Zones of interaction: Roman and native in Scotland

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Northern Britain is one of the best known and most extensively researched frontier regions in the Roman Empire. The fluctuations of Roman occupation in the late 1st, mid 2nd and early 3rd centuries AD are quite well understood and emphasize the peripheral character of the area, which never completely succumbed to Roman conquest. It also offers the opportunity to study the processes of interaction between Rome and indigenous peoples at the limits of empire. Too often, however, these have been seen as incidental to the main action, as if the local people were only the supporting cast for the foreign stars. If separately considered at all, the indigenous population has tended to be relegated to discussion of the native background, but over the last decade or so research has moved them more strongly into the foreground.

Material culture

By comparison with their southern neighbours, the Iron Age peoples of the north have tended to be regarded as culturally impoverished, primarily because of the comparatively poor recovery of material from excavated sites. But this value judgement has been reinforced by past interpretations of the fine bronzework, which has tended to be attributed to diffusion from the south despite in some cases a distribution which is almost exclusively Scottish. Recent analytical work has, however, served both to emphasize the local origin of much of the material and to demonstrate a greater emphasis on re-cycling in native society linked to an increase in the availability of raw materials derived from the re-use of Roman artefacts (e.g. Tate *et al.* 1985; Dungworth 1997: 48–9). By contrast, comparative analysis of iron knives from Roman and native contexts indicates little re-use of Roman iron or transfer of either smelting or smithing technology (Hutcheson 1997). This may have been reinforced by a deliberate strategy on the part of the Roman forces, for a second example of the deliberate burial of a large quantity of iron on the abandonment of a Roman fort has come to light (Hanson forthcoming a).

The presence of Roman finds on native sites or from unprovenanced locations has long been the subject of record in Scotland. Unfortunately this tradition has never extended south of the present political boundary, making potentially important cross-frontier comparisons impossible. The actual quantity of material appears to be quite small, though a recent re-assessment has prompted the suggestion that the volume of Roman metalwork in circulation may have been considerably underestimated (Hunter 1996; 2001: 290–91). Early approaches went little further than data collection, but more recently attempts have been made to draw wider conclusions from the distribution patterns (e.g. Macinnes 1989; Hunter 2001). Material of Flavian date seems to be found mainly in the southern and eastern lowlands and in quantity on only a few sites. In the Antonine period both the quantity and geographical distribution of Roman artefacts is greater, though the range of types does not change. They appear also on a greater variety of settlement types, though their distribution is still biased towards the more elaborate and presumably higher-status settlement forms such as brochs, duns, crannogs and souterrains. The large hillfort at Traprain Law, East Lothian continues to be pre-eminent in the range, quality and quantity of material received, including some highly Romanized items. It is also one of the few sites which continues to receive Roman material in the later 3rd and the 4th centuries (Macinnes 1989: 112–13; Erdrich *et al.* 2000). Overall, this distribution pattern suggests that contact with the occupying forces was limited, and largely confined to the upper elements within the local social hierarchy, and does not entirely support the supposed stimulatory effect of monetary taxation and a market economy (*contra* Breeze 1989: 228–9; Hanson & Macinnes 1991: 87–8).

Access to Roman goods is frequently regarded as contributing towards maintenance of a pres-

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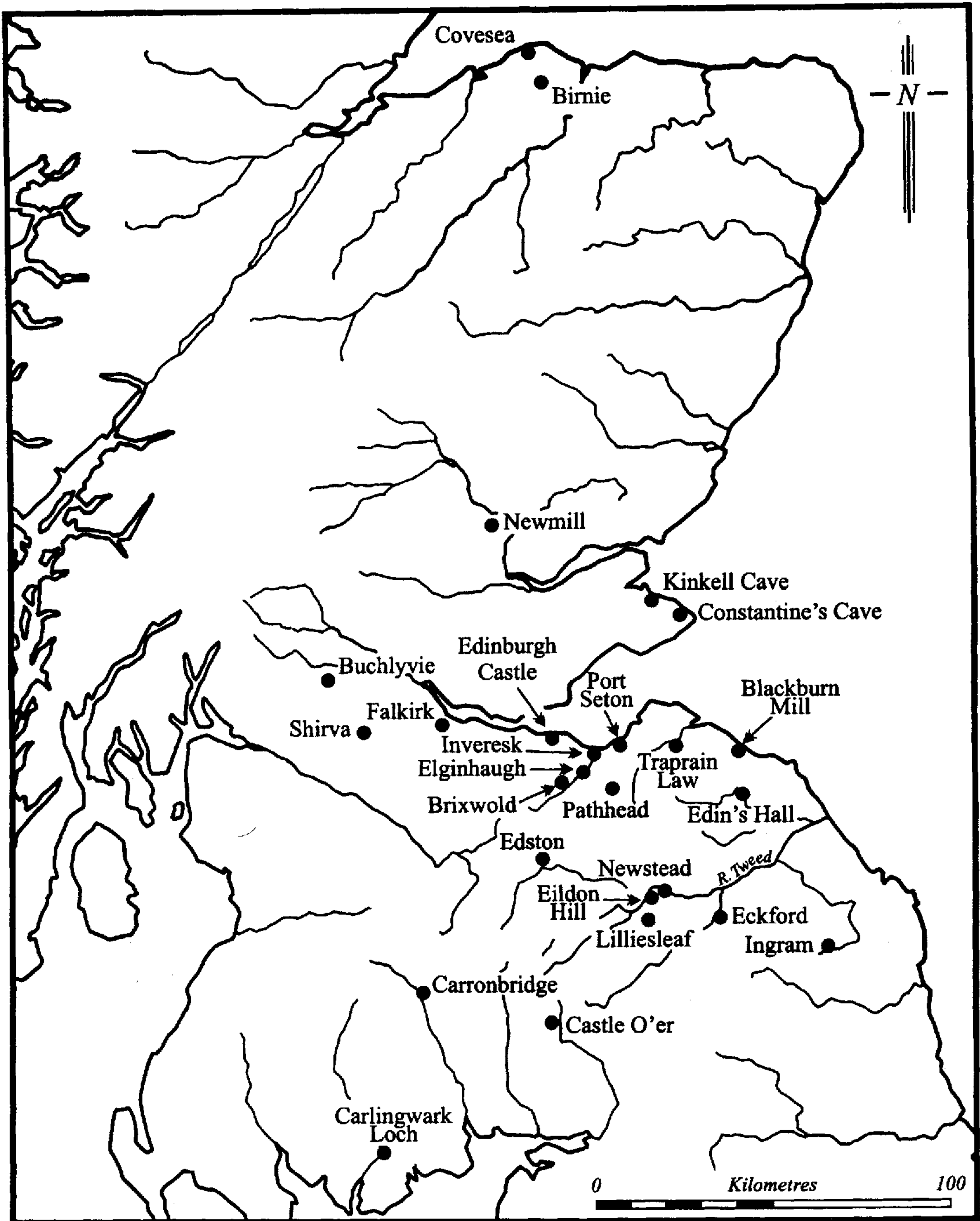

FIGURE 1. *Places mentioned in the text.*

tige goods economy in southern Scotland (Macinnes 1984: 241–2). However, it has also been suggested that the material may have been adopted in the same way as other 'exotic' artefacts and deposited in hoards to symbolize the community's alliances and contacts with the wider world (Hunter 1997: 121). Likewise the absence of such material from hoards in the northeast of the country is taken to indicate an emphasis on local identity, for Roman artefacts

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were potentially available since they are found occasionally in burials and Roman bronze was re-used in the locally produced bronze armlets (Tate *et al.* 1985). Indeed, considerable regional variations are apparent in the uses to which Roman goods were put, which were clearly socially contingent (Hunter 2001: 292–8).

Roman goods did not reach native hands by chance or as cast-offs. Though there is a broad congruence between what was in use in Roman forts and their associated *vici* and what is found on native sites, presumably reflecting access to the same supply system, it is not valid to assume that native peoples were eager to adopt Roman pottery and other artefacts simply because of their technological superiority. The indigenous population were clearly expressing preferences and exercising choice in their selection of material. This is immediately apparent from the percentage of high-quality artefacts and the relative scarcity of more mundane items. Samian, for example, is preferred to coarse pottery. There is an emphasis on artefacts associated with feasting and personal ornament, particularly ornate brooches or those with clear echoes of native decorative traditions (Hunter 1996: 121–3; 2001: 298–301). It has long been assumed that long-distance trading contacts beyond what became the established Roman frontier in northern England were a regular feature of Roman/native interaction. However, a recent re-examination of the Samian ware from Traprain Law stresses the absence of pottery either before or immediately after the periods of Roman occupation in the 1st and 2nd centuries, emphasizing that such material was only accessible to native communities during that occupation (Erdrich *et al.* 2000).

Interaction: resistance and diplomacy

Archaeological evidence for the aggressive phases of Roman and native interaction is surprisingly rare, but subsequent resistance can manifest itself in more subtle ways through material culture. For example, the continued construction of round houses has been taken as a potential symbol of the rejection of Roman values by some segments of the indigenous population (Hingley 1997). Similarly, Roman artefacts may have been positively rejected, as has been suggested above to explain their absence from hoards in northeast Scotland (Hunter 1997: 121). Even where Roman artefacts are found in non-Roman contexts, they may sometimes have been used in entirely different ways, with Samian bases inverted to form shallow dishes, or sherds converted into spindle whorls, gaming counters or polishers (e.g. Willis 1998; Erdrich *et al.* 2000). Such re-use of Roman pottery is not uncommon on native sites, but only rarely attested in Roman forts.

For Rome the success of diplomatic methods of control was of decisive importance for the continued integrity of the northern frontier. Such relationships are often shadowy and difficult to identify archaeologically, but a number of large coin hoards of late 2nd-, early 3rd- and 4th-century date, such as that from Falkirk (Todd 1985), has been interpreted as evidence of the payment of subsidies to Scottish tribes, since they relate to periods when there were no Roman troops stationed in the area. Recent discoveries have considerably reinforced this interpretation. In 1994 a hoard of 290 silver coins ending in *c.* AD 222 was discovered close by the hill-fort at Edston in Peebleshire, the pattern of its content very similar to the Falkirk hoard (Holmes & Hunter 1997). More dramatic have been the results of excavations at Birnie, Moray. Here for the first time two hoards of 3rd-century denarii have been found in context, buried in native pots a few metres apart outside a large round house (information from Fraser Hunter; *DES* 2000: 58–9).

Settlement and land use

In recent years the long-held view that the move from defensive to non-defensive settlement was a direct consequence of the imposition of the *Pax Romana* has been challenged, exemplified by reconsiderations of Scotland's two largest hillforts. Excavation at Eildon Hill North, Roxburghshire indicated that the defences were quite insubstantial, serving more as a territorial marker than a barrier (Owen 1992: 68–9), while Traprain Law has been interpreted as primarily a ceremonial centre (*cf.* Hingley 1992: 37, 40; Armit & Ralston 1997: 180). But there are dangers in substituting one orthodoxy for another. Recent analysis of the distribution of the finds from Traprain Law shows patterns which are more indicative of domestic than ritual activity (Erdrich *et al.* 2000), while ^{14}C dates from Castle O'er, Dumfriesshire, confirm maintenance and development of its defences into the Roman period (RCAHMS 1997: 78–82, 153).

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Three elements of the native settlement pattern are now relatively well understood. In the western Lowlands crannogs of elaborate timber construction are not uncommon in the lochs or estuaries, and frequently provide evidence of Roman contacts. Recent investigations have indicated that they had a long history of intermittent occupation with a substantial phase of building spanning much of the later 1st millennium BC into the first two centuries AD (Crone 1993: 245–8; Hanson forthcoming c).

Where dating evidence is available for the lowland brochs, their occupation falls into the 1st or 2nd centuries AD. They not infrequently produce considerable quantities of Roman material, as from Buchlyvie, Stirlingshire (Main 1998), though none was recovered from recent limited investigations at Edin's Hall, Berwickshire (Dunwell 1999). Continuity of occupation from earlier structures can sometimes be demonstrated, which confirms that the brochs were an integral part of local architectural developments, their more elaborate form offering an alternative mode of material symbolism or display for the wealthier elements of indigenous society (Macinnes 1984). The absence of brochs in the eastern Lowlands to the south of the Tweed may reflect the continued presence of the military cutting across traditional patterns of settlement and society (Breeze 1990: 93).

Souterrains are now widely accepted as grain stores (Watkins 1980; Armit 1999: 583). The larger examples are restricted to the eastern Lowlands north of the Forth, where aerial reconnaissance has demonstrated the considerable density of their distribution, with outliers in Lothian and the Borders. Though their associated settlements continued to be occupied, the souterrains seem to have been deliberately infilled. A recent re-assessment has attempted to link their demise with the departure of the Roman military and the cessation of the market for surplus grain (Armit 1999: 593–4). Though their use cannot be demonstrated to extend much beyond the Roman period, the continued construction of souterrains after the Roman withdrawal in the mid-second century is indicated by the re-use of much Roman masonry in the examples at Shirva, Dunbartonshire and Newstead, Roxburghshire. At the other extreme, Newmill in Perthshire has produced a ^{14}C date attesting its origins in the later Iron Age (Watkins 1980: 169, 178). Thus, linking their *floruit* to Roman activity cannot readily be sustained. The more likely explanation for their demise remains a change in the social structure that underpinned the use of local communal storage facilities, perhaps related to increased political centralization (e.g. Watkins 1984).

As with most other areas of Britain, however, there is still much to do to integrate the mass of settlement data recovered by aerial reconnaissance. A number of small rectilinear enclosures in the vicinity of Traprain Law have long been assigned to the Roman period on the basis of their morphology, an attribution that has been confirmed recently in one case at Brixwold, Midlothian (Crone & O'Sullivan 1997). More intensive survey of these sites is ongoing (information from Prof. C. Haselgrove). Investigation of the conjoined enclosures at Port Seton, East Lothian, confirm that their occupation continued into the Roman period, though evidence of contact is restricted to a single sherd of coarse pottery. It is postulated that abandonment of one of the enclosures and the contraction of the other may have been a result of the Roman occupation (Haselgrove & McCullagh 2000). Excavation of an enclosure in the vicinity of the Roman fort at Newstead, at Lilliesleaf, Roxburghshire, has produced coins of 1st-, late 3rd- and 4th-century date and other Roman material (Bateson & Holmes 1997: 531; *DES* 1994: 5; 1998: 80). Finally, the ^{14}C dates from double-ditched, square enclosure at Carronbridge, Dumfriesshire indicate occupation continuing from the later Iron Age to the late Roman period, though very few Roman artefacts were recovered. (Johnston 1994: 266–7, 273–4).

The only Romanized settlements attested in Scotland are the military *vici*, found adjacent to forts on the Antonine Wall. Their study provides the opportunity to examine sites with urban potential at an early stage in their development. Rarely, however, have any been subject to large-scale investigation, so that our knowledge of them is little more than rudimentary. Indeed, there is still a debate about the relationship between such settlements and the annexes that are not infrequently found attached to forts (e.g. Bailey 1994: 305–11; Clarke & Wise 1999). Investigations over a number of years around the fort at Inveresk, East Lothian have revealed various structures extending for approximately a kilometre from the fort with field systems beyond (Bishop 2002). Though clearly of consider-

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able size and importance, the full significance of this settlement has yet to be established.

Environment and food supply

Despite recent assertions that the Roman army played a major part in the clearance of the natural forest cover in large areas of northern Britain, particularly immediately to the north of the central sector of Hadrian's Wall (e.g. Dumayne 1994), significant Roman involvement in this process cannot be substantiated (Hanson 1996). Indeed, recent aerial survey work has indicated Iron Age/Romano-British agricultural activity in precisely that area (Gates 1999). Pollen analyses in Lowland Scotland and northern Northumberland, both regional (e.g. Ramsay & Dickson 1997; Dumayne-Peaty 1998) and site-based (e.g. Manning *et al.* 1997; Dickson forthcoming), consistently indicate a largely cleared landscape by the time of the Roman arrival. There is also increasing archaeological evidence that arable agriculture had been established even in some of the more remote uplands by the pre-Roman Iron Age (Armit & Ralston 1997: 190–91).

At the other extreme it has been argued, on the basis of soil erosion in river valleys, that in some areas the landscape may have been virtually devoid of trees by the late Iron Age (Tipping 1992). This may explain the apparent shortage of suitable building timber for Roman forts, with extensive use of alder rather than oak in the gates and towers at Elginhaugh, Midlothian (Hanson forthcoming a).

The ravaging action of the Roman army is the suggested explanation for the decline in levels of cultivation and regeneration of woodland seen in a number of pollen diagrams from northeastern Scotland in the early 1st millennium AD (Whittington & Edwards 1993). However, there are problems with the precision of the associated ^{14}C dating, and the suggested impact seems out of proportion to the size and scope of the military actions thought to have stimulated it. Nor does the archaeological record support the concomitant suggestion of depopulation and decline. By contrast, in central Scotland pollen samples from the ditch of the Antonine Wall suggest that arable cultivation did not decline until the end of the Roman occupation (information from A. Dunwell).

The consistent pattern of land use recorded in both macrofossil and pollen analyses is one of extensive grazed pasture land with hints of arable cultivation, predominantly of barley (e.g. Whittington & Edwards 1993; Dickson forthcoming). However, excavations on the settlement enclosures at Port Seton indicate the presence of wheat in quite large quantities (Huntley 2000: 161, 169–70). This has implications for the extent to which the food needs of the Roman garrison could have been supported locally. Thus, unprocessed wheat and barley samples recovered from the nearby Roman fort at Elginhaugh are likely to be of local origin (Clapham forthcoming). Recent estimates suggest that the impact of local food supply on the indigenous economic system were well within its capacity (Hanson 1997: 212).

Religious life

Roman vessels seem to have played a significant role in indigenous ritual practices in Scotland, being found quite frequently in association with water (Hunter 1997: 117, 127). However, this need not reflect any change in ritual practice, merely the utilization of exotic material as an alternative form of conspicuous consumption. Traditionally, the three large metalwork hoards from Carlingwark Loch in Kirkudbrightshire, Blackburn Mill in Roxburghshire and Eckford in Berwickshire are seen as Roman in origin. However, a recent review, drawing attention to the probable local origin of many of the iron tools indicated by metallographic and radiographic analysis (Hutcheson 1997), emphasizes their significance as indicators of change in local ritual practice, perhaps reflecting a greater emphasis on acts of communal rather than personal deposition (Hunter 1997: 116–17). The presence of a force of occupation may have induced a level of social stress and stimulated the need for the sense of security provided by greater social cohesion.

Whether the same social forces also stimulated renewed interest in traditional sites of religious significance is speculative, but we do see the ritual deposition of quantities of Roman material in cave sites, particularly in northeast Scotland. The best known example is Sculptor's Cave, Covesea, on the Moray Firth, originally a burial site of later Bronze Age date, but others are attested at Constantine's Cave and Kinkell Cave in Fife. Such assemblages of Roman material may be interpreted as representing the inclusion of exotic and powerful material within local ritual offerings (Hunter 1996: 119).

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Conclusion

There is a clear distinction between what became the civil part of the Roman province of Britain, and the military zone. After initial resistance the former was rapidly conquered by Rome and, judging by the paucity of Roman forts, does not seem to have required much in the way of long-term military control. Thereafter the southeast shows all of the characteristics which typify a developed Roman province in the western empire, with administrative control vested in major urban centres, an extensive road system linking a range of smaller urban settlements, a hierarchy of Romanized rural sites, including villas and temples, and the ubiquitous presence, even on lower-order rural settlements, of a distinctive Romanized material culture. By contrast, the north and west was much slower to succumb to Roman arms and remained dominated by the military presence. Urbanization was slow to develop and limited in nature and extent; rural settlements exhibit little sign of Roman influence, with only three villas known north of the Tees; and away from the military sites, the distribution of Romanized material culture is relatively sparse. It has been argued that these different patterns of occupation in the Roman period are a direct reflection of pre-existing levels of socio-economic and political development, for the civil zone coincides almost exactly with those areas in the pre-Roman Iron Age which exhibit signs of a more developed socio-economic system, with the appearance of a complex political hierarchy, proto-urban centres (*oppida*), independent coin use, and long-term diplomatic and trading contacts with the Roman empire (Hanson forthcoming b).

There was a north–south, or rather a northwest–southeast, divide in the later prehistoric and Roman periods. This should not be seen in terms of simplistic geographical determinism, but in relation to differences of ethnic identity, ideology and modes of social reproduction (Haselgrove 1997: 257–8). Nor should these differences be taken as a value judgement to indicate that the north was economically peripheral or some sort of cultural backwater (e.g. Hingley 1992: 10). The peoples of north Britain were merely exhibiting a different trajectory of development within which Roman cultural norms and values, and Roman material culture, were seen as less relevant to the majority of the population.

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The stone circles of northeast Scotland in the light of excavation

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The stone circles of northeast Scotland (FIGURE 1) take a most distinctive form. On one level, they are made up of structural elements that are widely distributed in Britain: they are built from raw materials that had been selected for their colour and texture; the monoliths are graded in height towards the southwest and may have been aligned on the moon (Burl 2000). On another level, they have a character all of their own. They are known as 'recumbent' stone circles because their most massive component is a large flat block which

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