Lucius Munatius Plancus, the governor of Further Gaul and servant of Julius Caesar in the Gallic wars, founded Roman Lugdunum by direction of the Senate in 43 BC. He established the city on the fourvière hill. Positioned at the intersection of the Rhone and Saône rivers, Lugdunum became the capital of the three Provinces of Gaul. The Romans built two theaters on the hill. The Gallo-Roman theater, the larger of the two, could seat upwards of ten thousand spectators and is well preserved. The smaller seated only twenty-five hundred. To the north of the fourvière, across Saône and nestled on the slopes of the Croix-Rousse hill, one finds the “Amphitheater of the Three Gauls.” Dedicated in 19 BC, Hadrian later modified the structure. It hosted the usual exhibitions, contests, games, and combats.¹ Today, unfortunately, only meager portions of barely a third of the original amphitheater can be seen.

The Amphitheater of the Three Gauls is the accepted location of the torture and execution, exacted by the Roman authorities, upon Christians from both Lyons and the neighboring city of Vienne, sixteen miles south on the east bank of the Rhone. Our witness to these killings is the Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne, a selection of which is preserved in Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History (5.1–3). The Letter is an account of the persecution that

befell these churches in the summer of CE 177. Written by one or more of the survivors of the Gallic community—some have even argued that Irenaeus was its author—the *Letter* was sent to Asia and Phrygia. Attempts to demonstrate that the *Letter* was a later forgery and that the persecution took place in Galatia, not Gaul, have not been successful. The persecution began perhaps on 2 June and lasted until 1 August, the feast of the Three Gauls. This feast commemorated the day in 12 BC when the altar to Rome and Augustus had been established. Representatives of the sixty Gallic *civitates* gathered in Lugdunum each year on this date to celebrate the cult of Rome and Augustus. The *Letter* recounts the social rejection, the accusations, arrests, abuse, and incarceration of the Gallic believers. It reports the public trial, the typical charges of incest

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