



The Meudon château

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astrophysique**

The château of Meudon has known a chequered history : originally a pleasure grotto, it became a château-appartement for royal courtiers, then an artillery battery with military quarters, and was finally transformed into an astronomical observatory with a monumental refracting telescope.

The existing château of Meudon is called the « château Neuf » (the « new château ») in contrast to the « château Vieux » (the « old château ») which was seriously damaged by fire in 1795 and was finally demolished in 1806.

The Château Neuf has had an eventful history. It was born as a small summer palace, designed by Le Primatice (1504-1570), an artist from Bologna : a pavilion overlooked a richly decorated artificial grotto, embellished with numerous fountains.



The grotto of the Meudon château, engraving by Israël Silvestre, 1683.

When Meudon became the Grand Dauphin's royal residence in 1695, the grotto was replaced by a new château, and so the number of apartments increased. Jules Hardouin-Mansart (1646-1708) finished there one of his last creations.

From the pleasure grotto to the château Neuf

After the château Vieux, which had been taken over by the committee of public safety (the comité de Salut Public) for military uses, was destroyed following some unfortunate artillery experiments, the château Neuf became the residence of the King of Rome.

The Meudon château

It was still an imperial residence under Napoléon III on the eve of the 1870 war.

With the encirclement of Paris and the retreat of the National Guard from Meudon to the Capital, the second bavarian corps established its quarters on the Meudon hills. The terrace, with its unequalled view, was transformed into a fortified battery. The park was changed radically and the trees were cut down. The inhabitants of Meudon were expelled and sent to Versailles.

Artillery battles

The artillery battles between the Bavarians and the Issy and Vanves fortresses did not affect the château. However, two days after the armistice, a fire ignited there. The fire lasted for three whole days. Finally, the gunners of the Commune launched a few projectiles towards the Château.

With the return of peace, and the fact that the walls of the château had survived relatively well, various projects for its restoration were proposed, but came to nothing. The park became the headquarters of the 3rd infantry division of the 2nd corps ; the ruins were pillaged and completely abandoned.



The Meudon Observatory, showing the ruined château Héliog Dujardin. *Annales de l'Observatoire d'astronomie physique de Paris sis Parc de Meudon*, 1896, Pl. III.

What remained of the château Neuf was saved by the addition of an enormous dome housing a monumental astronomical refractor. Starting in 1876, Jules Janssen had in effect already established his astrophysical observatory in a part of the park. The reconstruction of the building was entrusted to the architect Constant Moyeux. The dome itself was designed by Janssen and the Cail workshops. The work itself lasted ten years, from 1880 to 1890. The first observation with the large refractor took place on the 15th of December 1893.



Château and large dome 2007 - Frédéric Arenou 2007 - *Frédéric Arenou*