



15. FRÉJUS — Ruines de l'ancien Théâtre romain

Photo Munier

The building was entirely closed on itself between the conch of the grandstands (*cavea*) and the stage wall (*scaena frons*). This wall was as high as the *cavea*, like in Orange, decorated with sculptures and architectural elements. In that sense, the Roman theatre is significantly different from its Greek model, opening out to the surrounding landscape.

Since 1997, the theatre has resumed its role as a performance building and has hosted various events, including the «Nuits Auréliennes Festival» devoted to theatre plays. For this purpose, permanent stands were placed : they do not affect the ancient monument and the perforated metal used for their design reveals the remains of the radiating walls. The theatre is dedicated to actor Philippe Léotard, born in Fréjus, whose father was the Mayor of the City from 1959 to 1971, as was his brother François between 1977 and 1997.



Fréjus belongs to the French National Association of Cities and Regions with Art and History Heritage.

The Ministry of Culture, Heritage department, awards the title « Cities and Regions with Art and history Heritage » to territorial communities maintaining, valuing and sustaining their heritage. This guarantees the skills of the Architecture and Heritage facilitators and of the tour guides, as well as the quality of their services. From the ancient remains to the XXIst century architecture, these territories put the diversity of Heritage on show. Nowadays, a network of 202 cities and regions provides its expertise throughout France.

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The Archaeology and Heritage department coordinates the initiatives of Fréjus, a city with Art and History Heritage. Cultural programming is presented throughout the year in order to make the public discover and better understand the City heritage. They are available to teachers to build education activities. The Tourist Office guides/lecturers welcome you on many interesting visits. They know every aspect of Fréjus and invite you to « take a new look at the city » For information contact the Tourist Office.

Opening hours

- October 1st – March 31st
From Tuesday to Saturday
9:30 am – 12:30 pm
2:00 pm – 5:00 pm
Closed on Sundays, Mondays and bank holidays
- April 1st – September 30th
From Tuesday to Sunday, including bank holidays
10:00 am – 13:00 pm
2:30 pm – 6:00 pm
Closed on Mondays and May 1st

Rates

- Single ticket : 3 €
 - Fréjus Pass : 6 € (reduced : 4 €)
- Admission to the Amphitheatre, the Theatre, the Archaeological Museum, the local History museum and to the chapel « Notre Dame de Jérusalem »
- Free for children under 12 accompanied by an adult.
- Detail of the conditions of free and reduced to the reception.

Archaeology and Heritage department

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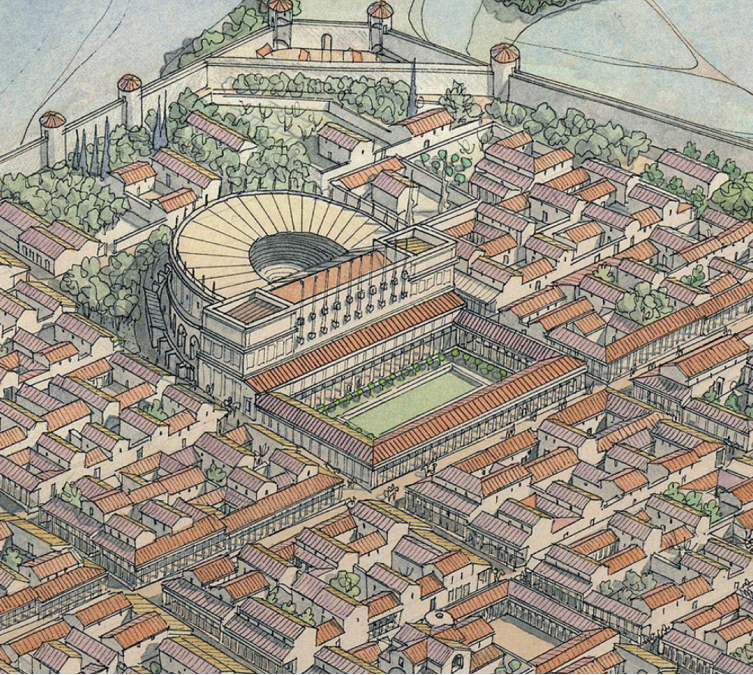
FOCUS THE ROMAN THEATRE



Avenue du Théâtre romain

☎ 04 94 53 82 47





Watercolor by Jean-Claude Golvin, *Forum Iulii* in the 2nd century AD

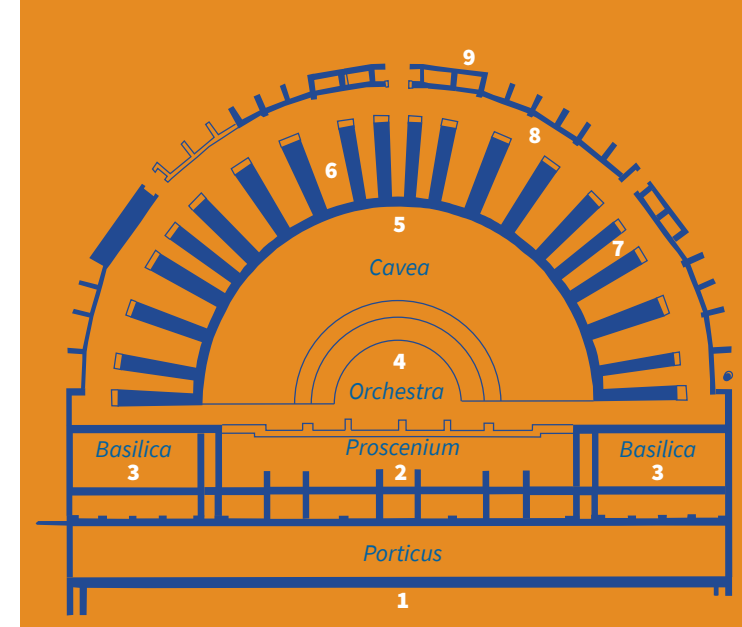
THE ROMAN THEATRE

Located in the north-western district of the ancient city, not far from the city wall and the Rome gate, the theatre was the first performance venue built in *Forum Iulii*.

Leaning against a gentle slope, the building was probably of smaller dimensions and mainly made of wood in its first design. The period of its construction is not precisely known, but it should be in the first half of the first century AD, as it is part of an urban plan dating back to the years 15-20 of our era (known as « réseau B »). Its present state hardly reflects its monumental appearance when it hosted tragedies of Virgil and Seneca, farces of Plautus and Terence or mimes and pantomimes, during the official celebrations of the city (*ludi*). It was then decorated with a large number of sculptures, some of which have been uncovered and are now displayed at the Archaeological Museum.

In spite of the archaeological findings by architect J. Formigé between 1919 and 1929, this monument remains enigmatic. The theatre has a semicircular form, corresponding to its use as a stage or grandstands. The front wall (*porticus*) (1), 83.80 metres long, which fenced

the building on its south-east side, is now almost completely levelled to the foundations. Of the stage (*proscenium*) (2) which was 39 m long and 6.80 m wide, only the foundations and piers that supported the floor (*pulpitum*) can be seen. On both sides, the *basilicae* (3) were used as dressing-rooms. In front of the stage was the *orchestra* (4), semicircular, where the authorities would sit on movable seats. The grandstands (5) which made up the different levels of the *cavea* are all gone. The first level was probably made of wood, thus leaving no permanent trace. As for the upper levels, it is possible to imagine their dimensions thanks to the presence of radiating walls (6). These walls, between which rampant vaults were built, supported the upper stands. Access was by paved passages between some of these walls ; one of these pavings actually still exists today (7) with lateral ditches for the drainage of water.



Theatrical mask

At the back of the radiating walls, we can see a semicircular space (8). It is very likely one of the superposed hallways which allowed horizontal movement in the monument and served the different levels of stands. Outside (9), there were several corresponding levels of arcades, probably surrounded by columns and architectural elements.

The facade and infrastructures were built in *opus coementicium* and in brown/red sandstone. Placed as a cladding material, it has disappeared in several places and has revealed the «core» of the wall, made of mortar and crushed stone. The stands and some elements of the stage building were perhaps made of wood. In the southern part, nowadays crossed by the Avenue du théâtre and occupied by residential houses, a square portico is supposed to have been built, the *porticus post scaenam*.

In many ways, the plan of the *Forum Iulii* theatre is in line with the classical Roman theatre (or Latin) described by Vitruvius in his Book V. Unlike Greek theatres, all the artists performed on the stage ; It was therefore wider whereas the *orchestra*, which was no longer circular but semicircular, got seats for local personalities. The Latin theatre formed a whole, with a semicircular *cavea* connected to a massive stage building that extended into large quadrangular rooms, the *basilicae*.