

Glossary

Edict of Nantes: promulgated by Henri IV in 1598, the edict recognised the Protestant religion in the kingdom of France. It was revoked in 1685 by Louis XIV.

Huguenot: a nickname given to Protestants by Roman Catholics.

Jobber: a workman paid by the job. Their marks are typical of medieval buildings, making it possible to identify who did the work. There are over 600 marks in Aigues-Mortes and only the Constance Tower does not have any.

Lido: a strip of coastline completely closing off a bay and sometimes separating a lagoon.

Phylloxera: a vine parasite which decimated French vineyards in the 19th century, changing the wine economy and the French countryside.

Practical information

Although it has been made safe, the monument is not hazard-free. Please watch your children.

Visit takes on average: 1 hour 15 minutes

Guided tours.

Tours suitable for disabled visitors.



The Centre des monuments nationaux publishes a collection of guidebooks about French monuments, translated into several languages. Éditions du patrimoine publications are on sale in the bookshop-giftshop.

Centre des monuments nationaux
Tours et remparts d'Aigues-Mortes
30220 Aigues-Mortes
réf. 04 66 53 61 55
fax 04 66 53 79 98

www.monuments-nationaux.fr

crédits photos P.Berthé © Centre des monuments nationaux, Paris. Illustration Karine Bernard, conception Plein Sens,Anders. réalisation beau fixe. traduction Caractères et cetera,Impression Néo-Typo, avril 2008.

A crusader port

The holy war

Eight military expeditions were organised by Western Christians in order to reconquer the Holy Land, which had fallen into the hands of the Muslims, between the 11th and 13th centuries. Crusades were considered to be the most prestigious pilgrimage and for certain Christians a duty of conscience. The very pious Louis IX led the last two crusades, both of which left from Aigues-Mortes.

1248: to Egypt

From 1246 onwards, equipment and provisions were gathered in preparation in Aigues-Mortes. However, Louis IX had to ask Marseille, Venice and Genoa to complete his fleet. He gathered 1800 ships in Cyprus in 1249, of which only 38 had left Aigues-Mortes with him. As soon as they arrived in Egypt, the king took Damietta, but his army was defeated at Mansurah in April 1250, where he was taken prisoner. Released in exchange for a large ransom, he remained in Palestine until 1254 and rebuilt the walls of the Frankish strongholds.

1270: departure for Tunisia

In 1270, the crusaders were summoned to the port of Aigues-Mortes for a fresh expedition. They embarked on July 1st 1270 and set off for the coast of Tunisia. However, the future Saint Louis died from dysentery on August 25 in Carthage.

Protestant heritage

The Constance Tower, the Camisard prison

From 1575 to 1622, Aigues-Mortes was one of the eight safe havens granted to the Protestants. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes* in 1685 caused severe repression of Protestantism, which was marked in Languedoc and the Cévennes in the early 18th century by the “Camisard War”. Like other towers in the town, from 1686 onwards the Constance Tower was used as a prison for the Huguenots* who refused to convert to Roman Catholicism. In 1703, Abraham Mazel, leader of the Camisards, managed to escape with sixteen companions.

A women’s prison

From 1715, ordinary women, often from the Cévennes, were locked up for having attended religious services or for simply being suspected of having done so. Among them, Marie Durand, with her unshakeable faith, is one of the outstanding figures of Protestantism. She was arrested in order to put pressure on her brother Pierre, a pastor, hoping that he would give himself up to the authorities. She remained imprisoned for thirty-eight years before being released in 1768. It is thought that she wrote the word “register”, which means “resist” in patois, on the window well in the upper room, though there is no proof that it was her. This has become an iconic appeal for freedom of conscience. In 1968, on the bicentenary of the release of the Protestant prisoners, a pillar was inaugurated in the courtyard at the Governor’s residence which referring to Marie Durand’s resistance.

* *Explanations overleaf.*

Aigues-Mortes

Saint Louis’s city

An inland port

Built on a swampy lido*, Aigues-Mortes was founded in 1240 by Louis IX, who was to become Saint Louis. The first king of France to have a Mediterranean port, he established himself on land surrounded by neighbouring powers. He build the future Constance Tower and a castle which no longer exists, and developed canals towards the sea, Arles and Montpellier. He left on his crusades in 1248 and 1270 from the port at Aigues-Mortes.



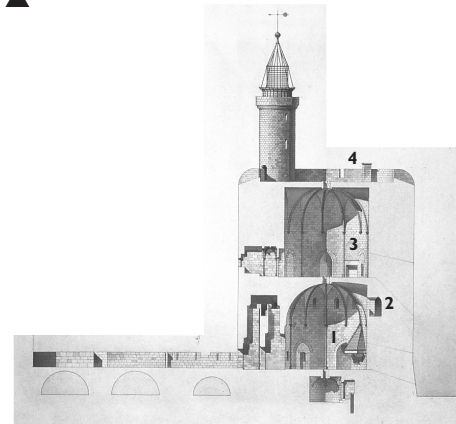
Doorway and dungeon of the kingdom

Sheltered by the city walls, in 1278 the port became the only southern port in the kingdom, handling goods such as spices and wool. But when Provence became a part of France in 1481 Marseille took its place. After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes* in 1685, the towers of Aigues-Mortes, formerly a Protestant city, were turned into prisons for the Huguenots*.

Between beaches and vineyards

Around 1875, a vineyard was planted on the land around the town, away from the phylloxera*. At that time the town was expanding due to the new fashion of sea bathing.

* *Explanations overleaf.*



The Constance Tower

This tower, completed in 1248, is all that remains of the castle built in Louis IX's reign. It was almost certainly the gatehouse tower, designed to be impregnable with its six-metre-thick walls. A spiral staircase leads to the different levels of the tower.

- 1 **The circular lower room** lies beneath a twelve-ribbed vault built on sculpted caps which are supported by polygonal columns. Four arrow loops open onto the outside. To the north, the entrance is formed by a double doorway closed by a wooden batten.
- 2 **The round passageway**, a sort of corridor high up within the wall, enables the lower room to be watched over.
- 3 **The upper room** was used as a prison for Protestants in the 18th century. **The vestibule** is remarkable for its high quality decoration.
- 4 **The terrace**, an ideal outlook post, overlooks the entire region. **The turret** used to house a lighthouse to guide the boats and ensured that they paid their customs duties.

Almost intact Medieval fortifications

The 1,640 metres of city walls were built in two phases: the first during the reign of Philippe III the Bold and the second during the reign of Philippe IV the Fair, who had the enclosure completed between 1289 and 1300. It was to be adapted for new weapons during the ensuing centuries, especially on the northern side which was the most exposed to attack. Many aspects bear the marks of the jobbers*. The wooden structures, roofing and moats can no longer be seen. There are several kinds of defence works along the walls, overlapping the curtain walls: entrance structures, flanking towers and corner towers.

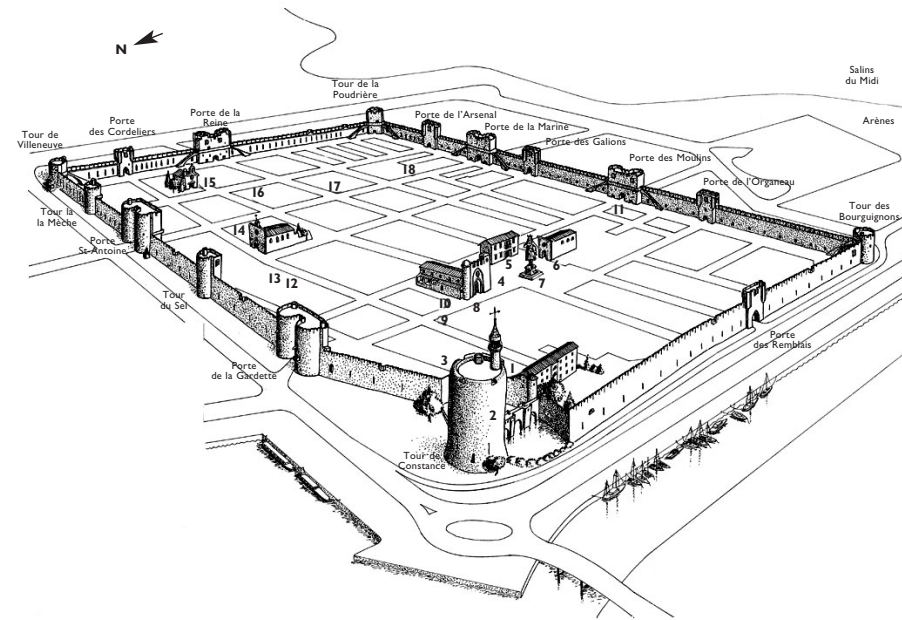
The north wall

The canal leading to the original port was on this side. The lagoon, which no longer exists, provided natural protection, strengthened by the defence works.

- 5 **The Porte de la Gardette** is the town's military gate, the only one with the remains of a draw-bridge. It was the only way into the town from the 16th to the 18th century. It had been protected since the 14th century by the Carbonnière gate tower, 3.5 kilometres to the north on the road.
- 6 **The tour de Villeneuve** is a good example of a corner tower, designed to provide additional protection.

The east wall

The towers on this part of the wall were often places of refuge in the fighting between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Marks left by missiles can still be seen.



The south wall

Protected naturally by a lake where boats have sailed since ancient times, this side had a landing stage from 1278 on. The bottom of the walls was strengthened with earth excavated to make the Beaucaire canal in the 18th century.

- 7 **The Porte de la Marine** is so named for its proximity to the port. Goods were transported in flat-bottomed boats.
- 8 **The Porte des Galions** has vaults decorated with a Minotaur and a monk talking to the birds.
- 9 **The Porte des Moulins** takes its name from two windmills built on it in the 17th century. Make sure not to miss the keystones with the angel holding a crown and the frowning old man. The salt works, which were connected to the town in 1290, are the source of the "white gold" which formed the basis of the city's wealth. Their ecosystem is typical of the whole of the Camargue.

The west wall

For a long time, the north-west quadrant was a military quarter, with the place d'Armes and the Governor's residence built in the 17th century on the site of the old king's palace, which was destroyed by fire in 1421. The town was extended on this side in 1272, adding the forest as far as the Mauguio lake.

The town

Around place Saint-Louis, the historic heart of the town, there are several old buildings such as the 17th century Capuchin convent. Notre-Dame-des-Sablons, mentioned as early as 1260, was built before the fortified enclosure, during the lifetime of Saint Louis.

* Explanations overleaf.