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Space and place in the Early Iron Age in eastern Burgundy

Régis Labeaune

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RURAL SETTLEMENT

RELATING BUILDINGS, LANDSCAPE, AND
PEOPLE IN THE EUROPEAN IRON AGE

edited by

Dave C. Cowley, Manuel Fernández-Götz,
Tanja Romankiewicz & Holger Wendling

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RURAL SETTLEMENT



Sidestone Press

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Space and place in the Early Iron Age in eastern Burgundy

Régis Labeaune

9.1 Introduction: Geographical context and research history of the study area

This paper is concerned for the most part with the eastern zone of the Côte d'Or during the 8th to 5th century BC, focusing on the region around Dijon and the Saône plain (Figure 1). In this area the network of rivers plays an important role in how settlements are distributed and their organization and is also significant for transport. The Saône River is an important commercial route between the Mediterranean and the North Sea via the Rhône and the Rhine. It is located 80 km to the south of the site of Vix where imported objects from the Mediterranean have been found. These were transported along commercial routes via eastern Burgundy, using the Saône River and its tributaries to gain access to the Seine Valley further to the north. With this developed exchange system in place, the number of settlements increased in this area.

Up until the 1980s, the excavations of tumuli, cemeteries and hilltop settlements were the main source of data for the Early Iron Age (Figure 2 A). These sites, which are still visible in the landscape today, gave the incorrect impression of a higher density of occupation on the plateau than in the valleys during Late Prehistory. Work on settlements located on the plains was under-represented and based mainly on incidental discoveries (Figure 2 B).

However, over the last 20 years, the rise in the number of preventive archaeology excavation projects has provided the opportunity to investigate large areas, and this has had a major impact on our knowledge of settlement patterns on the plain (Figure 2 C). With the expansion of the urban area of Dijon, over a thousand hectares have been archaeologically investigated through evaluation and full area excavation. These areas are mainly to the east and the southeast of the town, where the landscape is more suitable to large-scale development. This mosaic of interventions supports a new approach to the Hallstattian occupation of this area which has completely overturned the schema established before the 1980s. In contrast, during the last 30 years or so there have been no excavations of hilltop sites and tumuli.

In D.C. Cowley,
M. Fernández-Götz,
T. Romankiewicz &
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9.2 Problems in understanding the spatial organisation of settlements

The excavation of large areas within the framework of preventive archaeology has shed new light on the spatial occupation of sites even though investigation is restricted to the actual surface area of the project. This limitation can be frustrating in the case of linear developments, such as roads, where the area investigated is rarely more than 50 m across and it is impossible to explore the full extent of archaeological sites. Thus, it is only after multiple excavations in adjoining areas over several years that a complete picture is possible. This is not a problem for largescale investigation in quarries or with the development of large commercial zones.

The methods used for evaluation can also limit understanding of the spatial occupation of a site. Evaluation trenches cover about 10% of the surface area on a random sampling, and the results of these interventions inform the decision by the Ministry of Culture whether an excavation takes place or not. The number and the concentrations of features in the trenches need to be sufficiently important to trigger an excavation. However, the density of features

on small rural settlements is generally low which does not encourage the excavation of these types of sites.

The second factor that can alter our perception of occupation patterns concerns their state of preservation, which is dependent on the type of agriculture practiced on the land. In the second half of the 20th century, ploughing to depths of 35 cm was particularly damaging for archaeological sites. With the exception of the site of Talant “La Peute Combe” (which we will discuss further on) where occupation levels have been preserved, all other sites have been heavily truncated and important information has been lost. To give an idea to the extent of this erosion, the plans of three buildings from Talant can be used to simulate the impact on our knowledge of the site of truncation to depths of 10 cm, 20 cm and 30 cm (Figure 3). In building 1 truncation to 10 cm depth would remove the layer of burnt flooring, leaving only two postholes about 15 cm in depth and a third about 30 cm deep.

The second example (Figure 3, number 4) is apsidal on plan with an earth floor delimited by a partition defined by stake holes. With truncation to a depth of 30 cm, only the postholes and the principal structure of the building

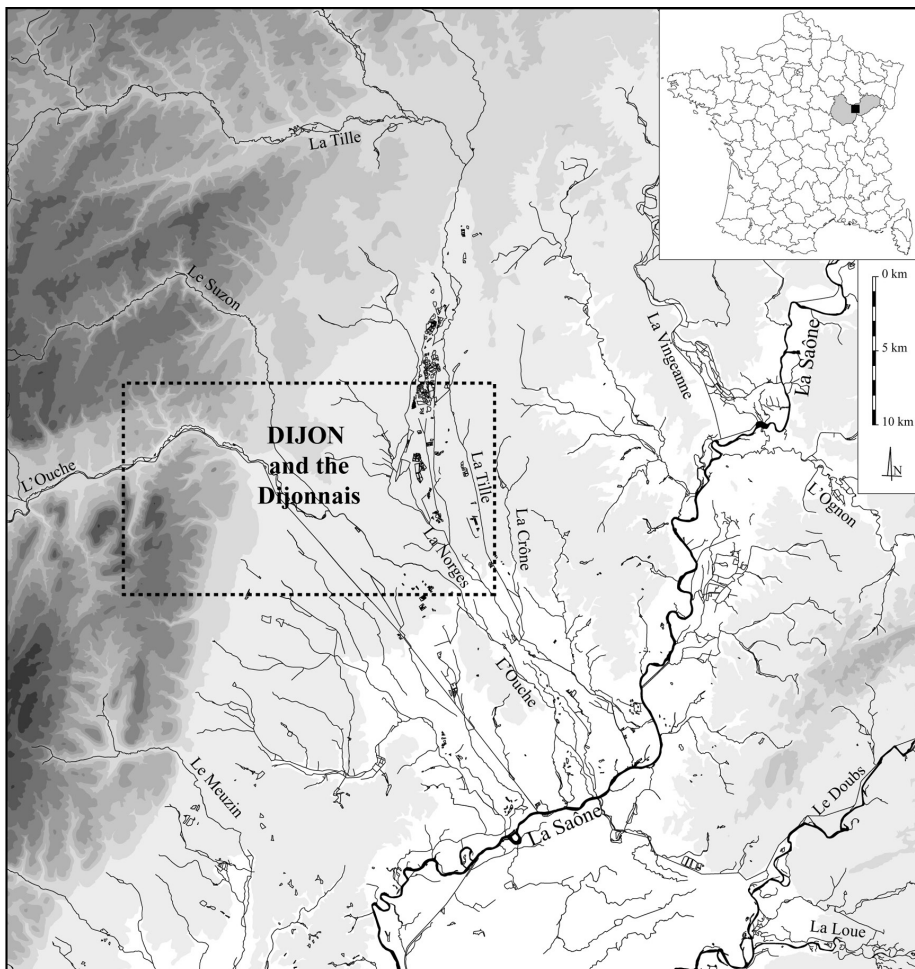


Figure 1: Presentation of the geographical context.

and several pits remain, making it look more like a six post hole granary. The third example (Figure 3, number 5) is divided into two parts, one with a sunken floor, which seems to have been a forge workshop. At a depth of 30 cm only this sunken area is still visible under the level of the forge, while the other part of the building has totally disappeared.

These examples are presented to illustrate the potential impact of truncation on our knowledge-base. If this site had been discovered in an area subjected to heavy ploughing these three buildings would appear as a granary, a few isolated post holes and a refuse pit showing metalworking activity. However, even when two thirds of the information on the spatial organization of the buildings might have disappeared, the artisan activity on the site might still be identified.

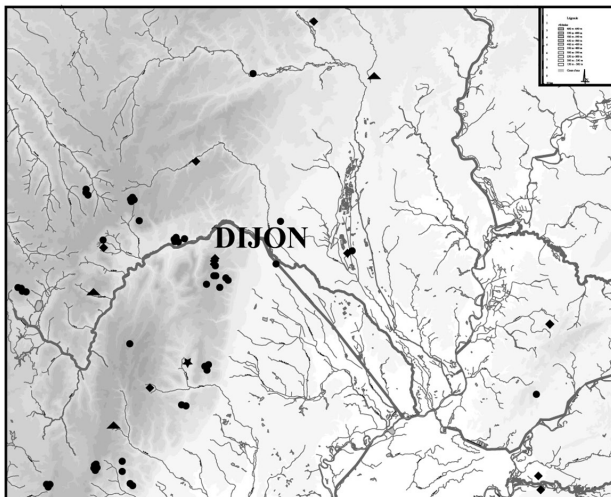
9.3 The evidence for the Early Iron Age

The combination of past work, and the growth in the evidence base over the last two decades provides us with a range of evidence for the Early Iron Age occupation of the study area. This ranges across both settlement and funerary evidence, which will be reviewed briefly before turning to a more general synthesis of occupation during this period.

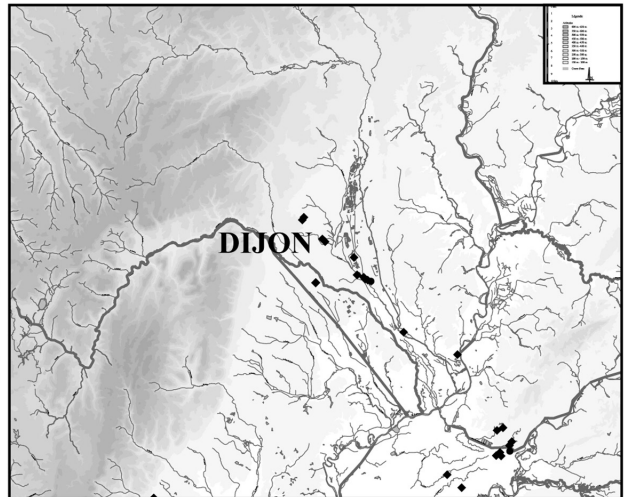
9.3.1 Hilltop sites

From the beginning of the 20th century, local scholars compiled the first inventories and made the first site plans of hilltop dwellings that survived as earthworks visible on the surface. On many sites, trenches were also dug in order to understand the architecture of the ramparts. In the 1960s these settlements became the focus of research

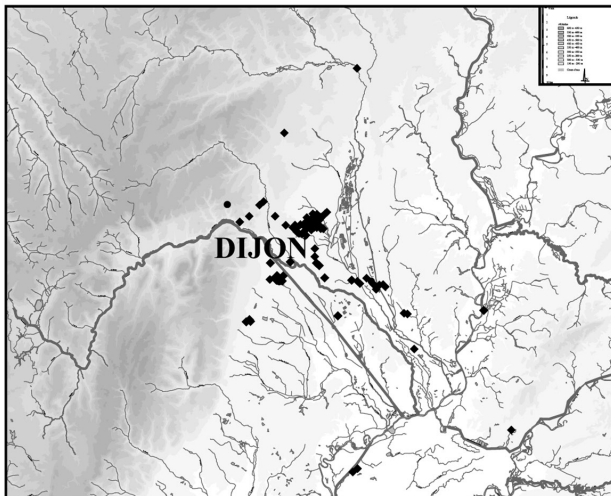
A - Sites discovered before 1980



B - Sites discovered between 1980 and 2000



C - Sites discovered between 2000 and 2013



D - Areas of investigation around Dijon

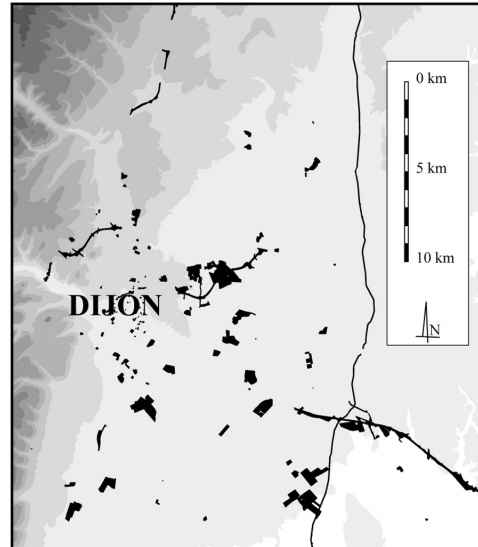


Figure 2: Patterns of discoveries of Early Iron Age sites.

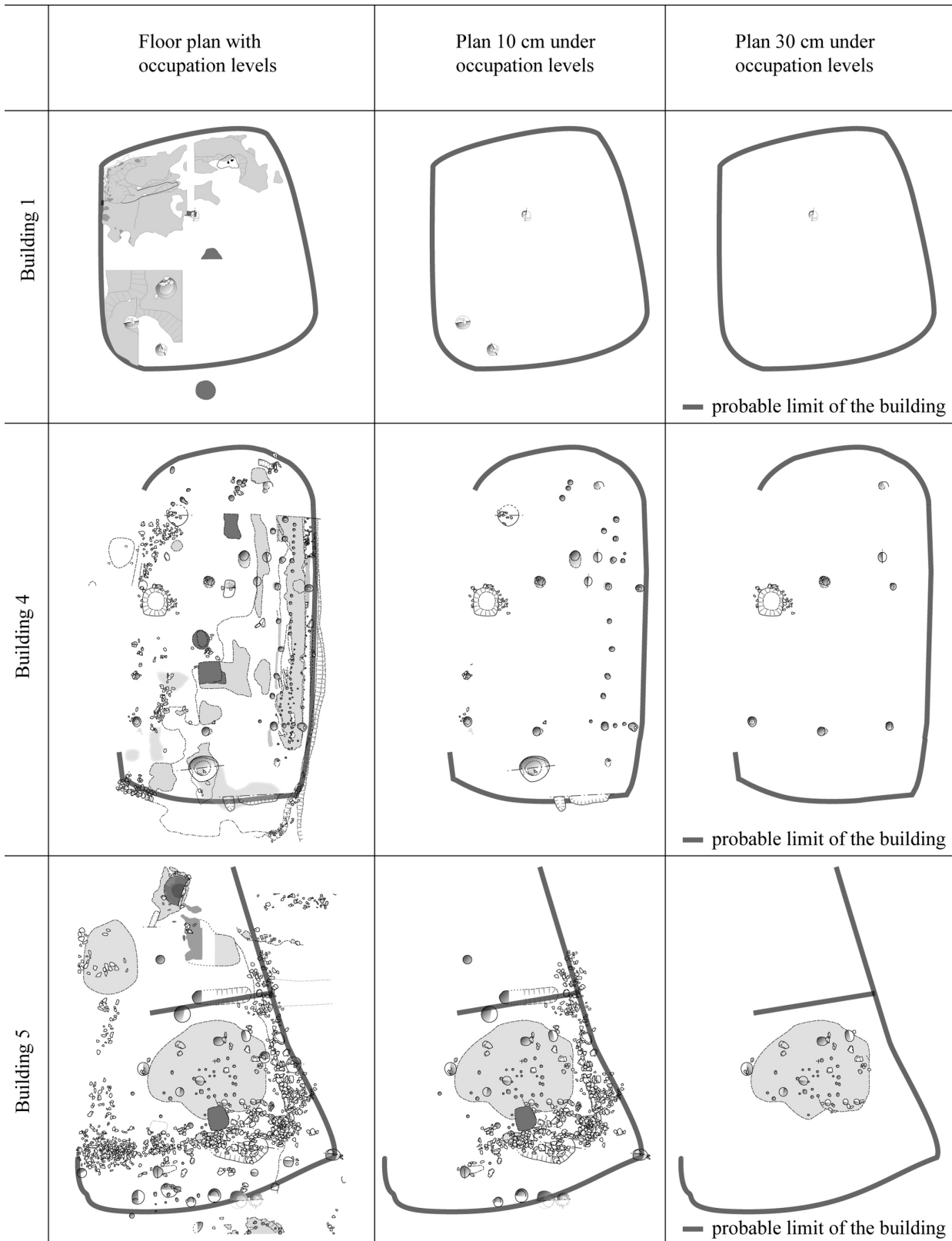


Figure 3: Examples of site erosion using data from Talant « La Peute Combe ».

by J.P. Nicolardot who created a typology of different groups, the three most frequent being hilltop settlements, barred spurs and settlements located on the edge of the plateau (Nicolardot 2003).

Among the 40 or so fortified hilltop sites that have been identified only five seem to have been clearly occupied during the Early Iron Age (Figure 4). These are situated on the edge of the study areas on the reliefs of the “la Côte” and the Massif de la Serre, and range from 1.3 to 6.5 hectares in internal area including the ramparts.

The establishment of these settlements appears to be strategic as they are sited in locations that could control communication networks that serve the river valleys. Most are dated only by few pottery sherds found during field walking. Where trenches have been excavated they extend over less than 1% of the overall area of the sites. The Etaule site is one of the most excavated with an intervention carried out between 1976 and 1987 and focused on an area of 700m² on the rampart (1.4% of the total area of the site). Dating evidence is scarce and their internal spatial organization is unknown. The Rahon site, dating to the Ha B3/Ha C, seems to be the oldest, while the Mesmont site dates to the HaB3 and was in use until the Early La Tène with a hiatus during the Ha C. The place of these sites in a potential hierarchy of settlement is unclear with so little information, but their location on the major exchange routes make them strategic locations for the organization of the territory during the last phase of the Early Iron Age.

9.3.2 Settlements on the plain

Unlike hilltop settlements, settlements on the plain are more difficult to identify by field walking as they do not survive in relief on the ground surface. The removal of topsoil across extensive areas has however brought a new perspective, although, as discussed above, full excavations of sites may not always be possible, or may occur piecemeal over several years, and truncation of deposits through ploughing is a problem. However, the collated evidence allows us to broadly characterize the Early Iron Age settlements over time.

Hallstatt C sites are no larger than 4000 m² in area, but generally have an average surface area of 1700m². The best-preserved sites comprise several buildings, storage pits, and a poly-lobed pit. During the Ha C/Ha D (8th to 7th century BC) transition period the number of features evident within an equivalent surface area increases. However, settlements from this period may show many similarities, as can be seen in the similarities of settlements dating from Hallstatt C and Hallstatt D2 (6th century BC) in the east Dijon area (Figure 5). Both settlements include one complex building with storage features such as granaries, pits and refuse pits.

HaD3/LT A1 (first half of the 5th century BC) settlements contain more buildings, and in particular granaries, though the sites are bigger (e.g. average 3 or 4 ha in area) and activity within them is less dense. This has an important impact on the likelihood of them being excavated, as when only a few pits are identified during evaluation the low density of the features predisposes decision-making away from excavation. Unlike the enclosed hilltop sites, settlements situated on the plain are more diffuse and it is only during the investigation of large areas that it is really possible to define the surface area of sites and to understand the organisation of these small agro-pastoral installations (Malrain *et al.* 2005).

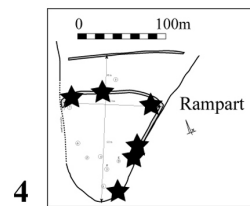
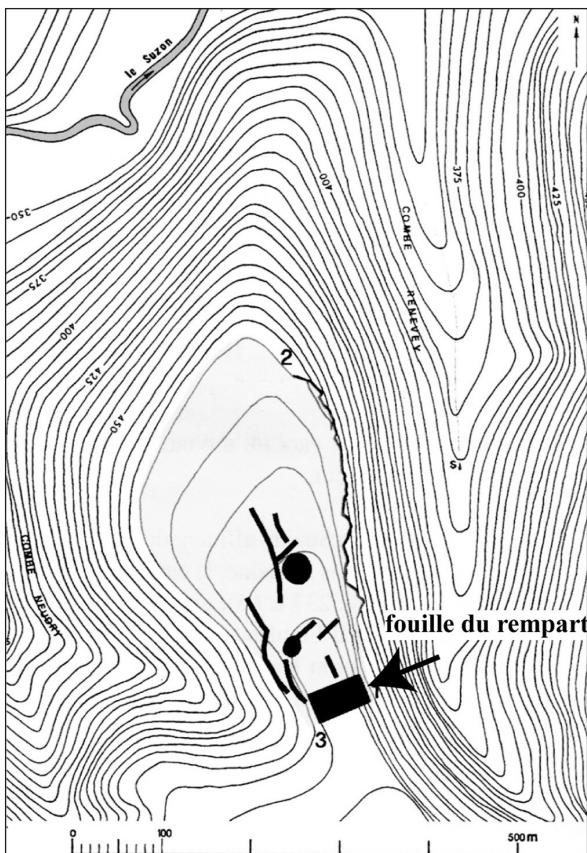
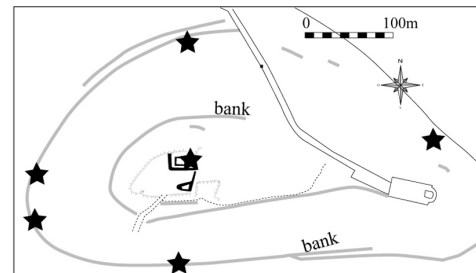
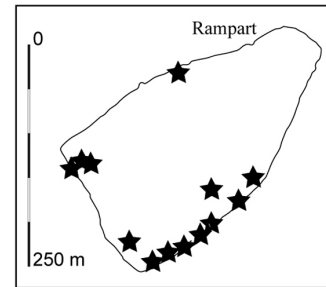
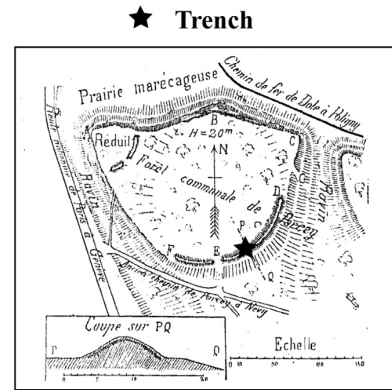
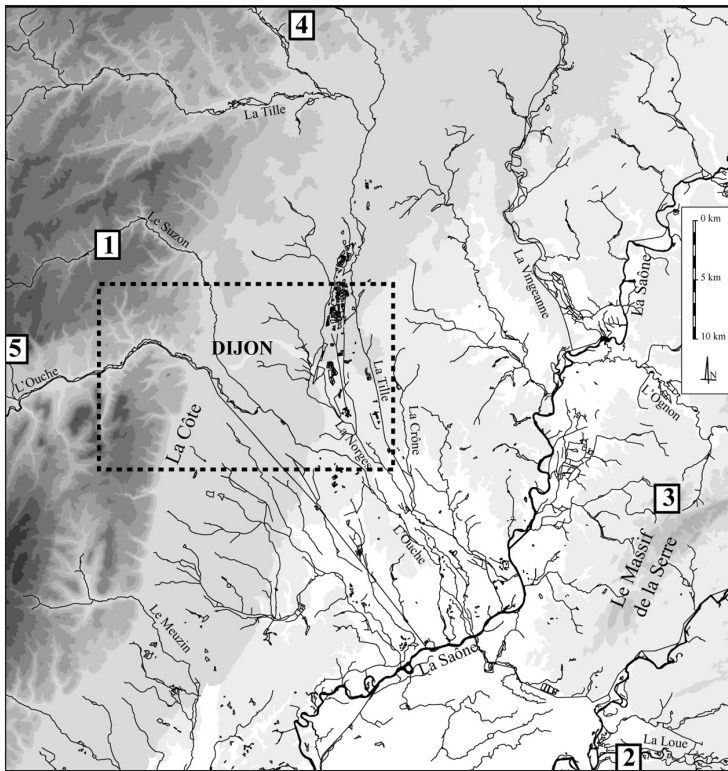
9.3.3 The Talant « la Peute Combe site: an artisanal suburb

The Talant site is an important discovery because of its excellent preservation, which includes floors and hearths. This hamlet dating to the first half of the 5th century BC includes 14 buildings spread over a surface area of 8000 m² (Labeaune & Alix 2014). One of the remarkable features of the site is evidence of specialised manufacture of small iron and bronze objects (fibulae, belt buckles, scalptorium, etc...), the number and diversity of which constitutes a reference collection for the Early/Late Iron Age transition period. The microscopic and macroscopic study of the iron metal waste and slag provides the opportunity to study this metalworking activity in detail and to identify the specific techniques used by the metalworkers (Labeaune *et al.* 2017).

There are two hypotheses for the economic network within which the objects from the Talant workshops were exchanged. Firstly, the site manufactured objects for distant markets, which would explain why the products are rarely found on other settlements and cemeteries in eastern Burgundy. Secondly, Talant could be the artisanal suburb for an important site located somewhere in the Dijon area, the location of which has not yet been identified. The study of the faunal remains shows a preference for good quality meat underlining its privileged status, whereas the archaeo-botanical evidence indicates that it is a consumer site, which probably depended on neighbouring farms to provide food. The manufacture of fibulae seems to be quite common during the 5th century and the site can be defined as an artisanal suburb, a main producer for an important settlement that was located close to Talant.

9.3.4 The funerary context

Many tumuli and monuments have been located by field walking and on aerial photographs. Almost 20% of Late Prehistoric mounds date to the Early Iron Age. However, data on actual monumental cemeteries in Eastern Burgundy is poor as only 5% of these sites date to the same period.



- 1 : Etaule : 5 hectares
- 2 : Rahon : 2.5 hectares
- 3 : Montmirey-la-Ville : 6.5 hectares
- 4 : Crecey-sur-Tille : 1.3 hectare
- 5 : Mesmont : 1.5 hectare pour le sommet,
13 hectares pour le rempart le plus large

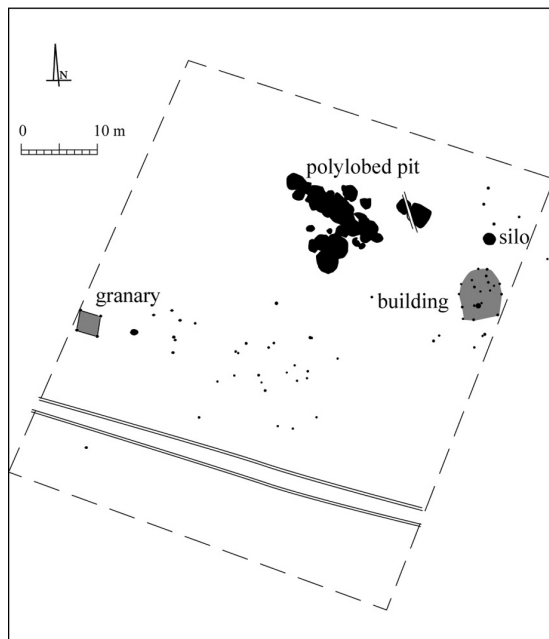
Figure 4. Hilltop settlements dating to the Hallstatt period.

The information gathered on funerary features and tombs during the first part of the 20th century is disparate as the activities of the Brigade Archéologique Bourguignonne destroyed many of the mounds during excavations designed to furnish private collections. These early excavations provide no data on the object assemblages of each tomb or in particular on the internal organisation of the tumuli. It is only from the 1960s onwards that the architecture of the Dijonnais monuments is studied with the drawing of plans and sections during excavation.

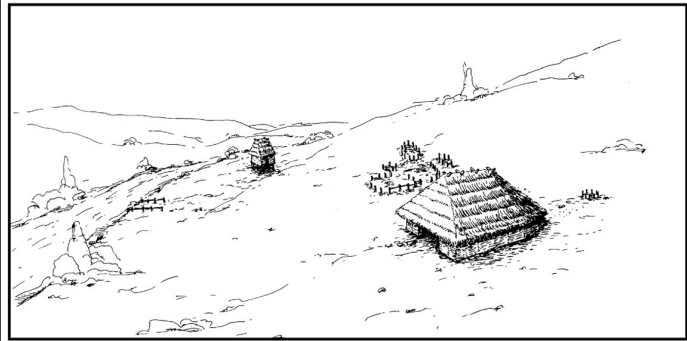
For the Early Iron Age mounds, which usually occur in cemeteries, the founding tomb often contains an iron sword. Unfortunately, these weapons are badly preserved and in most cases it is not possible to identify the typology of the sword and its date. From the beginning of the Hallstatt D,

these long weapons are replaced by smaller daggers with antenna. Lignite or bronze annular jewellery (e.g. torcs, bracelets or leg rings) is common and represents the main type of adornment found in funerary contexts. Other objects include leather belts decorated with bronze studs and buckles and objects such as pendants sewn onto clothes.

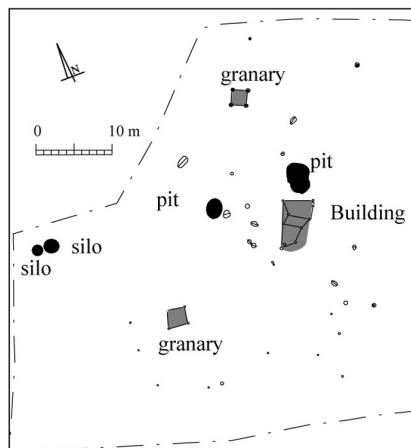
Fibulae are rare in funerary contexts of the early Hallstatt D, but they are more common from the Hallstatt D3 onwards. These later elements probably date to the Early La Tène and provide a *terminus antequem* for cemeteries that fell out of use around the middle of the 4th century BC. Even each individual tomb cannot be precisely dated; the objects found in each mound indicate that cemeteries were used over long periods, in some cases for almost three centuries.



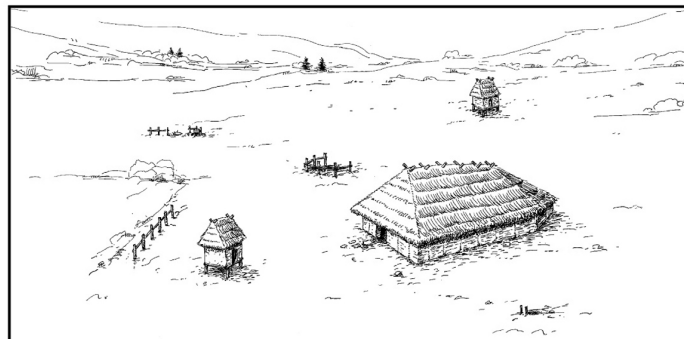
Ha C rural settlement



Saint-Apollinaire « Sur le petit Pré » (Labeaune Wiethold 2007)



Ha D2 rural settlement



Saint-Apollinaire « La Tirbaude 2 » (Labeaune Wiethold 2007)

Figure 5: Comparison of two settlements on the plain to the east of Dijon dating to Ha C and Ha D2.

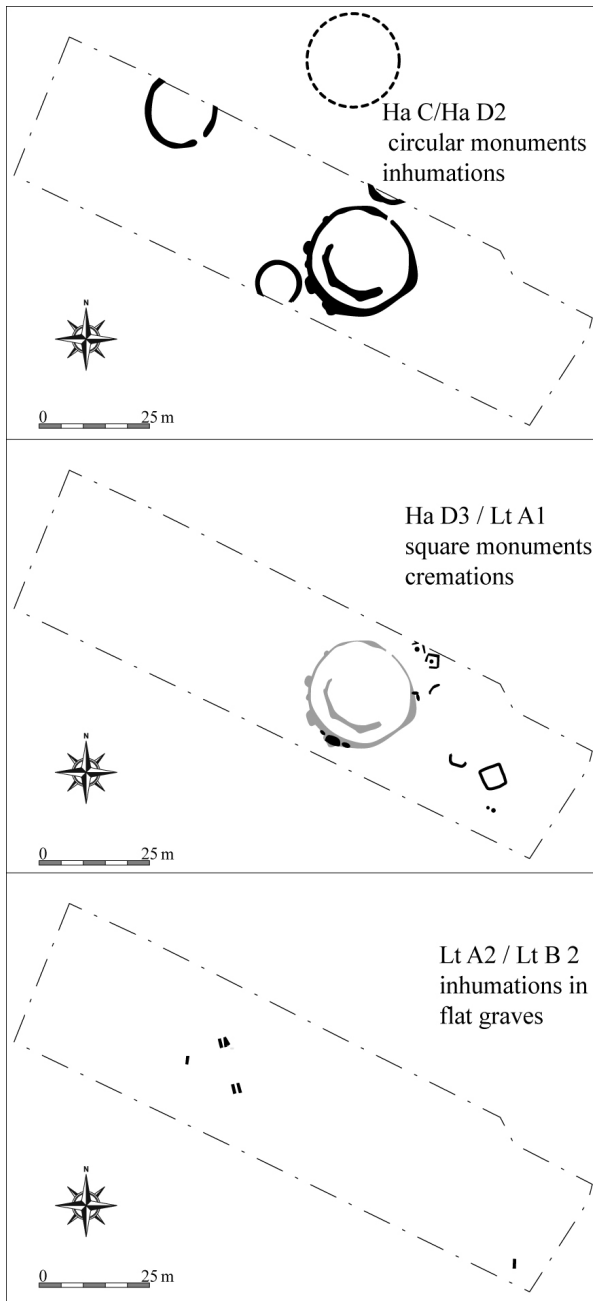


Figure 6: Evolution of the Genlis cemetery illustrating the continuity of funerary sites.

The development of aerial reconnaissance and photography has transformed our archaeological knowledge of the Saône plain and its tributaries. One of the most studied cemeteries in the area is Genlis discovered during aerial reconnaissance and excavated during construction of the railway line to the east of Dijon (Figure 6). It comprises three circular ditches and six small quadrangular enclosures with six inhumations and two cremation burials located around the monuments.

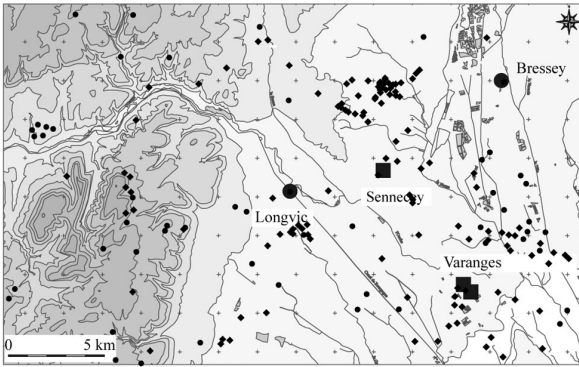
Two of the smaller circular ditches with diameters of 6 and 10 m have gaps in the ditches on the south-east. Four supplementary burials were discovered in the ditch of the largest monument confirming that the funerary space was extended. A burial sealing the ditch fill contained small iron toiletry objects dating to the Ha D3/LT A1. In the 5th century, funerary monuments change as the circular ditches with inhumations are replaced by quadrangular ditched monuments measuring less than 5.5 m across and containing cremation burials. More recent burials that date to the LT A2 and LT B, are found around these monuments showing a continuity in the use of the cemetery. As is the case for the tumuli, these cemeteries remained in use for around three centuries.

9.4 A synthesis of land occupation

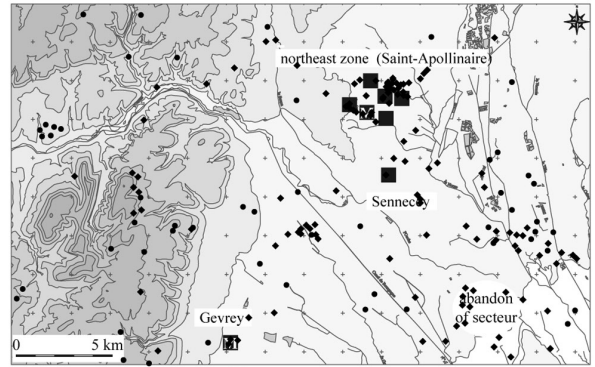
Most of the archaeological data from Eastern Burgundy comes from the area around Dijon and the synthesis of occupation from the 9th to the 3rd century BC is mainly focused on this area. The interpretations are based on work carried out during the last 30 years within the framework of preventive archaeology, taking account also of older discoveries.

In the second half of the 9th century, the density of sites in the area seems to be low and only a few can be dated to the Ha B3 (Figure 7a). The two known settlements in the Dijon area are characterised by post-hole buildings, large extraction pits, granaries and storage pits, though the excavations were not extensive enough to show how the sites were organised. However, the series of features that extend over an area of more than 10 hectares indicate a dispersed organisation of settlements, the question being whether these features belong to several smaller settlements or to one large settlement equivalent to the lakeside dwellings (Billaud *et al.* 1993). The finds from Varanges provide an excellent reference for regional pottery production of the Ha B3 similar to pottery from the east of France or from the west of Switzerland. Cemeteries are rare and only two areas have produced burials of this period. The first is the Longvic cemetery (Goguy 1984) and the second is an isolated cremation burial in a simple pit (Bressey-sur-Tille). The date of the latter burial is based on the pottery used to cover the cremation which dates to the end of the 11th century BC. It is impossible to propose any kind of spatial organisation for these discoveries, but they indicate that settlements were mainly located in the valleys of the river Tille and the river Ouche.

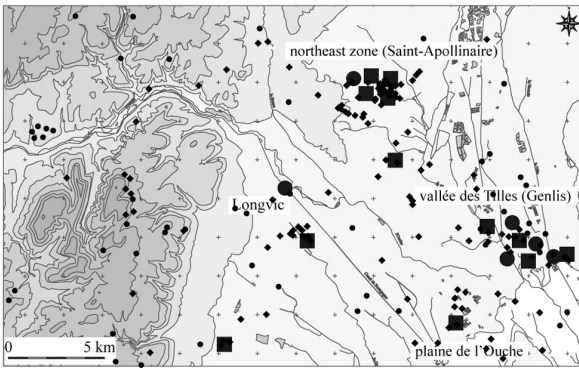
During the Hallstatt C1, the area of the Ouche plain appears to be completely abandoned. However, the northeast of the Dijon agglomeration is heavily occupied with the presence of at least six settlements (Figure 7b). These contain small units located at regular distances over the area. Their surface areas are less than 2000m² and in most cases they are characterised by the presence of large



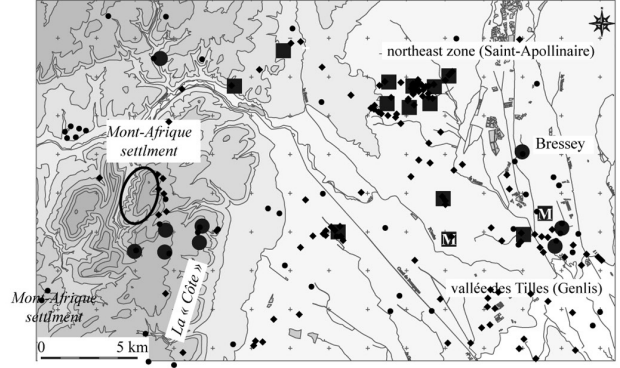
a : occupation during Ha B3



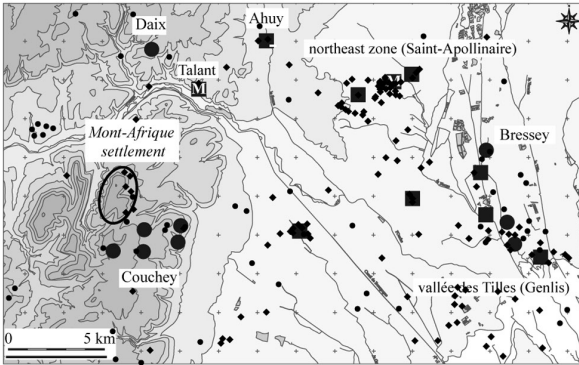
b : occupation during Ha C1



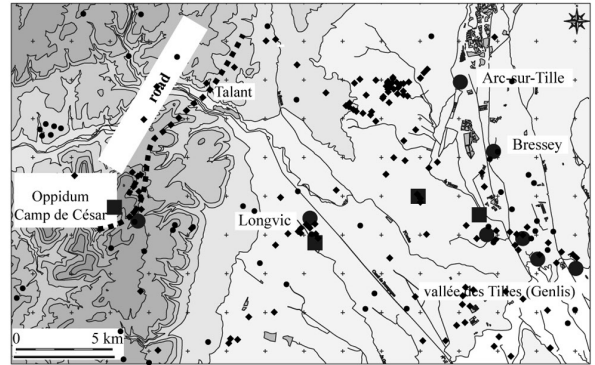
c : occupation during Ha C2/D1



d : occupation during Ha D1/Ha D2



e : occupation during Ha D3/ Lt A1



f : occupation during Lt A2/Lt B

● cemetery ■ settlement ▣ settlement with metalworking

Figure 7: Proposed development of spatial occupation in the Dijon area.

extraction pits used for building materials (then refilled with refuse that contains many pottery sherds). Storage areas are located on the eastern periphery of these farms. Two other settlements have been identified in the Dijon area at Sennecey-les-Dijon, a small farmstead which seems to correspond to the relocation of an earlier Ha B3 farm located 300 m away. The second was discovered at Gevrey-Chambertin during an evaluation, but investigations did not go far enough to better characterise the site. The identification of bronze metalworking in one of the pits

indicated the proximity of a building, perhaps a workshop. Evidence of metalworking dating to this period is rare and was not observed on the Saint Appollinaire site even though a clay mould fragment was found in a pit. Archaeobotanical study indicates that these settlements are mainly agricultural installations. No cemeteries have been discovered that are directly linked to these settlements.

During the Hallstatt C2 the density of land occupation increases (Figure 7c). To the northeast of the area, settlements are displaced towards the east to form a

new concentration of buildings that extends over 1 km². This seems to be the result of regrouping several small farmsteads along a river. The distance between the settlements is too great to be able to define this organisation as a village. Other settlements gradually colonise the Tilles valley. They are most often made up of a main building with silos and granaries and can cover an area smaller than 2500m². As is the case for settlements, the number of cemeteries also increases, as six funerary sites have been identified in the area. Only one inhumation with a bronze sword discovered in the Longvic cemetery was already in use during the Ha B3 (two circular monuments), and can be dated to the Hallstatt C2. This cemetery does not seem to have been used during the Hallstatt C1, but this chronological hiatus could be the result of the lack of extensive excavation around the cemetery. In total eight circular ditched monuments have been identified from aerial photographs and only three have been excavated. Monuments with several ditches have also been identified at three sites in the Tilles valley. It is not sure when the monuments were built but the ditches were filled in during the Hallstatt D2. By comparison the doubled ditched monuments of the middle Tille valley are built during this period.

In the late 7th century and early 6th century BC (early Hallstatt D1) land occupation of the plain becomes denser with the founding of several new settlements (Figure 7c). As in the previous periods, the principal activity is agriculture. The distance between the farmsteads and the cemeteries is about 500 m, which could mean that each funerary site can be directly linked to a settlement. Unfortunately, archaeological investigation on the linear developments only gave an insight into a small area of these funerary sites. To the north-east the settlements are located in the same area as the previous period. The only funerary feature is a double cremation burial dated to Ha C2/D1 by radiocarbon analysis. The Tille valley and the northeast of Dijon are the areas that are the most densely occupied during the first half of the Hallstatt DA. The rest of the Dijon area has a lower density of occupation and the Ouche valley is reoccupied after being abandoned for over two centuries. This hiatus could be linked to flooding of the area.

During the second half of the Hallstatt D1 is easier attribute chronology to excavated remains even though pottery forms evolve slowly. In addition, the fibulae start to appear on settlements during this period and are good chronological markers. However, it is still necessary to group together Ha D1 and D2 as this is a short period difficult to identify in settlement contexts. The north-eastern area of Dijon is still densely occupied by at least seven settlements (Figure 7d). These farmsteads double in size to an area of about 5000m². There are higher numbers of four post granaries and silos, as

storing cereals remains a major activity. Settlements in this area are located about 1 km apart. In the Tilles plain the monumental cemeteries are still in use as long term funerary sites that extend over several generations. Settlements move around but stay close to the cemeteries. The Bresse-sur-Tille tumulus is somewhat different with 114 inhumations and six cremations – a large cemetery founded in the 6th century and remaining in use for two centuries. Several cemeteries containing stone tumuli located on the ‘Côte’ are founded during this period. They occupy this area and the plateau at the foot of the ‘*Mont-Afrique*’, which were not occupied until this period.

Many fibulae have been discovered in Corcelles-les-Monts, which indicate the presence of a large settlement over eight hectares. This could be a hilltop clustered settlement that dominated the Dijon area. During the Ha D2 metalworking appears in several small settlements (Figure 7d). On these sites bronze (*e.g.* crucibles, clay moulds, cast metal) and iron (slag, shafts and bars) are worked together in the same installations. This remains still a rare activity in the Dijon area.

In Hallstatt D3 the tumuli founded during the previous period remain in use (Figure 7e). This is the case at Couchey, at Bresse-sur-Tille and at Daix where surrounding burials have been identified. However, in the Tilles plain funerary practices change and inhumation is replaced by cremation. The large circular ditched monuments are abandoned for smaller quadrangular monuments built to enclose simple cremation burials. These changes were in progress since the Ha C2/D1 on funerary sites in use for long periods. The number of settlements decreases but they are larger with a greater storage capacity (*e.g.* Ahuy where the storage pits are the main features found on the site). The number of granaries also increases and these are located on the outskirts of the farmsteads. Finds of timbal shaped fibulae on the ‘*Mont Afrique*’ indicate that the site was still in use during this period. Metalworking has been identified at Saint Apollinaire but with its three forges, Talant has been identified as the main metalworking site of the area.

From the second half of the 5th century (La Tène A) occupation in the Dijon area is mainly represented by cemeteries and isolated inhumations (Figure 7f). The Bresse-sur-Tille tumulus is still in use and Dux type fibulae are found in the most recent tombs. At Genlis the flat graves are located between earlier circular and quadrangular monuments. Cremation is again replaced by inhumation but older cemeteries continue to be used. The inhumations are often at the centre of large quadrangular ditched monuments such as at Longvic or circular monuments such as at Arc-sur-Tille. These clan or family cemeteries are abandoned during the La Tène B.

The organisation of settlements is not easily observed as sites become rarer. Only three settlements dating to this

later period have been excavated. These farmsteads have large storage areas (granaries and silos). The disposition of cemeteries can provide indications of occupation patterns but again it is difficult with so little information to propose a coherent model. The cemeteries are located in the valleys along the rivers. At Talant a road dating to the first half of the 5th century overlies the settlement dated by La Tène B fibulae. The first occupations on the 'Mont-Afrique' appear during this period. The Talant road could provide the means of transport between the 'Mont Afrique' and the plain via the river valleys. From the end of La Tène B indications of occupation become rarer and seem to finally disappear. This absence could however be linked to a change in the forms of sites or a change in the type of remains, with a reduced visibility in the archaeological record.

9.5 Conclusion

This first comparative approach drawing together recent evidence from preventive archaeology projects shows the diversity of occupation mainly at the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 5th century BC, a period during which princely or high status seats develop (Milcent 2012). One of the criteria that characterises this trend is the founding of a hilltop settlement or a centralised seat of power. However, in the Dijon area, most of the excavated settlements are small farmsteads. The increase in the number of sites during the Early Iron Age is linked to the multiplication of farming communities in the area. The scarceness of Mediterranean imports on these sites indicates that they did not engage in long distance exchange in order to support their communities.

Talant « *la Peute Combe* » does not however fall into this category of sites. This suburb of artisans is exclusively given over to the manufacture of small bronze and iron objects. The high degree of specialisation means that the site relied on at least one or two other settlements to distribute its products. The number of fibulae in the Dijon area is high and indicates that the consumer sites have not yet been discovered and that they could be located near to the workshops. A similar organisation is found in Bourges where the workshops are located about 2 km from the princely settlement (Augier *et al.* 2012). The same organisation appears in Lyon (Ramponi 2009; Carrara 2009) and the Heuneburg where the artisan quarters are on the outskirts of the fortified settlement (Kurtz 2012).

Comparing the Dijon sector with neighbouring areas during the Early Iron Age leads us to believe that there was a major site in this area located on the hilltops near to Talant (Labeaune 2016). This secondary economic power base probably administered the increasing number of small agricultural settlements that gravitated around the Dijon area during this period.

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9.7 Bibliography

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