emphasis on the shape of the building, as well as the part to whole ratio and cohesiveness.

Jantzen mentions aesthetics in relation to the stained glass windows and the sculpture that make up exterior portals. He comments on the color of glass used in different buildings that create different atmospheres within the cathedrals, as well as the overarching themes of these large windows. He uses Chartes as his example, because of the large amount of original stained glass that still survives. Jantzen describes the pictures within the windows as "a pictorial pageantry which profoundly affects the interior and supplies a decisive share of the sublime majesty characteristic of Gothic interior design." These windows also told the story of who commissioned them; many different benefactors contributed to the cathedral, from the royal family to various guilds such as weavers and pastry makers.¹³

At Amiens, there are three portals on the western façade. *Beau-Dieu* is the central portal, the Virgin Mary is the south portal, and St. Firmin, Amiens' first bishop, is the portal to the north. When discussing the exterior portals, Jantzen places

¹³Ibid., 132.

structure firmly behind the symbolic and aesthetic argument, although he does credit the “disciplined style of the monumental sculpture” to the master builder, Robert de Luzarches, rather than to the sculptor.¹⁵ Jantzen emphasizes the innovation made by Robert de Luzarches when he added a horizontal band across the socle which ran across the face of the buttress piers as well. A main focus of his discussion on the portals is the appearance of the figures within them and the theological role they play. The Virgin Mary appears as the Queen of Heaven and is sculpted more realistically than the Anne of Chartes, which indicates a shift away from the abstraction of the human figure; this shift also suggests that the south façade, where the sculpture is placed, was finished during the later years of construction of the Cathedral. The placement of figures within the portal is an important indicator of the portal’s use and meaning.

Jantzen’s work on the Classic Gothic Cathedrals paved the way for many new art and architectural historians. Stephen Murray is one such architectural historian. In his 1990 article, “Plan and Space at Amiens Cathedral,” Murray approaches the Cathedral in a different way than Jantzen; he integrates a much more detailed formal analysis and also de-emphasizes the “family of Chartres” theory. Murray devotes considerable attention to the spatial dimensions and views the building in a geometric fashion. He also puts forth the idea that “the plan of Amiens Cathedral was shaped by a designer who was primarily interested in shapes and proportions based upon simple geometric relationships that can actually be sensed.”¹⁴ Unlike Jantzen, Murray does not emphasize the master builder; instead he questions how much of the Cathedral is built as the result of Robert de Luzarches’ plans and asks how much the other three master builders contributed. This indicates a fascination with the problem of authorship, the need to understand who was responsible for the creative ideas that came together and formed the cathedral standing today.

Murray’s treatment of the building is much different than Jantzen’s. Murray takes his audience through a virtual tour of the cathedral; he does not break the building down into separate parts that require deep analysis until he reaches the choir and hemicycle, where Murray spills considerable ink explaining the geometry that creates the ambulatory. Murray relies heavily on the work of Eugene Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), who mapped the

¹⁴Ibid., 133-134, 136.

geometric grid of the hemicycle. Through his analysis of the hemicycle of Amiens cathedral, Murray's argues that the radiating chapels were created in conflict with the design of the rest of the Cathedral. This conflict between the different designs led to a "looseness" where the hemicycle meets the straight bays of the choir. The radiating chapels themselves are also a point of interest with Murray because of geometry. Viollet-le-Duc put forth the theory that the radiating chapels were planned to be five points of an octagon. This design idea was not put into practice, because of the competing desires for perfection of geometry as well as the completeness of slender masonry features throughout the Cathedral.¹⁵ This article presents a much different perspective than an article Murray authored that same year, 1990.

In March of 1990, Stephen Murray published "Looking for Robert de Luzarches: The Early Work At Amiens Cathedral." The title itself is a definite signal of the architectural historians' increasing interest in authorship. In this article, Murray seeks to dispel the standard narrative of the construction timeline of Amiens Cathedral. Using documents as well as archeological evidence, Murray makes the case that the normative timeline is incorrect. Murray also writes this article with the intent of finding the creative style and architectural legacy of Robert de Luzarches, which are main concerns of the formalist school of thought. This article relies heavily on the textual evidence, primarily the 1236 Charter of Bishop Geoffroy d'Eu, which, in summary, outlined the need for a new cathedral. To make room for the new cathedral, an earlier church known as St. Firmin's had to be demolished and the sanctuary of this small church required relocation into the Hotel Dieu. This is a shaky argument; charters were drawn up in some cases after the action had already been taken. Murray's evidence, though, does not stop there. Archaeological research has suggested that an old Roman wall was to blame for the delay in construction. This curious development has shed light on the reason the chevet is one step higher than the nave. Viollet-le-Duc is again cited in this article for his documentation of the "extraordinary raft of foundation . . . under the chevet."¹⁶ Murray uses these two arguments to support his theory that the standard narrative must be dismissed. Also in this article, Murray attempts to decipher what contributions de

¹⁵Murray and Addiss, "Plan and Space at Amiens Cathedral," 44-66.

¹⁶Murray, *Notre-Dame, Cathedral of Amiens*, 58-61.

Luzarches made to Amiens in order to recreate the building campaigns of the three subsequent master builders and the pace of construction in a single stroke. Using small aesthetic differences and technological advances in the upper choir and nave, as well as textual and archeological evidence, Murray's article provides a strong argument for the reevaluation of the accepted timeline of construction of Amiens Cathedral.

In 1993, Murray published his famous monograph, *Notre Dame, Cathedral of Amiens: The Power of Change in Gothic*, in which discusses the Cathedral from all sides, from aesthetic, to structural and theological. In the introduction, Murray takes an aesthetic approach while comparing Amiens to other contemporary Gothic cathedrals, such as Reims and Chartres. Murray is stressing the differences of opinions between historians such as Jantzen and Jean Bony, particularly on the subject of the portals, suggesting a desire to fit Amiens into a greater cultural context. While Jantzen saw the portals as beautiful features of the cathedral, Bony saw them as too different from the interior of the building (i.e., the depth and form of the sculpture of the façade was at odds with the smooth and flat planes in the interior).¹⁷ Bony's theories were also centered on the idea that the change in craftsman's tools were the cause of change between the exterior and the interior of the cathedral. Throughout the introduction, Murray stresses the need to re-establish a chronology that is based on the building itself, with no ingrained assumptions of cathedral building as a whole. Murray seeks to dismantle the theory that Amiens was simply another cathedral that was within the "family of Chartres" and instead suggests that Amiens be studied on its own, and seen as "a glorious invention."¹⁸ Murray concluded by briefly suggesting the possibility of an Augustinian theological influence in the portals, one which illustrates connection between the material world and the New Jerusalem of Heaven. In the portal of St. Firmin, the quatrefoils of the west façade display art that makes it very clear that when the Eternal City is established the "secular" world and all that encompasses will be destroyed in order to create New Jerusalem. Murray also discusses the motion of the Eucharist as playing a dynamic role in the designing and decoration of the Cathedral. On this particular point, Murray moves away from formalist thought and drifts

¹⁷Murray, "Looking for Robert de Luzarches," 111-131.

¹⁸Murray, *Notre-Dame, Cathedral of Amiens*, 3.

much closer to social history. He uses the west façade sculpture to illustrate this point: "The Church is propelled inexorably forward toward the end of time anticipated at each celebration of the Eucharist."¹⁹ Murray's focus on the portals also has a symbolic rationalization. These portals are not just the portals to the Cathedral; Murray also sees them as defining the space in a purely theological way. He proposes that the Apocalyptic Christ who sits in the middle portal serves to remind the faithful that they are entering a liminal space between heaven and earth, a New Jerusalem on earth. The different form Christ takes is also important, according to Murray. The three in the portals, the Apocalyptic Christ, the *Beau-Dieu* and the Sacramental Christ are all portrayed to remind the congregation of the loving care their God shows them and to fear Him.

Amiens Cathedral has stood for the better half of a millennia. This building as a whole is a beautiful example of the proportion and grace that typifies the Gothic style. Amiens' figurative location has shifted throughout the centuries as a result of the changes in perspective of the historians writing about the cathedral. While this building stands, people who are interested in it will always be able to discover something new and fresh to write about. Each new generation who observes this building uses the knowledge of the previous generations to form theories that are unique. Notre Dame d' Amiens has been viewed through many lenses, from a purely structural thought, to a purely aesthetic one. Theology also has a voice that is heard in these debates as well.

THE QUESTION OF PLACEMENT

Amiens Cathedral is a building of stunning beauty and supreme grace. The aura of cohesiveness is exuded in a quiet manner, all the parts coming together to create a mesmerizing whole. The question of placement is this: what buildings are Amiens closely related to, and what can we make of this relationship? Many art and architectural historians, such as Hans Jantzen (1881-1967) and Eugene Viollet-le Duc (1814-1879) have categorized Amiens as being a part of the "family of Chartres," a group of buildings that also includes the cathedrals of Chartres and Reims.²⁰ Stephen Murray, an art historian, allows that Amiens

¹⁹Murray, *Notre-Dame, Cathedral of Amiens*, 124.

should only be compared to these two cathedrals, but he insists the ingenuity and daring of the architects responsible for Amiens should be appreciated for its own merit. This debate has continued for some time, and a close inspection of these buildings will shed light on the question of placement.

These cathedrals are contemporary to each other. Construction at Chartres began in 1194 and lasted until 1260. Reims Cathedral was begun after a fire destroyed the previous cathedral in 1211 and continued until 1290. Amiens Cathedral has the shortest construction span, from 1220 until 1260.²¹ These cathedrals are also relatively geographically close, within two hundred and fifty kilometers of each other.²² Overlapping construction timetables and relative geographical closeness indicate a relationship with one another. These factors do not necessarily preclude an intentional relationship with each other. In the extant records of Amiens Cathedral, there are no mentions of masons from either Reims or Chartres. Masons in this period would have traveled to wherever the work took them, and it is possible that a mason could have worked two or all three of these sites. This is not to say that each master architect was not aware of cathedrals being built elsewhere. Amiens was the last church of these three to be finished, and it is not a coincidence that it is also the tallest.

Art historians of both camps have relied on close analyses of these buildings to make their cases. All three cathedrals had labyrinths at one point, and in Reims and Amiens the architects are honored within them. In the Reims labyrinth, the architects are rendered on the outer corners of the labyrinth, each holding an architectural instrument (see Figure 11). Unfortunately, the original labyrinth was destroyed; the only evidence extant is within manuscripts. In Amiens, the labyrinth is a square, with a cartouche in the center, where the architects and the founding bishop are commemorated (see Figure 6). The labyrinth in Chartres is circular and has no inscription within its center (see Figure 12). The labyrinth of Amiens was created in 1288; the one at Reims dates to 1290; and the one in Chartres was made

²⁰Jatzen, *High Gothic*, xii.

²¹Haynes, *Amiens Cathedral, Amiens*.

²²<http://google/maps> (accessed April 12, 2010).

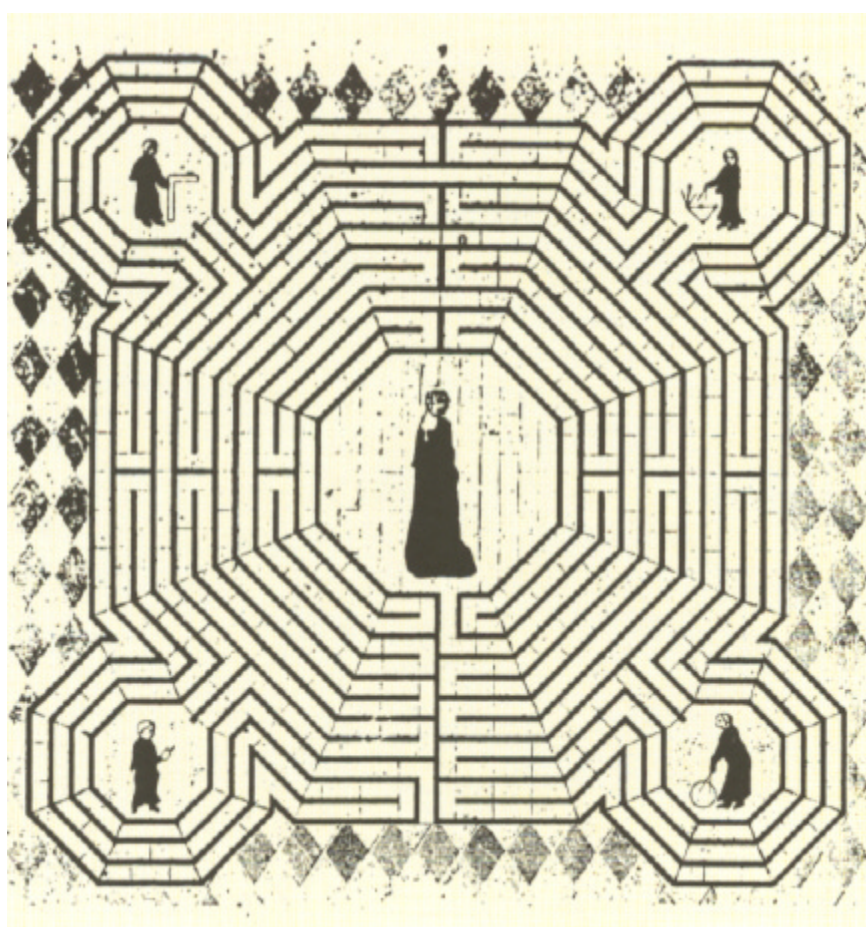


Figure 11. Labyrinth of Reims Cathedral. Courtesy http://center-forjungianstudies.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/images/The_Labyrinth_at_Reims_Cathedral.56114501.jpg.

around 1220. The patterns of these labyrinths do not suggest much borrowing. Instead, each designer created something unique and individual to their cathedral.

The similarities of these cathedrals also extend to the façades. Each cathedral has an articulated west entrance typical of Gothic architecture, but these west façades are very different. The west façade of Chartres is the least detailed, with a height that is quickly deemphasized by windows that are above the portals (see



Figure 12. Labyrinth of Chartres Cathedral. *Courtesy <http://artandhistory.files.wordpress.com/2009/01/labyrinth121.jpg>.*

Figure 16). This window design was not repeated in either Reims or Amiens; instead, the rose windows dramatically take the place of the long vertical windows. The rose window in Chartres is unarticulated at the corners, which is not the case at either Reims or Amiens. The Reims Cathedral rose window is enclosed by a slightly pointed arch and the Amiens rose window is articulated



Figure 13. The west façade of Chartres Cathedral. *Courtesy* <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/france/chartres-cathedral-photos/slides/facade-p-cc-stevecadman.jpg>.

by triforium rosettes in each corner (see Figures 14 and 4). These portals are similar, but marked differences are apparent. In Chartres, the portals are much taller and the gables are less pointed. The portals are not deep as in the later cathedrals of Reims and Amiens. The tympanums of the Chartres west façade are much larger than those at Amiens, and Reims substitutes stone tympanums with stained glass windows. Chartres portals do not visually assault the viewer, as those at the other two cathedrals do. The portals at Reims are very tall, but do not appear as tall as those at Chartres because of the archivolts that surround the entrance. The gabled roofs of these portals demand the eye to look vertically



Figure 14. The west façade of Reims Cathedral. *Courtesy* <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/france/reims-cathedral>.

towards the sculpture at the very top of the gable. The eye is then brought forcefully to rest on the windows that replaced the traditional masonry tympanum. The center portal holds a Rayonnant style rose window, while the smaller side portals are dominated by rosettes, with a smaller one taking up the rest of the window above. Instead of a statue in the center of all three doors, Reims façade only has a statue in the center portal, that of the Virgin Mary. Amiens west façade is more traditional than Reims and is more articulated than the portals of Chartres. The gables of Amiens seem to stand farther apart from the rest of the building than the gables of the other two cathedrals, demanding attention, almost at the expense of the whole façade. These gables have ar-

chivolts that are more defined than those of the earlier cathedrals, with statuary and sculpture in more abundance as well. The archivolts of Amiens are less open than those of Reims, where they make the gable seem wider because of their size. The gables and façade as a whole of Amiens have been criticized by many art historians, such as Jean Bony, who have found it at odds with the understated elegance and simplicity of the interior.²³ Amiens is the only one of these three cathedrals that has statues between the doors of every portal. This heavy emphasis on the articulation of the portals signals a break from Chartres. The windows of the portals at Reims demand the viewer's attention more than the sculpture. In Amiens, the jamb statues arrest the viewer's attention by flanking them on either side, in such a manner that the viewer seems surrounded, which is not the case in either of these earlier cathedrals.

A typical structure in Gothic architecture is the flying buttress, an apparatus used to create stunning height by shifting the thrust away from the walls and actually out of the building. Flying buttresses are pivotal to this style and are unsurprisingly found in all three cathedrals in question. Each cathedral's builders approached the problem of weight bearing and thrust very differently however.

In Chartres, the builders decided to create a thick outer wall, with spur walls as well as flying buttresses. This drastically limited the height the Cathedral could achieve because of the sheer weight of the walls. This also limited the height of the side aisles, and as a result, Chartres has the lowest nave and side aisles of these three cathedrals. The buttress with columns is very heavy, making the buttresses appear too large for the building. Another problem with the buttress system in Chartres is the tendency to overshoot the springing. The buttresses connect to the wall above the springing, not allowing them to catch the full weight of the vault. At Reims, the builders may have been aware of these design flaws with Chartres and may have planned with them in mind. Where at Chartres the thick wall traveled the entire length of the wall, Reims thick outer wall stops at the level of the side aisles. This allows the level of the side aisles and nave to rise. The flying buttresses are still overshooting the springing of the vaults, but they are much lighter than those found on Chartres. Amiens' flying buttress system is radically different than that of Chartres. Stephen Murray along with Jean Bony assert that "to find slenderness and delicacy in Gothic architecture, we

²³Murray, *Notre-Dame, Cathedral of Amiens*, 3.

should turn not to the ponderous forms of Chartres, or even to Reims, but the daintiness of Soissons Cathedral.”²⁴ Instead of long and thin flying buttresses, the planners of Amiens opted for the use of shorter buttresses that were not built of solid masonry, connected to a thick wall that was joined to the building at the window level of the side aisles. This allowed for more voided space at the triforium and clerestory levels, in which the planners placed large windows. Amiens’ buttress system also allowed the side aisles to gain height as well as the nave. Amiens Cathedral is the tallest of these cathedrals, with a nave height of 137 feet.²⁴

There are several explanations for these differences between these three “Classic” Gothic cathedrals. Some art historians, Paul Frankl, for example, believed that Gothic architecture was an “immanent process,” in which each mistake made by previous builders was not replicated, but created new problems with each change. Frankl, as well as Hans Jantzen, believed that Reims was the inspiration of Amiens Cathedral. Murray takes a different approach, instead of placing Amiens in the creative shadow of other cathedrals; Murray places her on her own pedestal, as her own muse.

²⁴Jatzen, *High Gothic*, 45.