PRESS PACK

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ROMAN THEATRE OF ORANGE
& Art and History Museum

A site developed and managed by

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CULTURESPACES,
REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE ROMAN THEATRE OF ORANGE

With more than 25 years of experience and nearly 3 millions visitors every year, Culturespaces is the leading private organisation managing French monuments and museums, and one of the leading European players in cultural tourism.

Culturespaces produces and manages, with an ethical and professional approach, monuments, museums and prestigious historic sites entrusted to it by public bodies and local authorities.

Are managed by Culturespaces:

- l’Atelier des Lumières, Paris (in 2018)
- Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris (since 1996)
- Musée Maillol, Paris (since 2016)
- Hôtel de Caumont-Centre d’Art, Aix-en-Provence (since 2015)
- Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild, Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat (since 1992)
- Carrières de Lumières aux Baux-de-Provence (since 2012)
- Château des Baux-de-Provence (since 1993)
- Roman Theatre and Art and History Museum of Orange (since 2002)
- Nîmes Amphitheatre, the Maison Carrée, the Tour Magne (since 2006)
- Cité de l’Automobile, Mulhouse (since 1999)

Aware that our heritage must be preserved for future generations, Culturespaces contributes every year to financing restoration programmes for the monuments and collections it has been entrusted to look after. More generally, Culturespaces is responsible for upgrading spaces and collections, welcoming the general public, managing staff and all services, organising cultural activities and temporary exhibitions and promoting sites at national and international level, with efficient and responsible management methods certified ISO 9001.

To ensure that visits are always a pleasure, the Culturespaces teams place quality of reception and cultural enrichment at the heart of all their services to visitors.
FROM OBLIVION TO RENEWAL, THE HISTORY OF THE ROMAN THEATRE

Origin of the City of Orange

Orange, *Arausio* in Latin, became part of Roman history in 103 BC. Conquered by the Romans a quarter of a century before, it had to defend itself against Germanic invaders, the Cimbre. This was the first time the name of Arausio was mentioned by ancient writers and it had to wait until 36 or 35 B.C. to be established as a Roman town, adjoining the hill of Saint Eutrope. Arausio was a colony founded by veterans of Caesar’s 2nd Gallic Legion, who had been assigned to build the city.

In accordance with the principles for establishing Roman towns, the construction of the city followed a regular, geometric plan and was organised around public monuments: the sanctuaries and the theatre. For the Roman authorities, the theatre was a means of spreading Roman culture amongst the colonised population as well as being a means of distracting them from any political concerns and avoiding any nationalist demands.

The construction of a Roman theatre

Although techniques enabling a theatre to be built on flat land had been mastered at the time of Imperial Rome, the building was constructed against the Saint Eutrope hill using a technique borrowed from the Greeks.

In fact, the Romans had two methods of constructing this type of building: they either constructed enormous walls to support the terraces or they used the natural lie of the land. This was what they decided to do at *Arausio* as the terraces, called the cavea, are directly supported by the Saint Eutrope hill, with infrastructures intended to even out any ground irregularities.

Seating, a reflection of the social order

A resident of *Arausio* could not just sit anywhere in the cavea. It was not a matter of money as the shows were free for everyone, but a question of social standing. In fact, seating in the various terraces was strictly allocated according to status, and movement around the corridors and galleries was controlled so that there was no intermingling. To sum up, the seating of spectators was a perfect reflection of the social hierarchy of the city.

In front of the stage, in the orchestra, people from civic and military life were seated on moveable seats. Behind them, separated from the orchestra by a stone parapet, the first terraces were reserved for members of the equestrian order, the horsemen. Higher up were the magistrates, members of priestly colleges, corporations of craftsmen and merchants, who played a very important role in the town. And the higher you went up the terraces, the lower the classes became, until you came to the pullati, people on the margins of society, seated at the top: beggars, prostitutes, but also outsiders, who did not benefit from the privilege of Roman citizenship. The covered gallery at the top of the terraces was reserved for these people.

An important detail: women had the right to attend shows at the Theatre, only public place where you could be alongside them.
Shows at the Roman Theatre of Orange in the Roman period

On show days, Arausio residents would go to the Theatre from morning onwards. The most frequent shows were undoubtedly mimes, pantomimes, poetry readings, verbal sparring matches, comedies or attelanes, and other entertainment, such as jugglers, conjurers or bear tamers.

Mimes were farces parodying both domestic life and politics or mythology. Performed by actors in costume but without masks, they alternated between dialogue, dancing and singing, accompanied on the tibia, a double-reeded wind instrument, and on the scabellum, a pair of small cymbals attached to articulated wooden sandals which the musician operated by moving his foot.

Pantomimes were entirely performed by non-speaking dancers who performed solo and wore masks with sealed mouths. By their movements and coded body language, they acted out tragic, epic or poetically inspired intrigues, which were sung by a choir accompanied by an orchestra made up of tibiae, scabella, zithers, lyres, syrinx, tambourines and cymbals.

The attelane was a farce, quite similar to the commedia dell’ arte, and was performed by four actors wearing conventional masks: Pappus, the old man, Doscenus, the hunchback, Bucco, always starving, and Maccus, the idiot. Their comical adventures were mainly inspired by daily life.

The theatrical repertoire had long since move away from the Greek tragedies. The public was only interested in shows. But these were evolving towards an increasingly spectacular genre, towards increasingly bloody scenes.

The decadence of the shows

Gradually the shows went into decline. There was no dialogue and there were violent and immoral scenes. The public attended murders or rapes of prisoners or of those condemned to death. The theatre became a place of perdition, cruelty, approaching the style of the Roman games. In 391, Christianity was proclaimed the official religion of the Empire. The Church fought against paganism and deviance and therefore ordered that the Theatre be closed.

The big sleep

In the 4th century, the Western Roman Empire collapsed. In 412, the Theatre was attacked by the Visigoths, who pillaged the town. They tore down the Emperor's statue, burnt the roof over the stage, destroyed the terraces to make them into sarcophagi and dismantled the marble and mosaics.

Middle Ages and the Renaissance

William of Gellone, a Count of Toulouse and cousin of Charlemagne, took over Orange from his relative and bravely fought against the Saracens. The little horn on the coat of arms of the city of Orange was chosen as a reminder of William of Gellone. The principality created in the 12th century passed to the lords of Baux, then to the Chalon family. In 1530, the last of this line left everything to his nephew, René de Chalon, prince of Nassau, whose descendants would remain princes of Orange until 1702. This family still reigns today in the Netherlands.
During this time, the Theatre fell into disrepair, although its superb wall remained standing. The barbarian invasions were followed by pillaging. Stone, marble and mosaics from the monument were reused in other private and public buildings. In the Middle Ages, the Theatre became a defensive post and a sentry box was built within its walls.

During the wars of religion, Orange is governed by protestant princes. To avoid being massacred, some of the population fled the town and took refuge behind the big theatre wall. Sometime later, peace was restored and the inhabitants found space limited within the city walls, so within the Theatre, against the stage wall and on the terraces, building work began on humble dwellings, which multiplied and ended up forming an actual district with a road across it. Prisons were accommodated within the thick walls and were used until the 19th century, particularly during the Revolution when detainees were held in abominable conditions.

Period of restoration

Abandoned for centuries, the Roman Theatre of Orange has been used for its original purpose since the 19th century, to the delight of the public. In 1825, Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870), who was then Director of Historic Monuments, started a vast programme of renovation.

In 1869 and partially restored, the Roman Theatre of Orange hosted the Roman festivals, organised by the writer and composer, Antony Réal (1821-1896). The performance included *Les Triomphateurs*, a cantata sung to the glory of the Romans, as well as *Joseph*, an opera by Étienne Méhul (1763-1817). It was an immediate success; the magical atmosphere of the Theatre and its amazing acoustics delighted the audience.

In 1902, the events regularly organised took the name of *Chorégies*. They now took place every year. A succession of celebrities took centre stage. In 1903, the great Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) acted in one of her finest roles in Racine’s “*Phèdre*”. Until 1969, performances of plays alternated with musical works, operas or symphonic pieces. After that, theatrical works were moved to Avignon and opera stayed at Orange.

Therefore, 1971 marked the start of the New Chorégies. The greatest opera singers have performed in front of the famous stage wall: Barbara Hendrix, Placido Domingo and more recently Roberto Alagna and Angela Gheorghiu. Sumptuous productions of the great works, such as *La Tosca* by Puccini, *Aïda* by Verdi and *Carmen* by Bizet, are performed each year to the delight of audiences from across the world.

In 2002, the District of Orange decided to call on Culturespaces to develop and manage the Roman Theatre.

The roof that currently shelters the scene was installed in 2006; a huge glass canopy over 1,000 m² in area, 32 meters high.
One cannot help but wonder at this wall, which is so grand, so simple, so well built and so well preserved,” Stendhal

Designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1981, the Roman Theatre of Orange bears witness to the grandeur of the Roman Empire in the West.

The best preserved Theatre in the Roman Empire

The Theatre of Orange is the only Roman theatre to have been preserved in Europe, and there are only two others in the rest of the Roman Empire: one at Aspendos in Turkey, the other at Bosra in Syria. The Roman Theatre of Orange is a unique historical site.

The exterior wall

“These were the words used by Louis XIV to describe the postscenium, the imposing theatre façade measuring 103 metres long, 1.80 metres thick and 37 metres high.

Like the stage wall, it consists of three parts: the lower part, decorated with nineteen Doric order arcades running between the three gates; above that, the smooth wall, lacking its fine stonework; finally, the upper level with its twenty-one dummy arcades which seem to be drawn into the wall.

The stage wall, the frons scaenae

It would originally have been decorated with marble slabs, stucco, mosaics, statues and columns and the winged Victories could be seen pulling chariots, centaurs bearing offerings. These mythological figures illustrate the victory of order over chaos.

Although it no longer has its three richly decorated levels, the Theatre of Orange is exceptional in that it has preserved its stage wall.

The central niche, above the Royal Door, houses an imperial statue of Augustus measuring 3.55 metres in height. This niche first contained a representation of Apollo and it is likely that the triumphant emperor was only substituted at a later date. The statue is dressed in a general’s coat, the paludamentum imperatoris, and is holding his staff. It serves as a reminder that to preserve peace throughout the Roman Empire everyone must respect its laws. This rich decoration was protected by a large sloping roof. To facilitate certain effects (disappearances, ascents and apparitions), the machine operators and actors could move between the coffered ceiling and the tiled roof, as well as in the concealed corridors superposed on two levels in the wall.
The stage
61m wide and 13m deep, it is bordered to the east and west by two towers called parascaenia. Consisting of a floor resting on beams, it contained trapdoors to make actors or machinery appear suddenly. At the end of the orchestra and stage was the pulpitum wall, a straight wall decorated with statues acting as fountains. An ingenious system of cables, winches and counterweights enabled actors and props to be hidden from the audience using a curtain approximately 3m high.

The Parascaenia
This towers were located on each side of the stage. Inside were rooms, which provided a foyer. During shows, actors, chariots and items of scenery were collected here before going on to the stage. The higher level(s) were used to store decorations or accessories.

The terraces, the cavea
The terraces were arranged around a semi-circular orchestra and were built into the side of the hill to make construction easier and more solid. Split into three sections (of twenty, nine and five terraces), they were divided up by radiating stairways. The upper section was covered by a portico. In rain or scorching heat, a large canopy, the velum, protected the audience from bad weather and the sun. This system worked by using beams fixed to corbels on top of the walls. The velum could, therefore, cover either the stage or the entire Theatre.

The orchestra, the pit
With a diameter of 19 metres, this semi-circle is the epicentre of the terraces. This area was inherited from the Greek tradition. It accommodated the choir in tragedies, who often represented the voice of Fate and, by dancing and singing, provided the public with explanations and commentaries on the drama. However, over the centuries, the Roman theatrical repertoire went through changes and the voice of the choir was gradually silenced. The surface of the orchestra, originally of beaten earth, was covered with tiling, which has since disappeared.

The temple of nymphs
To the west of the Theatre, a semi-circle is carved into the hillside. At its centre is the 2nd century temple dedicated to nymphs, the spirits of rivers and running waters. This area, traditionally called “courtesan’s chamber”, is an extension of a natural grotto, which would have contained a spring.

A new stage roof, inaugurated in June 2006
The Roman Theatre of Orange was originally covered by a roof structure dating from the 14th century AD, which was destroyed by fire. From the 19th century onwards, numerous roofing projects were devised to protect the ancient façade of the great stage wall, which was rapidly deteriorating. Rainwater and bad weather were increasingly weakening this magnificent Imperial Roman building. However, it was impossible to restore the roof to its original state. The Roman remains were insufficient to attempt a restoration of this type and there were no documents, no records had been preserved. Moreover, the original structure was made of wood and to recreate this structure would have placed too much weight on this already eroded edifice.
After many years of study and thought, the audacious project presented by Didier Repellin, Chief Architect for Historic Monuments, was finally accepted. In charge of restoration work on the Villa Médicis in Rome and the Popes’ Palace in Avignon, he worked closely with the AREP agencies and the Eiffel company, having collaborated on the renovation of the Grand Palais, and proposed a contemporary structure of glass and steel.

Therefore, the immense over 1000m² glass roof of the Roman Theatre of Orange is made of metal structures, which support the glass plates. This roof only weighs 200 tonnes, i.e. 50% less than a timber structure. To preserve the monument, it does not rest on the ancient stones but on a gigantic 61.70 metre long cross beam, supported by the side buildings reinforced by injections of lime into the stone.

This project perfectly preserves the unique and extraordinary acoustics of the Roman Theatre of Orange. The roof has been installed at a height of 32 metres whereas the human voice only rises to 25 metres and singing to 27. In addition, an acoustic membrane has been placed under this stage roof and acts as a “louvre”. By integrating current safety standards, the installation also serves as a support for the lighting and curtain which, concealed by a thin metal mesh, discretely fit into the decor. This stage roof was designed to fit in with the countryside and the monument. The roof is not higher than the north wall and is not visible from the surrounding area.
Opposite the Roman Theatre, the Art and History Museum of Orange

Since 1933, an 18th century mansion has housed the Orange Art and History Museum. Any visit to the Theatre must include a visit to the museum, as the ground floor houses fragments of friezes, which originally decorated the stage wall: eagles, amazons and centaurs still pursue one another as they have done for centuries, forever preserved in stone.

Other objects give an idea of Orange’s Imperial splendour, such as the Centaurs mosaic, the 3rd century amphora mosaic, busts and a number of everyday items, pottery, glassware, etc.

A precious archaeological document, the impressive Roman cadastre, dating from the 1st century AD, illustrates the Roman occupation of the Narbonne area. It concerns taxation and property issues in the Gallo-Roman period. The marble plaques fixed to the wall are admirably preserved and constitute the most complete cadastre ever found.

The Triumphal Arch

Further evidence of Orange’s great Roman past, the arch is also a Unesco World Heritage Site. It is, in fact, a commemorative urban arch, which served as a gateway at the entrance to the city, and not a triumphal arch in the true sense, because triumphs were only celebrated in Rome. Erected during the reign of Tiberius in homage to the veterans of the 2nd Gallic Legion who had founded the city, it is an exceptional Provencal Roman monument. It consists of a monumental three-bay gateway and a double attic, it is richly decorated with panels depicting weapons: shields, helmets, insignia, etc. On the first attic, maritime references of exceptional interest allude to Rome’s supremacy on the high seas.
EVENTS IN 2018

1st of April

EASTER EGG HUNT
In partnership with the Chorégies, the Theater organizes a riddle hunt with a booklet and animations for the children throughout the day.

From May 4th

VIRTUAL REALITY SEIZES THE ROMAN THEATER
Starting May 4th, virtual reality is coming to the Roman Theater of Orange! The historic monument, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, will be digitally reconstructed in 360° and the public will experience it with a virtual reality headset. After a guided tour of the theater, visitors will be invited to dive into the heart of Roman antiquity for an immersive experience. Propelled to the 1st century BC, they will witness the building of the theater, from the foundation of the city of Arausio until its inauguration.

June

THE CHORÉGIES OF ORANGE
The Chorégies come back at Orange this summer. All of the world’s great lyrical artists have performed there, bestowing international prestige on this ideal stage which continues to prove itself with each passing year.
Discover the program at www.choregies.fr

From July to August

GUIDED TOUR
Guided visits in French and English allow visitors to learn about the history of the Théâtre and how it was built. For more information on dates and times, see : www.theatre-antique.com

The 7th, 9th, 16th, 21st, 23rd, 28th and 30th August
Open until 11pm, last entry 9.30pm

DISCOVER ARAUSIO AT NIGHT
Night-time visits ‘Discovering Arausio’
Relive the effervescence of the Theatre district, the social, political, and religious hub of the city during the Roman era.

8th and 9th September

THE ROMAN LEGIONS
History lovers young and old, travel back in time and experience Orange in the days of the Romans! A hundred enthusiastic re-enactors are invited to fill the streets of Orange and its ancient theatre in honor of the founders of the Roman colony of Orange. Dramatized night-time visits allow visitors to discover what life was like in Arausio (the Latin name for Orange) in the year AD 15.
Since 2002, the work of Culturespaces has resulted in:

Opening our doors all year round, 7 days a week

Creation of a welcoming reception and ticket office area
The welcome area was the idea of the interior decorator Yves Taralon and is based on the model of a Roman tent, taking visitors back in time to the Roman Empire as soon as they enter.

Creation of a bookshop/gift shop
Installed in one of the Theatre’s basilicae, the gift shop invites you to prolong your discovery of Imperial Rome and Provence. In this area decked out in the colours of the Empire, you will find a wide choice of books, postcards, DVDs, ornaments, jewellery, and T-shirts inspired by the Roman world and Provence. A range of personalised objects will give you an original souvenir of your visit to the Theatre.

Miniatures, weapons made of wood, scale models and fascinating books mean that children can replay original battle scenes and relive the joys of the theatre. Finally a “delicatessen” sells delicacies from Provence.

Creation of a free audio guide service
Audioguides, which explain the history of the theatre and present the Museum’s collections, are available in 10 languages (French, English, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese and Russian). The sounds of trumpets and lines recited from the tragedies immerse the visitors in the atmosphere of Ancient Rome.

Creation of a projection room and showing of a film on the Roman Theatre
In the projection room, 2000 years of the Theatre’s history are portrayed. Computer-generated images show what the Theatre and City of Orange would have looked like in the Gallo-Roman period. Visitors find out about the Theatre’s location at the heart of the imperial sanctuary, the perfect way in which the Roman city was organised and the influence of the Theatre on political life. Reconstructions of ancient shows, with actors wearing masks and buskins, trace the history of dramatic art. Finally, this film brings to life the great moments in the history of the Theatre of Orange up to the present-day Chorégies and shows extracts from the finest operas performed at this venue.

Creation of special offers for groups
Numerous programmes designed for groups are available: combined tickets with other Culturespaces or regional sites to discover all the unmissable locations or even gourmet packages.
Setting up of educational workshops and provision of teaching packs for schoolchildren
The groups participate in 1 workshop of their choosing: costumes, mosaics, calligraphy, clay masks, board games or oil lamps
The theatre offers teaching packs for primary and secondary school children. This pack contains sheets for both teachers and students and is provided free of charge.

Creation of a reception service
The site provides a majestic setting for splendid receptions. The various areas can host numerous events (cocktail parties, fine dinners, seminars or shows) up to 9,000 people.
Contact: message@theatre-antique.com

Implementation of an active communications policy
Culturespaces organises all the media planning for each new cultural event. A range of media are used to reach the different target audiences: city posters (underground, bus, flagpoles), radio and TV broadcasting, advertising in the press and online, articles in the regional and national press, etc.

Creation of the internet website www.theatre-antique.com
As with all the museums and monuments in the network, Culturespaces has designed an ergonomic, dynamic website incorporating all the latest multimedia devices (videos, visit guide for downloading, etc). The new website for the Roman Theatre was inaugurated in October 2011. It receives more than 89,000 visitors every year.

Creation of the multimedia show “The Ghosts of the Theatre”
Since 2010, Culturespaces has put on the multimedia show “The Ghosts of the Theatre”. Known world-wide or more unusual, the characters who tread the boards of this place, classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, will reappear thanks to the magic of multimedia. The ghosts will take you on a journey featuring some of the greatest moments in the history of the Roman Theatre: Antiquity, the Belle Epoque, Orange 75 “the French Woodstock” and the world of the Chorégies d’Orange and Opéra Lyrique.

Created by Bruno Cohen, this journey combines optical theatre, video projections and musical snippets. It gives the youngest children an opportunity to learn the history of the Theatre in a factual yet fun way.

Launch of an iPad / iPhone application dedicated to the Roman Theatre and the Orange Museum in January 2013. A new way to find out more on this amazing place.

Creation of a Facebook page: Follow all the information and updates of the Théâtre Antique on its Facebook page (more than 4200 fans)
Launch of the Culturespaces online store:
www.boutique-culturespaces.com. Since 2013, Internet users can find all the derivative products developed by Culturespaces which is pursuing its policy for innovation by enriching its offering and adapting to the new practices of its audience. The e-store offers more than 710 articles selected from the offerings in all the Culturespaces museum, historical monument and cultural site stores, including the roman theatre of Orange.

Creation of a games book for children with two new mascots
Given free of charge to every child on arrival at the site, this amusing new tool has been devised to enable children from 7 to 11 to discover the roman theatre of Orange. Hugo and Lea, two mischievous children, accompany young visitors as they discover the site via amusing activities, games and enigmas.

Result of the Culturespaces campaign

With **170 000 visitors** in 2017, the Roman Theatre of Orange is one of the most visited sites in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region.
Established in 2009, the Culturespaces Foundation sets up specific cultural actions for hospitalised children or those who are disabled or made vulnerable by poverty or social exclusion.

Convinced that the discovery of historical monuments and museums is an excellent way of gaining access to culture, the Culturespaces Foundation distinguishes itself by the creation of made-to-measure educational programs before, during and after the visit.

Based on the involvement of specialists in the field of disadvantaged and sick children, the Foundation creates specially designed tools for each group of children to promote the uniqueness of the experience of a visit to a museum or monument.

In particular, the Foundation collaborates with the Cité de l’Automobile in Mulhouse, the Amphitheatre of Nîmes, the Roman Theatre at Orange, the Carrières de Lumières at Les Baux-de-Provence and the Hôtel de Caumont Art Centre in Aix in Provence.

Lasting partnerships have been established with childcare facilities: social centres, paediatric hospitals, institutes and priority schools. In 2018, more than 3,000 children will be welcomed in the Culturespaces sites.

The initiatives of the Culturespaces Foundation are funded through the support of individual donors, companies and corporate foundations.

www.fondation-culturespaces.com
PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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Téléphone : + 33 4 90 51 17 60
Fax : + 33 4 90 51 74 70
E-mail : message@theatre-antique.com
www.theatre-antique.com

OPENING HOURS

January, February, November, December: from 9.30 a.m to 4.30 p.m
March, October: from 9.30 a.m to 5.30 p.m
April, May, September: from 9 a.m to 6 p.m
June, July, August: from 9 a.m to 7 p.m
Evening opening hours may change if there are rehearsals or shows taking place.

ACCESS

By road: A7 and A9 motorways, Orange centre exit or main road 7, Orange centre exit.
Free car park 800 meters away.
By bus from the railway station.
By train: Avignon-TGV station.
By plane: Avignon, Marseille and Montpellier airports.

RATES

Theatre + Museum of Art and History – with audio guide
Full rate: € 9,5 / Reduced rate: € 7,5

Museum of Art and History only – with audio guide
Full rate: € 5,5 / Reduced rate: € 4,5

Rate one hour before site closure (without audio guide)
Full rate: € 8,5 / Reduced rate: € 6,5

Offers for families: free entry for the second child aged 7 to 17 when two adults and one child entries have been bought.

Reduced rate for children aged 7-17, students, teachers and unemployed (on presentation of written proof). Free for children under the age of 7 and journalists (on presentation of written proof).

Groups
Adults (20 people min.): 7,5 €
School (20 pupil min): 5 €
Educational workshops: from 15 € per pupil
Under reservation.

Roman Pass (Roman Theatre + Nîmes Amphitheatre + Square House + Magne Tower)
Full rate: € 18,5 / Reduced: € 14

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