

# Britain in the Atlantic: Late Antique ceramics and connections

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## Summary

Since the 1930s there has been a long history of research on imported Mediterranean pottery found at early medieval sites in Britain and Ireland. Nevertheless, it is clear that the limited amount of information available from other regions of the Atlantic Seaboard has affected interpretations of this material, particularly influencing the models constructed for contact and exchange in the Atlantic – and between this region and the Mediterranean. This paper will summarise the history of this research in Britain, focusing on the search for Atlantic parallels for the British finds, and the use of Continental data – or its absence – in the formation of models for the transport of these wares. Recent research from the south of Devon will be discussed, specifically to consider the potential of new or reassessed data for re-evaluating connections between south-west Britain, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. This article will highlight the potential of information emerging from the Atlantic region for new understandings of the complexity of exchange mechanisms operating along the western sea-lanes between the fifth and seventh centuries.

## 1. The study of Late Mediterranean imports to Britain

### 1.1 An earlier 'Atlantic Symposium'

In September 1959 approximately thirty people, described to be 'mostly professional workers in the period' gathered at the Royal Institution of Cornwall in Truro, Britain, for a conference entitled 'Early Medieval Pottery in the Celtic West of Britain'; the details of this event were subsequently conveyed in a note in *Antiquity* by Charles Thomas (1960). Eight papers were presented, summarising research on this topic since the end of the Second World War. These were seen by Thomas to represent a 'progress report' rather than a 'final pronouncement on the theme' (Thomas 1960: 59).

The subject was introduced by C.A. Raleigh Radford, whose excavations at Tintagel, Cornwall, had led to the first identifications of Mediterranean pottery in the south-west of Britain (see Raleigh Radford 1956). His talk, unsurprisingly, focused on the connection with the 'Celtic Church'; he had interpreted Tintagel as a major monastic site (a model which would later be rejected), and therefore considered the imported amphorae and fine wares as indicators of trade driven by ecclesiastical connections (Raleigh Radford 1956: 59, 68-9). Thomas' review comments that 'within this framework' the other

speakers described a complex sequence of Mediterranean imports and local products (Thomas 1960: 59). His own presentation outlined the alphabetic classification system for the pottery – initially developed by Radford, refined by Thomas, and which largely remained in use in British archaeology until Ewan Campbell's 2007 publication – before going on to consider the potential sources for the various wares and their chronology. The imports found in Ireland, principally at Lagore and Garranes, were summarised by Michael J. O'Kelly, while Leslie Alcock discussed the Welsh evidence. Only one presentation considered possible Continental parallels for the British and Irish finds. Bernard Wailes, conducting doctoral research at the University of Cambridge, delivered a paper on examples of contemporary pottery in France, which was reported by Thomas as

*'...the first coherent account of the pottery of post-Gallo-Roman France, where imprecise differentiation of the various late wares descended from terra sigillata, and confusion with Visigothic wares had obscured the picture.'* (Thomas 1960: 59).

Radford's published article on the British finds – which assigned a broad Mediterranean origin to the Tintagel fine wares – had suggested the presence of equivalent pottery at sites in France and Spain, including sherds with Christian symbols from Bordeaux and Nantes (Radford 1959: 66). However, during his research Wailes had reviewed these examples and identified them as 'Visigothic wares' (i.e. DSP – Dérivées des Sigillées Paléochrétiennes), and had, therefore, rejected them as comparable African and East Mediterranean Red Slip wares. Ultimately, Wailes had concluded that no pottery equating with that recorded from western Britain was to be found on the Atlantic Seaboard, but only in the Mediterranean regions of France and Spain (Thomas 1959, Wailes 1963: 92-100; see Figure 1). As such, within his completed thesis, he surmised that the imported wares

*'must have reached the British Isles by a direct sea voyage' which could 'only have been through the Straits of Gibraltar and northwards along the Atlantic coasts of Europe to the English Channel, the Bristol Channel, and the southern Irish Sea area'* (Wailes 1963: 129).

Although never published, Wailes' analysis was a key turning-point for research on the imported pottery; the first possible parallels from the Atlantic Seaboard had been dismissed, which, as a specific consequence,

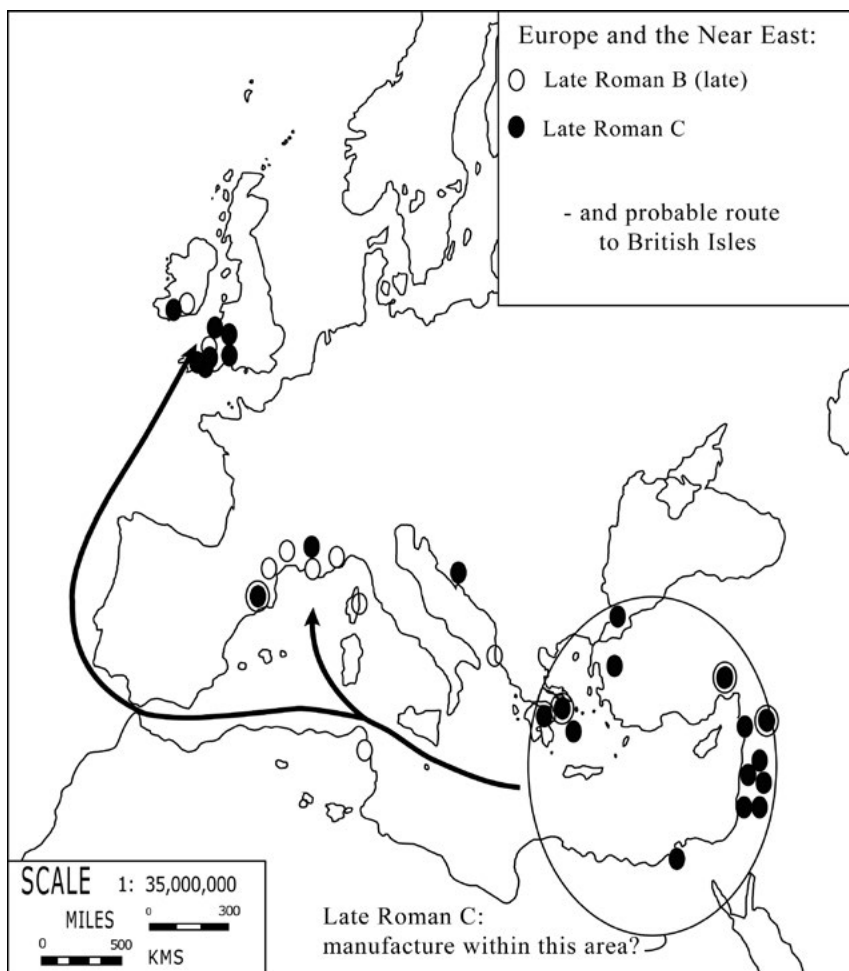


FIGURE 1. THE DISTRIBUTION OF FINE WARES COMPARABLE TO BRITISH 'A WARE' [ARS AND LRC] AND PROPOSED ROUTES OF TRANSMISSION. REDRAWN FROM WAILES 1963: FIGURE 170.

suggested a model of direct shipment from the East Mediterranean to post-Roman sites in western Britain via an exclusively Atlantic route.

The proceedings of the 1959 conference were never published, but Wailes' preliminary findings were included in Thomas' first extensive discussion of the imports to Britain and Ireland (Thomas 1959). Here, the apparent absence of Continental parallels was stated to make the British examples 'even more outlying than had been thought' (Thomas 1959: 90). This publication includes Thomas' first catalogue of the Insular finds, but despite this containing examples of his 'E ware' category from French sites - provided courtesy of Wailes, but mostly rejected later by Campbell (see Campbell 2007: 32) - the examples of Mediterranean wares are notably restricted to Britain and Ireland. From this point forward little information on Continental parallels for the 'late' Mediterranean imports came to be incorporated into British publications. Thomas' 1981 catalogue of imported pottery was specifically limited to finds from Britain and Ireland, although his subsequent publications do show a shift in interpretation, acknowledging the possible 'intermediacy' of sites in Portugal and Spain in this exchange and even the involvement of an 'Atlantic *entrepôt*' (Thomas 1990: 11; 1993, 96). Nevertheless, as no equivalent pottery from the Western seaboard was

presented, this remained an unexplored possibility. Most significantly, south-western Britain was never disputed as the primary and ultimate destination of these voyages.

### 1.2 Models of transportation

This post-Roman exchange-system was considered in an influential article by Michael Fulford, where, again, a model of direct shipment from the East Mediterranean was proposed, thereby indicating a phase of contact between western Britain and the Byzantine world c. 475-550 (Fulford 1989: 4-5). The composition of the British assemblage, characterised by a higher proportion of East Mediterranean imports (amphorae and Phocaeen Red Slip ware/Late Roman C/LRC) to North African pottery (amphorae and African Red Slip ware/ARS), was observed to be the reverse of the typical pattern in the West Mediterranean (Fulford 1989: 3). This argued against a model of redistribution from a western or Atlantic port and positioned the inspiration for contact and exchange firmly in the north-east Mediterranean. Trade with Britain - based on the acquisition of tin - was seen to be a 'deliberate objective' of certain voyages from the East (Fulford 1989: 4). Fulford, nevertheless, did raise the possibility of future discoveries along the 'Atlantic seaways', commenting that the absence of equivalent finds was 'puzzling' but might prove a 'temporary

aberration' (Fulford 1989: 3). His discussion notes the group of LRC from Conimbriga in Portugal – describing it as the only other 'notable incidence' of LRC on the Atlantic – and mentions a sherd of Late Roman 1 amphora (LRA1) found at l'île Lavret, Brittany (Delgado et al. 1975; Giot and Querré 1985; Fulford 1989: 3).

Jonathan Wooding's broad research on trade in the 'Western Sealanes' mentioned the presence of parallel Mediterranean imports in Atlantic Spain and Portugal – which were taken to indicate the likelihood of 'landfalls' in this area – and, echoing Fulford's prediction, suggested that further evidence might prove the British finds to be 'isolated speculations arising from a much larger traffic with Atlantic Iberia' (Wooding 1996a: 41-2, 52). He nonetheless concluded that the absence of equivalent pottery in western France indicated the direct shipment of ceramics from the East Mediterranean to Britain and Ireland, with some material being collected *en route* in North Africa (Wooding 1996b: 79-80). Describing Wailes' failure to identify parallel imports in this region, Wooding commented that this 'negative evidence' had continued beyond the point where it could be blamed on a lack of identification.

*'Centres such as Bordeaux, Orléans and Tours have all seen extensive exploration and related late-Roman wares are known from these sites. We would not now expect PRS [LRC] or class 43 amphorae [LRA2] to exist unrecognised in these centres'* (Wooding 1996: 43).

Ewan Campbell's major monograph, published in 2007 and representing two decades of meticulous research, focused on interpreting the imported pottery found in western Britain and Ireland. This provided a revised full corpus of the Insular finds, particularly detailed descriptions of the later E ware imports, and, crucially, the 'Continental' glass (Campbell 2007: 2-3). Despite a consciously 'Insular' focus, the book and its accompanying database note a few examples of Mediterranean imported pottery found on the Continent, including amphorae from Le Yaudet, Brittany, Tours, Saint Seurin in Bordeaux and Saint-Laurent-des-Combes, also in Gironde (2007: xvii-xx, 3). Campbell's text also contains a brief discussion and distribution map of the overall western distribution of LRC fine wares, based principally on Paul Reynolds' research in the western Mediterranean (Reynolds 1995; Campbell 2007: 16). He observed that the quantity of LRC in south-west Britain was 'surprisingly large', given the increased distance from the production source, and was roughly equivalent to that found in Mediterranean regions of Spain – with Conimbriga again representing the only Atlantic site with a significant collection (Campbell 2007: 16). Campbell also presented the overall character of the Insular assemblage as unlike typical ceramic patterns in the West Mediterranean, revealing an unusually high incidence of Late Roman 2 amphorae (LRA2), an absence of south-eastern Mediterranean amphorae (LRA4-7), a higher proportion of LRC to ARS, and a lack

of 'Cypriot' Red Slip ware/Late Roman D (LRD) (Campbell 2007: 127). These factors again argued against a model of redistribution from a western Mediterranean port, although Campbell did mention the possible 'offloading' of cargoes at the Isles of Scilly (Campbell and Bowles 2009: 304). Nevertheless, the specific characteristics of the Insular assemblage suggested that the British finds could not be explained by 'normal' commercially-driven exchange, as in the West Mediterranean, or by diplomatic connections. Instead, a model of sustained, direct and potentially Imperial state-backed contact was proposed, with demand for tin and other metals in the Byzantine East representing the 'primary motivation' for this trade (Campbell and Bowles 2009: 299-311).

Despite a few alternative interpretations, the impression that the imports to Britain and Ireland are 'exceptional' in the Atlantic has persisted. This has directly resulted from the two key observations of the British import assemblage: firstly, the relative isolation of the Insular material – arising from Wailes' early research on the Continent, but never countered by subsequent appraisals; and secondly, its distinctive characteristics – specifically the unusual prevalence of East Mediterranean material, as presented by Fulford, and the broader list of atypical attributes summarised by Campbell. These observations have supported assumptions that deliberate contact with sites in south-west Britain was the fundamental force driving Atlantic exchange-systems between the fifth and sixth century. Finds of Mediterranean pottery outside of the focus of concentration in south-western Britain – representing a handful of sites in Wales, Scotland and Ireland – have been accounted for by models of redistribution, while sporadic finds on the Atlantic Seaboard are seen to demonstrate the routes taken and to indicate possible intermediate stopping-points. A few publications have mentioned occasional parallel finds at Continental sites, principally the LRC fine wares from Conimbriga, but these were typically seen as outliers to the main British distribution. Ken Dark, for example, suggested that the few finds of LRC in western France and Spain might be explained as a 'by-product of directional trade aimed at western Britain' (2000: 127). Overall, the apparent absence of published, comparative data from sites on the Atlantic Seaboard has left the British finds to be largely examined in isolation. As a direct consequence, this has reinforced notions of special political, diplomatic or commercial links between the newly-emerging British and Irish Kingdoms and Byzantium. As a contrast, it is worth considering that the presence of luxury goods from the East Mediterranean in eastern, Saxon regions of Britain has usually been taken to reflect indirect transport – resulting from chains of transmission across Merovingian France (Harris 2003: 162).

Over half a century on from the first conference, the ceramic imports remain a topic of major interest within British archaeology. The pottery has provided crucial dating evidence for early medieval sites in western

Britain and Ireland, based principally on the typochronological sequences of fine wares developed in the Mediterranean, particularly by John Hayes, and work by Thomas and Campbell on the E ware. New finds have continued to appear in Britain and Ireland as a result of rescue and research excavations, while the re-analysis of older site assemblages has revealed a greater complexity to the British assemblage as a whole. It has, however, become increasingly evident that interpretations of the pottery are based on a very restricted Atlantic data-set. New publications from this region and the increasingly availability of resources has demonstrated that the apparent 'gap' in the distribution of Mediterranean pottery along the Atlantic Seaboard has been overemphasised, and that new data from 'intermediate' locations necessitates new understandings of the Insular finds.

## 2. A Surge of Atlantic data

The distribution of Late Roman C fine ware has been seen as 'emblematic' of the spread of East Mediterranean commodities into the western Mediterranean and Atlantic from the mid-fifth century and into the sixth century (Fabião 2009: 34). LRC is the most common of the fine ware imports in Britain and Ireland, represented by an approximate minimum of sixty-four vessels, roughly half of which were recovered at Tintagel (Campbell 2007: 16; Doyle 2009; Duggan 2016: 107). As mentioned, Reynolds' 1995 dataset of western finds of LRC has been used as the principal point of comparison for this Insular distribution; apart from the British group, this included only four sites in Atlantic with LRC (Reynolds 1995: 162, Appendix B.2). However, the updated map in Reynolds' 2010 *Hispania and the Roman Mediterranean* recorded the ware at additional sites up the western Iberian coast as well as at Gijón, Asturias, on the northern Spanish coast (Reynolds 2010: 170, Map 12). The quantity of LRC recorded from Portugal has, in fact, been steadily increasing since the 1970s (as demonstrated by the catalogues, maps and discussions presented by Maia 1978, Delgado 1988 and Melim de Sousa 2001). Carlos Fabião's 2009 synthesis mapped 49 western Iberian sites with LRC, as opposed to the approximate total of 20 sites in Britain and Ireland (Fabião 2009: 34). Although many of these Iberian finds have not been published in detail, it has become apparent that south-western Britain was not the focus for the Atlantic distribution of this fine ware.

Additional Atlantic examples of LRC – specifically from Galicia, Spain – were included in the map in the published thesis of Adolfo Fernández Fernández (2014: 440, Fig. 225). More significantly, Fernández's analysis of the LRC from Vigo has presented an assemblage that not only dwarfs the Insular collection but surpasses its chronological boundaries. The broad date-range for the production of LRC Form 3, as presented in *Late Roman Pottery* (Hayes 1972), has provided the primary dating structure for the Mediterranean imports to Britain and Ireland. As Campbell

rejected the identification of LRC 10 at Tintagel (reported in Thomas 1981, 6), there are no longer any clear examples of imported Mediterranean pottery from western Britain that necessarily date beyond c. AD 550 (Campbell 2007: 14). In contrast, the group of 605 vessels of LRC recorded from Vigo, though dominated by Form 3, included earlier and later variants, as well as examples of the latest form, LRC 10 – demonstrating the site's extended chronology for connections with the Mediterranean into the later-sixth/earlier seventh century (Fernández 2014: 222–61). Similarly, there are no examples of the later-sixth/seventh century forms of ARS among the western British finds, as identified at Vigo and, to a lesser extent, at Place Camille Jullian, Bordeaux (Fernández 2014: 154; Bonifay 2012: 256). Even if links with south-western Britain did provide some impetus for trade routes originating in the East Mediterranean, this region appears to have lost any connection with the Mediterranean by the mid-sixth century – a pattern echoed, it should be acknowledged, by the majority of sites on the Atlantic Seaboard. The wide Insular distribution of E ware, nevertheless, suggests a re-negotiation of the northern Atlantic systems around this date – characterised by connections between western Britain and Ireland and south-western France, potentially centred on Bordeaux.

Beyond the expanding distribution of LRC, recent years have witnessed a surge of data from the Atlantic region, providing information on all categories of material – amphorae, fine wares and even imported coarse wares. Patterns of Imported Mediterranean pottery from sites in the Atlantic – as highlighted at the *Ceramics and Atlantic Connections* symposium at Newcastle in 2014 – will be further elucidated in this volume. This growing data-set, and indeed this volume, represents a direct challenge to the notion that the British and Irish finds are isolated on the Western seaboard, thereby refuting Wailes' original conclusions. As mentioned, the published assemblage from Vigo has fundamentally altered understandings of scale of connections between the East Mediterranean and Atlantic (Fernández 2014), while recent publications from Britain (Noble et al. 2013), Ireland (Doyle 2009; Kelly 2010), France (Maurin 2012) and Portugal (Magalhães 2012; Quaresma 2012; Quaresma and Morais 2012) have continued to reveal new details of the extent and character of these exchange-networks. David Guitton's research not only integrates Central Western France into these networks but highlights antecedent and connected systems of regional ceramic production, while Joachim Le Bomin's article in this volume presents the first, comprehensive overview of Mediterranean wares across Atlantic France.

This new information presents a much more complex picture of material – ceramics and associated commodities – moving within dynamic Atlantic Seaboard networks. Rather than a simple model of direct transport from the Mediterranean, it can now be proposed that the imports to Britain and Ireland were shipped via intermediate

ports, or, as seems likely, were redistributed from one or more transshipment ports in the Atlantic. Fernández has argued convincingly for Vigo, acting as an Atlantic ‘emporium’, as having this role – an interpretation reaffirmed by Michel Bonifay and supported by the range and volume of material (Bonifay 2014, xi; Fernández 2014: 475–8). The papers presented in this collection, furthermore, demonstrate that other classes of pottery beyond the Mediterranean fine wares and amphorae must be considered as part of these evolving Atlantic systems – and it seems likely that the distribution of ‘Atlantic’ products will become a matter of increased relevance. Although much remains to be fully understood, this emerging data provides a new opportunity and stimulus to develop revised models of contact and exchange between Britain, Ireland, the Atlantic regions of France, Spain and Portugal and the Mediterranean in this crucial, transformative period of the fourth to seventh centuries – and potentially beyond.

### 3. Mediterranean imports to Britain: recent evidence from south Devon

This appreciation of parallel Atlantic data permits a revised consideration of the Insular finds, allowing the composition of the British assemblage to be examined within a wider Atlantic context. The scale, distribution, range and chronology of the British ceramic imports can start to be weighed against broad patterns observed along the Western seaboard, while the Insular ‘import sites’ can now be positioned within an ‘Atlantic network’ of contact and exchange. As such, the significance of south-western Britain and its position as the ultimate destination of the Atlantic routes can be questioned. An extensive reconsideration of imported material from the south-west must now be a target for research, but a brief examination of recently published evidence from south Devon provides a ‘test-case’ for this approach.

Since Radford and Thomas’s early research, interpretations of the Insular finds have been dominated by the collection from Tintagel, which remains the largest British or Irish group on the basis of sherd counts and estimated vessel counts (Campbell 2007: 120; Doyle 2009; Bidwell et al. 2011: 93). The absence of a full, illustrated and published catalogue from Tintagel has limited understanding of the quantity and character of the assemblage, but estimates of 150 amphorae and 80 fine ware vessels have been presented (Thorpe 2007: 246. These figures may change as a result of the new phase of investigation at the site, commencing in the summer of 2016). Many of the ‘second tier’ of Insular sites, such as South Cadbury, Cadbury Congresbury, Dinas Powys or Garranes have only produced estimated vessel counts of roughly ten to twenty vessels. The majority of the Insular ‘import sites’, furthermore, are represented by only a handful of stray sherds or even individual fragments – taken to represent the presence of a single imported vessel (Campbell 2007; data-sets presented in Campbell

2011; Doyle 2009). The excavations at Bantham, Devon, in 2001 have provided a counterpart for Tintagel, producing, by Insular standards, a second ‘large’ assemblage: 719 sherds representing an estimated 52 amphorae and two vessels of LRC as well as a few associated types, including three of E ware (Bidwell et al. 2011: 94). Together with other recent finds from sites in south Devon, the material from Bantham presents a rather different impression of the Insular imports, which can, perhaps, be more closely aligned with contemporary patterns in the West Mediterranean and Atlantic (see Figure 2).

#### 3.1 Bantham

Many of the larger ‘import sites’ in south-western Britain, notably Tintagel, have been interpreted as centres of local political power, indicating that the presence of the imported pottery – and therefore the acquisition, consumption and redistribution of associated commodities such as wine – were somehow connected to the formation or maintenance of local power-structures during the fifth and sixth century (Turner 2004: 26–8). In contrast, imported pottery was recovered at Bantham in association with hearths and middens interpreted to represent temporary occupation, and it emerged as the type-site for the so-called ‘beachmarkets’: coastal, sand-dune sites of seasonal exchange (Silvester 1981; Turner 2004: 27; Campbell 2007: 121). Following the most recent phase of excavations in 2001 the site has been re-interpreted as ‘port’ with a resident population and as a location where imported olive-oil or, more likely, wine, was consumed within communal feasting activities (Reed et al. 2011: 132). It is also probable that Bantham functioned, like Tintagel, as one of the primary entry points for Mediterranean imports into south-west Britain (Reed et al. 2011: 129). Its proximity to Dartmoor has suggested that the exchange of mineral resources, particularly tin, for exotic commodities, provided the impetus for this coastal interchange (Bidwell et al. 2011: 115). Geoarchaeological analysis has revealed evidence of tin-streaming on Dartmoor to the north of Bantham and Mothecombe, while forty tin ingots of possible early medieval date have been recovered from the sea at Bigbury Bay, close to both sites (Fox 1995: 21–22; Thorndycraft et al. 2004). As such, Campbell’s focus on mineral exchange as driving the Insular supply can be re-affirmed, although the British evidence can now be envisaged within Atlantic Seaboard systems of collation and trans-shipment.

The majority of the pot-sherds recovered from the 2001 excavations at Bantham were of amphorae, only one sherd of which was identified as LRA2, whereas the majority were LRA1 – representing c. 26 vessels (Bidwell et al. 2011: 94, 110). Most of these appear to fit with the ‘transition’ between Pieri’s LRA1A and LRA1Bi sub-types, indicating an import date sometime in the later-fifth/sixth century, although six vessels of a ‘variant’ type were also identified (Pieri 2005: 70–6; Bidwell et al. 2011: 110; see Figure 3). It is

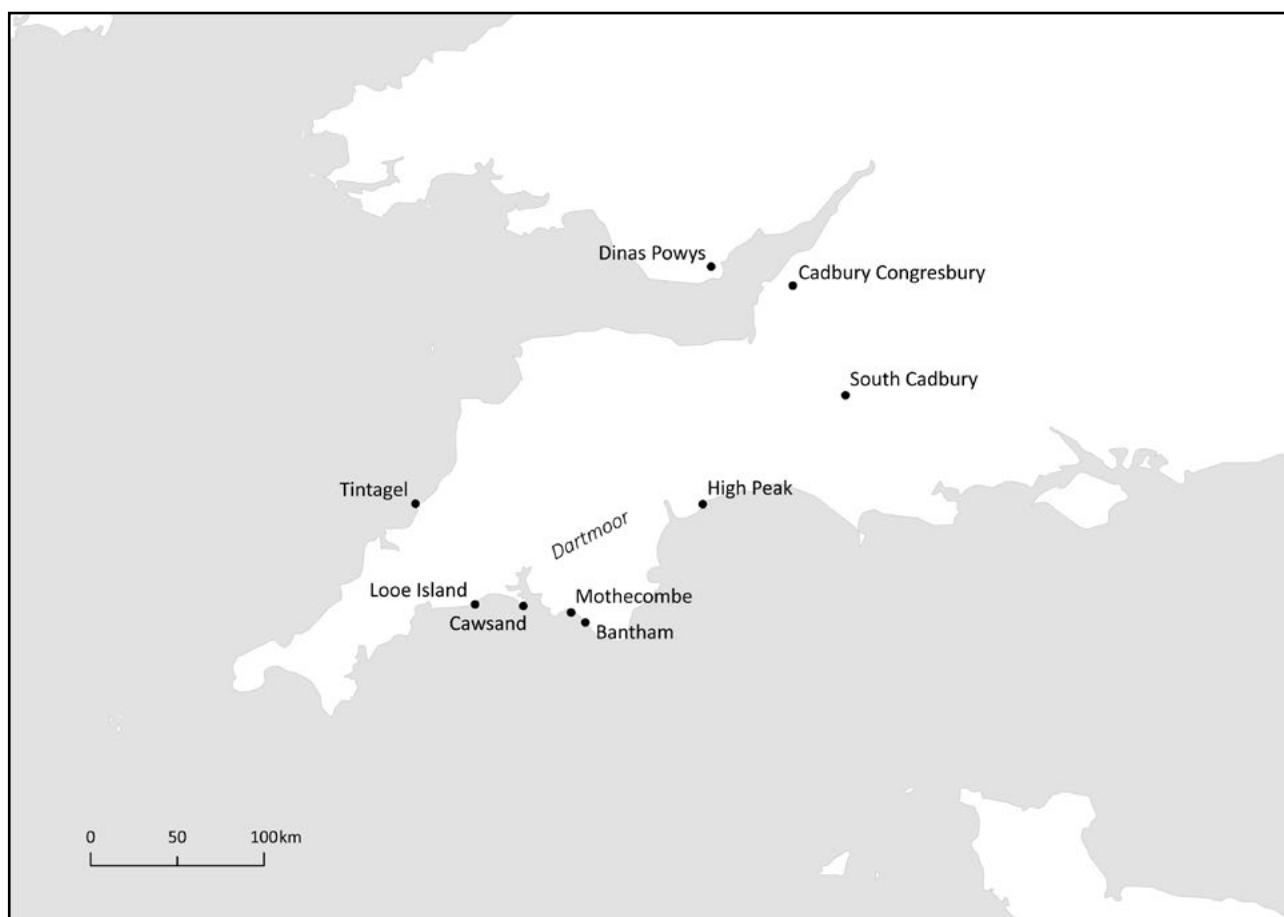


FIGURE 2. LOCATION MAP OF SELECTED 'IMPORT SITES' IN SOUTH-WESTERN BRITAIN.

likely that the latter – characterised by pale fabric, grooved surfaces and arched handles – represent an alternative Mediterranean or even Iberian source that needs to be established (Bidwell et al. 2011: 99; Fernández Fernández pers. comm.). To date, none of the Bantham amphorae have been pinpointed to specific production regions, although the varied fabrics suggest multiple origins.

The scarcity of LRA2 at Bantham presents a marked difference with Tintagel. Given the scale of the assemblage from Tintagel, its particular features have come to characterise the British assemblage as a whole – in particular a focus towards LRA2. LRA1 is, overall, the most common amphora represented at the Insular sites, although it is regularly accompanied by LRA2. However, where proportions of the Insular finds have been published (see, for example, Campbell 2007: 23, Figure 14) the elevated quantities from Tintagel have, naturally, slanted the overall impression of the British material. The exact, current totals and relative proportions are not clear, but estimated vessel counts from Tintagel have highlighted the prevalence of LRA2 (see Figure 4). The sherd counts from the 1990-99 excavations also suggest the high frequency of this Aegean type (Thorpe 2007: 232-3). This contrasts with contemporary patterns observed in the Western Mediterranean, where LRA2 is typically rare (Reynolds 2010: 109). As such, the composition of the

assemblage from Bantham, and, indeed, the proximate sites in south Devon, seems better aligned with the western Mediterranean and with the wider Atlantic, where LRA2 is also generally uncommon. Nevertheless, Fernández has identified LRA2 as particularly well represented at Vigo in the first half of the sixth century (Fernández 2014: 344). It may be, therefore, that the differences between the Tintagel and Bantham groups reflect selective patterns in redistribution, regional connections to different import-channels/shipments, or specific chronological phases to this Atlantic exchange (Campbell 2007: 26, 103; see discussion in Reynolds 2010: 109-10). Imported vessels may have continued to arrive at Bantham later than at Tintagel, although the low quantity of E ware at Bantham – seemingly absent at Tintagel – suggests limited connection with the Atlantic systems developing from the mid to later-sixth century.

The Bantham group also included two examples of Gazan Late Roman 4 amphorae, which, apart from a possible, abraded example from Dinas Powys, represent the first examples of this type to be identified from post-Roman western Britain (Campbell 2007: 22; Bidwell et al. 2011: 100). Two amphorae of North African origin were also identified, although not to a specific type (Bidwell et al. 2011: 102). A group of unprovenanced amphorae identified as 'Thick-walled' were also recorded, seemingly

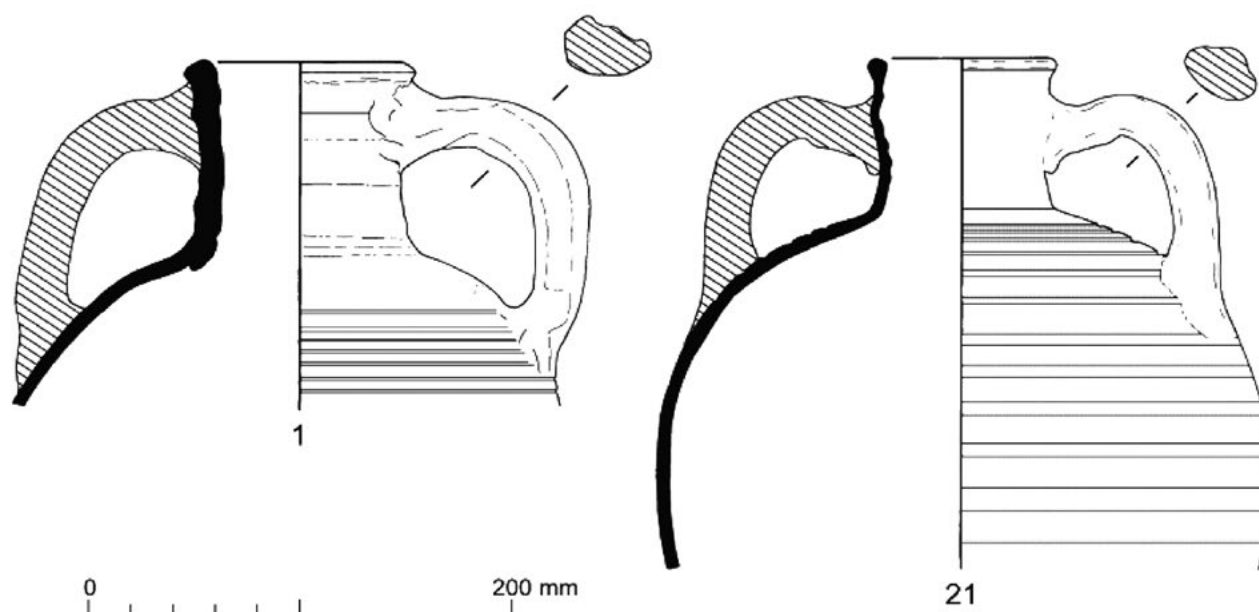


FIGURE 3. LRA1 (LEFT) AND LRA1 'BANTHAM TYPE' (RIGHT). AFTER BIDWELL ET AL. 2011: FIGURES 14.1 AND 17.21. DRAWINGS BY R. ORAM AND D. WHITWORTH, ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN *MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY*.

	Tintagel						Bantham	
	Sherd counts from 1990-99 excavations (Thorpe 2007: 232-3)		'Provisional site totals' (Thomas 1988a)		Minimum vessel counts (Campbell 2011)		Minimum vessel counts from 2001 excavation (Bidwell et al. 2011)	
	Sherd Count	%	Vessel Count	%	Vessel Count	%	Vessel	%
LRA1	375	21.9	35	24.8	29	29.3	20	38.5
LRA1 'Bantham type'	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	11.5
LRA2	914	53.3	40	28.4	34	34.3	1	1.9
LRA3	19	1.1	5?	3.5	3	3.0	-	-
LRA4	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3.9
Other East Med	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	9.6
'Bv'/'Thick-walled'	118	6.9	27+	19.1	23	23.2	5	9.6
North African	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3.9
'Miscellaneous' / 'Unknown' / 'LRA' / 'Unidentified'	288?	16.8	34*	24.1	10	10.1	11	21.2
Total	1714	100	141	100	99	100	52	100

FIGURE 4. RELATIVE PROPORTION OF AMPHORAE AT TINTAGEL BY SHERD COUNT, VESSEL COUNT AND PERCENTAGE COMPARED AGAINST VESSEL COUNTS FROM 2011 EXCAVATIONS AT BANTHAM.

\*includes a group described as 'untyped and coarseware vessels' of which Thomas assigned four a North African origin and 30+ an East Mediterranean origin

equating with the group of amphorae labelled 'Bv' from Tintagel (Bidwell et al. 2011: 102. This Insular 'Bv' group is no longer thought to wholly, or even largely, comprise North African imports, with Reynolds indicating a possible Cádiz/Algarve source for many of the sherds (Reynolds 2010: 109, 293). Establishing the consistency and distribution of this group, not negligible among the Insular/Tintagel assemblage, and pinpointing its precise provenance must now be a research priority.

As mentioned, the Bantham excavations also produced a minimum of two vessels of LRC Form 3, although fine wares were generally rare – again presenting a point of contrast with Tintagel (Bidwell et al. 2011: 106). Finally, another notable vessel from Bantham was a flat-bottomed dish or bowl in a heavily micaceous fabric of unknown origin (Bidwell et al. 2011: 108, Figure 24.63). A possible Continental source was suggested in the 2011 report, with comparison made to vessels from Brittany. However, the

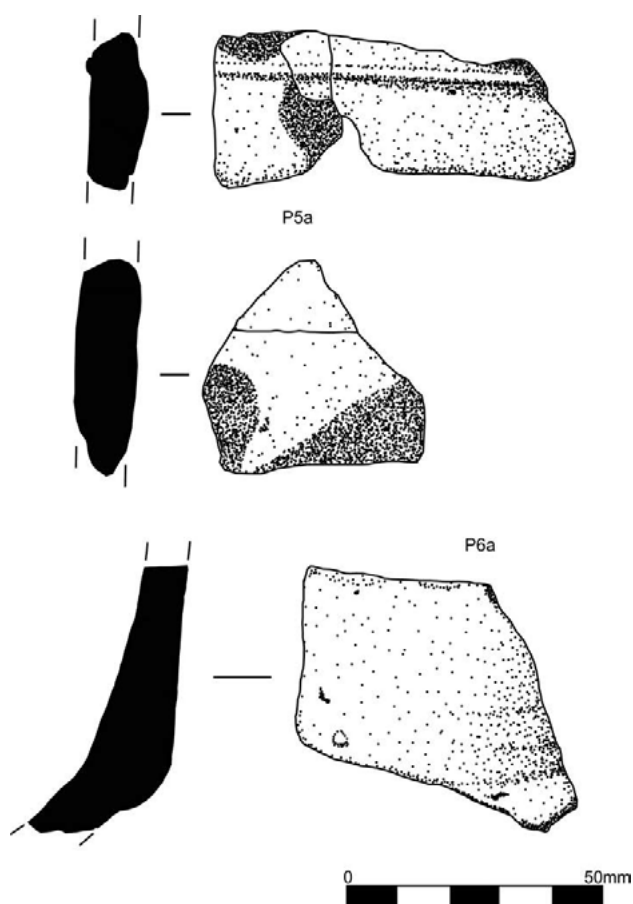


FIGURE 5. SELECTED LRA1 SHERDS FROM MOTHECOMBE.

fabric of this vessel can be equated with coarse wares recovered at Vigo (Fernández pers. comm; 2014: 525) and although not yet tested, this sherd appears to represent the first example of a north-western Iberian pot identified from a post-Roman site in Britain. The possibility of equivalent vessels from elsewhere in the south-west must now be considered. It should be noted that a significant proportion of the finds from the Insular sites have not been matched to the major Mediterranean classes of fine ware and amphorae. This is certainly due to the typically small and abraded state of the sherds, but future collaboration between researchers in the Atlantic will permit better understandings of some of these currently 'unidentified' or 'unknown' products, and may increase the known range of imports to Britain and Ireland.

### 3.2 Mothecombe

The excavations at Bantham produced a significant volume of Mediterranean pottery, but not much structural evidence. This can be contrasted with Mothecombe: a coastal site to the west of Bantham, at the mouth of the River Erme. The presence of equivalent pottery had been recognised at Mothecombe since 1959 when a few sherds were recovered from deposits eroding out of the back of the beach (Fox 1961). Between 2004 and 2011 excavations were carried out at the site by Newcastle University and

the University of York, which produced a small number of additional sherds (Agate et al. 2012; Duggan 2012). A number of hearths on the eastern side of the beach were excavated, which showed temporary, but repeated use, fitting the model of a beachmarket/seasonal trading-station, like the earlier interpretation of Bantham (Agate et al. 2012: 354-7). However, on the west side of the beach two truncated, curving features were exposed, which were interpreted as the foundations of two successive, large, early medieval timber structures, indicating some sort of long-standing occupation at the site (Agate et al. 2012: 358-64). Imported 'post-Roman' amphora sherds and residual/reused earlier 'Roman' sherds were found in association with both the hearths and the building foundations. It seems likely that the residents of these buildings were engaged in the consumption or control of imported commodities such as wine or other exotics.

The overall amount of pottery recovered from Mothecombe was relatively small. The group included 24 very small and 'non-diagnostic' amphora sherds and was rather abraded in comparison with the sherds from Bantham (Duggan 2012: 372-8). However, the assemblage composition was quite similar to Bantham, showing, again, a clear focus towards LRA1: this type was represented by neck and body sherds (see Figure 5). Again, the amphora fabrics were rather varied, and estimated to represent a total of nine or ten vessels of various origins, including roughly five LRA1, possibly two LRA2 and at least one potential North African vessel (Duggan 2012: 377).

### 3.3 High Peak

In 2012 a full review and reassessment was conducted of the imported pottery recovered from the site at High Peak, Sidmouth, again situated on the south coast of Devon (Duggan 2013a). This Neolithic, cliff-top site was reoccupied as a fortified settlement in the 'post-Roman' period (fifth/sixth centuries) (Rainbird et al. 2013). Sherds of imported Mediterranean amphorae were collected by antiquarian investigators from eroding occupation deposits at the site in the mid to later-nineteenth century, and were recovered from several, subsequent phases of excavations. Following excavations in 1961 and 1964, Charles Thomas identified the pottery from High Peak as representing 'post-Roman' imported amphorae and the finds were added to the growing British catalogues of the imported wares (Pollard 1966: 52-3). Eleven additional amphora sherds were recovered in 2012, nine of which were from the same LRA1 vessel (see Figure 6), while the other two sherds matched an amphora excavated in the 1960s (Rainbird et al. 2013: 38).

These new finds raised the overall site total to 139 sherds, with a weight of 836g, almost all of which would seem to be of Late Roman amphorae. Unfortunately all were small and abraded and there were no handles or rims, preventing precise vessel counts or identifications of dated sub-types. A visual examination of the fabrics conducted as part of this reassessment produced an



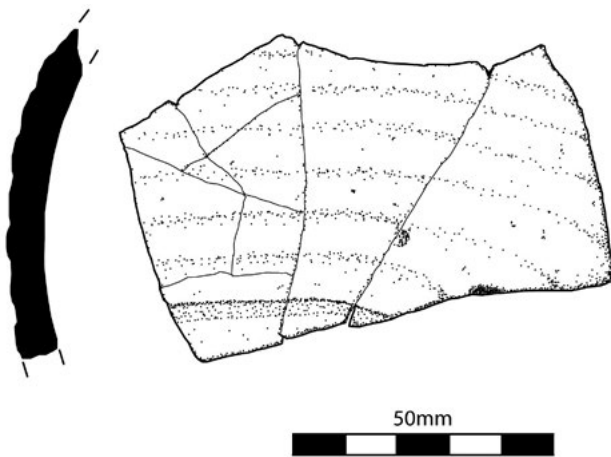


FIGURE 6. SELECTED LRA1 SHERDS FROM HIGH PEAK, SIDMOUTH.

estimated total of c. 10-11 vessels, including five or six LRA1 and possibly two LRA2 (Rainbird et al. 2013: 39; Duggan 2013a). At least two other vessels could not be identified with certainty. Three small body-sherds in the assemblage show the same pale fabric and square-grooved surfaces as seen on the variant 'LRA1 type' at Bantham, which might suggest a specific pattern of supply to this region – or else indicate redistribution from the primary entry-point at Bantham. At least one of these was originally classified as LRA2 by Charles Thomas, hinting that a wider reconsideration of the Insular finds would

be beneficial, in light of the expanding set of Atlantic comparanda (Pollard 1966: 53).

### 3.4 Plymouth Sound amphora

Finally, this recent information from south-west Britain can be supplemented by a fragment of an amphora found in a marine context off the British coast (Duggan 2013b). This was discovered in the 1970s by a sports diver in the sea at Plymouth Sound, close to Cawsand (just into Cornwall, to the west of Devon), but was not published at the time. Although shown to the museum at Plymouth, it was never included in British catalogues of post-Roman imports and has since remained in the possession of the finder. The fragment was found in isolation, although the diver only carried out a brief examination of the sea-floor, and it is not clear whether the lower portion was left behind in the sea-bed. The area was investigated by divers in 2013 but nothing else was found, perhaps due to the large amounts of sediment that had accumulated following recent storms. The artefact comprises the rim, neck, handles and upper body of a LRA1 amphora, with clapper-board horizontal ridging just visible on the upper body (see Figure 7). The amphora can, again, be best compared with Pieri's LRA1Bi sub-group, with a likely date of arrival in the late-fifth or sixth century (Pieri 2005: 70-6). It presents a notable similarity with the LRA1 from Bantham, and although not from a firm archaeological context, the vessel does fit very well with

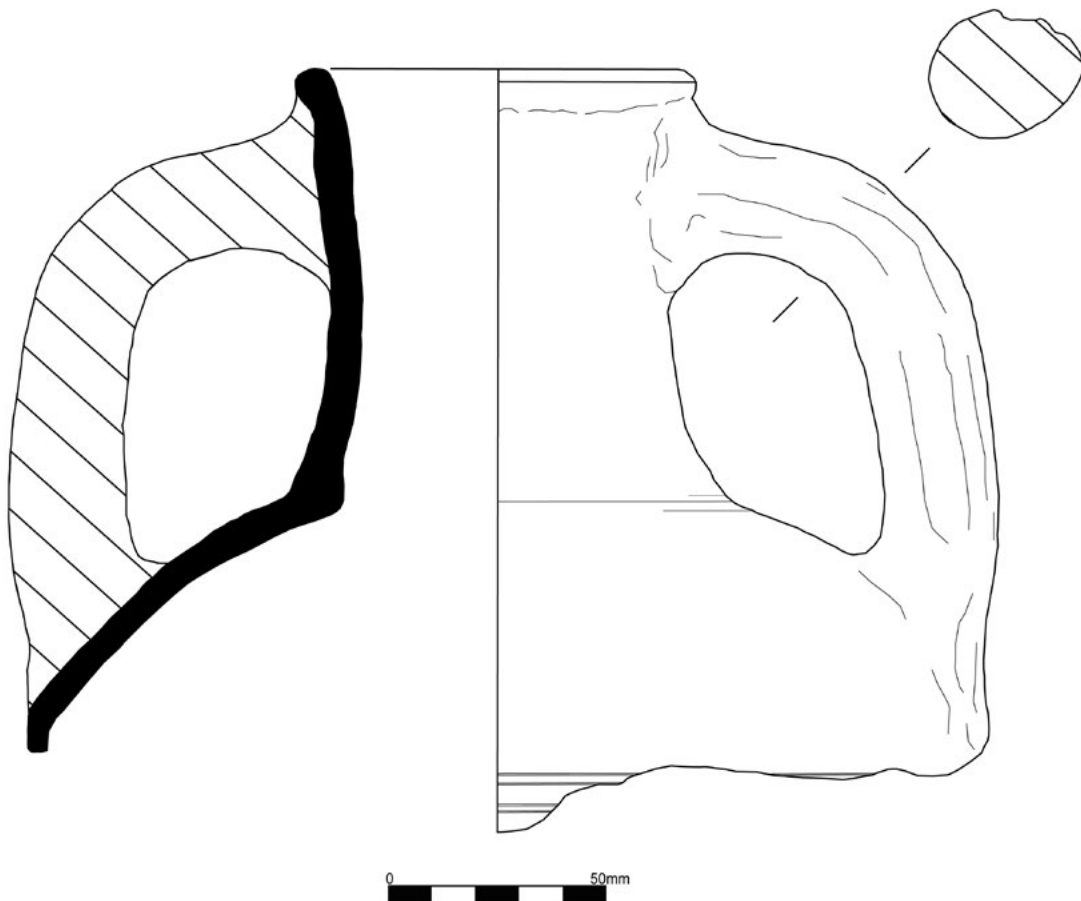


FIGURE 7. FRAGMENT OF LRA1 RECOVERED FROM THE SEA OFF CAWSAND.

the chronology and pattern of local imports. As such, it seems reasonable to consider this as a genuine post-Roman import, rather than an ‘antiquarian’ object that ended up in a marine context. No sites with imported pottery have been identified on the nearby Rame Peninsula, but this fragment might signal the arrival of Mediterranean commodities in the area in the post-Roman period, or else attest to shipments heading eastward across Plymouth Sound. As mentioned, forty tin ingots were found by divers in the sea at Bigbury Bay, close to Mothecombe, which can also be positioned within a model of sea-trading along the south coast. To the west of Cawsand, the next closest site with imported pottery is Looe Island, which produced a surface find of LRA2 (Thomas 1981: 10).

### 3.6 Summary

These recently discovered or published ceramic finds from south Devon demonstrate the difficulties of constructing models of exchange-systems on the basis of small, abraded and non-diagnostic sherds, thereby reaffirming the importance of collaboration with researchers working in areas with larger or better preserved assemblages. Despite these difficulties, certain broad similarities across this area can be offered, particularly following the Bantham publication, which start to point towards localised patterns in supply, preference or demand. In particular, the clear regional focus on LRA1 can be seen to contrast with the reported pattern at Tintagel, where LRA2 is particularly common. One specific feature of these sites in Devon, and one that they do share with Tintagel, is that they have produced little or no E ware. The coarseware is absent at Mothecombe and High Peak and relatively scarce at Bantham. This suggests that these sites had limited connection to the subsequent, though connected, phase of exchange centred on south-western France. None of the south Devon sites have produced DSPA, also hinting that connections with south-western France were less significant. Again, it might be that this reveals a specific, regional narrative or else might be linked to the chronology of the individual sites or contexts investigated to date. Finally, the possibility of establishing firm connections between south Devon, and south-western Britain in general, and Atlantic regions of Spain and Portugal on the basis of amphorae and coarse wares should be stressed as a research objective. This ceramic evidence has the potential to underline dynamic Atlantic connections stressed in other sources of evidence as presented in the work of José Carlos Sanchez Pardo (see this volume).

### 4. Conclusions: Britain in the Atlantic

The increasing quantity of data from Spain, Portugal and France presents a vastly different picture of ceramic exchange along the Atlantic Seaboard, showing the finds from Britain and Ireland to be neither isolated nor exceptional, but directly associated with an extensive

Atlantic system. Specifically, the Insular examples of East Mediterranean amphorae and fine wares, particularly the LRA1 and LRC, and the late-fifth/sixth century forms of ARS-D represent the northerly reaches of a major Atlantic distribution. As such, previous models explaining the arrival of these wares can be seen to be founded on an extremely restricted dataset and to require revision. A new model of transportation can be presented, whereby material of East Mediterranean and North African origin was exchanged through shorter distance interactions up a busy Atlantic coast. Vigo seems likely to have functioned as a primary entrepôt/trans-shipment point on the Atlantic routes (see Fernández 2014), although it is likely that Bordeaux, Lisbon and other locations functioned as significant hubs of exchange within these networks. Britain, cut-off from long-distance supply in the early/mid-fifth century seems to have been reintegrated into the Atlantic networks from the later-fifth century, although, on the basis of current understanding, seems to again lose this mediated connection with the Mediterranean from the mid-sixth century.

Although the Insular assemblage presents some idiosyncrasies, particularly a raised proportion of LRA2 and a higher incidence of amphorae in general, its composition broadly corresponds with patterns of ceramic distribution seen on the Atlantic Seaboard in the period c. 475 to 550. Dark has highlighted the ‘Constantinopolitan character’ of the British assemblages as a possible reflection of close political or diplomatic ties between the Byzantine East and south-west Britain, specifically Tintagel (Dark 2014: 25), but although the focus on Eastern wares in this period cannot be disputed, this can now be seen as paralleling a widespread Atlantic pattern. As more data from the Atlantic emerges, and more precise understanding of the relative proportion of ceramic types becomes possible, these comparisons can be refined. At the same time increasingly localised models of distribution and re-distribution can start to be constructed, as shown by the case study of sites in south Devon. An evaluation of the regional networks responsible for the accumulation of mineral resources and the associated control and dissemination of imported, exotic commodities can, therefore, be highlighted as specific direction for future research. Many questions remain about the emergence, operation and evolution of these late Antique Atlantic systems. Further analysis is necessary to fully comprehend the position of the northern Atlantic Seaboard regions, and specifically the significance of south-western Britain and its metal sources, within wider Atlantic and Atlantic-Mediterranean exchange-systems. Nevertheless, it is clear that if south-west Britain was not the sole or ultimate destination for Mediterranean ships in the Atlantic, the presence of Mediterranean pottery at British sites cannot be taken as evidence of unique links with the Byzantine East – whether founded on economic or diplomatic motives. As such, closer connections between communities in western Britain and the emerging polities of post-Roman Gaul and Iberia

would have been more significant than long-distance and indirect links with the Byzantine World.

Although long-standing impressions of the Insular finds arising from the 1959 symposium can now be refuted, the intention of the event to stimulate discussion on these wares must be approved and reaffirmed. As the Insular finds must now be understood within a wider Atlantic context, it is clear that developments in British research will be increasingly reliant on the assistance of ceramicists and archaeologists working across this region. The 2014 Atlantic symposium can, therefore, be seen to mark a new phase in the study of the imported wares, founded on international collaboration and communication. Within this context, the publication of Campbell's primary data online (Campbell 2011) must be seen as a benchmark for the effective and open dissemination of information.

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