

NOTRE DAME DU PORT



UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE - THE ROUTES OF SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA IN FRANCE

Masterpiece of Romanesque art



Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture



Chemins de Saint-Jacques-
de-Compostelle en France
inscrits sur la Liste du
patrimoine mondial en 1998



Basilique
Notre-Dame-du-Port
—
Clermont-Ferrand

+ clermont
auvergne
métropole





NOTRE-DAME-DU-PORT BASILICA

MASTERPIECE OF ROMANESQUE ART

SITUATED AT THE HEART OF THE PORT DISTRICT IN THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF CLERMONT-FERRAND, NOTRE-DAME-DU-PORT BASILICA IS ONE OF THE CITY'S MOST VISITED HERITAGE SITES.

THE BASILICA WAS ADDED TO THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LIST IN 1998, AS PART OF THE ROUTES OF SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA IN FRANCE, AND FIGURES ON THE PRESTIGIOUS LIST OF UNESCO PROPERTIES.



Exceptional architecture

Built on a Latin cross plan, the basilica is 45 metres long and measures 24.7 metres at its widest point. The nave stands 18 metres high.

The basilica owes its iconic light blonde colour to the use of arkose, which is superbly enhanced by the lava stone decorations in the apse.

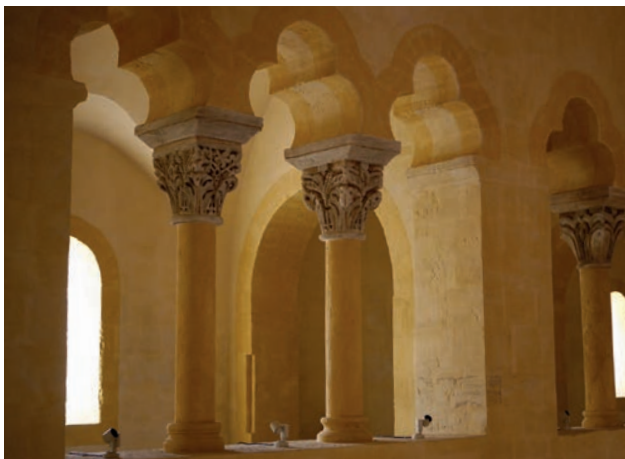
The basilica illustrates the knowledge and skill of the builders of the 12th century: the building's proportions, elevations and decoration come close to perfection.

In the Romanesque period, artisans had not yet begun to form guilds. They were itinerant workers, who travelled from site to site to offer their services. They did not remain within a particular diocese, but travelled far and wide to work on Romanesque buildings. When the basilica was being built, craftsmen from different trades and cultures worked side by side and shared their knowledge.

That's why other churches in the old diocese of Clermont share significant similarities with Notre-Dame-du-Port: Orcival, Saint-Nectaire, Issoire and Saint-Saturnin.

The chevet (east end), the most sacred part of the building, is particularly elaborate. The pyramidal elevation, from the ground to the top of the octagonal tower, is a skilful blend of stepped and layered volumes: radiating chapels, apse, transept, massif barlong (section above the crossing which supports the tower) and the bell tower itself. The detail of the decoration on the chevet demonstrates how, over a long period, the builders learned much about Byzantine and Mozarabic art from Mediterranean countries such as Spain and Italy.

This ornamentation also owes much to other mediaeval trades such as illumination, silversmithing and woodworking. The gem-inlaid rose windows, series of billets or scrolled modillions.

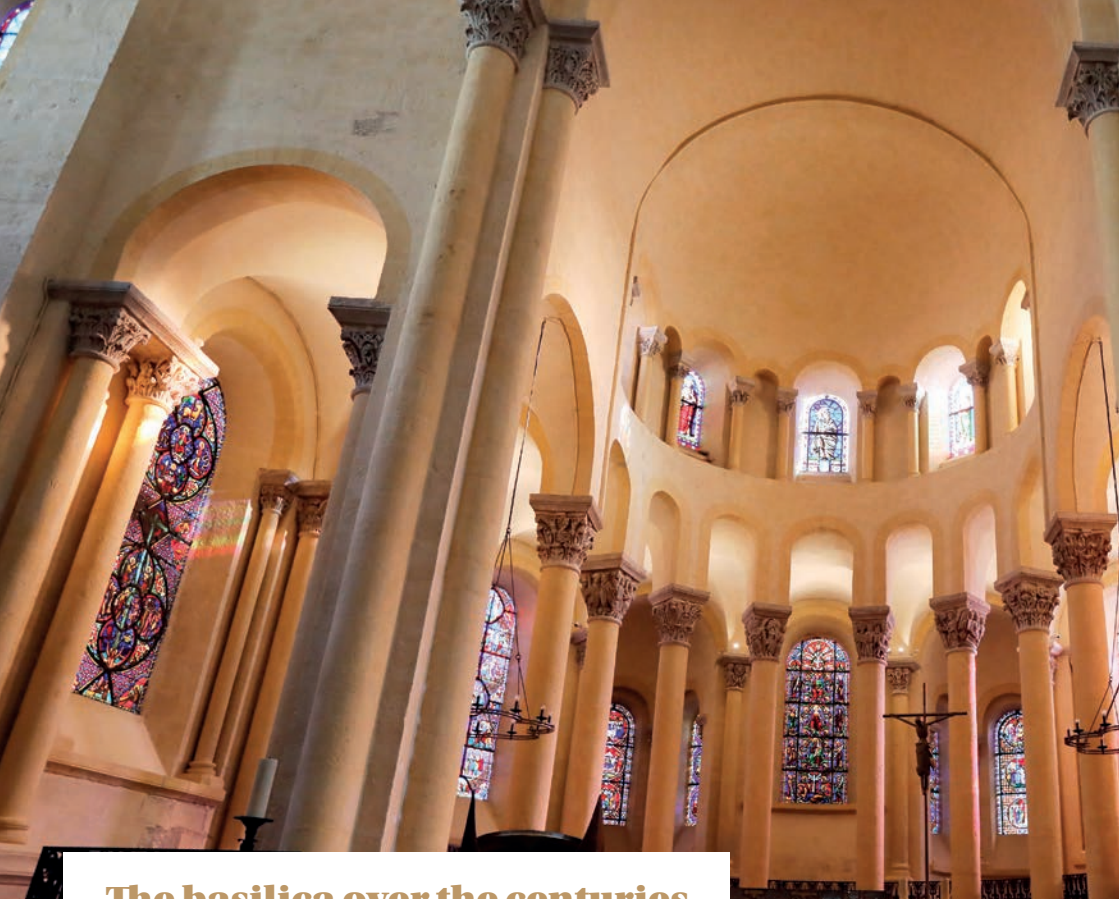


DID YOU KNOW?

THE BASILICA'S ORIGINS

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Legend has it that Notre-Dame-du-Port was built in the 6th century by Saint Avitus, the Bishop of Clermont. Following its destruction by the Normans in the 9th century, it was rebuilt by Avitus' successor, Saint Sigon, and then again by Étienne II in the 10th century. Experts believe that the Romanesque church was built in the 12th century.



The basilica over the centuries

From the start, the church was entrusted to a community of clerics (canons) who made up a collegiate chapter. That is why it has a cloister and chapter buildings on its northern side.

In the 15th century, work had to be done on the roof. In 1490, an earthquake caused extensive damage. A slate-covered bell turret replaced the crossing tower which had collapsed.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the basilica flourished thanks to an annual procession dedicated to the reputedly miraculous Black Virgin. First held in 1614, the parade took in the

whole town and the surrounding area. Work was undertaken to provide easier access to the crypt; the two transept chapels were removed to keep the ever-growing stream of pilgrims flowing freely.

Thanks to donations from the faithful over the centuries, the church acquired a rich collection of works by the old masters. This historical legacy can still be seen in the basilica: the Annunciation by Philippe de Champaigne (1643), paintings by Jean Restout (18th century), sculptures including a Virgin cradling the baby Jesus (1380-1420).

The Revolution halted the church's development, and plans

were even made to demolish it to make way for a hide and skin market. In 1800, a citizens' petition saved the church, which had now lost its bell towers, roof and much of its furniture.

During the 19th century several architects carried out restoration work on the building. In 1823, Agnan Ratoin began to build the new west bell tower, using Volvic stone - a departure from the rest of the building.

Following its inclusion in the first list of French historic monuments in 1840, Notre-Dame-du-Port was restored in 1843 by the architect Aymond Gilbert Mallay, who worked with the



utmost respect for the building's history. He rebuilt the crossing tower from old drawings and restored access to the crypt from the nave, but made the mistake of replacing the Roman tiles with Volvic stone slabs.

In 1881, the church entered a new golden age following its elevation to the rank of a minor basilica. The interior was restored again in the 20th century by Gabriel Ruprich-Robert, who removed the limewash and replaced the lime joints with cement ones.

Further renovation work to the exterior between 2003 and 2006, and to the interior between 2006 and 2008, restored the building to its former glory. Roman tiles were reinstated on the roof, the stone was washed or replaced, the interior was re-limewashed and the chapels were restored.

The work on the crypt and sacristy in 2021 marks the completion of the restoration project.



Engraving, 1817, Musée d'art Roger-Quilliot, Clermont Auvergne Métropole

DID YOU KNOW ?

INSCRIPTION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST
IN 1998

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Boasting nine centuries of history, the basilica is an internationally famous monument. Its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage list, on 2 December 1998, as part of The Routes of Santiago de Compostela in France, was its crowning moment.



Outstanding UNIVERSAL HERITAGE

ALONG WITH 77 OTHER COMPONENTS (SECTIONS OF ROUTES, PILGRIMS' HOSTELS, BORDER CROSSINGS AND VENERATION SITES), NOTRE-DAME-DU-PORT BASILICA BELONGS TO THE "ROUTES OF SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA" SERIAL CULTURAL PROPERTY, WHICH IS INSCRIBED ON THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LIST.

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, works to identify, protect, preserve, showcase and pass on heritage for future generations. Now totalling a thousand around the world (including 45 in France), the properties on the World Heritage list were included on account of their outstanding universal value.

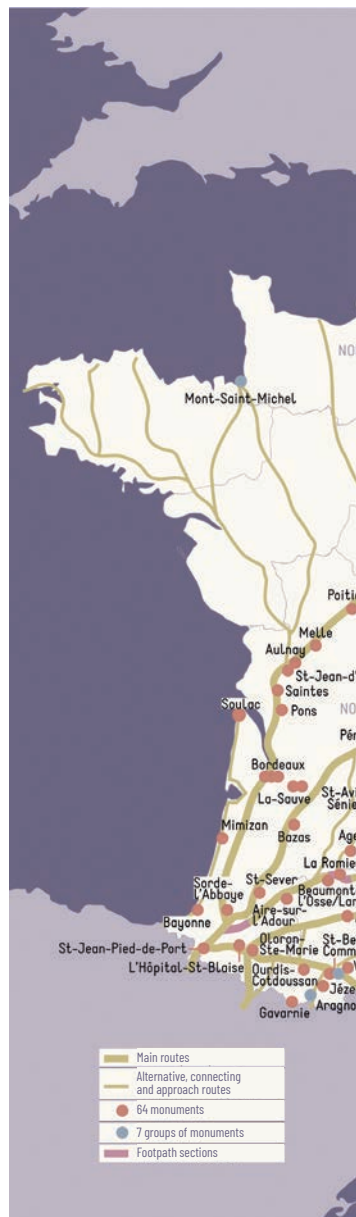
These properties exemplify humanity's creative genius, possess particularly remarkable architectural features, or are of considerable historical importance.

Throughout the Middle Ages, Santiago de Compostela was a major destination for countless pilgrims from all parts of Europe. Hospitals, bridges, imposing sanctuaries or more modest churches attest to the veneration of Saint James, the Virgin Mary and the saints, which finds its expression mainly in the pilgrimage.

The Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage route also played a vital role in trade and in religious and cultural developments during the Late Middle Ages, as exemplified by the monuments listed. It provides a remarkable illustration of the power and influence of Christian faith in all social classes and in all European countries during the Middle Ages.

For further information, visit:

www.cheminscompostelle-patrimoine mondial.fr





Veneration of the statue of the Virgin and the pilgrimage

The longevity of the Notre-Dame-du-Port pilgrimage explains the building's inscription as part of the Routes of Santiago de Compostela serial property in France.

According to legend, a statue of the Virgin was found in a spring on which the first church was built. So the crypt is built around the well and the "miraculous" spring.

The veneration of saints developed during the Middle Ages. Places that possessed relics, tombs or miraculous statues became places of pilgrimage, for example Sainte-Foy in Conques, Santiago de Compostela... and, for the people of Clermont, Notre-Dame-du-Port.

For the faithful who came to pray to her, the Black Virgin in the crypt was more than merely a wooden statue, she offered the hope of divine intervention.

The veneration of the statue in the crypt, known as Notre-Dame-Souterraine (Our Lady Underground), grew tremendously from 1614 onwards. The town had endured a long, harsh winter, the people expected a poor harvest, and food shortages loomed. So, on 15 May 1614, the Notre-Dame-du-Port Virgin was brought out of the crypt and processed around the town. This marked the beginning of the pilgrimage. In 1697, 15 May was designated a public holiday for the whole town. The procession was, therefore, an important event for the people of Clermont. The whole town was involved because the route passed through all its residential areas.



FURTHER INFORMATION

ABOUT THE BASILICA

The basilica's blonde arkose

The basilica is built mainly from arkose, a blonde sandstone. The capitals and decorative elements are made mainly from locally quarried limestone from the banks of the River Allier. The volcanic rock, from which the decoration on the chevet and the bay voussoirs is made, is scoria from the nearby summits of the Côtes, the Puy du Chanturgue and the Puy de Var.





Capital in the chancel, bearing the inscription “Robertus me fecit” (“Robert made me”).

The capitals

Notre-Dame-du-Port’s capitals really are “books carved in stone”. The basilica boasts 320 of them, 176 of which are to be found in the interior. The capitals fall into broad categories: those with plant motifs (the most common), and those decorated with zoomorphic figures which depict an isolated scene.

The most famous are the four historiated capitals in the chancel. Their four faces depict episodes from Genesis, from the life of the Virgin Mary, and from Prudentius’ poem *Psychomachia* (War within the soul) about the conflict between Vices and Virtues.

The intricate craftsmanship of the stone carvers can also be admired on the south door, on the triangular lintel and the tympanum.

The stained glass windows

The oldest stained glass in the basilica is in the clerestory windows in the chancel. It was made in 1834 by the Sèvres factory.

The existing stained glass windows were installed in the 19th century by two internationally renowned master glaziers, Étienne Thevenot (1797-1862) and Félix Gaudin (1851-1930). Thevenot endowed Notre-Dame-du-Port with the stained glass windows in the chancel, which tell the story of the life of Jesus. Felix Gaudin, for his part, chose to decorate the side aisle windows with scenes from the basilica’s history. Gaudin also created the stained glass window in the axial bay, which depicts the coronation of the statue of the Virgin of Notre-Dame-du-Port in 1875.





The crypt, a place of special significance for the faithful

The crypt is the most important, not to say sacred, place in the church. The well at its centre, and the statue of the Virgin placed close by, dictated every aspect of the building's architecture. Recent archaeological digs have provided evidence of many projects to display La Souterraine since the 17th century.

Brought to an end by the Revolution, the tradition of votive offerings resumed in the early 19th century. The most visible signs today are the ex-votos. We know there were ex-votos here as early as the end of the 18th century, but none of them remain. Those that have been preserved and partly re-installed date from between 1856 and 1998. These marble plaques, each bearing a short inscription, covered all the walls, including the staircases.

The ex-votos illustrate the important part that Notre-Dame-du-Port played in the lives of the townsfolk, for whom it was associated with all events, both tragic and happy - even passing an exam!



Why the basilica is called Notre-Dame-du-Port?

The name “port” comes from the Latin “*portus*”: “place for storing goods, warehouse”. It meant a “*public place where merchants pay their taxes to the State and ply their trade*”.

At the end of the 13th century, and during the 15th century, the district experienced periods of internal urban growth and reached its cur-

rent boundaries between the Place d’Espagne to the north, the Place du Terrail to the south, Place Delille to the east and the Place Gondard to the west. The district was heavily damaged by earthquakes in 1478 and 1490 and the houses had to be rebuilt.

In 1630, Clermont and Montferrand were merged by

the Edict of Troyes. Nobles then moved into the Rue Pascal and Rue du Port and converted old buildings into private mansions. The façades on the Rue du Port and Rue Pascal reflect the evolution of building in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.



The project to upgrade the area around the basilica, a joint venture between the City of Clermont-Ferrand and Clermont Auvergne Métropole, will provide a fitting showcase for this jewel of Romanesque art. More generally, this urban regeneration project will bring benefits for the whole of the historic Port district. The interpretation centre, along with the opening up of views and perspectives of the basilica, will attract visitors and provide a starting point for (re)discovering Notre-Dame-du-Port.

© Linazasoro & Sanchez,
architects



NOTRE DAME DU PORT

GUIDED TOURS

A wide range of guided tours are available all year round! Suitable for individual visitors, groups, families, or school parties, our amazing tours unlock all the secrets of Notre-Dame-du-Port basilica. Tours are led by tour guides and cultural mediators.

BASILICA OPENING HOURS

7 days a week, 9 am - 7 pm

MEETING ON

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