

## Tournai Cathedral (Belgium)

No 1009

### Identification

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| <i>Nomination</i>  | Notre-Dame Cathedral in Tournai                        |
| <i>Location</i>    | City of Tournai, Province of Hainaut, Wallonian Region |
| <i>State Party</i> | Belgium  |
| <i>Date</i>        | 6 July 1999  |

### Justification by State Party

In the case of the nave and transept, the early date of the elevation to four levels and its subsequent widespread extension meets the criterion of considerable influence and is further reinforced in the transept by the masterly integration of a "corridor triforium" and by the unusual composition of volumes.

The early 12th century construction in the nave of a "viaduct" structure on a four-storey elevation is unique in a period where church builders limited themselves to three levels. The technique would be adopted in the latter half of the 12th century in many French Gothic churches to become the standard elevation in pre-Chartres Gothic.

The transept also echoes the same architectural design and is the first example to contain a corridor triforium. It is unique also in its five bell-towers. This multiple tower concept, too, was adopted in the latter half of the 12th century in the great French Gothic churches, although never fully realized.

#### Criterion ii

These same elements also meet the criterion of unique testimony, in the light of their outstanding state of conservation in a region that has lost virtually all its great basilicas of the Romanesque or pre-Chartres Gothic periods. This is particularly true of the sculpted decoration of the nave.

Archaeological sources of exemplary value serve to put the environment of the Cathedral into perspective. Here again the argument of unique testimony holds good given the few comparable sites in Europe, either from the historical standpoint or in terms of the prospects of discovering and exploiting such remains as exist.

#### Criterion iv

The Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Tournai has been associated from the 5th century down to the present day with the rites of the Catholic church, satisfying the needs of local society and performing both cultural and diocesan functions. Every day the chapter of

canons and other church functionaries said prayers for the diocese. Services in the Middle Ages would have been rich with sound, movement, colour and fragrance, bringing the Cathedral to life: liturgical vestments and ornaments, processions, musical instruments, boys' choirs at the services of Prime and Vespers and the periodic ringing of bells would have made this a "multimedia" performance much appreciated at the time. Today services are led by the bishop on special occasions and by the canons on a daily basis. Over the centuries of uninterrupted worship, the church has accumulated a number of precious objects which are still kept in the Cathedral and used during services.

The Cathedral also fulfils a social function: even today it is a place of solidarity. In the Middle Ages, religion was closely associated with concern for the less privileged, expressed in caring for the sick, giving alms, or taking responsibility for the weakest in society. The city of Tournai still possesses buildings that bear witness to this social function of the church, such as the former hospital of Note-Dame, now the Academy of Fine Arts.

The church's intellectual role is also inextricably linked with the life of the Cathedral and was manifested initially in the education of the populace through the preaching of the clergy. For centuries the Cathedral was the city's only seat of learning: it offered a handful of young people the rudiments of reading, writing, and calculation. The founding and administration by the chapter of a large number of scholarships also supported students at the great universities of the time.

The Cathedral also houses the famous library, still known as the "Librairie".

This intellectual function is also manifested in the archives kept at the Cathedral, many of which bear outstanding witness to archive-keeping methods of the Middle Ages: these include the Inventory scroll dating from the late 13th century and the great catalogue of 1422, updated in 1533. Also worthy of note is the series of Capitularies, consisting of a bound volume of 600 pages for every calendar year since 1566.

The Cathedral also performs a cultural function by virtue of the richness of its heritage in a variety of fields: liturgy, music, architecture, sculpture, gold and silver work, fabrics, manuscripts, and binding.

#### Criterion vi

### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *monument*.

### History and description

#### History

In the 1st century BCE Tournai was already an important Roman administrative and military centre (*Turnacum*), on the river Escaut at the crossroads of

an extensive network of roads. Christianity was brought to Tournai in the late 3rd or early 4th century by St Piat, but it was not until the 5th century that the bishopric was created, probably in the reign of Childeric, King of the Franks. After extending the kingdom as far as the Pyrenees his son Clovis (481-511) moved the main royal residence from Tournai to Paris. An episcopal foundation grew up around the Cathedral of St Stephen and the church of St Mary and became the centre of the city's political, economic, social, and intellectual life under the Carolingians.

The Romanesque Cathedral was built after fire destroyed the episcopal ensemble in the mid 9th century. The great 11th century basilica, part of which still remains, owes its construction to the growing importance of the Marian cult, which attracted many pilgrims in the wake of the plague of 1089 (Notre-Dame des Malades, "Our Lady of the Sick," otherwise known as Notre-Dame de Tournai or the Flemish Notre-Dame). Another factor was the wealth of Flanders and of Tournai, its religious centre and a renowned centre of learning, in a region that produced wool and exported local limestone. In 1146 the city was granted its own bishop instead of being attached to the archdiocese of Noyon, as it had been since the early 7th century. The Romanesque elements of the Cathedral have never been definitively dated. Recent research, however, would seem to put the date of construction in the first half of the 12th century, that of the nave more precisely in the first third of the century and the transept in the second. The original plan included a ceilinged nave with vast galleries on the vaulted side-aisles and a harmonious west front.

The site of the Gothic choir seems to have opened out on a building completed when Bishop Etienne d'Orleans (1192-1203) had the chapel of St Vincent built on the south-west side and added vaulting over the transept and choir of the Cathedral in 1198. Towards the beginning of the 13th century, the first Romanesque portal was replaced by a more monumental construction which was later masked by a stone porch at the beginning of the following century.

Bishop Gautier de Marvis (1219-52) planned to build a new cathedral. Work began on the choir in 1242 and ended in 1255 but did not affect the Romanesque nave and transept. Other constructions were added to the building: a vast chapel, contemporary with the Gothic choir, in the south aisle which would be dedicated to Louis IX of France in 1299 and the prayer-chapel added to the choir in the 14th century. From this period onwards the Gothic choir seems to have shown disturbing signs of instability and potential collapse, remedies for which were sought through consolidation work carried out at different periods. Once completed, the Romano-Gothic Cathedral benefited from the climate of artistic creativity that reigned for many centuries in Tournai and acquired many works of art for its embellishment.

The spires of the flanking towers, and no doubt that of the central tower as well, date from the 16th century, as does the parish chapel, now vanished, that once stood up against the north side of the nave on the site of the Romanesque cloister. Tournai did not escape the rise of Calvinism, losing the archdeaconates of

Bruges and Ghent in 1559 and seeing its Cathedral sacked in 1566. The Cathedral was restored the following year, however, and a Renaissance rood screen replaced the Gothic enclosure. Numerous alterations were made over the next two centuries, such as the partial reconstruction of the narthex in Tuscan style (1620), the raising of new vaulting over the nave galleries to replace a wooden ceiling (after 1640) and over the nave (1753), the modification of the Romanesque staircases in the western bay of the side-aisles (1757), the closing off of the side arcades opening out onto the narthex, and the opening of new doors into the side-aisles.

The return of the French in 1797 brought with it the closure of the Cathedral, the sale of its rich furnishings, and the dispersal of its collection of works of art. The building narrowly escaped demolition, but its poor state of preservation necessitated restoration work, which began in the choir in 1840 and continued over subsequent decades: the principal realizations were the reconstruction of the gable-end of the north apse to match that of the south apse, which was itself renovated, the reconstruction of a neo-Romanesque gable-end inspired by those of the transept arms, and the creation of the great rose window. In the early 19th century the Cathedral was left standing in isolation by the demolition of the surrounding houses. Incendiary bombs landed in the choir on 17 May 1940 and the fire spread to the roof of the nave. The parish chapel, the episcopal palace, the diocesan archives, and the extensive chapter library were all destroyed. A fresh restoration campaign was launched after the war ended.

#### *Description*

The Cathedral of Notre-Dame lies at the heart of the old town, not far from the left bank of the Escaut. It is separated from other blocks of buildings by a series of streets, small squares, and gardens, except to the west where the Place de l'Evêché opens out, framed to the north by the Maison des Anciens Prêtres (a home for retired priests) and to the south where some houses back on to the choir. In architectural terms, the Cathedral is the product of three design periods that can still easily be distinguished. It offers the contrast of a Romanesque nave and a Gothic choir linked by a transept in a Transitional style featuring an impressive group of five bell-towers.

The Romanesque nave, divided into nine spans over a length of 48m, is flanked by side-aisles. It includes a narthex with groined vaulting that supports the turn of the galleries which in turn are reached by two broad wooden Louis XV style stairs, one to the north, the other to the south. Halfway up the south stair is the access to the episcopal chapel of St Vincent, an adjunct to the main building that opens out on the episcopal palace.

The nave is distinctive for its rise to four levels, separated by continuous horizontal cable designs. A long series of semi-circular three-cylindrical arches rest on massive pillars consisting of a cruciform core with embedded half-columns and slender octagonal columns decorating the internal angles. The galleries,

which open out extensively on to the nave, are more or less identical but the pillars decorated with slender octagonal columns are simpler in composition. The rhythm is accentuated at the third level, or false triforium, which features two semi-circular arcades per span separated by short columns decorated with broad pilasters. Each of the arcades originally contained a niche, now walled up, which gave on to the gallery roofs. The last level, that of the tall windows, features an external running course which links together the various parts of the building. The tall windows provide direct natural lighting into the nave which, in common with the side-aisles, is surmounted by groined vaulting. The 740 capitals in the nave offer a wide diversity of compositions and motifs, mostly inspired by plants, executed with sharp clarity.

Two Romanesque vaulted rooms, probably chapels, were added shortly after the construction of the nave, one to the north and the other to the south, at the turn of the western galleries over the side-aisles against the arms of the transept.

The transept is vaulted in its entirety and its two arms each culminate in an apse with a narrow ambulatory framed by two towers. The rectangular crossing is topped by a lantern, two floors of which are visible above a Gothic arch. The elevation of the nave extends into the arms, with the adjustments necessary to incorporate the ogival vaulting and smooth the transition to the elevation of the apses. These also consist of four levels: the semi-circular arcades, higher than those of the nave, resting on columns, the much lower gallery level, the triforium with its border, and the tall windows between which run the ribs of the fan vaulting.

The choir extends over seven spans surmounted by ogival vaulting along the longer side and ends in a semi-decagonal apse topped with an octagonal vault. The chapels open off the ambulatory include six three-sided radiant chapels in the apse. The arcades with lancet arches take up almost half of the total height and the triforium, with its passage now walled up, reproduces the line of the tall windows on a smaller scale.

On the exterior a Gothic porch shelters the double portal in the west front. The lower ranges of the front are decorated with sculptures dating from different periods (14th, 16th, and 17th centuries) depicting Old Testament scenes, episodes from the city's history, and saints. Above them runs a row of bays surmounted by a great neo-Romanesque rose window and, finally, a gable end flanked by two circular turrets decorated with two rows of columns.

The high outer wall of the north and south side-aisles is topped by the pentice of the galleries and pierced by two rows of bays underlined by four continuous horizontal cords. A small blind arcade incorporated into the broad, flat buttresses separating the spans alternates with each of the bays on the second level. The level of the high windows is bordered by an exterior running course of columns which continues up to the turrets on the front. The Mantile and Capitole doors open through a trefoil arcade into the

return of the north and south side-aisles respectively. They are ornamented by sculptures illustrating the battle between the Virtues and the Vices and the battle of Sigebert and Chilperic in the case of the Mantile door, and the end of the world in the case of the Capitole door.

The transept is distinguished by five towers, each crowned by a spire, and by its two apses which form an imposing whole. Each apse framed between its two towers (the Brunin and St Jean towers to the north and the La Treille and Marie towers to the south) offer a harmonious facade at each extremity of the transept. These four square towers each have seven floors (except for the Pontoise tower which has six), presenting a great variety of treatments (bays of different forms, cords and mouldings), and their arcatures illustrate the transition from Romanesque to early Gothic style. The lantern over the crossing is rectangular in form and its spire is quartered with bell-turrets. The two apses repeat the elevation of the nave with heightened simplicity. They are topped by a semi-conical roof and a gable-wall featuring rising blind arcades.

The Gothic choir creates a striking contrast to the Romanesque elements. The ambulatory windows under a gable occupy the entire area between the buttresses from behind which emerge two flights of flying buttresses, with the tall windows between them.

## **Management and Protection**

### *Legal status*

The Cathedral of Tournai is the property of the Province of Hainaut as regards the edifice and buildings. Its contents, including those used in the practice of worship, are the property of the Cathedral chapter.

The Cathedral of Tournai was designated a listed historic monument by Royal decree of 5 February 1936. It is situated in the conservation area of the ancient centre of Tournai under the terms of the order of the Walloon Regional Executive of 14 May 1984.

Every three years the Wallonian government draws up a list of outstanding heritage properties in the region. The Cathedral of Tournai has figured on this list ever since the order of 29 July 1993, which has been regularly renewed ever since.

### *Management*

The Cathedral of Tournai is currently in a state of suspense: although its condition reflects constant maintenance, major work is now needed on the structure and presentation. An outline agreement with the Wallonian Region is in preparation. Under the terms of this agreement the region will contribute 95% and the Province of Hainaut 5%.

The contract constitutes a commitment to the completion of a predetermined programme, the costs of which are still to be estimated, independent of any political or economic issues.

The precondition to completion is thus the work in progress on analysing problems and their causes: this consists of sampling, surveys, etc. Once these are complete, an international competition will be held to select a project manager to handle collation of the results and propose a restoration programme, combined with an estimate which will form the basis for the outline contract.

These actions are under the supervision of a scientific monitoring commission, and the Royal Commission for Monuments, Sites and Excavations plays an advisory role. Information obtained from the principals (in particular the Wallonian Region) indicates that the contract is agreed in principle. In parallel with the technical surveys, archival research is under way and a programme of archaeological excavations is in progress. The archaeological research is also covered by an outline agreement.

The Province of Hainaut contributes between 1 and 2 million Belgian francs annually to the cost of maintenance work and has requested further aid from the Wallonian Region. The maintenance programme has been severely disrupted by the tornado that struck on 14 August 1999. After the storm it became apparent that certain endemic problems, probably related with the geological nature of the land on which the Cathedral stands, had suddenly been exacerbated in the upper part of the choir. This required emergency shoring, which was still in progress at the time of the ICOMOS expert mission. The shoring, which consists primarily of transverse metal buttresses, has been specifically designed to carry walkways from which all the necessary inspections of the vaulting can be carried out.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

The dual ownership inherited from the Concordat of 1801 (when the province was still part of France) vests responsibility for the building in the province and its contents in the chapter. Three main stages of conservation in the contemporary era can be identified.

In 1840 a programme which began with work on the buttresses of the choir was extended to the whole edifice. The most important modification involved the west front, the upper sections of which were entirely restructured. Between 1902 and 1906 work was aimed at liberating the Cathedral from the buildings that hemmed it in. In 1940 bombing destroyed much of the city, and the roof of the ambulatory along with some of the chapter buildings were partly destroyed by fire.

The present state of the building bears witness to constant maintenance. Apart from the structural problems now under consideration, the main alterations concern the stonework. At least three areas require urgent work: the sculptures under the west porch, the Mantile door, and the Capitole door.

### *Authenticity*

The authenticity of the Cathedral of Tournai is beyond doubt. The inevitable 19th century restorations (to which every major building of the Middle Ages was inexorably subject) retained for Tournai its outstanding external dimensions, and it must be accepted that the alterations to the west front (minor in relation to the size of the building) are now part of its history.

Three distinctive elements of the Cathedral's exterior deserve special mention: the richness of the exterior carvings on the west porch and the north and south transept doors surmounted by trefoil arches which only strengthen the "oriental" impression given by the interior of the transept. Despite the regrettable alterations to the doors, these elements are now threatened by the decay of the stone, with the carvings at particular risk.

In the interior, certain floor coverings are to be deplored but the size of the Romanesque nave (vaulted in plaster in the 18th century), the richness of its carved capitals, the originality of the transept, and the contrast created by the Gothic choir have all been preserved from major alteration. The exposed beams in the transept, which were seen during the mission, are a rare example of early 12th century roof beams still *in situ*.

The Treasury of objects, which are universally recognized and prized for the chronological continuity they represent, and the liturgical vestments dating from the early Christian period in this part of Europe, has been preserved intact over the centuries, most recently from the World War II bombings.

## **Evaluation**

### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Tournai in February 2000.

### *Qualities*

The Cathedral of Tournai is unique in its external form; the principle of a transept crowned by towers exists in later buildings but on nothing like this scale. The same is true of the transept with its double apse.

Inside the Cathedral, the nave and transept are equally outstanding in their size, the richness of their carved capitals, and the contrast they make with the Gothic choir.

The Cathedral of Tournai is primarily a Romanesque structure, which in no way diminishes the boldness of the Gothic choir, but this part of the building is in a style that is common, particularly in the North of France, hence the overriding interest of the Romanesque section.

### *Comparative analysis*

Tournai stands at the point where Rhineland and Ile de France influences converge. No certainty exists as to the date of construction of the Romanesque sections, but the nave is generally agreed to date from

the early 12th century. The transept is a little later, although still from the first half of the 12th century. The following illustrates the links to the three traditions.

The *Rhineland* influence offers many examples of transepts with rounded extremities: they are to be found in Bonn, at the church of the Holy Apostles in Cologne, and at St Quirin in Neuss. The arms of the Tournai transept are unusual in possessing side-aisles, a feature which certainly influenced later church building in Northern France, as at Noyon.

The *Norman* influence is seen in what appear to be the unfinished towers on the west front. Had they been completed, they would have produced an effect reminiscent of the great abbeys of Caen.

The *Ile de France* influence is reflected in the height of the nave, which can be linked (although much later) to early Romanesque churches such as Vignory. One of the unusual features of this elevation on four levels is that it prefigures the arrangement of the pre-Chartres Gothic cathedrals, all of which included galleries, although here no vertical pattern interrupts the four horizontal registers. The reason for this is that the levels were initially roofed (the vaulting is a decorative feature added in the 18th century). Even in churches with exposed beams, vertical points frequently transfer the loading to the floor. Tournai Cathedral therefore presents a structure rare in a building of this size. Other buildings that have now disappeared would no doubt have enabled a more detailed analysis to be made, but this part of Belgium has lost many of its great churches in a succession of wars. The transept is the product of a dual influence: the first impression is oriental. Without taking the analysis too far, the eye is reminded of the great buildings of the Middle East that had so much influence on Western art after the year 1000, an influence supported by the trefoil arches of the north and south doors. A second observation, in the rectangular section, reveals the presence of supports rising from the floor to make provision for sexpartite vaulting, although this project was apparently never brought to completion. In combination with the square cross-section of the arches making up the vaulting of the semi-circular section, this provision links the transept to the early signs of the emerging Gothic style.

#### *ICOMOS comments*

The Cathedral of Tournai is the largest Romanesque edifice in the Province of Hainaut. It has retained all its unique exterior volumes. In its design it reflects the characteristics of a Romanesque building in the full flowering of the style. It is difficult to ascribe the Cathedral to a single influence or school, but in its layout and elevations it presents features that certainly influenced the development of early Gothic style.

The Cathedral stands in surroundings of high quality, although largely restored in the wake of World War II, and it constitutes, with the belfry and Grand Place, the historic yet living centre of the city. The belfry, in the immediate vicinity of the Cathedral, is the oldest of all

the historic belfries of Belgium inscribed on the World Heritage List.

The proposed buffer zone requires no particular comment, since it corresponds to an urban entity wholly covered by legislation to protect listed historic centres.

#### **Brief description**

The Cathedral of Tournai was built in the first half of the 12th century. It is especially distinguished by a Romanesque nave of extraordinary dimensions, a wealth of sculpture on its capitals and a transept topped by five towers that foreshadow the Gothic style. The choir, rebuilt in the 13th century, is in the pure Gothic style.

#### **Recommendation**

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iv*:

*Criterion ii* The Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Tournai bears witness to a considerable exchange of influence between the architecture of the Ile de France, the Rhineland, and Normandy during the short period at the beginning of the 12th century that preceded the flowering of Gothic architecture.

*Criterion iv* In its imposing dimensions, the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Tournai is an outstanding example of the great edifices of the school of the north of the Seine, precursors of the vastness of the Gothic cathedrals.

ICOMOS, September 2000