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GLENROTHES

VOLUME FOUR 1998

A Tristram and Iseult mirror-case from Perth: reflections on the production and consumption of romance culture

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Summary

In the collections of Perth Museum and Art Gallery is a newly recognized mirror-case valve depicting Tristram and Iseult. Its history is reviewed and arguments presented dealing with its identification as a mirror-case and its iconography and general cultural significance.

Description

The object has the Perth Museum and Art Gallery accession number 2151 and comprises a single, open work, valve of a pewter mirror-case. It is oval in shape measuring 54mm (l) x 46mm (w) x 5mm (d) and weighing 15.20g. It depicts elements of the Tristram and Iseult legend based upon the lovers' tryst beneath the tree and has an accompanying Anglo-Norman inscription. The distorted and broken remains of a hinge and clasp are opposed on the top and bottom edges, partially folded against the body of the case. The back carries the remains of a white deposit. Illus 1 shows the front and back faces of the valve.

Discovery and pre-1995 analysis

The mirror-case valve was discovered in 1921, during construction work on the corner of St John's Place and King Edward Street (NGR approx NO 1184 2359) within the medieval heart of Perth and the focus of the developing burgh (see Illus 2). It was presented to Perth Museum and Art Gallery on 5 June 1921 by Mr T McLaren (Burgh Surveyor). The circumstances of its discovery are discussed in more detail below (Dating and Production).

Soon after its discovery (and probably before 1925) it was seen by Mr F C Eeles and Mr E MacLagan (Victoria and Albert Museum), who identified it as a badge or decorative plaque representing the Tristram legend, made in France in the 13th century.

By 1938 Mary Boyle (secretary to the French prehistorian Abbé Breuil) was researching the 'plaque'. Correspondence indicates she was to publish it as 'An Interesting Medallion Found in Perth' but there is no record of its publication. As part of the work for this, the then Curator of the Museum, Mr J Ritchie took the mirror-case to the British Museum where chemical tests were employed to show its composition as a lead-tin alloy (ie pewter) with no silver content. Mr Ritchie also corresponded with Sir George MacDonald on Mary Boyle's behalf. MacDonald had reported on the Perth Hoard, found 12 months earlier in the same general area as the mirror-case valve (MacDonald 1921). In a letter of 14 February 1939 Ritchie informs MacDonald that following its discovery the 'medal' was given to Balfour Paul, the Lyon King of Arms, 'to find out something relative to it', and he in turn submitted it to 'French Authorities who decided it was of French origin' (correspondence files in Perth Museum and Art Gallery).

Fresh eyes were brought to bear in the late 1980s when preparatory work for a new exhibition at Perth Museum and Art Gallery led to the opinion of Brian Spencer (then, Museum of London) being sought. He brought the mirror-case valve to the attention of Dr M Jones (Sheffield University), who produced a significant interpretation of its iconography. He identified the characters of King Mark, Tristram, Iseult, Brangain and Tristram's hound Husdent. He made some headway with the Anglo-Norman inscription, particularly the phrase ME PORTERA DE JOIE ('Will Bring Me Joy'). In concert with Prof Claude Buridant (Strasbourg University) he made little sense of the remainder. Dr Jones felt it to be 'an important piece of Anglo-French (ie made in Britain but in a French speaking milieu) Romance iconography' (see correspondence 2 March 1989, in PMAG). He doubted it was an item of jewellery and was inclined to accept it



Illus 1. The Perth mirror-case valve.

as a decorative plaque, but never saw the actual object.

In 1995 work leading to this paper commenced when one of the authors (M Hall) sought to clarify what was known of the mirror-case and shortly afterwards was approached by Prof Owen to see 'the Tristram and Iseult plaque' in pursuit of his interest in the Franco-Scottish culture of the 13th century.

Identification as a mirror-case

Examples of simpler metalwork mirror-cases in the Perth collections (Spencer, forthcoming b), other published examples (Bayley et al 1984; Egan and Pritchard 1991) and discussions with colleagues soon led to its re-identification as a mirror-case valve. Brian Spencer and Dr Ingeborg Krueger were particularly helpful and brought similar pieces from Billingsgate, London (Spencer, forthcoming a) and Regensburg, Bavaria (Krueger 1995) to our attention. Both mirror-cases depict in a similar but devolved style the same aspects of the Tristram legend as the Perth case and are discussed below (Iconography and Inscription).

Bayley et al 1984 (and Bayley 1990) discusses the survival of a white deposit on some mirror-cases, which X-ray diffraction (XRD) has shown to be calcite (calcium carbonate), ie the remains of the putty used to hold the glass of the mirror-cases in place. Traces of a white deposit are clearly evident on the back of the Perth mirror-case valve. The National Museums of Scotland kindly agreed to analyse a sample of this, using XRD and X-ray fluorescence (XRF). The work was carried out by Peter Davidson (Dept Geology and Zoology). The XRD analysis showed that the pale grey to white efflorescence was a mixture of calcite and quartz (the quartz in diminishing amounts) and the presence of calcite was confirmed by a violent reaction and total dissolution in a small drop of concentrated hydrochloric acid. XRF analysis confirmed the lead-tin alloy composition of the mirror-case and also revealed a small amount of lead (<1%) in the calcite. This could either be lead corroded out from the body of the case or a trace of the lead used as a backing for the mirror glass. The quartz is probably part of the filler in the calcite.

Iconography and inscription

The inscription of the Perth mirror-case has two elements: a circumferal inscription and two central bands bearing the names of the key protagonists.

Above the central zone occurs the name:

W A R C U I S

and below the central zone the names:

T R I S T R E W I S O U D C

In the spelling of these names the T's are represented by reversed J's and the C in Isoudc repre-

sents an E. The M's are clearly upside down. Uncommonly, there is an I in Marcuis, as there is in the more garbled version of Marcuis on the Billingsgate mirror-case. These names - Marcus, Tristrem and Isoude are all consistent with insular Anglo-Norman forms. 'Tristram' is the first name form found in English documents dated from 1189 to 1273, but the 'Tristrem' form becomes prevalent in texts by the 14th century (Malcolm Jones, pers comm; Withycombe 1977, 283). Isoude is also a 14th century form in English documents, preceded by Ysoude, Isouda and Iseuda (ibid).

The circumferal inscription is somewhat more problematical. Accepting the convention of a cross as the start it seems to commence bottom right and runs:

+ I I || R M C P O R J E R A D E
I O I E N C [L] I F A U D R A I E
S U R I E N C M C

Here, a correct J seems to represent a T (in Porjera) and the C's again represent E's.

Prof Owen translates this as two phrases (separated by ••). The first is

|| R M E P O R T E R A D E I O I E
N E L I F A U D R A .

The R and the preceding || break is problematical. If it were a malformed QI or KI (from the Anglo-Norman form KI or KOR / K'OR - 'the person who now') this would give a grammatical sentence with the meaning 'whoever will carry me of joy there will be no lack to him / her', ie 'the person who carries (wears) me will have no lack of joy'. This is a common type of medieval prophylactic phrase (cf Bruna 1996, 105 no 117 and 312 no 597) intended to avert evil and bring good luck.

The second phrase, IE SURIE NE ME, is even more of a puzzle of which no really satisfactory sense can be made. A degree of garbling seems highly likely. IE SURIE could be 'I smile' with typical A-N confusion of verb conjugations. If NE ME could be taken as NE MEN, this would be 'nor lie', making the whole read 'I am smiling nor lying'. This is clearly nonsensical. An alternative is that IE SURIE could be an Anglo-Norman form from S(e)urer, meaning 'I assure (make safe, guarantee, protect)'. This would make the NE ME difficult to explain. However, if the word order had been garbled and the R represents a B this would give IE SU BIEN EME, meaning 'I am well loved'. The phraseology is appropriate both if the mirror-case had an amuletic quality (in line with its courtly love imagery) and for a functional mirror, designed and owned to re-assure the vanity of its user when peered into. Mirrors have long been held to symbolize the truth for they cannot lie only report exactly what they see (as powerfully conveyed in the fairytale of Snow White). This honesty also makes them suitable as love tokens. A Chinese



Illus 2. Location maps showing where the mirror-case was found and places mentioned in the text. Drawn by D Munro, SUAT.

mirror from a Sarmatian burial (of 100 BC to AD 100) in Vinogradni near Rostov, Russia is inscribed 'Looking at the sunshine we will never forget each other' (Batey 1996, 26). It reminds us of the longevity of this tradition, across time and disparate cultures. The wider potency of mirror symbolism is reflected in the large number of later medieval 'speculum' (mirror) texts (including *Speculum caritatis*, *Speculum de mysteris ecclesia*, *Speculum vitae*, *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, the 13th-century *Speculum Historiale* [translated into Dutch as *Spiegel Historiale*, into French as *Miroir Historiale* and eventually published in English by Caxton as *Mirror of the World*], the works of Hildegard of Bingen and secular works such as *Le Roman de la Rose* and *The Canterbury Tales*).

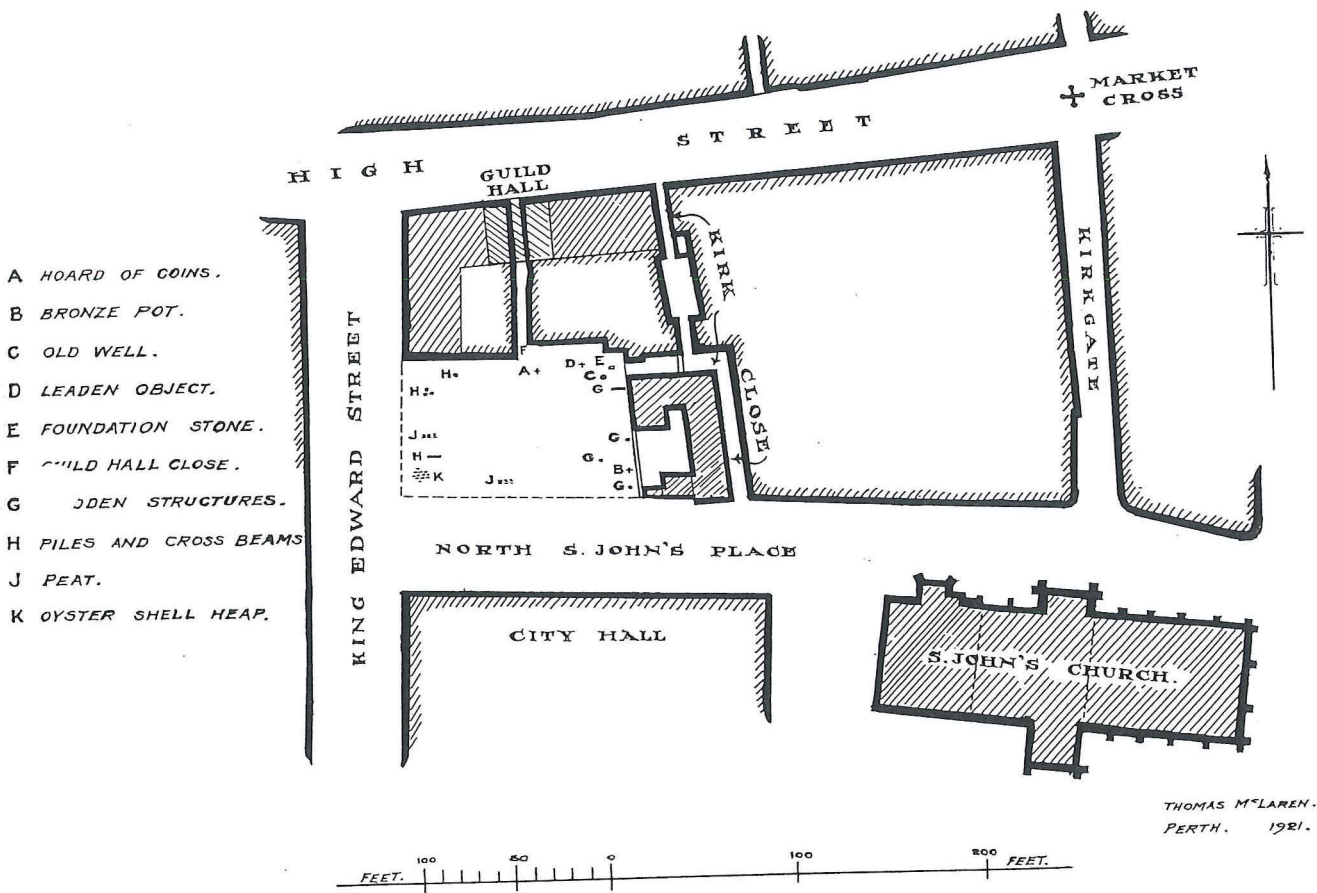
The iconography is arranged in three zones upper, middle, and lower, contained by the circumferal inscription and separated by the horizontal inscriptions.

The upper zone is largely empty (probably due to breakage). It does contain, along its lower horizontal plane (above WARCUIIS), vestiges of a design marked out in hatching. The lower zone contains a hound, facing right, between two pillars, representing Tristram's hound Husdent (or Petitru). The central zone contains, on the right, a knight on horseback advancing left, his sword raised. In front of him is a tree / post-like structure probably representing the trunk and a superimposed fountain with laver attached. John Higgitt (pers comm 1998) has reminded us that this could also be a scene-separating architectural convention (column, base, capital and springing arches). It could even represent a (garbled) mixture of the two – direct symbolism and iconographic convention. That said, the authors are satisfied that it is the tree and laver being depicted in a manner consistent with other tryst scenes (see Loomis 1938). Beyond this, on the left, are three standing figures. On the extreme left two figures stand together in an attitude of conversation; they are wearing crowns and long cloaks with long, decorated girdles. To their right the third figure wears a slightly shorter garment (close and folded) with a belt rather than a girdle. The figure's right hand is raised and holds what seems to be a goblet.

This clearly represents the tryst scene from the Tristram legend (Loomis 1938), although not in a conventional manner. It incorporates the earlier episode of the love potion in the goblet, suggesting the figure is Iseult's maid Brangain, which led indirectly to the tryst. The problem of the Brangain figure is the short tunic being worn. Usually such costume indicates a male, but not exclusively so: MS Bodl 264 fo 60r shows, at the foot of the page, two pairs of women playing board games; one woman in each pair wears apparently shorter dress. The garbling of the text on the valve has already been pointed out and perhaps the short

tunic, if it is male, is due to a similar garbling of the imagery? It also shows Tristram (the knight) approaching in a warlike manner (perhaps exhibiting his knightly qualities or perhaps to evoke his earlier heroic victories?). The tree with spring and laver is to be expected, since under it Tristram and Iseult meet. The two remaining figures are presumably Mark and Iseult as king and queen before Iseult attends her clandestine meeting. The one element of the tryst that is missing is King Mark spying on the lovers from the tree's branches. This may be what is missing from the upper zone, and the placing of the name WARCUIIS above the scene, and those of TRISTREW and ISOUDC below would seem to support this. Was the image deliberately cut out at a later date as it did not sit well with the 'lover' who owned the mirror-case? This is by no means certain. The mirror-case does not show Tristram and Iseult actually meeting and so its designer may have thought a spying Mark unnecessary. What does survive of the design in the upper zone certainly does not resemble the branches of a tree. The Perth mirror-case conflates various aspects of the legend in an inventive way, given its confined space. Such an approach is not untypical of Tristram and Iseult art. In his discussion of the Forrer Casket, Loomis (1938, 43–4, figs 19–23 esp fig 21) points out that this bone casket carved in the early 13th century follows at least three different manuscript traditions of the Tristram legend. The lid of the casket (also see Cherry 1991, plate 75) shows Mark and Iseult in bed after their marriage, with Brangain bringing the remaining love potion. The scene is shown within a Romanesque arch, flanked by two towers. Their open colonnaded lower storey suggests an architectural possibility for the empty upper zone in the Perth mirror-case valve. What does survive there could just be the base of such a tower. Something markedly similar can be observed in the Regensburg and Billingsgate cases (and see Krueger 1995, 231 and no 58, 232, fig 30 and 31). The upper zones of each has three very crude, tower-like structures, consistent with them being later devolved examples. The empty zone would then be an accidental loss not a deliberate excision. This would be entirely consistent with the blow holes and blockages typical of the intricate moulds used to manufacture such artefacts (pers comm, B Spencer 1996). There remain clear difficulties. Why towers? (Do they represent Mark's authority?) And why three? Do the Regensburg and Billingsgate cases accurately represent what may have been in the Perth mirror-case? There may be another explanation for the missing fragment. When found it was reported crumpled-up and subsequently straightened out (see below under Dating and Production). Finally, looking at the design as a whole – the text, its phrasing and the iconography – reveals that the Perth mirror-case valve could well reflect the use

EXCAVATIONS AT KING EDWARD ST. PERTH.



Illus 3a. Excavation plan.

of a more skillfully executed model. Certainly the inscription was devised by someone more literate than the maker (J Higgitt, pers comm 1998).

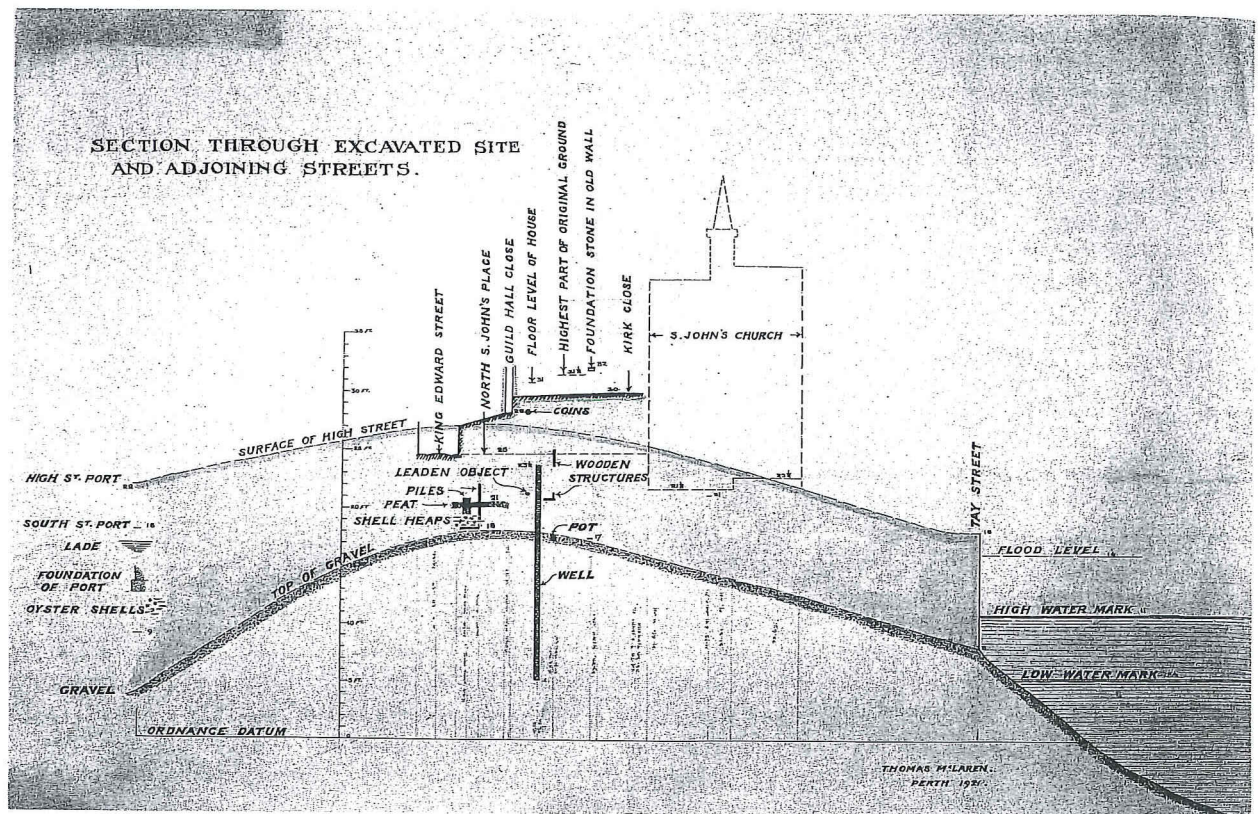
Dating and production

In trying to arrive at a date for the mirror-case three avenues present themselves: the archaeological context, the design style and the dating of other mirror-cases. All end, in varying degrees, in the 13th century.

The archaeological evidence is somewhat tentative but worth examination in some detail. The chief element is the patchily recorded excavations that took place during the construction of a new cinema near the junction of St John's Place with King Edward Street. It is clear from putting together news reports, reports made by Mr J Ritchie (Curator, Perth Museum) and the work of Mr T McLaren (Burgh Surveyor) that these were more of a salvage operation than systematic excavations. There are numerous references to material being recovered later from spoil dumps made on the North Inch. That said, a significant amount of on-site observation and recording was made by McLaren and Ritchie which has left an

important archive in the shape of two plans made by McLaren (the earliest plans in Scottish urban archaeology - see Illus 3a and b) and 8 photographs taken by Ritchie (see Illus 4a and b for two of them). McLaren (presumably) also produced a brief report entitled 'Discoveries of Perth'. It has some seemingly factual errors which indicate it may have been produced some time later - the dates 1919 and 1923 in particular do not tally with more immediate reports which indicate the construction took place between 1920 and 1921. It also records later interventions made by Ritchie. Its brevity and significance allow us to quote it in full (except for a single footnote):

Between 1919 and 1923 the ground in St John's Place between the City Hall and the High Street, Perth, which some old plans name 'Little College Yard', was being cleared with a view to erecting a Picture Palace. During excavation a number of interesting archaeological discoveries were made on this site. The ground was dug at several places to a depth of 20 feet below the present level. The lowest level showed evidence suggestive of a lake village; oak and



Illus 3b. Excavation cross-section showing mirror-case find-spot. Drawn T McLaren, 1921.

birch piles were driven in on a gravel bottom, ling bushes were doubled up and large stones weighed them down as if to form a barricade against water. Many years before a dug-out canoe had been found adjacent to this site. Built wells which had been sunk in medieval times were opened, much of the debris in the level of that age consisted of off-scourings of tanyards, parts of medieval boots and shoes, horse trappings, old iron, oyster shells etc. A bronze pot with plaited handle was also found in the vicinity as well as a hoard of XVth century coins buried probably about the early years of James IV's reign. In the same area workmen found a crumpled-up, seal-like object. A chemical analysis proved this object to be of pewter. The Curator of Perth Museum, after straightening it out submitted it to the Lyon King of Arms, J Balfour Paul, who appealed to the French authorities since the legend round it was French. They said it was XIIIth century. Later the Curator submitted it to Sir Eric MacLagan and F C Eeles of the Victoria and Albert Museum who said it obviously represents an incident in the romance of Tristram and Iseult which became part of the Arthurian cycle of romance in France in the middle ages. It is probably French work of the early part of the XIIIth century.

The 'crumpled-up seal-like object' is the mirror-case valve and this record of its condition and subsequent straightening may be a clue to its present condition. The vestiges of its crumpling and straightening are clearly evident and either event may explain the missing piece from the upper zone. We can reasonably conjecture the mirror-case valve being crumpled up after or as a result of some damage affecting the missing valve, the glass and the missing fragment. If the missing fragment had survived until the straightening of the valve it would surely have been remarked upon at the time.

In conjunction with McLaren's plans (see Illus 3) we can also use this report to construct some tentative stratigraphic relationships. The late 15th-century Perth Hoard, discovered in August 1920 (MacDonald 1921, 278-85) was found well above the mirror-case valve. The pottery, iron and leather objects were found scattered over the site, but as material typical of the 13th-15th century this is not problematical. Significantly, a single artefact is recorded at a much greater depth than the mirror-case valve. Described then as a bronze pot it is a bronze cauldron (Perth Museum and Art Gallery accession number: 1960). This is of the German / Low Countries globular type which Lewis (1978, 38) dates as generally in use from the 13th century (to the 17th century) but with the proviso that they are known from the 12th century. Whilst it could be of 13th-century or later date and have been buried in a deep pit, given our lack of knowledge



Illus 4a. St. John's Place / King Edward Street, site demolition crew, 1921.

covered in circa 1829 at a depth of 10 feet during building work in St John Street. It was originally reported in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1829, ii, 267) and the case was recently summarised by Mowat (1996, 103 [A58]), who observes that the vessel was not a log boat. It was built of bound oak planks, fastened with copper rivets and included a leather rope. It seems highly likely that this was in fact a medieval boat. Beneath it were the remains of willows and water-loving shrubs. Was this perhaps buried in situ when the water-front land was extended by in-filling? What we know of the vicinity's archaeology thus supports a 13th-century date for the mirror-case valve and the dating of other mirror-cases.

The Victoria and Albert Museum suggested an early 13th-century date for the mirror-case but no detail of this attribution survives. A fresh examination moves us closer to it.

The costumes of the figures depicted include long, close, folded garments, lengthy girdles, a slightly shorter female (?) dress and a simply attired horse: all are consistent with a 13th-century date. Most significant in this respect however is the Tristram figure. He is dressed as a knight of the early to mid-13th century. He has chain mail (including a hauberk) encompassing the whole of his body, wears a flat-topped great helm and carries a small shield and a broad sword. Similar attire can be found depicted in other artistic media which help to confirm this date. Examples include:

- The Chertsey Abbey tile of Richard I charging Saladin, mid-13th century [Cherry 1991, plate 30 and Eames 1980 – design 468]
- The battle scene from the Maciejowski Bible of c 1250 [f 10, m 638 Pierpont Morgan Library as figured in Pierce 1990, plate 13]
- The Crusader Knight from a 12th-century wall painting at Arienes Church [Hallam 1986, 79 top right]
- The Effigies of Knights in the Temple Church of St Mary London [Egan and Pritchard 1991, plate 132]
- The Silver Seal Matrix of Robert Fitzwalter (d.1235) [Cherry 1991, 1]
- Bronze seal matrix of Finn Gautsson of Mel, Sunnhorland, Bergen, Norway (signatory to the Treaty of Perth 1266) [Glendinings Auction Catalogue – Ancient, English and World Coins and Historical Medals 2 Oct 1996 London, no 490, p 28, plate VII and cover].
- Three Ivory Chess Knights, [cat 146–8 in Alexander and Binski 1987, 253–4]

The impression of a 13th-century date is confirmed if we look at the dating evidence of

f the stratigraphy we could see it as of 12th-century date, helping to confirm the stratigraphic dating of the mirror-case valve.

What, however, are we to make of the supposed lake village remains? Here we must turn to more recent excavations in this part of Perth, of which there have been several: King Edward Street Bowler et al 1995, 931–8; Blanchard and Ross 1987, 102–110 High Street (Cachart 1988 (unpubl)); (unpubl), 86–100 High Street (Blanchard 1987, 8–45) and 80–86 High Street (Moloney and Coleman, 1998). The 80–86 High Street excavations are particularly pertinent as they revealed a wattle-ditched enclosure which may have defined an enclosure round an early church. From the mid- to late 12th century this ditch was back-filled and in the mid- to late 13th century substantial timber structures were built. Small-scale multi-craftworking was also testified, including metal-working, leather working and bone working. What McLaren described as '... oak and birch piles ... lining bushes doubled up and larger stones weighed them down ...' clearly represent a continuation of the medieval ditch and timber structures. At 80–86 High Street these buildings were dated, in their first phase, to the late 12th to early 13th century, following the back-filling of the ditch (Moloney and Coleman, forthcoming). What for McLaren confirmed a prehistoric date – a prehistoric log boat – in reality confirms a medieval re-interpretation. The boat McLaren refers to was dis-



Illus 4b. Part of the site where the mirror-case was found, St. John Street / King Edward Street.

other metal mirror-cases. The generally accepted view of these is that they were introduced in the mid-13th century (Bayley et al 1984; Spencer, forthcoming b; Egan and Pritchard 1991). Similarly French ivory mirror-cases, though much more sophisticated, do not appear until the 13th century (Koechlin 1924; MacGregor 1985, 99, which also makes reference to cheaper composite bone mirror-cases). The two most direct parallels for the Perth mirror-case, from Billingsgate and Regensburg, do not come from closely dated contexts but have suggested dates of the late 13th-14th century (Billingsgate – Spencer, forthcoming a), and 12th-14th century (Regensburg – Krueger 1995, 231 footnote 58). Krueger (ibid, and footnote 59) accepts a 13th-century date for both on stylistic grounds. Both pieces are neither as complete nor as well executed as the Perth mirror-case and their inscriptions are much more garbled and illegible. On the Regensburg example, a semblance of the names Marcus, Tristram and Iseult appears above and below the central zone, as on the Perth example, and there is an illegible circumferal inscription. On the Billingsgate example the names again appear but this time they are upside down

and in different positions. MARCUI:S (with the S reversed) appears below the central scene whilst TRISTREIW: ISOVD (with the first S retrograde and the V inverted) appears above the scene. There is no circumferal inscription and the layout is further altered by the 3 figure group on the left in the Perth example now being on the right. The single figure (of Tristram) on the right of the Perth example is now a gap on the left of the Billingsgate piece. It does seem fair to see them as degenerate in comparison to the Perth piece, perhaps influenced by its type and so later in date. There is, of course, the possibility that all three were influenced by a more precious example / examples in circulation (precious metal mirror-cases were certainly circulating by the close of the 12th century, see Zarnecki et al [1984] 252, cat 255).

In looking at the production of the mirror-case valve several lines of enquiry open up. It is, as stated above, composed of a lead-tin alloy and was clearly cast in a mould typical of the sort used for lead pilgrim badges (for example Spencer 1990 and 1987, cat 451). It also displays a striking similarity with the start and break conventions and the abbreviations typical of those used by engravers of

s and coin dies, and the depiction of Tristram be seen as typical of the way knights were worn on noble seals of the 13th century. This argues for the involvement of a skilled craftsman, not accepting some degree of illiteracy (see below). Other aspects of the production (for example a ghost A in WARCUIIS, perhaps due to a stiffening of the mould in an attempt to improve the spacing of the letters) perhaps suggest the hand of an apprentice. If the upper zone is absent due to a casting fault then there clearly are problems with the piece, at least intermittently, though any problems do not seem to have prevented the piece going into production. The casting fault could have been such that it made the piece weak, resulting in the dropping out of the upper zone during use rather than in production. Interestingly, the mirror-case retains some of its original patina indicating it was used rather than discarded as unsatisfactory.

Can we deduce anything of its place of origin from its production. Could it have been made in Perth itself? Or was it made elsewhere in Britain or the Continent? The Anglo-French inscription is seen as strongly indicative of an insular origin; of course, craftsmen, like their skills, were international (Campbell 1991, 130; Stevenson 1988), and presumably open to international commissions, though this would seem to be less likely for such mass produced items. It seems then appropriate to review what we know of metal-working in Perth.

To date there is no direct evidence from Perth of the working of pewter, though there is plentiful evidence for the working of most other metals – including gold and silver – and the moulds from the High Street excavation (1975–77) for casting of pewter alloy trinkets are of the type that could have been used for the mirror-case (Holdsworth 1977, 157–8; Spearman 1988, 134–47, esp 144–5 and references; Bogdan, forthcoming). The operation of a variety of metal-working crafts is supported by documentary references in the late 12th to early 13th century. They include, Henry the Bald, a goldsmith (Scone Liber, no 82, 86, 45; Duncan 1973, 46) Baldwin the Lorimer a Fleming (RSSi, no 1; Duncan 1973, 37) and William the helmet-maker (RRSii, 471–2). In addition, well over 1,000 metal artefacts have been recovered from Perth excavation sites, or as stray finds (including a water brooch fragment from St John Street). Whilst some were clearly not made in Perth – e.g. grim badges of St Thomas of Canterbury, Our Lady of Walsingham and St John the Baptist at Ayr – many others were. It would be very surprising if the ability to work pewter were the only craft absent from Perth. In the 12th and 13th centuries Perth underwent an economic boom as one of Scotland's leading burghs and it contained a large number of flourishing industries, providing

finished goods for local consumption and export (Yeoman 1995, 69–84). In addition it enjoyed a good deal of royal and ecclesiastical patronage (Duncan 1973; Duncan 1975; 467–71, 475–7; Anderson 1922, 138). Given the large number of wealthy burgesses and the constant comings and goings of high-ranking members of society there was clearly a market for a wide range of products across all social classes. In addition, in Scotland generally there was a plentiful supply of the basic raw material – lead, e.g. from Sillerholes, West Linton, Lothian. Clearly, Perth had the craft potential to produce the mirror-case, but there is insufficient evidence to prove that it did. That it is an insular product though is supported by the wider study of pewter and copper-alloy mirror-cases.

Bayley et al, (1984) (followed by e.g. Allason-Jones et al 1986 and Spencer 1992) looks at the distribution of mirror-cases in Britain (including a number of identical punch decorated types, in gun metal, one of them found in Perth – see also Spencer, forthcoming b) and suggests that the common traits displayed indicate their possible production at the same workshop in the Low Countries or SE England, in the 13th century. Bayley and Spencer detail a significant amount of evidence to indicate the general availability of mirror-cases from the mid-13th century. A number of illuminated manuscripts and written records indicate Continental usage and production, particularly in France and Flanders. Krueger (1990) pushes the dates for the production of mirror-glass (not necessarily mirror-cases) back into the 12th century and adds Germany as a manufacturing centre. The conclusion of Bayley and Spencer is that into the early 14th century the growing popularity of mirror-cases was sustained by imports. Thus, a ship's cargo from the Low Countries arriving in London in 1384 included 1,000 mirrors. Egan and Pritchard (1991, 365) support this and indicate that the production of mirrors itself (by 'mirrorers') is not visible in the written record until the 14th century. Biddle and Hinton (1990, 654) note a record of commodities from Brugge on route to London being confiscated at Sluis in 1371, including two tuns (4,480lbs) of mirrors. These references are to mirrors (i.e. the glass) not mirror-cases. A possible production centre for cases in Britain, the quantity of glass being imported and the position of Perth in an extensive trading network (Stevenson 1988; Ditchburn 1988; Yeoman 1995) do add weight to an insular production for the Tristram and Iseult mirror-case valve.

The final aspect of production to be discussed here is the level of literacy displayed. Engravers, either seal-makers or goldsmiths, are known to have worked across a variety of media if inscriptions needed to be cut. If such a skilled crafts-

person had produced the Perth mirror-case could we have expected a more intelligible inscription? If, as discussed above, the maker was copying his text (perhaps a pewterer using inscriptions made by a goldsmith or sealmaker) then the answer is no. But we can probe deeper than this. All three Tristram and Iseult mirror-cases exhibit varying levels of illiteracy. J G Callander (1924, 105), in his discussion of inscribed jewellery of the 14th century in Scotland, notes 'That the engravers of these inscriptions were quite illiterate craftsmen is evident, as it is very seldom that all the words are correctly spelt. Inverted and contorted letters and mis-spelt and reversed words are of frequent occurrence.' It is tempting to expect cheap, mass-produced items such as these mirror-cases to automatically exhibit the illiteracy of their makers. But at this time illiteracy was applicable across all levels of society (Clanchy 1993, 224 ff; for developing lay literacy, Parkes 1991, 275-97). Craftsmen in lead and pewter, like other craftsmen (eg seal-makers, see Heslop 1987, 114-7) were capable of working across a whole range of products. This was a world aware of the importance of words regardless of individual literacy. In this, Christianity was a key influence (from the Prologue of St John's Gospel we have 'In the beginning was the Word the Word was the true light ... the Word was made flesh ...', see Jones 1968). Indeed, the control of writing, ie the Word of God, enabled the Church to legitimise both its temporal and spiritual power. Only the Church could lead people to salvation (Schmitt 1983, 177), the main basis of a pervasive 'clerical culture'. But the Word went hand-in-hand with the image, each authenticating the other. Where the two are combined we have both the words and the image of these words made flesh (see also Camille 1987, 34-5). Such mirror-cases would have been made and owned by literate and illiterate alike: for both they would have carried this double, reinforcing message. This example is secular, but initially this type of juxtaposition may have been heavily influenced by the growth in the use of the written text, particularly by the Church. More popular, folk or vernacular culture was often in opposition to this clerical culture (eg gaming was frowned upon, as were romance tales and presumably such material culture as this mirror-case) though the two 'cultural poles' had a more complex relationship than simple direct opposition (see Schmitt 1983, I). This vernacular culture influenced by the written word remained largely oral and thus primarily based on drama, song, story-telling, puppetry etc, with a gradual evolution from oral traditions to more courtly, literate and elite versions of legends and stories. Through its material, iconography and inscriptions the Perth mirror-case can be linked to the huge amount of mass-produced cheap jewellery of the late 12th to 15th centuries. They show

that the mass of ordinary folk who were using this jewellery were familiar with the themes depicted (otherwise they would not have been made) and that they were a key way in which knowledge was popularised and disseminated in the later Middle Ages. The production and dating of the Perth mirror-case is further evidence of this and the way material culture fused and arbitrated between oral and literate culture.

The culture of romance

The final aspect of the Perth mirror-case to discuss here is the illumination it offers on the extent of Franco-Scottish culture in the 13th century. Romances (from the French *roman*, 'vernacular') were essentially tales of love and chivalry, which came to be preferred to the feudal epic. Tristram and Iseult, whose story was loosely linked to the Arthurian cycle, became recognized as ideal lovers. The popularity of their story ensured their depiction on a wide variety of artefacts, including bone and ivory caskets and mirror-cases, misericords, leather shoes, embroideries, tiles, wall paintings, manuscripts and metalwork (many are discussed in Loomis 1938; for the shoes see Meuwese 1996, 159 and note 35; Vandenbergh 1973, 205-23, fig). The earliest surviving Tristram romance, in French showing Anglo-Norman features, is believed to be the incomplete version by Thomas, who probably composed it in England c 1160. French romances are known to have circulated in Scotland, and one, the Romance of Fergus (a skit by 'Guillaume le Clerc' on the Grail legend), may have been produced by Bishop Malvoisin of Saint Andrews for William the Lion's entourage (see Owen 1991, intro; Owen 1997).

The genesis of the Tristram legend can be traced to myths woven around the Pictish name of Drostan (or Drystan). Folk etymology eventually changed the name to Tristan via transmission through old French sources that associated it with the French 'triste' (Latin 'tristis'); both meaning 'sad', a reference to the tragic fate of Tristram. Drostan's name survives on one of the stones in the St Vigeans (near Arbroath, Angus) collection of Pictish sculpture (see Clancy 1993, 345-53 for the most recent evaluation). The name also occurs in the story of the landing in Ireland of the six sons of Cruithne where he is one of the sons and spelt variously as Drostan and Trostan. This Irish thread has been detected in the early development of the legend. Coghlan (1991, 206-9) suggests that the Irish tale of Diormaid and Gráinne was combined with the Pictish tale of Drust son of Taloran and a derivative Irish episode (in the Wooing of Emer) to give a Pictish combination Drust saga. This was further developed in Wales, Cornwall and Brittany, with the medieval romance of Tristram then being developed by various writers including

Inomas (see above), Beroul, Eilhart and, later, Gottfried von Strassbourg. Later versions appeared in Norway, Spain and Italy. Dryston son of Tallwch (possibly from the Pictish Talorc) is briefly referred to in the Mabinogion as a member of King Arthur's Council of Advisers (Hanks and Hodges 1990, 323). Other Arthurian matter has strong local associations in Tayside. In Meikle, Perthshire, one of the several important Pictish sculptures (Meikle 2) has been long associated with the legend of Vanora (Guinevere) whom Arthur sentences to be torn apart by wild beasts for supposed infidelity with Modred (Ritchie 1995, 2-3). Between Meikle and Coupar Angus stood the (now lost) Arthur's Stone and near Stirling is Arthur's O'on. These sites and legends help confirm a Celtic background for some later Romance legends including Arthur, a subject discussed in the detail elsewhere (for example, Loomis 1926; Padel 1994, 1-31; McHardy 1984, 33-8).

Tristram, now firmly part of the Arthurian cycle, makes a return to fertile Perthshire soil in the 12th to 13th century with surviving documents indicating a further manifestation of Tristram's popularity. Gilbert, Earl of Strathearn (1171-1223) had his foundation charter (of AD 1200) for Inchaffray Abbey witnessed by one Tristram, Laird of Gorthy. Between 1200 and 1220, his son, also Tristram, witnessed other charters of Earl Gilbert (LIM, 1847, XXIV, XXVII, 8,12,64). In 1266 an agreement between Trestram de Gortyn and Alan Abbot of Inchaffray, allowed Trestram his right to a chapel at Gorthy (Black 1946, 779; LIM 1847, 46). Black claims the name Tristrem or Tristram continued to be used by the Gorthy family for nearly 400 years. Earl Gilbert's first wife, Matilda (daughter of William de Abigni, Count of Aberle) was French and it has been suggested that Tristram may have reached Strathearn in her train. The earl's second wife, whom he married c 1210, was named Yseult and she was the sister of two Norman knights in Strathearn (Duncan 1975, 447-52; Ritchie 1952, 161).

The earldom of Strathearn was one of the oldest in Scotland, arising out of the division of Fortriu, one of the seven provinces of the new kingdom of Alba, in existence by the close of the 9th century. Watson (forthcoming) has convincingly shown how this old Celtic lordship clung to its Celtic way of doing things whilst taking what suited from new Anglo-Norman (feudal) innovations. By the mid-13th century many of the key families of Strathearn were incomers, including Tristram of Gorthy. These men assumed Celtic offices (eg *rennnaire*, or food-dividers) and quickly adopted the names of their lands as surnames. They were readily assimilated as were elements of their culture (witness the mirror-case valve). Of course, this may not have been difficult in a powerful, independent lordship in a region that gave birth

to Tristram. What may at first seem like imported French / Anglo-French culture could equally be seen as contributing to a renascent Scottish culture, both combining in a Franco-Scottish culture. This type of fusion and cultural mix has been discussed for other regions, most recently Ireland. Deevy (1997, 73-81) shows how Anglo-Norman and Gaelic societies within Ireland influenced the use and form of jewellery with '... some social groups deliberately portraying themselves as part of wider European culture,' (ibid, 73).

Whilst at present it is not possible to prove any tangible connection between the Strathearn Tristrams and the Perth mirror-case, they were operating in a shared cultural milieu. Whilst the dating is feasible, the status of the Strathearn Tristrams perhaps argues against them possessing such cheaply made pewter items. Sumptuary laws in England and in Scotland indicate that by 1450-1500 the wearing of jewellery was a matter of rank (Cherry 1987, 177; Hinton 1982, 20-1 and 1992, 327-9; Strachy et al 1767-1832; Luders et al, 1810-1828; H H General, 1875). Imitative jewellery in non-precious metal would have expressed a desire for social improvement as well as serving as symbols of personal social relationships (cf Deevy 1997, 81; Hinton 1993, 329). Whilst the Perth mirror-case is not strictly jewellery it obviously has a parallel function and nobility seem more likely to have used the more sophisticated ivory mirror-cases (some of which also depicted Tristram designs). Although the manufacture of the mirror-case valve is not sophisticated, its iconography is, particularly in its conflating elements of the Tristram legend around one key scene and enabling this to act as a broader metaphor for courtly love and romance culture, in a popular vein. Nevertheless, and somewhat contradictorily, the mirror-case is more of a status object than say a simple badge or pilgrim souvenir. It is neither provable nor impossible that it was possessed by a member of the earl of Strathearn's retinue (female or male), possibly one of the Strathearn Tristrams, or someone in their household. The proximity of their estate to Perth gave them a ready opportunity to participate in the marked level of material culture consumption taking place in Perth at this time. The very large amounts of imported pottery and metal artefacts and waste recovered from Perth excavations are more significant than for comparable excavations from other British sites (pers comm, Geoff Egan and Robert Will) indicating a consumer boom of staggering proportions, participated in by every level of society, within the urban environment and its more rural hinterland. Participants would have included, of course, the owner of the property on which the mirror-case was found: a key burgh plot on the High Street. Well-to-do burgess or aspiring craftsman plying

his trade: the mirror-case would be well within the orbit of possession of either. The real importance of the 'Strathearn Tristrams' and the Perth mirror-case being in Perthshire in the same broad time-frame is in illustrating how romance imagery permeated society. The Perth mirror-case shows how that imagery, springing from oral culture, was a part of popular iconography. Both show that 12th-13th-century Scotland was no cultural back-water but vibrantly in tune with European cultural tastes.

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Abstract

Questions of production, iconography, dating and consumption are discussed in relation to a newly recognized mirror-case in the collections of Perth Museum and Art Gallery.

Keywords: Tristram and Iseult, mirror-case, medieval