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A mysterious discovery at the bottom of a well at Entrains-sur-Nohain

Inrap has just completed five months of archaeological excavation at Entrains-sur-Nohain in advance of a private development project, curated by the State (Drac Burgundy). The 1000 m² explored yielded part of the Antique town of *Intaranum*. The archaeologists unexpectedly discovered the remains of a mass grave, providing evidence of a massacre of a civil population.

On the outskirts of *Intaranum*

To the north-west of the Aedui territory, at the intersection of a large Roman road network, the Antique town of *Intaranum* developed over the first four centuries of the modern era. At its apogee, it covered 120 hectares. Today, the excavation has revealed an ironworking workshop, a section of a Roman road and a group of stone dwellings. Behind these structures, the occupants had bathing facilities with small, private thermal baths equipped with warm rooms and cold pools. The water was supplied by wells. At the end of the excavation, the archaeologists explored two of these wells. This very specific excavation required the installation of a technical platform and the intervention of a team from Archéopuits, in order to remove the infill while adhering to strict safety conditions.

A gruesome discovery...

In the small space (barely 1.3 m in diameter) of one of the wells, the archaeologists unearthed human skeletons and two large keys at more than 4 m in depth. They then uncovered numerous bones descending three meters in depth. Though many were broken by the weight of the sediments, some were still in anatomical connection. The 20 to 30 bodies thrown simultaneously into the well were in diverse positions: backed up against the wall, on their stomach or back, with their limbs folded or disconnected. The presence of men, women and children, sometimes very young, represents a civil population. A Carbon 14 date gives a preliminary chronological indication: if the well dates to the Antique period, the deceased would be attributed to the 8th to 10th centuries AD. Other dates will soon clarify the chronology of this dramatic even at Entrains-sur-Nohain.

A very troubled period provides many clues

During the Carolingian period, Burgundy ceased to be an independent kingdom. It was dismantled and annexed to Austrasia by Charles Martel. The Carolingian empire was then raged by the war of succession led by the three sons of Louis the Pious: Lothaire, the legitimate successor, Charles the Bald and Louis the German. In 841, according to accounts from this period, several tens of thousands of soldiers were killed in the Battle of Fontenoy (25 km to the north of Entrains, approximately one day away on horseback). Charles the Bald, for example, installed his camp in Thury, 16 km from Entrains. Such large installations of armed troops required enormous amounts of supplies and services, which could have led to violent acts in the village.

During the second third of the 9th century, Viking invasions also took place. They were in Paris in 845, Chartres and Beauvais in 858-859, and then descended the Rhone into Valence between 859 and 862. In the middle Rhone, Viking invasions took place in around 856 (pillaging of Orleans and the Abbey of Saint-Benoit-sur-

Loire). While they mainly used drakkars, the Vikings did not hesitate to venture inland, as in the expedition of 856, which started in the Saintonge region and traversed the Massif Central to besiege Clermont-Ferrand. Entrains-sur-Nohain is located less than 30 km from the banks of the Loire.

A period as disruptive as this could also have led to events such as plundering, which would have nothing to do with this significant event: a small, well-armed and determined band can easily overcome a village.

... or an epidemic?

The archaeologists currently favour the hypothesis of a massacre or an epidemic. A paleo-pathological study will perhaps reveal ancient illnesses or on the contrary, *perimortem* traumas linked to weapons.

Due to the complexity of this mass grave and its excavation, *in situ* observations are difficult. The well and the skeletons were thus modelled in 3D by the Captair company. This highly precise photogrammetric recording will enable further observations of these elements after the excavation.

Inrap

With nearly 2000 collaborators and researchers, Inrap is the largest archaeological research structure in France and one of the most important in Europe. This national research institute realizes most of the archaeological diagnostic operations and excavations in partnership with private and public developers, equaling nearly 2500 sites per year in metropolitan France and its overseas territories. Its missions also include the scientific exploitation of the results and the diffusion of archaeological knowledge to the public.

Captair

Captair is a young and innovative company associated with the CNRS. In collaboration with archaeologists, it is developing new photogrammetric recording methods. High Resolution Photogrammetric (HRP) recordings are realized by identifying the pixels shared by a group of photos and by replacing them in space by triangulation, giving the scatter plots that are produced a truly scientific value. At Entrains-sur-Nohain, the resolution obtained is approximately one micron.

www.captair.net

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