



MEDIEVAL ABBEY AND CITY OF
LAGRASSE

T O U R G U I D E



LAGRASSE ABBEY

➕ DOWNLOAD FREE APPS



Cathar Country - the guide



Castrum - the game

Abbaye
médiévale
de
Lagrasse

Centre
culturel
Les arts
de lire

www.abbayedelagrasse.fr

Facebook icon Abbaye médiévale de Lagrasse, centre culturel Les arts de lire

Instagram icon @abbayedelagrasse.lesartsdelire

Facebook icon YouTube icon Instagram icon audetourisme

payscathare.org



Plan: ©H.Nodet/CAML - Graphic adaptation: Le Passe Muraille

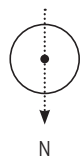
STABLES
LOF



Map key

- Private area
- Upper stonework
- Lower stonework
- Roof stonework (beams, rib vaults etc.)
- Ground floor
- Upstairs (number in a circle)
- 15th - 16th centuries
- 11th - 14th centuries
- 5th - 10th centuries
- Station for the Cathar Country app
- Station for the Castrum app
- Literary bistro
- Les arts de lire bookshop

0 25 m



THE PALACE 1



WELCOME TO THE LORD ABBOT'S DWELLING.

From the reception area, you arrive not in a cloister, but a palace courtyard. These are the abbot's private quarters. The Abbot of Lagrasse is a powerful lord and many of the monks are wealthy, come from noble families and have their own servants. Lagrasse is the most powerful abbey of medieval Languedoc and a major business which receives donations, helps the village to develop and manages its assets from Catalonia to Albigeois. It is a place for prayer, but also a hive of everyday activity.

Living Quarters and Opulence 2



The palace rooms are accessible from the courtyard via galleries which also link it with the service and reception areas, like the entrance hall at the far end of the first gallery. The lavishly decorated hall near the stables is probably where Abbot Auger received prestigious guests. The door and ceiling are decorated with Abbot Auger's coat of arms... There are 144 on this

ceiling alone! The coat of arms can also be seen just about everywhere in the abbey, especially the chapel on the 1st floor.

+ Comprehension

Many of the objects in the palace courtyard come from other parts of the abbey. Some of the column heads are from the Romanesque era, although the palace was built later, in Gothic times. Before it achieved heritage status, the abbey was a living space which evolved through the centuries to comply with the needs and methods of each era. It stands out for being split into two sections: the one you're standing in has belonged to the Département since 2004 ; the other welcomes the Clerics Regular of the Mother of God. It was divided during the French Revolution when the abbey was sold in two lots.

LAGRASSE ABBEY: 13 CENTURIES OF HISTORY VIDEO

Next to the the lower vestibule, you will see the lower chapel, where you can watch a film about the abbey's history. You're in for a sight for sore eyes...

The film is also available to view on the audeTV channel on YouTube.

COMMUNAL SITES

COMFORT AND OPULENCE

The Larder 3

The larder is the abbey's food storeroom. And it is quite impressive. It stores flour, wine, salt and oil, among other items, for an undoubtedly huge population: monks and their servants, passing guests, etc. Feeding them all requires enormous stocks, which arrive from the numerous assets managed by the abbey, or from surrounding estates where watermills and windmills produce flour and oil, from the Orbieu River where monks fish at the foot of the monastery, or from the vegetable gardens along its banks...



MEALS

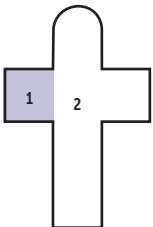
Meals were governed by the Rule of St Benedict. There is normally one main meal comprising 3 courses which is taken at the end of the working day. The first dish is composed of pulses, such as beans or lentils. The second is a protein dish of eggs, fish or poultry. The Rule forbids the consumption of beef or the meat of any other quadruped. Finally, dessert with fruit and honey... On top of this main meal, 2 or 3 collations are taken during the day.

+ Comprehension

Archaeologists discovered pipes running throughout the abbey. From the Middle Ages it had a water supply, like all monasteries. Monks dug a small canal, or *béal* in Occitan. Water is tapped 2 km away and a sufficient slope ensures that it reaches the abbey. The canal was created in the public interest and today it is still used in summer to water the village gardens.

ORIGINS

AT THE TIME OF CHARLEMAGNE



This is the most intriguing and most moving part of the abbey. The arm of the transept, which you can access after the sacristy (1), extends into an entire church on the other side of the wall between us and our neighbours, the canon community (2). Excavations have uncovered the depths of time, as far back as the 8th and 9th centuries and the abbey's foundation.



The sacristy 4

The first area, the sacristy, was raised in the 17th century to accommodate a guest house and infirmary. Much of the floor is still covered by 16th century paving slabs. Under the paving, archaeologists discovered a calade from the time of Auger and, underneath, holes and posts dating back to the Carolingian era. All of this was found just under the paving, which means the site has always been used since it was first built.

“Calade”: pebble pavements

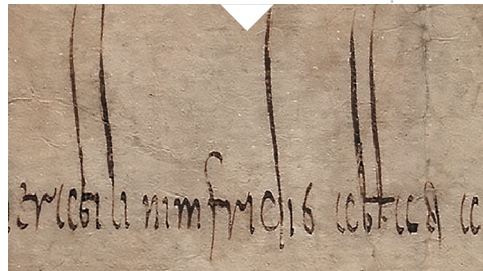


The transept 5

The second area is the North arm of the transept of the abbey church. Here lie the abbey's oldest remains, the pre-Norman tower and the church dating back to the very beginning of the Romanesque era in the 11th century.

+ Comprehension

The foundation of Lagrasse probably dates back to the beginning of the 8th century. Its existence is confirmed by a privilege charter that was given by Charlemagne in 779 to Abbot Nimfridus, the first known abbot of Lagrasse. The document is written in Merovingian and is the oldest document to be held in the département archives. Nimfridus was a friend of Benedict d'Aniane, who was an influential advisor to Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious. He reformed the Rule of St Benedict, which gave huge momentum to monasticism to the benefit of the Carolingian dynasty.



Focus: Charter of Privilege

A LEGEND

The Lagrasse monks created a masterpiece in the mid-13th century, an epic novel detailing the foundation of their abbey: it's called the Philomena. The epic tale mentions the heroes of the Song of Roland, Charlemagne, Bishop Turpin, and Christ himself... There are two known versions of this work of propaganda which was intended to further establish the abbey's reputation. One is written in Latin, the other in Occitan. This is characteristic of our region: from very early on, texts were translated into spoken language.

If you retrace your steps you can take the main staircase up to the dormitory and the beautiful chapel of Auger de Gogenx...

5 6





The Dormitory 6

This immense dormitory has also spent several decades under a collapsed roof. It is now a magnificent space where calm and comfort reign. Take a moment to listen to the quality of silence here, most unusual for such a vast space... Communal life knew many exceptions under Benedictine rule. There were some independent dwellings within the abbey walls and, in the dormitory, wooden partitions created private compartments...

👁 Observation

Stand at the entrance to the dormitory and observe the beautiful arches... which are out of alignment! This is deliberate; the walls are not perfectly parallel, to fit better into the environment. Abbot Auger de Gogenx's signature style. This aesthetic choice was typical of Abbot Auger de Gogenx. At the base of the arches lie decorative consoles designed to be seen from below, from what became the larder! Archaeologists think that the larder and dormitory may have originally formed a single, vast space.

The Chapel 7

A window in the dormitory looks onto Auger de Gogenx Chapel. You can see this Gothic masterpiece through the window and the door on the other side of the chapel. The mural visible from the dormitory window depicts the Last Judgement, with the usual notions of heaven and hell, and the weighing of souls... On the wall behind the altar is an oriental-style mural, the Tree of Life, a very original topic for that era. The chapel floor is paved in multicoloured tiles in a carefully designed geometric arrangement of extraordinary beauty.



The upper vestibule 8

A lively spectacle in three colours: ochre, red and black. If you look more closely, patterns appear in the form of lines that undulate all over the hall. A basic conservation project was scheduled until the discovery turned it into a more ambitious restoration campaign. The restorers working on the vestibule revived the bright colours and patterns.

On either side of the door that opens onto the chapel, you will notice two superb human head sculptures, one of which appears to have been carved out of foliage...

+ Comprehension

In the 13th and 14th centuries, it took substantial human and financial resources to execute such decorative work. It is thought that Auger de Gogenx called upon the great craftsmen who were working at the time on Narbonne Cathedral and Carcassonne's Saint-Nazaire Cathedral. The décor also demonstrates an expressive spirituality. Art serves faith, expressing its power and beauty. There are different schools of Christian thought.

The Benedictines, for example, seek to glorify the work of God while others, like the Cistercians or Franciscans, advocate a return to the simplicity of origins. The value of simplicity is part of the Cathar faith...

👁 Observer

There are two beautiful rooms on the same floor, just after the chapel. You can't take your eyes off what's left of the abbey's pure white romanesque entrance in the Maître de Cabestany room 9. There's a headless recumbent statue, perhaps of Auger, that's been turned into a pipe. Further along, the state room 10 celebrates Renaissance opulence with its fabulous hearth and classic 16th century French-style ceiling.



THE VILLAGE OF LAGRASSE

LE PONT VIEUX



VILLAGE ON THE ORBIEU RIVER

The Orbieu River runs between the abbey and Lagrasse village. It is one of the main reasons why the first monks chose to establish themselves here. The river was essential for fertile land, for industry and crafts which needed its driving power, and for the comfort and nourishment of inhabitants. Hence, the monastery developed a booming economy in this "fat valley". And the whole village followed. It emerged in the shadow of the monastery, on the same side of the river. Later, probably in the early 13th century, a new town was established on the opposite bank.



FORTIFIED BRIDGE

Lagrasse was a major trade route intersection. Trade was facilitated by Le Pont Vieux, the bridge over the Orbieu. To cross the bridge in the Middle Ages, a toll had to be paid, as in many places nowadays. The tollgate was an imposing structure. Two crenelated gate towers, rising 18 m above a 40 m deck, monitored traffic and watched over the Orbieu River. Both towers were demolished in the 18th century, as the bridge was collapsing under their weight... But a 1303 seal depicts the toll gate as it must have appeared to travellers at the time, impressive and unavoidable.



THE GARDENS

When they dug the canal to tap water from the Orbieu, the monks created the ideal place to establish gardens, between the canal and the river. This land belonged to the monastery, who rented it to inhabitants. The soils of Horte Mage and Hortete, where men and women cultivated fruit and vegetables, brought monks and laics into contact with one another. A path follows the canal alongside the gardens and up to the dam, known as "La Païssière".



LA HALLE (MARKET HALL) & THE STREETS

Lagrasse market was the biggest market in the Basses Corbières. You could find everything here: cereals, fruit, pelts, wine, fish, oil, spices, etc. It is a trading site that is profitable for the monastery which levies taxes, and for the villagers who benefit from this strong economic activity. It is the heart and soul of the town, and a strategic site that is jealously guarded by the abbots.

A RARE WITNESS

In the 14th century, the market had 57 stalls set out under the hall and covers. One of the covers, is still visible on one side of the square. You can see wooden capitals with sculpted designs: fish, figures.

On the other side are evenly spaced pillar bases. This unspoilt market hall is an exceptional example of the civil architecture from the Middle Ages.



THE PRESENCE OF THE VIGUIER

As early as 1287, Lagrasse had a municipality, the "consulate". Consuls were in charge of defending the inhabitants' interests, but the abbot established the rules and granted "customs and liberties". "La Maison du Viguiér", the abbot's representative at Place de la Halle, reminds us of that power.

THE STREETS

The streets, many of which are cobbled, are lined with beautiful façades that bear witness to the prosperity of Lagrasse. The Middle Ages dominate Rue des Deux Ponts, Rue des Tineries, and Rue Mazels where Lagrasse's only half-timbered house stands. On Rue Foy stands Maison Sibra from the Renaissance era, while at Place de la Bouquerie, the Sisters of Charity Nevers Convent brings to mind the Century of Lights.



CHURCH OF SAINT MICHEL

THE BUILDING THAT WAS MOVED

The first parish church stood near the abbey and original village on the other side of the Orbieu River, in what is still the cemetery. In the 1350s, the consuls asked the abbot for permission to move the church to the other bank, where we are now. The request led to long negotiations. In 1359, the abbot finally agreed and chose the village centre as the new location. But placing the church here meant destroying some houses for which the monastery received rent. The villagers paid 500 gold florins as compensation and financed the construction themselves...

THE HOUSE OF HERITAGE

EXPLORE THE PAINTED CEILINGS

These painted ceilings are a recent discovery as they're often covered up by other styles. The artform is widespread in the Mediterranean Basin and very popular in Lagrasse. The ceilings reflect incredible wealth and the Lagrasse middle class's social status and inner circle.

The House of Heritage invites you to discover the free exhibition provides a fascinating insight into the techniques used, the representations and the challenges involved in producing them.



PAINTED CEILINGS

The ceilings are made of wooden beams, equivalent to floor joists, with painted panels placed in between. There are several that can be admired here, including one from Montpellier which is of outstanding craftsmanship. Shields and knights alternate with grotesque scenes or fantastic animals. In fact, the alternation of pictures can be interpreted in two ways. Depending on which end of the room you start from, the succession of motifs reveals scenes of either heraldry or fantasy. This dual interpretation concept is also found in poetry of the 16th century when such intellectual games were fashionable...



NEARBY



PLANETS VIEWPOINT
The most beautiful views of the village



NOTRE-DAME DU CARLA
A spectacular 2 to 3 hour walk



At the end of your visit to the abbey discover the Les arts de lire bookshop



The general bookshop Les arts de lire is one of the largest in the department, offering a wide range of books to local residents and visitors all year round. As a showcase for literary events, it has become a place where people can share their knowledge and enjoy literary events. This bookshop is unique in its rich and unique offering in a heritage site: history and heritage, literature, works for young people, comic strips, essays, fine books, nature, etc.

THE ESPLANADE 11

Before leaving the abbey grounds, go round the right-hand side of the buildings. The longest wall is the wall of the larder and dormitory where you can see some machicolations that were built during the Hundred Years' War. This is indeed a fortified building. Also, the large tower, so characteristic of the abbey, is unusual in that it was both a religious bell tower and a defence structure, with bombards. It was built in the 16th century by Abbot Philippe de Lévis. It was never finished, and this adds to its character.



With your back to the abbey, you can enjoy a beautiful view over Lagrasse village. You can reach the village via the little alley, on the right as you leave, which runs alongside the gardens. Or you can return via the cemetery and reach the village by crossing the Pont Vieux.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION



SERVICES



PARKING

Parking restrictions apply. There are 2 paying car parks.



BOOKSHOP, SHOP AND LITERARY BISTROT

Inside the abbey.



TOILETS

Public toilets can be found at 4 locations in the village.



CASH WITHDRAWAL

There's a cash point on Place de l'Ancoule.



TOURIST INFORMATION / MAISON DU PATRIMOINE

Rue Paul Vergnes - 11220 Lagrasse

+33 (0)4 68 27 57 57



Abbaye
médiévale
de
Lagrasse | Centre
culturel
Les arts
de lire

payscathare.org | abbayedelagrasse.fr | lagrasse.fr

Reception of the abbey: +33 (0)4 68 43 15 99 - contact@lesartsdelire.fr



Abbaye médiévale de Lagrasse, centre culturel Les arts de lire



@abbayedelagrasse.lesartsdelire



@departementdelade



@departement_de_l_aude