

The origins of the Carmelite order

The Carmelite order was founded by hermits on Mount Carmel in the 13th century. In 1562 at the Spanish convent of Saint Joseph in Avila, Sister Teresa, who wore simple rope shoes [10], introduced greater sobriety into the order's way of life. The separation between these Discalced Carmelites and the Mitigated Carmelites such as those established in Place des Carmes in Toulouse was pronounced in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII.

The Carmelites of Toulouse

Under the influence of the reformation initiated by Teresa of Avila, in 1616 a group of nuns from Toulouse converted to the Carmelite Order and had a convent built. The first stone of the church was laid in 1622, the year of the saint's canonization. The project was completed in 1625.

After the French Revolution

In 1792 the convent was nationalised and the Discalced Carmelites were forced to leave. The diocesan seminary was then held there from 1805 to 1905, which explains the presence of stalls in the church. Listed as a historical monument in 1909, these Discalced Carmelites and the Mitigated Carmelites such as those established in Place des Carmes in Toulouse were destroyed in 1928 and replaced by the Bibliothèque d'Étude et du Patrimoine (Library for Studies and Heritage).

The church of the convent of the Discalced Carmelites

The construction site, like that of Saint Expère for the Discalced Carmelites of Toulouse, was overseen by the stonemason Didier Sansonnet. The brick church with its single nave is characteristic of those built in the region since the Gothic period. Its originality lies in its oak-panelled vault with golden ribs. The nuns attend services in the chancel, separated from the faithful by a double grille and a curtain.

History of the decor

In 1682, the church was decorated for the first time by the painter and architect Jean-Pierre Rivalez (also known for the design of the Salle des Illustres in Toulouse) of which four Virtues are still extant [2, 3, 17 & 18]. The work remained unfinished from the death of the painter in 1706 to that of his son Antoine in 1737. Jean-Baptiste Despax, Antoine Rivalez's pupil and son-in-law, defined a new programme with Sister Marie-Louise de la Miséricorde and made the preparatory sketches. In 1751, after finishing his training in Paris with the painter Jean Restout (1742-1746) he went on to complete the works that combine both the expressive contrasts of the Rivalz painters and the freshness of Restout's colours.

The vault

Whereas the convent, with its sober interior, reflects the sisters' vow to achieve perfection according to Teresa of Avila, and to be granted a place in heaven. The saint, to whom a chapel is devoted in the church, ascends to God through ecstasy [10]. The mystery of the Incarnation of Christ, which is the main subject of meditation for the Carmelites, is evoked in the virtuosity of Despax and his workshop painters in creating illusions is apparent in the trompe l'oeil architecture, which appears to weigh very heavily on the shoulders of the caryatids.

Depicting Carmelite spirituality

The sixteen virtues that frame the windows are those needed to achieve perfection according to Teresa of Avila, and to be granted a place in heaven. The saint, to whom a chapel is devoted in the church, ascends to God through ecstasy [10]. The mystery of the Incarnation of Christ, which is the main subject of meditation for the Carmelites, is evoked in the opposite apse [A, B and M]. The nave [C to L] is dedicated to Elijah and his disciple Elisha, the spiritual founders of Carmel and patron saints of the perfect monastic life. The miracles performed by Elijah on Mount Carmel form a bond between heaven and Earth. The paintings were removed between 1794 and 1835, and were not put back in their original positions.

Chapelle des Carmélites

Tour guide

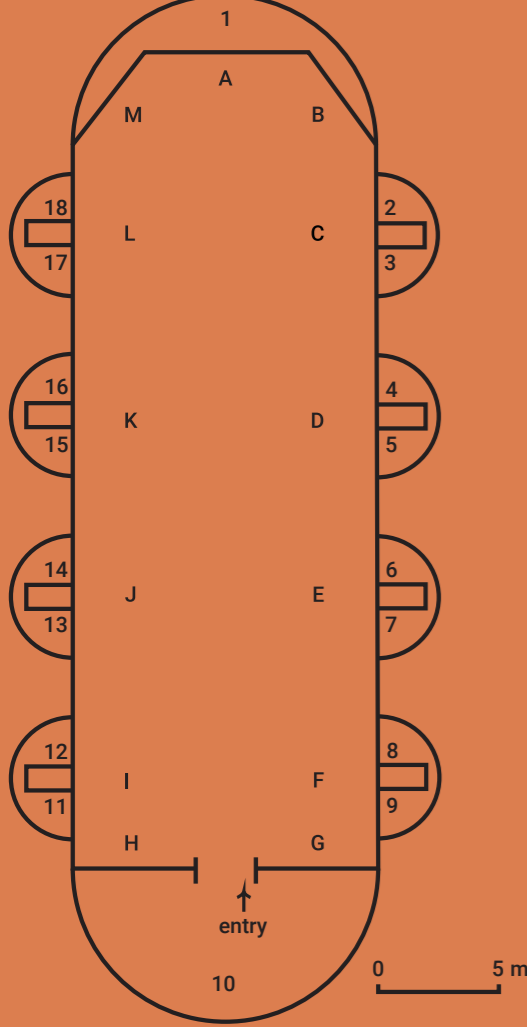


Aimer Vivre à Toulouse
MAIRIE DE TOULOUSE



- ### Upper register
1. Annoucement of Redemption
 2. Contemplation
 3. Silence
 4. Humility
 5. Science of the Saints
 6. Submission
 7. Poverty
 8. Zeal
 9. Prudence
 10. The Glorification of St. Theresa
 11. Vigilance
 12. Work
 13. Obedience
 14. Purity
 15. Penitence
 16. Hope
 17. Faith
 18. Charity

- ### Inferior register
- A. Annunciation
 - B. Adoration of the Magi
 - C. Elijah and the angel
 - D. Assumption
 - E. Elijah and King Ahab
 - F. Elisha instructs his disciples
 - G. Elisha resurrects the Sunamite's son
 - H. Elisha's multiplication of oil
 - I. Elisha separates the waters of the Jordan
 - J. Elijah sends fire from heaven
 - K. Nativity
 - L. Elijah gives his cloak to Elisha
 - M. Adoration of the shepherds



Map: Conseil départemental de la Haute-Garonne, Archives départementales de la Haute-Garonne
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