

*The Notre-Dame
Translation Project*

V. History

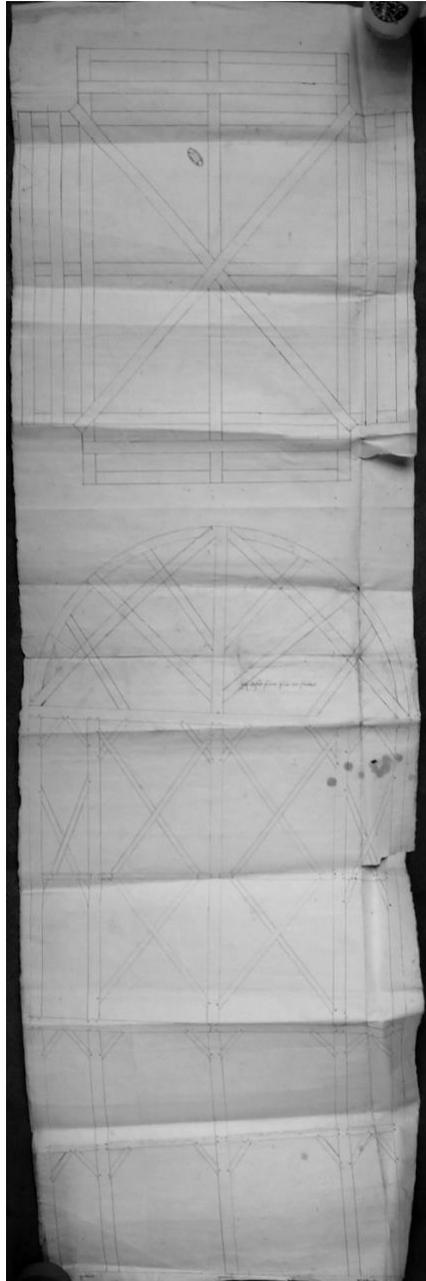
Edited by Lindsay S. Cook and Kathleen Hart

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A Project to Transform the Crossing Vault of Notre-Dame in the Early 16th Century

Written by Etienne Hamon ([source](#))

Translated by Charlotte Gong | Edited by Kathleen Hart



The vaults constructed in the 12th and 13th centuries, structurally sound and protected from the elements, were not modified significantly before the 19th century. However, in the 16th century, the masters of the works of the cathedral brought to the attention of the cathedral chapter the alarming state of the crossing vault. They recommended its reconstruction as a lierne vault, which they deemed better suited to its large span. But that meant building scaffolding at a great height, as evidenced by a rare project, perhaps drawn by Jean Guitart, cathedral carpenter. Shocked by the expenses that would have come along with such an intervention, commissioned a second opinion and, against the advice of the master of masonry works, the architect Jean Moireau, the chapter opted for an economical repair. In 1526 and again in 1567, the state of the vault was thus still equally troubling. From rejoining to replastering, the crossing vault remained in place until Viollet-le-Duc dismantled it and then reconstructed it on a quadripartite plan.

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The Contribution of Medieval Images of Notre-Dame to its Restoration

Written by Raphaële Skupien ([source](#))
Translated by Jake Gaines | Edited by Lindsay S. Cook



Notre-Dame of Paris is one of the capital city's emblematic monuments that has been represented the most frequently since the Middle Ages. All of its parts were admired. Attesting to this fact is the wide variety of viewpoints from which the monument is depicted in images. The cathedral's superstructure, damaged in the fire of April 15, 2019, is highlighted in city views, which enables us to appreciate the slate roof topped with a tall spire. Numerous openings appear to

have ensured the ventilation of the attic, while two figural finials capped the spire and the hipped roof of the chevet.

The western frontispiece attracted the attention of artists. Those who presented the most faithful views clearly distinguished the spire of Notre-Dame, visible between the two asymmetrical towers, from that of the Sainte-Chapelle.

By privileging the representation of the chevet over that of the western frontispiece, two painters demonstrated a more complete and in-depth understanding of the monument than most of their counterparts. Their images provide very precise information about the junction between the roof and the masonry. Remarkably, one of them even depicted a construction scene . . . particularly instructive for architects since we see in it 15th-century construction techniques applied to the repair of the roof of the chevet of Notre-Dame!

The degree detail of these drawings enables their transposition into a 3D digital image (via SketchUp software, for example), from which we can produce a 3D-printed model for the purpose of potential reconstruction. This innovative restoration method was used for the îlot de Sainte-Croix-en-la-Cité, the model of which will be displayed next fall at the Archives nationales. If medieval images must be analyzed with caution, in light of the context in which they were produced and archaeological and technical data, they provide invaluable information about the form and even the formal development of the cathedral of Paris in the 15th century.

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Medieval Builders Attest to the Artistic and Technical Perfection of Notre-Dame

Written by Etienne Hamon ([source](#))
Translated by Teddy David | Edited by Kathleen Hart



For more than a century, art historians have demonstrated, based on careful study of the works themselves, the exceptional place of the Gothic cathedral of Paris as a model for monumental buildings across Europe: the elevation has served as a model since the completion of the choir; the lead roof, since the installation of the final roofing; the sculptural program, each step of the way as the west portals were put into place; the openwork façade, from the time the new walls of the transept were put up; the chevet, both before and after the addition of the Rayonnant chapels, etc.

Frequently overlooked texts relating to elements that are no longer extant or never saw the light of day remind us that the reference point Notre-Dame offered, whether absolute or relative, still had a hold on the imagination of most of the players in the creation of what was still fresh in the mind of most of the players in the creation of the major French and European artistic centers, long after the Rayonnant period, when the last significant changes had been made to the edifice, and often well after the conception of the imitated elements. The list of written accounts that follows, which should not allow us to forget all that Notre-Dame itself owes to its counterparts, is not exhaustive. Nevertheless, this sampling provides a good overview of the diversity of models the cathedral of Paris still offered at the end of the Middle Ages.

Likely due to the late date of its completion, among the achievements to arouse the most interest was the choir screen, carved in the early 14th century. For example, around 1400, it was imitated by its counterpart at Reims Cathedral. The new, large-scale liturgical installations were equally admired, including the brass lectern in the choir, which, also around 1400, served as a model for that of Rouen Cathedral. At the same cathedral in Normandy, the builders also copied one of Notre-Dame's bells, in 1451, (the one named "Jacqueline," which had been recast in 1430) and the south tower's belfry, in 1501. At the beginning of the 16th century, the large wall hangings of the Notre-Dame choir were regularly cited as a desirable model by the patrons of the woven ensembles, which were popular at the time, just as the tombstones were imitated for export throughout the Paris Basin and its organs were admired as far as Picardy.

But the 12th- and 13th-century architecture of Notre-Dame was still in the spotlight during the Flamboyant period. Even the parapet over the side aisles was still likely, due to its technical characteristics, to provide models for a variety of programs. During the 1480s, the levelling of the masonry at the Château de Saint-Fargeau (Yonne) was accomplished using a "cement" whose recipe was inspired by the one employed at Notre-Dame. But, above all, it was

the western frontispiece that continued to inspire builders. In 1456, and again in 1489, Notre-Dame welcomed delegations from the Troyes cathedral chapter, who were in search of the best models and the best architects to apply them in the construction of a new façade. Finally, between 1524 and 1528, the cathedral chapter of Saint-Etienne of Bourges—a late-12th-century cathedral often invoked for its debt to Notre-Dame—debated terminating the north tower, being rebuilt at the time, with a terrace, and then to furnish it with a wooden framework covered with lead, in both cases “*ad instar turrium ecclesie Parisiensis*” (“in the manner of the towers of the cathedral of Paris”). From 1505, Notre-Dame’s nave was presented as a model of regularity by Jean Pèlerin, author of *De artificiali perspectiva*, the first illustrated treatise on perspective printed in France.

Knowledge of Notre-Dame, which spread through the circulation of people and architectural drawings, was sometimes more critical. In the 1420s, the master masons of Milan Cathedral – who had invited artists from Paris and elsewhere to enlighten them on the fundamental structural options for their church—opted, in the end, for a less elongated plan, believing that the prominence of the necessary buttresses would disagreeably darken the church, as was the case, in their estimation, at Notre-Dame.