

SAINT PETER'S ABBEY

Some dates

The first texts mentioning monks living in the abbey date back to the 9th century, in the Carolingian era.

In the 11th century, there was a revival of the abbey thanks to the abbey of Cluny , the most influential abbey in the Middle Ages. Durand of Breton, a monk from Cluny , was made 1st abbot of Moissac in 1047, and later became bishop of Toulouse.

The abbey church was rebuilt and 40 years later, the cloister was completed in 1100, in a Romanesque style. Capitals were carved in limestone and columns were made of marble. The capitals are topped with pointed arches reshaped in the Gothic style at the end of the 13th century.

In the 12th century, about a hundred monks lived in the monastery. Everyday, 8 prayers, handwork, intellectual readings and writing gave rhythm to their day. A life governed by the rules of Saint Benedict. Scribes commented the holy texts such as the Bible written in latin. Most of the original writings and illuminations written in Moissac are now displayed in the National Library of France in Paris.

In the 19th century, the railways linking Bordeaux to Sète was built, running through the refectory in the north part of the abbey. Despite the destruction of this part, the cloister was classified as

France's historical and cultural heritage. In 1998, the cloister and doorway were listed in UNESCO as World Heritage, thanks to its pilgrimage routes of St Jacques of Compostela.

The cloister

The cloister of Moissac is **the oldest cloister in the world** enclosing 46 adorned capitals, commenting Bible scenes or Saints' lives and 30 are ornamented with leaves.

In the center of the west gallery, a marble pillar mentions its foundation in 1100, commissioned by abbot ANSQUITIL.

The tympanum

The doorway presenting Romanesque influences was carved after the cloister. Its tympanum depicts St John's vision of the Apocalypse. The Christ in majesty in the centre surrounded by the 4 Evangelists and the 24 Elders looking all towards him, as a symbol of unity.

In both inner sides of the porch, the Last Judgement is represented with the separation of Good and Evil .Some of the seven deadly sins were carved for Evil, and the Annunciation and Visitation of Mary or the Flight into Egypt for Good.

WEST GALLERY

I - Saint Philip

1. Abraham's sacrifice
2. Glorification of the cross
3. Acanthus leaves
4. Birds in combat
5. Daniel in the lion's den; the Good Tiding brought to the shepherds
6. Acanthus leaves
7. Monster with trunks and bows
8. Resurrection of Lazarus
9. Palms
10. Imaginary characters and animals

II - Saint Simon

11. Coronation of David by the prophet Samuel
12. Rampant plant decoration
13. Birds and wild animals
14. Acanthus leaves
15. The Beatitudes
16. Lions in combat and human faces
17. Story of Cain and Abel
18. Rampant plant décor
19. Ascension of Alexander ?
20. David and Goliath

III - Saint Bartholomew

SOUTH GALLERY

IV - Saint Matthew

21. Herod's Feast and the Beheading of St John the Baptist
22. Birds in the tree-like plants
23. The city of Babylon
24. Birds in combat
25. Nebuchadnezzar's dream
26. Martyrdom of St. Stephen
27. Acanthus leaves
28. David and the angel musicians
29. The city of Jerusalem
30. The well of abyss

31. Symbols of the Evangelists
32. Woman of Canaan and the centurion
33. Good Samaritan
34. Temptation of Christ
35. Vision of St John in Patmos
36. The Transfiguration of Christ
37. St. Peter's imprisonment and release
38. Baptism of Christ

VI St. Paul

EAST GALLERY

VII - St. Peter

39. Samson and the lion of Gabatta
40. Martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul
41. Rampant plant decor
42. Original sin
43. Acanthus leaves
44. Martyrdom of St. Lawrence ?
45. Christ washing the disciples' feet
46. Palms
47. Lazarus and the rich man
48. Gryphons fighting and grasping heads in their claws

VIII- Durand de Bredons

49. Figures seizing eagles by the neck
50. Marriage in Cana
51. Rampant plant decoration and pinecones
52. Adoration of the Magi: massacre of the holy Innocents
53. Foliage and nuzzles
54. Acanthus leaves
55. Martyrdom of St. Saturnin
56. Acanthus leaves
57. Martyrdom of St. Fructueux, St. Augure and St. Euloge

58. Annunciation an Visitation of
 Mary
IX St. James

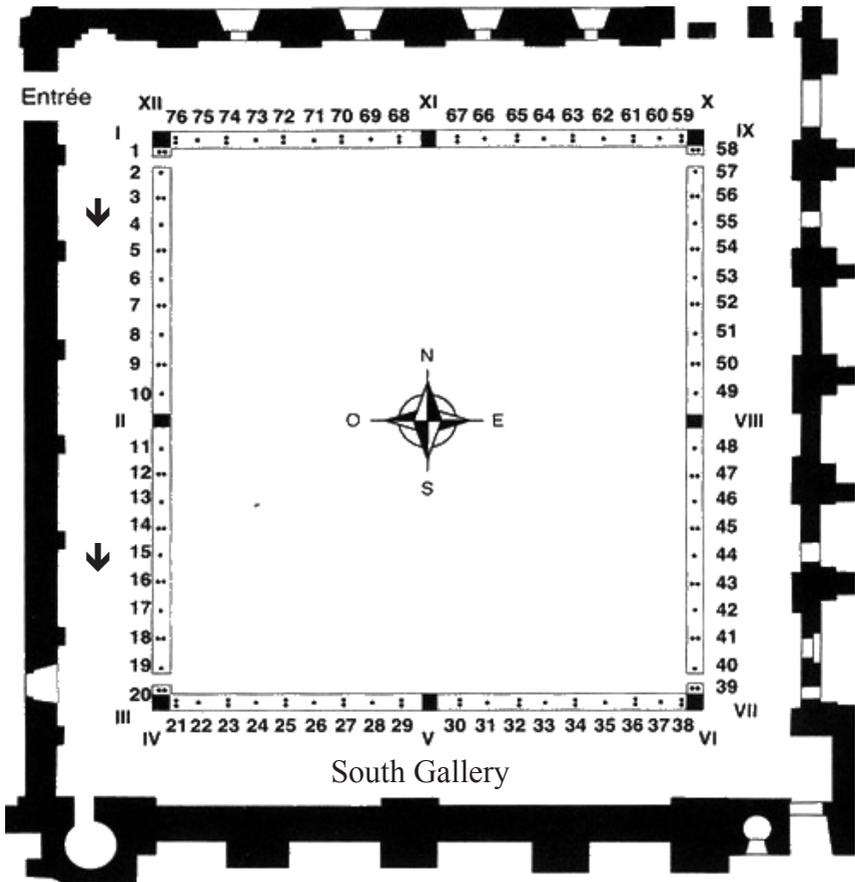
NORTH GALLERY

X - St John

- 59. Angels slaying dragons
- 60. Eagles
- 61. Rampant plant decoration
- 62. Two miracles of St. Benedict
- 63. Imaginary birds fighting
- 64. St. Peter healing a paralysed man
- 65. rampant plant decoration
- 66. Celestial Court
- 67. Miraculous catch

- 68. Daniel in the lions' den and Habbakkuk the prophet
- 69. Arrival of the Crusaders in Jerusalem ?
- 70. Rampant plant decoration
- 71. Symbols of Evangelists
- 72. Birds fighting
- 73. Three young Hebrews in the fiery furnace
- 74. Story of St. Martin
- 75. Rampant plant decoration
- 76. Jesus and the woman of Samaria

XII - St. Andrew



CAPITAL: SYMBOL OF THE EVANGELISTS (N°71)

The founding fathers of the Church gave the 4 Evangelists a symbol: St Mark is the Lion, as is mentioned in his gospel John the Baptist yelling in the desert. St Luke is the bull, as his gospel starts with Zachariah offering a bull to God as a sacrifice. St Matthew looking like an angel whose gospel describes the family tree of Jesus. And John, the eagle, a metaphor for the heights to which he rises in the first chapter of his gospel.

This capital shows the 4 Evangelists one on each side, as 4 facets of the Christ. Every side displays winged characters whose heads were hammered by vandals during the French Revolution.

On the west side is Matthew, the angel holding an opened book.

On the north side is Luke, the bull with a closed book in his hands.

On the east side, you can see Mark, the lion holding a book.

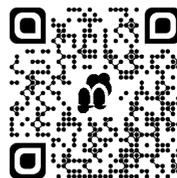
And John, the eagle is on the south side holding a closed book in his hands.

Facing this capital, is another capital referring to the 4 Evangelists in the south gallery of the cloister, representing the war of the sons of Light against the sons of Darkness. These 2 capitals were probably carved as a group of sculptures linked to the same theme.

You can find 3d models and explanations of the sculptures (in french for the moment) on www.clunypedia.com



More info (in english): tourisme.moissac.fr



Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture



Chemins de Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle en France
inscrits sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial en 1998