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FRAUGHT WITH HIGH TRAGEDY: A CONTEXTUAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL RECONSIDERATION OF THE MAIDEN CASTLE IRON AGE 'WAR CEMETERY' (ENGLAND)

Summary. *The Iron Age 'war cemetery' of Maiden Castle hillfort, Dorset, England, is one of the most internationally celebrated of British archaeological discoveries, levels of trauma recorded on skeletons found there being interpreted as evidence for a Roman massacre. A new radiocarbon dating programme and reanalysis of the burial patterning, presented here for the first time, shows that the inhumations actually fall into temporal clusters of lethal violence, plausibly spanning multiple generations, spread mostly between the early and middle decades of the first century AD. This is suggestive of increasing societal stress in the decades leading up to, rather than as a product of, the Roman invasion of AD 43.*

INTRODUCTION

The Iron Age hillfort of Maiden Castle, Dorset is one of the most impressive prehistoric monuments in Britain (Fig. 1), its fame enhanced by investigations conducted in the 1930s by Tessa and Mortimer Wheeler (Wheeler 1943). Many of the Wheelers' observations stand to this day, but one aspect of the site which has become increasingly problematic pertains to a cemetery found within the hillfort's east gate, a find which many still regard as Maiden Castle's most defining feature. The trauma obvious on many of the skeletons was interpreted by Mortimer Wheeler as the result of a Roman attack in the mid-first century AD. 'The dead had met a violent, sometimes savagely violent end' Wheeler observed, adding that 'surely no poor relic in the soil of Britain was ever more fraught with high tragedy' (1956, 105–6).

Following renewed archaeological investigations at Maiden Castle in the mid-1980s, aspects of the Roman assault, so persuasively argued by Wheeler (1943, 61–4), have been called into question (Sharples 1991, 117; Papworth 2008, 132–3; Stewart and Russell 2017, 106–12, 158–61; Russell 2019, 338–41). A detailed reinterpretation of the east gate 'War Cemetery', however, has yet to be conducted. This is long overdue for a number of reasons. First, the belief that graves were cut rapidly following a single event is based on assumption rather than evidence, the attribution of skeletal injuries to a Roman attack necessitating that everything be conflated to fit a

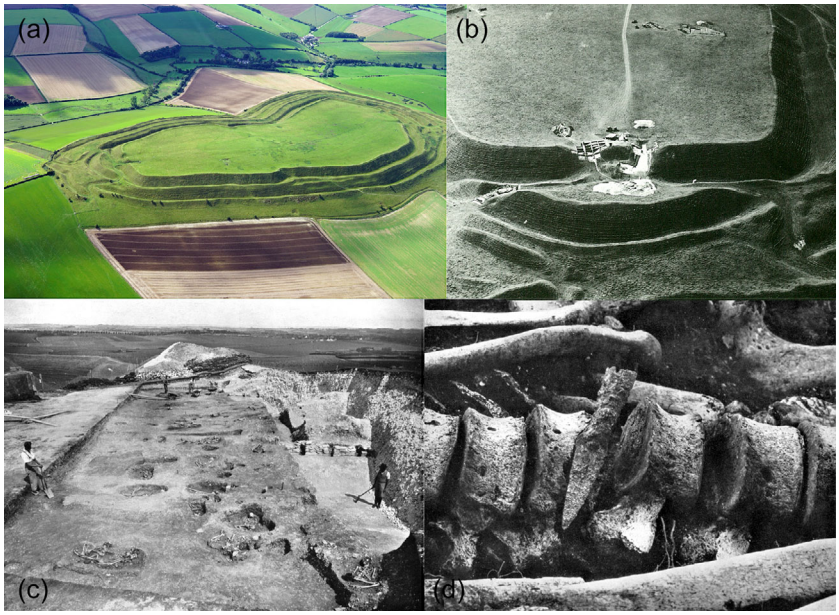

FIGURE 1
Maiden Castle hillfort, Dorset, England: a – From the air, looking south with the east gate at the left of the picture © Jo and Sue Crane; b – The east gate under excavation 1936–37; c – The east gate 'war cemetery' in 1937: general view from the south; d – The 'ballista bolt' (actually a spear or javelin head, most likely of native manufacture) lodged in the vertebra of skeleton P7a at Maiden Castle © the Society of Antiquaries of London and Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society (reproduced with permission).

predetermined interpretation. Secondly, the need to take account of differential deposition was sidestepped by the assertion that variation can be explained by the hurried nature of burial in the aftermath of a massacre.

REASSESSING AN ICONIC ASSEMBLAGE

Burials recovered from Maiden Castle in the 1930s were assigned to a series of broad cultural groups according to the Iron Age A, B, C-model developed by Christopher Hawkes (1931; 1959). Broadly speaking, bodies found without grave goods were interpreted as belonging to the earliest periods, Iron Age A and B, whilst those in the ramparts and ditches of the east entrance were ascribed to period C with the 'Belgic War Cemetery' representing the final phase of inhumation. Reconsideration of the sample suggests that these groups are by no means clear-cut, although recent discussions remain speculative as to how these were distributed across time (Sharples 1991; 2010; Redfern and Chamberlain 2011, 69).

The concentration of 34 inhumations, designated by Wheeler as belonging to the Belgic War Cemetery, form a group that are tightly clustered spatially, but which are otherwise part of a larger sample spread across investigated portions of the hillfort. In reconsidering this wider burial group, recorded on the published plans of 1943, it is important to note that it was only feasible to

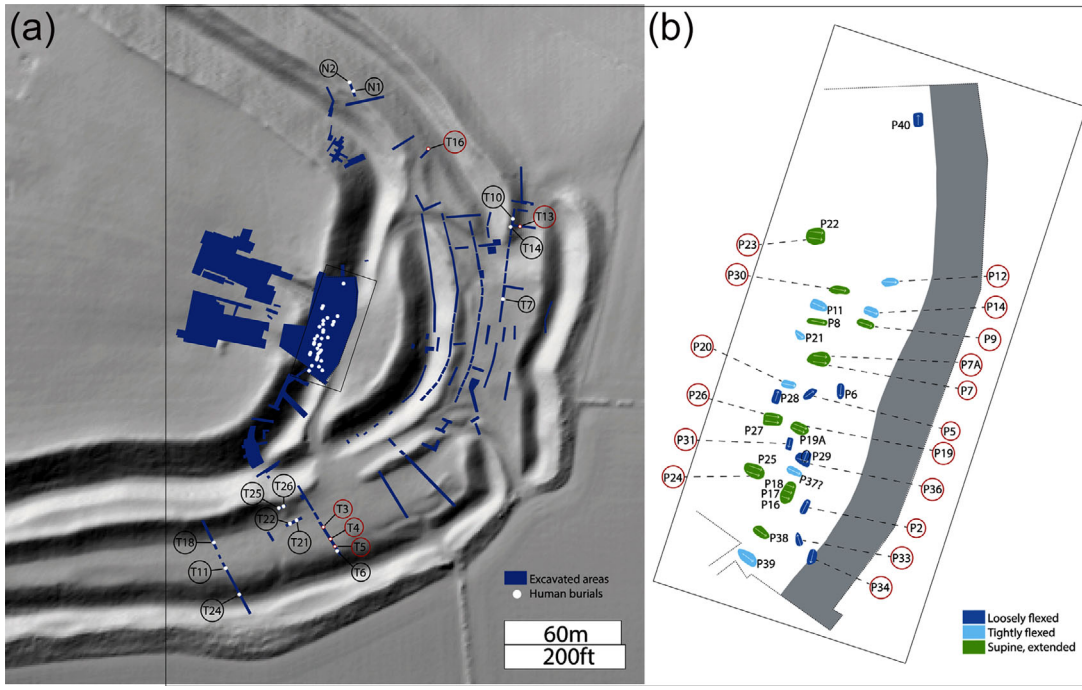

FIGURE 2
Maiden Castle hillfort: a – LiDAR image of the eastern end of Maiden Castle hillfort showing the position of the 1936–37 trenches, the location of the cemetery and the outlying burials encountered amongst the ramparts; b – Plan view of graves in the eastern cemetery showing burial type and orientation.

cut sample trenches, the 1930s area investigated constituting only 1.08% of the hillfort total (Fig. 2). In this respect, the 82 individuals recovered (70 adults, 12 infant burials) represent chance finds and should be seen as only a small sample of the likely total burial population.

Deposition and orientation of the body

If the excavated Iron Age burials are considered purely in terms of deposition and body positioning, interments can be divided into four distinct groups (Fig. 3; Table 1). In the first of these (Group 1), bodies were deposited at the base of disused storage pits (Fig. 3a). Positioning varies within this group, with the upper body either supine or on one side, a degree of flexion in the lower limbs being necessary to fit the corpse into the space. Such re-purposing of storage pits for funerary deposition has been observed at other southern British sites including Danebury (Cunliffe 1983), Poundbury (Farwell and Molleson 1993), Venables Farm (Millett and Russell 1982) and Winterbourne Kingston (Russell *et al.* 2014), the practice dating from the third to the first centuries BC.

Burials in the second group (Group 2) are characterized by oval-shaped, purpose dug graves, the body most frequently orientated east–west and placed predominantly on its right side, lower limbs tightly flexed (Fig. 3b), head at the east end facing north (Papworth 2008, 84; Harding 2016, 83): a burial position suggestive of being bound or tightly wrapped (Gerdau-Radonic

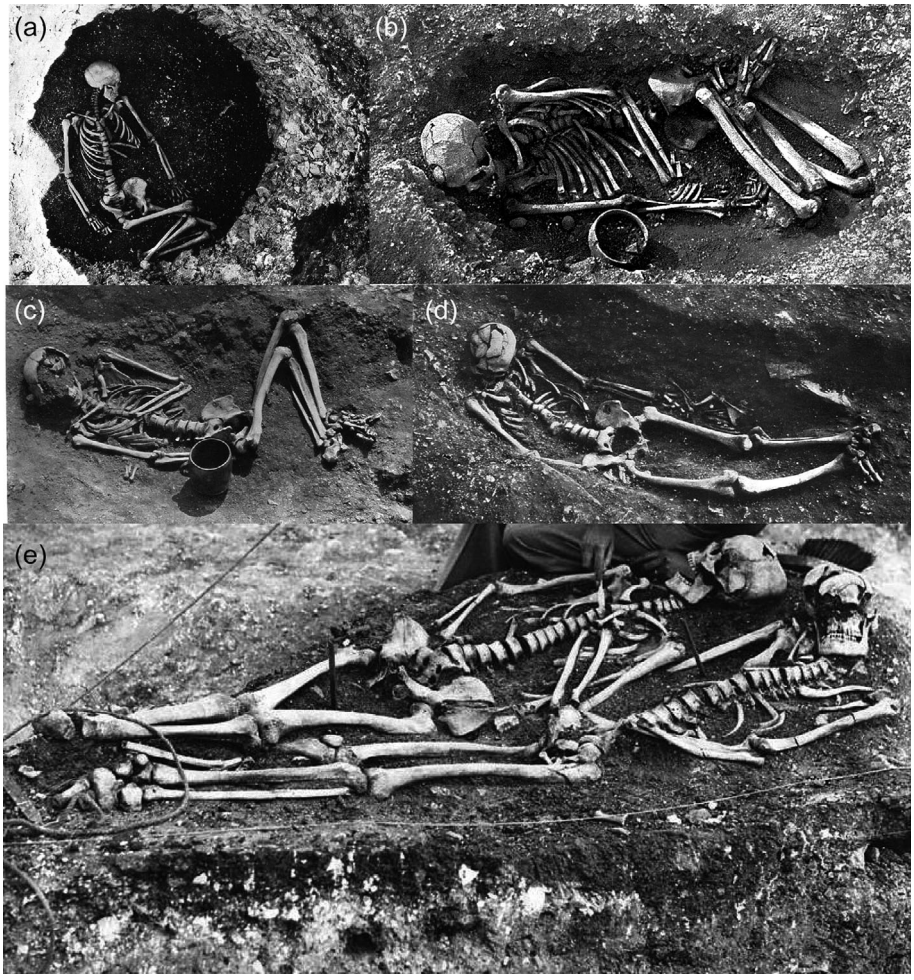

FIGURE 3
Examples of the differing burial types at Maiden Castle: a – Group 1 bodies deposited within disused storage pits (burial Q4); b – Group 2 Later Iron Age 'Durotrigian-style' inhumations in purpose dug shallow graves, the body most frequently orientated east–west with the lower limbs tightly flexed and generally accompanied by grave goods (burial P34); c – Group 2a with aspects of a 'Durotrigian-style' of inhumation less strictly adhered to and with a greater degree of variation in orientation and flexion of limbs, furnished with a selection of grave goods (burial P2); d – Group 3 extended supine position (burial P9); e – One of the Group 3 double burials set down together in shared graves (burials P7 and 7a) © the Society of Antiquaries of London and Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society (reproduced with permission).

et al. 2020). Individuals were generally, although not exclusively, accompanied by grave goods, most commonly a pot or joint of meat and sometimes a brooch, possibly used as a fastener for a shroud. This style of burial appeared by the end of the first century BC in Dorset and seems to have persisted until at least the first quarter of the second century AD (Papworth 2008, 82–3; Sharples 2010, 277; Harding 2016, 83–4).

The third group of burials at Maiden Castle (Group 2a) is less well-defined but is comprised of oval, scoop-like graves, furnished with a selection of artefacts (Fig. 3c) and with a greater degree

TABLE 1
Maiden Castle: adult burials of Iron Age to early Romano-British date.

Burial Group	Burial ID	Skel. ID	Sex	Position
1.	site H	8	?M	Supine, with right leg flexed at knee.
	B42	25	F	Fragmentary cranium and R femur only.
	Q4	24	F	On left side. Legs flexed.
	T9	17	M	Skull only.
2.	N2	27	F	Tightly flexed, R side.
	P5	50	F	On R side. Head at NE. Knees drawn up.
	P31	76	F	On L side. Head at SW. Knees tightly flexed.
	P34	78	M	On R side. Head at SW. Legs tightly flexed.
	P37	79	F	On R side. Head at S. knees drawn up.
	T1	16	F	On L side. Head to W. Legs tightly flexed.
	T4	33	M	On R side. Head to NE. Legs flexed.
	T5	35	M	On R side. Head ENE. Knees tightly flexed.
	T12	39	F	On back. Head ENE. Knees tightly flexed.
	T13	18	F	On R side. Legs tightly flexed.
	T18	21	F	On L side. Legs tightly flexed.
	T20	41	M	On R side. Head to SSE, legs tightly flexed.
	T24	23	F	On L side. Head ENE, legs tightly flexed.
2a.	N1	26	M	Legs flexed, thighs at right angles to body.
	P2	49	M	On back. Head at NE. Knees loosely flexed.
	P6	51	M	On back. Head at SSW. Knees drawn - not tightly flexed.
	P14	58	F	Lying on face. Head at SE. Legs loosely flexed - upper body supine.
	P11	56	M	On back. Head at SE. Legs flexed.
	P12	57	M	Lying on face. Head at E. Knees flexed.
	P20	64	M	Lying on back. Head at SE. Legs flexed.
	P21	65	?M	Flexed on side.
	P28	72	M	Lying on back. Head at NE. Knees loosely flexed.
	P33	77	F	On back. Head NNE. Knees flexed.
	P39	81	M	On R side. Head at SE. Knees flexed.
	P40	82	F	Unknown (fell from section), shown as flexed on side.
	T6	36	F	On R side. Head at NE. Knees flexed.
	T10	37	M	On R side. Head at SSE. Legs flexed to NE.
	T11	38	M	On back. Head at ENE. Legs flexed to NW.
	T14	19	F	On R side.
	T16	40	M	On back. Head at SE. Legs bent.
	T17	20	M	Legs flexed.
	T21	42	F	Lying on face. Legs bent back from knee only.
	T22	43	F	On R side Head at NE. Knees flexed.

(Continues)

TABLE 1
(Continued)

Burial Group	Burial ID	Skel. ID	Sex	Position
	T25	44	M	On L side. Head at NE.
	T26	45	F	On L side. Head at NW.
	T27	46	F	Head to SE. Knees flexed.
	T29	48	F	On R side, limbs flexed
3.	P7	52	M	Supine. Head at ESE.
	P7a	53	M	Supine. Head at ESE.
	P8	54	M	Supine. Head at ESE.
	P9	55	M	Supine. Head at SE.
	P16	59	?M	Fragmentary.
	P17	60	?M	Fragmentary.
	P18	61	M	Lying on back. Head at SE.
	P19	62	F	Supine. Head at SE.
	P19A	63	M	On back. Head at SE. Legs flexed to fit in grave.
	P22	66	M	Extended. On L side. Head at E. Legs loosely flexed.
	P23	67	M	On back. Head at ESE. Legs bent out.
	P24	68	M	On R side. Head at SE. L leg straight. R leg flexed.
	P25	69	M	On L side. Head at SSE. Legs flexed.
	P26	70	F	Lying on face. Head at ESE. Knees bent back.
	P27	71	M	On back. Head at ESE. Legs extended and crossed.
	P29	73	M	Lying on face. Head at NE. Knees tightly flexed.
	P30	75	M	Lying on back. Head at E. Legs bent out.
	P36	74	F	Lying on back. Head at SE. Knees flexed to the right.
	P38	80	M	On back. Head at SE. R leg bent out. L leg flexed.
	T3	33	M	Supine. Head to the E.

M = Male,? M = Probable male, F = Female; attributions of biological sex from Morant and Goodman (in Wheeler 1943, 337–60) and Redfern (2011). Light shading = double burials, dark shading = triple burial.

of variation in terms of orientation, approximately half the group being orientated east–west, the remainder broadly orientated with the head to the north. This latter group are not tightly positioned, lower limbs having a loose degree of flexion. Whilst nine out of 24 such burials were positioned on their side, approximately equal proportions lying on their left and right, the remainder were placed with the upper body supine and the legs flexed. In noting these differences, we considered it possible that this style was contemporary with Group 2, with such variations in mortuary practice perhaps signifying differences in social status that are not apparent archaeologically. Alternatively, these could have represented a later phase, when the tenets of burial practice were less strictly adhered to.

The fourth group at Maiden Castle (Group 3) comprises 20 individuals whose burials are distinct from the others, being placed in an extended supine position. Burials in this group were exclusively east–west orientated, all but one (T3) being located within the cluster identified as the 'Belgic War Cemetery'. Within this, 15 were further distinguished by being set down together in shared graves, with six double graves containing pairs of individuals buried simultaneously (Fig. 3d), and one triple grave. Supine burials exhibit aspects of Roman funerary practice in terms of the position and orientation of the body, although multiple burials are common neither to Roman nor Late Iron Age Britain. Whilst again a degree of overlap with the other groups was thought plausible, yet based on these 'Romanized' aspects, it appeared likely that in fact these represent the latest burials, clustered at the eastern end of the hillfort.

Grave goods

In the above groups, 32 of the 62 burials contained objects either in the grave fill or directly associated with skeletal remains. The majority of such inclusions were items generally found in graves of Late Iron Age date in Dorset, principally locally made pots (P2, P6, P7, P18, P19, P22, P23, P24, P25, P34, P36, P40, Q4, T6, T12, T17 and T20), animal bone (ox: P25, P28, T11; pig: T27; and sheep: P9, P14, P19A, P20, T4 and T28) and items of personal adornment such as shale bracelets and dress fittings.

Eight individuals from Groups 2a and 3 also had objects that are not part of the more general Durotrigian complement of grave items: two in Group 2a and two in Group 3 having spiral bronze rings on the feet of adult males (P2, (Fig. 4a), P19A, P28 and P30). A female in 2a (P14) wore a double iron ring on the fingers of her right hand, whilst a male in Group 3 (P27) wore an iron bracelet (Fig. 4a) on his left wrist (1943, 35). A further noteworthy item, a small copper alloy ear scoop of Roman manufacture, was found with burial P22 in Group 3 (Fig. 4a and b). The position of the artefact suggested that it had been worn around the neck on a cord (Wheeler 1943, 281).

Groups 2a and 3 at Maiden Castle were further distinguished in that they included items of weaponry. Burial with weapons is rare within the Durotrigian tradition, the most famous exception being the Whitcombe 'warrior' (Whitcombe Grave 9) – a young adult male buried in a less classic Durotrigian style more akin to the Maiden Castle Group 2a burials, furnished with an iron sword, scabbard, iron spearhead, iron file, spindle-whorl and copper alloy brooch (Aitken and Aitken 1990, 57–93). A female burial of Group 2a (T29) had an iron 'arrowhead' positioned in the grave in such a way that Wheeler thought she had been buried holding the shaft (1943, 350–1). This object is in fact similar in size and style to the iron point found lodged in the spine of burial P7a. The latter has in the past been popularly misidentified as the head of a ballista bolt but is more convincingly interpreted as a spear or javelin head. In addition to the ear scoop, individual P22, a male from one of the Group 3 double burials, had an iron whittle-tang knife and a triangular razor (Fig. 4a and b), similar to

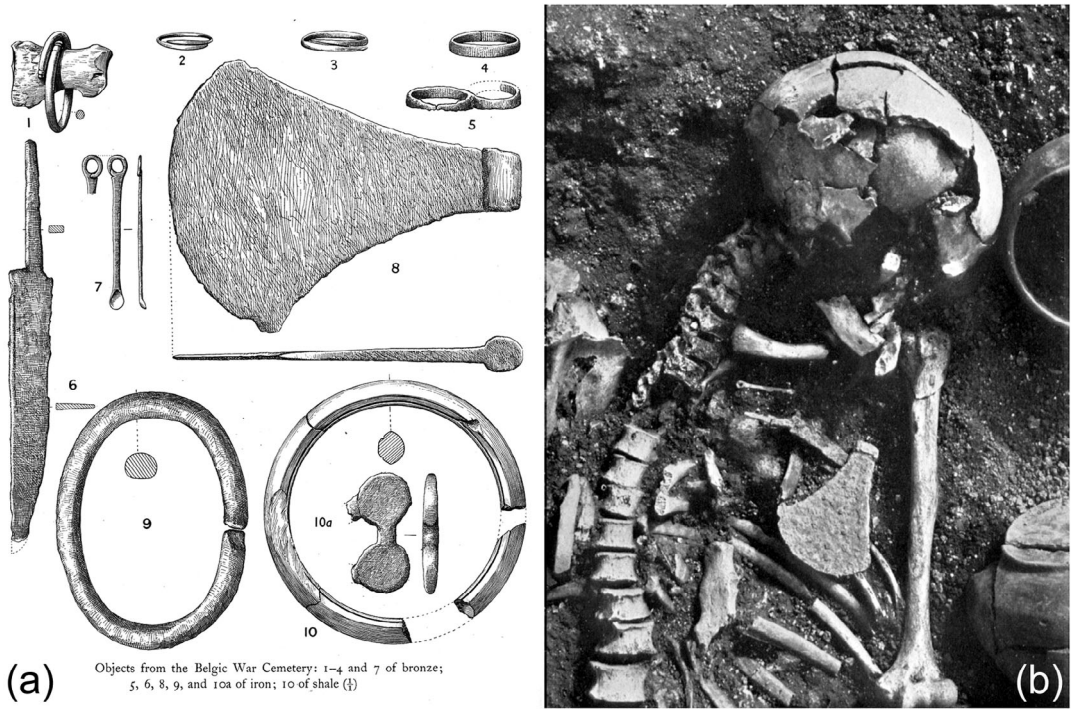

FIGURE 4
Grave goods from the Maiden Castle east gate cemetery: a – Objects as illustrated by Wheeler (1943, fig. 92.1–4 and 7 copper alloy; 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10a iron; 10 shale); b – Detail of P22 showing iron whittle-tang knife, copper-alloy ear scoop and triangular knife/razor © the Society of Antiquaries of London and Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society (reproduced with permission).

examples recovered from late first century BC–early first century AD cemeteries at King Harry Lane, St Albans (Stead and Rigby 1989, 104–5) and Westhampnett, Chichester (Fitzpatrick 1997, 101).

Demography

The demographic distribution of excavated burials at Maiden Castle is at variance from the pattern expected for a standard attritional cemetery, indicating one or more forms of selectivity. Redfern and Chamberlain (2011) conducted a structured comparison of the Maiden Castle burial population against other Iron Age cemeteries in Dorset together with assemblages from later periods including both attritional cemeteries and samples from military contexts. This added statistical power to the observation that the Maiden Castle population differs from contemporary Iron Age burial assemblages, whilst also demonstrating concordance with the military samples in being disproportionately composed of young adult males.

A point of note is that none of the Maiden Castle burials were children, the youngest individuals buried in the eastern entrance being older adolescents afforded 'adult' burial rites. Such a practice would accord with the observation that, in pre-industrial societies, adulthood is commonly

attributed on the grounds of biological or reproductive status rather than chronological age (Cox 2000). The Wheelers encountered 12 infant burials at various locations, none of which are securely dated, but if all are assumed to be contemporary with the late Iron Age/Early Roman burial of adults, these would give a ratio of one child to 5.16 adults (12/62). Notwithstanding the above point, the east gate cemetery contained only adults, in contrast with the nearby late Iron Age cemetery at Poundbury, where 27 adults were outnumbered by 31 subadult burials (1.14 children to one adult), amongst which 22 were infants (<1 year), with five individuals aged between one and 13 years (Farwell and Molleson 1993). The sexed adult burials at Poundbury were evenly distributed, with 12 males and 11 females (1.09: 1). This latter pattern is consistent with a standard mortality profile as expected in a pre-industrial population (Waldron 2007).

Amongst the 61 sexed adult burials from Maiden Castle, males outnumber females by 36 to 25 (a ratio of 1.44: 1). This imbalance is variably distributed across the identified burial groups, with numbers of males and females being equal in Group 1, but females outnumbering males by 4:1 in Group 2. Group 2a contains 14 males and 11 females giving a ratio of 1.27:1, whilst Group 3 is particularly unbalanced, containing 17 males and only three females (4.25:1). Using a binomial probability distribution for Group 3 demonstrates that a ratio of males to females in a randomly selected group of 19 burials where the ratio of males to females is equal ($p = 0.5$) would only be expected to occur one in 540 times (probability $p = 0.00185$). This indicates that the male dominated imbalance observed is very unlikely to be a chance sampling effect.

Skeletal Injuries

The proportion of individuals with observed weapon injuries at Maiden Castle is high by any standard (Redfern 2011, 131–3). Of the 62 adult burials, 26 (41.93%) had traumatic injuries consistent with violent assault (Fig. 5; Table 2). These traumata were unevenly distributed between the sexes, with more examples amongst males 18/36 (50%), although the proportion amongst women was still very high compared to other assemblages of the period at 32% (8/25). In regard to the style of burial, Group 3 displays the highest prevalence, with 12/21 instances (57.14%). Group 1 (pit burials) exhibits no such injuries, whilst Groups 2 and 2a exhibit injuries in similar proportions (Group 2: 5/13, [38.46%] Group 2a: 9/24 [37.5%]). Perhaps the most interesting comparison is between single and multiple burials. Amongst the single burials 15/43 individuals had weapon injuries (34.88%) whilst amongst the individuals buried in double or triple graves 11/15 (73.33%) had signs of such trauma. This latter difference becomes even more striking if the triple burial (P16, P17, P18) is excluded on the basis that trauma was unobservable due to poor preservation, with the rate amongst the double burials being 11/12 individuals (91.66%) with weapon injuries. It is therefore reasonable to say that whilst weapon injuries were frequent throughout the Durotrigian style burials, such traumata were particularly concentrated amongst the double burials in Group 3. Of these, 10 of the 12 individuals were male, whilst the two females both had violence-related injuries.

The most frequent class of unhealed weapon injury (Table 3) was sharp force trauma (incised cuts or perpendicular chopping blows by bladed implements) both in terms of the number of individuals affected (17) and also the total number of wounds observed (49). Blunt force injuries were the next most frequent (10 individuals, 15 injuries), followed by penetrating injuries from pointed implements (three individuals, four wounds). Individuals with only one injury were in the minority (9/26, 34.61%), with seven individuals displaying two wounds and one with three. Four

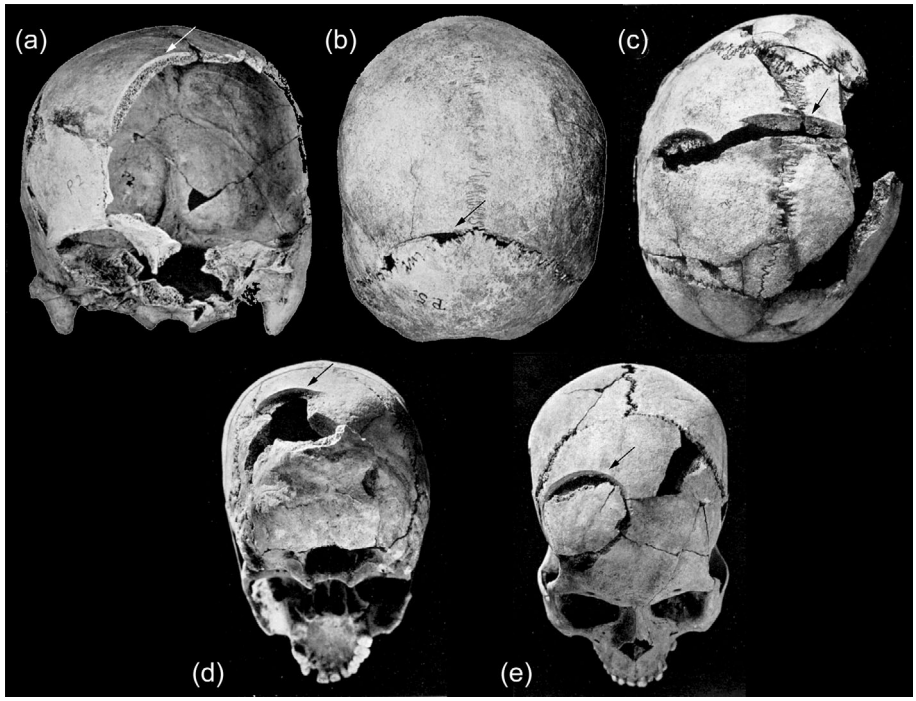

FIGURE 5
Examples of traumatic injuries from Maiden Castle: crania displaying unhealed blade wounds (arrowed): a – P2; b – P5; c – P12; d – P14; e – P34 © the Society of Antiquaries of London and Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society (reproduced with permission).

individuals had even higher numbers of injuries, one with five wounds, two with eight and one with 11 (burial P12 had nine blade wounds to the head in addition to blunt force injuries). Seven individuals spread throughout the three burial groups also had healed injuries consistent with violent altercations. On one hand these may reveal nothing beyond indicating that the respective individuals had been the victims of assault. However, examples of violent injury recidivism might alternatively mark these individuals as active (and repeated) participants in violent confrontations as experienced fighters. Four individuals had wounds to the bones of forearms or hands. Such wounds are commonly sustained when an individual attempts to block a blow (Judd 2008) and are termed 'defensive injuries'. Three individuals also had healed nasal fractures of a type most commonly sustained through deliberate blows targeting the face (Brickley and Smith 2006).

Violence is a culturally specific phenomenon that tends to be expressed in particular and socially sanctioned forms. Clearly several of the Maiden Castle dead had been struck significantly more times than would be necessary to kill or incapacitate, raising questions about the social context in which such 'overkill' took place. Finally, it should be noted that recognizing injuries to the skeleton in archaeological material is always a challenging endeavour, whilst any injuries that did not affect bone will be unobservable. The prevalence of such should, therefore, always be considered at best as minimal, and frequently as underestimates.

TABLE 2

Maiden Castle: traumatic injuries consistent with violent assaults recorded as published by Redfern (2011)* and Morant and Goodman (in Wheeler 1943, 337–60)**. Where descriptions of apparent injuries were unclear or not possible to verify, the respective examples have been omitted

Burial type	ID	Sk. no	Sex	Skeletal trauma observed
2.	N2	27	F	Fractured mandible - struck on the chin*
	P5	50	F	Single long cut along lambdoid suture, large BFT left side of head **
	P34	78	M	Roundel of bone removed from superior aspect R frontal bone. Injuries to mandible - cut mark on posterior aspect, slices of outer cortex removed from inferior aspect of mandibular body*
	T1	16	F	Slight healed wound on left side of frontal
	T13		F	Compression # R 1st MT, healed # top of R humerus, healing #'s multiple unsided rib shafts and R scapula*
	T18	21	F	Ante- and peri-mortem fractures, a perimortem weapon injury and penetrative injuries*
2a.	N1	26	M	Traumatic depression on right parietal
	P2	49	M	Single cut across frontal bone**
	P6	51	M	Left parietal probably fractured before death**
	P14	58	F	Bone cut from occiput by 3 blows, BFT to sides of head, 3 cuts to outer surface of rib*
	P11	56	M	2 #'s to prox. and mid third of L radial diaphysis and #'s to olecranon and mid third of L ulna*
	P12	57	M	Skull mutilated with 9 cuts and damaged by blows. Injuries from L orbit to supra-occipital
	T16	40	M	Cutmark inner surface of rib, incision anterior surface R radius, posterior L radius, both ulnae, L metacarpals, SFT and BFT to head*
	P20	64	M	Healed #'s to nasal bones, healed # R zygomatic
	P28	72	M	Blow to midline of face, bevelling to the medial aspect of the left nasal and maxilla bones*
3.	P7	52	M	Long cut across frontal. Two short cuts on right parietal. Left temporal squama pierced by square section
	P7a	53	M	Iron spearhead in vertebra. Slice of bone removed slice from mandible**
	P9	55	M	4 large cuts on cranial vault*
	P19	62	F	Weapon injuries to posterior aspect of L tibia and fibula -oblique line prob produced by a single blow*, healed nasal #
	P19A	63	M	Healed wound on skull by L orbit*
	P23	67	M	3 oblique cut marks to anterior aspect of an upper lumbar vertebra. Oblique # to distal third of R ulna*
	P24	68	M	Fragment of bone cut from mandible. Cranial vault smashed by blows - 2 #'s present, one vertical to L side of body and oblique fracture, running posteriorly from R lat. incisor. Cut mark to posterior aspect of L mandibular ramus plus indirect force #'s to mandible*.
	P25	69	M	Skull smashed by blows**. Incision on medial border of L radius and another on anterior aspect of middle third of R femur*
	P26	70	F	Skull has single long cut to L parietal
	P27	71	M	Small healed wound on frontal. Long cut on L parietal. Superficial cut removing slice at sagittal suture**, SFT to posterior aspect of middle and distal thirds of L radius, plus injury to anterior aspect of distal third of L ulna*
	P30	75	M	Piece of bone cut from jaw on L of chin**
	P36	74	F	Healed # on L fibula**, healed #'s to nasal bones*

M = Male,? M = Probable male, F = Female, # =Fracture, BFT = Blunt force trauma, SFT = Sharp force trauma, MT = Metatarsal.

TABLE 3
Maiden Castle: numbers of violence related injuries by burial group

Burial Group	No. Individuals	No. Injured Individuals					
		SFT	PT	BFT	Nasal #	Healed	Total*
2	13	3	1	4	0	2	**10**
2a	24	4	0	5	1	2	**12**
3	20	10	2	1	2	3	**18**
		Total No. Injuries					
		SFT	PT	BFT	Nasal #	Healed?	Total
2		5	2	7	0	2	**16**
2a		23	0	7	1	2	**33**
3		21	2	1	2	3	**29**
Total		**49**	**4**	**15**	**3**	**7**	**78**

SFT=Sharp force trauma, PT = Penetrative trauma, BFT = Blunt force trauma, # = Fracture.
* Some individuals had more than one class of injury.

Summary

The Maiden Castle burials are highly unusual on multiple counts, accumulating as a cemetery population at a time when the hillfort had been out of use for generations, a significant proportion receiving styles of burial at variance with that seen at other local late Iron Age/Early Roman period cemeteries. In contrast to the nearby attritional cemetery at Poundbury, there appears to have been a high degree of selectivity in operation with the choice of burial at the hillfort, skewed towards young adult males and individuals with weapon injuries sustained around the time of death. The degree of care taken, and reverence implied in the style of burials, would appear inconsistent with execution, whilst some exhibit aspects of treatment not seen in any other cemetery in the region. In addition, there is a concentration of grave goods that are not commonly present in late Iron Age burials for the area and which would appear to mark the respective individuals out as having held elite status.

RADIOCARBON DATING

Despite considerable discussion (Sharples 1991, 119–25; Redfern 2011; Redfern and Chamberlain 2011; Harding 2016, 189–91; Stewart and Russell 2017; Russell 2019; Redfern and Hamlin 2022), the unusual character of the Maiden Castle cemetery has never been satisfactorily explained. The current study set out to improve understanding of the site by testing several key possibilities through radiocarbon dating and the application of Bayesian modelling. The strategy focused on testing defined hypotheses regarding the overall duration over which burials accumulated, the question of whether the different styles of burial noted were sequential or contemporary, and the extent to which burials pre- or post-dated the arrival of the Roman army shortly after AD 43.

The hypotheses tested can be summarized in the following terms:

a) duration – did the cemetery and burials in the wider hillfort ramparts accumulate incrementally over an extended period spanning multiple generations or did some (or all) of the east gate individuals die 'en masse' during one or more conflict events?
b) burial form – did the differing forms of burial relate to sequential phases, representing changing traditions over time, the most likely ordering of phases being groups 1, 2, 2a and finally 3, with 2 and 2a overlapping, or were differing forms of burial contemporary, relating to social status or other circumstances particular to individuals, rather than discrete diachronic phases?
c) the impact of Rome – do Group 2 and 2a flexed burials relate to indigenous traditions which changed to a more 'Romanized' form of extended, supine burials following the conquest or do Group 3 burials represent a shift unrelated to the conquest, with flexed burials continuing after the Roman arrival?
d) the nature of violence – are double burials, which combine the highest prevalence of observable trauma and overkill with 'prestige' grave goods, remains of elite individuals killed during episodes of violence predating the AD 40s or deaths which postdate the arrival of the Roman army, opening other possibilities?

Radiocarbon dating sample selection

Human burials from the 1934–37 excavations were deposited at the Department of Archaeology, Cambridge University (Goodman and Morant 1940; Wheeler 1943, 337–60), three individuals (Burials P7, P7A and Q1) later being returned to Dorset Museum for display. The current project acquired funding to obtain 22 radiocarbon dates in total. Initially, the double buried individuals at Dorchester (P7, P7A) were dated to test the assumption that these were contemporary and to inform the subsequent sampling strategy. Following this, dates were obtained from 20 skeletons curated at the Leverhulme Centre for Evolutionary Anthropology, Cambridge as part of the Duckworth Collection.

A sampling strategy was devised to achieve optimal intersectional coverage of different burial categories, location, demography and the presence/absence of weapon injuries (Table 4). This selection comprised 15 individuals from the east gate cemetery, with the remaining five samples selected from individuals buried among the outer ramparts. An individual deposited at the base of a pit, interpreted as a foundation burial predating the earliest rampart extension (Wheeler 1943, pl. XLIV) was excluded from the assessment, whilst the three remaining burial types (2: loosely flexed, 2a: tightly flexed and 3: supine-extended) were included in broadly equal proportions. The sample included five 'true' double burials, and one interpreted by Wheeler as two separate burials, one superimposed above the other (P36/P29). Within each of the represented burial types and locations, individuals of both sexes were sampled and also individuals with and without weapon injuries. The initial two AMS dates were obtained by Beta Analytic, Miami, Florida; according to protocols as listed at https://www.radiocarbon.com/beta-radiocarbon-lab.htm, with results accredited to ISO/IEC 17025:2017 Testing Accreditation PJLA #59423 standards. The subsequent larger sample was obtained at the Centre for Isotope Research (CIO) at the University of Groningen, Netherlands, according to the protocols outlined by Dee *et al.* (2020).

With regard to the latter, the stable isotope ratios (δ13C and δ15N) were obtained via combustion in an elemental analyser (EA, Elementar Vario Isotope Cube) coupled to an isotope ratio mass spectrometer (IRMS, IsoPrime 100). The quality of collagen preservation was primarily assessed by the C:N ratio. The C:N range of 2.9–3.6 from De Niro (1985) is often cited as

TABLE 4
Maiden Castle: selection of individuals sampled for AMS dating. All samples were fragments of rib from the respective individuals with the exception of P7 and P7A for which samples were taken from the left tibia. BWC = Belgic War Cemetery

Phase	**Burial no**.	Double burial?	Trauma?	Sex	Location
2	P5	N	Y	F	BWC
	P34	N	Y	M	BWC
	T13	N	Y	F	Ramparts (NE)
	T5	N	N	M	Ramparts (SE)
	P31	N	N	F	BWC
	T4	N	N	M	Ramparts (SE)
2a	P2	N	Y	M	BWC
	P14	N	Y	F	BWC
	P12	N	Y	M	BWC
	P20	N	Y	M	BWC
	T16	N	Y	M	Ramparts (NE)
	P33	N	N	F	BWC
3	P19	Y	Y	F	BWC
	P23	Y	Y	M	BWC
	P24	Y	Y	M	BWC
	P26	Y	Y	F	BWC
	P9	N	Y	M	BWC
	P30	N	Y	M	BWC
	P36	Y	Y	F	BWC
	T3	N	N	M	Ramparts (SE)
	P7	Y	Y	M	BWC
	P7A	Y	Y	M	BWC

acceptable for collagen purity, but the CIO prefers to investigate results if they fall outside 3.1–3.3 (Dee *et al*. 2020), and aims to reject all samples with results outside 2.9–3.5. Each pretreatment batch includes a secondary standard, with known isotope ratios, and a duplicate. The δ13C and δ15N data are obtained at the following 1σ precisions: δ13C = 0.15‰ and δ15N = 0.3‰. The CIO stable isotope ratios are substantiated by a range of international references and inhouse controls. For δ13C, this is primarily caffeine (-38.2‰), and the IAEA oxalic acid (-17.60‰); and for δ15N, the same caffeine (-6.61‰) and CaN (caffeine with enriched nitrogen, +18.8‰). The controls include an in-house long-run collagen reference (δ13C = -19.87‰ and δ15N = +9.87‰). The percentages on combustion are substantiated by long-run measurements on said standards, and amount to ±0.4% for carbon and 0.2% for nitrogen on both caffeines, and ±0.3% and 0.9% on the collagen, respectively.

Results

All of the samples proved sufficiently well preserved for successful collagen extraction (with C:N values varying between 3.18 and 3.4). The ^{14}C measurements and calibrated date ranges are listed in Table 5. As the stable carbon isotope values indicate a terrestrial, C3-based diet, radiocarbon results are unlikely to have been affected by any significant marine reservoir effects (Bayliss *et al*. 2004), calibrated date ranges being regarded as accurate estimates of the sample ages. The majority of results lay between the first century BC and the second century AD, with two

TABLE 5
Maiden Castle: AMS dating results

Burial	Lab Ref	^{14}C Result	Error range	Calibrated Range 68% CI		Calibrated Range 95% CI		σ^{15}N (VPDB)	σ^{13}C (Air)
P5	GrM-32432	2019	23	43 BC	16 AD	88 BC	65 AD	9.85	-19.72
P34	GrM-32434	2009	21	42 BC	24 AD	48 BC	64 AD	9.99	-19.56
T13	GrM-32435	2075	23	147 BC	44 AD	165 BC	3 AD	10.13	-19.68
T5	GrM-32436	2037	22	51 BC	10 AD	102 BC	58 AD	10.49	-19.69
P31	GrM-32437	1878	22	130 AD	206 AD	120 AD	229 AD	10.91	-20.41
T4	GrM-32623	2060	23	102 BC	4 AD	154 BC	10 AD	9.22	-19.54
P2	GrM-32624	2016	23	43 BC	20 AD	53 BC	66 AD	10.63	-20.65
P14	GrM-32625	2006	23	41 BC	55 AD	49 BC	73 AD	10.83	-19.85
P12	GrM-32688	1981	25	31 BC	75 AD	41 BC	118 AD	9.85	-19.91
P20	GrM-32689	1968	22	21 BC	109 AD	34 BC	121 AD	8.84	-19.81
T16	GrM-32690	1933	23	62 AD	126 AD	22 AD	203 AD	9.35	-20.03
P33	GrM-32692	1974	23	13 AD	107 AD	38 AD	119 AD	9.58	-19.73
P19	GrM-32693	2008	24	42 BC	26 AD	50 BC	76 AD	9.54	-19.88
P23	GrM-32694	1988	22	32 BC	63 AD	42 BC	110 AD	9.39	-19.93
P24	GrM-32695	2011	22	42 BC	23 AD	50 BC	66 AD	10.77	-20.22
P26	GrM-32697	1974	23	13 AD	107 AD	38 BC	119 AD	9.91	-19.41
P9	GrM-32700	1966	22	23 AD	109 AD	32 BC	121 AD	10.59	-19.9
P30	GrM-32701	1997	22	38 BC	60 AD	45 BC	106 AD	9.93	-20.12
P36	GrM-32702	1898	23	121 AD	203 AD	76 AD	215 AD	11.03	-20.09
T3	GrM-32703	2027	23	46 BC	11 AD	94 BC	61 AD	11.28	-20.11
P7	Beta-585369	1991	19	37 BC	64 AD	43 BC	79 AD	9.7	-20.2
P7A	Beta-585368	1996	17	40 BC	60 AD	44 BC	70 AD	9.4	-20.1

samples possibly dating from the second century BC and three returning ranges spreading (at low probability) into the early third century AD (Fig. 6).

The overall range of results can be summarized as falling into three broad groupings. The earliest comprised three burials (T4, T5 and T13) excavated from the wider ramparts around the eastern end of the hillfort, with dates most likely in the mid first century BC. The second group concentrated between the final decades of the first century BC and the first half of the first century AD and included all but two of the 'P' numbered burials sampled from the eastern entrance cemetery. These latter two burials (P31 and P36) were amongst three temporal outliers (the third broad grouping), having produced dates most likely falling in the mid second century AD, the other being T16 which was dated most probably between the late first and early second centuries AD.

The simple calibrated results (Fig. 6) are accurate estimates of the dates of the samples and provide useful information regarding the overall spread and general sequence of burial activity. The current project aims, however, required a greater degree of specificity to differentiate between the competing hypotheses (outlined above). Greater precision in the date ranges was required in order to arrive at a picture of burial activity, and the events to which the deaths relate, that equates to something more like a history of funerary use at the hillfort rather than an overall archaeological estimation. Bayesian modelling was therefore applied (Buck *et al.* 1996) in an effort to refine the sequence with tighter dating ranges. Such an approach requires the definition of diachronic, sequential relationships, defined on the basis of relative stratigraphical positioning, or associated data that are typologically or otherwise chronologically differentiated, which permit the results to be placed in a reliable order. Such sequencing can allow modelling of the start and end of various discrete events, gaps between phases, and the probable span over which events occurred. A

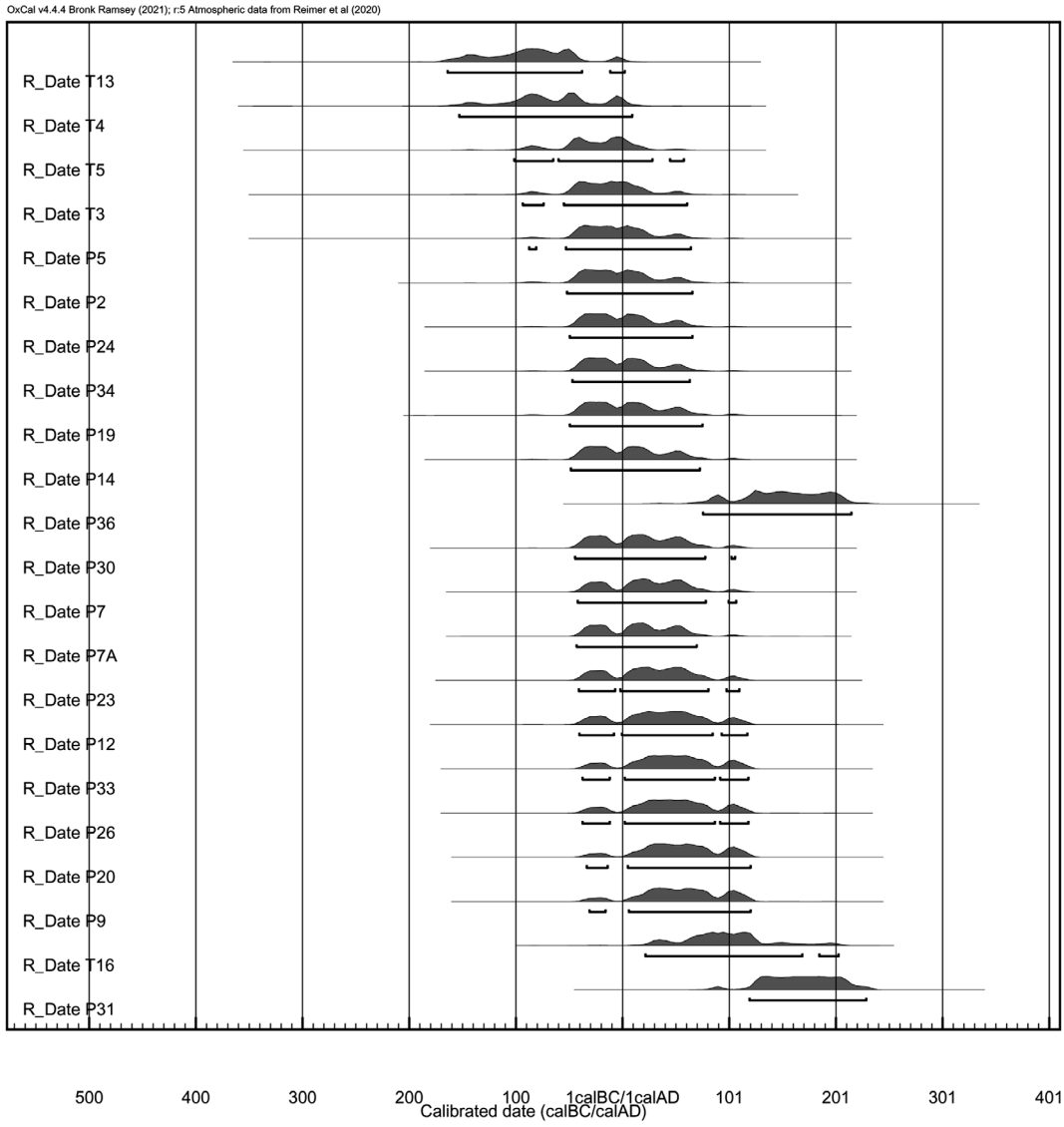

FIGURE 6

Maiden Castle: unmodelled calibrated radiocarbon probabilities; the 'P' numbered burials are from the Eastern Entrance Cemetery and are for the most part clustered with greatest probability between the late first century BC and the mid first century AD, but with outliers from each group likely dating slightly later during the second century AD.

horizontal cemetery, without intercutting graves, as considered here lacks stratigraphical relationships in the strict sense. However, at the outset of the current project the authors were optimistic that the differing forms of burial most likely represented sequential phases in a successive sequence, therefore offering potential for modelling based on grave typology. The chronological modelling attempted, was undertaken using OxCal 4.4, Version 168 (Bronk Ramsey 1995; 1998; 2001; 2009; 2019), and the internationally agreed calibration curve for the northern hemisphere

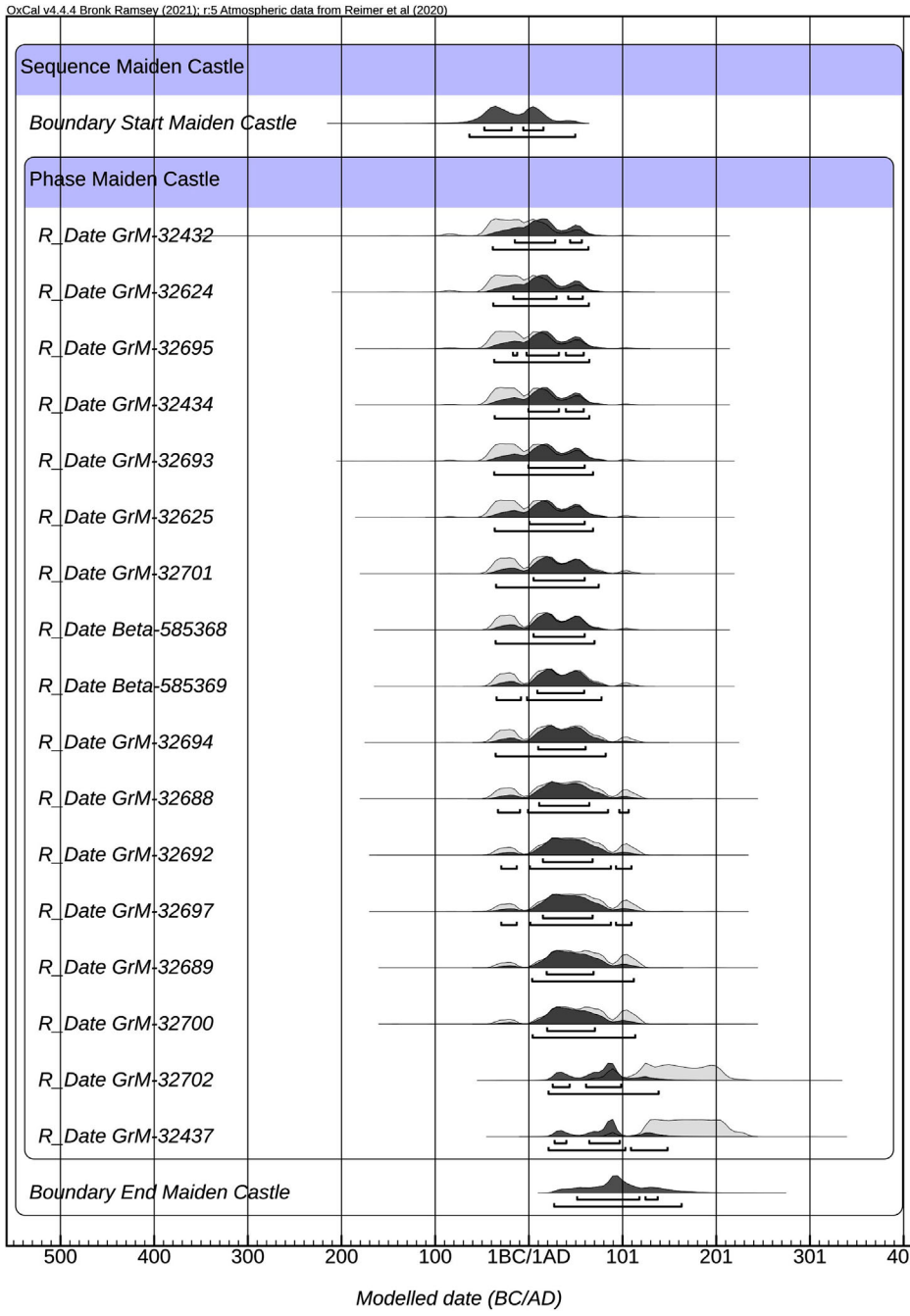

FIGURE 7
Maiden Castle: modelled radiocarbon dates, with unmodelled probabilities shown in outline and modelled probabilities shown in bold.

(IntCal20: Reimer *et al*. 2020). The models are defined by the OxCal CQL2 command terms and by the brackets on the left-hand side of Fig. 7. Calibrated radiocarbon dates are shown in outline and the posterior density estimates produced by the chronological modelling are shown in solid black. The Highest Posterior Density intervals which describe the posterior distributions are given in italics.

The burials spread around the ramparts and enclosed within the eastern entrance do not intersect and cannot be separated on the basis of vertical stratigraphy. Initial attempts at chronological modelling were applied to test the hypothesis that different forms of burial occurred in overlapping, but sequential, phases on the assumption that Group 2 (loosely flexed) burials were earliest, whilst Group 3 (extended, supine) burials were latest in the sequence. This model had poor overall agreement (Amodel = 7.3% (A'c= 60.0%)) and was rejected. Continued attempts at modelling using various possible prior assumptions were similarly unsuccessful. Differing combinations using the burial styles defined above (Groups 2, 2a and 3) in addition to the issue of double versus single burials, the presence/absence of trauma or selection for sex all either returned even lower Amodel values, or the application (Oxcal) simply failed to compute any results. In this sense we can state that the robustness of these differing priors has been tested, and led to the conclusion that the dating would appear to demonstrate that such suggested criteria for phasing burials, at least in the region and period covered by the current study, are fallacious: erroneous archaeological precepts that give a false impression of a linear progression.

Having exhausted all avenues that the data would permit for constructing a sequential model, we were obliged instead to process all the Eastern Cemetery dates as a single phase. Oxcal was instructed to calculate the start and end dates, as well as the duration of the phase. The results are shown in Fig. 7. This simple model succeeded in tightening the likely span of overall burial activity to be mostly concentrated during the first two-thirds, and mainly the first half of the first century AD, with the latest individuals dated having most likely died at around AD 80. When the overall spans of the modelled ranges are compared as shown in Fig. 8, the dates fall into four apparent groups. The first nine dates (P5–P23) all most likely predate AD 43, with median points that are closely clustered (AD 12.5–AD 23.5, mean 16.65, St.Dev. 3.78). All of the respective individuals had weapon injuries and so this group of burials potentially indicate a series of violent events spread over the second decade of the first century AD, or even a single violent episode occurring during the period.

The following dates fall into three clusters with similarly close median points (P12–P26; medians: 36.5, 40, 40; P20, P9; medians: 58.5, 59.5; P36, P31; medians 80.5 and 85.5). As shown in Fig. 8, the differing styles of burial are spread across this period. The different forms of burial noted do not conform to a simple temporal sequence, but are contemporaneous, although the supine/extended burials only seem to appear during the first century AD, amongst which none of the dated double burials likely post-date the AD 43 Claudian invasion. Lastly, amongst the dated burials the flexed burial tradition went on after this time, post-dating the supine-extended form, with burials continuing sporadically both at the eastern entrance and amongst the ramparts, for at least two to three generations. The overall impression given by these overlapping patterns is one of a culture in flux, variation across decades presenting a snapshot of a time when cultural norms were shifting as accepted practices were challenged and renegotiated.

Stable isotope values

No obvious patterning was observed regarding the stable carbon isotope ratio (δ13C) values amongst the sample. The stable nitrogen (δ15N) values were notable in that they were

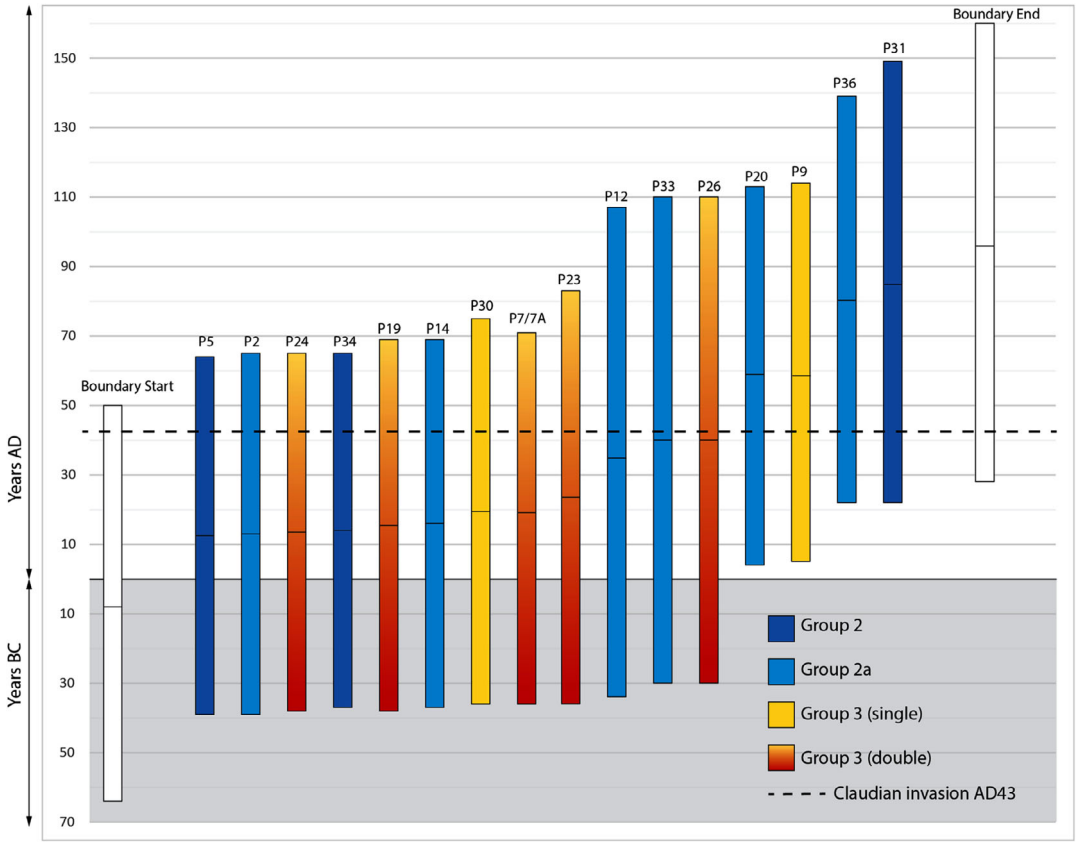

FIGURE 8
Maiden Castle: Comparison of modelled date ranges for the eastern cemetery burials, with median points marked and burial styles indicated by shading.

generally relatively high (Table 5), with a mean value of 9.9‰ amongst the overall sample (st. dev = 0.66). Nine out of the 22 values obtained were above 10‰, with two of these above 11‰. The trophic levels indicated by these values are consistent with a diet where a large fraction of the overall protein was derived from animal sources. These data were explored further by dividing the sample along various lines for comparison including burial type, location, sex and the presence of weapon injuries. When compared using a t-test (at 0.05 confidence) no significant differences were present when equating single versus double burials, males versus females, or individuals with and without weapon injuries. However, differences very close to this level of significance were found when comparing Type 2a (loose flexed) ($\overline{x}$=9.69‰) with Type 3 (supine, extended) ($\overline{x}$=10.32‰) burials (p=0.06) and also in comparing the outlying rampart burials ($\overline{x}$=9.56‰) with Type 3 (p=0.06). In summary, the general level of dietary animal-derived protein was high throughout the sample, but highest amongst those given extended burials.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from the radiocarbon dates that not only does the Maiden Castle east gate cemetery comprise casualties from multiple incidents, but also that the different forms of burial recorded do not indicate discrete, sequential traditions but perhaps contrasting degrees of social status, kin affiliation or simply new ideas and cultural forms coming into currency. These deathways are not apparently gendered but are sufficiently formal and consistent to indicate a set of agreed/accepted practices regarding placement of the deceased. It is possible that the tight versus flexed burials simply relate to some interments having been shrouded, something which may further reflect practical concerns, like the degree of decomposition, or personal choice for the mourners rather than holding any symbolism or significance.

Burials placed among the ramparts at Maiden Castle appear to have accumulated incrementally over time, the site being used as a place of selective burial for those who died violently. It is reasonable to conclude that the three subsequent clusters relate to short periods of time where violence erupted, each possibly even representing a single incident or episode, such as a skirmish or raid. Those in the east gate are clustered in three temporal groupings, spread between the close of the first century BC and the first half of the first century AD, individuals in these groups exhibiting a high prevalence of perimortem weapon injuries. When the clustered dates and trauma prevalence are considered together, this pattern suggests three possibly brief episodes of lethal violence, each a generation apart. This pattern is plausibly suggestive of increasing societal stress in the decades leading up to the Roman conquest in the mid AD 40s, following which the area was formally pacified. The temporal outliers, the latest dated burials, evidence occasional continuity as a place of burial (possibly, but not necessarily, for those dying with violence) on into the following century.

Supine/extended burials appear to be a late innovation, with none pre-dating the first century AD. Some of these contain Roman items and possess a different pattern of grave goods from the more 'traditional' flexed burials, in particular items of personal adornment (including a razor and ear scoop) that might imply higher status. A possible interpretation is that these evidence Roman practices adopted by elite individuals in the decades leading up to the invasion. The double burials remain unique both in the Durotriges zone and across Iron Age/Early Roman Britain. There are occasions where Durotrigian burials are found superimposed with a later grave overlying an earlier (such as the temporal outlier P36, dated to between AD 76–215), possibly signifying close kin relations. The other Maiden Castle double burials differ in being individuals who died violently and were buried simultaneously in the same grave cut, a possible interpretation being that these were close kin who died during the same event. It is notable that all double burials are supine/extended. Possible circumstances for their deaths include reciprocal outbreaks of episodic raiding, respective groups seeking 'revenge' or perhaps internal dynastic struggles resulting in the killing of familially-related individuals. In either case, this episodic pattern appears to have ended following the establishment of Roman rule.

The high stable nitrogen isotope ratio values for the sample as a whole indicate a diet rich in animal-derived protein. Given the general wealth of evidence for arable farming in this period, the Durotriges cannot plausibly be characterized as a society of pastoralists, amongst whom a diet based primarily on herded animal resources with limited inclusion of vegetable foods could be expected for the general population. This point further raises the question as to whether those buried at Maiden Castle represent a high-status group as opposed to more 'average' members of society, it being noteworthy that those with the highest stable nitrogen values are the Group 3 burials.

Comparative data are available from various contemporary skeletal assemblages from Dorset. Individuals sampled at nearby Poundbury (N.=13) produced an average δN15 value of 8.4‰ (Richards *et al*. 1998), whilst 38 individuals from various sites produced an average δN value of 9.3‰ (Redfern *et al*. 2010). Notwithstanding the point that those with higher values amongst the latter sample might themselves be high status individuals; we might suggest that the selection criteria for burial at Maiden Castle also comprised elements of social status, with the site forming the burial ground of local Durotrigian 'nobility' and/or their followers.

Inter-group violence in later Iron Age Britain

As an Iron Age hillfort with inhumations exhibiting signs of violence, Maiden Castle is by no means unique, although it is unusual in that bodies were set down as discrete formal burials with grave goods. Elsewhere across southern Britain, the discovery of human bodies and body parts, 'dumped' in hillfort ditch fill or 'heaped without ceremony' within the collapsed remains of rampart material, have been referred to as 'massacre or desecration' deposits (Harding 2016, 192–8). One of the more macabre was recorded in the south-western entrance to Cadbury Castle, Somerset (Alcock 1972), where articulated and semi-articulated remains of men, women and children were found distributed through the entrance passage and the burnt rubble of a gate structure and slighted ramparts. Originally calculated as representing 30 individuals (Alcock 1972, 105), subsequent analysis has suggested the total could have been three times that number (Forbes in Barrett *et al*. 2000, 117–21). Marks of gnawing on bone indicates that some bodies had been exposed, or at least insufficiently covered. Physical trauma 'consistent with death in battle or in its aftermath' (Harding 2016, 194) was further recorded, whilst the identification of isolated skulls and skull fragments may indicate headhunting or execution.

The variable representation of body parts and high levels of skeletal trauma with 'weapon injuries to all areas of the body' (Redfern 2011, 115) makes it difficult to interpret the Cadbury Castle deposit with certainty. Initially thought to represent the victims of a Roman assault in the AD 40s, Alcock subsequently suggested that deaths may have occurred decades later, perhaps reprisal for a localized rebellion (Alcock 1972, 170–2). Tying the deposit to a documented event is difficult, however, and it has been postulated that the assemblage may represent residue of a 'more complex set of circumstances' (Harding 2016, 194), possibly involving deliberate desecration of a religious, ceremonial or burial place (Barrett *et al*. 2000, 111). A similar explanation, of a ceremonial or cult site 'targeted for destruction' may explain the dismembered and partially disarticulated human remains recorded from Ham Hill in Somerset (Harding 2016, 196).

Other hillforts where the 'gruesome treatment' of human remains has been taken as suggesting the massacre of occupants include Sutton Walls in Herefordshire, where the remains of at least 24 individuals, all adult male, were found jumbled in a ditch by the west entrance (Kenyon 1953). Six had been decapitated whilst others 'bore injuries indicative of violent death' (Harding 2016, 192). The positioning of skeletal remains suggested haphazard disposal, the absence of grave goods or funerary care possibly indicating that individuals had been methodically stripped. Similar evidence has been recovered in the southern inner entrance of Kemerton Camp, Worcestershire (Hencken 1938) where 36 individuals, comprising 29 adults and seven sub-adults, the majority young males, were identified, with evidence for sharp and blunt force trauma as well as decapitation and mutilation (Western and Hurst 2013, 165–70). Radiocarbon analysis provide

a date range in the mid second to mid first centuries BC (170–50 cal BC: Western and Hurst 2013, 161–3).

Further evidence for possible intercommunity violence has been recovered from Fin Cop hillfort in Derbyshire where 15 individuals, comprising women and children, were found in a rubble-filled ditch (Waddington 2012, 182–4). With the exception of one skeleton exhibiting cranial trauma, none displayed obvious signs of injury, although their irregular positioning, within rubble from a destroyed rampart, suggested execution and disposal of 'non-combatant women and children, the men presumably having been slain in an engagement elsewhere or taken into slavery' (Harding 2016, 197). At War Ditches in Cambridgeshire, the ditch of a small enclosure, slighted in the early 4th century BC, contained articulated, partially articulated and dismembered human remains, interpreted by the excavators as residue of a 'cataclysmic event' (Pickstone and Mortimer 2012, 56).

Excavation at Danebury hillfort, Hampshire, has identified gate burning, charnel pits and 'ammunition dumps', possibly reflecting periods of prolonged social instability (Cunliffe 2003, 77). Of the 100 or so individuals recovered, 27 had evidence of severe cranial penetrative spear and sword injuries together with decapitation and knife cuts 'of a kind that might have resulted from scalping' (Cunliffe 1993, 53). These have variously been interpreted as evidence for combat, execution, butchery or cannibalism (Hooper in Cunliffe 1984, 465–73; Cunliffe 1995, 76; 2003, 74–7, 149–56). Re-examination of the human remains has shown the full extent of peri-mortem mutilation and dismemberment, suggestive of 'denigration of the deceased' (Craig *et al*. 2005, 174–6). The homogenous nature of weapons-induced trauma apparent on the mandibles of two juvenile skulls, consistent with decapitation at the level of the second and third cervical vertebrae, when combined with simultaneous disposal in a pit at Danebury, argues strongly for at least one execution or ritualized killing (Craig *et al*. 2005, 170).

A dynastic parallel?

The skeletal evidence recorded from Kemerton Camp, Fin Cop, Sutton Walls, Danebury and War Ditches may suggest attempts to 'annihilate the social identity of the group' using deliberate, targeted intercommunity violence, execution and postmortem mutilation and the forsaking of normative funeral rites in throwing bodies into ditch fill or leaving them to rot where they fell (Western and Hurst 2013, 178–9).

Whilst there are no precise parallels for the combination of features seen in the Maiden Castle cemetery (selective burial biased towards younger adult males, multiple traumata, double burials and accumulation over multiple events clustered in time), the group does bear similarities to a cemetery at Driffield Terrace, York, dating from the turn of the third century AD. Here a 'large, highly unusual non-attritional Roman cemetery population' (Montgomery *et al*. 2011) comprised 80 individuals, 48 (60%) of whom had been decapitated. The assemblage was heavily skewed towards young adult males, amongst whom there was also a high prevalence of perimortem cranial trauma and sharp force injuries, including defensive wounds to the forearms. There were three instances of double burials as well as one triple and one quadruple burial. Stable isotope values indicate that several individuals originated outside Britain (Montgomery *et al*. 2011).

One suggested interpretation for the Driffield Terrace burials is a gladiator cemetery (Caffell and Holst, 2012). This could be consistent with the diverse origins of some and could further explain multiple burial, as gladiators were known to fight in pairs. In such a scenario, double

burials at Maiden Castle could represent individuals who died in nearby Dorchester amphitheatre, established in the late first century AD. Although Maiden Castle possessed both martial connotations and physical separation from the formal burial grounds established by urban authorities, a gladiator cemetery may be discounted in light of the radiocarbon results. An alternative interpretation for Driffield Terrace (Montgomery *et al*. 2011) suggests individuals systematically killed during an established historical event, namely the death of emperor Septimius Severus in AD 211, after which his son, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (Caracalla) removed opposition on his way to the throne. The diverse origins of individuals, coupled with the high-status nature of the cemetery, would be consistent with such a social group, in addition to the fact that they were afforded otherwise normative burial. If the York burials were the victims of a high-ranking dynastic struggle, it would be reasonable to question whether the multiple parallels apparent between this and the Maiden Castle assemblage might indicate the latter resulted from a similar pattern of events.

Recent aDNA results obtained from sites across Dorset (Cassidy *et al*. 2025) have suggested that Durotrigian society was organized along matrilocal and matrilineal lines, individuals cognisant of familial descent over multiple generations, indicated by the successful avoidance of inbreeding. Well-furnished burials in the region have furthermore been matrifocal, implying that Iron Age wealth transferred down through the female line, objects perhaps being placed in graves only when an individual died without issue. The importance of women as key figures anchoring social networks and determining land ownership within the Durotriges may explain presence and patterning amongst the Maiden Castle burials. The double burials mostly contain men. Whilst women are present in some, none contain two women together, perhaps again because when females occur in this context, they represent the last of a line.

The extreme nature of violence detected at Maiden Castle, particularly amongst extended and double burials, inflicting multiple wounds in combinations far beyond what would be required to terminate or incapacitate, constitutes overkill. Such behaviour implies extreme strength of feeling, which in modern forensic circumstances is usually linked to psychopathology (Kopacz *et al*. 2023). When such behaviour occurs in a repeated pattern that is systematic and diachronic, this implies a deliberate, premeditated practice intended to produce a specific effect. This latter point is of particular importance as it necessitates an intended 'audience' for extreme acts of performative violence, implying such brutality to function as an extreme form of communication. In this respect, overkill can be seen as a tool of social control (Potter and Chiupka 2010) intended to impress a lesson on 'willing or unwilling observers' (Moriarty 2023) and enforce existing or refashioned power relationships in a shockingly unequivocal manner. In light of the implied elite status of the mutilated individuals at Maiden Castle, and the resemblance to the pattern at Driffield Terrace, examples of overkill prevalent amongst the extended and double burials add weight to the idea that these represent an episodic dynastic struggle where the outcome was intended to send a clear message to a wider audience.

CONCLUSION

The new programme of radiocarbon dating at Maiden Castle, combined with a reconsideration of the contextual nature of interment, has helped elucidate a clearer sequence of inhumation. As individuals dying at different times, possibly from different causes, it is now possible to explain the nature and context of the unusual elements of the 'Belgic War Cemetery' without recourse to a single historical event, avoiding the chronological and contextual issues that have confounded interpretation.

Describing the burials as Iron Age casualties of war provided both explanation and a narrative hook on which Mortimer Wheeler could hang the published interpretation, it being normal for him to link excavated material with established historical events (Carr 2012, 235; Russell 2019, 331). In associating the cemetery with a Roman attack, however, Wheeler missed an intriguing proposition, namely that the individuals derived from different, though no less dramatic, forms of violence enacted in the final years of the pre-Roman Iron Age. Whether this related to raiding, dispute resolution or dynastic conflict, it is clear that those interred in the east gate died in episodic periods of bloodshed which may have been the result of localized social turmoil. Ironically, perhaps, it would appear that acts of interpersonal Iron Age violence ended within a generation or so following the formal establishment of a Roman province in the mid first century AD.

In providing temporal resolution for the east gate cemetery at Maiden Castle, this project allows novel questions to be framed. In light of these, it has become possible to move towards a narrative account of the years before AD 43 that is more akin to history than previously possible. Perhaps most importantly, the new data obtained illuminate a population using an abandoned hillfort as a place of selective burial in the decades leading up to the Roman Conquest, as active authors of their own future, with forward-looking agency and complex hierarchical concerns, rather than as passive members of a 'simple' society destined to be absorbed within the sphere of an ostensibly more sophisticated power.

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