



# THE SIEGE OF DIJON IN 1513

By Philippe & Gilles HOUDRY

Clad in Yellow and Red, Collection Genus Familia  
[ *In Gelb und Rot gekleidet / De Jaune et de Rouge Vêtus* ]  
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Swiss piquier, 15th century

## **From July to September 7th, 1513: Preparations for defence at Dijon.**

After the defeat of Novarre in Italy, Louis of the TREMOILLE returned to Dijon, where he was the governor with a council of 24 alderman. He had to prepare the city to face foreign troops, who undoubtedly would attack quickly. Louis XII had a presentiment of an imminent attack by the Swiss against his kingdom, and warned Dijon by letter on July 3, 1513.

At that time, Dijon's population was 13,000 inhabitants, excluding the possible refugees from outside the city, who would require protection in the event of danger. As this danger approached, a massive emergency was organized on August 5, 1513, to hold off an attack that was expected.

The munitions were numerous, even blocks, arrows, etc. Although the arsenal was well stocked, the powder supply was short, and the canons were in bad shape. The city walls of an earlier period would not be able to hold off a steady attack for long.

As the ancient capitol of the Dukes of Burgundy, Dijon could call up an infantry of approximately two thousand men, without counting those who were quartered in the neighboring fortified towns. To these could be added 600 infantry soldiers in six companies and 600 cavalry riders with 1,800 horsemen and attendants. On its ramparts, Dijon also counted on 21 towers equipped with couleuvrines and catapults of crossbows, manned by roughly 500 artillerists. Finally joined to this, were the 500 men in seven companies of home guards, reviewed August 20, but of doubtful value as war effort, and so Dijon could summon up from four to five thousand defenders.

As the enemy troops were approaching more and more, it was decided to destroy suburbs encircling Dijon. Their dwellings would have been easily taken by the attackers, who would then have been enabled to advance very close to the city walls, too close under the protection of those dwellings. Between September 4th and 6th, Louis of the Trémoille ordered the suburbs burned, even the St. Nicolas Church just outside the city walls.

In early September of 1513, Dijon was safe, but the city would not be able to sustain a long battle.

## **From August 1st to September 7th, 1513: Departure of the Swiss and Entry into Burgundy**

At the request of the German Emperor and by consent of a Diet at Zürich, the mobilization of an army began on August 1, 1513. This assembly asked for a drafting of 16,000 men for the regular militia, but the Swiss Confederacy probably raised double that amount. There was a grand review in Zuerich on August 17th and the city was in a festive mood as the troops departed that same evening.

The point of rallying of the cantons was to be at Besancon on August 27th (At this time, this French Comte or earldom belonged to the German Empire). By the orders of Duke Ulrich of Württemberg, 1,000 German cavalry men accompanied some 4,000 militia men from Hainaut (often called Hennuyers) and 500 artillerists with about 30 large pieces of artillery that the Swiss joined to it. With the enlistment of 2,000 from the French Comte, the grand total was in effect about 40,000 combatants.

At Besancon, the Council of War met on August 28th. The Germans would have liked to have marched directly onto Paris, but the Swiss decided to take care of old unpaid debts of Burgundy.

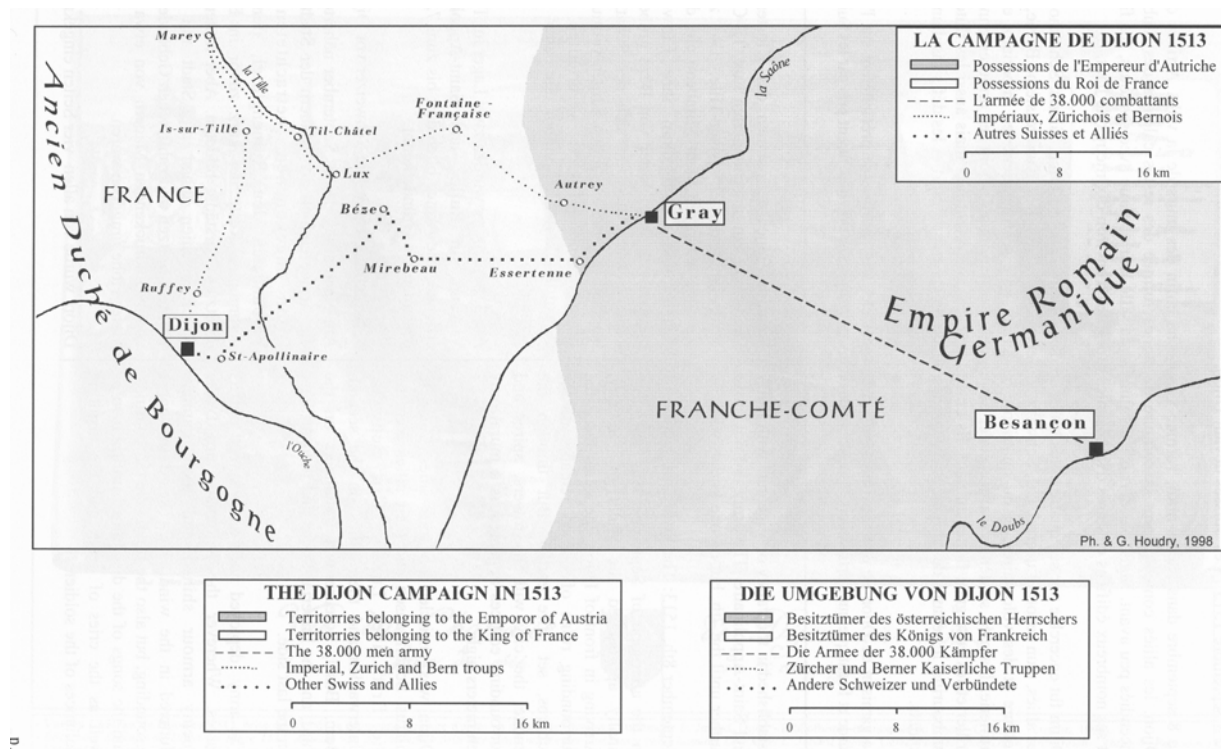
Their objective then was the capture of the Duchy of Burgundy for the Emperor and the plundering of Dijon. Hence it was necessary as soon as possible to cross the Saone River to Gray.

Bern, Fribourg, Soleure and Schaffhausen left as an avant-garde on August 28th. The German Cavalry followed suit with the recruits from Basel, Zuerich, St.-Gall, the Grisons, volunteers from Appenzell and some others. Equipped with innumerable wagons to bring back the spoils, they constituted the center of the army. In the rear were Luzern, Uri, Schwytz, Unterwalden, Zug, Glarus and opportunists from all provinces. The French-Comte Cavalry joined at Gray.

After crossing the Saone River, the army took two routes to invade the Duchy of Burgundy: via Autrey and via Essertenne. All was clear in front of them.

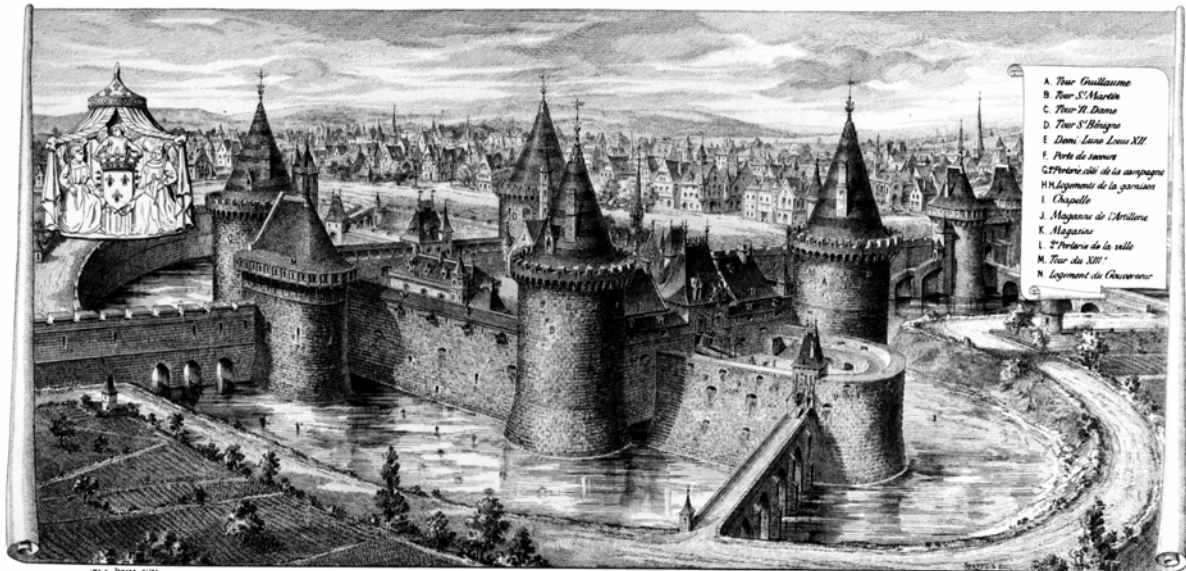
The Germans, Zürich and Bern took the first route and ransacked Fontaine-Francaise, captured the castle of Saint-Seine, and plundered Lux, Til-Chatel, Marcy (then Is-sur-Tille). The second column took Mirabeau, which it held ransom and then massacred. With the monastery of Beze, they dug up graves to seize any treasures found in the coffins. Some officers condemned such violence, but were unable to prevent it.

By September 3rd, the two camps were established in the valley of Vigeanne with Ruffey and Saint-Appolinaire. The army did not move further until the 7th, but no one knows why.



### September 8th, 1513: The Swiss at Dijon.

In the afternoon of September 8th, the army finally approached the walls of the city. Arriving in front of Dijon, the allies faced the surrounding ruins of burned remains of the suburbs, set afire earlier. But through the smoke, the city with its towers, spires and surrounding edifices appeared as a mural only ten meters high.

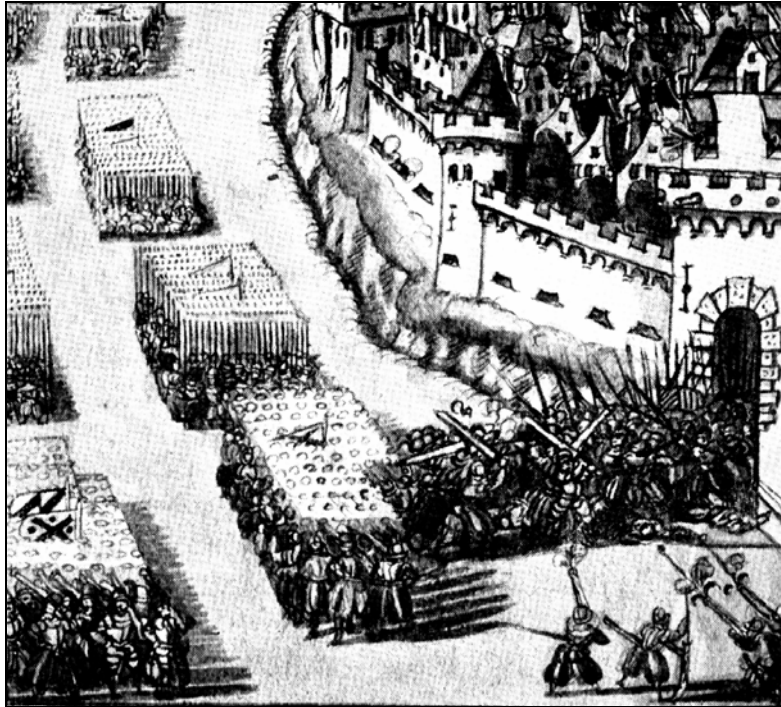


View of the Dijon Castle in 1512, from the country side  
(Engraving from a drawing of Chapuis – Public Library of Dijon – Photo F. Perrodin, 1998).

The army deployed itself as to spread out its forces. Wherever the Dijonnais turned, the enemy armour shined and their banners fluttered in the wind. They heard the horns resounding, but also the flutes, the tambourines, and the songs of the disciplined militia men as well as the cries of death and the insulting defiances of the soldiers.

## September 9th, 1513: The First Bombardment of Dijon.

From the middle of the day, the great German canons thundered and particularly hit the wall. Serpentine and veuglaires were heard, and in the middle of the entire fracas fearful resoundings. Falcons and arquebuses added their strident sounds. The smaller canons of the Swiss, certainly among the Zürich soldiers, launched their balls in every direction inside Dijon. They were on the height of Theuley.

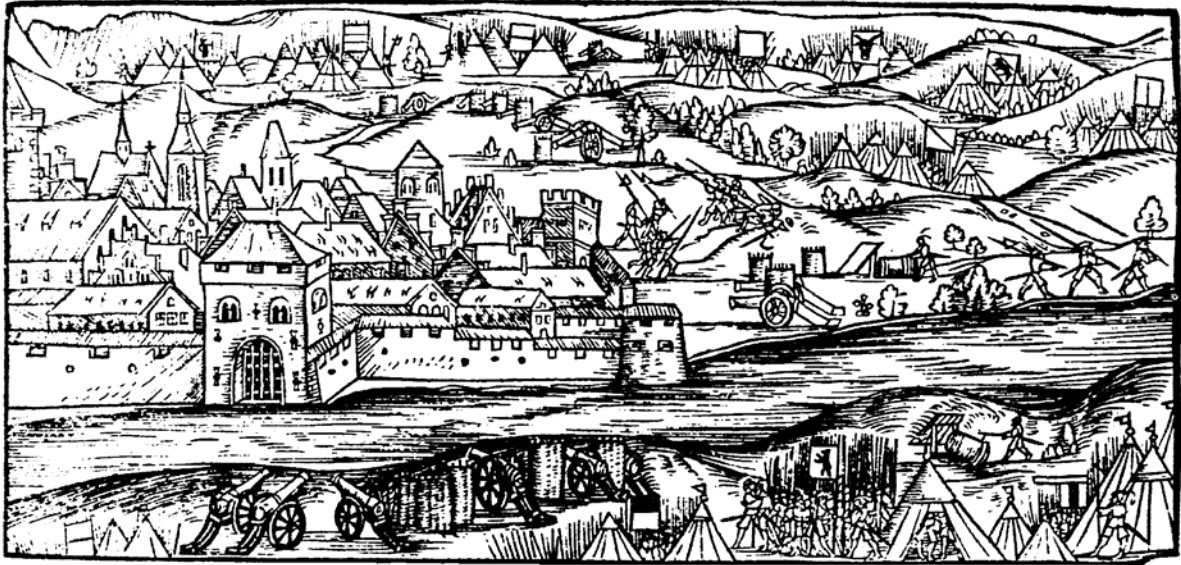


An exit by surprise in the 16th century (Drawing from the Art of Artillery, War Library, Paris 1929).



A suburb, except enclosure of Dijon, on an island of Ouche (Partial from the Bretin plan – Dijon 1574).





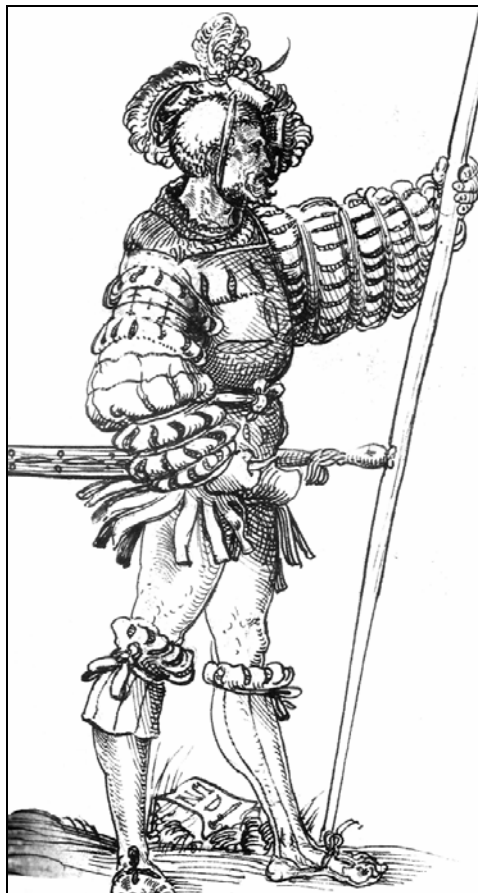
Dijon besieged by the Swiss in 1513  
(After a woodcut from Stumpf's « Schwytzer Chronica », 1554).



House Millièr: It is in front of this masonry, on Owl Street, that the religious procession of Dijonnais passed by in the morning of September 11, 1513 (Photo Jacques Houdry, 1998).



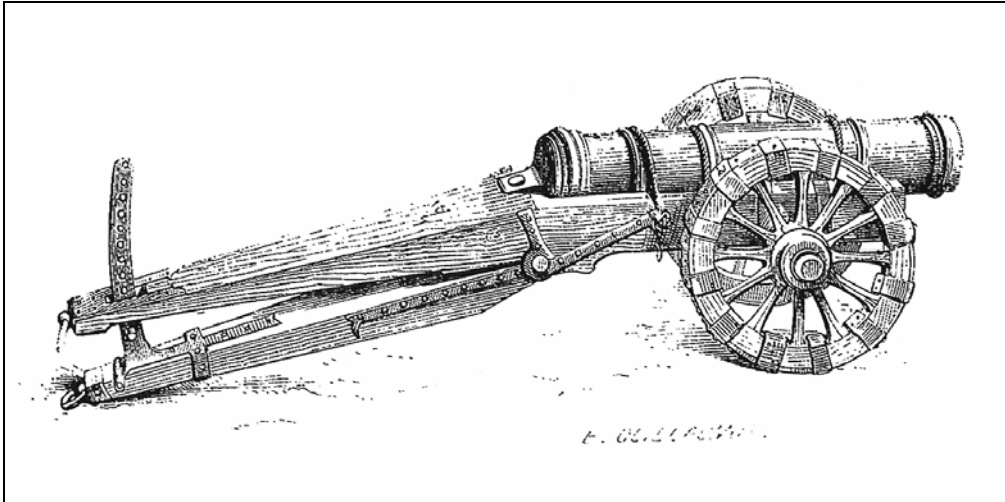
Louis de la TRÉMOILLE (1460-1525 Pavie).  
He deceived the Swiss, inducing them to raise the siege of Dijon in return for promises which Louis XII subsequently refused to keep (From Ghirlandajo, XVIth century).



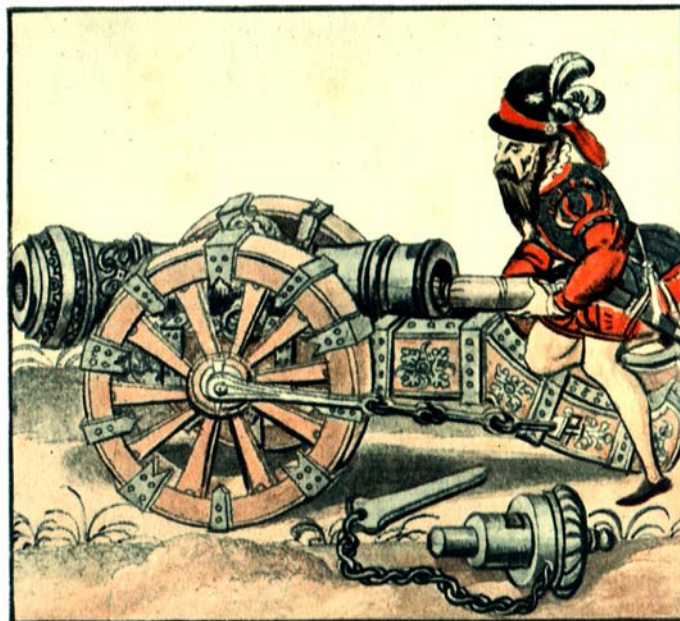
Swiss piquier, 15th century (Bâle Museum).



The attacking artillery fire caused terror among the besieged. There was much damage, but there were no deaths than estimated by the original documents of the period. Where one could see an opening breach, the walls were likely to fall. Louis of the Trémoille had to take new measures to counter this eventual possibility. He had earth removers dig a large ditch behind those points of the wall that were most threatened. It seems that this work apparently was not noticed by the attackers, or they were just unaware of it.



Mounting canon of the 16th century. The word “affût” (to mount) dates from the 16th century and designates the framework that carries the canon, permitting the placement of batteries and the pointing of canons (Engraving of E. Guillaumot).



Mounting canon of the 16th century, with which the characteristic was to take care by the cylinder head (Engraving extracted from the manuscript of Wolff de Senftenberg – War Library, Paris 1929).

### September 10th, 1513: The First Breaches in the Walls.

On Saturday morning of the 10th, the attackers ascertained little effect of their discharges. The towers and walls were shaken but still standing. Moreover, no fire alarm was heard in the city. The Swiss then resolved to strike a great blow. They organized a second battery for bombarding Dijon in a cross fire. If two breaches were opened, then the capitol of Burgundy could only capitulate.



Before the second battery was operational, Louis of the Trémoille dispatched a messenger to the Swiss. He wished to examine the preliminary conditions for a treaty. No accord was reached as the assailants were in a position of power.

The bombardment was general and lasted for long hours. Even during the night it did not stop. The principle target of fire was always the towers and the walls. By evening some breaches in the wall opened from east to west, sufficient to permit passage of an attack. But that day, Dijon held its assailants at a distance, inflicting some losses on the Swiss.

In the countryside occupied by the attackers as well as in the city there was no hope.

### **September 11th, 1513: Skilfull Negotiations of Louis of the Trémoille.**

On Sunday morning before the celebration of Mass, the Dijonnais organized a procession. They prayed for mercy that the lives of their children be saved from massacre and fire. They started from the Place de Notre-Dame and returned by Owl Street (where was the Milliere house) before continuing their way to avoid the enemy projectiles.

In this morning of September 11th, the allies made an effort to widen the breaches sufficiently to allow the entrance of their troops. But their life-line supplies to nourish 40,000 men were increasingly diminishing in spite of the forced contributions and the plundering of the surrounding countryside.

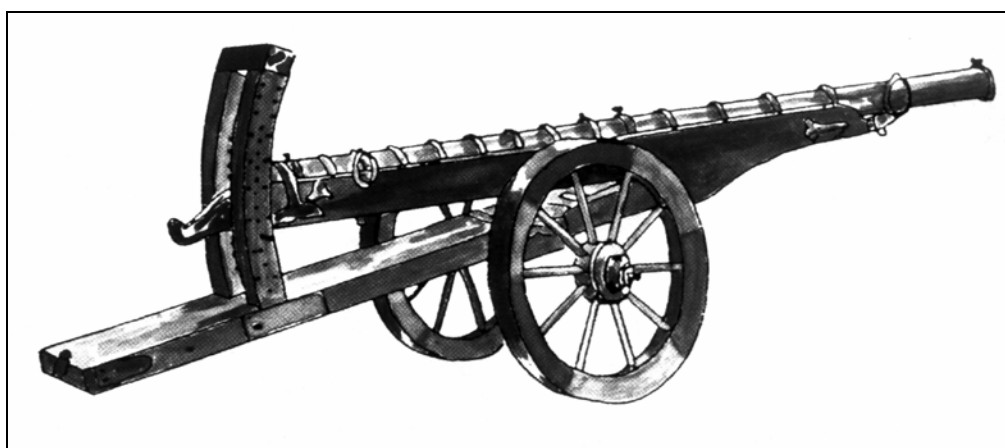
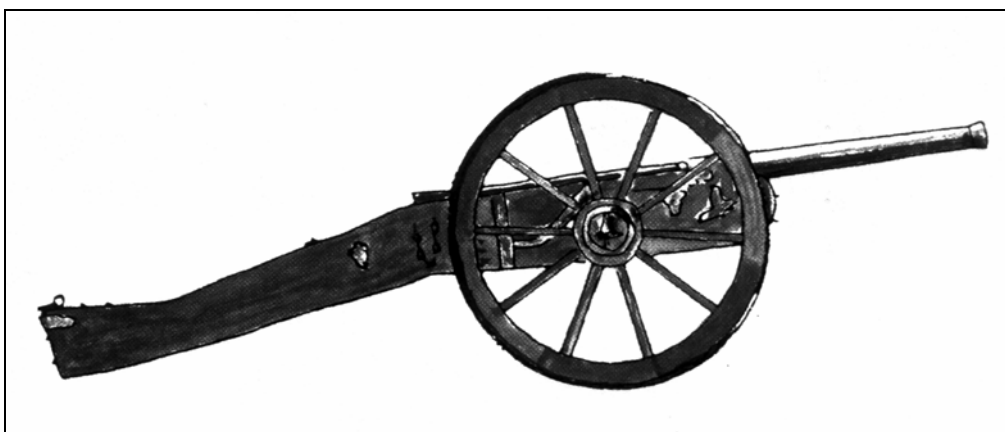
The German and French-Comte chiefs showed more decisively than ever before the objective that was assigned to them: to conquer the Duchy of Burgundy and first of all to seize the capitul.

But the Swiss no longer shared this view point. Some days earlier on September 1st, the Emperor had promised them their pay and they were still waiting for it. Their munitions and supplies started to diminish, and so the French did not appear very weakened after several days of bombardment. The conquest and pillaging that the Swiss had in mind appeared only as an illusion. The Germans tried to re-engage them, but without success.

These dissatisfactions were not ignored by Louis of the Trémoille, who decided to profit by skipping over the conflict on the grounds of diplomacy. In the afternoon, he demanded a new treaty and turned to the camp of the Swiss. Until then, the Germans received the messengers from the Dijonnais, and they suspected some mischief on the part of the Governor of Dijon. They presumed that he was searching first of all to placate the anger of the Swiss and win their confidence, and finally to detach them from the Germans. The object of his negotiations was to promise the Swiss to intercede for them for obtaining the payment of their financial claims.

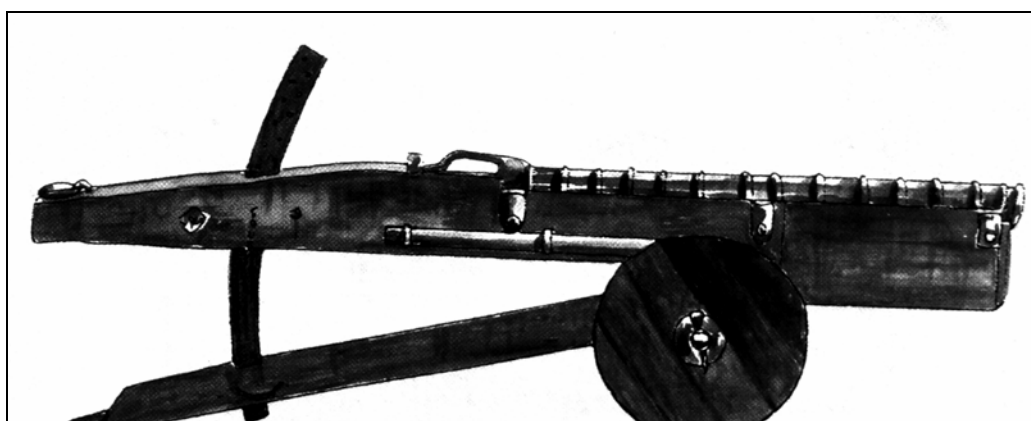
The Germans demanded the Swiss to abandon these negotiations, but they did not obtain any cooperation. The pursuits of the Dijonnais were visibly moving ahead. The banners of the German troops were springing at the breaches in the wall. Traversing the crumbling walls under fire of French projectiles, they crossed over and discovered the ditches that were dug a few days earlier.

Louis of the Trémoille concentrated his forces at this point, and they formed an unconquerable rampart. Only the Germans knew that they could not pass through there. They would need the support of the Swiss because their numbers were greater. This forced the Germans into retreat, whereas the negotiations between the French and the Swiss continued.

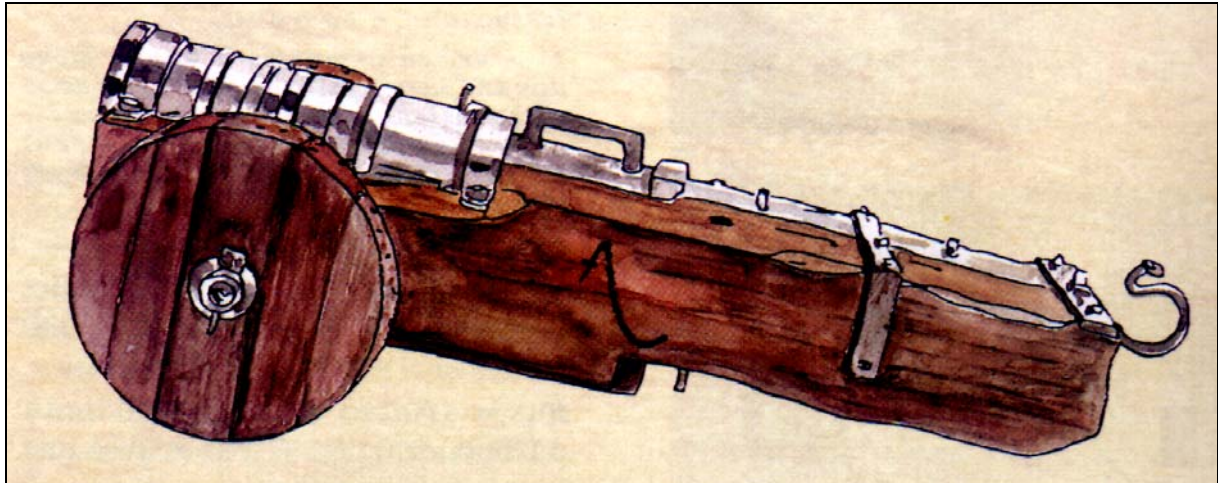


These « Serpentes » (snakes), which appeared about 1340, were captured by the Swiss in Morat. Developed in various sizes, the largest was able to fire balls from 5 to 6 inches in diameter and the smallest about 3.

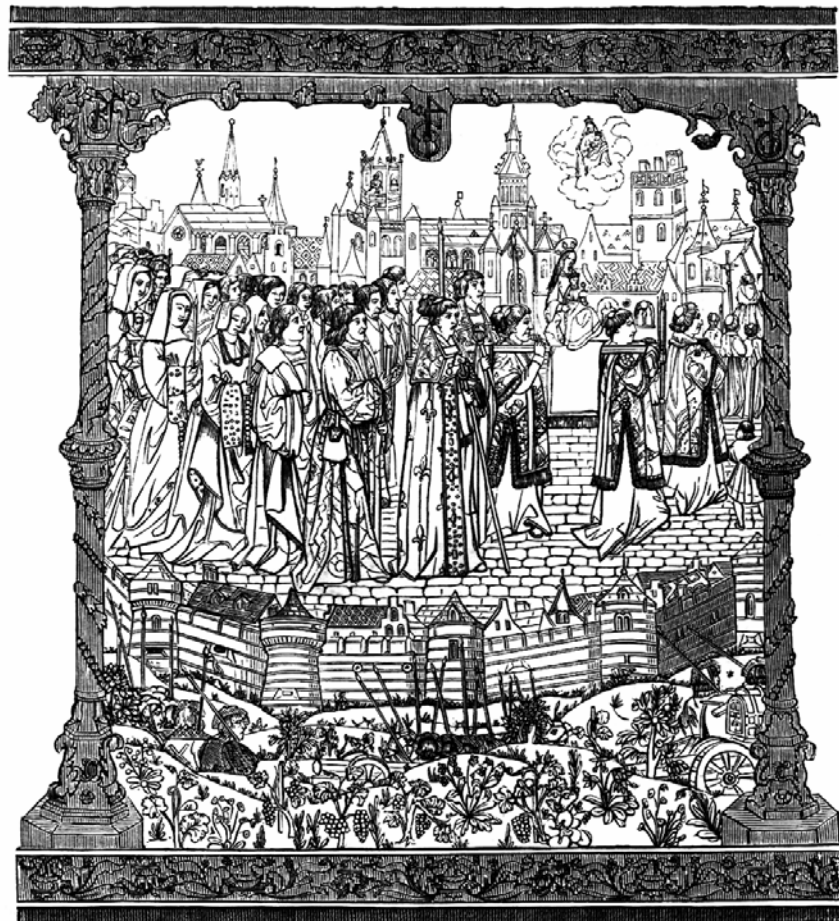
This gun was ideal for the battlefield because it was more powerful than the « Couleuvrine », and very mobile and easy to maneuver in battle (From Ch. Brusten).



« Couleuvrine » of the 15th century, with sighting gear (From Ch. Brusten).



15th century gun called in French « Veuglaire » which was introduced around 1340 and used until 1420, and then again much later. It consisted of a canon (tube) and a barrel. It was loading in the cylinder head and the projectile was a ball of stone, iron or lead, or mixed, which varied in diameter from 5 to 7 inches (From Ch. Brusten).



The religious procession of Dijonnais in the morning of September 11, 1513  
(Engraving from a copy of A. Jubinal).

A treaty was drawn up between them in the course of the day of the 12th. It comprised eight articles. Among these, the first article was devoted to accomplished facts a little earlier in Italy by saying that the King of France would return territories to the Pope.

The third article would cede the Duchy of Milan and Asti to the Swiss (Louis XII would challenge this although Louis of the Trémoille had the power by his letters of accreditation). The fifth article detailed the ransom of Burgundy. France was to deliver 400,000 French Franks to Zürich. This was the price of the Swiss for pulling back and not as payment for any earlier debt. Half was to be paid on September 27th and the balance on November 11th.

The seventh article required the repayment of debts to the Swiss that the French Crown owed over many years. Before signing and perhaps at the instigation of the Germans, the Swiss demanded a payment. Louis of the Trémoille refused, but the Swiss threatened to return again to the firing line. The Governor of Dijon pointed out that this sum was due to them by the King and not by the city. Nevertheless he undertook raising a loan from the Dijonnais to show their good faith. The Swiss accepted 25,000 franks as well as a guarantee of five hostages who would be turned over. On the evening of the 12th, the treaty was not yet signed, and there was a great restlessness among the Dijon residents.

The following day, the 13th in the morning, the amount was raised in the seven parishes of the city. At midday, the agreed amount was collected. The hostages were also designated and handed over so that at 3 o'clock in the afternoon the treaty was signed by the Swiss.

### **September 14th, 1513: The Aftermath of the Dijon Treaty.**

Some of the Swiss left on the 14th and others on the following day. Their German and French-Comte allies having been abandonned, also left. On that same route for their return, robbery and plundering continued.

The Bernois returned home on September 20th and the Zürichers a little later. That sudden return caused a great surprise among all the Swiss. Some reproached them for having signed a "peace of paper" in spite of the hostages and the advantageous treaty they brought back from Burgundy.

The King of France was informed of the treaty by September 14th and was dissatisfied with the contents of certain articles, which he did not ratify. The Swiss Cantons awaited impatiently for the two payments of ransom, but no transfer of funds was made. The hostages were kept securely, but were molested severely. When the Swiss raised a new army of 20,000 men, Louis XII dispatched a messenger to negotiate, but the Swiss opposed each argument: "The Treaty of Dijon or nothing!".

As long as the ransom was not paid, the hostages remained in the Zürich dungeon, of whom one was Philippe of Maizière, nephew of Louis of the Trémoille. The five risked being executed: two aristocrats were to be decapitated, and three burgesses hung. With the delay, the conditions of detention were becoming extremely hard. With the payment of 13,900 franks by their families, the hostages were freed on October 3, 1514.

The final solution to this treaty would come only from engagement in Italy, but this would depend upon a very young King Francis I, because Louis XII died on January 1, 1515 in the midst of festivals celebrating his new wedding.



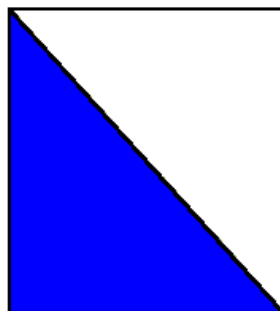
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## **To see at Dijon, at the Fine Arts Museum:**

There is a lithography of Leroy, copying the tapestry of the siege of Dijon, kept at the Fine Arts Museum in Dijon (Dijon City Library, cote 90 050, Photo F. Perrodin, 1998).

Tapestry showing the siege of Dijon: Solemn procession organized by the clergy and inhabitants of Dijon on September 11, 1513, in the intend to pray Our Lady for the release of the city, besieged by the Swiss. In the years thereafter. This ceremony has long been repeated. It was named: “Feast of Notre-Dame of the Swiss”.



Zürich