THE PICTISH ARTS SOCIETY
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Spring Lecture Series

17 March 2017 – Dr Neil McGuigan

Alba and the end of Northumbria

The spring series of lectures kicked off with a talk by Dr Neil McGuigan. Neil is currently a Teaching Fellow at St Andrews University, where he completed his doctoral thesis on the decline of the Kingdoms of Northumbria and Strathclyde in the Viking Age. The waning of Northumbrian power and the subsequent accession of the Lothians and Borders to the Kingdom of Alba was the subject of his talk and Neil began by stating that there is no clear definitive story of these events recorded in history but rather a series of different accounts from a variety of sources. In picking his way through these often contradictory statements, Neil described his interpretation as being based on best evidence.

After the Battle of Dunnichen in 685, it appears that the Picts and Northumbrians lived in relative equilibrium. The first Viking raids in the closing years of the 8th century were no more than that: raids looking for plunder. But by the mid-9th century, the Norse were taking control of and settling large areas of land, putting pressure on kingdoms all over the British Isles. It seems likely that this pressure on both Dàl Riata and Pictland resulted in their closer political alliance, making it easier for Kenneth MacAlpin to become king of both Scots and Picts in 843, laying the foundations for the Kingdom of Alba.

In 850, Kenneth MacAlpin attacked Northumbria, getting as far south as Melrose, and for the next century, both sides warred over the Lothians and Borders, with fortune favouring each side in turn.

Neil then looked in detail at various contradictory accounts of how the Scots gained control of the Lothians during either the 10th the 11th century. In the first account, the Chronicle of the Kings of Alba states that in the reign of King Idulfus (954–62), *'Oppidium Eden* (the fortified town of Edinburgh) *was vacated and left to the Scots, as it is to this day'*. In the second, King Edgar of Northumbria gifts the Lothians to Kenneth II in return for Kenneth's homage. A third version of events would have it that the Scots took the Lothians by force, following King Malcolm II's resounding victory over the Northumbrians at the Battle of Carham in c1018.

A fourth account states that Eadwulf 'Cuttlefish', Earl of Bernicia, ceded the Lothians to King Malcolm II in an act of cowardice, for fear the Scots might avenge the bloody slaughter of their army under Eadwulf's brother, King Uhtred, in 1006. And finally, a fifth version has King Malcolm III (Malcolm Canmore) receiving the Lothians as a dowry from Edward the Confessor upon his marriage to Edward's great-niece, Margaret in 1070.

Neil examined the veracity of each case, weighing up the pros and cons and considering the place and date it was compiled and the likely political bias at play. The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba has been re-worked and the '*Oppidium Eden*' passage appears to have been inserted into the text, as it breaks up an earlier entry about Idulfus. The notion that the Lothians were a 'gift' to Kenneth II is seen as being part of a Northumbrian foundation legend but only appears in post-1100 versions, long after the reign of King Edgar. Earlier versions make no mention of any such 'gift'. The source of the Eadwulf 'Cuttlefish' story does have some historically accurate detail that can be attested elsewhere and as Eadwulf was Uhtred's successor, the author of the account may have had access to an accurate tradition. However, the text also includes numerous errors so cannot be taken at face value. The written account citing the Lothians as a dowry dates to the first half of the 12th century, making it closer to the events described than any of the other sources. It is generally dismissed by historians, not least because Edward the Confessor died several years before he was supposed to have given Margaret and the Lothians away.

And, just to add to all this uncertainty, Neil also explained that there is no contemporary definition of 'the Lothians' and that the area under discussion could have extended much farther than the modern region, perhaps as far west as Stirling and south into what we would now call the Borders.

No version of events is entirely reliable but it seems likely that Norse expansion into the southern half of Northumbria, Cumbria and Galloway in the 10th century weakened the Kingdom of Northumbria and played into the hands of the Scots, as did the Norman Conquest of 1066. Within a few short years, the Normans had tightened their grip on England and Malcolm Canmore was the 'lucky' Scottish monarch who was able to capitalise on that and secure Scottish power south of the Forth. *JB*

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21 April 2017 – Jamie Humble

Excavations at the vitrified hillfort of Dun Deardail, Glen Nevis

This talk was cancelled due to bereavement in the speaker's family but Jamie has rescheduled the talk for Friday 15 September 2017.

19 May 2017 – Sophie Nicol

The hillforts of the Tay: Recent excavations at Moredun Top, Moncrieffe Hill

The May lecture closed the 2016/2017 series of six lectures. Our speaker was Sophie Nicol, Historic Environment Officer with the Tay Landscape Partnership, a project led by Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust. She came fresh from the last day of the excavations that formed her topic. She, along with volunteers and other professional archaeologists, had spent the day backfilling the site, but she nevertheless exuded energy and enthusiasm.

Moncrieffe Hill stands south east of Perth. This volcanic plug rises above the floodplain where the River Earn enters the River Tay. Bounded by the Tay to the north and east and the Earn to the south, the rocky prominence is an obvious choice for a defensive site and commands a long view of Strathearn. No wonder then that a hillfort occupies the summit.

In fact 10 hillforts edge Strathearn. Originally there was a plan to dig test pits at each one to investigate how they tied in in terms of date, style and character. A small survey was carried out at Deuchny Wood to the east of Perth as the Forestry Commission had recently cleared the site, which allowed the shape of the hillfort to be ascertained and dated to perhaps the middle of the Iron Age. This might be a project for the future. But the decision was taken to concentrate on Moncrieffe Hill, which had not one but two possible hillforts on its summits.

In the first year of excavation the focus was on the smaller of the two sites, Moncreiffe hillfort. It was not yet certain that it was a hillfort as it was concealed under vegetation and woodland. Magnetic gradiometry and a resistivity survey provided nothing conclusive. Small trenches were dug over possible ramparts. After positive findings they were to become bigger and bigger.

The team of volunteers, both local and international (Hawaii being the furthest flung), along with professionals, discovered a stone-faced rampart following the line of the hill. This was followed by another three concentric ramparts. The bedrock had been cut to form steps and laid down stone seemed to form paving. Burnt material and a shale bracelet came to light. The site was dated to the middle Iron Age, 200BC–200AD, but a Neolithic arrowhead indicated earlier activity on the site.

The next seasons of excavation focussed on the second and larger structure, called Moredun Top, once called Carnac by early antiquarians, which encircles the summit. At the end of the 19th century D Christison visited the site but no record of any excavation exists. Before excavation began, some tree clearance was undertaken of the south west sections, grant-funded by Historic Environment Scotland, which opened up the view and revealed a rampart and possible entrance. A resistivity scan showed areas of dense stone, not surprisingly, but magnetometry was not very readable. A recent detailed survey of the site by HES identified three or maybe even four main phases of construction.

There have been three seasons of excavations, every year a month. The average has seen 30 volunteers per day and seven professionals on site. One task was to date the big features. The outer rampart was the earlier, the inner wall was later. An annex was built onto the north and formed a large enclosure. Was the top citadel to the south the latest phase? There was also a large mound inside the fort in the north east.

The outer rampart consisted of earth and rubble and was once 5m thick and 3-4m high. The inner rampart is higher up and stone-faced – one section is on bedrock. The path that runs through the annex could well be very old and led to the entrance. (Of course the estate has improved, used and repaired the track over the years.) The top citadel is built with 5m thick walls, a stone rubble core and stone facings, but also massive boulders, creating a wall 4-5m high.

The mound inside the second rampart also has walls 5m thick. Its external wall is of neat stonework and it is thought that the occasional facing stones of red sandstone must have been brought up from the River Earn area below. Between the outer and inner walls was rubble. Toolmarks can be seen on the bedrock in places. Inside the entrance was found evidence of a great amount of burning and there is a hearth inside. It may suggest that the structure was thatched. The v-shaped stones that mark the entrance indicate that the original entrance was 2m wide, and that it was possibly narrowed during a later phase. Cup-marked stones have been used and placed facing upwards or outwards near the entrance. Inside, the space is about 10m across. So what is it? A broch, or a monumental round house?

How do occupants of a hillfort survive without water? A soggy area near the mould was assumed to be a pond for collecting rainwater, but on closer inspection turned out to be a cistern cut into the bedrock into which water seeps – could this be a spring? The pond has worked wood and wattle and daub within it, which will hopefully provide new insights into hillfort life one day in the future.

At the highest point in the fort is the top citadel, which has been thought of as Pictish. There are slight signs of hut circles, evidence of shale working with a partially finished bracelet, and a tiny twisted piece of metal. X-ray revealed a copper-alloy round-headed pin with enamelled animalistic working.

It has long been thought that the fortifications on Moncreiffe Hill have their origins in the early Iron Age and that they were re-modelled and re-occupied in the Dark Ages. Indeed some believe that the name Moncrieffe derives from *Monad Croib* (meaning Hill of the Tree) which was said in Irish writings to be the site of a battle between two rival Pictish dynasties fighting for supremacy in AD728.

During the months of excavation spread over three years, volunteers have successfully shifted huge quantities of rubble. There were of course Health & Safety issues where people are moving heavy stones around crumbling dry stone walls. The results have justified the risks. The structure of both hillforts has been clarified. Overall the finds of stone artefacts have been many: quern stones, maces, stone lamp, spindle whorl. Evaluation will continue for some time.

Sophie rounded off her talk with a description of the inner rampart of the citadel. The footings are huge blocks of rock. The construction of the wall is of especial interest as rows of voids were uncovered. These are sockets for horizontal timbers that ran right through the 5m thick walls. The wall may even have been 5m high, as a cracked stone suggests an immense weight bore on it from above. Timber lacing would have made the wall stronger and allowed building higher. It may also have served to wick moisture running down the walls. On top were possibly a palisade and a walkway. There is no sign of vitrifaction that is found in other timber-laced ramparts.

Finally, after questions and answers, our speaker encouraged the audience to sign up for the dig at Abernethy Law, another site with intriguing timber-lacing (28 June – 8 July 2017). *Elspeth Reid*

Re-evaluation of Jackson's theories on Sueno's Stone

Some basic information:

Location: in the east end of Forres, Moray, at junction of A96 and B9011, 27.8 miles / 44.73 km east of Inverness

Material: yellow (ORS) sandstone, protected from erosion by a glass shelter

Weight: 7 tonnes

Height: 20 feet or 6m (exact dimensions: 6010 x 113 x 35 cm, Henderson & Henderson 2004:252)

Owned by the Earls of Moray[1], but now in guardianship and care of Historic Environment Scotland

Largest Class III monument in Scotland (class III: early Christian without Pictish symbols), but – contrary to Christian tradition – cross facing west rather than east, quite unlike other Pictish carved stones. Note 'the enormous interlaced cross' (interlaced knotwork) which Jackson[2] considers 'without parallel in Pictish monument sculpture'

For access inside the glass shelter phone 01667 460 232 [as per 24 03 16]

Summary

By comparing Jackson's theories with research by other writers, this evaluation tries to demonstrate that, contrary to tradition, the Sueno Stone has indeed nothing to do with Svejn/Sueno, but that it commemorates the victory of a Scottish king over the Picts. In view of the fact that the Picts can no longer be described as pagan at the time the stone was carved, the emphasis on Christian symbols can only be seen as political propaganda asserting the legitimacy of the reign of the victorious Scottish King Kenneth MacAlpin over the notoriously rebellious Pictish/Scottish lieges of Moray. Jackson interprets the decapitation scene[3] as evidence for the legend of the assassination of Pictish kings invited by Kenneth MacAlpin to a conference at Scone, demonstrating rather convincingly that no-one other than Kenneth would have had reason to erect such a monumental symbol of his power in this very location. My re-evaluation of Jackson's hypothesis has found no convincing counter-indication to his theory and I therefore propose that it should be signposted to the viewing public, if only to 'provoke discussion and offer some *possible* alternative solutions as to why this very special Class III [Pictish] stone was ever erected at Forres'.[4]

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Dr Isabel Henderson and Cait McCullagh who both took the trouble of reading my first drafts and for making valuable suggestions towards the improvement of this re-evaluation. Any additional comments or suggestions will be gratefully received by the author on <bg@allezweb.co.uk>.

'Sueno's Stone sketched in the mid 18th century. It was certainly much less eroded 200 years ago.' (McKean 1987)

As stated by Jackson[5], the monument lay buried until the 18th century although this is questioned by McCullagh[6] (1995). In fact, the figurative side is preserved much better than the cross side suggesting that it may have been lying for some time with the cross side exposed to the elements (for a reasonable photographic image see Discovering Scotland). This exposure would be significant considering the timescale (up to 250 years, cf. maps up to 1750).[7] It seems to have been re-erected mistakenly"with the cross facing west – whereas according to Christian tradition, cross slabs are normally erected with the cross facing east. In fact, Jackson argues that the execution scenes would have faced west towards the power centre of Moray – as a warning to the men of Moray.

The side panels are decorated with 'wiry vine scrolls inhabited by men', which Isabel Henderson[8] interprets as suggesting a date 'somewhat earlier than the 10th century' on account of similarities with the Book of Kells. Accordingly, this would tally with the period of Kenneth MacAlpin's reign (843–858) (see also Woolf [9]).

There is a bewildering array of battle, parade and decapitation scenes. In order to make up your own mind about Jackson's controversial theory, I would suggest you start by focusing on the panel just below the centre (Jackson's panel C) showing a gory scene of seven decapitated figures. This depiction strikes Jackson as 'curious, as the victims lie under an

awning while only their chiefs battle away outside'. Jackson ascribes this depiction to a legend which claims that the Scottish king Kenneth MacAlpin 'caused all the Pictish nobility to be murdered at a banquet'. This is said to have happened in the course of the conference of all the Pictish and Scottish nobility in Scone, which Kenneth had called, ostensibly to hatch out a war plan against the Norse who defeated the Picts of Fortriu in AD839, killing the Pictish king Eoganan (Uuen, son of Oengus), the last recorded king of the Picts. Jackson also mentions an attack of the Norse on the well-known Pictish fort at Burghead in AD842 which would have been recognised as a major event by the local populace. These repeated attacks, Jackson thinks, may have induced the Picts to ask 'Kenneth for help which he falsely promised'.

Jackson argues that panel C shows 'the 7 Pictish lineage heads [Ö] executed under a tent while their retainers are fought off and driven away', as shown in the next panel below (panel D). The fact that there is no Pictish cavalry or infantry depicted is clear – if there was no battle, just a slaughter at the conference banquet. This would contradict the recent 'assessment of significance' by Historic Scotland (2015) referring to the panels comprehensively as 'scenes of warfare'. As Jackson has shown, the illustrations depict more than just scenes of warfare.

Jackson argues further that Kenneth may have ceded his claim on Northern Pictland to the Norse, on the understanding that they would leave his southern kingdom free from attack. This enabled Kenneth to appoint four Scottish kings to Southern Pictland thus putting an end to Pictish rule. It may have been a direct result of unbridled Norse influence that Northern Pictland fell into disarray. This meant that only Morayshire remained independent of the Scots for a few more centuries, thus supporting Jackson's theory that Kenneth perceived Moray to be a thorn in the side of his kingdom. It was indeed a Mormaer – Macbeth – who eventually seized the Scottish throne (1040–57).[10]

The centrepiece of the monument is the panel with the big bell (a Christian symbol) and seven decapitated figures (feet pointing left) and four figures (Scottish kings appointed by Kenneth?) around the bell perhaps as guardians of this Christian symbol thus reinforcing Jackson's propaganda theory outlined below.

One of the central panels (in Jackson panel B, above C) shows two standing figures on either side of a crowned and kilted figure, holding up swords. The four Scottish kings swearing allegiance to Kenneth? Beneath that two sets of four warriors fighting – meaning what – Scottish kings defending their kingdoms against the Picts?

At the bottom of the cross side (now hardly visible), there is a panel with 'two elongated figures, each supported by an acolyte'.[11] – Unclothed and with pigtails, they are bending over a central figure (much defaced), suggesting some significant activity under the sign of the cross. Jackson asks whether this is a blessing from on-high or a coronation. If the defaced figure is supposed to represent Kenneth, this defacement by the Mormaìr [plural of Mormaer][12] would be entirely understandable.

The cross is exactly in line with the bell on the other side, indicating that all the designs were laid out very carefully in advance leaving nothing to chance in the execution of the design. Jackson argues that the monument can be seen as a very important piece of propaganda [or as we might now say 'agitprop', just as practised by the Romans long before the 9th century thus giving the Picts a bad press]. Jackson then proceeds to demonstrate what this propaganda could have been in aid of.

Where I have to disagree with Jackson is his claim that the Pictish kingdoms were still pagan at the time of Kenneth MacAlpin arguing that 'The most likely explanation of Sueno's stone is that it relates the victory of the Christen Scots over the pagan Picts'[13] and referring to 'a triumph of Christianity in putting down the pagan Picts'.[14] Although there are bound to have been pockets of paganism in various parts of the country, it would be a gross exaggeration to claim that Paganism was still the dominant Pictish belief system. What is more, the archaeological evidence speaks against this in view of the fact that a considerable amount of cross slabs combining Christian and Pictish symbols (often on one and the same side of a carved stone) were created in the course of several centuries since Christianisation of Scotland, as e.g. the Hilton of Cadboll cross slab). Although the cross-slabs of the Seaboard villages of Nigg, Shandwick and Hilton all seem to bear similar hallmarks, I find it difficult to agree with Jackson's theory that the majority of such carvings were necessarily created by itinerant Scottish [rather than Christianised Pictish] stonemasons. This position was echoed in a presentation at the recent Firths and Fjords Conference in Dornoch positing that the Nigg Stone contains evidence for both innovation and localisation.[15] Another paper presented at that conference showed that the Picts were enthusiastic and ingenious participants in the monastic movement that affected Ireland and the northern regions of Britain.[16] In sum, it can be stated that leading archaeologists would not agree that the Picts were still pagan at the time they carved the so-called Sueno Stone and therefore either unlikely or unable to represent Christian symbolism in their work. Consequently, it is not unreasonable to argue that the driving force behind the creation of this monument can only have been political propaganda.

As was pointed out above, Jackson says 'only Morayshire remained independent of the Scots for a few more centuries'. In his 'Brief History of Moray',

Bishop[17] writes that 'by the end of the 9th century the establishment of Moray as a province of Scotland was complete, with its head, the Mormaer [king or high steward] of Moray, becoming a major figure not only locally but in the affairs of Scotland as a whole' and that by the time of the [Orkney] Earldom of Sigurd in the late 9th century 'Moray was Ö a frontier between the Scottish Kings across the mountains and the Viking Earls to the north'. Bishop also refers to 'suggestions that the Mormaers of Moray and the Viking Earls made pacts with each other at various times, when it suited them'. According to Bishop, the 'Mormaers of Moray continued to function as regional rulers, and the area maintained its status of both political and cultural importance' (NB 'importance' rather than 'independence'). If Bishop's statement is anything to go by, this would reinforce Jackson's theory that the monument was commissioned by Kenneth as a demonstration of his power sanctioned by God (as evidenced by Christian symbolism: the bell in panel B of Jackson's diagram, the huge elaborate cross side and what seems to be the anointment of a king by supernatural figures beneath the cross).

Why then is the monument called Sueno's Stone? This may be due partly to the fact that the famous 19th century stonemason Hugh Miller vouched 'for the Danish origin of the Obelisks of Ross & Cromarty'.[18] Sueno seems to be a corruption of the name Sveijn, a 12th-century Danish king, father of King Knut. According to Sellar (1993), Alexander Gordon published a theory in the 18th century that the monument commemorates a 12th century defeat of the Picts by the "Danes". As argued convincingly by Jackson, this is highly unlikely, because the Stone was carved long before the Vikings were Christianised (Williams 2011). It is more plausible that the work was commissioned by Kenneth MacAlpin when he became the first King of both the Scots and the Picts (843–858). This theory seems to be accepted by McCullagh (1995:716) who states that

> the iconography, with its celebration of rule ordained by military might and clerical authority, offers a political context which is matched by the wider archaeological context within Moray. Recent research offers a landscape that is well populated by late prehistoric and early historic sites which contain the trappings of secular (eg Burghead) and religious (eg Kinnedar) centres of political power (Shepherd 1993).

Is it possible that the monument was erected on a parcel of land owned by the Scottish king in the middle of Forres? In *A Historical Introduction to the Northern Picts* Evans[19] writes that 'the king often limited the power of the *mormaer* by holding considerable landholdings in the *mormaer's* territory'. Besides, evidence has come to light that the placename Forres may once have been synonymous with the old Pictish kingdom of Fortriu. Recent scholarship[20] indicates that Fortriu, rather than having been located in Menteith, Strathearn and in Forfarshire, was in fact located north of the Mounth, citing the Venerable Bede (10th century) and the *Prophecy of Berchan* (early Middle Ages) as some of the sources. Retranslating the original Latin and Old English texts into modern English, Woolf suggests plausibly that the placenames 'Fortrenn', 'Fortriu' and 'Forres' can in some ancient texts be read as interchangeable.[21] The precise extent of Fortriu has never been established, and Woolf surmises that the complete disappearance of the name Fortriu might suggest that the kingdom was broken up in the course of the 10th century.

Whatever the reasons for this enigmatic monument to be erected in Forres, I think it is wrong to leave visitors without any clues as to the reasons for its erection and the significance of its potential former orientation.

In view of the good preservation of the carvings on the more secular side of the stone, it is interesting to note that McCullagh's team of archaeologists found no evidence of the monument ever having been buried on site. Even more puzzling is the suggestion that it may have had a twin (as indicated by various maps, starting with Pont in c.1590), which raises yet more unfathomable questions (cf. Historic Scotland 2015). Notably, Henderson & Henderson[22] state that there is good evidence that there "were originally two 'curiously carved pillars' on the site" (cf. McCullagh[23] and Pont's map [undated]).

Conclusion

My re-evaluation of Jackson's article has brought me to broadly the same conclusion as Jackson. I feel confident in stating that the Sueno Stone has indeed nothing to do with Svejn/Sueno, but that it commemorates the victory of the Scottish King Kenneth MacAlpin over the Picts and that its purpose was to act as a powerful piece of political propaganda on behalf of this first King of the Scots and the Picts, using religious symbols to reinforce the legitimacy of his reign. Reading the interpretative panel on the current site of the monument, the well-informed archaeologist may be satisfied in terms of accuracy, but the uninitiated visitor is given very little information regarding either its background history, the likely original orientation of the monument or its probable significance at the time of its creation. Although Jackson's theories cannot be proven by archaeological evidence, enough is known about the political situation at the time this monument was erected, to shed some light on its likely history and to deflect visitors' attention away from the Sueno legend guiding them more profitably to Jackson's thought-provoking and, to a great extent, plausible theories.

Brigitte Geddes

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Discovering Scotland, good photograph of cross side, available [online] at <http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/forres/suenosstone/> [28 02 15]

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Footnotes

1 McCullagh 1995
2 Jackson 1984:173
3 Jackson 1984:168ff
4 Jackson 1993:95
5 Jackson 1984
6 McCullagh 1995
7 McCullagh 1995:702
8 Henderson, I, 1983:258 cited in McCullagh 1995:716
9 Woolf 2007:95-98
10 Jackson 1993:93
11 Jackson 1984:173
12 Evans 2014:73
13 Jackson 1984:168
14 Jackson 1984:170
15 McCullagh 2016, presentation
16 Carver 2016, presentation
17 Bishop undated
18 Henderson and Henderson 2004:235
19 Evans 2014:74
20 Woolf 2006:201
21 Woolf 2006:196
22 Henderson and Henderson 2004:136, footnote 62
23 McCullagh 1995:717

Forthcoming events

The 2017 PAS conference will take place in Cupar on Saturday 7th October. Entitled 'Pictish Fife', it will explore recent research and excavation in the southernmost part of Pictland. Speakers include Dr Oliver O'Grady, Meg Hyland, Dr Fraser Hunter, Dr Simon Taylor, Dr Sally Foster, Peter Yeoman and Edwina Proudfoot.

It is hoped to plan a fieldtrip on Sunday 8th October – details to be confirmed.

Full programme and booking details in the next newsletter and, in due course, on the PAS website <http://www.thepictishartssociety.org.uk> and facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/ThePictishArtsSociety/?ref=page_internal>.

Autumn 2017: Lectures at Brechin Town House Museum

Friday 15 September

Jamie Humble

Excavations at the vitrified hillfort of Dun Deardail, Glen Nevis

(postponed from April 2017)

Friday 20 October

David McGovern

Carving King Kenneth: Adventures of a Pictish Stonecarver

Friday 17 November

Dr James Bruhn

Negotiating Frontiers: The role of glass bangles in Late Iron Age and Roman period society in Britain

Ecclesiastics on Pictish sculpted stones: reflections of reality or symbolic constructs?

An analysis of relevant Pictish sculpted stones that the author has visited in the counties of Perth and Kinross, and the county of Angus (Conclusions from a MA dissertation)

Part Two - Depictions of ecclesiastics not hitherto recognised as such on St Vigeans 11

This article is further to one of the same title published in the *PAS Newsletter* 80 (Autumn 2016). It is the first discussion of the individual figures re-classified as being depictions of ecclesiastics. The ten figures that are deemed to require re-classification as reflections of the daily life of ecclesiastics are portrayed on: Aberlemno 3; the Dunfallandy Stone; Kirriemuir 1; and St Vigeans 7 and 11. Another three re-classified figures are designated as being within symbolic constructs and are on: the Eassie Stone; Meigle 2; and the Dunfallandy Stone. The seated figures on Fowlis Wester 2 have previously been categorised as ecclesiastics, however this research re-classifies them as symbolic constructs representing the Desert Fathers SS Paul and Antony.

This article focuses upon the six figures depicted on St Vigeans 11.

It is stated elsewhere in one interpretation that of the six figures depicted on this stone, four are ecclesiastics and two are laymen (Canmore ID 35562 <http://www.rcahms.org>). Another interpretation states that the figures on the front face depict an ecclesiastic and an angel, whereas the four figures on the reverse face represent the Trinity and two lay people (Front face figures: G. Henderson and I. Henderson, *The Art of the Picts*, p.152; Reverse face figures: Ibid, p.143). Both these interpretations are disputed by this research, which finds that all six figures depicted upon this cross-slab fulfil the criteria for classification as ecclesiastics (**1** & **2**).

1 *St Vigeans 11, front face*

2 *reverse face*

3 *St Vigeans 11, front face detail, left*

4 *St Vigeans 11, front face detail, right*

It is suggested herein that both the figures on the front face are depictions of ecclesiastics that reflect everyday ecclesiastical life.

The ecclesiastic standing to the left of the cross shaft holds a small book the size of a portable liturgical book with his left hand supporting it and his right hand resting upon its upper edge as if showing it to the viewer (**3**). Thus he portrays an ecclesiastic involved in missionary and/or pastoral work. His prominent ears indicate a Petrine tonsure. His ecclesiastical vestments depict a *dalmatica* over a *tunica talaris*, the sleeves of the latter being clearly visible beyond that of the *dalmatica*. The fullness of the *dalmatica* is evident in the carving of folds of fabric.

6 *Aberlemno 3 front face detail*

The figure to the right of the cross shaft is not an angel but an ecclesiastic (**4**). Angels on other Pictish sculpted stones have hair that, despite being of varying lengths, covers their ears, e.g. Aberlemno 3 (**5**), Fowlis Wester 2 (**6**), Kirriemuir 2 (**7** & **8**), whereas on St Vigeans 11 the prominent left ear of the figure indicates a Petrine tonsure.

6 *Fowlis Wester 2 detail*

Rather than being angel's wings, this figure wears a *paenula*, an ecclesiastical vestment that covers the arms, beneath which is a *dalmatica* with vertical decoration or narrow lines indicating folds of fabric. Below the hem of the *dalmatica* hangs a *tunica talaris* with a deep decoration of horizontal bands around the hem. This combination of *dalmatica* and

7 *Kirriemuir 2 angel, left*

8 *Kirriemuir 2 angel, right*

tunica talaris is suggested because it is unlikely there is simply a *tunica talaris* directly under the *paenula* given the vertical decoration on the body of the vestment because the *tunica talaris* is usually only decorated at the neck, hem and sleeve ends. The swirling decoration across the chest is a pair of linked brooches used to hold the *paenula* in place, as also depicted on Meigle 29 (**9**). The circles at the shoulders constitute decorative work on the *paenula*. Such elaborate ecclesiastical vestments allude to the rank of bishop or abbot.

9 *Meigle 29*

All four figures on the reverse face of this cross-slab are ecclesiastics and not as is stated elsewhere a representation of the Trinity and two laymen (Trinity and laymen: G. Henderson and I. Henderson, *The Art of the Picts*, p.143; two laymen: Canmore ID 35562 <http://www.rcahms.org>). The interpretation of the two upper figures as being part of the Trinity is due to the presence of a pair of tiny feet between their heads, that they are enthroned, and the positioning of the figures with regard to each other (10).

10 *St Vigeans 11, reverse face detail. Upper two figures*

The tiny feet have been interpreted as being those of an angel representing the Holy Spirit (G. Henderson and I. Henderson, *The Art of the Picts*, p.143). However, it is suggested that the presence of the Holy Spirit above these figures does not necessarily equate to them being a representation of God and Christ. On Fowlis Wester 2 there is an angel standing behind a figure that this research has interpreted as being St Antony (future article) and thus is a representation of the Holy Spirit outside of the Trinity. If the angel on St Vigeans 11 is a representation of the Holy Spirit, its presence could also be highlighting the special holiness of the two ecclesiastics; maybe they are saints lost to history? The tilting of the ecclesiastics' heads has previously been interpreted as them leaning toward each other, but this can also be interpreted as them inclining their heads to listen to a message from the Holy Spirit (Leaning towards each other: G. Henderson and I. Henderson, *The Art of the Picts*, p.143). Furthermore, an alternative proposal is that this small figure is simply an angel. Other ecclesiastics have regular involvement with angels without those angels being the Holy Spirit, the most notable of these being Columba (Adomnán, *Life of St Columba* Book III).

The interpretation of the two figures as God and Christ is also reliant upon arguments regarding the enthronement and positioning of the figures with regard to each other (G. Henderson and I. Henderson, *The Art of the Picts*, p.143). Nevertheless, it is suggested that the Bible verses quoted elsewhere in evidence of this do not support either argument (G. Henderson and I. Henderson, *The Art of the Picts*, p.143). The figures are enthroned as required by Matthew 22:44, Mark 14:62, and Psalm 110 (in the King James Version but Psalm 109 in Roman Catholic Bibles). However, in each example Christ is sat to the right of God. In Trinity iconography Christ is seated lower than God, therefore if these figures represent the Trinity the figure on the left of the stone (from the viewer's perspective) needs to be Christ for Him to be sitting on the right-hand side of God. On St Vigeans 11 the lower figure is seated on the right from the viewer's perspective and thus is on the left-hand side of the figure interpreted as God, i.e. placing Christ on the wrong side of God. Furthermore, the other Bible quote employed to support the Trinity argument, Acts 7, is used incorrectly because the applicable verse (55) describes Christ as seen standing, not seated, on the right-hand side of God (Argument using Acts 7: G. Henderson and I. Henderson, *The Art of the Picts*, p. 143). Furthermore, the figure designated as Christ is wearing clothing that is more decorative than that of the figure designated as God, therefore the hierarchy of this iconography is the wrong way round (the evidence of Pictish portrayals of ecclesiastical hierarchy depicted through clothing will be shown in the future article on the St Madoes Stone). Consequently, these two figures cannot be a

representation of the Trinity reliant upon their enthronement, positioning or clothing.

In addition to these obstacles, these figures have Petrine tonsures and a lack of facial hair both of which contrast with depictions of God and Christ in contemporary illuminated manuscripts and sculpture. On the *Book of Kells* folio 309r God has long hair. In the same manuscript Christ has long hair on folios 32v, 114r, 125r, 179v, and 309r. On sculpture Christ is depicted with long hair on the Ruthwell Cross, the Durrow Cross, and at Kells on the Cross of SS Patrick and Columba and on the Unfinished Cross (Ruthwell Cross: J. L. Dinwiddie, *The Ruthwell Cross*, p.4; Durrow Cross: P. Harbison, *The high crosses of Ireland. Volume 2: Photographic survey*, Figs 247, 248, 254, 256 and text for same figs in P. Harbison, *The high crosses of Ireland. Volume 1: Text*; Cross of SS Patrick and Columba: P. Harbison, *High*, Vol 2, Figs 353, 354 and text for same figs in P. Harbison, *High*, Vol 1; Unfinished Cross: P. Harbison, *High*, Vol 2, Figs 360 and text for same figs in P. Harbison, *High*, Vol 1). On the Ruthwell Cross Christ also has a beard (J. L. Dinwiddie, *Ruthwell*, p.4). His wearing of a beard is repeated in depictions on the *Book of Kells* folios 32v, 114r, and 125r. God has a full beard on folio 309r. Therefore it is suggested that God and Christ would not be depicted on Pictish sculpture as tonsured and clean-shaven because this is not consistent with contemporary depictions of their appearances. Furthermore, if the above arguments for St Vigeans 11 are applied to the Lethendy Stone and the Aldbar Stone, thus also disputing their previous interpretations as depictions of God and Christ, then to date there are no known depictions of God and Christ on Pictish sculpted stones.

However, if these figures are analysed utilising the catalogue of ecclesiastical attributes then these figures are reflections of reality of ecclesiastical appearance and lifestyle. In addition to the catalogued attributes of appearance they are carrying flabella; these being ecclesiastical accoutrements as illustrated on the *Book of Kells* folios 27v and 129v.

Both ecclesiastics are holding books: the ecclesiastic on the left holds his across his chest whilst the right-hand ecclesiastic holds his up as if showing it to the viewer of the stone. Both books are the size of portable liturgical books, thus suggesting they are part of missionary and/or pastoral work.

Their ecclesiastical vestments are the *dalmatica* because sleeves can be seen. Beneath these both ecclesiastics are wearing a *tunica talaris*. The right-hand ecclesiastic's *tunica talaris* is more highly decorated than his companion's, having a deep band of horizontal stripes for decoration at the hemline. These *tunicae talaris* are full, hanging in vertical folds of fabric. Both ecclesiastics have bare feet.

Their throne is similar to that depicted on the Aldbar Stone (**11**). This seating would usually suggest that

11 *Aldbar, reverse face detail. Ecclesiastics*

these two ecclesiastics are bishops or abbots; however the lack of a *paenula* would suggest otherwise.

The remaining two figures are on the lower half of the reverse face. They have previously been described as laymen (G. Henderson and I. Henderson, *The Art of the Picts*, p.143; Canmore ID 35562 <http://www.rcahms.org>). Herein it is suggested that they are ecclesiastics.

The depiction of the ecclesiastic on the left is mostly missing, nevertheless it can be seen that both ecclesiastics are wearing a hooded cowl and are holding pastoral staffs (**12**). They stand in profile facing toward the middle of the stone.

12 *St Vigeans 11, reverse face detail. The most complete figure, on the right-hand side of the lower edge*

13 *Aberlemno 3, reverse face detail. Ecclesiastic showing tunic*

Their cowls are of the design endorsed by Kentigern (Joceline, *Life of S Kentigern* in Anonymous (ed) *Two Celtic Saints*, ch13) and of the length depicted on the *Book of Kells* folio 255v, as well as worn by the ecclesiastic on horseback on the Papil shrine panel (not illustrated). On the complete figure this is worn over a short tunic, similar to that worn by the figures deemed by this research to be ecclesiastics on Aberlemno 3 (**13**) and top right on reverse face the Eassie Stone (**14**).

14 *Easie, reverse face detail*

A previous interpretation of this tunic as a pair of trousers (G. Henderson and I. Henderson, *The Art of the Picts*, p.144) is disputed because the slight upward curve in the hem of the garment between the ecclesiastic's legs also appears on depictions of the *tunica talaris* on Kirriemuir 1 (**15**) and the Aldbar Stone (**16** & **17**).

15 *Kirriemuir 1, front face*

The vertical lines carved upon it indicate the fullness of fabric. He is wearing plain shoes. The two pastoral staffs are of a shape and size to render them useful as walking aids as described in the documentary sources, as well as liturgical objects (Walking aids see Bede, *The Life of Cuthbert* in D.H. Farmer (ed), *The Age of Bede*, ch 8 and 27; Liturgical objects: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04515c.htm>).

16 *Aldbar, front face detail. Ecclesiastics*

17 *Aldbar, reverse face detail. Ecclesiastics*

Their positioning and attire suggests that these ecclesiastics are travelling in order to undertake any of the activities that require journeys as outlined in the previous article. All of these endeavours would have been a regular part of the lives of ecclesiastics living and working in, or visiting, St Vigeans in the 9th century given the site's status. Furthermore, the staffs imply the rank of bishops or abbots, persons to be expected at St Vigeans. That ecclesiastics of these ranks would be walking is consistent with the documentary sources (Chad: Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, III.28; Aidan: Ibid, III.14; Cuthbert: Bede, *The Life of Cuthbert* in D.H. Farmer (ed), *The Age of Bede*, ch 9).

Sarah Louise Coleman

PAS contact details

Please note the editor's new email address:

john.borland@hes.scot

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