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The Cathedral of Santa Maria

La Seu is one of the iconic symbols of Mallorca, not just because of its monumental scale and beauty, but because it was funded by a broad cross-section of society and institutions from the island.

Mallorca Cathedral, La Seu, is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and is the most important place of worship on the island. It was begun in the 13th century and has become a symbol of the religious, cultural and historical identities of the Mallorcan people. The cathedral is the seat of the bishop and is governed by the canons who are responsible for the day-to-day running of the building. The mission of La Seu is to bring anyone who enters into contact with the Catholic faith.

We invite you to embark on a journey to discover Mallorca's foremost place of worship.



The royal house of Mallorca

The Kingdom of Mallorca was created by James I of Aragon, who was also known as James the Conqueror, and ruled by three independent monarchs, who generally divided their time between Palma and Perpignan.

James II (1276-1311) was the first king of Mallorca. He was the second son of James the Conqueror and Violant of Hungary. James II married Esclarmunda (1260-1316) on his own initiative. This was unusual at the time as most royal marriages were arranged. Esclarmunda was the daughter of the Count of Foix, who was lord of a territory that bordered with Roussillon, and was considered by her contemporaries as one of the wisest, most honest women in the history of the Crown of Mallorca.

James II and Esclarmunda had six children: James (1274), Sancho (1276), Ferdinand (1278), Elizabeth (c. 1281), Sancha (1281) and Philip (1288). Both the king and queen took great pains to ensure their offspring married into families that would favour the interests of the royal house of Mallorca. This led them to forge links with the most important royal dynasties in medieval Europe, such as the Kingdoms of Naples and Castile.

James II was succeeded by his son Sancho, who was crowned King Sancho I of Mallorca (1276-1324). He married Maria of Naples (1280-1350) and they enjoyed a peaceful reign. Sancho was buried in Perpignan inside a church that is now part of the cathedral of Saint John the Baptist, where his remains are now interred in a tomb carved by the sculptor Frederic Marès in the middle of the 20th century.

Sancho's nephew James (1315-1349) acceded to the throne following his death, and was crowned James III of Mallorca. James's first wife Constance of Aragon (1318-1346) gave birth to the heir apparent James (1335-1375), who, as James IV, became the unsuccessful claimant to the Kingdom of Mallorca. When James III was killed at the Battle of Lluçmajor in 1349, he was buried in the parish church in the town but his remains were later moved to Valencia Cathedral, on the orders of King Peter IV of Aragon, to prevent the Mallorcans coming to the church to pay their respects to the late king. James's body was brought back to the island in 1905 and buried in La Seu. His son, James IV, never came to the throne, and was just fourteen years of age when he was imprisoned by Peter the Ceremonious, the king of Aragon. The monarch's cruelty resulted in a group of noblemen taking pity on the youngster and freeing him from the iron cage where he was being kept. James fled to the city of Soria in Castile where he died in 1375.

The history of La Seu

The origins of the cathedral we see today can be traced back to the time of the Christian conquest of Mallorca in 1229 by King James I of Aragon. It stands on the site of a former mosque, which James had consecrated as a Christian place of worship until building work on the cathedral began. The cathedral was dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

The cathedral project was part of the settlement plan that followed the conquest of Mallorca. It was built in three stages:

First stage: 13th-14th centuries

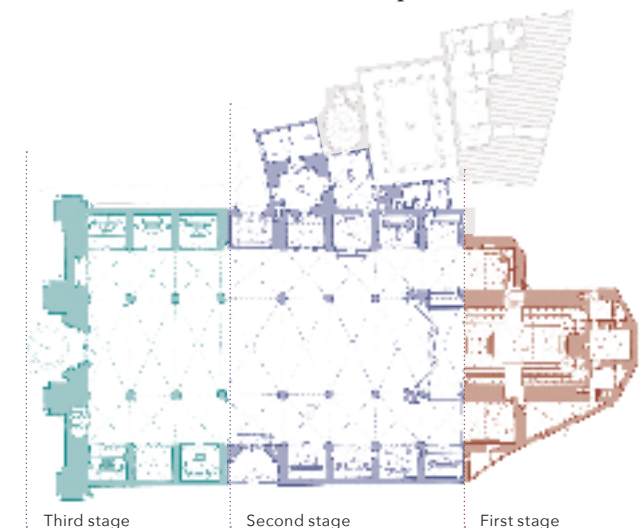
The first historical documents containing information about the fabric of the cathedral date from 1230. The chancel was built during this period. It consisted of the sanctuary (presbytery) and the royal chapel of the Santíssima Trinitat, where the mausoleum of the royal house of Mallorca was to be located. These early structures were built in the Mediterranean Gothic style.

Second stage: 15th century

The side entrances, the Portal de l'Almoïna and the Portal del Mirador, were built during this second stage, along with the Casa de l'Almoïna and the original main façade, which encapsulates the style of Guillem Sagrera, the architect overseeing the project.

Third stage: 16th-17th centuries

The cathedral was completed during this stage. The four remaining aisles were built in a combination of the Renaissance and vernacular styles. The main entrance, the Portal Major, was also built at this time and dedicated to the Immaculate Conception.





The sculptures from the Gothic main altarpiece are now on display in the sanctuary. We see Saint Eulalia, Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Barbara, on one side, and Saint James, Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist, on the other.



The figures from the Gothic main altarpiece were placed inside historicist canopies built by Mallorcan artisans following Gaudí's instructions.

The Sybil, Intangible Heritage

The Song of the Sybil is a medieval Gregorian chant that is performed at midnight mass on Christmas Eve in all the churches in Mallorca and Alghero. It became widespread throughout Europe during the Middle Ages until the tradition began to die out following the Council of Trent (1545-1563). In 1572, it stopped being performed at La Seu, but resumed in 1575, when Bishop Joan Vic i Manrique allowed it to be sung outside the liturgy. Although most of the theatrical elements have been removed, the song remains practically unchanged to this day. In 1967, following the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the Song of the Sybil returned to its rightful place, the Christmas Eve service, and thus became Mallorca's most ancient and unique Christmas tradition.

This liturgical drama foretells the coming of the Messiah and the end of the world. The song is usually performed a cappella and originates from a melody that is probably Gregorian in origin with words that were translated into Catalan in the 13th century.

The Song of the Sybil is usually performed by a young boy or girl, or a woman dressed as the pagan prophetess, the Sybil. They wear a white or coloured robe, which is sometimes embroidered around the collar and hem, and a cape. In some towns and villages the cape is replaced with another robe. Their head is covered with a cap that is the same colour as the robe and they carry a sword in their hands, holding it upright in front of their face while they are singing. When they finish, they draw a cross in the air with the sword. In 2010, UNESCO placed the performance of the Song of the Sybil in Mallorca on its Intangible Cultural Heritage list.



The Sybil at La Seu in Mallorca.



In front of the presbytery steps there is a large marble slab with borders in different colours. It was installed in the middle of the 18th century. In the centre, there is a small child blowing bubbles, in reference to the fleeting nature of life. The burial site below the slab was used to house the remains of the bishops and canons who did not have individual tombs.

Royal chapel of the Santíssima Trinitat

The royal chapel of the Santíssima Trinitat takes pride of place at the back of the sanctuary. It was commissioned by King James II of Mallorca in 1306 as a royal pantheon for the Mallorcan dynasty, and was dedicated to the Holy Trinity.

The gilded wooden carving of Our Lady of the Cathedral is the centrepiece of the chapel. It dates from the middle of the 14th century and was originally part of the Gothic main altarpiece. It is a beautiful example of a *virgo sacrario*, or Marian tabernacle, which performed this liturgical function.

There is a royal tomb on either side of the chapel: the one containing the remains of James II, who died in 1311, and the one containing those of his grandson, James III, who died in 1349. They were both carved from alabaster by the sculptor Frederic Marès between 1946 and 1947. The coffins are supported by lions and decorated with the coats of arms of the main territories that were part of the old Kingdom of Mallorca. James II, on the Evangelist side, is wearing his royal robes to show his organisational skills as a monarch, while James III, on the Epistle side, is wearing military attire in reference to his death at the Battle of Lluçmajor.

The chapel was commissioned by the King James II of Mallorca as a royal pantheon for the Mallorcan dynasty in 1306.



Detail of Our Lady of the Cathedral.



The keystone above the entrance to the chapel depicts King James II of Mallorca, praying as a mediator between the people and God.



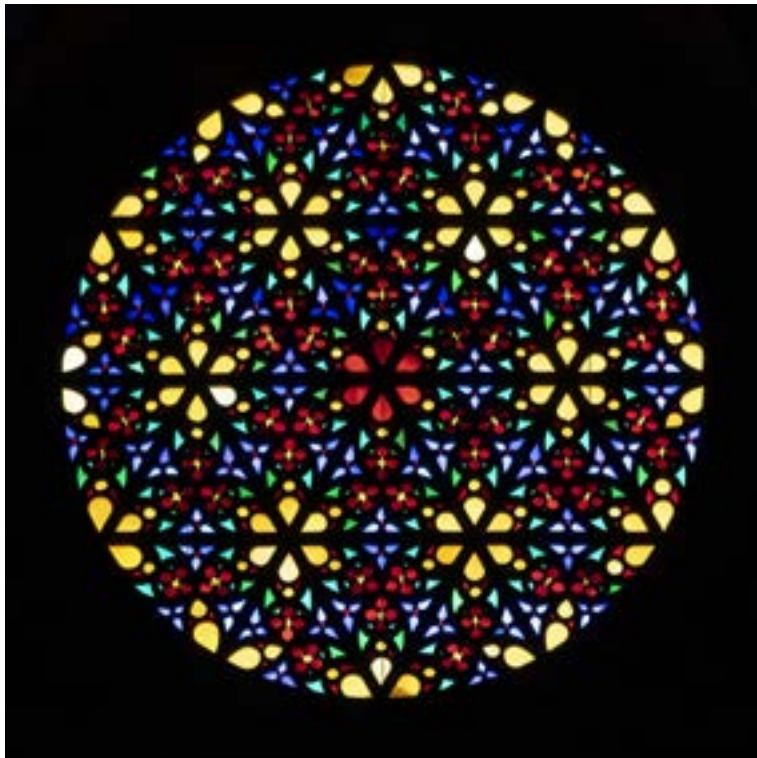
The stained-glass windows in the chapel of the Trinitat were made in 1889 by the Barcelona-based Amigó studio. The central window features Saint Peter and Saint Paul, surrounded by geometric and floral motifs.

Main rose window

The way the light comes streaming into La Seu is truly impressive. It has five rose windows in all, the largest one known as “the Gothic eye” because it is one of the biggest Gothic rose windows in the world. The structure was built in 1370, during the tenure of Bishop Antoni de Galiana, but the stained glass was not added until 1599.

The window has a surface area of almost 100 m² and a diameter of 11.3 m, and contains 1,115 pieces of red, blue, green and yellow glass, set inside geometrical Arabesque tracery. Visitors can enjoy myriad light effects inside the cathedral throughout the year. The ones that can be seen on 2nd February and 11th November are particularly impressive. After sunrise, at around 8,30am, the light of the rising sun shines through the main rose window and is projected onto the opposite wall, just below the rose window on the main façade. This means that, for a short period of time, you can see two rose windows: one made of glass and another made of light.

The window contains 1,115 pieces of red, blue, green and yellow glass, set inside geometrical Arabesque tracery.



The main rose window is located above the arch leading into the presbytery, 30 metres above the ground.



The cathedral of light

La Seu is known as the “cathedral of light” due to the light that comes flooding into the interior. There were eighty-seven stained-glass windows in the original plans: seven in the chapel of the Trinitat, eight in the sanctuary, sixteen in the nave, sixteen in the aisles, four in each chapel in the apse and thirty-six in the chapels in the aisles. To date, fifty-nine stained-glass windows have been installed.

The cathedral has five rose windows which intensify the light. There is one on the main façade, another at the rear of the apse, two in the smaller aisles and the biggest above the nave.

Artificial light also deserves special attention. La Seu is lit by five lanterns: one in the nave and four in the aisles. They were originally powered by oil but were converted to electricity during Antoni Gaudí’s refurbishment of the cathedral at the beginning of the 20th century.



The entire structure of the baldachin is lit by electric light: the crown, the spheres between the ropes and the thirty-five hanging lanterns.



The candelabras around the columns designed by Gaudí in 1904, which are placed 5 metres above the ground, and the lamps in the sanctuary and the chapel of the Trinitat, are other important elements used to light the cathedral. They are all made of wrought iron.

Chapel of Sant Josep

The chapel of Sant Josep was formerly dedicated to the souls in purgatory. It was built in 1515 but was fully renovated between 1885 and 1886, when the current neo-Gothic style altarpiece, by the sculptor Guillem Galmés, was made.

The altarpiece stands on a rectangular wooden plinth decorated with a marbling effect. It consists of a predella and an upper section. The predella features a low-relief carving depicting the death of Saint Joseph (1888), while in the centre of the upper section we see a statue of Saint Joseph (1885) beneath a canopy, flanked by the figures of Saint James and Saint Teresa of Jesus (1816).

The stained-glass windows behind the altarpiece are dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and were made by the Barcelona-based Amigó studio in 1889. The light filters through geometric and plant motifs and religious symbols, like those of the four evangelists: Saint Matthew (represented by an angel), Saint Mark (represented by a lion), Saint Luke (represented by an ox) and Saint John (represented by an eagle).

Altarpiece predella with the scene of the death of Saint Joseph.





The Episcopal Palace



Coat of arms of Bishop Bernat Cotoner (1671-1684) in the palace courtyard.



Window with a cross-shaped wrought-iron grille designed by Antoni Gaudí.

The Episcopal Palace stands just behind the cathedral apse on top of the wall around the royal palace, the Palau de l'Almudaina. Its origins can be traced back to the time of Ramon de Torrella (1238-1266), who became the first bishop of Mallorca when the island was established as an episcopal see in 1238. Nevertheless, its aesthetics are the result of different interventions commissioned by different Mallorcan prelates, who have left their mark since the 13th century.

The building has a rectangular floor plan and is set around a courtyard. The entrance is on the main façade, which was completed in 1616 at the behest of the bishop of Mallorca, Simó Bauçà i Sales (1608-1623), whose name appears on the inscription inside the frieze on the entablature. His coat of arms can be seen on the door lintel and over the central balcony. The façade, which is markedly classical in style, bears the episcopal salutation *Pax Vobis* ("peace be with you" in Latin).

The first oratory dedicated to Saint Paul, which was built at the end of the 14th century, stands near the main façade of the palace. There is a small image of the saint above the door leading into the oratory, holding his epistles. There is a cross with the image of Christ at the top of the door and four medallions on the ends with depictions of the Virgin Mary, Saint John the Evangelist, the Mystic Lamb of the Apocalypse, and Adam emerging from the

tomb after the crucifixion.

In the centre of the courtyard, there is a monument dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus by the sculptor Miquel Arcas. It was done in 1932 as a tribute to the archbishop and bishop of Mallorca (1930-1947), Josep Miralles Sbert. The coats of arms of the bishop, Palma and Pope Pius XI can be seen on the base of the monument, alongside a commemorative inscription.



Stained-glass window dedicated to Bishop Campins, designed by Antoni Gaudí.



Stained-glass test pieces made by Antoni Gaudí for La Seu.

The legend of Na Coca's dragon

In the 17th century, a fearsome dragon lived in the sewers of Palma and would come out at night in search of victims to feed on. One evening, the knight Bartomeu Coch arrived in Palma to visit his sweetheart, Catalina Rosselló. While they were talking lovingly to each other, the beast appeared and was slain by the knight. Bartomeu gave the dead dragon to his beloved as a token of love and they called it Na Coca, the feminine form of the Coch family name.

Na Coca's dragon was actually a little crocodile that came to Mallorca on board a merchant vessel around the 17th century. After it had been dispatched by Bartomeu Coch, it was stuffed and kept at the Rosselló family home until it was donated to the museum at the beginning of the 20th century.



Na Coca's dragon.