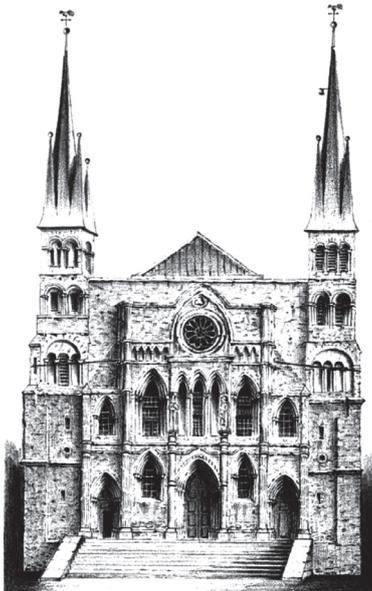


# 5 THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE BASILICA



Picture 22 – The western façade before the early 19th century restoration  
– collection TD

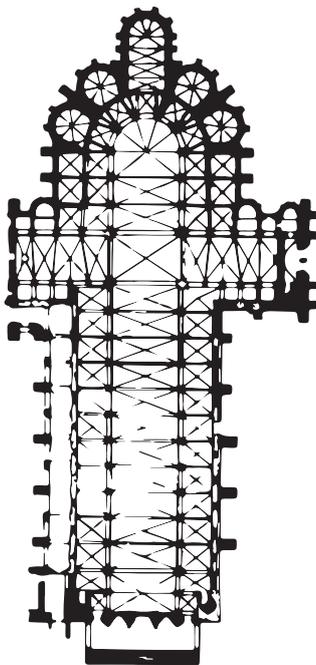
## The Basilica, a work that has travelled the ages

Since its origin, and over the centuries, the basilica has been the fruit of the constant efforts of its builders. Before his death, Remi had expressed his wish to be buried in the Saint-Timothy basilica, next to the first martyrs of Rheims. But, given their veneration and the emotion caused by the decease of their bishop, the faithful chose to consecrate a building free of any other sacred presence to their revered bishop. They chose the Saint-Christopher chapel, a small oratory built in the 320s.

Soon, towards 535, the monument was enlarged and equipped with a crypt to store the relics. In 568, Gregory of Tours mentioned this monument and said it was a holy site of pilgrimage. Its architecture was simple: an apse with a vaulted semi-dome, and a wood framework typical of the sixth century. It is only in the tenth century that protection work was started, with the building of a bulwark around the borough that had grown around the basilica. But before the year 1,000, the edifice was going to ruin. Soon after he was elected in 1007, Abbot Airard undertook large-scale works; his plan endowed the basilica with five naves – a central one and two side aisles on each side. But this project was not carried out because it was too ambitious for the time.

## The consecration in 1049

Abbot Airard's successor, Abbot Thierry, completely redesigned the already accomplished works. The side aisles were torn down and a harmoniously proportioned building came out, in pure Romanesque style. As a crowning achievement for the extraordinary campaign, Pope Leo IX was present at the consecration of the Saint-Remi basilica. He had accepted the invitation and announced that he would at the same time hold a council dedicated to the reform of disciplinary rules in the Church. On this occasion, the Pope condemned the wedding of William the Conqueror (called "the bastard") with his cousin Mathilda of Flanders. Hoping to be forgiven, "the bastard" had two abbeys built in Caen: the Men's Abbey and the Women's Abbey. The Saint-Remi basilica was the largest in the Christian world, north of the River Loire; it was almost as large as Saint-Peter in Rome, which had been built under Constantine. Then, the Gothic age came, in the middle of the twelfth century. Another huge building was a major project, with the reconstruction of the facade and the apse (that was before the next construction campaign of today's cathedral that started in 1211). After 1163, Abbot Peter of Celle started work to update the basilica in accordance with the new Gothic art that became dominant. Peter of Celle was from a noble family of the Champagne district. He was the Abbot of Montier-la-Celle in 1145 (that is where his name comes from), and he became Abbot of Saint-Remi in 1162. At the end of his career, he became Abbot of Chartres (1180-1183). Under this dynamic abbot, between 1165 and 1175, the Roman porch was refurbished and the nave was enlarged with two bays.



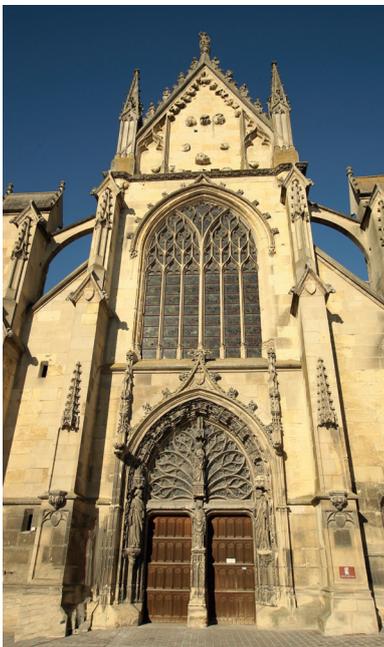
Picture 23 – Plan of the basilica. The north side is engaged with the adjoining abbey.



Picture 24 – Cross vaulting from the end of the 12th century – photo TD



Picture 25 – Spectacular view of the Romanesque nave and aisles – photo TD



Picture 26 – 16th century portal of the facade of the south transept – photo TD

Between 1185 and 1200, the vault of the nave was heightened, and rebuilt with a cross vault supported by new columns.

Then, after 1175 and until 1185, the apse was reconstructed with radiating chapels. These important works cost 1,500 pounds (in the same period, Suger gave 200 pounds a year to Saint-Denis). As a consequence, around 1190, under Abbots Simon and Peter II, the Basilica had a Romano-Gothic style, even if the Romanesque was still predominant. The light was diffused through the oculi that had been added by the threshold of the vault. This architecture was considered a significant milestone in the development of the Gothic style, with the constant use of pointed-arches and arch-buttresses.

### End of the Middle-Ages and Renaissance

At the end of the fourteenth century, a bell tower was built at the cross-over point of the transept but it did not survive the Revolution. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the architecture was influenced by the Renaissance and Baroque styles. The commendatory abbot Robert of Lenoncourt ordered a new portal for the façade of the south transept, making the porch longer. The whole was treated with flamboyant gothic windows, and a magnificent sculpted group of statues, cornices, grotesque masks and pilasters. Built between 1648 and 1714, a choir enclosure offered the sanctuary a sumptuous delimitation. The tomb of Saint Remi, which was modified throughout history, stood in the middle of the choir. Today, it has a magnificent Renaissance style, with a group of statues from the sixteenth century.

### Eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

On February the 13th 1790, the Constituent Assembly abolished monastic vows and forbade religious congregations. The ecclesiastics were expelled from the Abbey in 1793. At the same time, the mausoleum in the basilica was vandalized; the body of the saint was desecrated; and the Holy Phial was publicly broken on the Place Royale by Proconsul Philippe Ruhl.

The Basilica and the formerly Royal Abbey were despised and degraded like all the sites that were linked to the Ancient Regime. At the time of the coronation of Charles X, in 1825, people were worried about the poor condition of the Basilica and contemplated starting repair works. Architects were summoned, and the most pressing security problems were dealt with. Then, in 1828, the real campaign of reconstruction started. The west façade was modified and consolidated. In 1837, a part of the vaults collapsed. Under the direction of Narcisse Brunette, the vaults were repaired with wood and plaster that were less heavy. In 1841, the religious building was definitively saved when it was inscribed in the list of historical monuments. The north tower and the gable of the facade were totally rebuilt in 1844.