

Whatever its date may be, the castle of Jublains is the best preserved or to speak more exactly, the less ruined of all the roman fortifications erected on our soil and, in this respect, it's a unique and a highly interesting monument.

Prosper Mérimée / Letter from the 11<sup>th</sup> of october 1837 (Archives de la Direction du Patrimoine)

Towns and regions of art and history  
The Region Coëvrons-Mayenne

discover the **story** of  
**Jublains,**  
**roman town**

# Jublains, roman town

Located at 35 km north from Laval, Jublains was in the Antiquity, Noviodunum, Diablintes' capital.

Map of the Gaul. 1590.  
This map from Abraham Ortelius tries to locate the gallish people named in the antic texts. It still has a lot of mistakes. It sites the Diablintes in the Finistère.

## On the border of a plateau

Jublains is at the southeast corner of a round summit plateau. Situated in change of incline, the site dominates the Évron basin from 40 m.

The horizon is closed to the east and to the southeast by a chain of high hills of which the highest are the Montaigu, the Mont Rochard and the hillock of Sainte-Suzanne. A modest valley, occupied by the Moulin Neuf stream, separates the town from the village of Doucé, at 1,3 km. The North and the West have no visibility from the summit of the plateau.

## A granite underground

The antique town lays on a granite ground. This large grained granite provided most of the materials for the building of walls and ways. Some clay and sand deposits are in the plain, until the Bias stream. The Gallo-roman also used a clear grey coarse grained sandstone for most of the constructions. It was used for columns and the base of the great wall of the fortress. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the opening of a quarry at Pierre-Aiguë, on the district of Sainte-Gemmes-le-Robert, allowed to determine its origin. Some traces of an ancient exploitation, as some abandoned column shafts, were discovered there.



Diablinte coin.  
(Archaeological museum of Jublains)

## Birth and decline of a town

### The birth of Noviodunum

Before the conquest of the Gaul by the Romans, the territory of Jublains belonged to the Diablintes, one of the ethnic groups of the Aulerque's nation, which spreads out from the Seine to the Massif Armoricain. From the 4<sup>th</sup> century B. C., the Gallic had edified a sanctuary at Jublains, at the northern extremity of the antique town.

On the eve of the conquest, a few houses settled nearby but the word "town" cannot be employed yet. The urbanisation of the site began around the beginning of our era, particularly from the Tiberius' reign (14-37 A.D.).



Mural fragment from the temple. Pigeon.



Children before the fortress.  
(Baron de Wismes' engraving. 1862)

The town took the name of Noviodunum ("New Town") as craftsmen settled in. At the beginning, the dwellings were scattered, without a previous urban plan.

### The capital of a city

The Gaul was organised by the emperor Augustus (27 B. C.-14 A. D.) in cities; kind of self-governing micro-states corresponding to the main Gallic people area. Noviodunum became the main town of the Diablintes' city, which stretched over two thirds of the Mayenne and the south of the Orne departments. The councillors met at the

forum, the heart of the town. One of these local notables; Orgétorix, offered a theatre to his city.

### A vanished capital

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the Roman empire was faced with a crisis which reached a peak during the

years 260-285. The Gaul was periodically invaded by Germans. Some peasants revolted against the tax pressure. A fortified building, settled close to Jublains, was surrounded by an earthen rampart. It became then a real fortress by the construction of an outer stony wall, remained unfinished. But the town was declining. It lost its position of capital during the 5<sup>th</sup> century, as the Diablintes' city was incorporated into the Cenomans' one: that is the origin of the Maine, whose capital was Le Mans. In the early Middle Ages, some quarters became cemeteries. Nevertheless, the town subsisted until the Carolingian period. It vanished at the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, as a new power place asserted itself, 10 km further: at Mayenne, where a palace reused the stones picked up in Jublains.

### Jugs





# Noviodunum

The first town developed itself in an anarchic manner. Then, it transformed at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A. D. and adopted all the urban principles and the equipment of the Roman cities.

## The urban project

In the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A. D. the inhabitants undertook some great work which changed the aspect of the town. They started in replacing the old Gallic temple by a monument in stone around 66-68. The theatre took place at the southern border, on the side of the plateau, 800 m further from the temple.

Between these two monuments the streets adopted a geometric network covering 25 ha and dividing the space into rectangular islands. Two others monuments are on the north-south axis of the town: the forum and the baths. A fortified building was built at the borders of the town. The urban project was realised in its broad lines but never utterly finished.



# The fortress

The Gallo-roman fortress is the largest and the best conserved monument, but also a real riddle concerning its functions.

## A composite monument

This fortified set was not built in one time. It results from the addition of three fitted together elements; a central building, then, an earthen rampart preceded by a gap and a surrounding wall. Its function might have evolved during these transformations.

### The central building ①

Maybe built around 200 A. D., the central building is a large room with a central yard ④, endowed with a floor and 4 square towers at its corners ⑤. It is accompanied by two small baths buildings ⑥ ⑦. The thickness of the walls and the locking system of the doors by wooden boards give a defensive character to the edifice. The archaeologists have not agreed yet to consider this edifice as civil warehouse or as a fort. Some recent studies hint that there was a military presence in the region from the 1<sup>st</sup> century A. D.

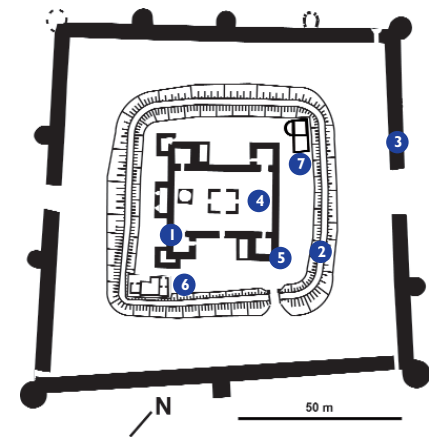
### The earthen rampart ②

Initially endowed with a large gap, it was realised around 290, in a context of troubles. The multiplication of buried treasures of this period prove the fears of populations concerning

the invasion rumours, the piracy acts along the Channel or the peasant revolts.

### The stone rampart ③

The Roman Empire recovered itself, under the emperor Diocletien's reign. He reorganized it in instituting the Tetrarch (two Supremes to govern the Occident, two others to govern the Orient). It coincided with the beginning of the construction of the outer wall, around 295. It may aim at turning the site into a real fortress for the resupplying of the camps which settled on the Channel coasts in order to struggle



against Saxon pirates. Yet, owing to a changing of project, the work was given up before the completion of the wall. The fortress was deserted in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A. D. whereas Jublains was irremediably declining.



## The baths

Built during the transformation of the town, they are nowadays located under the church.

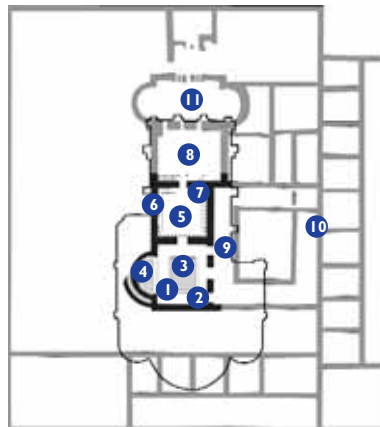
### From the baths...

The baths were built about the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. They are settled in an island, in the main axis of the town; their building thus succeeded to the setting up of the urban plan. Striking monument of the town and symbol of the Romanization, they were a place of hygiene, sport and therapy but also a civic and cultural life one. The monumental set was delimited by a portico, shops and rooms of various functions; reading, fight training etc. The baths building was in the middle of this set. The bather came in by a small yard. He left his clothes in the cloakroom and crossed the cold and warm rooms to perspire in the sweat room and washed himself in the hot baths. Finally, he came back on his steps to bathe in the cold baths. The succession of cold and hot baths results of a use of baths definitively established around 80 A. D.



### ... To the church

After 350, Christianity spreads out into the West, in the towns first. About the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Noviodunum baths, unused, were converted into churches. In pulling down the partitions and filling up the basins, the faithful got a lengthened room fitted to their liturgical needs instead of the pagan temple which had never been aimed at greeting a faithful assembly. Modified during centuries, the church kept its Gallo-roman masonries of several meters high until 1877, where it was utterly reconstructed. Thus, the base of the walls and the concave parts, basins or hypocaust (heating by the soil system), are the only remnants of the roman building.



## The theatre

It marked the southern limit of the town. Two buildings succeeded themselves on this place.

### The Orgétorix's gift to his city

The theatre is on the southern side of the plateau on which the town stretched out. It thus benefits from the natural slope, completed on its sides by cuts in order the spectators to dominate the scene. An inscription, exhibited in the museum revealed that this theatre was offered to the town by a person: Orgétorix, surely a rich Diablinte, member of the Decurion order, who ruled the city. The antique notables justified their power in offering some presents to the community. With its elliptic shape, Orgétorix's theatre distinguishes itself from the classical Roman models, notably by the lack of the stage wall, replaced by a small semi-circular building. It is characteristic of a few monuments built in Gaul on the 1<sup>st</sup> century A. D.

### Two theatres

- 1 Cold baths room
- 2 First state of the cold baths
- 3 Later state of the cold baths
- 4 Annexe basin
- 5 Warm room
- 6 Hypocaust supports
- 7 Remnant of the overhanging soil
- 8 Sweat room
- 9 Early Middle Ages tomb
- 10 Constructions under the square
- 11 Hot baths room



# The temple

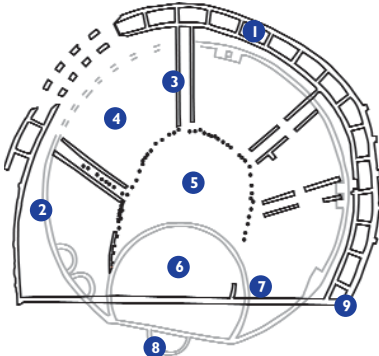
In 66-68 A. D. its reconstruction was the starting point of the urban landscape transformation.



## The second theatre

At a remained unknown date (maybe the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century), the theatre was rebuilt at the same place. Larger than the preceding one, the new building adopted a semi-circular form. It also comprises a wide area surrounded by a wooden fence and destined to the shows. This ones might have evolved: beside stage representations, some gladiators fights, hunts etc. developed themselves.

- 1 Outlines of the second theatre
- 2 Outlines of the first theatre
- 3 Corridor access of the vomitorium
- 4 Place of the tiers
- 5 Entertainment area of the second theatre
- 6 Orchestra of the first theatre
- 7 Iron Age stele
- 8 Stage building of the first theatre
- 9 South-east corner of the second theatre (best preserved part)



## The sanctuary of the city

Its reconstruction began about 66-68 and pursued until the 120 years. Located at the doors of the town, this wide proportioned monument was the Diablintes' sanctuary: here was practised the main cult of the city maybe associated with the imperial cult.

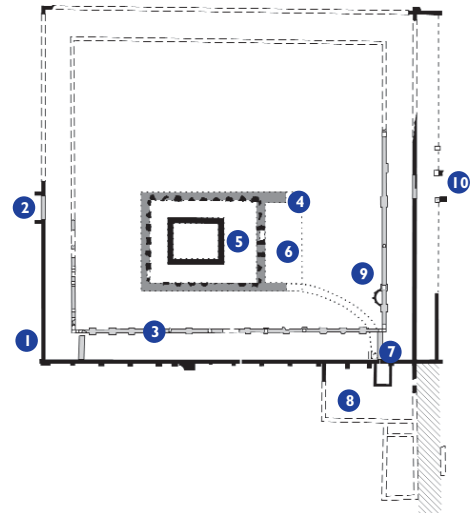
## A gallo-roman temple

### A local goddess in a classical temple

The outer wall (or peribolus) is a square of 78 m side. Inside, 4 porticoes constitute a kind of cloister surrounding the sacred area where the temple which sheltered the divine statue, is situated. Of peripteral\* plan, it rises on a podium and adopts the Corinthian order. Some fragments of a statue were found. They represent the Mother Goddess under the shape of a woman sat down in an armchair. This divinity belongs to the Celtic pantheon but was surely assimilated to a Latin goddess during the Gallo-roman period.

\*: Peripteral:  
the cella (room) sheltering the statue is surrounded by a colonnade gallery on its four sides.

- 1 Peribolus
- 2 Western entrance
- 3 Inner portico
- 4 Temple
- 5 Podium structure
- 6 Staircase
- 7 Shell
- 8 Building for ablutions
- 9 Half-circular basin
- 10 Eastern entrance







Let's tell you the story of **Coëvrons-Mayenne**, a region of art and history ...  
... in the company of a guide-lecturer autorised by the ministry of culture.

The guide will welcome you. He knows all about Coëvrons-Mayenne and will give you the vital elements required to understand the scale of a landscape, the story of the region in its different areas. The guide is there for your benefit, feel free to ask any questions you may have.

#### The heritage mediation service

runs the region of art and history Coëvrons-Mayenne. It organises events throughout the year for individuals and groups (adults and school children) .

#### If you are with a group

Coëvrons-Mayenne offers visits throughout the year subject to reservation.

Coëvrons-Mayenne is part of the **national network** of towns and regions of art and history

The architecture and heritage division of the ministry of culture and communication attributes the name of “towns and regions of art and history” to local communities which promote their heritage. It guarantees the skills of guide-lecturers and promoters of heritage and the quality of their activities. From ancient remains to XXI<sup>e</sup> century architecture, the towns and regions present their heritage in all its diversity. A network of 146 towns and regions is currently in existence throughout France.

#### Nearby sites,

Laval, Le Mans, Angers, Vitré, Fougères, Nantes, Guérande, Fontenay-le-Comte and Saumur have been granted the name “town of art and history”; the Perche Sarthois et the Vallée du Loir have been granted the name “region of art and history”.

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