

J. M. de Navarro: The finds from the site of La Tène. Volume I: Scabbards and the swords found in them. Parts I and II. Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1972. Part I: text: 379 pp., Part II: catalogue and plates: 120 pp., 158 pls. £20 the set.

The work forms the first part of a comprehensive publication of finds from La Tène. It will thus fulfil a particular need in pre- and protohistoric research. The significance of this Swiss site, at the mouth of the Thielle on Lake Neuchâtel, has been duly acknowledged since 1872, when the Swedish archaeologist Hans Hildebrand named the later phase of the pre-Roman Iron Age after it. It was, though, only with the evidence from systematic excavations by W. Wavres and Paul Vouga between 1907 and 1917 that a proper interpretation could begin. Paul Vouga published a summarized account in 1923, in which, however, he presented only a characteristic selection of the most important finds. Since, furthermore, the finds were dispersed into a number of museums in Europe and America, which has seriously hampered all systematic work on the material, de Navarro's present study can only be welcomed with the greatest interest.

From among the numerous objects found at La Tène—weapons such as swords, spearheads and shields, ornaments such as fibulae and pins, agricultural implements and other tools, horse-gear, metal cauldrons, wooden and pottery vessels etc., this first volume deals with sword scabbards and the swords found inside them. Altogether 140 scabbards, or fragments, are described and illustrated by photographs. In addition, old

drawings are reproduced, showing many details of decoration which today are no longer distinguishable. Despite the great trouble which author and publisher have taken with the presentation, in a number of instances one could wish that, since they are of such interest, the finds could have been shown by new and more precise drawings, to allow a better appreciation of the structure of the ornament.

The volume of text contains a full description of the scabbards. There are, in addition, introductory chapters which give a short summary of what is known of the site. Its position, and the history of its discovery, are described, and there is a cautious interpretation of its nature. In this, the author follows K. Raddatz, who would see the site as a votive deposit. An alternative interpretation has recently been offered by Hanni Schwab; based on her excavations at the La Tène bridge at Cornaux she prefers to regard La Tène as a trans-shipment centre, which was overwhelmed by a catastrophic flood (*Arch. Korrespondenzbl.* 2, 1972, 289 ff.). The text concludes with a further survey of the absolute chronology of the La Tène period, which the author presents as admittedly provisional, since it should properly come only when the whole investigation is completed.

The scabbards are divided into several groups according to their form and decoration, and are then fully discussed, together with comparable finds which range from Hungary to England. It is easy to distinguish a small number of examples from the Early La Tène period. The Middle La Tène scabbards are divided into two principal groups, A and B. Group A is characterized by a midrib, rounded chape-clamps, and long V-shaped chape-ends. The scabbard mouth is rounded or bell-shaped. Reinforce-clamps below are found on the front plate only. In Group B on the other hand the sheath is held together by a shorter chape, commonly with thickened finials and characteristically with an ornithomorphic chape-bridge. The bell shaped curve of the mouth rises to a high point. Reinforce-plates may be confined to the reverse of the sheath, or they may be bilateral.

In the further Group, C, features typical of A and B scabbards are combined. The few scabbards which are not clearly classifiable are assigned to a Group D.

There is a separate discussion of scabbards with dragon and bird motifs. These begin in Early La Tène, but belong principally in the

Middle La Tène Group A. The motifs are fully considered in further chapters, likewise the ornamentation in Group B.

The author convincingly traces the distinction between A and B scabbards to a difference in chronology. The A scabbards have more features in common with Early La Tène work, and thus may be held to be older. Correspondingly, it may be assumed that C scabbards occupy a central position chronologically.

From certain elements of form, for example, the bird-bridges and bird-headed clamps of the chapes, from decorative motifs or methods, such as incised laddering or *chagrinage* (whereby the scabbards are made to resemble pounced leather), de Navarro is able to define a 'Swiss' school of sword-makers—distinguishable from that of the so-called Hungarian swords, and from the workshops whence, for example, the Cernon-sur-Coole (Marne) scabbard derives, or from which English swords developed. It was not the author's intention to attempt a closer interpretation of its distribution, since our view of this will be influenced by the very poor condition of some of the finds, and biased by the vast mass of material preserved underwater in Switzerland.

A few observations may be in order about the Swiss Sword Style of decoration, which was just touched on in Paul Jacobstal's fundamental *Early Celtic Art* (1944), but which can only now, with de Navarro's book, be appreciated properly. The dragon and bird motifs of the Group A scabbards must be set aside, since they are also frequent on Hungarian swords, where they manifest peculiar characteristics. Widespread connexions between workshops are perceptible here. The ornament style of the B swords is the first to stand out clearly. Apart from some influences from the east—for example tendrils ending in the head of a bird of prey—de Navarro regards this as simply an internal development within the La Tène area. I believe that concurrently one must allow direct influences from the south, possibly from the region of Italy. The fine wave-tendrils on sword No. 71 with triangles in the spandrels, which I take for calyces, have no parallels in the older Waldalgesheim phase, and can only be a direct borrowing from Mediterranean work. The same is true of tendrils terminating in three leaves, for example on scabbard No. 86, which with one exception from the find of Waldalgesheim itself were not usual earlier. In occasional features, for example the hatching of the bird-bridge of scabbard fragment

No. 68, it must be asked whether the influence of the acanthus motif is not discernible. Especially noteworthy are the tendrils occurring on several scabbards, such as No. 66, which in their plant-like nature are far nearer to southern work than to those of earlier La Tène style. These thoughts cannot be developed further here. Nonetheless, it seems to me that there was repeated contact between the developing Celtic art and the Mediterranean world.

J. M. de Navarro's work does not make easy reading; but whoever takes the trouble to follow the author through all his arguments will derive great benefit from his enquiry. It is to be hoped that further volumes describing this important material will soon be published.

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