GOLD IN CAVES AND GRAVES: THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

ORO EN CUEVAS Y TUMBAS: LA CARA OCULTA DE LA LUNA

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The deep cave in the "Massif de Boine" at Han-sur-Lesse (prov. of Namur) features an underground river. The "Trou de Han", where the river reappears, produced hundreds of metal objects, mostly found in it's bed. They all date to the end of the Bronze Age ("Bronze final II b" to "Bronze final III b"). Some fifty gold objects and fragments have also been found here, all of them ornaments, except for two ingots. Part of the objects belong to the North Alpine "complex" ("complexe techno-économique nord-alpin"), part of them to the Atlantic "complex" ("complexe techno-économique atlantique").

Amongst the first group are a number of gold discs of a type known also in the tombs of Wollmesheim and Dietzenbach, amongst the second a collection of gold-plated penannular rings such as also found in Sculptor's Cave in Covesea or the Balmashanner hoard. Quite exceptionnal is the discovery of three fragments of hollow pearls decorated with filigrane and granulation, ornaments that must have been imported from the Mediterranean, probably Italy, where a comparable pearl was found in Veio "Quattro Fontanili". The presence of gold objects at the bottom of the Lesse seems very significant and is clearly very symbolical. The on-going study of the finds of the cave of Han-sur-Lesse, and the gold in particular, indeed shows it must have been a place where the dead, or Death, played a major part, the "Trou de Han" maybe playing the role of some kind of Gate to Hell.

A contemporary site that produced a number of gold finds is the "Trou del Leuve" at Sinsin (prov. of Namur), where a series of basket-shaped hair-ornaments were found, a type also known from Han-sur-Lesse, and very probably of local manufacture. This cave was used for collective burial (over twenty individuals), exceptionnal for the use of inhumation instead of incineration, and for the abundance of grave goods, rarely found in cemeteries of the same period.

The French author Honoré de Balzac stated that "la gloire est le soleil des morts", we will try do find out to what point gold is, in Han-sur-Lesse, a translation of that glory, capturing for eternity the light of the sun.
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