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Ancient roman structures in France

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Abstract

All the roads lead to Rome. But in France, it is also Rome that is visible to you. The Romans not only did throw slaves in front of the lions or wage war against Vercingetorix by installing colonies in the four corners of Gaul from the end of the 2nd century BC. J.-C., but also, they implanted their architecture and their art.

Technical prowess, rigorous and pragmatic town planning, colossal monuments, or fine decorations, proves that Roman civilization is undeniably a civilization of artists and builders. But now, the centuries have passed, and very often, these wonders have disappeared.

Fortunately, not all of them. Some Roman monuments still and always resist the ravages of time! Sometimes sheltered in museums, sometimes living spaces, the Roman remains in France still have many stories to tell.

Keywords: France, architecture, roman, century, bridge, arches, ancient, structures, Rome, arena, amphitheatre

Introduction

La Maison Carrée

La Maison carrée in English "square house", is undoubtedly the best ancient preserved Roman temple in the world. It is situated in Nîmes, completed at the beginning of the 1st century AD. During the construction of the Maison Carrée was dedicated to Augustus in the glory of his two grandsons: the consuls and military leaders Lucius Caesar and Caius Julius Caesar. Over the centuries, the temple has notably become a consular house, a church, and then a museum of ancient arts.

Like all Roman temples, the building rests on a podium. 2.65 meters high, it highlights the temple, above the bustling public square. The stones used come from several quarries located around the city. Those of the podium and the staircase are from Barutel, those of the columns, the walls and the entablature of the monument come from the Bois des Lens. This very dense white limestone, of a quality close to marble, makes it possible to produce sculptures of great finesse. The interior of the temple has only one room, the cella, preceded by a pronaos. The roof of the pronaos is supported by 10 columns, 6 of which are on the front. The following 20 columns are engaged in the walls of the cella. 9 meters high, these 30 Corinthian columns are crowned by capitals decorated with a double row of acanthus leaves. Above the capitals, the entablature is decorated with a frieze of foliage directly inspired by models made in Rome at the same time. Like the other roofs of the Roman city, the Maison Carrée is covered with alternately flat and curved tiles, the tegulae and the imbreces.

Les Arènes de Nîme (Nîmes Arena)

Towards the end of the 1st century, during the reign of Augustus, the city of Nîmes reached its peak and acquired a superb amphitheatre, built on the model of the Colosseum in Rome and one of the 20 most important among the 300 known in the Roman world. The prosperity of the notables and the extraordinary success of gladiatorial combat including wild animal hunts and public executions explains the construction of this gigantic stone monument. We do not know the name of the very wealthy Nîmois who donated the amphitheatre out of his own money, but this donation is part of the Benevolence taxation of the richest people towards their fellow citizens, characteristic of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds.

Built of stone, this monument with 133 meters long and 101 meters wide with a track of 68 by 38 meters, 21 meters high of its facade consisted two levels of sixty arcades, has a distinctive elliptical shape, which becomes more or less evident depending on where you are sitting in the stands. The outer border still retains most of the one hundred and twenty supporting masts of with protruding molding pierced awning that gives shelter to the public from the sun. In Roman times, the amphitheatre of Nîmes could accommodate 24,000 spectators on 34 tiers of seats divided into four separate areas called maeniana. Each maeniana corresponds to a social category, the notables being placed closest to the track. The public enter and leave five circular galleries, which were accessed by stairways and passages called vomitories. This system, remarkable in its design, allows the building to be filled and emptied in record time. It avoids congestion and dangerous jostling within a large crowd. Each year, during religious or civic festivals, a notable of the city must offer one or more days of games in the amphitheatre.

Amphithéâtre d'Arles (Arles Amphitheatre)

Amphithéâtre d'Arles or Arles Amphitheatre, is a big sports arena built by the Romans during the reign of Augustus (27 BC–14 AD) around the first century BC or AD in Arles, known as the "soul of Provence" a southern French city, situated in Bouches-du-Rhône department of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region. Being benefited from the construction of several monuments, Arles Amphitheatre was one of the largest amphitheatres built at the time of the flourishing of Arles as a Roman colony.

It was built to accommodate over 20,000 spectators, with over a hundred Corinthian and Doric columns spread over two levels with a length of 136 meters. The Amphitheatre is oval-shaped and is surrounded by terraces, a total of 60 arcades on two levels of bleachers, a system of galleries, and a drainage system.

In the 5th century, after the collapse of Western Empire, the amphitheatre turned into a shelter for the people and was transformed into a fort with four towers. As a real functioning locality, more than 200 houses were established in its structure, with its public open space built in the centre of the arena along with two chapels. The role as a residential town was continued until the late 18th century, and from 1825 it was changed into a national historical monument by the initiative of writer Prosper Mérimée.

From 2001, an extensive and historically authentic restoration project was undertaken. Arles Amphitheatre remains one of the town's most impressive sites. It is now one of the city's UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Pont du Gard

Pont du Gard is a three-level aqueduct bridge built by the Romans in the 1st century AD. It is located in Vers-Pont-du-Gard between Uzès and Remoulins, not far from Nîmes, in the French department of Gard. Once it carried water from Uzès to Nîmes but according to the latest research, it would have ceased to be used at the beginning of the sixth century.

In the middle Ages, the arches of the second story were built so that the structure could be used as a road bridge. From the sixteenth century, the exceptional architecture of Pont du Gard having attracted attention, the work benefited from regular restorations intended to preserve its integrity. A road bridge was attached to it in 1743-1747. Being the highest

known aqueduct bridge in the Roman world, it is classified as a historic monument by the list of 1840 and was included on the UNESCO World Heritage List in December 1985.

It is exceptional in terms of its dimensions with its 49 meters high, it is the highest Roman aqueduct in the world. It is composed of 3 rows of superimposed arches (6 arches on the first level, 11 arches on the second level, and 47 arches originally), which is also an extremely rare achievement for the time. Finally, it is remarkable because of its excellent state of preservation, which today has earned its admiration as a masterpiece of human creative genius. It is the only example of an ancient 3-story bridge still standing today. Nearly a thousand men worked on this colossal site, completed in just 5 years.

Grand Roman Theatre of Lyon

The ancient theatre of Lugdunum, an important Roman city in Gaul, established on the current site of Lyon is one of the main Roman monuments in Lyon. The theatre was built in the 1st century BC, at the beginning of the Empire, perhaps under Augustus. It was then 90 meters in diameter. It was built on the side of the hill of Fourvière which overlooks the city. It was enlarged at the end of the 1st century or the beginning of the 2nd century, and could then accommodate up to 10,000 spectators. Some of the stones used came from far away, imported from Glanum, a city formerly located in the current region of Bouches-du-Rhône.

Abandoned at the end of the Roman Empire, it was transformed into a quarry and badly damaged then, completely buried in the middle Ages, it fell into oblivion. It was spotted by chance at the end of the 19th century, then completely cleared and restored from 1933. Museums and Roman theatres, emblematic of ancient Lyon, constitute an exceptional archaeological complex, classified as World Heritage by Unesco. It is unique for its richness of its collections and its audacious architecture made of raw concrete. One can discover splendid mosaics (a pattern or image), sculptures, jewellery, ceramics and the monumental bronze plaque carrying out the speech of the Emperor Claudius, witness to the relations between Rome and the other peoples of the Empire. And your visit to the site of the ancient theatres, a reflection of the prestigious past of the capital of Gaul.

Le cryptoportique de Reims

The monument is made up of 3 galleries forming a U. One of two parallels (west and east) is 60 m long and the other closing the forum to the north is 100 m. An access to the south gallery has been identified (remains of the staircase next to the apse), as the Roman entrance. The cryptoporticus has two naves, separated by freestone pillars and covered with a groin vault. The small rubble walls were bound with tile mortar (mixture of lime and terracotta fragments) and the pillars were entirely decorated with murals (a painting applied to and made integral with the surface of a wall or ceiling). Red traces are still visible at the level of the basements of the niches and the pillars, while green and white bands are differentiated at the level of the niches. A sanitation gallery, passing the west wall served as protection against humidity and thermal insulation. This plan is found at the Bavay cryptoporticus.

Revealing the dating of the cryptoporticus is difficult. Following archaeomagnetism's studies, observing on the

bricks of the structure, specialists are now inclined towards the 1st century AD. J.-C.

Today about ten cryptoporticus have been found in the Roman world, including four in France (Arles, Bavay, Narbonne and Reims).

Le Temple de Diane

Le temple de Diane is a Roman monument built in the 1st century in Nîmes, in the Gard. It is the most romantic but also the most enigmatic monument in Nîmes, certainly associated with the imperial sanctuary. The Temple of Diana, located in the Jardins de la Fontaine, was one of the components of the great sanctuary dedicated to Nemausus and the imperial cult. We do not know the true function of this construction in the ancient sanctuary whether it was library or worship hall or anything else. However, we still admire the large vault thrown above our heads, the pattern of the niches along with the walls or the finesse of certain sculpted boxes at the back of the room.

If this construction is still standing, it is due to the fact that it used as a monastery in the Middle Ages. In addition, a large part of the temple is imbricated in Mont Cavalier, a hill in France. This had protected it from the weather until it was ravaged by fire. Since then, the place has been in ruins, except only a vaulted room, almost 15 m long, two stairwells and a long dark corridor.

Pont Flavien

Le Pont Flavien is an ancient Roman bridge placed on the Roman road that linked Marseille to Arles, in the extension of the via Aurelia. It set over the Touloubre at the entrance of Saint-Chamas in the Bouches-du-Rhône. It bears the name of its promoter, a certain Claudius Donnius Flavius. It is the only Roman bridge in the world to have kept its arches. Le Pont Flavien is the subject of a classification as historical monuments by the list of 18401.

Travelers access the bridge by passing under two monumental arches placed on each side. The friezes and architraves of these arches each bear the same inscription in local Latin.

Inscription

c. donnivs. c. f. flavos flamen. romae et.
avgvsti. testamento. fieri. i. vssit. arbitratv.
c donnei, venae. et. c. attei. rvfei.

Translation

Claudius Donnius Flavius, son of Claudius, flamine of Rome and Augustus, ordered in his will to build this bridge and these arches, under the direction of C. Donnius Vena and C. Attius Rufus²

Théâtre antique d'Orange

The ancient theatre of Orange, built during the reign of Augustus in the 1st century BC. AD by veterans of Julius Caesar's 2nd legion, is one of the best-preserved Roman theatres in the world. It still has an impressive exterior wall with the original elevation (104 m long and 35 m high).

Facade wall: The outer wall or postquantum is 104 m long and 35 m high. "It's the most beautiful wall in my kingdom", said Louis XIV during a visit. Originally, it was preceded by a portico, of which an arch remains on the west side. With a very sober aspect, the large stonework, the facade is divided

into three levels. On the ground floor, three rectangular doors - the "royal door" in the centre, the others two "guest doors" on its sides - are separated by a series of arcades.

Cavea: The cavea could hold some 9,000 spectators, divided according to their social rank. It is divided into three zones (mæniana), staged in 34 steps and separated by walls. Below, the orchestra forming a semicircle is separated from the tiers by a parapet. The first mænianum, called ima cavea, consists of twenty tiers, the first three of which were reserved for knights, as evidenced by the inscription Eq (uitum) g(radius) III. The second area (media cavea) consists of nine tiers accommodating merchants, Roman citizens, while the third part (the highest, called summa cavea) consists of five tiers accommodating only prostitutes, slaves and people not holding Roman nationality. Large, stacked rooms were used to welcome the public and housed the backstage

Stage and stage wall: The stage, made of a wooden floor under which the machinery was installed, is 61 m long and 9 m deep: It towered over the orchestra about 1.10 m, supported by a low wall, the pulpitum. Behind, there is the curtain pit (which was lowered during performances). The stage wall (frons scænæ) measured 35 m was once decorated with statues, friezes and marble columns, of which some vestiges remain. This wall is pierced by three doors: the royal door in the centre and the two side doors (entrance of the secondary actors). Above the royal door it is found 0.70 m high frieze of centaurs. The niche of the stage wall shelters a colossal statue, 3.50 m high, whose head is not original. It is considered by some as a statue of Emperor Augustus, but according to others, it would be much later than this emperor. It is dated to the 2nd century AD.

Conclusion

Roman structures have therefore provided us with magnificent structures that have, quite literally, stood the test of time. By combining a wide range of materials with elegant designs, the Romans were able to push the boundaries of physics and make architecture an art form. Architecture thus became an imperial tool to demonstrate to the world that Rome was culturally superior, because it was the only one with the wealth, skills, and audacity necessary to produce such buildings. More importantly, the Romans' use of concrete, brick, and arches, combined with constructions such as the amphitheatre and the basilica, had a considerable influence on all Western architecture down to the present day.

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