

# The Estudi General of the Universitat de València. *Cultural Centre La Nau*



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VNIVERSITAT D VALÈNCIA  
Vicerectorat de Cultura, Igualtat i  
Planificació

# HISTORY

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The origin of Universitat de Valencia can be tracked down to the wish of the City Juries to unify all the higher schools of Valencia into a single place.

To that end, some houses on the current site were purchased and then adapted as an *Estudi General* (a General Study) by the renowned architect Pere Compte – the author of the Silk Exchange and other important works at the Cathedral and the Parliament– who was commissioned the project in 1498.

Its bylaws were drawn up in 1499 and Pope Alexander VI and King Ferdinand II the Catholic gave the institution university status in 1502.

For centuries, university life unfolded peacefully and at times it even reached great splendour. Its classrooms were used for teaching and learning, and high-statute figures taught there, like the philosopher Luis Vives, the humanists Rojas Clemente and Honorato Juan, the naturalist Cavanilles, the scientist Corachán, the mathematician Tomás Vicente Tosca, the scholars Gregorio Mayans and Francisco Pérez Bayer, and the researchers Ferrán and Ramón y Cajal.

The Universitat building was badly hit by the 1812 bombing during the city siege by Napoleon's troops led by Marshall Suchet. A fire caused by the bombing destroyed the library, the classrooms and the offices, and only the

auditorium and the chapel survived. Done throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the reconstruction was slow and hard.

In 1844 Universitat lost its financial and institutional autonomy, being made answerable to the central state. Its lecturers became civil servants. An interesting Museum of Natural Science was created but it was burned in a fire in 1932.

Today, the university's academic activity is developed at colleges and schools scattered around three campuses and at different research institutes around the city. The historic building caters for the Historic Library, the rector's rooms and different administrative and cultural services.



Universitat de Valencia. Estudi General

## THE HIGH CLOISTER

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Its current shape dates back to a 1838 project by Timoteo Calvo Ibarra (1799-1879) aimed at remodelling the old student patio. It consists of two porticoes with columns and architraves on two levels and over a trapezoidal plan.

Its construction started in 1840 with the Tuscan colonnade of the Academic Theatre and the Lecture Hall and was completed at the ground floor by Sebastián Monleón (1815-1878) in 1870. Following an initiative by the rector José Monserrat, a bronze statue of Luis Vives sculpted by José Aixa (1844-1920) and molten by Vicente Ríos was erected on a high pedestal at the

centre of the cloister. It was to express the great development of classical humanities in the history of the University. It was surrounded by a medicinal garden which evoked the important student tradition in botany and pharmacopeia.

In 1902, on the occasion of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the University, fine medallions in relief with portraits of outstanding personalities in university history were hung on the walls and in 1944 the Ionian porticos of the first floor were built by the architect Javier Goerlich (1886-1972), who also designed the niche of the clock.



High Cloister



## THE SAPIENCE CHAPEL

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The university chapel was built in 1498 by the renowned architect of the Valencian Gothic period Pere Compte and totally refurbished in 1736 by Miguel Martínez following a Southern Baroque classicist variant.



The Sapience Chapel

It is preceded by the university patio, ornamented in 1842 with the emblems of the four Colleges: Medicine, Sciences, Law, and Philosophy and Humanities.

With a single nave in five vaulted sections, the chapel is segmented by Corinthian pilasters and a series of arches. The presbytery is enhanced by a graceful oval dome whose keystone displays the coats of arms of Valencia, as the city encouraged its foundation. A high choir at the end takes up the first section.

The high altar is a fine Baroque piece in golden wood which frames the original

Renaissance painting of our Lady of Wisdom, the university's patron saint, painted by Nicolás Falcó in 1516; it is surrounded by other Baroque paintings attributed to Evaristo Muñoz (1631-1737). Paintings from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries hang from the walls. They depict the judgement of Salomon, the Revenge of Tomyris, and different saints that were linked to the Valencian academic institution. A painting of the Immaculate Conception as a child is shown under the choir's vault.

Ever since its foundation, the Chapel has been used as the university's conference hall; apart from services, it held professor examinations, presentations of theses, the approval of degrees, and the so-called "Sabatines", scholastic discussions between lecturers and students in which citizens could be present too.



*Virgen de la Sapiencia* by Nicolás Falcó, 1516

The Chapel was fully remodelled between 1985 and 1990, and it is frequently used for cultural activities: recitals, lectures and music concerts.



## THE AUDITORIUM

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From its origin, the Academic Theatre was used like a chapter house.

Apart from academic discussions, it held the meetings of the senate which dealt with university matters and other formal functions and public events. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was also used as a theatre, with comedies by Plautus and Terence being staged in their original language. And exceptionally, it hosted meetings of great transcendence for political and cultural life. Today, it is used for formal events, for the opening of the academic year and for the investiture of Honorary Doctors.

It was built in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century and largely refurbished in 1869 by Sebastián Monleón, who gave it its present appearance. It was also remodelled in 1985.

Its plan is trapezoidal and has a projected balcony on the first floor. It is covered by a wide Catalan vault with lunettes, ornamented with trompe l'oeil trims. A large bronze chandelier hangs from the centre. There are stalls with seats and a

presidential platform. The walls are ornamented with portraits of renowned personalities connected to the history of Universitat.

From the highest point of the front area, the hall is presided by a splendid painting of the Immaculate Conception (1660) by J. Espinosa, with an idealized view of Valencia whose coat of arms –held by two angels– crowns the picture. The painting is flanked by the names –written in “golden letters”– of distinguished people in university history.



*José Sanchís,*  
by Jerónimo Jacinto de Espinosa,  
c. 1606



The Auditorium

## THE HISTORIC LIBRARY

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The historic library is the most important project undertaken during the reformist period of the Enlightenment, with Vicente Blasco as university rector. Based on a neoclassical project by the architect Joaquín Martínez, it was built (1789-1795) on a plot of land purchased for that purpose on the corner of the block between Universidad St and La Nave St.

The bombing of Valencia in the first days of January of 1812 during the city's siege by Napoleon's troops caused a fire that destroyed a large portion of the university building and burned down the new Library.

Between 1830 and 1837 it was reconstructed and conditioned as per the original project; it was equipped with lacquered wood shelves for books with funds provided by the librarian Mariano Liñán, and with books donated by several professors and scholars and collections from the libraries in convents and monasteries that had been expropriated in 1835.

The architectural plan devised for the Library was later used as a model for the reconstruction of the whole university building, as laid down in the refurbishment project of the prestigious architect Timoteo Calvo Ibarra in 1839, and for the formal unification of the whole block, which was completed in 1954.

At present, after moving the General Library to the new premises at Tarongers Campus, it has been converted into the Historic Library, which caters for publications up to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Among its most valuable assets is a collection of codices and manuscripts originally coming from the Royal Library of Naples, which was transferred to the Valencian Monastery of San Miguel de los Reyes by Fernando of Aragón, Duke of Calabria.



Sala Pérez Bayer

The library stores up valuable manuscripts, incunabula, printed works from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, prints, stamps, posters, and fine high-quality samples of Valencian graphic art from the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These valuable collections are complemented by posters of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), an important map library with Portolan charts, maps and very valuable atlases with cartographic spheres (round books), together with collections of stamps, engravings and cameos that make up a unique treasure for researchers and interested visitors.

## CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

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The old historic building of the *Estudi General* (General Study) was radically refurbished on the occasion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Centennial of Universitat de València. It is considered to be a major reference for the institution -right at the heart of the city- and a public showcase of the conscientious education, research and culture-related tasks developed by university for all citizens.

As a cultural centre, "La Nau" offers a broad programme of activities aimed at spreading culture and promoting arts and social awareness. This programme includes temporary exhibitions at *Estudi General* and *Thesaurus* exhibition rooms, interesting theatre shows at Matilde Salvador Hall and at the cloister thanks to the well-rooted theatre tradition of the Valencian university, concerts with the university's own symphonic orchestra, weekly chamber music at the *Sapiencia* Chapel, and the successful summer serenades held at the cloister. All these activities are complemented by the lectures, debates and publications of the successful *Forum de Debats* (Discussion Forum) focused on raising social awareness, by poetry recitals, cinema debates, videoconferences of international events, specialised courses, seminars, scientific congresses, and other actions that contribute, together with the university's art collections and museum premises, to an extensive and

diverse cultural supply at the service of an ambitious cultural project that enhances the meaning of the emblematic university building and complements Valencia's cultural offer on the basis of reflection, dialogue and service, which have been the foundations of the academic institution ever since it was founded, more than 500 years ago.



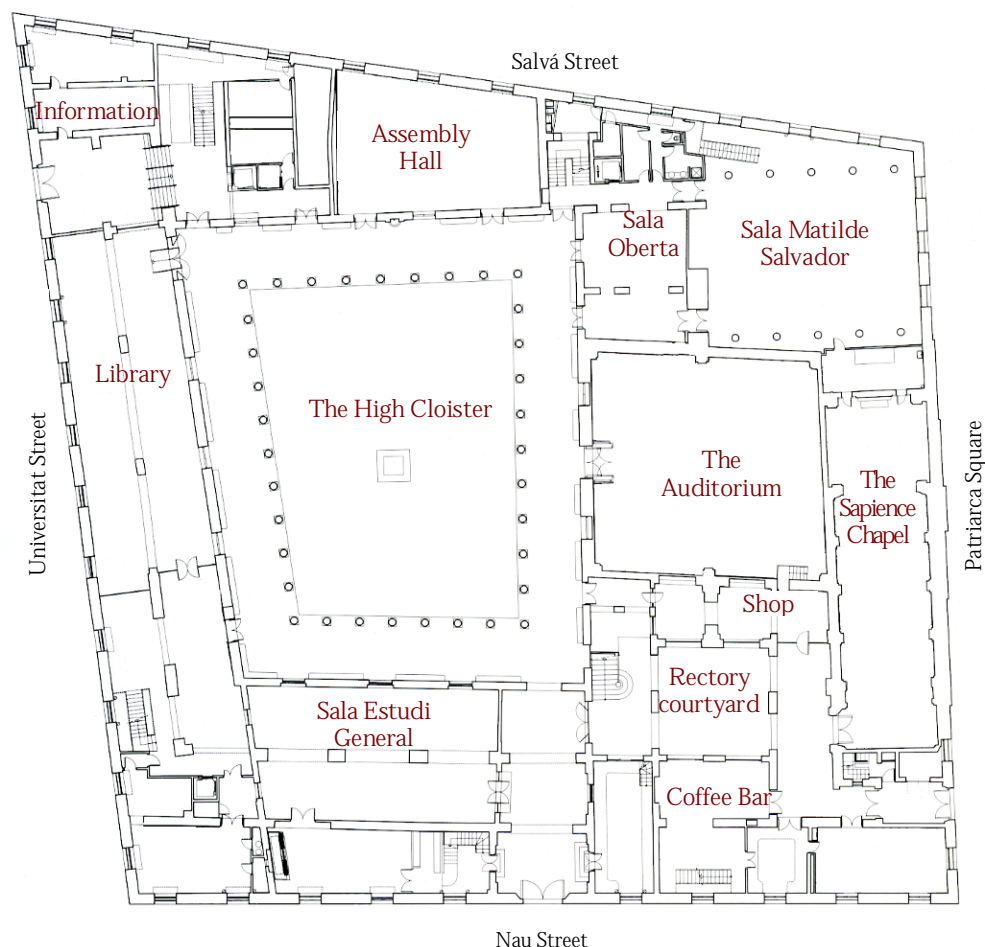
Performance of *Edipo Rey*



# INFORMATION

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Ground floor:



Floor 1: Sala de Códices Duque de Calabria, Sala de Investigadores Pérez Bayer, Sala Martínez Guericabeitia, Sala Thesaurus.



ÀREA DE CONSERVACIÓ DE PATRIMONI CULTURAL



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