

Press release
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Rediscovery of a Lutetia necropolis

As part of the creation of a new exit for users of the "Port Royal" RER B station, a preventive archaeological excavation has been prescribed by State services (DRAC Île-de-France). This operation is being carried out by INRAP archaeologists. The research covers a 200 m² plot where the graves of a large necropolis, located south of Lutetia in the second century AD, are being studied.

The Saint-Jacques necropolis

During ancient times, the spaces dedicated to the dead and the living were quite different. The necropolis was located at the exit of the city and the graves were at the edge of a road. During the High Empire, Lutetia, whose southern urbanisation stretched as far as the Val de Grace, had several necropolises. The largest, known as the "South Necropolis" – also known as the Saint-Jacques Necropolis or the Rue Pierre-Nicole Necropolis (due to the large number of graves discovered in the southern part of this street) – developed south of the city, along the *cardo maximus* (now Rue Saint-Jacques).

The current excavation allows us to study a small part of it that has escaped the numerous roadworks, including the construction of the RER B in the 70s. This still preserved islet thus reveals an extension towards the west of the supposed limits of the necropolis; its excavation offers new data thanks to the different approaches of archaeology and modern anthropology.

An ancient necropolis revealed in the 19th century

Most of our knowledge of this necropolis comes from observations, made in the nineteenth century, during major works in Paris, of a small portion of the burial and cremation graves that composed it. Study of the archaeological material discovered at that time indicates regular use of the funerary space from the early first century until the third century, until it began to be abandoned in the fourth century. These observations also suggested that the necropolis extended to the site of the Abbey of Port-Royal as far as Boulevard Saint-Michel, and that at the height of the Roman city, it occupied a considerable area of approximately four hectares.

50 graves uncovered

The excavation uncovered 50 burial graves, most dating from the second century. They are reasonably dense and there are many overlaps. As is commonly observed in ancient times, no organisation or influence seems predominant, and the excavation revealed burial pits sometimes of very large dimensions, both in length and depth, and just as frequently, narrow and shallow.

This site has only revealed burials. No cremation has been detected even though both coexisted in this period of antiquity. They are all in coffins, perishable containers whose boards are sometimes still visible and whose nails are still present. The individuals buried here are male or female adults and also children, as could be expected in a large necropolis.

Just under half of the burials are accompanied by deposits of different kinds. These may be ceramic containers (cups, goblets, jugs or plates, etc.) or glass containers (balsam jars, lacrymatories, glasses, etc.). More rarely, a coin is placed in the

mouth of the deceased or in his or her coffin. This practice, common in ancient times, probably refers to the offering to the ferryman of Hades, Charon. Finally, several traces of shoes can be seen in the form of numerous small nails from the sole: they are either positioned at the feet of the individual as they would be worn, or left at the side of the subject. A few items related to clothing (fibulas, jewellery, pins, belts) have been unearthed. It should be noted that there is a unique and remarkable pit containing the skeleton of a whole pig, those of another small animal and two whole ceramic containers: this pit would therefore not be a grave per se but would rather have been used as a "pit for offerings".

This excavation will make it possible, through the study of the different burial methods, those buried there as well as the associated material, to refine the dating and the duration of use of this necropolis. Its organisation could reflect voluntary groupings and its analysis will provide valuable information on the lifestyles of Parisii.

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The Institut national de recherches archéologiques préventives (National Institute for Preventive Archaeological Research) is a public body under the oversight of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Research. It works to detect and study archaeological heritage ahead of land-use planning. Each year, it carries out about 1,800 archaeological diagnostic missions and over 200 excavations for public and private developers, working in mainland France and overseas. Its missions cover the scientific analysis and interpretation of excavation data, as well as disseminating archaeological knowledge. Its 2,200 officials, who are spread out over eight regional and inter-regional directorates, 42 research centres, and a

headquarters in Paris, make it the largest European archaeological research operator.

RATP development

Scientific inspection **Regional Archaeology Service (Île-de-France DRAC)**

Archaeological research **Inrap**

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