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Hallstatt urban Experience before the Celtic Oppida in Central and Eastern Gaul. Two Case-Studies: Bourges and Vix

Pierre-Yves Milcent

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edited by

Manuel Fernández-Götz, Holger Wendling, Katja Winger

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Front cover: 3D reconstruction of the Heuneburg at the height of its prosperity in the first half of the 6th century BC (after Fernández-Götz & Krause 2013; © Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Baden-Württemberg)

Back cover: Reconstruction of the *Pfostenschlitzmauer* wall of the Donnersberg *oppidum* (Photo: Manuel Fernández-Götz)

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Hallstatt Urban Experience before the Celtic Oppida in Central and Eastern Gaul. Two Cases-Studies: Bourges and Vix

Pierre-Yves Milcent¹

Celtic oppida from the Late La Tène period are often interpreted as the earliest towns in temperate Europe. But it seems clear that some of the open agglomerations built on plains in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, like the site of Aulnat, were also proto-urban settlements. These two types of large settlements, fortified on a hilltop or open, have in fact 'ancestors', often dated from the end of the First Iron Age and the end of the Late Bronze Age, like Bourges or Corent in central France. The aim of this article is to discuss the features and status of these sites which are older than the Celtic oppida, in central and eastern Gaul. Some of them are only the result of a concentration of rural settlements, or correspond to the development of an aristocratic house. But others, like Bourges, are clearly urban sites although they were not occupied for a long time. They show there were different waves and ways of experimentation during the earliest history of urbanisation.

Introduction

A recurring set of problems from European Protohistory is how to characterise Iron Age societies based on their organisational forms and underlying long term dynamics in order to determine their level of complexity, which is sometimes increasing and sometimes decreasing. Among these societies, we often ask ourselves to discuss those which had a complex structure; and, in particular, those which could be considered as state level societies. In order to argue for the existence of state level societies, identification of towns becomes a key archaeological criterion. This is true even if we know that certain states were not structured around towns, whether they were permanent or not. The debate may be extended by more specific questions: when do towns appear and in what forms? Were these towns perennial or ephemeral? What role did external stimuli, including Mediterranean, play in the access of certain societies to an urban state? Without going further, the questions naturally lead to the problem of how to archaeologically define what a town is in the context of European protohistoric societies. This problem is subtle

because the definitions and recognition criteria for towns were not produced by protohistorians and often not even by archaeologists (with some exceptions).

In temperate Europe, the Celtic *oppida* from the Late La Tène period have been interpreted for the past thirty years as the oldest towns (Collis 1984). Today one may ask oneself about the status and functions of some of the large unfortified settlements situated on flat, open terrain of the La Tène world dating from the 3rd–2nd centuries BC, like Aulnat in Auvergne, which immediately precedes the time of the large *oppida*. Generally regarded as mere craft villages, some of these could correspond to proto-urban settlements. Both types of settlements agglomerated from the end of the Iron Age – large grouped habitats on plains and *oppida* – have in fact some antecedents dating from the First Iron Age or, more often, at the end of this period. These fall in the central and western Hallstatt area (Fig. 4.1). These large Hallstatt habitats have generally been interpreted as ‘princely seats’ following the work of W. Kimmig and from the identification of some of the four main characterisation criteria that the

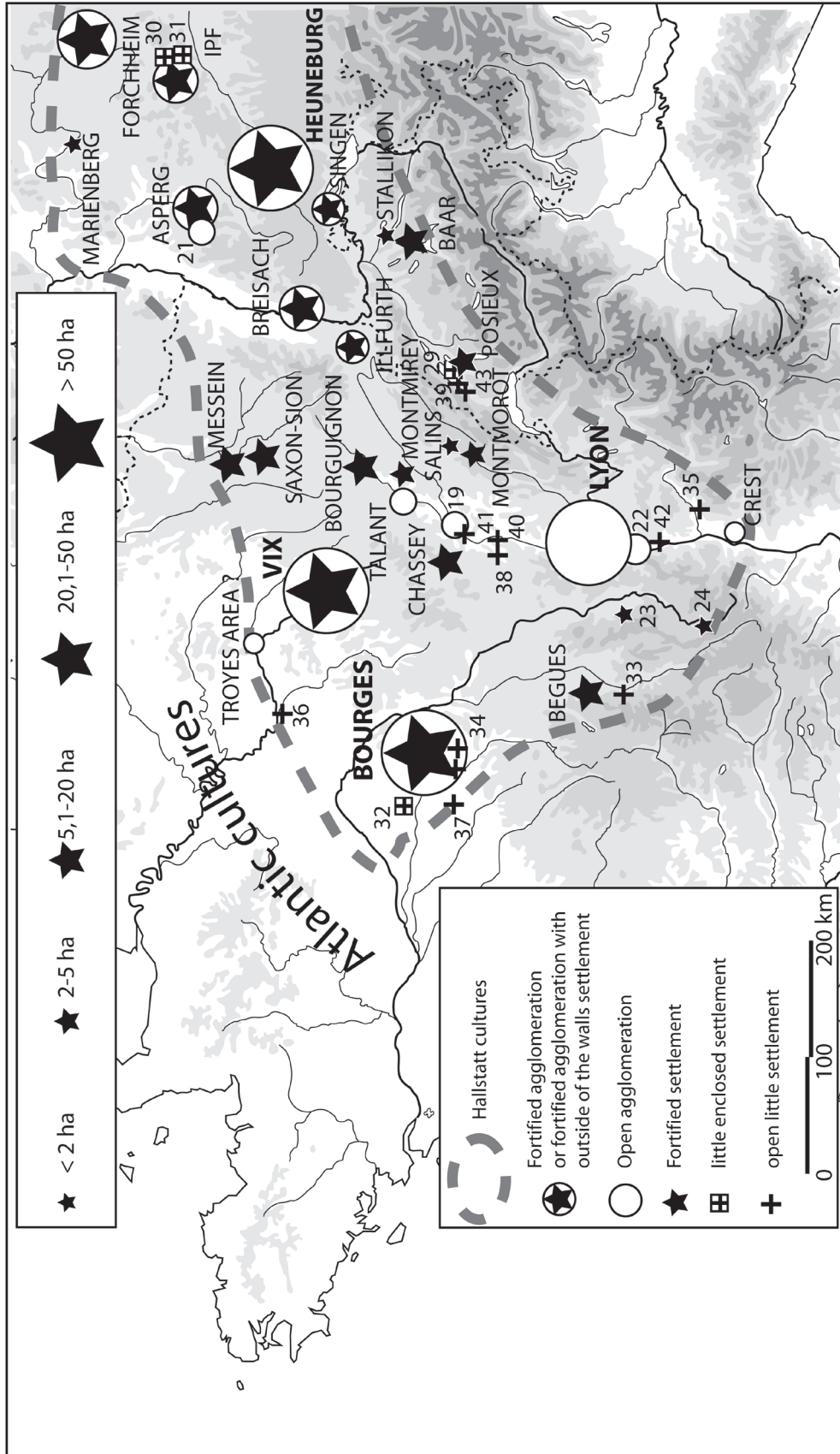


Fig. 4.1: Map of the Hallstatt settlements which have given Mediterranean imports dated from the 6th and 5th centuries BC. N.B.: the settlements and imports are not all contemporary. The numbers correspond to a list published in Milcent 2007: 273

German scientist had proposed (Kimmig 1969). In France, the elite Hallstatt graves and the Mediterranean imports have long focused the attention of experts (Kimmig 1983), rather than the settlements that could be associated with them. The renewal of research on Hallstatt habitats during these past 20 years allows us to relook at information regarding the status of the main habitats in a completely different manner today. From this point of view, the excavation conducted in Bourges on a large settlement which was occupied and agglomerated primarily during the 5th century BC, provided the material for new interpretations. 15 years ago, I formulated the hypothesis that Bourges, at the end of the First Iron Age, was not a ‘princely seat’ more spread than others, but a real agglomeration with features and functions that were properly urban (Milcent 1998; 2004: chapter 3). Three centuries before the Late La Tène *oppida*, the town of Bourges from the 5th century BC witnessed a proto-urban process during a short time (less than a century) and without any immediate aftermath. This is why I called this process an “Hallstatt urban experience” (Milcent 2007). Reactions to this thesis were at first reserved and even the French were skeptical. However, the development of the German research program called *Frühe Zentralisierungs- und Urbanisierungsprozesse* (Krause 2008) has allowed these points of view to evolve. It is true that in France, the idea that towns existed northwest of the Mediterranean before the Roman conquest was accepted with difficulty for the Late La Tène period. The protohistorians remember how difficult it was to impose the idea that the main Celtic *oppida* were really fortified towns. However, in order to pitch their renewed vision of Late Iron Age societies, some of them have sinned by optimism and glided over a more complex reality. All the Late La Tène *oppida* are not, in fact, towns, and much remains to be done to characterise these from a functional point of view. Similarly, it would be wrong today to promote the idea that most of the larger Hallstatt settlements from the end of the First Iron Age, in the past qualified as ‘princely seats’, participated in the Hallstatt urban experience. Having underestimated the scope and complexity of these settlements, it would be harmful to overestimate the degree of organisation and the status of some of them. Their archaeological features should be discussed in the context of the possible identification of proto-urban sites. We will give two examples with the Bourges and Vix sites. These case studies, to be well understood, must first be placed in a broader context, namely, that of the French sites which were qualified until recently as Hallstatt ‘princely seats’.

About the diversity of Hallstatt sites qualified as princely settlements or princely seats in Gaul

If one must retain one aspect of Hallstatt settlements which becomes a focus of attention because they contained

Mediterranean imports and/or because they were surrounded by elite tombs (the two most important identifying criteria according to W. Kimmig), the one aspect is the diversity of cases, especially in terms of size (Fig. 4.2). What is common, other than some Greek pottery fragments, among agglomerations like Bourges or Lyon which cover, at the very least, dozens of hectares, and hilltop settlements such as those of Salins-les-Bains or Montmorot in Jura, whose area is measured in a few thousands of square metres? These very small settlements are not exceptions. To my knowledge, all the small fortified sites of the end of the First Iron Age which have been the object of investigations in Central and East-Central France delivered Mediterranean imports (table Milcent 2007: fig. 35). So I think the vast majority of similar settlements were acquainted with, but to varying degrees, a consumption of imported goods, more or less luxurious, but rarely exceptional. As long as we admit that it’s about habitat, which is only an educated guess, knowing that other functions are possible (places of refuge, of periodic meetings, etc.) and could have been able to succeed each other or could have been combined, then, these sites could correspond to permanent or temporary elite residences. But to speak of ‘princely’ residences on the basis of some Mediterranean sherds is excessive or premature because indicators of exceptional habitats or of true nearby princely tombs are usually missing. To return to the example of the Camp du Château in Salins-les-Bains, the wagon burials from the end of the First Iron Age known in the area, those that have been discovered in the Moidons forest, about 6 km as the crow flies, can in no way rival true princely tombs: these are burials in an older barrow of average size and deposited on a very simple wagon with four wheels (Les Moidons ‘Tumulus de Morgan’ and Bois de Parancot T.21 ‘Champ Peupin’). None of these poor wagon graves presents any luxurious objects, whether in gold or imported goods from the Mediterranean area (Piningre & Ganard 2004: 114–125, 155–158, 337–339, fig. 122). In addition, no very large mounds have yet to be reported near Salins-les-Bains.

Other fortified sites that have Mediterranean imports are naturally more extensive, but they do not necessarily show signs of a dense habitat or of a large dimension. At Bourguignon-lès-Morey in Haute-Saône (17 ha in size), occupations and constructions appear concentrated along the rampart (Dubreucq & Piningre 2007; Piningre 1995) and a large part of the surface area, in the centre, would be empty. What is known about the sites of Bègues in Allier (5 ha) and the Cité d’Afrique at Messein in Meurthe-et-Moselle (7 ha for the main rampart, 2 ha for the attached rampart) would go in the same sense: the empty areas surpass the developed and inhabited areas (Lagadec *et al.* 1989; Milcent 2007: 421–422; Pion 2009). The wealth of these sites does not appear clearly superior even if we consider their small finds or the objects from the tombs excavated in their environs. In other words, again, the information is missing that could

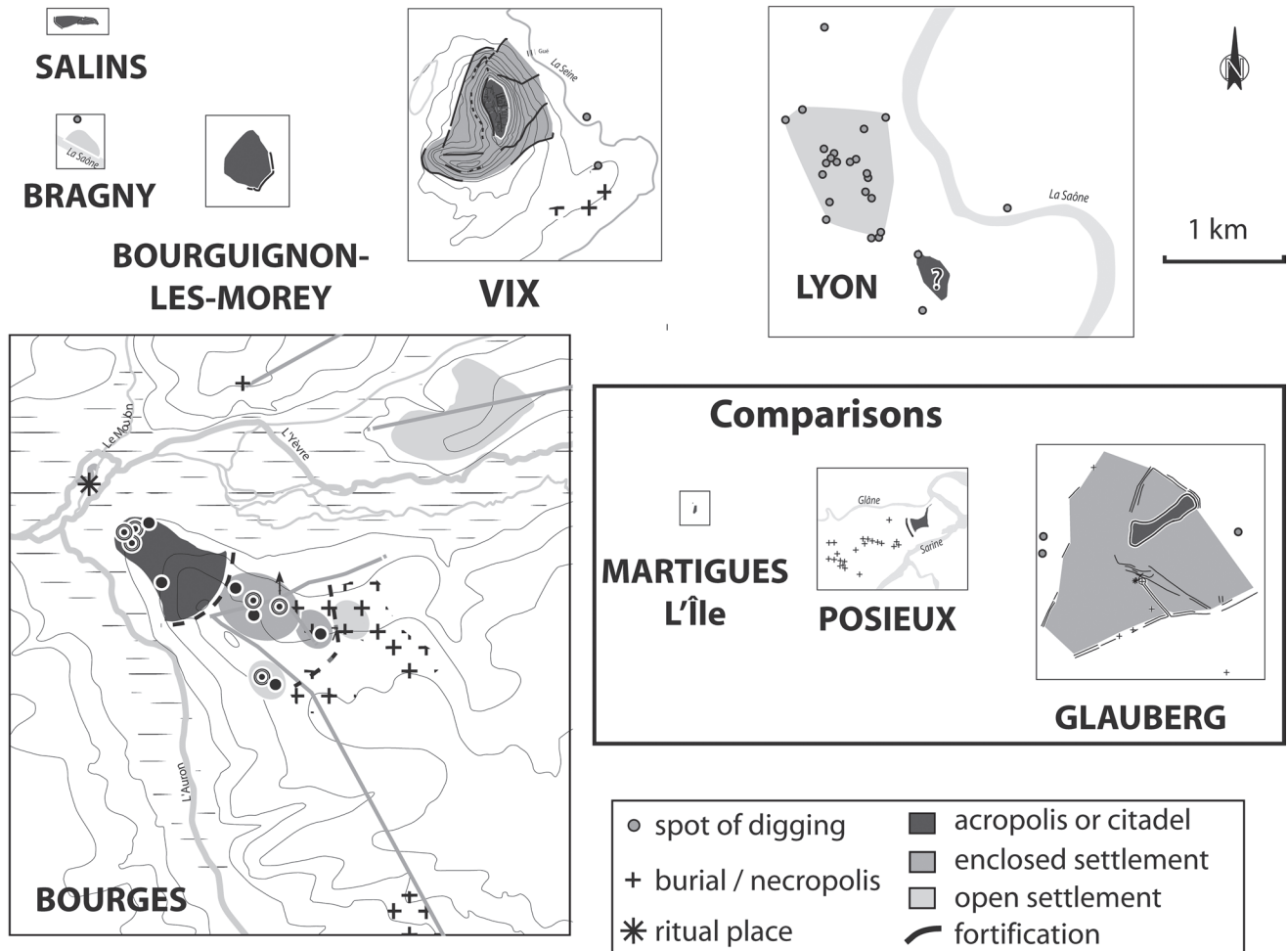


Fig. 4.2: Plans of different Hallstatt sites from the 6th and 5th centuries BC (Milcent 2012). Salins (Jura) 'Camp du Château'; Bragny-sur-Saône (Saône-et-Loire) 'Sous Moussière'; Bourguignon-lès-Morey (Haute-Saône) 'Camp Romain'; Vix (Côte-d'Or) 'Mont Lassois'; Lyon (Rhône); Bourges (Cher). For comparisons: Martigues (Bouches-du-Rhône) 'L'Île'; Posieux (Switzerland, Fribourg) 'Châtillon-sur-Glâne', Glauberg (Germany, Hesse)

qualify these as princely residence or even housing. As far as we can tell, the dominant impression is that these sites do not show any evidence that could clearly distinguish them from their antecedents of the Late Bronze Age either functionally or economically. But we must admit that information about them remains poor, and no investigation has been conducted to verify the presence or absence of an extension of these settlements outside the fortifications.

A 'Big Ranch' instead of an acropolis: Vix

Based on the current state of research, at least one original fortified site remains. It is the Mont Lassois in Vix. The research having been intensive and of such a quality in Vix, that one knows not only the Hallstatt habitat itself,

but also its immediate environs, the necropolis below, as well as other surrounding funerary deposits (Fig. 4.3). The presence of an exceptional tomb in Vix (Rolley 2003), along with other rich wagon burials in Sainte-Colombe, as well as the remarkable quality of habitat finds allows, without difficulty this time, to classify Mont Lassois among Hallstatt settlements of the first rank.

The highest part of Mont Lassois, the Saint-Marcel plateau, covers an area of 5.4 ha and has a very powerful fortification 9 m wide of a *Pfostenschlitzmauer* type. The wall only defines the western edge of the plateau; but, the most recent research confirms what René Joffroy had introduced (Joffroy 1960), which is that the slopes of Mont Lassois are doubled, especially at the base by impressive fortifications from the end of the First Iron Age (Chaume & Mordant 2011; Pertlwieser & Urban 2010). Aside from a

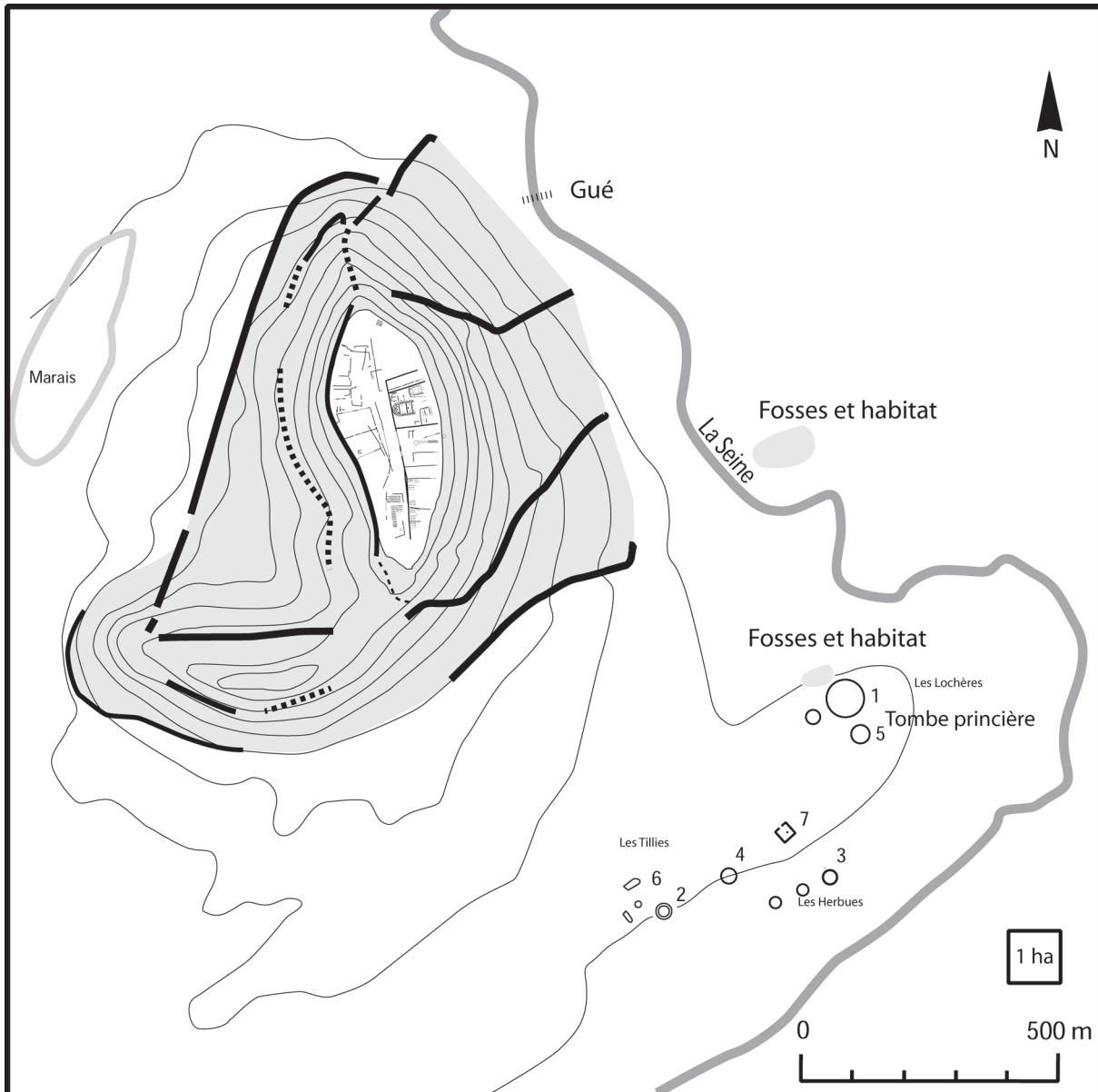


Fig. 4.3: The Mont Lassois at Vix (Côte-d'Or, Burgundy) (after Milcent 2012, with corrections and additions)

few inhabited ledges that have been dug by R. Joffroy, we do not know much about these slopes: were they neglected for the most part, or cultivated, or were they inhabited terraces where the terrain permitted? In total, the walled area of the Mont Lassois is extensive and comprises at least 55 ha, knowing also that small scattered habitats are also identified outside the fortifications, in the immediate vicinity (Chaume & Mordant 2011: 186). However, an important part of this walled area (upper slopes for the most part) was not conducive to the installation of buildings considering the hilly landscape.

Another significant development is the acquisition of a readable and interpretable plan regarding major structures

in negative features of the Saint-Marcel plateau, which dominates Mont Lassois, thanks to geophysical prospecting methods (Mötsch *et al.* 2008: fig. 2; Von der Osten-Woldenburg 2011: 129–132, figs 28, 32 & 33). Recent excavations and surveys reveal that the hollowed outlines correspond to palisade trenches more or less important, and that the regular holes are postholes; the structures in the excavated hollows are dated essentially by material from the end of the Hallstatt D period and show few signs of maintenance, except for the largest buildings in the eastern part (Mötsch *et al.* 2008: 14–18). The readability of the plan and the spatial coherence is such that it presumes a concerted development during one phase, ascribable to the late 6th

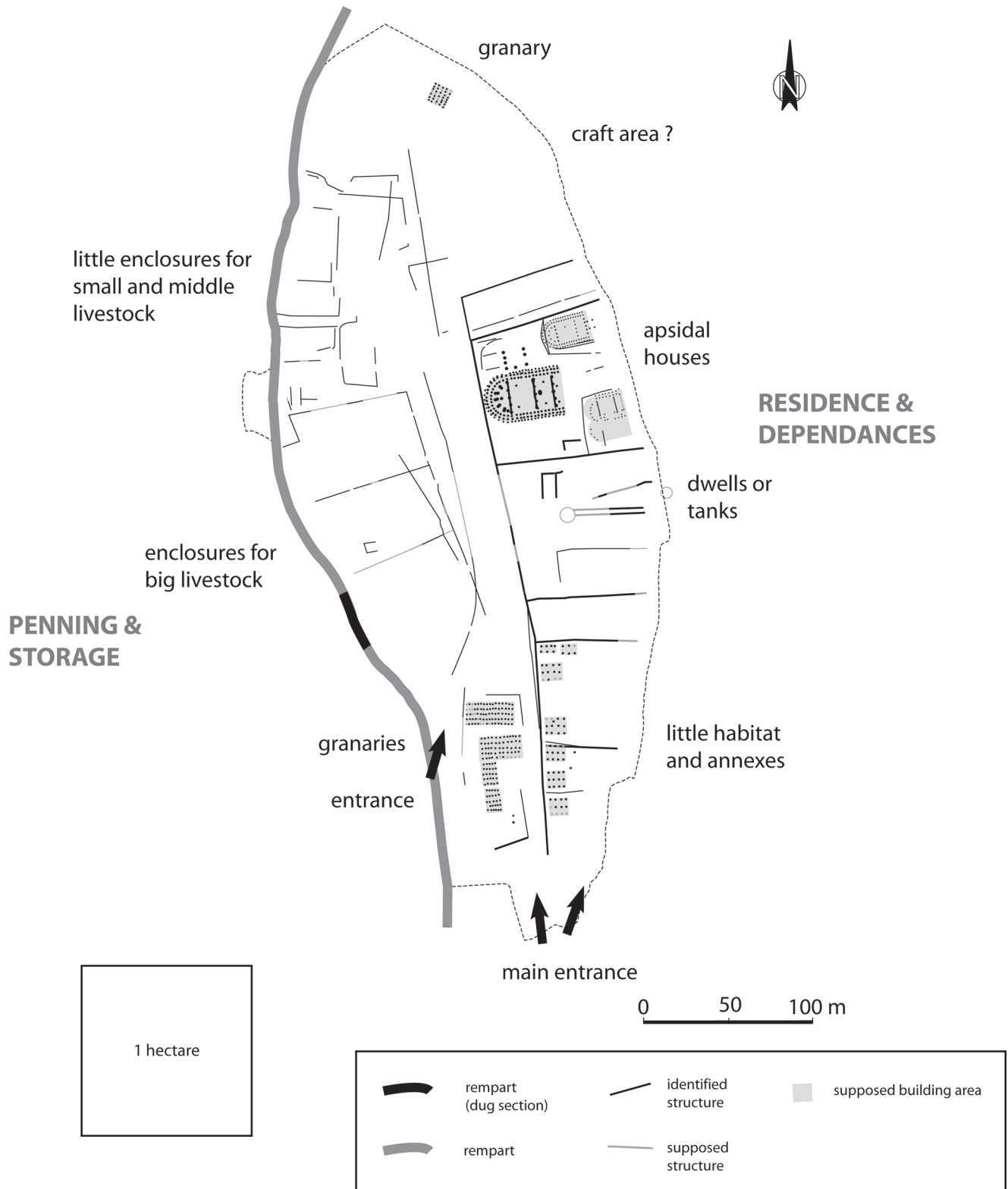


Fig. 4.4: Plan of the princely residence of the Saint-Marcel plateau, on the top of the Mont Lassois at Vix (Côte-d'Or; Burgundy). It is based on the results of the geophysical survey conducts by H. von der Osten-Woldenburg and on the new excavations (after Milcent 2012, with corrections and additions)

century BC. That's why the geophysical surveys, combined with the results of the first excavations, allow one to see clearly, and for the first time, the structure of a complete Hallstatt citadel (Fig. 4.4). This plan merits observations in the context of determining whether it shows or not, original traits, namely urban (B. Chaume and his colleagues (2004, 11, 41) cited a 'quasi-urban organisation') compared to the most common habitats.

We first notice there, in the extension of the main entrance situated to the south, a double enclosure system very airy on either side of an operating service split into two parts, oriented north-south. This has been described earlier as a 'street', or as a 'planned square' (Chaume *et al.* 2004: 14, 41). However, this central area appears very simple since there is no single transversal path leading to it directly. Rather, it is left free for one to circulate in, without organisation or a specific boundary area. Near the main entrance to the southwest, four large rectangular buildings based on five rows of tall poles squeezed together (the spacings are about 50 cm), 10 m wide with a length exceeding 20 m for the biggest ones (that is just over 200 m² of surface area), are identifiable as large granaries raised on stilts and delimited by some fences. From the same west side, more to the north, two major sub-trapezoidal spaces are delimited by small palisade trenches with many interruptions, sometimes in zig zag or sometimes in a funnel shape. The northernmost of these is itself partially cut into small sub-rectangular enclosures of various sizes, also with complex entrances, including overlapping ones. The system of the access and morphology of these enclosures indicate areas dedicated to the management and penning of herds of domestic animals. The differences in size and area suggest the presence of animals of different species: small and medium livestock in the northern enclosures; and probably large animals (possibly horses?) in the main southern enclosure which is cut into three areas. Beyond these enclosures and opposite the entrance, the northern zone remains virtually empty of visible organisation, with the exception of another rectangular building of five rows of fairly tightly arranged posts that should correspond to another storage building. But the terrace near the top of the hill that is next to the northeast slope has delivered numerous refuse items, mostly from handcraft activities, which could indicate the presence of production activities relegated to the end of the plateau due to the nuisance they could engender.

To the east and across the central service area, the palisaded enclosures are larger and more regular than others. They are also based on wider trenches and probably deeper. We do not know their eastern boundaries. Given that these tidy enclosures introduce very few interruptions which open onto the central service area, we can make the hypothesis that they opened up on another circulation space, the latter along the eastern edge of the plateau. In this system of very regular enclosures, to the southeast and in front of the

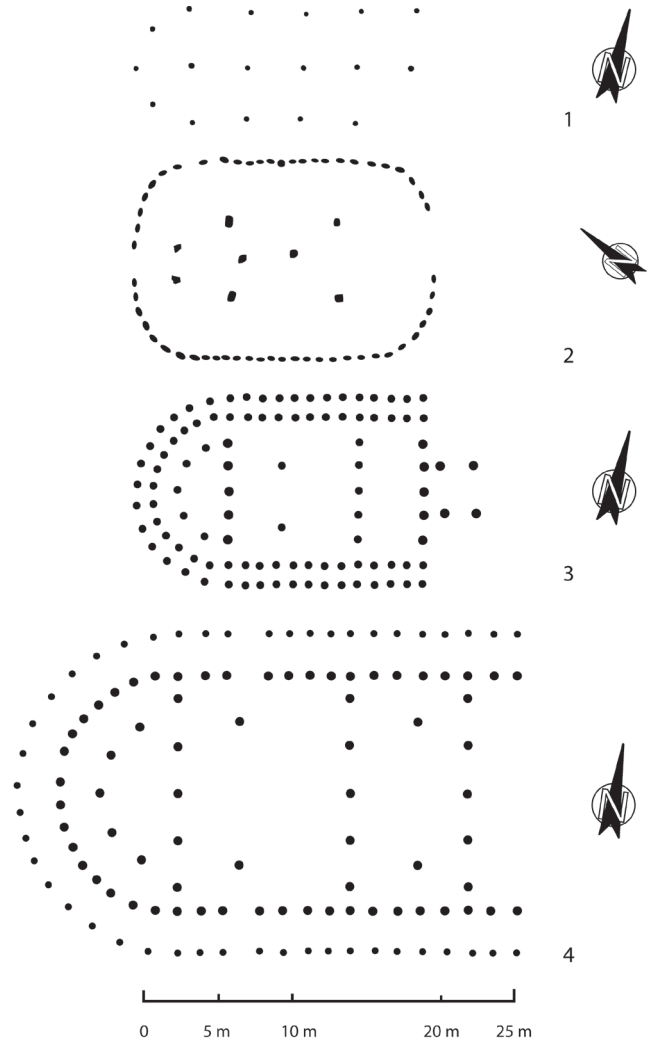


Fig. 4.5: Central-eastern Gaul apsidal buildings from Late Bronze Age (No. 1) to the end of the 1st Iron Age (Nos 2–4). 1: Barbuise (Aube, Champagne-Ardenne) 'L'Erable' (Lenda, Ducreux 2010, with modifications); 2: Grisy-sur-Seine (Seine-et-Marne, Île-de-France) 'Les Terre du Bois Mortier' (Gouge, Séguier 1994, with modifications); 3–4 : Vix 'Mont Lassois' northeastern and western buildings of the main enclosure (after Chaume *et al.* 2008; Chaume 2012, with modifications). The building No. 3 is probably older than No. 4

granaries, there are five similar rectangular buildings with 12 posts based on three rows, 40 m² in area (Chaume *et al.* 2004: 13–14), and at least two buildings with two rows of posts. These constructions must correspond to a small zone of simple habitats, with a few annexes that seemed to be in a position to monitor not only the comings and goings, but also, the granaries. Towards the centre, a large enclosure (about 60 m on each side) has a large hole, which, if not natural, could correspond to a storage arrangement or access to water: probably a well or a tank. Two ditches appear to leave towards the east and could indicate small water

channels. Another well or tank is localised near this place on the top of the eastern slope. Finally the largest trapezoidal enclosure (approximately 60–70 m long depending on the sides) surround four or five apsidal buildings of which two large edifices were recently excavated (Chaume & Mordant 2011; Mötsch *et al.* 2008). The plan with internal partitions and especially the impressive size of these two buildings (35 × 22 m for the first, of which 400 m² was covered in its last state, 21 × 13 m for the second, see Fig. 4.5, Nr. 3–4), as well as their luxurious equipment (painted walls with reliefs, local banquet ceramics and Greek ceramics imported from the Attic; see Mötsch *et al.* 2008: 16–18) leads us to identify these as very privileged dwellings, and also as places for reception, performances, assemblies and for religious gatherings (different domestic, political and religious functions closely overlap in these kind of archaic aristocratic residences). The apse of the Vix's buildings, oriented based on the prevailing winds in Mont Lassois, that is to say, to the West, is above all an element to moderate the windage on a framework that would be elevated and could possibly accommodate at least one upper floor. Knowing that the apsidal houses (and bi-apsidal in the south) are well documented in Eastern and Southern Gaul in the Bronze Age (Buchsenschutz & Mordant 2005) as well as the First Iron Age (Dedet 1990; Moret 2002), the two buildings seem to derive, despite their size and remarkable degree of development, from an architectural tradition if not exclusively, at least essentially, of an autochthonous descent (Fig. 4.5). The entry porch as well as the gallery of the Vix main apsidal buildings are rare, but not unknown features, in the dwellings of the Bronze and Early Iron Age from middle Europe; there is no need to imagine some Greek comparisons, at worst anachronistic (e.g. the large building of Toumba at Lefkandi in Evia, dated 10th century BC, see Popham *et al.* 1979) while at best occurring at the same time, but having become very rare and undervalued in the Greek world at the time of the apogee of Mont Lassois.² Unlike the big dwelling, with a tripartite main body, of Etruscan design that belonged to the area outside the walls of Heuneburg (Verger 2008), no Mediterranean influence can be detected with certainty using the floor plans of the main buildings in Vix.

In summary, the Saint-Marcel plateau is longitudinally divided into two main areas each one with an access path, some enclosures and some buildings. To the west, the space is devoted to storage and penning activities, essentially of an agro-pastoral nature, and forms a large farmyard. To the east, there is a residential and service area, of the type where an upper courtyard could accommodate fairly large social activities and gatherings. This area is not oriented towards the central service area: it 'turns its back to it' while opening itself to the east. A third area, a periphery to the north, with no net development apart from a probable traces of an isolated granary, or perhaps devoted to craft industries,

probably needs to be distinguished unless it simply needs to be connected to the rest of the farmyard. Without being really complex, the bi-or tripolar organisation of the site appears to be consistent and very functional, probably planned, with areas devoted to specialised and well-defined functions. It also appears partitioned because the articulation between the different areas is reduced to a minimum and it is clear that the residential areas do not open onto the interior of the site and its central service space. They are cut off by fences that present only rare and small interruptions. On the other hand, residential enclosures are widely open to the outside of the plateau, especially the panorama offered, to the east, by the valley of the Seine lower down. From the evidence, nothing demonstrates that this site had urban characteristics as seen by a reconstructive illustration (Fig. 4.6). If one omitted the scale and the fortification, we could qualify this site as being an enclosed private estate residence as it existed in the campaigns in northern Gaul at the beginning of the Iron Age, and even earlier during the Late Atlantic Bronze Age.

For comparison, we will observe that a large enclosed farm from the Middle Atlantic Bronze Age similar to the one which was discovered in Nonant (Lower Normandy, Calvados) already presents about ten centuries before the times that interests us, a somewhat similar organisation (Lepaumier *et al.* 2005; Fig. 4.7). This rural settlement is included in a trapezoidal moated enclosure of 6200 m² and partitioned by palisades. The first space is an open court yard which serves not only as a service area, but also as a warehouse area with some annexes, storage pits and granaries. Another yard apparently devoted to penning and livestock management if we are to judge by its zig zag and funnel shaped access. A third area at the heart of the site, but in an off-centre position, has a domestic nature as evidenced by the presence of an oven. This main space brings together three large buildings. The largest one of them has an apsidal plan, oriented in the same way as in Vix, and covers an area of about 110 m², which is important for that time. In summary, the Saint-Marcel plateau does not evoke, at all, a Mediterranean acropolis. It looks more like a rich farm, albeit hypertrophied, such as those that have existed in Gaul since the Bronze Age. No concentration of buildings, no original architectural form or structured or complex space is perceptible. The ambition is limited somehow to monumentalise and fortify an aristocratic dwelling and its annexes of rural and traditional morphology. As such, we can consider the Saint-Marcel plateau as a typical example of a true 'princely' Hallstatt residence. It certainly had few inhabitants (a few dozen at most) and indeed, the foremost of them had a higher socio-economic status based on the size and quality of the apsidal buildings qualified as palatial. Linking the princely tomb in Vix, found below, with the contemporary residence on the Saint-Marcel plateau appears, therefore, very relevant today. In addition, the

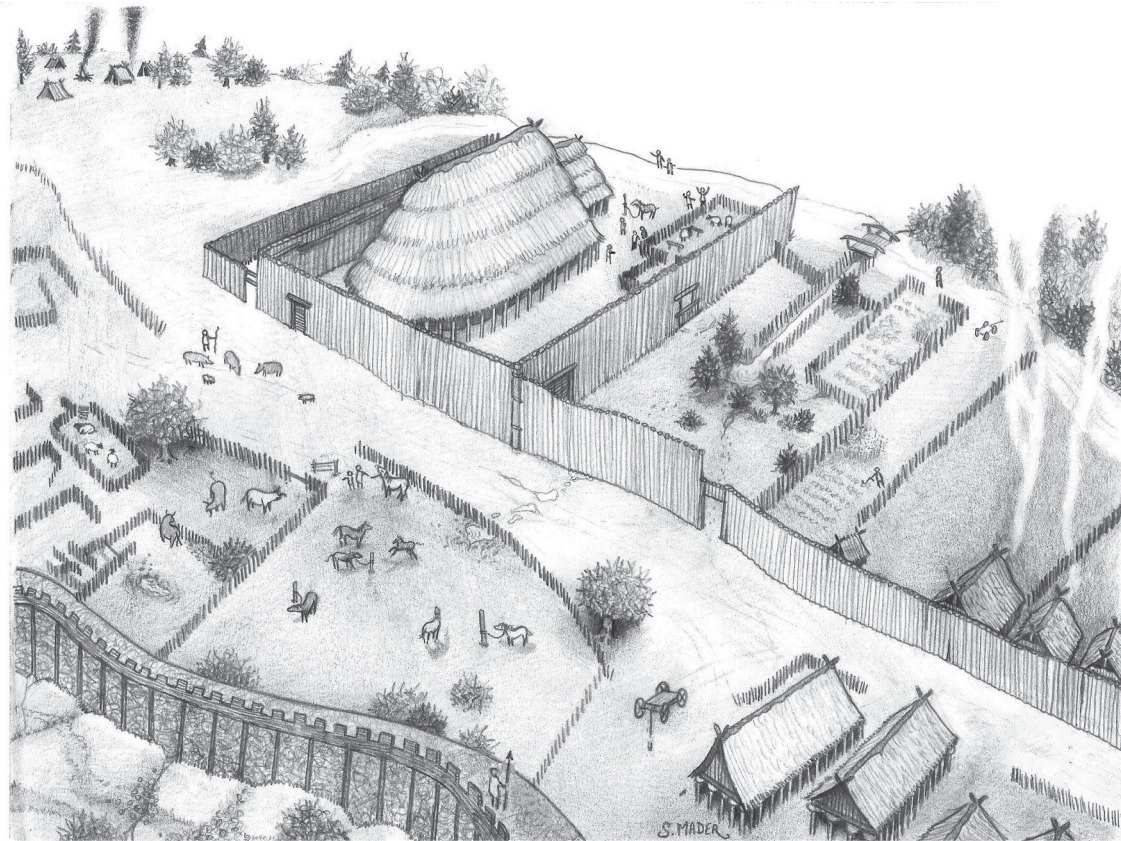


Fig. 4.6: Idealised reconstruction of the princely residence of the Saint-Marcel plateau at Vix, around 500 BC (drawing by Sylvain Mader)

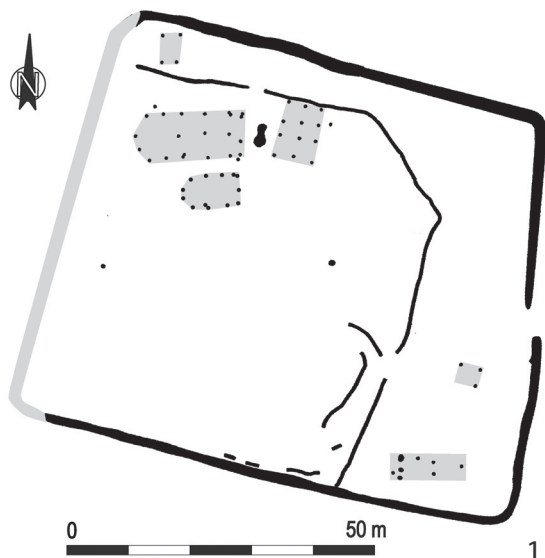


Fig. 4.7: Middle Bronze Age rural settlement from Nonant (Calvados, Normandy) 'La Bergerie' (Lepaumier et al. 2005). 1: plan; 2: reconstructive illustration

architecture and structure of the site is mostly consistent with an indigenous tradition, without any really noticeable Mediterranean influence. The presence of corrals and barns and especially enormous granaries are, at last, a completely new element, which emphasises an economic element that never appeared in classical models of princely residences, that of a wealth based on agro-pastoral resources and their management. The differences appear therefore distinct with the Hallstatt citadels of Ipf and especially the Heuneburg, where the open spaces are reduced, while improvements and buildings appear very dense with few partitions. With the Heuneburg citadel, there is no doubt that we are dealing with grouped dwellings which brought together a significant number of families. But since the occupations on the slopes of the Saint-Marcel plateau remain unknown (neither their area, nor their density, nor their functions), one must keep from concluding that Mont Lassois was limited only to a hypertrophied, fortified, farmlike princely residence. The impressive aspect of these outermost fortifications and small discovery areas on the slopes leave open the hypothesis that a relatively large settlement encircled the princely residence. Finally, the 'rural' morphology of the princely residence of the Saint-Marcel plateau is not an argument by itself to exclude the identification of an urban agglomeration at Mont Lassois. In other words, if the occupation of the Saint-Marcel plateau is absolutely not urban in its form, that does not exclude that it was part of a larger settlement with potentially urban functions. Recent paleoenvironmental research shows, however, that the vegetation around Mont Lassois remained heavily wooded during the First Iron Age and that the human impact remained small, especially compared to the Roman period (Cruz 2012). This vital information does not argue in favor of the existence of a very large and permanent population on Mont Lassois.

A proto-urban complex site in Bourges/*Avaricum*

With the huge settlements of the First Iron Age in Bourges and Lyon, the documentary situation is almost the opposite of that of Mont Lassois. Topographically dominant spaces (acropolis?), which could correspond to the centres of these settlements or to fundamental areas to the structuring of the sites, are accessed with difficulty by the archaeologists because they are covered by large posterior occupations, while peripheral areas, or supposed as such, have been the subject of many extensive surveys and excavations (see Fig. 4.2). Given the fact that the agglomeration of the First Iron Age in Lyon, covering at least 50 ha, has a chronology and shows traces of craft and commercial activities comparable to what is known in Bourges, and also because it has been the object of a recent and well documented review by Stéphane Carrara (Carrara 2009), we will focus on the example of Bourges in the Berry region.

At Bourges,³ the area most densely occupied during the First Iron Age, and with the longest duration, is located on the promontory of current downtown Bourges, on approximately 40 ha (Fig. 4.8). The chronological clues collected cover all of the Hallstatt D as well as La Tène A1 periods, that is to say, a period of two centuries from about 625 to 425 BC, but the period 525–475 BC is the best documented. An hiatus or lesser occupation is next observed at the end of the 5th century and at the beginning of the 4th century BC. Despite the confined excavations, artefacts and infrastructures from the First Iron Age are often of high quality. One will note in particular, the remains of buildings with several rooms decorated with real plaster walls painted brown, red and blue (conjecturally), on a white background (Cammass & Allag 2007: 147). Recurrent, overlapping and successive improvements portend a constraining framework, perhaps in the form of a densely built area.

Setback from the promontory, several belts of defensive ditches have been identified, but their initial excavation is still not dated with confidence. A first ditch was excavated at the site of 'Haut de la rue Moyenne' and superficially dug in 1987 (Krausz & Ralston 2009). The excavations cross-section is triangular, 25 m wide at the opening and estimated to have a depth of more than 10 m (Fig. 4.9). Its upper level filling could be attributed to the Augustus period and this Augustan *terminus ante quem* is the only confirmed chronological clue. The triangular shape and size of the trench has no exact parallel in the fortified sites of the Late La Tène period. However, since the discovery of the extension of peripheral defensive network in the Heuneburg, and especially since the excavations of very large ditches below the plateau of Vix, one can no longer exclude that the large defensive ditch at the site of 'Haut de la Rue Moyenne' had been made in the First Iron Age, and subsequently maintained and later integrated into the defense system of the Late La Tène period mentioned by Julius Caesar (*BG*, VII, 23). The best comparison to be found is the Late Hallstatt triangular ditch levy 3 at Mont Lassois, 30 m wide and 10 m deep.

Moreover, setback and at 1 km from the 'Haut de la Rue Moyenne', a second defensive ditch with a triangular cross section (8 m wide and 4.5 m deep) has been repeatedly spotted in the southeastern zone of *Etablissements militaires* (Figs 4.8 & 4.9), as early as the end of the 19th century. It would have delivered a burial with ornaments dating from the end of the First Iron Age (Milcent 2007: 23–24). If the dating is verified, it should be recognised that some areas from the First Iron Age initially assimilated to a kind of open suburbs (Saint-Martin-des-Champs neighborhood and *Etablissements militaires*), were, in reality, areas within the walls of the city, which would identify Bourges as a huge settlement with multiple and extensive fortifications, covering an area exceeding 100 ha. The recent archaeological evaluations in the *Etablissements militaires* sector seems

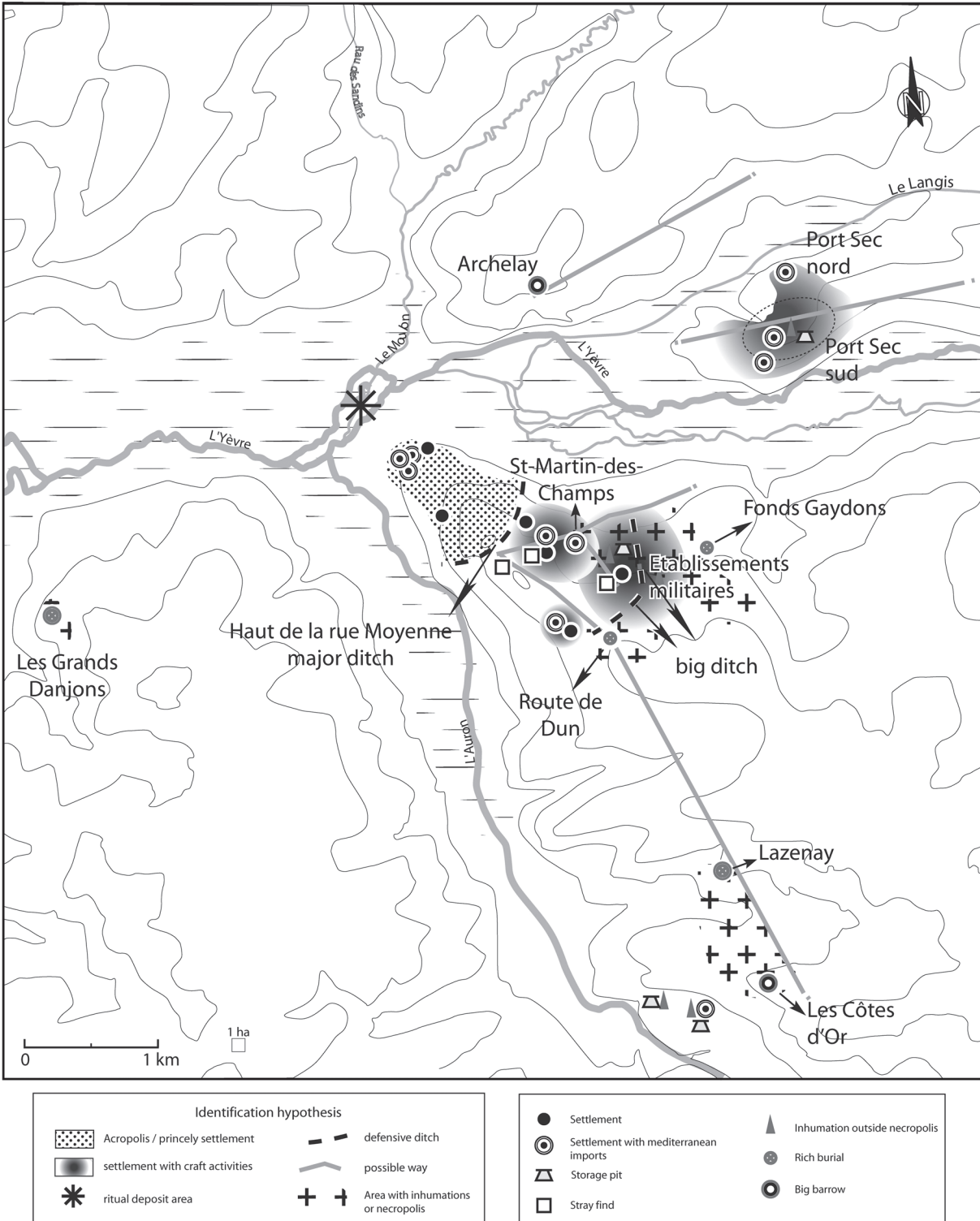


Fig. 4.8: The proto-urban complex of Bourges/Avaricum (Cher, Berry) during the Hallstatt D3-La Tène A1 period (c. 510–425 BC)

also to further confirm one of my assumptions, namely that at the end of the First Iron Age a settlement covered also the locations of *Etablissements militaires*.

The areas surrounding the town of Bourges, hypothetically

within or outside of the walls, are loosely and discontinuously arranged, which is why the term ‘complex’ is justified. This low density agglomeration does not preclude, in any event, a regular or, at a minimum, a planned layout. The latter

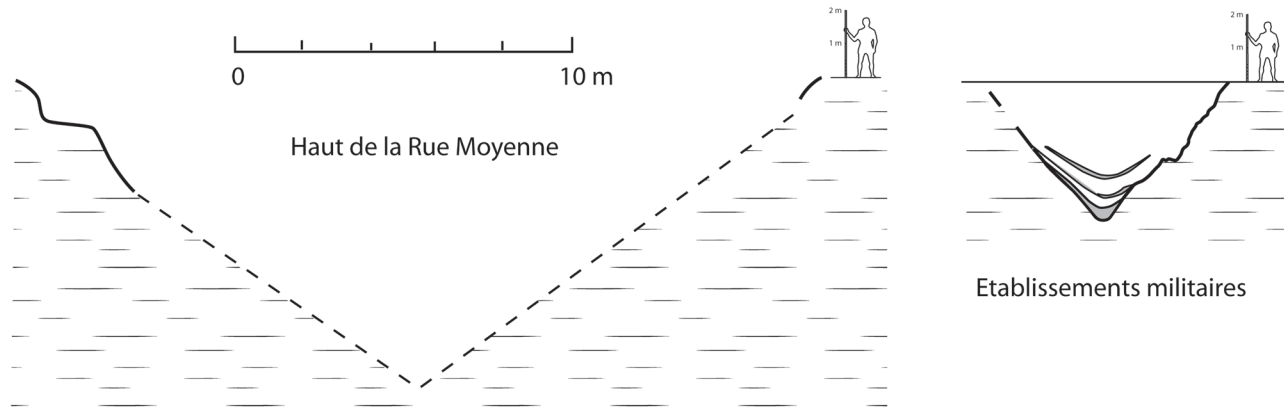


Fig. 4.9: Bourges (Cher, région Centre). Defensive ditches profil from the Haut de la Rue Moyenne (after Krausz & Ralston 2009, with modifications) and from the Etablissements militaires (after Milcent 2007)

is reflected in the spatial distribution of facilities in the Saint-Martin-des-Champs area, where rectangular spaces of comparable modules can be delineated (Milcent 2007: 253–255; Fig. 4.10). Organisation is also visible in another sector, in the Port Sec nord and Port Sec sud, where the negative features conform globally to straight alignments (Fig. 4.10). The surrounding fabric of the agglomeration of Bourges therefore appears less dense, organised around different cores, not necessarily synchronous but perhaps structured around a network of branched passageways. To this date the surface of the Bourges complex is impossible to accurately estimate since the aggregate limits are hardly tangible, and also because the small rural satellite settlements dispersed around the farming area could befuddle attempts to measure it. Apparently many in numbers, these rural settlements could, if one is not careful, maintain the illusion of an enormous extension of the Bourges complex. One could also advance that the global seat of the agglomeration at the point of its maximum development, during the 5th century BC, should be measured in hundreds rather than tens of hectares. From east to west and from north to south, the distance between the truly grouped habitats are 3.5 and 2.5 km. In addition, a few necropolis and large burial mounds mark, without doubt, certain symbolic limits of the city.

Peripheral habitats, for example in the recently published area of Saint-Martin-des-Champs (Milcent 2007), have some fences or little ditches, post holes, and storage pits, but also many semi-sunken quadrangular features corresponding to workshops, sheds or other types of ancillary habitats. The houses, themselves, remain unknown, so we think they were built without being deeply anchored in the ground, in the location of many spaces left open (on the promontory of the present city centre, where patches of once occupied ground are preserved, some footprints of houses, for example, have been able to be detected). Abundant refuse of a domestic nature, indeed, leave little doubt about the presence of these

homes. Among the trash one could be astonished to see a mix of refuse from craft activities as well as fragments of luxury goods, including Mediterranean imports. I see there the indications of overlapping, in the same place, of populations of different statuses, as has been suggested by the external extension at the Heuneburg, where elites often share the same spaces as their close dependants, including craftsmen. The rich graves discovered at the periphery of the agglomeration of Bourges is also a sign that the elite lived there or at least in close proximity.

In a more synthesised way, various archaeological criteria reveal the functions and status of the agglomeration of Bourges. We have just seen that, despite a low density periphery, the size of the agglomeration hints at a large concentration of population for this period. This population is stratified from a socio-economic perspective. From the area of the promontory towards the centre, to the peripheral areas, differences appear: one passes from a mostly residential area, probably fortified, perhaps densely occupied with at least two high quality buildings (since they are decorated with painted walls), to open areas, where craft related activities dominate (Augier *et al.* 2009). Beyond this, almost to the four cardinal points, large mounds punctuate as monumental marks, which could be the main access to the city. No religious area has yet been identified with certainty, but we know that the marshy confluence of the Yèvre and the Auron, dominated by the headland, has delivered at least three exceptional objects, two of which date back to the end of the Bronze Age (an Atlantic carp's tong sword and an Italic razor), while the third is an antennae dagger of Ludwigsburg type, imported from around Hohenasperg near Stuttgart (Baden-Württemberg) and for which the best comparison is the dagger covered in gold leaf from the Hochdorf tomb (Milcent 2004: 289–290). This dagger, along with other imports from far away, allows us to understand that Bourges occupied at the end of the First Iron Age, a

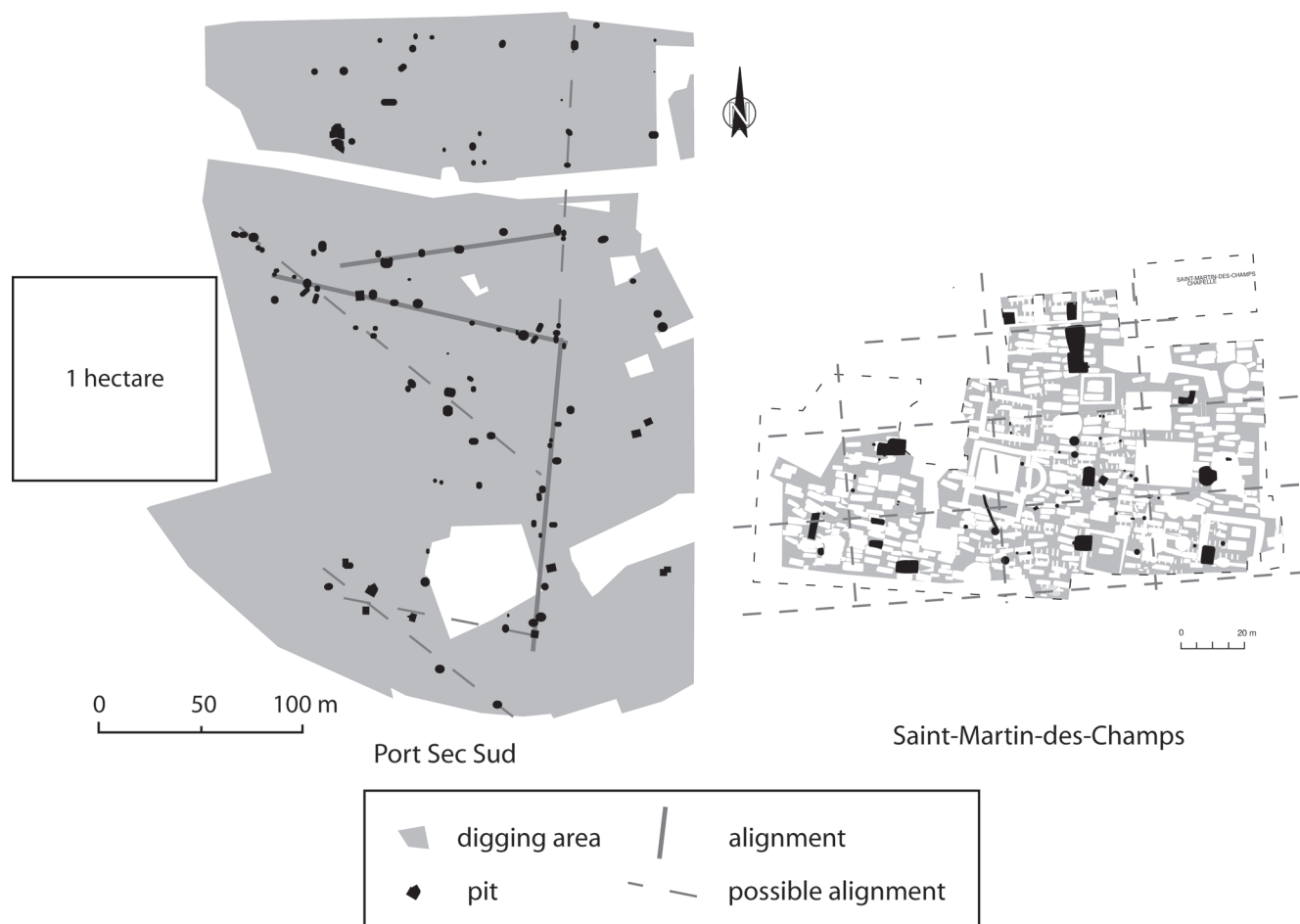


Fig. 4.10: Bourges (Cher, région Centre). Plans of the peripheral settlements of Port Sec sud (after Augier et al. 2009: fig. 2, with modifications) and Saint-Martin-des-Champs (after Milcent 2007: fig. 1, 253) dated from the La Tène A1 period (c. 475–425 BC). A regular distribution of the features is visible on each settlement

remarkable position in an extensive network of contacts and exchanges between the centre of the Hallstatt area to the Atlantic coast via the lower basin of the Loire, and between the Parisian basin to the Mediterranean via the upper basin of the Loire (see Fig. 4.1). Among other clues, the average proportion of attic pottery in Bourges (around 1% of vessels), much higher than what we know of the hilltop habitats in the Mediterranean hinterlands of Gaul, reveals that we not only have to deal with individual gifts of luxury items among chiefs, but also real trade of Mediterranean goods for which the trading compensations are still not well identified (mainly metals?). Bourges therefore corresponds to a transit and trading hub, market, as well as a consumer of a relatively large amount of these imported goods.

Overall, all the evidence that I have just listed comes from urban markers defined for the end of the Iron Age by Henri Galinié (Galinié 2009: 201–202): out of the 14 markers that we keep in mind (the 15th, presence of a mint, must be rejected for the period we are interested in)

seven are identifiable, four are probable and one is hinted at (Table 4.1). To these clues, one can add data relative to the political territory that go in the same direction, namely the identification of a city of the first rank, or polyvalent in the sense of Henry Galinié, that is to say a city in the full sense of the term at Bourges. In east-central Gaul, examining the distribution of elite tombs of the late 6th and 5th century BC, which show at least two levels of wealth, allows one, in fact, to identify the coexistence of very different territorial entities (Fig. 4.11). These territories overlap in a mosaic quite distant from the theoretical picture that was made up until recently about the distribution of Hallstatt principalities. It appears that the political territories envisaged from the distribution of elite tombs are numerous, generally small in size (a dozen kilometres radius on average), and with no real centre, at least not in the form of an agglomeration or a monumental fortified princely residence. These entities could be autonomous, interspersed among much larger territories and centralised around a location with a breadth

Table 4.1: Archaeological urban markers defined by Henri Galinié and their presence or absence in Bourges at the end of the First Iron Age

<i>Marqueurs urbains (d'apr. Galinié 2009)</i>	<i>Présence de ces marqueurs à Bourges à la fin du 1er âge du Fer</i>
Système défensif / tracé distinguant dedans et dehors	Probable (fossés des Etablissements militaires et du haut de la rue Moyenne (?))
Desserte viaire dense, hiérarchisée, parfois pré-établie	Probable (St-Martin-des-Champs ; Port Sec)
Lieux de culte ou d'expression du sacré	Avérée (marais de confluence)
Monuments ou monumentalisation de constructions, utilitaires ou non	Avérée (édifice à enduits peints du collège Littré)
Bâtiments publics ou lieux d'assemblée pour l'expression des rôles sociaux	?
Bâtiments exprimant l'exercice de l'autorité, le contrôle des populations et des productions	Probable (édifice à enduits peints du collège Littré)
Densité forte de l'occupation du sol dans l'enceinte ou la zone circonscrite	Avérée (secteur Collège Littré, La Nation, Hôtel Dieu; St-Martin-des-Champs (?))
Constructions aux plans spécifiques, distincts des constructions agricoles ou villageoises	Possible (édifice à enduits peints du collège Littré)
Usages du sol, des habitations et des objets variés, reflétant la stratification sociale	Avérée (zone résidentielle de la vieille ville ; faubourgs artisanaux de St-Martin, Baudins, Port Sec)
Usages du sol et des constructions à vocation artisanale et/ou commerciale adaptés à chaque métier	Probable (faubourgs artisanaux de St-Martin, Baudins, Port Sec)
Structures et instruments attestant la spécialisation des tâches et la standardisation des productions	Avérée (fabrication de fibules à timbale(s) à St-Martin, Baudins, Port Sec ; production de céramiques tournées)
Produits de luxe d'origine lointaine	Avérée (nombreux vases nord-italiques, étrusques et grecs, vin et parfum grecs, poignard centre-hallstattien, etc.)
Un lieu au moins de marché	?
Un espace au moins dévolu aux morts	Avérée (nécropole de Lazenay, nécropole de la Route de Dun et ses environs, etc.)

similar to Vix. In the case of Berry, a vast territory, about 25 km in radius, seems to structure itself around Bourges: this is another critical argument in order to identify a city there, at the end of the First Iron Age.

A critical question remains, the one of the territorial nodes of the major centres such as Bourges. Without exception, it is difficult, indeed, to conceive of a city organising a vast territory without the existence of any secondary nodes stitching that area together. The scarcity of excavated hillforts in Berry leaves open this question: perhaps this is where we should identify some secondary centres of territorial organisation.

One could also make an historical hypothesis: was Bourges/*Avaricum*, at the end of the First Iron Age, the capital of the kingdom of the Bituriges mentioned by Livy (V, 34)⁴ about the initial Celtic migrations? A lot has been written about the passage that Livy dedicated to this episode and it is not for us here to summarise the discussions. This text should not be taken literally because it is primarily a literary construction (four centuries separate the events from the narrator ...), especially because it includes tangled chronologies and gives pride of place to a narrative at once mythical and full of rhetorical figures (Milcent 2007: 288–294). But it still resonates, nevertheless, with key archaeological facts observed in Berry and Bourges in the 5th century BC:

First step: a demographic growth, a concentration and intensification of economic activities, a rising political

organisation, development of trade in goods and ideas with Northern Italy and Southern Gaul.

Second step: a rapid decline of the Bourges agglomeration and disappearance of Mediterranean imports.

Conclusion: from the characterisation of sites to the identification of the Hallstatt urban experience

Settlements which were once otherwise called, without distinction, princely Hallstatt residences thus cover realities very different, both in terms of morphology as well as the structuring, functions and status, not to mention the chronology. They have little in common, other than being defended and having delivered imported objects from far away, which is also well known during the Late Bronze Age and which became common during the Late La Tène period. The majority of them remain very poorly known, insofar as information concerning them is often limited to the results of one-off and old excavations, and are difficult to use. None has been excavated on a scale that would suggest that most of the vestiges have been found. Only a few can be characterised and it is significant that, from one to the other, the variability in the findings is great. Among them, however, there is a small group of agglomerations sharing the same traits: a very large size, a high degree of organisation, some activities of specialised production generating a

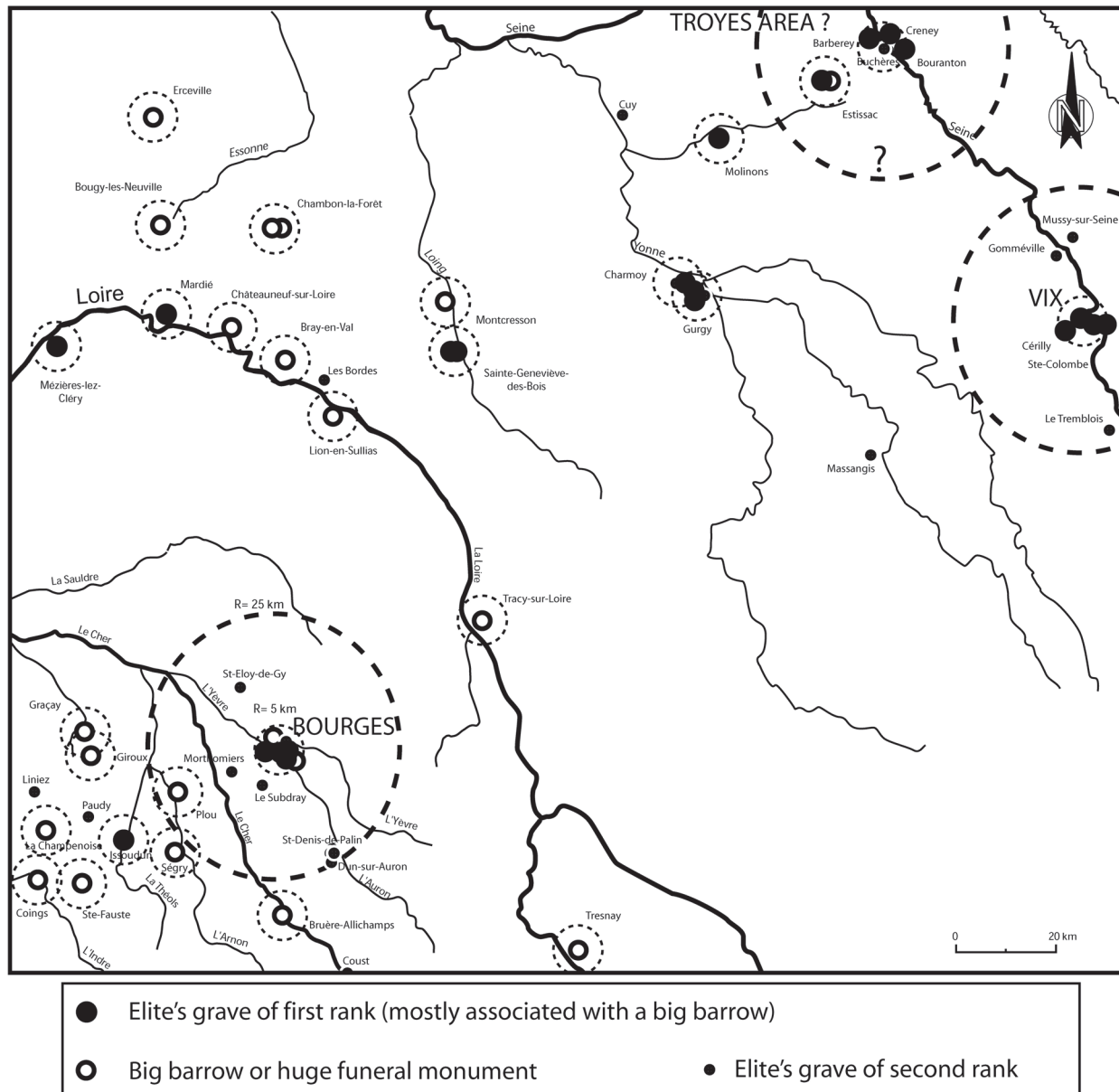


Fig. 4.11: Central-eastern Gaul elite's burials and possible territories at the end of the First Iron Age (Hallstatt D3-La Tène A1)

large volumes of wastes, an excellent integration in trading networks at medium and long distance, and a calling as a political centre for a vast territory. All this implies the development of centralisation, the release of agricultural surplus to feed a large population no longer dedicated, or very secondarily, to agro-pastoral activities, in short a major socio-economic shift that affects a large part of society and not just the elites. This endogenous development favours, at the same time or subsequently, the development of long-distance trade, especially trade concerning Mediterranean goods. The complex of Bourges, and also probably that of Lyon, belongs to those rare agglomerations monopolising the majority of these markers that we can use to qualify it

as urban given the level of development of societies in the First Iron Age of temperate Europe. The example of Vix brings insight into how these agglomerations can appear inside architectural and organisational traditions essentially autochthonous; and which are not necessarily disconnected in their form or in the structure from the rural world.

I speak of the 'Hallstatt urban experience' regarding these agglomerations in so far as they reach their maximum development in a short time, apparently very quickly, and because they decline just as fast, if not brutally, between the second and third quarter of the 5th century BC. Insofar as it is the first confirmed urbanisation process in the History of interior Gaul, and because it did not have the time to be

carried out over several generations, nor, perhaps, could it take original forms clearly distinct from what is known about anterior rural sites and agglomerations, the term of ‘proto-urbanisation’, in the strict etymological sense, seems appropriate to us, even if we would prefer that of ‘urban experience’. The process of centralisation and intensification that we observe proceeds from an experience to the extent that it had no immediate descendants during the early La Tène period. In Berry, Burgundy and the Lyon region, there is no urban continuum because one has to wait until the end of the 3rd or 2nd centuries BC to see a resurgence of these agglomerations which, anyway, does not bear the same physiognomy nor the same characteristics. In other words, the first cities in the Iron Age, ephemeral and original, reinforce the idea that Protohistory does not follow a slow and gradual evolution always towards greater complexity, and where Mediterranean stimuli necessarily play a key role. In fact some chaotic trajectories and involutions have cut across the history of these societies between the Late Bronze Age and the time when the urban threshold was definitively established (Roman or Middle Ages according to the region).

Notes

- 1 English translation: Harry and Marie-Madeleine Pugh.
- 2 The occasional appearance of apsidal buildings is seen in the Greek world up until the 6th century BC; but, it is observed in rural sites that are not distinguished by their wealth or, very occasionally observed, in urban settlements during a period of crisis and pending restructuring of the urban fabric of the agglomeration (Luce 2002). In other words, these buildings no longer represent a typical Greek model, which is even less prestigious, during the period we are studying. In the Mediterranean, at that time, the Greek house was quadrangular in shape (Moret 2002).
- 3 Bourges was also a Celtic *oppidum* called *Avaricum* at the end of the Iron Age. According to Julius Caesar, it was the capital of the Bituriges *civitas*.
- 4 “About the passage of the Gauls into Italy we have received the following account. Whilst Tarquinius Priscus was king of Rome, the supreme power amongst the Celts, who formed a third part of the whole of Gaul, was in the hands of the Bituriges; they used to furnish the king for the whole Celtic race. Ambigatus was king at that time, a man eminent for his own personal courage and prosperity as much as for those of his dominions. During his sway the harvests were so abundant and the population increased so rapidly in Gaul that the government of such vast numbers seemed almost impossible” Translation Rev. Canon Roberts.

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