

Press release  
7 October 2008

## Fanum Martis, a northern city with oriental rites

Situated between the Bavay-Cambrai and Bavay-Tournai Roman roads, on the frontier between Nervien and Atrebat territories, the ancient town of Famars, covered an area of 80 hectares, but curiously figures neither in the Peutinger Table nor in the Antonine Itinerary. Its ancient name, *Fanum Martis*, indicates that there was probably a temple dedicated to Mars, yet to be discovered. A city of Gallia Belgica, it was also an important Roman military camp (*castrum*) whose walls are still visible.

Archaeological discoveries were noted as from 1639 and the ancient town was explored in 1655. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its baths and aqueduct were partly excavated. Between 1917 and 1918, the German archaeologists G. Bersu and W. Unverzagt, benefiting from the presence of German troops, studied the *castrum* enclosure and the city baths. Much research has been carried out since the post-war period, revealing part of the history of the ancient agglomeration. Today, part of the Roman town is preserved within an archaeological reserve.

Curated by the Regional Archaeological Service (SRA Nord-Pas-de-Calais) on the occasion of the urban development by the Group GHI Immobilier, a team from the National Institute of Archaeological Research has been excavating from the month of April 2008, an area of 4.2 hectares, i.e. 5% of the total surface of the ancient city. The aim is to understand the function and organisation of this quarter equipped with a complex water system, and to determine the exact function of the buildings encircling the public space, limited by a large ditch surrounding the theatre.

### Fanum Martis from the 1st century AD to circa 320 AD

The origins of *Fanum Martis* date from the middle of the 1st century AD. As most Gallo-Roman towns it declined around 320 AD.

Numerous buildings bordered two perpendicular roads one of which following the axis of an aqueduct. The north-south axis opens onto an space around which several religious buildings were placed.

On the border of this zone there was a large public space limited by a large ditch surrounding the theatre, today under a housing estate.

Marble elements and sheet bronze fragments confirm the presence of large statues in the hexagonal public space around a building whose function has yet to be defined.

Bronze dross, small ingots as well as waste from metal-casting reveal the presence of a bronze maker's workshop. Moreover, numerous bronze objects (wall lamps, fibulae, pins, spoons ...) have been gathered all over the area. A hoard of 134 bronze coins (late 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) was hidden near one of the buildings.

Four kilns and their working areas are very well conserved. All heated limestone materials (chalk, marble, "Tournai blue stone") to produce the lime for the building of the *castrum* circa 320 AD.

### **The temple area**

Many archaeological elements are linked with the worship of Mercury, Mithra, Attis and Cybele:

- vases with busts: the number of busts is based on the principle of the days of the week (seven), a concept known above all in the cult of the god Mithra in which the 7 days of the week and the 7 levels of initiation to the cult were fundamental. Typical of the city of the Nerviens, these vases carry 6 or 7 busts representing deities (planets),
- the zoomorphic vases: similar to the bust vases, they only figure Mercury and his attributes (goat, cock, two ram-headed serpents, purse, caducea). The cult of Celtic Mercury was very popular in this city of Nerviens. Protector of the arts he was above all worshipped by potters or bronze metal-workers.
- a bronze bracket: the goddess Cybele is the central element of this object in which Attis with his Phrygian cap, a pine cone and two lions also figure. The Persian goddess was very popular during Emperor Claudius's reign, but it was during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries that oriental cults developed. Cybele, much in love and deceived by Attis struck him with madness and pushed him to castration.

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