

4-23-2017

Discoveries: Rebuilding or Restoring the North Tower of St. Denis

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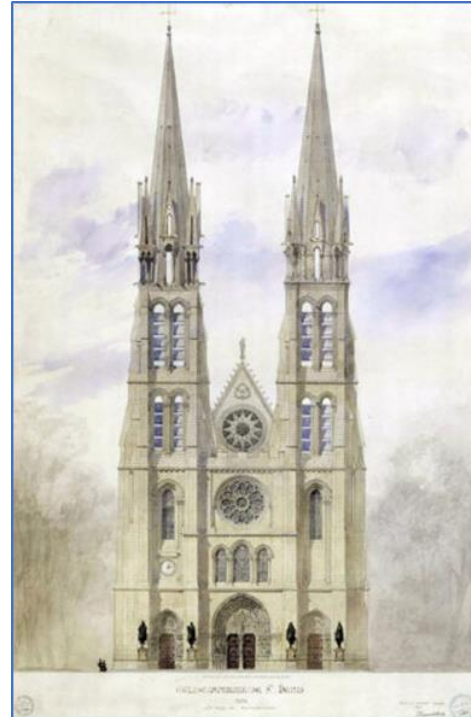
. "Discoveries: Rebuilding or Restoring the North Tower of St. Denis." *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 6, 1 (2017): 196. <https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol6/iss1/34>

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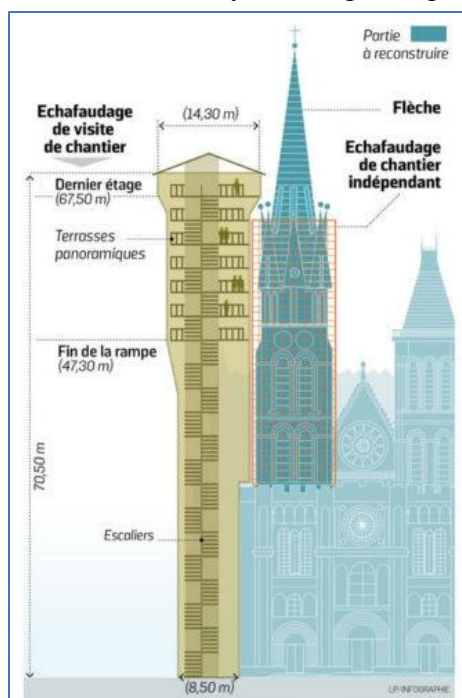
Rebuilding or Restoring the north tower of Saint-Denis

In 1846, the Gothic steeple of the Abbey of St. Denis was destroyed by a violent storm. First built during the 7th century by the Merovingian king Dagobert, it would be rebuilt



several times over the succeeding centuries, most notably by Abbot Suger starting in 1135. In the later 13th century, large portions were redone in the latest Gothic style, including the two western towers. After the north tower fell, Viollet-le-Duc, began his work on the church with hopes of restoring it to “a complete state that may never have existed at a given point.” As his drawing indicates, he wanted to recreate his view of a medieval tower, but funds fell through.

For some years, beginning in the 1980s, there has been discussion of rebuilding the tower



using some of the original materials saved from the 1846 demolition. Now the plan is to turn the reconstruction into a medieval working site, where tourists might pay for access to the experience the actual rebuilding. By demonstrating techniques of working the stones and building the tower, the commission finally hope to have found a way to lure more tourists out of central Paris. They expect more than ten times the present number of visitors.

This has caused some controversy, particularly addressing the question of what form the new tower should take and how much building can take place without disturbing the medieval fabric. Recently, the National Commission for Historical Monuments voted on the plan, but were split. Still, the representatives for the church and the City of Saint-Denis and the Minister for Culture, Audrey Azoulay, are positive.

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