



Préfecture de la région Languedoc-Roussillon
Direction régionale des affaires culturelles
Service régional de l'archéologie

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An exceptional Iron Age (IX-VIIth century BC) cemetery in Languedoc (Puisserguier, Hérault).

A team from the National Institute for Research in Preventive Archaeology (INRAP) is at present finishing preliminary work in the Puisserguier (Hérault) region. Undertaken prior to the creation of an economic development zone (ZAE), by the community of regions “entre Lirou et Canal du Midi”, the work was curated by the archaeology service of the Direction régionale des Affaires culturelles of Languedoc-Roussillon.

The excavation has revealed a rich early Iron Age cremation cemetery.

A Remarkably Preserved Cemetery

The Puisserguier cemetery was used continuously from the ninth to the end of the seventh century BC, and remarkably for southern France, the complete plan of this protohistoric cemetery has been discovered. It contains 235 graves which offer insights into mortuary practices, the social organisation of a cemetery, and the identity of the indigenous communities that lived in the south of Gaul just before the beginning of Greek colonisation. This cemetery belongs to a category identified at Mailhac (Aude) and Agde (Hérault) but also in more northerly locations such as Castres (Tarn). The originality of this intervention lies in its being a study of the complete cemetery which allows us to follow in a precise and detailed way the chronological evolution of mortuary practices.

Cremation Tombs

Here only adults were cremated. In western Languedoc, during the entire proto-historic period, cremation was the exclusive practice. It totally replaced other mortuary practices until the Roman conquest. Marked by mounds of earth and stone, the tombs are constructed as deep circular graves closed by a heavy stone slab. They are placed in the centre of circular or rectangular stone enclosures set out along small paths. No burial abuts the neighbouring burial. Situated in the heart of the cemetery, two tombs stand out because of their size and complexity, indications of the high rank of the deceased.

Funerary practices of the indigenous communities

The grave goods are located at the base of the grave-cut. Generally, they comprise a vessel in which the ashes of the deceased and his personal belongings (small knives, bracelets, clothing accessories, brooches, harness pieces...) as well as accompanying vases, were placed. The “urn” and its contents relate to the life of the deceased, whereas the additional vases represent collective practices. In Puisserguier, a grave contains on average 20 vases, and some of them up to 55. In total, the number of vases can be estimated at 4000, and the number of small metallic objects at 600. All the accompanying vases are placed in a way that suggests the use of a specific funerary ware.

This is one of the first times in France that an Iron Age cemetery from this era presents such a spectacular ensemble. Preliminary results suggest that after the burials, the grave continued to be visited and tended. The care given to the construction of the tombs, the management of burial space and also the exceptional quality of preservation, make Puisserguier’s necropolis a national reference.

Site Director : Florent Mazière (INRAP).

Curation : Direction régionale des Affaires culturelles of Languedoc-Rousillon/ archaeology service.

Developer : Community of Regions “Entre Lirou et Canal du Midi”.

Contact :

INRAP
Service de la Communication
7, rue de Madrid
75008 Paris
Tel. : 01 40 08 80 00
Email : communication@inrap.fr