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Roman and native in Scotland: new approaches

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Introduction

Roman–native relationships have been an active topic of debate for many years, and interest shows no signs of abating. However, in the three decades since the last major survey of the Scottish data (Robertson 1970) there has been a substantial increase in the data-set, and it should now be possible to develop more complex and robust interpretations. The aim here is not to present a detailed new corpus of Roman material from non-Roman sites, although a list of finds since Robertson's work is given in the Appendix: instead, it is to look at the quantity and distribution of the material; to explore new approaches that allow us to develop models of its use; and to look at its nature. The study concerns itself with finds from Iron Age sites, burials or hoards; stray finds are not considered in detail since their cultural context is much harder to assess. The focus is on the uses made of Roman material in Iron Age societies. From this perspective, the mechanisms by which the material was acquired and the motives of the Romans in dealing with the 'barbarians' are less crucial, and they will not be considered in detail here. Different parts of Scotland sustained very different societies during the Iron Age and had quite different histories of Roman contact (Armit 1997a; Breeze 1982). To allow for this, an attempt will be made to identify regional patterns in the use of Roman material.

Previous work

In the study of Roman finds from non-Roman sites in Scotland, the names of Curle and Robertson stand out. J. Curle (1913; 1932) first began to develop this area systematically while A. Robertson (1970; 1983) carried the task forward; but whereas her regular surveys of coin finds have been sustained over the years (e.g., Bateson and Holmes 1997), there have been no updates on other artefacts, although an index is maintained at the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow (Keppie 1989, 68) and Wilson (1995; 1997; 2001) has produced valuable studies of data from SW Scotland.

The work presented here aims both to update Robertson's work and to re-assess the material, re-examining the finds in the light of recent scholarship. Robertson's data-base has been the foundation for subsequent research, notably Macinnes' (1984; 1989) study of S Scotland. She sees Roman artefacts functioning within a prestige-goods economy where access was socially controlled. This, she argues, shifted over time, with more restricted access in the 1st than the 2nd c.; Wilson has identified similar patterns in SW Scotland. In this process Macinnes links the distribution to certain key sites (such as the lowland Scottish brochs). There are some difficulties, especially with the reliance she places on over-precise artefact dating, but her work has shown the potential of the data for socially-based interpretations.

The Romans have been seen as the motor behind many changes in Scottish Iron Age societies, from the supposed abandonment of upland sites in the late 2nd c. (Hill 1982, 10-12), through the *floruit* and abandonment of the southern souterrains (Armit 1999), to the genesis of the Picts (Mann 1974, 40-42). These broad-ranging interpretations require further substantiation but indicate the potential of this data-set for tackling complex social issues.

The quality of the Roman finds has also been debated: some authors (Fulford 1985, 102; Macinnes 1989, 110) see them as essentially mundane, while others comment on their quality (Robertson 1970, 200; Keppie 1989, 48). This paper cannot hope to address all these topics, but it is hoped that by focusing on the artefacts and their uses in Iron Age society it will provoke further discussion.

The data-set

Discoveries made since Robertson's survey have brought a major change to our understanding of Roman finds in Iron Age Scotland. There has been an 85% increase in the number of Iron Age