SAINT DENIS

ABBOT SUGER’S WORK AND THE BEGINNING OF GOTHIC
St.-Denis: window I in axial chapel
The Nativity of Christ

Abbot Suger at the Annunciation
St.-Denis, the west façade, consecrated 1140
St.-Denis: tympanum, central portal, west façade: at the Last Judgment: “a good end to a good beginning”
Suger’s preparations for the rebuilding:

A. PROPERTIES AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT
1. reclaims abandoned or usurped properties
2. acquires new terrain and/or houses as a source of income

B. ABBEY: REPUTATION AND IMAGE
3. enhances the reputation of St.-Denis and its relics
4. brings attention to the abbey and its long history, and “monumentalizes” the façade of the old Carolingian church – adopts “imperial” façade model
5. finds materials (wood, stone, columns) on the abbey’s own properties to economize with building expenses
6. attracts both precious materials (gems, gold) from various sources, and artists from many backgrounds
7. Impresario! Big events with important people
8. Suggests all this is because “God approves:” miracles
Fulrad’s basilica, consecrated 775 in the presence of Charlemagne

1. Built in “the Roman manner” (copying, on a small scale, Old St. Peter’s in Rome, “apostolicity”)
2. The (later) legend of the miraculous consecration: the walls were relics
The 8th century church would have looked like an Early Christian basilica, such as Sta. Sabina in Rome, 422
Rome, Old St. Peter’s ca. 330

Annular crypt added by Pope Gregory the Great, ca. 590

confessio
The annular crypt (c. 7775) at St.-Denis from the interior.

*Romanitas*
“roman”

Abbot Hilduin’s extension of c.830

Annular Crypt, 775
Old St. Peter’s, annular crypt

Tomb of Peter in the confessio
Milan, the *confessio* at Sant'Ambrogio and relics of Saints Ambrose, Protasius and Gervasius
Hilduin’s extension of about 830

Burial *ad sanctos*: near the relics of the saints
St.-Denis: Abbot Suger’s West façade of 1140, reconst. by Sumner McKnight Crosby
The traditional Roman basilica that was imitated at St.-Denis in 775 had a nave with side aisles, clerestory and wooden truss ceiling, rounded apse to east; an arcade of re-used Roman columns.

At St.-Denis Abbot Suger uses columns for harmony and concordance between the new and the old.
But also radical innovations:

1. towers on the west façade, in this he is adopting the Carolingian/German imperial model of the westwork
2. a completely vaulted new structure – ideas picked up in Normandy?
3. pointed arches and rib vaults
Abbot Suger’s new façade at St.-Denis, c. 1140

3 portals that correspond to the nave and aisles on the interior

The first rose window

The powerful articulation of the exterior buttressing

Sculpted portals with rich decorative program

Twin towers

Crenelations

Dynamic pattern of windows and blind arches
Caen, St. Etienne, begun 1063 by William the Conqueror as burial church

St. Denis: west façade cons. 1140
Rome, the Triumphal Arch of Constantine, about 313

St.-Denis, west façade, 1140
St.-Denis: west façade and entrance bays, consecrated 1140
But he incorporated some of the older walls: “harmony and concordance”

Then Abbot Suger jumped to the east end and built a new apse with an ambulatory and radiating chapels.

And he left the apse and annular crypt below intact.

Consecrated in 1144.
Romanesque style
Conques: St.-Foi

Gothic style: St. Denis consecrated 1144
Diaphanous walls, rib vaults, pointed arches
The *en délit* column, also known as a monolith
A column of coursed masonry (above) vs an *en delit* column (right)