

Interdisciplinary research on the aqueduct of Nîmes and the Pont du Gard

Guilhem Fabre, Jean-Luc Fiches and Jean-Louis Paillet

In 1990 the programme “Archéologie, histoire et géo-système de l’aqueduc romain de Nîmes”, which was started in 1984 by the CNRS, and continued from 1987-1990 with excavations made possible by the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, officially came to an end. For most people, the aqueduct is known from an excellent but brief synthesis written more than 60 years ago and based upon survey carried out during the 19th c. when plans to reuse parts of the aqueduct were being considered (Espérandieu 1926), and that synthesis has been widely ‘exploited’ by other scholars and writers who did not contribute anything new. Our own work was intended to produce the most complete inventory possible of the remains, with a view to their protection and restoration, and to carry out archaeological and architectural studies. However, the interdisciplinary team formed in 1984 did not wish to restrict itself to the analysis of the aqueduct proper, but to integrate the monument in its physical and human context from the moment of its construction up to the present day. This paper aims to present some of the principal results of this work (still largely unpublished), and to show the rich potential of such an approach, which combines the sciences of history and geography and makes use of different specialist analyses.¹

Course of the aqueduct and gradients

An analysis of the course of the aqueduct shows that it was well adapted to the natural environment, integrating 10 different geographical units alternately located on the interfluvial and depressed areas (fig.1). These geographical units are studied in detail elsewhere (Fabre 1990). They are (starting from the source, and ending at Nîmes)

1. The Eure valley (fig.1.1)
2. The southern foot of the eastern Garrigues of Uzès (fig.1.2)
3. The plateau and the Garrigues of Vers (fig.1.3)
4. The crossing of the Gardon (fig.1.4)
5. The Garrigues of Remoulins (fig.1.5)
6. The Saint-Bonnet depression (fig.1.6)
7. The Garrigues of Sernhac (fig.1.7)
8. The upper valley of the Vistre (fig.1.8)
9. The southern foot of the eastern Garrigues of Nîmes (fig.1.9)
10. The town of Nîmes itself (fig.1.10)

1 This interdisciplinary program is under the dual responsibility of G. Fabre (geographer-geologist, UA 903) and J.-L. Fiches (archaeologist, CRA, Sophia-Antipolis); since 1987 excavations have been managed by Fiches and J.-L. Paillet (architect-archaeologist, IRAA, CNRS). The following organizations have participated: Centre Camille Jullian of the CNRS, Aix-en-Provence; UA 903 of the CNRS and the Laboratoire de Géographie Physique, Aix; the Universities of Provence and Aix-Marseille II; the Département Génie civil of the IUT of Nîmes-Montpellier, the Musée archéologique and the city of Nîmes, the Direction régionale des Antiquités Languedoc-Roussillon, the Laboratoire d’Hydrologie Mathématique of the USTL of Montpellier, the Laboratoire de Sédimentologie of Luminy, Marseille; the Institut de Recherche sur l’Architecture Antique, Aix; the Ecole Normale de Filles de Nîmes; the Nîmes campus of UA 903, University of Aix-Marseille II; the archaeological associations of Uzès, Lédénon, Bezouce, etc.; we are also grateful to the rural districts and urban boroughs concerned, and to many highly motivated individuals.

This paper summarizes chapters 3, 4, 8, 12 (Guendon and Vaudour), and 18 of the book by the same authors *L’aqueduc de Nîmes et le Pont-du-Gard: archéologie, géosystème et histoire* (Conseil général du Gard, forthcoming 1991). We are grateful to J.-L. Guendon and J. Vaudour for contributing paragraphs, as attributed.