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Bronze Hoard

Corsica

Circa 900 B.C.

Bronze

Dimensions (see description)

Dagger L: 27.8 cm, Luniform bronze, possibly a belt buckle L: 10.8 cm, Shield-shaped bronze with a point Diam: 6.5 cm, Pommel Diam: 3.7 cm, Violin-bow brooch L: 17.5 cm, P-Shaped bow brooch L: 9 cm, Bow brooch L: 3.5 cm, Ring Diam: 7.7 cm, Ring Diam: 4.8 cm, Ring Diam: 3.7 cm

A collection of unique bronzes found together on the bed of the Gravona river in the French territorial collectivity of Corsica, during the construction of the Ajaccio-Bastia railway line, which first opened in 1888. This provides two possible precise locations for the find, at the two points where bridges were constructed for the line to cross the river: either in Carbuccia, 10 km north-east of Ajaccio, or at Bocognano, 10 km further in the same direction along the valley. This discovery was published in 1924, in an 8-page essay in the bulletin of the Société Préhistorique Française by Dr Robert Forrer, the director of the Musée préhistorique et gallo-romain in Strasbourg.

Various reasons for the discovery of this group in one place have been suggested. It may have been part of a funerary hoard, or perhaps several burials along the banks of the Gravona, a trader's wares, or even the hidden treasure of a warrior. Both potential discovery sites are in inland mountainous regions. Forrer posits that the bronzes were brought in from Sardinia, via Ajaccio and up the river, and were the property of a Sherden warrior. However, recent research indicates that the Torrean civilisation in the south of Corsica – previously thought to have begun in the second millennium BCE when Sherden warriors landed on the island – was in fact an indigenous population. There is at least one confirmed example of the distinctive megalithic towers (torri) built by this civilisation in the Gravona valley, north-east of the capital. Therefore, these bronzes may have been produced near the discovery site.

The group contains: a dagger; a luniform bronze that may have been a belt-buckle; a pommel; a disc

with a projecting spike, which may have been part of a horse's harness or brooch; three bow fibula of various sizes; and three simple rings of differing sizes, possibly a form of proto-currency. The style of these objects suggests a burial date of around 900 BCE.

The dagger is in the style of swords of the late Bronze Age, featuring a leaf-shaped blade with a raised medial rib down its length. The blade and hilt appear to have been cast as one. The hilt joins the blade via a raised semi-circle, and is adorned with five raised round rivets.

The crescent-shaped object features five similar rivets along the arc, and a pointed hook on the reverse. A short cross with rounded ends extends from the inner centre of the arc. The rivets and hook could have served as a means of affixing the bronze in place, suggesting that this object may have been a belt-buckle, or perhaps part of a scabbard or horse harness.

The circular disc features a large rounded spike projecting from its centre, recalling the shields held by warriors in Nuragic bronze statues. Small holes are pierced around the circumference, four of which contain chain links, suggesting that this disc was previously part of a larger object. The disc may have been a phalera on a horse harness or perhaps the centrepiece of a brooch, as in a contemporaneous example in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2007.498.2).

The pommel takes the form of a hollow ovoid, pierced longitudinally with a hole about 1.3-1.4 cm in diameter, and with another very small hole through one side. This would allow a stick to be inserted through the pommel and held in place by a small nail, so that the pommel could be wielded as a part of a sceptre or other weapon. However, at only 69 g, it seems most likely that this pommel served a decorative, rather than a martial, function.

This collection contains three brooches, including one of remarkable size. The largest brooch is of the typical violin-bow form, with a long pin and spiral coil. The broad catchplate is adorned with raised points of hammered decoration, with a few horizontal lines incised on the bar connecting the plate to the spiral. The median-sized P-shaped brooch, now missing its pin, features an incised pattern of a cross across the arch. Three thin rings attached in a chain at the foot of the brooch suggest an additional ornament of some kind was originally affixed here. The smallest brooch curves towards a pronounced raised rib in the centre of the bow.

Each of the three rings in this find are formed from a single bronze rod, bent into its circular shape. The largest is made from a cylindrical rod, while the others are each formed from a rhomboid rod. It is unlikely that these would have been bracelets, as their diameters are too small. Forrer proposed that, due to their simple forms and the relationship between each of their weights (the weight of the smallest is about 2/3 of the second smallest, which is approximately 1/4 of the largest), these rings may have been a form of currency, of the kind found in other Bronze Age settlements in Europe.

Literature:

R Forrer, 'Un trésor de bronzes préhistoriques découvert en Corse', Bulletin de la Société préhistorique de France, 10, 1924, pp. 224-232.