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

Historical and background information

1. The Gothic cathedral of Amiens was constructed between 1220-1269, following the destruction of the old cathedral in 1218; nave chapels, west towers and central steeple are later. Bishop Evrard de Fouilloy initiated the work. The master masons were Robert de Luzarches, Thomas de Cormont and his son Renaud de Cormont. Built of chalk; measures 470' in length and 213' in overall width; crown of interior vaulting rises to a height of 137' (144 royal feet).

2. Position of the cathedral in the town. Amiens, acquired by the French monarchy in the 1180s, was governed by a commune. Notre-Dame was the seat (cathedra) of the bishop and was served by a chapter of forty canons.

3. The Gothic cathedral as civic and religious monument.

4. Plan: cruciform; orientation. Parts of plan: nave, aisles, transept, crossing, choir, apse, ambulatory, radiating chapels. The plan involves a combination of arithmetic and geometric proportions. The nave bays are modular (squares and double-squares); the overall dimensions are derived from the great square placed in the center of the edifice.

5. Symbolic role of numbers in measurements
   a. Height of interior vault of 144 royal feet: 144 cubits is measurement of heavenly city of Jerusalem (see Book of Revelation)
   b. Central crossing square measures 50 feet: 50 cubits is measurement of width of Noah’s ark (nave from the Latin navus, meaning boat: the cathedral as a vehicle for salvation).

6. Construction: arch and vault; pointed arch and ribbed quadripartite vaults, piers with colonnettes (piliers cantonnés), uprights and flying buttresses.


8. Stained glass: lancets, oculi, rose window; space and light; directionality. (The stained glass at Amiens was lost to storms and other destruction before the French Revolution; for a cathedral with its original windows, see the comparative material on Chartres.)

9. Sculptural program: Design and style; location and relation to architecture.
   a. West façade: Last Judgment in tympanum of central portal.
      Trumeau figures: St. Firmin (patron saint of Amiens) on north portal, Beau Dieu (Christ) on central portal, Virgin Mary on south portal. Quatrefoils: Labors of the Months, Signs of the Zodiac, Virtues and Vices.
   b. South transept portal: Vierge Dorée—Gothic style of the 1250s.

Readings and web resources

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

**Readings on Butler Reserve**
Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century* (New York, 1972), especially chapter 1: “General Characteristics of Medieval Iconography” (also available as an E-Book through CLIO)
Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (New York, 1976) (also available as an E-Book through CLIO)

**Other readings**

**Web resources**
The “Amiens Trilogy,” a series of short films narrated by Professor Stephen Murray, available as downloads or streaming video; QuickTime VR 360 degree views of the exterior and interior of Amiens; and ground plan and elevation available as .pdf document from the Amiens page of the Art Humanities website.
Amiens 360 at [http://www.learn.columbia.edu/amiens_360](http://www.learn.columbia.edu/amiens_360)
Digital 3-D model of Amiens available at [http://www.mcah.columbia.edu/Amiens.html](http://www.mcah.columbia.edu/Amiens.html)

**Local museum resources**
The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, located on Amsterdam Avenue at 111th Street: [http://www.stjohndivine.org/](http://www.stjohndivine.org/)