

# PARIS FOOD HISTORY WALKS

## Gallo-Roman Paris

After almost two millennia, little survives of Lutetia (Gallo-Roman Paris). Yet just enough remains that anyone with a deep interest in the era can get a general idea of the long-disappeared city. This walk will take you through key locations from that era.

Before you begin, you might want to visit the French Ministry of Culture's site about Lutetia:

- Paris, A Roman City <http://www.paris.culture.fr/en/>
- Paris, Ville Antique <http://www.paris.culture.fr/>

This will give you an idea of the Roman city's layout and general facts about its location and history.

Note that **this walk includes visits to two museums with entry fees and set hours.** Since you will probably want to include these in your walk, be sure to check if they are open on the day you take it.

Start at metro Rue Monge. Turn left as you come out and walk along the outside of the small park until the entrance to the "Arenas".

### **Square des Arènes de Lutèce**

*4 rue des Arènes*

The "Arenas of Lutetia" are the remnants of the huge amphitheater that was once outside the Roman city. Given its original size, this probably welcomed not only residents of the city itself but people from the countryside. This was a "mixed use" amphitheater which included a stage as well as the standard open space (Lutetia also had a theater within the city itself).

One reason to start this tour with the amphitheater is because it was outside the city. Lutetia had no walls and so no physical structures mark its boundaries (though archaeologists have now developed a good general idea of these). But at this location you are firmly outside what was once Lutetia. Since this location is now in the heart of modern Paris, this also gives you some idea how small the Roman city was.

Return to the rue Monge (exactly how will depend on which exit you use). Cross to the other side and turn right on the rue Rollin. This will take you up one side of the "Mount" St. Genevieve. This low hill was where the Roman city began. Continue to up to the end of the street and left to the place de la Contrescarpe. (If you are a Hemingway fan, you might know he often wrote here.) Turn right and walk west to the opposite side. You are now at the eastern edge of the original city. You are also on the rue Mouffetard.

### **Rue Mouffetard**

This street has existed since Roman times. If you look to your right (north) you can see that the street continues and in fact becomes the rue Descartes. In Roman times it began all the

way down near the Seine by the place Maubert. Looking to your left (south) you will see that the street descends steeply. (Among other things, it hosts a lovely market further down.) Once the street continued on to become the road to Lyons. Today, where it levels out, it becomes the avenue des Gobelins.

Nearer to Lutetia, the Roman road once led to a graveyard. While no sign of it remains today, archaeologists have recovered a great deal of artifacts from the site.

Continue on to the rue Blainville. You are now entering the eastern side of the Roman city. Follow this street until it becomes the rue de l'Estrapade and then follow on until it becomes the rue des Fossés Saint-Jacques. Try to imagine Roman-style buildings with red tile roofs all along the way. Keep walking until you come to the rue St. Jacques. Turn right on to this street.

### **Rue St. Jacques**

Like the rue Mouffetard, this street dates to Roman times. But it was not just any street – it was the *cardo maximus*, the north-south street which was the spine of any Roman city. It is very likely that this road (which might have followed an earlier Gaulish one) was laid out before the rest of the city was built. Take a moment to imagine people in togas and Roman and Gaulish armor walking about it.

Continue on to number 172 on the rue St. Jacques, which is right by the rue Soufflot. This is probably the point zero at which Roman surveyors began mapping out what would become the grid of streets which made up the Roman city. You are now at the heart of the lost Roman city, right by the site of the most important structure in a Roman city: the Forum.

### **SITE of the Roman forum**

The easiest way to envision the Forum is to think of it as covering all of the rue Soufflot from the rue St. Jacques down to the boulevard St. Michel; more precisely, it covered a rectangle 89 wide by 178 meters in length between the rue Malebranche, the rue Saint-Jacques, the rue Cujas and the boulevard St. Michel. Remnants of it survived underground into modern times but were moved when a parking structure was built here.

The Forum would have included a temple but also numerous shops and a market and was built on several levels because of the sloping ground. The *macellum* – the main market – was either in it or nearby. This was not the only forum built in Gaul; any city that was rebuilt to Roman standards had one and a number have been documented in France. More than any other element, it emphasizes how very Roman a city Lutetia was.

Other specific sites have been uncovered on the hill itself, including the remains of a villa in the courtyard of the St. Barbe school and a small intersection of two streets, with remains of houses, off the rue Pierre and Marie Curie. But none of this is visible today (videos of both excavations can be found in the *Videos* section of this site.) While many of the finer houses were on this hill, potters also lived in the neighborhood and much of the Roman pottery found here was made in the city itself.

Cross north on the rue Soufflot and turn left, walking down to the boulevard St. Michel. Though it was built in 1860, this may roughly correspond to a lesser Roman road. The grid that made up the city was based on a Roman unit of 300 feet, and so the distance between the rue St. Denis (which prolongs the boulevard St. Michel) and the boulevard St. Martin (which prolongs the rue St. Jacques) is 600 feet. Some parts of the layout use half the unit; that is, 150 feet. Evidence of this unit confirms how planned a city Roman Lutetia was.

Look across the street to the Luxembourg Gardens. This area too was part of Roman Lutetia and various Roman remains have been

found there.

Turn right and start north just a few feet up the Boulevard St. Michel.

**Remnant of the Forum** As you head north on the boulevard St. Michel, you will see an entrance to the parking structure across from number 61. Go in and downstairs to see a block of stone from the foundation of the Forum.

*61, boulevard St. Michel*

Continue north to the rue Cujas. This was once the northern limit of the Forum. Continue a few steps farther to the place de la Sorbonne. If you want, you can step into this small square to see a Gallo-Roman well.

**Gallo-Roman well** Towards the middle of the square, you will see a round decorative pond with a smaller circle just to the north of it, this covered with a metal grill. The grill covers a well which was once part of a Gallo-Roman ‘island’ of housing.

*place de la Sorbonne*

Return to the boulevard St. Michel and continue north past the rue des Écoles and the rue Pierre Sarrazin. You will now see the Cluny museum. Proceed almost to the next corner and turn right to enter the garden and go to museum entrance. **[NOTE: the museum is closed through mid-July 2018]**

**Musée de Cluny** The Cluny museum is filled with treasures from several eras. But in regard to the Gallo-Romans, you will want to be sure to see at least two things: the huge baths and the Pillar of the Boatmen (*Pilier des Nautes*).

*6 place Paul Painlevé*

It is nearly miraculous that the baths have survived largely intact for almost two thousand years. They were not the only baths in Lutetia and others have been discovered since. But these were above ground and often occupied over the centuries. (Note that this space was NOT, as it has often been called, Julian’s palace, nor was Julian crowned emperor here.)

The Pillar of the Boatmen is especially precious because it documents both Roman and Gaulish elements in early Lutetia.

These are not the only Roman sights in the museum, but they are two you will absolutely not want to miss.

To check opening information, visit <http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/visiter/english.html>

Return to the boulevard St. Michel and head north and across the pont St. Michel bridge about midway up the boulevard du Palais, to number 10: the Palace of Justice.

**SITE of the Roman palace** The gates of today’s Palace of Justice correspond to the site of the original palace on the island. THIS is almost certainly the one where Julian (“The Apostate”) was declared emperor by his troops. A palace – probably the same one – still stood here in later centuries and was long used by French kings. Nothing remains of it today

*10, boulevard du Palais*

Continue on to the edge of the island and turn right on to the quai de la Corse. Follow this quai past the next bridge (the pont d’Arcole) and turn right soon after onto the rue de la Colombe.

**SITE of the Roman** In Roman times, the quai de la Corse did not exist, anymore than much of the rest of the

**rampart** outside of the island. It was smaller then and the Seine came further in. Here you can see a trace of where the Roman rampart once stood when the water was much closer.  
*5, rue de la Colombe*

Continue on and turn left onto the rue Chanoinesse, which once ran along the Roman rampart. Pieces of the rampart have also been found under the southern side of this street. Again, this gives an idea of how much smaller the island was in Roman times. Stay to the right and turn on to the rue Massillon, turn right again and head east on the rue du Cloître-Notre-Dame. Continue on past the front of Notre-Dame (at left) until the road coming out of the square. Turn left and walk to the entrance of the Archeological Crypt of the Ile de la Cité. Go down the stairs to the entrance.

**Crypte archéologique de l'île de la Cité** This is the museum for all the remains of structures found underneath the square – the *parvis* – in front of Notre-Dame. This includes both Roman and medieval finds. Among the Gallo-Roman remnants you will find here are another (smaller) set of baths and a stretch of the Roman port (showing yet again how far farther the Seine once came in).  
*7, parvis Notre-Dame*

*To check opening information, see <http://www.crypte.paris.fr/en/crypt>*

And so the tour ends with one last look at actual pieces of Lutetia. Not all of the city was on the Left Bank or the island, but these were the main centers of the Gallo-Roman city; far less has been found on the Right Bank. You have now seen the bulk of what remains of Gallo-Roman Paris.