

The construction of the museum of Saint-Antoine has begun in autumn 2023. Although the *Lanterneaux Project* is intended to be visually sober and unobtrusive, it consists of a considerable conservation challenge, in terms of architectural realisation, permanent monitoring of temperature and humidity level, as well as the choice of archaeological material to be left visible on the site in the frame of museum valorisation. The costly project is justified by the highest value of the *Saint-Antoine Esplanade* archaeology cluster and its major significance for the population of Geneva.

Genava, diapason of time, defibrillator of the contemporary Geneva

By Celina Kosinski

It is worldwide known Geneva conceals mysterious undergrounds. Fiction delights speculating about the entrails of CERN and bank safes, without obscuring the diplomatic and strategic dealings in the shadow of governmental missions and international organisations. Nevertheless, for the inhabitants living in the tip of the urban iceberg, the true wealth lies in the city sedimentary foundations. Apart from the canton's natural bituminous resurgences and geothermal explorations, it is undeniable human history of Geneva is not so well known by the general public, traders and globetrotters.

In the heart of the city in 2008, a fortuitous request for authorisation to fell trees at the end of their life implies archaeological *test pits*. The embankment of the *Saint-Antoine Esplanade*, thought insignificant by the unadvised onlookers, reveals 2000 years of history. *Preventive excavations* therefore turned into *planned excavations* mainly occurred between 2012 and 2015, flaking layers of time one after the other, transmuted astonishment into marvel. Laymen and initiated amateurs could this year discover the result of the digs at 2 exceptional public openings, on February 11th for the conference and presentation of the *Bastion de Saint-Antoine Project* for the *Cercle genevois d'archéologie* (Geneva archaeology circle), and on September 9th as part of the *European Heritage Days*.



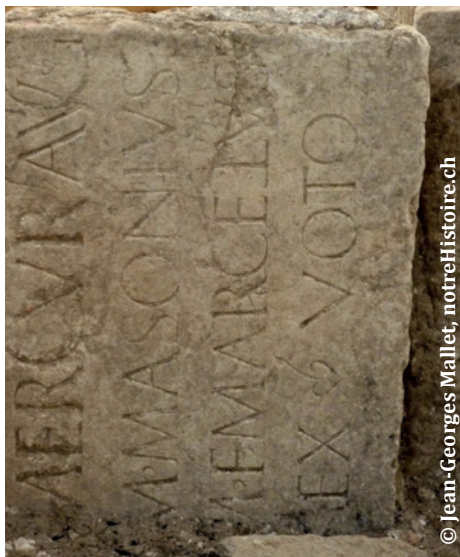
Remarkably led by the Cantonal Archaeology Service, the visits were abstruse awes at the residual evidences of an inhabitation, sepultures, fortifications, intertwined with volutes of the Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance. Thus named by Julius Caesar (in *Gallic War, Book 1, 58 BC*), *Genava*, the Roman Geneva, sets the tone, the sound, the vibration of the diapason filtering out tumult of the blindly agitated contemporary city. Under the shield of history, the beholder enters petrified into the archaeological site. He is slapped by death. Mortuary chests, unbroken skeletons, skeletons in shreds, take him back to his inner shakespearian dialogue. More than 300 *anonymous* unearthed from the Late Antique necropolis, then the Early Middle Ages funerary church, lead him out of his personal mourning, towards the existence of his predecessors who built the urban foundations.

Reconstructed history slowly unfurls its resurrected flesh around the bones, opening the way to the depths of time. The beholder understands the contemporary city, accused of being a *superficial show-off* is only a veneer. He removes the disguise of his own lie, like he would take off his shoes at the entrance of a sacred place. Geneva, once believed to be spiritless, possesses a secret essence that can only be discovered in its substructures and subterranean passages. Uproars of battles, howls, gashes of daggers and improvised lancets. The beholder faces the restored wall of *Saint-Laurent* stronghold. In 1537, the construction of this fortified enclosure required the reuse of material already on site. The *Saint-Laurent* funerary church (6th-7th centuries AD) and the tombstones from the necropolis were recycled to build an unassailable rampart. Hence, even the dead contributed to defend the city against the enemy of the time. Indeed, in Calvinist Geneva, *the unity of the city and its citizen* was the conditional weapon to survive division then tearing Europe apart.

The echo of *Post tenebras lux* - motto of the Republic of Geneva taken from the *Book of Genesis* - has a new resonance for our beholder. His confidential venality throws its weapons at the foot of the remains of the fortress. Freed from his past of surface, he leaves the archaeological underground of the *Saint-Antoine Esplanade* in spite of himself. He wanders between the shops of the *lower streets*, not understanding anymore why all this cacophonous clatter, the rush for instant gold and the immediate frenetic consumption of domestic shoddy goods. His sense of time has changed. Lustrous signs perched on facades are taking on thus far unsuspected connotation. In seductive windows, he no longer sees diamonds as symbols of prestige of the finest watchmaking brands firmly rooted in the Geneva tradition. Are diamonds illusory, ephemeral copies of the stars, compasses of the universe. Our beholder is henceforth intrigued by the invisible of the *complications*. *Perpetual calendar, equation of time, tourbillon*, astronomic hazards digested by tiny wheel trains, precisions approved by the *Poinçon de Genève* stamped on the *movement* of the most precious *cases*. The craftsmanship seal of excellence introduced in 1886 marked the onset of *universal time* calibrated on the telescopes of the observatory at the edge of town.

At nightfall, our beholder goes back to the abyss of time attracting him like a *magnetite deposit*, as if a loved one had been buried in the ancient sepulture, among the citizen of *Genava*. He returns to the place of its vanquished venality, outside the defensive wall of the *Protestant Reformation*. He is now aware the root of Geneva, perhaps his own and even the one of expatriates, stateless and uprooted humankind, abides within the leaflets of history. He is searching the bygone chronometric observatory, the one before the industrial era, the one that first set all the clocks of the city. From the second observatory of 1830 - at the present *Promenade de l'Observatoire* - he calculates 70 meters in the direction of the *Bastion de Saint-Antoine*, as indicated in the archives. At 70 meters as the crow flies, the first observatory of Geneva adjoined the archaeological museum currently under construction.

In 1772, the astronomer Jacques-André Mallet could at last scrutinise the night sky vault from his freshly elevated observatory. He was entrusted with a mission of the uttermost importance, that of spreading accurate time around the world through timepieces that came out of the Geneva factories. He was far from suspecting his astronomical calibrations would forge a time scale condensing the history of Geneva, from his timed celestial bodies to Gallo-roman skeletons still buried just a few steps away. Our beholder of the contemporary Geneva, knows this. The vanishing spectrum of the first observatory mutates into a gigantic metronome oscillation coordinating heaven and earth. An odd drumming sound emanates from belowground. Our beholder confounds his own heartbeat with that of the bones quivering in their cases of wood, molasse and stone. It is a genuine festivity of excavated reunions. On the day of the museum inauguration, citizens of *Genava* and Geneva will at last be able to converse with open tomb and heart, knotting and reknitting a rope of roots on the arc of time, in direction of the stars, souls of the departed, landmarks of the living. *Post tenebras lux*. From a funeral ossuary, from the ink of night, pours out light of knowledge, a rediscovered urban identity, to be transmitted and shared.



Ex-voto dedicated to the god Mercury, engraved on a limestone plaque from the Roman Period (1st to 2nd century AD), reused as a side of a Merovingian tomb (6th to 7th century AD) in a Christian funerary context.

In Michel Aberson, Anne de Weck, *Une dédicace votive à Mercure découverte à Saint-Antoine, Archéologie genevoise 2012-2013. Patrimoine et architecture, Série archéologie n°2, 2015.*



Detail of Spanish oil amphoras composing a sanitary crawl space which regulated humidity of a storage room in a Gallo-Roman peri-urban *domus* (2nd half of 1st century AD).

In Evelyne Broillet-Ramjoué, *L'esplanade de Saint-Antoine – un complément essentiel à la connaissance du développement oriental de la cité. Archéologie genevoise 2012-2013. Patrimoine et architecture, Série archéologie n°2, 2015.*



Individual buried in the 6th century AD in the cemetery of the *Saint-Laurent* funerary church, in the west portico.

Following the archaeological test pits carried out in 2010, in 2013 the *Association of the inhabitants of the Geneva city center and the old-town (AHCVV)* brings to success an application to enhance the site and open it to the public by creating a museum on Charles-Galland Street. Consequently, the City Council submitted a request for a credit in 2020.

The *Lanterneaux Project* is located on a land belonging to the municipality of Geneva. The canton and the City of Geneva partner in order to provide strategic and financial support for the project, jointly with financial sustain of the Loterie romande and a private Geneva foundation.

In addition to its urban heritage, educational and cultural dedication, the construction of the museum of Saint-Antoine is intended to protect archaeological remains and redevelop the exterior, which will include a new tree planting on the Saint-Antoine Esplanade.

Inauguration of the museum of Saint-Antoine between late 2025 and 2026.

Information on the *Lanterneaux Project*, archaeological museum of Saint-Antoine:
<https://www.ge.ch/node/14455>

Description of the archaeological excavations of the Saint-Antoine Esplanade and literature of reference:
<https://www.ge.ch/node/14692>

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ARTIFACTS

Fragments of bricks and tiles (opposite) and oil lamps from the Roman Period, ritual crockery, cooking and make-up utensils, jewellery, bone styluses and game tokens were found in the backfill around the entire perimeter of the site. Ceramic material and coins in particular allow to date nearby archaeological material and in soil layers in which they are found. Artifacts also provide evidence of the successive types of occupation of the site (residential, funerary or religious).

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