

## Cahiers LandArc 2017 - N° 23

POST-MEDIEVAL

A Knife handle of Dutch style  
of the 17<sup>th</sup> century at Loches  
(Indre-et-Loire)



# LandArc

ARCHÉOLOGIE  
RECHERCHE  
COMMUNICATION

# A Knife handle of Dutch style of the 17<sup>th</sup> century from the royal lodgings of the fortress at Loches (Indre-et-Loire)

Pierre Papin<sup>(1)</sup> & Jean Soulat<sup>(2)</sup>

## Keywords:

Knife handle, enamel, bagpiper, Dutch, 17<sup>th</sup> century, Loches.

## Mots-clés :

Manche de couteau, émaux, joueur de musette, hollandais, XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Loches.

## Abstract:

Since 2013, the Archeological Service of Indre-et-Loire (Sadil) has been working on a new research programme on the fortress of Loches, within the area of the royal lodgings. In the middle of the excavation campaign in 2014, a singular object was discovered. It is a brass knife handle set with enamels. In addition to this ornamentation, a musette player, a wind instrument derived from the bagpipes, is distinguished in the top part, and treated in detail. Investigations of knives of the post-medieval period have shown that this type of handle originally belonged to a table knife common in Holland during the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, the same enamelled brass handles could have different terminals like a griffin head, a human character or a rounded end. However, the Dutch origin of the handle is not necessarily the same as that of the blade, which could have been manufactured in Germany or France. The discovery of several similar Dutch-style handles of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Netherlands, Germany, England and France testifies to a European diffusion of this high-end production destined for the European nobility.

## Résumé :

Depuis 2013, le Service de l'Archéologie du Département d'Indre-et-Loire (Sadil) s'est engagé dans un nouveau programme de recherche sur la forteresse de Loches au sein des logis royaux. Au milieu des vestiges archéologiques de la campagne de fouille 2014, un objet singulier a été découvert. Il s'agit d'un manche de couteau en laiton serti d'émaux. Outre cette ornementation particulière, un joueur de musette, instrument à vent dérivé de la cornemuse, traité de façon détaillée, se distingue en partie sommitale. Les investigations sur les couteaux de la période moderne ont permis de montrer que ce type de manche appartenait à l'origine à un couteau de table courant en Hollande au cours de la 1<sup>ère</sup> moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. De plus, les mêmes manches en laiton émaillé pouvaient avoir une terminaison différente comme une tête de griffon, un personnage ou encore un embout arrondi. Cependant, l'origine hollandaise du manche n'est pas nécessairement la même que celle de la lame ayant pu être fabriquée en Allemagne ou en France. La découverte de plusieurs manches similaires de style hollandais du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle aux Pays-Bas, en Allemagne, en Angleterre et en France, témoigne d'une diffusion européenne de cette production haut de gamme destinée à la noblesse européenne.

(1) Archaeologist, specialist of medieval period, Archaeological Service of Indre-et-Loire, UMR 7324 CITERES-LAT.

(2) Small artifacts specialist, LandArc laboratory, UMR 6273 CRAHAM.

## CONTEXT OF DISCOVERY

Since 2013, Archeological Service of Indre-et-Loire (Sadil) has been working on a new research programme on the fortress of Loches. The objective of this programme is to enrich our understanding by carrying out, for the first time, extensive archaeological excavations within this site, considered as a reference site for medieval architecture. To date, research has been concentrated in the park of the "royal lodgings", at the northern end of the fortress (fig. 1 and 2).

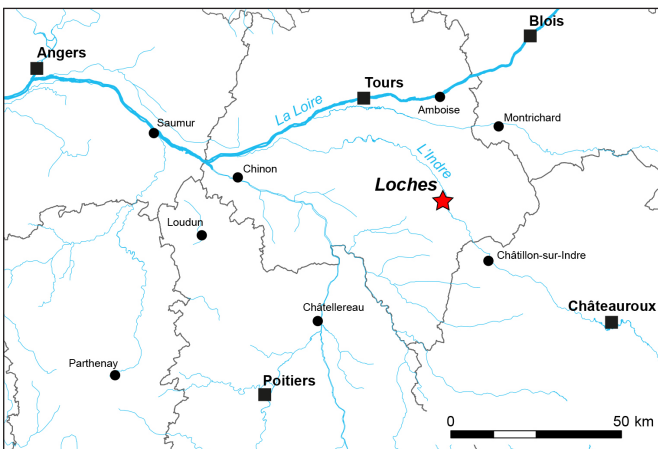


Fig. 1 – Geographical location of Loches (by P. Papin, Sadil).

One area of this park had been the focus of attention: the theoretical location of an old chapel dedicated to Saint-Louis, whose existence was supposed only from late written references<sup>(3)</sup> and a mid-18<sup>th</sup> century plan depicting a vanished building perpendicular to the royal lodgings<sup>(4)</sup>. It was on the basis of these indications that the first limited survey was carried out in 2013<sup>(5)</sup>, which made it possible to clearly identify the south-west angle of the structure. This first intervention was followed by two campaigns to thoroughly investigate the building in 2014 and 2015<sup>(6)</sup>. Exploration of the sector has also revealed previous occupation, allowing

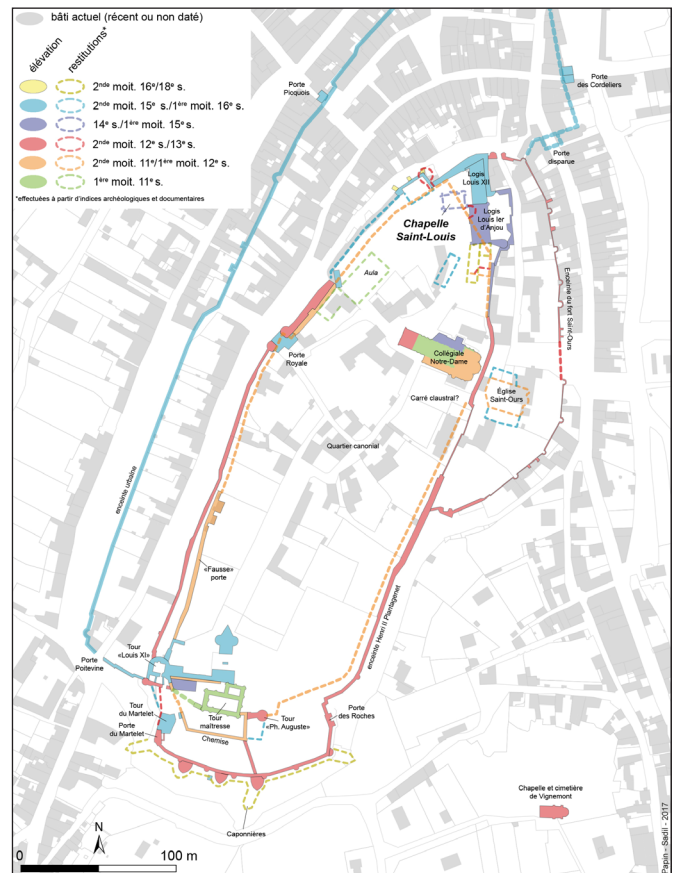


Fig. 2 – General map of the castle with location of the main elements (by P. Papin, Sadil).

for a reconstruction of the evolution of occupation in the sector over the long term (fig. 3).

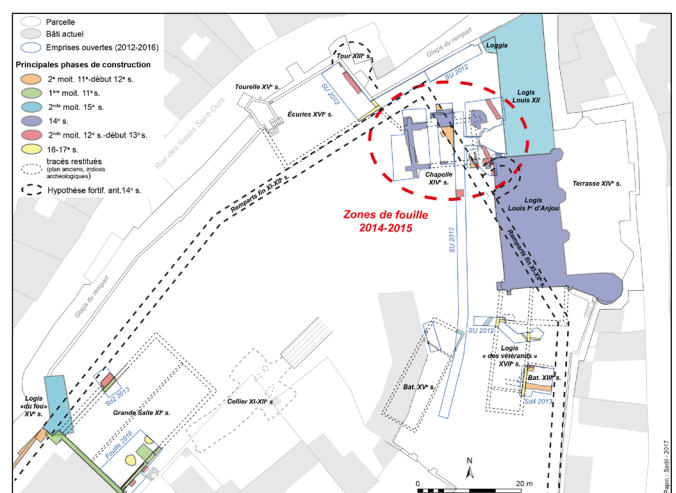


Fig. 3 – Map of the excavation zones in the park of the royal lodgings (2012-2016) (by P. Papin, Sadil).

(3) Archives Départementales d'Indre-et-Loire, C656: various documents (minutes, status of repairs, expert reports, etc.) for the years 1606 and 1607, clearly mentioning the "chappelle Saint Loys" as "joining" (ie connected), the great halls of the King.

(4) Plan of "de lhuillier de la Serre", médiathèque of Loches (1751-1756).

(5) Papin 2014.

(6) Papin 2015, Papin 2016.

Whilst traces of late Neolithic activity were revealed, the first structured occupation to be uncovered dates back to the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Backyard occupation deposits succeeded each other until the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when the sector saw the installation of part of a masonry rampart. This frontage was reinforced by the construction of a terrace, palisaded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The chapel of Saint-Louis is recorded in several visits of royalty to Saint-Louis, from the time of Charles VII (1422-1461) until that of Francis I (1515-1547) who last stayed at Loches in 1539. Thereafter the chapel fell into disuse. It was temporarily occupied by the workshop of a bell foundry in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (probably for the nearby collegiate church), as evidenced by the vestiges of a large furnace and a mould 3m in diameter. Destroyed at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is not mentioned in a series of rather precise documents dating from 1782 to 1785, indicating that it may already have been demolished<sup>(7)</sup>, unless its destruction was the result of one of the actions of the revolutionists. Either way, the building had disappeared on a plan of 1806<sup>(8)</sup>.

During the post-medieval period until the Revolution, the royal lodgings of Loches were occupied by "captains", lieutenants of the king, who were often close relatives chosen among the great aristocrats of the kingdom<sup>(9)</sup>. The modern levels associated with the building of the chapel of Saint-Louis have also produced some objects reflecting the aristocratic status of the occupants of the place. A knife handle was discovered in 2014 in the US 2056, corresponding to a demolition level of the tiles of the chapel, linked to the installation of the workshop of the bell foundry (fig. 4). Its deposition in a stratigraphic layer linked to the reoccupation of a disused building most probably indicates the loss here of a utensil coming from the dresser of the occupants of the royal lodgings in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, perhaps already by then broken or very degraded, and discarded.

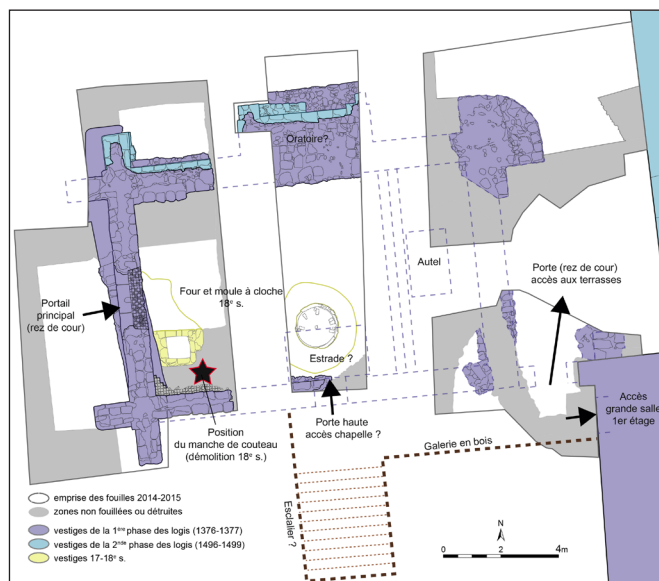


Fig. 4 – Plan of the vestiges and restitution in plan of the chapel Saint-Louis (by P. Papin, Sadil).

## DESCRIPTION OF KNIFE HANDLE

This handle, originally accompanied by a blade, formed part of a table service (fig. 5). All the comparable pieces found during our research lead in the same direction and evoke a table knife. Reinforcing this assertion, no comparable handle was found to be associated with forks or spoons. The state of conservation of the brass is fairly good, chemically and physically, although the enamel is very altered and incomplete, and the iron has reacted a little<sup>(10)</sup>.



Fig. 5 – Restored enamelled brass knife handle (Photo LandArc laboratory).

(7) ADIL, C 281, *État des réparations urgentes et nécessaires à faire au château de Loches*, 1782-1785.

(8) A plan of the architect Vallée (ADIL IV.31.2.1).

(9) See the complete list of the lieutenants of Loches, formerly published by Edmond Gautier in *Histoire du donjon de Loches*, Châteauroux, imp. Nuret et Fils, 1881, 221 p.

(10) The handle was subjected to cleaning and restoration in 2015 by I. Queixalos (LandArc laboratory), at the request of the Indre-et-Loire Archeological Service.



In addition, the top of the cap of the figure is pierced due to a casting defect or to an accident of use. On the flat surface of the handle, a fine thin metallic layer was observed, originally indicating tinning or gilding. The handle has a trapezoidal shape of quadrangular section with a slightly curved external face. In addition, it has an enamelled foliate decoration with white and blue hues associated with a pattern of hollow points in the solid fields (fig. 6). In the upper part the handle is surmounted by an anthropomorphic representation, a male figure whose head is provided with a cap, the man covered with a jacket with a collar and a belt from which a knife and a purse are hung. He holds in his arms a pocket and a bellow that belongs to a wind instrument. Between the pocket and the mouth of the character, one notices a stem, probably indicating the blowpipe of the instrument<sup>(11)</sup>. The instrument is a court musette, an instrument derived from the Irish bagpipes, whose use developed in aristocratic circles, appearing in the 17<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century

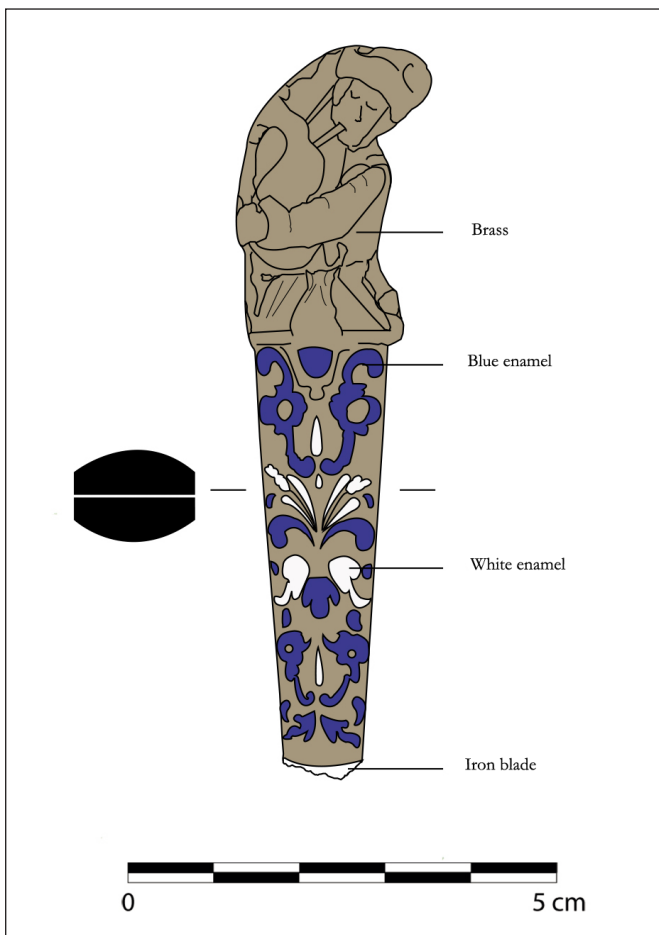


Fig. 6 – Drawing restoring the colour of the enamels (by J. Soulat).

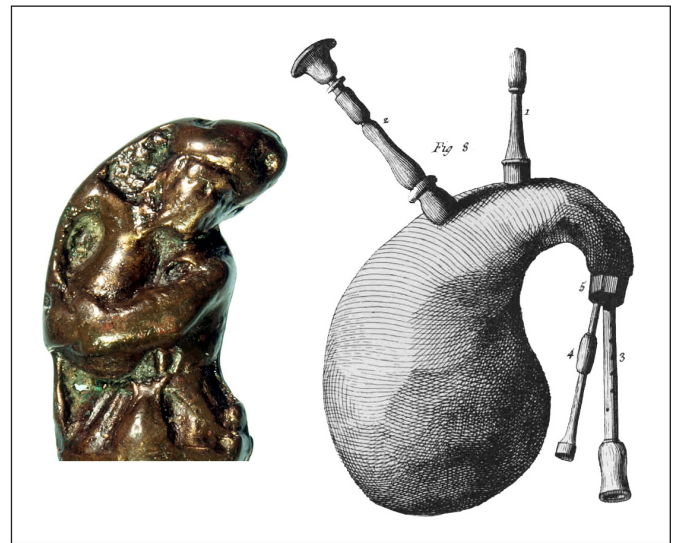


Fig. 7 – Comparison between the musician of the knife and an image of the musette (after L'Encyclopédie 1751-1780).

(fig. 7). As for the manufacture of the handle, it is made from two parts welded together (fig. 8), the lower part of which accommodates part of the iron blade. It measures 86 mm in length, with a maximum width of 19 mm and a thickness of 17 mm. After restoration, the object weighs 43.5 g.

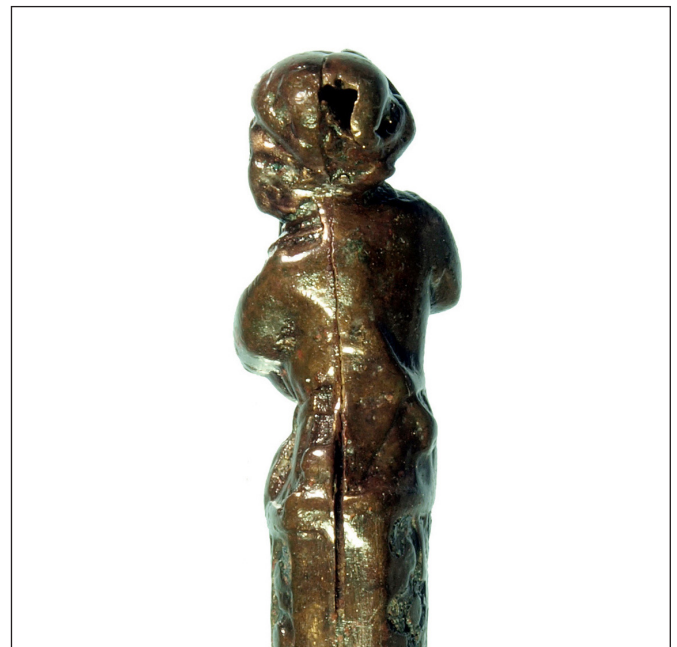


Fig. 8 – Detail of the weld on the musician's back (Photo LandArc laboratory).

(11) Diderot et d'Alembert 1751-1780.

## CHRONOLOGY

In addition to the musette, which allows the dating of this handle of knife to be placed towards the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, other characteristics refine the period of its use and diffusion more precisely. We must first of all dwell on the figure of the musician. The figurative treatment of table knives becomes common in aristocratic circles from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards in Europe with the appearance of handles of bone and antler<sup>(12)</sup>. In this respect, it should be remembered that table knives in the Middle Ages and during the post-medieval period were regarded as personal utensils appropriate to each guest<sup>(13)</sup>. However, the representation of figures on metal handles, of brass or silver, is recurrent in the post-medieval period and particularly during the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>(14)</sup>. These representations can vary according to the models adopted<sup>(15)</sup>. In particular, anthropomorphic figures can be distinguished, including a musician systematically playing the musette, a bust of a single female or male figure, a whole female figure representing a kind of siren, a

man and a woman standing side by side and holding one another, but also more fanciful figures like a type of griffin's head. Associated with this figurative terminal, the enamelled ornamentation is present on both sides of the handle of Loches and illustrates a foliate motif current at this period.

## A DUTCH ORIGIN ?

The stylistic study of the character and ornamentation, as well as specifying the dating of the object, provides information about the techniques of manufacture, and also about its origin. As already mentioned above, the variation in figurative depictions on knife handles in the 17<sup>th</sup> century indicates a precise period of time, but also seems to be linked to Dutch craftsmanship. The associations of a musician, a character's bust, a griffin's head or a rounded open end with a nipple, with a handle with enamelled foliate decoration (fig 9) come mainly from Dutch archaeological contexts, with a fairly sustained diffusion in England. It is interesting to note that the enamels preserved on certain specimens are always of two or three different colours: white and blue or black, and they systematically present the same foliage decoration, the probable signature of a single workshop. Thus, various enamelled leafy handles have been discovered in the Netherlands with rounded or open-ended ends or

(12) Holtmann 1993, p. 291-292, 294, 311-318.

(13) Soulat 2014 ; Soulat in preparation.

(14) Pagé 1904, p. 1538bis, pl. CCCXXVII ; van Tright 2003, p. 113 ; Lewis 2012, p. 326-328, Moore 1999.

(15) Holtmann 1993, p. 402.



Fig. 9 – The Variation of endings for an enamelled knife handle in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (after Victoria and Albert Museum, Portable Antiquities Scheme, Baart 1977, Duijn 2011 and van Tright 2003).



Fig. 10 – Knife handle from Enkhuizen (after Duijn 2011).

with nipple and musician, particularly during excavations in Amsterdam<sup>(17)</sup>, within two sites at Enkhuizen<sup>(18)</sup>, at Lutjeschardam (Noord-Holland)<sup>(19)</sup> or in the marshes of Bourtange (Drenthe and Groningen)<sup>(20)</sup> (fig. 10). Apart from these isolated handles from various archaeological contexts dating from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there are also several occurrences in museum collections such as those from the Victoria and Albert Museum<sup>(21)</sup> or those of the J. Hollander collection<sup>(22)</sup>, in particular two handles with surviving blades similar in many respects to that of Loches (fig. 11).



Fig. 11 – Knives from collection of J. Hollander similar to Loches (after van Tright 2003).

In England, many knife handles with foliate and enamelled motifs have been discovered, some of them presenting a musician playing the musette in court as at Kettering (Northamptonshire)<sup>(23)</sup> or Reigate and Banstead (Surrey)<sup>(24)</sup>. Two other quite similar occurrences come from Norfolk<sup>(25)</sup>. However, the configuration of these musicians differs from that present on the handle of Loches with the exception of two cases, one found in the Norfolk<sup>(26)</sup> and other near Lostwithiel (Cornwall)<sup>(27)</sup>. As in the Netherlands, variants exist with the representation of a griffin head, as at London, Kent and Hampshire<sup>(28)</sup>. It should be mentioned that this animal figure is visible on a complete knife from an Italian private collection<sup>(29)</sup>, but also on a complete copy found in the reserve collections of the museum of Besançon whose copper alloy handle is twisted and not enamelled<sup>(30)</sup>. Simpler sleeve shapes with<sup>(31)</sup> or without<sup>(32)</sup> rounded open ends may also be mentioned in Norfolk, Lincolnshire and London.

(16) For this unpublished information, I would like to thank the archaeologists of Archeologie West-Friesland, Michiel Bartels, Christiaan Schrickx, Dieuwertje Duijn, and Marloes Rijkelijkhuisen from University of Amsterdam.

(17) Baart 1977, p. 333-334.

(18) Duijn 2011, p. 43.

(19) <http://www.archeologiewestfriesland.nl/opgraving/395/>

(20) Calisch 1993, p. 545.

(21) There are four different copies visible on the online database: M.949-1926, M.100-1929, M.8-1928 and 2319-1856.

(22) There are five copies of three different types in van Tright 2003, p. 155.

(23) PAS : NARC-D89036.

(24) PAS : SUR-742887.

(25) PAS : NMS-829EE2 et NMS-1942E1.

(26) PAS : NMS-7C5508.

(27) After the Portable Antiquities Scheme : CORNE303D9.

(28) PAS : LON-540E79 - KENT4694 - HAMP-AE36D4 ;

(29) An example coming from an auction: Hampel. Works of Art. Friday, 07. December 2007.

(30) Besançon ; musée des beaux-arts et d'archéologie, n° inv. 852.2.280.

(31) PAS : NMS-2C8D44, NMS-454152 et SWYOR-92474B.

(32) PAS : NMS-7963D2, LON-744D12 et LON-4F9F30.

## HYPOTHESIS AND INTERPRETATION

While the knife handle of Loches appears to be undeniably Dutch in style, it remains unclear whether it comes directly from a supply network established between Holland and France, or whether it arrived via England. The dissemination of these knives took place during the Thirty Years' War which lasted until the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when France and the United Provinces were allied against Spain, while England was not engaged in the conflict. This context could thus be conducive to maintaining trade between the countries of north-west Europe.

Concerning the study of the handle, no archaeometric analysis could be carried out, especially on the enamels. However, it can be assumed that these come from Venetian workshops, as confirmed by the results of the analyses made on several jewels of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe<sup>(33)</sup>. An inventory of the enamelled handles made it possible to demonstrate a certain polychromy. Most of them have only two to three colours (black, white and blue), but the Italian private collection has retained all these enamels, which are distinguished by five different colours (black, white, red, blue and turquoise). In this case it seems reasonable to suggest that Dutch craftsmen used this ornamental technique in order to fasten their knife handle securely, thereby distinguishing themselves from other productions of the time which did not integrate the knife enamel. In addition to the enamels, the handles of the J. Hollander collection, as well as that of the Italian collection, reveal gilding covering the brass. Although no example discovered in an archaeological context has yielded this type of coating, one cannot rule out the idea that other handles were similarly endowed, particularly given their poor conservation. The handle from Loches presents a fine, thin metal layer, white in colour, which could be the spectrum of a tinning or even a gilding. Future analyses can answer this question.

(33) Wypyski 2007, p. 56-57.

Besides the handle, it is also pertinent to wonder about the blade of the knife. Indeed, whilst the blades of knives with enamelled brass handles are rarely preserved when they come from archaeological contexts, those of knives from museum collections are preserved. The latter have a total length varying between 200mm and 220 mm, and a width not exceeding 20 mm. Some of them inform us about their provenance through their trademark. Thus, for the five J. Hollander collection enamelled knives, all the blades have a similar mark, an H associated with a hammer type tool<sup>(34)</sup>. As for the knife of the Italian collection, it has on one side two trademarks, an inscription in Latin "MORS ET VITA IN MANU LINGVAE", as well as a foliate motif on the other side.

## CONCLUSION

The knife handle discovered during the examination of the royal dwellings of the fortress of Loches appears unique in France but is associated with a range of tableware well known in the Netherlands and England. Produced and used during the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this type of knife with rich ornamentation, combining brass, sometimes gilded, and polychrome enamels, is witness to a Dutch-style luxury production. The Loches example thus allows us to focus our attention on those objects of the post-medieval period which present figurative variants, from the griffin to the musician, but retaining the same enamelled foliate motif, the result of a possible production series. Coming from one or more Dutch workshops, different and contemporary models have been identified, satisfying the demands of the wealthy customer, who bought a personal table knife, a symbol of his high social status. The knife handle of Loches can therefore be interpreted as a luxurious object that most probably belonged to a well-endowed person who had stayed or passed through the lodgings at that time.

(34) van Tright 2003, p. 155.



## REFERENCES

### Baart 1977:

J. Baart, *Opgravingen in Amsterdam: 20 jaar stadskernonderzoek*, 1977.

### Bourocher 2015:

S. Bourrocher, *Le «Logis Royal» du château de Loches depuis le XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle : l'essor d'une résidence ducal puis royale dans le Val de Loire*, thèse sous la dir. D'A. Salamagne, Université François Rabelais de Tours, 5 vols.

### Calisch 1993:

A. Calisch, «Bestek. Een onderzoek naar het gebruik van mes, lepel en vork naar aanleiding van Bourtanger bodemvondstern», dans J. J. Lenting, H. van Gangelen, H. van Westing (ed.), *Schans op de grens. Bourtanger bodemvondsten 1580-1850*, Sellinger, 1993.

### Diderot, d'Alembert 1752-1772:

D. Diderot, J. D'Alembert, *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des arts et des métiers, 1751-1780*, Réimpression, Inter-livres, 1752-1772 (rééd. 1994).

### Duijn 2011:

D. M. Duijn, *Een nieuwbouwwijk uit de Gouden Eeuw Archeologisch onderzoek aan de Molenweg binnen de Vest van Enkhuizen*, West-Friese Archeologische Rapporten 33, 2011, 180 p.

### Holtmann 1993:

W. Holtmann, *Untersuchung zu mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Messern dargestellt am Beispiel von archäologischen Funden vornehmlich aus dem weiteren Küstenbereich von Nord- und Ostsee bis zur Mittelgebirgszone*, Göttingen, 1993, 592 p.

### Lewis 2012:

M. Lewis, «Report of the Portable Antiquities Scheme 2011», *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, 46/2, 2012, p. 320-332.

### Moore 1999:

S. Moore, *Cutlery for the table: a history of British table and pocket cutlery*, Hallamshire Publications Ltd, 1999, 320 p.

### Pagé 1904:

C. Pagé, *La Coutellerie depuis l'origine jusqu'à nos jours. La fabrication ancienne et moderne*, tome VI, cinquième partie, La coutellerie étrangère Europe, Châtelleraut, 1904.

### Papin 2014:

P. Papin (dir.), *Loches. Première campagne de fouilles sur la forteresse*. Rapport de sondages archéologiques, Conseil Général d'Indre-et-Loire, Tours, 2014, 258 p.

### Papin 2015:

P. Papin (dir.), *Loches. Seconde campagne de fouilles sur la forteresse*. Rapport de fouilles archéologiques, Conseil Général d'Indre-et-Loire, Tours, 2015.

### Papin 2016:

P. Papin (dir.) avec la collaboration de V. Hirn, *Loches. Troisième campagne de fouilles sur la forteresse*. Rapport de fouilles archéologiques, Conseil Général d'Indre-et-Loire, Tours, 2016.

### Soulat 2014:

J. Soulat, Une mitre de couteau à décor quadrillé des XV<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles provenant de Massy (Essonne, Île-de-France). Première approche et essai de synthèse, *Cahier LandArc*, 4, 2014, 5 p.

### Soulat forthcoming:

J. Soulat, «Fabrication et diffusion des manches de couteau à décor foliacé : témoin de la culture matérielle française de la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> à la 1<sup>ère</sup> moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle», dans Y. Henigfeld, P. Husi, F. Ravoire (dir.), *L'objet au Moyen Âge et à l'époque moderne : fabriquer, échanger, consommer et recycler*, XI<sup>e</sup> congrès international de la Société d'Archéologie Médiévale, Moderne et Contemporaine, Mai 2015, Bayeux, à paraître.

### van Tright 2003:

J. van Tright, *From gothic tot art deco. Cutlery. The J. Hollander collection*, Pandora, Ghent, 2003.

### Wypyski 2007:

M. T. Wypyski, «Chemical Analyses of Renaissance Enamelled Jewellery», dans L. Pilosi (ed.), *Glass and Ceramics Conservation 2007, Interim Meeting of the ICOM-CC Working Group*, August 27-30, 2007, Nova Gorica, Slovenia, 2007, p. 47-59.



Head Office:

1 rue Jean Lary  
32500 Fleurance  
Tel. +33 (0)5 62 06 40 26  
archeologie@landarc.fr  
N° Siret: 523 935 922 00014



Northern Correspondent:  
7 rue du 11 novembre  
77920 Samois-sur-Seine  
archeologie@landarc.fr

[www.landarc.fr](http://www.landarc.fr)

ISSN 2272-7817

