



Glossary

Astragal: round moulding between the column shaft and the base of the capital.

Chapter: weekly assembly of canons to discuss their affairs.

Clergeon: young clergyman or choirboy from the cathedral school who sang the offices.

Cross-springer: projecting transverse arch doubling the barrel of a vault on the inside.

Mashrabiya: in Arabic architecture, a grid placed in front of a window through which one can see but not be seen.

Olifant: horn made from elephant tusks.

Pilgrim's staff: long walking stick.

Secular: one who lives in the non-religious world, not subjected to religious community life.

Practical information

Average length of visit: 1 hour

Guided tours in French

Information available from reception

Tours suitable for disabled visitors.



Bookshop-Giftshop

The guide to this monument is available in the 'Cathédrales de France' collection in the bookshop-giftshop.

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Our Lady of Le Puy

On the route to Santiago de Compostela

In the 11th century, the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela developed following the recapture of Spanish territories from the Muslims. The pilgrims, who could be identified by their pilgrim's staff* and the shell they wore, performed acts of devotion or penitence and stopped to worship other saints encountered on the way to Santiago.

The Le Puy route or *via podiensis*

Four main routes led Christians from all over Europe to Spain. One of them started at Le Puy since the time when Godescalc, bishop of the town and one of the first pilgrims in 951, promoted the walk to Santiago de Compostela. Hubs of cultural, artistic and intellectual exchange, the "ways of Saint James", were proclaimed the "first European cultural itinerary" by the Council of Europe in 1987 and then declared World Human Heritage by Unesco.

A centre of worship

Bishop Godescalc, it is said, also promoted the devotion to Our Lady, worshipped in the form of a black Madonna with Child. The statue that can be seen in the cathedral today is an evocation of the old version, which was burned during the Revolution. Much evidence attests to its importance as an object of worship, such as the ex-votos presented in the treasury.

* Explanations overleaf.



The cathedral's treasures: gold and embroidery

A collection of rare quality

In 2010, the State acquired a set assembled by two passionate collectors, Josiane and Daniel Fruman, featuring 185 embroidered textiles, 75 of which can be seen in the hall of the states of Velay. It offers a vast overview of the embroidery of liturgical ornaments and votive offerings produced in Europe from the 15th to the 19th centuries.

Role of the cathedral treasury

The cathedral treasury brings together all of the objects required for practising religion: gold and silver objects, liturgical books and precious fabrics that lent magnificence to ceremonies (altar ornaments and officiators' garments). It also includes reliquaries and some rare pieces that fill the faithful with wonder, such as the olifant*. As the name suggests, a treasury is precious but it is above all made up of objects with specific functions, carefully used and preserved over the centuries.

Dialogue between two collections

The historic garments of Our Lady of Le Puy belong to the cathedral's treasury, and form one of the links with the embroidered collection. The exhibition evokes both the diversity of objects that once composed religious treasuries and the wealth of artistic items used to serve the beauty of religious worship.

* Explanations overleaf.



English

Le Puy Cathedral Cloister

The canons' inner courtyard

Starting point for Santiago de Compostela

The cathedral is perched on top of a huge basalt rock on the slopes of which the town of Le Puy was built. This rock, known as "Mount Anis", has been inhabited since Gallo-Roman times. It became a place to worship the Virgin Mary in the 4th century and the seat of the bishop in the 7th century. In the late 10th century, the town reached the height of its renown with the veneration of a statue of the Virgin: Our Lady of Le Puy. Pilgrims coming from countries bordering France gathered there to continue their journey to Santiago de Compostela.



The town of Le Puy in the 17th century, engraving.

A cloister for canons

In the 11th and 12th centuries, the church was extended so as to accommodate the ever increasing numbers of pilgrims. An adjoining cloister was then built. It was reserved for the cathedral's secular* canons, who met there and constituted the bishop's council. Between the 14th and 18th centuries, the cloister underwent various restoration works. From 1842 to 1853, the architect Mallay carried out major works to dismantle, reconstruct and restore the Roman decoration, continued by Mimey until the early 20th century in keeping with the original spirit of the architecture.

* Explanations overleaf.



Architecture and decoration

The cloister rests against the last three bays of the northern side of the cathedral nave. Its construction probably began in the mid-11th century. It is rectangular in shape. Its galleries include five arcades on the north and south sides, nine on the west and ten on the east. Robust columns supporting the galleries' groin vaults lend the cloister a solid quality. They support, on the garden side, double scrolled arcades with alternating white sandstone and dark volcanic rock keystones, topped by a multicoloured terracotta mosaic. This alternating colour scheme can also be seen in other contemporary churches, such as La Madeleine de Vézelay in Burgundy or Saint-Austremoine in Issoire, Auvergne, and reveals the inventiveness of Roman builders in their use of local materials, according to the polychrome style common in the 12th century.

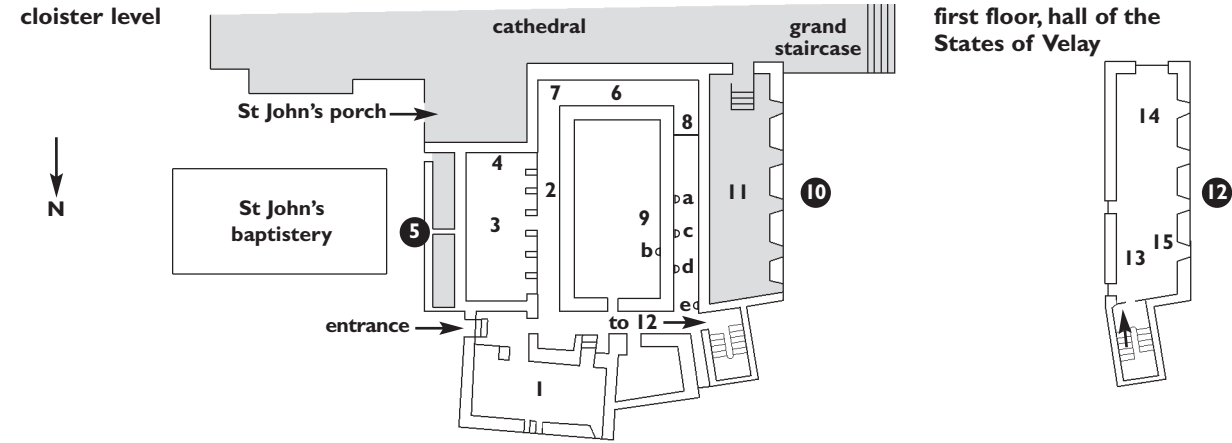
1 The reception room is the former guard room.

The cloister galleries

The cloister or indoor courtyard supplied the buildings reserved for secular* canons serving the cathedral offices. They gathered here during chapters*. Most of them lived outside the cathedral close, in private town mansions. The capitals located inside the galleries are all originals and offer an insight into changing styles in the 12th century. Most of the capitals on the garden side were restored in the 19th century.

2 East gallery: the capitals have stylistic unity in their Corinthian-inspired shape, the presence of animal or human heads and ribbed interlacing patterns.

3 The chapter* house has pointed barrel arch vaulting on cross-springers*. It communicates with the cloister through a gate with a sawtooth



arch resting on curved pilasters. This room, also known as the "chapel of the dead", then served as a burial chamber for canons from 1339 to the French Revolution. Their tombstones are fixed against the walls. The coats of arms serve as a reminder that many canons were from the nobility.

4 A Crucifixion, painted around 1200 on the south wall, was still inspired by the Byzantine model in its treatment of characters and their attributes. The golden palm, for example, evokes the depictions of Christ in majesty in Byzantine mosaics.

5 The upper part of **the clergeons'* house** is not open to visitors. This two-storey residence offered high-quality living quarters. It has retained a rare fireplace from Roman times with a cylindrical chimney stack topped with "a mitre in the form of a lantern covered by a cone", as described by Viollet-le Duc.

6 The south gallery dates from the 11th century and was modified during 19th-century restoration works. The capitals placed in the south-east angle bear traces of polychrome patterns, a reminder that the cloister was painted in the Middle Ages. The ribbed column shafts were inspired by the ancient Doric order.

7 Three capitals attest to construction prior to the year 1000 or the reuse of Carolingian elements. Imposing in size, they are Corinthian in style with acanthus leaves and are without astragals*. In the corners of one of them are doves sitting on baskets decorated with red ochre-tinted interlacing. The copies made during the 19th century can be identified by their whiteness and perfect symmetry.

8 The wrought iron gate closes off the entrance to the west gallery. Composed of winding patterns reminiscent of mashrabiya*, it is one of the oldest examples of ironwork in France, dating from the late 12th or early 13th century.

9 Among the capitals dating from the 12th century, the following can be distinguished: the depiction of an angel playing an olifant* (**a**), centaurs on the garden side (**b**), an angel flanked by two demons (**c**), an abbot and an abbess fighting over a crozier (**d**) and lions (**e**).

10 The machicolation building

Dominating the west gallery, this imposing building is associated with the temporal power of the Episcopal clergy, which exercised seigniorial rights over Le Velay. An essential part of the

defence system, it protected the bishop and canons from the hazards of the time: seigniorial armed robberies and town rebellions. The building features five levels, two of which are below cloister level.

11 The former library, located on the third level – at cloister level – is nowadays the chapel of relics. It can be accessed through the cathedral.

The Treasury of Religious Art

12 The hall of the States of Velay, on the fourth floor of the machicolation buildings, is the bishop's and canons' former seigniorial hall. The lords of Velay, vassals of the bishop of Le Puy, gathered here. The treasury, composed of gold and silver liturgical objects, paintings and sculptures, was extended in 2011 with a collection of embroidered art, featuring devotional paintings and numerous fabrics and liturgical garments.

13 The Virgin and Child, "*Sedes sapientiae*" is the oldest piece of embroidery in the collection, dating from the 15th century.

14 The cloak decorated with a Jesse tree, from the 16th century, was used to dress the statue of Our Lady of Le Puy which was once venerated in the cathedral.

15 The Holy Nail, reputedly one of the nails used during the Crucifixion of Christ and transformed into a bit for Emperor Constantine's horse, has belonged to the Le Puy treasury since the 19th century, and was found in an abbey in the surrounding area.

* Explanations overleaf.