

Charlotte Araya Moreland (History) – France, September 2018

In September 2018, I travelled to France to visit historical sites associated with my studies in Part I of the History Tripos. The seven-day trip included Paris, Orléans, and the village of Fontevraud.

Beginning in Paris, I spent the first evening visiting the Musée d'Orsay and exploring the neighbourhood around Invalides, which I had briefly studied when researching for an essay on Louis XIV. The next day began with a visit to Saint Chappelle, a magnificent reliquary built by Louis IX to house the Crown of Thorns and other treasures from the Crusades. I was slightly disappointed to find that the Crown was actually in Notre Dame, and that there were no relics to see at all in Saint Chappelle. I was also initially very impressed with how well the interior paintwork was preserved – only to find that it was completely renovated in the nineteenth century and wasn't authentic at all. After this, I went to the Musée de Cluny, which had plenty of genuine medieval artefacts, including an impressive collection of gold devotional figurines and the stunning Lady and the Unicorn tapestries. Later in the day, I visited the Medici fountain in the Luxembourg Gardens, and the Church of Saint Sulpice.

The next day I caught a train to Saumur, a town on the Loire, to wait for my connection to the village of Fontevraud. In Saumur, I explored the old town, including the town's chateau, and a Benedictine monastery. After the buzz of Paris, Saumur was a welcome opportunity for relaxation.

Having arrived in Fontevraud the previous evening, I spent Sunday visiting the Royal Abbey. I especially enjoyed seeing the effigies of Henry II, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Richard I and Isabella of Angoulême, and exploring the crypt. It was a pleasure to be able to spend a day in such a fantastically conserved medieval monastery which was of central importance to the Anglo-French history which I had studied for my degree.

On Monday, I travelled to Orléans, stopping over in Tours for an hour. During this time, I managed to visit the cathedral, which was very beautiful indeed, and had several sections of original medieval polychrome wall decoration.

Orléans cathedral was also magnificent, and I very much liked the Joan of Arc chapel. I visited the city's Museum of History of Archaeology and the House of Joan of Arc, which was very quaint. The Musée des Beaux Arts had some interesting pieces from seventeenth-century Dutch painters and was very enjoyable indeed.

The trip was extremely rewarding, and I am grateful to Pembroke College for providing the grant which made it possible.