

Missions, Institution

A mission of research and diffusion

Created in 2002 by the Law on Preventive Archaeology, INRAP ensures the detection and study of the archaeological heritage affected by development and infrastructural works. It undertakes the study of these finds, disseminates the research results within the scientific community and contributes to spread the knowledge of archaeology to the general public. The creation of the institute confirms the growing importance of archaeological research in France since the 1970s, and asserts the state's strong commitment to support this public service mission.

An original institution

INRAP is a public research institution under the supervision of the Ministries of Culture and Communication, and of Research. Within the Ministry of Culture it collaborates closely with the Department of Architecture and Heritage, the National Council for Archaeological Research, the interregional commissions for archaeological research and the regional archaeological services. Its administrative board includes representatives of the state, representatives of research organizations and local communities, developers, and personalities qualified in the domain of archaeology. The research activities of INRAP are conducted under the aegis of a scientific council which links the supervising ministries and members of the archaeological community: the CNRS (Centre national de la recherche scientifique), the universities and the archaeological services of local communities.

Numerous partners

To carry out its mission of evaluations and excavations, INRAP collaborates every year with more than 1,500 private or public partners. These include property developers, motorway building companies, quarry owners, regional councils, general councils, local communities, town councils, public enterprises, public housing units, and others ...

Organizations over the whole territory

With approximately 1,800 collaborators and researchers, INRAP is present throughout metropolitan France, as well as in French Guyana, Guadeloupe and Martinique. It is by far the largest and most important operator in preventive archaeology at work, in both rural and urban areas. With its nation-wide coverage, with the sheer numbers of its personnel and the diversity of their competence, INRAP is a research institute unlike any other in Europe and beyond.

Areas of competence

Unique skills and advanced techniques and a wide range of expertise

As the successor to the Association for national archaeological excavations (AFAN) created in 1973, INRAP benefits from nearly thirty years of experience in the field. It brings together almost 50% of the archaeologists working in the French territory and counts in its ranks numerous high level researchers, including over a hundred PhDs and about 300 graduates with Masters or equivalent degrees.

The diversity of its teams enables INRAP to deploy the whole range of skills of modern archaeological research. The Institute includes specialists in all archaeological periods – Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages, Antiquity, Middle Ages, Modern Times, the contemporary epoch – as well as ceramologists, numismatists (coins) and topographers, a broad range of geo-archaeologists, sedimentologists, anthropologists, palynologists (pollens), carpologists (seeds), anthracologists (charcoals), archaeo-zoologists, malacologists (molluscs), and more generally, specialists in the history of climate and landscape (palaeo-environment). These researchers rely in turn on a large range of techniques stemming from the natural sciences, in particular dating methods (carbon 14, thermoluminescence, dendrochronology ...).

Research directions

Evaluations and excavations are at the centre of INRAP's research policy. Field activities and their ensuing scientific reports are extended by a number of coordinated research strands, which serve to integrate the results of archaeological fieldwork within a broader scientific framework. These research directions include the Upper and Middle Palaeolithic periods; settlement patterns in the Middle and Late Neolithic; architecture, funerary practices and palaeo-anthropology during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages; funerary practices and societies during the Iron Age; funerary practices and the geography of death during Antiquity; religious and funerary archaeology in an urban context; production and work of iron; the evolution of territorial occupation as perceived through large-scale operations; and, for French Guyana and in the Lesser Antilles, recent evidence on the early peopling of these regions. The archaeological data and results attained lead, first and foremost, to a range of publications, seminars, conferences and scientific lectures. Every year, INRAP researchers publish more than 300 articles in scientific journals in France and abroad.

Scientific partners

INRAP engages in scientific collaborations with the entire archaeological community. Some 250 of its researchers are active in 'mixed research units' including university departments and CNRS laboratories. INRAP is a partner of the departments of archaeology at the universities of Dijon, Toulouse II, Tours, Lille III, Nantes, Paris I, Paris X (Nanterre), Strasbourg II, Montpellier III, and also of the networks of the Maisons des Sciences de l'Homme and of the Collège de France. Its research activities rely also on the works of the Bureau for Geological and Mining Research, the Centre for Research and Restoration of the French Museums and the Laboratory of Research on Historical Monuments. Lastly, INRAP has signed numerous partnership agreements with the archaeological services of the local communities.

International Cooperation

INRAP works in close relationship with the international scientific community. It is a member of the Europae Archaeologiae Consilium, which links all the public archaeological services in Europe, and also a corporate member of the European

Association of Archaeologists. Following its participation in the Interreg Planarch project (involving the Nord – Picardie regional office with partners in Germany, Belgium, Netherlands and the United Kingdom), INRAP aims to participate in further European-funded collaborative projects. INRAP is also an institutional member of the International committee on archaeological management of ICOMOS, and provides expert advice to UNESCO, notably on the archaeological protection and evaluation of world heritage sites. On a bilateral level, INRAP cooperates with other European countries, with Russia, with Northern and Western Africa, as well as South East Asia, mainly contributing training and advice on preventive archaeology. In addition, INRAP researchers are encouraged to cooperate with archaeological teams working in such countries as in Cambodia, Albania, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Italy, Jordan, Mongolia, Oman, Romania, Somalia, Syria and Tunisia.

Essential Facts

- 8 interregional offices and 50 research centres
- More than 2000 on-site evaluations and 300 sites excavated per year
- Annual budget : 128 million Euros (in 2006)
- 1500 archaeologists working nation-wide throughout France