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Sources and bibliography
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Links
www.tourisme-pyreneesorientales.com/en
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Holy Week and Easter Celebrations

Long before Easter became the most significant Christian celebration, we would celebrate the arrival of the spring as a symbol of new life beginning. In April, and more specifically, during Easter week, there are festivals held here that show the survival of certain deep rooted Catalan traditions emanating from pagan beliefs, secular traditions and a solid faith.

Anything involved with the Holy Week and the Passion of the Christ celebrations have had to adhere to a strict set of rules for centuries. But in the Pyrénées-Orientales, there is a specific colour and a very special atmosphere. The extraordinary and spectacular [Sanch Procession](#) on Good Friday in Perpignan is proof of that, as well as the processions in [Collioure](#) and [Arles-sur-Tech](#) with lanterns and torches. And in the village of Bouleternère, the evening procession is held on Maundy Thursday.

Other processions also take place to the sound of a thousand bells and the ceremonies have become very joyful occasions. When Christ and the Virgin meet on the morning of the Resurrection (Easter Sunday, the procession of the resurrected) in Céret and Ille-sur-Têt.

The week wouldn't be complete in Roussillon without the Easter Monday celebrations in one of the hermitages where the Catalan people get together to dance one of their superb *sardana* dances of Roussillon. The air is filled with the scents of the *cargolade* (grilled land snails) and the Easter omelette made with all the very best Catalan deli meats (black and white pudding, pork belly, sausage, etc.) and ancient vegetables (crunchy artichokes, etc.), and the warm sun shines down on the golden-coloured wine of the nearby vineyards and hillsides.

But Easter is also about the eggs. The *goigs dels ous* (literally meaning 'hymn to the eggs') have become popular tradition and are sung throughout the night at Easter. They are sung to praise the Virgin and the hospitable welcome at each house, where the singers will beg for eggs and black and white pudding for their baskets, which will then be the essential ingredients of the Easter meal.

Events' Calendar for Easter Celebrations

- ✓ Arles-sur-Tech: Good Friday: Evening procession of the penitents
- ✓ Bouleternère: Maundy Thursday: Evening procession of the penitents
- ✓ Céret: Easter Sunday morning: Procession of the Resurrected
- ✓ Collioure: Good Friday: Evening procession of the penitents
- ✓ Ille-sur-Têt: Easter Sunday morning: **Procession of the Resurrected and singing from 'Régina'** (140 choristers and 40 musicians)
- ✓ Perpignan: Sacred Music Festival (during Holy Week) and in the afternoon on Good Friday, the Sanch Procession through the streets of Perpignan.

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Background

The Archconfraternity of La Sanch dates back to the 11th October 1416, but the Procession goes back almost six centuries and has most definitely experienced moments of glory as well as trials and tribulations over the years. It was celebrated until 1777, and then disappeared progressively due to a number of disturbances, before being reinstated in 1950 upon agreement from the Canon Mestres, priest of Saint-Jacques, and Monseigneur Bernard, bishop of Perpignan. The members of the Archconfraternity of La Sanch had sent a letter prior to this decision, to the civil authorities of the town and the political parties, to request authorisation to revive this past tradition.

Father Boher, the old '*hortolà*' (gardener) was the keeper of this tradition for a long time and it is thanks to him that the Confraternity of La Sanch were able to revive the centuries-old tradition on the 6th April 1950. Once limited to the surrounding area of the church of Saint-Jacques, the procession has since taken to the streets of the old town, just like it did back in the day, surrounded by huge crowds.

The English translation of the '*Confraria del Preciosissim Sanch del Senyor Jesus Christ*' is 'the Confraternity of the precious blood of Jesus Christ'. The Sanch Procession groups together the confraternities of La Sanch from the town's parishes (Saint-Jacques, Saint-Joseph, La Réal), as well as penitents from the confraternities of nearby villages, hence the name 'archconfraternity'.

Paraded through the streets are several '*misteris*' (symbols of the Passion of Christ) and Mary, Mother of Sorrows is represented standing at the foot of the cross, watching the sacrifice of her son. Her chest is decorated with a heart pierced with seven swords. Each sword portrays one of Mary's seven sorrows, as sung in the '*goigs*' (compositions of poetry praising the Virgin Mary).

Following his approval given in 1950 when the procession was revived, the Bishop of the Diocese became the official representative of the spiritual and religious side of this commemoration of the Passion of Jesus Christ. In recent years, it has become customary for Monseigneur Chabbert to give a sermon, either when the procession leaves from the church of Saint-Jacques, or when it stops in front of the cathedral.

All historians have come to the conclusion that the origin of the Sanch Procession goes back to 1416, to Saint-Vincent Ferrier, a Dominican friar, who preached penance and helped sinners prepare for judgement. In preaching the Passion to the Clarisses Convent, the '*bona gent*' of Perpignan had the idea of founding a confraternity of penitents who would gather around this important topic of the Passion.

The word '*goig*' comes from the Latin '*gaudium*', meaning joy and praise. This was the name given to the songs which, before the 14th century, were devoted to praising Mary. From the 15th century, especially after the visit from Saint-Vincent Ferrier, these songs were especially sung in tribute to the suffering endured by Christ and his mother. The verses of these songs were full of sadness and therefore given the name '*goigs dolorosos*' (painful joy), a concept that was rather unique to literature, and they spoke of Mary's suffering at the Calvary.

Of the many professions that flourished in the 14th century in the area around Saint-Jacques, that of the gardeners ('*hortolans*' in Catalan) was the most prominent and the most ancient. They were responsible for the meticulous floral decoration of the '*misteris*' (symbols of the Passion of Christ).

The cross known as '*improperis*' (insults) was the large cross carried at the head of the procession, featuring the various symbols of the Passion of Christ (cockerel, crown of thorns, whip, chalice, pincers, hammer, the torturous nails, etc.).

The Sanch Procession is so much more than just a historic ritual or a mysterious tradition from the Middle Ages, it is a fascinating commemoration of the Passion of Jesus Christ and a key moment in the religious culture of the Catalan people.

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Glossary

Kyrielle: Litany according to the most reliable of dictionaries. A long series of curses, insults such as those directed at Christ during the Passion, symbolised in the Sanch Procession by the cross of '*improperis*'. In the procession, it is placed behind the *Regidor* with his iron bells, and according to tradition, this cross of '*improperis*' paves the way for the various '*misteris*'.

Mary is represented at the foot of the tree of redemption, being handed the body of her divine son, crucified. In every church across our region, there is a chapel or at the very least, a statue of the '*Pietat*', similar to the one represented by the '*misteris*' in the procession. The *Pietat goigs* that are sung the day before Easter speak of the celestial joys of the Virgin.

The '*misteris*' are full-size representations of the various scenes of the Passion of Christ. The figures are positioned on a sort of shield, decorated with flowers. At each stop along the way, the participants place sections of the '*misteris*' onto sticks with a small fork (*forqueta*) at the far end.

Today, the Sanch Procession is famous across the globe thanks to the many documentaries and films devoted to the topic, and so hordes of professional and amateur photographers and filmmakers flock to see the procession.

Originally, the processions took place in the evening and the biggest one in the evening of Maundy Thursday. There were in fact three processions held during the Holy Week. The first one on Maundy Thursday, the second on Good Friday and the last one on Easter morning.

The robes worn by the penitents (*caperutxes*), were once worn by the condemned who were escorted by the '*gens d'armes*' outside of the Castillet, away from the town centre, to be hung or decapitated. Embroidered onto the cone part of their red or black robes, the penitents wear the emblem of the Archconfraternity of La Sanch, the five wounds of Christ, with the crown of Catalonia Aragon over the top.

It became customary for the gardeners of Saint-Jacques to add many flowers to the '*misteris*' from the olive grove gardens. They would choose '*quarantains*', violiers or wallflowers. According to ancient popular belief, these flowers would flourish during the Holy Week, and especially on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, and they would have a different scent to the rest of the year.

The Archconfraternity is led by three *Regidors* surrounded by the other members of the brotherhood. The Confraternity of La Sanch was founded by Saint-Vincent Ferrier and its members included people from the most long-standing Catalan families, as well as knights, market traders and humble labourers. The three *Regidors* were chosen at random from all three classes on the day of the Epiphany.

On the 11th October 1416, the Confraternity of La Sanch was officially founded at the church of Saint-Jacques, with gardens stretching across the neighbourhood bearing the same name, after Jacques the 1st, the conqueror. Every year on Good Friday at 3pm, the procession begins in Miranda Garden and once it has been around the whole town, it ends at the church of Saint-Jacques.

Pincers (*tenailles*) These were attached to the cross of '*improperis*' (insults), to symbolise how they were used to remove the nails that Jesus was attached to the wooden cross with.

The procession was for a long time restricted to the surrounding area of the Saint-Jacques neighbourhood but since 1950, the itinerary has been extended to cover three kilometres through the old town of Perpignan, passing by some of the key monuments in the town's history: the Consul's Mansion, the Palais des Corts, the Loge de Mer, the Castillet, the cathedral, the church of La Réal and the church of Saint-Jacques.

Throughout the centuries, the Confraternity of La Sanch became so well-known that it very quickly spread to several other villages in Roussillon. Over time, many of them have disappeared, but their memory lives on in the very heart and soul of the local area. The biggest Good Friday processions that still take place today are in Arles-sur-Tech, Collioure and Bouleternère (the most ancient of all), and they are held in the evening from around 9pm.

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