

# SOME IBERIAN INFLUENCES ON THE COPPER AGE POTTERY OF THE IRISH CHANNEL AREA

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The archaeological evidence for cultural relations between the Iberian peninsula and the Irish Channel area in the Late Neolithic and Early Metal Age has often been discussed, and the weight attached to it at different times by different scholars has varied greatly. While, for example, most prehistorians still accept that the megalithic passage graves of north-west Europe must ultimately derive from those of Iberia, views continue to differ as to the mechanism. They range from postulation of folk movements, usually in the form of a series of local movements, culminating in one from Brittany to the Irish Channel (Herity and Eogan, 1977, 79) to that of missionary activities by a priestly class (Mac Kie, 1977, 190-9). With the beginning of the full Bronze Age in the British Isles, at the beginning of the 2nd millennium B. C., we enter a phase in which the cultural currents seem to run very largely in the opposite direction, as Mac White showed (1951), and one must envisage trade and travelling craftsmen rather than migrant populations, until, in the later Bronze Age, the latter again dominate the stage and are seen to be bearers of Celtic speech in the peninsula.

During these discussions Irish discoveries of minor portable artefacts of Neolithic or Copper Age date which could be directly related to actual immigrants (however specialized professionally!) have played a relatively limited role compared with the morphology of tombs (Herity, 1974) and the carvings with which some are decorated (Shee, 1972). It is true that the former, even more than the latter, are subject to the familiar archaeological condition that most of the surviving products of a culture which lasted several centuries in a peripheral area will show a local development diverging increasingly from the parent culture. That condition seems to apply particularly to pottery in Ireland. On the one hand the bulk of the pottery which has been found on Neolithic sites in Ireland represents an insular tradition which has its roots in Britain and ultimately France rather than Iberia. On

the other hand the relatively small amount of coarse, roughly decorated pottery which has been found in passage graves in Ireland appears to bear very little relationship to that which is known from the passage graves of Iberia, or, for that matter, Brittany. As it happens, however, there is a curious resemblance between the crude «Carrowkeel Ware» of Ireland, just referred to (fig. 1, 2) and what appear to be early manifestations of the «Boquique» tradition of the Spanish *Meseta* (fig. 1, 4), the later stages of which certainly continued into the Late Bronze Age (Savory, 1968, 216). Both of these ceramic groups show a preference for an all-over decoration formed of horizontal and vertical groups of lines executed by «stab-and-drag» technique. Since the northern *Meseta* may, in fact, have contributed to the cultural elements which were spread as far as north-west Europe along with the passage grave tradition (Savory, 1975), this ceramic affinity may really be significant, as Herity has recognized (1974, 198). The fact that close analogues seem to be lacking in the intervening areas of western France may simply be due to the pre-existence there of highly developed local Neolithic pottery industries. Such, indeed, was the case even in Ireland: Case, who studied the development of these industries very fully, was so struck by the contrast that the crude and intrusive «Carrowkeel Ware» presents to them that he refers them to contacts with the megalithic culture of Scandinavia (Case, 1961, 185). Subsequent development of radiocarbon chronology, however, seems to indicate that the suggested cultural link arose rather from Irish influence on Scandinavia rather than the reverse (Savory, 1978).

It is the purpose of this note, however, to draw attention to another Irish ceramic group which has recently gained definition as a result of new discoveries. It is not associated with passage graves but with separate burials, mostly by inhumation, in round *tumuli* in a limited area of southeast Ireland (Leinster), and has been classed by Herity (1977, 81-5) as «Late Neolithic». This «Linkardstown» group consists, in fact, of vessels which could be seen as a specialized development from the sharply carinated bowls of Case's «Ballyalton» group (Case, 1961, 186-9) with ledge-rims and decoration supposedly derived, on the one hand, from the «stab-and-drag» tradition of Carrowkeel ware and, on the other, from the southern Irish «Limerick» group of Western Neolithic ware (Case 1961, 206-8), in which rims and sides are decorated with incised grooves and tramline patterns, as seen particularly well on the newly discovered bowl from Ballintruer More (Co. Wicklow) (fig. 2, 4) (Raftery, J., 1973). In fact the latter decoration probably reflects the influence on both groups of the tall Bell Beaker and Zoned Beaker tradition which had by then (in the latter part of the 3rd millennium B. C.) already arrived in Ireland, through southern England,

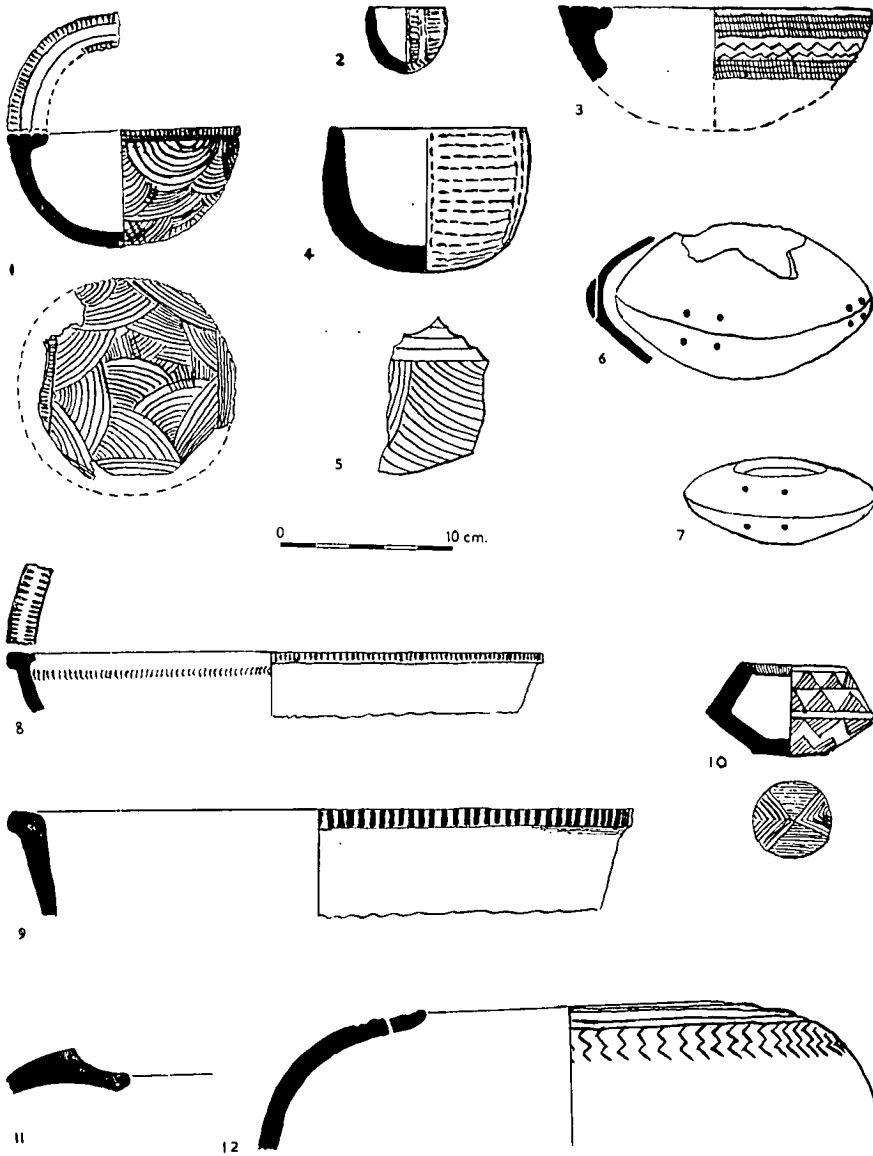


Fig. 1.—1. Baunogenasraid (Carlow) (after B. Raftery); 2. Lislea (Monaghan) (after Case); 3. Jerpoint West (Kilkenny) (after Ryan); 4. Castro de Pavia (Evora) (after V. Correia); 5. Vila Nova de S. Pedro (Santarem) (after Savory); 6. Purchena (Almería) (After V. & G. Leisner); 7. Cabinteely (Dublin) (after Thurnam); 8. Nottage (Glamorgan) (after Savory); 9. Sabugo (Lisbon) (after Savory); 10. Llanblethian (Glamorgan) (after Grimes) 11. Penedo (Lisbon) (after Spindler); 12. Chibannes (Setubal) (after Savory).

from northern France, and was rapidly replacing the technique of notched decoration by continuous incision. The use of the term «Late Neolithic» must therefore be taken, as so often in the British literature, as referring to the indigenous culture on what is really a Copper Age horizon in continental terms. It is in this setting that we can understand the association of these southeastern Irish «Late Neolithic» bowls with separate burials by inhumation in the Bell Beaker manner rather than cremations of the sort practiced by the Irish passage grave culture.

One of the most striking vessels of the Linkardstown Group, however, that found with the primary inhumation in a large circular *tumulus* at Drimnagh near Dublin, has a special feature: four holes pierced, for the purpose of suspension, in the ledge-rim (fig. 2, 1), and it is, in fact, a «hanging bowl». When he found it the excavator (Kilbride-Jones, 1939) greeted it enthusiastically: «the potter was an Iberian and he made the Drimnagh hanging bowl some time before 2000 B. C.». Enthusiasm has since waned, with the realization that the ware and the decoration of the bowl are essentially local, but the excavator was surely justified in seeing a relationship between his hanging bowl and those found in the Copper Age passage graves alike of Almería and central Portugal. It is curious, however, that he did not notice how strongly this relationship is confirmed by another «hanging bowl» which has long been preserved in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy—that from Cabinteely (Co. Dublin). This small biconical bowl was noticed by Thurnam (1870, 373), who states that it was found with a cremation burial in a rough cist and that the four vertical perforations are subcutaneous throughout (fig. 1, 7), exactly like those on various Almerian hanging bowls—e. g., one from Purchena (fig. 1, 6) (Leisner, G., 1943, Pl. 4, 18). The Cabinteely bowl, though probably locally made, also resembles its Almerian analogues in being quite undecorated and therefore has a better claim than the Drimnagh vessel to have been made by an Iberian. It is, perhaps, also significant that the Cabinteely bowl should have been associated with a cremation—the usual rite in Irish passage graves—but with a single one, like another cremation recently found with a Carrowkeel bowl in a «Henge» earthwork at Monknewtown on the Boyne (Sweetman, 1976). One can, therefore envisage that the Cabinteely burial belongs to an horizon not too far from that of Los Millares I-Vila Nova de São Pedro I and at the beginning of the Late Neolithic single burial sequence (c. 2500 B. C.) which in Ireland continues in the Early Bronze Age with «Food Bowls» and «Pygmy Cups».

The idea of the «hanging bowl» is, perhaps, still present in another unusual vessel of the Linkardstown group (fig. 1, 1), which was found with a primary inhumation burial in a circular *tumulus* at Baunogenasraid (Co. Carlow) (B. Raftery, 1974). This bowl is hemispherical in form, with a broad,

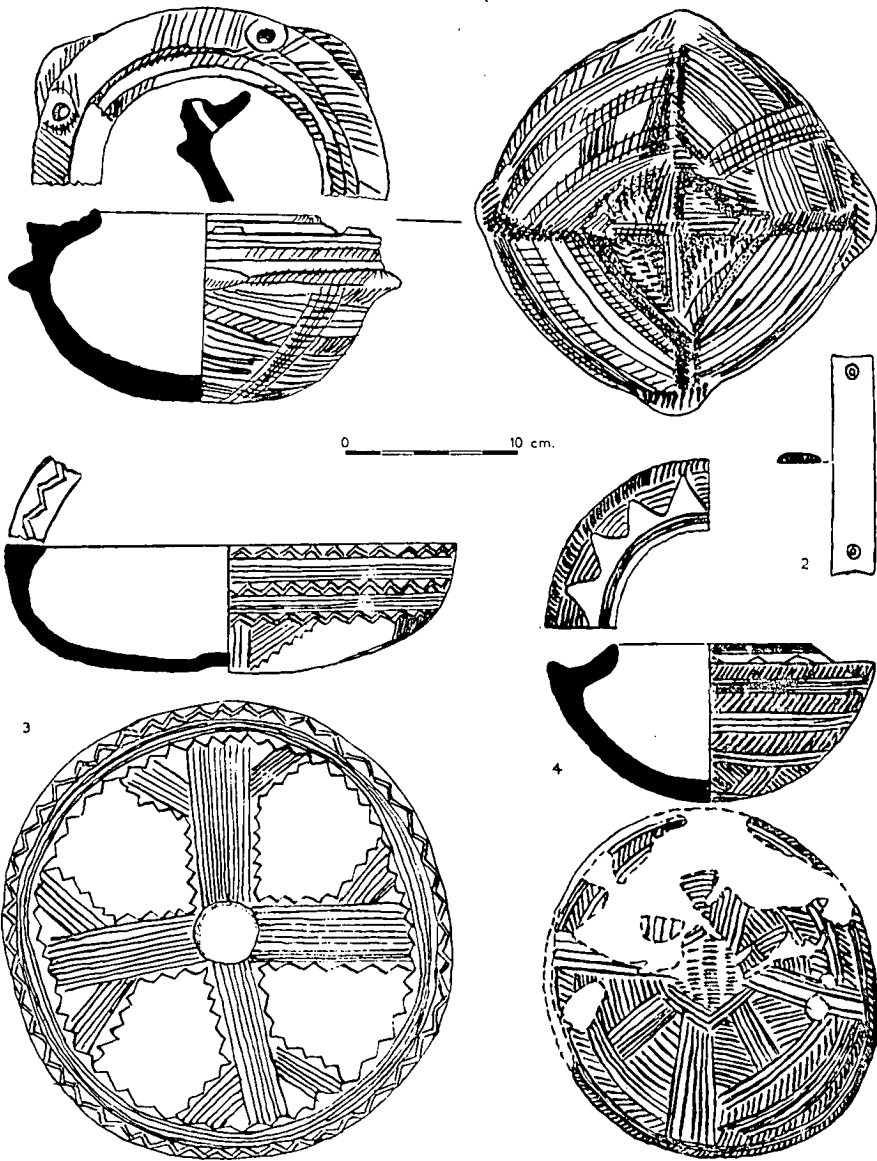


Fig. 2.—1. Drimnagh (Dublin) (after Kilbride-Jones); 2. Llantrithyd (Glam.); 3. Palmela (Setubal) (after Cartailhac); 4. Ballinruer More (Wicklow) (after J. Raftery).

internally and externally projecting rim, decorated in the «Limerick» manner and with an encircling groove below the rim which could have aided suspension by a cord. The whole of the outer surface of this bowl is covered with a channelled decoration of multiple concentric arcs interlocking in a manner which is identical with some of the finely fluted pottery from the lower layer at Vila Nova de São Pedro (largely unpublished) (fig. 1, 5). The vertical incisions, in the manner of a pie-crust, which decorate the outer lip of the Baunogenasraid bowl are another feature with counterparts on some large dishes and bowls found on Copper Age sites in central Portugal (fig. 1, 9), but also occurs in «Limerick» pottery and on a related bowl from a «Late Neolithic» house at Mount Pleasant, Nottage, in south Wales (fig. 1, 8) (Savory, 1952, fig. 3.3), which is probably part of the recurring Irish influence found in this area. «Channelled Ware» of a sort is, of course, a well-known feature of the «Late Neolithic» in Britain and probably reflects contacts with Copper Age groups in western and southern France at this time, but the multiple arcs at Baunogenasraid relate much more definitely to the channelled ware of central Portugal and do not resemble so closely in their arrangement the concentric arcs carved on the stones of Gavrinis, Morbihan (Péquart and Le Rouzic, 1927, Pls. 99-132) as advocates of Breton influence in Ireland might be inclined to suggest. In view of this possible relationship with central Portuguese channelled ware, one might be inclined to suspect that the tendency to concave ledge-rims, seen at Drimnagh and Ballintruer More and on other Linkardstown pots, may reflect the influence of rim forms found on a pre-Bell Beaker horizon at Castro sites in central Portugal, notably at Rotura near Setubal (Tavares da Silva, 1971), where a stratification has been recorded, at Chibannes near Setubal (fig. 1, 12) (Savory, 1968, 205 f.) and Penedo near Torres Vedras (fig. 1, 11) (Spindler, 1969, fig. 22). If these Iberian analogues have any significance, they imply contact of some kind between the two areas in the early part of the third millennium B. C.

While the Cabinteely and Baunogenasraid vessels, as we have seen, stand relatively close to their supposed Iberian models and should belong, therefore, to the beginnings of separate burial in Ireland, the Drimnagh bowl seems to represent a more advanced stage of localisation. The «hanging bowl» idea does, in fact, seem to have had an extraordinarily long currency in the burial practices of the Irish Channel area, for we still find, towards the end of the Early Bronze Age in Ireland and Wales (*c.* 1500 B. C.) cremation burials accompanied by small biconical vessels, rather like that from Cabin-teely, some of the best examples of which, like the fine specimen found with rich grave goods at Breach Farm, Llanblethian, Glamorgan (fig. 1, 10) have a varying number of horizontal perforations on the keel which could embody a tradition of suspension (Savory, 1958). About half way in date between the

Cabinteely hanging bowl and «pygmy cups» like Breach Farm (c. 2000 B. C.?) one might place another hemispherical bowl reconstructed from fragments found with an inhumation burial in a cist under a round *tumulus* at Jerpoint West (Co. Kilkenny) (Ryan, 1973) (fig. 1, 3). This reconstruction must, certainly, be received with some caution because what was, in fact, found was a collection of small sherds which the excavator treats as from a single vessel, and indeed the scheme of decoration appears to be the same throughout, but whereas one rim sherd would suggest a reconstruction like that proposed (Ryan, *ibid.*, figs. 5 and 6) another seems to relate to a biconical vessel with vertical lugs. It seems, in fact, that, two similarly decorated vessels are represented. The hemispherical bowl, at any rate, though certainly of a coarse local ware, bears a striking resemblance to the type of broad bowl, with heavy, flattened rim on which some of the incised patterns found on the side are repeated, which is characteristic of the later Bell Beaker pottery of the lower Tagus and Guadalquivir, and parts of the Meseta. This distinctive tradition, in which notched decoration has been almost entirely replaced by incised and hemispherical bowls with flattened rims are a common form (fig. 1, 3) did not establish itself in the British Isles and the heavy, flat rim of the Jerpoint vessel contrasts with the insular Beaker tradition, which hardly has a place for the bowl form. The zoned decoration of the Jerpoint vessel with its diagonally hatched bands alternating with zigzag lines certainly comes close to the «Meseta» style (Delibes de Castro, 1977). While clearly not itself a «Meseta», or, for that matter, a «Palmela» bowl, the Jerpoint bowl may well have been made by a local potter who had seen such a bowl. Considering how far the products of the late Beaker industry of the lower Tagus and Guadalquivir were traded down the coast of Morocco (Savory, 1968, 179) it would not be altogether inconceivable that such things occasionally found their way as far north as the Irish Channel. The Cabinteely and Baunogenasraid bowls might represent similar copying of the occasional imported vessel at a somewhat earlier date; that such copying was more than the isolated whim of an individual is suggested by the enduring nature of the influence which the Drimnagh hanging bowl and the Early Bronze Age «pygmy cups» represent.

The possibility of trade and traders emanating from the Iberian peninsula, of which the occasional imported pot might be only a minor by-product, as early as the Copper Age, has an important bearing on the problem, still somewhat obscure, of the origins of the Irish copper industry and its bronze-using successor, which had such an important role in western Europe in the late 3rd and 2nd millennium B.C. It is now quite clear that the vast preponderance of the Bell Beaker and Zoned Beaker pottery found in Ireland reflects not the transmission of primary forms of «broad» Beaker by sea-routes

from western France and ultimately western Iberia to Ireland but that of locally evolved types of «tall» Beaker from northern France through southern England and the Bristol Channel area during the latter part of the 3rd millennium, to be followed centuries later by various types of British «necked» Beakers (Herity and Eogan, 1977, 114-32) \*. In view of the role of the Beaker Folk in spreading early metallurgy in north-west Europe generally, there has been a natural predisposition to attribute to them its introduction to Ireland. Unfortunately, however, recent metallurgical studies (Case, 1966; Northover, 1977) have shown that the types of metal used for the daggers and other small implements associated with early Beakers in the Low Countries and in Britain for the most part relate to central European and possibly Breton ores and technology, while the copper flat axes and halberds which are the characteristic products of the early Irish industry have their own distinctive pattern of impurities, with arsenic, antimony and silver but no nickel, and a tendency to add arsenic for technical purposes in the manner of early Iberian smiths, and there are no direct associations of these implements with Beaker pottery. While most Irish copper axeheads and halberds are of locally evolved forms, it is probably significant that the earliest form of flat axe in Ireland is trapezoidal in form and though rare, is chiefly found near the south coast, in the areas where most of the early copper-mining seems to have taken place (Case, 1966, 14-2-7 and Harbison, 1969). There is no space here to embark upon the difficult and highly technical subject of early mining, ores metallurgy, but the possibility that the contacts with the Iberian peninsula which the «Linkardstown» pottery seem to suggest, in the latter part of the 3rd millennium B.C., may have extended to metallurgy should be borne in mind.

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\* An exception to this is the stone archer's wristgaur (fig. 2.3) recently found in a disturbed deposit at Llantrithyd, Glamorgan (South Wales), which resembles western and southern French and peninsular forms rather than those characteristic of British Beaker burials (Cardiff Archaeological Society, 1977, 57-9).



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