

Significances and image of dome in the controversy about the restoration of the Parisian Panthéon between eighteenth and nineteenth century

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Abstract The debate occurred between the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth century, with regard to the *désordres* diagnosis of the dome of the Parisian Church of Sainte-Geneviève and the choice of its strengthening and restoration, reveals us a very interesting outline of the relationships among scientific knowledge; all that in a delicate and significant period for Architecture and Conservation history. However, the controversy gives us the possibility to point out a meaningful survey of the “dome” as architectonic element: we can mark how it assimilates significances and, at the same time, generates others which are so essential to be considered by the conservation discipline.

The very vicissitudes of the various plans worked out by Jacques-Germain Soufflot, show the very complex factors that are inherent in a dome: technical ability, constructive technique and materials, but also and especially, architectonic language which is a real expression of a shape. This shape, on the one hand, becomes “reception” of a culminating point of an architecture – such as the intersection of the nave and the transept – and, on the other hand and simultaneously, turns into an urban profile, very skyline of that Parisian *couronne monumentale* planned and carried out by the urban and “monumental” outlook of the late 18th century France. The contribution aims, through a selection of various discordant opinions about the *restauration du dome du Panthéon français*, to underline the crucial points of the dome restoration; it must necessarily face up the material, technical, constructional, but also, symbolic, environmental and urban aspects which define the very urban and historical landscape.

All that highlights, as we can notice, a strong analogy with the existing and current issue in connection with dome conservation.

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