

**THE ROUTE ALLEGEDLY TAKEN BY THE BULL  
THAT DRAGGED THE BODY OF SAINT SATURNIN,  
FIRST BISHOP, MARTYRED IN 250**

**The basilica of Saint-Sernin**  
worship of the saint's relics  
from the 5<sup>th</sup> century until today



**Notre-Dame du Taur**  
Formerly Saint-Sernin-du-Taur, the site of  
the first burial place according to legend

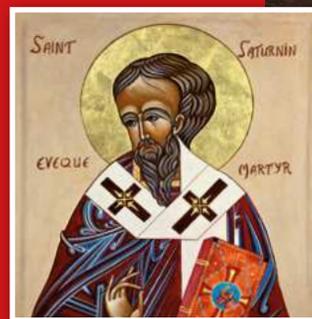
**Place du Capitole  
today**

**Place Esquirol**  
Formerly the Capitol,  
where the saint was martyred  
on the altar to the Roman Gods

Saint Saturnin was venerated as early as the VI<sup>th</sup> century. Almost 700 churches, chapels or places in France, Spain, Italy and elsewhere were named after him. With changes in local dialects, "Saturninus" became Sadurni, Savournin, Surnin, Sarnin, Arni, Cerni, Cernin, Sorlin and of course Sernin. The basilica of Saint-Sernin is a major link in the chain of local pilgrimages known as 'Camino de Santiago' or Way of Saint James.



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some Soul...*



# Saint Saturnin The First Bishop of Toulouse

**The Founder of the Church in Toulouse  
Died a Martyr in 250 A.D.**



[www.basilique-saint-sernin.fr](http://www.basilique-saint-sernin.fr)  
[www.toulouse.catholique.fr](http://www.toulouse.catholique.fr)

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## A Context of Crisis

The origins of Christianity in Toulouse raise important but tricky questions. The first signs appeared in 250 with the martyrdom of Saturninus – Saturnin or Sernin – the founder of the first Christian community, commemorated on Nov. 29th, his saint's day.

Emperor Decius in power since 249 was the first Roman ruler to launch widespread persecution of Christians through an imperial edict compelling the inhabitants of the Roman Empire to make sacrifices to the traditional gods and worship the Emperor. For the latter it was a means to ensure the loyalty of his subjects in a time of crisis: economic, financial, political (given the great instability of the imperial power between 235 and 268) and military (Persian offensive in the Orient, forays by the Goths in the Balkans - Decius himself died fighting in 251).

For refusing traditional worship, the Christians were accused of defying the *pax deorum*, a contract between the traditional gods and the inhabitants of the Empire. Most of the Christians, loyal subjects even if they did not consider the Emperor as divine, had to choose between martyrdom or apostasy, accepting the official sacrifices. This lies at the heart of the tragedy of Saturninus.



the Capitoleum Triade (Jupiter, Juno, Minerva). There was also a theatre near the present Pont Neuf, an amphitheatre at Purpan and public baths.

## The Circumstances and Site of the Martyrdom



The *Passio Sancti Saturnini*, written in the early 6th century, tells of the circumstances of St Saturnin's death and allows us to speculate about the site.

The saint was not put to death by the authorities but was victim of mobbing by the crowd. He was on his way to a Christian place of worship, possibly rue St Anne along the Roman rampart not far from where the cathedral of St Etienne is today.

St Saturnin was put to death on the steps of the temple where place Esquirol is today. Tradition has it that the bull that was meant for sacrifice dragged the martyr along the *cardo* – rues des Changes and St Rome – to the present-day place du Capitole, crossed at the time by the city ramparts with the North gate.

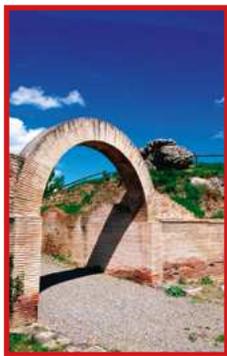


Another tradition has it that the martyr was first buried on the site of Notre Dame du Taur. This hypothesis has been abandoned given that recent archaeological excavations show no sign of a necropolis, unlike the area around the basilica of Saint-Sernin, the site of suburban graveyards.

## Ancient Toulouse

What was Toulouse like at the time of Decius' persecution? The Roman town founded in Augustus' reign covered 90 hectares and had about 20,000 inhabitants. Surrounded by ramparts, it was built in the 1st century more for prestigious reasons than military ones. Like many Roman cities, Toulouse was organised around the *cardo* bordered by the *rues Pharaon*, *Filatiers*, *des*

*Changes*, *St Rome*, and the *decumanus* formed by the *rue de Metz*. These two axes cross at the *Forum*, where *place Esquirol* is today. Here was built the temple of



Of course the final guardian of the memory of Saint Saturnin is the basilica, which bears his name. It is very likely that the remains of the first bishop of Toulouse were deposited here directly.

