

1. The historiated capitals (12th century)

The ten capitals in the nave are among the most original examples of Anjou Romanesque work. Three themes break the soberness of the architectural programme, alternating intertwined leaves, mythical monsters, such as griffons and two more exceptional historiated capitals. Placed facing the north door, the latter symbolise the two powers that organised the rural world in the Middle Ages: clergy and nobles. On the first, a priest, officiating with his hands raised, is assisted by two men bearing pitchers. On the second, a knight with a halo (perhaps *Saint George, the patron saint of knights*), accompanied by a falconer, is striking down a dragon.

2. Bas-relief of Saint John preaching in the desert (16th c.)

This bas-relief in alabaster, of unknown origin, was largely restored in 1830 by Philibon Bouard. The pilasters, decorated with stylised candelabras, and the entablature, with a running foliage decoration (*horizontal crowning of the composition*), belong to the First Renaissance style. The Corinthian capitals are, on the other hand, of a later type and are probably the work of the 19th century, as the polychrome and the indefinite figures of God the Father, Mary and Jesus located in the entablature. The actual bas-relief represents Saint John announcing the arrival of the Messiah before a crowd gathered in the "desert". Crowning it all, a statue of the saint is placed in a niche with the traditional attributes: lamb, tunic in sheep's skin and crucifix stick.

3. Vault headstones (15th century, restored in 19th c.)

These are decorated with coats of arms that confirm the construction of the south collateral by King Louis XI. From West to East you can see: Saint Michael running the dragon through in honour of the order of the Knights of Saint Michael, founded by the king, the coats of arms of Charles, the Dauphin, and his mother, Queen Charlotte of Savoy, the coat of arms of France, along with those of Dauphiné and the King's Royal Coat of Arms.

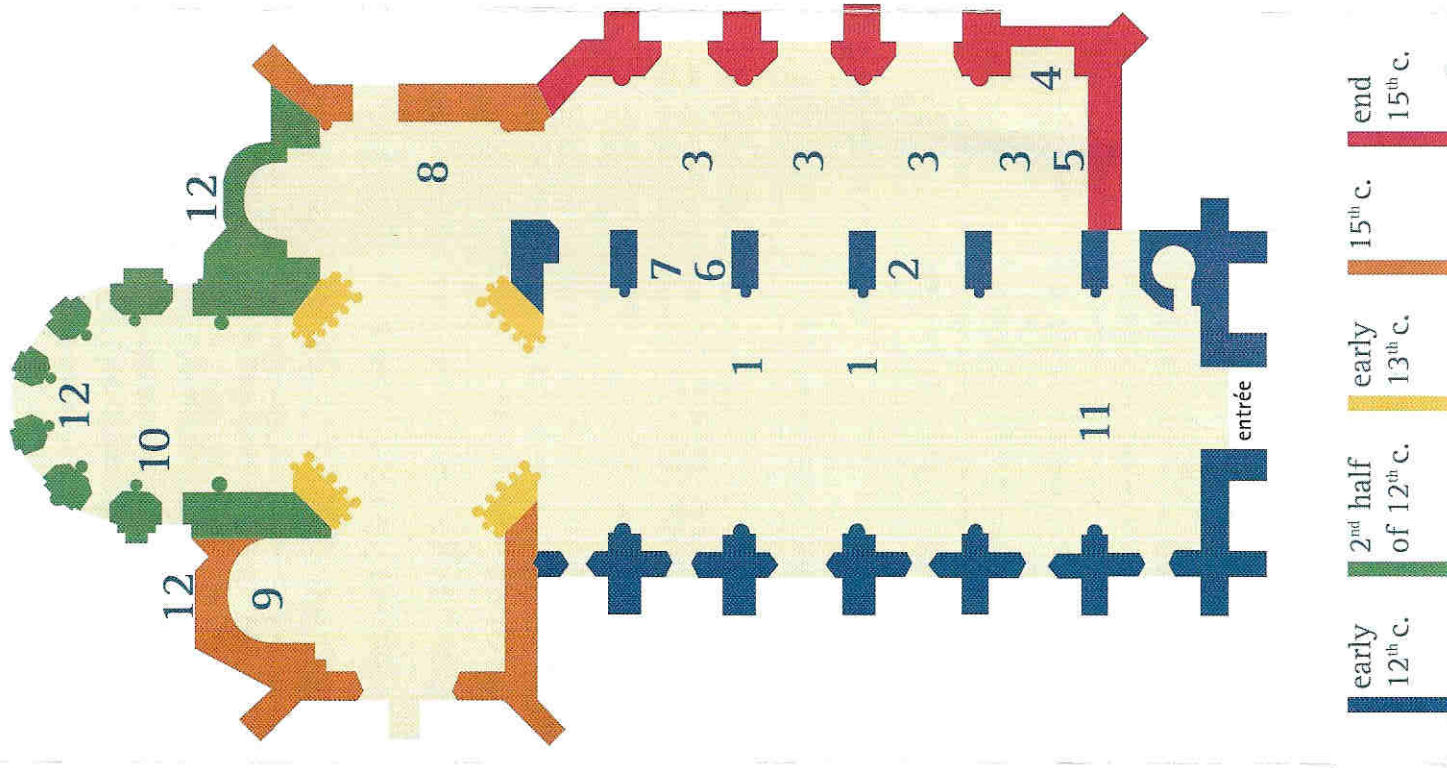
4. The so-called Oratory of Louis XI (15th c.)

Built by Louis XI at the same time as the south collateral, the oratory was partly restored in the 19th century. It differs from a chapel by the absence of an altar and remains, therefore, above all, a simple place of meditation. It opens on to the church by two broken bays in flamboyant arrangements, linked by a wide accolade. Composed of two bays with rib vaulting, the oratory is currently occupied by the baptismal fonts.

5. The "Vierge du Rosaire" (Virgin and Rosary) stained glass window

Designed by M.L. Rouillard in 1899 and executed in the same year by Ch. Lepévost, this stained glass window was given by the Confrèrte du Rosaire (*Confraternity of the Rosary*) and was installed in the church in 1639. It shows, in the centre the Vierge à l'enfant (*Virgin and Child*), with Mary holding a rosary in her right hand, sitting on a throne. She is surrounded by Pope Pie V and Saint Dominique whilst Pope Léon XIII is kneeling at her feet. In the lower part, we note the Nativity, the Crucifixion and the Crowning of the Virgin.

Plan of the Church of Notre-Dame de Nantilly



6. Thiéphaïne Funeral Epitaph (15th century)

This epitaph is the only element remaining from the tomb of Thiéphaïne la Magaine, who died in 1458. She was the wet nurse to Marie d'Anjou, the future wife of Charles VII, and to her brother, King René. It was ordered by the latter who wished to express his gratitude in this way.

7. Crosier of Gille de Tyr (13th c.) stolen in 1988

This crosier was discovered in 1614 in the tomb of Gilles de Tyr, buried in Notre Dame de Nantilly in 1266. The Keeper of the Seals for King Louis, he was the legate of Pope Urban IV and Archbishop of Tyr. The enamelled and champelevé volute of the crosier takes the form of a serpent enrolling itself around Adam and Eve.

8. Stained Glass Window of the Assumption

This was executed by the Delon workshop in Paris in 1903, perhaps with reference to the Confrèrte du Notre Dame du Mioust (*Confraternity of Our Lady of Mid-August*) later to become the Confrèrte de l'Assomption (*Confraternity of the Assumption*). The two key moments in the Assumption are represented by, on the right, the discovery of the empty bed and, in the centre, the ascension to heaven.

9. The Vierge à l'enfant (Virgin and Child) (12th century statue in polychrome wood)

According to the legend it was discovered by a labourer in a lentil field on the site of the church and it became a place of pilgrimage. It is, undoubtedly, the oldest work in the building. The hieratic postures of the figures are here rather broken by the diversity of the pleats in the clothes. Some parts, like the head of the child, have been redone in an undetermined period.

10. Choir stalls (17th century)

The thirty stalls stand out by the surprising decoration of the Miserere (*supports placed under the mobile seat that make it possible to sit whilst giving the impression of standing*). They are decorated, for the main part, with grinning faces surrounded by feathers or leaves. There are also angels' heads, a snail's shell and simple consoles. These, representing animals or people in a naïf style, seem to be more recent.

11. The organ

It was built between 1685 and 1690 by Jean Lehellocq. Destroyed during the Terror in 1793, it was partly reconstructed around 1847 by L. Bonn, an organ maker in Tours. It is composed of a large "Expressive Solo" organ in the romantic taste and a choir organ placed on the balustrade of the gallery. You will note the lateral towers of the large organ borne by atlantes (*male figures serving as vertical support*).

12. Choir and apse stained glass window

These are the work of the famous Lobin de Tours workshop. Those of the choir executed in 1862 represent a *Virgin and Child* framed by the *Virgin receiving the Holy Ghost* and the *Crowning of the Virgin*. Those of the north apse date back to 1869 and are dedicated to Saint Joseph whilst those on the south, dating from the same period, are a *Nativity*, a *Crucifixion* and another *Crowning*, as in the stained glass window of the Virgin and Rosary. These church windows highlight the importance of the cult of the Virgin Mary in the 19th century, as well as the church's name.

Nantilly is mentioned in the 11th century, but the present church, the oldest in the town, dates back to the 12th century. Originally it was a priory founded by the Saint-Florent abbots whose abbey was then located by the castle.

Until the Revolution Notre-Dame de Nantilly was the Saumur parent-parish. It was also a place of pilgrimage dedicated to the Virgin Mary whose statue is still in the chapel to the right of the choir. This cult of the Virgin Mary appeared at least as early as the 13th century with the founding of the *Confrérie de l'Assomption (Confraternity of the Assumption)*. Jeanne Delanoue, the Saumurois saint who devoted her life to the poor, was a member in the 18th century. In the 15th century King XI came to pray here. He ordered the construction of the southern part of his royal policy of donations to churches dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

Three architectural programmes

The nave and the façade date back to the beginning of the 12th century and the choir to the second half of the 12th c.

The Nantilly nave is an example of an exceptionally wide vessel (13 m) with broken tunnel vaulting that is in contrast with wood-framed churches or the series of cupolas usually found at that time in the West. It was restored by the Saumurois architect, Joly-Leterme between 1850 and 1854. The plan and historiated motifs on the capitals are inspired by Angou Romanesque sculpture. On entering, to the right, there is an underground chapel.

The façade is a wall screen with studied originality combining dominant horizontal lines of Aquitaine Romanesque tradition with strong vertical buttresses of Anjou culture. The late addition of the church spire (15th century or 1608, as indicated by the date on the nave oculous)

has remodelled the primitive aspect of the façade. Lucien Magne, architect for Historical Monuments, restored it in 1890. It was again restored in 1998.

The choir, with its very sober decoration, terminates in a cul-de-four apse. The bays provide it with considerable light.



The chancel dates from the 13th century

The chancel, narrower than the nave, is covered by a ribbed Romanesque cupola similar to that of the Church of Saint-Pierre located in the centre of the town. The transept arms date from the 15th century.

The collateral dates from the 15th century

Between 1470 and 1483, a vast collateral was designed for the celebration of parish services to meet the wish of Louis XI who planned to receive a college of canons in the nave. This new construction, nearly doubling the nave, required five large archways to be pieced in the south wall. The care given to this flamboyant Gothic programme bears the mark of Royal works, just as those carried out at Notre-Dame de Cléry (Loiret) where Louis XI is buried.



The collateral, severely damaged in the 17th and 18th centuries, was restored by Lucien Magne between 1897 and 1901.

The restorations

The steeple was restored in 1996, the façade and the first bay of the nave in 1998. The wood frame and roofing were restored in 1999-2000. The fine collection of 21 tapestries were executed between the 15th and 17th centuries. They are undergoing major restoration works, the reason for which they have been temporarily removed from the church. The organ, dating from 1685, will also be restored.

For more than eight centuries Notre-Dame de Nantilly has been the place of worship for a strong Christian community.

To know more about the Church of Notre-Dame de Nantilly contact:

The Tourist Office, place Billange

Tel. : 02 41 40 20 60
<http://www.saumur-tourism.com>
 which organises guided tours by appointment.

Other churches worth visiting : Notre-Dame des Artilleurs and the Church of Saint-Pierre, the Protestant church and churches in Saumurois bearing the indication: "Churches open to visitors in Anjou".



Church of Notre-Dame de Nantilly
 architecture and furniture