

Convent of the Asunción
Address: Ejido de Calatrava
13270 - Almagro (Ciudad Real, Spain)
Phone: (+34) 926 69 33 32
E-mail: dominicos@almagro.es

Tourist Information Centre
Address: 21, San Agustín Street
13270 - Almagro (Ciudad Real, Spain)
Phone: (+34) 926 86 07 17
E-mail: turismo@almagro.es

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Convent of the Asunción



After several negotiations, the construction of the convent of the nuns of Calatrava was ratified in 1524. The magnitude of the project led to stop its construction for years due to the exhaustion of funds. It was not until 1543 when Gutierre de Padilla contributed a large sum of money under the condition that the construction had to be completed within one year.

Nuns of the order of Calatrava inhabited the convent until 1815, whereupon they were transferred, and so the convent was hosted by friars until 1836, when religious orders were abolished, and all the assets belonging to this convent passed to the State by the process known as *desamortización*.

In 1851 the convent was declared National Historic Monument, but the building suffered unfortunate interventions due to its use as cavalry barracks, and the subsequent restoration works carried out by the Dominican order from 1903 onwards in order to arrange it as a seminary. These alterations modified severely the original design, such as the church.

The proportioned layout of the cloister, one of the most beautiful and least known of the Spanish Renaissance, is of quadrangular ground plant and consists of two galleries with sixty classic columns with sandstone bases and capitals and white Macael marble shafts. The selection of the Ionic order on the ground floor and the Tuscan on the upper floor is related to a knowledge of the work of Serlio *The general rules of architecture*, based on the Vitruvian one. The proportionality of the architectural elements of this cloister proves the correct theoretical training of the author of the project.

Stylistically it has great similarities with the Toledo Hospital of Tavera. This raises questions regarding its implementation, authorship and chronology. It is believed that its author is Enrique Egas El Mozo, a pupil of Francisco de Luna, the main master of the Monastery of Uclés (Cuenca), and inhabitant of Villanueva de los Infantes during this period. In fact, this is clear as in the second half of the 16th century the Tavera and Albacete monasteries were being built, and they have great parallelism. As regards the chronology, it is documented that in 1534 the cloister was under construction.

This cloister stands out thanks to its decoration and its wonderful carvings, which would deserve a detailed iconographic analysis. Around the galleries are seven doors and three windows on the ground floor and two doorways on the upper floor, where it is reflected its Plateresque style decoration that el Mozo had presumably assimilated from the Toledo circles, since the decorated motifs were exactly the same as those used by Covarrubias in some of his works (garlands, fruits, cameos, and so on).

The most remarkable element of this cloister is doubtless the grand staircase, which it is based on the typical cloister pattern of staircase of the 16th century. This staircase has three sections and a flamboyant Gothic style balustrade.

