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Production Team

EDITORIAL TEAM

James Eogan
Jerry O'Sullivan
Niall Roycroft
Michael Stanley
Rónán Swan
Rachel Pierce (copy-editor,
Verba Editing House)

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Cover image: An Edward I silver long-cross penny, c. AD 1279–1307, found in the ditch of a medieval enclosure excavated at Busherstown, Co. Offaly, on the N7 Castletown–Nenagh: Derrinsallagh to Ballintotty road scheme.
(Photo: John Sunderland)

Welcome to the Third Edition Of *Seanda*

FRED BARRY, Chief Executive of the National Roads Authority



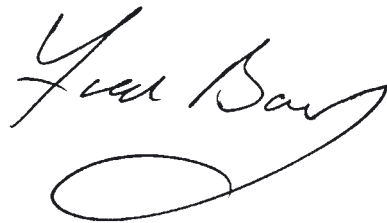
Fred Barry

In a general sense all archaeological investigation is a form of research and the principle aim of *Seanda* magazine is to communicate the results of NRA-funded archaeological research to the widest possible audience. As some of our readers may be aware, the NRA has also funded specific, formal research projects such as the Ballyhanna Research Project (see *Seanda* Issue 1 [2006], pages 60–66). This project, through the application of a suite of scientific analyses, will endeavour to learn as much as possible about the population of a medieval cemetery excavated along the route of the N15 Bundoran–Ballyshannon Bypass. Preliminary results of this research, conducted by researchers from Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and Institute of Technology, Sligo, were published recently in the latest volume in the

Archaeology and the National Roads Authority Monograph Series—*Roads, Rediscovery and Research* (see page 3). This new book, which explores the theme of archaeological research in its broadest sense, also contains papers by archaeological and historical researchers contributing to the M3 Research Framework, which is ensuring that the maximum knowledge will be extracted from the information being generated by the M3 excavations.

The current edition of *Seanda* brings news of further research initiatives to which the NRA Archaeology Section is contributing to (see page 5). A new research project being undertaken by the Botany Department of Trinity College Dublin is receiving funding as part of the NRA Research Fellowship Programme and the NRA also became a research partner in a project led by the School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology at QUB that is funded through the newly established Irish National Strategic Archaeological Research programme. The 2009 issue of *Seanda* will include feature articles describing these projects in greater detail.

The NRA is committed to ensuring that all NRA-funded archaeological work is conducted to the best possible standards and that the results are published widely so as to expand and enrich our understanding of Ireland's past. Research collaborations with the private and academic sectors have been and will continue to be built and developed by the NRA, with the goal of participating in internationally significant research. The fruits of these studies will feed back into the NRA's core archaeological work so that it can be informed by current research thinking and provide 'value-added' benefit.



The sherd of Phocaean Red Slip Ware from Collierstown 1, Co. Meath. (Photo: John Sunderland)



A Turkish import in County Meath: Mediterranean pottery on the M3

Amanda Kelly, Post-doctoral Fellow in Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies at Trinity College Dublin, discusses the significance of her identification of a pottery sherd from western Turkey, which was discovered on the route of the M3 Clonee–North of Kells motorway scheme.

Analysis of a pottery fragment discovered on the M3 has revealed evidence of ancient trade between Ireland and the eastern Mediterranean. A sherd from the rim of an imported pottery vessel recovered from an early medieval cemetery at Collierstown 1, Co. Meath (excavated by Robert O’Hara of Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd), has been identified recently as Phocaean Red Slip Ware (PRSW) Form 3. The type is named after a major production centre at Phocaea, in western Turkey. The Collierstown sherd comes from a vessel manufactured there some 1,500 years ago.

Phocaean Red Slip Ware is a category of red-slipped fine wares, comprised of a large array of shallow bowls or dishes. (Slip is thinned potter’s clay used for decorating or coating ceramics. The umbrella term ‘red-slipped fine wares’ covers a range of tablewares in which the slip can vary from a high gloss to a dull finish.) This type of pottery became extremely common throughout the eastern Mediterranean in the fifth to seventh centuries AD.

What does it look like?

PRSW Form 3 is characterised by a wedged or flanged rim that is generally concave on the outer face and incorporates a pronounced ledge where the rim meets the body of the pot. The complete form is open with a curved or slightly angled flaring wall and a low, to almost imperceptible, foot. The average-sized versions have diameters of 190–360 mm; the Collierstown vessel would have had a diameter of 300 mm.

Decoration usually features a stamped motif on the interior floor of the pot, often combined with grooves and rouletting (a form of impressed decoration) on the outer surface of the rim—as is clearly visible on the Collierstown sherd. The rouletted decoration, common on this ware in the fifth and early sixth centuries, would have been applied using an implement with a series of parallel teeth, capable of producing whole bands of decoration simultaneously.



A stamped PRSW bowl from Crete depicting a stamped-deer motif on the interior floor. The Collierstown vessel may have been similarly decorated. (Photo: Amanda Kelly)



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0cm 4cm

The Collierstown sherd. (Drawing: Amanda Kelly)

Broader circulation

The main concentration of PRSW pottery focuses on the wider area of the Aegean Sea. Traditionally, its distribution stretches from Sicily to Syria and from the Black Sea to North Africa. Assemblages from Athens and Thessaloniki in Greece and Istanbul in Turkey attest that in the mid-fifth to early sixth centuries the ware almost monopolised the fine-ware trade in the Aegean region. Its distribution pattern indicates a sea-borne dispersal: in the East it featured predominantly in the ceramic assemblages of major cities, such as Antioch and Tarsus, while in Egypt it did not penetrate beyond the Delta region.

The distribution of PRSW in western Europe suggests a coastal trade route from Italy (south-eastern Sicily) to southern France (Marseille), towards the south-eastern coast of Spain (Valencia, Alicante, Murcia and Baelo) and northwards along the coast of Portugal and, ultimately, to Ireland and south-western Britain. One of the most significant concentrations of PRSW outside of the Mediterranean was discovered at Conímbriga, in Portugal. This and other sporadic finds in Portugal may serve to provide the vital link between the Mediterranean distribution and its occasional presence—previously unexplained in terms of any distinctive trade route or distribution pattern—on sites in Ireland and Britain.

Chronology

Tracing the circulation of PRSW away from its Turkish origin, the first major wave of imports, both in Italy and Portugal, post-dates AD 450. An example of PRSW from Dinas Powys in Wales, dating to c. AD 460–490, constitutes the earliest import found in Britain. The profile of the Collierstown sherd is similar to numerous examples found throughout the Aegean, dating to the late fifth and early sixth century. On the basis of form and fabric alone, the production, rather than the actual deposition, of the Collierstown rimsherd can be confidently dated to this period.

Irish distribution

The first documented find of PRSW in Ireland was a rimsherd found in the early 1940s during the excavation of a high-status ringfort at Garranes, Co. Cork. PRSW has also been found at Clogher, Co. Tyrone, Mount Offaly Cemetery at Cabinteely in Dublin and, most recently, at Collierstown 1. Even from this limited distribution it seems that this foreign trade can be associated with high-status settlement sites, often interpreted as royal sites.

The triple-ramparted ringfort at Garranes (measuring over 100 m in diameter), known as Lisnacaheragh, has been traditionally identified as Ráth Raithleann or Raithliú, a royal site of the Uí Eachach Muman, associated with Eóghanacht Raithlind, who reigned in the third quarter of the fifth century. This loosely concurs with the original central date attributed to the site by its excavator, Seán P Ó Ríordáin.

Clogher represents one of the sites marked as *regia* (royal) on Ptolemy's mid-second-century map of Ireland—a status that is maintained through the centuries, as reflected by the artefacts from the site. Certainly, at Clogher a high degree of wealth is indicated c. AD 500 by the presence of PRSW, a Syrian wine amphora (Bii ware) and the accoutrements of a specialist metal workshop producing, amongst other artefacts, decorated bronze penannular brooches. Clogher is traditionally interpreted as the seat of the Síl nDaimíni, of the Airgíalla, a people initially allied with, or subject to, the Ulaid, but who subsequently shifted allegiance to the Northern Uí Neill.

Royal sites and trade

Royal sites exerted much influence over trade networks, stimulating long-distance importation and secondary redistribution locally. Such sites have been classified as gateway sites, controlling and monitoring access to prestige or luxury items and facilitating the filtering of foreign imports throughout a tiered network of affluent sites within their broader hinterlands. With regard to this model, Collierstown's proximity to the Hill of Tara cannot be overemphasised. Its physical connectivity to this focal-point makes the site an unsurprising addition to the distribution.

Royal sites seem to be stamped with the insignia of high status, incorporating a suite of material that includes brooches, glass and various ceramic imports. Similarly, the PRSW discovered at these sites are among these indicators of high status. Distributions of PRSW sherds do not exist in isolation but dovetail with distributions of various foreign imports and prestige commodities. Counties Cork, Meath and Down/Tyrone have been noted for their high densities of sites producing evidence of precious metalworking and these broad regional groups correspond with distributions of imported ceramics.

Elsewhere in Europe, notably in regions closer to its source of manufacture, the presence of PRSW is interpreted within a framework of regular trade. High concentrations found at Eleutherna, in Crete, are explained by their possible use as ballast in ships, which were carrying, on their outward journey, some eastern food products (including wine, oil or even grain) and, on their return trip, some Cretan products (such as honey, dairy products, wine and olive oil). Naturally, the circulation of the PRSW wares in the Mediterranean piggy-backed on trade in other commodities, such as wine, oil or other luxury items, and the framework for trade in Ireland should not deviate greatly from this pattern.

What was being traded in Ireland? This is not clear archaeologically, although the dearth in the archaeological record suggests perishable materials, as is attested by written sources, whereby animals and various products (including cereals, beer, salt and clothing, such as animal hides and textiles) were exchanged regularly. A text relating events of the seventh century (*Life of St Philibert of Noirmoutier*) mentions a ship coming from Ireland to Noirmoutier Island in France: 'Not much later an Irish ship filled with various merchandise came to shore and supplied the brothers with an abundance of shoes and clothing'.

The presence of PRSW in Ireland has significant implications for communication and trade between Ireland and the fringes of western Europe and the Mediterranean in the late fifth and early sixth centuries and, by association, for the status of Tara as a trading centre. The rising numbers and variety of PRSW identified in north-western Europe clearly points towards an established network of regular trade.

The significance of a sherd

It seems that in Atlantic Europe at this time trade with the Mediterranean region was facilitated by high-status secular centres along the western Atlantic seaboard. Initial acquisition of foreign imports was followed by a secondary redistribution to satellite sites in the hinterlands, in turn instigating a variety of local imitation. A complex trade network is revealed when we combine the distributions of PRSW with Bii ware (sherds of which were also found at Collierstown) and the glass vessel trade. It is reasonable to assume that ships embarking originally from the eastern Mediterranean region travelled westwards through the Straits of Gibraltar, where they were relieved of much of their remaining cargo along the Portuguese coast.

Between Conímbriga and Cork there is still an absence of sites yielding PRSW, and here the theory of coastal connectivity seems to run aground. It is still plausible, however, that the Gallo-Hibernian glass trade piggy-backed on a much wider shipping network, and that any remaining cargo from the eastern Mediterranean galleys was redistributed among smaller local vessels in the ports of western France, from whence they sailed to southern Britain and Ireland. At these final destinations the vessels were then emptied completely and restocked with largely perishable materials to distribute on their return journeys.

Regardless of the exact trade route to Ireland, it is certain that the sherd discovered at Collierstown was produced in Turkey in the late fifth or early sixth century and that its presence in Ireland represents the regular movement of goods through the Mediterranean and along the western Atlantic seaboard. Moreover, the presence of this imported pottery in Ireland is undeniably a signature of prestige, since what is easily acquired, commonly used and ultimately mundane in one society acquires status in another through novelty, rarity, distance from source of manufacture and difficulty of acquisition.



Post-excavation aerial view of the Collierstown 1 early medieval cemetery where the Turkish pottery sherd was discovered. (Photo: Studio Lab)

Ploughshare	The detachable part of a plough that cuts the undersurface of the sod from the ground.
Quern-stone	A large stone used for grinding grain into flour. The four main categories of querns found in Ireland are, in chronological order: the saddle quern, beehive quern, rotary quern and pot quern.
Radiocarbon dating	A scientific method of dating by measuring the decay of the radioactive isotope Carbon 14, which is present in all organic material.
Ring-barrow	A barrow is an earthen burial mound, generally dating to the Bronze Age and Iron Age. Ring-barrows are the most common form and consist of a low, circular mound of earth, 15–20 m in diameter, surrounded by a ditch with an external bank.
Ring-ditch	A small, circular enclosure, defined by a ring-shaped ditch, which is often associated with prehistoric burials. Many have been discovered to be ploughed-out ring-barrows.
Ring-pin	An early medieval dress- or cloak-fastener, usually of copper alloy, with a swivel ring inserted through a perforation or loop at the top of the pin. The ring of the pin is sometimes decorated.
Post-hole	The void or soil-filled hole where a post once stood.
Post-medieval	The period after the medieval period, often taken to be the period after the dissolution of the monasteries in the mid-16th century.
Prehistoric	Any period for which there is no contemporary documentary evidence.
Slag	Glassy, non-metal residue and waste material left behind after the smelting of a metal.
Souterrain	A long, narrow, subterranean passage, usually with a slab roof, dating from the early medieval period. Some have small chambers off the main passage.
Spindle whorl	A small, perforated disc of stone or pottery used as a weight attached to the end of a spindle (a metal rod or wooden stick) for spinning yarn or thread from wool, cotton, or other material.
Viking (<i>Vikingur</i>)	Scandinavian word for seafaring raiders from Norway, Sweden and Denmark who ravaged the coasts of Europe from the seventh century AD onwards.

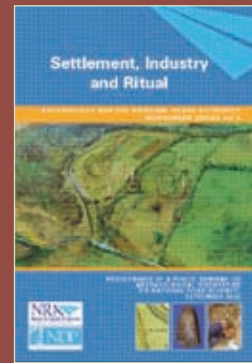
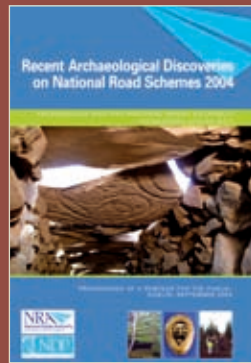
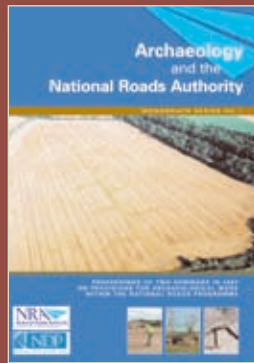
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