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The rich hours of the Protohistoric village of La Cougourlude at Lattes

In advance of construction work to protect the lower Lez Valley from flooding, a team of Inrap archaeologists is conducting an excavation, curated by the State (Drac Languedoc-Roussillon), of more than two hectares of the eastern part of a large Iron Age village. Discovered in the 1960's by Henri Prades, the site of Cougourlude was occupied during the 6th to 5th centuries BC. Studies of the remains of this site provide new information on the organization, evolution and chronology of this village, the ways of life and activities of its occupants and their exchanges with their famous neighbors of the port trading post of *Lattara*.

A Gallic village unique in the region but limited in time

Why was this village established in this location? Was it to take advantage of the river, a ford and a circulation route? The village of Cougourlude is in effect implanted on the two banks of the ancient course of the Lironde river, at the junction of a route. According to the observations realized over the past thirty years, the surface of the Protohistoric village would have covered around 17 hectares, which is extremely large relative to neighboring lagoon villages. The abundant remains depict a rural habitat with both constructions on posts and semi-buried buildings. Fragments of daub are scattered all over the site. Clumps of mudbricks were detected in some places, but the burned remains of adobe bricks are much more common. Nearly two thousand structures, hearths, silos and diverse pits have also been identified. Arranged inside and around the houses, there are ovens and hearths, silos to preserve grains, cellars and many pits whose function has not yet been determined. A pottery kiln and remains of a forge for the production of iron and the treatment of lead were also found. Two imposing trenches, 8 to 12 m wide and 3 m deep, traverse the site. They could have served in the defense of the village, or, since they are connected to the ancient channel of the Lironde, for the distribution of water.

Etruscan and Massaliote artifacts

The artifacts recovered are abundant and varied and permit the archaeologists to date the occupation. It began at around 550 BC and continued until 475 BC at most. The discovery of a large number of Etruscan and Massaliote amphorae and the high proportion of dishes imported from Greece and Italy indicate close trade relations with these regions.

Prestigious neighbors: the trading post of *Lattara*

The chronology of Cougourlude (between 550 and 475 BC) covers the period immediately preceding the foundation of *Lattara* (around 525 BC) and the first occupation phase of this agglomeration. The presence of a rather extended habitat at just a few hundred meters away raises many questions concerning the relationships between these two sites in terms of complementarity or dependence. What role did the inhabitants of Cougourlude play in the emergence of the neighboring city?

If *Lattara* was a trading post founded by Etruscan merchants, repeated contacts with indigenous populations could have facilitated the settlement of the newcomers. These exchanges are attested on the site by numerous Etruscan and Greek amphorae. They indicate a high consumption of wine by the inhabitants of Cougourlude, as well as their active participation in commercial exchanges. The form of the village of Cougourlude differs completely from that of the neighboring agglomeration of *Lattara*, a portside city with a city wall, organized plan and houses with stone foundations. The abandonment of the village toward the middle of the 5th century BC also raises many questions. Did the population move to *Lattara*?

The evolution of the site

During the Gallo-Roman period, a mausoleum must have been linked to the Roman *villa* excavated a few tens of meters away. A tall, richly decorated tower with an interior enclosure 18.5 meters long contained the funerary chamber. This monument was dismantled in the Roman period and its stones were reused in other constructions. The location nonetheless retained its funerary function since in the 4th century AD, a small cemetery was installed.

L'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 public research institution undertakes the majority of archaeological evaluations and excavations in partnership with private and public developers, a total of more than 2000 sites per year in mainland France and its overseas territories. Its missions also include the scientific exploitation of excavation results and the transmission of archaeological knowledge to the general public.

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