

Maria Duggan – PhD Research Student, Newcastle University

PhD Project Title

Links to Late Antiquity: Understanding Contacts on the Western Seaboard in the 5th to 7th Centuries AD.

Supervision team: [Dr Sam Turner](#), [Dr Mark Jackson](#)



Bantham looking to Burgh Island

My Project:

My PhD project studies imported pottery on post-Roman sites in Britain, Ireland and on the Atlantic seaboard of continental Europe.

Since the 1950s publication of the excavations at Tintagel, the presence of Mediterranean imported pottery at late Antique (post-Roman) sites in western Britain has been recognised. Since then, archaeological research has increased the quantity of imported pottery identified from sites in Britain and Ireland (Campbell 2007; Thomas 1981). The imported amphorae (transport and storage vessels) are generally thought to have contained wine or olive oil, whilst fine, red-slipped pottery may have been imported for dining.

My study will offer new interpretations of these imports but will also consider this material fully in its wider continental and Mediterranean context. In particular, the traditional assumptions of direct trade with the east Mediterranean will be questioned. New discoveries at recently published sites on the western Atlantic seaboard suggest a more complex picture of this transport. My thesis will consider

whether the imported pottery reflects previously unidentified networks of trade or exchange between western Britain and communities in France, Spain and Portugal in Late Antiquity. This analysis will be used to consider the economic, political and cultural connections between the Atlantic seaboard and the east Mediterranean in this period.

Comparisons of the character and composition of the British, Irish and Continental ceramic assemblages will be central to understanding the mechanisms of this transport. These conclusions will be further illustrated and interpreted by GIS mapping and network analysis techniques. The project will also integrate new research carried out in the Mediterranean to provide new understandings of the nature and origins of the material transported.

My Background

I originally studied at the University of Liverpool and spent many years in the north-west. Between 2001 and 2006 I worked as a commercial archaeologist for Liverpool Museum Field Archaeology Unit and Manchester University Archaeology Unit on various excavations and subsequently became interested in ancient pottery. Since starting my research at Newcastle University I have been involved with archaeological research projects in Britain, France and Turkey where I have supervised the processing and quantification of Roman, Byzantine and Medieval ceramics. I gained AHRC funding to start my PhD project in October 2011 and additionally received a research grant from Devon County Council.



Processing pottery in the east Mediterranean

In April 2012 I spent two weeks in Devon on a research trip to study imported pottery held in the county. In addition I was also able to visit a number of sites, including Tintagel in Cornwall and Bantham in Devon. Viewing this material in person and seeing the associated sites is an essential part of my on-going research.



Bantham Beach

Bantham, on the South Devon coast, has been investigated for roughly the last century. The most recent excavations, published in 2011 (Reed et al. 2011), revealed a significant quantity of pottery from the east Mediterranean, suggesting that Bantham was a trading site in the later 5th and early 6th century, linked to tin exploitation in the region. This material is now held at Plymouth Museum, and a considerable number of sherds are displayed in the impressive archaeology gallery.



Late Roman 1 amphora from Bantham held at Plymouth City Museum

Mothecombe

My supervisor, Dr Sam Turner of Newcastle University, excavated at Mothecombe (on the south Devon coast, west of Bantham) between 2004 and 2006. This site has also produced late Antique imported pottery as well as evidence of occupation. In 2011 I was able to be there for the final excavation season and will write the ceramic report for the publication.



Mothecombe

My interest in late Antique ceramics stems from my work in Turkey. However, this research has allowed me to study the same types of pottery at British sites of the 5th and 6th century AD. I find it endlessly fascinating that vessels from south Turkey and the Aegean could end up at coastal sites in Devon, such as Bantham and Mothecombe, in this period.

I am hoping that my project will shed light on the mechanisms that got these vessels there and reveal links between Devon, south-west Britain and the Atlantic world in this interesting period of social transformation.

I am hugely grateful to all the museums I visited, notably Plymouth City Museum, for allowing me access to this material and for their continued support with my research. Having access to collections from local sites in regional museums is an invaluable resource for researchers.

If anyone would like to contact me about my research, to ask questions or provide new information, my details are below.



Bantham

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References:

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Reed, S., Bidwell, P. and Allan, J. (2011) 'Excavation at Bantham, South Devon, and Post-Roman Trade in South-West England', *Medieval Archaeology*, 55, (1), pp. 82-138.

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