

The cloister's pillars

The apostles, the church's pillars, become the cloister's pillars at Moissac. An inscription written above their heads enables us to identify them. In the south-east corner, close to the door leading to the church, we can find Peter and Paul, the patron saints of Cluny's abbey.

At the center of the eastern gallery, Durand de Bredons's effigy, abbot of Moissac and bishop of Toulouse, stands in front of the capitular room's door where the important resolutions of the monastic community are taken.

Capital n°5

Daniel in the lions' den and the Annunciation to the Shepherds

This capital shows two biblical scenes, one from the Old Testament, the other from the New Testament. The northern face refers to one episode in the Book of Daniel (6, 1-29). The prophet Daniel, because he was praying to the one God despite king Darius' prohibition, is thrown in the lions' den, but he gets through unharmed.

The other sides are devoted to an episode in Luke's Gospel (2, 8-12) : the Annunciation to the Shepherds. On the southern side, an angel is holding a disc stamped with a cross, the sign of the Christ. Under the central cube, a shepherd is holding a stick with a dog wrapped around his leg, and on the right, we can find a donkey [ASI(NUS)], an ox [BOVES] and a pig.

Assembling these two sceneries makes sense. Daniel is considered to be the last prophet who announced precisely the Christ's arrival and the shepherds are the first witnesses of the incarnation's reality. Therefore the New Testament unveils the Old Testament's true meaning.

Capital n°23 The city of Babylon

Close to the capital illustrating Jerusalem (n° 29) stands the city of Babylon. Above the fortified doors [BABILONIA MAGNA] is written. Just like the Jerusalem's representation, the city is depicted as a fortified place with walls, punctuated by high towers, running all around the capital's basket. Some figures stand on the rampart walk, pointing either to the sky or to the ground, or holding objects. This opposition between the two cities, one considered full of sins, the other considered Holy, is a well-known motif of the illuminations in numerous "Beatus" (commentaries' replicas of the Book of Revelation).

Capital n°53 Foliage and Animal Heads

Most of this capital's basket is decorated with the motif of the palmette inscribed in a upside down heart shaped medallion. At the end of the scrolls, animals' heads mouths opened are spitting out stems forming palmettes, whereas at the center, other animals are letting their triangular tongues dangle. On the abacus, birds, lions and griffins are fighting each other.

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SAINT-PIERRE OF MOISSAC ABBEY



ANGLAIS

A thousand-year history

The legend, forged by the abbey's monks, mentions a foundation by king Clovis during the 6th century. However historical and archeological research can't confirm its existence before the Carolingian era, at the end of the 8th century.

In the middle of the 11th century, Moissac's affiliation to the famous Burgundian Cluny abbey was a turning-point for the life at the monastery. In 1047, Durand de Bredons was named abbot. Durand, who was also bishop of Toulouse, began the abbatial church's reconstruction.

At the beginning of the 12th century, around a hundred monks live inside the monastery.

Their main occupation was praying during the 8 services which sets the tempo of their daytime. As stated in the Rule of Saint Benedict, they also need to perform some manual work. Therefore the monastic scribes copy religious texts : the Bible, extracts and commentaries from the Church Fathers and Doctors, and seculars texts as well. Around 120 manuscripts are preserved at the french National Library, after they were bought in 1678 by Colbert, Louis XIV's minister.

The abbatial church's large doorway was sculpted shortly afterwards the cloister. The tympanum's iconography takes its inspiration from one of the visions from Saint John's Book of Revelation and features the moment of the Christ's glorious return to Earth. The church was rebuilt several times. The lower stone parts date back from the 12th century, the gothic extra height in bricks is from the 15th.

In 1626 the monastery was secularized : the benedictine monks became canons, seculars priests who no longer live inside the abbey. The religious life at Saint-Pierre of Moissac comes to an end during the french Revolution. In 1790, the buildings are sold as "biens nationaux" (national property).

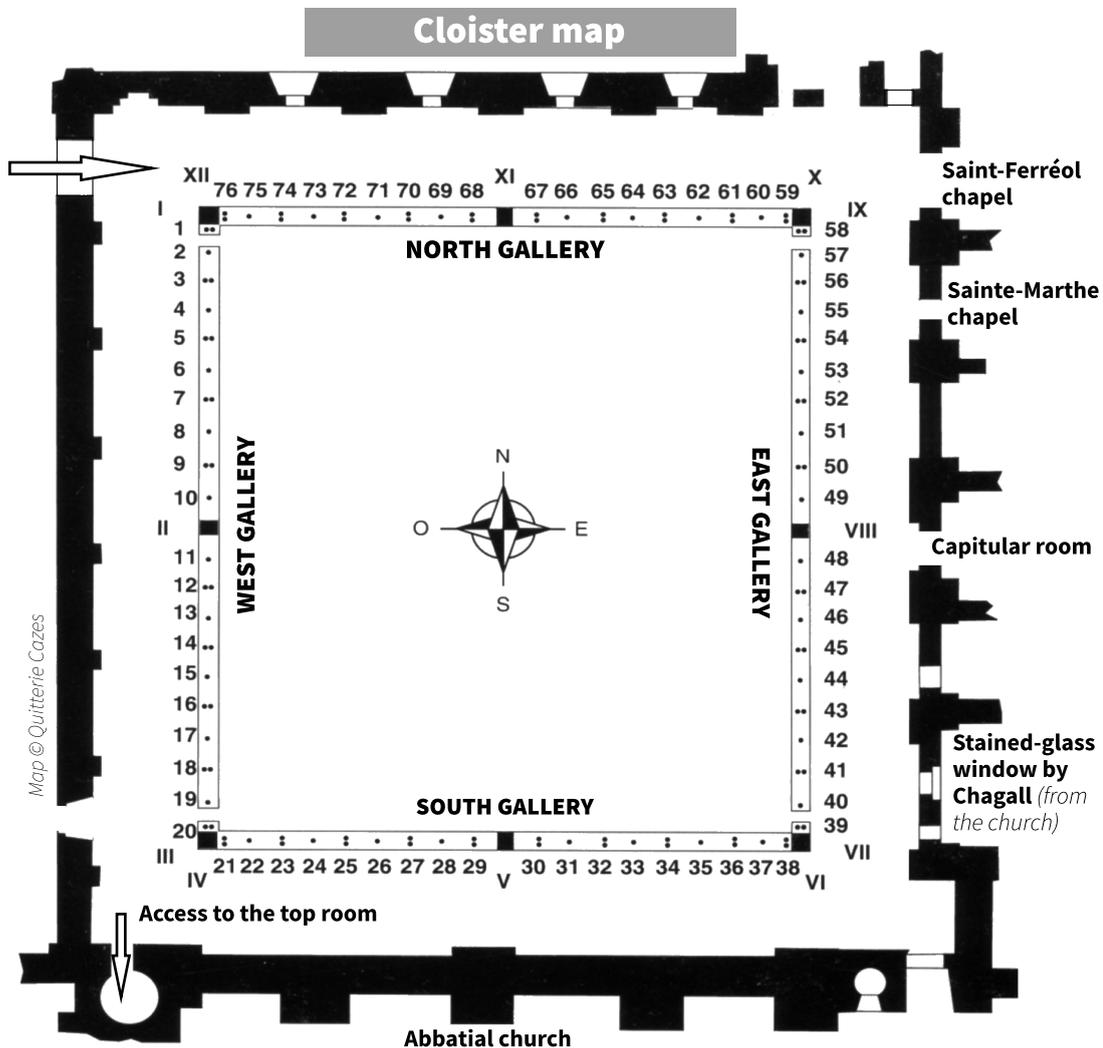
A surge of interest manifests itself during the 19th century, leading to the inscription of the cloister and the church on the first Monument Historique's list. However, over the same period, the Bordeaux-Sète railway's construction leads to the destruction of the medieval refectory.

In 1998, the Pilgrimages Routes to Santiago de Compostela, which includes Moissac as a stopover, are recorded on the UNESCO World Heritage list.



The cloister

Among the 76 capitals decorating the cloister, more than half of them are called "historiated", because their decoration comment on episodes of the Bible or the saints' lives. The rest of them, called "decoratives", mentions the Creation. In the western gallery, the central pillar's marble slab specifies that the roman cloister was completed in 1100. The meaning of the four last lines' letters still remains a mystery.



Map © Qutterie Cozes

West Gallery

PILLAR I - Saint Philip

1. Abraham's Sacrifice
2. Glorification of the Cross
3. Acanthus leaves
4. Birds facing each other
5. Daniel in the lions' den and the Annunciation to the Sheperds
6. Acanthus leaves
7. Monstruous figures
8. Raising of Lazarus
9. Palm leaves
10. Fantastic figures

PILLAR II - Saint Simon and Ansquitil slab

11. Coronation of David by prophet Samuel
12. Plant decoration
13. Birds and wild beasts
14. Acanthus leaves
15. The Beatitudes
16. Lions facing each other and human figures
17. Story of Cain and Abel
18. Covering plant decoration
19. Ascension of Alexander
20. David and Goliath

PILLAR III - Saint Bartholomew

South Gallery

PILLAR IV - Saint Matthew

21. Feast of Herod and Beheading of Saint John the Baptist
22. Birds in arborescent plants
23. The City of Babylon
24. Birds facing each other
25. The Dream of Nebuchadnezzar
26. Martyrdom of Saint Stephen
27. Acanthus leaves
28. David and his musicians
29. The City of Jerusalem

PILLAR V - Red marble

30. Bottomless pit
31. Symbols of the Evangelists
32. The Canaanite Woman and the Centurion
33. The Good Samaritan
34. The Temptation of Christ
35. Vision of Saint John on Patmos
36. The Transfiguration
37. The Imprisonment and Deliverance of St Peter
38. Baptism of Christ

PILLAR VI - Saint Paul

East Gallery

PILLAR VII - Saint Peter

39. Samson and the Lion
40. Martyrdoms of Saint Peter and Saint Paul
41. Plant decoration
42. Original sin
43. Acanthus leaves
44. Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence
45. Washing of the Feet
46. Palm leaves
47. Lazarus and The Bad Rich Man
48. Dragons gripping heads

PILLAR VIII - Durand de Bredons

49. Figures grabbing eagles by the neck
50. The Wedding at Cana
51. Plant decoration with pine cones
52. Adoration of the Magi and massacre of the Innocents

53. Foliage and animal heads
54. Acanthus leaves
55. Martyrdom of Saint Saturnin
56. Acanthus leaves
57. Martyrdom of Saint Fructuosus, Saint Augurius and Saint Eulogius
58. The Annunciation and Visitation

PILLAR IX - Saint James

North Gallery

PILLAR X - Saint John

59. Angels slaying dragons, Saint John
60. Eagles
61. Plant decoration
62. Two Miracles of Saint Benedict
63. Confronted fantastic birds
64. Curing of the Paralytic by Saint Peter
65. Plant decoration
66. The Heavenly Court
67. The Miraculous catch of fish

PILLAR XI - Pillar with decoration of waves

68. Daniel in the Lions' den and prophet Habakuk
69. Arrival of the Crusaders in Jerusalem ?
70. Plant decoration

PILLAR XII - Saint Andrew

71. Symbols of the Evangelists
72. Confronted birds
73. Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace
74. Story of Saint Martin
75. Covering plant decoration
76. Jesus and the Samaritan Woman



Cloister capitals © Dominique Viet