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An Attempt at the Meaning of the Pictish Symbols III

Stuart Kermack

MEANINGS

Meanings are tricky. In this part of my essay I want to attempt, on a balance of probabilities, to understand what their symbols meant to the Picts themselves: what they did with them, and why.

Theories

This is the Holy Grail of Pictish studies which many claim to have found already. The Earl of Southesk, for one, thought (1893, 83) the symbols were introduced by Vikings, or even Goths, into the northeast of Pictavia during, or shortly before the reign of King Nechtan, c458A. D.; and that their meaning was religious, but they also designated rank or office, or tribe, which secular meanings continued after Christianity. Macalister (1940, 185) stated flatly that the symbols 'are family or personal marks, indicating by means of pictorial heraldry which it is not too much to call totemistic, the genealogical connections of the owner of the monument'. Diack (1944) maintained that some of the figures dated from the Bronze Age and the stones showed the 'rank' and 'class (or 'grade') of a person almost always buried beneath it. Professor Thomas, on the same tack (1961, 1964, 1984; cf. 1994, 22) found ancient origins for the figures and traced them through tattoos in the 1st-3rd centuries AD. 'The animals,' he said, were 'statements of general meaning' (place, clan etc) and the others 'commemorative' 'gravestones' showing 'status' and 'group affiliation'.

Dr. Henderson (1971), would have none of this, but argued that the symbols might well have been made up by a powerful leader after the 5th century as 'noticeboards' establishing heritable rights, a sort of Pictish Land Register. Anthony Jackson, I think, went rather for a Marriage Register (e. g. 1984) although I know I am not alone in being totally unable to follow his reasoning. Stephen Driscoll (1988a, 1988b) I also find quite difficult, but he, as I understand him, came to the purely theoretical conclusion that the Class I stones were burial monuments and the symbols there showed the hereditary position of the deceased in an expanding royal establishment; and Class II, though not funerary, mark the Church as a new arena of power. According to Ross Samson (1992), the symbols on the stones were 'di-thematic' names on 'memorials'. Mack (1997, ix; 1998) deduced that these stones were 'gravestones' and suggests that the symbols are best explained as aristocratic family 'badges' whether of spouses or of the parents of an individual.

Most of these theories have had their adherents form time to time but none has attracted universal acceptance. I am inclined to be inclusive. I think the symbols pre-date the Roman invasion; that the Picts 'wore' them as tattoos and ornaments; and then carved them on stones as, *inter alia*, memorials; that their message was both spiritual and heraldic often the insignia of the families of an individual and vouched a candidate's right to be considered for a hereditary office. I shall now proceed to facts.

Archaeology

Simplistically, 'the Pictish symbols' mean, nowadays, those figures which have been preserved for us on durable material, mostly stone; occasionally cut into the living rock or scratched on the walls of caves; or on pebbles; but mostly either 'pecked' on to otherwise undecorated, undressed slabs (Class I); or carved on dressed cross-slabs, often along with other figures (Class II). 'It is usually taken that (the Class I stones) may be as early as the sixth or seventh century AD and continue in later times, while (Class II) may have an origin in the second quarter of the eighth century and continue into the ninth' (RCAHMS

1999, 5); and since this was the heyday of the Picts in the area, the stones are pretty well universally attributed to them.

Symbol-stones have been found only in Scotland, almost exclusively in the more habitable parts east of Drumalban and north of the Forth and Clyde. Class II tend to be concentrated in Angus and round the Moray Firth, but individual figures are not limited to any particular locality. On the contrary, Mack's maps (1997, 2-28) show they are distributed fairly evenly throughout the whole area. He has further calculated (1998, 3) that 101 or 55 % of known Class I stones, and 53 or 85% of Class II, were found in 'ecclesiastical, burial or memorial' areas, 'places where people are buried' and, even allowing for those stones which were transported there for safekeeping, I do not think one can reasonably resist his conclusion that they were to that extent, 'almost certainly gravestones' (1997, xi) or, at least, 'individual memorials' (1998, 8; see also Samson 1992, 32; and Cruickshank 1999, 27).

The symbols occur generally in disparate pairs with, or without, a Mirror, and, perhaps, a Comb.

There is, also, rather a meagre haul of symbols preserved on metal, considering the Picts' mastery of this craft: the terminal of one out of ten silver chains (mostly found outside Pictland) engraved with the Broch or Notched Rectangle above the Sun-chariot and Z-rod; two curious silver 'plaques' from Norrie's Law, Fife, engraved with a Beast's Head below a Chariot or Double-disc and Z-rod; and an actual bronze Crescent and V-rod from the Laws of Monifieth in Angus, engraved with a similar Beast's Head below a Chariot or Double-disc and Z-rod, now lost but illustrated in ECMS (lxxxvi).

History

In my opinion, the North Britons were already 'wearing' their symbols when they first appeared on the stage of history for Tacitus (Agricola, 29) described their warriors at the battle of Mons Graupius as *sua qisque decora gestantes.*

Sua quisque means 'each his own' and I notice it later. Regrettably, in Part I, I treated *decora* as 'suitable', when, as I now think, it comes from *decor, -is* m. 'ornament' (Lewis and Short). *Gestantes* is the present participle of *gesto,-are,-avi, -atum* 'to bear, to carry, to have, to wear, to wield' (Lewis and Short).

Diack (1944, 24) and Thomas (1964, 89) link this passage from Tacitus with Herodian's account (iii, 14, 7) in Greek, in 208 AD of the British enemies of another Roman expeditionary force in the north under the Emperor Septimius Severus.

> 'They are ignorant of the use of clothes, and only cover their necks and bellies with (plates of) iron, which they think and ornament and sign of wealth as other barbarians do gold. They tattoo their bodies not only with the likenesses of animals of all kinds but with all sorts of drawings. And this is the reason why they do not wear clothes, to avoid hiding the drawings on their bodies' (trans. Diack, 1944,25).

The almost incredible nudity of the North Britons, despite the weather and the midges is vouched by the unfortunate fellow 'in his birthday suit' at the bottom of the Bridgeness distance slab, and by their arch-enemy, Gildas, who described them as 'rather covering their villainous faces with hair than their private parts and the regions nearest to them with decent clothes' (Ritchie 1994, 4 & 8). The object of the rest of the passage is, as I read it, to explain how a naked man can *gestare* his *decora*: i.e. as ornaments or tattoos.

Ornaments

An iron neck ornament was found at Dunadd. The silver chains are just the thing, too, for the neck, and the lost bronze Moon-ship or Crescent from Monifieth for the belly. Not iron, certainly, which will, presumably, have all rusted away long since.

Tattoos.

Tattooed Picti are 'currently unfashionable' (Foster, 1996,78). Modern sceptics (e.g. Chadwick 1955 passim; Wainwright 1955, 2; Ritchie, 1994,4-6; cf. Diack 1944,25; Thomas 1963, 88) explain away the contemporary witnesses (Appendix I) as misled by the word Picti, the Latin name for the North Britons, which they say has nothing at all to do with pingo, -ere, pinxi, pictum, meaning to represent pictorially with pencil or needle, to paint, embroider... to paint, stain, colour...esp. to tattoo...to adorn, decorate, embellish (Lewis and Short) but is either an exonym for the North Britons (Nicolaisen, 1996, 4-6) or referred to pitch- or tar-daubed boats (Chadwick 1955, 173).

The onus of proving this proposition must, naturally, fall on those who allege it, and, with the greatest respect to such eminent authorities, I am unconvinced, for the following reasons: -

1. The sceptics, do not, as far as I can seem offer any positive evidence of their own, but rely only on the ignorance of the contemporary witnesses. Herodian was the official historian of the Severan campaign. Solinus lifted practically all his material from Pliny and Mela without acknowledgement (Oxford Classical Dictionary sub nom. 'Solinus'), but this is not one of his own 'meagre additions about the British Isles', so it is more likely than not to be from independent information.

2. Although I admit the genesis of Picti is complex (Kermack 1999 unpubl.) Herodian wrote in Greek and neither he nor Solinus, in fact, may have known the word in this context, since they wrote soon after 200, and as Mrs. Chadwick concedes, Picti is not recorded with reference to the North Britons till 297AD.

3. Bishop George, an extremely experienced papal legate (Story, 1998, 99), who had been sent to North Britain (nowadays we would say he was 'parachuted in') especially to reinforce Papal and Carolingian orthodoxy there, was horrified to find 'far to the north' of York 'the injury of staining' the God-given body 'with hideous scars' which he condemned as a non-catholic remnant of paganism. His careful capitulary of 786 to that effect was endorsed by King Aelfwold of Northumbria, the Archbishop of York, sundry other clerics, including the Bishops of Candida Casa and of Mayo, and of all the great men of a region. They must, surely, have known what they were talking about.

4. Herodian, Solinus, and Bishop Isidore of Seville supply a wealth of circumstantial detail which they could not possibly have gathered from the word alone. Did they make it all up?

5. The Pictish Chronicle says that the Picts 'took their name from their *picto corpore* in their own language.

6 'Not only...the likenesses of animals of all kinds, but...all sorts of drawings'. (Herodian); 'various forms of living creatures are represented by cunningly wrought marks' (Solinus); 'forms of birds, beasts and fishes' (Mac Firbis). These can only be the symbols that we know from the stones; it is beyond belief that these authorities could, by chance, have described them so aptly, or that the Picts could have devised two such systems. The figures, moreover, are 'pecked out' on Class I stones, *minutis opifex acus punctis* just as Isidore says they were on the flesh. It is often asked why the figures show no development of design or technique, but Solinus supplies the answer: they were practised by professionals on skin, 'their perfect medium' (Macmillan 1998), long before they were transferred to more durable materials.

7. Although, more's the pity, we do not have real evidence here in the shape of an actual North British 'bogman', or deep-frozen Pict, we have in 130R of the Book of Kells the next best thing: a picture of one, naked and tattooed pretty well from head to foot, just as specified by Herodian. With respect, I cannot dismiss him as a 'gentle monkish joke' (Ritchie 1994, 10). On the contrary, he is sitting in the mouth of a lion with its tongue in his hand. Dr. George Henderson (1987, 165) thinks that he stands for the Daniel/ Jonah image of redemption out of peril, or a soul in peril, hardly a laughing matter.

I conclude, therefore, on a balance of probabilities that the Britanni 'wore' something like the Pictish symbols as *decora* from at least before 84 AD (Mons Graupius), specifically as metal ornaments from at least 208 (Herodian) and as tattoos from at least then till at least 786 (Bishop George's capitulary) and also carved them on stones from at least the seventh century.

SPIRITUAL

But what were they up to, with their *decora* and their symbols? The numinous objects and powers must, surely, have had a magical purpose.

Altars

Delba were specifically 'representations of creatures...forms of elements' which the pagans 'carved on their altars and adored there' (Cormac's Glossary, ed. Stokes 1868, 94). The Romans revelled in the horrid Celtic altars. Those on Anglesey were 'drenched with the blood of victims (Tacitus); and the elevations in the sacred grove near Marseilles were 'crowned with ruthless altars and every tree was stained with human gore' (Lucan, Pharsalia iii, 404). 'Teutates was appeased with direful bloodshed, Esus with his merciless altars, the shrine of Taranis not more humane than Scythian Diana' (Lucan, ibid. i, 444). Teutates was in fact placated by a man being thrust headfirst into a vat and suffocated there, which is reminiscent of the Triple-disc or Cauldron and the carving on Glamis 2.

I noted in Part I, an altar engraved with a Serpent and a Sun (Green 1992, 199) but it was in Gloucestershire, unfortunately. Altars in Pictland are, distinctly, 'not proven.' The sculptured caves at East Wemyss and Lossiemouth are a possibility, and perhaps, by extension, the souterrains, called 'weems' in Angus (from Gaelic *uaimh*, 'cave'), where symbols are often found and more could have been painted on the walls. Watson, intriguingly, deduced (1926, 17) that Ptolemy's Smertae in Strathoykell and Strathcarron were so called because they smeared themselves with the blood of their enemies. Is it possible that the gruesome altars of the Picts were their own smeared bodies engraved/tattooed with *delba*?

Amulets

The metal ornaments look like amulets, similar to the 'medals' still seen today on the beach or at the swimming-pool, anywhere where semi-nudity is common, as it was among the Picts, according to Herodian, for that very reason. In battle, perhaps they were protective talismans, like 'ghost shirts.' I have submitted elsewhere (1996) that the two curious silver 'plaques' from Norrie's Law represented seeds from a sacred tree and, thus, 'Passports to Paradise,' and it occurs to me now that the symbol scratched pebbles might have served a similar purpose. They are found principally in Shetland, where leaves (and silver) are in short supply.

DEPAGANISATION

It was my hypothesis, in my Part II, that the substance of the numinous pagan figures required considerable modification (some would say 'spinning') to become acceptable to Adomnan. Yet on the Class II stones, their form 'caused no offence to the Cross, and indeed there was some common relevance shared by the symbols and the Cross that made it apt for them to appear together' (Henderson 1967, 158-9). My submission is here, therefore. that these forms were 'depaganised ' on the stones in much the same way as I say their substance was 'Christianised' in the *Vita.*

Origin

It is not necessary for my argument, but it seems possible that this process of 'depaganisation 'may well have begun with the indelible tattoos on the bodies of converts. These certainly seem to have raised problems in Ireland, as shown by a doublet of anecdotes about St. Bridget quoted byMacQuarrie (1999). In one, the Saint erased the 'wicked tattoos' from King Conallus and his gang on their conversion; and in the other, a group of ruffians asked her to bless their plundering, but she, on the contrary, persuaded them to reform and miraculously wiped out their tattoos. These 'wicked tattoos' would have vouched murder-oaths and the like, but the same problem would likely have arisen with tattooed symbols, and lacking divine intervention, the Christian Picts would need to devise some way to draw their pagan sting.

Be that as it may, it is my submission that we can see on the stones at least three conventions whereby the symbols are (i) disabled; (ii) deleted; and (iii) defeated.

(i) Disabled

The clearest example here, I think, is Allen and Anderson's (ii, 66) 'Notched Rectangle with Curved End,' the 'tuning fork' symbol, which I am now convinced (abandoning all I have said heretofore (1997, 10)) represents a sword with its point knocked off and a notch cut into the blade right up to its hilt (see authorities reviewed in Cessford 1998, 4). The co-relative chapter in the *Vita Columbae,* is, I submit. ii, 29 where 'skilled smiths ' liquefy a *pugno* (dagger, dirk, poniard) which was not able to harm man nor beast because the Saint had (inadvertently) blessed it. It looks as if no complete sword has survived for us unless the additional symbol at Anwoth (Mack 1997, 28) is such (Laing 1999,11).

Similar notches were cut into the roots of Trees and the wheels of the Sun-chariots (Mack 1997, 7&11), all with the obvious intention, in my opinion, of disabling them.

The Z-rod is frequently embellished to become a spear, and the V-rod an arrow. They are also, I now submit, lightning and, therefore, the appropriate weapons for a Sun-chariot, or to defend the magic Broch, or to kill an Earth Serpent, all of which the spear qualifies; while on the other hand, an arrow is a proper weapon in a Moon-boat, which is, presumably, why it uniquely qualifies that symbol. I note, however, that Gore, in the *Vita* (1,47) was scraping bark off his spear shaft (see Sharpe 1995, n311) under his upturned boat (the Moon-boat or Crescent) when he met the fate enigmatically predicted for him by Columba. These weapons are, almost invariably, disabled by being broken, which is, I suggest equivalent to disabling the symbols themselves. Contrariwise, on Congash 2 the Moon-boat (not a Bow, see Kermack 1997, 10) is disabled but the Arrow is unbroken. Interestingly, too, there are two unbroken spears on Sun-chariots in the Court Cave at East Wemyss which may be a non-Christian site.

The Druid's Tree is an obvious target for Christian symbolic vandalism. All the others are weapons and, therefore, I think most likely disabled in accordance with 'the northwest European practice of breaking weapons...in order to release their strength to another world' (Foster 1996, 74). On the same lines, perhaps weapons were taboo to Coiffi, the Pagan Chief-Priest, who, when he converted to Christianity,

girt himself with a sword and hurled a spear into the temple of his ancient gods to show how powerless they were to harm him (Bede iv, 13).

(ii) Deleted

Rods, however, in my submission, had another relevant meaning. Although they may have been the subject of speculation from at least the Earl of Southesk in 1803 (sceptres) to Joss in 2001 (trees), as far as I know I am the first to notice that they are no more than a formalized version of the same sort of scribbles with which we cancel things out today. I am fortified in my view by the curves filling their acute angles, which would naturally occur with a chisel-ended quill, like the one carried by St John in the Book of Kells (folio 291 v) if it were not lifted from the page.

In the Book of Kells they use minute red dots to delete mistakes (1990, 70) except on folio 218v which was, almost incredibly, duplicated. One can imagine the panic in the *scriptorium*, when this error was discovered, but it seems to have been put right by a series of red crosses round the margin of the page. A similar expedient was adopted on 146v to insert a substantial omission. This may be relevant to the next convention.

(iii) Defeated

In the *Vita,* one of Columba's main weapons against the pagan symbols was their Christian complement, the Cross, by which, for example, he opened the door of the king's castle (Notched Rectangle; ii, 35), expelled the devil from the milk pail (Cauldron or Triple-disc; ii, 16), rendered the *pugno* harmless (Notched Rectangle with Curved End; ii, 29), and so on. It is usually wielded by the Holy Man himself, either as an explicit gesture or as his blessing (which could be the same thing, e.g. ii, 29). The sign nevertheless contained its own power, for it operated even while the Saint did not know what he was blessing (ii, 29) and the milk-boy was rebuked because he did not make the Holy Sign over the pail before he filled it. My submission is, therefore, that the Cross would similarly 'depaganise' a symbol if the two were placed together on a monument, albeit on different sides. Class II stones, therefore, were always acceptable to Christians, although the symbols there often, of course, exhibited the other conventions as well.

HERALDIC

The symbols persisted into the Christian era in my opinion because they had a heraldic as well as a spiritual meaning; which is not, of course, uncommon, think of St Andrew's Cross, for instance. Medieval heraldry began with the 'coats of arms' worn by knights otherwise unidentifiable in their suits of armour (Moncreiff and Pottinger 1953, 10). I suggest that the Britannic warriors wore their own (suis quisque) decora, because, being naked, they, too, had a similar problem of anonymity which they solved, as Herodian says, by flaunting their tattoos and ornaments.

The medieval knight 'quartered' his 'shield' with inherited family 'devices' (Moncrieff and Pottinger 1953,32-6), and so, in my opinion, did the Picts with the result that 'there is almost always a pair of symbols on a stone-and *only* a pair (the mirror or mirror-and-comb being regarded as an additional symbol)' (Mack 1997,): one coming from each parent.

The Dunfallandy Stone

This system is illustrated elegantly on the Dunfallandy Stone as 'read' by Niall Robertson. There are three persons on the reverse of this magnificent cross-slab: two seated above and a proud Horseman below. Each, in my opinion, have their symbols beside them: top left, a Sun-chariot or Double-disc above

a Moon-ship or Crescent and V-rod; top right a Beastie crammed up above a blank space; the Horseman: Moon-ship or Crescent and V-rod above a Beastie. Niall Robertson, at a memorable conference in Forfar (1994) convincingly identified the stone as the family tree of the Horseman, with his mother top right and his father top left. His break-through, however (see also Cummins 1995,136-7) for which he invited us to "wave ir bonnets i the air" (the whilk I blithely di) was to point out that the Horseman had inherited his lower symbol from his mother and his upper from his father. It is worth noting, too, I think that on this interpretation, the symbol of the Horseman's maternal grandfather is omitted. Grandfathers are otiose in matriliny, though the Horseman's father's upper symbol had to be included to show that the moon-ship or crescent was his lower one, and therefore, that of the Horseman's grandmother.

Additional and Pseudo-Symbols

Mack (1997, 27-8) identifies a number of 'additional symbols', i.e. over and above the usual pair to which this system cannot, logically, apply. My submission is that they refer to a Pict as an individual and not to her or his family.

Mirror and Comb

In Part I, I said this was 'an attribute of the Goddess,' but I am now prepared to agree with the traditional view that they simply indicate a woman (Robertson, 1993), which fits my theory admirably, though the mirror on the Drosten stone remains a difficulty. Heraldry, incidentally, signifies a female by a 'lozenge' rather than a male 'shield'.

Sword

This unique symbol is carved in the living rock beside a fort at Anwoth, Galloway, far from Pictland, so it looks like the defiant gesture of an invading Swordsman (a latter-day Calgacus?).

Wheel

Again, there is only one, on Knockando 1. This may, similarly indicate an anachronistic Charioteer, or perhaps a more prosaic Wheel-wright.

Hammer, Anvil and Pincers

These, however, can only designate a Smith and shows how proud the Dunfallandy Horseman was of his craft.

Shears

By the same reasoning, the Shears on Migvie should show that the Horseman there was a shepherd, but may, on the other hand, be related to the next symbols.

Sheep, Shepherd's Crook and Harp

These are, surely rightly, taken by Allen and Anderson (ii, 247) at Aldbar and Mack at Nigg (1997, 117) as referring to King David, who is shown nearby rending the lion's jaws. But, since David was not a Pict, they should perhaps be classed as 'pseudo-symbols.'

Male Mammals

These are normally, though not invariably, solitary and are generally understood to be different. Thomas (1964) thought them 'statements of general meaning' like place and tribe. The Bull may sometimes be military since they all 'came from the sites of fortresses in use in Pictish times' (Mack 1997, 18).

Prosapiae

Though both the knight and the Pict may have craved recognition on the battlefield the latter, in my submission, had another, special, reason for his tattoos, based on 'a feature of Pictish society which was universal and long-lived but exclusive to the Picts' (Forsyth 1997, 93): their system of succession. Bede (I, 1) thinks it important to tell us that

> ut ubi res veniret in dubium magis de feminea regum prosapia quam de masculina prosapia regem sibi eligerent; quod usque hodie apud Pictos constat esse servatum. (Where the matter is in doubt, they (the Picts) elect their kings from the royal feminea prosapia in preference to the masculina prosapia; and it is well known that this custom has been observed among the Picts to this day).

Without entering into the controversy which rages round this short passage (e.g. Gray, 1999,13), I just want to draw attention to prosapia, -ae, f. and obsolete word for 'stock, race, family' (Lewis and Short). Presumably, therefore, one's prosapia feminea is one's mother's family and one's prosapia masculina is one's father's family, i.e. the self-same things which I say are represented by the symbols.

The Scots, too, chose their kings and chiefs from the derbfine descendants of one man, and Bede's gobbet reads much like Caesar's description of what happened on the death of an Arch Druid (v1, 12):-

> if any one of the rest (of the druids) is of outstanding merit, he succeeds to the vacant place; if several have equal claims, (cf. ut ubi res veniret in dubium) the Druids usually decide the election by voting, though sometimes they actually fight it out.'

So there was nothing special about electing a leader, nor from one family. The system obviously had its advantages though the Picts, free-booters, after all, pirates, would surely, also be much inclined to fight it out.

What Bede found worthy of comment, I think, was the involvement of both prosapiae in the business; and, the Picts preference for the feminea. This must, in practice, have made confusion worse confounded, for the Picts would have been as inclined to fraud as to violence. Even to convene a meeting of candidates and/or electors would have been a nightmare: unless of course, each one had his voting card, the symbol of his prosapiae, indelibly tattooed on his body which had, as Solinus says, grown with him from early youth. Once tattoos fell out of use, parties would naturally turn for proof, like all genealogists, to the family graves, which, having been erected, as Driscoll points out (1998,228) not by the deceased but by his or her descendants, could be relied on to contain the necessary symbols to vouch their own inheritance.

INSIGNIA

It has often been argued, convincingly , that it is unlikely that any specific figure on the stones stands for an individual tribe or family, since none can be matched with a particular district. If, however, as I have pointed out, above. Mack's maps (1997, 2-27) show that most of the figures are spread pretty evenly throughout the whole area, their distribution fits very well with the idea that they are the badges of 'rank and high birth' (Isidore of Seville), 'rank or office'(Southesk), 'rank' and ;class' (or 'grade') (Diack),

'status' (Thomas) or, as Driscoll (1982, 351-8) more exactly specifies, 'hereditary positions within a royal establishment as it gained centralised control of resources and force'.

Such heraldic devices indicating an office are known as 'insignia' and are often placed behind the shield of an official (Moncrieffe and Pottinger, 59), It is my hypothesis that many, if not all, the Pictish symbols are, similarly, insignia. Driscoll, as I understand him, arrived at his conclusion purely theoretically, but I am prepared, on the balance of probabilities, to chance my arm and actually identify the symbols of the *prosapiae* of some of these royal functionaries, the first being:

The King's Broch

Bede's *prosapia regum*, which I identified in Part I as the broch or notched rectangle.

The Mormaer's Bear

Driscoll does not refer to the king, but mentions particularly, the mormaer and the *exactor* (tax-man).

Diack (1944,35) says of the carving in the Doo Cave, East Wemyss, 'This is clearly the prototype of the bear symbol...In the cave drawing it is, I think, apparent that the bear is the ground form of the strange figure that the design ultimately takes. The bear is known to have existed in Scotland down to the Middle Ages and one of the Celtic words for it, *art*, enters into both personal and place names.' I agree with his interpretation of our Beastie, renouncing all that I have written heretofore. Atkinson, in fact, recognises a naturalistic bear-symbol in the Keillor stone; but, elsewhere, anyone can see that the Beastie is highly stylised, though, in my opinion, it looks no more unlike a bear than does the eponymous Teddy , or the Lion Rampant looks like a lion. The bear has a long snout and gallops, which accounts for the symbol's curious 'beak' and the position of its feet. But what really convinces me is *art*.

The medieval heralds found it useful to coin a written language to describe their pictures, which they called 'blazoning' and., so, I believe, did the Picts, so that certain stones, which I call 'Pictish Rosetta Stones', bear both symbols and an inscription. Scoonie and Brodie, for instance, as can be seen from Appendix II, display both the Beastie and the word EDDARRNONN. Most of the symbol is missing from Scoonie and that on Brodie is most peculiar, 'late and corrupt' according to Mack(1999, 97). In my submission the word here had been used to eke out the deficiencies of the figures, the one damaged, the other uncertain.

The word is equated with the name Ethernan, (Jackson, 1955,139) so, presumably, ogham 'dd' is pronounced 'th' in Pictish as in Welsh and we should, therefore, read 'ETHARRNONN'. 'NONN,' 'NON' are common in the inscriptions, perhaps they are diminutives, and I shall put them aside, meantime. Jackson has noted (1954; 1955,158) that *Pritani* ('Britons') in the south are *Priteni* in the north and both *maqq* and *meqq* appear quite often on these inscriptions, so I shall, similarly, substitute 'a' for 'e' giving 'ATHAR.' AR seems to me indistinguishable from 'ur' which I both Pictish and Welsh is derived from Celtic '*wiro*,' 'man'(Jackson, 1955, 163) giving ATH-man. My suggestion is that this is the same as Welsh 'ART-UR', Bear-man, one of the Celtic personal names derived from *art*, a bear to which Diack refers. Arthur in Culwch and Olwen , was the leader of a band of warriors, later the Knights of the Round Table. Artbranan('White Bear') in the Vita Columbae (I,33) was *primarius cohortis Geonae* (the leader of the Cohort of Geon(something to do with Ce?)).

In my submission, therefore, EDDAR on Scoonie and Brodie means 'Bear-man', the blazon of the Beastie is a Bear and the insignia of the prosapia of the hereditary leader of the royal war-band, the mormaer.

Fordoun seems to bear this out. The top of the stone is missing, as well as, apparently, a symbol which has, I think, been replaced by the word PIDARNOIN in half- uncials. Mack (1997, 76) and others

suggest it should be read P IDARNOIN, equivalent, in my opinion to ogham Eddarnonn. One cannot say, of course, what symbol has been lost, but the main figure on the stone, a mounted spearman is, to my mind, the very model of a Pictish mormaer.

The Taxman's Box

I did not, in Part I, give a meaning to Allen and Anderson's 'Rectangular Figure' (ii,66) although it seems obvious to me now. It 'may' Mack says, 'represent a container with a flap.' It is drawn, of course, without perspective a rectangular 'container with a flap' viewed three dimensionally, becomes a box with a lid; in this case, in my submission, the royal treasure-chest and the symbol of the prosapia of the exactor. As usual it has its appropriate anecdote in the *Vita Columbae* (ii,33) where Columba gives the Pictish king a magic medicinal stone which he places '*in thesauris*' (among his treasures). The miracle is that the stone can never be found when someone is due to die, including the king himself.

In all probability there must have been other hereditary royal positions, with their appropriate insignia, perhaps:-

The Admiral's Salmon?

Turning again to Appendix II, Ackergill 1 is also broken and 'not much of a salmon survives' (Mack, 1997, 29), but it bears the ogham inscription NEHTTRI to make up for it, in my opinion. The Inchyra stone has got into a fearful muddle (Mack, 1997, 54) and the oghams have obviously been used to try to sort it out. Significantly, I think there is , at one end, a Sun-chariot or Double-disc and a Salmon, and beside them an inscription containing NEHHET. Latheron 1 is peculiar in that it is a cross-slab incised on one side only, including an eagle and a Salmon and reading, *inter alia*, this time NNAT, I deduce from these that the Salmon and NEHTET/NEHHET/NNAT are connected. The word is equated with the name Necthan, and even Neptune, Nechtan was the husband of the River Boyne which had a supernatural salmons at its source (pers. comm. from the late Alan Bruford). Gordon (1964, 215) connects the symbol with fishing and Henderson (1971,66) with fishing rights; but it is tempting to see Nehtet as 'Fish-man', Eddar's naval colleague, the hereditary Admiral of the Pictish Fleet.

The Poet's Tree?

The position of Druid often degenerated to that of poet, and Adomnan recounts that Columba did not bother to request a poem from one because he was just about to drop down dead at that instant. One is familiar with hereditary pipers to the clan-chiefs. I suggest that the family of the official bard also inherited the Tree symbol from the pagan priest.

The Baron of the Bachuil

Driscoll further hypothesized that the symbols later played a part in the Church, when it became the 'arena of power,' and, here, I think, we find another symbol, a veritable heraldic coelocanth which has carried its bat right through from Pictish times to the present day. In Parts I and II, I noted the Crozier on St Vigeans (No. 4), which I would now claim to be the insignia of the prosapia of the Guardian of the Staff of St Fechin. similar positions are held nowadays by the family of Livingstone, hereditary 'Barons of the Bachuil' and the eponymous Dewars Coigerach. Bachuil is from Gaelic bachall, a crozier, Latin bacalum, a staff (Watson, 1926,266). And the Baron of the Bachuil is the Keeper of the staff of St Moluag. 'Dewar; means Keeper and the Coigerach is the staff of St Fillan. Both these families have matriculated arms in the Lyon court, which I have excerpted in Appendix III

It is at once apparent that the insignia there are identical with that on St Vigeans. What is not so obvious is the link between the Baron of the Bachuil and Eddar/Arthur. 'The word baro...came to England from Normandy and to Scotland from England...In origin (it) simply meant "man," and acquired its later

meaning form the sense of "king's man"...But a number of barons held their jurisdictions under earldoms or bishoprics, or the Lord of the Isles,' (Moncreiff of that Ilk). The Baron of the Bachuill is, therefore, 'Crozier-man ' in exactly the same way as I say that Eddar is 'Bear-man.'

It is clear, too, from the reference to the 'Bachuil lands of Lismore' that the office carried with it the right to heritage (see also Watson, 1996,266), It seems likely that other positions would also carry the possession of property; but that is another story which I shall leave to another time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Graeme Cruickshank and Bill Grant for advice on the contents of this essay, but of, course, the responsibility is all mine.

APPENDIX I

Solinus (probably soon after 200 AD)

> Regiones partim (Brittianiae) tenet barbari, quibus per artifices plagarum figures nam inde a pueris animalium effigies incorporantur, inscriptisque visceribus hominis incremento pigmenti, nota notae crescunt nee quiquam mage patientae loco nationes ferae ducunt, quam ut per memores cicatrices plurimum fuci artus bibant. (The area is partly occupied by barbarians on whose bodies, from their childhood upwards, various forms of living creatures are represented by means of cunningly wrought marks; and when the flesh of a person has been deeply branded, then the marks of the pigment get larger as a man grows, and the barbaric nations regard it as the highest pitch of endurance to allow their limbs to drink in as much of the dye as possible through the scars which record this. (Mommsen 1895 102-3, trans. Chadwick, 1955,160)

Isidore of Seville (590-636 AD)

> Gens Pictorum nomen a corpore, quod minutis opifex acus punctis et expressis nativi graminus sucus includit, ut has ad sui speciment cicatrices fertat, pictis artubus maculos nobilitas (the race of the Picts have a name derived from the appearance of their bodies, These are played on by a needle, working with small pricks and by the squeezed out sap of a native plant, so that they bear the resultant marks according to the personal rank of the individual, their painted limbs tattooed to show their high birth. (Lindsay, 1911 XIX23, pp6-7 &IX 2p103, trans. 'closely and literally' by Diack 1944,26).

Capitulary of George, Bishop of Ostia, Legate to Pope Hadrian (786A.D.)

> Si quid ex ritu paganarum ramansit, avellatur, comtennatur, abjiciatur. Deus enim formavit hominem pulchrum in decore et specie; pagani vero , diabolico instinctu, cicatresa teterrimas superinduxerant, dicente Prudentio 'Tinxit et innocuam maculis sordentibus humum.' Domino enim videtur facere injuriam qui creaturam suam foedat et detrupat. Certe si pro deo aliquis hane tincturae injuriam sustinere, magnam inde remunerationem acciperet. Sed quisquis ex superstitionem gentilium id agit non et profit ad salutem. (We (i.e.George) have added (to the statutes of Pope Hadrian) that each faithful Christian must take example from catholic men and if anything has remained of the rites of the pagans, it is to be plucked out, despised, cast away. For God made man fair in beauty and comeliness, but the pagans by diabolical promptings added most hideous cicatrices as Prudentius says, 'He painted also the innocent earth with unclean spots.' For he clearly does injury to the Lord who defiles and disfigures his creature. Certainly if anyone were to undergo this injury of

staining for the sake of God he would receive great reward for it, But if anyone does it from the superstition of the pagans, it will not contribute to his salvation, any more does circumcision to the body to the Jews without belief of heart.

Pictish Chronicle (971-995A.D.)

Picti propria lingua nomen habent a picta corpora; eo quod, aculeis ferreis cum atramento, variarum figararum annotantur. (The name by which the Picti call themselves in their own language is due to the fact that they puncture on their own bodies various figures with a needle and die. (trans. Diack, 1944,26).

Duald Mac Firbis C17 (Gaelic)

The Cruithneach is one who takes the cruths or forms of beasts, birds and fishes on his face, and not only on it but on his whole body. (trans. Diack 1944, 2).

De Bello Gothica XXV 416 Claudian (392 A.D)

Venit ad extremis legio praetenta Britannia quae Scotto dat freni truci,
ferroqu notates perlegit exanimes Picto moriente figures

(Next came the legion which had been left to guard Britain, the legion that kept the Scots in check, whose men had scanned the strange devices marked with iron on the faces of the dying Picts.)

APPENDIX II

I am most grateful to Miss Forsyth, an acknowledged authority, for her version of the inscriptions; for the symbols, I have relied on the Meticulous Mack.

Key: letters in upper case are reasonably secure
letters in lower case, doubtful
—— text incomplete at this point
/ alternative transliterations or readings.

EDDARRNONN/Beast

Scoonie	Brodie	Fordoun
EDDARRNONN	(a) (v/al)ON(-)ECCO(-	PIDARNOIN(Hiberno-Saxon)
Beastie	(b) EDDARNOnn	Double-Disc Z
	(c) R(g/am)iAGchqOOTOS(o/l)mbsf-	
	Beastie, Double-Disc Z	

NEHHET (Salmon)

Inchyra	Ackergill	Latheron 1
(a)INHHETESTIERtd-iNNE (b)ETTLIETRENOIDDORS-uHTDiGED- (c)SETU (a)Double-Disc, Salmon (b) Rectangle(?), Mirror+Comb (c)Salmon,Adder	NEHETRI Salmon, Rectangle	DUNNODNNATMAQQNET(ut)u- Eagle, Salmon

APPENDIX III

Extract of Matriculation of the Arms of Livingstone of Bachuil

> ...THAT the said Bachuil lands have from time immemorial been held and reckoned in baronia along with the dignity and title of "Baron of the Bachuil", in the Baronage of Argyll and the Isles, a barony wherein was consistent with the said honourable office within the abbacy and bishopric of Lismore, analogous to the Barons of the Chretient of sundry great bishoprics on the Continent of Europe, so that the Petitioner and his ancestors have been known and received as Barons of the Bachuil.. and have borne arms anterior to the year 1672 AND the Petitioner having prayed that the Ensigns Armorial appropriate to him as Livingstone of Bachuil, Baron of the Bachuil and Heritable Keeper of the Pastoral Staff of St Moluag might be matriculated in his name...along with the insignia relative to the said heritable office, the Lord Lyon King of Arms .. grants warrant .. to matriculate .. the following Ensigns Armorial, videlicet:-
>
> 'Argent, upon a bend Vert between two ciquerolles Gules, a baton Or, charged with seven torteaux ..the Shield, behind which are placed in saltire two bachuils within their cases Or, jewelles Gules, being the Petitioner's insignia as Heritable Keeper of the Bachuil....

DEWAR, Hereditary DEWAR COIGERACH

> 'Ermine, a pall Azure charged with the crozier of St Fillan proper:...Behind the shield are place two croziers of St Fillan in saltire proper, being the Insignia of the Office of Hereditary Keeper of the Crozier of St Fillan.

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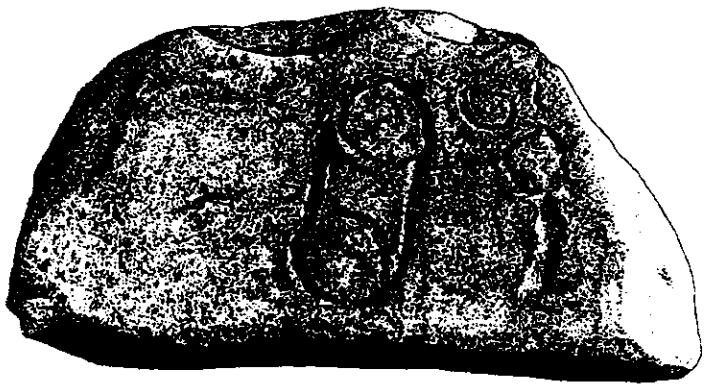

Wargaming Nechtansmere

Allan Webster

'Fancy what a game of chess would be if all the chessmen had passions and intellects, more or less small and cunning; if you were not only uncertain about your adversary's men, but a little uncertain also of your own'

Felix Holt, by George Eliot

For a battle that is such an important turning point in the history of northern Britain, Nechtansmere is surprisingly poorly documented. No Pictish accounts of this victory over the invading Northumbrians have survived, and the main source is Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, completed 46 years after the event. Bede wrote:

In the following year (685) King Ecgfrith, ignoring the advice of his friends and in particular of Cuthbert, of blessed memory, who had recently been made bishop, rashly led an army to ravage the province of the Picts. The enemy pretended to retreat, and lured the king into narrow mountain passes, where he was killed with the greater part of his forces on the twentieth of May in his fortiety year and the fifteenth of his reign. (EH: IV.26)

According to Bede, this disaster led to Northumbria's decline (though the resurgence of the rival English kingdom of Mercia was arguably a more important factor) and enabled the Picts to regain occupied territories, while the Scots and some of the Britons regained their independence. Two Irish sources - the *Annals of Tigernach* and the *Annals of Ulster* - record the battle, and from the former we learn that the victor was Brude, son of Bile, the king of Fortriu. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle notes the slaying of King Ecgfrith, and there are references in the anonymous *Life of Cuthbert* which preceded Bede's own life of the saint, in Eddius' *Life of Wilfrid*, and in a poetic fragment preserved by the seventeenth century Irish scholar Duald MacFirbis which he attributes to Abbot Riaguil of Bangor whom MacFirbis alleges was in Pictland at the time of the battle:

This day Brudei fights a battle for the heritage of his grandfather;
Unless the Son of God wills it otherwise, he will die in it.
This day the son of Oswiu was killed in a battle with green swords;
Although he did penance, he shall lie in Iona after his death.
This day the son of Oswiu was killed, who had the black drinks.
Christ heard our supplications, they spared Brudei the brave.

None of these sources gives us a detailed account of the fighting, or of the forces involved. The Irish Annals' name for the battle - 'Dun Nechtain' - suggests the existence of a fortification in the area; while two later sources, Nennius (c. 800) and Symeon of Durham (early 12th century) use names that imply a water feature - 'Linn Garan' (Pool of the Heron) and 'Nechtan's Mere' respectively. The site of the battle was identified as Dunnichen in Angus by Chalmers in 1807 and confirmed by Wainwright (1948) who also surveyed the area of the now reclaimed moss south of Dunnichen Hill. There is now no trace of a dun, though it is mentioned by Chalmers: '*The remains of this ancient strength may still be seen upon an eminence on the south side of the hill of Dunnichen*', and its location remains contentious. The *New Statistical Account* of 1833 records a local tradition that King Arthur fought his last and fatal battle here against the Picts. (The summit of nearby Dumbarrow Hill was formerly known as Arthur's Seat!) While such a garbled folk memory of a real battle is not impossible, this tradition seems to have been founded on discoveries of (probably older) stone cist burials at East Mains of Dunnichen and Letham Den. A modern scholarly interpretation of the battle is Graeme Cruickshank's *The Battle of Dunnichen* (1991).

Information on the armies involved can be gleaned from representations of warriors on some of the Pictish stones, archaeological finds of weaponry at numerous sites in Britain, and accounts of other battles in the period.

Was the Pictish victory over the Northumbrians at Dunnichen inevitable? After all, Ecgfrith was an experienced commander who had already defeated the Picts in 671. And where was the dun? Did the location of *Dun Nechtain* have any influence on the course of the battle? As a keen wargamer, PAS member, and resident of Letham with a particular interest in our local battle, I had been planning for a miniature re-enactment of Nechtansmere over a number of years. Together with other members of Kirriemuir and District Wargames Society I have now gamed the battle on a number of occasions, mostly in public venues. Lest those unfamiliar with wargaming picture us scampering among the trees on Dunnichen Hill firing paintball guns at each other, it is necessary to explain that we are talking about military miniatures here - or, if you must - toy soldiers.

Sometimes known as "chess with a thousand pieces", the War Game, or *Kriegspiel,* originated as a military training exercise in the Prussian Army of the nineteenth century, and involved teams of officers moving model units on a tabletop terrain according to realistic rules which simulated actual combat. After Prussia's victories over Austria and France, the general staffs of other nations began to copy Prussian training methods. Wargaming can be used to rehearse military manoeuvres in advance, and also as a means of researching historical battles. Presented with a tactical situation, both sides play to win, thus gaining an insight into the problems which commanders face and the decisions they have to make. From its use as a military training aid the wargame caught on as a hobby, and sets of rules covering every conceivable type of conflict have been proliferating since the 1960's. Kirriemuir and District Wargames Society draws members from Angus and beyond.

After I had broached the idea with Norman Atkinson, the wargames club was invited to stage a miniature re-enactment at Pictavia on a weekend last October. Our thanks to Craig Lafferty and the staff of Pictavia for their enthusiastic cooperation with this project. Two different teams of wargamers commanded the Pictish and Northumbrian forces for separate re-fights on the Saturday and the Sunday, with myself as umpire. Dunnichen Hill and its environs were represented by model scenery on an eight by six foot table (fig.1). The hills were thickly wooded. North of the main ridge was mostly open moorland, while to the south lay marshes and the shallow mere called *Linn Garan*. King Brudei arranged the initial deployment of his forces before Ecgfrith's Northumbrians began to arrive from their advance up Strathmore. The Pictish team planned their opening moves on paper, since most of their warriors were very sensibly hidden in the woods or behind Dunnichen Hill. When their opponents brought on the Northumbrian advance guard from the western corner of the table, they were confronted by a handful of elusive Pictish archers who sniped at them from clumps of vegetation and folds in the ground, while withdrawing slowly before them. The wooded heights beyond revealed no signs of life to the invaders. What to do next?

A word about the forces engaged: the Anglo-Saxons generally fought on foot, although better-off warriors had horses to transport them to the battlefield. There is an intriguing reference in Eddius Stephanus' *Life of Wilfrid* (chapter 19) to Ecgfrith employing a troop of cavalry against the Picts in 671, fourteen years before Dunnichen. Were these cavalrymen British mercenaries or a force of Northumbrians? In our re-enactment of the battle, the Northumbrian army of King Ecgfrith consisted of the royal hearthguard, 300 strong; the personal retainers of a powerful sub-king (again 300); a force of 200 cavalry; five bands of land-holding *gesithas* - later known as thegns - from various parts of Northumbria (each 250); and 400 assorted churls equipped with javelins, slings or bows to provide skirmishers. Archery was little practised among the Anglo-Saxons, but Eddius refers to use of the sling as a weapon (chapter 13). Slings would be a cheap and easily portable missile weapon for the poorer folk, although, by their nature, difficult to prove archaeologically. All these types of fighting men were represented on the table by models on a scale of one miniature warrior represents ten real ones. There were also suitably resplendent figures to portray Ecgfrith and two of his ealdormen.

The Picts had Brudei and three sub-kings, four bands of noble cavalry (each 120), four bands of spearmen (250), six of javelin-armed warriors (120), skirmishers mounted on ponies (120), and about 500 skirmishers on foot armed with bows, crossbows or javelins. Ecgfrith's objective was to burn Dun Nechtain and/or destroy the Pictish army. Brudei's was to prevent either of these things happening - and if possible, destroy the invaders.

On the Saturday only, the Northumbrians also had about a thousand spear-carrying but not very effective churls to make up the numbers and fill the back ranks. After Ecgfrith tried to use them as cannon-fodder, driving them forward in advance of his better-class troops to absorb enemy arrows, the umpire ruled such churlish behaviour unhistorical. On reflection, it seemed improbable that such a large force of *hoi polloi* would have been called out for an away-game, but only when Northumbrian territory was invaded. Reluctantly, these carefully-painted models were returned to their box.

The location of the dun

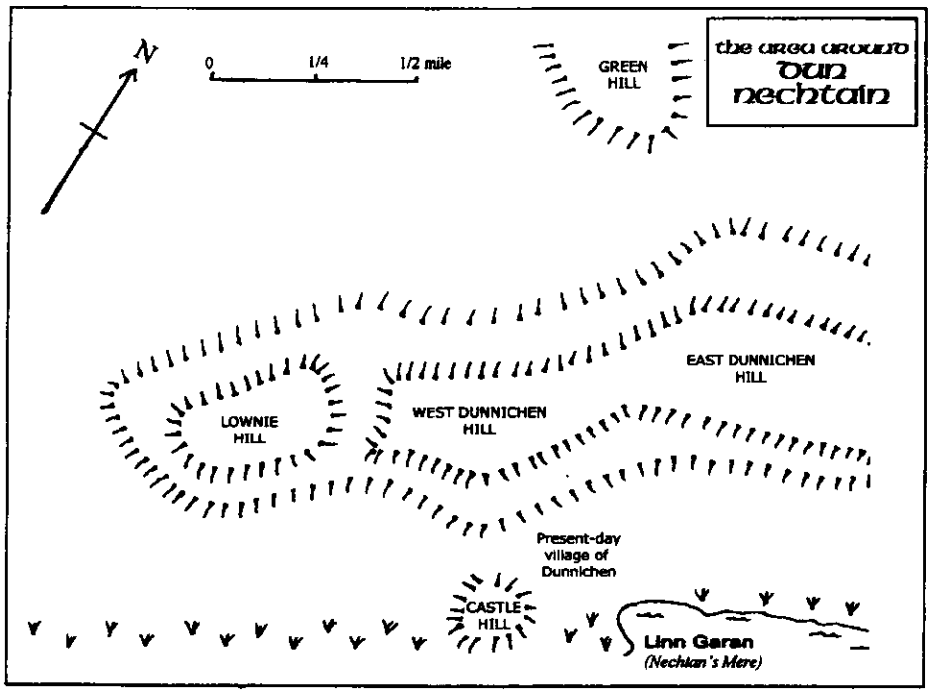

Fig.1 Prominent features around the Dunnichen Area

Any remaining stonework still visible in Chalmers' day has long since been quarried for building purposes. There are three possible sites. The summit of East Dunnichen Hill (232 m) is the highest eminence in the whole area, but does not fit Chalmers' description. The knoll on top of West Dunnichen Hill (220 m) is possibly a better site for all-round defence, and there is also the low spur named Castle Hill, south-west of the present village of Dunnichen. Either of these two could be Chalmers' *eminence on the south side of the hill of Dunnichen.* It is possible, as Wainwright seems to suggest, that there was a walled semi-protected Pictish settlement on Castle Hill, with a stronger fortification somewhere on Dunnichen Hill itself. On both days at Pictavia we placed the dun on East Dunnichen Hill, with a lightly-fortified village on Castle Hill.

Saturday's battle

As soon as the Northumbrians began to deploy in the area of present-day Kingsmuir, our Ecgfrith - a wargamer named Bruce - took one look at the marshy terrain beyond Hillend of Lownie and declared, 'I'm not venturing into that lot!' Instead, he opted to advance north of Lownie Hill in the direction of Green Hill, making for the pass which ascends between West and East Dunnichen Hill. His intention, clearly, was to assault the dun. The Picts, commanded by a wargamer who wishes to remain nameless, were so thrown by his unsporting decision not to saunter into their carefully prepared trap behind Dunnichen Hill that they came pouring off the wooded heights to attack him on open moorland.

There followed a hard lesson in tactics: if you are commanding lightly-armed troops who are best-suited to dodging around in bogs and woods and heather, you do not tackle the best troops in Northern Europe in a frontal assault on level ground. The Picts were thoroughly trounced and King Brudei was killed in the rout - much to the disgust of a band of life-size Pictish look-alikes who were also doing their stuff at Pictavia that weekend. Indeed, when these tattooed and burly fellows armed with vicious-looking spears crowded into our exhibition area to voice their displeasure, we thought we were not going to get out of Pictavia alive.

It is only fair to say that our Picts got what they deserved, that day. When we had tested the game-system at club meetings on various evenings, we discovered that in a head-to-head clash on open ground the Northumbrians invariably rolled over the Picts. If, however, the Picts made use of their superior mobility in rough terrain they could run rings round the close-ordered and less manouevrable Northumbrians, inflicting serious casualties by sniping at them from cover. On one such occasion, two Northumbrian ealdorman were picked off by crossbowmen as they led their troops around the end of Lownie Hill. The Ecgfrith of that night was so incensed that he sent one of his best units straight up the slope and into the trees to annihilate these pests. The Northumbrians disappeared into the wood - which was infested with hundreds of Pictish javelinmen - and were never seen again.

Round Two

We did it all again on the Sunday at Pictavia, with different people in command. Our new Saxon king, Graeme, adopted similar tactics to his predecessor, advancing on Dunnichen Hill from the north. The Pictish commander began well, keeping the bulk of his forces hidden on the various wooded hills; then, encouraged by the success of his archers and skirmishing cavalry in whittling down the Northumbrians, he left the high ground and launched a full-scale charge by his spearmen on the enemy shield wall. The result was predictable: more carnage for the Picts, with their king dying bravely, yet blaming one of his sub-kings for the debacle. We tried to avoid telling the tattooed lads with the spears.

It had become apparent that, with Dun Nechtain clearly visible on top of East Dunnichen Hill, there was no sensible reason for the Northumbrians to go anywhere near the reputed historical battle site at East Mains of Dunnichen. The invitation for our club to stage an event two weeks later at the Model Railway Exhibition in the Caird Hall, Dundee, gave the opportunity to try an alternative hypothesis. This time, I located the dun on Castle Hill, while the flat crown of East Dunnichen Hill was partly cleared for cultivation and the remainder of the Lownie Hill/Dunnichen Hill ridge was still heavily wooded. Before anyone argues that the hill fort cannot have been on Castle Hill since it is overlooked by the much higher ridge of Dunnichen Hill, I would suggest that this would only be relevant if artillery is available! Castle Hill is well beyond bowshot of Dunnichen Hill. If the former was a sensible place to build a medieval tower (as the name might suggest, and as indicated on Sheet XXXIX of the 1866 Ordnance Survey) it was a sensible place for a Pictish stronghold.

In preparation for the Caird Hall re-fight, I took the precaution of writing a tactical briefing (idiot's guide) for each side. Essentially, the Northumbrians were advised to keep clear of woods and marshes, instead tackling their enemy in the open; while the Picts should rely on skirmishing and try to entice their opponents into difficult terrain where they would be at a disadvantage, then hit them in the flank. Would anyone remember in the heat of battle?

Showdown at the Caird Hall

The Picts played a cannier game this time. King Brudei (or Mike), with a thousand spearmen, ensconced himself in the fort on Castle Hill. His entire cavalry force, commanded by a subordinate, was massed out of sight to the east of Green Hill. The bowmen and other skirmishers were concealed on the edges of the woods, with hundreds of javelin-armed warriors prepared to back them up as required. The Northumbrians saw that, in order to reach and destroy the fort, they must either go over Dunnichen Hill or around it. They decided to make a wide sweep round to the west, keeping out of bowshot of a handful of Pictish archers who had been spotted at the western end of Lownie Hill. As soon as the head of the Northumbrian column was out of sight, the Pictish cavalry commander sent a small force from behind Green Hill to harrass the flank of his advancing enemy. Ecgfrith responded by detaching an ealdorman with a band of *gesithas* and all his cavalry to see them off. The Picts waited until these Northumbrians were sufficiently distant from the main body, then brought the rest of their cavalry from behind Green Hill. The lightly-equipped Pictish horsemen swarmed around the hapless Northumbrians, pelting them with javelins and charging on both flanks. In a scene reminiscent of the Aberlemno Kirkyard stone - except it was the Picts who were all mounted - the Northumbrian cavalry was virtually annihilated with the ealdorman riding for his life. His hapless infantry, cut off and surrounded, determined to sell their lives dearly. They died to a man, taking a large number of the Pictish nobility with them, which should be worth a song or two over the ale cups in the feasting hall. Cue for the wargamers to adjourn for lunch, leaving the Pictish cavalry to the grisly business of despoiling the slain.

In the afternoon, Ecgfrith continued his lengthy progress around the hill end towards Dun Nechtain. A group of Pictish crossbowmen began sniping at him from the edge of the marshes, but he ignored them. He still had no information about how strongly-garrisoned the fort might be, or how many Picts were hidden on the wooded ridge to his left. His leading unit approached the dun. Seeing no signs of life (since Brudei and his spearmen were prudently keeping their heads down) its commander launched an assault without waiting for the rest of the army to close up. His spear-armed *gesithas* scrambled over the bank and ditch, arriving in some disorder at the foot of the palisade, and were bloodily repulsed by the defenders. Before succumbing to a Pictish javelin, their gallant but foolhardy commander remarked that the fort was a tough nut to crack. Ecgfrith took the situation in hand, moving heavy columns of men around the north side of the stronghold to assault it from three sides. His own hearthguard made for the gate, which faced towards a track running along the north shore of Linn Garan.

At a signal from King Brudei, the Picts on West Dunnichen Hill made their move. Six hundred warriors armed with shields and javelins ran screaming from the edge of the woods. The Northumbrian commander was visibly stunned. '*How* many Pictish javelinmen?' he gasped incredulously. I imagine the real Ecgfrith said much the same, in similar circumstances! The closely-packed Northumbrians had no time to deploy against this new danger on their flank. The Picts hurled their javelins then drew off to a safe distance, readying themselves to charge again with a fresh salvo of missiles. The hindmost Northumbrian unit, still negotiating the end of the hill, was violently assailed from the rear by the Pictish cavalry who had now finished looting the fallen (late back from the pub, actually). The Northumbrian rearguard fought valiantly, but was wiped out as more Picts ran from the trees on Lownie Hill to join the fight.

It became apparent to Ecgfrith that his army was surrounded. A fort crammed with Pictish spearmen to his front, hundreds more Picts coming down the hill on his left, victorious Pictish cavalry mopping up fugitives in his rear, and a line of impenetrable marshes and a treacherous-looking mere denying him room to manoeuvre and cutting off any chance of escape. Surrender was unthinkable. He resolved to fight to the last man. The rest, as they say, is history.

So what did it prove? If the more lightly-armed Picts tackle the Northumbrians on a level playing field (literally) they lose heavily. If, however, they make sensible use of the available terrain such as wooded hills and marshes, they have a better chance of beating the invaders. Was Ecgfrith lured into a trap by a feigned retreat on the battlefield? The Picts tried that on the Saturday at Pictavia, and an unbiased but experienced wargamer did not fall for it. The veteran Northumbrian infantry was unlikely to

behave like (some) of the Saxon *fyrd* at Hastings. The rules we were using did provide for troops getting out of hand (particularly undisciplined ones), so perhaps if I had left Ecgfrith with those churls it would have been a different story! I suggest that Bede's comment - *the enemy pretended to retreat, and lured the king into narrow mountain passes (EH IV.26)* - refers to the strategic situation in the days before the battle. Picture a Northumbrian advance up heavily-wooded Strathmore, possibly on the line of the old Roman road, with the Picts employing Fabian hit and run tactics to draw their enemy deeper into hostile territory. Having emerged in the vicinity of present-day Forfar, a series of ridges and valleys would be seen stretching away eastwards. Try standing on Balmashanner Hill above Forfar, looking towards Finavon Hill, Turin Hill and Dunnichen Hill. Imagine it as a landscape of marshy valleys and wooded heights, with the hostiles out there somewhere. Hardly "narrow *mountain* passes", but we can allow the survivors a little exaggeration. Our Pictish cavalry certainly lured the Northumbrians on one occasion by concealing their true numbers.

If the hill fort was on East Dunnichen Hill itself, we could find no good reason why an experienced commander like Ecgfrith should have entered the area between Dunnichen Hill and Dunnichen Moss. It would have been much more practicable to assault the dun from the north, rather than by the constricted approach from the south, where low-lying marshy ground stretched away parallel to the main ridge. Granted that his army would have been thoroughly outscouted by the Pictish cavalry so that he was probably short of accurate information about the terrain, he could hardly have failed to spot a fortification on such a commanding height. Arguably, his army was lured over Dunnichen Hill by a feigned Pictish retreat and got completely out of hand, charging down towards the mere in pursuit, but if the dun was clearly visible on the high ground to their left they would hardly have ignored it. The dun would not have been screened by trees, since any fortification would, necessarily, have a cleared area around it.

If, however, the dun was on Castle Hill - virtually a peninsula jutting into the marshes before the land reclamation undertaken by Dempster and others in the last two hundred years, and therefore a highly-defensible site at the time - Ecgfrith would obviously have to lead his army south of Dunnichen Hill onto the presumed historical battlefield to attack it. To do so, he had to go over the hill, or - as in our Caird Hall re-enactment - around it.

The third possibility is that the dun was on the knoll which caps West Dunnichen Hill. A walk over the ground reveals an interesting point. If you approach Dunnichen village from the west, by the road which passes below Lownie Hill towards Castle Hill, the summit of West Dunnichen Hill is concealed by its southern shoulder and only comes into view when your reach the village and look back to your left. Suppose, then, a hill fort on West Dunnichen Hill, and a village settlement on Castle Hill. It remains conceivable that, if the Northumbrians advanced around the end of Lownie Hill towards a settlement on Castle Hill which would have been clearly visible to them, they could have been ambushed by Pictish warriors concealed on West Dunnichen Hill. This, in effect, was what happened in our Caird Hall version of the battle, though we had our fort on Castle Hill, on this occasion. There are still a number of permutations for us to explore in future wargames.

By way of a footnote: in March this year, we had the opportunity to try another variant at the Glasgow Wargames Show, with the dun on Castle Hill and the Northumbrians trying to reach it by advancing over Dunnichen Hill. On this occasion, Brudei was represented by Craig Lafferty of Pictavia, who launched a surprise attack on the Northumbrian rear with cavalry, followed up by massed spearmen. After a stiff fight the Northumbrian rearguard was overwhelmed, but their sacrificial bravery allowed time for their king to redeploy his army against the new danger. In the midst of a bloody and confused combat, a warband commanded by Brudei in person found itself confronted on open level ground by Ecgfrith and his hearthguard. Surrounded by Picts, Ecgfrith's veterans charged. Brudei's spearmen were routed, and he was slain attempting to rally them. Nothing is inevitable in war, but a good wargame can be an accurate simulation of the possible outcomes, as well as being much more enjoyable than the real thing. All of us who took part now have a much better appreciation of the real King Brudei's generalship.

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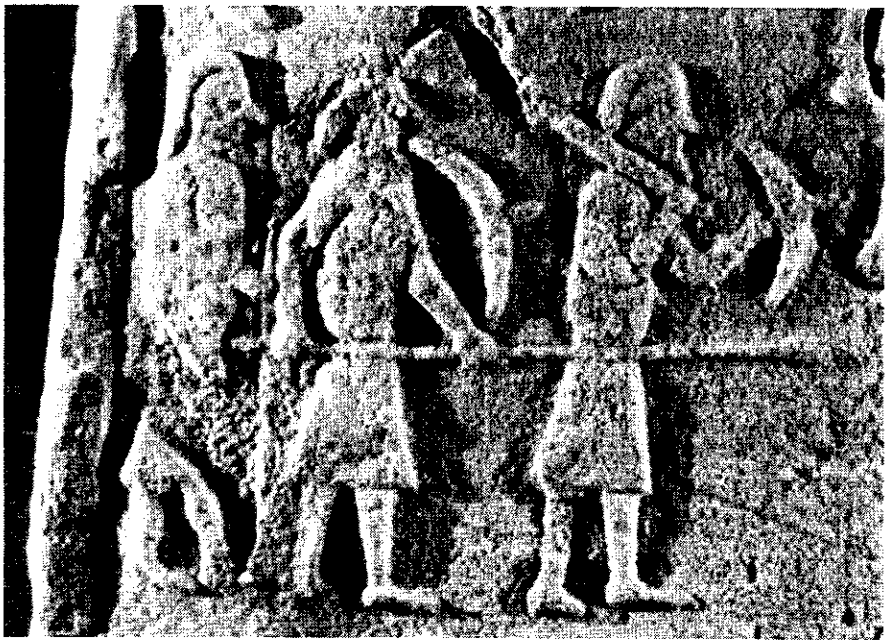


Frederick Sandys' Pictish Morgan Le Fay

Craig Cessford

The Victorian artist Fredrick Sandys (1829-1904) oil painting entitled **Morgan Le Fay** is of interest to studies of Pictish art because the lower part of her dress is decorated with a collection of Pictish symbols. This prompts two main questions; where did Sandys obtain his inspiration to use these symbols and why did he consider them appropriate for his painting?

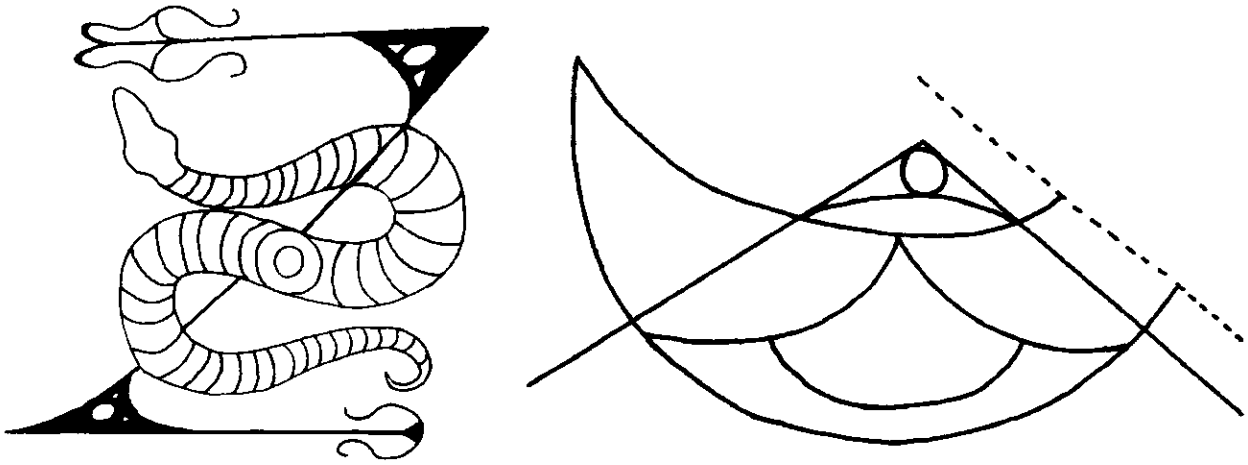
There are eight symbols on Morgan Le Fay's dress, six genuine Pictish symbols and two others. The Pictish symbols are a crescent and V-rod, part of a double crescent, a serpent and Z-rod, part of a flower, a triple disc and a double-disc and Z-rod. The other symbols are a dragon and part of another symbol.

During the early 1860's Sandys, who was already a well known artist, worked on a variety of detailed and highly finished paintings inspired by Flemish and German art of the early sixteenth century and by the works of Millais and Rossetti.[1] These included a number with female Arthurian themes including *King Pelles' Daughter Bearing the Vessel of the Sanc Grael* (1861), *La Belle Ysonde* (1863), *Vivien* (1863) and *Morgan Le Fay* (1864) which he exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1864 [catalogue no.519] and which is now owned by Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. While Sandys drew much of his literary inspiration for these paintings from Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, which had been revised and edited by Thomas Wright in 1858, artistically they must be seen within the wider perspective of the Arthurian revival in Victorian art (Mancrof 1990). This does not, however, explain the Pictish symbols on Morgan Le Fay's dress. As Sandys painted his picture in 1864 the obvious source of inspiration for the Pictish symbols is the first volume of John Stuart's *Sculptured Stones of Scotland* published in 1856, which created a great deal of interest in Pictish art and must have affected Sandys. Sandys use of Pictish symbols must also be viewed in the context of nineteenth century attitudes to the Picts although little attention has been paid to this topic (see Ritchie 1994). There was certainly a long tradition of artists depicting painted Britons and Picts in particular based on Classical literary descriptions (Laing and Laing 1993, 2-3; Piggott 1989). Sandys whilst perhaps influenced by this tradition deviates from it in using actual Pictish symbols, as previous artists had not done this, and by having the symbols on a cloak rather than directly on the naked skin of the subject. An examination of the symbols in Sandys drawing shows that, with the exception of the dragon, they are similar to those published by Stuart. The crescent and V-rod is clearly based upon the symbol on the stone at Crichie (Stuart 1856, plate X), although Sandys has depicted the symbol upside down. The serpent and Z-rod is derived from the symbol on the Newton House 1 stone (ibid, plate XXXVII). In this instance Sandys has omitted the details on the serpent's head and simplified the rings on its body. The rest of the symbols are also paralleled in Stuart's volume but none are sufficiently close to link them to a particular example. Sandys seems to have selected an eclectic mix from Stuart's volume and has indulged in a fair degree of artistic licence. Additionally Sandys, by depicting such a large number of Pictish symbols, ignores the evidence of Stuart's volume which clearly shows that the symbols do not occur in such large groups.

[1] See entry on Sandys by Betty Elezea in *The Dictionary of Art* volume 27 (Macmillan 1996), p.726-77. B. O'Looney *Fredrick Sandys 1829-1904* (exhibition catalogue) (Brighton Art Gallery and Museum, 1974). Also Gray, J.M. Fredrick Sandys, *Art Journal* 46 (March 1884), 73-78 and Wood, E. A, A consideration of the work of Fredrick Sandays, *The Artist* (November 18, 1896), 23-24.

In Arthurian myth Morgan Le Fay was the daughter of Gorloris and Ygraine and thus the elder half sister of Arthur. She was supposedly married to Urian, although the historical Urien was the ruler of Rheged in south-west Scotland. Geoffrey of Monmouth makes Urian the king of the men of *Murief* or Moray [ix.9 and ix.12], following Arthur's victory over the Picts and the Scots there [ix.6]. This provides an obvious geographical explanation for why Sandys thought that Pictish symbols were appropriate for Morgan Le Fay. The mysterious symbols were also eminently suitable for Morgan in her role as enchantress.

Fredrick Sandys' Morgan Le Fay demonstrates the artistic influence that scholarly publications on Pictish art could have: Stuart's work was obviously only one amongst a variety of influences such as *Morte d'Arthur* and the Pictish symbols seem to have been included largely as exotic space fillers.



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The Origins of the Pictish Beast

Craig Cessford

INTRODUCTION

The symbol usually referred to as either the 'Pictish Beast' or the 'swimming elephant' is a sinuous animal with a long snout, spiralled feet and a drooping, typically spiral-ended tail. It is one of the most common symbols in the Pictish repertoire, occurring twenty-nine times on class I stones, twenty-five times on class II stones and five times on the walls of caves. Various origins and identifications have been suggested for this symbol. It has been argued that it is derived from the ornamental repertoire of eighth century Insular art, or is based upon some unknown type of object (Mack 1997, 8-9). Other possible derivations include a deer (Thomas 1963, 49-52), a dead sheep or wolf (Fortescue 1992, 16), a mythical animal such as the kelpie or *eich uisge* (water horse) or *tarve uisge* (water bull) of later Scottish folklore (Foster 1996, 74; Kermack 1997, 10 and 1998, 6-7; Murray 1986, 243; Sutherland 1997, 86-88). In general a derivation from a sea mammal such as a dolphin (Cruickshank 1992, 38 and 1995, 26; Foster 1996, 74; Thomas 1986, 166) or beaked whale (Macleod and Wilson 2001) has tended to be the most popular idea in recent publications.

Previous Ideas

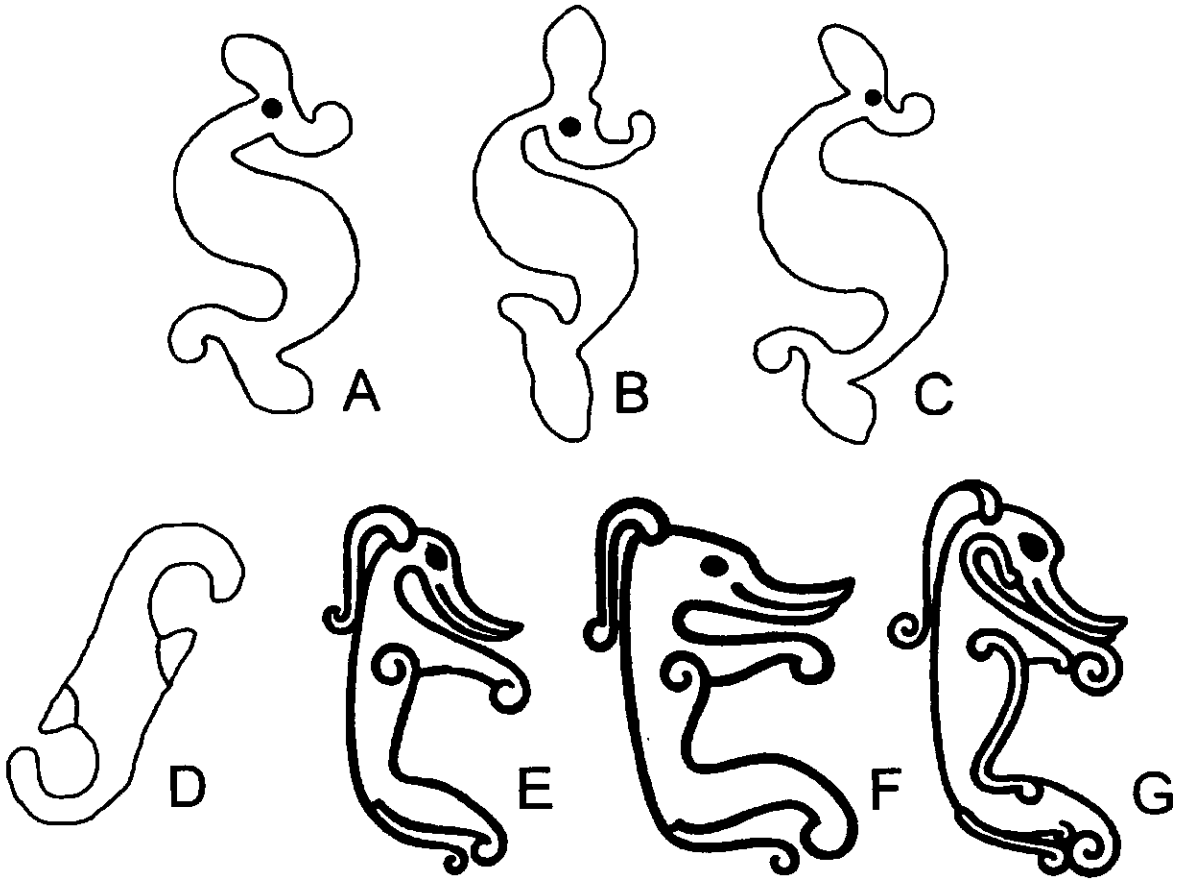
The most coherent argument for the Pictish Beast being derived from a dolphin is that advanced by Carola Hicks (1996). She identifies a number of recurrent features that support the identification as a dolphin. These include its diagonal posture as if plunging upwards, the head lappet indicated by a single or double line, a long snout curling outwards at the tip, limbs which end in coiled scrolls, not feet and a rudimentary tail shown by a single line (ibid, 49-50). Whilst this identification of certain elements of the Pictish Beast as being derived from a dolphin appears credible, Hick's view is perhaps a little simplistic and requires modification. Isabel Henderson has argued that the Pictish Beast is '*manifestly ... an imaginative composite made up of parts of animals including horned and marine creatures, but essentially a pure hybrid with no core species*' (1996, 15). The view that this is a composite beast with dolphin elements has found support (Carver 1999, 18). The more recent suggestion that it is a beaked whale rather than a dolphin (Macleod and Wilson 2001) is intriguing, but this argument is based largely on the shape of the head and does not explain the whole symbol.

Surviving examples of Pictish symbols, mainly carved in stone, date to the second half of the first millennium AD. It is, however, likely that they were initially developed several centuries earlier, possibly around the first and second centuries AD, for utilisation on organic materials that have not survived. This means that the symbols that survive are relatively late and developed forms that do not necessarily have a particularly close relationship to the earliest forms, so even if it is possible to recognise typological developments (eg Henderson 1958, 51-52; Murray 1986, 243-49) these are not particularly helpful. Elements of the head of the Pictish Beast are apparently derived from the crested heads of dragonesque brooches of the first and second centuries AD, which were then grafted on to the body of a quadruped or hippocamp (Laing and Laing 1993, 120-21). Whilst plausible, this argument does not appear to go far enough and it is possible that the overall form of the Pictish Beast is in fact based entirely upon dragonesque brooches.

Dragonesque Brooches

The idea that the Pictish Beast symbol is derived from dragonesque brooches receives support from a number of pieces of evidence. The most basic is that in general terms of shape and appearance the main elements of the Pictish Beast are a reasonably close approximation of a dragonesque brooch [Figure 1].

Figure 1: A to C Dragonesque brooches; D Mortlach 2 symbol; E to G Pictish Beasts [Based mainly upon Allen and Anderson 1903, vol III and Kilbride-Jones 1980].



As a piece of high status metalwork of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, the dragonesque brooch is a likely candidate for the origin of a Pictish symbol as many other symbols appear to be based on metalwork of this date (Thomas 1963). The body of the Pictish Beast is infilled with interlace, fretwork or spirals. This makes it similar to symbols that are either based on objects or are abstract rather than animal symbols (Allen and Anderson 1903, vol I lxiii). It is therefore almost certain that those who carved the symbols did not think of the Pictish Beast as an animal- based symbol.

Another possible piece of supporting evidence is a symbol on the Mortlach 2 stone [Figure 1D], described in the stone's original publication as *'hitherto unrecorded and I am unable to hazard even a conjecture as to what it may represent'* (Simpson 1926: 274-78). This symbol was so unusual that Henderson failed to list it in her catalogue of symbols, recording only the Pictish Beast on the stone above it (1958, 58) and the RCAHMS catalogue describes it simply as a *'curvilinear symbol'* (1994, 13). This symbol has been identified as either a dragonesque brooch (Thomas 1963, 57), or a uniquely shaped version of a symbol known as the ogee (Mack 1997, 103). This identification as an ogee appears unlikely and Thomas's identification is more plausible. The striking thing about the symbol on Mortlach 2 is its similarity

in alignment and overall form to the Pictish Beast symbol above it; with projections corresponding to the head, tail and upper and lower limbs of the Pictish Beast identifiable. The relationship is so close that it seems impossible to escape the conclusion that for some reason the carver of the Mortlach 2 stone is depicting the Pictish Beast symbol and its origins.

Dragonesque brooches are S-shaped pieces of jewellery depicting double headed animals with large upstanding ears and curled snouts that appear to date from between the mid first and later second centuries AD (Bulmer 1938; Feachem 1951 and 1968; Johns 1996, 151-53; Kilbride-Jones 1980, 170-83; MacGregror 1976, vol 1 127-29). Their distribution is concentrated in northern England and southern Scotland, with the closest examples to the area of the Pictish symbols being six from Traprain Law. Although none have been found further north, several other types of artefact that Pictish symbols are based upon, such as mirrors (Cessford 1997) or cauldrons (Cessford 2001), are also completely or largely absent from the area where the symbols are found. If dragonesque brooches are the origin of the Pictish Beast symbol then this raises the question what animal do the brooches depict? Unfortunately it is impossible to tell if they are based on a real or mythical creature, although if it is a real animal, then the most likely candidate is believed to be a hare (Johns 1996, 152). It has been suggested that the double headed form of an Anglo-Saxon S-shaped brooch of the late 5th or early 6th century from Lakenheath in Suffolk may partly derive from the dragonesque brooch tradition (Briscoe 1968). If this is the case then it suggests that rare examples may have remained in circulation for a long time, or that some were perhaps rediscovered when earlier sites were disturbed.

CONCLUSION

It seems likely the Pictish Beast symbol originated as a depiction of a dragonesque brooch given their overall similarities and the clues that it is not an animal symbol. The similarity between it and sea mammals such as dolphins and beaked whales is, however, unlikely to be entirely fortuitous. Perhaps as dragonesque brooches went out of use and faded from memory the general form of the symbol was enough to suggest dolphins and the meaning was altered, as seems to have occurred for instance with some mirror symbols (Cessford 1997). Why this should have happened is uncertain, dolphins were an attribute of Neptune and Venus in the Classical world and were frequently shown on funerary monuments, including some in Northern Britain. Later they were adopted as a Christian symbol because of their role on pagan funerary monuments. In Early Christian art they have a dual nature, with a fish element symbolising Christians and Christ and a whale element relating to Jonah, whose story prefigures Christ's death and resurrection. If either the Classical or Christian overtones of this animal were appropriate to the meaning of the Pictish Beast symbol then the transition from being based on a dragonesque brooch to being based on a sea mammal would have been much easier. It is also possible that dolphins had a pre-existing local significance in the beliefs of northern Scotland that could have played a role. Certainly there is evidence from bones recovered from archaeological sites that various sea mammals were known to the inhabitants of the area (Mulville 2002).

As one of the most common of the Pictish symbols, the origins of the Pictish Beast are of particular significance and while certainty in such matters is impossible. the dragonesque brooch appears to be the most likely candidate.

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Pit- names and the Culdees

Bob Henery

CLASS II SYMBOL STONES AND Pit- NAMES

It is well known that *Pit-* place-names occur in that area of Scotland where Class II Pictish symbol stones are found. This fact is often used by place name scholars to link *Pit-* names to the Picts, and hence to the Pictish language. Though there is general agreement between the two distributions, there is no strong link between the two at a local level, however. For example, there are very few Class II stones in Fife, yet Fife has the highest concentration of *Pit-* place names. In our search for the local factors underlying the use of *Pit-* as a place name element, let us start by identifying the areas that have the strongest concentrations of *Pit-* names. The four strongest clusters of *Pit-* names are near to the towns of Abernethy, Dundee, St Andrews and Brechin, the clusters containing 20, 15, 11 and 11 *Pit-* name places respectively. What do these centres have in common that might explain the local abundance of *Pit-* names? It turns out that all except Dundee are places where Culdees were strongest around 1050 AD, and the prime example is Abernethy.

The largest single cluster of *Pit-* place names is around Abernethy, with about 20 *Pit-* place names within a 10 km (about 6 miles) radius. What is so special about Abernethy that would make it the strongest centre of *Pit-* place names? The answer is that Abernethy was perhaps the strongest centre of the Culdee church. Brechin is known as another important Culdee centre, and this too has many *Pit-* place names in the vicinity, though there are only about 9 within a 10 km radius. Of course, at one time or another, Culdees were established over much of modern Scotland, and references can be found to isolated Culdees in places as far apart as Iona, Applecross, Lesmahagow and Dornoch. But by the 11th century, the cult was dying out, and Culdee communities were confined to a narrow region within Pictland. According to Easson (1957) there were only seven "Houses of Culdees" in existence after about 1050AD. The number of *Pit* place names within a 10 km radius of these Houses is as follows: Abernethy 20, Brechin 9, Loch Leven 8, Monifieth 6, Monymusk 6, Muthill 9, and St Andrews 9. The sites of these seven Culdee Houses are shown in the map below as solid circles. They lie in the counties of Fife, Perth, Angus and Aberdeen. Of course, this happens to be the region of Scotland in which *Pit-* place names are most abundant.

The same map shows the centres of the 12 strongest clusters of *Pit-* names in Scotland, plotted as open circles (of diameter 10 km approximately). These clusters have a certain minimum size (9) and strength (all points within a cluster are close to each other). They have been formed, in reasonably objective fashion, from all the *Pit-* names that appear in the charters. It will be noted the distribution of *Pit-* name clusters is also restricted to Fife, Perth, Angus and Aberdeen, with an outlying cluster in Kincardine. More importantly, each Culdee House is close to a *Pit-* name cluster. This suggests that *Pit-* place names have their origins in estates owned by Culdee Houses, more specifically, Culdee Houses in existence around the beginning of the 11th century.

The awkward cases are of two kinds.

(1) Some Culdee Houses have relatively few Pit- names in the vicinity. For example, Monifieth is not close to a strong *Pit-* cluster, though there are 6 *Pit-* names in the neighbourhood. Similarly, there are relatively few *Pit-* places in the immediate vicinity of St Andrews (say a 4 km radius), though there is a strong cluster nearby, to the south. The charters mention several *Pit-* places belonging to St Andrews that cannot now be traced, among which are *Pethwwenethe* and *Pettenduen*.

(2) Some *Pit-* clusters are not near any of the seven named Culdee Houses. The second strongest *Pit-* name cluster (with 15 *Pit-* names) lies to the west of Dundee, as far as Coupar Angus, and there is no obvious candidate for a House of Culdees there, unless it be Monifieth 10 km to the east of Dundee. Yet this is not an unreasonable association. There is a strong concentration of *Pit-* names running all the way from Coupar Angus to Dundee, passing just to the north of Monifieth, and extending a few miles further east of Monifieth. Associating Monifieth with this enlarged Coupar-Angus-Dundee-Monifieth cluster would solve two problems simultaneously, of course.

All four of the strongest *Pit-* name clusters can be identified with Culdee Houses. All seven Culdee Houses have many *Pit-* names in the vicinity. Other strong centres of *Pit-* names, such as Dunfermline and Scone, are not listed as Culdee Houses around 1050AD. There is also a weak cluster of *Pit-* names near *Pitlochry* (Blair Atholl), perhaps related to the *Pit-* names of that area mentioned in the founding charters of Dunfermline Abbey.

CONJECTURES AND CONSEQUENCES

That clusters of *Pit-* names are close to Culdee Houses is consistent with the conjecture that *Pit-* (more accurately *Pet-*) was a portion of monastic land that the Culdee monks tilled and/or got their peat from. This conjecture, if true, would allow us to infer the existence of Culdees in the immediate vicinity of a concentration of *Pit-* place names. There is the added inference that *Pit-* names were formed around or just before 1050AD. This is borne out by the earliest church charters, which date to the 11th or 12th centuries. In these charters there is a relatively high proportion of *Pit-* place names, and these *Pit-* names are often listed together as if linked in some way. For example, in a charter of 1125 by King David to the Church of Dunfermline, the three *Pit-* names *Pethnaurcha, Petcorthin, Petbachelin* are listed one after another. Also, *Pit-* names at this time are phrases rather than words. Thus *Pett meic Gobroig, Pett Maelduib* and *Pett meic Garnait* occur in the 11th century Book of Deer.

To explain why the dreaded letter *P* is used, we can look to the language of the Culdees, rather than the language of the Picts. Latin would be the dominant influence, of course, but it seems that the Culdees preached the gospel in the local language, so they might have picked up a Pictish element that was retained in the local language. In any case, it seems that they did use *pit-* as meaning portion. There is a footnote in Watson's book(1986) to the effect that the word *pit* was used in (early) monastic discipline as meaning portion or share (of food I believe). It would be natural also to use *Pit* to mean a monk's portion of land, though place-name evidence suggests that *Pet-* was the word for a portion of land. Monk's portions are mentioned in a charter of 1592 from the Calendar of Fearn, where the reference is to portions of ground given to pensioned-off monks.

We should also expect the specifics of these names to reflect their church origins. We give an example close to Monymusk. *Pitcaple* is part of a cluster of about 9 *Pit-* names that includes *Pitscurry, Pitbee, Pittodrie* and *Pitmedden.* Though this *Pitcaple* cluster is only about 10 km to the north of the Culdee House at Monymusk, it may have been associated with a separate church, namely the *Chapel of Garioch.* If true, it is likely that the place name *Pitcaple* meant *Pit-of-the-chapel* when first formed. Macdonald (1899) gives the derivation *Pet caibeil,* "Chapelton", adding "It is in the parish, and near to the Chapel of Garioch, in connection with which was the chaplainry of *Pitcaple*, and a croft of land for the chaplain". Macdonald gives the earliest reference to *Pittodrie* as *Pettochery* (1355-7), translating the latter as *Pett uachdarach,* "upper town". More likely the name derives from Old Irish *tochar* "causeway", since the Maiden Causeway is an ancient track leading from Chapel of Garioch to Bennachie (past *Pittodrie* and *Pitmeddan* on the way). Following Watson (1986), most authors translate *Pitcaple* as *Pit-of-the-horse,* and offer no translation for *Pittodrie.*

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Sir Daniel Wilson and Pictish Art

Lloyd Laing

The career of Sir Daniel Wilson (1816-1892), and his role in the Scottish Enlightenment, has been the subject of recent and perceptive appreciation by Bruce Trigger, who has described him as 'the English-speaking world's first scientific archaeologist' (1992, 55), as well as by Douglas Simpson (1963). Although largely ignored by later scholars of prehistoric archaeology in Scotland, among them Joseph Anderson and Gordon Childe, Wilson not only seems to have been the first person to use the term 'prehistory' (though this has been debated), but to have followed a much more enlightened tradition of thinking about prehistoric societies than many of his contemporaries, such as John Lubbock.

Wilson's great study of early Scotland first appeared in Edinburgh as *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* in 1851. Two years later he left his homeland to take up the post of Professor of History and English Literature in the University of Toronto, rising to become President of the University in 1887. The second edition of his work, renamed *The Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, appeared in two volumes in 1863, published by Macmillan in London, the first volume covering the period down to the inception of the Iron Age (Wilson followed the Scandinavian archaeologists Christian Thomsen and Jens Worsaae in classifying his material in line with the 'Three Age System'), the second carrying the story through to the sixteenth century. It is easy to forget that Wilson's book, despite its title, was not confined to prehistory - it amounted to the first (and still the last!) single survey of Scottish archaeology ever published.

It is notable that Wilson chose to decorate the spine of his book with a West Highland cross slab, and the front cover with a crescent and v-rod and double-disc and z rod in an ornamental frame: the symbols were based on those on Rosemarkie 1, and reflect his interest in early medieval art in Scotland.

By the time he was writing the second edition of his book, he was able to draw upon the first volume of Stuart's *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, (1856) (vol.2 did not appear until 1867). Wilson was a skilled draughtsman, having been at one time a professional engraver (Trigger, 1992, 58), and drew detailed and generally accurate illustrations (there are 240 illustrations including 25 steel engraved plates in the two volumes of the second edition). His engraving of the Hunterston Brooch is superior to many published subsequently.

Wilson's review of the Early Christian period was extensive, and his treatment of the art spread out over three chapters, on 'Sculptured Standing-Stones', 'The Norrie's Law Relics' and 'Scotto-Scandinavian Relics'.

Wilson adopted a commonsense approach to the Pictish symbol stones. He distinguished between the incised monuments of Class I and the relief sculptures of classes II-III, arguing that the incised symbol stones were earlier than the relief-decorated monuments. The latter he saw as contemporary with early medieval manuscripts, most notably the book of Kells, and with Irish metalwork such as the Breac Maodhoc (he calls it the Shrine of St Medoc), which he followed Petrie in dating no earlier than the eighth century and on which he saw parallels for some of the interlace on Pictish stones. He seems to have been the first to argue that the bosses on Aberlemno 3 and 'one of the Meigle crosses' were derived from metalwork (though he suggested shield bosses), and drew attention to the same feature on a cross near Maughold in the Isle of Man. His arguments that the relief decorated stones had close parallels with monuments in Ireland led him to believe that they were evidence for 'contemporary intercourse between Scotland and Ireland', and he suggested this pre-dated the erection of the Irish High Crosses which he saw (following George Petrie) as later, and of the tenth century.

Fig.1 The cover of the second edition of *The Prehistoric Annals of Scotland,* (1863), and the plate (XVII) showing the Hunterston brooch.

Wilson seems to have been the first to identify the creators of these works as the Picts specifically, on the grounds that they were not found in the 'Scotic kingdom', and were different generally to the monuments of the Iona School (1863, 219). He discussed the overall distribution of Pictish stones and their almost total absence from southern Scotland, with the exception of the Anwoth carvings and the stone from Edinburgh, concluding that any Viking explanation for them was absurd, since there was nothing comparable in Scandinavia.

On the subject of the meaning of the symbols, Wilson was not surprisingly cautious. He quoted the then-fashionable view that they could be related to Gnostic symbolism, but concluded that 'we look in vain for the secret signs of its perfection, or for any well-defined symbols of Gnostic philosophy among the northern Picts' (1863, 225). His view was that the symbols were connected with pagan Pictish belief. 'Nothing appears to be more clearly indicated by the monumental evidence, confirmed as it is by the remarkable sepulchral disclosure of Norrie's Law, than that its peculiar symbolism preceded that of the new faith' (1863, 225). He saw that their later conjunction with Christian symbols meant that the Christians had adapted pagan motifs to a Christian end, suggesting that they went so far as 'even adapting to the new worship some of the most popular Pagan rites'. He argued that a parallel to the use of the symbols in this way could be seen in the manner stones from megaliths were incorporated into churches (1863, 226-7).

He attempted to identify the 'objects' that he saw depicted as symbols, drawing attention to mirror and comb as a female symbol, and drawing an analogy with the catacombs in Rome, where these were adjuncts of female burials. He pointed to the survival of the feature on the tombstone of the prioress Anna at Iona (1863, 228), which had a mirror and comb above her head. For the model for the mirror he pointed to the recently-found Balmaclellan exemplar, illustrating also the copper-alloy crescent from the same find, without however directly suggesting that it too could have been a model for a symbol (1863, 228-9). The 'Pictish beast' he suggested was in fact a walrus (1863, 230), and his discussion of the Pictish bestiary included a discourse on the camels at Meigle and A'Chill, Canna (1863, 231), as well as the repertoire of fantastic beasts. He was the first to see that the stones depicted details of Pictish life - he discussed the ship on St Orland's Stone, and the wheeled vehicle and bow on the lost Meigle 10 (1863, 233), commenting on the weaponry, fashion and subject matter of the stones. He pointed out that 'There is, moreover, a peculiar style running throughout the sculptures, and a certain action and contour in the figures and animals, which marks them with as distinctive a character as belongs to any medieval or modern school of art' (1863, 235). He discussed the hunting iconography of the St Andrews Sarcophagus, correctly ascribing it to the Picts (1863, 235-6).

Wilson was suitably sceptical of traditional explanations for the stones, quoting Boece's assertion that Meigle 1 was the monument of Queen Guinevere and the suggestion that Sueno's Stone commemorated the 'ejection of the Norsemen from the Scottish mainland' ; 'The traditions associated with those singular monuments, gathered directly from local traditions, or culled from the marvellous pages of monkish chroniclers, are equally contradictory and valueless as throwing any light on their origin' (1863, 234).

Wilson devoted some attention to inscriptions, including the enigmatic text on the Newton Stone and the assemblage of Pictish oghams, which he argued in some cases were secondary additions to the stones, notably at Scoonie and Goslpie. The Drosten stone, seen by Wilson as providing a clue to the Pictish language, was extensively discussed, Drosten being identified with Drust, king of the Picts who died in 729.

Wilson's discussion of Pictish art was not confined to sculptures. His survey of the Norrie's Law hoard was a balanced and valuable one - he noted that 'the person by whom the valuable hoard was purloined still resides, in good circumstances, at Pitlessie in Fife. Conscious as he is of the appropriation of treasure which was not his own, and not yet entirely free from apprehension of the interference of the Scottish Exchequer to reclaim the fruits of his ill-gotten wealth, he naturally declines much

communication on the subject... It may be permitted to us to reflect with some satisfaction, that by the fears thus excited, the depredator has not entirely escaped punishment for the irreparable mischief which his wretched cupidity has occasioned' (1863, 252-3). Wilson added materially to the account of the discovery published by Buist in 1839, referring to a coin of Valentinian I from the hoard and two further of Valens and Constantius II of which he had obtained drawings from Skene. He also made it clear that the bronze coins of Antonia and the Byzantine emperor (attributed by him to Tiberius Constantine) were not found in the hoard but in another collection, apparently dug up in 1822 nearby (for the Norrie's Law coin debate, Laing, 1994, 22-23).

Wilson published some discussion of major pieces of Celtic ornamental metalwork. He recognized that the Hunterston Brooch, despite its Viking runes, was not Viking, and published a series of hinged pins and stick pins which he attributed to the Viking Age. Perhaps his greatest achievement was in recognizing St Fillan's crozier in Canada, and arranging for it to be returned to Scotland by its Hereditary Keeper, to the National Museum of Antiquities, in 1877 (Simpson, 1963, 5).

Wilson's Plate XVIII illustrated three hinged pins, the Dunipace, Stirlingshire brooch, the unprovenanced brooch bought in Glasgow (for a recent account of these, Laing, 1993, nos. 104 and 105) and a third which Wilson had drawn in Canada, where he had been shown it by a farmer who had brought it from Ross-shire (1863, 313). Apart from its publication in 1863, it has attracted no further notice in discussions of Celtic metalwork. Fior that reason Wilson's engraving is reproduced here. The brooch belongs to an eighth to ninth-century series which Stevenson characterized as 'hinged pins', on which the pin does not move freely round the hoop but is hinged on a central bar. The classic example is the Westness, Rousay, brooch (Stevenson, 1987; 1989). Such brooches are found in Ireland as well as Scotland (for a series, Armstrong, 1922, pls. XII-XIII), but there is reason to believe the 'Ross-shire' brooch published by Wilson was a Pictish product. The distinctive feature of it is the central roundel with a ribbed border on the plate, clearly originally containing an inlay of glass or enamel. This element, which is echoed in the borders of the whole of the head, recalls the circular terminals on a series of Pictish penannular brooches of my Type Ja (Laing, 1993, 19), the closest parallel perhaps being provided by the Croy, Inverness brooch (Laing, 1993, no 51). To the best of my knowledge this design is not matched in the Irish series of hinged pins.

In a group of pins, Wilson also illustrated one which now appears to be lost, from Lunan Bay, Forfar (1963, pl. XIX, no 169). Wilson cited as a parallel one in the collection of the Royal Irish Academy, and an Irish origin for this ornate pin seems likely.

We should be grateful to Sir Daniel Wilson for putting the study of Pictish art on a sensible and sound footing, on which later scholars, notably Joseph Anderson and Romilly Allen, were to build so successfully.

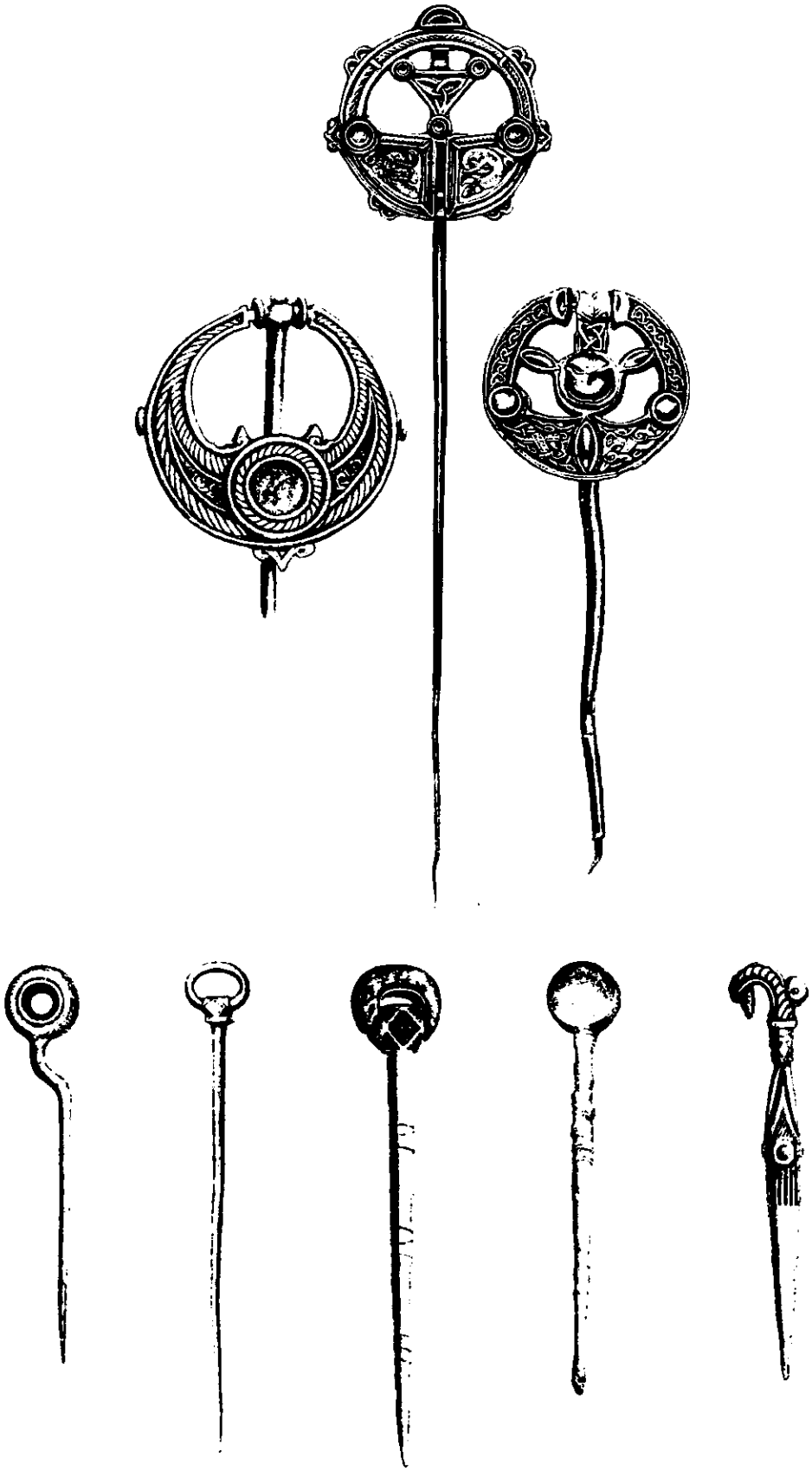

Fig 2. Plate XVIII (ring brooches) abd Plate XIX (stick pins) from *The Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (1863).

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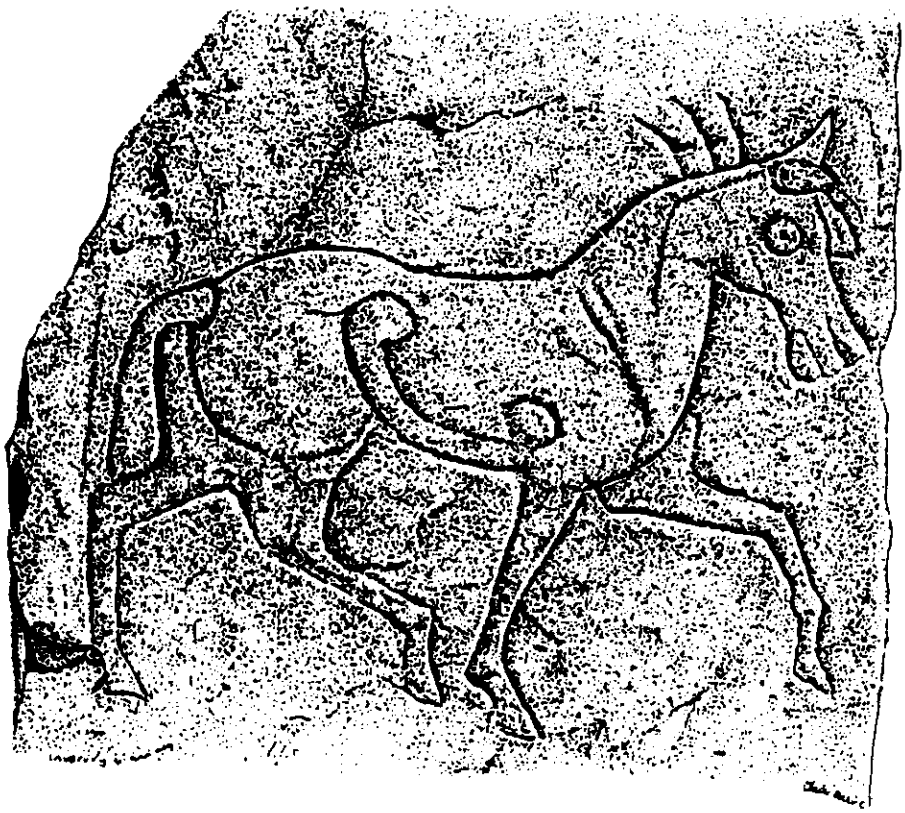


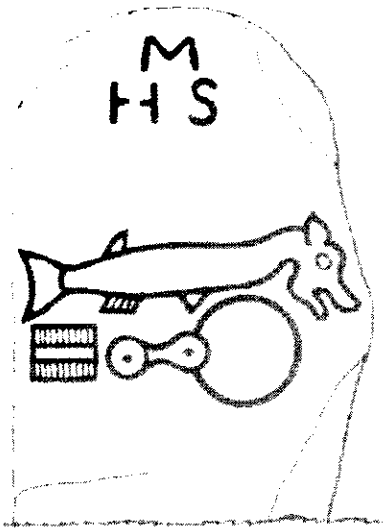
The *serpent* symbol on Upper Manbeen

Bob Henery

I believe that there is a *serpent* symbol on the upper half of **Upper Manbeen**, just about midway between the initials and the so-called "*fish-monster*". The *serpent* is quite clear to the naked eye, and the photo below demonstrates this reasonably clearly (the head of the serpent can clearly be seen on the right hand edge of the stone - just below the line of the 's'). There are also several photos in NMRS, by Tom Gray and others, that show the serpent just as clearly, yet it does not appear in Stuart's sketch of 1856 (plate xvii), nor in Romilly Allen's sketch of 1903 (ECMS Fig. 134). Stuart's sketch does at least show the head of the *serpent*, but the ECMS sketch shows nothing of it. Clearly the ECMS sketch is misleading in a number of ways. Most significantly, the ECMS sketch shows the "fish-monster" to be complete, but Stuart's sketch shows that flaking has already occurred between the "fish" and the "head".

There is a parallel with the **Newton House Ogam** stone, on which a *mirror* has recently been noted. As with **Upper Manbeen,** the newly noted symbol is relatively easy to spot, and is on a stone known to be Pictish or at least be of some antiquity. Yet these stones have been examined, photographed, sketched and rubbed many times, and by countless experts. If the experts can miss relatively clear symbols on such stones, what guarantee is there that they have not missed symbols on other stones? We can be reasonably confident that deeply incised symbols would not be missed. But what if all the carving on the stone is faint, or masked by lichen? Consider **Nether Corskie** for example. The symbols on this stone would have been unnoticed, but for the accident of a mangy horse using the stone as a rubbing post. The lower part of the stone was painted with hot lime to remove traces of the mange, and this had the fortunate side effect of removing the lichen, thus making the symbols visible. Had the symbols on **Nether Corskie** not been faint, it is probable that they would have been noted much earlier. Perhaps we should inspect, photograph and record **all** the standing stones in Scotland, especially those covered in lichen. Modern photographic methods, such as 3-D laser technology and digital imaging, should be used as they are less sensitive to colour information, and so are more effective at discovering symbols masked by lichen.

Stuart 1856



ECMS 1903

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