

Hoard Found in Brittany



The Laniscat hoard of 545 base-gold and silver staters and quarter staters, as excavated. Photo: © INRAP/AFP.

The Osismii "the extremists" occupied the Finistère department of West Armorica "country by the sea" in Brittany. The hoard was found at Laniscat near the eastern border of Osismii territory. Map: © Chris Rudd after de Jersey 1997.

On 17 December 2007 it was announced that a large hoard of Iron Age Armorican coins were found by archaeologists on agricultural land at Laniscat in central Brittany preceding the construction of a four-lane national motorway. The excavation was carried out by France's National Institute for Preventative Archaeology (INRAP) who found the coins at a depth of 20-25cm over 200 square metres of farmland occupied from the 3rd century BC to the 1st century AD.

There were 545 base-gold and silver coins in the hoard - 58 staters and 487 quarter staters - all apparently minted in the first part of the 1st century BC by the Osismii tribe of West Brittany. The Osismii inhabited the Finistère department of north-west France, north of the Veneti tribe, around the seaport of Brest, a major naval station planned by Richelieu and fortified by Vauban in the 17th century; they also controlled the river-port of Lannion (Côtes-du-Nord), north-west of Saint-Brieuc. The Osismii are mentioned twice by Julius Caesar in his commentary on the Gallic War (*De Bello Gallico* 2.34 and 3.9) and their name means "the far out ones" or "the extremists", due to their geographical position on the north-west peninsula of Gaul.

Though large, the Laniscat hoard of 545 coins is by no means the only Iron

Age hoard to be found in Armorica (originally *Aremorica* "country by the sea"), nor is it the largest. Since 1718, when 13 silver *phaleræ* and 18 coins were found in an iron-bound pot on the island of Sark (Bailiwick of Guernsey), no fewer than 170 Iron Age coin hoards and temple deposits have been discovered in Brittany and the Channel Islands. For example, between 1838 and 1845, at least 15,000 coins, many of them Gaulish, were recovered during the canalisation of the river Vilaine at Rennes (Ille-et-Vilaine), mostly from the 30 metre stretch above the Pont-Neuf. And, on 22 April 1935, a hoard of 12,000 silver and billon staters were unearthed at La Marquanderie, St Brelade's Bay, Jersey; practically all of them were of the Coriosolites ("army of the sun") tribe, eastern neighbours of the Osismii; "they looked like a lot of old buttons", said Mr. W. Aufrey, the workman who dug them up.

The Laniscat hoard includes six examples of the extremely rare Carantec type electrum stater which has a left-facing Armorican god on the obverse with four little severed heads tied to his hair by long cords. On the reverse we see an Armorican cavalryman galloping to the left and carrying a javelin and oval shield, with a large flower in front of the horse and a boar battle-standard below it. Only five or six other specimens of this type were previously recorded; they were among a small hoard of 41 Armorican

staters found with a little ring in a vase by a farmer working on the Isle of Callot at Carantec (Finistère) in 1910.

According to Yves Mendez of INRAP, finding Celtic coins in rural areas is rare because such coins were not used much in everyday life; they represented either major transactions or wealth storage in case of an important future need. He says: "The Celtic homes here were constructed of wood and mud and 2,000 years later we have only the foundation holes left." For archaeologists the Laniscat hoard indicates the possibility of a large dwelling place in an agricultural area, because grain storage houses have been discovered. "These discoveries are causing us to revise our view that simple farming Gauls lived here, because an aristocratic dwelling seems to have existed here", remarks Michel Ballieux of INRAP.

Commenting on the 545 coins, Stephan Deschamps of the regional archaeological services says: "Such a find is exceptional by its quantity and also because it has been located in its place of origin, casting a new light on our understanding of Brittany towards the end of the Iron Age. This hoard represented a considerable value in its time and this permits us to reconsider the importance of the Osismii, Gauls of Celtic origin, who once lived in today's region of Finistère and west Côtes d'Armor."

Dr Philip de Jersey, assistant archae-



An ancient myth says that the giant Ogmios pulled men after him with thin chains of gold tied to their ears. Is the myth reflected in this silver stater of the Osismii? Reconstruction by Derek Allen © Edinburgh University Press 1980.



Electrum staters from the Laniscat hoard including the extremely rare Carantec type which shows a cavalryman with javelin and shield. Photo: © INRAP/AFP.

ologist for the States of Guernsey and author of **Coinage in Iron Age Armorica** and **Celtic Coinage in Britain** (over 7,000 copies sold), comments on the Laniscat hoard as follows: "It's a very interesting hoard, but not the largest Armorican hoard - a few have been bigger, particularly if we include Jersey in the definition of Armorica. However, it seems to be the largest hoard of just Osismii coinage. The location is a little unexpected - it's right at the eastern edge of Osismii

territory, and certainly quite a bit further east than the principal concentration of Osismii coinage. The excavators note that there are a lot of copper-rich coins in the deposit and suggest a date of 75-50 BC, which seems very reasonable. It's a shame that the hoard had been scattered by ploughing. It seems a reasonable assumption that it was buried on the Gaulish settlement, but there is no mention that a point of origin was definitively

identified (or a container), and the coins were spread over 200 square metres. All in all, it's an important hoard. It should add a great deal to knowledge of the Osismii coinage. There certainly hasn't been anything like this recovered under modern archaeological conditions elsewhere in Armorica." TH

STRAIGHT TALK from



Tired of hype and ready for some help in selecting the right detector? Our new 64-page Metal Detector Information booklet is packed with accurate, up-to-date technical discussions ... un-biased, understandable answers to your toughest questions... expertly written articles on all phases of treasure hunting. Coinshooting, water hunting, prospecting, relics, research, detector technology - it's free. To receive your copy, see your local dealer, or send the coupon + 4 x 1st Class stamps.

PLEASE SEND A COPY OF THE NEW 64-PAGE METAL
DETECTOR INFORMATION BOOKLET TO:
NAME:.....
ADDRESS:.....
Postcode..... TH

TREASURE WORLD

192 Albany St, London NW1 4AP
Tel: 0207 387 3142 Fax: 0207 388 2714