

## 6 The current research programme

### 6.1 *The research context of the study*

The site of Le Yaudet has, throughout history, been recognized as a site of unusual importance. It was widely known as ‘Vieille Cité’ □ a place endowed with the legitimacy of age believed to be one of the oldest inhabited settlements in Brittany. It was here, so tradition ran, an early bishopric was founded by Gu é na □ l in the sixth century. Le Yaudet □ as Guinodet □ appears on Tassin’ s map of Brittany published in 1634 and well into the nineteenth century its pardon, held on the third Sunday in May, attracted very large numbers of pilgrims. The historical writings of de La Borderie (1853 and 1896) and of Guillotin de Corson (1888a and b) placed the site firmly at the centre of the early history of Brittany. The historical record was further extended by a series of archaeological observations (outlined above) culminating in Fleuriot’ s excavations of 1952 □ 4.

The evidence was sufficient to suggest that Le Yaudet, by virtue of its favoured position, commanding a major estuary and provided with several well-protected anchorages, had been occupied over a long period of time. In the Iron Age it was fortified by an é peron bar é e while the discovery of Carthaginian coins hinted at extensive trading contacts. Refortification took place in the late Roman period. Thereafter the historical tradition suggested continuous occupation up to

the present day.

Le Yaudet, therefore, offered much potential. It promised to contribute valuable evidence to the study of Atlantic trade which one of us (BC) had been pursuing with a programme of excavations at Hengistbury Head and Mount Batten in England and Le Cŕtel in Jersey, and it was of central importance to the study of the Roman period in Brittany □ a theme being actively researched by the other (PG). It also offered the prospect of being able to examine, through archaeological excavation, the difficult questions posed by the migrations and immigrant settlement of the fifth and sixth centuries AD. Of added importance was the fact that the site had probably been continuously occupied for over two thousand years and thus offered a rare opportunity of studying the *longue dur é e* of successive communities occupying the same ecological niche. In short Le Yaudet was a microcosm of Breton life spanning two millennia.

To explore fully the remarkable historical and archaeological potential of Le Yaudet the project was conceived at the outset as being long term. It was to consist of successive short seasons of excavation lasting three weeks each year supported by programmes of historical study and fieldwork. From the beginning the project was a collaboration between the Centre de Recherche Bretonne et Celtique, University of Brest and the Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford. As such it was able to call upon the facilities and expertise of both

contributions of several of them appear in this volume. Together they bring a formidable battery of expertise to bear on our theme.

In addition to the support given by our two institutions financial assistance was provided by grants from the British Academy, the Arts and Humanities Research Board (of the British Government), the Direction des Antiquités de Bretagne and the Département des Côtes-d'Armor.

## *6.2 The fieldwork programme in outline 1991–2002*

**1991 and 1992.** The first two years of excavation were concerned to establish the archaeological potential of the site and to develop procedures of analysis appropriate to the data. Two areas were examined: in parcelle 20 an area was excavated to test the build up of deposits behind the main cross-ridge rampart (trenches 1 and 3); and at the north-east corner a trench (trench 2) was cut close to Fleuriot's excavation to examine the Iron Age and Roman defences.

**1993–5.** The first three-year programme was designed to develop and extend the work of 1991–2. To this end the excavation of trenches 1 and 3 was completed in 1993 and the line of trench 1 was extended to provide a section through the main Iron Age rampart (trench 4). Work then began on a second area excavation (trench 6) in parcelle 20 some 20 m from trench 1/3 to provide another sample of the rich Late Iron Age to medieval sequence. The

excavation was spread over two seasons (1994–95) in the second of which the trench was extended (as trench 9) across the rampart to provide a section to compare with that recorded in trench 4. While this work was in progress, in 1995 three trenches were excavated at the north-east corner of the headland near the Poste de Douane (trenches 5, 7 and 8) to explore the Iron Age and Roman defences where the Roman wall was still standing. Finally, in 1995 a trench was cut along the top of the cross-ridge rampart (trench 10) to test the possibility of there being an entrance close to Les Rochers de Beaumanoir – a point hinted at by the discovery of a hollow-way in trench 3.

At the end of the first five seasons of excavation much had been learned of the site:

- C The promontory had been occupied throughout the prehistoric period. Mesolithic, Neolithic and Early Bronze Age artefacts had been discovered in secondary positions and Early Bronze Age occupation was identified *in situ*.
- C Middle Iron Age occupation, in the form of rectangular stone buildings, had been located at the north-eastern extremity of the site.
- C The earthwork defences could be shown to belong to the first century BC. Three phases were represented in the cross-ridge defence and two in the defences at the north-eastern corner. One gate was positively identified at the north-eastern corner.

- C The excavated areas produced little evidence of intensive use from the first to the late third centuries AD.
- C In the late third century the headland was again defended this time by a masonry-built wall following (at least in part) the Iron Age defences. One gate replaced the Iron Age gate at the north-east corner.
- C In the early medieval period the area behind the cross-ridge rampart was cultivated by the lazy-bed, or cord-rig, method and the fields were associated with corn-drying ovens. These were later dated by radiocarbon to the sixth and seventh centuries.
- C Occupation continued here into the later medieval period (twelfth to fourteenth centuries) during which time a series of oval-shaped stone-built houses were erected among yards, garden plots and middens.

The success of the project led to a second three-year programme with two principal aims: to test the archaeological potential of the rest of the site, sampling in turn the Upper Plateau, the central valley and the Lower Plateau; and to complete the study of the Iron Age and Roman defences.

1996–1998. The second three-year programme examined, in successive years, the three zones of the site. In 1996 the Upper Plateau was explored in trenches 11–15, in 1997 the central valley was sampled in trenches 19, 20, 21, 22 and 26; and in 1998 trenches 28, 29 and 36 examined the potential of the Lower

Plateau. Throughout this period trial work was carried out on the main cross-ridge rampart close to Les Rochers de Beaumanoir partly in pursuance of the hypothesized Iron Age gate, and the northern and western defences were traced in two small trial trenches (trenches 31 and 35). One of the unexpected results of the excavations close to Les Rochers de Beaumanoir was that a hitherto unexpected Roman gate was identified in a trench to the west of the outcrop (trench 33).

1999. To explore fully the gate and its context an additional season of work was devoted to it requiring four trenches to be dug (trenches 37, 38, 39 and 40).

The programme of excavations in 1996–9 clarified many issues and added considerably to our knowledge of the settlement in all of its phases. The principal *new* discoveries were:

- C The Late Iron Age defences extended around the perimeter of the headland except for along the western edge of the Upper Plateau where no defence was required.
- C The main Iron Age Land Gate probably occupied a position at the eastern end of the cross-ridge rampart roughly where the present road enters the fortified area.
- C Late Iron Age occupation was identified on all parts of the headland and, in the central valley, continued into the beginning of the Roman era.

- C In the late third century AD, when the site was redefended with a masonry-built wall, a new gate was built to the west of Les Rochers de Beaumanoir probably to give access to the spring and the Baie de la Vierge. It is likely that the main Iron Age gate at the east end of the cross-ridge rampart was rebuilt at this time.
- C The late Roman settlement was laid out with an orthogonal street grid. Much of the area was occupied by timber buildings with tile-covered roofs.
- C The late third century settlement was abandoned at the beginning of the fourth century.
- C In the late fourth–early fifth century the site was reoccupied. High-status finds (a silver coin, a crossbow brooch and a decorated phalera) hint at the presence of *foederati* – possibly the first incursion of people from Britain.
- C In the early medieval period (sixth–eighth centuries) the field system respected the Roman grid and it is possible that the earliest church occupied a terraced area created in the centre of the Roman settlement.
- C The Roman gate to the west of Les Rochers de Beaumanoir was deliberately blocked in the period fourth–eleventh centuries possibly at a time of stress.
- C In the later medieval period (twelfth–fourteenth centuries) the settlement was extensive covering much of the Upper Plateau.

In order to complete the current work at Le Yaudet it was decided to undertake one final three-year programme on the Upper Plateau in parcelle 1016 which lies close to the heart of the present village between the cross-ridge rampart and the church, the principal aim of the work being to explore the development of the settlement from the Iron Age to the Middle Ages in an area where there was every expectation that the stratigraphy would be well preserved, as it had proved to be in the adjacent field, parcelle 20, examined in 1991<sup>15</sup>.

2000<sup>16</sup>. The third three-year programme involved the excavation of a single trench (trench 41) up to 20 m wide extending from the south-east wall of the parcelle, which ran along the tail of the cross-ridge rampart, to the northern boundary of the parcelle delimiting the curtilage of the church. As anticipated the excavation exposed evidence of occupation from the Late Iron Age to the present day. The principal significant discoveries were:

- ☐ Several phases of Late Iron Age and early Roman occupation immediately behind the rampart including a row of massive four-post granary buildings of pre-conquest date.
- ☐ Roman occupation spanning the first to late third centuries AD with a series of small rectangular timber buildings of late third century date.
- ☐ Occupation levels of the late fourth to sixth centuries AD producing imported Mediterranean amphorae. A complex dry-stone building of this



☐ Evidence of early monastic land apportionment probably beginning in the sixth century with some of the parcels used for cultivation and another set aside as a burial ground. The curtilage boundary of the church was probably laid out at this time.

☐ Extensive occupation of a domestic character dating to the tenth to fourteenth centuries colonizing the earlier agricultural plots.

The results of the 2000–2002 excavation added much that was new and will allow the development of this remarkable site to be described in detail. In presenting the successive changes which took place on the headland of Le Yaudet from the Late Iron Age to the later Middle Ages a microcosm of the *longue durée* of Breton history will be revealed.

In parallel with the annual excavation extensive surveys have been carried out. The headland has been mapped in detail and many of the individual buildings and structures carefully recorded. A magnetometer and resistivity survey of large areas of the Upper Plateau and the central valley was also undertaken. Beyond the defended headland fieldwork has begun to extend into the area between Le Yaudet and Ploulec’h. In parallel with these programmes a study of the vernacular architecture of the region proceeds accompanied by the relevant documentary research.

### 6.3 *The publication strategy*

With the completion of the excavations in 2002 work has now begun on the preparation of the final scientific report which, it is intended, will be published in several volumes. Rather than wait until the post-excavation programme has been completed it has been decided to publish this first introductory volume in advance to provide a background study for the entire project and to offer an indication of the riches to come.