

**Tales of The Confolentais area, Land of art and history...**  
... in the company of a guide approved by the Ministry of Culture and Communication.

The guide welcomes you and gives you the keys to understand the scale of a place, the development of the town from one quarter to another and the surrounding villages. The guide knows the area perfectly and he is at your disposal. Do not hesitate to ask him your questions.

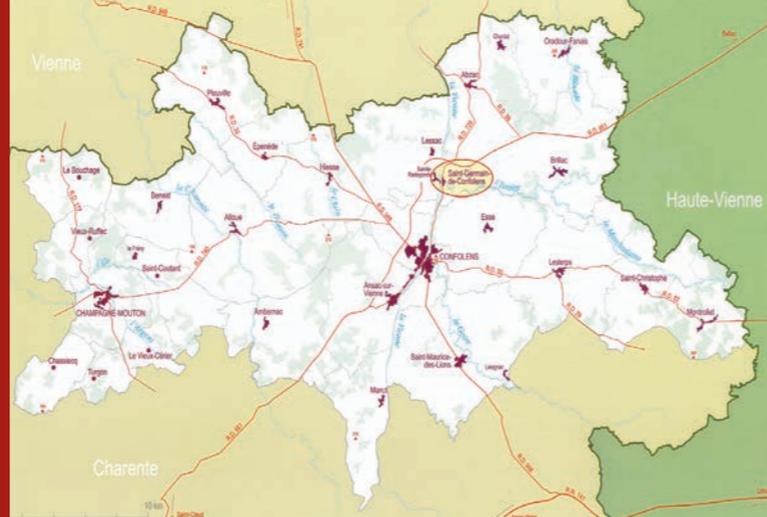
The heritage promotion service coordinates the initiatives of Confolentais, Pays d'art et d'histoire. All through the year it offers events for the inhabitants, schoolchildren and visitors. It is at your disposal for any project.

#### If you are a group

The « Pays d'art et d'histoire » offers visits all through the year by reservation. Information available at the **tourist office**.

Informations, reservations :  
Confolens Tourist Information Point  
8 rue Fontaine des jardins  
16500 Confolens - Tél. 05.45.84.22.22  
www.charente-limousine.fr  
Rubrique Pays d'art et d'histoire

Service Patrimoine : Céline DEVEZA  
Architecture and heritage coordinator  
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This brochure was produced thanks to the results of the heritage inventory, conducted between 2003 and 2006 by the Community of Communes of Confolentais and the general inventory service of the cultural heritage of the Poitou-Charentes region.  
To contact the service : 05.49.36.30.07  
<http://inventaire.poitou-charentes.fr>

#### The Confolentais is a member of the national network of Towns and Lands of art and history

The Ministry of Culture and Communication, directorate of architecture and heritage and regional directorates of cultural affairs, awards the label Town or Land of art and history to local authorities that implement actions to promote and enhance their architecture and heritage. It provides technical and financial support for these actions.

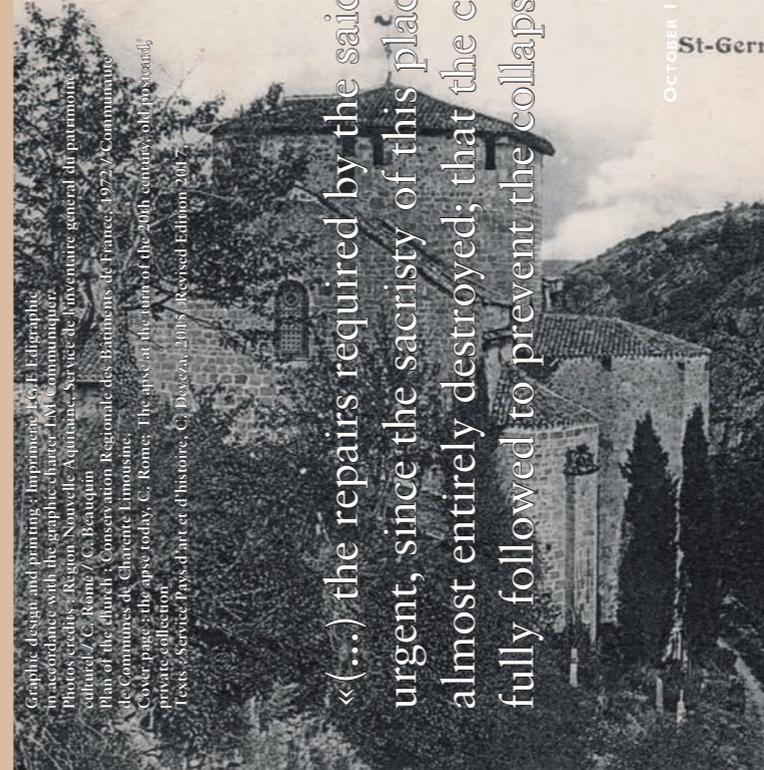
It guarantees the expertise of the guides, those involved in promoting architecture and heritage and the quality of their actions. From ancient relics to 21<sup>st</sup> century architecture, the towns and lands show heritage in all its diversity.

Today, a network of 202 Towns and Lands of art and history of which 79 Lands offers its expertise throughout France.

#### Nearby

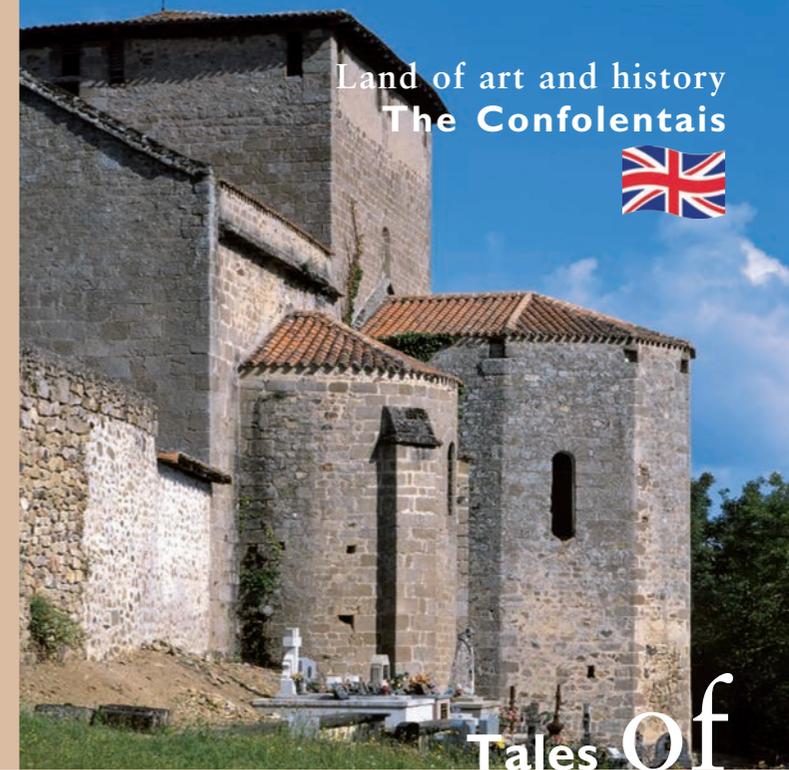
In the Nouvelle Aquitaine Region : the towns of Bayonne, Bergerac, Bordeaux, Cognac, La Réole, Limoges, Pau, Périgueux, Grand Poitiers, Rochefort, Royan, Saintes, Sarlat, Thouars ; the lands of Angoumois, Béarn des Gaves, Châtelleraudais, Grand Villeneuveois, Hautes Terres Corrésiennes et Ventadour, Île de Ré, the Mellois en Poitou, Monts et Barrages, Parthenay-Gâtine, Pyrénées béarnaises, Saint-Jean-de-Luz and Ciboure, Vézère and Ardoise, Vienne and Gartempe.

« (...) the repairs required by the said parish priest ... were necessary and urgent, since the sacristy of this place which overlooks the cemetery was almost entirely destroyed; that the cover of the said church should be fully followed to prevent the collapse of the vault (...) »



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Cover page : the apse today, C. Rome; The apse at the turn of the 20th century, old postcardly private collection  
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OCTOBER 1782 LETTER IN P. BOULLANGER, SAINT-GERMAIN-DE-CONFOLENS (CHARENTE)  
P. 88 / 2012



Land of art and history  
The Confolentais



Tales Of

The  
Church of Saint-Vincent  
in Saint-Germain-de-  
Confolens  
Town of Confolens

## Its history

Mentioned in 1185, the church of Saint-Vincent was located within the fortified enclosure of the castle. Considered until now as the castle chapel, the recent study by Sébastien Dumasdelage suggests that it was the church attended by the lord and the aristocratic families living in close proximity to the castle.

It was built in several stages. The arcade bases or «springers» on the back of the facade and on the pillars at the entrance to the apse seem to be the remains of an early building.

The church as we know it today dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The apse was rebuilt in the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century, as shown by the semicircular base of the original apse compared to the polygonal plan of the upper part.

The parts of the church built in large blocks of granite do not seem to have been altered. In places, the walls were repaired in ashlar work at an unknown date.

It was in the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century that the chapel took on the status of a parish church. It also became the seat of a priory attached to the Abbey of Charroux.

This new destination may have been linked both to the presence of oratories in the castle rebuilt at the time but also to the parish church located in the village falling into disuse.

The cupola over pendentives which was at the transept crossing probably collapsed during the Wars of Religion and was later replaced by a floor. The bell tower was also rebuilt, it is probably lower than the original bell tower.

The last major works took place at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They concerned the two arms of the transept (1989-1990) and the roofs (1991-1992).

The church has been included in the supplementary inventory of historic monuments since 1973.

## Its architecture

The church of Saint-Vincent is located north of the castle, on the rocky outcrop overlooking the village of Saint-Germain.

It is built in large blocks of granite and ashlar stone for certain elevations ; the ashlar parts undoubtedly correspond to modifications.

The Greek cross plan of the church results in a very short nave, a wide transept, each arm opening onto an apsidiole on the eastern wall and a polygonal apse with a base.



The portal is on the western gable wall of the nave which acts as a facade. Simple and without decoration, it is covered with a large saddleback lintel.

It forms part of a facade which is also very sober with only two other openings : a semicircular bay decorated with a stained glass window of the Sacred Heart and an oculus.

Each transept crossing has two semicircular openings and a door. The bell tower, square in plan, stands above the transept crossing.

It has several different types of stonework as a result of modifications. These changes have made it smaller than it originally was. It is pierced with many rectangular openings, possible vestiges of the defensive purpose of the bell tower.

The seven-sided apse is built on the side of a rock. It rests on the foundations of an earlier apse which is semi-circular in plan and has buttress bases. It is this base that is commonly called the crypt.

Inside, the nave is made up of a single bay, a very slightly pointed barrel vault.

A string course, including the upper part of the capitals of the columns or «abacus», runs through the church under the springers of the vault.

It will be noted that the base of the side walls of the nave and the transept has a broad ledge in the form of a bench.

The transept crossing was covered with a cupola, of which only the triangular pendentives and the base remain today. It is now replaced by a wooden floor. The different arches, slightly pointed, rest on columns with curved capitals.

The semicircular absidioles, on the eastern wall of the arms of the transept, have half dome vaults and each is lit by a semicircular bay.

The narrow, low apse opens under the triumphal arch that supported the cupola to the east. It is pierced by three semicircular bays and has vestiges of mural painting.

The stained glass windows in the choir are creations of the Gesta workshop in Toulouse. They represent Saint Vincent, the Sacred Heart and Saint Germain. To the south, a small niche is covered with an accolade.

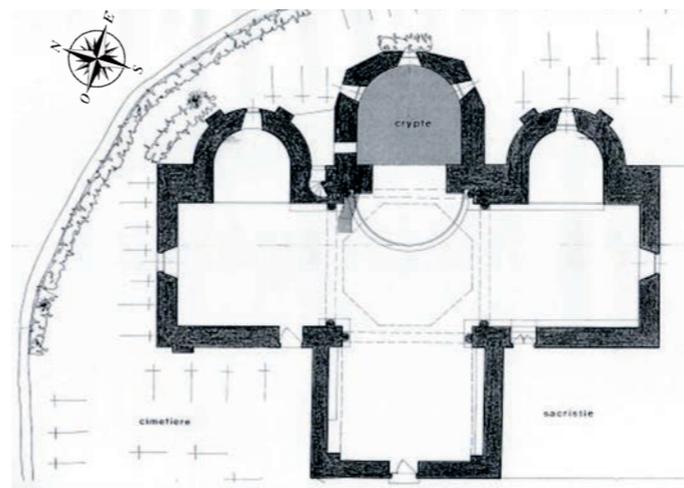
The base, or « crypt », is accessible by a passage at the entrance to the north arm of the transept. It is lit by a bay window, altered during the Gothic period, whose lintel has an incised pointed arc and a tympanum with a trefoil tracery decoration (see photo).



## The plan

The Saint-Vincent church has a Greek cross plan which is unique in the Confolentais.

The most frequent plan is indeed the single nave, even if certain churches have a nave and a side aisle (Saint-Maxime in Confolens) or a nave and side chapels which were added later.



The church of Saint-Maurice in Saint-Maurice-des-Lions and the abbey of Saint-Pierre in Lesterps are the only ones to have a nave and two side aisles.

The Greek cross plan of the church is partly masked by the old presbytery which is built on to the southern transept and separated from the nave by a small passage. This building was constructed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by the priest Antoine Rolland on the site of a previous building visible on the cadastral plan of 1825.

Note the presence, at the foot of the church, of the town cemetery. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, conceptions of hygiene and the fight against epidemics led to cemeteries being moved outside the town centres.

All the Confolentais cemeteries were then transferred outside the inhabited areas, except in Montrollet, where the town developed away from the church, and in Saint-Germain-de-Confolens, where the cemetery was already located away from the inhabited area.

Limited in its expansion due to its location on the rocky outcrop, the cemetery will eventually have to find a larger location.

## To find out more :

BERLAND Jean-Marie, Les cryptes de Charente, Mémoires de la société archéologique et historique de la Charente, 1971, p. 405, note 9, p. 416- 417.

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Id. Saint-Germain de Confolens, Quelques pages de notre histoire, p. 19.

Id. Un château médiéval à Saint-Germain-de-Confolens, Mémoires de la société archéologique et historique de la Charente, 1969, p. 168, 169, 174, 185-191.

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LAURIERE Jules de, Rapport sur l'excursion de la société à Saint-Germain-sur-Vienne, Bulletins de la Société Archéologique et Historique de la Charente, 4e série, tome 5, 1867, p. 329-334.

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## Zoom : Saint Vincent, patron saint of the church

Here we are talking about Saint Vincent of Saragossa, born in the 3<sup>th</sup> century.

Deacon to Bishop Valère, he preached and taught the faithful. He was arrested with the bishop and sentenced to martyrdom. Vincent is said to have endured all the suffering caused by the torture without losing his calm and benevolence towards his torturers. Once put to death, his body was exposed to animals, but his remains were defended by a crow. His body was finally weighted and placed in the open sea but, instead of sinking, it returned to land before the return of the boat. He is depicted in deacon's clothes and has different attributes : a spiked iron bed, a millstone, a boat which he carries in his arms or even a billhook, a pail and bunches of grapes. These latter attributes are to be linked with his patronage of winegrowers. This astonishing patronage may come from the fact that he was tortured on a press bed, his blood then flowing where wine usually flows.