

ROMAN ANTIQUITIES AT SANXAY IN FRANCE.

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At a time when the discoveries of further remains of the ancient baths at Bath are attracting so much notice, and public attention has been called to those interesting remains illustrative of the Roman history of Britain, it may not be undesirable to show what has been done in other countries in a similar direction, and especially in France, the ancient Gaul, which has a close relation to ancient Britain.

Having seen a notice of the discoveries at Sanxay, near Poitiers, I was induced to pay them a visit, and having been so fortunate as to form the acquaintance of the Père de la Croix who made the discovery, and also has been at the sole expense hitherto incurred in uncovering the remains, I obtained a note from him to his overseer of the works.

Sanxay is about 18 miles from Poitiers, by road, but there is a nearer approach from Lusignan, where one may go by rail, on the way from Poitiers to Niort. We found it more convenient, however, to drive there through a level country, slightly diversified by hill and woodland scenery, until coming near to the old town of Sanxay on the small river Vonne. Sanxay is situated in the domain of La Bois Sière, on a rising ground on the northern banks of the river, and the uncovered remains consist of a temple with the surrounding portico or ambulatory, a system of baths with a hostelry and a theatre. The façade of the temple measures about 250 feet English, and is approached by three flights of steps, one in the centre which is the widest, and one on each side; within the enclosure is the temple, having a triple colonnade in front, three rows of fluted pillars with richly ornamented capitals, only fragments of which remain. The total number of columns was 66—three rows of 22, and the temple is in the form of a Greek cross, with an octagonal *cella*, a good portion of which still remains entire; at the end of this, and on each side as well as in front, are projections which form the cross.

In the centre is the place where the statue of the Divinity was placed, which appears, from a well-cut fragment of inscription found on the site of the temple, to have been Apollo, corresponding to the Gaulish Hesus, or Esus. The place of sacrifice was in front of the *cella*, and on one side of it was a building, or stable, where the victims were placed before being offered. All this is distinctly laid open. Immediately below the place of sacrifice is a fine drain, 6 feet in height, to carry off the water used in cleansing the temple and its surroundings, and also a large reservoir which supplied the adjacent baths as well as the temple.

The peculiarity of the temple is the form, unlike that of any other similar building hitherto found, and suggests the idea that the form of some early Christian churches has been taken from that of earlier temples, or the temples adapted, where convenient, to Christian uses, after purification.

The next range of buildings forms the baths, which have large hypocausts, or heating chambers, and cover a great extent of ground, and seem to have had additions made to them. On the south side of the baths has been found a large hostelry with chambers, covering about seven acres, for the accommodation of those frequenting the baths and the temple. The underground passages are quite perfect, but the flooring of the bath chambers has been taken up and burnt into lime. A large kiln has been found used for this purpose after the city became ruined, and pieces of sculptured stone found within it. The city is supposed to have been destroyed by fire in the first half of the fifth century, and the coins and medals that have been found reach from Hadrian to that date, about 400 years.

The third portion of these interesting remains that has been uncovered is the Theatre on the slope of the hill that rises on the southern side of the river, and the seats are formed out of the rock in the declivity of the hill reaching to the summit. The stage or arena is perfect, and quite circular, unlike the usual form of Greek or Roman theatres, but the acoustic principles are carefully observed, as every word can be heard from any point of the enclosure, and there is a large room close behind the stage. The seats range only above half the enclosure, but the arena seems to have been adapted to feats of horsemanship as well as scenic performances. The masonry is of excellent quality, and the stones all worked to one size. The seats will accommodate 7,000 or 8,000 persons, so that the city must have had a very large population, but it seems to have been unvalled, as no traces of any enclosure have been found. The inference is that it was a place of resort for religious purposes or for health or pleasure. It is situated in a forest district, and is supposed to have been one of the spots used as places of assembly by the ancient Gauls. In fact it was in trying to ascertain the situation of one of these places of assembly that Mons. de la Croix found the Gallo-Roman remains at Sanxay.

The public spirit and liberality of this gentleman cannot be too highly commended; he has not only defrayed all the cost of uncovering, but has himself drawn and planned all the remains discovered, and he purposes to erect a museum on the spot if the Government will undertake the further cost of excavation.

If the efforts of a single individual can effect so much, may we not hope that a joint effort made in Bath may effect much more? The remains of the ancient baths uncovered hitherto in Bath are of greater extent than those at Sanxay, and the work more massive, and perhaps earlier than at Sanxay. The extent of frontage of the baths at that place does not exceed 125 yards, by a depth of about 35; but what has been already found in Bath much exceeds this, and the plan is much more regular, and much remains still to be discovered.

If the researches in Bath can be continued, they will prove not less instructive than the discoveries at Sanxay. The character of the two places has much similarity. They were not occupied as most large stations

by a military force, but were resorts of health and recreation, for leisure and personal enjoyment. It is not impossible that Bath possessed a theatre in Roman times, but no traces of it has been found. Verulam is the only place where such remains have been exposed to view, but there must have been many in Roman Britain.

No doubt the tribes in Britain had places of assembly for judicial purposes, as well as those in Gaul. Stonehenge, Abury and Stanton Drew are regarded as points of tribal meeting; but may not Bath also have originally been one of them, and the Romans, who did not roughly violate national religious feeling, but adapted to their own system, have superseded the old British worship of *Sul* by incorporating it with that of *Sul Minerva*?

There seems little reason to doubt that Sanxay was the ancient place of meeting for the tribe of the Pictons or Pictavi, where deputies were chosen to represent that tribe at the general meeting "in Finibus Carnutum," which, as Cæsar tells us, represented the whole Gaulish nation. The connection of *Sul* with *Minerva*, and the altars found at Bath dedicated to their deity, lead us to think that the Romans, finding the British deity already worshipped on the spot, united with *Sul* their own divinity *Minerva*, and substituted as at Sanxay their own refinements and polished luxury for the ruder religious rites of the Belgic Britons. Roman manners and Roman religious rites were thus made by degrees to supersede the ancient worship and habits of the Britons.