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CELTIC ART IN EUROPE
MAKING CONNECTIONS
Essays in honour of Vincent Megaw on his 80th birthday

Edited by
Christopher Gosden, Sally Crawford and Katharina Ulmschneider


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ART IN CONTEXT: THE MASSIVE METALWORKING TRADITION OF NORTH-EAST SCOTLAND

Fraser Hunter

One of the few Scottish finds which regularly graces syntheses of Celtic art is the Deskford carnyx head (e.g. Megaw 1970, no. 272; Megaw and Megaw 2001, 232). My first encounter with Vincent was over this beast when, as a callow youth freshly ensconced in the National Museum in Edinburgh, I embarked on a study of it. I sought the master’s advice – and indeed dared to question some of his views. Having been roundly slapped into place for sins of language and intellect (an ongoing facet of our relationship), Vincent offered some gems, and he has been a regular source of assistance, new perspectives, titbits of gossip, and goading to think more, think further, think better ever since. The returns for him have been slender, I fear – a few titbits of Caledonian Celtic art (though new discoveries have been too sparse for both our tastes), and occasional despatches from one of his adopted cities, where he spent his formative undergraduate years under Stuart Piggott. This paper offers some more formal payback for assistances willingly offered. It is not about the carnyx (though that would appeal to his musical tastes), but about its context – the massive metalwork tradition of north-east Scotland, its objects, origins, uses and setting. This paper picks the flowers from a more detailed reassessment (Hunter in prep.) and seeks a broader understanding of this remarkable metalworking tradition.

‘Speak weel o’ the Hielans but live in the Laich’: the landscapes of north-east Scotland

The Scottish tourist industry would place our study area in the Highlands, but traditional Moray folk-wisdom says the opposite: ‘speak weel o’ the Hielans but live in the Laich’ (Keillar 1993, 25). The Laich is the narrow strip of fertile low-lying arable land on the southern edge of the Moray Firth, between the uplands and the sea (Fig. 35.1). It is the land of malts and Macbeth. Today its produce goes into Speyside whiskies; in the past it supported rich farming societies, able to raise a man who would be king in the 11th century, and to create Celtic art in the 1st. The dour Grampian hills created an isolation from more southern areas, but between mountain and water a strip of good land runs down the east coast to the firth of Forth. This area was defined by Stuart Piggott as the north-east province in his four-fold division of the Scottish Iron Age (1966); the definition has seen little subsequent challenge, although questions remain over the relation between the lowlands and the upland glens or upper Strathspey, where passes lead over to the west coast (e.g. Harding 2006).

The area is almost split in two where the mountains come down to the sea at the Mounth, south of Aberdeen; this natural division is often reflected in the area’s archaeology (e.g. Maxwell 1990, 45). In our period of concern, the Iron Age, we can play the distribution-map game to find both linking and dividing factors. A distinctive class of oblong forts with massive timber-laced stone walls neatly covers the province (Feachem 1966, 67–8; RCAHMS 2007, 100). Rarely do hillfort types provide such clear, bounded distributions; these ones compensate for this spatial compliance by rampant chronological bad behaviour, with a long-running debate over their date (see Alexander 2003), but recent evidence puts them in the middle Iron Age, c.300–100 BC (Cook 2010). Their distribution is close to that of our massive metalwork some centuries later; the
two indicate some long-running version of a north-east identity. Other distributions split south from north around the Mounth; glass bead styles, characteristic of the northern area (Guido 1978, figs 34 and 36), or a short-lived Roman Iron Age floruit of architecturally-exotic brochs, an Atlantic Scottish form adopted for display purposes in the southern area and parts of southern Scotland (Macinnes 1984).

A two-fold split at the Mounth hides further subtleties. We will explore these shortly through the metalwork, but it is worth turning once more to the land. The open landscapes
and low ridges of the Laich of Moray are very different from the valley-worlds of Aberdeenshire and Banffshire. South of the Mounth the country opens up once more, with an expanding wedge of good arable land down to the Tay. This is constrained by hills around Perth, with valleys again dominant. To the south the wide valley of the Forth and the peninsula of Fife form ‘a beggar’s mantle fringed with gold’ (James VI’s term for Fife), open landscapes dissected by hills and bogs, with rich edges. We are among Piggott’s regions here, the level below his provinces which is rarely considered today; and while I would query details of his scheme, this pen-picture broadly correlates with his.

By the core period of massive metalwork, hillforts were ancient monuments; there is no evidence of fort construction at this time (Alcock 1987, fig. 4; Ralston 1996, 135–7; Cook 2010, 87–8) and only very limited activity at a few small promontory forts (e.g. Wilson 1980). The area is characterised by settlements of timber-built roundhouses, often spectacularly large (up to 20m in diameter) and sometimes with semi-subterranean cellars (souterrains or earth-houses). Most settlements were unenclosed, but small enclosures (often for single houses) also occur (RCAHMS 2007, 82–96; Davies 2007). A combination of increasing excavation and metal-detecting has harvested fresh information and finds which let us contextualise the metalwork.

**Massive metalwork**

The basis of the corpus was established in the late 19th century (Wilson 1851, 446–8; Smith 1868; 1881; Anderson 1883, 140–61; 1904), and was integrated into the wider British picture by Leeds (1933, 126–36), although curiously avoided by Fox (1958). Piggott’s identification of the Deskford carnyx (1959) was contextualised by Stevenson’s (1966, 31–5) broader consideration of Scottish Iron Age metalwork. The fundamental studies remain those of Morna MacGregor/Simpson (Simpson 1968, 1970; MacGregor 1976); subsequent papers have considered individual items and new discoveries (Hunter 2001; 2006a).

Distribution and decoration give the tradition a regional coherence which is exceedingly rare in studies of insular Celtic art. This covers an underlying diversity, as we shall see, but the core area, from Forth to Moray Firth, is clear. The term ‘massive metalwork’ comes both from the sheer scale of many castings and the preference for prominent three-dimensional forms in the decoration. Designs are not complex but they are striking, with liberal use of slender trumpets, keeled diagonals and crescents.

Personal ornaments predominate: armlets, bracelets and finger rings. The massive cast penannular armlets weigh up to 2kg, their flat broad hoops typically in three integrally-linked decorated strands: the expanded perforated circular terminals are sometimes filled by enamelled insets (Simpson 1968; MacGregor 1976, nos 231–50; Hunter 2006a). Their distribution spans the region, but with different types in the north and south reflecting different workshop traditions (Figs 35.1–35.3): oval examples (which have fold-over symmetry) are northern, folded ones (with rotational symmetry) southern.

Such regional variety occurs also with the zoomorphic
spiral bracelets, which are found overwhelmingly on Tayside in the southern area (Figs 35.1 and 35.4) (MacGregor 1976, nos 213–9). Finger rings (discussed below) show no clear typological division, but the updated distribution has two very marked clusters in Moray and Perthshire/Stirlingshire with Aberdeenshire, a heartland of armlets, being a conspicuous gap. The situation is thus more complex than a north/south division: there are localised variations of expression within the broader picture (Fig. 35.1), reflecting some of the landscape units noted above. Only in the south do the distributions of armlets, bangles and rings overlap, but only immediately north of the Tay. To the north the current distributions of armlets and finger rings are essentially complementary, the former concentrating in Aberdeenshire, the latter along the southern Moray Firth. The single northern bracelet may be an import from Tayside. Thus the distribution is coherent but not united: the art styles are shared across this zone, but no object type was common to all areas. Different groups within the area chose to make and use different object types within overall linked decorative schemes. At one level the decorative styles show a regional identity; at another, the types show more local affiliations.

These ornaments were made to be used: almost all show use-wear. Consideration of internal diameters indicates that upper arms which fitted the armlets (interior diameters in the range 95–115 mm) would struggle to squeeze into the bracelets (typically 50–60 mm), and these are best seen as male and female ornaments respectively. For the bracelets, this is supported by comparison with Iron Age ‘jet’ bangles; they correlate with the smaller peak in the diameters of such bangles, whose bimodal distribution suggests different sizes for females and males (Hunter 2008a, 107). Rare smaller version of both armlets and bracelets are most likely for children or youths (e.g. Fig. 35.5) (Hunter 2006a, 151). The finger rings are consistently large, almost all having an internal diameter of 19–20 mm; in modern jewellery, these are men’s sizes. Thus, in the southern area there is evidence for a division of jewellery by gender; in the north, the focus is male, with armlets or rings, and only a single (imported?) bracelet.

**Finger rings**

Many of the new finds are finger rings: Simpson (1970) listed four, but the total has now grown to 17 (see Appendix
and Figs 35.13–35.14). All bar one have lentoid or trumpet-head mouldings where bezel and hoop meet, a typical motif of the massive tradition. Bezels show both openwork and enamelled decoration in considerable variety. Triskeles are most common, but several have enamelling similar to the massive armlet discs, with chequer or quatrefoil patterns. The decorative bezels point to Roman influence, as earlier indigenous finger rings were typically bronze spirals or plain bands in bronze or jet-like materials (Clarke 1971; Callander 1916, 222–8). They must have been developed very quickly after the initial design impetus, as one was found in the Roman fort of Strageath, Perthshire in a Flavian context (AD 83–7; Frere and Wilkes 1989, 154, fig. 79 no. 98; Hunter 2006b, 84–5). In developing a prototype from the classical world, these Scottish rings fall into a long tradition: from the early La Tène period onwards, Greek and Etruscan originals had inspired rings with bezels decorated in Celtic art styles (Déchelette 1914, 1264–70, esp. 1269–70; Jacobsthal 1944, 124–6, pl. 52; Megaw 1970, nos 58, 88, 138–9, 169; see also Schönfelder 2003; Polenz 2007).

Other

Personal ornaments are the dominant product, but the tradition was broader. A few widely-scattered strap junctions were probably for horse harness (MacGregor 1976, nos 36–8). Other singletons are linked to the tradition by decorative style. A recent addition is a tankard handle from the lowland broch of Castle Craig, Auchterarder, Perthshire (Fig. 35.6), identical in form to one from Oxtrow, Orkney (MacGregor 1976, no. 291) but with massive-style slender trumpet decoration. Sheet-work is very poorly attested, the Deskford carnyx head being the best example, but a pair of (physically) massive tweezers from beyond the main distribution at Kettleburn (Caithness) may be linked, not only on account of their size but from the feathered decoration which can be paralleled on massive armlets (Fig. 35.7). So-called massive terrets have traditionally been linked to the style as well, but their dating is later (3rd–7th century AD) and their distribution markedly broader (Hunter 2010a, 100–3). An unusual zoomorphic brooch from Bin Hill, Garmouth, Moray, could be linked to the massive tradition in its use of animal-head terminals, yellow enamel and zig-zag decoration, although its form seems closer to a series of unusual La Tène II brooches (Hunter 2009, 146–7).

When and why?

Detailed evidence for dating will be reviewed elsewhere (Hunter, in prep.), but a combination of stylistic analysis, contextual associations and technological information indicates a floruit of the later 1st–2nd centuries AD – the earlier Roman Iron Age. Examples from excavated sites are consistently of this date, as are associations from hoards, while the reused Roman metal in many of the alloys indicates a post-invasion date (in this area, post c.AD 80), as there is minimal artefactual evidence for contact before conquest (Hunter 2007a, 22). The finger rings, inspired by Roman prototypes, also indicate a post-contact date. Yet this art should not be seen as a purely post-invasion
Fraser Hunter

metalwork from the site, Culduthel provides a model of difficult to identify. Although there is no evidence of massive metalwork started before direct contact with the Roman army. There may be few pre-Flavian finds in the area, but through networks of contacts they were feeling the ripples in the pond.

Production

Cast products dominate the tradition, often large castings which would be tricky to carry out; indeed, many armlets show very skilful post-casting repairs, barely visible to the uninitiated eye. Non-ferrous metalworking was a rare skill in the area: casting evidence of this general date is known from under 10% of 235 excavated later prehistoric sites, and only ten of these are likely to be Roman Iron Age in date. Thus production was restricted, although the products were widespread.

The skills required were those not just of the bronze-smith but the enameller as well. The enamelling technology is both varied and innovative. Finger-rings provide the best evidence. Normal champlevé is attested, with cast-in fields, but the chequerboard patterns show no such field divisions, with blocks of glass being set in solid form and fused. A recent find from Castle Stuart, near Inverness, shows an even more complex picture (Fig. 35.13); although only partly preserved, the design shows a red substrate with inlays sunk into it. The technique is more familiar from glass-working, and indeed one of the inlays appears to be a reused multicoloured bead fragment. Such technical skills are seen also in the surviving enamelled armlets, with Castle Newe using blocks without cell divisions while Pitkelloney has cloisonné field divisions (V Rigby, pers. comm.). Red and yellow are the dominant colours, with blue attested only in the eyes of the Culbin bracelet.

The northern area was known for its glass-working (see below), and this link between technologies is attested at Culduthel (Inverness-shire). Here, excavation of a workshop area of 2nd century BC–2nd century AD date provided evidence of a wide range of technologies, including bronze-casting, glass-working and enamelling in the same area (Murray forthcoming; Hunter forthcoming a and b). There was also evidence of sheet-working, which is otherwise difficult to identify. Although there is no evidence of massive metalwork from the site, Culduthel provides a model of central production sites consistent with the wider evidence that non-ferrous metalworking was a restricted craft.

Analysis provides some further insights into technological process. Of sheet products, only the carnyx has been analysed: this showed careful control of different alloys, selected to create striking visual contrasts between bronze and brass (Hunter 2001). The cast alloys show much more variety; even armlet pairs are not consistently of the same alloy. There are some technological patterns: analysed finger rings were heavily leaded to facilitate casting, while the larger items have low lead levels, probably as a compromise between ease of casting and the need for extensive post-casting working and bending to shape (which was easier with a low-lead alloy). The variety of alloys is likely to reflect varying supply sources. The data can be categorised into three groups, which may represent a chronological progression: no or minimal zinc (typical Iron Age alloys), high zinc (primary reuse of Roman metal), and lower zinc, representing volatilisation of the zinc through continued recycling. Davis and Gwilt (2008, 149–50) have recognised similar patterns in Welsh late Iron Age metalwork. This is, of course, an argument lacking independent chronological control, but it hints at some time-depth to the tradition (discussed more fully in Hunter, in prep.).

Patterns and biases of deposition

In any study of decorative metalwork, processes of deposition and recovery can cast a critical bias on interpretation. With massive metalwork, a remarkable number of finds in north-east Scotland come from certain or probable settlement sites, suggesting a tradition of deliberate on-site deposition of valued material (Hunter 1997). There are clear patterns – (male) armlets and (female) bracelets were not mixed, and typically one or two armlets or a single bracelet were deposited, suggesting these were offerings linked to specific individuals in a domestic setting. We have little evidence for how they were deposited; for instance, was it a private offering by or for the individual, or in a public ceremony linked to them on their death or another rite of passage? Contextual details are frustratingly sparse, but some appear to be linked to the abandonment of sites: the Castle Newe armlets came from the entrance to a souterrain, while the Hurly Hawkin bracelet was in the shell of an abandoned broch (Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries Scotland 6 (1864–6), 13–14; Hunter 1997, 115–6). Such deposits on settlement sites were clearly infrequent, as armlets and bracelets are rare finds today. In the writer’s 20+ years at the National Museum, eleven finger rings have been found (four excavated, seven metal-detected) but, sadly, only one massive armlet. While some rings (five of the total of 17) are intact and may well have been deliberate deposits, the remainder were broken; they seem to show use-wear rather
than purposeful damage, and are likely to be accidental losses from on- and off-site contexts.

Deposition on settlement sites may have been the local norm, but when massive metalwork left its home area the rules changed – where the context is known, exported examples are from wet or other remote settings, fitting local practices in these areas. Off-site deposition was the exception in the north-east, and the rare examples are revealing.

One exception was the Deskford carnyx. This was deposited in a peat bog: excavations showed it was the most spectacular of a long-running tradition of ritual offerings (pot, butchered animal bone and quartz pebbles). An adjacent promontory had been cut off from the settled landscape by a palisade and was kept free of normal domestic use, acting like a temenos for this sacred site (Hunter 2001). Here both setting and find are non-domestic. It seems carnyces were not linked to individuals – they are never found in burials, for instance – but were symbols of a group’s identity, and their deposition thus took place in special areas away from the domestic sphere. Such objects may have been seen as too powerful, even dangerous, to be buried near the settlement. Likewise, vessels such as cauldrons, while rare in the area, come from off-site contexts (Hunter 1997, table 12.6), and these too are best linked to groups rather than individuals. The specific location of Deskford is interesting – in a subsidiary valley which links one of the major rivers to the coastal zone, and between the distributions of groups using armlets and those using finger rings, suggesting it may have functioned as a site where various communities came together.

The other major off-site find, the hoard from Bunrannoch, breaks all the ‘rules’ – remote from settlements, and mixing male and female ornaments (both a bracelet and an armlet were found in a vessel along with lost and tantalising ‘smaller articles’ (Anderson 1904)). Its unusual nature is matched by its unusual location, away from the core distribution in the uplands at the foot of Schiehallion – one of the most striking hills of the southern Grampians, its triangular profile catching the eye for miles around. The quantity of finds implies a connection to more than one individual, making it more of a communal or combined act, and the location is perhaps significant in this regard. The name means ‘fairy hill of the Caledonians’ (Watson 1926, 21). Was this where groups came together and offerings were made to cement alliances? Fiction perhaps, but both context and contents indicate this was different from the normal pattern of deposition.

We thus have four different processes forming our record: the deliberate burial of personal ornaments on settlement sites, linked to individuals; the deliberate burial of communal items in significant natural locations; locally-varied deposition of metalwork as it passed out of its core zone; and accidental losses of smaller items through use-wear.

**Precursors and stimulus**

Massive metalwork has little recognisable parentage in its homeland, although occasional metalworking debris of early-middle Iron Age date shows that copper alloys were being used, while gold ribbon torcs can now be recognised as a tradition of the area. Long assumed to be Bronze Age, Richard Warner’s arguments to subdivide them into a Bronze Age and an Iron Age group based on analysis, associations and typological variety (1993, 111–2; 2003; 2004) have been emphatically confirmed by the gold hoard found at Blair Drummond (Perthshire) in 2009, with two ribbon torcs in association with a French-style tubular torc and an unusual ring-terminal torc (Hunter 2010b). The Scottish distribution of ribbon torcs focuses in the north-east, and typological differences in the terminals of Irish and Scottish finds suggest regional manufacturing traditions (Coles 1968, 170–1). Dating evidence needs reconsideration in the light of recent finds, but is best seen as around the 4th–1st century BC, predating the massive tradition. It indicates a sheet gold-working tradition in the area, but provides little background for massive metalwork in terms of technology, form or decoration. The latter was highly innovative. Previous writers have recognised its style links to southern Britain and Ireland (MacGregor 1976, 184–5; Piggott 1959, 31–2), and the metalworkers of the area were clearly open to external influences, as seen in the creation of the carnyx (a local version of a Europe-wide type) and the influence of Roman finger rings. Yet these influences were absorbed and reinvented into new, distinctively local forms: the finger rings are transformed into the massive tradition, the carnyx is technically unlike any other examples known, while massive armlets have no convincing parallels. We see here the products of a highly creative society.

The stimulus for this is likely to be two-fold. A growth in ornamental material in the British late Iron Age (Hill 1995, 85; Hunter 2007b, 289) points to societies and individuals increasingly concerned with marking individual variation and affiliation. This was certainly the case in the north-east, where a vibrant tradition of glass jewellery developed in the later 2nd/1st centuries BC (see below). Yet a strong catalyst is likely to have been the perceived and actual threat of Roman invasion, with the opportunities and uncertainties it presented; this is seen as a key stimulus for the flourishing of British Celtic art at this time (e.g. Davis and Gwilt 2008, 147, 165, 177–8). Dating evidence tends to be biased by Roman associations, although the exported spiral bracelet from Snailwell shows that the habit began before conquest, by c.AD 50–65. How much earlier, if at all, is uncertain, but this puts it into a context before any significant evidence of direct contact, although societies in the area were clearly becoming aware of Rome. An existing local trend to increasing use of ornament as a key part of social interaction was heightened in this fast-changing place on the margins of Roman influence.
It is worth tracking what happened to massive metalwork in comparison to the art of central Britain. This area also saw a flourishing of Celtic art around the time of conquest, and this was key to the negotiation of new identities in the complicated world of the Roman frontier (Hunter 2008b). Objects of typically Iron Age styles commonly come from Roman contexts, and the decorative traditions continued to develop on Romano-British objects. This was not the case with massive metalwork. While it drew on Roman influences in aspects of its form (for finger rings) and raw material, it did not get drawn into these frontier identities. There are virtually no examples from Roman sites – a
finger ring from the fort of Strageath and a strap junction from York are the only exceptions. This may, of course, be an accident of history, since north-east Scotland stayed essentially beyond the Roman frontier. Yet it is noteworthy that the area was otherwise heavily drawn into Roman politics and material culture, but kept its art separate. Roman finds are commonplace from Iron Age sites in the area; the inhabitants were intimately involved in Roman frontier politics (Hunter 2007a). Yet it seems there were things it was considered appropriate to mix, and things which it was not. Celtic art was never hoarded with Roman finds in the area, in contrast to the south of Scotland. Certain spheres of life were separated from others, even when the objects were made from recycled Roman objects and, in some cases, influenced by Roman designs (Hunter 2013, 23–4).

More than massive: contemporary styles
Massive metalwork was mobile; it is found in Sutherland, Shetland, Skye, Lismore, south-east Scotland, northern Ireland and eastern England. The contacts are often counter-intuitive: the armlets from northern Scotland are of the southern folded type, not the nearby oval one, while the reverse is true of the two armlets in southern Scotland, suggesting a preference for more exotic longer-range contacts over neighbouring ones (Fig. 35.8). This is seen also in the links to East Anglia, with spiral bracelets from Snailwell, Cambridgeshire (Lethbridge 1953) and an unpublished fragment from Charsfield, Suffolk (J. D. Hill, pers. comm.). The Snailwell bracelet is worthy of note on other grounds. It is the exception to the gender associations noted earlier, being linked to a male grave (an assumption based on a shield boss; the cremated remains were not sexed); this is consistent with its larger diameter. Yet there are oddities to it – the shape is uneven, the inset eyes invisible as worn (Lethbridge 1953, 30). It seems the bracelet was transformed and reworked in its new homeland, from a female to a male ornament. Temptations to see this as a double-edged gift, with the northern tribes giving a proud male warrior a woman’s ornament fit for effete southerners, would simply be an imposition of modern prejudices.

These connections are hard to spot within the north-east because the hoarding tradition prioritised local metalwork over anything else, and settlement finds are rare. Recent metal-detecting finds appeared to offer a way around this: a range of fragmentary finds in non-massive-tradition styles were interpreted as settlement finds and stray losses which reflected contacts with southern Scotland and further afield (Hunter 2006a, 151–7). This proved too simple. Excavations at the Culduthel (Inverness) workshop provided the complication. Moulds were too fragmentary to identify, but the one clearly unfinished item was a cruciform strap junction decorated with small-cell enamelling (Fig. 35.9) which owed nothing to the massive tradition. It looks like a product of central Britain, but was clearly being made on site as the fastening loop had not been cleaned out after casting. More circumstantial evidence comes from other items of horse harness: there is now a cluster of unusual button-and-loop strap fasteners of openwork teardrop form in the area, a type which is otherwise rare (to the examples in Hunter 2006a, ill. 16c, 19c, add two unpublished finds from Clarkly Hill, Moray).

This evidence allows more complicated stories to be told. It seems societies in the north-east shared in more widespread traditions of decorated horse gear and thus marked connections to central Britain (in contrast to Atlantic Scotland, where such finds are unknown); but for personal ornaments they developed their own tradition, the massive style. In other areas of social display they made affiliations to neighbouring areas, but personal display provoked a clear expression of regional (and sub-regional) identity; whether this made long-lived patterns more visible or was a new creation of the moment remains for debate.

A decorated world? Massive metalwork in context
It is over-easy to focus on decorated metalwork at the expense of other ornament (Sharples 2008). What was the decorative world of the people who saw and used massive metalwork? As ever, our picture is biased by the non-survival of colour and of organic materials – in this area, even bonework is rarely preserved. But decoration is otherwise rare. Pottery was almost never decorated, and stone only rarely: there are a few decorated quernstones, with a circle around the hopper or with radial decoration (McLaren and Hunter 2008, fig. 4), while only a single painted pebble is known, with a simple pattern of dark dots (unpublished, from writer’s excavations at Birnie). Ornament is markedly more common on the stone cups or lamps common in the area, about a fifth of which carry decoration (Loudon 2000, 29; contra Steer 1956, 244). This is mostly simple linear geometric ornament, typically a band (sometimes raised) of herringbone or zig-zags under the rim (Fig. 35.10a; cf. Ralston and Inglis 1984, 35; Close-Brooks 1972). The herringbone patterns are also found on massive metalwork, while an example from Knockargity, Tarland has a bossed band suggesting a skeuomorph of a bronze vessel (Fig. 35.10b; cf. MacGregor 1976, nos 292, 305, 308). On one from Newton of Auchingour, Banffshire, the banded herringbone pattern covering the surface and zoomorphic terminal are reminiscent of spiral bracelets (Fig. 35.10c) MacGregor 1976, no. 334). These links to metalworking decoration are confirmed in rare examples with crude curvilinear decoration from Howbury (St Andrews, Fife; Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries Scotland 45
(1910–11), 222–3) and Hill of Syde, Aberdeenshire (Ralston and Inglis 1984, 37). There was no absolute separation of decorative styles by material, although the overlaps are small and rare.

Other metalwork of the period is quite plain: brooches are virtually unknown, pins are simple projecting ring-headed types, and other ornaments such as spiral rings or belt hooks bear only occasional simple linear geometric decoration. The trumpet and crescent decoration of massive metalwork was a very restricted phenomenon, found only on very selected material.

Significantly, the other group of material which was regularly decorated is glass jewellery (Fig. 35.11) – which had a technical connection to metalworking in the use of enamelling. Not only do beads provide splashes of colour in our rather monochrome view of the Iron Age, but their curvilinear and spiral decoration resonates with Celtic art styles. There are three relevant categories of finds: triangular glass beads of Guido (1978) class 13, with interlinked spiral decoration; class 14, with a range of loops, swirls and rays; and small glass balls, perhaps playing pieces, with inlaid spiral-decorated eyes. The beads concentrate predominantly north of the Mounth, while the much rarer glass balls are more widespread (Ralston and Inglis 1984, 41). Dating evidence focuses on the Roman Iron Age, but examples from Culduthel (Inverness) and Dun Bharabhat (Lewis) are linked to radiocarbon dates of the later 2nd century BC–early 1st century AD (Hunter forthcoming c).

Given the technological connection, the conceptual link of curvilinear decoration is perhaps not surprising; it is noteworthy that glass beads from other areas similarly show curvilinear patterning which is otherwise rare outwith metalwork (e.g. Guido 1978, plate I–II). Thus, the technically complex materials of glass and copper alloy were decorated
rather differently from other materials which, if decorated at all, tended to be linear geometric.

The other decorative strand was a novelty: Roman imports. These opened people up to new imaginative worlds and materials: brooches decorated with silvering or tinning, pottery with shiny slips and decoration, coins and pottery with naturalistic images. Roman brooches are widespread in the area, with a preference for Romano-British styles which reflected indigenous tastes; functionally these complemented rather than supplanting massive-style ornaments. The frequency of brooches compared to massive metalwork confirms the latter were more restricted and prestigious. The impact of other materials, like samian or silver coins, is as yet harder to gauge, though in the long term such naturalistic decoration may have influenced the development of Pictish art (Hunter 2007a, 38–42).

Changes

Defining the lifespan of the massive metalwork tradition is tricky. The earliest good evidence is mid-1st century AD, and no other associations are any firmer than 1st–2nd century. It could all have been made in less than a generation, or over 150 years. There is no evidence for its manufacture or use later than the 2nd century: this fits the pattern of central British Celtic art, which is found regularly in 2nd-century contexts but rarely thereafter (Garrow and Gosden 2012, 70–9). Other sources of evidence point to major changes in the north-east in the 3rd and 4th centuries, with the end of the long-lived roundhouse tradition, often a shift in settlement location, and a general difficulty in finding where people were living and what they were doing (Hunter 2007a, 42–50). This can plausibly be linked to major (and chaotic) social and political readjustments caused by the proximity and policies of the Roman world; it is the archaeological correlate of the emergence of the Picts. The processes are much debated (e.g. Mann 1974; Hunter 2007a; Fraser 2009, 30–61), but it is worthwhile examining any material traces.

The massive metalwork tradition may have ceased, but other styles developed and new ones emerged. The best evidence for continuity comes from minor items, notably pins: the development of projecting ring-headed pins into more decorative forms, apparently in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, has long been a typological classic (Stevenson 1955, 288–92). Along with other artefact types which mostly lack these clear links to earlier traditions, they define a new suite of material culture marking new connections stretching beyond the north-east to cover northern Britain, Ireland, and into Britannia (Laing and Laing 1986; Hunter 2010a). The regionality of massive metalwork had been replaced by much more outward-looking styles, reflecting the range of contacts prioritised by these groups. There may be clear dislocation in aspects of the archaeological record, notably

Fig 35.11. Other ornamental material – glass jewellery. a, class 13 beads, Culduthel (Inverness-shire); diameter of largest, 19 mm. b, class 14 beads; clockwise from left, Aberdeenshire, Cawdor and Wigtownshire (the latter an import); diameter 12 mm. c, playing piece with spiral inlays, Birnie (Moray); diameter 11 mm. © National Museums Scotland
settlements, but material culture provides signs of continuing development. This is true also in the stylistic development of Celtic art. The significance of a small find from Culbin Sands (Moray) has been widely overlooked (MacGregor 1976, no. 289). It is most plausibly a vessel handle, but its decoration is an interesting hybrid (Fig. 35.12). The handle itself has a lentoid motif flanked by slender trumpets, familiar from the massive tradition, but the zoomorphic terminals are those of late Roman Iron Age and early Mediaeval pins and brooches (e.g. Fowler 1963, figs 1–2). In this rare survival we see the development of later styles of Celtic art from the art of the Roman Iron Age.

Discussion

The massive metalwork tradition is woven from different strands, and the variety in its fabric reflects social variety in north-east Scotland in the late and Roman Iron Age. At one level, shared styles and widespread artefact types reflect a shared identity over a large area from the Forth to the Moray Firth, but teasing typology and distribution apart shows that this is made up of smaller distributions, overlapping or complementary, which reflect different uses of the metalwork in smaller areas. North of the Mounth, along the Moray plain, (male) finger rings were the dominant type, while in Aberdeenshire it was (male) armlets. In Angus, the wider spectrum of material included female ornaments (the spiral bracelets) as well as male. Regional differences are seen in other contemporary developments, such as the building of brochs in Angus and adjacent areas, distinctive and exotic buildings often rich in indigenous and imported material culture. The link of massive metalwork to such sites is striking, though not absolute – four brochs have produced such finds, but only one souterrain in the same area. It suggests increasingly hierarchical societies in the Angus area, or some groups making a claim for control and using metalwork as a medium for this. The chronology in relation to the expanding Roman world provides a plausible context for such very visible symbols of identity, though to see them as acts of resistance is to underplay a complicated relationship with the Empire where Roman material could be accepted and used, reused, absorbed as influences and, in some contexts, rejected.

Studies of such visually rich ornaments elsewhere have rightly questioned any uncritical assumption that they necessarily represent an elite, and discussed other possibilities; for instance, they could reflect adopted roles required by the community at particular moments, such as community leader, war champion or religious guide (Garrow and Gosden 2012). I would see the massive metalwork as more directly linked to individuals, for a variety of reasons. They show extensive wear and thus extensive use, not just on special occasions, while the wear is typically more pronounced on one side, suggesting habitual (individual?) preferences. The frequent link to settlements connects them to the people who inhabited these sites, while their deposition, typically singly or in pairs, suggests a link to individuals. The rare occurrence of child- or youth-sized versions of bangles and armlets suggests a concern with inheritance and genealogy. Such concern with individual status fits wider evidence for a growing emphasis on personal ornament and other indicators of inter-personal or inter-group differentiation, from the architectural (such as brochs and enclosed roundhouses) to the material (access to restricted craft skills and other imported goods). For me, the evidence indicates that jewellery in the massive tradition was used as an indicator of personal position within a defined regional identity, a process accelerated by proximity to the Roman world. It also opens windows onto a world where, at least in some areas, men, women and children were all appropriate wearers of prestigious metalwork, a rare situation for the period.

Yet this is not to see these as absolutely rare, elite ornaments. Within their core area they are relatively common – some 18 armlets, six bracelets and 15 finger rings, with the numbers of the latter in particular growing dramatically. This is consistent with the settlement pattern of numerous small-scale house-clusters, lacking major central places such as hillforts. In the south (closer to the Roman world), the brochs developed as part of an increasingly hierarchical society, but this was not the case further north. Any ‘elites’ were small scale and potentially short-lived, as the limited lifespans of most southern brochs suggest (Macinnes 1984).

The unusual hoards – Bunrannoch and Deskford – have
highlighted other aspects of the tradition, with the deposition of material away from settlements reflecting, perhaps, some of the places and rituals which bound these groups together. This gives these decorated pieces considerable social impact, in signalling the power and position of particular people and groups, the marking of large-scale affiliations as well as local identities, and the building of links between groups in the area. Above all, artistically this was an innovative style, drawing in influences and changing them to create striking new artefacts. In this the Deskford carnyx, international in concept but north-eastern in style, is emblematic – but it fits into this wider, innovative and versatile tradition which sparked into life beyond the edges of the Roman world.

Appendix: recent finds of massive-style finger rings

Massive-style finger rings were first synthesised by Simpson (1970) and updated by Hunter (1998, 344–5; see also Hunter 2006a, 152 (Middleton, Moray)). Excavated finds from Castle Craig (Perthshire) and Leckie (Stirlingshire) will feature in the excavation reports, as will one from Clarkly Hill which awaits conservation. Recent metal-detecting finds are reported here.

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**Castle Stuart, Inverness-shire** (Fig. 35.13)

Enamelled finger ring which has seen heavy wear: the D-sectioned hoop broke in antiquity, and the double-trumpet mouldings marking the hoop-bezel junction are worn (one was slightly deformed in the casting). The single large recessed cell on the oval bezel contained a complex enamelled design, only half of which survives. Into an opaque discoloured red, slightly bubbly substrate were set multi-coloured inlays of glass. Parts of three survive, none complete. The best-preserved is a crescent or pelta, the ‘stalk’ leading into the centre lost. Uniquely, these inlays are multi-coloured and must represent the reuse of remelted pieces of glass, probably broken beads. The largest has an area of opaque white interleaved with translucent pale blue in one part, and opaque red interleaved with translucent near-clear glass in the other, suggesting the reuse of two different glass fragments. The shape of the next inlay anti-clockwise is uncertain; it may have been similar to the first, but runs to the edge of the field. It primarily comprises opaque yellow interleaved with translucent clear glass; an opaque red/clear border along one edge may have been created when it was inserted (a number of the inlays show similar border effects). Only an interleaved red/clear corner of the third inlay survives.

The overall design is unclear, but if all the attested inlays were the size of the best-preserved one then there would be room only for three; the crescentic one could be seen as an arm of a slightly irregular anti-clockwise triskele. The inlays are likely to be reused fragments of beads – such broken decorated beads would be difficult to remelt owing to the use of multiple colours, so this would be a practical way to reuse them. It is vivid testament to the technical skills of the area.

The findspot (NGR: NH 74 50) lies in the same field as a later prehistoric settlement (NMRS NH75SW 35), and it is likely to derive from this site. L 25, W 15.5, H 19 mm; enamelled area 15 × 13 mm; hoop 3.5 × 3.5 mm, internal W 18.3 mm. Treasure Trove case TT 181/12; allocated to Inverness Museum.

**Clarkly Hill, Moray**

Four rings are known from the site, three from metal-detecting (reported here) and one from excavation (still undergoing conservation). All will go to Elgin Museum in due course. (NGR: NJ 131 675.)
Fraser Hunter

1: small circular bezel with raised rim; the flat interior has a channel round the edge to assist in holding the lost enamel. Slight nicks flanking the hoop where it expands to meet the bezel create a trumpet-head effect, protruding above the bezel; they are worn and polished from use. The oval-sectioned hoop broke in antiquity. Some corrosion pitting; margins of bezel damaged. External D 23; bezel 11.5 × 14 (field D 11); H 10; internal D at least 21; hoop section 2.5 × 1.5 mm (Fig. 35.14a).

2: very pronounced double-trumpets at junction with bezel, which has openwork peltae flanking a central figure-of-eight-shaped stalk with a central shallow dot in each lobe, perhaps once enamelled. About half of oval-sectioned hoop lost. Surface heavily corrosion-pitted. Bezel L 28, W 20; H 20; internal diameter 18.9 mm (Fig. 35.14b).

3: enamelled oval bezel; edge and much of design lost. Double-trumpet mouldings at junction with lost hoop. Ring-and-dot top centre, in reserved metal; remains of a tapering field curving around the top contain translucent pale blue enamel. A further blue fragment survives on the left edge, in remains of a marginal channel, and there may be a peltate field on the right hand side, but the overall design is unclear. 22 × 13 × 5 mm; internal diameter at least 18.5 mm (not illus.).

**Coldstream, Berwickshire** (Fig. 35.14c)
Oblong openwork bezel carrying a variant yin-yang design; opposed peltaes, joined at the stalk, spiral clockwise into the bezel rim. Two conical perforations flank the stalk. Double-trumpets mark the junction of the bezel and the D-sectioned hoop. Some wear and edge-damage, but intact. External D 23 mm, H 22.5 mm, bezel; W 12.5 mm; internal D 17 × 15 mm. NGR: NT 83 39. Found by metal-detecting c.250 m ENE of a bivallate cropmark enclosure (*NMRS NT83NW 18*). NMS FA 131.

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**Abbreviations**
NMRS: National Monuments Record of Scotland

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