A hoard of Armorican socketed axes from Riec-sur-Belon, Quimper, Finistère, France.

USELESS OBJECTS FROM ANOTHER TIME:

EARLY IRON AGE BRONZE SOCKETED AXE HOARDS IN NORTHWESTERN FRANCE

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Early Iron Age bronze socketed axes of the 'Armorican' type are inspired by the Late Bronze Age socketed axes and have previously been confused with them. However, they do not conform to Late Bronze Age standards but are skeuomorphic objects. Huge quantities of those axes have been discovered in Brittany and Normandy, where they were traditionally attributed to end of the Late Bronze Age (Ha B2–B3) and thought to have persisted throughout the Early Iron Age. However, a critical review of alleged Late Bronze Age hoards containing those axes proves this idea wrong. Their contexts date to the Ha D phase, perhaps as early as Ha C. Both objects and contexts differ from their Late Bronze Age parallels and hint at new concepts of metal use and circulation. The deposition of Armorican socketed axes contrasts with Late Bronze Age hoarding practices and must be understood against a broader Western European context of transition. Hoards were frequent during the Late Bronze Age, (nearly) disappeared during the Ha C phase, and became more frequent again during the Ha D phase. It is argued that the Early Iron Age, the bronze socketed axes' 'uselessness' is a key aspect to the understanding of how their social role differs from that of Late Bronze Age examples, but also of how new standards were established during a period of change. Often considered as evidence of continuity, they might also inform us about how traditional objects and practices were reused in new scial contexts.

Carp's Tongue sword phase; Early Iron Age; Hallstatt D (Ha D); Armorican type socketed axes; hoards; depositions

INTRODUCTION

Hoards containing Armorican socketed axes represent a specific phenomenon located mainly in Brittany but also in Normandy, the French department of Loire-Atlantique as well as the Channel Islands. Some small hoards – and a few doubtful isolated finds – are known in Britain (Schmidt & Burgess, 1981, p. 148; O'Connor, 1980, p. 235; 2007, p. 68, pp. 75–76; Boughton, 2015, p. 137). Despite the strong contrast between Carp's Tongue sword hoards and Armorican axe assemblages, both were traditionally – and sometimes still are – considered as contemporary since the relevant objects were believed to date mostly to the very last phase of the Bronze Age. Subsequently, it has been clearly established that the hoards were buried during the recent phase of the Early Iron Age (Ha D phase). At first glance, the persistence of the hoarding tradition focusing on bronze axes might give a false impression of continuity, interpreted as an archaic practice (Milcent, 2017a, p. 82). Although this observation might support the idea of an extended Late Bronze Age period in northwestern France, with the Early Iron Age starting only around 650 BC (Marcigny & Talon, 2009, p. 386, Fig. 1; Marcigny et al., 2017, Fig. 6), today, in the light of new discoveries and approaches, this previous framework must be drastically revised. Consequently, we have chosen to study how bronze axe hoarding practices differed and mirrored each other during those two phases, to understand their social significance in an Atlantic Early Iron Age.

A LONG-LASTING CONFUSION: A LONG ATLANTIC LATE BRONZE AGE IN NORTHWESTERN FRANCE?

The earliest socketed axes in Western Europe first appeared in the British Isles during the Middle Bronze Age (Hawkes, 1955; Schmidt & Burgess, 1981, p. 172; Eogan, 2000, p. 19). In France, they appeared in large quantities during the Atlantic Late Bronze Age 3. Many of them are found in hoards from the Carp's Tongue sword phase, spreading from Atlantic France, the Picardie region to western central France, to Britain and Ireland. A substantial number belong to the Plainseau type (Fig. 1, No. 1). Like other axe types, some come from the British Isles, and were either imported or copied (Fig. 1, No. 2). They are characterized by ornamental vertical ribs on their flat parts (Burgess, 2012). The socketed axes of the Plainseau type could most likely be considered prototypes for the Armorican socketed axes (Fig. 1, No. 3–8), as their socket and the mouth tend to have a quadrangular cross-section, while their collar remains circular, or at least sub-circular. In Britain, however, other socketed axe types with a quadrangular cross-section could be related to the Armorican axes (Schmidt & Burgess, 1981). Recent discoveries, a critical re-examination of former finds and new research methods for the study of ancient metallurgy lead us to reject the premise according to which Armorican socketed type axes would date mainly to the end of the Bronze Age. Even though it was preceded by a lengthy debate, their attribution to the Early Iron Age is now comprehensively established.

The originality of Armorican socketed axes, compared to other similar axes, was acknowledged from the 19th century onward, but controversies regarding their chronology soon arose. In their work *Le Musée préhistorique*, G. and A. de Mortillet dated these axes to the Iron Age, considering them as the expression of a persisting archaic tradition, practiced by a community which favoured bronze at a time when iron metallurgy was fully mastered (de Mortillet & de Mortillet, 1881, pl. XCIII). In the Bronze Age volume of his *Manuel d'Archéologie préhistorique, celtique et gallo-romaine*, a key work long time referred to in France, J. Déchelette dated these axes to his so-called Bronze IV phase, corresponding to our Late Bronze Age (Déchelette, 1910, p. 253, pl. IV). From the 1960s on, Armorican socketed axes have been subjected to specific synthetic studies, mainly by J. Briard (1965) and later by J. Rivallain (1971). The first of these two studies, which laid the foundations for the continental Atlantic Bronze Age typochronology, formulated the idea that these axes must mainly be associated with the Late

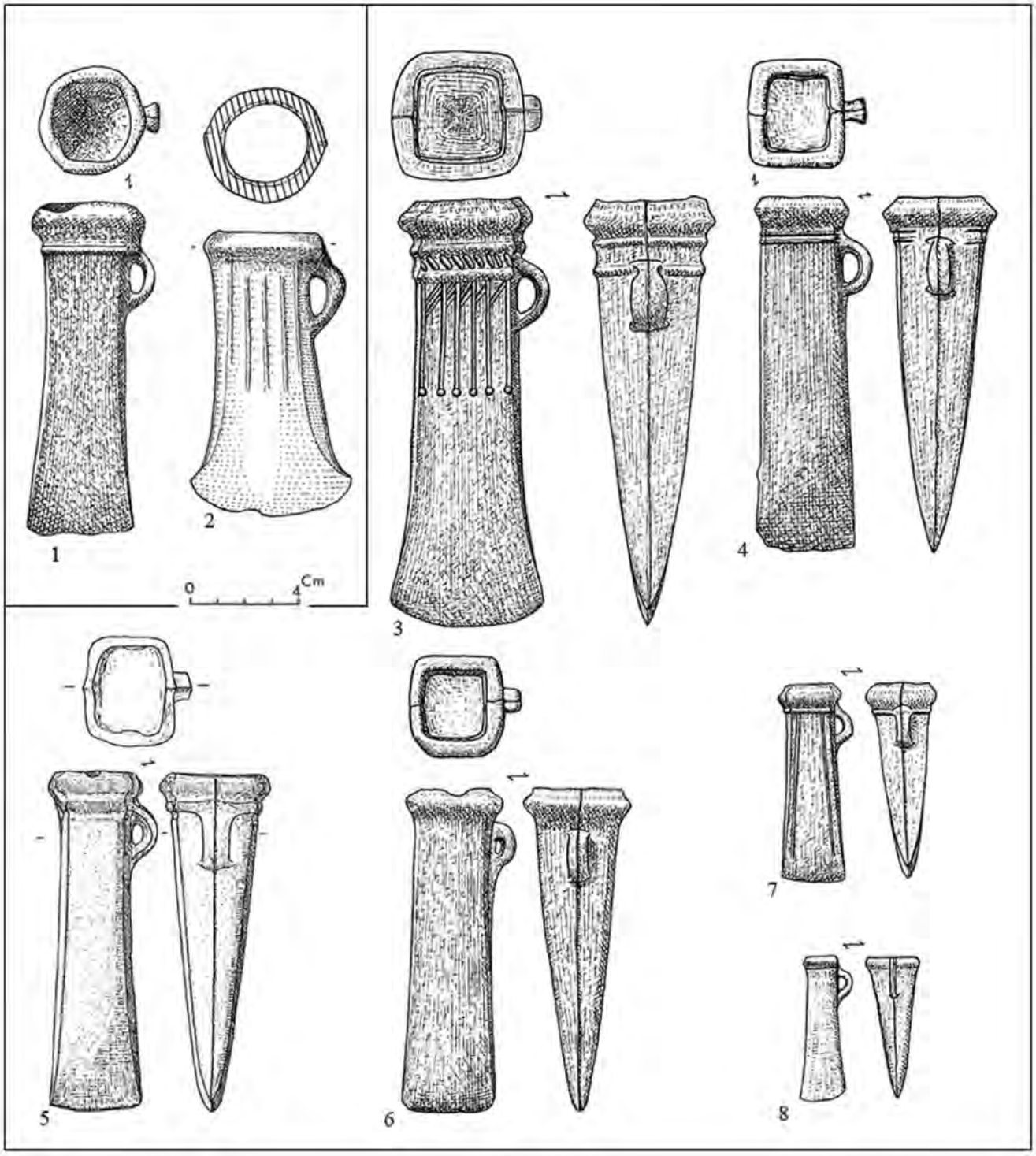

Fig. 1. The Carp's Tongue sword phase (Bronze Final IIIb/Ha B2–B3 phase); 1: Type Plainseau; 2: British type; 3–8: Armorican socketed axes; 3: Type Brandivy; 4: Type Dahouet; 5: Type Tréhou; 6: Type Plurien; 7: Type Couville; 8: Type Maure.

Bronze Age Carp's Tongue sword phase and then persisted during the Early Iron Age. Later, J. Briard noticed the complete absence of such axes in the Late Bronze Age hoards recently discovered in Brittany, which clearly supported his first hypothesis (Briard, 1991, p. 136), but then was revised again later (Briard, 2001). Unfortunately, this latter statement remained practically unnoticed for a long time (i.e. Rivallain, 2012). Only Briard's passing put an end to his ambitious project of a European synthesis on the subject.

A critical examination of hoards from the Carp's Tongue sword phase supposedly containing socketed axes of the Armorican type, discovered in Brittany, Normandy or on the Channel Islands, shows that none of them is reliable: they are connected to poorly documented ancient discoveries or mixed collections, and even the mere existence of some of them is doubtful (for more details, see Gomez de Soto, 2015)! It must be pointed out that none of the early discovered and well documented hoards from the Carp's Tongue sword period (e.g. Vénat, Longeville, Prairie de Mauves, Petit Vilatte, or Déville-lès-Rouen) has ever yielded any socketed axe of the Armorican type, and neither have the ones which were more recently found in Brittany (e.g. Gouesnac'h: Fily, 2009), Normandy (i.e. Auvers: Germond et al., 1988 and other unpublished recent discoveries) and western central France (e.g. Challans: Verney, 1990; Meschers: Gachina & Gomez de Soto, 2008; Triou: Pautreau et al., 1983). This had already been highlighted by J. Briard regarding the discoveries made in Brittany between the 1970s and the 1990s (Briard, 1991; 2001). As early as in 1965, Briard had noticed that Armorican socketed axes were sometimes associated with personal adornment items from the Early Iron Age, for instance in the hoards from Plonéis, Finistère (Fig. 2, No. 1–2) and Loudéac, Côtes-d'Armor (Fig. 2, No. 5), and that the carinated pottery vessels containing the hoards from Roudouallec in Kerhon, Morbihan, and Mahalon in Bogoudonou, Finistère, had specific shapes imitating Early Iron Age bronze *situlae* (Briard, 1965, p. 244).

Some recent discoveries which were accompanied by comprehensible documentation of the archaeological contexts confirm the Ha D dating, namely:

- *Kergariou in Quimper, Finistère*: at the bottom of a typical Early Iron Age semi-subterranean storage structure, several intact axes, fragments of axes and various bronze artefacts – among others fragments of an armlet and of a small-knobbed bracelet – were assembled in a pit and its immediate surroundings. The pit's filling yielded further artefacts from the Ha D phase, such as pottery sherds and a fragment of a decorated lignite bracelet (Menez et al., 2005; Menez & Gomez de Soto, 2018).

- Hoards from *la Forgerais in Ruffigné, Loire-Atlantique* (Fig. 2, No. 3), *Trelly, Manche and Locoal-Mendon, Morbihan*: axes associated with personal adornment items from the Ha D1 phase (Philippe, 1992; L'Helgouach, 1999; Verney, 1999; Aranda et al., 2013; Gomez de Soto, 2015, p. 125).

- Two recently discovered hoards contain Early Iron Age socketed axes of the Llyn Fawr horizon, or copies of the Armorican type: in *Hengoat, Côtes-d'Armor,* a broken axe close to type Sompting (Gomez de Soto, 2015, p. 127); at *La Touche ès Pritiaux in Saint-Glen, Côtes-d'Armor,* a small axe belonging to the Couville type, with linear decoration (Cabanillas de la Torre et al., 2016, no. 21) comparable to so-called linear-faceted type axes (O'Connor, 1980, pp. 231–233, 2007; Needham et al., 1997), now subdivided into the types of East Rudham, Portland or linear-decorated axes (Roberts et al., 2015, p. 373; Boughton, 2015, pp. 13–128);

- In a hoard found near *Quimper* (Fig. 2, No. 4), the axes were associated with fragments of two bracelets, one with round terminals (Giot, 1954). Parallels with similar armlets from Aquitania and Normandy confirm their dating at the very end of the Early Iron Age. This small assemblage seems to be the most recent of all datable hoards.

The persistence of the practice of hoarding on the Atlantic coast, especially in northwestern France where bronze axes continued to be produced in large quantities and buried in the ground, has led to a poor definition of the Early Iron Age in this area. Armorican socketed axes are one of the main sources that have only recently made it possible to distinguish the period from the Late Bronze Age, challenging the traditional idea of northwestern France being a marginal region lagging behind the developments of the western Hallstatt area (Milcent, 2017a, pp. 79–82). However, if closely looked at, hoards containing Armorican socketed axes in fact represent a completely novel standard which is clearly embedded in Early Iron Age practices and responds to newly emerging social needs.

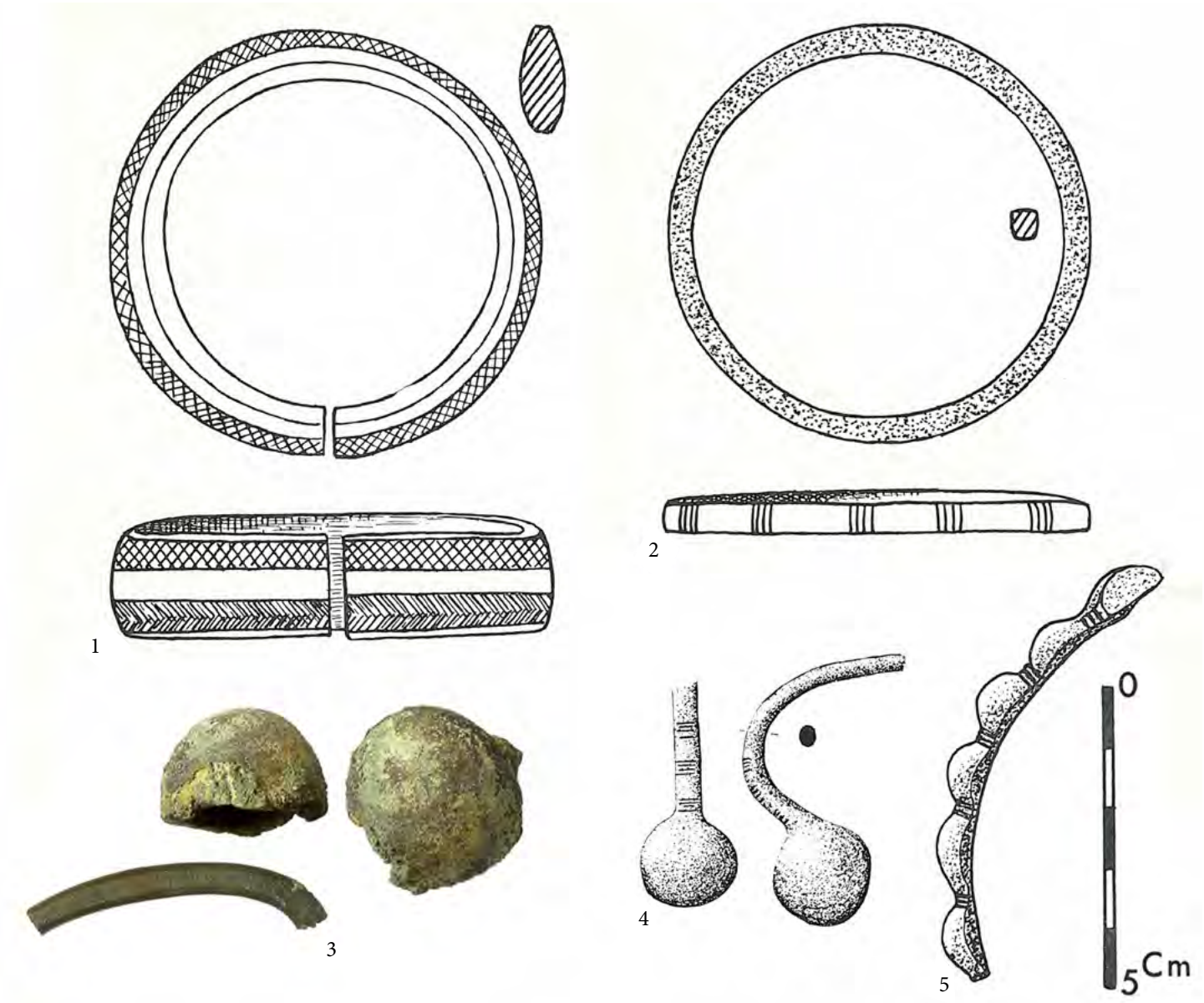

Fig. 2. Ha D ornaments from hoards of Armorican type socketed axes. 1–2: Coatjou-Glas in Plonéis, Finistère; 3: la Forgerais in Ruffigné, Loire-Atlantique; 4: around Quimper; 5: Saint-Bagan in Loudéac, Côtes-d'Armor (scale refers to 3 and 4).

THE PARADOX OF THE ATLANTIC EARLY IRON AGE

OBSOLETE OBJECTS

From a typological point of view, the Armorican socketed axes derive from Late Bronze Age Plainseau and Llyn Fawr models, following a well-established tradition. There is no need to detail their typology any further here, as it was described by J. Briard (1965), supplemented by J. Rivallain (1971), refined by J. Briard and G. Verron (1976) and recently by É. Tribouillard (2018). Armorican socketed axes belonging to Tréhou, Dahouet and Plurien types differ from earlier Plainseau type-items: their socket has a quadrangular cross-section with sharp angles, a more clearly defined square mouth, and a rectangular or trapezoidal general contour. Axes of the Couville and Maure types appear to be miniature versions of these. The Chailloué type, however, has an oval-shaped opening. Armorican axes thus form a distinctively regional set of types with some local variants, as opposed to the more widespread Plainseau models. The vertical rib decoration on imported or locally copied 'Armorican' socketed axes found in the British Isles from the Late Bronze Age on, can also be found on a great number of Armorican socketed axes found in northwestern France. Their size can be roughly compared to their Late Bronze Age counterparts, but they contain less metal and tend therefore to be lighter.

In fact, socketed axes of the Armorican and the Plainseau type are completely different objects. 'Armorican' items – except for the very rare large and solid Brandivy type – are made of a heavily leaded bronze alloy, while objects of the Pleucadec type are almost completely made of lead as has been thoroughly established through more than 30 years of metal analyses (Aranda et al., 2013). The chemical compositions of the artefacts from the Late Bronze Age IIIb period on the one hand, and of the 'Armorican' socketed axes on the other (both coming from the same geographical region), have been proven to be mutually exclusive (Aranda et al., 2013). This finding not only shows that hoards from the Carp's Tongue sword period and hoards with Armorican items refer to different raw materials, but also that they had distinct physical properties. When observed in detail, it appears that Early Iron Age axes did not undergo the same production process as their earlier counterparts: they are in fact as-cast, i.e. unfinished objects. The casting seams resulting from the use of two-part moulds are clearly visible on most items. The objects were neither reworked, polished nor sharpened after casting, and could not have been hafted as the clay remains of the casting process were not even removed from the inside of the sockets (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. As-cast Armorican socketed axe from Saint-Glen, Côtes-d'Armor.

On the other hand, the regional Late Bronze Age socketed axes were used as actual tools or weapons, as proven by means of traceology and experimental studies (Roberts & Ottaway, 2003). Although on a more European scale, Late Bronze Age objects and assemblages could have complex biographies (Dietrich, 2014) and went through specific manipulations before being deposited, they were sometimes buried as-cast or new (Fontijn, 2002, pp. 30–33), in northwestern France, they were all thought and made to be functional objects. In contrast, Early Iron Age 'Armorican' items were designed to be completely inefficient from a practical point of view, and hence lacked that 'dual role' of bronze axes in both daily use and deposition (Fontijn, 2002, p. 258). Due to their material properties, their size and/or specific features, they could not be used otherwise than for deposition, despite looking similar to earlier, 'real' axes. This aspect seems to be their most important feature: they did not represent the mere metal masses, like Late Bronze Age scraps or ingots, but rather they were shaped and sometimes decorated to resemble a distinctive functional object.

THE ASSEMBLAGES AND THEIR CONTEXTS

At the end of the Atlantic Late Bronze Age (Bronze Final IIIb/Ha B2–B3 phase), hoards from the Carp's Tongue sword phase contained various types of artefacts, in new or used condition, intact or deliberately broken or otherwise damaged, as well as a great number of other unfinished or miscast objects, often together with copper ingots, casting refuse and bronze scrap. Miniatures or other objects not designed for practical use are almost completely absent from northwestern France during this period. Variety

seems to be one of the main features of regional Late Bronze Age hoards, following specific patterns regarding the selection of object categories, the object fragmentation, and their deposition in remote places.

On the contrary, socketed axes of Armorican type are mostly found assembled in large hoards, mostly containing only this one specific, mass-produced object category (Fig. 4). They were deposited intact, apparently immediately after being crafted. Plant remains at the bottom of the pottery receptables in which they were deposited, for instance in Saint-Glen (Côtes-d'Armor) or Agneaux (Manche), might indicate that they were meant to be preserved as such (Cabanillas de la Torre, 2016, pp. 25–26; Marcigny et al., 2000, pp. 14–15; Marcigny, 2012, Fig. 9). Some of these hoards are huge and comprise several hundred very similar axes, in some cases forming sets, even tied together in bundles (Cabanillas de la Torre et al., 2016, pp. 23–24; Rivallain, 2012, p. 146). The dimension of some hoards supports the idea of the deposition not only taking place shortly after the production of the objects, but also near their place of manufacture – as opposed to many Bronze Age items that circulated before being buried (Fontijn, 2002, pp. 30–33). Hence, in the case under discussion, deposition seems to happen at an *early stage* of the objects' potential 'lifespan', which represents a fully new conception of hoarding as compared to the European Bronze Age and indicates that social needs and practices through storing metal were evolving. A considerable number of axes remained buried in the ground, meaning that they were not retrieved which leads to the assumption that they were deposited with a permanent objective. Their social role remains difficult to grasp, yet treating them as an innovation can shed light on the changes that led to this completely new practice of deposition, as well as to its end.

Fig. 4. A hoard of Armorican socketed axes: Riec-sur-Belon, Quimper.

A NEW SKEUOMORPHIC STANDARD IN TIMES OF CHANGE

ARMORICAN AXES AS PART OF NEW EARLY IRON AGE FEATURES IN BRITTANY AND NORMANDY

Armorican axe hoards show a shift from depositing actual objects to hoarding simulacra of objects. This development is often interpreted as the invention of currency (Milcent, 2017b). The specific properties of the objects under discussion indicates that the act of collecting and burying would have had a different meaning compared to Bronze Age practices. Although the weight of the relevant axes was not standardised, their skeuomorphic nature makes them suitable for a kind of commodity money (Briard, 1987; Briard & Rivallain, 1987), but also for a votive offering. Being extremely similar, at least for Early Iron Age conditions, they may have been considered as equivalents (Kujpers & Popa, 2021). Armorican axes were rarely buried in wet places (Tribouillard, 2016, p. 78, appendix), though generally knowledge about their find contexts is rare. We know of at least two cases in which they were hidden in places where they could be found and recovered (Menez, 2005, pp. 15–27; Cabanillas de la Torre, 2020, pp. 31–34), at least partially, as for ritual reasons a part might have been deliberately left behind *pars pro toto* (Fontijn, 2002, p. 254). Regardless of whether we consider that they were meant to remain underground or to further circulate, at the time, lavish hoards of Early Iron Age axes represented a novelty in northwestern France. They even created a new standard, as both the objects themselves and assemblages followed clear patterns (Rivallain, 2012; Tribouillard, 2016).

It is no wonder that the earliest form of the standardised, practically useless objects began being excessively produced during the Ha D phase. Major economic and technological changes began to take place and a new relationship with bronze emerged. Unlike in other Atlantic regions, no iron equivalent of the Armorican socketed axe is known from northwestern France, and more generally, no such functional axes are known from the transitional period between bronze to iron metallurgy. Yet, early iron smelting and distribution is well attested in northwestern France during the 7th to 5th centuries BC, suggesting that some tools were probably being made of the new metal. In Brittany, several charcoaled remains from iron smelting slags have yielded radiocarbon dates ranging between the 8th and the 5th

century cal BC, namely from Saint-Pierre de Plesguen, Les Renardières, Paimpont, Les Plaintes (Vivet, 2007, p. 67) and Châteaulin, Penn ar Roz (Nicolas, 2013). From the 6th century BC onwards, iron objects appear in both graves and settlements in Normandy and Brittany and at least seven iron *Spitzbarren* (bipyramidal bars) are known from the area, dating from the Ha D–Lt A phases (Berranger et al., 2017, pp. 310–312, Fig. 5).

The skeuomorphism of bronze axes of the Ha D phase makes much more sense if we consider that, in western Europe, as iron gradually took its place within a 'functional' sphere for manufacturing tools, bronze was mostly used for 'symbolic' objects, personal adornment items, such as torcs, fibulae, armlets and anklets, and also found in imported fine ware. Armorican axes materialize this shift of bronze to a symbolic sphere, where the objects needed to comply with visual standards, regardless of their practical attributes. It is therefore difficult to decide whether Armorican axes were commodity money representing wealth, 'specialized ingot-axes' (Fontijn, 2002, p. 257) or offerings to the gods: the most useful inference we can make at this point is that the axes probably functioned within a social sphere where they could be multi-functional, and where they probably served more as a communication medium than as exchange goods.

Keeping valuables underground was also a clearly important concern in the Ha D settlements in Brittany and Normandy, where large semi-subterranean storage structures commonly described as 'cellars' started being established during the 7th or 6th century BC (Bossard, 2020). Whether this architecture was due to practical reasons like safety issues, or ideological standards, or both, cannot be determined. The site of Quimper, Kergariou (Finistère, Brittany) seems to represent a link between both concepts: remains of a hoard of Armorican socketed axes were found in one of the site's cellars, probably buried in a pit under its floor before abandoning the settlement (Menez, 2005, pp. 15–20). At Saint-Glen, La Touche ès Pritiaux (Côtes-d'Armor, Brittany), a hoard and empty ceramic containers of six further ones were hidden near the postholes of a roundhouse, in a spot opposite of both entrances where they could hardly have been noted unless their location was known (Fig. 5) (Cabanillas de la Torre, 2020, pp. 33–34).

To sum up, neither Armorican socketed axes themselves nor the practice of hoarding them support the idea of continuity between the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age in northwestern France (Milcent, 2017a, pp. 78–83). Rather, they seem to reveal a new era of bronze deposition within a different social and material context. In fact, they can be considered as a typical Early Iron Age phenomenon, since the latest of the relevant hoards date to the transition to the La Tène period, which in both Brittany and Normandy is accompanied with a whole set of changes in the settlement layout and architecture, in funerary practices as well as in material culture (Menez & Lorho, 2013; Lepaumier & Delrieu, 2010, pp. 147–154; Cherel et al., 2018, p. 325; Lepaumier et al., 2018).

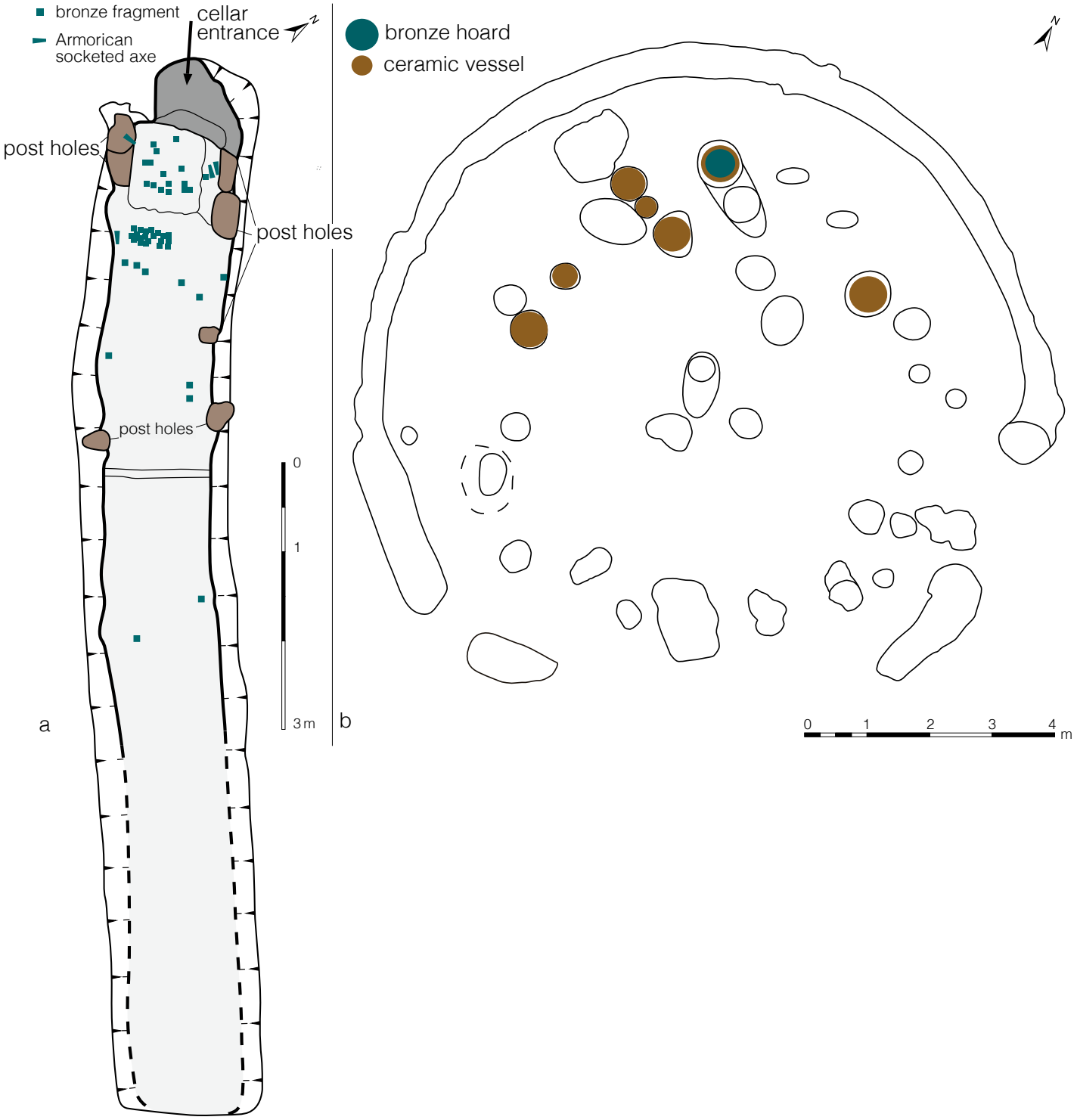

Fig. 5. Two hoards of Armorican socketed axes in context. a: A pit within a semi-subterranean cellar, Quimper, Kergariou; b: Within a roundhouse, Saint-Glen, La Touche ès Pritiaux.

FURTHER UNUSABLE EARLY IRON AGE SOCKETED AXES IN FRANCE AND BEYOND

A substantial number of Armorican socketed axes is stored in museums and private collections. J. Briard (1965, pp. 275–276) noticed that mainly during the 19th century the contents of many hoards were widely dispersed due to the antiquities trade. Sometimes they were sold with a fake origin to please collectors who desired local discoveries; many are now presented as local finds because when collections were offered to museums their (unknown) provenance was automatically assumed to be the collector's home region. The inventories show that the provenances of almost all conserved axes outside of the Armorica or Normandy do not have a confirmed origin or have a doubtful one (e.g. Belgium: E. Warmenbol, 2013; 2017; British Isles: Eogan, 2000, pp. 193–194; P. Schmidt and C. Burgess, 1981, pp. 248–249; eastern and south-eastern Europe: Dietrich, 2011). The same applies to France, wherever critical regional inventories were established. However, some authentic information can be notices in some cases (e.g. Artanne or Beauregard-Vendon, Puy-de-Dôme: Milcent, 2004, pp. 563, 565, pl. 100).

In addition, different regional unusable socket axes are known from Brittany and Normandy, and beyond. A series of bronze miniature socketed axes from the isle of Ouessant probably dates to the Early Iron Age (Roussot-Larroque & Le Bihan, 2004). In southern France, some miniature axes are known from Launacian hoards (Fig. 6, No. 1–4) (Guilaine et al., 2017, pp. 48–49; Guilaine et al., 2022, pp. 103–105).

In central France, very small, socketed axes are attested in the Ha D1–D2 hoard from Tavers in Loiret (Fig. 6, No. 6) (Milcent et al., 2015). Another very small, socketed axe, maybe from a hoard, was recently discovered in the French department of Aube (Fig. 6, No. 7) (unpublished). In Belgium, the Netherlands and the adjacent part of Germany, socketed axes of the Geistingen type were produced during the Early Iron Age (Fig. 6, No. 10) (Butler & Steegstra, 2001–2002, pp. 303–309; Fontijn, 2002, p. 160; Kibbert, 1984, pp. 60–61; Warmenbol, 2013). They are also completely unfit as tools: contrary to Armorican axes, the copper alloys of Geistingen axes contain only a small amount of lead (c. 2%) but important amounts of arsenic and antimony (Posma et al., 2005). At le Puiset, in the French department of Eure-et-Loire, a hoard containing 48 socketed axes was found together with an ingot fragment (Douard, 2012). Those axes are slightly different from the Tréhou type and resemble the Geistingen type (Fig. 6, No. 9). They are described as being similar to the 241 axes from the unpublished hoard of la Sente de Brouâtre in Poivilliers in the same department (Douard, 2012). Like the types of Tréhou and Geistingen, they are dated to the Ha D phase.

South of the English Channel and the North Sea rare linear faceted axes – imports or copies – are known: from Belgium, we know one from a Ha D1 barrow in the Court-Saint-Étienne necropolis (Mariën, 1958, Fig. 19)

as well as further single finds (Herpeux & Warmenbol, 2017). A linear faceted axe has been found in the Wijchen wagon-grave in the Netherlands (Pare, 1992, pl. 6, A8). A single find is known from Rethel, Ardennes department, France (Fig. 6, No. 8) (Lambot, 1980, Fig. 33). The emergence of skeuomorphic objects such as bronze axes during the Early Iron Age in most of Western Europe suggests that although those objects looked similar to Late Bronze Age equivalents, they must have played a role in the social change that characterized the Hallstatt period.

Fig. 6. Socketed axes from the Ha D phase. 1–4: Small unusable axes from Launacian hoards; 1, 4: Saint-Saturnin, Hérault; 2: Murviel-les-Béziers, Hérault; 3: Agde, Hérault; 5: Armorican axe from a Launacian context, Fontvielle, Bouches-du-Rhône; 6: Tavers hoard, Loiret; 7: 'Aube'; 8: Rethel, Ardennes; 9: As-cast axe from Le Puiset, Eure-et-Loire; 10: Type Geistingen axe, Caberg, Limburg, Netherlands.

WHY PRODUCE ANCIENT AXES?

First, imitating a functional object without providing it with the necessary features to function was a deliberate, meaningful choice compared, for example, to Launacian hoards containing personal adornments, which show closer resemblance to later Iron Age torc depositions. It is very delicate to suggest a single explanation for this practice, amongst other reasons because axes served a whole range of purposes in northwestern European communities, from the Neolithic to the Middle Ages, and the case of skeuomorphic objects adds an additional layer of complexity to the issue. The material value was not their only purpose: rather, they were recognisable artefacts, deliberately cast in a familiar shape. Since the Bronze Age, the shape of those 'ingot-axes' must have been meaningful in the metal circulation (Fontijn, 2002, p. 251). It has furthermore been argued that their key role in every day agricultural and domestic tasks might have turned them into a tool connected to land claims (Fontijn, 2002, pp. 248–250). This would be consistent with the recent phase of the Early Iron Age in Brittany, where landowning families were starting to settle permanently on land for centuries (Menez & Lorho, 2013, pp. 182–190). The 6th century BC represents, more generally, a period of increase in the number of farmsteads, and a dramatic change in storage capacities (Le Gall, 2017, pp. 161–261; Riquier et al., 2018, pp. 288–296; Jahier & Besnard-Vauterin, 2013, pp. 154–155). As weapons, they could also have epitomized power relations, which would explain the symbolic significance of the object, i.e. the representation of its function and not its real function.

More importantly, Early Iron Age communities might have consciously reproduced objects similar to 'old' Late Bronze Age ones, although not completely identical. If those Early Iron Age axe hoards have been confused with Late Bronze Age ones for such a long time, maybe this could have been part of their original purpose. Some southern British communities collected and deposited older, Bronze Age objects, including axes, until the Late Iron Age and even the Roman period, suggesting that they consciously perceived them as heritage (Farley, 2011, p. 39; Stead, 1998, p. 113; Hingley, 2009, pp. 145–149). It has been argued that those objects played a special role in linking the people to their past, or rather to their idea of the past – probably as another world (Hingley, 2009, p. 157). Similarly, copying ancient things might have meant creating 'fake antiquities', and collecting them for either exchange or hoarding purposes an attempt to renew or reenact a long-standing tradition in a different social setting. In societies in which the past could be considered both as a source of prestige and as a world parallel to the present, such behaviour might have been a powerful means of legitimation, maybe the kind of legitimation required to settle and own the land. In a context of change, providing objects with this meaning – maybe even when used as commodity money or as ingots – might have been

useful to assert some kind of identity or power. Though in this case, producing functional objects would not have been necessary: they only needed to look like the originals, and to function *symbolically* as such. This explanation of the skeuomorphic aspect of Armorican socketed axes is an attempt to consider their resemblance to Late Bronze Age types and is obviously compatible with other economic or votive interpretations of Early Iron Age depositional practices, as the relevant contexts were probably interconnected.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Armorican socketed axes were useless objects made of a seemingly outdated material, kept underground in huge quantities during the Early Iron Age. While they appear to have been cast for the purpose to be deposited, we know very little about why they were valuable enough to be preserved. Obviously, their real function within a social and symbolic framework remains elusive. Although we are as yet far from understanding their social significance, their Armorican socketed axes' attribution to the Early Iron Age is a key finding and milestone in the interpretation of the phenomenon against a wider material background. A critical examination of hoards from the Carp's Tongue sword phase presumably containing Armorican type socketed axes clearly shows that the latter are absent during the Late Bronze Age (Gomez de Soto, 2015; Verron, 2018). This type of axe did not appear before the Early Iron Age.

At the same time, we know that bronze tools and weapons were still produced during the first phase of the Early Iron Age, some of them showing no clear typological changes, others evolving naturally, as seen in the hoards from the Llyn Fawr horizon in the British Isles (O'Connor, 2007), or in Germany with the Ha C2 hoards from Scharlachkopf in Bingen, Kr. Mainz-Bingen in Rhineland-Palatinate (Kibbert, 1984, p. 129, pl. 100) or the one from Wattenheim/Alsenborn, Kr. Kaiserslautern, Saarland (Kolling, 1968, pl. 54–55; Kibbert, 1984, pl. 98–99). In Gaul, some socketed axe shapes of the Armorican type can be found during this period, like those from the Fossé-Creusette hoard in Verberie, Oise department (Blanchet, 2001). The Sompting type axes from the British Llyn Fawr horizon may also represent another intermediate type (O'Connor, 2007; Milcent, 2012, p. 165). Moreover, new research comparing the metallic compositions of objects from depositions from the Carp's Tongue sword phase and from those containing Armorican type socketed axes demonstrate significant differences (Aranda et al., 2013).

The deposition of Armorican socketed axes is a unique phenomenon, but it perfectly fits into more general Early Iron Age trends. It corresponds

to the dynamic of hoards in modern-day France: quite numerous during the Bronze Final III/Ha B2–B3 phase, they disappear (or become very rare in many areas) during the Ha C phase, to return again in the Ha D phase (Gomez de Soto, 2015; Milcent et al., 2015). Assemblages of personal adornment items from central France and the Parisian Basin (i.e. Saint-Pierre-Eynac in Haute-Loire: Millotte, 1972; Milcent, 2004, p. 541; Périgny-la-Rose in Aube: Piette, 1989, pp. 235–236) or from the Launacian complex in Languedoc are contemporary to Armorican types socketed axes hoards and probably show similar changes in relation to bronze. However, Early Iron Age communities from Brittany and Normandy expressed this new link in a very specific way, namely by excessively producing objects with an old appearance. We believe that this deliberate choice was a meaningful attempt to create a connection with their past during a period when change required legitimation.

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