

CLOISTER



ELNE

A SHORT HISTORY

In antiquity Elne was known under its Iberian name of « Illiberis », which means « Nex Town ». During the pre-Romanesque period it was a prestigious city with a leading role in religious life.

In the 4th century the town took the name CASTRUM HELENÆ, perhaps in honour of Hélène (Saint Hélène), the mother of Constantine the Great and Grandmother of the Emperor Constantine assassinated in 350.

By the 5th century the Roman Empire was disintegrating, the result of numerous attacks by Germanic tribes (Alains, Sueves, Vandals). From 413 the region was under Visigoth domination. The city became the Bishop's see around 568. After the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula the Arabs crossed the Pyrenees and occupied the Roussillon in 719 and remained until 770.

The cathedral was consecrated in 1069. In 1150 the inhabitants received permission to fortify the town, which was besieged, taken, or surrendered four times in its history: by Philip the Hardy in 1285, by Pierre IV of Aragon in 1344, by Louis XI in 1474 and by the troops of Louis XIII in 1641.

From the 14th century its economic activity declined in favour of Perpignan. On the 30th June 1602 the Episcopal See was transferred from Elne to Perpignan, along with the relics of Saint Eulalie and Saint Julie, the patron saints of the city.

In 1659 the town, along with the rest of the Roussillon passed definitively to the French, as a result of the Treaty of the Pyrennes. Louis XIV ordered the destruction of the ramparts in 1680.

At the beginning of the 20th century the sculptor Aristide Maillol created the war memorial in Elne, La Pomone. The Elne artist, Etienne Terrus, received Matisse and his friends Derain, Camoin, Marquet and Manguin, which later led to the birth of the Fauvism.

THE CATHEDRAL (11th century)

The Cathedral has a basilica plan i.e three naves: the principal nave and the two side naves without transept end in an apse and two absidoles with « cul de four » vaults. The Chancel on two levels had a crypt, which was filled in when the Baldachin was installed in 1742. Only the absidole remains on the exterior. A 13th century round arch, strengthened by two arch bands, replaced the original wooden covering. We can see where the beams were placed on the arch above the organ. A doubling up of the pillars was necessary.

The South aisle has been transformed by the addition of chapels at various times (end 13th – 15th century). Here the evolution of the Gothic arch is very visible. Some of the capitals date from the 11th century. In the garden, near the absidoles, we can see the base of a Gothic chevet, unfinished due to lack of money.

THE CLOISTER Visit from East to West

The Elne Cloister is one of the rare great Romanesque Cloisters. Its construction began at the end of the Romanesque period and continued throughout the Gothic. It has a diverse collection of sculptures, but remains an essentially Romanesque work. Built in Céret blue veined marble, it forms an irregular quadrangle, with its back against the North wall of the Cathedral. It leads to the **Chapter Room*** and the Chapel of Saint Laurent, now the History Museum and the Archaeology Museum.

THE SOUTH GALLERY late 12th century

The sculptures in this gallery are some of the last Romanesque works from the Roussillon workshops. They are characterised by their almost exclusively symbolic themes: plants (small palms, acanthus), and animals (lions, **griffos***, ibex, mermaids). There are, however some narrative scenes. The work is detailed and precise, the effect is dry and restrained, the volumes harmonious.

- 1 Scene from Quo Vadis, drawn from the life of Saint Peter. The Apostle is kneeling before Christ; on the longest side, Saint Paul on the road to Damascus among his companions; he falls, blinded, and then the hand of God appears from the clouds.
- 2 The Creation of Man: God modelled Adam in clay, then made Eve from his rib, the original sin.
- 3 Two medallions bearing a confronting lion and griffon, and two challenging peacocks.

The **cross tibbed vault*** replaced the earlier roof. On the springer of the vault the low relief sculpture shows the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus. All along the gallery there are tombstones and **epitaphs*** to bishops and canons.

The gothic portal to the Cathedral is in white and red marble, with traditional Romanesque ironwork on the door.

THE WEST GALLERY Early 13th century

The pillars and capitals were inspired by those in the South gallery. Some have a plant theme, which is Gothic in style. On the internal wall some tombstones; the ceiling is a crossed tibbed vault, the arches resting on « **cul de lampes** »* (13th century).

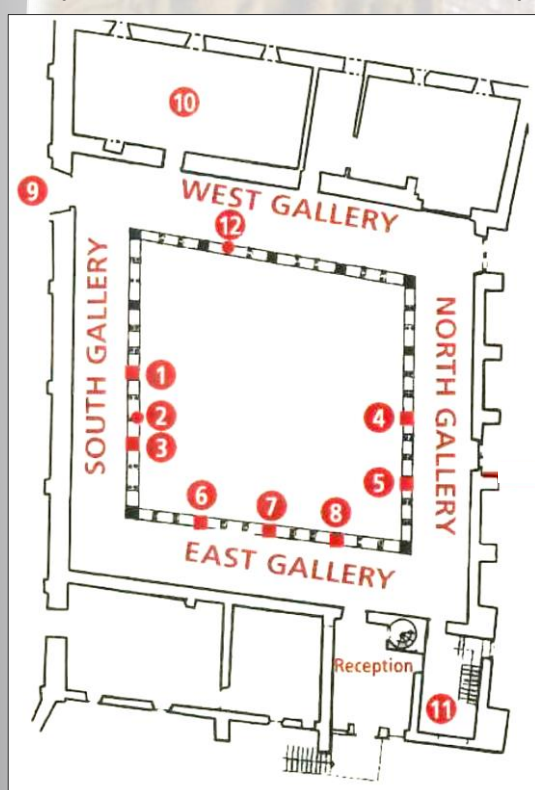
THE NORTH GALLERY Mid-13th century

The capitals are still of typical Romanesque inspiration; others are more modern with a predominantly plant decoration them.

- 4 The Martyr Saint Eulalie, patronsaint of the Cathedral. The young Christian noblewoman from Mérida was persecuted and suffered the same as Christ for refusing to renounce her faith.
- 5 « The Horsemen before the King », this enigmatic scene (the three Kings before Herod?), is repeated three times in this gallery.

THE EAST GALLERY Early 14th century

Built around 1315 – 1325 the gallery follows on from the Romanesque architecture of the Cloister with a perfect mastery of Gothic architecture and techniques. An important place is given to narrative compositions.



- 6 Scenes from the Life of Christ: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Birth of Christ, the Annunciation to the shepherds, the Three Kings and Herod.
- 7 The Three Kings: the King following the star, the Adoration of the Magi, the Magi's Dream, the Massacre of the Innocents.
- 8 Christ's Childhood: the Flight into Egypt, the Circumcision, Jesus in the Temple with the Doctors of the Church, the Dormition of the Virgin, Christ Resurrected meeting Mary Madeleine.

At the internal angles of each gallery we see the four Evangelists and their symbols: Luke and the Bull, Matthew and the Angel, Mark and the Lion, John and the Eagle.

KEY

SOUTH GALLERY

- 1 Quo Vadis (2nd pillar)
- 2 Genesis
- 3 Lion, griffon, peacocks (3rd pillar)

WEST GALLERY

- 12 Genesis

NORTH GALLERY

- 4 Martyr Saint Eulalie (1st pillar)
- 5 The Horsemen Scene (3rd pillar)

EAST GALLERY

- 6 The Nativity (1st pillar)
- 7 The Three Kings (2nd pillar)
- 8 The Flight from Egypt (3rd pillar)
- 9 Cathedral entrance/ 14th century Gothic Portal
- 10 History Museum
- 11 Archaeology Museum

LEXICON

CHAPTER ROOM: the room where monks meeting took place.

GRIFFON: a mythical animal from antiquity, with a lion's body and the head and wings of an eagle.

CROSS TIBBED VAULT: the main construction of a Gothic arch: two arches crossing, which shape and support the vault.

CORBEL: a protruding stone or structure, designed to support something: a beam, a cornice...

CUL DE LAMPE: a protruding stone in an inversed pyramid form, which supports the bottom of an arch supporting the vault.

EPITAPH: a commemorative inscription on a tombstone.



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