

Balade du Clermontais

LIAUSSON

A Balcony Overlooking the Lake

Little-known and prominent facts



Saturday 13th May 2017

To go beyond the « beauty » of the site

« A balcony over the lake », title of the heritage walk through Liausson, does not mean that the organisers will take you through a passive attitude of observation of a landscape, that is preconceived of being of “great beauty”. In fact why carry out a heritage visit of a village if the view is enough to satisfy one’s aesthetic emotions and wish for a change of scenery? The cultural and scientific inputs could only be a vain hope? What better sense to discover a village if not to differentiate it from the other inhabitants of this valley? The “communal sense”, in other words the manner in which everyone spontaneously provides a concrete explanation of what he is observing during his social life, can be better understood. If we consider a preconceived idea on the definition of that which is beautiful, does this “beauty” suffice to provide the emotional and personal improvement by simply being an observer?

We are all obviously bearers of culture “with its symbolic network of beliefs, social conventions and implicit compliance” – but that does not mean we automatically can access new perceptions or even cultural gains. It is therefore necessary to “educate” our gaze to widen our way “of seeing, of thinking and of behaving”.

There is no universal standard of beauty, and its mental representation will be influenced for each of us, by our social and cultural upbringing, our personal aesthetic experiences and our mental tools. It is in meeting others and the sharing of knowledge that gives rise to personal fulfillment.

If we have chosen to include a painter and artist, it is because he can show us what deserves to be depicted in this landscape. Do not be surprised that there are no photographic reproductions on the canvas – let us be led to discover how he seizes what he has seen. The same principle applies to the geologist, the sociologist or the historian. So don’t be held by classical conditioning of the media, modern man, and let’s be led by an artist or scientist towards a concrete message.

The inhabitants of this spot can surely be the best interpreters to explain discoveries? They have explored and developed the nooks and crannies of their living space. They have built a deep feeling by their activities. If the landscape exists it is thanks to the hand of man. There is no natural scenery. It is therefore essential to listen to the landscape by those who have inhabited it. How do the winemakers, the farmers, the hunters, the fishermen or even the sportspeople tell this tale? How do they relate to this ‘beautiful’ place?

At the end of this walk the different comparisons will help us to classify and organize our perceptions. We are taking a complex and complimentary approach to different interpretations of landscape. The beauty described seems fleeting in the course of transformations of scenery and the way we look at it and create its existence.

Brief History of Liausson

Liausson village is built on a peak overlooking the Salagou plain, at 225 m altitude. This situation is due to two factors : a defensive site – the inhabitants are protected from invasion; and the best arable land. The main core of the settlement can be found at the current site of Mas de l’Eglise.

From Laucion to Liausson

Today’s village of Liausson was known as Laucion in 1119. This habitat was part of the barony of Clermont until 1263. At this moment the Seigneur (lord) of Clermont, Bérenger II, sold Liausson to the Hospitaliers of the Nébian Commandery.

From 1256 the inhabitants of Liausson and Mourèze were emancipated from the wardship of the Seigneur of Clermont, and nominated Consuls to represent them to differing local authorities. This situation allowed the Consuls to manage the public assets for the protection of their citizens. The official minutes following the issue of a Land Registry in 1632 gives us the names of 3 Consuls : Jean Couderc, Antoine Vailhé and Etienne Bousquet.

This form of administration of towns and villages in Languedoc remained until the Revolution and was replaced in 1790 by a new organization with a mayor at its head, elected by the citizens, assisted by municipal officers. The first mayor of Liausson was Bousquet in 1790.

A walk through today’s village and around the commune shows a strong influence of the Catholic religion : chapels, holy crosses and particularly in the beginning of the 20th century a deep rooted feeling at the moment of the separation of the Church and the State, as can be seen in a parish bulletin for Liausson and Celles, in April 1906 – this bulletin violently attacked the ‘free-mason sect who has spread antireligious propaganda to the administrations of France’. This angry message came from the Abbé Bourrel , priest of Liausson, following a refusal from the Sous-Prefecture (subprefecture) to install a cross on Mount Liausson ‘ a cross is not a secular endeavour ‘.

Liausson through the archives

The oldest preserved document on the social life of the village is the deliberation of the General Council of Liausson that took place in public on 29th June 1712.. It is a valuable indication of the mentality of that period.

We can read that the First Consul is Antoine Vailhé, who is assisted by local large landowners: Pierre Mathieu (owner of la Grange that appears in the Cassini map of 1790), Etienne Couderc, Guillaume Mathieu (son of Pierre), Jean Mazur, Mathieu Bousquet, Pierre Couderc and another Pierre Couderc, Barthélemy Audran, Jean Gaillard, Antoine Trignan, Mathieu Pioch, Michel Millaud, Jean Bories, Antoine Panisse, Jean Bousquet, Jean-Michel and Jean Teil. The agenda of the meeting concerned a debt :

The mayor Pierre Chinion, is in debt for the sum of 790 livres, following the financial end of year tax accounts for the 9 years that his father (Jean Chinion 1663-1671) was in charge of collecting and paying taxes to the seat of the Languedoc Intendant! The deliberation aimed to penalize him with a fine and various fees, whilst obliging him to pay for the paternal debt.

Was this a sign that the management of public accounts was not fully understood or that the locally elected mayor was dishonest? Difficult to determine when only one of the people's representatives knew how to sign his name, 7 signed with a cross (X) and the remaining members did not know how to sign at all! Already in the report dated 2nd June 1687 written by the investigator of the Languedoc Intendant, the following remark was made : "a public place, enclosed, opposite the 'four banal' village oven owned by the same Seigneur – of the 3 Consuls none knew how to sign their name, one incorrectly wrote his initials, the two others made a cross". Did they even know how to read? However, we have confirmation (below) that they knew how to count.

Public School

Throughout all the villages in France the 19th Century was known for the building of public schools from 1833 onwards (loi Guizot). This did not reach Liausson until the first half of the 20th Century, following the insistence of the Elementary School Inspector and his hierarchy who were shocked by the deplorable situation of the classroom that housed 3 pupils – whereas the 17 students of the private (Catholic) school had comfortable facilities. In 1928 the Schools Inspector wrote to the Préfet (prefect) about the report from the Elementary School Inspector to say "that in the interest of public schools, for the decency of the health of several children, who despite everything, do not drop out of going to school" a school should be built. One month later the Préfet requested that the Sous-Préfet of Lodève (subprefect) receive the mayor in order to accelerate the purchase of a piece of land for the school, be it by a sale of property or by a compulsory purchase order for public benefit. It is only in 1933 that this building was planned and the construction carried out. Meanwhile the Catholic private school continued to take in far more pupils, the roll call in 1934 for the Saint Charles school was 40 students.

This information is gleaned from a book written by 'Les Amis du Mont Liausson'. It tells the history of Liausson, and of France from 1900 to 2000, from recollections and documents of local families and press articles, giving us an idea of the life of stable, well-established community, the good and bad times, wars (WWI, WW2, Maquis de Bir-Hakeim, Algeria), the village fêtes, wine harvests etc.

The Salagou Dam

A particular event became a landmark to the village. It was the building of the Salagou dam, which from 1959 onwards was met with incredulity and skepticism – Paul Duviols 19/10/1970 : “a dam is a laughable joke” because the land was so dry and the Salagou river such a small stream!

The building of the dam went ahead despite these doubts and the hostility from those who were to be expropriated. In 1969 Liausson saw bulldozers destroy certain house of inhabitants (Cabanes, Poujol, les granges de Gayraud, and grange de Philippe). The main R9 road that swept by 2Km below the village, was flooded. This was a period of



despondency and distress for certain inhabitants because the expropriation (called by some plundering) compensation was not paid quickly and did not recompense the work of those affected.

Today the village proposes a spectacular view over stunning countryside and provides an authentic panoramic gallery over the lake.

Thus the prediction by General de Gaulle, passing through Liausson in 1958, ‘that this is a commune that will one day disappear’ did not come to pass, and on the contrary the wine production and tourism have allowed it to develop.

Liausson and its geological surroundings

The old villages are often very well situated in their geographical and/or geological surroundings, for two main reasons that ensure their vitality : water and arable land. Liausson is no exception. Water is in abundance from the craggy slopes of Mount Liausson, either from springs or by streams on the hill. This flow of water brings with it the carbonate alluvium that enhance the long slope of ‘ruffe*’(see note), that would otherwise be as barren as the nearby badlands. Before the lake was filled with water, the steep slope of the ruffe shelf became horizontal, toward the lower Salagou valley, providing vast areas of agricultural terrain.

The springs

Liausson basks in a privileged position in the Salagou valley. In a dry and arid environment anyone on foot will immediately notice the fountain in the middle of the village. On the outskirts of the village, in the direction of Clermont l'Hérault, cyclists fill their flasks with cold welcoming water (even in the height of summer) from the Mourgue spring. Some people fill jerrycans! Other abundant sources are to be found in La Marguerite and Grange Montagne. Where does this water come from?



The explanation is in front of our eyes. Liausson is made up of two colours, the red and the white : the red is the 'ruffe', hard rock, crumbly and above all impermeable. The white is limestone, more recent, that dominates Liausson just above our heads. The limestone covered the ruffe and is porous, and acts like a sponge, storing the seasonal rain. The rain infiltrates downwards to the ruffe (impermeable) where it is diverted from its descent – hence the springs are created. In the Salagou valley this phenomena is identical in Salasc, where it has created small streams.

It can be trite to say that water is life, but the first settlers in Liausson immediately understood that this water springing from here and there meant their self-sufficiency in food. In fact if the ruffe is poor land for agriculture, if you irrigate it will become more fertile. In olden days the fountain beside the road supplied all water to the village. Today a bore hole dug in the limestone fills a water tank situated high up and provides water to each home, by gravitation. As a note, the authority for water supply has been with the village councils for a long time, but this might soon change and be transferred to the local Communauté des Communes (community of communes).

The churches

The village's main feature is several important church buildings :

Old Saint Félix church



Within the enclosure of the cemetery today, in a place called 'le mas de l'église', was the site of the first village church, that belonged to the Commanders of Nébian. Under the patronage of Saint Félix, this was a simple chapel in 1254, and later became a parish church. It was described by E.Bonnet in 1905 'as a small

12thC church, with the vault of the nave and curved arches mounted with pilasters. Its chevet is square but this arrangement does not seem original'.

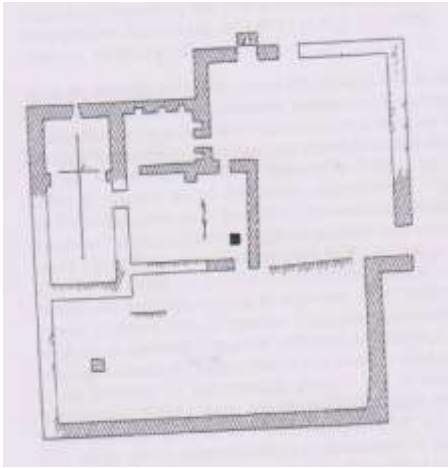
It was destroyed in 1937 due to its dangerous state.

To the west of this church, in the current cemetery , surface excavations have shown a small amount of pottery from the High and Low Empire (Roman). Was this the first sign of a stable population?

Saint Jean d'Aureilhan

In the middle of the 13th Century, three priests and one lay person, Pons Gazel, withdrew to a cave on the slopes of the Liausson mountain. Pons Gazel was proclaimed as the spiritual leader of the community, that soon received visits from the inhabitants of the valley. The cave became too impractical, so they built a church and accommodation that took the name of Saint Jean d'Aureilhan. This new order was placed under the rule of the Hospitaliers de Saint Jean of Jerusalem, under the auspices of the Commander of Nébian. This convent was abandoned during the 16th C.

The excavations carried out by O.Ginouvez in 1993 provided precise details (GREC publication).



Remake of the design of Saint Jean d'Aureilhan by O.Ginouvez

The Church of Saint Julien

This church, now renovated, can be found in the Domaine de la Marguerite, to the west of the manor house, near a spring. It is first mentioned in 1631 in the account written by Plantavit de la Pause, Bishop of Lodève, in his "pastoral visits". It is characterized by a square of approximately 6 metres on each side, by a curved arch entrance that opens onto the north and with two curved and arched windows one on the east, and one on the west.

The (new) Church of Saint Félix



Extract from land register of 1965 (inventaire régional)

Built between 1858 and 1861, to replace the parish church that was too small and in poor condition, it took the place of the ancient castrum in the centre of the village. Albert Fabre, in his 1879 dissertation on the village, described it as follows : 'its architecture along the lines of the middle-ages, is well perceived and it is maintained in an elegant manner that is pleasant to see in such buildings'.

The bell that dates to 1708, was transferred from the old to the new church. Smelted by M.Gorp, it was the topic of heated discussions noted in the deliberations of a council meeting. The mayor of that time, the Sire Chinion, (the mayor then only had fiscal responsibility), agreed with the smelter to a sum of 50 livres but wrote 60 livres in the community accounts! The inhabitants wrote to the Languedoc Intendant to claim back the difference of 10 livres. As mentioned above, Sire Chinion seemed to have a tendency to exaggerate these excesses...

La Grange Montagne



From the Grange de Mathieu to the Grange Montagne

We have previously seen that in 1712 the farm building was owned by **Pierre Mathieu** and that it was called by his name. How did it become the Grange Montagne? An inspection of the registers of the municipal deliberations, that became obligatory by law in 18th July 1837, let us examine the report for 1st January 1838. The agenda is comprised of the creation of a large communication track between Clermont and Bédarieux, that would pass by the village. The council proposed to offer the necessary land in exchange for a 'suitable compensation'. This could indicate the level of poverty of the villagers who had no means to collectively participate in the costs of the construction of this road. **Pierre Montagne**, farmer, was part of this council.

Headed for the Grange Montagne

On 13th June 1838 a statistical study allows us to see the organization of the communal territory. Three hamlets are part of the village :

1- The hamlet called Lagrange (in one word!) : 24 people, 1500 metres from the heart of the village, and only 4 inhabited houses

2- The hamlet called Mas de l'Eglise : 20 people, 500 metres from the village, and 8 houses

3- The 'outlying' hamlet of Berloudié (or Berlandié), 12 people, 300 metres from the village and 2 houses

Who were the owners of the properties? Are there any traces of them in the history of the village? The land register of Liausson, recorded from 1632 to the French Revolution, partially answers these questions. Working from the Cassini map (1790) that shows the 'La Grange de Mathieu', we can investigate the family name of Mathieu.

Page 180 of the register mentions that 'the 2nd May 1703, Pierre Mathieu acquired the cadastral plan from the Notary of Nébian'. The description of the property mentions that 'a barn existed already at the beginning of the 17th C. It was a house and pigeon loft, with a farmyard, stable, sheep pen and other buildings' The contract of sale pointed out that the whole of the tenant farm was sold by the heirs of Philippe Laurens for the sum of 2400 livres. Also some of the buildings that were sold were in ruin or demolished, and that the harvest of hay, fodder, wheat, wine and oil of that year would remain the property of the heirs. The livestock, the power behind agricultural tasks, was to be loaned until the date of Saint-Michel, with the help of one of the heirs who was a farmer. This enumeration of facts puts into situation an interesting moment of rural economy for the people of this village. We shall go into further detail during our heritage walk. However we can note that the domain was extensively rebuilt by Pierre Mathieu in the beginning of the 18th C. Towards 1820 the name of "La Grange de Mathieu" disappears.... And we have to wait until the census of 1851 to find the name "La Grange de Montagne", as the property had been acquired by Frédéric Montagne between 1838 and 1840.



Today tourism and wine production have replaced the livestock farming of goats and sheep. There are less traditional farming practices. A new economy has taken over that enhances the architectural and natural heritage of the site...

Liausson, yesterday and today

The land, water, sky ... the mountain, the vineyards

This walk is both geological and geographical – geological because we shall see the mineral substrates of the land, discover the landscapes, and their history from 1119 to today; and geographical because we shall identify the necessary means for human relations.

The organizers will provoke the encounter between the eyes of photographers and painters, to those of the public (equally astute) and the members of Liausson. This walk is a vast tour of a village that evolves, changes and watches hundreds of visitors go by each week, attracted to the beauty of the place. Their questions could have inspired this quote by the writer F.R. de Chateaubriant (1768-1848): “stones inspire the hand and the life of man. Their framework, audacious monster, rolls out with spleness towards the azure, whilst a halo of mystery covers the past...”

Today the agricultural economy, developed thanks to the presence of water, will evolve into other activities and new resources, other forms of welcome. The village has increased little by little, with new inhabitants from towns and neighbouring areas, some from far away, all happily integrated. The village is visited by sports folk, nature lovers, all interested in the beauty and different activities available. Cultural events (the Sillon Theatre), open-air cinema, party evenings, as well as welcoming choirs, exhibitions and conferences... It is this modern face of Liausson that this heritage walk wishes to promote in the symbolic new space of the Théâtre de Verdure.

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Traduction en anglais : Sandra Clozier

***Ruffe** local Hérault word. These rocks are formed by the combination of clayey sediments and iron oxides, hence their red color. Dates of the Permian (end of the Primary Era, from -298 to -252 million years), are the result of a deposit in calm freshwater aquatic environment