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# THE MUSÉE DE LA ROMANITÉ

**Facing the 2000-year-old Arena in the heart of Nîmes, the Musée de la Romanité opened on 2 June 2018.**

A contemporary building designed by Elizabeth de Portzamparc, this new museum with an international reputation forms a fine setting for the some 5000 heritage works of exceptional value in terms of archaeology and art. It also features temporary exhibitions such as 'Pompeii, a forgotten story' in summer 2019 that was focused on this fascinating period of history.

## **Why a Musée de la Romanité ?**

Rescue archaeology performed in 2006-2007 before works to be carried out in Allées Jean-Jaurès revealed a domus (a Roman house) and two mosaics—referred to as the Achilles mosaic and the Pentheus mosaic. They were in an excellent state of conservation and described by specialists as being 'the finest examples after those of Pompeii'. This discovery strengthened determination to schedule a contemporary museum project to show these extremely rare works, together with those housed in the 19th century archaeological museum that had become too small.

The city of Nîmes wished to display and pass on this magnificent heritage in a building that matched present-day museographical requirements and the expectations of the public. Continuing the process that has been used for centuries—drawing inspiration from an ancient building while remaining anchored in modernity—Nîmes has constructed a resolutely contemporary 9,200 square metre building displaying about 5,000 of the some 25,000 items held in the collection of the museum.

Other complementary archaeological focuses exist. They reveal the rich vestiges in the region, which was a leading place in Roman antiquity.

With this new museum, Nîmes has set up a dialogue between the monuments, between the ancient town and today's architecture.

The Musée de la Romanité is indeed a building open to the city, right in the centre opposite the Arena, that gives visitors unique immersion in Roman civilisation in the Mediterranean area.





*Revealing the roots of Nîmes in its Roman past, the Musée de la Romanité is one of the most striking architectural and cultural projects of the beginning of this century for both Nîmes and, more broadly, for the region as a whole. Guided by the strong requirement of highlighting our magnificent heritage and passing it on to future generations, we have done everything to make the museum an exceptional display of our impressive archaeological collections that have been restored on this occasion.*



**Jean-Paul Fournier,**  
Mayor of Nîmes



*The Musée de la Romanité opened in 2018 and has since gained a strong position in the cultural landscape of Nîmes—thanks to its exceptional collections and large-scale exhibitions and the excellence of its programmes.*

*Behind the extremely transparent contemporary architecture of the building, the SPL Culture et Patrimoine team concentrates on running this unique venue that also has a rooftop terrace, an auditorium, a restaurant, a garden and many other features... The mission has been carried out successfully as the museum has already attracted nearly 1 million visitors !*



**Valentine Wolber,**  
Chairwoman of SPL Culture  
et Patrimoine





# THE HEARTBEAT OF NÎMES HAS THE RHYTHM OF 2500 YEARS OF HISTORY

The people of Nîmes and visitors alike are accompanied at all times by a Roman identity and its major monuments: the Arena, the Maison Carrée, the Tour Magne, the Temple de Diane, etc. Archaeological discoveries, their conservation and their re-use

through the development of the town have given it an exceptional appearance. Indeed, Nîmes has grown by forging close links between history and modernity. It continued to make its mark in time at the end of its second millennium—while respecting

its past—with the building of Carré d'Art designed by the British architect Norman Foster in 1993, and today with that of the Musée de la Romanité opposite the Arena.



## A YEAR AT THE MUSEUM

Since its inauguration on 2 June 2018, the Musée de la Romanité is an exceptional attraction for both the people of Nîmes and tourists who are in the region. This incredible success is

explained by a true wish for a museum displaying the Roman archaeological collection of Nîmes, the attraction of contemporary architecture and also the quality of the programme since it was

opened: the temporary exhibitions, young public's activities, national events, and also theme visits and talks organised.





# THE DESIGN OF THE MUSEUM

An important assembly of Roman culture, an archaeological museum and a place to be in, the Musée de la Romanité is one of today's major contemporary architectural and contemporary projects in France.

**Its exceptional archaeological collections total some 25,000**

**items, of which 5,000 are displayed in 3,500 square metres of exhibition areas. They give a unique historical experience spanning 25 centuries of history thanks to immersive museography.**

Nîmes now has a centre that the quality of its archaeological

collections merits. The building has three aims: conserving this heritage, sharing it with the people of Nîmes and visitors from all over the world and passing it on to future generations. Its superb central position generates a unique dialogue with the history of the city.

## AN EXCEPTIONAL SITE

Opposite the Arena of Nîmes, the museum is at the edge of the historic city centre. Crossed by the remains of the Roman walls, its position is on the line that used to run between the medieval town and the modern town. These vestiges are overlaid by twenty centuries of urban strata and just as many fragments of architecture.

**As if it had risen among the witnesses of the past, the museum is designed as the gateway to an urban layout. Urban views and emphasis on perspectives show off both the treasures of the Roman heritage and that of the more modern architecture built around it. The lines and links created between the streets and the squares adjoining the site give great urban permeability and new pathways through the town.**

## AN ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN COMPETITION

**The architectural competition was launched in June 2011 and the jury selected three designs among the 103 received. A year later, the project by Elizabeth de Portzamparc submitted by the architects 2Portzamparc was declared to be the winner.**

In addition to the urban and architectural design of the museum, Elizabeth de Portzamparc also designed the museography, internal architecture and furniture items. This has resulted in a very coherent project.







**Elizabeth de Portzamparc,  
Urban Architect**



*'I analysed the Arena for a long time and asked myself about the very notion of a contemporary building and how to exalt the 21 centuries of history separating the two structures. Designing light architecture—made possible by present technology—seemed obvious to me, as did expressing the differences between the two architectures through dialogue based on their complementarity. On one side a round volume enclosed by the verticals of the Roman stone arches and firmly anchored in the ground and on the other a large square volume, set in levitation and draped entirely in a folded glass toga.'*





## A BUILDING DESIGNED BY ELIZABETH DE PORTZAMPARC

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As an architect and town planner, Elizabeth de Portzamparc designs buildings as architectural symbols that bear values—strong urban landmarks that give structure and fit in accurately with the places that they are built in. She reflects on the identity of towns and metropolises and her facilities strengthen the qualities of the context in which they are inserted. Their architecture is light, clean and sober, with emphasis on transversal spaces and a strong relation with nature, showing easily identifiable collective values and setting up exchange with the surrounding urban landscape. Using a twin sociological and architectural approach, she combines the requirements of social, urban and ecological approaches with optimum expression of form.

Open to the town and the people who live there, her projects are designed as places 'for living' that are easily appropriated. This is architecture that enhances spatial and human interconnections and is a framework for local activities and quality of life for users.

## A MUSEUM OPEN TO THE CITY

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The building is set around an inside street that follows the traces of the former Augustan ramparts. Accessible to all, this public passage creates a visual opening and links the apron in front of the Arena to the archaeological garden. Visitors and walkers feel the invitation when they cross the entirely transparent ground floor of the museum. In the centre, an *atrium* 17 metres high reveals a fragment of the propylon of the Sanctuary of the Fountain in a spectacular reconstitution of the sacred place that dates back to the founding of the pre-Roman town. This original public portrayal is an invitation to seeing all the collections and contents of the museum.

## CREATING AN ARCHITECTURAL DIALOGUE

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The Musée de la Romanité goes beyond a simple exhibition function. It is designed to be a gateway to understanding Nîmes and its history. More broadly, it provides an exceptional reading of the imprint of Roman civilisation in the Mediterranean.

The choice of a contemporary architectural gesture opposite

It is also possible to use the passage to go to the bookshop/boutique, the café or the restaurant with an unobstructed view of the arena: La Table du 2, run by the chef Franck Putelat, with 2 Michelin stars for *Le Parc* in Carcassonne.

The openings in the façade give many views of the Arena and the archaeological garden. A constant dialogue is maintained between museography and the areas outside throughout the exhibition spaces. The town thus enters the museum.

a monument—such as Carré d'Art a few years ago, sets the museum in the Nîmes tradition. Today, the museum gives a fresh vision of the position of the site and curve of the Arena with lightness opposite classic massiveness creating a strong archaeological dialogue between two buildings separated by two thousand years of history.

### **THE FAÇADES: BOTH A SETTING AND A FULLY-FLEDGED WORK**

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Façades form the final punctuation of a building, serving a twin function: identity and practicality. They are the visiting cards and thus put forward their values. Sited at the entry to the ancient town, the museum allows the Arena to be seen from Rue de la République across its transparent ground floor: it announces its grandeur, attracts and surprises. The supple 'drapery' of the façade refers to a Roman toga

and the glass squares that it is made of combine modern transparency and mosaic, a major Roman art.

It thus refers subtly to a key feature of the museum's collections. This translucent glass 'skin' consists of nearly 7,000 sheets of screen-printed glass covering 2,500 square metres. The reflection and undulations of this glass mosaic change with the different times of the day. A work within a work, it

creates kinetic reflections, subtle variations of reflection according to the angle, inclinations, hollows and bulges that accentuate its movement, resulting in ceaseless metamorphosis according to the time of day and the season, setting up a dialogue with the town by reflecting colours, light and the life around it.

### **THE ROOF TERRACE: A PANORAMIC VIEW OF NÎMES**

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The planted roof terrace was designed as a fifth façade open to the sky. The highest point of the building, it punctuates visits by providing a prodigious 360° view encompassing of Nîmes and its 25 centuries of history. The Arena is in the foreground and the Tour Magne, built on a tower that formed part of the Gallic ramparts, is in the distance. A public space open to everyone, a meeting place, this high point brings the urban area into the museum.

### **THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL GARDEN: A PLANT MUSEUM AND A PLACE TO BE**

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Laid out around the Roman ramparts and other remains discovered during excavation for the building, the archaeological garden is designed as a 'plant museum'. All the traces of history have been conserved and restored and are now visible free of charge to all visitors and walkers.

The public garden covers 3,500 square metres and is laid out in three strata corresponding to the major periods—Gallic, Roman and medieval—of the museographic route, thus enriching the scientific aspect. In each level, trees, shrubs and perennial plants have been chosen according when they were introduced as a result of, trade, influences or occupations.

In addition to its scientific merits, the archaeological garden forms a new natural area in the city for visitors and passers-by.

The garden is entirely open and linked directly to the surrounding urban structure. Access points linking Rue Ducros and Rue de la République mean that it can be crossed like a public space. It is thus used by walkers and as an occasion for meetings, creating a new venue for urban conviviality. It can also be used as a point of departure for exploring the museum and its collections.







# MUSEOGRAPHIC ROUTE

Knowing and understanding Roman civilisation better is the major focus of the Musée de la Romanité in Nîmes. History is recounted there by both material objects – vestiges from archaeological digs carried out over the centuries—and immaterial aspects—reconstitutions and multimedia presentations. Works illustrate the exceptional past of the town, a place of reference for Roman antiquity, and are displayed using innovative museography. Visitors are offered a unique experience spanning 25 centuries of history.

The Musée de la Romanité is a voyage from the 7th century BC (the Iron Age, the Gallic period) to the Middle Ages and completed by several 18th and 19th century collections assembled by scholars. Open to the town with, in particular, the nearby Arena and the roof that gives a view of the major monuments, it is exemplary of the link between the Roman imprint seen in the collections and that visible in Nîmes today with the strong in situ presence of numerous vestiges of one of the greatest civilisations of Antiquity.

The scientific requirements of a museum are combined with an educational approach aimed at interesting a large public. This is achieved by the use of multimedia programmes, audio-visual documentaries, immersion projection, enhanced reality, virtual visits and interactive cartography.





# THE MUSEOGRAPHIC APPROACH

The museographic principle used here consists of 'making objects speak', that is to say repositioning them in the context of their creation and use. This principle is the guiding line in three interpretation approaches.



*The Musée de la Romanité is an open window on Roman antiquity and its heritage. It allows people to immerse themselves in the history of Nîmes and its territory before strolling around the city and visit its famous monuments. At the museum, archaeology lives in the present by passing on the most recent discoveries and the research actuality.*



**Nicolas de Larquier, Head Heritage Curator**



## A TOPOGRAPHICAL APPROACH

A topographical approach centred on the Nîmes spring. This is where veneration of the divinity of the spring, Nemausus, gave Nîmes its name. Next to the spring, the Romans built the 'Sanctuaire de la Fontaine', a complex for the imperial cult. After it was destroyed it became the Abbey of Saint-Sauveur de la Font in the 10th century and was subsequently remodelled as the Jardins de la Fontaine in the 18th century, the occasion of the archaeological rediscovery of the ancient site.

## A CIVILISATION APPROACH

This consists of showing the meetings between peoples and their possible exchanges. The aim is to understand the 'how' and 'why' of the establishment, union and/or disappearance of cultures or phenomena through examination of the relation between an object and a tool for interpretation: currency for trade, epigraphy (the scientific study of engraved inscriptions) for writing, stopping points, trading posts

## A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

This involves a comparison with the Roman monuments or structures that define the markers of the Romans from the nearby region of Narbonne to the Romanized Mediterranean basin (Italy, Spain, Turkey, Tunisia, etc.).

The interaction between objects and their history is therefore fundamental. It leads to understanding the setting up and spreading of Roman models, their permanence and the interest that they still arouse. For what purpose? To make approaching the Roman world lively, not only by describing the objects concerned but by interpreting them to show human and social issues, ways of life, technical prowess, artistic talent, etc.

# THE MUSÉE DE LA ROMANITÉ IS INDISSOCIABLE FROM ITS URBAN AND CULTURAL AREA

The origins of the items in the collections at the museum are generally local (the Nîmes area) or regional (Gard department). When the context of the discovery is known this is shown as much as possible in the presentation to

the public. The museum wishes to show the polyvalent role played by the Nemausus colony and the links that it had forged with secondary settlements. Visiting the museum thus shows the imprint of Roman civilisation on the town. It acts as a

door to understanding the Roman places in the region.



## THE MAIN ENTRY

An example of the passage from Antiquity to modern times, the main entry to the museum is in the alignment of the ancient Augustan ramparts. It makes a direct reference to the founding of Nîmes as an imposing vestige of the Sanctuary of the Spring greets visitors. It is part of the pediment that nearly 2,000 years ago formed the monumental entry to the Sanctuary of the Spring (now the Jardins de la Fontaine). Set 15 metres above the floor level, it has recovered its function

as gateway—to the museum here—and also to the *atrium* and remains visible throughout almost all the museographic exhibition. This restitution understood by all is a strong feature that marks the determination to share knowledge with a specialised public as well as amateurs and the curious. It symbolises the link that we have—whatever our geographical area—with the people of antiquity as the museum in Nîmes welcomes visitors from all over the world.



## RICH AND VARIED COLLECTIONS

**1** thousand  
Latin  
inscriptions

**800**  
glass  
objects

**200**  
architectonic  
fragments

**389**  
bone and  
ivory objects

**65**  
mosaics

**450**  
oil lamps

**300**  
carved items  
(bas-reliefs  
and sculpture  
in the round)

**12 500**  
ancient and  
medieval coins

## BUT ALSO...

Several **hundred ceramic pieces**  
(sigillate, common, etc.)

### Bronze objects

#### Other categories of objects

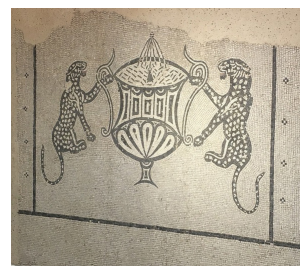
in smaller quantities are all the more  
precious as they are more rare  
in the Nîmes heritage:  
15 restored Roman wall panels  
including a complete Third Pompeian  
Style set (3.50m x 2.30m)

**Objects that are generally  
perishable** but that were preserved  
as a result of exceptional conditions  
(basketwork items, a set of small items  
in wood and a small ivory sculpture  
of a hippopotamus found in ancient  
wells that had been refilled)

## THE PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

The permanent collections are from sometimes spectacular recent archaeological discoveries and from the Nîmes Archaeological Museum founded in the 19th century. Some 5,000 items (of the 25,000 that are held) are set out along a chronological and thematic route from the 7th century BC to the Middle Ages, without forgetting the Roman legacy in the 19th century. Visitors see mosaics, statues in bronze, in marble, etc. in an exceptional condition that were collected over the centuries and restored. Some have never been shown before. Everyday objects in glass, ceramic and metal together with coins and inscriptions complete this vast panorama that illustrates the gifts and skills of one of the greatest civilisations of Antiquity.

**This is not just an archaeological museum, an art museum or an ethnology museum. It is a place that recounts Roman history using material traces at the scale of a town.** The spaces forming the permanent exhibition total 3,500 square metres (including the reconstitution of the pediment from the Sanctuary of the Fontaine) laid out on four levels: ground floor, entresol, first floor and mezzanine.



# INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY

**Varied reconstitution facilities chosen from the most recent technology supports accompany visitors throughout the exhibition space. They help them to imagine the original appearance of the ancient buildings and the everyday life of the population. A visio guide is available in several languages.**

Multimedia devices are scattered all along the visitors' route and virtual visits make it possible to enter a Gallic house dating back to about 400 BC and a rich Roman residence. Graphic animation (cartoon films and motion design) is used for example to observe the gestures and technique of Roman craftsmen in fields such as mosaic, fresco, ceramics and work in bronze. Maps show the positions

of settlements, battlefields or the zones under Roman influence. Audio-visual documentaries, 3D reconstitutions, computer graphics and animated sequences address a broad variety of subjects such as oppida, Celtic arms and archaeological digs in Nîmes. Audio pieces with one or several voices—some of which are synchronised with plays of light—bring historical persons and legends to life. In addition to the pieces displayed, visitors also learn about the Roman buildings of Nîmes, the medieval period, numismatics and food thanks to multimedia applications for touch terminals, interactive programs and educational mini-games on touch tables.

Reconstitutions using projected or interactive dynamic cartography—often monumental, immersive or synchronised with light play—address varied subjects such as the original spring of Nîmes, epigraphy or Roman quarries. Another feature is the video capture of the visitor shown on a large screen—the occasion to admire oneself wearing a toga or other Roman clothes!

panorama or the interactive wall of images (a unique and innovative scene facility), everything is done to send visitors into the past so that they see how people lived in Antiquity, the development of their know-how and the masterpieces that they made.

## KNOWLEDGE BOXES

Illuminated white boxes called 'knowledge boxes' are available for visitors and open the three chronological sections of the route of the visit. The procedure was created by Elizabeth de Portzamparc to act as an introduction to the various sequences: maps, chronological friezes and screens present the period in question and put it into its context.



Whether by augmented reality facilities, 180° interactive



# A CHRONOLOGICAL AND THEMATIC ROUTE

The route is presented in the form of major periods—pre-Roman, Roman and post-Roman. It invites visitors to learn about society in four phases:

the Gallic period before the conquest, the Romanisation process, the middle ages and finally the Roman legacy, that is to say the interest

shown over the centuries in Roman civilisation.



## THE PRE-ROMAN PERIOD

Nîmes grew at a very early date, well before the Roman period. Indeed, it was the main settlement in the east of the Languedoc in the middle of the Iron Age. The existence of an urban settlement where the city of Nîmes stands today, and where a singular culture took form, is an original feature highlighted in the visit.

### A LITTLE HISTORY

The first village sited on the southern slopes of Mount Cavalier in Nîmes was founded at the end of the 6th century BC. Attracted by the La Fontaine spring, the peoples concerned became sedentary and founded a 30-hectare *oppidum* bounded by ramparts dominated by a substantial watchtower later used as the base for the Tour Magne. The village doubtless played an important economic role at the time. The plain was scattered with many roads and tracks serving a network

of farms and burial enclosures and leading to other oppida and trade centres in the region. Such places enabled peoples to meet, as is shown for example by the Gallo-Greek writing that is very well represented in the museum's epigraphic collections.

## IN THE MUSEUM

Visitors are invited to an immersion in the Nîmes area by addressing the features that enabled the first settlement that formed around La Fontaine and resulted in the founding of the town of Nîmes.

To show how the Romanisation process operated during the pre-Roman period, the museum has collections that cover both the degree of development of the native populations (statuary, Gallo-Greek inscriptions, archaeological furniture from the Gallic house at Gailhan, everyday objects from the two iron ages) and the first records of the penetration of Italic culture (tomb furniture from the 1st and 2nd centuries BC).



## RECONSTITUTION OF THE GALLIC HOUSE AT GAILHAN

The pre-Roman sequence is punctuated by the reconstitution of the Gallic house at Gailhan, showing a house in eastern Languedoc in the Middle Iron Age. It dates back to the 5th century BC and was excavated by Bernard Dedet from 1978 to 1981 in the Plan de la Tour *oppidum* at Gailhan (Gard).

There is much data of exceptional quality as a result of the circumstances of the destruction of the house: it collapsed suddenly, causing the fossilisation of its contents. Numerous ceramic pieces smashed on the floor of the house have been reconstituted. These factors allow an ethno-archaeological interpretation of the site.

These features make it possible to understand both the skills used by the Gauls and their way of life: the design and building of the house, the internal layout and fittings (a decorated cooking hearth, stone benches that were

probably covered with furs or straw mattresses), food (meat, grain, legumes, etc.) and their farming method (the share of hunting and gathering in comparison with livestock and crop farming), domestic activities including the cooking hearth, objects such as pots for storing, preparing, cooking and serving food (jars, bowls, etc.). A suggested reality process is a fine example of the contribution of the new technologies to the perception and understanding of ancient vestiges while a reality process suggested and interactive multimedia facilities give visitors the feeling of immersion in the everyday life of the Gauls.





# TRANSITION: THE CONQUEST PERIOD

## A LITTLE HISTORY

The Second Iron Age (425-125 BC) was marked by the Punic Wars that affected southern Gaul and resulted in its incorporation in the Roman world in the 120s BC

In the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, the town became part of Gallia Transalpina ('Transalpine Gaul'), the first Gallic province controlled by Rome. It subsequently became Gallia Narbonensis ('Gaul of Narbonne') during the reign of Augustus.

Growth of the economy and the population resulted in spread towards the South and East, going somewhat beyond its original framework. The urban network became markedly denser during the 1st century BC. Penetration by Latin culture took place fairly slowly with, for example, the gradual introduction of architectural novelties. Small groups of tombs bordered the roads at the edge of the town. Large enclosed farms with several hectares of fields and crops—including vineyards—were laid out in the plain.

Nîmes differs from the other settlements in the eastern Languedoc by its vast inhabited area inherited from the pattern at the beginning of the 4th

century. The town had an area of 30 to 35 hectares at the end of the 2nd century BC. There were hardly any similar places in southern Gaul, except for Arles and Béziers. Its monumental tower and its coinage were very special, with Nîmes being the first town in eastern Languedoc to mint coins—in the first quarter of the 2nd century BC.

## IN THE MUSEUM

The Roman policy of domination is shown from its beginnings by a kind of temporal corridor with traces of a Roman road marked on the ground. Visitors—in a specific sound atmosphere—can see Gallo-Greek inscriptions (dedications or epitaphs), 2nd and 1st century BC tombs, the first coins and a 'geographic' post listing the towns under the authority of Nîmes at the time.



## PRE-ROMAN SCULPTURE

Original statuary was made in southern Gaul during the Iron Age. It forms part of the pre-Roman sculptures that used to be called 'Gallo-Greek', with particularly productive workshops in the lower Rhône valley. Discoveries during excavations at various sites brought to light the 'Grézan' and 'Sainte Anastasie' male busts, the Marbacum and Tour Magne statues, seated figures (Villa Roma), a statue of an animal (a bovid or an imaginary animal) and lintels from Nages (severed heads and horses) and Nîmes (severed heads).



## FUNERARY PRACTICES

Very little is currently known about necropolises and the funerary world in general during the First Iron Age and the older part of the Second Iron Age. In contrast, many sepulchres dating back to the 2nd and 1st centuries BC have been found in Nîmes and the surrounding area. The 'corpus' of sepulchres

dating back to the transition period between the Iron Age and the Roman imperial period (2nd and 1st centuries BC) has been enriched considerably in the last fifteen years thanks to rescue archaeology operations performed because of the growth of Nîmes.



## GALLO-GREEK INSCRIPTIONS

The local populations in the region of Nîmes during the Second Iron Age were Celtic and spoke Gaulish, characterised by oral expression. However, contact with Greek culture that spread along the coast of the Gulf of Lion via Marseille led the locals to use the Greek alphabet to transcribe their language when this was essential for them. They thus engraved Gallo-Greek inscriptions on stones (dedications and epitaphs).

Gaulish is still not well known and the inscriptions are difficult to decipher when they are somewhat complex. Six of the 15 Gallo-Greek inscriptions in the museum's collection are exhibited. The texts were copied by scholars such as Guiran and Séguier from the 17th and 18th centuries onwards. Then, in the 19th century they were read again by epigraphists who studied very methodically the numerous inscriptions found in the region. They are often dedications to gods engraved on stelae or capitals. Visitors are provided with keys for deciphering them—so they can become archaeologists and try to translate the inscriptions!



# THE ROMAN PERIOD

## A LITTLE HISTORY

At the end of the Caesarian period (44 BC), Nîmes became a colony heading 24 subsidiary settlements. It took the name *Colonia Augusta Nemausus*.

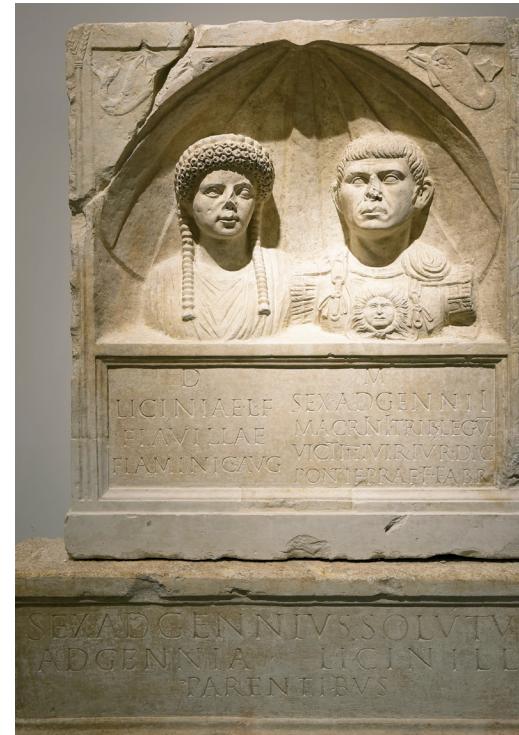
The urban landscape changed radically during the Augustan-Tiberian period (27 BC to 37 AD) in Nîmes and also in many other towns in Gallia Narbonensis. Vast new ramparts 6 kilometres long and enclosing nearly 220 hectares were built and punctuated by monumental gates such as the Porte d'Auguste by which the Via Domitia entered the town.

## IN THE MUSEUM

Opening on to Place des Arènes, the museum makes it possible to compare the town today with the historical representations that have come down over the centuries.

This back and forth movement is also illustrated by an augmented reality facility underlining the closeness of the Augustan ramparts and the Arena during the Roman period.

Under Augustus, a mint set up in the town of Nemausus made the famous 'as with a crocodile' bearing the abbreviation 'Col Nem' for Colonia Augusta Nemausus. Two places devoted to the imperial cult were founded in the Augustan period: a dynastic sanctuary (called the *Augusteum*) at the site of the Fountain and the Maison Carrée, a temple built south of the *forum*.



## MONUMENTAL ARCHITECTURE

Like epigraphy (the scientific study of engraved inscriptions), monumental architecture is one of the common threads at the museum. It is present throughout the visit and the various periods, but a more specific section is devoted to it at this stage in order to understand its importance in the town, in public facilities and in homes. It forms a link between Nîmes in the Empire and the

excavation of Villa Roma and Avenue Jean-Jaurès. Models of the main public monuments are exhibited together with a set of friezes, cornices and capitals in limestone or marble. The quarryman's trade is shown through the tools used and leads to understanding the building methods used.



## RECONSTITUTION OF THE DOMUS VILLA ROMA

A living room is reconstituted with respect of the volume of the time—narrow with a high ceiling. One of the walls is decorated with a significant wall painting whose missing parts are replaced by projected images.

## THE PENTHEUS MOSAIC

The statue of Neptune, with its admirable restoration work, is followed by the magnificent 35-square-metre Pentheus mosaic. It is from the beginning of the 3rd century AD and was discovered in 2006 during excavation work for an underground car park in Avenue Jean-Jaurès.

It is impressive because of its size, composition and colours and the astonishing vivacity of the composition showing the mythological story of Pentheus. Son of the maenad Agave, he was put to death by his own mother for having defied Dionysus.





## PAINTING AND MOSAIC

The route of the visit continues on a mezzanine 2.70 metres above the general level of the exhibition. An area is devoted to the interior layout and decoration of homes. Visible only from the threshold to the space in order to clearly separate existing elements from created



scenography, a remarkable *cubiculum* (bedroom) with so-called 'Brignon' decoration has been reconstituted.

The smaller mosaics with frequently delicate motifs ornamented with details (often the central panels of large mosaics), are displayed on the floor of the mezzanine while several large mosaics are shown on the double height surface of the façade on the garden side. As they are set back from the mezzanine they can be seen as a whole.

The superb mosaic with Bellerophon as the theme is displayed in a special manner. Placed on the ceiling of the tunnel of a subsequent sequence covering the cult of gods, this mosaic was found in 1950 during works carried out in Boulevard Gambetta.

The central panel in small cubes of marble shows a famous mythological scene: the fight between Bellerophon and the Chimaera. Its large size (nearly 14 square metres), decorative design, the technique used and its state of conservation make it an exceptional item. This space is good for a contemplative pause before coming down from the mezzanine and continuing the visit.

## DAILY LIFE

This section is explored by themes: education, leisure, body care, use of the area, etc. Interactive facilities linked to specific display cases show clothes, games, food, etc. in a playful manner.

## COINS

We are now beneath the mezzanine. Coins are displayed in several ways. A series of large sheets of glass makes a chronological frieze of

the Roman emperors and the coins associated with them; as they were depicted on the coins it is easy to follow the series in time. Two hanging showcases contain a very dense sample of the museum's collection. Magnifying glasses are provided for close examination of certain remarkable coins.

The well-known Nîmes as has a cabinet of its own. A circular screen opposite explains its history and anecdotes about it—as was to become the emblem of the town.



## THE CULT OF GODS AND THE WORLD OF THE DEAD

The space devoted to the end of the Roman period is punctuated by scenes centred on religion and the world of the dead. Visitors are invited to follow a kind of initiation route through a tunnel before coming out and finding tombs set in the floor of the museum. They then reach the monumental staircase of the museum.



## TRANSITION FROM THE EARLY CHRISTIAN PERIOD TO THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES

At the level of the entresol, this transition forms the link between the Roman period and the Middle Ages. Visitors first seen the Valbonne sarcophagus, installed majestically, a capital

with mixed decoration, an example of the mixture of styles resulting from a variety of influences, and texts and engravings illustrating the legend of Saint Baudile,

a man who tried to evangelise Nîmes but was beheaded by the Romans. His head is said to have bounced three times, and a spring emerged at each impact!

## POST-ROMAN PERIOD: THE MIDDLE AGES

The period is divided into the Romanesque period and the Gothic period.

## THE ROMANESQUE PERIOD

### A LITTLE HISTORY

The Tour Magne and the Maison Carrée are still standing among the ruins of Roman buildings. Abandoned outside the town, the monumental vestiges of the ancient Sanctuary of the Spring, where pagan gods and even the emperor had been venerated, were Christianised by the founding in 994 of Saint-Sauveur's convent. The nuns made the Temple of Diana their church. The surfaces of the sarcophagi in the necropolises established east of the town under the protection of the martyrs Saint Baudile and Saint Perpetua were often made of re-used ancient material. These were troubled times that were not propitious for creative art and the most elaborate vestiges

that have come down to us are stone sarcophagus lids attributed to the Visigothic period.

At the end of the 11th century and during the 12th century, there was a renewal in Nîmes—as elsewhere—resulting from the consolidation of feudal power, the development of crop production, livestock farming and trade. Nîmes experienced a period of prosperity and many buildings were completed—most of which were partially destroyed during the Wars of Religion. The demolition of the buildings inside the Arena from 1786 to 1809 resulted in the disappearance of the medieval towers of the fort and the two churches Saint-Pierre and Saint-Martin. Stones





were recovered from these and used during the Gothic period to carve religious scenes that has escaped mutilation. The remaining parts of the original Romanesque Notre-Dame-et-Saint-Castor's Cathedral are the first floors of the bell tower (the upper floor is a Gothic addition) and the left-hand part of the western façade. Above the well-conserved friezes, a gutter decorated with lions' muzzles and acanthus leaves is an imitation of that of the Maison Carrée. Other noteworthy vestiges are formed by small stone masonry of the fort in the Arena in the walls;

they were inspired by certain parts of the ancient building and doubtless built with material taken from it.

### IN THE MUSEUM

The Roman period is highlighted by sculptures in the round (a fragment of a masculine statue, possibly Herod, human and animal heads), in relief (a combat between two monsters, two old men of the Apocalypse, etc.) and also by the collection of capitals and ornaments in

the museum's collections. They are placed on columns of different sizes. The decoration on the double-height wall in the background shows graphic reconstitutions of façades of a Romanesque house and a 15th century house.



## THE GOTHIC PERIOD

### A LITTLE HISTORY

The period of prosperity that started in the 12th century continued in the 13th and was linked to the position of the town—close to the Mediterranean—that was supplied by the kingdom of Saint-Gilles and then by Aigues-Mortes. The interest in the area shown by the kings of France was marked in particular by Louis IX's visits to Nîmes in 1248, 1254 and 1270 when he stayed for two months while waiting to board for his crusade. The town had a population of about 20,000 towards 1320 (half of those of Toulouse and Montpellier) and was a flourishing financial centre in the 13th century with

its 'Lombards'—bankers from various towns in Italy.

A measure of decline started at the end of the 13th and beginning of the 14th century with the departure of the Italians and the departure of the papacy from Avignon in 1377. After a long period of troubles, the town did not begin its economic recovery until the mid-15th century. As for those of the Roman period, the stone vestiges that have come down to us are often damaged but are essential witnesses of the existence of monumental decoration in Nîmes.

### IN THE MUSEUM

The pieces illustrating this period are mainly sculptures and inscriptions. The high point of this section is a set of 14th century reliefs from Saint-Martin-des-Arènes church. They are bas-reliefs recovered by a private individual in 1809 at the end of the destruction of the buildings that had been in the Roman amphitheatre since the Middle Ages. They became part of the collection of the Archaeological Museum in 1875.

A display of frescoes, busts, fragments of architectural decoration, capitals, etc., can also be seen.

## THE ΓΟΠΛΗ LEGACY

Pieces from the collections, iconographical elements and multimedia facilities illustrate the Roman legacy—that is to say the interest shown over the centuries in Roman civilisation—with the major role going to large cork models made by

Auguste Pelet in the 19th century. They represent various ancient monuments in Nîmes such as the Temple of Diana and the Maison Carrée and also the Coliseum in Rome, the Parthenon in Athens, etc. In addition to the pleasure of seeing these buildings at a scale

that highlights the details, the set of models gives information to historians about the state of conservation of these buildings in the 19th century. Other scholars and collectors are mentioned and their collections are in display cases.



## THE ΜΥΣΕΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΗ ΑΡΡΟΛΗ

### LOOK, UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE

The route of the visit is designed to alternate knowledge, the observation of works and objects and pauses. Seating and rest areas are provided at strategic points of true interest for learning and looking.



### **A FLEXIBLE MUSEOGRAPHIC ROUTE**

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The dense collection and the richness of the scientific approach can make the visit long (about 2 hours) and so breaks in the circuit are provided. These mean that visitors can divide their visit into parts or focus on the periods and themes that they wish to examine in greater depth.

### **PERSONS WITH REDUCED MOBILITY**

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The overall ergonomics of the route of the visit—from museographic display structures to signposting—has been designed to meet the requirements of people with reduced mobility, especially

by favouring ramps and escalators. The showcases have been designed for the best possible view and the use of multimedia facilities by those with a physical disability.

## **ΠΟΛΕ ΤΗΛΕ Α ΜUSEUM, Α LIVING PLACE**

### **THE AUDITORIUM AND ITS FOYER**

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With its view of the archaeological garden and its 182 seats designed by the RBC group, the auditorium is an important place in the life of the museum. A privileged space which presents throughout the year a large part of the cultural programme: lectures, readings, courses offered by the Ecole du Louvre, etc.

The foyer adjoining the auditorium can be turned into a reception, relaxation or cocktail area, which makes the package particularly ideal for companies wishing to host a seminar or a meeting at the museum.



## 'LA TABLE DU 2' RESTAURANT

On the second floor of the Musée de la Romanité in a magical setting opposite the Roman amphitheatre, the brasserie highlights regional products at accessible prices, in a simple and warm decoration.

The extra something ?

Two star-winning chefs combine to design a menu for each season. Franck Putelat, two Michelin stars since 2012 and also winner of a

Bocuse d'Argent in 2003, and a 17/20 score in the Gault et Millau guide, signs the menu and manages the team in the kitchen. But as gastronomy means sharing, an international chef will join Franck Putelat each year to propose a dish for each season.

The restaurant, with magnificent openings towards the Arena in perfect harmony with the

architecture of the building, has seating for 75 plus 50 on the terrace.

## INFORMATIONS PRATIQUES

Tél. : 04 48 27 22 22  
[latabledu2.com](http://latabledu2.com)



## THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL GARDEN

Both a green space in the heart of the town and an arboretum tracing the past of Nîmes, the 3,500 square metres of greenery display a broad range of the flora here, as it arrived in a succession of periods... Crossing point and meeting place, the museum

garden quickly found its place with people of Nîmes as day walkers, who willingly make it a space for rest as soon as the summer weather returns.

### DID YOU KNOW ?

That although olive, fig and almond trees arrived in the pre-Roman period, the Romans planted lavender, thyme, garlic and chestnut trees, while in the Middle Ages, the crusaders brought peach trees, tarragon, chives and plum trees...



## THE RECEPTION ROOM

On the second floor of the museum is the reception room. Fully open, on the green roof on one side and on the Arena on the other, this bright space is the ideal place for hosting corporate events : cocktails, evenings, meetings, etc. The

reception room, which can be arranged to suit all requirements, can cater for up to 200 people in a more intimate space. With its spaces available for private hire, the Musée de la Romanité opens its doors to the corporate world during prestigious events,

and makes it a real living place in daylight as well as at night...

## THE ROOFTOP TERRACE

Up we go on the roof terrace as the visit is coming to an end... Alternating planted areas and wooden decking, this place open to all offers a panoramic view of Nîmes and its most emblematic monuments : Saint Paul's Church, the Magne Tower, the Alphonse Daudet highschool, Saint Castor's Cathedral, the Arena, Saint Baudile's Church, the Courthouse, Sainte Perpétue and Sainte Félicité's Church, the

Prefecture, the Museum of Fine Arts and the Protestant Temple of the Oratory.

From this spot, it's possible to look over the city's roofs and the horizon day and night as this space can also be privatised by companies. As the summer weather returns, watching the sun go down from the rooftop terrace is a delightful spectacle that gives any event an exceptional character !



## THE BOOKSHOP

A present, a souvenir ? The bookshop is located on the ground floor of the museum and accessible right after the end of your visit and from the outside. It reinvents the codes of Romanness and stocks contemporary objects with a wide choice of stationery, books, games and toys, fashion accessories, art of living items, modern design and regional products—all carefully chosen. The bookshop has

numerous books covering the themes shown in the museum as well as the themes of temporary exhibitions and architecture, aimed at the whole reading public: adults, enthusiasts and children.

# A FEW FIGURES

## THE MUSEUM

**25**

centuries of History

**3**

years  
of building work

**9 200**

sq.m  
floor area

**5 000**

works displayed  
from a collection of  
nearly 25,000 items

**3 500**

sq.m  
of exhibition out  
of a total of 4,800 sq. m  
of spaces devoted  
to the public

**200**

sq.m  
reception room (top  
floor, terrace with  
a view of the Arena)

**700**

sq.m  
of reserves

**140**

sq.m  
of bookshop-boutique

**3 500**

sq.m  
garden

**180**

seats and a foyer at  
the auditorium

**250**

sq.m  
of documentation  
centre

**400**

sq.m  
of educational space  
in 3 rooms

**1** restaurant (menu by the chef Franck Putelat,  
2 Michelin stars) and **1** café

## SINCE IT OPENED

on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2018

**985 000**

**VISITORS**

to the museum's permanent collections  
and temporary exhibitions

A museum with international  
ambition, visited by people of

**170**

**DIFFERENT  
NATIONALITIES**

Some

**857**

**EVENTS**

have been hosted  
at the museum

### Cost of the project

**59,5** m€

(all expenditure  
included) in  
conformity with the  
budget announced

**35 398 321** €

financed by the City of Nîmes

### Subsidies

**24 151 678** €

- Occitanie Region : 10 m€
- Gard département : 6 m€
- Nîmes Metropolis : 5 m€
- State : 2,5 m€
- DRAC : 463 339 €  
for restoration work  
and the displaying  
of Roman vestiges
- CCI : 150 000 €
- ADEME : 38 339 €



# PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Musée de la Romanité  
+33 (0)4 48 210 210  
16 boulevard des Arènes  
30000 Nîmes  
[www.museedelaromanite.fr](http://www.museedelaromanite.fr)

## OPENING TIMES

Open every day :  
From April to October  
10.00 - 19.00  
  
Open every day except Tuesday :  
From November to March  
10.00 - 18.00

## PRICES

(Permanent exhibition + temporary exhibition)

Full price : €9  
Reduce price : €6  
Children 7/17 years old : €3  
Free for children under 7  
Family rate : €21  
(2 adults + 2 children)  
Visioguide : €4 (full price),  
€3 (reduce price)

## GUIDED VISITS

Entry included  
  
Full price : €12  
Reduce price : €9  
Children 7/17 years old : €6  
Price with free entry : €3  
Family rate : €30  
(2 adults + 2 children)  
Free for children under 7

## MUSEUM MEMBERSHIPS AND PASSES

**Jupiter membership** : €30  
Annual 1-person membership  
(Musée de la Romanité)  
**Vénus membership** : €50  
Annual duo membership for you and the person of your choice (Musée de la Romanité)

**Pass Romanité** : 1 entry to the Musée de la Romanité/Arena/Maison Carrée/Tour Magne  
Full price : €20,50  
Reduce price : €15  
Children 7/17 years old : €9,50  
Family rate : €49,50  
(2 adults + 2 children)  
(Valid for 3 days from the date of purchase)

**Musées de Nîmes Pass** :  
Annual pass : €40

## PRICE CONDITIONS

Reduce price :  
- Students  
- Unemployed  
- Teachers on display of a 'Pass Education'  
- Groups of 20 persons or more  
- Jupiter and Vénus passes (guided visits)  
- Carte Passeport Seniors (Nîmes)

## Free entry :

- Children under 7
- Disabled person + 1 person accompanying (+ free visioguide to enhance accessibility)
- Persons benefiting from social minima
- Lecturers and curators
- ICOM, ICOMOS and Ministry of Culture

## CHILDREN

The museum respects the Mom'Art charter and so undertakes to perform a welcoming and service mission for children and families. An adventure booklet and an archaeologist's mission on visioguide for 7-12-year-olds mean that children can discover the museum while playing.

Numerous multimedia facilities are perfectly suitable for children.

In addition, the museum has an archaeological and Mediterranean garden and a roof terrace for a complementary visit, with areas for relaxation well suited to families.

## PRESS CONTACTS

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MUSÉE  
DE LA  
ROMANITÉ