

[ancient-origins.net](https://www.ancient-origins.net)

Notre Dame Sarcophagus Opened Revealing Knight with Elongated Skull!

Ashley

6-8 minutes

Finding the remains of a high priest buried at the most

sacred spot in Paris's Notre Dame Cathedral, and all of medieval France, seems a predictable discovery.

However, unearthing a knight with an elongated skull came as something of a shock.

The foundation stone of [Notre Dame Cathedral](#) was laid by [Pope Alexander III](#) in 1163 AD, but in 2019 a fire almost entirely [destroyed](#) it. After having spent the last two years securing its foundations, work

began this year on repairing the oak spire that was unveiled on August 18, 1859. This 19th century spire reached a height of 315 feet (96 meters), which was 59 feet (18 meters) higher than the original 12th century spire, but it came crashing down in the aftermath of the 2019 blaze.

It was directly beneath the spire floor, where the transept crosses the nave, that researchers identified several

tombs containing hundreds of fragmented hands, feet, faces, and plants from stone statues. It was among these shattered relics that two well-preserved lead sarcophagi were discovered, buried at what represents the holiest site in all of [medieval France](#) .

- [Notre Dame de Paris: Survivor of 850 Years of Upheaval, Revolution, World Wars and Fire](#)
- [Intentionally Deformed Skulls](#)

[Dug Up in Odd Neolithic](#) [Iranian Cemetery](#)



The 2019 fire that engulfed the cathedral indirectly led to the discovery of these Notre Dame sarcophagi (Wandrille de

Préville / [CC BY SA 4.0](#))

Unearthing the Canon and the Knight

In April this year, Professor Christophe Besnier, the leader of the scientific team, told [The Guardian](#) that this discovery was both “extraordinary and emotional.” [Ancient Origins](#) reported in April that Dominique Garcia, the head of the National Institute of

Archaeological Research, speculated that one of the lead sarcophagi “probably belonged to a dignitary from the early 14th century.”

Now, the team of French archaeologists has confirmed that Garcia’s speculations were accurate, as they announce one coffin contains an “[elite canon of cathedral](#)” while the other hosts “a young [cavalier](#) (knight).” Dominique Garcia was quick to remind that these

human remains “are not archaeological objects,” for they were recovered from within a church, and therefore they “will be treated with respect from beginning to end.”

- [Ancient Skills Used to Raise Roof at Notre Dame Cathedral](#)
- [Skeleton with Elongated Skull Discovered in Russia](#)





Opening of the sarcophagi at the Toulouse forensic medicine laboratory. Credit: [DR UT3](#)

Buried at the Heart of the Cathedral

The fragmented statues and two lead coffins were

discovered beneath the floor of the transept crossing. The transept of a church separates the nave from the chevet (choir), belonging equally to the main nave axis and to the transept. Eric Crubézy, professor of biological anthropology at the University of Toulouse III, said the two men were “clearly important in their respective eras to have been buried in such prestigious tombs at the heart of the

cathedral”.

Described as of “remarkable scientific quality,” both burials were found during a speculative [subterranean](#) dig before the installation of the 98 foot (30 meter) high, 600-ton scaffold that is being used to replace the cathedral's fire-damaged spire. A report in [The Guardian](#) stated that one of the bodies belonged to a high priest who, after leading a sedentary life, died in 1710 AD.

The second lead coffin was dated to the 14th century and contained “a young, wealthy, and privileged noble.”

Who Were these Elites Buried at the Heart of the Cathedral?

Buried one meter deep, the holy man was found with a brass plaque confirming he was Antoine de la Porte, the canon of Notre Dame

Cathedral, who died on Christmas Eve 1710 at the age of 83. De la Porte was a clever, influential, and rich old priest who commissioned several works of art that are now in the [Louvre](#). The second coffin was found to contain the remains of a man in his thirties, and the researchers say his pelvic bones suggest he was an experienced horseman. So, he has been named “ *Le Cavalier* ” (the knight).

The knight was interred at the foot of a large cross that was once displayed on the now-destroyed rood screen that separated the chancel and nave (clergy and choir) from the congregation (poor people with diseases). Cloths and organic plant materials discovered in this burial suggest the knight was embalmed, which the archaeologists say was “a rare practice in the [Middle Ages](#).”

Moreover, the knight was buried with a crown of flowers. It is speculated that this man was of the upper echelons of the 14th century French elite. This belief stems not from his floral crown, nor the fact that he was [embalmed](#), and not even because he had the power to demand burial at the most sacred spot in Paris - but because the dead knight had a “[skull deformation](#),” better known as an elongated skull.

Headbanding for Power, All Over the World

The knight had a “deliberately deformed skull,” resulting from having had a tight cloth band tied around his head during his first three months of life, inducing the shape change. In the 1920s, Peruvian archaeologist [Julio Tello](#), the “father of Peruvian archaeology,” uncovered hundreds of elongated [Paracas](#)

civilization skulls dated to between 750 BC and 100 AD, and they have since been unearthed across the Middle East and Asia.

Elongated skulls, like the one discovered in the Notre Dame sarcophagus, were characteristic of the Paracas

Culture (Didier Descouens / [CC BY SA 4.0](#))

It is generally agreed that cranial banding and the resulting elongated skulls were symbols of power practiced among controlling families in different countries. However, long after the practice died out in Peru, it continued up to the [early 20th century](#) in the region of Deux-Sèvres in western France. Here, too, the practice was a symbol of power among

social elites, but it was also practiced among poorer families who tried to align their children with higher social classes.

Top Image: The elongated skull of a knight found in one of two lead-line sarcophagi found interred in Notre Dame Cathedral. Source: [Denis Glicksman / INRAP](#)

By Ashley Cowie