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Places of worship in Marseille – studies of representativeness in the city

Mixing the history of Marseille and the histories of each of the city's communities, this route will illustrate the variety of cultures and forms of expression of the religious heritage within one and the same city. Marseille is unique in its juxtaposition of religions and communities. Because of its representative nature, architecture is the aspect best able to create an awareness of the importance of this community heritage which punctuates and structures the urban fabric. This route, presenting not only places but also the people who played a part in their history, will foster a better understanding of the links that have grown up over time between the different cultures.

The route described below is intended simply to lay down some historical markers, for guidance purposes:

The La Major cathedral:

A route illustrating the representativeness of religious buildings in Marseille can only start with the oldest surviving example: the old La Major cathedral. Truncated by the removal of two bays to make room for the present cathedral, it is one of the only vestiges of mediaeval Marseille. The baptistry that once existed was one of the most important monuments of Vth century Marseille. A new cathedral designed by Vaudoyer was built in the XIXth century.

When he arrived in Marseille, Vaudoyer realised very quickly that the key issue where this cathedral was concerned was to find an appropriate location and style. After winning the Grand Prix de Rome in 1826, Vaudoyer had gone to Rome, where he joined Duban and Labrousse. Inspired by the historiography movement under the Restoration and the writings of Guizot and Thierry, this group of architects sought to renew architecture's links with its past. The teaching they received in Italy drew them not only towards ancient monuments, but also towards mediaeval buildings. Marseille cathedral later became the most complete expression of these attempts at didactic historicism, in which, like a geological formation, the forms of a building reflect all the historical stages through which they have passed. Vaudoyer sought to go back to the Byzantine origins of the mediaeval decorative and structural system in order to create in Marseille this lost monument which would describe the path followed by the pendentive dome characteristic of the Byzantine style in Constantinople and the Greek world, via Saint Mark's in Venice and Lombard Romanesque architecture. This conception of architecture as being a synthesis of different influences is characteristic of a Saint-Simonian view of Marseille: a city open to eastern influences destined to breathe new life into the west. The new ports, which were a symbol both of the links with the Levant and of modernity were, to Vaudoyer, the ideal site for the new La Major. As Blaise Cendrars said in "L'homme foudroyé", "Marseille belongs to those who come from the sea": the cathedral is the first monument seen by travellers arriving in Marseille, and the painting "Marseille port de l'orient" by Pierre Puvis de Chavanne shows the cathedral and the basilica of Notre Dame de la Garde as the monuments symbolising the city for newcomers.

Eglise Saint-Cannat:

The *église Saint-Cannat* (1526-1739) is one of the last vestiges of this XVIIIth century district which was completely transformed in 1858-1864 when the *rue Impériale* was driven through it. This major town planning project for Marseille was an important stage in the development of the modern city, whose urban fabric and city centre monuments bear the imprint of the XIXth century. Both the consideration given to this monument when the new thoroughfare was built and the destruction of the *église Saint-Martin* (on the current site of *place Sadi Carnot*) show the importance of religion in the history of Marseille. It was the destruction of the *église Saint-Martin* and the neighbouring properties that prompted Augustin Fabre to write his book "*Les anciennes rues de Marseille*", which became the authoritative work on the historiography of the city.

Eglise de la Dormition de la Vierge:

At the turn of the XVIIIth century, a number of wealthy young Greeks from Anatolia, the Black Sea, the Aegean islands and even Constantinople decided to throw in their lot with a new society engendered by the spirit of 1789. They met up in Marseille with soldiers returning from the Napoleonic campaigns. In 1820, they were sufficiently numerous and had sufficient funds to organise their society around their religion of origin. The first cleric in charge of the church was Archimandrite Arsène Yannucos, a reservist chaplain in the Bonapartist army living in Paris. The founding of this church dates back to Easter 1820, in a small chapel on the corner of *rue de la Rotonde* and *rue de la Grande-Armée*. This first chapel was replaced by the current building, which is the oldest Orthodox church in western Europe. This church, based on the Greek Orthodox liturgy, nevertheless possesses some outstanding stained glass windows, whose design is the work of artists from Marseille (for example, the monumental stained glass window depicting the Dormition of the Virgin Mary).

Eglise Saint-Vincent-de-Paul:

The *église Saint-Vincent-de-Paul*, known popularly as "les Réformés", was erected on the site of a chapel of the "reformed" Augustinians, a branch of the Augustinian Order. The "petits pères" as they were known, possessed, in addition to the church and their monastery, an adjoining plot of land, four houses on the *allée de Meilhan* and two sheds. The foundation stone of the church had been laid in 1611 by the Duc de Guise, governor of Provence, and was apparently found again when the church was demolished in 1869.

The church of the "Réformés" was built in two stages. The building of the first part (comprising the choir, the transept and the start of the main nave), to the west of the Augustinian chapel, on land acquired for that purpose, took place between April 1855 and 1868. The congregation continued to attend the old church during the work on the new building. Demolition of the chapel began in 1869, and the second part of the church, known as the "*église haute*" (comprising the nave, narthex and portal), was built on this site between 1872 and 1885.

The early retirement of architect/entrepreneur François Reybaud, who had drawn up the plans, and a series of financial and political crises account for the fact that the work lasted for nearly 30 years without the church ever being fully completed. On 22 May 1930, masonry fell from one of the church towers on to the street below, with fatal results. This led to the urgent removal of all the projecting parts of a building which had already been badly damaged by the elements.

Protestant church in rue Bel-Air:

In 1867, Pastor J. Guyer succeeded in forming a partnership for the purchase of a building to be used for the education of children. This building was located in rue Puget (the current rue Albert Chabanon). Once essential repairs had been completed, the pastor installed his church. The house giving on to the street served as a residence for the pastor and the teacher, while a small house in the heart of the property, giving on to rue Bel-Air, was converted into a school. Pastor Guyer had grander ambitions, but did not raise sufficient funds to build the church until 1888, the year in which the foundation stone was laid. The building was inaugurated in November 1890. It is currently the property of the Association Guillaume Farel.

Eglise Saint-Nicolas-de-Myre : à préciser

A short walk from the Prefecture, in rue Edmond Rostand, the église Saint Nicolas de Myre by itself represents the Melkite community of Marseille. Its interior decoration, which is still intact, is inspired by the links established between Marseille and the Levant in the XIXth century.



Grande Synagogue de la rue Breteuil : à préciser



The Jewish religion is represented in Marseille by a major building: the synagogue in rue Breteuil. Designed by architect Salomon Nathan in 1860, it represents the culmination of ideas about synagogue architecture in the XIXth century and the role played by the Jewish religion in the city.

Armenian Apostolic Cathedral Serpotz Tarkmantchatz (Holy Translators):

The first Armenians to settle in Marseille were not refugees, but traders. In the 1860s, the community already numbered some 60 families who had put down strong roots and were busy trading with the Levant. In 1881, it had a chapel in rue de l'Ormeau, which was moved to la rue Saint-Jacques, then to rue Stanislas Torrents, where, in the closing years of the century, the Armenian national school was also located. Despite their small size, these places of worship were sufficient for the needs of the community. They proved totally insufficient from the 1920s onwards, when refugees began to pour into Marseille in their tens of thousands. From Beirut to Piraeus, from Smyrna to Aleppo, where survivors of the genocide had taken refuge, a huge exodus began. In the space of six years, Marseille took in 60,000 of these survivors, who lived cramped together in the Sainte-Marthe and Mirabeau camps, on railway company land, near boulevard Oddo, and in apartment blocks in the Belsunce and Porte d'Aix districts. Of course, not all of them remained in Marseille, but many decided to settle there. It was essential to build a new place of worship. But instead of being tailored to the needs of 60 families, it was to be tailored to those of a community of several tens of thousands of people.

The Armenian community bought a plot of land on boulevard du Prado: it was here that it planned to build its cathedral, to which it would give the name Serpotz Tarkmantchatz (Holy Translators). A wealthy Armenian from Brussels, Vahan Khorassandjian, funded the entire operation. On 12 February 1928, the foundation stone was blessed by Mgr Krikoris Balakian, who was soon to become head of the Armenian diocese of southern France, and the cathedral was consecrated on 25 October 1931. The architect of this building, A. Tahtadjyan, based his design on the structure of Echmiadzin cathedral, near Yerevan, built in 303. Seeking to mark the urban landscape and identify with an architectural tradition, this cathedral illustrates this idea of the representativeness of religious architecture.

Mosque in rue Malaval:

The last place of worship on this route will be the mosque in rue Malaval.



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