

Contention in Construction

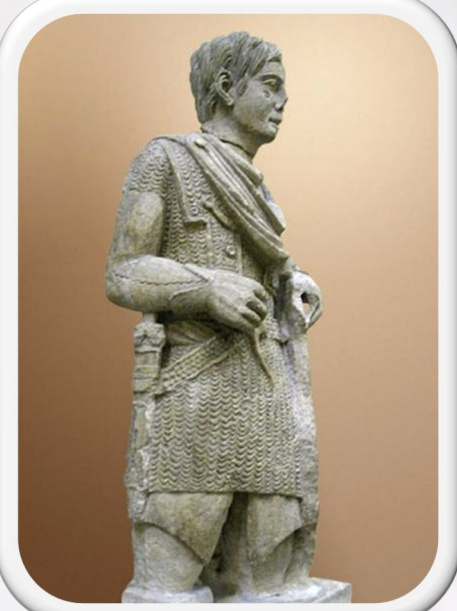
The Papal Palace at Avignon

By Scott Sowton

Background

In 1271, the Alphonse of Poitiers gave a parcel of land to Pope Gregory X to use as his domain in Southern France. In 1309, Avignon was established as the location of the Papal court, becoming the largest Gothic building in the world. The Palace is a spectacle of spirituality as well as military might as it is located strategically on the only bridge over the Rhone River (Heckart:1989). The start for the construction of the palace has been contested by academics, still believed to be commissioned by Clemence VI, the actual year of construction of the old palace is debated. Matters are complicated further with the new palace being built alongside it also in the 14th century.

Before being owned by the church, Avignon was originally inhabited by the Celtic-Ligurian tribe of Cavares, archaeology such as this statue of a Celtic warrior was found in Avignon and the surrounding area (Lazarov:2006).



Avignon, Palais des Papes



Early Maps

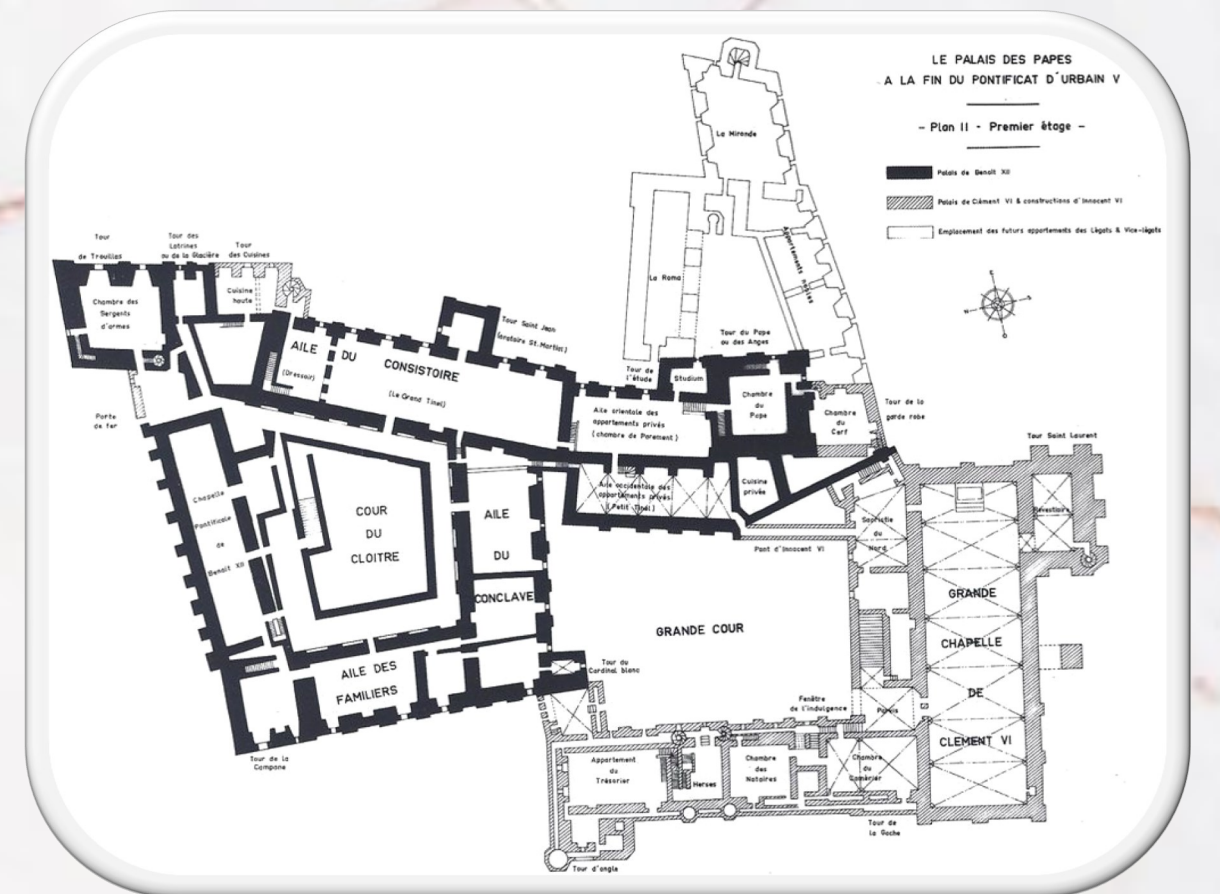
Avignon was so significant that on early cartographers' maps, such as those of Jean Bonfa in the 17th century, the palace of the popes out-scaled the rest of the town as a sign of its splendour and importance (Stroup: 1995).

"Avignon! Avignon on her mighty rock! Avignon, the joyful ringer of bells, whose stone carved belfries, side by side, point heavenwards; St Peter's god-child, Avignon, who saw the saint's bark ride at anchor in her haven and who bears his keys at her battlemented girdle; Avignon, that lovely city, tumbled and dishevelled by the mistral..." (Mollat: 1949)

The Papal Palace as a Tourist Attraction

The papal palace at Avignon is one of the top 10 tourists attractions in France with 650,000 annual visits. Art Exhibitions are common at the papal palace such as the Musée de l'Oeuvre and the Luminescences, a sensorial video experience (Avignon-et-provence.com: 2019) .

As seen by the phase plan below, the Papal palace is actually two segments joined together; The 'old palais' of Benedict XII and the 'new palais' of Clement VI.



When was Avignon constructed?

The construction of the Avignon Papal Palace is contested amongst historians with information on the building varying between sources. A press release made by the Avignon Tourism board, claims that construction first began in 1333, and only took 20 years to build including the addition of the 'new palais' (Avignon Tourisme:2015).

There are discrepancies here as Morris says that construction started in 1342. There is also the writing of Rollo-Koster, an historian with focus on Avignon, who writes that construction of the palace walls had been finished by 1348, only 7 years into the 20 year process claimed by the press release (Rollo-Koster:1978).

Historians such as Mollat (Mollat:1949), who in his writing makes it difficult to understand which of the palaces he is writing about, but this may be due to the fact that this source came from the 40's and may not be fully up-to-date.

