

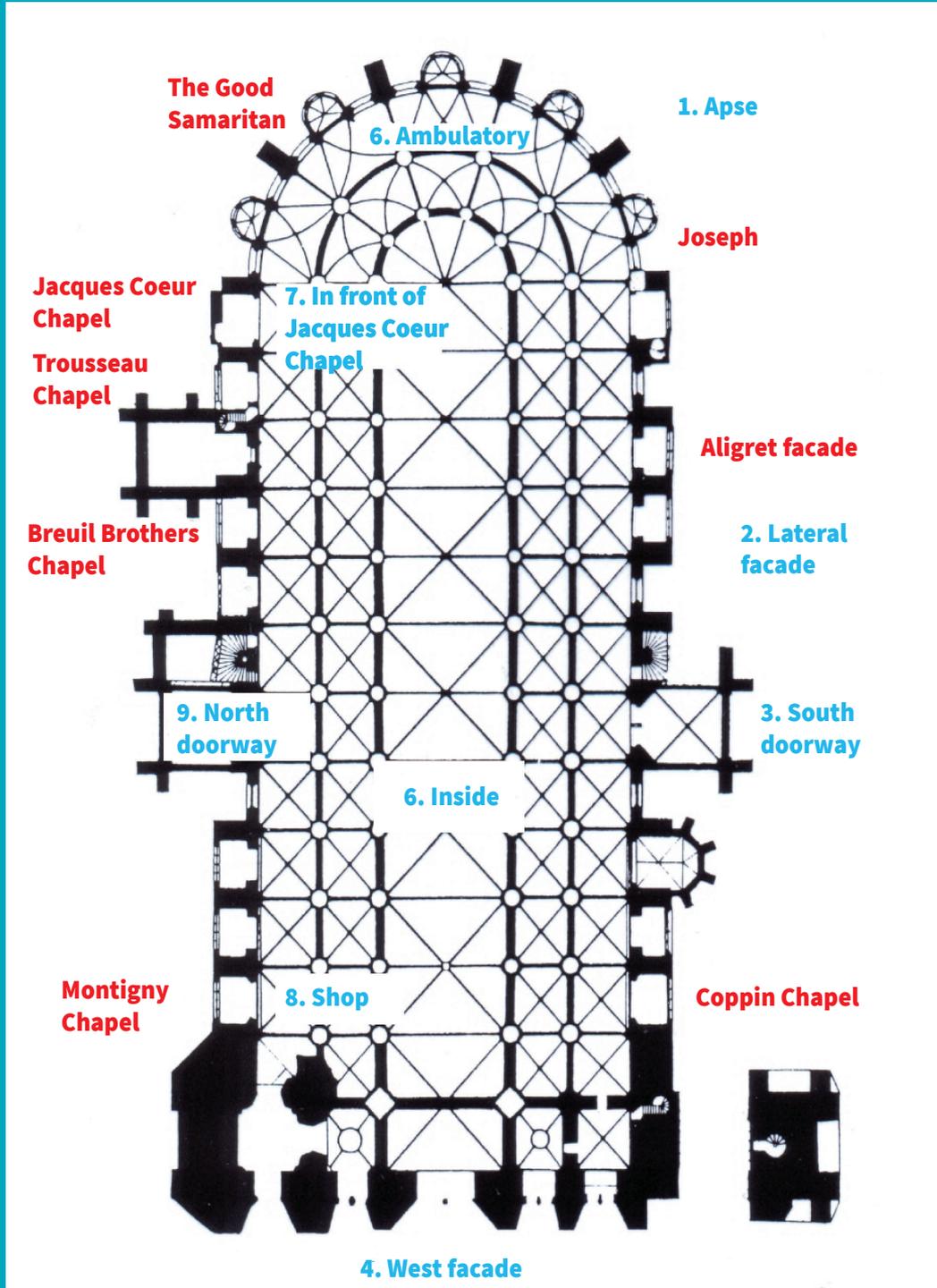
# FOCUS BOURGES SAINT ETIENNE CATHEDRAL



**A BOOKLET TO HELP YOU  
IN YOUR VISIT**

**VILLES  
& PAYS  
D'ART &  
D'HISTOIRE**

# PLAN





# **SAINT ETIENNE CATHEDRAL, WORLD HERITAGE**

**The cathedral of Saint Etienne shows architectural features which give it a very special place in the history of architecture.**

**According to Unesco, it is a Gothic masterpiece and «its striking beauty results from masterly crafted space with harmonious proportions and the high quality decoration». It was built during a singular period. The cathedral had been registered on the World Heritage list the first time in 1992, and then again in 1998 as an important stage on the Pilgrimage of Compostela route.**

**What is a cathedral? The word itself is formed on the word «cathedra», throne of the bishop. The cathedral is in fact the church of the bishop. Until the French Revolution, it was the symbol of the religious dogma and power, without any parochial function. A college of canons was in charge of the daily management, as well as liturgical and administrative tasks.**

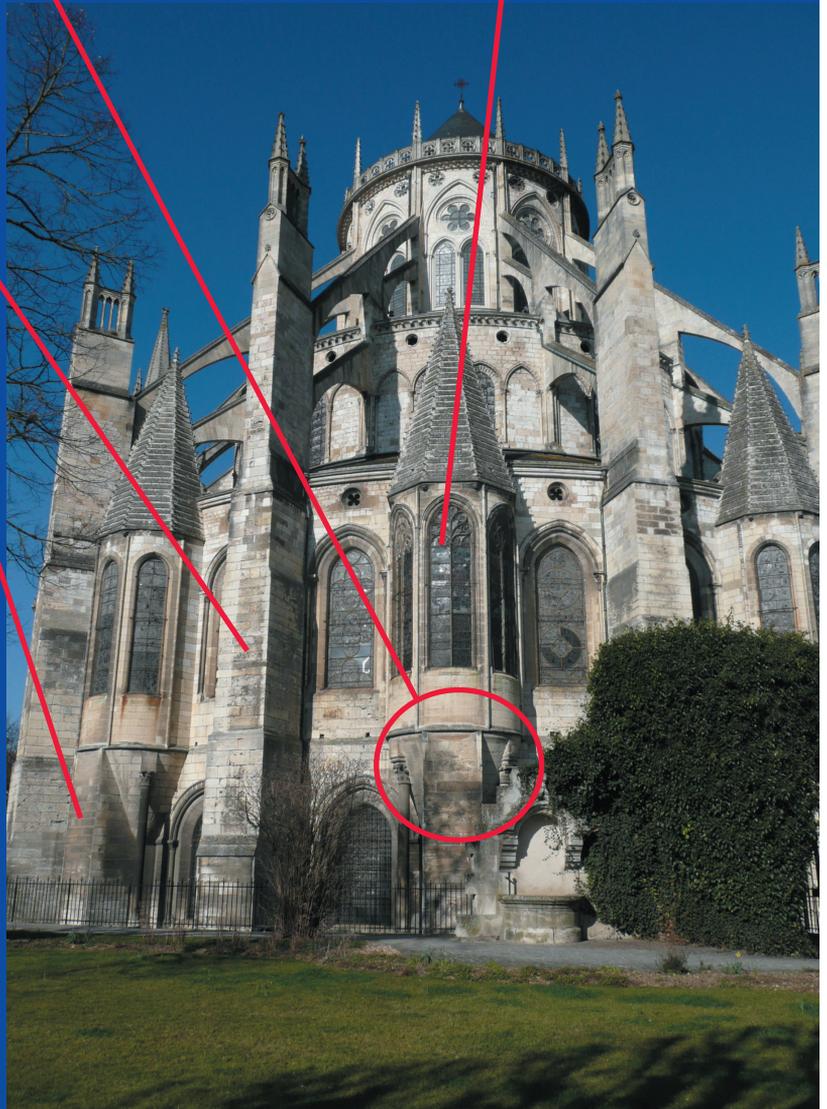
**In 1905, French law established a partition between Church and State. Since then, the pre-1905 churches are the property of the State: an architect belonging to a national body called «Bâtiments de France» is in charge of the maintenance of these churches.**



**Corbeled Bartizan**

**Counter forts**

**Radiating Chapel**

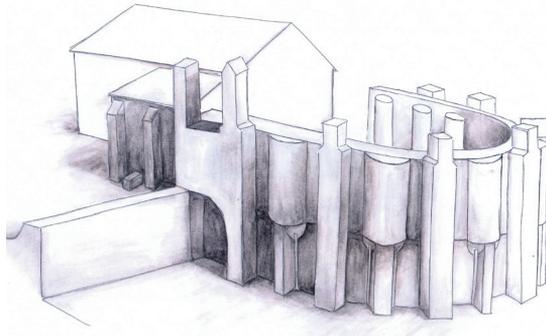


**The Apse of the cathedral**  
© Service patrimoine



## 1. Construction of the apse of the cathedral

© Cassandra Cousy



## 1. IN THE ARCHBISHOP GARDENS, IN FRONT OF THE APSE OF THE CATHEDRAL

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The building of the cathedral in Bourges started around 1190. Bourges had been the more Southern town of the small capetian (French dynasty) domain for nearly a century.

Facing the Plantagenets, the city was important for the French kings, both in a strategic and symbolic way. Bourges was as well the headquarters of a very powerful ecclesiastical metropolitan archbishop. His authority stretched as far as the town of Albi in the South.

To show the royal power, a new rampart was built. It was defended by a fortress with a strong keep, built to the same designs the keep of the Louvres in Paris. To show religious power, the cathedral was built in the new Gothic style, then in favour around Paris.

### THE WORK IN PROGRESS

Since the 6th century, a romanesque cathedral had been standing at that very place. It was redecorated between 1141 and 1171. Then, a decision was made to built the church we now know.

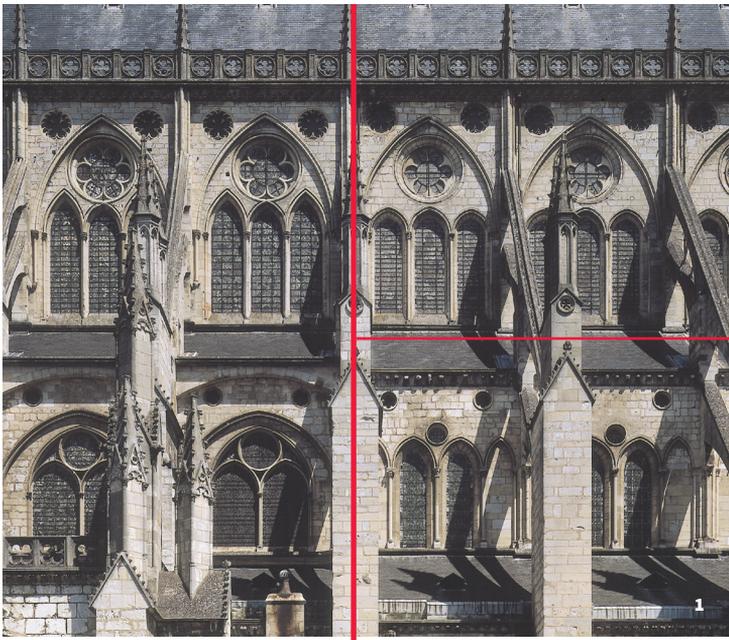
At the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Archbishop Henri de Sully initiated the work.

To help, the king gave permission for the inhabitants to build on the old gallo-roman wall. The work started at the apse.

But there was (and still is) a six meters gap between lower and higher parts of the town. To compensate for the gap, a «low church» was built first. The romanesque cathedral was finely demolished in 1215, but only when the new choir was completed. The work seems to have been finished in 1250, with the doorways of the west facade.

### THE APSE

Five radiating chapels surround the apse. They are corbeled out with bartizan, on platforms standing on the counter forts of the low church. These chapels seem to be held by smooth columns, but in fact, the columns are masking the dissymmetrical shapes of the low windows. Glass windows and windowless stone walls alternate to create an original movement towards the top. That is an exceptional feature which can only be seen in Bourges.



Difference between the two phases of the work

## 2. ETIENNE DOLET SQUARE, IN FRONT OF THE LATERAL FACADE

### THE ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF THE CATHEDRAL

The building is 125m long (to compare with the 130m long of Paris and Chartres cathedrals), 50m wide and 55m high at the top of the roof. The North Tower is 65m high.

Contrary to most Gothic cathedrals of the royal domain, the church was built on the basilican plan : no transept to form a latin cross shape. In addition, the cathedral has five naves instead of three.

The 28 flying buttresses which surround the cathedral have a special shape : the two flights of buttresses have a strong slope. The upper flight compensates for the wind pressure, while the lower one counteracts the vaults thrust. In the higher parts of the choir, an iron safety chain reinforces both efficiency and elegance of the church.

These choices notably reduced the weight of the pier buttresses as well as the amount of stones used on the site, and also final cost of the building.

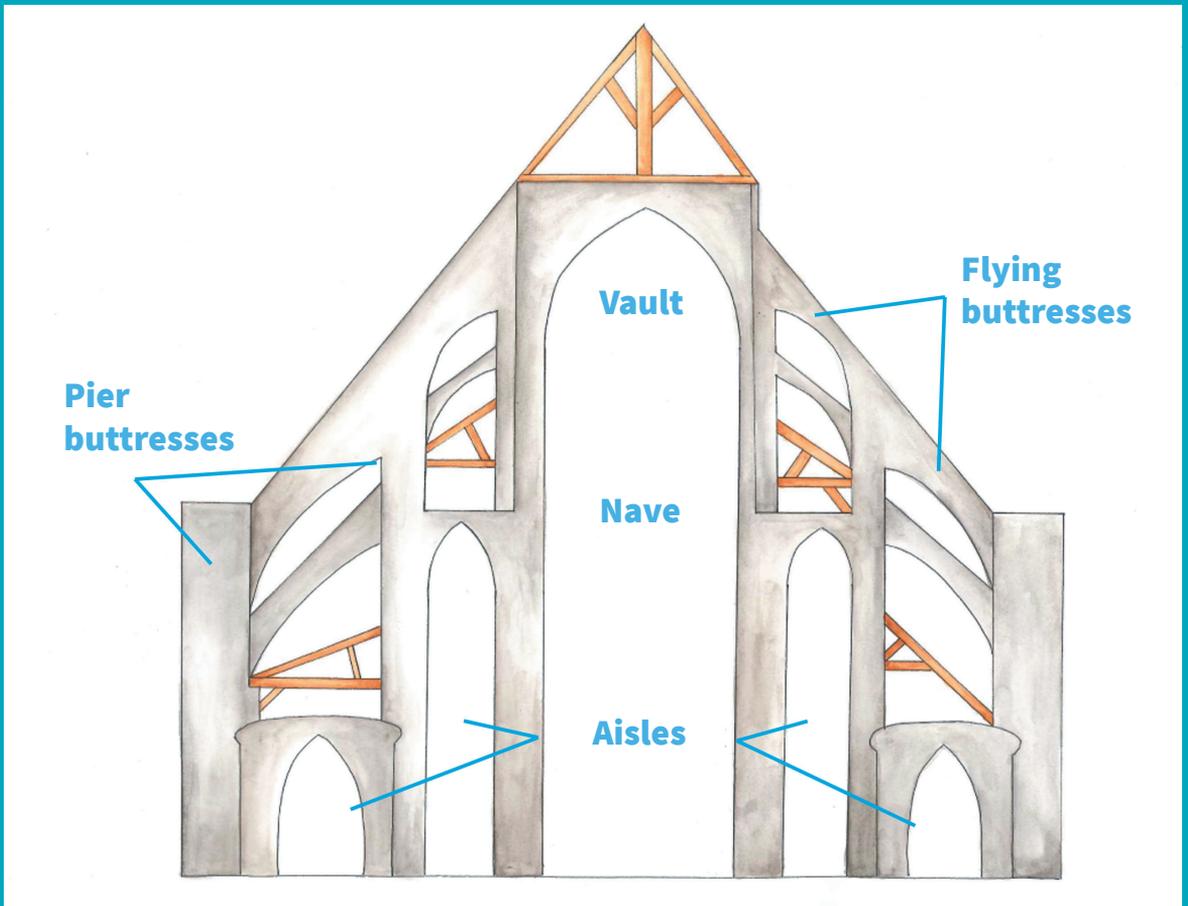
On the lateral facade, it is easy to see that the progression of the work stopped for a while. Between the end of the choir building, completed in 1215, and the building of the nave around 1225, one notices that, from the 4th western bay, the shape of the upper windows changes and the pier buttresses become larger.

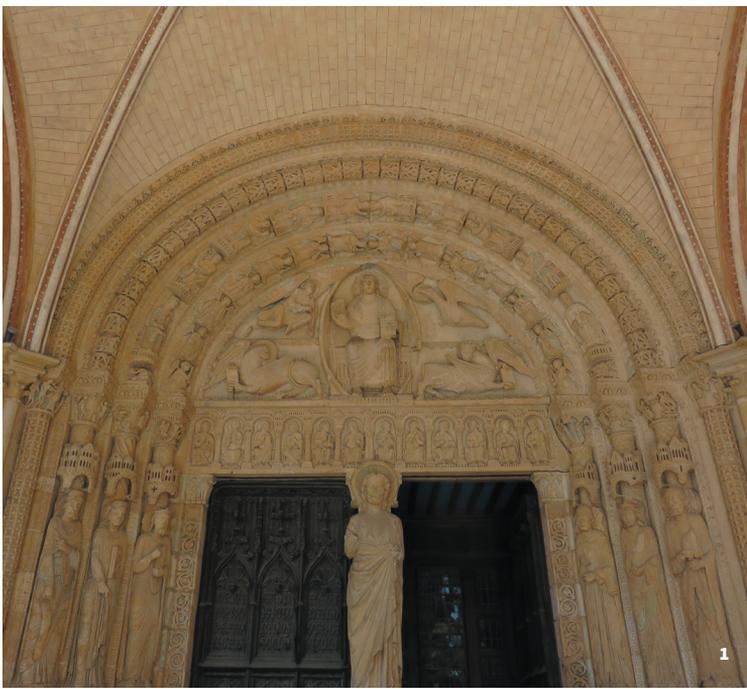
**1. Lateral facade detail**

© Service patrimoine

**2. Transversal cut  
of the cathedral**

© Cassandra Cousy





**1. The South doorway**  
© Service patrimoine

**3. The west facade**  
© Service patrimoine

**2. Stepped arches of the South doorway with traces of paint**  
© Service patrimoine

### 3. IN FRONT OF THE SOUTH DOORWAY, ON ETIENNE DOLET SQUARE

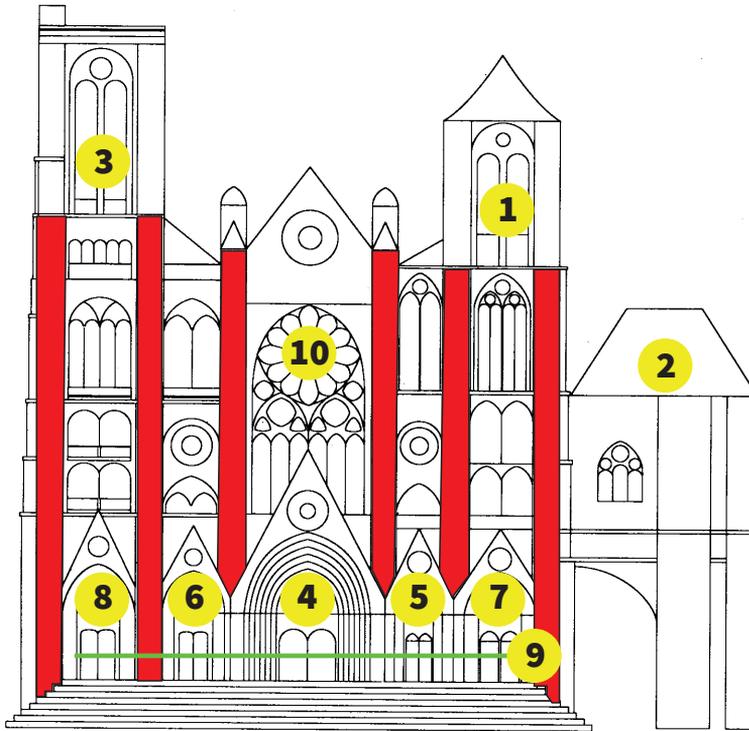
#### THE SOUTH DOORWAY

The access to the cathedral is possible through three sides : the main entrance on the western facade and two doors on both the South and North sides.

The two lateral doorways are from the previous cathedral and are typical of mid 12<sup>th</sup> century sculpture.

At the tympanum, the enthroned Christ is surrounded by the four evangelists' symbols - Matthew (the man), Mark (the lion), Luke (the bull) and John (the eagle). The underneath lintel shows the twelve apostles speaking to one another. In the recesses, the statues represent prophets, kings and queens of the Old Testament.

The capitals of the columns are ornate with fantastic scenes, vegetal designs and scenes of the Old Testament. For instance, on the left side, the First Sin with Adam and Eve being expelled from the Garden of Eden. Many vivid colours traces of the original paint have been discovered during restoration



1. South Tower
2. Shouldering buttress
3. North Tower
4. Doorway of the Last Judgment
5. Doorway of saint Etienne (saint Stephan)
6. Doorway of the Virgin Mary
7. Doorway of saint Ursin
8. Doorway of saint Guillaume
9. Basement
10. Large rose Window (called «Grand Housteau»)

## 4. IN FRONT OF THE WEST FACADE

### THE FACADE

The west facade is 55m wide, even 73,45m if including the shouldering buttress.

It has five doorways, one for each nave. Six counterforts stand to hold the facade which is affected both by its size and by the openings.

The two towers are located above the extreme right and left doorways. They are not of the same height : 58m for the South tower, 65m for the North tower. Their styles are different.

Because the cathedral was built on a sloping ground, it has always shown potential weakness in its structure. From the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the enormous shouldering buttress was built to support the South

tower, but no bells were ever installed. But it is the North tower which collapsed, in 1506, on December 31<sup>st</sup>. The fall partly destroyed the adjacent nave. Nave and tower were rebuilt in the following years.

### THE ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAM

The coherence found both in the stained glass windows and sculptures was maintained all along the construction. We discover the Holy History with Christ as the main character, along with prophets, the Virgin Mary, apostles, saints of the Golden Legend and saints who founded the local Church. They appear all triumphant at the End of Times, with the Resurrection of the Dead, the Last Judgment and the Apocalypse.





Grace is above Law and New Testament above Old One. That subtle and complex program was aimed at clerics who had a strong theological knowledge.

angels presenting the Instruments of his Passion. The Virgin Mary and saint John the Baptist are kneeling and two angels take down the now useless sun and moon.

## THE DOORWAYS

The Gothic doorways were completed between 1230 and 1240. The North doorway was finished in 1515. The mutilations date wars of religions, in 1562.

On each side are located the doorways dedicated to the Virgin Mary and saint Etienne. That same organisation can be seen as well at the choir stained glass windows.

### THE DOORWAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

In the gothic architecture, the middle doorway is the most important one. Like the others, it reads from bottom to top, frame by frame.

### THE DOORWAY OF SAINT ETIENNE

It emphasizes his martyrdom: after he was consecrated as the first among the seven deacons, he was accused of blasphemy and dragged out of the town to be stoned to death.

The Dead surge from their coffins. Then, the archangel saint Michel weights the souls and protects a man coveted by a demon. The Blessed ones are ushered by saint Pierre towards Heaven. Then they join Abraham who hold their souls in a cloth on his lap. On the other side, the Damned are pushed by the demons into a cauldron and the mouth of Hell. Above that frame, the Judging Christ is surrounded by

### THE DOORWAY OF THE VIRGIN MARY

It mixes reused elements of the 13th century with 16th century elements. It reads, from bottom to top : the «Dormition» (death) of the Virgin (16th century), the «Assumption » (bodily ascent to Heaven) and her crowning by Christ (13th century).

**1. Doorway of the Last Judgment : The Damned**

© Service patrimoine

**2. Doorway of saint Guillaume (détail)**

© Service patrimoine

**3. Samael : Cycle of Genesis**

© Service patrimoine



**EXTREME LEFT AND RIGHT DOORWAYS THE BASEMENTS**

They are both dedicated to the two archbishops involved in the building of the cathedral : saint Ursin who brought the Christian faith to the Berry, and saint Guillaume.

**THE DOORWAY OF SAINT URSIN**

In Rome, Ursin and Just, his first companion, were told by Peter to leave and go to the Berry area. But Just died outside Bourges, before Ursin entered with the reliquary containing saint Etienne's relics. Ursin preached the Good Words. He consecrated the first cathedral, received the feudal homage from Leocadius, the Aquitaine governor, before the latter received baptism. Here is a political message : religious power is superior to secular power.

**THE DOORWAY SAINT GUILLAUME**

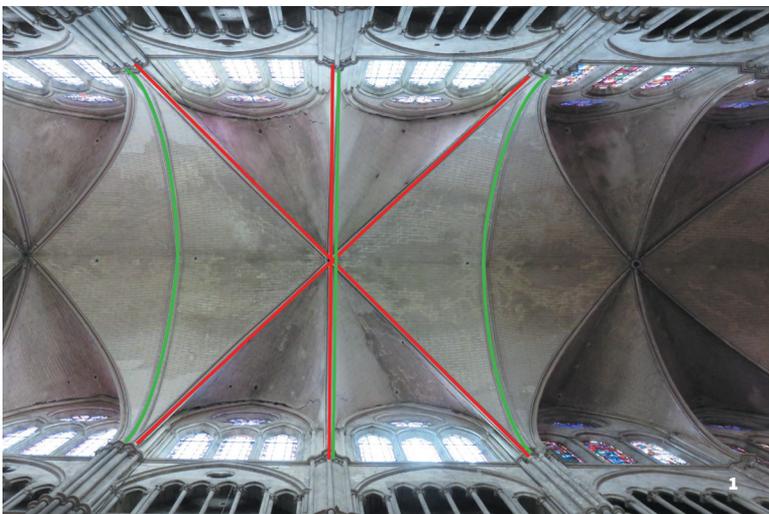
The sculptures show that the poor as well as the rich gave money to finance the cathedral initiated by Guillaume de Donjon. It shows the miracles he performed ( healing, the flight of a demon). As a consequence of these miracles, Guillaume was made a saint soon after his death.

They show bas relief sculpted scenes. On the North side, the cycle of the life of the Virgin Mary (completed in 1515), then the cycle of Genesis, (dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century).

That tale is very specific to Bourges because it refers to Hebraic sources. For instance, a scene shows a man standing on a snake surrounded by dragons among vineyards. It is Samael, the fallen angel, one of the main character in the Jewish demonology: competitor of the God of Creation, he planted vines in order to tempt Adam with the fruits. Maybe that cycle was a concept of a converted Jew and was feeding a theological debate.

**THE « GRAND HOUSTEAU »**

The large rose window in the middle of the facade was completed at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The glass work is mainly from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.



**1. Main nave vaulting:**  
in red, the webs  
in green, the limits of  
each bay

© Service patrimoine

**2. The different parts  
of the elevation**

© Cassandra Cousy

## 5. INSIDE THE CHURCH

When entering the cathedral, you have the feeling it had been conceived by a architect of genius : he made visible the search for a large unified space, regularly lit and opened on multiple perspectives.

### DIMENSIONS

The main nave is 15m wide, each collateral 5,65m wide. They are 118m long. The floor surface is around 6000 square meters. The main nave is 37m high.

### VAULTING

The main nave is covered with sex-partite vaults (six webs each). As each of them covers two bays, the different arcs put different pressure on the pillars: strong pillars (diameter of 1,68m) alternate with «feeble» pillars (diameter of 1,42m).

To pretend the pillars are all the same, they are flanked with eight columns each.

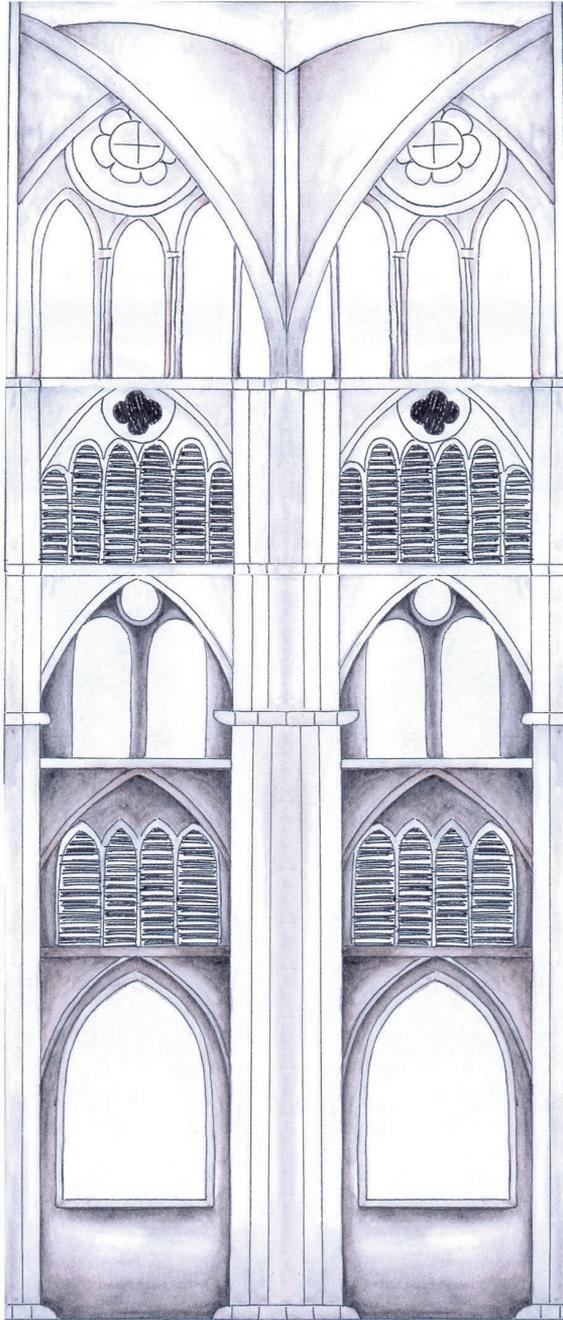
### ELEVATION

A classical elevation is composed with great arcades, clerestory and clerestory windows. Here in Bourges, the great arcades are higher than anywhere else (21,30m at the keystone) : this enables to visually discover a five level elevation : low window, triforium, high window of the middle collateral, triforium and high clerestory window of the main nave.

In fact, five alternatively blind and window levels dispatch the light in the whole cathedral.

### AN ARCHITECT'S TRICK

To avoid the impression of narrowing due to perspective, the choir piers are slightly more spaced than the nave piers (14,90m versus 14,25m). The base of the «feeble» piers is larger than the base of the strong piers.



Clerestory windows

Triforium

High windows

Large arcades

Triforium

Low windows





1

## JUBE OR ROOD-SCREEN

At first, the choir was separated from the nave by a stone enclosure which was used as a gallery to read out Epistles and Gospels. The jube was destroyed in 1758. Fragments were found during the 19<sup>th</sup> century ; they have been on display since 1994 in the low church. The jube opened by a central door. It had painted bas relief sculptures about Passion of Christ. These sculptures are considered as a major Gothic work of art.

## THE ASTROLOGICAL CLOCK

It was built in 1424 by Jean Fusoris, a canon in Paris and Rheims, and by André Cassart, iron smith in Bourges. The clock reads hours on the upper face ; solar and lunar calendars as well as zodiacal signs can be read on the bottom face. It strikes hours with the first notes of the «Salve Regina» and strikes each fifteen minutes. The wooden cabinet was painted by Jean d'Orléans.

The cabinet and the original mechanism have been restored between 1992 and 1994. The clock still works, thanks to the making of an exact copy.

## THE ORGAN

It was built from 1663 to 1667 by Guy Joly and Pierre Cauchois, organ makers. In 1985, it was totally refurbished in its original shape by the Kern company.

## THE KNEELING STATUES OF JEAN DE BERRY AND JEANNE DE BOULOGNE

The statues are kneeling in front of the axial chapel, in the ambulatory. They were initially located in the Sainte-Chapelle (Holy Chapel) built by the Duke Jean de Berry at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and destroyed in 1757. The realistic way the clothing is sculpted is remarkable.



**1. Reproduction of the jube from remains**

© Service patrimoine

**2. Stained glass window of Joseph : carpenters and wheelwrights - Detail**

© Service patrimoine



## 6. IN THE AMBULATORY BEHIND THE CHOIR

### THE 13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

The saint Etienne cathedral has a rare collection of stained glass windows, dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In the choir and the ambulatory, the windows were completed between 1210 and 1220.

In the upper parts, the Virgin Mary stands in the middle, surrounded, on the North side, by prophets and by apostles on the South side. Bishops of the diocese are represented at mid-level windows.

The ambulatory stained glass windows show scenes from Christian theology where Old and New Testament echo each other. It shows lives of saints in the radiating chapels.

The windows are a coherent body, where can be seen the mission of evangelisation of the metropolitan Church of Bourges.

The 13<sup>th</sup> century windows are formed with medallions of different shapes (circles, stars, multi lobed shapes...). They read mainly from bottom to top, but the composition can be organised in different ways.

Several tales cross one another, as in the Good Samaritan parable. The main story is told on the middle and comments have been added on right and left sides: Creation and Sin, Alliance and Idolatry, Scourging and Death of Christ.

The feelings are revealed by body language and composition, but not by facial expressions. At the bottom part of most windows, the trade associations which financed the work have had their activities represented, as a «signature».

The colours range is restricted : blues, reds, greens dominate. With some unusual white pieces of glass, the composition is enlighten and colours taken apart from each other.



2. God creates the Sun and the Moon

4. God creates Eve

5. God settles Adam and Eve in Heaven

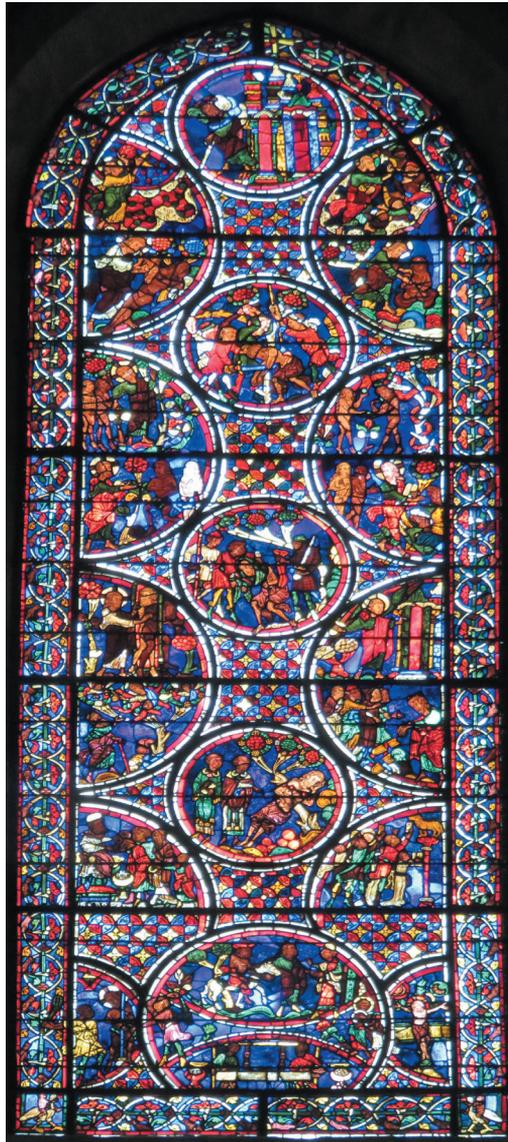
8. God looks for Adam and Eve who are hiding

9. God expels Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden

11. God appears to Moses in the Burning Bush

12. The Hebrews bring jewels to Aaron

15. The Scourging



1. God creates angels

3. God creates Adam

7. The Temptation and the Sin

6. God tells Adam and Eve to take care of the animals

10. An angel closes the door of Heaven

14. Moses breaks the Tablets of Law

13. The Hebrews adore the Golden Calf

16. The Crucifixion

1. A man leaves Jerusalem
2. The man is hit
3. The man is robbed
4. Two clerics passed the wounded man.  
They do not help him
5. The man is helped by a Samaritan
6. The weavers  
(donators of the window)



**1. The window of the Good Samaritan**

© Service patrimoine

**2. The kneeling statues of the Laubespine family monument**

© Service patrimoine

**3. The Annunciation (détail)**

© Service patrimoine



## 7. IN FRONT OF THE CHAPEL OF JACQUES CŒUR

### THE 15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY WINDOWS

During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the art of stained glass evolved : portraits under rich architecture were painted on the mullions. Pieces of glass became wider and the amount of necessary lead decreased. White glass was used as well as «jaune d'argent», a paint made from ochre and argentite salts ; that colour diffuses into the glass and gives nuances from the palest yellow to orange.

These windows stand in the lateral chapels built by rich notable people, mainly clerics. The first chapels were built by close relatives of Jean de Berry (Alligret and Trousseau chapels).

But the famous Annunciation window was ordered by Jacques Cœur. It was completed in 1451.

The four mullions show an Annunciation with the Virgin Mary and the archangel Gabriel, surrounded by saint James, patron saint of Jacques Cœur, and saint Catherine. That window shows a great pictorial quality with an obvious flemish influence. It demonstrates a rare masterly technique: for instance, the «chef d'oeuvre» mounting, where

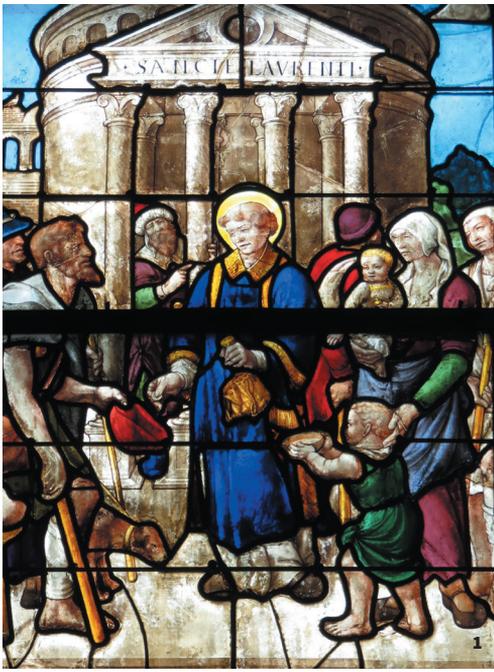
small pieces of coloured glass are inserted in a hole cut out a large white piece of glass. Look at the «precious» stones of the haloes.

### THE FUNERARY MONUMENT OF THE LAUBESPINE FAMILY

The three kneeling statues and the bas relief elements of sculpture affixed on the wall were part of the funerary monument of the Laubespine family (local notables). It was designed between 1656 and 1658 by François Mansard and completed by Philippe de Buyster, Louis 14<sup>th</sup>'s sculptor.

### LA CHAPELLE DES BREUIL

It was founded in 1465 by the Breuil brothers. It holds its stained glass windows (The adoring Wise Men) and also its mural paintings, rediscovered and restored in the early 1990. It shows a Crucifixion, a «Noli me tangere» (apparition of Christ to Mary Magdalene) and a trompe l'oeil painting pretending to be a tapestry with the two brothers' names initials.



## 8. BACK TO THE MAIN NAVE NEAR THE NORTH TOWER SHOP

### 16<sup>TH</sup> AND 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the art of stained glass evolved a lot, then it disappeared a century later.

The windows were then related to canvas paintings : large compositions spread out the whole window, or «stories» framed by fake Renaissance architecture.

The characters were realistic and the landscape was important, with new perspective innovations.

The colours range spread with new techniques like sanguine, «Jean Cousin» red and enamel. Thanks to engraving, the sketches were travelling around, subjects and compositions were widely shared.

The window of the chapel of the Fonts, called the Montigny chapel, shows the Assumption (1619) from an engraving of an Italian canvas.

Opposite, the martyrdoms of saint Stephen (saint Etienne) and saint Laurent are represented in a window painted by Jean Lécuyer around 1535 for the Coppin chapel. To notice, the Antiquity style architecture, typical of the Renaissance, specially the reference to the Rome Pantheon in the left bottom scene.

**1. Stained glass window  
of the Coppin chapel  
(détail)**

© Service patrimoine

**2. Stained glass window  
of the Bodily Ascent of  
the Virgin Mary**

© Service patrimoine

**3. The tithe barn**

© Service patrimoine



## 9. SORTIE PAR LE PORTAIL NORD

### THE CATHEDRAL AREA

The cathedral of Bourges is located at the top of the historical centre. The area was secluded from the rest of the town. What is left from that area are the evocative names of its streets : rue du Guichet (Wicket street), rue Porte-Jaune (Yellow Door street), rue Porte Saint-Jean....

The postern at the entrance of the «rue du Doyen» (Dean Street) and two hinges rue Porte-Jaune are still visible.

### THE TITHE BARN (GRANGE DES DÎMES)

It was built during the 13<sup>th</sup> century in the cathedral precinct . It was used by the canons of the chapter to store wine and cereals.

# « DO YOU KNOW THAT YOUR CATHEDRAL IS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THINGS IN THE WORLD ? »

George Sand, Letter to Émile Régnault, 1831

## Opening times of the Saint Etienne cathedral

From 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September :  
8.30 - 7.15

From 1<sup>st</sup> October to 31<sup>st</sup> March :  
9.00 - 5.45



Several formulas of visits adapted to your wishes are available all year around.

To prepare your groups visits:

For adults groups : 0033 248 480 019  
or reservation@ad2t.fr

For school groups : 0033 248 578 146  
or patrimoine@villedebourges.fr

Special needs visits can be organise on request :



A free and easy to read booklet in French is available at the Tourist Office.

To visit the low church and the North tower :

Every day, except Sunday morning, tickets at the shop in the cathedral or at the Palais Jacques Cœur (reduction for the visit of the two sites). Partner of the Pass Privilege Jacques Coeur.

## Bourges belongs to the national net of «Villes et Pays d'Art et d'Histoire»

The French Ministry of Culture gives that distinctive label to the local bodies who care about their patrimoine. That label guarantees the competence of both the guides and the people in charge of the architecture and of the patrimoine. It guarantees the value of the activities related to the patrimoine.

From archeological vestiges to contemporary architecture, the « Villes et Pays d'art et d'histoire » are in charge of the diversity of the patrimoine. Today, a net of 188 «Villes et Pays d'Art et d'Histoire» gives you the opportunity to discover its know-how all over France.

## In the area

Blois, Chinon, La Charité-sur-Loire, Loches, Moulins, Nevers, Orléans, Tours, Vendôme, Le Pays Loire Touraine, Le Pays Loire Val d'Aubois et le Pays de la Vallée du Cher et du Romorantinais have all got the label «Villes et Pays d'Art et d'Histoire».

**Le Service du Patrimoine** coordinates the initiatives of Bourges, Ville d'Art et d'Histoire, in collaboration with the DRAC Centre-Val de Loire (national body depending on the Culture Ministry).

## For more informations

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