

## **The Permanent Exhibition concerning the Historic Heritage of Civaux**

The Town Council of Civaux and the Association of Friends of Civaux have united to offer visitors a permanent exhibition in the setting of the Archaeological Museum. It is entitled 'The Valley of Civaux from its origins to the Middle Ages.'

On the ground floor, comprising several rooms, panels and glass display cabinets present the history and heritage of Civaux and its environs, from prehistoric times to the end of the Middle Ages. This area deals with the conserved monuments, the necropole, the church and the chateaux and displays remains unearthed during the course of excavations since the 18<sup>th</sup> century including the Gallic-Roman Villa, baptismal bath and burial grounds. A collection of objects, stone masonry, weapons and pottery of protohistory, ceramics, tombstones, funeral urns and diverse objects from the Gallic-Roman period, jewellery and pottery of the Middle Ages are also on show.

On the first floor part of the space has been allocated for temporary exhibitions and conferences. There is also an auditorium, seating thirty, to show films and slides in connection with Civaux's history, the regional heritage and any other archaeological subjects. Furthermore, in addition to the numerous visitors who already come to the site, attracted principally by the Merovingian Necropole, pupils and students, in the course of their educational studies, will be welcomed.

Visitors may profit from guided tours to learn about the Civausian heritage. Documentation concerning Civaux, as well as other sites in the region, is available in the reception area. In particular an illustrated book is available, 'Civaux from its Origins to the Middle Ages' by Brigitte Boissavit-Camus, Senior Lecturer at Nanterre University, Jean-Claude Papinot, Honorary Curator of the Heritage and Jean-Pierre Pautreau, Research Director at C.N.R.S. (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique).

# **The Archaeological Museum of Civaux**

## **The Civaux Valley, from its origins to the Middle Ages**

### **In the Garden**

#### **The Civaux Valley: the River and Man**

Thirty kilometres, south east of Poitiers, the Parish of Civaux spreads out on both sides of the River Vienne. In this locality, the valley with its rocky escarpments, its wide plain and the river's navigability has offered hospitality to man throughout time.

It was the necropolis which first intrigued the scholars but they very quickly widened their investigations to other sites. The exhibition presents the remains and documents preserved or brought to light in the Civaux environs. It also includes, for reasons of geographic and historic coherence, a few uncovered sites in Civaux's surrounding parishes of Lussac les Chateaux and Mazerolles to the south and the Valdivienne to the north.

#### **The Civaux Valley from its origins to the Middle Ages.**

##### **Summary of the Exhibition.**

Garden: The enigma of Civaux: - legends and history.

Courtyard:: Prehistoric Times.

Room 1: The Metal Ages (Bronze and Iron) to the Gallic-Roman epoch.

Room 2: The Gallic-Roman epoch.

Room 3: The end of the Roman period and the arrival of the Franks.

Room 4: The Early Middle Ages and the Middle Ages.

## The Garden

### Legends and Traditions: recourse to the supernatural.

Of all the remains, one is exceptional, the Merovingian Necropole. Although it is very much changed today, it cannot leave one indifferent. It can be imagined that in Medieval times, all those who were inclined to contemplate the thousands of tombs were dumbstruck with astonishment and even stupor. In the ancient mentality the origin of this phenomenon could only be in the realms of the supernatural.

Two legends concerning the necropole have come down to us: that of the battle of Clovis against the Visigoths in 507 A.D. and that of Girart de Roussillon's combat against King Charles le Chauve in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In the first legend, a rain of sarcophagi fell to provide graves for the dead soldiers. In the second legend, a rain of beautiful white sarcophagi fell to give a last resting place for the dead warriors.

In the Middle Ages only exceptional events, like great battles, could explain such a great number of sarcophagi and only heaven could have provided them. There are places on the banks of the Vienne that bring to mind, even today, events relating to the battle of Clovis, the Gué de la Biche, the Font Chrétien and the Chaise du Roi. It is likely that these medieval legends only served to renew memories of more ancient battles in a place, from all evidence, charged with history.

Another legend, that of St. Sylvain, concerns Christianity and especially its arrival in this region. The cult of this Limousin martyr, whose body was thrown into the Vienne after his execution, was practised by the population. On the bank of the Vienne, at Loubressac, near Civaux, a Roman Chapel was dedicated to St Sylvain. It became a place of pilgrimage.

### Progressive Discoveries of an Unsuspected Past.

The first archaeological excavations of the necropole were undertaken in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. So great a number of sarcophagi in one place, excited the astonishment and curiosity of the scholars.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, E. Siauve and his colleagues of the Société d' Emulation de Poitiers observed, described and compared the different types of sarcophagi. They put forward hypotheses and tried to find rational explanations. E. Siauve wrote in his memoirs of the Civaux excavation, published in 1804 the following verse:

*Annales, Monuments, Traditions, Usages,  
Eclairer l'horizon de l'antique Civaux  
De son champ funéraire écartez les nuages,  
Et montrez-nous la main qui creusa ses tombeaux.*

« Annals, monuments, traditions and usage  
Light the horizon of antique Civaux  
From its burial ground, remove the clouds  
And show us the hand that dug out the tombs”

The ‘mystery’ of the necropole is still not entirely solved. Numerous uncertainties remain even today: the exact number of sarcophagi accumulated here in the late Middle Ages (mainly from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century): the precise chronology of the occupation of the necropole: the reasons that led a great number of the faithful to want to be laid to rest in a stone sarcophagus.

In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries research was done around the church, in the cemetery and in the land near the village. The construction of the Nuclear Power Station afforded a methodical exploration of the sectors concerned.

### **Archaeological Discoveries.**

#### **Former Discoveries.**

In 1737, the Steward of Poitou, Le Nain, proceeded to excavate the necropole and a hundred and fifty graves were opened. Père Routh left an account of which the interest resides in the description of the condition of the necropole and the sarcophagi and also the information on other burial sites.

In 1960, F. Eygun, Regional Director of Historic Antiquities, excavated the interior of the apse and then the exterior of the church. The discovery of a Gallic-Roman wall led him to continue his research and uncover a temple in which, during Merovingian times, a baptismal bath had been installed.

#### **Recent Research and Discoveries.**

The main contemporary research comes within the category of ‘preventive’ excavation.

From 1980 to 1987, excavations prior to the building of the Nuclear Power Station, revealed considerable information concerning the Neolithic, protohistoric, Roman and Merovingian Periods. Most of the remains were discovered by aerial and land surveys undertaken before the research.

## **The Courtyard**

### **Prehistoric Period. Palaeolithic – Showcase n°1**

#### Palaeolithic hunter – gatherers.

Prehistory covers the period prior to the appearance of writing; its date varies according to the region in the world. Palaeolithic people lived by hunting and gathering wild fruits, seeds etc. Neolithic people progressed to rearing animals and agriculture, i.e. farming.

Man belongs to the order of Primates. Primates appeared 70 million years ago. The remains of the oldest (known), human ancestor (dated circa 6 million years ago) was found in Chad. The first tools (stone fragments and carved flat pebbles) were made 2.7 million years ago. The most ancient, (discovered), nomad-hunter encampments date back to approximately 1.8 million years ago.

It is about 550,000 years ago that he mastered fire; knew how to ignite it and maintain it on a hearth.

In Europe, prehistoric art culminated with Cro-Magnon man. The most ancient known paintings are near to 30,000 years old. The hunter-gatherers of the Magdalenian epoch (the name comes from a cave in Perigord) painted and carved representations of animals and humans; also they decorated tools and weapons, sagaie bone spear points and harpoons. On the banks of the Vienne at Lussac les Chateaux they achieved an exceptional artistic output.

### **Magdalenian Art in the Vienne Valley**

#### Carvings and Paintings from 17,000 to 10,000 BC.

In the La Marche cave at Lussac more than 15,000 carvings on big stone slabs, small stone tablets or simple flat pebbles have been found. Representations of animals are portrayed in a very realistic manner. However, it is the representation of humans which is most astonishing. Several hundred men, women and children, singly or in groups, in various postures, some holding objects, figure on these stones.

## **The Neolithic Period**

### **The first Neolithic Farmers**

The Neolithic Age is characterised by a change in man's behaviour in respect of his surroundings: from hunters men became farmers and sought to control their environment. They domesticated their animals and cultivated the land. A demographic growth may have stimulated the evolutionary process. Arriving in the Near and Middle East as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> millennium, the Neolithic Age first arrived in Europe towards 6,000 BC and it was circa 5,000 BC that economic production really developed in the Vienne Valley. Men became

settlers living in villages in wooden and cob dwellings of which archaeological traces are very scarce. The majority of the tools were of flint but they were polished to render the cutting edges of axes and adzes less brittle and thus more efficient for clearing the ground and working with wood.

### **New Funeral Rites**

Between 4,500 and 2,500 B.C. the European Atlantic coastline was covered with monumental funeral architecture. Dolmens, such as one sees nowadays, are only the remains of complex monuments; originally they comprised one or two funeral chambers, generally with corridors of access. The chamber was most often covered by an enormous slab resting on huge stones (boulders) that today are known as dolmens. The chambers were covered over with stone slabs or earth.

The Loubressac Dolmen situated to the south of Civaux had originally seven limestone or granite slabs. The chamber measured 4 metres by 2.50 metres. Adults and children were buried there, ceramic vases as well as flint tools accompanied the deceased.

\*Tall, upright, prehistoric, monumental stones.

## **Room 1**

### **From the metal ages to Gallic-Roman Times**

#### **Metal Ages – Showcase n°2**

The arrival of metallurgy was the beginning of profound changes in Neolithic mentalities and societies. The fabrication and use of metal corresponded to the progress of specialist craftsmen who no longer participated directly in the activities for subsistence and it is also linked to that of warriors and probably merchants. Natural copper was used from the seventh millennium in Anatolia but it was only at the end of the fifth millennium that objects were made using smelted copper. Copper being a metal too soft to be used for the fabrication of arms or tools it was necessary to add to it harder elements: (arsenic, antimony and certainly tin) to produce an alloy, bronze.

The last two millennium before our era saw the progress of metallurgy during the bronze age (18,000 to 750/700 B.C.) and the Iron Age (750/700 to 50 B.C. approximately). Archaeologists divide the Bronze Age into three periods (Early, Middle and Late) and they also make a distinction between the Early Iron Age and the Late Iron Age. The period grouping the Bronze Age and the Iron Age is called protohistoric.

## **Bronze Age**

The search for the raw materials necessary for the fabrication of bronze was the origin of a commerce on a grand scale. **Copper** was found in a natural state in the Alps and around the Mediterranean basin. **Tin**, on the other hand, was found in great quantities in the British Isles and in Brittany. Gold was also sought at this time: surface deposits of river gold, e.g. in the Limousin, were exploited and used for making jewellery.

Bronze was used to make weapons and tools as well as ornaments and many other implements. Artefacts were buried in caches in the ground and they seem to have been offerings to the gods. Religions linked to the sun developed at this time.

## **The Early Iron Age.**

In the Early Iron Age (750/700 to 450 B.C.) the use of iron, of which ore was abundant, democratised metallurgy. The arrival of iron metallurgy changed dramatically the commercial circuits established during the Bronze Age. Bronze was still used for making jewellery. In the Vienne Valley a great amount of cult and funeral artefacts known in the Bronze Age were still used..

## **The Middle Iron Age.**

The period of the late Iron Age (450 to 50 B.C.) continued to progress like the early period but it was marked by some important changes. They were due more to the growth of contacts and cultural exchange than to the movement of peoples. At the time of the Roman Conquest, the whole of Gaul belonged to the same cultural and economic system.

Most of the sacred sites of the Gallic-Roman period, found in Poitou, were preceded by Gallic settlements. Hill fort are better known than the sanctuaries. The cult and funeral aspect which characterised the Vienne Valley on each side of Civaux, since the end of prehistory, would last until the present day.

## **The Gallic-Roman Period.**

From 58 to 51 B.C., Julius Caesar's Roman Legions undertook the conquest of Gaul. At that time the Narbonensis, conquered since 121 B.C. was already part of the Roman Empire. **Gaul** was divided into four provinces: the Narbonensis, Belgica, Lugdynensis and Aquitania. The provinces were divided into state governments and the state governments into smaller units, *pagi*.. The civilisation that is known nowadays as Gallic-Roman wasn't a simple transfer to Gaul of Roman manners, beliefs and practices. It was an original culture, a true fusion of Gallic tradition and the Roman contribution. The religious rites, in particular, demonstrate this.

### **The Romanisation of Poitou.**

In 56 B.C. the Roman General Crassus occupied the country south of the Loire. The Pictons were part of Roman Aquitania; its capital in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. was Saintes and then probably Poitiers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and finally Bordeaux in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. *Lemonum* (Poitiers) capital of the Pictons, became from the 1<sup>st</sup> Antiquity (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries) a typical Roman town. Orthogonal roads marked out some locales. It was endowed with grand buildings and public monuments, aqueducts, fountains, temples, thermal baths, squares, a theatre, an amphitheatre and a Triumphal Arch. Sumptuous dwellings, shops and craftsmen's workshops and living quarters for the less rich people were to be found there.

The countryside was transformed, thanks to the creation or modernisation of roads and the construction of towns and rural centres. Aerial photographs and research have revealed the configuration of these sites.

### **Civaux in Roman Times.**

The Medieval and present day village of Civaux was built, in part, on the same foundations as the Gallic-Roman habitations. Consequently much of the remains of this period (Gallo-Roman) have disappeared. However, some important discoveries permit several hypotheses to be advanced about the utilisation of the land. The architectural complex formed by the La Croche Villa and the theatre on one side of the small valley by the sanctuary in the square and the residential and workshop area on the other side form with the necropole a homogenous and organised site.

#### **The Sanctuary in the square.**

Former excavations have brought to light, three walls of a Roman monument (a temple?) of which the last 'wall' was found in 1988. The surrounding wall measured 30m by 20m. Inside a square room 5m by 5m (*cella*) used to shelter a statue of a god. This off centre construction in the sanctuary can lead one to suppose the existence of another temple under the actual church.

#### **La Croche Theatre.**

As this edifice has not been excavated, its exact dimensions are not known but soundings (probes) have permitted an estimated 50m diameter. The *Cavea* (auditorium), where the tiers were arranged, opened towards the north east.

#### **La Croche Villa.**

The Villa was a very big residential, agricultural and artisan domain existing from the 1<sup>st</sup> Antiquity. It is difficult to give its precise area, somewhere between 250 and 500 acres (1 to 2 sq kilometres).

## Room 2.

### The Potters' Craft – Showcase n°3

In the Gallic-Roman period, the clay that the potters used was refined, pressed and clarified. Rendered malleable with water it could then be worked. If the clay was very fine or greasy it crazed. To remedy this, a degreasing agent was added, often sand, fine gravel or shell fragments. After throwing (shaping) the vase was put to dry before firing. It was the kiln's layout and the fashion of firing the pottery that determined its appearance.

Earthenware was, in general, the object of a firing called 'reductive techniques': the ware was more or less in contact with the flames and smoke. The kiln was composed of a large perforated tile which served as a ledge or platform resting on one or several supports. The ware was stacked on it for firing. A clay dome with a 'chimney' covered it. The heat produced in the hearth in front of the kiln spread itself through the firing tunnel to where the pots were stacked. After firing and cooling, the potter broke the dome open and took out the pots. Those that were badly fired or deformed were thrown into a waste ditch. The others were stored away for sale. Earthenware's use was utilitarian rarely decorated, sometimes the potter decorated it with simple designs made with the finger, a stylus or a toothed wheel, occasionally it was painted. The shape of the pots corresponded to their use: jugs, plates, cups, cooking pots, mortars, oil lamps etc.

Terra sigillata, a terra cotta covered with a bright red slip, could be smooth or decorated with motifs in relief obtained by using moulds. The decoration depicted mythological or hunting scenes or designs of interlaced flowers or leaves. To protect the slip, the firing was done in more elaborate kilns (using tubes) so that the pots were not in contact with the smoke and flames. This firing, called oxidation, was first imported from Italy, (Arezzo in northern Tuscany). Terra sigillata was later produced in Gaul – at Lyon and in the Vienne around 15 B.C. then in the Massif Central, the basins of the Loire and Garonne notably at La Graufesenque near Millau, in the 1st century A.D. In the 2nd century it was made in Allier at Lezoux. There were more than 500 workshops in Gaul.

'Sponged' ware, whose colour varied from red to dark brown-black, was thus called because for a long time it was believed that its decoration was obtained by pressing a sponge on to the fresh slip. In fact, these motifs, stars or daisies, were made by pressing the palm of the hand or the thumb on to the slip. From the abundance of potsherds found in Civaux, covering almost all known shapes and decorations, it would seem likely, that there was a local production (industry): only the discovery of a workshop would confirm this. Nevertheless in 1930 an inhabitant of Civaux found, whilst ploughing, a stone mould for relief appliqué used to make figurines which ornamented 'sponged' mortars.

### The 'os resectum.' - Showcase n°4

A tomb found at the north west extremity of the Genêts necropole deserves particular mention because it is the sole example of this type of tomb yet found: the funeral urn in glass had been placed in a limestone coffin closed with a lid and decorated on the top with an *ascia* (adze). This symbol was meant to ensure the inviolability of the burial place by marking its sacred character. The 'os resectum' was found in front of the coffin. According to the common practice in Rome, but rather exceptional in Gaul, one or a few bones were removed from the

deceased before cremation and placed in the tomb. In this case the two feet were cut off. One can only suppose that the sepulchre was that of a notable Romanised person or that of a native Roman.

### **Tombstones (Steles)**

Stèles were placed on the graves to mark their place. Three of them, probably placed originally in the Civaux necropole, exist to this day: they are of indigenous and popular style.

The first stèle, 1.40m high, depicts a man in Gallic dress, holding a long handled tool and he is accompanied by a child holding a toy. The second shows a person wearing a rather short cape and bearing an *ascia* (adze) on his chest. The third one is too eroded to distinguish any decoration.

### **The Pièce des Genêts Necropole - Showcases n°4 and 5**

The Pièce des Genêts necropole was discovered in 1981, 700m from the village on the road from Civaux to Toulon (parish of the Valdivienne). It seems to have been used from the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. until the second half of the 2nd century. Thirty four incineration places (graves) were revealed in an enclosure, of about 250 square metres, surrounded by a dry stone wall.

The '*ustrinum*' or pyre was a simple trench. After the cremation, the ashes and bone remains were placed in a pottery or glass funeral urn and buried in the ground. The funeral urn containing the bone pieces, was sometimes accompanied with pottery, coins or diverse objects. The grave of a child whose ashes had been placed in an earthenware goblet covered over by a piece of pottery, included a jug, a baby's feeding bottle, a little bovine head in white Allier earthenware, a glass paste bead and a Roman coin. Two more incineration graves were found outside the enclosure as well as two burials.

### **Gallic-Roman Objects – Showcase n°6**

The different sites have furnished numerous Gallic-Roman objects – coins, weavers' weights, earthenware figurines and articles useful or decorative, in bone or in metal, including jewellery and a great quantity of pottery such as earthenware, terra sigillata, decorated or not, pottery called 'sponged' with decoration of stars or daisies. Certain of these objects were made in the place where they were found, notably the earthenware; two kilns were found to the north west of the village.

### Room 3

#### **The End of the Roman Empire and the Invasions.**

Agriculture, crafts and commerce had been very prosperous during the *Pax Romana*, from 50 B.C. to 250 A.D.

Then followed, what is called, the period of the big invasions; the term migrations would probably be more appropriate. The north of Gaul was subject to numerous incursions from the Germanic peoples – neighbours on the banks of the Rhine, from the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. In 395 the Roman Empire separated into Western and Eastern empires. Throughout the 5<sup>th</sup> century numerous groups of peoples, i.e. the, Franks, Burgundians, Alaman and Visigoths penetrated Gaul and installed themselves on its territory. In 476 A.D., Odoacre, Barbarian Chief, deposed the last Roman Emperor marking the end of that Empire.

Even so, in Aquitania, the 4<sup>th</sup> century appears to have been a period of prosperity. Towards 390 A.D. the writer, Ammien Marcellin, tells of the brilliant regions of Saintes and Poitiers and the calm in Aquitania where beggars were not to be found. Excavations confirm this, particularly in Civaux.

Right at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century the Vandals sowed terror in the region. In 418 the Visigoths settled in Aquitania under the federal statutes. In 475 the rupture with Rome occurred and the foundation of independent kingdoms took place. The Visigoths left little archaeological traces in Poitou-Charentes.

#### **The Arrival of Clovis and the Victory of the Franks.**

King of the Salian Franks from 482, Clovis (466 to 511) consolidated his kingdom at the expense of the Alaman, Burgundian and Visigoths territories. In 486 he was victorious over Syagrius, the last chief remaining on Roman territory in Gaul, at the battle of Soissons. In 486 he was also victorious against the Alamans at Tolbiac. He was then converted to Christianity and baptised.

In 507 after having conquered the Visigoth king, Alaric, in the battle called Vouillé, near Poitiers, he founded the Frank Monarchy and promoted the spread of Christianity. Between 494 and 498 the Franks made deep incursions into Aquitania and took, among others, Saintes and Angoulême. Clovis's victory in 507 brought Aquitania into the Frank Kingdom.

#### **Dynastic Problems in the Merovingian Period.**

At his death, Clovis left the Frank Kingdom to his four sons, Thierry, Clodomir, Childebert and Clotaire who shared the paternal inheritance. Dividing territories became the rule during the 250 years the Merovingian kings' reigns. With each generation the sharing among the inheritors meant that the maps of the countryside had to be redrawn. It was accompanied by cruel dynastic struggles, as well a succession of other crimes between brothers, nephews and cousins.

After 511 the Poitou – Charente region knew a period of disorder and atrocities. In the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, Poitiers changed rulers more than twenty four times. The Franks, few in number, perhaps fifty to sixty thousand , like the Visigoths, have left little archaeological trace.

#### **Room 4**

##### **The Early Middle Ages in Poitou – Showcase n°7**

The early Middle Ages are the long period which extends from the Roman period to the Romana period. It covers what is called Merovingian and Carolingian times; from the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the year 1000 A.D. Two major factors radically changed the institutions and society; on one side, the great Barbarian invasions with the instability that followed and on the other side, the arrival of Christianity and with it the organisation of the church.

A fact of prime importance, sometimes in connection with aristocratic power, was the religious but also civil role of the church. To the Apostolic Missions, was soon added the business of order and organisation of the church, opposing civil power if necessary. Throughout all this period the church assured the continuity of the Roman heritage.

It is probably towards the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century that Christianisation progressed in Poitou. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century the first local churches were set up. In 356 A.D. St Martin of Tours in association with St Hilaire, the Bishop of Poitiers, contributed to the evangelism of the rural areas. Around 360 A.D. he founded the first known monastery in Gaul, at Ligugé not far from Poitiers. In 555 A.D., or thereabouts, St Radegonde, Thurigian princess and wife of King Clotaire 1<sup>st</sup>, son of Clovis, united nuns around her in the Saintes-Croix Monastery in Poitiers. It was the first convent.

In the countryside, the communities set up churches around which the faithful wished to install burial grounds in order to benefit from the cult of the saints. Civaux at this period was one of these communities.

##### **Civaux in Merovingian and Carolingian Times.**

The importance of Civaux between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries is linked to the expansion of Christianity that particular circumstances certainly favoured there, very early on. As far as is known, Civaux was the only religious centre in the region that possessed, outside the Episcopal seat, a baptismal bath before the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Elsewhere a stele dated the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> proves, with certitude, the Christian presence at this time. Also, the existence of a vast necropole supports the fame of this sacred place.

##### **Civaux, Religious Centre.**

The renown and importance of this religious centre must be put in relation to the precocity of the Civaux Christian community, the probable presence of relics of Saints Gervais and Protais and the influence of certain persons, close to the Episcopal milieu.

### The Church.

The first church existed at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup>. In effect the dedication to Saints Gervais and Protais indicates generally a rather early foundation. Martyred in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, their bodies were found in 386 A.D. in Milan by St Ambroise, giving rise to a cult which expanded rapidly, as much in Italy as in Gaul. In the Vienne, apart from Civaux, there are three churches bearing these Saints' names; at L'Isle-Jourdain, Millac and Persac. There are nine more in the Department of the Vienne.

### The Apse

Contemporary archaeologists date the actual church to be of the 6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> century. The heptagonal apse was constructed of small cubic stones with a linking of longer stones. All the original openings in the apse have been restored by the Ministry of Ancient Monuments. The construction and the décor, characterised by the use of brick with red mortar for the joints, place this building in the true Roman tradition.

### The Aeternalis and Servilla Stele.

This stele is a limestone slab 54cm. by 35cm., upon which is carved a monogram of Christ, flanked by the alpha and omega, symbols of the beginning and the end. At the base of the stone, one can read the inscription: *Aeternalis et Servilla, vivatis in deo*: Eternal and Little Servant, live in God. At the beginning of Christianity, Christians were given names referring to their faith or their status.

### The Baptistry.

A Merovingian baptismal bath was discovered in the north part of the temple. The hexagonal bath, about 50cm. deep 1.75m. long and 1.05m. wide across the middle, possessed steps at each end. It is dated 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Merovingian Necropole at Civaux.**

Today, the necropole is a quadrilateral of about 90m. on each side surrounded by sarcophagus lids embedded in the ground. Classed as an Historic Monument in 1919, the necropole has, nevertheless, served as the communal cemetery until quite recently.

Burials and pillage have altered this exceptional site, only the part to the north east has been saved by a protective measure. The central pathway and the sarcophagi, placed here and there, as well as on the perimeter are protected by a law of 1926, inspired by the famous Alyscamps at Arles. The number of sarcophagi, that were here during the Middle Ages is difficult to ascertain precisely ! According to Père Camille of La Croix, there were 10.000 to 15.000. The size of the necropole in the Late Middle Ages was in relation to Civaux's importance as a

religious centre. In other respects this necropole was inscribed in the valley's funeral destiny over thousands of years. The sarcophagi are trapezoidal. They were sometimes shaped from fragments of Roman architecture. The lids, the same shape, were decorated with a long stone band with three transverse bands. This type of decoration is, perhaps, a simplified imitation of Roman sarcophagi at Acrotères. The lids were decorated with motifs such as a cross, a trident, a fish, a monogram ... inscriptions were rare, just a simple name 'Maria', 'Ulfila'. Such an important manufacture of sarcophagi needed as much organisation for the fabrication as for the commercialisation. Several stone-masons' workshops have been found in Civaux.

## **The Middle Ages.**

### **Civaux in the Middle Ages – Showcase n°8**

This period, from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century saw, with the disintegration of the Carolingian power, the development of regional power. The Count of Poitiers' descendent, Guillaume Tête d'Étoupe (932 to 963) proclaimed himself Duke of Aquitaine. A new territorial organisation took place. Feudal districts replaced the judicial administrative divisions (vigueries); the Lords conducted dealings one with another. A complex, aristocratic hierarchy regulated the relationships. Civaux marked the northern boundary of the Basse Marche county. But it had the Count of Poitou as feudal overlord. Civaux did not play a significant role in the baron/squire framework that the towns of Chauvigny, Morthemmer, Lussac les Chateaux and L'Isle-Jourdain were part of.

#### **La Tour aux Cognons.**

All that remains of this edifice is a four storied keep, 10m x 10m and about 12m high. This fortification was constructed in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries by the *Conienses*, lords of Lussac. The domain was a dependency of the 'Seigneurie' of Calais whose seat was at L'Isle-Jourdain. La Tour au Cognons participated in the surveillance of the Vienne Valley, like all the chateaux that bordered the river. A permanent residence was added to it in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **The Church.**

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the church tower was built, the nave was vaulted and then divided into three by two lines of columns. On the column capitals were representations of fantastic animals and floral motifs in the Poitevin tradition. One of the capitals is the original work; on one face, two birds are drinking from a chalice, on the second side, a mermaid is tempting a fisherman, on the third side, a man and a woman are holding hands.

The façade decoration is simple. In the centre there is a round arched doorway over which is a window encircled by four arches. Some animal sculptures, under a cornice, decorated the façade in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. An inscription, to the right of the outside door, dating from the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, reads: 'here is the house of the Lord .... firmly built'. The word '*igne*' on this ancient stone might indicate that the work had been done following a fire. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, extensive work was done to the building, which was in a very bad state. The vault roofs were repaired, the façade and north wall were reinforced with buttresses.