

## Ewan Campbell

Continental and Mediterranean imports to Atlantic Britain and Ireland, AD 400–800 2007

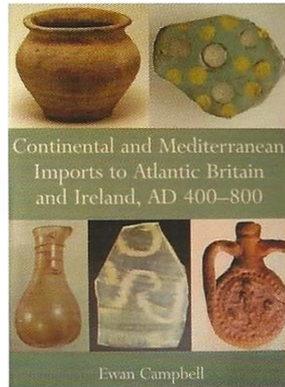
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From the 5th to 8th centuries AD there was a flourishing trade network linking the Atlantic coasts of Britain and Ireland to the Mediterranean and north-west Europe, bringing imported pottery and glass as well as new ideas from these areas. This material is now almost always often recovered from rescue excavations, and it is now recognised that imports from Europe and the Mediterranean are more widespread and more diverse than previously believed. This publication is the first comprehensive investigation of this material, and is linked to an online database. Finds from some of the most significant excavated sites from this era, including Dinas Powys (Wales), Tintagel (Cornwall), Dunadd and Whithorn (both Scotland) are discussed at length.

The book has been divided into a number of chapters, beginning, with an introduction, which includes research aims, scope and terminology, previous research and the authors approach to the data. Chapter two includes the typology, chronology, provenance and distribution of Mediterranean pottery; Late Amphorae, Phoenician Slipware and African Red Slipware. Chapter three goes on to discuss *Dérivées sigillées paleochrétiennes*, Atlantic group (DSPA) and Class E Ware. This is followed by a chapter on imported glass: Groups A-E, including their chronology, taphonomy and distribution. Chapter five covers all the miscellaneous material including St Menas flasks, coins, unclassified imported pottery and other Byzantine and Continental finds. Chapter six includes the patterns of consumption and taphonomic studies from the major site of Dinas Powys, while chapter seven deals with the same patterns at other sites. Chapter eight covers import site characteristics and their patterns of distribution, while chapter nine covers the mechanisms of distribution. Finally chapter



ten ends the monograph with a short but important summary of the evidence.

Having spent a considerable amount of time over the last few years researching French medieval pottery in Scottish museums and archaeological stores, I know firsthand the myriad of problems besetting anyone researching archives of material culture. I cannot therefore but be overawed by Ewan's tenacity in bringing to publication, his research on Continental and Mediterranean imports to Atlantic Britain and Ireland.

This summary of high status imports reveals important aspects of early medieval society, otherwise dealt with sparsely in the historical record, this includes contacts with the Byzantine Empire and Merovingian France. Ewan argues convincingly that the trade was controlled from a few key sites with royal characteristics, where wealth was accumulated and used to produce amongst other high status objects, elaborate jewellery. Analysis of these imports also gives us important insights into the growth of royal power at this formative stage of insular early medieval states.

As with most works of this type as many problems seem to have been thrown up as were answered and perhaps the most important of these is the barrier to the distribution of the western imports into areas of Anglo Saxon control. The author gives some plausible explanations for this, but it strikes me that more could be done with the ever increasing amount of coin evidence. That said it's almost certain that the most important legacy of all this research will be Ewan's creation of an on line data base. At the time of publishing this listed 150 sites and included 370 Mediterranean and 600 Continental vessels. These comprise fine tableware's, drinking vessels and transport containers for luxuries such as dyestuffs, nuts, wine and olive oil.

It is a pity that the major problem of the reputed 10th century white gritty wares being apparently related to E ware and the visually similar later Scottish White Gritty Ware fabrics was not tackled as part of the Historic Scotland funded White Gritty project. This was due to the reluctance of the NMS archaeology department to allow any of the sherds in their collections to be sampled.

I have absolutely no hesitation in commending this splendid and incredibly well researched and well produced piece of work. At £30 it is good value, and a monograph which no archaeologist or specialist with an interest in the period, can afford to be without.

George Haggarty

Online database can be found at

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/departments/archaeology/research/projects/earlymedievalimports/>

