

‘Triumphal’ Arch of Orange



The ‘Triumphal’ Arch is located in Orange, in southeast France, along the via Agrippa. The exact date it was built is unknown but it is thought to have been built during the reign of Augustus (27BC-14AD). It was originally dedicated to the Veterans of the Gallic Wars, Legio II Augusta. The arch was then rededicated to Tiberius/Germanicus for their campaigns against the Gallic Tribes in A.D. 26-27. The Arch is approximately 19.57 metres in length by 19.21 metres in height and 8.40 metres wide (Cook, T. A. 2000: 60.). I will be discussing the controversies of whether it can be called a triumphal arch as no triumph has been recorded in Orange; the date of its original construction (Augustus or Tiberius’ reigns). The *fasti triumphales* is our most complete source of Roman triumphs from until 19 B.C.E. and is inscribed on the Arch of Augustus, however, some lines are missing. (Verlag, F. S. 1993: 61.).



Dedication and re-dedication:

The main debate surrounding the arch is the date of when it was built. The date will always remain a mystery since the inscription has been lost. However, most scholarly debate estimates the arch to be built during Augustus or Tiberius’ reign with a recent claim that it was during the Severan period (A.D. 193-235.). Paul Zanker claims that Arausio (Orange) built an unusually elaborate triumphal arch in the years A.D. 26-27 for the emperor Tiberius or possibly Germanicus for defeating a revolt of the Gallic tribes (Zanker, P. 1990: 84). However, this claim is not widely supported as Frothingham writes “I assign this arch to the early part of the reign of Augustus, for reasons to be given elsewhere” (Frothingham Jr, A. L. 1904: 6.), this however provides no clarity on the issue and cannot be taken as fact by itself. Furthermore, Fagerlind writes that the inscription dedicated to Tiberius is clearly secondary and “covers the *fasciae* of the main architrave” and also that its development could be accurately dated to the Caesarian or early Augustan age because of its decoration and this claim can be confirmed by Couissin’s study of the armour depicted on the arch (Richmond, I. A. 1933: 151.). Platter, also adds his view that Marius built it and named it ‘Tour des Arcs’ because it outline was similar to a fortified tower, however, this was in 1597 and is not a widely agreed upon theory. Millin, also gives a wide range of emperors from Augustus to Hadrian (Cook, T. A. 2000: 70.).



Structure and original appearance:

The Arch was believed to have statues on top of it as three pedestals can quite clearly be seen. What these statues would have been is unknown but our best guess for the middle pedestal would have been the emperor possibly standing alone or in a chariot similar to the statue of Augustus in the *quadriga* in the Forum Augustum, and possibly slaves or pacified people either side of him. The Arch was and still is elaborately decorated with floral and militaristic reliefs, containing scenes of naval and land battles on the attics (Gallic wars, Actium). Lances, curved swords, trumpets (carnyx: a Celtic war trumpet that would have been used to intimidate and confuse the enemy. Polybius. 29.2.), battle standards, drapery, and shields can be found above one of the lower arches supporting the a militaristic theme to the Arch. The naval scene does not show any complete ships, only parts which provide the relief with an underwater effect, whilst also being another medium of propaganda for Actium, and their victory over Anthony and Cleopatra. The battle scene depicts a soldier carrying a shield with a Capricorn on it, a symbol of the *Legio II Augusta*—a legion that fought in the Gallic wars, this would support an argument for its dedication originally being for victories in the Gallic wars. It is clear that there was originally an inscription on the Arch due to the clamp holes that are still present, this would end the debate of when it was originally built and then dedicated.

Conclusion:

- The Arch was an effective medium of imperial propaganda that symbolised Rome’s glory for their naval and land victories .
- The date it was built has been heavily debated and with no clear answer to the question, the debate will likely continue.
- It is one of the most decorated Triumphal Arches that was built throughout the Roman empire, perhaps only second to the Arch of Constantine.
- Despite it being known as the Triumphal Arch of Orange it is disputed to whether an actual triumph took place in order for the arch to be classified to be ‘triumphal’ as a Arch of Augustus had been built and commemorated Actium.

This inscription roughly translates to: “In honour of Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the Divine Augustus, grandson of the Divine Julius, Pontifex Maximus, invested with the Tribunician power for the twenty-sixth time, Imperator for the eight time, and Consul for the fourth time, the Decurions restored this Triumphal Arch” (Cook, T. A. 2000: 72; Mignon, J.M. 2009: 183.).

[Ti(berio) Caesari divi Augusti f(ilio) divi Iuli nepoti Augusto pontifici maximo tribunicia Potestate XXVIII imperatori IIX con(n)s(uli) IIII restitutori coloniae]]

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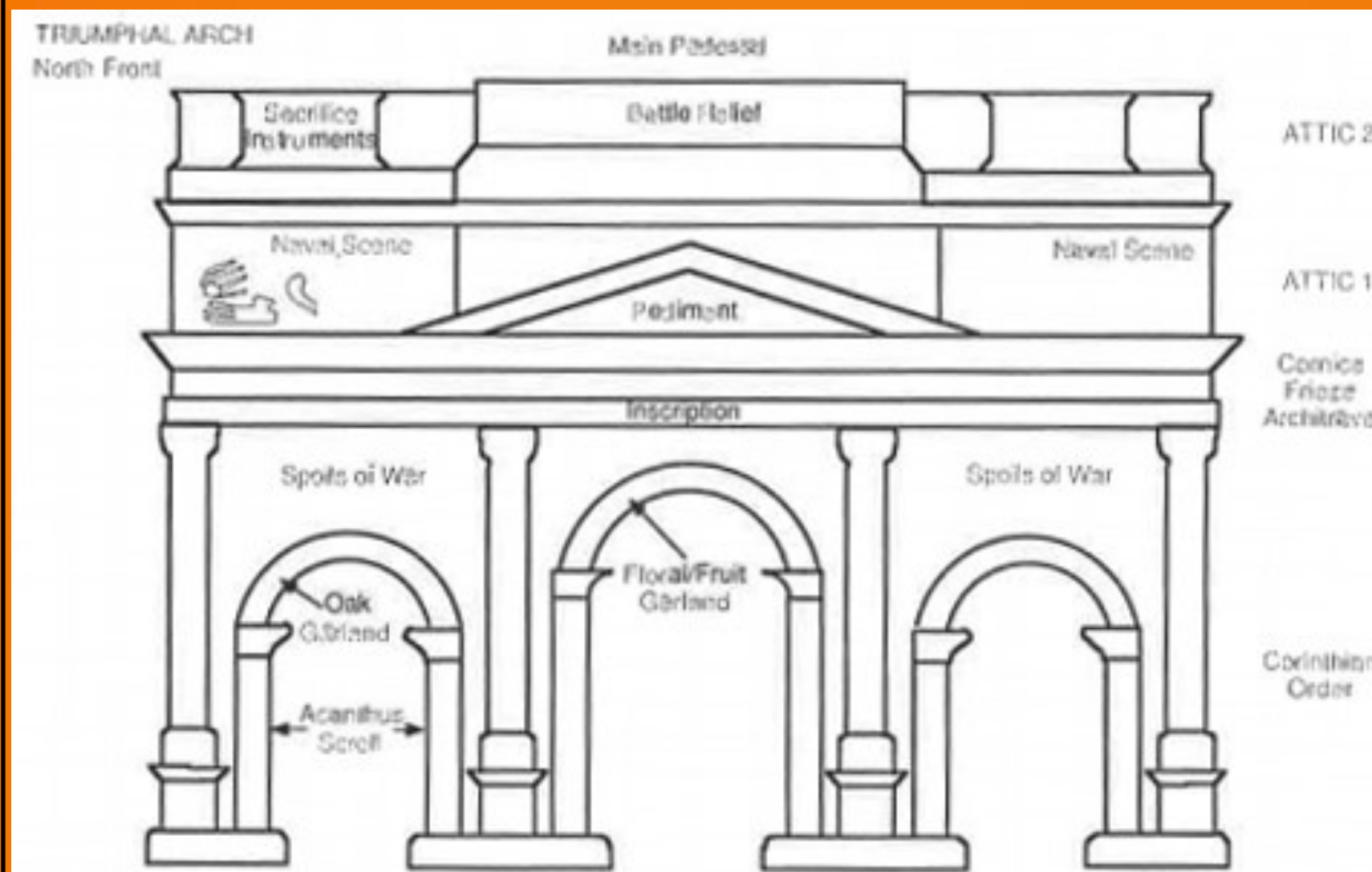
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Comparison info:

The Arch of Septimius Severus was built in A.D. 203 to commemorate their victories against the Parthians in A.D. 194-9 and was built and is still located in the Forum Romanum and like the arch at Orange has three arches, this would be typical of later triumphal arches. The inscription on the attic of the arches is dedicated to Septimius Severus and his two sons: Caracalla and Geta (Cartwright, M. 2013.).

The Arch of Augustus was built in the Forum Romanum to commemorate either Octavian’s victory at Actium in 31B.C.E. or the return of the Parthian standards in 20 B.C.E. The triple arch was uncommon at this time and this was the first of its kind in Rome. Cassius Dio argues that the arch was built in celebration and dedication to Augustus for the return of the standards (Cass. Dio. 54.8.3.)However, it is most likely that two arches were built and dedicated to Augustus for each victory, and the monuments for Octavian/ Augustus are said to have transformed the look of the Forum Romanum. (Zanker, P. 1990: 81.)

