

Press release
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The Gallo-Roman bread rolls of Saint-Symphorien street in Reims

After five months, the preventive archaeological excavation conducted by Inrap on the future A3C building site, Saint-Symphorien street in Rheims, is reaching its end. Extending over 500 m², the archaeological levels are more than 5 m deep and recount 2,000 years of continuous human occupation.

A prestigious residence

The last levels uncovered date from Antiquity. The area excavated is in the centre of the Gallic agglomeration at the south-east angle of the Roman forum.

The beginning of the reign of August (27 to 5 BC) provides only a few wooden constructions on sill beams and posts, the earliest stone constructions appearing in the 1st century.

One example is a large edifice, at least 500 m² in area, which has a 60 m² reception hall, decorated with a black and white, geometric mosaic. Painted plaster is still visible at the bases of the walls, and in some parts is conserved to a height of 2 m. The house had underfloor heating (hypocaust). The status of this structure remains to be defined: luxurious *domus* or *schola* (co-operative building). The fire that ravaged it at the end of the 1st century provides useful information.

A fossilised instant of daily life

The fire “fossilised” everything contained in two cellars.

The cellar to the south of the *domus* was devoted to domestic storage. Here is where three bread rolls and three amphorae (very rare elements in such a context) were discovered arranged on a wooden tray. One of the two wine-jars was even recycled to store wheat! The northern cellar was more carefully built and does not seem to have served for storage. A small vase placed in a pit seems to indicate some kind of ritual activity.

Following the fire the structure and appearance of the residence were greatly modified in the 2nd century. The spaces formerly occupied by the now backfilled cellars could be built on. Heated baths were constructed and the size of the rooms diminished while the outside spaces were enlarged.

The evolution of a quarter over 2,500 years

This archaeological operation allows us to trace the history of a quarter occupied from the Augustinian period. In Roman times, luxurious habitations were built. At the beginning of the Early Christian period, the area passed from secular to religious hands. As early as the 4th century, the ecclesiastics of Rheims acquired the land and founded the first cathedral. Later, the canons of Saint-Symphorien established their cloister from which architectural pieces and fragments of statues were found. The religious vocation of the quarter continued until the end of the 18th century.

Inrap

With 1,800 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.

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