Waterscape in the Canche Valley (France). Quentovic - The growth and development of a river port by the sea

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Quentovic was a major economic and administrative centre throughout the Early Middle Ages. Located on the left bank of the River Canche at Visemarest (Pas-de-Calais, commune of La Calotterie), this early medieval port was part of a vast network of emporia that ensured the movement of people, goods and ideas around the English Channel, the North Sea and the Baltic. Its northern position in the kingdom of Neustria, at the crossroads of sea and land routes, made it ideally suited to cross-Channel relations and provided a direct connection to the north and south of the continent via an ancient Roman road.

Its location, at the head of the Canche estuary, also means that it is relatively well protected from storm flooding. But the river dynamics in this intertidal sector are quite marked, requiring the construction of facilities and work to adapt to changes in the Canche. Recent excavations, closely linked to palaeo-environmental studies, now offer a better representation of the development and living conditions of this urbanised area. Thanks to these studies and a regression analysis of the landscape, the site, which is now 15 km from the coast and around 750 m from the bed of the present-day Canche, appears to have been reconnected to the sea.

In addition, this analysis of the landscape, coupled with a historical study, lays the foundations for consideration of a wider occupation on the scale of the lower valley, where the roles and relationships between secular and ecclesiastical powers remain to be defined.

In addition, the position of the portus, on the borders of Merovingian and Carolingian Neustria, at the meeting point of the maritime and terrestrial, insular and continental, Scandinavian and southern worlds, is of strategic importance, particularly in economic terms. These exchanges, as evidenced by its artefacts, probably dictated its rapid and organised development.

Keywords: Early Middle Age; Quentovic; Emporium; Waterscape Evolution; Paleoenvironment; Archaeology

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