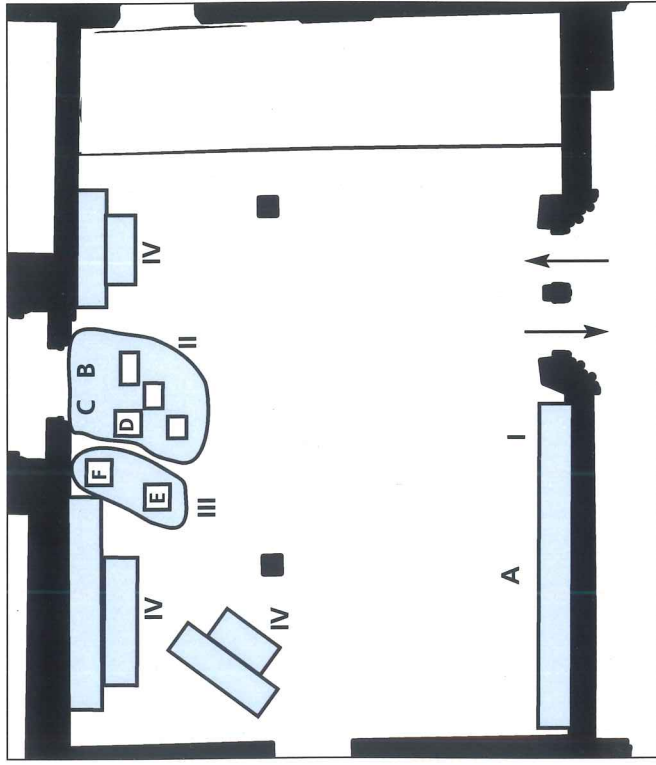




Room 8 English

The sculptures of Notre-Dame de Paris

The 1977 discovery of hundreds of sculptured fragments from Notre-Dame de Paris at the headquarters of the Banque Française du Commerce Extérieur (now Banque Natexis), which generously donated them to the Musée de Cluny, greatly advanced our understanding of the world famous cathedral. Firstly, with regard to the fate of these fragments following vandalism of the façades in 1793, we already knew that they had been purchased by a builder, a certain Monsieur Bertrande, but it then became clear that after he sold them they were used to shore up the foundations of a private mansion designed by the architect Henry for Jean-Baptiste Lakunal-Dupuget and built from 1796 onwards. Significant light was also shed on the nature of the 12th and 13th century façades. Combined with existing elements fully restored by Viollet-le-Duc and Geoffroy Dechaume (between 1843 and 1864), and more especially with those which were already housed at the Musée de Cluny, they provide a valuable insight into the history of monumental sculpture between 1140 and 1250.

The western façade

The right-hand doorway - Sainte-Anne doorway (fig. 1 - I; fig. 2 and 3)

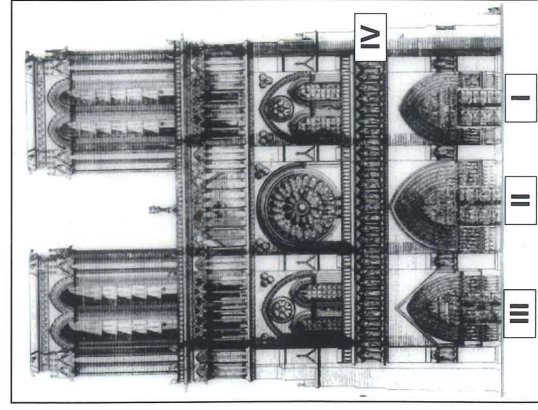


fig. 1 Western façade

In 1163, bishop Maurice de Sully laid the foundation stone for the new cathedral of Paris. The western façade, begun in the 1200s, incorporated part of the former church's doorways, which may seem surprising today but was in fact common practice at the time. These doorways were erected around 1145

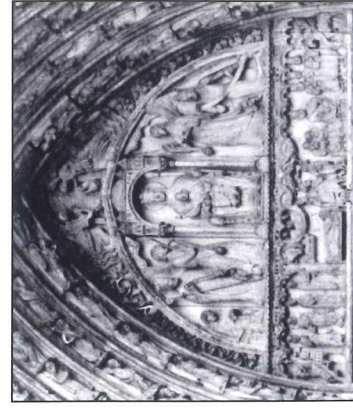


fig. 2 - I Sainte-Anne doorway (détail)

(room 10) and prior to that of Chartres cathedral, the sculptures reincorporated into the Sainte-Anne doorway (fig. 3) can be traced back to the birth of Gothic sculpture, with their elongated figures, their sharp drapery folds and the sheer finesse of the distinct low-relief decorations, particularly the hems on clothing, as can be seen in the representation of Saint Marcel (A. Cl. 18640) which occupied the trumeau.

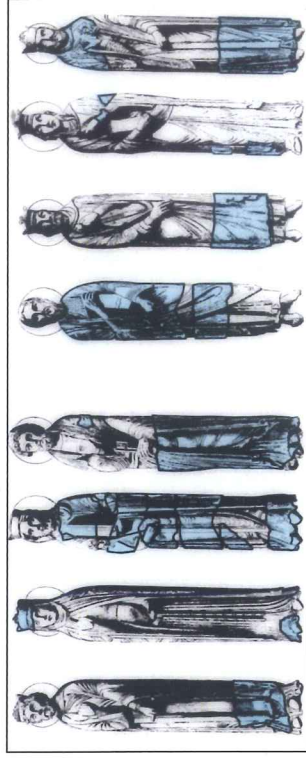


fig. 3 - I Sculptures of the Sainte-Anne doorway

The central doorway (fig. 1 - II; fig. 4) and the left-hand doorway (fig. 1 - III)

Begun in the early 1200s, construction of the western façade of Notre-Dame continued through to the 1220s, and the central doorway and the left-hand doorway were sculpted between the 1210s and early 1220s. The principal remnants of the central doorway (fig. 1 - II) devoted to the last

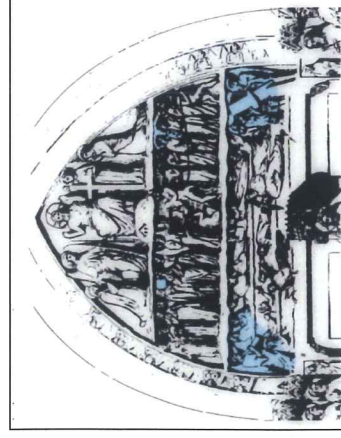


fig. 4 Sainte-Anne doorway (détail)



B. Cl. 18643 c



C. Cl. 18643 a-b



D. Cl. 14417



E. Cl. 22969

Judgement (fig. 4), are the fragments of the lintel savaged by Soufflot in 1732 to make room for the canopy used to cover the Holy Sacrament during processions. These fragments are of particular interest since, although certain figures are part of the so-called classical Gothic sculpture (B. Cl. 18643 c), others, particularly an angel sounding a trumpet and one of the damned (C. Cl. 18643 a, b), possess the kind of wavy hair, delicate features, slit eyes and high cheek bones more typical of the sophisticated sculpture tradition of the 1240s, the era of the apostles of Sainte-Chapelle (room 11). From the plays on this same doorway (II) is preserved a head of Saint Paul

(D. Cl. 14417), recognised by his bald head. From the left-hand doorway (fig. 1 - III) devoted to the Coronation of the Virgin Mary, comes a Head of an Angel (E. Cl. 22969) and another of a bishop (F. Cl. 16602). These three heads are characteristic of classical Gothic sculpture with their flat foreheads emphasised by small wrinkles, wide eyes with straight lower eyelids and gently undulating hair.

The gallery of kings (fig. 1 - IV)

In the 1220s, the façade of Notre-Dame de Paris hosted an innovation which was to enjoy considerable success throughout the 13th century: the gallery of kings. Its role was primarily visual, allowing the vertical elevation of the façade to be split in the middle by a horizontal gallery. This gallery does not represent the genealogy of the kings of France, as believed during the Revolution and since the 17th century, but rather

Circa 1140-1145

Installation of new doorways in Saint-Étienne de Paris

1160

Maurice de Sully becomes bishop of Paris. Work begins on reconstruction. The cathedral becomes Notre-Dame

1200-1220

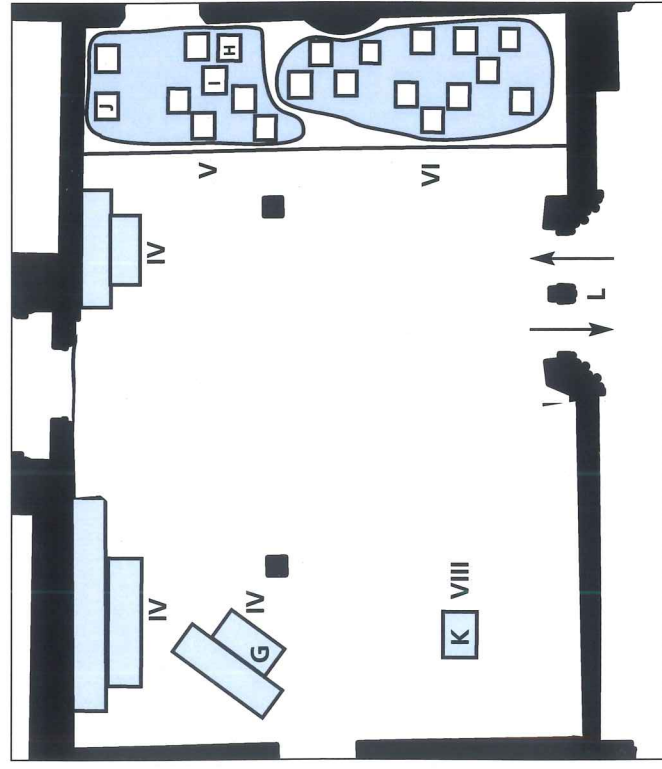
Construction of the western façade

1230

Work recommences in the nave

1773

Soufflot modifies the central doorway of the west façade to allow the passage of the canopy used to cover the Holy Sacrament during processions.



that of the kings of Judah, ancestors of the Virgin Mary and Christ. This gallery was destroyed during the Revolution and only twenty-two of the twenty-eight heads remain identifiable. Although they were not intended as portraits and despite their somewhat impassive dispositions, these heads are all distinct. While there is no real individualisation as such, we can detect a clear intention to differentiate. Moreover, it can clearly be seen on the head said to be of David (G, Cl. 23002) that these sculptures were originally painted, as were the entire façade of Notre-Dame and all Medieval façades. Traces of the various colours are still visible: the pink of the carnations and, for the clothing, the dominant hues of red and blue (the easiest colours to obtain). Finally, the sculptor's tool marks can clearly be observed; the faces are extremely elongated, monumental and impressive. However, it can hardly be said that they are delicately sculpted. The sculptors took account of the distance and the low angle from which the statues would be viewed, elongating them disproportionately as a result, but not needlessly working on details which would not be visible.

The arms of the transept (fig. 5 – V and VI)

In the original plan dating from the 1160s, Notre-Dame was a church with five naves and a non-projecting transept. In the 1250s, the bishop and the chapter decided to modify this plan by creating a projecting transept (absorbed in the general plan once again in the 14th century through the addition of side chapels). Work was firstly entrusted to Jean de Chelles, who built the north arm (fig. 5 – V) and laid the foundations for the south arm (fig. 5 – VI). The doorway of the north arm (V)

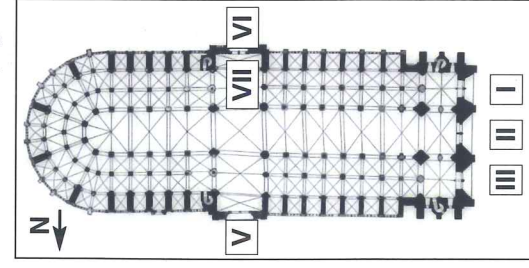


fig. 5 Plan (today)

which served as the canons ceremonial access was devoted to the Virgin Mary, positioned in the trumeau and flanked by wise men. The wise men were depicted at least twice on the north flank (V), as reflected in three monolithic bodies (H, Cl. 18644) and the head (I, Cl. 23127) found in 1977, a head which could not have originated from the bodies given the differing dimensions. With their long tubular folds, calm and measured aspects, the

bodies reflect Jean de Chelles' familiarity with major projects at the time, particularly the structures of Sainte-Chapelle and Saint-Denis. The head of the wise man (I, Cl. 23127) and the head of a man (J, Cl. 23606) illustrate the sculptor's genius: the flowing movement and the elegant rendering of the drapery folds around the neck and the faces contrast with the somewhat methodical approach to major royal works from the same period.

After the death of Jean de Chelles in 1265, work on the south arm (VI) was continued by another of the great architects and sculptors of the time, Pierre de Montreuil, architect of the Chapelle de la Vierge in Saint-Germain-des-Prés whose door (L) offers access to the room in which you now find yourself.

Interior decoration

Sculptured decoration was not limited to the exterior of Notre-Dame de Paris since the interior was no less rich in decoration. Apart from the grand choir closure which is still partially preserved, a particularly noteworthy ensemble was created by Pierre de Montreuil on the reverse of the south arm of the transept (fig. 5 – VII) and captured in an 18th-century drawing (fig. 6) in the Robert de Cotte collection (BnF, département des Estampes). Of this ensemble showing

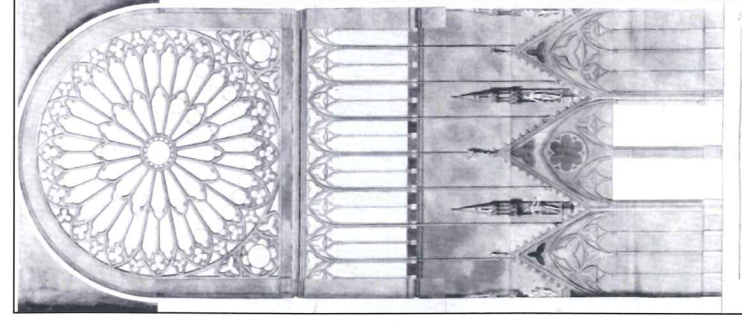


fig. 6 - VII Drawing (18th century)

Adam and Eve on either side of a Christ in Majesty, only Adam (K, Cl. 11657) now survives. Removed during the Revolution, the statue then passed through the hands of the Musée des Monuments Français founded by Alexandre Lenoir, where the lower right arm was resculpted, modifying the hand's gesture. This Adam is a fairly remarkable example, not only of the sculptors' art in the 1260s, but also of their expert knowledge of ancient sculpture. In fact, whereas the head and torso of Adam draw inspiration from the statues of Apollo, the general disposition of the body, hips, legs and arms clearly evoke one of the most classical ancient poses from the Praxitelean tradition known as Venus Pudica. It is moreover extraordinary that this sculpture, which was intended to be positioned high up against a wall, was entirely sculpted in ronde-bosse even if the reverse side is rougher and shows signs of the sculptor's tool marks. Finally, it is worth noting the careful attention paid to the representation of the fig leaf which reflects 13th century tastes for models inspired by nature. This style can also be observed on the door (L) of the Chapelle de la Vierge in Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

Xavier Dectot, *curator*



G. Cl. 23002



H. Cl. 18644



I. Cl. 23127



J. Cl. 23606



K. Cl. 11657

Before 1258 Jean de Chelles becomes master mason of the cathedral. Work starts on the north arm of the transept	1265 Death of Jean de Chelles. Pierre de Montreuil succeeds him and finishes the south arm of the transept	1792-1793 During the Revolution, vandalism of the "symbols of feudalism" followed by the removal of sculptures at Notre-Dame	1839 Discovery in Paris (coal market, Rue de la Santé) of statue fragments from Notre-Dame	1843-1864 Restoration of the western façade under the supervision of Lassus and Viollet-le-Duc	1977 Discovery of fragments during work on the Hôtel Moreau, headquarters of the BFCF (subsequently Banque Natexis)
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