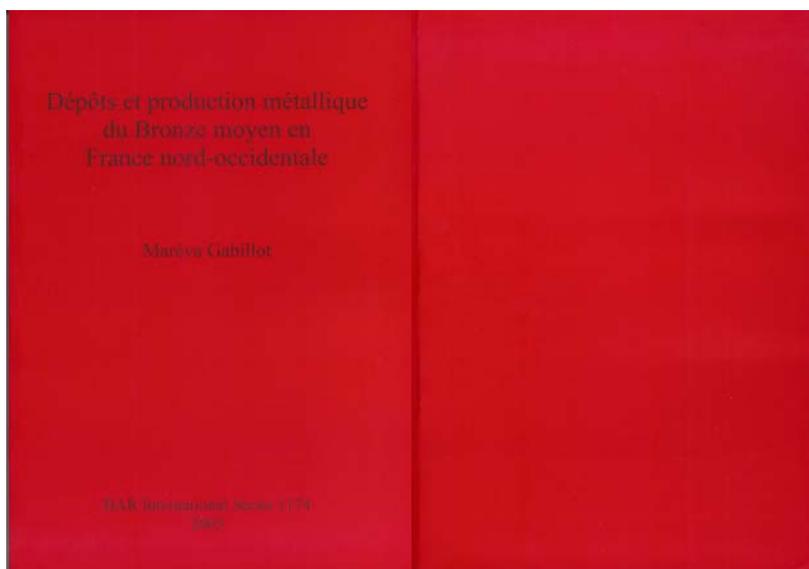


**Gabillot, M. 2003. Dépôts et production métallique du Bronze Moyen en France nord-occidentale (BAR International Series 1174). – Archaeopress, Oxford**

Book review<sup>1</sup> by L. Meurkens



Metalwork has for long occupied a central position in studies of the Bronze Age in northwest Europe. One of its prime values lies in the fact that metalwork types gradually change through time. Combined with the association of different types in burials and hoard finds, this has provided us with an excellent indicator of chronology. For a large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the construction of chronologies was one of the most important research questions asked in relation to Bronze Age metalwork. This has resulted in the construction of elaborate typological schemes for every object type imaginable, ranging from swords to pins, from almost any period and region. In more recent years, particularly in the Anglophone world, typological studies of Bronze Age metalwork have become somewhat of a backwater, in favour of research that focuses on the social dimensions of metalwork production, use and deposition. The fact that typological research is by no means dead-and-buried is evident from the continuous publication of monographs in the 'Prähistorische Bronzefunde'-series and the book under review here.

In this book, Gabillot's Ph.D. thesis, the author presents a new analysis of metalwork types and associated finds (hoards) of Middle Bronze Age metalwork in northwest France, roughly comprising the area between the river Loire in the south, the Belgian border in the north and the Champagne-Ardennes in the east. Through this renewed analysis the author hopes to establish a more detailed chronology as well as gaining more insight into extra-regional relations and the practice of hoarding during the Middle Bronze Age in northwest France. Gabillot specifically chooses the Middle Bronze Age (c. 1700-1350 BC), because she considers it to be somewhat neglected. In particular she wants to review whether we can speak of an Atlantic community during this period and to what degree the Middle Bronze Age was formative to the ensuing Late Bronze Age during which such an Atlantic entity certainly existed.

The book is divided into five chapters. The first starts with a review of past research into the Middle Bronze Age metalwork of northwest France and a discussion of chronological problems, from which it is clear that much work still needs to be done in establishing an absolute chronology. From a discussion of the material that is available for study, it is certainly clear that Gabillot is to be admired for her endeavour to bring order into a corpus of some 6600 objects, deriving from over 1200 different find spots. For many of the finds, information on context is sketchy at best, usually amounting to nothing more than the find location (usually only a village or department).

Chapter 2 presents a renewed typological analysis of all Middle Bronze Age metalwork types found in northwest France. A large part of this chapter is dedicated to different types of axes, which make up about 85% of the entire corpus. One can place question marks at some of Gabillot's typological divisions, which appear to be taken into the extreme. Within two main groups of flanged axes, for instance, she discerns 20 varieties, some

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<sup>1</sup> Second version, uploaded 22 January 2006.

of which are only represented by five examples! Did such classifications have any meaning to Bronze Age man at all?

A new chronological scheme is constructed in chapter 3, by way of comparing the content of hoard finds. In addition to this chronological scheme, which did not incorporate all object types, dates are provided for as many individual types as possible. Gabillot proposes to divide the Middle Bronze Age into four phases, instead of two, which makes sense as this makes the northwest French chronology more compatible with chronologies from other regions.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to hoards. Gabillot subjects every hoard from the study area to several criteria, including the number of objects it contains and the total mass of bronze deposited. A more important criterion is the composition of the hoards in terms of the function of the objects they contain. Based on these criteria, Gabillot discerns 22 different categories of hoards. As with her classification of individual object types, some categories appear to be a bit meaningless. Why, for instance, are hoards containing multiple weapons (two to eight objects) presented as a single category, while axe hoards containing an equal amount of objects are divided into four groups. Nevertheless, Gabillot effectively argues that many of the 22 types are meaningful entities in chronological and geographical terms.

The synthesis in chapter 5 combines all information of the previous chapters in a phase-by-phase discussion of metalwork production and hoarding practices in northwest France, as well as its relation with other European regions. It is clear that northwest France is by no means a backward region during the Middle Bronze Age. There were extensive contacts with other European regions, particularly southern Britain. Furthermore the intensification of metalwork production in the course of the Middle Bronze Age, which is evident from the massive production of palstaves in Brittany and Normandy, paved the way for the elaborate metalwork production system of the Late Bronze Age.

As stated earlier, Gabillot is certainly to be admired for her attempt to order a corpus of material containing a staggering 6600 different objects. Her approach of discussing all metal objects from a single period and region is certainly preferable to that usually taken in the 'Prähistorische Bronzefunde'-monographs, where a single object type occupies a central position. Gabillot is thus in an excellent position to sketch the development of the metalwork production system during the Middle Bronze Age in northwest France. Yet, apart from the extended discussion of typological and chronological issues, I was left with the feeling that something was missing. The discussion of hoarding practices, for instance, was rather limited and again focused only on questions of chronology and geographical distribution. Admittedly, this is largely due to the limited amount of additional information that is available on most finds, but still, some discussion of the meaning of the different hoard groups defined by Gabillot would have been welcome. The value of this book lies in its making available for study a large corpus of Bronze Age metalwork, excellently described and illustrated in a monumental appendix. As such, however, it will only appeal to the specialist of Bronze Age metalwork.

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