



Arles' Forum and Cryptoporticus

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Introduction

This poster will look at three controversial features:

- The supposed reconstruction of the layout of the Arles' Forum and how it differs from the 'typical' forum
- The disputed purpose of the Cryptoporticus as a warehouse or mere architectural construction
- The dating of the Forum and Cryptoporticus

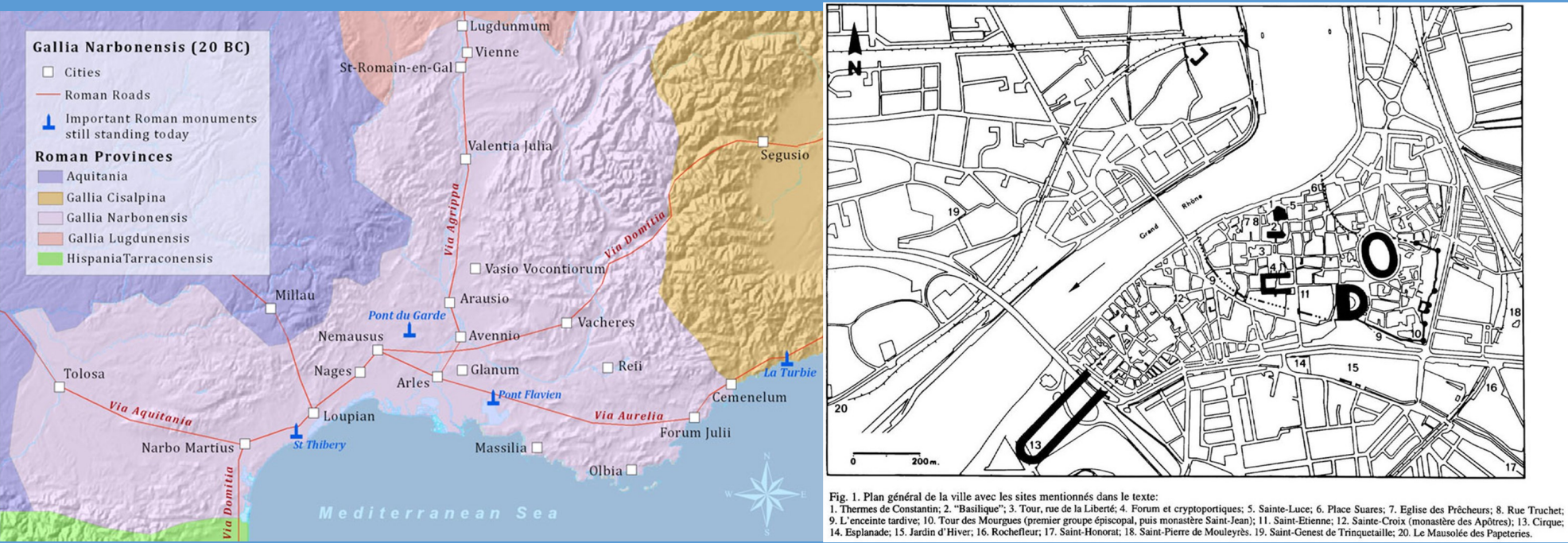


Figure 1. Location of Arles within Roman Provence. From: Historical Atlas of the Mediterranean.

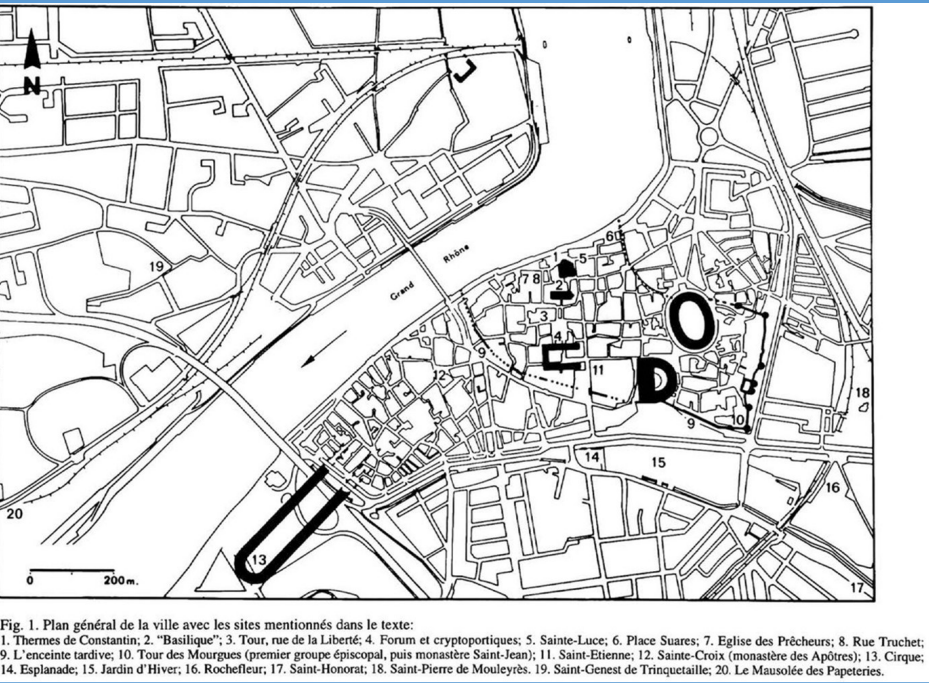


Figure 2. Arles Roman remains map. From: Marc Heijmans.

History of Arles

Arles, originally the Greek colony of Theline, was settled in the 6th century BC, and was to become the Roman province of Arelate in Gallia Narbonensis. Arles underwent a resurgence with canals being built under Marius in 104BC. It was later used by Caesar in 49BC as a war-port when he was besieging nearby Massalia/Marseille, because of its position at the edge of a gulf (see Figure 1). Suetonius writes that after the Alexandrian War, Tiberius was sent to Gaul to found colonies including that of Arles and Narbonne, and that they were given the name '*Iulia Paterna*' (Suet. Tib. 4.1; Février, 1973). The province Arelate was ultimately founded in 46BC (Lafond, 2006).

The Forum's Legacy



Figure 3. Remains of Roman Forum at Arles. From: Tripadvisor.

One of the two physical remains of the forum are fragments of a portico seen on the Place du Forum today on the Hotel Nord-Pinus (see Figure 3; Rothé & Heijmans, 2008, p. 359). As can be seen in Figure 3 there are holes in the façade where a bronze lettering inscription would have been attached, and there are two interpretations as to what have may have been written here (see insert below). The Place du Forum has been immortalised by an 1888 Van Gogh painting of the *Café Terrace at Night*

The two interpretations of what the façade inscription may have been. Top is Séguier (1778) and Benoî's (1951) interpretation. Bottom is Heijmans' (2008) interpretation.



Figure 4. Café du Forum or Café Terrace at Night by Van Gogh. From: Van Gogh Route.

Arles' Unusual Forum

According to Heijmans (2006), the forum of Arles was built during the first major urbanisation of the town as gratitude from Caesar in 46BC for assistance during the civil war and his besieging of nearby Marseille (Heijmans, et al., 2006). However, the character of the columns, cornice remains, and capital, as well as the angularity and rudimentary modelling of the Arkanthus leaves on the columns puts a suggested date for the forum at c.25BC (Droste, 2003, p. 35), which implies that there was an urbanised town before 46BC. The



Figure 5. Arles Forum Reconstruction. From: Jean-Claude Golvin.

Forum was in a central location on the intersection of the two main roads *Cardo* and *Decumanus* (see Figure 2; Droste, 2003, p.33). It was the central location for religious, administrative and civil buildings (Heijmans & Sintés, 1994, pp. 160-1; Droste, 2003, p. 34).

Various reconstructions of the forum have been attempted (see Figure 5), however, there are only two fragments remaining (see Figure 3), so reproductions are based solely on the subterranean Cryptoporticus and on the model of Rome's Forum Romanum, which was dated to the 4th century BC (Höcker, et al., 2006). Our surviving literary description of the forum comes from one of Sidoine Apollinaire's letters in AD 461 where he describes it as being "cluttered with columns and statues" (Epistulae. 1.11.7-8; Heijmans & Sintés, 1994, p. 160). Droste argues that the Forum mostly follows the ideal plan of a Roman market place, and was 60m wide and c.190m long (Droste, 2003, p. 34). However, the surrounding forum complex has some peculiarities, notably the lack of basilica, and there is also an oval space connecting the main forum to the temple complex (see Figure 5 & 6; Droste, 2003, p. 36). Additionally, there is a smaller forum square to the North of the main forum and down a flight of stairs (see Figure 5), which is unique to compared to other examples of forums (Droste, 2003, p. 36).

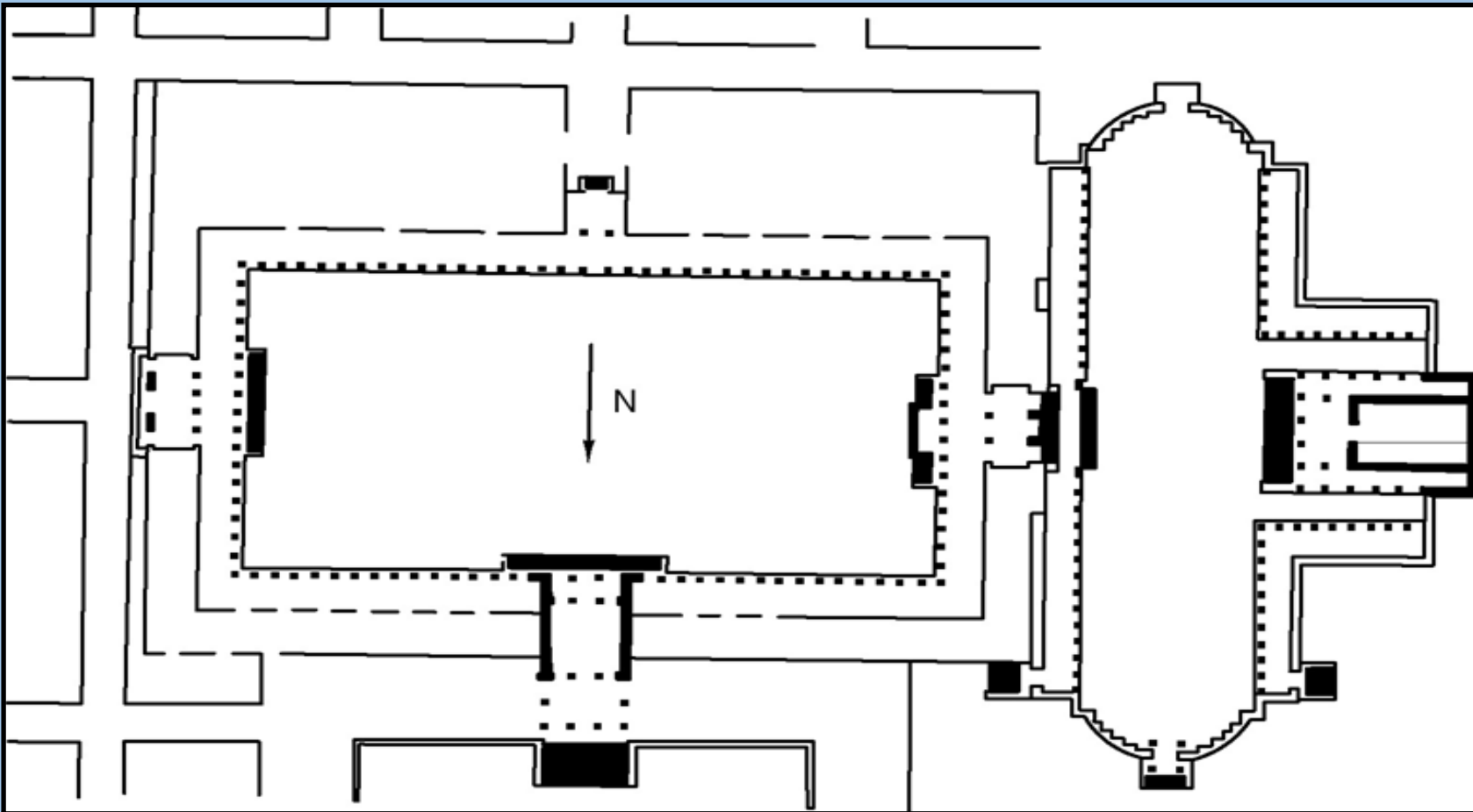


Figure 6. Arles Forum plan. From: Cambridge University Press.

The Purpose of Arles' Cryptoporticus

Arles' Cryptoporticus is formed of three galleries in the shape of a U facing east (see Figure 7; Amy, 1973, p. 275). It lies 5.80m below the modern city between the Place du Forum and Place du Republic and is accessible from the modern town hall (Amy, 1973, p. 275). The function of these subterranean buildings is disputed. Ward-Perkins argues that the function of the Cryptoporticus is merely constructional, and it is the simplest and most economical way of ensuring that the large rectangular open space required for the forum would be level, as the Arles Forum was built on a hill (Ward-Perkins, 1970, p. 11). However, considering the impressive appearance and space of the Cryptoporticus (see Figure 7) it seems unlikely that they would not have been put to some use. Therefore, Vitruvius' claim that they were warehouses (De arch. V.9.5) seems logical. Especially as they were built under the forum and market place, were accessible, and would have been a cool area to store produce.



Figure 7. Arles' Cryptoporticus. From: SpottingHistory.

Dating the Cryptoporticus

Dating the cryptoporticus is problematic as there is no distinctive sculpture or notable features (Amy, 1973, p. 286). Dating has been attempted from the marble finds in the North Gallery, these include a bust of Octavius Augustus (Amy, 1973, p. 286; Salet, 1952, p. 268). Although it is argued that the marbles are dated from around AD 27, after Augustus' support of Arles against Marseille, Amy and Salet both doubt that the marbles originate from the same date as the Cryptoporticus (Amy, 1973, p. 286; Salet, 1952, p. 268). A Corinthian capital, in the style of a forum monument, found in the northern corner of the Cryptoporticus is more likely to be of the same period (Amy, 1973, p. 286), although this time frame is unknown.

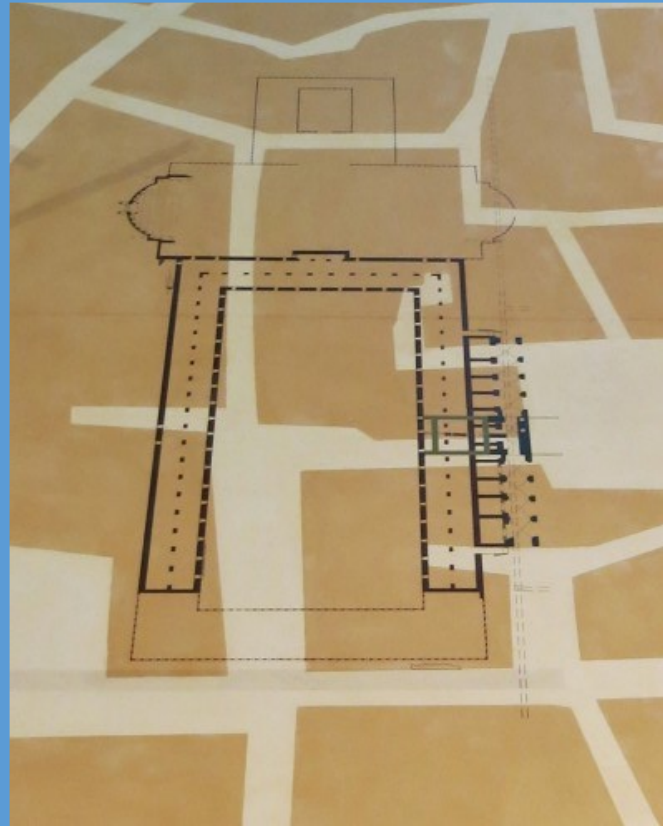


Figure 8. Cryptoporticus plan embossed on Forum plan, on top of current street plan. From: Mikestravelguide.

Conclusion

Although the Forum mostly follows the typical Roman structure, it includes an odd northern square and an enclosed open space in front of the central temple, there is also a distinct lack of basilica. The dating of both the Cryptoporticus and Forum is problematic, with variations depending on either the social context of Caesar's use of the city, or Augustan and later Tiberian-Flavian influence (Droste, 2003, p. 37).

Although Vitruvius states that the purpose of the Cryptoporticus was storage, it has been argued to have only a constructional purpose.

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