

ANNUAL REPORT: Malvieu 2018 FIELD SCHOOL

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Malvieu, seen from the east. The equipment corresponds to the landing-station of the Lidar-bearing drone.

This past July (2018), with the support of the IFR, exploration began anew of the site of Malvieu, a hillfort settled between the Late Bronze Age and the latest phases of the Early Iron Age (c. 1150-500 BC) located in the mountainous woodlands of Mediterranean southern France. The month-long campaign enabled us to deepen our understanding of the use of space by an early-first millennium BC society in the Mediterranean. The international team, composed half by IFR students and half by French archaeology students from the University Bordeaux Montaigne (UBM), worked under the supervision of experienced field archaeologists. The students excavated different areas of the site and explored the relationship between space and human activity in the dynamic context of the early 1st millennium BC Mediterranean –the time of Phoenician and Greek expansions to the West, but also of the emergence of the city-state in different regions. This team did not intervene in an unknown area: the site itself has been explored since 2001 (campaigns took place between 2001 and 2003, and between 2009 and 2014). These previous research campaigns resulted in the recovery a stone fortification wall, (320m long by 2m wide and probably as high as 5m originally) and provided a good understanding of the urbanism of the site. Yet, many questions remained to be solved. Two main interrogations structured this year campaign: what were the dynamics of the morphology of the site (how did it evolve through time)? Which social, economic or political processes were they linked to? All the data acquired was recorded in 3D (through the use of a 3D scanner) and Lidar acquisition will provide a Digital Ground Model, allowing for the best possible understanding of the relationship between the natural topography and human activity, as well as of the different constraints and potentialities (what do you mean by potentialities? Possible scenarios?) that conditioned the development of the settlement and its immediate surroundings.

The overall strategy this year was to work on different scales, and to "sample" the inner space of the settlement through the excavation of areas differing in their morphology and location.

Moreover, a Lidar acquisition, performed the last day of the excavation in collaboration with the French society "l'Avion Jaune", will provide data allowing for a better understanding of the morphology of the site and its immediate surroundings. It will also allow us to determine the presence of possible built structures, and therefore help planning the next steps of the excavation.

The fortification, one of the earliest stone ramparts known in the region, is probably the major feature of the site. Its southern gate, which was only known superficially, was explored this season. This gate was probably one of the most important entries to the site: it opened to the widest of the three surrounding valleys and was also the most visible from outside, especially for people coming from the densely settled area spreading between the Montagne Noire and the Mediterranean sea, a few tens of kilometers to the South. The evolutions in the conception of Malvieu southern gate were probably linked with the need of the settlement to strengthen its defensive capabilities as well as to reinforce its monumental image, in other words, to protect the interior of the site and to affirm sovereignty over the surrounding lands.

Regular planning appears clearly through the general overlay of the settlement. The excavation of a new house has provided a striking picture of what an Early Iron Age neighborhood looked like, with 3 houses built in 3 of the 4 branches of a crossroad, the last branch being occupied by an open space, probably used for outdoor activity and social interactions. The house excavated this year was built according to a three steps sequence: first, the rock bed was dug out and made a little bit more regular, then the walls were built, and lastly, an infill of limestone blocks allowed for obtaining a horizontal surface. In a corner of the house, a small storage pit was found. The discovery of a 7th century BC earring, belonging to a type often found in Central France feminine elite burials, suggests that this house, not especially big or complex, was the home of a wealthy domestic group. An observation not exceptional in Malvieu.

This year's campaign also provided the opportunity to accurately excavate an open space, a small terrace located outside one of the bigger and more complex compounds of the site, probably an elite mansion dated between 650 BC and 500 BC. It proved to be used for different activities and crafts. Faunal remains were abundant. Small or fragmented copper alloy objects were found. Most exceptionally, we discovered an iron hammerscale, providing evidence of iron forge, one of the earliest evidence for such craft in Iron Age France. Hammerscale was also present inside the building itself, suggesting a connection between the latter and the open space excavated this year. A hypothesis we still have to confirm. Yet, the excavation of this open area provided a vivid picture of the use of a multi-purpose space, mixing domestic activities and copper-based and iron metallurgies - a mix frequently seen in other parts of the Mediterranean, as for instance in archaic Greece.

The 2018 campaign reinforced our conviction that northwestern Mediterranean societies of the first half of the first Millennium were not significantly different from those of Greece or Italy. The divergence occurred during the 6th century, with the development of writing, coinage, etc. in some parts of the Mediterranean. The true question is: what provoked this divergence? The excavations in Malvieu are an invitation to overcome the academic boundaries between the "classical" Mediterranean and the Late Prehistoric one, to build a narrative considering all the actors of the dynamic processes that gave shape to the Ancient world. The joint IFR-UBM team gave a new impulse to such research questions. Students participating to this innovative excavation had the opportunity to work in a truly international team, and to perform all the tasks a field archaeologist has to master. Moreover, they were the actors of a new way of considering the Mediterranean area and its diversity at the dawn of written history.

