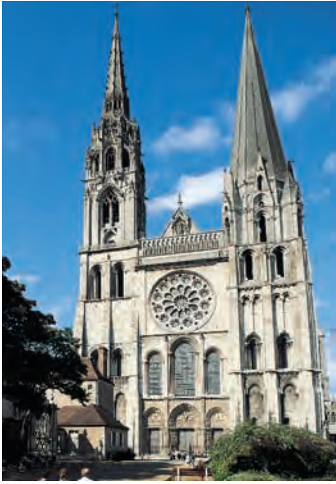


13

Gothic Art

Gothic cathedrals are among the greatest and most elaborate monuments in stone. The term *Gothic* is applied primarily to the art produced in Western Europe from about the middle of the twelfth century in France to the sixteenth century in other parts of Europe. The term was first used by Italians in the sixteenth century to denigrate the pre-Renaissance style. Literally, *Gothic* refers to the Germanic tribes who invaded Greece and Italy and sacked Rome in A.D. 410. The Goths were blamed for destroying what remained of the Classical style. In fact, however, the origins of Gothic art had nothing to do with what had happened several hundred years earlier. By the nineteenth century, when scholars realized the source of the confusion, it was too late. Gothic remains the accepted name of the style discussed in this chapter.

Origins of the Gothic Style in France

The time and place in which the Gothic style emerged can be identified with unusual precision. It dates from 1137–44, and it originated in the Île-de-France, the region in northern France that was the personal domain of the French royal family. Credit for the invention of Gothic goes to Abbot Suger of the French royal monastery at Saint-Denis, about 6 miles (10 km) north of Paris.

Suger was born in 1081 and educated in the monastery school of Saint-Denis along with the future French king Louis VI. Suger later became a close political and religious adviser to both Louis VI and Louis VII, and he remained a successful mediator between the Church and the royal family. While Louis VII was away on the Second Crusade (1147–49), Suger was appointed regent of France.

In 1122 Suger was named abbot of Saint-Denis, which had a special place in French history. Not only was Denis, the first bishop of Paris and the patron saint of France, buried there, but it was also the burial place of the French royal family. Suger decided to rebuild and enlarge the eighth-century Carolingian church of Saint-Denis, making it the spiritual center of France. To this end, he searched for a new kind of architecture to reinforce the divine right of the king's authority and enhance the spirituality of his church. The rebuilding program did not start until 1137, and in the meantime Suger made extensive preparations. He studied the biblical account of the construction of Solomon's Temple and immersed himself in what he thought were the writings of Saint Denis. (Scholars now believe that Suger was reading the works of Dionysius, a sixth-century mystic theologian.)

Suger was inspired by the author's emphasis on the mathematical harmony that should exist between the parts of a building and on the miraculous, mystical effect of light. This was elaborated into a theory based on musical ratios; the result was a system that expressed complex symbolism based on mathematical ratios. The fact that these theories were attributed to Saint Denis made them all the more appealing to Abbot Suger. In his preoccupation with light, Suger was thinking in a traditional Christian framework, for the formal qualities of light had been associated with Christ and divinity since the Early Christian period. In his reconstruction of the church, Suger rearranged the elements of medieval architecture to express the relationship between light and God's presence in a distinctive way. None of the individual architectural devices that Suger and his builders used was new; it was the way in which he synthesized elements of existing styles that was revolutionary. *The Book of Suger, Abbot of Saint-Denis* describes the beginning of the work on Saint-Denis (see Box) as follows:

> The first work on this church which we began under the inspiration of God [was this]: because of the age of the old walls and their impending ruin in some places, we summoned the best painters I could find from different regions, and reverently caused these [walls] to be repaired and becomingly painted with gold and precious colors. I completed this all the more gladly because I had wished to do it, if ever I should have an opportunity, even while I was a pupil in school.[1]

Early Gothic Architecture: Saint-Denis

Suger's additions to Saint-Denis consisted of a new narthex and west façade with twin towers and three portals. Most of the original sculptural decoration on the portals has been lost. Inside, Suger retained the basic elements of the Romanesque pilgrimage choir. A semicircular ambulatory in the apse permitted the public to circulate freely, while the clergy remained in the radiating chapels. But Suger combined these elements in an original way (figs. **13.2** and **13.3**).

Under Suger's revision, the arrangement of the chapels is a formal echo of the ambulatory, which creates a new sense of architectural unity. Suger's **chevet** (the east end of the church, comprising the choir, ambulatory, and apse) also emphasized the integration of light with lightness, because the entire area was covered with **rib vaults** (fig. **13.4**) supported by pointed arches. (The Romanesque builders, in contrast, had restricted the lighter vaulting to the ambulatory.) The arches, in turn, were supported by slender columns, which further enhanced the impression of lightness. On the exterior, thin buttresses were placed between the chapels (fig. **13.3**) to strengthen the walls. Suger's new architectural approach attracted immediate attention because the effect was so different from the dark interiors and thick, massive walls of Romanesque architecture. He describes his changes in the verses of the consecration inscription:

RELIGION

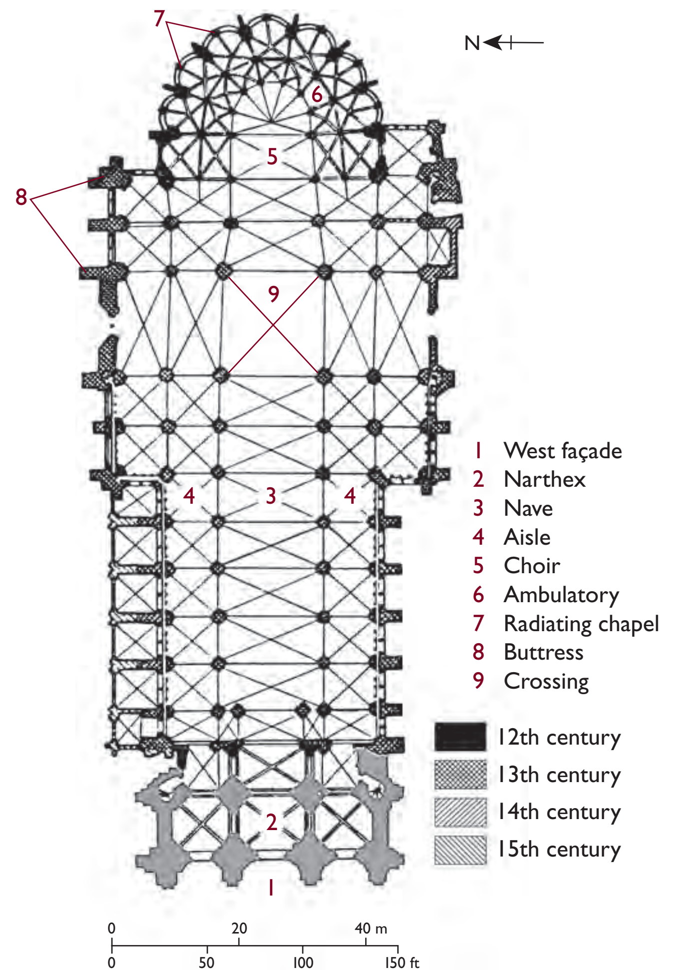
The *Life of Saint Denis*

The hierarchical organizing principle of Gothic manuscript illumination can be seen in the early-fourteenth-century manuscript page from the *Life of Saint Denis* (fig. **13.1**). Saints and members of the clergy occupy the larger top section, while lay people and secular architecture are represented in the smaller section below. The elaborate architectural frame is Late Gothic. The vines transform it into a metaphor for the church building by reference to Christ's statement "I am the vine." At the top, Saint Denis is the largest figure; this denotes his importance. His lion throne connects him typologically with King Solomon and his church, therefore, with Solomon's Temple. The abbreviated cathedral entrance over his head emphasizes his position as archbishop of France and his association with the Heavenly City. His scroll winds around and forms a lintel-like horizontal under the clerestory windows.

The scene below depicts everyday life in the Earthly City—in this case, fourteenth-century France. A coach enters the gate at the upper left, a doctor checks his patient's urine sample on the right, and commercial boats carry a wine taster and two men completing a transaction. Travel, medicine, and trade are among the transient activities of daily life, while the saints above are engaged in the loftier pursuit of preserving the name and memory of Saint Denis through his image and biography.

13.1 Manuscript page from the *Life of Saint Denis,* completed 1317. Ms.Fr.2091, v. II, fol. 125. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France. This manuscript was commissioned during the reign of Philip IV the Fair. It contains twenty-seven illuminations that narrate the life of Saint Denis. In this scene, the saint asks two others to write his biography.

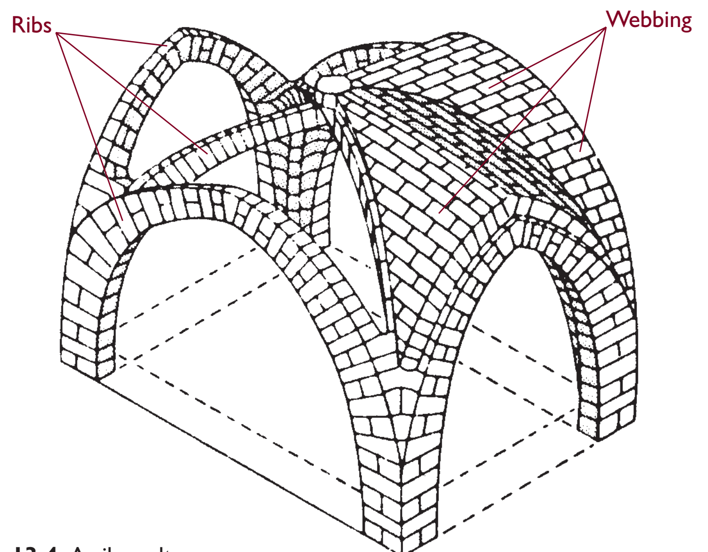
13.2 Interior of Saint-Denis. Each chapel bay has a pair of large stained-glass windows, delicate columns, and rib vaults. The ambulatory and chapels have merged to form a series of spaces illuminated by large windows supported by a masonry frame. Suger described the new effect as "a circular string of chapels, by virtue of which the whole [sanctuary] would shine with the miraculous and uninterrupted light of the most luminous windows."



13.3 Plan of Saint-Denis, 1140–44. The chapels of the apse are connected shallow bays, which form a second ambulatory parallel to the first. This arrangement creates seven wedge-shaped compartments radiating out from the apse. Each wedge is a trapezoidal unit (in the area of the traditional ambulatory) and a pentagonal unit (in the radiating chapel). The old nave and the choir were rebuilt in the High Gothic style between 1231 and 1281.

Once the new rear part is joined to the part
in front,
The church shines with its middle part brightened.
For bright is that which is brightly coupled with
the bright,
And bright is the noble edifice which is pervaded
by the new light;
Which stands enlarged in our time,
I, who was Suger, being the leader while it was
being accomplished.[2]

The new style was particularly popular in northern and central France, where royal influence was strongest. From the 1230s to 1250, French architects built over eighty Gothic cathedrals. Notwithstanding the close association of Gothic with France (it was soon dubbed *opus francigenum,* or "French work"), the style migrated north to England, south to Spain, and east to Germany and Austria. There was also an Italian Gothic style, although Italy was the region that welcomed the style least and rejected it soonest.



13.4 A rib vault.

Elements of Gothic Architecture

Rib Vaults

In Gothic architecture, the rib vault (fig. **13.4**) replaces the earlier barrel vaults of Romanesque. The rib vault requires less buttressing than the barrel vault, which exerts pressure along its entire length and thus needs strong buttressing. Since the weight of the rib vault is concentrated only at the corners of the bay, the structure can be buttressed at intervals, freeing more space for windows. The ribs could be built before the intervening space (usually triangular or rectangular) was filled in. Adding ribs also enabled Gothic builders to reinforce the ceiling vaults and to distribute their weight more efficiently. Because of the weight-bearing capacity of the ribs, the vault's surfaces (the **web** or infilling) could be made of lighter material.

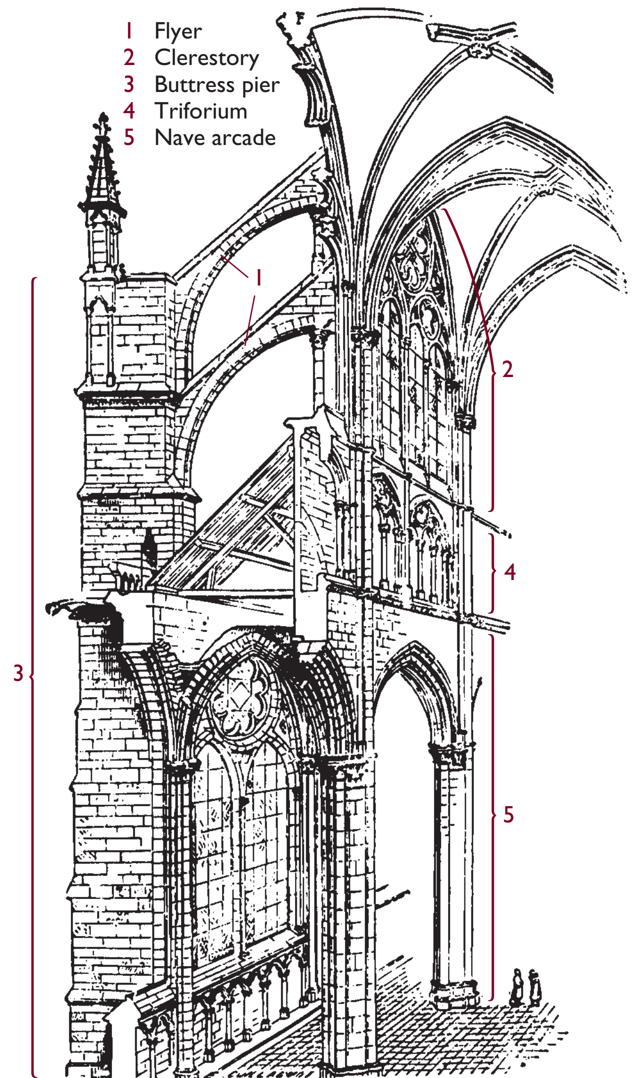
Piers

As the vaults became more complex, so did their supports. One such support is the cluster or **compound pier** (see fig. **13.18**). These are the large columnar supports on either side of the nave to which clusters of **colonnettes** are attached. Although compound piers had been used in Romanesque buildings, they became a standard Gothic feature. The ribs of the vaults formed a series of lines that were continued down to the floor by colonnettes resting on compound piers.

With this system of support, the Gothic builders created a vertical unity leading the observer's gaze to the clerestory windows. The pier supports, with their attached colonnettes branching off into arches and vaults, have been likened to the upward growth of a tree.

Flying Buttresses

In Romanesque architecture, thick walls performed the function of buttressing. This decreased the amount of available window space, limiting the interior light. In the Gothic period, builders developed the **flying buttress,** an exterior structure composed of thin half-arches, or **flyers.** This buttress supported the wall at the point where the thrust of an interior arch or vault was greatest (fig. **13.5**).



13.5 Section diagram of a Gothic cathedral (after E. Viollet-le-Duc). The **elevation** of the Gothic cathedral illustrates the flyers, which transfer interior thrusts to a pier of the exterior buttress. Since the wall spaces between the buttresses were no longer necessary for structural support, they could be pierced by large windows to achieve the desired increase in light.

Pointed Arches

The pointed arch, which is a characteristic and essential feature of Gothic architecture, can be thought of as the intersection of two arcs of nonconcentric circles. Examples are found in Romanesque buildings but in a much more tentative form. The piers channel the downward thrust of the pointed arch, minimizing the lateral, or sideways, thrust against the wall. Unlike round arches, pointed arches can theoretically be raised to any height regardless of the distance between their supports. The pointed arch is thus a more flexible building element, with more potential for increased height. Dynamically and visually, the thrust is far more vertical than that of a round arch.

The Skeleton

The features described above combined to form what is called a "skeletal" structure. The main architectural supports (buttresses, piers, ribs) form a "skeleton" to which nonsupporting elements, such as walls, are attached. The Gothic builders had, in effect, invented a structure that

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Guilds

Medieval **guilds,** or gilds, were associations formed for the aid and protection of their members and the pursuit of common religious or economic goals. The earliest form of economic guild was the Guild Merchant, which was responsible for organizing and supervising trade in the towns. Efforts by merchants to exclude craftsmen from the guilds led, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, to the formation of the craft guilds. These comprised all practitioners of a single craft or profession in a town. Craftsmen had to be members of the guild before they could ply their trade.

The functions of the craft guilds included regulating wages and prices, overseeing working conditions, and maintaining high standards of workmanship. Their effect, especially early on, was to ensure an adequate supply of trained workers and to enhance the status of craftsmen. They also provided charity to members in need and pensions to their widows.

The guilds had three grades of membership—masters, journeymen (or paid assistants, *compagnons* in French), and apprentices. A precise set of rules governed the terms of apprenticeship and advancement to other grades. For promotion to the rank of master, a craftsman had to present to his guild a piece of work to be judged by masters. This is the origin of the term ***masterpiece.***

biologists would describe as exoskeletal. An exoskeletal creature is one, such as a crab or a lobster, whose skeleton is on the outside of its body.

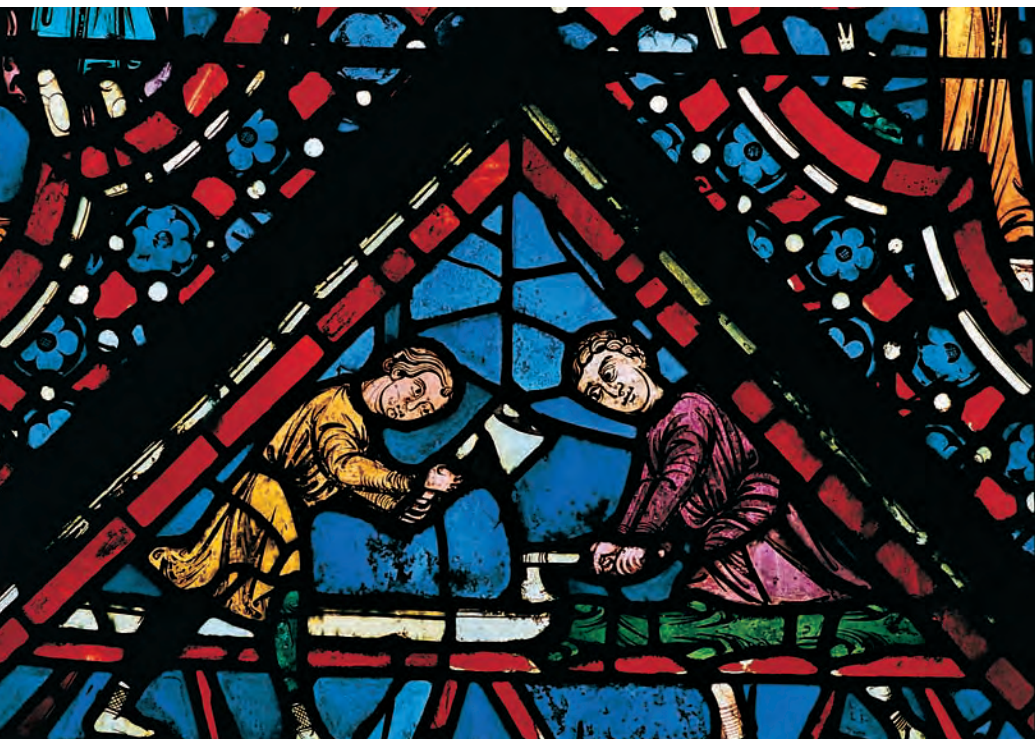
Stained-Glass Windows

Finally, the light that had so inspired Abbot Suger required an architectural solution. That solution was Suger's special use of the stained-glass window, which filtered light through colored fragments of glass. Light and color were diffused throughout the interior of the cathedral. The predominant colors of Gothic stained glass tend to be blue and red, in contrast to the golds that characterize most Byzantine mosaics.

Stained glass is translucent colored glass cut to form a window design. Compositions are made from pieces of colored glass formed by mixing metallic oxides with molten glass or fusing colored glass with clear glass. The artist cuts the individual pieces as closely as possible to the shape of a face or whatever individual feature is to be represented. The pieces are then fitted to a model drawn on wood or paper, and details are added in black enamel.

The dark pigments are hardened and fused with the glass through firing, or baking in a kiln. The pieces of fired glass are then arranged on the model and joined by strips of lead. Figure **13.6** is a detail of a stained-glass window from Chartres Cathedral (see figs. **13.10–13.19**). The blue background is broken up, seemingly at random, into numerous sections. Once the pieces of stained glass are joined together, the units are framed by an iron armature and fastened within the tracery, or ornamental stonework, of the window.

Stained-glass windows were made occasionally for Early Christian and Byzantine churches and more often in the Romanesque period. In the Gothic period, stained glass became an integral part of religious architecture and a more prominent artistic medium. The use of stained glass in Saint-Denis reflects Suger's intention to convey God's presence through a dazzling display of light and color.



13.6 Carpenters' Guild signature window, detail of a stained-glass window, Chartres Cathedral, early 13th century. This signature scene depicts two members of the guild stripping a plank of wood lying across three sawhorses.

Romanesque Precursors of Gothic

One of the buildings that show how elements of Gothic style evolved from Romanesque precursors is the abbey church of Saint-Étienne at Caen, in Normandy (figs. **13.7** and **13.8**). It was begun in 1067 by William the Conqueror (see p. 196), and the nave was completed in 1087. The organization of the façade into three distinct sections—a central rectangle surmounted by a gable and flanked by towers—became characteristic of Gothic façades. (The later spires date from the Gothic period.)

A few years after the completion of Saint-Étienne's nave, the first European cathedral with rib vaults and pointed arches was planned at Durham, in the northeast of England (fig. **13.9**). Construction began in 1093 under the supervision of its French bishop, William of Calais. The nave, finished in 1130, reflects some of the advantages of combining the pointed arch with a second transverse rib. This divided the vault into six sections and allowed for increased height, while relieving the massiveness of the Romanesque walls. It also made larger clerestory windows possible, which opened up the wall space and admitted more light.

The aesthetic effect of these structural developments was an impression of upward movement toward the source of light. This is consistent with the symbolic role of light as a divine presence in Christian churches. The success of the vaulting at Durham inspired the builders of Saint-Étienne at Caen to change the original flat roof into sexpartite (six-part) vaulting (see fig. **13.8**). This new approach to vaulting, like the three-part façade, influenced Early Gothic architecture in the Île-de-France.

13.7 West façade, Saint-Étienne, Caen, Normandy, France, 1067–87.

13.8 Nave, Saint-Étienne, Caen. The vaults date from c. 1115–20.

13.9 Nave, Durham Cathedral.

The Age of Cathedrals

By the time the choir and west façade of Saint-Denis were completed, in about 1144, and even before Abbot Suger turned his attention to the rest of the church, other towns in northern France had been competing to build cathedrals in the new Gothic style. A cathedral is, by definition, the seat of a bishop (the term is from the Greek word *kathedra,* meaning "seat" or "throne") and belongs to the city or town in which it is located. In contrast to rural churches, such as Sainte-Foy (see p. 186), cathedrals required an urban setting. Also consistent with increased urbanization in the twelfth century was the development of cathedral schools and universities. Their growing educational importance encroached on the relatively isolated monasteries that had proliferated in the earlier Middle Ages.

The construction of a cathedral was the largest single economic enterprise of the Gothic era. It had a significant effect on neighboring communities as well as on the city or town itself. Jobs were created for hundreds of masons, carpenters, sculptors, stonecutters, and other craftsmen. When a cathedral was finished, it attracted thousands of pilgrims and other visitors, and this continual traffic stimulated the local economy. Cathedrals also provided a focus for community activities, secular as well as religious. Above all, they generated an enormous sense of civic pride among the townspeople.

The cult of the Virgin Mary expanded during the Gothic period. Most of the great French cathedrals were dedicated to "Notre Dame" ("Our Lady"), the Virgin. To avoid confusion, therefore, it is customary to refer to the cathedrals by the towns in which they are located. At Chartres, the importance of Mary's cult was reinforced by the tradition that a pagan statue of a virgin and child, worshiped in a nearby cave, had prefigured the coming of Jesus and the Virgin Birth.

Chartres

The town of Chartres is approximately 40 miles (64 km) southwest of Paris. Its cathedral (fig. **13.10**) combines the best-preserved Early Gothic architecture with High Gothic, as well as demonstrating the transitional developments in between. For a town like Chartres, with only about ten thousand inhabitants in the thirteenth century, the building of a cathedral dominated the economy just as the structure itself dominated the landscape. At Chartres, the construction continued off and on from around 1134 to 1220. The most intensive work, however, followed a fire in 1194, when the nave and choir had to be rebuilt.

The bishop and chapter (governing body) of the cathedral were in charge of contracting out the work, but the funds came from a much broader cross section of medieval French society. The Church itself usually contributed by setting aside revenues from its estates. At Chartres, the canons (resident clergy) agreed in 1194 to give up their stipends (salaries) for three years so that the rebuilding program could begin. When the royal family or members of the nobility had a connection with a particular project, they also helped. At Chartres, Blanche, the mother of Louis IX, paid for the entire north transept façade, including the sculptures and windows. The duke of Brittany contributed to the southern transept. Other wealthy families of the region gave windows, and their donations were recorded by depicting their coats of arms in the stained glass.

Guilds representing specific groups of craftsmen and tradesmen donated windows illustrating their professional activities (see fig. **13.6**). Pilgrims and less wealthy local inhabitants gave money in proportion to their means, often by buying relics or in gratitude for answered prayers. These donations went toward general costs rather than to a designated use. There were thus economic and social distinctions, not only in the size and nature of the contributions, but also in the degree to which they were publicly recognized.

Exterior Architecture of Chartres

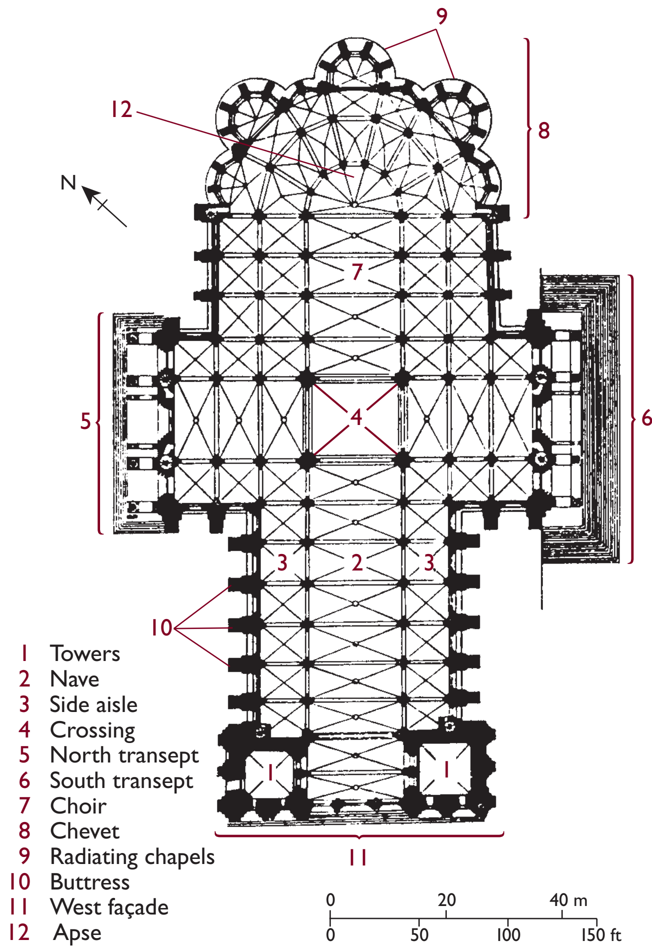
Chartres was constructed on an elevated site to enhance its visibility. The vertical towers seem to reach toward the sky, while the horizontal thrust of the side walls (fig. **13.10**) carries one's gaze east toward the apse. The view in figure **13.13** shows the west façade, whose towers illustrate the dynamic, changing nature of Gothic style. The southern tower, on the right, dates from before 1194 and reflects the transition from Late Romanesque to Early Gothic. The northern tower, begun in 1507, which is taller, thinner, and more elaborate than the southern tower, is Late Gothic. Its greater height reflects advances in structural technology, as well as Suger's theological emphasis on verticality and light as expressions of God's presence.

13.10 South wall of Chartres Cathedral, 13th century.

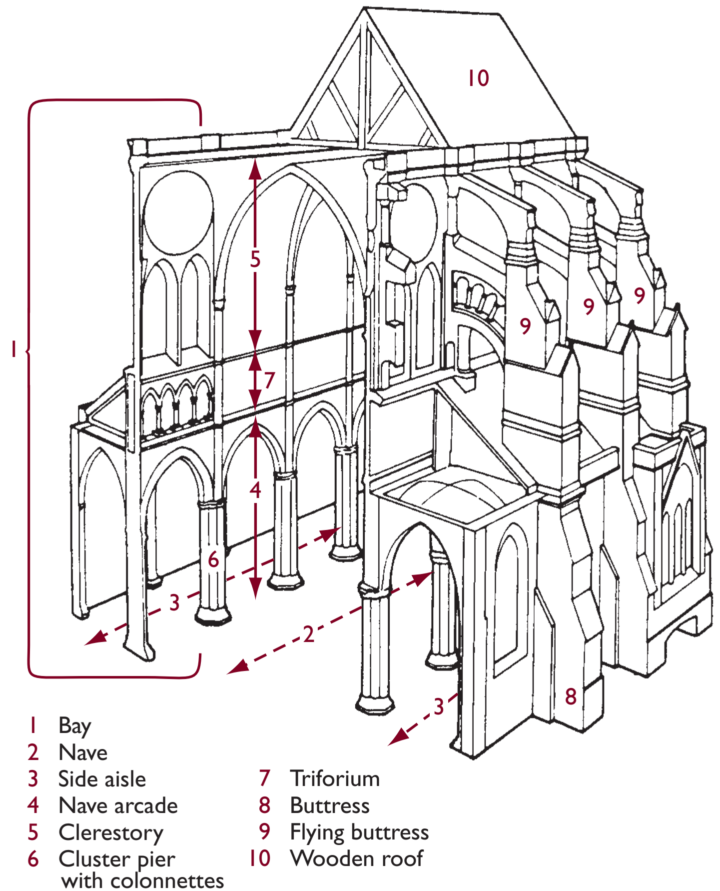
The tripartite organization of the west façade is characteristic of most Gothic cathedrals. Like Saint-Étienne at Caen (see fig. **13.7**), it is divided into three sections. Towers with a belfry flank the central rectangle, which is further subdivided. The three portals consist of the same elements as the Romanesque abbey church at Conques (see fig. **12.7**); above each portal is a tall, arched, stained-glass **lancet** window. Embedded in the rectangle over the lancets is the round **rose window,** a feature of almost all Gothic cathedral entrance walls. Above the rose window, a gallery of niche figures representing Old Testament kings stretches between the two towers. Finally, the gallery is surmounted by a triangular gable with a niche containing a statue of the Virgin and the infant Christ. The repetition of triple elements—portals, lancets, three horizontal divisions, and the triangular gable—suggests a numerical association with the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

In the rose window, too, there is symbolic Christian significance in the arrangement of the geometric shapes. Three groups of twelve elements surround the small central circle. These refer to Christ's twelve apostles. The very fact that the rose window is a circle could symbolize Christ, God, and the universal aspect of the Church itself.

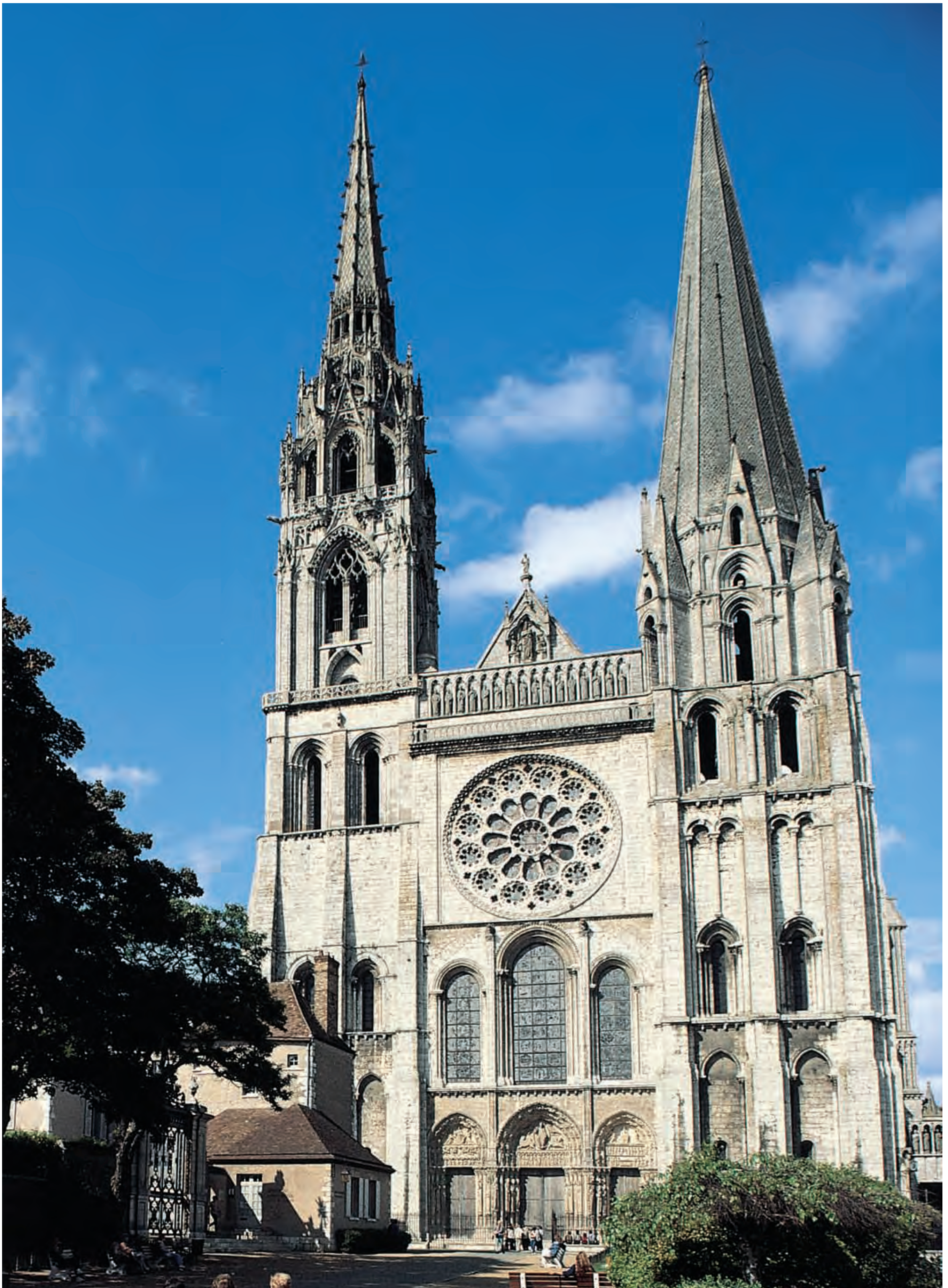
Proceeding counterclockwise around the southern tower, the visitor confronts the view in figure **13.10**. This is one of two long, horizontal sides of the cathedral, parts of which are labeled on the plan in figure **13.11.** Visible in the photograph are the roof (10 in fig. **13.12**), the buttresses (8) between the tower and the south transept entrance, and the flying buttresses, or flyers (9), over the buttresses and, at the east end, behind the apse. The entrance wall of the south transept has five lancet windows, a larger rose window than that of the west façade, and a similar gallery and triangular gable with niche statues.



13.11 Plan of Chartres Cathedral. Although the plan is quite symmetrical, the number of steps leading to each of the three entrances increases from west to north and from north to south. This increase parallels the building sequence, for Gothic architecture became more detailed and complex as the style developed. The *X*s on the plan indicate the vaults.



13.12 Perspective diagram and cross section of Chartres Cathedral.



13.13 West façade, Chartres Cathedral, c. 1140–50. Symmetry in the Classical sense was not a requirement of the Gothic designers. Gothic cathedrals are structurally, but not formally, symmetrical. That is, a tower is opposite a tower, but the towers need not be identical in size or shape.

Exterior Sculpture of Chartres

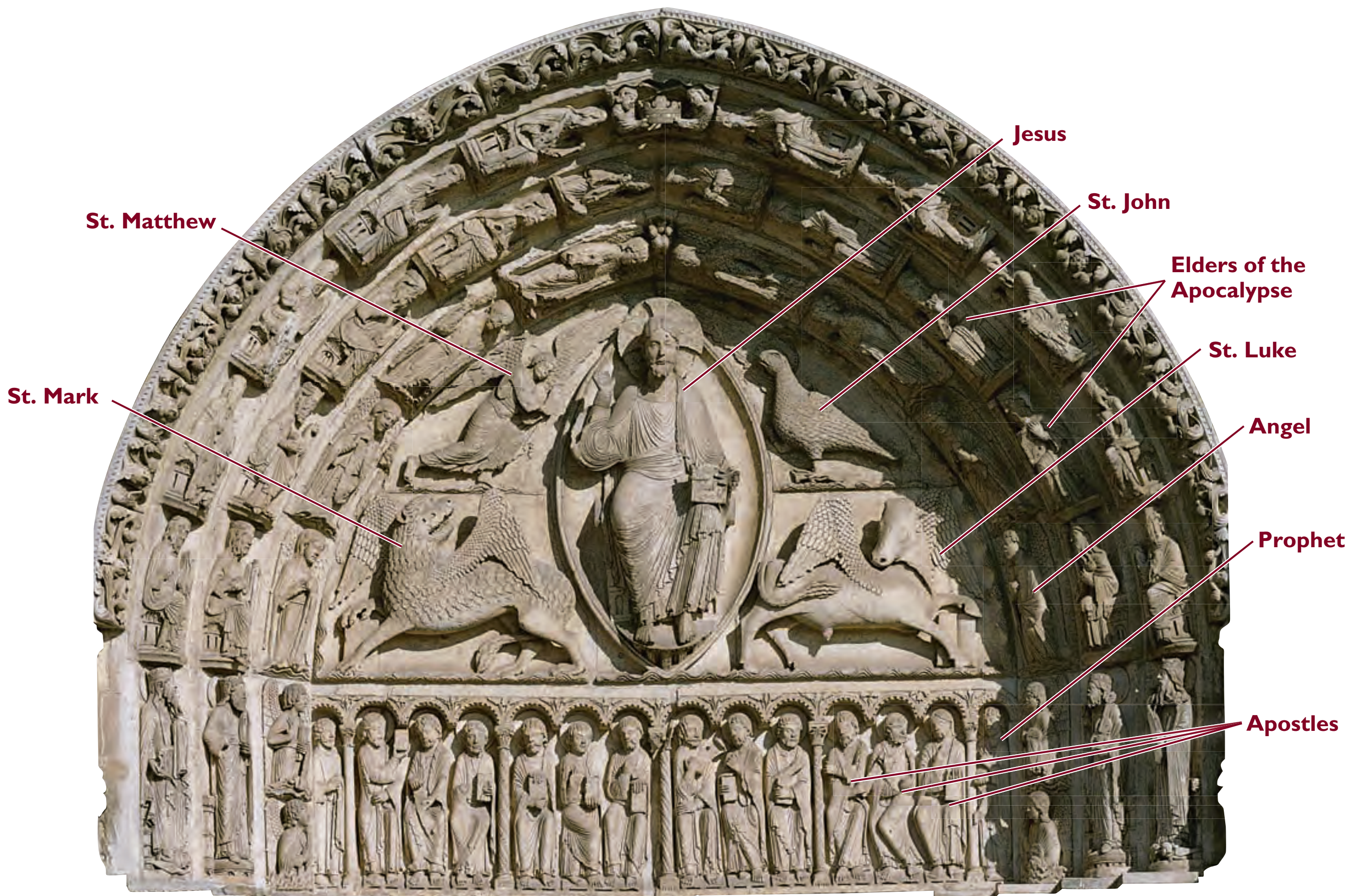
On the exterior of Chartres there are so many sculptural details that it would take several volumes to consider them thoroughly. We shall, therefore, concentrate on a few of the most characteristic examples on the west and south sides of the cathedral.

Royal Portal (West Façade) There are three doors, together known as the Royal Portal, on the western entrance of Chartres (fig. **13.14**), the central door being slightly larger than the other two. This arrangement was derived from the Roman triumphal arch, which marked an entryway into a city. The derivation of the cathedral portal from the Roman arch highlights the symbolic parallel between the interior of the church and the heavenly city of Jerusalem. Throughout the Middle Ages, entering a church was thought of as an earthly prefiguration of one's ultimate entry into heaven.

In the most general sense, the Royal Portal exemplifies the typological view of history. The right, or southern, portal contains scenes of Christ's Nativity and childhood on a double lintel. An enthroned Virgin and Christ occupy the tympanum, which is surrounded by the Seven Liberal Arts in the **archivolts.** The Liberal Arts as depicted here correspond to the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) adopted from Donatus by Alcuin of York under Charlemagne (see p. 176). This curriculum reflects the importance of learning and the high status of the cathedral school as well as Mary's designation as one who "perfectly possessed" the Liberal Arts. On the left, or northern, tympanum and lintel are scenes of the Ascension. The archivolts contain signs of the zodiac and symbols of the seasonal labors of the twelve calendar months.

The central portal juxtaposes Old Testament kings and queens on the door **jambs** with the apocalyptic vision

13.14 The Royal Portal of the west façade, Chartres Cathedral, c. 1140–50. The door jamb sculptures are slender, columnar figures of Old Testament kings and queens, hence the name "Royal Portal." Many of these statues were destroyed during the French Revolution (1789) by rioting crowds that mistook the biblical figures for kings and queens of France.



13.15 Tympanum, lintel, and archivolts of the central portal, west façade, Chartres Cathedral, c. 1145–70. The scene on the tympanum represents the Second Coming of Christ, with the four apocalyptic symbols of the Evangelists: the angel stands for Matthew, the lion for Mark, the eagle for John, and the bull for Luke. The surface patterns on all the tympanum figures are stylized—for example, Christ's drapery folds and the wings, drapery, feathers, and fur of the Evangelists' symbols. Christ is frontal, directly facing the visitors to the cathedral, as if reminding them of their destiny.

of Saint John the Divine above the door. The door jamb statues, dating from around 1145–70, are the oldest surviving examples of Early Gothic sculptural style. Each figure is slim and vertical, echoing the shape of the colonnette behind. Separating each statue and each colonnette is a space, decorated with floral relief patterns, which acts as a framing device.

As in Early Christian and Byzantine mosaics, the Old Testament kings and queens are frontal. Their arms are contained within their vertical planes and their halos are flat. Their feet slant downward on a diagonal, indicating that they are not naturally supported. The drapery folds reveal the artist's delight in surface patterns—for example, the repeated zigzags along the hems and circles at the elbows, as well as the stylized hair and beards.

The New Testament event represented over the central door (fig. **13.15**) is the Second Coming of Christ, described by John the Divine in the Book of Revelation. On the tympanum, a seated Christ is surrounded by an oval mandorla and the four apocalyptic symbols of the Evangelists. Beneath the tympanum on the lintel, the twelve apostles are arranged in four groups of three. Each group is separated by a colonnette supporting round arches that resemble halos. At either end of the lintel stands a single prophet, holding a scroll. Of the three archivolts, the outer two contain the twenty-four elders of the Apocalypse. The inner archivolt contains twelve angels; the two in the center hold a crown over Christ's head, proclaiming his role as King of Heaven.

Considered as an iconographic totality, the Royal Portal of Chartres offers the visitor a Christian view of history. The beginning and end of Christ's earthly life are placed over the right and left doors, respectively. The Old Testament kings and queens on the door jambs are typological precursors of Christ and Mary, while the Second Coming of Christ dominates the central portal.

13.16 Door jamb statues, west façade, Chartres Cathedral, c. 1145–70.

A comparison of the door jamb statues from the central doorway of the Royal Portal (fig. **13.16**) with those from the south transept entrance (fig. **13.17**) illustrates the stylistic transition from Early Gothic to the beginning of High Gothic.

South Transept Façade The saints who decorate the left doorway of the entrance portal on the south transept of Chartres (fig. **13.17**) conform less strictly to their colonnettes than do the figures on the Royal Portal, and their feet rest naturally on a horizontal plane. They are no longer strictly frontal, they have facial expressions, and they are of different heights. The heads turn slightly, and there is more variety in their poses, gestures, and costumes. In the figure of Saint Theodore at the far left, for example, the right hip swings out slightly in response to the relaxation of the stance. The diagonal of the belt, apparently weighed down at the saint's left by a heavy sword, conveys a slight suggestion of movement in three-dimensional space.

13.17 Saints Theodore, Stephen, Clement, and Lawrence, door jamb statues, south transept, Chartres Cathedral, 13th century.

This general increase in the sense of depth is enhanced by the more deeply carved folds and facial features, as well as by the projecting, crownlike architectural elements over the figures' heads. The proportions of the figures have also changed in comparison with those on the west door jambs. They are wider and seem as if they might step down from their supports into the real world of the observer. Such changes from Early to High Gothic reflect a new, fledgling interest in human form and emotion that would continue to develop in the Late Gothic era.

Interior of Chartres

The overwhelming sensation on entering Chartres Cathedral from the western entrance is height. Its nave is the earliest example of High Gothic architectural style. The view in figure **13.18** looks from the nave toward the curved apse at the east end of the building. The ceiling vaults rise nearly 120 feet (37 m) but are only about 45 feet (14 m) wide.

The new height achieved by Gothic builders was made possible by the buttressing system, whose effect can be seen in the clerestory (see fig. **13.12**). The latter is supported at two points by flyers, allowing more of the wall to be replaced by windows. In each bay, the clerestory windows consist of two lancets under a small round window. At the far end, in the apse, the clerestory lancets are taller, but there are no round windows.

Proceeding down the nave, from west to east, one arrives at the crossing (see fig. **13.11**) and the two transept entrances. Figure **13.19** shows the north rose window illuminated by outside light filtering through the stained glass. Dominating the interior entrance walls, these window arrangements are like colossal paintings in light. Their intensity varies according to weather conditions and time of day. At the center of the rose window, a small circle contains an image of Mary and the infant Christ, surrounded by twelve even smaller circles.

Each series of geometric shapes around the center of the rose window numbers twelve—a reference to the twelve apostles. The first series after the tiny circles contains four doves and eight angels. Twelve Old Testament kings, typological precursors of Christ, occupy the squares. The twelve quatrefoils contain gold lilies on a blue field, symbols of the French kings. The outer semicircles represent twelve Old Testament prophets, who are types for the New Testament apostles.

The central lancet depicts Saint Anne with the infant Mary. At the left are the high priest Melchizedek and King David, and on the right are King Solomon and the priest Aaron—all Old Testament figures. In these windows, as in the west façade sculptures, the lower images act as visual and symbolic supports for the upper images. Here, the additional genealogical link between Christ and Saint Anne is arranged vertically, with Mary as an infant in the lancet below and as the Virgin Mother above, at the center of the rose window.

Wherever possible and appropriate, Gothic artists integrated Christian dogma into the cathedrals. Such buildings were designed as supreme monuments to the glory of God. They also expressed the skills of builders, sculptors, and other craftsmen, as well as the generosity and religious devotion of the patrons.

13.18 Nave, Chartres Cathedral, looking east. The three stories of Gothic elevation rise on either side of the nave. The lowest story, or nave arcade, is defined by a series of large arches on heavy piers. These separate the nave from the side aisles (see fig. **13.12**). The second story, or **triforium,** is a narrow passageway above the side aisle. At the top is the clerestory, whose windows are the main source of light in the nave.

13.19 Rose window and lancets, north transept, Chartres Cathedral, 13th century. Note that the north windows are larger and more elaborate than the earlier west façade windows. The north lancets are taller and thinner than those on the west. The north rose window is larger and contains a greater variety of geometric shapes. Additional windows have also been inserted between the lancets and rose window. The rose window measures over 42 feet (12.8 m) in diameter. The windows between the rose window and lancets are decorated with royal coats of arms, which proclaim the divine right of French kings. They also serve as a signature, recording the donation of the north transept by Blanche, the queen mother.

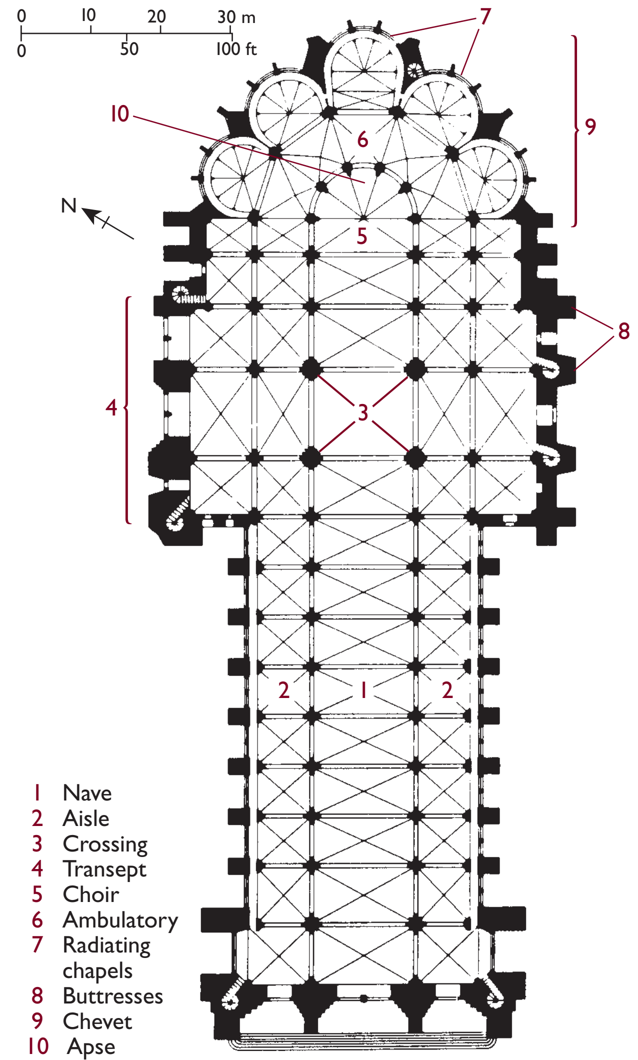
13.20 West façade, Reims Cathedral, France, begun 1211. The window space has been dramatically increased at Reims as a result of continual improvements in the buttressing system. The tympanums on the façade, for example, are filled with glass rather than stone. At Reims the portals are no longer recessed into the façade but are built outward from it.

Later Developments of the French Gothic Style

Completed in 1220, Chartres set the standard for other great French cathedrals in the High Gothic style. Height and luminosity were the criteria by which they were measured. The cathedral at Reims, northeast of Paris, was the next to be built, from 1211 to about 1290. Its nave was 125 feet (38.1 m) high.

Reims

The west façade of Reims (fig. **13.20**) and the interior view of the nave (fig. **13.21**) show the extent to which cathedral designs were becoming progressively elongated, with an increasingly vertical thrust. The proportions of the arches at Reims are taller and thinner than those at Chartres, and the plan (fig. **13.22**) is longer and thinner. The radiating chapels are deeper than at Chartres, and the transepts are somewhat stubby, appearing to merge into the choir with little or no break.



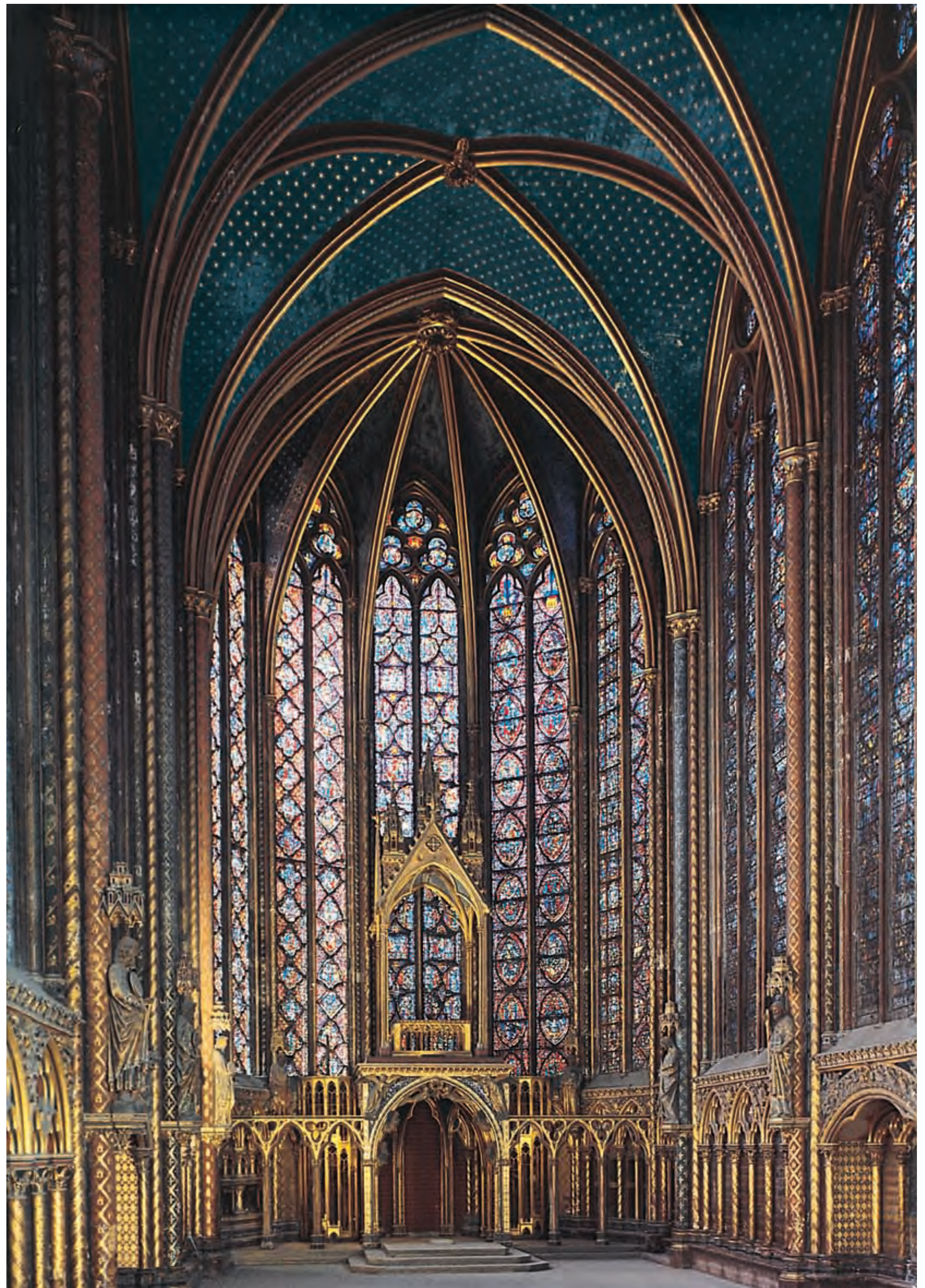
13.22 Plan of Reims Cathedral (after W. Blaser).

13.21 Nave, Reims Cathedral, 1211–c. 1290. 125 ft. (38.1 m) high.

The exterior surfaces at Reims are filled with a greater number of sculptures than at Chartres. In contrast to the increased verticality of the architecture, the sculptures have become more naturalistic, as can be seen in the door jamb statues on the west façade at Reims (fig. **13.23**). Rather than being vertically aligned and facing the viewer, as at Chartres, the Reims figures turn to face each other, interacting in a dramatic narrative and engaging the spaces between them. The drapery folds suggest human anatomy, poses, and gestures in a more pronounced way than even at the south transept of Chartres. This is one of the earliest examples in the monumental Christian art of Western Europe of an interest in the relationship between drapery and the human form it covers.

13.23 *Annunciation and Visitation*, door jamb statues, Reims Cathedral, c. 1225–45.

The two figures on the left are the angel Gabriel and Mary. They enact the scene of the Annunciation, in which Gabriel announces Jesus's impending birth to Mary. On the right, in the Visitation scene, Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth and tells her that she is three months pregnant. Elizabeth informs Mary that she herself is six months pregnant. Her son will be John the Baptist, Christ's second cousin and childhood playmate. Note the different drapery styles in each scene. The folds in the Annunciation figures are broader and flatter than those in the Visitation, indicating that the scenes were carved by different artists.



13.24 Nave, Sainte-Chapelle, Paris, 1243–48. 32 ft. × 99 ft. 6 in. (9.75 × 30.3 m). Thomas de Cormont designed Sainte-Chapelle, which was the chapel of the French kings. It was located on the Île-de-la-Cité and attached to the palace.

Paris: Reliquary Chapel of Sainte-Chapelle

The transcendent quality of Gothic light is nowhere more evident than in the reliquary chapel of Sainte-Chapelle in Paris (fig. **13.24**). It was commissioned by King Louis IX, who ruled from 1226 to 1270 and was canonized in 1297, and epitomizes the *rayonnant* style. Here the walls literally become glass as the stone supports diminish. There is no transept, and this allows the tall, thin colonnettes to rise uninterrupted from a short, dimly lit first story. This distinction between the lower darkness and the upper light is an architectural mirror of traditional Christian juxtapositions associating darkness with the lower regions of hell, the Earthly City, and the pre-Christian era. Light, in this context, evokes the Heavenly City and the New Dispensation. These metaphors are reinforced by the ceiling vaults, which are painted blue and decorated with gold stars in the form of ***fleurs-de-lis***—the emblem of the French kings.

13.25 *King David Looks Down at Bathsheba Bathing and Up to God,* from the Saint Louis Psalter, Paris, c. 1260. Illumination on parchment, 5 × 3½ in. (12.7 × 8.9 cm). Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France.

The Saint Louis Psalter

The dichotomy between earthly and heavenly vision that characterizes King Louis IX's conception of Sainte-Chapelle recurs in a page from his **psalter,** as shown in figure **13.25.** It illustrates the initial *B* of the first psalm and shows King David above, staring down at the nude Bathsheba bathing before his castle. His gaze is reinforced by those of the two females attending Bathsheba. Juxtaposed with this scene is a more spiritual kind of looking in which David—who is also symbolically King Louis—prays before a heavenly vision of Christ seated within a mandorla and removed from the earthly plane of existence. As at Sainte-Chapelle, the pattern of *fleurs-de-lys* identified Louis IX with the works of art he commissioned.

English Gothic

Within a generation of the new choir at Saint-Denis, the Gothic style had spread beyond France. Among the first to adopt the style was England. Since its defeat by the Normans in 1066, there had been commercial, cultural, and political contacts between the two countries.

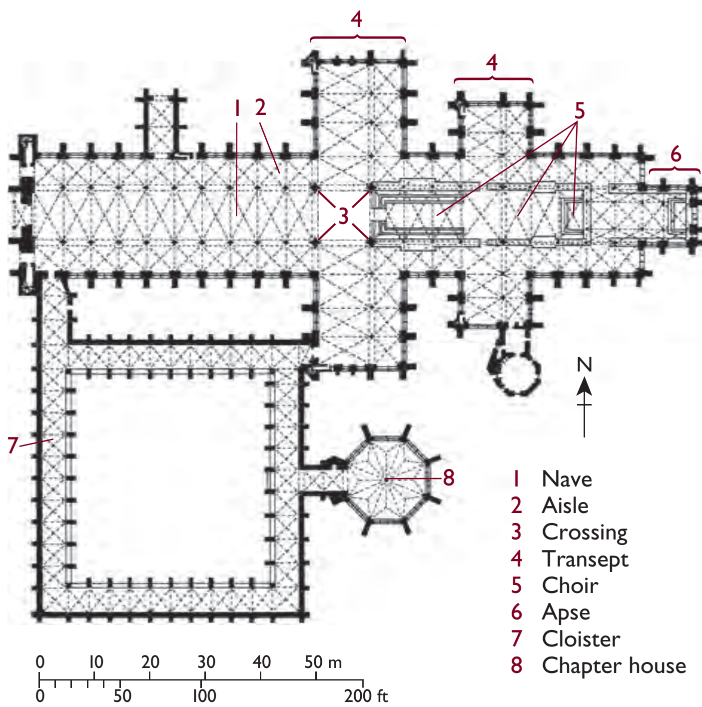
Salisbury Cathedral

English Gothic was typically more varied than French Gothic. The best example of Early Gothic style in England is Salisbury Cathedral, located in the southwest, not far from Stonehenge (fig. **3.10**). Salisbury Cathedral (fig. **13.26**) was built from 1220 onward in a relatively homogeneous style. It has a cloister (7 in fig. **13.27**), a feature of monastic communities that the English adopted as part of their cathedral plans. In contrast to French cathedrals, Salisbury has a double transept and a square apse. Its **chapter house** (8 in fig. **13.27**) is octagonal, another feature that distinguishes English from French Gothic. As is characteristic of English cathedrals, Salisbury is set in a cathedral **close,** a precinct of lawns and trees. Whereas French cathedrals usually rise directly from the streets and squares of a town, emphasizing their verticality, Salisbury is integrated into the landscape, with horizontal planar thrusts. It has fewer stained-glass windows than most French Gothic cathedrals and, therefore, less need for exterior buttressing.

The large square on the plan represents a **cloister** attached to the south side of the cathedral. Apart from the cloister and a small porch on the north side of the nave, the plan is relatively symmetrical. The double transept and the square apse differ from the corresponding parts of a typical French Gothic cathedral.

The view of the chapter-house ceiling (fig. **13.28**) shows a fan vault, so called because the central pier fans upward and outward toward the ceiling. The fan ribs join those of the vault and resemble the spokes of an inverted umbrella.

13.26 Salisbury Cathedral, England, begun 1220. The tower and spire were added in the 14th century.



13.27 Plan of Salisbury Cathedral.

13.28 Vault, chapter house, Salisbury Cathedral, 1263–84.

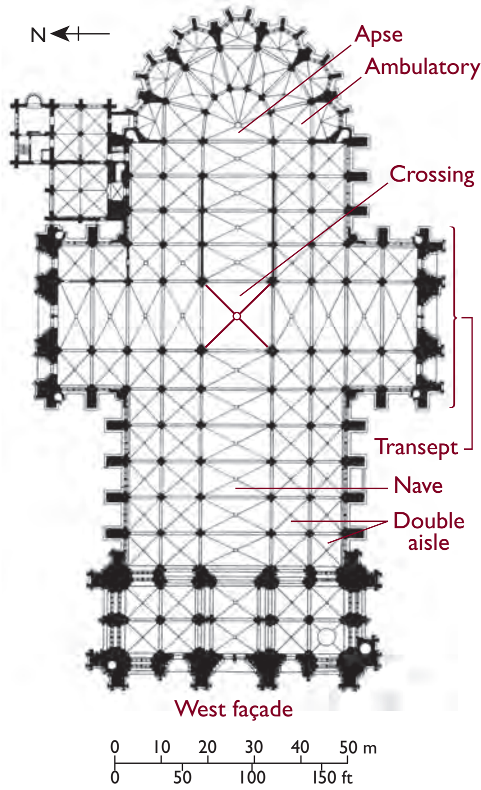
German Gothic

Cologne Cathedral

The Gothic style also spread to Germany, where one of its most elaborate expressions is Cologne Cathedral (figs. **13.29–13.31**). Begun in 1248, Cologne is the biggest cathedral in Germany, with two aisles on each side of the nave for increased support (see plan). Double flying buttresses on the exterior also reinforce the exterior walls. The towers, which are 515 feet (157 m) high and were completed in 1350, exemplify the late Gothic taste for ornate tracery on the spires, slender vertical thrusts, and animated surfaces that overwhelm the portals. The view of the nave in figure **13.31** shows the dramatic upward movement of the interior as well as the elegant patterns created by the vertical regularity of piers, vaults, and windows. The repetition of statues on the piers creates a horizontal alignment that leads our gaze toward the apse. Until 1890, Cologne Cathedral was the world's tallest building, and it contains the largest reliquary in the West—namely, the Shrine of the Three Kings.

The Gothic style spread throughout Europe, lasting in some areas well into the fifteenth century. In Italy, however, Gothic was relatively shortlived, and by the early fourteenth century the new Renaissance style was beginning to emerge. Later, in the nineteenth century, a Gothic revival style would appear in England and the United States.

13.29 Cologne Cathedral, begun 1248. Towers completed 1350.



13.30 Plan of Cologne Cathedral.

13.31 Nave of Cologne Cathedral.

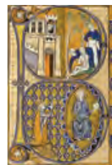
1137 **1500**

GOTHIC ART

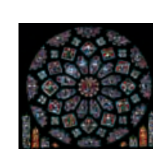
(13.2)

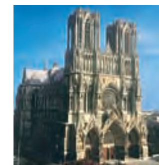
(13.13)

(13.6)


(13.25)

(13.17)


(13.19)


(13.20)

(13.26)

Suger named abbot of Saint-Denis (1122)

University of Paris founded (1150)

Arabic numerals in Europe (late 1200s)

Jacopo da Voragine publishes *The Golden Legend* (1266–1283)

Thomas Aquinas writes *Summa Theologiae* (1273)

Fall of Acre; end of Christian rule in the East (1291)

Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1387)