

CIPEG – 2015 – Short Activity Report – MAN, Saint-Germain-en-Laye

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Housed in the royal castle of Saint-Germain-en-Laye dating back to the 13th century, the Musée des Antiquités nationales (Museum of National Antiquities) changed its name in 2005 to become the Museum of National Archaeology because the public no longer understood what was meant by the term “antiquities”. In French, this is an ambiguous word with the meaning of “archaeological objects” in the time of antiquarians, or “furnishings” for elite estates or castles. Since the French Revolution, no pieces of furniture were preserved in the castle of Saint-Germain-en-Laye

In France, the MAN is a leading museum of archaeology which displays the richest collection of prehistoric works of art in the world. Approximately 30,000 archaeological artefacts from the Early Stone Age to the beginning of the Carolingian period are exhibited. At the end of this conference, I will speak about the Department of Comparative Archaeology of which I am in charge, so I will not speak about that now.

For several years, the Museum has been experiencing a constant increase of its public attendance. In 2005, the overall number of visitors was 66,000 among whom a large number were school groups. In 2008, the Ministry of Culture selected the Museum and about ten of others to try completely free access for six months with a positive result. This success was confirmed in 2012 on the occasion of the opening of the renovated exhibition rooms of the Second Iron Age (La Tène). In 2014, thanks to the exhibition “The Greece of Origins”, the Museum welcomed 111,000 visitors, an attendance rate experienced during a whole year in the 1990's.

The administrative consolidation of the castle with the entire domain (park and forest) and the arrival of a new director who, for the first time since the foundation of the

museum was not an archaeologist, led to a reorganization of several departments and services. It is still a work in progress.

Proposals from the public for cultural and pedagogic activities increase each year: visits for parents and children; discovery of one cultural aspect through the whole collection; visits with story-telling; workshops especially dedicated to children or adults to practice reading or making engraved palaeolithic works of art, clay pottery, or epigraphic decoding to name a few examples. These activities are organized all year long (for example a cycle of archaeological films), on the occasion of national events such as “La Nuit des musées” (Night of Museums) or Les Journées de l’Archéologie (one Saturday + Sunday every year in June), or on the occasion of special events repeated every year in the MAN (for example every October for the last 12 years, le “Mois de la Préhistoire” (Month of Prehistory)).

Concerning the scientific activities, the most important recent work is the new scientific and cultural project to define the new role of the establishment towards the regional museums of archaeology, the INRAP (National Institute for Rescue Archaeology) and its links with universities and research. For the moment, the Museum is committed to several programs of scientific cooperation: three curators regularly conduct or take part in fieldwork in France and abroad. Most of the members of the scientific team are involved in Labex projects established around collections and archival documentation, the importance of which is fundamental to understanding how humanities, and especially archaeology and history have been constituted in France and Europe during the last two centuries. There is no doubt that the next four to five years will be decisive for the transformation of the MAN and the way it will survive, because we will have to think about the complete re-organization of the walking tour for visitors, the creation of external store-rooms, the use of multimedia tools, the conception of contextual documentation intended for distant public. We are well aware that it is a turning point for this cultural institution.

