

A Roman burial from Cramond (Edinburgh) rediscovered

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with contributions by D Henderson & C Wallace

ABSTRACT

A 19th-century discovery of a Roman urned cremation is reconsidered. The remains were those of an adult male younger than middle age with evidence of arthritis and a partly healed fracture. The pot used as a receptacle was a locally produced Greyware jar, most probably of Antonine date. Corrosion marks on the pot suggest the former presence of iron objects with the burial. Possible locations for such a burial are discussed within the context of Roman Cramond, and its wider place in the scanty evidence for Roman burials in Scotland is outlined.

INTRODUCTION

Roman burials are exceedingly rare in Scotland. A 19th-century find of an urned cremation found near Cramond, Edinburgh, was published a few years after its discovery (Macdonald 1897), at which time it was in the private collection of James Mackenzie, FSA Scot. In the publicity surrounding the discovery of the Cramond Lioness (Hunter & Collard 1997), the burial has re-emerged. Its intervening history is uncertain, but at some stage it was acquired by the Roseberys of Dalmeny, and we are grateful to Lord and Lady Rosebery for drawing it to our attention. The opportunity is taken here to present a full account of the burial, which raises a number of interesting issues.

DISCOVERY

The burial was discovered during ploughing in December 1889, and a paper read to this Society in May 1897, drawing on James Mackenzie's account: he had visited the site the day after the discovery and could verify the circumstances. Details are presented in Macdonald (1897); the key points are summarized here. The cremated bones were in an upright pot, with a stone covering the mouth. There are suggestions that the burial lay in a pit some 5½ ft (1.7 m) square; the soil in the immediate area was charcoal-rich. There was no cist or similar protection for the burial. Some pebbles were found in the same spot, and marks on the pot (below) suggest that iron objects, not noted at the time, were also present in the grave. The find-spot is recorded as 'a field near

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Cramond' which was 'distant more than half a mile' from the shore, the likely source of the pebbles.

The pot bears three labels. One is a newspaper account of the paper read at the Society's meeting, and adds nothing to it. This gives the find-spot as 'near the seashore', but this may best be taken as inaccurate reporting rather than more detailed information. The other two are handwritten. The first simply reads 'Cinerary Urn of grey unglazed Earthenware'. The second reads as follows:

'Roman Cinerary Urn, grey unglazed Earthenware found Dec. 1889 — in a field near Cramond Shore, Edinburgh
It contains bones which have been burnt in some rude process and are human remains. Only one small tooth was seen on careful examination. The Urn was damaged [. . .] but has been repaired'.

The labels are undated but are assumed to date to the 1880s or 1890s. It is unclear, however, whether the more detailed label relied on the published account or is an independent source of information. The phrase 'near Cramond Shore' suggests a garbled or at best an uncertain account of the discovery; the associated beach pebbles seem to have confused the picture and, overall, it seems best to rely on the version in the *Proceedings*. Archival research has not revealed any further information.

THE CREMATION

David Henderson

It is impossible to know if the material now available represents the complete cremation, or to know the extent of breakage of bone since its recovery, but in view of the comparatively large amount of bone present and the size of the fragments, it appears that there has been no major loss. The remains are clearly human, though one fragment of ?sheep rib, thoroughly calcined, was also present.

The cremated material was sorted by hand, after sieving to 5 mm. A total weight of 768 g was recovered, of which 111 g (14.5%) is cranium. The cremation is of a single individual, probably male (estimated from skull morphology) and fully mature (erupted third molars, no unfused epiphyses discovered). None of the cranial sutures was fused, suggesting that the individual was probably younger than about 40 years, and the lines of epiphyseal fusion were still visible in the trabecular bone of long-bone ends, also suggesting a young adult age.

One cervical vertebra left inferior articular facet displayed arthritic changes (to Sayer Grade II: Brothwell 1981, 150). This was the only cervical articular fragment identified, so the extent of the arthropathy remains undetermined. A fragment of rib displayed a callus, indicating a healing fracture.

The colour of the cremated bone covers a wide range, from evidently unburnt yellow/brown, through dark brown, to black and blue-black, and finally white or light grey fully calcined bone. Approximately 60% of the bone had become fully calcined, quite a low proportion (Mays

1998, 217). The presence of calcined bone suggests that the pyre attained a temperature of at least 650°C, but the varied condition of the bone — representing incomplete burning — suggests that this temperature was not maintained for long enough to reduce all the bone to a calcined state (*ibid.*, 219).

The pattern of burning was peculiar; the bones of the top and back of the skull (frontal, parietals and the superior part of the occipital) and the lumbar vertebrae were the least fully burned. The bodies of the lumbar vertebrae were, in some cases, almost unaffected by heat and the cranial bones were mostly calcined on the inner surface only, and merely blackened on the outer surface. Some cranial bones had been broken after they had been heated, but were still hot enough to distort after breaking. It appears that the skull was broken open, perhaps deliberately, before it had been fully burnt, but after the fire had burnt down, so that the pieces then came to rest on hot ashes.

Several pieces of long-bone were over 70 mm in length, although most were in the range of 30–40 mm. Most of the skull fragments were roughly square, approximately 20 mm in width. It does not seem likely that the bone was deliberately broken up after retrieval from the pyre. Although an adult skeleton will yield between 1.5–2 kg of cremated bone, the fact that considerably less was recovered in this case is not unusual in Romano-British cremations, where complete recovery of all the bone from the pyre for burial does not seem to have been considered necessary (Mays 1998, 220–4).

THE POT

Colin Wallace

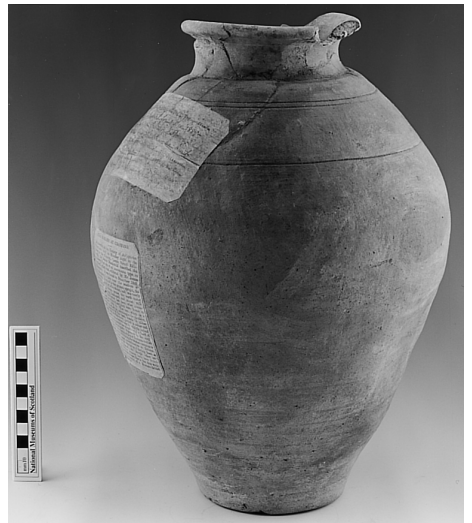
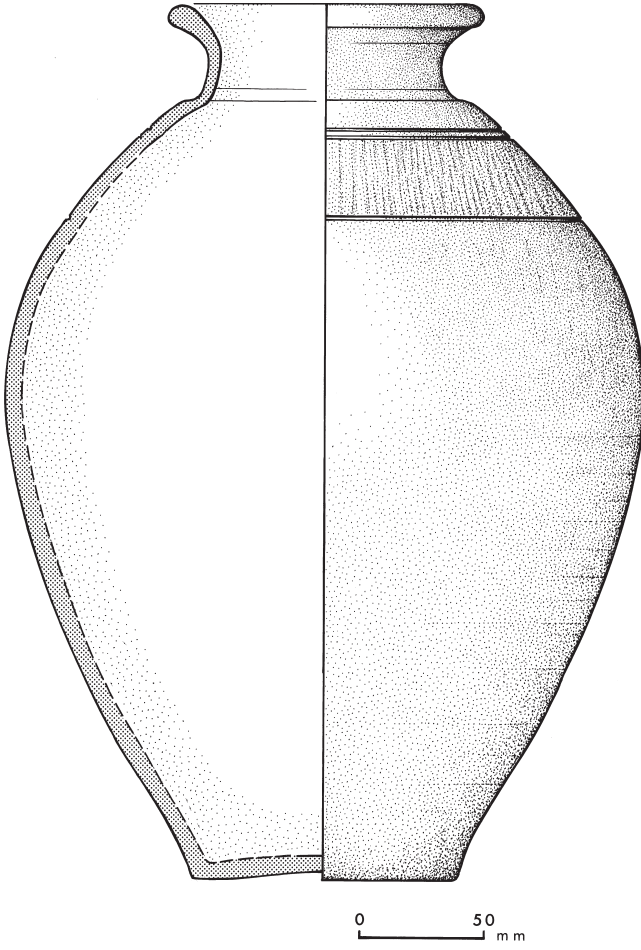
The vessel (*illus 1*) is a plain, largely undecorated narrow-necked jar with a simple base. The base, at 110 mm, is narrower than the neck (125 mm); the height of the whole vessel is 245 mm. It is an obvious ‘second’, as the photograph (*illus 1*) shows. Firing faults — such as the undulating rim and the two opposed areas on the body that are dented from contact with other pots in the kiln — presumably mean that it was locally made (a flawed item is unlikely to have been exported). This is a point of some interest and is further explored below.

The neck and rim have been broken (probably on discovery: Macdonald 1897, 244) and repaired. There are three iron corrosion stains on one side of the body, 10–20 mm in diameter and 70 mm, 130 mm and 250 mm up from the base, where iron objects were once in contact.

The jar is made in a sandy Greyware, the surface wiped but not burnished. Where visible at the broken rim, the fabric is pale grey (Munsell 10Y 8/1), with abundant rounded quartz sand and occasional larger angular pieces; there is also sparse mica on the surface of the vessel. A slight darkening of the surface on parts of the upper body may be another firing fault. Greywares (not further subdivided) made up about a third by Estimated Vessel Equivalents (c 42% by weight) of the assemblages from the 1975–81 excavations at Cramond, and Ford (*forthcoming*) suggests that local production of such wares was possible. This provides the local ceramic context.

There is a broad, flattened cordon at the junction of the neck and shoulder, marking a distinct change of direction. A further zone directly below this, bearing faint traces of incised vertical lines, is defined by incised lines (two at the top, one below). There are heavy throwing lines, especially on the lower part of the body.

The form is hard to parallel from Roman Scotland, other than a Greyware vessel from Newstead of roughly similar shape and size (Curle 1911, 252–3, pl XLIXB.7) and a rim from the mid second-century Mumrills destruction deposit (Gillam, in Steer 1963, fig 14.59). It is different



ILLUS 1 Cramond pot (drawing scale 1:3) (photo © Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)

from the Black-Burnished cooking pots, BB copies and other everted-rim jar forms that dominate the published assemblages. Using Gillam (1970) is unhelpful, as the present pot can only be seen to combine elements of Types 28 and 30. By contrast, the form is relatively common in the south of Britain, such cordoned, narrow-necked jars being designated Type 1 in his original Severn Valley Ware paper by Webster (1977a, fig 1; see also Scottish finds in Webster 1977b, fig 11.1, nos 2 & 3). Cordons at the junction of neck and shoulder and upper body grooves are both common features on Severn Valley Ware jars (of which a small amount is recorded at Cramond: Ford forthcoming).

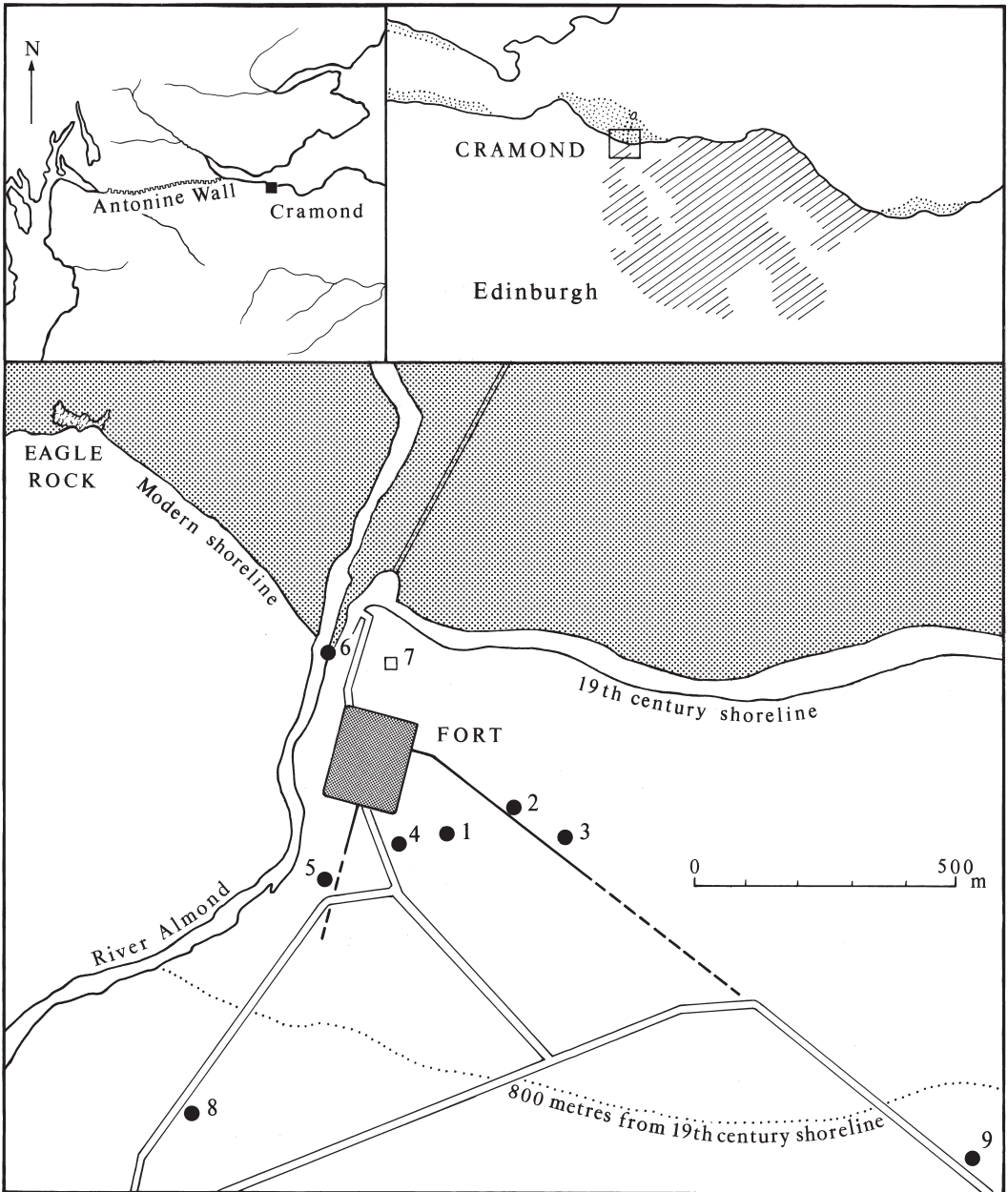
Thus the wider ceramic context for this vessel lies far from Cramond; Macdonald (1897, 245) was correct in associating it with a southern Romano-British industry. The significance of it being a 'second' is that it provides support for the suggestion that local pottery production extended beyond the known oxidized ware manufacture of the early third century (Ford forthcoming). Its date range is provided by the span of occupation at Cramond (mid second to early third centuries; see below); the suggested dating of the Severn Valley Ware found in Scotland (c AD 140–165/170: Webster 1977b, 172) suggests it is Antonine. The particular vessel type is long-lived (Webster suggested mid first to fourth century AD, the entire lifespan of the industry).

The wheel-thrown pottery vessel used for this sparsely furnished cremation is therefore of no little interest, as a further indication of the spread of local pottery production in Antonine Scotland (cf Breeze 1987, fig 1) and as an example of the export of vessel-shape traditions from the south of the province. It can be added to the evidence of locally made cooking wares of North African type discussed by Ford (forthcoming) and by Swan (1994, 4–5; 1999), to the Antonine-period oxidized ware production at Inveresk (Swan 1988) and, from slightly further afield, to the copies of Hadrianic-Antonine Verulamium Region and fourth-century Dorset BB1 wares recently published from northern England (Bidwell & Croom 1997, 100–1; Busby *et al* 1996).

THE CONTEXT OF ROMAN CRAMOND

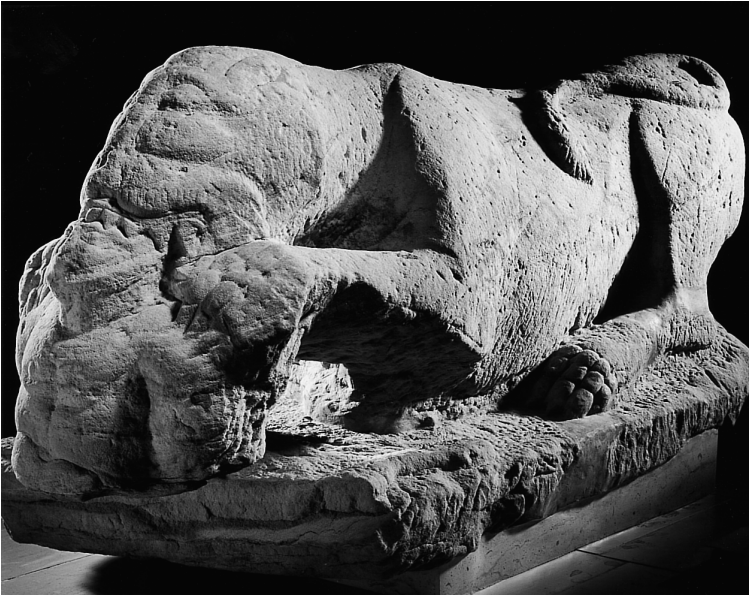
The Roman fort at Cramond has been extensively investigated since the 1950s when its location was definitively established (Rae & Rae 1974; Holmes forthcoming) (illus 2). It was first built as an outpost fort of the Antonine Wall defence system, with a garrison of auxiliary troops, protecting the eastern seaboard of Roman-occupied Lothian from the AD 140s. The main garrison was probably removed in the AD 160s following the withdrawal to the Hadrian's Wall frontier, although Holmes suggests some lesser level of occupation continued until the late second century. The site was reoccupied as a support base in the early third century, as part of the campaigns of the emperor Septimius Severus, when the fort was evidently reconstructed and a large industrial complex built to the south-east. While there was systematic demolition of much of the fort and surrounding structures after the death of Severus in AD 211 prior to withdrawal, again structural and artefactual evidence suggests some form of continued Roman presence or influence on a reduced scale, though the nature and duration of this is not fully understood.

To understand the context of the burial it is necessary to assess the extent of the fort complex. The fort at the heart of the Roman occupation occupied a plateau above the river valley of the Almond, with extensive views to the north across the Firth of Forth. It has been the focus of investigation over the past 40 years, with its defences definitively established to the south and east. Outwith these, extensive areas of occupation have been defined to the south and south-east (illus 2), extending along the two roads leading inland from the fort. One runs from the main east gate of the fort but turns almost immediately and heads south-east; the other runs SSW from the south gate, presumably towards a bridge across the Almond, as yet unidentified. The routes



ILLUS 2 Roman finds in the Cramond area: 1, industrial complex; 2, roadside buildings; 3, buildings and destruction debris; 4, masonry structures; 5, metalled surface and occupation debris; 6, lioness sculpture; 7, bathhouse; 8, cist; 9, ? burial monument

of both of these have been recorded at some distance from the fort (more than 300 m to the south-east and 150 m to the south). Along the road to the south-east, part of a Severan industrial complex was excavated by Holmes (illus 2, no 1). Beyond this, and perhaps forming part of the same complex, substantial roadside buildings dating to the early third century have been recorded



ILLUS 3 Cramond lioness
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up to 150 m from the east gate of the fort (Holmes 1986, 28; Callander & Hoy 1979, 18; Hoy 1981, 22) (illus 2: nos 2 & 3). To the south, only limited observation of substantial Roman masonry structures and areas of cobbling was possible during construction of a new housing estate at Cramond Glebe Gardens (Walker 1971, 55) (illus 2: no 4). Further south, at Waterpark, a metallised surface with bootstuds, and other evidence for Roman activity, were 140 m from the fort gate (Callander & Hoy 1979, 18) (illus 2: no 5).

The find-spot of the cremation urn, half a mile (c 800 m) from the shore, places it at least 450 m south of the southern defences and well beyond the currently known limits of Roman occupation, within land which was under cultivation in the late 19th century but which is now covered by late 20th-century housing or by a golf course further east. The reported information about its discovery is unfortunately imprecise and offers no real clues to its relationship with the settlement area at Cramond, except perhaps by offering a potential limit to the settlement, albeit at some considerable distance from the fort (although the Antonine extra-mural settlement at Inveresk extended for 500 m from the gate of the fort: Thomas 1988, illus 2).

In light of the eventual deposition of the cremation and its container at Dalmeny House, the possibility that it was found on the opposite side of the river Almond from Cramond should not be entirely discounted, but seems most unlikely on the available evidence. With the exception of the badly degraded carving known as Eagle Rock on the foreshore (Keppie & Arnold 1984, no 65) (illus 2), there is no evidence for Roman occupation on the western side of the Almond near Cramond. Furthermore, a find-spot 'half-a-mile distant' from the shore on that side would have been close to the deep rock-cut gorge where the river flows quickly, well away from any possible ford or convenient bridging spot to the fort on the other side of the river.

Despite extensive investigations at Cramond, from the first antiquarian interest in the 18th century through to modern excavations, no other concrete evidence for Roman burials or cemeteries was known — in the form of interments, inscriptions or sculpture — until the discovery of the Cramond Lioness in 1997 (Hunter & Collard 1997) (illus 2: no 6). This sculpture of a lioness eating her prey — a naked and bound barbarian (illus 3) — represents the power of death

in Roman symbolism. It was probably made for the ornate tomb of a high-ranking Roman, but its findspot in the river offers no clue as to where the tomb may have been.

In this context, reference should be made to the discovery of an empty short cist at 93 Whitehouse Road, Cramond (Collard 1995, 53) (illus 2: no 8). Although traditionally interpreted as an archetypal Bronze Age burial practice, there is evidence from the cemetery at Lanchester, County Durham, that cists of this type and size (c 1 m by 0.5 m) were in use during the Roman period too (Turner 1990, 74); while rather larger cists are known in Scotland, at Camelon (Breeze *et al* 1976; Buchanan 1923). The Cramond cist lay not far from the projected line of the road from the south gate of the Roman fort. However, if a cemetery did lie in this area, it would be surprising that no discoveries were made during the construction of a housing estate south of Cramond Road North.

There is also an antiquarian reference to a possible Roman burial near Cramond. Wood (1794, 13) recorded that 'within my remembrance, there was to be seen a large sepulchre, formed of flat stones, on the east side of the road leading from Lauriston to Nether Cramond, in the line of the military way, a little below the east entry to King's Cramond; but this monument is now completely destroyed'. This would lie on the projected line of the SE road, some 1.2 km from the fort defences (illus 2: no 9).

Overall, our knowledge of the cemeteries of Roman Cramond remains distressingly imprecise.

BURIAL RITES AND PARALLELS

Very few Roman burials are known in Scotland. Indeed there are more recorded tombstones and grave sculptures than actual burials. This would be a reversal of the original picture, of course, since tombstones and tombs with sculpture would have been restricted to a minority of those buried in Roman Scotland, as many of the inscriptions indicate. Funerary inscriptions and sculptures are known south of the Antonine Wall from Cramond itself (Hunter & Collard 1997), Birrens and Inveresk; on the Wall from Mumrills, Croy Hill, Bar Hill, Shirva (probably originally from Auchendavy), and Castlehill; and north of the Wall from Ardoch (RIB 2115, 2142, 2172, 2181–3, 2213; Keppie & Arnold 1984, nos 22–4, 59, 90, 101, 108–13, 120, 144; Keppie 1998, nos 47–53). By contrast, the only other cremation burials are two from a temporary camp ditch at Newstead (Curle 1911, 19), one from Croy Hill (Frere *et al* 1977, 364; Keppie 1986, fig 26), and likely cremation pits from Camelon (Breeze & Rich-Gray 1980). There is also a late second- or early third-century cremation with Roman goods from High Torrs, Wigtownshire (Breeze & Ritchie 1980). This last was not associated with a known Roman site and, given how little we know of local burial traditions, could equally have been a high status native burial (cf Hunter 1997, fig 12.3). Camelon has also produced inhumations (Breeze *et al* 1976), as has Inveresk (Gallagher & Clarke 1993). It is worth noting the presence of human remains in unusual contexts which do not relate to normal burial practices, notably skeletons from the Newstead pits (Smith 1857, 425; Curle 1911, 110–11; Bryce 1911; Wells 1958; Clarke & Jones 1994) and the remains of human hands and feet from a pit at Bar Hill (Macdonald & Park 1906, 61). The occasional antiquarian accounts of intact pots should also be borne in mind as possible indicators of burial sites (eg Stevenson 1879).

In sum the recorded burials of Roman Scotland are disappointingly few; and as every Roman fort would have had adjacent cemeteries, the dearth of our knowledge in proportion to the original number of burials is very evident. The small sample that is known shows considerable variation. Some of this has been attributed to the persistence of a local pre-Roman inhumation

tradition (Breeze *et al* 1976, 77–81), a phenomenon which finds wider parallels (Philpott 1991, 222), although to talk of a previous burial tradition is perhaps stretching the scant and varied Iron Age evidence beyond reasonable bounds.

The Cramond cremation is typical of Roman burials in the military zone as known from further south (Philpott 1991, 220; Wilmott 1993; Charlton & Mitcheson 1984): cremation was the dominant rite until the third century, with inhumation gaining in popularity from the later second century onwards (Philpott 1991, 53). The rite here appears to be burial in a pit along with ashes from the cremation. This is well paralleled, for instance at Petty Knowes, High Rochester, Northumberland (Charlton & Mitcheson 1984). The original grave assemblage is uncertain: the corrosion traces on the pot indicate that iron objects were originally present, but were either missed during recovery or had decayed. Otherwise no other artefacts were found, although the surrounding ground was explored. A cremated fragment of possible sheep rib suggests food may have accompanied the deceased on the pyre. Burials with few or no grave goods are again typical of the northern military zone (eg Wilmott 1993; Charlton & Mitcheson 1984; Turner 1990); richer burials (eg Snape 1994, grave 1) are unusual, although the evidence of the tombstones and sculpture indicates that more impressive burials were available for some of Roman frontier society.

The Roman norm of burial outwith the settlement area is well established (Toynbee 1971, 48–9). However, it is worth noting how far from the settlement this may have been. The Cramond pot, at some 450 m from the defences, is far from atypical. The few other published Scottish burials give distances from the defences of around 200 m at Newstead, 130 m and 600 m at Camelon — for the 1975 and 1922 finds respectively — and 300 m and 850 m at Inveresk — for the inhumations (above) and a pine-cone finial (Thomas 1988, *illus* 2). (Distance is measured from the fort, not the settlement edge, because the former is both better known and less variable.) It is therefore no surprise that so few burials are known, as the study of Roman Scotland has been heavily focused on the forts themselves, with little attention to their environs. Not only cemeteries, but temples, shrines and *vici* are all poorly known compared to northern England. A more rounded picture of Roman Scotland must look to these wider aspects of the fort complex, and it is to be hoped that both changing agendas and chance finds from rescue work around forts will help to expand the picture. Until then, finds such as this pot and the Cramond Lioness stand as tantalizing glimpses into life and death in Roman Scotland.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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