

# The devil AND THE BRIDGE

Situated at a crossroads, the Pont du Diable (Devil's Bridge) is one of the oldest Romanesque bridges in France. It was built as the result of an agreement between the abbots of Aniane and Gellone and was completed in 1031, in spite of a number of entanglements with the Devil...

## A PHASED CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

An archaeological study of the bridge's structure has provided useful information about the stages of its construction. The eleventh century bridge has been redesigned, repaired and strengthened on a number of occasions. In the 19th century, it was extended on the gorges side, which is exposed to floods, and the entire facade was renovated.

The bridge, which holds 'National Monument' status and is inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List\*, underwent a complete restoration in 2010-2011: the cladding was cleaned, the mortar was repaired, deteriorated stones were replaced and a cobbled street was restored.

\* under the designation 'Routes of Santiago de Compostela'

### The legend of the Pont du Diable

Hoist by his own petard

Jean de la Fontaine  
The Rat and oyster

Friends, passers-by, ...

If the Devil, that inveterate tempter, is often hidden in the detail, he can still be beaten at his own game, especially when he thinks he has the upper hand... Otherwise, this bridge might not even exist.

Legend has it that the monks worked tirelessly to build the bridge. But every morning, they found their building work demolished. Demoralised and despairing, they prayed to their Patron Saint, Saint-Guilhem. And so, one night, he hid himself close to the bridge. As he kept a look-out, he saw the Devil arrive and demolish the building work. Saint-Guilhem came out of his hiding place and said to the Devil:

- "Satan, what on earth are you doing? Why do you keep destroying my brothers' bridge?"
- "I haven't the slightest interest in anything the mongrels who serve you do."
- "Listen. Why don't we settle this matter in a sensible way?"
- "Fine. Give me three days and I'll build the strongest bridge you can imagine. In exchange, I'll take the soul of the first of the mongrels who serve you to cross the bridge."

"It's a deal", Guilhem calmly replied. "Let's meet back here in three days."

Three days and three nights later, Guilhem, the Devil, the monks from the two abbeys and the local villagers gathered close to the bridge. Proud of his achievement, the Devil demonstrated how strong it was - not even he could destroy it. He then claimed his due from Guilhem. Saint Guilhem, who had brought his dog with him, took a bone from his pocket and threw it across the bridge. Without further ado, the dog ran barking across the bridge.

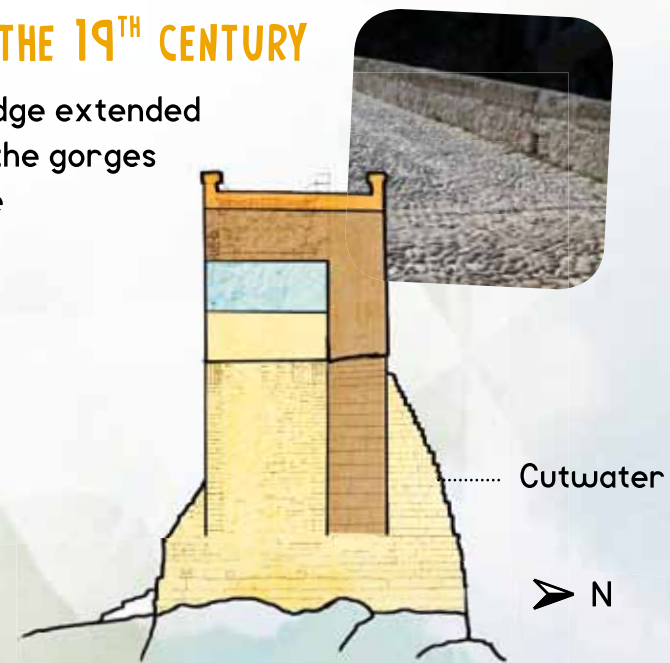
So Guilhem said to the Devil:

- "So, Satan, you see that I always honour my commitments. Three days ago, you demanded the soul of one of the mongrels who serve me. So, there you are. He is the most loyal of them all."
- "You have tricked me, Guilhem!" cried the Devil.

The Devil then became enraged. He tried unsuccessfully to demolish his bridge and finally threw himself into the River Hérault, hollowing out a black chasm beneath the bridge.

### IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Bridge extended on the gorges side



**Key**

- Previous era
- 11<sup>th</sup> century
- 17<sup>th</sup> century
- 19<sup>th</sup> century
- 20<sup>th</sup> century

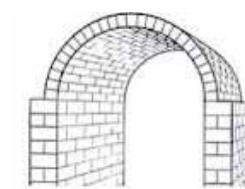
### A structure at the mercy of floods

It was perhaps the rumbling sounds which emanated from the 30-metre-deep black ravine and the violence of the elements during floods which led people in ancient times to believe that it was in some way the Devil's doing...



On the rocks alongside the bridge, you can see the high-water marks left by floods: they give us some idea of the power of the river, which can reach levels of over 10 m. The addition of a cutwater on the central pillar makes the bridge more robust and the holes at each side allow water to pass through in the event of a flood.

### DID YOU KNOW?



Romanesque art

Romanesque architecture, which developed in Europe between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, is characterised by its semi-circular openings and arches and its semi-cylindrical vaults known as barrel vaults.

