

Review of: Ballmer, A., Schäppi, K. & Dela Casa, Ph. (2022). *Der Westabhang des Mont Lassois (Vix/F). Befestigung, Unterstadt und Kultplatz der Eisenzeit. Ausgrabungen der Universität Zürich 2009-2014. Befunde und Kleinfunde*. Basel: Librum Publishers & Editors LLC. 224 pages. ISBN 978-3906897660

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Mont Lassois in Burgundy (France) is one of the most important archaeological sites of Early Iron Age Europe. Together with the Heuneburg in southwest Germany, it represents the most prominent example of the so-called *Fürstensitze* ('princely seats'), which developed between central France and Bohemia during the Late Hallstatt period and maintained close interactions with the Mediterranean world (KRAUSSE, 2010; KRAUSSE ET AL., 2016; ZAMBONI ET AL., 2020). The site of Mont Lassois reached international fame with the discovery in 1953 of the famous female burial of Vix, one of the richest graves of late prehistoric Europe (ROLLEY, 2003). Further work in the area of the necropolis led to the identification of the enclosure of 'Les Herbues' in the 1990s, probably a sanctuary related to ancestor worship. For its part, the investigation of the settlement of Mont Lassois has peaked since the early 2000s, starting with a large-scale geophysical survey of the plateau that provided spectacular results. This non-invasive work was followed by targeted excavations on the plateau itself and its immediate surroundings. This has led, among others, to the identification of several large apsidal buildings and a complex system of fortifications on the slopes and environs of the main plateau (CHAUME & MORDANT, 2011). The work of the last few decades has fundamentally changed our knowledge about the size and demography of Mont Lassois, a site that at the end of the Hallstatt period would have covered an area of around 40-45 hectares, with an estimated population of 3,500 to 5,000 inhabitants.

The leading investigator has been Bruno Chaume, who has carried out a re-evaluation of older data, developed new surveys and excavations, and coordinated large research initiatives (BRUN ET AL., 2021; CHAUME, 2001; CHAUME & MORDANT, 2011). In close collaboration with French scholarship and under the overall umbrella of the collective research programme 'Vix et son environnement', directed by Bruno Chaume, several international teams from universities such as Kiel, Vienna, and Zurich have also been active with fieldwork at the site.

The present volume is the outcome of one of these research projects, representing the publication of the excavations undertaken from 2009 to 2014 by the Department of Archaeology of the University of Zurich in the area of the western slope of Mont Lassois, known as 'Champ Fossé'. The book is relatively short for an excavation monograph of this type (only 178 pages of main text), but it is elegantly produced, well-written, and richly illustrated. While the decision to publish the book in German might reduce its reception in French scholarship, it is useful that the authors have included short summaries in French and English at the end of the monograph. The numerous high-quality images, many of them in colour, encompass photos, plans, and find drawings. This graphic material represents one of the most valuable elements of the publication, being a fundamental complement to the information provided in the usually relatively short text descriptions. The volume is divided into 5 chapters, each of them with numerous subsections: introduction (Chapter 1), archaeological features (Chapter 2), small finds (Chapter 3), discussion of selected find complexes (Chapter 4), and synthesis (Chapter 5). Chapter 1 starts by outlining the topography of the Champ Fossé and the research history in this area, which goes back to the investigations undertaken by René Joffroy – excavator of the Vix grave – in 1949 and 1950. This is followed by a description of the fieldwork undertaken by the Zurich team, including the location of the excavation trenches, the aims of the project, the organisation of the work team, the recording system, and the analytical methods applied.

The much longer Chapter 2 is devoted to the archaeological features that were excavated during the course of the project at Champ Fossé, as well as to their ordering by chronological phases. The most significant structure was the so-called Rampart 5, which was erected in several stages during the Late Hallstatt period at the foot of the western slope of Mont Lassois. The rampart was preceded by a ditch and constituted an integral part of the complex system of fortifications that surrounded the plateau. In addition, the excavations also uncovered evidence for a passage, as well as for the occupation levels in the enclosed area behind the rampart.

Chapter 3 comprises the small finds recovered during the fieldwork campaigns, from metal objects (e.g. brooches, tools, and weapons) to pottery finds (including some Greek imports) and other materials such as glass, amber, and stone. The majority of the finds were found in the area

behind the rampart and belong to the periods Hallstatt D2 and D3, thus coinciding with the main period of occupation at Mont Lassois. However, the excavations also uncovered some finds from the La Tène and the Roman periods, with weapons from La Tène C representing a particularly interesting find category.

The following Chapter 4 encompasses a contextual discussion of some selected find complexes. These include, for example, evidence for artisan activity (e.g. bronze and iron metalwork) and the ritual deposition in the ditch of a human skull and two ceramic pots from the Late Hallstatt period. Particularly remarkable are a paved surface and some remains of weaponry from the Middle La Tène period, which the excavators place in relation to Late Iron Age ritual activities, perhaps a *tropaion*-like structure. This latter finding represents one of the highlights from the excavations at 'Champ Fossé', since it adds a new dimension to the biography of Mont Lassois after the end of the Late Hallstatt 'princely seat'.

Finally, Chapter 5 provides a short interpretative synthesis that brings together the information from the previous chapters. This synthesis is written in German, French, and English, thus broadening up the results to a larger international audience. Perhaps more could have been said in terms of placing the results from the Zurich excavations within a wider context, both in relation to the work carried out in other areas of the Mont Lassois complex and at other contemporary 'princely seats'. Nevertheless, the synthesis is well-written, providing a clear summary of the main insights gained throughout the excavation campaigns. This is followed by a brief bibliography (6 pages), which includes a good selection of works in different languages, and some appendices containing lists of features, radiocarbon dates, and finds, as well as some additional plans and section drawings.

Overall, the book represents a valuable addition to our knowledge of Mont Lassois, providing exciting new information about its Late Hallstatt fortification system and a previously unknown Middle La Tène cult place. It deserves to be widely read by scholars and students interested in the temperate European Iron Age.

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