

Bibracte:

How urbanised is it?

Bibracte

Bibracte is a hillfort in what we call Gaul, this covers much of central Europe, which is called temperate Europe to create a clear devision between it and the Mediterranean. Bibacte is located on Mont-Beuvray (Drinkwater, 2005) which is situated south-east of Paris near Autun (Cunliffe, 2018). It is said that Bibracte was the Capital of the Aedui, who were a ‘Celtic’ nation that created a defensive line against Caesar in 52BC (. The Iron age site is cited in modern scholarship as “The best example of indigenous Celtic urbanization in cental Gaul during the late iron age” (Drinkwater, 2005). The site covers 135 hectares of land fortifies by 5km of ramparts (Cunliffe, 2018).

The site was first excavated on the orders of Nepolian III who initiated the interest in oppida in France (Cunliffe, 2018), in 1867 Jacques-Gabriel Bulliot lead the first exca- vations (Dietler,1998). These excavations continued until 1895 before being taken over by Bulliot’s nephew Joseph Dechelette, a celebrated archaeologist for the iron age until 1907(Dietler, 1998). Bibracte next came into the spotlight in 1984 when French President Francois Mitterrand re-started excavations to help his political view of French identity (Dietler,1998).

As a site Bibracte holds importance because we can find written evidence for its ex- istence and what happened here. Due to this it creates higher interest, generating more fund for further exploration. It is mentioned by Caesar in his war with the Gaul’s as the place Vercingetorix held his council to become the leader of the Gaul’s against Caesar. The next year it is again mentioned due to Caesar visiting the oppi- dum.

Urbanisation and Civilisation during the iron age in is a debated topic due to the existence of ‘Celts’. Celts, Keltoi or Celtae are names given to the people of central Europe by the Greeks and Romans, this overreaching definition of people was then split into nations (Cunliffe, 2003). These nations had many similarities and difference that caused the differing opinions on the ‘Celts’.

My site is a ‘Celtic’ site and as such the few ancient written sources about it and the nation of the area must be accepted as being written by the conquer- ing Romans who being to push further into Europe at the end of the iron age. This is important to interpreting how urbanised my site is because if it is writ- ten about then it must have been organised enough to warrant attention.

Urbanization in iron age Europe

Oppidum’s of temperate Europe have until recently been considered ‘barbarian’ due to com- paring them to the urban centres of the Mediterranean, especially the classical world (Fernandez-Gotz, 2018). My site for example has two fortifications encircling a main road with buildings along each side. While they are not as organised as a Roman street grid the Archaeological record shows people living in different districts due to their jobs. Though we know that

In modern scholarship the term Oppida or Oppidum is being debated, these debates are about how sites become classified as Oppida and what similarities allow for them to be grouped together (Jackson, E. 2017). Oppida as a word means ‘town’ and o gives a precon- ception to what we expect from a site defined as one. Despite this the oppida of the 2nd and 1st century BC are thought to be the first signs of Urbanisation in temperate Europe (Fernández-Götz, 2014). Bibracte fits into the definition of a hillfort due to location and it is an oppidum because it is fits the common features of ramparts or defensive walls, is a centre of either religion or politics and was called such be the Romans (Morre, 2017).

The location of Bibracte creates power due it being a source for rivers, the height of Mont-Beuvray. These two things are important because without resources or a view of any attackers coming for you it would be difficult to continue the oppida in the same place of so long. Bibracte was first settled in the 2nd Century BC (Cunliffe, 2018) and grew from there. Many of the fortifactions from the Hallstatt period didn’t last through the La Tene and iron age due to lack of resource or attack, for example a site may have primarily worked in iron production but due to running out of materials to create iron the move to somewhere new.

Picture of Vercingetorix coin.—https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/ff/Vercingetorix_stat%C3%A8re_MAN.jpg/1200px-Vercingetorix_stat%C3%A8re_MAN.jpg. Accessed 30.01.19.



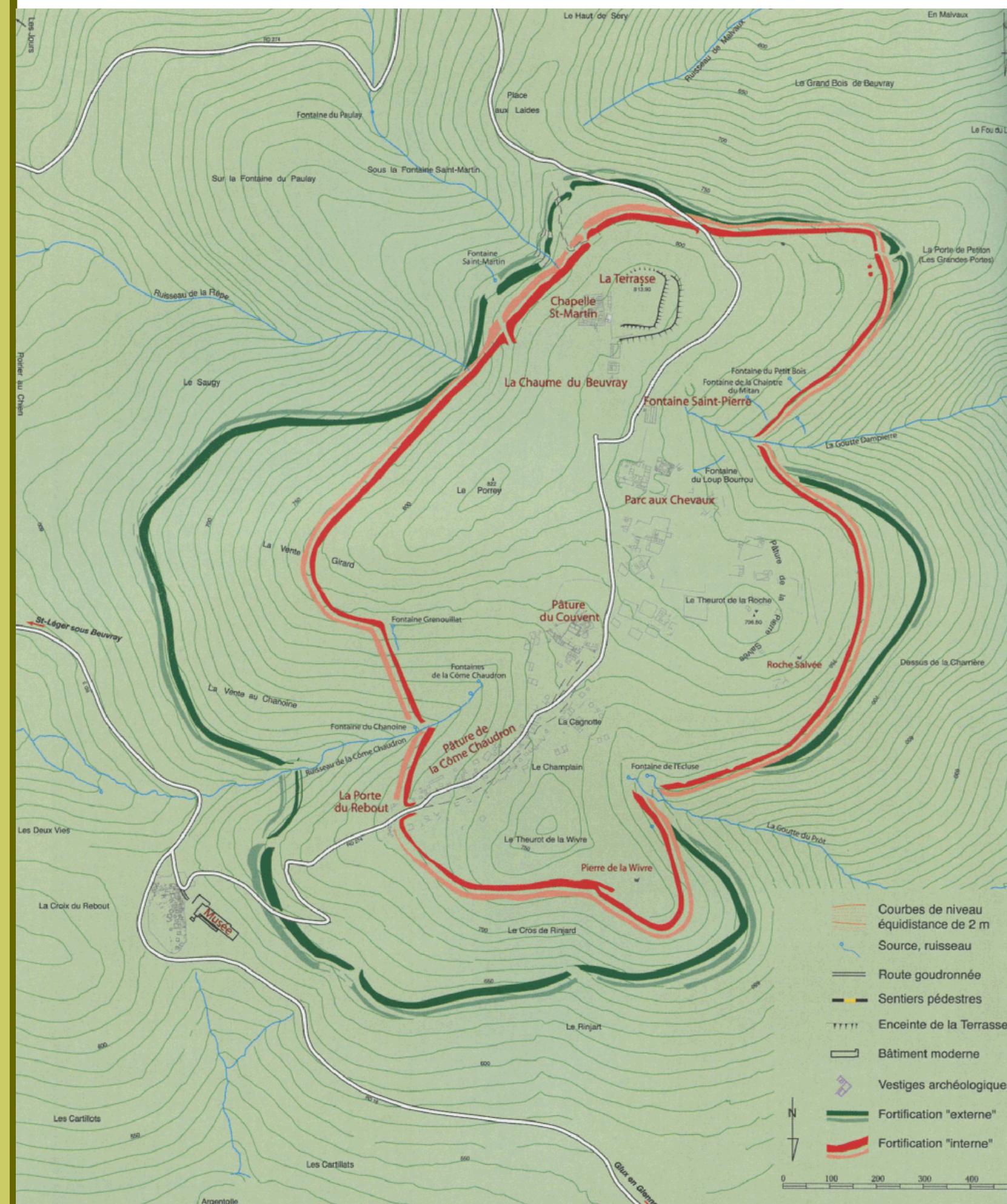
Vercingetorix was the leader of the Aedui. He lead a council at Bibracte to be selected as the leader of the ‘Celts’ against the Romans. He was captured and killed in Alesia and oppida connected to Bi- bracte through a footpath. Napoleon III used him as the first example of a French revolu- tionary.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Bibracte is a good example of urbanisation in temperate Europe in the 2nd century BC, because it not only shows an example of an oppidum that will flourish into a central power for the Aedui, it will catch the attention of the Caesar. Its location shows its power though controlling the landscape bellow it and the trade through it due to being located on a nexus of resources.

Map of Bibracte on Mont-Beuvray.

http://crea.ulb.ac.be/images/PNG/plan_Bibracte.png. Accessed 30.01.19.



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Picture of monumental fountain at the heart of Bibracte .

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibracte#/media/File:Monumental_Basin_in_Bibracte.jpg. Accessed 30.01.19.

