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Trade, Gift-giving and *Romanitas*: A Comparison of the Use of Roman Imports in Western Britain and Southern Scandinavia

Abstract: *Superficial comparison of Roman artefacts found in Southern Scandinavia with those of Britain demonstrates that different items were valued in the two areas. However, the Roman artefacts in both areas can be viewed as high-status luxury items. The essay argues that a comparison of the distribution of Roman artefacts in Britain and Scandinavia sheds light on their use and value within the respective importing societies. High-status Roman goods were used by local elites in both Britain and Scandinavia to help bolster their claims to authority and power.*

The Nature of the Evidence

§1. What follows examines the distribution and context of Roman imports in two superficially different regions, in order to establish whether there are any common trends lying behind the use of Roman goods by peoples outside of the Empire. Roman imports are found in Southern Scandinavia from the second century BC through the fifth century AD and can be broadly classified as 'luxury' items, largely made in the workshops of Italy (before the first century AD) and Roman Gaul. The goods thus imported to Scandinavia consisted mainly of drinking equipment, high-denomination coins and other precious-metals, and military equipment (Todd 1992; Hedeager 1978a and 1987). However, these are only the archaeologically visible imports and it seems likely that other luxury goods, such as the wine mentioned by Tacitus, also arrived in Southern Scandinavia along with the drinking sets.

§2. In the Pre-Roman Iron Age (PRIA, period up to *ca.* 1 AD) imports are usually found in communal votive deposits made in lakes, whilst in the Early Roman Iron Age (ERIA, *ca.* 1-200 AD) and the Late Roman Iron Age (LRIA, *ca.* 200-400 AD) they are usually employed as grave-goods, with Roman-manufactured weapons appearing in the great votive deposits of this period. Towards the end of the LRIA and in the Early Germanic Iron Age (EGIA, *ca.* 400-600 AD), Roman imports are found at settlement/trading sites such as Gudme-Lundeborg and Dankirke (Todd

1992; Hedeager 1987; Jensen 1982). On the basis of Tacitus (Fulford 1985, 91-2) and other written sources it seems likely that some of the imports were diplomatic gifts (particularly the silver-ware), whilst others may have been the fruits of barbarian raiding or goods brought back by local warriors after serving in the Imperial Army. On the whole though, the majority of the objects, particularly those from the LRIA, probably reached Scandinavia as a result of directed trading, perhaps in return for goods such as amber, furs and skins (Hedeager 1978a; 1987; Todd 1992; Hansen 1989; Pearson 1989).

§3. The picture from Western Britain contrasts with that from Southern Scandinavia. For example, the majority of imports have been found on settlement sites. Whilst the trade to Southern Scandinavia came from Gaul and Italy, that with western Britain seems to have originated in the heart of the Eastern Roman Empire. However, as with Scandinavia, the evidence suggests a continuous, directed trade involving a carefully selected ‘package’ of luxury goods carried by a number of ships (Campbell 1996a; 1996c, 86-8).

§4. The archaeological evidence for trade in Western Britain consists largely of ceramics, in particular fine red-slipped table-wares and amphorae, along with a few East Mediterranean coarse-wares (the latter only at Tintagel—see Harry *et al* 1997, 78, 81). The vast majority of this pottery has its origin in the North-East Mediterranean, with only a very small proportion having a North African provenance (Fulford 1989a). Chronologically, the finds date from the period *ca.* 475-550, concentrated largely *ca.* 500-525, whilst those from North Africa date from the second quarter of the sixth century (Campbell 1996a; Campbell 1996c, though see Campbell, Hill and Price 1997, 315). This is a significantly shorter period of trading than that seen in Southern Scandinavia and is part of a short-lived expansion of trade in ceramics outside of the eastern Mediterranean that also affected Italy, Spain and Portugal. The total number of pottery sherds found in Britain are probably indicative of over 200 vessels (indeed, current estimates put this many at Tintagel alone) but it has rightly been pointed out that this can only be the ‘tip of a fairly large iceberg’ (Morris *et al* 1999, 214; Harry *et al* 1997).

§5. Finds of amphorae stoppers indicate that these containers arrived in Britain along with their contents (Wooding 1996, 81; Harry *et al* 1997, 81). Based on the types of amphorae, the likely contents included wine, sesame oil, rare oils and unguents, and olive oil (Campbell, Hill and Price 1997, 316). In addition to ceramics, there is evidence for the importation of exotic glass vessels from the Mediterranean (Harry *et al* 1997; Campbell, Hill and Price 1997, 297-300; Morris *et al* 1999, 214; Price 2000, 24-6; Campbell 2000, 38-9); inscribed gemstones, perhaps used for sealing letters and documents (Anon 2000); and possibly Byzantine silver vessels (Campbell

and Lane 1993, 30). Furthermore, comparative evidence from the Mediterranean strongly suggests that pottery was never more than a minor component of cargoes, which primarily consisted of higher value and perishable wares such as silks (Campbell 1996c, 86-8).

§6. There are, therefore, two seemingly very different trading patterns—they contrast in terms of the origin of the artefacts, the chronological range of the trade, the contexts in which the artefacts are found, and in the types of artefacts found. Nevertheless they are fundamentally similar insofar as both can be seen as continuous, directed trading from the Roman Empire to some of the least Romanised areas of Western Europe, involving goods that were clearly luxuries in the societies in which they are found.

Distribution and Context: Southern Scandinavia

§7. Southern Scandinavia only becomes the main focus for Roman luxury imports around the beginning of the LRIA. Up to the end of the ERIA the evidence suggests that the imports reached Scandinavia by land, probably through Bohemia (Pearson 1989, 206). In this period the imports are concentrated in relatively few graves in Denmark. On the basis of locally produced materials present in the graves these should be described as rich to very rich/‘princely’ within their society and the number of imports in a grave is directly proportional to the number of locally produced items found in the grave (Hedeager 1978b). As Hedeager says, ‘local wealth’ would seem to have been ‘an important pre-condition for the acquirement of traded Roman commodities’ (218), with 75% of the imports found in graves with more than nine other separate artefact types.

§8. The distribution of these rich import graves in East Jutland and on Funen and Zealand is very regular and this has been taken as indicative of local elite groups controlling small territories *ca.* 15-28 km in diameter (Pearson 1989, 210-12). However, on the island of Lolland the richest graves with greatest numbers of luxury imports seem to cluster in the south-west around the famous Hoby grave, with the import graves from this concentration generally being richer than those of Zealand to the north.

§9. In the LRIA the situation changes somewhat. Exceptional numbers of imports reached Denmark (largely from workshops in Northern Gaul), compared with other areas, and the trade in Roman luxuries was probably being directly focussed on Denmark and the Baltic, conducted via the sea (Hansen 1989). This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that the LRIA fine glassware and painted cups are largely confined to the west Baltic (Todd 1992, 90-1).

§10. Another change is that the number of graves in which these imports are found increases—in the LRIA only 35% of the total number of imports are found in graves with more than nine separate artefact types

(Hedeager 1978b, 218). There are similarly important changes in the distribution of the import graves. In East Jutland, west Funen and Lolland the number of import graves declines sharply, whilst in East Funen and Zealand there is a noticeable concentration (Pearson 1989, 212-18; Hedeager 1987). In both the latter regions, the regular pattern of distribution from the previous century disappears, and is replaced by a pattern similar to that in Lolland during the ERIA, namely definite groupings of graves in a particular area.

§11. This concentration of burials is most noticeable on Zealand, particularly on Stevns, where the richest graves with the greatest number of imports in Southern Scandinavia are found. This group is surrounded by an empty area of *ca.* 20 km without any finds and then, after this, four smaller concentrations situated in a semicircle around Stevns. Beyond these, there are a few scattered import graves but no significant groupings. Because most of the Roman imports—greatly increased since the ERIA—are found in this area, it is seen as both a centre for its local region and for the Baltic as a whole. Roman goods were exchanged in Zealand and then redistributed to the rest of Scandinavia and the Baltic coast, via local trading and/or elite exchange (Jensen 1982, 248 ff.; Hedeager 1978b, 222; Hansen 1989).

§12. These alterations to the distribution patterns are generally understood as the result of fundamental changes to the social structure of Southern Scandinavia. Thus the distribution of ERIA import graves may indicate that local elites were ruling small territories, and the imports were distributed amongst these autonomous local chiefs via elite exchange. Hedeager has shown that such elites certainly existed in this period based on convincing evidence from the votive deposits of the late ERIA. In this practice, the war-gear of whole armies was ritually deposited, demonstrating that these armies were professional bodies who used imported Roman weapons and other war-gear, often led by mounted soldiers (Hedeager 1992a, 169 ff.; Ørsnes and Ilkjær 1992, 219). Spurs are frequently found in the rich graves considered here.

§13. Over time the landscape of relatively equal local chieftains (as evidenced by graves) of the ERIA was replaced by definite groupings of graves that indicate centralisation of power. Hedeager's study of the LRIA graves in Zealand indicates that not only was there definite concentration, but that in the LRIA a hierarchy of such concentrations emerges (this is not present on ERIA Lolland). Thus in the 'central' Stevn region we find the richest graves with the most imports, whilst in the surrounding four concentrations the average 'wealth' of the graves is lower than in Stevns and the graves contain fewer imports. In the more peripheral areas, the graves are further reduced in average wealth and Roman imports are rarer still. The evidence suggests that Stevns was the centre of a small polity with a number of sub-centres, controlling the surrounding region and seemingly

the distribution of imports within that region (Hedeager 1978b; Jensen 1982, 247 ff.). The centralised control of a large *regione*, as well as the distribution of goods within it, is a LRIA development, which can be demonstrated by looking at the only significant ERIA concentration of rich graves and imports on the island of Lolland. Whilst the concentration itself is obvious, there are no signs that the elites controlled either the surrounding region or the distribution of imports in this area. The imports are found mainly in the richest graves and do not appear in less wealthy graves as they do in the LRIA.

§14. In the fourth and fifth centuries, the quantity of imports declined in Eastern Zealand while increasing in Jutland and Funen (as well as sites further afield in Norway and Sweden). In this period, the imports are now increasingly found on what were clearly elite settlement sites such as Gudme-Lundeborg and Dankirke, rather than in graves. This probably signifies the emergence of new centres of power in these regions, although the distribution of gold hoards from this period indicates that the centres in South-East Funen and Zealand maintained their position throughout the EGIA (Hedeager 1987, 130 ff.; Todd 1992, 99). The fact that new elite centres seem to adopt Roman imports at the same time as they disappear from long-established centres may be due to changing trade routes (perhaps, at Dankirke, related to nearby iron production at Drengsted, see Jensen 1982, 249). Nonetheless, as we shall see, this simple explanation may well mask some important lessons about the way imports were used. It is clear that the importation of Roman luxury goods was inextricably caught up with elite political developments in Denmark. However, before considering this relationship, we first need to examine the distribution of imports in western Britain.

Distribution and Context: Western Britain

§15. The Roman imports in western Britain are almost all recovered from settlement sites and, as such, come from a context which may more accurately indicate the use of these items in life. The main focus of the imports seems to have been South-Western England (in particular, Cornwall) and South Wales, presumably motivated by a Byzantine desire for tin, the ‘British Metal’ according to Stephanos of Alexandria (Wooding 1996, 82; Campbell 1996c, 88). This is ample explanation for both the fact that merchants were willing to sail *ca.* 10,000 km to western Britain to trade, and that the trade was centred on Cornwall. It also, interestingly, raises the possibility of Imperial involvement, which may find some support from the statements of Procopius in the sixth century (see Dark 1994, for a very speculative ‘maximum’ view of such involvement).

§16. Within these areas there seems to be a reasonably clear hierarchy of

sites at which these artefacts are found. At the top of the scale we have Tintagel (Cornwall). The finds from this one site alone total more than those from all other sites in Britain, with the total amount increasing with every excavation (Morris *et al* 1999, 214). The site was a very extensive, heavily fortified secular settlement of the fifth and sixth centuries. In all probability it was the primary citadel of the rulers of the historical kingdom of Dumnonia, a point driven home by the discovery of a Latin secular inscription (Thomas 1992; Harry *et al* 1997; Morris *et al* 1999). The extraordinary concentration of imports at Tintagel has led excavators to comment that it must have been the primary point of entry for Roman artefacts. This is confirmed by finds of amphorae stoppers from the site and the presence here—but nowhere else—of significant quantities of African imports (and, indeed, Near Eastern coarse-wares).

§17. Away from Tintagel we find much smaller but still significant concentrations at Cadbury-Congresbury (Somerset) and South Cadbury (Somerset), both also within the Dumnonian kingdom. These sites should be considered major fortified elite or royal sites controlling significant territory in the post-Roman period. South Cadbury commanded enough resources to construct a one kilometre timber-laced rampart (Rahtz *et al* 1992; Alcock 1995). With regards to Cadbury-Congresbury, the Mediterranean imports are associated with a structure best interpreted as a feasting hall, which (like the one at Tintagel) provides us with valuable evidence for the use of imports. Outside of the historical Dumnonian kingdom on the south coast of Wales, small concentrations of imports (glass, amphorae and fine-ware) are found at elite fortified settlements such as Dinas Powys and Hen Gastell (Wilkinson *et al* 1995). Longbury Bank (Dyfed) may also be added to these two south Wales examples. It has evidence for fine-ware from Western Turkey, amphorae, and possibly a Byzantine silver vessel—Campbell and Lane consider it to be of similar status to Hen Gastell and Dinas Powys despite it lacking obvious defences (Campbell and Lane 1993). The imported wares were excavated from a midden associated with a possible hall.

§18. In addition, there are a number of smaller and more questionable concentrations of imports. One of the most interesting is the group of imports from Gwithian (Cornwall) associated with small stone-walled huts. Thomas (1988, 16) sees this as a farm that had received imports as gifts from a nearby fortified minor elite settlement on the Hayle estuary. However, Campbell and Lane (1993, 68) suggest that the source of imports may have been a largely unexcavated undefended elite site like Longbury Bank (South Wales). Other such debatable sites include Bantham, Trethurgy and Glastonbury Tor (Thomas 1988, 16-8).

§19. Whilst the types of artefact and the contexts in which they are found are quite different from those imports found in Southern Scandinavia

in the LRIA, the basic scenario is remarkably similar. In both areas we find luxury imported goods associated with what appear to be both major and minor elite centres. The clear hierarchy in the sites of Western Britain—both when considering the imports and when excluding them from the analysis—indicates that a comparison with the situation in LRIA Scandinavia is not unwarranted and, indeed, can be taken further. As with the imports into Eastern Zealand in the third century AD, the pattern of distribution generally fits. We have a single predominant centre where it is generally agreed that the majority of goods were traded; a number of sub-centres, within the polity of which the primary site is part (such as Gwithians/Hayle and probably also Cadbury-Congresbury and South Cadbury), and to which these imports were primarily dispersed; and a mixture of other sites, from minor potentate settlements to farms, which saw very few imports, probably redistributed from either the primary site, Tintagel, or the sub-centres. Whilst not as neat as that for Zealand, this scenario would seem to explain all the sites on the distribution map.

§20. If the historical Dumnonian kingdom is Western Britain's version of Zealand, then the sites in South Wales and beyond could be seen like the sites on the Baltic Islands, North Germany and North Poland. These were local power centres that obtained their luxury goods through their relations (*i.e.* elite exchange) with the primary importation site rather than directly (for example, Wilkinson *et al* 1995, 18). Such a definition would fit the more limited distribution of these materials outside of Dumnonia. None of the finds are really suggestive of direct trading (*pave* Thomas 1988) and many of those sites with imports north of South Wales are known to have been elite centres or emporia (for example, Dumbarton, the 'capital' of the kingdom of Strathclyde). Campbell (1989) has suggested that, whilst this 'elite trade' may have been conducted directly with Dumnonia, it might also have taken place via politically neutral areas, safe from attack, which would explain the finds of imports on Caldey Island (south Wales) and Dalkey Island (near Dublin).

§21. If the above conclusions are accepted then, in spite of the differences in chronological range, type of artefact, origin of artefact, and context of the finds, the import trades with Western Britain and Southern Scandinavia (in the LRIA) are quite closely comparable. In both areas the imports appear inextricably linked with the highest elites and the political organisation of the region. The reason this may have been the case during the LRIA of Scandinavia, as opposed to the earlier periods, is probably due to a number of factors. Not least of these may be that it is only during the LRIA that something like the kind of regional polity that we know to have probably existed in post-Roman Dumnonia emerged from an earlier pattern of largely local chiefdoms. Additionally it might also be related to the fact that it is only from *ca.* 210 AD that we see evidence of the kind of directed trade between the Empire and Scandinavia that seems to be present in post-

Usage of Roman Imports: Some Implications

§22. In both Western Britain and Southern Scandinavia, the Roman luxury imports were primarily associated with the leading elites of their regions, who then redistributed some of these items to families of apparently lesser status (though still of higher standing than average, if we take grave-wealth as indicative of status). The natural question is, therefore, how these imports were bound up with the elites?

§23. It must first be recognised that the nature of the imports as high-status luxury items originating in the Roman Empire carried with it a certain important symbolism (that this symbolism was more important than their intrinsic value is indicated by the lack of hoards containing this material—their main value was on a personal, symbolic level, see Hedeager 1987, 129). Whilst their basic nature as luxury goods naturally symbolised the high-status of their owner—as did native luxury items—their symbolism went beyond their material value. In both areas the majority of the imports were restricted to the highest elites, and this must be a function of the fact that their exotic nature betokened wide-ranging contacts and, most importantly, *romanitas*.

§24. In early medieval Western Europe it seems that almost every barbarian ruler wished to be Caesar. We find Theoderic enjoying an Imperial *Adventus* in Rome in 500; Clovis being made a Roman consul; a king buried in Roman-style regalia at Sutton Hoo; and Edwin of Northumbria marching with a Roman standard (see James 1988; Collins 1991). There is no reason why Western Britain and Southern Scandinavia should be seen as any different. To be Roman was, quite simply, to be powerful, and this would be well known to the Scandinavians of the Roman Iron-Age and certainly remembered by the Britons in the late fifth and sixth centuries (inhabiting, as they did, a region that had been part of the Empire until the early fifth century).

§25. As such we can plausibly see the usage of Roman artefacts in our study areas as an attempt by the elites in this area to present themselves as Romans and thus all-powerful. For example, the parade helmets imported into southern Scandinavia must have been valued for their symbolism of Roman authority, as they would have been of little practical value (Todd 1992, 45). Similarly the likely use of an eastern Mediterranean inscribed jewel found at Cefn Cwmwd, Anglesey, for sealing documents and letters can only represent the deliberate adoption of *romanitas* by a member of the local elite (Anon 2000).

§26. Indeed, if we examine the nature of the majority of the imports and the contexts in which they are found we can clearly see an attempt to

integrate Roman manners with traditional elite activities. Thus in Western Britain the imported goods—where there is evidence for the specific usage of the imports—are frequently associated in some way with large hall-like structures (as at Tintagel, Cadbury-Congresbury and Longbury Bank). These buildings are generally interpreted as communal elite structures used for feasting and drinking by a lord and his retinue, of which we read in early medieval written sources from all over North-West Europe (the most famous example being Heorot in the probably eighth-century Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*). Such festivities were often portrayed as a central element in the ‘heroic’ lifestyle of the elite and undoubtedly helped bond the retinue/war-band to their lord.

§27. The imports found at these sites—exotic glass vessels, fine-ware plates, amphorae of wine and olive oil, and silver dishes—combined with the fact that these archaeologically visible items are likely to have formed a minority of the imports behind silks and the like, paint a picture of the Dumnonian king and his household taking part in the traditional festivities whilst dressing in exotic cloths, drinking wine from imported glass vessels, and eating from the finest Roman plates food cooked (in imported saucepans, skillets, casseroles etc.) with olive and sesame oils. In other words, it seems highly likely that the king and his retinue were consciously trying to appear Roman, but interpreting *romanitas* through the cipher of their more familiar traditional activities (Gildas, writing his *De Excidio Britanniae* in Western Britain around 540 AD makes it clear, in § VII, that wine and oil were viewed by the Britons as particular signs of *romanitas*).

§28. Though we lack settlement evidence to allow us to be certain on this point, it is highly likely that the feasting and drinking equipment discovered in Southern Scandinavia should be interpreted in a similar light. Furthermore, recent contextual approaches to burials consider both the objects deposited with the deceased and the burial rite itself to be an entirely symbolic act of ‘social theatre’ conducted and dictated by the families of the deceased (Hodder 1982; Halsall 1992; Hedeager 1992b). In view of this, the deposition of these items with the deceased must be a definite attempt to signal the continued *romanitas* of the family of the deceased and thus protect their position in society. The elites of southern Scandinavia were trying to be Romans both in life and death, and this cultural association was apparently essential to the maintenance of high social status. As Hedeager says, in Denmark the Roman imports became an important ‘physical part of the language of power’ used by the highest elites (1992b, 286).

§29. The great votive deposits of the Roman Iron Age—in which lay the destroyed equipment of defeated armies—should also be understood as attempts by the leading elites to appear Roman. Analysis of this material reveals that considerable quantities of Roman war-gear was in use, and this is paralleled in weapons graves. Parade helmets, mail garments and swords

all seem to have been imported (indeed, the Empire in the fourth century AD outlawed such trade) into Southern Scandinavia, despite the fact that some of the equipment was unsuited for practical use (Todd 1992, 43-5, 95). These items seem to have been restricted, like the drinking sets, to the elites, with the rest of the army equipped with native weapons such as the lance and spear. Given all this evidence, it is hard not to see the elites of this region as attempting to appear Roman not only when at home, in the feasting hall, and in death, but also when out on the field of battle (the Roman imports in the latter situation clearly acting as signs of rank).

§30. Returning to Western Britain, a further indication of the symbolic importance of the imports is provided by the contexts in which a few pieces are found. At Whithorn, Trethurgy, Dalkey Island and Cadbury-Congresbury, some of the imports were used in a talismanic manner and as foundation deposits of hearths and structures interpreted as shrines (Campbell, Hill and Price 1997, 316). Such a usage is both puzzling and highly suggestive of the power that possession of these artefacts must have been thought to confer. With specific regards to Western Britain, there are good reasons to think that it may have been very susceptible to the symbolism carried by the imports. Recent studies indicate that although the Roman economy collapsed in fourth century Britain, Roman culture was preserved in the western regions, including Latin learning sufficient to produce the late fifth or early sixth century *Vergilius Romanus* probably on a secular commission (Dark 1998; Howlett 1998). Indeed, the recent discovery of a secular Latin inscription at Tintagel (Morris *et al* 1999, 214) chimes nicely with the notion that the lord of Tintagel was knowingly presenting himself as a Caesar.

§31. In summary therefore, it seems clear that the imports were associated with highest elites of the areas in which they are found, and in all areas possessed symbolism in the 'language of power' beyond that provided by their high value and exotic nature alone. These elites wished to strengthen themselves by appearing Roman and thus associating their power with that of Rome, and the imports allowed them to do this (it is worth noting that in neither region were imports copied locally, which provides further evidence of the symbolic worth of a genuine Roman artefact).

§32. If the use of these items was intended to sustain and legitimise the power structures in both Britain and Scandinavia, we must ask how this worked. Obviously this might be achieved by the elites simply appearing to be Roman and, indeed, this does seem to have been the case in ERIA Denmark. However, the usage of the symbolism of these items gains a new perspective in LRIA Denmark and the kingdom of Dumnonia.

§33. It is clear from written sources that the power of barbarian rulers (unlike that of local chieftains, as the elites appear to be in the ERIA) in late antique and early medieval Europe rested on their relationship with, and the

size of, their retinues/war-bands. This relationship rested in turn upon reciprocal gift-exchange. The latter involved the gifting of valuable items to the war-band in return for unswerving loyalty, thus creating dependency. If a lord had a good reputation for giving gifts, then he would attract more warriors to his side and thus increase in power, whilst at the same time increasing his bonds of loyalty with the existing members of his retinue. However, if he failed in his duty as a gift-giver then these bonds would be weakened, warriors would leave his service and he would consequently be reduced in power.

§34. The distribution of imports in both LRIA Southern Scandinavia and Western Britain should be seen within the context of gift-giving: in these areas, the rulers gave imports to retainers in return for their loyalty, producing the previously observed spreading of imports to graves with less than nine other artefact types, and the sub-centres seen in the distributions. These retainers, being lesser lords in their own right, then further redistributed the imports they received to their own retainers, producing the peripheral distribution we have observed. In Western Britain, Thomas (1988; Harry *et al* 1997, 82) has shown that the minor scatters of imported pottery can be associated with tin streams and production, and he argues that the lord of Tintagel received tin as tribute from the petty lords controlling these streams and in return they received gifts of imports with which to sustain and raise their own status in the *regione* under their control. Thus the finds from Gwithian may well represent gifts to the people involved in the production of tin from their lord on the Hayle estuary. This local lord would then send the tin on as tribute to Tintagel (to be traded for imports) and receive Roman imports as a gift in return, some of which he would then pass on to the original producers (Thomas 1988, 16).

§35. The true value of the imports may thus lie not with simply allowing the elites to project a powerful image of themselves, but also in enabling them to create and maintain power over much larger regions. The imports were the ideal gift with which to buy and ensure loyalty from lesser lords and warriors, being exotic, of high-value, and symbolic of power and civilisation. The nature of these artefacts therefore made them a doubly invaluable resource in the elites' quest to secure and enhance their status and power. Indeed the use of these items in this way does not seem to have been restricted just to use within the regions that they controlled. The presence of imports in small concentrations all across the Baltic and in Wales, Scotland and Ireland requires explanation if we accept the above arguments that Stevns and Tintagel controlled Roman trading with their respective areas. The most plausible explanation is that they were transferred to remote central places such as Dumbarton as a result of elite exchange designed to further help secure and enhance the status and power of the elites who controlled the trade.

§36. Of course the use of these imports eventually came to an end in

both Dumnonia and Zealand, and an examination of the reasons behind this may well further illuminate the usage and importance of the imports in these societies. In Dumnonia the end seems to be dictated by a general collapse of the trade in luxuries outside of the Byzantine Empire that first brought the items to Tintagel (perhaps due to Justinian—see Campbell 1996c, 86). This sudden and unexpected change appears to have a devastating effect on Dumnonia. Tintagel and the other potentate sites cease to exist as elite sites, having very little part in the trading of Gallic pottery and glass in which the rest of Western Britain and Ireland took part during the late sixth and seventh centuries. The only readily apparent reason for this is that the kingdom came to rely too heavily upon East Mediterranean imports. Without them, the gift-exchange system—and thus the social organisation of the kingdom—collapsed, having no other source of valuables that might be utilised, unlike in other areas of Celtic Britain (Maddicott 2000; Campbell 1996c).

§37. In contrast, the ending of Roman imports in Eastern Zealand and on Funen seems to have caused no major changes in the society there (as was once assumed), with the distribution of gold hoards showing that centres in these regions maintained their predominant position. The clue to this disparity lies with the fact that just as the old established centres on Zealand and Funen cease to make use of imports, new centres in other areas adopt them. It is well known that when early medieval elites feel secure in their position they cease to make use of extravagant burials, as the symbolism is no longer needed. Indeed, such an ending of ostentatious burial seems to be occurring in fifth-century Denmark (Halsall 1992; Hedeager 1992a; Geake 1992). A similar notion can be applied to the Roman imports. The imports, like ostentatious burials, were seen as a piece of crucial symbolism by elites who were trying to secure and expand their grip on power and hence were used by the early polities in South-West England (which had been part of the Empire until the early fifth-century) and on Zealand, and by the new fourth and fifth century elites in Jutland and Norway. Over time however this symbolism becomes less important as the elite's position becomes more secure—thus the centres on Zealand show no signs of disruption when the focus of trade shifted away from them as the elites here were secure. However, in Dumnonia the break in imports happens suddenly and, it would seem, at a time when they were still needed by the elites of that area.

§38. If the above is accepted then the role that imports played in securing and creating the polities in southern Scandinavia and western Britain can be seen as very significant, with the premature withdrawal of these imports having devastating results.

Conclusion

§39. Despite initial indications to the contrary, it would seem that a comparison of the role of imports in LRIA (and to a lesser extent ERIA) Scandinavia and South-Western Britain can prove valuable. Whilst the nature of the artefacts, their origin, the chronology of the importation, and the contexts in which they are discovered are significantly different, the two regions seem fundamentally similar. Both see continuous directed trading from the Roman Empire to some of the least Romanised areas of western Europe, involving goods that are clearly luxuries for the cultures in which they are found. This trade and its imports were securely in the control of the highest elites in the respective regions, who were consciously trying to appear Roman in their usage of these items (thus securing their position in society). Further, the general distribution of the imports in both regions is comparable and suggests the redistribution of these items by the elites to their retainers in an attempt to secure and consolidate their control over a wider region. Outside of their area, the local elites seem to have redistributed the items to other elites, probably via elite exchange and again with the aim of securing their position. The importance of such usage of the imports is demonstrated by the collapse in the social structure of the kingdom of Dumnonia when the trade in these items suddenly ceases.

§40. In sum, the presence, distribution and use of these items in Western Britain and southern Scandinavia can be taken as evidence for the influence of the Roman Empire on barbarian societies and their concepts of kingship; for the existence of what might be described as early kingdoms in these regions, based ultimately around gift-exchange for which the imports were used; for the existence of a number of minor central places within these polities that might not otherwise have been identified, a knowledge of which enhances our understanding of the complexities of such early states; and for the presence of a healthy economy that could clearly produce sufficient surplus to make long trips by Roman traders worthwhile—if the ships involved were similar to that from Yassi Ada they would have held around forty tons of Cornish tin, (Campbell 1996a, 81)—combined with a sufficiently well organised political system that allowed imports to be collected at a single centre (or possibly a number of centres) for trading.

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