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From *Lugdunum* to *Convenae*: recent work on Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges (Haute-Garonne)

J. Guyon (coordinator) with contributions by:

P. Aupert, C. Dieulafait, G. Fabre, J. Gallagher, M. Janon, J.-M. Paillet, J.-L. Paillet, C. Petit, R. Sablayrolles, D. Schaad, J.-L. Schenk, F. Tassaux

Introduction

Because this town (a *civitas*-capital) reverted in the early Middle Ages to countryside, Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges has been the object of important excavations facilitated by the wide availability of open land. During half a century (roughly 1920-1970) successive excavations brought to light a number of official monuments which have been left open to the public, as well as several habitation quarters which have for the most part been covered up again. In general publications (such as the classic *Manuel d'archéologie gallo-romaine* of A. Grenier) as well as in synthetic works on Roman Gaul, Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges occupies a choice position inasmuch as its study allows various phases of its history to be illuminated — from the late republic, when *Lugdunum* was founded by Pompey at the foot of the Pyrenees which he had just subdued, to the dark ages when the town, henceforth known as *Convenae*, became to its misfortune the stakes of a civil war which ravaged the kingdom of the Franks. After an interruption of some 15 years, archaeological excavations began again in 1985. They started with a re-examination of monuments previously excavated, prior to their restoration by the Service des Monuments historiques as part of a larger plan of *mise-en-valeur* of this important site. The team which is responsible for these new investigations here presents to the international scientific community the first results. It was particularly willing to do so because it was convinced that the time had come for the first synthesis to be given at the Congress on the towns of Aquitaine organised at Bordeaux in September 1990 by the Fédération *Aquitania*. With the permission of the editors, the team has chosen to publish here in English a revised version of the notice on Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges which will appear, with the *Actes* of the Congress, in a supplement to *Aquitania*, and to add to that contribution a series of unpublished notices devoted to the chief sectors and monuments which have been the object of the new work since 1985. This dossier is as complete as possible in the current state of research. First, however, we should preface our remarks with a few words on our debt to our predecessors.

First of all, to Raymond Lizop goes the credit for having begun excavations on the site; he is at the same time the author of a valuable thesis on the city and its neighbour of Couserans, Saint-Lizier.¹ Next, Bertrand Sapène, whose name is synonymous with that of the site, since with the exception of the Christian basilica all of the discoveries were made under his responsibility. A man of the soil, he took upon himself single-handedly the rôles of teacher, excavator, and conservator of the museum which he himself had founded; the achievements of his research are to be found in many articles, in the successive reports of the *Commission des fouilles* 1931-1945, in "Informations archéologiques" in *Gallia* (1947-71), and in the guide-book (3rd ed., 1966). Finally, Robert Gavelle, who died two years ago, leaving a number of articles including some of a synthetic nature: to him we owe the cataloguing and conservation, in conditions which were often difficult, of the museum collections of B. Sapène; today, happily they have become the musée archéologique départemental de Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges.

Before proposing our own reconstruction of the history of the town, we will recall briefly the ideas of these earlier investigators. We are continually confronted by the working hypotheses of our predecessors, and we do not wish to set up between them and us a forced opposition. For even when we may regret that the excavation methods of those days deprived us of important information, we cannot forget what we

¹ R. Lizop, *Histoire de deux cités gallo-romaines: les Convenae et les Consoranni (Comminges et Couserans)* (Toulouse-Paris 1931).