

Four decorated antler mounts and a stone ‘egg’ amulet from Bu Sands, Burray, Orkney

Fraser Hunter*

ABSTRACT

Four decorated antler mounts from Bu Sands, Burray, Orkney, found in 1990, are described. Relevant parallels are studied, from which a Roman or early Anglo-Saxon date is proposed, with manufacture in southern Britain. Consideration of the evidence for Orcadian contacts at this time suggests a late Roman date is most likely, and the mounts probably ornamented a box which arrived in Orkney as a prestige gift in the third or fourth century AD. An appendix describes a find of a stone ‘egg’ amulet of the first few centuries AD from the same site, and discusses similar amulets.

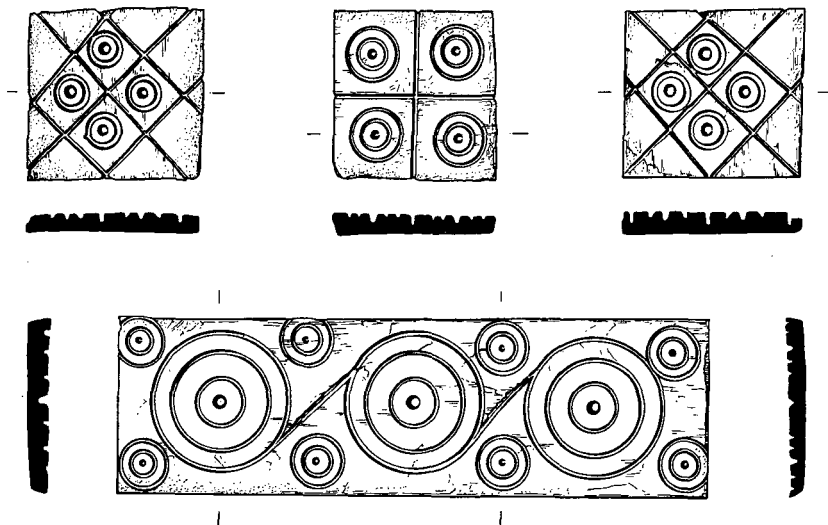
THE FIND

The mounts which are the main subject of this paper were found in August 1990 by two holidaymakers, Mrs and Ms Brooks of Mirfield, Yorkshire, while walking along the beach at Bu Sands (North Links), on Burray, the island between the south-east Mainland of Orkney and South Ronaldsay (ND 487 975). They describe the circumstances of the find as follows:

Although not found close together, all the pieces came from what appeared to be a midden consisting of thick black sandy earth packed with mollusc shells, mainly limpet, and bones. Each of the plaques was found packed in amongst a deposit of ‘stacked’ limpet shells. The midden was behind the remains of a wall of vertically set, flat, naturally worn stones with a short run of stones set at right angles to the others. As everything in front of this had been removed by sand extraction operations it was impossible to tell how much further this pattern had extended.

A photograph taken by the finders confirms this account, showing a dune with a midden layer c 0.1 m thick overlying clean sand, exposed by wind-blow and quarrying, with crude wall foundations visible. The relationship between midden and wall has been lost. The circumstances of the find make it unlikely that the mounts represent a complete set. This area is known to be an extensive settlement site, with finds spanning the Iron Age recovered by surface collection (Smith *et al* 1988). A stone ‘egg’ amulet found on the site a few years ago is described in Appendix 1. The area is being systematically quarried for sand by the landowner, and access to the site for professional archaeologists has been limited.

* Department of Archaeology, National Museums of Scotland, Queen Street, Edinburgh



ILLUS 1 Decorated antler mounts, Bu Sands, Burray. Upper row, 1-r, mounts 1-3; lower row, mount 4. Scale 1:1. (Drawn by Marion O'Neil)

The mounts were claimed by the Crown as Treasure Trove. After conservation and study in the National Museums of Scotland, they were disposed to Tankerness House Museum, Kirkwall, by the Treasure Trove Advisory Panel, with the finders receiving a reward (Tankerness House Museum reg nos: 1993.7.1-4).

DESCRIPTION

The Bu find consists of three small square mounts and one long rectangular mount, all made of antler (illus 1). All four bear incised decoration consisting of combinations of straight lines and ring-and-dot motifs. Small flakes have been lost from some edges and there are a few slight grooves and faint scratches (some deriving from manufacture). Otherwise the mounts are in excellent condition.

Mount 1: 22.5 × 22 × 2.5 mm. Four single ring-and-dots are arranged within a diagonal criss-cross pattern. Two opposing edges (those not shown in the section) have been chamfered by cutting along the lower edge, creating a section which tapers in from the decorated surface.

Mount 2: 21.5 × 21.5 × 2.5 mm. Four double ring-and-dots are arranged in the quadrants of an incised vertical cross. A small facet has been trimmed off one corner. Two opposing edges are chamfered, as shown in the section.

Mount 3: 23 × 21 × 2.5 mm. The decoration is virtually identical to mount 1; two edges are chamfered.

Mount 4: 77.5 × 23 × 2.5 mm. Three large triple ring-and-dot motifs are positioned along the mount, each joined to the next by a tangential incised line rising from left to right to form a

'running wave' motif. Eight smaller double ring-and-dot motifs are arranged around the running wave, forming two parallel rows of four. The long sides of the mount have been chamfered as shown in the sections; the ends are square. This mount is slightly lighter in colour than the others.

TECHNOLOGY

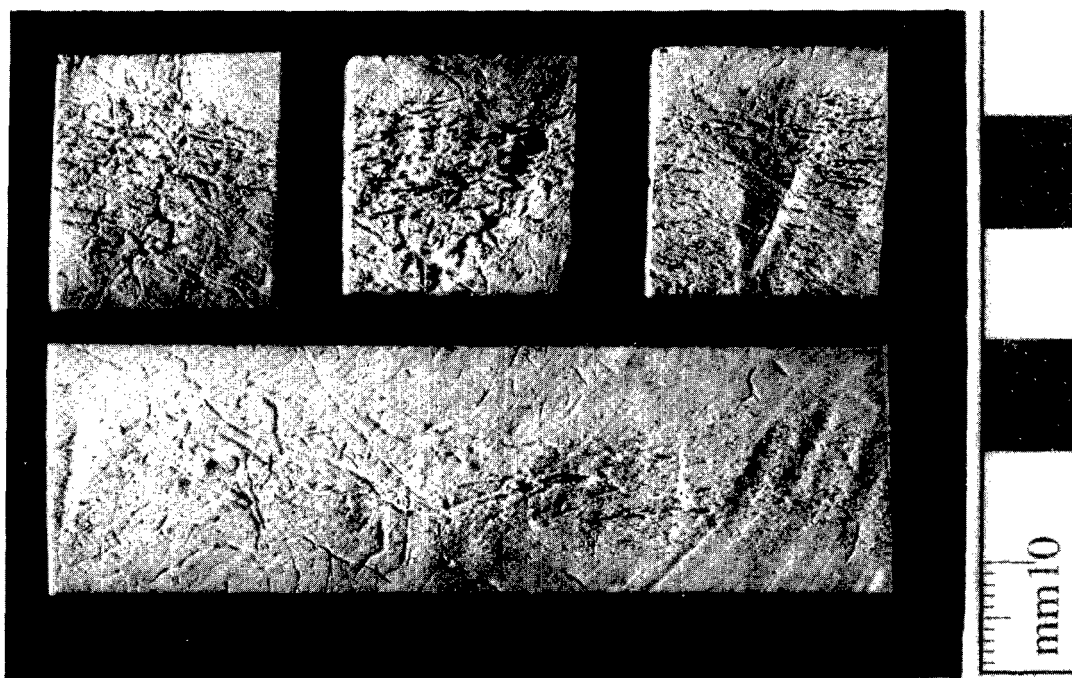
The mounts have been cut from a flat piece of antler, probably the beam, and trimmed to shape. Facets and tool-marks visible on the rear probably come from knife-trimming and filing (illus 2), while the front surfaces have vestigial scratches from polishing (illus 3). Traces of cancellous tissue remain on the rear of the mounts. While the individual elements in the designs are carefully cut, the smaller mounts are not perfectly quadrangular and the linear geometric motifs are slightly asymmetrical. On mount 4 part of the design has been lost, indicating it was incised before the piece was cut to shape. The straightness of the mounts' edges and the square section of the linear grooves on mounts 1–3 indicate they were cut by a saw. The V-sectioned groove joining the triple ring-and-dots on mount 4 was cut by a knife after the ring-and-dots were incised: the bases of the outer rings have grooves where the knife followed the line of the circle before cutting out the joining line.

In all the ring-and-dots, the dot is a truncated cone with a flat base. The single ring-and-dots differ from the others in section: the ring has a longer slope on the inner side and an undercut edge on the outer side. One ring has facets on the inner surface, suggesting the inner edge was trimmed back after the initial design was cut to make the ring more prominent. The double and triple ring-and-dots have rings which in section form a symmetrical steep-sided U with a flat base; the inner edge of the inner ring is more rounded than the other edges. Different rings are not invariably cut to the same depth, and even within a ring the depth can vary. On one of the triple rings the outer ring is extremely shallow over part of its circumference.

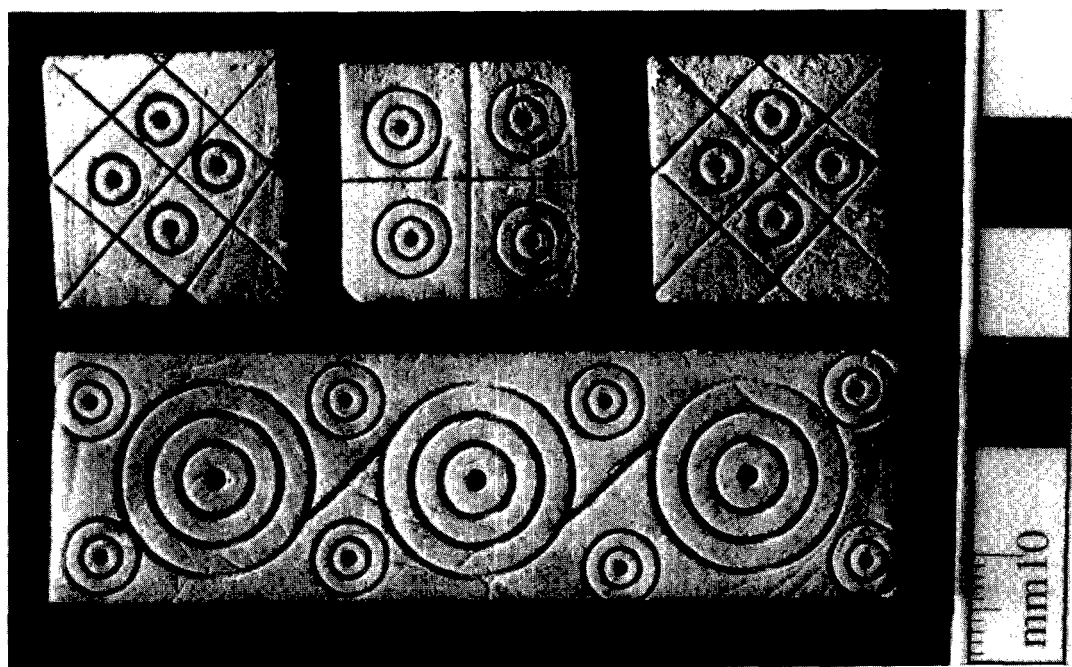
The diameters of each ring pattern were measured microscopically. Within the measurement errors (± 0.1 mm) each motif (single, double and triple rings) forms an identical group, both on the same mount and between different mounts (ie the single rings are identical on mounts 1 and 3, as are the double rings on mounts 2 and 4), suggesting all were made at the same time. The ring diameters of the single rings do not correspond with the small rings in the multiple ring patterns: hence the larger patterns were not built up using several fixed compasses of different diameters. It is not possible to say whether the designs were constructed from variable compasses or fixed compasses with multiple teeth (MacGregor 1985, 60). There is no sign of any inlay in the designs: deposits remaining in the grooves are midden material.

OTHER DECORATED BONE AND ANTLER MOUNTS

Decorated bone and antler mounts occur from the Roman period to the early 13th century AD in Britain and on the Continent: the most comprehensive discussion is by MacGregor (1985, 197–200). (For references to individual mounts, see Tables 1–3.) Throughout this series the ring-and-dot motif is the basic decorative element, in various shapes and forms. The mounts fall into two chronological groups, with a large number from Roman and early Anglo-Saxon contexts (2nd–7th century) and another group from the 10th to the 13th century. This clustering may be artificial, since the gap covers the period between the ending of grave good deposition with the onset of Christianity and the beginning of well-preserved urban deposits,



ILLUS 2 Rear of the antler mounts, showing toolmarks. Arranged as in illus 1



ILLUS 3 Front of the antler mounts, showing toolmarks. Arranged as in illus 1

and the mounts may be best seen as a continuous class (there is, for example, such a mount from the early urban deposits in Saxon Southampton; although the dating evidence is unclear from the report, an eighth- or ninth-century date is likely). A similar pattern is seen in the Continental material, but here the gap is less noticeable since there are more excavated early urban deposits, and a number of caskets can be dated stylistically to the eighth/ninth centuries (see below). However, it has also been suggested that the elaborate box or casket mounts found in Anglo-Saxon graves are heirlooms from the late Roman period (Myres & Green 1973, 86–7; White 1988, 146–7). While there is undoubtedly a continuing tradition in ring-and-dot decoration in the Anglo-Saxon period, as seen for example in comb ornament, there are also clear differences between the earlier and later material (as discussed below), and it may well be that the more complex box mounts *are* Roman, while similar motifs and simpler mounts continued to be employed in the post-Roman period. It is difficult at present to resolve the argument one way or the other.

TABLE 1
Characteristics of Roman bone and antler mounts

Sites are listed alphabetically by county south of the Humber-Severn line, followed by northern and western examples. In all boxes, an x denotes a positive response. x/- implies some of the mounts do and some do not have that characteristic: the order indicates whether most do (x/-) or do not (-/x).

Closed finds (eg a group of box mounts) and closely similar finds from the same site are grouped in the same row.

Key: Cat – catalogue or reference number in published report
Date – century in numbers; E, M or L for early, middle or late, eg M3 = c AD 250; LR/PR for late- and post-Roman
Int – intact (x for yes)
Riv – presence of rivet or peg holes
Perf – presence of decorative perforations
Shape – R rectangle; S square; L lozenge; T triangle; M mitred strip; C circle; O other

The following columns attempt to classify the decorative scheme. This obviously involves a degree of subjective assessment – the guidelines used are as follows:

Lin – presence of linear motifs

Simple:

R + D – presence of single ring-and-dot motif

R + D row – presence of row of ring-and-dot motifs (number of rows)

Simp – simple design (constant size motif, irregular or simple geometric arrangement eg square, cross)

Complex:

Comp – complex arrangement (varying size ring-and-dots and related motifs, arranged around one another)

Inter – the rings of each ring-and-dot are interlinked to the next one

Join – adjacent ring-and-dots are joined to one another by a tangential or slightly curvilinear line (= running wave pattern)

Other – any other decorative motifs used

Interlinking and joining motifs were selected out for particular notice to see if they had any chronological significance.

<i>Site</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Cat.</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Int</i>	<i>Riv</i>	<i>Perf</i>	<i>Shape</i>	<i>Lin</i>	<i>R+D</i>	<i>R+D row</i>
Bancroft Villa	Bucks	161-2	L4	x			S		x	
"	"	164-5	L4				?	x		
"	"	167	L4		x		S?	x		
Little Woolstone	Bucks	166	4	x	x		S			
Stantonbury Villa	Bucks	163	L4				?		x	
"	"	169	L4		x		R?		x	
Chelmsford	Essex	28	L3-M4				R?			
Colchester	Essex	2150	E2-M4	x			R			3
"	"	2151	R		x		R			
"	"	2156	4?				O			
Gloucester	Glos	36	4-E5	x	-/x		R S T M	x	x	1
Lydney Park	Glos	147, 155	LR?	x			L T	x	x	
Neatham	Hants	439	L3-4				R?			
Portchester	Hants	121	L4		x		R?	x		1
"	"	122	L4→	x			~S			
Verulamium	Herts	193	M2	x			S			
Brading	I o Wight	D4	R	x			L		x	
Lullingstone	Kent	395-7	4	x			S		x	
"	"	399	L4-E5	x			S	x		
"	"	400-1	4	x			S			
"	"	402-9	E4	x			S T M	x		
"	"	464	L4				M	x		1
Richborough	Kent	IV:276	LR	x/-	x/-		R S T M O	x	x	1
"	"	V:225	4?	x/-	x/-		R S C M	x	x	1
Leicester	Leics	2	?		x		O			
"	"	39	LR/?PR	x	x		O	x	x	
Burbage	Wilts		LR?		x		R	x		1
Langton	E Yorks	13	4		x		R	x		
Caerleon	Gwent	8	M2-M3	x			S		x	
"	"	31, 37	4	x			T		x	
Caernarfon	Gwyn	445	L3-M4		x		R?			

<i>Simp</i>	<i>Comp</i>	<i>Inter</i>	<i>Join</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Ref</i>
						Zeevat <i>et al</i> 1987, 143 fig 45
						<i>ibid</i>
	x					<i>ibid</i>
		x				<i>ibid</i>
						<i>ibid</i>
	x		x			Wickenden 1988, 107, fig 72
					Also linear-grooved mounts (2152–5, 2157–9), c 250–400 AD	Crummy 1983, 82, fig 87
	x		x			<i>ibid</i>
	x		x			<i>ibid</i>
			x		1709 pieces found	Hassall & Rhodes 1975, 73, fig 28
					Also 156 trellis design cf Lancaster, Jones & Shotter 1988 fig 56	Wheeler & Wheeler 1932, 91, pl 31
x						Millett & Graham 1986, 127, fig 86
						Cunliffe 1975, 224, fig 119
x						<i>ibid</i>
x					Also triangular mount with linear grooves, dated early C2	Frere 1972, 150, fig 54
						Tomalin 1987, 53, 55
					Also square mount with trellis 398	Meates 1987, 144, fig 58
x						<i>ibid</i>
x						<i>ibid</i>
x				Floral design	Mounts from box containing gaming pieces	<i>ibid</i>
						<i>ibid</i> 151, fig 62
	x	x	x			Bushe-Foxe 1949, 152, pl 57
x	x		x		Box mounts – key plate survives. Unclear if C2/C4; Myres & Green 1973, 86; Crummy 1983, 89 n5	Cunliffe 1968, 106, pl 61–2
x						Kenyon 1948, 269, fig 92
					Also triangular mount with linear grooves 40, late C3	Hebditch & Mellor 1973, 52, fig 21
					Dating uncertain; PSAS 107, 321 n3	Goddard 1896
			x			Corder & Kirk 1932, 73, fig 19
						Zienkiewicz 1986, 207, fig 73
						<i>ibid</i> 211, fig 76
x					Also mitred strip with linear grooves, 444	Casey & Davies 1993, 202, fig 10.19

The mounts show a wide range in design, from single ring-and-dots to complex patterns, and undoubtedly had a wide range of functions. Some were box-mounts or furniture inlay, while others may have been mounts for handles or belts, or perhaps gaming pieces. The finest examples are a series of high-quality caskets (mainly reliquaries) from the Continent, some with figural decoration. Detailed stylistic analysis has placed these in various groups: two (Werden and Oldenburg 1, in Germany) are from the eighth or ninth century, while the bulk are 10th–12th century in date (Elbern 1973; Gabriel 1988, 151–7); specialist manufacture in the North Italian / Alpine region is suggested for the finest of the later pieces (Elbern 1973, 97). There may have been an early example, similar to the sixth-century find from Heilbronn, Württemberg, with the burial in mound 3 at Sutton Hoo (Grainger & Henig 1983); some other late Roman / early Anglo-Saxon examples (eg from Richborough and Dover; see also Droitwich, Barfield 1977) must also have been high-status objects.

Differences can be seen between the earlier and later mounts in their shape and decoration; supporting evidence can be found in Tables 1–3. In terms of shape, the earlier examples show more variety. The later examples are almost all long rectangular strips, while the earlier mounts include rectangles, small squares, lozenges, triangles, mitred strips

TABLE 2
Characteristics of early Anglo-Saxon period bone and antler mounts

For key see Table 1; IA/EH? = probably Iron Age or Early Historic

<i>Site</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Cat.</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Int</i>	<i>Riv</i>	<i>Perf</i>	<i>Shape</i>	<i>Lin</i>	<i>R+D</i>	<i>R+D row</i>
Abingdon	Berks	38	L5		?		R?			
Southampton	Hants	CW 20	8–9?	x	x		R	x		
Dover	Kent		L4–E5	x/-	x		R O			1
Thurmaston	Leics	20	M5–6				?			
Northolt Manor	Middx		L7–E8				R?			1
Caistor-by-Norwich	Norf	X 11	E5?	x	-/x		R S T M	x	x	1
Spong Hill	Norf	1351	5–7				R?	x	x	
Spong Hill	Norf	1645	5–7	-/x	-/x		M	x		1
Asthall Barrow	Oxon		7	-/x			L R?	x		
Cassington	Oxon	II 6	5–6	x			R M	x		1
Sutton Hoo	Suff	Mound 3	L6–7		x		?	x		
Dinas Powys	S Glam	11	M5–M8	x	x		L			
Ballinderry	Meath		IA/EH?	x	x		R O	x		1
?Strokestown	Rosc.	S23	IA/EH?	x	x		R		x	

and other geometric shapes. The decoration of the earlier examples also shows more diversity, and they are often more strictly geometrical. A line of ring-and-dot motifs remains a basic pattern throughout the series; ring-and-dot lines framed by parallel incisions and large ring-and-dots surrounded by smaller ones are also found in early and late examples, as is criss-cross decoration. However, in the later examples the criss-crossing is restricted to long strips: earlier it is also found on small squares, and is only one of a range of linear geometric patterns which are found both alone and integrated with ring-and-dots. In the later examples, the main variant on a single ring-and-dot row is a double or triple row. The reliquaries do show much more decorative variation than other later mounts, but can be discriminated from earlier examples by the dominance of rectangular pieces. Reuse, however, could complicate matters: the eighth-century casket from Werden incorporates cut-down earlier mounts (Lasko 1971, illus 117, top and bottom row of mounts on illustrated panel). One feature apparently found only in the later examples is the use of large perforations with decorative metal backing (MacGregor 1985, 199). Hence although it is very difficult to date a single mount or a simple pattern, where the design is more complex or several mounts are present (as in the case of Bu) more precise dating may be possible.

<i>Simp</i>	<i>Comp</i>	<i>Inter</i>	<i>Join</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Ref</i>
			x		Not illus in report	Leeds & Harden 1936, 18
x						Hinton 1980, 77, fig 15.2
	x				Could be LR – dating unclear	Kendrick 1937
x						Williams 1983, 33, fig 27
						Evison 1961, 226, fig 58
x		x		cable		Myres & Green 1973, 85–7, 191–2, pl 20–1, fig 27
						Hills 1977, 30, fig 138
	x	x	x			<i>ibid</i>
						Leeds 1924, 118, fig 4
					LR pottery sherds in grave fill	Kirk and Case 1950; White 1988, 147, fig 91
	x				Poss. similar to Heilbronn casket (Granger & Henig 1983)	Bruce-Mitford 1975, 114–5, fig 63, 69
	x					Alcock 1963, 153, fig 34
x					Not close parallels	Munro 1890, fig 112
					Also rectangular mount with incised lines. Neither certainly from this site	ex inf R. Ó Floinn

TABLE 3
Characteristics of late Saxon and Medieval bone and antler mounts

For key see Table 1

<i>Site</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Cat.</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Int</i>	<i>Riv</i>	<i>Perf</i>	<i>Shape</i>	<i>Lin</i>	<i>R+D</i>	<i>R+D row</i>
Facombe Netherton	Hants	1	M10				R?			1
Southampton	Hants	1924	12				R?			1
Goltho	Lincs	16	M9-M12		x		R?	x		
Lincoln	Lincs	132-7	11-12		x/-		R?		x	1
Castle Acre	Norf	16-22	12		x/-	-/x	R M?	x		1/2
Great Yarmouth	Norf	16	11-12		x		R?			1
Thetford	Norf	103	10-11		x		R?			
Thetford	Norf	104	10-11				R			1
Thetford	Norf	14	L12-E13		x		M			3
Northampton	North	WB 83-91	?10-11		x/-		R?			1
South Cadbury	Som		11	x	x		R			2/3
Ludgershall Castle	Wilts		12	x/-	x	x	R	x		1/2
Dublin	Dublin		11-12	x	?	?	R			?
York	Yorks		10-11?	x/-	x	x	R			1/2
York	Yorks		11	x	x		R	x		
Perth	Tays		12-E13			x	R	x		

THE DATE AND FUNCTION OF THE BU MOUNTS

The best parallels for the Bu find come from the late Roman/early Anglo-Saxon series. In particular, the 'running wave' on mount 4 is very similar to late Roman examples from Colchester, Richborough IV, Langton and Gloucester. The size and linear decoration of the smaller plaques are similar to examples from Gloucester, and small squares with several ring-and-dots are found at Richborough and in one of the late fourth- or fifth-century Anglo-Saxon burials at Caistor-by-Norwich. In contrast no directly comparable motifs have yet been noted on any of the later mounts, even the complex reliquary series. It does not seem possible to differentiate Roman motifs from early Anglo-Saxon ones stylistically, although the possibility that all are Roman (see above) should be borne in mind.

The predominantly southern distribution of comparable finds suggests that the Bu mounts were imported ultimately from this region. Given Orkney's position, a Continental origin is also possible but difficult to prove. Their distribution within Britain is very strongly concentrated in southern England: the known northern examples are a fourth-century example from Langton villa, East Yorkshire, a Roman example from North Wales (Caernarfon), and probable Late Iron Age/Early Historic specimens from Irish crannogs, most of which are not

<i>Simp</i>	<i>Comp</i>	<i>Inter</i>	<i>Join</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Ref</i>
						MacGregor 1990, 447, fig 10.1
						Platt & Coleman-Smith 1975, 271, fig 247
x						Beresford 1987, 191, fig 162
					Mount 138, mitred with grooves, may be Roman	Mann 1982, 18–19, fig 16
	x					Margeson 1982, 246, fig 46
						Rogerson 1976, 167, fig 51
x						Rogerson & Dallas 1984, 182, fig 199
						ibid
						Dallas 1993, 159, fig 160
					Poss workshop waste. Refers to similar C19 finds.	Williams 1979, 315–6, fig 141
						Alcock 1972, fig 91
						Wilson & Hurst 1966, 192, pl 15
?					Apparently similar to York (Waterman) e.g.	Mann 1982, 41, n20; Ó Floinn pers comm
	x				Also unpub eg from York Minster: larger & more ornate (MacG op cit)	Waterman 1959, 86–7, pl 17
x						MacGregor 1979
x						Bogdan & Holdsworth 1978, 27

directly comparable; later examples come from York (three box lids) and Perth. Similar decorative motifs can be found on Scottish Early Historic combs (eg 'running wave' decoration on combs from Loch Inch Crindil, Wigtownshire, and Dun Cuier, Barra: Munro 1885, fig 30; Young 1956, fig 13.2); there are also Norse parallels, eg on a comb from Jarlshof (Hamilton 1956, fig 77.9). However, the lack of comparable mounts in areas such as the Northern and Western Isles, where large Iron Age/Early Historic bone and antler assemblages survive, suggests the rarity of mounts is genuine (cf the sizeable assemblages from Burrian, North Ronaldsay, and Foshigarry and Bac Mhic Connain, North Uist; MacGregor 1974; Hallén forthcoming).

Similar mounts to the Orcadian ones are interpreted as mounts from boxes and, in the Roman period, as furniture inlays. Furniture inlays tend to show more variety in shape, and the interpretation as box or casket mounts is best. Since the find is certainly not complete, the arrangement of the mounts is a matter of conjecture. While some similar mounts have perforations for rivets or pegs, there are none on the Bu examples. This is unlikely to mean they are unfinished, but rather that an alternative method of fastening was used, as on other

finds. The clearest example is glue, traces of which survived on many of the pieces from Lullingstone, Kent (Meates 1987, 144, nos 402–9). Shiny patches which were noted on the back of the Bu mounts were tested for carbohydrates, proteins and gelatin by wet chemical methods and capillary gas chromatography by Dr Anita Quye (Conservation & Analytical Research, NMS), but no trace of any animal adhesive or plant gum was found. The mounts could have functioned as loose lids to compartments within a box, as on a Roman wooden box from Warf Eunum, Netherlands (La Baum 1964, Abb 154), or could have been held by clamps, although this is unlikely as it would have obscured the design. However, the most likely explanation is that all traces of the adhesive have disappeared. The chamfered edges along two sides of each mount suggest they were intended to slot into a prepared field, and would have been true inlays rather than being fixed to a flat surface, as most such objects were (MacGregor 1985, 199).

IMPLICATIONS

The mounts are not just of intrinsic interest, but are important evidence of Orkney's wide-ranging contacts. It is impossible to say what sort of delay occurred between the manufacture of the mounts and their journey north, and they could have arrived in Orkney during the Norse period. However, acquisition in the Roman or post-Roman period seems more likely. There is an appreciable scatter of Roman material from Orkney and neighbouring Caithness (Robertson 1970); for example, there is samian from the East Broch on Burray itself, as also from Midhowe and Oxtro brochs (at the latter, a late type, post-dating the Roman withdrawal from Scotland); six silver denarii were excavated at Lingro broch, including two later than Antoninus Pius (Crispina, AD 180–193; Anderson 1883, 244); while a trumpet brooch and a melon bead are known as stray finds. There has been a tendency to dismiss much of this material as late arrivals with 'reliquary' status (eg Alcock & Alcock 1987, 131). This may be true in some instances, but is untenable in cases such as the Oxtro material: here a complete vessel must have been present on the site, since several sherds join to make up most of a base, with evidence of repair. Much of this material probably arrived as prestige goods, perhaps diplomatic gifts from the Romans or from neighbouring chiefs. Recent discussion of the unusually early Gurness amphora has favoured this view (Fitzpatrick 1989). The samian was high-quality pottery, and the glass drinking cup from Westray again implies a high-status gift. This cup probably postdates the Roman withdrawal from Scotland (in Scandinavia the type is dated to period C1, c AD 150–250 (Lund Hansen 1987, 74–7); it is found there in rich burials), and indicates, along with finds such as the fragment of a similar but painted cup from Clickhimin, Shetland (Hamilton 1968, 143–4), and the copper alloy vessel hoard from Helmsdale, Sutherland (Spearman 1990), that high-quality Roman artefacts reached northern Scotland in the later Roman period, where they undoubtedly circulated for some time before deposition. The late samian from Oxtro, and the Lingro coins, are further evidence of this continuing contact. This provides a situation in which the arrival of the box bearing the Bu mounts can be understood.

In contrast, the fifth- to seventh-century contacts which brought Mediterranean and Gaulish pottery and glass to the western seaboard do not seem to have reached Orkney (Alcock & Alcock 1990, 127, illus 18; Thomas 1981). It is not until the eighth and ninth centuries that artefactual evidence of extensive contacts reappears (eg eighth/ninth-century glass from Birsay: Hunter 1982, 46–7; note also the Anglo-Saxon gilt copper alloy mount from Stromness (Bell & Dickson 1989, 127–8), although a Viking agency is possible here).

This strongly suggests that the Bu mounts (and the other northern Scottish Roman material) arrived in the area during the Roman period; if they were still being exchanged as prestige commodities in the post-Roman period, we would expect such contacts to be marked also by status goods then current, such as imported amphorae or cone beakers. The Bu mounts are best seen as ornamenting a prestige gift which arrived in Orkney in the late Roman period.

APPENDIX 1

A ROMAN-PERIOD STONE 'EGG' AMULET FROM BU SANDS

The find

Another unusual recent find from Bu Sands is a stone 'egg' amulet (illus 4), found casually by a local man, Mr Budge, who donated it to Tankerness House Museum (reg no 1989.38.1). The amulet measures 40 mm in length and 24 mm in maximum diameter, and has a striking surface pattern which arises from the raw material, serpentinite.

Parallels

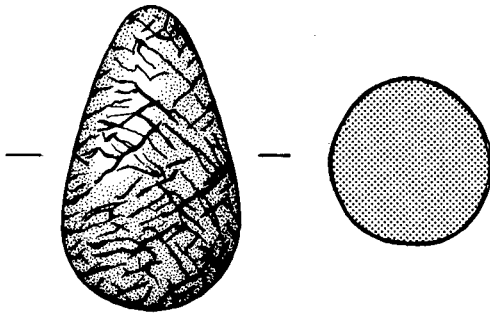
This object belongs to a small class of 'egg' amulets discussed by Stevenson (1967), the other examples coming from Cairnhill, Monquhitter, Aberdeenshire, and Traprain Law, East Lothian. Based on these examples, a date of c AD 0–400 is likely. The salient features of the five known examples are given below.

<i>Site</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Max. diameter</i>	<i>Material</i>
Bu Sands	40 mm	24 mm	Serpentinite
Cairnhill (EQ 767)	45.5 mm	28.5 mm	Steatite
Cairnhill (EQ 768)	34.5 mm	21.5 × 18 mm	Lithomarge
Traprain (GV 967)	34 mm	24 mm	Steatite
Traprain (GV 989)	29 mm	24 mm	Steatite

(Numbers are National Museums of Scotland registration numbers)

All five examples are made from unusual stone of striking appearance. The serpentinite of the Bu egg is not native to Orkney, although extensive deposits are found on Shetland (Mykura 1976, 120). The steatite of the Cairnhill and Traprain examples could have come from several sources: Portsoy in Banffshire (which is relatively close to Cairnhill), Shetland, or a number of west coast sources. Stevenson & Collins (1976) suggested that lithomarge (as used for the second Cairnhill bead) could have Roman connections, with a source around the Mediterranean. However, W J Baird and Dr A Livingstone (NMS Geology Dept, pers comm) note that visually similar materials can be found in bauxitic levels in Ayrshire, and it is probably unwise to be dogmatic about the source at this stage. It is however clearly exotic to Aberdeenshire.

In an attempt to gain further insights, the 'eggs' were compared to those of modern birds to see if any particular type of egg was being mimicked. The shape of the Bu and Cairnhill 'eggs' is termed pyriform by ornithologists (Harrison 1975, 34–5). This is an unusual shape for British bird eggs: the closest parallels for the stone 'eggs' are with those of auks (especially guillemots), while some waders have broadly similar shapes (Harrison 1975, pl 39–41, 47). The two Traprain 'eggs' are termed short pyriform, with a flatter base than the



ILLUS 4 Serpentinite 'egg' amulet, Bu Sands, Burray. Scale 1:1. (Drawn by Marion O'Neil)

pyriform specimens, a shape which cannot be paralleled in British bird eggs. However, the flattening may well be a functional modification of the basic pyriform shape, enabling them to stand upright: allowing for this, an auk (or wader) is again the most likely model.

Assessing the significance of this observation is difficult. The important role of animals and birds in Iron Age belief systems is widely accepted (eg Green 1992, 1–4), but we lack detailed knowledge of this in a Scottish context. The 'eggs' may indicate a particular interest in certain seabirds which should be borne in mind, but it is difficult to go much further. It cannot be proved that a specific bird was the model, but the fact that an unusual egg shape was selected does suggest they represent more than a general egg concept (in which case the more normal oval shape would be expected). However, it could be argued that the shape is an entirely practical measure designed to stop the 'eggs' from rolling off a flat surface.

It is difficult to advance the question of their detailed use. Those 'eggs' whose surface is well preserved do not have obvious use-wear traces apart from polishing (implying rubbing in use), although the smaller Traprain example has enhanced wear on its tip. It should also be noted that the Cairnhill steatite example has a cross incised on its tip. It seems likely that the Traprain examples were used in a slightly different way from the others since they were able to stand upright, although the similarities in material and shape imply they still had an amuletic purpose.

No associated finds were recovered with the Bu Sands 'egg', but the discovery of the Cairnhill cache in an earlier cairn strongly suggests it was a votive offering. This raises the question of whether the Traprain examples were also from a votive deposit. Attempting to reconstruct data from old excavations is a hazardous business, but a study of the context of the 'eggs' from Traprain raises some interesting issues. Both were found in 1921 in square O, one from level 2 and one from level 3; it is noted specifically that they were found 'only a few feet apart' (Cree & Curle 1922, 253; the difference in levels has little stratigraphic meaning; Burley 1956, 119–20). Study of the finds from these levels highlights some other unusual objects. From level O3 comes a haematite polisher (Cree & Curle 1922, 253), an unusual stone which would be at home in a votive deposit. The distinctive 'alphabet stone', the broken fragment of a prepared stone slab with the incised letters ABC and part of D surviving on it (Collingwood & Wright 1965, no 2131), came from level O2. In a non-literate society, an inscription could easily have been seen as a powerful object; this instance is particularly significant because it bears the start of the alphabet, the emblem of literacy. Finally, another of the most unusual finds

from Traprain, the miniature silver strainer (Burley 1956, no 261), was found in level 2 of the adjacent square N. This is almost certainly of Roman origin, and a votive purpose would seem more plausible than Burley's suggestion of its use as a toilet implement. The miniaturisation of normal objects for votive purposes is well attested both in Roman times and in the late Iron Age (Green 1981; 1987. In a Scottish context, note the model cauldron from a burial at Waulkmill, Tarland, Aberdeenshire: Callander 1915); the strainer was probably intended to represent a wine strainer (cf den Boesterd 1956, no 53), and was suspended in use. A parallel to this native use of Roman votive objects is provided by the clay model of a bale of fleeces found at Dun an Iardhard, Skye; this, too, is a Roman votive model (Green 1981, 268), and its location in the lowest levels of the dun, almost on the rock (according to Curle 1932, 395–6), could suggest use in a foundation deposit.

Proof in this matter is impossible, but the probability is high. The discovery of two of the most unusual and exotic objects from Traprain (one at least probably votive in character) and two undoubted amulets in close proximity, all from the same levels, with three from one square and one from the immediately adjoining one, combine to make a strong argument for this as a votive deposit which has been disturbed by later buildings. It can be further suggested that the most likely interpretation is as a foundation deposit, perhaps for one of the circular huts which can be vaguely discerned in the published plan of level 2 in squares N and O (Cree & Curle 1922, fig 33).

CONCLUSION

The Bu 'egg' is a notable addition to the small number of 'egg' amulets. Their distribution is so far restricted to Scotland, and they should be seen as of Scottish manufacture: an 'egg' amulet from Housesteads, on Hadrian's Wall, has a very different shape and is better linked to the Mithraic worship attested there (Stevenson & Collins 1976; Green 1978, 29–30, 61). Noteworthy features of the series are the use of exotic and striking stone in their manufacture and the morphological similarities to the eggs of certain seabirds. While much remains to be learned about them, these 'eggs' provide an all-too-rare insight into Iron Age beliefs, and give us valuable evidence of the movement of objects or raw materials between different areas of Scotland.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Tankerness House Museum for permission to publish these objects, to Marion O'Neil for the illustrations, Ian Larner for the photographs, Dr Anita Quye for the organic residue analysis and Andrea Smith for identifying the material as antler. Bob McGowan provided considerable assistance with the ornithological parallels for the 'egg' amulets, and Bill Baird and Dr Alec Livingstone willingly discussed the identification of the raw materials of the 'eggs'. The following people also kindly provided information and advice: Dr David Clarke, Arthur MacGregor, Dr Ragnhalla Ó Floinn, Dr Alison Sheridan, and Dr Egon Wamers. The copyright of the photographs rests with the Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland.

REFERENCES

- Alcock, L 1963 *Dinas Powys*. Cardiff.
 Alcock, L 1972 *'By South Cadbury Is That Camelot...'*. London.

- Alcock, L & Alcock, E A 1987 'Reconnaissance excavations on Early Historic fortifications2, Excavations at Dunollie Castle, Oban, Argyll, 1978', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 117 (1987), 119-47.
- Alcock, L & Alcock, E A 1990 'Reconnaissance excavations on Early Historic fortifications4, Excavations at Alt Clut, Clyde Rock, Strathclyde, 1974-5', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 120 (1990), 95-149.
- Anderson, J 1883 *Scotland in Pagan Times: The Iron Age*. Edinburgh.
- Barfield, L 1977 'Roman bone inlay from Bays Meadow, Droitwich', *Antiq J*, 57 (1977), 332-3.
- Bell, B & Dickson, C 1989 'Excavations at Warebeth (Stromness Cemetery) Broch, Orkney,' *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 119 (1989), 101-31.
- Beresford, G 1987 *Goltho: The development of an early medieval manor c 850-1150*. London (English Heritage Archaeol Rep 4).
- Bogdan, N Q & Wordsworth, J W 1978 *The Mediaeval Excavations at the High Street, Perth, 1975-6: an interim report*. Perth.
- Bruce-Mitford, R 1975 *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial: Vol. I*. London.
- Burley, E 1956 'A catalogue and survey of the metal-work from Traprain Law', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 89 (1955-6), 118-226.
- Bushe-Foxe, J P 1949 *Fourth Report on the Excavation of the Roman Fort at Richborough, Kent*. London (=Res Rep Soc Antiq Lond 10).
- Callander, J G 1915 'Notice of a bronze cup and other objects found apparently in a sepulchral deposit near Tarland, Aberdeenshire', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 49 (1914-15), 203-6.
- Casey, P J & Davies, J L 1993 *Excavations at Segontium (Caernarfon) Roman fort 1975-1979*. London (=CBA Res Rep 90).
- Collingwood, R G & Wright, R P 1965 *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain, Vol I*. Oxford.
- Corder, P & Kirk, J L 1932 *A Roman Villa at Langton, near Malton, E Yorkshire*. Oxford (Roman Malton & District Report 4).
- Cree, J E & Curle, A O 1922 'Account of the excavations on Traprain Law during the summer of 1921', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 56 (1921-2), 189-259.
- Crummy, N 1983 *The Roman small finds from excavations in Colchester 1971-9*. Colchester.
- Cunliffe, B 1968 *Fifth Report on the Excavation of the Roman Fort at Richborough, Kent*. London (=Res Rep Soc Antiq Lond 23).
- Cunliffe, B 1975 *Excavations at Portchester Castle, Vol I*. London (=Res Rep Soc Antiq Lond 32).
- Curle, J 1932 'An Inventory of Objects of Roman and Provincial Roman Origin found on Sites in Scotland not definitely associated with Roman Constructions', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 66 (1931-2), 277-397.
- Dallas, C 1993 *Excavations in Thetford by B.K. Davison between 1964 and 1970*. Gressenhall (*East Anglian Archaeol*, 62).
- den Boesterd, M H P 1956 *The Bronze Vessels in the Rijksmuseum G.M. Kam at Nijmegen*. Nijmegen.
- Elbern, V H 1973 'Das Beinkästchen im Essener Münsterschatz', *Aachener Kunstblätter* 44 (1973), 87-100.
- Evison, V 1961 'The Saxon objects', in Hurst, J G, 'The kitchen area of Northolt manor, Middlesex', *Medieval Archaeol*, 5 (1961), 211-99.
- Fitzpatrick, A P 1989 'The submission of the Orkney Islands to Claudius: new evidence?', *Scott Archaeol Rev*, 6 (1989), 24-33.
- Frere, S S 1972 *Verulamium Excavations, Vol. I*. Oxford (=Res Rep Soc Antiq Lond 28).
- Gabriel, I 1988 'Hof- und Sakralkultur sowie Gebrauchs- und Handelsgut im Spiegel der Kleinfunde von Starigard / Oldenburg', *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission*, 69 (1988), 103-291.
- Goddard, E H 1896 'Notes on a Roman Cross-bow, &c., found at Southgrove Farm, Burbage', *Wiltshire Archaeol Natur Hist Soc Mag*, 28 (1894-6), 87-90.
- Granger, G & Henig, M 1983 'A bone casket and relief plaque from mound 3 at Sutton Hoo', *Medieval Archaeol*, 27 (1983), 136-40.
- Green, M J 1978 *A Corpus of Small Cult-Objects from the Military Areas of Roman Britain*. Oxford (=British Archaeol Rep, Brit Ser 52).

- Green, M 1981 'Model Objects from Military Areas of Roman Britain', *Britannia*, 12 (1981), 253–69.
- Green, M 1987 'A votive model shield from Langley, Oxfordshire', *Oxford J Archaeol*, 6(2) (1987), 237–42.
- Green, M J 1992 *Animals in Celtic life and myth*. London.
- Hallén, Y, forthcoming 'Bone and antler artefacts from Foshigarry and Bac Mhic Connain, two Iron Age sites on North Uist, Western Isles'.
- Hamilton, J R C 1956 *Excavations at Jarlshof, Shetland*. Edinburgh.
- Hamilton, J R C 1968 *Excavations at Clickhimin, Shetland*. Edinburgh.
- Harrison, C 1975 *A Field Guide to the Nests, Eggs and Nestlings of European Birds*. London.
- Hassall, M, & Rhodes, J 1975 'Excavations at the new Market Hall, Gloucester, 1966–7', *Trans Bristol Gloucestershire Archaeol Soc*, 93 (1975), 15–100.
- Hebditch, M, & Mellor, J 1973 'The Forum and Basilica of Roman Leicester', *Britannia*, 4 (1973), 1–83.
- Hills, C 1977 *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery of Spong Hill, North Elmham: Part I, Catalogue of Cremations*. Gressenhall (*East Anglian Archaeol*, 6).
- Hinton, D A 1980 'The bone and antler objects', in Holdsworth, P, *Excavations at Melbourne St., Southampton, 1971–76*. London (=CBA Res Rep 33), 77.
- Hunter, J R 1982 'Glass: A Report', in Curle, C L, *Pictish and Norse finds from the Brough of Birsay 1934–74*. Edinburgh (Soc Antiq Scot Monogr 1), 46–7.
- Jones, G D B & Shotton, D C A 1988 *Roman Lancaster*. Manchester (Brigantia Monogr 1).
- Kendrick, T D 1937 'Ivory mounts from a casket', *Antiq J*, 1 (1937), 448.
- Kenyon, K M 1948 *Excavations at the Jewry Wall Site, Leicester*. Oxford (=Res Rep Soc Antiq Lond 15).
- Kirk, J R & Case, H 1950 'Cassington, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia* 15 (1950), 104–6.
- La Baume, P 1964 *Römisches Kunstgewerbe zwischen Christi Geburt und 400*. Braunschweig.
- Lasko, P 1971 *The Kingdom of the Franks*. London.
- Leeds, E T 1924 'An Anglo-Saxon Cremation-burial of the Seventh Century in Asthall Barrow, Oxfordshire', *Antiq J*, 4 (1924), 113–26.
- Leeds, E T & Harden, D B 1936 *The Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Abingdon, Berkshire*. Oxford.
- Lund Hansen, U 1987 *Römischer Import im Norden*. Copenhagen.
- MacGregor, A 1974 'The Broch of Burrian, North Ronaldsay, Orkney', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 105 (1972–4), 63–118.
- MacGregor, A 1979 'Taking the lid off the past', *Interim* 6/3 (1978), 6–8.
- MacGregor, A 1985 *Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn*. London.
- MacGregor, A 1990 'Objects of bone, antler and ivory', in Fairbrother, J R, *Facombe Netherton*. London (British Museum Occ Paper 74), 447–50.
- Mann, J E 1982 *Early Medieval Finds from Flaxengate I*. Lincoln (Archaeology of Lincoln, 14–1).
- Margeson, S 1982 'Worked bone', in Coad, J G, & Streeton, A D F, 'Excavations at Castle Acre Castle, Norfolk, 1972–77', *Archaeol J*, 139 (1982), 241–55.
- Meates, G W 1987 *The Roman Villa at Lullingstone, Kent, Vol II*. Maidstone (Kent Archaeol Soc Monogr 3).
- Millett, M & Graham, D 1986 *Excavations on the Romano-British Small Town at Neatham, Hampshire, 1969–1979*. Gloucester (Hampshire Field Club Monogr 3).
- Munro, R 1885 'The Lake-Dwellings of Wigtonshire', *Archaeol Collections Ayrshire & Galloway*, 5 (1885), 74–124.
- Munro, R 1890 *The Lake-Dwellings of Europe*. London.
- Mykura, W 1976 *Orkney and Shetland*. London (British Regional Geology Series).
- Myres, J N L, & Green, B 1973 *The Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries of Caistor-by-Norwich and Markshall, Norfolk*. London (=Res Rep Soc Antiq Lond 30).
- Platt, C & Coleman-Smith, R 1975 *Excavations in Medieval Southampton 1953–1969*. Leicester.
- Robertson, A S 1970 'Roman Finds from Non-Roman Sites in Scotland', *Britannia*, 1 (1970), 198–226.

- Rogerson, A 1976 'Excavations on Fuller's Hill, Great Yarmouth', *East Anglian Archaeol*, 2 (1976), 131–245.
- Rogerson, A & Dallas, C 1984 *Excavations in Thetford 1948–59 and 1973–80*. Gressenhall (*East Anglian Archaeol* 22).
- Smith, B, Budge, W, & Budge, K 1988 'North Links (S Ronaldsay parish) Prehistoric Settlement Site', *Discovery Excav Scot*, 1988, 29.
- Spearman, R M 1990 'The Helmsdale Bowls, a re-assessment', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 120 (1990), 63–77.
- Stevenson, R B K 1967 'A Roman-period Cache of Charms in Aberdeenshire', *Antiquity* 41 (1967), 143–5.
- Stevenson, R B K & Collins, G H 1976 'Beads of reddish marbled stone (lithomarge)', *Glasgow Archaeol J*, 4 (1976), 55–6.
- Thomas, C 1981 *A Provisional List of Imported Pottery in Post-Roman Western Britain and Ireland*. Redruth (Inst Cornish Stud Special Rep 7).
- Tomalin, D J 1987 *Roman Wight*. Isle of Wight.
- Waterman, D M 1959 'Late Saxon, Viking, and Early Medieval Finds From York', *Archaeologia*, 97 (1959), 59–105.
- Wheeler, R E M & Wheeler, T V 1932 *Report on the excavation of the prehistoric, Roman and post-Roman site in Lydney Park, Gloucestershire*. Oxford (=Res Rep Soc Antiq Lond 14).
- White, R H 1988 *Roman and Celtic Objects from Anglo-Saxon Graves*. Oxford (=British Archaeol Rep, Brit Ser 191).
- Wickenden, N P 1988 'Objects of bone and antler', in Drury, P J, *The mansio and other sites in the south-eastern sector of Caesaromagus*. London (=CBA Res Rep 66), 106–7.
- Williams, J H 1979 *St Peter's Street, Northampton: Excavations 1973–1976*. Northampton.
- Williams, P W 1983 *An Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Thurmaston, Leicestershire*. Leicester.
- Wilson, D M, & Hurst, D G 1966 'Medieval Britain in 1965 (Ludgershall, Wiltshire)', *Medieval Archaeol* 10 (1966), 191–2.
- Young, A 1956 'Excavations at Dun Cuier, Isle of Barra', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 89 (1955–6), 290–328.
- Zeepvat, R J, Williams, R J & Mynard, C D 1987 *Roman Milton Keynes: Excavations and Fieldwork 1971–1982*. Aylesbury (Bucks Archaeol Soc Monogr 1).
- Zienkiewicz, J D 1986 *The legionary fortress baths at Caerleon, II. The Finds*. Cardiff.