



DOSSIER DE PRESSE

Saint-Denis Basilica and Cathedral

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www.monuments-nationaux.fr

www.tourisme93.com/basilique



I / What's New

1.1 / The Rugby World Cup

This international sports event is taking place from 7 September to 20 October 2007 at the Stade de France, located in the vicinity of Saint-Denis Basilica and Cathedral. To mark the event, the Centre des monuments nationaux and the city of Saint-Denis have established a partnership to present their historical treasures with a common past.

- **Saint-Denis Basilica and Cathedral**

Fridays, 7, 14 and 21 September, and Saturdays, 13 and 20 October 2007: open until 7 p.m. when there are matches at the Stade de France.

Tuesday, 9 October, 8 p.m.

The Festival Ovale presents a free liturgical concert by two polyphonic choirs, with Georgian ensembles Marani and Madrikali, and a Basque choir, Anaiki.

Guided tours for the general public every day at 10.30 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Audioguides in French, English, German, Italian and Spanish

Free activity booklets for children (in French): *A la recherche du saint clou*

- **Musée d'art et d'histoire de Saint-Denis**

Exhibition: *Marco Polo et le livre des merveilles (Marco Polo and the Book of Wonders)*, 7 September to 3 December 2007

Throughout the long journey that took him from Venice to imperial China, Marco Polo (1254–1324), a traveller and explorer, had a unique vision of the world that is related in his *Book of Wonders*, a mythical work that has been copied and translated in all of Europe since the 14th century. **The exhibition is divided into five sections:**

- Imago Mundi: representations of the world
- the main travellers to the Orient: pilgrims, merchants and ambassadors
- Venice, Constantinople and Saint-Denis
- the great trade routes
- the *Book of Wonders*. .../...

.../...



Saint-Denis, a Renowned Religious and Commercial Centre

In Marco Polo's time, Saint-Denis was a major religious centre placed under the domination of the abbey whose power and independence were strengthened in the 12th century by Abbot Suger. Pilgrims and the powerful University of Paris played an important role in the rapid development of trade, and the Foire du Lendit that was held at La Plaine became the most important fair in the Paris region. It attracted people from France and abroad, who came not only to purchase supplies, but also to satisfy their curiosity and amuse themselves.

www.musee-saint-denis.fr

Le village Rugbycolor, set up at the Porte de Paris, is the site of 30 free concerts presented as part of the **Festival Ovale**, as well as a world sports forum, exhibitions and live broadcasts of matches on giant screens. True to the spirit of the game, the city's cafés and restaurants will display the colours of the Rugby World Cup throughout the festivities.

www.ville-saint-denis.fr
www.festival-ovale.fr

1.2 / European Heritage Days, 15 and 16 September 2007

This year's theme is 'Heritage Professions: Men and Women Dedicated to Cultural Assets'. Admission to the monument will be free, and activities will include a demonstration of the making of stained glass by a master glass maker, a chance to meet the monument's administrator, thematic tours and early-music concerts.

The Medieval Garden

Several activities will be offered in the garden located behind the cathedral, which will be open on both days to allow the public to admire the newly restored chevet.

On both days:

- discovery tours of the medieval garden with activities for children and adults
- an activity booklet for children: *Le jardin médiéval et ses secrets*

Saturday, 15 September:

- **2.30 p.m. to 3.15 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. to 6 p.m.:** meet the administrator of Saint-Denis Basilica and Cathedral to learn about



what she does and find out what goes on behind the scenes in a historical monument

Sunday, 16 September:

- **2 p.m. to 6 p.m.:** demonstration of the making of stained glass by master glass maker Ricardo d'Oriano (atelier O'RUS)
- **2 p.m., 4 p.m. and 5.15 p.m.:** early-music concerts (guitar and flute) by Michel Pérugien

In Saint-Denis' royal necropolis:

- **guided tour every 30 minutes:** subjects include a recumbent figure, a historical period, restoration work, historical research, etc.
- **Activity booklet for children**

1.3 / Fête de Saint-Denis, 29 and 30 September 2007

During the city's festival, numerous events will take place in the city centre. The Centre des monuments nationaux will participate by offering free admission to the basilica.

Guided tours for the general public every day at 10.30 a.m. and 3 p.m. May also be offered at other times. Further information on site.

1.4 / Third Edition of Contes et Histoires, 26 December 2007 to 7 January 2008

For the third edition of Contes et histoires (Fairy Tales and Other Stories), the monuments in Paris and the Île-de-France that are managed by the Centre des monuments nationaux will offer various activities and creative workshops for children to help them discover the monuments, their history, their legends, and the people and characters associated with them in a way that is both playful and unusual.

A good opportunity to take advantage of the Christmas holidays to discover the Pantheon, the Arc de triomphe, the Towers of Notre-Dame Cathedral, the Conciergerie, the Sainte-Chapelle, the Chapelle Expiatoire, Saint-Denis Basilica and Cathedral, the Château de Vincennes, the Château de Champs-sur-Marne, the Château de Maisons in Maisons-Laffitte, the Villa Savoye in Poissy, the Domaine national de Saint-Cloud and the Maison des Jardies in Sèvres.

The calendar of events will be posted on www.monuments-nationaux.fr



II / Tours and Activities for Everyone

Educational Activities

Saint-Denis Basilica and Cathedral has a variety of educational resources in the areas of history, architecture, literature, music, the fine arts and the art of gardening. Educational projects encourage young pupils to get their bearings in time and space. In this spirit, the basilica welcomes pupils throughout the year. They work right in the building, under the supervision of a specially trained animator, and actively discover the whole monument: architecture, sculpture and stained glass, from the nave to the crypt. They use educational materials developed especially for them: study of recumbent figures, kings and knights; the functioning and role of the medieval image; and an orientation activity based on the basilica's floor plan. Practical exercises are also offered: handling of architectural models illustrating the construction of a semicircular arch, the purpose of a flying buttress and the evolution of the basilica's construction. The pupils do pastel drawings on regular or velvet paper. Full- and half-day workshops are offered.

Contact: 01 48 13 14 73
service.educatif.basilique@monuments-nationaux.fr

Culture for All: an Accessible Monument

Saint-Denis Basilica and Cathedral is one of the pilot sites the Ministry of Culture and Communication has selected for the programme aimed at improving accessibility in historical monuments.

It was granted the **Tourism and Handicap label for accessibility to visitors with hearing or intellectual deficiencies.**

A **ramp** provides access to the nave, and an elevating device has been installed in one of the chapels in the crypt. These permanent devices allow people in wheelchairs to tour the basilica, accompanied by a staff member. Abbot Suger's chevet is the only area that remains inaccessible. Wheelchairs are also available for loan.

Adapted tours offered year-round: tactile tours for people with visual impairments and tours for those with intellectual deficiencies. Two new audioguide tours will be available in December 2007 for visitors with visual or hearing deficiencies:



- A sign-language video guide that uses touch-screen Visitor Digital Assistant (VDA) technology. These sign-language videos will offer a full tour of the basilica.
- An audioguide for visually impaired visitors and their guides. It will include adapted text, audio descriptions and tactile stations.

These pilot projects were specially designed by the monument's educational team and Ophrys Systèmes. They are the subject of a partnership between Saint-Denis and associations representing people with disabilities that are also partners of the monument: Association Valentin Haüy (**AVH**), the Fédération nationale des sourds de France (**FNSF**) and the Groupement pour l'insertion des personnes handicapées physiques (**GIHP**).

Reservations: 01 48 13 14 79
basilique-saint-denis@monuments-nationaux.fr.

Visiting the Basilica

Self-guided Visit

This simple formula allows you to see what you want the way you want. A free brochure in French, English, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Russian and Japanese is available at the door. It outlines the history of the monument and the location of the tombs. There are also numerous information panels throughout the monument.

The public may also view a permanent exhibition on the basilica's history that includes a large model showing the Saint-Denis abbey and market town around 1600, a reconstruction of the former arcature of the medieval cloister and an audiovisual presentation on the archaeological discoveries made at the monument (Spanish and English subtitles).

Guided Tour

90-minute tours in French, every day at 10.30 a.m. and 3 p.m. Sundays also at 12.15 p.m. Tours may be offered at other times as well, as required.

Tours in English and Spanish may also be offered on site. Reservations are advised.

Audioguide Tour

Audioguides are available at the ticket office. Languages offered: French, English, German, Spanish and Italian. An original way to tour the monument on your own (length: about 75 minutes).



Group Tours or Tours of Several Sites

The **Office de tourisme de la ville de Saint-Denis Plaine Commune** proposes several tour options that include other attractions (Stade de France, Musée d'art et d'histoire), as well as accommodation and entertainment.

Information on rates and conditions: 01 55 87 08 70
infos@saint-denis-tourisme.com.

III / Practical Information

Saint-Denis Basilica and Cathedral is both a place of worship and a historical monument. The area reserved for worship may be accessed free of charge. The royal necropolis, which includes the royal tombs, the crypt and the chevet, is open to the public by the Centre des monuments nationaux, and an admission fee is charged.

Getting There (20 min. from the centre of Paris)

Pedestrian city centre

Metro: Line 13, get off at Basilique Saint-Denis

By car: 9 km from the centre of Paris, Porte de la Chapelle, take the A1 and exit at Saint-Denis centre — parking on site

Centre des monuments nationaux

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www.tourisme93.com (minisite on the basilica)

Opening Hours of the Royal Necropolis*

1 April to 30 September 2007:

Monday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6.15 p.m. / Sunday, 12 p.m. to 6.15 p.m.

From 1 October 2007:

Monday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4.45 p.m. / Sunday, 12 p.m. to 6.15 p.m.

* The ticket office closes 30 minutes earlier.

Closed on 1 January, 1 May, 25 December and during certain religious services.



Admission

Full rate: €6.50

Reduced rate (large families, people under 25, teachers): €4.50

Groups and tourism professionals (20 people): €5.30

School groups: €30

Free admission: children under 18 accompanied by an adult, members of the press, the unemployed, people receiving RMI benefits, disabled persons and their attendant

Audioguides

Available in French, English, Spanish, Italian and German

Individuals: €4 Couples: €6 Groups: €2

IV / A Unique Historical Monument

4.1 / Saint-Denis Abbey

For centuries, the Saint-Denis royal abbey illuminated the artistic, political and spiritual history of the Frankish world. The abbey church was designated a basilica in Merovingian times. Starting in the 4th century, the word *basilica* was applied to churches whose floor plans were the same as those of Roman civic buildings used for trade and the administration of justice. Often erected outside cities and over the tomb of a saint, basilicas frequently led to the development of neighbourhoods or market towns, such as the city of Saint-Denis, which was built around the abbey and its economic potential.

The church stands on the site of a Gallo-Roman cemetery, the resting place of Saint Denis, who was martyred around 250. In addition to a Carolingian crypt, part of the building consecrated by Charlemagne in 775, it retains vestiges of two structures that played a pivotal role in the development of religious architecture: Suger's chevet, a veritable hymn to light and the manifesto of the nascent Gothic art; and the part that was rebuilt in Saint Louis' time, whose vast transept was designed to house royal tombs.

A place of memory, in the Middle Ages the Saint-Denis monastery linked its destiny to that of royalty, gradually asserting itself as the preferred resting place of royal dynasties, helped by the cult of Saint Denis. Forty-two kings, 32 queens, 63 princes and princesses and 10 nobles were laid to rest there. **With over 70 recumbent figures and monumental tombs, the basilica's royal necropolis** constitutes the most important collection of funerary sculptures from the 12th to the 16th centuries.



Throughout history, sovereigns have sought legitimacy, which explains in part why they wanted to be laid to rest near Saint Denis' relics. The king believed that, through the power of the holy martyr, he would gain power and protection during his lifetime, especially in battle, as well as direct access to Paradise.

'Montjoie saint Denis!'

The rallying cry of the knights on the battlefield in the 12th and 13th centuries, inscribed on Saint-Denis' famous oriflamme, a scarlet banner powdered with gold flames. 'Montjoie saint Denis' became the motto of the kingdom of France, which thus placed itself under the protection of Saint Denis, its patron saint. Systematically raised in wartime, the ensign was given to kings by the abbot on the altar of the holy martyrs. It was one of the major objects of the medieval epic around which early national sentiment began to unfold. A copy of the banner is kept at the basilica.

The Hundred Years War, the wars of religion and political unrest all contributed to the decline of the royal abbey of Saint-Denis, well before the Revolution precipitated it. In 1793, the revolutionaries attacked the symbols of the monarchy, exhumed remains and buried them in a common grave, but they preserved most of the funerary sculptures, to be used in the education of the people. In 1806, Napoleon I ordered the restoration of the building. Then Louis XVIII, renewing the abbey's role as a necropolis, exhumed the remains in the common grave and placed them in a vault, in the basilica's crypt. He also had the remains of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette transferred to the basilica. The restoration work continued throughout the 19th century, under the direction of two architects, Debret and Viollet-le-Duc, who took over in 1846. In 1966, the basilica became a cathedral, a designation derived from the word *cathedra*, the bishop's seat.

4.2 / A Royal Monument

Dagobert's Tomb, and the Merovingian and Carolingian Kings

The first 'mausoleum' was built around 475, most likely commissioned by **Saint Geneviève**, who was particularly devoted to Saint Denis. The development of a necropolis led to the expansion of the church in the 6th and 7th centuries. Numerous Frankish aristocrats, women for the most part, were buried as close as possible to the saint.

The discovery, in 1959, of a sarcophagus containing the remains of **Queen Arégonde**, Clovis's daughter-in-law, who died in the second half of the 6th century, provides evidence of the sanctuary's power of attraction. The jewels found in the tomb are in the collection of the



Louvre. Fifty years after Arégonde's death, in 639, **King Dagobert became the first Frankish king to be buried in Saint-Denis Basilica.** Certain Merovingians and Carolingians were also laid to rest there, in particular **Charles Martel, Pépin the Short and Charles the Bald.**

King Dagobert distinguished himself by making generous donations to the abbey, and legend has it that he created the **Saint-Denis fair** that was held each October and was a source of great wealth for the monastery.

Pépin the Short, the son of Charles Martel, **was anointed by Pope Stephen II** at Saint-Denis in July 754, sealing the alliance between the Frankish kings and the papacy. He was the first sovereign to be crowned as the image of God on earth. This great king then had the church rebuilt along the lines of the Roman buildings known as basilicas. Featuring a wooden roof and dozens of marble columns, it was decorated with thousands of oil lamps. A **crypt** was added for the first time and, until the 12th century, it housed the relics of Saint Denis. **The vestiges of that Roman-style martyr with paintwork imitating marble can still be seen today.**

Saint Louis' Fundamental Contribution

Louis IX (Saint Louis), who was canonized in 1297, was called a 'superman' by the pope. A man of great faith, he was particularly attached to Saint-Denis. He continuously strengthened the basilica's role as a royal necropolis, in particular by commissioning, around 1263, an initial series of **16 recumbent figures**. A recumbent figure is a sculpture depicting someone lying down. The word *recumbent* is derived from the Latin verb *recumbere* (to recline). Fourteen of those original sculptures have survived. They can be found in the arms of the transept, their original location, according to 18th-century engravings.

In the Middle Ages, the gilded silver tombs of **Louis VIII and Philip Augustus**, Saint Louis' grandfather and the victor at Bouvines in 1214, had the places of honour at the centre of the crossing. This grouping was completed around 1280 by the addition of a magnificent silver-gilt tomb in honour of Saint Louis, 'the most beautiful tomb in the world', according to chronicler Guillaume de Nangis. All three of these monuments were destroyed during the Hundred Years War.

The medieval recumbent figures commissioned by Saint Louis are modelled on the column figures found on church portals. The sovereigns bear a crown and a sceptre. The idealized faces of 16 recumbent figures are majestic expressions of the royal function. Originally painted in bright colours, the figures, which are clothed in 13th-century style, are not depicted dead; their eyes are open to the eternal light. Affirming a belief in the Resurrection, they are turned



towards the east, towards the rising sun, the image of Christ whose return they await.

But the Capetians also had a political purpose in mind. They wanted the dynastic continuity that existed between the Merovingians, Carolingians and Capetians to be remembered, and they sought to achieve this through sculptural representation.

In addition to the 14 recumbent figures from the Saint Louis commission, the basilica still houses **Capetian tombs** (Philip III, the Bold; Isabelle d'Aragon; Philip IV, the Fair; Louis X, the Quarrelsome; and Jean I, the child king); **Valois tombs** (Philip VI of Valois; Jean II, the Good; Charles V; Charles VI; Isabeau de Bavière); and the tombs of several **servants of the Crown** (Du Guesclin, Louis de Sancerre).

Sculptures of princes and kings initially housed elsewhere were also transferred to the monument in the mid-19th century: Clovis, Childebert, Fredegunde, Charles d'Anjou and the dukes of Orleans. The abbey's role was to preserve and record the memory of the reigning dynasty, and to make that memory known through writing. At Saint Louis' request, a monk named Primat translated a series of important texts into the French language for the first time, establishing a **framework for a history of France**. This collection of official kingdom chronicles was developed until the 15th century, under the title **Grandes Chroniques de France**. In the late Middle Ages, the monastery's **library** was the most important in the kingdom.

Royal Funerals

The three two-level tombs of **Louis XII, Francis I and Catherine de' Medici** are based on the same model. On the lower level, there are the *transis*, lifeless naked bodies sometimes depicted in a macabre fashion. Above, the serene souls pray to be lifted up unto God.

The invention of two-level Renaissance-style monuments probably sprung from funeral ceremonies. From the time of Charles VI to that of Henri IV, when the king died, a funerary effigy of him was created. It had a wax face and was served solemn meals several times a day. Lying in state, the effigy represented the permanence of the monarchy. The day of the burial, the coffin was placed inside a catafalque, and the effigy, on the upper platform. The tomb of Louis XII and Anne de Bretagne conveys in marble the ephemeral funeral structures. The tomb of Francis I celebrates the knightly king who emerged victorious at Marignan in 1515. On that of Henri II and Catherine de' Medici, the emphasis is on religious and Catholic themes.

Whereas the bodies of medieval and Renaissance sovereigns were buried directly beneath the sculpted monuments, the **Bourbons**,



starting with **Henri IV**, were laid to rest in the central part of the crypt, where the burial vault of the Bourbons was located. All these sovereigns were laid in plain lead coffins encased in wood.

4.3 / Innovative Architecture

Over the centuries, the construction of the basilica evolved around the tomb of Saint Denis. The various monuments erected on the site from the 5th to the 13th centuries — Carolingian church, Suger's basilica and Saint Louis' vast nave — were all considered innovative masterpieces in their time.

Saint Denis

Saint Denis' spiritual influence greatly contributed to the abbey's temporal authority. Considered the first bishop of Paris, the saint was martyred around **280. [cf. p. 8]** What we know about his life comes mainly from a series of legends written in the shadow of his tomb from the 5th to the 14th centuries.

As early as the 5th century, the tomb, a pilgrimage site, attracted the devotion of the various royal dynasties. In the 9th century, 600 years after the saint's death, Saint-Denis' abbot, Hilduin, recorded **the legend of Saint Denis.** According to the narrative, the saint was beheaded on Montmartre ('the mount of martyrs') and walked from there to the current site of the basilica with his head in his hands. The text contributed to a tenfold increase in the abbey's prestige. And the cephalophoria episode contributed to the spiritual edification of Christians.

A rich and very influential Parisian noblewoman, **Saint Geneviève** most likely commissioned the first building in 475, which was 20 m long and 9 m wide, and of which foundation walls have survived. Because many aristocrats wanted to be buried near Saint Denis, the basilica was expanded in the 6th and 7th centuries.

In the 8th century, upon his coronation, Pépin the Short decided to rebuild the church along the lines of the Roman buildings known as basilicas. The tomb and relics of Saint Denis and the two men martyred with him were kept in the basilica up until the 12th century. Today, in Saint-Denis' cavernous crypt, which guards the basilica's most ancient history, a pit serves as a reminder of **the location of the tomb and relics.** This pit has been the centre of all the buildings erected on the site, from the first chapel (4th to 5th centuries) to the 13th-century abbey church.



In the crypt at Saint-Denis, people with a passion for the **Romanesque** will find one of the rare examples of this style in the Île-de-France. This space also features several storiated capitals depicting, among other things, the life of Saint Benedict, as well as foliated capitals. Being so massive, the crypt supported the new chevet created in 1140 by Saint-Denis' famous abbot, Suger.

Abbot Suger, a Key Figure and the 'Originator of Gothic Art'

This man, who was 'small in physical and social stature, driven by his double smallness, refused, in his smallness, to be small'. This epitaph conveys the iron will of Abbot Suger (1081–1151), who was born near Saint-Denis and became an Oblate at the age of ten. Provost then abbot of Saint-Denis, he travelled extensively and had a special relationship with the pope, bishops and kings, serving as adviser to Louis VI and Louis VII. Starting in 1135, he devoted himself to the reconstruction of the old Carolingian building. From 1140 to 1144, 'in three years, three months and three days', as he put it, he built a new chevet flooded with light. This prestigious structure was a reflection of the rapidly expanding Capetian kingdom. A product of the synthesis of European technical experiments, the chevet was linked to a theological conception of light inspired by the mystical texts of the pseudo-Denys, one of the fundamental references used in teaching at the time. Thanks to his innovative architectural vision, Suger sanctioned the birth in the Île-de-France of what Italian detractors of the Renaissance disdainfully termed **Gothic art**.

The bright new chevet was better suited to the display of the relics of saints venerated by the pilgrims who were arriving in increasingly large numbers. The exiguity of the Carolingian crypt, where the relics were previously kept, had indeed led to major problems during pilgrimages. The crowds were so thick that, according to Suger, some women found it oppressive and fainted, or died uttering harrowing cries.

In addition, the architectural originality of the chevet, whose upper sections were rebuilt in the 13th century, resided in the use of a forest of monolithic columns, supporting one of the first **ribbed vaults** to be successfully built. The chevet was consecrated on 11 June 1144, during a procession led by King Louis VII and Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine. About twenty bishops, numerous abbots and the papal legate transported the three silver reliquaries of the holy martyrs from the dark, narrow Carolingian crypt to the new chevet. Set in a magnificent gleaming gold and silver altar that has since disappeared, the relics were bathed in light and visible to all, from every part of the church. Today, the 19th-century altar still houses three reliquaries containing bones.



The Church's Adornment: the Stained-Glass Windows

Of the 12th-century stained glass all that remains in Saint-Denis are five windows and a few elements removed in 1997 for restoration and currently replaced by photographic films.

In the 12th century, the services of a master stained-glass maker were retained for the maintenance of the windows. This was extremely rare. **The stained-glass windows apparently cost more than the stone building itself.** The subjects depicted on them were rich, complex and essentially meant for erudite monks.

The major themes of the 12th-century west façade, which presents the Old Testament as the prefiguration of the New Testament, culminate in the window illustrating the life of Moses and in the one Suger called the anagogic window, meaning the one 'leading up'. The Lady chapel features the **theme of the Jesse Tree**, which remained famous throughout the Middle Ages. This simplified genealogy of Jesus is the one found at the beginning of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew.

Commissioned by architects Debret and Viollet-le-Duc, the stained-glass windows on the upper parts of the building were created in the 19th century.

High Gothic Architecture

In 1231, Saint Louis was already contributing financially to the reconstruction of the abbey church, a major work of 13th-century Gothic art. The fact that the reconstruction was completed in 1281, in less than fifty years, provides an indication of the abbey's immense wealth.

Pierre-de-Montreuil, one of the principal architects of the time, who oversaw the construction of part of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris and the refectory at Saint-Germain-des-Prés, also contributed to this major undertaking of the century.

The Treasury and Regalia

The basilica's treasury, an assortment of disparate objects used in worship and items from collections bequeathed by wealthy abbots or kings, was among the most important ones in the Middle Ages. Suger viewed the treasury as the church's adornment. At the entrance to the current choir stood **a cross that was almost seven metres high** bearing a gilded silver Christ. For ceremonies, the chapels, which are now decorated with 13th-century altarpieces, were adorned with relics and valuable liturgical objects such as Eleanor of Aquitaine's vase, **Suger's eagle** or Charles the Bald's porphyry bathtub, all of which are now at the Louvre. But these liturgical objects were also **monetary**



reserves. Thus, in the 14th century, a Saint-Denis abbot did not hesitate to have a gold statue of Saint John melted down to pay for the services of the abbey's butcher.

Regalia, the symbols of royal power used during coronations — crowns, sceptres and hands of justice — were also deposited in the abbey's treasury. Part of the treasury was melted down in 1793 and in Napoleonic times, but several exceptional pieces are today housed in the Louvre, the Cabinet des Médailles of the National Library of France and foreign museums. In the 19th century, Louis XVIII commissioned new objects for use as royal insignia during funeral ceremonies. These are on display in one of the basilica's chapels.

4.4 / The Birth of the City of Saint-Denis

The city of Saint-Denis sprung up in the shadow of the monastery. Royal favours and a thriving economy, due in particular to the medieval fairs, led to the rich and durable development of the monastic market town starting in the Carolingian era. Pépin the Short had the first wall built, protecting the city in an area that was more or less circular. In the 14th century, the city experienced considerable growth, especially towards the west, and in the 15th century, it was surrounded with fortifications.

In Merovingian times, a network of funeral chapels began to emerge north of the abbey church. Until the Huguenots began destroying them, those churches, which by then were parish churches, formed a vast semicircle around the cemetery. The Pierre-de-Montreuil Garden now defines the precinct of the former monastery. In the cemetery, which contains over 20,000 graves, archaeologists have identified over 40 levels of occupation dating back to the 6th century.

In 1974, large-scale urban excavation north of the cathedral, carried out under the direction of the Unité d'archéologie de la ville de Saint-Denis, placed the site in a whole new light. Thousands of objects of all kinds were discovered. They are still being studied, and the findings are being published.

The square located in front of the abbey church, called Pannetière in the Middle Ages, has always been the site of flourishing economic activity. Even today, part of the extensive Saint-Denis market, which is held three times a week, takes place there, exactly where the **foire du Lendit** was set up in the 15th century to get away from unsafe areas in the Lendit, where the Stade de France now stands.

South of the abbey church, a series of projects for the construction of monastic buildings succeeded one another, particularly from the 12th



century onwards. Over 150 monks depended on the abbey. In the 18th century, the medieval structures were completely rebuilt under the direction of Robert de Cotte, and it was in those buildings that Napoleon established, in 1802, a **Maison d'éducation de la Légion d'honneur**. Today, this institution still houses a school for 500 girls whose parents or grandparents have been made members of the Legion of Honour or the National Order of Merit.