

Convent of
Santa Cruz la Real





CONVENT OF SANTA CRUZ LA REAL

Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1985, the city of Segovia is famous for its cathedral, alcázar castle and its aqueduct. It is also renowned for its Romanesque art and many other outstanding buildings, including monasteries and convents. One of these convents, the Convent of Santa Cruz la Real, houses the IE University campus just outside the city walls in the Eresma River valley.



HISTORY

According to the Life of Saint Dominic of Guzmán, the Convent of Santa Cruz was the first to be founded by the Order of Preachers in Spain in 1218, just two years after the creation of the mendicant order of the Dominicans. Diego de Colmenares, a 16th century chronicler, adds that Saint Dominic did penance in a cave near the river to the north of the city, outside its walls, and that he founded the order in this spot.

The order's dedication to the holy cross also originates from the early times of this community according to Colmenares and other 14th century documents.

In the fifteenth century the Catholic Monarchs, as King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella were known, gave their patronage to the convent and this royal protection was what led it to be known as Santa Cruz "la Real", i.e. the convent of the "Royal" Holy Cross.

Although the city's institutions had played a part in the convent's development, the Dominicans were not a prosperous order until the Catholic Monarchs came to the throne, when they were given control of the Inquisition. The convent was rebuilt over the former 13th century Romanesque structure and the current church, with its monumental portal, was also erected under Friar Tomás de Torquemada, the first Grand Inquisitor and prior of the Holy Cross community.

The Dominican presence in the convent lasted until the monks were released from their religious vows as decreed by the minister Mendizábal in 1836. The convent then became a hospice and, until recent times, it was a nursing home for the elderly under the ownership of the Segovia Provincial Council. It has since undergone extensive renovation to house IE University.



**“The IE University
campus in Segovia is
a perfect combination
of historic and
modern, local and
international.”**



RECONSTRUCTION

Reconstruction work in the late middle ages was carried out under the auspices of the Catholic Monarchs. The project was the idea of Juan Guas, an architect who worked for the Crown of Castile between 1453 and 1496 and who was the greatest exponent of the Hispano-Flemish school. His legacy includes the façade of the Infantado Palace (Guadalajara) and the Monastery of San Juan de los Reyes in Toledo. He was the master builder of the old cathedral in Segovia, where he built the cloister and façade, and lived in the city from 1472 - 1494. He was also responsible for the great chapel at the El Parral monastery.



The sculptor Sebastián de Almonacid (1460 - 1526) worked alongside Juan Guas. He was responsible for some of the great funerary works of the Crown of Castile, including the Tomb of Constable Álvaro de Luna in the Cathedral of Toledo, and the Tomb of Martín Vázquez de Arce, “the Young Nobleman”, in the Cathedral of Sigüenza.

Old and new spaces in Santa Cruz la Real

Not much is known about the primitive Romanesque church although brief archaeological work uncovered some remains, which may be seen in the current archaeology lecture theatre, next to the main cloister. In the absence of any previous records, its east-west construction is presumed to date from the period when the Dominican community was founded and the church's three naves were crowned by three apses. The Cave of Saint Dominic, which used to be connected to the convent by a passage with a flight of steps, now sealed off, is located on the north side of the church. Today it is reached through an antechapel, built in the time of the Catholic Monarchs.

In the later part of the 15th century the convent was extended in late Gothic, or Hispano-Flemish style, filling the space that separated the earlier buildings from the city wall. The convent included the church, which is currently IE's main conference hall, and the chapter room and refectory, both of which have been converted into conference halls.

The single-nave church, situated on the south side of the main cloister only has chapels on one side, inserted between the buttresses, and a wide elevated chancel over a vault which serves as a vestibule. The roof is made up of six ribbed vaults. Although its Dominican function was to serve as a place for preaching it was also used as a burial site. This is clearly illustrated by the many tombstones both inside the church and in the main cloister. The outer part of the church is decorated with pinnacles, which crown the buttresses, and a frieze across the walls, featuring references to Isabella and Ferdinand.

The main cloister features several Romanesque arches from the original building. The west side houses the refectory, which is now a conference hall.

The chapter hall, formerly a chapel and meeting place where the community discussed important issues, is located on the east side. It has a square plan and a ribbed vault. The ribs rise up from capitals decorated with angels holding the emblems of the Order of Preachers and of the Catholic Monarchs.

A smaller Renaissance-style cloister was built in the 16th century to the east of the main cloister. It is a well-known fact that the proliferation of cloisters is a common feature of mendicant order buildings. As a result of institutional stability and the rise in the number of people answering the religious calling, convents became more complex structures, with areas devoted to secondary purposes, such as study and storage.





RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE CHURCH PORTAL

The church portal has an unusual off-center position to the main altar and the church axis. It belongs to the “facade-altarpiece” type of churches and its iconography centres on the redemption and on the death of Christ. This religious, Messianic symbology is combined with political symbology. It is represented as being linked with the work of the Catholic Monarchs, which, in turn, are shown to be connected to the Order of Preachers.

The lower central part of the portal shows the Lamentation over the Dead Body of Christ, with Mary Magdalene, the Virgin Mary and a bearded figure, thought to be Joseph of Arimathea. The Catholic Monarchs, protectors of the convent of Santa Cruz, are seen praying. They are escorted by two figures who are probably their chamberlain and lady in waiting, Andrés Cabrera and Beatriz de Bobadilla.

The upper part of the portal shows the Crucifixion, a direct reference to the dedication of the convent of the Holy Cross. Two important Dominicans are shown praying to the cross. They are Lope de Barrientos, Bishop of Segovia between 1438 and 1441 and an intellectual in the court of King John II and on the left, the theologian and preacher, Saint Vincent Ferrer (1350-1419).

Two crowned royal coats of arms, held by imperial eagles, flank the central part. The coats of arms include the arms of Castile, Leon, Aragon, Sicily and Granada.

The royal coat of arms, held by the eagle appears again in the central part of the portal. It has two lions on either side holding the monarch's yoke and arrows.

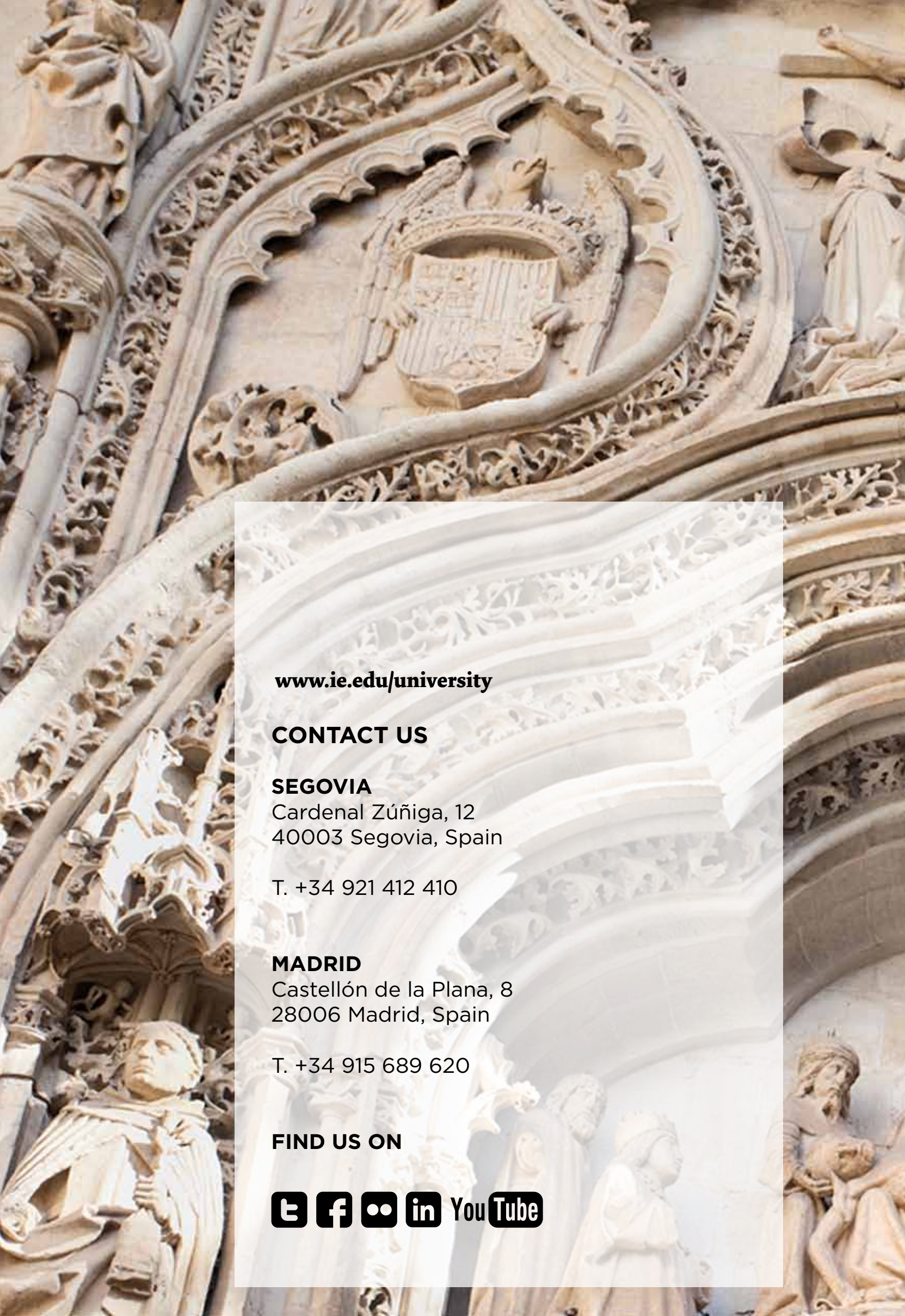
In the upper corners, the two angels holding the Cross Flory are accompanied by four images under canopies, representing 13th century saints of the Dominican order, including Saint Dominic of Guzmán (1170-1221), founder of the order; Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Saint Peter of Verona (1203- 1252). It is difficult to identify the image on the upper left, but taking into account the chronology and stature of the other three figures, it may be presumed to be the canonist Saint Raymond of Peñafort (1185-1275), frequently included in Dominican depictions.

IE University's role in the conservation of a major cultural heritage site

The Convent of Santa Cruz la Real once housed a major art collection, but most of it was lost in the fire of 1809. The artwork which was salvaged was transferred to the regional authorities, museums, churches and private collections. This was the case of the altarpiece by Ambrose Benson, a Flemish painter who died in Bruges in 1550, which is currently in the Prado Museum but was previously in the Trinidad Museum, where much of the salvaged artwork was taken.

The site of IE University is owned by the Regional Authorities of Segovia, which have allowed it to be used for higher education. This is an excellent example of cooperation between public and private institutions for the recovery, conservation and use of a unique architectural building in the city of Segovia, which was declared a historic monument by royal decree on 3rd June 1931.





www.ie.edu/university

CONTACT US

SEGOVIA

Cardenal Zúñiga, 12
40003 Segovia, Spain

T. +34 921 412 410

MADRID

Castellón de la Plana, 8
28006 Madrid, Spain

T. +34 915 689 620

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