



CHURCH OF SANTA MARÍA

This is the church of the Rabal neighborhood, which was formerly outside the walled town. It began to be built in the 16th century, extending its construction in the following centuries. Therefore, both inside and outside, we can see a wide variety of architectural styles, from Gothic and Renaissance to Baroque.

A BIT OF HISTORY.

It is considered that the primitive church of Santa Maria was erected on the foundations of the former main mosque of the Muslim medina of Bilyana.

The current temple is linked to a figure belonging to the local oligarchy, Doña Catalina Ruíz de Alarcón, who was in charge of defraying the first part of the temple. In recognition of her patronage, she was buried in the main chapel. After her death, financing problems prolonged the work on the church, and both the façade and bell tower were finished in the 18th century.

During the civil war, the church suffered numerous damages: high altar, altarpiece, grille and roof were seriously affected or directly lost for good. The altarpiece that can be seen today is a post-war reconstruction.

WHAT TO SEE.

The interior of the temple presents the characteristics of Levantine Gothic, with a single nave and chapels between buttresses, in turn perforated as side aisles.

To the right of the high altar is the exceptional Renaissance doorway of the sacristy, attributed to the workshop of Jacobo Florentino and Jerónimo Quijano.

OUTSIDE.

Its Baroque façade, dedicated to Santa María de la Asunción, is admirable, as well as its bell tower, where the two oldest bells of Villena are located: two Gothic examples from the mid-fifteenth century. At the foot of the tower we can see a curious sundial, still in operation, that was recovered in 2017.



OUTSKIRTS AND DISTRICTS

- 10 Chapel of San Bartolomé. (2,7 km from Villena)
- 11 Shrine of the Virgin of the Virtues (7,4 km from Villena. Las Virtudes)
- 12 Church of San Isidro Labrador (23 km from Villena. La Zafra)
- 13 Church of San Juan Bautista (21 km from Villena. La Encina)

01 Archdeaconry church of Santiago.

02 Church of Santa María.

03 Hermitage of San Antón.

04 Hermitage of San José.

05 Church and convent of the Trinitarian nuns.

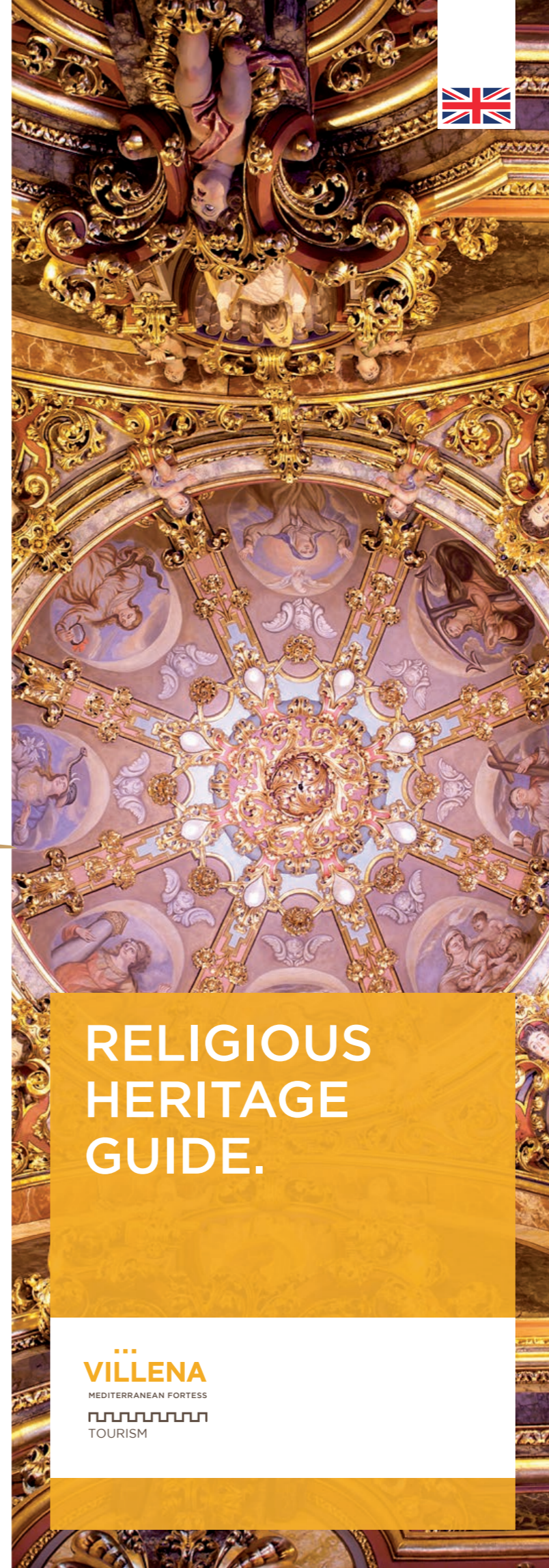
06 Church asilo de las heremitas de los ancianos desamparados.

07 Salesian School.

08 Church of San Francisco de Asís.

09 Church of la Paz.

FURTHER INFORMATION	
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RELIGIOUS HERITAGE GUIDE.



SHRINE OF THE VIRGIN OF THE VIRTUES

Located about 6 km west of the town centre, it was separated by the waters of the ancient Lake of Villena until 1803. The image of the patron saint of the city, the Virgin of the Virtues, affectionately known as "La Morenica", is there.



A BIT OF HISTORY.

According to local popular tradition, around the year 1474, the residents of Villena were forced to flee the town due to a plague that ravaged the region, so they decided to settle in the location of the Black Poplar Fountain. In this place, the Virgin of the Virtues was chosen as patron saint and advocate against the plague. After the delivery of an image of the patron saint by some strangers, the epidemic subsided, so, by way of thanks, it was decided to erect a shrine in her honor next to the aforementioned fountain.

The Shrine and the convent that we can see today were an extension of the primitive hermitage carried out during the 16th century, after the arrival of a community of Augustinian monks in 1526. They lived there until the disentanglement of 1835.

WHAT TO SEE.

On the exterior, in front of the doorway, there is a magnificent Renaissance façade, attributed to Jerónimo Quijano's workshop, which is accessible through a staircase.

We will find the cloister of the monastery inside, with two floors and lowered brick arches. Two large stone cisterns have been preserved in the centre, which collected rainwater to supply the monks.

The highlight of the church, which has three naves, is the golden altarpiece of the main altar, made in 1940, with the image of the Virgin of the Virtues exposed in the centre. The carving was made in 1939 by the prolific artist from Villena, Antonio Navarro Santafé, author of the sculpture of the Bear and the Strawberry Tree in the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, among others. Behind the altarpiece, and entering through the sacristy, we reach the 17th century chapel, which is covered by an impressive 18th century baroque decoration.

OUTSIDE.

To the right of the main door is the access to the crypt of the Shrine, inside which are still visible remains of the primitive hermitage built before 1526. In the centre of the esplanade, in front of the Shrine, stands the Cross of the Calvary, sculpted in 1948, which replaces another that disappeared during the civil war. Moreover, one of the best known and most loved sculptures by the citizens is on this esplanade: the Fountain of the Frog, from 1917. To the north, some steps lead up to the pine forest of the Shrine, where we find what is known as "the hole of the Virgin", next to which the Fuente del Chopo (Black Poplar Fountain) used to flow. Here a small obelisk marks the place where, according to tradition, the image of the Virgin of the Virtues appeared.



ARCHDEACONRY CHURCH OF SANTIAGO

Built between the 14th and 16th centuries, it is one of the most important Gothic-Renaissance temples in the Valencian Community. It is also an excellent example of Catalan or Levantine Gothic, with a large central nave, side chapels between the buttresses and rare incidence of natural light.



A BIT OF HISTORY.

Although there is news of the existence of a first temple in 1369, the current Church of Santiago is due to the patronage of Sancho García de Medina, parish priest of the temple and canon of the cathedral of Cartagena at the end of the 15th century, who promoted the expansion of the primitive church "which was small and narrow".

With the support of Pope Alexander VI, the Valencian Rodrigo de Borja, the church acquired the archpriestly benefit in 1492, and years later, Pope Julius II promoted it to the dignity of archdeaconry. This fact, and the fact of being the main benefactor of the Church, made that the remains of Sancho García de Medina were buried in the crypt of the Church, under the main altar.

After the death of Sancho García de Medina, the patronage was assumed by his nephew, Pedro de Medina, treasurer of the Cathedral of Cartagena. He was responsible for the presence of Jacopo Torni (Jacobo Florentino) in Villena, an Italian sculptor and disciple of Michelangelo who intervened in the temple.

After Pedro de Medina, Juan Rodríguez Navarro, also a canon of the cathedral of Cartagena, ordered the construction of the last two sections of the temple in Renaissance style. He preserved the original Gothic style doorway of the central nave, which he added to the Renaissance part, while the doors of the side naves are already in the Renaissance style. In addition, he built the choir (now disappeared) and paved the floor of the altar, which he closed laterally with a gate and triple stone balustrade.

The large Communion Chapel, in Neoclassical style, was finished in 1881, with a neo-Gothic portal in 1930.

During the civil war, a fire in the church destroyed the baroque altarpiece of the main altar, the organ, the parish archives, most of the grille of the presbytery and all the stained glass windows, except that of Santa Filomena from the 19th century.

WHAT TO SEE.

Inside the temple there are twelve fabulous Solomon's columns that stand out and line the main nave, whose capitals are decorated with animal, plant and heraldic figures. These columns are similar to those of the Lonjas of Valencia and Palma, although they acquire a greater monumentality in this case. The capitals are decorated with curious figures such as the sun and the moon, or elements that refer to the Camino de Santiago such as the staff, the cap and the pilgrim's shell, as well as coats of arms with the M that refer to the Medina family. The sharpness of the edges that finish off the capitals is striking.

To Jacobo Florentino and the members of his workshop, among whom Jerónimo Quijano stood out, we owe the most important Renaissance elements such as the chapter house and the sacristy, with its magnificent windows that are visible from the street, and a doorway with an access laid out obliquely, the remains of the grille of the presbytery, and, especially, the baptismal font. Located in front of the main altar and sculpted in limestone in 1525, it is considered a landmark of Spanish Renaissance sculptural art.

OUTSIDE.

It is worth approaching up to the apse wall to contemplate the bell tower, topped by an octagonal spire, with a design that responds to Italian medieval patterns. It houses the second largest bell in the Valencian Community, after the Micalet of Valencia. Known as María la Gorda, it was cast in 1572, has a diameter of 162 cm and weighs more than 2,400 kilos.

Under the windows of the apse there is a heraldic panel with the coats of arms of Sancho García de Medina, apostolic protonotary of Pope Alexander VI, the coat of arms of the city of Villena and the coats of arms of the Catholic Monarchs, under whose reign the church was built. Also on this wall, there are visible two marks in the shape of a cartwheel at a distance that corresponds to the pattern of the tahulla, an old unit of agricultural surface to measure irrigated land.

Two sundials can be seen on the southeast façade of the church. The oldest, dating from the end of the 16th century, is the one to the right of the door and is not valid for telling the time, as its design is not appropriate for that orientation. For this reason, the clock above the doorway, which is appropriate for the orientation of the façade, was built at a later date. The clock displays the motto "BREVEs DIEs HOMINIS SVNT" (Brief are the days of man), and shows the hours from 4:00 to 15:00, forming a pair with the clock on the façade of the Municipal Palace, which shows the hours from 9:00 to 20:00.

Two gargoyles and the remains of others that have disappeared can still be seen from the street lamp in the centre of the Plaza de Santiago.



OTHER OUTSTANDING BUILDINGS

In the historic centre of Villena can be found two of the oldest hermitages in the city:

HERMITAGE OF SAN ANTÓN:

that of San Antón, patron saint of the neighbourhood of the same name, built at the end of the 16th century and renovated in 1791.

HERMITAGE OF SAN JOSÉ:

San José, patron saint of the Rabal neighbourhood, built in 1607.

On leaving the historic centre, as one crosses the bustling Calle Corredera, the visitor penetrates into the streets of the old suburb of San Francisco, the first modern expansion of Villena. This is the old area where the monasteries and convents of the city used to be. In Calle de la Congregación is:

THE CHURCH AND CONVENT OF THE TRINITARIAN NUNS:

Who arrived in Villena in 1524.



Nearby, in the charming Plaza de las Malvas, is:

THE CHURCH AND ASILO DE LAS HERMANITAS DE LOS ANCIANOS DESAMPARADOS:

Whose neoclassical chapel, dating from 1910, is attached to the 18th century Baroque Mergelina palace.

SALESIAN SCHOOL

In the central part of the Avenida de la Constitución, known as the "Calle Ancha" in Villena, it can be found the Salesian school along with its church, which is dedicated to María Auxiliadora, built in a neo-Gothic style in 1917.



Also from the 20th century, the churches in the expanding neighbourhoods:

CHURCH OF SAN FRANCISCO DE ASÍS:

In the neighbourhood of the same name, to the south.

CHURCH OF LA PAZ:

Located to the north of the town, with a single nave.



On the outskirts of Villena, on foot or by bike along the Chicharra Greenway, or by car along the old road to Las Virtudes, you reach a recreational area where the small and simple:

CHAPEL OF SAN BARTOLOMÉ:

Patron saint of butchers, dating from 1724, stands out.



CHURCH OF SAN ISIDRO LABRADOR:

From the 18th century, located in the hamlet of La Zafra

CHURCH OF SAN JUAN BAUTISTA:

From the 20th century, built in the railway settlement of La Encina.