

Lugdunum (Lyons)

JAMES THORNE

Lugdunum (“Stronghold of the god Lug”), a Roman colony established near a Celtic settlement soon after Caesar’s Gallic War, became the capital of the province of Lugdunensis, and then of the Three Gauls as a whole. Located at the confluence of the Rhône and Saône, it flourished early on, but lost status to other centers after the end of the second century CE.

Despite no mention in JULIUS CAESAR, and some modern views (Drinkwater 1975), it is now thought that there was a significant Romanized Gallic settlement on the site from the second century BCE (Desbat 2004). Roman traders are said to have fled here from Vienne of the Allobroges some time before the GALLIC WAR (Cass. Dio 46.50; see VIENNA (VIENNE, FRANCE)). The colony proper was founded in 43 BCE by L. Munatius Plancus, probably following Caesar’s intentions. Lugdunum, Iulia Equestris (Nyon), and Raurica (Augst) formed an outpost system intended to protect southern Gaul and Italy from German invasion. Lugdunum’s strategic location within Gaul as a whole was excellent (Strabo 4.6.11), but the immediate locality forbidding: the initial site at Fourvière (“Forum Vetus”), high up on the right bank of the Saône, is waterless, and the city eventually required provision by around 200 km of aqueducts.

The glory days of Lugdunum came early, under AUGUSTUS and the Julio-Claudian emperors, who often visited the colony. Drusus founded the pan-Gallic altar of Rome and Augustus on August 1, 12 BCE (or possibly 10 BCE, the birthday of Drusus’ son, the future emperor Claudius) at Condate (Celtic “Confluence”), extending the city across the Saône (Fishwick 2004). This is the latest date at which Lugdunum can have become capital of the Three Gauls. Its status may be owed to its original obscurity. By choosing Lugdunum among the feeble Segusiavi, the Romans avoided choosing a city of the powerful Arverni, AEDUI, or Allobroges as the provincial capital. Rivalry with nearby Vienne went on

at least until the 60s CE. Augustus himself visited Gaul four times, and must have often been at Lugdunum; CALIGULA entered his third consulship there in 40; CLAUDIUS delivered a speech there in 48, recorded in a major inscription (*CIL* XIII 1668, cf. Tac. *Ann.* 11.24); exiled foreign princes were housed here. From ca. 12 BCE to at least 37 CE imperial gold and silver coinage was minted at Lugdunum rather than at Rome; perhaps in connection with this, it was initially the only city in the empire except Rome to be garrisoned by an urban cohort (Echols 1961). It was also there that Italian craftsmen first made the fine table-wares which would give rise to later, local derivatives of the Arretine product.

The city was typically prosperous during the second century CE. HADRIAN’s name is associated with a number of new buildings; the martyrdom of Christians in 177 was a minor event to most inhabitants (Euseb. *Church history* 5.1–2). However, the change in the fortunes of the empire hit Lugdunum disproportionately hard. Sacked by SEPTIMUS SEVERUS during the civil war against CLODIUS ALBINUS in 197, it declined, particularly in comparison with its now ascendant neighbor Vienne, and with the new imperial headquarters at AUGUSTA TREVERORUM (TRIER) and later at Arles. In the fifth century, its bridges collapsed and the Burgundians took over. Finally, most of the inhabited area, which had moved down to the river banks with the near abandonment of Fourvière by the fourth century, was washed away by a great flood in 580.

SEE ALSO: Augusta Raurica (Augst); Coinage, Roman Republic; Colonia Iulia Equestris/Noviodunum (Nyon, Switzerland); Gaul (Tres Galliae); Ruler cult, Roman.

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