



Great bronze statues in Nyon

It's difficult to imagine what Nyon, the *Colonia Iulia Equestris*, looked like 2000 years ago, in Roman times! Through the centuries, a lot of things have changed in people's habits and their way of life.

The only clues that have survived are the discoveries made by the archaeologists when they dig in the ground. This is how the bronze fragments from Nyon were found. Fragments are broken parts of much bigger objects. In this case, we know that these parts came from statues that were human sized, or bigger.

These statues were made out of bronze. Bronze is a mixture of metals (an alloy) that was difficult to make and was very expensive. These statues were therefore very valuable and precious.



Equestrian statue of the roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. 2nd century AD. Capitoline Museums, Rome

(Photo: Wikipedia)



➤ *What was the purpose of these statues?*

For the Romans, these statues represented important figures of their everyday lives: gods (the Romans had quite a few), political or prominent figures, artists or athletes and very often the Emperor himself or the members of his family.

These statues were exhibited in public places so that everyone might see them. They were placed along the streets and on the *forum*, an important public square where the Romans met up to talk politics, do business or go to temple. Statues were also used to decorate theatres and public baths where the Romans frequently went. Sometimes some of these statues were also used to decorate the wealthiest houses.

Statues representing the Emperor were the most frequent. He could be riding a horse or standing on a chariot pulled by horses. Depictions of the Emperor in the cities were very important because they acted as a reminder of the Imperial power and gave the impression that the Emperor was always close by.

Unfortunately, few of these statues have survived through time. Since they were made of a mixture of precious metals, they were often destroyed and recasted into smaller bronze objects (dishes, small figurines, tools...).



*The three figurines found in the "la Duche" underground parking : Venus, Apollo and Hecate.
They measure between 6 and 13 cm (height). (Photo : Rémy Gindroz).*



➤ *A clue found in Nyon*



Fragment of a bronze sculpture found in Nyon (Photo: Flore Higelin)

In Nyon, we found a few fragments of these sculptures, forgotten after their destruction.

The small fragment above was found near the Lake during the construction of the “la Duche” underground parking in 2005. It was close to an important building. This small piece of bronze could be part of a sculpture that was placed, originally, in this building, and was then destroyed probably to be recasted. This fragment would have been forgotten then and there.

➤ *But what does this fragment teach us?*

If we have a close look to this fragment, we are immediately surprised by its strange color: that’s because it’s actually covered with gold foil. Normally bronze is not green but coppery, which resembles gold without looking it. When it spends some time in the ground, it oxidizes (rusts in a way) and its color becomes greenish, as is often the case with the bronze statues seen in Museums.

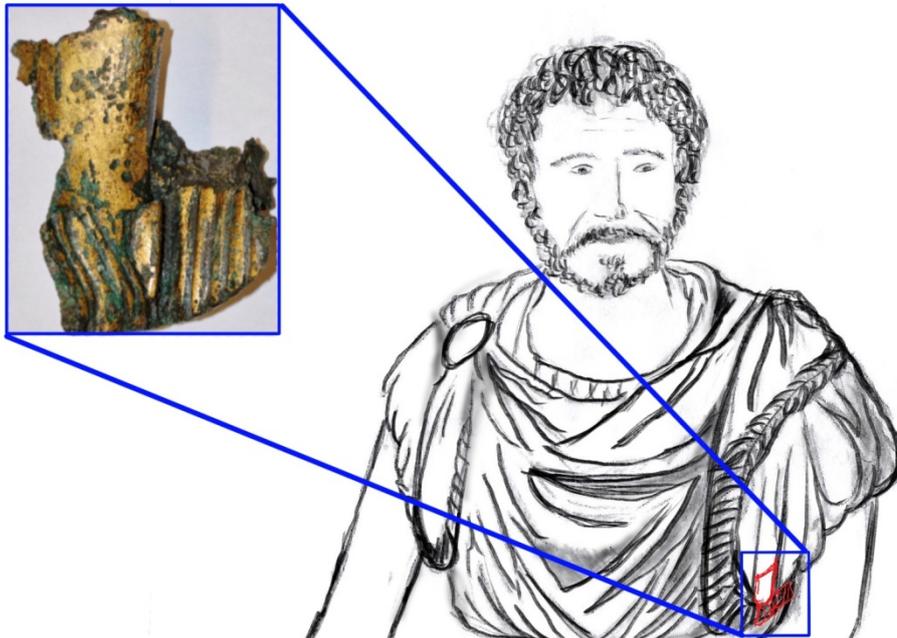


Example of a « coppery » bronze fragment on the left and an « oxidized » bronze fragment on the right. (Photos: Flore Higelin)



The use of gold on statues was restricted to important sculptures such as depiction of Gods, prominent figures and, most importantly, the Emperor! If you have a look at the first picture, of Marcus Aurelius, you will see traces of gold on the horse's head and a few other places.

On the Nyon fragment, we can see thin grooves that are in fact fringes, similar to the ones you might find on some rugs. This design is a reference to the fringed coat that prominent Romans wore. With these clues, we can imply that this fragment comes from a statue of a prominent figure, probably the Emperor wearing a fringed coat.



This is an example of an Emperor wearing a fringed coat, the fringes falling over his left shoulder.

(Drawing: Flore Higelin)

Other fragments of statues have been found in Nyon. Even if we only find small pieces of these statues, they are actual proof of the existence of these grand statues that decorated the Roman city of Nyon. With a little imagination, maybe you will be able to see them when you walk around town!