

Market Halls : From feudal emblem to touristic symbol



Remarkable market halls in the Park

Market halls and Barns

The visitor who passes through the villages in the Forêt d'Orient Regional Nature Park will be surprised by the majestic presence of four sumptuous market halls.

Coming from Troyes the first to be seen is in Piney. It stands proudly in the centre of the village. The market hall in Lesmont serves as a gate towards the interior of the village and the nearby church .

Its sister in Brienne shows the past grandeur of the town but also by its surroundings the martyrdom of the last war.

Dienville, has the only stone market hall. Rebuilt under the reign of Napoleon III with money paid for war damage; the historic and sumptuous wooden market hall had disappeared in 1814, this late construction gives the town the look of a town in the south of France.

Alas, the one in Vendevre has disappeared.

These market halls, the site of weekly markets during the Ancien Regime were also the sites for annual fairs that were never successful.

The special economic evolution of southern Champagne meant that labourers preferred to go to Troyes rather than use the small local market. On the other hand, these market halls are a symbol of the glory and authority of the local nobility. The market hall in Piney shows this. Rather than build a chateau, the duke created a ducal square like in Charleville or in Richelieu, he surrounded it with his own house, the seat of his administration and the houses of his officers (the fire of 1926 destroyed a large part of it). In the centre of the square, stands the market hall that bows towards the duke's former house, as if it was still paying him respect.

Rural Cathedrales

Symbols of prosperity and trade these rural cathedrales are above all symbols of power, that of the duke of Piney peer of France, the count of Lesmont, the count of Brienne, the baron of Dienville, the Marquis of Vendevre,. In effect, all titled lands and these alone possessed a market hall, because the right to hold a fair and to receive taxes on goods could only be granted by the King. Only nobles of the first rank obtained this privilege. Two different examples derive slightly from this model for historic reasons: Le Villeneuve - Au - Chêne and Dienville. La Villeneuve - Au - Chêne, could have had its own, its Lord Jean IX of Mesgrigny, had become a state councillor and the king had granted him the right to hold fairs in 1631, three years before this the lord's domain was raised to a barony. However, in 1638, the new baron of Le

Villeneuve purchased the neighbouring barony of Vendevre and its market hall. He had now no more need to construct a new one. Nor his son, who became first President of the parliament of Provence, and obtained from the king the right to change the two baronies into a marquisate, the two villages were one until the Revolution. On the other hand, the baron of Arzillières in the Marne, Lord of Dienville, couldn't get the right to change his lord's domain into titled lands, the powerful count of Brienne his neighbour guarded legal powers in Dienville. The baron thus preferred to get from the King the right to construct a Covered market in this village.

Five market hall in Forêt d'Orient

Four market halls border the Forêt d'Orient, five if one includes the one that has disappeared in Vendevre. They are the sisters of it. Only the presence of the rich oaks forests and the considerable revenues that they gave allowed the creation in such a confined space of so many titled lands. The absence of a market hall in the south of the forest might surprise one. The lords of this part were monks, and their abbots who were mitred with the rank of important lords, could have built them. But the Cistercians of Larivour faithful to their rule wanted to remain in the "desert" so their symbolic market halls are the sumptuous granges of their once isolated farms which are now however situated on the route around the Lake. As for the Benedictine monks of Montieramey, the richest, they had the distinguished privilege of being considered a closed town with the right to hold fairs from the C15th, which cost them in return the displeasure of their neighbours and complete destruction. The cost of reconstructing their abbey that was only finished on the eve of the Revolution did not give them the time to rebuild a new market hall. On the other hand, the labourers enriched by the excellent economic conditions of the C18th, constructed their own barn like a miniature market hall.