

Palais des Papes, Avignon..

Popes, Benedict XII and Clement VI, built the Palace of the Popes as we see it today within a period of approximately twenty years.

BENEDICT XII

THE START OF A PONTIFICAL PALACE, 1335-1342, architect Pierre Poisson. The palace was anchored on bedrock and was based on the layout of Pope John XXII's early palace. The strong walls of the Papal Tower rose high over the city. It protected the sacred person of the pope and the wealth of the church.

The building continued with the Consistory wing, with the Chapel Tower, the Trouillas Tower and the kitchen and latrines towers on its sides. Gardens were laid out in lower lying land.

Benedict XII had his palace richly decorated with furnishings, wall hangings and mural paintings.

CLEMENT VI, THE NEW EXTENSIONS (OPUS NOVUM), 1342-1352

At the beginning of his papacy, Clement VI completed the construction of the Trouillas tower, added a new tower housing the kitchens and ordered the construction of the Wardrobe Tower adjoining the Papal Tower.

Pope Clement VI's architect Jean de Louvres, who came from Ile-de-France, was Maître des œuvres and supervised the organisation of the construction site for the new extensions. This work mobilised an average of 600 men at a time of upheaval created by the Hundred Years' War and the Black Plague.

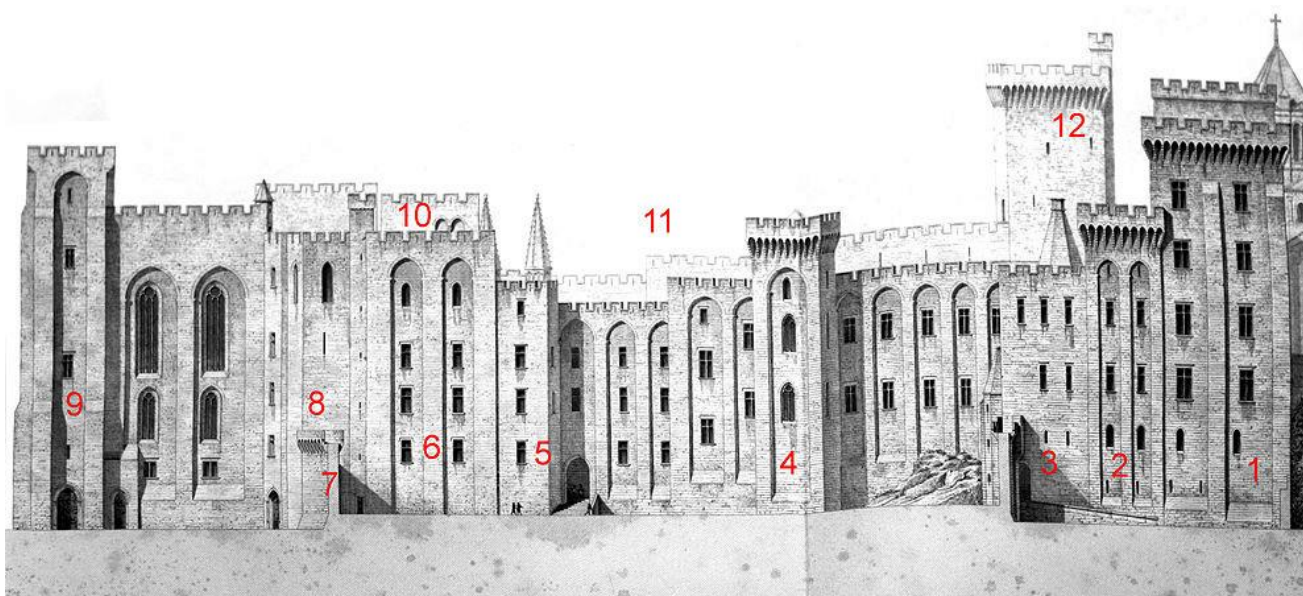
In undertaking his ambitious plans, Jean de Louvres started by demolishing the adjoining neighbourhoods to create his spectacular construction.

Pope Clement VI attracted the greatest intellectuals and artists of his time to the papal court, among them painters such as Matteo Giovannetti. Clement VI made Avignon into a cultural crossroads and a source of European exchange.

By the time of the death of Pope Clement VI, most of the papal buildings had been completed.

- The Palace of the Popes is the symbol of the Church's importance in the Christian Western world in the 14th century. The Palace was built in less than twenty years, starting in 1335, and was primarily built by two popes, Pope Benedict XII and his successor Pope Clement VI.

- Avignon has a magnificent urban landscape. The Rocher des Doms overlooks the city and the Rhône. Here there is an exceptional architectural group which includes the Pont d'Avignon (also known as Pont Saint Bénézet, the Ramparts, the Petit Palais, the Doms Cathedral and the massive walls of the Palace of the Popes, with four impressive towers in each corner.
- This unique architectural ensemble has been ranked as a UNESCO World Heritage site.



The palais des Papes and its towers – from the east

1 – "tour de Trouillas", 2 – "tour des Latrines" or "de la Glacière"

3 – "tour des Cuisines" (kitchen tower), 4 – "tour Saint-Jean", 5 – "tour de l'Étude", 6 – "tour des Anges" or "tour du pape"

7 – "tour du Jardin" (garden tower)

8 – "tour de la Garde-Robe", 9 – "tour Saint-Laurent", 10 – "tour de la Gache" (derrière)

11 – "tour d'angle" or "tour des Grands Dignitaires" (under)

12 – "tour de la Campanie"



Note the quadrupartite rib vaulting.

The wall paintings in the Saint Martial chapel, in the Saint John chapel and in the Grande Audience hall were painted by the Italian artist Matteo Giovannetti. Prior to his work, the famous Italian painter Simone Martini (1284-1344) had painted the outstanding frescoes on the portal to Notre-Dame-des-Doms cathedral. These frescoes are now displayed in the Consistory room in the Palace of the Popes.

SAINT MARTIAL CHAPEL

This oratory just next to the Grand Tinel is where deliberations took place during conclaves. The highly detailed decors in the frescoes which decorate the chapel were painted by Matteo Giovannetti between 1344 and 1345, commissioned by Pope Clement VI. The scenes are in the alphabetical order of their legends, and introduce innovative effects of perspective and realism. They are painted in a spiral

movement from the vaulted top of the chapel to the bottom. They tell the marvellous story of Saint Martial who was sent by Saint Peter to spread the word of the Gospel in the Limousin area of France – the Pope’s native region.

This chapel is currently undergoing restoration and is temporarily closed to the public. A film shown at the entrance to the chapel enables visitors to see the entire set of the painted frescoes in the chapel.

SAINT JOHN CHAPEL

Located just below the Saint Martial chapel, Saint John chapel is the oratory for the Consistory. The chapel’s name comes from the fact that the walls and vault are decorated with frescoes which tell the story of the lives of Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist. This cycle of frescoes was painted between 1346 and 1348 by a team of artists under the direction of Matteo Giovannetti. Unlike the unusual subject painted in the Saint Martial chapel, here the painter has illustrated a subject that was very popular subject that is also featured in the Saint John of Latran basilica in Rome. The artist used classic, codified iconography here to build a more stylized, less animated decorative ensemble than that seen in the Saint Martial chapel. His work nevertheless is every bit as innovative in that it shows the artist’s strong inclination for naturalism, for portrait art and for well-developed use of space. This is Italian pictorial experimentation at its most successful.



FRESCOES OF THE PROPHETS

These frescoes were painted by Matteo Giovannetti in 1353 on the vaults of the last bay in the Grande Audience hall. Twenty prophets, kings and patriarchs from the Old Testament fill the scene. Each holds an excerpt from the Holy Scriptures. The range of postures and expressions, noble yet human, clearly convey Matteo Giovannetti’s skill as a portrait artist.

Matteo Giovannetti, pictor pape (painter to the pope)

Matteo Giovannetti was born around 1300 in Viterbo. He became the prior of the Church of San Martino in 1336. He arrived in Avignon around 1343. He was bestowed the prestigious title of “Pictor Pape”, the Pope’s painter, in 1346 and was in charge of the major decorating work in the palace. He died in 1369, most probably in Rome where he was working on the decoration of the Vatican palace. He spent most of his career outside of Italy, serving exclusively the Prince of the Church.

The style of Matteo Giovannetti

Rediscovered long afterwards by art historians, Matteo Giovannetti brought the major pictorial innovations that were taking place in Tuscany to Avignon. His work is distinguished by his outstanding talent as a portrait painter, his inclination to naturalism, and his great mastery of spatial representation, which he put to work adding effects of perspective and trompe-l’œil.

THE PAINTED ROOMS

The private papal apartments lie at the junction of the old and new palace and were the heart of the private areas where the popes lived.

Papal Bedroom.

The walls are covered with a sky-blue colour that serves as the background for plant-inspired paintings of grape-vine scrolls and oak tendrils which abound with birds and squirrels. This decoration dates from 1337-1338 and recreates a textile decor. The window space is used to provide amazing perspective through a series of painted delicate Gothic arches holding various bird cages, some of which hold birds but most of which are empty.

Stag Room.

A narrow corridor leads from the Papal Chamber to the Stag room, which Pope Clement VI used as his study. A team of French and Italian artists decorated this room in 1343 in a continuous panorama of the pleasures and pastimes pursued by the lords of the time. Hunting and fishing scenes show various techniques used at the time – hunting with decoys, hunting with weasels, fishing in pools. The scene depicting a stag hunt, the leading pursuit of the aristocratic class, must have left a great impression, since this room became known as the Stag Hunt room. The forests shown in the background are domesticated and peaceful, source of fruit, flowers and herbs. In the trees, people are picking fruit and capturing birds. Below the wood frame a frieze on a red background shows scenes of hunting, fishing and real and mythical animals.

