

## The chapel of Saint-Jean de Todon

The chapel of Saint-Jean de Todon, popularly called Saint-Jean de Rousigue in the region, is the last occupation of a Gallic, then Roman agglomeration named « Le Camp de César » (Caesar's Camp) and located on the plateau of Lacau.

The building has a nave\* closed by an apse\* and is 24.8m long and 8m wide.

The western part of the building (the nave) is older, truncated to the east by engaged pillars.

The ten excavation campaigns carried out around the 2000s have shown that this building is built in several stages and that it has a complex history that can have its roots between the 5th and 7th centuries, and ends in the modern era.

The site was abandoned as a place of worship from the 14th century. According to Dom Pinière de Clavin, it was destroyed by the British, but this information can't be verified.

The priory is gradually dismembered, but still appears in the 16th century.

The building remains a place of memory and popular piety at least until the end of the 18th century, because local beliefs are still very lively until this time.

### Local beliefs and customs

A popular legend has it that a golden goat is buried nearby or in the rubble of Saint-Jean de Todon. This belief is so widespread that many inhabitants would have undertaken in the middle of the 19th century to carry out excavations in order to find the famous golden goat, some of them spending large sums of money to do so.

Another local superstition was widespread especially among the women of Laudun, who used to bring their sick child to the ruins of Saint-Jean de Todon to place him on an altar present in the chapel. Once in front of the altar, they removed the child's clothes to replace them with new ones and throw away the old ones. Rumor has it that this ritual would always lead to a very rapid recovery in the following weeks.

In the same idea, some women who couldn't have children made a pilgrimage to this place to remedy their sterility.

### The cemetery

The archaeological excavations were originally to be centered on the chapel building itself, but it was ultimately the study of the graves surrounding it that took an important place in the research.

Indeed, the many modifications made over time on the architecture of the building and the damage caused by the non-official « excavations » of the 19th century made the dating of the chapel very complex.

The construction of the cemetery also made the dating task more complex, as the ground was turned over and mixed, preventing stratigraphic\* observations.

On the other hand, the rubble fallen from the chapel and those resulting from the clandestine « excavations » protected the cemetery which is therefore particularly well preserved near the building, on approximately 360m<sup>2</sup>.

3 graves are monumentalized :

- One by a sarcophagus, a practice unusual at the time in this region
- Two others by building a crypt, probably reserved for a privileged elite.

4 other types of grave signs are found, and appear more frequently.

Two, quite discreet :

- A rectangular cord of limestone rubble stone arranged around the pit.
- A stele placed vertically at the feet, head or both ends of the pit.

Two others, more remarkable :

- A gravestone, consisting of a grey limestone slab placed at ground level and covering the pit.
- A block of quadrangular\* masonry, on an average 2m long and 0.75m wide, which is built over the formwork containing the body, in order to extend well beyond the ground and thus be more easily and longer visible, ensuring the survival of the memory of the deceased.

The necropolis would have served between the second half of the 9th and the end of the 13th century. 141 anthropomorphic forms and 81 secondary burials were studied after the 2010 excavations.

Very little furniture was found in the graves : 11 vases (pegau type) deposited either at the feet or on the lower limbs and sometimes next to the head.

3 subjects are also found accompanied by a perforated shell of *Pecten Maximus* (St James shell), which are insignia of pilgrims.

The excavations of the 2010 campaign yielded a batch of 32 coins, 30 of which could be identified :

- 20 Gallic coins
- 1 Roman coin from the Principate
- 3 Roman coins from the Late Empire
- 6 feudal coins
- 2 unidentifiable antique coins

Nave : Main hall of a church or civil basilica, where the faithful attend the religious service.

Apse : Semi-circular end of a church, behind the choir.

Stratigraphy : Science to study the succession of different geological layers (strata).

Quadrangular : Whose base is a quadrilateral (here, a rectangle).