CHAPTER 12

SOME CORNER OF A FOREIGN FIELD?

All the evidence presented in this report points to the fact that the cemetery had a relatively short life. The longest estimates would place the start of burial about A.D. 200 and finishing around A.D. 310, the shortest would have a period of activity between A.D. 220 and 300. There is no evidence of any earlier burial activity prior to A.D. 200 and the cemetery appears to have stopped being used as abruptly as it started. This is not the sort of pattern normally associated with Romano-British cemeteries. This chapter explores why it is the case here.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE CEMETERY POSITION

It is possible, of course, that the picture sketched above of a new foundation is inaccurate. Earlier burials could have been outside the area excavated. This seems unlikely as the only feasible area for a continuation of the cemetery is the rest of the hilltop (see p. 25). The known burials would appear to have bordered the northern edge of the road. This would have been typical Roman practice and is seen at cemeteries such as that on the racecourse at Derby (Wheeler 1985, fig. 98) and alongside Watling Street in Southwark (Mackinder 2000, fig. 12). It would be unusual for the favoured roadside locations to be spurned initially in favour of ones away from the road and for the cemetery to grow towards it.

If, as seems probable, this was a new foundation the reason for it could have been purely pragmatic – other cemeteries around Brougham could have been full. Another reason may have been that a group of people were either excluded from burying their dead in existing cemeteries or for reasons of their own had no desire to be associated with the rest of the community in death. Sometimes, often for religious reasons, the two reasons are combined. Examples of this include medieval Jewish cemeteries such as that at Jewbury, York (Lilley *et al.* 1994) and the graveyards of the Dissenters which developed in England from the seventeenth century onwards to avoid burial in ground controlled by the Church of England (Curle 2000, 37). There are many reasons for thinking that if the Brougham cemetery was founded for reasons of exclusion – either imposed by others or chosen by the people themselves – this is unlikely to have had a religious basis. In late antiquity it is known that people of different religions could easily end up being buried close to each other, even when the religions they belonged to claimed exclusive rights to the afterworld (Turcan 1996, 324). A more likely reason might be that a group of a different nationality or ethnic identity might wish to establish a new cemetery if they felt that existing ones did not allow them to bury their dead in the 'correct' way. If only a small group arrives at a new place and wishes to do this they may be pushed to a marginal position. If the new group is of a large enough size they may have the resources to choose a favourable site. To a certain extent the Brougham hilltop fits both criteria. It is marginal but also it is on the nearest high ground and the dead would be visible from the fort and *vicus*.

Within the context of Brougham, the obvious explanation for the founding of a new cemetery in such circumstances would be the arrival of a new military unit. It would have control of

the *territorium* of the fort and its commanding officer would be in a position to decree that the hilltop would be used as a cemetery if he so chose. Given that *numeri* are believed to be an early third-century unit type (Mann 1988), it may have been the *Numerus equitum Stratonicianorum* that decided to start burying its dead in this cemetery. Epigraphy is silent on what the ethnic origins of this unit might be. The material culture of the site, however, provides some clues and it is to these we now turn.

THE PANNONIAN CONNECTION?

The two most extraordinary features of the finds from the cemetery are the iron bucket pendants (see p. 383) and the fact that horses were being cremated on the pyres (p. 325). Both are unparalleled within a Romano-British context and it has been difficult to find instances of the pendants or the cremation of horses elsewhere in the western empire. These two features are a good place to start an exploration of the ethnic identity of the people buried at Brougham.

Mould (p. 384) has shown that during the third century the pendants were in use beyond the borders of the Roman empire and were common in the areas under Gothic occupation in the trans-Danubian regions. The numbers recovered at Brougham and their discovery in at least three different deposits suggest that they may also have been relatively common amongst the possessions of people living there. This suggests the unit may have had connections with the trans-Danubian area.

The cremation of horses seems to be most unusual within a Roman milieu though that may, in part, be because the study of cremated animal bone is still in its infancy, and there are not many detailed reports to act as *comparanda*. McKinley (p. 332) has drawn attention to the fact that within a British context only early Saxon burials produce the remains of horses in the quantities seen at Brougham. From this she suggests some limited contact with north Germany might be implied, though it is unclear whether the practice of cremating horses was current in that area as early as the third century. One area where horses appear to have occasionally been cremated in the second to third century is Switzerland. They were present in the cemetery at Avenches, and in discussing these Olive (1999, 146) noted that small quantities of cremated horse bone had also been recovered from two other cemeteries in Swizerland at Augst and Courroux.

The presence of this practice at Augst and Avenches is of considerable interest as gold-in-glass beads and the red-striped blue beads have been found at both sites and are types that are also common at Brougham. As already noted they are rare in Swiss contexts but are frequently found in Danubian and trans-Danubian ones. Indeed the red-striped blue beads are one of the types chosen as a defining feature of the trans-Danubian Maslomecz-Gruppe where bucket pendants are common finds (see p. 387).

Other items amongst the pyre goods which might link Brougham to the Danubian world include the swastika mount in **75**, the needles in **168** and **265**, and possibly the bell in **171**. All are common funerary goods there, but are rare within those contexts in Roman Britain. British *comparanda* for placing pipeclay figurines on pyres, as in **106**, have been discussed on p. 401 where it is suggested the practice may have occurred more often than has been appreciated. It still, however, cannot be considered a regular act, whereas it does appear to have been in, for example, Raetia (Sági 1954, 66).

The most frequently encountered pyre good for adults are the bone veneers that decorated the biers of the adults. Similar veneers have been found at a handful of other sites in Britain, mainly associated with military establishments, but nowhere in the quantities seen at Brougham. Elsewhere I have suggested that such biers were a northern military fashion that developed in the third century in emulation of the elaborate pyre ceremonies that took place at the cremation of Septimius Severus at York (Cool in Wilmott *et al*. forthcoming). In the light of the exotic connections at Brougham, it may be that initially such biers were introduced from abroad. It is clear that they have no connection with the elaborate funerary couches in

bone and ivory that were in use in Italy in the first century B.C. and first century A.D. (Caravale 1994, 33–66). The use of these spread into the provinces, but was always rare in northern Europe, and had died out a century or so prior to the cremations at Brougham. A problem with identifying veneer-decorated biers elsewhere is that quite frequently the fragments will be small and unprepossessing, and precisely the type of small find that is not published in detail. A good example of this happening occurred at Low Borrowbridge where what appears almost certainly to be a veneer fragment was identified during the osteological analysis (McKinley 1996, 120) but was not described in any of the finds reports. Fragments very similar to the Brougham pieces have been found in a cremation burial contemporaneous with the Brougham cemetery at Intercisa (Sági 1954, 78, Taf. xxi. 14, no. 14a). Interestingly these were only published and described because it was thought that they were playing pieces.

The material culture repeatedly points towards the community burying its dead at Brougham as having links with the Danubian and trans-Danubian region. Such a link is also apparent in the written evidence from the site. A jar from **152** has the grafitto Bata, a name of Illyrian origin, and of course a 70-year-old Pannonian was commemorated on a tombstone found in the cemetery (***14***).

There may also be links in the actual burial practice, though here the problems with the Brougham records make them less easy to evaluate. One of the features of the cemetery are the vessel deposits or 'memorials' for which a variety of explanations can be advanced (see p. 457). At present it is difficult to assess to what extent such deposits are unusual in Romano-British cemeteries due to the tendency until recently of assuming that everything in a cremation cemetery was a 'burial'. It is a practice that has, by contrast, frequently been commented on in the continental literature and clearly occurs in the Rhineland (see for example Wahl and Kokabi 1988, 37) and on the Danubian frontier (for example Sági 1954, 65; Kraskovska 1976, 6; Topál 1981, 76). Given the presence of bucket pendants and red-striped blue beads at Brougham, the fact that such deposits are also a regular feature of trans-Danubian Maslomecz-Gruppe cemeteries (Kokowski 1997, 743) is also of some interest.

Another feature which may link burial practice at Brougham with the Danubian lands may have been observed in the complex cist **227**. Topál (2000, 199) notes that grave pits purified by ritual fire are regularly observed in Noricum, Pannonia, Dalmatia, Upper Moesia and Dacia, and, interestingly in the light of the graffito in **152**, links the practice especially with Illyrian-Pannonian populations. The person who excavated the complex known here as **227** confessed himself confused by it and clearly did not understand the formation processes. He was quite sure, however, that there had been an organic lining of some type hammered into the walls of the pit. He describes this as appearing as 'dark charcoal stains'. There was no implication that the pit could have been a *bustum,* but the evidence would be consistent with the interior of the pit having been burnt prior to the complex process of deposition taking place. Deposits **149** and **236** are also described as having thin dark lines around their edges. Burning is not necessarily implied but the choice of words to describe that seen in **149** 'very black strips' is very reminiscent of Topál's 'charcoal stripes' used to describe pits that had been fired prior to deposition (Topál 1981, 75). It may be that the dark stains were just the result of the decay of an organic lining though whether such discolouration could be expected at Brougham is open to question. It should be remembered that the conditions there were often extremely corrosive, extreme enough for example to 'corrode' Roman glass (see p. 366).

The north of England in the Roman period was a cosmopolitan place with soldiers, traders and officials coming and going from other places, both within the province and beyond (see for example Cool 2002, 35). Occasional foreign traits are to be expected, and do not imply large-scale transfers of a large group of people. Here, though, a consistent picture emerges from a range of different categories of evidence – material culture, epigraphy and burial practice – and it seems reasonable to suggest that this is what happened in Brougham in the third century.

All of the evidence strongly suggests that, if the people buried in the cemetery were indeed the soldiers of the *Numerus equitum Stratonicianorum* and their families, then the unit may

have come from the Pannonian area of the Danube lands and may have included cavalrymen from the Barbaricum. This may well account for the hints in the finds that the females with their bead necklaces and possibly unusual hairstyles would have appeared rather alien when stood by the side of a native Romano-British woman living further south. Women often seem to retain traditional or ethnic fashions in dress and ornamentation for longer than men (Swift 2000, 11). Where precisely they came from is not possible to suggest, and it is unlikely that their burial ritual survived intact, as such things have a tendency to evolve under new influences. The pottery assemblages placed in the graves, for example, are very different from those in the cremation burials on the Danubian frontier where lamps form a conspicuous part of the majority of the groups (see for example Kraskovska 1976; von Schnurbein 1977; Topál 1981). It is also possible that the unit did not come directly from the Danubian area. There is, for example, a strong Rhenish presence in the finds. This might have come about by normal trade and exchange, but often cuts across the patterns seen in the rest of the country. An individual at Brougham, for example, owned a Venus figurine that originated from Köln, whereas most of the population in Britain who owned such things had acquired them from the workshops of central Gaul.

It would, of course, be tempting to suggest that at Brougham we have a unit raised from the Iazyges tribe of the Sarmations transferred to Britain at the end of the Marcomannic war in A.D. 175 (see p. 387), but this seems unlikely. The Sarmatians practised inhumation at this time (see for example Vaday 1983; 1985). By the third century the north of Britain was exceptional in continuing to prefer cremation over inhumation, and over most of the empire a change was either underway, or had taken place, to inhumation (see for example Morris 1992, 41–69). If the Sarmatians had arrived and started cremating their dead, this would be a most unusual inversion of the dominant trends.

Fitzpatrick (p. 433) has noted that the majority of the names recorded at Brougham are Celtic which would allow for the population commemorated to be of native origin. Many parts of the empire including the Danubian lands, however, were populated by people who were in origin what is generally described as Celtic. To have a Celtic name in Roman Britain was no guarantee that you and your ancestors had lived from time immemorial where your tombstone was erected.

Finally the end of the cemetery must be considered. Why does activity cease so abruptly at the end of the third century? The most economical hypothesis must surely be that the unit was posted elsewhere. Frere has suggested that Constantius' reorganisations following the defeat of Carausius and Allectus included the redeployment of the *numeri* in the north (Frere 1987, 332–3). If Mann (1988) is correct in seeing the *numerus* as being a short-lived title then their disappearance from the records may just be that the units were called something else. At Brougham, however, the fact that this cemetery ceased to be used at about the time of the proposed military reorganisation might provide support for the hypothesis that here, at least, a *numerus* was transferred.

BROUGHAM AND NORTHERN BURIAL STUDIES

These excavations revealed the largest cemetery associated with a military site in the north of Britain ever to be investigated. Even prior to their full publication here, partial information about the cemetery had entered the public domain and had started to inform debate, sometimes erroneously, about burial practice in the north (see for example Philpott 1991, 221; Lambert 1996, 123; Pearce 1999, 58–9). There can be no doubt that once published, the excavations will play a central role in any future discussion. It is appropriate therefore to sound some notes of caution.

All of the evidence indicates that this was a cemetery in use for a relatively short period of time by a particular group of people who may have had an ethnic identity that was not shared by other units in the north. The funerary practices seen here were clearly not those of the

people burying their dead at the same time at Low Borrowbridge a relatively short distance to the south. Little in the report of that cemetery (Lambert 1996) hints at the complexity of the funerary ritual seen here. Though the cemetery at Brougham shows a similarity with other northern cemeteries in the continuation of the preference for cremation, the careful deposition of pyre debris and the small quantities of material it was felt appropriate to collect from the pyre for formal urned burial; other features may well be unique to this site. In how many other northern sites were central Gaulish decorated samian bowls curated for decades prior to being placed in the graves of esteemed elders? Did any other community decide that colour-coated beakers were the special prerogative of children and young people? Were the funerals of adults and the young so very different everywhere?

Brougham cannot be taken as typical of burial practice in the north but it does provide a most vivid insight into life and death in the community there in the third century. It provides patterns of funerary behaviour that can be explored at other sites. It highlights the wealth of information that can be extracted from even the most unprepossessing material if studied in detail and in an integrated manner. It also shows that even the unpublished backlog sites dug under difficult circumstances may provide important new insights into life in the past if studied with fresh eyes and in the light of advances in archaeological thought.

Talio, Merispater, Annamoris, Ressona, Vidaris, Lunaris and many others buried their loved ones with care and attention on the hilltop at Brougham. Dorothy Charlesworth, Tony Pacitto and their teams rescued their remains when the road destroyed the cemetery seventeen centuries later. To all we owe an enormous debt of gratitude for providing us with this unrivalled window looking onto the third century.