

The Effects of Early Christianity on Early Medieval Scottish Mortuary Practices

Auna Campbell

Research Questions:

1. How did Christianity change the mortuary practice of ancient Scottish people?
2. What defines a Christian grave?
3. What did grave look like prior to Christianity?
4. What was the religion prior to Christianity in Scotland?



Fig. 4.3.1.c. Rosemarkie 6 Pictish Stone (her.highland.gov.uk /monument/MHG8843).

Theory and Methods :

- The archaeological theory I used was Processual Archaeology Theory, or "New Archaeology" Theory
 - Created in the 1950s and 60s
 - Focuses on cultures, how they were formed and how they interact
 - Also focuses on quantitative or 'scientific' data, such as radiocarbon dates
- The methods in which I acquired the data include searching databases like:
 - Google Scholar
 - Internet Archive
 - CONSORT
 - Peer-reviewed journals
 - Excavation notes and reports
 - JSTOR
 - ProQuest EBook Central
- I also created a set of criteria to try to determine which graves were Christian, based on both modern scholars and a few historical factors

Archaeological Data:

- I examined the following sites for evidence of graves:
 - Portmahomack
 - Swainbost, Isle of Lewis
 - An Corran, Boreray
 - Galson, Isle of Lewis
 - Dunbar Town and Dunbar Golf Course
 - Winton House
- A total of 14 bodies were examined, along with graves goods, if present
- Time frame examined ranged from roughly the 1st-century BCE to 900 CE.

Location of all archaeological sites

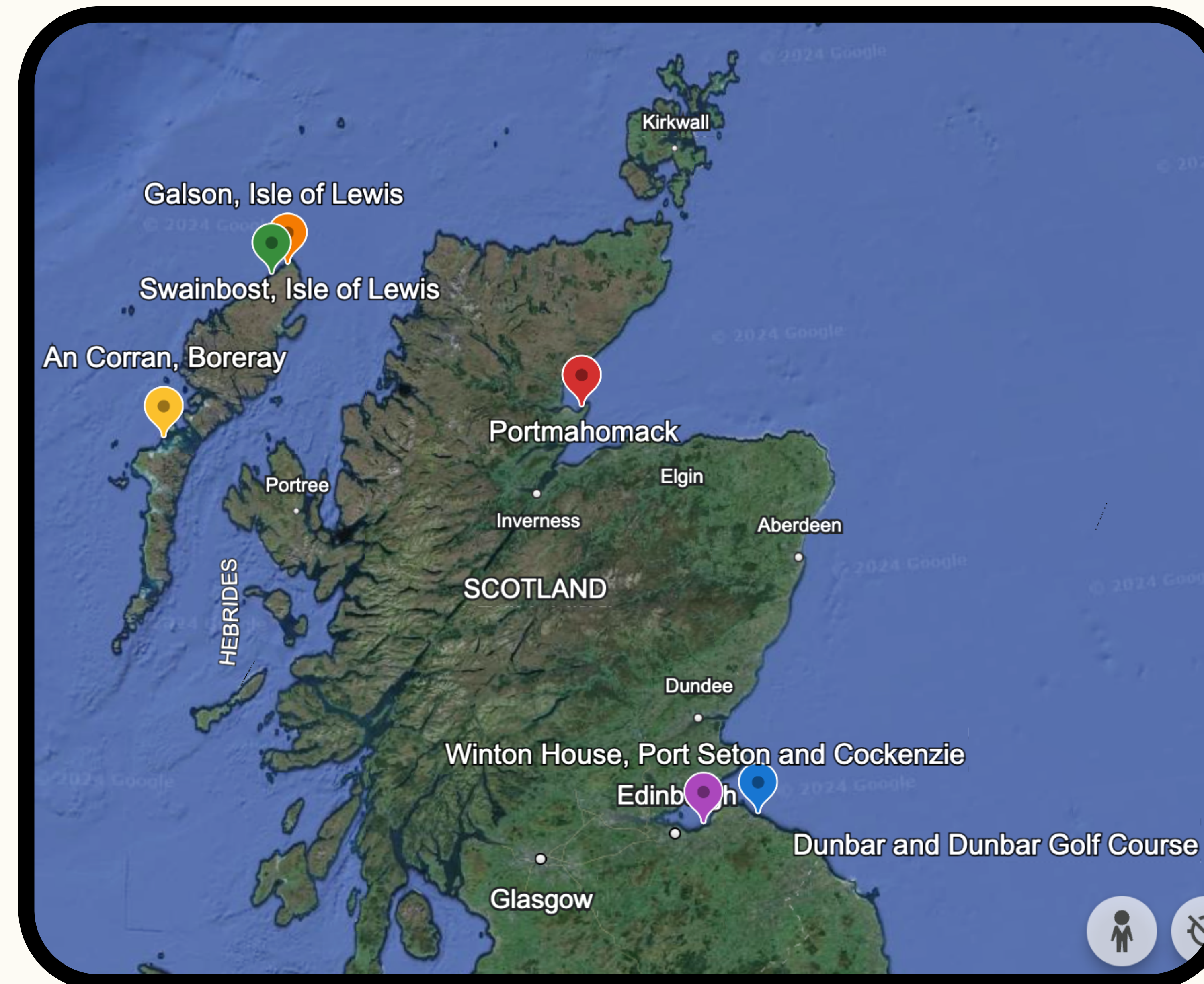
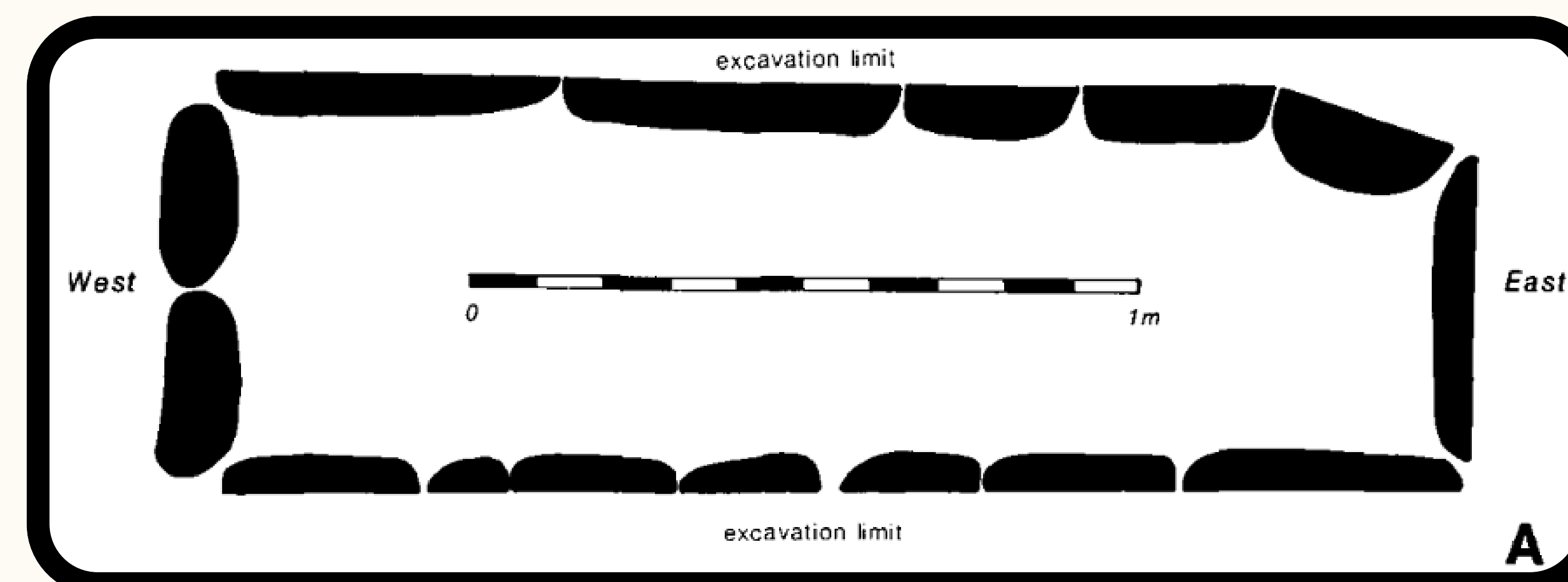


Fig. 3.2.2.c. Stone layout of Cist 2 (Ponting 1989: 94)



Historical Data:

- There was not many historical texts looking at Christian graves and the arrival of Christianity within Scotland
- A few older texts from around the 4th, 5th, and 6th-centuries which discuss Early Christian graves include:
 - *Octavius* by Marcus Minucius Felix
 - *Vita S. Antonii*, (Life of St. Anthony) by Athanasius of Alexandria
 - *De Cura Pro Mortuis Gerenda*, (On Care to be Had For the Dead) by Augustine of Hippo
- Earliest native text regarding Christian burial was a law code by King Æthelstan of England
 - II Æthelstan created in the 9th-century CE
- Modern scholars have also discussed what could make up a Christian grave, which include:
 - Christopher Sparey-Green
 - Gerard Baldwin Brown
 - Dorothy Watts
 - Charles Thomas
- Pictish Stones are the earliest monument-based evidence for Christianity
- Earliest historical texts discussing Scottish peoples include:
 - *Gallic Wars* by Julius Caesar
 - *Agricola* by Tacitus

Conclusions:

- I discussed the data I found in regards to the set of criteria I made:
 - I found that only 4 out of the 14 bodies were considered possibly Christian
 - Galson 1996 and Cist 2 from Galson, Isle of Lewis
 - Burial 128 and Burial 152 from Portmahomack
- The shift from non-Christian based graves to regulated Christian graves was much slower than originally thought
- Christianity adopted local burial practices, making it very difficult to determine which graves were Christian and which ones were not