

with each other. These are separated by slim Salomonic columns and the whole set is embellished by exuberant raised work decoration whose motifs are repeated around: stylised flowers, acanthus leaves and garlands. The keystones in the arches represent different shields.

The central chapel is higher than the rest; the columns have been replaced as far as the height of the lateral chapels by two pairs of low columns which support a blazoned entablature from which the long central banister stands up with raised work of smiling little angles, flowers, bows and garlands.

From the moulding of the upper arches, the takes a cylindrical shape, limited by a circular entablature divided into eight carved corbels. The frieze is decorated with garlands in a continuous pattern. The entablature supports an spherical tambourless dome of great purity, traversed by light mouldings as far as the circle of the cylindrical lantern, also covered by an spherical dome.

The four windows of the lantern and those opening around the top gallery form a bright and spotless space.



Due to the layout of its parts and to its magnificent ornamentation, this circular gallery can be considered as the most important Baroque monument in our island.

The Cloister

Close to the main church doors on the right hand side, you can find the entrance to the Museum of Menorca. If you go in, you will be able to see the harmonious proportions of the ancient convent yard. Its layout reminds us of other Spanish cloisters of the Baroque period, and its decorations -although simple- are also typical of that artistic period in fashion at the end of XVII and beginning of XVIII centuries.

Parròquia de Sant Francesc d'Assís



ENGLISH

History

You are visiting *St. Francis of Assisi parish church*, formerly the *Convent of Jesus*, founded by Franciscan Fray Bartolomé Catany and twelve other monks in 1459.

The convent, the first founded in Mahón, was built on the southern cliffs of the harbour, not far from *El Portal del Mirador*, later called *Portal del Monestir*.



Those were hard times in Menorca and the population was overwhelmed by shortages; under those circumstances Emperor Charles V must have granted the Franciscans a nearby vegetable garden as well as the exclusive right to use fishing nets in the innermost part of the harbour. King Philip II renewed the grant to the monastery in 1568.

There is nothing left of the old convent today; the oldest remains is *the Cloister*, situated in the southern side of the church and used nowadays for the museum of Menorca exhibitions.

In XVIIIth century when Menorca's sovereignty changed 5 times, the living conditions on the island improved considerably, mainly due to the growth of sea commerce which brought greater prosperity and welfare. The favourable circumstances must have made the Franciscans decide to build the spacious temple you can see now.

Its first stone was blessed on 7th June 1719 by the Bishop of Mazzara (Sicily), Bartolomé Castellví who was passing through Mahón and staying in the Convent of Jesus.

It is precisely known how the new church was built. The side walls must have been raised in the beginning but it was not until 1730 that the first vault

span was completed; from then on the ceiling of the nave was built at greater speed, being blessed on 21st November 1736 by Father Caretaker Fr. Gabriel Fábregues. From that date the side chapels were opened and in 1757-58 the balcony of the choir was built, situated at the back of the temple just above the main entrance, supported by 8 columns with their corresponding barrel arches. The presbytery and sacristy were erected between 1766 and 1770 and the façade and belfry in 1775. The works were completed in 1792.

In 1877 Bishop Mercader reorganised the diocese of Menorca, appointing as a Parish what had been until 1835 the *Convent of Jesus* of the Franciscan Order, which had had more than 40 monks and it exerted great spiritual and charitable influence.

Artistic Features of today's church

A single nave with a late Gothic style ceiling: pointed and barrel vaults, whose nerves spring from Corinthian capitals; the lateral chapels between the buttresses have barrel vaults and arches and columns with spiral and zig-zag ornaments.

The presbytery is lower and narrower than the rest of the building and is connected through a sort of triumph arch in which we can see numerous painted



angels adoring the name of Jesus sitting high up on a sun; in the same edge 2 neo-classical imposing entrances give on to the sacristies.

Outside you can see the trumpet shaped arched entrance, which seems inspired by the Romanic, but the frame dates from the Renaissance and a small vaulted niche can be found between it and the arches.

Inside the church other ornaments such as the wall painting (in grisaille) in the presbytery which represent scenes in St. Francis' life date from XIXth century. Very artistic, too, are the wrought iron gates that shut off the main altar, a remain of the former splendid ornamentation of the church.

Today's main altarpiece in Baroque style was inaugurated in 1945.

The Chapel of the Virgin, La Concepción, also called ***The Communion***, deserves special mention. Built between 1745 and 1752, without the octagonal ground plan, covered by a big lantern dome is joined to the rest of the building by the space which corresponds to the fourth nave chapel, on the right hand side of the main doorway.

The face opposite the entrance archway contains a not very deep chapel, and the other six arranged three to each side, present chapels with elliptical low arches. Just above some galleries open up with arches in the same arrangement which communicate