

Victor Baltard, architect and restorer

From Place Saint-Augustin (8th) to Père Lachaise Cemetery (20th)

Victor Baltard (1805-1874) was the son of Louis-Pierre Baltard (1764-1846), a famous Neo-Classical architect and an important architectural theorist. A professor at the School of Fine Arts from 1818 until his death, he published a number of written works including the *Architectonography of Prisons* (1829), dedicated to a comparative study of different prison systems.

Victor Baltard followed in his father's footsteps and in 1824 entered the Architecture department of the School of Fine Arts in Paris, where he obtained the Rome Prize in 1833. A resident of the Villa Médicis until 1838, his vision of architecture and monumental decor was profoundly affected by the examples offered by his stay in Italy and by the character of Ingres, then Director of the Academy of France in Rome.

He was appointed Inspector of Festivals and Artistic Works of the City of Paris and was responsible among other things for the maintenance, decoration and restoration of churches. Architect of Les Halles from 1845, his project for cast-iron pavilions was selected by the municipal council in 1853 following fierce debates. In 1860, the Council for Civilian Buildings adopted his project for Saint-Augustin church, a key building where he deployed all his knowledge of construction and decor. The year 1860 also saw his appointment to the head of the architectural service of the City of Paris, followed in 1863 by his election to the Academy of Fine Arts. Passionate about the questions of adornment and the relationship between the arts, Baltard also created great Second Empire ceremonies, for which he designed sumptuous ephemeral buildings.

1

(8th) Place Saint Augustin **Saint-Augustin Church (1860-1871)**

Together with the central Les Halles, this was Baltard's major architectural creation. In 1859, the City of Paris commissioned him to construct a church at the junction of Boulevard Haussmann and Boulevard Malesherbes in a district exhibiting a new-found opulence. Baltard very skilfully took advantage of the problems posed by the triangular shape and limited size of the land. This constraint imposed by the urban order determined the central plan for the building and its means of construction, as using a cast-iron structure, Baltard managed to erect a monumental dome more than 60 metres high without having to use external buttresses.

The grandiose effect of the dome continues in the internal spaces, where Baltard paid particular attention to the decoration. He used the most valued artists of the Second Empire in the fields of sculpture (no fewer than 36 sculptors were asked, including Bonnassieux and Ottin, who had both stayed with him in Rome), painting (Bézar, Bougureau, Signol, etc.), decor (Denuelle, Lameire, etc.) and stained-glass windows (Maréchal, Lafaye, Lusson, Oudinot, etc.).

The size of the internal areas led Baltard to design an imposing dome above the main altar. In order to avoid too much aridity in the rendering of the metallic elements, these are adorned with ornaments (angels overhanging the columns, decor ornamented with diaphragm-arches) and a polychrome and gold treatment. A number of stylistic references can be found side-by-side in Saint-Augustin church, which is a paragon of the eclectic style born under the Second Empire. Byzantine inspiration can be seen in the plan of the building, the opulence of the materials, the paintings with gold backgrounds on the pendentives and the hieratic figures of the cupola, the latter reminiscent of great Italian Renaissance examples, while the rest of the building combines elements with Roman and Gothic influence.

Although the ingenious plan of the church and the grandiose effect of its elevation were admired, Baltard faced criticism of the combined use of metal and stone. One particular reproach made of the architect was the contrast between the imposing effect of the internal volume and the spindly appearance of the cast-iron columns which played a support role. It was also considered unsuitable to leave metal visible in a religious building, as this material was usually associated with industrial architecture.

2

(6th) 3, Place Saint-Germain des-Prés

Saint-Germain-des-Prés Church

Baltard's first major project in his position as architect of the City of Paris was the internal decoration of Saint-Germain-des-Prés church. In an "archaeological" spirit, in 1842 Baltard designed a pictorial programme intended to be coherent with the style of architecture.

Continuing the partnership he had begun at Saint-Séverin, he entrusted the decor of the ante-choir (1842-1846) and then the nave (1856) to his friend Hippolyte Flandrin, the most faithful of Ingres' disciples and a major artisan of the revival of religious painting in France in the 19th century. At Saint-Germain-des-Prés, under Baltard's guidance, Flandrin created an ambitious mural decor painted in wax in a deliberately archaistic style (gold background, frieze compositions, etc.). The intentional ambiguity between the decoration campaign and the restoration of an ancient decor was disapproved of by Delacroix, who wrote in his Journal in 1852, "[...] I have seen the Gothic daubing with which the walls of this magnificent church are being outlined [...] I prefer the imaginings of Lehman to the counterfeiting of Baltard, Flandrin et al."

Hippolyte Flandrin died in 1864 and the paintings in the nave were completed by his brother Paul. Baltard had a monument erected in memory of the painter in the bottom left part of the church.

3

(2nd) 9-13 Rue de la Banque

New Timbre Mansion (1845-1852)

This project marks the Paris debuts of Baltard, who was entrusted with the execution of a project originally designed by the architect Paul Lelong, who died in 1846. The sombre, majestic street-facing façade is framed by two monumental Corinthian pilasters and crowned with a sculpted pediment of two lions surrounding an escutcheon. Baltard's contemporaries believed they could see in this façade "reminiscences" of the architect's long stay in Italy.

4

(1st) Rue du Jour

Saint-Eustache Church (1849-1858)

On 16 December 1844, a fire destroyed the great organ of Saint-Eustache church and damaged the first three rows of the nave and the aisles. Following this accident, Baltard was entrusted with the entire restoration of the building. In 1849, during the building work, a 17th century painted decor was discovered under the distemper in Saints-Agnes chapel. This discovery, commemorated by an inscription painted on the right wall of the chapel, and the discovery of other traces of ancient decors in the church, inspired Baltard to create the decoration programme for all the chapels along fairly similar lines: large figured scenes adorn the east and west walls, decorative paintings (architectural, geometrical and vegetal motifs) highlight the moulding while two seated angels painted on a golden background occupy the corner-stones of the large arches opening on to the aisle. Eminent Second Empire artists were involved in this vast project, including the painters Cornu, Pils, Glaize, Signol, Vauchelet, Barrias and Couture and the sculptors Chatrousse, Etex and Triqueti.

Baltard himself created the designs for the furniture destroyed in the fire, namely the case of the great organ, the high altar and the pulpit.

At the same time, at the gateway to Saint-Eustache, Baltard carried out his largest project since 1844: the construction of Les Halles de Paris with which his name would remain associated. The selected project consisted of some ten pavilions, examples of modern, spacious and light architecture achieved with the use of different industrial materials, including cast-iron (structure and frame), brick and glass. The only pavilion to escape the destruction of Les Halles in 1971 was rebuilt in Nogent-sur-Marne in 1977.

5

(1st) 57 Bd de Sébastopol

Saint-Leu-Saint-Gilles Church (1857-1862)

Baltard was responsible for designing a new chevet for Saint-Leu-Saint-Gilles church at the time when Haussmann was cutting through the Boulevard Sébastopol. The architect very ingeniously made the most of the reduced plot available to him by designing a new church façade which is visible from the Boulevard. The

rounded form of the apse can be seen behind a base wall which provides the alignment. Into this wall were pierced two entrances decorated in a Renaissance style. The ends are punctuated by two terraces surmounted with roof timbers with skylights. To the left, in the continuation of the alignment, the façade has a balcony and two niches housing angels under a canopy.

Baltard explored new technical possibilities inside the building and used cement to create the thin diaphragm arches of the Chapel of the Virgin in a single casting.

6

(3rd) Carnavalet Museum, 23 Rue de Sévigné, room 128

Cradle of the Imperial Prince (1856)

This ceremonial cradle, a gift from the City of Paris to Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie on the birth of the Imperial Prince in 1856, was designed by Baltard, who also oversaw its creation. The fastidious decor bears witness to the degree of technical expertise achieved by decorative arts under the Second Empire: the figure of the City of Paris in polished silver was created by Simart, the enamels representing the cardinal virtues were produced by the Sèvres factory using sketches by Hippolyte Flandrin and the bronzes were smelted by the Froment-Meurice company.

Baltard was also able to develop his taste for decoration by creating the temporary decors for the official ceremonies organised at the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall) under the Second Empire, including the festivities for the marriage of the Emperor in 1853, the baptism of the Imperial Prince in 1856 and the receptions for the Queen of England in 1855 and for sovereigns during the Universal Exposition in 1867.

7

(3rd) 13 Rue du Perche

Porch of Saint-Jean-Saint-François Church (1853-1855)

This project is an example of the extensions to older buildings which Baltard created at the request of the City of Paris. The architect designed a new entrance to Saint-Jean-Saint-François church in the form of a monumental porch placed on the anterior elevation of the church, a former chapel of the Capuchins of Le Marais. The harmony of the proportions does not immediately reveal the eclectic aspect of this façade, where Baltard skilfully combined inspiration from Roman and Renaissance art.

8

(20th) 16 Rue du Repos

Père Lachaise cemetery

Baltard designed a number of tombs, seventeen in total, the majority of which can be found in Parisian cemeteries. The ancient tombs he studied during his stay in Italy formed his greatest source of inspiration. On the death of his friend Hippolyte Flandrin in 1864, he designed a monument to his memory in Saint-Germain-des-Prés church and created his tomb in Père Lachaise cemetery (division 57) along fairly sombre lines: the bust of the artist sculpted by Oudiné in the style of an ancient philosopher is placed in a niche on a simple stele. The tomb of Ingres (division 23) created in 1868 along fairly similar lines was nevertheless given a more advanced architectural and ornamental design. Baltard thus pays the ultimate tribute to the man who was not only his mentor but also a close friend (Ingres painted the portraits of Baltard and his wife Adeline with their daughter Paule).

Other works by Baltard can be seen in Paris

Baltard worked on a number of other churches in Paris, whether doing decoration and restoration work (churches of Saint-Séverin, Saint-Merri, Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, Saint-Gervais, Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin, Saint-Denis-du-Saint-Sacrement, etc.) or extensions to existing buildings (catechism rooms of the churches of Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas, Saint-Philippe-du-Roule and Saint-Etienne-du Mont). Baltard was also entrusted with the transformation of the church of the Abbey of Petemont into a Protestant temple (he was himself a

