

Glossary

Clerestory window: row of bays opening onto the wall of a building.

Collateral: side aisle of a nave.

Galilee: in the Cluniac ritual, the space where the monks gathered during certain festivals.

Maior ecclesia: Latin phrase meaning “the greatest church”.

Rib: ribbed arch marking the edge of a vault.

Triforium: passage located above the large arcades and opening onto the interior of the nave.

Votive mass: does not correspond to the service of the day and is celebrated for a particular intention.

Practical information

Average length of visit: 2 hours.

Guided tour.

Adapted visits for people with disabilities.



Gift and book shop

The guide for this monument is available, in 6 different languages, in the “Itinéraires” collection in the gift and book shop.

Centre des monuments nationaux
Abbaye de Cluny
71250 Cluny
tél. **03 85 59 15 93**
abbaye-de-cluny@monuments-nationaux.fr

www.monuments-nationaux.fr

crédits photos © David Borides / Centre des monuments nationaux - musée d'Art et d'Archéologie, Cluny Illustration Jean-Benoît Héron, réalisation graphique Marie-Hélène Forestier, traduction Tinducteo, Imprimé en France, 2022.

Arts et Métiers

A school in an abbey

Once the last monks had left in 1794, the monastic buildings were given new roles. In 1801 a school was installed, teaching traditional subjects: literature, Latin, geography, mathematics, etc. The attraction of cities like Mâcon and Tournus, where students could discover more technical subjects, would lead to its decline. In 1866, it was replaced by a school specifically for technical education and a teacher training college.

The birth of Arts et Métiers

In 1891, the “*école pratique*”, or “practical” school, opened and developed rapidly. It had over 300 students, with the first workshops built on the site of the monks’ vegetable garden. This school was transformed into a School of Arts and Crafts, under the name *Arts et Métiers*, in 1901. Since then, engineers are trained on the abbey site. Every year, classes of nearly 200 students are welcomed for 2 years at Cluny, and are known as the *Gadz’arts*, contraction of the name “*gars des arts*” (Guys from the Arts, the school’s nickname is the “Arts”).

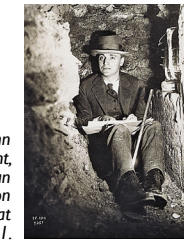
The origin of the school

At the end of the 18th century, the Duke de La Rochefoucauld, a colonel in Louis XVI’s army, created a school for orphans and sons of soldiers. They not only learned reading, writing and arithmetic but also professional skills: stonemason, cabinetmaker, locksmith, etc., while following a course of study and military exercises.

Archaeological excavations

Kenneth John Conant

In 1928, the American architect Kenneth John Conant was the first to take an interest in Cluny Abbey. He carried out the first excavations with the aim of rediscovering the plan of the great church and monastic buildings of the Middle Ages. His research is well documented, and has provided a solid basis for current research.



Kenneth John Conant, during an excavation campaign at Cluny in 1931.

Archaeological excavations from the end of the 20th century to today

In the 1990s, archaeological research resumed with broader objectives: to understand the architecture, the different stages of construction and how the areas were used. A complete study was carried out of the transept and Congregation courtyard, both the basement and elevation. Research has continued since 2006 with a study of the chapter house and the choir of the church dated 1000. The last excavation campaigns focused on the early days of the abbey’s existence with the 10th century chapel then the former infirmary, near which an extraordinary monetary treasure was discovered in 2017. Since 2021, archaeologists have been excavating the cloister to understand how the medieval monastery was organised.

Cluny Abbey

A spiritual capital

A thousand-year-old foundation

In 910, William the Pious, Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Mâcon, founded an abbey under the protection of Saints Peter and Paul, and under the direct authority of the pope. It developed substantially until the 12th century, thanks to abbots such as Odilon and Hugues de Semur. Mother house of more than 1,000 monasteries, it became the seat of the largest monastic order in the West: the Cluniac order.

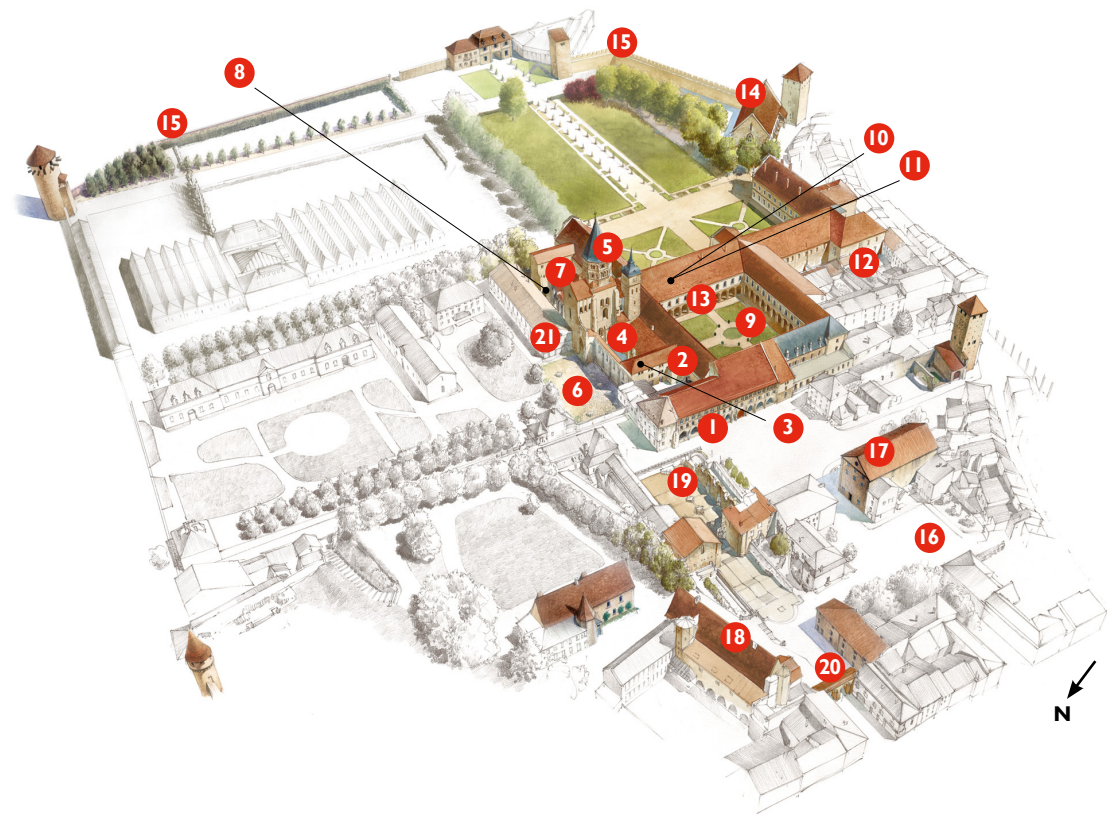
A long and slow decline



The decline began at the end of the Middle Ages. In the 15th century, Abbé Jean de Bourbon put the abbey’s affairs in order, but this did not curb the deterioration which would be accelerated by the Wars of Religion in the 16th century. Other renowned abbots were appointed, but the Cluniac order continued its decline.

Reconstruction and destruction

Around the mid-18th century, an extensive reconstruction of the monastery was undertaken: the medieval buildings were demolished and replaced by classical constructions. The French Revolution dissolved the monastic orders, the buildings were sold, and the greatest destruction continued into the 19th century.



The numerous buildings of the abbey are very large but also fragmentary; some are embedded in the town or now occupied by a school for engineers.

- 1** Nowadays, **the palace known as the "Pope Gelasius" Palace** is open to visitors. This 14th century building has undergone many alterations, including the complete restoration of its façade in the 19th century. Only the clerestory window* on the top level is medieval. Inside, a digital installation enables you to see the major stages of the whole abbey's architectural evolution.
- 2** **The small cloister** presents examples of Cluny's sculpture from the 11th to 17th centuries, illustrating the permanence of artistic activity on the site. In the screening room, the film *Maïor Ecclesia** presents a view in 3D images revealing the scale of the great abbey church that has now disappeared.

3 **The Galilee Passage*** is a passage that connected the cloister and the *Maïor ecclesia**. The abbey's reliquaries are now exhibited here.

4 **The nave** is only partially accessible. It extended under the neighbouring garden, between the buildings of the Haras National stud farm, built in the 19th century, after the destruction of the church. The bases of the columns have been restored to give a better idea of the various spaces within the church.

5 **The great transept** is the largest remaining vestige of the *Maïor ecclesia**. Its cupola reaches a height of 31 metres. The columns rise, without a break, to the capitals, the chapels are surmounted by large bays, and above the arch of the small collateral aisle* is a blind triforium* of high windows. Many of its elements are influenced by classical architecture.

6 **The small transept** contains 3 chapels. This made it possible to celebrate votive masses*. The augmented reality terminal shows the choir of the church, and highlights the rich decoration of the *Maïor ecclesia**.

7 **The Jean de Bourbon chapel** is named after the abbot who ordered its construction for his funerary chapel around 1460. In flamboyant Gothic style, it has a rich decoration of consoles depicting the prophets of the Old Testament. These supported statues that likely disappeared during the Wars of Religion.

8 **The Congregation courtyard** enables the visitor to see the elevation of the south arm of the great transept and of the bell tower of the Holy Water, the most imposing vestiges of the *Maïor ecclesia**.

9 **The cloister** is the heart of the monastery. The buildings are arranged around its galleries. It dates from the 18th century and replaced the medieval cloister and a part of the church built in 1000.

10 **The choir of the church dating back to 1000**, the first abbey church built by the monks. It was discovered during archaeological excavations. The slab on the floor marks the location of the main altar. The video shows us how this altar was placed in the choir of the church.

11 **The chapter house** opens onto the cloister; the monks would meet there every day. Originally the columns separated the room into 2: half is hidden by the current buildings. The augmented reality terminal enables you to discover the entire room and see the medieval cloister.

12 **The monks' wash basin**, located at the end of the "450 feet" gallery, opened onto the refectory, now demolished.

13 The 18th century **monastic buildings** form a U. The classical architecture is punctuated by the decorative elements of the wrought iron balconies.

14 The 18th century **flour store** is the only medieval building for domestic use that remains. It was used to store foodstuffs. Just in front, the augmented reality terminal offers a glimpse of the medieval buildings that stood between the flour store and the *Maïor ecclesia**.

The cellar, in the lower part, has ribbed vaulting*.

The flour store, in the upper part, has a roof of semi-circular arches. The 8 capitals from the apse in the choir of the *Maïor ecclesia** are exhibited here. In the centre is an altar table dating from the 11th century.

15 **The abbey's fortified outer wall** included many towers, such as the Round Tower and the Mill Tower, dating from the 13th century.

16 **The village** developed thanks to the economic activity generated by the abbey. Some medieval houses remain, the most recognisable of which have a clerestory window* on the façade with capitals decorated with foliage.

Remains of the abbey integrated into the town

17 **The hostelry of Abbot Hugues** is one of the largest surviving buildings from the late 11th century. It accommodated guests on the upper floors and their mounts in the lower room. Today a municipal theatre and exhibition hall occupy the site.

18 **The Jean de Bourbon Palace**, built in the 15th century, houses the Museum of Art and Archaeology.

19 **Before the vestibule** is a monumental staircase that descends between the remains of the towers, called "Barabans", which framed the portal. It was built around 1130. The bases of the columns have been reconstructed.

20 The 12th-century **main door** marked the main entrance to the abbey like a triumphal arch. Part of its decoration remains and features references to Antiquity with Corinthian capitals and fluted columns.

21 **The 19th-century Haras National** is built partly on the site of the church; it now hosts equestrian events.