

# Iron Age warriors point to glories of Gaul

April 14 2013, by Laurent Banguet

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Cecile Paresys of the French National Institute of Preventative Archeological Research (INRAP - Institut National de Recherches Archéologiques Préventives) stands next to the bones of two Celts together with pins and bronze jewelry, on a site in Bucheres, near Troyes, on April 11, 2013. The site, earmarked for a warehouse project, is yielding a stunning array of finds

In a muddy field located between a motorway and a meander of the Seine southeast of Paris, French archaeologists have uncovered an Iron Age graveyard that they believe will shed light on the great yet enigmatic

civilisation of Gaul.

The site, earmarked for a warehouse project on the outskirts of Troyes, is yielding a stunning array of finds, including five Celtic warriors, whose weapons and adornments attest to membership of a powerful but long-lost elite.

Archaeologist Emilie Millet is crouched at one of 14 burial sites that have been uncovered in recent weeks.

At her feet are the remains of a tall warrior, complete with a 70-centimetre (28-inch) iron sword still in its scabbard.

"I have never seen anything like it," said Millet, gazing at a metal-framed shield whose wood-and-leather core has long rotted away.



General view April 11, 2013, of an excavation carried out by the French National Institute of Preventive Archeological Research (INRAP - Institut National de Recherches Archéologiques Préventives), in Bucheres, near Troyes.

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Buried next to the warriors are several women, whose jewellery—twisted-metal necklaces known as torcs, and large bronze brooches decorated with precious coral—also speak of high status.

In one grave, a woman was buried next to a man, separated by a layer of soil, speaking of a close but as-yet unfathomable bond.

"This graveyard is exceptional in more ways than one," says the National Institute for Preventive [Archaeological Research](#) (Inrap), which excavates sites of potential interest before the bulldozers are allowed in.

The jewellery suggests that the dead were buried between 325 and 260 BC, in a period known as La Tene. Another clue may come from analysis of the scabbards, whose decoration changed according to military fashion. Designs in this period typically had two open-mouthed dragons facing each other, with their bodies curled.

La Tene, whose name comes from an archaeological site in Switzerland, ran from about the 5th century BC to the first century AD, marking the glory years of the Celts.

During this time, the Celts expanded from their core territory in [central Europe](#) to as far afield as northern Scotland and the Atlantic coast of Spain.

They clashed with the emerging Roman empire, whose writers recorded the invaders as pale-skinned savages, dressed in breeches with bleached hair, who cut off their enemies' heads, preserving those of high rank in cedar oil.

The barbarian image, though, has been dispelled by historical research in recent decades.

It has laid bare a complex civilisation that had a mastery of metal and a trading system which spanned Europe and generated great wealth.



A member of the French National Institute of Preventative Archeological Research (INRAP - Institut National de Recherches Archéologiques Préventives) examines the the bones of two Celts, together with pins and bronze jewelry, at an excavation site in Bucheres, near Troyes, on April 11, 2013. The site, earmarked for a warehouse project, is yielding a stunning array of finds

The find at Bucheres raises several questions, for there has never been any trace of major Celtic settlement in this neighbourhood.

The graves were uncovered at a depth of about two metres (6.5 feet) but if they had any external markers, none remains.

An earlier civilisation, from the Bronze Age, left a line of burial mounds nearby, "which would have been visible for miles (kilometres) around," said Inrap archaeologist Cecile Paresys.

Just as intriguing, the excavation has yet to find any pottery or evidence of food, which were often added to [Iron Age](#) burials to sustain the dead in the spirit world.

No remains of children have been found, although this absence is common to Celtic necropolises—something that anthropologists are at a loss to explain.

Years of patient forensic work lie ahead to tease out clues about how these people lived and died. In the meantime, the remains are being recorded where they lie before being gently prised from the earth and preserved.

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Citation: Iron Age warriors point to glories of Gaul (2013, April 14) retrieved 28 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-04-iron-age-warriors-glories-gaul.html>

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