

THE RESTITUTION OF THE THEATRE

After 20 years of restoration work to the Roman Theatre in Aosta, in August 2009 the monument was reinserted into the archaeological city landscape.

The undertaking is promoted and organised by the Ministry for Education and Culture of the Valle d'Aosta autonomous Region and is part of what is known as Restitution; the Theatre was finally released from its scaffolding and has become one of the cultural sites which can be visited in the area. Free guided tours as well as a concert under the stars were organised in the archaeological site to restore the original function of leisure to the monument.

It is in awareness that cultural sites cannot be frozen within their context nor enclosed within their beauty with no scope of interaction with the citizens, that the event was planned; the intention is to promote and show the value of this important hallmark in Aosta as an attraction of tourist and cultural interest as well as an opportunity for the cultural development of the community.

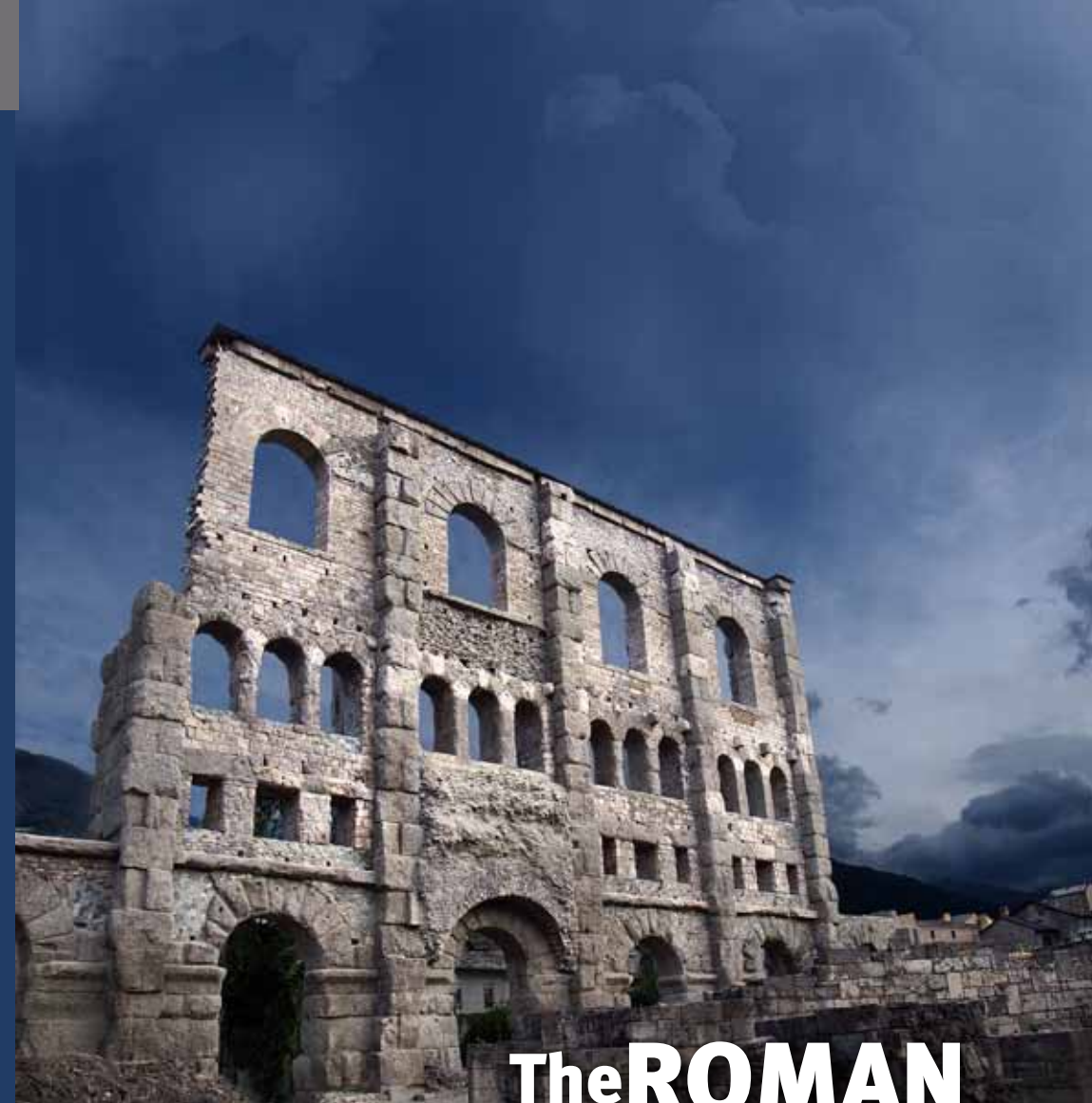
This kind of action which is essentially based on conservation, sets the

conditions whereby the value of the Theatre is enhanced by exploring its different possible uses such as plays and other cultural events, as it was originally designed for, avoiding thus the museum only label.

The Roman Theatre in Aosta has therefore become the venue for the summer festival events organised by the Ministry for Education and Culture of the Valle d'Aosta autonomous Region.

When planning events for the enhancement and promotion of culture in view of the Restitution of the heritage, this archaeological site is chosen to host cultural events, concerts and performances which can be enjoyed and shared by people living in Valle d'Aosta as well as tourists on holiday in the region.

Amongst the appointments at the Roman Theatre in Aosta worth noting are the *Assemblée de Chant Choral*, a meeting of local choirs, the *Mogol Prize*, *Théâtre et Lumières*, a show of lights and music projected on the main facade of the monument, the *Aosta Classica* festival and a host of musical events for young musicians.



The ROMAN THEATRE in AOSTA

Preserving in order to value
Valuing in order to restore



THE ROMAN THEATRE IN AOSTA

The town planning of *Augusta Praetoria* (Roman Aosta), founded in 25 B.C, placed public performance buildings such as the Theatre and the Anfitheatre in the north-east of the town, in the three sections by the perimeter walls of the town.

This seemingly peripheral “area for performances” was however extremely efficient in providing an orderly access to the performances from the nearby *Decumanus Maximus*, the main road, and from the monumental *Porta Praetoria*. The permanent theatre would have given the Roman colony dignity and prestige and contributed to the urbanisation process of the surrounding areas as planned by the Empire. The theatre however was not built at the same time as the town but was undertaken at a later date, possibly a few decades, as recent findings of preexisting buildings have testified.

Imposing ruins are what is left of what was one of the most meaningful Roman theatres in northern Italy and what we can see today of the recently renovated

façade reveals the magnificence of the building with its openings and its 22 metre high wall to the south. The façade presents three different rows of arches, different in size and shape, rigorously geometrical and supporting each other on all sides all the way up to the top.

Great blocks of pudding stone (concrete-like building material used for local architectural work was taken from the river) with a rough finish as well as travertine limestone make up the characteristic supporting walls.

Of the raised semicircular seating area for the audience only six of the lower stone seating blocks remain as well as two wider, lower ones set around the semicircular orchestra and which were reserved for the local dignitaries. Throughout the centuries and more specifically in the Middle Ages, public roman buildings were left abandoned and used as stone quarries for other building work. The theatre fell into disuse, other buildings were erected on the site and the façade of the building inappropriately became the retaining walls for other constructions.



FROM THE INITIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS TO THE RESTORATION OF THE FRONT WALL

The first archaeological work was undertaken by the engineer-architect Carlo Promis who was appointed in 1837 by King Carlo Alberto to carry out thorough research into the ancient monuments of Aosta. Almost a century went by before any work was done to the Theatre and it was not until the 1920s that the monument started to take on the appearance that we can see today.

The buildings against the façade of the monument were the first to come down; the excavation of the seating area was then completed and the proscaenium and the stage brought to light. The work resumed after the war and in the 1960s excavation work to the east and south-west uncovered the remains of Roman houses. (insulae 31 and 32)

Finally the further research carried out in other areas and along the walls between 1997 and 2000 lead to a better understanding of the how the monument was built and designed.



The conservation work of the 1930s to the façade also involved the renovation of the top arch which consequently protected the lower part of the monument from environmental damage. At the time the work was undertaken in compliance with the restoration Paper of Athens and the quantities of cement used have jeopardized what was left of the mortar in particular. The restoration work, which was completed in 2009, was carried out after thorough research into the materials used such as puddinga (kind of concrete) and travertine which were used for construction work. (1) This first stage was followed by the creation of a joint project which involved the Scientific Analysis Laboratory, the Restoration Laboratory for archaeological sites as well as the Ministry for Education and Culture of the Valle d'Aosta autonomous Region.

Dry cleaning work involving three different sand blasting techniques were used in order to avoid the use of water which would have further jeopardized the already damaged stonework. (2)

Consolidating the surface was the second stage and in view of the porous stonework used for building the monument, specific laboratory-produced mortars were chosen. (3) Liquid materials were not chosen for the protection stages because they could not guarantee the safeguarding of the work carried out. The use of restoration mortars was therefore chosen to provide the best protection to the surface of the stone blocks over time; the draining of the rainwater was also undertaken to reduce the effect it could have on the structural walls. (4)

