

An offprint from

Bronze Age Connections
Cultural Contact in
Prehistoric Europe

Edited by Peter Clark

Oxbow Books
Oxford and Oakville

© Oxbow Books 2009
ISBN 978-1-84217-348-0

Contents

List of contributors	vii
1. Introduction: Building New Connections <i>Peter Clark</i>	1
2. Encompassing the Sea: ‘Maritories’ and Bronze Age maritime interactions <i>Stuart Needham</i>	12
3. From Picardy to Flanders: Transmanche connections in the Bronze Age <i>Jean Bourgeois and Marc Talon</i>	38
4. British immigrants killed abroad in the seventies: The rise and fall of a Dutch culture <i>Liesbeth Theunissen</i>	60
5. The Canche Estuary (Pas-de-Calais, France) from the early Bronze Age to the <i>emporium</i> of Quentovic: A traditional trading place between south east England and the continent <i>Michel Philippe</i>	68
6. Looking forward: Maritime contacts in the first millennium BC <i>Barry Cunliffe</i>	80
7. Copper mining and production at the beginning of the British Bronze Age <i>Simon Timberlake</i>	94
8. The demise of the flint tool industry <i>Chris Butler</i>	122
9. Land at the other end of the sea? Metalwork circulation, geographical knowledge and the significance of British/Irish imports in the Bronze Age of the Low Countries <i>David Fontijn</i>	129
10. The master(y) of hard materials: Thoughts on technology, materiality and ideology occasioned by the Dover boat <i>Mary W Helms</i>	149
11. Exploring the ritual of travel in prehistoric Europe: The Bronze Age sewn-plank boats in context <i>Robert Van de Noort</i>	159
12. In his hands and in his head: The Amesbury Archer as a metalworker <i>Andrew Fitzpatrick</i>	176

5. The Canche Estuary (Pas-de-Calais, France) from the early Bronze Age to the *emporium* of Quentovic: A traditional landing place between south-east England and the continent

Michel Philippe

The Quentovic *emporium* was founded in the Canche Estuary sometime in the 6th century AD. It was the hub of an active maritime trading world, and one of the busiest ports of the Merovingian kingdom of Neustria, and later the Carolingian Empire. It traded with other centres of the same type along the Friesian coasts, such as Dorestad at the mouth of the Rhine, and ports in the British Isles like Hamwic and Lundenwic. During the 7th century AD, it lay on the main route taken by travellers from the island of Britain to Rome, and was also one of the main customs posts for these states. A study of contemporary writings reveals that this port was the counterpart of Dorestad (Lebecq 1991); goods and travellers, moving westwards and towards central Europe, *en route* for the Atlantic and Mediterranean worlds, had to pass through Quentovic, whereas those moving eastwards had to travel via Dorestad. These two ports were thus closely linked by the Strait of Dover which acted as a sort of dividing line.

One may discern, through the earliest writings, that these ports were part of a system of sea routes, themselves connecting with river and road networks, which were the primary means of transporting goods and people (Lebecq 1994).

In prehistoric Europe also, particularly since the beginning of the Bronze Age and the

rapid growth of metal circulation, exchange relations involved cultural contacts (Clark 2004a). These exchange relations imply that there were regular landing places to which port facilities were attached, which should probably be imagined as natural beaching points. They were no doubt well-known to navigators and linked to each other through routes that were carefully memorised by sailors.

In societies that had no form of writing, the current state of archaeology does not yet permit a precise study of the historical geography of the traditional maritime routes around the Strait of Dover. Despite this limitation, imposed by the lack of documentation, it seems possible, as an initial approach, to look at the numerous pieces of evidence recovered from the estuary of the River Canche and to identify it as a strategic hub for one of these routes, a traditional-landing place for people and cargoes. Its foundation dates back at least to the prehistoric navigators of the Bronze Age.

The aim of this text is to present the data on the basis of which I can advance this suggestion, and to explore a few hypotheses that could explain why this estuary was involved in cross-Channel contact for such a long time. Space does not allow an exhaustive review of all sites and evidence from the estuary; I will simply present the sites that provide evidence

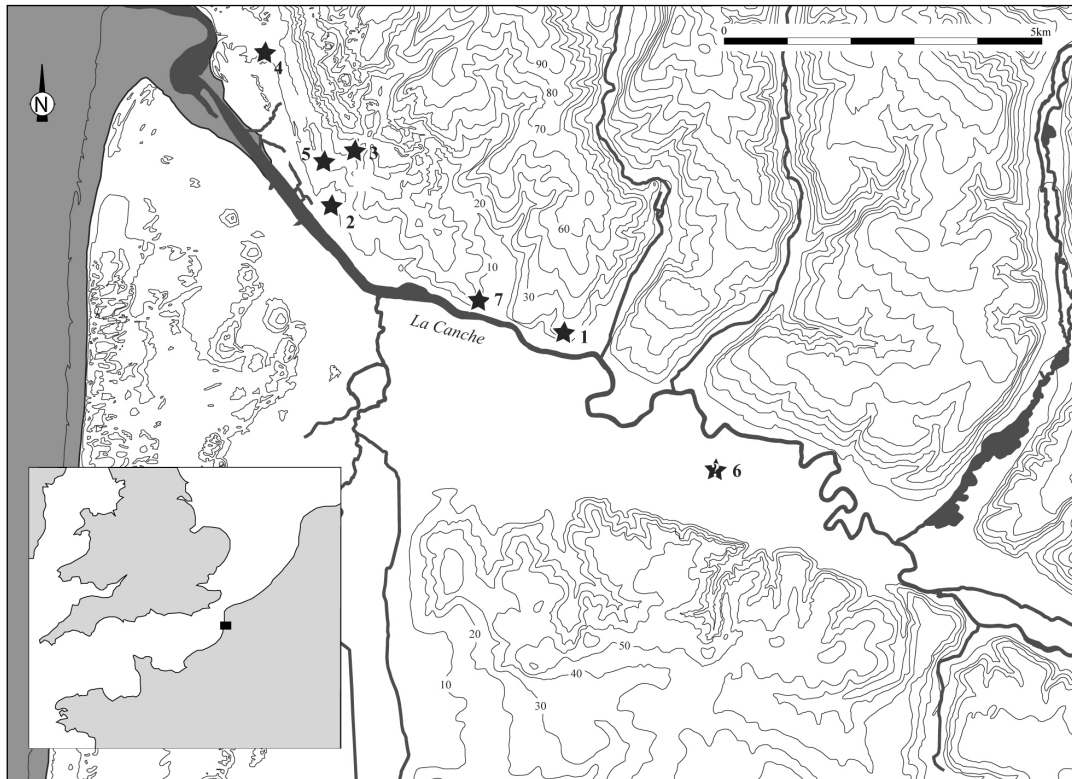


Figure 5.1 Location of the sites mentioned in the text: 1 – Étaples, ‘Mont-Bagarre’; 2 – Étaples, ‘Bel-Air’; 3 – Étaples, ‘La Pièce-à-Liards’; 4 – Beach sites; 5 – Étaples, north vicus; 6 – *Quentovic* (presumed location); 7 – Étaples, ‘Les Sablins’

for the continuous role of trading place for the River Canche (Fig 5.1).

The early and middle Bronze Ages: the first port?

A significant complex of Bronze Age dwellings, the result of at least five hundred years of continuous occupation starting from the beginning of the early Bronze Age, was revealed during construction of a motorway in 1992 at the hill of ‘**Mont-Bagarre**’ near Étaples (Desfossés 2000a).

The first inhabitants settled here **between the twentieth and eighteenth centuries BC** on a promontory overlooking the river, slightly upstream of the river mouth. A very large oval enclosure was constructed, (Fig 5.2), its ditch over one hundred metres in diameter, but less than one and a half metres deep. It had three points of exit/entry, and its ditch was lined with an internal bank made from upcast spoil. Its role marking a territorial boundary is evident, however. It seems to affirm the possession of the territory by the group that inhabited it. Perhaps it was also used as a sheepfold? Did it have some sort of ritual status? At any event,

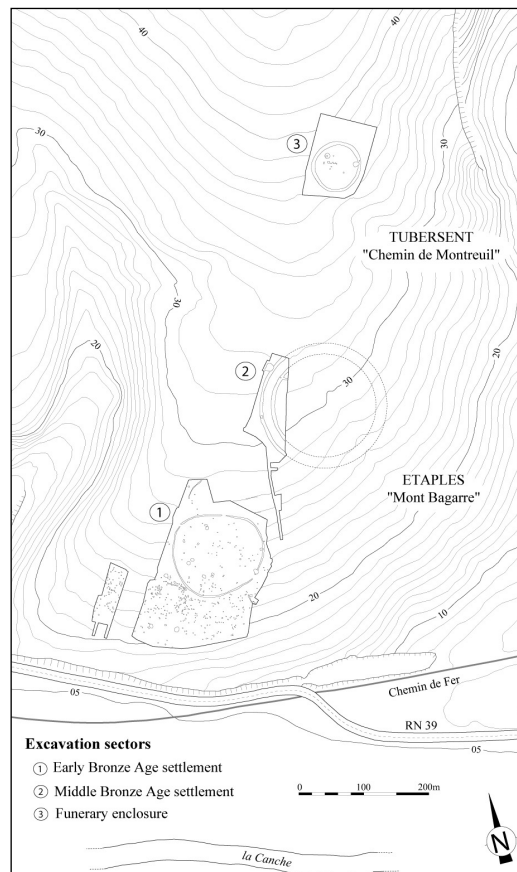
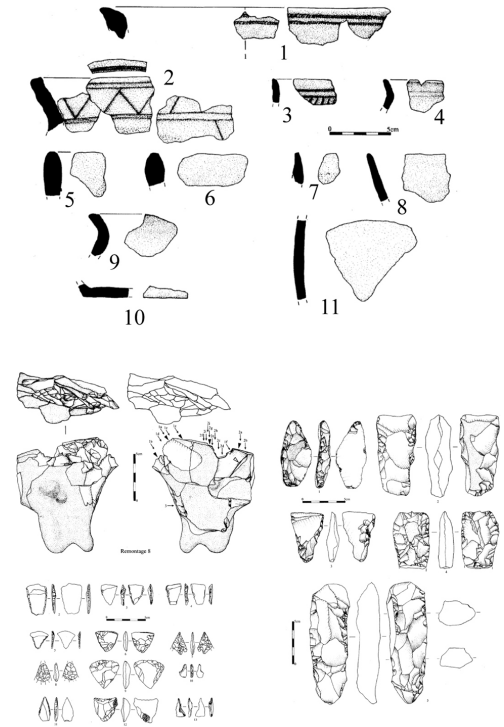
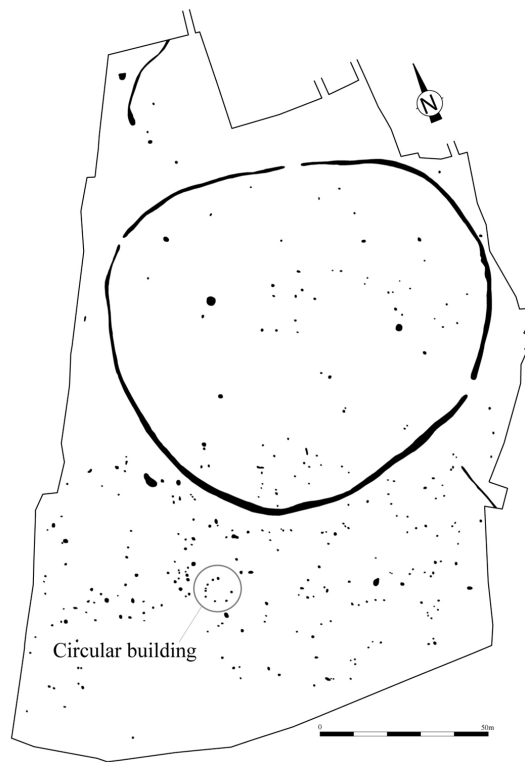


Figure 5.2 Étaples ‘Mont-Bagarre’; site plan showing the areas of excavation and distribution of features (after Desfossés 2000a, modified)

Figure 5.3a Étaples 'Mont-Bagarre'; plan of the southern (Early Bronze Age) Enclosure 100 and associated features. A possible circular building is highlighted to the south of the enclosure (after Desfossés 2000a, modified)
 Figure 5.3b Étaples 'Mont-Bagarre'; pottery and flint artefacts derived from Enclosure 100 (after Desfossés 2000a, modified)



it did not appear to play a defensive role as its associated settlement lay outside it, as can be deduced from the post-holes, ditches and granaries to the south and south-west of the enclosure ditch and bank.

Among the excavated structures there was a group of post-holes that may be identified as at least one building, a circular structure reminiscent of the British building tradition. Despite their generally poor condition, certain pottery sherds show many similarities with contemporary British pots of the 'Collared urns – Primary Series' and the complex of 'Food Vessels' (Desfossés 2000a, 39–40), for example Fig 5.3 No. 2, with a simple cord decoration impressed along the edge of the rim.

These characteristics appear to be in a more overtly British tradition than that of nearby sites, which often display mixed influences, as at Fréthun 'Les Rietz', excavated during the Eurotunnel construction (Bostyn *et al* 1990). This triple funerary enclosure produced an urn decorated with chevrons made by using impressed cord on the upper part – the British influence – though its S-shaped profile is very different to that of English vessels, as are its

four arched handles, typical of continental influence.

Due to soil truncation and later disturbances, we know little of quotidian life in the Étaples 'Mont-Bagarre' village; the abundant assemblage of lithic tools attest to the important role of this resource, whilst an (unpublished) piece of bronze casting waste provides evidence for metallurgy and the discovery of three loom weights for weaving.

A few hundred years later, on the cusp of the early and middle Bronze Ages, between the nineteenth and sixteenth centuries BC, this first site was abandoned. The population moved higher up the hill, where a new and perfectly circular ditch was dug. The new enclosure, measuring a hundred thirty metres in diameter, was much more pronounced in size than its predecessor. Its ditch was three and a half metres wide on average, and its depth often exceeded two metres. Here again, upcast from the ditch was used to create an embankment on the inside edge of the ditch.

This new accommodation experienced a phase of expansion between the 17th and 15th centuries BC. This time, rather than moving away, the occupants preferred to dig

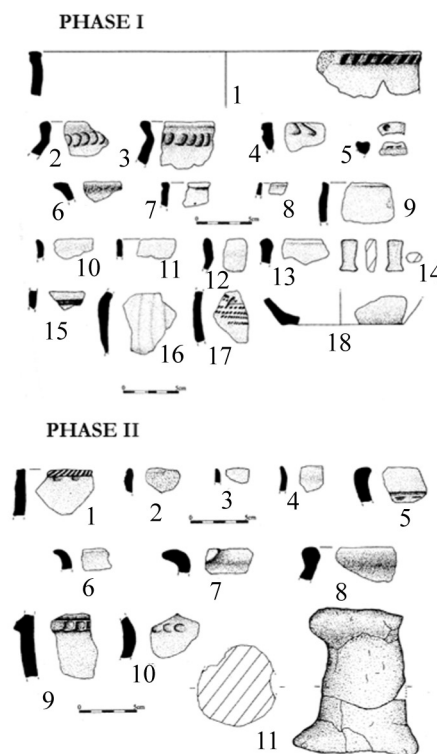
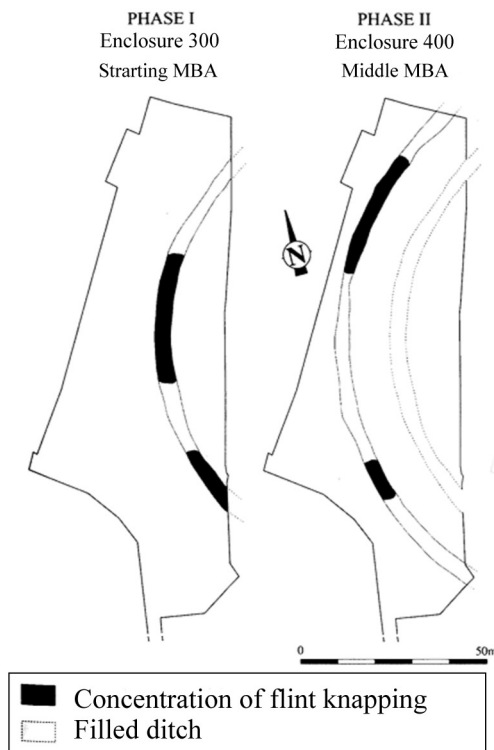


Figure 5.4a *Étaples* 'Mont-Bagarre'; plan showing the development of the northern (middle Bronze Age) enclosure. The original enclosure ditch (Phase I; Enclosure 300) was infilled and a larger, concentric ditch constructed (Phase II; Enclosure 400) Figure 5.4b Ceramic material associated with the two phases of the northern (middle Bronze Age) enclosure (after Desfossés 2000a, modified)

another ditch around the previous one, which was then infilled. The new enclosure reached a diameter of a hundred sixty metres, and was somewhat wider than its predecessor (4m). After this expansion, occupation of the interior continued and covered the area previously occupied by the first ditch.

Here again, the pottery reveals British traditions; the finger-tip impressions cordons (for example, Fig 5.4 Phase I, Nos 2–4; Phase II, No. 9) lie alongside examples with cord impressed decorations, reminiscent of the Deverel Rimbury culture (Desfossés 2004a, 39–40).

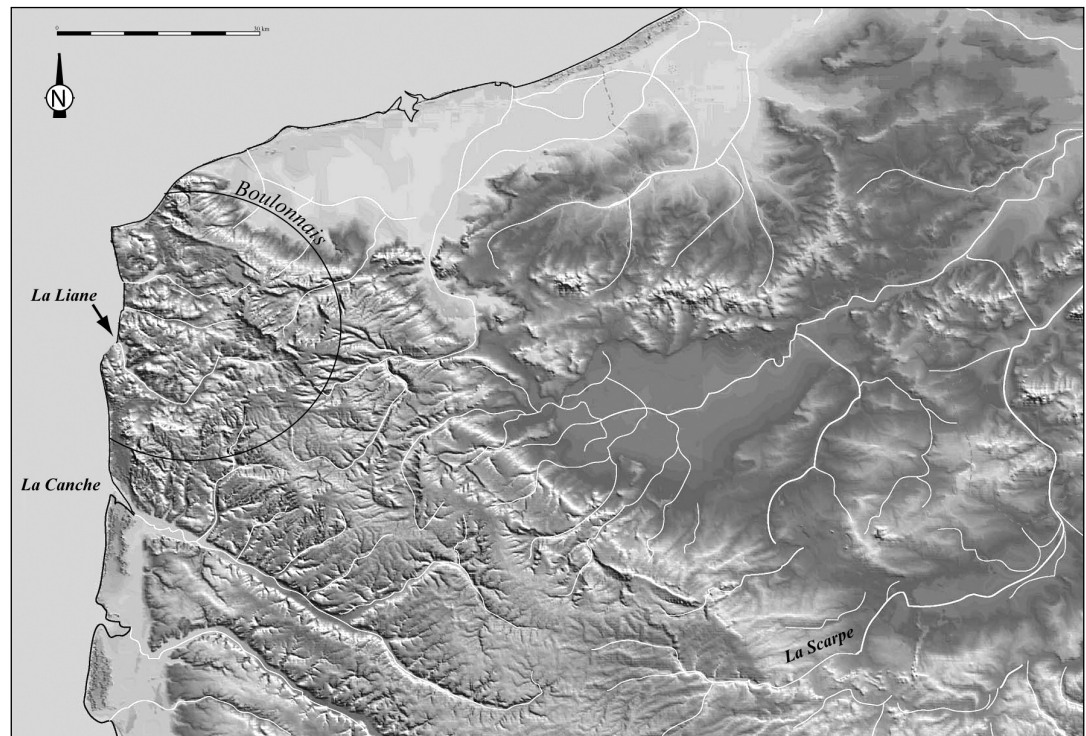
The position of these two concentric enclosures at the edge of the excavation area meant that it was not possible to observe more than 10 per cent of their internal area (nearly 17,000 m² for the second enclosure). It is thus difficult to determine precisely the nature of occupation. Several factors however allow us to assume a domestic function for the settlement; the diversity of ceramic forms, the abundance and composition of the flint tool assemblage, indicators of craft industry (a briquetage pillar used for salt production; a perforated stone weight from a balance) and of domestic construction (cob).

A huge ring ditch with an unbroken diameter of sixty metres was associated with one of the later two villages, lying some 300m to the north. Numerous indications, including an absence of the recutting of the ditch and the quantity and composition of material discovered, indicates that this was a funerary enclosure, surrounding a now completely levelled mound.

So, during the early and middle Bronze Ages, the Estuary of River Canche was occupied by a large settlement, dominated by a monumental enclosure. Material left by its occupants indicates a close relationship with the British Isles. What type of relationship was this? Is the similarity between the pottery from *Étaples* and the English material due to the passage of pots, potters or style? The site was too badly eroded to provide an answer to this question, although an analysis of the clay from which the sherds were made, which remains to be performed, might provide more clues.

At any event, and whether or not the occupants were colonists who had arrived from Great Britain (which is the interpretation preferred by Yves Desfossés; 2004b), this settlement suggests that the Canche estuary almost certainly played a major strategic role in the routes across the Channel around the

Figure 5.5 The Boulonnais and its hinterland (map by Brigitte Van Vliet-Lanoë)



Strait in the context of a busy trade between the coastal settlements of the Continent and the British Isles. The exchanges, which involved most of the Channel Coasts and the North Sea, are revealed in a number of ways (Bourgeois and Talon 2005), including architectural similarities in funerary enclosures and dwellings, similarity of pottery styles and decoration and finds from the sea floor (whether they be from shipwrecks or deliberately deposited; Samson 2006). The British boats from this period, and particularly the Dover boat (Clark 2004b), constitute magnificent evidence of the type of vessel used.

This leads us to the geographic factors which, above any other consideration, no doubt governed the choice of this estuary. The architectural design of these fluvio-maritime boats is adapted to the particular environment of the coastal and riverine context of Northern Europe, where the relations between coastal maritime space and river space are often considered in terms of complementarity and of continuity *via* a full lagoon estuary at the mouth of many rivers (Pomey and Rieth, 2005). Moreover, it is probable that the first occupants who selected the site as their usual landing-place had analysed the course and navigability

of the waterway as a means of exploring the interior. This constituted a natural way through the dense primal forest (although it had thinned considerably since the start of the Neolithic), as well as a practical transport solution for equipment and goods.

Let us look at the topography of the continental part of the Strait and the first portion of the Atlantic seaway on the basis of this supposition (Fig 5.5).

The area closest to the English coast is the 'Boulonnais'. It consists of an eroded anticline caused by the forces of Alpine compression, whose Mesozoic chalk covering was eroded after its uplift (Van Vliet-Lanoë *et al* 1998). The inlier is edged to the south and east by a chalky *cuesta* which is nearly hundred metres higher than the enclosed hills of clay. This unusual relief restricts the flow of water, which is enclosed in the inlier, thus creating a basin isolated from other local valleys by a steep slope.

The River Liane, which is the first navigable river to offer itself to navigators moving through the Strait towards the Atlantic, is not a good route for penetrating the hinterland because it is very short, for the reasons described above. Trying to move inland by boat

along this route would involve a complicated portage.

That is not the case with the River Canche, which would have been the second estuary encountered by navigators, and which gave access to a waterway deep enough to be navigable. This river allows penetration of the interior for a distance of more than 80km, where it reaches the junction with the river basins of the Scarpe and the Escaut.

No doubt this geographical factor, perfectly conformed to the required criteria, contributed to the choice of site.

In any case, it should be noted that other settlements showing a similar tradition have been found along this river route. There is the necropolis of Fresnes-lès-Montauban (Desfossés and Masson 2000) which shows at the end of the early Bronze Age the emergence of finger-tip decoration and the presence of a pottery vessel of a very similar shape to that of the British 'bucket urns'. The ceramics of the nearby middle Bronze Age site of Rœux (Desfossés *et al* 2000) have even more markedly similar characteristics, due to the presence of large cylindrical vases, the preponderance of finger-tip decoration and the existence of cylindrical weights which are very similar to those found in the Deverel-Rimbury complex. In addition, two small oval houses were excavated that are very similar in size and arrangement of post-holes to numerous British examples.

On the other side of the relief created by the Boulonnais, on the border of the plain of Flanders, numerous finds (such as funerary enclosures and gold necklaces), suggests the existence of a similar settlement, possibly included in this system.

For this reason, Yves Desfossés has suggested that the Mont-Bagarre settlement at Étaples could have been a bridgehead destined for the colonisation of the continental hinterland (Desfossés 2000b; Desfossés and Philippe 2002). Whether this assumption is confirmed or not in the future, the evidence from Étaples shows that between the 20th and 15th centuries BC the estuary of the Canche played a role not dissimilar to that which it would take in the early Middle Ages. We cannot, of course, necessarily connect the choice of the former with the existence of the latter. We should now examine the evidence which may make it possible to suggest the

continuity of this role through the times which separate them.

From the late Bronze Age to the Roman conquest: continuity of the phenomenon?

At around 1300 BC the site of Mont-Bagarre was abandoned, a time when indications of the island traditions disappeared from the region, which was re-occupied by Continental groups from the RSFO (Rhin-Suisse-France Orientale) complex (Blanchet 1984).

The late Bronze Age settlement moved from the hill of Bagarre to the mouth of the estuary. This site, at **Étaples 'Bel-Air'**, was discovered in the 1960s (Fig 5.1; Mariette 1970). The excavations, performed entirely by hand, only recognised the site through soundings. From what can be gleaned from the few items that were published and the resumption of fieldwork currently in progress, it would appear to have been a **substantial settlement**.

Its eventual abandonment was probably the result of changes in the coastline and the river courses due to geodynamic variations (Meurisse 2004; Van Vliet-Lanoë *et al* 2004).

Towards the end of the early Iron Age, domestic occupation seems to stay around the entrance of the estuary. This is indicated by the discovery of an early Iron Age cemetery at **'La Pièce à Liards'**, sited on a rise on the plateau that dominates the bay, which was probably used for the leaders of the community. It was revealed during the construction of a new district to the north of Étaples in 2003 (Fig 5.1; Henton 2005). A square ditch surrounded enclosed this small necropolis that contained twelve tombs, of which nine had been covered in wooden cladding (Fig 5.6). Three individuals had been buried with rich grave goods. Two of them wore necklaces that combined elements of bronze and a perishable material, possibly leather, which appear to be, in the current state of knowledge, unknown elsewhere. Another wore a bronze brooch whose parallels seem be limited to Ireland and Wales (Fig 5.7), whilst numerous amber beads recovered from the thorax indicated that they had been buried in decorated garments which suggests some contact with northern or central Europe.

The limited number of graves in the necropolis, the fact that the tombs were covered in cladding and the ornamentation

Figure 5.6 Étapes 'La-Pièce-à-Liards'; site plan showing the relationship between the original (early Iron Age) cemetery and subsequent (late Iron Age) enclosures (after Henton in preparation)

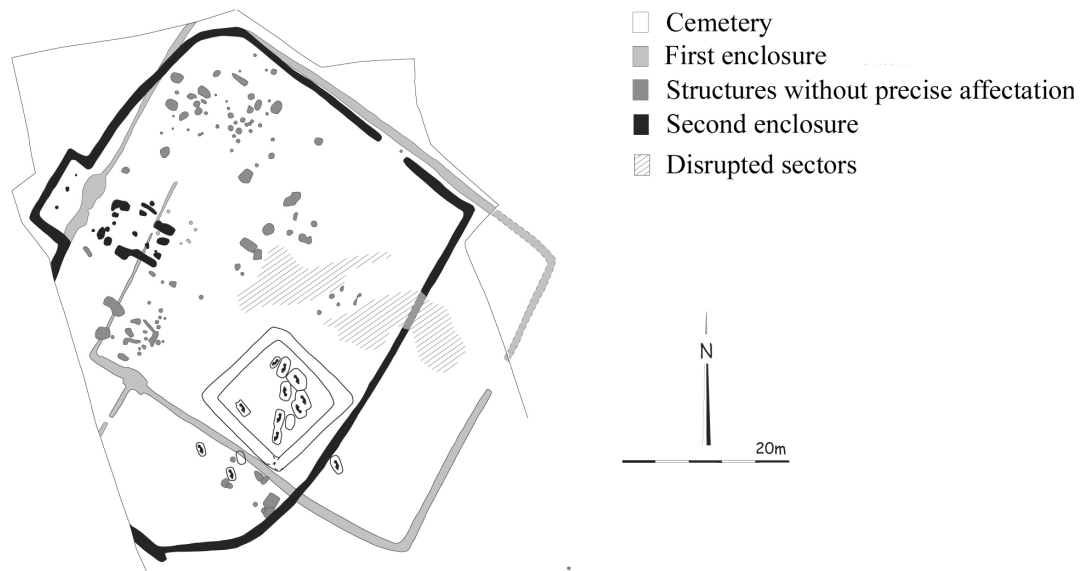


Figure 5.7 A bronze brooch from Étapes 'La-Pièce-à-Liards' (after Henton in preparation)



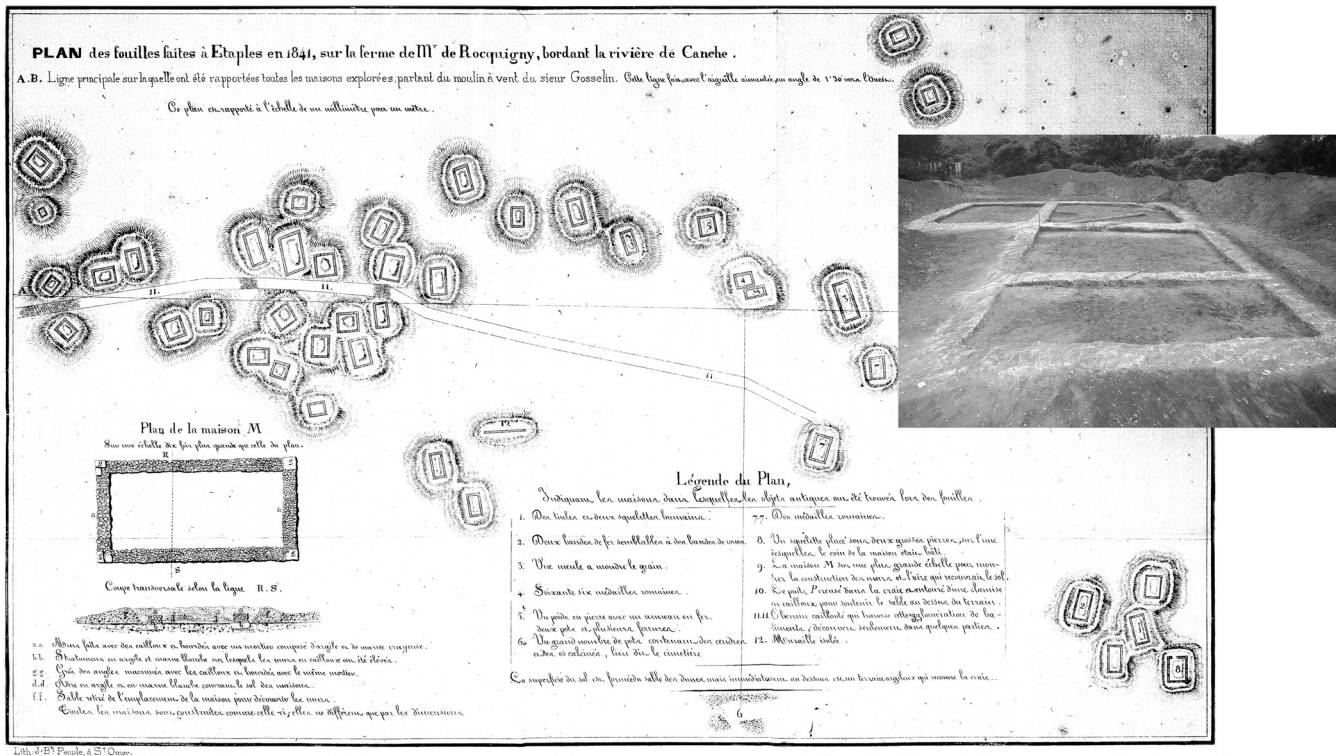
accompanying the bodies are all indications of the high status of the deceased. Since this has been studied at numerous other sites, it is widely held that the ruling classes of the early Iron Age built their fortune and power on the control of trade, particularly between northern Europe and the Mediterranean area. Even though the study of this site is still in progress, we can advance the possibility that this cemetery indicates the existence of a trading post perhaps run by the deceased, which was no doubt linked to contacts across the English Channel (as suggested by the brooch).

After the cemetery ceased to be used for burial (we have no knowledge of the settlement linked to it), a large village was built at the foot of the hill in about the 4th century BC (the middle La Tène period). It was excavated on the beach of St Gabriel in the 1960s (Fig 5.1; Mariette 1972). As at the excavations at Étapes 'Bel-Air', the site was only recognised through soundings, though the quantity and extent of

material recovered suggests it was extensive. The site seems to have remained occupied until the Roman conquest.

The rise on the plateau on which the necropolis was sited ('La Pièce à Liards') was reoccupied by the inhabitants of this beach settlement on the cusp of the 2nd and 1st centuries BC (Fig 5.6). A small group of structures were surrounded by a roughly rectangular ditch, which also enclosed and respected the earlier necropolis, running along its south-western side. For a reason which escapes us, this enclosure was soon replaced by a new ditch of the same type, but slightly offset from it. This also enclosed and respected the necropolis, running along its south-eastern side. The necropolis was still visible and recognisable some 300 years after its creation, and clearly had some significance to those who built the enclosures. Perhaps the enclosures and associated structures were not typical settlements, but rather places of worship (Henton in preparation).

After the Roman conquest, the siting of regional ports underwent a fundamental change. The Liane estuary, which hitherto seems to have been sparsely occupied, became the site of the continental military port of the *Classis Britannica*. The town of Boulogne (*Bononia-Gesoriacum*), headquarters of the military administration, developed in parallel as a trading centre and became the main customs post of the Dover Strait. Paved roads connected it to Théroutanne (*Taruenna*), capital



city of the *Civitas Morinorum*, and to Amiens (*Samarobriua Ambionorum*), one of the largest urban centres of the northern Empire.

The Canche estuary remained occupied during the Roman period by a dense and extensive settlement that spread along the road to Boulogne, in the same area of the earlier settlements (Philippe 2004). A large sector of it was excavated in 1841–42, but almost all the data and material then recovered has since been dispersed (Marguet 1841; Cousin 1842). After 1964, the southern part of this settlement was excavated at the time of the construction of the 'Blanc-Pavé' and 'Bergeries' districts (Couppé 1972). This possible *vicus* consisted of more than 120 buildings and adjoining structures (courtyards, streets, wells, etc.), with foundations of chalk and sandstone, and with wattle and daub walls (Fig 5.8).

The age of the most extensive excavations makes the interpretation of detail of this settlement difficult; complementary to Boulogne, it no doubt formed part of the trade networks of the Strait. We do not know the exact site of its port, which could have been a simple boat hard on the beach. Perhaps during the Later Empire, this site was supplemented by a military installation; certain elements collected at the site of the castle of Étapes at

the time of the nineteenth century excavations seem to indicate the existence of buildings and a necropolis here (Souquet 1865). The distribution of military places known on the British coast in the vicinity of the Strait shows that Dover, seat of the *Classis Britannica*, was surrounded of a network of forts, separated by 20 to 30km (*Lemanis*-Lympne, in the south; *Rutuplae*-Ritchborough and *Regulbium*-Reculver in the north; Ordnance Survey 1956). It seems plausible that a similar network might exist around Boulogne, continental seat of the fleet. The estuary of Canche, about 30 km to the south of Boulogne, could, accordingly, have constituted an important strategic point.

However, the amount of material that this *vicus* has produced is considerable (Delmaire 1994). Over 15,000 Roman coins have been found, from at least ten hoards. In addition there are more than 10,000 brooches, numerous tools, evidence of fishing (anchors, needles for mending fishnets, fish-hooks) and evidence of cosmetics and jewellery. The excavations also collected an important quantity of ceramics, including several vessels of 'Black Burnished Ware', a British import (Clotuche 1998).

Let us consider a particular coin hoard, on display in Quentovic Museum. It was uncovered in 1964 when the current road to

Figure 5.8 The ancient *vicus* of Étapes; plan of the 1841–1842 excavations (after Cousin 1842). Inset: photograph of a large building with chalk foundations at Étapes 'Blanc-Pavé' (photo: Jean Couppé)

Boulogne was being widened (Giard 1965; Delmaire and Couppé 1988), and consists of almost 4,000 silver coins dating from the 3rd century AD, minted in Rome, Milan, Antioch and Cologne. None of the coins show signs of deterioration due to their having been in circulation. An excavation carried out following this discovery showed that this deposit was placed in the foundations of a building (Couppé 1965). Judging by its composition, it was probably payment for a large commercial transaction rather than the hoarding of official coinage by an individual. This makes it possible to suggest that even if the main commercial route across the Strait had undeniably moved to Boulogne in antiquity, trade still thrived in the Bay of the River Canche. The number of coin hoards recovered (around ten or so), reinforces this impression, especially as the routine explanation of coin hoards as a response to catastrophic events like war and invasion is no longer widely accepted, allowing alternative possibilities such as economic and commercial operations as their *raison d'être* (Delmaire 1995).

Evidence for this period is more fragmentary than for earlier times, because no domestic settlement has been the subject of modern, exhaustive excavation. If the little evidence we do have does not allow detailed interpretation, they however make it possible to posit the continuity of occupation and its peripheral technical elements in the estuary. The high social status of the people of the First Iron Age, and the remote geographical references of the ornaments with which they were associated, suggests the maintenance of an establishment dedicated to trade between British Isles and the continent. The importance of the later Roman settlement and the quantity of coin hoards found in it insufflate a concept of permanence.

The end of Roman rule: a return to the Canche

The situation would, once more, change fundamentally after the fall of the Roman Empire. With the arrival of new political masters, the economic and political basis of the region suffered a radical change. For the Germanic groups who came to dominate the Western European area, the north seas played a vital role, similar to that assigned to

the Mediterranean sea by the civilisations of Antiquity.

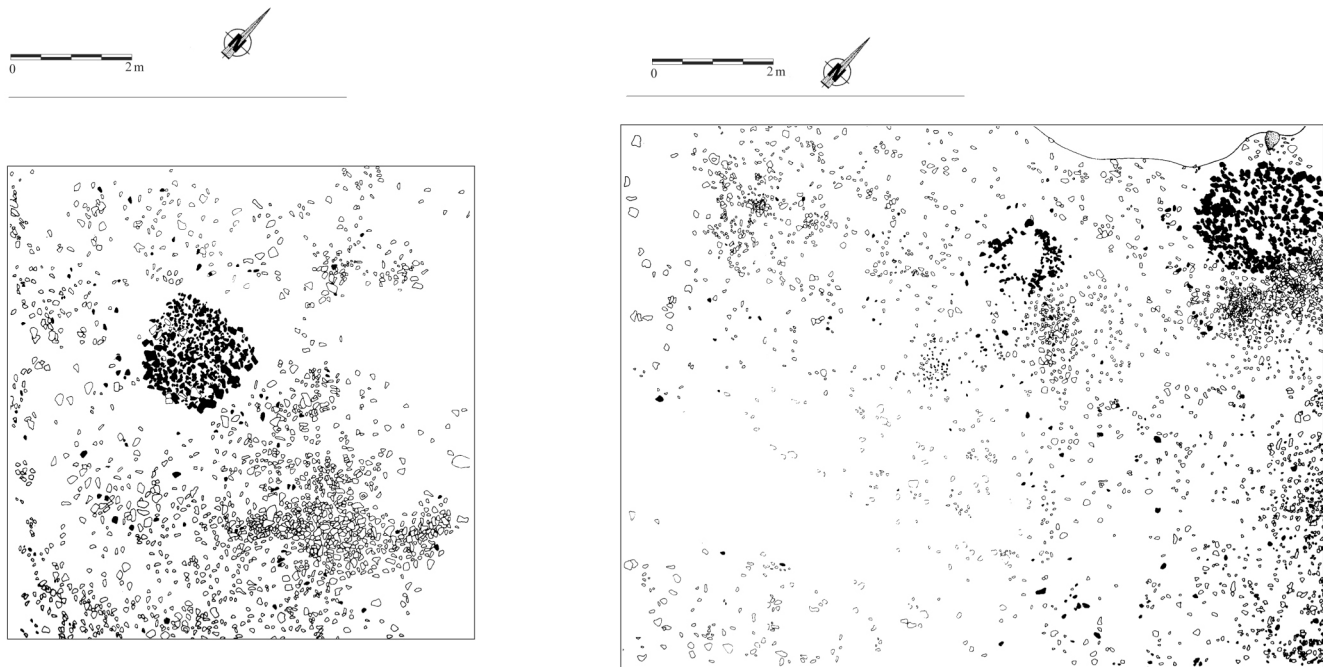
In this context of intense commercial and diplomatic activity, the Canche Estuary regained its regional supremacy in links with Great Britain following the establishment of the *emporium of Quentovic*, discussed above. After the decline of the Roman *vicus* at Étapes, which started in the last quarter of the 3rd century AD and ended with its disappearance in the early 4th century, the *emporium* was installed further upstream on the left bank of the river.

The re-establishment of the Canche Estuary as the major regional port for maritime trade, at the end of what was merely an interregnum of a few hundred years, seems to point another important factor that would also explain the role played by this area throughout history. It is that of shipbuilding.

The *port of Boulogne* seems to have been an *ex-nihilo* creation, preceded by no other known settlement. What was the important event that permitted – or caused – the choice of this site, in view of the fact that it was restricted to the period of Roman occupation? Numerous criteria probably played a role, such as the ability to build paved roads, which in part facilitated movement away from the *cesta*-bound coast and out of the Boulonnais. At the same time, as the dominance of Boulogne was limited to the Roman period, we must surely consider the introduction of ships from the Mediterranean tradition (one trireme at least is attested in Boulogne by an *ex-voto*), which were unsuited to the lagoon-like estuaries of the region or for beaching. The Liane estuary, which cuts through more solid geology than the chalky soil of Artois, would make it much easier to build a port with quays.

This is probably not the only reason for the change of site. From what we understand, the vessels of the Roman tradition were more seaworthy than those of the local inhabitants (Pomey and Rieth 2005); their keels enabled them to brave stronger winds and sail in more extreme weather. Whether before or after the Empire, local ships, adapted to inland waterways and lagoons, were by nature of their system of propulsion and steering less manoeuvrable and capable at most of using a cross-wind. They were thus much more at the mercy of the vagaries of current and wind.

The English Channel at the Strait of Dover



is a shallow corridor, through which huge masses of water and sediments are transported, just like an estuarine river. The speed of the current increases as the gap narrows, creating a significant flow which, dependant on the time of day, pulls either towards the Channel or the North Sea. The currents at high tide (flowing towards the North Sea) are stronger than at low tide (flowing in the opposite direction). Thus a ship sailing from the Canche Estuary at high tide would be carried towards the Hampshire or Kent coasts for up to six hours. If leaving from the Thames Estuary at low tide, it would borne towards the Friesian or northern French coasts; however, if a ship sailed at high tide from Cap Gris-nez or its immediate surroundings, it would tend to be taken northwards, out on to the high sea.

For this reason, it would appear that the Canche Estuary was highly suited to take advantage of the currents in the Strait, in addition to providing a suitable environment for beaching such vessels, as noted for the ships of the later Middle Ages by Michel Rouche (1977). Using their knowledge of the currents, sailors of all periods seem to have found just the right balance between the constraints created by topography and level of contemporary seamanship at the mouth of the River Canche.

A Neolithic foundation?

At what moment and by whom was this choice first made? In the current state of knowledge, it can be attributed at least to the early Bronze Age. Yet the existence in the estuary of dense Neolithic occupation may suggest an earlier date.

This Neolithic settlement of Étapes, 'Les Sablins', appears to have covered a total area of about 45 hectares. It no doubt consisted of a village with peripheral industrial areas which are evidenced by numerous flint knapping spots and hearths (Fig 5.9), as well as a dense concentration of stakes-holes discovered in 2006 that are still quite a puzzle.

The largest part of the site had only just been identified when the land was allocated for industrial development in 1970, though an area where the occupation deposits were in an excellent state of preservation, including a well preserved paleosol, was protected as an archaeological 'reservation'. Numerous excavations have been conducted since (Hurtrelle and Piningre 1976; 1979; Piningre *et al* 1991; Philippe *et al* 2006).

The first occupants were probably drawn to this place by its exceptional situation; near fertile land on a headland at the edge of sea. It was, moreover, located near a source of flint of a rare quality in the area. There were three phases of occupation. The lowest

Figure 5.9 Étapes 'Les Sablins'; site plans showing the distribution of Neolithic burnt stone (white) and knapped flint (black) (after Hurtrelle and Piningre 1976)

has been dated to around 4700 cal BC by radiocarbon dating, and belongs to the Cerny culture (Néolithique moyen I); the intermediate phase last year produced a sherd of Chasséo-Michelsberg pottery (Néolithique moyen II), whilst the upper phase produced bell-shaped pottery sherds (attributable to the Néolithique final).

If the challenge of the current excavations consists mainly in characterising the type of occupation of each phase, the general issue surrounding the estuary, as I have described it, is not absent from our preoccupations. Many criteria show us that since the beginning of the 4th millennium BC, the sea has not constituted an obstacle to relations, even over long distances (Cunliffe 2002). I am thinking particularly of the spread of stones axes from the Alps to Scotland and Ireland (Pétrequin *et al* 2005), or of the spread of megalithic architecture which has shown that there were direct connections between the coasts of Portugal, Brittany and Ireland, evidence which is again reinforced by the distribution of the first Beaker (Campaniforme) pottery (Salanova 2000).

It is thus possible to imagine that the Neolithic inhabitants of the Canche estuary were in contact with their contemporaries in south-east England, especially since the Dover boat has shown, through the technological advancement of its construction, that the tradition of boat-building extends far back in time, even if we do not know the type of vessel then used.

Conclusion

The possibility of a cross-Channel port in the Canche Estuary during the Neolithic must remain speculation until more concrete evidence emerges from the excavations at 'Les Sablins', where we have been working for only a short time. For now, it is the seamen of the early Bronze Age – the contemporaries of the Dover boat – are those who must be credited with opening up a sea route that seems to have remained active for more than 3,000 years.

Whoever these pioneers were, this very special estuary deserves the description of a 'hub' of the maritime route across the Strait, even though much remains to be done to fill in the outlines presented here.

We have surveyed the various factors that

may be behind this; the physical geography of the coast and its hinterland, the architecture of the sea vessels employed, and the relationship with the marine currents and prevailing winds around the Strait. These various combined factors seem to me to have created the right conditions for the first inhabitants to have considered the local geography of the Canche in their search for a permanent base for maritime connections across the Strait and this is what ultimately dictated their choice.

Acknowledgement

Thank you to Peter Clark for his kind help in the translation of this paper.

List of references

- Blanchet, J 1984 *Les premiers métallurgistes en Picardie et dans le Nord de la France*, Mémoires de la Société préhistorique française, 17, Paris
- Bostyn, F, Blancquaert, G and Lanchon, Y 1990 'L'enclos triple de Fréthun «Les Rietz»', *Cahiers de Préhistoire du Nord*, 8, 37–46
- Bourgeois, J and Talon, M (eds) 2005 *L'âge du Bronze du Nord la France dans son contexte Européen: Hommage à Jacques Briard*, Actes du 125e Congrès National des Sociétés Historiques et Scientifiques, section pré- et protohistoire, archéologie, Lille, 2000
- Clark, P (ed) 2004a *The Dover Bronze age boat in context – Society and water transport in prehistoric Europe*, Oxford: Oxbow Books
- Clark, P (ed) 2004b *The Dover Bronze Age boat*, with illustrations by Caroline Caldwell, London: English Heritage
- Clotuche, R 1998 *Étaples: «La Garennière» Rapport préliminaire de fouille de sauvetage urgent, 1997*, Association pour les Fouilles Archéologiques Nationales and the Service Régional d'Archéologie Nord-Pas-de-Calais
- Couppé, J 1965 *Rapport d'intervention sur le bâtiment ayant livré le trésor: Rapport de fouilles archéologiques*, Étaples: Société Quentovic
- Couppé, J 1972 'Le Gallo-romain à Étaples', *Quentovic*, 11, *Collections du musée d'Étaples et notes historiques*, 16–24
- Cousin, L 1842 'Rapport sur les fouilles archéologiques faites par le Comité de Boulogne à Étaples en 1842', *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de la Morinie*, 6, 1841–1843, 47–64
- Cunliffe, B 2002 'People of the sea', *British Archaeology*, 63, 12–17
- Delmaire, R (ed) 1994 *Le Pas-de-Calais*, Carte archéologique de la Gaule, Pré-inventaire archéologique, Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles-Lettres, Association pour les Fouilles Archéologiques Nationales, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris
- Delmaire, R 1995 'Les enfouissements monétaires, témoignages d'insécurité?', *Revue du Nord-Archéologie*, 77 (313), 21–26
- Delmaire, R and Couppé, J 1988 'Un lot du trésor trouvé à Étaples en 1964', *Trésors Monétaires*, 10, 55–57

- Desfossés, Y (ed) 2000a *Archéologie Préventive en Vallée de Canche: Les sites protohistoriques fouillés dans le cadre de la réalisation de l'autoroute A16*, Nord-Ouest Archéologie, **11**, Berck-sur-Mer: Centre de Recherches Archéologiques et de Diffusion Culturelle
- Desfossés, Y 2000b 'L'apport des sites d'Étaples-Tubersent et de La Calotterie' in Y Desfossés (ed), *Archéologie Préventive en Vallée de Canche: Les sites protohistoriques fouillés dans le cadre de la réalisation de l'autoroute A16*, Nord-Ouest Archéologie, **11**, Berck-sur-Mer: Centre de Recherches Archéologiques et de Diffusion Culturelle, 185–187
- Desfossés, Y and Masson, B 2000 'Les enclos funéraires du «Motel» à Fresnes-Lès-Montauban (Pas-de-Calais)', in J-C Blanchet (ed), *Habitats et nécropoles de l'Age du Bronze sur le Transmanche et le TGV Nord*, *Bulletin de la Société préhistorique française* (Etudes et Travaux), **89** (10–12), Travaux 1, 303–342
- Desfossés, Y and Philippe, M 2002 'Angleterre et France à l'Age du Bronze – Les Contacts Transmanche', *Archéologia*, **391**, 46–57
- Desfossés, Y, Martial, E and Vallin, L 2000 'Le site d'habitat du Bronze moyen du «Château d'Eau» à Roeux (Pas-de-Calais)', in J-C Blanchet (ed), *Habitats et nécropoles de l'Age du Bronze sur le Transmanche et le TGV Nord*, *Bulletin de la Société préhistorique française* (Etudes et Travaux), **89** (10–12), Travaux 1, 344–391
- Dilly, G 1988 'Découvertes côtières et marines sur la Côte d'Opale', *Nord-Ouest Archéologie*, **1**, 25–32
- Gallois, J and Couppé, J 1977 'Découvertes gallo-romaines au nord et à l'est d'Étaples', *Bulletin de la Commission Départementale des Monuments Historiques du Pas-de-Calais*, **10** (2), 65–72
- Geoffroy, J-F 1994a 'Étaples: Fouille d'un quartier d'habitat rural secondaire', *Revue du Nord-Archéologie*, **76** (308), 147–153
- Giard, J-B 1965 'Le trésor d'Étaples', *Revue Numismatique*, (6^e série), **7**, 206–224
- Henton, A 2005 'Étaples – «La Pièce à Liards»', *Bilan Scientifique Régional Nord-Pas-de-Calais 1994*, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 145–148
- Henton, in preparation *Étaples – «La Pièce à Liards»: Rapport de fouilles*, Institut National de Recherches Archéologiques Préventives
- Hurtrelle, J and Piningre, J 1976 'Le site néolithique des Sablins à Étaples (Pas-de-Calais): premiers résultats', *Septentrion*, **6**, 46–57
- Hurtrelle, J and Piningre, J 1979 'Les ateliers de taille du silex à Étaples', *Archéologia*, **137**, 36–40
- Lebecq, S 1991 'Pour une histoire parallèle de Quentovic et de Dorestad', in J-M Duvoisquel and A Dierkens (eds), *Villes et campagnes dans l'Occident médiéval: Mélanges Georges Despy*, Bruxelles-Liège, 415–428
- Lebecq, S 1994 'Entre Manche et mer du Nord, entre Grande-Bretagne et continent, les relations à travers le détroit dans les premiers siècles médiévaux', in S Curveiller and A Lottin (eds), *Les champs relationnels en Europe du Nord et du Nord-ouest des origines à la fin du Premier Empire*, Calais: La Municipalité de Calais, 29–43
- Marguet, H 1841 'Rapport sur les fouilles faites en 1841 à Étaples, lu à la séance publique du 20 décembre 1841', *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de la Morinie*, **6**, 1841–1843, 191–215
- Mariette, H 1970 'Préhistoire de la Côte d'Opale, du mésolithique à la conquête romaine', *Septentrion*, **5–6**, 90–96
- Mariette, H 1972 'Un site protohistorique de production du sel à Étaples (Pas-de-Calais)', *Congrès Préhistorique de France, XIX^e session, Auvergne, 1969*, Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 284–292
- Meurisse, M 2004 'Evolution du littoral Picard durant l'Holocène', *Sucellus*, **55**, 17–31
- Munaut, A 1989 'Analyse palynologique de structures datant des III^e et IV^e s.s., observées à Étaples «Blanc-Pavé» (Pas-de-Calais)', in I Sidera (ed), *Une agglomération secondaire romaine en secteur rural: Rapport de fouilles archéologiques*, Association pour les Fouilles Archéologiques Nationales and the Service Régional d'Archéologie Nord-Pas-de-Calais, annexe 1
- Ordnance Survey 1956 *Map of Roman Britain*, 3rd edition, Cheshington: Ordnance Survey
- Petrequin, P, Errera, M, Cassen, S, Billand, G, Colas, C, Marechal, D, Prodeo, F and Vangele, F 2005 'Des Alpes italiennes à l'Atlantique au Ve millénaire – Les quatre grandes haches polies de Vendeuil et Maizy (Aisne), Brenouille (Oise)', in G Auxiette and F Malrain (eds), *Hommages à Claudine Pommepuy*, *Revue Archéologique de Picardie*, numéro special, **22**, 75–104
- Philippe, M 2004 'L'occupation du territoire d'Étaples (Pas-de-Calais) durant l'Antiquité gallo-romaine – un état des connaissances après deux siècles de fouilles et de trouvailles', *Sucellus*, **55**, 32–50
- Philippe, M, Meurisse, M, March, R and Rassart, V 2006 *Fouilles archéologiques et études morphosédimentaires du site d'Étaples, 'Les Sablins' (Pas-de-Calais): Rapport de fouille, janvier 2006*, Service Régional de L'archéologie Nord-Pas-de-Calais
- Piningre, J, Bostyn, F, Couppe, J, Constantin, C and Delibrias, G 1991 'L'atelier de taille du silex des Sablins à Étaples (Pas-de-Calais)', *Gallia Préhistoire*, **33**, 83–135
- Pomey, P and Rieth, E 2005 *L'Archéologie navale*, Paris: Éditions Errance
- Rouche, M 1977 'Les Saxons et les origines de Quentovic', *Revue du Nord – Archéologie*, **235**, 457–478
- Salanova, L 2000 *La Question du Campaniforme en France et en les Ile Anglo-Normandes: Production, Chronologie et Rôles d'un Standard Céramique*, Paris: Société préhistorique française/ Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques
- Samson, A 2006 'Offshore finds from the Bronze Age in North-Western Europe: The Shipwreck Scenario revisited', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, **25**(4), 371–388
- Souquet, G 1865 'Rapport sur des fouilles faites au château d'Étaples en 1864', *Bulletin de la Comité des Antiquités Départementales du Pas-du-Calais*, **2**, 270–274
- Van Vliet-Lanoë, B, Gandouin, E and Meurisse, M 2004 'Evolution des niveaux marins quaternaires dans le nord de la France: données nouvelles et mise au point', *Sucellus*, **55**, 1–16
- Van Vliet-Lanoë, B, Mansy, J, Margerel, J, Vidier, J, Lamarche, J and Everaest, M 1998 'Le Pas-de-Calais, un détroit cénozoïque à ouvertures multiples', *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Sciences, Série 2, Sciences de la terre et des planètes*, **326**, (10), Paris, 729–736