

City Cathedral
created by Sophia Keskey

Urban Books, Spring 2014

Hagia Sophia: Istanbul, Turkey, construction began in 532 CE

Canterbury Cathedral: Canterbury, England, construction began in 1070 CE

Notre Dame, Paris: France, construction began in 1163 CE

Cathedral Basilica: Saint Louis, USA, construction began in 1907 CE

The setting aside of space for the sacred has always been a component of the city. From Mesopotamian Eridu's shrines to Jerusalem's Temple and European cathedrals, sanctuaries have been integral to the metropolitan fabric.

Cathedrals, in particular, occupy a unique paradox in this practice of urban sanctuary. As a symbol of a particular church and hierarchy, cathedrals can seem distant, distinctly separate from their context. However, under the aloof façade, a cathedral is central to its city, acting as a place of worship and penance, refuge, political theater, and commerce, as well as the subject of great works of culture.

Looking specifically at the Hagia Sophia, Canterbury Cathedral, Notre Dame of Paris, and the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Louis, this book seeks to highlight this tradition of hidden centrality through excerpts from historical texts, song lyrics, modern online interactions, and probing questions - both general and specific.

By creating a continuum of tradition between cathedral and city, I hope to place the Cathedral Basilica and Saint Louis (despite being relatively new locations) into the greater history of the city cathedral.

Hagia Sophia

Thus, as you direct your gaze towards the eastern arches, you behold a never-ceasing wonder. And upon all of them, above this covering of many curves, there rises, as it were, another arch borne on air, spreading out its swelling fold, and it rises to the top, to that high rim upon whose back is planted the base of the divine head-piece of the center of the church. Thus the deep-bosomed conch springs up into the air: at the summit it rises single, while underneath it rests on trifold and through fivefold openings pierced in its back it provides sources of light, sheathed in thin glass, through which, brilliantly gleaming, enters rosy-ankled Dawn. Now, towards the east and the west, you will see nothing beneath the arches: all is air. But towards the murmuring south wind and the rainless north there rises a mighty wall up to the chin of the rounded arch, and it is illuminated by twice four windows. Countless other lights, hanging on twisted chains, does the church of ever-changing aspect contain within itself; some illumine the aisles, others the center or the east and west, others shed their bright flame at the summit. Thus the bright night smiles like the day and appears herself to be rosy-ankled...

A Description of Hagia Sophia written in 563 by Paul the Silentiary

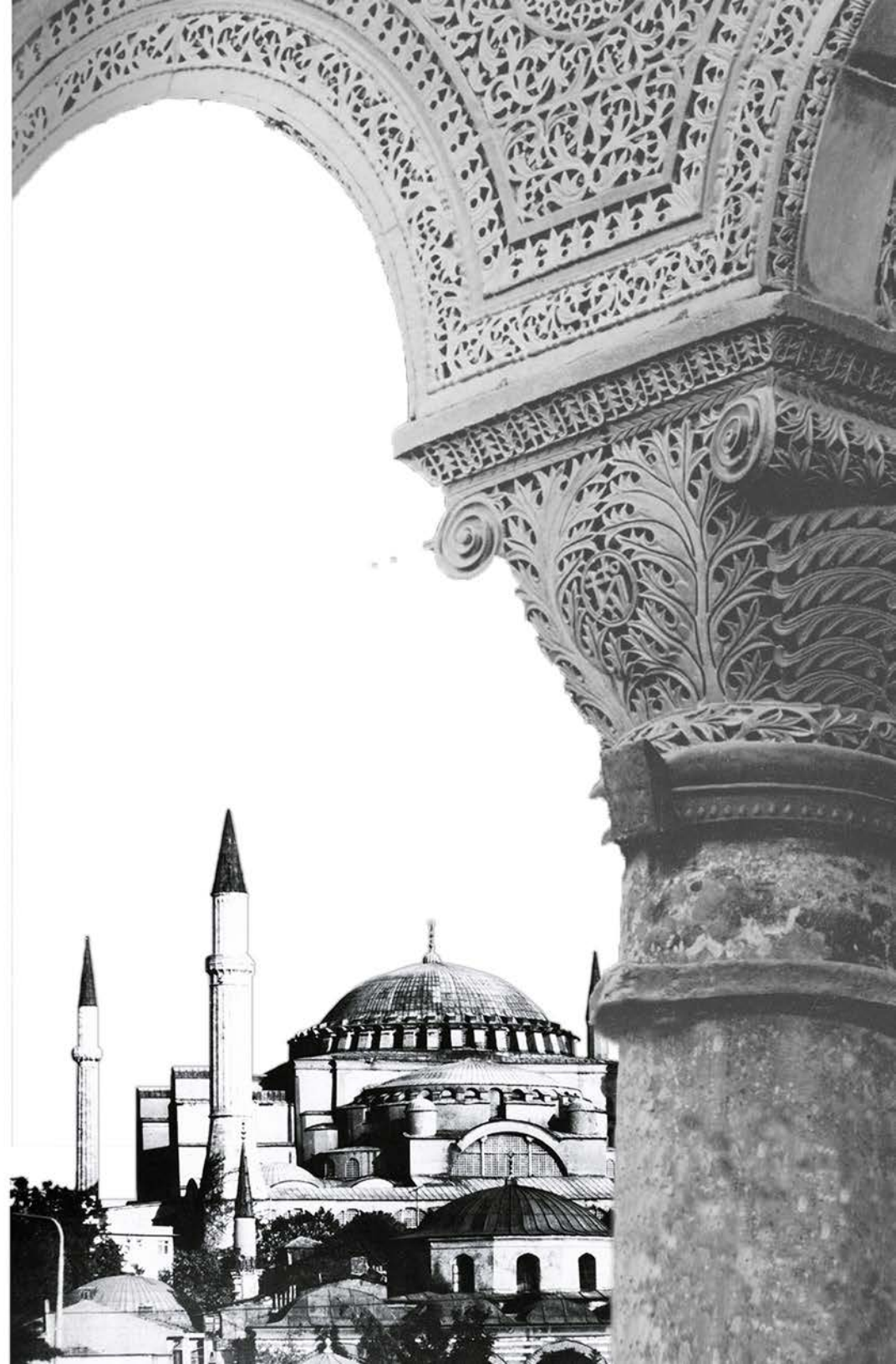
What defines a cathedral, a mosque, a church, a temple, or a museum?

Why a dome?

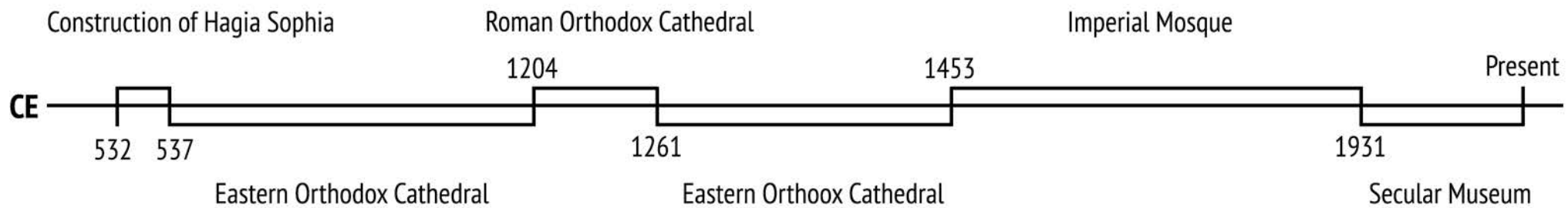
How does the salt water nearby affect the facade of the Hagia Sophia?

Where is the cathedral located geographically in the city?

What is the role of the sanctuary in the city?

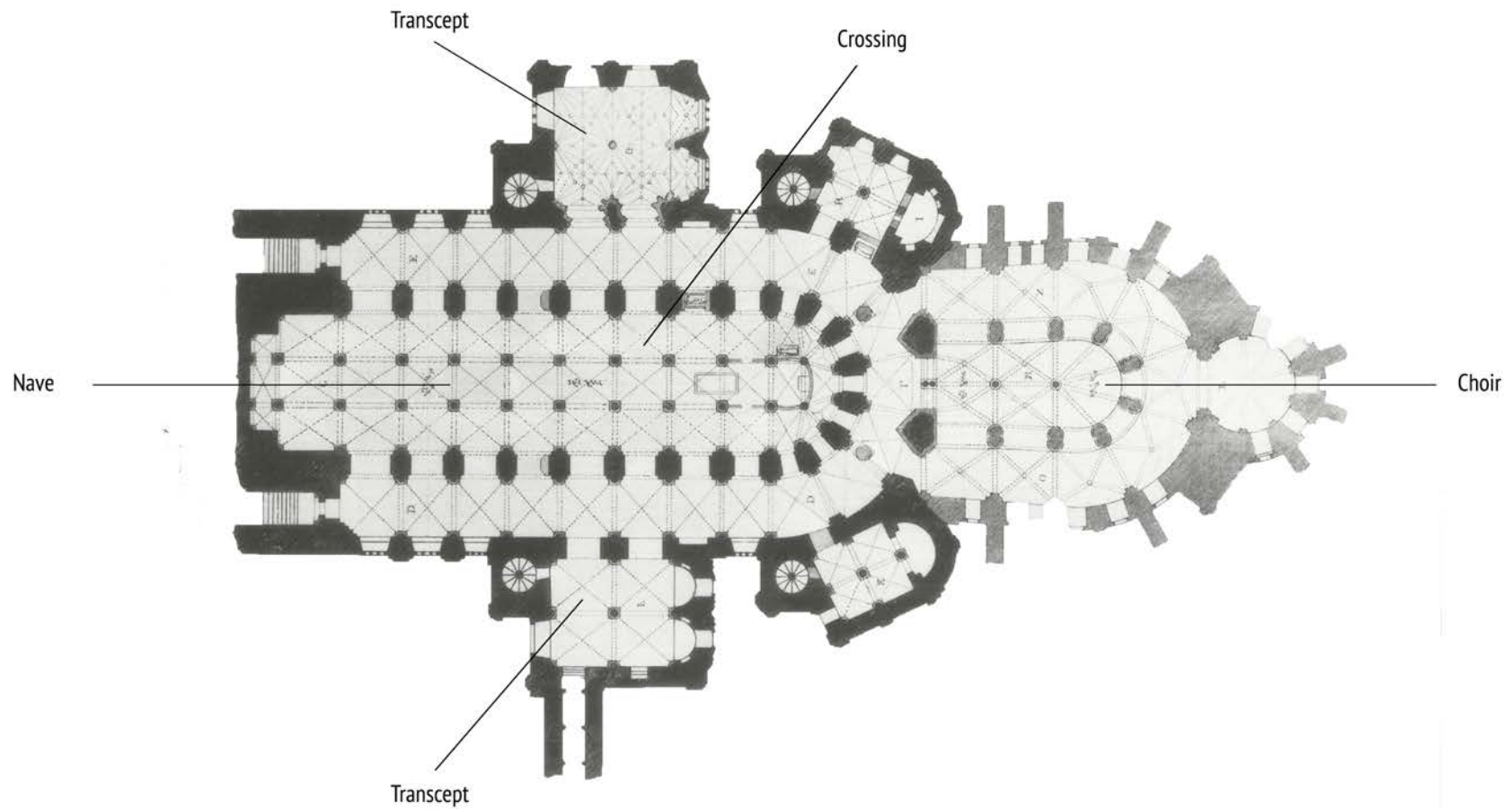


Hagia Sophia



What defines Hagia Sophia as a cathedral, a mosque, and/or a musuem?
Has its identity - its spirituality - changed? Or does it forever remain a
sanctuary in the eyes of its city?

Floor Plan of a Cathedral



Is the form of the cathedral integral to being a sanctuary?

Is the basic floor plan (and it's main componenets) a requirement for every cathedral?

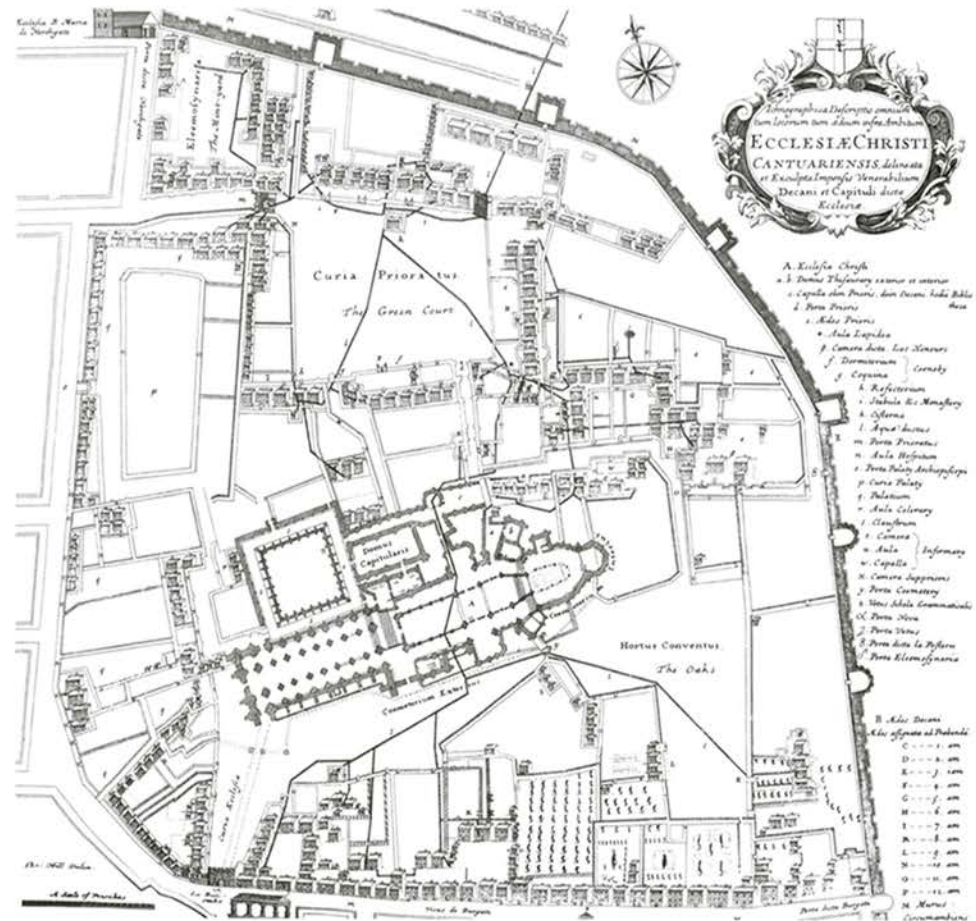
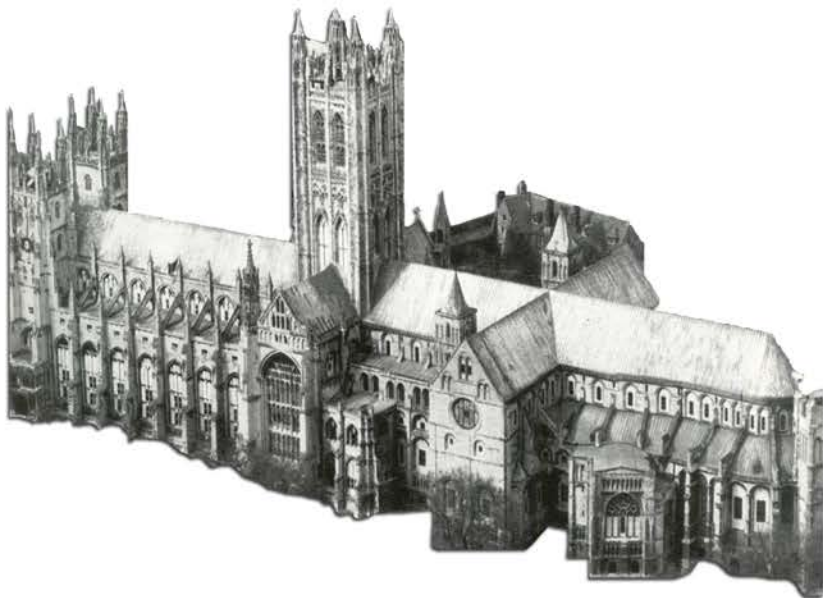
Does form follow function in a cathedral? Or does function follow form?

Is sheer scale an indicator of importance?

Canterbury Cathedral

When April with his showers sweet with fruit, the drought of March has pierced unto the root and bathed each vein with liquor that has power to generate therein and sire the flower; then do folk long to go on pilgrimage, and palmers to go seeking out strange strands, to distant shrines well known in sundry lands. And specially from every shire's end of England they to Canterbury wend, the holy blessed martyr there to seek. Who helped them when they lay so ill and weal befell that, in that season, on a day in Southwark, at the Tabard, as I lay ready to start upon my pilgrimage. To Canterbury, full of devout homage, there came at nightfall to that hostelry some nine and twenty in a company of sundry persons who had chanced to fall in fellowship, and pilgrims were they all that toward Canterbury town would ride.

The Canterbury Tales : Prologue by Geoffrey Chaucer, 1400



How many men did it take to build the cathedral?

Why is it attached to a boarding school? And what does that mean for the students?

What makes a place a cathedral?

How many men have played the Canterbury Cathedral's organ?

Does Canterbury Cathedral have a memory of me?

Where is a cathedral situated in the sentiment of its city?



Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury (1162-1170 CE), Martyr, Saint Thomas of Canterbury, Victim, Saint, Rebel, Thomas of London.

When the Archbishop of York, the Bishop of London, and the Bishop of Salisbury crowned King Henry II, they breached coronation privilege. Thomas, steadfast and immovable, excommunicated the three and continued until his opponents in the church were all but eradicated.

Just as angry, the newly crowned Henry muttered a wish for Thomas' death; "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?" Four knights, attempting to carry out this barely uttered royal command, marched their way to Canterbury, where Thomas, still steadfast and immovable, refused to give account of his actions, rejecting the King's will. It was then the knights attacked. And in the words of Edward Grim, "[Thomas] fell on his knees and elbows, offering himself as a living sacrifice, and saying in a low voice, 'For the name of Jesus and the protection of the Church, I am ready to embrace death,'" dying on the pavement.

Soon, Thomas was Saint Thomas (canonized by Pope Alexander III), the object of legends and cults, and Canterbury Cathedral a regular pilgrimage site for the masses.

What is the place of the cathedral in politics?
What does it take for a site to become worthy of a pilgrimage?
Did Canterbury Cathedral bear witness to Thomas' martyrdom?
Are the legends as true as the histories? Or are the histories as true as the legends?

Christian belief in the power of relics, the physical remains of a holy site or holy person, or objects with which they had contact, is as old as the faith itself and developed alongside it. The body of the saint provided a spiritual link between life and death, between man and God. Fueled by the Christian belief in the afterlife and resurrection, in the power of the soul, and in the role of saints as advocates for humankind in heaven, the veneration of relics in the Middle Ages came to rival the sacraments in the daily life of the medieval church. Indeed, from the time of Charlemagne, it was obligatory that every altar contain a relic.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013

Are the relics more important than the cathedral?
Does the relic's authenticity have anything to do with its importance?
Does the concept of the holy relic remove the cathedral from its city context? Or, with its physical presence, does it connect the cathedral further to its material reality?

Stone from the tomb of Jesus
The Virgin Mary's milk
The shroud of Jesus
The bones of several saints
Silver iconostasis



Thomas Becket's blood
Parts of Thomas Becket's skull



A piece of the Cross
A nail of the Passion
The Holy Crown of Thorns



Sacred Heart Shrine



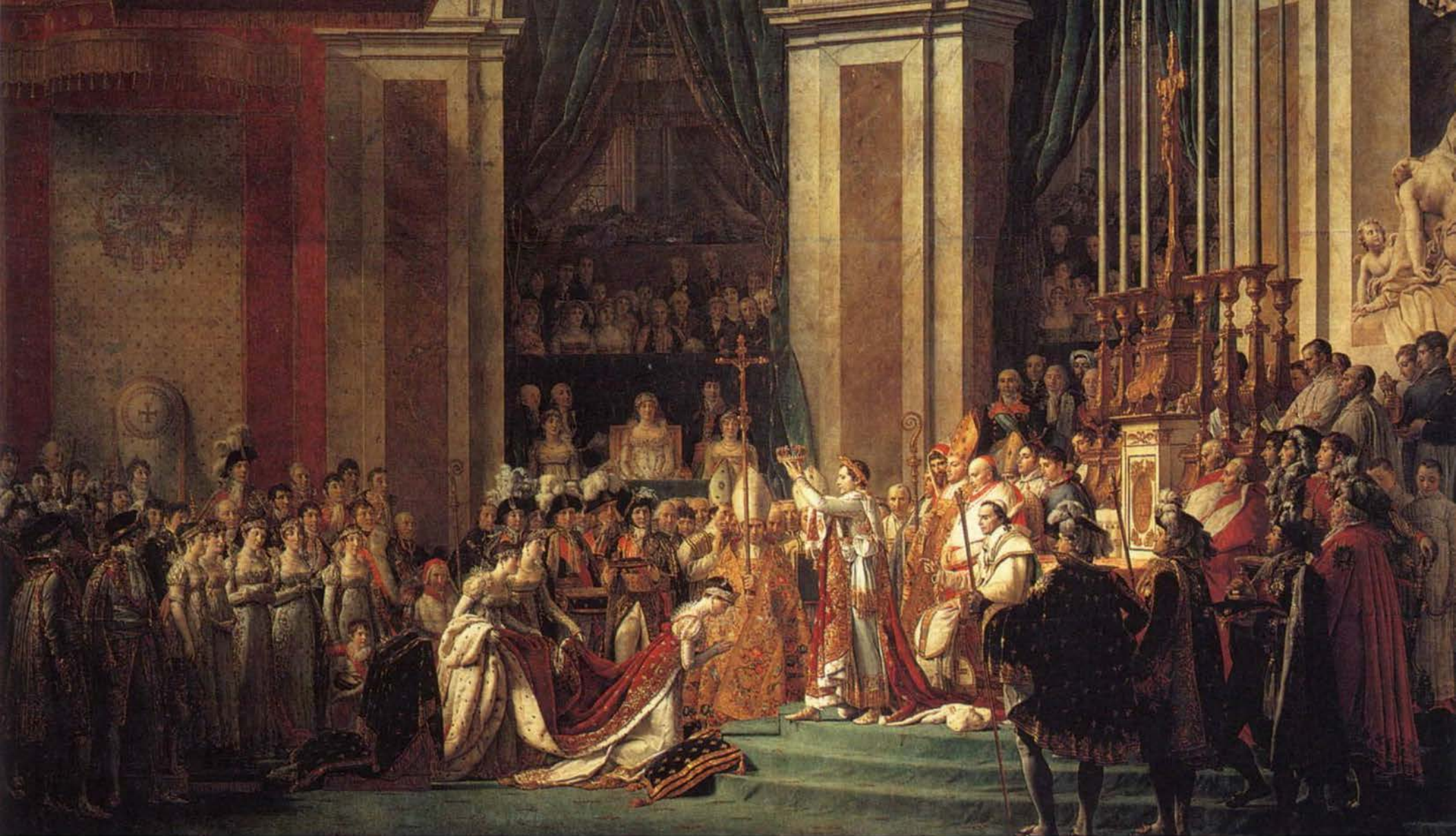
Notre Dame

I don't even know which way this storm is facing. Only because even today I wanted to stand here and look up at you, Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris, I came, getting drenched, only because I wanted to touch you, only because I wanted to kiss your skin, the stone, unknown to anyone. O another deluge of wind and rain. Though it's already time for morning coffee, a little while ago I looked from the Pont-Neuf, the boats on the Seine were still tied up to the banks, like puppies. The leaves of the gentle plane trees shining in their autumn colors on the banks are like flocks of buntings chased by hawks... O Notre-Dame, Notre-Dame, rock-like, mountain-like, eagle-like, crouching-lion-like cathedral, reef sunk in vast air, square pillar of Paris, sealed by blinding splatters of rain... O soaring in front, Notre-Dame de Paris. My heart trembles now that I see you. Looking at your form like a tragedy, a young man from a far distant country is moved. A cathedral standing in it solid with the weight of eight centuries, a mass of millions of stones piled and carved by believers of old. A great scaffold for truth, sincerity, eternity. You stand wordless... You know the strength of nature's force... O cathedral in the thrashing rain ...wind and rain that took a breath and has driven itself harder, all the instruments of the heavens gone berserk, the dance swirls around... O cathedral.

Cathedral in the Thrashing Rain by Takamua Kotaro, 2000

Do the stories of the stained glass change?
What are the different elements of Gothic Architecture?
What are the components that make a cathedral?
How do you make a place spiritual?
How much glass was used to make the rose window?



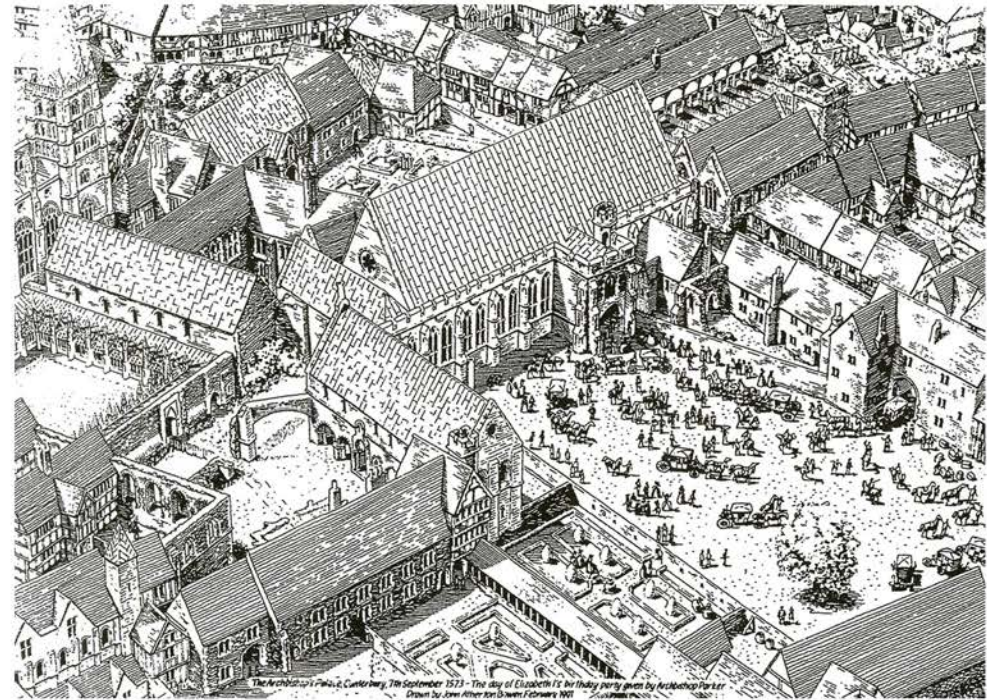


The Coronation of Napoleon, Jacques-Louis David, 1805-1807

Commissioned by Napoleon himself, Jacques-Louis David painted Napoleon's coronation, which was held in the Notre Dame of Paris. By planning a coronation in Notre Dame, Napoleon broke the French tradition of consecration (traditionally held in Reims Cathedral), to prove that he was a true son of the revolution. The two portions of the ceremony were acted at different ends of the cathedral to emphasize the disconnect between the religious and the secular. Pope Pius VII attended.

Despite the painting rewriting history, does Notre Dame of Paris stay the same? Why did Napoleon choose Notre Dame and not another Parisian cathedral? Can a cathedral be secular? Is there a difference between the secular and the spiritual?

Place of Worship
 Place of Penance
 Sanctuary
 Asylum
 Arena for Revenge
 A Political Theater
 A Market Place
 A Time Capsule
 Refuge from a Military Siege
 Refuge from Inner Demons
 The Subject of Great Works of Art
 Home of the Sacred
 Home of Corruption
 A Christian House of Prayer
 Everyone's House of Prayer
 A Bank
 Seat of the Law
 A Provider of Charity
 The Conclusion of a Pilgrimage
 Home to the Relics of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Saints, and the Disciples
 A Structure
 The Center of Town
 Axis Mundi
 A City's Spiritual Heart
 An Escape from Modern Life
 A Storehouse for Grain in Times of Famine
 A Place of Beauty
 A Place of Awe
 An Inspiration
 Architecture



What can a cathedral be?

What are all the functions of a cathedral? And is there even a finite amount?

Is the definition of a cathedral personal?

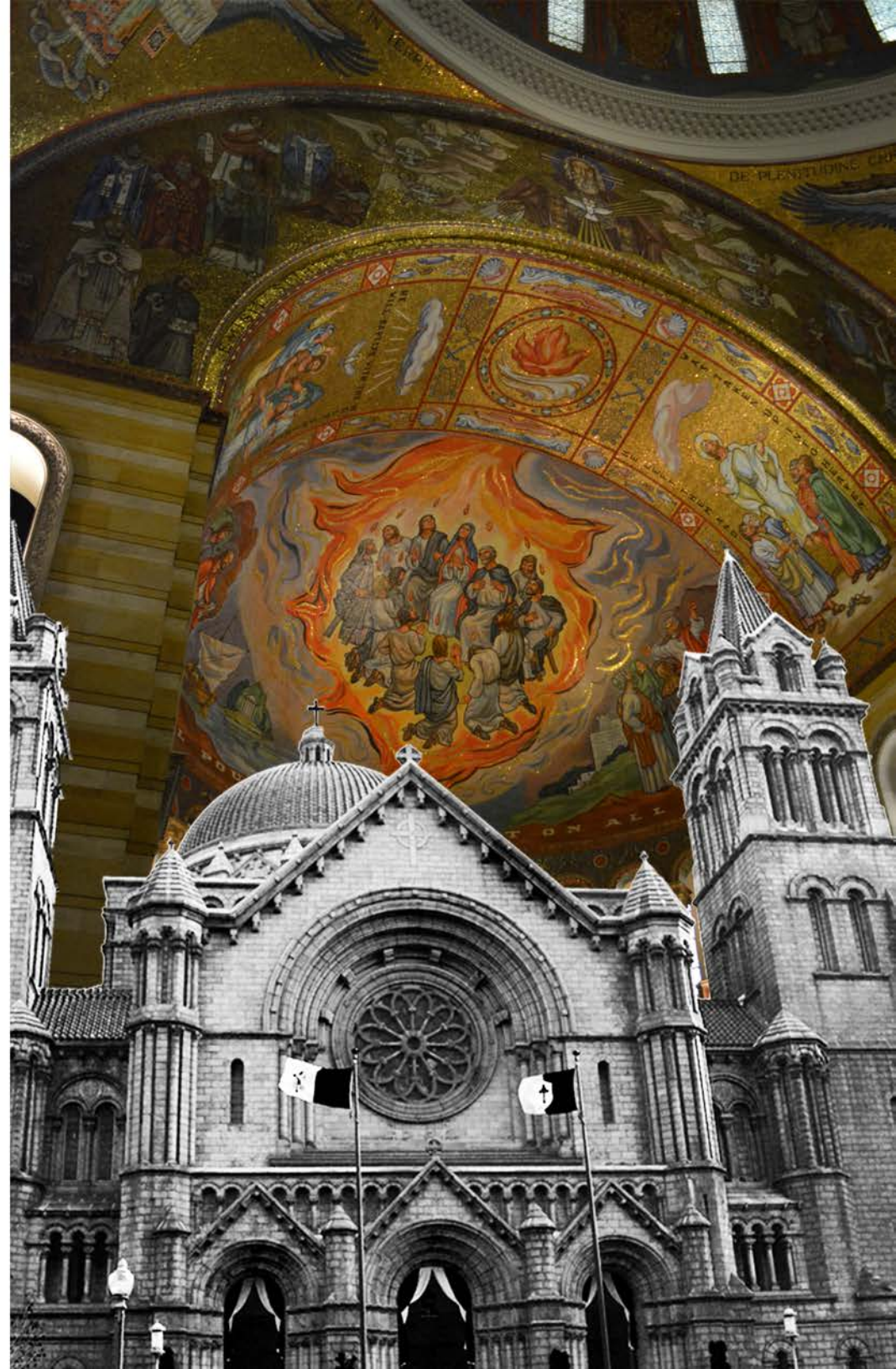
Is the definition of a cathedral defined by its context and its city?

Cathedral Basilica of Saint Louis

A St. Louis treasure. I don't care if you're Catholic, Mormon or Hindu, you'll be absolutely inspired by the beauty and scale of this building. Monumental and grey on the outside, vast and absolutely astounding on the inside. I felt humbled and very small, which might sound like a bad thing, but it wasn't. The way the music reverberates inside is something that should be experienced in person. If you give this Cathedral less than 5 stars, now is the time to repent. Words cannot explain the beauty that will overcome you. MAGNANIMOUS. MAGNIFICENT. STUPENDOUS. AWE-INSPIRING. The golden inlay, marble, statues, and gloriously carved wood are the tip of the iceberg here. The Spirit moves easily through you in this beautiful church. A must see, because it was probably excavated from another country...

A Collage of Yelp Reviews, 2011-2014

How many people did it take to assemble the mosaics?
What role does the cathedral play in its modern community?
What makes it the "new cathedral?" And how does it fit into tradition of?
How is a cathedral basilica different from a cathedral?
Is it as holy as its European counterparts, despite being younger and American?





The installation of the Cathedral Basilica mosaics began in 1912. Completed in 1988, the mosaics collectively contain 41.5 million glass tesserae pieces in more than 7,000 colors. Covering 83,000 square feet, it is one of the largest mosaic collections in the world. The mosaics were designed and installed by Tiffany Studios and August Oetken. Biblical, historical, and contemporary scenes are depicted.

Why mosaics and not paintings or frescos?

How many images can you create from the same pieces of glass tesserae?

How do the mosaics distinctly represent Saint Louis?

City Cathedral

Text set in PT Sans Narrow and Print Clearly, and printed on
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Images collected from

The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral by Reverend R. Willis

Canterbury Cathedral Priory in the Age of Becket by Peter Fergusson

The Formation of English Gothic: Architecture and Identity by Peter Draper

Hagia Sophia, 1850-1950: Holy Wisdom Modern Monument by

Robert S. Nelson

Hagia Sophia: Architecture, structure, and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church
by Rowland J. Mainstone.

*Mosaics of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul: the Fossati Restoration and the Work of
the Byzantine Institute* by Natalia B. Teteriatnikov.

Notre-Dame of Paris by Allan Temko

Notre-Dame de Paris introduction by Jean Verrier with photos by
Jean Roubier

Notre-Dame de Paris, Mémorial de la France by Pierre Du Colombier

Notre-Dame de Paris and the Sainte-Chapelle by Yves Bottineau and
translated by Lovett F. Edwards

Text quoted from

Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer

Cathedral in the Thrashing Rain by Takamua Kotaro

Description of Hagia Sophia by Paul the Silentiary

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