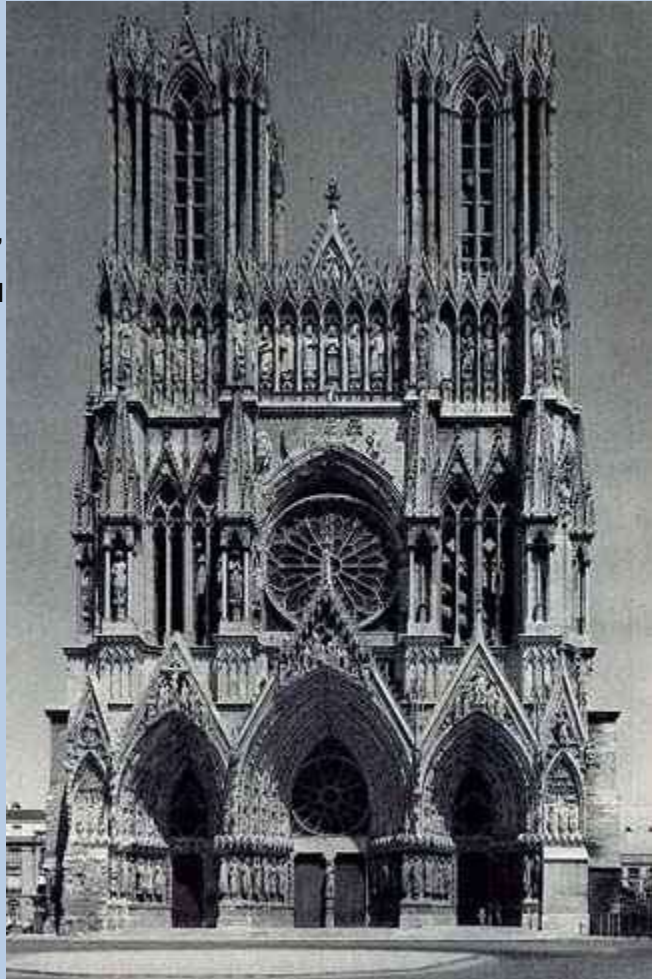


Gothic Art

Lecture: The term "Gothic" is used today to designate the style that began in Northern France before the middle of the twelfth century and in the rest of Western Europe anywhere from a generation to a century later. Gothic architecture became a welcome escape from the rules of classical art. It soon became recognized as the refined intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual achievement of a highly developed urban society. Gothic revival of the 18th century meant Gothic revival buildings have continued to appear in most parts of the world. In England, there has not been a century since the eleventh when Gothic structures have not been built. Extremely large proportions of Gothic religious buildings still survive today, despite social upheavals and two world wars. They are largely intact and are still quite practical for daily use. The Gothic developed a competitive momentum, architects, sculptors and painters were well aware of what was being done elsewhere and were constantly trying to beat their rivals at their own game. The excitement of this momentum may be partly responsible for our enjoyment of Gothic Art. The Gothic style lasted for 400 years, from the mid twelfth century into the sixteenth century (everywhere except Italy).



ELEMENTS OF ARCHITECTURE

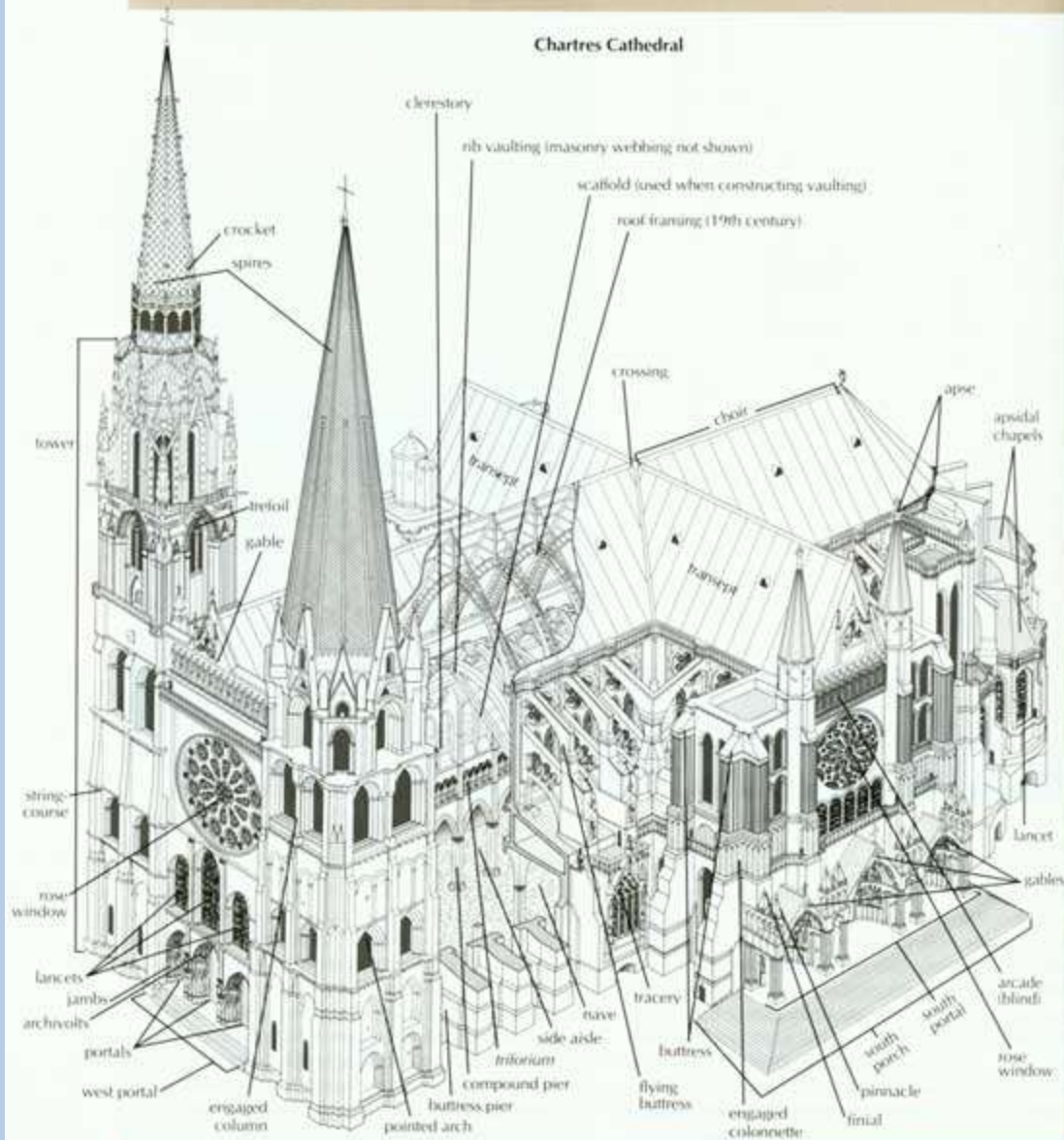
The Gothic Church

Most large Gothic churches in western Europe were built on the **Latin-cross plan**, with a projecting **transept** marking the transition from **nave** to **sanctuary**. The main entrance **portal** was generally on the west, the **choir** and **apse** on the east. A **narthex** led to the nave and **side aisles**. An **ambulatory** with radiating chapels circled the apse and facilitated the movement of worshippers through the church. Above the nave were a **triforium** passageway and windowed **clerestory**. Narthex, side aisles, ambulatory, and nave usually had **rib vaults** in the Gothic period. Church walls were decorated inside and out with **arcades** of round and pointed arches,

engaged columns and **colonnets**, and horizontal moldings called **stringcourses**. The roof was supported by a wooden framework. A spire or **crossing tower** above the junction of the transept and nave was usually planned, though often never finished. The **buttress piers** and **flying buttresses** that countered the outward thrusts of the interior vaults were visible on the outside. Portal facades were customarily marked by high, flanking towers or **gabled porches** ornamented with **pinnacles** and **finials**. Architectural sculpture generally covered each portal's **tympenum**, **archivolts**, and **jamb**s. A magnificent stained-glass rose window typically formed the centerpiece of the facades. More stained glass filled the tall, pointed **lancet**-shaped aisle and clerestory windows.

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Chartres Cathedral



We tend to think of Romanesque as the architecture of the monasteries and to some extent this is true. However, only because in most Western cities, even some small ones, the Romanesque

cathedrals of the eleventh and twelfth centuries became inadequate. In the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries they were replaced by larger Gothic structures. Gothic cathedrals were the largest economic enterprises of the Middle Ages. The cathedrals absorbed the activities of architects, builders, masons, sculptors, stone cutters, painters, stain-glass makers, carpenters, metal-workers, jewelers, utilizing materials brought sometimes from great distances.

THE OBJECT SPEAKS

NOTRE-DAME OF PARIS

Think of Gothic architecture. Chances are, the image that springs to mind is the Cathedral of Notre-Dame of Paris. Just as this structure rivals the Eiffel Tower as the symbol of Paris itself, Notre-Dame is the vision of what a Gothic cathedral should look like. In fact, the Notre-Dame we see today began as an early Gothic building that bridged the period between Abbot Suger's rebuilding of the Abbey Church of Saint-Denis and the thirteenth-century Chartres Cathedral. On this site—a small island in the Seine River called the Île de la Cité, where the Parisian people who gave the city its name first settled—Pope Alexander III set the building cornerstone in 1163. Construction was far enough along for the altar to be consecrated twenty years later. The nave, rising to 115 feet, dates to 1180–1200. The west façade, whose tympana (like that of the north portal) are dedicated to Mary (Notre Dame) dates to 1200–50. By this time, the massive walls and buttresses and six-part vaults, adopted from Norman Romanesque architecture, must have seemed very old-fashioned. After 1225, new masters modernized and lightened the building by reworking the clerestory into the large double-lancet and rose windows

we see today. Notre-Dame had the first true flying buttresses, although those seen at the right of the photograph, rising dramatically to support the high vault of the choir, result from later Gothic remodeling. (The 290-foot spire over the crossing is the work of the nineteenth-century architect Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc.)

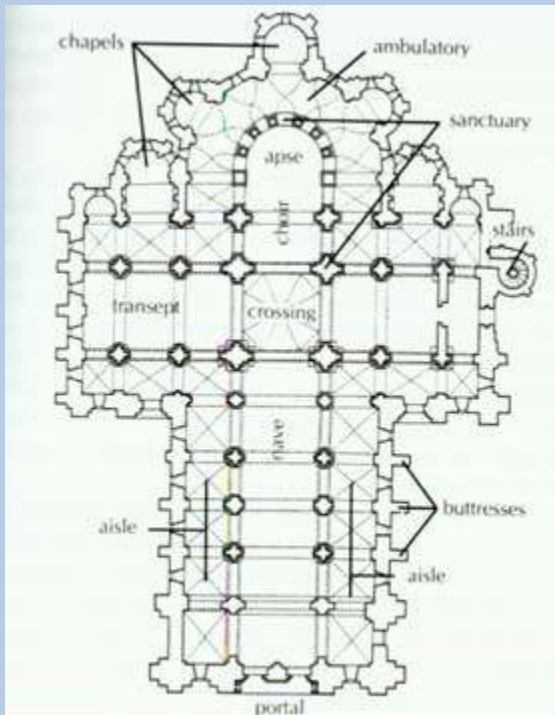
Throughout its history, Notre-Dame has spoken so powerfully that people in each age have embraced it as a symbol of their most passionate beliefs. For example, French revolutionaries decapitated the statues associated with deposed nobility and transformed the cathedral into the secular Temple of Reason (1793–95). Soon afterward, Notre-Dame returned to Christian use, and in 1804 Napoleon crowned himself emperor at its altar. Notre-Dame was also where Paris celebrated its liberation from the Nazis in August 1944. Today, boats filled with tourists drift under the bridges spanning the Seine and circle the Île de la Cité to admire the beautiful cathedral. Notre-Dame so resonates with life and history that it has become more than a house of worship and work of art; it expresses so many aspirations of Western culture even as it inspires affection and awe at a universal level.



16-22. Cathedral of Notre-Dame, Paris. Begun 1163; choir chapels 1270s; spire 19th-century replacement. View from the south

Monasteries were generally located in the country. A cathedral, by definition the seat of a Bishop was in a town and it became a symbol of the town's corporate existence and to a great extent this is still true today.

In the Gothic period communal devotion to the construction of the cathedrals was so great that, according to contemporary chroniclers, not only did the rich contribute financially to the limit of their ability to the building and decoration of the cathedrals, but also rich and poor alike joined with laborers and oxen to pull the carts that were full of building materials. With their soaring height, their immense interiors, their pinnacles, towers and their innumerable images and narratives in stone, paint and glass, they united in a structure that constituted a comprehensive medieval picture of the Universe from the heights of Heaven to the depths of Hell.



15-3. Plan of Abbey Church of

The entire cathedral in the 12th and 13th century became a framework to hold stained glass, it darkened the interior but had it's own indescribable beauty of color and pattern. Much Gothic stained glass has perished; some deliberately destroyed in later times either by Protestant reformers or simply in order to lighten cathedral interiors. The tain glass does tell many stories. After seeing a stain glass

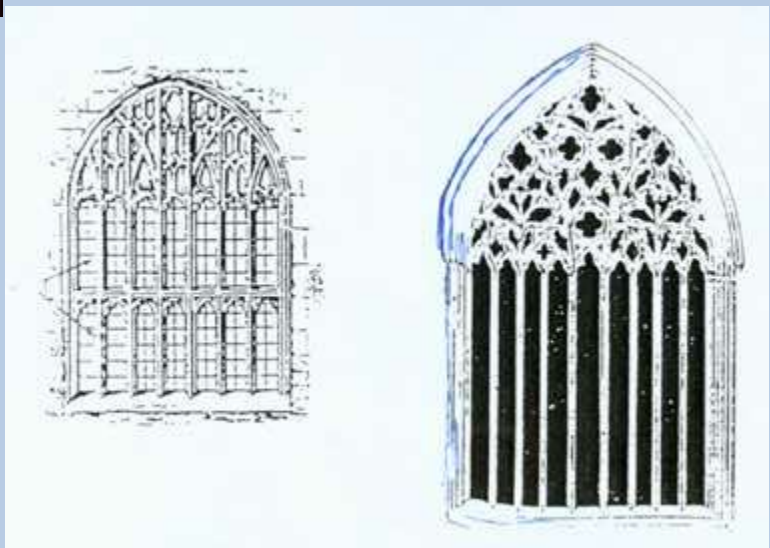


cathedral, one walks away with an experience of deep respect for the Middle Ages. The representations encompass the entire range of medieval knowledge, the Old and New Testaments, lives of the saints, labors of the months and signs of the zodiac.



The Colors of Gothic Stain Glass: In the 13th century the predominant colors were red and blue, white, yellow and green appear, but the red and blue contrast is what one remembers. Stained glass is fabricated from pieces shaped as closely as possible to the contour of a section of face, figure, drapery or background. A full scale model is made; drawn on wood or later on paper and the pieces of colored glass are cut to fit. The lines are then painted on the glass with a dark pigment. After this paint dries, a coating of pigment is sometimes applied and scraped away with a stiff brush while still wet, so that what remains in the hollows will increase the sparkle of the underlying color. The pieces are then fired in a kiln, so that the pigment will harden. Finally the pieces are arranged on the model and joined together by lead soldering strips. Each scene is enclosed in an iron frame and the frames are bolted together within the tracery so that they can be easily taken down for repairs. In France, cathedral windows were removed twice in the present century to protect them from damage in the two world wars.

Tracery on Stain Glass Cathedrals: As the art of stain glass grew more sophisticated, the clergy became aware that these windows which so enhanced the beauty of their churches could have an educational value. In the last years of the 10th century, the storybook windows that illustrated in a series, the lives of the saints and biblical stories, for the benefit of the largely illiterate churchgoers, began to make their appearance.





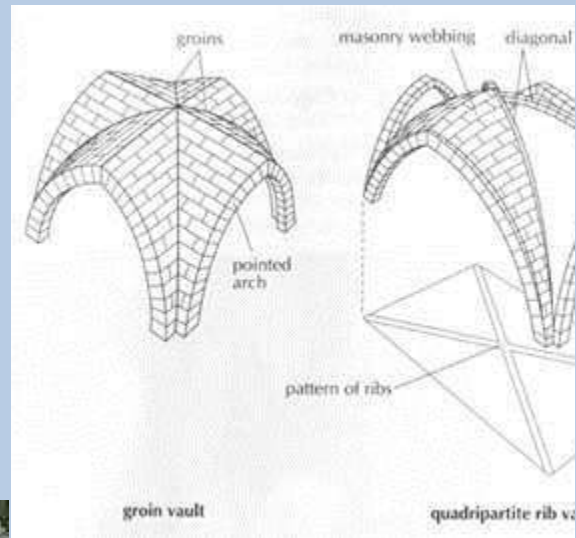
In the early years of stain glass windows, the limitations of the craft had prevented windows of large sizes from developing. In the later half of the 12th century iron frameworks called armatures were built into the walls. The stain glass was fastened to them. It is thus that the so called medallion (a decorated window) was developed.

As the stained-glass designer skill increased, so did the builders desire to increase the light in the church. Even with the use of iron frameworks it was difficult to strengthen a window opening over 8' wide. It became necessary to divide the larger area into smaller widths, and thus tracery was originated. Tracery is the ornamental design of stone ribs, with varying patterns on a window. Tracery designs differed from country to country, but the general trend was from geometric shapes, circled,



triangle to flamboyant forms in the later years. The flamboyant style is the last phase of French Gothic named for the flame like quality of its intricate curvilinear design.

Vault: A vault is an arched roof or covering made of brick, stone or concrete. The Gothic builders perfected the rib and groin vaults, and incorporated them with the pointed arch. "Only when diagonal ribs are used in direct conjunction with pointed transverse arches in the vaulting of an interior can a structure be identified as Gothic." This form of rib vaulting was the decisive factor in the evolution of the French Gothic Cathedral. In looking up at a Gothic ceiling we can see the vaults are only draperies, and that the ribs are really the constructive parts of the ceiling. If the ribs were removed the ceiling would fall in. The vaults could be removed and the skeleton, made up of the ribs, arches, and columns would remain intact.



Flying Buttresses: The buttress has been used in architecture since ancient times. A buttress is a mass of masonry or brick that project from, or is built against a wall to give it added strength, and may also receive and transmit the weight of a roof to the base or foundation. The first buttresses were simply an extra thickness of the wall at the point where the ribs from the vault joined it. They supported almost the whole weight of the vault, and the actual walls had little work to do. The structure of the Gothic church exerts an outward and downward thrust. This thrust increased, as churches became taller and wider. To avoid thickening the walls as earlier builders did, the Gothic mason added buttresses. As the desire for taller buildings developed, the Gothic builders developed the flying buttress. The flying buttress, developed in the mid-12th century, is a purely Gothic development, which enable the builder's upward and outward freedom. As the Gothic period developed, the buttresses themselves became larger, heavier, richly ornamented,

and more complex. Pinnacles were added which seem to be purely decorative, yet are structurally functional.

ROMANCE The ideal of romantic love arose in southern France in the early twelfth century during the cultural renaissance that followed the First Crusade. Unlike the noble marriages of the time, which were essentially business contracts based on political or financial exigencies, romantic love involved the passionate devotion of lover and loved one. The relationship was almost always illicit—the woman the wife of another, often a lord or patron—and its consummation was usually impossible. Dubbed “courtly love” in the nineteenth century, this movement transformed the social habits of western Europe’s courts and has had an enduring influence on modern ideas of love. Images of gallant knights serving refined ladies, who bestowed tokens of affection on their chosen suitors or cruelly withheld their love on a whim, captured the popular imagination (see page 580).

Tales of romance were initially spread by the musician-poets known as troubadours, some of them professionals, some of them amateur nobles, and at least twenty of them

women. They sang of love’s joys and heartbreaks in daringly personalized terms, extolling the ennobling effects of the lovers’ selfless devotion. Among the literature that emerged from this tradition was the story of the love of the knight Lancelot for Guinevere, the wife of King Arthur, recounted in the late twelfth century by Chrétien de Troyes, a French poet. Such works marked a major shift from the usually negative way in which women had previously been portrayed as sinful daughters of Eve. The following example, a stylized lovers’ debate (the woman speaks first), is an example of courtly love poetry of southern France.

Friend, because of you I’m filled
with grievous sorrow and
despair,
but I doubt you feel a trace
of my affliction.
Why did you become a lover,
since you leave the suffering
to me?
Why don’t we split it evenly?

Lady, such is love’s nature
when it links two friends

together,
that whatever grief or joy they
have
each feels according to his way.
The way I see it, and I don’t
exaggerate, all the worst pain’s
been on my end of the game.

Friend, I know well enough
how skilled
you are in amorous affairs,
and I find you rather changed
from the chivalrous knight you
used to be.
I might as well be clear,
for your mind seems quite
distracted:
do you still find me attractive?

Lady, may sparrow-hawk not
ride my wrist,
nor siren fly beside
me on the chase, if ever
since you gave me perfect joy
I possessed another woman;
I don’t lie: out of envy
evil men insult my name.

(Attributed to the Countess of Dia and
Raimbaut d’Orange, late twelfth cen-
tury; cited in Bogin, pages 147, 149)

Pinnacle: A small turret or spire on a buttress served the purpose of bearing the buttress down more firmly into the ground. They exerted a vertical pressure that helped to counteract the vault’s outward thrust.



Villard de Honnecourt. Sheet drawings with geometric figures and ornaments.

Gargoyle: Gargoyles are grotesque stone figures most commonly found on Gothic buildings at the roof or eaves. Originally the term meant the "unadorned spout that extended outward from a rain gutter"; the gargoyle allowed water to fall free of the building, preventing seepage and damage to masonry. Eventually the spout became a carved head or body with grotesque features. Although the demons and monsters so prevalent in cathedral sculpture may seem almost quaint to modern eyes, the men of the Middle Ages did not find them so. The purpose of most cathedral sculpture was not decorative. It was intended to scare the hell out of its beholders, presenting the horrors of damnation in living color. Only slight traces of the original color can be seen today.



MASTER BUILDERS

"At the beginning of the fifth year [of the rebuilding of England's Canterbury Cathedral], suddenly by the collapse of beams beneath his feet, [master William of Sens] fell to the ground amid a shower of falling masonry and timber from . . . fifty feet or more. . . . On the master craftsman alone fell the wrath of God—or the machinations of the Devil" (Brother Gervase, Canterbury, twelfth century, cited in Andrews, page 20).

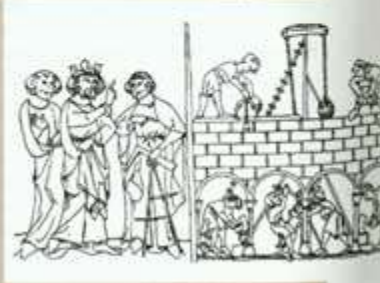
Master masons oversaw all aspects of church construction in the Middle Ages, from design and structural engineering to decoration. The job presented formidable logistical challenges, especially at great cathedral sites. The master mason at Chartres coordinated the work of roughly 400 people scattered, with their equipment and supplies, at many locations, from distant stone quarries to high scaffolding. This workforce set in place some 200 blocks of stone each day.

Master masons gained in prestige during the thirteenth century as they increasingly differentiated themselves from the laborers working under them. In the words of Nicolas de Bliard, a thirteenth-century Dominican

preacher, "The master masons, holding measuring rod and gloves in their hands, say to others: 'Cut here,' and they do not work; nevertheless they receive the greater fees" (cited in Frisch, page 55). By the standards of their time they were well read; they traveled widely. They knew both aristocrats and high Church officials, and they earned as much as knights. From the thirteenth century on, in what was then an exceptional honor, masters were buried, along with patrons and bishops, in the cathedrals they built. The tomb sculpture of a master mason named Hugues Libergier in the Reims Cathedral portrays him, attended by angels, as a well-dressed figure with his tools and a model of the cathedral. The names of more than 3,000 master masons are known today. In some cases their names were prominently inscribed in the labyrinths on cathedral floors.

The illustration here shows a master—right-angle and compass in hand—conferring with his royal patron while workers carve a capital, hoist stones with a winch, cut a block, level a course of masonry using a plumb rule (a board with a line and a weight), and lay dressed stones in place. Masters and their crews moved constantly from

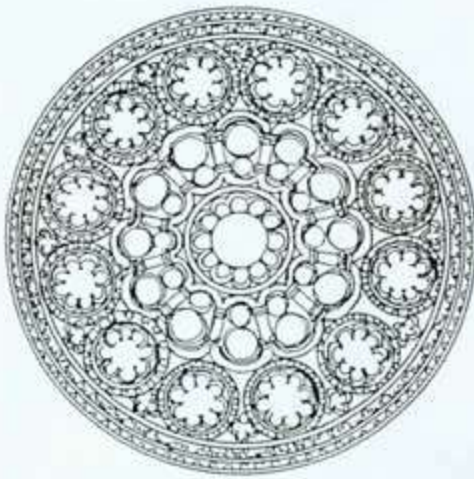
site to site, and several masters contributed to a single building. A master's training was rigorous but not standardized, so close study of subtle differences in construction techniques can reveal the hand of specific individuals. Fewer than 100 master builders are estimated to have been responsible for all the major architectural projects around Paris during the century-long building boom there, some of them working on parts of as many as forty churches. Funding shortages and technical delays, such as the need to let mortar harden for three to six months, made construction sporadic.



Page with King Henry III Supervising the Works. copy of an illustration from a 13th-century English manuscript, original in The British Library, London

The circular window, the Gothic rose, evolved from the Romanesque wheel window. The rose windows were filled with symmetrical radiating tracery or similarly stained-glass patterns. These are the windows we come to remember and associate with the Gothic period and the great cathedrals.

CHARTRES CATHEDRAL,
FRANCE, PLATE TRACERY
1196-1216



AMIENS CATHEDRAL
FRANCE, FLAMBOYANT
15TH CENTURY

