

Press release
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The aristocratic grave at Warcq (Ardennes): an exceptional Gallic chariot grave

A combined team composed of archaeologists from the Ardennes departmental archaeology unit and from Inrap has just finished excavating the aristocratic Gallic grave at Warcq (Ardennes). Curated by the State (Drac Champagne-Ardenne), this site was part of the investigation of the route of the A304 motorway being constructed by the Dreal between Charleville-Mézières and Rocroi.

This type of aristocratic grave, containing a ceremonial or war chariot, emerges in the 7th century B.C. and disappears with the end of the Gallic period. Champagne-Ardenne is famous for such funerary practices, which are generally dated to the start of the second Iron Age (5th-4th century B.C.).

The deceased, his chariot, his horses and a rich set of artefacts...

The remains discovered in the Warcq grave have now been revealed to be exceptional. The vast funerary chamber (5.50 x 2.80 m) was preserved to a depth of more than a metre. In this damp environment, the wooden walls and ceiling were extremely well preserved. Over time, the latter had collapsed directly onto the floor of the chamber, covering the deceased and his goods.

The funerary artefacts discovered were of unusually high quality. The main item was a two-wheeled ceremonial chariot. The vehicle was carefully decorated, particularly with pieces of bronze, in places set with dark blue or yellow glass paste on the chariot body and hubs. Other more mysterious wooden objects were also covered in fine gold leaf.

One of the most spectacular elements was the burial of four horses: two in the south west and north west corners and two in front of the chariot, beneath the yolk. The deceased person, most likely a man, was lying on the body of the chariot. An unusual gold collar, probably on a leather or wooden frame, was still around his neck. A fibula was inserted into his garments. A bent sword scabbard, a pair of shears and an iron razor were lying alongside him.

Three pottery vases had been crushed when the chamber ceiling collapsed. Finally, one of the food offerings was constituted by a pig.

Everything here indicates that this was an extremely elaborate, very spectacular funeral, some aspects of which are very uncommon in chariot graves in Champagne. These include the presence of four horses, but also that of a sword scabbard folded in half, a practice common in Celtic graves in northern Italy but very little attested in Gaul. One of the vases discovered, which has a baluster shape, bore a geometrical decoration probably created with tin and of which no other example has yet been found in France. Before archaeologists have even begun to define the exact chronology, a number of indicators enable the Warcq chariot grave to be attributed to the late 2nd or early 1st century B.C. (La Tène D1), a period in which this method of inhumation had all but disappeared.

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. Inrap researchers also participate in international research and education programs, as well as expertise missions.

The Ardennes departmental archaeology unit

The purpose of the Departmental archaeology unit of the Ardennes General Council is to reduce intervention times and to promote and communicate archaeological discoveries to the citizens of the department and to the scientific community. Employing 6 permanent agents, it was certified on 22 June 2009 by the Ministry of Culture and Communication for the realization of diagnostic operations within the department, and for the excavation of Gallo-Roman and Medieval sites. This certification was recently renewed for 5 years, starting on 22 June 2014. Over the past five years, this departmental unit has realized 84 diagnostic operations across 458 hectares.

Developer **Dreal**

Curation **Regional Archaeology Service (Drac Champagne-Ardenne)**

Archaeological research **Ardennes departmental archaeology unit / Inrap**

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