



ministère de la Culture
et de la Communication
ministère de
l'Éducation nationale, de
l'Enseignement supérieur
et de la Recherche

Inrap
Institut national
de recherches
archéologiques
préventives



Press release
18 September 2014

From the end of independence to Romanization: excavations at Mont Castel in Port-en-Bessin



A team of archaeologists from Inrap, the CNRS, and the universities of Rennes 2 and Burgundy are currently conducting a research excavation of the Gallic *oppidum* of Mont Castel in Port-en-Bessin.

A vast coastal plateau covering around twenty hectares and dominating the village of Port-en-Bessin, this archaeological site had not yet been subject of field investigation. The archaeologists suspect that it may be the port of the Baiocasses people, in charge of overseeing the flow of merchandise between southern England and Normandy. Mont Castel is part of a larger network of fortified sites that formed a protection system for this space unique in the Protohistory of western France.

While there is evidence that Mont Castel was occupied during Protohistory, the nature and chronology of this occupation remained to be defined. The topography and the bits of information available seem to indicate that it was a fortified site during the Final La Tène period (150-30 BC), of the *oppidum* type, situated in a remarkable and highly strategic location since the end of the Bronze Age (1350-800 BC).

Test-pits were realized in 2010 under emergency conditions following the discovery that the site had been extensively looted. These tests confirmed the first hypotheses: the site was occupied during the Final Bronze Age, followed by the construction of fortifications at the very end of the Iron Age. These test-pits also yielded Roman armaments (sword scabbard, ballista or scorio darts, lead sling-shot bullets, etc.).

After the conquest... before Romanization

The period between the end of Gallic independence and the beginning of Romanization – from 52 to 24 BC – is an obscure period for historians and archaeologists because the historical records provide only vague or indirect information on the political and social situation. The year 52 and the defeat of Alésia marked neither the end of the war against Rome, nor the immediate Romanization of the Celtic society. The foundation of the material and spiritual culture of Gaul remained essentially indigenous until the Augustinian period. After the final battle of the Gallic Wars at *Uxellodunum*, the situation was not entirely under Roman control. Caesar had distributed all of his legions throughout Gaul and himself spent the winter of 51-50 at *Nemetocena* (Arras?). Gaul was exhausted, unstable and probably unsettled by internal conflicts, requiring the presence of an occupying army.

The discovery of *militaria tardo-républicain* on Mont Castel was a new occurrence in western France and recalls a situation that archaeology has begun to reveal on the grand *oppida* of northern and central-eastern Gaul. It supports the hypothesis that the first Roman military camps were installed on the *oppida* at the end of the conquest before being moved away from these urban centers during the Augustinian period.

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 1,500 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 diffusion of archaeological knowledge to the public.

Scientific coordination

Site directory **Cyril Marcigny, Inrap, UMR 6566, Université Rennes 2**

Collaborative research program director **Jean-Paul Guillaumet, UMR 6298, Université de Bourgogne, Bibracte**

Pierre Giraud, Conseil général du Calvados, Service Archéologie

Anthony Lefort, Inrap, UMR 5594, Université de Bourgogne, CNRS

Contact

Mahaut Tyrrell

Media Communication

Inrap, Media partnerships and relations

01 40 08 80 24 – mahaut.tyrrell@inrap.fr