

# FROM GALLO-ROMAN LYONS TO THE FRANKISH TOWN

TOPIC

## ROOM 2 : ANTIQUITY, THE PALEOCHRISTIAN ERA

### The foundation of Lugdunum

#### A Roman colony (43 years B.C.)

Emperor Julius Caesar conquered Transalpine Gaul 58 to 51 years B.C. Following his assassination 44 years B.C., the Allobroges Gaulois from Vienne (Isère) got rid of the Roman columns. In order to confirm the domination of Rome over recently conquered Gaul, in 43 B.C. the latter created a Roman colony on the strategic site of Fourvière Hill at the confluence of the navigable routes of the Rhône and the Saône. Installed in Ségusiave territory, this colony was opposite the Gallic installations on the Vaise plaine and at the bottom of Croix-Rousse Hill (Condate). The city took the name of its founder and first governor, Lucius Munatius Plancus: *Colonia Copia Felix Munatia Lugdunum*.

Its first buildings, of modest size, were made from wood and earth in the image of military camps. Surrounded by a mound of earth with ditches and fences, it occupied only the summit of the hill.

The colony was revamped in the early 1<sup>st</sup> c.: Islets measuring 36 square metres in this direction, pebbled streets and tiled, painted buildings (Inv. 1149.7 - Plan of Ancient Lyons).

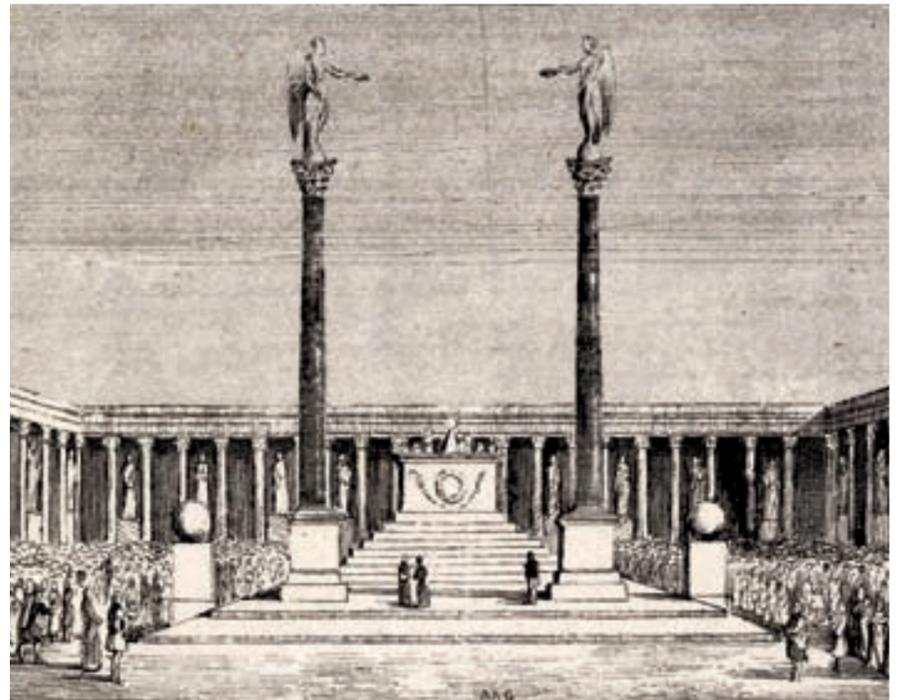
*Buste de Munatius Plancus sur un socle parmi des trophées (bust of Munatius Plancus on a pedestal amongst trophies)*  
frontispice, engraving, Nicolas Auroux, printer Benoît Coral, 1666, Inv. 1477.6



### The development of Lugdunum

#### The capital of the Gauls under the Julio-Claudian Dynasty (27 years B.C. to 69 years A.D.)

Towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. B.C., Emperor Augustus divided the territory of Gaul into 60 nations, which he regrouped into three imperial provinces: Lugdunensis, Aquitania and Belgica. In 27 B.C., Augustus made Lugdunum the capital of the Gauls\* and the headquarters of the governors. He had Roman roads constructed, which extended throughout Gaul, originating from Lugdunum (Inv.1333.2 - Lugdunum under the Gauls, Romans and Rhodians).

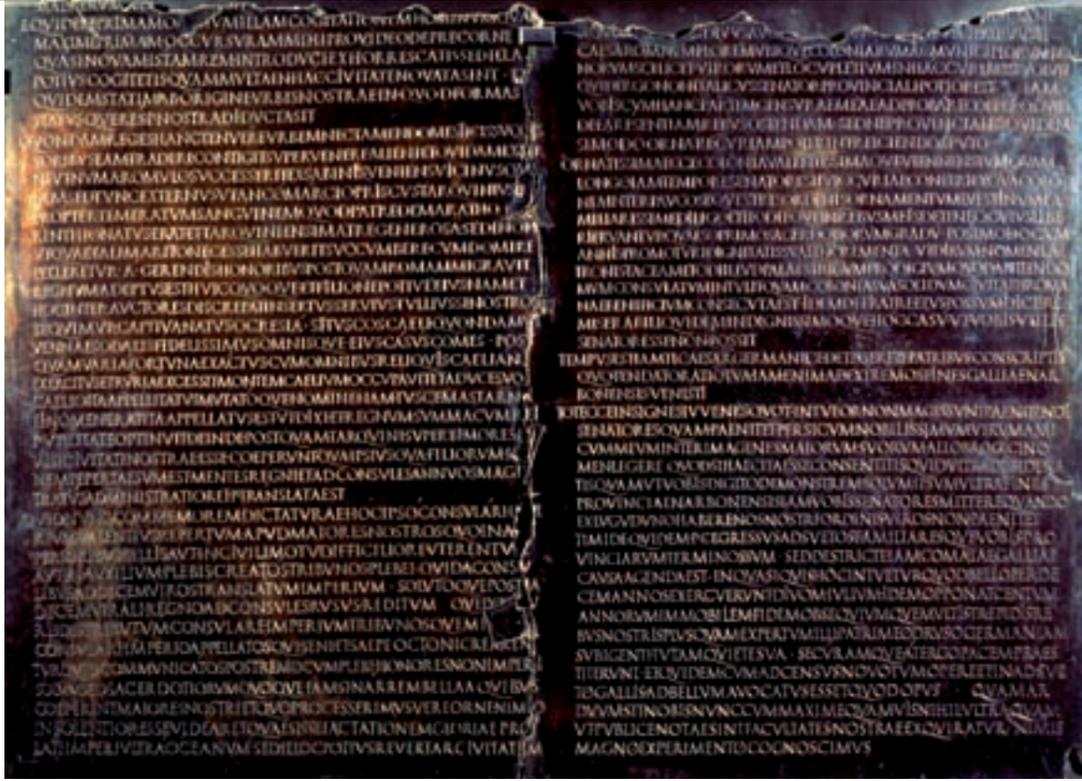


Antique theatre of Lyons, lithography, rock, drawing, A. Gaillard, Inv. N 3505.3

Aqueducts were constructed (Inv. 743 - Decline of the Saint-Irénée aqueduct), drains, public buildings (theatre, large temple, etc.) and, on the side of the Croix Rouse Hill, the federal sanctuary of the Three Gauls, which has nowadays disappeared. On 1 August every year, representatives of the various nations met here to celebrate the Roman and Augustus cult and to reaffirm their loyalty to the empire. From 19 A.D. onwards, the celebrations were held in the Three Gauls' amphitheatre inaugurated by Emperor Tiberius and extended from the early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. under Emperor Hadrian: This was the largest amphitheatre in Gaul with the capacity to accommodate 20 000 spectators! The amphitheatre also hosted typical Roman games and entertainment: gladiators, executions and wild animals.

With the advent of Emperor Claudius, who was born in Lyons, the colony became known as *Copia Claudia Augusta Lugdunum*.

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Claudian tablets, bronze plaque, Museum of Gallo-Roman Civilisation,  
© Ch. thioc, musée gallo-romain (the Gallo-Roman Museum), Rhône Department

In 48 A.D., the latter gave a famous speech before the Senate in Rome in which he proposed to grant the Gauls access to the public magistracy in Rome... a speech immortalised by a bronze plaque displayed in the Sanctuary of the Three Gauls: the famous Claudian Tablets\*.

## Lugdunum at its peak

### The *Pax romana* (Roman peace) under the Flavians and the Antonins (69 to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. A.D.)

Lugdunum, like all of the Roman empire, then enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity. With approximately 35 000 inhabitants, it became one of the largest cities in Gaul. The upper part of the town (Fourvière Hill) flourished: thermal baths, terraced housing, etc. The city also extended downwards, on the right bank of the Saône (nowadays known as Vieux Lyon – Old Lyons), in the *Canabae* district (currently the peninsula between Ainay and les Terreaux, gradually banked up during the 1<sup>st</sup> c.) and in the Gaul market town of *Condate* (around Place Sathonay). Local crafts prospered with the arrival of glassblowers, potters, wine/water skin manufacturers and metallurgists, etc. Trading developed with the importing of wines from Italy and Greece, oil and brine from Spain and many other foodstuffs arriving by boat.

However, in 197 A.D., Claudius Albinus declared himself Emperor and settled in Lugdunum. The rightful emperor, Septime Sévère, confronted him and won the battle waged on the Tassin-la-Demi-Lune plateau. Lugdunum was inevitably pillaged, the disloyal middle class were exiled and their goods confiscated and seized by the Emperor.

## The decline of Lugdunum

### A destitute capital

In 297 A.D., on reorganising the Roman Empire due to increasing pressure from outside enemies, Lugdunum lost its status as capital of the Gauls to Trèves (nowadays Germany), which was closer to the Rhine border. It regressed to the status of administrative headquarters of the small province of Première Lyonnaise (Premier Lugdunensis).

Fourvière Hill was abandoned between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> c. Only specific areas around the Christian funeral sanctuaries of Saint-Irénée and Saint-Just, were occupied. The population withdrew to the foot of the hill along the right bank of the Saône and to the *Canabae* in the peninsula.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> c., the town was centred on the headquarters of the Bishop and the episcopal group in the Saint-Jean district: Saint-Jean-Baptiste Cathedral, Saint- Etienne Baptistry, Sainte-Croix Church. The federal sanctuary district was abandoned.

## In the barbarity kingdoms

### Burgonde town, Frankish town

Towards the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> c., following the Barbary invasions, Gaul was divided up under the domination of several kingdoms at war with each other: the Franks to the north-east, the Wisigoths to the south of the Loire, in Languedoc and in the vallée de la Garonne, the Ostrogoths and Burgondes in Bourgogne (Burgundy), in Savoie and in Lugdunum. From 461 onwards, Lugdunum came under the “burgonde” denomination – a kingdom with a capital in Geneva.

But the Franks gained ground and, in 534, annexed the kingdom of Burgundy. Lugdunum became a Frankish town and part of the Clotaire kingdom in 558.

On 4 September 476, abdication of the Emperor Romulus Augustulus put an end to the Roman empire in the west and to Roman Lugdunum: from this point onwards, the eastern Roman Empire exercised only a theoretical authority over the city from afar.

### glossary

**Gaul:** From the Latin term, Gallia, the name given by the Romans to two regions occupied by the Celts: Cisalpine Gaul (to the south of the Alps from the Roman perspective) and transalpine Gaul (to the north of the Alps), the latter comprising present-day France as well as Switzerland, Belgium and the left bank of the Rhine.

**Claudian Tablets:** discovered on the slopes of Croix- Rousse Hill in 1528 by a cloth merchant, they were purchased by the town for 50 ecus of gold in 1530 and displayed in the Town Hall. They are exhibited at the Museum of Gallo-Roman Civilisation in Fourvière.