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Title of report

Powerhouse of the West?: the possible wider influence of Irish Bronze Age material culture and ritual practices

Concise overview of the project

This project re-evaluates the present Ex Occidente Lux paradigm for the origins of metalworking in Ireland (Fig. 1). In light of typological evidence supported by use-wear analysis, an alternative possibility is considered; that the roots of Irish metallurgy lay in Iberia and eventually the influence of Irish material culture and ritual practices would extend across Early and Middle Bronze Age Britain and beyond.

Main findings

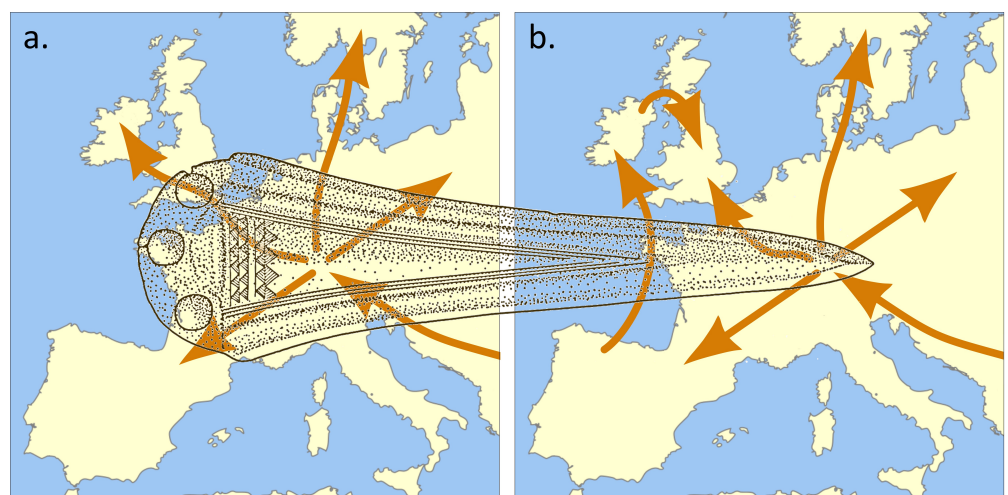
At about 1550-1500 BC—the commencement of the Middle Bronze Age in Britain and Ireland—there was a transition from the inclusion of metalwork in burials to its deposition in rivers and other wet places. While long the preferred tradition in Ireland, by the Late Bronze Age the cult of wet deposition became ubiquitous across both regions. Inspection of a readily identifiable subset of transitional artefacts, decorated bronze dirks and daggers, should chart the south-westward spread of a novel ‘destruction and immersion’ ritual.

Figure 1: (a.) Current and (b.) proposed model for the flow of metalworking skills and ritual practices in the Early and Middle Bronze Age

Impacts of the research

Far from being a peripheral net recipient of skills and ideas, at a pivotal period in Late Prehistory, Ireland may have been the cradle of innovative technologies and ‘religions’ the influence of which stretched from the Tay to the Thames. It appears possible, therefore, millennia before its renown for saints and scholars; Ireland was the land of mystics and metalworkers.

At least one image must accompany the report, though one can upload multiple images if they wish. Only images of the highest quality and at least 880x440mp will accompany the report on the Academy's website and in the annual review.



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