Carp’s Tongue Sword Hoards - News date from Northwest France
Francis Bordas

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Carp’s tongue sword hoards
News data from northwest France

Research Framework

Our PhD thesis focuses on carp’s tongue sword hoards discovered in Atlantic France at the end of the Bronze Age (Bronze final atlantique 3: BFA 3, 950-800 BC). The aim of this study is to identify and to interpret modalities and mechanisms of constitution of these hoards. Indeed, schemes of associations and selections are perceptible, translating compositions which do not seem to be due to chance. Within sometimes wide variations, some combinations of objects are recurring, as well as common schemes contributing in regional, chronological and probably cultural features. These recurrents occurred in types of deposited remains as well as in the processes of fragmentation and handling. By combining all the observable data (masses, dimensions, conditions, types), the question will be restored to subtly regional interactions and dynamics evolving within the French Atlantic Complex.

Process

The chronological period studied is distinguished by a very wide corpus, covering Northwest France. The latest inventories count more than 15,000 metal remains in more than 250 hoards (Michoel 2016, III, 1 31, and addenda). However, despite the extensive literature referring to Late Bronze Age, many hoards are still largely under documented. In fact, many of them formerly discovered are in fact very partially known and published. They cannot therefore support satisfactory supply research on metal hoards. For example, only 25% of them are illustrated exhaustively and benefit from precise data (masses, dimensions, states of the metal scrap). Moreover, the development since a few years of ill official effort to save the recent data what still can be. Unfortunately, most of newly discovered Atlantic final hoards come from scientific excavations and there are certainly a lot of hoards which are not still known. Thus, in order to go beyond the simple state of the art to and the offer new data, we have undertaken a research campaign to observe publicly and private collections known and preserved in Brittany, in Normandy and in the region Pays-de-la-Loire.

First Observations

This approach allowed us to document several important hoards which are partially unpublished (fig. 1, 2, 5 and 7). In addition to recording the data required for our investigations, we were able to rectify inventories mistakes and to find some objects considered to be lost (fig. 7, n° 4). At the same time, datag mining on archives preserved in the CRAAH-Ar- chéosciences laboratory in Rennes offer us to complement missing data with unpublished iconographic documentation (fig. 6). After all, few close collaborations have fully contributed to the development of the corpus, especially concerning recent discoveries (fig. 6).

Thus, more than 3000 new metal remains have integrated our database. In the light of this initial phase, some facts can already be asked. First of all, all these hoards have a relatively homogenous structure composed mainly of traditional cultural traits for the BFa 3. We can of course observe a strong fragmentation, peculiar phenomena of reconstructions which are relatively rare for Brittany. This development since a few years of il official effort to save the recent data what still can be. Unfortunately, most of newly discovered Atlantic final hoards come from scientific excavations and there are certainly a lot of hoards which are not still known. Thus, in order to go beyond the simple state of the art to and the offer new data, we have undertaken a research campaign to observe publicly and private collections known and preserved in Brittany, in Normandy and in the region Pays-de-la-Loire.

By enriching the available corpus, we will be able to sharpen the maps of distribution of many types of objects and the exogenous flows. This is especially true for certain types of bracelets (types of Saint-Germain-le-Gaillard, La Haye-Villers, etc) as well as for hoards and charged objects (fig. 2 and 5, n° 1 and 9) or cauldrons (Bordas, 2016). Distribution maps has hitherto shown a rather tenuous existence of the Atlantic Massif. It will then be necessary to supplement the research focusing on the Atlantic swords (Brandhem, Burgess, 2009) by recognition of rare or unusual types for carp’s tongue hoards (fig. 7). The sword fragment attributed to Monte-Santo-Sierra type from the Keriero hoard in Guidel (Morbihan) is one of the best examples (fig. 7, n° 3).

Prospects

By investing a significant part of our doctoral research in the updating of data concerning carp’s tongue French hoards, we now benefit from a partially renewed corpus. It will allow us to enrich the knowledge of material culture and to better understand the rate of constitutions of hoards. However, much remains to be done to fully exploit the new data from these hoards, in particular it will be necessarily to expand our investigations to the north and east of the French Atlantic Complex. In addition, a campaign of radiocarbon dating of copper remains will also enrich this study to try to deliver some new key to the chronology. Similarly, ceramic containers will be the subject of a comprehensive approach (fig. 4). Ultimately, once this survey is completed, we will have reliable and exhaustive documentation for the BFa 3, allowing us to base our thoughts on the difficult question of hoards interpretation as well as their socio-economic and cultural meanings.

Figure 1 : Distribution of few carp’s tongue sword hoards discovered in Atlantic France. Study of PhD Thesis (Aug. 2015).
Figure 2 : example of metallic production from unpublished or little known carp’s tongue French hoards : 1 Keriero hoard from Bangor (Morbihan) : summary of the proportions by number of remains and types of each typological category. Despite a large number of unclassified iron objects available on site, the composition of the Keriero hoard points to a few made of bronze hoards. The metal mass weighs 27.16 kg. Fragmented objects represent 97% of total (Bordas, 2016). The Keriero hoard is the most important dated from the BFa 3 in Brittany. The Keriero hoard includes also the most iron (fig. 5). The Keriero hoard is the most important dated from the BFa 3 in Brittany. The Keriero hoard includes also the most iron (fig. 5).
Figure 3 : examples of sword hilts from unpublished or little known carp’s tongue French hoards : 1 Keriero hoard from Bangor (Morbihan) : information and study in progress - José Gomez de Soto. Diverse types of sword hilts are represented by bronze objects from the Keriero hoard. The Keriero hoard includes also the most iron (fig. 5).
Figure 4 : Keriero hoard from Bangor (Morbihan) : classic carp’s tongue sword hoard discovered in several sites between the years 1985 and 1989. Bronze discoveries will relate the few centuries but the first part of the hoard is preserved in the Musée d’Archéologie et d’Histoire de Saint-Malo. The Keriero hoard is the most important dated from the BFa 3 in Brittany.
Figure 5 : Keriero hoard from Bangor (Morbihan) : summary of the proportions by number of remains and types of each typological category. Despite a large number of unclassified iron objects available on site, the composition of the Keriero hoard points to a few made of bronze hoards. The metal mass weighs 27.16 kg. Fragmented objects represent 97% of total (Bordas, 2016). The Keriero hoard is the most important dated from the BFa 3 in Brittany. The Keriero hoard includes also the most iron (fig. 5).
Figure 6 : Keriero hoard from Bangor (Morbihan) : classic carp’s tongue sword hoard discovered in several sites between the years 1985 and 1989. Bronze discoveries will relate the few centuries but the first part of the hoard is preserved in the Musée d’Archéologie et d’Histoire de Saint-Malo. The Keriero hoard is the most important dated from the BFa 3 in Brittany. The Keriero hoard includes also the most iron (fig. 5).

Contact : Francis Bordas
Tel : 33 98 06 42 88
Francis.bordas@wanadoo.fr