

Press Release
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All the treasures of Reims

Inrap archaeologists are at present excavating two important sites in the historical centre of Reims. Curated by the Regional Archaeological Service (Drac Champagne-Ardenne) they add decisively to our knowledge of the history of Reims which, during the Gallo Roman period, was one of the most important towns of the Roman Empire, covering more than 600 hectares.



Under the future tramway: the ancient heart of Reims

The creation of the tramway, more than 11 kilometres long, crossing Reims from north to south, has given Inrap teams the opportunity of undertaking research over more than 2 hectares of the ancient town centre. Sixteen months of excavation have revealed the Gallic levels, but above all the town structure of Antique, Early Christian and Medieval Reims.

About thirty archaeologists, intervening on different sectors of the line, have revealed remains, often very well preserved, at depths from 50cm to 5 metres.

The north-south way (*cardo maximus*), backbone of the antique town of Durocortorum, and adjoining buildings on the Place de la République have been excavated. A building, probably an Early Christian oratory mentioned in ancient texts, and a medieval cemetery have been brought to light.

Above an early first century AD urban installation, a Gallo-Roman amphitheatre has been identified on the Place Saint Thomas.

Moreover, foundations of a monumental arch, Place Myron-Herrick, appeared. It is the "Gate of Soissons" known as the "Gate of Venus" by ancient historians. This Gate marked the passage of the *decumanus*, the east-west way of the Gallo-Roman town. Under the arch, a vaulted sewer dating from the 2nd-3rd centuries AD of impressive dimensions (2.90 metres high), has been cleared.

Silverware in the cellar

Opposite the present railway station, the tramway excavations have revealed an ancient cellar, containing an exceptional discovery: an ensemble of Gallo-Roman silverware, placed in a ditch, still wrapped in pieces of cloth. It is composed of silver-coated bronze tableware, consisting of two round dishes one of which one has a beaded decoration, two oval plates with engraved horizontal borders, a flanged cup, a round plate containing an inverted cup and four silver and bronze spoons. The remains of two bronze ewers, terracotta goblets and many metallic objects were also found in the cellar.

This tableware was fabricated in the centre or the east-centre of Gaul and dates from the 2nd-3rd centuries AD.

The most noteworthy aspect of this discovery is the state of conservation of the pieces of cloth that wrapped the ensemble. Textile remains are frequently found in the form of oxidised wefts on metal objects, but in this case, thanks to exceptional conditions of conservation, several tens of

square centimetres in their original supple form have come down to us. In addition, the first plate has also kept scraps of fur or of skin. Even though this tableware is not of solid silver, the discovery of such a homogeneous group of objects is rare. It was not a treasure hidden by some worried owner, but a service of quality carefully put away and intended to present dishes according to the new table manners in vogue during the 2nd and 3rd centuries.



The old port: a crafts zone and warehouses on the River Vesle.

On the western limit of the Gallo-Roman town, a group of archaeologists has revealed archaeological remains over an area of 3800 m² on the banks of the former river bed of the Vesle. Several buildings have been brought to light (warehouses, workshops ...), a Gallo-Roman wharf on the river banks and fish tanks dating from the late Middle Ages. This humid milieu is particularly favourable to the conservation of organic remains (leather, wood, seeds, pollen ...).

To reinforce foundations in these damp conditions the Gallo-Romans drove piles down to the geological substratum. These piles were then covered with an apron on which the walls were built. In this excavation, the role of wood is omnipresent. Four square-shaped wells whose casing is composed of planks assembled either half-wood or dovetailed, were probably linked with some craft activity. Several ditches for storage or decantation of potter's clay testify the production of ceramics nearby. Other craft activities seem to have been intense in this part of the town. The production of textiles is testified by four workshops in which looms were installed. A series of kilns or drying ovens, as for them, lead one to presume activities linked to the fabrication of iron objects, or the drying of cereals. The explanation of the large quantity of leather shoes found in the river bed at the outlet of the gutters of an ancient street has not yet been found (work rejects, shoemaking activity ...).

An interactive atlas and a documentary

On its website, Inrap proposes an interactive atlas concerning 25 years of archaeology in Reims and its surroundings: www.inrap.fr Furthermore, the town of Reims, Reims Métropole, Mars (Mobilité agglomération rémoise) and Inrap co-produce with Zadig productions a 52 minute documentary realised by Jean-Paul Fargier and entitled "Reims la romaine" (to be completed late 2009).

Inrap

With more than 2 000 collaborators and researchers Inrap is the largest French archaeological organization and one of the foremost in Europe. A public research establishment, it carries out most of the archaeological evaluations and excavations in France, in partnership with private and public developers: i.e. about 2,500 sites a year in mainland France and in the overseas departments.

Tramway developer: **Mobilité agglomération rémoise**
Scientific control **Regional Archaeological Service (DRAC Champagne-Ardenne)**
Site Director **Stéphane Sindonino, Inrap**

Developer of the Urban Development Zone(ZAC Vieux Port) **Reims habitat**
Scientific control **Regional Archaeological Service (DRAC Champagne-Ardenne)**
Site Director **Philippe Rollet, Inrap**

To contact us

Mahaut Tyrrell
chargée de communication médias
Inrap, pôle partenariats et relations avec les médias
01 40 08 80 24 – mahaut.tyrrell@inrap.fr

Estelle Bénistant
chargée du développement culturel et de la communication
Inrap, direction interrégionale Grand-Est-Nord
03 87 16 41 54 – estelle.benistant@inrap.fr

Captions photos

1- Part of the find of silverware with the flanged cup, oval plate, round plate, cup with its wrapping cloth, silver spoon and silver spoons wrapped in cloth © Denis Gliksman/Inrap

2- Small oval plate with decorated border and 2 bronze spoons
© Denis Gliksman/Inrap

3- 2 silver spoons © Denis Gliksman/Inrap

4- Flanged cup, silver leaf on a bronze alloy © Denis Gliksman/Inrap

5- Back of a round plate covered with silver plate with remains of fur in which it was wrapped © Denis Gliksman/Inrap

6- Cup, silver leaf on bronze alloy core, with cloth in which it was wrapped
© Denis Gliksman/Inrap

7- 2 silver spoons totally wrapped in cloth
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8- Small oval plate with engraved horizontal border – silver leaf on bronze alloy with remains of cloth
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