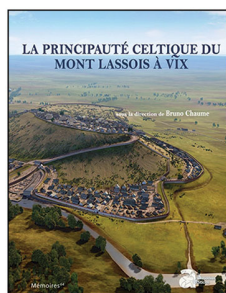




Book Review

BRUNO CHAUME (ed.). 2024. *La principauté celtique du Mont Lassois à Vix. Fouilles 2011–2017* (Mémoires 64). Bordeaux: Ausonius; 978-2-35613-625-1 hardback €60.



The site of Mont Lassois near Châtillon-sur-Seine (Côte-d'Or, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, France) has been a focus of Iron Age research since the discovery of the famous grave of the 'Lady of Vix' in the early 1950s. This female burial is one of the richest of late prehistoric Europe, drawing attention to the prominent role of women within Late Hallstatt communities and leading to the inclusion of the nearby hilltop in the group of so-called Early Iron Age 'princely seats' of the sixth and fifth centuries BC. Later research in the immediate environs of Mont Lassois uncovered other evidence linked to social elites, including the square enclosure of 'les Herbues', which can convincingly be interpreted as a sanctuary dedicated to ancestor worship (Chaume & Reinhard 2007).

However, despite some early archaeological interventions, the settlement of Mont Lassois itself remained underexplored until the early 2000s, which stood in contrast to the wealth of information recovered at other contemporaneous agglomerations such as the Heuneburg in southwest Germany (Krausse *et al.* 2016). This changed fundamentally with a geophysical survey carried out on Mont Lassois's summit plateau Saint-Marcel in 2003, which revealed a complex settlement layout with evidence of clear planning. The results helped to inform subsequent fieldwork, which, for example, led to the complete excavation of a large apsidal building and the discovery of several other ones. Moreover, the monumental fortification system surrounding the plateau was also the subject of investigations. The combined results of the 2002–2008 work were published in the edited volume *Le complexe aristocratique de Vix* (Chaume & Mordant 2011). The research was carried out by various international teams, which in addition to French colleagues also involved the Universities of Zurich, Vienna and Kiel, under the umbrella of the collective research project 'Vix et son environnement', co-ordinated by Bruno Chaume. With family connections to the name-giving village of Vix itself, Chaume's dedication to the site (already evidenced by his PhD, see Chaume 2001) has been the main driving force behind the research undertaken in the past few decades.

The present volume, also edited by Chaume, represents the continuation of this work and provides a detailed account of the fieldwork carried out at the site and its environs between 2011 and 2017. It should be noted that the results of the 2009–2014 Swiss excavations on the western slope of Mont Lassois have recently been published in a separate book, providing new insights into the Late Hallstatt fortification system in this area known as 'Champ de Fossé', as well as identifying a previously unknown Middle La Tène cult place (Ballmer *et al.* 2022).

The volume under review includes contributions from 20 authors and is divided into two main parts, the first called ‘descriptive analyses’ (focused on the excavations on the plateau Saint-Marcel itself and the areas of ‘Le Breuil’ and ‘Les Renards’) and the second entitled ‘thematic syntheses’ (encompassing the study of architecture, local and imported pottery and plant and animal remains, with a final summary chapter by Chaume). The distinction between the two parts of the book is, however, not clear-cut, since part 1 already includes individual chapters on pottery and zooarchaeology and, conversely, part 2 contains numerous descriptive elements. References are organised by chapters, rather than in one bibliography at the end of the book. Chapters are illustrated with a large number of high-quality tables and figures, comprising excavation plans, photographs of selected features and finds and some re-creations. It would have been beneficial, nonetheless, to start with a general map of the site indicating all the areas in which the investigations had taken place.

The book is first and foremost a detailed account of the fieldwork results, and in that regard it does a truly excellent job. For example, the reader will get comprehensive insights into the excavations within the elite enclosure from the upper plateau that contains five large apsidal buildings. At the foot of the plateau but still within the fortification complex and close to the River Seine is the area known as ‘Les Renards’, where fieldwork has revealed abundant evidence for craft production. This area of approximately six hectares might have constituted a sort of ‘lower town’, comparable but larger than the Heuneburg *Vorburg*. In addition, the investigations have identified outer settlement areas, most notably ‘Le Breuil’ and ‘La Navette’. At the former, described in detail, excavations and surveys suggest that there was a substantial external settlement area on the plain, thus supporting the idea of a suburb extending from the foot of the plateau to the River Seine. ‘La Navette’, on the other hand, is mentioned only briefly, but it is hypothesised that it might have included a possible harbour area.

In sum, the fieldwork carried out since the beginning of the twenty-first century has clearly demonstrated that the Late Hallstatt agglomeration of Mont Lassois was much larger than just the occupation on the five hectares of the plateau Saint-Marcel, similarly (although still on a smaller scale) to what has been attested for the Heuneburg at its zenith. Recent estimates expand the area of the Mont Lassois complex to about 45 hectares within the fortifications, with a population of between 3500 and 5000 inhabitants (Brun & Chaume 2021).

While the final chapter by Chaume is very helpful in summarising the main insights from a decade of research (encompassing both the studies presented in the book and others carried out by various colleagues at the site), for a wider and more comprehensive discussion of how Mont Lassois sits within the phenomenon of the ‘princely seats’, the reader is advised to look at the recently published edited volume *Vix et le phénomène princier* (Brun *et al.* 2021). Despite its many merits, it is also a pity that the book under review does not include a summary in English and/or German, which would have helped to disseminate the important outcomes to a wider international audience. Leaving these minor considerations aside, the volume represents a new milestone in our knowledge of Mont Lassois, showing how much has been achieved in the past few

decades but also the enormous potential that the site and its environs still hold for future research.

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