

# The Archaeology of Medieval Rural Settlements and Urban Habitation in Western Switzerland: From Rejection to Absence of Materiel Culture

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During the Medieval Period, Western Switzerland comprising the regions of Geneva, Vaud, Fribourg, Neuchâtel, Valais and the Jura, had in many ways, a similar occupation to its bordering countries (France and Italy). Excluding the mountainous regions (the Alps and Jura) where habitation is much more dispersed and subject to the contingencies of the environment, the density of civil settlements is significant. The 12<sup>th</sup> century saw the creation of new towns with the partition of territories into multiple manors. The occupation of territory is easily identifiable since the occupation zones of today are medieval (or even more ancient) creations in origin and historic networks of Swiss communication routes have been well examined in the Inventaire des voies Suisse. However in medieval civil settlements, both rural and urban, knowledge of the conditions of implantation and development, as well as the associated material culture, is still insufficient. Territorial, political and geographic analysis take the place of site studies, with very few exceptions.



1 Map of Switzerland with the Romand (French-speaking) Cantons in blue, Canton Vaud in dark blue. Main cities: 1. Lausanne 2. Geneva 3. Bern 4. Basel 5. Zurich

For the Canton Vaud, which will be the principal focus of appraisal in this presentation, the findings are even more considerable as Vaud is not only the largest Canton in Western Switzerland but also belonged to the territory of the Kingdom of Burgundy, then to the Bishops of Lausanne and the House of Savoy before becoming Bernese. The aim of this presentation is first and foremost, to identify the reasons for this inequality of information between the cantons and to show how the practice of Archaeology is subsequently influenced, which has consequences for both scientific discourse and mindset. Finally this presentation aims to highlight the specificities induced by this situation, which can once identified and detailed, reveal possible solutions.

## REASONS FOR THE CURRENT SITUATION

### THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADITION

- Romand Medieval Archaeology comes from a heritage of conservation (*La Suisse du paléolithique au Moyen Âge VII*, Verlag Archäologie Schweiz, Basel, Pg.17). Albert Naef, Cantonal Archaeologist for the Canton Vaud from 1899 to 1934 was an architect by profession, as was Louis Bondel, the Cantonal Archaeologist for Geneva from 1923 to 1963. Medieval Archaeology evolved therefore as a specialisation of Structural Archaeology. Archaeological studies at this time were thus confined to Medieval remains such as castles and religious structures.
- Throughout the whole of Western Switzerland there has never been a Medieval Archaeology department in any Uni-

versity. There are however courses in Medieval Archaeology on offer within other Archaeology departments (at the University of Lausanne and Geneva).

- French-speaking Switzerland was not affected by the theoretical currents of the 1960s and 70s as France (or Britain) had been, which led to the creation of an independent modern Medieval Archaeology constructing its own questions by prevailing over the monumental (Landscape Archaeology, studies of deserted villages, Technical Archaeology...).
- The language divide hinders exchanges with the German-speaking regions of Switzerland where Medieval Archaeology is very dynamic.

## TODAY IN PRACTICE

### THE "UNLOVED" DISCIPLINE

- Archaeologists practicing Medieval Archaeology come therefore from a university education based on other periods and are instead, structural specialists. Their theoretical affiliation is that of the precursors of Swiss and French Structural Archaeology.
- The mentality of the domain is confined to the idea that there is no Medieval Archaeology worthy of the title in Western Switzerland.
- The difficulty finding Medieval Archaeologists, specialists in the field of Preventive Archaeology. Cross subject and multi-disciplinary studies suffice.

## THE STATE OF KNOWLEDGE AND RESEARCH

- As can be seen in the table (Fig 2.) which originates from the Archaeological map of the Canton Vaud, certain sites are identified from archives, place-name studies and gleaned from historic texts. The archaeological sites, protected by the regions (Art.67 LPNMS) are presumed but rarely excavated.

- Sites are preserved on the one hand because they have not evolved into a form of sustainable habitat or on the other hand as they are untouched by construction or development. These constitute archaeological reserves (Fig 2.).

- The above developed findings inevitably lead to a weak representation of publications on the Medieval Period: the *Cahiers d'Archéologie romande* the main collection of all things Romand devoted only 19 (two of which were double editions) of 156 to the Medieval Period (between 1974 and 2015). Nine of these issues dealt with religious buildings (including the Monastery of Romainmôtier and the cloister of the Cathedral of Lausanne), 3 are consecrated to Funerary Archaeology, 3 to fortified castle residences (Prangins and Yverdon), 3 to architectural elements (oven tiles and roof tiles) and 1 to the evolution of urban construction of an ilot of Lausanne ((Fig 3.) *La "cour des Miracles" à la Cité*, François Christ, CAR n°58, Lausanne, 1992).

- Only the Cantons of Fribourg and Neuchâtel can suggest synthesis on the processes of emergence and implantation of habitation. Knowledge of material culture of ceramic in particular, remains limited to the Cantons of Geneva and Fribourg. Knowledge of medieval ceramics is non-existent in the Canton Vaud.

CANTON VAUD: 318 TOWNS, 755,369 INHABITANTS

TOWN NAME	PLACE NAME	DESCRIPTION	TYPE OF INFORMATION
Epesses	In Epesses	Village	Historic text
Payenne	Champ Aubert	Settlement cluster. Potholes, ceramic, iron slag.	Excavation 1997
Chavannes-le-Chêne	Vallon des Vaux	Cliff dwelling. Ceramic.	Mapped and measured 1985
Molondin	Bourg Saint-Martin	Village associated with the castle.	Survey
Aigle	In Aigle	Aigle intra muros. Traces of lost habitation, inhumations.	Local observation owing to urban construction
Sainte-Croix	Chez la Berre	Many habitations were found along the road.	19 <sup>th</sup> century land registry local observation
Sainte-Croix	La Râpe, Gîte Dessus	Remains of walls and terraces visible on the ground corresponding to ancient buildings. Medieval Archeological finds.	Ground survey 2001 - 2007
Renens (Vaud)	Le Biez	Ancient lost village.	Archive from the 10 <sup>th</sup> century
Puidoux	Mont-Cheseaux	Buried stones found on the slope of the hill 1971. No precise location given.	Historic text
Puidoux	Publoz	Ruined village. Horseshoe found on the ground.	Old local finds
Riox	La Crausaz	Lost village.	Archive from the 13 <sup>th</sup> century
Yverne	Maison Blanche	Village destroyed in 1584 by a rock fall.	Archive from the 16 <sup>th</sup> century
Adens	In Chibli, sur le Motty	Lost village and church. The Cemetery still exists.	Archive from the 11 <sup>th</sup> century
Adens	En St-Christophe	Lost Village and church	Archive from the 13 <sup>th</sup> century
Brenles	In Villars-Biegy	Fortified barn, ditches.	Place-name study
Curtelles	La Roche	Village shifted from Curtelles to La Roche.	Archive from the 13 <sup>th</sup> century
Bex	En Bornuit	Substantial lost village located around the castle or the manor.	Archive
Bex	Tour de Duin	Village associated with the castle.	Historic text
Bex	Le Bévieux	Village	Place-name study
Bière	Gayroux	Lost village, some walls were still visible in 1977.	Local observation
Moudon	Moudon, upper town	Fortified town built on a presumed helvetic oppidum.	Excavation 1985 and 1991 - Survey 2007
Moudon	Moudon, lower town	Fortified habitation quarter.	Historic text
Coppet	In Coppet	Fortified town	Archive
Coppet	L'Eglise	Civil habitation found under the existing church.	Excavation 1981-1982
Gland	Marcins	Lost Village known between 1142 and 1462.	Archive
La Rippe	La Gerve	Lost Village. No precise location: three possible locations.	Archive
La Rippe	Pellens	Lost village deserted.	Archive
Prangins	Promenthoux	Lost village church associated with the Convent of St-Oyens. No precise location.	Archive
Saint-Cergue	Vieux-château	Fortified village around the castle. Traces on the ground.	Local observation
Le Vaud	Montlacen (mollensan)	Lost village which was previously a barn associated the Convent of Bonmont.	Archive and survey 1983 (negative)
Le Vaud	Volota	Lost village. Ancient walls visible at the beginning of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century.	Archive
Vich	Clarens	Village of Vich, known between the 12 <sup>th</sup> century and 15 <sup>th</sup> century. Forge.	Archive
Les Clées	Bourg des Clées	Fortified Village of les Clées consisting of the old part located around the castle and the new part located to the north. Must be pre-13 <sup>th</sup> century.	Archive
Romainmôtier-Envy	Lanfrey	Hamlet. Remains of terraces still visible on the surface.	Archive
Vaulion	En St-Julien, les Cheseaux	Lost Village of Vaulion, dated of the end of the 11 <sup>th</sup> century. Church.	Archive
Les Tavernes	Freydeville devant Hautcret	Village	Archive
Les Thioleyres	Verney, Es Murailles	Large building. Roof tiles, ceramic.	Ground and aerial survey 1983
Bursinel	L'Oujonnet	Estate of the Oujonnet, property of the Charterhouse of Oujon. In 1251, there are several houses and two barns. A house with medieval structures is still visible.	Archive from the 13 <sup>th</sup> century
Avenches	Bourg médiéval	Town of Avenches, fortifications, church.	Archive, excavation, history
Exsertines-sur-Rolle	Mont-le-vieux	Village located south of the castle.	Archive
Mont-sur-Rolle	Mont-le-Grand	Village Sainte-Marie located around the castle.	Observation on an old 19 <sup>th</sup> century plan
Rolle	Champ de vers	Lost village, mill.	Archive and presumed discoveries in 1967
Montreux	Devant la cour de Chaulin	Large lost village. Walls still visible in 1914.	Archive and local observations
Vevey	In Vevey	Fortified small town.	Excavated 2002 and later 2005 - 2013
Veytaux	Chillon	Fortified village with a church.	Archive
Champvent	Saint-Christophe	Lost village. No precise location.	Archive from the 13 <sup>th</sup> century
Yvonand	Cave des Faux-memeyers	Cliff dwelling.	Local observation
Corbeyrier	En chaman	Lost medieval village. Probably destroyed by a rock fall in 1584.	Historic text
Cossonay	In Cossonay	Village.	Archive, historic text
Montricher	Torclens	Lost village. Some foundations found.	Survey 1961. No measurements archive
Dommartin	Vers la tour, le cimetière	Fortified lower town of Dommartin, separated from the castrum of the upper town by a ditch. Church. Burnt down in the 13 <sup>th</sup> century.	Archive, local observations
Lutry	In Lutry	Fortified town by a ditch.	Excavation 1999
Grandcour	Grandcour la ville, champ de l'église	Village next to a lost church.	Archive
Grandcour	In Grandcour	Fortified village.	Archive
Echallens	In Echallens	Small Town.	Archive
Palézieux	In Palézieux	Fortified village.	Archive
Orbe	In Orbe	Fortified Town.	Archive
Gilly	La Rue	Village. Medieval houses, pits.	Excavation 2014
La Tour-de-Peilz	In la Tour-de-Peilz	Fortified village. Walls, oven tiles.	Excavation 2010
Yverdon-les-Bains	In Yverdon	Fortified town. Habitation. Beams.	Excavation 2013

2 Settlement sites for the Medieval Period indexed in the archaeological map of the canton vaud.

orange texts: Early Middle Ages settlement  
white and blue texts: Middle Ages settlement  
blue texts: recent operations

Lausanne, the capital of the Canton Vaud is not on the list (Data not updated). Some towns and villages of medieval origin are not on the list either as they have since developed at the same location and no archaeological surveys have been carried out.