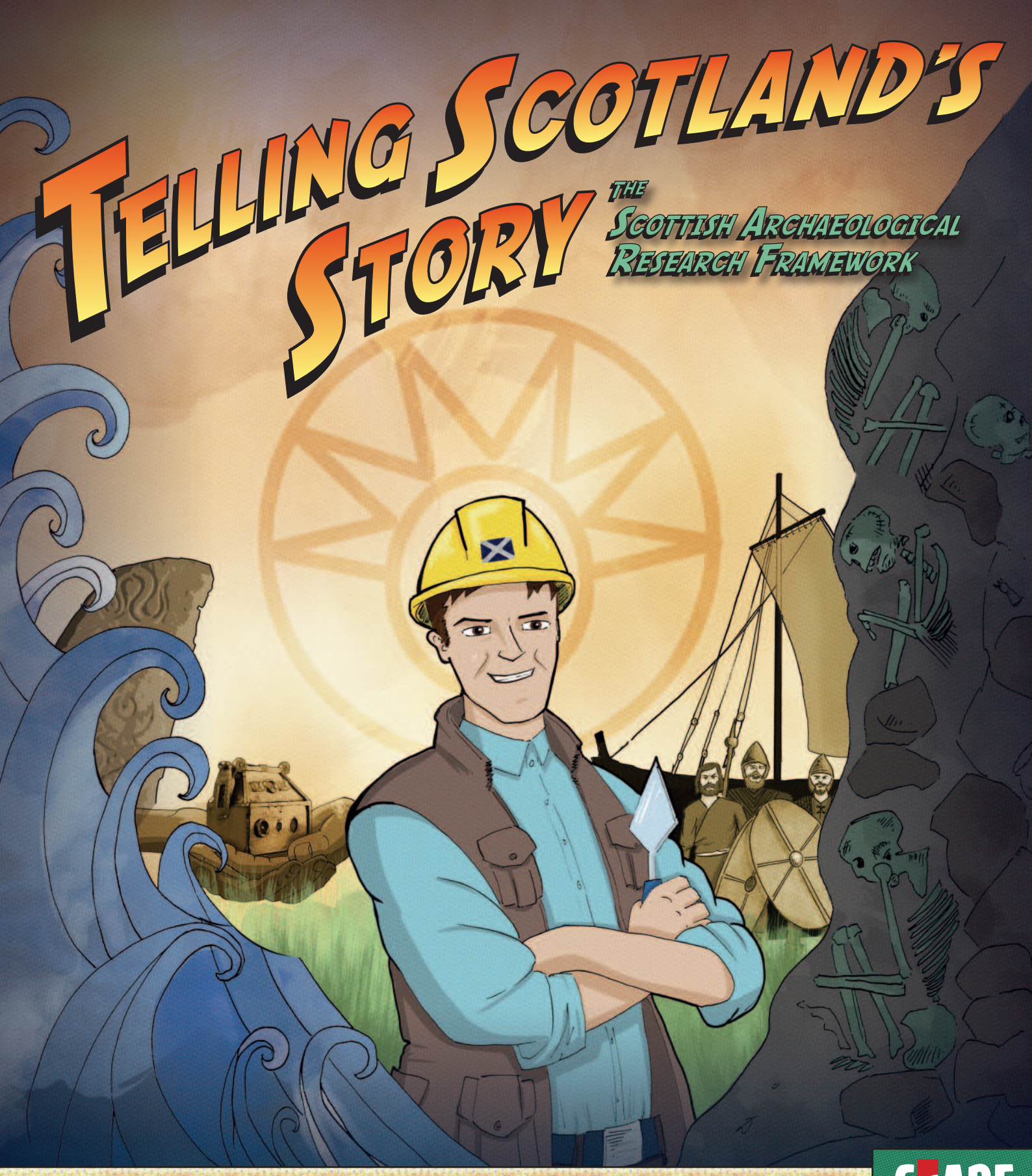
Telling Scotland's Story

The Scottish Archaeological Research Framework



SO YOU THINK YOU KNOW THE STORY OF SCOTLAND?

SCARF

Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

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Introduction

The Scottish Archaeological Research Framework

So you think you know the story of Scotland?

Eight thousand years ago, after the collapse of the Norwegian coastal shelf known as the 'Great Edge', a gigantic tidal wave devastated the east coast of Scotland, the beginning of a process that would see an entire landscape submerged beneath the North Sea.

Around 1600BC, in a tiny village on the Hebridean island of North Uist, a series of human body parts preserved in peat were reassembled as part of an arcane ritual. These would become some of the earliest mummified remains ever found in the British Isles.

In the second century AD, on the site of what is today a public park in Musselburgh, the disciples of a mysterious Roman religion — for a time as popular as Christianity — met in an underground temple to worship at the altar of a bull-slaying god called Mithras.

On 6 April 1520, on the snow-clad banks of the River Fyris near the Swedish town of Uppsala, an army of Scottish soldiers fought and died for the cause of the Danish crown. Their dismembered bodies were discovered five centuries later, buried in a mass grave beneath a cycle path.

ARE YOU SURE?

Telling Scotland's Story

THE PAST DOES NOT STAND STILL. AND SO THE STORY OF SCOTLAND – THE REAL STORY – FOR EVER CHANGES.

Some 14,000 years ago, as the glaciers of the last Ice Age melted away, people ventured northwards to hunt and explore. These were our earliest ancestors — nomads who moved with the seasons through a wild land, and left only the faintest of traces behind.

But we can still find them, if we look hard enough.

Buried beneath earth and sand, we have discovered the places where those ancient hunters first landed and set up camp. We have found flint arrowheads and barbed spear tips shaped from deer antler, millennia-old cooking pits and piles of discarded animal bone. We can stand on the same ground and look the ghosts of our ancestors in the eye.

WE CAN GIVE THE STORY OF SCOTLAND A BEGINNING.

Today, across the landscapes of the nation, archaeologists continue to search for the many different threads of this one story. They are digging in remote island caves, excavating beneath buildings in our modern cities, and diving in the dark waters of our lochs. New technology is revolutionising the study of the past. Ground penetrating radar can detect long lost structures hidden in the earth, and laser scans can produce 3D models of entire landscapes and even reconstruct individual faces from human skulls.

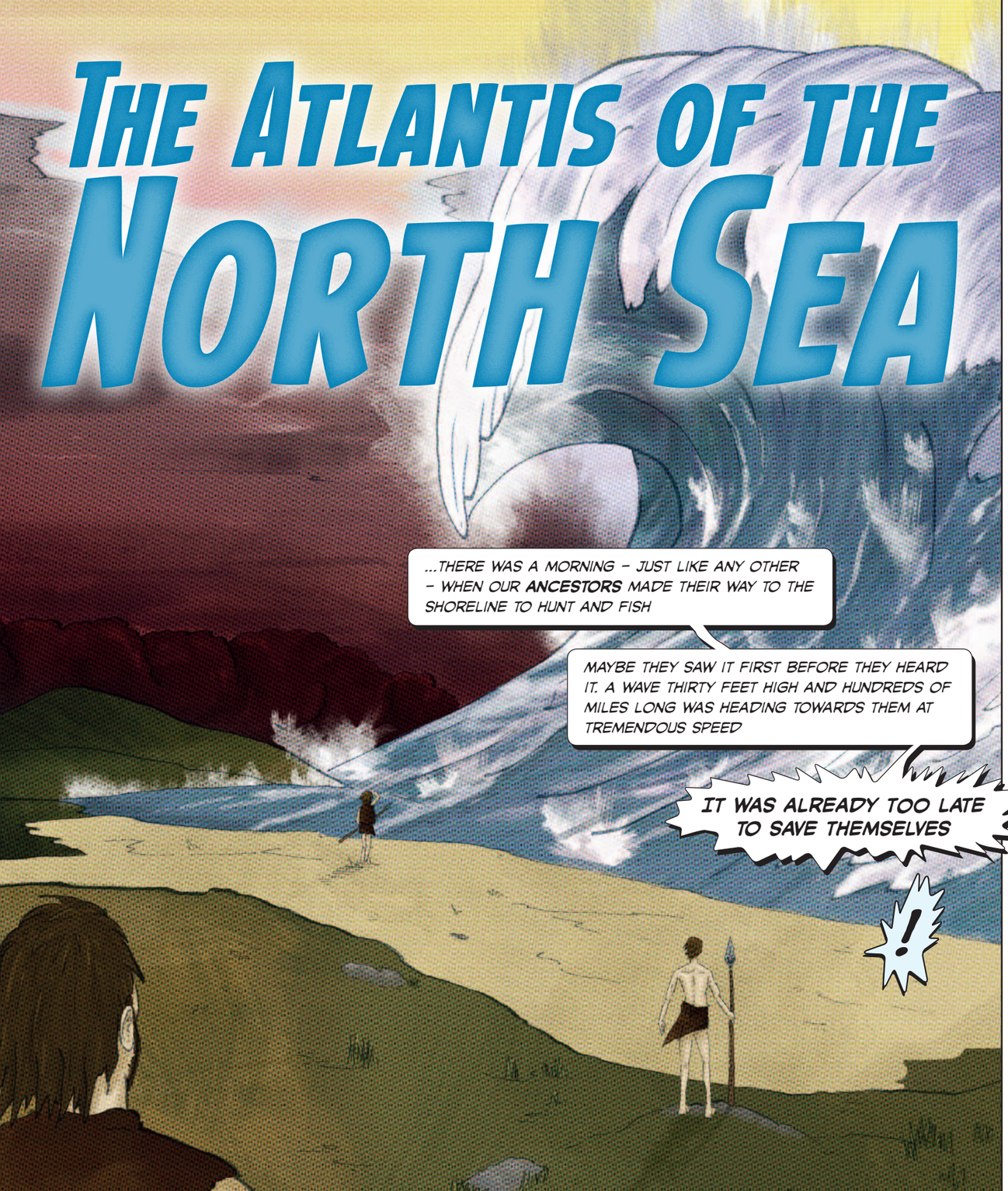
Now, for the first time, the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (ScARF) is bringing together the combined knowledge of all our experts in one place.

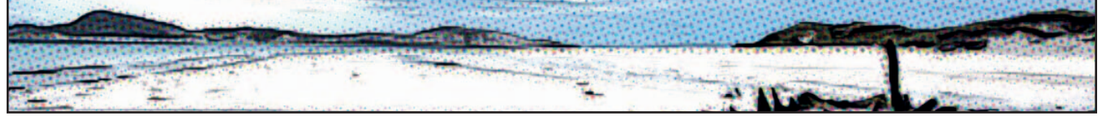
But this is just the first step. ScARF also marks the beginning of something even bigger. Spanning millennia — from the earliest known traces of human activity to the present day — it is attempting nothing less than the mapping out of the history of Scotland in its entirety.

The goal is to explore the uncharted territory of what we do not know — to fill in the blanks in the collective memory of Scotland and to better understand how we lived 100, 1,000, and even 10,000 years ago. It is about asking questions, encouraging research and argument, and puzzling out our past from every new fragment of evidence.

IT IS A MILLION STORIES WAITING TO BE TOLD, AND IT IS ONE STORY. IT IS THE STORY OF SCOTLAND.

The Atlantis of the North Sea





IMAGINE YOU ARE WALKING ON THE DUNES OF MONTROSE BAY, OR ALONG THE GOLDEN EXPANSE OF SAND BY ABERDEEN'S FAMOUS BEACH BALLROOM. IT IS A SUNNY SUMMER'S DAY AND FAMILIES ARE PLAYING BY THE SHORELINE. PERHAPS YOU ARE AT THE WATER'S EDGE, TROUSERS ROLLED UP AS YOU DIP A TOE IN THE SURF.

Then, all of a sudden, the tide rushes away from you at a remarkable speed. Soon, everyone on the beach has stopped what they are doing. Just like you, they are staring over the wet sands towards the disappearing North Sea. The wind picks up, blowing into your face from offshore. Maybe you see it first, before you hear it — a great white line on the horizon. But soon you have to shout to be heard above the roar. A wave 30 feet high and hundreds of miles long is heading towards you at tremendous speed. It will break on the beach and then surge inland, devastating everything in its path. It is already too late to save yourself or anyone near you.

This sounds like the stuff of nightmares. Surely it couldn't happen in Scotland. Or could it? Chillingly, archaeology tells us that it already has.

Some 8,000 years ago, Scotland was a ridge of mountains marking the north-western edge of Europe. To the east, a vast, low-lying plain stretched from Aberdeen to Denmark — an abundant heartland for hunter-gatherers. Slowly but surely, however, this land was disappearing. Sea levels had continued to rise since the end of the last Ice Age, and with every passing year more hunting grounds were lost beneath the water. Over time, this gradual process may well have isolated Britain from the rest of the continent. But what we now believe is that it was not just climate change that helped to create the island we are part of today — it was also catastrophe.

All along the east coast of Scotland, thick lines of sand sediment have been found layered in the earth far above sea level. There are deposits in Shetland, the Montrose Basin and even 50 miles inland along the Firth of Forth. Carbon dating of plant material from the sediments clusters around one specific date — 6100BC.

There was a morning — just like any other — when our ancestors made their way to the shoreline to hunt and fish. And they had no idea that, hundreds of miles away across the sea, a gigantic shelf of Norwegian bedrock known as Storegga — Norse for the 'Great Edge' — had collapsed into the Atlantic.

The tidal wave it triggered caused the greatest natural disaster northern Europe has ever known. Shetland was engulfed first, before the immense wall of water smashed into Scotland's east coast. But the greatest casualty was the land at the centre of the peninsula. When the wave subsided it was never the same again. Instead, like a prehistoric Atlantis, much of it was lost for ever beneath the waters of the North Sea.

In the last hundred years, strange fragments from this drowned world have been brought back to the surface. Mammoth ivory, lions' teeth and bones of 'woolly' rhino have been found tangled in fishermen's nets. Dredged lumps of peat have concealed harpoons fashioned from deer antler, fish prongs and flint tools. Archaeologists now call the place that these artefacts came from 'Doggerland' — after the famous shipping forecast region of the Dogger Bank.

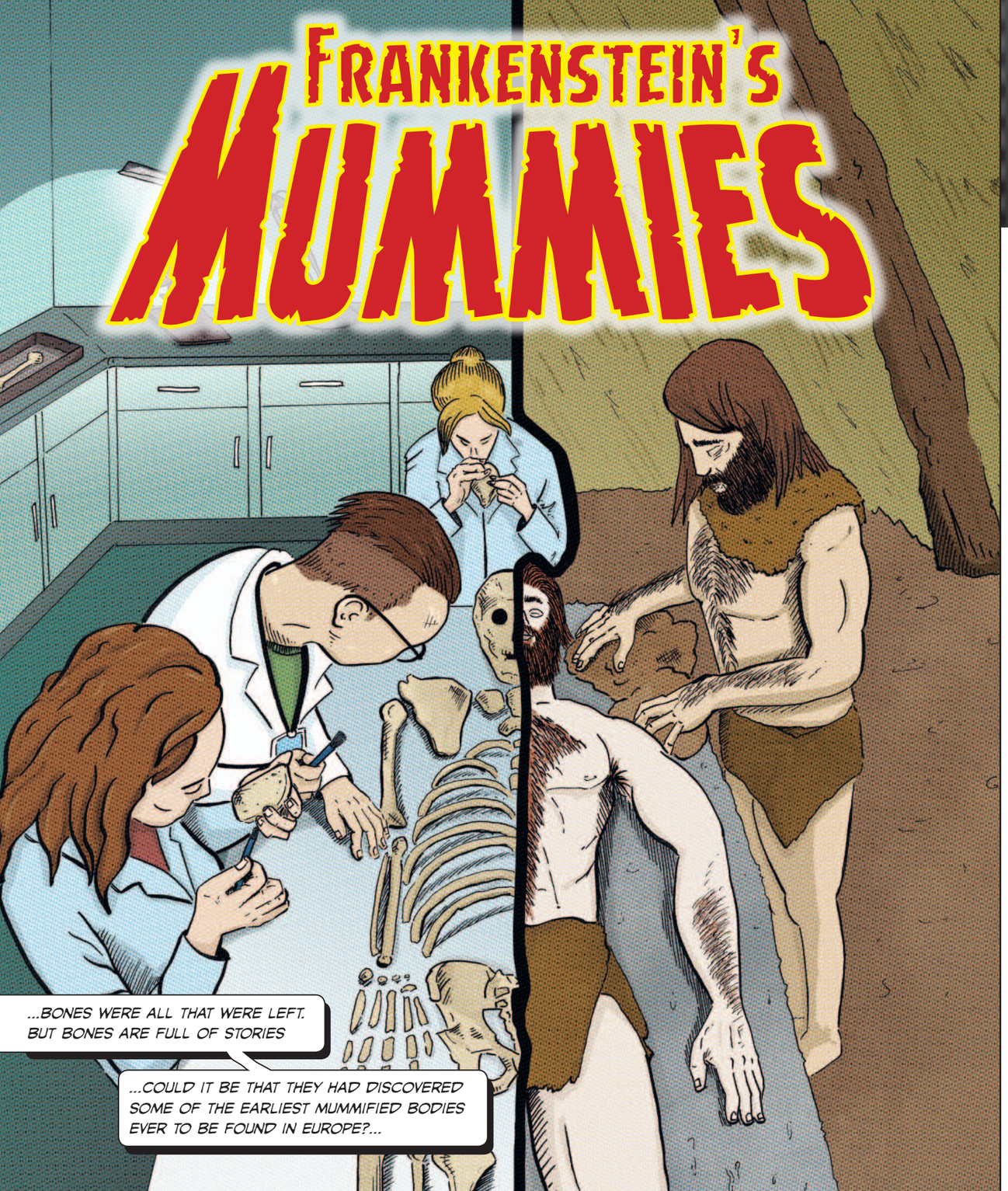
Over the past few decades, companies prospecting for oil and gas have, in minute detail, surveyed, probed and bored large tracts of the North Sea floor. Now, by using this data, scientists and researchers have pieced together the first 3D map of the lost landscape of Doggerland. What has emerged is an astonishing vista of hills, valleys, rivers, lakes, swamps and estuaries. By examining the fossil record and pollen grains, they have been able to tell which animals roamed these sunken plains, and what plants and vegetation grew there. And, perhaps most remarkable of all, they have worked out its human population — calculating that thousands of people could have been living on Doggerland when catastrophe struck.

Marine archaeology can take us back to the very moment when the tidal wave hit, and it can describe the aftermath as Scotland gradually became part of an island. Yet it can do much more than that. It can tell us what happened to our ancestors during a phase of intense climate change. It can reconstruct a time of rising sea levels, disappearing coastlines and extreme weather patterns — a scenario that may sound eerily familiar.

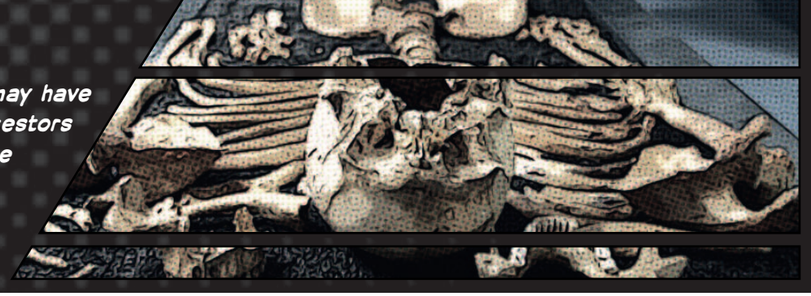
Today, from Shetland and Orkney to the western seaboard and the Outer Hebrides, the sea is steadily consuming many of our coastal and island landscapes. Vital undiscovered traces of the past are sinking beneath the waves, and it is a race against time and tide to record and understand them before they are gone.

Yet this archaeology is not just about looking backwards. While underwater worlds like Doggerland give incredible insights into lost peoples and ancient cataclysms, they also offer a cautionary tale, providing us with information that may be crucial to our future. After all, if it can happen to our ancestors, who is to say it cannot happen to us too?

FRANKENSTEIN'S MUMMIES



...At Cladh Hallan the people may have wanted to create symbolic ancestors — spiritual icons made up, quite literally, of the many parts of those that had passed on...



THE SKELETONS OF A MAN AND A WOMAN ARE LAID OUT SIDE BY SIDE ON A LABORATORY EXAMINATION TABLE.

Even though they are over 3,500 years old, they are remarkably well preserved.

The bodies are stretched to their full size but this was not how they were found.

When they were first excavated from the sandy, coastal grasslands of Cladh Hallan on the island of South Uist, their knees were drawn up against their chests, with their arms clutching the fronts of their legs. Straight away, the archaeologists realised that they had come across something extremely unusual. The skeletons must have been arranged in this position deliberately, perhaps by being bandaged very tightly or being bound with cords or straps of leather. The archaeologists had never seen bodies treated like this before in Britain.

Could it be, they wondered, that on a remote island in the Outer Hebrides, they had discovered some of the earliest deliberately mummified bodies ever to be found in Europe?

Bones were all that were left. But bones are full of stories. With modern technology, an incredible amount can be pieced together from the tiniest of fragments. What had really happened thousands of years ago at Cladh Hallan? The truth would be unravelled in the laboratory.

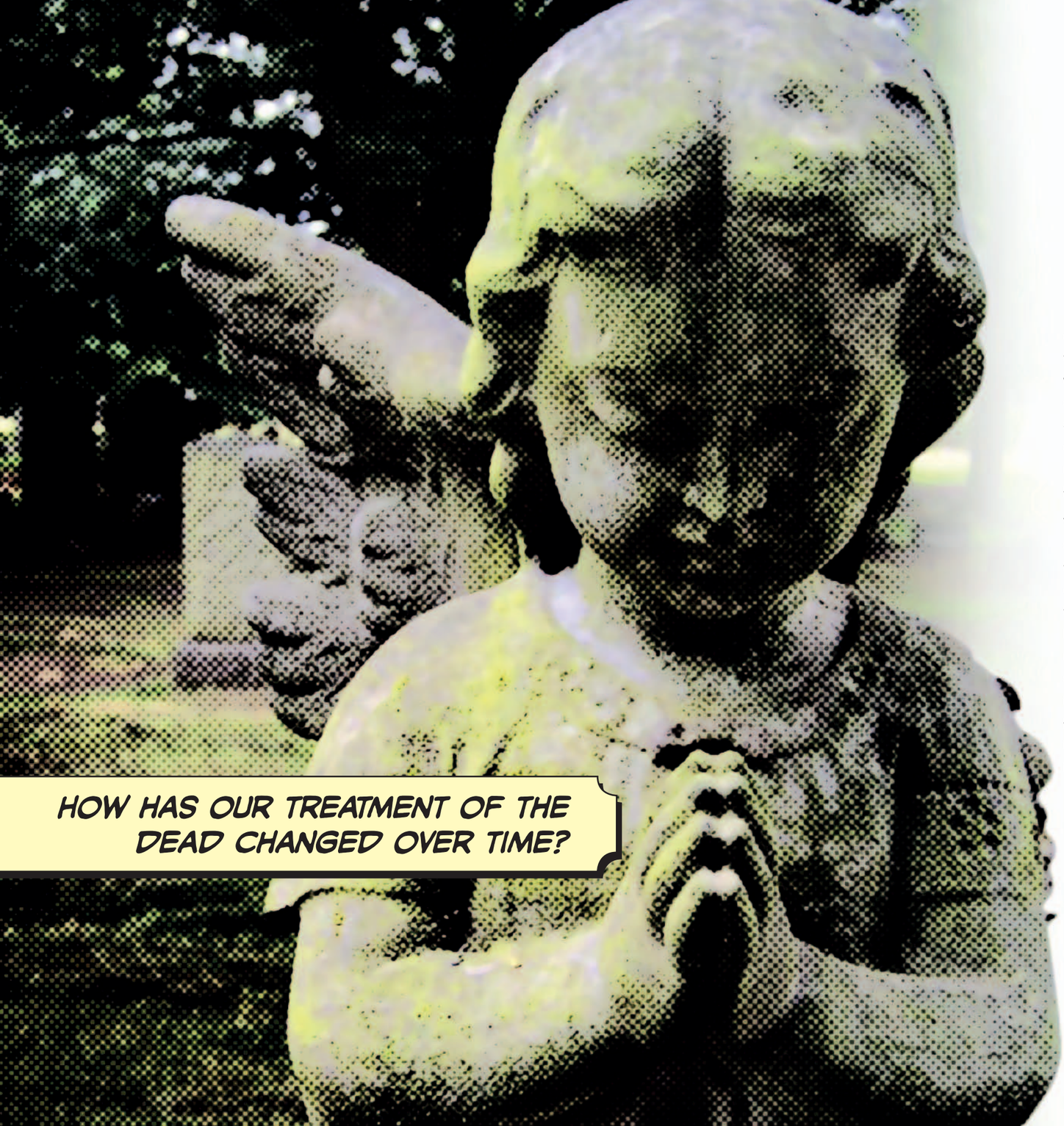
Radiocarbon dating of the skeletons and the material from their graves immediately highlighted a major discrepancy. Both bodies had been buried around 1000BC, yet the man had died six hundred years earlier, and the woman three hundred years earlier. Long before they were placed in the ground, something must have been done to preserve the sinews and skin that kept their skeletons intact. Further examination of the bones revealed just what this was.

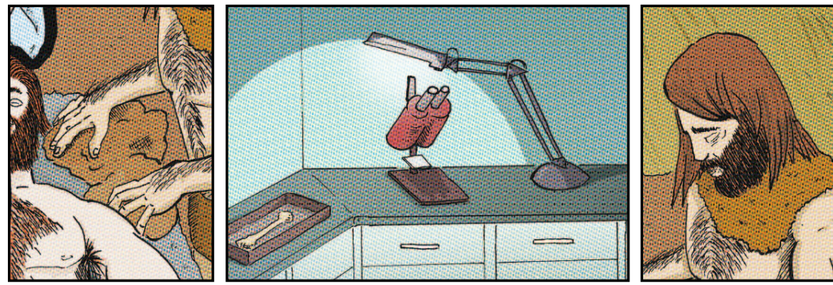
A day or two after death the bodies were immersed in a peat bog — a process that tans human skin like animal hide being turned into leather. Over time the acid in the peat will destroy bone. But, at Cladh Hallan, the man and woman were left just long enough — perhaps a year — for preservation to take place. Mummified by the peat, they were then removed from the bog and kept above ground for hundreds of years, until they were finally buried beneath the foundations of a Bronze Age house.

This whole story is written in bone. And it has one last, remarkable twist. As they continued to study the skeletons, the researchers realised that the jaw of the woman did not match the skull. After sampling DNA from various parts of her body, they made the startling discovery that she was made up of at least two separate people — and that her skull in fact belonged to a man. Testing of the other skeleton revealed the same. These were not just individuals that had been mummified, but different arms, legs and heads arranged to create one whole body.

These were Frankenstein's mummies.

What the archaeologists are continuing to puzzle over is why. In ancient Egypt, pharaohs and their servants were mummified to gain eternal life. In Peru, Incan emperors were mummified so that they could remain part of society — their corpses even taking seats at state banquets. At Cladh Hallan the people may have wanted to create symbolic ancestors — spiritual icons made up,





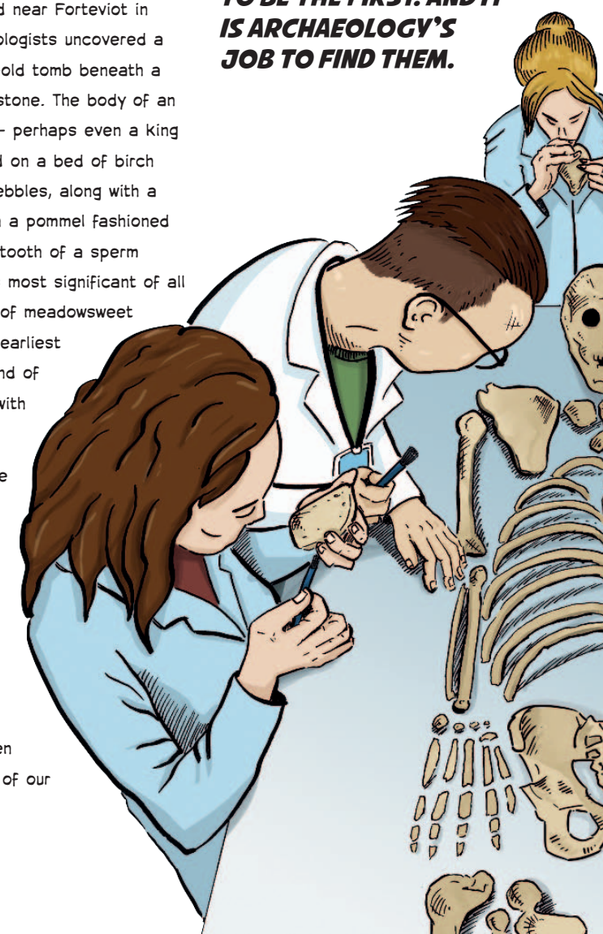
quite literally, of the many parts of those that had passed on. Perhaps the mummies were props in a village shrine, kept for centuries in a special house of the dead, and, like a rather more macabre version of Madame Tussauds, their limbs were replaced with new ones as they fell apart from wear and tear.

We may never know for certain. But by studying how our ancestors responded to life and death, we can attempt to draw a line from the past right up to the present day. On a gentle, sloping hillside overlooking the site where the mummies were discovered, a drystone wall surrounds a cemetery. First established in the early eighteenth century and filled with over 2,000 gravestones, it is a memorial to many generations of islanders. Burial plots are marked with simple stone crosses, solid granite headstones, and elaborate Victorian and Celtic designs. Families walk among the graves, paying their respects to lost loved ones. Some leave flowers. Others even speak to the headstones — a way of feeling close to relatives that are gone.

This is how we deal with death in the modern world. Is it really so different from what happened millennia ago on almost the same spot?
The rituals and customs of our prehistoric ancestors do not always disappear; they can be passed down in one form or another from generation to generation. In 2009, in a field near Forteviot in Perthshire, archaeologists uncovered a near 4,000-year-old tomb beneath a giant slab of sandstone. The body of an important person — perhaps even a king — had been placed on a bed of birch bark and quartz pebbles, along with a bronze dagger with a pommel fashioned from gold and the tooth of a sperm whale. But perhaps most significant of all was the discovery of meadowsweet flower buds — the earliest evidence in Scotland of flowers being left with the dead.

Archaeology can be a guide to why we do what we do. Today it seems obvious that we mark the places where people are buried, put flowers on coffins and headstones, or even talk to the graves of our families — so obvious in fact that we forget to question where these ideas came from.

SOMEONE, SOMEWHERE HAD TO BE THE FIRST. AND IT IS ARCHAEOLOGY'S JOB TO FIND THEM.



MUSSELBURGH AND THE MYSTERIES OF MITHRAS

IT IS THE SECOND CENTURY AD IN A NORTHERN FRONTIER OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

A group of men, most of them soldiers, make their way underground into the gloom of a vaulted chamber. At the far end of the chamber there is a soft glow. As they move closer, they see a great stone carving of a man's face. Candlelight shines from his mouth and his eyes, spreading out in a halo around his head. Above him is a line of smaller carvings — sculptures of the heads of four women, representing the seasons. Flowers decorate the hair of Spring and Summer; Autumn has a garland of grapes; and Winter is wrapped in a shawl. The flickering light falls across a second altar stone. In large, carved Latin script there is a name — 'Gaius Cassius Flavianus' — and a dedication: 'To the Unconquered God Mithras'.

The ceremony of a secret religious cult is underway. Perhaps a new disciple is about to begin his initiation into the 'mysteries' of Mithras — his first step into the seven grades of those 'united by the handshake'. Or maybe a feast is being held. The men taking part will never say. The first rule of the 'mysteries' is: you do not talk about the 'mysteries'. What happens beneath the ground, stays beneath the ground. There are no scriptures for this religion. Yet throughout the Roman world, rites are being performed in thousands of subterranean temples called Mithraea — and the cult is spreading. Some are even wondering if it could grow to become the dominant religion of the Empire.

IT IS 2010 IN THE TOWN OF MUSSELBURGH IN EAST LOTHIAN.

In a corner of Lewisvale Public Park, work on a new cricket pavilion is about to begin. Archaeologists are carrying out a routine inspection of the foundations, when something unexpected emerges from the earth. Two giant sandstone slabs lie beside each other. As they dig deeper into the soil and brush away the dirt, the archaeologists reveal side panels with ornate carvings. They think they have found a pair of ancient altar stones, cracked and broken long ago. The slabs appear to have been toppled and buried face down and to avoid any further damage they have to be removed and looked after with great care.

As part of the conservation process, the stones are kept in storage for almost a year. For all that time, whatever is on the front of the altars remains a mystery. And then, at last, they are ready to be turned over. The surfaces are caked in dirt. The cleaning work is painstaking. It takes weeks, moving from dry brushing to swabbing with distilled water. On the first stone, they begin to reveal a carved Latin inscription. As they are working from the base upwards, the letters become visible in reverse. When the soil is finally cleared and the inscription is visible an expert is brought in to translate.

There is a name — '*Gaius Cassius Flavianus*' — and a dedication: '*To the Unconquered God Mithras*'...

Like many gods before and after him, Mithras did not, in the end, prove to be unconquerable. In the modern world, almost no one has heard of him. Yet from the first to the fourth centuries AD, his was a religion very much on the rise — a religion of men from the lower classes, of the soldiers, merchants and bureaucrats of Rome. According to his story of origin, Mithras was born from a rock, naked apart from a dagger and a Phrygian cap. He hunted down a sacred bull which he first overcame, and then killed in a test of strength, releasing power, energy, vitality and life to the world. To celebrate, he feasted on the bull with Sol, the god of the sun.

Because Mithraism was a secret cult most of what we know about it today comes from artefacts and broken remains. For archaeologists, understanding it is like working on a vast jigsaw — where almost all the pieces are gone for ever. And that is why the discovery at Musselburgh is of such international importance. Now, for the first time, we know that the worshippers of Mithras reached as far as Scotland and the very edge of the Roman Empire. We know that a centurion called Gaius Cassius Flavianus commissioned altar stones. And we have those remarkable stones to conserve and study — the very same stones that witnessed the mysteries of Mithras nearly two thousand years ago.

The search for lost religions remains one of the most exciting and challenging tasks in archaeology. How do you piece together ancient rituals and beliefs, when all you have to go on are cracked Roman altars, arcane symbols like the carvings of the Picts, or the abandoned stone circles of Lewis and Orkney? Imagine trying to work out the story of Christianity from the ruined abbeys and monasteries of the Scottish Borders alone.

Yet, when the evidence is so scarce, it means that each new find has the potential to alter radically our understanding of the past. A breakthrough is always waiting, somewhere beneath the soil.

Archaeologists are not just pulling stones from the ground: they are digging up faith and dogma. They are unearthing heaven and hell. And they are excavating the Gods.

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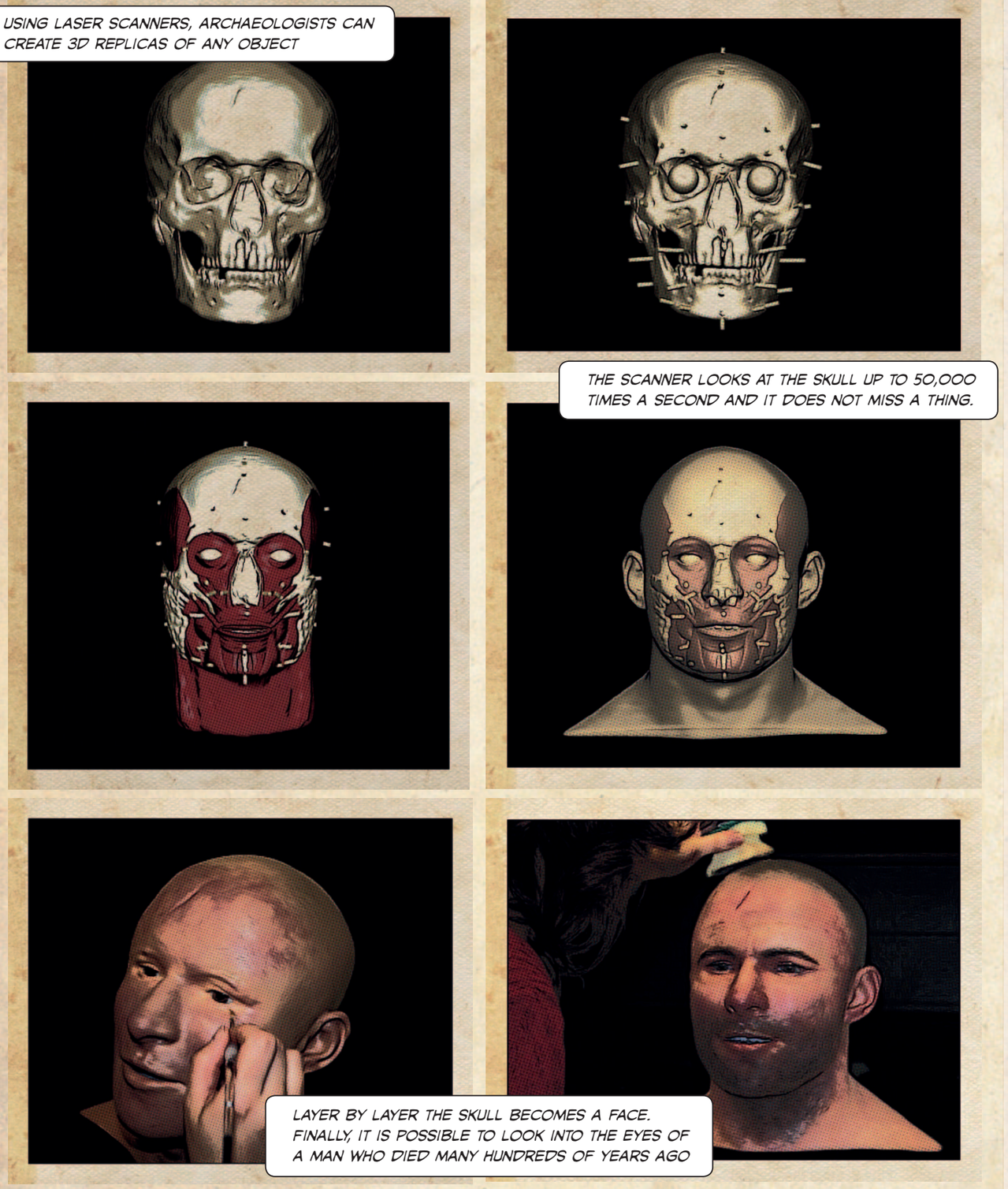

FACING THE PAST

...WHAT CAN NEW TECHNOLOGIES REVEAL ABOUT SCOTLAND'S PAST?...

A HUMAN SKULL RESTS ON A PERSPEX PLINTH. MOST PEOPLE LOOKING AT IT WILL SEE NOTHING UNUSUAL. AFTER ALL, ONE SKULL CAN LOOK VERY MUCH LIKE ANOTHER. AN INQUISITIVE OBSERVER MAY NOTICE SOME DISTINCTIVE MARKS AND PECULIARITIES – MISSING FRONT TEETH, A LARGE DENT IN THE FOREHEAD – BUT LITTLE BEYOND THAT.

Scientists, of course, use these small details to reveal much more. From the heavy brows and the considerable size of the jaw, they know this skull belonged to a man — a large and powerful man at that. They can tell that the deep groove in the top of the skull came from a severe blow. But they can also see bone regrowth over the wound. Whatever caused this trauma — and they suspect it was an axe — did not kill this man. An expert will also spot large cavities above the front teeth — a sign that something had either shaken the teeth loose or knocked them out completely, allowing bacteria to create abscesses in the roots. So they can even be certain that, at some stage in his life, this man will have experienced severe toothache.

Forensic archaeology trains the eye to question every detail, and it can help to paint remarkably vivid pictures of how our ancestors lived and died. Now, thanks to technological advances, it can go even further. By using laser scanners, archaeologists can create exact 3D replicas of any object. As the skull sits on the plinth, beams are fired at it and reflected back. The time taken for the lasers to return is used to calculate the distance to even the tiniest curves, grooves, scratches or indentations on its surface. The scanner 'looks' at the bone-structure up to 50,000 times in a second, and it does not miss a thing. A centuries-old human skull is given a new existence in a digital world. And it is here that science can take an extraordinary leap. By using the exact measurements for bone size and density recorded by the scanner, complex computer software can accurately recreate muscle and add it to the skull. Once the muscle is in place, it can wrap it in skin. Layer by layer, the skull becomes a face. Finally, it is possible to look into the eyes of a man who died many hundreds of years ago.

The question remains, however: who was he?

The skull and its skeleton were excavated, along with ten other bodies, from the site of what is believed to be a lost royal chapel discovered deep in the bowels of Stirling Castle. Carbon dating established that he died at some time in the fourteenth century, and he was probably in his mid-twenties. But science cannot reveal a name. For that, the only option is to dig into the historical records. Researchers now believe that they have their man — Sir John de Stricheley, a Knight from Buckinghamshire who died in 1341 and was part of an English garrison occupying Stirling Castle during the Wars of Independence — but they cannot know for sure. All the same, to take a collection of medieval bones and to recreate a life — right down to the facial features — demonstrates the remarkable contribution modern technology can make to archaeology.

Several hundred miles to the north of Stirling, on the northern coast of Caithness, it is not just one man, but a whole landscape that is being reconstructed by laser scanning.

While the principle remains the same — sending pulses of light towards an object and measuring the echoes — the scale is vastly different. Archaeologists fly over the landscape in an aeroplane and use state-of-the-art 'light detection and ranging' equipment, known as LiDAR, to direct lasers down at the earth. The scanner is so accurate it can record differences in altitude to just a few centimetres. What is perhaps most remarkable of all, is that trees, bushes and even dense forests are no barrier to receiving accurate measurements. Through a combination of lasers and computer algorithms, branches and undergrowth are stripped away to find the true surface, the 'naked' earth. And it is here that the ancient traces of settlement and farming — burial cairns and earthworks — can be discovered.

A whole tract of Caithness can be surveyed in a matter of hours. Although a vast amount of information is generated, computers examine the results systematically, pinpointing the tell-tale geometric shapes and patterns of man-made structures. The 3D model can then be turned, flipped and rotated, lit and shaded from every direction and studied in the minutest detail. So far, the results from Caithness have been astonishing. Large numbers of unknown archaeological sites are appearing in the data. Suddenly, researchers are finding themselves looking at a lost landscape — a patchwork map showing the remains left behind by people who lived on this coastal fringe of northern Scotland thousands of years ago.

A digital world of Scottish archaeology is emerging. Through advanced techniques like laser scanning, more and more objects and places are filling this world. Now, from a computer screen, researchers can fly above mountains, forests and plains to search for fragments of our ancestors. They can walk among millennia-old tombs and ruined buildings, and study ancient sculptures and monuments. And they can even sit face to face with a 700-year-old skull, and watch it come back to life.

IN THIS NEW WORLD, THE HORIZONS ARE LIMITLESS.

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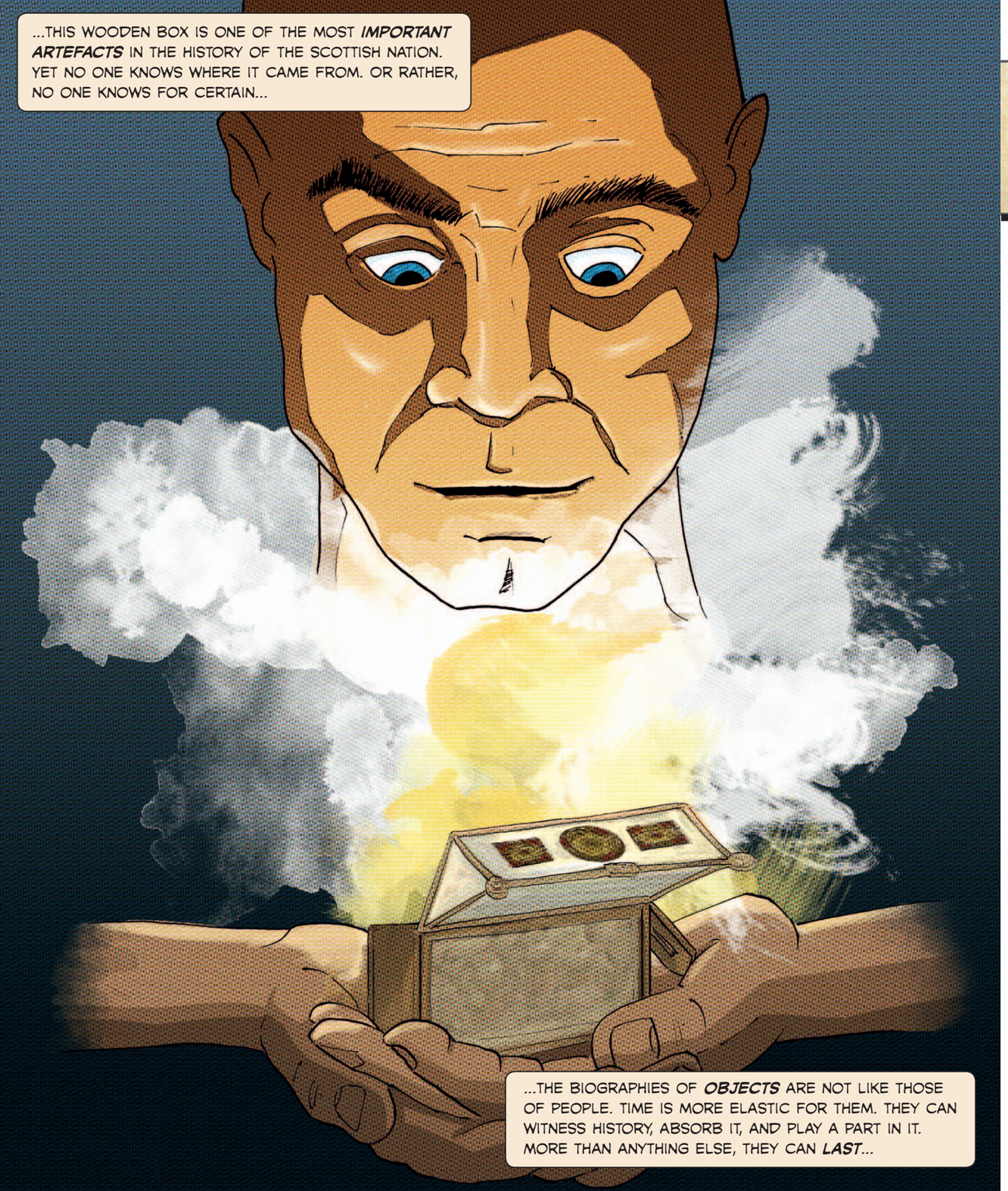

THAT OBSCURE OBJECT OF...

DESIRE

IN A DISPLAY CABINET OF REINFORCED GLASS IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SCOTLAND THERE IS A SMALL WOODEN BOX. IT IS SO SMALL IT COULD REST COMFORTABLY IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND.

The box is made up of two parts, each hollowed out of a single piece of yew wood. The top — a triangular lid — is attached to the bottom by metal rivets and a hinge. When you first see it, what it looks like most is a tiny model house.

The front and the lid are covered with thin plates of silver, and decorated with delicate mounts of bronze, red enamel and blue glass. At one end there is a hinged bronze arm marked with a yellow-and-red star — possibly once used to attach a leather strap to allow the box to be worn around the neck. If you look very closely, and if the light catches the silver plates at the right angle, you will see the surfaces marked with a series of tiny dots — a stippling effect that forms an arcane pattern of leaping and twisting beasts.

This box is one of the most important artefacts in the history of the Scottish nation. Yet no one knows where it came from.

Or rather, no one knows for certain.

Such is the life of an object. The biographies of things are not like those of humans. Time is more elastic for them. As they pass from place to place and from person to person, they can be changed. They can take on new meanings. They can be damaged, broken and put back together again. They can witness history, absorb it, and play a part in it. They can be forgotten and then remembered. They can disappear and then reappear, centuries later, in the unlikeliest of places. More than anything else, and certainly more than you or I, ***they can last***.

Archaeologists believe that this wooden box has lasted for over twelve hundred years. Its intricate ornamentation is typical of the art of the Picts and the Celtic church in the eighth century AD — a style that found glory in the details, perfection in miniature. Some of the greatest artists of the time lived on the island of Iona, and it was there that the monks produced the Book of Kells, an extravagant illuminated manuscript of the Gospels of the New Testament. Similar and distinctive artistic fingerprints are all over the little box.

So, let's say we can imagine the 'birth' of the object, see the hands of a master-craftsman piece it together by monastery candlelight. But what was it for? And where did it go next?

We have a good idea of the answer to the first question. The box was one of a small number made around the same time, perhaps even in the same place. Others have been found in Ireland and in Norway, and they all appear to have been designed with one purpose in mind — to be used as a 'reliquary', a vessel for carrying the bones of a saint. If the box was made in Iona, then perhaps it was intended to hold the remains of St Columba, the exiled Irish priest who founded the monastery on the island in the sixth century AD and who embarked on converting Scotland to the Christian faith.

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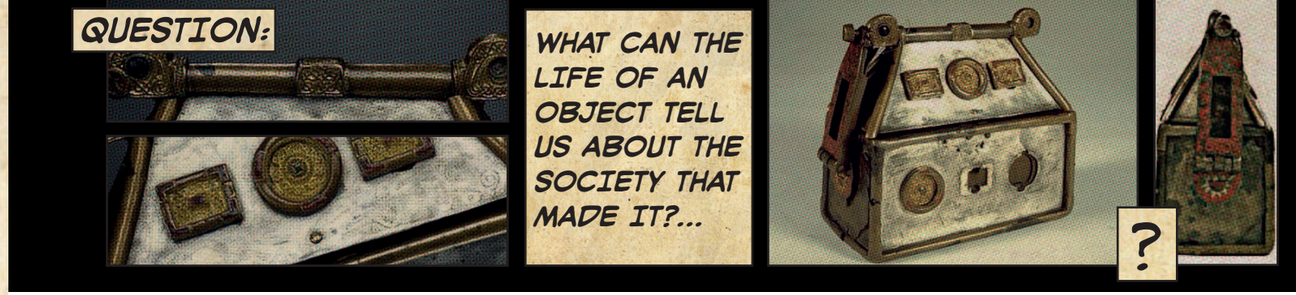


Answering the second question is not so easy, however. In the ninth century, many of Iona's most sacred objects were moved to prevent them falling into the hands of Viking raiders. Some went to Kells in Ireland, others to Dunkeld. And it is there that the trail of the box goes cold.

We may, however, be able to pick it up again some four hundred years later. Early in the morning of 24 June 1314, a Scottish army led by Robert the Bruce advanced out of the woods on the fringes of the Bannock Burn. Among the throng was Abbot Bernard of Arbroath, and he had with him an object known as the Breccbennach. This was the army's lucky talisman, a sacred icon that had been carried into battle alongside the kings of Scotland since the time of William the Lion in the thirteenth century.

What exactly was the Breccbennach? Frustratingly, there is no definite description. Thought to be connected to St Columba, some have suggested that it was a banner or standard, and may even have been made from the garment that the saint was wrapped in at the time of his death. Others believe that it was a kind of portable shrine, something that could have held Columba's bones. In which case, it needed to be small enough to be taken to the battlefield — perhaps worn around the neck on a leather strap.

Could it be that the Breccbennach and the little house-shaped box are one and the same thing?

Certainly, that was what the antiquary who rediscovered the box in the nineteenth century believed. Records show that a year after the battle of Bannockburn, the Breccbennach was granted to Malcolm of Monymusk. And it was at Monymusk House in Aberdeenshire that the box was found. The conclusion seems obvious, especially when you consider that the Gaelic translation of Breccbennach is 'speckled, peaked one': an apt description of the silver vessel and its pointed lid. This argument proved so convincing that in 1933, when the box, known today as the 'Monymusk Reliquary', appeared for auction in a London saleroom, a high-profile campaign was mounted to save it for the nation.

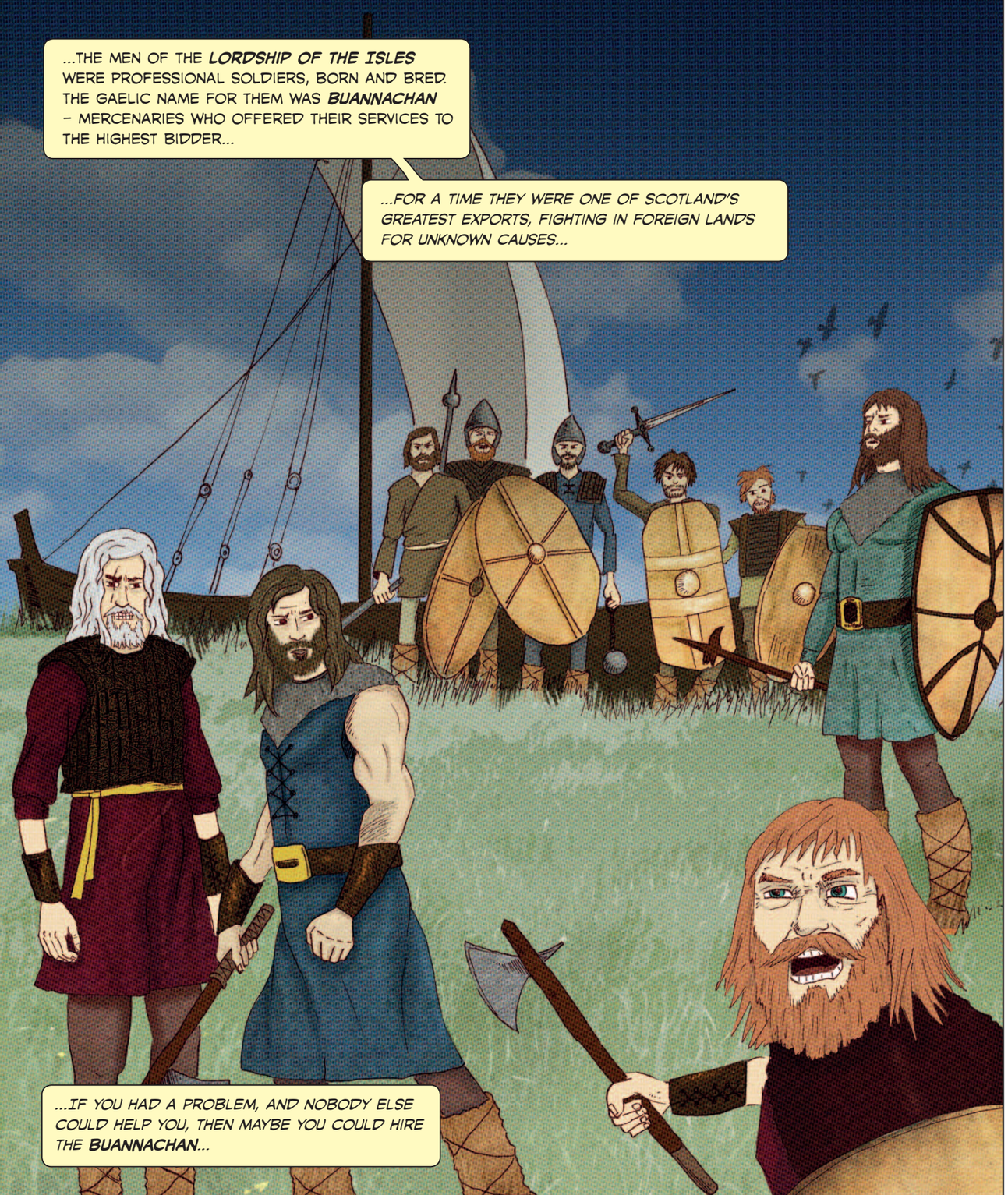
QUITE A JOURNEY FOR ONE LITTLE OBJECT. BUT THE QUESTION REMAINS: HOW MUCH OF IT IS ACTUALLY TRUE?

The latest research on the Monymusk Reliquary has cast serious doubt on the link between the box and Iona, and experts consider it unlikely that it was once the sacred totem of the Scottish army. Often, archaeology will tell us what things are not, as much as what they are — pulling artefacts back into the darkness of obscurity.

And so this one account of the life of the box fades away. Yet others will come to take its place. Because the biographies of things are not fixed. With new technology we can return to objects again and again, and we can continue to ask new questions of them. The answers are often remarkable, confounding expectations and sending researchers off in entirely different directions.

Objects like the Monymusk Reliquary have a lot more left to tell us than we already know. Although it rests behind glass in a museum today, its story is far from over. Lift the silver lid on the wooden box and it may appear empty. But it is not.

MANY SECRETS REMAIN HIDDEN WITHIN, JUST WAITING TO BE DISCOVERED.



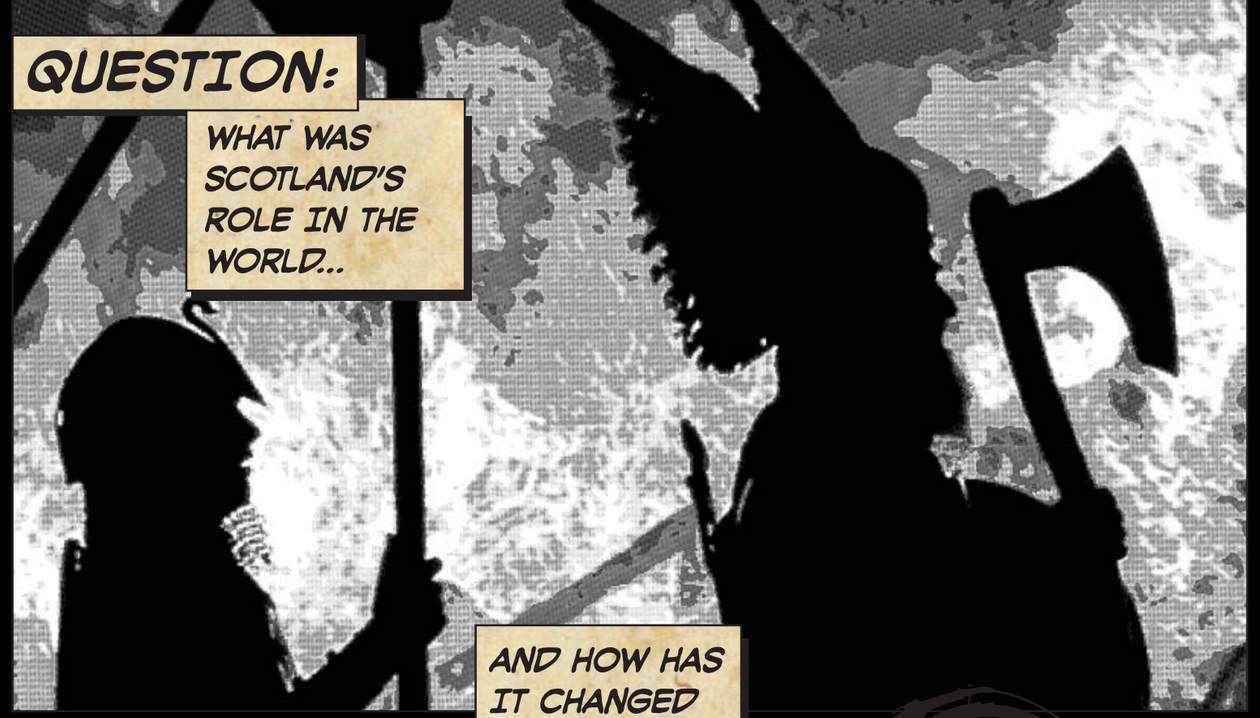
The Tartan Army On Tour

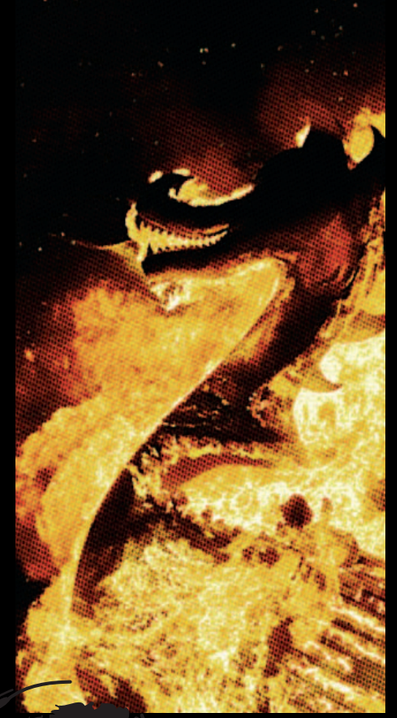
THE FACE IN THE CARVING IS HARD TO MAKE OUT BENEATH ITS HELMET, THERE ARE ONLY THE FAINT IMPRESSIONS OF EYES AND A MOUTH LEFT IN THE WEATHERED STONE. THE SHOULDERS ARE SHOWN ENCASED IN THE ARMOUR OF THE WEST HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND. ONE HAND GRASPS THE SCABBARD OF A GREAT HIGHLAND SWORD, WHILE THE OTHER TUGS AT THE END OF A BELT, AS THOUGH IN THE ACT OF FASTENING IT AROUND THE WAIST. BENEATH THE BOOTS THERE IS A SHIP WITH A HIGH PROW AND STERN, ITS SQUARE MAST UNFURLED AND READY TO SAIL. WHOEVER THIS MAN WAS, IT IS CLEAR THAT HE WAS A LEADER AND A FIGHTER – AND HE WAS ON HIS WAY TO WAR.

This sculpture is part of a grave slab, a heavy lid that once sealed a body in its tomb. It was discovered at a site called Finlaggan, on a small island at the edge of a loch, at the centre of another island, Islay, in the Inner Hebrides. Some time ago, perhaps in the nineteenth century, the slab was prised open by treasure hunters and then discarded among the ruins of an ancient chapel.

Today, Finlaggan is a remote, abandoned and sombre place. Yet throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it was the vibrant hub of the kingdom that ruled over the western seaboard of Scotland — the Lordship of the Isles. The Great Hall of the Lord once stood on the island in the loch, an imposing structure of stone and timber. Clansmen from the Butt of Lewis to the Mull of Kintyre, and from across the seas in Northern Ireland, came here to pay homage to the Lord and to enjoy the legendary hospitality of Finlaggan — its food, feasts, drink and music. This was a warrior society, descended from a union between Vikings and Gaels, and at its peak it boasted an army of nearly 10,000 men and over 100 ships. The lowland kings both admired and feared this power base on the edge of Scotland: on the one hand it served as a potent ally; on the other it could be a dangerous enemy.

In the late fifteenth century, the Lordship was torn apart by civil war. John Macdonald and his illegitimate son Angus Og fought out a bitter and bloody battle for control, ultimately, the real

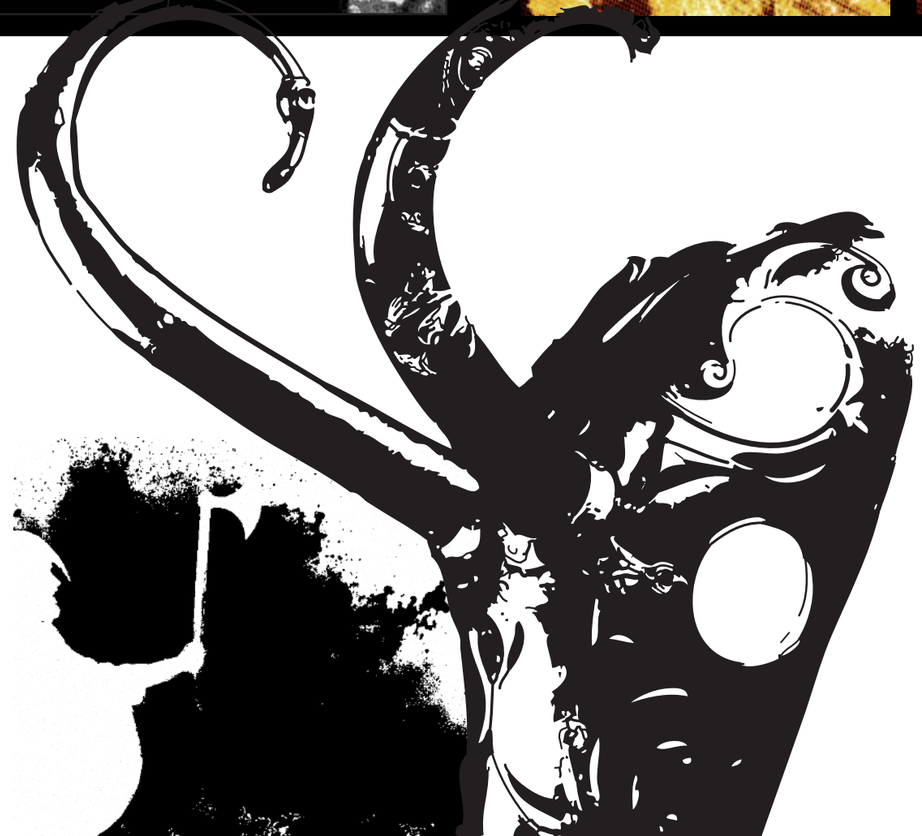




loser was the union of the Isles itself. The divisions caused by the conflict would never heal, and without a true leader the clans drifted apart. In the space of little more than a year, the kingdom was gone.

But its way of life was not.

The men of the Lordship were professional soldiers, born and bred. Their reputation as a fighting force survived, and their skills were in high demand. The Gaelic name for them was buannachan — mercenaries who offered their services to the highest bidder. Donald MacGillespie was one such man. Granted tenancy of the lands of Finlaggan by the crown, he sought his fortune fighting in the wars in Ireland. And on his death, sometime around the mid-sixteenth century, he was commemorated in the traditional West Highland way — with a carved stone grave slab showing him fastening his sword and belt in preparation for battle. It is MacGillespie's tomb that archaeologists believe they have discovered, discarded among the ruins of the Lordship on the deserted island at Finlaggan. The mercenary warrior took as his burial plot the sacred heartland of his illustrious ancestors — perhaps in tribute, perhaps in defiance.



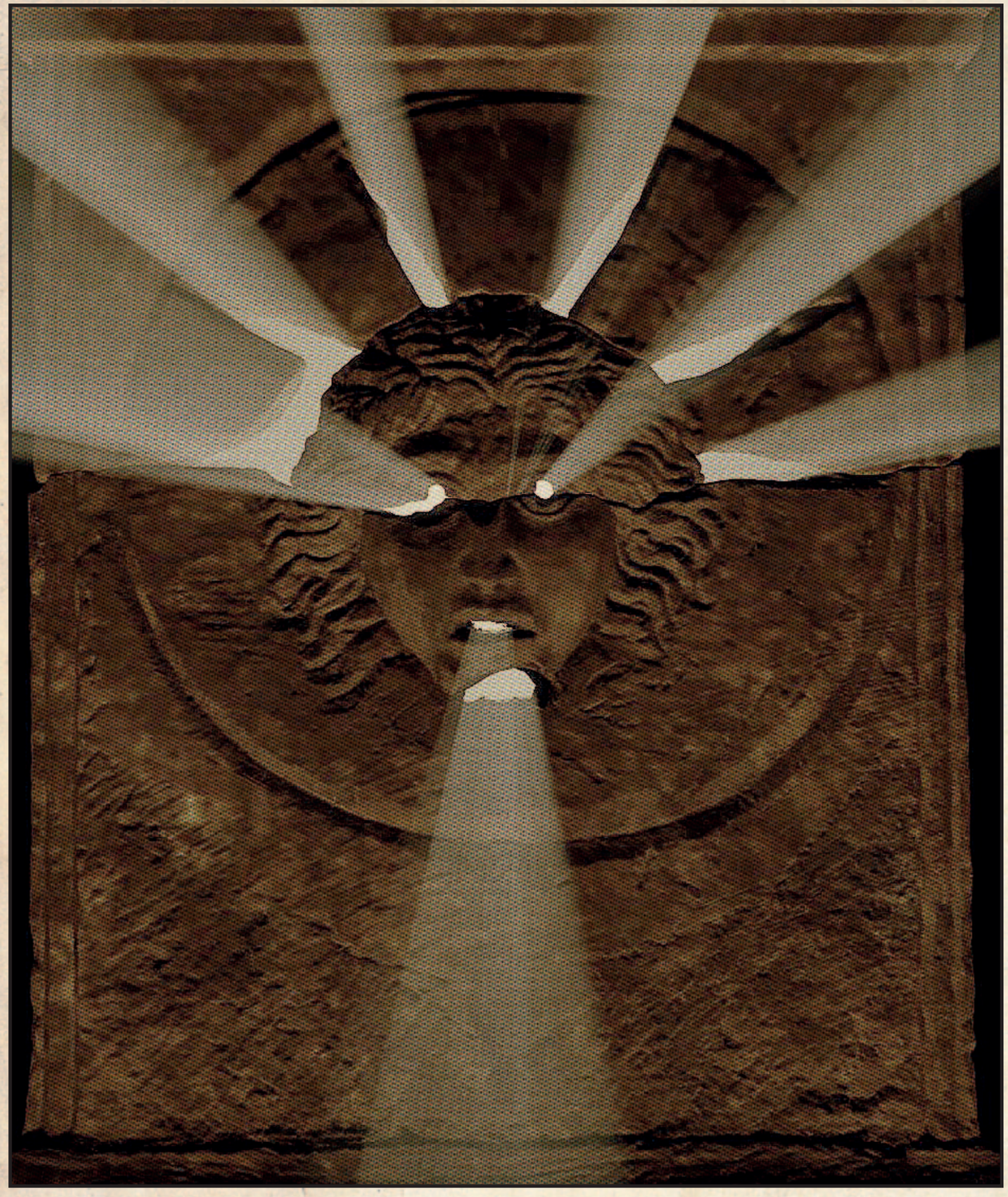
For a time, Buannachan like MacGillespie were one of Scotland's greatest exports. In their distinctive, ocean-going longships — known as birlinns — they could travel at speed across the Irish Sea and even further afield to continental Europe, injecting foreign armies with a unique brand of battle-hardened aggression. These men were nothing less than contractors in the art of war. Pick any medieval flashpoint and there is every chance that Scottish mercenaries will have been there. They fought in strange lands for unknown causes, as long as there was money to be made.

Archaeologists are now attempting to follow this mercenary trail across Europe — to find out just how far the 'Tartan armies' travelled on their tours of duty. New evidence continues to emerge. In 2001, workmen extending a cycle path below Uppsala Castle in Sweden uncovered a mass grave filled with the bodies of at least 60 men. Carbon dating of the remains and a study of historical records have now traced their origin back to 1520, and even to a specific day — 6 April. Good Friday.

As a two-hundred-year-old union between Sweden, Denmark and Norway began to disintegrate, Scandinavia was turned into a violent war zone. On that April morning, a Swedish peasant army crossed the frozen Fyris river and marched through heavy snow to attack the forces of King Kristian II of Denmark, who were holed up in the town of Uppsala. Although fighting on the side of the Danish, the majority of the soldiers guarding the town were buannachan: the hired swords of Scotland. And it is likely to be their bodies that were buried in the shadow of the castle, beneath a steep, grassy slope now used by university students for picnicking and sunbathing. A specialist study of the bones has revealed that the men were mostly aged between 25 and 34. Besides the fatal wounds, largely caused by blows to the head, there was much evidence of old injuries and fractures. Although in prime physical condition, the men must have borne the battle scars of a warrior's life. And these sons of the Hebrides and ancestors of the Lordship finally met their end far from their island homes, fighting in a foreign land for a foreign crown.

Across medieval Europe, if kings and rulers had a problem, and no one else could help them, they would hire the buannachan.

TODAY, CENTURIES LATER, THE HUNT IS STILL ON FOR SCOTLAND'S SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE.



THE LAND OF A MILLION STORIES

CHOOSE AN OBJECT. CHOOSE A BUILDING. CHOOSE A LANDSCAPE. CHOOSE A FRAGMENT OF BONE, A WOODEN BOX, OR A SLAB OF SANDSTONE. CHOOSE A RUINED CHAPEL FAR AWAY ON A REMOTE ISLAND. CHOOSE A HORN OF BRONZE, A CHEST OF IRON, A CASKET OF SILVER OR A CROWN OF GOLD. CHOOSE A LINE OF SAND IN THE EARTH OR A MAMMOTH TUSK DREDGED FROM A DROWNED WORLD. CHOOSE AN UNDERGROUND TEMPLE, A GIANT ALTAR STONE, OR THE FACE OF A FORGOTTEN GOD.

Choose any one of them, and archaeology will tell you their story.

Every day, researchers are writing, and rewriting, the history of Scotland. Whether on windswept dig sites or in high-tech laboratories, they are working on the front line of discovery. Ruins, remains and artefacts may be thousands of years old, but the stories they are telling are brand new.

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SCOTLAND IS A LAND WITH A MILLION STORIES. SCARF IS YOUR GUIDE TO EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM.

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For the experts, ScARF will continue to grow and thrive through constant input. ScARF will help to shine a light on the unexplored regions of Scotland's past, but it relies on the research community to keep examining, studying and reporting back on what they find. New stories will be uncovered, and many old ones will be rewritten. By allowing researcher to speak to researcher, ScARF will ensure that no opportunity to advance knowledge is lost.

For the enthusiast, ScARF can be a doorway to discovery, a first step to getting more involved in finding out about Scotland's history and culture.

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has a list of local and regional groups that can be joined, as well as details of local museums and local authority archaeological services.

Canmore, the searchable online database of the ***Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS)*** —

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