

The later prehistory of ‘black holes’: regionality and the south-west Scottish Iron Age*

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ABSTRACT

The Iron Age archaeology of south-west Scotland has always been anonymous in national syntheses of the period in comparison to better studied areas. This lack of attention does not reflect the quality of the archaeological record however, which testifies to a rich and diverse later prehistoric society. This paper is a discussion of the range and nature of the evidence for Iron Age society in Dumfries and Galloway west of the Nith, considering affinities with other areas, particularly the Atlantic regions to the north, and exploring the reasons for the form and distribution of Iron Age monuments in the area. It is argued that a reanalysis of our definition and interpretation of fundamental characteristics of later prehistoric society, such as domestic monumentality, may be rewarding in heterogeneous and unsorted areas such as Galloway.

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF THE SOUTH-WESTERN IRON AGE

In major syntheses that form the basis of the theoretical framework for the Iron Age in Northern Britain, the south-west of Scotland has featured only fleetingly. In their agenda for the British Iron Age, Haselgrove et al (2001) classed the south-west of Scotland among the ‘black holes’ in our understanding of the later prehistory of Britain, lacking any theoretical paradigm within which to place the currently recorded settlement record and too research-impooverished to allow contextualization. Undoubtedly, the problem stems largely from a lack of field research, and Hingley was able to draw on the evidence of only one or two sites in his comprehensive overview of the Scottish Iron Age in 1992 (Hingley 1992). Major campaigns of research unfortunately still elude the south-western Iron Age, and the relatively small scale of commercial development in the region means that, with a few exceptions, rescue archaeology has so far contributed little to an understanding of the regional picture. Even

in the most definitive and up-to-date statement on the Scottish Iron Age (Harding 2004), the south-west features minimally. The Iron Age of Dumfries and Galloway deserves more discussion than is usually allowed, however, and as will be discussed in this paper the reasons for the anonymity of the south-west go beyond a lack of survey and excavation: chronological frameworks and models of social structure have been elusive even in comparison to other little-studied areas. It is probable that the path towards understanding the south-western Iron Age may require different investigation techniques than those traditionally associated with studies of later prehistory, and the use of traditional tools such as artefact typologies are unlikely to be as feasible as elsewhere in Britain. As is widely recognised, the region is extremely rich in later prehistoric archaeology, and could contribute to a new understanding of the northern British Iron Age: importantly, issues of identity and cultural affinity in Galloway might help us to understand more fully the significance of settlement types found in greater numbers elsewhere.

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ISSUES OF DEFINITION

It is often assumed that the lack of field research is the biggest obstacle to an understanding of Iron Age settlement in the south-west. A number of other factors however, both archaeological and historical, have complicated the study of this area, and a measure of contextualization is necessary at this stage. Perhaps the least durable zone of Piggott's 1966 scheme, the Solway–Clyde 'province' has struggled for a recognizable identity since its definition due in part to the lack of a characteristic site type with which to associate the area. Piggott suggested that crannogs could be taken as a characteristic site type of the south-west (Piggott 1966), but as surveys of the deep highland lochs north of the Forth–Clyde line have demonstrated (Dixon 1982; Morrison 1985), lake settlements are much more widespread than had previously been documented. The decline of diffusionist explanation in Iron Age archaeology has (perhaps unjustifiably) reduced the impact of the famous metalworking finds from the region, like the Torrs pony cap or the Balmaclellan mirror, which had previously supported the conventional wisdom linking south-west Scotland with Southern Britain. Diffusionist explanations or no, in modern discussion it would be disingenuous and inconsistent to characterise south-west Scotland in terms of individual finds, when otherwise it is common to characterise on the basis of settlement, and as we note the clear significance of La Tène-style influence on metalwork from the south-west (eg Harding 2002), we must consider more sophisticated explanations for its appearance and the implications of those explanations for our understanding of the region more generally.

In fact, one of the greatest challenges facing the construction of a useful framework for the south-western Iron Age is that as our knowledge currently stands, with the exception of the spectacular metalwork finds mentioned above, a few Roman items and the occasional wetland find, the area is extremely impoverished in

terms of later prehistoric material culture and chronological frameworks for the pre-Roman Iron Age are virtually non-existent. Again, the dearth of excavation is the default explanation for this, yet even in comparison to other little-studied areas Galloway has little in the way of a 'standard' Iron Age material culture. In order to found some basis for understanding the south-western Iron Age, we will be forced to consider carefully the methods by which we investigate this period, and when we borrow expectations from elsewhere, we must ensure we are borrowing appropriately.

SOUTH-WEST SCOTLAND: A REGION OF BORROWED IDENTITIES?

As research in other areas has progressed, then, south-west Scotland has lost much of its previous identity, but has not acquired any meaningful replacement. In standard writing on the Scottish Iron Age, including the most recent texts, the south-west is included under the category of 'Southern Scotland' (eg Harding 2004), grouped alongside the much better known areas of south-east Scotland, the Borders and, as a result of the Royal Commission's work in the 1990s (RCAHMS 1997), Eastern Dumfriesshire. One of the suggestions I would like to put forward here, however, is that this classification – and even the modern administrative boundary of Dumfries and Galloway – masks important variation that might better help to understand the archaeology of the area. The apparent assimilation of much of Dumfries and Galloway under Rheged and latterly into the kingdom of Northumbria in the historic period may have further perpetuated the illusion of unity in academic perception. Even a recent attempt at the rehabilitation of south-west Scotland's Iron Age, by Ian Banks, could not draw on evidence of more than a few sites farther west than the River Nith, and treated Dumfries and Galloway as a single geographical unit (Banks 2002). In this paper, greater emphasis is placed on less well known parts of the area, focusing

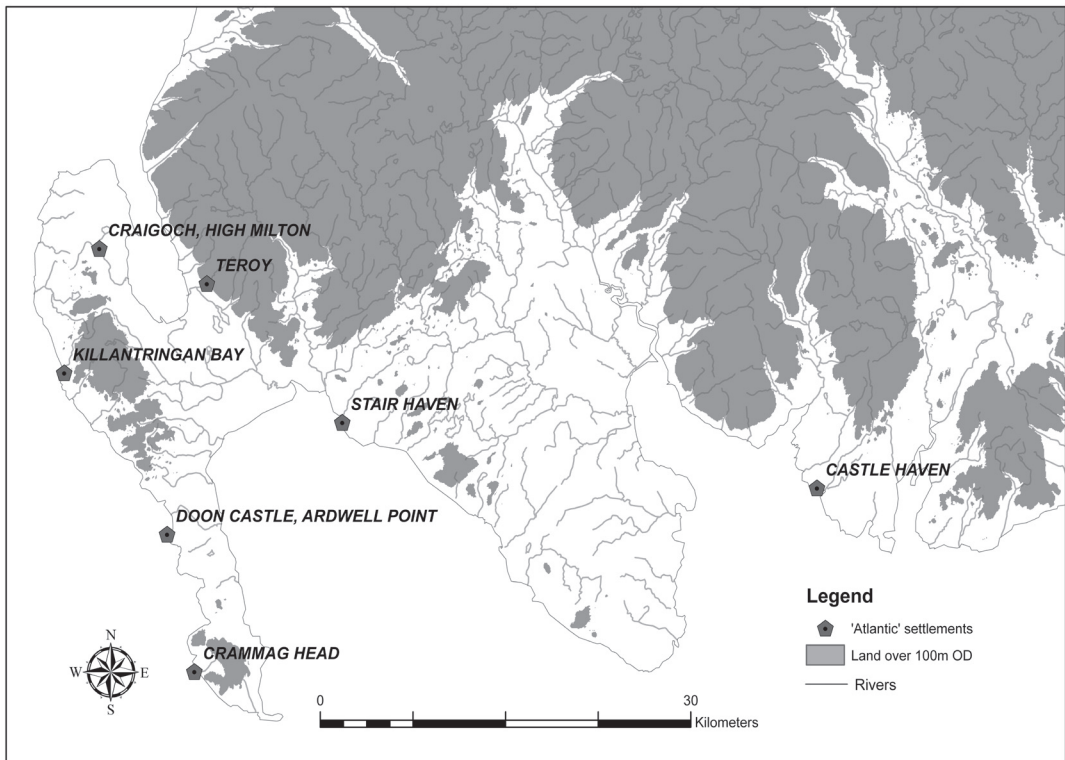
more specifically on the west of the region: the Machars and Rhinns of Galloway.

It has been noted before that west of the Nith, later prehistoric settlements tend to be smaller, more regularly circular and more frequently built in stone (Cowley 2000). This area is Galloway, and it is with this region in the extreme south-west that this paper is primarily concerned. One of the more useful perspectives of this region was taken by Jack Scott as early as 1960 when he considered Galloway alongside Ayrshire and Argyll, emphasising the contiguity of settlement types along the western seaboard of the area (Scott 1960); it is this connection to the Atlantic regions that will be examined in the following discussion, considering the significance of some key sites in this light before

turning to the question of regional identities and social structure in the South West.

THE VARIETY OF SETTLEMENT TYPES: 'ATLANTIC' AND BEYOND IN GALLOWAY

A recent treatment of the Atlantic Iron Age and the continuity of settlement forms in western Europe discussed south-west Scotland, albeit cursorily, in the context of 'Atlantic Scotland' in the traditional definition, and considered the area closely related to Argyll and other areas of western Scotland (Henderson 2007). To define the Iron Age settlement of the south-west as 'Atlantic' in character may be viewed



ILLUS 1 The distribution of classic 'Atlantic' style sites in Galloway

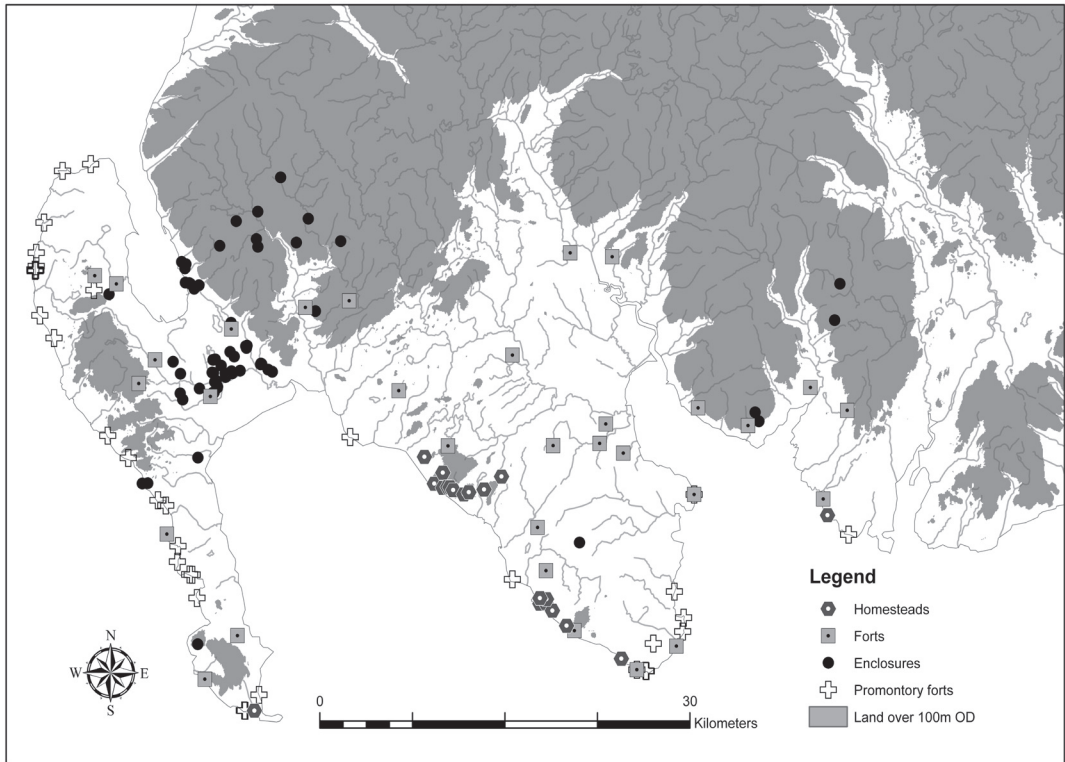
as arguing a special case, and certainly the site types traditionally associated with this label do not seem to be found in great numbers. The archetypal ‘Atlantic’ settlements – complex Atlantic roundhouses – are found, however (illus 1), and although they may not conform to the classic blueprint of this site type (in that the most diagnostic features such as bar-holes, scarcements and staircases are variously missing or unusual in form in the Galloway examples) they seem no more exceptional than variation within the traditional boundaries of Atlantic Scotland would allow. Eccentricities such as the double staircase (one landward, one seaward) at Stairhaven broch (illus 2; Yates 1980), and the double entrance at Doon Castle, Ardwell find parallels in Argyll at sites like Dun Kildalloig (RCAHMS 1971: 88) and Druim an Duin (Christison 1905: 292), and there can be no doubt that these sites were designed as ‘broch’-style structures. The remains of Doon Castle suggest that the external walls of that site may have stood at around four metres high, while the wall base accounts for over 50% of the overall diameter of Stairhaven. There is no question that although

these sites may be regional interpretations, they were designed and built very much with the monumental Atlantic roundhouse concept in mind.

It is important to assess the significance of these sites within the regional settlement system, as they can be seen as an indicator of the closeness of Galloway to the Atlantic west. Typically, in both established and recent literature (eg Armit 2002a) the south-western brochs have been classed under the same ‘Southern outliers’ label as the central and south-eastern examples like Edin’s Hall and Torwoodlee in the Borders, and therefore assumed to be late arrivals, perhaps built by southern elites and used as symbols of power in emulation of the brochs of the north and west (see eg MacInnes 1984). While we run the risk of arguing over sites for which there is no excavated evidence, it is questionable whether this is an appropriate interpretation of the south-western examples. The only Atlantic roundhouse in the south-west to have been investigated is that at Teroy, where Curle cleared the rubble from part of the interior; a rotary quern stone and a handful of other prosaic artefacts were



ILLUS 2 The broch at Stairhaven, the Machars (photo: author)



ILLUS 3 Defended sites – forts, promontory forts and ‘homesteads’ – in Galloway

the extent of the material assemblage, so clearly reliable dating is a problem (Curle 1912).¹ However, it is asserted here that the explanation that the south-eastern outlier brochs have some relationship to the Roman presence – perhaps inspired as a symbol of native power in the face of external threat – would appear on the basis of our current understanding to have no real bearing on the Galloway sites. The extreme south-west of Scotland seems to have been far less Romanised than the south-east, with only one temporary marching camp known west of the Fleet (at Glenluce; Keppie 1993), so that to link the appearance of the Galloway brochs to this same stimulus may be overly tenuous. Furthermore, as we have already considered and unlike the other southern examples, the construction and form of the Galloway brochs,

which in the case of the double-entranced Doon Castle finds parallels in the local roundhouse form (eg Rispain, Haggarty & Haggarty 1983; Craggleton, Ewart 1985), is not so exceptional as to require special explanation in any case, and could equally be seen as a natural, if particularly spectacular, expression of the local roundhouse building tradition.

This consideration of the south-western brochs as particularly recognizable examples of an ‘Atlantic’ style settlement system seems more plausible when we consider the wider settlement spectrum and the character of sites likely to be contemporary with them. Both ‘dun houses’ and ‘dun enclosures’ in Harding’s (1984) scheme are represented in significant numbers in Galloway, though they tend here to be referred to as ‘homesteads’ or stone forts (illus 3). They



ILLUS 4 The entrance to the primary phase 'dun' enclosure at Castle Haven, Borgue (photo: author)

could also legitimately be termed 'ring-forts' if it were felt that this was a more useful label. The present author does not feel so, since this term invokes connotations that might pre-judge their dating, but the affinity with Northern Irish sites of similar form is important and it may be that such comparisons may be as instructive on the elusive northern Irish Iron Age as in Galloway itself. Again, the dating of these sites is based on morphological comparisons with elsewhere, but the earlier phase of the intriguing site at Castle Haven, near Borgue (illus 4) is very probably datable to the pre-Roman or Roman Iron Age, as evidenced by spiral finger rings and other objects recovered during excavation, and finds morphological parallels in Argyll, albeit in poorly-dated sites.

The small defended circular settlements that are particularly common in the Machars region

of Wigtownshire, termed 'homesteads' in the Royal Commission's inventories, can certainly be compared to the duns of the north-west, and particularly the Argyll examples. Galloway has a large number of these sites, with one particular concentration located on the raised coastline along the west Machars peninsula.

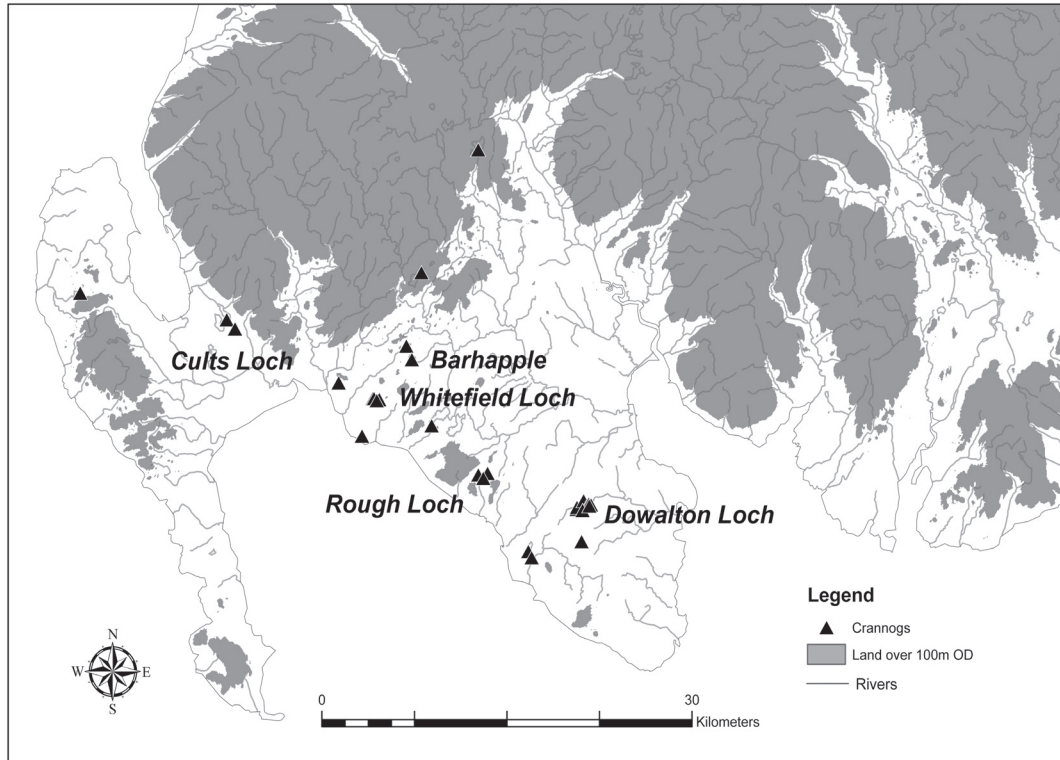
Recent exploratory excavations by George Geddes and the author at Airyolland have provided some data on the form of these 'homesteads' (Cavers & Geddes *in prep*). The Airyolland site consists of a large circular rubble enclosure approximately 38m in external diameter and, like many other homesteads, is located on the shoulder of the raised west Machars coast. Exploratory excavation established the presence of a massive stone wall around three and a half metres in width, constructed with two well-built wall faces and a rubble core. Again,

the site finds its closest parallels in Argyll and particularly with a site recently excavated in Mid Argyll by Gilmour and Henderson at Dun Glashan. The dimensions of that site are very similar to those of Airyolland, and the wall construction is almost identical. Like Dun Glashan, the (small) trenches at Airyolland were virtually devoid of small finds and no ceramics were recovered. These results are also consistent with the findings of an excavation in the 1950s at Chippermere homestead, near Airyolland, which found the same construction techniques, and despite opening a much larger area, recovered virtually no finds (Fiddes 1953). Radiocarbon dates spanning the second half of the 1st millennium BC were returned for the Glashan site, and this would be a reasonable working hypothesis for the dating of the Airyolland site until such time as dates can be obtained.

The form and coastal location of the Galloway homesteads blurs the distinction between those sites and promontory forts, which certainly seem to have been occupied in large numbers in the pre-Roman Iron Age. Toolis' recent excavations at Carghidown promontory fort in Wigtownshire have shown that the site consisted of a strongly defended enclosure, with a stone rampart and a deep ditch, and although the site was very likely to have been domestic in function it may never have been completed (Toolis 2007). The coastal location of promontory forts strongly indicates that association with the sea was of central importance during the Iron Age in Galloway, and that the coastal margins would likely have represented the core rather than the periphery of activity. The forts at Dunagoil on Bute (Harding 2004b) certainly demonstrate that some promontory settlements functioned as production centres for valuable metalwork and other high-value commodities; the distribution of identifiable 'marker' objects such as knobbed 'spear butts' and the moulds for making them illustrate the engagement of coastal settlements in a western seaways trade that involved western Scottish, Hebridean and Irish regions (Heald 2001).

The proliferation of promontory forts in Galloway can be taken as another indication of the affinity of the south-west with the wider Atlantic regions (see Henderson 2007:128), and in their form and physically marginal location they can be compared to the other major later prehistoric settlement type of Galloway – the artificial islets or crannogs (illus 5). Although, as noted earlier, this idea has been questioned due to their proliferation elsewhere, crannogs can be seen as a characteristic settlement type of the South West. As the number of surveys of lochs has increased, the geographical range of crannogs in Scotland has been greatly extended, but on the basis of numbers and densities they must surely be seen as characteristic of the Atlantic west (Cavers 2005). As analysis of density distribution has shown, they are found in their greatest numbers by far in Galloway, Argyll and the Inner Hebrides. Furthermore, their clear conceptual affinity with the island duns of the Hebrides again establishes a link with the traditional heartland zones of Atlantic Scotland.

It seems probable that virtually every available body of water was occupied by at least one crannog site, while several lochs – such as the important crannog complex at Dowalton (Hunter 1994) – had several, often sited in close proximity. Recent work by Crone, Henderson and the current author on the crannogs of the south-west has added to our knowledge of these sites, with radiocarbon dates for a range of crannogs demonstrating that they were a significant component of the pre-Roman Iron Age landscape (Henderson et al 2003 & 2006). In form, they seem mostly to have been in the so-called *packwerk* mode, built by revetting dumped material with piling to form an artificial platform, as in the case of Barhapple Loch. It seems that some, such as the site in Rough Loch, may have had substantial stone-built superstructures; in this case the stone construction forms a roundhouse around 15m in diameter. Some sites were undoubtedly monumental constructions by any definition –



ILLUS 5 Crannogs in Galloway

the site at Dorman's Island in Whitefield Loch (illus 6) is almost 40m across and rises some 5m from the loch bed – but it seems clear that they were designed primarily as homes, and environmental analysis of samples from this site has yielded evidence of mixed arable and pastoral agriculture, with evidence of cereal processing and animals kept on site (eg Bogaard 2005; Hall 2006).

The importance of crannogs in Galloway is the way that they encapsulate the Atlantic settlement style. The centrality of crannogs and the island settlement tradition to the western Scottish Iron Age can be illustrated when the essential elements of this tradition are analysed thematically (Cavers 2005); to a lesser or greater extent the Iron Age settlement of the Atlantic west incorporates all of these themes:

the outward display of defence, the deliberate preference for settlement of marginal zones, the display of architectural prowess, and that most recognizable characteristic – the deliberate display of domestic monumentality. Crannogs embody all of these themes, and as such it can be argued that their profusion in the south-west can be taken as indicative of the affinity of the region to the broader 'Atlantic' zone.

'Non-Atlantic' types

It would be disingenuous to characterise the extreme south-west of Scotland merely as an extension of the traditional Atlantic province, however, without considering the evidence for other styles of settlement indicating other external influences had a bearing in the region.



ILLUS 6 Dorman's Island, Whitefield Loch, the Machars (photo: author)

Similarly, that unquantified and poorly explored facet of Iron Age society, unenclosed settlement, was widespread and certainly continued well into the historic centuries (eg Condry & Ansell 1978), and although aerial reconnaissance has not been comprehensive, the RCAHMS has documented a large number of crop-mark settlements that would not be out of place in the Borders or Northumbria (Cowley & Brophy 2001). Quite how important and widespread palisade-enclosed settlements were is also uncertain, but although they were probably varied in both date and function, ranging from the Bronze Age (eg Aird, Cook 2006) through the Iron Age (MacGregor 1996 & 1997) and into the Early Historic period and later, their role in the later prehistoric settlement system should not be underestimated in discussions of social hierarchies.

One site worthy of special consideration is the peculiar rectilinear earthwork enclosure at Rispaun Camp. The site clearly has some special significance within its local context, with monumental earthworks, ditches containing deposits that must surely be interpreted as votive in character and two very large internal roundhouses (Haggarty & Haggarty 1973). While the form and dimensions most closely resemble Northumbrian rectilinear sites like West Brandon (Jobey 1962), providing suggestions of connections to the east, the rectilinear form could perhaps equally be seen as a characteristic of the Irish Sea region, recalling the Cornish square enclosures. It is possible, however, that we do not need to look elsewhere for the explanation for rectilinear forms and that they have been more widespread than seems initially apparent. Possible comparative sites to Rispaun

may be found near Dowalton Loch at Annat Hill and at Crows Fort, Kirkinner (Haggarty & Haggarty 1983: 44), as well as in the cropmark record at Cairn Connell Hill (Cowley 2000: 173). Furthermore, the apparent distribution of square barrows in Galloway – if they are Iron Age in date – may hint that rectilinear form was more fundamental to the local tradition than is usual in the western Scottish Iron Age, suggesting that while Galloway may share characteristics with elsewhere, the area held its own unique traits. Indeed, this fundamental similarity but difference in detail may be precisely what warrants comparison of the south-west of Scotland to the wider Atlantic zone (eg Cunliffe 2001; Henderson 2007); the variability of the south-west of Scotland may mean that the area is as good a place to study the regionality of Iron Age communities as any in Britain.

APPROACHES TO MATERIAL CULTURE

It is clear that the paucity of later prehistoric material culture in the south-west of Scotland will necessarily impose a new approach to the interpretation of later prehistoric society through material remains. Patently, Iron Age societies in this region were not culturally impoverished; they not only had access to, but produced items of spectacular quality, reflecting close connections to wide-ranging artistic influences and mastery of complex production technologies (see items listed in MacGregor 1976; Harding 2002). Besides the well-known metalwork from the south-west, a wide range of glass objects including bracelets/armlets and beads (Guido 1978) testify to a richer material culture than comparison with traditional British Iron Age assemblages might allow.

Although few sites have been excavated, the rarity of ceramics must surely now be taken as genuine, since even the small-scale excavations that have been carried out would have produced large quantities of ceramic finds had the sites in question been located farther

north in the Atlantic regions (although not perhaps in mainland Argyll). The significance of this is worthy of examination, since ceramics and particularly decorated pottery are often taken as characteristic signifiers of ‘Atlantic’ society in later prehistory. The obvious and functionalist explanation may be that the availability of wood resources made the use of ceramics less important, and the introduction of lathe technology in the mid-1st millennium BC may be one reason for an increase in use of wooden vessels and the decline of pottery, but it may be more productive to examine the evidence we do have, and consider more closely the purposes to which the few ceramics that were used were put. Once again, the most suitable view of south-western material culture may be obtained by changing the perspective, and considering what the objects that are found can tell us, rather than trying to explain the absence of those that are not. To this end, more detailed studies of coarse stone objects, bone implements and glass may be rewarding avenues of research, particularly since all of these were produced locally.

LANDSCAPE, DISTRIBUTION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN A ‘BLACK HOLE’

What can be taken from this possible evidence for Galloway’s affinity with Atlantic Scotland? Again, in the absence of reliable material culture we are forced to examine settlement distributions and resort to comparison in an attempt to elucidate the social structure of the region.

Following the initial findings of the RCAHMS (1997) in Eastern Dumfriesshire, Banks considered a settlement hierarchy in south-west Scotland whereby larger hillforts may occupy an upper tier in the settlement system, with scooped or terraced homesteads on a level below and unenclosed or palisaded settlements situated at the base of the social spectrum (Banks 2002; Halliday 2002). This, however,

is a difficult case to argue for Galloway, where very few enclosed sites exceed half a hectare in area and the vast majority of reliably Iron Age types seem to fall in what would be classed as the 'middle tier' of an Eastern Scottish hierarchical system. Furthermore, these supposedly 'middle tier' sites – which would include crannogs and defended homesteads – were so numerous that either some were more prominent in the social hierarchy than others, or that south-western Iron Age society was not organised in such a way as to provide small numbers of high status sites to which all others were subordinate, as was probably the case in south-eastern Scotland by the early 1st millennium AD.

Armit's now familiar theory of the comparatively egalitarian social structure of the Western Isles (Armit 1990; 1997a; 1997b; 2002b) was based on the high densities of Atlantic Roundhouses, the lack of differentiation within the settlement record and the apparent lack of contemporary lower order settlements. Given the clear affinity with the Atlantic regions farther north and the apparent contrast of Galloway with Eastern Dumfriesshire, it is a moot point whether this argument can be reasonably applied to the south-west. The answer is unlikely to be simple, and there are many complicating factors even before more excavated data are available. Furthermore, the question over the structure of society in more heterogeneous areas like Galloway raises important questions over the function of domestic symbolism, which was apparently so important in the Atlantic west.

IDENTIFYING IDENTITY

In archaeological terms, it may be possible to correlate the area west of the River Nith, where settlements tend to be smaller and more often stone built, with the Novantae tribe named by Ptolemy (eg Maxwell 1980:7). Identifying the traditional limits of Galloway with the Novantae seems to leave this tribe without a 'tribal centre', and they are often characterised in discussions

of Roman interaction as a 'loose confederation of septs' (eg Wilson 2001: 76; Scott 1976: 37). One possible alternative to this view exists however, and McCarthy (2006) has recently reviewed the evidence for the enigmatic site of *Rerigonium*, the supposed 'lost city' of Iron Age Galloway. Archaeological evidence for the site is conspicuously absent, but, as McCarthy has considered, Ptolemy's use of the word '*poleis*' suggests a function above and beyond that of a simple farmstead, hinting that the Novantae may indeed have had a political centre, even if this had various functions. Furthermore, the lack of any obvious destination for the Roman road that traverses much of the region suggests that a fort – and possibly other major settlements – remain undetected, perhaps destroyed, by modern Stranraer (McCarthy 2006).

Further caveats in any argument against an undifferentiated structure for society in the south-west are the rich cropmark remains of the area, which remain unsorted and little analysed. Excavations are needed to test the hypothesis, and careful theoretical measures for evaluating comparative status in an area where material culture is lacking would need to be developed, but there is certainly scope for envisaging a far more heterogeneous settlement record than is suggested by the upstanding enclosed sites in the area; the problematic 'lower classes' that are so difficult to identify in much of the Atlantic west may indeed be found in Galloway. An unenclosed roundhouse at Moss Raploch (Condry & Ansell 1977), probably in occupation in the 1st or 2nd century AD, sounds a warning to the over-emphasis on monumental and defended settlements, and as previously noted the extent of unenclosed settlement remains an unknown quantity (see Haselgrove et al 2001). Methodologies for the assessment of status, and perhaps most importantly the differentiation of implicit from explicit status may be one of the biggest challenges facing the construction of a theoretical framework for theory impoverished areas like Galloway. We are now familiar with the concept of non-functional monumentality in

Iron Age northern Britain, but its real purpose is often unclear (or at least unexplained). In areas like Galloway and Argyll we have evidence of the traits of Atlantic Scotland – such as the preference for isolated and marginal locations – that may suggest political fragmentation, but conversely there are suggestions of social hierarchy as hinted by documentary sources and perhaps by some of the apparently high-status metal items. It may be that in areas like Galloway where we have such a heterogeneous settlement record, the exploration of explicit versus implicit symbolism of Iron Age domestic architecture may be rewarding.

While it could be levelled that this paper highlights problems and identifies avenues for future research rather than offering firm opinions, the author is convinced that south-west Scotland offers an opportunity for highly informative research with implications for our understanding of Iron Age societies more generally, and the chance to examine preconceptions of the function of later prehistoric material culture, including both the artefactual and architectural records. As Hill recently re-emphasised in a paper to the First Millennia Studies Group in Edinburgh, it is easy for students of the Iron Age to mischaracterise society by misidentifying its constituent units. People, not buildings, form societies and it may be that a re-examination of our interpretations of the symbolism of monumental construction is required in the south-west, where an ‘Atlantic’-style character is suggested but where other affinities are also apparent and its role is not clear. What precisely constitutes the Atlantic Iron Age character and what did it mean in a heterogeneous area like Galloway? It is probable that there is some balance to be found between the pyramidal and planar social models of the western Scottish Iron Age, and there need not be direct correlation between social and settlement differentiation. We are now familiar with the non-practical explanations for characteristics like physical monumentality, but it is possible that it is in unsorted and differentiated ‘black

hole’ areas like Galloway, where the rules of our current understanding are bent and broken, that we may find some of the answers to questions of identity and meaning in the northern British Iron Age.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTE

- 1 Although a sherd of Samian ware has recently been identified as originating from this site (F Hunter pers comm).

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