Shifting Economic Power in Autun: The Donation of Constantine

Although few cities in northwestern Europe have a better textual and material record for the late third and early fourth century than the city of Autun (Roman Augustodunum), no one has ever integrated these sources to explore how and why ancient patterns of life began to give way during this pivotal period in northeast Gaul. Adopting a methodology developed in feminist historiography, this article explores the effect on Autun’s political economy of resources funneled to Autun’s bishop by the emperor Constantine in the early fourth century. Because Constantine did not restrict his patronage just to Autun, the city serves as a case study demonstrating how the introduction of imperial patronage to local bishops could push cities toward a more “medieval” political economy: these prelates became increasingly significant within their civitates, as landowners, and as developers of what we might call a “religious tourism economy”; while, in a separate shift, driven initially by third-century economic uncertainty, people moved away from the cities and “specialist crops,” in favor of mixed agriculture in the countryside.¹ In analyzing these socio-economic changes, this article also demonstrates how socio-political relationships in one community shifted to accommodate the increasingly assertive and hierarchical power of the bishop.

Autun (ancient Augustodunum) was in bad physical shape at the end of the third century in a way that made it difficult for its population to function: pandemic and siege warfare had effectively prevented the city from playing its necessary role in the political economy of the Roman Empire in the north. The emperor Constantius (286-306) first addressed

this problem in a way that reached toward the status quo ante. In the last years of his reign, however, by implementing the tax policies and religious persecution sponsored by his eastern colleagues, Constantius undermined the city once again. When his son, Constantine (306-37), seized the throne, he addressed some of the harms that his father’s policies had wrought.

Philanthropy to Autun, with its economic recovery incomplete and its Christian infrastructure damaged, provided a ripe opportunity for the emperor to shore up his own fortunes after he had executed for sedition his father-in-law, the former emperor Maximian. Addressing these harms, however, shifted the social structure of the town to include a new source of socio-economic power, namely the hierarchy constituted by the bishop and his clients.

The shift in Autun’s socio-economic power centers offers an opportunity to illustrate the factors that affect the relationships within heterarchies over time. Although the concept of heterarchy first emerged in archaeological scholarship to describe relationships between groups of settlements, more recently scholars have applied it to characterize social groups within a given urban environment. Using Emiliano Urciouli’s terminology from the Introduction to this section, in Autun there was a “simultaneous coexistence of multiple loci of distributed power,” i.e., an intraurban heterarchy, which shifted to include the bishop and his clients. At the same time, the Christian community became “increasingly hierarchical.” Both shifts


happened as imperial resources flowed into the city and transformed its socio-economic relationships into a recognizably late ancient or early medieval form.

Autun is especially well-suited to study the mechanism for the evolution of late ancient urban heterarchies. Unique among all but a handful of late ancient cities (e.g., Rome, Antioch, Carthage) and alone among the cities of Gaul, Autun left traces of its late third and early fourth century life in documentary sources beyond inscriptions, namely, a series of speeches delivered by professors from its famous academy of law and rhetoric. These are speeches preserved in the *Panegyrici latini*, numbers VII, IX, VI, and V.\(^6\) The city also boasts a rich tradition of archaeological exploration, extending across the past half century, from planned excavations of the churches and cemeteries in its countryside, to salvage operations in the city center.\(^7\)

Nevertheless, despite the relative richness of the source material—especially for a Gallic *civitas* in Late Antiquity, there are yawning gaps in our record. Perhaps this is why there is no comprehensive history of the ancient city, beyond analyses of its archaeology and monuments.\(^8\) While the panegyrics offer rich details, and the archaeological record traces shifts of settlement and production, neither type of evidence populates the town. That is to say, neither the speeches nor the archaeology—on their face—record how pandemic, or siege, or Constantius’ funds, or the new tax system, or Diocletian’s persecution affected the landowners,

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\(^7\) Trier also offers a substantial late ancient record, but lacks the detail for the late third and early fourth century that the *Panegyrici latini* afford here.

farmworkers, factory owners, and their workers, shopkeepers, or enslaved labor. Not one of these sources in any unmediated way allows us to see directly how their lives changed in response to changing economic circumstances. This article is an experiment to apply a methodology developed in feminist historiography and subaltern studies, to populate the past.

Although it has become customary for ancient historians to bemoan how dramatically our written sources privilege elite voices, there are a few notable exceptions. Amy Richlin, for example, urges Classicists to “argue with silence,” not simply to just take “no for an answer.” Blossom Stefaniw employs creative non-fiction to trace the history of the Tura papyri. And authors like Saidiya Hartman, in studying the Atlantic slave trade, have used “critical fabulation” to overcome the limitations of documents and archives, which works “By advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities), in fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research.” While Jennifer Trimble, Dan-el Padilla Peralta, and Candida Moss have applied methods similar to Hartman’s to explore the lives of enslaved persons in late

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11 The “legal records, surgeons’ journals, ledgers, ship manifests, and captains’ logs,” do not allow a person who has been enslaved to speak, to tell her story. And, by the quiet and methodical acts of collectors deracinating, aggregating, and sorting these documents, the archive compounds the violence so that “the unimaginable assumes the guise of everyday practice.” Rightly seeing the subjects she confronts as “matters still contested in the present,” Hartman has developed a methodology for narrating the history of people whose lives have been “eradicated by the protocols of intellectual disciplines.” Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 12, 6, 10.

antiquity,\textsuperscript{13} I am not aware of any study that has applied this technique to explore socio-economic systems more broadly, as I do here. This article uses the subjunctive in order to populate the political, social, and economic roles—overlooked in the speeches and mute in our material artifacts—that, on the basis of other sources from other places, we know must have existed. After populating the town, based on the testimony of the documentary and material record, I then imagine how the different stressors affected them and their relationships with one another over time.

The argument will proceed as follows. After a brief look at the pivotal role Autun played in the economy of northeastern Gaul in the early third century, I will describe how a series of hardships devastated the city. Next, I will argue that the interventions of the emperor Constantius, while ameliorating a good bit of Autun’s distress, failed to resolve the crisis before new tetrarchic policies (both a new tax structure and Diocletian’s persecution) began to undermine the recovery that the city had made. Finally, I will argue that Constantine’s willingness to extend economic aid both to the landowners and to the bishop not only addressed his needs and those of the city in the short term. But it also served to reorient the city’s socio-economic structures of power into a new urban heterarchy, one that involved the local bishop as a prominent member.

The Ripple-Effect of Autun’s Third-Century Hardships on Its Socio-Economic Networks

Autun before the “Third-Century Crisis” was a pearl in the string of cities along the Rhône and Saône rivers joining the Mediterranean to the Rhineland frontier. An Augustan foundation, whose name, “Augustodunum” (i.e., “the hill fort of Augustus”), acknowledged its debt to imperial patronage, Autun’s construction rewarded the Aedui for their loyalty to Julius Caesar (and enticed them down from their hilltop town of Bibracte). It was not just that the city’s residents profited from an especially rich number of resources; nor was it unique to be a civitas, a city administering its own territory in the Gallic northeast. Autun’s size, monuments, and connections testify to how effectively the city’s political leaders had managed these resources over time. By the end of the third century, however, a series of calamities had harmed Autun’s residents in a way that made it difficult for the city to function, either to provide its customary goods and services to its residents or to play its customary role in the political economy of northern and central Gaul.

14 Balcon, Berry, and Sapin, “Architecture and Sculpture,” 212 n. 5.
17 In a province of 23 civitates, it was second in size only to Lyon; in the northwest (Alpes Cottiae, Aquitania, Belgica, Britannia, Germania Inferior, Lugdunensis), among 113 civitates, only Metz, Trier and Lyon were bigger; only Köln and Limonum had larger territories. Pellegrino, “Size Distribution of Self-Governing Cities,” 80.
Autun is remarkably well situated in Burgundy near the Arroux, Saône, and Rhône rivers, in a region (like today) especially good for agriculture, viticulture in particular. These resources led to industries, professions and livelihoods that flourished because they supported each other.\(^{18}\) Above all, Autun’s countryside produced grapes, which villa owners would have sold both for the table and for wine, an industry in this region that archaeologists are just starting to understand.\(^{19}\) If Autun was typical of Roman towns, this agricultural production would have been the source of the majority of the population’s wealth, as farmers and villa representatives came into the city to sell their surplus and bought what they needed from local artisans and shop-keepers.\(^{20}\) Wine and table grape production, in turn, likely supported nearby basket and barrel industries.\(^{21}\) In addition to the vineyard economy, there was a coroplast pottery industry,\(^{22}\) several workshops making products from local cattle bone and antlers (e.g., pins and...
needles), a spindle-maker, a tablet maker, major metal-working workshops, including a bronze-works producing fibulae, and a glass works. The region was also well-known for timber, sheep, and cattle (hence the bone and antler industries).

Autun's size and monuments testified not just to its residents’ productive use of local resources, but also how effectively the city’s political and economic leaders had managed them.

As a planned *colonia*, Autun from its origins featured many of the urban amenities that distinguished the Roman Empire’s cities. Its well-appointed forum lay within a regular grid defined by its *cardo* and *decumani*, each of which met the town’s wall at a major gate, two of which—the Porte d’Arroux (N) and the Porte St. André (E), still stand. The city’s footprint was


big, both within the wall and the countryside, signifying that the economy supported a large population. Within the walls, six kilometers in circumference,\textsuperscript{31} Autun had an amphitheater and a theater, one of the largest in the Roman Empire (also still visible).\textsuperscript{32} Although their physical traces have disappeared, Autun’s temples honored a range of divinities, from Berecynthia, Apollo, and Diana, to a Capitolium which honored Jupiter, Minerva, and Juno.\textsuperscript{33} The city’s economy was so productive that the residents could direct their wealth into the construction of well-appointed houses.\textsuperscript{34} Outside the walls, a more recent theater,\textsuperscript{35} at least one temple (the so-called Temple of Janus),\textsuperscript{36} a number of extensive necropoleis, and several prominent funerary monuments (e.g., the Pierre de Couard) stretched out from the city as was typical for so many other “settler colonial” foundations.

Autun’s many gifts had allowed the city to function as a “nodal point within the urban system of the western empire.” But even more important, Autun’s resources, both human and material, together with its connectivity “imbued” it “with major” economic, “political and symbolic power.”\textsuperscript{37} We can see that leverage working in several ways. Autun served as an

emporium for goods (grapes and wine, yes, but also spindles and ceramics) which—thanks to people traveling, exchanging, and buying them, might then find their way to markets in other towns. As goods moved back and forth, so did people: Autun’s commercial and industrial economy supported a high level of Immigration and emigration, linking it to cities and regions well beyond central Gaul (see Figs. 1-2). For example, from at least the second century, Autun’s residents included Greek-speakers. The movement of people was also responsible for Autun’s becoming home to one of Gaul’s earliest Christian communities, their existence often overlooked but unsurprising, given the city’s proximity to Lyon, the provincial capital, where their existence is better known, thanks to Irenaeus and Eusebius. The city’s amenities and connections also attracted the professors and students required to support one of the most prestigious colleges of rhetoric and law in the northwest empire. In the center of the city near the forum, along the school’s walls stretched a map of the Empire’s cities and the distances

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42 There was likely some overlap between the Greek-speaking and Christian communities, especially if those in Autun had migrated from Lyon, given the connections between those in Lyon and Vienne to Asia Minor (Eus. HE 5.2.1), and the language in which Irenaeus was writing in the late second century.

between them that testified to the influence of its students.\textsuperscript{44} As a regional “representative[e] of the administrative and ideological institutions of Rome,” Autun extended its influence along the roads to the “cities of the Senones and the Parisii and the Saône and Loire valleys, between the territories of the Sequani and the Bituriges.\textsuperscript{45} Lying along an important military supply line linking Lyon to Köln through Chalon,\textsuperscript{46} Autun likely took pride in its place as an important node in the economic network that supported the Roman administrative and military structure.\textsuperscript{47}

By midcentury, however, Autun endured a string of tragedies the serious emotional toll of which can be imagined from the devastation the city’s infrastructure had endured.\textsuperscript{48} The causes of the damage were several. And the effects of these losses were significant. So serious were these harms that they disrupted Autun’s power structures, which in turn meant that city could not perform its customary—and increasingly necessary—administrative and economic role.


\textsuperscript{45} Martin, “Augustodunum.”

\textsuperscript{46} Pellegrino, “Size Distribution of Self-Governing Cities,” 78, 80.

\textsuperscript{47} Pellegrino, 80. Wine amphorae, for example, demonstrate the extent of Autun’s connections throughout the Gallic northeast, especially for military supply. See Olmer, “Amphores.” Of course, amphorae are also evidence for products from other regions being bought and sold in Autun, as well. See Armand-Calliat M. L and G. Viallefond, “Amphores et monnaies romaines trouvées en 1956 à Autun,” \textit{Revue Archéologique de l’Est et du Centre-Est} IX (1958): 275–78; María Pilar González Serrano, “Anforas romanas de origen español halladas en Autun,” \textit{Archivo Español de Arqueología} XXII (1958): 198–99. For cities’ awareness of their links to the imperial government, see Potter, \textit{The Roman Empire at Bay}, AD 180–395, 104.

The “Cyprianic pandemic” (249-62) likely robbed the city and the surrounding rural villages of a number of residents. Although there is no documentary evidence of the disease (likely a hemorrhagic fever, like Ebola), our recent shared experience with COVID-19 reveals how devastating a disease with even a relatively low mortality (1%) can be. As Fig. 1 shows, heavy traffic linked Autun and Carthage—where the pandemic was attested, virtually assuring the pathogen’s arrival in central Gaul. Although we do not usually think of pathogens as “things,” they would have travelled in and with their human hosts who journeyed from south to north, as they intentionally exchanged other commodities. And—as we now know all too well—waves of death and illness would recur over time.

The city also suffered serious physical damage from Roman troops in the waning days of the Gallic Empire. As the pandemic destabilized central political and military control, the Germans and Persians launched opportunistic raids across the Rhine, Danube, and eastern frontiers. To mount a more effective advance against war parties of aggressive Germans than


51 Cyprian, De mortalitate.

52 Kyle Harper, “Another Eyewitness to the Plague Described by Cyprian, with Notes on the ‘Persecution of Decius,’” Journal of Roman Archaeology 29 (2016): 473–76; Guido Alfani and Tommy E. Murphy, “Plague and Lethal Epidemics in the Pre-Industrial World,” The Journal of Economic History 77, no. 1 (March 2017): 319. Although scholars have dialed back some of Harper’s claims, there is no question that Cyprian observed a pandemic event in Carthage that would easily have spread to Autun along the well-established trade routes illustrated in Fig. 1. John Haldon et al., “Plagues, Climate Change, and the End of an Empire. A Response to Kyle Harper’s The Fate of Rome (2): Plagues and a Crisis of Empire,” History Compass 16, no. 12 (2018): e12506.
the emperor seemed willing or able to do, Postumus, a part-German military commander in the north seized control of the northern armies. The provinces of Hispania, Britannia, Gaul and Germania followed his leadership. In the struggle over command of the “Gallic empire” after Postumus’ death, Autun allied with Claudius II. As the archaeology reveals, although the Germanic raids of the period seem to have left Autun unscathed, Victorinus, Postumus’ successor, besieged Autun as punishment for the city’s decision to support Claudius II. The siege significantly damaged the city’s urban fabric and rode roughshod over the surrounding countryside. The city’s fine elite houses—many of them the town homes of the villa landlords who owned the most prosperous shops, workshops, and industries—and the college suffered serious damage. The aqueduct was broken. In the countryside, the vineyards, flooded and overgrown, could not be harvested. The local roads were impassible. The Bagaudae (probably ordinary people made homeless by the agricultural, political, and economic upheavals) supported themselves by raiding those who continued to reside in the city and countryside. Resources did not flow from Lyon, the provincial capital, or Trier, the capital of the prefecture.

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56 Jones, LRE, 1:714. Two specific examples are the houses of Balbius lassus and the “house with the gold case (à l’étui d’or) which appear to have been kept up through the third quarter of the third century, but then slowly declined: Blanchard-Lemée, Olivier, and Rebourg, “Deux Maisons.” Further testimony both to the wealth of some at least of Autun’s inhabitants and the precarity of this period comes from the opulence of the cache of jewelry and coins, dating probably from 270, and discovered in the city in the 17th century: François Baratte, “Le trésor d’orfèvrerie découvert à Autun en 1614: nouvelles observations,” Bulletin de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France, 1992, 201–12; Xavier Loriot, “Le trésor d’Autun de 1614,” Bulletin de la Société française de numismatique XL (1985): 603–8.
58 Although groups of organized bandits survived under this name well into the fourth century, Autun was one of their most prominent early targets. Domenico Lassandro, “Le rivolte bagaudiche nelle fonti tardo-romane e medievali. Aspetti e problemi (con appendice di testi),” Invigilata Lucernis III–IV (1982): 57–110.
Starting with Claudius II (who himself died of the pandemic disease), emperors had tried to bring the Gallic Empire’s provinces back under central control. But stable central control itself was not so easily established, with five men occupying the throne between the reigns of Claudius II and Diocletian. Even though Diocletian’s tetrarchy would prove to be more stable, it still could not divert resources toward rebuilding Autun or any other city before dealing with the usurpers Carausius and then Allectus, who had seized Britain and the Gallic port city of Boulogne.

These calamities had a number of wide-ranging effects on the people who lived in Autun and its countryside, all of which diminished the city’s ability to function, both as a self-governing city and to fill its role as a nodal point within the northwestern urban system. This was an especially grave situation, given the prominence of Trier as an administrative center in the early fourth century and the needs of the frontier. Shifting into the subjunctive here, the economic effects of these hardships are relatively easy to imagine. The demographic, agricultural, and economic calamities together would also have undermined Autun’s political functioning. All told, these disruptions would have isolated Autun’s residents from the rest of Gaul (not to mention the wider world) and—as they retreated from the city—from one another.

We know from the Panegyrici Latini that the vineyard economy was in tatters, a situation that would have undermined the economic security of everyone involved in it, from the landlords themselves, to their labor, to their suppliers. The landlords were bringing in much less cash, and the consequences of that shift would have been manifold. The villas would have

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been thrown into a barter economy, growing what they could to sustain themselves and trading whatever surplus for the things that they lacked. The landlords would likely continue to employ the men and women who maintained their kitchen gardens, whether as wage-earners or enslaved persons. In the best days, the villas could support perhaps as many as ten workers per iugerum; But as income contracted, the villas could support fewer laborers, together with overseers, plowmen, willow gatherers or swineherds. And so the landlords would have had to let go a number of wage-earners or people whom they had fed and housed in exchange for their labor. These included people who were themselves farmers, farmhands working for remuneration, or people working off debts. Neither they nor their spouses and children were likely to find work at other villas or in the town. Generous landlords or those with large holdings might have allowed them to farm a portion of their land for a portion of the proceeds. But one should not assume that someone who used to plant, train, graft, harvest or prune grapes, for example, could successfully take up farming for themselves and their families. And that person would still need a startup investment. Life would have become even more precarious for people enslaved to the villa owners. The landlords might try to sell them, but if the surrounding villas were in the same situation, there would be few people in a position to buy them. The landlords may have thus freed and released men and women enslaved to them, if

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60 Cato, De agricultura 10-11; Sherwood et al., Greek and Roman Technology, 97.
61 Cato (De agricultura 56-59) provides a sense of the provisions required for labor from workers to “fettered slaves”; not just wheat, but also wine, olives, fish brine, vinegar, olive oil, and salt, together with a tunic and a wool blanket. Sherwood et al., 101. For the 40-60% reduction of population in the countryside between 250-300, see Kasprzyk, “Mesures de Constantin,” 201.
62 Varro, De agricultura 1.17-22; Sherwood et al., Greek and Roman Technology, 99.
64 For tasks, see Columella, De agricultura in Sherwood et al., Greek and Roman Technology, 124.
65 It is impossible to ascertain the ratio of free to enslaved people, but the likelihood that some enslaved people worked the fields is noted by Varro, De agricultura 1.17-22. Sherwood et al., 99.
their upkeep cost more than their value. Whether free agricultural worker or freed-person, few people can quickly become so proficient at farming, even if granted a plot of land and startup materials, that they can sustain themselves and their families—especially in a region that endures significant winters.

In tandem with the collapse of the grape economy, portions, at least, of the industrial economy would have collapsed. The barrel-making industry nearby, for example, was likely harmed, as they had supported local vintners. Also the Pistelius pottery which exported its coroplast ware suffered from the diminished traffic and reduced economic circumstances, as it seems to have disappeared, although the factory making spindles, pins, and needles survived. Their diminished income would put factory owners in a difficult position with respect to their labor. Like the landlords, they would have had to let go men and women working for wages, or whomever they fed and housed in exchange for their labor. Like the landlords, they too would probably have freed men and women enslaved to them once their value dropped below the cost of their upkeep. If the factory owners owned no land, they—like their labor—would have been forced to try to sustain themselves, and their families. They might have migrated with or without their families in search of other employment opportunities, or tried their hand at urban farming, or petitioned a local landlord for a plot to farm in exchange for some of the yield (but,

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67 For the depopulation of the traditional artisanal blocks in 270-80, see Kasprzyk, “Mesures de Constantin,” 200; Nouvel and Venault, “Agglomérations,” para. 15.

68 See notes 21 and 22.

again, farming is difficult to learn). There were no troops stationed in Autun, and thus they could provide neither an infusion of cash nor a source of labor. Finally, Autun’s depressed wine economy would have also brought down suppliers outside the city, the amphora factory in Gueugnon, for example.  

Finally, the school of law and rhetoric would have been affected in a way similar to Autun’s industry. Hazardous travel and a damaged urban core meant that the school would have had difficulty in attracting students from outside the region. Although the school’s finances are opaque to us, fewer students meant a reduced income whether paid directly to the faculty or to the city (which may have paid some faculty salaries from civic revenues). The size of the faculty would have shrunk, either because some may have moved on with their families to other cities, or because those who died were not replaced. The school’s administration would have been able to support fewer mean and women earning wages or enslaved to them to care for the building and the students and so those people would have left as well. The school’s building was unsuitable for instruction, and so the faculty taught in their homes, among their spouses and children. Nevertheless, the persistence of the school—like the presence of a few aristocratic homes—shows that the economy had shrunk, but the economic structure had not totally collapsed.

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71 Jones, LRE, 1:736. The public character of the school is evident from Eumenius’ remarks at PL 9.4.3, 9.2.3, 9.8.1-2, 9.9.1, 9.10.2, 9.16.6. He would not have to ask the governor’s permission to donate his salary otherwise.
72 Eumenius, Pan. Lat. 9.17.3, 9.1.
The economic situation and its attendant demographic changes would have disrupted the heterarchy of power structures in Autun. Within the city, but also in its surrounding territory, people whose financial outlook had declined would have found their influence waning as well. Owners of struggling industries (e.g., pottery manufacturing) would have lost influence, relatively speaking. They would have had fewer clients because they would have had fewer employees. Moreover, people who no longer needed their products would have been less concerned about the well-being of those industries. Owners of smaller vineyards would have also found their influence diminished. Another group of people likely to have been similarly adversely affected were the local priests. It is significant that among all of the dozens of archaeological reports on late ancient Autun, not one describes a temple refurbished in the early fourth century. Autun’s monumental Claudian-era temple to Apollo, in fact, appears to have been repurposed in the mid fourth century. Conversely, in gaining tenants, and so clients, the landlords who owned the larger estates would have gained influence. These would have been the people with the most resources (i.e., land) to extend to others who needed to sustain themselves, whether their own former workers, those who used to work on other estates, or labor from the town attempting to make a go at farming. Those who gained clients would potentially have increased their influence relative to those landlords who had fewer clients. These groups of people were not mutually exclusive; nevertheless, looking at different categories of activity helps visualize the overall economic situation.

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Finally, the influence of some people would have remained the same. As people who could best articulate the community’s needs and communicate them effectively to others, the faculty of the school would continue to be influential in the community, even though they brought fewer students into the community and employed fewer workers. Leaders of certain associations with diverse memberships would also continue to be influential. Associations with diverse memberships would have been especially likely to survive the emigration of specific groups of people from the town (e.g., pottery workers or coopers). These leaders would include the bishop, since Christians had been a legal association since 260. Indeed, the bishop was uniquely positioned to become a kind of community leader. His congregation likely reflected a cross-section of the population. Thus he could serve as a nexus putting people in contact with one another to exchange goods and services. In other words, as a result of the economic crisis, the number of patrons would have been reduced, with a few landlords becoming dominant, and the influence of most others declining.

The demographic, agricultural, and economic calamities together would also have disrupted Autun’s political and civic functioning. Since land owning was likely a qualification for membership, reduced circumstances for the villa landlords, proprietors of industries (and, of course, shops and workshops) would have meant fewer people to serve as decurions on the city council (which once likely numbered in the hundreds) and as curatores civitatis, leaving

75 Patres of the local Mithras association may have been in a similar role. Although a Mithraic altar was found near Autun in 1840, it is impossible to say more about the activity of the participants. n.d. Statue (remains of red paint; background in relief). Place: From an altar found in vicinity of Autun, Saône-et-Loire dept., France. 1840.. https://library.artstor.org/asset/AWSS35953_35953_31686694, accessed 1 April 2021.
administration and decisions in the hands of fewer men, with fewer sons to succeed them. Thus there were fewer men to elect or appoint as quaestors to oversee the local finances, or as aediles to manage municipal services (e.g., maintaining the streets and water supply, running the market). Moreover, there were fewer men available to appoint as magistrates in charge of collecting levies and taxes (e.g., the \textit{susceptores mancipes}),\footnote{The \textit{susceptores} collected levies and taxes; the \textit{mancipes} oversaw the public post. Jones, \textit{LRE}, 1:724–25; Roselaar, “Local Administration,” 126–28.} a task which would have exacerbated civic tensions because there was also less local and human capital (whether this came from rents of civic land, interest on loans, local dues or taxes or \textit{munera patrimonalia}) to invest in repairing or maintaining public infrastructure (the temples, theaters, amphitheater, baths, markets, streets, arches, aqueducts and fountains) and private buildings or to support the school.\footnote{Jones, \textit{LRE}, 1:732, 736; Roselaar, “Local Administration,” 131–32.} And there would have been fewer people to appoint as \textit{flamines} of the civic cults or to the colleges of \textit{pontifices} and augurs, with less agricultural surplus to sustain rituals, including festivals, sacrifice and public feasting—not to mention games or theatrical displays. Finally, all those whom the city administration supported, from professors and doctors to the humbled free or corvée labor—the nightwatchmen, the fire brigade, the street and sewer cleaners, the public post workers—would have found their incomes or sustenance diminished, if not eliminated—with dire effects for their families.\footnote{Jones, \textit{LRE}, 1:724, 736.}

Taken together, these disruptions would have isolated Autun’s residents from the rest of Gaul (not to mention the wider world) and from one another. Fewer students at the school meant that the faculty had fewer networks extending outside the city. The diminished

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79 Jones, \textit{LRE}, 1:724, 736.
population and the state of the roads meant that fewer people would have traveled to Autun. There were fewer marketing opportunities, fewer employment opportunities, and a diminished audience for theater productions, if, indeed, they continued. It would have been much more difficult for the city council to send delegations communicating Autun’s needs to the governor in Lugdunum (I) at Lyon—not to mention the Praetorian Prefect or consistory in Trier, although, it appears, the town’s landlords did have a high-ranking contact in Constantius’ consistory in the person of Eumenius. In short, its diminished economic circumstances impeded the ability of Autun’s residents to care for themselves, to make their needs known to the wider world, and for the city to serve its erstwhile function as part of the supply chain supporting the troops at the northeastern frontier—especially important in the early fourth century under the tetrarchy’s new provincial structure.

Three steps forward and two steps back during the reign of Constantius

Imagining a new provincial structure in the Empire’s northwest quadrant was not the same thing as imposing it. To do so, the emperor Diocletian sent first Maximian to subdue the Bagaudae, and then Constantius to push Carausius and then Allectus from the northern ports and North Sea channel. Constantius had been able to wrest northern Gaul and Britain back under Roman control, he implemented a number of measures designed to help Autun return to its status quo ante. Resuming control of the north provided the peace and the labor that helped Constantius begin to reintegrate Autun into the wider economy. He also attended to the city’s

81 Kasprzyk, “Mesures de Constantin,” 204.
urban core by restoring its human and physical infrastructure. Autun’s grape industry, however, did not fully recover before the emperor’s death.

Constantius’ defeat of Carausius and Allectus allowed the emperor to take measures that affected Autun’s connection with northern Gaul, a region responsible for about a third of the traffic in and out of Autun (i.e., the roads to the northern ports and to the Rhine camps; see Figs. 1-2). He restored Britain to the imperial economy, making British resources available to others: people, crops, mineral wealth, taxes.\textsuperscript{82} Constantius enslaved Carausius’ former allies and put them to work in fields from Beauvais (Caesaromagus) to Langres (Lingones), north of Autun.\textsuperscript{83} These farms could now produce enough to sell animals to markets outside of their immediate area.\textsuperscript{84} The availability of more animals had far-reaching repercussions, as their market price would have dropped. It would have been more affordable to include meat in the local diet, leading to a stronger, healthier population. It would have been easier to purchase a horse to ride or an ox to pull a plow or a cart, thus stimulating agricultural production as well as transportation—between countryside and city, and between Autun and other cities.\textsuperscript{85}

Constantius also devoted resources to Autun’s urban renewal, restoring both human and physical infrastructure, a transformational undertaking that finally addressed the destruction that Victorinus’ soldiers had wreaked 30 years earlier. The emperor devoted resources to restore urban structures, both public and private. Legionary engineers attended

\textsuperscript{82} PL 8.11.1.
\textsuperscript{84} PL 8.9.4.
not only to the aqueducts, but even helped rebuild private dwellings. British artisans rebuilt the old houses, repaired public buildings (including streets, porticoes and gates), and restored temples. Constantius appointed Eumenius, a former member of the consistory (magister sacrae memoriae), as director of the College, who in turn donated his considerable salary (600,000 HSS) toward their restoration at the end of the third century. The emperor helped to repopulate Autun: He encouraged wealthy families to move there—a sign that the number of landowners resident in the city had been insufficient to sustain the town, and he supplied


90 Pan. lat. IX.11.2.

91 PL 9.11.2; Nixon and Saylor Rodgers, Panegyrici Latini, 148. A relatively recent excavation found evidence that the school had been refurbished at the end of the third or beginning of the fourth century. Yannick Labaune et al., “Une Schola Monumentale Decouverte Boulevard Frederic-Latouche a Augustodunum/Autun (Saone-et-Loire),” Gallia, no. 70 (2013): 197–256.

92 PL 9.4.3; Jones, LRE, 1:720.
many distinguished new students to the school. Even if some industries did not recover, the investment of human capital with connections elsewhere, together with restoring the physical infrastructure of the city, helped to reconnect Autun into the regional economic network that included the army camps along the Rhine.

These imperial investments would have replicated, to some degree, the heterarchy—or loci of socio-economic influence—that had characterized Autun before its decades of troubles. It is unclear what the wealthy families did with their money, but there are a number of possibilities. They might have purchased villas and townhomes from bankrupt landlords, thus replicating that network of labor and social dependencies. They might also have loaned money to landlords, putting themselves at the top of those agricultural networks. They might have loaned money to entrepreneurs, reviving local industries (such as pottery or coopering). These investments would have exerted a pull beyond the city, encouraging people to come and to find work, whether in the fields or in the town. We already saw one example of this restoration with Eumenius, who came from a line of Autun magistri, which gave him the connections and prominence to join the imperial consistory, a career trajectory that gave him the civic attachment and imperial influence that allowed him to return home and devote his income (as Director) toward the physical restoration of the school, and whose actions and presence would, in turn, have attracted students to return to the city. The men of these new families, in other words, would have become important players overnight. They were financial patrons and they

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93 PL 9.2.3; 9.8.1-2; 9.10.2, 9.16.6; 9.5.1-3.
94 E.g., the bronze works discovered under Autun’s military school ceased operation at the end of the third century. Chardron-Picault and Pernot, Un quartier antique.
were connected to the emperor. They would have been available to serve on the town council, as decurions, and as priests (which might have meant an effort to revive local cults and traditions). To the extent that these local investments helped revive agriculture, industry, and commerce, and brought more people into or sustained the middling population of Autun, the ranks of the associations would have filled out, allowing them better to serve their function—and also helping to reconnect Autun to wider commercial networks.\footnote{As the anonymous orator in 311 noted, the collegia were part of the party that greeted Constantine upon his entry to the city. \textit{Pan. lat.} 5(8) 8.4; John S. Kloppenborg, “Occupational Guilds and Cultic Associations in Ostia Antica: Patronage, Mobility, Connectivity,” in \textit{Ancient Cities}, ed. N. Andrade and et al. (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2019), 412 n. 56. For the way in which collegia served as intermediaries for Roman merchants and shippers see Wim Broekaert, “Partners in Business: Roman Merchants and the Potential Advantages of Being a ‘Collegiatus,’” \textit{Ancient Society} 41 (2011): 221–56.} It is not impossible that some of Autun’s newcomers, whether wealthy or humble, also became part of the Christian community, in this case reinforcing the social stability that the congregation had gained in the previous decades. At the time, Autun’s citizens seeing Constantius’ involvement as a transformational undertaking, called him their second founder and dubbed the city Flavia Aeduorum.\footnote{PL 8.21.2; 5.1–3.}

Despite the resources Constantius had lavished on the town early in the fourth century, by the time of his death in 306, the town’s residents were aggrieved by policies, deriving from the eastern tetrarchic leadership, that challenged the city’s elites in new ways. For example, in answer to the edicts of persecution that Diocletian had issued early in 303, Constantius’ soldiers would have demolished the building where Autun’s Christians had since 260 legally assembled, i.e., their church, likely a modest structure, perhaps part of the bishop’s house.\footnote{The first securely dated documentary evidence for Christians in Autun is the mention of the city’s bishop, Reticius, among those gathered in Rome to adjudicate the Donatists’ complaint. Nevertheless, for that person to have the stature to serve in that role, not just for the emperor, but also for the Africans, presupposes a long-standing Christian community. See Digeser, “Crisis as Opportunity,” 110, inc. n. 63.} After so much
work to restore the urban fabric, this violence would have provoked anger and resentment on the part of the Christian community and possibly beyond. This reaction was particularly likely if the bishop had been a good socio-economic facilitator before imperial money and people had come into the city. It’s likely that at least throughout the bishop’s community there would have been a shock wave of anger at this attack because it was unprovoked. (In this way the situation was substantially different from the execution of Symphorian, the Christian who had mutilated a statue of Berecynthia during the reign of Aurelian.\(^{100}\))

Three years after the demolition of the church, the tetrarchs’ new taxation system, implemented in 306, threatened to undermine the city’s recent economic gains.\(^{101}\) Now landowners were assessed taxes on fallow and flooded vineyards.\(^{102}\) The new tax structure threatened to jeopardize Autun’s fragile renewal,\(^{103}\) and some roads were still in need of repair.\(^{104}\)

**New Urban Heterarchies under Constantine**

Although scholars of an earlier generation saw Autun’s history after Constantius as one of decline,\(^{105}\) his son’s patronage allowed the city to function within the emergent late ancient


\(^{102}\) For fallow vineyards, see *PL* 5.7.2.

\(^{103}\) *PL* For the taxation system, see Lactantius, *Mort.* 7, 23. For the suggestion that land allowed to go fallow was being assessed as productive, see Kasprzyk, “Mesures de Constantin,” 207–8.

\(^{104}\) *PL* 5.7.2. Possibly the road to Chalons; see below.

\(^{105}\) *PL* 5.7.2. Constantius “took steps to restore its former splendor, ... but these efforts were in vain: it shrank to the area around the high city, which later acquired a surrounding wall, mostly medieval.” So Martin, “Augustodunum.”
social and cultural economy, first by restoring its productivity and connectivity, and second, by
infusing its Christian community with the resources that would help it sustain the city through
the turbulent fifth century and emerge on the other side as an important episcopal see.

In 310, Constantine, Constantius’ son and successor, had just presided over the
execution for sedition of his father-in-law, the former emperor Maximian. The need to address
the political situation motivated Constantine to address some of the harms that his father’s
policies had wrought. In particular, he forgave five years of tax debt,107 he patronized a series
of professors from the College,108 and he likely provided Autun’s bishop Reticius with significant
resources to rebuild his church.109 We don’t know how much he received. But Carthage, a city
of about 100,000 people, received between 125 and 300 pounds of gold.110 Moreover,
Constantine provided opportunities for the city’s bishop to network with other western bishops
dealing with the ripple effects of the tetrarchy’s anti-Christian edicts. Although he did not

106 For Constantine’s reaction to Autun’s distress, see Antony Hostein, “« Lacrimae principis »: les larmes du Prince
devant la cité affligée,” in La « crise » de l’Empire romain de Marc Aurèle à Constantin: mutations, continuités,
ruptures, Passé présent (Paris: Pr. de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2006), 211–34. I discuss Constantine’s motives
107 PL 5.10.5. Constantine issued a remission of tax arrears for the indiction and progress in 310 and reduced by
7000 capita the 32,000 due from that which would follow his visit. Pan. Lat. VII (5), 11-13 and Kasprzyk, “Mesures
de Constantin,” 208.
108 Pan. Lat. 6, 5, 12, 4.
109 For details, see Digeser, “Crisis as Opportunity,” 117.
110 T. G. Elliott, The Christianity of Constantine the Great (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1996), 76 n. 14;
Raymond Van Dam, “Bishops and Clerics during the Fourth Century: Numbers and Their Implications,” in Episcopal
Gold sells today for $1780/oz. Accordingly, in today’s dollars, the bishop of Carthage received between $3.56 and
$8.54 million dollars. If the bishop of Autun received only 20% of that amount (assuming that Autun was 1/5 the
population of Carthage), it would have been between $712,000 and $1,708,800. This seems like a reasonable
figure in comparison with Eumenius’ salary. His 600,000 HHS was worth approximately $2,189,000. This calculation
is based on the weight of a Constantinian aureus (5.8 g), and there having been 100 sesterces (HHS) to the aureus
(Seth William Stevenson, A Dictionary of Roman Coins, Republican and Imperial (G. Bell and Sons, 1889), 427–28.)
For the aureus, see BNK R.67, minted in Rome in 294-305. These numbers are very rough estimates only, and are
useful only in providing a sense of scale.
improve the road between Autun and Chalon, the nearest port (at least by 311), he did fortify Tournus where there were horreae and which may have helped safeguard local transport.\(^{111}\)

Constantine’s interventions, however, shifted the balance of power among Autun’s different socio-economic networks, creating a more multi-polar heterarchy. In the first place, forgiving five years of tax-arrears would have preserved the standing of the town’s traditional power structure. At the same time, the socio-economic standing of certain professors at the school would have risen (at least for a time), as their involvement with the court had brought change to the town, enhancing Autun’s reputation as a well-connected law school, attracting more students and boosting the possibility that the imperial court might be their future employer.\(^{112}\) The position of the landlords was also seemingly reaffirmed until the economic basis of the town shifted about a half-century later.\(^{113}\) As Nouvel and Venault illustrate, the school—and at least one of the mansions—that had characterized the town stood until mid-century.\(^{114}\) Around 350, however, the footprint of the town shifted, as these areas contracted and lime kilns replaced the domiciles. Lime kilns are also part of the construction process, but their emergence here suggests that they supported development elsewhere.

The cash stipend that the bishop received would have dramatically augmented his status and economic influence, putting him on par with other local elites.\(^{115}\) He could now

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\(^{112}\) For the continuation of Autun as a law school, see Detlef Liebs, “Rechtskunde Im Römischen Kaiserreich: Rom Und Die Provinzen,” in luirisprudentia Universalis: Festschrift Für Theo Mayer-Maly Zum 70. Geburtstag (Köln ; Wien: Böhlau, 2002), 383–407.

\(^{113}\) Jonasch, “Fortification,” 311.

\(^{114}\) Nouvel and Venault, “Agglomérations,” paras. 17–18.

\(^{115}\) Digeser, “Crisis as Opportunity,” 118–19.
purchase land inside and outside the city and had the means to become a significant local patron, as funds from the emperor would have reinforced the networks he already had. To build a new church, the bishop would have used his existing network to amplify his clientele. There would have been an economic and social ripple effect as the bishop hired labor and paid wages for church construction. Whereas Constantius had provided labor and talent from the army, the bishop would have had to find and purchase materials (plaster, brick, opus caementicum, slaking lime for stucco, marble veneers [perhaps], wooden beams) and compensate the surveyors, architects, craftspeople (including carpenters), and crane operators required for his needs.\textsuperscript{116} The church that resulted is probably the late ancient funerary mausoleum outside the walls in the Via Strata cemetery 1 km east of the city at Saint-Pierre-l’Estrier,\textsuperscript{117} it monumentalized a grave in a cemetery already used by Christians.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{116} See Sherwood et al., \textit{Greek and Roman Technology}, 283.


The complex history of this church has attracted the attention of a number of archaeologists.\textsuperscript{119} To a first-century villa, deserted in the late third century,\textsuperscript{120} was added in the late third or early fourth century a cellula or “hypogaeum-like mausoleum,” in a funerary area just to the west of the villa,\textsuperscript{121} which is tempting to associate with Autun’s martyr, Symphorian.\textsuperscript{122} In this period, this area also included a second church, St. Etienne, known to Gregory of Tours, but destroyed in the French Revolution.\textsuperscript{123}

The bishop would also have likely gained leisure time, as he now had the funds to hire labor (whether free or enslaved) for work he might once have done himself. Reticius used his to devote himself to theological treatises, writing against Novatian and writing commentaries on \textit{The Song of Songs}.\textsuperscript{124} Participating in councils at Rome and Arles, called at the emperor’s behest to resolve the Donatist issue, would have raised the Reticius’ standing even more,\textsuperscript{125} as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} Bailey K. Young, “Sacred Topography: The Impact of the Funerary Basilica in Late Antique Gaul,” in \textit{Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources} (Aldershot ; Burlington (Vt.): Ashgate, 2001), 169–86; Christian Sapin, “Découverte d’un chapiteau mérovingien à proximité de l’ancienne église de Saint-Pierre l’Étrier à Autun (Saône-et-Loire),” \textit{Revue Archéologique de l’Est} 49 (1998): 371–73. For the most recent overview, see Balcon-Berry and Berry, “Le site de Saint-Pierre.”
\item \textsuperscript{120} Possibly as a result of Victorinus’ siege, as suggested by numerous coins from that period. Balcon-Berry and Berry, “Le site de Saint-Pierre,” paras. 7, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Balcon, Berry, and Sapin, “Architecture and Sculpture,” 205; Balcon-Berry and Berry, “Le site de Saint-Pierre,” paras. 10–13.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Symphorian’s \textit{Passio} mentions the cellula where he was buried; his relics were later transferred to the church bearing his name, north of St. Pierre l’Étrier. Jean-Charles Picard, “Autun,” in \textit{Province ecclesiastique de Lyon (Lugdunensis Prima)}, ed. Brigitte Beaujard et al., vol. 1, Topographie chrétienne des cites de la Gaule: des origines au milieu du Ville siècle, IV (Paris: De Boccard, 1986), 43.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Gregory of Tour, \textit{Glory of the Confessors}, trans. Raymond Van Dam, 76-7.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Jerome, \textit{Vir. ill.} 82, \textit{Ep.} 5.2; 37.
\item \textsuperscript{125} For Augustine, Reticius of Autun was “a bishop of great authority,” a status that derived from his participation in the councils of Rome and Arles (\textit{Contra Julian} 1.3.7). See Optatus for Reticius’ participation in these events, with Maternus of Köln and Marinus of Arles. The monks of Saint Maur, \textit{Temporum ordine digesta, ab anno Christi 177 ad ann. 1563}, vol. 1, Conciliorum Galliae, tam editorum, quam ineditorum (Paris: Sumptibus Petri Didot, 1789), col. 477.
\end{itemize}
the meetings put bishops in touch with one another. Such contact gave them an opportunity to exchange ideas (e.g., Jerome likely found Reticius’ writings in Trier).\footnote{Jerome’s Vir. ill. 82 notes that he read Reticius’ \textit{Commentary on the Song of Songs} and his writings against Novatian.}

Constantine also more firmly sat atop the city’s various hierarchies, as the town’s adopting the name Flavia Aeduorum after his intervention clearly signified (\textit{Pan. lat.} V.1).\footnote{Although the date of the speech is not certain, it is obviously after Constantine’s visit and intervention. Nixon and Saylor Rodgers, \textit{Panegyrici Latini}, 255–56.} In their simplest form these patronage networks comprised the following heterarchy: The director of the school who may have controlled access to the professors, who then had their own dependents (students, support staff, enslaved labor [e.g., scribes]). The landlords and their support networks, including industry, urban and agricultural labor (including tenant farmers and whatever persons remained enslaved to them); the leaders of associations representing the remaining local industries, shops, and artisans not directly related to the college or the agricultural networks; and the bishop and his networks, which included not just labor but also his congregation; the church could now even be a landowner, with agricultural labor networks sustaining the bishop and his dependents. (It is impossible to say anything about the place of traditional priests or priestesses in these networks—although that absence of evidence itself may be significant.)

Constantine’s interventions not only reinvigorated the traditional pressure groups of landowners, association leaders, and professors,\footnote{Jones, \textit{LRE}, 1:362.} but they also reaffirmed the old model of the emperor as the universal patron that we saw first with Augustus / Agrippa, and more
recently Constantius.\textsuperscript{129} Although technically Autun’s leaders would have had to appeal to the emperor through the governor at Lyon, or further to the vicarius and praetorian prefect (both at Trier), the direct person-to-person contact that the \textit{magistri} and the bishop had made with the emperor would have well served them and their networks in the future.\textsuperscript{130} Evidence for the debt that the Christian community felt to the emperor is ample, extending beyond the construction of the church into the town’s culture. For example, the poem \textit{Laudes domini} (usually dated to 317) refers to Constantine as the poet’s savior (an image that court propaganda was cultivating).\textsuperscript{131} Moreover, the Pectorius inscription shows Greek-speaking Christians in Autun to have been engaged with poetic ideas circulating at Constantine’s court (or vice versa).\textsuperscript{132}

\textbf{Merovingian Autun Shows the Effects of Constantinian Socio-Economic Shifts}

Autun would experience many more hardships over the course of the later fourth and well into the fifth century, but the features of the town and countryside under the Merovingian Franks show that the city’s Christian hierarchy played a prominent role. This is not the place to

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{130} Jones, \textit{LRE}, 1:370, 373.
\textsuperscript{131} Roger Rees, “The Rhetoric and Poetics of Praise in the ‘Laudes Domini,'” \textit{Quaderni Urbinati Di Cultura Classica} 95, no. 2 (2010): 72 inc. n. 1. The date (317) is based on the poet’s reference to Constantine’s children in the plural (“I wish heaven that his children are equal to the father”).
\textsuperscript{132} IG 2525: Decourt, \textit{Inscriptions grecques de la France}, 233. Dated to the fourth century, its use of the acrostic echoes that of Constantine in the \textit{Oration to the Saints} (18) and Lactantius’ knowledge of the Sibylline acrostic (\textit{Inst}.7.6.11,19.9,20.3). The date of this inscription has ranged widely, from the second to the fourth century. Decourt follows Guarducci in dating the inscription to Cassian’s bishopric (just after Reticius) on the basis of the writing. Margherita Guarducci, “Nuove osservazioni sull’iscrizione eucaristica di Pektorios,” \textit{Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Serie III, Rendiconti} XXIII–XXIV (1949): 243–52.
\end{footnotesize}
describe in detail the Merovingian city, but it is important to note that the city’s topography changed in response to the networks that the early fourth century political and economic structures could sustain, with ecclesiastical buildings prominent among the excavated remains. Within the walls, the city’s footprint shifted markedly, taking the shape that would define the town for the next millennium. After Constantine, a smaller castrum came into existence which would serve as the locus of the city’s count, when the decurions gave way. In the south, St. Nazarius was built by the sixth century at the latest, near what is now St. Lazarus cathedral. By the early seventh century, two monasteries occupied the deserted parts of the lower ancient city. The castrum, together with the ecclesiastical complex comprised one pole of the town, with the secular authority maintaining control of the forum region. By the late fourth century, fabricae and a gynaeceum defined Autun, instead of the school—which seems to have disappeared by century’s end.

There was also considerable development outside the walls. Burials had started to cluster around the late ancient mausoleum at St-Pierre-l’Estrier by the mid fourth century when a

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137 Christie, Fall of the Western Roman Empire, 176.
139 Balcon, Berry, and Sapin, 198, 212–13 n. 15.
140 Notitia dignitatum 9.33-34 ; 11.59. The career of Ausonius suggests that scholarly communities at Bordeaux or Trier replaced Autun’s professors.
second structure appeared east of the tomb to create a funerary church. This structure in the fifth century became a three-aisled basilica. Remodeled in the sixth and eighth century, its tombs of Autun’s sainted bishops (Rheticius and his successors, Cassian, Egémone and Simplicius), along with the local saints Amator (a legendary third-century bishop), Evance and Pragmace, became one of the most famous pilgrimage sites Merovingian Gaul, renowned for its miracles. It was joined by monasteries dedicated to Saints Symphorian (mid fifth century) and Martin (late sixth century). Symphorien’s tomb, first probably housed in the cellula, moved to a church a bit north built by the bishop Euphronius (450-90). As veneration of Symphorian spread throughout Gaul, making him the most popular regional saint, his tomb become a pilgrimage site along with the tombs of Autun’s fourth-century bishops, Reticius and Cassian in what is now St.-Pierre-l’Estrier. St. Martin’s and other monasteries probably sustained themselves by participating in the villa economy. While the city’s landowning elites

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142 Gregory of Tours, Confessions 73-74; M. Viellard-Traïekouroff, Les monuments religieux de la Gaule d’après les œuvres de Grégoire de Tours (Paris: Champion, 1976), 45–46; Sapin, “Tombeaux des premiers évêques,” 116–20; Balcon-Berry and Berry, “Le site de Saint-Pierre,” para. 1. The presence of a female body among those interred in state is tempting to associate with Gregory’s legend of Rheticius’ burial alongside his wife (Conf. 74). Balcon-Berry and Berry, para. 27.
145 Where Amator visited it: Acta sanctorum May 1, 50-60. Manuscripts of Cîteaux, 640, fol. 7. Gregory of Tours also says that Euphranius built his basilica over Symphorian’s tomb: Historia Francorum 2.25, although Gregory seems unaware of the earlier structure. Nicholson, “Autun,” 184; Christie, Fall of the Western Roman Empire, 176; Beaujard, Culte des saints, 390–91.
146 Gregory of Tours HF 2.15: Euphranius, later bishop of Autun, built the church of the martyr Symphorian. The Passio S. Symphoriani, written in the mid fifth century, is contemporary with the construction of the basilica (8.1467). Beaujard, Culte des saints, 137.
148 Gregory of Tours.
did not completely disappear, their villas lay next to these monasteries whose monks joined them in making a living from the land and being linked to multiple networks of power. 

During the Merovingian period, as the temples to its traditional protectors fell into ruins and disappeared, Autun saw stability as an episcopal see. Autun’s bishop would continue to be a power broker in the region, increasingly independent from the emperor, helped in some part by the religious tourism that he played a role in developing, namely, the flow of pilgrims to the graves of the city’s martyr and early bishops. with the bishop continuing to be a power-broker well beyond the modest but revolutionary role Reticius played in the councils of 313 regarding the Donatist controversy. For example, Euphronius of Autun accompanied the bishop of Lyon in order to dedicate a new bishop at Chalon. Later still, Bishop Syagrius (d. 600), who had resources enough to embellish a local church with mosaics, baptized Chlothar II, hosted Augustine and his monks on their way to convert the people of Britain, and was granted a pallium by Gregory I who considered the bishopric of Autun to be next in eminence after Lyon among the Gallic bishoprics. Under bishop Leodegar, this visibility continued through the middle of the seventh century, as he held a number of councils in the city and oversaw the foundation of several new monasteries (the Benedictine Abbey of St. Martin and the abbey of St. Andoine, built by Brunhilde) and a hospice run by Benedictine nuns (the Abbey of St. John). Although the prominence of Christian structures and the role of bishops may appear
to be an artifact of both the interests of archaeologists and Gregory of Tours, it is through its monastic and episcopal establishments that Autun continued to be connected and influential within Frankia.

My exploration of Autun’s socio-political transformation in Late Antiquity began with a small group of people, the orators, including Eumenius, who related the dire economic situation of their city and gave thanks upon its renewal; the emperors Constantius and Constantine who reached out with economic aid, and the bishop, Reticius, whose position imperial patronage had uniquely improved. Imagining all the people involved in Autun’s economic difficulties and renewal, however, allowed the article to become a case study illustrating how a seeming act of economic and social justice—compensating the bishop for the destruction of his church—had unintended consequences, restructuring the heterarchy that directed the socio-economic life of the city. Recently, Noel Lenski has argued that Constantine’s court took advantage of open lines of communication between his court and the empire’s cities to press forward—when practicable—an agenda of Christianization. The analysis here suggests that simply compensating the Christian community to offset the cost of damage to their infrastructure (much as Theodosius I felt compelled to do when Christians set fire to the synagogue in Callinicum) could have helped shift the Empire’s cities toward a more medieval economy even in the absence of any overarching ideological goal. Constantine’s successors could have changed the direction of his policies, but they largely did not. Thus, Autun’s story allows us a

157 For Theodosius’ aborted efforts to aid Callinicum, see Ambrose, *Epistle 40*. 
glimpse into the transformation of the urban landscape and economy from its ancient political and medieval patterns into the start of a more “medieval” way of life.

Fig. 1: Flow to Augustodunum (accessed 21 April 2021). Diagram is from ORBIS: The Stanford Geospatial Network of the Roman World (orbis.stanford.edu).
Fig. 2. Flow from Augustodunum (accessed 21 April 2021). Diagram is from ORBIS: The Stanford Geospatial Network of the Roman World (orbis.stanford.edu).