

## Atlantes and caryatids on façades

### FROM THE PASSAGE DU BOURG-L'ABBE (2ND) TO THE PLACE DE LA TRINITE (9TH)

In the 1860s, **atlantes\*** and **caryatids\*\*** became widely used to adorn the façades of buildings, although they had rarely been used in private decor before this time. The fashion was launched by the new Opera, where Charles Garnier made plentiful use of them. It lasted until the First World War, with a noticeable increase during the 1880-90s. The arrival of atlantes and caryatids on façades can also be explained by architects reacting against the standardisation of Haussmann buildings and the severity of the laws governing construction in Paris. It also expressed the desire of certain property owners to make their building look like a palace. Atlantes and caryatids support the axial balcony, which is usually located on the first floor (and sometimes adorn the windows of cut-off corners). They frame and enhance the upper part of the door, whose monumental woodwork now included the building's mezzanine floor. The presence of either one of these weight-bearing figures, often charged with a sense of allegory, seemed primarily to be the choice of the architect or sponsor. Their number was a matter of prestige and different combinations were possible (caryatids or atlantes on their own or combined with busts under consoles to enhance the balcony, whose length could vary. If the decorated buildings had an official function (banks, theatres), atlantes and caryatids were found on the top floor and supported pediments and cupolas, in accordance with tradition. As the century progressed, the figures on the façade tended increasingly to free themselves from the original model to become simple monumental sculptures.

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### 3, Rue de Palestro

The entrance to the Passage du Bourg-l'Abbé, leading to the Rue de Palestro, was constructed by Henri Blondel in the early 1860s once the Rue de Turbigo had been built and the eastern part of the gallery had been destroyed. The top part of the access archway, which encompasses the building's ground and mezzanine floors, is flanked by two caryatids. The sculptures, which support the first floor balcony, serve as signs for the building and symbolise Industry (to the left) and Commerce (to the right). In addition a hive, engraved on a cartouche, also expresses the economic activity of the passage. The statues are dated 1863 and were sculpted by Aimé Millet, the creator of the great Apollo at the Paris Opera, who was often in demand among Parisian builders. In 1889, Henri Blondel reused the Rue de Palestro design for an apartment building at 15 Rue du Louvre (1st), but added to his structure by including a second entrance archway and adding powerful atlantes to the entrance.



L. Ruffat

**59, Rue de Réaumur – corner of Rue Saint-Denis** The building, whose cut-off corner is at the angle of Rue de Réaumur and Rue Saint-Denis, was built in 1883 by the architect Albert Le Voisvenel following the construction of the first part of the Rue Réaumur at the end of the Second Empire. Large bay windows, under a continuous balcony, provide light for the mezzanine floor, confirming the commercial use of the building. The axial window, whose segmental arch has been re-cut, is decorated with caryatids and griffins facing each other, supporting the balcony on the cut-off corner. The semi-naked figures with a composite canopy are signed L. Ruffat and are derived from the same model. They seem to have been produced in a workshop.



Jacques Perrin (1847 – 1915)

### 101, Rue Réaumur – corner of Rue de Cléry

The building at 101 Rue Réaumur, the second commercial building constructed by Albert Walwein along the clearing made by Haussmann, stands out from its neighbours due to the power of its elevation, which is crowned by a two-storey corner rotunda. A colossal order on the façade unites the floors reserved for workshops and offices. The sculpted decor almost seems secondary to this! Two sheathed caryatids created by the sculptor Jacques Perrin, who also produced the monument to Condorcet in Paris erected next to the Institute, adorn the mezzanine floor at the end of the building. Their presence in this position is surprising and could lead the observer to think that there used to be an access there which has since been blocked off. The two figures are raising their hand to the overhanging cornice and easily blend into the architecture. On the corner of the building on the second floor, forming a prow, it is also possible to see an extremely Mannerist-style neo-Renaissance caryatid bay, providing evidence of the building's eclecticism.



### 116, Rue Réaumur, corner of Rue du Sentier

The building with the cut-off corner, constructed in 1897 – 1898 and awarded a prize during the City of Paris "Façades contest", was commissioned from the architect Albert Walwein (1851 – 1916) by the Storch Company, a flannel and cotton fleece manufacturer. The strange removal of most of the decor on the façade a few years

ago merely emphasized the survival of the ground and mezzanine floors of this commercial building in their original condition. The entrance archway is flanked by two powerful atlantes supporting the upper cornice and likened to the figure of Hercules. The sculptures, wearing lion skins, are sheathed in a scroll which is resting on the animal's muzzle. When it was constructed, the composition drew attention to the sign engraved in the tablet on the floor above. The door to the building, between the bosses of the axial pillars, is topped by a pediment decorated with a bas-relief showing a scene from mythology (Diane accompanied by two cupids). Two sheathed caryatids could originally be found on the fifth floor, on either side of the opening onto the cut-off corner.



Louis Lefèvre (1849 – 1893)

Ernest Hiolle (1834 – 1886)

### 142, Rue Montmartre

This building, which was constructed in 1883 by the architect Ferdinand Bal, was the headquarters of the newspaper La France, which had been bought in 1874 and installed there by Emile de Girardin. The main façade onto the Rue Montmartre has a frieze decor of four sculpted figures. Two atlantes wearing lion skins and two caryatids to the left and right of the entrance archway symbolising Journalism and Typography draw attention to the newspaper's sign located under the first floor balcony. The sculptor Louis Lefèvre moved away from tradition for the statues of atlantes: he infused his figures with a realism rarely found at the time, transforming his models into porters, their bodies turned towards the building and their hands seizing the cornice in order to bear its load. The allegories sculpted by Ernest Hiolle show the same desire for innovation: the artist has freed himself from the model of the caryatid, not hesitating to turn his figures around to draw attention mainly to their anatomy.



Aimé Millet (1819 – 1891)

### 2, Rue du Quatre-Septembre

The building was constructed in 1870 by Henry Dubois, who was also the architect for the Paris markets company; in this capacity he constructed a number of metallic markets around the capital. The façade does not offer much in the way of decorative extravagance apart from a couple of classical style sheathed caryatids on either side of the axial window above the entrance door. They were created by the sculptor Aimé Millet, whom Henry Dubois met during the construction of the Grand Hôtel (Paris Mansion), on which they both worked under the architect Alfred Armand. The figures were given a major facelift a few years ago when the outside of the building was cleaned and they lost a lot of their vibrancy.

Aimé Millet (1819 – 1891)



### 12, Rue du Quatre-Septembre

The building was constructed in 1865 by André Cheviron at the request of the insurance company "Le Monde" (The World), for whom he also created the offices at 19 Rue de Châteaudun a few years later. The building departs from the traditional model of urban buildings with the introduction of a colossal overhanging order on the façade which encompasses the first and second floors. In order to give the entrance to the building the monumental quality required by the programme, Cheviron flanked the arch of the access gate with winged caryatids created by the sculptor Aimé Millet, providing an original evocation of famous people. These caryatids

have an elegance which shows the artist's skill in adapting to the programme. They are extending an arm and a hand holding ears of wheat towards the motif which crowns the arch. Originally it was also possible to see a globe bearing the name of the company.



Jules Salmson (1823 – 1902)

## 2, Boulevard des Capucines - 3, Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin

The Vaudeville theatre (which became the Paramount cinema in 1927) was constructed in 1868 on the corner of Boulevard des Capucines and Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin. Commissioned by the City of Paris and constructed by the architect Auguste Magne, its upper floor had four caryatids symbolising Folly, Comedy, Satire, and Music which were created by the sculptor Jules Salmson. The overall design was directly inspired by palace façades, as was the norm for the façades of theatres and banks at the turn of the century (cf. the two façades of the Crédit Lyonnais buildings at 19 Boulevard des Italiens and 16 Rue du Quatre-Septembre and that of the Société Générale at 29 Boulevard Haussmann). The building's cut-off corner was reworked at a later date, with the addition of a corner cupola and the transformation of the high windows, which were framed by six new caryatids designed from a single model (currently in position). The theatre has a side entrance at 3, Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin. It consists of twin doors and is topped by one atlante and two caryatids. They were probably added after the construction of the building during its reworking.



Edmond Lormier (1847 – 1919)

## 71, Rue de Provence

The building at 71 Rue de Provence, which is at right angles to the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, was constructed in 1887 by Alfred Leroux. The architect was known chiefly for having constructed the headquarters of the Petit Journal during the same period on a huge plot of land on the corner of Rue Lafayette, Rue Rochechouart and Rue Lamartine. On Rue de Provence, Leroux took care of the external decor, placing two sculpted medallions, one showing the Duke of Antin and the other the Count of Provence, above the first floor window cornices on either side of the cut-off corner. This reference to the history of the location was part of a late 19th century trend in public art devoted to the hero-worship of great men. Two caryatids, created by the sculptor Edmond Lormier (who produced a large number of public monuments, particularly in the Pas-de-Calais region from where he originated), complete the decor of the façade. They support the first floor cornice above the entrance door and are holding flowers and fruit. They can only be distinguished from each other by the arrangement of the drape covering them.



Joseph Michel Caillé (1836 – 1881)

## 2, Place Estienne-d'Orves

The building at 2, Place Estienne-d'Orves, constructed in 1866 by the architect Jean-Charles Forrest a stone's throw from the Church of the Trinity and a masterpiece of eclecticism, also demonstrates a true decorative freedom. On the mezzanine floor, two atlantes sculpted by Joseph-Michel Caillé frame the semi-circular arch of the carriage entrance and support the first floor balcony. The artist gave them Egyptian traits, whilst dressing them individually in lion skins, evoking the figure of Hercules. Two years later, he repeated this theme to create one of the groups for the attic of the Pavillon des Etats (Pavilion of States) at the Louvre, showing a child

leaning against a sphinx's head (removed in 1985). Caillé was not the only one to find an alternative to Greco-Roman sources in the art of Ancient Egypt. A building on the Rue des Bourdonnais (1st), constructed by the architect Joseph Lobrot, was also decorated with Egyptian-style caryatids around the same period; these were sculpted by Charles Gauthier (destroyed in 1973).

Aimé Millet (1819-1891)  
3, rue de Palestro

Aimé Millet (1819-1891)  
12, rue du Quatre-Septembre

Jules Salmson (1823-1902)  
2, boulevard des Capucines  
3, rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin



\***Atlante**: figure of a man, sculpted in the round or in relief and used as a vertical support. The atlante evokes the giant Atlas, who was condemned by Zeus to carry the vault of heaven on his shoulders. He is shown standing, seated or crouching, his hands above his head, on his hips or on his knees and bearing an entablature on his neck and shoulders.

Atlantes whose lower halves are in the form of a plinth are known as sheathed.

\*\* **Caryatid** (from Kariatides, maidens of Karyai): statue of a woman, with or without arms, wearing a long robe and used as a vertical support. Caryatids are used to hold up entablatures, with their heads serving directly as supports. Caryatids are said to be sheathed when their lower half is in the form of a plinth.