

CURRENT TRENDS IN FRENCH CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Abstract

*In order to establish current trends in the history of construction in France, we need to start with the ten-year review (2004–2014) published in 2018. Without being able to be totally exhaustive, we will confine ourselves to following the three main lines: scientific publications, on which we will focus on two key events: the bi-annual publication since 2017 of the new international construction history journal *Ædificare*, of which we will review the first ten issues, and the launch of a new collection of works by Classiques Garnier dedicated specifically to the history of construction. The second focus is on access to historical sources, which have increased in number around materials such as plaster, but also building site accounts, construction literature and photographs of building sites during the Reconstruction period. We would also like to emphasise the important role played by useful databases, such as the one on Parisian building surveys for the period 1690–1790. The third area concerns the research projects that were launched mainly after the Notre-Dame fire in 2019, within the framework of numerous research bodies such as the CNRS, in a wide range of disciplines. Finally, the analysis of the hundred or so thesis projects submitted between 2018 and 2023, as well as the reminder of several collective projects and collective publications from French-speaking congresses should allow collective access to European projects.*

Zusammenfassung

*Um die aktuellen Trends in der Geschichte des Bauwesens in Frankreich zu ermitteln, muss man die 2018 erschienene Bilanz für den Zehnjahreszeitraum (2004–2014) betrachten. Hierbei beschränken wir uns jedoch auf lediglich drei Aspekte: zunächst die wissenschaftlichen Veröffentlichungen, bei denen sich wiederum zwei Höhepunkte herauskristallisieren: die seit 2017 zweimal jährlich erscheinende internationale Zeitschrift für Baugeschichte *Ædificare*, deren erste zehn Ausgaben bilanziert werden, und die Einrichtung einer neuen Buchreihe bei Classiques Garnier, die der Geschichte des Bauwesens gewidmet ist. Der zweite Schwerpunkt liegt auf dem Zugang zu historischen Quellen, die sich rund um Materialien wie Gips, aber auch um Baustellenbuchhaltungen, Bauliteratur und Baustellenfotos während der Zeit des Wiederaufbaus vervielfacht haben.*

Die nicht zu vernachlässigende Rolle nützlicher Datenbanken wird hervorgehoben, insbesondere die Datenbank zu den Pariser Baugutachten im Zeitraum von 1690 bis 1790. Der dritte Fokus betrifft die Forschungsprojekte, die hauptsächlich nach dem Brand von Notre-Dame im Jahr 2019 im Rahmen etlicher Forschungseinrichtungen wie dem CNRS vielfältig ins Leben gerufen wurden. Schließlich sollte die Analyse der 100 zwischen 2018 und 2023 eingereichten Dissertationsprojekte, diversen Gemeinschaftsprojekte sowie die Gemeinschaftsveröffentlichungen auf französischsprachigen Kongressen den kollektiven Zugang zu europäischen Projekten ermöglichen.

Since the two collective volumes with Antonio Becchi and Joël Sakarovich published in France by Classiques Garnier in 2018 and covering the period from 2004 to 2014, entitled *Construction History. Survey of a European Building Site*, i.e. for the last 10 years or so, what has happened to construction history in France?

The first volume of around 520 pages, or a third of the total, contains reports from each European country or group of countries (Fig. 1). The French report, written by five authors, takes up almost a quarter of the total number of reports, which in no way reflects France's weight in the history of construction in Europe, but this is probably a bias introduced by the French authors. The second volume is an anthology of texts on the history of construction that appear to best reflect, over a long period of time, examples of work on the history of construction and the methods used. Of the 43 texts reproduced, 8 are French. By definition subjective, the choice was made above all to show the various possible approaches (and their limitations) to the history of construction, through background articles and case studies. We highlighted three phenomena: the level of maturity, the scale of work and the idea of constructive design.



Fig. 1 The European assessment of the history of construction drawn up by the most informed European representatives. 1497 pages of historical knowledge

And their intersection with the disciplines used: science and technology, the humanities and social sciences, archaeology and heritage conservation.

What has happened since then in France in terms of scientific production in the field of construction history? In order to be as clear as possible, I would like to divide my remarks into three points: first, scientific publications; second, access to new sources; and third, the research projects that have marked the last ten years.

Publications

A number of books on the history of construction have been published. We do not have enough space here to list all the publications but it is appropriate to emphasise the axes which structure this transmission of successful research:

- Men and their networks;
- Carpentry and drystone masonry;
- An anthropology of building materials;
- The building site as a place of technical, social, administrative and economic exchange;
- The production of technical drawings;
- And above all, in order to find one's way in contemporary debates, reuse, maintenance and energy saving.

Beyond that, we are proud – with a dedicated and hard-working team, that I would like to thank here – to have produced two issues per year, of an international, multilingual and peer-reviewed journal (Fig. 2). *Ædificare*. Ten issues with an average of about 335 pages, 4 *Varia* and 6 thematic issues:

- Building Techniques in Architectural Treatises: Construction Practices *versus* Technical Writings,
- Agencies and Labour Regulations in Building Sites (13th–19th centuries),
- Recycling and reuse. The second life of construction materials,



Fig. 2 The first ten issues of the international construction history journal *Ædificare*

- The Building Contractor. New Perspectives (Middle Ages–20th century),
- Construction Accounting,
- Stone and Urban Dynamics,

That is to say nearly a hundred illustrated articles published in five years (2017–2021).

Let us stop for a moment to analyse this young journal, which has a fairly positive record over five years, with the publication of nearly a hundred articles on nearly 3,500 pages. It is a good symbol of the research themes addressed in France (with the exception of No. 2, which is the initiative of a young Belgian team).

It is difficult to keep up with a journal of around 300 pages (between 250 and 350; Fig. 3). Three issues have reached 400 pages or more, which may seem problematic in view of the rising cost of paper in these times. The next issues will be shorter.

Without counting editorials or reviews, the articles, whether written in a thematic or *varia* framework, are fairly well distributed between the different periods, with a slight weakness in Antiquity (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3 Evolution of the volume of the journal

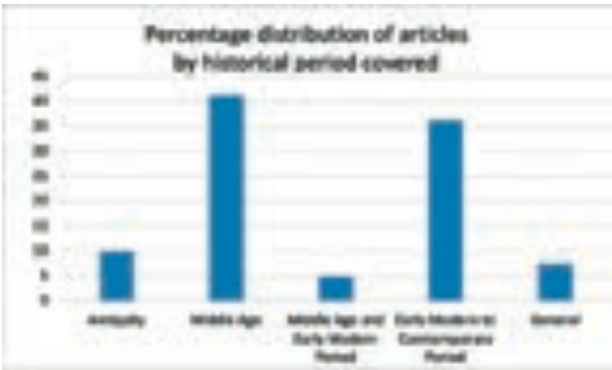


Fig. 4 Evolution of content according to the historical period covered

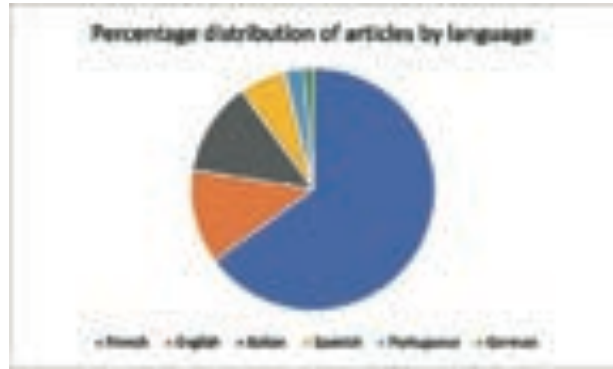


Fig. 5 Evolution of language use

One of the special features of the journal is that it accepts six major European languages (Fig. 5). It is the only one to do so, since the *Construction History Journal* only publishes in English and the brand new *Revista de Historia de la Construcción* only in Spanish. As far as the languages adopted are concerned, French remains in the majority at over 65 Percent. This seems obvious for a French journal. The 35 Percent of articles written in another European language is quite remarkable, symbolising the confidence acquired from our sister associations but also undoubtedly a clear support for us and our enterprise. On closer examination, we find a greater use of Romance languages (60 Percent) compared to Germanic languages (40 Percent). These results concerning the share of foreign authors published by our journal deserve to be rebalanced or even strongly developed to welcome more foreign languages. We truly believe in using our own language to write and to write well and to transmit all our thoughts. Chat GPT is not the solution, nor would DeepL be. While these tools help, they are not a panacea.

Our future issues will focus on:

- Fires or History and Archeology of Fires on Major Buildings, n° 11, 2022-1 (published),
- The Accident Perspective. A Driver for Construction History, n° 12, 2022-2 (published),
- *Varia* issue, n° 13, 2023-1 (published),
- Roof coverings and their materials from antiquity to the contemporary era, n° 14, 2023-2 (published),
- A tribute to Joël Sakarovitch under the title *Épures d'histoire* recalling the title of his thesis *Architectural sketches*; In 2024, it will be ten years since he passed on. We still greatly miss him. N°15, 2024-1 (published),
- The first restoration work on the foundations of medieval cathedrals, n° 16, 2024-2 (published),
- The ›masterpiece‹ in the art of building, 13th to 20th centuries, n° 17, 2025-1 (to be published).

In order to maintain this pace, we are calling on young post-doctoral researchers to edit thematic issues on topics that intersect with their own research or to submit papers for publication in *varia* issues.

In 2021, we are also inaugurating a collection of books in Construction History of various types (theses, essays, editions or translations of texts in construction history, etc.) with the *Classiques Garnier* publishing house, covering all historical periods from Antiquity to the contemporary period, whose directors are, apart from me, an early modernist, Hélène Des-sales (ENS Ulm and professor at UNIL – Lausanne, antiquity historian), Philippe Plagnieux (University of Paris 1 – Panthéon Sorbonne, medievalist) and Guy Lambert (École nationale supérieure d'architecture Belleville, contemporary historian).

The first titles will be on *The Conseil des Bâtiments civils, the engineers of the Etats du Languedoc, the agency of the architects Franque*, An edition of *Philippe de La Hire's architecture course*, *The reed in Greek and Roman construction*, and *Ancient carpentries, 6th-4th century BC. J.-C., The appearance of long spans...*

We are proud to announce the publication of the first volume in this collection. The others will follow in due course.

We take this opportunity to launch a call for manuscripts in the history of construction, even if they are written in English (Fig. 6). I am thinking here of Belgian students, but not



Fig. 6 Presentation of the 1st volume in the ›History of Construction‹ series published by *Classiques Garnier*

exclusively. All manuscripts will be assessed. It is not necessary to present a particular funding to propose a manuscript.

In parallel with the production of various and varied historical works, we have noticed – and this has even given rise to numerous debates between historians due to the proliferation of the digital issue – that historians have often put forward the constitution of corpora of sources and their semantic analysis. The organisation of manuscript sources used to be the preserve of archivists. Today, each discipline organises its own sources and programmes, its own research methods appropriate to the problems of the project: whether quantitative or qualitative, historical, linguistic, economic, legal, etc. But before this can be achieved, all the stages involved in building up a corpus have to be worked out.

Access to historical sources

Here are some examples of the interest of French research in the constitution of databases and access to sources, essential material for research.

The creation of a ›Musée du Plâtre‹ (Museum dedicated to plaster) is a good example. It is both an exhibition space and a resource centre on plaster as a material, combining art, history and science.¹

I remember during a thesis defence the interest that the great French historian of sensitivities Alain Corbin (from the history of smell to the history of rest, via the history of shadows or emotions) showed in this material emblematic of 19th century France, which he deliberately and sincerely described as the century of plaster.² Several theses on the subject have been defended in archaeology and the history of façade restoration, but the fundamental, structuring role of plaster in vernacular construction does not seem to have attracted enough attention from researchers.³ In addition, the *Centre de recherches historiques* (CRH) at EHESS is the custodian of a collection of documents compiled by a private individual, Michel Legagneux, who worked for several decades on collecting archives relating to the Belleville plaster quarries. Focusing mainly on the 17th and 18th centuries, this collection (1254–1889) is highly eclectic and includes notarial deeds, legal documents, police reports, etc. More than 10,000 documents have been transcribed, and initial analysis shows that they go beyond the mere

1 See the website of the Museum dedicated to plaster <<https://www.museeduplatre.fr/>> (07.07.2024).

2 See the book he has just written on this subject. Corbin, Alain: *Fragilitas. Le plâtre et l'histoire de France*. Paris 2023.

3 Le Dantec, Tiffanie: *Les façades enduites au plâtre d'Île-de-France. Le déclin du plâtre extérieur, du XVII^e au XX^e siècle* (Plaster-coated façades in Île-de-France. The decline of exterior plaster from the 17th to the 20th centuries). PhD in history, University Paris Saclay, 2019; Lafarge, Yvan: *Le plâtre dans la construction en Ile-de-France: techniques, morphologie et économie avant l'industrialisation* (Gypsum in construction in the Ile-de-France region: techniques, morphology and economics before industrialisation). PhD in History of Technology, University Paris 1, Panthéon Sorbonne, 2013.



Fig. 7 The register of construction account of the Amboise Castel, 1495–1496

reality of careers to encompass a history of families, assets, property, tools, labour conflicts and urbanisation that is specific to a Parisian suburb. Cleaned up and formatted, this collection is now available to the scientific community.⁴

Then there is the acquisition by the French state, thanks to the sponsorship of the AXA Company, of a unique heritage item that is directly linked to the history of construction: the register of construction accounts of the Amboise Castel, 1495–1496, in 2016

This manuscript, digitised and analysed by Lucie Gauguin, is available online in the ›Digital edition of the Renaissance archives‹ interface (Fig. 7). It presents the tools and materials used on the royal building site, and also provides valuable information on the multitude of workers and variety of trades involved. The history of the economy and the value of things is also supported and energised by access to this remarkable source.⁵

In the same field, we feel it is essential to highlight the publication of Sandrine Victor's excellent ›habilitation‹ on the analysis of a medieval building site in Catalonia (renovation of the Salses Castel) in the 15th century from the standpoint of its administration and management. This innovative analysis focuses on the men who organised the processes and produced the documentation, as well as the workers and their links with the administrative agents.⁶

French research institutions are increasingly providing access to sources. CNAM has developed a genuine policy of regular digitisation of the handwritten and published sources it possesses, providing easy access to almost 2,500 titles of rare and valuable heritage works and journals, such as, in the field we are interested in, builders' catalogues (410 titles), all the

4 See the Homepage of the website providing access to the database on plaster quarries. Belleville and eastern Paris. 13th–19th centuries <<https://carrieres-belleville.huma-num.fr/exist/apps/belleville/index.html>> (07.07.2024).

5 The manuscript is digitised and analysed by Lucie Gauguin <<http://renumar.univ-tours.fr/publication/le-compte-de-construction-du-chateau-damboise-1495-1496/>> (07.07.2024).

6 Victor, Sandrine: *Le Pic et la Plume. L'administration d'un chantier (Catalogne, XV^e siècle)*. Paris 2023.

publications from world exhibitions (703 titles), construction books (255 titles) and publications on materials (224 titles).⁷

Since 1986, the Centre d'archives d'architecture contemporaine or *archiwebture*, co-produced by the Cité de l'architecture, has been collecting the archives of French architects, town planners, engineers and interior designers active from the end of the 19th century. Its mission is to safeguard, process, communicate to the public and promote these works. It has just had a facelift.⁸

Between 1940 and 1945, France underwent major destruction on a scale unprecedented since the First World War. Reconstruction was finally an opportunity for all those involved to modernise the built environment, make up for 50 years of backwardness in housing and urban development and plan for the future in the decades to come.

Architects, town planners, engineers, surveyors, ministry officials and local authorities produced an abundance of images: photographs, films, maps, plans, aerial views, posters and tracings, that made it possible to combine scales and perspectives, documenting and capturing the evolution of towns and cities and heralding the urban and regional development of the 'Trente glorieuses' (1945–1975).

The online study day on 8 April 2021 had two aims: to find one's way around the various collections of heritage institutions by presenting the types of iconographic and audiovisual documents, while understanding the context in which they were produced; and to understand what these sources are used for today, what they contribute to research into the history of architecture, town planning and techniques, and also to grasp their interest for heritage professionals, elected officials and local players, in terms of thinking about heritage and day-to-day management and relations with the inhabitants of and visitors to reconstructed areas (Fig. 8).⁹

In addition to access to new sources through reasoned analysis, the creation of accessible databases, the digital decoding of manuscripts, and digital technology makes it possible to understand the relationships between actors and their actions, materials and their use, and through processing a large number of archives, to understand the state of mind of an era, or of a specific group of actors, the challenges of a new profession, etc. Taking the example of the population of Parisian building experts in the 17th and 18th centuries, over precisely one century between 1690 et 1790,¹⁰ we have put together on a dedicated website, soon to be

7 CNUM: Digitisation and online access to CNAM (*Arts et Métiers*) archives and documentation, regularly updated <<https://cnum.cnam.fr/>> (07.07.2024).

8 See *Archiwebture* home page *archiwebture* <<https://archiwebture.citedelarchitecture.fr/>> (07.07.2024).

9 Labidurie, Boris; Palant, Christel (Hg.): *Les archives iconographiques et audiovisuelles de la Reconstruction en France, de 1940 aux années 1960*. Publications des Archives nationales, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pan.2911>.

10 ANR project 'Knowledge practices between judgement and innovation. Building experts and expertise, Paris 1690-1790' (2018–2023). In addition to myself as project leader and legal historian, the team consists of Valérie Nègre (historian of technology), Michela Barbot (economic historian) and Emmanuel Château-Dutier (digital humanities). Four collaborators have been brought on board: Juliette Hernu, Eléonore Losserand, Yvon Plouzenec and Josselin Morvan.



Fig. 8 Poster of workshop on 'The iconographic and audiovisual collections of the Reconstruction in France from 1940 to the 1960s' (2021) ENSA Versailles and AN



Fig. 9 ANR Experts project website

accessible to the public, all the information on each of the actors: the 242 experts and 82 building clerks, their lives, their families, their functions and professional activities, as well as an analysis of and access to ten years of expert reports, i.e. nearly 5,000 minutes amounting to nearly 60,000 photographs (Fig. 9).

Our results, which go beyond the strict statistical significance of all these data, have enabled us to analyse the body of experts and court clerks from both the individual angle (birth, entry into office, area of competence, leaving office, death) and the collective angle (family, social and professional networks), and to grasp their activity in its main expert functions (technical, legal, economic; Fig. 10 a–c).

For the players, we have clarified the current state of the corpus (correct number of experts, economic terms of access to the office), uncovered the criteria of competence, analysed the intelligence of the experts' perceptions, actions and reasoning, placed the experts in their social framework, constituted the first networks that linked them, etc.

For the expert reports, we have established the legal status of the institution, their contribution to the structuring of the architectural profession, the role of expert reports in terms of property maintenance and repairs, the degree of innovation in the reports, the economic aspects, and the methods used to estimate the value of real estate, etc. Thanks to new funding from the Ministry of Justice, and through the automatic transcription of manuscripts, we are now going to analyse the vocabulary of expert reports, the speeches produced by experts and the drawings.



Fig. 10 Example of an expert report with plan

Although the latter project provides, it is already a research project.

Research projects

In 2019, the fire at Notre-Dame struck horror into the global world of art, heritage and architecture. Its images were seen around the world. Disaster (collapse of the entire building and many victims) was averted, but the trauma is very real in the minds of the people of France, and even beyond. The fire ravaged a landmark of the Republic, indeed of the Nation, albeit of a religious nature. This accidental outrage had to be repaired. The worksite was described as the ›worksite of the century‹, with all the pomp and circumstance you can imagine!¹¹

The reconstruction site actually offered exciting new opportunities for research (access to the gutted structure and damaged materials). In this field, an unexpected event had disturbed the peace of mind of researchers: the fire at Notre-Dame, a shock on a local but also a global scale.



¹¹ See The French Ministry of Culture website <<https://notre-dame-de-paris.culture.gouv.fr/fr>> (07.07.2024).

Mobilisation was indeed international. An association was created in the early days; a mailing list with a brilliant concept: ›the scientists of Notre Dame‹, like valiant knights in search of the Grail. The CNRS set up a grandiose research structure with appropriate resources.¹² This was the opening of a real multidisciplinary, diachronic and heuristic scientific site at the CNRS in conjunction with the Ministry of Culture. Eight working groups are organised to develop and guide the research: in Digital Ecosystem, Civil Engineering and Structural Calculation (vault analysis¹³), Wood/Carpentry, Stone¹⁴, Glass, Metal (huge metal staples as a structural element at the top of the walls¹⁵), Acoustics, and Heritage Emotions. All these fields cover entire areas of the history of construction.

We all know that theses are the lifeblood of scientific research. We have consulted the French website dedicated to theses. In this database, which contains all the theses registered in France since 1985, we have selected those concerning the history of construction using a number of cross-referenced criteria. Our result is quite astonishing: 112 theses dealing or partly dealing with our favorite field. When we analyse the hundred or so thesis projects that are underway today, we can certainly rejoice because for a field that in France is not a real discipline taught in the strictest sense of the term, the result is remarkable. Even if we know that not all the students enrolled will finish, it is an encouraging result (Fig. 11)!



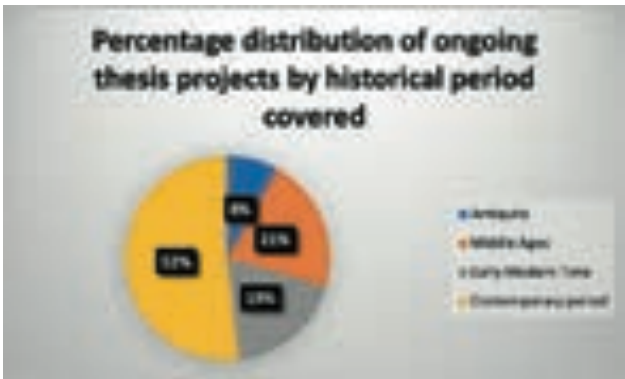
Fig. 11 The project thesis according the registration date

12 CNRS quickly announces huge research project <<https://www.cnrs.fr/fr/notre-dame-de-paris-le-cnrs-lance-un-chantier-pour-coordonner-les-recherches>> (07.07.2024).
 13 *Les voûtes de Notre-Dame de Paris. Recherches récentes 2019-2023*. Colloque, Calenda, Publié le lundi 23 octobre 2023 <<https://doi.org/10.58079/1c1m>>.
 14 Prunet, Pascal; Fromont, Rémi: *Notre Dame de Paris, Matériaux de reconstruction* <https://www.mediachimie.org/sites/default/files/Chimie_notre_dame_Chpt3.pdf> (07.07.2024).
 15 L'Héritier, Maxime; Azéma, Aurélia; Syvilay, Delphine; Delqué-Kolic, Emmanuelle; Beck, Lucile et al.: *Notre-Dame de Paris: The first iron lady? Archaeometallurgical study and dating of the Paris cathedral's iron reinforcements* (2023). PLOS ONE 18(3): e0280945. <<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0280945>>.

Fig. 12 Project Thesis:
Paris vs Province



Fig. 13 Project Thesis:
Time Sharing



These projects have – with a few exceptions – been implemented over the last ten years, mainly in the last five years since 2018 (Fig. 12).

Their registration locations, as for all theses, are mainly in Paris, an exceptional university centre (46 Percent). Note the significant role of co-supervision with countries other than France, which shows the importance of international networks in our field (9 Percent). The remainder are distributed more to the north of the country with 12 Percent for the North East and nearly 18 Percent for the North West, with the south making do with 10 Percent in the South East and 5 Percent in the South West.

The distribution by historical period is – all in all – fairly standard with contemporary history greater than other periods (52 Percent; Fig. 13). The other 48 Percent is almost equally divided between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period (21 Percent and 19 Percent respectively). Antiquity remains the poor relation with 8 Percent, probably because of the gaps in the sources or the great difficulty of interpreting them outside the excavated sites. The examples on which construction history studies can focus – we discover them all the time – exist for each historical period. There is no shortage.

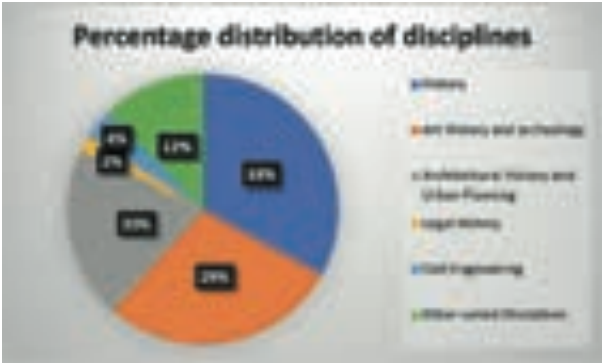


Fig. 14 Project Thesis: Don't neglect disciplines other than pure history

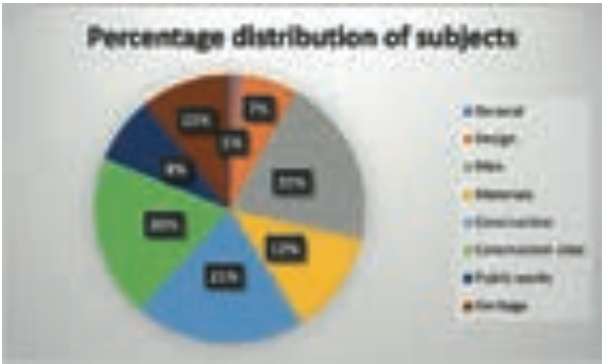


Fig. 15 Domains of Project Thesis: Of sites and men

The distribution between the disciplines is, of course, heavily weighted towards history (33 Percent; Fig. 14). The speciality of art history and archaeology is well represented (29 Percent), as is the history of architecture (20 Percent). The remaining 18 Percent is scattered among nearly fifteen multiple disciplines as remote and unlikely as languages, plastic arts, law, politics and economy, earth sciences or geography, which also shows that the history of construction can be approached in unusual disciplines but which sometimes remain very innovative.

This last table presenting a typology – standard in all respects – of the subjects dealt with in the history of construction by these projects replicates three-quarters of research in our field: tradesmen 20 Percent (professions and functionaries); materials 12 Percent (from the most frequent to the most obscure, including use for replacement); construction methods 21 Percent (practical specialities: the art of masonry, carpentry, stereotomy, and the most common activities of all journeymen, etc.); private and public building sites (28 Percent) remain a sector that is increasingly analysed by the diversity of the complementary sources kept in the archives and the unity of the place of their treatment (Fig. 15). While the issue of building maintenance



Fig. 16 *The 3CFHC Nantes in 2017, Construire! Entre Antiquité et époque contemporaine, sous la direction de Gilles Bienvenu, Martial Monteil et Hélène Rousteau-Chambon, 2019*



Fig. 17 *The 4CFHC Tlemcen (Algeria) in 2020–2021, L'histoire de construction, une histoire de l'humanité, provisional cover model, 2024*

is beginning to emerge as a subject of history although it has always existed in practice¹⁶, the political, economic and legal issues remain largely unexplored.

Finally, in a highly competitive environment, many projects manage to receive financial support and to provide grants for theses or to employ many post-docs – even if sometimes with a precarious status (see the above-mentioned ANR Experts project).

For example, ANR RECAP Masonry techniques in the face of earthquakes from antiquity to the present day¹⁷, ANR Archipal on aluminium¹⁸ or National Raw Earth Project.¹⁹

To conclude, in relation to these research projects, numerous meetings, seminars and colloquiums are organised to fuel debate and present the findings of the work. Here are the two volumes resulting from the two French-language conferences we organised after

16 Denis, Jérôme; Pontille, David: *Le soin des choses. Politique de la maintenance*. Paris 2023.

17 See ANR Recap project website <<http://recap.huma-num.fr/webpublic/#recap>> (07.07.2024).

18 See Archipal project website Architecture, Aluminium and Heritage <<https://archipal.hypotheses.org/>> (07.07.2024).

19 See Website of the national raw project supported by the French Ministry for Ecological Transition <<https://projet-national-terre.univ-gustave-eiffel.fr>> (07.07.2024).

the first, held in Paris in 2008 and published in 2010 (*Edifice & artifice*), and the second, held in Lyon in 2014 and published in 2016 (*Les temps de la construction. Processus, acteurs, matériaux*).

The 4CFHC Tlemcen, the first to be held outside mainland France on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, strongly supported by our Spanish partners and then abandoned when a European Erasmus project file was put together, unfortunately had to take place online because of Covid (Fig. 16–17). We have finished correcting and harmonising the manuscript. It is due to be a co-edition between France and Algeria, despite all the difficulties we have encountered.

As for the next French-speaking congress, it is provisionally planned for Toulouse in 2025.

The Francophonie organisation wishes – as we announced before Covid – to become more anchored in the reality of the contemporary world by restructuring its statutes. It is almost an obligation for us today to not to remain disconnected from the impact of climate change on construction. It seems to us that it is essential to give ourselves the possibility of being actors in our future and as historians of construction on major themes such as re-use, energy saving (in the context of renovation), the safeguarding of the built heritage, accident prevention and the development of a reflection on the maintenance of buildings. This obviously requires a connection with the actors of today's practice, professional associations, trade unions, building federations in all its various sectors and branches, craftsmen of all kinds, from the mason (dry stone waller, continuing vernacular techniques) to the companion stonemasons (of the Tour de France) *via* the large international construction *consortia*, in order to associate them with our approach as historians.

It might be valuable for us to reflect together, as members of sister European associations, as to the most appropriate ways of teaching the history of construction according to our respective cultures; valuable for our associations to become partners in organising initial or continuing training courses by combining our experiences. It might be valuable for us as institutions to dare to respond to national or European calls for proposals in order to be actors in our field of research, setting an example to our leaders as to the usefulness of our research in the general interest. History, including Construction History, must contribute to the history of our future.