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# AN IMPERIAL DESTINY

(LYON, 10 BC  
ROME, 54 AD)



**CLAUDE** (Lyon, 10 BC - Rome, 54 AD)  
**AN IMPERIAL DESTINY**  
exhibition until March 4th, 2019

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**Curator of the exhibition:**

Geneviève Galliano  
Chief Curator of Heritage,  
Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon,  
Department of Antiquities

**Co-commission:**

François Chausson  
Professor of Roman History,  
University Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne  
Hugues Savay-Guerraz  
Director of Lugdunum - Roman museum and theaters

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cover: **Statue de Claude dans  
La nudité héroïque**, vers 40 ap. J.-C.,  
marbre. Paris, musée du Louvre  
Photo © RMN - Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) /  
Hervé Lewandowski

*Claude, Maître de la Terre et de la Mer*, relief provenant  
du Sebasteion d'Aphrodisias (Turquie), règne de Claude.  
Photo © Ferrante Ferranti

## **CLAUDE** (Lyon, 10 BC - Rome, 54 AD) **AN IMPERIAL DESTINY**

exhibition **until March 4th, 2019**

Tiberius Claudius Drusus was born in Lugdunum. Fifty years later, against all expectations, he would be proclaimed emperor.

Claude lived in Lyon only a few months after his birth before going to Rome and came back only occasionally throughout his life. Yet his memory is still deeply linked to the city's history, especially through an exceptional object, the Claudian Tablet, which is an inscription on bronze of a speech that the emperor gave to the Senate in 48 AD requesting that citizens of Gaul have access to high-level positions as Roman magistrates. The exhibition traces Claudius' life from his birth in Lyon on August 1, 10 BC until his death in Rome on October 13, 54 AD. This tale is quite different from the dark and unflattering version presented by ancient authors that is still expressed in fiction and film today. This new narrative is based on recent work by historians and archaeologists who, in addition to studying new archaeological and epigraphical discoveries, cast a critical eye on the ancient sources, placing them into the political and social context of the early Empire. The result is a revised image of an emperor who cared for his people, promoted useful reforms, and was a good manager, and to whom the Empire owes the foundation of an organization that reached its height a few decades later.

The exhibition highlights the life and the reign of a man of singular destiny through more than 150 works: statues, bas-reliefs, cameos and coins, objects of everyday life, history painting, etc.

## I. THE JULIO-CLAUDIAN EMPIRE

In 27 BC, after a century of civil war, the Empire succeeded the Roman Republic. Its founder, Octavian (to whom the Senate granted the supreme command, the *Imperium*, as well as the prestigious religious title of *Augustus*), Julius Caesar's heir, launched a reform of Roman institutions, concentrating their authority. Rome then dominated a large part of the Mediterranean area. Upon his death in 14 AD, Octavian Augustus left an expanded empire that was stable and largely peaceful. However, dynastic rivalries and natural deaths had decimated his direct descendants, and the eldest son of his wife Livia, Tiberius (Claudius' uncle) succeeded him. Two illustrious families, the gens of the *Julii* and that of the *Claudii*, would reign over the Empire for almost a century. Claudius – *Tiberius Claudius Drusus* – was born into this imperial dynasty in Lyon on August 1, 10 BC. Fifty years later, against all expectations, he would be proclaimed emperor.

## 2. BIRTH IN LYON

Claudius was not born in Lyon by chance. The colony – *Colonia Copia Felix Munatia Lugdunum* – had been made the capital of the province of Gallia Lugdunensis and served as a rear base for Augustus during the Germanic wars. A mint – the only one outside Rome that was authorized to mint gold and silver coins – was created in 15 BC in order to provide soldiers' pay.

Claudius' father, Drusus the Elder, probably stopped in Lyon several times when he went to Gaul and to the Rhine to lead military operations. He directed a census there in 13 BC, and on August 1 of the following year he presided over the dedication of the Sanctuary of the Three Gauls dedicated to Rome and Augustus. While her husband battled on the Rhine, Antonia the Younger, most likely with their two older children, Germanicus and Livilla, stayed in Lyon. That is where Claudius was born on August 1, 10 BC. The city was then in the midst of great development; surrounded by an honorific wall, it acquired significant structures such as a theater, while houses were built according to a rigorously organized plan.

Claudius left Lyon after his father died in Mainz, less than two years after his birth; he would occasionally return to it in later years. But his Gallic origin – he was the first emperor to be born outside Italy – seems to have influenced his life. Under his reign, the city was called *Colonia Copia Claudia Augusta Lugdunum*.



**Victoire**, fin du I<sup>er</sup>-II<sup>e</sup> siècle, alliage cuivreux. Lugdunum - Musée et théâtres romains. Image © Lugdunum-Musée et théâtres romains de Lyon, J.-M. Degueule

**Statue de Claude dans la nudité héroïque**, vers 40 ap. J.-C., marbre. Paris, musée du Louvre. Photo © RMN - Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski



**Sesterce d'Auguste à l'autel des Trois Gaules (revers)**, Atelier de Lyon, 9-10 - 14 ap. J.-C., laiton. Lyon, musée des Beaux-Arts. Image © Lyon MBA - Photo Alain Basset



### 3. HIS BROTHER GERMANICUS

When Augustus died in 14 AD, Claudius was 24 years old. Ever since childhood, he had suffered from neurological problems – stuttering and a limp – which troubled the imperial family, who kept him apart from any public life. His participation in games during religious festivals was minimal and he was only grudgingly allowed to enter the priestly college of the augurs (priests in charge of interpreting divine omens).

His brother Germanicus was 29 years old. The young general was exceptionally popular and was destined for a bright future. His uncle Tiberius had adopted him ten years earlier, when Augustus had asked him to do so, out of concern for establishing the line of succession. On the same day, Augustus had himself adopted his stepson Tiberius and his last living grandson, Agrippa Postumus.

Tiberius' reign continued along the same lines established under Augustus. He consolidated authority and stabilized the empire. However, rivalries within the imperial dynasty, which were stoked by his mother Livia, worsened, and Tiberius responded with violence. Germanicus was probably one of his victims. Having returned victorious from the Germanic campaigns, Germanicus was sent to the East to put down uprisings. He died in Antioch, near Syria, probably from being poisoned, in 19 AD. The announcement of his death caused public mourning and the Senate granted him funerary honors.



**Germanicus**, vers 10, marbre. Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines.  
Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski

### 4. HIS NEPHEW CALIGULA

When Tiberius died in 37, Claudius was his closest living male relative. Yet, after the long reigns of Augustus (41 years) and Tiberius (23 years), the Senate granted the *imperium* to Germanicus' last living son: *Caius Julius Caesar* (affectionately nicknamed *Caligula* or "little boot" by his father's soldiers). He had the advantages of his father's glory and his youth (he was 25 years old). His reign was brief, for he was assassinated on January 24, 41, after four years of authoritarian and often excessive rule. He was the first one to bring his uncle into the circles of power. Under Tiberius, Claudius' public functions had remained very marginal. He was a member of various public religious associations, and had received the insignia of the consulship (a prestigious annual magistracy), but with no actual responsibilities, and he had not been admitted to the ranks of the Senate. In 37, Caligula finally gave him access to the Senate and shared a consulship with him.

The emperor's violence and downward spiral caused his death. It seems that Claudius had been informed of the conspiracy against his nephew and decided to turn a blind eye to it.



**Caligula**, vers 40, marbre. Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines.  
Photo © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Daniel Lebée / Carine Déambrosis

## 5. CLAUDIUS, FROM THE SHADOWS INTO THE LIGHT



**Messaline et Britannicus**, vers 50, marbre. Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines. Photo © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Anne Chauvet

In January 41, just before acceding to the throne, Claudius was almost 50 years old. Pushed aside from public life by his family, he had devoted his life to his studies, especially history. He was a scholar who had acquired his knowledge from books and the teachings of his tutors. He introduced three new letters into the Latin alphabet in order to represent certain sounds more accurately. However, his various engagements and marriages show that he did play a role in dynastic matrimonial strategies. Between 4 and 8 AD, he was engaged twice: to Æmilia Lepida, the great-granddaughter of Augustus, and then to Livia Medullina. Shortly afterwards, he married Plautia Urgulanilla, the granddaughter of a friend of his grandmother Livia, who gave him a son, Claudius Drusus (but the little boy died in an accident); the couple divorced around 24. Shortly afterwards, Claudius married Ælia Paetina (whom he repudiated in 31), and they had a daughter, Antonia, around 25–27 AD. As of 38–39 AD, he was the husband of his young cousin Messalina, with whom he had a daughter, Octavia, and then a son *Tiberius Claudius Germanicus* (nicknamed Britannicus), who was born in 41. This was the first time that a son was born to an emperor during his reign.

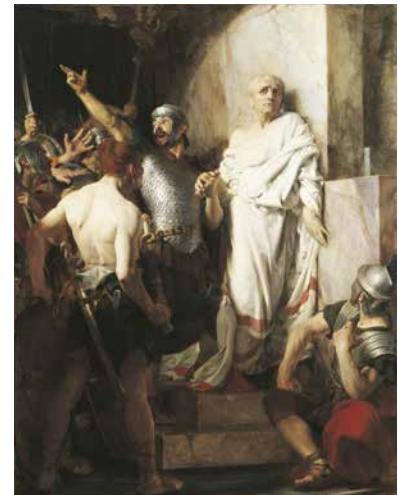
The history of Claudius has come down to us through ancient authors such as Seneca, Flavius Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius, who, echoing a hostile senatorial tradition, created an unflattering portrait of the man and his reign, seeing him as a weak individual manipulated by those around him. This negative image still persists today.

## 6. HIS ELEVATION TO EMPEROR

Immediately following the assassination of Caligula, the Praetorian Guard proclaimed Claudius emperor and brought him to their camp on the Quirinal Hill. The Praetorian Guard was made up of elite cohorts assigned to protect the emperor and maintain order. Their commander (the praetorian prefect) was an extremely influential senior imperial official.

However, the Senate hesitated – some senators wished to return to the aristocratic government of the Republic. But, after lengthy discussions, they recognized Claudius as emperor the following day, January 25, 41.

Flavius Josephus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius described his proclamation as emperor as the result of a fortuitous chain of events: terrified by his nephew's assassination, Claudius was said to have hidden behind a wall hanging, where a Praetorian Guard discovered him and pulled him out. The most unlikely candidate to succeed Caligula was thus said to have come to power by pure chance. However, a critical rereading of the ancient sources challenges this narrative: it was not just anyone whom the Praetorian Guard recognized and proclaimed emperor, but the son of Drusus and the brother of Germanicus, who had been kept apart (or had willingly removed himself) from any dynastic claims. Claudius justified this line of descent by taking the name *Nero Claudius Caesar, Drusi filius, Germanicus*.



**Charles Lebayle, Claude proclamé empereur**, 1886, huile sur toile. Beaux-Arts de Paris.

Photo © Beaux-Arts de Paris, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / image Beaux-arts de Paris

## 7. THE EMPIRE

When Claudius became emperor in 41, the borders of the empire were roughly the same as at the death of Augustus. Tiberius had conquered only the kingdom of Cappadocia and Caligula had attempted to annex the kingdom of Mauretania. Under Claudius, the empire grew by annexing formerly subjected territories: Mauretania Tingitana and Mauretania Caesariensis in 42; Lycia in 43; the former kingdom of Thrace circa 45-46; and Noricum in 46. Claudius' greatest victory remains the conquest of southern England in 43. Although it was relatively easy, this expedition – which

Julius Caesar had not been able to complete successfully a century earlier – resulted in a triumph for him and military glory which he had not been able to claim up until then. The Senate granted his descendants the right to be known as *Britannicus*. His reign was also marked by a policy of large public works projects in Rome, especially the building of aqueducts that improved the city's water distribution, and the founding in Portus (Ostia) of the largest port in the Roman world, intended to guarantee the supply of wheat to the population, ensuring social stability.

## 8. DYNASTIC LEGITIMACY

In January 41, when Caligula's successor was chosen, Claudius was an outsider, and some senators who sought a return to republican institutions hesitated to ratify the choice of the Praetorian Guard. The new emperor thus had to shore up his authority and justify his own legitimacy. He therefore systematized the image of the hereditary Julio-Claudian dynasty. Its structure was based on its founder, the divine Augustus, and some key individuals from the reigning family: Livia, his grandmother, whom Claudius divinized in 42; Drusus the

Elder, his father; Antonia the Younger, his mother, the daughter of Octavia (Augustus' sister) and Marc Antony; and especially Germanicus, his deceased brother. Claudius naturally had his place within this prestigious lineage and was depicted ensuring the future of the dynasty through images of his wives, Messalina and then Agrippina, and his son, Britannicus. Throughout the empire, the circulation of portraits of the deceased and living family members (sculptures, coins, and cameos) served as propaganda for the Julio-Claudians.



**Balance romaine**, Pompéi, 47, bronze. Naples, Musée Archéologique National.  
© Su concessione del MiBAC. Image © Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli - Photo Giorgio Albano



**Fourreau de poignard de ceinture**, Colchester, vers 10 - 40, fer, cuivre, émail. On loan from Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service.  
Image © Colchester Museums



**Camée: Claude**, Rome, règne de Claude, Calcédoine (monture: argent doré). Vienne, Kunst Historisches Museum, département des antiquités grecques et romaines.  
Photo © KHM-Museumsverband

## 9. THE GOVERNMENT

Claudius' administration was in line with that of his predecessors. Most legislative, judiciary, military, and religious powers were concentrated in the person of the emperor. Senior officials (prefects) and the offices of the imperial chancellery carried out administrative functions under his authority. However, to the great dismay of the senators, Claudius made a significant change by granting senior duties and responsibilities to imperial freedmen (slaves who had been liberated), whom he fully trusted, and to equestrians, who were inferior in rank and wealth to members of the senatorial class. In this way, the management of the government was greatly improved.

Another important measure during his reign was the census that took place in 47-48. This large-scale operation was intended to register all citizens of the empire and to classify them according to their wealth in order to establish the amount they had to pay in taxes. This was also a way of verifying the list of senators and equestrians, based on their wealth. Above all, Claudius is famous for supporting the request of the notables of the Gallic provinces in 48 to have access to senatorial-level appointments and therefore to the Senate – an innovation that was met with great hostility by the Roman Senate. His speech is recorded on the Claudian Tablet. That same year, the emperor made a lasting impression by holding splendid ceremonies (Saecular Games) for the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the founding of Rome.



Portrait funéraire de l'affranchi Caius Auruncius Prineps, Rome, vers 40-50, marbre. Bruxelles, musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire.  
Image © Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Bruxelles

## 10. THE CLAUDIAN TABLET

This large bronze plaque was discovered in Lyon in 1528 on Croix-Rousse Hill. It has a Latin text engraved in two columns. The title, the beginning of the text, and the beginning of the second column have disappeared. It is the speech that Emperor Claudius gave to the Senate in Rome in 48. The circumstances are known thanks to the historian Tacitus (circa 58-120): the notables of Gallia Comata (the territory of Gaul before it was divided into three provinces by Augustus) requested the right to become magistrates in Rome and to join the Senate. Their request was met with hostility by the senators, and Tacitus summarized their arguments as follows: Italy was still quite capable of providing Rome with senators; there were already too many foreigners in the Senate; they would take the place of native-born Romans; the Gauls had always been the enemies of Rome. Examined in detail, Claudius' speech is complicated to follow. It is more in the style of a scholar than that of a politician: he makes many digressions, including long references to Roman history. But the essential message is that he supports the Gauls' request. It is likely that the Gauls' request was transmitted through the Council of the Gauls, which met in Lyon in the Sanctuary of the Three Gauls. It is assumed that the speech was posted there in memory of the emperor's intervention. We know from Tacitus that access to the Senate was first granted to the Aedui, the inhabitants of Augustodunum (modern-day Autun in France), who had been considered allies of the Roman people for a long time.



Table Claudienne, ap. 48, bronze. Lugdunum – Musée et théâtres romains.  
Image © Lugdunum-Musée et théâtres romains de Lyon, J.-M. Degueute



## II. SIGNS OF POWER

The conquest of the province of *Britannia* brought the emperor glory and gratitude. The Senate granted him a triumph (a military parade along with a religious procession), the greatest honor offered to a victorious general, as well as the privilege of expanding the *pomerium* (the sacred boundary of the city), which was reserved for those who had extended the boundaries of the empire. The area of the city of Rome was thus doubled, going from 800 acres to over 1600 acres.

A triumphal arch dedicated in 51-52 on the Field of Mars also celebrated this victory. It was the monumental arch of the *Aqua Virgo* aqueduct that spans the *Via Lata* (the current *Via del Corso*), the large road that crosses the city from north to south. Only some scattered fragments of its splendid sculpted décor remain.

Other reliefs, most of which were placed into the façade of the Villa Medici during the Renaissance, are evidence of the existence of a great altar, whose original location has been lost. Scenes illustrate a large sacrificial procession, which was surely the one that was held upon the return of the expedition to Britain. Another altar dedicated to Piety (*ara Pietatis*), which is known by the dedicatory inscription to Claudius dated 43, was located near the Altar of the Augustan Peace (*ara Pacis Augustae*) on the Field of Mars.

The monumental arch of the *Aqua Claudia* and *Anio Novus* aqueducts, which is currently the Porta Maggiore in Rome, was dedicated by Claudius in 52, and is the only Claudian monument preserved on the site where it was elevated.



**Relief historique, dit Relief des Prétoriens**, vers 51-52, marbre. Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines.  
Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski

## 12. THE END OF AN EMPEROR, THE BIRTH OF A GOD.

Accused of having plotted against her husband in order to ensure that her son Britannicus would come to power, Messalina was assassinated in the autumn of 48. The following year, the emperor married his niece Agrippina the Younger, the daughter of Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder, the direct descendant of Augustus. The young woman was already the mother of a 12-year-old child, Nero – *Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus* – whom the emperor adopted in 50 under pressure from his wife, thus pushing aside his own son Britannicus in the line of succession. Claudius was then over age 60 and his health was declining. He died during a feast on October 13, 54, after eating a dish of mushrooms in what may or may not have been an assassination.

Nero succeeded him as emperor. Britannicus was assassinated the following year. Agrippina the Younger and her son asked the Senate to divinize the deceased emperor, as Augustus had been divinized forty years before. The building of a huge temple dedicated to the Divine Claudius was begun on the Caelian Hill; interrupted by Nero, the construction was completed by Vespasian two decades later.

Nero, the son of the Divine Claudius, ruled for fourteen years. The Julio-Claudian dynasty ended with his death in 68.



**Agrippine la Jeune en flaminique**, après 54 ap. J.-C., Grauwacke; résine moderne (tête). Rome, Musées Capitolins, Centrale Montemartini.

© Roma, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali. Image © Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini, foto Zeno Colantoni

# PRACTICAL INFORMATION

## OPENING TIMES

Museum open daily except Tuesdays and bank holidays  
from 10 am to 6 pm, Fridays from 10.30 am to 6 pm.

Late openings from 6 pm to 10 pm:  
on Thursday March 4th, Friday February 1st

Late openings in the exhibition: 5 €/3 €/free

## ENTRANCE FEES

exhibition: 12 €/7 €/free

## PRESS

### Visual materials available for the press

Please contact us to get access codes  
to visit our press website.

### Press contact

Sylvaine Manuel de Condinguy  
sylvaine.manuel@mairie-lyon.fr  
tel. : +33(0)4 72 10 41 15 / +33(0)6 15 52 70 50

Museum of Fine Arts, Lyon  
20 place des Terreaux, 69001 Lyon - France  
tel. : +33 (0)4 72 10 17 40  
www.mba-lyon.fr

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