
9 Discussion by Gavin MacGregor

Analysis of the Glennan urn and its contents has shown that a single adult male was cremated with at least part of a goat/sheep. There are sufficient examples of animal bone previously found accompanying Bronze Age burials to suggest that animals may have formed a role in mortuary rites before burial of human remains. The role and status of these animal remains is not always clear; they may have been the remains of feasting, sacrifice on pyres or employed in ceremonies with symbolic connotations.

In the case of the Glennan burial, analysis has shown that marks on the bones may relate to skinning of the animal (see [Section 5.1](#)). Indeed it is not inconceivable that the flint knife that probably accompanied the burial and which shows signs of use ([Section 6](#)) was indeed used for this particular purpose. Skinning would be in keeping with butchery of the animal and when considered in conjunction with the small proportion of the animal represented within the cremation deposit it suggests that only a proportion of a butchered animal had been placed as an offering on the pyre. The rest could have been eaten by the mourners, for in the cases of several Bronze Age inhumation burials discussed below, the deceased was buried with just a portion.

There are other examples of cremated animal bone from Bronze Age burials. Burnt animal bone identified as sheep/goat was present within three cremation burials (068, 082 and 056) at Cloburn Quarry, Lanarkshire ([Lelong and Pollard 1998](#), 122). A radiocarbon date was obtained, from charcoal within burial 082, of 1910–1620 cal BC (Beta-111007). At Horsburgh Castle Farm, Peebleshire a cremation burial, which had been inserted above a short cist, contained fragments of scapula, tibia, humerus and mandible of sheep ([Denston 1974](#), 57).

There are also several examples of pig ‘joints’ accompanying Bronze Age burials. At Gairneybank, Perth and Kinross, a cist (cist 3) containing an inhumation was accompanied by the right humerus, radius and ulna of a pig ([Cowie and Ritchie 1991](#), 98). A radiocarbon date of 2300 – 1600 cal BC (GU-1120) was obtained from the burial (revised date from the Historic Scotland date-list on their website, www.historic-scotland.gov.uk). At Muirhill, Perth and Kinross, pig bones, sea urchin spines and a flint knife ([Stewart and Barclay 1997](#), 43), accompanied a crouched inhumation in a short cist. A radiocarbon date of 1900 – 1623 cal BC (AA-22180) was obtained from the burial. Similarly, at Aberdour Road, Fife, a cist (cist I) contained a crouched inhumation that was accompanied by the fore-limb bones of three pigs ([Close-Brooks et al 1972](#), 123 and 132). At Grainfoot,

East Lothian, pig fore-limb bones were recovered with two inhumations in a short cist ([Dalland 1991](#), 113). A radiocarbon date of 1310 – 940 cal BC (GU-2762, revised as the Gairneybank date, above) was obtained from human bone. The unburnt humerus and radius of a pig was found with inhumations and beaker at Uppermill, Aberdeenshire ([Harman 1977](#), 90).

Although the sample is small, this evidence suggests that different species of animals were considered more appropriate for inclusion in different burial rites during this period; pigs associated with inhumation and goat / sheep associated with cremation. The choice of a domesticated animal to accompany the mortuary rites may have been of significance during a period when agro-pastoral farming was being widely practiced, and may reflect the perceived inter-relationship between the cultural landscape of people and their livestock. While we see potential distinctions drawn out in terms of what animals were appropriate to accompany different burial rites, in both cremation and inhumation the animal parts deposited were partial. This may suggest that the mourners were consuming the remainder of the animal and indeed that the deposition of part of the animal with the deceased related to a concept of sharing between the living and the dead.

Analysis by Julie Roberts suggests that the skeletal remains from the pyre were carefully collected and probably cleaned before insertion in an Enlarged Food Vessel urn ([Section 5.5](#)). The surviving portion of the vessel shows no obvious signs of previous use and may have been constructed solely for the purpose of burial (see however [MacGregor 1998b](#), 156–57). An unburnt retouched flint flake may have accompanied the burial ([Section 6](#)). It is unclear whether it had been placed at the base of the urn before inserting the cremation or adjacent to it within the upper fill of the pit cut.

Whether the cremation took place close to the boulder shelter or lower down in the bottom of a nearby glen is, however, unknown. As there was no slab beneath the urn, it was probably originally covered with skin or cloth before its inversion and could, therefore, readily have been carried from some distance away.

While the insertion of the Glennan cremation vessel into a pit in an inverted position is typical of cinerary urns of this type at this time, its context of deposition within a boulder shelter is more unusual. However Enlarged Food Vessels have been found within a rock shelter cemetery at Goatscrag, Northumberland ([Burgess 1972](#), 52–55). Other types

of cinerary urn burial are known from caves/rock shelters throughout Britain.

More locally, there are several other examples of the use of cave sites, in the broadest of senses, for funerary purposes during the second millennium BC from the west of Scotland (Tolan-Smith 2001, 5–9). These include a rock cleft at Carding Mill Bay, Oban, where fragments of a Food Vessel were found in association with human bone (Connock *et al* 1993, 29) and the rock shelters at Crinnan Ferry, Knapdale, where ‘urns’ including Beaker were discovered in conjunction with human bone (Mapleton 1881; Campbell and Sandeman 1964, 21 [no 148]). Although it is unclear whether or not it was accompanied by human remains, the discovery of a Food Vessel in a boulder shelter at Creag An Eig, Benderloch, is suggestive of ceremonial activity (Smith 1873, 82/88). Also of note was the discovery of Beaker pottery from Tinkler’s Cave, Loch Fyne (Tolan-Smith 2001, 159), the presence of which could suggest funerary or ceremonial activity in the cave.

The majority of earlier Bronze Age vessels from Kilmartin Glen have been Food Vessels (RCAHMS 1999, 10–11 and 108–09), with one example having

been found in a cist near Ford (Soc Antiq Scot 1886, 73–74). The context of deposition, from a boulder shelter in the uplands, of the Glennan Enlarged Food Vessel urn provides an interesting contrast with the deposition of such vessels focused on the valley floor. It indicates that while many of the more visible ceremonial and funerary sites of the second millennium BC may focus on the floor of the Glen, other parts of the landscape were also significant in terms of such activities. This pattern can also be contrasted in the location of the rock art in the Kilmartin Glen area, which is more frequently situated up from the valley floor, and later incorporated in ceremonial or burial monuments built on the floor of the Glen during the second millennium BC (Stevenson 1997, 101–09). Whether the location for the burial of the Glennan urn was chosen because it was outwith the landscape of daily activity or whether it is a reflection of the regular use of the uplands is unclear. In particular, as the Enlarged Food Vessel urn reflects a different ceramic tradition from that represented by the bowl Food Vessels of Kilmartin Glen, it raises interesting questions about interaction as much as it adds to our understanding of the use of the glens beyond Kilmartin during the second millennium BC.