

THE CHURCH OF SAINT MAURICE OF AIGLE

CHURCH OF THE CLOISTER



Before the Reformation

The first mention of the city of Aigle is made with reference to this Church, dedicated to Saint Maurice. The allusion is in a document relative to the Prieuré de Saint-Maurice d'Aigle, founded by the Royal Abbey of Agaune, document signed by Saint Guérin, the bishop of Sion from 1138 to 1143.

This sanctuary was originally a monastic chapel which has since disappeared. At the period of the Reformation, the cloister church was in ruins. The Edict of the Reformation made it the "parish church" beginning of March 1528. Until then the parish church had been the Church Saint-Jacques, situated at the extreme limits of the town, on the present Rue du Midi. It was there that the reformer [Guillaume Farel](#) preached for the first time on November 30th, 1526.

In August 1476, a decision of the Congress of Fribourg integrated the Government of Aigle into the Republic of Bern and made Aigle the first French speaking territory to enter the Swiss Confederation. The Government of Aigle (which included Mandates of Aigle, Ollon, Bex and the Ormonts) was thus the first bastion of Reformation in a French speaking country.

Presentation

It remains unknown if in the beginnings the sanctuary of the Middle Ages was preceded by a basilica. Presumably it was built during the Burgundy era around the sixth century. Most

probably the church was built at the end of the eleventh, at the same time as the first Tower of Aigle, the ancestor of the present castle of Aigle. The style was certainly roman. The nave, as the digs of 1899 showed, was narrower at the time, and there was a small semicircular choir (marked by the special paving just behind the communion table).

At the end of the fifteenth century, the vault of the nave, probably arched before this time, was lowered and rebuilt in gothic style. The side-aisles formed chapels. Those to the south are linked together by arched doorways. The nave is made of four bays with ribbed vaults, the groined vaultings rest on the pendants inserted in the walls, except for those separating the first and the second bays, which repose on a pillar.

The organ occupies the first bay. It is situated on the balcony supported by two pillars of St. Triphon marble. Finally, the pulpit, dated 1901, a richly decorated walnut, is placed to the left of the entrance to the choir under the triumphal arch.

Architectural Details

The actual choir was built during the fifteenth century. It is larger than the nave and polychromic paintings were found, but their limited value did not justify their restoration. The choir is gothic with roman windows on each side. The stained-glass windows are the work of the local artist [Frédéric Rouge](#) (1867-1950) and represent scenes from the life of Jesus. The stalls are most interesting: certain date from the end of the sixteenth century, others from the eighteenth and have gothic misericords (the narrow ledge on the underside of the tilted-up seats). There are also some in the nave. Those to the left of the lectern carry show the coat of arms of the families Bertholet and De Loës.

On the keystone of the nave figure the Bernese coat of arms and those of the Bernese governor, Thomas Schöni, who was ousted from the Aigle government in 1486. Schöni was the initiator of the renovation of the church – or at least was the one who supervised the work – mandated by their Excellencies of Bern. At this time the choir was almost completely reconstructed. The ribs were joined again with a new keystone with the coat of arms of Jean Fournier, the apostolic protonotary who, perhaps, was the prior of Aigle around 1480. According to Professor Marcel Grandjean¹ the reconstruction of the church could have been the work of [Jean Vaulet-Dunoyer](#), the master builder of the beautiful bell-towers of the Old Chablais and Lower Valais. This reconstruction and edification of the actual belltower can be dated between 1480 and 1500.

Finally let us mention the “bell of 1202”. It is the largest in the tower (you can see the plaster casts in the alcove near the pulpit). This date has been frequently called into question and the bell could be a recast of the “bell of 1202”, a recast done here in the area at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The actual organ dates from 1964 and replaces the older one of 1874.

It is indeed a beautiful church, our Church of Saint Maurice of the Cloister. The mixture of roman and gothic styles makes it a monument of important architectural interest.

Charles Kraege / KMK

¹ Marcel Grandjean, *Architectes du Vieux-Chablais à la fin de l'époque gothique, Vallesia XXXIII, 1978* – [réro en oct. 2022](#)