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Alain Champagne, Benoît Clavel, Christophe Dupont, Charles Guérin,  
Véronique Montembault

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# Archaeological investigations at the *Maison Champlain* site (16th-18th century), Brouage (France)

Since 2003, six archaeological operations have been undertaken in the village of Brouage. The area has been relatively free of construction, probably since the late eighteenth century, and as such the archaeological deposits are exceptionally well preserved beneath contemporary gardens and a square. The excavations focused on houses fronting on to the road, alleys crossing the lots and gardens, and the courtyards that functioned as craft workshops or gardens, all within an area marked by significant social contrasts.

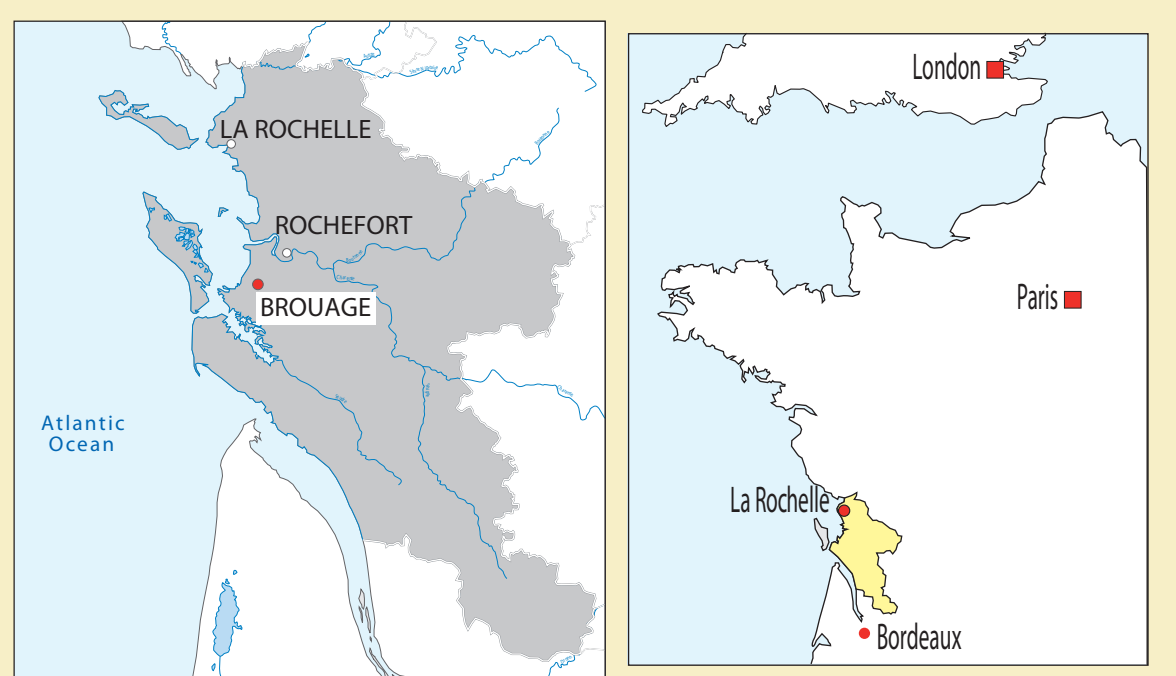
## Historical Background

The city was founded in 1555 in a marshy area, and despite a difficult start (storms and high tides), it witnessed rapid development, primarily thanks to salt, making it an essential harbor from the end of the sixteenth through the seventeenth centuries. However, both silting along the coast and the creation of the Royal Arsenal de Rochefort by Colbert in 1666 ultimately condemned the city and the harbor : today it is an inland marsh 3 km from the sea.

Excavation, Court No. 5, cobble-stone floor (Picture A. Champagne)



Plan of Brouage in 1717 (Archives du génie, Vincennes)



## Building in Brouage

The marshland does not facilitate the construction, nor urban life. The joint use of wood and earth as primary building materials are probably documented. The wood species used are mainly softwood whose accurate identification is difficult, oak is used for cased wells and pit latrines. The use of stone becomes dominant over time. These obviously of local origin (limestone), but the recovery of discharged ballast stones from ships is common and reflects the relations with Northern Europe (Cornwall, Ireland, Norway). Rarer and more surprising materials used include shells : the prickly cockle in the creation of decorative patterns, as in Roman times, and oysters to backfill the soil outside.



Softwood bottom plate with two embedded vertical elements (Court No. 5) (Picture A. Champagne)

## The table in the 17th and 18th centuries



Saintonge jug, Rhenish stoneware bottle (type Bellarmine), majolica stemmed dishes from Montelupo (Pictures B. Zélie, A. Champagne)

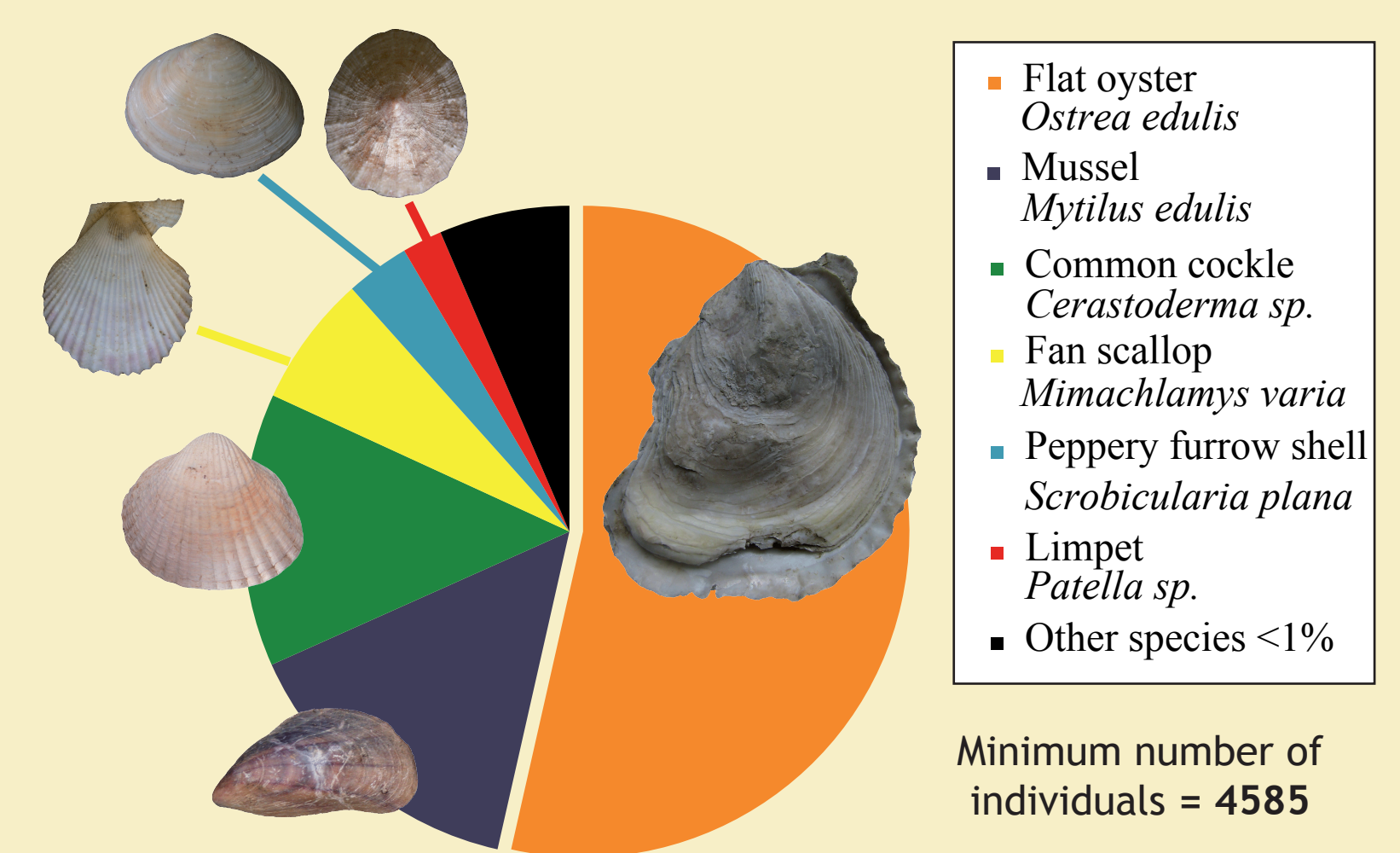


Local crockery, called Saintonge, dominates the Brouage table. However, the percentage of imported elements is significant. Taking advantage of their coastal location, companies were able to promote new tastes and fashions. Stoneware, and Spanish and Italian majolica-wares, are present from the second half of the sixteenth century, with their relative importance possibly related to the proximity of the house of Pierre de Comminges, the King's lieutenant, whose arms are present on the facade of the parish church.

A significant assemblage of bones and shells from midden deposits are currently under study, but some trends are already emerging.

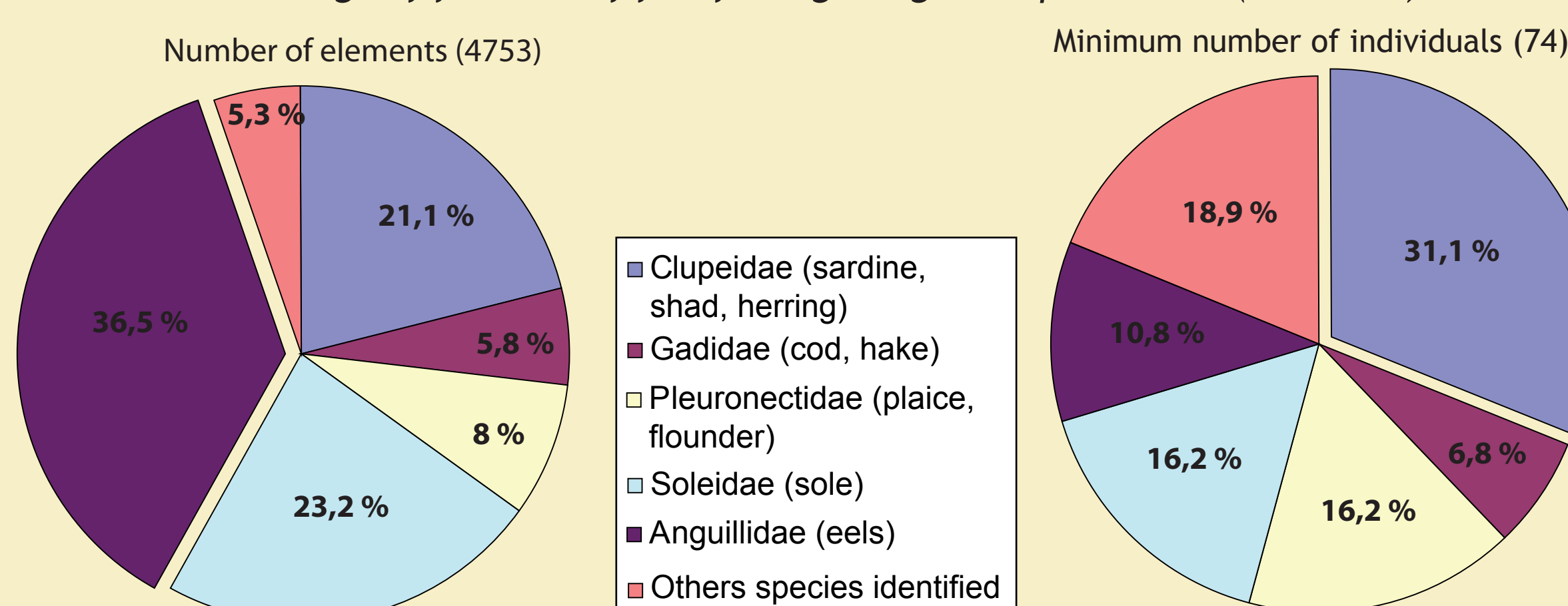
Besides the “backyard birds” (chickens, geese, and ducks), marsh birds (herons, snipes, sandpipers ...), peacocks, which was the particular dishes reserved for the medieval elites, and turkey (from the early seventeenth century), were also eaten.

More than sixty species of marine shells were found out on the site, which is an astonishing number in itself. However, only four of these were destined for the dining table by selecting large specimens (oysters, fan scallops, mussels, and cockles).



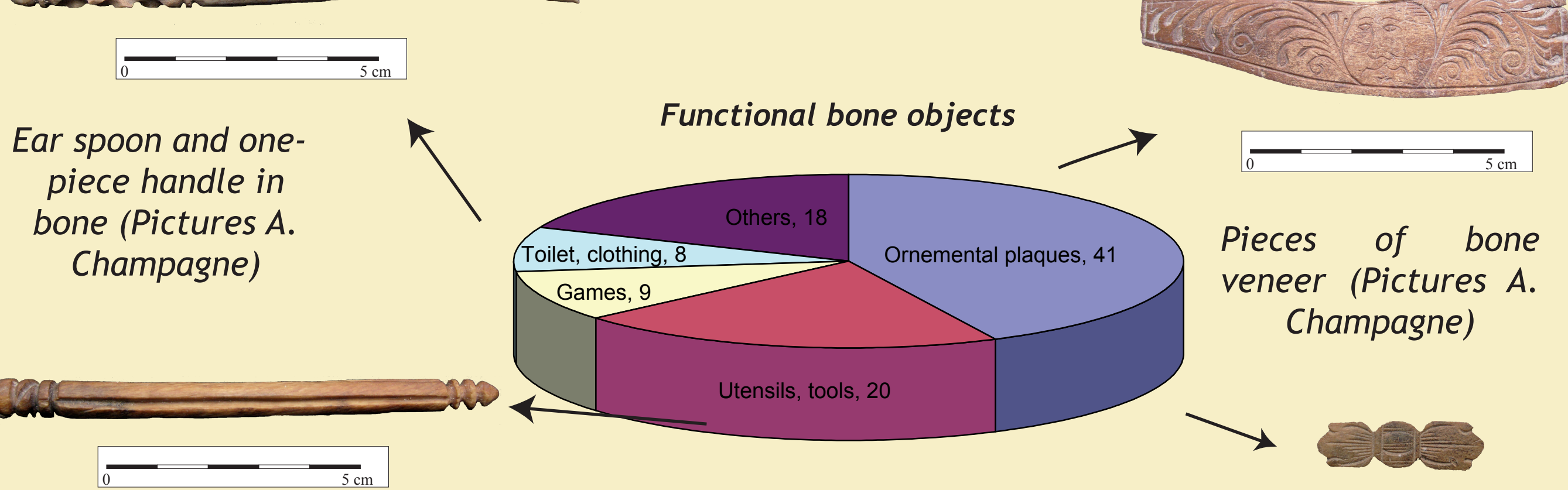
Spectrum of shellfish species consumed Brouage, all phases combined (in % of Minimum number of individuals) (C. Dupont)

Range of families of fish from garbage dump US 3008 (B. Clavel)



We know the role of fish at the site only from the eighteenth century garbage dump (U.S. 3008), which demonstrate the importance of fresh and tidal species, such as Clupeidae, Soleidae and Pleuronectidae. In contrast, preserved fish (cod, whiting) are more limited compared to inland assemblages.

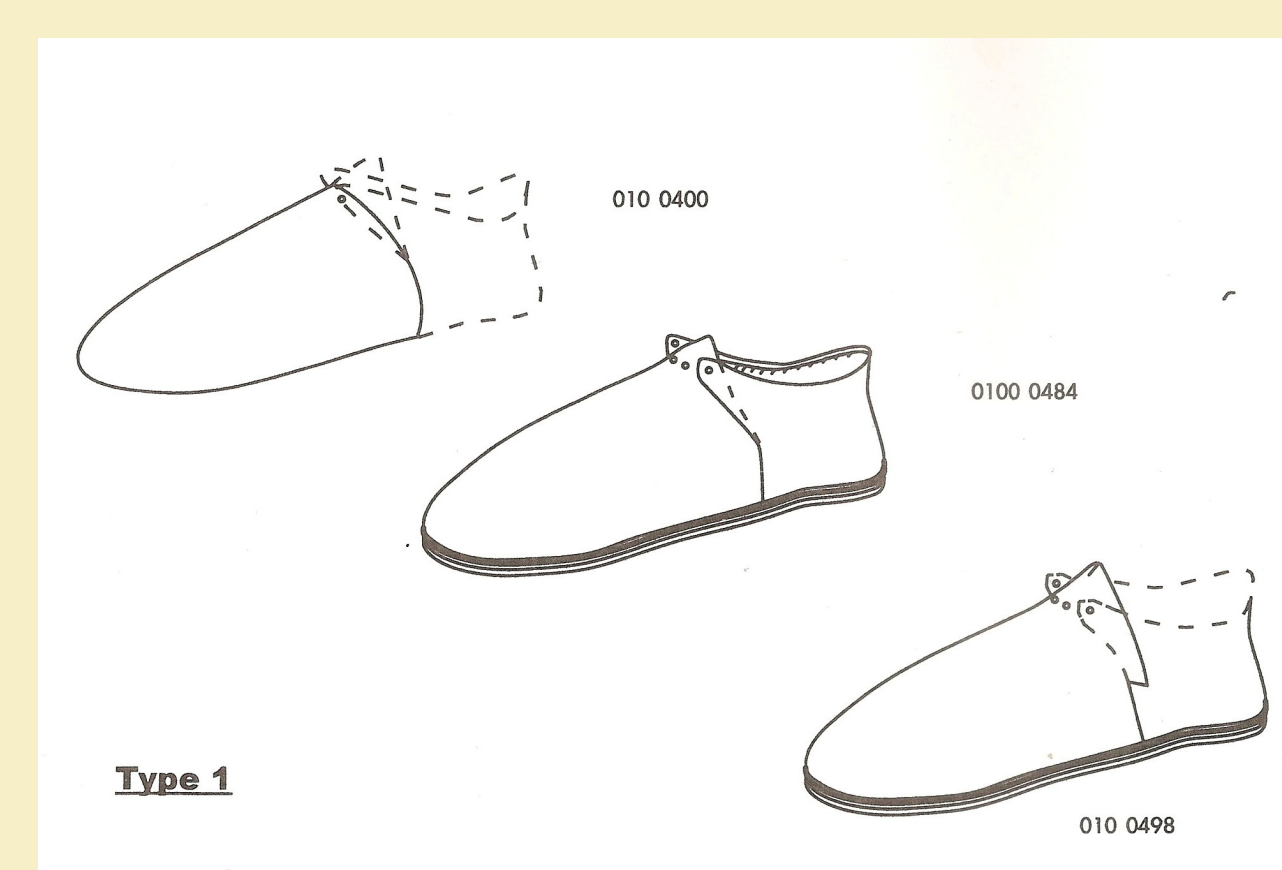
## Worked bone



Ninety-six pieces of bone, horn and ivory were recovered, an unusually large assemblage for a “non-workshop” type of site. Many decorated, ornamental plaques were recovered, likely belonging to hunting firearms (muquet, arquebus, pistols); their materials and traits suggest a late 16th century and early 17th century German influence (Nuremberg, Augsburg).

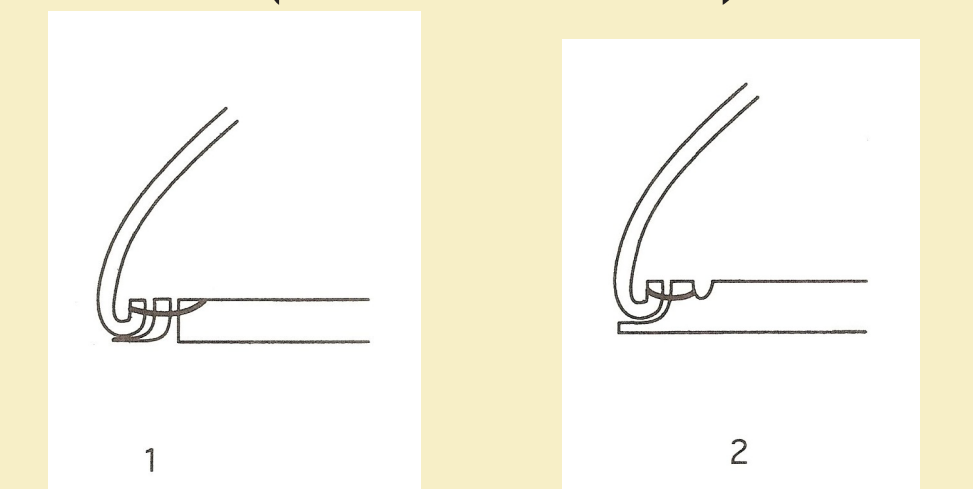
## Leather

The humid depositional environment at the site favored the conservation of leather. Ninety-eight lots, dating to the early sixteenth century, were recovered : purses, holsters or cases, sheaths, offcuts and shoes.

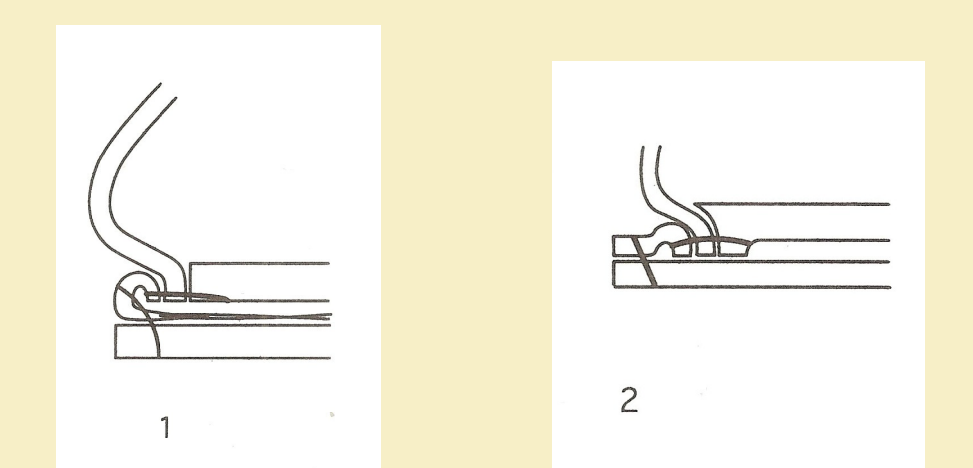


Type of shoe close to Dutch models (V. Montembault, veronique.montembault@neuf.fr)

A range of elements showing the transition between two technical traditions (V. Montembault)



Section view of two variants of turnshoe construction (before 1520)



Section view of two variants of welted stitching, typical of modern shoemaking