

Press release  
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## The exceptional grave of Louise de Quengo, a 17<sup>th</sup> century Lady

From 2011 to 2013, an Inrap team realized a rescue excavation, curated by the State (Drac Brittany), at the Jacobin Convent, the future site of the Rennes Métropole conference center. Two years later, the ongoing studies have yielded new discoveries.

The Jacobin Convent, constructed in 1369 after the War of Succession, marked the victory of Jean IV of Montfort, the Duke of Brittany, over Charles de Blois. From the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, this Dominican establishment became an important place for pilgrimages and inhumations. Approximately 800 graves were uncovered by the archaeologists, including five lead coffins. One of these contained a remarkably well-preserved corpse. Its study provides rare evidence for the funerary practices of elites during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### Lead coffins and hearts

The five lead coffins, dated to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, were accompanied by reliquaries in shape of hearts.

Four of the coffins, uncovered in the church choir, yielded relatively well-preserved skeletons, some with a sawed skull and rib cage, an embalming practice reserved for elites.

The five lead reliquaries accompanying the coffins in the Jacobin Convent constitute a unique group of artifacts in Europe. They contain a heart and four of them have inscriptions revealing the identity of the deceased. Some of the hearts were enveloped in tissue and embalmed with vegetal materials. An analysis of the textiles, the vegetal species and some organs contributes information on the embalming procedure.

### Louise de Quengo, Lady of Brefeillac († 1656)

At the base of a wall of the Saint-Joseph Chapel, the fifth coffin contained an exceptionally well-preserved corpse. The nearly intact body is that of Louise de Quengo, Lady of Brefeillac. This identification could be made thanks to inscriptions on the lead reliquary of the heart of her husband, Toussaint de Perrien, Knight of Brefeillac (deceased in 1649).

In order to limit as much as possible any loss of information from the decomposition of the body, a study was realized in collaboration with the Molecular Anthropology and Synthetic Imaging Laboratory (CNRS/Université de Toulouse), and the medical-legal service of the CHU of Toulouse.

### The autopsy: scientific and heritage contribution

After scanning the entire corpse, the autopsy revealed the health condition of Louise de Quengo. This was a rare opportunity in archaeology to collect human tissues with no environmental contamination. Complementary microbiologic and genetic analyses enable the scientists to determine if the cause of death was infectious. The DNA of pathogens, including that of tuberculosis, enable the observation of the micro-organisms of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present, a rapidly developing research topic.

These studies also contribute precious information on the funerary practices of the time, as well as the history of sciences and medicine. The removal of the heart of the deceased thus revealed a great mastery of surgical practices. It was probably



inhumed in an as yet unknown location, probably with her husband to accompany him to heaven.

The inhumation of body parts in different locations began in the Middle Ages, as is seen in the funerals of Bertrand Du Guesclin and Anne of Brittany. However, the nature and evolution of these practices during the Modern period were until now poorly known.

### **A complete costume from the 17<sup>th</sup> century**

Louise de Quengo was dressed in a religious vestment: cape, chasuble, a brown frieze frock in a crude serge wool, a plain fabric shirt, leg warmers or chausses in serge wool and leather mules (shoes) with cork soles. A devotional scapular was wrapped around her right arm and her hands were joined and holding a crucifix. Her face was covered with a shroud and two bonnets and a hood, held by a bandeau, covered her head. It was common for secular elites who were authorized to do so to wear a religious vestment for important ceremonies. But it is also possible that Louise adopted a monastic lifestyle after she became a widow. The exceptional preservation of this outfit led the Museum of Brittany to ensure the restoration of the clothing (*Materia Viva* laboratory in Toulouse) and the shoes (2CRC laboratory in Grenoble) in preparation for their presentation to the public.

Following the scientific studies, measures will be taken to rebury the deceased and to preserve the textiles.

### **A presentation during the National Days of Archaeology**

During the Village of Archaeology event at Champs Libres in Rennes, on June 20 and 21, the Inrap archaeo-anthropologist Rozenn Coleter will give a presentation of the discovery of the Louise de Quengo grave.

[journées-archeologie.fr](http://journées-archeologie.fr).



## **Inrap**

With nearly 2000 collaborators and researchers, Inrap is the largest archaeological research structure in France and one of the most important in Europe. Each year, this national research institute realizes approximately 1,800 archaeological diagnostic operations and 250 excavations in partnership with private and public developers in metropolitan France and its overseas territories. Its missions also include the scientific exploitation of the results and the transmission of archaeological knowledge to the public.

### **Excavation of the Jacobin Convent**

Contracting authority **Rennes Métropole**

Curation **DRAC Bretagne**

Archaeological research **Inrap**

Site director **Gaétan Le Cloirec, Inrap**

Physical anthropologist **Rozenn Colleter, Inrap**

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