

The Tau room, a place of power

Episcopal power: over the clergy and teaching

From the Middle Ages onwards, this huge room was used to assemble the clergy answerable to the prelate. Under the Ancien Régime the Church had sole responsibility for education. In 1548, against the twin backdrop of the Renaissance and the Catholic Counter-Reformation, Cardinal Charles de Lorraine founded a university whose formal sessions were held in this room until Revolutionary times.

Feudal power: over the city and lords

Once the prelate had received the right to mint coins, rights of earldom over the city of Reims and its surrounding land were conferred upon him. The Archbishop of Reims, who was often a member of the nobility, was a great lord whose authority was not always willingly endured, as the defensive aspect of the medieval palace shows.

Royal power: over the vassals

Following feudal custom, the king exercised his "right to entertainment" from the Archbishop-Duke who was his vassal, and stayed at the palace with part of his entourage on the eve of his coronation. After the ceremony, the *festin royal** was held in the Tau room. Formally seated on a raised throne overlooking the rood screen*, the king was surrounded by the Twelve Peers of France, ecclesiastical dukes and earls who paid homage to him.

* Explanations overleaf.

Glossary

Festin royal: the royal feast at the origin of the "grand couvert" ceremony, a meal taken by the king in public.

Gable: decorative work over a window.

Rood screen: a partition separating the choir from the nave.

Sainte ampoule: or "Holy Ampulla". During the coronation ceremony, the king was anointed with the holy oil contained in the holy ampulla that, according to legend, Saint Remy miraculously received from a dove.

Tau: the letter T in the Greek alphabet; this form was also that of the first Episcopal cross. The Tau room owes its name to two buildings which until the 17th century were in the shape of this letter.

Practical information

Visit takes on average: 1 hour 30 minutes.

Guided tours.

Special tours for disabled people.



The Centre des monuments nationaux publishes a collection of guidebooks about French monuments, translated into several languages. Éditions du patrimoine publications are on sale in the bookshop-giftshop.

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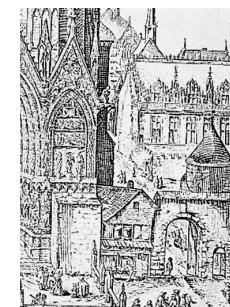
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Palais du Tau

An archiepiscopal and royal residence

Roman origins and royal coronations

There has been a palace on this site since the time of the ancient town. In the early 5th century, Bishop Nicaise settled there and had a cathedral built, dedicated to Our Lady. For several centuries, the palace was to be home to prelates. In memory of the baptism of Clovis in Rheims circa 496, it became customary in the 9th century to crown France's kings here, the last coronation being that of Charles X in 1825. The sumptuously designed Palais du Tau* gets its name from its T-shaped layout.

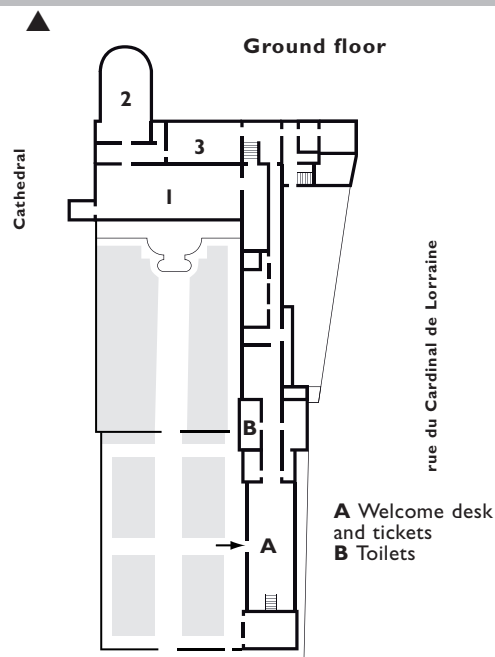


Renaissance and classicism

Following a fire in 1210, the palace was rebuilt and a chapel added. At the end of the 15th century, it was refurbished in High Gothic style, and then in the late 17th century further work gave it its present classical appearance. During the Revolution it was made the property of the Nation, but was returned to the Church in 1823. For Charles X's coronation, part of its medieval decor was restored. In 1905, it became State property and restoration work was carried out until 1972.

The cathedral and the Palais du Tau are listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites.

* Explanations overleaf.

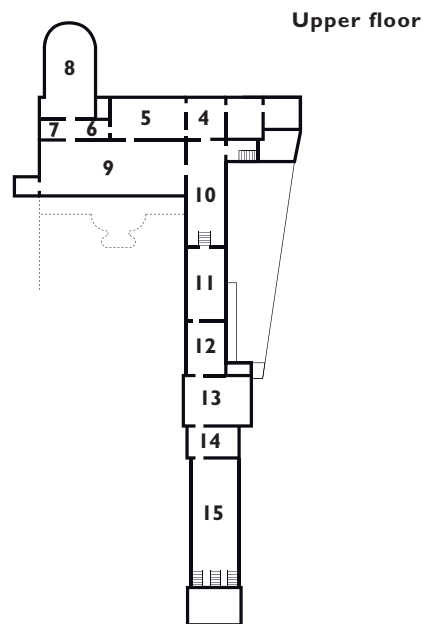


Ground floor

- 1 The lower room** was probably used as a store-room. It is divided into two naves by columns with sculpted capitals, and has cross-ribbed vaulting. Arches can still be seen in the masonry of the north wall, evidence of Carolingian construction.
- 2 The lower chapel** is reached via a door surmounted by a 14th-century tympanum depicting a Virgin with Child. Built in the early 13th century, since 1919 the chapel has housed a lapidary collection, notably including fragments from the cathedral's rood screen dating back to the 15th century.
- 3 The Deneux room** presents the restoration work carried out on the cathedral and palace between 1915 and 1938 by architect Henri Deneux.

Upper floor

- 4 The king's antechamber** depicts the coronation ceremony of the kings of France and displays the portraits of the 32 kings crowned in Rheims cathedral.
- 5 The Charles X room** is devoted to the last coronation celebrated in Rheims, that of Charles X. The cathedral's treasure, and religious objects and regalia used in the coronation are displayed in the following two rooms.
- 6 The 19th-century treasure** includes a set of neo-classical style gilded silver plate ordered for Charles X's coronation
- 7 The Ancien Régime treasure** includes an outstanding piece: the reliquary made for the *sainte ampoule**. It also includes the talisman belonging to Charlemagne (9th-century), the coronation chalice (12th-century) and the reliquary of the Resurrection



- 8 The upper chapel.** Its very light style is especially characterised by the passage hollowed out in its interior buttresses.
- 9 The Tau room** is reached by walking beneath a tympanum decorated with the Adoration of the Magi. It was used as a banquet hall after coronations. Of its mediaeval layout, all that remain are its size and the fireplace bearing the arms of Archbishop Guillaume Briçonnet who, at the end of the 15th century, had work carried out in the palace. The 15th-century wall coverings depict episodes from the life of Clovis.
- 10 The Goliath room** houses the sculptures removed when the cathedral was restored. It is dominated by a 5.4 metre high Goliath, part of a set dating back to 1260.
- 11 The Gargoyle room** displays two large statues of Abraham the patriarch, and the high priest Aaron, probably made around 1215.
- 12 The Song of Songs room** refers to the book of the Bible from which the scenes depicted on 4 large embroidered pieces (17th-century) are taken. Small sculptures show the faces of angels, bishops and executioners.
- 13 The square room** is decorated with 17th-century tapestries woven in Rheims, depicting episodes in the life of Christ.
- 14 The King of Judah room** gets its name from a statue moved here from the great gallery over the façade. These 14th-century sculptures were designed to be viewed from the ground and have amazing proportions.
- 15 The room of the Crowning of the Virgin** provides a rare example of chancel hangings. Donated to the cathedral in 1530, these hangings tell the story of the life of the Virgin Mary. The room is named after the original gable* of the cathedral's central portal, inspired by the Apocalypse (mid-13th-century).

* Explanations overleaf.