

English Summary

The Lords of the Marshes: The moated residence of La Mothe de Pineuilh (France, Gironde, 10th-12th century)

The site of La Mothe de Pineuilh (France, Gironde) is located near the Dordogne River, about 30 km east of Bordeaux. One half of the site was excavated during an archaeological operation carried out between September 2002 and July 2003, before the construction of a road bypassing the neighbouring town of Sainte-Foy-la-Grande.

Twenty years later, this monograph, written by 31 authors, takes stock of the work carried out on this medieval settlement installed in a damp valley, which follows an ancient course of the Dordogne (Montsabeau or Vinayrols stream). The state of preservation of all the organic materials makes the settlement exceptional.

The palaeoenvironmental studies have revealed the gradual clearing of the valley and neighbouring slopes and the careful management of an ancient woodland that provided the oaks used for construction before this resource became scarce during the 12th century. The thousands of pieces of timber found have also enabled most of the phases of occupation to be dated to the year and have provided exceptional information on the successive structures.

Phase 1a (975-994). Earthworks were carried out between 975 and 978 to create a circular ditch. It delimits a platform 28 m in diameter bordered by a ringwork interrupted by a large entrance. A temporary building and a bridge were installed in 979-80. This installation allowed the construction of a large rectangular timber building with a porch between 981 and 983. This type of settlement is simply called a *domus* in regional written sources.

Phase 1b (995-1043). After twelve years of occupation, a new bridge was built to the west, ending at the entrance to the platform with a portico bordered by a wooden floor.

Phase 2 (1043/1044 - ca 1124). In 1043-44 the ditch was recut and widened considerably and a part of the spoil was used to fill in the interior of the ringwork to establish a motte about 3m high. The old house was replaced by a building built on top of the motte, but

this is only known from scattered pieces of wood. A new bridge was built on the south side to reach the top of the motte.

Phases 3-4 (circa 1124 - shortly before 1200). The new building underwent several renovations until around 1124. Shortly afterwards, the ditch was entirely filled in and replaced by a small drainage ditch which still exists today. The site's defensive facilities disappeared, and a more basic bridge was built. The residence was occupied until the years 1180-1190, as shown by the abundant artefacts found at the foot of the motte.

Phases 5 and 6 (13th-15th century). From this time onwards, the residence built in the middle of the marsh was abandoned and replaced by a stone manor house established a few hundred meters to the north, on the slope. It has retained the name of La Mothe to this day. All the remains of the late Middle Ages discovered during the excavation (pond, probable watermill) are concentrated at the foot of this new settlement.

The artefacts are exceptional in terms of their abundance and the presence of numerous wooden objects. They have been the subject of a systematic catalogue and comparisons on a European scale.

The weaponry consists of heavy and light spears but also fragments of bows and crossbows. Large terracotta horns could be used for hunting, warfare, guard duty and for summoning diners to the table. Equestrian accessories are also common, in the form of metal items (bits, spurs, horseshoes) but also fragments of painted wooden saddles.

The first two phases of construction yielded woodcutter's and carpenter's tools as well as a series of wooden spades and shovels. Later, a few sickles completed the tool set. The locking of buildings and furniture is illustrated by wooden and metal locks.

There is no evidence that the occupants of La Mothe de Pineuilh practised agriculture or animal husbandry themselves. The storage of foodstuffs also poses a problem in this damp environment, and it is necessary to consider either reserves in the attics of successive buildings or annexed spaces outside the excavated settlement.

The limited space available was not conducive to craft activities either: traces of smithing are almost non-existent, and even the tools used for textile work, which were common in any domestic environment at that time, are rare. A few objects made of deer antlers, bone and leather were, however, produced on the platform.

The occupants of the site ate a wide variety of foods: pollen and seeds illustrate the presence of eight varieties of cereals and seven kinds of legumes, to which are added numerous fruits, herbs, and rarer taxa such as the melon, the cucumber (or gherkin) and the gourd. In addition, there are the usual textile plants, hemp and flax.

As in most elite settlements of the 10th-12th centuries, the proportion of pigs is very high compared to cattle and sheep/goats. Horses are not consumed, but their hides are used. The barnyard is equally composed of hens and geese and the presence of the peacock should be noted.

Depending on the phase, the species hunted represent between 1 and 3% of the remains, a relatively high percentage. In contrast to the residences of the high aristocracy, it is not deer that dominates, but the wild boar and then the hare. The other wild species testify for some to the damp environment but also to hunting in the forest (woodcock) and the usual commensals of man: black rat and corvidae.

During the entire period of occupation, birds of prey and dogs accompanied the hunt. The environment also favoured fishing, documented by wicker traps, net components and fish remains.

The earthenware is mainly made up of cooking pots and jugs produced in the region, but the well-preserved wood completes the collection with dishes, bowls and cups. Some exceptional pieces - a marble mortar and a ceramic aquamanile - again indicate the social status of the inhabitants. Wooden spoons and spatulas, an exceptional wooden *crémaillère* and iron knives complete the kitchen utensils.

No fabric fragments were found among the personal objects, but we have a small series of shoes and a collection of boxwood combs. Metallic elements of costume or jewellery are at first very rare but tend to increase in number in the second half of the 12th century. The chess and trictrac pieces again show the aristocratic lifestyle of the inhabitants.

Only three coins were found, all of regional origin. The management of the estate is reflected in a few objects, in particular a bushel used to measure the harvest and a few tallies used for summary accounting.

It is clear that the occupants of La Mothe de Pineuilh shared the lifestyle and values of the elites of their time, but their economic power was probably limited: luxury items or items

of distant origin are totally absent from this small settlement. But who were these minor aristocrats?

The archives of the abbey of Conques preserve a small number of texts that precisely concern the valley where the residence of La Mothe was established. Between 1073 and 1085, a man named Falcon de Barta gave the monastery the church of Saint-Martin de Pineuilh and the villa of Vinayrols on the banks of the Dordogne, with its harbour and ruined church. Later, this villa became a priory and then, from 1255, the new town (bastide) of Sainte-Foy-la-Grande.

Land belonging to the Barta family (who were never called *milites* but had important rights over the waters of the region) has long existed between the Dordogne and the village of Pineuilh. It is in this area that the residence of La Mothe was built at the end of the 10th century. It is therefore possible that the partly excavated settlement corresponds to the residence of the Barta family or that of a vassal dependent on it.

Occupied for seven or eight generations, La Mothe de Pineuilh appears to be an exceptionally well-preserved archaeological settlement, but it is undoubtedly a fairly commonplace form of housing for the small medieval elites of south-west France.