

Press release  
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## An aristocratic site in Bassing between independent Gaul and the Roman conquest

In 2010 an Inrap team excavated a 3.5 hectare site in Bassing, in the Moselle department. This research was curated by the State (Drac Lorraine) in advance of the construction of the East-European high speed train line by the Réseau Ferré de France.

Occupied for one thousand years, from 200 BC to 800 AD, this site revealed a Gallic aristocratic establishment, a Gallo-Roman villa and several medieval buildings. Numerous weapons and an exceptional monetary deposit of 1165 Gallic coins attest alone to the power of the elites of Bassing.

### An aristocratic and warlike site

Between 150 and 120 BC, a vast rural establishment was built in Bassing. A large quadrangular trench, 3 meters wide, with a talus and palisade, surrounded the habitat over one hectare. Inside the enclosure wooden buildings associated with an farm and a habitation were constructed. The ensemble survived until 14 AD.

The size of the farm, the size of its trenches and the richness of the artifacts illustrate the privileged status of the occupants. Among the jewelry, there were bracelets in cobalt blue glass and a bead in Baltic amber. 123 fibulae were also present, some of which were made at the site. Metalworking was thus one of the resources of this aristocratic site at which casting, spinning, weaving and shoemaking completed the resources provided through agriculture.

Among the drinking utensils, colanders associated with wine came from Italy. The wine, imported from the Mediterranean, was a real luxury product that was consumed in large quantities, as is shown by the discovery of numerous amphorae. The Inrap archaeologists uncovered a large quantity of Gallic and Italian military artefacts: chariot parts, a combat axe, the dagger of a Roman legionary (a *pugio*), arrowheads, uniform ornaments, sandal nails, horse tack of the Roman cavalry and even the metal mouthpiece of a war trumpet.

Located in the territory of the Mediomatrici, between the *oppida* of *Divodurum* (Metz) Saverne, the site of Bassing thus belonged to an aristocrat whose power was linked not only to a large agricultural exploitation, but also to his warrior status. The conquest of the Gauls does not appear to have affected the function of the site. During this troubled period, the establishment of Bassing remained stable and prosperous, with a dense and continuous population. In 27 BC, stone was replaced by wood for the construction of buildings in the rural establishment, still situated within the Gallic enclosure.

### An exceptional monetary deposit: 1165 Gallic coins

The most remarkable find at this site is an exceptional monetary deposit of 1165 Gallic coins. This treasure has been dispersed over the site since the Middle Ages by successive plowing. The archaeologists thus gradually collected the coins during the excavation.

They are composed of 1111 silver coins, 3 gold coins and 51 bronze coins. All of them were issued during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, and the majority just after the Gallic Wars.

One of the particularities of this treasure is that it includes silver coins. During this period, bronze coins and *potins* played a major role in daily exchanges, while silver

was reserved for the payment of personnel linked to powerful positions. The three gold coins, which are very rare, are mediomatric, and thus local.

The two kilos of silver include different types of coins issued in several regions of Gaul. 74% of the lot originates from the Center-East of Gaul and belongs to the Sequani of Besançon, the Lingones of Langres and the Aedui of Bibracte or Autun. 14% originates from the peoples of Val de Loire, 7% from the Remi of Reims (from Belgian Gaul) and 3% from the Arverni of Clermont-Ferrand. Finally, a few specimens belong to the Segusiavi, a population near Lyon.

These coins are Gallic imitations of quinaries, a Roman silver coin with a diameter of less than 1.5 cm. North-eastern Gaul, nicknamed "the zone of the last Gaul" by numismats, distinguished itself after the conquest by the imitation of Roman coins. The last Gaul equals a half-denier (or quinaire) of the Roman Republic. This standard unit facilitated commerce between Rome and Gaul.

### **The money of war in a Romanized Gaul**

One third of the Bassing treasure is composed of imitations with minting errors. Some representations of Gallic or Greco-Roman warriors, from helmeted Rome, have a crude style. These imitations were usually made in a context of urgency. Between the 40's and 30's BC, lacking Roman deniers, such copies were made to pay the military contingents, including the auxiliary Gallic troops enlisted in the Roman army.

During the conquest, Cesar relied on part of the Gallic elite. This nobility widely adhered to the new Roman power. Local aristocrats and their contingent warriors then contributed to the different Roman conquests.

At the beginning of the Empire, the Bassing deposit equaled one and a half years of the salary of a legionary. This large sum of money could correspond to the funds of a chief mediomatrici to pay the salaries of his troop. As military leaders, local leaders, auxiliaries of the Roman conquests, the elites of Bassing benefited from a high social status, both before and after the conquest.

### **Conference at the Musée du pays de Sarrebourg**

On Friday 30 November 2012, at 20:00, at the Musée du Pays de Sarrebourg, Inrap archaeologists Laurent Thomashausen and Jean-Denis Laffite will give a presentation entitled "The site of Bassing, new discoveries from Gallic, Antique and Medieval periods", in which they will recount the major discoveries made at this major aristocratic site. This presentation is offered by the Musée du Pays de Sarrebourg, ARAPS, Inrap and Réseau ferré de France. Free entry.

Musée du Pays de Sarrebourg Rue de la Paix 57400 Sarrebourg

### **Inrap**

With nearly 2000 collaborators and researchers, Inrap is the largest archaeological research structure in France and one of the most important in Europe. Each year, this public research institution realizes approximately 1500 diagnostic archaeological operations and 250 excavations in partnership with private and public developers in mainland France and its overseas territories. Its missions also include the scientific exploitation of the results and the diffusion of archaeological knowledge to the public.

### **Réseau Ferré de France**

Owner and manager of the national network since 1997, the Réseau Ferré de France provides access to a dense railway network of 30,000 kilometers of lines. The goal is to offer an efficient network, accessible and adapted to everyone, meeting the economic and environmental challenges of our societies. RFF oversees the East European High Speed line project. The civil engineering work of the second phase, extending the line from Baudrecourt to Vendenheim, began in the summer of 2010, and the preventative archaeology operations in 2008 along the entire line. These excavations operated with a budget of nearly 18.2 million Euros, which was funded by the global project. The work of the second phase, which will cost 2010 million Euros, is funded through a convention associating local governments, the State, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the European Union and RFF. [www.lgv-est.com](http://www.lgv-est.com)

Developer **Réseau Ferré de France**

Curation **Regional Archaeology Service (Drac Lorraine)**

Archaeological research **Inrap**

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