



## *PAS Newsletter* celebrates its ton-up

So here we have it – a century of issues for the Newsletter of the Pictish Arts Society. A cause for celebration? Most certainly. Of course, it all depends what sort of century it is. One of my lecturers in Scottish History at Edinburgh University back in the 1960s, Bill Ferguson, put it quite succinctly when he said “History is not cricket, and centuries as such have no particular merit”. He was of course talking about periods of time of one hundred years duration, and in that context, he was correct. Time happens, and there is nothing we can do to change it, prevent it, or take credit for it. Cricket is indeed different, for centuries have to be earned, as in other fields of endeavour. Like producing long-running publications.

Thus the appearance of *PAS Newsletter* No.100 merits a hearty round of applause. There is just one tiny fly in the ointment – is it really the century issue? Harsh arithmetic casts a scintilla of doubt on the calculations. The PAS was formed in the Autumn of 1987 in the wake of the conference ‘The Problem of the Picts’ (mark II), picking up from the 1955 event of the same name. A committee quickly coalesced, and embarked upon a programme of action aimed at achieving an ambitious string of objectives. One of these was to produce a publication which would develop into a regular series. And so the *PAS Newsletter* came about.

The first issue of the *Newsletter* appeared in Autumn 1988, and received a warm reception. No.2 was issued before the year was out. The publication developed in size, content, scope, and reputation. By the end of 1991, nine issues had been published, but this very success created a problem – it had outgrown its name. Yes, it still functioned as a newsletter, but it did so much more in addition, acting as a vehicle for articles of an academic nature, ranging from short pieces to more lengthy offerings, accompanied by bibliographic references. This situation was not intended to portray the Society as primarily an academic organisation that would not have been in line with either its conception or its objectives, and the membership came from much too broad a spectrum for that to happen but nonetheless

this was seen as an aspect of its work which was widely recognised as worthwhile.

This dichotomy caused me some concern back then, and during my tenure as Vice-President (in effect, Acting President because of the long-term illness of the President at that time), I floated the notion of a two-tier structure for our publications. At one level, the *Newsletter* would be retained, functioning in that capacity, while on another level, a new publication would be launched, its content being non-ephemeral and with a serious long-term objective in mind. This approach found favour, and the first issue of the *Pictish Arts Society Journal* made its appearance in Spring 1992. It progressed strongly, reaching No.15 before the end of the decade, but the advent of the 21st century saw it stutter to a virtual standstill. Only two further issues were produced before its sad demise in 2008.

Meanwhile, the *Newsletter* developed apace, with a renewed sense of vigour now that it had been released from its former weighty obligations. There was a minor problem, however – the aforementioned ‘harsh arithmetic’. (It is at this point that I should do my Pontius Pilate impersonation – I had just begun my annual disappearing act to South-East Asia which was to occupy much of the next fifteen years, locating and recording items of Scottish export pottery, meaning that I was no longer on the PAS Committee, and anyway it is pretty difficult to keep a handle on affairs if you’re away for up to seven months at a time, often on small and remote Eastern islands or deep in the jungles of central Borneo.) The first issue of *Newsletter* mark II came out in the Autumn of 1993, a year and a half after the inaugural *Journal*, and it certainly was the first, because the editorial began ‘Welcome to the new style *PAS Newsletter*’. The numbering was odd, however, because it carried No.2. How could this be?

The anomaly seems to have arisen because a rival of sorts had already taken the field in the shape of a secretary’s newsletter, apparently designed to fill the gap until the new-style *Newsletter* could be established. Indeed, there had already been five issues before that happened, all apparently coming out in 1993, ranging from No.1 in March to No.4 in July

(surely not 1992, as appears on it), then to compound the confusion over numbers, when a new secretary took over that Summer, the fifth issue went back to No.1 again! There was apparently no hand on the tiller. When the first true *Newsletter* appeared that Autumn, maybe the editor felt it should not be given the No.1 tag, with two claimants already in the field. At least it did not carry No.6. To my mind, it should have been No.10 (which would have meant that our 100th Newsletter was actually the one issued in Summer 2019).

There were to be no more secretaries' newsletters, but the numbering confusion was far from over, because the next dozen(?) issues of the *Newsletter* were unnumbered. Most were dated (the exception being the probable No.3), which at least preserved the sequence, but the actual numbers which they should have borne cannot be confirmed. The No.4 listed on the website has to be earlier than No.3. Some ambiguity is attached to the listed No.6 (actually No.5) which is dated 'Winter 1994' – climatically speaking, there are two possible periods, separated by more than half a year, during which at least one issue should have come out.

An aberration occurred in February 1996 with the production of a single-sheet 'Update' – should it be regarded as a *Newsletter* or not? It currently appears as No.9a, a somewhat awkward compromise solution; I reckon that it merits its own number. After all, another single-sheeter appeared two issues late called 'News Update', and that appears in the list as No.11 in its own right. Either both should count, or neither; I would advocate the former. When numbering was eventually resumed in Winter 1997/98 (calendar year uncertain), issue No.15 had been reached. By examining what is extant, it may be calculated that that number is correct. From No.10 onwards, the road is clear.

So where does that leave us in the quest to demonstrate that this present issue is indeed No.100? A little manipulation is required, but not of the underhand variety. Firstly, it is necessary to recognise that an abnormality exists – it must be acknowledged that there was no No.1 in the sequence of second-series *Newsletter*. That loses us one from the total. However, if we include both Updates as *Newsletters*, and not just one of them as at present, then the numbers are levelled up, and we are back on an even keel (as long as there are no unrecorded unnumbered issues skulking in the shadows).

### **Therefore this current issue does indeed bring up the century.**

So was this tortuous analysis really worth the effort, both of writing and of reading? I think so (or I wouldn't have done it), for several reasons, the most important of which is bibliographical. These *Newsletters* contain some little gems which are well worth quoting to illustrate a point, but an author using any issue before No.10 is faced with problems regarding how to cite the relevant one. Hopefully this piece will clarify the situation, and resolve any dilemmas which may arise on that score.

The present-day *Newsletter* format first appeared in Winter 2004/05 with issue No.34, since when it has sailed on to its century edition. However, its progress has not been in a straight line – the wheel forever turns. With the demise of the *Journal*, the *Newsletter* became once more the only regular PAS publication, and so it attracted, and was compelled to accommodate, articles which hitherto would have been fodder for the *Journal*. Some of the more substantial offerings had to be split in two, and there have been instances where lengthy treatises have actually been issued in three successive Newsletters, spread over six months or so. Inevitably, some of the impetus gets dissipated. Ironically, we have arrived back at almost the same position we were in thirty years ago, with the *Newsletter* fulfilling both its own function and that of the *Journal*. If the latter is to remain defunct, or at best in abeyance, is '*Newsletter*' still appropriate as a title for a publication which is in reality so much more? Maybe the century issue is time to take stock, and consider a more appropriate intermediate name, such as 'Bulletin', or shall we sail on towards a double century for the *Newsletter*?  
*Graeme Cruickshank*

Thanks for clearing that up Graeme (I think). *JB*

### **The Pictish Arts Society – a brief history**

In 1988 the School of Scottish Studies within the University of Edinburgh began to host gatherings of the Pictish Arts Society, both its committee meetings and its public lectures. The Society, formed to further interest in, and study of, all aspects of the Picts was originally conceived by me and the American-born artist Marianna Lines. Our presence was facilitated by linguist David Clement who was seconded to the School from the department of Celtic

Studies. I had kept up a tenuous connection with the School since my undergraduate days. The three of us were joined at the inaugural committee meeting by ethnologist Bob Brydon, historian Graeme Cruickshank, lawyer George Fraser and knitwear designer Heather Richard.

In 1992, due to a considerable level of public interest, our initial *Newsletter* developed into the *PAS Journal*, which presented a wide range of academically sound articles from a range of contributors, including archaeologists, historians and linguists, as well as professional artists, as the original mission statement of the Society had specifically laid emphasis on the corpus of Pictish Art and its potential to stimulate new work in the modern world. The *Journal* ran to 17 issues before ceasing but the quarterly *Newsletter* has continued. The open meetings in the Conference Room were always lively and stimulating, and within a couple of years the Society began to stage annual conferences, which were initially also held in the School, and which originally included exhibitions of contemporary Pictish-inspired artwork.

Over time the conferences began to be held in other locations, most of which would generally be considered somewhat more appropriate than Edinburgh, even if tradition tells us that Arthur's sleeping companions inside his Seat in Holyrood Park are Picts. This highlighted the situation that many members had to travel extensively to come to Edinburgh and in 2000 the PAS officially moved from 27 George Square to Pictavia, a newly-opened visitor attraction near Brechin. The move was organised by my successor as President of the Society, Norman Atkinson, with the support of Angus Council. Since then, the Society has continued to hold regular meetings and conferences. With the closure of Pictavia in 2016, the meetings moved a short distance to Brechin Town House Museum. Since last year's Covid pandemic, all events are held online.

At the time when the PAS was formed there were no books on the Picts in print. It is testament to the work of the membership that nowadays there are so many works available, both reprints and new works, and it is likely that the efforts of the early group in George Square has helped ensure that today's Scottish archaeologists and historians are much more involved with matters Pictish than was the case when first we met. Sadly, since our early days in the School of Scottish Studies many of the original enthusiasts have passed on, including in 2018 our co-

founder Marianna Lines, whose vibrant and colourful interpretations of Pictish symbol stones were so effective in bringing much of Scotland's ancient culture to wider public notice.

*Stuart McHardy*

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## The end of an era

For almost as long as I've been a member of the Pictish Arts Society, David Henry has been involved in some way or another with the *PAS Newsletter*. David took over production with No.32 in the winter of 2003 and was Editor from No.34. The numbering and frequency of the *PASN* was somewhat haphazard initially (see Graeme Cruickshank's article in this edition) and David resolved to introduce strict quarterly deadlines for the receipt of material so that issues could be produced and despatched at regular intervals. He also sought clarity by displaying the edition number and date on the new masthead.

As an experienced publisher, he brought a more professional appearance to the newsletter, adopting a two-column design. In addition to taking care of its layout, David also undertook to print and dispatch the newsletters. Editor, designer, printer, and postmaster – an impressive contribution by any measure.

David continued as Editor until No.60, when he handed the baton over to me but he continued to be our designer, printer and distributor of the hard copy version (the more recent pdf version is distributed by Membership Secretary Elspeth Reid).

David resigned initially at the beginning of 2020 but, with the advent of the Covid pandemic and the cancellation of our live events, he willingly rose to the challenge and agreed to continue to issue No.100, including producing bi-monthly editions for the remainder of 2020.

There was much debate about whether or not this is in fact the 100th edition of the *PASN* but Graeme Cruickshank's methodical if convoluted accounting tells us it can be classed as such (and I for one wouldn't dare to argue with him). So we can rightly celebrate this milestone for the Pictish Arts Society and at the same time, say a heartfelt "thank you" to David Henry, who, with the production of *PASN* 100 bows out to take a well earned rest. (I wish! *DH*)

The challenge is now on to find a new designer, printer and distributor. Wish us luck. *JB*

## A Pictish Design in a Continental Manuscript?



1 *Evangélaire de Saint-Ursanne, page 13 verso (detail)*

The book in question is a 9th century volume containing the four Gospels, originally from Saint-Ursanne, preserved as Ms. 34 in the Bibliothèque cantonale jurassienne, in Porrentruy (Canton of Jura, Switzerland).<sup>1</sup> The manuscript is available online, and is worth a look in its own right: though its illuminated letters are few, they are particularly reminiscent of the Insular style.<sup>2</sup> Most striking, however, is the first page (13, recto) of the Cannon Tables (Gospel concordances) which precede the texts of the Gospels. This features the image of a zoomorphic creature, repeated three times (1) which is remarkably similar to a Pictish ‘beast’ symbol adapted to fit a narrow vertical rectangular space, such as that on face d of Meigle 5 (2). The manuscript creatures are also reminiscent of the Pictish beast on face c of the Gellyburn cross slab (3). Note:

- The great similarity of the head.
- The large ear possibly adapted from the lappet.
- The stubby limb to which a lanky ‘arm’ has been rather awkwardly attached.
- The rather dubious ‘tail’ which could be a confused memory of the short Pictish one.
- The outline round the body, cutting across the neck and the ‘beak’.

This is the only one of several Cannon Tables pages in the book that has a creature set into its ‘pillars’ like this. I know of no reason that this part of the concordances should be marked in this way (though Biblical scholars may know better). The design is so strikingly like our ‘beastie’ that one cannot help feeling that the artist had seen the symbol, liked the design, and adapted it for his manuscript.

That Insular – even Pictish – influence might be found in a Carolingian manuscript is not



2 *Meigle 5, face d*



3 *Gellyburn cross-slab (Perth Museum)  
DP00226721.  
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remarkable in itself. Anglo-Saxon and ‘Scottish’ (ie Irish – some of them certainly from what is now Scotland) monks, missionaries and scholars abounded on the Continent. Columbanus, Boniface and Alcuin are only some of the most famous. Many surviving manuscripts show heavy influence from Insular styles: the astonishing Bible of Charles the Bald, for instance. Manuscripts in pure Irish style were produced hundreds of miles from ‘home’ at such monasteries as St Gallen in Switzerland. It does not seem too much to imagine that a well-travelled scribe might have come across the ‘beast’, and had it in mind when he created the image reproduced here. *Niall M Robertson.*

1 The manuscript, known as the *Evangélaire de Saint-Ursanne*, was at Saint-Ursanne at least as early as the 10th century, as a list of donors with Frankish names added to an unused page demonstrates. However, the description of the book in the online catalogue of the Cantonal Library suggests it was produced at Saint-Bertin (Pas-de-Calais, France). The book is well-preserved and almost complete. The illuminations are few, mainly large single letters marking important breaks (such as the beginnings of the Gospels). There are no Evangelist portraits or carpet pages.

2 Saint-Ursanne: this historic town takes its name from St Ursicinus (fl 620), an Irish missionary and hermit in the Jura region. He was a follower of Columbanus of Luxeuil, and founded a monastery on the site of the town. His supposed stone sarcophagus is preserved within a much later shrine in the 12th-century Collégiale de Saint-Ursanne there.

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## A Pictish Rabbit



A great number of websites tell us that the Normans introduced the rabbit into Britain, often mentioning the 11th or 12th century. However, one look at the Drosten Stone<sup>1</sup> in St Vigean's Museum would seem to disprove that.

On the fragment re-attached to the major section of the Drosten Stone is a typical Pictish scene: hunting dogs race in pursuit of a stag, albeit without the customary hunters on horseback (on missing fragment?). Unusually, beneath the stag's forelegs is what Romilly Allen termed 'a small animal'<sup>2</sup> and Professor Geddes 'a hare'.<sup>3</sup> I would suggest that it has more the look of a rabbit with its rounded back and short legs. It lacks the large hindlegs of a hare and its ears are rather short for a hare. Other animals carved by this stone-carver are naturalistic and I think that if he were indeed depicting a hare, it might look more hare-like.



*St Vigean's Ia*

On 18 April 2019 the BBC broke the news: 'Evidence of rabbits in UK in Roman times, say academics' <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47963324>>. Scientific tests on a bone found at Fishbourne Roman villa in West Sussex showed that the animal was alive in the first century AD. Apparently the tibia had been found in 1964 but remained in a box until 2017 when a zooarchaeologist recognised that it came from a rabbit. 'Analysis, including radiocarbon dating, was carried out by researchers at the universities of Exeter, Oxford and Leicester.'

To be very precise, their analysis can only prove that this one rabbit was resident in Britain in Roman times. But the BBC had already reported other 'Remains of Roman rabbit uncovered' back in 2005 when butchered rabbit bones were found in Norfolk. According to the local archaeologist:

We know the rabbit remains are from the early Roman period because pieces of pottery found within the pit date from the first century and the site was undisturbed.

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/norfolk/4439339.stm>>

I think we can safely assume that rabbits were being kept in Britain in the first century AD. Rabbits have a well-deserved reputation for reproduction and if any escaped from their captors, eight centuries or so could be ample time in which to multiply before appearing on a Pictish carved stone in Angus. Whether the Drosten Stone shows a wild and free rabbit or one bred in captivity for food is unanswered, especially since the adjacent piece of carving is missing.

In conclusion, I contend that the Pictish bestiary should be expanded to include one rabbit. (Or, if I am wrong, one hare.) The Drosten Stone in St Vigean's is the sole Pictish stone to depict this particular 'small animal' *Elsbeth Reid*

### Notes

- 1 Duke, Rev. William Notice of the Fabric of St Vigean's Church, Forfarshire; with Notice and Photographs of Early Sculptured Stones recently Discovered there, &c. *Proc Soc Antiq Scot* 9 (1870-72), pp 481-498; illus: pl 33 ff p498  
<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/psas/volumes.cfm>
- 2 J Romilly Allen and Joseph Anderson, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, 1903, reprinted 2 vols, The Pinkfoot Press 1993, vol 2, p239, St Vigean's No. 1a; illus: vol 2, fig 252B, fp 237
- 3 Jane Geddes, *Hunting Picts: Medieval Sculpture at St Vigean's, Angus*, 2 vols, Historic Environment Scotland 2017, vol 1, p122; illus: vol 2, p222, pl 1 VIG001-C498

## The Alyth Stone – standing at the crossroads

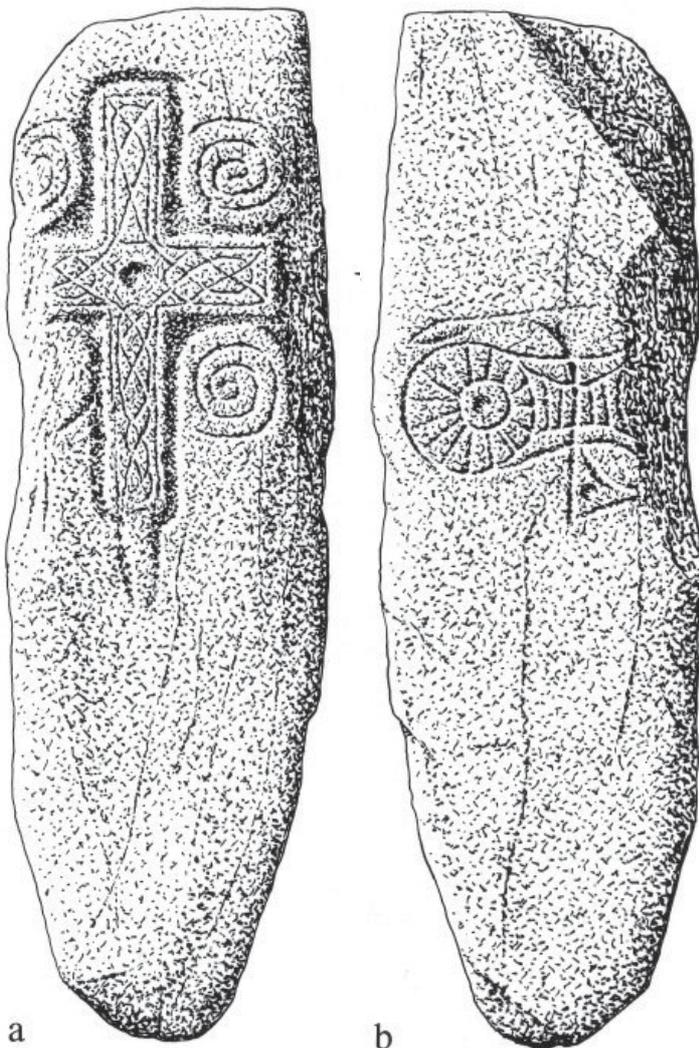
Every Pictish Art enthusiast is aware of the fundamental Classification system for the symbol stones, and most are also aware of its inadequacies. Devised very late in the 19th century or very early in the 20th, it first appeared in the seminal work *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903), by J. Romilly Allen and Joseph Anderson. The problem was that both men produced their own definition of the Classes, and both results proved to be less than satisfactory. That no doubt explains why virtually every Pictish writer since has felt impelled to produce their own definition, and no-one, in my view, has got it right yet. I composed a provisional paper on the subject back in 1971, and voiced these views at the PAS Conference held at The Pleasance in Edinburgh in 1995.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the Class I stones comply readily with the system, with only a few exceptions, but the position changes dramatically with so-called Class II stones, where many do not sit comfortably in that niche. That is why I advocated an intermediate stage, called Class I/II, to allow for the inevitable overlap. Even so, some symbol stones obstinately refuse to be categorised, and there is no better example of this than the one which rests in the High Kirk of the little Perthshire town of Alyth, near Blairgowrie, which straddles the lowland/upland divide. It was discovered buried in the manse garden in 1887. No doubt with the co-operation of the minister of the day, the Rev. John Maclaren, a stout wooden frame was constructed to provide safe accommodation for this early Christian relic, and it has apparently resided in the Kirk vestibule since that time.

The stone's find spot is not far from its present location. The Established Church of Scotland manse was just north of the The Arches (the remains of the long-gone medieval church of considerable size) on the other side of the High Street, and a short distance to the north-east of the High Kirk itself (built in 1839), in whose vestibule the stone resides. One must take care when manse-spotting, because at this time there were three Presbyterian churches in Alyth, the other two being the Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterian Church, but their manses were some little distance away.

So what exactly is the problem with the Classification of the Alyth stone? To understand that, we should consider how it matches up to the criteria which can be used to determine which Class label should be attached to any particular stone. These, I should say, are my chosen headings; some folk might select a different range of terms. I have arranged the list below in a way whereby Pictish stones may be Classified according to these four criteria.

1) **Surface treatment.** This may range from a natural or roughly-hewn boulder, to a carefully dressed rectangular slab. The Alyth stone gives the appearance of being entirely natural, without any signs of preparatory work. It is a large pillar, of somewhat regular shape, probably being water worn – the Den o' Alyth, through which flows Alyth Burn, is close by the



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The Alyth symbol stone. Drawing by John Borland Scale 1:10

stone's find-spot. This makes it Class I, even though many rougher examples are known.

2) **Design location.** This may range from the sculptor finding the most suitable flattish area on a boulder, to filling both sides of a dressed slab, and maybe the edge-faces as well. In the case of the Alyth stone, neither option is appropriate, though a little of each is admissible. As the stone is approximately ovoid in transverse section, it could be said to have two 'sides', which is a Class II feature, though perhaps 'faces' would be a less loaded term. The two sculpted elements here, symbol and cross, do indeed appear on opposing sides of the stone, confirming its Class II affiliation.

3) **Decorative technique.** The range here moves from linear incision to relief sculpture. What we see at Alyth is the former. The lone symbol – a double-disc & Z-rod looks just like any other symbol when that is the limit of the sculptor's repertoire. Likewise, the cross here is far removed from the overpowering magnificence of the crosses which appear on most cross-slabs. Both it, and its decorative features, are executed by incision and not in relief. *There is no interlace here* – what is employed is the technically much less demanding process of criss-cross. The spirals in between the cross-arms are indeed deeply cut, but they are incised nonetheless.

4) **Artistic content.** The choice here is fairly stark – Pictish symbols only, or a range of subject matter, including Pictish symbols plus the Christian cross (usually, though by no means always, on opposite sides of the stone), often combined with a variety of other motifs, including narrative scenes, the most popular being depictions of a stag-hunt. At Alyth, we do indeed have a cross on the opposing face to the symbol, but it is small in comparison to the norm, and it stands alone. This gives the stone a Class II slant, but stops a long way short of what might be expected were it to be recognised as being Class II proper. There is none of the more expansive artistic repertoire alluded to above. Even a hint of that variety of elements is conspicuously absent.

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So where does that leave us with regard to the Classification of the Alyth stone? Adding the four criteria together, I reckon that we have a result of I+II+I+II = 'something bang in the middle' (with perhaps a slight favouring towards I). That is why I have chosen to give it the tag of Class I/II, because I reckon that it is inappropriate to use either Class in isolation, when so

much of both are evident in this example. So what do other written accounts have to say on this score?

The first Pictish scholar to comment was, unsurprisingly, Romilly Allen in *ECMS*.<sup>2</sup> He describes the stone as 'an unshaped slab', which some may regard as a contradiction in terms, though one can see what he means. Slabs may occur with minimal or even no human intervention, though the geology of Perthshire does not lend itself to such creations. He notes that it is 'sculpted with incised lines on two faces', avoiding any suggestion of 'relief', and referring to 'faces' rather than 'sides'. He does, however, identify a 'front' and a 'back' without good reason, though given the title of the book, he really had no option. The entry is accompanied by a fine line drawing of his own devising.

Allen seems in no doubt regarding the classification of the Alyth stone. His great Survey of Scottish early medieval sculpture was conducted county by county, north to south, and within that geographical structure, the stones were classified and then arranged in alphabetical order. Alyth appears first in the list of Perthshire stones placed under the Class II heading. This is somewhat at odds with what he had written in his consideration of the results of his Survey, especially in section V, which dealt with the general arrangement of the designs sculpted on the monuments. As if to signify a degree of unease with his 'two Classes fits all' approach regarding Pictish symbol stones, he wrote 'Next in order of development after the rude pillar stones comes a transitional class between them and the upright cross-slabs'.

Allen sees only one factor as being responsible for this additional subclass, whereas there are actually several, and so by commenting that 'There are only a few examples belonging to this transitional class', he rather underestimates the numbers involved. By his reckoning, there are six, which he names, and among them is Alyth. It may seem odd that he does not mention this factor when considering this stone in his main Survey.

Allen goes on to describe the three arms and shaft of the cross as being 'ornamented with interlaced-work' – can interlace be rendered in two dimensions only? I really don't think so, though it can be suggested, by leaving gaps in the under-strand where it dips below the over-strand. Although the decoration on the top-arm of the cross is not in harmony with the rest of

the pattern, Allen likens the Alyth design to No.568 in his analysis of interlaced-work, which appears in the same great volume as his Survey. However, he does use the 'gap' graphic technique there, and also in all but a couple of the 625 examples which he illustrates, spread over 168 pages. He evidently failed to spot that the technique used at Alyth was criss-cross, and not interlace.

The Alyth style of figure-of-eight knots Allen reckons was derived from a four-cord plait, and he is able to cite plenty of examples – six on Pictish symbol stones, seven on other stones within Scotland, thirty in England, and three in Wales, besides another eleven in different media, ranging from the silver and gold Hunterston brooch to Norwegian bronzes, a bone object in York, and illuminated gospel manuscripts including the Book of Durrow in Ireland. All this, yet Alyth is missing from that list – an accidental omission, or did Allen realise that he had made a mistake in confusing simple criss-cross incision with more complex relief sculpture?

Frustratingly, he mentions in passing that 'this stone was noticed and illustrated in a local newspaper at the time of its discovery', but fails to give either the name or the date, which represents a disappointing lapse of scholarship. There were a number of local newspapers published in the town over many decades; going by the date, the one in question here was probably the *Alyth Guardian & Merchants' Advertiser*, but a search through all the issues for 1887 and 1888, courtesy of Perth Museum, has failed to detect the article which Allen mentions. As it carries an illustration or two, it should be quite easy to spot. Finding the right newspaper is the problem, and it may turn out that 'local' does not mean Alyth itself. Blairgowrie would be the next likely choice.

An admirable book of great benefit to local historians of the town and its environs was published in 1933 by the minister of the day, the Rev. James Meikle,<sup>3</sup> who served the parish for 35 years, from 1897 to 1932. He paid due attention to the Pictish stone in his church vestibule 'it would have difficult for him to have done otherwise' appreciating that it is illustrative of the 'Pictish symbol/Celtic cross' dichotomy. He makes the observation that the decoration on the cross 'shows a beginning of the movement in art that afterwards developed the beautiful and highly symbolic Celtic Cross', though the path by which he arrives at this conclusion may be

questionable. This section in his book is illustrated using Allen's fine drawing, though uncredited, but a quotation from Allen's description is duly referenced.

Many a guide-book on Pictish stones published since then has included the Alyth example, but usually only in a sentence, or just a phrase. A few grant it a short paragraph, such as that which appears in *Ancient Monuments of Tayside* (1970), compiled by Herbert Coutts.<sup>4</sup> Straight away, he designates it as a Class II stone, though he is alive to the fact that it is 'unusual'. He echoes Allen in calling it 'an undressed slab bearing a cross ornamented with interlace' without spotting the anomalies, with the cross he refers to being on the 'front'.

It is worth seeing what the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland had to say in its *Inventory of North-East Perth*[shire], published in 1990.<sup>5</sup> It calls the Alyth monument 'a Class II symbol stone', and in a short description, records that 'the arms and shaft of the cross are decorated with interlace'. A practised eye should have been able to distinguish between criss-cross and interlace, and also the important technical and cultural distinctions between the two. The term 'front' is again used for the cross-face.

*A Field Guide to the Pictish Symbol Stones* was compiled by Alastair Mack in 1997.<sup>6</sup> In it, he describes the Alyth stone as 'a natural slab carved in relief on one face and incised on the other', without specifying which is which. The reader is left to surmise that he is referring to the cross-face first, because the symbol on the other face is purely incised, whereas the four spandrels formed by the arms of the cross and the incised spiral decorations, one of which occupies each angle, have been hollowed out, providing an impression of relief which is actually no more than pseudo-relief. The 'front/reverse' designation continues to be used.

An expanded version of the Royal Commission's Inventory of Pictish stones, running in various formats since 1984, appeared in 2008, compiled by Iain Fraser,<sup>7</sup> but the extremely brief entry contributes nothing noteworthy. It is accompanied by an excellent stipple drawing by John Borland.

In her 1992 book *Sacred Stones, Sacred Places*,<sup>8</sup> Marianna Lines goes along with the customary Class II attribution but notes the stone may have started out as a Class I symbol stone to which a cross was added later, converting it to Class II. She repeats Allen, stating that Alyth belongs to

‘an unusual transitional period’ in the development of Pictish stone-cut art.

I cannot lend support to a theory that claims the addition of a cross of whatever size to an incised symbol-bearing stone automatically confers Class II status upon that stone. Furthermore, I would argue that the situation is not that unusual, and several categories of stone may be regarded as falling into this transitional period.

Marianna takes it further, claiming that ‘This double use reflects the mixture of pagan and Christian beliefs and practices which seem to have often prevailed in Early Christian times’. While it is generally accepted that the symbols pre-date the introduction of Christianity to the Picts, their purpose is unknown, despite a range of theories being put forward. Even to regard them as secular is uncertain, and to categorise them as being pagan is to assume more than we know as to their *raison d’etre*.

While there is nothing of substance to suggest that the two designs on the Alyth monument are not contemporary, equally there is no reason to dismiss the notion that they could have been executed at different times. It is certainly a theory worthy of consideration, though the likelihood is that the treatment of the two faces is contemporary. A possible pointer in that direction is that both designs the remaining disc-symbol and the cross share a curious characteristic: each has a deep dot in the very centre. Were it the situation that the two faces were executed at different times, then it would not so much be a matter of terming them ‘front’ and ‘back’, but more a case of ‘original front’ and ‘later front’.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is not merely the conundrum of classifying the Alyth stone which makes it so special, for it has a number of other intriguing features. For a start, it exhibits a single symbol, which is indeed a rare occurrence. There are a few lone animals, the best known being the multiple Burghead bulls, and the Inverurie horse which is the sole equine example in Class I art. Lone symbols of the abstract/representational variety are rarer still. Leaving aside a few dubious examples, there are five instances of such potentially pairing-symbols actually standing alone.

Two of these belong in Class II times, Fourdon and Kirriemuir 2, appearing on cross-slabs in association with hunting scenes, so they are far from being alone. They are both examples of the double-disc & Z-rod (as seen at Alyth), the second one being degenerate. Two more belong to Class I, Nether Corskie and Kintradwell 3,

being a mirror-case, and a crescent & V-rod, respectively. They may reasonably be regarded as potentially pairing-symbols which have lost their partners, but they too do not stand alone, as both of them are accompanied by the qualifying symbol of the mirror-and-comb.<sup>9</sup> That leaves just Alyth as providing an example of a single Pictish non-animal symbol standing solitaire on its stone, thus signifying it as unique in its field.

The symbol itself, the common double-disc & Z-rod, is also special with regard to the decoration of the disc (only one of the pair survives, the other having been on a section of the stone which has at some point broken away and been lost, despite a search being made for it at the time of the stone’s discovery). It is ornamented with patterning which resembles a spoked wheel. This device is seen, but rarely, as a detached symbol, on the stones from Kinblethmont, Pulvrenan, and Ardjachie, accompanied by between one and three other symbols. Calling it the ‘wheel symbol’ probably begs the question to an unjustified degree; a more geometrical description such as ‘a rayed disc symbol’ would be safer. The use of this device to adorn a disc symbol is unique to Alyth, as far as is known, but this claim refers merely to the pattern, and should not be taken as providing an example of one symbol being used to decorate another.

Moving to a consideration of the cross, its small size makes it appear curiously understated, for there is no hint here of the great crosses which were to dominate the Class II cross-slabs, in most instances. Romilly Allen notes an unusual feature, ‘a spike at the bottom’, though offers no suggestion as to its purpose. It was the local minister, of a later period than that of the stone’s discovery in the manse garden, who considered it in more detail. The Rev. James Meikle commented in 1933 ‘At the bottom of the Alyth cross there is the representation of what was formerly described as a spike [by Allen] for sticking it in the ground [presumably], but which is now recognised to be a handle [citing North African comparisons], showing that the cross represented was intended to be carried about and used, [perhaps] in processions or held up in parts of the service’.

In support of such a theory, it may be observed that the narrower downward extension of the shaft is not sharply pointed, as a spike would be, but given a somewhat rounded termination, more conducive to being carried. The RCAHMS report describes ‘an unusual tenon at the base of

the shaft' (a 'tenon' being the projection at the end of a piece of wood (normally), designed to slot into the socket of another, called a 'mortise'). Mack sees only 'a narrow base', while Fraser refers to 'a tenon-footed cross', but does not speculate as to its function. Artist Marianna Lines provided a slightly more considered appraisal of this feature, which she described as belonging to 'a small Latin (*ie* long-shafted) cross with a tenon, as though it were a drawing of a wooden cross that would be set into the ground'.

In support of the tenon-and-mortise theory, we have a fragment, Menmuir 2, which includes what Romilly Allen called 'a truncated conical tenon projecting from the bottom'. This seems not to have been a detachable cross, however, for the rectangular lower section is filled by a horseman on one side, and contains the lower half of a robed figure on the other. We also have recipient slots in some of the recumbent stones in the assemblages at Meigle and St Vigean, sometimes described as grave-covers, though they belong to Class III, being late and lacking symbols. Each has richly-carved side-panels, with a deeply-cut mortise on top as if to accommodate the tenon of a small cross, or other vertically-placed element. Meigle 9 and St Vigean 14 provide particularly striking examples. No candidates have emerged, even among the many fragments found at both sites, for whatever it was which filled the sockets.

So there we have it – differing views as to the purpose of the terminal element. It might have been stuck in the ground, it might have been fixed into a socket, or it might have been grasped to enable its active use in religious ceremonies. There may be further possible explanations. Proof is lacking for any of them, but some pointers may be discerned. A medieval(?) stone from Howmore on South Uist shows a hand grasping a Celtic cross, though by the shaft rather than by means of a handle. In general shape, it echoes the magnificent example on the Crosston of Aberlemno cross-slab, reckoned by some to be a hugely-enlarged depiction of a small portable cross. Actual examples of such are known from Ireland, made of metal. The cross incised on the Alyth stone might be seen as a link in this chain.

So what has this analysis taught us about the Alyth stone? I would suggest the following:

- 1) It is not a cross-slab ('cross-pillar' might be a more appropriate term).

- 2) It does not belong in Class II, as it exhibits a mixture of Class I and Class II features, tending towards the former.
- 3) It defies ready classification according to the established system, and should be recognised as belonging to a transitional class (a notion promoted by Charles Thomas decades ago) – a motley crew, to be sure, not always sharing too many common characteristics, but nonetheless meriting a place of their own in the wider scheme of things. Truly, the Alyth stone stands at a cross-roads in the development of Pictish stone-cut art.

\* \* \* \* \*

The inspiration for this paper came during the course of the PAS annual conference field-trip in 2015 when I was asked to give an impromptu talk about my home-town Pictish stone. With effort but care, we moved the heavy wooden frame which holds the stone so that both symbol and cross could be seen and a hearty debate ensued. In his write-up of the field-trip, John Borland correctly referred to the subject of our attention as a 'symbol-bearing cross-incised stone', noting that there was some talk of the cross it bore having more of a Western feel than Eastern. He picked up on one of my main points, *viz.* that 'the relationship of the cross on one face and the double-disc & Z-rod on the other, and the actual form of the stone, made this an unsatisfactory candidate to be labelled a Class II cross-slab'.<sup>10</sup> Quite so. This article has now come full circle.

#### **Addendum**

The 'local' newspaper article relating to the discovery of the Alyth stone has thankfully come to light at the last moment<sup>11</sup>. It appeared in the *Dundee Advertiser*<sup>12</sup> under the heading 'Celtic Cross discovered at Alyth, comprising a single-paragraph news report, plus sketches of both faces of the stone – somewhat rough, but fairly accurate. The anonymous reporter provided a reasonable description:

On one side is a richly traced cross [rightly avoiding any mention of interlace], and on the other side is a double disc symbol, one of the discs having been broken off [but no mention of the surviving portion of the Z-rod]. The missing portion has not as yet been found [sadly, that remains the case].

The one deficiency is that the tenon, which appears to be parallel-sided, has been squared off at the end. A sound observation is made regarding the stone's relative chronology: 'The sculpture is ruder than that on the Celtic stones

at Meigle, and probably belongs to an earlier date'. When it comes to actual dates, however, the chronology is somewhat shaky:

From its appearance, competent authorities consider the date of its sculpture to have been between the eighth and twelfth centuries – the likelihood is that it was executed very much at the early end of that extensive date range. The guesstimate of its size, 3 feet by 2, does not compare favourably with Allen's measurement of 4 feet 6 inches by 1 foot 7 inches. The initial local assessment is that the sculpture belongs to two different periods, the stone having been reused:

The reverse side is understood to be Druidical in character, while the front belongs to the Christian era, it having been a common practice to appropriate memorials of one religion for the purpose of the other.

The sad fact is that there is no mention of the Picts in all this, even though it comes 36 years after Daniel Wilson first proclaimed the Picts to be the originators of the symbol stones<sup>13</sup>.

Graeme Cruickshank

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10. *Pictish Arts Society Newsletter* No.77, 2015, p.10.
11. Thanks to it being noticed in *Alyth : A Licht Abune* (ed. Bill Davidson, Alyth Literary Society, 2000), p.4.
12. *Dundee Advertiser*, 30th July 1887, p.6.
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## The Face of the Symbols (Part 3)

### Dominance and the Mirror & Comb

Previously, I have discussed how a set of symbols has an inherent order, and that this order is then reflected on a symbol stone with its symbol pair in the same order (*PAS Newsletter* 98). For example, the crescent and V-rod occurs in some positions above the double-disc and Z-rod in the symbol ordered list, and so the normal order on a stone is the same, crescent and V-rod over double-disc and Z-rod. With few exceptions, stones with symbols which do not have an accompanying mirror/mirror & comb are in the normal order and both have the same face.

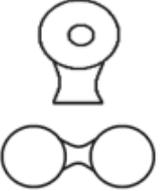
I have also discussed how, when a single mirror (without a comb) occurs below a symbol pair, this acknowledges that the order is 'reversed' (*PAS Newsletter* 99). Also, in the infrequent case of a left-hand (LH) symbol below a right-hand (RH) symbol, there is usually an accompanying mirror & comb.

This leaves a considerable number of stones, all with a mirror & comb, most with a normal order, but occasionally a reversed order. In fact, there are 42 cases of the mirror & comb out of a total of 202 symbol pairs that can be checked. So what does the mirror & comb signify in general?

The answer to this seems to revolve around the issue of what I have called 'dominance'. Normally, the symbol that occurs higher in the ordered list, that is, the top symbol of a pair on a stone, has dominance over the lower one. The presence of a mirror & comb signifies that dominance is to be changed to the lower symbol on this particular stone. Why the symbol pair has a dominant and subordinate symbol, I can't be sure at this point, nor for that matter do we even know why symbols come in pairs. But we can still study how they relate to each other.

This dominance of one symbol over its pair can be seen in the treatment of V and Z rods. Each rodded symbol comes with a standard form of rod (speaking only of class I stones, as again things deteriorate rapidly on class II stones). This standard form can be seen when paired with a non-rodded symbol. But if another rodded symbol is also part of the pair, then the lower symbol can be seen to acknowledge the dominance of the upper symbol by changing the form of its own rod ends. This is a complex area which I have laid out in 'Z rods and V rods of the Pictish Symbols', available online at academia.edu

One way of changing dominance from one symbol of the pair to the other, is for one symbol to simply lose its rod so that the other symbol can retain its own form of rod ends and assert its dominance. We see instances of all four of the rodded symbols at times without their rod. This situation also occurs when a symbol pair holds two of the same symbols – one of them loses its rod. It can also occur when a rodded symbol loses its rod to give dominance to a non-rodded symbol, regardless of order on the stone. A mirror & comb is also present with some of these pairs, underscoring the dominance of the lower symbol, but it doesn't appear to be necessary in this case.

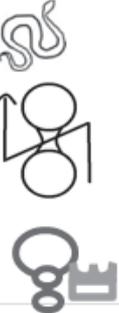
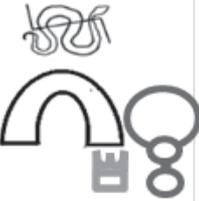
normal	reverse	normal	reverse	normal	normal
					
ABERLEMNO1		KNOCKANDO2		ROSEISLE	
NEWTON_HOUSE		BRECK_OF_HILLWELL		WESTFIELD1	

1 Symbols lose their rod to give dominance to the other symbol in the pair

Another method of removing the dominance of the upper symbol is to make it much smaller than the lower symbol, handing dominance to the lower symbol. A symbol pair is usually drawn with both symbols of roughly the same size, but here the upper symbol is made significantly smaller. Again, we find a mirror & comb accompanying the lower, now dominant, larger symbol.

The case of Aberlemno1 shows application of all three rules used to indicate the dominance of the lower symbol – the snake loses its Z rod, and the snake is drawn relatively small, and a mirror & comb is added. Other stones show that only one rule at a time is required, but various stones apply a combination of two or three rules at the same time.

What is interesting in the selection in Fig.2 is that the Tillytarmont and Newbiggin Leslie stones could have let the wolf and arch respectively have dominance simply by leaving them in the normal

normal	reverse	normal	reverse	normal
				
ABERLEMNO1	INVERAVEN1			DYCE3
NEWBIGGING LESLIE			TILLYTARMONT6	

2 The upper symbol is drawn much smaller to indicate its loss of dominance

order in the pair – as the top symbol. This shows that there is an external factor which is determining what will be the order and which symbol should be dominant on a particular stone. The setup of the stone isn't to note the normal dominance of the wolf or arch, but rather it is reflecting the external motivations that are dictating the choices of order and dominance which are different to normal for this particular symbol stone.

The thread that runs through all these types of configurations with a mirror & comb seems to be that the lower symbol is being given dominance on a particular stone, rather than leaving the dominance naturally with the upper symbol. This makes sense of the mirror & comb always and only occurring below or beside the lower symbol, never the upper symbol.

This idea of giving the lower symbol dominance by the addition of the mirror & comb also explains why sometimes we find a symbol pair evidently with the correct order and the correct faces, yet still with an accompanying mirror & comb – the change being indicated by the simple addition of the mirror & comb is to move dominance to the lower symbol.

ORDER	normal	normal	normal	normal	normal	normal	normal	normal	reverse
DOMINANCE	upper	<b>lower</b>	<b>lower</b>	upper	<b>lower</b>	<b>lower</b>	upper	<b>lower</b>	upper
	KINBLETHMONT			RHYNIE4	BOURTIE				
	INERAVON4	GOLSPIE2		TILLYTARMONT2	TOTE			CAIRNTON	
	KINTORE1			TILLYTARMONT3			INERAVEN2	LINDORES	

3 Some comparative examples with & without mirror+/-comb

Of course, this doesn't explain why symbols come in pairs nor why certain configurations of order, face, or dominance are required by any particular stone. That is the next question to ask – what are the external factors requiring these changes in configuration? But we do know that the change in order and dominance can only happen on stones, not in cave carvings or on portable items where symbol pairs are only seen in their correct order and matching faces, and with no mirrors or combs. Change in order, face, and dominance is somehow tied specifically to the function of the symbol stone.

To summarise, the main rules governing order, face, and dominance are:

- 1) The symbols have a natural order expressed in an ordered list, and symbols in a symbol pair prefer to reflect that order.
- 2) Symbols have a right-hand and left-hand face, and a symbol pair prefers to have both of its symbols with the same face.
- 3) A RH over LH symbol is allowed but is accompanied by a mirror & comb, giving dominance to the lower LH symbol.
- 4) Symbol stones without a mirror/mirror & comb have correct order, face, and dominance of the upper symbol.
- 5) If the symbol order on a stone needs to be reversed, and dominance is given to the now upper symbol, then a single mirror below is required.
- 6) A single mirror can also be used beside a symbol to note its reversed face (provisional).
- 7) A mirror & comb is used to indicate change of dominance from the upper symbol to the lower symbol.
- 8) Change in dominance can also be indicated by the subordinate symbol losing its rod.
- 9) Change in dominance can also be indicated by the subordinate symbol drawn much smaller than its pair, but this still requires a mirror & comb.

Further indepth discussion and data can be found in 'Order & Face of the Pictish Symbols' available online at academia.edu.

Helen McKay

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## The Battle of Dunnichen – playing the numbers game

The celebrations which marked the 1300th anniversary of the Battle of Dunnichen in 1985 certainly raised its profile dramatically. I had harboured a deep interest in the event since childhood because of a family connection with the area, and the occasion afforded the opportunity to engage with the topic which opened up new and unforeseen avenues of presentation. The media sensed the importance of the anniversary, and there seemed to be no-one else to whom to turn, so in the space of a few hectic days, I had a feature article in the *Weekend Scotsman*, conducted a battle-site visit for the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, given three radio interviews, and made two television appearances. Several other publications and media presentations followed. Over the years, I have given maybe 25 or 30 talks on the Battle of Dunnichen (including the inaugural lecture to the PAS in 1988), plus at least a dozen battle-field addresses. In all of these, one question has been raised on virtually every occasion – if this was such a major battle, how big were the armies involved?

It is not an easy question to answer, the reason being a paucity of contemporary records. There were almost no historians in those days; what we had instead were chroniclers, who jotted down the bare bones of a notable event, using a minimum of words, and providing virtually no detail. The largest number of mentions in medieval sources come from Ireland (in the *Annals of Ulster*, the *Annals of Tigernach*, and the *Fragmentary Irish Annals*), and none allude to the size of the armies. The same applies to other ancient sources, such as the ‘History of the Britons’ by Nennius, the ‘History of the Church of Durham’ by Symeon, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Even when we come to Bede (who does merit the title of ‘historian’) and his great work, the ‘*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*’, his account being much more extensive than any of the others, it is still woefully inadequate given that he was alive at the time of the battle. He fails to record many facts which must have been known, including an indication of the size of the armies.

I dislike the uncomfortable position of sitting on the fence, but in making my assessment, it seemed that there was little option. The best I could do in my little book on the Battle of

Dunnichen was to say that it ‘represents a mighty clash of arms which can have had few equals in the history of Dark-Age Britain’.<sup>1</sup> Such a generalisation is of little help in calculating numbers, but I went on to say, when considering the size of the respective armies, that

there is little doubt that they would have consisted of the maximum potency which each side could muster. Ecgrith [king of Northumbria] is hardly likely to have embarked upon such an invasion without the full weight of his military resources, while Bruide [king of the Picts] must have realised that to repulse an attack of that scale (which he himself may have initiated) would require the deployment of all the martial power that Pictland could summon together.

It might have been considered imprudent had I dealt with actual numbers, but others have been less restrained when examining this aspect of the Battle. A very practical hands-on approach was taken by the Kirriemuir and District Wargames Association in 2003. Following the PAS conference in May of that year, the Battle of Dunnichen was re-enacted in miniature at Pictavia (the erstwhile Pictish cultural centre near Brechin), as reported in the next *PAS Newsletter*.<sup>2</sup> This was the latest in a series of refights which were designed to test various hypotheses about the Battle. That fairly brief note promised that something more substantial would follow, and further refights took place over an October weekend, resulting in the appearance of a lengthy article in the next *PAS Journal*.<sup>3</sup> As its author Allan Webster was at pains to point out, wargaming is somewhat more complicated and sophisticated than merely playing with toy soldiers. The scale used on the battle-table, which measured 8 feet by 6, was one miniature warrior representing ten real ones. The K&D Wargames Association attempted to formulate an accurate construct of the circumstances of the Battle, and that included an assessment of the relative sizes of the opposing armies. Drawing on some ancient sources quite unconnected with this particular conflict, estimates were made not only of the sizes of the respective armies, but of their composition as well. If my arithmetic is correct, Webster pitches up with a force of 2,450 invading Northumbrians challenging 2,700 Picts. Those are substantial numbers, though I would have imagined them to be a little on the low side. Incidentally, it is somewhat disquieting to discover that only 200 of the invading Northumbrians were designated as cavalymen, equating to just 12% of their force, while the probability is that it was actually

100%. Webster was aware of the problem here, commenting that

on reflection, it seemed improbable that such a large force of *hoi polloi* [referring to the supposed Northumbrian infantry] would have been called out for an away game, but only when Northumbrian territory was invaded.

I have always imagined that the battle ground in the vicinity of Dun Nechtan on 20th May 685 would have contained thousands of participants, but other historians of the Battle disagree. James Fraser, who has investigated the conflict to a greater extent than any other scholar this century, freely admits that ‘we have no explicit surviving information to indicate the relative sizes of the forces that were brought to bear against one another at Dunnichen’, yet he reckons the Northumbrian army to have numbered only ‘perhaps 500 or 600 specialised fighting horsemen’.<sup>4</sup> Despite advocating caution, he nonetheless contrives to describe his guesstimate as an ‘actual fact’, when in reality it is no more than unsubstantiated speculation.

The Pictish host, Fraser reckons, was probably somewhat larger, which he estimates as comprising ‘at least 1,000 men, though not more (and probably significantly less) than 2,000 men’, another guesstimate which lacks any basis of support. This still seems on the meagre side, considering that Bruide may well have spent several years following the disastrous defeat on the plains of Manau (in the area of modern Grangemouth) in *circa* 672 establishing the power of his kingship over a united Pictland. His army therefore had the potential to be very large indeed, but Fraser has a clever counter to that argument. Ecgfrith’s evident haste to embark on his Pictish campaign may be accounted for by his desire to engage Bruide before the Pictish king had time to rally the full support which in theory he had at his disposal. Were that the case, it would have restricted the size of both armies.

Such a viewpoint does not prevent higher guesstimates being put forward. John Sadler, in his wide-ranging study of Scottish battles, gives Ecgfrith ‘a total force of perhaps 5,000 or 6,000 men’.<sup>5</sup> That may truly rate as an army. When Guy Halsall wargamed the battle in 1984, just before its anniversary, he provided Ecgfrith with 3,100 troops, while placing Bruide in command of a force of 4,300 men (all categorised).<sup>6</sup> All this talk of numbers remains purely speculative, for as Peter Marran in his assessment of the Battle has starkly put it, ‘the Northumbrian force

may have been smaller for the purpose than was wise, although we know nothing at all about its numbers or composition’.<sup>7</sup> However, his suggestion that Ecgfrith had ‘many troops pinned down in Ireland’ looks to be wide of the mark, the wasting of the province of Brega by one of his generals in the previous year being virtually unopposed, while talk of Ecgfrith’s ‘war-band’ heading for Dunnichen is seriously misplaced.

Scottish historians in general see the Battle of Dunnichen as a major event in the development of the emergent nation, but certain English historians have taken the reverse view, tending to downplay its significance to a remarkable (and unjustified) degree. This might be an appropriate moment to consider these opinions.

A book with a title like *The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* may not sound as if it has much of relevance to offer, but a chapter entitled ‘Early medieval kingships in the British Isles’ holds out a greater degree of promise. However, the author, Thomas Charles-Edwards, does not rate Bruide’s kingship as worthy of notice, though he does make an oblique reference to the Battle of Dunnichen, and also to the earlier conflict of *circa* 672 (which James Fraser has neatly contrived to name the Battle of the Two Rivers, they being the Avon and the Carron). Charles-Edwards presents the theory that ‘In Northumbria, one reason for Ecgfrith’s use of small forces of horsemen in operations against the Picts may have been with the intention of carrying off cattle so as to compel the payment of tribute’.<sup>8</sup> As we know of only two campaigns in which this Northumbrian king clashed with the Picts, culminating in the two battles mentioned above, it is they which must be the subject of his comment. So what is this about ‘small forces’? More on that shortly.

Despite what may be regarded as the distorted nature of such an opinion, it has been picked up and made considerably worse by Stephen Evans in his book *The Lords of Battle ... in Dark-Age Britain*. Again there is no mention of Bruide, despite the Battle of Dunnichen falling well within his definition of the period covered by the Dark Ages. Here the claim is made that the mighty Battle of the Two Rivers

should be seen as a cattle raid whose purpose was to re-establish tribute obligations ... It seems likely that cattle constituted the most common form of tribute and non-battlefield booty.<sup>9</sup>

He makes some interesting comments regarding warlike raiding, though in a different context. With reference to the campaign of 673–75 initiated by Mercia against Northumbria, he maintains that the intention was not merely to fight (and win, presumably), but also to compel the defeated opponents to pay tribute *servili animo* ('in the spirit of a slave'), according to the words of his source, Eddius Stephanus.

This leads Evans to comment

Those who were forced to give tribute were seen to be servile to those who received it. Little wonder, then, given the reluctance of rulers to pay tribute, that some campaigns were initiated with the express purpose of enforcing the terms of tribute obligations.

This conclusion seems sensible enough, but he then cites Bede's description of the Dunnichen campaign as suggesting 'essentially the same purpose' the maintenance [i.e. maintenance] of overlordship with its inhered [i.e. inherent] tribute obligations 'for Ecgrith's final campaign against the Picts'. Setting aside the spelling aberrations contained in that sentence, it is a piece of blatant fantasy in which Evans appears to have confused cause and effect, for Bede is very clear as to the reason for Ecgrith's demise, as he sees it, but says nothing at all regarding his reason for embarking upon the Dunnichen venture. He does provide a brief mention of Ecgrith's objective, *viz.*, *uastandam Pictorum prouinciam* ('to devastate a/the province of the Picts'), which certainly gives the impression that his plan of campaign was on a much larger scale than a cattle raid.<sup>10</sup>

These two books by English historians both strongly push the notion that only a small force of Northumbrians advanced into Pictland in 685, the purpose of their campaign being nothing more than a punitive cattle raid. The supposition contained in the secondary claim seems to depend in large measure on the primary claim, the issue boiling down to the 'small force' of invading Northumbrians. So where did this notion come from, and just how reliable is it? It was Eddius Stephanus, in his 'Life of Bishop Wilfrid', who provided the information upon which these claims seem to be based. He gives no indication at all about the size of the Northumbrian force at the Battle of Dunnichen, but he is considerably more forthcoming in this respect concerning the Battle of the Two Rivers, fought a dozen years earlier.

On two occasions, Eddius mentions this aspect of the campaign in the chapter entitled *De victoria regis in feroces Pictos* ('Of the king's

victory over the warlike Picts').<sup>11</sup> In the first instance, he says that Ecgrith attacked the Picts *parva manu populi Dei* ('with his little band of God's people'). In the published account, the translator, Bernard Colgrave, chose to equate *manu* with 'band', though 'hand' is the literal translation; in military terms, 'cohort' might have been the expected noun. However, the context raises the question of just how literally this term should be taken. Many armies over many centuries have made the claim that they had God on their side, the more so when Christians fought Christians. Perhaps this monkish historian wished to emphasise the belief that it was of no account how large, or small, the Northumbrian army was on this occasion, for as long as God was on their side they would be victorious.

In the second instance, Eddius is rather more matter-of-fact when describing Ecgrith's preparations for the Manau campaign, saying that *statim equitatu exercitu praeparato* ('he forthwith got together a troop of horsemen'). The word 'troop' does not give the impression of a large body of fighting men, certainly not an army. Bernard Colgrave was the leading published translator of texts of this period during the Inter-War years, and his authority was such that the accuracy of his English versions was regarded as beyond question. However, as this is such a vital matter, the translation has been rechecked with a surprising result.

The key Latin phrase used by Eddius Stephanus is: *statim equitatu exercitu praeparato*. Taking the words one by one, in a different order, they may be translated as follows:

*statim* means 'immediately'

*praeparato* derives from *praeparo*, meaning 'to make ready'

*exercitu* derives from *exercitus*, meaning 'trained' (as with a body of soldiers)

*equitatu* derives from *equitatus*, meaning 'cavalry'

This crucial phrase may therefore be translated thus: He immediately made ready the trained cavalry.

The point to note is that there is nothing in the Latin to suggest that Ecgrith's forces consisted of a 'troop' of cavalry (which would have been called *turma*), nor anything else which even hints at the Northumbrian force being small. My medieval Latin being a trifle on the rusty side, some time ago I had sought the opinion of the late Geoffrey Barrow, emeritus professor of Scottish History at Edinburgh University and

HM Historiographer Royal for Scotland, and widely recognised as one of the foremost early medieval scholars of his day. When presented with the passage in question, he expressed his opinion thus: “We clearly have to do with an ‘army’, not a ‘troop’; *exercitus* cannot be reduced to a troop ... Ecgrifh needed a host, an army, and that army needed to be on horseback because of the distance”.<sup>12</sup> To reinforce this view, the noun *exercitus* alone is often translated simply as ‘army’.

Imponderable queries remain. Why did a scholar of Colgrave’s standing get it wrong? Why has the correct translation not been made since? Why did English historians go into print without checking the original source? Did they have ulterior motives for permitting the incorrect version to colour and distort their views? Putting all that aside, at least we now have a reliable translation on which to base our understanding of those crucial 7th-century battles. If it has been demonstrated that Ecgrifh took an army with him to fight the Battle of the Two Rivers, then it is more than likely that he was also accompanied by a host on his Dunnichen campaign.

We may dismiss talk of the invasion of 685 being merely a punitive cattle-raid conducted by a troop of cavalry; rather, it represents Ecgrifh bent on exercising a policy of aggressive territorial expansion by the use of his army, which was brought to a shuddering halt along the margins of Nechtan’s Mire by the sound stratagem and clever tactics employed by Bruide. The Battle of Dunnichen may therefore be seen as a mighty clash of arms in which the Picts were the overwhelming victors, safeguarding their territorial integrity while allowing their culture to flourish and their artistic skills to blossom.

*Graeme Cruickshank*

### Postscript

This essay was written as part of a lengthy commentary on the article ‘Wargaming Nechtansmere’ by Allan Webster in *PAS Journal* No. 16 (2004), and was intended for publication in the following issue. However, that was delayed until 2008, by which time the typeset text had been mislaid, and *Journal* No.18 has never yet made its appearance. It is only with the bumper century issue of the *PAS Newsletter* that it has been practical to present at least the most important element contained within the intended article, though sadly Prof. Geoffrey Barrow, whose interest and assistance in a crucial part of the investigation was much appreciated, has not lived to see its publication.

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3. Webster, Allan ‘Wargaming Nechtansmere’ (inexplicably regressing the name of the Battle to its outmoded English equivalent), in *Journal of the Pictish Arts Society* No.16, 2004 [even though it bears a publication date of 2001], pp.19”25.
4. Fraser, James *The Battle of Dunnichen 685* (Stroud, Gloucestershire), 2002, pp.45, 70, 71.
5. Sadler, John *Scottish Battles from Mons Graupius to Culloden* (Edinburgh, 1996), p.21.
6. Halsall, Guy ‘A Woeful Disaster’: the Battle of Nechtansmere’ in *Miniature Wargames* No.19, 1984, pp.14”17.
7. Marren, Peter ‘Nechtansmere’, Pt. I, chap. 2, of *Grampian Battlefields* (Aberdeen, 1990).
8. Charles-Edwards, Thomas ‘Early Medieval Kingships in the British Isles’ (pp.29”39), in Basset, Steven, ed., *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (Leicester, 1989).
9. Evans, Stephen *The Lords of Battle: image and reality of the commitatus [warband] in Dark-Age Britain* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1997), pp.129”30.
10. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, Bk.IV, Ch.26.
11. Eddius Stephanus, *Vita Episcopi Wilfridi*, Ch.XIX.
12. Professor Geoffrey Barrow, pers. comm., 6/12/2000.

## Dunfallandy – again

Further to Elspeth Reid’s note in *Newsletter* 99, re the raised area where a symbol should have been, but apparently was not carved, there is other evidence to suggest that the Dunfallandy cross-slab\* is unfinished.

The area behind the horseman on the symbol-bearing side has never been reduced to the same level as the rest of the background surface. Thus the rider’s back and the horse’s rump are defined by an incised line whilst the rest of the figure and the two small symbols are carved in shallow relief. Also, the design in the square panel at the centre of the cross on the other side has a curiously tentative look compared to the bold carving on the rest of this face. It gives the impression of being a laying-out sketch awaiting definition.

There thus seems good reason to suppose the cross-slab was never finished. We can only speculate on the reason. Did the ‘money’ run out? Did the sculptor die? Or was he called away, and never came back to finish it? There is no way of knowing.

*Niall M Robertson*

\* See illustration overleaf



Dunfallandy face C.

## The Dunfallandy slab: part 1

### A brief analytical description and parallels for some detail

*The Dunfallandy slab is unique in its iconographic programme, aspects of which cannot be understood unless seen in context of the complete programme covering both faces. This note deals only with some detail on the back of the monument (face C) which has recently become a focus of interest.*

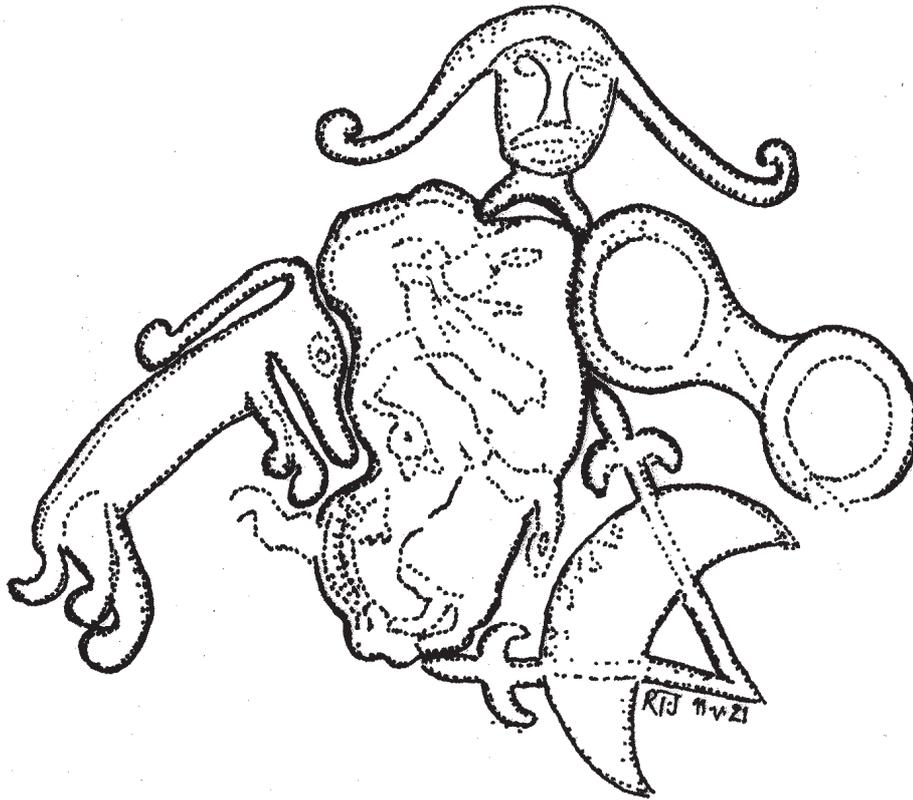
In a recent note in *PAS Newsletter* Elspeth Reid<sup>1</sup> commented on an unexpected blank area in the midst of other decoration at the top of face C of the Dunfallandy slab, an irregularly shaped space which has been left standing proud of its surrounding surface. This central element is closely flanked by three symbols which are so orientated that they appear to focus around it. She assumed that a 'fourth symbol was left undone' but the question of a potential fourth

symbol is much to the point and why would the area have been left deliberately blank in the middle of such an otherwise well-developed programme. An exploration of the context may help in understanding its purpose.

**A brief description of the programme on face C.**<sup>2</sup> The slab face is framed on both edges by a border of beast-headed sea-serpents whose profiled heads flank a human bust that stares out confronting the sculpture's audience. The serpents' tongues protrude from their long jaws, framed between prominent lines of teeth, to lick the sides of the figure's head, while his long braids of hair extend on either side along the line of the upper edge of the beasts' tongues before curving upwards at the tips. Immediately beneath lies the undecorated area surrounded by three symbols (clockwise left to right), a 'Pictish' beast, a Double-Disc and a Crescent and V-rod. All three symbols seem to touch the undecorated area while the undecorated area and the double disc both make contact with the shoulders of the bust above. Below is a scene comprising a raised, mounted cross flanked by two seated confronting male figures depicted in profile who are dressed in ankle-length attire with their hoods pushed back leaving their heads bare. The seats they occupy are ornately portrayed, particularly in the detail of the joints (reminiscent of the limb-joints of animals such as the Dores, Clune Farm boar<sup>3</sup>), and stand, together with the cross, on an irregularly-drawn thin horizontal line which suggests that this scene and the symbols above all represent a single panel subdivided into two registers, upper and lower.

A lower panel is also sub-divided into two registers. The upper depicts a male figure mounted on a horse who rides to the right towards two symbols, a Crescent and V-rod above and a 'Pictish beast' below, both of which appear to face towards the rider. The register beneath depicts three tools, one to the left is a hammer or axe-hammer with tapering head,<sup>4</sup> on the right a pair of metalworking tongs and below is the trapezoidal outline of what is probably an anvil.

**The upper programme.** A figure or a bust portrayed in this manner, fronted between two beasts, may be understood as a scene constructed from the Old Roman bible, Old Testament text of the Book of Habakkuk 3:2, 'In the midst of two beasts thou shalt be recognised',<sup>5</sup> a text by which a believer might identify the Messiah as Christ and through Him win salvation.<sup>6</sup> Other examples of the Habakkuk motif occur fairly



*Christ's bust arising from the clouds of heaven covered with other faint surface evidence*

frequently in Scotland in both literal and symbolic forms such as on the Maiden Stone, Drumdurno 1A,<sup>7</sup> where a full-length fronted Christ standing on top of a cross is flanked by sea-beasts or on the back of the Brodie slab where three different framed abstract symbols flank a fourth larger motif beneath perhaps portraying symbols of cosmic power and on the Kilduncan slab where sea-beasts encompass a cross.<sup>8</sup> Another close parallel for this scene occurs on a disc-headed monument in the Isle of Man at Old Kirk Braddan where, adopting a bust model of Christ similar to that portrayed on the Dunfallandy slab, a head bust is flanked by upright leonine beasts whose tongues lick Christ's face and identify the figure as the Saviour by creating saltire crosses with their crossing limbs while one of the beasts curls its tail, the combined elements creating a Chi-Rho symbol.<sup>9</sup> In both Dunfallandy and Braddan images the bust of Christ is positioned above a similar blank area of the programme which indicates that the figure is also depicted emerging from the anomalous area beneath and suggests this is a cosmic depiction of the Saviour in the process of rising out of the clouds of heaven, a crucial moment in the faith, when He is recognised by the Habakkuk beasts before descending into the world to fulfil His redemptive mission. A similar image of Christ rising from the clouds of heaven (though not associated with a Habakkuk motif) appears in

the Book of Kells on fol 34r,<sup>10</sup> a page on which a full-length Chi-Rho symbolising Christ is swathed by triskel-filled motifs that portray the Trinity and which overall symbolises a mantle of heavenly cloud. A bust of the Redeemer emerges at the top through the clouds, rising above a lozenge motif at the core of the Chi-Rho symbol. The lozenge confirms the presence of Christ symbolised as the Logos, second person of the Trinity, and indicates cosmic harmony.<sup>12</sup>

The lower register in the upper panel provides a worldly contrast with the cosmic scene above. Christ, symbolised by a cross in the centre of the scene, is descended from heaven into middle-earth where He has offered Himself as sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Two figures, fourth-century eremitical desert fathers, Saints Paul and Anthony, recognise and contemplate the symbol of the crucified Saviour who has fulfilled his earthly mission and made their redemption possible. Other portrayals of Saints Paul and Anthony occur in Scotland where they serve as significant flanking figures<sup>13</sup> and a related example occurs in the Isle of Man<sup>14</sup> which can be understood as a reflex of Scottish practice. In the lower panel of this face a single rider travels towards the dexter slab edge. He shows no evidence of bearing a satchel for carrying the chrism or books so appears not to depict a cleric but rather a high-status layman who potentially symbolises humanity on a spiritual

quest. The various panels and registers on this face represent different elements in the universe, the lay, spiritual and cosmic in God's creation but all, recognisable or not, have symbolic purpose and meaning and were not intended to be interpreted literally.

The meaning of the programme, however, seems to go much deeper than this brief exploration. If the undecorated area at the top of the slab portrays the clouds of heaven why would it become such an intense focus for three symbols – what have they to do with Christ in heaven and what purpose do they serve. More significantly, does the undecorated area really depict the clouds of heaven: its irregular outline would suggest it does but it should serve to make us question its purpose. A close look at Allen's image in ECMS<sup>15</sup> is not especially instructive but a careful examination of a Tom Gray photograph published in George and Isabel Hendersons' book<sup>16</sup> reveals a faint outline of what may be a shadowy figure within the area of the cloud. The figure stands along the right-hand edge of the outline facing towards the left, moreover a small object seems to project to the viewer's right at waist level. Opposite, on the left side of the cloud-shape, fainter surviving evidence also seems to be present for another feature or features which are marginally more clearly visible towards the base where the lower part may rest beneath a foot of the figure to the right. The two elements seem to be depicted in a state of conflict but who they are or why this takes place is uncertain and their purpose is unclear in the context of the programme. It seems unlikely they are portrayed as if shrouded within the clouds of heaven and are, in fact, superimposed across its outer surface. Much more remains to be explored in this cross face programme which it is hoped to examine further in a future note where more extensive evidence will be identified.

Ross Trench-Jellicoe

#### Notes:

- 1 Elspeth Reid (Spring) 2021 'The missing 'fourth' symbol on the Dunfallandy stone' *Pictish Arts Society Newsletter* 99, 9. Her note drew attention to similar earlier queries, see Helen Mulholland (Winter) 2020 'A note on the Pictish symbol stone at Dunfallandy' *PAS Newsletter* 98, 5-6
- 2 Allen and Anderson 1903, fig 305; Henderson and Henderson 2004, illus 77
- 3 Henderson and Henderson 2004, pl 26
- 4 Axe-hammer parallels appear on Aberdeen, Rhynie 7, Shetland, Papi 1 and Mail, Cunningsburgh (Henderson and Henderson 2004, pls 180-1, 228)
- and an example was found in the Sutton Hoo ship burial (Bruce-Mitford 1983, figs 595, 597, 599)
- 5 The Vetus Latina text reads 'In medio duorum animalium innotesceris'.
- 6 Éamonn ÓCarragáin 2005
- 7 Ian Fraser 2008, 32: no 33, Aberdeenshire, Drumduro
- 8 Henderson and Henderson 2004, pl 108; Trench-Jellicoe 2005, illus 3, 16
- 9 Kermodé 1907, pl xxvii [Braddan 2:72(69)]
- 10 Meehan 2012, pls 46, 47
- 11 Richardson and Scarry 1990, 47; Éamonn Ó Carragáin 2021, The Jennifer O'Reilly Memorial Lecture, <<https://youtu.be/jB6NfWSmQRs>>
- 12 Saints Paul and Anthony occur in Easter Ross at Nigg, and in Angus on St Vigean 7, and in Perthshire on Fowlis Wester: Henderson and Henderson 2004, illus 203, 204, 222
- 13 Kermodé 1907, pl xxvi [Maughold 5:96(67)]
- 14 Noble, Goldberg and Hamilton 2019, 121, consider the symbols to be associated with the saints but this seems unlikely in light of their orientation
- 15 Allen and Anderson 1903, fig 305
- 16 Henderson and Henderson 2004, illus 77

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## From Angus to Easter Ross and beyond: tracing St Boniface/ Curetán through sculpture

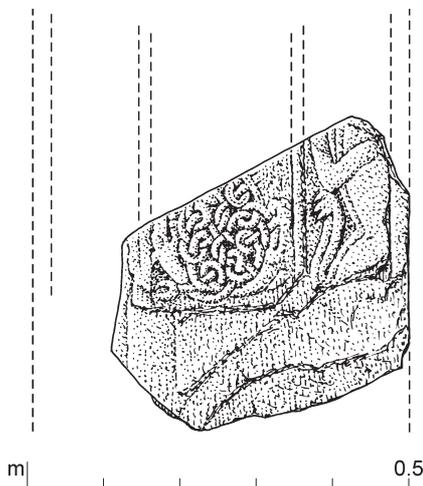
Lowland Angus displays a remarkable concentration of sites, mostly ecclesiastical settlements, producing high quality sculpture of the eighth and ninth centuries AD. On analogy with Mercia in England, where evidence for ecclesiastical patronage was stronger in dependent territories than in the Mercian heartland, Isabel Henderson has suggested that this density of sculpture-bearing sites in southern Pictland may reflect political domination by the Pictish kingdom north of the Mounth (2017, 54). This idea can be supported by stylistic connections between the artistic traditions of sculptors working in north and south Pictland, particularly those seen on the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab in Easter Ross, on cross-slabs at Meigle and Aberlemno in Angus and on the St Andrews Sarcophagus in Fife (Henderson 2008, 202; Thickpenny 2018, 170). These are monuments conceived on a grand scale, but the same connections can be demonstrated amongst smaller monuments, some of which are exquisitely carved. One particularly clear example is expressed in the motif of a flattened snake 'boss', which is shared by the great cross-slab at Shandwick in the north and a fragment of a cross-slab from Murroes, the sole example in the south (Henderson 2005, 79-80). On Shandwick it occurs as a panel of ornament on the reverse of the slab, whereas on Murroes it is placed within the shaft of the cross, and in both cases the circle consists of the intertwined bodies of four serpentine creatures (1). Shandwick is one of the great landmark monuments of Easter Ross, like Hilton of Cadboll, yet the Murroes

fragment was part of a more modest cross-slab, in size if not in aspiration. Murroes is now a small village to the north-east of Dundee, but it is one of a halo around the city of early medieval sites with significant sculpture that runs from Monifieth on the Tay estuary to the east, by Murroes, Tealing, Strathmartine and Benvie to Invergowrie on the Tay to the west of Dundee. There must surely have been one or two other such sites within the halo that were obliterated first by the growth of a great medieval burgh and in the nineteenth century by the sudden industrial development of the city of Dundee.

This cluster of sites producing early medieval sculpture is separated from those of Strathmore by the Sidlaw Hills, a long range of hills only rarely in excess of 400m OD and certainly no barrier to overland travel. Beyond Strathmore and the major sculptural centres of Meigle and Kirriemuir, the Mounth was by contrast an extensive area of steep hills up to 700m OD, presenting a formidable hindrance to travel between south and north Pictland. It was mentioned, with the implication of a barrier, in the *Annals of Ulster* in a record of the death of Talorc, 'king of the Picts on this side of the Mounth' in the year 782 (Fraser 2009a, 327). Ten or eleven routes across the Mounth have been used in more recent centuries, one of which, the route over Cairn O' Mount north of Fettercairn, was graced at St Ringan's Cairn by an impressive cross-slab carved in deep relief, intended perhaps as a wayside marker in Pictish times (Canmore 36070; 36067; Ritchie forthcoming). Other passes over the Mounth may also have been in use in early medieval times, particularly the route known as the Firmouth from Glen Esk to the River Dee which is marked at Tarfside by an early cross-slab (Geddes et al 2015, 270-1).

Among those who may have used these routes must be numbered the holy men and women associated with a legendary mission by St Boniface, also known as St Curetán, around AD 700. The sources are centuries later in date but they are now generally accepted as preserving an acceptably early legend, and they have been discussed by several historians in the last three decades, from Aidan MacDonald's Groom House lecture (1992) to Alan MacQuarrie's edition of the Aberdeen Breviary (2012). MacDonald argued very plausibly that the Roman name Boniface had been adopted by a native-born monk named Curetán, and there is a consensus that Curetán, bishop of Ross, had

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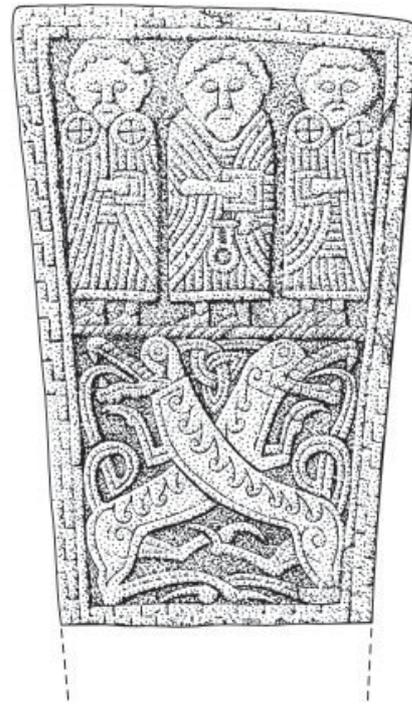


1 Murroes, scale 1:10 drawing by John Borland

his seat at Rosemarkie, where the Pictish king Naiton built a new church around 715 (Fraser 2009b, 15-17). Kenneth Veitch argued that the legend arose as ‘an allegorical attempt by later Columban Church hagiographers’ to strengthen the link with Rome and to portray Curetán as the key figure in a period when Roman influence was being absorbed into the religious life of Pictland (Veitch 1997, 638). There is also an attractive suggestion mooted almost two centuries ago by John Stuart that the mission should be identified with Bede’s account of a party of clerics and architects sent into Pictland by Abbot Ceolfrid of Jarrow in response to a request from Naiton (Bede book 5, chap 21; Stuart 1890, 291). But to return to the legend itself, the two earliest sources in the early decades of the sixteenth century are the Aberdeen Breviary and *The Chronicles of Scotland* by Hector Boece, and together they bring Boniface and his entourage from Rome to Pictland, arriving by boat in the Tay estuary at Invergowrie, where he founded a church before moving inland into Angus and founding another church at Tealing, both dedicated to St Peter, which are two of the sculpture sites already identified on the outskirts of Dundee (the sources are fully examined in MacDonald 1992, chap 2). Restenneth is also mentioned, but this is likely to be an assumption on the part of later scribes, for there is no evidence that the history of the church site at Restenneth can be taken back beyond AD 1000 (Cameron 1994, 375). There is a better candidate for a church founded by St Boniface in the place known from place-name studies as Egglespether (Barrow 1983, 8). This is possibly the site of a chapel known to have been dedicated to St Boniface to the south of Forfar, where the foundations of a small chapel were still visible in 1822 (MacDonald 1992, 41; Canmore 33572), or alternatively it might be sculpture-rich Aberlemno (Atkinson 1997, 8-9). Thereafter Boniface and his party continued northwards, until they reached Rosemarkie on the north side of the Moray Firth, where Boniface/Curetán became Bishop of Ross and spent the rest of his life.

#### *The legend in sculpture*

Several carved stones in southern Pictland appear to offer evidence that the Boniface/Curetán legend was known and revered there in the late eighth and ninth centuries. Appropriately, the first is from Invergowrie to the west of Dundee, the traditional landing-place of Boniface and his entourage, and this is a ninth-century cross-slab that may preserve some



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2 *Invergowrie 1, scale 1:10 drawing by John Borland*

memory of the saint (2). Heavily ornamented on all visible faces, Invergowrie 1 bears on face C three robed and tonsured figures carrying books, and the central larger figure also carries a special badge of authority, perhaps a seal matrix (Henderson & Henderson 2004, 57). He might well represent Boniface/Curetán himself. A few miles to the north-east lies Tealing, mentioned in the legend as the second church that the saint founded and the find-spot of a fragment of another significant cross-slab discussed in a previous *PAS Newsletter* (Ritchie 2020, 7-8). From Tealing the party would have crossed the Sidlaw Hills towards the Restenneth area. There are two likely routes: one passes between Craigowl Hill and Gallow Hill and descends into Glen Ogilvie and thence to Glamis, and the other climbs the neck between Craigowl Hill and Balkello Hill to descend into Denoon Glen and ultimately to Glamis. Both routes are shown as tracks on the 1860s six-inch map (Ordnance Survey 1865) and are likely to be of some antiquity, but there are good reasons for thinking that the second is the most likely long-distance route in early medieval times. It has a likely way-marker in the once-impressive cross-slab at South Balluderon known as Martin’s Stone or St Martin’s Stone (Canmore 31864), and Denoon Glen contains not only the site of an early medieval chapel with Pictish sculpture at Wester Denoon but also the remains of an impressive fort on Dunoon Law which may have been refurbished in early medieval times. A fragment of a small cross-slab from Wester Denoon, no 1, is carved in relief with a large

frontal figure wearing a formally draped and decorated robe and a huge penannular brooch, clearly a person of importance who may again, like Invergowrie, relate to the Boniface/Curetán legend (3). The proximity of a prestigious fort and church at Denoon suggest that they may have formed a centre of royal power for Strathmore in the eighth and ninth centuries.

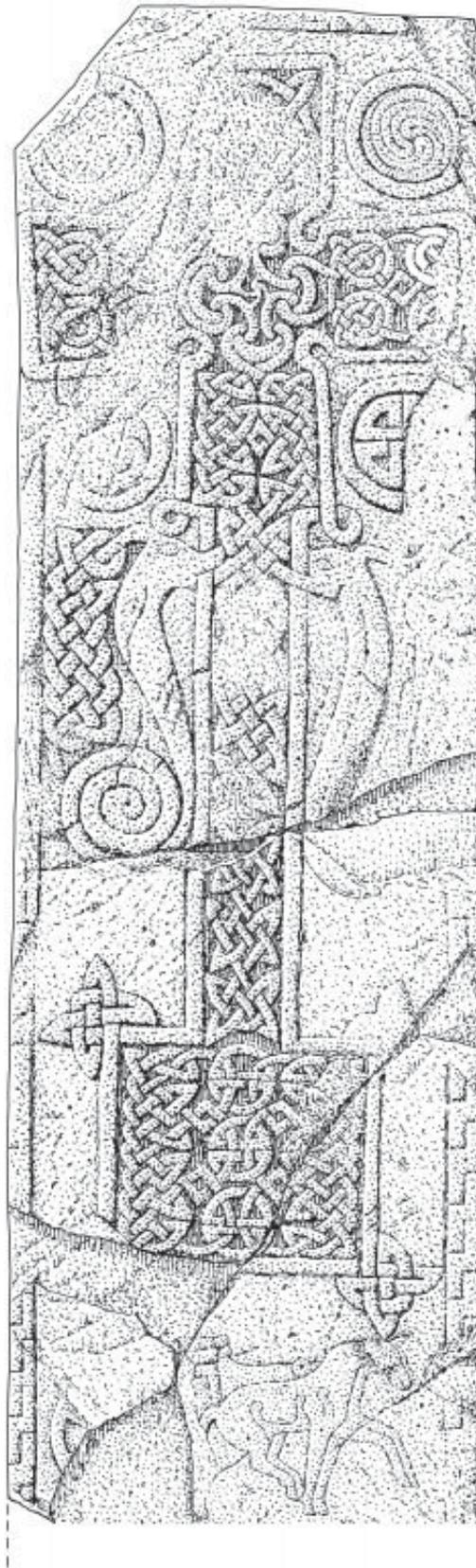


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3 *Wester Denoon 1*, scale 1:10 drawing by John Borland

In Strathmore, north-east of Glamis, there is another tall cross-slab that probably acted as an early way-marker at Cossans, known as St Orland's Stone. This splendid and elaborately carved monument may have guided travellers through what was then marshland, and the use of large-scale symbols and horizontal lines dividing up the picture space on its reverse face links it with sculptural trends in Easter Ross (Henderson & Henderson 2004, 67). One of the scenes shows a boat with three crewmen and three passengers, which has been discussed in recent editions of this newsletter (Borland 2020; Coleman 2020). It is tempting to see a potential reference here to the sea voyage of the Boniface/Curetán legend, but the passengers' long hair suggests that they are secular rather than ecclesiastical dignitaries. To the north beyond Cossans lies Kirriemuir with its large collection of early medieval sculpture (Canmore 32298), which displays a taste for borders of simple step pattern like those on the cross-slabs from Tealing, Invergowrie and Benvie, farther north at Menmuir and in the far north in Caithness on the tall cross-slab Skinnet 1. The tightly coiled tails of the hybrid creatures on Wester Denoon 2 are best paralleled on Skinnet as well (4).

Rosemarkie on the north shore of the Moray Firth became the home and diocese of Boniface/Curetán, and from there his influence spread northwards, arguably to Skinnet near Thurso and manifestly to Papa Westray in the northern isles



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4 *Skinnet 1*, scale 1:10 drawing by John Borland

of Orkney, though in the latter case not necessarily in his lifetime. The later sculptural links between Skinnet and Angus have already been mentioned, and there is a second stone at Skinnet which suggests that an ecclesiastical settlement could have existed here as early as the time of Boniface/Curetán (5). Skinnet 2 bears

a large, incised cross-of-arcs set on a stem, probably intended to represent a processional cross, and there appear to have been ornate triquetra knots carved within the arms. Knowledge of processional crosses implies the existence of a prestigious church at Skinnet, but its dedication is unfortunately unknown. In Papa Westray there are later medieval chapels dedicated to both St Boniface and to one of his companions, St Triduana, the origins of which are sadly obscure but nonetheless interesting in showing that the legend was not only remembered but believed to be relevant to Orkney (Thomson 2008, 17-21). No reference to Boniface survives in placenames between Rosemarkie and Papa Westray, but Triduana appears in two places close to the coast of

Sutherland at Kintradwell near Brora and Croit Trolla near Dunbeath. Skinnet's cross-of-arcs may be found, set within circles, on two incised cross-slabs from St Boniface Church in Papa Westray, and one of them is topped by a small linear cross with expanded terminals which could again be a reference to a metal processional cross (Scott & Ritchie 2014, illus 8, nos 21-2).

#### *Closing the historical gap*

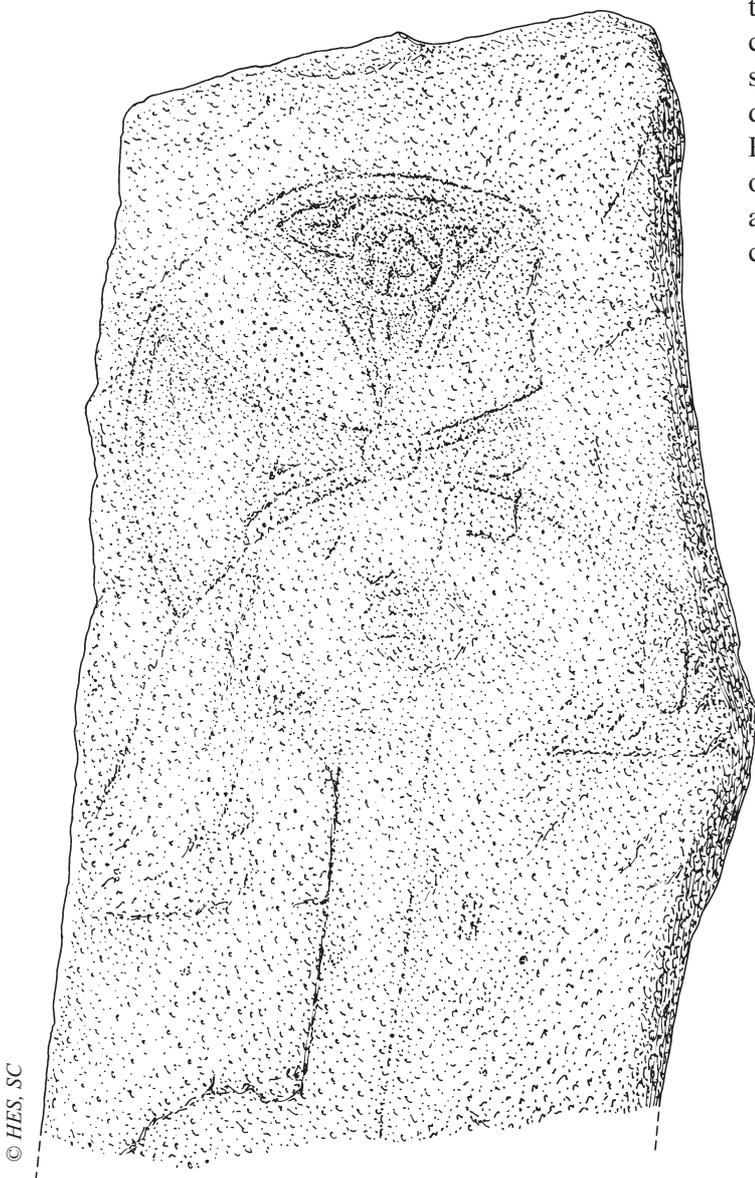
The daunting chronological gap between the Boniface/Curetán of around AD 700 and the surviving written record of the legend some 800 years later can at least be lessened in impact by the sculpture discussed here, some of which suggests that the story was remembered and revered in the eighth and ninth centuries. By the twelfth century or a little later, most of the churches associated with Boniface/Curetán in southern and northern Pictland had been dedicated to St Peter (except Egglesther, Peter's Church, which may have retained its original eighth-century name: Clancy 2013, 22), and these Petrine dedications may be another conscious reference to St Boniface.

*Anna Ritchie*

Grateful thanks are offered to Barbara Crawford and Norman Atkinson, who were kind enough to comment on a draft of this text.

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5 Skinnet 2, scale 1:10 drawing by John Borland

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## Pictish Book Satchels

In the 1970 Jarrow Lecture, Professor Kathleen Hughes argued that the Picts were a Latin illiterate society, who possessed no vibrant monastic scriptoria, and no famous saints of their own. Writing fifteen years earlier, this viewpoint was certainly not shared by Wainwright (1955: 25), and Hughes' paper has since come under scrutiny (see Kirby 1973; Forsyth 1998; Evans 2011: 59). As Forsyth (1998: 40) rightly states, 'No biblical or liturgical texts have survived from the Pictish church, yet it is inconceivable that they did not exist: the church simply could not have functioned without them.' Hughes (1970: 9-10) was reluctant to consider Pictish sculpture as evidence of book culture and literacy in Pictland; however, close examination of the sculptural evidence indicates that the Picts, like their Insular and Continental neighbours, were active participants in early Christian book culture. There are no less than eighteen examples on Pictish cross-slabs and a shrine panel where figures are shown holding books, reading from books, or wearing book satchels. For comparison, there are only fourteen Irish high crosses where figures are depicted with books. Compared to other Insular cultures, satchels are more commonly found on Pictish sculpture. Examples, with brief descriptions, include:

### I. Papil Stone, West Burra, Papil, Shetland (Canmore ID 629; NMS X.IB 46)

The Papil Stone is an early ninth-century cross-slab from West Burra, Shetland (Kilpatrick 2011). It depicts two pairs of ecclesiastics on either side of the cross-shaft. These figures are each shown in profile, wear peaked cloaks, and carry crosiers. The outer-two figures each have an incised satchel suspended over their shoulder.

### II. Monks' Stone, West Burra, Shetland (Canmore ID 629)

The Monks' Stone is the front of a shrine panel and comes from the same workshop as the Papil Stone (Kilpatrick 2011: 161-62). The panel depicts four ecclesiastics on foot, each of whom has a crosier, and an ecclesiastic on horseback. They are depicted in profile, and face a cross on the left of the scene. The final cleric in the procession wears a book satchel, lightly incised, over his shoulder.

### III. Bressay Cross-Slab, Cullingsburgh, Shetland (Canmore ID 1279)

The Bressay cross-slab is a later copy of the nearby Papil Stone (Kilpatrick 2011: 164–67). On the front face, two ecclesiastics are shown in profile, facing the cross-shaft. They wear peaked hoods and carry crosiers. Suspended around their shoulders are book satchels. On the reverse of the cross-slab, two ecclesiastics in peaked hoods face each other. They each hold a crosier and have an incised book-satchel suspended over their shoulders.

### IV. St Madoes Churchyard (Canmore ID 28201)

On the reverse face of the Class II cross-slab from St Madoes in Perthshire (now housed in the Perth Museum and Art Gallery) within individual panels are three riders and three Pictish symbols. The riders are shown in profile and wear peaked hoods. The rider in the bottom panel has an incised book satchel suspended over his left shoulder. The riders in the two top panels are not shown to be bearing arms, which may suggest they all represent churchmen; Allen and Anderson (1903: 295) tentatively proposed that they might be ecclesiastics.

### V. St Vigeans no. 7 (Canmore ID 35587)

This fragmented cross-slab from St Vigeans portrays two clerics on the lower front panel to the left of the cross. They are both in profile and face the cross-shaft. They wear peaked hoods, shown with the hoods pulled back, revealing that the clerics have their hair in the Roman tonsure. They both carry staves, and the external figure wears a book satchel over his shoulder. Other sculptural examples of figures depicted with books at St Vigeans include nos. 10, 11, 17 and 18 (see Geddes 2017).

The figures with satchels on the Papil Stone, Monks' Stone, St Madoes, and St Vigeans no. 7 have several shared features. Most are incised or carved in light relief, the figures under discussion wear peaked hoods, and are shown in profile. Each of these examples also has more than two ecclesiastics depicted, and it is the exterior men or last in a procession that wear the satchels. On the Papil Stone and St Vigeans no. 7, it is the ecclesiastics near the edge of the stone who wear the satchel. On the Monks' Stone it is the final figure in the procession who wears the satchel. If viewed from top to bottom, the

lowest figure on the St Madoes cross-slab has the satchel.

A similar example to the Pictish satchel-bearers is the early ninth-century Carndonagh Stele, on the Inishowen Peninsula in Co. Donegal. On either side of the shaft of a *flabellum* (a liturgical fan) is a cleric shown in profile facing the handle; each holds a crosier in the right hand, and has a satchel suspended around his neck and over his shoulder, ending about waist height. Harbison (1991: 217) suggests that the satchel 'is the sign of the traveller', and coupled with the imagery of the crosiers, proposes that the Carndonagh Stele iconography may represent pilgrims visiting a holy site. Similarly, the satchel-carriers on Papil, Bressay, and St Vigeans no. 7 carry crosiers or staves, and each man in the procession on the Monks' Stone except for the rider carries a crosier. The figures on the St Madoes Stone are on horseback.

Movement is implied in the figure-iconography of these cross-slabs. Though pilgrimage is one interpretation, it is also possible that the ecclesiastics depicted in the Pictish examples represent itinerant clerics. This is not only suggested by their attire, but also by the satchels. Thomas (1971: 156) suggested that the scene on the Monks' Stone may commemorate the churchmen who introduced Christianity to Shetland. With the exception of St Madoes, the satchel-bearers also hold a crosier, a staff meant to represent a shepherd's crook, which was an early symbol of ecclesiastical office. Crosiers are recorded on several occasions in early Celtic hagiography, particularly in contexts when abbots, bishops, or saints were travelling or establishing churches. For example, in i.33 of the *Life of Saint Columba* (Anderson and Anderson 1991: 112–13), while on the Isle of Skye St Columba strikes his staff (*baculus*) at the place (dobur of Artbranán) where a pagan would be baptized, and in ii.14 St Cainnech leaves his staff on Iona by accident, but miraculously finds it before him on the island of O'lddech. In the *Tripartite Life of Saint Patrick* (Stokes 1887: 236, 474) St Patrick holds his crosier in his hand as he marks out the enclosure at Armagh.

The use of satchels in the transportation of books is recorded in a number of early texts written in Irish contexts (see Sharpe 1985). For example, ii.8 of the *Life of Saint Columba* relates how a young man carrying books in a 'skin satchel' (*pellicius sacculus*) belonging to Columba fell from his horse and drowned in the River Boyne.

The man's body was found days later, 'holding fast between his arm and side the satchel with the books', which were dry and unharmed (Anderson and Anderson 1991: 105). A similar miracle occurs in ii.9, which describes how a boy travelling in Ireland with a book of hymns written by Columba, fell from a bridge into a river in Leinster with a 'skin satchel' (*pellicius sacculus*) containing the book. The book and satchel were later found and brought to a priest, a Pict named Iógenán, to whom the book had formerly belonged. The *Life* states that the satchel was 'sodden' and 'rotten', but the book was miraculously unharmed (Anderson and Anderson 1991: 107).

The types of square- or rectangular-shaped shoulder bags depicted in Pictish sculpture were likely satchels for books or the Gospels and other sacred texts, though it has also been suggested (Thomas 1971: 156; cf. also Sharpe 1985: 152) that they were also used to carry relics and portable altars. A few early book satchels (also known as budgets) survive. In 1960 a sixth- to seventh-century fragmented satchel was discovered in Loch Glashan in Argyll (now housed in Kelvingrove Museum, ID A.1960.46.dy). Three early medieval Irish examples also survive: the Breac Moedóic satchel; the Corpus Christi College, Oxford satchel; and the Book of Armagh satchel (Waterer 1968). Close investigation of these satchels indicates that their original purpose was, in the words of Waterer (1968: 70), 'to hold a valued manuscript – not merely to carry it about, but to form its habitual receptacle in which it hung, together with others of its kind, in the monastic library of the period'. The Breac Moedóic satchel, for example, was originally designed to fit a specific book, but it was later altered to accommodate a house-shaped reliquary (Waterer 1968: 70).

Such bags may have had multiple functions, and therefore their interpretation on sculpture may differ, though contemporary written descriptions such as the examples from the *Life of St Columba* discussed above, suggest that they represent a container for a sacred book. Satchels or sacks for books also feature in the *Hisperica Famina*, a collection of poems in Hisperic Latin, which were probably written in Ireland in the mid-seventh century (Clarke 2008: 18; see Herren 1974–87). Part of the *Hisperica Famina* describes students' experiences. For example, lines 213–14 are translated (Herren 1974: 81): 'Remove the speckled volumes from the curved

satchels | and heed your rhetoric assignment.' When the students arrive at an inn, they use their book satchels to impress the locals (Clarke 2008: 18). Lines 262–64 read (Herren 1974: 85): 'Hang your white book sacks on the wall, | set your lovely satchels in a straight line, so that they will be deemed a grand sight by the rustics.'

The depiction of book satchels is attested elsewhere in Insular monumental artwork, but there are notable differences in how these are portrayed. The Pictish examples and the stele from Carndonagh show the figures in profile with the satchel slung over their shoulders. In Northumbrian sculpture, figures depicted with book satchels are front-facing, with the satchel suspended around their neck and resting on their chest. Examples from North Yorkshire include Stonegrave no. 1, York St Mary Bishophill Senior no. 1, and possibly Nunburnholme (Lang 1991: 88–89, 189–93, and 215–6). The Northumbrian examples may represent the practice of wearing a relic or the 'Word of God' as a protective charm (see Brown 2003: 70). The twelfth-century *Libellus de exordio* by Symeon of Durham records that the *Stonyhurst Gospel of St John*, which was found in St Cuthbert's coffin in 1104, was worn with great honour by a cord from the necks of visiting dignitaries' (Tudor 1989: 460, quoted from Brown 2003: 70).

The late Pictish cross-slab at Elgin may depict figures with satchels hung around the neck in this fashion. This cross-slab is badly weathered, and the details are difficult to discern. Above and below the arms of the cross are four figures, each of whom is front-facing. These likely represent the four Evangelists: the bottom left figure has a man behind him (symbolising the Evangelist Matthew), and the one on the bottom right an eagle above his shoulder (for the Evangelist John). The winged figures above the arms of the cross have a rectangular object over their chests. The drawing of the Elgin cross-slab in Allen and Anderson (1903: 134) depicts the top figures with satchels suspended around their necks, however, the more recent drawing by Ian Scott may cast doubt on this (Canmore ID SC952426; Fraser 2008: 108, no. 156). The iconography of the Elgin cross-slab has long been recognised to have similar features to the tenth-century *Book of Deer*, which was produced in Scotland. The two figures seen on folio 1 verso likely represent books carried in satchels and hung around the neck, and this imagery reoccurs throughout the figures in the

*Book of Deer* on folios 16, 29, 41 and 84 verso (Geddes 1998:538).

It is most unfortunate that no Pictish manuscripts have survived. Except for the Pictish regnal lists (Anderson 1973: 43-102, especially 101-102; Evans 2011: 50, 60-61), it is even more unfortunate that no Pictish texts have survived in later manuscript copies (Forsyth 1998: 39). The sculptural evidence, however, strongly suggests that there were literate Pictish communities, and new archaeological evidence from Portmahomack confirms that a Pictish monastery produced vellum, probably for manuscript production (Carver 2008: 119–25). Every manner in which a book is represented in Insular Art is also found in Pictish sculpture (Kilpatrick forthcoming); however, what is unique about the Pictish corpus is the number of figures portrayed with book satchels. Preliminary analysis of the sculptural, archaeological, and literary evidence suggests that these carvings represent bags for carrying sacred books, and that their use was widespread in early Irish and Pictish Christian culture. Further examination of this iconography may shed more light on the conversion of the Picts, Irish influence in the Pictish church, and the type of monastic libraries in early Christian Ireland and Pictland.

Kelly Kilpatrick

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## Sign of the times



The medieval pedestal shrine of St Amphibalus (c1340) in St Albans Cathedral, has been conserved, restored, rebuilt, and blessed earlier this year. The restoration work was carried out by Lincolnshire firm, Skillingtons, much of it comprising new carving to replace missing parts of the original stonework. Work began in June 2019 and continued during the Covid crisis, and the pandemic has been suitably commemorated in one of the carved modern heads being depicted wearing a face-mask – a contemporary whmsy very much in the tradition of the medieval ecclesiastical stone-carvers. DH

*More masks on p36*

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## Yet More on Pictish Symbol Usage

In *PAS Newsletter* 99 (pp.10-14) Graeme Cruickshank wrote a response to my response to his critique of my original article in *PAS Newsletter* 96. He raised additional questions which I am happy to respond to.

Cruickshank is still a bit vexed by the names that I have used for symbols, whether that be the newly accredited Placard symbol or more long-standing names like Tuning Fork. I understand his frustration, given his opinion that the symbols represent real-world objects. However, I do not believe that pairing symbols, other than fauna, are representative of real-world objects and their naming had no bearing whatsoever on the type of analysis I undertook. Therefore, I do not intend to defend my naming further, other than to say that they are merely descriptive.

I am wary that we might get into a similar discussion on my numbering of the Pictish Designs (potential symbols) because he is reading too much into those too. Nevertheless, it is entirely reasonable to ask why they are numbered the way they are. I simply took Allen and Anderson's numbering system from *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (pp.57-8, 1903) as the basis and extended or contracted it where necessary, as Anthony Jackson had done in *The Symbol Stones of Scotland* (1984). Cruickshank asks

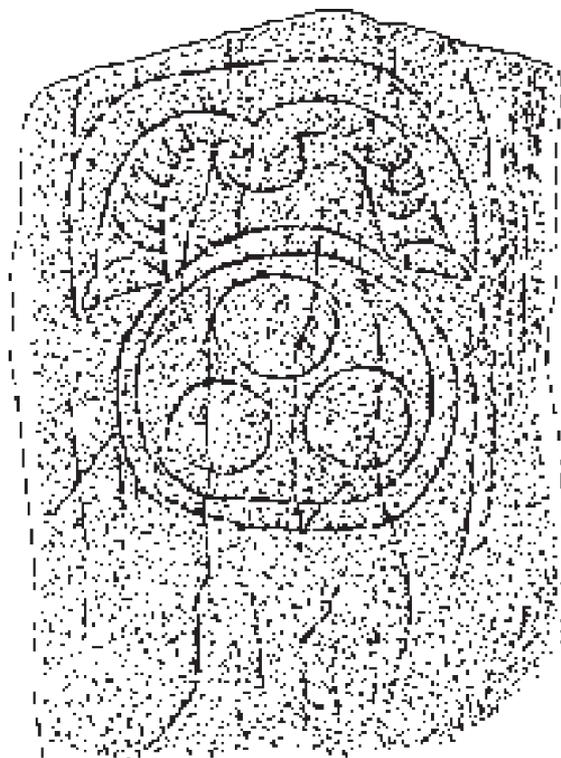
Why, for instance, is the mirror (at 24) so far away from the mirror-case (6). It is fair enough to present the mirror & comb together, even though their tags are rendered separately, but why should symbol pairings be included in this list at all?

I am afraid that only the ghosts of Allen and Anderson can answer those questions.

He then asks, 'do sub-numbers indicate derivative symbols?' I take full ownership of the sub-numbers. They were used where I wanted to look for sub-types of symbol e.g. to see if the number of leaves/petals on the Flower symbol might be significant; so no.46 (Flower) from *ECMS* became 46.1, 46.2 and 46.3 to reflect the Flower variants I had identified. The unique rectangle with rod (no.23.1), which Cruickshank asks about, was simply slotted in after *ECMS*'s notched rectangle (no.23) because it was also based on a rectangle shape. It needed to go somewhere and that was as good a place as any. However, let me restate that while my numbering and naming may frustrate him, they

both remain completely irrelevant to my research objectives.

Cruickshank raises some interesting and relevant questions in relation to small differences in the appearance of some symbols. He notes the 'hinge' on what I would call the Arch symbol at Rothie Brisbane (1). He likens it to a hinged bronze collar. He also references small notches that sometimes appear in specific symbols, suggesting that they may be 'another type of qualifier'. I agree they may be qualifiers or modifiers and that is something that I included in my research, but not in great depth. For reasons of space and time, I did not include them in my earlier *PAS* article or in my presentation at the Conan Stone Conference, but I will discuss them in my talk at the PAS Conference in October and make brief comment here.



1 Rothie Brisbane stone

I investigated three symbol variations as potential modifiers: (a) the bar that sometimes appears across the Triple-Disc (or Cauldron) symbol, (b) the bulbous protrusion that sometimes appears on the Arch (as at Rothie Brisbane), the Double Crescent, and on the Bulbous Square symbol, and (c) the notch that appears on the Mirror-Case, three Double-Disc symbols, two Arches and one Crescent. In summary, the bulbous modifier and the notched mirror-case appear to be heavily influenced by geography, so my assumption would be that these are merely stylistic differences but there could be more to it.



## 2 Bulbous Modifier distribuion

Of the five bulbous modifier appearances, four are in close proximity as is evident from figure 2. The outlier in Caithness is Crosskirk which was discovered in 1846 but soon lost, as was a facsimile. However, the drawings in Stuart and *ECMS* show an Arch of this variant. At Grantown (not shown), 45 miles to the west of the Aberdeenshire group, is a Rectangle with spirals on opposite corners which is like the opposing corners of the Bulbous Square. This may be a related stylistic feature. While the bulbous variant was focused on a small area and included two Arches, it does not mean that all Arches in the locale were bulbous; most were not. This could suggest a localised specific meaning or a stylistic variation of a specific school of carving or individual carver.

The notched Mirror-Cases (black) are very clearly favoured in the North, with unnotched ones preferred in the South (white). See figure 3. The notched outlier in the South is possibly a symbol misattribution on my part, so can be excluded from the results. The blue one shown in Orkney has an incomplete Mirror-Case so we do not know if it was notched or not.

Cruickshank complains, ‘the lion (of St Mark) being touted as a Pictish symbol, even though Romilly Allen did just that, plus the Class II Golspie ‘dog’’. May I respectfully remind him that the table of Pictish Designs shown in my last response were those that I recorded, so that I could test whether or not they behaved as symbols; I was not saying that they were symbols. If he wishes to complain



3 Distribution of Notched Marmor-cases

about them being ‘touted’ as Symbols he must take that up with the ghost of Romilly Allen once more. For the record, I rejected the Golspie dog as a symbol and agree that it is part of the wider narrative on the stone. The Lion is more problematic and was included in my results as a ‘Possible or Limited Symbol’. In most circumstances it does not behave as a symbol but clearly does on the Ulbster stone. Hence it behaves as symbol in a limited capacity.

Cruickshank asks why the bull’s head on Mortlach is shown twice. The reason is quite straightforward. Some writers have treated the bull’s head with the serpent above as one symbol (see Allen in *ECMS* p.73), whereas others have treated them separately, so I decided to investigate both interpretations as potential symbols.

I hope that these answers and my presentation at the Conan Stone Conference will have satisfactorily explained the rationale for my work and the results obtained. If not, I look forward to some lively questions at the PAS Conference in October!

*Hugh Levey*

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## Spring Lecture Series

19 March 2021 – Dr Oisín Plumb

### The Picts in the Irish Church: Travels West over the Storm-Swelled Sea

For our first online lecture of the spring 2021 season, Dr Oisín Plumb based his talk on a poem found among the genealogies of saints and holy people contained in the Book of Leinster. Untitled there, it has become known as *The Seven Brothers*. The poem begins ‘The seven beautiful sons of Oéngus, they went to the land of Ireland.’ These seven ‘brothers’, who may have been of Pictish origin, were Troscán, Torannán, Mo-Chullian, Agatán, Itharnaisc, Eógánán and Mo-Thrianoc. Four, it seems, travelled together and died on the ‘day preceding the Nones of June (the 4th of the month). The three other ‘sons of Oéngus’ presumably travelled separately. In Ireland, the poet places them all in Leinster, in the east midlands, an area eventually claimed by the Uí Néill. Oisín considered the evidence for the activities and cults of each of these seven brothers from other sources, before going on to examine the possible reasons for the composition of the poem.

Torannán, first of the four who travelled together, ‘settled above the hosts of Tulach Tinni’. He is commemorated on the 12th of June in the early 9th century Martyrology of Tallaght (MT) which describes him as ‘ab Bendchair’, abbot of Banchory. The slightly later Martyrology of Oéngus (MO) remembered Torannán as ‘lasting, deedful, over the wide ship-abounding sea’. ÓCróinín suggested Tulach Fortcheirn on either the Broma or Silver rivers, in Offaly or West Meath as the site of Torannán’s Irish settlement. The Torannán of MT appears as Ternan in Scotland, where his cult was associated with that of Palladius, who was said to have been sent to Ireland before Patrick but ended in Britain. Both were remembered in Banchory, where St Ternan’s fair was held in June and the Paldy fair in July. A fourteenth century note in a version of MO seems to suggest that Torannán and Palladius were, in fact, one person. This copy of MO is known to have been in the possession of St Anthony’s Franciscan College in Louvain, which sent a mission to the Outer Hebrides in the seventeenth century. Oisín suggested that on arrival the Franciscans found a number of place names (e.g. Taransay) which seemed to commemorate Torannán, and to which they attached stories from the life of Palladius - stories which were collected in the islands by Alexander Carmichael in the late nineteenth century. There is little evidence for an earlier Torannán cult there.

To summarise, Torannán appears to have been an influential figure both in Ireland and north-east Scotland. By at least the early ninth century, he was recorded to have travelled across the sea to Ireland. His cult in the Western Isles appears to have been introduced much later.

Troscán may be more familiar as Drostan. He crossed the sea with Torannán and died on the same day. ‘Troscán the strong, settled at Ardbreccan, with melodiousness’. This may have been the ‘Drostan of Derthach, [who] rested in Ard Breccan’ in an Annals of Ulster (AU) entry for 719. He does not appear in early martyrologies as celebrated either on the 4th of June (the date of death according to the poem) or on the 12th, when Torannán was remembered. It has been suggested that Drostan of Derthach and Drostan of Deer were one and the same. By the late eleventh or early twelfth century he was credited with the foundation of the Abbey of Deer and devotion to him had spread across north-east Scotland. Later Scottish calendars offer a variety of dates for Drostan’s feast day, probably owing to confusion or association with other saints. One, the 19th November, may have originated in an association of the cults of Drostan and Fergus. While Fergus was not one of ‘The Seven Brothers’, there was a ‘Fergustus Episcopus Scotiae Pictus’ – Fergus, a Pict, bishop of Irish – who was a signatory to a council in Rome in 721. Possibly he was the ‘Fergus Cruithnech’ who was noted in MT against the 8th September. The association between Drostan and Fergus, with a shared November feast day, is strong in Caithness, and may find resonance in the inscription on the Drostan stone at St Vigean. The association of Drostan and Fergus in the north-east of Scotland may reinforce the suggestion that these were holy men who travelled from this part of Scotland to Ireland in the late seventh or early eighth century.

The third of the fellow travellers in the poem was Mo-Chullian, ‘in Dresnatha of the Fotharta Fea’. Although Dresnatha itself has not been identified, the territory of the Fotharta Fea may have been Forth, Carlow. There are a handful of early references to a ‘Mo-Chullian’ in early documents, but it is impossible to suggest an identification with the individual in the poem. The ‘Mo’ prefix conveys an affectionate respect for ‘my’ saint. It is possible that in some cases, the second part of the name refers to Columba although other candidates are also possible.

Agatán, who found his ‘little hermitage on the banks of the cold Imry’ was the last and youngest of the four who travelled together. Oisín has been unable to trace any other mention of Agatán, who was assigned the most northerly location of all the seven, on the banks of the river which formed the traditional boundary between Leinster and the territory of the Uí Néill.

These four appear to have settled in widely separated locations in the Irish midlands; two of them, at least, have good claims to be recognised as Picts in Ireland.

The ‘famous Itharnaisc at Clane’ was the first named of the other three ‘sons of Oéngus.’ MT at 22nd December describes him as ‘Itharnaisc Cloenad’ and gives an alternative name meaning ‘Silent’. MO also notes ‘Itharnaisc, who is not of speech’ at 23rd December, suggesting that Itharnaisc of Clane’s cult

was well established by the early 9th century. A similar name appears in the Annals of Ulster (AU 669): ‘Itarnan et Corindu apud Pictores defuncti sunt’ - Itarnan and Corindu died in the land of the Picts. The Aberdeen Breviary (AB) includes St Ethernasc under the 22nd of December, probably the patron of Lathrisk in Fife, where the registry of the priory of the cathedral at St Andrews records the consecration of the church to St John the Evangelist and St Atherniscus in July 1243. Other Scottish calendars list an ‘Ethernan’ under the 22nd December. Another possible St Ethernan, said to have founded the church at Rathen, Buchan and died there is commemorated on the 2nd December in the AB, which also gives an account of Adrian of Pannonia, Hungary, celebrated on the 4th March. He, it seems, travelled to Scotland, journeyed among the Picts and was killed by Danes on the Isle of May. The possibility of identifying any of these figures with Itharnaisc of Clane is complicated by the suggestion that his feast might have been transferred from Itharnaisc’s 22nd December to Athernaisc/Ethernan on the basis of a similarity of name. On the evidence, we can at least say that there was a very early cult of Itharnaisc at Clane, and that his name is at least a plausible one for a Pict.

Eóganán, the second of the three odd men out, ‘was at Cend Laccaig’ and seems to be commemorated at 19th December in MT as ‘Eóganán, son of Oéngus at Ard Leccaig.’ One suggestion for the location of Leccaig is Lackagh in Kildare. This would allow identification with the Pictish priest Iógenán who, according to Adomnán, owned a miraculous book of hymns written by Columba. This fell into a river in the region of the Lagen on Christmas day and was recovered undamaged at Easter, despite the satchel which contained it having become soaked and rotten. MT, however, locates Leccaig in Mag Ene, identified as being in the far south of Donegal. It is possible that the poet was aware of the Pictish priest located by Adomnán in Leinster and mixed him up with an Eóganán of Donegal. Or perhaps the author of MT was aware of a Leccaig in Donegal, and so placed Eóganán there – Lackagh at the present day being a fairly common place name in Ireland.

Finally, Mo-Thrianoc was the first mentioned in the poem. He was, we are told, ‘received at Ruscach, among the Uí Failge’. MT has two possible listings: Mothrianoc Ruscaig at the 20th August and Mothrianoc mac Aengus at 2nd February. Ruscach in County Offaly has been suggested as a location for Ruscach, placing it in the territory of the Uí Failge. Other alternatives have been suggested. Ruscach, in Cooley, Louth is in an area perhaps to be linked to that monk called Trenan, whom Columba sent as an emissary to Ireland. This Trenan was of the moccu Runtir, probably in the east of Louth. However, the Trenan Drui nImgan mentioned in the genealogies may give us a location at Rath Imgain, Rahangan, in east Offaly. And we should note that there are several other possible individuals to be

considered as Mo-Thrianoc. Regardless, if we accept an Offaly location for Mo-Thrianoc, it places him in fairly close proximity to the other two of the trio of odd men out.

Turning to the question of why – and where – was the poem written, Oisín suggested that the poet was based at or near Clane. The early association of Clane with Itharnaisc, attested in the martyrologies was an established fact. The other two of the group of three can perhaps be identified with individuals described by Adomnán as travelling from Scotland to Ireland, and possibly Itharnaisc himself travelled west across the sea. All three seem to have settled in a fairly small area. By contrast, the four who were said to have travelled together ended up widely spread apart. Is it possible that the monasteries of Torannán, Troscán, Mo-Chullian and Agatán marked out territory that not only included those of the other three, but that was claimed by the Uí Néill? Was the poem part of the propaganda accompanying the Uí Néill push for dominance over this part of Leinster?

Whatever the reason behind its composition, it shows that it was plausible to write a poem bringing together seven early medieval churchmen who were likely historical migrants from Pictland to Ireland.

*16 April 2021 – Professor Benjamin Hudson*

#### **The Intellectual Background of the Sculptured Stones, or Pictures and Ideas**

Our April Zoom talk marked a first for PAS – our speaker, Prof Ben Hudson of Pennsylvania State University addressed us from his home in the USA on the topic of *The Intellectual Background of the Sculptured Stones, or Pictures and Ideas*.

Ben began by outlining the idea Pictish carved stones can be seen as historical documents, one of the most important tools for understanding this period in northern Britain. Historians tend to be document driven, relying on the written word for information on dates, names and events, but these are not generally provided on carved stones. There has been a tendency to dismiss Pictish society as bookless and barely literate because no written books have survived. However, there is plenty of evidence for books on carved stones, such as those held by the figures on cross slabs such as at Aberlemno and Auldbar. On a number of stones, clerical figures are shown with books prominently held in front of them. We know of some books that were portable objects, carried in satchels. This suggests that the use of books was not confined to monastic libraries or other fixed locations; these were precious yet practical working objects to be taken around with their owners.

It is likely that many of the books shown on the stones were bibles, objects treated with reverence as shown at the top of the Nigg cross slab, where the figures bow over their books. We should be aware that the bible could be studied as literature as well as from a purely religious viewpoint. Until at least the late nineteenth century, the bible was firmly part of

general literary culture, frequently quoted in secular writing. The bible is a rich source of stories and ideas as well as liturgical material. The question arises: what aspects of the bible really moved the audience in Pictish society? For example, does the boat on the Cossans stone represent a biblical boat – the fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, perhaps – or is it secular with no biblical significance? Is the reference to a more local story in which the boat sails on the (now drained) nearby loch? The intended audience would have understood, although we can only speculate over various options. Does the scene on Dunkeld 2 represent the distribution of the loaves and fishes? We can't be sure. This lack of certainty necessarily accompanies much of the following discussion.

The figure of Mary at Brechin is one of only a handful of early representations of the Mother of God, although by the 12th century Marian figures had become fairly common. Is this evidence of the early beginning of the cult of the Virgin? What of the three hooded figures below the crucifixion scene on Abernethy 4? Is this a reference to a Celtic group of three, or is it the Christian group of the three Marys? Did the prior knowledge of one predispose to an easy acceptance of the other? It has long been accepted that Adam, Eve and the serpent, with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is represented on the Farnell stone. This group is also to be found on a few Irish high crosses and in a tenth century Irish vernacular version of their story (which expands the biblical account to take us up to the death of Adam.)

However, the two large serpents flanking the much smaller figures of Adam and Eve on the Farnell stone are rather more prominent than is usually the case in contemporary representations. Does this indicate some special significance in the minds of the Pictish community who saw the stone?

Some groups may indicate the spread of ideas through the church. For example, Daniel in the lions' den is probably the figure surrounded by beasts on Meikle 2, while Jonah and the whale feature at Dunkeld and Bressay. These figures would belong to a specific genre of scenes or stories that relate to invocations of the 'Help of God', or the 'commendation of the soul', ideas that were current by the early ninth century. Literary evidence for this survives in early Irish hymns. – Does this show a growing faith in the power of God to protect and defend his believers? Was it a reflection of the beginning of Viking raiding, leading to an increased need for God's protections and help, or is it evidence of links to cultural trends happening elsewhere in Europe (or both)?

The story of David and Goliath belongs to this group of 'Help of God' narratives. However, it is David the harper who appears on stones such as the Dupplin cross. This is a reflection of David as the model king, a secular representative of God. This was how David was viewed at the Carolingian court, where the

church was influential in developing the type of the ideal ruler as a servant of God. The people who 'read' the stones were not uncouth barbarians; they belonged to a society that aimed to establish principles of good government. However, David was a fallible man as well as a good king; his treatment of Uriah the Hittite betrays his weakness. David's story is a complex one: how was it understood in Pictland?

The figure of Samson on the Inchbrayock stone is another example of a flawed hero. Ben suggests that here the viewer may be expected to recall the whole of Samson's story, not simply the events leading up to the slaying of the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass but his eventual demise in his demolition of the Philistine temple. The message here is that one must face the consequences of one's actions.

Not all of the scenes that appear on the stones were from the bible. Some figures of humans tormented by strange animals may represent stories of martyrdom. (Calendars of saints were definitely known in Scotland by the twelfth century with tales of martyrs slain in the arena transmitted by the written word.) The widespread bird imagery may have some links with religious figures: representations of eagles for example probably stand for the Evangelist. Others may be associated with tales from Saints' lives, such as the swans that visited St Colman.

Non-religious iconography includes classical figures. The figure of the centaur trailing a branch at Aberlemno is possibly Cheiron, half man, half horse and the wisest of individuals (unlike his fellow centaurs). An expert archer and skilled in the use of herbs in medicine, Cheiron numbered Achilles among his pupils. Unlike the centaur on the Glamis Manse stone, however, he was not associated with the use of axes. The mantichore, a man-eating creature with the face of a human and the body of an animal, such as appears on the Meikle recumbent is not of Mediterranean origin, but seems to have been imported from further east. These carvings, and others bear ample witness to a church in touch with the works of classical literature. A surviving Irish text from the ninth century tells the story of Achilles, and only a few centuries later we have solid evidence of a Greek literary revival in Scotland. Is it possible that classical materials were already being taught in Pictish church schools? Can we think of some of the carvings at Meikle as advertising a school of classical learning here?

Ben turned to Pictish animal representation to explore the possibilities further. Take, for example, the boar. Represented in Celtic artwork before there is any evidence of literacy, the boar may have been a symbol of power and prestige. It is possible that it also has resonance in vernacular literature as in the example of Twrch Trwyth, the great boar hunted by Arthur and his court in the Welsh tale of Culhwch and Olwen. A king metamorphosed into a wild boar and hunted to death for his failure to meet proper kingly standards, Twrch was not an import from a

Mediterranean culture. We should not ignore the importance of an oral tradition and native folklore in informing the intellectual life of Pictish society.

The Christian church not only needed a literate clergy, it first became established in a Mediterranean world with its own literary and intellectual traditions. Thus classical literature was imported along with the Bible as Christianity took hold in Pictland. However, while Christianity and classical literature may have been imported from the south and east, it is worth looking to the north and east to see if we can find any evidence of a pre-Viking cultural exchange. Intellectualism need not be dependent on literacy; oral tradition and folklore did not depend on written records. Their transmission from one part of the world to another followed the movement of people. Ben compared the battle scenes on the Aberlemno Churchyard and stones from pre-Viking 'Gotland, drawing attention to the way in which the figures on the stones were grouped and other similarities in composition. Rather than telling the same story, these images invoke a sense that they originated against a background of a similar world view.

We should not believe that in order to get some feel for the intellectual world of the Picts we need to have written material. The images on the stones, composition as well as content, can give us some insights. We can question what they were reading and what was important for them to understand about the world they inhabited. *Sheila Hainey*

## An actual Pictish word

What a rarity! Here is an actual word in the Pictish language. See 'English and Pictish Terms for Brooch in an 8th-century Irish Law-Text' by Colmán Etchingham and Catherine Swift, available to read online at [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu).\*

The authors aim

to draw to the attention of archaeologists, art historians, and others interested in material culture, some hitherto overlooked references to brooches in Old Irish legal texts of the 8th and 9th centuries. Of particular interest in these references is the fact that they include Old English and Pictish words for brooches, showing an awareness on the part of the Irish intelligentsia of the elite metalworking of their neighbours in the British Isles. .



Rogart brooch, Sutherland

The relevant Old Irish law-text is *Bretha Nemed Toisech*, translated as 'The First Judgements concerning Privileged Persons' and probably written ca.730. Thanks to those who have transcribed and interpreted 'this lengthy and very difficult text', we learn it offers instruction on aspects of law, including the practice of giving pledges to guarantee contracts. A pledge must consist of items amounting to an appropriate value to act as surety, and 'exceptionally valuable items (brooches and a drinking vessel) comprise a pledge proper to members of the privileged social elite; specifically, to scholar-poets'. Brooches count as 'one ounce' in this system of assessing the correct value of a pledge, calculated in terms of weight. Two specific brooch types are mentioned, one of which is a *cataigh*.

Then, over a century later, the word appears in *Sanas Cormaic*, known in English as *Cormac's Glossary*. Dated to ca.900, this early Irish word list supplies words with their definitions. The authors quote the following:

*Catit nó Cartait .i. delg .i. bérla Cruithnech .i. delg ara-cuirit[h]er a chos*

This they translate as: 'Catit or Cartait, i.e. a brooch, i.e. in the Pictish language, i.e. a brooch the pin [cos, literally, 'foot'] of which turns back/turns away [?].'

They note that the brooch pin which turns back or away describes the distinctive feature of a Pictish penannular brooch.

The above entry comes from version Y of *Cormac's Glossary*. Minor variations occur in other versions: B offers *Cartit* as the word for brooch in the Pictish language, H1a gives *Caitit*, and M *Catait*, according to the Early Irish Glossaries Database on <[www.asnc.cam.ac.uk](http://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk)>, where the manuscripts can also be viewed. These slight differences in spelling are not significant. Sadly we are informed that *Cormac's Glossary* designates no other word as being in the *Cruithnech* tongue apart from this one word for brooch. (Modern Scottish Gaelic for Picts is Cruithen or Cruithneach.) But even one Pictish word from their lost language is a rare and welcome find.

Thanks go to the authors for highlighting Pictish *cataigh* in *Bretha Nemed Toisech* and its gloss in *Sanas Cormaic*. *Elsbeth Reid*

\*The paper by C Etchingham and C Swift appeared in *Medieval Archaeology*, Vol 48, 2004, pp 31-49. DOI: [10.1179/007660904225022799](https://doi.org/10.1179/007660904225022799)

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## Picts and the pandemic



While the war against Covid 19 continues, we have become accustomed to the wearing of a face-mask as one of the major defences against the dreaded virus. Production of this essentially simple article has burgeoned and a huge range of styles and materials have emerged.

The display potential of the mask has been exploited as a vehicle for advertising and marketing, offering a blank canvas for slogans and images, and also for exhibiting bespoke expressions of personal identity, affiliation, or interest, trespassing on the previously almost exclusive territory of the printed T-shirt.

Among the mask's multifarious manifestations, it is not really surprising that Pictish imagery figures. David Lyons, a commercial photographer from Northern Ireland, now based in Cumbria, advertises a range of masks bearing images from his portfolio, including two with details of Aberlemno 2. He clearly has an interest in early medieval monuments, as, in addition to the Aberlemno masks, he advertises two sporting the Dupplin Cross, and several others featuring Irish high crosses.

In current circumstances, a mask bearing the image of a battle-scene can be regarded as appropriate, but the symbolism of a severely cropped pair of confronting hippocampi on a face-mask is more difficult to fathom. *DH*



*The Aberlemno masks are available from David Lyons Face Masks at: <<https://fineartamerica.com>> price £11.46 each.*

## Forthcoming Events

Lectures will continue to be delivered online via Zoom until further notice. Details of how to access the lectures will be circulated by email to members prior to each lecture.

### **PAS Autumn Lecture Series 2021**

Friday 17 September – Dr Guto Rhys  
*The Pictish Language*

Friday 15 October – Jennifer Wallace  
*The Dupplin Cross*

Friday 19 November  
Professor Roger Stalley  
*Irish high crosses and the art of the Picts*

### **PAS Annual Conference 2021 - online**

Saturday 2 October

#### **Gordon Noble**

*Northern Pictish Project  
update, season 2020-2021*

#### **Christine Cowart-Smith**

*Free-standing cross developments in Pictland*

#### **Elizabeth Alexander**

*Old Testament Iconography in Pictland*

#### **Jane Geddes**

*Early medieval sculpture at St Andrews:  
gravestones and more*

Discussion

Sunday 3 October

#### **Hugh Levey**

*Towards Establishing the  
'Rule-book' of Pictish Symbol Usage*

#### **John Borland**

*Tullich – A major ecclesiastical site in the  
heart of Pictland. But where were the Picts?*

#### **Ruth Loggie, John Borland**

*Sueno's Stone reconsidered*

#### **Virtual tour of museum collection**

*details TBC*

Discussion

Final programme  
and booking details in the next *Newsletter*

## **PAS Newsletter 101**

The deadline for receipt of material is  
**Saturday 14 August 2021**

Please email contributions to the editor:  
<[johnborland60@aol.com](mailto:johnborland60@aol.com)>