

## Churches of the second empire

### FROM SAINT-EUGÈNE (9TH ) TO SAINT AUGUSTIN (8TH)

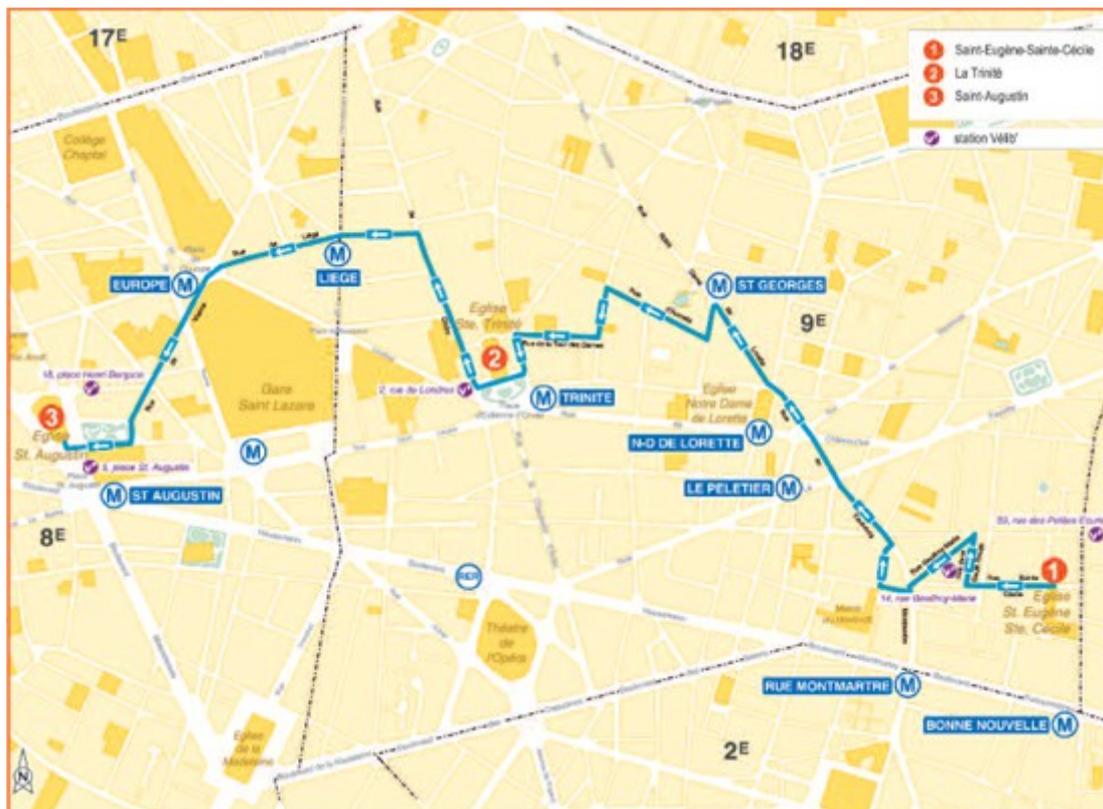
Over half of the forty-three churches built in Paris in the 19th century were completed, erected or opened under the Second Empire. This boom can be explained first and foremost by the growth in the population of Paris (which doubled between 1800 and 1850), which meant new places of worship were needed.

The close relationship between the imperial regime and the archdiocese of Paris helped to impose the image of a triumphant Catholicism in harmony with the political authorities, through this wave of construction. The churches thus punctuated the urban fabric that was remodelled by Haussmann, creating the image of a strong, expanding religion, which was at odds with the dechristianisation of the population of Paris.

In accordance with the eclectic taste that characterised this period, the architectural style and decorations drew inspiration from the past. While the Neo-Romanesque style was preferred in the working-class neighbourhoods of East Paris for its sobriety and low cost, opulent edifices inspired by a mixture of Medieval, Renaissance and Byzantine sources were built in the western areas of the capital.

To deal effectively and economically with the building programmes that were submitted to them, the architects took inspiration from the models of the past but nonetheless made use of modern technical possibilities. Metal began to be used frequently, which stirred up a number of passionate debates, as this material had been reserved for civil buildings until that point.

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(9th) 4, rue du Conservatoire

architect : **Louis-Auguste Boileau** (1812-1896)

### **Saint-Eugène-Sainte-Cécile**

The modest external appearance of Saint-Eugène Church gives no hint of this building's importance in architectural history. It was in fact the first religious monument ever to be entirely built out of metal.

The parish of Saint-Eugène was created in 1854 in the working-class neighbourhood of Faubourg Poissonnière, which was growing steadily at the time. It was entrusted to Abbot Coquand, who financed the construction of a church on a small piece of land which he owned. He set out an unusual programme, specifying that the church must conform to the 13th-century style but be built out of cast iron, in order to create as much space as possible while remaining economical.

During the Romantic era, the Gothic style chosen by Coquand seemed the most appropriate for religious architecture, as the Middle Ages were an idealised period of Christian history at the time. The choice of materials was first and foremost determined by the limited resources available.

The use of cast iron and iron kept building costs down while increasing the useable volume, with no struts needed.

The church was made in less than two years (1854-1855) at a very low cost by Louis-Auguste Boileau. Boileau, a trained carpenter and self-taught architect, was the author of a synthetic cathedral project in 1850. He had to deal with many criticisms once Saint-Eugène Church was completed, mostly relating to the underlying distaste for metal in religious constructions. Indeed, iron was considered a profane material that was usually reserved for engineers working on industrial constructions.

Viollet-le-Duc accused Boileau of having produced the work of a mechanic, not an architect. He also criticised the Gothic shapes that he felt were a bad-taste imitation, especially since they were at odds with the material they were made of.

The inside of the building contrasts with the modesty of the outside: the light effects through the stained glass windows reflect the rich colours of the vaults, columns and painted walls. The ornamental motifs of the cast iron arches, tribunes and grilles are subtly continued in the sculpted parts of the woodwork. The group of windows by Lusson and Gsell is quite exceptional, and is an example of the vitality of stained glass window art at the time. The way of the cross in the lower register is the only known example to be entirely produced using this technique.



(9th) 3, rue Trinité

architect : **Théodore Ballu** (1817-1885)

## La Trinité

La Trinité Church was built during the same period and in the same spirit as Saint-Augustin (see following entry), with both parishes having been created in September 1851. The construction project, which extended from 1861 to 1867, was entrusted to Théodore Ballu.

The church, which was designed to be the centre of an urban group, is closely linked to the surrounding bourgeois neighbourhood of Chaussée d'Antin, which was being redeveloped by Haussmann at the time. Its bell tower stands at the end of the narrow Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, which opens up into a square forming a crossroads. The little square, designed by Alphand, and the side ramps form an elegant setting completed by the two buildings on either side of the monument, which themselves were designed by Ballu.

Previous work by the architect includes the Gothic-style Sainte-Clotilde Basilica (1846-1857). At the same time as working on La Trinité, he was involved in the construction of Saint-Ambroise, carefully imitating the forms of the Romanesque style. La Trinité, for its part, was in no way an imitation of an old church: Ballu inventively combined sources from the past that were familiar to him, to meet the needs of his opulent programme. The façade, richly decorated with its niches, pediments and pilasters, is inspired by the Italian Renaissance and the Gothic style. On top stands a 65 m tall bell tower in the form of a belfry. The symbolism of the number three - the number of the Trinité - appears throughout the decoration of the lower part: the porch with three arches is preceded by three fountains with three basins adorned with statues of the theological virtues, Faith, Charity and Hope. The four cardinal virtues - Prudence, Justice, Strength and Temperance - are represented at the top of the façade, while the four stone statues at the base of the campanile represent the evangelists.

Although no metal can be seen, Ballu did make use of cast iron and iron in this construction. This enabled him to minimise the number of pillars and design a wide vault, making for impressive internal dimensions: 90 metres long by 34 metres wide and 30 metres high.

The edifice, built to a rectangular plan, consists of a vast nave without a transept, lined by narrow side aisles providing access to the side chapels. The ensemble, punctuated by alternating pillars and columns, opens onto

an elevated choir flanked by tribunes on either side of the high altar created by Poussielgue. At the back of the sanctuary, the chapel dedicated to the Virgin closes off the volume with a wall with cut-off corners. The interior decoration makes use of a graduated, intense colour scheme and brilliant gilding to accompany the architectural effects.

The paintings on the arches of the nave (figurative subjects on a gold background), commissioned from Félix Barrias and Félix Jobbé-Duval, offer perfect stylistic unity. The decoration of the side chapels, executed ten years or so later by renowned artists (such as Delaunay and Lecomte du Nouy), is more varied however. Various trends in Second Empire sculpture can be seen here: the severe style that dominates most of the apostle figures on the pillars of the nave contrasts with the supple, refined art of the Angels by Gumery (back of the entrance wall, above the fonts) and the Virgin and Child by Paul Dubois (Chapel of the Virgin).



(8th) 3, avenue César Caire

architect : **Victor Baltard** (1805-1874)

### Saint-Augustin

The parish of Saint-Augustin was created in 1851, at the same time as La Trinité.

The neighbourhood, which experienced poverty at the turn of the century, underwent far-reaching changes under the Second Empire, with the development of the Gare Saint-Lazare station and Haussmann's creation of large streets lined by smart buildings. The construction of the church (1860-1871) by Victor Baltard was one of the most expensive projects of the Second Empire.

The chosen site is a narrow, irregular plot of land formed by the intersection of several avenues. The constraints of this configuration were cleverly overcome by the architect, who used modern techniques to give his building a sense of scale and unity. The use of metal for the structure allowed him to avoid using external buttresses and elevate a majestic, monumental dome standing over 60 metres tall, ensuring a high level of visibility for the building. This was all the more necessary as the church appeared as the centrepiece of one of the most opulent residential areas in the capital.

The opulence of Saint-Augustin is expressed through its eclectic style. The imposing cupola evokes the great models of the Italian Renaissance (Saint Pierre in Rome, Sainte Marie des Fleurs in Florence), with the rest of the building combining Romanesque, Byzantine and Gothic elements. With its abundance of stylistic references and clever mixture of these different sources, the church stands out from the other Neo-Romanesque and Neo-Gothic constructions, thus asserting its aristocratic opulence.

The eclectic character of Saint-Augustin can also be seen in the juxtaposition of materials: while the metal structure is hidden by a stone envelope, the internal ornamentation makes use of the decorative possibilities of cast iron (openwork ceiling beam arches, angel figures and keystones at the top of the columns).

The richness of the decoration can be seen outside as well as inside the building. Sculpted parts feature on the main façade, on the tribunes and above the upper windows, while colour is concentrated in the altars adorned with mosaics from Lyon, and in the upper parts of the building.

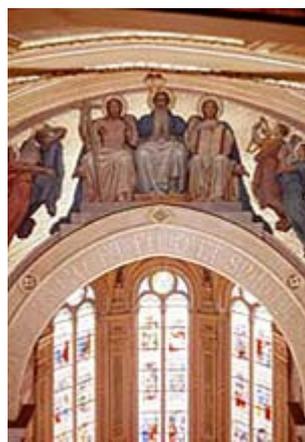
The iconographic programme combines the lives of Christ, the Virgin and Saint Jean Baptiste with the prophets, evangelists and Church Fathers, as well as saints connected with the history of Paris. It unfolds in a series of layers, with many stained glass windows, sculptures and paintings commissioned from a host of artists including Bouguereau, Signol and Bézard, who were at the height of their glory at the time.

Saint-Eugène

La Trinité

Saint-Augustin

Saint-Eugène



Due to the provisions of the Concordat signed in 1801 between France and the Holy See, which ratified the Revolutionary seizures of the clergy's possessions and transferred the property of the parish churches and their offices to the communes, the City of Paris currently owns around one hundred religious buildings, including a large number of Catholic churches.

The Concordat regime, which remained in force until the 1905 law separating Church and State, proved to be advantageous for religious buildings belonging to the commune. Making the works of art confiscated during the Revolution available to the clergy, combined with an active policy of commissioning decors and constructing new buildings, made the churches of Paris an artistic series of buildings of exceptional wealth covering the major periods of French art, from the Classical era to the modern period.

The Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of Paris is currently responsible for conserving this considerable heritage. It is in charge of its inventory, maintenance and promotion as well as the restoration work necessary to conserve the buildings which house it.