Lecture Summaries

Cave dwelling in Mid-Argyll: recent and more distant past

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In his report on the excavations at the Kilmelfort Cave (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot,* 113 (1983), 11–22) Professor J M Coles drew attention to the need for a systematic study of the caves and rock shelters known to exist both at the head of the various raised beaches and further inland in mid-Argyll. The Mid-Argyll Cave and Rock Shelter Survey began work in 1985 and has been supported by the Society since 1986. Hitherto the work of the project has concentrated on three aspects of the archaeology of cave use: field survey, excavation and ethnohistory.

After an initial wide-ranging reconnaissance in 1985, field survey activity has been concentrated in North Knapdale on the Keills and Kilmory Knap peninsulas; an area of approximately 86 km^2. A total of 84 natural shelters has been recorded in this area, 53 of which show some signs of use; a density of one archaeological cave or rock shelter per 1·6 km^2. Sites consist of former sea caves, cavities formed among the boulders of massive screes and fissure caves. Dating is virtually impossible without excavation.

To date three sites have been excavated and post-excavation work on a fourth, excavated before the inception of the project has now been incorporated. In 1986 a salvage excavation was undertaken at the Tinklers' Cave, Lochgilphead. This site, situated at the head of the Main Holocene Transgression beach preserved remains of a shell midden whose earliest surviving deposits have been dated by radiocarbon to the early second millennium BC. Finds include stone tools, beaker period and later pottery and large quantities of shellfish remains. The following year excavations began at Ellary, in a small rock shelter and a rather larger boulder cave, both inland sites. Work here continues and radiocarbon dates are awaited. Finds of Neolithic pottery and an assemblage of flint, quartz and pitchstone artefacts suggest occupation during the fourth millennium BC, but the earliest levels in the cave remain to be examined.

Virtually every site in the study area exhibits traces of having been used on a casual basis in recent times and all excavated sites have produced medieval and post-medieval remains as well as evidence for far earlier activity. Western Scotland is rich in ethnohistorical evidence for cave use spanning several centuries. In collaboration with Roger Leitch an attempt is being made to view this evidence within a systematic framework that will lead to a better understanding of the rather ephemeral archaeological remains. Initial indications are that a regular pattern for cave use by semi-nomadic bands of travellers and tinkers continued down until the time of the First World War when government restrictions made cave dwelling illegal.

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The spatial and social context of craft specialization in the Atlantic Province of Scotland from the time of the brochs to the arrival of the Norse

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This paper attempts to demonstrate how by examining the spatial aspects of society, the field of craft specialization and its patronage can be better understood in its social context. All discourse takes place somewhere, and it is therefore necessary to consider how its location structured that activity. Interior space, architecture, is naturally the most common *locales* for activity and social interaction. Fortunately domestic architecture constitutes the primary archaeological resource in the Atlanic Province during the Iron Age. There are two ways in which this impressive resource should be examined, both as a cultural resource, and in terms of its rôle as the *locales* for discourse within it. In practice it is difficult to totally differentiate between these.

In order to understand the part space plays in structuring social relations and the part social relations play in structuring space it is helpful to look at the patterns of relations between inhabitants and between inhabitants and strangers as they are reflected in the architecture itself. Interior space can be examined in terms of the patterns created by boundaries and entrances. The control and segregation of space is an important method of structuring activity and physical encounter. Other cultural resources, in this case metalworking and its patronage, provide evidence for the activities which take place in buildings, and it is equally important to consider the rôle which architecture played in structuring these. The main way to do this is by examining where recognizable activities occur. The residential unit can thus be defined not just in terms of its settlement plan, but in terms of the activities which take place in it. The significance of these *locales* is inextricably intermeshed with the structuring principles of society, which were responsible in the first place for the spatial organization of the settlement. Thus it must be argued that the evidence for social practice which other cultural resources furnish is secondary in nature to that derived from architecture as such. The access analysis of Hillier and Hanson can be successfully adapted for archaeological purposes in order to examine both of these.

A change from a locally-based ranked society to more distant sources of authority can be demonstrated for Orkney and Caithness. This is seen in the shift from the Middle Iron Age nucleated and integrated settlements (the brochs and their outbuildings) with a strict hierarchical use of space whose very construction and functioning was one of the symbols by which the authority of the local leaders was accepted, to more egalitarian, less spatially prescribed on-site relations (for example the Late Iron Age II sites around the Birsay Bay area). By the Early Medieval Period/Late Iron Age II society increasingly relied on enhanced social encounter to reproduce itself and the relationship of dependency was no longer expressed in such overtly spatial terms. In effect we are seeing the change from *intensive* power, where there was the ability to organize tightly and command a high level of mobilization or commitment from the participants, to *extensive* power, where there was the ability to organize large numbers of people over far-flung territories in order to engage in minimally stable

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co-operation. The context and nature of craft specialization changed as the need developed for the ultimate social authorities to maintain more extensive social networks.

Good quality iron ore is available in bog ore form virtually everywhere in Scotland, and the assumption must be that somebody at each of the Middle Iron Age sites was smelting enough iron for the immediate consumption of the whole community, an activity ordained by ties of obligation and authority. Whether smelted, or simply smithied on the site, it is important to note that the evidence for these, and other activities such as pottery manufacture, is with few exceptions confined to outbuildings, where there is also zoning of these activities. This emphasizes how activities such as these were structured by the strong arm of patronage. Demand for iron tools in communities this size, perhaps also for client settlements, would have been large, and their importance as the means of transforming natural resources and in structuring agricultural labour cannot be over-emphasized. Seasonal collection of bog ores could have been a communal activity as part of tribute payments. There is no archaeological justification for assuming all smiths to have been peripatetic, although the quality of production was high and there may have been specialists expert in the production of difficult items such as swords. The adaptation of caves for smelting is probably no more than the judicious use of natural enclosed spaces by adjacent settlements, rather than the use of a natural feature by a travelling smith.

Copper alloy working is a different matter. The more restricted nature of available ores in comparison to the distribution of sites with metalworking evidence shows that there must have been movement of ingots (such as those from Carn Liath) and/or recycling of materials. The finished products, particularly the ostentatious personal ornaments, are items which were used to distinguish between people in day to day encounters. Gift-giving is a means of accumulating social obligation, and the privileged minorities in the broch would have provided patronage for these fine metal-workers because they needed to accumulate the gift debts which their products could accrue. Manufacture was for a well-defined demand, those with the resources to control the services rendered, and for whom possession of the products was crucial in terms of legitimizing status and performing ritual.

The circumstances which could support the evolution and sustenance of the broch system did not last for ever. The structural record for the late Iron Age I is poorly documented. Such metalwork as there is is less flamboyant and on a smaller scale. Most Late Iron Age II fine metalworking is as yet confined to the strongholds of potentates. In Orkney evidence for production is confined to the important secular or ecclesiastical centre at the Brough of Birsay, the only site in this area which can be put forward as an important centre. Here moulds attest the mass production of pins and penannular brooches. There was also evidence for iron-working, perhaps in zones, but this was probably prevalent on most large settlements of this period. The ability to give gifts and to emphasize status in terms of personal appearance has not diminished, but due to extended distancing between potentates and followers, gifts perhaps needed to be given more frequently.

At this time there was almost certainly an increased emphasis on personal appearance as a means of recognizing, legitimizing, structuring and reproducing relations of power over extended distances. In view of the symbiotic relation between state and church at this time it is therefore not surprising that evidence for specialized craftworking need be found on both types of site, or that both types of site should overlap.

Cromartie: The survival of a Highland estate and its people 1700–1914

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The Buchan Lecture for 1989.

The Cromartie estate was accumulated in Mackenzie hands from the early 17th century into a substantial property of about 200 000 acres by 1700. Its three baronies, Coigach, Strathpeffer, and New Tarbat, provide an excellent cross-section of strikingly-varied Highland territory from west to east. During the extraordinarily successful but controversial political career of the first Earl of Cromartie (1630–1714) the estate was constituted into a separate county.

The estate passed through most of the dramas of modern Highland history. These included a large involvement in the Civil War, the Union of 1707, the Jacobite Uprisings, Annexation, agricultural revolution and the clearances, and the Crofter War of the 1880s. The survival of the owners of the estate turned on the long term trends in rental income, the inflow of external capital, and the consumption habits of its incumbents. Particularly crucial were the provisions (in the form of annuities and pensions) made for family members which often became impossible burdens on estate finances. Bankruptcy threatened at several critical moments. Alliances with the Gordon of Invergordon family in the 18th century, and with the Duke of Sutherland's family in the 19th enabled the continuity of ownership to be preserved. The development of the Victorian spa at Strathpeffer is the most visible benefit of the latter alliance. But by 1910, partly by legal misfortune, the Cromartie estate was beginning to sell off capital assets, the first sign of the economic retreat which affected many such landowners after the Great War.

For the people of the estate the problem of survival was mainly contingent on rapid and geographically specific population growth after about 1770. It was also affected by general economic trends and competing demands for land, particularly by large-scale arable and grazing farmers and, later, by sporting tenants. The recurrence of famine or near famine throughout the 19th century was a symptom of great social and economic difficulty. The reorganization of landuse was relentless but produced few dramatic clearances, though there was severe resistance at Coigach in 1852–3. After that the landlord desisted from further reorganization of the crofting community. Emigration pre-dated the clearances and continued throughout the century but was proportionately greater in the more favoured eastern districts of the estate. Population in Coigach continued to increase until 1861 but the crofters' relative contribution to estate income declined throughout. The Crofter's War and its outcome did not diminish the process of marginalization of the crofters. When living standards rose at the end of the period the population of the estate began to decline absolutely for the first time for a century. The diminution of the crofting population coincided with the decline in the territorial standing of the descendants of the first Earl of Cromartie.

The records of the Cromartie estate provide a precise and vivid documentation of the Highland experience from 1650 to 1914. They demonstrate clearly the differential responses of the various strata of estate life to the recurrent problems that faced Highland society over these years.

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