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## **Session-Session**

**7**

**PROTOHISTORY and ETHNOHISTORY  
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## **Bone artefacts from Colonial sites of Martinique (1645-1902): Between imports and local crafts.**

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### **Abstract**

For fifteen years, French archaeological investigations in Martinique allow a fresh look at daily life in the past, from French settlement to the years that followed the abolition of slavery. The study of bone artefacts from the sites of Cour d'Appel-Rue Schoelcher (Fort-de-France), Allée Pécoul (Saint-Pierre), Habitation Perinelle (Saint-Pierre) and Maison Coloniale de Santé (Saint-Pierre) help us to better understand the close connection between France and its colonies, through society and customs. People maintained this "*savoir-vivre à la française*" though they lived 6000 kilometers from mainland France. Besides the bone artefact trade, the discovery of more than 500 fragment from button debris manufacturing together with finished buttons at the Habitation Perinelle site (Saint-Pierre; 1645-1763) confirm the presence of local bone working.

Keywords: Bone artefacts, Martinique, Historical Period, Daily life, trade, local crafts.

### **Résumé**

Depuis une quinzaine d'années, la recrudescence d'opérations archéologique en contexte colonial sur l'île de la Martinique permet de porter un nouveau regard sur la vie quotidienne des populations historiques, de la colonisation européenne aux temps ayant suivi l'abolition de l'esclavage. L'étude du mobilier en os issu des sites de la Cour d'Appel-Rue Schoelcher (Fort-de-France), de l'Allée Pécoul (Saint-Pierre), de l'Habitation Perinelle (Saint-Pierre) et de la Maison Coloniale de Santé (Saint-Pierre) nous aide à mieux cerner les liens étroits existants entre la France et ses colonies à travers les us et coutumes de ces sociétés historiques qui, bien que distants de 6 000 kilomètres, ont gardé ce « savoir-vivre à la française ». Outre ce commerce d'objet fini en os, la découverte de plus de 500 déchets de taille et de boutons finis sur le site de l'habitation Perinelle (Saint-Pierre ; 1645-1763) atteste bien de la présence d'une activité de tabletterie sur cette île.

Mots clés : Mobilier en os, Martinique, Période historique, Vie quotidienne, Commerce, Artisanat local.

### **Resumen**

Desde hace aproximadamente quince años, el recrudescimiento de operaciones arqueológicas en contexto colonial en la isla de Martinica ha permitido renovar la visión de la vida cotidiana de las poblaciones históricas, desde la colonización hasta los tiempos que siguen a la abolición de la esclavitud. El estudio de los artefactos de huesos provenientes de los yacimientos de La Cour d'Appel-Rue Schoelcher (Fort-de-France), L'Allée Pécoul (Saint-Pierre), L'Habitation Perinelle (Saint-Pierre) y La Maison Coloniale de Santé (Saint-Pierre) nos ayuda a entender mejor las estrechas relaciones que existían entre Francia y sus colonias a través de las costumbres de estas sociedades históricas que, si bien alejadas de 6000 kilómetros, conservaron este "savoir-vivre" a la francesa. Además del comercio de objetos acabados, el hallazgo de desechos de talla y de botones inacabados en el yacimiento de L'habitation Perinelle (Saint-Pierre; 1645-1763) se observa la presencia de una actividad de "tabletterie" en la isla de Martinica.

Palabras clave: artefactos de huesos, Martinica, Periodo histórico, Vida cotidiana, Comercio, Artesanía local

## Introduction

Barely studied until now, bone artefacts found in Colonial contexts on the island of Martinique invite us to reexamine the habits and customs of historic populations from European colonization to the post-abolition period (1645-1902). Whether ornamental elements, toilet accessories, game pieces or, kitchen utensils, these objects bear witness to everyday in the past, and are also cultural markers of this multicultural society (French settlers, Religious community members, Enslaved peoples ...) under construction. In this article, we will attempt, thanks to the analysis of bone objects coming from four historical sites, to learn more about the lives of historic populations and the links between France and this colony.

### Study context, sites and material

This study presents over 650 worked bone remains from four archaeological sites. These sites are divided between the city of Saint-Pierre and the city of Fort-de-France: l'Habitation Perrinelle (1645 - 1902), la Cour d'Appel-Rue Schoelcher (1726 – early 20th century), l'Allée Pécol (late 18th/early 19<sup>th</sup> century - 1902) and la Maison Coloniale de Santé (1839-1902). The two towns, located on the west coast of Martinique, were established in the first decades of French colonization and played economic, military and politic roles throughout the colonial period. Saint-Pierre, called "le Petit Paris des Antilles" (the little Paris from West Indies) was indeed a major Antillean trade centre until the early twentieth century (Veuve & Guillaume, 1999; Butel, 2002). As for Fort-de-France, it housed the military fort and became, during the late seventeenth century, the administrative capital of the island (Contour, 1994).

L'Habitation Perrinelle, one of the rare stone buildings dating to Martinique's colonization, was occupied from 1645

until May 8th 1902 when the eruption of Montagne Pelée volcano destroyed the whole town. Excavations carried by Serge Veuve between 1996 and 2001 led to the discovery of the Jesuit castle (1645-1763) that became, in the late eighteenth century, l'Habitation Perrinelle (1775-1902). The slave quarters and the gardens of the plantation were also discovered (Veuve, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2001). More than 1800 zooarchaeological remains were identified as well as 630 worked bones including utilitarian objects and manufacturing waste related to button production.

Excavations carried out by the INRAP in 2012 on the site of La Cour d'Appel – Rue Schoelcher, helped us to better understand the urban evolution of this historic district related to the early colonial administration of Martinique in the second half of the 17th century, until the early 20th century. In addition to the numerous data concerning the configuration of private and administrative buildings of the island (Courthouse, then Internal Affairs), the excavations revealed different constructions probably linked to craft and / or commercial activities. Building plans and initial results from material culture analysis seem to confirm this hypothesis. A total of 184 zooarchaeological remains were discovered, among which five bone artifacts including two handles, two brushes and a hand fan.

The excavation of l'Allée Pécol site, carried out by INRAP in 2013 has uncovered three housing units located in a rich urban residential area. One of these houses, almost entirely excavated, included a main house, associated domestic buildings and a courtyard with a well and pond. The buildings' evolution was documented up until the eruption of Montagne Pelée, which buried all the structures under a thick layer of pumice.

Besides the 8011 remains of vertebrate fauna, this site has contained 14 bone artefacts related to various functions.

Finally, we studied material culture remains from the site of La Maison Coloniale de Santé, the first psychiatric hospital in the French West Indies built in 1839. The site, excavated in the early 90's by Serge Veuve, contained 9 bones objects including clothing items and toilet accessories (Veuve, 1994).

### **Crafts import: the “French etiquette”**

After buttons, toiletry products are the best represented crafts in these collections, especially toothbrushes. The five examples recovered in these sites are simply carved and without decorations. Despite the fact that they are broken at their most useful part, the toothbrushes from Habitation Perrinelle (fig. 1a), la Cour-d'Appel (fig. 1b) and la Maison Coloniale de Santé (fig. 1c) have preserved parts of their heads intact. They were all perforated to three-quarters depth, and then perforated longitudinally. Then, a linen thread was used to sew the pig bristles into each hole. The thread was inserted into a hole then emerged in the last drill hole, closest to the handle, and so on. The frames were generally made from mammalian long bones.

Two of them, recovered from deposits dating from the second half of the nineteenth century, have the inscriptions: "SUPERFINE PARIS" from la Cour-d'Appel (fig. 1b) and "EXTRA-FINE GARANTIE" on the toothbrush discovered at la Maison Coloniale de Santé (fig. 1c). These inscriptions don't concern their brand but rather their qualities, their manufacturing sites, their place of origin place or their wholesaler. This type of inscription does not appear before 1850, confirming the dates obtained for these deposits. We find the same type of inscription on copies fabricated in the Oise department, north

of Paris. Indeed, in the 19th century, numerous orders were taken on by Parisian wholesalers for department workshops, which were specialized in toiletry brushes and they manufactured this kind of product in large quantities. Therefore, it seems that these two copies were imported from Paris and manufactured in the workshops of the Oise department.

Two parasol handles were discovered at the Allée Pécoul site. The first is embossed with a rose and its two leaves. This was made in one piece, from a diaphysis of a radius or tibia of a large mammal. The second example is also carved (fig.2). On its upper part, the decoration is composed of geometric motifs. The lower part has a zoomorphic figure, a greyhound with lowered ears. The handle consists of two parts joined at the second inferior "bead". The quality of the workmanship on this handle is fantastic, but it is not a unique piece. Indeed, the pattern of the greyhound was very fashionable in Paris from 1840 to 1855 (comm. Pers. Michel Hertault). Made in Parisian art workshops, this type of figurine was also available in ivory as seen in a similar copy at the Galliera museum. In the nineteenth century, parasols were fashionable and an important element for sun protection. Indeed, at that time, it was important for a lady of high society to have a pale complexion without recourse, if possible, to make up to stand out from the lower social classes who, from working outside were tanned.

### **Local craft: private factory or a testimony of bones and horns workshop in Martinique?**

Similar to parasols, fans were an important element of dress in the West Indies, as represented in an engraving showing “the Creole suit” (LeClerc &

Dupin, 1779). The discovery of a hand fan on the Cour-d'Appel site confirms this (fig. 3). Many streak marks were observed on the back of this artifact suggesting that it could have been broken during manufacture or sold and used as a fan, even if was unpolished. Although the status of this artifact is still uncertain, the presence of beef horn cores in the same stratigraphic unit and a second bone artifact could support the hypothesis of a bone and horn workshop on this site in the eighteenth century.

Besides, at the Perrinelle plantation, more than 600 remains (between waste and worked bones; fig. 4) from the button industry were recovered, certifying that the entire chaîne opératoire for their production was local. All artefacts are from surveys, excavated in 1996 and 1997, in the south wing of the plantation and in the garden.

These buttons were almost exclusively taken from ribs of large mammals. Regarding the general form of the rib fragments, they were likely cattle ribs as those of horses are too narrow, and almost cylindrical in shape and therefore not appropriate for button production (Barone, 1976). It is possible to observe that only the proximal part was not exploited. The raw materials were likely provided by a butcher who had cut the rib into two or three fragments to separate individual cuts of meat. Then, the sections were split longitudinally with a cleaver. It is easier to work rib fragments when the inner and outer parts are not in one piece, avoiding uncontrollable "breaks". At this site, the artisan chose the best use of raw materials: The edges were not removed and small-sized cuts were made in staggered rows. The discs were produced with a wick in three points, set on a brace. The central spike pierced the bone in one side while the other two points traced the contour to cut the disc. As soon as the disk surface was

considered satisfactory, the worker returned the bones and worked on the other face of the disk by focusing in a central perforation. The buttons were covered with fabric and set in an embossed metal sheath and laced.

A study of the diameter's show predominantly medium-sized buttons and especially between 12 and 14 mm diameter, generally used for trousers or shirts. The same type of reinforcement was recovered during the excavation of the tomb 115 of the Anse Sainte Marguerite cemetery in Guadeloupe found on the chest and pelvis of a man (Courtaud & Romon, 2004) and are often found in the West Indian colonial sites (Tomadini, data from PhD thesis in progress).

Button production in Perrinelle was not unique, five more colonial sites revealed this type of production in the West Indies. Located in Antigua, St Kitts, St Eustatius and Guadeloupe, all these sites, dated from late 18th until middle of 19th centuries, had military functions (Klippel & Price, 2007; Jégouzo, 2011). At Perrinelle, contexts where these remains were discovered are not chronologically defined, and it is impossible to accurately identify the social context in which this button factory was situated. Indeed, during these three centuries of occupation, this site was occupied successively by the Jesuits (1645-1763), a military barracks (1766-1770) and finally by M. Perrinelle (1776-1902). If one refers to the dates of other West Indian sites, this factory may have existed for one of these occupations. However, regarding of the function of these sites, the military occupation at Perrinelle seems to be favored.

## Conclusion

Concerning craft imports, it appears that France and Martinique maintained close commercial and cultural relationships. Imported manufactured objects are from

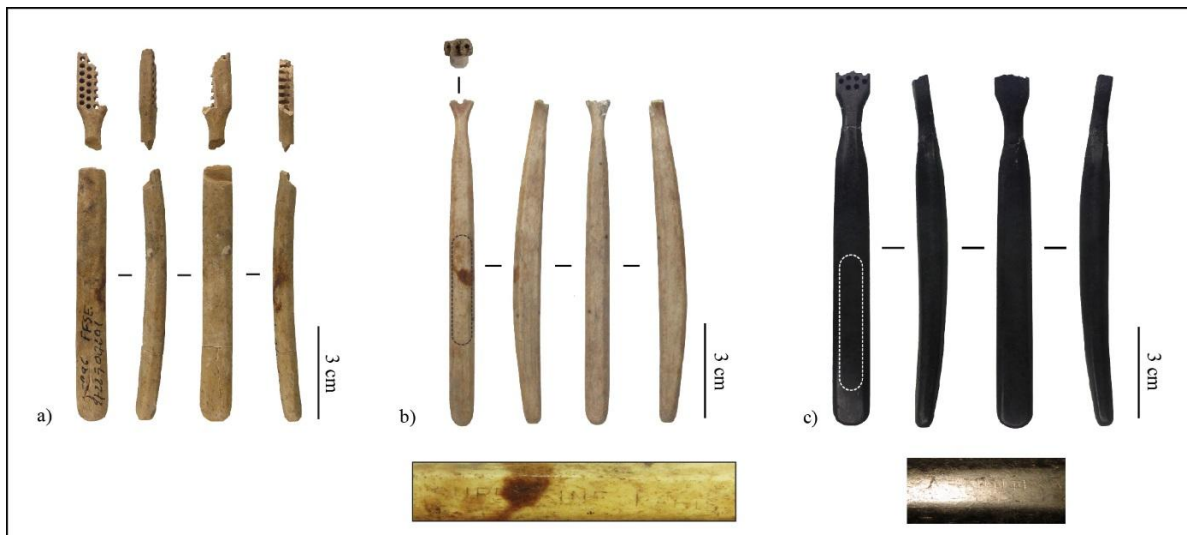
major French production centers, along with those from Parisian art workshops. Nonetheless, those objects were intended for people with privileged social status. Besides this trade of manufactured objects, the discovery of significant worked bone waste in Perrinelle appears to attest to local craft activities during the historic period. Nonetheless, without ceramics to date these contexts, the social framework of these sites remains unknown. The status of the hand fan from the site of la Cour-d'Appel also remains uncertain and we cannot confirm that this was locally produced on Martinique in the colonial period. Does this suggest manufacturing exclusively developed within the private sphere on island and reserved for the site's inhabitants? Or does it represent the knowledge and techniques of European craftsmanship and was an item imported from Europe? Only

ongoing archaeological investigations in historical contexts and continued archival research will allow us to answer these questions and better understand the social and economic status of these bone objects.

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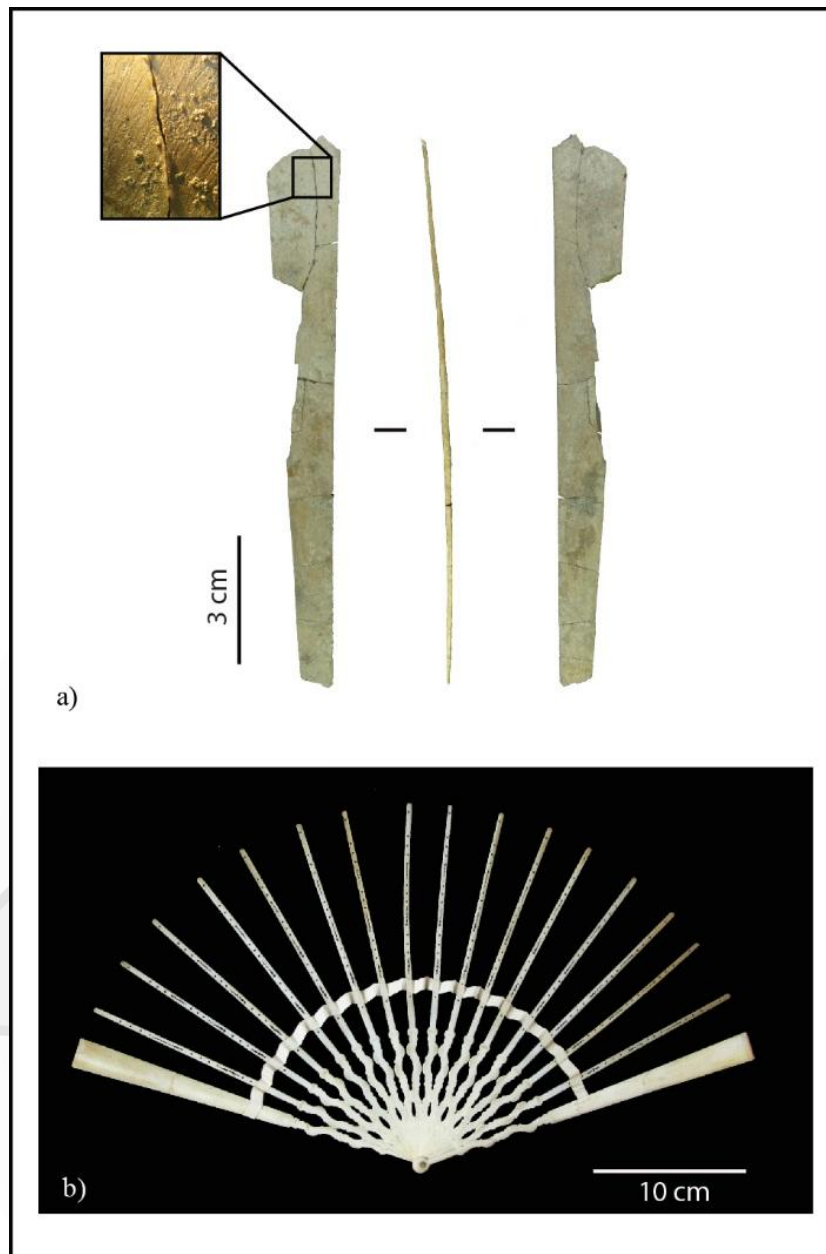


**Figure 1: a) Toothbrush from Habitation Perrinelle (South Wing); b) Toothbrush « SUPERFINE PARIS » from la Cour d'Appel – Rue Schoelcher (US 181– post. 1850); c) Toothbrush "EXTRA-FINE GARANTIE" from La Maison Coloniale de Santé (East dormitories – 1902).**



**Figure 2: Parasol handle, 1840-1855 (US 532, Allée Pécoul).**





**Figure 3: a) Cour-d'Appel's hand fan with streak marks observed on the back (US 152 – 18<sup>th</sup>); b) Bone's fan – 19<sup>th</sup> (Piece n° 46, collection C.H.M.E).**



**Figure 4: Habitation Perrinelle, waste and worked bones (Surveys S1/S2) .**

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