

Chapter 6: Precious Cups of the Early Bronze Age

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History of discovery and study

The first record of a cup belonging to the group of 'precious cups' defined for the Early Bronze Age dates back to 1774; it was found at Stoborough in Dorset seven years earlier and was possibly made of shale (cat. no. 16). The piece has been lost since early the following century and cannot be attributed to this group with absolute certainty. However, the burial rite and monument, described in enlightened fashion for the time, is patently consistent with an Early Bronze Age date (Hutchins 1774, 26–7; Gough 1786, xlv–xlvi). Moreover, by interpreting Gough's drawing rather than the schematic reconstruction in Hutchins, the cup has much in common with the subsequent finds of carved cups. In tune with the state of knowledge of the time Gough ventured: 'There is no pretence for this having been the body of Edward the Martyr, AD 978, but it is highly probable that it belonged to some petty prince or chieftain of the Saxon or Danish times.'

The next cup to come to light was the amber one from Hove, 1856 (cat. no. 11). We are fortunate to have another fine description of the grave and its contents with a sober assessment of their parallels (Phillips 1856). Phillips was able to make a number of comparisons with barrow material published by Colt Hoare which was already being ascribed to the 'Bronze Period'.

Three more cups were discovered or brought to antiquarian attention in the late 1860s. Already at this time Smirke, Way, Hutchinson and Kirwan were noting similarities between the first few cups known despite the fact that three different materials were involved. Smirke (1867, 192–3) and Way (1867, 197), in the first publication of the Rillaton gold cup (cat. no. 2; 30 years after its discovery), likened it to the Hove amber version. Although Albert Way had '...great difficulty in suggesting a date...' (ibid, 196), the associated bronze objects at the two sites, plus some other evidence from Cornwall and Scandinavia, led him '... to assign the relics to a remote period, when the use of that metal prevailed' (ibid). Way's further discussion of broader stylistic comparisons paid particular attention to corrugated objects, amongst them the Mold cape and the Cuxwold armlet, now linked together with the Rillaton and Ringlemere cups, *inter alia*, as part of an embossed tradition of goldworking (Needham 2000a).

Kirwan and Hutchinson were independently drawing a parallel between the newly excavated Farway shale cup (cat. no. 14, quickly followed by no. 15) and those from Rillaton and Hove (Kirwan 1867–8, 630–2; Hutchinson 1867–8). They both also drew attention to the earlier Stoborough find (above and cat. no. 16) thus bringing it in for consideration as a related vessel. Originally described as 'a small vessel of oak, of a black colour', Kirwan ventured that 'it is more probable... that it may have been of the Kimmeridge shale of the district' (1867–8, 628). He went on to make some comparisons with certain ceramic cups, but these have stood the test of time less well.

Later in the 19th century a second amber cup was unearthed, from the Clandon barrow, Dorset (cat. no. 10). Although the excavation was not properly published until much later (Drew and Piggott 1936), Abercromby dealt with it and the other three cups known in shale or amber in his comprehensive treatment of Bronze Age pottery. He commented that they 'are remarkable as regards both material and form, and more especially as they seem to have been turned on a lathe like similar wooden cups from Denmark' (Abercromby 1912, 29). On this point of technology he was following Evans (1897, 446), rather than Thurnam (1871, 524) who inclined towards hand turning. Thurnam seems to have been the first to note the comparison with surviving wooden cups or bowls from the Danish waterlogged coffin burials, but we now know that these are a little later than the precious series under consideration. Another key feature of Abercromby's publication was the early use of photographs, thus providing us with the first published examples of the two Farway cups and that from Clandon (1912, pl. LXII fig. 3a, pl. LXXXI figs 260, 261).

The next thorough treatment was by R.S. Newall, occasioned by Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum's acquisition of two shale cups (cat. nos 12 & 13) as part of the Job Edwards collection (Newall 1927–9). Sadly, the provenance of these two is effectively unknown; Newall concluded that 'probably Wiltshire' would be a safer description than the 'Amesbury neighbourhood' (ibid, 111) and we have followed his advice in even more tentative fashion here (possibly Wiltshire). By this time, the number of illustratable vessels in this series from England was eight. He listed but dismissed two other examples as of unknown form and date – from East Riding, Yorkshire, and Rempstone, Dorset. One of the Scandinavian wooden vessels (from Dragshoi) and ceramic cups from Swiss Lake sites were also mentioned, but are not now considered particularly relevant.

Piggott gave the shale and amber cups fairly brief discussion as part of his seminal formulation of the Wessex Culture, deferring to Newall (Piggott 1938, 82–3). However, he did make a rather pertinent suggestion regarding origins which was later to be taken up by Gerloff. Being at pains to find form parallels for the English precious cups and, moreover, given other evidence for links with the Aunjetitz world, Piggott wondered whether '...it may not be too fantastic to suggest connection with the handled cups of similar form characteristic of this phase' (1938, 83). He was of course referring to the many ceramic examples of the Aunjetitz and congenere cultures. He also noted the silver sheet fragments from St Fiacre (cat. no. 9) which he alternatively described as from a cup or a bowl (ibid, 68, 100). Aveneau de la Grancière, the excavator in 1898, thought that the fragments were unreconstructable and were from a burnt bronze vessel (Aveneau de la Grancière 1898, 88, 93).

At some point after 1938 restoration of the Saint-Fiacre fragments was attempted in the Ashmolean Museum by mounting them on a wooden former of the shape envisaged. Although we offer here a modified reconstruction, this earlier attempt showed that they belonged to a cup-sized vessel.

Even though the complete Gölenkamp example had been found much earlier, in the 19th century, it was the discovery of the Fritzdorf gold vessel in 1954 that first made clear that similar precious cups could occur on the Continent (von Uslar 1955). Von Uslar showed that although not identical vessels, the Fritzdorf and Rillaton cups were strikingly similar in their handles and rivet fixings. A decade later Briard linked the lost gold object from Ploumilliau (cat. no. 6) to this precious cup series (Briard 1965, 76–7).

So by the time of Sabine Gerloff's important review of these cups in the early 70s (Gerloff 1975, 177–96), it was clear that an interrelated series could be identified stretching from Cornwall and Brittany in the west, to the middle Rhine in the east. Potential examples that she considered from more outlying locations – the Cuxwold ornament from Lincolnshire and the Caldas de Reyes cups from Pontevedra province, Spain – can be dismissed from this series for different reasons. The former can now be seen to be so similar to the Lockington armlets as to leave little doubt of a similar identification (an identification suggested by many scholars over time; Needham 2000a). The three handled cups in the Caldas de Reyes hoard are thick and heavy (between 540 and 640g), having been cast by the lost-wax method, and they are of rather different style from the series under consideration here (Armbruster 1996; 2000, 128–35, 201–2). The dating of the large Caldas de Reyes treasure has been much debated, but Armbruster points out that both the technology of the cups and the many associated massive-bar ornaments (arm- and neck-rings) are in keeping with a later Bronze Age date, rather than earlier.

Consolidation of a 'Rhineland' distribution came with the public appearance in 1974 of the Eschenz example, it having been unearthed much earlier in 1916 (Hardmeyer and Bürgi 1975). Coming from the head of the Rhine in the Alpine foreland, Eschenz indicated penetration of this precious cup series into the heart of Europe. The research it engendered also brought into the open the 19th-century find from Gölenkamp, near the German/Dutch border, a vessel with some significant similarities, but in many ways the most deviant of the whole group under discussion.

At about the time that Eschenz was published, Jacques Briard was excavating a second silver example from a tomb at Saint-Adrien (Briard 1978; Briard 1984, 134 fig. 83, 135 fig. 84, 225–6); this added further weight to the Armorican distribution (cat. no. 8). The only other related find we are aware of since is a cup published for the first time in 2001 (Wamser and Gebhard 2001) and said to be from Germany, but wholly lacking any contextual or historical information, a decidedly unfortunate situation given its potential importance (cat. no. 7).

For the sake of completeness, mention needs to be made of two small rim fragments of jet vessels or ornaments, both from Northumberland. The respective publishers have suggested they could come from vessels, but neither comes from a well-dated

context. The fragment from Hebburn Moor is part of a surface collection made over many decades (Newbiggin 1941) and cannot necessarily be accepted as Bronze Age or even prehistoric. Its radius of curvature is not given. The second fragment was excavated by George Jobey from within a small double entrance enclosure (hengiform), where it was 'lying on the disturbed brash surface above bed-rock' (Jobey 1966, 37–42 fig. 15). The fragment is under 4cm long and 1.8cm deep with an estimated external diameter of 10cm; the wall thickens towards the rim which has a flat top and bulbous outer lip. Jobey was not confident that this was from a cup.

With the final addition of Ringlemere, the current distribution of Early Bronze Age precious cups is that shown in **Figure 28**. The intensity of the distribution along the southern coastal strip of England is striking, but may be enhanced by deposition and recovery factors relative to the opposite shores of France and Belgium. The Armorican finds also basically fall within 'coastal' zones, although Saint-Fiacre would seem to relate to the Morbihan coast facing the Bay of Biscay rather than to the Channel. At the east end of the distribution, the three provenanced finds are more inland, although two come from locations on the Rhine and the Gölenkamp example is not far distant from the Frisian coast (100km).

Comparative features of the cups

Before exploring further the contacts and transfer of influences implied by the precious cups, it is necessary to review the series and the extent to which they represent a single phenomenon, or ideal of style or usage. For Sabine Gerloff, an important common property was the biconical shape combined with a single handle (1975). Of course they are also united by being fairly small vessels, but size in itself cannot be a defining attribute since small vessels also occur among the ceramic repertoires of the north-west European Early Bronze Age.

The presence of a handle is similarly of limited value as a defining feature, not least because a minority of the precious cups actually lacks handles. Again, handles can occur on various types of ceramic pot in Britain (see below) and are standard on the aptly named vases à anses of Brittany, but they only systematically appear on cup-sized ceramics further inland in continental Europe (**Fig. 28**). In fact, Gerloff, developing an initial suggestion from Piggott (1938, 83), argued persuasively that many ceramic cups of the mature Early Bronze Age in the middle to upper Rhinelands – belonging to the Adlerberg and related cultures – offered good form parallels for some of the north-western precious ones (Gerloff 1975, 184). This connection remains significant, we believe, and deserves further exploration of transmission process and reason for imitation.

What has become clearer from our new study of the cups is that although there are many common features, not all examples conform in all key respects. Indeed, when examined on a trait by trait basis, there is a surprising amount of diversity (**Fig. 29**; **Tables 4 & 5**). No specific trait forms are universal and few are predominant among the series. This variability needs to be examined in relation to geography, chronology and material used.

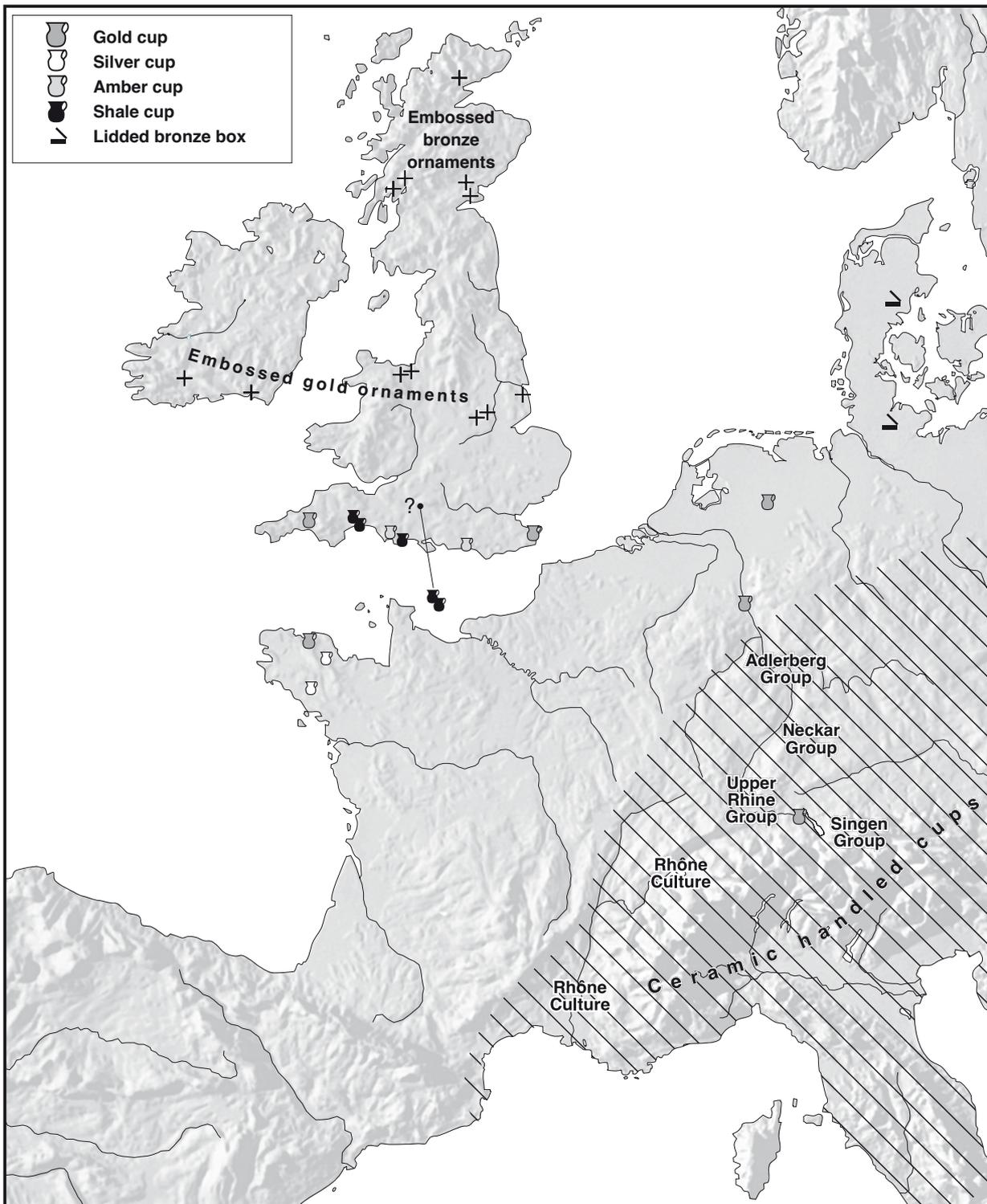


Figure 28 Map of recovery for north-west European Early Bronze Age precious cups. Also shown are the sources of inspiration for form and technology – ceramic handled cups and embossed sheet metalwork.

Gold

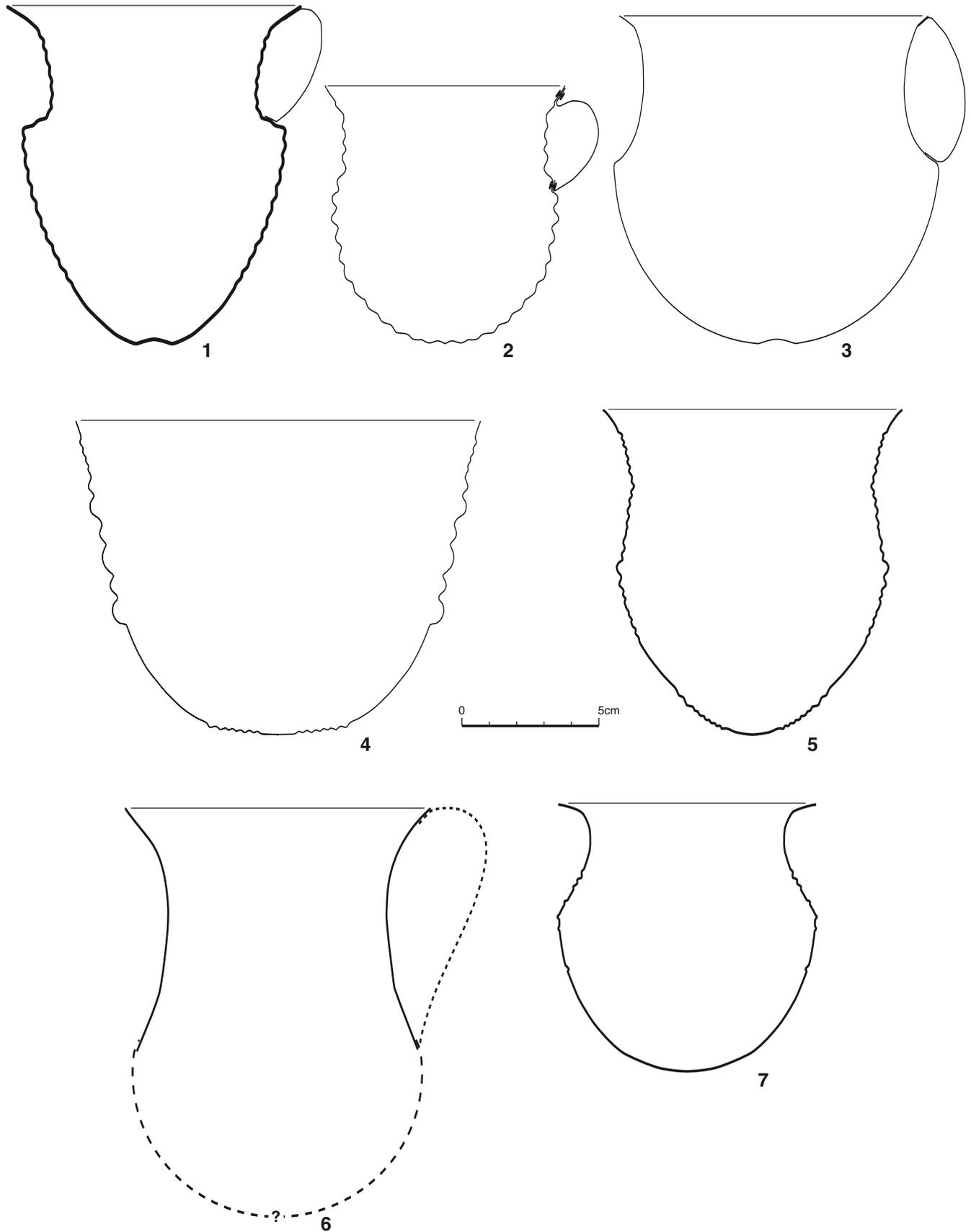
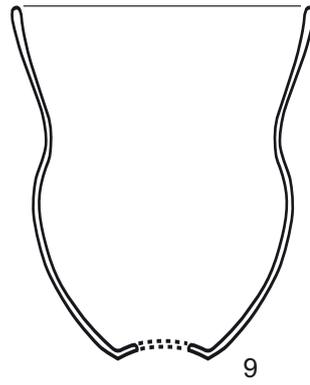
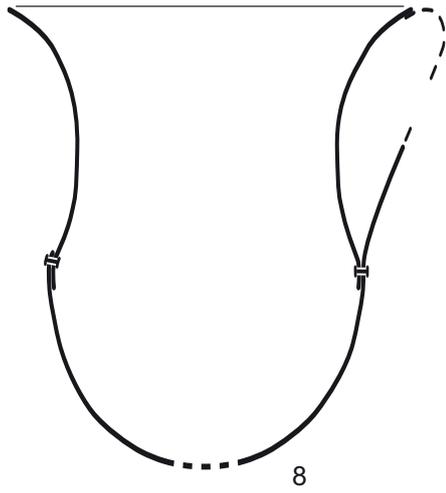
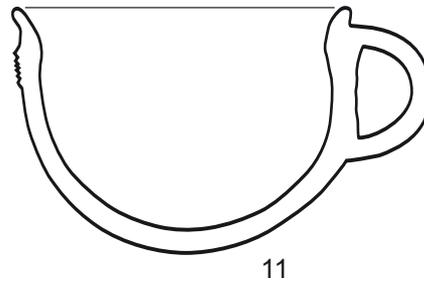
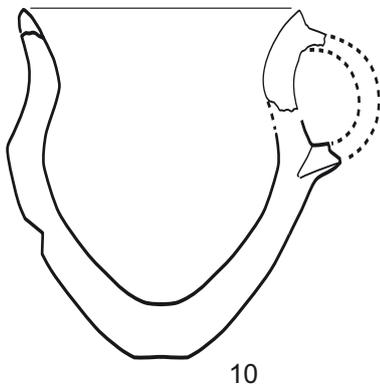


Figure 29 Comparative profiles of the precious cups (for full 'ideal reconstructions' see respective catalogue entries)

Silver



Amber



Shale

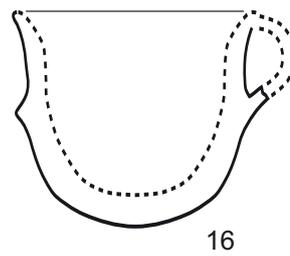
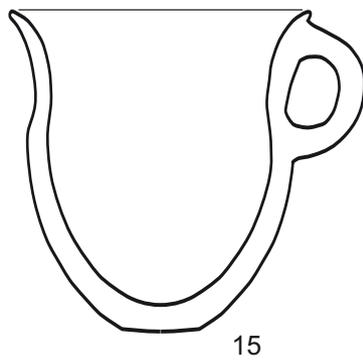
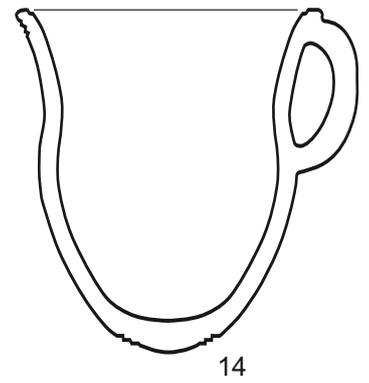
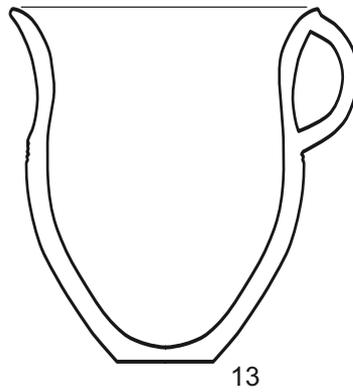
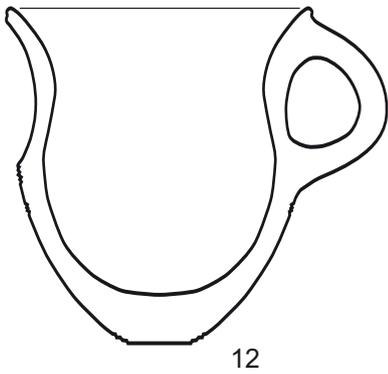


Table 4 Summary of principal dimensions of precious cups as reconstructed

Provenance	Height (mm)	Mouth diam.(mm)	Carination diam.(mm)	Weight (g)	Capacity (litres)
1. Ringlemere	123	109	96	184	0.60
2. Rillaton	95	85.5	77.5	77	0.36
3. Fritzdorf	121	116	122	221	0.91
4. Gölenkamp	116.5	149	-	255	1.31
5. Eschenz	118	110	98.5	136	0.69
6. Ploumilliau	>90	110	98	Lost	>0.52
7. No provenance	98	94	94	90	0.45
8. Saint-Adrien	122	106	86	Fragmentary	0.53
9. Saint-Fiacre	93	80	68	Fragmentary	0.31
10. Clandon	92	76	80	(115, as restored)	0.21
11. Hove	65	89	88.5	-	0.21
12. ?Wiltshire 1	88.5	80	73	Incomplete	0.20
13. ?Wiltshire 2	93	82	72	Incomplete	0.23
14. Farway 1	90	80	66.5	- 0.23	
15. Farway 2	85	77.5	69.5	Incomplete	0.18
16. Stoborough	55	65	60	Lost	0.08

Table 5 Summary of attribute variation for precious cups

Provenance	Cat. no.	Metal/ carved	1 or 2 part body	Grooves/ embossing ¹	Handle ²	No. handle grooves	No. rivets	Washers ²	Other handle grooves ³	Body ⁴	Mouth form ⁵	Carin ⁶	Base form ⁷
Gölenkamp	4	M	1	C	a	-	-	-	-	S	3	0	2
No prov.	7	M	1	C	a	-	-	-	-	M	1	2	1
Eschenz	5	M	1	C	a	-	-	-	-	N	2	1	1
Rillaton	2	M	1	S	p	5	3	p	0	N	2	2	1
Ringlemere	1	M	1	S	p	3	4	p	0	N	1	3	3
Fritzdorf	3	M	1	0	p	3	4	p	0	M	2	3	3
St Fiacre	9	M	(1)	0	a	-	-	-	-	(N)	4	1	(3)
St Adrien	8	M	2	0	p	(0)	7	a	0	N	1	2	(1)
Ploumilliau	6	M	2	0	p	?	7	a?	-	-	2	-	-
Farway 1	14	C	1	C	p	2	-	-	0	N	3	1	1
Stoborough	16	C	(1)	C	(p)	-	-	-	-	S	(3?)	3	(1?)
Hove	11	C	1	S	p	5	-	-	T	S	3	2	1
Clandon	10	C	1	0 (S?)	p	(0)	-	-	-	M	3	2	2
?Wiltshire 1	12	C	1	S	p	3	-	-	TV	N	2	2	2
?Wiltshire 2	13	C	1	S	p	4	-	-	T	N	2	1	2
Farway 2	15	C	1	S	p	2	-	-	0	N	2	1	2

Key

- N/A
- 1 0: none, S: simple design, C: complex design
- 2 a or p: absent or present respectively
- 3 0: absent, T: transverse, V: v-shaped
- 4 Body proportions - S: squat, M: medium, N: narrow
- 5 Mouth form - 1: very flared, 2: moderately flared, 3: slightly flared, 4: slightly convex
- 6 Carination - 0: none, 1: slight, 2: moderate, 3: strong
- 7 Base form - 1: rounded, 2: flat or near-flat, 3: omphalos

There is a surprising spectrum of capacities from as little as 0.08 l to 1.3 l (calculated from the estimated original profiles; Table 4). The main variation in capacity is straightforwardly explained by difference in materials. All of the carved cups of amber and shale have capacities under 0.25 l. Most form a tight group between about 0.18 and 0.23 l. The unavoidable thickness of the body of the carved cups severely reduces their capacity relative to a sheet metal vessel of comparable external dimensions. A second factor is that, for the amber ones in particular, size would have been limited by the block of raw material it was possible to obtain.

The metal cups all have capacities greater than 0.3 l but in a broad range extending to over a litre. The smallest estimated capacity, for Saint-Fiacre, is uncertain due to its very fragmentary state. Rillaton, Saint-Adrien and the unprovenanced cup fall between about 0.36 and 0.53 l; Ringlemere and Eschenz between about 0.60 and 0.7 l and

Ploumilliau would have been comparable if its lower body matched the shape of Saint-Adrien. The Fritzdorf vessel has a larger capacity of approaching a litre while Gölenkamp is larger still, primarily because it has no carination and the body continues to flare unchecked all the way to the rim.

The number of cups is small, but it is possible that there is a trend with larger capacities found in more easterly locations than the smaller ones. This can only be tested for the metal versions given the more restricted geographical occurrence of the carved cups. However, the four largest capacities (>0.65 l) come from Kent and the Rhineland group, with just the possible addition of Ploumilliau. Three of the smaller capacities (<0.5 l) are from Cornwall and Armorica; the fourth is the unprovenanced gold cup.

In terms of the underlying body form (ie ignoring initially corrugations and grooves), the strongly flared mouth of the Ringlemere cup is really only closely paralleled on the

unprovenanced gold one and the St Adrien silver cup (nos 7–8; **Fig. 29; Table 5** – mouth form 1). The shoulder-like form of the carination is equally unusual, only Fritzdorf (no. 3) coming close. Other cups have moderate or indistinct carinations, with the exception of Gölenkamp (no. 4) which has no break at all in its flared profile. Fritzdorf also has a neat small omphalos, a feature otherwise only present at Saint-Fiacre, according to our new reconstruction. To isolate these three in this respect may, however, be a little artificial since most of the other cups also have a defined base roundel which, when not an omphalos, can be either a rib-encircled boss or a flattened circular surface, in either case of small diameter. Only the Hove cup (no. 11) certainly lacks any defined base feature, the fragmentary nature of Saint-Adrien (no. 8; **Fig. 47**) precluding certainty. Whether the bases are omphaloid, rounded or flat, they all basically give rise to cups that would have great difficulty standing unaided on a flat surface, especially when full of liquid; they are inherently ‘unstable’.

Body proportions are rather variable through the series with two, and perhaps three, cups being particularly squat (Hove, Gölenkamp and Stoborough no. 16). However, the majority, at least eight cups including Ringlemere, have relatively slender proportions (carination diameter/height less than 0.82). There is no correlation between body proportions and geographical location.

Decoration of the body is generally fairly restrained and two main types correlate with the material employed. The corrugations seen on Ringlemere are a feature now uniting five gold cups, while the other four metal cups (two of gold, two silver) probably all had uncorrugated sheet bodies with decoration restricted to punched dot rows at the rim. In contrast, six out of the seven carved cups (amber and shale) carry narrow bands (or broader fields on one) of multiple incised grooves. These do not mimic the corrugations either in scale or coverage and yet this could have been achieved by a highly competent craftsman if desired. Indeed, it would appear that the Clandon cup (no. 10; **Fig. 49**), otherwise plain, was given a single crescentic groove on the lower body opposite the handle. Conversely, the metal versions could just as easily have been decorated with incised lines if directly copying the shale/amber versions. The implication is that these two decorative forms were for some reason integral to the respective materials, technologies or traditions of production. There was an accepted way of decorating a precious cup according to the material from which it was made.

The corrugations are in fact treated very differently on each cup on which they occur. Rillaton (no. 2; **Colour Pls 5–6; Fig. 41**) bears truly sinuous corrugations of fairly constant amplitude and depth until they get close to the base. In contrast, the corrugations meet in well defined, albeit obtuse, angles on Ringlemere to give a continuously cusped profile; again there is only a little variation in amplitude. Gölenkamp (no. 4; **Colour Pl. 9; Fig. 43**) has two distinct grades: small sinuous corrugations in a band below the rim and concentrically on the base; much larger bulbous ribs on the main body separated by flat zones carrying boss rows. Two grades are also present on Eschenz (no. 5; **Colour Pl. 10; Fig. 44**), but the larger is represented by just a single prominent rib on the carination; it divides two fields of continuous small corrugations. It too has boss rows, but also totally novel components: panels of diagonal

ribs on the lower body and a single band of embossed cabling. Each element of the last is in the shape of a stretched out ‘S’.

The unprovenanced, ?Germany cup (no. 7; **Fig. 46**) is similar to Eschenz in having a relatively elaborate embossed design employing ribs in different motifs. A limited number of narrow horizontal corrugations divide the body into registers. The lower two are filled respectively with alternating panels involving in both cases vertical ribs. The lowest register has intervening reserved triangles with a supplementary rib along the top border; in the register above, vertical-rib panels alternate with long oval, dot-lined grooves. The shoulder field is plain but for horizontal ribs, while the neck has yet another novel motif – a continuous double zigzag again executed as dot-lined grooves which spring from a horizontal double dot-groove just under the rim. This recalls the band of decoration inside the mouth of Farway 1 (no. 14; **Colour Pl. 13; Fig. 53**) and the single motif on top of the handle of ?Wiltshire 1 (no. 12; **Fig. 51**). However, it is also carried through onto the later flask like vessels from Villeneuve-Saint-Vistre, and Lienewitzer Forst (**Colour Pl. 14; Springer 2003, 15–16 figs 7 & 8; Eluère 1982, 104–7 figs. 125–6, 159 fig. 158; Ellmers 2003**). In fact, it is easy to see these latter vessels as the direct descendants of the Eschenz/ ?Germany’ form of the early series, but now with the addition of the encircled boss motif (*Kreisbuckel*) which so critically marks out the later tradition of Bronze Age embossed gold (Gerloff 1995; Needham 2000a, 48).

The distinctive handles present on many of the Early Bronze Age cups have commanded much attention in the past. They are not universally present, however, and it is noteworthy that the three examples on which they are definitely absent are among the four furthest East in the overall distribution. This may be another point of significance in the heralding of the predominantly handle-free series of embossed gold vessels of the later stages of the Bronze Age in northern central Europe.

At least 11, and possibly 12, cups had handles, all four materials being represented. The handle evidently had not survived on the Ploumilliau piece (no. 6; **Fig. 45**), but seven rivet emplacements under the rim testify to its original existence. Of the remaining 10, or 11, at least 8 carry groove decoration running parallel with the convex sides. This is either incised on the carved materials or formed as narrow corrugations on the metal ones – Ringlemere included. The type of decoration on the Saint-Adrien handle (no. 8; **Fig. 47**) mentioned by Briard (1984, 225) is not described, while the surviving handle stumps of the Clandon amber cup (no. 10; **Fig. 49**) show no groove ends; normally they extend the whole length of the handle. Handle grooves occur as a band of between two and five on either side of the handle, with three being the most recurrent, as seen on Ringlemere, Fritzdorf (no. 3; **Fig. 42**) and the shale cup from ?Wiltshire 1 (no. 12; **Fig. 51**). Three of the carved cups also have horizontal grooves on the handle, usually at top and bottom thus forming a frame with the side bands, and one of these (?Wiltshire 1) has in addition the double-line ‘V’ motif suspended from the top.

The handles are all waisted to some degree, expanding top and bottom towards the body attachments. This ‘hourglass’ shape is in fact widespread on ceramic vessels which have handles from many periods and is presumably a general attempt to provide a stronger union with the body; such handles are separate components which are luted onto and/or plugged into

the body. Where the precious metal cups have a handle, it too is attached, although in one case (Saint-Adrien, no. 8; **Fig. 47**) it is formed as an extension of the lower body portion and only needed attachment at the top. This is also likely to have been the construction used for Ploumilliau (no. 6; **Fig. 45**). The five metal handles were fixed by between three and seven rivet emplacements per end; perhaps significantly seven rivets occur on the two Breton handled cups, while fewer were used elsewhere: three at Rillaton (no. 2; **Fig. 41**), four at Ringlemere and Fritzdorf (no. 3; **Fig. 42**). It is only on these last three that rivet-washers survive and the closely matching diamond shape on Rillaton and Fritzdorf which has long attracted comment (von Uslar 1955) now extends to Ringlemere.

There is evidence for a handle on all of the extant carved cups although this is a tentative interpretation for Stoborough (see cat. no. 16) and this would have been shaped from an initial lug left on one side of the block being worked (Sloper 1989). Experience would quickly have taught the craftsmen that the waisted shape desired would naturally have arisen by cutting the sides of the lug to a trapezoid plan tapering away from the body (*contra* Sloper's fig. 1a). If cut thus as flat planes converging on one another outwards, the intersection of those planes with the curved handle profile would naturally result in the classic waisted shape in face view. The precise degree of waisting may have been less easy to predict while roughing out the blank and this makes it difficult to assess the significance of the spectrum of curvatures found. The strongest waist curvatures all occur on carved cups (Hove no. 11, ?Wiltshire 1 no. 12, Farway 2 no. 15; **Figs 50, 51 & 54**), with the Ringlemere handle being more intermediate.

There is one further decorative feature to be discussed – the occurrence of pointillé rows. These are subtle in their impact – sometimes to the point of being easily overlooked – and yet would seem to be of symbolic importance or an engrained part of a tradition, for they occur on virtually all of the metal cups. No evidence survives on the Saint-Fiacre fragments (no. 9; **Fig. 48**) and the feature is definitely absent from Gölenkamp (no. 4; **Fig. 43**). In every other example one or two horizontal rows occur just below the rim, although at Rillaton (no. 2; Kinnes 1994, A26) only a short row beside the handle exists. Normally, the rows are punched directly into the plain band below the rim, but on the Eschenz example (no. 5; **Fig. 44**) they have been set into the uppermost two grooves of the neck corrugations. This groove-set pointillé is echoed on the unprovenanced gold cup (no. 7; **Fig. 46**) – in its oval motifs as well as the V motifs suspended below the standard under-rim pointillé.

As relatively consistent as its presence is on the metal cups, such dot decoration is wholly absent from the carved cups. That their materials would not have lent themselves so readily to taking dot decoration may be a factor; nevertheless, some similar effect could surely have been achieved if this was really important to convey a certain message. It is noteworthy, for example, that contemporary spacer-plate beads of jet include dots in their decoration. We do therefore seem to have an unexplained feature which was important to the integrity of the gold and silver vessels, but not to that of the amber and shale ones. Dot decoration does have a long ancestry on sheet metalwork going back, in north-western Europe, to the earliest ornaments of the Copper Age (c. 2500–2150 BC; Taylor 1980, 22–4). While this ancestry does not in itself explain the meaning

of the dots on the cups, it does give a strong line of continuity in the realm of prestige metalwork.

Dating evidence, sequence and origins

Seven of the 16 cups have associations that may help with relative dating; not all are necessarily closed associations and they are also weighted towards the west, five in England, two in Brittany. This makes it particularly difficult to ascertain the relationship with Adlerberg ceramic cups in the critical interaction zone of the Rhinelands (**Fig. 28**).

The two Armorican silver cups (nos 8 & 9) both come from tombs that contained relatively rich inventories. The possibility has been raised that in both cases these inventories were the product of more than one burial event spread over a long enough time for perceptible change to have occurred in classic grave goods (Needham 2000b). Both, however, are series 2 assemblages, where the last diagnostic accompaniments can be dated to the Kernonen-Kerodou phase, c. 1950–1750 BC. In the case of the well excavated grave of Brun Bras at Saint-Adrien (no. 8), it seems almost certain (given the absence of a body) that the cup was among a small group of prestige items surrounding the latest interment in a coffin (Briard 1984, 56 fig. 33); a Trévère type dagger is included and is considered diagnostic of Kernonen-Kerodou (Needham 2000b, 173). These are among the earliest demonstrable contexts for precious cups. A radiocarbon determination on an oak plank in the Brun Bras grave gave an even earlier date (3650 ± 35 BP; GrN-7176; 2140–1930 cal BC), but is potentially based on mature wood.

A specific context for the Ringlemere cup must remain unproven (see above), but even if not in closed association, it is likely to be significant that the cup and the two amber objects are the only Early Bronze Age artefacts recovered from the site so far (excluding Beaker material) and all were recovered from a limited area of the interior. Because the cup has certain similarities to that from Rillaton, it was at first assumed that they would be closely contemporary, datable to the period of Wessex 2. However, the detailed morphological and technical comparisons made above, plus the clear fact that precious cups had an overall currency of some three to four centuries, allow scope for reconsideration. The two amber objects at Ringlemere are best dated earlier, broadly contemporary with the Bush Barrow grave series of Wessex 1, c. 1950–1750/1700 BC. The pommel is best paralleled in the Manton grave, in Wessex (whose second cup is not of Aldbourne type characteristic of the succeeding phase – *contra* Taylor 2005, 316, 324, but instead a Longworth type 7, trunco-conic cup – Longworth 1984, 52), while the probable pendant has parallels in both Wessex and more specifically in the Kernonen tomb, eponymous to the contemporary phase in Armorica.

The Clandon amber cup (no. 10) is more certainly of this earlier phase. Although apparently not deposited as a classic grave group (Drew and Piggott 1936), it and a few other prestige objects were clearly part of a single depositional horizon trapped between the inner cairn and a later mound enlargement. The objects associated at this horizon are all acceptable as specific to the Bush Barrow/ Wessex 1 period (Gerloff 1975, 182).

Three British contexts are of the subsequent, Camerton-Snowhill grave series, c. 1750–1550 BC, a Camerton-Snowhill dagger being present in each case. The associated cups are of gold, amber and shale showing that varied materials coexisted.

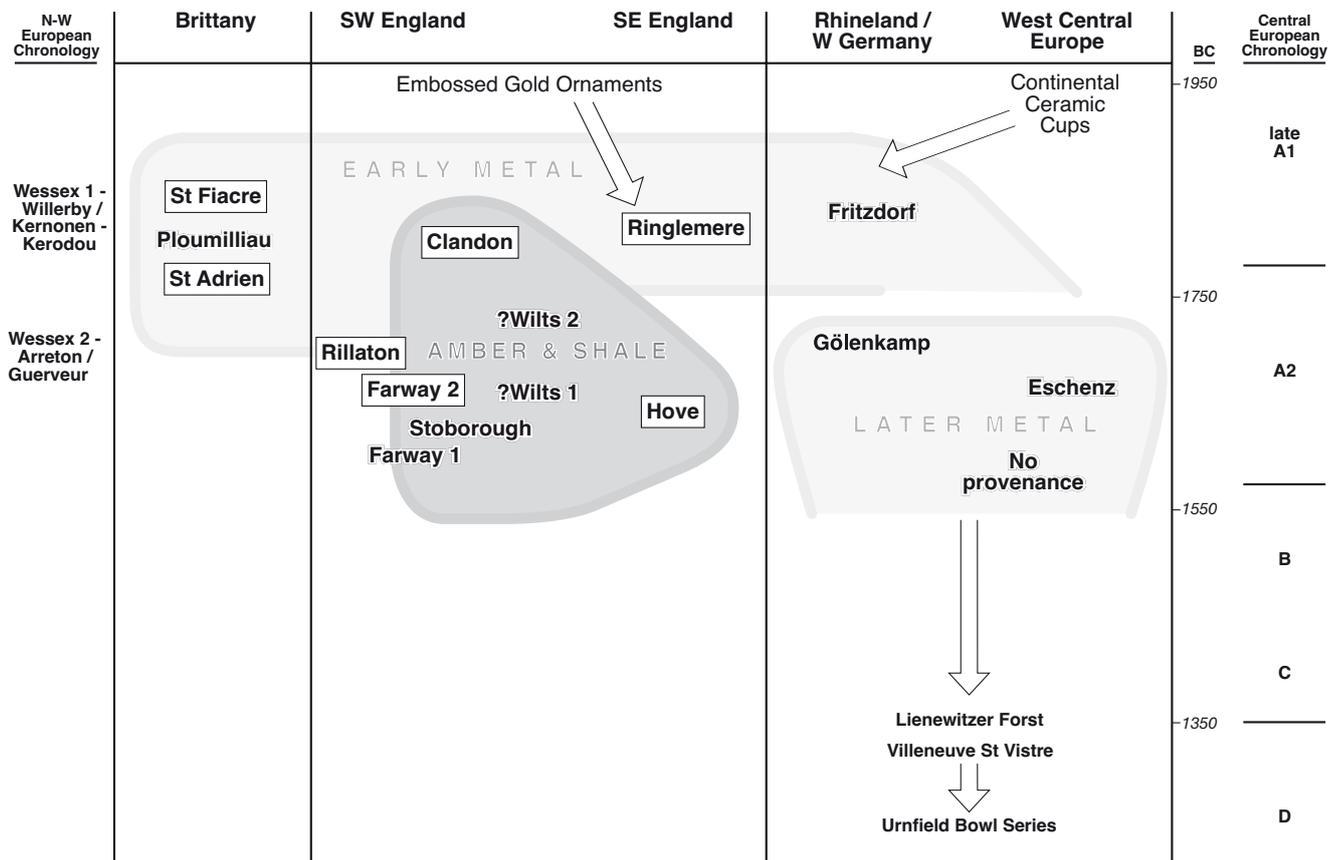


Figure 30 Suggested chronology for Early Bronze Age precious cups

At Rillaton (no. 2) the cist also contained other objects now lost, but no useful descriptions or depictions are known. At Farway 2 (no. 15) the dagger lay on charred material, the cup approximately 1m away; both were among the stones of the central cairn, but may not represent exactly the same depositional event. Finally, the Hove cup (no. 11) came from a closed grave group (Colour Pl. 12); not only is the dagger closely datable typologically, but so too is the developed style of battle-axe present – Roe's stage V Snowhill type (1966, 237). A perforated whetstone is less diagnostic in itself, but is a type primarily placed in graves during the Camerton-Snowhill phase (Wessex 2). A final piece of evidence from Hove is a radiocarbon date on remains of the coffin, 3190 ± 46 BP (BM-682; 1610–1310 cal BC); this is an early-run measurement and now looks a little on the young side.

With these fixed points and the evidence of feature comparisons between individual cups it is possible to venture a tentative chronology for the whole series (Fig 30). The Saint-Fiacre (no. 9) and Saint-Adrien (no. 8) cups are both plain-bodied, excepting under-rim pointillé; the third Breton, incomplete example (no. 6) matches in this respect and has the bipartite construction of the latter. It is thus also best placed in an early phase. Its associated gold spoon or ladle has a dot row outlining the handle, decoration recurrently found on early sheet goldwork from primary Beaker times on.

Clandon (no. 10) too, just across the Channel from Brittany, is essentially undecorated and this raises the likelihood that the remaining plain-bodied vessel, Fritzdorf (no. 3), is of an early phase. From an interpretive point of view this helps to make sense of the initial north-westwards transmission of the idea of handled, unstable cups from the middle Rhineland or beyond, where the ceramic versions abound. Fritzdorf's handle and its

fixing are of neat workmanship, whereas the body seems rather less proficient even allowing for later denting and distortion (Colour Pl. 8). The omphalos is neatly executed, but this would be a technically easier feat than obtaining good all-round shaping of the body.

Connections between Armorica and western central Europe are clearly attested at this date. Not only is there the general stylistic parallelism seen in the mutual adoption of long grooved daggers a little earlier (Quimperlé and Rumédon types in Armorica; Oder-Elbe types in northern Aunjetitz zone), there are four daggers at Singen (close to Eschenz) of Atlantic inspiration if not manufacture (Krause 1988; Gerloff 1993, 75 footnote 48) and, more poignantly, a Rhône-type dagger in the Saint-Fiacre assemblage (Needham 2000b, 164 fig. 6.6). One should also mention the Gaubickelheim hoard from the middle Rhine in which one dagger betrays some affinity with the Breton Quimperlé style (Hundt 1971; Needham 2000c, 40).

Ringlemere would thus stand out as the one early cup which was not plain-bodied; is this a problem? Certainly if Fritzdorf is early, we have an ideal model for the handle and its fixings, plus important similarities in profile, which leaves only the matter of the corrugated body. Embossed goldworking had already been developed to a highly proficient standard in central Britain by the years either side of 2000 BC, at this date employed for ribbed armlets (Needham 2000a) – so the technology and the ribbed style were already available by the time the idea of precious cups emerged in the lands flanking the Channel and the Rhine. Since these cups were for the most part individual interpretations, indeed individual creations by leading craftsmen at their respective points of gestation, it is eminently plausible that the conjunction of cup and embossing could have been made early on, as soon as these influences impinged on one another.

Arguments based on the technical sophistication involved can also be dismissed once it is appreciated that the Mold gold cape may date as early as the period in question or, if later, only a little later (Needham 2000a). There is no particular obstacle to an early date for the Ringlemere cup and nothing specific to push it later; it may be that it was indeed contemporary with the amber items from the site.

Rather than allowing Rillaton to drag down the date of Ringlemere, it may be that it would be worthwhile to consider whether Ringlemere should elevate the date of Rillaton. The context of Rillaton is as solidly dated as it can be in the absence of most of the grave group; Camerton-Snowhill daggers are still best interpreted as a later style than those in the Bush Barrow grave series, despite earlier debates on the subject. However, the Rillaton cup hardly seems to be in fine condition, especially when it is considered that unlike many of the other cups, it was protected from the weight of a mound by a stone cist. The difficulties of discriminating between ancient and more modern wear notwithstanding, the condition of the upper original rivet suggests that the cup was far from fresh when buried.

Thus far, we would suggest that an early phase of cups includes plain-bodied examples of gold (2), silver (2) and amber (1). One or both of the simple-ribbed gold cups may also belong this early. Three gold cups from west central Europe are the only remaining metal cups and are not dated by association. In all three the embossed decoration is more complex than on the British pieces. All three have no handle, thereby departing from the previous ideal. The design of Eschenz (no. 5; **Colour Pl. 10**) and, even more so, that of the unprovenanced cup (no. 7; **Fig. 46**) seem to be moving towards the earliest of the later Bronze Age vessel series of continental Europe. In particular, it is not hard to see the flasks from Villeneuve-Saint-Vistre and Lienewitzer Forst (**Colour Pl. 14**; Eluère 1982, 104–7 figs. 125–6, 159 fig. 158; Springer (ed) 2003, 293–7; Ellmers 2003), dated to around the 14th century BC, as being direct descendants of the style and technique, albeit once the new array of motifs appropriate to the later (Urnfield) series had become key design elements.

The final group to be discussed in terms of dating comprises the majority of the carved cups, excluding only Clandon which has been dealt with. The associations at Farway 2 (no. 15) and Hove (no. 11) are of the later phase – Camerton-Snowhill – and the others can be argued to belong here on stylistic cross-linking. All have horizontal groove bands, while the more complex motifs on Stoborough and Farway 1 have parallels with designs on late metal vessels. The vertical-to-diagonal hatching of the lower body of Stoborough (no. 16; **Fig. 55**) could represent the same theme as the diagonal-filled panels seen in a similar position at Eschenz (no. 5; **Fig. 44**), while Farway 1 (no. 14; **Colour Pl. 13**) shares with the unprovenanced cup (no. 7; **Fig. 46**) a row of deep pendant triangles, or zig-zags. The zig-zag is of course a commonly employed motif in decorating a variety of materials and was certainly frequently used on Beaker ceramics at an earlier date. However, the position on the two cups, descending from the rim, makes them strikingly similar, albeit that one is carved inside the mouth, the other is impressed from outside, creating ribs inside.

The single ‘V’ motif on the handle of the ?Wiltshire 1 vessel (no. 12; **Fig. 51**) may be linked less certainly to the continuous triangle row. Otherwise, the two ?Wiltshire vessels share with

Hove (no. 11; **Fig. 50**) transverse handle grooves, these additional to the edging groove bands present on the whole group, but apparently absent at Clandon (no. 10; **Fig. 49**).

Flattened bases link the two ?Wiltshire cups (nos 12 & 13; **Fig. 29**) and that from Farway 2 (no. 15) with the Gölenkamp late gold vessel (no. 4), but it also appears earlier at Clandon (no. 10). Another base form, the ringed-roundel, puts Farway 1 (no. 14) with the other later gold cups, Eschenz (no. 5) and unprovenanced (no. 7); indeed Rillaton (no. 2) as now reconstructed would have been a variant on this theme. Even the multiple rings on the flatter Gölenkamp base (**Fig. 43**) reflect a similar concern with neatly styled concentric design at the very bottom, where earlier some had neat omphaloi or were simply rounded. Farway 1 is unique among the carved cups in adopting this otherwise gold-focused design theme.

To summarise and simplify the complex interactions and chronology deduced above, it is possible to define three groups of precious cups (**Fig. 30**). Chronological primacy can be given to an *Early Metal Group* comprising six vessels of silver and gold. Rillaton may be a little later but otherwise these can be attributed to the period c. 1950–1750 BC (Kernonen-Kerodou/ Bush Barrow/ Reinecke A1b). They were initially inspired by the ceramic cups of west central Europe and the Rhône Culture which share in having single handles and frequently being unstable. Fritzdorf was pivotal typologically and geographically in this formulation of precious metal cups. Why this imitation should have occurred is discussed below. An alternative source of inspiration is feasible for the Breton cups, given the Rhône culture connections, but it seems highly unlikely that these two developments would have happened in isolation from one another. The inter-regional contacts traversing northern France mentioned above could easily have promoted parallel developments in certain spheres.

Cups of the *Carved Group* in amber and shale (seven vessels) were first developed during the early period as attested by the Clandon find, but the great majority thus far would seem to belong to the succeeding period, c. 1750–1550 BC (Camerton-Snowhill/ Reinecke A2–beginning B). Given the prevailing chronology and the fact that all are from southern England, it is most likely that they were a response to the early metal cups, rather than having been directly inspired by the ultimate ceramic prototypes.

Third is a *Later Metal Group* comprising just three cups with more complex embossing from west central Europe. These show the transfer of embossing skills *par excellence* to continental Europe (Needham 2000a, 46–8) and anticipate the vigorous uptake of embossing for fine gold vessels and the supreme status equipment represented by the crowns of west-central Europe (Schauer 1986 Springer 2003). In the design of these late metal cups a handle was usually not considered necessary and they were thus in some respects departing from the later British series. Nevertheless, there would appear to have been continuing connections at some level to account for certain shared features.

A chronological overlap is possible between the Later Metal Group and the four embossed vessels from Biha in Roumania, if we accept Mozsolics (1965–6, 10ff, 56–7, pls 4–10) dating of them to the Hajdúsámson period, c. 16th century BC. However, these are so utterly different in morphology and decoration that it is hard to see any connection to the north-west European series.

They are shallow bowls with squat necks, the neck formed of a single or double concave profile; the necks on three turn out horizontally and the handle projects initially in line; the style and technology of the handles is totally distinct from our series and they may never have rejoined the body lower down (only one is complete); the main embossing on three of the Biha vessels is continuous vertical ribbing below the carination, each rib tapering towards the base. The base itself is in two cases plain, the third bears three concentric beaded ribs and the fourth a single annular rib, much as a foot-ring. This fourth vessel has curvilinear punched decoration in four zones and a row of simple hemispherical bosses along the centre line of the handle. The others have close set rows of smaller bosses at the carination, at the rim, or under the rim – the close setting of bosses creates the effect of beading.

A separate vessel, from a hoard at Biia, is different in being a deeper bowl with a contracting upper body before an out-turned mouth (Mozsolics 1965–6, 48–9, pl 12; Florescu 1971, 32–3 no. 110, pl.). Two opposed handles are long straps terminating in double spirals; again, these seem never to have rejoined the body. Decoration includes one register of a repeating inverted Y motif executed in dots and on the lower body three rows of hemispherical bosses amongst which are set symmetrically three *Kreisbuckel* motifs – a boss encircled by three rings. Bouzek (1985, 51–2) is doubtful that any of these Romanian vessels need be as early as Mozsolics argues. Her main argument rested on the spiral decoration on one of the Bihar examples, but Bouzek notes that such decoration continues later, while other features better place the vessels between Reinecke C and D (c. 14th–13th centuries BC).

A series of precious metal cups and vessels from the Aegean has often been called upon as the source of, or the stimulus for the north-western gold cups (eg Bouzek 1985, 51). There are now considerable chronological difficulties in deriving the north-western series from Mycenaean prototypes, and neither these nor earlier vessel styles represented in the Aegean and Anatolia (Segall 1938, 11–14 no. 1; Childe 1924; Hood 1956, 87–92; Catling 1964, among figs 17–21; Bouzek 1985, 50 fig. 19) have more than a superficial resemblance. Beyond sometimes being of precious metals, being vessels of small-ish capacity and having handles, no useful comparison can be made.

The fact that a bronze bowl, found at Dohnsen, north-west Germany, seems to be an import from the south does not alter the picture. Sprockhoff identified it as a Mycenaean vessel, datable at that time to about 1400 BC (Sprockhoff 1961). While that dating may now be revised backwards, this find yet again emphasises the morphological rift between north-western precious cups and those of the Aegean and south-east Europe. The Dohnsen bowl cannot be in any way responsible for the development of the north-western series, instead its presence in the far north strengthens the case that there was a growing interest in fine metal vessels in the north German area from the final Early Bronze Age onwards.

No good case then can be made for initial inspiration from the south-east; there is an enormous geographical and morphological gulf between Fritzdorf and the Romanian/Aegean cup zone, not to mention the chronological dislocation that now appears between the earliest cups in the two regions. If the south-east of Europe can no longer be understood to be the source of stimulus for the north-western

precious cups, then we do need to explain how the technology involved emerged indigenously. Sheet metalwork forms that were both fully three-dimensional and expertly embossed had in fact been mastered in northern and central Britain by 2000 BC, as already noted; the main products at that time were broad armlets (Needham 2000a; 2000c). With such background skills available, adaptation to produce cups, and indeed embossed cups, would have been no great technical leap forward.

However, we are left with something of a conundrum with respect to the hypothesised earliest cups. At first sight one might assume that the plain-bodied cups from Fritzdorf and Armorica would have emerged first, being technically easier to produce than embossed versions. And yet there is no evidence at all for the prior development of hollow-sheet-working skills in those regions. So a big question is whether they could have been coincidentally developed independent of British metalworking traditions. Given that sheet-metal cups of similar style appear on both sides of the Channel at about the same time, it seems more realistic to accept that all depended on a common pool of experience and specialist skills. This would suggest that there was a transfer of the required expertise across the Channel to allow the production of the Continental cups. But in this case, does it mean that the ‘precious cup’ had already been invented on British shores and, if so, were the first ones already embossed following in the wake of the armlets?

The resolution of our dataset, with only a small number of vessels represented, makes it impossible to determine where the fusion of the unstable cup form with hollow-sheet-metalworking techniques first occurred. The important point is that the fusion represents a cross-over of style-*cum*-function from one direction and technical expertise from the opposite direction and, moreover, that it took place in lands flanking the Channel and lower Rhine. If, as we argue below (Chapter 8), communities in this zone were united by certain common objectives, it rather diminishes the importance of isolating one side of the Channel or the other as the originator of the precious cup.

Manufacture of the carved cups

The one-piece cups of shale or amber have given rise to much discussion as to whether they were lathe turned (see Shepherd 1985 and Sloper 1989 for recent discussions of techniques of production). In-ground distortion of some cups and the need to restore others from sherds have made it impossible to be sure of precise dimensions. Usually, therefore, it is not possible to make a judgement on the basis of rotational symmetry. In all examples however, the handle has been carved out of the same block of raw material and must have started as a lug on the side of the roughed out vessel. Consequently, the late stages of shaping the exterior of the body could not have been achieved by a continuously rotational action since the handle lug would prevent rotation through 360° (a problem appreciated by Phillips as long ago as 1856).

Supporting evidence for hand-turning comes from the apparently undistorted Hove cup (no. 11; Fig. 50). Subtle profile variations and a variation of up to 2mm in mouth diameter are not what would be expected of proficient mechanical turning. On the other hand, this reasonable degree of symmetry, pleasing enough to the eye, would be readily achieved by careful hand cutting by an experienced craftsman (Thurnam 1871, 524).

During the early roughing out of the body a large projecting

lug would have been left on one side to form the handle. As the body was nearing the desired shape, the lug could be refined. Most of the surviving handles seem to have been trimmed down so as to have a trapezoid shape in plan and a neat semi-circular or less protuberant C-shape in side view. The orthogonal intersection of these two profiles naturally gives rise to the attractive waisted shape that the handles all present in face view (as discussed above). In the case of the ?Wiltshire 1 vessel (no. 12; **Fig. 51**), the handle is of the same basic form, but the plan view is modified so that the sides of the trapeze are gently concave rather than straight.

After shaping the outer surface of the handle, its perforation could be tackled. Obviously the greater restriction on tool angles could lead to a cruder finish inside the handle, while the fact that it was less visible might also have encouraged a less fine finish being applied. Theoretically, the interior profile of the body itself could have been turned full circle on a pole lathe with a centering device, ie a pivot-hole, on the inside. Since there is no sign of any such hole in the bases of the cups, the last part of the interior would have to have been removed manually; evidence for toolmarks has been noted inside the Hove cup (no. 11). Whatever technique was used for hollowing out the interior of the vessel, this would have best been done secondarily, once the desired external profiles had been attained.

Relationships to local pottery

The point has already been made that one of the unifying characteristics of the precious cups is their inability to stand on a surface unaided. The peculiarity of this feature is highlighted by the fact that contemporary ceramic vessels from the regions concerned always have flat bases that allow them to stand freely. Nevertheless, some thought still needs to be given to potential relationships with indigenous pottery in the relevant regions.

Handles, although never standard attachments on British vessels of this age, occur repeatedly on a wide variety of forms (Manby 2004). They are certainly occasionally found as early as Beaker period 2 (c. 2250–1950 BC), that is preceding the appearance of the handled precious cups. The Dunnichen Beaker bowl, Angus (Coutts 1971, 46 no. 83, 49; Manby 2004, fig. 79.2) is associated with a flat riveted bronze dagger of this period; few other bowls are known with handles and their restricted distribution has led to the nomenclature *Dorset bowls* (Clarke 1970, nos 1028, 1033, 1035; Manby 2004, 216 fig. 72).

A complete form contrast is provided by the collared vessel from the secondary grave at Gravelly Guy, Oxfordshire (Cleal 2004), associated with a radiocarbon date calibrated to 2150–1920 BC (2-sigma). This is classified as a Beaker and joins some 15 other handled Beakers in having more or less pronounced ‘collars’ formed by wall thickening, under-rim cordon, or in-turned mouth (Clarke 1970, 412, 415–6). The decorative designs on at least some of these would place them in the same period, but others are probably a little later. This series merges into handled Beakers which are of tankard form (Clarke 1970, 413–4).

Food Vessels too can occasionally have loop handles, as distinct from the frequently perforated lugs on Yorkshire Vases (Manby 2004). The vessels in question vary in form and decorative design, although cord impression is the dominant technique, as found more generally in this potting tradition.

Manby agrees with Clarke that the application of handles on Food Vessels probably copied handled Beakers and that these in turn were imitating wooden prototypes (Manby 2004, 231, 234).

One handled vessel, classified alternatively as a Beaker or a Food Vessel, must be singled out for detailed treatment – that from Balmuick, Perthshire (eg Clarke *et al.* 1985, 116–8 fig. 4.49, 282–3). Its profile of continuous horizontal grooves with intervening ribs has frequently been compared with the Rillaton cup in particular and other precious cups in general. The comparison does not stand up to scrutiny (Manby 2004, 236) especially now that it is established that Rillaton had no flat base whereas Balmuick has a broad flat one. In the absence of the corrugated gold cups, Balmuick would not have attracted undue attention and certainly would not have evoked metal prototypes. The handle is decorated throughout with horizontal impressed grooves quite unlike the designs on the precious cup handles. The body is otherwise unremarkable – a mid-carinated Beaker form with a typical under-rim cordon and All-Over ornamentation. The execution of the latter makes no attempt to simulate the undulating topography of the corrugated cups.

Strap, or ribbon handles are proportionately much better represented on the Trevisker Urns of the south-west than any other Early Bronze Age pottery (Patchett 1944; 1950). Again, some of these are more like perforated lugs. In addition to the three handled Beaker bowls from Dorset, the far south of Britain has also yielded at least three more individual vessels of relatively small size (**Fig. 31**). The first is a cup from Denzell Downs, Cornwall, associated with a cremation burial (**Fig. 31a**); it is about 94mm high with a simple flared profile rising from a rounded foot (Abercromby 1912, 92, pl. 22 no. 301; Patchett 1944, 27 fig. 5; 1950, fig. 1). Patchett (1944, 26–7) likened its stabbed decoration within lozenge frames to that of Aldbourne cups; while there may indeed be a relationship, the cup is not of Aldbourne type and is currently unique.

The second is from an inhumation grave at Collingbourne Ducis Gr6, Wiltshire (**Fig. 31b**), and has a profile not dissimilar from the Denzell Down example, but is undecorated and has a more obvious flat base with a vestigial carination above mid-height (Annable and Simpson 1964, 63 no. 499, 117 fig. 499). It is also of similar size, 90mm high, but the handle is smaller, being confined to the upper body. Both of these cups are squat relative to most of the precious cups, but it is possible that they do represent a ceramic response to them, particularly the late Hove and Stoborough versions.

The third example is more distinctive still; it is from Gallibury Down, Isle of Wight (**Fig. 31c**), associated with two enlarged Food Vessels containing a cremation (Tomalin 1988, 219) and now three separate radiocarbon dates – one on charcoal and two on cremated bone (Needham forthcoming). The handled Gallibury vessel is a very globular jar 135mm tall. The handle was broken off in antiquity, but the vessel was kept in use (Tomalin 1988, 208–9). It is of a high-quality ware with a reddish slip and in some respects this too might be regarded as a ‘precious cup’. The radiocarbon dating (2050–1900 BC) suggests it was deposited late in Beaker period 2 and thus precedes the group under discussion. The decoration is simple and of widely used motifs, so, given chronological antecedence, one should not press comparisons too far. This vessel comes, like all the British precious cups, from south coastal strip of England, but it differs from them in having a stable flat base.

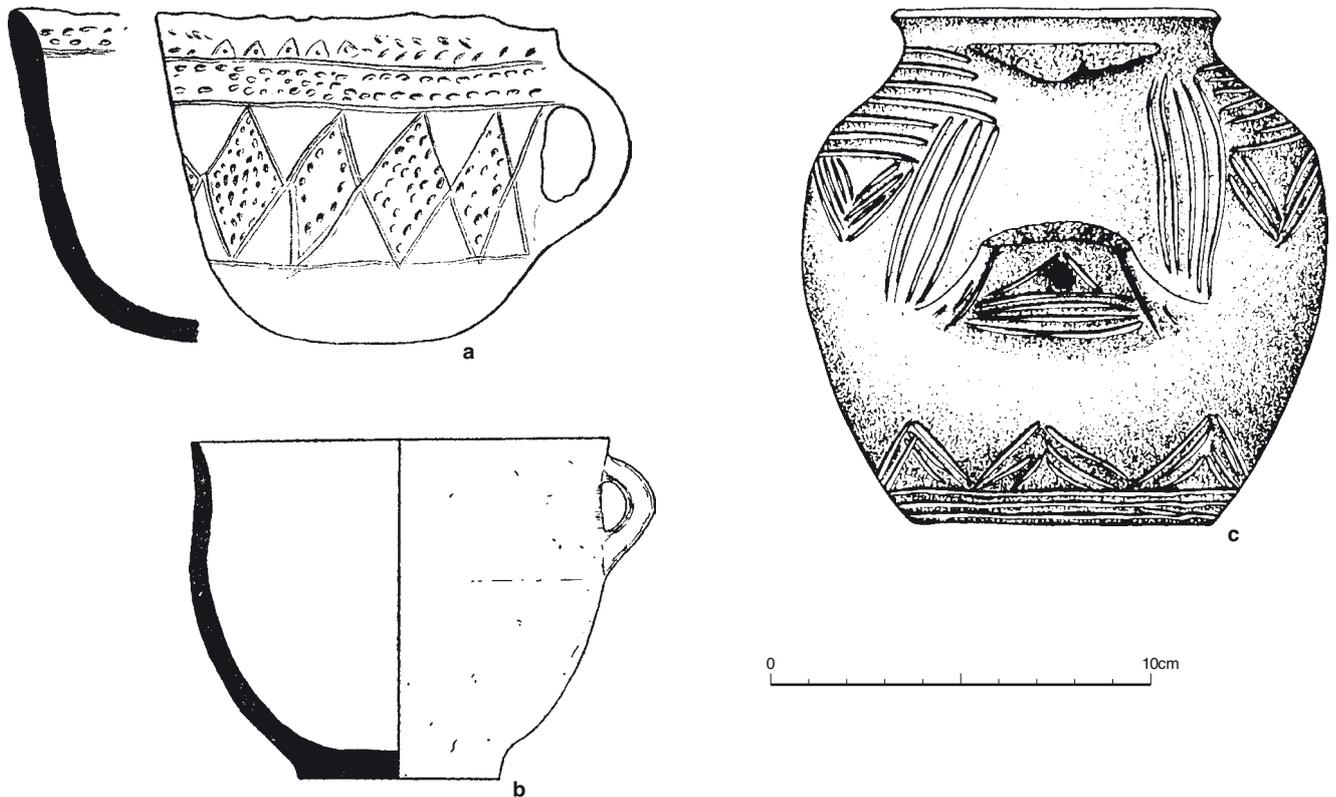


Figure 31 Small ceramic vessels with handles from Britain: a) Denzell Downs, Cornwall (after Patchett 1950); b) Collingbourne Ducis G 16, Wiltshire (after Annable and Simpson 1964); c) Gallibury Down grave H, Isle of Wight (after Tomalin 1988). Scale 50%

Tomalin recognised that the Gallibury vessel reflects a ceramic tradition alien to the region, and found the best comparisons in the Armorican *Vases à Anse* series. But he also appreciated that it did not entirely conform to that series and concluded that it may have been manufactured in the Channel Islands, rather than on the Armorican peninsula. At the very least on current evidence we can say that the Gallibury vessel is individual and that it relates to a trans-Channel style, further points that may herald the ensuing precious cup series.

The high frequency of handled pottery in the Armorican Early Bronze Age is well known. Briard believed that the addition of handles was due to central European influence (1984, 118). This would give a more general background to the specific links between those two regions noted above and could offer a context for the parallel adoption of the handled biconical cup form. Unfortunately, there is little useful dating evidence for the origins of the *Vases à Anse* (Briard 1984, 113 ff, 192; Needham 2000b, 152, 165–7), but the Gallibury dates would point to an early evolution of the style, by the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC.

The profiles of the Armorican *Vases à Anse* are typically carinated, but unlike the precious cups, the carination tends to be placed high and is often strong, leading to a sharply contracted mouth. They do not therefore, even vaguely, look like enlarged versions of the cups. Conceivably more relevant are occasional pots with a single handle and moderate carination at around mid-height, as at Hellen à Cléder and Juno Bella à Berrien (Briard 1984, 117 fig. 67.1, 123 fig. 72.1) and again much further east at Etaples, Pas-de-Calais (Blanchet 1984, 131 fig. 56.1). Without chronological information it is hard to speculate on their precise relationship to the Armorican precious cups, let alone the wider group.

It remains to consider the handle-less small ceramic vessels

which are broadly contemporary. These are the ‘incense cups’ or ‘pygmy cups’ frequently found as accessory vessels in British graves. There is much variation in form, not yet fully explored by any modern classification (Abercromby 1912). Such vessels are characterised above all by small capacities and relatively squat bodies. They frequently occur in a grave in association with a larger pot, most usually a cremation urn and this context suggests they could have played a regular part in the rituals attending the funeral. The accompanying pot is most often, but by no means universally, a Collared Urn. That they are not simply domestic drinking cups is clear from the fact that many have perforations or slits in their walls.

Incense cups probably appeared at about the same time as the cremation urns they accompany, towards the end of the 3rd millennium BC, and they then continue to the end of the Early Bronze Age making them broadly coeval with the precious cups. Incense cups are found the length and breadth of the country, a point which only goes to highlight the restricted distribution of the precious cups. They are not, however, exclusive of one another; indeed one type – the slotted incense cup – may be a complementary part of the cultural system employing the precious cups.

Slotted incense cups are sometimes thought of as a ‘Wessex’ type, but in geographical terms this is not the case (Fig. 32; Ashbee 1967, 31). Taking together Longworth’s groups B and E (1983), characterised by rectangular to narrow linear slots, only two come from the Wessex heartland with another two from south Dorset (Fig. 33). In addition, a related cup with broad oval perforations comes from Great Shefford, Berkshire (Fig. 33.13); it has the cord decoration found on virtually all of the slotted group. This is a thin distribution given the over-representation of excavated graves in the region. In reality these cups show essentially a south coast distribution, with one in the Upper

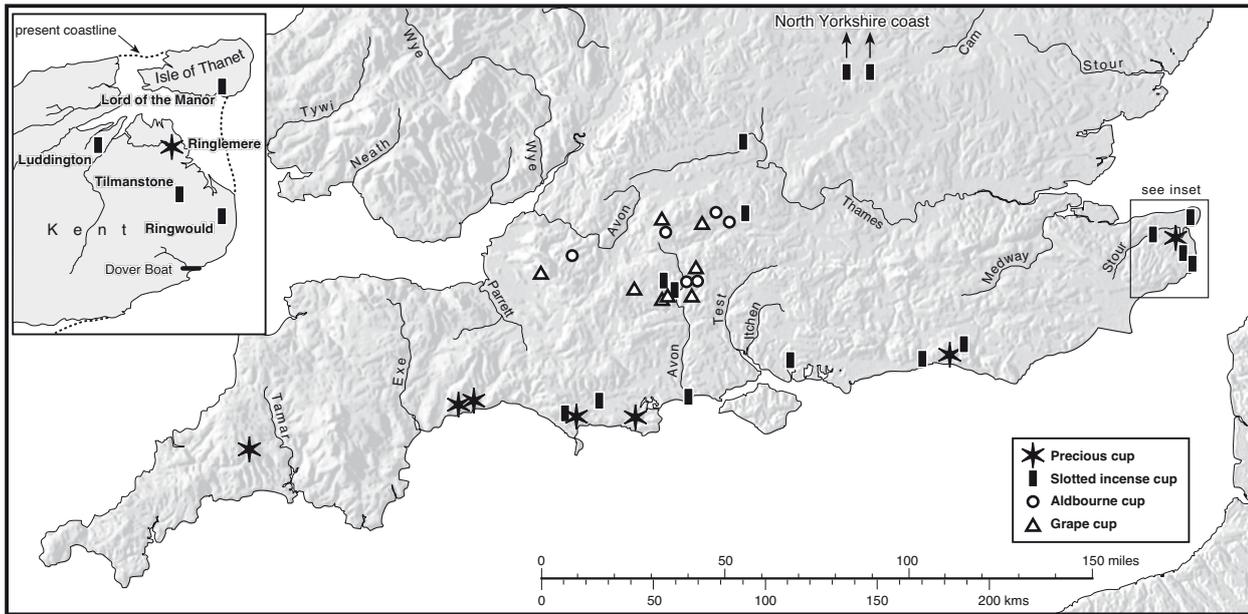


Figure 32 Map of recovery for precious cups in southern Britain in relation to incense cups of selected types – slotted, grape and Aldbourne

Thames valley and two near the coast of North Yorkshire, one of which is in any case a hybrid (Fig. 33.14; Longworth 1983, 67, 69 fig. 20).

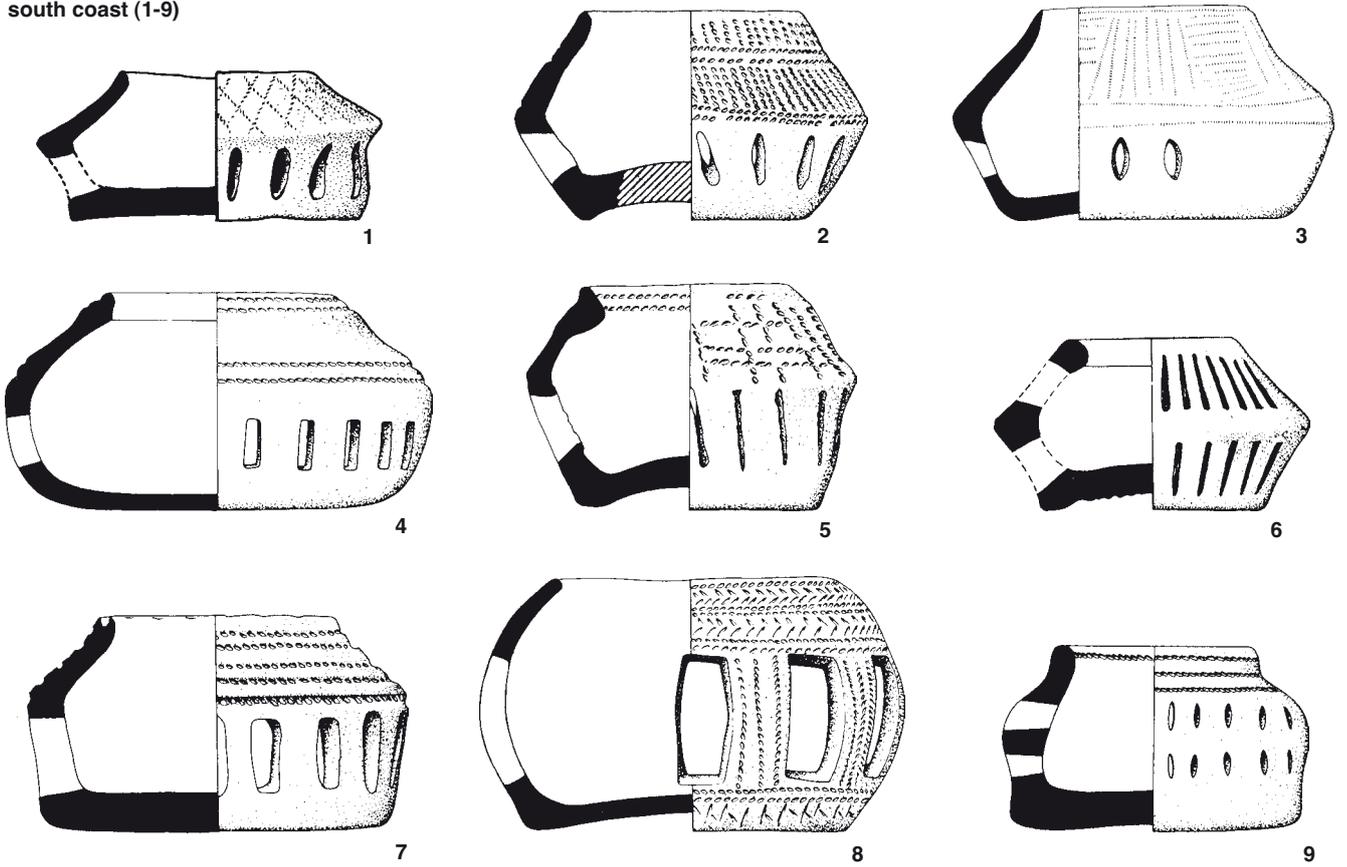
As many as four slotted cups occur in east Kent (Parfitt and Champion 2004, 270), the strongest cluster anywhere; Ringlemere lies amidst them (Figs 32 & 33.1-4). Two examples come from central Sussex, close to Hove, and one is from Portsdown, overlooking Portsmouth Harbour and the Solent. The next following westward is from Hengistbury Head, a grave group that we shall see is pivotal in the passage of amber from the east into Wessex and, furthermore, has express links with one central Wessex grave group containing such a slotted cup – Wilsford G8. Finally along the south coast are examples from Burleston, east Dorset, lying between the Clandon and Stoborough precious cup finds, and one from the Clandon barrow itself (Cowie in Clarke *et al.* 1985, 274-5; Ann Woodward – pers. comm.). Precious cup and slotted incense cup were not, however, together at Clandon; while the incense cup was found deliberately broken and scattered under an internal flint cairn, the amber cup was one of the objects distributed on top of that cairn (Fig. 34); they clearly belonged to separate depositional

events (Drew and Piggott 1936, 19, pl. I).

A cultural distinction between a south coast zone and inland Wessex is further emphasised by consideration of two highly specialised incense cup forms – grape cups and Aldbourne cups (Fig. 32). These have a distribution confined to Wiltshire and immediately adjoining areas (Abercromby 1912, 25-7, types 1 and 2), which includes the more recent find from Charnham Lane, Berkshire (Ford 1991).

In distributional terms, then, it can be seen that there are strong links between slotted cups and the precious cups. They may belong to different aspects of a single ritual system prevailing in the southern coastal areas. The Wessex heartland features instead the other specialised incense cup forms discussed and as yet there is no secure evidence that it took in precious cups and their attendant rituals. The function of the incense cups is far from settled (Gibson 2004), although Woodward concludes that 'the cups seem to have been designed specifically for the controlled burning of substances' (2000, 114; see also Parker Pearson 2003, 20). One thing is certain; unlike the precious cups, most incense cups are ill-suited to holding liquid.

south coast (1-9)



inland & north coast (10-15)

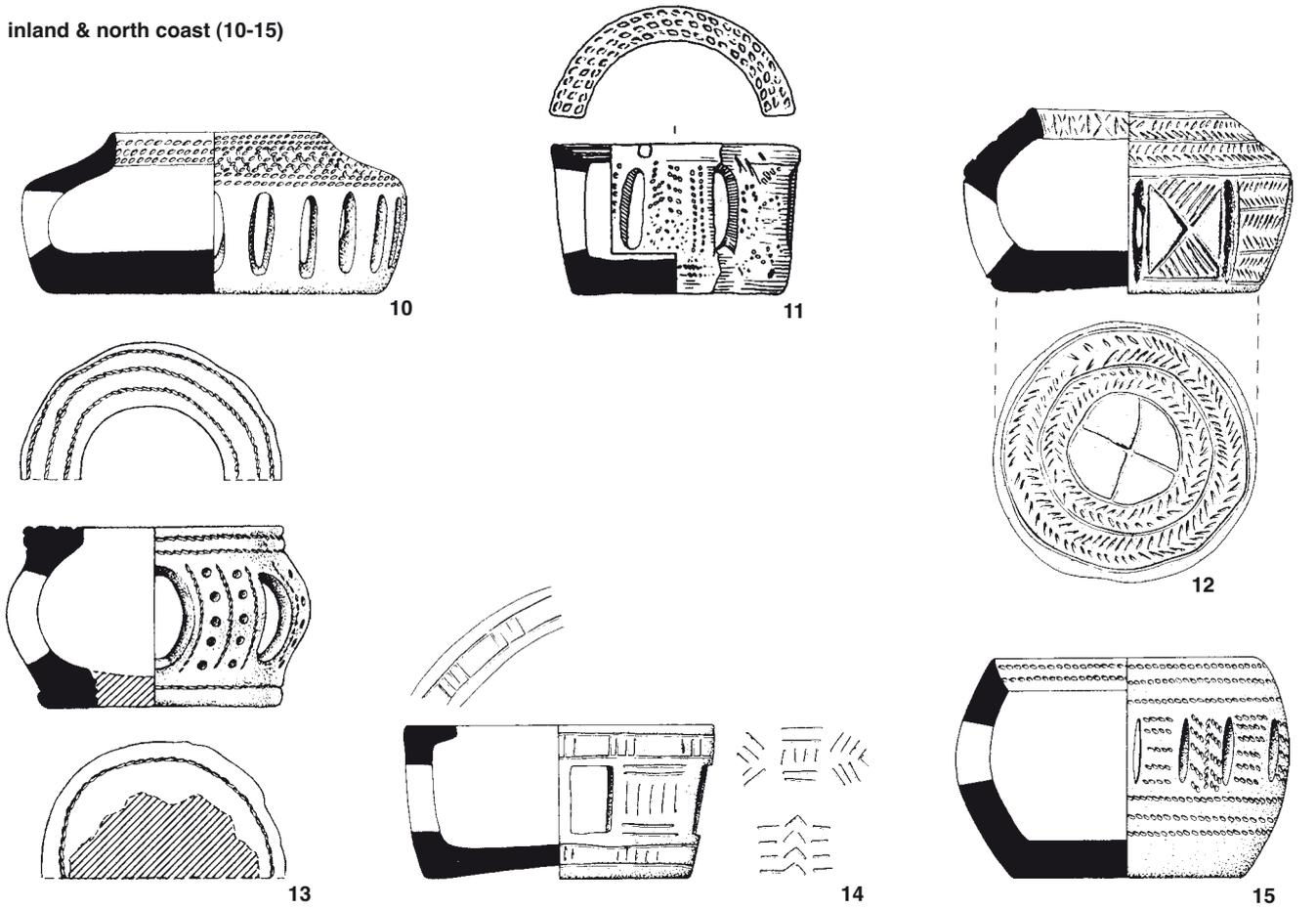


Figure 33 Slotted incense cups (after Longworth 1983; Perkins 1980, and Green and Rollo-Smith 1984): 1) Lord of the Manor, Kent; 2) Luddington Wood, Kent; 3) Ringwold, Kent; 4) Tilmanstone, Kent; 5) Clayton Hill, Sussex; 6) Lancing, Sussex; 7) Portsdown, Hampshire; 8) Hengistbury Head, Hampshire; 9) Burlleston 3A, Dorset; 10) Wilsford G8, Wiltshire; 11) Shrewton 5c, Wiltshire; 12) Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire; 13) Great Shefford, Berkshire; 14) near West Ayton Moor, North Yorkshire; 15) Comboots, Scalby, North Yorkshire. Scale 50%

