

## Introduction

### 1.1 Summary

Pottery of Mediterranean origin has been recognised at sites of early medieval date in western Britain since Raleigh Radford's excavations at Tintagel in Cornwall (Radford 1956). Since the 1950s, sherds have been catalogued from sites across western Britain and Ireland and models for the arrival and distribution of these imports have been developed (Thomas 1959, 1981; Fulford 1989; Doyle 2009). Ewan Campbell's major synthesis of the Insular finds proposed a regular system of importation from the Mediterranean via Atlantic channels operating c. AD 475-550 (Campbell 2007a).

The arrival of new types and forms of pottery to Britain in the mid to later-fifth century, with a distinct western and coastal distribution, indicated the emergence of a new and discrete post-Roman import system, which has typically been characterised by a model of direct shipment from the East Mediterranean. This model of transportation is founded on two observations: the seemingly unique composition of the British assemblage and the apparent scarcity of comparable material on the Western/Atlantic Seaboard. Pottery of western Gaulish origin has been connected to a separate and subsequent phase of 'Continental' importation in the sixth and seventh century.

New information emerging from the Continent has suggested that these interpretations need to be reconsidered. Increasing evidence from Britain has led to new understandings of the character and chronology of the Insular imports, while ceramic data appearing from sites on the Continent have started to fill the 'gap' in distribution on the Atlantic Seaboard. Revised patterns of ceramic distribution in the Atlantic suggest that the British 'import sites' were integrated into more complex systems of trade or exchange than previously recognised.

This new appraisal will examine recent publications on ceramic imports to Britain, particularly those that offer new understandings of the date and character of this import system. It will also assess emerging evidence from the Western Seaboard, particularly from south-western France, north-western Spain and Portugal. This will allow new comparisons to be drawn between patterns of pottery importation and use in Britain and the wider Atlantic region in Late Antiquity.

### 1.2 Aims and objectives

The intention of this work is to consider the ceramic evidence from Britain in its wider Atlantic and Mediterranean context. Its specific aim is to question the two factors that

underpin the traditional model of direct connection with the East Mediterranean: the exceptional character of the Insular assemblage and the apparent lack of parallel material along the Atlantic Seaboard.

To address the first factor, this work will reconsider the character of the British material, using published catalogues and recent publications as well as primary research and analysis conducted in south-western Britain. To address the second issue, it will assess the presence of comparable material on the Atlantic Seaboard, identifying the types of pottery present and, where possible, relative quantities. Comparisons between the British and Atlantic assemblages will be considered and used to suggest revised models of exchange and contact between sites in Britain, Ireland, France, Spain and Portugal – as well as links with the Mediterranean world – between the fifth and seventh centuries AD.

### 1.3 The imported material: an overview

The imported pottery from the Mediterranean comprises two main categories: amphorae and Red Slip fineware. The amphorae are principally of East Mediterranean and, to a lesser extent, North-African types. Grouped as 'B wares' in earlier British publications they are now, more usefully, matched to amphora classifications established in the Mediterranean (Campbell 2007a, 4). Similarly, the 'A ware' group coined by Radford was matched to Mediterranean classes 'African Red Slip Ware' (ARS) and 'Phocaean Red Slip Ware' (PRS) by Thomas' 1981 Catalogue (Thomas 1981, 3). The latter class has returned to its earlier designation 'Late Roman C' (LRC) in some recent publications, and this convention has been followed (Cau et al. 2011, 6).

The main types of amphorae identified in British contexts are Late Roman 1 (hereafter LRA1) and Late Roman 2 (LRA2), previously classified in Britain as 'Bii' and 'Bi' respectively (Thomas 1959). Both types were produced between the fourth and seventh century but are not thought to have been imported into Roman Britain. Their identification at sites in western Britain is therefore taken to indicate some connection to a separate import system commencing in the later-fifth century (Campbell 2007a, 19). Other East Mediterranean amphorae (LRA3, LRA4), which occur in lesser numbers on these post-Roman import sites, have been reported from late Roman contexts in Britain (Campbell 2007a, 19-20). Likewise, amphorae of North African origin were imported to Roman Britain, particularly in the third and fourth century (Williams and Carreras 1995, 234) but are also found – though in a smaller proportion to East Mediterranean types – within post-Roman assemblages. The forms of amphora are long-

lasting and cannot usually be closely dated in themselves. Instead, the dates reflect production dates based on typologies established in the Mediterranean, particularly for the Red Slip finewares (Campbell 2007a, 19).

A secondary and subsequent phase of imported pottery from the Continent has also been identified (Thomas 1959). ‘E ware’ is a coarseware of presumed western Gaulish origin, which has a wider distribution in western Britain and Ireland (Campbell 2007a 46-7). The main period for its importation is thought to be the later-sixth and seventh centuries (Campbell 2007a, 46). Present only in very small numbers in Insular contexts a second ware, ‘Dérivées des Sigillées Paléochrétiennes’ (DSP), has been thought to overlap the main phases of Mediterranean and Continental importation (Campbell 2007a, 133).

Despite the long history of this research the overall quantities involved remain relatively modest, with c. 322 imported amphorae reported from sites in Britain and Ireland. The amphorae – used to transport commodities such as wine or olive-oil – are more common than tablewares, with c. 126 vessels of Mediterranean and Continental origin reported from western Britain and Ireland.

A full concordance of the specific ceramic terminology is provided in Appendix A.

#### 1.4 Historical background and period terminology

This work describes patterns in ceramic importation to Britain and the Western Seaboard between the fifth and seventh centuries, although some discussion of preceding and subsequent developments is incorporated. This period witnessed considerable change in the Atlantic region, epitomised by the end of Roman control in the West in the fifth century and the rise of the successor states. It is not feasible to fully outline these complex developments; understandings of the history of Late Antique and early medieval Europe presented in the following chapters have principally been drawn from detailed narratives in Harris 2003, Wickham 2005, Knight 2007 and Collins 2010. The political landscape shifted markedly from the fourth century, when all of the regions considered – apart from Scotland and Ireland – fell under direct Roman control. The map in Figure 1.1 presents the situation c. AD 525, by which point the Visigothic Kingdom was largely restricted to the Iberian Peninsula and Frankish rule was fully established in the former provinces of northern/western



Figure 1.1. The political landscape of Western Europe c.525. From Jotischky and Hull 2005, 21

Gaul. Prior to this – between c. 418/9 and 507 – Aquitaine (including Bordeaux) had been subject to Visigothic settlement/authority (Collins 2010, 79-80). Suevic control in north-west Spain expanded from the early-fifth century, although the kingdom was eventually assimilated into the Visigothic State in 585. With the loss of Carthage in 439 all of the Roman holdings in North Africa fell under Vandal rule (Collins 2010, 79). Byzantine control was not re-established until 533. The early-fifth century saw the end of direct Roman control in Britain; the subsequent period is characterised by the division between the surviving indigenous ‘British’ communities of western Britain and the regions of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ settlement and control to the east (Harris 2003, 143). This split has been seen to characterise the Insular distribution of the imported pottery.

As this project covers a considerable geographical area some complications with the broad chronological terminology were unavoidable. Within the text I have followed Campbell in using ‘early medieval’ to refer to the broad period from the fifth to eleventh century – and, in particular, to refer to the British and Irish sites with imported pottery, thereby distinguishing them from earlier ‘Roman’ patterns (2007a, 3). In relation to Britain, the term ‘Roman’ refers to the period before AD 410 and ‘post-Roman’ to the subsequent period; this division cannot be directly applied across the Atlantic region. The term ‘Late Antique’ has been used to refer to a non-regionally specific period dating from the fourth to the seventh century. All dates mentioned represent AD dates.

Some additional clarification can be offered for the general terminology used to describe the pottery. The amphorae are typically referred to as ‘Late Roman Amphorae’ but this represents a standard term for East Mediterranean vessels of fourth century and later date and does not, necessarily, equate to periods of Imperial control in the West. The terms ‘Mediterranean imports’ or ‘Continental imports’ have been used in reference to the source of the vessels, while ‘Insular imports’ has been used to refer to imports recovered in Britain and Ireland.

### 1.5 Outline

After introducing the topic, the material, and the background to this project (Chapter One), the history of research in Britain is reviewed (Chapter Two). This appraisal describes previous attempts to find Atlantic parallels for the British finds, and examines the associated development of models of connection between western Britain and the Byzantine world. A detailed discussion of the major types of pottery and their occurrence in Britain is presented in Chapter Three, updating older understandings of the chronology and typology of these wares with reference to recent Mediterranean research.

Chapter Four assesses ceramic research at the major British site of Tintagel and suggests recommendations for future work on its assemblage. The significance of a second large

assemblage – recently published following excavations at Bantham – is evaluated within a case study of imported pottery in South Devon, and used to assess emerging trends in the British data. Within this case study, original research conducted as part of this project is presented, summarising published reports of pottery recovered at Mothecombe and High Peak in Devon and an amphora found in the sea at Cawsand, Cornwall.

The work then moves to discuss the emerging Continental evidence, starting with the Mediterranean imports reported from France, and particularly from Bordeaux (Chapter Five). This chapter also includes a consideration of types of Continental pottery that were imported to sites in western Britain – DSPA and E ware. New evidence for the origin and distribution of these wares is considered, and its importance for wider understandings of Atlantic networks is assessed. The following chapter (Chapter Six) focuses on the considerable evidence for Mediterranean imports in Atlantic Spain and Portugal. This includes a case-study of the site at Vigo, which outlines its unique significance for determining connections with early medieval Britain.

Finally, Chapter Seven reviews the overall findings, with specific reference to the patterns of ceramic distribution presented in Appendix H. This new information is used to suggest revised models of contact between Britain, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, and the wider social and economic importance of these findings is considered.

Maps showing the locations of Atlantic sites with this pottery are presented in Appendix B. The respective ‘Site ID numbers’ (linking Appendix B and the tables of ceramic data presented in Appendix K) are shown in square brackets on the first mention of each site within the main text.

### 1.6 Methodology for data collection: Chapters 4, 5 and 6

The basic aim of the data collection was to assess the relative distribution of selected ceramic types – those identified as imports to post-Roman, western Britain – across the Atlantic region. The plotting of this data within distribution maps would allow geographical and, potentially, temporal patterns in Atlantic supply to be determined. Given the long history of publications on pottery imported to Britain and Ireland, it was not the intention of this project to provide a full reassessment of the Insular evidence. Understandings of the character of the British and Irish import assemblage are, therefore, dependent on catalogues of ceramic finds published by Charles Thomas (1959; 1981) and, principally, on the expanded dataset compiled by Ewan Campbell (2007a; 2011). It was also not viable to view each sherd/assemblage in person; the Insular data has expanded to such a point where such an undertaking was not feasible, and a replication of Campbell’s extensive research was certainly unnecessary. The major assemblage from Bantham was, however, viewed in person, and is considered – together with assemblages from south Devon assessed as part of this project – in Chapter Four.

### Data sources and geographical limits

The Insular data presented here is largely founded on the digital archive of Ewan Campbell's 2007 monograph, *Early Medieval Imported Pottery and Glass in the Atlantic Province AD 400-800*. The accompanying dataset was lodged with Archaeological Data Services (ADS) and made available online via the University of Glasgow – the latter of which was updated in 2011. This was downloaded, with permission, towards the start of the project in 2012. The dataset was subsequently amended on the University of Glasgow page in October 2012, but this has not been used – any references to Campbell's dataset therefore refer to the 2011 version. The data for import sites in Ireland is founded on the extensive catalogue published by Ian Doyle and the detailed synthesis by Amanda Kelly (Doyle 2009; Kelly 2010).

Where possible, the original source publications reporting the discovery of the Mediterranean imports and the DSPA were located and reviewed. However, it must be noted that a significant number of the finds represent unpublished sherds that have been added to the Insular 'corpus' since Thomas' first catalogue. Key references for the British sites with Mediterranean pottery and DSP have, therefore, been provided in Appendix K, but Campbell's dataset and Doyle's catalogue should be considered the primary points of reference for the others. Similarly, the primary ceramic reports were reviewed, wherever possible, as part of the data-collection of ceramic types and quantities. However, it was not considered prudent to amend Campbell's sherd and vessel counts from assemblages which had not been examined in person.

It was not the initial intention of this project to consider E ware, but it became clear that important new evidence for the production and distribution of this pottery could not be overlooked – and that the supply of this ware could not be easily separated from the 'Mediterranean' phase of importation. Campbell's dataset was again used as the principal source of evidence, but in this case the majority of the primary sources were not reviewed. The E ware data was again supplemented for Ireland by Doyle's catalogue (2009).

No geographical limit was imposed for data collection or integration from Britain and Ireland, although the distribution of the relevant ceramic wares in Britain was almost exclusively western.

Although material from Vigo and Bordeaux was viewed first hand for reference, the Continental figures are essentially reliant on multiple and varied published sources. For France, the principal sources of information were the catalogues of imported amphorae published by Dominique Pieri and by Catherine Amiel and Frédéric Berthault. As discussed in Chapter Six, there has been a long history of research on imported wares to western Spain and Portugal – particularly on LRC – and these numerous sources are specifically detailed. Again, where possible,

the primary ceramic or excavation reports were located and examined – although many of the accessible sources comprise published syntheses, catalogues, lists of data or annotated maps. The extent and quality of information available for each site, excavation or find-spot was extremely variable, and in many cases little more could be established than the presence of a particular ware or form. As such, the discussion in Chapters 5 and 6 is focused on broad, regional patterns, and on specific 'case studies' of larger assemblages and/or sites with dated stratigraphic sequences.

Within Chapters 5 and 6 the supply of North African and East Mediterranean pottery to the Atlantic in the fourth century has been considered, but within the database I have attempted to limit the data to types likely to date from the fifth century onward. This was intended to enable closer comparisons with the post-Roman material from Britain – theoretically consisting of imports dating from the later fifth-century onwards. This restriction was not always easy to implement. A break in ceramic importation to Britain has been postulated for the middle decades of the fifth century, but there was not, necessarily, a comparable rupture in supply to Atlantic regions of France, Spain and Portugal. This, unsurprisingly, led to complications with ceramic types and forms that could have been imported in the later-fourth or earlier-fifth century. In these cases, I opted to include them in the dataset, although where possible I have mentioned that they might represent fourth century arrivals. The exception is for Britain, where, following Campbell, vessels considered as potential 'Roman period' imports have been discussed but not included in the data-tables or maps (Campbell 2007a, 22). Patterns of supply to the Atlantic in the earlier-fifth century are examined in Sub-Chapter 7.2.1, but it must be acknowledged that this phase remains to be fully understood.

For France, Spain and Portugal, geographical limits were imposed to limit data-collection to sites in Atlantic regions. As a broad principle, sites in coastal regions or with local access to rivers leading to the Atlantic were included. Although it is impossible to prove that such sites were supplied from ships plying Atlantic routes, the ceramic distributions presented in Appendix H suggest that in the majority of cases this would be likely. The majority of sites included are coastal, although a few locations are situated very far inland, thereby reflecting secondary re-distribution systems.

For France, the data-collection principally comprised finds from the (current) Regions of Brittany, Pays-de-la-Loire, Poitou-Charentes and Aquitaine (broadly equating with the Late Roman Provinces of *Aquitania Secunda/Tertia* and *Lugdunensis Tertia*). A few relevant finds from French sites situated further east along the Channel coast or on rivers reaching the Channel have been included (from the Regions of Lower Normandy, Upper Normandy, Picardy, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Centre and île-de-France), and it seems increasingly possible that material might have ar-

rived in northern regions via Atlantic shipments as well as overland/riverine routes. The dataset also includes some information on amphorae found into the Region of Midi-Pyrénées, but finds from Toulouse itself have not been included as the city seems to have been supplied from the Mediterranean (see Sub-chapter 5.3.1).

For the Iberian Peninsula, ceramic data has been included from ‘Atlantic regions’ equating to the Late Roman Provinces of *Lusitania*, *Gallaecia* and north-western *Tarraconensis*. This, therefore, comprises all of Portugal and the modern Spanish Autonomous Communities of Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria and the Basque Country. As with France, a few additional outliers were included (from Navarre and Castile and León) which seemed likely to be connected to Atlantic supply, and where it would not make sense to discount them based on modern geographical divisions. The south-eastern Portuguese/Spanish (*Lusitanian/Baetican*) border represented the furthest limit of data-collection. No data was collected from the Gulf of Cádiz to the south-east of the Guadiana River. Although sites in Andalucía are discussed, data from this region is not included in the appended data-tables (Appendix K). Baelo (*Baelo Claudia*) was doubtlessly of major relevance to the extension of supply routes from the Straits of Gibraltar into the Atlantic, but the port has been discussed separately within western Mediterranean patterns – which have been comprehensively considered by Paul Reynolds (1995; 2010).

### GIS Mapping

The sites with Mediterranean imports and DPSA were plotted in Google Earth, based on information provided in the excavation reports, catalogues or published discussions. Where possible, the findspot/excavation was pinpointed, although in many cases the location could only be assigned to the named town or site. The coordinates (in WGS 1984) were then transferred to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet where the ceramic data was added – and thereafter transferred to an Access database. Queries were created to compare the relative quantities of pottery at these ‘import sites’; this queried data was exported to Microsoft Excel before being plotted in ARCGIS.10. The basemap used in Appendices B and H was downloaded from Natural Earth ([naturalearthdata.com](http://naturalearthdata.com)). Where material was recovered from various excavations in one town or city, these have been presented separately in Appendix K, but were summed for the production of the distribution maps. The locations shown in red in Appendix H are scaled proportionally, and this is consistent across all the maps. Those shown in black are not scaled due to the limitations of the data available. The transparency of certain find-spots was increased for clarity, but this is not, otherwise, significant.

The locations of the sites that only had finds of E ware were not located directly from Google Earth; instead the co-ordinates provided within Campbell’s 2011 dataset were used.

### Data Collection

The published data for the Atlantic region shows considerable variation in the recording of the imported ceramics, which has hampered the comparative assessment of assemblages. The methodology for data-collection was also driven by previous approaches to quantification. Although Campbell recognised the value of estimated vessel equivalents (EVEs) over sherd counts as a comparative measure, this was not considered to be useful for the characteristically small assemblages of the Atlantic region (2007a, 11-12). Quantification by EVE would also have been hindered by the general scarcity of rim-sherds. Instead, Campbell’s approach – similar to that of Thomas – was to identify sherds to specific vessels and, thereby, to estimate the minimum number of vessels (MNV) by type for each site. Campbell also used this identification of individual vessels to study distributions across individual sites, but this has not been attempted here.

Quantification by EVE is also not commonly used on the Continent, and for effective comparisons the British and wider Atlantic data needed to be as closely aligned as possible. Fortunately, minimum vessel counts were available for many of the Continental sites, and particularly the larger assemblage such as Vigo and Bordeaux. A point of caution is that, in practical terms, this is a somewhat subjective measure – reliant on individual assessments of form and fabric – and can be particularly difficult to assign for assemblages with few diagnostic elements, such as Mothecombe and High Peak. In this case the measure must be considered as an ‘estimated’ rather than ‘absolute’ minimum. As a basic rule the presence of one sherd of a particular type or ware at a site was taken to represent at least one vessel, although it is acknowledged that individual sherds might have been transported between sites.

In some cases, such as Conimbriga, only sherd counts were available; these were recorded in the primary database and have been frequently noted in the text of Chapters 5 and 6. Where possible, minimum vessel counts were assigned based on the catalogued or illustrated forms, although it is recognised that this might have led to an underestimate of the totals. Where this was not possible or where only the discovery of the particular ware or type had been documented – as with many of the Iberian instances of ARS-D and LRC – the ‘presence’ alone was recorded in the database. To assign some measure of quantity – as presented in Appendices J and/or K – the label ‘P’ was used to signify the presence of a certain ware or type, ‘P+’ for a site considered to have more than ten vessels and ‘P++’ for sites thought to have more than 50 vessels. The use of such labels is admittedly arbitrary, but represents a compromise to allow some presentation – and better understanding – of relative frequencies. ‘P?’ was used to represent a site where the presence of a particular type or ware was uncertain.

Additional points explaining the data-collection for the specific ceramic types are presented in Chapter Three. To

summarise: for the finewares all examples of LRC and LRD have been recorded as well as all British examples of ARS considered to represent post-Roman imports. The presence of ARS-D at Continental sites has been recorded, with the acknowledgement that these examples will include fourth century imports (see Sub-chapter 3.3.2). Data for late forms of ARS-C was collected but was not mapped or included in Appendix K. All sites with DSPA have been recorded, although it is unlikely that the French distribution presented is exhaustive. For the amphorae: all of the ‘post-Roman’ British examples have been included (i.e. those presented by Campbell from secure post-Roman contexts). All examples of East Mediterranean ‘Late Roman Amphorae’ from Ireland or other Atlantic sites have been included, with the caveat that these might potentially include late fourth/early fifth century arrivals. All instances of North African amphorae of likely fifth century date that were encountered were also recorded (see discussion in Sub-chapter 3.2.4).

The methodology for the primary ceramic research in Britain is noted in Chapter Four.

### *Limitations of study*

This project represents an attempt to synthesise and evaluate recent Insular findings and, in particular, new evidence emerging from the Continent. Naturally, such an undertaking requires a consistent approach to data collection and analysis, although it became apparent that the variable availability and quality of the data would impose unavoidable limitations. Most significantly, it became clear that it would not be legitimate to statistically analyse the data, or even to provide relative percentages of ceramic types across the entire dataset or across particular regions. It is only possible to offer broad interpretations based on the relative distributions presented. Where the data permits, more precise comparisons have been attempted between particular assemblages or groups.

In his study of patterns of ceramic supply to the West Mediterranean Paul Reynolds described two types of dataset: one based on comparisons of contemporary,

excavated assemblages recovered, ideally, from a ‘sequence’ of closed deposits, and one based on the general presence of wares across sites. Considerations of the latter, he comments, allow the definition of ‘general distribution trends and approximate relative quantities’, although he adds that there will be a ‘degree of loss of temporal definition’ (Reynolds 1995, 2-3). In addition, he notes that ‘published scraps from diverse sites’ might help to ‘confirm an impression of trends in regional imports’ (Reynolds 1995, 3). Although this synthesis incorporates data from excavations of sequenced deposits (Vigo, Place Camille Jullian, Bantham) it is acknowledged that most of the information relates to Reynolds’ second type, and to the presence of ‘scraps’. As such, patterns in the distribution of these wares can only be used to assess broad chronological trends in supply across the Atlantic Seaboard.

Apparent patterns and ‘gaps’ in the data must be considered with caution. The relative distributions of the ceramic types presented in Appendix H are likely to reflect levels of archaeological research and the availability of published reports as much as the actual spread of these wares. It is also likely that the Insular quantities will be artificially elevated due to the long tradition of research, and to the practice of recording small, undiagnostic sherds in considerable detail. Such fragments are unlikely to be quantified as individual vessels within a large assemblage. Furthermore, as Orton and Hughes note, such maps cannot provide any understanding of the proportional ‘significance’ of the imported ware at the individual site level (2013, 239). Complications with the data from Tintagel are discussed at length in Chapter Four and it has become clear that additional research on the British assemblage is necessary. Finally, it is not expected that the data or distribution maps presented will be comprehensive or final. More information, for example, is available for the spread of East Mediterranean finewares than for other types. Most importantly, the sherds and vessels recorded must be recognised to only represent a surviving fragment of the whole ‘picture’ of trade in the Late Antique Atlantic. Nevertheless, it is hoped that future research from the Atlantic will help to extend the data available, and to develop and clarify these interpretations.