From Palaeolithic Caves to Roman Villas: Brittany's Distant Past

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1. Introduction

As one of the peripheral regions of Europe, the Armorican peninsula is often believed to have been a cultural backwater, hardly ever reached by the major cultural and technological changes taking place in late prehistoric continental cultures. For people living away from the ocean, the latter is often seen as an obscure threat, an awful obstacle, a liquid wall isolating from one another continental masses and cultures. But, as a matter of fact, the ocean was always used as a passageway, a link between countries bordering the Atlantic, from the south of the Iberian Peninsula to the North Sea (Cunliffe 2001a: 21–63). In this vast sea-space, the Armorican landmass, situated at the articulation between two maritime zones, the Bay of Biscay to the south, the Irish Sea and the Channel to the north, was a place where various cultural influences would come into contact and interbreed. Far from being a dead end, it was perfectly integrated, during the various phases of its long history, in the major cultural and technological currents running along the western facade of Europe.

The thorough excavation of the deposits which had accumulated in the Menez-Dregan (Plouhinec, Finistère) sea cave (Gaillard, Le Goffic, & Monnier 2014) has shown that, as early as 500,000 B(efore) P(resent), small human groups of hunters-gatherers roamed the peninsula in the very cold environment of the Pleistocene glaciation, taking refuge in caves, rock shelters or even makeshift huts (Saint-Colomban, Carnac, Morbihan (Monnier & Le Cloirec 1979: 172–77), where they lit fires (Menez-Dregan) to keep warm and cook the meat of the animals (notably mammoths) they had hunted. A scatter of Acheulean stone implements (bifacial tools) (Tréguennec, L'Hôpital-Camfrout, Finistère; etc.) point to their presence in various parts of the peninsula. Later phases of the Palaeolithic (Middle and Upper Palaeolithic) are also fairly well documented, both by occupation sites like Mont-Dol (Ille-et-Vilaine) (*c.* 70,000 BP) or Plasenn-al-Lomm (Bréhat, Côtes-d'Armor) (*c.* 23,000 BP) and changes in the typology of stone tools, the schist plaques engraved with figures or horses and aurochs discovered in the *Rocher de l'Impératrice* rock shelter (Plougastel-Daoulas, Finistère) (*c.* 14,000 BP) showing that at the very end of the Paleolithic, local communities were well aware of the artistic/symbolic trends then developing in Europe.

The end of the last Ice Age, *c.* 10000 BC, brought major changes both in the sea level, which rose rapidly, and in the natural environment, as the former steppe-like landscape gave way to heaths and forests and copses of beeches and pines, then of oaks and hazels, while boars and roe deer replaced the larger mammals of the Palaeolithic. The larger, and probably still nomadic, communities of the Mesolithic (*c.* 10000–5000 BC) (Kayser 1984: 7–13, Marchand & Musch 2013: 7–36.), made use of these new resources and, on coastal sites, of seashell and seabirds, their burials, on the (now) islet of Téviec (Saint-Pierre-Quiberon, Morbihan) (*c.* 5400 BC), revealing elaborate funerary rituals and pointing to the existence of increasingly complex social structures.

The best-known monuments of Brittany's prehistoric past are, undoubtedly, the Neolithic (*c.* 5000–2500 BC) standing stones, large cairns and smaller dolmens, still visible in large numbers in its countryside. Thousands of menhirs were set up in that period — the Ménec (Carnac, Morbihan) *alignement* has 1,170 such stones –, some being huge — the Er Grah (Locmariaquer, Morbihan) stone was originally 18 meters high, the Kerloas (Plouarzel, Finistère) menhir being 9.5 meters high –, this, together with the sheer massiveness of some of the cairns built in the 5th millennium BC, such as Barnenez (Plouézoc'h, Finistère) (fig. 1), Guennoc III (Landéda, Finistère) (Giot 1987) or Petit Mont (Arzon, Morbihan) (Lecornec 1994), — 4,700–4,200 BC for the jointed cairns at Barnenez, the monument being 75 meters long, 22 meters wide and including some 10,000 cubic meters of building rubble –, suggests that they bear the stamp of collective action, being raised by large teams of individuals sharing the same intents or beliefs within close-knit and probably strictly hierarchical communities.

Fig. 1. The Barnenez cairn

The strong demographic growth it also implies assuredly stems from a major change ("Neolithic Revolution") in the procurement of food resources, the cultivation of cereals — emmer wheat and barley are documented on several sites dated to the early 5th millennium BC, such as the Dissignac (Saint-Nazaire, Loire-Atlantique) cairn — and the breeding of animals, associated with the clearance, for cultivation, of large tracts of heaths and woodland, gradually replacing the hunting-gathering activities of the earlier periods.

As societies grew more complex and more outward-looking, the development of long distance exchanges along the Atlantic façade, which can be read in the spread of look-alike megalithic funerary monuments from Spain to Ireland or in the presence, in southern Britain (Giot, L'Helgouac'h & Monnier, 1979: 368) of dolerite stone axes quarried and polished in the vast Sélédin (Plussulien, Côtes-d'Armor) workshops, active from 4200 BC to 2000 BC — they produced more than 6 million axes (Le Roux 1999) —, is a sure sign that, in the late millennia BC, men, goods and ideas circulated freely between the maritime regions of northwestern Europe.

One of the most idiosyncratic traits of the Bronze Age, which, at the end of the 3rd millennium BC, gradually succeeded the Neolithic period,[1] was the use of metals, gold, mostly for jewellery, copper and copper alloys for weapons (axes, swords, daggers), tools and harness parts. In its first phase (Early Bronze Age, *c.* 2200–1600 BC), as Armorican communities gradually came into contact with other groups which, in Central Europe and southern Iberia, had begun mastering the extraction and working of copper, the earliest metal objects in use were flat axes, made of arsenical bronze, which were mostly prestige artefacts, used as "diplomatic" gifts between chieftains and sometimes placed in their graves.

Making copper alloys locally entailed the exploitation of Armorican tin, abundant in the cassiterite flats — in the Aber-Ildut valley, Finistère, for instance –, but also, as Breton copper resources were too small, imports from insular sources such as the Irish Ross Island and Killarney copper mines (Jackson 1980: 9–30, O'Brien 1994) or their Welsh equivalent at Great Orme near Llandudno (Lewis 1998: 45–57). Both activities were controlled by an aristocracy of wealthy landowners, controlling vast tracts of land, its members being buried individually in large barrows and given a range of grave goods, including finely knapped flint arrowheads, silver or gold containers, amber artefacts and copper alloy daggers (Briard 1970). Beyond the sheer wealth of such groups and the networks of power one may surmise from such finds, they certainly point to the existence of land and maritime contacts with other areas and similar élite groups, such as the one developing in Wessex (Wiltshire, mostly), where massive burial mounds and abundant grave goods were given to

1 In the intermediate period between the Late Neolithic and the Early Bronze Age, a few finds of small copper daggers testify to contacts with non-Armorican groups.

another aristocratic élite, exchanging with western Britain and the Continent. As early as the end of the 3rd millennium BC, maritime contacts and exchanges thus played a major role in cultural and possibly linguistic changes and to some extent underpinned the Armorican economy. The latter, however, remained essentially based on agriculture, its workforce of dependent peasants making up the bulk of the population.

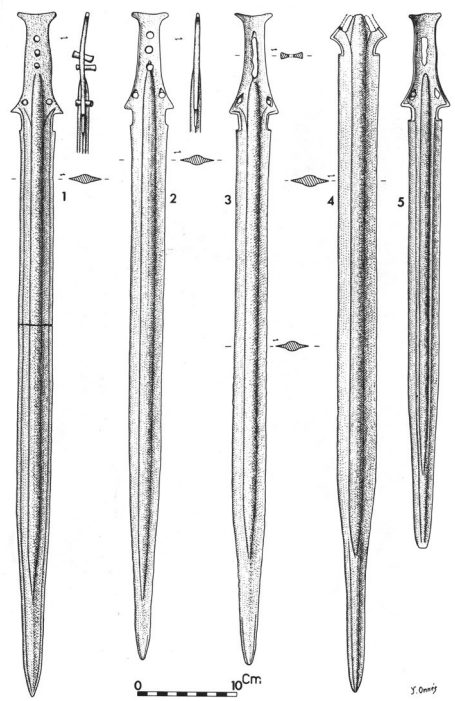

Fig. 2. Late Bronze Age 'carp's tongue' swords (after Briard and Onnée 1971)

In the later phases (Middle Bronze Age, 1600–1300 BC — Late Bronze Age, 1300–800 BC), copper alloy objects became more common, being used to fashion not only weapons, but also tools and various utility implements. New types of swords designed for horsemen, together with harness parts, may point to the development of a warrior class, fighting on horseback and perhaps controlling smaller territories than their Early Bronze Age predecessors. Such developments were certainly influenced by maritime interactions, as the distribution maps of Rosnoën type swords (Late Bronze Age I, *c.* 1300–1125 BC) (Briard 1965: 151–73) and of swords of the "carp's tongue" complex (Late Bronze Age III, 950–800 BC) (ibid., 199–239, Brandherm & Moskal-Del-Hoyo 2014: 1–47) (fig. 2) show that long distance contacts were still active along the whole Atlantic facade, from southern Spain to the Netherlands

and Ireland, with remarkable concentrations of finds at the mouth and along the course of the Somme, the Seine, the Loire and the Gironde rivers leading into the heart of France (Cunliffe 2001a: 14, fig. 7). Middle and Late Bronze Age metal artefacts dredged off the coast of Kent and Sussex (Samson 2006: table 1) also tend to show that the estuaries of the Thames and of the Rhine also played a major role in these exchanges. This is largely confirmed by the discovery of a wreck, dated to the end of the Middle Bronze Age (*c.* 1300–1150 BC) in Langdon Bay, to the east of Dover, most of the broken artefacts meant for smelting found on the seabed being of Continental origin (Needham 1987: 119–24, Clark 2004). Further west, off Devon and Cornwall, similar finds reveal interactions between western France (Normandy and Brittany) and southwestern Britain, another Late Bronze Age wreck, discovered between Prawle Point and Salcombe, in Devon, being loaded with copper and tin ingots, together with metal artefacts of continental origin (Muckelroy & Baker 1979: 189–210). In western Brittany, a few objects of British origin and copper ingots found offshore again point to cross-Channel contacts in the last days of the Bronze Age. This obviously implied more than exchanges between aristocratic groups, though the workings of the social mechanism it underlies are far from clear.

Fig. 3. The Armorican tribes

In most of Europe, the Iron Age (800–50 BC), and especially its latter phase, called the *La Tène* period—i.e. the second half of the first millennium BC—was characterised by economic and demographic growth, together with much increased contacts with the Mediterranean world, and especially powers on the rise, the Etruscan and Greek city states and the Roman state. Aerial surveys (Gautier, Guigon & Leroux 2019) have shown that Late Iron Age farms, enclosed by one of several ditches (Menez 1996), were thick on the ground in the peninsula, much more so than in the

earlier periods and obviously serving a larger population, while, on the coast, briquetage techniques,[2] where sea salt, used for the preservation of meat and fish, was extracted from a concentrated brine, correspondingly grew in number (Gouletquer 1970). For most of the Iron Age, political and economic power was still in the hands of an aristocratic elite, whose fortified residences (Menez 2021) were remarkable features of the archaeological landscape, but which seems to have remained highly individualistic until the Late *La Tène* period, never developing into a real oligarchy. The large, fortified settlements called *oppida*, so common in the *La Tène* world where political, administrative, economic and religious activities were concentrated in a central place, at the heart of the tribal territory, are absent here — the extensive *Camp d'Artus* (Huelgoat, Finistère), though provided with strong ramparts, was only sparsely occupied (Wheeler & Richardson, 1957: 13–38) — except perhaps as coastal strongholds trading with western Gaul and southern Britain (Le Yaudet (Cunliffe & Galliou 2004–2007), Alet (Langouët 1988: 221–24, fig. 1.77.)). By the end of the 2nd century BC, most Armorican tribes were probably governed by oligarchic councils, such as the "senate" of the Veneti[3] — and minted their idiosyncratic coinage (Abollivier 2008, Gruel 1981) (fig. 3–4).

Fig. 4. Coin of the *Osismi*

2 Briquetage technique is explained as "thick-walled very coarse ceramic material used for the manufacture of evaporation vessels in saltmaking from the mid-2nd millennium BC through to medieval times in northern Europe. The forms and fabrics of briquetage vessels are fairly distinctive and allow trade patterns and distribution networks to be established, especially for Iron Age" (www.oxfordreference.com, accessed 29 August 2023).

3 Caesar, *De bello gallico*, III, 16.

Armorican socketed bronze axes have been unearthed in fairly considerable numbers in southern Britain (Briard 1965: 279–80, fig. 107, Cunliffe 2001a: 287–8, fig. 7.21). This demonstrates that cross-Channel exchanges continued during the Early Iron Age, such axes, with often a high lead content, being used as a palaeocoinage (Briard 1987: 133–42, Briard 2001: 37–50).

In the early times of the Late Iron Age (5th–2nd centuries BC), cross-Channel exchanges appear to have lost most of their impetus, this being probably due to the end of the massive production of bronze artefacts, and even more to the swift growth of Greek, Etruscan and Phoenician communities, inflecting towards the Mediterranean and continental Europe the trade routes which previously used the Atlantic seaways. Though a few objects, imported from Aquitania or the Iberian Peninsula, point to repeated contacts along the Atlantic facade, they certainly do not imply major maritime exchanges. In the same period, however (352–300 BC) Pytheas, the Marseilles Greek adventurer, explored the Atlantic coasts and sailed as far north as Iceland, recognizing on his way Ushant (*Ouxisama*), the land of the *Osismi* (*Ostimioi*) and the British Isles (Strabo 1923: I.iv.5, Cunliffe 2001b). But even though the tin trade from Cornwall to Gaul and the Mediterranean world is well attested,[4] nothing, in the Armorican archaeological record, shows that local resources were tapped for that long-distance trade with Mediterranean communities.[5] That a form of Celtic was spoken in the Armorican peninsula in the first millennium BC is certain, as *c.* 325 BC, Pytheas, sailing northwards, identified *Ouxisama* (Ushant) and the territory of the *Ostimioi* (*Osismi*), both being perfectly recognisable Celtic names.[6] Other Celtic names, ethnonyms (*Coriosolitae*, *Riedones*, *Veneti*) and placenames (*Darioritum*/Vannes, *Vorgium*/Carhaix, *Gesocribate* / Le Conquet ?) are only mentioned, often in a Latinised form, after the Roman conquest, but clearly show that Gaulish was the vernacular language in the peninsula (Fleuriot 1991: 165–94), the 3rd/4th century AD inscription on an Iron Age stela at Plumergat (Morbihan) showing it was still spoken, at least in some areas, till the end of the Roman period (Bernier 1970: 655–67, Lejeune 1970: 669–670). It is however equally obvious that the traditional model which had iron sword wielding Celts from a Central European *Urheimat* invading Gaul, Ireland and Britain and imposing their ways and their language upon the natives is no longer tenable, as DNA studies have proved that there was no such thing as a common Celtic biologically heterogeneous population,

4 See, in particular, Carcopino (1957), Hawkes (1984: 211–33).

5 The only evidence so far identified of Armorican early tin working is the Late Middle Bronze Age tin slag found at Délé-Braz in Plouarzel (Finistère) (Giot & Lulzac 1998: 598–600).

6 The name of the *Osismi* derives from an earlier **postimios*, the initial *p*- being dropped in early Celtic, implying that the ethnonym had already had a long life when Pytheas encountered this western tribe.

even in reputedly Celtic areas, such as Cornwall, Wales and Ireland (Oppenheimer 2010: 121–51, Leslie *et al.* 2015: 309–14), while archaeology has revealed no trace of such intrusions into native communities. A close examination of the Iron Age cultures of the Armorican peninsula thus only shows that they had progressively evolved from Bronze Age identities within a multicultural Atlantic world extending from southern Spain to the British Isles and not that they had undergone any such sea change. The reason why Armoricans came to speak Celtic is still debated, but ethnic and linguistic facts should be dissociated from both artefacts and cultural trends, objects and cultural elements then being referred to chronological and not ethnic developments. Indeed, what is called the "Celtic world" is nowhere near a homogeneous, uniform whole and should be seen as a loose mosaic of independent but interconnected communities, their ways being largely related to their physical and economic environment, as well as to age-old traditions evolving under outside change. The Armorican tribes are a good case in point, as, if one looks at their archaeology, their daily activities, mostly agricultural, and their building techniques have obviously nothing idiosyncratic[7] but were largely dependent on both their Atlantic environment and approaches widespread in Northern Europe since the Neolithic agricultural revolution of the 5th–3rd millennium BC. In all these aspects of material life, there is nothing one would call "Celtic" and major elements of "Celtic art", such as the highly decorated pieces of jewellery and bronze artefacts found in the Champagne or the Rhine and Moselle valleys, appear only very rarely here. As some of the most telling traits of Late Iron Age developments commonly, but wrongly, associated with *la civilisation celtique* are missing in western France, should one therefore conclude that Armorica, being geographically distant from the major centres of *La Tène* culture, was totally excluded from these changes and evolved along its own lines?

Pottery, mostly used for everyday preserving, cooking and eating, is among the most common site finds in Iron Age contexts. Most of it, meant for home usage, was left plain but some good quality locally made wares, distributed in the westernmost part of the peninsula, were carefully decorated. The earliest series, appearing in the late 6th–early 5th century BC, show a combination of lines of geometric patterns stamped on a short range of pots (Giot 1971: 82–84). They might of course be thought of as the simplistic artistic expression of local potters, unaware of the major innovations of Late Hallstatt/Early *La Tène* art, were it not for the presence of similar contemporary decorative styles in northern Italy and in the Hallstatt and *La Tène* cultures of the Alpine zone (Schwappach 1969: 7–8). One could, obviously,

7 Except for the series of underground chambers, known as *souterrains armoricains*, found in most farmsteads and agricultural settlements of the western part of the peninsula, and which could be used as underground storerooms (Giot 1990: 53–61). Most are dated to the period extending from the Late Hallstatt to Middle *La Tene* phases.

imagine that such stylistic groups appeared independently in several areas, but a survey of regional pottery styles showing a thin spread of similar and slightly later wares in the in-between zones of Gaul (Gomez de Soto 2006: 57–65), a dissemination from Italy and/or Central Eastern Europe seems more likely,[8] some of the motifs used, like svastikas, being favoured by Western Armorican potters (Daire 2011: 41–52, Du Chatellier 1898: 312–320).[9] However, the 5th century Kernavest (Quiberon, Morbihan) dagger (Révèlière 1894: 157–66, Villard-Le Tiec 2003: 222–3) is, so far, the only metal object decorated in this style found in the peninsula. Other examples of such long-distance contacts may also be found in a series of slightly later (4th century, mostly) high-quality pots, decorated with hand-drawn curvilinear motifs, like the Saint-Pol-de-Léon (Finistère) cinerary urn (fig. 5). Its glossy surface is essentially decorated with large palmettes, a theme common in the Early *La Tène* art of the Champagne and the Rhine valley and ultimately derived from Greek and Etruscan prototypes (Du Chatellier 1897: 14–15, Duval 1977: fig. 58, 25).

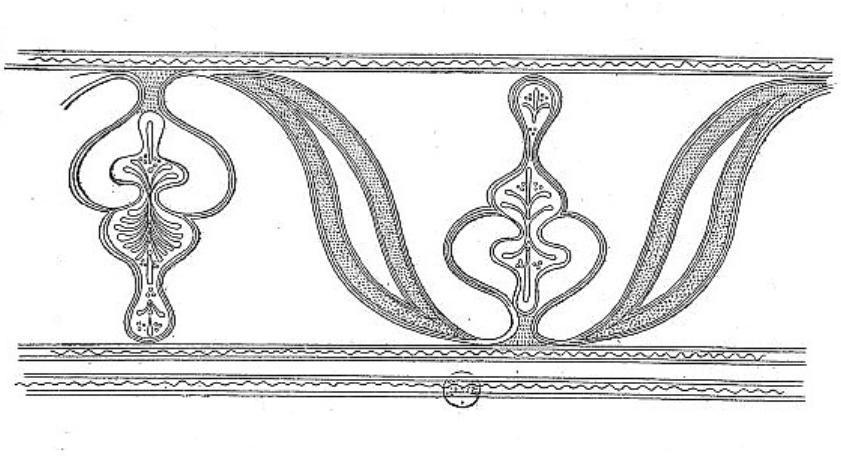

Fig. 5. Hand-drawn decoration of the Saint-Pol-de-Léon (Finistère) pot (after du Chatellier 1897)

Coming in a variety of shapes, Armorican stelae, of which more than two thousand are known, mostly in Finistère and Morbihan, were used as grave markers in *La Tène* cemeteries (Daire 2005, Villard-Le Tiec 2011: 323–37) (fig. 6). Though carefully hewn from hard granite, they were generally left plain, only a dozen being

8 This is also the case of the 4th century richly decorated metal helmets found at Saint-Jean-Trolimon (Finistère) and Agris (Charente), which, though evincing North Alpine and Mediterranean stylistic influences, were probably made in Western Gaul (Gomez De Soto, op. cit.). On the Saint-Jean-Trolimon helmet, see Duval 1990: 23–45.

9 A svastika is to be seen on one of the sides of the Kermaria (Pont-l'Abbé, Finistère) stone stela (Du Chatellier, op. cit.).

decorated—surface erosion will, of course, have played havoc on them—with friezes of geometric patterns (spirals, svastikas, hooks and frets), largely similar to those stamped on contemporary potteries and probably derived from the same sources in the same time span (Daire & Villard 1996: 123–56). The decoration of the Kerviguérou (Melgven, Finistère) stela is so close to that of the Ionic columns of the Metaponte (southern Italy) D temple, dated 470 BC, that a mere coincidence is very unlikely (ibid., 150–1), reminding us that, despite distances, men, craftsmen and mercenaries, travelled widely in Europe. Scientific advances, using the strontium and oxygen isotopes present in ancient bones and teeth, have shown that people travelled all over the continent and to Britain as early as the 3rd millennium BC.[10]

Fig. 6. Iron Age stela at Grouanec-Coz (Plouguerneau, Finistère)

10 The Amesbury Archer, whose grave was discovered in Wiltshire and dated to the 24th century BC, probably originated from the Alpine zone (Fitzpatrick 2011). A young girl, aged 16 to 18, buried in Egtved (Denmark) *c.* 1370 BC, had moved several times from the Black Forest to Denmark (Frei *et al.*, 2015).

Iron Age Armorica was not, then, the cultural backwater it is often reputed to have been and its craftsmen were clearly in contact with distant Iron Age communities. It may of course be argued that Armorican tribes showed some backwardness in only adopting such innovations after a certain time lag, and that, besides, they were entirely passive, absorbing changes without in the least innovating themselves. A counterargument may however be found, among others, in the development of *La Tène* "weapon deposits" ('*sanctuaires à armes*'), best exemplified by the Tronoën (Saint-Jean-Trolimon, Finistère) sanctuary. Though poorly excavated in the 19th century, the latter produced numerous iron weapons, including swords and spearheads, dated to the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, and fragments of iron and bronze helmets, probably originally decorated in gold leaf, high value elite artefacts produced in the late 5th or early 4th century (Gomez De Soto 2006: 57–65). Tronoën is of course one of many such sanctuaries where weapons were ritually "killed" before being devoted to the gods, but all are, so far, dated to the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC,[11] Tronoën being therefore, to the best of our knowledge, the earliest example of that series. In that field, at least, Armorican communities, largely integrated in the northwestern Gaulish cultural zone, certainly played a major role in Late Iron Age developments, which they otherwise quickly absorbed in their own way (Giot 1973: 602–3).

The account of the war waged by the Romans against the Armorican tribes and of their final defeat at sea and on land in 56 BC is certainly one of the purple passages of Caesar's *De bello gallico* (III.8–19), but the armed confrontation was preceded by a century long phase of peaceful contact, during which the Armoricans imported large amounts of wine from Italy and probably some of the ideas and knowledge that went with it, Caesar's intervention in western Gaul being partly due to his wish to control trade with Britain, which he tried to invade in 55 and 54 BC. Though the peninsula was peripheral to Roman Gaul, it was fully Romanised along the lines set in "Celtic" Gaul. Its tribes were turned into *civitates* governed by the local landowning or/and merchant Gaulish élite (Galliou 1983: 40–3), their original territory being left largely unchanged, and given a capital each, *Condate* (Rennes) for the *Riedones*, *Fanum Martis* (Corseul) for the *Coriosolitae*, *Vorgium* (Carhaix) for the *Osismi*, *Darioritum* (Vannes) for the *Veneti*, *Condevicnum* (Nantes) for the *Namnetes*, the corresponding cities being built *ex nihilo* on an orthogonal plan modelled on Mediterranean examples and given the same monuments (forums, theatres, aqueducts, etc.) as other Gaulish towns (Galliou 1983: 60–74; 2014: 217–29; 2017: 264–87) (fig. 7).

11 For Western Gaul, see, for instance, Lejars (1989: 1–4). More generally, see Lejars (1996: 607–30, esp. fig. 1).

Fig. 7. The temple at Haut-Bécherel (Corseul, Côtes-d'Armor)

Fig. 8. Fish-salting tanks at Plomarc'h (Douarnenez, Finistère)

The birth of "small towns" such as Quimper was, on the other hand, due to economic developments, many being situated at the first fording point of tidal rivers, where goods brought by seafaring ships could be unloaded and distributed in the hinterland by the road system, while other commodities, coming from the countryside, could be loaded for export to other parts of the province or of the Empire (Galliou 1994: 223–26).

The road system thus played a central role in the circulation of goods within Armorica, some of the itineraries dating back to pre-Conquest times but the greatest part of its dense network being built in the Roman period to connect *civitas* capitals and serve all parts of their tribal territories. Enabling rural settlements to sell their surpluses on local or foreign markets, and, likewise, to import luxury goods or commodities not produced regionally, roads were a key element of an integrated economy, in which town and country worked as an interdependent whole.

Though many farms were probably just above the subsistence level and only minimally Romanised—a tile roof, a few imported pots, a few coins—others were gradually turned into fully fledged *villas*, provided with the amenities (bathhouses, gardens) and the decorative elements (painted plaster, pavements, etc.) found in many similar country residences throughout Gaul or Britain. But like the native farms, these *villas* were also agricultural units, in which cattle and pigs were bred and cereals cultivated, according to an economic model developed several millennia before. While some traditional briquetage techniques were still active, particularly in eastern Brittany, entrepreneurs from southern Gaul developed a new industry in the 2nd century AD, mostly on the territory of the *Osismi* and particularly around the Baie de Douarnenez, using the salt and fish (sardine) local resources to produce sauces and pastes in seaside units, built on the same plan and using the same techniques as those so common on the shores of the Straits of Gibraltar and in the Algarve, for instance (Sanquer & Galliou 1972: 189–223, Eveillard 2008: 395–400) (fig. 8). The quantities produced being far too large to have been consumed locally, the southern entrepreneurs probably intended, for purely economic reasons, to bring this industry closer to the Lower Rhine and Britain, that is to captive military markets, though there is so far no direct proof of such exports.

Conclusion

From what we have just examined, it seems pretty clear that, from the administrative and economic points of view, western Gaul was well integrated into the province of *Lugdunensis*, even if there were degrees in the Romanisation of things and minds, the eastern and southern parts of the peninsula showing stronger signs of Romanisation than the west. Inscriptions on metal or on stone, public or private, are uncommon in Armorica, except in the more Romanised areas, and are all written in Latin, which, however, does not tell us much as to the regional linguistic

situation, as public inscriptions would have used Latin and private dedications were offered to the deities by the wealthiest and most advanced elements of Gaulish society. Apart from the Plumergat (Morbihan) stela, no text or graffito in Celtic has ever been found in the peninsula, which does not mean that Gaulish had disappeared from western Gaul and that all Armoricans had switched to Latin. According to Sidonius Apollinaris (AD 430–486), Gaulish was still spoken in Aquitania in the 5th century AD, and there is little reason to believe that Armorica fared differently. Contrary to urban groups, most members of rural communities probably rarely encountered spoken Latin and if they ever used the idiom, it must have been in the form of a *lingua franca* in which the two languages were used in proportions varying according to place and speaker.

The *pax Romana* had brought Gaul political unity, military stability and economic prosperity, but in the last quarter of the 3rd century AD, the Roman Empire collapsed as a result of major, multifarious crises, doubling with Germanic raids and invasions across the Rhine. The latter incursions did not reach as far west as the Armorican peninsula, but the crisis itself had deep and lasting effects on the Armorican *civitates*. The fish-salting industry of the *Osismi* and *Veneti* came to an abrupt end[12] while towns progressively shrank and lost their former importance during the following century, their buildings and monuments being demolished or left to dereliction. The luxury buildings of villas, and particularly bathhouses, were turned into rough-and-ready workshops or partly rebuilt in wood and earth, most, however, being abandoned before the end of the 5th century AD. All these events certainly testify to serious economic problems, but also, and perhaps even more so, as the Empire was no longer able to safeguard peace and economic prosperity, to a gradual and widespread disenchantment with all things Roman and a shift of investment away from conspicuous consumption and pretentious architectural display. In the 5th century AD, the last remnants of the administrative structures of the *civitates* disappeared, leaving the Armorican landowners and aristocrats to fend for themselves in a rapidly changing political and social environment, as the West was about to enter a new phase of its long history.

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12 This, however, may be simply due to the depletion or disappearance of sardine shoals near the Armorican coasts (Galliou 2020: 15–20).

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