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Searight-Martinet, Susan (2016): The battle of the axes?- IC-Nachrichten 98 (Institutum Canarium), Wien, 37-38 [PDF]

Susan Searight-Martinet

## **The battle of the axes?**

It's good to see Alain Rodrigue still ready to leap forward in defense of his favourite theories. The occasion was prompted by a nomenclature correction by the present author of an article by Sáenz de Buruaga (2014) on engraved axes discovered in the Tiris (Atlantic Sahara). The axes described were what are commonly known as hache-peltes and not the Adrar n'Metgourine type as stated. This short note concerns these two types of metal axe found engraved in Morocco, discussed by Rodrigue in this issue of the IC-Nachrichten. One goes under the rather curious but accepted name of hache-pelte; the other traditionally known as the Adrar Metgourine type.

The name hache-pelte was used by Chenorkian (1988: 187) to describe an image which he considered represented an axe. In its most characteristic form, the engraving is of a thin crescent, resembling a new moon, mounted on a straight or strongly angled shaft. This is indeed an unsatisfactory name but, as is the case for the Adrar Metgourine axe, it is scarcely possible now to "definitely banish the term" as decreed by Rodrigue (supra).

As for the other Moroccan axe, I recognize that the name of "southern Morocco Axe" that I had cautiously used (Searight 2004) is not satisfactory. Rodrigue, indicating that it does not have his "approbation", prefers the term "fan-shaped axes". This is a pretty term, but unfortunately, those found so far (in south Morocco) have no resemblance to a fan (as waved by elegant women when the weather is hot). Perhaps a better name could be found? Or is it suggested that all axes, hache-peltes and the Adrar Metgourine type should be lumped together as fan-shaped?

Despite the impressive erudition shown by the numerous references to axes quoted in the IC-Nachrichten (2016) article, only one thing is certain: the earliest metal weapons engraved in the High Atlas – notably daggers and halberds – certainly had their prototypes in the Argaric culture of southern Spain. As a reminder, no undisputable hache-pelte or Adrar Metgourine axe was found during excavations on Argaric sites. None of the 30-odd metal weapons found so far in Morocco were hache-peltes or Metgourine axes (many were surface finds, many now lost). To assert with great authority that the axes engraved in southern Morocco are derived from those of the High Atlas may turn out to be correct, but is, as yet, unsubstantiated. And, in passing, Chenorkian, the undoubted expert on protohistoric metal weapons, did suggest (1988: 323) that the haches-peltes were "the Atlasic transcription of a metal axe which everything

leads us to believe has a Saharan origin (that is to say, non Mediterranean)" [my translation]. There is food for thought here.

The whole question of the origin of these axes needs to be looked at more closely, with the production – if possible – of facts and not assertions. The chronology in particular is a problem, and requires, perhaps, the collaboration of others who have worked on, or who are working on, the High Atlas engravings.

Many thanks to the Institutum Canarium for their initiative in bringing about what can only be a fruitful exchange of opinions.

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