



Schwerpunktfachwoche Latein, 2023:

From the Ice Age to Roman Romandy

This past Fall's Latin trip in September was as varied as it was interesting, from my point of view; though, I believe the participating 3LaLe students found it instructive, beneficial and even somewhat fun for a mandatory school project and travel week.

Having each done their research on one aspect of roman life in ancient Aventicum, modern Avenches, they presented their findings before the entire class, Frau Eitel and myself on the first day. The topics included the roman baths, amphitheatre, theatre, fortifications, forum, temples, funerary monuments and inscriptions.

Their evident unease at public speaking was assuredly compounded and aggravated by a stranger's presence at the back of the room, i.e. me, but they all exhibited varying degrees of confidence that only comes with preparedness. They had done their proverbial and literal homework. Besides having to present, those listening were tasked with the evaluation and critique of the presenters' delivery, their language, choice of images, fluidity and fluency as well as their ability to answer questions. As candid as those reviews were, they were also respectful and insightful.

Following a well-deserved break, they were then subjugated to a ninety minute all encompassing short history of human prehistory from the beginning of the last ice age, 250 000 years ago, to Latène Culture in advance of our visit to the Laténium in

Neuchatel. In their evaluation of my presentation, they were somewhat lauding, though I



wonder if it was due to their thinking that a harsh criticism may have had a detrimental effect on any grade they might receive.

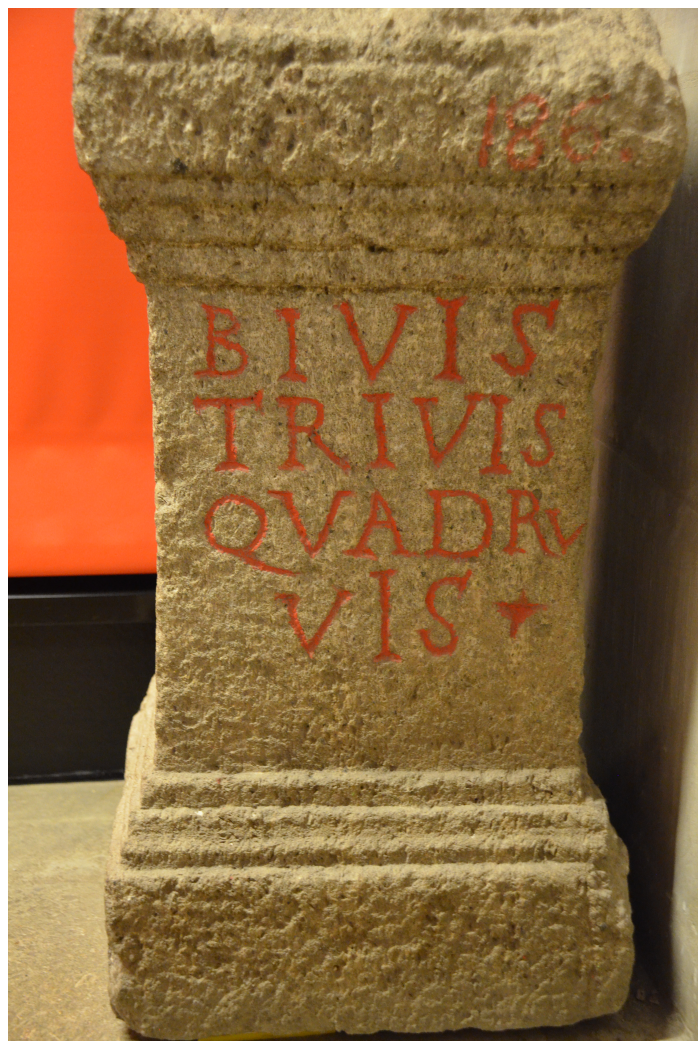


The second day we travelled West towards Avenches, making a stop in Neuchatel to visit the world class jewel of a museum dedicated to the emergence of humankind and civilization in our Alpine regions. The Laténium, built on the waterfront not far from the town's centre, is worth a visit if unknown and a revisit as anyone who knows it would say.

By evening we were in Avenches. The town developed on the site of Roman Aventicum, which itself was built upon the already existing Celtic town, and served as the Helvetic provincial capital under the romans. The still extant fortification walls that run a circuit round the surrounding landscape with the modern town at centre upon the hill, allows the visitor to observe how large the ancient city truly was. In antiquity, the city served as a trading hub for goods moving across the Alps, connecting the Mediterranean and Baltic Seas, and naturally, this ideally situated Celtic town became one of the wealthiest Roman cities North of Rome.

The Romans built an Amphitheatre into the hill for their gladiatorial games, a theatre with a view towards the river for staged productions and concerts, as well as public baths, temples, a port, roads and aqueducts. In short, anything and everything one might imagine a roman city to have, it had.

The museum, housed in the medieval tower built upon a section of the amphitheatre, exhibits its collection of Gallo-roman antiquities that provides the visitor a comprehensive view of the ancient city's wealth, culture and diversity that blended local Celtic traditions within, at the time, an ever-expanding romanising world.





Having spent two nights there, visiting the extant ruins and museum, it was time for the grand finale prior to our return East. A guide from the tourism office of Avenches, Luc Bourquin, himself an actor, writer and teacher of theatrics, first gave us a tour of the building, describing the form and function of a roman theatre and then set out to train and organise the students, by the end of our ninety-minute booking, in order to get them to perform, within the ruins of the ancient theatre, an ancient play written by the comic playwright, Plautus.

We had no idea how he would manage such a herculean labour, but the results astounded us all. He himself was in awe at the imaginativeness, inventiveness and willingness of those students, the 2023 3LaLe, who, by entertaining themselves, entertained their privileged audience, made up of Frau Eitel, M. Bourquin and myself, to laughter to the point of tears.

