

## Illuminated manuscripts

### A tradition in Tours

In the Middle Ages each of the three major religious establishments in Tours had a copyists' workshop. The oldest was at Marmoutier abbey, created in the late 4th century. The scriptoria at the Saint Martin basilica and the Cathedral emerged later and developed in Carolingian times, when manuscripts from the Tours region started to become famous. Workshops in the town started to specialise in illumination from the middle of the 15th century. Many talented scribes were drawn by the presence of the kings in residence at the châteaux of Amboise, Blois and Chambord, and their court residing at Tours.

### An elegant and moderate style

It is thought that Jean Fouquet (born around 1420 in Tours) was the first to produce manuscripts inspired by the Italian and Flemish schools with bright colours and detailed landscapes and perspectives. The miniatures of the Tours school were highly prized up until the beginning of the 16th century.

## Glossary

**Cathedral choir school:** in Renaissance times, these were prestigious institutions where children received advanced musical and religious instruction, before going on to hold important Church positions.

**Chapter:** assembly of canons.

**Chapter house:** the place where canons met to listen to a reading of a chapter of their rules.

**Chevet:** a radiating chapel outside the choir aisle, more complicated than an apse.

**Entablature:** the upper part of an architectural decoration.

**Pilaster:** flat, vertical decoration resembling a column and fulfilling a similar function.

**Precentor:** cathedral choir master.

**Scriptorium:** a workshop where monks copied manuscripts.

## Practical information

Average length of visit: 30 minutes  
Guided tours in French.

Centre des monuments nationaux  
Cloître de la Psalette  
Cathédrale de Tours  
37000 Tours  
tél. 02 47 47 05 19  
fax 02 47 47 05 19

[www.monuments-nationaux.fr](http://www.monuments-nationaux.fr)

# La Psalette cloisters

Where the Gothic meets the Renaissance

## The canons' place of work

From the High Middle Ages onwards, these cloisters were the place of work for the canons of the Saint Gatien Cathedral in Tours. The current buildings were built from the 15th century onwards thanks



*The cloisters, 19th-century drawing*

to the patronage of Bishop Jean de Bernard, and were completed in the 16th century. The La Psalette cloisters owe their name to the psalms that were sung in the adjacent cathedral choir school\*.

## A humanist library

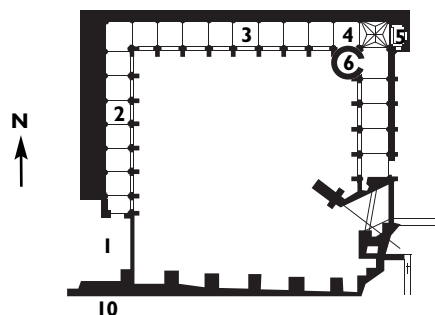
At the end of the medieval period, the chapter\* was a hive of cultural activity thanks to its scriptorium\* and library, one of the richest in France. It was modified and extended in the 16th century by Canon Raoul Le Segaler who wished to create a large humanist library along the lines of the one at Sélestat, in Alsace. The chapter\* was dissolved during the Revolution in 1793, and the library dispersed in 1802, when a road was pierced through the chapter house\*.

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\* Explanations overleaf.



### Ground floor



The La Psalette cloisters illustrate the gradual transition from the Gothic to the Renaissance style, as can be seen from the doors, staircase and facades.

### The ground floor

- 1 The breach** in the cloisters' enclosure shows where the chapter house\* once stood. When it was demolished, remains of the Gallo-Roman enclosure were unearthed, against which the first cathedral was built in the 4th century.
- 2 The oldest gallery** in the cloister, built around 1442, is decorated with a medieval floral design and its facade still has a medieval aspect with regular, slender buttresses.
- 3 In the north gallery**, the ground-floor buttresses are prolonged by pilasters\* on the first floor, indicating the emergence of Renaissance features in the period 1508-1524. Beneath the gallery, however, the ribbed vaulting is in the Flamboyant Gothic style. The two doors, one leading to the cathedral choir school\*, the other to the dwelling of the precentor\*, are also representative of the first Renaissance.

**4 The last bay** has multiple-ribbed vaulting, characteristic of the late Middle Ages. A recently discovered 17th-century wall painting shows the Massacre of the Holy Innocents and the flight to Egypt.

**5 The little chapel**, where the two galleries meet, has a coffered ceiling dating from the first Renaissance with many surviving polychrome traces.

**6 The door to the staircase** is adorned with sculpted decoration, with a double entablature\* and pilasters\* decorated with candelabra. The staircase, thought to be by Bastien François, seems to be a small-scale replica of the one François I had built for Blois chateau around 1520. The medieval-style spiral staircase changes as it goes up. It has wide bays, the central part of the spiral acts as the handrail, there is a coffered ceiling at the top of the staircase, and it is decorated with pilasters\*, foliage, and acanthus leaf capitals borrowed from the Classical repertoire used outside.

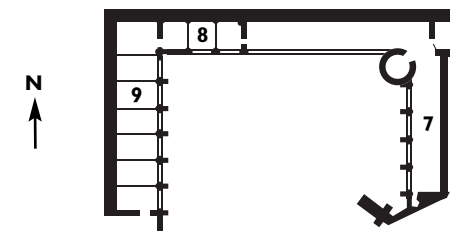
### The first floor

**7 From the terrace** you may see four centuries of architecture. First there is the cathedral, with a 13th-century chevet\* and towers which were completed around 1547. The rose window in the transept dates from the 14th century.

**8 The scriptorium\***, where the copyists worked, is lit by two south-facing windows and it is the only room to have a fireplace. It is in the Renaissance style.

**9 The library** which was used to keep the chapter's\* books has eight bays with richly sculpted keystones.

### First floor



The keystone in the last bay bears the arms of Raoul Le Segaler. The upper part of the windows has stained glass by Max Ingrand, fitted in 1960. Facsimiles of a selection of manuscripts give an idea of the rich collection held by Tours Municipal Library and give a feeling of the original use of this room. In the 16th century this room communicated with the north tower via a passage that only the canons were allowed to use.

- 10 In the cathedral**, be sure not to miss the 13th-century stained glass in the apse chapels and, at the corner of the south transept, the tomb of the children of Charles VIII. It was sculpted around 1500 by an Italian artist, Girolamo da Fiesole, who was a key influence on sculptors of the time from the Tours region.