

Press release
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The discovery of Early Christian mosaics at the foot of the Marseille Cathedral

In advance of a landscaping project realized by Euroméditerranée on the esplanade of the Marseille Cathedral (also known as “The Major”), a preventive excavation curated by the State (DRAC Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur, Regional Archaeology Service) is being conducted by an Inrap team until the end of November 2008.

The birth of Christianity in Marseille

This site is located at the western extension of a large excavation realized in 2000 during the digging of the Tunnel of the Major. This sector, which is very important in the history of Marseille, was already known through past discoveries. In 1852, during the construction of the New Marseille Cathedral (*Nouvelle Major*), buildings of the ancient church and the Early Christian baptistery of the 5th century were revealed.

Destroyed in the 19th century, these remains are now known only through plans and drawings of the decorations published in 1905 by F. Roustan.

Today, a beautiful, 5th century mosaic, preserved over 15 m², has just been uncovered. It could belong to the Episcopal Palace. This discovery is very similar to the decorated floors discovered in 1994, which have been conserved *in situ* inside the Old Marseille Cathedral (*Vieille Major*).

Tombs under the esplanade

A parish cemetery in activity from the 12th century to the Modern era is now being excavated. The majority of the bodies were buried in oriented graves. Several mass graves, in which the dead were deposited with no particular organization, date to the 18th century. They attest to an epidemic crisis whose origin remains to be determined (the plague of 1720, cholera?).

The excavation will likely continue with the exploration of earlier Greek and Roman urban occupations. According to data collected during preceding excavations, the quarter would have been established during the 5th and 4th centuries BC.

Inrap

With nearly 2000 collaborators and researchers, Inrap is the largest archaeological research structure in France and one of the most important in Europe. This national public research institution undertakes the majority of archaeological evaluations and excavations in partnership with private and public developers, a total of nearly 2,500 sites per year in mainland France and its overseas territories.

Euroméditerranée

Created by the State and Local governments in 1995, Euroméditerranée is a project of national interest whose goal is to place Marseille at the level of the greatest European metropolises. A source of economic, social and cultural development, **Euroméditerranée is the largest urban renovation operation in Europe.**

Situated in the heart of this project zone, the Marseille Cathedral is being renovated so that this element of **the patrimony of Marseille** may rediscover its nobility. New lighting, trees, a water park and large pedestrian areas will transform the Cathedral esplanade into an agreeable leisure area for the residents of Marseille. The Cathedral will occupy a new role in the landscape of Marseille, between tradition and the necessity to adapt to the needs of a dynamic city.

Developer **Euroméditerranée**

Curation **Archaeological** Research Service (Drac PACA)

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