6

EPILOGUE

THE AFTERLIFE OF MONUMENTS

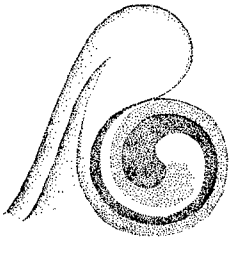
By their very nature monuments survive over long periods of time. The process of interpretation described in the previous lecture did not end during the prehistoric period: it still concerns us today. The final lecture considers how certain monuments were reinterpreted in the early Medieval period when particular examples, ranging in date from Neolithic to Roman times, were brought back into use as high status sites. This process can be compared with the invention of traditions and in certain cases served to legitimise the position of new elites. Even the selection of sites for renewal shows a certain patterning, and this may shed light on the origin myths of different groups in the post-Roman world. The argument is illustrated by 'royal sites' in the British Isles.

◆◆◆

I return one last time to my starting point in Mid Argyll. There is an extraordinary range of monuments in this area, but if there is one site which dominates all the others, I have said little about it so far. This is Dunadd, that distinctive lump of rock set between the uplands and the sea (RCAHMS 1988, 149–59; illus 58). It owes its wider fame to its pivotal role in the post-Roman world, when it was one of the high status fortifications of Dalriada. Like sites of similar eminence elsewhere, its position may have been determined partly by its natural appearance. It is essentially a place turned into a monument, but I wonder whether that is the whole story.

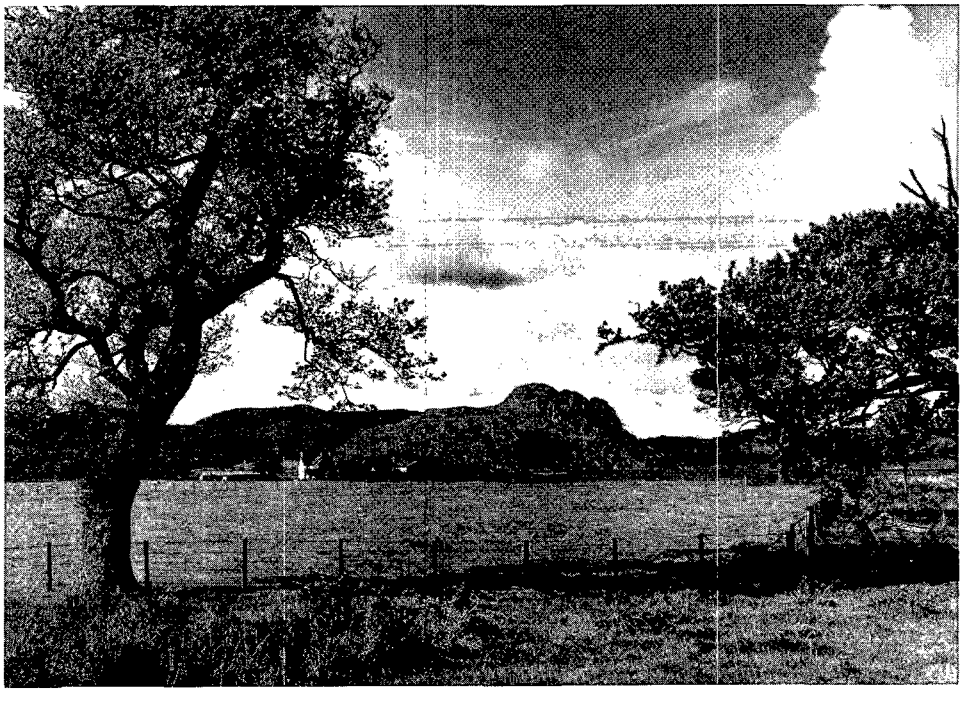
Consider its setting in Argyll. It commands a route leading across a narrow tract of land between west Scotland and the Irish Sea, a route important enough to be recreated by the Crinan Canal in the 18th century. It is at the edge of an unusually productive region of low-lying ground, the very area which had attracted such a high density of monuments from the Neolithic period onwards. Yet that last statement carries echoes of the setting of other post-Roman centres. How common it is for these to be found amidst an array of older monuments, yet how rarely is this observation discussed by prehistorians. Once again the archaeology of this small area provokes a train of thought which I would like to develop further.

There is a case to be made that Dunadd had a prehistory to match its eminence in the historic period, but that case, I accept, is a weak one. There are Neolithic and Bronze Age artefacts from the site, one of them (a Neolithic stone ball) of a specialised type well outside its usual distribution (RCAHMS 1988, 7). There are standing stones at the foot of Dunadd and there are rock carvings, apparently of prehistoric date, on the outcrop itself (*ibid*, 154). Even the famous inauguration stone – a deep footprint carved into the living rock – is matched by a much fainter petroglyph of the same kind (*ibid*, 157–9). Most probably both date from the post-



Roman period, but similar carvings are known from prehistory, and the difference of preservation could be due to a difference of age. But far more important is the sheer concentration of major monuments in the surrounding area. The distribution of fortified sites visible from Dunadd is not so very different from the distributions of ceremonial enclosures, mortuary cairns and rock art, most of which could still have been identified in the first millennium AD.

That argument for some kind of continuity is tenuous and to some extent unnecessary, but it is an argument that has been championed on the basis of far more detailed studies at other sites of this period. Consider the evidence from the Northumbrian site of Yeavering (Hope-Taylor 1977). At a general level the two areas have much in common. Yeavering is at the edge of the Milfield Basin, another unusually fertile tract of lowland in an essentially upland region, and, like the area around Dunadd, it contains a remarkable array of prehistoric monuments: henges, barrows, rock carvings and hillforts (illus 59). But in this case the excavator of the site explains its location in terms of its history rather than the resources at its command. Again there is a standing stone close to the palace site, and at Yeavering the buildings of the post-Roman complex were located in between two Neolithic or Bronze Age monuments: a round barrow at one end of the site and a stone circle at the other. A henge monument has been identified on the edge of this complex (Harding 1981), and the excavation of the post-Roman buildings produced evidence of a cremation cemetery of Early Bronze Age origin (Hope-Taylor 1977; Ferrell 1990). There were Roman burials in field ditches underneath the palace, and towering over the site, on Yeavering Bell, is one of the largest hillforts in northern England.



58
Dunadd, Argyll: a royal centre of the early historical period. Photograph: Historic Scotland.

At a general level the relationships seem similar, but their interpretation was decisively different. For the excavator of Yeavering the evidence points to an enormously long continuity of public use for ritual and ceremonial, a sequence beginning in the Neolithic period and lasting, perhaps without interruption, through to the first millennium AD (Hope-Taylor 1977). Now I do not find this idea convincing. The prehistoric components of the sequence have been misunderstood and are punctuated by long intervals in which there are no signs of activity on the site. In the same way, the relationship between the prehistoric and the early medieval constructions suggest that the original layout of this complex could no longer be comprehended when the royal centre of Gefrin was built. It is not my intention to go through these detailed objections here, for they are available in print (Bradley 1987b), but to reflect on the character of this kind of sequence and its implications for the afterlife of monuments.

◆◆◆

In the last two lectures I talked about a process by which ceremonial monuments developed. In a sense these constructions were adapted to changing circumstances, but in a most individual manner. As we found with public ritual, those changes were only rarely expressed as rupture and outright rejection; more commonly they were achieved by a process of interpretation. The past provided a source of authority no matter how far practices had changed. We saw this in the development of one particular category of monument – the Neolithic enclosure – and also

59
View of the Milfield Basin, Northumberland looking towards the royal site at Yeavering.

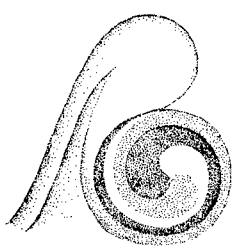
in the changing configuration of monuments that make up the ceremonial centres of the British Isles. But in every case the process did have an element of continuity, even if the links with the past were reinterpreted to suit contemporary ideas. That is only one kind of sequence. Monuments could, and did, go out of use. Few of those established in the Neolithic period retained their significance in the different cultural climate of the first millennium BC, and some were even ploughed out (Bradley 1981). It is precisely this hiatus, during the later prehistoric period, that breaches the continuity of ritual observance claimed by the excavator of Yeavering. Once such a hiatus had been allowed to happen, a different kind of history emerged.

It is archaeologists and historians who think in terms of linear time. Archaeologists have field methods for analysing sequence, and specialised procedures for providing dates. Historians work with written sources, scrutinising these for bias and outright error, and comparing different accounts of the same events (cf Goody 1977). But without those skills, or the kinds of raw material to which they are applied, the past loses its orderly appearance. As we know from the work of early antiquarians, enigmatic monuments were attached rather uncritically to the few names known from written sources: to Romans, to Druids, to the Anglo-Saxons. The evidence of place names reveals a similar process. To take a simple example, among the hillforts of Wessex are sites attributed to Caesar, Vespasian, Hengist, King Alfred, the Welsh and the Danes. If the past is a foreign country, it is a country waiting to be colonised.

As historians have shown so clearly, traditions can be invented (Hobsbawm 1983), or at least they can assume the status of a myth (Cohen 1985, 99). New developments are more secure where they are invested with the authority of the past. That is why origin myths are so important and yet so malleable. It is also why genealogies have to be created. The point is made very clearly in Michael Hunter's discussion of the Anglo-Saxon sense of the past. Describing these genealogies, he says:

> 'Their uniform length and their random combinations of noble-sounding names suggest artificiality, and they were clearly important to contemporaries less for their historical accuracy than for the impression of age they conveyed' (1974, 33).

They would be easy to memorise, for they could be codified in verse with a strict alliterative structure that made them ideally suited for public performance (Sisam 1990). They might contain the names of pagan gods, heroes or characters from Germanic mythology, along with figures from the Roman world. Thus the genealogy of the East Anglian kings includes Julius Caesar but identifies him as the son of Woden. With the coming of Christianity, descent was traced back to Adam, and this is found from Ireland to Scandinavia where the royal line took in Saturn, Jupiter and Priam along the way.



The manipulation of time is central to the argument, but it is not found universally. The reuse of prehistoric monuments may be explained in several ways, and I would be the last to suggest that social explanations need be uppermost. Certain

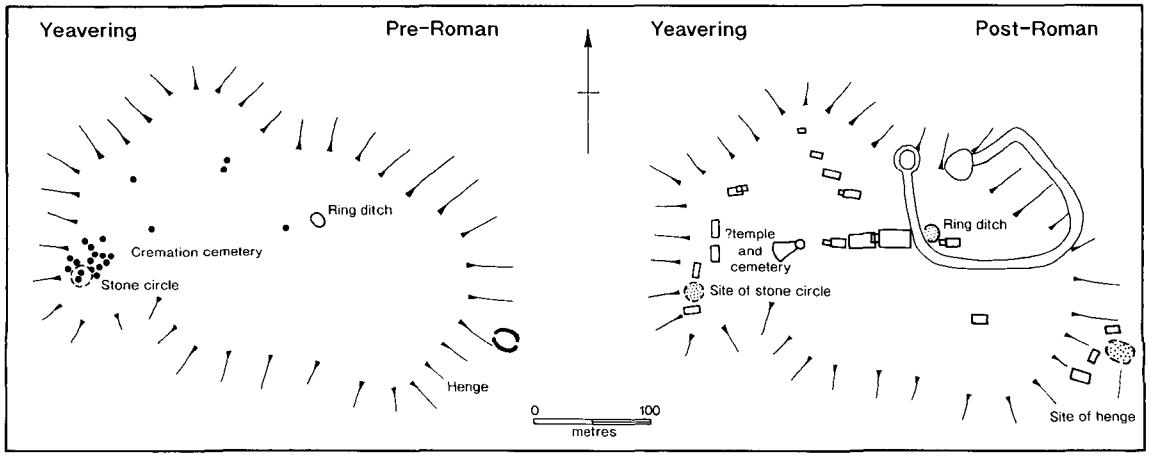
geographical positions, of which Dunadd is a likely example, are of strategic importance, whilst others control particular resources: agricultural land, trade routes or mineral wealth. Some monuments might be rebuilt simply because this involved less work than a new construction; thus the Romans converted a Neolithic henge monument into an amphitheatre (Bradley 1975) and the process was repeated during later phases when several amphitheatres were reused as fortifications (*ibid*; Thomas, C 1964; Fulford 1989). It is only where monuments of particular social eminence are juxtaposed that more detailed discussion is warranted. Even here, the existence of an overall pattern is more important than any single element.

◆◆◆

I can illustrate this point with two examples. First, let us return to the evidence from north Northumberland, where, Bede tells us, successive royal centres were created at Yeavering and at Milfield. Both sites have been located by air photography and one has been excavated on a large scale (Hope-Taylor 1977; Tinniswood & Harding 1991). As we saw in my discussion of monument complexes, the prehistoric earthworks of this area have also been investigated systematically (Harding 1981). What is so striking is how persistently Neolithic and Bronze Age sites seem to have been invested with a new significance during the post-Roman period.

I discussed the Neolithic monuments of the Milfield Basin in the previous lecture. Although their detailed histories may vary, their basic configuration seems clear. For the most part the henge monuments are found in a line extending along the basin, with important outliers to the east and west. Some of these sites were recreated as stone circles, whilst others were accompanied by freestanding posts or menhirs. In certain cases these uprights enhanced the axis of particular sites, which tends to be directed towards natural features of the skyline and not at astronomical events. A few of the henge monuments saw the addition of single burials towards the end of their history, and Bronze Age round barrows and flat graves are often found nearby (*ibid*).

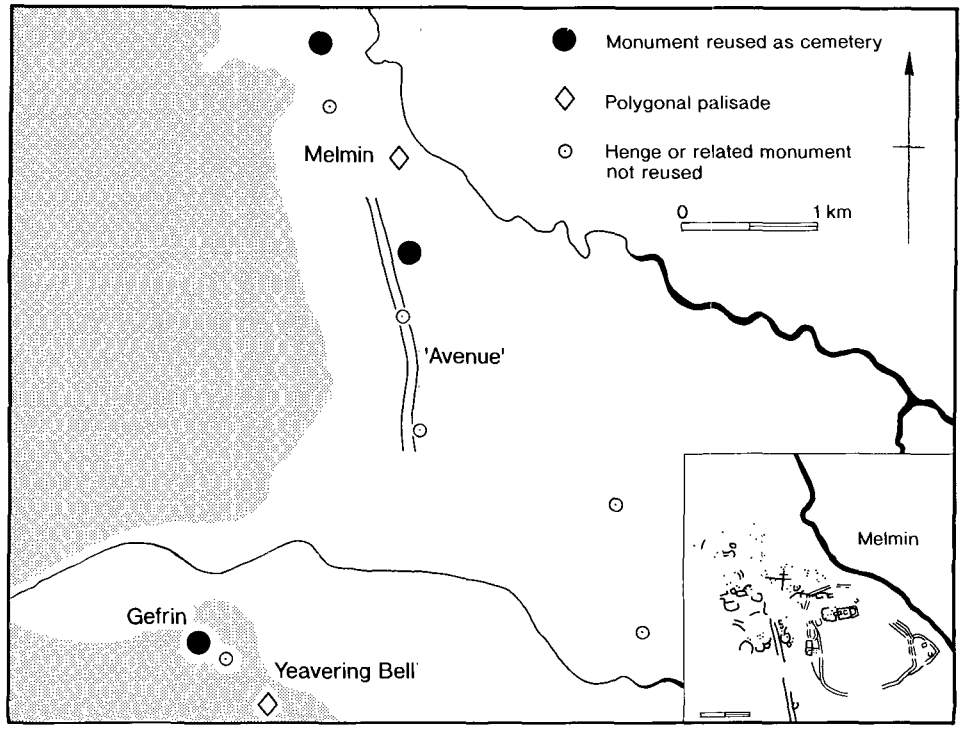
60
Outline plans of the prehistoric and early medieval features at Yeavering. (Data from Hope-Taylor 1987, Ferrell 1990 and Tinniswood & Harding 1991.)



In the post-Roman period it seems as if a selection of these sites were brought back into use after an interval of perhaps 2,000 years during which many of them had apparently been forgotten. But if their importance had lapsed, their earthworks certainly survived. We can see these developments at two geographical scales, and it is my submission that they were so pervasive that, taken together, they invested the landscape as a whole with a new layer of meaning. At the same time, they associated the political developments of the day with a history and a range of associations that had little justification in reality.

Individual monuments were certainly reused, and occasionally they were recreated. The timber buildings at Yeavering not only extended between two of the prehistoric monuments on the site: both earthworks could have been purposefully rebuilt (Hope-Taylor 1977, 70–8, 108–16; illus 60). It is hard to be sure how many of the prehistoric monuments were still visible, but an older mound or ring ditch seems to have been encapsulated in the defences of a fort. Whether by accident or design, its position was marked by an enormous post. The stone circle at the opposite end of the complex was replaced by a pagan temple, then both monuments were chosen for the creation of cemeteries. The same was true in the landscape at large, for two of the henges close to the royal complex at Milfield were treated in much the same way (Scull & Harding 1990). In one case it is not certain that this juxtaposition was intended, but on the other site the distribution of graves was defined by the surviving bank of the enclosure.

At a broader level it seems as if the original layout of the ceremonial centre was recreated in the post-Roman period (illus 61). The original row of henge monu-



61
The distribution of early medieval sites in the Milfield Basin, with a detail of the cropmarks of Melmin. (Data from Bradley 1987b and Scull & Harding 1990.)

ments appears to have been enhanced by a double-ditched 'avenue' linking three of the sites and leading into the royal centre at Milfield. Two of the enclosures joined in this new design were associated with post-Roman burials (*ibid*). This avenue has been treated as an early feature (Harding 1981, 89–93), but it seems to post-date the individual enclosures and appropriate parallels are completely lacking in the prehistoric period. In view of its close link with the Milfield palace complex, the best comparison might be with the 'royal roadways' associated with high status sites in early medieval Ireland (Wailes 1982). As I mentioned earlier, a number of the henges were directed towards prominent features of the skyline, including the distinctive peak of Yeavering Bell. This emphasis on alignments between the sites seems less surprising when we find that a palisaded enclosure, very likely of this date, was built on the mountaintop. Its position encapsulates another complicated history, for it was superimposed on the position of some of the houses within an older hillfort (Bradley 1987b, 10).

◆◆◆

Although Bede's account sheds light on the identification of the sites at Yeavering and Milfield, it tells us all too little about their wider associations. My second example provides some compensation. This time I am concerned with the reuse of Neolithic monuments in the Boyne Valley. Again they were discussed in the previous lecture. All three of the largest tombs saw a phase of renewed activity during the first millennium AD, but at Dowth too little survives for this evidence to be drawn into a wider interpretation (O'Kelly & O'Kelly 1983). For that reason I shall concern myself with the changing history of the neighbouring mounds of Knowth and Newgrange. In this case we have a rare opportunity of comparing the evidence from modern excavations with the traditional associations of both these monuments (O'Kelly 1982; Eogan 1986; 1991).

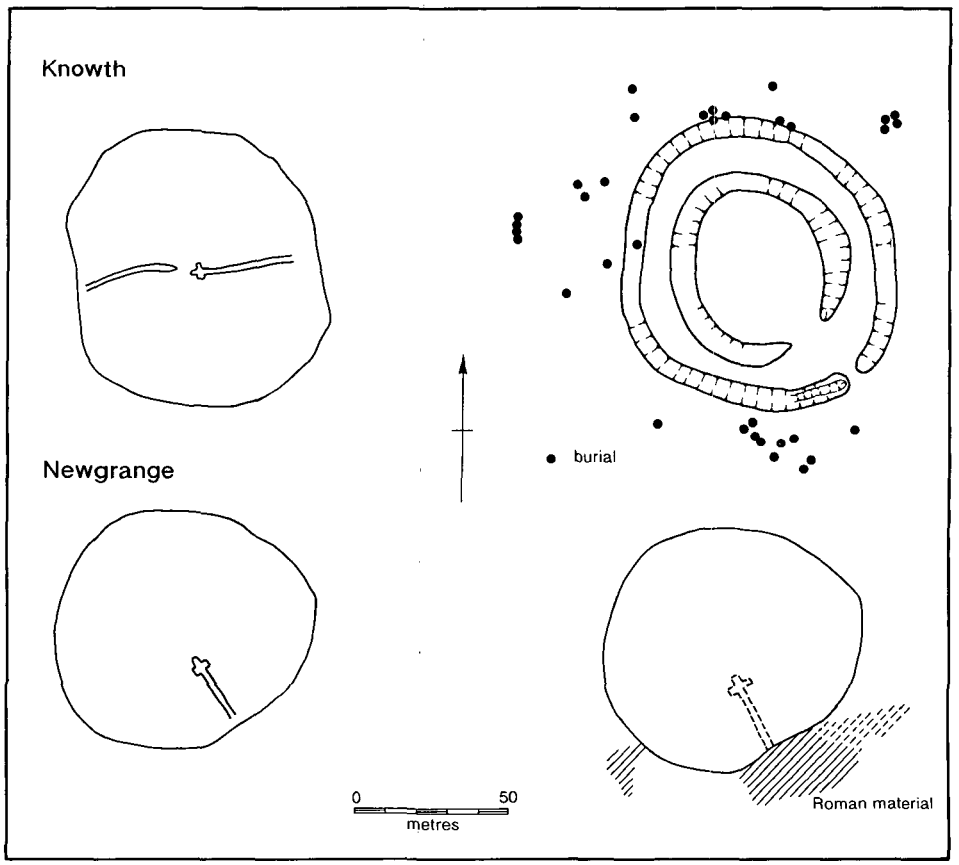
These tombs play different roles in the early history of Ireland (illus 62). During its heyday Knowth was one of the focal points of a small kingdom, the northern Brega. It was a royal capital (Byrne 1968), and excavation has confirmed its importance as a high status settlement. Early in the first millennium AD it was enclosed by two concentric earthworks which transformed the Neolithic mound into a massive ring fort. Around its base were nearly forty burials, some of them associated with an unusually rich collection of grave goods (Eogan 1991); a similar arrangement is found around the Ulster passage tomb of Kiltierney (Hamlin & Lynn 1988, 124–6). In contrast to Knowth, Newgrange was always viewed as a tomb, as the burial place of the ancestors, the dwelling of supernatural beings (O'Kelly 1982). That interpretation was no doubt supported by the way in which the midwinter sunrise lit its central chamber.

Again, there is an archaeological counterpart to the legendary history of Newgrange, for scattered around the periphery of the mound, and in particular towards its entrance, is some of the finest Roman metalwork found in Ireland (Carson & O'Kelly 1977). Similar collections are rare but a few pieces are known from Knowth, and there are more from other high status sites such as Tara (Warner 1976). The collection from Newgrange has a distinctive composition.

The artefacts had been carefully selected and must have been deposited intentionally. The most likely explanation is that they were intended as offerings. But offerings to whom?

In fact there seems to be a clear relationship between the legendary history of Newgrange and the archaeological sequence at Knowth, where excavation charts its changing role in Irish history. At first the ancestors of the local rulers were credited with supernatural powers and were thought to live inside the mound at Newgrange (O'Kelly 1982). The finds of Roman metalwork may have been dedicated to them, and their association with this site helped to confirm the legitimacy of the political system. When the settlement at Knowth was absorbed into a larger unit, the history of Newgrange was revised. Far from being the home of the gods, it was the burial place of the High Kings of Ireland. Its past was reinterpreted to fit changing political circumstances (Byrne 1968; O'Kelly 1982).

In this case we are able to combine two distinct lines of argument – archaeology and legend – to show how prehistoric monuments could be used to legitimise a political elite and to lend it the authority of the past. But it is very rare to be able to trace these processes in so much detail. For every Yeavering or Knowth, there are other sites where the archaeological sequence poses problems and historical



62
(Left) Outline plans of the Neolithic passage tombs at Knowth and Newgrange (after Eogan 1986 & O'Kelly 1982 respectively). *(Right) The pattern* of reuse at the same sites during the early historical period (data from Eogan 1991 and Carson & O'Kelly 1977 respectively).

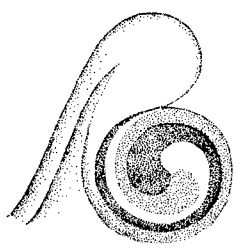
sources are silent. In such cases it would be all too easy to let the argument lapse, but there are certain gains in working at a large geographical scale. If the evidence of individual monuments is often insubstantial, can any general trends be discerned at a regional level? Again I shall take my examples from the early post-Roman period.

◆◆◆

In most areas our starting point is the end of the Western Roman empire. This has been studied most systematically on the Continent, where the evidence for the continued use of Roman sites has been carefully assessed. In particular, there are useful studies of the turnover of urban buildings and the maintenance of different kinds of Roman structure, from houses and fortifications to temples and public works (Ward-Perkins 1984; Greenhalgh 1989). The British Isles, on the other hand, exhibit a far more varied pattern, and it is this legacy that I wish to consider now. How far did the selection of particular sites for reuse, or, alternatively, their rejection in favour of other locations, diverge along regional lines? And if it did so, what light can it shed on the ways in which different societies in the post-Roman world constructed their own histories?

The British Isles were at the extreme edge of the Roman empire, but its official limits fluctuated though time. We can see this even in terms of modern geographical divisions. England was largely assimilated into the Roman system, although there were certainly limits to that process in the north and along the Atlantic seaboard. Wales, on the other hand, was essentially a military zone in which the Romans never secured a firm hold. Towns and villas are uncommon and the most massive constructions are the forts. Scotland shares this characteristic, but with a significant difference, for in this case the extent of Roman power fluctuated between and beyond the frontiers. This was an area in which experience of the Roman world will have varied from one period to another. Lastly, although political contacts certainly existed, Ireland remained outside that sphere of influence completely, and when we find Roman imports, as we do at Newgrange or Tara, they seem to have played a part in an entirely different social system.

These different histories are obvious in the archaeological record and have been discussed on many occasions. Less obvious perhaps, but almost equally revealing, are the ways in which those pasts were used after the Roman collapse. Here again we can combine some of the archaeological evidence with the evidence of literary tradition. But it would be quite misleading to consider this material in relation to modern political divisions. As we have already seen, there is only a partial overlap between national boundaries and the extent and character of Roman power. It is much more revealing to try to recognise different types of transition in the archaeological evidence, and only then to consider how far they characterise separate parts of the British Isles.

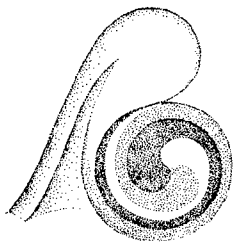


Let us start with the evidence from the urban core of Roman Britain. Here opinion has shown a significant shift during recent years, from a belief that Roman towns remained in use into the historical period to a growing acceptance that they were

abandoned, even if they were reoccupied later (Esmonde-Cleary 1989). The demise of those towns occurred at different paces, and there are certainly instances in which archaeological and historical evidence shows that some of their functions remained intact after the formal withdrawal of Roman power. Even so, the strongest evidence for the continued importance of towns comes from two distinct sources, both of them essentially new. Certain towns, such as Canterbury, seem to have become important ecclesiastical centres with a significant role in the administration of the Christian church. Perhaps the strongest archaeological evidence comes from Lincoln where the church of St Paul in the Bail was located at the centre of the Roman forum, whose imposing remains must have provided a monumental backcloth to the new construction (Steane 1992). The archaeological sequence remains to be resolved, but the discovery of a hanging bowl inside this building provides a purely insular component of the equation.

A similar situation may have arisen at late Roman forts like Burgh Castle which were selected as the sites of monasteries (Johnson 1983). As Michael Hunter (1974) points out, the very act of Christian baptism invoked connections with the imperial past, for often it was undertaken by foreign missionaries and took place in major Roman towns. Somewhat later, in the Middle Saxon period, such towns may have been at least as important as the bases of Christian kings. Both the church and some of the royal dynasties looked to Continental Europe, and particularly to the successors of the Roman state, as a source of legitimate authority (Moreland & Van de Noort 1992). On the other hand, in neither case can we show clear evidence for the continued nucleation of population or for the sheer range of productive activities that had characterised their use in Roman times.

That is not to deny the scale of craft production or the importance of long distance trade (Hodges 1982). The international significance of a number of coastal sites has long been known from historical sources, but until recently it seemed impossible to reconcile these with any convincing body of archaeological material. That even applies to such a famous site as London, where the historical evidence for occupation seemed to be contradicted by signs of a period of desertion between the late Roman and late Saxon periods. In fact, recent fieldwork in several towns has revealed a striking pattern spanning part of that period. From about AD 700 those towns were indeed in use and participated in large scale production and exchange, but they did so from locations some way outside the limits of their Roman predecessors. That pattern has now been recognised at London (Hobley 1988), Southampton (Brisbane 1988) and York (Kemp, R 1987) and it calls for more discussion than it has received so far. There is little to suggest that one location was more suitable than another, and in fact the movement away from the surviving fabric of the Roman towns may signify a rejection of the past. That might also be consistent with the cultural axis of the early trade routes, which extended far beyond the frontiers of the Romanised world. It was only through the quite different alignment of the Christian church that some sense of a Roman inheritance was maintained, and it was surely from that starting point that the re-emergence of older towns began. When that happened, the process was most obvious in lowland England.



As so often, there are some special cases, and it is certainly true that a combination of archaeological and traditional sources suggest that a small number of towns or forts may have been associated with powerful groups or individuals in the wake of the Roman collapse. Possible examples include the towns at Wroxeter, Catterick and Caerwent, and possibly the forts of Segontium, Pen Llystyn and Birdoswald. None of the evidence is clear-cut but it does have certain common properties. A palisaded enclosure overlies the fort at Pen Llystyn (Hogg 1968) and massive halls were built over the Roman ruins at Birdoswald (Wilmott 1989). At Wroxeter, the central area of the town was replanned after the public buildings had gone out of use (Barker, P 1975). In other cases there are finds of early post-Roman artefacts (Edwards & Lane 1988). Little of this material commands much confidence, for where the archaeological contexts are well documented, the chronological evidence is weak, whilst the best dated artefacts are essentially unprovenanced. Here we have to rely on the additional support of historical evidence which suggests that a number of these places could have been associated with leaders in the early post-Roman world (Alcock 1987). The evidence from western Britain is particularly interesting because Magnus Maximus plays a significant part in early Welsh genealogy. Equally important, these sites are all found around the limits of the Roman province, and there may even be historical links between post-Roman society in Wales and northern England.

Hints of even more local distinctions can be found elsewhere in the frontier zone. Martin Biddle has pointed out that early churches are associated with Roman forts along the western section of Hadrian's Wall (1976, 67). In the eastern half, they avoid those monuments entirely. He suggests that the division corresponds with the territories of two different groups: the Britons of Strathclyde to the west and the Votadini to the east. The contrast may be due to different attitudes to the Roman world and to the adoption of Christianity. The argument is an attractive one but it needs testing by excavation.

I mentioned that western Britain had never been fully assimilated into the Roman system. The same point is illustrated by the later history of Roman sites in that area. Of particular importance is the extent to which late Roman and early post-Roman material has been discovered at older hillforts. This may be linked with the creation of Romano-Celtic temples in the countryside and, in southwest England, with the establishment of late Roman cemeteries in these locations (Rahtz & Watts 1979). One possibility is that we are witnessing the re-establishment of an older, decentralised pattern represented by prehistoric hillforts. It may have grown up in competition with the urban settlements, and these are the sites that went on in use into the post-Roman period when occupation of the nearby towns came to an end. There is nothing new in an interpretation which sees a reciprocal relationship between late Roman use of the towns and the growth of hilltop settlement (Burrow 1981). I would merely add the rider that the use of such locations for hillforts, shrines and even cemeteries might be part of a revival of traditional practice, half remembered and half invented. At all events it signalled the rejection of urban life.

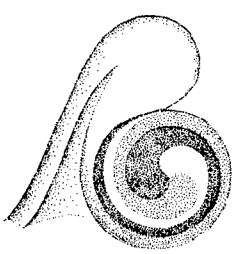
The same pattern is seen at sites in Wales and Scotland, where hilltop temples are lacking. In this case it would be wrong to emphasise the contrast with Roman practice

quite so sharply, for some of the new centres of power were well away from any Roman forts. But one striking pattern is worth mentioning here. On at least three sites with well-attested post-Roman ramparts, Ruberslaw and Clatchard Craig in Scotland (Curle 1905; Close-Brooks 1986) and South Cadbury in south-west England (Alcock 1982), it seems as if a deliberate decision was taken to incorporate Roman building material in the defences. Although this could have been found near to South Cadbury, in the other cases it seems to have been brought in from a distance, in one case from the Roman fort of Carpow. This suggests a distinctly ambivalent attitude to the Roman inheritance: the fort itself was shunned and yet some of the building material was transported to a quite different location, where it was of no particular use. It seems possible that a similar attitude to the past is evidenced at other sites. At Cadbury Congresbury the excavators have argued that Roman artefacts were introduced to the fortified settlement long after they had gone out of commission; once there, these objects were deposited with some formality (Burrow 1981, ch 6). Peter Hill (1987) has recently suggested that the same interpretation applies to the Roman metalwork from Traprain Law.

Earlier, I mentioned the remarkable site of Yeavering close to the Scottish border, but so far I have confined myself to the way in which its Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments were reused during the post-Roman period. There is one extraordinary building at Yeavering which is quite separate from these prehistoric earthworks. This is the timber amphitheatre on the site (Hope-Taylor 1977), which can only have been inspired by Roman prototypes, although none had been built for well over a century; in any case the most obvious sources of inspiration are in areas well to the south of Hadrian's Wall. It is difficult to say much about a structure which lacks any obvious parallel, but the reference to the Roman inheritance is clear, although the builders of Yeavering may have been alone in constructing a past out of so many disparate elements.

◆ ◆ ◆

For the most part, the sites which make reference to Roman buildings or material culture are around the outer edges of the province, in south-west England or close to the northern frontier. In some ways Yeavering and Milfield are rather unusual, for the reuse of earlier prehistoric monuments is generally found in more distant areas; the one exception is the relatively late site at Thwing on the Yorkshire Wolds (Manby 1986). The best known evidence for the reuse of prehistoric monuments comes from Ireland, but it can be misunderstood in much the same way as the archaeological sequence at Yeavering. There is no doubt that some of the Irish royal sites do have features in common with Neolithic monuments. Certain of the major enclosures can be compared with henges, just as the timber settings inside them recall the structures found within Late Neolithic enclosures, from eastern Scotland to Wessex (Wailes 1982, 19–20). The problem is that good Irish precedents are lacking, whilst the sites which show the strongest resemblances to one another are separated by 2,000 years.



One approach is to postulate the continuous existence of ritual specialists – Druids are the favourite candidates – who maintained traditional learning across the gen-

erations (cf MacKie 1977, 229). There are serious objections to this idea. Irish henge monuments are poorly dated and do not resemble their counterparts on the mainland especially closely. The great timber settings of the royal sites have a more convincing source among the Late Bronze Age ringworks in Ireland, particularly Navan (cf Cooney & Grogan 1991). Yet the fact remains that an unexpectedly high proportion of the royal centres did occupy important Neolithic sites. I have already discussed the sequence at Knowth; an equally convincing example is found at Tara (O'Riordain 1959). The main elements to attract attention, however, were not enclosures but mounds. This seems hardly surprising when we consider that some of the major passage tombs in Ireland carried elaborate decoration and in several cases adopted obvious astronomical alignments. At present there is no real evidence that Irish henge monuments were brought back into use, although Derek Simpson (1989) has suggested that the outer enclosure at Navan could be a Neolithic monument. A Neolithic structure of some kind may also have existed at the centre of Dún Ailinne (Wailes 1990).

In fact some of the major complexes have a longer history than either Yeavering or Knowth, where there was a considerable interval between the use of the prehistoric monuments and their recreation in the first millennium AD. At Tara, for example, rich Early Bronze Age burials were inserted into the Neolithic passage tomb that was the oldest structure on the site, and fine metalwork of Later Bronze Age origin was found nearby (O'Riordain 1959); two gold hoards of similar date come from Downpatrick, where the full archaeological sequence is uncertain (Proudfoot 1955; 1957). There may be other sites with a more varied history. At Rathcroghan the evidence takes a different form, and here the earthworks include mortuary mounds that could span the entire prehistoric sequence (Waddell 1988). In a few cases the associations of royal centres may be less apparent from their surface topography. At least one of these sites seems to have developed at what we can call an offering place. This is the royal crannog of Lagore, which overlay a complex sequence of deposits that have never been studied systematically (Hencken 1950). They included a deer skeleton, animal bones, items of Bronze Age metalwork, human bones including a skull and a remarkable wood sculpture dated by radiocarbon to about 2000 BC (Coles 1990, 322–3, 326). At one time the crannog itself was the capital of the southern Brega and would have been the counterpart of its northern capital at Knowth.

I have argued that mounds like Knowth were particularly attractive in the selection of royal sites in Ireland. The same point can be illustrated by the excavated earthworks at Clogher (Warner 1988). But the reuse of older mounds is by no means restricted to Ireland. Steven Driscoll has recently drawn attention to the importance of 'those ceremonial centres which served as meeting places, the places to hold popular courts and the sites of quasi-religious inaugurations to high office' (1991, 98). As he says, the best known of these is Moot Hill at Scone. There are several cases in which such sites can be identified through place names and appear to be associated with prehistoric earthworks, cairns and settings of stones. In his own study area one such site seems to be marked by the position of a causewayed enclosure and a henge, whilst a more famous example is found at Forteviot where Leslie Alcock has been working. In this case the importance of a Pictish royal

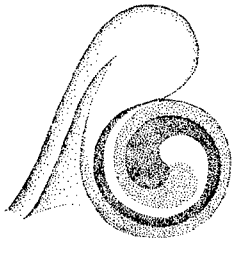
centre is attested by several different sources: historical accounts, monumental sculptures and a carved stone arch (Alcock 1984, 28–9). The site has probably been identified from the air, but for our purposes it is significant that near to it are the crop marks of a Neolithic enclosure, as well as several small henge monuments and mounds. Interspersed among them are the sites of square barrows probably dating from the first millennium AD.

Such sites as Forteviot and Tara seem to show a similar attitude to the remains of the past and developed in relation to monument complexes of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age date. It is a sequence that is perhaps best established in Ireland, but it can be recognised more widely; yet there seems to be no need to postulate detailed links between different areas. What they do share is a remoteness from the Roman system and a willingness to ground political developments in a different and more remote past. It may be true that in England and Scotland the people who created these centres had little appreciation of the antiquity of the surviving remains, but that hardly matters. What they could appreciate was that they were entirely distinct from the relics of Roman colonisation.

◆◆◆

I am coming close to the territory mapped out with much greater expertise in Leslie Alcock's Rhind Lectures (Alcock 1988), and this might seem the ideal point at which to close. But I do have one more suggestion to make, and in doing so I shall take us back full circle to my starting point on the rock of Dunadd. So far I have said nothing about the extraordinary natural appearance of many of the high status centres of the early post-Roman period, those fortified crags that Leslie Alcock has made so much his own. These are distributed far more widely than the other sites I have considered, and for the most part they lack the same association with older monuments. Among the features that seem to unite them are their distinctive natural setting. To a prehistorian like myself these places look very much alike. Who could deny the striking physical presence – indeed, the similar appearance – of Tintagel, the Rock of Cashel or the Mote of Mark (illus 63)? To quote Professor Alcock's discussion of three of these sites (Dumbarton, Dunadd and Dundurn):

> 'What links these three major Celtic strongholds is not the plans of their defences, but the stepped topography of the hills on which they were set. The hill was primary, the defences secondary, and the close relationship of hill and defences was something which evolved with time. The particular significance of the slope of the hill was that it lent itself to a hierarchical organisation of space' (Alcock *et al* 1989, 210).



It lent itself to that distinctive layout, but it made it seem natural at the same time.

I wonder whether there is still another dimension, for as I said at the beginning of this lecture, the visual effect of such sites makes them quintessentially places that have been transformed into monuments. We cannot offer much evidence of their remoter history, but it does seem most unlikely that they lacked all mythical assoc-

iations until the very moment when they were first defended. They may be works of nature, but they were also places which could have evoked a range of complex responses that are lost to field archaeology. And in that sense they were beyond time itself.

I started at Dunadd, and I shall end there, for that site and the archaeology of the area around it provide concrete examples of practically everything that I have suggested in these lectures (illus 64). I do not say this merely as a literary device, as a way of rooting these thoughts in the Scottish experience. What I have discussed are a series of ideas that grow out of the experience of visiting and thinking about monuments. Ideally, a study of this kind would work best if it could be grounded in the archaeology of just a single area – even of a single site – developing different ways of coming to terms with its history. At present I do not think that this is possible, although there are areas like Orkney where this objective may soon be within our grasp. I have had to follow a more devious course, drawing out several lines of thought that were suggested by the monuments of Mid Argyll, but developing these at different geographical scales according to the quality of the archaeological evidence and the limits of my own knowledge. As often as not, that led me to consider the prehistory of Continental Europe, but in this final lecture I have returned entirely to the archaeology of the British Isles.

Even on a continental scale the British landscape is extraordinary for the extent to which prehistoric monuments survive. At their best there is little to match their abundance and sheer variety. Yet I would contend that there are lessons still to be learned if we are to study them effectively. We no longer investigate the ancient pattern of settlement through the piecemeal recording of occupation sites. Where possible, we work at a larger scale, linking the separate settlements to their boundaries, their field systems and to the wider use

63
The Mote of Mark, Dumfries and Galloway.

of the terrain. That is the lesson of the recent Royal Commission survey of north-east Perth (RCAHMS 1990). But we have yet to appreciate how necessary it is to treat the more specialised monuments in a similar frame of mind: to consider their relationship with one another and the patterns of interpretation and cross-reference that inform us of the mental world they once inhabited. As with landscape archaeology, the right time scale is one of centuries, if not millennia, but unlike settlements and field systems, the more prominent monuments of earlier prehistory – enclosures, stone settings, mounds and decorated rocks – impose themselves on human consciousness in most distinctive ways. We recognise that as consumers of the human past, and some of us contend with just that dimension as the managers of what survives. The paradox is that we have become so skilled at explaining settlement patterns at a time when the public show more concern with questions that we feel reluctant to answer. For every settlement or field system that we can explain, at least to our own satisfaction, there are more conspicuous monuments that we find entirely enigmatic. Perhaps that is because we have always taken them for granted. For that very reason they pose their challenge now.

When we visit an area like Mid Argyll, we are confronted with just how different the past was from the present. It is this feeling of difference that we would do so well to emphasise in our work. In the first lecture I argued that we tend to create a

64 Dunadd and the surrounding landscape. Photograph: Historic Scotland.

past in terms that are familiar to us, to explain the archaeology of monuments though the assumptions of an agricultural society like our own. In the second, I went on to argue that we overlook the wider significance of place in an unmapped landscape, and I returned to that point when I discussed the post-Roman occupation of sites like Dunadd. Because we lack that ability to incorporate the unaltered topography into our sense of the landscape, we have marginalised whole areas of archaeological fieldwork. That is why, for instance, rock art has played little part in mainstream prehistory. But, as I suggested in the third lecture, monuments and places worked together to direct and stimulate the experience of prehistoric people. It is their inability to come to terms with experience itself that leaves prehistorians so vulnerable to the inroads of alternative archaeologies.

Last of all, monuments feed off the associations, not only of places, but also of other monuments. Monuments are enhanced and rebuilt; they are reinterpreted and changed; and new constructions are created around old ones. We tend to lose that dimension of the archaeological record as we become immersed in chronological analysis. In their different ways the last three lectures have all had points in common. What we think of as the evolution of monuments, their ordering according to a linear perception of time, was really a process of finding out about the world: a way in which successive generations established a sense of place and time in relation to the living and the dead. On occasion this involved the wholesale rejection of monuments, their abandonment or destruction. At others, it required a greater act of the imagination: a process of recreating a past that was really beyond recall and of making it play an unrehearsed part in the present.

That is also what archaeologists do. It is what I was doing as I walked through the prehistory of Mid Argyll two years ago. And it is what our public do when they visit those same places. Our perceptions are bound to be different, but we should be able to talk to one another. More than anything else, the archaeology of monuments is where those conversations begin.