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The discovery of Antique Uzès

An Inrap team is currently excavating, under State curation (Drac Occitanie), part of the history of the city of Uzès, from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. The archaeologists have recently uncovered large mosaics that are part of two Antique buildings. This excavation, conducted in advance of the construction of a boarding facility for the Gide and Guynemer high schools by the Occitanie region, documents the Roman city of *Ucetia* for the first time.

The Roman city of *Ucetia*

Today, this Roman city is known only through the toponym *Ucetia* included in a geographic inscription of Nîmes, as well as a few early discoveries of mosaic fragments. The current excavation of 4,000 m² has uncovered numerous remains dated from the Republican period (1st century BC) to the end of Antiquity (7th century), and more rarely to the Middle Ages.

The archaeologists have recently uncovered a large wall and masoned structures dating to just before the Roman conquest. Some of the rooms contain remarkable constructions, such as one with the floor of a bread oven, later replaced with a *dolium* – an enormous ceramic recipient.

A fawn, duck, owl and eagle

In another zone, the archaeologists have uncovered a large, 250 m² building opened to the south. Its colonnade suggests it was a public building.

It is composed of four rooms in a row, two of which have cement floors and walls decorated with painted plaster. At one end of the building there is a room with a mortar floor incrustated with crosses made with tesserae (*opus signinum*). It opens into a large 60 m² room whose floor is decorated with a complex mosaic pavement. Two large mosaics are decorated with geometric motifs (posts—an ornamental motif composed of continuous winding lines—, meanders and swastikas) that frame two central medallions composed of crowns, rays and chevrons. One of the medallions is surrounded by polychrome animals, an owl, duck, eagle and fawn.

This building stood until the end of the 1st century AD. Its spaces were partially restructured. The mosaics were no longer maintained and the destroyed mortar floor was replaced by a more rudimentary cement surface. In the adjacent street, the circulation level was raised.

An Early Empire *domus*

The beginning of the Current Era has yielded other edifices, including a large building of more than 500 m², perhaps a *domus* (urban house). Its stone walls delimit regular spaces in an east/west axis, probably determined by a nearby road. The presence of several *dolia* clearly show that wine was produced here. During the Early Empire, the *domus* underwent a significant spatial reorganization. One of the rooms is decorated with a mosaic composed of lines of tesserae forming geometric motifs, accompanied by dolphins in the four corners.

Inside the dwelling, a new heated piece was constructed. Only its hypocaust – the crawl space supported by brick pillars where the heat circulated – is preserved. The courtyard was then bordered by a portico. This sector seems to have been assiduously frequented until the end of Antiquity, from the 5th to 7th centuries. The

buildings from this period respect the orientations of the Antique circulation axes. To the south, a deep pit dug in the 17th century for defense purposes destroyed all of the Antique structures.

A new excavation zone

The archaeologists have recently begun excavating a final zone covering 1,100 m². Antique and Medieval occupations are also present here, including two roads and an intersection, abandoned at the start of the 2nd century AD. The zone seems to have been reoccupied during the 5th century.

Inrap

With more than 2,000 collaborators and researchers, Inrap, a public State institution, overseen by the Ministry of Culture and Communication and the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research, is the largest archaeological research establishment in France and one of the most important in Europe. It realizes most of the archaeological diagnostic operations and many of the excavations in partnership with developers, equaling nearly 2,000 sites per year in metropolitan France and its overseas territories. Its missions also include the exploitation of scientific results and transmission of archaeological knowledge to the public.

The Occitanie/Pyrénées-Méditerranée region

The Occitanie/Pyrénées-Méditerranée region strives to provide the most favorable and equitable conditions for its high school students. At the site of Uzès, the preventive archaeological excavations costing 1.5 million euros enables the study and collection of the remains before the construction of the boarding facility and restaurant that will be used by the Charles Gide and Beorges Guynemer high schools. Through this project, the Region realizes its objective to receive 1,150 students, including 235 in the boarding facility. The second phase of this construction will then permit reconfigurations of the two establishments, as part of a multi-year project costing 33.5 million euros.

Developer **Région Occitanie / Languedoc Roussillon Aménagement**

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

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