



Direction régionale
des affaires culturelles
Midi-Pyrénées



Press release
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EXCEPTIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERY IN TOULOUSE

The mediaeval castle of the Counts of Toulouse found beneath the Palais de Justice

The remains of the mediaeval castle of the Counts of Toulouse have been found during the restructuring of the Palais de Justice in Toulouse. The excavation, curated by the Regional Archaeological Service (Drac, Midi-Pyrénées), is being carried out by the Institut National de Recherches archéologiques preventives (Inrap).

Exceptional brick architecture

Following the demolition of the south wing of the former Palace of Justice, excavations which began on August 8 brought to light important remains of the “Château Narbonnais”. The archives indicated that the famous residence of the Counts of Toulouse was to be found here, but the account of its destruction in the 1550s left little hope of finding significant remains. In fact, nearly the whole of the south façade and its eastern corner have now been uncovered. Made of brick, this 2.4 metre thick wall, with powerful buttresses, unique in mediaeval military architecture, has been preserved over a length of 30 metres to a height of 4 metres. It gives an idea of the size of the castle, cradle of the Toulouse family, and mentioned in texts from the end of the 11th century.

Toulouse, an important centre of French history

In addition to the quality of the architecture, which is for the South West region of France a very rare example of urban military architecture, the historical and symbolic importance of the discovery should be stressed.

Toulouse was the power centre of the family of the Counts of Toulouse. Dukes of Narbonne, they were one of the most important European forces during the 12th century. One of them, Raymond IV aspired to the royal crown. The “Château Narbonnais” which has just been discovered was the centre from which the power of the counts emanated. It was very probably built on the site of a Gallo-Roman gate, the main access in antiquity from *Gallia Narbonensis*, through the ramparts of *Tolosa*, into the city. In the Middle Ages in reference to this distant past, the castle was called the “Château Narbonnais”.

Elements of comparison enabling us to measure the importance of the building are rare: the Louvre in Paris is the site which first springs to mind. A reference all the more understandable when one realises that, in 1271, when the County of Toulouse became Crown land, the “Château Narbonnais” became a royal castle. Its extensions (Clock Tower and rampart) illustrate the important role then occupied by Toulouse in the southern ambitions of the Capetians.

The continuation of the excavations

Excavation which has only just begun should continue until the end of the year. The chronology of the structures discovered in the important Palais de Justice site will be clarified. So will the evolution of the castle's defence system and that of the town, from Antiquity up to the French Revolution.

This exceptional discovery once more confirms the importance of Toulouse from its origins which date back to the last years of the independence of Celtic Gaul.

Developer: Ministry of Justice

Curation: Regional Archaeology Service (Drac Midi-Pyrénées)

Preventive Archaeology Operator: Inrap

Site Director: Jean Catalo (Inrap)

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