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# Technologies – Knowledges – Sustainability Crafting societies in the first millennium CE

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The front page: Amber nuggets and semi-finished amber beads and pendants from pit-house 7/91 in Biskupice, Poland.

Photo: Marcin Woźniak.

The back page: Suspension loop for gold bracteate S12625, from Hå on Jæren, Rogaland. Photo: Annette G. Øvreid.

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# Craft productions in Quentovic: current knowledge

INÈS LEROY

Inès Leroy 2025. **Craft productions in Quentovic: current knowledge.** *AmS-Skrifter* 29, 73–80, Stavanger, ISSN 0800-0816, ISBN 978-82-7760-205-9.

To date, little is known about the craft productions in Quentovic. Discovered artefacts leave no doubt, however: in the heart of the settlement along the river Canche, the working of amber, metal, antler and glass is clearly documented from the very first occupation of the site at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, until it was abandoned around the 10<sup>th</sup> century. On the southern plateau above the valley, a Carolingian-age potter's workshop was in use during the 9<sup>th</sup> century, located at the edge of the monastic estate of Saint-Josse. My paper will present the current evidence of these productions, their locations and their integration into the site. It will also raise the question of the involvement of the abbeyes established near the *portus* in the exploitation of the resources of the lower Canche valley.

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*Key words:* Quentovic, *Emporium*, pottery, metal, antler, amber

## Introduction

In the Early Middle Ages, Quentovic was a major economic and administrative centre and part of the network of *emporium* that dominated trade from the English Channel to the Baltic. Its emergence was determined by the importance of cross-Channel relations, with the Canche estuary and the ancient roads providing its continental network. Characteristic craft production was concentrated here, and the institutional and economic management of river activities attested to its importance from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries (cf. Leroy 2023a, 202–22).

The archaeological site of Quentovic, discovered in the French commune of La Calotterie, (hamlet Visemarest) in 1982, is made up of two main centres of occupation (Figure 1). At the bottom of the valley along the river Canche, a settlement existed since the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. It has been documented by several archaeological campaigns in 1980–1990 (Hill 1992; Hill et al. 1990, 1992; Hill and Worthington 2010) and developer-led/commercial archaeology (since 2006) (Cense-Bacquet 2016, 2021; Duvaut-Robine 2015; Routier and Barbet 2010). Between 1984 and 1992, 68 test pits (each from 2 to 4m<sup>2</sup>, 1–2m deep), were dug to assess the extent of the site. At that time, four limited-area sections (each between 50 and 225m<sup>2</sup>, 0.5–2m deep) were partially excavated. It would appear that some of the material from these digs was

sieved, but it is not possible to determine exactly which areas or layers were involved. Between 2006 and 2014, three rescue excavations explored larger plots (12.800m<sup>2</sup>, 2500m<sup>2</sup>, 900m<sup>2</sup>, respectively), limited in depth, in preparation of construction projects. The total area explored to date is around 2ha.

Recently, a synthesis of all this data distinguished four main phases of occupation (Leroy 2023a). First, there is a gradual development of the settlement from the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century to its peak in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, followed by its contraction and transformation into a farm during the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In 1995, a second site was uncovered on the plateau (hamlet La-Fontaine-aux-Linottes) during motorway construction work (Desfossés 1997; Desfossés et al. 1997a, 1997b). This was a large cemetery (more than 650 burials) that had been in use in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, followed by a ceramic production workshop between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the first third of the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In parallel with this newly established archaeological overview, a reflection on the contemporary environment of Quentovic has led to a regressive analysis of the landscape, based on the observation that this site, reputed to be a port, no longer has any connection with the sea (Leroy 2023b). This regressive study of the landscape of the lower Canche valley is based on an integrated spatial analysis of textual, cartographic, archaeological,

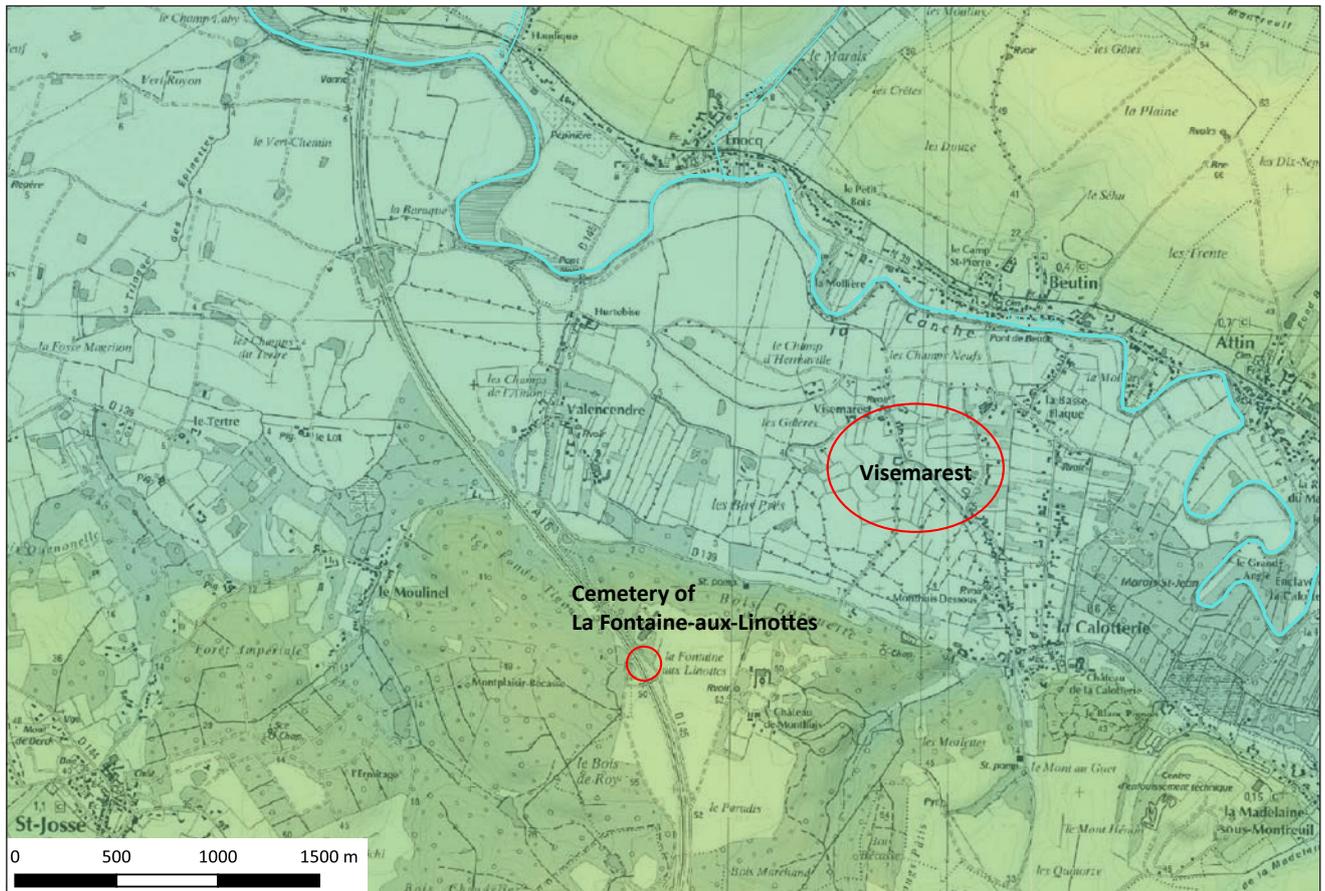


Figure 1. Localisation map (base map: © IGN).

palaeoenvironmental and micro-toponymic data, coupled with digital imagery (aerial photography, satellite images and lidar). It provides a context for the site, raises questions about the occupation and management of the land, and outlines the links to the hinterland and to the Anglo-Saxon, Frisian and Scandinavian worlds. It also lays the foundations for a reflection about the scale of the occupation of the valley, where the roles and relationships between secular and ecclesiastical powers, including those across the Channel, remain to be defined for the early periods.

To date, major efforts still have to be done in the field of archaeological artefacts, as treatment varies greatly depending on the operations concerned and the types of artefacts. Standardisation and/or updating of the few existing studies are essential, and a systematic review of pending files must be carried out. However, despite this incomplete vision, a range of craft practices can be observed or deduced, mainly for the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. In this sense, the main goal of this paper is to provide an overview of our knowledge of these productions, to identify the evidence and to consider the location, chronology and, where appropriate, the phases of the represented production processes.

## Crafts production

While little is known about 7<sup>th</sup>-century workings in Visemarest, a range of craft practices of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries have been identified. Ceramic, textile and glass production as well as bone, metal and amber working are all represented by tools or production waste (Figure 2). The quantity of findings varies according to their nature and the extent of the waste deposits, however. No workshops seem to have been positively identified in the various excavated areas. Rather, the evidence of the large number of test pits (68 test pits, from 2 to 4m<sup>2</sup>) clearly indicates that these different activities were spread throughout the site. These are activities that traditionally also were practised at other contemporary equivalent sites such as London (Blackmore 2002, 2010, 2012; Cowie and Blackmore 2008, 2012; Fowler and Taylor 2013; Malcolm et al. 2003), York (Hall 2014), Haithabu (v. Carnap-Bornheim and Hilberg 2007; Hilberg 2011, 2018, 2022; Kalmring 2010, 2020a, 2020b; Schietzel 2018) or Ribe (Bencard 1981; Sindbæk 2022; Søvsø 2020).

### Textile craft

Although evidence of textile craftsmanship is frequently found at sites from the Early Medieval Period, the evi-

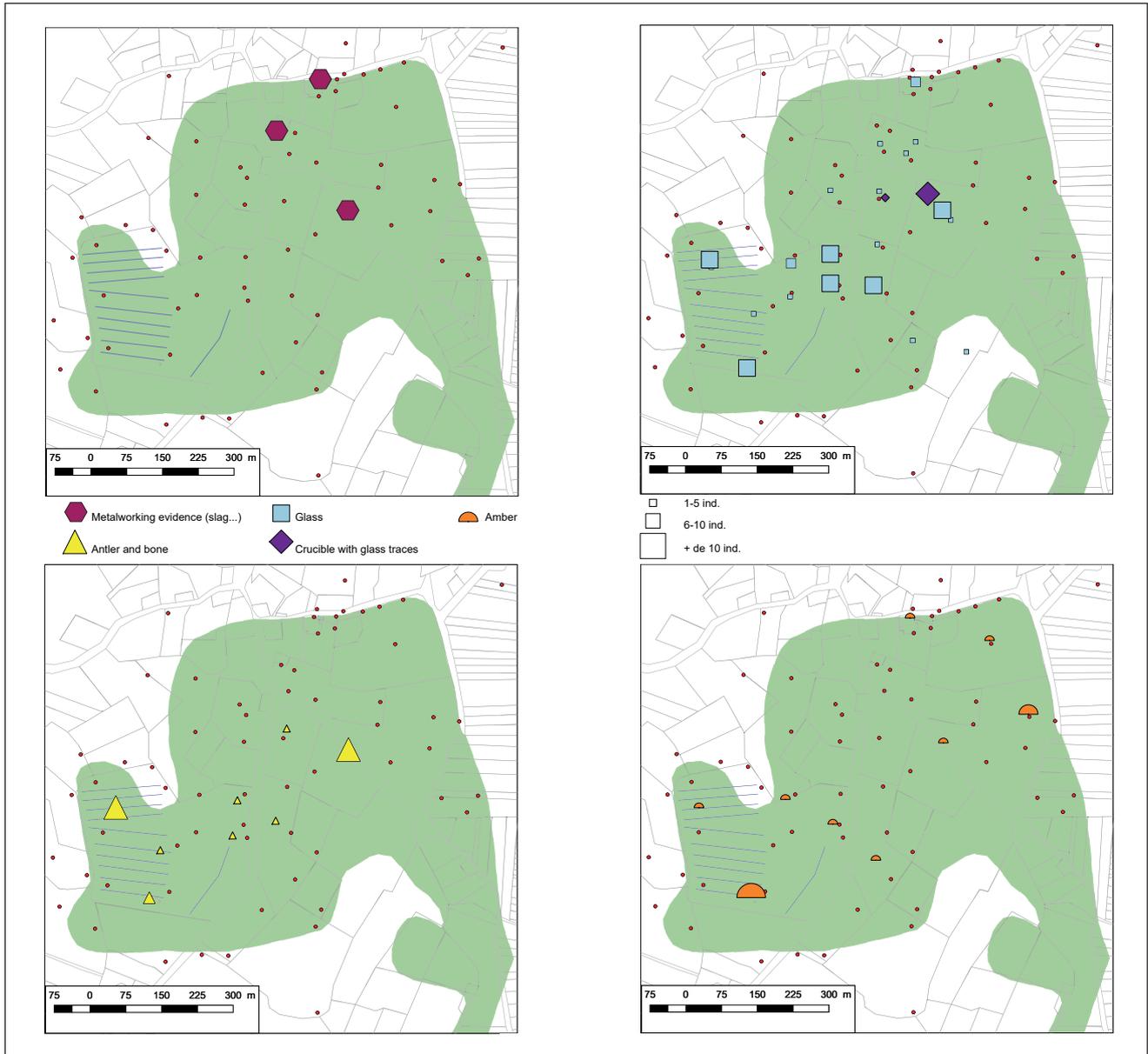


Figure 2. Distribution of different types of artefacts (the symbols indicate the location of test pits or trenches that have yielded artefacts; the extension of the site proposed by David Hill is shown in green shading).

dence it often fairly limited and here represented only by a few artefacts. These objects, found throughout the site, document the preparation of wool, spinning, weaving and sewing.

A large number of sheep bones, which probably were from animals used for the production of wool that had been culled as the quality of the fleece declined, have been discovered (Oueslati 2012; Yvinec 2018; Yvinec et al. 2018). Shears likely were used to shear sheep, while several wide-toothed combs and a possible fragment of a carding comb confirm that the wool was processed (Soulat et al. 2019). There is no palynological evidence of textile plants, mainly because of the poor preservation of pollens in the studied samples. On the other hand, the

last excavation revealed remains of hemp, which account for 16% of the cultivated plants in the assemblage of plant macroremains from the Carolingian phase (Preiss 2018). According to the specialist, this indicates that the plant probably was used both for its oleaginous properties and for its textile fibres.

Although the evidence is fairly limited, spinning seems attested to by seven bone and three chalk spindle whorls (Barbet and Routier 2018, 299–300; Soulat 2012, 52–54, 76–80, 83). Weaving is identified by the presence of nine weaver’s spindles made of antler, animal bone and stone, three awls and 23 fragments of loom weights; these were hand-crafted from chalky clay. As Jean Soulat has pointed out, they have a circular shape that is not very

common in northern France, but is more common in England between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (Soulat 2012). Finally, there were five bone needles, a probable indication of sewing.

### **Metalworking**

Evidence of metalworking is also limited (or sparse). However, scrap metal was discovered in the backfill of a ditch (plot AC 277) at the site, dating from the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Duvaut-Robine 2019). The bases of forges, slag and scraps of iron cuttings all point to metalworking having taken place near this ditch. Production continued in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, as evidenced by the metallurgical waste with a total weight of 40kg found in 15 pits (plots AC3p/AC40) (Cense-Bacquet 2021). Again, the waste mainly consists of slag, scrap, metal waste and metal objects, but also of fragments of the walls of a kiln with ventilation holes. Two areas of concentration were observed, but no specific archaeological structures were identified as the bases of forges only were evidenced by waste slags from the bottom of a melting pot, and of the kilns just minor elements from the vault remained. Despite the lack of defined structures the waste slags and vault-remains might indicate a nearby metallurgical activity and forging, especially since a forge requires very little: a fireplace, a container of water, something to serve as an anvil (a stone, a chopping block of wood) and a supply of firewood. No specialist study has been carried out on this waste.

More bases of forges, slag and scraps of iron cuttings were discovered in the 1980s, but still have to be studied. And according to some drawings of artefacts discovered during the same period, copper appears to have been

worked here, too. Finally, research needs to be done on objects in connexion with the artefacts of the cemetery, such as the plate of a fibula discovered in the *vicus* that is similar to a complete fibula from the cemetery (Figure 3). Does this plate represent a dismantled object that was meant to be remelted, or was it intended to be used on a new fibula? The question is open.

### **Glassmaking**

Glass was found in small quantities throughout the site. Only six test pits revealed larger concentrations, a phenomenon partly linked to the larger size of the excavation areas (Evison and Heyworth 1990). Most of the finds are fragments of vessels, including bell beakers, cone beakers and palm cups. Six fragments of linen-smoothers and pieces of window glass were also found.

In addition to these objects, production waste (glass paste flows, fragments of furnace walls), eleven crucibles and reticulated rods attest to the glassmaking craft at the site (Cense-Bacquet 2012, vol. 2; Evison and Heyworth 1990). The concentration of this evidence in and around plots AC 3p and AC 40 suggests that there was a workshop located close to these plots, although the exact location cannot be established.

### **Antler and bone**

Bone and antler working is much better represented: a total of 278 cutting scraps from 41 archaeological contexts (mostly unstudied) demonstrate that crafting of these materials took place at the Quentovic site. The occupation level of the 7<sup>th</sup> century contained a large concentration of worked bone and antler (174 scraps from 10 contexts) including 47 tines, 43 (fragments of) rectangular plates and

Figure 3. Plate and Faversham-type fibula, cemetery, grave 755. © Musée de Berck-sur-Mer. After Desfossés et al. 1997.



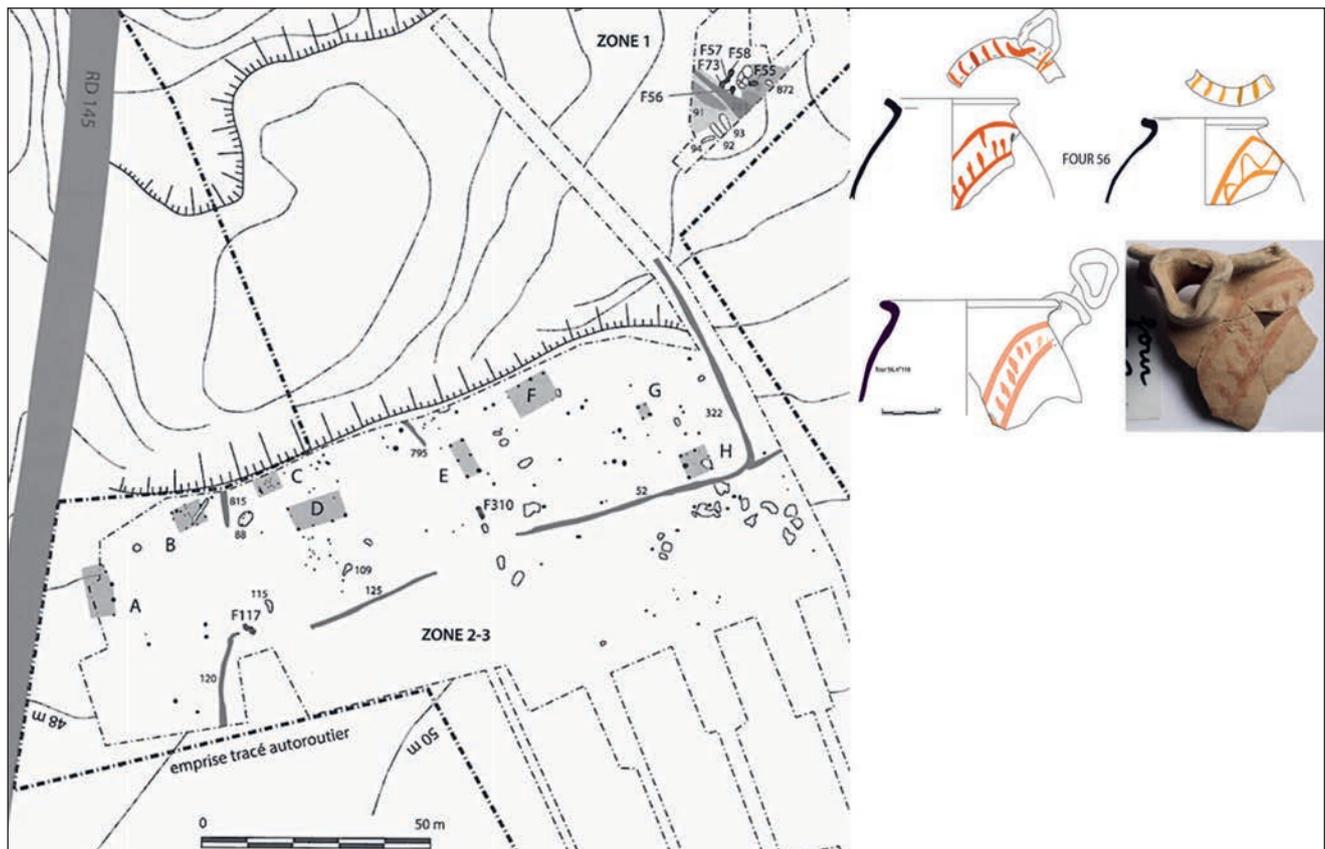


Figure 4. Carolingian ceramic workshop. After Thuillier et al. 2015. The excavation of zone 2/3 revealed several ovens, as well as working and/or residential buildings, a pit house, domestic ovens, a series of ditches and a large number of pits.

tines with squared ends, perhaps used to make stamps for ceramics, as well as other production waste.

Craftsmanship continued in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, as attested by the discovery of animal remains with toolmarks and several objects (94 from 25 contexts), including 35 combs (Soulat et al. 2019). This corpus of combs, one of the largest in northern France, is typologically very heterogeneous and includes examples of Frisian, Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian types that have never been seen in France before.

Most of these objects and production waste are of antler, but a number of bone artefacts, including a spindle, an amulet, a (knife ?) handle and a spindle whorl, were also discovered (Soulat 2012). The utilisation of ruminant horns is evidenced by the presence of isolated bones and frontal bones with cutting marks. Morphological examination shows that they come mainly from male animals. In general, there are more females than males in animal herds, so the fact that more male remains were found in the archaeological repository implies that the meat supply was not limited to a few nearby herds, but was fairly extensive, i.e., suggesting a wide supply area. A case of ovine polykeratitis has been

confirmed, providing rare evidence of sheep brought in from across the Channel. Other animal remains found at the site were pig *fibula* (to make needles), large ox bones (*metacarpus*) and ruminant horns. This collection makes Quentovic one of France's most richly endowed sites with bone artefacts, albeit the quantity is less than from other *emporia*.

#### Amber craft

Amber working debris was discovered in five test pits and five excavation areas. For the most part, it contains extremely small fragments found during the rare occasions when sieving were carried out. They include two beads and a few partially worked pieces. Two major areas with amber workshops were identified, one in the north of the site and one in the south, in the 7<sup>th</sup>-century layers. It is therefore tempting to compare these observations to the large number of amber beads (559 beads or its fragments spread over 70 graves) that were discovered in the cemetery of La Fontaine-aux-Linottes, although contemporaneity sites cannot yet be established with any certainty. The small quantities discovered in the *vicus* obviously appears negligible compared to those of the other

*emporium*, but very little use was made of sieving, which strongly suggests that the smallest fragments were lost.

### **Carolingian ceramic production**

A pottery workshop was partly excavated on the plateau in the hamlet La-Fontaine-aux-Linottes (Desfossés et al. 1997a; Thuillier et al. 2015). It consisted of nine kilns and adjacent circular firing structures associated with buildings on posts and a pit house. Several pits of varying sizes probably were used for extracting clay before being converted into workshop dumps. One of them stands out for its dimensions and likely was a structure dedicated to the preparation or storage of clay. More than 150 postholes were discovered. Five buildings were identified, such as workshop buildings, housings and a granary. About 25.000 fragments of pottery formed the basis for the definition of four types of tempers mainly produced with local clay from the Eocene formation at Saint-Aubin (Bocquet-Liénard and Routier 2016; Thuillier et al. 2015). The large quantity of finds attest to the production of pottery, mainly pots and jugs, some with red painted motifs, from the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> to the first third of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Thuillier et al. 2015) (Figure 4).

### **Conclusions**

At this stage, the evidence relating to these various crafts is insufficient to assess the scale of production or to establish whether they met local needs or were intended for commerce. It is also difficult to determine the practical importance of these crafts for the site's economy. However, the presence of the Carolingian ceramics workshop in the grounds of the Abbey of Saint-Josse-sur-Mer raises the question of the involvement of religious institutions in this trade and, more broadly, in the organisation and management of the Quentovic site (Leroy 2023b, 199–232).

The aim of this article was to provide an overview of the crafts represented at Quentovic. The preliminary inventory of objects from all campaigns is going to serve as the basis for a systematic continuation of this study in the future in relation to the different phases of occupation that recently have come to light.

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