



# Architectural Transformations and Ownership Dynamics of Urban Commercial Buildings: the shops of *Lugdunum* and *Vienna* as a case study (France)

## *Transformations architecturales et dynamiques de propriété des complexes commerciaux urbains : les boutiques de Lugdunum et de Vienna (FR) comme étude de cas*

Retail spaces played a significant role in shaping the urban landscapes of Roman cities, including their plots and street networks. Archaeological work in the colonies of *Lugdunum* and *Vienna*, key trade centres in the Rhône Valley and Roman Gaul, has brought to light a valuable assemblage of shops ranging from the 1st century BC to the 3rd century AD. A diachronic and multi-level analysis of these features carried out in the framework of a PhD thesis completed in 2023 has revealed that these commercial buildings over time underwent a series of architectural and planimetric transformations. Beyond their impact on the organisation of commercial and urban traffic, what do these structural changes reveal about the evolution in the ownership and management of shops? How do these transformations reflect shifting strategies of investment in commercial architecture in these two colonies over the centuries? How is this phenomena at the levels of individual shops, commercial buildings, or even entire blocks, to be interpreted in the light of what is known about the real estate market in the Roman world through legal and epigraphic sources?

**Keywords:** ancient economy, retail trade, shops, architecture of commercial buildings, urban archaeology, Roman Gaul.

Les infrastructures du commerce de détail ont joué un rôle important dans la fabrique des paysages urbains des villes antiques, de leur parcellaire et de leurs réseaux de rues. Les données archéologiques des colonies de *Lugdunum* et de *Vienna*, jalons majeurs du commerce antique dans la vallée du Rhône et plus largement en Gaule romaine, fournissent un précieux corpus de boutiques datant du I<sup>er</sup> siècle av. J.-C. au III<sup>e</sup> siècle apr. J.-C., étudiées dans le cadre d'une thèse de doctorat achevée en 2023. L'analyse diachronique et multicritères de leurs vestiges a permis de mettre en évidence les différentes transformations architecturales et planimétriques que ces bâtiments commerciaux ont subies au cours du temps. Au-delà de leur impact sur l'organisation des pratiques commerciales et de la circulation urbaine, que révèlent ces changements structurels sur l'évolution de la propriété et de la gestion des commerces? Comment ces transformations reflètent-elles l'évolution des stratégies d'investissement dans l'architecture commerciale de ces deux colonies au cours des siècles? Ces phénomènes, observés à l'échelle des boutiques individuelles, des complexes bâtis, voire d'îlots entiers, peuvent-ils être interprétés à la lumière de ce que nous savons du marché immobilier dans le monde romain grâce aux sources juridiques et épigraphiques?

**Mots-clés :** économie antique, commerce de détail, boutiques, architecture commerciale, archéologie urbaine, Gaule romaine.

## Introduction

Retail trade had a significant impact on the urban fabric of the ancient city, particularly through the shops as the architectural framework of the commercial transaction, which could accommodate activities of retail, storage, production and rental accommodation. These places became integrated into the street network and urban plots and could be found everywhere in the city. They played a major role in everyday commercial transactions and the urban economy more widely. As part of the real estate market, shops were also valuable assets. They could serve as lucrative investment opportunities, as they generated revenue not only through business operations but also through rental income (Broekaert and Zuiderhoek 2020; Maschek 2023: 194-201). Epigraphic and juridical sources of the Roman world testify that their owners could adopt various strategies to run it. The shop may be managed directly (the owner runs the business himself, possibly alongside other members of his *familia*) or indirectly (by placing an intermediary agent with servile status): the owner then recovers the profit from the sale. On the other hand, the owner and the tradesman may be separate individuals when the shops were rented out. This practice is attested, for instance, by a painted inscription from Pompeii in the *Praedia Iulia Felix* (CIL IV, 1136), which records the lease of *tabernae cum pergulis suis* for five years, with an agreed annual rent (Pirson 1999: 15-19; Tran 2013: 46; Courrier 2014: 147). According to the principle of *superficies solo cedit* as mentioned in the *Digest*, the owner of the ground floor unit was—at least initially—also the owner of the upper floors (Dubouloz 2011: 203–211).

In the case of the urban commercial buildings in Roman Gaul, are we able to perceive these various types of ownership configurations despite the absence of textual or epigraphic evidence, such as rental contracts providing insight into the real estate market or giving us information about the identity of the landlords or tenants? Moreover, can we observe the dynamics of ownership during the lifespan of these commercial buildings? The archaeological data gives us clues on the built framework of these commercial complexes, the activities they accommodated, and their integration into the urban environment. With this in mind, we must exercise cautious interpretation when inferring details about property divisions and their changes over time. Architectural connections do not necessarily imply a unified ownership in the legal sense, and we must not confuse the forms of management with the ownership status of the shops (Monteix 2010: 351-352; Dubouloz 2011: 574). However, we can explore

these questions by examining well-known urban blocks over the long term from an archaeological perspective, allowing us to observe dynamics and transformations in the planimetry, construction and use of commercial spaces. Recent publications on certain *insulae* of Pompeii (Ellis 2023; Busen 2023; Esposito 2023) or *Herculaneum* (Dardenay 2022: 176-213) adopt this perspective while proposing cautious interpretations of the architectural evidence in terms of ownership. Adapting this approach to case studies in Gaul presents initial challenges, largely due to the limitations of the documentation at our disposal and its preservation. Comprehensive knowledge of an entire block and its adjacent streets over the *longue durée* is rarely achieved, as the windows opened by excavations tend to give us only a fragmented overview. Moreover, the earth and wood architecture of many shops, along with the extent to which remains have been levelled, can make it difficult to perceive certain architectural connections (such as thresholds, masonry repairs, and closures), even though these could have provided relevant clues about changes in ownership.

As part of a PhD thesis focused on the commercial landscape of two colonies in *Gallia Lugdunensis* and *Gallia Narbonensis*—*Lugdunum* and *Vienna*—I was led to examine several case studies that illustrate the connections between architectural transformations and ownership dynamics. These colonies were recognized for their significant economic potential, serving as key nodes in the river and inland trade networks connecting the Mediterranean region to the northern provinces via the Rhône and Saône valleys. The dynamism of these port cities and of the long-distance trade positioned them at the heart of both regional and extra-regional networks, fostering the movement of money, goods, and people. This activity created an influx of potential customers and available capital, which encouraged investments in urban construction and the development of commercial and productive complexes. Evidence of this can be seen in the density of occupation within residential blocks, the prominence of monumental architecture in both colonies, and the numerous commercial buildings recorded between the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century BC and the end of the 3<sup>d</sup> century AD. I analyzed 26 archaeological sites, including 591 shops, i.e. 83 commercial complexes in *Lugdunum* and 34 in *Vienna* during this period. The shops were either part of larger buildings, such as houses and public complexes, enhancing their façades, or they occupied the ground floors of multi-storey buildings and commercial squares.

Through selected case studies illustrating different types of commercial buildings, I will try to identify in this paper some archaeological evidence, in

terms of construction and transformations, that could be interpreted with caution as signs of their evolving ownership. I will also try to show the limits of such an analysis by underlining the ambiguity of some situations that could not deliver a clear interpretation of the ownership process.

### **Shops, Houses, and Ownership: Insights from a Micro-Scale Perspective**

In Lyon and Vienne, many shops were constructed at the front of houses on each side of the main entrance or on a side façade. These commercial façades typically consisted of two to eight rooms and were usually built as a part of the original residential unit. The retail space accounted for about one-quarter of the total ground floor area of the residential property. Such shops were part of what I called “integrated complexes”, which refer to shops architecturally and structurally integrated into another building. In such configurations, the uniformity of construction techniques, as well as the connection of masonry, often indicates the same building programme, leading to the postulate that the shop front and the residential unit behind were initially owned by the same individual. It should be noted, however, that due to legacy and sale processes — which are difficult to discern through

archaeological clues — the plot could also have been divided into separate properties (Dubouloz 2011: 119; Dardenay 2022: 205).

Some archaeological evidence could support the idea of a common ownership. On the one hand, some cases in Lyon and Vienne showed evidence of direct access between a shop and the house behind it. Examples include the façade of the *Maison aux Pierres Dorées* in Vienne during the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century and the site of the *Hôpital de Fourvière* in Lyon during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, both marked by a threshold or interruption in the masonry (fig. 1). More indirectly, in the context of a row of shops in façade, the absence of a recognized corridor from the street suggests that the only possible access to the residential space is through a shop. These shared circulations seem to indicate a common ownership and, beyond that, the involvement of the owner of the house in the management of the shops (Pirson 1999: 58; Monteix 2010: 327-331, 364-367; Tran 2013: 264, 353-354). On the other hand, the conversion of shops into residential rooms, whether for domestic use, utility, or circulation, could also signal a unified ownership. This phenomenon is observed, for example, at the *Clos du Verbe-Incarné* site in Lyon during the transformations that occurred in the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. One final example pertains to a common waste disposal strategy that showed the tight links between the shops and



Figure 1. Lyon, *Hôpital de Fourvière*, 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD: negative of a door in the rear wall of a shop leading to the domestic plot; in the foreground, steps between the two communicating shops (Photo: *Archeodunum*, in Silvino 2011: 305).

the house located at the rear in terms of circulation and space usage. Another case from the same site in Lyon during the Augustan period showed evidence of waste disposed of in a pit dug in the courtyard of the house that resulted from the metallurgical activities carried out in the front shops (Delaval 2024: 42).

Contrarily, concluding common ownership based on observations of shared utilitarian structures between the house at the rear and the shops at the front can be misleading. We could mention shared water drains originating from the house at the back that were utilized by the shop occupants to dispose of their waste, but also shared *praefurnium* located in a shop and used for a neighbouring hypocaust. These configurations indicate connections in terms of shared usage and interaction between the residents of the adjoining house and the retailers in the shops. However, they do not necessarily imply a common ownership due to the presence of servitudes, well-known in the ancient jurisdiction as arrangements between landowners that allow one to benefit from the neighbouring plot or structures (Saliou 1994: 148-151; Ynnilä 2013: 85).

However, let's keep in mind that a single (supposed) ownership did not necessarily imply one single management choice. These choices may differ even within the same domestic façade of shops. This variability can again be supported by archaeological evidence. The façade of the *Maison aux Faussaires* on the site of the *Hôpital de Fourvière* is a particularly good example of this, as the middle shop appeared to form a coherent, distinctive unit with the western one. Firstly, it provided direct access towards the house. Secondly, these two shops communicated with each other and presented a common excavation before the installation of their pavement, unlike the neighbouring premises, whose floors are simply raised (Silvino *et al.* 2018: 92). We could assume direct management specifically for these two facilities and not for the others.

### **Multi-Storey Commercial Buildings: dynamics of investment, dynamics of ownership?**

Multi-storey buildings are a widely recognized architectural pattern for commercial complexes in the Rhône Valley. Typically, the shops were located on the ground floor, while the upper floors were occupied by apartments that were often rented out. This collective and rental housing model is like the well-known *insulae* in Italy. However, it is not often reconstructed within the urban grids of Gaul due to the relatively recent attention paid to the archaeological recognition of upper floors

—a topic that has gained renewed interest in cities like Lyon and Vienne thanks to recent excavations (Clément 2023)—. These economic buildings came in various shapes and sizes, covering ground areas ranging from almost 100 m<sup>2</sup> to over 750 m<sup>2</sup>, depending on their position in the urban fabric. The layouts often involve the same units, i.e. shops, backrooms and flats on the upper floors, all of which often closely linked to the street porticoes. The shops took the form of several elongated naves, back-to-back cells, or cells combined with open spaces such as courtyards, corridors, or squares. This category of commercial complexes can be described as 'autonomous' because they didn't complement another building but gave full space to commercial activities on the ground floor. The modularity of the units they contained, coupled with their development in height and the multiplication of independent flats, made them highly attractive property complexes that were suitable for rental, despite their small surface area on the ground. With the disappearance of the domestic function on the ground floor, relegated to the upper floors and the tendency to rent the cells, the physical distance between the users of these professional facilities and their owners is increasing, making even more difficult to identify ownership links (Ellis 2018: 122; Monteix 2020: 199-200).

Considering the challenges faced, the only possible way to perceive if not the ownership itself (as the identity of the owner) at least the dynamics of it, is to examine the planimetric and architectural changes these types of buildings have undergone over time, particularly in terms of reconstructions, divisions, or changes in plot boundaries. I want to focus on two examples that could be relevant regarding that type of approach.

First, let's take the example of a vast courtyard commercial complex combining shops and apartments on the right bank of the river Rhône in Vienne, excavated a few years ago on the *rue Trénel* site (Baldassari 2015) (fig. 2a). Located near a bridge leading to the suburban districts on the opposite bank, it was built in the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD on a reconstructed surface area of 8,000 m<sup>2</sup> around a square flanked by at least two rows of shops and backrooms. The discovered storage structures suggest that it may have served for the sale of solid and liquid foodstuffs, whereas some productive equipment testifies to a glass-making activity. In the initial project of construction, the shops had the same size (35 m<sup>2</sup>), were widely opened on the square, and all functioned with back rooms. Although only fragments of the complex are known, the north and south shop wings certainly belong to the same building programme, due to the uniformity of dimensions and construction techniques.

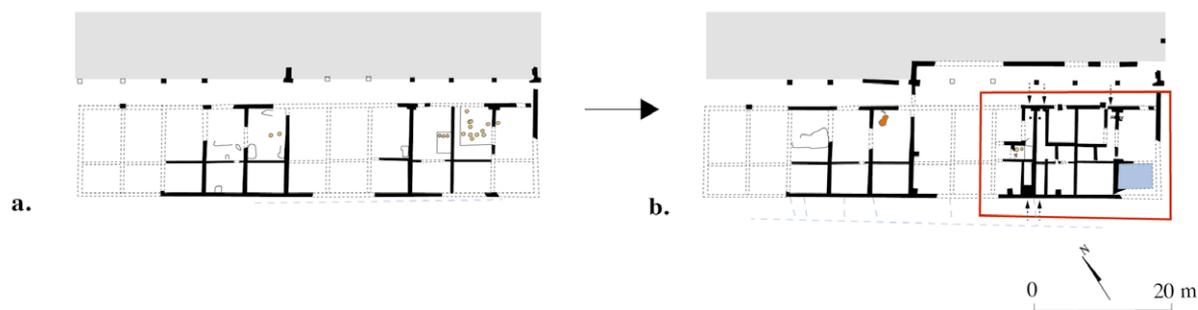


Figure 2. Vienne, *Rue Trénel*, planimetry of the south wing of the commercial complex: a. mid-1<sup>st</sup> century AD; b. last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (CAD M. Lépée, from Baldassari 2015).

The transformations that the building underwent in the last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century disturbed the initial uniformity (fig. 2b). Only four of the nine initial cells had their front wall rebuilt and their layout reorganized. Cells that used to be shops with their back rooms were transformed into a row of back-to-back shops, some facing the square and others facing the side street. As a result, these shops would become smaller due to the addition of annexe spaces, corridors, and stairwells. At the same time, four of the back rooms became independent, accessible from the alleyway on the south, as shown by the stairwells on the façade. The increased division of space led to the development of independent apartments on the upper floors, which extended over the portico of the square, following the installation of a new stylobate at the front. This reflects the desire to maximize the rental potential of the complex for both commercial and residential purposes.

In that specific case, the structural changes observed, which are limited to specific areas of the complex, suggest that these reconstruction efforts were not merely one-time interventions by the tenants but rather decisions made by the owners. Legally speaking, while routine repairs to maintain the building in its original condition fell under the responsibility of the tenant or the individual using the building (Davoine 2019), any reconstruction activities that result in significant alterations to part of the building must have been carried out by the owners. According to Roman legal principles, a usufructuary cannot make something new (*novum faceret*), i.e. he or she cannot change the decor or construct extensions, for example (Davoine 2019: 19). It is possible that the original large-scale construction project was initiated by members of the local elite families or by local authorities, given the size of the building. This project may have been then divided into several segments; however, this does not necessarily imply that it was split among different owners. It could be the same owner who decided to redevelop

the building for various tenants or intermediaries to increase revenue by expanding both retail space and rental units above. This demonstrates the adaptability of the initial plans established by the owners for commercial complexes. Such plans are often standardized yet flexible enough to accommodate changing needs and investment strategies (Lépée *in press*).

A second relevant example for the demonstration could be the plot of the *Maison des Dieux Océans* in Vienne and its neighbouring Commercial Building, as the various stages of its development are well documented through excavations (fig. 3) (Prisset *et al.* 1994). The plot is situated on the right bank of the Rhône, in a residential and commercial area that has been occupied since the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. During this period, two peristyle houses were constructed: the *Maison aux Pierres Dorées* featured four shops along a major street leading to a bridge over the Rhône, with one shop connected to the house, likely managed directly by the owner as already described. Adjacent to the north, the *Maison au Grand Péristyle* operated in conjunction with an independent building which housed six shops across its entire façade on another significant street of the neighbourhood. In the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the entire area seemed to be acquired by a single owner who constructed a 2,400 m<sup>2</sup> house, known as the *Maison au Vestibule à Colonnes*. This new house maintained the commercial building on its eastern façade but featured only one shop on the southern side. It appears that the owner chose to prioritize this ‘secondary’ façade for potential rental income. Additionally, apartments above the shops were developed, as evidenced by the remains of staircases, indicating a similar goal. At the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the shops began to integrate more into the residential environment, as suggested by several observations: an opening in the back wall of one shop, the passage of a water supply pipe leading to the peristyle pool, and the closing of the portico, which

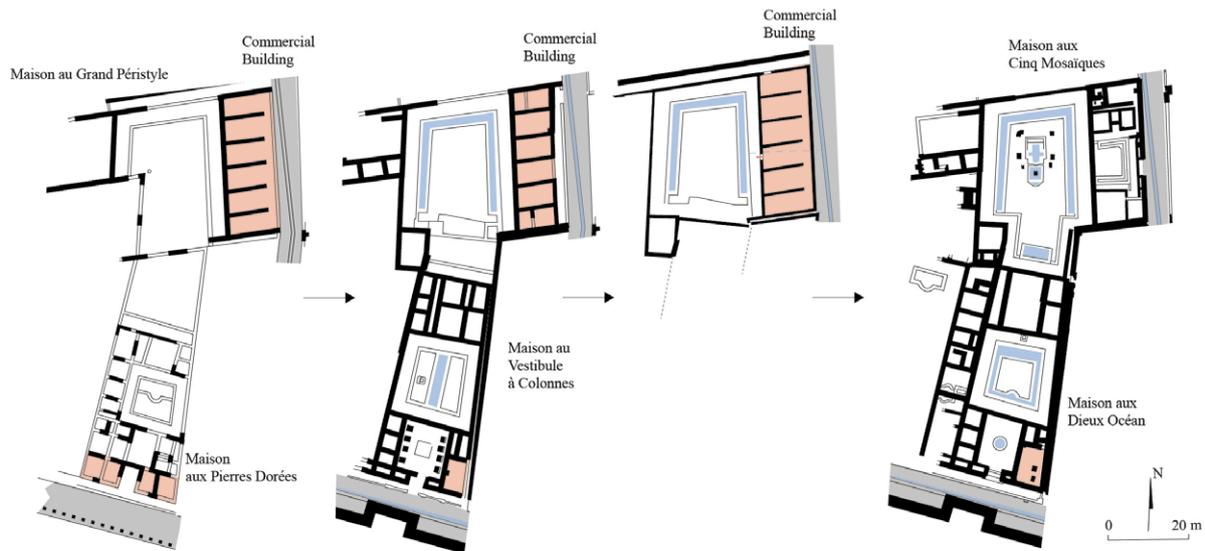


Figure 3. Vienne (Saint-Romain-en-Gal), planimetry of the evolution of the plot of the *Maison aux Dieux Océan* and the adjoining Commercial Building, between the 20's AD and the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (shops in red) (CAD M. Lépée, from Prisset *et al.* 1994).

was transformed into a gallery surrounding the building. This could imply a potential return to direct management by the owner, although this remains highly speculative. By the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the economic building was replaced by another peristyle house, reflecting a shift from commercial spaces to residential properties. This transition involved taking over the surface area, orientation, and some masonry from the previous building's perimeter walls. During this phase, the owners seemed to prefer subdividing properties and refocusing on domestic functions rather than maintaining the economic building.

These architectural and property dynamics reflect the diversity of investment strategies in commercial architecture at the scale of a single complex over time, whether the priority was given to the commercial space and the income derived from it or to the residential functions. It remains impossible, though, to say if it was the result of a shift in the investment strategies of a single owner or whether the building changed hands after being sold or inherited.

### At the Scale of the Urban Block: Changing Dynamics of Adjoining Plots

There are rare examples in Lyon and Vienne of blocks well documented from facade to facade, which would allow us to reflect on the evolution of plot boundaries and dynamics of ownership. However, one example from Lyon is an exception: a block that has been documented almost in its

entirety and in relation to the streets on the site of *Clos du Verbe-Incarné*, already mentioned in this paper. This residential and commercial block was in the heart of the colony at the top of Fourvière hill, close to a monumental sanctuary dating from the Tiberian-Claudian period. It developed on at least five adjoining parcels divided into elongated north-south terraces and featuring houses and shops from the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC onwards until the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD (fig. 4 and 5).

Shared walls between two adjoining plots are a common feature on this block already during the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, for example between a corner complex of shops on plot 1 and a house with commercial façade on plot 3 or a multi-storey building on the north-east corner of the block and a house on plot 2. This sharing of perimetral walls could easily be linked to the contemporary subdivision of the land from the colonial installation. It remains though challenging to determine from this architectural detail whether the plots themselves were owned jointly or separately. A shared wall didn't necessarily indicate a single owner. It could represent joint ownership as *paries communis*, a concept known to have been used in Lyon based on an inscription (AE 1973, 331; Rey-Coquais and Audin 1973) mentioning such configuration for a wall between two *horrea*. Alternatively, the wall could belong to just one owner, with the neighbour utilizing servitudes. We should also note that in the context of a densely urbanized city centre as the upper city of Lyon attested, notably from the Claudian



Figure 4. Lyon, *Clos du Verbe-Incarné*, mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD: overview of the block during its last phase of occupation; in the foreground, the Claudian fountain (excavation archives, *Service Archéologique de la Ville de Lyon*).

period onwards, using a common perimetral wall answered also to very pragmatic issues: seeking to save space on the ground as well as building materials without unnecessarily doubling the masonry, especially in the context of a sloping occupation where the terrace walls have a high elevation to provide support (Delaval and Thirion 2018: 279).

Diachronic observations at the scale of this case study show, however, certain choices of doubling the boundary walls that were initially shared between neighbouring plots. This is the case, for example, between plots 1 and 3, from the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. This phenomenon could reflect the reconfiguration of property divisions, establishing now a clear demarcation between two separate buildings —from now on, in that specific case, a narrow multi-storey building with four shops on the ground floor and a house with atrium and commercial façade. The same phenomenon of doubling was attested between almost all the plots of the southern half of the block at that time and seemed to be favoured until the general abandonment of the block at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. However, this change may have been driven more by technical considerations than by changes in ownership: the addition of a second wall was thus particularly helpful for the development of upper storeys in shops and houses, as it allowed for the installation of floor beams against

the perimeter walls without requiring separate owners to utilize servitudes (Monteix 2010: 361-362; Saliou 1994: 30; Delaval 2024: 201). In the same direction, having separate perimetral walls made occasional maintenance work easier for the owners: the doubling of only the eastern wall of a shop in front of plot 6 encouraged us to interpret it in that latter sense.

The specific case of the block studied here is particularly revealing when we look at the transformations affecting it, especially from the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century. These changes do not directly indicate the distribution of properties but rather reflect shifts in the real estate strategies of the owners, whose identities and relationships remain unclear. One notable example is the conversion of former houses with shops into independent commercial complexes (fig. 5). Plot 5 demonstrates this transformation, having been developed into a commercial building with three naves and apartments above, replacing a previous house with an atrium that it essentially took over in terms of surface area. The corner plots were significantly affected: plot 1 was completely reconstructed and featured a multi-storey commercial building with four shops on the ground floor, while a narrow, four-cell commercial building was constructed adjacent to plot 2.

To understand the reasons behind these changes in commercial architecture at the block level,

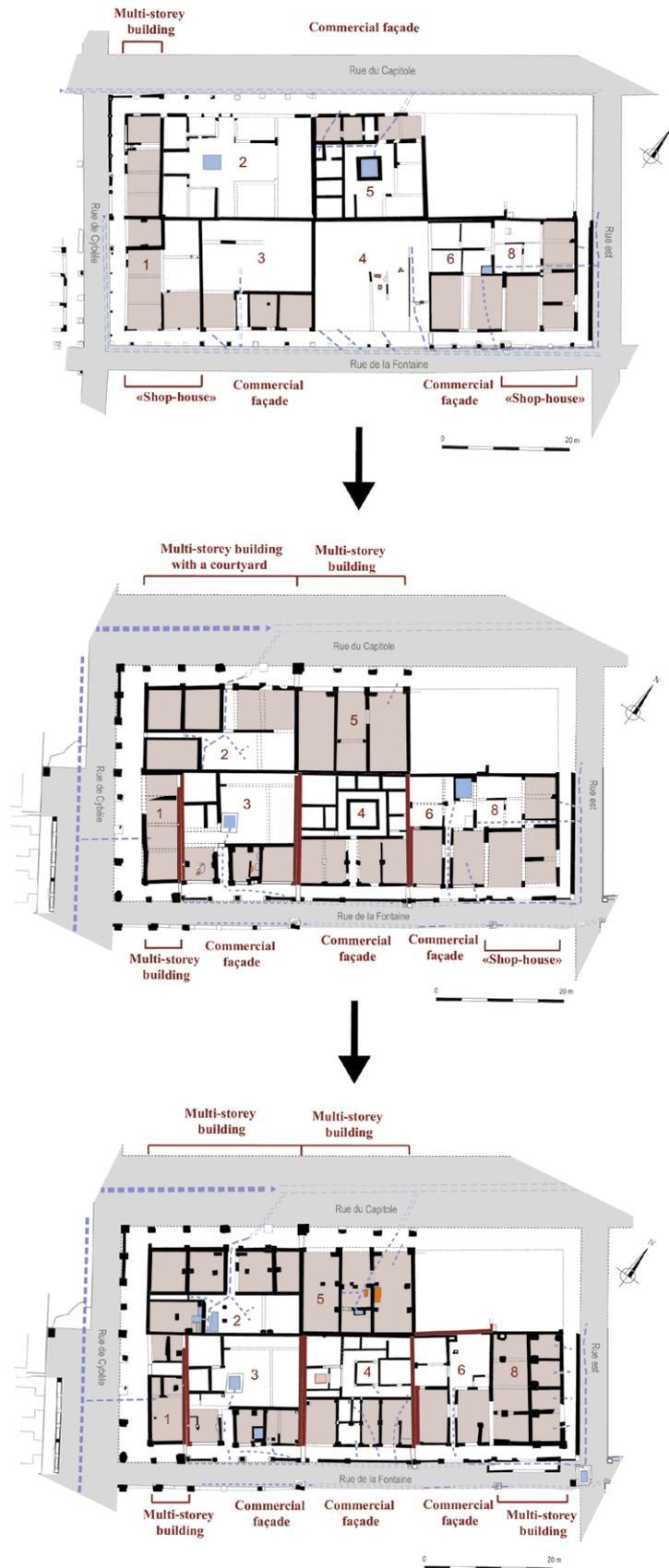


Figure 5. Lyon, *Clos du Verbe-Incarné*, changing occupation patterns in block XIV between the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century and the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (doubled perimetral walls in red) (CAD: M. Lépée from Clément 2018: 521-522).

we must look beyond potential shifts in ownership. The transformations were primarily triggered by a larger phenomenon affecting the entire urban fabric in this area: the construction of a monumental sanctuary further west during the Claudian period. This led to the widening of the two streets bordering the block, which in turn resulted in the relocation of the western perimeter wall and the narrowing of the corner plots (Desbat 2008). This architectural shift was thus a response to broader urban changes because such commercial buildings growing in height were more adapted to narrower plots. Nonetheless, it also suggests a strategic decision by the owners, who aimed to adapt to a higher density of occupants and to maximize the profitability of the block's remodelling, especially considering the significant investments required for reconstruction. It can be assumed that the owners preferred to generate income from renting out the shops and the numerous upstairs flats (as indicated by the location of the stairwells on plots 2 and 5), as multi-storey buildings offered more lucrative prospects than traditional domestic frontages.

This pursuit of profitability and adaptation to increased density of occupation can be observed in the subsequent development of shops on this block during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Storeys were expanded on plots 4, 6, and 8, and rooms were added below ground by excavating existing levels on plot 1. Overall, the area occupied by shops consistently grew, while residential spaces gradually shifted to the upper floors. Thus, the rebuilding process was initially driven more by the need to adapt to topographical changes than by a simple choice; however, it also illustrates how the investment strategies of the owners evolved in response to the changing urban landscape, with a clear emphasis on expanding retail premises.

Understanding the internal organization of the block, along with the adjacent porticoes and streets, could also provide insights into the ownership of adjoining properties. While we do not have evidence as clear-cut as the differing pavement developments along neighbouring façades observed in Pompeii —interpreted as visual indicators of distinct properties (Saliou 1999: 178-182; Dardenay 2022: 162-165)— we can still analyze the characteristics of certain porticoes in relation to the shops they lined. In this block, a notable example is the shop at the northeastern corner of plot 1 during the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, which features a portico built on masonry blocks, in contrast to the remaining portico on the plot that is constructed with planted posts. The choice of granite over pebble for the perimetral walls within this plot further emphasizes its independence, possibly indicating separate ownership. This kind

of segmentation of the porticoes has been observed in other urban contexts in Roman Gaul —such as the frontage of strip houses in *Lousonna/ Chavannes 11* (Berti Rossi and May Castella 2005: 260), at Bliesbrück (Petit 2005: 90), or in insula 13 at *Aventicum* (Blanc 2023: 236)— and is interpreted as a likely result of decisions made by various property owners. These variations may involve differing rhythms of monumentalization, the use of different materials, or the appearance of distinct drainage elements such as gutters. Even though street porticoes are part of the public urban landscape, they often relied on private initiatives, as reflected in some provincial legislation as the *Tabula Heracleensis* (CIL I<sup>2</sup>, lines 68-72) or the *Lex Colonia Genetivae Iuliae* (ch. 104).

Despite the initial difficulties mentioned in the introduction, archaeological remains of shops in Lyon and Vienne have revealed various architectural dynamics at different scales, including the individual shop, the commercial building, and the urban block, that lead us to cautiously infer some hypotheses regarding changes in ownership or investment strategies at play. Only a selection of them has been presented in this paper. No doubt that other paths could be explored to help us re-establish the connection between commercial properties and their owners. One lead to examine could be, for instance, to closely examine phases of construction and reconstruction to track a unity of ownership (observing contemporary repair work on adjacent plots, tracking the origin of certain backfills containing demolition elements from a clearly identified building, then reused inside neighbouring shops...). In this regard, it is worth recalling that legal constraints shaped how such reuse could occur: for example, with regard to painted plaster, the law did not allow decorative materials to be recovered and sold, and required the owner to reuse them within the same sphere of property during renovation works (Davoine 2017: 18).

Ultimately, shops seem particularly suitable for analyzing these dynamics, as they were inherently flexible and open to frequent transformations for several reasons:

- they faced the streets and therefore adapted to urban developments;
- they generally remained in strategic locations but underwent numerous internal redevelopments to accommodate different types of businesses over time;
- they were often connected to other types of buildings within the urban block;
- they were highly lucrative properties that attracted significant investment, whether in the building itself or in equipment.

It appears that the transformations of commercial buildings over time offer more insight into the real estate owners and their decisions than into the retailers themselves, who are often hard to perceive through the traces they left at their places of business.

From this selection of case studies, at least two methodological approaches seem important to develop in further work about economic buildings. First, a diachronic archaeological analysis must be encouraged to understand the dynamics and changes over time, with planimetric and architectural transformations at the micro-scale level being examined. Second, the remains must be approached in context: the shops, more than any other architectural entity, should not be viewed in isolation but as integral parts of the

urban landscape. Their connections to adjacent domestic structures, monumental buildings, and surrounding streets offer valuable insights into the evolving nature of commercial properties and their role in the urban fabric.

Marine Lépée

Scientific member of the École française de Rome  
Associate researcher at laboratory ArAr-UMR5138  
École française de Rome  
Piazza Farnese, 67  
00186 Roma – Italia  
marine.lepee@efrome.it  
ORCID: 0000-0002-7086-8353

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