

## Illuminated manuscripts

### A tradition in Tours

Illuminated manuscripts are richly decorated hand-written books. The art of illumination endured over almost eleven centuries, from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century up to the 1550s. 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 4<sup>th</sup> century. The *scriptoria* at the Saint Martin basilica and the Cathedral, which emerged later, began to develop during Carolingian times, when the fame of the manuscripts from the Tours region was beginning to spread.

During the Gothic period, from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, commercial production was set up in urban workshops and gradually took root in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries thanks to a wealthy clientèle (the nobility, rich traders, etc.) who ordered books of hours in large numbers. At the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, the city of Tours was both the political capital of the Kingdom of France and the capital of the luxury industry. At the time, in the wake of Jean Fouquet (a Tours-born painter, circa 1420-1480), the city was home to numerous illuminators whose art was influenced by Italy and Flanders. An elegant and tempered style emerged, known as the 'École de la Loire', which dominated French production up until the 1520s.

## Glossary

**Candelabra:** a moulding that often decorates pilasters\*.

**Chapter:** assembly of canons.

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

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

**Liberal arts:** disciplines passed down from Antiquity and taught in medieval schools. They were taught in two groups: Trivium, composed of grammar, dialectic (logic) and rhetoric, and Quadrivium, composed of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music.

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

**Pinnacle:** ornament forming the cap or crown of a buttress or turret.

**Precentor:** cathedral choir master.

**Psalette:** choir school attached to a church where, in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, young boys would receive a high-level musical and religious education.

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

## Practical information

Average length of visit: 30 minutes

Guided tours in French.

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# La Psalette cloisters

## Where 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 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards thanks

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



*The cloisters,  
19<sup>th</sup>-century  
drawing*

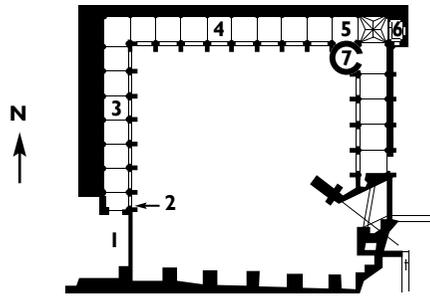
### A humanist library

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 16<sup>th</sup> 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\*.

\* 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 4<sup>th</sup> century.
- 2 At the entrance to the west gallery**, the sculpted decor indicated the function of the space: figures perched around a pinnacle\* singing or playing musical instruments, including a portable organ, a harp, a vielle and a lute. Below, the pedestal is decorated with verses from psalms: "*Laudate pueri Dominum, Psallite nomini ejus, quoniam suave*" ("praise the Lord, for the Lord is good. Sing psalms to his name, for it is sweet").
- 3 The oldest gallery** in the cloister, built around 1442, is medieval in its floral design and its facade with slender buttresses. It houses part of the stone store of Saint-Gatien Cathedral, remnants from the cathedral restorations in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**4 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 Psalette\*, the other to the dwelling of the precentor\*, are also representative of the Early Renaissance.

**5 On the wall of the last bay** the remnants of a 17<sup>th</sup> century mural depict the Massacre of the Innocents and the Flight into Egypt.

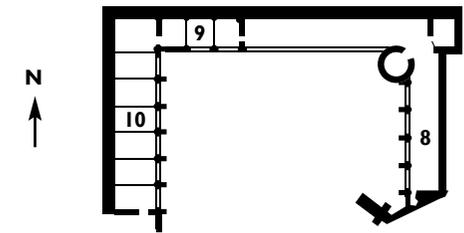
**6 The little chapel**, at the corner of the two galleries, is covered by a polychrome coffered ceiling dating from the Early Renaissance decorated with roses. Above the alter, the window is adorned with stained-glass by Max Ingrand (1908-1969), one of the most renowned French master glassmakers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Dating from 1948, the panes depict the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

**7 A semi-detached spiral staircase** tower stands at the corner of the north and east galleries. It features large windows, while the newel draws the eye to the top of the spiral covered by a coffered ceiling. It is accessed via a door in the west gallery, surrounded by two pilasters\* decorated with candelabras\* and topped with a double entablature\*.

## The first floor

**8 From the terrace** you can admire four centuries of architecture: from the apse of the cathedral built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the towers built around 1547, as well as the rose window of the transept dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

## First floor



**9 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.

**10 The library** was used to house the chapter's\* books, some of which are now kept in the Tours municipal library. It is composed of seven vaulted bays decorated with richly sculpted keystones. The keystone in the last bay bears the arms of Raoul Le Segaler. The windows are decorated with contemporary stained-glass by Max Ingrand dating from the 1960s which create a restyled and modernised take on the theme of Liberal Arts\*. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this room communicated with the north tower of the Cathedral via a passage that only the canons were allowed to use.