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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Simon-Claude Constant-Dufeux and the Symbolic Interpretation of Architectural Origins in 19th-Century France

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This essay examines the design by French architect Simon-Claude Constant-Dufeux of a tomb of the maritime explorer Jules Dumont d'Urville, erected in the *cimetière du Sud* in Paris (today, Montparnasse cemetery) in 1844. Its unusual parabolic profile and the vivid polychromy of its surface made it something of an archetype for architects in Paris in the 1840s, who saw it as an assault on the neoclassical ideals promoted by the French Academy.

In the world of the visual arts, music, and literature, Romanticism is among the most fundamental movements, a watershed moment in which art was rethought in light of the exigencies of the modern world. Romanticism in architecture, however, is more difficult to describe. Drawing on French Romantic philosophy, particularly the works of Pierre Leroux and Victor Cousin, and from archeologists, especially the work of Charles Lenormant, this essay interprets the tomb of Dumont d'Urville within the Romantic discourses of the early 19th century. It argues that the tomb's Romanticism lay in its ability to enact a totalizing ideology, one which fused form and content, communication, and expression.

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**Keywords:** Simon-Claude Constant-Dufeux; 19th century architecture; 19th century archeology; Romanticism; Pierre Leroux; Victor Cousin

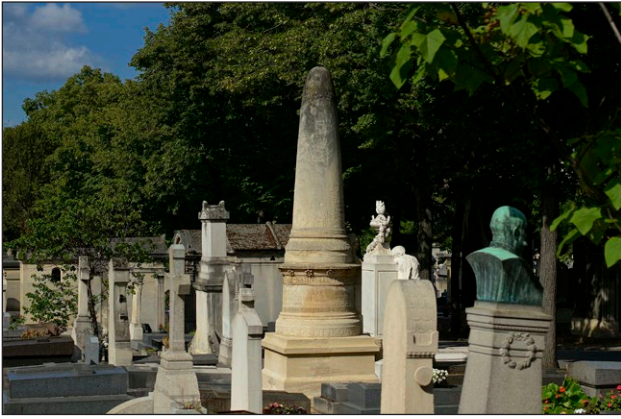
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Few funerary monuments have elicited the kind of passion expressed for the tomb of the French maritime explorer Jules Dumont d'Urville erected in the *cimetière du Sud* (today, Montparnasse cemetery) in Paris in 1844.<sup>1</sup> What for critics was a 'bizarre' and 'pain-inducing' monument (one critic's exact words: 'le tombeau ... produit une sensation pénible'), for others the tomb was a defiant battle cry for the new ideals affecting architecture in mid-19th-century France (Delaunay 1844).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the form of the monument was decidedly unconventional; like an oversized street bollard, the base of the project gave way to an immense conical capstone hewn out of a single rock. As even its supporters remarked, the tomb was audacious and the product of 'a man who reacts to the ordinary with horror' (Mérimée 1844). The playwright Prosper Mérimée published an analysis of the work in *Le constitutionnel* shortly after its inauguration in 1844, which prepared readers for the 'effect' it would generate in the press, and for the lively public discussion that would assuredly result upon visiting the monument.

Cemeteries were very charged places in the 19th century. While they emerged in the beginning of the century as pastoral gardens and refuges from the swelling metropolis, fifty years later they proved to be zones of competing

ideologies. Tombs and sepulchers were seen as the most individualized works that architects might produce, a domain of fierce experimentation (Etlin 1977). César Daly, a prominent architectural critic, stated that tombs are to architecture what tragedy is to literature – the most noble but also the most difficult genre. There were no building types, he claimed, 'in which the imagination could expand to greater heights, where the necessity of expression was more imperious' (Daly 1872). The cemetery, in short, became a terrain of radical architectural expression; what was restricted on the tree-lined streets of the city was condoned and even encouraged on the tomb-lined alleys of the cemetery. But even within the relatively permissive confines of the cemetery, the tomb of Dumont d'Urville was a highly idiosyncratic object. It was compared to fetish objects displayed in the shop windows of the most ill-reputed streets in Paris. Its phallic appearance and the absence of any Christian symbols made it seem like a pagan intrusion into the otherwise-sacred precinct of the cemetery (**Figure 1**).

Simon-Claude Constant-Dufeux, the architect of the tomb, helped ignite a Romantic revolt in architecture in the 1820s and '30s. Along with his former classmates at the *École des beaux-arts*, architects such as Félix Duban, Henri Labrousse, and Léon Vaudoyer, Constant-Dufeux sought to develop an architecture rooted in 19th-century social and cultural values. Like theirs, his early projects



**Figure 1:** S.-C. Constant-Dufeux, Tomb of Dumont d'Urville, Montparnasse Cemetery, Paris. Photograph by Ralph Ghoche.

tested the aesthetic and political sensitivities of the French Academy. More so than his colleagues, however, he paid special attention to the minutiae of architectural practice, to emblems, signs, and figures: in other words, forms of symbolic representation that focused architectural meaning and attempted to convey its message in a concise and immediate way. In his writings and his buildings, as well as his teachings at the *École des beaux-arts* – he held the chair of perspective from 1845 until the dramatic reforms that reshaped the institution in 1863 – Constant-Dufeux elaborated a theory of architecture as a discipline concerned with symbolic expression and communication. His contemporaries considered this to be his main contribution. Architects such as Charles Lucas (1891: 381) and Jean-Baptiste Lassus (1858: 34) observed an ‘elevated symbolism’ in his works, remarking on the tendency of each element to express ‘a mystical and profound sense’. In the 20th century, the French architectural historian Louis Hautecœur (1955: 251) echoed this characterization, arguing that Constant-Dufeux ‘aimed to impart all forms with a symbolic thrust’.

What is the nature of the symbolism that so many professed to see in Constant-Dufeux’s work? In late 18th- and early 19th-century architectural circles, to be ‘symbolic’ implied a certain predisposition toward the primitive origins of the artistic and built form and a shared interest in reaching back to the opaque recesses of civilization’s most distant past. In 1836, the French archeologist Charles Lenormant named the unaffiliated architects of this archeological persuasion the ‘*école dite symbolique*’ and included among its members some of the great architectural luminaries of the early century: Charles Robert Cockerell, Gottfried Semper, Jean-Nicolas Huyot, and two prominent colleagues of Constant-Dufeux: Duban and Labrousse (1836: 216; emphasis mine). According to Lenormant, the architects were profoundly shaped by the new archeological worldview, and sought to incorporate ‘the experience of the antiquarian’ into the architect’s training and intellectual formation (1861: 454).

While Constant-Dufeux’s name was omitted from Lenormant’s cursory list – in 1836, after all, he had just completed his architectural studies and was little known – within a few years the young architect produced the

tomb that is the focus of this essay, a bold and overt example of what one might term the ‘originary’ or ‘archetypal’ imagination that took hold of Romantic architects in the first half of the 19th century. In visual arts, music, and literature, Romanticism is among the most fundamental of movements, a watershed moment in which art was rethought in light of the exigencies of the modern world. Romanticism in architecture, however, has always been a difficult category. Traditionally, it has been associated with the neo-Gothic in Germany and England. In France, it has been a much more difficult concept to grasp.<sup>3</sup> One of the key ways that it manifested itself there was through the pursuit of primordial origins. In other words, it was largely filtered through archeology.

Constant-Dufeux was one of Romanticism’s key theoreticians. His tomb, this largely forgotten 19th-century monument, was perhaps the most overt and ambitious attempt at fulfilling Romantic aspirations. Its Romanticism lay in its ability to enact a totalizing ideology, one that fused form and content, communication and expression. Romantic philosophers like Pierre Leroux and Joseph-Daniel Guigniaut described their aim as producing an instantaneous language, ‘like a lightning bolt in a moonless night’ (Creuzer and Guigniaut 1825: 24). Artistic works did not simply evoke a thought or an idea, as would have been the case in neoclassical theory and its focus on imitation, but rather expressed and contained something of that thought. In other words, the Romantics moved away from a representational philosophy of knowledge. Instead, knowledge was about embodiment, about physiology and sensation. These aspirations constituted the true nature of Romantic symbology. While the notion of the ‘symbol’ was left un-theorized by the earlier Enlightenment period (for example, Diderot and d’Alembert devoted a scant few lines to its definition in the *Encyclopédie*), by the 1830s the philosopher and publisher Pierre Leroux characterized the term as ‘the unique principle of art’ (Leroux 1841: 543).

The ambition of totality, of producing a unified monument that coalesced and ordered the disparate but primordial facets of architecture, was Constant-Dufeux’s central aim. Although the architect was only at the midpoint of his career in 1844, the tomb was a summation of all he believed architecture to be. With it, he attempted to resolve ideas that had first arisen during his Grand Prix sojourn in Rome in the early 1830s, and that had matured over the years of teaching in his private *atelier* and at the *École des beaux-arts*. The design emerged out of deep reflection on the nature of architectural origins and historical development, on the contention that architecture should encompass painting and sculpture, as it had for primitive civilizations, and on the belief that architecture was a truly unitary discipline in which its constituent parts, the skills required for its realization, and the forms of knowledge necessary for its apprehension could be seamlessly integrated.

These intentions were being simultaneously disclosed in the architect’s design for the medal of the *Société centrale des architectes*, the first official corporation representing the profession and licensing architectural practice in France (**Figure 2**). The *Société*’s founding was a

response to specific challenges experienced by architects in the 1840s. Among these were problems arising from increased real-estate speculation, which acted through a system of patents and was seen to limit artistic freedom and to supplant the architect's traditional, unifying role among the arts. In addition to external pressures on the profession, internal conflict had broken out into an all-out war between the rigid classicism advocated by the French Academy and the fledgling Gothic revival, typified by such advocates as Jean-Baptiste Lassus and Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc. The discord and increasingly partisan uses of historical form in mid-century were satirized by Constant-Dufeux's student Victor Ruprich-Robert in the pages of the *Revue générale de l'architecture et des travaux publics* (Figure 3).

Constant-Dufeux responded to the fragmented nature of the architectural landscape by advocating for an inclusive approach to history that would come to characterize architectural eclecticism in the mid-19th century. Here, the architect's understanding of eclecticism was markedly different from the way the term would be understood by the European modernists of the early 20th century. That latter definition, which is largely our own today, was primarily the product of a campaign waged by neo-Gothic

architects who challenged what Lassus described as the 'monstrous hybrids' ('accouplements monstrueux') erected by eclectic architects (1846: 11). By contrast, Constant-Dufeux's eclecticism followed the sense imparted to it by Romantic philosopher Victor Cousin in a series of lectures in 1818, first published in 1836 under the title *Du vrai, du beau et du bien* (see Cousin 1854). If Cousin had revived the late Greek term to argue that diverse and often competing philosophical perspectives in history could be captured within a single, unified system of thought, the architect reconfigured it to assert that beneath the visible discord of historical styles lay important unities and concordances with a common historical source.

The design of the medal reflects Cousin's interpretation of eclecticism. Crowded within the area circumscribed by the two-inch medal is a proliferation of emblems and symbolic figures that evoke the theme of variety within unity. Emerging from a singular source, the muse's mind, are representations of three different historical 'types', the Greek temple, the Latin Basilica, and the Gothic Cathedral. Personifications of the three arts, architecture, sculpture, and painting, are grouped together in the muse's right hand so as to convey the unity of art forms. The scene is encircled by vigorous branches that bear flora, all implausibly emerging from the same source, the one on the right yielding bunches of different fruits (berries, an apple, a plum, and a cluster of grapes), and the plant on the left producing an assortment of flowers. Here again, the dissimilar is portrayed as sharing a common source, a unique point of origin.

The theme of unity is reiterated with the inclusion of a trowel beneath the bench, which the architect described as signifying the 'cimentation' or 'aggregation' of dissimilar parts (Féraud 1872: 251). At the bottom of the medal, Constant-Dufeux reworked the title of Cousin's lecture series into one more appropriate to the architectural profession: *Le Beau, Le Vrai, L'Utile*. The tripartite structure here was not accidental, for it suggests the same consubstantiality of distinct qualities in Christian doctrine. Each element is distinct, but each element is also all of the others.

The ideas minted into the medal of the Société centrale des architectes were equally vital to the design of the tomb of Dumont d'Urville. The commission to design the tomb of the French explorer was awarded to Constant-Dufeux as the result of his participation in a series of



Figure 2: S.-C. Constant-Dufeux, obverse face of the medal of the Société centrale des architectes, (c. 1843–1849) (Constant-Dufeux 1849: pl. 17).

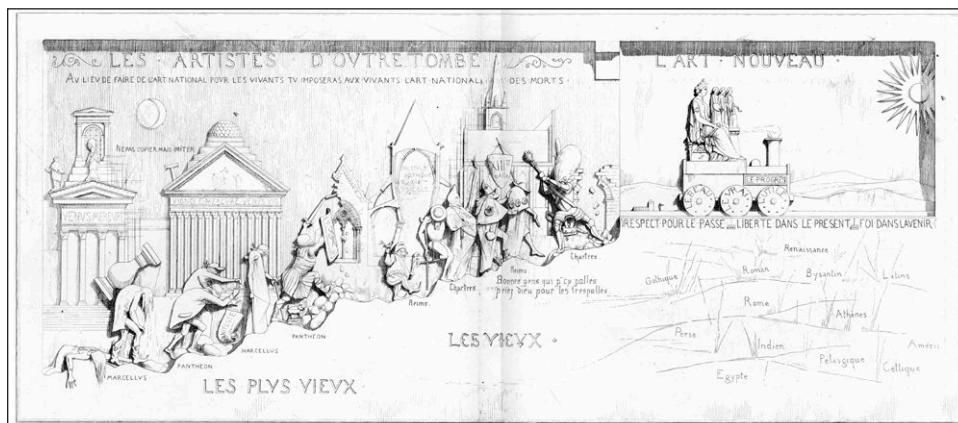


Figure 3: Victor Ruprich-Robert, 'Respect pour le passé, liberté dans le présent, foi dans l'avenir' (Constant-Dufeux 1849: pl. 8).

unfortunate events. On May 8, 1842, the architect and an old friend, Pierre-Joseph Garrez, a former fellow *pensionnaire* in Rome, were returning from Versailles on the late afternoon train to Paris after attending festivities celebrating Louis-Philippe's birthday at the gardens of the palace. Midway to Paris, on the outskirts of the town of Meudon, an iron component in the first of the two locomotives experienced what would later be known as metal fatigue, precipitating the train and its 17 carriages into a collision of monumental proportions ('Catastrophe du chemin' 1842) (Figure 4). Constant-Dufeux and his colleague survived the accident without injury, and reportedly, after the initial shock, helped rescue those trapped in carriages engulfed in flames. Among the 59 dead was the train's most renowned passenger, the maritime officer and explorer Jules Dumont d'Urville. Seated in one of the first-class carriages at the head of the train, Dumont d'Urville, along with his wife and son, were burned beyond recognition. Phrenological casts that had recently been made of the explorer's skull were used to identify the corpse (Rochette 2003).

D'Urville was indisputably a hero in France at the time of his death. His achievements included the acquisition of the statue of Venus de Milo on behalf of the nation, the recovery of the remains of the famed 18th-century explorer Le Comte de Lapérouse in the South Pacific (coincidentally, the discovery occurred while traveling on *l'Astrolabe*, a ship named after Lapérouse's own lost vessel), the discovery of countless botanical, faunal, and entomological species, and finally, the discovery of the South Magnetic Pole in late January 1840. D'Urville's biographers remarked on the unfortunate irony that, having circumnavigated the globe three times in antiquated wooden ships, the explorer would perish in what was the most advanced technology of transport to date (Bertelot 1843).

### Unity of the Arts

Much of what we know of the reception of the tomb of Dumont d'Urville comes from the solemn ceremonies that accompanied its inauguration in the *cimetière du Sud*



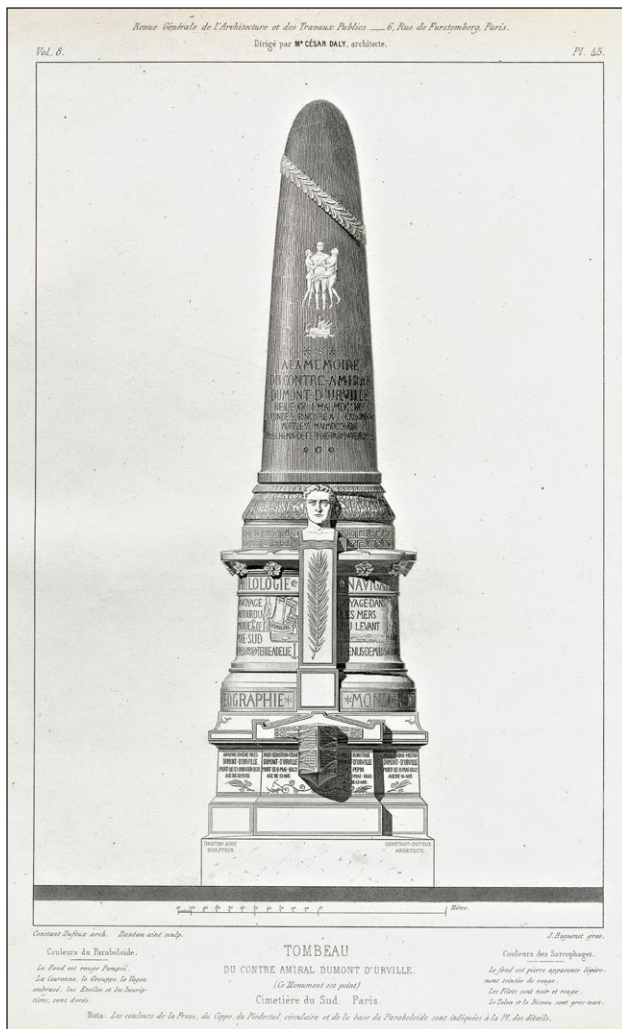
**Figure 4:** A. Provost, *Évènement du 8 Mai 1842 chemin de fer de Versailles Rive gauche*, undated. Collection musée du Domaine départemental de Sceaux. Photograph by Pascal Lemaître.

on November 1, 1844. A large crowd of government officials, dignitaries, members of the Société de géographie, artists, architects, and local inhabitants stood around the monument. It was enveloped in a long white shroud and surrounded by golden lances strung up with garlands of laurel and yellow everlastings. The unveiling must have provoked some surprise, for the polychromy of the monument was more vivid than the pageantry that accompanied it, especially given the gray mid-autumn drizzle of the day. Saturated greens, pinks, and ochers colored the base, with details tinted in dozens of colors, specified with precision by the architect. The bust of Dumont d'Urville, by the sculptor Antoine Laurent Dantan, alone incorporated six different colors; even the explorer's chest hairs were picked out in brown and gold.<sup>4</sup> Towering above the crowd, the conical protuberance capping the monument was painted in deep, Roman red, 'like a triumphal robe', Constant-Dufeux remarked in his speech at the inauguration (which was published five years later) (1849: 217) (Figure 5).

The polychromy of the monument was truly unprecedented in France of the 1840s. Richly painted murals were incorporated into the symbolic programs of several buildings (Louis-Hippolyte Lebas' church of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette being the most significant), but as Daly



**Figure 5:** Léon Leymonnerye, watercolor of the tomb for Dumont d'Urville, undated. Cabinet des estampes du Musée Carnavalet © The Image Works.



**Figure 6:** S.-C. Constant-Dufeux, 'Tombeau du Contre Amiral Dumont d'Urville' (Constant-Dufeux 1849: pl. 45).

remarked, neither the durability of such painting nor the public reactions to its use had been tested in the case of the exterior of monuments (1849: 438). Moreover, none had dared to apply paint so unreservedly as Constant-Dufeux, nor to apply it directly to figurative sculpture, as was the case with Dantan's bust of the explorer. These new artistic forays made the tomb to Dumont d'Urville legendary for succeeding generations, and in response to its fragility in the face of intemperate weather, it was repainted several times over the century (Lucas 1891).

The admirers of the tomb understood its polychromy as an assault on neoclassical ideals. Indeed, the polychromy was a direct transgression of the opinion of the former *secrétaire-perpétuel* of the French Academy, Antoine-Chrysosthème Quatremère de Quincy, on the separation of artistic media. In his *Essai sur la nature, le but et les moyens de l'imitation dans les beaux-arts* of 1823, the historian and archeologist had railed against the new tendency among Romantic artists toward what he termed the 'mixture' of art forms. Informed by the sensationalist theories of the French and English Enlightenment, Quatremère de Quincy held that art was composed in a series of steps, and relied both in its making and in its reception on a succession and accumulation of impressions that needed

to be kept separate and distinct. Quatremère de Quincy contrasted the neoclassical 'reunion' of art forms to the Romantic 'mixture' of distinct media. 'In the reunion of art forms, each art remains itself, and its share of the overall work is clear', he explained. 'In the mixture', he continued, 'each art form is neutralized and its share in the whole is degraded' (1823: 59). He criticized Romantic poets for their use of vivid scenes that appealed to the sense of sight (thereby using the medium of the painter) and denounced them for literary details that adhered too closely to the laws of the external world.

As with so many of the architect's concerns, Constant-Dufeux's interest in polychromy was derived from his time as a *pensionnaire* at the Villa Médici in the early 1830s. He was certainly not alone in documenting the remnants of applied color while in Italy; Jacques Ignace Hittorff and Désiré Raoul-Rochette were early pioneers, as were Louis Duc and Labrousse. By the late 1820s, Hittorff had begun to reconfigure the collected scientific research and archeological evidence into more salient arguments regarding the use of polychromy in ancient architecture. These observations were published some years later, in 1851, in *Restitution du temple d'Empédocle à Sélinonte, ou l'architecture polychrome chez les Grecs*. Hittorff claimed to discover in the ancient use of color what he termed 'a system of coloration' (1851: 43). He argued that polychromy had remained a universal practice from ancient Egypt to the Gothic period and that, more so than the orders, it was essential to the overall character of the building. Among Hittorff's most important justifications for the use of polychromy in architecture was that, in conjunction with sculpture and architecture, it helped achieve the ancient goal of an 'alliance of the three art forms' (see Van Zanten (1977) and Middleton (1982) for more on the topic).

The tomb of Dumont d'Urville could not have been a more glaring example of the 'mixture' of art forms that neoclassicists had decried. Many remarked on its peculiar singularity, noting especially the uncanny quality of the explorer's painted bust, which, according to Mérimée (1844), appeared so lifelike that it resembled a wax figure. The combination of figuration with the bright polychromy of its surface seemed to give the monument a quality of being between two worlds at once, the material world of modern Paris and the ancient world, when a freshly painted tomb might not have been uncommon.

The polychromy was but one manner by which the architect articulated the expression of the tomb. Beyond reuniting the the three arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture, the tomb employed text, lots of it, in varying sizes and typographic styles (Figures 6 and 7). Two bands across the top and bottom of the cylindrical midsection listed in large, bold letters the branches of knowledge to which the explorer had contributed, and the name of the institution that had funded the building of the tomb, the Société de géographie. In addition, Constant-Dufeux titled the explorer's four journeys depicted on the tomb, and enumerated with short phrases Dumont d'Urville's multiple discoveries. Finally, the architect labeled the many memorable objects and places that explained the visual

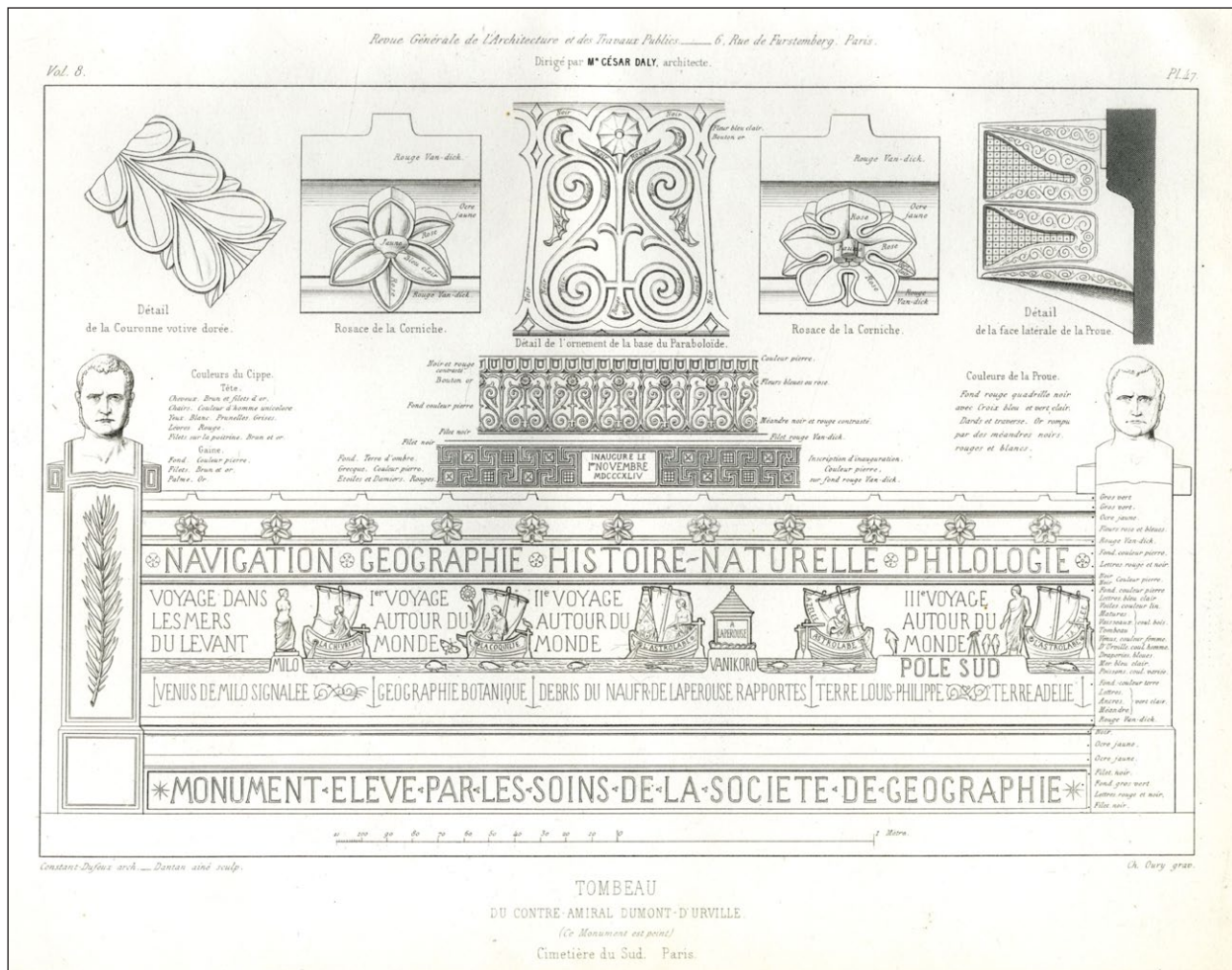


Figure 7: S.-C. Constant-Dufaux, 'Tombeau du Contre Amiral Dumont d'Urville' (Constant-Dufaux 1849: pl. 47).

sequence with simple words: 'Milo', 'Vanikoro', 'Pole sud', and 'l'Astrolabe'.

The combination of words and symbolic figures produced a dizzying display. The result recalled the busy wall-scape of the Latin Quarter in mid-century, with newspapers, graffiti, and pasted placards competing for the attention of passersby. Indeed, the overladen monument bore a resemblance to the newly installed *colonnes Rambuteau*, advertising columns that had begun to dot Parisian streets in the early 1840s, and antecedents to the *colonnes Morris* that were installed throughout Paris beginning in 1868. The tomb reflected the vibrant print culture of the epoch, and exemplified the search among artists and thinkers for an instantaneous and universal mode of communication in writing and printing. Borrowing from the techniques of the comic strip artist, Constant-Dufaux aimed to create what he termed a 'hieroglyphic' language, one which sought to bring image and text into a single stream of communication.

The resulting jumble of text and image was criticized by allies and adversaries alike. The architect Léonce Reynaud, who otherwise lauded the remarkable 'severity' of the monument, denounced its excessive 'multiplicity of images and symbols' and the unrestrained addition of markings (1863: 350). André-Hippolyte Delaunay, who just weeks later would embark on a campaign to torpedo Constant-Dufaux's application for a chair at the *École des*

beaux-arts, wrote a scathing review of the monument in the *Journal de l'artiste*, comparing the tomb to the tactless signs at a busy market: 'Mister Constant-Dufaux', Delaunay railed, 'seems to have confounded the idea of a funerary monument with that of charlatan's signboard' (1844: 388).

What is clear is that redundancies abounded in the tomb. Painting, sculpture, bas relief, and text reiterated the tomb's main message – the celebration of the explorer's achievements – with each medium competing for the viewer's attention. Romantics envisioned an alliance of the three arts, now amplified by the presence of text, as producing what Hittorff described as the 'simultaneous bombardment of the senses' generating 'an effect akin to the sublime' (1851: 13). The multiplicity of expressive means gave rise to a visual and sensorial inundation which, Leroux and other Romantic philosophers had argued, encouraged the manifestation of correspondences between the distinct artistic media and the senses. The collusion of the various art forms was intended to confound the senses, and allowed the synesthetic overlap of distinct artistic media, producing in turn a kind of pre-reflective or pre-conscious sense of unity, one which focused and intensified perception and experience. The tomb thus evoked an originary historical moment before the separation of the arts into distinct disciplines, while also pointing forward to the eventual

reconciliation of human enterprise in the newly modernized world.

### Civilizational Unity

Beyond the polychromy of the monument, Constant-Dufeux challenged neoclassical doctrine at a more fundamental level by proposing a wholly different account of the origins of civilization. More than any other issue, this one revealed the depths of the conflict between academically orthodox thinkers and the new Romantic generation of architects. In short, the dominant neoclassical view, which was advanced by, among others, Quatremère de Quincy, posited different geographic points of origin for separate civilizations. Quatremère de Quincy laid out these ideas for French audiences in *De l'architecture Égyptienne, considérée dans son origine, ses principes et son goût, et comparée sous les mêmes rapports à l'architecture Grecque*, a public essay written in 1785 on the occasion of a competition hosted by the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres and published in 1803. The essay rested on the essential premise that Egyptian civilization was genealogically different from that of the Greeks, and shared no significant historical or material connection. This view of the arts was very much a product of the Enlightenment belief in reason as a universal basis underlying the motivations of civilizations, wherever they may be located. Marc-Antoine Laugier's renowned allegory of the primitive hut demonstrated this principle in its simplest form. Civilizations could be historically distinct while connected by this one basic human attribute.

By contrast, the worldview of the younger generation of Romantic architects owed much to Jean-Nicolas Huyot's account of origins, which repudiated the neoclassical narrative. Huyot's courses at the École des beaux-arts on the history of architecture were vital in cultivating the archeological interests of Romantic architects in the 1820s. They brought new focus to theories developed by an earlier generation of architects, antiquarians, and archeologists investigating the primitive origins of architectonic form and challenging the doctrine of imitation that lay at the heart of the academic system in France. The course notes indicate that Huyot's prime interest lay in retracing Western civilization back to its farthest roots in the Orient. 'An impenetrable veil seems to shroud the infancy of the human race', he stated in the opening remarks (1822–1840, vol. 1: 7). Only with patient and persistent study could one hope to glimpse the 'faint light of truth' of that far-removed past. Huyot evoked the catastrophist theories of Georges Cuvier, believing that contemporary civilization emerged from a singular place in the desert of the Orient, which Huyot called 'the primitive homeland of humankind'. Despite the dispersal and migration of these original peoples and their subsequent adaptation to new geographies and environments, he argued that one could still see traces of the common origin in the language, institutions and, most of all, in the architecture of modern peoples across the globe.

The differences between the civilizations that emerged after the great dispersal were equally important for Huyot, whose approach and methods regarding history can be seen as challenging the ruling assumptions at the École des

beaux-arts. In spite of the key role played by Quatremère de Quincy in securing Huyot the professorship at the École, Huyot took aim at the historian's well-known account of the origins of architecture. Architecture, he explained, was not the result of a universal human instinct for shelter, for otherwise it would be invariable, like the swallow's nest or the beaver's hut (1822–1840, vol. 1: 19). Rather, architecture had an 'obligation' to adapt to the site, to the climate and available materials, and to be shaped by the laws, the religion, and the institutions of a given civilization. Huyot's account was guided by the historical outlook sweeping through the disciplines in the early 19th century, and his narrative privileged cultural migration over innate human faculties and instincts. 'One could write as many histories of architecture', Huyot maintained, 'as there were of these original buildings whose distinct expressions [caractères] were formed by the different landscapes and climates' (1822–1840, vol. 1: 35). The emphasis on architecture's adaptability to specific local conditions shaped the thinking of Constant-Dufeux's generation, most of whom had attended Huyot's course lectures at the École des beaux-arts. 'To be of one's time' ('Être de son temps') was the Romantics' great battle cry.

With the tomb of Dumont d'Urville, Constant-Dufeux clearly demonstrated that he subscribed to Huyot's position, and that he too believed that civilization had emerged from a single point of origin. For example, the architect affixed the naval ram of an ancient Greek ship directly onto the sarcophagus, painting it a bright medley of saturated blues, reds, and greens in order to wrest it from the background. The ram evoked the theme of civilizational exchange and the migratory expansion of ancient peoples while also summoning Dumont d'Urville's own voyages, which proved that global exchange was equally relevant in the modern world. Indeed, as the architect's inaugural speech made clear, Constant-Dufeux maintained that the long epoch of dispersal and conflict between peoples was coming to a close, and civilizational unity would again return. His prophetic tone had a decidedly Saint-Simonian coloring, as he advanced the idea that modern forms of communication and transport were bringing about a new era of peace and prosperity: 'Inevitable tragedies, as sorrowful as they are', the architect explained:

Cannot prevent us from admiring an invention which, by uniting men according to points of interest on the globe and by tapping into their fraternal sense of affection for one another, will one day fulfill the aim of the moral scriptures and effectuate the principles of humanity. (1849: 221)

Directly above the naval ram, and just above the eyelevel of viewers, Constant-Dufeux incorporated the bust of the maritime explorer perched upon a vertical pillar as though an ancient herm protruding from the face of the tomb. Ancient herms – associated with Hermes, the Greek god of boundaries and fertility – served as boundary markers, signposts, and milestones. Here, the simple pillar punctuated an otherwise continuous sequence of bas-reliefs which, in image, word, and color, detailed the life and achievements of the deceased explorer. Moving counter-

clockwise from the herm, the chronological sequence began with the explorer's journey to the Aegean Sea in 1820 aboard *La Chevrette*. Next in the sequence was the explorer's first trip around the globe, which was characterized by the discovery of a vast number of unknown species of flora and fauna and the discovery of the remains of Lapérouse's ship. The sequence concluded with the explorer's third trip around the globe, during which he set foot on the Antarctic continent and claimed for France a portion of the continent (which he named Terre Adélie, after his wife) that stretched from the newly discovered coast to the South Magnetic Pole (**Figure 8**).

The way in which one encountered and moved around the monument reinforced the idea of a signpost. Indeed, the tomb suggested a new ritual of circumambulation in order to read the important events of the deceased explorer's life that were vividly chronicled, in image and text, on its surface. The architect further dramatized the relationship between viewer and monument by orienting the tomb along the axis of the cemetery, while positioning the visual sequence of the explorer's life along the true cardinal points of the earth. In his inaugural speech for the tomb, the architect noted the divergence, pointing out that the location of the illustration for the explorer's expedition to the south pole aligned with the true magnetic south (1849: 213). Like a compass used for oceanic navigation, the tomb oriented the viewer, creating a palpable awareness of one's location with respect to that of the globe. It established a clever discrepancy between cemetery axis and cardinal orientation, between the local disposition of the monument and the global orientation of its illustrated sequence. As the visitor moves around the monument, visually and legibly reading its surface, the visitor reenacts, in motion and experience, the explorer's own famed circumnavigations of the earth.



**Figure 8:** S.-C. Constant-Dufeux, Tomb of Dumont d'Urville, Montparnasse Cemetery, Paris. Photograph by Ralph Ghoche.

### Raised Stones

The final element, topping the project, is undoubtedly the most distinct. For this part of the tomb Constant-Dufeux designed a bold and towering cone, returning to a form that had roused the curiosity of generations of antiquarians, archeologists, and architects alike: the raised stone. The attention to this enigmatic type of monument emerged in the 18th century in the works of the Comte de Caylus, Court de Gébelin and Baron d'Hancarville, and, some years later, Viel de Saint-Maux, the first architect to be interested in the phenomenon. According to much of the discussion about these artifacts, the raised stone was the first unified form of cultural expression and communication, usually understood to have had its original meaning associated with phallic cults. The 18th-century architect Jean-Louis Viel de Saint-Maux, for example, thought that these stones – and neither the tree, nor the human body – were the first columns and antecedents to buildings: raised stones were the first complete temples. As he described them, soon after their appearance raised stones began to be carved and covered with hieroglyphic markings and abstract signs, essentially transforming them into the first mediums for language and painting. It was through the building of these monuments, Viel de Saint-Maux argued, that primitive peoples first established themselves self-consciously and historically as civilizations; with these monuments, he explained, 'the ancients introduced themselves as in a book' (1787: 16).

These ideas eventually percolated into architectural pedagogy, first through Jean-Antoine Coussin, and some years later at the *École des beaux-arts* through Huyot (**Figure 9**). For Huyot, these stones belonged to a larger taxonomy of monuments that he named 'les monolithes' and which included the obelisk, Greek and Roman cippi, termes, herms, and stelae, as well as ancient raised stones from Brittany.

In his opening address at the inauguration of the tomb to Dumont d'Urville, Constant-Dufeux summarized much of the preceding thinking related to raised stones and monoliths. Conceding that the form he had employed to crown the tomb appeared 'a little out of the ordinary for us and for our time', he assured the crowd that its use was nearly ubiquitous in history. 'They are far from being new', he explained; in fact:

They were pervasive in all antiquity. Egypt had its pyramids and its obelisks; Greece its steles; Etruria and the Romans of the Republic and the Empire also had their conical tombs identical to this one; Sardinia its nurhags; all the way to our old Gaul, its numerous monuments, named menhirs, also employed the conical form which defies time. Witness the large raised stones, so numerous in Brittany, like those of Locmariaker, and like the menhir of the camp Dolent, still standing near Dol. (1849: 218)

Constant-Dufeux had observed many of these types of stones in Italy. Upon his arrival in Rome in 1830 to begin his Grand Prix sojourn, the country was teeming



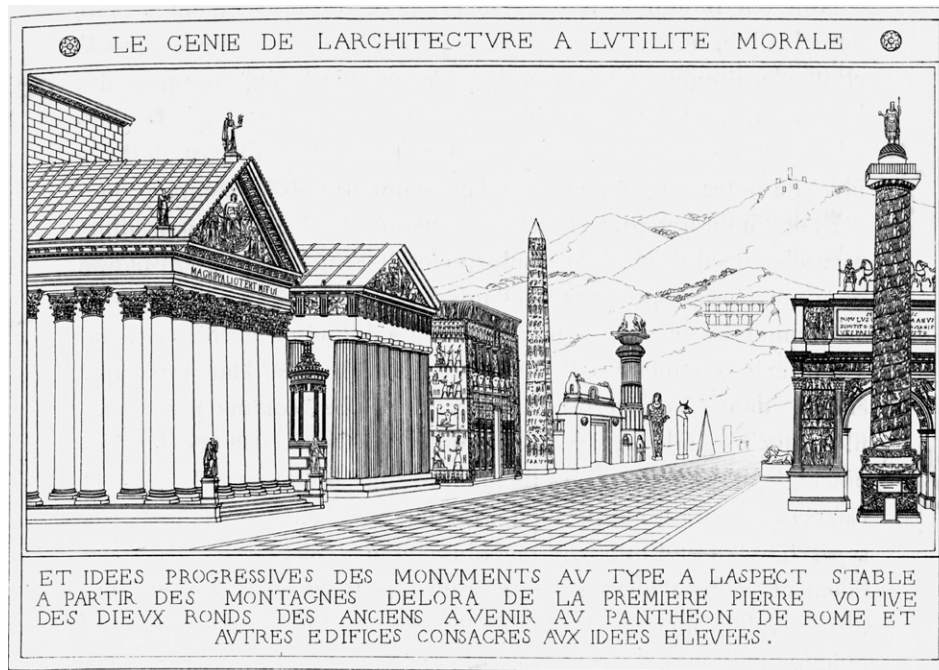


Figure 9: Jean-Antoine Coussin, 'Le génie de l'architecture à l'utilité morale' (Coussin 1822: pl. 3).

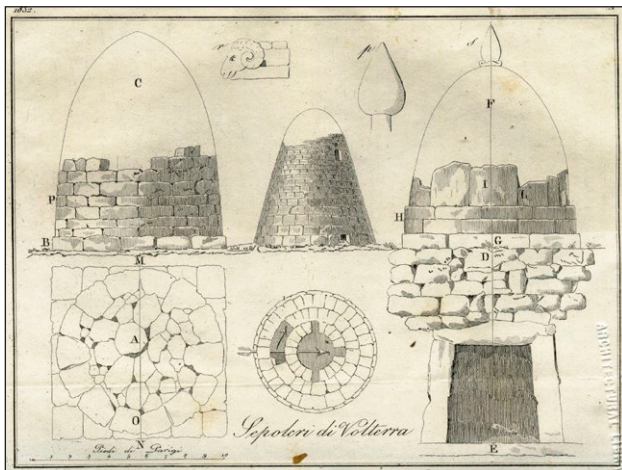


Figure 10: 'Sepolcri di Volterra,' illustration depicting Etruscan conical tumuli in Volterra, Italy (Inghirami 1832: pl. A).

with researchers interested in similar phenomena, many of them connected to the Institut de Correspondance Archéologique. Conical monuments were of prime interest to this group, for while they shared specific traits that associated them with more distant monoliths, they also were very particular to Etruscan civilization (Bressani 1999). The governing interpretation of these built forms was that they were the most elemental representations of the phenomenon of piling without the use of mortar, the general form of a bottom-heavy monument rising up to a point. As drawings of such tombs demonstrated, they were built out of a series of smaller stones, cut and assembled to create the conical outline (Figure 10). These forms, some members of the Institut suggested, had their origins in Pelasgian civilization, for they employed techniques similar to those used in the construction of the Pelasgian walls

and archways whose archeological remnants could still be found at the base of ancient cities and fortifications. If, using their dry, dressed stone, building techniques, the Pelasgians had produced the first arches, then the Etruscans inverted the form and constructional logic of the arch to create the solid conical form. In essence, these scholars and architects believed that the Etruscan conical tombs were important transitional monuments, bridging the ancient constructional knowledge of the East with the eventual development of the Roman arch in the West.

As Constant-Dufeux explained, the uppermost element of the tomb of Dumont d'Urville was meant to evoke a very distinct variety of the ancient monolithic type, the Etruscan conical tomb. In the design of the project, the architect seemed to echo much of the thinking on Etruscan funerary monuments advanced by the members of the Institut de Correspondance Archéologique. Nonetheless, there was a paradox in Constant-Dufeux's decision to employ one large stone rather than an aggregation of smaller stones for the culminating element of the structure. If he meant the stone to represent and embody the phenomena of piling ('Can one find a more stable form than the pyramid or the cone?' Constant-Dufeux asked rhetorically in his speech), why would he not also have had it built that way?

In the intervening years between the height of the Institut de Correspondance Archéologique's work in Rome in the early 1830s and the construction of the tomb of Dumont d'Urville, Charles Lenormant provided a compelling solution to the question. Lenormant's article was received as something of a breakthrough when it appeared in 1836. The archeologist proposed that the myth of Cybèle, the 'Magna Mater' ('Great Mother') of the ancient world, was the key unifying cult linking the seemingly unconnected tapestry ('une broderie légère et changeante') of local beliefs across Asia Minor, Greece,



**Figure 11:** Paul Delaroche, reproduction of the obverse face of the 'Médaille de Smyrne, tête couronné de tours crénelées' (Lenormant 1850: pl. III).



**Figure 12:** S.-C. Constant-Dufeux and Henri Labrouste, design of the 'jeton de presence' (Constant-Dufeux 1849: pl. 17).

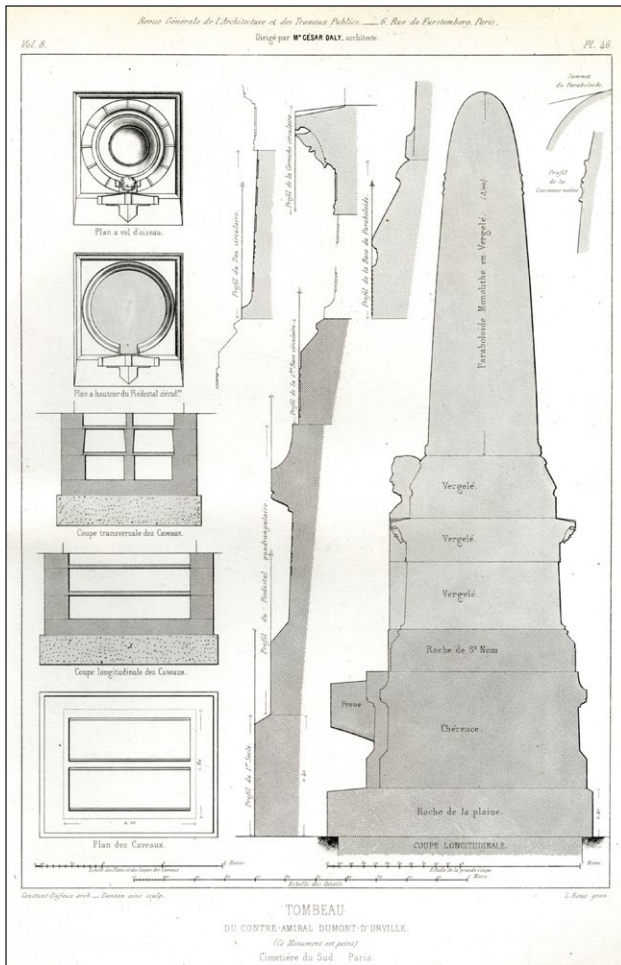
the Italian peninsula, and beyond, to ancient Gaul (1836: 215). The cult of Cybèle was so tightly connected to other ancient beliefs, Lenormant insisted, that it resembled 'Roman mortar bonded to stone', this bond being so unyielding that 'one would likely break the stone than separate and unbind the cement' (1836: 217). Lenormant drew attention to the conventional iconography of the deity which pictured the goddess's head surmounted by a crown in the form of the city (**Figure 11**). No doubt Constant-Dufeux had this motif in mind when composing the medal and coin (which was later refined by Labrouste) for the Société centrale des architectes; the muse of architecture at its center summoned the turreted goddess in such a way as to represent her as 'the mother of all industries and all of the arts' (Constant-Dufeux 1845) (**Figure 12**).

According to Lenormant, the ancient goddess was represented more abstractly by unadorned upright stones that exemplified momentary control and cohesion over a pantheistic conflict between the one and the many, unity with diversity. Lenormant's ideas confirmed Huyot's early suspicions that what linked the diverse lithic forms together was their monolithic composition. His interpretation stressed that there was symbolism in the use of monolithic stone beyond the particular form into which it was shaped. Following Lenormant, Constant-Dufeux exaggerated the monolithic quality of the cone. He specified that he had procured the largest single stone possible with the available sums for this third zone of the monument, explaining that great care had been taken 'to preserve its character of unity' by leaving the stone largely clear of ornament and painting it uniformly red (1849). If Constant-Dufeux had attempted to represent the imperative of unity through descriptive means elsewhere in the tomb, here he did so by drawing attention to the medium of stone, which constituted the tomb's singular composition. In other words, the very materiality of the tomb was folded into the larger symbolic portent of the work.

### Science and Sensation

While the profile of the tomb pointed back in time to originary lithic monuments, it also projected forward, to the modern, scientific, and eminently abstract world that had been conceived in the 17th and 18th centuries and that was becoming material fact in the 19th. In addition to the primitivist allusions evoked by the conical stone capping the tomb of Dumont d'Urville, Constant-Dufeux intended to conjure an entirely different sphere of reference, one that reflected the scientific and technological proficiency of the modern world. Indeed, for the shape of the cone the architect adopted the paraboloid, a form generated by the rotation of a parabola around its axis of symmetry (**Figure 13**). He described the thinking behind his decision: 'For the contour of the monolith we have adopted the parabola, this curve of such beauty which describes the arc of a projectile thrown in the air, and which appeared to us to be the curve which the eye follows with the most pleasure' (1849: 217). The choice was peculiar, for the parabola was not the optimal form to capture the invisible forces bearing down on the monument from its own weight. In fact, the conical and pyramidal form were closer approximations to the correct geometry. Furthermore, Constant-Dufeux's explanation for its use cited the form's source as that of a projectile thrown in the air, an explanation that seemingly had little relation to the constructive durability of the tomb. Finally, according to Huyot and Lenoir and others, the conical Etruscan tomb had prompted the development of the Roman arch. It could be assumed, therefore, that the solid form of the cone, and the profile it charted, also implied the negative space below an archway. But again, the parabola did not represent the scientifically optimal form of an arch. While paradox reigned in Constant-Dufeux's decision to employ the paraboloid, certain historical details shed some light on the architect's motivations.

As is well known, Galileo Galilei first discovered that the trajectory of projectiles followed a parabolic curve in the early 17th century, publishing his findings in 1638 in



**Figure 13:** S.-C. Constant-Dufeux, Tombeau du Contre Amiral Dumont d'Urville (Constant-Dufeux 1849: pl. 46).

*Dialogues of the Two New Sciences.* The Italian scientist, however, famously dithered on whether the parabola also produced the optimal form for an arch resisting the weight of vertical forces. The English polymath Robert Hooke discovered the definitive solution to this problem, revealing that a catenary, the shape assumed by a hanging chain with a curve very similar to that of the parabola, was the prime form for an arch of equal weight. Hooke would inform the architect Christopher Wren of his findings; the interior dome of St Paul's in London was designed in this way. The exact mathematical nature of the catenary was determined some years later by the Swiss Bernoulli brothers.

The discoveries quickly affected building practices in France. Jacques-Gabriel Soufflot, and after his death, Jean-Baptiste Rondelet, designed structural elements of the Panthéon using catenary arches after having experimented with a number of forms, including paraboloids and extended elliptical arches. In *Traité théorique et pratique de l'art de bâtir*, Rondelet assessed the structural effectiveness of various conical forms and concluded that, although unpleasant in appearance and requiring concealment, the catenary was the form best suited for spanning large areas. But the parabolic shape and the

trajectory of projectiles would continue to be important for architects despite the ascendancy of the catenary in structural design.

The question over which of the two forms, the catenary or the parabolic, was more advantageous for modern structural design re-emerged in the early 19th century with the development of suspension bridge technology. Claude-Louis Navier, who had employed the young Constant-Dufeux during his large public infrastructure projects in Paris in the mid-1820s, provided the definitive solution to the problem. Unlike stone arches, the arcs formed by the cables or chains in suspension bridges were weighted at periodic junctures along their run, and the resultant form proved to be parabolic. Navier's results were widely published, and they were the basis of the two-part article 'Théorie des ponts extensibles' featured in the first volume of César Daly's *Revue générale* in 1840. They fed the fascination with these curves and the belief that the parabola and its close cousins, the ellipse and the catenary, epitomized progress in building science. Daly, for example, claimed that these forms 'will play a capital role in the future evolution' of architecture. He argued that they were 'destined to symbolize ... an educated society, industrious and peace loving' (1869: 68). These progressive and utopian beliefs would give rise in the more radical architectural circles of the time (many connected to Constant-Dufeux) to the widespread use of parabolic curves.

In much the same way as the naval ram affixed to the front of the tomb highlighted both ancient civilizational exchange and the utopian dream of global speed and communication, the conical profile simultaneously evoked forms from the dawn of civilization and those from its very apogee. Merging the archaic with the scientific was not unusual for Constant-Dufeux and his generation, immersed as they were in the Romantic and utopian counter-cultures of the epoch. Indeed, the utopian aspirations of many of the prophets of the 19th century were largely based on the presumption that science was another way of returning to an originary form of wisdom. Science itself was understood as akin to a historical return, revealing truths that were sensed and intuited by primitive civilizations, truths that could finally, and triumphantly, be revealed with exactitude in the modern world.

An understated facet of the 19th-century architect's concern with scientific rigor is the extent to which it was folded back into a symbolic and idealist logic. The parabolic profile of the tomb of Dumont d'Urville was but one instance in which the rationalism and facticity of mathematical form were instilled with historical, aesthetic, and moral resonance. The tomb illustrated the architect's goal of achieving unity between the three central poles governing architecture, 'le beau, le vrai, l'utile'. One can interpret the monument through Victor Cousin's thought and writing, a key source for Constant-Dufeux. For Cousin, the artist's charge was to find the hidden geometries in nature and make them transparent, overt. 'The core [le fond] is somewhat veiled and obscured in nature', Cousin explained; 'art cleanses it, giving it forms that are more transparent' (1854: 177). The symbol for him was

a particular kind of disclosure by which correspondences amongst art, science, and spirit were made manifest. Daly reiterated much the same message in an article in 1845 titled 'La Science et l'industrie, sont-elles les ennemies de l'art?' Architecture needed to correspond 'to utility, to beauty and to truth, which are three aspects of universal unity', he reminded his readers. Daly explained that architecture was in essence mathematical and the architect's imaginative license 'is always and of necessity exercised in perfect accord with mathematics' (1845: 54). The parabolic profile of Constant-Dufeux's tomb was chosen precisely because of its mathematical exactitude, so that mathematical precision could be made manifest to the senses and experienced as a beautiful and pleasing form. The goal here was to give palpable, experiential, sensual form to scientific truth, or conversely, to bring *le vrai* into the realm of beauty and sensation.

### Conclusion

The themes explored in Constant-Dufeux's tomb of Dumont d'Urville had been explored earlier in poetry and painting, but in architecture they had never been provided such a blunt, and effective, rendering. Constant-Dufeux's monument was celebrated throughout the 19th century as the clearest declaration of the Romantic ideals challenging the neoclassical orthodoxies of the epoch. The architect achieved this by aligning all elements of the tomb toward a singular and unique goal, producing the effect of a total work of art. The tomb is totalizing, however, not only by unifying all artistic media, but because it also sought to consolidate the totality of the world, and to render that totality immediately palpable to all organs of human perception: to sensation and to the intellect.

The architect's preoccupation with unifying the otherwise diverse, and often divergent, elements of the discipline was an important facet of his Romantic identity. In France, philosophers interested in the artistic creation framed the issue around the question of the symbol. In place of the prevailing theories based on imitation, Pierre Leroux, for example, proposed an aesthetics based on the productive association of internal psychological states with external phenomena. The symbol, for Leroux, was a kind of link, an instantaneous coupling of distant sensations, ideas, and objects in the overall semantic constellation of the artist's vision and life. The artist creates a web of associations in which harmonious accordances can take place. For Cousin, the symbol was the point of intersection of the idea and its sensual form; it was less a thing than a moment, a unifying bond that mediated between intangible, invisible ideas and real-world objects and sensations. Everything in Cousin's universe was potentially symbolic and one's artistry resided in the capacity to 'correct' nature and bring out the unity of its design, thus liberating its potential for further symbolic correspondence.

These aims were at the center of Romantic thinking in the early 19th century. Creating its own gravitational field, the tomb attracted and ordered the disparate facets of architecture in an attempt to retrieve the lost

language of pure presence before the dispersal of civilization. The French writer Pierre Simon Ballanche, for example, sought the coincidence of words and things that he believed had existed in primitive poetry connected to the Orphic bard. To name something was to participate in its creation. In its own way, the tomb of Dumont d'Urville revealed a parallel fixation with locating an originary form of communication. The semantic constellation that it generated through the multiple redundancies and overlaps of forms of communication – word, image, color, form – produced what one might term an onomatopoeic monument, creating a highly charged experience conducive to the conflation and cohesion of the tomb's multiple aspects. As Mérimée noted soon after the tomb's completion, 'One sees in Constant-Dufeux ... a singular concern to align all of the elements towards the same goal' (1844: 3).

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The tomb has been briefly examined in the 20th century in the writings of Louis Hautecœur, *Histoire de l'architecture classique en France*, vol. 6 (Paris: Edition A. et J. Picard et Cie, 1955), 249–53; Philippe Sorel, 'Le monument funéraire de Dumont d'Urville (1790–1842)', *Les appels d'Orphée* 3 (1991), 15–18; Richard Etlin, 'Landscapes of Eternity: Funerary Architecture and the Cemetery, 1793–1881', *Oppositions* 8 (1977), 25–28; Antoinette le Normand-Romain, 'Tombeaux d'artistes', *Revue de l'art* 74 (1986), 55–63; David Van Zanten, *Designing Paris: The Architecture of Duban, Labrousse, Duc, and Vaudoyer*, 208–210.
- <sup>2</sup> All translations from French in this article are my own.
- <sup>3</sup> The work of French Romantic architects has been explored in a number of important studies beginning with Neil Levine's groundbreaking dissertation on Henri Labrousse ('Architectural Reasoning in the Age of Positivism: The Neo-Grec Idea of Henri Labrousse's Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève') completed in 1975. The book-length studies by David Van Zanten (*Designing Paris*, 1987, and *Building Paris*, 1994) and Barry Bergdoll (*Léon Vaudoyer: Historicism in the Age of Industry*, 1994) have made noteworthy contributions to the question of what constituted the Romantic approach to architecture in the first half of the 19th century. This essay follows on these lines of inquiry while also aiming to take on the issue of Romanticism more directly. Here, I take up some of the paths first established by Martin Bressani in the article 'Projet de Labrousse pour le tombeau de l'empereur Napoléon. Essai d'interprétation symbolique de l'architecture romantique' of 1999 and look at the question of Romanticism and architecture from the perspective of Romantic archeology and philosophical aesthetics.
- <sup>4</sup> The decision to paint the bust by Antoine Laurent Dantan (known as Dantan aîné) was made by Constant-Dufeux. On the day of the inauguration of the monument, Delaunay reported, 'The bust of Dumont d'Urville has been so disfigured by the layers

of various colors that Dantan ainé, its author, could scarcely recognize it at the inauguration' (1844: 388).

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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