

# Unusual Roman Iron Age burials on the Links of Pierowall, Westray, Orkney

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## ABSTRACT

*Antiquarian accounts and surviving finds allow two Iron Age cist-burials found in the late 18th century on the Links of Pierowall on Westray, Orkney, to be reconstructed, although no details of the bodies survive (but both were most probably inhumations); the unusual finds have not previously received full attention. One burial contained a polished stone disc, used as a palette for grinding some valued substance, probably cosmetic, medical or narcotic. A review of the type emphasises its particular prevalence in northern Scotland, and places it within the wider context of an increase in artefacts linked to personal appearance and behaviour in the Roman Iron Age. The other burial contained a well-known Roman glass cup and a hitherto ignored ‘metal spoon’ which can reasonably be identified as a Roman import as well, plausibly of silver. Such spoons are rare import goods, known from rich burials beyond the frontier on continental Europe in the late 2nd and 3rd century AD. This suggests that the Roman world adopted similar approaches to its varied neighbours in terms of the goods offered in (most likely) political or diplomatic connections.*

*Burials accompanied by polished stone discs can now be recognised as a rare but recurring feature of the Scottish Iron Age from the Tay to Shetland. Burials with Roman goods are infrequent, and it is noteworthy that there are no exceptionally rich examples, in contrast to other areas beyond the frontier, although a similar spectrum of import goods can be recognised. It is suggested this may arise from a local distaste for extravagant burials.*

## LINKS OF PIEROWALL

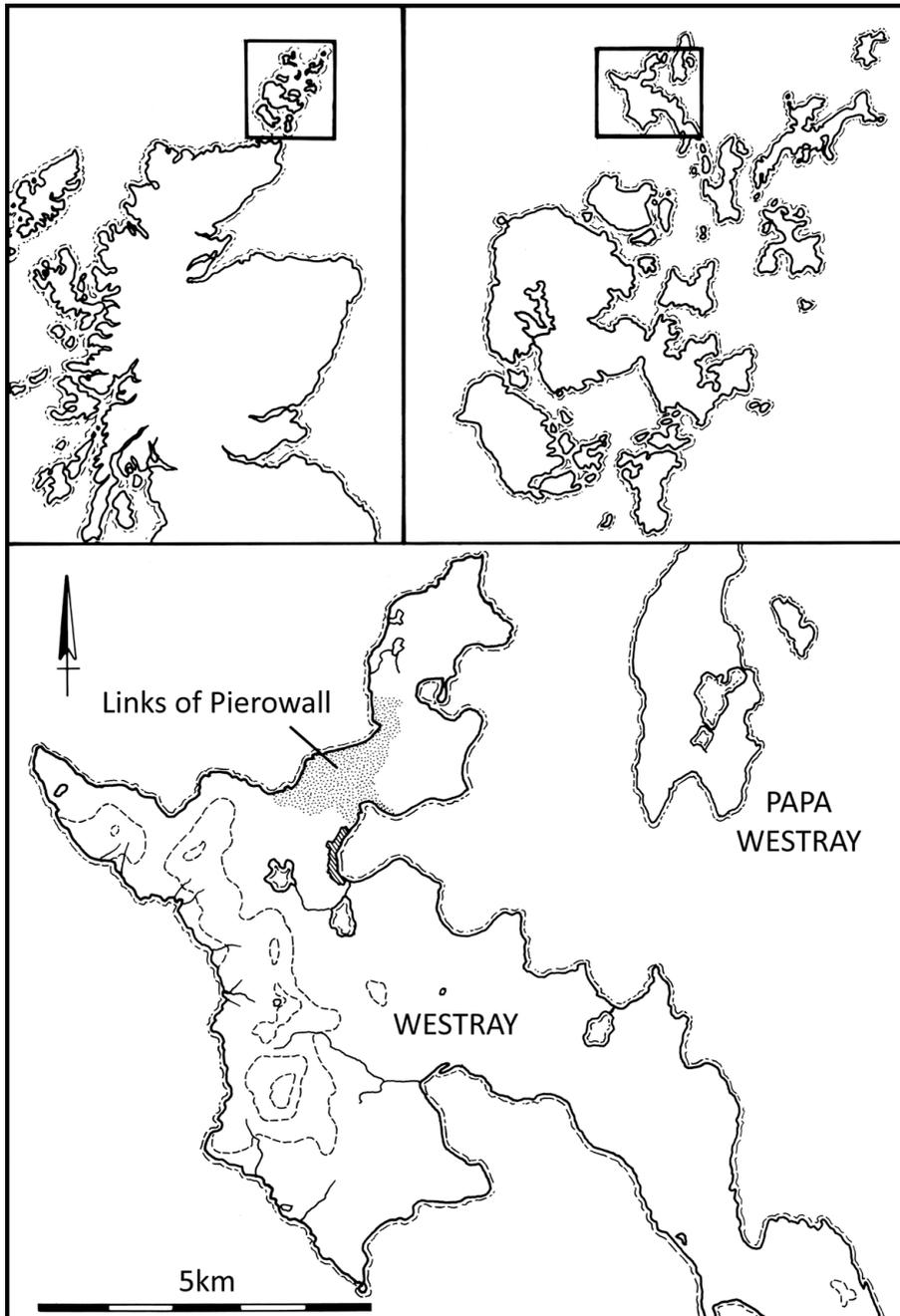
During his *Tour through the North Isles and part of the Mainland of Orkney in the Year 1778*, the Rev George Low visited Westray and ‘the house of Trinabay’ (Trenabie), at a time when ‘the whole corn grounds, gardens, etc., round Noutland Castle by a storm of northwest wind, were deluged with Sand’ (SAS MS 539; Goudie (ed) 1915: 146; Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998: 129, fig 7.8; Graham-Campbell 2004: 213; Graham-Campbell forthcoming). This sand-blow

derived from the Links of Pierowall (Illus 1), as described in the RCAHMS *Inventory of Orkney* (1946: 355, no. 1046):

A broad band of blown sand extends from the shore of Pierowall Bay, across a neck of land, barely half a mile [c 800m] wide, to the N.W. shore of the island. On the Pierowall side it extends round the bay to the neighbourhood of Gill, and on the hill behind the village the surface of the sand has, by a process well known to the botanist, become converted into links. The links stretch from Noutland Castle, which is not itself on the sand, in a N.E. direction to Rackwick Bay and Biggins, but do not reach the house of Trenabie.

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ILLUS 1 Location map showing the Links of Pierowall, Westray. (Drawing by Alan Braby)

## DISCOVERY

In 1778 Low described how:

The shifting of the Sand has laid open many particulars which had been hid for hundreds of years under (in some places) more than 20 feet [6m] of Sand. Ancient burying-places are very frequent here. These are of two sorts, the Tumulus, or grave, made up into a vast heap of Stones and rubbish, or the second kind which has the grave simply set round with a tire of small stones on end. These last are generally in clusters and even with the Sand (Goudie (ed) 1915: 146–7; Cuthbert 1995: 118–19).

Low went on to describe what were clearly pagan Norse burials, providing considerable information concerning their contents (quoted in full in Graham-Campbell 2004: 213; see also Graham-Campbell forthcoming), although his inventory of the finds provides evidence for the simultaneous discovery of at least two Iron Age burials:

In examining these [graves] we find besides the bones of Men, those of Cows, Horses, Dogs and Sheep; besides warlike instruments of all kinds then in use ... Also instruments in use for the common necessities of life ... Likewise matter of ornament ... Also many particulars the use of which is now totally lost, as a *round flat piece of marble about 2½ inches in diameter ... In one was found a metal Spoon, and a neat Glass Cup which may contain about two Gills Scottish measure.* [our italics]

The ‘neat Glass Cup’, of Roman manufacture, and the ‘round flat piece of marble’ both still exist in National Museums Scotland (NMS), having passed through different hands (as described below), whereas the ‘metal Spoon’ is lost.

Low had in fact learned of these finds sometime before visiting Westray during his 1778 tour, as is evident from his passing reference to the discovery of ‘the glass cup’ in a letter, dated February 1778, written to ‘Mr George Paton, of the Custom House, Edinburgh, a well-known antiquary’, as published by Joseph Anderson in his ‘Introduction’ to Low’s (1774) *Tour through the Islands of Orkney and Schetland* (Anderson 1879: lx):

I have now just fallen in with a few very great curiosities from one of the neighbouring graves to which the *glass cup* was found, and which I have secured.

1, A sword made of bone, being part of the jaw of a Spermaceti Whale, broke in the middle; 2, an iron sword, in bad preservation; 3, part of a casque or helmet, very neatly ornamented with engraving; 4, several things made of stone, uses unknown, resembling the whorles made use of in making a spindle turn.

You may depend on ... having the above catalogue sent as soon as I take drawings of them.

These other artefacts do not survive (nor do Low’s drawings, if executed), but they can be recognised as Viking Age grave goods, with (1) being a whalebone weaving batten. Iron weaving battens are present in several pagan Norse burials in Scotland (and whalebone battens are known from Norway), including the boat grave at Scar, Sanday, Orkney, which also contained two stone spindle whorls (Smith 1999).

Low failed to find publishers for his manuscripts in his lifetime (1747–95), and his 1778 *Tour* was only published in 1915, when edited by Gilbert Goudie; however, the Rev George Barry, the minister of Shapinsay, made extensive use of them in the preparation of his *History of the Orkney Islands*, which was published shortly before his death in 1805 (see below). In the meantime, the relevant passage was paraphrased in print by the Rev James Douglas in *Nenia Britannica* (Douglas 1793: 76).

In his contribution on the ‘Parish of Westray’ to the *Statistical Account of Scotland* (vol 16: 251–64), the Rev James Izat (1795: 263) described how:

In several places along the shores of the island of Westray you meet with graves, which are certainly of a very ancient date. On the north west shore of this island, and not far from the house of Trenaby, some of these graves were opened a few years ago, and among the ashes were found one or two short sabres or swords, which were perfectly entire as to the shape, though much consumed with rust. There was also found at the same time, in one of these graves a drinking vessel, though it could not be easily distinguished of what materials it was made.

Izat's reference to 'ashes' (cf Low's 'bones of Men') may well account for the later (1870) reference to the 'Glass Cup' grave as containing 'bones apparently burnt' ('Donations', in *Proc Soc Antiq Scot* 8 (1868–70): 390–1), given that there is no mention of this in any other source.

The fuller version of the relevant passage in Low's (1778) *Tour* was published soon after by Barry (1805: 205–6). According to the *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885–1900* (vol 3), 'Barry's "History" displays much diligent research and careful individual observation, notwithstanding the fact that he had access to the valuable manuscripts of Low.' Barry was thus able to provide greater detail about the finds than Izat:

The island of Westray, in particular, contains, on the north and south-west sides of it, a great number of graves, scattered over two extensive plains, of that nature which are called *links* {Sandy, flat ground, generally near the sea} in Scotland. They have at first, perhaps, been covered by tumuli, or barrows, though of this there is no absolute certainty, as the ground, on which they are, is composed entirely of sand, by the blowing of which the graves have only of late been discovered. They are formed either of stones of moderate size, or of four larger ones on end, arranged in the form of a chest, to contain the body, and such other articles as the custom of the time interred with it. Few or no marks of burning are observable in these mansions of the dead, which are occupied mostly by bones, not of men only, but of several other animals. Warlike instruments ... also make a part of their contents ... They have, besides, been found to contain instruments employed in the common purposes of life ... and others that have been used as ornaments ... together with some other articles the use of which is now unknown. Of this last kind may be mentioned, a flat piece of marble, of a circular form, about two inches and a half in diameter ... In one of them was found a metal spoon, and a glass cup that contained two gills Scotch measure.

Barry's only significant departure from Low's manuscript is in his reference to graves, 'formed ... of four larger [stones] on end, arranged in the form of a chest, to contain the body' (short cists),

while emphasising that 'few or no marks of burning are observable in these mansions of the dead, which are occupied mostly by bones'.

#### THE 'GLASS CUP'

Low's 'neat Glass Cup' has for long been in fragments (Illus 2; NMS: X.EQ 97), certainly by the time it was drawn by James Irvine (Ritchie 2011) for inclusion in his figure of miscellaneous 'Orcadian Antiquities from the Museum of the Scottish Antiquaries 1863' (Illus 3). Its base was subsequently engraved for publication by Joseph Anderson (in Davidson 1886: fig 2), as 'Portion of the Bottom of Glass Vessel found in a Cist in Westray' (Illus 4).

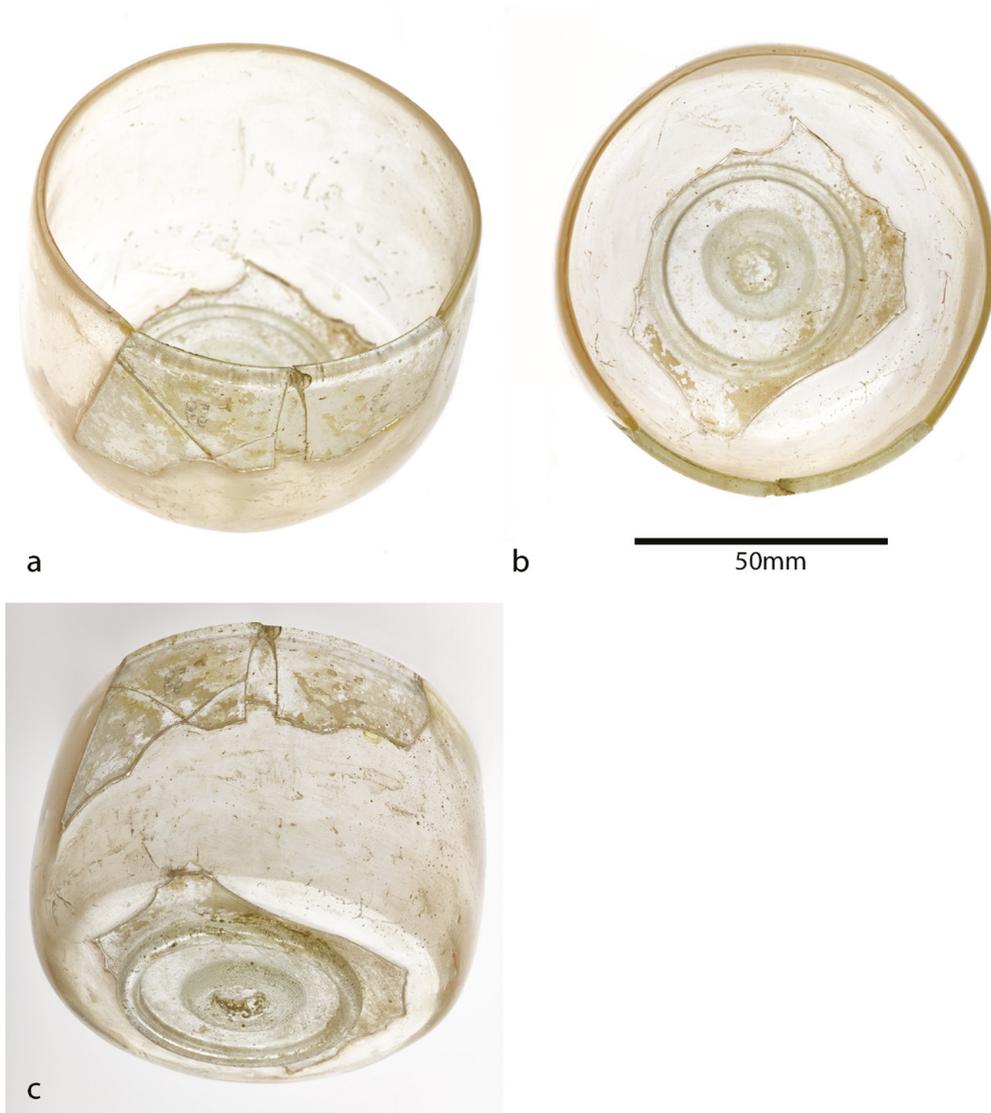
The cup was, however, intact when found and was illustrated as such in 1790 by Adam M L De Cardonnel, of Edinburgh, in vol II (pl 2, fig 1) of a pair of albums of his watercolours, *Relicta Antiqua*, now in NMS (Graham-Campbell 2004: 213–14, illus 5). The two views of the plain cup (signed and dated by him) are captioned: 'A Glass Cup found in a Danish Grave in Orkney. 2½ Inches deep and 3 Inches Diameter' (Illus 5). However, in his 'Introduction' to the albums (vol I: xxii), he states that:

In Westra, one of the Orkney Islands was found some years ago, a Glass Cup, supposed to be of very great Antiquity in many places the metal is eaten through by the Damp.

De Cardonnel's watercolour is presumably based on an ink drawing in his scrapbook (National Library of Scotland: Acc12139, p 97, no. 350) that seems to be signed McBain (?).

Joseph Anderson (in Davidson 1886: 139) provides the following explanation for the cup's condition:

I am informed by Colonel Balfour of Trenaby, F.S.A.Scot., that the vessel was quite entire when found, and that it was accidentally broken after it had been brought to Edinburgh to be given to Dr Brunton.

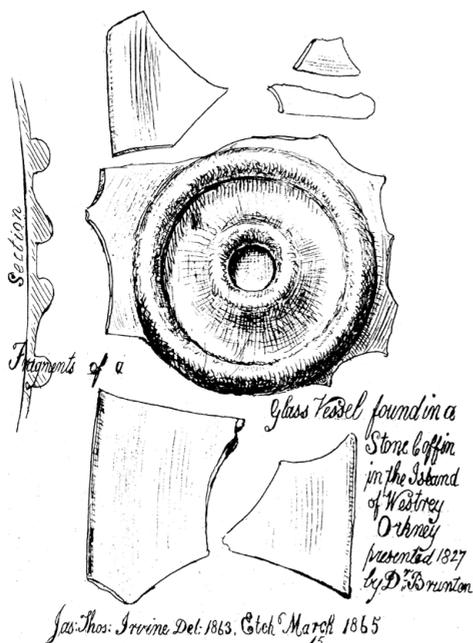


ILLUS 2 The glass cup fragments, set in a reconstructed vessel: (a) angled view from above; (b) view of the base; (c) angled view from below. Scale 2:3. (© National Museums Scotland)

The next recorded appearance of the cup is the occasion on which it was presented to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS) by the Rev Dr Brunton, on 12 March 1827 (*Archaeologia Scotica* 3 (1831): Appendix II of Appendix III, 113), when it was described as:

A Glass Vessel found in a stone coffin in the island of Westray, and the only specimen hitherto discovered of glass being contained in these cemeteries.

Alexander Brunton (1772–1854), of Edinburgh, was a minister in the Church of Scotland (Moderator of the General Assembly, 1823) and a noted academic, being Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Languages at the University



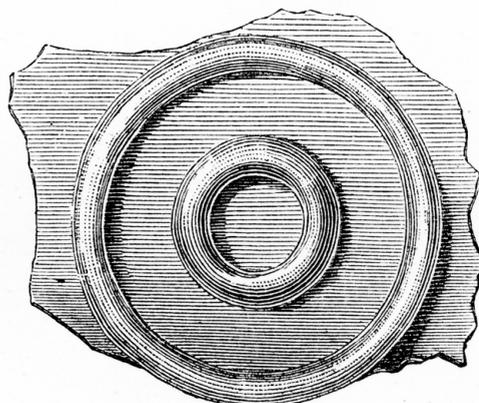
ILLUS 3 The glass cup fragments, as illustrated by J T Irvine in 1863. (Courtesy of National Museums Scotland Library, 936.113 IRV)

of Edinburgh (1813–47) and University Librarian (1822–54).

Although Daniel Wilson (1851: 307) observed correctly that this glass cup was ‘not improbably of Roman manufacture’, Joseph Anderson (1874a: 586–7) devoted a separate section to it in his ‘Notes on the relics of the Viking period’: ‘Section V. Beaker of Glass, found in a Grave in Westray’. However, he came to change his mind, following the discovery of a similar ‘small cup-shaped glass vessel ... in a stone cist’ at Airlie, Angus (Davidson 1886), concluding that (ibid: 139):

We have thus in Scotland certainly two, and probably three, examples of the occurrence of this variety of small cup-shaped vessels of glass, associated with interments which are probably of Iron Age.

Anderson’s initial interpretation of the cup as a Viking Age ‘relic’ was followed by Anton Brøgger (1930: 168), who introduced a new



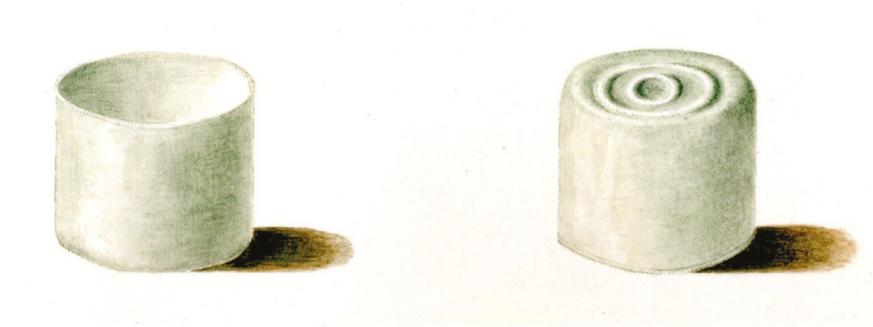
ILLUS 4 The base of the glass cup, as illustrated by Joseph Anderson. Scale 1:1. (Davidson 1886: fig 2; courtesy of Society of Antiquaries of Scotland)

confusion by supposing that it had been found in a stone cist opened in 1827 (Pierowall ‘grav-funn no. 15’), presumably having misunderstood Anderson’s statement (1874a: 587) that: ‘It was presented by the Rev. Dr Brunton in March 1827, and is described as having been “found in a stone coffin in Westray”’.

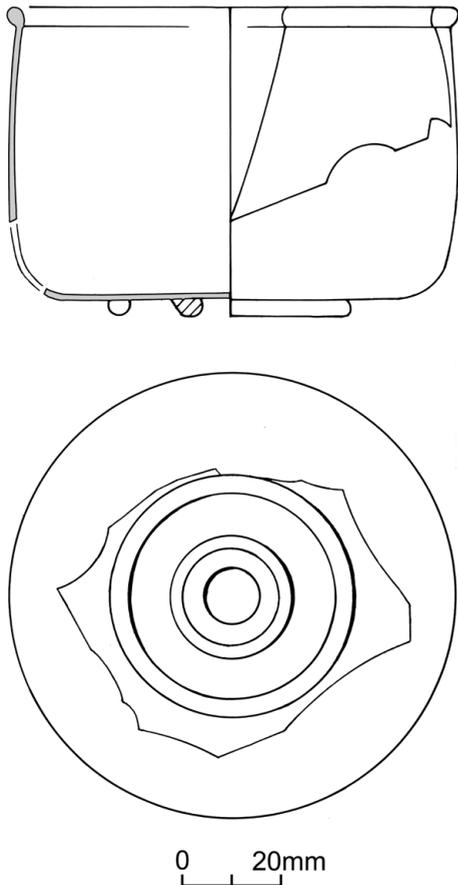
Brøgger’s acceptance of the cup as being of Viking Age date was disregarded by both Sigurd Grieg in *Viking Antiquities in Scotland* (1940) and Arne Thorsteinsson in ‘The Viking burial place at Pierowall, Orkney’ (1968). It appeared in accounts of Roman finds from non-Roman sites in Scotland (Curle 1932: 395, no. 88; Robertson 1970: 212), before finally receiving full treatment in Dominic Ingemark’s study of *Glass, Alcohol and Power in Roman Iron Age Scotland* (2014: 60–70, 246), which we paraphrase here.

#### ROMAN CYLINDRICAL GLASS CUPS

The plain cylindrical glass cup, with its fire-rounded rim (Diam: 90mm) and double base-ring (Diam: 48mm), was originally some 60mm tall (Illus 6); the base-ring shows notable use-wear (Illus 2c). It belongs to a group of Roman drinking vessels well known from Iron Age Scotland. Ingemark’s catalogue includes 13 to 15 examples from 11 Iron Age sites north of Hadrian’s



ILLUS 5 The intact cup. (Illustration by Adam De Cardonnel; © National Museums Scotland)



ILLUS 6 Reconstruction of the glass cup. (Drawing by Marion O'Neil)

Wall, predominantly from north of the Forth–Clyde line. Such cylindrical cups were ‘one of the most frequent types of drinking vessels of the late second- to mid-third century AD in the north-western provinces’ (Ingemark 2014: 64), but they are disproportionately frequent in the spectrum of glassware reaching Scottish sites, and there is also a disproportionate number of decorated examples (otherwise extremely rare). This indicates a clear selectivity (whether in supply or demand), firstly for drinking vessels, and secondly for more ornate examples. Three such cylindrical cups are recorded from the Northern Isles: sherds of two painted examples from Clickhimin and Old Scatness, Shetland (Ingemark 2014: 65, A1–2, figs 3.8.5, no. 3, & 3.8.6b), and this plain one from Orkney (ibid: 64, 65, 246, B:3, figs 3.8.5, no. 2, & 8.4).

The type starts in the late Antonine period, and in Romano-British contexts is thought to run to the middle of the 3rd century (Ingemark 2014: 62), but Roman contexts on the continent show a longer date-range, to *c* 300, with examples surviving into the 4th century (Fünfschilling 2015: 134–7, 696). Examples from burials beyond the frontier in Scandinavia and north Germany fall into the 3rd century; Lund Hansen (1987: 74–7; 2000: 330) put them in the latter part of phase C1b of the Germanic Iron Age, *c* 230–60 (see Ethelberg 2000: fig 33). None of the Scottish finds have associations to confirm when they were buried, but a similar date-range of *c* 160–300 seems acceptable. The wear on our example suggests that it saw extended use.

## THE ‘METAL SPOON’

The fate of the Westray ‘metal Spoon’ is unknown; indeed, the glass cup and marble disc are the only known survivors from among the grave goods recovered in the 18th century from the Links of Pierowall.

This (lost) spoon is unique in an Iron Age burial context in Scotland, and it was most plausibly a Roman import, along with the glass cup with which it was reportedly associated. Its ‘metal’ was unfortunately not specified by Low, and it may be that it was not immediately identifiable because of corrosion. It is worth recalling that the contents of the St Ninian’s Isle hoard, Shetland, of predominantly Pictish silver (including a spoon) ‘were thought to be bronze on discovery [in 1958], given their “brilliant green incrustation”’ (Graham-Campbell 2002: 4).

Two alternative identifications should be considered. Copper-alloy ‘scoops’ are occasional finds from Iron Age graves in Britain, with a Scottish example from Burnmouth in Berwickshire (Craw 1924; MacGregor 1976: nos 281–2; more broadly, Fitzpatrick 2007: 290–9). However, these are a firmly pre-Roman type, and an association with a Roman glass cup is most unlikely. In addition, they habitually turn up in pairs, but only a singleton is recorded here. As another alternative, it should be noted that there are at least two copper-alloy spoons from Viking Age graves in Scotland and Ireland: from Moan, Orkney (Cursiter 1887: 345; Grieg 1940: 201), and from Kilmainham, Dublin (Harrison & Ó Floinn 2014: 208–9, ill 134). However, Low clearly states that ‘In one [grave] was found a metal Spoon, and a neat Glass Cup’, and he was a reliable commentator (see Hunter 2006: 146–7); his statement about the association can be treated with a high degree of confidence.

To contextualise this scanty reference, we need to cast our net more widely across *barbaricum*, given that Roman spoons are otherwise all but unknown from Iron Age contexts in Scotland. While examples do occur in the 5th- and ?6th-century *Hacksilber* hoards from Traprain Law (East Lothian), Norrie’s Law (Fife) and Gaulcross (Aberdeenshire), these

fragments were brought north for bullion rather than use (Painter & Baratte forthcoming; Hunter forthcoming a, with further references). We are left with only two other finds. From Traprain Law (East Lothian) comes a lion-handled copper-alloy folding spoon (Burley 1956: 183, no. 260), while an inscribed copper-alloy fragment from Sculptor’s Cave, Covesea (Moray), has recently been recognised as part of a late Roman spoon (Benton 1931: fig 15.5; Hunter 2020: 137, 146–8, illus 5.50 SF781); this cave was used for burials in the Roman Iron Age, accompanied by intact personal ornaments (Armit & Büster 2020: 255–7), but the condition of this find suggests that it was deliberately broken for deposition in this sacred place. Clearly Roman spoons were not a regular part of the suite of import goods to Iron Age Scotland. The same is true of Ireland: a remarkable jet spoon found at an Iron Age burial site at Carbury Hill, Co. Kildare, must be a Romano-British skeuomorph of a 4th-century large-bowled swan-handled silver spoon (Raftery 1984: 342), but no metal spoons are known from the island except two silver fragments hacked for bullion in the Ballinrees *Hacksilber* hoard which probably reached the island in this condition (Hunter forthcoming a, with references).

Finds from graves beyond the frontier on the continent offer better parallels. Within the north-west provinces, spoons started to appear in graves during the 2nd century (Böhme 1970: 191–2). They were unknown in *barbaricum* before this but appear thereafter in small numbers. In western, central and northern Europe, they are consistently associated with the richest graves of the so-called Haßleben-Leuna type, a series of inhumation burials of the 3rd century which concentrate in central-northern Germany and western Poland, with related finds from Scandinavia and rare, spectacular examples from Slovakia and the Czech Republic (Table 1). Their dating puts them in a similar timeframe to ours; the presence and significance of spoons in these burials is discussed further below. Spoons also appear in rich burials beyond the eastern frontier in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, in Crimea and Georgia: for instance, in a female burial from

near Glinišče, Kerch, Crimea, and double-burials from Mtskheta and Zghuderi, Georgia (Reinach 1892: 40, 80, pl XXX, nos 3 and 5; Apakidze & Nikolaishvili 1994: 33, fig 20 nos 16–17; Braund et al 2009: 74–5).

There is no other tradition of spoons in burials beyond the frontier until the 5th–7th centuries, when they appear, usually singly and without other culinary gear, in burials in the lower and middle Rhine area (Böhme 1970: 179), a tradition that extended to southern England as well (see list in Sherlock 1973). These examples are different in concept and later in date, and they will not be considered further.

#### SPOONS IN THE HAßLEBEN-LEUNA BURIALS AND RELATED FINDS

Spoons occur in 14 of the Haßleben-Leuna burials, from 11 findspots (Table 1). They are mostly found singly: where pairs occur, some comprise near identical spoons, but in others they are of different types, suggesting that different spoons had different specific functions.<sup>1</sup> All are of silver;<sup>2</sup> a number have decorated bowls and/or handles. Associations (mostly based on grave goods rather than skeletons) are with both males and females. A number of features are noteworthy. Firstly, they are found in the richest stratum of burials (Schlüter 1970), though it is notable that the rich find from Gommern, with its wealthy tableware assemblage, had no spoon (Becker 2010). Secondly, they are always found with other table gear for eating (plates, dishes and bowls of silver and bronze) and drinking (vessels of glass – though not the type found at Pierowall – bronze, silver and, in one case, gold). Indeed, they were often placed among these items in the grave (Prohászka 2006: 61). It has not been possible to assess whether they show signs of use-wear (Swift 2014).

In a number of instances, the spoons have owners' graffiti. Most strikingly, the grave from Białęcino (formerly Balenthin) in western Poland had the same graffiti, Attius, on both the tinned bronze dish and the silver spoon (the male name indicating that this was from a previous owner, as it was probably buried with a woman). Hahula

(1996: 150) suggested that it was loot, but it seems more likely to represent a personal gift, as such graffiti are a recurring feature, being found on spoons from Mušov and Emersleben.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of date, Mušov is the earliest, falling at the interface of phase B2/C1 of the Germanic Iron Age, c 160–90 (Peška & Tejral 2002: 508). The example from Hågerup, on Funen (Denmark), dates to phase C1b, c 210–50. The remainder are dated to phase C2, c 250–310, apart from the rich Årslev grave which was buried in phase C3 (later 4th century), but included material up to 200 years old at the time of burial (Storgaard 1990; *contra* Lund Hansen 1987: 426); the spoon is a 3rd-century type.

Although some of the spoons are relatively plain (such as those from Hågerup, Tuna and Białęcino), many are ornate, with decorative handles and, in some cases, bowls. A slightly cruder example from Zakrzów/Sackrau grave 3 has been interpreted as a local version of such a spoon (Quast 2009: 30, Abb 46), indicating a local social value was placed on these items.

Beyond these graves, evidence for spoons as import goods is very rare. The published volumes of the *Corpus der römischen Funde im europäischen Barbaricum* (CRFB) produce only a handful of examples, almost all in bronze (Table 2). In several cases they come from sites in central Germany rich in Roman scrap and are likely to have been imported as fragments for recycling rather than as items for use (cf Voß & Wigg-Wolf 2017: 109).

#### IMPLICATIONS

All the spoons certainly from burials are thus of silver, making it most likely that our Pierowall example was too (and hinting at its likely fate, recycled upon discovery). The other burials were notably rich but Pierowall, it seems, was less so, as fits local practice (see below), with no hint of further finds in the sparse early records other than the glass cup. The spoon and glass cup represent exotic feasting gear, perhaps enough in themselves as grave goods, or perhaps organic vessels provided the platter or bowl for use with the spoon.

TABLE 1  
Spoons from burials in *bar-baricum*, ordered geographically (all are silver apart from the Pierowall example, whose material is not known). Conventional phases of the Germanic Iron Age are given, with chronological equivalents.

<i>Findspot</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Notes</i>	<i>Phase/date</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Pierowall (Orkney/UK)	1	burial		170–300	
Tuna, Badelunda (Västmanland/Sweden)	2	burial F?	same type	C2, 250–310	Stenberger 1956; Lund Hansen 1987: 223–5 & no. 336
Årslev (Funen/Denmark)	1	double burial M/F	associated with F	C3, 310–75	Eggers 1951: no. 84; Lund Hansen 1987: 224–5; Storgaard 1990
Hågerup (Funen/Denmark)	1	burial M		C1b, 210–50	Eggers 1951: no. 102; Lund Hansen 1987: 224–5, 426
Emersleben grave 2 (Sachsen-Anhalt/Germany)	2	burial F	different types	C2, 250–310	Eggers 1951: no. 1494; Schulz 1952; CRFB D6: VII-04-5/1.10, /1.11
Halbleben grave 8 (Thüringen/Germany)	1	burial F	placed in ceramic cup	C2, 250–310	Schulz 1933: 11; Taf 7.2; Eggers 1951: no. 1635; CRFB D8.1: XVII-13-18/1.21
Halbleben grave 34 (Thüringen/Germany)	1	burial F		C2, 250–310	Eggers 1951: no. 1637; CRFB D8.1: XVII-13-18/1.46
Leuna 1926 grave (Sachsen/Germany)	1	burial M		C2, 250–310	Eggers 1951: no. 1539; Schulz 1953: 28, 62–3, Taf XIX, 2; CRFB D6: VIII-10-12-1.17
Białęcino/Balenthin (Pomerania/Poland)	1	burial F or child	graffiti on dish and spoon	C2, 250–310	Eggers 1951: no. 657; von Kleist 1955: 24, Taf 27; Hahula 1996
Zakrzów/Sackrau grave 1 (Wrocław/Poland)	1	burial F?		C2, 250–310	Eggers 1951: no. 768; Majewski 1960: 142 no. 105, pl XXXd

TABLE 1  
Continued

<i>Findspot</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Notes</i>	<i>Phase/date</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Zakrzów/Sackrau grave 3 (Wrocław/Poland)	1	burial F	Germanic copy	C2, 250–310	Eggers 1951: no. 770; Majewski 1960: 144 no. 132, pl XXXc; Quast 2009: 30 & Abb 46
Mušov (Moravia/Czech Republic)	2	burial M	2 different types with same graffito, one with overlying graffito	B2/C1, 160s–180s	Künzl 2002: 354–6; Künzl & Künzl 2002: 588–90, G3–4
Ostrovany/Osztopataka (Slovakia)	2	burial			Prohászka 2006: 61–2; Prohászka 2014
Stráže grave 1 (Slovakia)	1	burial F			Krupa & Klčo 2015: 106–7
Stráže grave 2 (Slovakia)	2	burial M	same type		Krupa & Klčo 2015: 120–3
Glimišče (Aschik), Kerch (Crimea)	2	burial F	2 different types; graffito	early 3rd century	Reinach 1892: 40, 80, pl XXX nos 3 & 5
Mtskheta grave 905 (Georgia)	2	double burial (1 F)	2 different types; placed in small silver bowl on silver tray	mid-2nd–3rd century	Apakidze & Nikolaishvili 1994: 33, fig 20 nos 16–17
Zghuderi, sarcophagus 3 (Georgia)	2	double burial	similar; one with local graffito; probably made 1st century AD	c 200	Braund et al 2009: 74–5

TABLE 2

Settlement and stray finds of Roman spoons from western and northern *barbaricum*. Material: Ag silver, CuA copper alloy

<i>Findspot</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Detail</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Covesea (Moray/UK)	CuA	fragment, junction	burial/ritual	4th century?	Benton 1931: fig 15.5; Hunter 2020: 137, 146–8, illus 5.50 SF781
Traprain Law (E Lothian/UK)	CuA	folding spoon, intact	settlement	late 2nd/3rd century	Burley 1956: 183, no. 260; Sherlock 2007
Blankenburg (Sachsen-Anhalt/D)	CuA	long-handled, intact	stray	?	Schirwitz 1926: 8, 44–5, Taf III no. 34
Eichenbarleben (Sachsen-Anhalt/D)	tinned CuA	bowl, bag-shaped	settlement	c 180–230	CRFB D6: VII-16-2/1.1
Großjena (Sachsen-Anhalt/D)	Ag	handle fragment	settlement	mid-late Roman	CRFB D6: VIII-11-5/1.59
Großjena (Sachsen-Anhalt/D)	CuA	fragment, junction	settlement	mid-late Roman	CRFB D6: VIII-11-5/1.60
Kleinjena (Sachsen-Anhalt/D)	CuA	fragment	settlement	mid-late Roman	CRFB D6: VIII-11-6/1.11
Wulferstedt (Sachsen-Anhalt/D)	CuA	long-handled, intact	stray	probably early medieval	CRFB D6: VII-08-8/1.1
Bremen-Grambke (Land Bremen/D)	CuA	handle fragment	settlement	4th century	CRFB D4: XVII-**-1/5.1

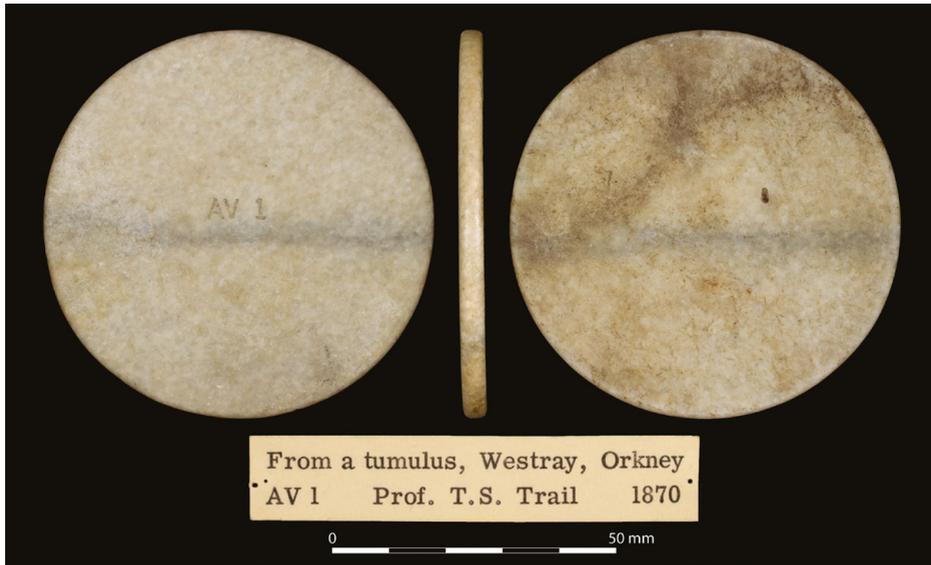
The continental Haßleben-Leuna burials represent a parallel and contemporary phenomenon, as do those around the Black Sea. There is no evidence of direct contact between groups in Scotland and the continent. Instead, the presence of spoons in rich burials in widely separated areas indicates a consistency in Roman dealings beyond different frontiers. As part of attempts to impress or cultivate relations at this time, silver spoons took their place among the finest of dining and drinking gear. While Roman bronze vessels are quite common in Germanic burials, these spoons were notably rare. The fact that a number have graffiti from previous (Roman) owners suggests that they may well have been personal gifts to seal personal diplomatic relationships.

#### THE MARBLE DISC

Low's 'round flat piece of marble about 2½ inches [c 64mm] in diameter' can readily be

identified, from its description and size, with a polished stone disc from Westray in NMS (X.AV 1; Diam: 69.5mm, Th: 4.5mm). It is perhaps the most striking example of this class of polished stone discs, in a beautiful white marble with a near-central blue vein, the faces perfectly flat and highly polished, the edge likewise well-polished and slightly convex (Illus 7). The stone is not local to Orkney, but such marbles (metamorphosed limestone) are known from elsewhere in Scotland, although the source cannot yet be pinned down (identification and commentary by Peter Davidson, NMS Geology). The two faces show different wear traces: on one the polish is well preserved but there is a multitude of fine cutting lines; on the other, the polish is rather more worn and the surface stained, with some amorphous brown streaks. It suggests the two faces were used differently.

This disc was acquired in 1870 as part of the collection of Orkney antiquities formed by the late Professor Thomas Stewart Traill



ILLUS 7 Polished stone disc from Links of Pierowall. (Photographs by Hugo Anderson-Whymark; © National Museums Scotland)

(1781–1862). Traill, who was born in Kirkwall, trained as a doctor in Edinburgh and practised medicine for 30 years in Liverpool before becoming Professor of Medical Jurisprudence at the University of Edinburgh (1832–54), while serving as Curator of the Museum of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (1834–56). His antiquarian involvement in Orkney is most evident in connection with the pagan Norse graves at Swandro, Westness, Rousay (Anderson 1874a: 563–6).

This ‘Collection of Antiquities from Orkney’ was presented to NMAS by ‘the Executors of the late Professor William [*sic*] Stewart Traill, M.D., through the Rev. J.R. Omond, Monzie, F.S.A.Scot.’, as recorded in the Proceedings of the meeting of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in May 1870 (‘Donations’, in *Proc Soc Antiq Scot* 8 (1868–70): 390–1), with the object in question being listed as:

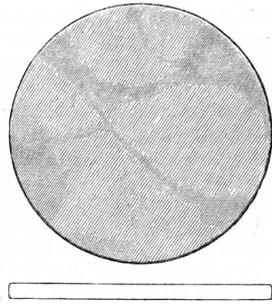
A Disk of polished marble,  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches diameter, and about  $\frac{3}{16}$ ths of an inch in thickness; found in a tumulus in the island of Westray, Orkney, in which were also found pieces of armour and portions of a glass cup, with bones apparently burnt.

This statement presumably reflects what Traill supposed to have been the find-circumstances of his polished marble disc from Westray (followed by Lamb 1983: 26, no. 81: ‘unlocated’), but it is more likely a conflation of the accounts by Low (in Barry) and Izat (see further below).

The disc was first illustrated by Joseph Anderson in the published version of his paper, entitled ‘Notes on some polished stone discs of unknown use, in the Museum’, delivered to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland on 11 May 1874; it was, however, wrongly captioned by him as a ‘Polished Disc of Marble from a brooch in Orkney’ (Anderson 1874b: 717). This error was corrected in the 1892 *Catalogue* in which the original woodcut (Illus 8) was reproduced and identified as AV 1, ‘found in a tumulus in Westray, Orkney – Prof. T.S. Traill, 1870’ (NMA *Catalogue* 1892: 67–8).

#### POLISHED STONE DISCS

Anderson’s paper references the three polished stone discs then in NMAS (1874b: 717), the other two examples being of ‘Mica Schist from Urquhart, Elginshire’ (NMS: X.AV 3), and ‘from



ILLUS 8 The polished stone disc, as illustrated by Joseph Anderson. Scale 1:2. (Anderson 1874b: 717; courtesy of Society of Antiquaries of Scotland)

the Broch of Burray, Orkney' (NMS: X.GC 46). His purpose in writing it was 'to revive an old conjecture of mine' regarding the probable function of these Iron Age artefacts, advancing 'the hypothesis that such discs of stone [dipped in water] may have been mirrors' (ibid: 719), drawing on ethnographic parallels from Peru and classical references. Anderson's (1874b) initial listing of the stone discs, which mentions others not in NMS, was subsequently extended in the *NMAS Catalogue* (1892: 67–8, AV 1–9), with the comment:

Their precise use is unknown, but it has been suggested that they may have been home-made substitutes for mirrors of metal, which would be scarce and costly. When dipped in water they would make tolerably fair substitutes for mirrors to people who had no other kind.

However, such use seems implausible for this type, not least since water itself would reflect an image better than the disc.

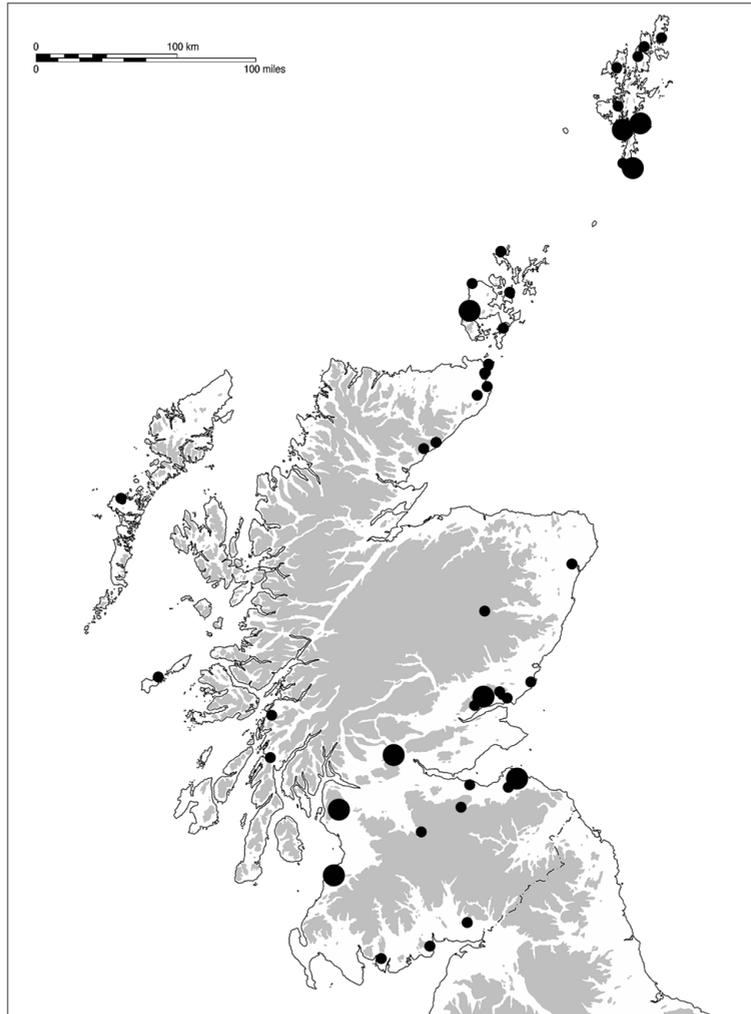
Anderson's lists were supplemented by Gordon Childe (1935: 245) without further comment, and then pithily but expertly by Robert Stevenson (1966: 28, 41 n68), who noted their broad distribution, from the Northern Isles to West Yorkshire; he suggested a role as palettes, but noted that '[the type] needs further study'. This it received in Audrey Henshall's publication of the stone assemblage from the Hurly Hawkin broch, Angus, where the 50 discs recovered ranged from finely polished ones to others that

had simply been chipped to shape. In dividing them into four types, she noted the boundaries were arbitrary and argued for a continuity from crudely chipped to finely polished, the polish arising from their use (Henshall 1982: 233–5). 'Some superb examples of type a are known, either from graves or chance finds, where the precision of their form is deliberate ...; these may perhaps have been used for special or ritual occasions.' It seems much better to separate out this group of better-made polished items; as Henshall herself noted, the cruder discs are found on sites of a wide range of dates, and her types b–d show a much wider range of diameters at Hurly Hawkin (a, 74–104mm; b, 46–112mm; c, 25–107mm; d, 18–102mm). This conflates objects of similar shape but different intent, and it is a mistake to link them.

Since Henshall, individual examples have been published (eg Ballin Smith 1994: 192; Clarke 1997: 123–4, illus 115.15; Bashford 2015: 342–3), but with no synthetic discussion until the discovery of one in a burial at Milla Skerra, Sandwick, Unst; the publication took the opportunity to explore aspects of the type (Goldberg & Hunter 2019: 115–17). Responding to Henshall, it was argued that 'Polished examples can be differentiated from other stone discs by the material, often lustrous or otherwise distinctive, and the effort in manufacturing the finely polished surface and carefully ground edges' (ibid: 116); those are the criteria followed here.

Childe and Stevenson noted the broad distribution of the type, which is particularly common in the Northern Isles (Illus 9).<sup>4</sup> Few have good contexts, but they were clearly current during the Roman Iron Age (with examples from Traprain Law, Hyndford crannog, and Birrens Roman fort, for instance), and the Milla Skerra burial was radiocarbon-dated to cal AD 150–390 (at 95.4%; cal AD 240–330 at 68.2%; SUERC-10745; Lelong 2019: 39). They are notably absent from classic hillfort assemblages of the pre-Roman Iron Age.<sup>5</sup> The disc is entirely at home with an Orcadian findspot and a Roman Iron Age date.

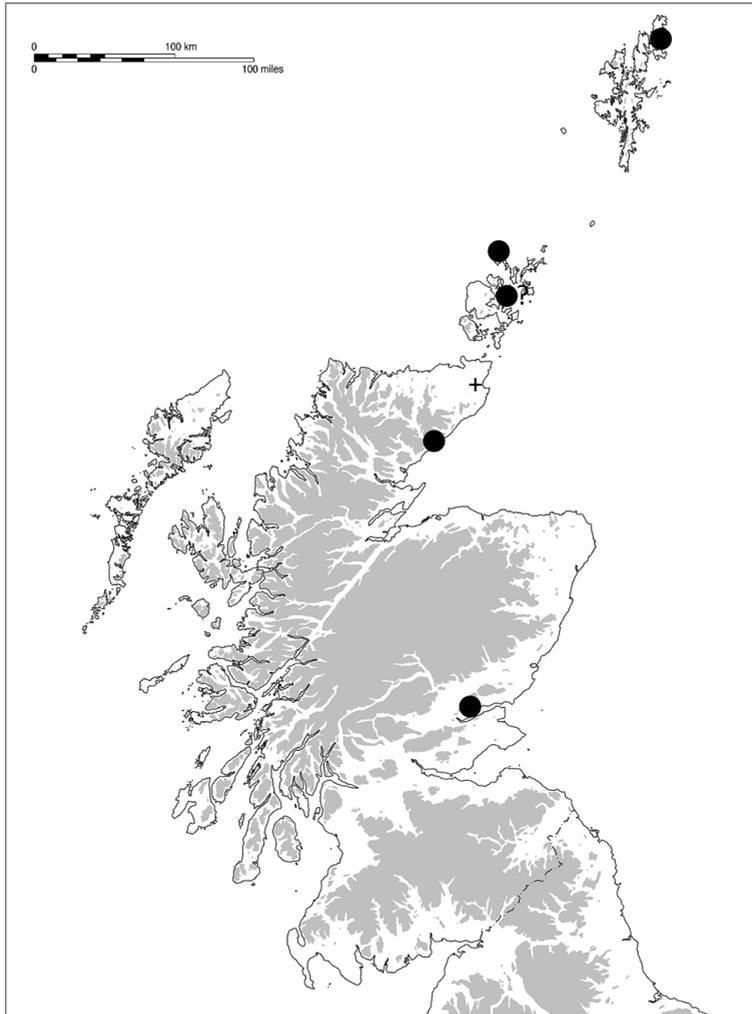
The likely date bracket raises the question of whether one should see influence from the quadrangular palettes, often of exotic stone, which



ILLUS 9 Distribution of polished stone discs; larger dots represent multiple finds. There are also poorly provenanced stray finds from Shetland (two), Orkney (two), Angus and Wigtownshire. (Image by Fraser Hunter)

were used in the Roman world for both cosmetic and medical functions (Riha 1986: 43–9; Joos 1986; Reniere et al 2018: 285–8; for medical use, Künzl 1982: 68, Abb 43.1; 74–5, Abb 49.2; 105–7, Abb 84, 85.12; 114, Abb 90.3). Seen in a wider context, J D Hill (1997) has noted an increasing interest in ‘toilet instruments’ (tweezers and suchlike) in the late pre-Roman Iron Age across Britain, and a similar pattern may be noted in the late La Tène period on the continent. It suggests enhanced attention to personal

appearance, a trend which accelerated in the Roman period. Scottish evidence of toilet instruments is reviewed elsewhere (Hunter 2020: 137, with further references). It is manifested primarily in the increasing appearance of tweezers, some likely to be Roman imports but others clearly local versions, with the habit running into the early medieval period. The discs can be seen as part of this phenomenon; there may be a direct influence from palettes, but it is perhaps better to envisage changing mindsets which made such



ILLUS 10 Distribution of polished stone discs from burials (dots) or their vicinity (+). (Image by Fraser Hunter)

items desirable in the context of wider social changes, enhanced by knowledge of or exposure to Roman habits.

Given the rarity of Iron Age burials in Scotland, it is notable that a number of these discs have burial associations. Three or four others are known, all from north of the Tay (Illus 10; Goldberg & Hunter 2019: 117). There is the Unst example noted above, and discussed further below; a possible one from Gorn on Shapinsay, said to have been found in a barrow (NMS X.AV 18), although the account is unclear;<sup>6</sup> another

was turned up with an inhumation in ploughing at Portgower, Helmsdale, Sutherland (NMS: X.AV 17); and a label on an example in Dundee Museum states that it was ‘Found in a Tomb at Baledgarno Gravel Pit’ (Hunter forthcoming b; Coutts 1971: 67, no. 139; Dundee Museum cat 1964–79). Also of relevance is one from the surface of a cairn at Ackergill, Caithness, perhaps deposited as an offering (Edwards 1927, although not mentioned; NMS: X.AV 11).

Most associations are too sparse to offer much information, but the Unst example came

from the burial of a mature adult (aged 50–60, probably male) who was also buried with a spiral copper-alloy ring holding two yellow glass beads, found in the chest area (Lelong 2019: 39–40; Goldberg & Hunter 2019: 113–18; Duffy 2019). The disc lay close to his mouth; white residues on the underside did not prove susceptible to analysis, but provide some support for the palette interpretation, assuming they represented a substance to eat or inhale. A slightly dulled area in the centre of one side is likely to represent use-wear, and a number of other examples show dish-ing (Goldberg & Hunter 2019: 117).

## CONTEXT

A critical approach to the limited, and somewhat contradictory, 18th- and 19th-century accounts of ‘burying places’, graves and grave goods discovered on the Links of Pierowall, as a result of wind-erosion shortly before (or early in) 1778, demonstrates that these included a minimum of two Iron Age graves among more numerous burials of Viking Age date.

It is probable that the ‘Glass Cup’ burial was in a stone cist, for the first recorded owner of the cup itself (pre-1827), the Rev Dr Alexander Brunton, believed it to have been ‘found in a stone coffin’, and it may well be that it was covered by a tumulus because such are recorded by Low, but his account provides no confirmation for this. It is also possible that this was a short cist, as such are mentioned by Barry. There is no evidence to support Wilson’s (1851: 307) statement that it was ‘apparently deposited on the breast of the deceased’.

According to Professor Thomas Traill, the first recorded owner of the marble disc (pre-1862), it had been found ‘in a tumulus ... with bones apparently burnt’, and such might have been the case, except that Low clearly states that the graves contained ‘the bones of Men’, rather than ‘ashes’ (Izat), which accords with the fact that all the better-recorded Viking Age graves recovered from the Links of Pierowall during the 19th century appear to have been inhumations. It was suggested above that Izat (1795) was less

well informed about the details of the burials than Low, who had visited the recently uncovered ‘burying places’ in 1778, but it could well be that Izat’s account influenced Traill’s description, despite Barry’s (1805) affirmation that ‘few or no marks of burning are observable in these mansions of the dead’.

A further note of uncertainty regarding the accuracy of Traill’s information is introduced by his additional statement that in the ‘tumulus ... were also found pieces of armour and portions of a glass cup’, given that Low’s account separates the marble disc from the grave in which ‘was found a metal Spoon, and a neat Glass Cup’. It is also worth bearing in mind that the two extant artefacts – the marble disc and the glass cup – passed through different hands before eventually reaching the museum during the 19th century.

Low’s initial ‘on-the-spot’ testimony has been accorded pre-eminence here over the finds-documentation of the two 19th-century collectors in reaching the conclusion that a minimum of two Iron Age burials were discovered on the Links of Pierowall, shortly before (or early in) 1778. These burials were more probably inhumations than cremations, and one – at least – appears to have been in a stone cist.

## ROMAN IRON AGE GRAVES IN SCOTLAND

Until relatively recently, Iron Age Scotland seemed to lack any burial tradition (Whimster 1981: 172–4, 410–16). Chance discoveries – especially with the routine application of radiocarbon dating to unaccompanied burials – have changed this picture (see Wallace *nd*), although it is clear that burial of any form was still a minority rite, and that Iron Age burial practices were enormously varied (for instance, see Armit *et al* 2013: 430–2 for East Lothian). Yet burials with Roman grave goods remain rare: the only addition to the most recent distribution (Hunter 1997: 123 n2, fig 12.3) is a further antiquarian find, from Goshen, near Camelon, Falkirk (Hunter 2001a), confirming the strong bias in the distribution to eastern Scotland north of the Forth (Illus 11; Table 3). By the standards of the continental burials which we have been examining, none of the

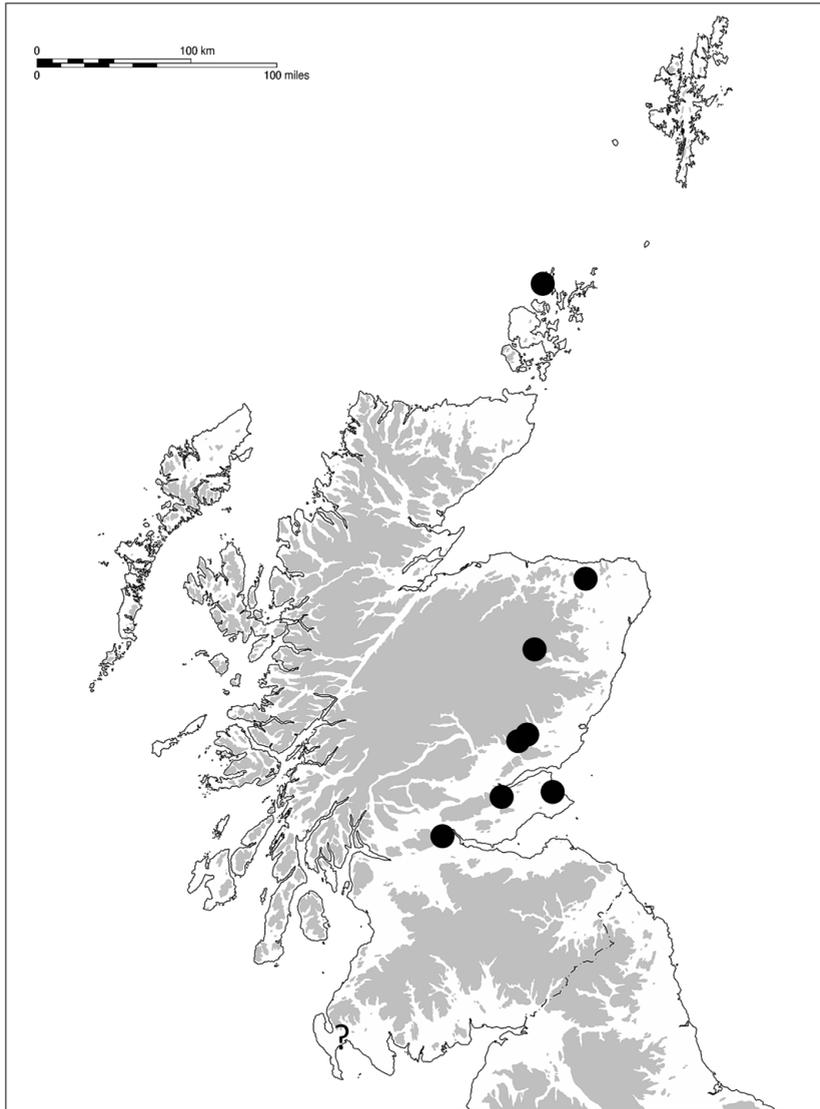
TABLE 3

Iron Age burials with Roman grave goods from Scotland; that from High Torrs (italicised) may well be a Roman burial. If no burnt remains were noted, the burial is assumed to be an inhumation. Burials accompanied just by a Romano-British penannular brooch are excluded, as it is possible such brooches were also made locally. The burial from Dalmeny with a Roman glass sherd reused in a necklace is excluded as it is early medieval (Ingemark 2014: 258). Key: Ag silver; CuA copper alloy; Fe iron; frag fragment

Site	Dining gear	Jewellery		Other	Notes	Date	Reference
		Roman	Other				
Airlie (Angus)	Glass cup				Inhumation in cist	170–250/300	Ingemark 2014: 64–5, 253, I:1
Brackenbraes (Aberdeenshire)	Glass jug		Glass or amber beads		Considered most plausibly a burial	75–150	Ingemark 2014: 252–3, G:3
Goshen, Camelon (Stirling)		Trumpet brooch		Fe spear	Inhumation in cist	75–200	Hunter 2001a: 114–17
Hallow Hill cist 54 (Fife)		Ag snake bracelet; CuA disc brooch	?	CuA seal box, pebbles and animal teeth gathered in bag with bracelet frag; fastened by brooch?	Iron Age CuA finger ring in construction of overlying cist; samian sherd and worked bone in lower fill. Child inhumation in cist	100–300	Proudfoot 1996: 413–14, 417–20
Hallow Hill 1861/cist 51B (Fife)	Glass cup (1 or 2)		Glass bangle?	Two bone items (handles?), one with bronze ?blade; stone ?whorl; jet fragment; smoothed pebbles	Inhumation in cist	170–250/300	Proudfoot 1996: 388, 413, 420–2; Ingemark 2014: 64–5, 257–8, L:2

TABLE 3  
Continued

Site	Dining gear	Jewellery		Other	Notes	Date	Reference
		Roman	Other				
High Torrs, Luce Sands (Dumfries & Galloway)	Samian jar and bowl; Fe dish	Fe ring with intaglio		CuA ring; iron chest fitting; hobnails and iron fragments; crucible fragment; slag	Roman cremation burial? Crucible fragment and slag perhaps accidental inclusions	160–250	Breeze & Ritchie 1980
Kingoldrum (Angus)	Glass cup		CuA chain and cross- pendant		Inhumation in cist; confused record (Hunter 1997: 123 n2)	170–250/300?	Ingemark 2014: 64–5, 253, 1:2
Merltsford (Fife)		Langton Down brooch		Fe spear	From a cairn	1–60	Hunter 1996: 120
Pierowall, Westray (Orkney)	Glass cup; Ag(?) spoon				Inhumation in cist	170–250/300	This paper
Waulkmill 1898 (Aberdeenshire)		Ag penannular brooch		Gaming set (stone and Roman glass counters); fine Fe dagger	Inhumation in cist	200–300?	Ingemark 2014: 52–5, 251–2, G:2; Bradley et al 2016: 29–30, 47–52



ILLUS 11 Distribution of burials with Roman grave goods. (Image by Fraser Hunter)

nine are rich, but the range of finds is comparable, with a focus on dining (five instances), jewellery (seven), weaponry (three) and, in one case, a gaming set. There was little admixture of indigenous material with the Roman: the weapons are most likely local, and one Hallow Hill burial may have had a local glass bangle, but there is otherwise nothing in the way of indigenous prestige goods in these graves. It seems Roman finds

alone were all that was needed to mark these burials out. Roman dining gear and jewellery, the predominant grave goods, were the key groups of material that were desirable in local Iron Age societies (Hunter 2001b), but there is none of the extravagance that marks burials such as those of the Hasleben-Leuna group or Kerch. This is perhaps unsurprising; in an area where burial rites were traditionally understated, the provision of

any grave goods at all, especially valued and exotic items such as these, would carry considerable impact.

In contrast, the second burial, with the palette, can be argued to represent a local special item. While such discs are not uncommon, being known from over 50 sites, the examples from burials are often a cut above the rest in material and finish. The distribution of those from burials is very similar to burials with Roman goods, with a focus on eastern Scotland north of the Forth (Illus 10; cf Illus 11). Yet the discs have not been found along with Roman grave goods, although they were at least in part contemporary. It indicates that different social roles were being signalled by this material; this makes it even more unfortunate that the bodies themselves so rarely survive to inform us of these unusual individuals with their unusual offerings.

## CONCLUSION

Daniel Wilson (1851: 307) was moved by the existence of the ‘imperfect’ glass cup from Westray to comment:

The extreme rarity of such articles probably characterizes this as another example of the ungrudging generosity of affectionate reverence for the deceased, no less marked than the more valued sepulchral deposits of the precious metals.

Both of the Iron Age burials from Pierowall contained items of rarity, with the tantalisingly lost spoon being most likely the rarest of all. We might now be less certain of the motives behind those objects chosen to accompany the deceased, but the two burials stand as exceptionally unusual discoveries. The one with the disc represents a rare northern and eastern Scottish tradition, with the detailed role of such enigmatic discs still obscure. That with the Roman finds is a version of habits found widely beyond the Roman empire, in the 3rd century AD in particular, and emphasises the need for a broad comparative view to put our Scottish finds into the appropriate context.

## NOTES

- 1 Pairs: Tuna (Sweden), Strazé 2 (Slovakia). Different types: Emersleben (Germany), Mušov (Czech Republic). Two of the eastern finds, from Glinišče, Kerch (Crimea) and Mtskheta (Georgia), also had two spoons of different types.
- 2 A stray find of an intact bronze spoon from Wulferstedt (Sachsen-Anhalt / Germany) comes from an area where Germanic burials are known (CRFB D6, VII-08-8/1.1). Schulz (1952: 116) argued that it was probably found with a silver Germanic brooch, but Schwarz (1950: 10) noted that they were found at different times and the precise findspot is not stated. Its solid, square offset suggests in any case that it is early medieval. There is a further intact stray find of a bronze spoon from Blankenburg (Sachsen-Anhalt), published by Schirwitz (1926: 8, 44–5, Taf III no. 34), but omitted from the relevant CRFB volume. Again its context is unknown, and the drawing is too small to suggest an accurate date, though it does seem to be Roman. A further example, from Perleberg (Brandenburg / Germany), has been claimed as Roman (Bohm 1937: 82, Taf 72.1; CRFB D1, IV-11-15/2.1), but its form, with a more rounded-oval bowl and multiple knobs at the handle terminal, is more typical of late medieval spoons (cf Ward-Perkins 1940: pl XXVII).
- 3 One of the two spoons from Glinišče, Kerch (Crimea) had two graffiti on the rear, one giving a date in the early 3rd century (Reinach 1892: 80). One spoon from Zghuderi had an inscription in the local script, Armazian, and in Greek (Braund et al 2009: 26, 74).
- 4 Examples previously noted from northern English caves (eg Stevenson 1966: 41 n68) do not feature in more recent studies of Romano-British cave finds (Branigan & Dearne 1991: 81–6, 96–7); further work is needed to confirm if the distribution does extend into northern England and Ireland.
- 5 One from Kaimes Hill, Midlothian, sounds promising from the publication (Simpson

et al 2004: 101, illus 35:4) but is irregular and unpolished. A plausible candidate from a phase 4 context (3rd century BC) at Broxmouth, East Lothian, is a sub-circular disc with ground edges and dished, stained surfaces (Cool 2013: 369), but there is no mention of polish and it is smaller and thicker than the norm. It could not be located at the time of writing in order to check it.

- 6 The description as a barrow comes from the museum accession register. The find was made in 1963; an Ordnance Survey surveyor visited the findspot in 1972 with the finder, but was equivocal on its nature (Canmore ID 3074), while Raymond Lamb (1987: 12, no. 23) saw it as a settlement site. We are grateful to one of our referees for drawing our attention to the debate, and noting that it could represent a burial inserted in a settlement site.

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