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# The contributions of the settlement to the understanding of the rural societies of Northern Gaul in the 10th century

Édith Peytremann

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# The 10th Century in Western Europe Change and Continuity

edited by  
Igor Santos Salazar  
and Catarina Tente



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# The 10th Century in Western Europe

## Change and Continuity

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Igor Santos Salazar  
and Catarina Tente

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São Gens rock-cut graves necropolis from the 10th century. Celorico da Beira, Portugal. ©Danilo Pavone  
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# The contributions of the settlement to the understanding of the rural societies of Northern Gaul in the 10th century

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## Abstract

The purpose this article is to discuss about the 10th century from archaeological data and especially those concerning rural settlements located in the northern half of France. Settlements with military (clods, sites of height, etc.) or religious (monasteries, priory, etc.) character are not addressed in this study without being ignored. Based on a corpus of 383 sites attesting an occupation in the 10th century, the study attempts to analyze successively the dynamics of occupation, the composition, the topography and the economy of the settlements in order to identify singularities peculiar to this period. The examination of the dynamics is carried out starting from the creations, abandons and duration of the occupations. Through the composition of the settlement, it is particularly the buildings, the equipment, the religious buildings and the burials which are approached. The topographic analysis focuses on the organization of farmstead as well as that of the agglomerations while the analysis of the small finds discovered on the sites makes it possible to sketch hypotheses on the social and economic nature of the habitats.

## Keywords

Northern France; rural settlement; 10th century; social distinction; possession.

## 1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the 10th century has been the subject of several archaeological studies in France rural settlements, thanks in particular to the development of preventive archeology, which has led to the acquisition of many new data. Indeed, before this revival in which this book is inscribed, the 10th century was mainly perceived through a particular type of site, “aristocratic or seigneurial settlements”, being one of its forms, the motte, was particularly studied (Bourgeois 2006).

In the late 1980s, the commemoration of the advent of Hugh Capet was a pretext for the holding of a major international conference Hugh Capet, *La France de l'an mil* bringing together historians, archaeologists and historians of art. This meeting is at the origin of several publications taking stock of the 10th century (Barral i Altet 1987; Barral i Altet *et al.* 1991; Iogna-Prat and Picard 1990; Parisse and Barral i Altet 1992; Riché *et al.* 1987; Zimmermann 1987). It is in the volume devoted to *Paysage monumental* that Gabrielle Demians of Archimbaud draws up a report on the village and the rural settlement (Démians d'Archimbaud 1987). His study shows that the archaeological data in 1987 are still scarce and question researchers who are often prisoners of the concepts defined by historians from written sources, such as *encellulement* where the importance of the church and castle are put forward for the “stabilization” of the settlement and its transformation into “village”. The author proposes to designate the settlements found as “protovillages”. Several regional contributions illustrate the different sites then known. It is in another volume from this same conference that Patrick Périn proposes a radically different analysis of settlement sites and in opposition to the hypotheses formulated by Robert Fossier and currently

accepted (Périn 1992). If in the 1990s, the publications dedicated to the rural habitat multiply in France, they remain most often monographic or regional value like the catalog consecrated to the *Île-de-France de Clovis à Hugues Capet* in which Jean Chapelot raises a synthesis on rural settlement (Chapelot 1993). On this occasion, he particularly insists on the abandonment of the settlements in the 10th century that he puts in relation with the introduction of the feudal system. Jean-Marie Pesez questioned also this phenomenon of desertion of habitats in his review of the state of archaeological research on the northern French settlements of the High Middle Ages, proposed at the first conference of the Rurulia association, held in 1995 in Prague (Pesez 1996). It is only from the 2000s that some syntheses on settlement in the 10th century are proposed (Zadora 2009; Peytremann 2010; Peytremann 2014) The main results show not only that desertions are not systematic in the 10th but that the sites are multiform and the levels of wealth in finds are extremely various. Séverine Hurard's thesis on *Archéologie des élites Rurales ordinaires dans le Bassin parisienne (III<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, although it does not focus on the 10th century, nevertheless provides innovative elements for thinking about rural societies through their settlements (Hurard 2017).

Despite all these works, the perception of the 10th century through settlements remains difficult insofar as the partitioning of archaeological studies (rural archeology, castral, religious, fortifications, etc.) does not allow to have a vision overall, with the exception of the synthetic work done by Christopher Loveluck at European level (Loveluck 2013: 215-235, 286-290).

In this study, rural societies of the 10th century will be approached through the prism of the rural settlement devoid of military or religious functions (the famous partitioning of studies!). After a critical examination of the corpus available, the components, the topography and the finds of the settlements are studied in order to propose hypotheses on these societies of Northern Gaul.

## 2. The corpus of occupied sites in the 10th century and its chronology

The corpus on which this study is based mainly consists of sites that have been the subject of an archaeological excavation, in the context of preventive archeology, and more rarely in that of programmed archeology. This means that in the vast majority of cases, the sites are not studied in their entirety. This corpus is also distinguished by the fact that the bulk of excavated sites have been definitively abandoned. The sites which have survived and which are currently included in villages or current towns are a minority, although progressively French archaeological research is taking them into account better and better (Peytremann 2019). The quality of the dating of the corpus is variable insofar as it depends on the state of the research on ceramics. Nor can this corpus claim to be exhaustive, as it is difficult at this supra-regional level to centralize the data. In addition, the figures used in this study correspond more to a trend than to a quantified reality.

On a corpus of 714 sites of rural settlements located in the northern half of France, 383 sites, or 53.6%, attest an occupation in the 10th century. Several possibilities are identified concerning the chronology of the occupations: the occupation of the site ends at the 10th century (112 sites), the occupation of the site starts at the 10th century (88 sites) or, last possibility, the 10th century is integrated with the duration of occupation of the site (183) (Figure 4.1). The proportion of sites abandoned in the 10th century compared to the entire corpus is 16%<sup>1</sup> while the percentage of creation is around 12. These first figures relativize the generally expressed hypothesis of a massive abandonment of rural settlements in favor of new creations associated with a place of worship or power (Fossier 1982, 160-163). The data collected over the past twenty years have made it possible to underline the duration of occupation of the habitats, since 25% of the sites of the high Middle Ages (4th-12th century) have a duration of occupation, which integrates the 10th century. Only a dozen sites are only occupied during the 10th

<sup>1</sup> This figure is slightly lower than figures previously published from a smaller body of 286 sites (Peytremann 2003, vol. 1: 266).

century. Comparisons between the different regions show a large number of dropouts in Île-de-France (Figure 4.1b). If this information had already been underlined, it appears that with a larger corpus of sites, the phenomenon is less important. Recent works by François Gentili in the Paris region show that the phenomenon of abandonment certainly starts in the course of the 10th century but continues until the end of the 11th century (Gentili 2017: 261). The observation concerning the short duration of occupation (one to two centuries) of settlements created in the 10th century, carried out in a previous study (Peytremann 2003: 273), is confirmed by the new data.

The chronological examination of the rural settlements attesting an occupation in the 10th century indicates a relative continuity of the latter, characterized by a large number of abandonments, with however important regional variations, and creations in rather large numbers.

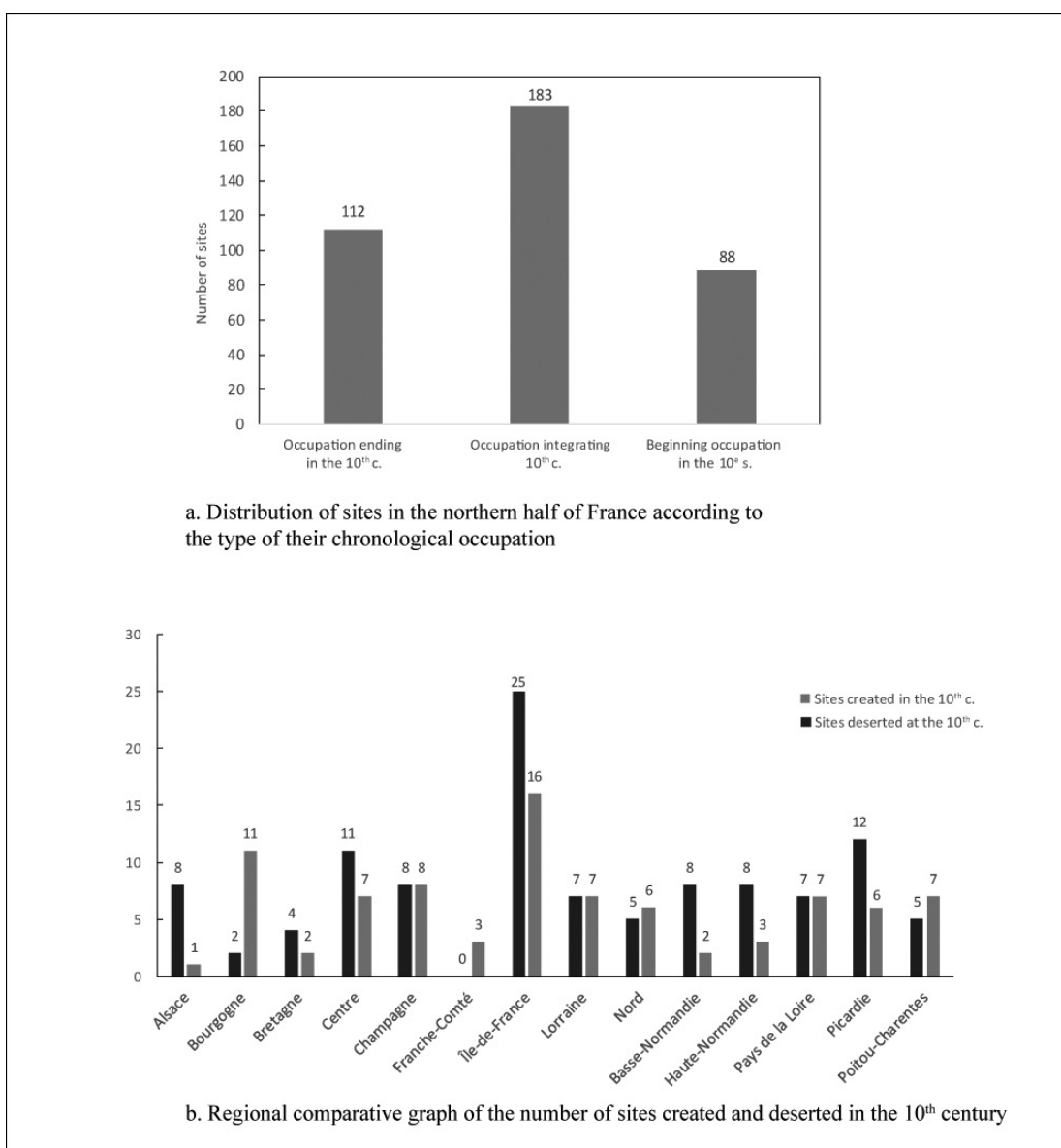


Figure 4.1. Analytical graphs of the corpus of sites (© E. Peytremann).

### 3. Composition of settlements

The examination of settlement components makes it possible to identify more concretely the continuities and breaks that reflect changes affecting both lifestyle, agrarian techniques and social organization.

#### 3.1 The buildings

Four types of construction coexist (Figure 4.2). Buildings built on wooden posts according to a plan of one to four naves, possess for some, two or three pieces. It is from the 9th century but especially

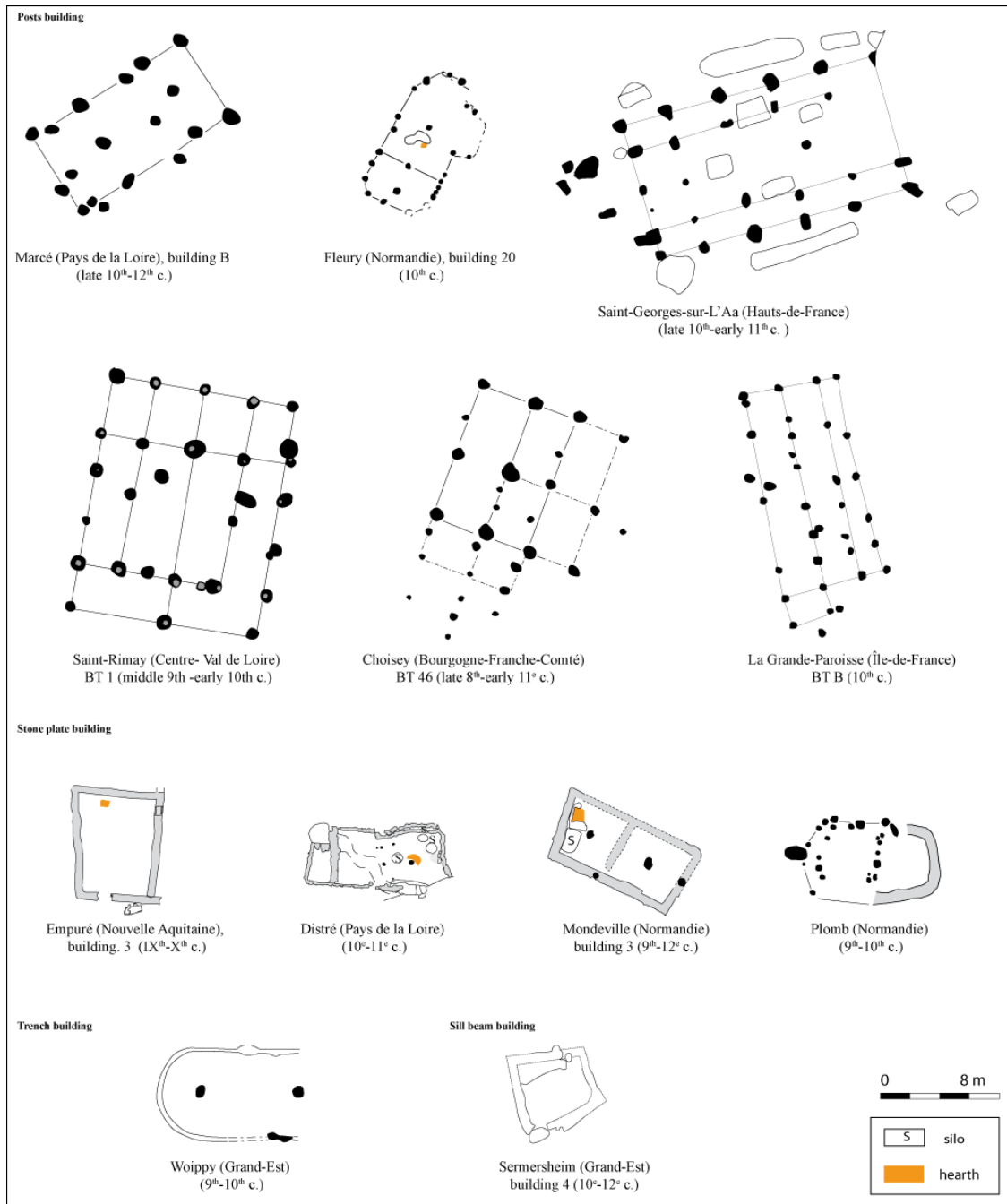


Figure 4.2. Examples of building dated to 10th century (© E. Peytremann).

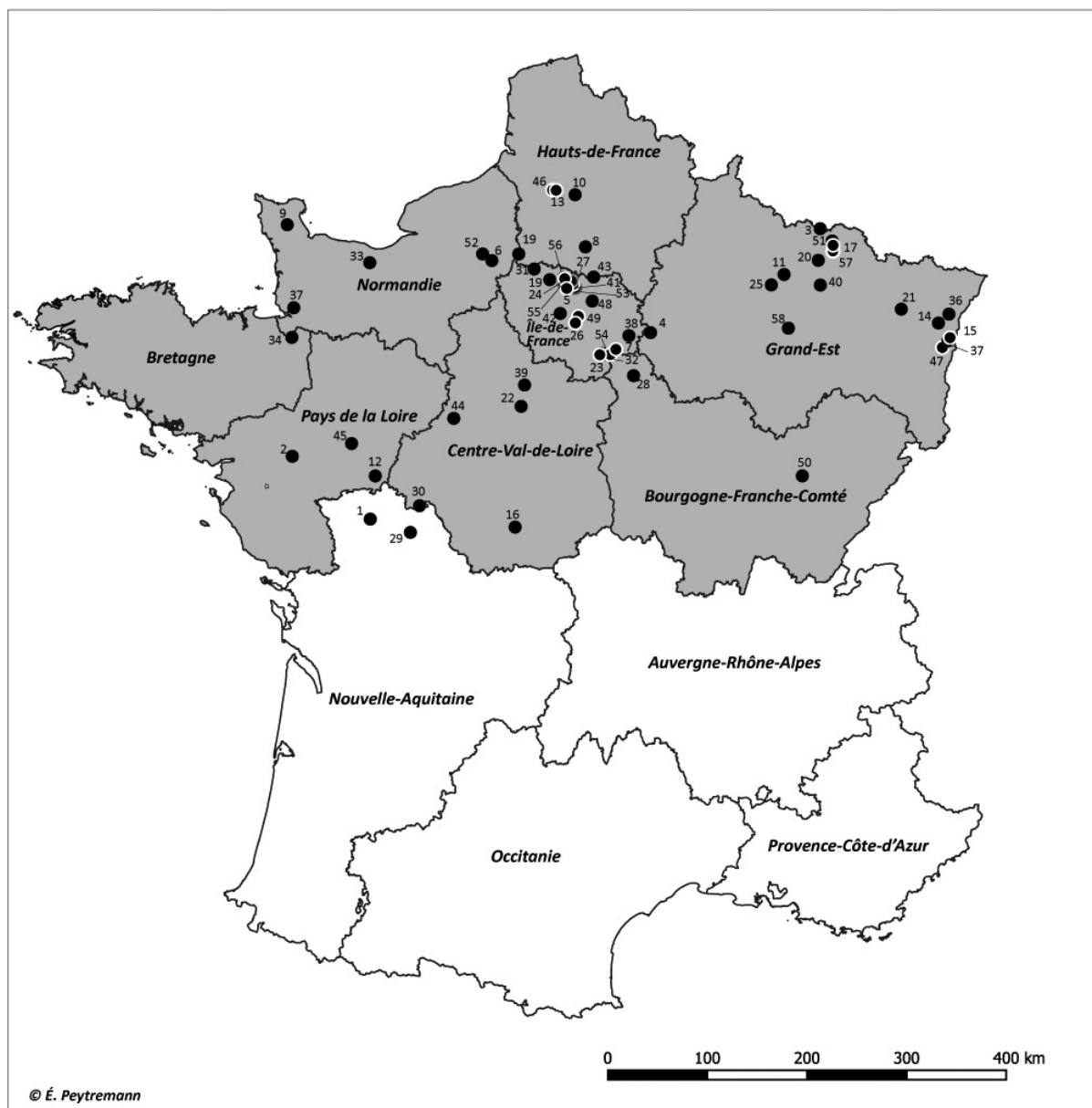


Figure 4.3. Location of sites mentioned in the chapter (© E. Peytremann).

in the 10th-12th centuries that constructions with three or four naves or complex buildings develop<sup>2</sup> (Figure 4.3) (Peytremann 2013a). More generally, it appears that buildings have a larger area than those of previous centuries. The constructions on sill-beam remain little attested. On the other hand, it is difficult to know if these few occurrences are related to a weak use of this construction technique or to the frequent erosion of the sites. Structures on wall-trenches are more particularly attested in Lorraine<sup>3</sup>. Construction on dry stone-footing or clay-related flashings is more common in western

<sup>2</sup> For example: Saint-Rimay (Joly 2006) in the Centre-Val de Loire, Louvres (Gentili 2017), Saint-Pathus (Hurard 2011), Servon, La Grande-Paroisse (Petit 2009) in Île-de-France, etc.

<sup>3</sup> For example: Thionville-Veymerange, Trois Domaines in the Grand Est (Blaising 2005)

France. They may have two or three rooms and be equipped with a wall fireplace<sup>4</sup>. The plans of the buildings, generally rectangular [Mondeville (Lorren 1989), Louvres, etc.], sometimes have one or two semi-circular apses [Plomb in Normandy (Carpentier 2007), etc.]. A last type of building can be mentioned. These are buildings on posts or sill-beam with a cellar dug in the ground. These buildings appear at the beginning of the 10th century. They are currently known in Alsace<sup>5</sup> and in Île-de-France<sup>6</sup> (Peytremann *et al.* 2022). It should also be noted that the use of plaster on wattle in the region of Ile-de-France has replaced daub (Gentili 2017: 262). The identification of the function of these constructions, in the absence of preserved soil level, remains always delicate. In a number of cases, however, it has been possible to offer the functions of dwelling (Saint-Rimay, Saint-Pathus, etc.), stables (Trois Domaines in Lorraine) or sheepfold (Barbuise, in Grand East) (Guicheteau 2015: 185), mixed buildings, housing under the same roof men and animals, or attics for small buildings and barns (Bonneuil in Île-de-France).

### 3.2 *The sunken-featured buildings*

These constructions are attested in the 10th century on many sites throughout the northern half of France, with the exception, however, of the Breton tip and the Pays-de-la-Loire where these structures are nonexistent. The majority of 10th century SFB have two axial postholes and sometimes stone walls. The function of these huts remains difficult to identify despite the large number of structures discovered. Recurrent assumptions make weaving workshops, annexes for storage or parking small animals. They are found in agricultural units as well as in specific activity areas. Some decrease in its employment is noted from the 10th century in some areas.

The rapid examination of the buildings of the 10th century reflects an improvement of the building with more spacious constructions or very imposing for some, the occasional use of window glass and the introduction of element of comfort such as the chimney or at least the wall fireplace in some cases.

### 3.3 *Equipment structures*

Among the most frequently discovered equipment structures are the water wells, whose construction techniques vary: in dry stone (Vitry-sur-Orne in the Grand Est, Marigny-Marmande in the Centre Val-de-Loire), wooden using corner-timbering or using hollow tree trunk (Sermersheim in the Great East). Wells are located both within farmstead, in specific activity areas and in public spaces (place). More and more latrines are identified<sup>7</sup>, probably reflecting an improvement in comfort.

Food ovens are particularly well represented in Île-de-France, Picardy and Champagne. Largely dug underground from wall of a pit, in the 10th century they have a thinner floor that probably indicates better control of the source of heat. It is also at this time that the big ovens are the most numerous (Bruley-Chabot 2003). Silos and granaries on posts are not only present in farmstead, but are also frequently attested in specific activity areas where they are sometimes the only types of structures thus forming storage areas. The latter are known from previous centuries and a number of sites have silage zones with more than 50 silos<sup>8</sup>. The storage capacity of silos is also greater than in previous centuries (Peytremann 2013b). In some regions, a new storage mode appears. These are undergrounds in which are stored the food (Marigny-Brizay in New Aquitaine, Distré in the Pays de la Loire, etc.).

<sup>4</sup> Mondeville (Peytremann 2003), Distré in the Pays de la Loire (Gentili and Valais 2007) or La Grande-Paroisse (Petit 2009, p. 32 et 41).

<sup>5</sup> Pfulgriesheim, Osthouse, Ergersheim and Erstein.

<sup>6</sup> Saint-Pathus, Rungis, Villiers-le-Sec.

<sup>7</sup> Démuin in Picardie, Florange in the Grand Est, Bonneuil in Île-de-France and Poupry in the Centre-Val-de-Loire), etc.

<sup>8</sup> Mesnil-Aubry, Roissy-en-France, Bonneuil, Tremblay *Le Chemin des Ruisseaux* in Île-de-France, Dury, Chevières in Hauts-de-France, Distré in the Pays de la Loire, Poupry in Centre-Val de Loire, etc.



The 10th century watermills currently known, are generally located away from settlements as evidenced by the remains found on the sites of Audun-le-Tiche in the Great East, Thervey in Burgundy-Franche-Comté and Colomby in Normandy (Jaccottey and Rollier 2016).

### **3.4 Burials, cemetery and religious buildings**

Finally, three elements complete the composition of settlements in the 10th century. They are burials installed in the settlement outside of the cemetery, the cemetery and buildings with funerary and / or religious function. Burial practice in the domestic context, now well known, has been documented since the middle of the 7th century and generally continues until the end of the 10th century. The topography and number of burials is variable. The burial can indeed be isolated, installed within a cluster of a dozen other burials or within a larger funeral group. These burials are often installed along a path or ditch as in Pfulgriesheim (Peytremann and Réveillas 2015) or in the filling of abandoned structures. Examples of 10th century sites associating a religious and / or funerary building are not common. Some sites have a building whose date of foundation is prior to the 10th century<sup>9</sup>. In other cases, the building is contemporary with the occupation<sup>10</sup>. These buildings are systematically associated with a cemetery.

The different components of the settlement testify not only to a great diversity especially in the constructions and the organizations, an improvement of the comfort but also an increase of the capacities of storage and cooking. The singularity of the corpus to rest mainly on abandoned sites unfortunately does not allow estimating the importance of religious and / or funerary establishment within the settlement. Many, however, are the sites that are totally lacking.

## **4. Topography of settlements**

The most common forms of settlement in the 10th century are settlement grouped loosely or densely. Isolated farms remain a minority nevertheless present in Lorraine, Brittany, etc. Generally, the settlements consist not only of a farmstead, with variable sizes (from 350 to 2500m<sup>2</sup>) (Peytremann 2006) but also of specific activity areas that generally include structures related to agricultural and / or artisanal activities. (Peytremann 2018: 288-302) and sometimes a religious building and a cemetery. Different organizations have been identified. Farmsteads can indeed take place in elongated plots that are arranged in parallel (Florange in the the Great East, Malay-le-Grand Les Pâquis in Burgundy Franche-Comté) or perpendicularly from a traffic lane (Figure 4.4) (Vitry-sur-Orne, Demange-aux-Eaux in the Great East (Gérard 2012), Val-de-Reuil in Normandy). Small ditches or fences materialize often the plots, especially in the west of France. The organization of the farmstead around a central courtyard within an enclosure, delimited, again, by a ditch or even a fence, or a plot is also well attested (Saint-Rimay and Sorigny in the Centre-Val-de-Loire, Prény in the Great East) (Figure 4.4). This type of arrangement around a courtyard has continued since at least the Merovingian period. The courses vary in size according to the importance of the property and the social level of the inhabitants (Peytremann 2013a; Hurard 2017: 249-250). The setting up of new plots is relatively frequent in the 10th century, particularly in Brittany or Île-de-France. These creations, however, should not be overestimated and often have a local significance (Watteaux 2008: 524-525). In parallel with the development of new plots and ditches to delimit spaces (enclosures), the establishment of new roads axes of varying importance (Etrechet in the Centre-Val-de-Loire. Some oval-shaped enclosures<sup>11</sup> containing a post-building are sometimes interpreted as representative of some elites. Road junctions continue to be privileged locations for habitats.

<sup>9</sup> Tournedos-sur-Seine, Mondeville en Normandie, Saleux in the Hauts-de-France, Serris et Poigny in Île-de-France et Imling in Grand-Est (Peytremann 2003; Catteddu 2009).

<sup>10</sup> La Grande-Paroisse en Île-de-France (Petit 2009) et Airvault en Nouvelle Aquitaine.

<sup>11</sup> Especially on the sites of Frépillon, Villiers-le-Bel, La Grande Paroisse, Serris or Marolle-sur-Seine in Île-de-France.



Distré (Pays de la Loire) (8th-10th c.)

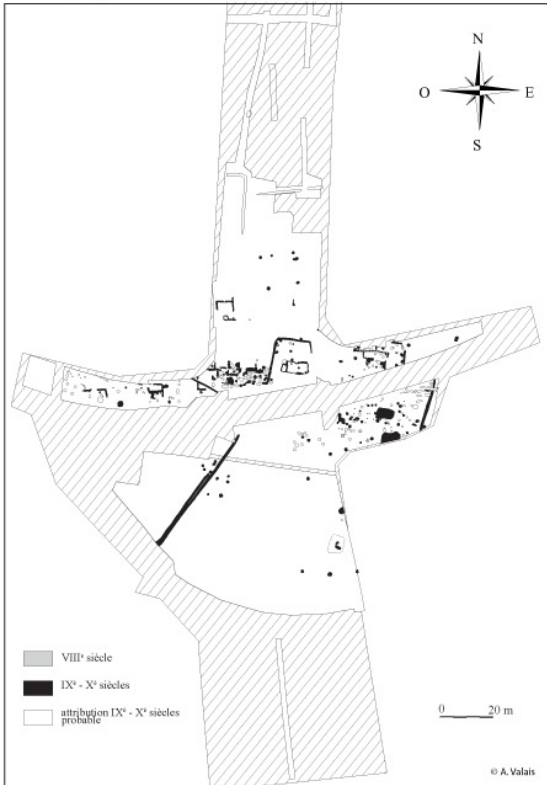


Figure 4.4. Examples of sites dated to 10th century (© E. Peytremann).

## 5. Economic activities and social levels

Examination of exhumed small finds brings new elements to the knowledge of rural societies of the 10th century. The find is more abundant from the 9th century but even more in the 10th century, especially the metal small finds. What is indeed noticeable for this period is an increase of the tooling indicating by the same a greater specialization by profession. The tools required for the textile industry, which was widespread before the 10th century, knew little change. Note, however, the development of glass smoothers and that of the use of the weaving loom with legs and double bar at the expense of the vertical loom weight, which continues nevertheless to use. The craft of wood, fur, as on the site of Dieue-sur-Meuse (Great East) where the squirrel skin has been worked (Rodet-Belarbi and Gazenbeek 2016), leather and metal is more visible within the settlements. The work of the stone can also be cited as the manufacture of grindstones attested on the site of Distré (Gentili and Valais 2007). This visibility tends to show that a certain number of settlements include farms as well as workshops and dwellings of artisans. Regarding agriculture, it turns out that most of the discoveries of plowshares and / or iron plows<sup>12</sup> date back to the 10th century. The majority of sickles, spades, hoes, pruners or forks found in rural habitats date back to the 10th century. The equestrian equipment also undergoes transformations with the appearance of the horseshoes and the collar of shoulder, which allows an improvement of the traction. A copy has been unearthed on the site of the Grande-Paroisse in Île-de-France (Petit 2009: 130-133). The spur discoveries in a settlement context are, again, more numerous<sup>13</sup>. Some of this equestrian equipment show a particularly neat realization such as the damascened horse bit discovered on the site of La Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin in the Centre-Val de Loire region. Among the most frequently discovered finds on the sites, note the presence of weapons for military or hunting purposes. Generally, it is arrowheads and spearheads. It should be noted that generally, sites that have delivered abundant metal tools are also those on which equestrian or armament elements have been discovered. Monetary discoveries on 10th century settlement sites are, again, significantly larger but not abundant. Finally, the ornaments and accessories of the metal garment are generally more common (fibulae, ring, etc.). Another type of object, the glass, ceramic or stone lamps, are also mentioned more often.

At the scale of the northern half France, it is unfortunately not possible to analyze data from archaeozoological and carpological studies as the regional differences are important.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Diversity of occupations

At the end of this brief study, one of the most striking results is the extreme diversity of rural occupations, probably accentuated by a greater visibility of the spatialization of settlements. At the various military and residential establishments, generally associated with elites and religious and residential institutions (abbeys, monasteries, priory, etc.) add a whole range of establishments, which goes from the isolated establishment to the village through smaller groupings. Within these main distinctions, various cases can be presented as isolated elite settlements organized or not around a court but generally delimited by an enclosure, materialized by a ditch or a palisade (Saint-Rimay, Pourpy). These elite establishments can sometimes also take place within a group of farmsteads such as in La Grande-Paroisse or Saint-Pathus where the religious function is advanced for the elite establishment (Hurard 2017: 364-365). The topography of the occupations itself is variable. Organizations in row village (Vitry-sur-Orne, Tournedos-sur-Seine, Dury etc.) (Figure 4.5), majority, alongside more nuclear arrangement as in

<sup>12</sup> Saint-Sylvain-d'Anjou « Les Grandes Valinières » in the Pays de la Loire, Malay-le-Grand in Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, Varennes-sur-Seine, Villepinte et Bonneuil-en-France in Île-de-France.

<sup>13</sup> Châtenay-sur-Seine « La Rigoulotte », La Grande-Paroisse, Serris, Le Mesnil-Aubry, Marines and Lieusaint in Île-de-France, Pfulgriesheim in Grand-Est, Gisors in Normandie, etc.

Mondeville, Pfulgriesheim or Distré. Within these villages or hamlets, again there is a great diversity with the presence or not of specialized activity areas (Sermersheim, Tournedos), scattered burials or even cemetery (La Grande-Paroisse, Mondeville) (Figure 4.5), buildings religious, or places. Diversity observe also in buildings, whose plans are varied even if there is a certain standardization of buildings complex plan.

### **6.2 Improved comfort**

Another sensitive result, that of highlighting the increase in buildings confort. The buildings are better and can have cellars and some are equipped with wall hearth and has glazed openings. It seems likely that these improvements are due to the diffusion of architectural practice in vogue among the rural upper elites, within the ordinary elites. The mention of latrines at several sites probably contributes to the same element of diffusion of comfort elements.

### **6.3 Increased level of equipment**

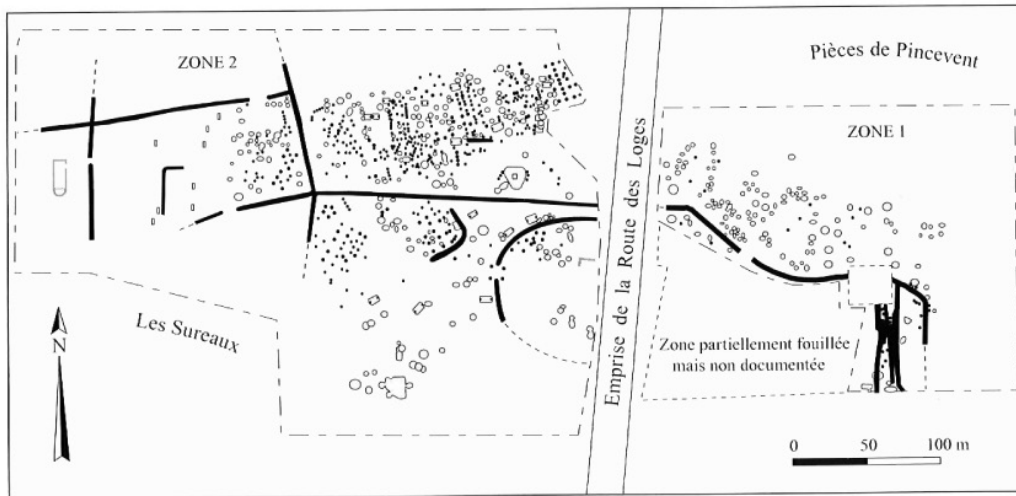
Another aspect revealed by this study, the improvement of the level of agricultural and artisanal equipment. The much more abundant presence of iron tools but also establishments with forges and even reduction infrastructures testify to the importance of the development of metallurgy since the 8th century, even if it is true that it is generally the sites with elite characters that have the most metal find. Moreover, the diversity of the tools compared to previous centuries tends to show the presence of artisans specialized as well in the work of wood, leather, fur, textile as metal in the village. It is also from the 10th century that there is evidence of technological improvements (modernization of sickles, horseshoes, etc.). More spur discoveries from the 10th century indicate a likely increase in the number of riders. The more abundant luminaire on the sites also contributes to this improvement.

### **6.4 Increased storage capacity**

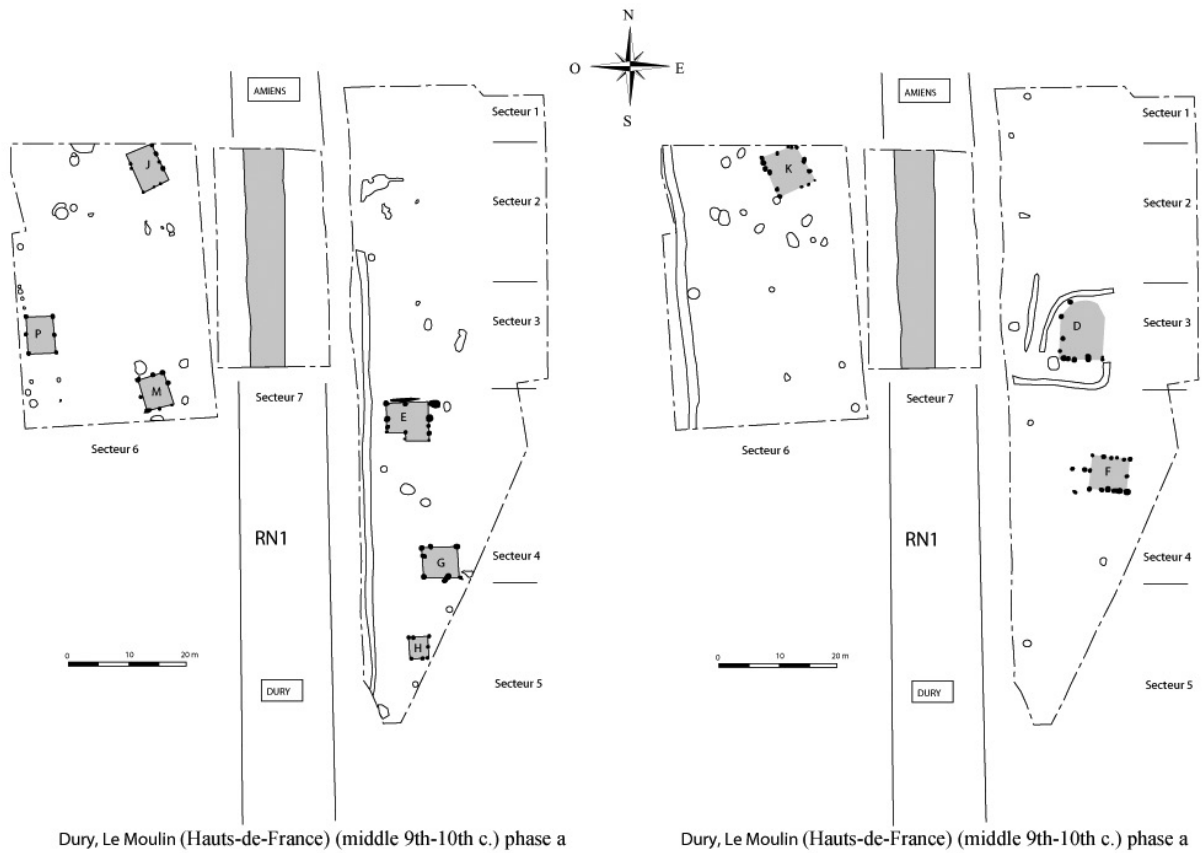
Here again, the study shows that from the 10th century the number of silos or granaries within establishments and / or farmsteads increases as their capacity testifying to a hierarchy of society (Sahlins and Clastres 1976) and improved farming techniques. This increase also shows to a change of mentality, which finds a resonance in the written documentation a little later according to the study of Nicolas Perreux (Perreux 2022).

All these elements show a rural society in the 10th century attached to the possession and social distinction that is displayed not only through his residence, but also by his dietary, hunting, playful and military practices. These last ones also testify of a more violent society where clashes are frequent. The development of fortified rural sites (*motte*, *castrum*, etc.), not studied here, confirms this observation. Various signs point to an increase in wealth, particularly from agricultural production and probably inequalities, and a transformation of commercial practices with increased use of money, including in rural areas. The indices are weak from only the studied corpus of sites but, added to the monographic studies of the churches, the development of the churches in the 10th century also constitutes an index of enrichment. The development of monasteries and the growth of their possessions is another indicator.

Finally, the image of rural societies of the 10th century, revealed by the archaeological study of the settlements, is close to that given by the study of the written documentation even if the fuzziness and the sharpness are done on different points.



La Grande-Paroisse (Île-de-France) (10th c.)



Dury, Le Moulin (Hauts-de-France) (middle 9th-10th c.) phase a

Dury, Le Moulin (Hauts-de-France) (middle 9th-10th c.) phase a

Figure 4.5. Examples of sites dated to 10th century (© E. Peytremann).

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