

Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Clermont-Ferrand is

Gothic cathedral and French national monument located in the town of Clermont-Ferrand in the Auvergne, France. It is built entirely in black lava stone, which makes it highly distinctive, and visible from a great distance. Its twin spires are 315 feet tall, and tower above the town's rooftops. In the 5th century, Bishop Namatius laid the foundation of the city's first cathedral, allowing the Christian community to leave its ghetto. He dedicated the building to Saints Vitalis and Agricola, whose relics he brought from Bologna. It was ornamented in marble, with a nave, two parallel aisles, a transept and 70 columns. It was destroyed in 760 by Pepin the Short who, repenting of this act, gave a large sum to finance reconstruction work, which lasted from 764 to 768. This second structure was again destroyed, this time by the Normans, in 915. Bishop Stephen II built a third Romanesque cathedral, which was consecrated in 946. Unsurpassed, this building probably served as the model and prototype for many churches in the Auvergne. The present crypt dates back to this 10th century church, and included a 4th-century white marble sarcophagus. The main originality of the structure is the material used: the rock from Volvic, that gives the building its dark color and whose strength allows the construction of highly delicate pillars.

Jean Deschamps was entrusted with the work. He worked from 1248 to 1287 on the choir, in which Louis IX came to marry his son (the future Philip III) to Isabella of Aragon. The king financed (maybe for this occasion) part of the stained glass windows. The choir, the transept and the start of the nave were finished about 1295. The mainly blue rose window over the north door and the mainly orange one overlooking the south door were made in the fourteenth century. Between 1507 and 1512 a high roof was raised covered with lead, replacing the original roof. A planned flamboyant Gothic façade was refused by the chapter because it would cost too much. During the French Revolution, the revolutionaries wanted to tear down the church, but the Benedictine Verdier-Latour managed to persuade them that it would be an excellent gathering place for the people. Only the rood screen, choir stalls, altar, statues and furniture (with the exception of an Easter chandelier) were destroyed, though three transept towers were razed. La Bayette owed its survival only to its practical usefulness, for it gave the time. It was not until 1866 that completion works began. In 1884, the western façade with its spires and the last span of the nave were finally completed, with full respect for construction methods of the Middle Ages. Only the size of a few of the dry stones shows any difference. A little-noticed detail is that the building was completely painted with lines to imitate masonry and cut stone blocks.

