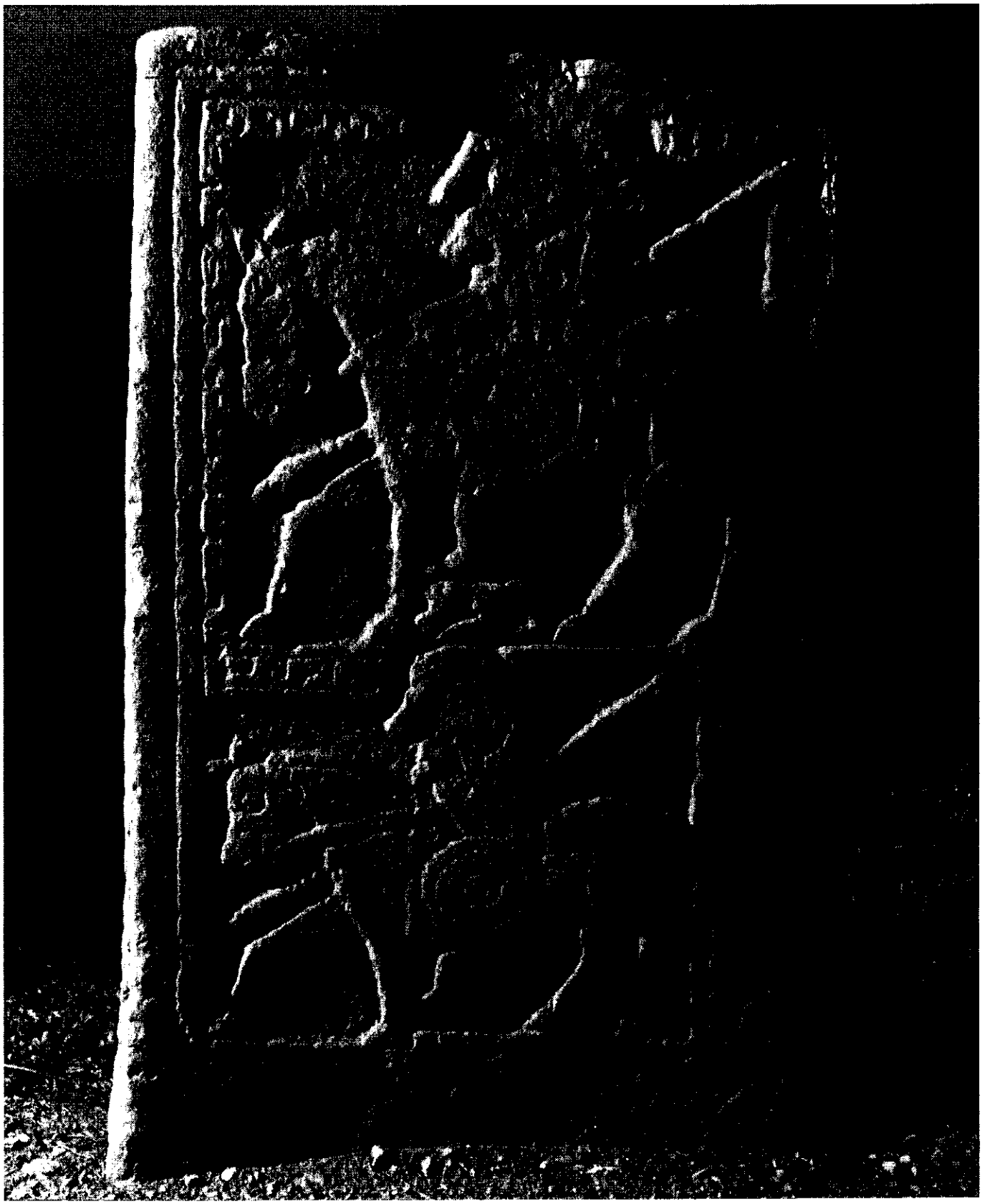
pictish arts society journal 13



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Is the Bestiary represented on the front of the Canna Cross?

Ian G Scott

In the course of fieldwork directed by my colleague Ian Fisher of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, I found myself on the island of Canna, in the Inner Hebrides, standing in front of a very large block of weathered stone erected in a field. The recording and drawing of this Canna Cross posed all sorts of problems, but here I would like to suggest a possible solution to just one of the iconographic puzzles.

At the top of the shaft of the east face of the Cross all the commentators on the sculpture have noticed an "animal", with another twisted around immediately underneath (Allen & Anderson 1903, III, 107-9, Fig 111). This face of the Cross is in high relief, in contrast to the very shallow relief of the reverse. The depth of the carving has allowed a more dramatic artistic presentation, but has not helped the preservation of the detail, or our understanding of it (Fig 1).

The lower of the animals with which we are concerned is twisted over on itself, its head engraved on its own body. The four legs are reasonably well preserved and there is fairly general agreement that we can here identify one of the otter or weasel/stoat family. Both the hind- and fore-quarters are finely drawn and an impressive exercise in modelling. The mid-back area, however, with the head resting on the chest, was not finished in the same way, nor outlined clearly, allowing only a rough drawing which is difficult to follow.

The animal above is in a much worse state, leading to almost complete puzzlement as to the intention of the ancient carver, to the extent of doubt even as to which way it is meant to be facing. I looked first at the legs. I can see only two, and they appear to be moving the creature to the right. The body is finished with an amorphous shape to the "rear", which I believe can be interpreted as the remains of a bunch of feathers, when considered with the head, which is large and appears to be "beaked". If conceived thus, it is facing towards the head of the lower animal.

This interpretation made me think of the cockatrice or basilisk in the Bestiary, and note that the left side is broken off behind the "feathers". Although impossible to prove, this does suggest the possibility that the creature had the King of Serpents' tail.

The apparent confrontation of the two carved beasts led me to investigate their association on a 14th century misericord in Worcester Cathedral (north side, 14th from east; see Laird 1986, pl 115). The story illustrated at Worcester is that of the weasel repelling the awful basilisk by means of the holy herb, rue.

Besides suggesting an identity for the animals, this story could also neatly explain the difficulty I had in drawing the back of the lower animal: if this was the weasel with rue in its mouth, the restoration of the branch of rue would solve my difficulty.

I can find no illustration of the basilisk as early as the probable date of this cross, and any help would be gratefully received.

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Fig. 1. Detail of the east face of the Canna Cross (Ian G Scott)

Tongs and 'Tuning Forks'

Craig Cessford

Tongs/pincers are among the rarer of the Pictish symbols: there are only two generally accepted examples, on the Dunfallandy cross-slab (Allen & Anderson 1903, III, 286-9), and on the Roskeen symbol stone (Ibid, 61). An examination of the so called 'tuning fork' or notched rectangle with curved end symbol (henceforth NRCE) on Kintore 3 (Ibid, 174-5) shows that it is in fact very similar to the tongs symbol. On Kintore 3 the NRCE is to the left of a double crescent and is almost vertical, with a slope from right at the top to left at the bottom. It has generally been accepted as a NRCE, rather than the tongs it more closely resembles, because there is only one other symbol on this stone, and tongs and other metalworking tools have been taken to be additional symbols which can only occur in addition to other symbol pairs. If Kintore 3 is a pair of tongs then it would be decidedly uncanonical. The Roskeen tongs, which Romilly Allen stated could be: 'either a pair of pincers or the tuning fork symbol' (Ibid, 61), are only directly associated with a single very worn symbol, possibly a crescent, whereas the third symbol, a step, is in fact on the other face of the stone (Fig 2).

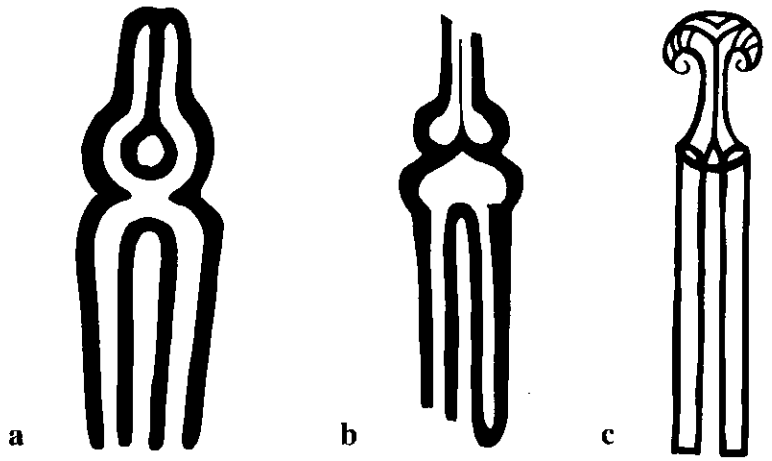

Fig. 2. Tong / Tuning Fork symbols from **a** Roskeen, **b** kintore and **c** Dunrobin (after J.R Allen).

The NRCE has been identified as a broken sword by Charles Thomas (1963, 52-3), Graeme Cruickshank (1990, 4), Lloyd and Jennifer Laing (1984, 269; 1993, 109-10), Sally Foster (1996, fig 46.e) and Alastair Mack (1997, 20). The case is put most forcefully by Cruickshank, who states that : 'The handle is close to proof' and argues that the fork effect is a: 'slightly exaggerated rendition of the fuller' (Cruickshank 1990, 4). Dissenting voices include E C I Fortescue who identifies it as a retting tool (1992, 16), Stuart Kermack, who believes that it was a beater for weaving (1997, 10), and Elizabeth Sutherland who thinks that it was a combination of three separate confused objects, a broken sword, a tuning fork and a pair of tongs (1994, 111; 1997, 16). As far as I am aware, the tuning fork was invented much later than the Pictish period, and there is no archaeological evidence for tools for retting or weaving that particularly resemble this symbol. With regard to the general theory that the NRCE represents a broken sword, there are serious weaknesses to the idea. If, as is almost universally accepted, the Z- and V-rods represent a broken spear and arrow respectively, by depicting them as bent, why is a broken sword not depicted by a bent blade, but rather by a divided one? This seems an inconsistent way of indicating that an object is broken. Another argument against the broken sword theory is that it bears little resemblance to the symbol at Trusty's Hill, Anwoth (Allen & Anderson 1903, III, 477-9) which *is* probably a sword.

If we turn our attention to the Abernethy 1 symbol stone (Ibid, 282), we have a horizontal line of hammer, NRCE and anvil/crucible over a crescent and V-rod. If the NRCE were in fact a pair of tongs, then the row of symbols would closely resemble the combination of hammer, tongs and anvil/crucible on Dunfallandy. The Abernethy 1 NRCE is of course placed vertically, rather than horizontally as at Dunfallandy, and is much larger than the hammer and anvil/crucible beside it. This could be explained by suggesting that the stone is depicting a 'double symbol', which is both the NRCE of the symbol pair of NRCE and crescent and V-rod, and the tongs of the 'metalworker's tool-kit' of hammer, tongs and crucible/anvil. The carver, who was aware that the NRCE was actually a depiction of a pair of tongs, was playing a visual pun, in a manner similar to St Madoes 1 (Cessford 1997), by combining the elements from two different groupings that he knew were in fact depictions of the same object. This would also explain why the hammer and anvil/crucible were split by the NRCE taking up the middle of the stone, which might make little sense if the three symbols were not related.

The Kintore 3 symbol stone suggests that the NRCE is in fact a pair of tongs. The only objection to this theory is the bulge at the head of the tongs, which is pelta like, and has usually been interpreted as the sword pommel. Of the other NRCE symbols, Kintradwell 4 (Allen & Anderson 1903, III, 45), Collace (Mack 1997, 93) and Tarbat 1 (Allen & Anderson 1903, III, 73-5) all consist of only the prongs of the NRCE and lack the head of the object. Craigton 1 and North Redhill, which Allen thought might possess NRCE symbols (Ibid, 41; 154-5) more probably show divided rectangles (Mack 1997, 104; 121). This leaves only Ardlair (Allen & Anderson 1903, III, 505-6), Dunrobin 1 (Ibid, 42) and Raasay (Richardson 1907) which, along with Abernethy 1, where the head of the figure has been partially removed, possess the developed head of the symbol. The Portsoy whetstone may well have a crude depiction of the NRCE symbol on it, as suggested by Lloyd and Jennifer Laing (1993, 119, Fig 92), although this is not certain, but in any case it is too crude to be of any assistance. Additionally, a non-Pictish stone from Kilmorie chapel in south-west Scotland also depicts a pair of tongs (Allen & Anderson 1903, III, 482-3). There are therefore a relatively small number of complete examples of the NRCE symbol. A comparison of these examples with the various swords known from archaeology does not appear to show a particularly close resemblance (MacGregor 1976, I, 77-92; II, 136-76). What if the head of the object is not part of the symbol at all, but is instead meant to indicate something else? This could be either some object that the tongs are holding or, more probably, it signifies the fire or heat that the tongs are plunged into. Indeed, the symbol as a whole could be intended to signify fire.

Iron tongs of a simple two piece construction are common finds on Irish sites of this period (Craddock 1989, 171, no 226; Edwards 1990, 88, fig 39c; Laing 1975, 294, fig 105.18). They closely resemble the tongs on Pictish stones and also, I believe, provide an acceptable parallel for the NRCE symbol. The form of tongs has in fact remained unchanged since the early Iron Age until the present date, so there are no typological variations which would allow us to determine the geographical or temporal origin of the symbol.

The evidence of Kintore 3, backed up slightly by the interpretation of Abernethy 1, suggests that the most likely identification for the NRCE symbol is in fact a pair of tongs. A three-stage sequence for the development of the symbol can be proposed:

Stage 1 Simple naturalistic pair of tongs, typified by Roskeen.
Stage 2 Intermediate stylised pair of tongs, as seen on Kintore 3.
Stage 3 Developed NRCE form with decorated head denoting 'fire', exemplified by Dunrobin 1.

If this is accepted, then the tongs were both the basis for a normal symbol and part of a group of additional 'metalworking symbols' which would be an interesting and possibly important juxtaposition. The two symbols, although based on the same object, may well have had different meanings, with one being part of a group related to metalworking and the other signifying fire.

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Hilton of Cadboll Rides Again

Craig Cessford

In earlier issues of the *PAS Journal* there was a lively discussion concerning the object that the female rider on the Hilton of Cadboll stone is carrying, with suggested identifications including a torc and a portable perch (Black 1993, 37-40; Cessford 1993, 41-2; Cessford 1994, 31-2; Trench-Jellicoe 1994, 1-7; Trench-Jellicoe 1995, 3-9). At the risk of re-igniting the argument, I would like to draw attention to a small first or second century AD stone statue from Alise-Ste.-Reine in Burgundy illustrated by Miranda Green in her book *Celtic Art: Reading the Messages* (Green 1996, 78-9, fig 50). This depicts the Celtic horse-goddess Epona seated side-saddle and holding what is probably a torc. While there are obvious differences between the Alise-Ste.-Reine statue and the Hilton of Cadboll carving (for instance, the fact that they are riding in opposite directions), I believe that the similarities are striking enough to suggest that both female riders fall within the same broad iconographic tradition and that the Cadboll woman is therefore carrying a torc. If accepted, this has implications for the status of the Pictish rider, as she is portrayed in a manner befitting a goddess. It is also an interesting parallel for the possible Cernunnos figure on Meigle 22, who may be wearing a torc around his neck (Cessford 1993, 41): both the Hilton of Cadboll and Meigle 22 depictions of torcs appear to be based on much older Celtic models linked to divine figures.

Green's book is an interesting and well-illustrated attempt to explore: 'Celtic art as a reflection of its society and an investigation of whether it is possible to decipher some of the coded messages that may well be present' (Green 1996, 11). At times these attempts seem a touch simplistic, and are in my opinion ultimately largely unsuccessful. Nonetheless it is well-written and makes a number of intriguing suggestions. The Picts only figure very briefly (*Op cit*, 163, 165) and the less said about the description of the symbol on Meigle 5 as a 'mirror' the better.

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'Reverse Order' Crescent and V-Rods

Alastair Mack

The crescent and V-rod is among the most familiar of Pictish symbols: it is the most commonly occurring, there being 86 known examples (Mack 1997, 2). Of these, 66 are on Class I symbol stones or fragments, 20 on Class II cross-slabs, and the distribution of the 79 monuments (62/17) almost exactly matches the overall symbol stone distribution (Ibid, xii-xiii).

Nevertheless, what the crescent and V-rod represents is unknown. The crescents, although usually containing internal designs or patterns, may originate from some lunar symbol (Thomas 1963, 58) or, less likely, may be circular shields seen from the side, or may perhaps be memories of ancient lunula-like badges. Stevenson stated that: 'the Crescent ... resemble[s] nothing real' (1955, 99), and although the various designs within the crescent are surely secondary, he concentrated his discussion on the internal designs (Ibid, 106).

More certain is the meaning of the V-rod. This appears to be a representation of a bent or broken arrow. The simple and very plain crescent and V-rod on the Wester Balblair stone (Cameron 1969) shows this particularly clearly (Fig 3). The left end of its V-rod is very flight-like: semi-circular in shape and divided by the end part of the 'shaft'. The right terminal is a pointed leaf-shape and is not divided: it does look just like an arrowhead. Thomas, although writing six years before the discovery of the Wester Balblair stone, considered the V-rod to be a representation of a bent or broken arrow (1963, 52). One could therefore assume that the 'crescent' is meant to be a bow, but this seems unlikely. Whether the crescent is decorated or plain, its lower line is almost without exception an arc; a bow-string *per se* would surely be a chord.

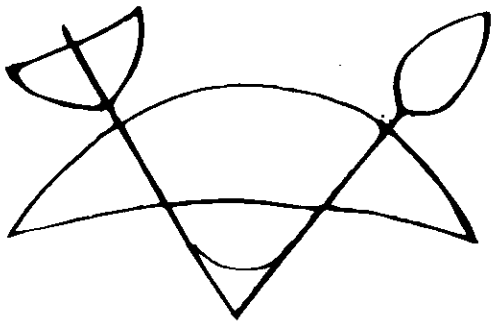

Fig. 3. The Wester Balblair crescent and V-rod (A Mack).

There are more than twenty Class I crescent and V-rods with both terminals still complete or nearly so, and all but one, the huge symbol on the Craigton standing stone (Allen & Anderson 1903, 41) have one rod-end clearly 'flighted' and the other 'pointed' or 'headed' (Fig 4). There are nearly thirty others with one rod-end still distinguishable, and apart from two or three of odd shape, these surviving rod-ends are either 'flights' or 'points'. Almost all differ from the Wester Balblair example in that the rod-ends are curlicued immediately below the 'flights' and 'points', but this seems to be no more than a decorative addition. The Class I V-rod <u>does</u> have the features of a bent or broken arrow.

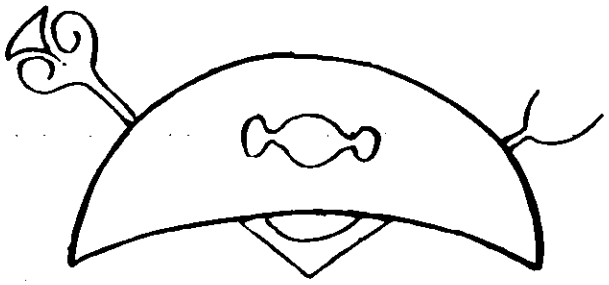

Fig. 4. The Craigton crescent and V-rod (A Mack).

Although some of the Class II examples have twin-pointed V-rods and others have stubs or uncertain devices rather than 'flights' or 'points', a fair proportion have a 'flight' at one end of the V-rod and a 'point' at the other. These are like the great majority of Class I crescent and V-rods with recognisable V-rod ends - and almost all of the pointed and flighted Class II examples have something else in common with the majority of their Class I counterparts: the left rod-ends are 'flights' and the 'points' are on the right. However, in both Classes, there are exceptions where the opposite applies.

Four Class I crescent and V-rods are known with what are or seem to be 'reverse order' rod-ends (Fig 5). These are Advie, Finlarig, Inverallan and Lynchurn (Allen & Anderson 1903, 101, 101-2, 105; Joass 1906, 346-7). The Inverallan crescent and V-rod, which has a curlicued arrowhead as its left rod-end and a curlicued set of flights as its right, is the only complete example, but what remains or remained of the others apparently showed the same rod-end order. Although only the left half of the symbol survives on the Finlarig and Advie fragments, Finlarig's visible rod-end is pointed, and the rubbing made by Joass of the Advie stone shows that its was also. An 1873 sketch of the subsequently defaced Lynchurn fragment (Allen & Anderson 1903, fig 109, 105) shows that what remained of its only surviving symbol, a crescent and V-rod, had no visible left-hand rod-end, but had a 'flighted' right-hand end. Advie's and Lynchurn's rod-ends were also curlicued; Finlarig's is reverse-curlicued.

These four symbol stones or fragments, all found within a few kilometres of each other,[1] are not only from the same Highland administrative area, Badenoch and Strathspey, but were, until 1997, the only known monuments in the area to bear the crescent and V-rod symbol. Before the Ballintomb stone (Fig 6) came to light in that year,[2] all Badenoch and Strathspey's crescent and V-rods had 'reverse-order' rod-ends. This reverse order seems to have been, at least on Class I stones, a very local custom, peculiar to Badenoch and Strathspey alone. Despite this, the internal designs of the decorated crescent and V-rods from the area all differ.

The 'reverse-order' of V-rod ends is a practice even more localised in the Class II period. Under the floor of the old kirk at Rosemarkie[3] were found two of the pieces which make up the great Rosemarkie Class II cross-slab (Allen & Anderson 1903, 63-8). On the upper part are two complete crescent and V-rods with a Z-rod between them and the remains of a third crescent and V-rod above. The central crescent and V-rod is conventionally left-hand 'flighted' and right-hand 'pointed', but the V-rod ends of the lowest crescent are, like four out of five of the Badenoch and Strathspey examples, 'flighted' and 'pointed' in reverse order. Not only that, but a recently discovered fragment, thought to be the upper left corner of the back of the cross-slab, contains a point. If, as seems very probable, the new fragment is the cross-slab's upper corner, this 'point' would have been the left-hand end of the incomplete crescent and V-rod. It is therefore likely that this symbol too was left-hand 'pointed' and right-hand 'flighted'.

The Rosemarkie stone is unique among surviving cross-slabs or cross-slab fragments bearing the crescent and V-rod, in that it has certainly one and probably two crescent and V-rods with V-rod ends in 'reverse order'.

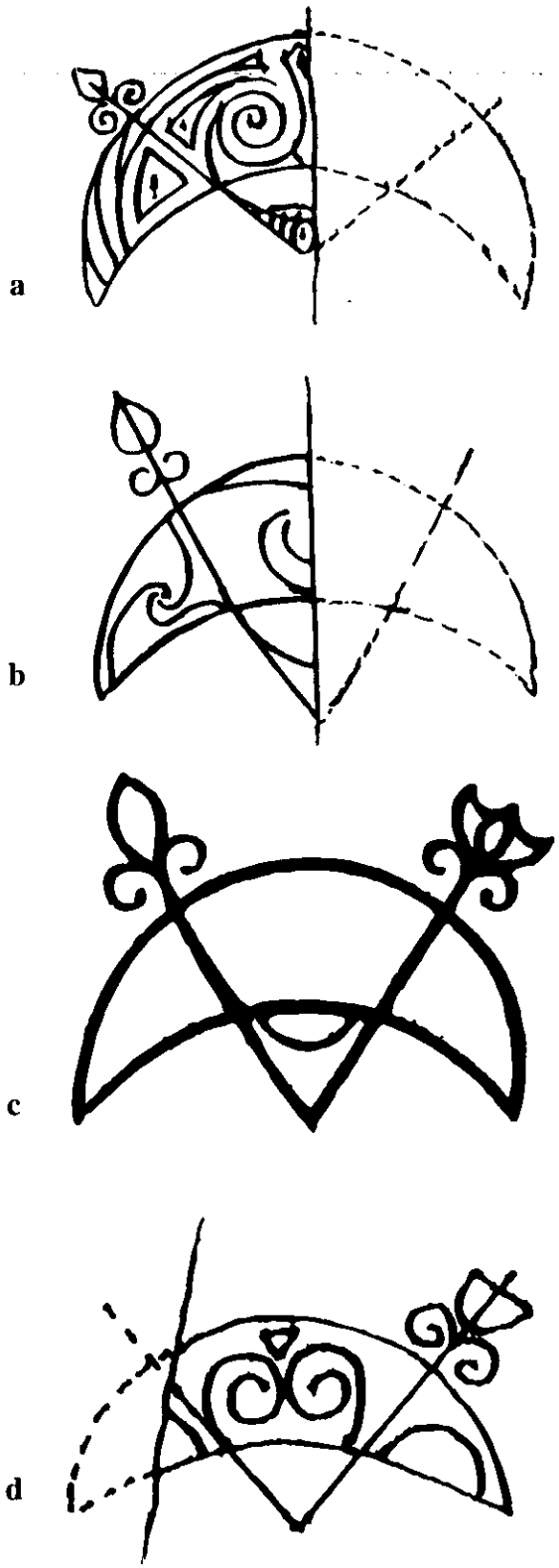

Fig. 5. The four Badenoch and Strathspey 'reverse order' crescent and V-rods: **a** Advie **b** Finlarig **c** Inverallan **d** Lynchurn (A Mack).

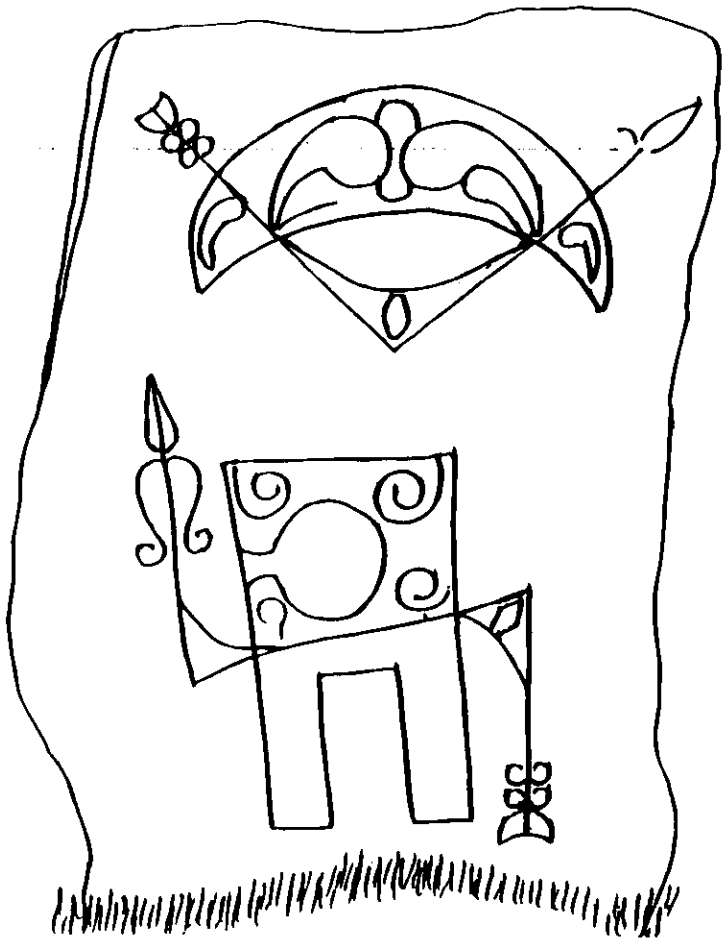

Fig. 6. A sketch of the Ballintomb symbol stone (A Mack).

There are no other such crescent and V-rods, and in Class I there are only the four Badenoch and Strathspey examples. There are two more apparent contestants but both are almost certainly dismissible. Although J R Allen's drawing of the west face of the Dingwall stone seems to give the impression that the lower of its pair of crescent and V-rods is left-hand pointed (Allen & Anderson 1903, fig 55,57), a close examination of the stone shows otherwise. What remains of the rod-end above the curlicue is splayed away from the line of the left arm of the V-rod; it is almost undoubtedly one side of a set of 'flights' (Fig 7). The second, also perhaps favoured by avid readers of *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, is the crescent and V-rod on the Brandsbutt stone (Allen & Anderson 1903, 506, fig 551). Only one rod-end, the left-hand one, can be seen in the ECMS photograph, and it appears to be a lateral oval with a point above it. However, in Fig 8 all the surviving parts of the stone are shown, and the right-hand rod-end is visible. Above reversed curlicues is a large leaf-shaped 'point'; in comparison, the oval seems to be a corrupt form of 'flights'. The only known Class I crescent and V-rods with left-hand 'points' and right-hand 'flights' are the Badenoch and Strathspey four; the only similar Class II example is on Rosemarkie 1. This 'reverse-order' custom embraces no more than 6% of all known crescent and V-rods, and it occurs in only a small area of Pictland. Its purpose is as obscure as the meaning of the symbol itself.

Fig. 7. Dingwall symbol stone, west face (A Mack).

NOTES

1 At NJ 142 353 (Advie), NH 991 254 (Finlarig), NJ 027 260 (Inverallan) and NH *c*953 206 (Lynchurn).

2 The Ballintomb stone (Mack 1998, 40-1) is shown in Fig 6 . Its crescent and V-rod, which is internally decorated with the commonest of the accepted patterns, the dome-and-wing, has the left-hand rod-end 'flighted' and the right 'pointed'. The 'flights' are U-shaped, are divided by the rod, and have two sets of curlicues below them; the right-hand rod ends with a worn but long leaf-shaped point which is not apparently divided and has below it the remains of a single curlicue on the left side. It is likely that both V-rod ends were virtual replicas of the Z-rod terminals of Ballintomb's other symbol, the uniquely decorated divided rectangle and Z-rod. Not only is the latter's right-hand (lower) Z-rod end a U-shaped and divided 'flight' with two sets of curlicues before it, but the left-hand (upper) has a leaf-shaped head similar in size and shape to the V-rod 'point'. The Z-rod head or 'point' is complete, and may show what the V-rod's worn end was like. The Z-rod head is clearly divided and below it are two long and spiral-ended curlicues. The 'flighted' ends of both rods are certainly replicas of each other; the worn V-rod end may have been as exact a replica of the Z-rod's 'pointed' end.

3 Not so very distant from Badenoch and Strathspey at NH 737 576.

Fig. 8. Brandsbutt symbol stone (A Mack).

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Crieff Cross-Slab

Mark Hall

On 28 and 29 September 1998 the Crieff Burgh Cross, in origin an early medieval cross-slab, was lifted from the position it has occupied for many years within railings in a roofed shelter on the north side of Crieff High Street as part of a larger project to conserve it, the Drummond Cross and the town stocks, to ensure their continued survival in the face of severe weathering. All three pieces, after being conserved in Edinburgh, will return to Crieff in Spring 1999. They will go on display in the refurbished wing of the Old Town Hall (now the Tourist Information centre) with improved interpretation. The work on the Burgh Cross is being carried out by Graciela Ainsworth, and the whole project is a co-operative venture between Perth Museum and Art Gallery (Perth and Kinross Council), Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust and the National Heritage Lottery Fund.

A valuable result of the removal of the Burgh Cross was the discovery that the rear face of the stone is not completely defaced, as formerly thought, but has a surviving fragment of sculpture at the very bottom, not visible in its former position as it was concealed by the stone base, of relatively recent origin, in which the cross-slab was erected.

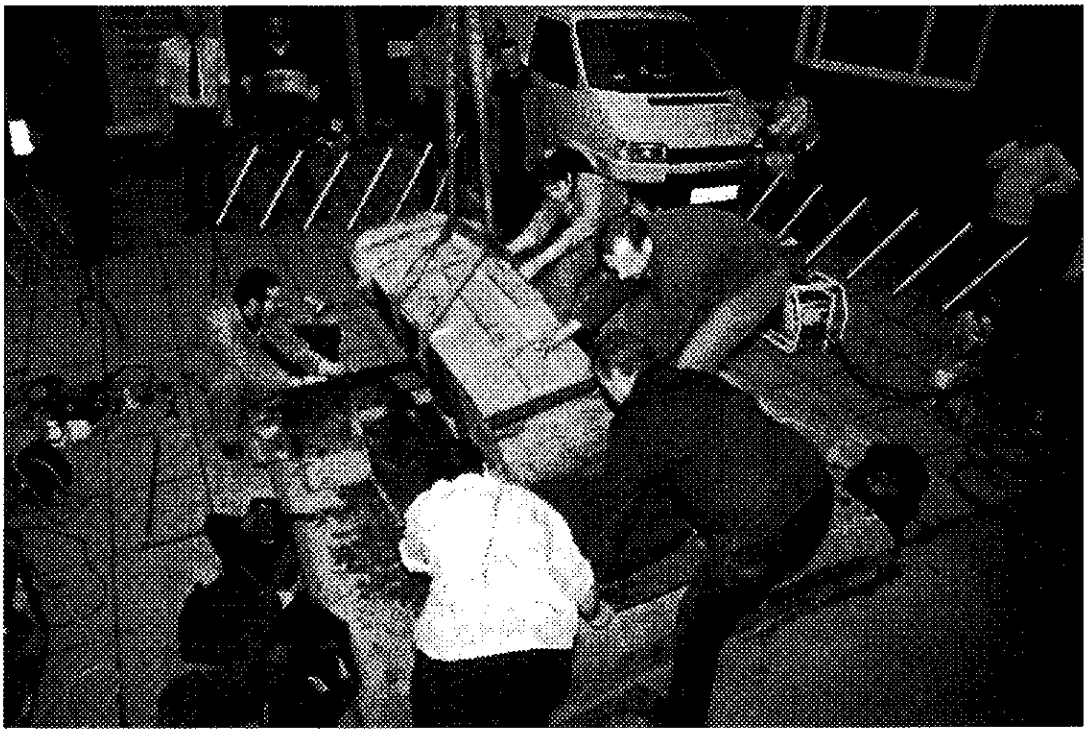


Fig. 9. The removal of the Crieff cross-slab, September 1998 (Mark Hall, Perth Museum and Art Gallery).

BOOK REVIEWS

The St Andrews Sarcophagus: A Pictish Masterpiece and its International Connections edited by Sally M Foster (Four Courts Press, Dublin 1998). 287 ps. HB, £45.00. ISBN 1 85182 414 6. PB, £14.95. ISBN 1 85182 415 4.

This is the first book to concentrate solely on the St Andrews Sarcophagus, one of the outstanding pieces of 'Pictish' sculpture. It consists of a number of papers by leading scholars, first presented at a conference organised jointly by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and Historic Scotland. The event was held in the Royal Museum of Scotland on 27 September 1997, where the delegates were able to view the Sarcophagus on its safe return from temporary exhibition in the British Museum. Before it was sent south, the opportunity was taken to clean and conserve the monument, and a detailed examination of the disassembled Sarcophagus by scholars took place at Historic Scotland's conservation laboratory.

Despite the complex technical nature of some of the papers, the book is very readable. This should allow a greater understanding to grow about what has been described as: 'one of the most fascinating and beautiful monuments of pre-Romanesque art in Europe' (Henderson 1972, 126-7). I have approached this review as an interested layman, since I can claim no real art historical or other expertise.

Sally Foster and the publishers are to be congratulated on the timely production of this seminal work at a reasonable price: £14.95 for 287 well-illustrated pages (paperback). The indexing is adequate, and a nice feature in the bibliography is that all references specifically about the Sarcophagus are in bold.

The first three papers deal with the Sarcophagus itself. Isabel Henderson's first paper: 'Descriptive catalogue of the surviving parts of the monument' describes it in detail. The standard of illustration is good, the choice of line drawings making for clarity of detail, though it can be a little frustrating to have to refer to other parts of the book for some of the illustrations while reading the descriptions.

Sally Foster then gives an excellent and informative paper about the 'Discovery, recovery, context and display' of the monument. She sets the scene for several of the subsequent discussion papers by thoroughly reviewing the history of the finding and the various reconstructions of the monument. For me, the crux of her discussion is her covering of the significance of the find spot, deep below the surface of the burial ground between St Rule's Tower and the east gable of the Cathedral. She reviews the evidence for the origins of the Early Christian monastic site at Kirkhill, bringing out the significance of the Sarcophagus' recovery in an area which has produced several ninth century and later grave-slabs.

Sally also postulates that St Andrews was a Pictish royal site, originally founded in the eighth century by Onuist/Óengus son of Uurguist/Fergus. In a later chapter Dauvit Broun discusses both the problem of the Dál Riata kinglists (with their possible Pictish king insertions), and the fact that there are clear links between Pictland, Dál Riata and even Northumbria.

In addition, Stephen Driscoll examines the Sarcophagus' archaeological context. While little of his article actually discusses St Andrews itself (a disappointment), his ideas, drawn from other Pictish royal sites such as Forteviot, Scone and Dupplin, give a perspective usefully different from the art historical approaches. Driscoll argues that the Sarcophagus was commissioned as a symbol of a king's relationship with St Andrews, ie to emphasise the royal ecclesiastical role. This in turn reflected a number of changes in society, whereby there was a shift from fortified hilltops to unfortified 'palace' sites, along with a change in patronage to the embellishment of churches and ecclesiastical sites.

The final section of Sally's article deals with the contentious area of the best way to reconstruct the Sarcophagus, since its dismantling allowed a reappraisal of previous interpretations. This links nicely to Richard Welander's interesting technical paper on the conservation and preservation of the stone slabs making up the Sarcophagus.

In form, the Sarcophagus belongs to the unusual group of monuments known as corner post shrines, briefly discussed in Charles Thomas' paper in the book. Here he reiterates previous discussions where he put the St Andrews shrine, in term of form and function, in the context of a small but important group of North British monuments (predominantly found in Shetland and north-east Scotland). He dates the shrine on typological grounds to 800-850 AD. This contrasts with Isabel Henderson's suggestion that the origin of such monuments may lie in the kerbed cairns typical of north-east Scotland, a view I find less convincing when one begins to look at the evidence outside the narrow confines of Pictland.

Having as it were set the scene in the earlier papers, the meat of the whole book is for me Isabel Henderson's substantial and packed article (some 70 pages) on the interpretation of the sculptured slabs comprising the Sarcophagus. Isabel points out that the usual Pictish monument was a grave marker or standing stone, which in itself makes the Sarcophagus an unusual object. Also, the cross motif is not the of the usual Pictish type, but has more in common with crosses found in the *Lindisfarne Gospels* or the *Book of Kells*. There are various other decorative motifs which are not Pictish in origin, although they are treated in the native manner (presumably by a Pictish sculptor).

A great deal of the article is concerned with the detailed and sometimes very technical discussion of the iconography on the slabs, particularly the motif of David killing the lion. At times as a layman I found the discussion difficult to follow, given the amount of detail which is necessarily given. The complex discussion concerning the significance and origin of David's sword/knife, which it is suggested may have been modelled on a real artefact, perhaps an Anglo-Saxon gift to a Pictish king, is a typical example: scholarly arguments do not always make for easy reading. After going into a number of possible scenarios for the meaning of the David and lion image, Isabel concludes that this aspect of the Sarcophagus is most likely styled on an Italo-Byzantine ivory carving.

Similarly, Isabel's discussion of the significance of the hunting scenes and the spreading tree leads her to postulate some non-Pictish origins for various aspects of the main panel, which nevertheless is clearly Pictish in feeling. For example, the lion leaping up at a mounted hunter can be compared to Sasanian (Persian) metalwork, not directly, but via links with Northumbria.

All this discussion serves to illuminate the unique nature of the Sarcophagus, not only as a magnificent work of art in its own right, but also as a superb illustration of the cosmopolitan nature of Pictish society at the highest levels.

The final group of papers aims to examine the broader background to this Pictish Sarcophagus. Douglas Mac Lean explores the links between Pictland and Northumbria, identifying three particular points, namely:

a) The links between some of the motifs on the Class II Pictish cross-slabs and Northum brian relief cross-slabs.
b) The 'Romanising policy of ecclesiastical institutions', ie the importing of Continental ideas, of Nechtan.
c) The importation of Northumbrian technical expertise into Pictland.

All these factors contributed to the Northumbrian influence on Pictish art detected by other scholars.

In a similar vein Nancy Edwards explores the Irish connection. She feels that the comparisons between the Sarcophagus and Irish sculpture stem from the fact that sculptors, metalworkers and manuscript illuminators on both sides of the Irish Sea had a similar attitude

to design and were working in a similar milieu. Given the range of contacts between clerics, rulers and craftworkers in Ireland, Dál Riata and Pictland, there would have been an exchange of portable objects, from domestic ones like combs to high status ones like manuscripts.

Steven Plunkett in his discussion of the Mercian perspective explores the extensive exchange of ideas between Mercia and Pictland. This probably followed the well-established maritime trading links around the North Sea. He picks up on Henderson's idea that there are elements of the Sarcophagus which have associations with Mercian artistic developments in the last quarter of the eighth century. Plunkett further argues that Mercian art provides a parallel to, not an explanation of, the Sarcophagus, whereby there was a process of reciprocal interchange between power centres in eighth century Britain, and cites a number of examples. I find this a particularly interesting paper in its exploration of the historical processes which brought the Sarcophagus into being.

The final paper in the volume, by Edward James, reviews the tradition of using (and re-using) sarcophagi in Continental Europe. He concludes that iconographically there are few parallels between the St Andrews Sarcophagus and Continental sarcophagi, but that there were social and cultural links with a Roman past.

All in all the book is an academic *tour de force* which for the first time sets one of the foremost Pictish monuments in a broader context as well as analysing its iconography in great detail. Sally Foster, Isabel Henderson and all the other contributors are to be congratulated on a job well done.

Bob Diamond

REFERENCE

Henderson, G 1972 *Early Medieval*, Harmondsworth.

The Sculptured Stones of Caithness a survey by Tim Blackie and Colin Macaulay (The Pinkfoot Press, Balgavies, Angus 1998). PB; 24 ps. £ 4.00. ISBN 1 874012 20 2.

This attractively produced little book is an up-to-date and comprehensive guide to all the Pictish and Early Christian carved stones known from the former county of Caithness. They have been listed in what might be called the 'traditional' order established by *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*: Classes I-III plus Isabel Henderson's suggested Class IV, followed by such unclassified stones as the Reay 'pillar' and two Norse rune-stones. Twenty-nine stones are listed, all of which, except the lost Castletown stone, are illustrated by photographs and sometimes reproductions of old engravings. The dimensions of each monument, its find-spot and principal references are listed, and short descriptions are given, more idiosyncratic than those in *ECMS* or the RCAHMS *Inventories*.

A short introduction by Robert Gourlay, former Highland Regional Archaeologist, emphasises the stones' importance both archaeologically and artistically, and touches on the vexed question of their preservation for future generations. The authors' enthusiasm is rightly praised - in addition to cataloguing the carved stones, they had to raise the necessary money to cover printing costs (organisations which gave financial support to the project are listed on the inside of the front cover).

Apart from its comprehensiveness, the most valuable aspect of the book is the illustrations. Many of the photographs are by Tom E Gray: of superb quality, and justly reproduced. This is particularly useful for the study of the Caithness stones, several of which are more than ordinarily difficult to photograph (the two Pictish cross-slabs in Thurso Heritage Museum, for example). Photographs of the stones in the national collection in Edinburgh (a surprisingly large percentage of the area's total) have been supplied by the National Museums of Scotland.

Caithness' carved stones are an eclectic group, and in their desire for completeness, the authors have included the portable stone altar found in the sea off Wick Harbour, and an undecorated free-standing cross at Reay, the latter only dubiously early medieval in date. The most recent finds are covered, and the extraordinary Ballachly cross-slab, found in 1996, with its probable Chi-Rho cross and Early Christian fish symbol, appears on the front cover. I would personally have been cautious about including the supposed rune-stone newly discovered at Portormin, as it appears to be incised with Anglo-Saxon runes - Caithness' genuine rune-stones, both from Thurso, employ the Norse *futhark*, as would be expected. I suspect a fake, written perhaps by a fan of *The Hobbit*.

A useful guide to a small but important group of monuments, which deserve detailed study, it would be good to see this book's format extended to those other areas of the country whose carved stones are still inadequately published. The authors are to be congratulated for bringing this interesting material together in a single publication, and David Henry of the Pinkfoot Press deserves praise for extending his early medieval catalogue by a reasonably priced work of the expected high standard.

Niall M Robertson

Barbarian Warriors: Saxons, Vikings, Normans by Dan and Susanna Shadrake (Brassey's *History of Uniforms*, London 1997). HB; 144 ps. £18.95. ISBN 1 85753 213 9.

A book on military history might seem a surprising choice to include in the review section of the *PAS Journal*, especially since titles in this series more commonly cover such periods as the Napoleonic or American Civil Wars. *Barbarian Warriors*, however, has a chapter on Pictish (and Irish) warfare to which it is well worth bringing the attention of those interested in this major aspect of Pictish history.

The book's front cover features a painting of the 685 battle of Nechtanesmere between Picts and Northumbrians, done by the meticulously accurate historical artist Richard Hook, one of a number illustrating the various peoples covered. Most of the plates in this lavishly illustrated book, however, are photographs showing reconstructions of weapons, armour and battle tactics by members of the 'living history' group Britannia and others who specialise in recreating 'Arthurian' warriors of the early Dark Ages and their enemies, Celtic or Germanic. As the Introduction states (7):

> The aim of this book is to describe in detail the military equipment of a succession of peoples who inhabited these islands between the end of the Roman Empire and the Norman Conquest, and test the credibility and effectiveness of their original equipment by reference to its present day re-enactment and recreation . . .

This is a legitimate (and no doubt fun) form of historical research, and the re-enactors' attention to accuracy seems as painstaking as any historian could wish. The results can be astonishing: a full colour recreation of a 'Beowulfian' Geat warrior (102) is especially magnificent. Helmet and mail-shirt, based on excavated examples, are impressive enough, but it is the details which tell: fine embroidery on the hem and arms of the tunic, tablet-woven braids at the neck, Germanic bird appliqués on the sheath of a *seax*, and the beauty of a pattern-welded sword showing the sheen it was meant to have instead of a network of rust.

Tell-tale let-downs of cloaks too plainly made from tartan travel rugs, and the odd rather overweight weekend warrior not looking at home in what he is wearing, are hinted at in some of the reconstructions, but the re-enactors' dedication to getting the past right is palpable.

The Pictish chapter relies heavily on the visual evidence of the carved stones, rather than archaeological finds as other parts of the book tend to do. This is inevitable given the extremely limited number of excavated Pictish weapons or fragments of weapon - an almost ludicrously small amount of material compared with the scores of Anglo-Saxon or the hundreds of Continental Germanic examples known. If only the burial of grave-goods with the dead had also been a common Pictish custom! The sculptured stones are a rich source of evidence in their own way, but the reconstructions of Pictish equipment are inevitably more speculative than those in other parts of the book.

The evidence (or lack of it) for helmets, swords, shields and so on is gone through systematically, as it is in the chapters dealing with the other peoples covered in *Barbarian Warriors*. The authors have relied heavily on the writings of Graeme Cruickshank, whose paper on Pictish helmets in *PAS Journal* 5 and booklet on the Battle of Dunnichen are both cited. The possible representation of the battle on the Kirkton of Aberlemno stone is, as is well known, the most informative surviving representation of Pictish equipment and tactics, and the 'Dunnichen battle block' of three mutually supporting warriors is reconstructed on page 55. Apparently, the formation functions: 'with great effect against random and ordered forces of greater number' and is 'very hard to beat' in the field (65). A valuable new indication of the reality behind the famous battle-scene and perhaps the key to Bridei son of Bili's victory.

Other chapters in the book cover Arthurian Warriors, Saxons, Vikings and Normans. There is a Dark Ages Directory at the end, listing re-enactment societies (none based in Scotland), armourers and craftspeople who supply their equipment, and other useful addresses, including that of the Pictish Arts Society.

There are rather a large number of spelling mistakes in the text, and the authors make the occasional minor factual error, perhaps inevitable when dealing with a field at once specialised and diverse. Nevertheless, this is a valuable corpus of information on all aspects of the military history of the early medieval British Isles, and indispensable for anyone interested in re-enacting the period.

Niall M Robertson

The Horse in Celtic Culture: Medieval Welsh Perspectives edited by Sioned Davies and Nerys Ann Jones (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1997). PB; 190 ps. £14.95. ISBN 0 7083 1414 7.

At first glance, it might appear that this book has a limited appeal to those interested in the Picts, but when you delve deeper, you find a fascinating account of a wide range of topics.

For the general reader, the chapter by Miranda Aldhouse Green on: 'The Symbolic Horse in Pagan Celtic Europe' gives a detailed account of subjects such as Celestial Horsemen and the multifunctional goddess Epona, depicted in the form of a horse. This chapter is rich in detail and gives a thorough exploration of the role of the horse in Pagan culture.

Nerys Ann Jones' chapter 'Horses in Medieval Welsh Court Poetry' brings the images to life. The horses received by Cynddelw are described as (85): 'Splendid grey steeds/ of the colour of young salmon, grey stall-fed ones . . . / Steeds fettered [and fed] on oats, / Journeying afar, fine, magnificent ones running together.' A far cry from the image of small, rough, sturdy ponies often associated with this period.

The existence of well-bred horses is further borne out in the chapter 'Horses in the Early Historic Period: Evidence from the Pictish Sculptured Stones' by Irene Hughson. This chapter is of particular interest to those interested in Pictish studies as it draws on stones well-known to us. The hunting scene on the Hilton of Cadboll stone is used as an example which indirectly provides a source of much information relating to the use of horses. A very sophisticated level of horsemanship is shown to have been present in this culture. The conclusions in this chapter make a valuable contribution to this topic, which has hitherto perhaps not received the attention it merits.

More specific topics covered in the book include 'The Earliest Words for 'Horse' in the Celtic Languages', 'Horses in the *Mabinogion*' and 'The Horse in the Welsh Law Texts'. A scholar with an interest in these areas would find this book invaluable.

The Horse in Celtic Culture is a book well worth a look if you have a general interest in horses, language, folk lore and, of course, the Picts.

Stephanie A A Primrose

Who Built the Platforms? (The Recessed Platforms of the West of Scotland) by Elizabeth B Rennie (E & R Inglis, Dunoon, 1998). PB; 41 ps. £3.00. ISBN 0 9532761 0 4.

E B Rennie's *The Recessed Platforms of Argyll, Bute and Inverness* (BAR British Series 253, Oxford, 1997) was reviewed by Bob Diamond in *PAS Journal* 11 (Summer 1997), 35. The author has now published a shorter work on the same subject to complement the more exhaustive and academic-BAR volume, omitting its extensive lists of platform sites, and designed to serve as an introduction to this class of monument for the general reader.

The pocket-sized booklet, illustrated with numerous black and white photographs and distribution maps, summarises the main points in all known aspects of 'recessed platform studies', the field that Elizabeth Rennie has made uniquely her own in Scottish archaeology: size, distribution, differences with the more ancient unenclosed platform sites of the Borders, excavation evidence, date, possible historical background and so on. To the Pictish enthusiast, the latter would perhaps be the most interesting aspect: Rennie postulates that the platforms, which often appear to occur in concealed and remote locations, may often have been refuges for 'natives' fleeing the encroaching Scots in the early centuries AD, and/or later refuges for the Scots, now the 'natives' - of the kingdom of Dál Riata - themselves, seeking safe havens from the Viking assaults.

The excavation evidence, presented in summary form, gives irrefutable proof that these platforms were the stances for wooden round houses, and not charcoal-burning platforms of the eighteenth century or later as was formerly assumed (although sometimes re-used as such), and Rennie's work as a whole gives ample demonstration of the valuable work that can still be done by the amateur in Scottish archaeology: in this case bringing to the attention of the archaeological community a hitherto almost wholly neglected class of site, quite likely the places where a large percentage of the 'ordinary' people of Dál Riata lived.

Niall M Robertson

Who Built the Platforms can be obtained directly from Elizabeth B Rennie at: Upper Netherby, Kirn, Dunoon, Argyll PA23 8DT for £3.50 (incl p & p), or from 'BOOKPOINT', Argyll St, Dunoon, or the Kilmartin Museum, Kilmartin, by Lochgilphead.

Celtic Art: The Methods of Construction by George Bain (Constable, 1996). PB; 163 ps. £9.95. ISBN 0 09 476900 1.

It is a measure of the popularity of the Celtic art revival in recent decades that this was the nineteenth edition of this work to be published since it was first issued in 1951. George Bain's text and illustrations remain unaltered, but a brightly coloured cover has been added, as well as eight colour plates showing various designs laid out using the author's methods. It is fairly obvious that these were created using felt-tipped pens on lined paper, and they will not be to everyone's taste; they do, however, demonstrate that it is possible to create original designs using the late Mr Bain's guidelines, and this is a lesson I for one would be glad to see certain craftspeople taking on board. Far too much work for sale in shops and craft fairs, in various media, is no more than a slavish copy of the designs in *Celtic Art* (designs which, I believe, are still in copyright). I don't know how many times I've seen those three interlaced horses, based on the animal symbol at Inverurie, reproduced (Pl 14, 144), but I suspect I would not be the only person becoming pretty tired of them. Work of this sort, fashionably but often inaccurately labelled 'Celtic', may do tourist shop profits some good, but has little or nothing to do with art. George Bain himself desired that his methods should be used for creating original work (18):

> *That this book may help to provide materials that will make possible the opportunity to use again the methods of this great . . art for new achievements and to modern applications in art and industry is the chief motive of its author . .*

It is to be hoped that this emphasis will not be overlooked by purchasers of what is in its field a classic work.

Niall M Robertson

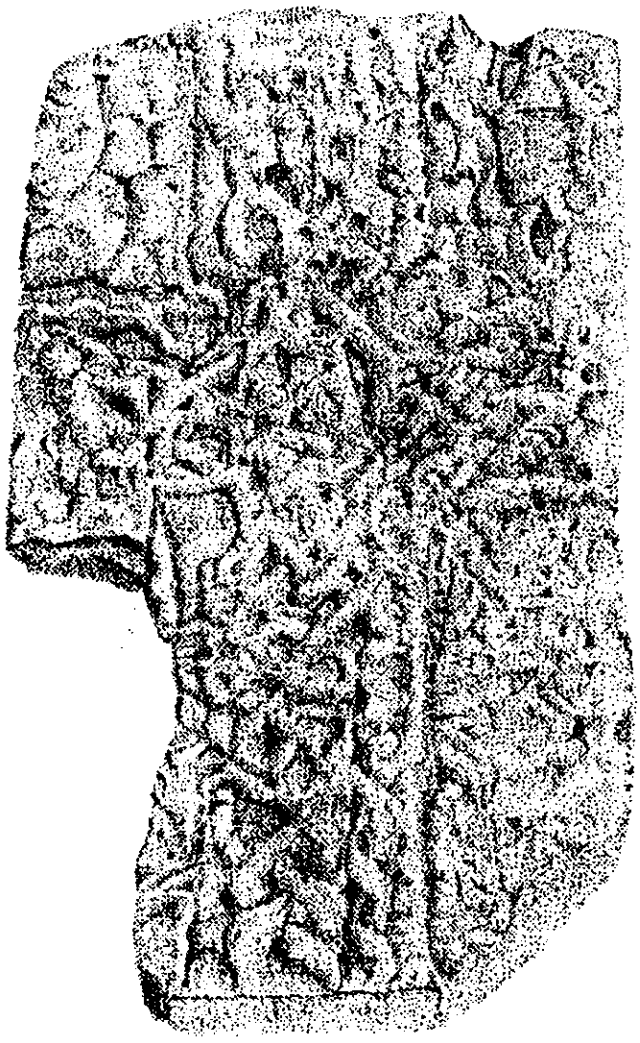
Stone Carvings & Carved Stones in Fife by M S Evans (Megart, Fife, 1998). PB; 76 ps. £ 3.50. ISBN 0 9532294 1 6.

PAS member Margaret S Evans is an enthusiastic drawer of carved stones, and her home county of Fife has provided plenty of scope for her to practice her realistic and painstaking tone drawing style. The results are printed in this booklet, which she has published herself. Something of a calligrapher, Margaret has written out all the text as well as completing a large number of drawings of carved stones of various periods. These range chronologically from prehistoric standing stones to a Methil wall plaque of 1936. A goodly number of the early medieval stones of Fife (and three from Perth and Kinross) are shown, including both parts of the recently recovered Kilrenny cross-slab. I believe the Dunino Den incised cross and the Portmoak cross-slab have never been properly illustrated in print before.

Short historical notes are appended to each drawing, and the National Grid Reference number of each stone is quoted to allow it to be easily located. The book would make an attractive souvenir for visitors to Fife, being produced by a local artist, and illustrating a selection of the carved stones that give the Kingdom much of its historic character.

Niall M Robertson

Stone Carvings & Carved Stones in Fife can be obtained from most Fife museums and bookshops, or directly from the author at: Megart Publishing, North House, The Causeway, Kennoway, Fife KY8 5JU.



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